

Daniel Blank

Sherlock Potter



The Magical Treaty

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A Magical Detective Adventure by Daniel Blank

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Imprint

Information according to Section 5 TMG:

Daniel Blank

Sollner Strasse 7

82049 Pullach im Isartal

Email: sherlock.potter.official@gmail.com

Responsible for content according to Section 55 (2) RStV:

Daniel Blank

Sollner Strasse 7

82049 Pullach im Isartal

The missing casket

In the same year that Sherlock Potter solved the murder of Professor Deere, we were once again called upon to investigate on behalf of the Ministry of Magic. Without exaggeration, this case must be regarded as my companion's first major affair. Had we failed to resolve the matter, the consequences would have been catastrophic—for every witch and wizard, indeed for the entire British magical fraternity.

It was a rainy October day in the year 1859, and the raindrops drummed incessantly against the windows of our rooms at 121B Baker Street. Potter had gone out to procure magical supplies for his painting—he needed enchanted brushes, an Everbase canvas, and several vials of Aurorflow pigments. I, however, had remained behind in our lodgings. Dejected, I sat in the armchair by the fireplace. In my hand, which hung limply over the armrest, I held the letter I had received from Scarlett Zink at Hogwarts.

During my short stay at the wizarding school, I had encountered my childhood love again after many years. Hope had flared in me at once—that perhaps, at last, I might form a deeper connection with her.

But the letter I now held dashed all such hopes. Scarlett Zink wrote that her time as a teacher at Hogwarts would soon come to an end. She had decided to accept a teaching position at Beauxbatons Academy of Magic in France at the turn of the year—and thus, she would vanish from my life once more.

Lost in gloomy thoughts, I stared into the fireplace, where the embers glowed faintly.

At that moment, Potter returned from his outing. Rainwater dripped from his dark hair, and not even protective enchantments had managed to keep his cloak from becoming thoroughly soaked. He gave me a brief glance, then asked, "My dear Watson, what troubles you so gravely?"

"A purely private matter," I replied curtly. With that, I folded the letter and slipped it back into its envelope.

My companion hesitated—then decided not to press the issue further. He retrieved his easel and took down the graveyard painting from the living room wall—the very one he had worked on before. I had assumed it was already complete, but Potter immediately began adding to the canvas once more.

Wishing to distract myself, I placed the letter on the table and reached for the Daily Prophet to study the results of the latest Quidditch match.

Thus passed the afternoon. In silence, each of us was absorbed in his own activity, both puffing on a pipe filled with Talsker weed.

Later that evening, having already finished our supper, we sat together by the fireplace and discussed an article from the Daily Prophet. According to the report, Minister for Magic McPhail was developing a novel kind of vehicle—one that would allow multiple witches and wizards to travel long distances in a matter of moments. The prototype was being developed under the project name "Knight Bus."

I considered the idea pure nonsense and remarked that the Ministry ought to focus on improving the reliability of Portkeys instead—but Potter seemed not entirely opposed to the notion of the Knight Bus.

Our discussion was suddenly interrupted by a frantic tapping at the window. I opened it, and a thoroughly drenched owl swooped inside. Outside, the wind howled and the rain lashed so fiercely that I immediately felt the wetness on my face.

I quickly shut the window. After handing Potter a letter, the owl made no attempt to fly off again. Instead, it settled by the fireplace, cooing softly as it warmed itself. I offered it a biscuit from the tin I always kept within reach.

"Well now," I said to Potter, "Owl post at this hour?"

"Undoubtedly a new case," Potter replied with delight as he opened the envelope. He unfolded the letter and began to read aloud:

Dear Mr Potter,

Please come to the Ministry of Magic at once. We require your assistance in a matter concerning the well-being of the magical fraternity. I await you in the Ministry's Atrium.

With magical regards,

Inspector Lestrangle

Potter looked at me. "You'll accompany me, won't you?"

I glanced toward the window. The rain continued to lash unrelentingly against the panes—a fitting reflection of my reluctance to leave the house.

"I'm sure you'll once again find ways to support me in this investigation," Potter urged as I hesitated. "Come now, Watson. Didn't our last case bring a bit of welcome excitement into your daily routine?"

"Very well, Potter. If it means that much to you, I'll come along."

"That's the spirit!"

My companion stepped over to the secretary and took a vial of Floo powder from a drawer. He handed me a pinch.

"After you, Watson."

"Atrium of the Ministry of Magic," I declared—and in an instant, we found ourselves in the Ministry's entrance hall, which was teeming with Aurors.

A clearly agitated Inspector Lestrangle hurried toward us.

"Gentlemen, thank Merlin you came so quickly!"

The Inspector's finely curled moustache trembled with tension, and beads of sweat had formed on his bald head.

"We came as soon as we received your letter," said Potter, rubbing his hands together. "So—what sort of trouble are we dealing with? Another murder?"

"Mr Potter, Mr Watson, I must demand your absolute discretion. We are dealing with a case that could cause considerable unrest within the magical fraternity."

As the Inspector spoke, Potter's gaze drifted to the statue in the Atrium, which had progressed somewhat since our last visit.

"The Ministry is certainly doing its best to provoke every other magical being in existence," he remarked dryly.

Inspector Lestrange ignored Potter's sarcasm.

"Please follow me—we're expected at the scene of the crime."

As we followed him toward the lifts, Potter asked, "Where did the crime occur?"

"In the office of the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic. I've instructed my Aurors to keep away from the scene so as not to disturb any evidence."

"By Merlin," said Potter, "our work is finally taking effect."

We took the lift, the remarkable new contrivance, to Level One to reach the mentioned office. The moment we stepped into the corridor, we noticed splinters of wood scattered everywhere. The door to the office hung crookedly in its frame.

"Lestrangle, this almost looks as though someone broke out of the room," Potter observed.

"In a manner of speaking, you're right," replied the Inspector. "Please, come in."

Inside the office, we were greeted by a witch and a wizard. I immediately recognised the latter as Minister for Magic Dugald McPhail.

"Here, Mr McPhail, is the detective who will be assisting us in the investigation—Mr Sherlock Potter," said Inspector Lestrangle, introducing my companion. "And his, um, assistant, Mr Ron Watson," he added.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said McPhail. "This is Mrs Henrietta Hopkirk, my Senior Undersecretary," the Minister said to us. Needless to say, he did not bother to introduce himself. I studied the witch beside him—someone I, like the Minister, knew from my years as an Auror.

Just as I remembered, a rosy-pink witch's hat sat perched atop her head, adorned with a turquoise ribbon. Wisps of grey hair spilled out from beneath it. Her matching pink cloak featured a garish brooch shaped like a unicorn. As I looked around the office, I recalled that she had always decorated her workspace to suit her tastes: figurines of adorable magical creatures were scattered about for ornamentation. A pink cloth covered the desk.

Mrs Hopkirk greeted us in a squeaky voice.

"Good evening, Mr Watson. Good evening, Mr Potter..."

But she was immediately interrupted by Sherlock Potter, who asked impatiently, "Well then—what exactly is the problem?"

He seemed to consider formalities toward the Minister for Magic and his Senior Undersecretary as nothing more than a waste of time—a trait I would come to witness in him quite frequently.

The Inspector replied, "As I mentioned before, gentlemen, we are dealing with an exceptionally delicate matter. The Ministry of Magic has lost a document of the utmost importance. Should this paper fall into the wrong hands, the consequences for peace within the magical fraternity would be catastrophic—and I do not use that word lightly. I speak of possible uprisings and rebellion."

He cast a questioning glance at the Minister for Magic, clearly uncertain whether he should continue.

Potter pressed him, "My dear Inspector, without further information about the stolen document, I fear I'll find it rather difficult to assist you or solve the case."

As Lestrangle continued to hesitate, Minister McPhail took the lead.

