

# **Come Find Me**

By: joerandom

**Fandom:** harry potter

**Summary:** In the summer after 5th year, Hermione is targeted by Death Eaters. One dies and she ends up banished; expelled from Hogwarts, her magic bound, she and her parents are obliviated. Now the Death Eater's are out for her blood, but she doesn't even know they are coming. And Harry finally comes to realise what she means to him. The beginning of a very new journey. AU H/Hr

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# 1. Harry's Rescue

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**DISCLAIMER:** I own nothing; I'm only visiting this universe.

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AUTHORS NOTES: This story is about Harry realising how important Hermione is to him (because he loses her) and him repaying her for all her help over the years, all of her belief in him, all her love for him. A story of devotion, of selflessness, of dedication. A story about giving your life; not in a singular act of heroic glory, but the rest of your life, one ordinary minute after another, every minute you have left. And then some, if you can.

Also, I'm not British. So I don't have an intimate knowledge of British Higher Education. I'm guessing. So don't shoot the author for a little guessing and hand-waving on a limited budget.

Also, I do not intend to bash Dumbledore, but he doesn't come off very well in this tale. A very damaged character who desperately tries but never manages to rise above his issues. Similarly with Ron.

Please note that this is intended to be more of a Romance novel than an Adventure novel. Thus the action may be subdued in relation to my other stories. Maybe. Possibly.

TYPOGRAPHY: Punctuation within quotes is meant to be lyrical rather than grammatical; e.g. a "," is a pause at the end of a spoken phrase, a "-" is a longer pause in someone's thinking or an interruption of someone's phrase, and a "..." is the unintended end of someone's sentence.

## Chapter 1 Harry's Rescue

### Harry Potter

Sunday, 14 July, 1996

Harry sighed, realising he'd woken up, and wishing he hadn't. He laid there, breathing his exhaustion, feeling the weight of his arms. His mind wandered toward a desire for a calm day –

*"Sirius! NO!" Sirius fell backwards, surprise on his face as he fell toward ...*

Crushing weight landed on Harry again, as he relived watching Sirius die again. His chest hurt, his throat threatened to close up. He rolled over to avoid thinking.

He could barely breathe. Sleep was his best escape from his guilt – if he could only stay asleep ...

The first lock on the door clicked open. Harry woke up the rest of the way – another lock clicked – he jumped out of bed. Another lock clicked. Harry stepped back from the door as the final lock clicked and the door burst open.

"Boy! Get down there and start breakfast." Uncle Vernon filled the door, face purple, a mask of hatred and anger.

Harry stood defensively, ready to move, looking angrily at Vernon's third button down on his shirt.

Neither breathed, the tension arcing between them.

Slowly, Vernon started to move out of the door and back towards his room.

Harry took that opportunity to move to the loo. If he wanted to preserve any peace, any control over his own life, he needed to move fast. Faster than Vernon. Self-preservation took over. It was the easiest way to keep

things stable. Harry got down to the kitchen and had breakfast started and was working on setting the table in ten minutes.

In a little less than an hour breakfast was done, Vernon was gone, Dudley was gone, and Harry had moved out to the back garden to start tending the plants. It was his only escape from the Dursley's.

But not from his memories. He kept seeing the flash of spells. Sirius falling through the Veil. Ron being attacked by those brain-things. Ginny's broken ankle. Hermione falling after being hit by Dolohov's spell. His face burned with the guilt of Sirius falling. And of Hermione being injured. Particularly since she was right, it had been a trap. And *still* she came with him. And he hadn't listened to her.

He angrily pulled up another weed and tore it to pieces. But his anger only reminded him of his attack on Belatrix, on his pitiful attempt to use the Cruciatus Curse on her. His guilt burned. He closed his eyes tightly, but it didn't make the memories go away.

## **Hermione Granger**

Hermione stirred and started to take a deep breath as she woke up, but quickly stopped as the long purple scar that ran from her shoulder across to her opposite hip pulled painfully. The lasting result of the battle in the Ministry building at the end of fifth year. Her mother softly walked into her room and sat in Hermione's favourite reading chair, a rocking chair, next to her bed.

Emma's face was full of concern, "Are you feeling better this morning?"

Hermione smiled a small smile and nodded, "A bit. It's slow, like the healers said."

Emma tried to smile, "And here I thought magic was supposed to be so much faster in healing."

Hermione tried to smile too, but it was still rather pained, "Yes, except when magic does the damage. Then it seems slower than even normal healing."

Emma paused for a moment, "What would you like for breakfast this morning?"

Hermione thought, but what she really thought about was Harry. Her heart broke at thinking about what she knew Harry was doing to himself; namely, kicking himself for all the trouble he caused, and his impulsive actions, and Sirius dying, and ...

"Any ideas?" Emma interrupted her thoughts.

Hermione focussed back on her mum, "I'd like to try getting up and being at least somewhat normal today."

Emma looked concerned, "Are you sure? It won't strain you?"

Hermione shrugged, "I won't know until I try. Eggs?"

Emma stood up, "Yes, but don't think you're going to try those stairs by yourself."

Hermione slowly, painfully sat up, with her legs over the side of the bed, puffing a bit by the time she was sitting up.

Emma held out her hands ready to catch Hermione as she leaned forward and started to stand up. "You don't look to be ready for this. Are you sure?"

Hermione held out her hands and stood up fully, stretching a bit, and gave her mum a very determined look, "Yes, I must."

Emma rolled her eyes lightly and took Hermione's hand, "Ok, let's see how far we get. Your Dad can carry you back upstairs if you get stuck down there."

Hermione's eyes softened and looked more determined at the same time, "I'll just live on the couch."

Emma didn't look convinced, "Mmmm." She lead her out into the hall, stopping at the top of the stairs, "Very slowly. One step at a time."

Hermione held on to Emma's hand and the stair railing as she stepped one foot down, then brought the other beside it. Hermione felt invigorated at this seeming normal activity. But she was really starting to feel it by the time she stepped off the stairs onto the floor. The walk to the kitchen table was fine, but sitting down took a bit of negotiation with her scar as it pulled and strained with her movements. It left her puffing, sitting in the chair.

"You said eggs?" Emma moved toward the stove to start cooking.

"Yes. - Mum? I'm very worried about Harry."

Emma glanced to Hermione as she pulled out a pan, "Yes? He wasn't injured, was he?"

"Not physically, no."

"So, then what's to worry about?" She didn't sound sympathetic as she pulled out a carton of eggs.

Hermione winced at her mum's tone, "Mum, you know Harry's living situation is - not good."

Emma was cracking eggs into a bowl, "Yes, you've mentioned that before."

Hermione's stress rushed out with the words, "Harry was so hoping that he could live with his Godfather - with someone that cared for him - with - what amounted to a real family - and now Sirius has died. Leaving Harry with no one - except those monsters."

Emma turned to Hermione, a hollow look on her face. "Oh."

"And Harry thinks it's his fault that Sirius died."

Emma winced and turned back toward the bowl of eggs.

"It isn't his fault, but I couldn't get that through his thick skull."

Emma shook her head softly, "Those are intellectual arguments; they won't work on an emotional topic."

"And now, Dumbledore told all of his friends not to send him any mail and not to reply to any mail he sends, he said that Harry needs to 'process' what's happened."

Emma spun back to Hermione, anger pouring out, "What? Dumbledore's put him in 'time-out' or something? That's wrong! That is very wrong! What is he thinking? He doesn't have a degree in psychology! Stupid old man! To isolate Harry at a time like this is completely unhealthy. Yes, you don't push him and try to take him out to a movie every day, but to isolate him is - absolutely stupid." Emma glared at Hermione.

Hermione jumped on her opportunity, "I'd like to ask Harry to come here and help me recover from this - mess."

Emma realised that she had walked right into that one, but didn't mind much. Hermione's points were strong and no one should be crushed like that. "Do you think he will come?"

Hermione smiled, "I know exactly which buttons to push to get him to come over and help." Her smile dropped, "I know he's beating himself up quite thoroughly as it is, all I have to do is apply a touch of guilt aimed in the right direction and he will come and help."

Emma looked at Hermione with concern for a few quiet moments, "Ok." She walked over to pick up the phone and set it down in front of Hermione on the table, "Work your magic and bring him over. If nothing else, I'll at least be able to see what makes this boy tick."



Hermione smiled at her mum, "Thanks, Mum." Her Mum sounded like she would peel Harry open like a ripe fruit, but Hermione knew she really was just concerned for Hermione. She picked up the phone and dialled Harry's number. It took a bit of convincing to bypass Harry's aunt, but all Hermione had to do was suggest that she would 'pop right over' if she couldn't talk to Harry on the phone. Avoiding any magic was Harry's aunt's main point of motivation.

Harry was breathless and desperate sounding, "Hello?"

"Hi Harry."

"Hermione! I haven't gotten any letters and - I sent letters - and I haven't heard anything - but -" He sounded on the edge of a breakdown.

"Harry!"

"Yes?"

Hermione sighed, "Dumbledore told all of us to not contact you and not to reply to any mail you sent us."

His voice dropped like a rock, "Oh."

"I was talking to my parents about that and they said that this is a completely unhealthy approach to your situation. That you should not be left alone after something like this. "

"I don't think Aunt Petunia would let you come over -"

"Harry, I'm still recovering and in no condition to move right now."

Harry coughed and took a moment to respond, "But Dumbledore said I can't leave this house. That I need to be here to charge up the wards."

Her voice flashed angry, "You've done your two weeks in lockup, the wards are now charged."

Harry took a deep breath and pulled out his last card, "Dumbledore won't be happy. I already made him mad enough by trashing his office."

Hermione's voice grew even darker, "Given that Dumbledore's actions are threatening your health, how much do you think I care about what he thinks at this point? You should not be alone now."

He sighed, and sounded strained, "I - I'm not very sociable right now."

She huffed, "Yes, I know what you're doing to yourself. That's why you shouldn't be left alone." She paused and pulled out her weapon of last resort, "Harry, listen to me. You need to come over here and help me heal from the injuries I received while I was helping you!"

Harry choked. Guilt landed on him, hard. Again. His breathing was almost a whimper.

"Are we clear on your responsibilities?"

He swallowed hard. His voice cracked, "Yes, Hermione."

"Good. When will you be here?"

He took a breath, thinking, "I'll be there in an hour."

"How are you getting here?"

More thinking, "Ah - the Knight Bus?"

"Do you know the address?"

"Ah - no."

"Let me give it to you. Ready?"

The sound of Harry scrabbling for pen and paper, "Yes."

She gave it to him slowly, "Got it?"

"Yes, Hermione."

"Good. Bring all of your things. I'll see you in a bit."

"Yes."

The phone clicked and Hermione sighed heavily. She felt rather harsh pushing him so strongly, but she did not want him to back out.

"He's on his way?" Emma drew Hermione's focus.

Hermione nodded, "He'll be here in about an hour."

"You know your father is going to quiz him on all that's happened."

Hermione nodded, "Yes. It will probably be good for Harry to talk about it. – As long as Dad doesn't beat him up about it. Harry does that well enough all by himself."

Emma looked still and tense, "It *was* an irresponsible act."

Hermione's eyes flashed, "It was a *desperate* act! He thought his only family left to him was being tortured and no one was available to ask for help, or even ask what his visions meant. Dumbledore would not talk to him or explain anything all of last year."

Emma became more angry, "Why was Dumbledore not helping Harry?"

Hermione sighed and looked out the window, "He wouldn't say. He just seemed to avoid Harry and all his questions."

Emma looked quite pointedly at Hermione, "Is he not responsible for the students in that school?"

Hermione looked back with growing anger, "Not just the school, Dumbledore is supposed to be Harry's magical guardian! But he certainly isn't acting the part!"

Now Emma was drawing a slow calming breath and turned back to the eggs, pushing them around the pan with more intensity. "I'll call your father to let him know Harry is coming over, so it's not a surprise."

## **Harry Potter**

When Harry hung up the phone he walked immediately to the cupboard under the stairs and opened it. He pulled out his trunk and started up the stairs to his room. Wait! Half-way up the stairs, fear struck him hard!

He had opened the cupboard. It was locked! Wasn't it? How did he do that? Then his brain kicked in gear; his wand was still in his trunk – so it must have been accidental magic? Or – his Aunt had left it unlocked? He stood still on the stairs listening for any noises – like the sounds of owls from the Ministry.

After another moment he sighed deeply and started moving up the stairs again. He was shaken. This whole last few weeks had left him *deeply* shaken. So much had gone wrong. His life was falling apart. He started packing, barely noticing what he was doing.

Then the thought struck him; how was he going to get away from his minders? The Order was still watching him, weren't they?

Harry peeked out the window of his room to see if he could see any Order member hiding around his house, guarding him. After a moment he noticed a small portion of a shoe poking out from under the shrubbery at the side of the house. It looked like Mundungus Fletcher had fallen asleep again. That made things easy. He started packing his school trunk with everything, as fast as he could.

