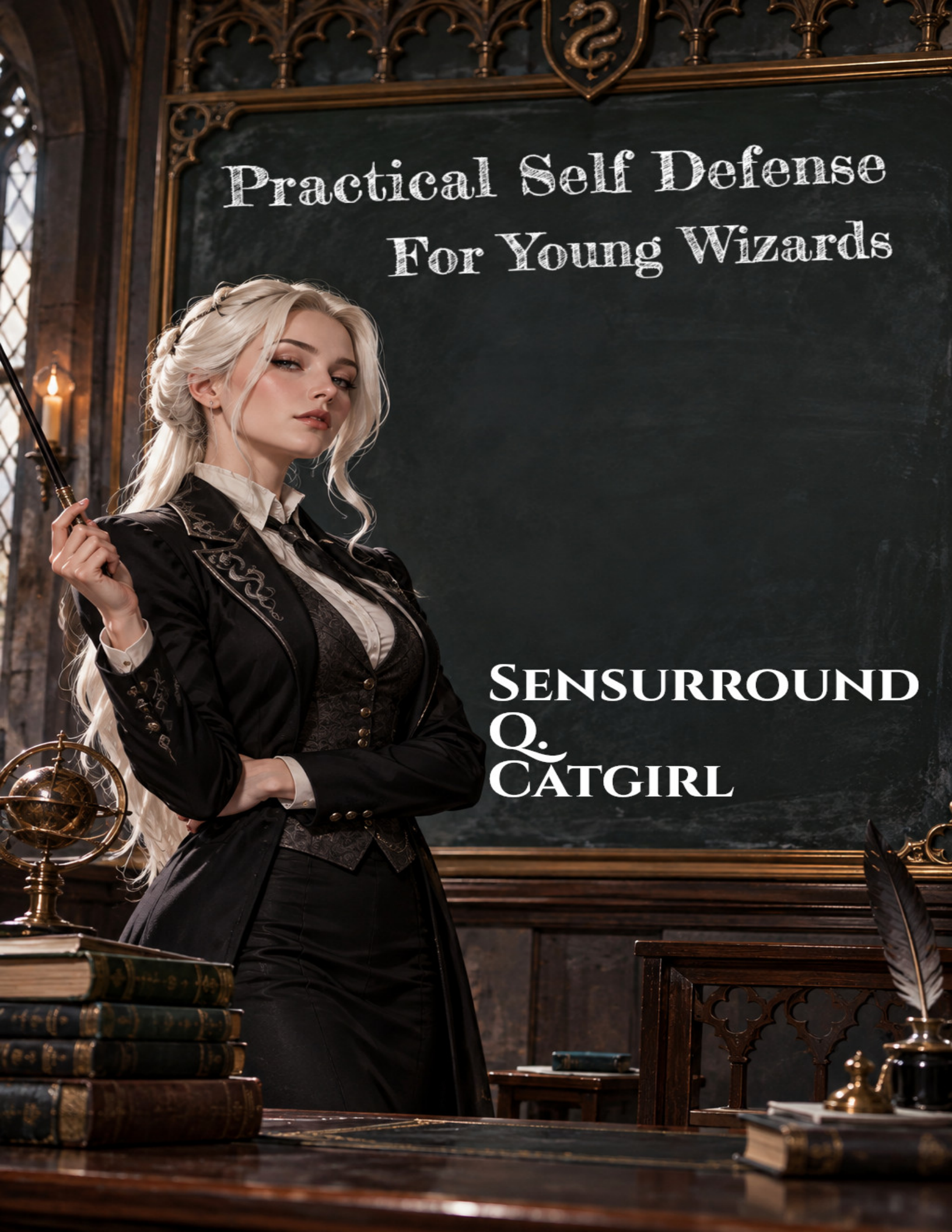


A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is the central figure. She is wearing a black Victorian-style jacket with gold embroidery over a white blouse and a dark skirt. She holds a black wand in her right hand. The background features a large chalkboard with the title text. To the left, there is a stack of old books and a small globe. To the right, a quill pen sits in an inkwell on a desk. The room has ornate wooden paneling and a window with a diamond pattern on the left.

Practical Self Defense For Young Wizards

SENSURROUND
Q.
CATGIRL

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The First Lesson: Overview

Dracena stood at the front of the classroom, surveying the students seated before her. She was dressed impeccably, her long blonde hair neatly arranged, her wand resting on the desk beside a small stack of books.

Behind her, written across the blackboard in elegant handwriting, were three words:

PROFESSOR MALFOY-POTTER

"Good morning, everyone."

"Good morning, Professor." the class replied, with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

"My name is Dracena Malfoy-Potter. You may address me as Professor Malfoy-Potter, Professor Potter, or simply Professor."

She paused, surveying the classroom. She hid her nervousness quite well, she thought.

"Ordinarily, I don't use my full hyphenated surname. It's rather cumbersome, and I've found that introducing myself as Mrs. Potter tends to make people considerably more pleasant to deal with."

A few students laughed.

"However, today I'm using both names for a very particular reason."

She turned toward the blackboard and underlined Potter .

"My husband is Harry Potter. I suspect some of you may have heard of him."

The classroom erupted in laughter.

"Yes, yes. Very famous. Quite dreadful at remembering to put his socks in the laundry basket, but otherwise a reasonably respectable gentleman."

More laughter.

"Harry was, of course, a Gryffindor. And I think it's fair to say that he's become something of an embodiment of that house's finest qualities."

She began writing beneath his name.

COURAGE. BRAVERY. DETERMINATION.

"He's brave. Sometimes extraordinarily so. He's willing to face danger, even when he's frightened. And when he sees someone in trouble, his first instinct is to help."

She smiled faintly. "Whether they asked him to or not."

She turned back toward the students.

"Now, I was a Slytherin."

She underlined Malfoy .

"And I come from a very long line of Slytherins. My family has traditionally valued rather different qualities."

She wrote another set of words.

CUNNING. AMBITION. RESOURCEFULNESS.

"We are clever. We are calculating. We prefer to consider our options before committing ourselves to a course of action. And yes, occasionally, we're a little sneaky."

Several Slytherins grinned.

"Historically, Gryffindors and Slytherins have tended to regard these qualities as being in opposition to one another."

She looked around the room again. She had their rapt attention. Good.

"Gryffindors sometimes think Slytherins are cowards because we prefer to avoid unnecessary risks."

She raised an eyebrow.

"And Slytherins sometimes think Gryffindors are idiots because they insist upon taking them."

The room burst into laughter.

"Both opinions." she continued, "are occasionally justified."

She let the laughter subside.

"But here's something I've learned over the years."

She drew a line connecting the two groups of words.

COURAGE + CUNNING

"These qualities are not opposites. In fact, when used properly, they supplement and complement one another."

She turned to face the class.

"Courage without judgment can become recklessness. Cunning without courage can become cowardice."

She let that settle.

"A brave wizard may be willing to confront a dangerous enemy. A cunning wizard may recognize that confronting that enemy directly is a terrible idea."

She smiled at the class.

"A *wise* wizard knows when to do which."

Dracena walked around her desk. "Which brings me to the subject of this course." She tapped the blackboard with her wand.

The words **DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS** appeared.

"For centuries, Hogwarts has taught a subject called 'Defence Against the Dark Arts.' It's an important subject. There are dangerous curses,

dangerous creatures, and dangerous people in this world. You must learn how to recognize and defend yourselves against them."

She paused, watching the students. Everyone was watching her. Good.

"However, I have a rather serious objection to the traditional curriculum."

She flicked her wand. The words changed.

PRACTICAL DEFENCE

A murmur passed through the classroom.

"Dark magic is not the only thing that can hurt you."

She began pacing slowly.

"A perfectly ordinary spell, used maliciously, can be just as dangerous as a Dark curse. A person doesn't need a wand to attack you. A magical creature may threaten you without intending any harm at all. And there are magical traditions throughout the world that most British witches and wizards know almost nothing about."

She stopped.

"Yet we continue teaching defensive techniques as though every dangerous encounter will be a polite little duel between two people standing several paces apart, waving wands at one another."

A few students laughed.

"I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the world is rarely so accommodating."

She turned toward the board again.

Four statements appeared.

AVOID THE FIGHT.

SURVIVE THE FIGHT.

PROTECT YOURSELF, AND OTHERS.

WIN THE FIGHT, IF YOU MUST.

"These are the principles around which I intend to organize your education."

She pointed to the first.

"How to recognize danger before it becomes a threat. How to avoid unnecessary confrontation. How to escape when escape is possible."

The second.

"How to defend yourselves when something goes wrong. How to remain calm, think clearly, and act effectively under pressure."

The third.

"How to protect someone who cannot protect themselves. A younger sibling. An injured friend. A complete stranger. How to keep yourself safe as well, as much as possible, anyway."

Her expression softened slightly.

"And finally, how to stop an attacker when you have no other reasonable choice."

She folded her hands.

"Some of you may be surprised to learn that I consider the first of those principles every bit as important as the last."

A Gryffindor boy raised his hand.

"Yes?"

"Professor, isn't running away from a fight cowardly?"

Dracena smiled.

"An excellent question. What's your name?"

"Daniel, Professor."

"Well, Daniel, let me ask you something. Suppose you're walking through Hogsmeade with your little sister, and a dangerous wizard threatens you.

You have an opportunity to escape safely with her. Would you take it?"

Daniel hesitated. "I suppose so."

"Why?"

"To keep her safe."

"Precisely. Now suppose you decided to stay and fight instead, and your sister was injured as a result."

Daniel looked uncomfortable. "That would be bad."

"Indeed." She leaned against her desk. "Your responsibility in that situation is not to prove how brave you are. It is to get your sister home safely." She smiled. "And if you accomplish that without casting a single spell, I would consider it a very successful defensive encounter."

Daniel nodded thoughtfully. "Thank you, Professor."

"You're welcome."

A Slytherin girl raised her hand.

"Yes?"

"Professor, what if you can't get away?"

Dracena's expression became serious. "Then, my dear, we're going to make absolutely certain you know what to do next." She walked back toward the blackboard. "Over the coming year, we're going to study spells, certainly.

But we're also going to study awareness, judgment, preparation, the responsible use of force, and the practical limitations of magic."

She looked around the room.

"Some of our lessons will involve very little wand work. Others will involve quite a lot." A small smile crossed her face. "And I should warn you that I intend to make the practical examinations considerably more interesting than those you're accustomed to."

Several students exchanged excited looks.

"Now, one final thing."

She tapped the two names on the blackboard.

MALFOY — POTTER

"I have spent much of my life learning that Gryffindors and Slytherins have rather more to teach one another than either house has traditionally cared to admit."

She looked toward the Gryffindor students.

"I expect you to learn to think before you act."

Then toward the Slytherins.

"And I expect you to learn that sometimes, despite all your careful planning, you must act outside your plans. OR without any at all."

Her gaze swept across the classroom.

"Because courage is not the absence of fear, and cunning is not the absence of honor." She smiled. "And neither is worth very much without the wisdom to use it properly."

Dracena picked up her wand.

"Now, then."

The blackboard cleared.

A single question appeared in large letters.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO WIN A FIGHT?

She turned toward the class.

"Who would like to begin?"

Nearly every hand went up.

Dracena smiled.

Oh, this was going to be fun.

The Second Lesson: Fighting Sucks

The students had been expecting something rather different. Professor Malfoy-Potter had instructed them to leave their wands in their bags, remove their robes, and report to the Defence Against the Dark Arts

classroom wearing comfortable clothing. She had also arranged for the desks to be removed. And, rather ominously, for Madam Pomfrey and two of her assistants to be present.

"Good morning, everyone." Dracena announced cheerfully. "This week, we're going to learn how to fight."

Several students exchanged excited glances.

"Without magic."

The excitement diminished somewhat.

"Now, I know what you're thinking. You're witches and wizards. You have wands. Why on earth would you need to learn how to fight without them?"

A Ravenclaw raised his hand. Dracena acknowledged him. "Because someone might take our wands?"

"Precisely. Or you might drop yours. Or break it. Or find yourself somewhere you cannot use magic. Or someone might simply get close enough to grab you before you can draw it." She paused, looking at the students. "Magic is a wonderful thing. But relying on it exclusively is a rather foolish way to go through life."

Dracena gestured toward the padded mats covering the floor. "Today, we're going to start with something very simple. I want you to pair up and wrestle."

A few students laughed.