"Mr Potter, naturally we cannot disclose all the details of the document to you, as it is a highly confidential missive of the Ministry of Magic. Is it not sufficient for you to know that it was stolen from this very office? Or has the Inspector overstated your abilities?"

"It is not my place to make such judgments, esteemed Mr McPhail. However, allow me to make this perfectly clear: this delicate matter already presents more than enough enigmas. If you choose to withhold essential information, our investigation will resemble a broomstick flight through thick fog. I urge you to reconsider your stance. Otherwise, Mr Watson and I shall return home—we do, after all, prefer to be in our warm beds at this hour."

The Minister turned crimson; clearly, he was accustomed to a certain degree of deference from those who addressed him. An icy silence fell upon the room. Inspector Lestrangle looked increasingly nervous—no doubt it had been his idea to involve Sherlock Potter in the case, and now the conversation was veering in a most uncomfortable direction.

At last, Mr McPhail cleared his throat.

"Very well, Mr Potter. We have too much to lose. It seems less risky to let you in than to forgo your help altogether. But is it truly necessary that both of you be informed?"

I was about to excuse myself. "Naturally, I shall withdraw."

But Potter grabbed my arm.

"Mr Watson is a valuable aide in my investigations. He must be informed just as fully as I am."

The Minister for Magic did not appear convinced, but he said nothing in return.

Having now received approval from the highest authority, Inspector Lestrangle resumed speaking.

"The document that has gone missing is a classified magical treaty. It contains provisions regarding the status of various beings within the magical society. Particularly delicate is a passage in which goblins are portrayed in a deeply defamatory manner. That section proposes further restrictions on goblin rights and even questions their role at Gringotts."

"An undeniably foolish suggestion," Potter interjected. "But please, Lestrangle, go on."

"This magical treaty was stolen from Mrs Hopkirk's office earlier this evening."

"Along with my jewellery casket!" Mrs Hopkirk interrupted.

"Yes, yes, along with your jewellery casket," the inspector replied. He rolled his eyes and was about to continue, but Potter cut in.

"Wait! What exactly are you talking about?"

Before Lestrangle could respond, Mrs Hopkirk spoke up.

"It's a casket—a keepsake from my recently departed mother. I used it to store the treaty." Her voice faltered, and she sniffled softly.

Potter asked, "You brought your own casket into the Ministry? Isn't it rather unusual to use a personal container for storing such significant documents?"

"You're quite right," she admitted. "But it's my most cherished heirloom, and I liked having it near me while I worked. I spend most of the day here, after all. Besides, I registered the casket properly with the Ministry."

Potter and I exchanged a puzzled glance. Even I, as a former Auror, had never heard of such a procedure.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, every personal item brought into the Ministry is thoroughly examined by our security office. They check for curses or any traces of Dark Magic. In the past, thieves managed to smuggle in an enchanted chest. Any documents placed inside vanished—straight into the hands of pickpockets. But my casket was completely free of dark enchantments, and I received full clearance from the security officers."

"Incidentally," added Inspector Lestrage, "this happens to be a stroke of luck—for the key to the jewellery casket is still here, with Mrs Hopkirk."

"By the holy Quaffle," I exclaimed, "that truly is fortunate."

Sherlock Potter nodded thoughtfully.

"But is the casket protected against unlocking spells?"

Mrs Hopkirk replied, "There are some protective enchantments on the box, but they aren't particularly strong."

"Then we must act swiftly," said Potter, "for it won't take the thief long to remove those spells. Once he does, he'll be able to open the casket and the magical treaty will fall into his hands. Can you describe the events surrounding the theft?"

The Senior Undersecretary answered, "I had just gone to the Atrium to bid farewell to the witch at the porter's desk."

"Do you recall what time that was?"

"Well, it must have been around nine o'clock. I had to finish urgent paperwork for Mr McPhail, which is why I was working later than usual this evening."

The Minister nodded in confirmation.

"So I was chatting with the witch at the porter's desk," Mrs Hopkirk continued, "when suddenly there was a loud crash from the direction of the lifts. And just moments later—my casket darted straight across the Atrium! Can you imagine?"

"The casket darted across the Atrium?"

"Yes, indeed!" the witch replied. "My little box had four furry legs and a similarly furry tail—almost like a fox."

"And what happened next?" asked Potter.

"Just as the casket reached the Floo Network fireplaces, a hooded figure stepped out of the flames. It snatched up the container, threw a fresh pinch of Floo powder into the hearth, and vanished again into the fire."

"You didn't happen to hear what destination the thief named?"

The witch shook her head.

"I could barely hear or see the figure— it was surrounded by green flames almost the entire time."

During the conversation, Potter had produced his jade-green pipe and lit it. He drew on it thoughtfully.

"You've got a charming little problem on your hands," he remarked to the Inspector and the Minister for Magic.

"The intruder must be someone with extraordinary magical ability. To cast a Transfiguration spell across several floors of the Ministry exceeds the skill of most witches and wizards by far. And such enchantments usually last only a short time—the thief had to be absolutely certain that the jewellery casket would reach the fireplaces in the Atrium. The legs and tail likely disappeared moments later."

My companion paused to think for a moment, then asked, "Who knew that the treaty was being kept in this office?"

"In the Ministry? No one—aside from Mrs Hopkirk and myself," replied the Minister for Magic.

Sherlock Potter took another thoughtful draw from his pipe, then tucked it back into his cloak. In its place, he pulled out his Magoscope and said "Very well, I shall now examine the scene of the crime."

At this point, the Minister took his leave. He had to give an interview to the Daily Prophet regarding the incident—though, of course, he would either deny or omit anything of actual importance.

We watched in silence as Sherlock Potter carefully examined the crime scene with his Magoscope. From our first case together, I had learned that he preferred not to be interrupted during his investigations. After a while, he drew his wand and tapped it against various points along the wall, murmuring spells under his breath.

At last, he declared, "We can rule out the existence of secret passageways into this room. Which means the thief could not have prepared the crime in advance."

He retrieved his Magoscope once more and stepped into the corridor. As the three of us began to follow, the detective said, "You may remain here in your office, Mrs Hopkirk. The investigation will take some time, as I also intend to inspect the corridor, the lift shaft, and the fireplaces. No doubt you would benefit from some rest."

Visibly worn out, the Senior Undersecretary sank into an armchair. As my companion had suspected, she was clearly shaken by the events of the evening.

After Potter had examined the scattered wood splinters from the door, we turned to the lifts. He cast only a brief glance into the shaft and said, "Mrs Hopkirk was telling the truth—there are small scratches here, caused by the casket as it moved through. Her account of the incident appears accurate."

"You didn't seriously suspect the Senior Undersecretary, did you?" asked Inspector Lestrangle.

I, too, was surprised. "She is undoubtedly a loyal servant of the Ministry of Magic. Potter, you can't be serious!"

Potter calmly let the Magoscope glide through his fingers before replying.

"You are most likely correct, gentlemen. But we must examine every facet of this case if we are to apprehend the culprit."

"But to suspect someone from within the Ministry—it seems far-fetched," I objected, my voice rising. During my time as an Auror, I had always sworn absolute loyalty to the Ministry.

"My dear Watson," replied my friend, "history teaches us that even honourable witches and wizards can fall prey to base instincts—be it the promise of power, gold, or Quidditch trophies. Still, in this case, I agree with you: Mrs Hopkirk does not appear to be involved in the crime. Let us examine the fireplaces, and afterwards, I have a few more questions for the Senior Undersecretary."

The examination of the fireplaces yielded no further clues, and we returned to Mrs Hopkirk's office. She had dozed off in her armchair, and it took no small effort on my part to wake her.

Once she had returned to full consciousness, Potter asked "Do you know where your mother got the casket?"