His stomach still roiled at the tension of what he was doing; going against Dumbledore, sneaking out of Privet Drive very early, sneaking away from the Order. But – he was also – excited. He was going to Hermione's house. Maybe it was just the chance to do something. To focus on something other than his chores – and his swirling, twirling thoughts.

Then he came to an abrupt halt. He was going to Hermione's house. Her parents would be there. His stomach sunk to the floor. They would think him a fool. A fool who involved their daughter in a foolhardy scheme – and injured her. He covered his face with his hands. They were going to kill him. It was all his fault. Hermione had tried to tell him but he wouldn't listen. Even more dirt to cover his grave.

After a few moments, fatalism set in. Was it not justified? Did he not deserve any punishment they would mete out? Hermione was injured, for God's sake! How could he have involved her in his mess? – And – it could have been so much worse. She could have ... she almost ...

He shook his head to clear those thoughts. He could not bear to think about those possibilities. Then he realised he needed to get moving, before Fletcher woke up. Or he would be stuck here and disappoint Hermione.

He dove back into stuffing his trunk full of anything and everything of value in his room, even his secrets below the floorboards. When he was done, and took a last look around his room, he peeked out the window again and saw the bit of shoe still poking out. He grabbed his trunk and moved quickly out of his room, down the stairs, and out the back door. Aunt Petunia was thoroughly involved with one of her shows on the telly and didn't see him sneak by behind her. He moved to the far side of the garden and slid behind the garden shed to the far corner of the garden – and the gate in the fence for the rubbish bins. They let him through into the back alley where he quickly walked to the next street and caught the Knight Bus.

The abject violence of the Knight Bus ride confused his stomach. Was it the ride? Or his impending arrival that caused this huge stone to be lodged inside him?

The Knight Bus came to a stop with a bang. His doom awaited. He stood up and stepped off the bus, lugging his trunk to the drive, in front of a large two story clapboard house with landscaping almost as nice as Privet Drive. Well, at least he can take care of that. That might lessen his punishment.

He almost jumped out of his skin as a large bang signalled the Knight Bus departing the area. He was left with no excuse, no distraction, no escape. He walked up the drive, up the front steps, – and steeled himself for the storm. He rang the bell.

Hermione Granger and Harry Potter

Emma sat up in the chair next to the couch Hermione was laying on, "That must be Harry." She got up and moved toward the door.

Hermione slowly sat up on the couch, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders and looked to the door in anticipation.

Emma Granger opened the door to see Harry standing, his body half turned away, with his hands stuffed deep in his pockets, shoulders tense, head hanging down, looking at his shoes. The very picture of dejection. "Oh, Harry." Emma hugged him into the house and noticed that he flinched at the hug. That will take a bit of work to fix.

"Hermione!" Harry noticed her sitting on the couch and came running over and knelt down in front of her, "I'm sorry, I – I'm so sorry. I should have listened to you. –"

She held up her hands to stop his ramble, "Harry!"

He stopped, feeling completely helpless.

She held out her hands, "Harry, help me up."

He stood up and took her hands to help her stand up. She was wearing checked flannel night clothes wrapped in a blanket. He choked as he noticed the huge purple welt on her shoulder peeking out from under her top. His guilt lashed him again. He could barely breathe seeing that horrible reminder.

She stood up slowly, painfully, until she grabbed him in a hug. It was weak, not her normal strength. She looked so frail.

Harry held her and had a hard time maintaining his composure, he whispered, "I'm sorry."

After a moment she leaned back and looked at him closely, "I'm sorry too. About Sirius. About - everything."

Harry took a few deep breaths trying to control himself. It wasn't working very well. He whispered again, "I'm sorry, Hermione."

"Harry, shhh. I need you to help me recover."

"Anything, Hermione. Anything. I'll do anything you need." He struggled to get the words out through his sniffing.

"The Healers say it's going to be a while before I'm back to normal."

Harry grimaced as if she had hit him.

"Harry, you can be a great help for me."

He looked a bit relieved.

She started to wilt and look very tired, "I need you to help me upstairs to my room. I can't make it by myself, Mum can't carry me, and Dad isn't home yet."

He nodded slowly, "Ok - how? Can you - walk?"

She shook her head, "No. Can you carry me?" She started to shake slightly, holding on to him.

Harry imagined trying to carry her upstairs in his arms and was having a hard time imagining he would be successful, "Can I carry you on my back?"

Hermione grimaced at the thought of squishing her scar against his back, "We can try. We just need to be very careful because it might hurt."

Harry sighed, turned away and bent down on one knee, "Ok, I will carry your legs and you try not to lean against me. I will try to not wobble as we go."

Hermione bent down putting her hands on his shoulders and gently, slowly kneeling down as he started to hold her legs. She leaned back to keep from leaning against him.

Harry slowly held her legs to take her weight.

She slowly relaxed as he held her legs and tried to lean away from his back as small hisses of discomfort escaped from her movements.

"Are you ok, Hermione?"

She took a shuddering breath, "I think so. Just go slowly."

He nodded and ever so slowly started to stand up. Once he was standing he asked, "How is this?"

"I think we can do this. Just – slowly." She tiredly leaned her forehead against the back of his neck.

Harry nodded his head against hers as she rested her head on his. He kept his legs bent and started small steps toward the stairs.

Little hisses escaped from Hermione.

Emma followed behind, "I'll be behind you on the stairs."

When they got to the stairs Harry couldn't figure out how he was going to hold the railing, "Hermione, can you hold the railing while we go up?"

She nodded on his shoulder and reached out a hand.

Harry took the steps slowly, one at a time. "I'm sorry," He kept apologising every time Hermione hissed at his steps. Eventually they made it to the top and Hermione pointed to her door over his shoulder. Harry stopped in the



doorway and smiled, "Oh, it's so you!" The bookcases, the framed maps on the walls, the large desk workspace.

Hermione chuckled, "Yes, I suppose."

He moved to standing in front of her bed, turned and slowly sat down, depositing her. He stood up and turned to help her lay down.

Hermione was exhausted, "Thank you, Harry."

Emma drew the covers up and started settling her in.

Harry noticed the sun was getting low out the window and his nerves spiked. He faded out of Hermione's room and went downstairs to find the kitchen. He needed to start dinner if it was going to be ready on time, something Aunt Petunia insisted on. He dove into the pantry making lists, planning menu ideas, finding the pots and pans, the utensils.

He was most of the way through a basic dinner when Emma came into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?"

He froze, not breathing.

She evidently noticed, "You didn't have to make dinner -" Then the smell caught her attention, "- what is it? That smells very nice." She leaned over his shoulder and breathed in the aroma. "You know how to cook?"

He relaxed a bit and started moving again. He nodded without looking at her.

He heard a smile in her voice, "I think you're going to spoil me."

Harry hid his own smile, "I think that's my job. It's the least I can do." He paused for a moment, thinking, "Did the healers give any restrictions on Hermione's diet?"

"No. She has some potions to take, and some ointments to apply." She sighed, "It seems that magic is not working very fast on this injury. I don't know what to expect. Hermione said it will likely be completely healed but she said it will not be fast. Do you have any experience with magical healing?"

Harry chuckled, "Yes, a good bit. It's usually at least ten times faster than you would expect for normal medicine."

"Really? Do you have an example?"

He paused, thinking, "Once I fell off my broom and broke my arm badly. Then a professor made a mistake – used the wrong spell – and vanished all the bones in my broken arm."

Emma gasped.

Harry looked at her a bit startled that she would be so concerned, "The school nurse gave me a potion to regrow all the bones in my arm. I was good as new the next morning."

Emma's face was pure shock, "Regrow all your bones? Overnight?"

He grimaced at the memory, "It was – not comfortable. Pain potions would disrupt the process, so – it hurt all night. A lot." He shook his head and turned back to his cooking.

Emma moved to setting the table. "Do you know why this would take so long? And be so debilitating in the process?"

Harry sighed, "Curses are designed to be difficult to heal. The magic resists healing."

Emma sighed and kept working.

When the food was done Harry set the the food on the table, "Go ahead and eat, I'll take a plate up to Hermione." He filled two plates and moved

up stairs. He was just about to enter Hermione's room when he heard someone come in the front door. He sighed, as he had probably just gotten out of the way of Hermione's father. Harry walked into Hermione's open door and sat the plates down on her bedside table.

He touched her shoulder to wake her, "Hermione, dinner is here."

Her eyes fluttered open and she mumbled something. "Dinner? Oh. My potions too."

"Where are they?"

She pointed to a set of vials on her desk across her room. "The blue one and the purple-ish one."

He picked them up, looking at the labels, but they were not helpful. He set them next to her plate of food and helped Hermione sit up. He picked up his plate and sat in Hermione's rocking chair to eat.

Hermione pointed her fork at the food, "Mmm. This is good. Did Mum make this?"

He avoided the question with mumbled noises from behind his bite of food, not looking at her.

She caught his diversion and looked at him intently, "Did *you* cook this?"

He tried to play innocent, like he hadn't heard her, "Hmm?"

She smiled at him, and saw straight through his misdirection. "Thank you, Harry."

Harry tried to smile and nodded. He set his empty plate back on the bedside table and watched Hermione take her potions and continue working on her dinner.

She set the plate down empty, then slowly leaned back into bed, "Harry, will you read to me?"

Harry looked startled, a bit shocked, "Yes. What would you like?"

She pointed at one of her bookcases, "That box set of books, 'The Lord Of the Rings'?"

He moved to the bookcase and picked up the boxed set, "This is rather large."

She smiled, "Yes, they are my favourite. Have you read them?"

He shook his head, "Never heard of them."

She sighed, "Would you?"

He smiled, "Yes. Anything for you." He sat down in the rocking chair and started in. It took him a while to relax into reading out loud. Then he started to enjoy it. After a few chapters he noticed a sound, looked up and found Hermione breathing steadily, asleep.

He sat there, looking at her. She was so peaceful – and – beautiful. He rushed on from that thought. He so wished he could speed up her healing. To see her so – set back, so depressed from her normal energy was difficult. He heard a noise and looked to the door.

Dan and Emma Granger stood in the door looking at Harry with smiles on their faces. Dan motioned for Harry to follow them. They all moved downstairs to the main room where Dan motioned Harry to sit on the couch.

Emma sat in a chair.

Dan sat in the chair across the low table, "Thank you, Harry, for making dinner. And for helping Hermione."

Emma smiled, "It was nice of you to read to her. Those are her favourite books."

Harry was now embarrassed, "Anything for her."

Dan nodded, "Maybe you can tell us the truth about the wizarding world?"

Harry's face dropped, he paled.

Dan continued, "Hermione has been - reluctant to tell us what is really going on and - we want to know how to protect her."

Harry sighed and dropped his head in his hands, "I'm afraid it's too late."

Emma spoke up surprised, "Why?"

Harry could barely hold on to his guilt as it raged about in his head, "It's all my fault." The silence after that statement landed on Harry.

Dan broke the silence, "I thought you stopped the last war, how could all of this be your fault?"

Harry felt his world collapse. He would have to tell them. They deserved to know, regardless of what Dumbledore had told him about keeping things secret. "I - there is a prophecy that -"

Emma looked suspicious, "A prophecy? Those things are real?" She obviously did not believe it.

Harry shrugged, "Dumbledore and Voldemort think so. It - says that - Voldemort and I are locked into a fight to the death. That only I can kill him."

"What!?" Both Dan and Emma chorused together.

Emma caught up first, "Who the bloody hell said that?"

Harry felt a bit better that their anger was not directly pointed at him, "The Divination professor at Hogwarts. She's a fraud most of the time, but she has given a few real prophecies before."

Dan took a deep breath and rubbed his face, "So this - prophecy - how is all this your fault?"

Harry was back to being crushed by his guilt, "Because anyone I am close to is at risk. I just heard about the prophesy a few weeks ago or – I would have not become friends with – anyone. But now – everyone I know is in danger from Voldemort because they know me. It's too late to change it or – I would have left a long time ago, if I'd known. The only thing I can do now is to defend my friends."

Dan looked angry, but somehow not at Harry, "We'll talk to Dumbledore –"

"Please don't."

Dan and Emma looked confused.

Harry continued, "I – when Dumbledore told me about the prophesy after the – fight at the Ministry – I got angry and – completely trashed his office. And – he told me not to tell anyone about this mess. He might – do something to you if he found out I told you."

Dan sat up and looked very angry, "And what would he likely do?"

Harry's head dropped, "He would likely obliviate you – take away your memories of what I've told you."

Dan growled and stood up. He started pacing. "Evil bastard."

Emma whispered, "I knew he was bad news. Just too slick and had too many nice meaningless answers."

Dan came back and sat down, "What are you planning on doing?"

Harry shook his head, "I have no idea. Dumbledore isn't talking to me any more. He won't answer any of my questions."

Dan huffed, "Sounds like you should return the favour. Refuse to talk to him for a while. Do you have ideas on how we can protect Hermione?"

Harry looked hollow, "Run. Take her away from here as fast and as far as you can."

Emma sighed, "Well – we'll think about it."