"I'm serious. Try to get your opponent onto the ground. Try to hold them there. Try to escape if they manage to hold you down."

She raised a finger.

"No wands. No spells. No biting, no gouging eyes, and absolutely no deliberately breaking anything. This is an exercise, not an attempt to murder your classmates."

She gestured toward Madam Pomfrey.

"Madam Pomfrey has very graciously agreed to supervise today's activities. If you're injured, shout 'MEDIC!' and she'll attend to you."

"I have agreed to nothing of the sort." Madam Pomfrey muttered.

"You agreed to be here."

"I didn't agree. I was TOLD to be here because you informed the Headmaster that you intended to have children physically assaulting one another!"

"An unfortunate characterization, Poppy."

"An ACCURATE characterization!"

Dracena smiled sweetly. "Well, then. Everyone find a partner."

The first five minutes were absolute chaos. Students who had never so much as shoved another person in anger discovered that wrestling was considerably more difficult than it appeared.

A Hufflepuff girl managed to pin a Slytherin boy twice her size, only to discover that she had absolutely no idea how to keep him there.

Two Ravenclaws spent nearly a minute circling one another, each apparently waiting for the other to make the first move.

A Gryffindor named Daniel charged his opponent with a heroic battle cry, immediately tripped over his own feet, and landed face-first on the mat.

"MEDIC!"

Madam Pomfrey hurried over. "Honestly!" A quick movement of her wand restored Daniel's nose to its previous shape.

"Thank you, Madam Pomfrey!"

"Don't thank me! Stop doing whatever idiotic thing caused this!"

Daniel returned to the exercise. Three minutes later:

"MEDIC!"

"OH, FOR MERLIN'S SAKE!"

Dracena watched with an expression of professional satisfaction. Madam Pomfrey did not share it.

"Professor Potter!"

Dracena turned.

Madam Pomfrey stood beside her, arms crossed, her face a remarkable shade of crimson. "This is barbaric."

"Yes, Poppy. You've mentioned that."

"These are CHILDREN!"

"I'm aware."

"They're bruising one another! They're getting bloody noses! That poor girl over there has just had her wrist twisted!"

"Which you've very kindly repaired."

"THAT IS NOT THE POINT!"

Dracena's expression softened. "No. It isn't."

Something in her tone made Pomfrey pause. "Then what, precisely, IS the point?"

Dracena looked across the room. "Look at them, Poppy. Really look."

Pomfrey followed her gaze.

"They're learning something that no textbook can adequately explain."

"How to injure one another?"

"How easily they can be injured."

Pomfrey frowned. Dracena continued quietly. "These children have grown up in a world where most injuries can be repaired with a wave of a wand. A broken bone is an inconvenience. A bloody nose is something you visit the hospital wing about."

"And thank goodness for that."

"Absolutely. But outside Hogwarts, things are rather different." Dracena folded her arms. "There are people in this world who will hurt you, Poppy. Deliberately. People who don't care about your ideas of civility. People who won't stop because you tell them that what they're doing is wrong."

"Surely you don't believe that throwing children into fights is the answer?"

"No. I believe teaching them to avoid fights is the answer."

Pomfrey stared at her. "Then why are you having them fight?"

"Because I want them to understand what they're avoiding." Dracena gestured toward the mats. "Every one of these students knows, intellectually, that getting punched in the face hurts. But how many of them actually understand what that means? How many have felt what it's like to be pinned beneath someone stronger than themselves? How many have discovered that their clever plans fall apart the moment someone grabs them? I'd rather they discover those things here, with you standing ten feet away, than in a dark alley somewhere with no one coming to help."

Pomfrey looked away for several seconds. "I still think it's barbaric."

"You're probably right."

"And I intend to tell the Headmaster exactly what I think of your teaching methods."

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't."

Pomfrey sniffed. "And that Gryffindor boy is going to break his nose again."

Dracena glanced over. "Yes, I rather think he is."

"MEDIC!" the child yelled, just as predicted.

"IDIOT CHILD!"

After about half an hour, Dracena raised her wand. A loud whistle echoed through the room.

"STOP!" Dracena yelled.

The students froze.

"Everyone, sit down. Right where you are."

They collapsed onto the mats, breathing heavily. Some were laughing. Some were rubbing sore shoulders. Several looked thoroughly miserable. Daniel was holding a handkerchief to his nose. Again.

Dracena surveyed them. "Well. That was educational."

A few students groaned.

"Now, I'd like to hear what you've learned."

A small hand rose. "Yes, Maribel?"

A girl with untidy brown hair stood up. "Well, Professor, I used to do wrestling at my Muggle school."

"Excellent! So you had some experience."

"Yes, ma'am. And I thought I'd be pretty good at this."

"Were you?"

Maribel hesitated. "Not really."

"Why not?"

"Because I was wrestling Tommy." She pointed toward a large boy sitting several feet away. "He's two years older than me, and he weighs about twenty-five pounds more. I tried everything I learned in wrestling, and none of it worked. He was just too strong."

Tommy looked embarrassed. "I wasn't trying to hurt her, Professor."

"I know you weren't, Tommy."

Dracena turned back to Maribel. "And what did that teach you?"

Maribel thought for a moment. "That being good at wrestling doesn't mean you can beat someone who's bigger than you?"

"Precisely."

Dracena looked around the classroom. "Now, this is something I want every one of you to remember. There are people who will tell you that size and strength don't matter if you know the right techniques." She shook her head. "That is nonsense."

Several students looked surprised. "Technique matters enormously. Training matters. Experience matters. And over the coming week, I'm going to teach you techniques that *may* help you escape from someone who is stronger than you." She pointed toward Tommy. "But Tommy is bigger and stronger than Maribel. Even without any wrestling experience, that gives him a considerable advantage. And if he learns the same techniques she knows, that advantage becomes even more significant."

Maribel nodded slowly.

"Now imagine." Dracena continued, "that Tommy wasn't a perfectly nice boy who was trying not to hurt you."

The classroom grew quiet.

"Imagine he was someone who genuinely wanted to hurt you. Someone who wasn't going to stop when you said you'd had enough."

Maribel looked down. "That would be pretty scary."

"Yes. It would."

Dracena let the silence linger. "And that's why I want you to learn something far more important than how to wrestle."

She looked around the room.

"Avoid getting into fights."

A few students blinked.

"That's it?" someone asked.

"That's the first lesson."

"But Professor." a Gryffindor protested, "isn't fighting sometimes the brave thing to do?"

"Of course it is." Dracena smiled faintly. "My husband is rather famous for doing exactly that."

Several students laughed.

"And I love him dearly. But I can assure you that Harry Potter has an almost supernatural talent for finding himself in situations where someone is trying to kill him."

More laughter.

"One of the things I've spent our marriage attempting to teach him is that not every problem requires him to charge directly toward it."

"Has he learned?" a student asked.

Dracena considered this. "Occasionally."

A hand rose near the back. It belonged to Daniel, the Gryffindor with the repeatedly broken nose.

"Yes, Daniel?"

"Well, Professor, I always thought fighting was sort of... brave."

"And now?"

He looked sheepish. "Well, it kind of sucks."

The class erupted in laughter. Dracena smiled. "Do elaborate."

"Madam Pomfrey had to fix my nose twice."

"Three times." Pomfrey corrected from the corner.

"Three times." Daniel agreed miserably.

"And?"

"And it really hurt."

"Yes."

"And I didn't really accomplish anything."

Dracena nodded. "Now we're getting somewhere." She walked slowly across the front of the room. "Daniel, when you charged at your opponent, what were you thinking?"

"That I was going to knock him down."

"And did you?"

"No, ma'am."

"What happened instead?"

"I fell over."

"And broke your nose."

"Yes, ma'am."

Dracena turned to the class. "Now, Daniel is a Gryffindor. He possesses a quality that I genuinely admire. He is willing to confront something that frightens him." She glanced at the boy. "That is courage."

Daniel brightened.

"But courage is not the same thing as good judgment."

His expression fell.

"Charging into a fight you don't understand, against an opponent you haven't assessed, without any idea of what you're going to do when you get there..."

She shook her head.

"All that is, is giving Madam Pomfrey more work to do."

The room dissolved into laughter.

"THREE TIMES!" Pomfrey shouted, smiling slightly at Dracena.

Dracena waited for the laughter to subside. "Now, I want you all to understand something." Her voice became more serious. "Over the next several lessons, I'm going to teach you how to defend yourselves without magic. We'll learn how to escape from someone grabbing your wrist. How to get back onto your feet if someone knocks you down. How to protect yourselves if someone attacks you unexpectedly. Most importantly, I want you to remember how you feel right now."

She gestured toward the exhausted students.

"The bruises. The sore muscles. The bloody noses. The frustration of discovering that someone bigger than you can simply overpower you." Her

eyes settled on Maribel. "The fear of realizing that the techniques you thought would protect you might not be enough."

Then she looked toward Daniel. "And the pain of discovering that courage doesn't make your nose any harder."

A few students chuckled.

"Today, you learned something that many adults never properly understand."

She raised one finger. **"Fighting hurts."**

A second finger. **"You can lose, even when you've done everything right."**

A third. **"And even when you win, you can still get hurt."**

She lowered her hand. "So before you decide to fight someone, ask yourselves a very simple question." She looked around the room. "Is there a way to avoid this?"

The classroom was silent. "Can you walk away? Can you talk your way out of it? Can you get somewhere safe? Can you find someone to help?"

She smiled. "If you can, do that."

A Slytherin raised her hand. "Professor? Isn't running away cowardly?"

Dracena's eyebrows rose. "Miss Parkinson, if someone twice your size decides to attack you, and you successfully escape without being injured, have you lost?"

"Well... I don't know? I guess not."

"Have you accomplished your objective?"

"I suppose, if my objective is 'not getting hurt' I guess."

"Then why on earth would you consider that a defeat?"

The girl thought about it. Dracena smiled.

"Sometimes, the cleverest way to win a fight is to make certain it never happens."

She glanced toward Madam Pomfrey. "Particularly when the alternative involves having your nose reconstructed three times."

"FOUR!" Pomfrey snapped.

Everyone turned. Daniel was holding his nose again. A thin trickle of blood had appeared beneath his fingers. "I think it started bleeding again." he said weakly.

Madam Pomfrey closed her eyes. "Merlin preserve me."

Dracena sighed. "Daniel, I believe you've learned enough for one day."

As the students filed out, Madam Pomfrey approached Dracena.

"I hope you're satisfied."

"Quite."

"Four bloody noses. Two sprained wrists. Six bruised ribs. And one child who managed to dislocate his own thumb."

"An impressive list."

"An APPALLING list!"

Dracena turned toward her. "Poppy, may I ask you something?"

"What?"

"If one of those children finds themselves attacked someday, and remembers today's lesson, and decides to run instead of fight..."

Pomfrey said nothing.

"And because of that decision, they come home safely..." Dracena smiled.

"Would today's injuries have been worth it?"

Pomfrey looked at the empty classroom. For a long moment, she said nothing. Finally, she sighed. "I suppose."

"Thank you."

"But I still think you're a barbarian."

Dracena grinned. "Well, I am a Slytherin."

"That's hardly an excuse!"

"No." Dracena agreed. "But it does explain rather a lot." Dracena said, grinning.

Pomfrey shook her head and started toward the door. "Tomorrow..." she announced, "I'm bringing twice as many assistants."

Dracena smiled. "Excellent. We'll be learning how to escape from someone who's trying to strangle you."

Pomfrey stopped dead. She turned around very slowly. "YOU'RE GOING TO DO *WHAT*? "

Dracena's laughter followed her all the way down the corridor.

The Third Lesson: Cooper's Color Code

Daniel was rather relieved to discover that the desks had returned. There were no wrestling mats, no students grappling on the floor, and, most importantly, no Madam Pomfrey waiting in the corner with her wand drawn and an expression of barely restrained fury.

Professor Malfoy-Potter stood beside the blackboard, looking unusually pleased with herself.

"Good morning, everyone."

"Good morning, Professor!"

"Last week, we spent our time learning some basic techniques for defending ourselves without our wands. We learned how to escape from someone grabbing us, how to protect ourselves on the ground, and how to get back onto our feet. And, of course, we learned something rather important about fighting." She looked directly at Daniel. "Daniel, would you care to remind everyone what that was?"

Daniel turned scarlet. "Fighting sucks, Professor."

The classroom erupted in laughter.