Still groggy with sleep, the witch replied, "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. But I do know my mother always kept all her bills of sale. I could check at home to see if I can find the one for the casket and bring it to the Ministry tomorrow."

"I'm afraid this matter cannot wait," said Potter. "We must find out immediately where your mother purchased the casket. It would be best if we accompanied you, Mrs Hopkirk. Where do you live?"

"In Great Orme Street. We can use the Floo Network."

"Then we'd best leave at once. Lestrangle, I think it would be best if you came with us."

"That's out of the question," replied Lestrangle. "I have to supervise the investigation here at the Ministry. What would it look like to Minister McPhail if the Ministry's highest-ranking investigator simply abandoned the scene of the crime?"

"Inspector," replied Potter, "I believe this case is far more explosive than you realise. Come with us—it won't take long. And if my assumptions are correct, we're headed straight for a catastrophe."

Reluctantly, the Inspector followed us to the Atrium, where the light of the enchanted chandeliers flickered dimly over the black marble floor. A number of Aurors were still gathered there, waiting for orders from their superior. They watched with puzzled expressions as we stepped into the green flames of the Floo Network—together with Inspector Lestrangle—and vanished from the Ministry.

At Mrs Hopkirk's residence

As we were about to step directly from the fireplace into her apartments, Mrs Hopkirk stopped us firmly. With a pointed gesture, she indicated a shelf beside the hearth, where a collection of guest slippers—each pair in baby blue—stood neatly arranged.

The living room fulfilled every cliché of a middle-aged lady's dwelling: lace doilies were meticulously placed on the table, and porcelain figurines shaped like unicorns and other dainty magical creatures served as decoration throughout the space. If the Senior Undersecretary's office already leaned toward fripperies, her home bordered on the tasteless.

We took our seats at the table in the living room. Mrs Hopkirk immediately offered us tea, which we accepted with thanks. While we drank, the witch began searching for the bill of sale for the casket.

After a short while, during which the tea at least revived my spirits somewhat, she returned to the living room with the document in hand. Lestrangle reached out to take the document, but Potter snatched it eagerly.

"Aha! Just as I suspected!" he cried.

He tossed the parchment onto the table so that the Inspector and I could view it as well.

The bill featured an image of a small, ornately decorated casket. It shimmered in a striking pink metal unlike anything I had ever seen. If her mother had a taste similar to that of her daughter, I could well imagine why she had chosen this particular box.

Beneath the image, the following was written:

Ornate Jewellery Casket

Purchase Price: 50 Galleons

Goblin Emporium, 23 Diagon Alley

Date of Purchase: 9th April 1847

Sales Assistant: Vernok

Lestrangle jumped up in a panic.

"Her mother bought the casket at the Goblin Department Store. That means this Vernok is a goblin! He must be the thief!"

Apparently, Potter had come to the same conclusion. "I also assume that the seller of the jewellery casket is our culprit. According to goblin notions of ownership, he likely considers the casket his rightful property again, now that the original purchaser is dead. That would explain why he reclaimed it at this particular moment—Mrs Hopkirk's mother died only recently."

Although Potter had spoken in a calm voice, Lestrangle grew even more agitated. He began pacing nervously around the living room.

"By Merlin's beard—we are on the brink of disaster! I must return at once and inform the Minister for Magic! We have to prepare for a goblin uprising!"

Potter pulled the Inspector back down into the armchair. "Calm yourself, Lestrangle. The key to the casket is still here—with Mrs Hopkirk."

"The goblin will find a way to break the protective enchantments eventually! After all, he made the casket himself! Once the goblins have the magical treaty in their possession—it will be a catastrophe. I must get back to the Ministry—every minute counts!"

Sherlock Potter replied evenly, "You are absolutely right, Inspector. We mustn't waste time. But we also have to keep a cool head if we're to assess the situation properly."

He reached into his cloak and pulled out his jade-green pipe. But a single look from Mrs Hopkirk was enough to make it clear that she would not tolerate smoking in her home. With visible reluctance, Potter tucked the pipe away again.

He summarized the facts.

"According to this bill, your grandmother purchased the jewellery casket from a goblin named Vernok at the Goblin Department Store. As we know, goblins have a completely different understanding of property. For them, a sold item is not considered the buyer's permanent possession, but rather a loan—valid until the witch or wizard who purchased it dies. From the goblin's perspective, the item then returns to their ownership."

"We're well aware of that by now," said Inspector Lestrangle impatiently.

But Potter remained unfazed.

"After your mother's death, Mrs Hopkirk, the goblin forcefully reclaimed the casket. Why he didn't simply ask you to return it beforehand remains unclear to me. But the crucial point is this: Vernok appears to be interested in the casket itself—not in the document inside."

Realisation was beginning to dawn on me as well. "If you're right," I said, "then Vernok wants the casket back intact—not pried open by force, correct?"

"Exactly, Watson. That's why we must ensure the goblin does not gain possession of the key. He will undoubtedly try to steal it from you, Mrs Hopkirk. And since he already knows where you work, it won't be difficult for him to find out where you live."

The witch clasped her hands over her mouth in fright, but Sherlock Potter reassured her. "We will make sure that you are not in danger, Mrs Hopkirk. And we will also ensure the casket remains unharmed."

He paused briefly before continuing.

"I suspect the goblin intends to sell the casket again. As my colleague Watson rightly observed, this plays to our advantage: Vernok will refrain from forcing the casket open—for fear of damaging it. So he will attempt to steal the key instead. And that gives us a critical edge—we're going to set a trap for him."

He turned once more to the Senior Undersecretary. "Do you have a safe?"

The witch nodded and pointed to a large painting on the wall. It, too, portrayed a rather sentimental scene: two young unicorns frolicking in a blooming meadow. When they noticed we were watching them, they grew shy and tried hastily to hide behind some bushes.

"Behind it is a safe made by the company MystSafe," explained Mrs Hopkirk.

"By thunder," said Potter with a hint of admiration, "I know that company all too well—their safes are renowned for their exceptional security. If we keep the casket's key inside, even a goblin won't be able to steal it easily."

Inspector Lestrangle cut him off nervously. "Mr Potter, this is all far too risky for me!"

Ever since he had learned that a goblin was involved in the theft, he had been a bundle of nerves. He continued in a flurry. "I'm going to order a house search at the goblin's residence. I'll find his address easily in the Ministry's address archive!"

Potter shook his head. "I strongly advise against that, Lestrangle. All you'd do is alert the suspect that we've identified him."

But Lestrangle had already risen. He strode purposefully toward the fireplace. It was clear he would not be dissuaded by Potter this time. Without another word, he

bid a terse farewell—and vanished into the green flames of the Floo Network with a sharp hiss.

Potter remained silent for a moment, deep in thought. Then he said “I expect Vernok will attempt to steal the key as soon as possible—likely sometime tonight or no later than tomorrow morning.”

He stood and stepped to the window. The slowly breaking dawn cast vanilla-hued rays around his silhouette like a golden halo.

“Due to the limited range of the Summoning Charm, Vernok will no doubt come to Great Orme Street in person,” he continued. “Mrs Hopkirk, I have the following suggestion: Watson and I will remain in your apartments to lie in wait for the goblin. You, however, should retreat to a safe location—in case things turn violent. Do you have any friends or relations you could stay with?”

“I could stay with an old university friend in the West End,” replied Mrs Hopkirk.

“Excellent. Then you’d best head there immediately.”

Mrs Hopkirk quickly packed a few belongings into a small suitcase. She had already thrown Floo powder into her fireplace, so that green flames flared up as she turned one last time and said, “There’s just one thing I need you to promise me.”

Potter raised an eyebrow. “And that would be?”

“No smoking in my flat!”

A crooked smile flickered across Potter’s face as he gave a slight bow.

“Of course.”

Then Mrs Hopkirk stepped into the flames and vanished. She had placed the casket’s key in the safe beforehand.

