

He had a point. Harry squared his shoulders, then offered his wand to Charlie, who took it with gentle hands. “I’ll keep it safe,” he promised, tucking it securely into his breast pocket.

There was a knock on the door, and Bill opened it to see a stern-faced goblin, who took one look at Harry and nodded.

It was time for the ritual.

The Gringotts ritual room *hummed* with magic. Harry could feel it dance along his skin, the crystals embedded in the stone walls glowing with an ethereal light, making the polished stone floor glitter with a riot of colours. It was beautiful, but Harry could hardly focus; not just because he’d left his glasses behind in the other room.

In the centre of the room was a cluster of people, and Harry could make out a ritual circle drawn on the ground. It was too fuzzy for him to see the details, but he would hazard a guess to say it was the same circle that he’d found in the book in Salazar’s library; or at least based off that circle.

Bill led him to the centre of it, where two more humans were waiting with a goblin. “Harry, all we need you to do is sit down in this spot,” the eldest Weasley directed, helping Harry to sit exactly in place. “Hands on the floor — there you go, perfect. You don’t have to do anything to participate in the ritual; sit still and let us do the work. Just, y’know— if it feels like it’s trying to latch on, give it a bit of a shove for us, yeah?”

His jovial tone wasn’t enough to hide the undercurrent of worry, but Harry pretended it had, grinning back. “Will do.”

Hopefully after all his meditation and practice with recognising foreign magic due to Dumbledore’s compulsions, he would be able to feel the horcrux and give it a hand on its way out.

Harry heard a quiet squeaking noise, and craned his neck to see one of the other humans in the room bringing in something that looked like a small metal box. It squeaked louder, and Harry realised in horror that there was some kind of animal in there; a rat, or something similar.

Of course, the ritual had described transferring the horcrux from one living host to another.

“You ready, Harry?” Bill called. Harry tensed, then gave a hesitant nod. Butterflies swarmed furiously in his stomach, and he swallowed them down resolutely. He would be fine. Bill was confident this would work.

All at once, the room filled with murmurs of a language Harry didn’t recognise, and the ambient magic seemed to *sharpen*, focusing on Harry. Harry breathed deeply, sinking into the best meditation he could manage in such a nerve-wracking situation, making sure not to fight the magic as it washed over him. It felt like ants beneath his skin, searching, converging on his scar with an unbearable itching sensation. But Harry had endured worse, and Bill had told him not to move.