"Quite right!" Dracena smiled. "An inelegant way of expressing it, perhaps, but wonderfully accurate."

She turned toward the blackboard. "Now, today we're going to learn about one of the most important ways to avoid getting into a fight in the first place."

With a flick of her wand, four words appeared on the board.

COOPER'S COLOR CODE

Beneath them appeared four colored circles.

WHITE — YELLOW — ORANGE — RED

"This system was developed by an American Muggle named Jeff Cooper, who taught people about firearms and personal defence. His system has been taught to police officers and many ordinary citizens, and I think it applies just as well to witches and wizards."

A Ravenclaw raised her hand. "Professor, why are we learning something developed by a Muggle?"

Dracena smiled. "An excellent question, Miss Whitmore. Why do you suppose?"

"Because Muggles have to defend themselves without magic?"

"Partly. But more importantly, because a Muggle can be just as observant, just as intelligent, and just as capable of recognizing danger as a wizard."

She tapped the board.

"Magic does not give us a monopoly on good ideas. And ignoring useful knowledge simply because it comes from Muggles is a particularly stupid form of arrogance." She paused. "One that my family was, regrettably, rather famous for." she muttered.

A few students exchanged surprised looks.

"Now. Let's begin."

Condition White

Dracena tapped the white circle.

WHITE — UNAWARE AND UNPREPARED

"Condition White means you aren't really paying attention to what's happening around you. You're absorbed in your thoughts, distracted, daydreaming, or otherwise unconcerned with your surroundings." She looked around the classroom. "Who here has ever been reading a particularly interesting book and failed to notice someone entering the room?"

Nearly every Ravenclaw raised a hand.

"Yes, I thought so."

A few students laughed.

"Now, here's something important. Condition White is not necessarily a bad thing."

She let that sink in.

"If you're relaxing in your common room, reading a book, or sitting at home with your family, it's perfectly reasonable to let your guard down. You cannot spend every waking moment looking for danger. You'd be absolutely miserable." She smiled. "Trust me. I've known people who tried."

A Slytherin raised his hand. "So Condition White is safe when you're somewhere safe?"

"Sort of. Being somewhere safe makes Condition White more appropriate. But no place is perfectly safe, and no one can remain alert every moment of the day." She pointed at the word *UNAWARE*. "The important thing is to recognize when you're in Condition White. Because sometimes, you might be in it when you really shouldn't be."

Condition Yellow

She tapped the second circle.

YELLOW — RELAXED AWARENESS

"This is where I'd like most of you to spend your time when you're out in public." She began walking between the desks. "Condition Yellow means you're paying attention to the world around you. You're not frightened. You're not expecting an attack. You're simply noticing things."

She stopped beside a Hufflepuff. "Mr. Finch, when you walked into this classroom today, did you notice whether the windows were open?"

"Er... no, Professor."

"Did you notice where the doors were?"

"Well, the main door..."

"There's another one."

The class looked around.

Dracena pointed toward a narrow door partially concealed behind a tapestry. "That leads to a storage corridor."

Several students stared.

"Now, I'm not suggesting you spend your life memorizing every door in every building. But there's nothing wrong with knowing where you are, who's around you, and what's happening." She returned to the front.

"Condition Yellow is not paranoia. It's not fear. It's simply awareness."

She smiled. "You can enjoy a beautiful day, have a conversation with your

friends, or admire a particularly attractive pair of shoes while remaining in Condition Yellow."

A Slytherin girl nodded approvingly.

"Yes, Miss Parkinson, that last example was for you."

Condition Orange

The orange circle glowed.

ORANGE — SPECIFIC ALERT

"Now things become more interesting." Dracena folded her arms.

"Condition Orange means you've noticed something that might be a problem." She pointed toward the classroom door. "Imagine you're walking through Hogsmeade. You're enjoying yourself, perhaps carrying a bag of sweets from Honeydukes."

She glanced at Daniel. "And then you notice someone across the street behaving rather strangely."

"How strangely?" Daniel asked.

"Perhaps they're watching you. Perhaps they keep looking at your bag. Perhaps they appear to be following you. Does that mean they're going to attack you?"

"No, Professor." answered a Ravenclaw .

"Exactly! They might simply be walking in the same direction. They might be waiting for someone. They might even be admiring your excellent taste in sweets." A few students chuckled. "But something has attracted your attention. You have a specific reason to be more alert."

She tapped the orange circle. "Now you're in Condition Orange."

A Gryffindor raised his hand. "Should we draw our wands?"

"Good heavens, no!" Dracena looked appalled. "Imagine if everyone in Diagon Alley started waving a wand at anyone who looked at them twice. We'd have a dozen duels before breakfast!"

The class laughed.

"No. You observe. You think. You consider your options. Perhaps you cross the street. Perhaps you enter a shop. Perhaps you decide that nothing is wrong and return to Condition Yellow." She smiled. "Condition Orange is not permission to behave like a lunatic. It is a reminder to pay attention to something specific."

Condition Red

The red circle illuminated.

RED — READY TO ACT

Dracena's expression became serious. "Condition Red means you've recognized a threat, and you're mentally prepared to take action if necessary."

She looked around the room. "Suppose that person following you in Hogsmeade suddenly draws a wand and threatens you."

The classroom fell silent.

"You now have a very real problem. But here's something I want you to understand. Condition Red does not necessarily mean fighting."

A Hufflepuff raised her hand. "It doesn't?"

"No. It means you're ready to act."

She began counting on her fingers. "Perhaps you run. Perhaps you take cover. Perhaps you call for help. Perhaps you use magic to protect yourself." She lowered her hand. "And if you have absolutely no other choice, perhaps you fight."

She glanced toward Daniel. "Although, as we've established, fighting rather sucks."

Daniel sighed. "Yes, Professor."

"Good. I'm delighted that particular lesson has made such a lasting impression."

Dracena erased the board, leaving only the four circles. "Now. Why do you suppose this is important?"

Maribel raised her hand. "Because if you notice something dangerous before it happens, you might be able to get away?"

"Precisely!"

Dracena pointed toward her. "Ten points to Hufflepuff."

Another student raised his hand.

"Because if you're surprised, you might not have time to draw your wand?"

"Excellent. Ten points to Ravenclaw." She looked around the room.

"Anyone else?"

A Slytherin spoke up. "Because if you know something is about to happen, you can prepare a spell?"

"Yes, although remember that preparing doesn't necessarily mean preparing to fight." She smiled. "Sometimes the best spell is the one you never have to cast." Five points.

As the discussion continued, Dracena casually picked up a sheet of parchment from her desk. She began rolling it into a ball. A Gryffindor boy named Andrew, sitting three rows back, watched her.

Dracena continued speaking. "Now, one of the greatest advantages of awareness is that it gives you something very valuable. Something that cannot be purchased, conjured, or recovered once it's gone."

She tossed the parchment ball directly toward Andrew's face. His hand shot up.

SMACK!

The parchment bounced harmlessly off his palm and landed on the floor. Several students jumped. Andrew looked at the parchment, then back at Dracena.

"Professor?"

Dracena was grinning. "Excellent!"

The class stared.

"Andrew, would you mind telling everyone what just happened?"

He looked confused. "Well... you threw a ball of parchment at me."

"Yes, I did. And what did you do?"

"I knocked it away."

"Why?"

Andrew hesitated. "Because I saw it coming?"

"Precisely. But let's be a little more specific. How did you see it coming?"

Andrew thought for a moment. "Well, you were talking about being aware of your surroundings, so I sort of decided to practice it while you were talking."

Dracena's smile widened. "Go on."

"I was watching what everyone was doing. And then I noticed you picking up that parchment and rolling it into a ball."

"And?"

"Well, I thought that was a bit strange."

The class laughed.

"And then I noticed you looking at me. And I saw your arm moving like you were about to throw it." He shrugged. "So I was ready."

Dracena looked positively delighted. "Outstanding, Andrew. Absolutely outstanding!"

Andrew blushed. "I was actually wondering what the heck you were doing, Professor."

The class burst into laughter.

"An entirely reasonable question!"

She retrieved the parchment with a flick of her wand. "**Accio Parchment!**"

"Now, everyone, consider what Andrew just told us." She held up the ball.

"He didn't wait until the parchment was flying toward his face before

deciding what to do. He noticed me picking it up. He noticed me rolling it into a ball. He noticed where I was looking." She pointed toward Andrew.

"By the time I threw it, he'd already recognized what might happen." She tossed the parchment gently from one hand to the other. "He had time to prepare."

A Ravenclaw raised her hand. "So he was in Condition Orange?"

"Exactly! He noticed something specific that seemed unusual. He didn't panic. He didn't leap out of his chair. He simply paid closer attention."

Dracena turned toward Andrew. "And when I threw it?"

"I knocked it away."

"Condition Red. You recognized the action and responded."

She smiled. "And now?"

Andrew looked around the room. "Yellow, I suppose?"

"Very good!" She placed the parchment on her desk. "That's another important point. These conditions aren't permanent. You move between them as circumstances change." She paused briefly, looking around at the class. "And there's no prize for staying in Condition Red all day. You'd exhaust yourself, frighten everyone around you, and probably give Madam Pomfrey a headache."

Dracena walked to the blackboard. With a wave of her wand, a sentence appeared.

AWARENESS BUYS TIME.

"That's what I want you to remember."

She turned toward the class. "Imagine two people walking through a dark corridor. Both are equally skilled with their wands. Both know the same defensive spells." She held up one finger. "The first is daydreaming.

Thinking about dinner, perhaps. Or the Quidditch match on Saturday." A second finger. "The other is paying attention. Listening. Looking around. Not frightened, just aware." She lowered her hand. "Now imagine someone steps out from behind a statue and attacks them."

She looked toward Andrew.

"Which student has the advantage?"

"The second one, Professor."

"Why?"

"Because they might notice the attacker before the attack happens."

"Exactly."

She paced slowly.

"Perhaps they hear footsteps. Perhaps they see a shadow move. Perhaps they notice someone standing where no one ought to be. That might give them several seconds to decide what to do."

Dracena looked around the room. "And several seconds can make an extraordinary difference." She tapped the board. "Time to draw your wand. Time to move away. Time to warn your friends. Time to find cover." She smiled. "Or, best of all, time to decide that the corridor looks rather unpleasant and take another route entirely."

A Slytherin raised his hand. "So the idea is to recognize trouble before it happens?"

"Yes."

"And avoid it?"

"Whenever possible."

He grinned. "That sounds rather Slytherin, Professor."

Dracena smiled back. "My dear boy, I should certainly hope so."

The bell was approaching when Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

"Yes, Daniel?"

"Can I ask something?"

"Of course."

"What if you're in Condition Yellow, and something happens so quickly that you don't notice it anyway?"

Dracena nodded. "An excellent question." She leaned against her desk.

"Then you may be surprised."

Daniel frowned. "So being aware doesn't guarantee anything?"

"No."

She shook her head. "Nothing I'm teaching you guarantees that you'll be safe. Not awareness. Not defensive spells. Not the techniques we learned last week." She looked around the room. "Someone may be faster than you. Stronger than you. More skilled than you. Or simply luckier. But there's a difference between having no warning and having some warning."

She gestured toward Andrew. "Andrew couldn't be certain I was going to throw that parchment. But he noticed enough to prepare himself." She smiled. "And when something did happen, he was ready."

Daniel nodded slowly. "I think I get it."

"Good."

Dracena glanced at the clock. "Now, before you go, your assignment for tomorrow is quite simple." Several students groaned.

"Oh, do stop that. I'm not asking for a twelve-inch essay."

The groaning stopped.

"I want you to practice Condition Yellow. When you're walking through the castle, notice what's around you. Who's nearby? Where are the doors?

What sounds can you hear?" She raised a finger. "And I do not want you treating your classmates as potential enemies. We're learning to be observant, not suspicious of everyone we meet."

She smiled. "Tomorrow, I'd like you to tell me something interesting you noticed that you might otherwise have missed."

The students began gathering their belongings.

"Oh, and Andrew?"

He looked up.

"Yes, Professor?"

"Fifteen points to Gryffindor."

He grinned. "For knocking the parchment away?"

"No." Dracena smiled. "For paying attention."

As the students filed out, Daniel approached her desk.

"Professor?"

"Yes?"

He hesitated. "Are you going to throw things at us in every lesson?"

Dracena regarded him thoughtfully. "Good heavens, Daniel. Of course not."

He looked relieved. "Thank you, Professor."