We extinguished the lights. Now there was nothing left for us to do but wait. Potter sank into the armchair, his jade-green pipe between his fingers—but, as promised, un-

lit. I was just about to sit down when there was a loud clonk from the direction of the safe.

"That must have been the goblin!" Potter shouted.

"He's tried another Summoning Charm—the key must have struck the inside of the safe! I didn't expect Vernok to make another move so quickly!"

He dashed to the window, and I hurried after him. We were just about to look outside when the safe behind us emitted a deep, ominous hum.

We turned just in time to see a green bolt shoot from the MystSafe—whistling narrowly between us, shattering the window with a crash, and streaking out into the open.

"Dragon dung!" Potter cursed. "I didn't think of that, Watson: every MystSafe vault is equipped with defensive enchantments. That one just fired a curse at the goblin—I just don't know which one. With any luck, it was a Paralysis Charm that hit Vernok."

He grabbed his cloak. "Quickly, Watson—we have to check outside and see if the spell immobilised him!"

We rushed out, but there was no one to be seen. Great Orme Street lay still and peaceful in the early light of morning. The fog, which had replaced the rain during the night's final hours, was beginning to lift.

Potter's expression darkened. "Now Vernok knows we're on his trail," he said.

I followed as he trudged back into the apartments, visibly displeased. I promptly sent an owl to Mrs Hopkirk to inform her she could return home.

"Vernok won't make another attempt at the key for the next few hours," said Potter.

"Come, Watson—we'll confront him directly. Nothing is more important now than securing the magical treaty inside that casket."

"Where do you think we'll find him?"

Potter waved the bill "At the Goblin Emporium, of course."

The Goblin Emporium

From his cloak, Potter pulled a small packet of Floo powder. "We'll come out through the fireplace at Borgin & Burkes," he said. When he noticed my astonished expression, he added "I know the proprietor rather well."

One more journey through the Floo Network later, we stood in the shadowy shop. It smelled of old dust and yellowed leather, and the sparse lighting cast long shadows across the walls. I was still surprised that my companion had chosen this particular place as our gateway into Diagon Alley. But the shopkeeper gave him only a brief nod—as though it were the most natural thing in the world for two wizards to step out of his fireplace in the early hours of the morning.

Then he caught sight of me and must have recognised me, for the expression on his face darkened at once. During my time as an Auror, I had led several raids on Borgin & Burkes.

By then, however, we had already passed the collection of shrunken heads, cursed weapons, and other relics of Dark Magic, and stepped out into Knockturn Alley. Despite the early hour, numerous shady figures were already loitering about. The stench of damp earth and decay rose to my nose, and a wave of unease swept over me. Though a fine autumn day was clearly on the rise, thick fog still hung over Knockturn Alley.

We made our way swiftly through the gloomy lane, and I was relieved when we finally emerged into Diagon Alley. Steam rose from the sunlit cobblestones. With hurried steps, we made for the Goblin Emporium, which stood directly opposite Ollivanders.

My gaze swept over the grand, two-storey building, its façade—like that of Gringotts—constructed of gleaming white marble. Among the neighbouring shops, it stood out with unmistakable opulence. Above the heavy front doors, large golden letters declared:

Goblin Emporium

Everything of the finest quality—and finest price.

We reached the Emporium just before opening time. To our surprise, a considerable crowd had already gathered outside the entrance—witches and wizards of all ages, murmuring excitedly amongst themselves.

In the shop window, framed by countless treasures masterfully crafted by goblin hands, several eye-catching signs caught my attention. They announced the arrival of new merchandise: apples made of pure gold, entirely encrusted with glittering jewels. What practical purpose these apples might serve beyond their ostentatious appearance was a mystery to me. The waiting customers, however, seemed utterly unconcerned—they were visibly thrilled and could hardly wait to get their hands on the new collection.

When the Goblin Emporium opened its doors, we followed the eager crowd into the shop. I must confess that I had never entered this place before, as I lack all appreciation for the decorative and ornamental. As its exterior had suggested, it was an exquisitely appointed establishment, stretching across an expansive shop floor. From the high ceiling hung magnificent crystal chandeliers, bathing the room in a warm golden glow.

Displayed in countless glass cases and on polished shelves were the most luxurious of wares: wand boxes fashioned from solid gold, designed to resemble ingots when closed; opulent candelabras; finely engraved monocles; and an impressive array of weapons. Silver sabres, axes made of mithril, and intricately forged short swords

sparkled under the lights. This truly was a place where everything was very fine—and very expensive.

One glance at the price tags was enough to make my head swim—it was immediately clear that I could afford none of these exquisite objects. Among all the other witches and wizards moving through the showroom with us, I felt poor and entirely out of place.

A goblin in a well-cut suit approached us. A small nameplate on his chest identified him as the manager, Shrewdfist. He greeted us with exaggerated courtesy.

“Welcome to the Goblin Emporium, gentlemen! How may I assist you?”

Potter cleared his throat. “Well, we’re looking for...”

“Say no more, say no more!” interrupted Shrewdfist briskly. “You’re surely here for an exquisite piece of jewellery for the missus?”

He examined first Sherlock Potter’s hands, then mine, clearly looking for wedding rings. When he found none, he carried on enthusiastically. “Or perhaps you gentlemen are interested in a goblin-forged weapon? An enchanted curved dagger? Or...”

“We’re not here to buy anything,” interrupted the detective.

The manager stared at us in disbelief.

“Rather, we’re here to speak with one of your colleagues—Vernok. Is he in?”

Shrewdfist gave us a look tinged with suspicion, before replying in a noticeably more reserved tone.

“He has not yet arrived, which is quite unusual. However, he’s expected any moment. You may wait for him back there.”

He gestured toward a corner of the shop I hadn’t noticed before.

A large burgundy curtain shielded that section from the rest of the store. When we arrived, it became clear why the area was kept so inconspicuous: it was the Goblin Emporium’s bargain corner. On a large table, items were carelessly piled—bracelets

faded with age, dull mirrors, sabres with blunt edges, and several objects whose function was a complete mystery to me.

My companion and I sat down in two worn-out wingback chairs beside the table. We waited for a while, but I soon began to grow impatient.

"Just be patient, Watson," said Potter. "Vernok will surely arrive soon. His supervisor already mentioned it's unusual for him to be late."

To pass the time, I began to examine the items on the discount table more closely. Among all the weapons and trinkets, one object covered by a black velvet cloth caught my eye. I carefully pulled the cloth aside and uncovered a pumpkin-sized glass jar with a metal lid perforated by small holes. Inside was a creature I had never seen before. It was about the size of a cat, covered in dark purple fur, and peered at me curiously with two enormous amber eyes.

A paper label stuck to the jar identified the creature as a Pombatz. Carefully, I lifted the jar and held it closer to my face. The little creature stared back at me unblinkingly with its round yellow eyes. I noticed that its legs were much shorter than a cat's—almost like those of a dachshund. Its head, on the other hand, was large and rounded, with small, slightly floppy ears.

Suddenly, we heard the voice of the manager behind us. "Gentlemen, Vernok has arrived."

I turned around. The manager had returned with another goblin, who must have been Vernok. But he was covered head to toe in green pustules. Shrewdfist appeared equally puzzled, as his facial expression clearly showed. He took his leave of the three of us—not without giving Potter, me, and finally his pockmarked employee a long, suspicious glance.

Potter wasted no time. "Where is the casket?" he asked Vernok.

Taken aback by the direct question, the goblin hesitated for a moment before shrugging and replying "What casket?"

"No games," said Potter. "We know perfectly well that you stole a jewellery box from the Ministry of Magic last night. Where is it?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about! And accusing a goblin of such a serious crime—especially in these times—is a very bold move."

It was clear that Vernok was recovering from his initial shock and beginning to regain his confidence. His voice grew louder, and a few bystanders had already begun to take notice.