Harry looked at her perplexed.

Dan glanced at his watch, "It's getting late. You must be tired."

Harry nodded and tried to stifle a yawn.

Dan smiled knowingly, "Come on, I'll show you to the guest room."

Harry followed him up the stairs. lugging his trunk, to the a room across the hall from Hermione's door.

Dan stopped at the door, "Harry, how much of all this is actually under your control?"

Harry stood and thought, and with each point he ticked off in his mind, he began to relax, "Well, not much."

Dan nodded slowly, "Think about what is and isn't, then we'll talk about what we can do to change some of that tomorrow."

Harry nodded, "Thank you – for not being angry with me."

Dan looked confused, "Why would I be angry with you?"

Harry's head dropped, "For getting Hermione injured, for endangering her, for –"

"Harry –" Dan put his hand on Harry's shoulder and turned him to look in his eyes, "Harry, you are the closest friend Hermione has ever had. You have brought so much good to her life –" He just shrugged, "I wish the danger wasn't there – and all this magic business that seems so messed up. But I can't deny all the good that you've brought to her life as well. That means a lot to me. We will help you."

Harry was having a very difficult time maintaining some control, and an even harder time when Dan hugged him.

"Good night, Harry."

**Monday, 15 July, 1996**

Harry woke up with a start, and a shot of fear. Breakfast! He had to get breakfast started or it would be late. He jumped up and started moving. Then he noticed that it was still rather dark outside. He looked at the clock; it was a little too early.

Then he got an idea, and a smile. Muffins! He started moving again. Washed, dressed, down to the kitchen, and searching the food stores for any muffin or cake mixes. Found one! He checked the other ingredients. Got them all. He started pre-heating the oven and dove in.

When his muffin batch went into the oven he started on the normal Full English breakfast. Within minutes the smell of the muffins and the sausage was starting to fill the house.

Very soon Emma came into the kitchen breathing deeply, "Oh, my goodness, what a smell! Do you do this often? Torture everyone in the neighbourhood with baking smells?" She peeked into the oven, smelling deeply, "Oh wow." She straightened up and grinned as she pointed an accusing finger at him, "You are a threat to my waistline."

Harry started chuckling.

Dan came in following his nose, "Oh that smells good!"

Emma started moving toward the door, "I'll go check on Hermione. She'll be going crazy smelling this and not being able to come down."

Harry started dispensing muffins, two plates and glasses on a tray, "Go ahead and get started, I'll take this to Hermione." He left Dan to struggle with his self-control. He arrived at Hermione's closed door with his hands full. He leaned in and spoke to the door, "Hermione. Are you ready for breakfast?"



The door opened to Emma looking hungrily at the plates. She stepped back, "Hermione, you are a very lucky girl."

Harry stepped in and set the tray down on the table next to the bed.

Hermione was sitting up and sniffing, "Harry! What did you do?"

Harry held up a muffin, wiggling it between his fingers, "I got a wild idea." He sat down in the rocking chair with his plate and started in, "You don't want any? I'm sure your Mum would like yours."

Hermione snorted at him, and grabbed for her plate, "No, I think I can handle this."

Emma sighed, "Ok, I think it's time for mine."

Harry gave her a look, "If there's any left ..."

Emma made a surprised noise and moved down the hall in a hurry.

Hermione started chuckling, "Harry." She shook her head fondly.

"How are you feeling today?"

Hermione paused, "Still feel weak." She looked concerned.

"Is the - scar looking better?"

She nodded, "The horrible colour is starting to fade and it's getting smaller - even if it doesn't look much like it yet." She finished her plate and set it down. "Would you read to me again?"

Harry smiled, got up and retrieved the book and backed up a chapter before he started in. Within three more chapters he heard Hermione's breathing even out as she fell asleep. He looked at her, so peaceful, so beautiful, so - Hermione.

He marked the book, got up, and headed to the back garden to find the gardening tools. He found them and started in on the roses and the shrubs along the front of the house. A little pruning and cleaning the beds of weeds. He moved to the back garden and cleaned more beds. He stopped when it was getting close to lunch.

He started next on cleaning the kitchen from breakfast, then started making sandwiches for lunch. He left most of them on the kitchen table and took a few up to Hermione's room. She was still asleep so he sat in the reading chair and started reading ahead in Hermione's book.

Another three chapters later and Hermione started to stir. He watched her breathe. She started to wake up as her stomach growled. She turned and opened her eyes, saw Harry, saw the sandwiches, and breathed deep, "Harry, you brought lunch."

Harry smiled, "It is that time of day."

She looked confused, "It is?" She looked toward her clock.

Harry's smile grew, "You fell asleep while I was reading."

She looked sad, "I'm sorry. I'm not being very sociable, falling asleep on you."

"You definitely needed the rest. I was reading ahead." He lifted the book to show her.

She smiled, "Do you like it?"

He nodded, "It's - like nothing I've ever read before."

"You haven't even gotten to the good parts yet." She smiled knowingly as she extended her legs over the side of the bed.

He looked at her with concern, "Do you need help sitting up?"

She shook her head and started to sit up.

Harry moved to help her anyway. When she was upright he held out the plate of sandwiches for her to take one.

She took a bite and looked at him with a touch of surprise, "You made this, didn't you?"

"What makes you say that?"

"It's better than Mum's."

Harry smirked, "Can't be. Who could possibly make anything better than your Mum? It's a basic law of the universe."

Hermione chuckled, "Harry."

He nodded to her seriously, "It's true. It's right up there with Einstein. It's called *The Extra-Special Theory of Relatives, Particularly Mum's*."

Hermione broke out into a laugh and shook her head, "Harry."

Harry looked at her incredulously, "What? They didn't teach you about that in Primary? What kind of school did you go to?"

Hermione just kept laughing.

Emma leaned in the doorway with a bit of a bleary look, "It's so good to hear you laugh again, Hermione."

Hermione smiled at her, "Did you see Harry made lunch?" She pointed at the plate of sandwiches.

Emma glanced at the clock, "It's lunchtime already?" She sighed, "I sat still too long and fell asleep. I never do that. Must be the stress."

Harry motioned toward the plate, "Well, sandwiches cure everything so go ahead. There's more downstairs."

Emma raised an eyebrow, "Must be magical sandwiches if they cure everything."

Harry looked mischievous, "Oh, yeah. These cure frowns, grumps, glares, pouts, – even orneriness. They are amazing!"

Hermione's smile was trying to hold back her laugh. She looked to her Mum, "I think they're working."

Emma's smile grew, she pointed to Hermione and the last sandwich, "You eat that one and I'll go find more." She moved downstairs in search of her own cure.

"Thank you, Harry."

Harry smiled, "I can't leave you suffering. I *must* work my magic. It's part of my Hyper-critical Oath."

Hermione chuckled, "You mean Hippocratic Oath."

Harry nodded, "Yeah, that too. I have lots of oaths."

Hermione shook her head in amazement, and a smile. "Lots? Do you collect them?"

"Sure. I have my Hypnautic Oath – that's if I'm ever onboard a ship. My Hippocampus Oath applies if someday I go to Uni –"

Hermione burst into laughter, "Ouch. Harry stop that." She clutched her stomach and fell over into bed chuckling. After a moment, she raised her head with a challenging smile, "What happens if you just go back to Hogwarts?"

"Ah, that's covered by my Hippo-cramp-us Oath."

Her head flopped back on the bed with a dramatic groan. "Silly boy."

Harry smiled contentedly to see her laugh. "Do you have any oaths that apply to Hogwarts?"

She looked at him darkly, "Yes, lots. But they're not suitable for polite company."

Harry nodded understandingly, "Maybe we should categorise all those collectively as the Hippo-lot-a-mus Oaths".

Hermione was back to smirking in a flash. "You think about this a lot, do you?"

"Not much else to do at my relatives."

Hermione noticed he said it too casually, too quickly, glossing over way too much. Her anger flashed, but her voice was calm, "What do you do at your relatives?"

Harry stiffened slightly, then shrugged, "Not much. Where were we?" He started flipping back through the pages of the book, "Ah, here we are." He started reading.

Hermione let him dodge the question. It was too hard to push him on such an obviously uncomfortable topic.

Another two chapters and Harry noticed Hermione's quiet breathing. He marked the book and got up to go start on cleaning the various parts of the back garden. He trimmed another set of roses; he clipped two for a vase in the kitchen. He shaped some of the hedges with light trimming. After putting away the tools and cleaning up he stood in the centre of the garden looking at the overall shape and considering what to do about a strangely shaped, lopsided apple tree.

"Something wrong?" Emma came out to stand with Harry looking around the garden.

Harry was caught thinking, and took a minute to catch up, "That apple tree. It looks unbalanced."

Emma smiled, "It's grafted. There are two varieties on that tree so each side has a slightly different shape to it. I'm surprised you noticed. Do you like gardening?"

Harry took a bit too long to answer, with a bit too fast of an answer, "It keeps me sane." He realised what that sounded like and tried to cover it over, "The beauty can be amazing. I've never seen a grafted tree before."

Emma nodded, "When you get close to it you can see a slightly different texture to the bark on each side."

Harry brought back a comfortable subject, "Is Hermione still asleep?"

"Yes, but she'll need to wake up soon. It's almost time for her potions."

Harry nodded with a smile, "I'll check." He went into the kitchen and found a pitcher, filled it, and brought a glass upstairs to Hermione. She was still asleep so he set the pitcher and glass down and settled into the reading chair to wait.

Harry read less than two chapters ahead before it was time for Hermione to wake. He reached over and touched her shoulder, "Hermione, wake up."

She pried open her eyes, took a huge breath, and stretched, "Ouch!" She curled back in on herself, "I stretched my scar. Stupid thing." She pouted, "Harry, what time is it?"

"Time for potions."

"Mmmgf. They taste horrible."

He smiled fondly and spoke teasingly, "So pleasant today."

She glared at him with her face half smashed into the pillow, "You're no different with Madam Pomfrey."

He chuckled, "No, I'm far worse. Everyone is just so used to it that they don't pay attention any more. It's all part of my plan." He wiggled his eyebrows like some kind of cartoon villain.

She smiled at his 'plan', "So you're saying I need to complain more often?" Her expression darkened a bit more, "And start more rows with Ron?"

Harry shrugged, "You can complain to me. I don't mind."

"Harry, you don't complain, you just – submerge and go silent." She waved her hand vaguely. "Like a submarine."

Harry's eyebrows ticked up with a slight grin peeking out, "A submarine? Where did you get that?"

She reached out her arm idly and tried to tap her finger on the tip of his nose, but couldn't reach. Her arm flopped back on the bed, "You. When you get stressed you submerge – disappear. No emotion breaks the surface. You just go silent."

Harry looked at her with a bit of concern, "I'm sorry."

She had a small smile and shook her head, "It's one of the ways I can tell something is bothering you."

"I had no idea I was so easy to read."

"You're not. Ron doesn't notice – but then he doesn't notice much."

Harry huffed in amusement, "No. Not much. But I can hear him now, 'Hey! I do too!'" Harry imitated Ron's voice.

They laughed.

"Ouch! Harry, don't make me laugh."

Harry whimpered comically, "It's what I live for, to see you laugh."

Hermione huffed, "Ok, hold that thought until my scar is cured. I'll laugh more often when it doesn't hurt."

He smiled, "That's a deal." He stood up and moved to the desk and picked up the potions, "Ok, It's time. The potions are in motions." He moved back toward the bed holding the potions and wiggling them at her.

She looked askance at him, "In motions?"

He shrugged with a smirk, "It rhymes. And there *are* more than one." He wiggled them at her again.

She huffed at him and took the potions from his hand and turned serious, "I can't wait for this to be over."

Harry went quiet, "I'm sorry."

She glared at him, "Harry, stop that." She downed the potions and shivered with an eye-watering grimace, "Oh, that's bad." After a moment she came to a conclusion, "Harry, help me up."

"What?"

"I want to go downstairs for dinner. I need to start moving or I'm going to go crazy. Help me up." She reached out for him.

He caught her hands and helped her to standing, with a minimum of groans, but quite a few grimaces. "Are you sure you're up for this?"

"No, but if I don't start, I never will be." She pointed to her closet, "Can you hand me my robe?" He did and she wrapped herself in the big fuzzy robe. "Ok, let's make a go of this."

He took her hand and lead the way toward the stairs, slowly down one step at a time, then to the kitchen table where she sat slowly, gingerly.

Harry immediately started making dinner, pulling out pots, food, and utensils.



"Harry, what are you doing?"

"Making dinner. It's late getting started."

"Why?"

He stopped and looked at her quite confused, "Why what?"

"Why are you making it?"

He looked around comically, "Because I'm hungry?"

She chuckled, "No, why are *you* making it? Why not Mum?"

He shrugged, still looking confused, "It's what I do."

Realisation started to land, "Do you do this all the time?"

"Yes."

"And weed the garden?" Emma stood in the doorway, her arms crossed.

"Don't think I didn't notice."

Harry started to submerge. Reluctantly he nodded.