She smiled sweetly. "Sometimes I'll have someone else throw them."

Daniel stared at her.

Dracena returned to her paperwork. "Condition Yellow, Mr. Daniel. Condition Yellow."

He left the classroom looking considerably more alert than when he'd entered.

Fourth Lesson: De-escalation

The first indication that something was wrong was the shouting. The students approaching the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom could hear it from halfway down the corridor.

"...AND I WILL NOT HAVE MY AUTHORITY UNDERMINED BY SOME HALF-WITTED, ILL-CONSIDERED INTERFERENCE!"

That was Professor Snape. There was no mistaking that voice. The students slowed.

"Perhaps we should come back later." whispered a Hufflepuff.

"Class starts in two minutes." Maribel replied.

"Yes, but I rather like being alive."

They cautiously entered. Professor Snape stood near Dracena's desk, his black robes hanging around him like the wings of an exceptionally angry bat. His face was pale, his eyes blazing. Professor Malfoy-Potter stood several feet away, her expression composed.

"Severus, I understand that you're upset..."

"UPSET?" Snape's voice cracked like a whip. "UPSET, DRACENA? YOU THINK THIS IS A MATTER OF BEING UPSET?"

Dracena said nothing.

"THIS IS A MATTER OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE! OF BASIC RESPECT! OF THE SORT OF ELEMENTARY JUDGMENT I WOULD EXPECT FROM A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT!"

Several students froze in the doorway. Dracena glanced toward them.

"Come in, everyone. Take your seats."

Snape spun around. "Oh, splendid. An audience."

The students hurried to their desks. Nobody spoke. Nobody even dared open a textbook.

"Severus." Dracena said quietly, "I can see that this is extremely important to you."

"IMPORTANT?" He took a step toward her. "Do you have the faintest comprehension of what you've done?"

Dracena shifted slightly to one side, maintaining a comfortable distance between them. "I understand that you believe I've interfered with something you were responsible for."

" *Believe?* " Snape's voice rose. "YOU THINK THIS IS A MATTER OF OPINION?"

"No." Dracena shook her head. "I'm saying that I understand you're angry. You were responsible for something, and you feel that someone acted without consulting you."

Snape's nostrils flared. "That is a remarkably charitable description." he said, coldly.

"Perhaps. But I'd like to understand what concerns you most."

"What concerns me MOST?" He threw his hands into the air. "THE SHEER, STAGGERING INCOMPETENCE!"

Dracena waited. Snape glared. She continued waiting. The silence became uncomfortable.

Finally, Snape spoke again. "Do you have any idea how much work went into that?"

"Quite a lot, I imagine. How much time, Severus?"

"MONTHS!"

"Months." Dracena repeated.

"Months of preparation. Months of careful planning. And then someone comes along and decides that all of it can simply be rearranged because it would be more convenient!"

Dracena nodded. "That must be extraordinarily frustrating."

"FRUSTRATING?" Snape looked ready to explode. Then, unexpectedly, he stopped. "Yes," he said bitterly. "It is."

Daniel leaned toward Andrew. "What's he talking about?"

Andrew shook his head. "No idea."

"Do you think she's in trouble?"

"She's married to Harry Potter. I think she's used to trouble."

"Quiet!" hissed Maribel.

At the front of the room, Snape was pacing. "And another thing! Do you know what happens when people interfere with carefully established procedures?"

Dracena remained silent.

"DO YOU?"

"I'd like to hear what you think will happen."

"DISASTER!" He pointed toward her desk. "Complete and utter disaster! And then, naturally, everyone will expect ME to repair the damage!"

Dracena nodded. "So you're concerned that you'll be held responsible for something you didn't authorize."

Snape stopped pacing, and rounded on Dracena. "Precisely!"

"And that you'll have to deal with the consequences."

"YES!"

"I can understand why that would make you angry." For the first time since the students entered, Snape's voice dropped below a shout.

"Yes. Precisely." Snape said.

Dracena allowed another moment of silence, then she spoke. "Severus, I don't want you to be left responsible for a decision you didn't make."

"Then you should have thought of that before making it."

"You're right that it should have been discussed previously."

Snape folded his arms. "An understatement of monumental proportions."

"Perhaps." She paused. "But shouting at one another won't help us decide what to do next."

Snape's eyes narrowed. "Are you suggesting that I am being unreasonable?"

Dracena didn't take the bait. "I'm suggesting that we both want the same thing: to make sure the work is done properly."

He stared at her.

She continued. "We have two choices. We can continue this discussion, or we can arrange a time later today when we can review everything together. But I don't think shouting at each other is going to work very well in fixing this."

Snape looked toward the students. They immediately became fascinated by their desks.

Dracena waited.

Finally, he spoke. "After dinner."

"That would suit me."

"Seven o'clock?"

"Seven o'clock."

"And I expect you to have the relevant documentation."

"Of course."

Snape straightened his robes. "Very well."

He turned toward the door, then stopped.

"Dracena?"

"Yes, Severus?"

"I am still extremely displeased."

"I understand."

He swept from the classroom. The door slammed behind him.

Nobody moved.

Dracena stood quietly for a moment, then she walked to the blackboard.

"Good morning, everyone."

Silence.

She smiled. "Well, that was interesting."

Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

"Yes, Daniel?"

"Are you... all right?"

Dracena looked genuinely touched. "Why, thank you, Daniel. Yes, I'm perfectly fine."

"Because Professor Snape seemed really angry."

"Yes, he did."

"Are you going to get into trouble?"

Dracena smiled. "I rather doubt it."

She turned toward the blackboard. With a flick of her wand, two words appeared.

DE-ESCALATION

The students stared. Dracena turned back.

"Who can tell me what that means?"

Maribel raised her hand. "Making a bad situation less dangerous?"

"Excellent. Ten points to Hufflepuff."

She gestured toward the door.

"Now, I'd like you to think about what you just witnessed."

Andrew raised his hand. "Professor... was that planned?"

Dracena smiled mysteriously. "What do you think?"

Andrew considered. "Well, you didn't seem very surprised that he was angry."

"An interesting observation."

"And you didn't shout back."

"No, I didn't."

She turned toward the board. "Today, we're going to discuss something that may save your life more effectively than any defensive spell I could teach you."

She underlined the word, then wrote:

How to prevent a confrontation from becoming a fight.

1. Be empathetic and nonjudgmental

"First." Dracena began, "what did I do when Professor Snape started shouting?"

"You listened." Maribel answered.

"Yes."

"You didn't tell him he was wrong." added Andrew.

"Precisely."

Dracena folded her hands. "When someone is angry, frightened, or upset, one of the worst things you can do is immediately begin arguing about whether their feelings are justified."

A Ravenclaw raised her hand. "But what if they're wrong?"

"An excellent question." Dracena smiled. "Being empathetic doesn't mean agreeing with someone. It means recognizing what they're feeling."

She pointed toward the door. "Professor Snape was furious. I didn't need to agree with every accusation he made to recognize that he was genuinely upset. Sometimes people need to know they've been heard before they're willing to listen."

2. Respect personal space

"Now, did anyone notice what happened when Professor Snape stepped toward me?"

Andrew raised his hand. "You moved away."

"Yes. Why?"

"So he couldn't hit you?"

"That is one reason."

A few students laughed.

"But there's another."

She stepped toward Daniel. He instinctively leaned backward.

Dracena stopped. "See?"

Daniel blinked. "What?"

"You moved away."

"Well, you were getting really close."

"Exactly."

She stepped back. "When someone is already angry, crowding them can make them feel threatened or trapped. Even if you have absolutely no intention of hurting them."

She gestured toward the space between them. "Give people room. And make sure you have room yourself. That also helps you to do the next thing i'm going to talk about."

3. Keep your emotional brain in check

Dracena returned to her desk. "Now, I want you to imagine something."
She smiled faintly.

"Professor Snape is shouting at you. He's accusing you of incompetence. He's questioning your intelligence." Several students nodded with expressions suggesting that this required very little imagination. "How would you feel?"

"Angry." said Daniel.

"Frightened." said a Hufflepuff.

"Like shouting back." said a Slytherin.

"Exactly." Dracena nodded. "Those are perfectly natural reactions. But just because you feel something doesn't mean you must act on it." She tapped her temple. "When someone becomes angry, their emotions can overwhelm their judgment. And if you respond with anger of your own, you may simply make the situation worse."

She paused, looking at the class.

"That doesn't mean you should allow someone to abuse you. It means you should remain in control of your *own* behavior."

4. Focus on feelings

"Now, what was Professor Snape actually angry about?"

Silence.

Daniel raised his hand. "Something about paperwork?"

The class laughed.

"Possibly." Dracena smiled. "But notice something interesting. None of you actually knows what the argument was about." She looked around.

"Yet you all understood that Professor Snape felt disrespected. That he believed his authority had been undermined. That he was worried about being blamed for something."

Maribel nodded. "Because you kept repeating those things back to him."

"Exactly." Dracena smiled. "I was listening for the feelings beneath the words."

She paused, watching the class.

"Often, when someone is extremely upset, the immediate argument isn't the most important thing. What matters is what they're afraid of losing."

5. Ignore challenging questions

A Ravenclaw raised his hand. "Professor, Professor Snape asked if you thought he was unreasonable."

"Yes, he did."

"And you didn't answer."

Dracena beamed. "Excellent observation!" She turned toward the blackboard. "Sometimes, an angry person will ask a question that isn't really a question."

She wrote:

"DO YOU THINK I'M STUPID?"

"Now, imagine someone asks you that while they're furious."

Daniel raised his hand. "Don't say yes?"

The class erupted in laughter. "An excellent starting point, Daniel!"

Dracena chuckled. "But even saying 'No, I don't think you're stupid' can sometimes lead to an argument."

She wrote another sentence.

"I WANT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S UPSETTING YOU."

"Instead of arguing about the accusation, return to the real issue." She paused. "Of course, if someone asks a genuine question, answer it honestly.

We're not trying to manipulate people. We're trying to avoid turning an emotional confrontation into a contest over who's right."

6. Set limits and offer choices

"Now, did I agree to everything Professor Snape demanded?"

"No." several students answered.

"Correct." She smiled. "I acknowledged his concerns, but I also made it clear that continuing to shout wasn't going to solve the problem."

She wrote:

CLEAR LIMITS. REALISTIC CHOICES.

"People who are angry often feel they've lost control of a situation.

Offering them reasonable choices can help restore that sense of control."

She paused. "But the choices must be genuine."

She looked toward Maribel. "Suppose someone is angry because you've accidentally damaged something belonging to them. What might you say?"

Maribel considered. "Maybe... 'We can talk about how to fix it now, or we can talk later when we've both calmed down'?"

"Excellent." Dracena nodded. "Notice that Maribel hasn't promised to do something she cannot do. She hasn't surrendered her own rights. She's simply offered two reasonable ways forward. I'd make one suggestion though. I'd not use the phrase 'calm down.' It's emotionally loaded. Infer it, but don't SAY it."

7. Allow silence for reflection

Dracena folded her arms. "Now, this last one is particularly difficult." She looked around. "When Professor Snape stopped speaking, what did I do?"

"You waited." Andrew answered.

"Yes."

"For a really long time." Daniel added.

Dracena laughed. "It probably felt longer than it was. Silence can be uncomfortable. When someone stops speaking, we often feel compelled to fill the gap." She looked toward the door. "But sometimes, silence gives people time to think." She smiled. "And occasionally, the best thing you can say is absolutely nothing."

Dracena stepped away from the blackboard. "Now. One final question."

She looked around the room. "Did Professor Snape seem genuinely angry?"

Every hand went up.

"Did any of you think the situation might become violent?" Several hands remained raised.

"Did you notice that I never raised my voice?"

More nodding.

"And did you notice that, by the time he left, he was speaking normally?"

The students considered. "Yes, Professor." Maribel answered.

Dracena smiled. "Then I think today's demonstration was a success."

Daniel blinked. "Demonstration?"

"Yes."

Andrew leaned forward. "Wait. You mean Professor Snape wasn't actually angry?"

Dracena's smile widened. "Oh, he was certainly angry."

The students stared. "Professor Snape is an exceptionally talented actor when he wishes to be. And he has a rather impressive ability to appear furious. Although, admittedly, that isn't particularly difficult for him."

Several students laughed.

"But yes. We arranged this little performance in advance."

Daniel looked astonished. "Professor Snape agreed to do that?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

Dracena considered. "Well, partly because he believes this is an important subject." She smiled. "And partly because I promised him he could shout at a room full of students without anyone being permitted to argue back."