"You witches and wizards have always tried to pin crimes on us that we didn't commit!" Vernok shouted. "If you want to provoke another uprising—go right ahead!"

Potter raised his hands in a calming gesture. "Please, calm down. I'm sure we can find a solution that's acceptable to all—"

"Nothing of the sort!" Vernok bellowed suddenly, so loudly that every employee and customer in the shop turned to look at us.

At once, Shrewdfist rushed over. "What is going on here, Vernok? What is all this shouting about?"

"These two wizards are accusing me of a theft I didn't commit! Without the slightest shred of evidence!"

Now Sherlock Potter's patience was wearing thin. "And where, then, did those pustules on your body come from? Those are clearly curse pustules—caused by a Myst-Safe vault."

His opponent hesitated again, but recovered quickly. "What a ridiculous lie! I caught these from my grandmother!"

The manager grew increasingly uneasy, for it was obvious that the attention of everyone in the showroom was now focused squarely on us. At last, he made a drastic decision.

With a firm voice, he declared "Gentlemen, I must ask you to leave the Goblin Emporium. The accusations against my employee are unfounded—unless, of course, you can present solid evidence."

Without waiting for a reply, Shrewdfist beckoned two other goblins, who immediately began walking toward us.

"Please escort these gentlemen off the premises. At once."

One glance from Potter was enough—I knew we would not resist. We were just about to exit the Emporium when the manager called after us, "Wait! You still need to pay for the Pombatz!"

Startled, I held the jar containing the little creature away from myself. "I didn't actually mean to—" I began, but Potter cut me off immediately.

"Of course, of course—we still need to pay for that!"

As I began to protest, my companion firmly steered me toward the till. He whispered "Play along, Watson. I have an idea."

I placed the jar with the Pombatz on the counter and pulled out my coin purse—only to find it contained a distressingly small number of Sickles. While Shrewdfist and his two assistants kept a close watch on us, the goblin cashier began writing up a bill of sale.

Sherlock Potter leaned toward him and said "Please don't forget that it's a discounted item from the bargain corner."

At the same moment, he made an awkward movement—so clumsy that the jar began to wobble on the counter—and finally tipped over.

The Pombatz let out a quick squeak as it realised its newfound freedom, then darted off at once. It tore through the shop at high speed, pursued by shouting staff members who tried in vain to catch it.

I lunged after the creature as well, but despite its short legs, the Pombatz moved with astonishing speed, dodging every attempt at capture. The other witches and wizards in the shop shrank back in alarm as stunning spells whizzed through the air—none of which managed to hit the nimble little animal.

It darted beneath tables, between cabinets and display cases, and sent the entire Emporium into chaos.

Finally, after a frantic chase—during which several display cases were shattered—one of the sales assistants managed to immobilise the Pombatz with a Freezing Charm. The small creature lay motionless, though its wide, yellow eyes still roamed the room with curiosity.

As the employee handed the frozen animal back to me, I could have sworn I heard it emit a faint squeak.

Manager Shrewdfist had finally lost his temper. “Leave the Goblin Emporium at once!” he shouted furiously.

“But I still have to pay for the Pombatz,” I replied.

Shrewdfist raised his hands in dismissal. “No, no, just take it. Consider it a reminder that you are now permanently banned from our store!”

“Potter, let’s go. I believe we’ve worn out our welcome here.”

But the detective was nowhere to be seen. Instead, I found myself being unceremoniously shoved out under the curious and judgmental gazes of the other customers. Moments later, I stood once more in Diagon Alley, the frozen Pombatz still in my arms.

I barely had time to wonder where Potter had gone when I heard a renewed commotion from inside the shop. Amid great uproar, he too was being expelled—far less gently than I had been. My companion was practically hurled through the door and landed roughly on the cobblestones of Diagon Alley.

I feared he might have sustained serious injuries, but to my surprise, Potter was back on his feet in no time. He seemed wholly unfazed by the force of his eviction.

"Those brutes!" I exclaimed indignantly, clenching my fist.

"We should file a formal complaint against that establishment!"

"Let it go," said Potter with a mischievous smile. "The goblins had every reason to throw me out like that."

I looked at him, puzzled. "Oh? Anyone can have an accident and damage an item—we were about to buy it anyway."

"Indeed," said Potter, "but I dropped the Pombatz's container on purpose. The little fellow is unharmed, I presume?"

I nodded, glancing down at the frozen Pombatz still cradled in my arms.

Potter continued. "During our conversation with Vernok, I suspected that he was late to work this morning because he had taken the casket to his vault at Gringotts."

"You may well be right."

"So the question became: which vault number belongs to Vernok? I used the chaos caused by the Pombatz's escape to slip into the Emporium's accounting office. In my haste, I found exactly what I was looking for—a wages record for the thief. It included the number of the vault where his wages are deposited: vault 712. That's where I suspect the jewellery casket is being kept."

"But Potter, surely you're not... Please don't tell me you're planning to break into Gringotts!"

But Potter only gave a sly grin. "I already have an idea."

Without another word of explanation, we hurried off in the direction of the wizard-ing bank.

Commotion at Gringotts

In front of the bank, we encountered Inspector Lestrange, surrounded by a large group of Aurors. He was barking orders loudly to his subordinates while a crowd of onlookers pressed in around the Ministry's deployment in Diagon Alley. When he spotted us, he paused.

"Mr Potter, Mr Watson—what are you doing here?" he asked.

We gave him a brief summary of what we had discovered.

"We also found nothing during the search of Vernok's flat," the Inspector replied. "So I've come to the same conclusion you have—that the casket must be in his vault at Gringotts. That's why we're about to storm the bank."

"What?" Potter and I cried out in unison, horrified.

"It's time to act! We're just waiting for a few Aurors with special skills in unlocking magical locks. We'll definitely need them to gain access to the vault."

"Inspector," said Potter, "have you considered that Gringotts has always been regarded as neutral ground? An assault on the bank could have severe diplomatic consequences—not just for the Ministry, but for the entire wizarding world."

"We have no choice! We can't risk the contents of that casket falling into goblin hands."

I stepped forward. "And what if the goblins deny you access? Any act of aggression could spark an open conflict!"

Lestrangle turned his tall frame toward me. "It's a risk we have to take. Now if you'll excuse me—I have more orders to give." With that, he turned back to his Aurors to issue further commands.

"Come on, Watson," said Potter. "We have to get into the bank before the Inspector and his squad. Let's make use of the time while Lestrage is still waiting for reinforcements."

We hurried into the bank, where neither the staff nor the customers had yet noticed that Lestrage and his Aurors were preparing to storm Gringotts. But to our dismay, we found long queues of witches and wizards waiting at the counters. My companion was undeterred. With determination, he began to push his way forward, and I followed him with a growing sense of unease.

The crowd grew restless, but we managed to reach one of the counters. There, a goblin greeted us with unmistakable hostility—he had clearly been watching our conduct closely.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply, without so much as a greeting.

Potter pulled out a small key. "I'd like to retrieve something from my vault."

The goblin examined the key. Once satisfied of its authenticity, he called out. "Griphook!"

Another goblin appeared and was instructed to escort us to Potter's vault. But first, I had to leave the frozen Pombatz behind at the counter.

"Magical creatures are not permitted in the vaults," Griphook explained sternly.

So the three of us climbed into a cart and rattled off into the depths of the bank. The tracks wound in wild curves through the darkness, past underground lakes, through vast caverns, and over dizzying chasms. The cold wind lashed through my hair, and I clung tightly to the side of the cart. After a rapid and jarring ride, our vehicle screeched to a halt in front of a door carved into the rock, above which the number 164 was engraved—Sherlock Potter's vault.