Emma and Hermione gave each other significant 'looks'.

Hermione sighed, "Harry, I can't let you become our house elf. You *must* let us share in the work."

Harry started to shrink, stuck his hands deep in his pockets.

Hermione stood up with effort and motioned for him to come to her.

He moved closer and she wrapped him in a hug and held on.

He held her up, his eyes closed, face buried in her hair.

Emma's voice softly broke through, "Well Hermione, there is the fact that he *is* a significantly better cook than either of us - sooo -"

Hermione started to chuckle, "Yes. Ok, you get to cook - *today*."

Harry smiled, "Thank you." He kissed the side of her head as he helped her slowly sit down.

Emma sat next to Hermione and watched as Harry resumed his motions toward a credible dinner.

Before dinner was ready to be put on the table Dan came in and took in the scene. "Harry, you have an audience."

Harry turned and smiled, "Yes, they have been watching me like hawks."

Dan smirked, "Alright, but are they applauding or critiquing? Maybe they could learn a few things?"

Hermione gasped, "Yes! I hadn't thought of that. Harry, you *must* teach me how to cook!"

Harry looked at her in worry, "Yes - but, maybe when you're a little stronger?"

Emma jumped in, "Yes, Hermione you are not allowed to strain yourself."

Hermione formed a pout that could disable armies.

Harry just stood and wilted, his hand trying to cover his face but he couldn't look away, "Oh, man, Hermione. You're killing me!"

Dan caught on to his difficulty, "Ah, Harry, you've caught the virus. You are now susceptible to pouts and puppy-dog eyes of all sorts. I'm sorry, I don't think it's curable." He shook his head with a rueful smile.

Harry began to snicker, "And who would want to cure that?" He held out his hand toward Hermione.

Dan nodded knowingly, "Oooh, the second stage of the disease."

Hermione cut in indignantly, "Hey! I'm right here."

Harry developed a confused, concerned, sneaking grin, "And you'd rather be somewhere else?"

"No! I'd just rather not be spoken of in the third person."

Harry's eyebrows rose with a touch of humour. He started pointing at Dan, then Emma, "One, two, -" Then he pointed at Hermione, "Three, -" Then himself, "Four. Looks numerical to me."

Hermione had a smile of retribution and said nothing.

Dan chuckled softly, "And round one goes to Harry. Congrats, that's a rare achievement."

Hermione covered her face, "Mum, you're not helping me."

Emma whispered, "Shhh, admit no weakness."

Harry turned back to the stove triumphantly, "And dinner is ready!" He moved the contents of the pan into a serving dish and everyone sat down.

Dan made a point to say, "Thank you, Harry. This smells wonderful."

Harry immediately choked up, his eyes watering. No one had ever thanked him for cooking - or anything he did. He tried to clear his throat and swallow his threatening tears. It was surprising to him, that he would feel so - grateful for something - so simple.

Hermione wrapped an arm around his neck and drew him into a one-armed hug around the corner of the table, and a kiss on the cheek, "Yes, thank you, Harry." She looked deeply into his eyes, "I take it you don't get many - any? - thanks?"

Harry could barely control his emotions. He held on by the barest of margins, then shook his head.

She continued to look concerned into his eyes for a moment and spoke seriously, quietly, "I think Dumbledore is no longer your friend."

Harry looked shocked, afraid. He whispered, "What?"

Hermione started ticking off her fingers, "He is avoiding you, he's not answering your questions, he's not teaching you anything, he has forbidden your friends from contacting you, he has forced you to stay with those - animals! He is not on your side any more!"

Harry looked almost panicked, "But - who else will help me -"

Dan broke in forcefully, "We will."

Harry startled and looked to Dan, Emma, and Hermione, "But - you need to be safe - I can't let -"

Dan shook his head forcefully, "No. We will protect each other. No one - not even you - can protect everyone. We all must protect each other. You are not our lone hero."

Harry was completely confused, "But - the prophesy -"

Emma huffed, "Is hogwash. It only holds meaning to you if you want to give it meaning. - In other words - it's self-fulfilling only if you want it to be."

Harry held his breath, "But - Dumbledore and Voldemort believe it."

Hermione looked at Harry sceptically, "Do they? Or do they merely respect the power of a statement that carries the tag of 'prophesy' because others will believe it? If the prophesy says you have the power to defeat Voldemort and everyone else believes it, that sets you up as a power that is a challenge to Voldemort. He must deal with you or look weak."

Harry was befuddled, "But - Dumbledore said that only I can -"

Hermione laughed bitterly, "Yes, how convenient. He can get you to fight the war for everyone else. And how do you think you're going to do that without any training? Training that only he seems to be able to provide? Why isn't he? What's the point of him saying you have to fight this war but him not giving you any training to do so? Does he *want* you to fail? Or maybe he just wants to see if you will get lucky and kill Voldemort? And it won't cost him much if you can't? A blind bet on the 'power' of a prophecy?"

Harry sat stunned. His thoughts swirled, running in circles. Then he had a shot of fear that turned his face white. Could he trust Dumbledore? Dare he? Can he afford to? He realised that other lives were at stake now, too. Like Hermione's. The anger from destroying Dumbledore's office came rushing back. The unfairness. The stupidity! And this anger was pointed at Dumbledore again.

"Harry."

Harry startled and came back into focus. Dan had called his name, "Yes?"

"We will help you. But you need to let go of this weight. This responsibility that is not yours. Voldemort is the Ministry's responsibility, the wizarding world's responsibility, not yours alone. That is the function of governments; to protect their people."

Harry paused, "But – the Ministry is weak – they can't protect anyone."

Dan sighed angrily, "The wizarding population gets the government they chose – and therefore the government they deserve. That isn't your responsibility either."

That hit home for Harry. He sighed and started to relax. But he was still confused. He had been so – captured by the prophecy. He didn't know how to 'let go of it' yet. But he *wanted* to let go of it. He resented that weight being dumped on him. That he had no choice, no – future, no hope. All that was robbed from him. No – room for love, for a life to be lived. Just –

death. He could not do that. He didn't know anyone who could. But – how could he let go?

"Harry, you need to eat. We will talk more later." Hermione picked up her fork. And gave him a look. With a growing smile. "Eat, Harry."

Harry wrapped himself in his food and submerged into his emotions. It was all he could do. To hide from – everything. His shame of what his relatives had done to him, at what was said about him starting with the story of his attending the St. Brutus' Secure Centre for Incurably Criminal Boys, all the lies he couldn't fight, his embarrassment at the pity that everyone showed him for what happened to his parents. He just wanted to run away and hide.

They all ate in silence, trying to be sensitive to Harry's emotions.

After dinner, Harry started to clean up, saving the left-overs in the refrigerator.

Emma helped Hermione move into the living room.

When Harry started cleaning the dishes, Dan spoke up, "Uh, Harry."

Harry turned, his hands covered in soapy water, "Yes?"

Dan came over and put a hand on his shoulder, "You should go sit with Hermione. The dishes are my responsibility."

Harry looked quite confused, "But –"

Dan smiled, "No, no. You cooked, I clean. That's the bargain."

"Bargain?" Harry still looked confused.

Dan nodded, "The division of labour. Someone cooks and someone else cleans. That's the deal. You go help Hermione with her potions and whatever she needs, Ok?"

Harry blinked a few times and focussed on Hermione, "Yes - ok." He rinsed his hands and moved toward the living room.

Dan smiled as he picked up the dishes and started in.

As Harry entered the living room Hermione saw him coming, "Harry!" She held out her hands to him, "Come sit with me."

He moved closer and caught her hands and held them, "In just a moment, I need to get your potions."

Her face fell and she looked tired, "Ok."

He ran up stairs, then down into the kitchen and came back with her two vials of potions and a glass of water, "These two vials, right?" He held them up for her to see.

She frowned, "Yes, they are definitely vile, all right."

Harry snickered, "Yes. That's true." He handed the potions and the water to her and sat down next to her.

Hermione groaned and grimaced with each one, followed by a drink of water, and ended with a shiver, "Oh, those are bad."

Harry smiled with sympathy, "The taste must be inversely proportional to their effectiveness."

She looked at him in amazement, "Are you trying to say that the worse it tastes, the better it works? That it's only the bad taste that cures the disease?"

He shrugged with a glint in his eye, "Sure seems like it to me. It's like some sort of magical placebo effect. The bad taste is all there really is and it incites our own magic to cure your ills."

Emma and Hermione laughed.

Emma shook her head, "Harry, are you making a sly comment on the wizarding world as a whole?"

Now Harry was chuckling, "I suppose I am. Does anyone really have any clue what's actually going on? It could mean that potions really are useless and all I need to do is to hit you with a spell that incites your magic to act and heal yourself." He sighed dramatically, "What would Professor Snape say to that?"

Hermione chuckled, "I suppose it is an interesting question. Is the magic in the potion? Or, if there is magic, does it actually work to cure you or does it cause an effect only because your own magic is responding? Or – something else entirely?"

Harry shook his head in exasperation and sarcasm, "Gee, where's that scientific method when you need it? Oh, that's right, the wizarding world doesn't believe in it! Ohhh, so sad." His voice grew darkly angry and bitter, "That sounds like a self-inflicted wound!" His voice hitched as he noticed Hermione and Emma's shocked looks and his face reddened, "- Sorry."

Hermione reached out to him, "Harry, what are you sorry about?"

He shook his head, "I guess – I'm rather angry at the wizarding world." His emotions started to rise, "Dumping all this on me."

She drew him into a hug, her own emotions running high, "Yes. Me too. You don't deserve any of this."

Harry looked at Hermione, then submerged a bit and nodded reluctantly. He felt embarrassed and wanted to move passed this topic but couldn't think of anything else. His mind was blank. Until, "How are you getting back upstairs?"

Hermione sighed heavily, "I – don't know."

He turned away and knelt down, "Ok. I'm ready."



"But you and Dad can help me up."

He looked back over his shoulder concerned, "Like a sack of potatoes? I don't think that will work."

She sighed again, "Ok." She started to get up slowly and leaned down, without leaning against his back.

"Ok, ready?"

"Yes, just – go slow."

Harry slowly got up, got a sly look, and started making vrooming noises as he started walking fast toward the stairs.

"Harry! Slowly."

"Handrail?" Harry stopped at the bottom of the stairs until Hermione reached out and caught it. Then started up – slowly.

Emma came up behind them.

Harry made flying noises as he came in for a smooth banked landing on the bed, depositing her sitting up. He sat in the reading chair as Emma drew up the covers. "Shall I read?"

Hermione smiled, "Yes, please."

Harry went through the ritual of getting the book, finding the page, and settling in for the duration. Another two chapters and Hermione's breathing evened out. Harry sat looking at her. He stared and imagined her as a five year old – or eight – living in this house, growing up with her parents. He was caught in the dream. Until he heard a throat cleared. He looked up at Dan and Emma smiling in the doorway.

Dan said, "You should probably get some sleep."

Emma cut in, "Yes, the first rule of caring for babies is that if they are asleep, then you need to be asleep. Otherwise you will never get any."

Harry chuckled, then looked up at the clock, it was almost 10. He nodded and got up, placing a marker in the page. He hurried across the hall to his room – when had it become *his* room? He shook his head to put those thoughts away, and tried to sleep.

## **Tuesday, 16 July, 1996**

Harry was up and cooking early in the morning again. Smells were beginning to fill the kitchen, until the heater turned on and started circulating the smells all over the house.

Dan walked into the kitchen and chuckled, "Harry, you're at it again. Filling the house with amazing food smells." He came over to Harry, put his arm around Harry's shoulders and leaned in to smell, "Is that cilantro I smell in there?"

Harry smiled and nodded. It was all he could do without choking up.

Dan sighed dramatically, "Wow. Very nice. I'm going to have to start taking notes." He moved back toward the table and sat down. He spoke softly, "Did your relatives make you do a lot of cooking? Is that how you learned how to cook?"

Harry stiffened and slowed his stirring, and then nodded without turning around.

Dan nodded sadly, "Does that create conflicting emotions for you? Cooking for us when that was what they made you do?"

Harry stopped and thought, then started moving again. He spoke equally softly, "No. Not when it's for people I care about. I'm – actually glad for the skills – now."

Dan smiled slightly, though Harry couldn't see him, "Well, just as long as you realise that we have no expectation that you do this. You can stop at any time, for any reason. If it ever stops being – good for you, you can stop doing this. If you enjoy it, if it is encouraging for you, if it somehow – redeems your experience, then feel free to help. But it is not, in any way, required. Ok?"

Harry kept stirring and didn't turn around, he just nodded. He knew he was hiding behind the food, but it was all he could manage now. It was a few seconds later that Harry stopped and quietly asked the pot in front of him, "Why?"

Dan smiled, "Because your value to us is not defined by, or dependent upon, what you do. For us or anyone else. Your value is based on who you are."

After a few seconds of quiet stirring Harry asked that pot, "Who am I?"