The classroom exploded with laughter.

After class

The students were filing out when the door opened. Professor Snape entered. The room went silent. He looked around with his customary expression of profound disappointment in humanity.

"Well?"

Dracena smiled. "Splendidly, Severus."

"Did they learn anything?"

"I believe so."

Snape surveyed the remaining students. "One can only hope."

Daniel raised his hand. Snape's eyes narrowed. "Yes, Mr. Daniel?"

"Professor... were you really pretending to be angry?"

Snape stared at him. For several seconds, he said nothing. Then he leaned forward.

"Mr. Daniel, I have spent a considerable portion of my professional life attempting to educate children who appear determined to remain ignorant."

Daniel swallowed. "Yes, sir."

"I assure you that I require very little assistance in becoming angry." He straightened.

"However, Professor Potter asked me to demonstrate what happens when an individual loses control of his emotions." He glanced toward Dracena.

"And I agreed."

Daniel nodded.

"Thank you, Professor."

Snape regarded him coldly. "Do not thank me, boy. Learn something."

He turned and swept from the room. Dracena watched him go.

Then she looked at Daniel. "See?"

Daniel frowned. "See what, Professor?"

She smiled. "Even Professor Snape can be reasonable when properly approached."

From the corridor came a familiar voice. "I HEARD THAT, DRACENA!"

Fifth Lesson: Wand Safety

The students arrived at the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom to discover that Professor Malfoy-Potter was nowhere to be found.

Instead, a message had been written on the blackboard.

**SHORT LESSON TODAY.
REPORT TO THE DUELLING PRACTICE ARENA.
BRING YOUR WANDS.**

Daniel regarded the message suspiciously.

"Short lesson?" he asked.

Andrew and Maribel's usual seats were empty.

"That's not a good sign." Thomas observed.

"Last time she said we were doing something simple, Madam Pomfrey had to fix my nose four times."

"Perhaps she's learned her lesson."

Daniel gave him a look. "Have you *met* Professor Malfoy-Potter?"

The duelling practice arena was a large circular chamber, its walls lined with protective enchantments and its floor covered in polished stone. By the time the students arrived, two people were already duelling in the centre.

Andrew and Maribel.

"STUPEFY!"

"PROTEGO!"

A jet of red light struck Maribel's shield and ricocheted toward the ceiling.

"EXPELLIARMUS!"

Andrew ducked. The spell struck the far wall and dissolved harmlessly against the protective enchantments.

Professor Malfoy-Potter was walking slowly around the two students, watching their movements. "Good, Andrew! Keep moving!"

"PROTEGO!"

"Excellent, Maribel! Don't let him dictate the pace!"

The arriving students gathered along the edge of the arena. Daniel watched for a moment, then frowned.

"That's not a good idea."

A Slytherin girl beside him glanced over.

"What isn't?"

"Professor Malfoy-Potter."

"What about her?"

"She's walking around them."

"Yes, Daniel. I can see that."

"No, look." He pointed. "She's behind Andrew now. If Maribel misses, she could hit her."

Parkinson considered this. "Well, she's a very good witch."

"That doesn't matter. She's standing where a spell could hit her."

Parkinson looked again. "You're right."

Daniel hesitated. "Should I say something?"

"Well, I certainly wouldn't want to be the one explaining to the Headmaster why we watched a professor get hexed."

Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

Dracena glanced toward him. "Not now, Daniel."

"But Professor..."

"Quiet, please. I'm watching."

Daniel lowered his hand reluctantly.

Parkinson leaned toward him.

"Well, you tried."

"Yeah, but..."

"STUPEFY!"

Andrew's spell flashed past Maribel's shoulder, straight toward Dracena.

CRACK!

A brilliant blue shield flared around her. The red spell struck it and burst into a shower of sparks. Several students gasped.

Dracena staggered backward theatrically, crossed her eyes, puffed out her cheeks, and stuck out her tongue. For a moment, she looked like an exceptionally startled pufferfish.

Then she straightened. "VERY GOOD! THAT'S ENOUGH!"

Andrew and Maribel lowered their wands.

"Professor!" Andrew exclaimed. "I'm sorry!"

Dracena waved a hand. "No harm done."

"But I nearly hit you!"

"Yes, you did hit me actually." She smiled. "And that, everyone, is precisely why we're here."

Dracena summoned a chair and sat down. "Now. Who can tell me what just happened?"

Daniel's hand shot up. "Yes, Daniel?"

"You got hit by a stray spell because you weren't paying attention to your surroundings."

"Excellent." She smiled. "Although I should point out that I was paying rather close attention indeed."

Daniel looked puzzled.

"You see, I deliberately placed myself where I might be struck. I had my Shield Charm prepared, and the arena's protective enchantments were active." She gestured toward Andrew. "Andrew was instructed to duel normally. He wasn't told to aim at me."

Andrew looked relieved. "Thank goodness."

"Nevertheless, his spell missed Maribel and came directly toward me." She stood. "Now, there are two lessons here. The first is a reminder of something we discussed several weeks ago."

She waved her wand. Four colored circles appeared in the air.

WHITE — YELLOW — ORANGE — RED

Cooper's Color Code.

Several students nodded.

"Awareness of your surroundings. Recognizing potential threats.

Understanding what is happening around you, even when your attention is focused on something else." She pointed toward the duelling arena. "When Andrew and Maribel began fighting, where was their attention?"

"On each other." Parkinson answered.

"Exactly." Dracena nodded. "Which is perfectly understandable. Someone is casting spells at you. Naturally, you want to pay attention to them." She paused, watching the class. "But there's a problem."

Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

"Yes?"

"I think I know where you're going with this."

"Oh?"

"Well, after our lesson about the color codes, I asked Madam Pince to find some books by that American Muggle you mentioned. Jeff Cooper."

Dracena's eyebrows rose. "Did you indeed?"

"Yes, ma'am. They're fascinating."

She smiled. "I'm delighted to hear it."

"One of them is about Muggle firearms."

A few students exchanged uncomfortable looks. "Barbaric things." Daniel added quickly.

Dracena chuckled. "Some of them certainly can be."

"But he makes some very good points about being responsible for what happens when you use one. And I was thinking that some of those ideas might apply to wands."

Dracena's expression brightened. "Go on."

"Well, one of his rules is about knowing what you're aiming at, and what's behind it." He pointed toward the arena. "Andrew was aiming at Maribel, but you were behind her. So when he missed, the spell hit you."

Dracena beamed. "VERY GOOD, DANIEL!"

Daniel blushed.

"Ten points to Gryffindor!" She turned toward the class. "That is exactly what we're discussing today."

Dracena walked into the centre of the arena. "Now, Andrew. Would you join me?"

He stepped forward.

"Stand there, please."

She positioned him in the centre.

"Imagine I'm a dark witch attacking you."

Andrew grinned. "That shouldn't be too difficult, Professor."

The class laughed. Dracena raised an eyebrow. "Careful, Andrew. My father spent years trying to convince people I was one."

More laughter.

"Now. You're fighting me. You're concentrating on my wand, my movements, and the spells I'm casting." She slowly circled him. "What happens if someone else approaches you from behind?"

Andrew considered. "I might not notice."

"Exactly."

She gestured behind Andrew, where Maribel now stood.

Andrew shivered in surprise.

Dracena smiled.

"Ah! See? Now he's paying attention."

She turned toward the class.

"But imagine that I were actually casting spells at him. Would he have been able to turn around so easily?"

"No, Professor." several students answered.

"Precisely." She folded her arms.

"There's a phenomenon Muggles call tunnel vision. When you're frightened, stressed, or concentrating intensely on something, your attention can narrow." She pointed toward Andrew. "You become so focused on the immediate threat that you stop noticing other things. Another attacker. A friend approaching to help. A dangerous object nearby. An innocent person standing behind your opponent." She looked around the arena.

"That can be extremely dangerous."

Dracena raised her wand. A wooden practice dummy appeared at the far end of the arena. "Now, let's consider something else." She pointed toward the dummy. "Suppose I want to cast a Stunning Spell at that target." She aimed her wand.

"STUPEFY!"

The red spell struck the dummy squarely in the chest, and it toppled backward. "Perfectly straightforward."

She restored the dummy. Then, with another flick of her wand, a second dummy appeared behind it. "Now what?"

Maribel raised her hand. "You might hit the second one if you miss the first."

"Correct." Dracena moved the second dummy directly behind the first.

"And what if the first target moves?" She cast again.

"STUPEFY!"

The first dummy sprang sideways. The spell struck the second, and it fell over.

"Exactly."

She looked toward Andrew. "Now, suppose that second dummy represents a friend. Or a child. Or someone who has absolutely nothing to do with your quarrel."

Andrew's expression became serious. "That would be terrible."

"Yes." Dracena nodded. "And notice that I wasn't trying to hit the second target. I was trying to hit the first." She lowered her wand. "Intentions

matter. But intentions do not change where a spell goes. That is why you must consider what lies beyond your intended target."

A Ravenclaw raised her hand. "But Professor, what about Shield Charms? Can't spells bounce off them?"

"An excellent question." Dracena conjured a shimmering shield in front of the dummy.

"Some spells are absorbed. Some dissipate. Others may be deflected, depending on the spell and the shield." She gestured toward the students.

"Which means that even a spell that strikes exactly where you intended may not behave exactly as you expected."

She lowered the shield. "Now imagine casting a powerful curse in a crowded room."

The students fell silent.

"Do you see the problem?"

Several nodded.

"Good."

Dracena returned to the centre of the arena.

"Now, I want to discuss something that I believe our entire society has become rather careless about." She held up her wand. "This."

The students looked at it.

"A wand."

She turned it slowly between her fingers. "An extraordinary instrument. With this, I can illuminate a dark room, repair a broken cup, heal certain injuries, summon objects, and perform feats that would astonish any Muggle. With this same wand, I can also inflict terrible injuries." Her voice grew quieter. "Or kill someone."

The class was silent.

"Now, most of you have carried wands for years. You've grown accustomed to them. You use them for everything from opening doors to cleaning dirt off your shoes." She smiled faintly. "And that's perfectly reasonable. They're tools. Wonderful tools." She lowered her wand. "But some tools demand more respect than others."

She looked toward Daniel. "Mr. Cooper understood that very well."

Daniel nodded.

"And I think we can adapt some of his principles to our own circumstances."

With a wave of her wand, four sentences appeared in the air.

FOUR RULES OF WAND SAFETY

- 1. Treat every wand with respect.**
- 2. Never point your wand at something you do not intend to cast upon.**
- 3. Be certain of your spell, your target, and what lies beyond it.**
- 4. Do not cast until you are ready and have made a conscious decision to do so.**

Dracena stepped back. "Now, let's discuss these."

Rule One: Treat every wand with respect

"A wand is not a toy." She looked around the class. "Yes, some spells are harmless. Some are amusing. Some are extraordinarily useful. But the fact that a wand can produce a harmless little light does not mean it cannot also produce something dangerous." She held hers up. "Every one of you should understand what you're holding." She smiled. "And if you ever find yourself becoming careless with it, remember that."

Rule Two: Never point your wand at something you do not intend to cast upon

Dracena looked toward the students. "Now, this is a habit I've noticed among witches and wizards for years." She pointed toward a Ravenclaw. "Miss Whitmore, would you mind coming forward?"

The girl approached.

"Thank you."

Dracena held her wand loosely, pointed toward the floor. "Now, imagine I'm explaining something to you." She began speaking animatedly. "And then I say, 'Well, of course, the problem is that *you* ...'" She raised her wand as though using it to emphasize the word, then stopped. The wand was pointing directly at Miss Whitmore's face. The girl instinctively leaned backward.

Dracena lowered it. "See?"

Miss Whitmore nodded. "Yes, Professor."

"Now, was I casting a spell?"

"No."

"Was I intending to hurt you?"

"No."

"Then why did you move?"

"Because you pointed your wand at me."

"Exactly."

Dracena smiled. "Now, pointing a wand at someone isn't quite the same thing as pointing a Muggle firearm at them. A wand doesn't discharge simply because someone touches a trigger. But that doesn't mean the habit is a good one."

She looked around. "How many of you have seen someone use their wand as a pointer while talking?"

Nearly every hand rose.

"How many of you have done it yourselves?"