With determination, he leapt from the cart and approached the door. I followed, while Griphook remained by the cart, drumming his long fingers impatiently against

the wood. My companion unlocked the chamber, and I peered inside with curiosity. The room was relatively narrow, with ceiling-high shelves on either side. They were filled with vials and potion ingredients, as well as all manner of materials for magical experiments. On the floor lay heaps of apparatus and contraptions, many of which I had never seen before.

Potter rummaged briefly through the items on the ground. At last, he returned carrying a broom under one arm. In his hands, he held something I had never seen before: it was red and about the size of a dinner plate, seemingly made of metal, with a large lever in the middle. Sherlock Potter handed me the strange device.

"What on earth is this?" I asked.

"Just hold it for a moment," replied Potter. He pushed the apparatus into my hands. "I'll explain everything in a moment."

With that, he drew his wand from his cloak and pointed it at Griphook, who was still standing idly by the cart, tapping his long fingers in boredom.

"Impedimenta forte!"

The goblin froze instantly and collapsed to the ground without a sound.

"What on earth are you doing?" I cried in alarm.

"As our friend Lestrage said earlier: it's time to act!" said Potter. "We need to get to Vault 712 at once and retrieve the casket. I fear the Inspector and his Aurors may already be inside Gringotts. I don't even want to imagine what will happen if the situation escalates."

Without further hesitation, he hoisted the frozen bank employee and his broom into the cart and climbed in himself. I still stood bewildered beside Potter's vault, the strange device in my hands.

"Come on, Watson," Potter called. "And if you'd be so kind—do close my vault door."

Moments later, we were rattling through the tunnels toward Vault 712.

"Tell me," I said as we sped through the darkness, "how do you even know how to operate one of these carts? I thought only goblins could do that. And what on earth is this red contraption?"

"Well," said Potter, "there was a time when I wasn't quite sure which side of the law I wanted to be on. I took the opportunity to learn a few things about Gringotts—such as how to drive these carts."

"You seriously considered breaking into Gringotts?" I asked.

"Well," replied Potter dryly, "strictly speaking, that is exactly what we're doing."

"If I had known—back in my days as an Auror—that you'd drag me into such questionable activities, Potter, I would never have come along!"

"Think of the cause, Watson! When the welfare of all magical beings is at stake, sometimes unusual measures are necessary."

"But of all things—a break-in at Gringotts! This is going to cost us dearly!"

"Be that as it may. This is exactly the sort of situation for which I developed the single-use Portkey and kept it in my vault."

"A single-use Portkey?" I asked.

"My own invention. This Portkey works only once—but it can penetrate numerous magical protective enchantments. As you well know, Gringotts is riddled with them."

"By the holy Quaffle," I muttered. "And with this Portkey, we'll simply disappear from Gringotts once we've retrieved the casket?"

Potter shook his head. "Unfortunately, no. The spells protecting Gringotts prevent any direct escape from the bank. But the single-use Portkey will at least get us to the entrance hall. I'm hoping Lestrage and his Aurors have caused enough chaos there by now that we can slip out unnoticed." He pointed to the broom he had also taken from his vault. "And if not, we'll try it the old-fashioned way."

The cart began to slow, rolled to a stop, and came to rest in front of Vernok's vault, number 712. Even as he leapt from the cart, Potter pulled a magical lockpick from his cloak. As he began working the lock, he muttered "Lucky for us Vernok installed a classic lock—and not one of those models that only responds to his palm print. I expect his pride compelled him to forge the lock himself."

I was about to lean against the adjacent door—number 713—when Potter called out. "Don't lean on that, Watson! It could be enchanted—who knows what traps it holds!"

So I positioned myself behind Potter and watched as he tried to crack the lock. Suddenly, a shrill, cackling laugh rang out behind us.

We spun around—and to our horror, Griphook stood in the cart, glaring at us with a vicious grin.

"You'll rot in Azkaban for this!" he shouted.

Before we could react, he tore off in the cart. Sparks flew from the rails as Griphook rounded the next bend and vanished into the darkness.

"By thunder," said Potter. "I should've hit him with a stronger Stunning Charm! And to make matters worse, my wand is still in the cart!"

"What now?" I asked. "Griphook will raise the alarm—this place will be crawling with goblins in no time."

"Don't forget, LeStrange and his Aurors must have entered the bank by now," said Potter. "I'm sure the entrance hall is in complete chaos. That should buy us some time."

"All right, Potter—then get back to it," I urged him.

"Now that the cart is gone and I'm wandless, we'll have to rely on the single-use Portkey and the broom to escape," Potter said, turning his attention back to the lock.

"I just hope your invention works," I said. "Have you ever actually tested the single-use Portkey?"

Before Potter could reply, there was a soft click. "By the holy Quaffle!" I cried with delight.

"You've done it—you've cracked the lock!" With a heavy clunk, the door to Vault 712 swung open.

It hadn't yet opened all the way when a loud, guttural grunt reached our ears. We took a few steps back. To our horror, a large, hulking figure stomped out of the vault: a fearsome dark troll, bigger than any troll I had ever encountered. Its dark skin was covered in scars, and two enormous tusks jutted from its jaw. Its small, milky eyes fixed on us with bloodthirsty intent.

I saw Potter instinctively reach into his cloak for his wand—but of course, it was with Griphook in the cart. The troll lumbered toward us, now only a few steps away, as we stumbled back. Panic rose within me—but my companion acted in a flash. He snatched the single-use Portkey from my hands, flipped the lever, and hurled it at the dark troll.

The red device let out a brief hiss. An instant later, with a pop, it vanished—along with the monster.

"The troll's been transported to the entrance hall," said Potter. "Let Lestrangle and his Aurors deal with him. Now let's find the casket and get out of here as quickly as possible."

"I couldn't agree more," I said. "I've spent quite enough time inside Gringotts for one lifetime."

With that, we entered the vault. It was considerably larger than Potter's. "It seems Vernok specialised in the crafting of containers of all kinds," remarked my companion.

The shelves lining the right and left walls were packed with caskets, chests, and boxes in every imaginable shape. Some gleamed splendidly—richly adorned and encrusted with gemstones. Others were cruder in appearance, made of sturdy metal and

studded with sharp spikes. Some were etched with magical runes, others crafted from dark, elegant woods wrapped in bands of silvery metal.

At the far end of the vault stood a strange statue—also forged of metal, grotesquely ugly, and more than twice the height of a man. I could not help but wonder who might have commissioned Vernok to create such a monstrous likeness.

We began to search for the casket among the many trunks and boxes, and indeed—it immediately caught our eye: with its ornate and tawdry design, and especially its pink metallic sheen, it stood out from the other containers in the vault.

“That must be it,” said Sherlock Potter, pulling out the bill of sale and comparing it to the image.

Meanwhile, I had stepped up to the shelf and lifted the casket from its place.

“No—don’t!” cried Potter—but it was already too late.

A burning jolt shot through my old scar. The pain was so intense I nearly dropped the casket. Suddenly, the entire vault began to tremble. Dust rained down from the ceiling, and various items clattered from the shelves. Stunned, I stood holding the casket, as Potter grabbed my arm and pulled me toward the exit.

“Out, Watson—you’ve triggered a magical trap!”

A deep rumbling echoed through the vault. Horrified, we watched as the statue at the far end began to move. A metallic grinding filled the chamber as its massive limbs came to life. Its once-lifeless eyes now glowed a menacing red.

“A goblin-forged gargoye!” cried Potter. “On the broom—before we’re done for!”

He swung himself onto the broomstick, and I climbed on behind him, clutching the jewellery casket tightly under my left arm. With my right hand, I tried to hold on to him. Together, we pushed off from the ground just as the gargoye burst from the vault with an ear-splitting roar.