Dan chuckled, "That is a question you get to answer. We can offer suggestions, give our views, but you get to decide that one. Just keep in mind that you can decide that any way you want, but don't accept any views from anyone who doesn't care about you."

Harry nodded and moved the contents of his pan to a serving dish and put it on the table. He started serving up two plates, "It's ready. Go ahead, I'll take some to Hermione."

"Thank you, Harry."

Harry hurried out of the kitchen, upstairs and spoke through the closed door, "Hermione, breakfast is here."

Emma opened the door and breathed deeply, "Ohh, that smells good."

Harry moved in the door and set down the plates.

Hermione sat up with some effort, "Harry, what am I going to do?" At his confused look she continued, "You're spoiling me. I don't think I can go back to normal."

Emma whispered toward Hermione, "Yes, but don't miss out! Tuck in." She moved down the hall to find more of that smell.

Harry was sitting in the rocking chair with his plate, he nodded at Hermione's plate, "It's getting cold."

She took her eyes off of him, picked up her plate and started in, "Thank you, Harry."

He shook his head, "Nothing to thank me for. I'm just trying to repay you for all you've done for me all these years. Helping me with school work, with - all my problems, with - everything."

She huffed, "I don't have anything to thank you for? Not even - a troll, flying keys, Fluffy, dementors? I can't even remember them all!" She gave him the eye - and a smile.

Harry rolled his eyes and bobbed his head side to side, "Well, I suppose." He tried to deftly change the subject, "Are you going to France again this year?"

Hermione shook her head sadly, "No." She continued at his surprised look, "I'm not strong enough yet. And - I can't go to the beach with a scar like this. Maybe next year."

Harry hung his head in shame.

"Harry! Stop that. You didn't do this to me. Dolohov did."

His face was crumpled in anguish, "I put you in that position!"

"No! I put myself in that position. Playing around with silencing spells instead of a good cutting spell."

"But you shouldn't have followed me!"

Hermione stood up, "Yes, I should! And I'd do it again."

"No! I'm not worth it!"

"Yes! You! Are!" She stood leaning over him, glaring down at him, pointing a finger at his eyes. Her voice broke as her emotions rose, squeezing her voice to a whisper, "You're worth more than anything to me."

Harry's anger broke as shock set in, "But – Ron –"

She shook her head as she glared into his eyes, "Ron and I would never work. I see that now."

Harry looked desperately confused, "But –"

Hermione huffed and waved her hand, "He doesn't care about anything I care about. And you're twice the man he is."

Harry looked stricken, "No! You can't! I'll get you killed."

She started to lose energy and turn pale, "Not if I have anything to say about it." She lost her balance and caught herself with her hand leaning on Harry's shoulder.

She slowly collapsed as Harry stood up as he caught her. He picked her up and gently laid her down in her bed, "Not like that, you won't."

Hermione smiled up at him, "That's why you're here to help me get better."

Harry leaned on the bed, his face full of anguish, "I can't risk your life."

"No. You can't. I am." She poked him lightly in the chest.

Harry stood up and turned away, "No! You can't!"

"I will."

Harry shook his head and moved down to the kitchen and started cleaning up breakfast. The monotony of cleaning helped him manage the turmoil of his emotions. Then he moved out to the back garden. The physical exertion helped to calm his shaking hands. He could not handle the thought of her risking her life for him. That was too far. He could not let that happen. He would have to leave her behind when it came down to fighting Voldemort – whatever that looked like. He couldn't fight if she was at risk. But – that was later, somewhere down the road. In the mean time he would see to her healing.

He cleaned up his trimmings and tools and came back into the kitchen to start lunch. By then he had calmed down and felt bad for arguing with Hermione, so he made a batch of scones too. With a sweet drizzle on top. He sighed heavily as he brought the food up to Hermione's room.

He stood in the doorway and saw Hermione asleep. He stood looking at her; his heart melted. Now he really felt bad; she cared about him. Even if that was a bad idea. He thought of how stubborn she was; how was he going to change her mind? He shook his head. First, her healing. He moved to set down the plate of scones and sandwiches on the bedside table.

Her touched her shoulder, "Hermione, lunch is here."

She drew a deep breath, "Ouch!" She curled into herself, "Stupid scar." She looked up with a pained expression, "Harry. What's happening?"

He smiled fondly, "Lunch is happening." He pointed at the plates of scones and sandwiches.

"Scones?" She glanced at him, "You made scones?" She struggled to sit up and reached for one.

He smirked, "Actually they just started falling from the sky. I just went outside and picked them up off the ground."

She huffed and gave him a dark look, with a sneaking smile, "Harry." Then she bit into one, "Mmmf! Gees r gud!"

Harry burst out laughing.

Hermione struggled to keep scone bits from leaking out around her smile, and not breaking down laughing too. She started pointing at him accusingly, "MmhhmmmHhm."

Harry was trying to control himself, "Yes? You were saying?"

She started mumbling more noises and throwing leaked scone bits at him.

He squeaked and tried to catch them. With nowhere to put them he just ate them. "Ooh, that was a good bit. Got any more of those?" He held out his hands expectantly waiting for her to throw another bit.

Emma stood in the doorway with a concerned look, "Hermione, no feeding the animals."

Hermione looked guilty, with a touch of angry pout, glaring at Harry, "He started it."

Harry burst out laughing again.

Emma shook her head in mock exasperation, "You two." She moved down the hall with a smile peaking out.

Harry controlled himself back to merely a subdued smile, "Hermione, I'm sorry I was arguing with you."

She turned serious and sad, she nodded, "Me too."

Harry nodded decisively, smiled roguishly, "So - you're a secret scone-monster, are you?"

Hermione chuckled, "Well, when their that good - yes!" She started on a sandwich.

Harry grinned, "Hhhmm. Maybe I'll have to escalate to donuts, or something."

"Donuts? No, you'll have to apply for a Sweets Permit from Mum, first. Otherwise you could get *arrested*."

Harry looked crushed, "No sweets?"

"Hey, dentists, remember? This is a 'no sweets zone'."

Harry started over-the-top whimpering, "How do you handle it? I'd die!"

Hermione gave him her 'are-you-serious' smirk, "I think you'll live." She laid down after her sandwich. She looked at him pleadingly, "Reading?"

He smiled, "Sure." He got up and got the book, sat down in the reading chair and started in. Harry was very excited because he knew from reading ahead that the attack on Buckland was about to begin. It wasn't until Frodo made it through the Hedge into the Old Forrest that Harry noticed Hermione's quiet breathing. He smiled, watching her breathe. He thought he was really coming to understand the concept of 'contentment' ... Or - even bliss? It warranted more thought...

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Harry woke to the clink of plates.

Emma was gathering up the lunch plates, "Good afternoon, you two. Time to wake up. Dinner is almost ready."

Groans, stretches, and mumbles answered her.

Harry gathered himself first, "Ohhh, I'm sorry. I fell asleep. And I forgot dinner." His words were squeezed through a stretch and pushed around a yawn.

Emma was smiling at him, "Well, you're in luck. Dan came home early today, so you won't have to suffer through my cooking." She turned to Hermione, "Would you like me to bring yours up here?"

Hermione shook her head and started to sit up.



Emma mumbled something about 'stubborn' and took the dishes downstairs.

Harry stood up to help Hermione, "How are you feeling?" He noticed her eyes were brighter, her smile had more energy.

"Much better. It still hurts to move sometimes and the scar is still big but the colour isn't as purple anymore."

He was captivated by the return of her vibrant smile. He hadn't seen it since he got there. He watched her move slowly down the stairs as he backed down in front of her, holding her hand. He stopped as he reached the floor.

As Hermione stepped onto the floor she turned into him and wrapped her arms around him, resting her head on his shoulder, "Thank you, Harry. This is so much easier with you here."

He whispered into her hair as he held her, "Anything for you, Hermione."

She gave him a brief squeeze and they moved into the kitchen for dinner.

"Just in time!" Dan moved a dish from the stove to the table and sat down, along with everyone else.

Dan rubbed his hands together expectantly, "Well, now that Harry has sufficiently raised the bar for dinner I felt I needed to respond and defend my standing as 'Head Chef' with – stir-fry!" He pointed about the table, "There are a selection of sauces, some cheeses, and there is always more to be made easily. So – tuck in."

Harry had never had stir-fry before so there was lots of discussions on the origins, styles, and options for it. He loved it, but knew he would never get his relatives to even try it. It was – foreign. Harry was so excited. The life that Hermione and her parents had was so – full. Full of wonderful food, new experiences, new places. It was everything the Dursley's didn't have and would never have. It was – even more than magic, because magic was

- in it's own way - almost as stilted and narrow as the Dursley's. Just as bigoted in the opposite direction. Hermione's life was a window to the whole world. Harry could barely contain his excitement.

Dan woke him out of his thoughts, "So, Harry, what do you think about the current state of the wizarding world?"

A growl popped out of Harry before he could catch it, "I was just thinking of that." He stopped and thought, "You know, my relatives are - quite bigoted against anything new, or foreign, or ..."

Hermione spoke quietly, "They are narrow?"

Harry turned to her, "Closed. Completely. To anything new. Well, guess what? The wizarding world is worse! They are hidebound, rigid, inflexible. Insular. Isolationist - what other bad verbs can I come up with?" He started to get a sly smile, "Bad verbs are kind'a like adverbs but - worse."

Emma missed his teasing and looked a bit concerned, "You don't like magic?"

Harry shook his head, "Oh, no, magic is wonderful. Magical culture? Magical people?" Harry was starting to get a bit heated, "All the pain in my life can be traced to magical people. To magical culture. I'm struggling to keep in mind the things that I think are good, that are worth saving. It's a pretty small list." Harry was surprised by his own vehemence. The depth of his feeling. But it was true. And the comparison between the Dursley's and magical culture was a revelation. "There is not a lot to hold me to the magical world." The words popped out - and the truth of it caught up.

Hermione put her hand on Harry's, "You've got your OWLs now. You are no longer tied to the magical world."

Harry's expression softened as he drifted into thoughts of the future, "Hm. Yes. Just - this Voldemort crap." He looked down at his plate, "Damn prophecies."

Emma spoke softly, "Harry, any pronouncement only has power over you if you let it."

Harry looked up, confusion racing back and forth across his face, "But - magic - and the prophecy -"

Emma spoke gently, "What role does magic play in belief? Or what role does belief play in magic? Not much, I think."

Hermione looked stunned, "Well - what role does magic play in a prophecy? Does it enforce the prophecy? Is it a statement of truth? Or does magic merely cause 'a leak' of information from the future and plays no role in that future? Is it only one possible future? Merely a warning of possibilities?"

Emma nodded to Hermione and looked back to Harry, "Given that Hermione has said that most wizards deify magic, isn't that the perfect set-up to enforce the power of the label of 'prophecy'? Of creating the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy? Because everyone can blame everything on a prophecy and escape the weight of choice, the weight of any responsibility? Any guilt?"

Hermione lightly chuckled, "The whole process of deifying magic removes almost all responsibility." She snorted in derision, "You don't even need a brain when you don't have to make any difficult choices." She posed and put on a posh accent, "Magic will fix it." She gave a dismissive wave of her hand before she huffed in derision.

Harry looked thoughtful into the distance, "Magic is pretty wonderful. How did magical people get to be so bad?"

Dan made a thoughtful noise, "Well - like you said, the Dursley's aren't any better. But it seems like magic plays in to humanity's weaknesses. Magic is like a drug. It seems so easy. It lures us in and promises an easy life. Like a very fun toy. But I think it comes with a cost." His eyebrows rose, "Or more accurately a responsibility?"

Hermione smiled darkly, "Yes, that old quote; 'To whom much is given, much is required'. With the wizarding world so isolated nothing is required any more. The Statute of Secrecy has become an enabling factor in skirting all responsibility. There are no needs that magic is needed to fill – at least none that magicals can see or will admit."

Dan looked very concerned, "Can I suggest you both get the hell out of magical culture?"

Harry nodded, "I'll go for that."

Hermione smiled, "We can go to Uni!"

Harry smiled to match hers, "That sounds nice."

Emma drug them back to reality, "But the issue remains, what is a prophesy? Does it control you? Is it something you are required to fulfil? Does it require anything from you? Does it mean all agency is removed from you and it will just happen? Then what is the purpose of a prophesy?"

Harry huffed, "Yes, if it removes personal choice, then why have a prophesy? What's the point? I resent that thing completely."

Emma softly chuckled, "Myself? I think the prophesy means nothing. Even if it does, I think the best thing for you to do is run away from it."

Harry sighed, "Yes, but – regardless of any prophesy, there is still some sort of linkage between me and Voldemort. Sometimes I have visions of what he is doing."

"What?" Dan looked very concerned. "How does that work?"

Harry looked confused and shrugged.

Hermione said, "We don't know. Dumbledore isn't talking to Harry any more so we can't really ask."

Harry put his hand to his forehead and sighed, "There is some sort of connection between me and him. My scar hurts when he is nearby, sometimes I can feel his strong emotions – even see through his eyes, what he is seeing. It seems – something about the scar that he gave me when I was a baby has connected us. And – I wonder if Dumbledore knows?"