Most hands remained raised. Dracena raised her own. "Yes. Even I have been guilty of it." She lowered her hand. "So I'd like you to develop a new habit." She held her wand at her side. "When you're not casting, keep your wand directed somewhere harmless."

She smiled. "And if you wish to point at someone while making a particularly devastating rhetorical argument, I suggest using your finger."

She demonstrated. "Far less likely to turn someone into a ferret."

Rule Three: Know your spell, your target, and what lies beyond

Dracena gestured toward the practice dummies. "We've already discussed this one." She pointed toward the fallen second dummy. "But I want you to remember something." She paused, watching the class.

" You are responsible for the consequences of the magic you cast. "

She let the words settle. "That doesn't mean you're expected to predict the impossible. Magic can be unpredictable. Accidents happen." She looked toward Andrew. "And in a genuine emergency, you may have very little time to decide what to do."

Andrew nodded.

"But that makes training and good judgment even more important."

She raised her wand. "Before you cast, consider what your spell will do. Consider what it might strike. Consider what might happen if it misses." She glanced toward the students. "If you cannot cast safely, consider whether there's another way to solve the problem."

Rule Four: Do not cast until you're ready

Dracena turned toward Maribel. "Maribel, when you were duelling Andrew earlier, did you ever feel rushed?"

"Yes, Professor."

"Why?"

"Because he kept attacking, and I was trying to defend myself."

"Exactly."

Dracena nodded. "And when you're frightened or rushed, it's very easy to make mistakes. Now, imagine you're startled by a loud noise and instinctively raise your wand." She looked around. "What happens if you cast before you've even identified what frightened you?"

Daniel raised his hand. "You might hurt someone who wasn't attacking you."

"Precisely." She smiled. "Your wand should respond to your judgment, not merely your surprise." She lowered her hand. "Sometimes you must act quickly. But acting quickly and acting carelessly are not the same thing."

The final lesson

Dracena returned to her chair. "Now, I want you all to remember something." She looked around the arena. "Most of you will never find yourselves in a serious magical fight." She smiled. "And I sincerely hope that remains true."

She gestured toward Andrew and Maribel. "But whether you're duelling, practicing spells, or simply performing ordinary magic, the same principles apply."

She raised her wand. "Be aware of your surroundings."

She lowered it. "Know what you're casting."

She pointed toward the practice dummies. "Know what you're casting at."

She gestured toward the second dummy. "And remember what might happen if something goes wrong."

She paused. "Your wand is an extraordinary gift. Treat it accordingly."

Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

"Yes, Daniel?"

"Does this mean we shouldn't use our wands for ordinary things?"

"Good heavens, no!"

Dracena laughed. "I would be absolutely miserable if I had to wash dishes by hand."

The class chuckled. "Magic is wonderful. Use it. Enjoy it. But respect it."

She glanced toward the clock. "Now, I believe that's enough for today."

The students began gathering their belongings.

"Oh, and one more thing." Everyone stopped.

Dracena looked toward Andrew. "Andrew, would you mind coming here?"

He approached cautiously. "Yes, Professor?"

She smiled. "Earlier, when your spell struck my shield, what was your first reaction?"

"I was frightened."

"Why?"

"Because I thought I'd hurt you."

Dracena nodded. "And what did you learn?"

Andrew considered. "That even if I'm fighting someone, I need to remember there's a whole world around me."

Dracena smiled warmly. "Exactly."

She placed a hand on his shoulder. "And that's worth remembering."

Andrew smiled.

"Thank you, Professor."

"You're very welcome."

He turned to leave.

"Andrew?"

"Yes?"

"Next time, try not to stun your Defence Against the Dark Arts instructor."

He grinned.

"I'll do my best, Professor."

As the last students left, Daniel lingered near the door.

"Professor?"

"Yes, Daniel?"

"Do you think Mr. Cooper would have approved of today's lesson?"

Dracena considered. "I think he would have appreciated the principles."

She smiled. "Although I suspect he'd have been rather surprised by the equipment."

Daniel laughed.

"Yes, Professor."

Dracena gathered her notes. "And Daniel?"

"Yes?"

"Keep reading." She gave him an approving nod.

"There's a great deal of wisdom to be found outside the wizarding world."

Daniel smiled. "I will, Professor."

Sixth Lesson: You Fight Like You Train

"Good morning, everyone!"

"Good morning, Professor Malfoy-Potter!"

Dracena stood at the front of the classroom, her wand resting on the desk.

"Today, we're going to discuss something rather simple. But before we begin, I have a question." She looked around the room. "Why do we have students practice duelling?"

Several hands rose.

"Yes, Andrew?"

"Because it's a tradition, Professor. Wizards have been duelling for centuries."

"Quite true. Maribel?"

"Because it's fun?"

Dracena smiled. "Certainly! I rather enjoy it myself."

A Ravenclaw raised her hand. "It's a sport, Professor. There are competitions and everything."

"Absolutely."

Daniel raised his hand. "To learn how to defend ourselves?"

"Yes, Daniel. And that's the answer I was looking for."

She walked around her desk.

"All of those are perfectly good reasons to practice duelling. But there's a particular reason why I want *you* to practice."

She turned toward the blackboard and waved her wand.

Five words appeared in large letters.

YOU FIGHT LIKE YOU TRAIN.

Dracena let the students read them.

"Now, over the past several weeks, we've discussed quite a few things.

We've learned some basic ways to defend ourselves without magic. We've discussed awareness, recognizing danger, avoiding unnecessary confrontations, de-escalation, and the responsible use of our wands. That's quite a lot to remember, isn't it?"

Several students nodded.

"And here's the problem. Most of those things don't come naturally." She folded her arms. "When someone frightens you, your first instinct might be to freeze. Or panic. Or shout. Or draw your wand without thinking." She glanced toward Daniel. "Or charge directly at someone and break your nose."

Daniel sighed. "Four times, Professor."

"Yes, Daniel. Four times."

The class laughed.

"Now, I can stand here all day telling you to pay attention to your surroundings. I can explain the importance of keeping your wand pointed somewhere safe. I can tell you to remain calm when someone threatens you. But knowing those things intellectually is not the same as being able to do them when you're frightened." She tapped the blackboard. "That's where practice comes in."

"Think about your other classes." Dracena continued. "When you first learned to transfigure a matchstick into a needle, was it easy?"

"No, Professor." answered several students.

"Of course not. You had to concentrate. You had to remember the incantation, the wand movement, and what you were trying to accomplish." She smiled. "But after enough practice?"

"It gets easier." Maribel answered.

"Exactly."

Dracena nodded.

"The same is true of Potions. The first time you prepare a complicated potion, you carefully follow every instruction. You check your ingredients, measure everything, and make certain you haven't forgotten a step." She paused. "Unless you're particularly fond of explosions."

A few students chuckled.

"But the more you practice, the more familiar those procedures become."
She gestured toward the blackboard. "Defending yourself is no different."

"Now, imagine you're duelling someone." Dracena pointed toward Andrew.
"Your opponent raises his wand. What do you do?"

"Cast a Shield Charm?"

"Perhaps. But what else?"

Andrew thought. "Move out of the way?"

"Good. What else?"

"Watch what he's doing?"

"Excellent. And what else?"

Daniel raised his hand. "Pay attention to what's behind him. And behind me."

Dracena smiled. "Precisely!" She turned toward the class. "Now, imagine trying to remember all of those things while someone is casting spells at you. Rather difficult, isn't it?"

Several students nodded.

"But suppose you've practiced them hundreds of times." She held up her wand. "Suppose that every time you duel, you practice moving, watching your surroundings, maintaining control of your wand, and choosing your spells carefully." She lowered it. "Eventually, you won't have to stop and consciously remind yourself of every little thing." She smiled. "They'll begin to become habits."

Maribel raised her hand. "Professor, does that mean we'll always do the right thing if we practice enough?"

"No." Dracena answered immediately. "Absolutely not." She looked around the classroom. "Practice doesn't make you invincible. It doesn't guarantee you'll remember everything. And it certainly doesn't guarantee you'll win. But good practice makes good decisions easier."

She pointed toward the blackboard. "And there's another side to this."
With a flick of her wand, another sentence appeared.

BAD PRACTICE MAKES BAD HABITS.

"Suppose you spend every duelling session standing perfectly still, casting spells as quickly as possible, and paying no attention to anything except your opponent." She looked toward Andrew. "What do you suppose you'll be inclined to do if you ever find yourself in a real fight?"

Andrew considered. "Stand still and cast spells?"

"Exactly."

Dracena nodded. "That's why I don't merely want you to practice duelling. I want you to practice duelling properly." She smiled. "Every time you practice, remember the things we've discussed in class. Pay attention. Think about what you're doing. Be aware of the people around you. And when you make a mistake, learn from it."

"Now, here's your assignment."

Several students groaned. Dracena raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, honestly. You haven't even heard it yet." She smiled.

"I want every one of you to practice duelling at least once a week."

The groaning stopped. Andrew looked delighted.

"Really, Professor?"

"Really."

"That's our homework?"

"Yes."

A Hufflepuff raised her hand. "Can we practice with friends?"

"Of course. In the supervised practice arena, using appropriate spells and protective enchantments."

She looked around the room. "And I want you to do something else."

She held up a finger. "Before each session, choose something we've discussed in class that you want to improve."

She began counting. "Perhaps you want to become better at noticing what's happening around you. Perhaps you want to improve your defensive spells. Perhaps you want to become more comfortable moving while casting."

She lowered her hand. "Whatever it is, make a conscious effort to practice it."

Maribel raised her hand. "Should we write down what we practiced?"

Dracena considered. "An excellent suggestion. Yes, I think that would be useful."

She smiled. "Keep a little record of what you worked on, what you found difficult, and what you think you've improved." She looked around the room. "Later in the term, I'm going to ask you about those experiences. I

want to know what you've learned, what you've struggled with, and how your skills have developed."

Daniel raised his hand. "Professor?"

"Yes, Daniel?"

"What if we practice something wrong and don't realize it?"

Dracena smiled. "Another excellent question."

She leaned against her desk.

"That's why we have instructors, Daniel. And why we have partners who can help us recognize our mistakes. Practicing something incorrectly a hundred times doesn't make it correct. It simply makes you very good at doing it incorrectly."

The class laughed.

"So ask questions. Help one another. And don't be embarrassed when someone points out something you could improve." She glanced at the clock. "Now, I believe that's enough for today."

The students began gathering their belongings.

"Oh, and one final thing."

They stopped.

Dracena pointed toward the blackboard.

"Remember those five words."

YOU FIGHT LIKE YOU TRAIN.

She smiled. "Make certain you're training the way you'd want to fight."

As the students filed out, Andrew turned toward Daniel.

"Want to practice duelling this afternoon?"

Daniel considered. "Sure."

"Brilliant!"

Andrew grinned. "Think you can beat me?"

Daniel smiled. "Probably not."

"Then why are you smiling?"

"Because I'm going to practice."

Andrew laughed. "Fair enough."

They started down the corridor. After a moment, Daniel added:

"And dis dime, I'm going do dry not do break my dose." he said, imitating someone with a broken nose, while grinning.

From inside the classroom came Dracena's voice. "AN EXCELLENT TRAINING OBJECTIVE, DANIEL!"

The two boys burst out laughing.

FINAL EXAM

The students arrived for their final Defence Against the Dark Arts examination to find the classroom empty. Professor Malfoy-Potter was

nowhere to be seen. On the blackboard, written in large, elegant letters, were four words.

NO CLASS TODAY.

Daniel stared. "What?"

Andrew looked at the board. "That can't be right."

Maribel checked her timetable. "We're supposed to have our final examination today."

"Maybe she's ill?" suggested a Hufflepuff.

"Professor Malfoy-Potter?" Andrew scoffed. "The woman who deliberately let herself get hit by a Stunning Spell to teach us about wand safety?"

"Perhaps Madam Pomfrey finally got her revenge." Daniel suggested.

Several students laughed.

A Slytherin girl gathered her books. "Well, I'm not asking questions. If there's no class, I'm leaving."

"On examination day?" Maribel protested. "That makes no sense!"

"Neither does standing around an empty classroom."

Within minutes, the students had dispersed.

Daniel lingered for a moment, looking at the blackboard.

Something about it bothered him, but the message was perfectly clear. No class today. He shrugged, adjusted his bookbag, and headed toward the library.

The first examination

Daniel was halfway down the third-floor corridor when he turned a corner and collided with something that felt remarkably like a stone wall.

"Oof!"