As we took flight, I caught a glimpse of it spreading its wings and launching into pursuit. Unlike its lumbering movements on foot, it was alarmingly agile in the air. With both of us on the broom, Potter struggled to navigate the narrow tunnels and corridors. Again and again, we grazed stone walls or even the tracks that the carts travelled on.

Despite Potter's best efforts, the magical guardian was gaining on us. Its metal body simply smashed through any rock that stood in its way. Suddenly, our broom struck a protruding outcrop of stone, and we wobbled violently. I heard a sharp crack from the broomstick. My grip on Potter's robe slipped, and I slid backward. At the last second, I managed to seize a fistful of his cloak again.

I could already feel the gargoyle's claws brushing my foot—when I realised that we had finally reached the upper level of the vaults. Potter steered with all his remaining strength toward the narrow passage leading to the entrance hall.

With a final burst of speed, we shot into the brilliantly lit chamber of white marble—nearly blinded by the stark contrast to the dark, cramped vaults behind us. I could barely make out the scene unfolding there: Lestrangle, waving a search warrant furiously, and a goblin—clearly the bank director—shouting at him in return. The Aurors stood in a semicircle behind the Inspector, wands drawn, while the Gringotts staff stood opposite them, armed with daggers and swords. The entire atmosphere was charged with tension.

In an instant, every eye turned to us, and from among the goblins, I heard Griphook call out,

"Those are the intruders who attacked me!"

But no one had a chance to respond to the accusation.

The next moment, with a deafening crash, the entrance to the vaults exploded as the gargoyle burst into the hall, effortlessly smashing through the masonry. Dust and

chunks of rock filled the air. Goblins, witches, and wizards alike dived for cover or ducked behind pillars.

With a thunderous impact, the magical guardian landed in the middle of the entrance hall. Surprised to find himself facing such a large crowd of opponents, the gargoyle spun on the spot. He seemed to be deciding whom to attack first.

“Stunning spells!” shouted Inspector Lestrangle—and before Sherlock Potter could even yell “No!”, the Aurors had already fired a volley of spells at the gargoyle.

But the creature’s magical, goblin-forged skin caused every spell to bounce off harmlessly. Spellfire criss-crossed the hall. Blinding flashes of light tore through the swirling dust, hitting goblins and Aurors alike. We, too, were nearly stunned as several curses whizzed past us by mere inches.

Panic erupted in the entrance hall of Gringotts: desks and waiting benches toppled, sheets of parchment fluttered through the air, and stunned goblins, witches, and wizards collapsed to the ground, frozen mid-motion. We ducked behind an overturned bench, trying to take cover.

Just as the magical guardian—who clearly recognised us as the ones who had awakened him—fixed us in his sights and began stomping toward us with thunderous steps, something utterly unexpected occurred. Unexpected by everyone—except, perhaps, Sherlock Potter.

Suddenly, there was a pop—and right in the gargoyle’s line of sight appeared the dark troll, still clutching my companion’s single-use Portkey.

At once, the two monstrous beings turned toward each other. After sizing each other up for the briefest of moments, they launched into a furious battle that shook not only the walls of the bank, but those of the surrounding shops in Diagon Alley.

The gargoyle had the advantage of flight. Again and again, he surged into the air with wings outstretched, diving down on the troll with razor-sharp, metal claws. He

tore deep gashes into the creature's flesh as the troll roared and tried to strike back. But each time, the magical guardian slipped away just in time, evading the troll's heavy but sluggish blows.

Dark blood oozed from the troll's many wounds, streaking thickly across the marble floor of the entrance hall. At last, the dark troll—exhausted and weakening—fell to his knees.

The gargoyle sensed victory. Once more, he swooped down from above, claws outstretched for a final attack.

But he came too close to his enemy's grasp.

With surprising speed, the troll raised one massive arm, caught the gargoyle by the leg, and, summoning all his remaining strength, slammed him into the ground with a thunderous crash. A deafening crack echoed through the hall as the magical guardian shattered into a thousand metal shards.

The dark troll, still clutching the gargoyle's severed foot, remained crouched in exhaustion as Sherlock Potter sprang from cover and shouted, "Stunning spell, Lestrangle!"

Immediately, the Inspector gave the order to his Aurors. Together, they unleashed a hailstorm of Stunning Spells from all sides.

Still gripping the gargoyle's foot in his fist, the enormous beast toppled to the ground—frozen in place.

Slowly, the dust of battle began to settle. Coughing, witches, wizards, and goblins emerged from their hiding places. Debris and shattered furniture lay strewn across the floor; the reception counters were reduced to piles of splintered wood. Amid the dust and rubble, the remains of the gargoyle glittered like a thousand tiny stars.

At once, the bank employees set about restoring order, sweeping the hall with enchanted brooms. Meanwhile, the Inspector, the bank director, Griphook, Vernok, Sherlock Potter, and I had gathered in a tight group.

Immediately, a heated discussion flared up—especially as Griphook renewed his accusation:

“These two wizards attacked me in the vaults!”

And Vernok, pointing furiously at the casket still in my hands, added, “And they’ve stolen my casket!”

The director of Gringotts turned to Inspector Lestrangle. “Is it not your duty, as an officer of the Ministry of Magic, to arrest these men at once? And to ensure the stolen goods are promptly returned to their rightful owner?”

“Strictly speaking,” replied Lestrangle, “this casket does not belong to Vernok, but to a Ministry employee.”

“But I crafted that casket myself!” shouted Vernok angrily. “I sold it many years ago at the Goblin Emporium to a witch who died just last week—meaning I’ve taken it back, as goblin ownership law dictates.”

“That is a goblin interpretation of ownership,” said Lestrangle, “and it does not apply to wizards.”

At once, murmurs rose from the goblins. They abandoned their cleaning work and stepped toward us with dark expressions. In response, some of the Aurors reached once again for their wands. The tension in the air threatened to erupt once more.

Then Sherlock Potter stepped forward. “I believe I have a solution!” he declared.

He pulled out the bill of sale for the jewellery casket and turned to Vernok. “You sold this casket to Mrs Hopkirk’s mother for 50 Galleons. Would you be willing to sell it again—for the same price?”

“I’ll have you know, its value has increased significantly since then, and—”

"Fine. Let's say 60 Galleons. No need to be petty. You've got bills of sale forms in this bank, haven't you?"

A goblin dashed off toward one of the overturned desks.

Potter turned to the Ministry Inspector. "Lestrangle, surely you have a few coins on you?"

Reluctantly, the Inspector pulled out his coin pouch.

"Think of the greater good," Sherlock Potter added with a mischievous smile.

And so we purchased the casket—along with the Magical Treaty, which the goblins had never even known about—and reclaimed it. On Inspector Lestrangle's order, the Aurors withdrew from the bank and streamed back out into Diagon Alley.

"But what about the two thieves? You can't just let them walk away! After all, they attacked one of my staff down in the vaults," the branch manager said to Inspector Lestrangle, and Griphook nodded eagerly.

"We'll present the case before the Wizengamot," said Lestrangle. You can be sure Mr Potter and Mr Watson will receive appropriate punishment. Besides, let's not forget that Vernok caused considerable damage during his break-in at the Ministry of Magic."

The bank director narrowed his eyes. He was clearly not satisfied. Turning to my companion and me, he said in a threatening voice, "You two are hereby banned for life from Gringotts—show your faces here again and you'll feel the wrath of the goblins. Rest assured, you'll be receiving a hefty account for the renovation of the entrance hall!"

Once Potter had retrieved his wand, we were, for the second time that day, expelled from a goblin-run establishment.

Shortly thereafter, we found ourselves once again in Diagon Alley, blinking into the sunlight that had finally broken through the autumn clouds. While the Aurors re-

turned to the Ministry of Magic, we travelled back with Inspector Lestrangle via Floo Network to 121B Baker Street.

As Mrs Pomfrey served us cauldron cakes—small, kettle-baked treats laced with revitalising fairy honey—we sent an owl to Mrs Hopkirk, requesting that she join us in our sitting room.

