

## Chapter 10

Under the sheet of paper was another one, which had been carefully blu-tacked to the wall. On it, in large letters, was written APOLOGIES SHORT TERM Mission statement Objectives for Thursday Friday follow-up LONG TERM The end of the Potter Queen's Birthday Party\*\*\*\*\*

'Would anyone who is not here please say so now', said Helga with a broad smile. They laughed politely. 'I wish Nicholai was here', muttered Wil under his breath. 'Share the joke, Wil', she looked down her nose at the end of the table, over half-moon glasses. She really was a nightmare. 'OK people, let's get started, Clara you take notes'. Although they were there to think about how they would occupy their time over the next week or so, Wil had had enough already. 'Why do we let her do this?', he muttered again to Freddy who was sitting to his left. 'Oh, let her get on with it, she doesn't bite'. He tried to reassure his friend. They let her drone on and on for ten minutes or so, going through her agenda. All the boys really wanted to do was to get outside on their bikes and cruise around the neighbourhood, like they usually did. All this talking was unnecessary and boring. Hardy stood up. 'What do you mean by The end of the Potter?' 'Thank you Hardy, I'm glad you asked that question. I'd like to propose that we vote on banning the reading of Hardy Potter literature, the viewing of Hardy Potter visual material, and the discussion of Potter topics, in this house. I mean have you seen the papers this morning? Most papers are full of Luna Lovegood in the new film, and even the financial press is obsessed by the profits from the books. I feel that the entire country is being taken over by a form of Potter-mania, and that we should at least have a break from it in our own house. All those in favour?'

'It's not her house, anyway,' murmured Freddy to Wil. 'She really is something else, isn't she?' Wil sounded half-admiring as he said this. No-one had responded to Helga's request for a vote, so Wil got up from his seat, stepped over the rope, and helped himself to an apple from the bowl on the table in the corner. 'Why don't we just head out on our bikes, or play hide and seek, or something. Let's just stop talking, please!' 'Well, Wil, thank you for your input, but I think you are rather out of the loop on this one. Now, stop going for the low-hanging fruit, and try to take a 360-degree view of the problem'. 'She's gone mad', he said to the assembled company.\*\*\*\*\* Freddy stood up, stepped out of the loop, and made his way to the area under the stairs where the bikes were kept. 'Freddy, please, we haven't finished the agenda yet!' Helga's voice had suddenly become shrill and whiny. 'Sorry, I can't take this any more, I just want to do something'. 'But what about the Queen's Birthday party? I really want to go'. 'Fine, go to it then, give her a kiss from me', he said dismissively. Hardy also got up and followed Freddy to the corner of the room. 'Kiss Her Majesty, oh my word!' Helga almost swooned over the table. She sat down, and started examining the notes that Clara had been taking, which had actually turned into a series of words and doodles. Helga read out what she could make of the notes. 'Hide the bikes; bake a fruit; 360 degrees; low-hanging Potter; kiss the Queen' 'Sounds like a plan to me', said Hardy, laughing with relief that the meeting was over. He headed over towards the door. As he reached the door which led up the stairs back into the hallway, he turned back to the group, reaching behind him for the handle. 'C'mon lads, let's...AAAAGHHHH!' He let out a deep scream as a shaft of pain shot through his hand, up along the nerves of his arm, and registered with his brain. In a split second he had removed his hand and was running towards the sink in the corner.

'It's red hot! Ow, ow ow ow'. He didn't sound like the school hard-man as he squeaked and moaned and jumped around the room. The boys moved over towards the doorway and stared at the doorknob. Not only was the handle evidently hot (it was almost glowing with the heat), but

around the frame of the door they could see a bright light. It was as if the light was trying to breakthrough the door, so bright was it around the edges. The room went silent. In the distance, music was playing. 'A-lleluia, A-lleluia'. Quiet at first, but growing louder. Coming from behind the door. Celestial music. Trumpets. Strings. Building to a crescendo of drums and gongs.\*\*\*\*\* Helga was cowering in the corner now, all pretence at confidence gone. She had not been friends with them for long, but had once stayed over with Clara for a weekend when her mother had been called to Kuala Lumpur at short notice. They had got to know each other quite well in the intervening months, and Helga obviously liked Clara's company. She looked to her friend now, who looked remarkably unconcerned. 'Funny things happen in this house, don't worry', Clara sounded unconcerned as well. 'I think I know what it is'. 'What is it, then?' replied Helga, half sobbing. 'Just wait and see'. She sounded confident, but at the same time slightly edgy and excited about the prospect of what was behind the door.\*\*\*\*\* The music had now reached a volume which made talking difficult, but the way the sound had developed over the previous three or four minutes indicated to them that something was about to happen. Clara strolled nonchalantly over, and pulled a chair away from the door area. There was a clear space of two or three square metres around the glowing, pulsating doorway. She stood back. The music reached a tremendous crescendo and stopped. Silence. They watched, fascinated, as the door handle slowly began to turn.\*\*\*\*\*