His books scattered across the floor.

"WHAT THE BLOODY HELL?"

Daniel looked up.

And up.

And up.

The boy standing before him was enormous. He was easily six feet two inches tall, with shoulders like a wardrobe and arms that looked as though someone had stuffed a pair of tree trunks into a school uniform. His face was bright red.

"WHY WEREN'T YOU WATCHING WHERE YOU WERE GOING, YOU IDIOT?"

Daniel froze. For a brief moment, his mind went completely blank, but then he remembered something.

Condition Yellow. De-escalation. Fighting sucks. Particularly, he suspected, when fighting someone who could probably use him as a Quaffle.

"I'm sorry." Daniel said calmly. "I didn't see you coming around the corner."

"YOU DIDN'T SEE ME?" The enormous boy stepped closer. "WHAT, ARE YOU BLIND?"

Daniel resisted the urge to step backward too quickly. Instead, he shifted slightly to the side, leaving himself some room. "No. I was distracted. I should have been paying more attention."

The boy glared. "YOU THINK?"

"Yes."

Daniel kept his voice even. "I can see you're angry. I didn't mean to run into you."

The boy's fists clenched. "YOU NEARLY KNOCKED ME OVER!"

Daniel glanced at the boy's enormous shoulders. That seemed rather unlikely. He wisely decided not to mention it. "I understand. That must be annoying to get knocked into when you were just walking. I'm sorry."

The boy stared at him. Daniel waited. A few seconds passed, then the enormous boy looked down at the scattered books.

"Well..." He shifted uncomfortably. "Just watch where you're going next time."

"I will."

The boy grunted. Then, unexpectedly, he bent down and picked up one of Daniel's textbooks. "Here."

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

The enormous boy walked away. Daniel watched him go, then exhaled.

"Merlin's beard." He gathered the rest of his books.

Twenty feet away, beside a suit of armour, the air shimmered almost imperceptibly. Professor Dracena Malfoy-Potter, concealed beneath a Disillusionment Charm, smiled. She made a note on her parchment.

DANIEL — ENCOUNTER ONE

Initial awareness: Poor.

Emotional control: Excellent.

De-escalation: Excellent.

Maintained distance. Did not respond to provocation.

Recognized opportunity to disengage.

She glanced toward the enormous student, who had disappeared around the corner. Must remember to thank Mr. Broadwick. Very convincing performance.

The second examination

Later that afternoon, Daniel was returning from the library when he noticed something unusual. The corridor ahead was empty. That wasn't particularly strange by itself, but a moment earlier, he'd heard several students talking around the corner. Now there was silence. He slowed.

Then he heard something else. A faint scraping sound, followed by a muffled thump.

Daniel stopped. He listened. Another scrape. Something metallic clinked against the stone floor. Daniel frowned.

That's odd.

He glanced toward the corridor. Nothing moved, but something about the situation felt wrong. Something specific had attracted his attention. He

didn't know what it was, and he didn't particularly want to find out.

Daniel looked behind him. The corridor was clear. He turned around and headed toward a different staircase. "Probably nothing," he muttered. "But I don't need to find out."

Behind a nearby tapestry, Dracena smiled.

DANIEL — ENCOUNTER TWO

Recognized environmental anomaly.

Transitioned appropriately to Condition Orange.

Did not investigate unnecessarily.

Chose safe alternative route.

Excellent judgment.

A moment later, she lifted the Disillusionment Charm just enough to reveal her face.

"All right, you two. You can come out now." Two students emerged from behind the tapestry.

One was holding a metal bucket. The other looked rather disappointed.

"He didn't even come down the corridor, Professor."

"Yes." Dracena replied happily. "That's rather the point."

The third examination

It was nearly nine o'clock when Daniel began making his way back toward Gryffindor Tower. He'd spent the evening studying in the library. The castle was quiet.

Too quiet, perhaps. He remembered the strange corridor earlier. Then he remembered Professor Malfoy-Potter's advice. Don't become paranoid. Just pay attention.

He relaxed slightly. The corridor ahead was empty. He could hear footsteps somewhere behind him. Daniel glanced over his shoulder. Two students were approaching.

Slytherins.

He recognized them vaguely. They were older than he was, and not very nice. One was tall and thin. The other was shorter, with broad shoulders and a rather unpleasant expression.

Daniel continued walking.

Then the taller student called out. "Oi! Gryffindor!"

Daniel stopped. "Yes?"

The two approached. The taller boy smiled widely. "That's a very nice cloak you've got there."

Daniel glanced down. It was a handsome dark-blue cloak with silver embroidery. His mother had given it to him for Christmas.

"Thanks."

"I think I'd like it."

Daniel frowned. "What?"

"I said I think I'd like your cloak."

The shorter Slytherin moved to Daniel's other side. Daniel noticed.

Condition Orange.

The taller boy smiled again. "I think now would be a very good time for you to give it to me."

Daniel looked between them. "No."

The smile disappeared. "Excuse me?"

"No. My mother gave me this cloak. I'm not giving it to you."

The shorter boy stepped closer. "You heard him."

Daniel shifted his weight. "Look, I don't want any trouble."

"Then give us the cloak."

"No."

The taller boy drew his wand. Daniel's hand was already on his own.

"Now, now." the Slytherin sneered. "Don't do anything stupid."

Daniel remembered something else Professor Malfoy-Potter had taught them.

If you can leave, leave.

He glanced toward the nearest staircase. Too far. The shorter boy was blocking his path.

Daniel took a slow breath. "I don't want to fight you."

"Then hand it over."

"No."

The taller boy raised his wand.

"EXPELLIARMUS!"

Daniel moved. He was ready. **"PROTEGO!"**

The spell struck his shield and scattered sparks across the corridor.

The shorter boy lunged toward him. Daniel twisted away, narrowly avoiding a hand that grabbed for his cloak.

"STUPEFY!"

His spell missed. The taller Slytherin ducked behind a stone pillar.

Daniel moved backward, trying to keep both opponents in sight.

Two of them. Don't let them get behind you.

Another spell flashed past his shoulder. Daniel ducked. His heart was pounding. He could barely hear anything over the rushing in his ears.

The shorter Slytherin charged. Daniel stepped aside, using the boy's momentum to send him stumbling past.

He raised his wand. "STU—"

Then he saw her. Maribel, standing farther down the corridor, directly behind the Slytherin.

Daniel's stomach dropped. "Oh, BLOODY HELL!" He stopped the spell before completing it.

The Slytherin turned. Daniel ducked behind a stone column as another spell flashed past.

He moved sideways, putting the wall behind his opponent instead of Maribel, then he raised his wand again.

"STUPEFY!"

The red spell struck the Slytherin squarely in the chest, and he collapsed.

Daniel spun toward the taller boy. **"EXPELLIARMUS!"**

The Slytherin's wand flew from his hand. Daniel caught it.

For several seconds, nobody moved. Daniel stood breathing heavily, his wand pointed toward the floor, then he looked toward Maribel.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Yes."

He swallowed. "I nearly hit you."

"I know."

"I'm sorry."

Maribel smiled. "But you didn't."

Daniel looked toward the unconscious Slytherin, then toward the disarmed one, then back at Maribel.

"Well..."

He took a shaky breath. "That really sucked."

"An excellent observation, Daniel." The voice came from behind him.

Daniel spun around. Professor Malfoy-Potter appeared out of thin air as the Disillusionment Charm faded. She was smiling.

Daniel stared. "PROFESSOR?"

"Good evening." He looked between her and the two Slytherins, then at Maribel, then back at Dracena.

"Oh, you've got to be fucking KIDDING me."

Dracena laughed. "Language, Daniel."

"THIS WAS A TEST?"

"Indeed."

"The whole thing?"

"Yes."

"The two Slytherins?"

"Volunteers."

"The enormous boy this morning?"

"Also a volunteer."

Daniel stared. "The weird noises in the corridor?"

"That too."

He closed his eyes. "Oh, Merlin."

Dracena smiled. "Congratulations, Daniel. You've just completed your final examination."

The After-Action Review

The next morning, Daniel sat across from Professor Malfoy-Potter in her office. A cup of tea sat before him. Dracena had a stack of parchment on

her desk.

"Now." she began, "before I give you your grade, I'd like to discuss yesterday."

Daniel nodded. "Yes, Professor."

"This is something Muggles call an after-action review. We examine what happened, what went well, what didn't, and what we might do differently."

She smiled. "Not to assign blame. To learn."

Daniel nodded again. "Let's begin with your encounter with Mr. Broadwick."

"The enormous boy?"

"The very same."

Dracena glanced at her notes. "You handled his anger beautifully. You remained calm, acknowledged his feelings, and didn't allow yourself to be drawn into an argument."

"Thank you, Professor."

"But let me ask you something." She leaned forward. "What could you have done better?"

Daniel thought. "Well..." He hesitated. "I could have been paying more attention when I turned the corner."

Dracena smiled. "GOOD!"

Daniel looked surprised. "Really?"

"Absolutely."

She made a note. "Now, let's consider the second encounter. The empty corridor."

Daniel nodded. "You noticed something unusual. You didn't know what it was, but you recognized that something might be wrong."

"Yes, Professor."

"And what did you do?"

"I went another way."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't need to go down that corridor."

Dracena smiled. "Precisely."

She looked at her notes. "And now, the final encounter."

Daniel shifted uncomfortably. "The fight."

"Yes."

She leaned back. "Tell me what happened."

Daniel took a breath. "Two Slytherins tried to take my cloak. I tried to talk them out of it, but they wouldn't listen."

"And?"

"They attacked me."

"What did you do?"

"I defended myself."

"Quite successfully."

Daniel looked down. "Mostly."

Dracena raised an eyebrow. "Mostly?"

"I nearly hit Maribel."

"Yes."

He swallowed. "I was so focused on the Slytherin that I didn't notice her until I was about to cast."

Dracena nodded. "And what happened when you noticed her?"

"I stopped."

"Why?"

"Because she was behind him."

"And?"

"Because if I'd missed, I might have hit her."

Dracena smiled. "So what did you do?"

"I moved. Got a different angle. Made sure she wasn't behind him anymore."

"Excellent."

She looked at her notes. "Now, Daniel, I want you to understand something."

She leaned forward. "You made mistakes yesterday."

Daniel nodded miserably.

"But you also made some very good decisions."

He looked up.

"You recognized danger. You avoided a potentially dangerous situation.

You attempted to de-escalate a confrontation. And when you were forced to defend yourself, you remembered that other people might be endangered by your spells." She paused. "Those are precisely the things I've been trying to teach you."

The grade

Dracena picked up a sheet of parchment. "Now, your final grade." She handed it to him.

Daniel looked down. At the top, written in elegant green ink, was a single letter.

O

OUTSTANDING

Daniel stared. "Outstanding?"

"Indeed."

"But..." He looked up. "I made mistakes."

"Of course you did."

"But I ran into that boy."

"Yes."

"And I nearly hit Maribel."

"Yes."

"And I didn't notice the Slytherins until they were already close."

"Quite true."

Daniel frowned. "Then why didn't I lose marks?"

Dracena smiled. "Because, Daniel, this examination wasn't about being perfect." She folded her hands. "It was about demonstrating good judgment."

He looked confused. "But I didn't always have good judgment."

"No. You didn't." She leaned forward. "And that's why we're having this conversation. After something happens, it's always useful to look back and ask yourself whether you could have done anything differently."

Daniel nodded. "Even if everything worked out?"

"Especially then." She smiled. "Sometimes you'll discover that you made a mistake. Sometimes you'll realize there was a better choice available. And sometimes you'll conclude that, given what you knew at the time, you made the best decision you reasonably could. That doesn't necessarily mean you did anything wrong."

Daniel considered. "So the point isn't to find something to blame yourself for?"

"Precisely." Dracena nodded. "The point is to learn." She gestured toward the parchment. "And yesterday, you demonstrated that you've learned quite a lot."

Daniel looked down at the grade again, then his eyes widened.

"Oh!"

Dracena raised an eyebrow.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Cooper!"

She smiled. "What about him?"

"He talked about this!"

"Did he?"

"Yes! About looking back at situations and figuring out what you could have done differently. Not just whether you won or lost, but whether you made good decisions."

Dracena beamed. "Very good, Daniel." She leaned back. "There's an important distinction between a good decision and a good outcome. You can make a foolish decision and get lucky. You can make an excellent decision and still suffer an unfortunate result. You should never confuse the two."