Just as we finished the cakes alongside a few cups of moonlight mocha, green flames flared in our fireplace. The Undersecretary stepped out, holding the key to the jewellery casket. The Inspector hurried to take it from her, opened the casket, and with trembling fingers retrieved the Magical Treaty—the very document that had caused us all so much trouble.

Potter handed the now-empty box back to Mrs Hopkirk. “There you are—your beloved casket. May it bring you peace from now on.”

The witch thanked us profusely and left in tears of joy.

We spent a good while in conversation with the Inspector, laughing and reflecting on all the worries and hardships that treaty had caused. By late afternoon, exhaustion overtook us; Lestrangle and I dozed off in our armchairs while Sherlock Potter resumed work on his painting.

When we awoke, Mrs Pomfrey had already begun laying out lunch. After enjoying a glass of cauldron schnapps and a pipe of Talsker herb, Inspector Lestrangle took his leave of us.

A warning

The next morning, we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast well into the late morning hours. The Pombatz purred contentedly on my lap as I scratched the back of its neck. The Daily Prophet lay in tatters across the table—Potter and I had each taken a few pages and were reading them in silence.

Naturally, the events at the wizarding bank dominated the headlines. I broke the silence. "Listen to this—it says that a warning plaque was installed at Gringotts earlier this morning."

"Oh really? What does it say?"

"The following words were engraved into the great silver double doors:

*Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn,
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there."*

Potter smiled. "You see—we've been immortalised, in a way."

I leaned back and took another sip of moonlight mocha. The Pombatz seized the moment to snatch a piece of toast from my plate.

"Well then, Potter, everything turned out all right in the end, didn't it? Inspector Lestrange recovered the Magical Treaty, Mrs Hopkirk got her casket back, and we saved the wizarding world from a major disaster."

Potter, who had by now produced his jade-green pipe, replied. "Well, my dear fellow, I believe we did our best. In hindsight, I would have preferred to approach the matter differently. But the impending raid on Gringotts by Inspector Lestrange and his Aurors forced our hand."

"But what could we have done better? For sure, we're banned from Gringotts for life—but the Ministry will cover all damages. We both know it's a price they're willing to pay. Just imagine what catastrophe might have unfolded had we failed!"

Potter exhaled a slow puff of smoke and shook his head.

"Don't forget the impression we left with the goblins. Their mistrust toward wizards and witches has only deepened. Think of Griphook, the goblin I stunned in the vaults—he'll likely never trust a human again. From now on, he'll act solely in the interest of his kind."

At that moment sounded the bright chime of the front doorbell. Moments later, we heard Mrs Pomfrey rushing up the stairs.

"Gentlemen," she called, flustered, "a carriage has just pulled up outside and is requesting to deliver two enormous wooden crates to you!"

Potter turned to me. "Are you expecting something?"

"Not that I recall," I replied. "I don't remember ever ordering anything by carriage. I usually prefer to do my shopping myself in Diagon Alley."

Together with our housekeeper, we made our way downstairs and stepped out onto Baker Street. Sure enough, a carriage stood waiting, laden with two large crates. We recognised the driver immediately by his cloak as a member of the wizarding fraternity.

"By thunder," said my companion, raising an eyebrow, "why deliver the crates like Muggles—with a carriage—and not simply use a few spells? That seems rather tedious to me."

The coachman answered awkwardly, "Yes, well, it's a bit embarrassing, but the sender insisted on it."

"Oh really? And who sent them?"

"I'm delivering on behalf of Gringotts. I was also instructed to give you this letter." He handed Potter an envelope, which my companion opened at once. He unfolded the letter and read aloud:

'Dear Messrs Potter and Watson,

Following the lifetime ban issued against both of you on 10th October 1859, your vaults have been emptied and we are hereby returning your personal belongings stored within. We consider our business relationship terminated.

Vigilant regards,

Gringotts Bank'

Potter shot me a sour look. I too was anything but pleased by the news.

"Well then, let's bring these crates upstairs," he sighed. "Watson, do you see any Muggles about?" he asked, drawing his wand.

The coachman looked even more embarrassed and shifted from foot to foot. "Mr Potter, I'm afraid your wand won't be of much help. The goblins placed curses on the crates—magical transport has been rendered impossible."

Potter lowered his wand in disbelief. I remarked "As you said, Potter—we've left quite the impression with the goblins."

And so, groaning and grumbling, we dragged the heavy crates up to our flat. Without needing to say a word, we silently agreed to leave them unopened in the sitting room for now—further worsening the already disordered state of our home.

Meanwhile, the Pombatz had finished off our breakfast and made itself comfortable by the fireplace.

Later that afternoon, when Mrs Pomfrey brought up lunch and saw the chaos in the living room, she seemed eager to leave as quickly as possible. But then her eyes fell on the Pombatz. As she picked it up, she asked, "Well now, what an adorable little creature you've got there. Technically, pets aren't allowed in rented rooms—but with such a sweet thing...what is it, anyway?"

"A Pombatz," I replied.

She frowned slightly. "Mr Watson, it's not dangerous, is it?"

"No," I said, "I don't think so."

Her brow furrowed. "What do you mean, you don't think so?" she asked nervously, carefully setting the creature down and taking a cautious step back.

Sherlock Potter came to my aid. "Do not alarm yourself, Mrs Pomfrey. It's a perfectly harmless little creature. Just... rather hungry." He smiled at our housekeeper, who at once appeared charmed again by the magical beast.

Once she had left us alone, Potter turned to me and said "We really ought to find out exactly what sort of pet we've brought into our home."

"But you just said—" I began.

"A little white lie, my dear fellow," replied Potter. "Be so good as to pass me the Lexicon of Magical Creatures."

I pulled the book from the shelf and handed it to Potter. "Hm, hm," he murmured as he thumbed through it. "Phoenix, Plimpy, Pogrebin... ah, here it is—Pombatz!"

He read aloud. "The Pombatz originates from Portugal, grows to the size of a cat, and is covered in lilac-coloured fur with large, yellow, bulbous eyes." Then he looked up.

"And?" I asked.

"That's all it says," replied Potter, throwing the Lexicon of Magical Creatures in frustration into the corner. "It's high time someone wrote a proper book on magical beasts and where to find them."

He drew on his pipe, then his gaze wandered to the letter from Scarlett Zink, which I had left on the table yesterday during our hasty departure for the Ministry.

"And what do you intend to do about your correspondence?" he asked. "What shall you write back to the lady—if I may be so bold?"

"Potter, you haven't read my letter, have you?"

"Perish the thought, my dear fellow!"

"Then how do you know it's from a woman?" I asked suspiciously.

"Well, first of all, the handwriting on the envelope suggests it," he explained. I glanced at the envelope on which Scarlett Zink had written "For Watson."

"Then we have the envelope itself: sealed parchment with the crest of Hogwarts—yet unofficial. And as you've only had this letter since returning from your brief stay at Hogwarts, I gather it must have been delivered to you there. All signs point to the sender being a schoolmistress at Hogwarts."

He raised a playful finger. "I do hope it's a professor and not a pupil. You do seem a little too old for that, Watson."

I pressed my lips together. Potter, realising I wasn't in the mood for jokes, took on a more serious tone.

"And have you written back? After all, your visit to Hogwarts was some weeks ago."

"No. I don't think I shall reply—what would be the point? I might as well try to cast spells with my wand again."

Potter raised his eyebrows in near shock. "But Watson! You mustn't think that way. Even if I know nothing of the letter's contents, your situation surely isn't hopeless!"

He waved his wand, and a quill floated over to the table. Sherlock Potter caught it mid-air and held it out to me.

"By thunder, Watson. Just write the reply. Remember: the future is not set. We all have the power to change it."