Hermione hummed, "Knows? Suspects? Guesses? Doesn't want to tell you? I'll go with that last one, for sure."

Harry ground his teeth, "I'm feeling rather abused as of late."

Dan nodded, "I'd say so. Is there anyone else you can ask questions of? That you could trust?"

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Harry turned back to Dan and started to speak – but he ended up just shrugging, "I could ask Remus – but he's very indebted to Dumbledore. I don't know anyone who isn't."

Emma turned to Hermione, "No one in the government is trustworthy? – And not in Dumbledore's pocket?"

Hermione shook her head slowly.

Harry sat up, "Wait – What about Madam Bones? I've always felt she is quite trustworthy."

Hermione looked sadly at Harry, "Madam Bones was murdered two weeks ago. Scrimgeour is head of the DMLE now."

Harry groaned and covered his face, "Oh, God."

Dan sat up stiffly, "*That* sounds bad." He took a long breath, "I think we might want to think about bailing out of England." He looked to Emma with a dark serious look.

Emma gave him a look of acknowledgement – and maybe agreement.

Harry nodded enthusiastically, "That sounds like a great idea. You'll be safe outside England."

Dan smiled, "Not without you, Harry."

"What?"

Hermione was looking at her parents with tears in her eyes, and a smile, "You two are amazing."

Harry was still lost, "What?"

Hermione turned back to Harry, "Harry, I think they are right. We should consider it. And no, we are not leaving without you."

Harry sat like a fish, his mouth working soundlessly and his eyes big and empty.

Dan smiled again, "Well, nothing will be decided this instant, so - I'll do some checking on some things tomorrow and we'll keep talking about it. Alright?"

Everyone nodded but Harry, who was still blinking in confusion.

Hermione started to move, "Harry, help me get up." She started to get up slowly.

Harry startled out of his confusion and stood up to help Hermione.

## 2. A Change of Direction

CHAPTER SIZE: 6515

### Chapter 2

#### A Change of Direction

Harry Potter

Wednesday, 17 July, 1996, 09:00

Harry was up and had breakfast started as the sun started rising. They were out of anything like muffin or cake mixes, and a few other things, so a trip to the store was in order for today. And, there was only enough in the refrigerator for an abbreviated not-so-full English breakfast.

Dan came in the kitchen and chuckled, "Harry, you beat me to it." He patted Harry on the shoulder and peeked into the pan, "Thank you." He sniffed, "Oh, that's nice."

Harry moved to let him see the pan, "We're a little short on some things, so we'll have to make a trip to the store today."

Dan looked excited, "Oh, an opportunity to expand our repertoire. That will be fun. Have you ever cooked any French cuisine?"

Harry shook his head, "No, my relatives only let me cook standard British faire."

Dan nodded with a frown, then his eyes lit up with a smile, "We can fix that! I can show you some simple things from the Continent that are amazing. Pastries and things - so nice!"

Now Harry's eyes lit up, "That sounds like a lot of fun."

"Ok. That's a deal, then." He looked at his watch, "I better get myself moving if I want to make my first appointment."

Harry served up his breakfast, "There you go. I'll get Hermione's breakfast together and take it up." He worked on filling two plates and started up the stairs. He stopped at Hermione's open door and saw her asleep.

Emma came down the hall and whispered, "Oh, that smells nice. Is she still asleep?" She peeked in, "Well, I'm sure she'd rather see you – with that –" She pointed at the plates, "Than me – with her ointments. So go ahead." She headed for the kitchen.

Harry smiled and set the plates down and touched her shoulder, "Hermione, breakfast is here."

She slowly worked her eyes open blinking constantly, then a big breath, "Oh, my. Already?" A big yawn broke out, "Oh, Harry. I'm still tired."

He sat down in the reading chair, "You did have an exciting day yesterday. But food will help." He pointed at her plate and picked up his own. He picked up his fork and was about to start in when she started to sit up. He set his plate down and helped her up, then handed her the plate.

"Ok, now I'm hungry." She started in.

"We'll have to make a trip to the store today. We're out of most everything."

Her face lit up, then fell, "I'd love to come – but I don't think I'll have enough energy."

Harry nodded, "I don't know if I should go. I don't want to leave you alone here."

Hermione looked considering, tapping her chin with her finger, "Hmm, I think Mum can *probably* handle going to the store by herself, so – you can stay with me!" She had a big smile at her revelation.

Harry rolled his eyes with a smirk, "Yes, quite likely."



"Did you make a list?"

He nodded, "Yes, I left it on the table. All I did was list everything that I used. But I think your father wanted to add more."

She murmured through her food.

He smiled as he remembered, "Your father said he would teach me about some French pastries."

She groaned with wide eyes, "Oh, I can hardly wait."

Emma stood in the door and caught their attention, "Hermione, dear, it's time for your ointments."

Hermione made a face, "Ugh. I hate that stuff. It's gooey. Gets all over everything."

Emma looked apologetically to Harry, "I'm sorry, Harry. But you can't help with this."

Harry's eyes got big and his cheeks turned red, "Ah - yeah, no problem." He got up quickly and headed down to the kitchen. There were lots of dishes for him to clean up. Nice safe dishes. Enough to keep him safely busy for a while.

He got all the food put away and started on washing the dishes. He was standing at the sink, facing out the window watching the sun fill the back garden. It was warming up to a beautiful day. He was thinking through his list of things to get at the store when he heard a pop. He looked up to see a masked Death Eater standing in the back garden. Harry turned off the water and dropped down below the counter. He heard five more pops. He peaked up over the counter to see them start to move to surround the house. He reached for his wand - he didn't have it! He cursed! It was still upstairs!

He ran upstairs as fast as he could and grabbed it off his night stand. He ran to Hermione's room, knocked quietly but insistently at the door, "Hermione! Death Eaters in the back garden, surrounding the house!"

He ran down the stairs, disillusioned himself, and ran out the front door. As he ran off the porch, a robed and masked Death Eater was walking across the front garden. The Death Eater wasn't paying enough attention because Harry hit him with a cutting spell and took him down. Harry turned right and kept running around the yard. He caught another one standing at the corner of the house with another cutting spell. Before the Death Eater hit the ground he popped out from what must have been an injury-triggered portkey. Harry kept running. There was another one facing the side of the house who was a bit more awake. He fired two spells at Harry but Harry was moving too fast and they missed. Harry's cutting spell didn't miss and the Death Eater popped out before he hit the ground.

The next one, at the back corner of the house was paying attention and fired off a set of spells. Harry tried to dodge but slipped on the wet grass and was hit with a bludgeoner on his right side and went down with a scream. He landed and screamed again. Another spell barely missed him as he slid along the wet grass. He stopped sliding and pointed his wand from the ground and fired back a cutting curse. The Death Eater had a shield up and deflected it, but he staggered back at the power of Harry's spell. Harry immediately sent three spells back and got him with one of them. He was gone before he hit the ground.

The next Death Eater came running from the back of the house toward where the last one apparated and evidently hadn't seen Harry, because Harry caught him with another cutting spell. This one didn't pop out but he screamed for help as he landed in the grass and was out of Harry's sight.

Harry stayed laying in the grass as another Death Eater came around the other side of the house toward the downed Death Eater. Harry sent a cutting curse at the new one, but he saw it coming and shielded. Harry couldn't move fast so he had to shield against a spell coming back from the second Death Eater. Being pinned down was not good. He tried to roll over

to dodge a second spell and screamed with the pain. Then he was hit with a spell that immobilised him. He lay on the ground looking up as the Death Eater walked over and leaned down.

The Death Eater spoke mildly, "Well, Harry Potter. Come with me." He reached down to grab Harry's arm.

Harry was about to explode with the thought of being captured and abandoning Hermione. As the Death Eater tried to apparate them, so did Harry.

Harry landed in overwhelming pain.

### **Hermione Granger, 11:00**

Hermione had just opened the window in Harry's room when she saw him and the Death Eater apparate away, "Harry!"

The last Death Eater, sitting on the ground injured, looked up at her and started to raise his wand.

Hermione sent a cutting curse with everything she had. Which wasn't that much. But it hit her target, who popped away mid-scream.

Emma peeked out the window to see if it was safe, "Hermione, what happened?"

Hermione turned and grabbed her Mum's arm, "Mum, some Death Eaters just tried to attack the house and they took Harry!"

Emma's shock and confusion shook her, "But – are they gone? Is it safe?"

"No! It's not safe! Mum, listen to me, you need to get Dad and go on vacation, now! You've got ten minutes to get out of here!" She started toward the stairs.

"What are you doing?"

Hermione stopped at the door and turned, "They will be back! You need to be gone before then. I have to find Harry!" She moved downstairs as fast as she could, which was achingly slow, and out the back to where Harry had popped away. She tried to run some tracking spells to see where Harry went, in between her gasps for air. But they showed her nothing useful!

She heard a spell fired at her from behind. She started to turn, to move - but was hit with a red stunner.

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Hermione woke up slowly, sluggishly. She kept breathing deeply to get her brain working. She opened her eyes and saw she was in a small stone room with a single dim lamp in the centre of the ceiling. She was laying on a small thin bed. She tried to get up but could only move a bit. Must be a restraining spell of some sort. The door looked like your basic dungeon door; thick wood beams and black iron bolts holding it all together. A small window with a flap covering it in the centre. All of it old and worn. She started to cry. To be captured by Death Eaters. Likely her parents, too. And Harry. The very worst ending to a wonderful week. What could she do? What hope did she have? No wand. She couldn't even move.

The door opened soundlessly. A woman in a Healers uniform came in and stood over her working her wand.

Hermione tried to climb into the corner away from this healer, but she couldn't move at all. She tried to say something but couldn't hear her own voice; she must be covered by a silencing spell.

The door opened again and an Auror entered the room, spoke some things to the Healer and they left. The immobilisation spell ended and she could sit up. She tried to yell, but she still couldn't hear her own voice.

Then, as her brain spun in confusion, the thought hit her; this looks like a cell. What was she doing in a cell that Aurors were guarding? Had she been arrested?

**Harry Potter, 15:30**

Harry woke up in a pile of leaves. He was on his back looking up into the branches of a large deciduous tree. The black branches traced intricate patterns through the green leaves. It was beautiful – except – his head hurt. He was trying to remember – he gasped and sat up. Death Eaters! At Hermione's house! He started to get up when his leg burst into pain and he flopped back to flat on the ground. Which made it hurt even more. He lay there gasping, trying to stay still and not hurt himself even more.

He wondered how long he'd been here, because he didn't remember landing. As the pain started to calm down he looked around and saw a hand – with only a bit of arm and sleeve still attached, laying on the ground next to him. He squirmed away from it. Then more of his memory came back. This must be the hand of that Death Eater who tried to apparate him somewhere. He looked around again, this was not where he had tried to apparate himself, but it also didn't seem to be where the Death Eater wanted to apparate them either. It must be quite a distance away from Hermione's house because now there was an overcast, where it was sunny at Hermione's house.

He slowly, carefully rolled over onto his left side and started to get up on his left knee, then leg, using the tree to hold onto. He looked down at the hand on the ground. It looked like it had been too much time since it was splinched to be able to reconnect it, not that he was going to go looking for the Death Eater to give it back, so he used a flame spell to burn it up, then vanished the bones. And a splash of water to put out the leaves that started burning.

He rested against the tree for a few more moments, thinking of what he needed to do next. Given the pain in his leg, he still needed to get to St Mungos. He tried an *Episkey* and almost fainted with the pain. When the pain let up he found himself hugging the tree, but still standing on one leg.

He stood up further and found he could move a bit easier. He started looking farther afield to see where he was. He was near the top of a gentle hill. Surrounded by more gently rolling hills, green fields, stone fences, occasional trees, and a small village hidden in the trees at the bottom of

the valley. The tops of roofs and the granite church tower poking up above the trees.

Harry was still puffing a bit from his exertion. Given that he had not been through any apparition training, and he'd only heard the training described, he didn't feel confident in trying it again. He was just very glad, and very lucky, that it worked when he really needed it to. He sighed at the long walk ahead of him, down toward the village. Until he heard a car, with only its roof barely visible, driving along the other side of a stone fence. There must be a road. And where there is a road, there can be a Knight Bus. He smiled. This road was only about 30 metres away. He slowly, unsteadily hobbled his way down the slope to the nearest part of the road.

Climbing over the stone fence was not easy with his injury. It took him a few minutes of puffing and panting, sitting on the stone fence. During that time he waited for a few cars to pass so summoning the Knight Bus didn't block traffic on the very narrow road. He stuck out his wand and almost instantly a bang ruffled his hair.

The door opened, "Harry Potter! Blymie! It's Harry Potter. Where do you need to go today, sir?"

Harry struggled to stand up and get up the first step, "St Mungos, please." He was grimacing and breathing hard.

"Whoa, what happened to you?" The conductor helped him up each step.

Harry winced as he sat down in the first chair and puffed to catch his breath, "Death Eaters."