Daniel nodded slowly. "I think I understand."

"Good."

Dracena smiled. "Because that's the most important lesson I can teach you."

Daniel stood to leave. "Thank you, Professor."

"You're very welcome."

He reached the door.

"Daniel?"

He turned. "Yes, Professor?"

Dracena smiled. "One final question."

"Yes?"

"Do you remember our very first lesson?"

Daniel laughed. "Fighting sucks."

"Indeed."

She smiled warmly.

"And what have you learned since then?"

Daniel considered, then he answered. "That the best way to win a fight is not to get into one."

Dracena nodded. "And if you can't avoid it?"

"Be ready. Pay attention. Think about what I'm doing. And remember that other people might get hurt."

She smiled. "Outstanding, Daniel."

He grinned. "Thank you, Professor."

As he left, Dracena returned to her paperwork.

A moment later, the door opened again.

Madam Pomfrey entered. "Well?"

Dracena looked up. "Well what, Poppy?"

"Did the children survive your ridiculous examination?"

Dracena smiled. "Every last one."

"Any injuries?"

"None."

Pomfrey blinked. "None?"

"Not a scratch."

Pomfrey looked suspicious. "And you didn't deliberately allow anyone to break their nose?"

Dracena laughed. "No, Poppy."

"Well."

Pomfrey folded her arms. "Perhaps you're finally learning something."

Dracena smiled. "One does try."

Pomfrey turned to leave, but then stopped. "Dracena?"

"Yes?"

"I heard you had students pretending to mug one another in the corridors."

"Ah."

Pomfrey narrowed her eyes. "Is that true?"

Dracena considered. "Would you prefer the honest answer?"

"DRACENA!"

She laughed. "Yes, Poppy. But nobody was hurt."

Pomfrey closed her eyes. "Merlin give me strength."

Dracena smiled sweetly. "Would you care for some tea?"

Omake: FULL MUGGLE JACKET



The students filed into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom.

Professor Malfoy-Potter stood at the front, wearing a dark green outfit, with military stripes on her arm and her platinum-blond hair pulled into a severe bun. She was wearing a green US Marine style campaign cover. She was also smiling. This was generally considered a bad sign.

"Good morning, class."

"Good morning, Professor Malfoy-Potter!"

Her smile vanished. "WHAT WAS THAT?"

The students froze.

"I SAID, WHAT IN MERLIN'S SAGGING UNDERGARMENTS WAS THAT?"

Silence. Dracena began pacing.

"I AM PROFESSOR MALFOY-POTTER! I AM YOUR DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS INSTRUCTOR! FROM THIS MOMENT FORWARD, YOU WILL SPEAK ONLY WHEN SPOKEN TO! AND THE FIRST AND LAST WORDS OUT OF YOUR FILTHY LITTLE GOBLIN HOLES WILL BE 'MA'AM!' DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT, YOU COLLECTION OF FLOBBERWORMS?"

"Yes, Professor!"

" **PROFESSOR?!** " She wheeled toward a trembling Hufflepuff. "DO I LOOK LIKE A PROFESSOR TO YOU, YOU HALF-BAKED HINKY-PINK?"

"Ma'am, Y-yes, ma'am!"

"THATS BETTER! WHY DID YOU CALL ME PROFESSOR RIGHT AFTER I TOLD YOU THE FIRST AND LAST WORDS OUT OF YOUR FILTHY GOBLIN HOLES SHOULD BE 'MA'AM?!'"

"Ma'am, I don't know, ma'am!'"

"THAT IS THE FIRST INTELLIGENT THING YOU'VE SAID ALL MORNING!"

She resumed pacing.

"YOU ARE THE SORRIEST COLLECTION OF UNDERDEVELOPED MANDRAKES I HAVE EVER HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF LAYING EYES UPON! I'VE SEEN MORE INTIMIDATING THINGS GROWING IN THE GREENHOUSES! PROFESSOR SPROUT HAS POTTED PLANTS WITH BETTER POSTURE!"

She stopped in front of a Gryffindor.

"WHAT IS YOUR NAME, YOU FRECKLE-FACED BUNDLE OF BAD DECISIONS?"

"Ma'am, Thomas, ma'am!"

"THOMAS WHAT?"

"Ma'am, Thomas McAllister, ma'am!"

"MCALLISTER? ARE YOU RELATED TO THE MCALLISTERS OF EDINBURGH?"

"Ma'am, no, ma'am!"

"THANK MERLIN! I'D HATE TO THINK A RESPECTABLE WIZARDING FAMILY HAD PRODUCED SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE A HOUSE-ELF LEFT OUT IN THE RAIN!"

She moved on.

A Ravenclaw was trying desperately not to laugh.

Dracena stopped. Very slowly, she turned toward him.

"IS SOMETHING AMUSING, YOU CORNISH PIXIE?"

"Ma'am, No, ma'am!"

"THEN WHY ARE YOU GRINNING LIKE A KNEAZLE THAT'S JUST DISCOVERED AN UNGUARDED AVIARY?"

"Ma'am, nothing, ma'am!"

"NOTHING? YOU FIND NOTHING AMUSING?"

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am!"

"ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU'RE LAUGHING AT NOTHING?"

"Ma'am, no, ma'am!"

"THEN WHAT IN SALAZAR SLYTHERIN'S SILKEN SMALLCLOTHES IS WRONG WITH YOUR FACE?"

The Ravenclaw's mouth opened and closed.

"MA'AM, I DON'T KNOW, MA'AM!"

"OUTSTANDING! A RAVENCLAW WHO DOESN'T KNOW SOMETHING! ALERT THE DAILY PROPHET!"

She continued down the line. A Slytherin girl stood at perfect attention. Dracena stopped before her.

"AH. A SLYTHERIN."

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am!"

"YOU THINK YOU'RE CLEVER, DON'T YOU?"

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am!"

"YOU THINK BECAUSE YOU WEAR GREEN AND SILVER YOU'RE SOMEHOW BETTER THAN THESE OTHER MISERABLE LITTLE TROLL DROPPINGS?"

"Ma'am, no, ma'am!"

"THEN YOU'RE NOT MUCH OF A SLYTHERIN, ARE YOU?"

The girl hesitated.

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am?"

"YES, MA'AM, WHAT?"

"Ma'am, I... I don't know, ma'am!"

"MERLIN'S BEARD! ANOTHER ONE! I'M SURROUNDED BY CHILDREN WHO DON'T KNOW WHETHER THEY'RE COMING, GOING, OR BEING TRANSFIGURED INTO TEAPOTS!"

She leaned closer.

"LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, MISS SLYTHERIN. I WAS A SLYTHERIN. MY FATHER WAS A SLYTHERIN. HIS FATHER WAS A SLYTHERIN. I HAVE MORE SLYTHERIN BLOOD IN MY LITTLE FINGER THAN YOU HAVE BRAINS IN YOUR ENTIRE POINTY HEAD!"

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am!"

"AND THAT DOESN'T MEAN A THING IF YOU CAN'T DEFEND YOURSELF!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"BETTER!"

Dracena returned to the front of the classroom.

"LISTEN UP, YOU MISERABLE EXCUSES FOR MAGICAL STUDENTS!"

She slapped her wand against the desk.

"YOU ARE HERE TO LEARN DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS! THAT MEANS LEARNING HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN SOME DERANGED WAND-WAVING LUNATIC DECIDES TO TURN YOUR INNARDS INTO HAGGIS!"

She pointed toward a Gryffindor.

"YOU! WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN SOMEONE CASTS THE KILLING CURSE AT YOU?"

"Ma'am, dodge, ma'am!"

"DODGE?!"

"MA'AM YES, MA'AM!"

"BRILLIANT! ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT! FIVE POINTS TO GRYFFINDOR FOR DISCOVERING THAT NOT BEING HIT BY SOMETHING IS PREFERABLE TO BEING HIT BY IT!"

The boy smiled.

"WIPE THAT SMILE OFF YOUR FACE! I HAVEN'T FINISHED INSULTING YOU!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"YOU THINK THE DARK LORD WAS DEFEATED BECAUSE MY HUSBAND WAS PARTICULARLY GOOD AT DUCKING?"

"Ma'am, no, ma'am!"

"HE WAS DEFEATED BECAUSE HE WAS AN ARROGANT,
SHORTSIGHTED, SNAKE-FACED IMBECILE WHO COULDN'T
COMPREHEND THE CONCEPT OF LOVE!"

She paused.

"AND BECAUSE MY HUSBAND HAS THE MOST
PREPOSTEROUSLY GOOD LUCK OF ANY HUMAN BEING ALIVE!"

She leaned forward.

"YOU WILL NOT BE RELYING ON LUCK!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"YOU WILL NOT BE RELYING ON SOME PROPHECY!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"AND YOU WILL ABSOLUTELY NOT BE RELYING ON THE FACT
THAT YOUR MOTHER LOVED YOU VERY MUCH!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"YOUR MOTHERS MAY LOVE YOU, BUT THAT WILL NOT
PREVENT A BLAST-ENDED SKREWT FROM REMOVING YOUR
BACKSIDE AND WEARING IT AS A HAT!"

A student near the back snorted. Dracena's head snapped around.

"WHO WAS THAT?"

Silence.

"WHO THE FLIP SAID THAT"

A timid hand rose.

"Ma'am, Me, ma'am."

Dracena marched over.

"NAME!"

"Ma'am, Neville Longbottom Junior, ma'am."

Dracena stopped. She stared. "Longbottom?"

"Ma'am, yes, ma'am."

"As in *Neville Longbottom* ?"

"Ma'am, he's my dad, ma'am."

Dracena closed her eyes. For a moment, the terrifying drill instructor vanished. "Oh, for heaven's sake."

She looked at the ceiling. "Of COURSE he has a son."

Then she leaned down until her face was inches from the boys face.

"LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR FATHER,
LONGBOTTOM!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"YOUR FATHER WAS ONE OF THE BRAVEST WIZARDS I EVER
MET!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"HE STOOD UP TO THE DARK LORD HIMSELF!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"HE KILLED A BLOODY GREAT SNAKE WITH A SWORD!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"AND IF YOU HAVE HALF THE COURAGE YOUR FATHER HAD,
YOU MIGHT JUST AMOUNT TO SOMETHING!"

Neville Junior stood a little straighter. Dracena narrowed her eyes.

"BUT RIGHT NOW YOU LOOK LIKE A CONFUSED PUFFSKEIN
THAT'S BEEN DROPPED DOWN A STAIRCASE!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"OUTSTANDING!"

Dracena returned to the front.

"NOW! BEFORE WE BEGIN, I WANT TO MAKE ONE THING
PERFECTLY CLEAR!"

She pointed toward the classroom door.

"OUTSIDE THAT DOOR IS A WORLD FULL OF DANGEROUS
CREATURES, DARK WIZARDS, AND PEOPLE WITH THE MORAL
CHARACTER OF A DEMENTOR AT A CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY
PARTY!"

She paced.

"THEY DO NOT CARE ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"THEY DO NOT CARE ABOUT YOUR HOUSE POINTS!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"AND THEY CERTAINLY DO NOT CARE WHETHER YOU'VE FINISHED YOUR HOMEWORK!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"MY JOB IS TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER ONE OF THESE CREATURES, YOU DO NOT IMMEDIATELY BECOME AN UNIDENTIFIABLE STAIN ON THE FLOOR!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

"AND I WILL DO THAT EVEN IF I HAVE TO DRAG EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU THROUGH THE SEVEN CIRCLES OF AZKABAN MYSELF!"

"MA'AM, YES, MA'AM!"

She stopped pacing.

Stood perfectly still.

Then, in a completely normal voice:

"Excellent. Now, if you'll all open your textbooks to page forty-seven, we'll begin with the Shield Charm."

The students stared at her.

Dracena smiled pleasantly.

"Is there a problem?"

A Hufflepuff slowly raised his hand.

"Yes, Mr. Finch?"

"Professor... what was all that?"

Dracena blinked innocently.

"What was all what?"

"The... shouting, ma'am."

"Oh, that."

She waved a hand dismissively.

"My husband showed me a Muggle film last night. I thought it might be amusing to try something different."

She opened her textbook.

"Personally, I thought it was rather effective."

The students exchanged bewildered glances.

"Now, page forty-seven, please."

She paused.

"And Mr. Longbottom?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Do tell your father I said hello."

She smiled.

"And that I'm still waiting for him to return the gardening shears he borrowed from me."