The conductor stepped back in shock, "What? -" He turned and yelled at the driver, "St Mungos now!" The bus let out a bang and started blasting through reality until it landed in front of St Mungos. The conductor helped Harry get up, "No charge for medical calls, Mr Potter." He helped Harry step down from the bus and to the door of St Mungos.

Harry made it ten steps – hops – into the lobby before a Healer came up to him.

"You're the one who triggered the medical alert ward on the front doors?"

He nodded, puffing and sweating with the effort of hobbling along.

She shoved him over backwards.

Harry squawked as he fell onto a levitation charm.

She grabbed the foot of his good leg and pulled him down the hall, into a room, pushed him over a bed, and gently lowered him onto the bed.

He gasped at a few intense pains as he settled into the bed. He was breathing too hard to put together a complaint.

She ran diagnostics on him for a moment, then pointed a finger in his face, "You stay put! I'll get some help." She left the room.

Harry breathed deeply and slowly to calm down – and then tried not to fall asleep. He was exhausted. It was so quiet. And warm. He was fading and not being very successful at staying awake.

The door banged open and two women Healers came in, the first one and a new one. The new one started running diagnostics and making disapproving noises, then spoke accusingly, "What happened to you, Mr Potter?"

Harry looked and sounded frustrated, "Got hit by some Death Eaters."

Both the Healers stiffened and went still.

Harry grew frustrated, "Look, I need you to patch me up so I can go back and take care of my – friend and her parents. They are in danger because the Death Eaters know where she is – and where I was!"

The new Healer's expression came back into focus, "I'm afraid you're not going anywhere tonight."

Harry started to get up, "But -"

He was hit by an immobilisation spell. Anger dripped from the Healer's voice, "You almost damaged your leg beyond repair with your running around and that stupid Episkey. That spell should never have been taught to the Aurors." She looked at him and calmed down a bit, "We can 'patch you up' without any permanent damage, but it will not be before tomorrow morning that you can leave."

"Look, there were six Death Eaters. I think I injured all of them but I got hit and one tried to apparate me away before they were all down. My friend and her parents were not able to defend themselves! I have to go back and help them!"

She glared in his eyes, "Do you *like* being able to run? Jump? Walk *straight*? Then lay still. You're lot leaving." She blew out a breath, "You'll have to leave it up to the Aurors to save your friend. Besides, it's already been at least three or four hours since this was broken."

Harry sighed and collapsed back on the bed. He nodded in defeat, "Fine. I'll send some Patronus messages to find out what's happening."

Both Healer's eyebrows rose. The new one nodded, "That will be fine. Let's fix this leg. A cracked femur is a very serious thing, Mr Potter." They started in on their spell-work and potions. After about 20 minutes they were done and Harry was grimacing from the strain of the healing. The Healers were cleaning up their potions vials.

Harry cast a message Patronus to Hermione. Prongs jumped out of his wand and landed with clattering hooves on the floor. Prongs turned around and came back to the bed, sticking his head and antlers over the shoulder of the Healer, bumping her out of the way. "Hermione, what's happening? How are you? How are your parents? I'm stuck in St Mungos for the night."



He sent it off and Prongs hooves clattered around the room before flying through the wall and disappearing.

The Healers stood still and stared at Harry with barely concealed amazement.

Unfortunately, Harry was getting very tired and could not keep his eyes open, "Did you put something – in my ..." He was out.

### **Hermione Granger, 16:00**

Hermione was trying to rest, but of course it wasn't going well. She had seen that Death Eater apparate away with Harry. It was killing her to sit here in this stupid cell when Harry was – somewhere else. The silencing spell kept her and everything completely quiet. She was starting to go mad. Not to mention exceedingly tired.

She was startled by a clattering and she opened her eyes to see – Prongs! Prongs was inside the silencing charm, "Hermione, what's happening? How are you? How are your parents? I'm stuck in St Mungos for the night." Harry's voice coming from Prongs was the best thing she had heard in years. It meant that he had gotten away from the Death Eater. She let out a huge breath as Prongs faded away.

She started thinking of a message to send back – but she had no wand. No way to send one back.

The door burst open and an Auror came in looking around. He ran some spells. She thought, with a smirk, that Prongs had probably set off a number of alarms in the cell block. She tried to talk to him. He glared at her, then left and closed the door.

At least she could relax about Harry. But not her Mum and Dad, yet. She hoped they had taken her rather pointed suggestion to start their vacation tonight.

### **Harry Potter, 23:30**

Harry woke up. It was dark, it was quiet. He looked around and found his wand. He ran a time spell: 23:36. He sighed. Not even midnight, yet. Still quite a few hours before he could leave. Then he got an idea.

"Dobby!"

A pop, and Dobby stood next to the bed with a big smile, "Yes, Master Harry?"

Harry sighed, "Dobby, it's so good to see you. Can you tell me where Hermione is?"

Dobby's face darkened, "She is arrested by the Auror-ors. She is in the cells."

Harry sat dumbly, "She what?"

Dobby just looked sadly concerned.

Harry's brain finally overcame the mental obstacle, "Do you know where Hermione's parents are?"

Dobby shook his head, "They are not at Miss Hermione's home."

Harry's stomach dropped, "They weren't taken by the Death Eaters, were they?"

Dobby looked angry and shook his head.

Harry sighed, "I'll have to go see the Auror department when they let me out of here." He got lost thinking for a moment, then looked up, "Thank you Dobby."

Dobby bowed and popped out.

Harry now had a new topic to worry over. Even after he fell asleep again.

**Thursday, 18 July, 1996, 08:00**

Harry heard the door open and he panicked! He sat up instantly, his eyes wide and his wand pointed at the healer standing at the end of his bed.

She looked to be desperately holding her breath, "Mr Potter, no need to be excited."

He let out his breath and collapsed back onto the bed, "Sorry – occupational hazard."

She huffed in frustration, "And what occupation would that be?"

He shook his head darkly and looked away, "The Boy-Who-Almost-Didn't-Live."

She looked at him sadly for a moment, "Let's check that healing." She ran her diagnostics, "Looks good. Do not strain that or you will be back here for a much longer stay. You may go."

Harry let out his breath and started to move, "Thank you." He stood up gingerly and tested his leg. It seemed fine so he started down the hall toward the front door. He thought he should go check on Hermione's parents. He knew where Hermione was, but not her parents. And she would be upset if he came to see her and didn't have an answer about her parents. When he got to the curb beyond the front door, he stuck out his wand and waited for the bang. Two breaths – three – bang!

The door opened, "Mr Potter! Feeling better, I take it?"

Harry smiled up at the conductor, "Yes, much better." He tried not to hop up the steps to prove it – and probably break his leg again in the process. He gave Hermione's address and they were off with a bang. The world flashed by like a high-speed video. Until the next bang, when Harry got up and started for the door. Then he realised his mistake – he shouldn't have had the Knight Bus drop him off in front of the house, what if it was being watched? He kicked himself for not thinking ahead. He looked out the window of the bus. The house looked quiet, with no one around. He thought he might as well go in, it's not like no one noticed the bus showing

up. He paid, thanked the conductor and stepped out, looking around slowly.

Bang! The bus moved off unobtrusively, like any normal elephant.

Harry shook his head muttering about wizards and their intelligence and started toward the house. It looked undamaged. He stopped in front of the depression in the grass where the first Death Eater he attacked had lain. He could see a depression, but no blood. He continued toward the house. The front door was locked, the drapes were drawn. He started around the house to the back. He paused at the places where the other Death Eaters fell. No blood. Until he got to the place where the Death Eater behind the house had been standing. He noticed in the wet grass was a bit of wood that looked out of place; looking closer he found it was Hermione's wand hidden in the grass. He picked it up and hugged it.

When he couldn't find anything else amiss, he moved to the back door and found it unlocked. They must have left in a big hurry. He moved inside. It looked just as he remembered it. Dishes not quite done, scones on the table. He picked up a scone and moved upstairs to find his trunk in his room, Hermione's trunk in her room, along with her bottomless bag. He picked that up immediately. Dan and Emma's bedroom looked like it had suffered a quick packing job; drawers half open, the closet open, some clothes still on the bed.

He went back to his room and packed up all his things and stuffed them into Hermione's bag. He was about to leave – but just had a bad feeling – they may need to run from Death Eaters so he decided to pack up Hermione's things too. Her books, her trunk, her clothes all shrunken in her bag. He couldn't think of anything else and left, locking the back door on his way out. And another scone or two.

Now it was off to see Hermione. Maybe she knew how to contact her parents. When the Knight Bus made it's loud noise, he asked the conductor why it made such a loud noise. Harry just shook his head as the conductor told him that the bus didn't always have a bang. That the bang was not

necessary but it was useful in that it tended to wake up the drunks who were waiting for the bus. The conductor didn't have to go looking for his customers. The conductor nodded as Harry said he wanted to go to the Ministry, and they were off with yet another bang.

As Harry got off the bus in front of the red Phone Box that was the Ministry of Magic's public street entrance, he took a deep breath. He was afraid of what this could be. It didn't make sense, for one thing. Why would Hermione be arrested? She hadn't participated in the fight and it was self-defence anyway. He went through the motions of the phone box and through the Atrium still in deep thought, trying to imagine all the ways things could have gone wrong. He got to the lifts and asked for the DMLE offices. The lift was packed but he barely noticed. When the lift came to his floor everyone moved aside and made a large path for him to leave the lift. He barely noticed.

The receptionist gave him a double-take, "May I help you?"

By this time Harry's impatience was starting to rise, "I understand a friend of mine was arrested yesterday. I need to talk to her."

The receptionist picked up some papers, "Who was this?"

"Hermione Granger."

She nodded and pointed at the list, "Yes ... You'll need to talk to the arresting Auror."

Harry blinked a few times, "Can't I talk to her?"

She shook her head, "You are still underage. You need a guardian present."

Harry was confused, and starting to stress, "Why? She shouldn't even have been arrested. Why can't I talk to her?"

She set down the paper, "She has been listed as a dangerous prisoner. You'll need to talk to the arresting Auror."

Harry was now glaring, "Who is the arresting Auror?"

"Auror Dawlish."

Harry stood and thought, then asked, "What is the charge?"

"Murder."

"WHAT!?" Harry's face ran through a string of emotions until, "Then let me talk to Auror Dawlish."

"He's not available."

"Ok, Scrimgeour."

The receptionists eyebrows rose, "He's in a meetings all day and can't be disturbed."

Harry was starting to boil, "Auror Shackelbolt."

"He's out of the office."

"Auror Tonks!"

"She's out of the office."

"How about Mad-Eye Moody?"

Her eyebrows rose again after Harry had just listed a big section of the department, "He's a reserve Auror. And not in today."

Now Harry was starting to turn red, "Who *can* I talk to?"

"Auror Dawlish. When he comes back."

Harry stood thinking about who he should try to talk to. Straight to Dumbledore? He didn't know any barristers. As he was thinking he noticed a paper on the receptionists desk. It listed the upcoming trials and their

scheduled locations and presiding judges. He was not really paying attention to the list until Hermione's name stood out on the paper. "Trial Before the Wizengamot: The Ministry v.s. Hermione Jane Granger: Murder. 10:00 Friday, 19 July, 1996. Wizengamot Chambers." He pointed at the paper, "That's tomorrow!"

She look down at the paper, "Yes."

He almost yelled, "Where the bloody hell is Dawlish!"

She shrugged and looked helpless, "Out of the office."

Harry fumed, "Where is Dumbledore's office?"

Her eyebrows rose again, "Next level down."

Harry turned and moved to the lifts. It took a few moments before one arrived. Harry was grinding his teeth. When the lift doors opened it was crowded but a space was made for him. He stood in the lift grinding his teeth audibly, tensely, with a scowl. Harry's magic pressed on everyone in the lift like the heat of a warm stove. Everyone gave him space. Then, by the time the lift doors opened on the next level he was angry. A sign pointed left. He almost stomped down the hall to a receptionists desk.

"I need to see Professor Dumbledore."

The receptionist looked up and blinked several times, "Mr Potter, Chief Warlock Dumbledore will not be in the office today. He will be in tomorrow."

Harry growled and took a long slow breath. "- Is there an owl? How do I send an owl message from here?"

Her eyes passed over his clothes as he stood in front of her desk.

Harry's face reddened as he became conscious of his muggle clothes – his grass-stained, muddy muggle T-shirt and jeans – slightly ripped.

She pulled out some parchment and pointed at one of the chairs in the waiting area that had a small table next to it, "You may use that table and I will send them for you."

He started to turn away, then thought, "These need to go out immediately, not tomorrow."

She nodded, "Yes, I can send them."

He moved to sit at the table and started writing. He wrote a message to Dumbledore explaining the situation and that Hermione was scheduled for trial tomorrow morning. He wrote a message to Professor McGonagall. He wrote to Remus. He was sitting trying to think who else he could write to that might help. He decided to write a formal letter to Minister Fudge. He even offered to support his government if he would help in this case. He gave the letters to the receptionist.

"I will have these sent momentarily."

Harry took a big breath as he stood thinking. This whole thing was not looking normal. Well - the Ministry was looking all-screwed-up normal but he was beginning to think that this could be a real problem. It was all happening too fast and he was unable to talk to anyone. He was getting a slowly growing feeling like a stone growing in his stomach.

"They have been sent." The receptionist said. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Harry snorted derisively with an angry scowl, "Can you fix the Ministry?"

She blinked, in shock, "Mr Potter, my sending those letters for you was not helpful?"

He leaned on the the desk, "My best friend was arrested for murder yesterday. Her trial is scheduled before the Wizengamot tomorrow morning. I can't get in contact with the Auror in charge, Scrimgeour, Dumbledore, -"



She looked affronted, "Mr Potter, justice will prevail."

He leaned closer, "I'm afraid that it won't! Six Death Eaters attacked her house yesterday. I probably killed half of them and injured all the rest of them."

She started to get wide-eyed and slowly backed away from him.

"It was self-defence! She was not involved! Why is she under arrest and not me? Why was I not even questioned? I spent the night in St Mungos so I wasn't hard to find. Why can't I talk to anyone? This whole thing is starting to smell really bad!"

She stammered, "I - don't know what to say."

Harry looked restrained and pained, "When will Dumbledore be here tomorrow?"

"On scheduled Wizengamot sessions he is usually here about fifteen minutes ahead of the session."

"When does the session start tomorrow?"

"Ten."

Harry straightened up, wiped his face with his hand and tried to control his temper. "Thank you." He turned and slowly walked down the hall toward the lifts, trying to think what else he could do or who he could talk to. He wasn't sure if he should wait for a reply to the owls he sent or if he should try more? He didn't want to offend or alienate anyone - but ...

Dumbledore should be able to straighten this mess out. He just needed to trust that this was a big misunderstanding that would get sorted easily.

After trying a few more times to talk to anyone he knew in the Auror department with no success he finally gave up and went to Grimmauld Place for the night. He would wait there for any replies to his owls. If

nothing else, he would get up early and be waiting at Dumbledore's office in the morning.

**Friday, 19 July, 1996, 09:00**

Harry was sitting in Dumbledore's Ministry office waiting area before his receptionist had arrived. He was trying to remain calm, but waiting was never his forte. His brain kept wandering off into dire imaginings of Hermione being cast into Azkaban - or worse. But those thoughts were not helping his - anything, so he would forcibly wrench them back into thinking about next year at Hogwarts. At least today he had wizard robes on and looked a bit more presentable for being in the Ministry building. He hadn't noticed the rips in his jeans from the attack yesterday. Was it only yesterday? He thought back to count the days, and yes it was only yesterday.

Dumbledore's receptionist came into the waiting area and stopped at the sight of Harry, looking at him with surprise, "Mr Potter, did you not get a reply from your owl messages?"

Harry shook his head and his anger flared. He crushed it, knowing that Dumbledore was going to help with this problem.

She moved to her desk, put her things away, and looked at the clock. It was 09:34, "He will likely be here in the next few minutes." She sat down and started working.

Harry took a deep breath and gritted his teeth. He could hardly wait to get this stupid mess cleared up and get back to his much-better-than-normal summer. He thought about how they were going to get back to some semblance of 'normal' after a mess like this. Hermione's house has no wards and the Death Eaters know where it is now. And that Harry might be found there. His stomach sunk. She and her parents could not go back to their home. Only to pack up their things and move somewhere else. Talk about throwing a spanner in their life. They went from quiet anonymity to front-page danger overnight, all because of him. Guilt came raging back.

"Mr Potter."

Harry looked up, "Yes?"

She glanced at the clock, "It's 9:49. He may not come here first. If you want to be sure to catch the Chief Warlock, you might want to go to the doors of the Wizengamot chambers."

Harry jumped up and his fear with it. He ran down the quiet, dignified halls of the Ministry of Magic to the lifts. Waiting, fuming, in front of the lift doors. He got to the Wizengamot chamber doors in record time and watched everyone flowing in.

He saw Scrimgeour coming toward the doors and moved to intercept, "Director Scrimgeour, I need to talk to you -"

Scrimgeour slowed slightly, "Mr Potter, I'm afraid I'm late -"

"But I need to talk to you about - Miss Granger's trial - it's not right!"

"Mr Potter I have much bigger fish to fry than one case, I have a war to prosecute."

"But she was not involved! -"

Scrimgeour was gone through the doors. He was about to chase after him when he saw Dumbledore coming and moved to catch him, "Professor Dumbledore -"

Dumbledore did not look happy, in fact he looked grim, "Harry, my boy."

"Professor, Hermione had nothing to do with what happened the day before, at her house. I did that, not her."

"Harry -"

"Professor, you have to stop this! We were attacked by six Death Eaters. I injured all of them, or worse. But no one asked me any questions. This is

wrong!"

Dumbledore looked pained, "Harry, I will do what I can. The best thing you can do is go back to your relatives." Dumbledore moved through the doors quickly.

Harry's stomach sunk. He stared at the doors until realisation hit him hard. Words abandoned him as his brain started to panic, "This can't happen. I can't lose her. What will I do? I need her!" That was when he finally realised the difference between his two best friends; he likes Ron - but he *needs* Hermione!

### **3. A Trial To The Accused**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 12513**

#### **Chapter 3**

#### **A Trial To The Accused**

#### **Harry Potter**

**Friday, 19 July, 1996, 10:00**

The Aurors started to close the doors to the Wizengamot chamber. Harry ran to get inside – just in time. He was at the top row looking down into the bowl of the Wizengamot 'arena' where contests of will, politics, and blood were played out. He looked for a seat in the public gallery and found one as close as he could get. All seats reserved for Wizengamot Members were arranged in importance measured by their distance from the Chief Warlock's and the Minister's seats. The public galleries wrapped around those seats and came down to the edges of the central floor. Harry's seat was farthest away from Dumbledore's seat but it was the closest to the central floor of the chambers. The noise of conversation was loud and echoing in the stone chamber as everyone milled about, talking.

Professor Dumbledore wrapped his gavel several times, his amplified voice filling the chamber, "Order! Order!" The noise level started to subside as everyone moved toward their seat. "Members of the Wizengamot, Department Heads of the Ministry, members of the public, are we prepared to do the will of the people?"

A wave of mumbles that sounded like "Aye" bounced across the chamber.

Dumbledore's voice again rang out, "Sargent at Arms, prepare the chamber."

Aurors closed and locked the doors and stood guard in front of them.

Dumbledore raised his gavel, "Let us take up the People's business!" That gavel rang out again. "Let the Clerk read the first order of business."

Percy Weasley stood up and read from a parchment, "First order of business, we are Sitting In Judgement on the trial of Hermione Jane Granger, accused of the murder of Aldwin Geldorf Ransom." An angry surge of sound rose from the members and washed around the room.

Dumbledore turned to Scrimgeour, "Director Scrimgeour, as Head of DMLE and Chief Prosecutor, you have the floor."

Scrimgeour stood up ponderously, pompously, menacingly, "I have been involved in critical plans so I delegate this trial to Senior Auror Dawlish as the responding Auror on this case." His empty dodging of his responsibility was indicated by his motioning toward the floor to Auror Dawlish.

Dawlish came forward to the centre of the floor, "Members of the Wizengamot, I was dispatched on a report of extreme, violent, and dangerous magic Saturday morning, to the muggle residence of the suspect, one Hermione Jane Granger, age 16, sixth year Hogwarts student." He turned to the doors at the back of the central floor and motioned with his hand. The doors opened and Hermione was pulled through the doors by two Aurors, still dressed in her night clothes and disheveled hair, with shackles and chains on her wrists, waist, and ankles. The crowd gasped and mumbled as she was brought to the Chair of the Accused, which appeared in the centre of the floor. As she was pushed into the chair chains snaked out and wrapped around her.

Harry's heart jumped to see her treated as some kind of dangerous animal or monster. He both burned with anger and chilled with fear at the possibilities for her.

Professor Dumbledore's voice interrupted the mumbles, "Auror Dawlish, are the shackles necessary?"

Dawlish spoke menacingly, "Given the violence of the attack, and the suspect's resisting arrest, yes they are. She is held as a Class One

Dangerous Prisoner."

Mumbles rose into growls as the wave of noise crested.

Hermione never reacted to any of the noise, not even looking around the chamber. Harry wondered if she was silenced. And maybe her vision was restricted as well.

Harry choked up seeing her so downtrodden.

Dumbledore broke into the noise, "Auror Dawlish, your case?"

"Upon arriving at this muggle-born student's residence I found the son of one of our Wizengamot Members, one Aldwin Geldorf Ransom, dead on the front lawn from a powerful cutting curse. I ran spells searching for any other victims in the area and found the suspect, Miss Granger in the back garden preparing to apparate away. Upon rounding the side of the house I was attacked by the suspect with a cutting curse. After a number of exchanges I subdued the suspect. Her wand showed evidence of cutting curses."

Harry jumped up and yelled, "I did that! She was -" Harry was hit by a silencing charm from Dawlish. Harry kept trying to indicate his argument to no avail.

Dawlish pointed at Harry and spoke over the mumbles brought on by the interruption, "Mr Potter was not there. He has no input on this case. And he is under-age and can not be considered reliable."

Harry only gesticulated more, jumping up and down in protest, trying to indicate his disagreement. The noise level rose at his display but brought no change in the proceedings.

Arthur Weasley stood from his chair to be recognised.

"The Chief Warlock recognises Arthur Weasley."

Arthur spoke calmly, "I know this young woman and I know she would not attack anyone outside of self defence. She -"

Dawlish yelled over Arthur and pointed at him, "I am a Senior Auror with over twenty years of experience! You would question me?"

The noise of growls from the crowd responded to the ferocity of Dawlish's anger, jumped up, and subsided slowly.

Dumbledore cracked his gavel until the noise abated, "Auror Dawlish, evidence is required, regardless of experience."

Dawlish pointed at Hermione and almost yelled, "She has a history of violence toward pureblood's and antipathy toward traditional magical culture as evidenced by complaints from students at Hogwarts."

Professor Dumbledore leaned forward in his chair, "I am not aware of any of this history you speak of."

Harry was jumping up and down in a silent rage, waving his arms and indicating his displeasure at these blatant lies, and at Auror Dawlish. His hand signals brought a few chuckles from the crowd. Particularly Harry's jabbing his middle finger repeatedly into his ear while pointing at Dawlish.

"I investigated and found a number of students who gave evidence to this behaviour."

Professor Dumbledore asked resignedly, "And who are these students?"

Dawlish stood up taller, "The Scion of the House of Malfoy and his betrothed, Miss Parkinson. The heirs to the Houses of Crabbe and Goyle."

Arthur, who was still standing spoke up, "I insist that Miss Granger be allowed to speak in her own defence."

Dawlish again almost yelled, "She is a Class One Dangerous Prisoner and speaking is not recommended. And she is under age and has no guardian



present."

Dumbledore stood up, "I am her magical guardian."

Dawlish pointed at Dumbledore, "Then you are not impartial and must step back from these proceedings as Chief Warlock!"

The level of shock in the attendees was overwhelming with a noise level to match.

Dumbledore looked caught out, "This is highly irregular."

Fudge stood up with a bare smirk, "A consequence of too many titles. Director Scrimgeour will attend for the duration."

Dumbledore stood tensely for a moment, then subsided, and moved out of his chair, "Then I, as her magical guardian, demand that Miss Granger be allowed to speak in her own defence."

Scrimgeour moved into Dumbledore's desk. He spent a few moments surveying the members, posturing, establishing his intimidation and position before speaking, "Auror Dawlish, it is standard procedure to allow the accused to defend themselves."

Dawlish took a moment to let the tension build, "As I said, she is a Class One dangerous prisoner who managed to still have communications with outside forces while held in the Auror Isolation Cells. This should not be possible. To let her speak in the very heart of the Wizarding world, with all of our leadership present, would be foolhardy. Particularly since there was significant evidence of wandless magic at the scene of the crime. She is widely known as the most advanced, the most dangerous, student at Hogwarts. Brewing Polyjuice as a second year, enchanting objects to beyond NEWT level as a fourth year. Involved with helping Sirius Black escape in her third year. She was one of the key participants of the break-in at the Department of Mysteries two months ago. The sophistication of her magical abilities is a clear danger to all good wizards in Britain."

Arthur broke in, "Why is being an excellent student now a crime?"

Dawlish spoke dangerously, "It is suspicious! It is dangerous! Particularly in someone of her - non-magical background." He looked at Hermione pointedly. Dark mumbles wandered about the Wizengamot.

Harry was hopping up and down, now pointing at Dumbledore. Motioning between himself and Dumbledore.

Professor Dumbledore and Mr Weasley stood blankly, angrily, with seemingly no arguments that would work against blatant bigotry and fear.

Scrimgeour paused a moment, then asked, "Auror Dawlish do you have more evidence?"

Dawlish spoke like a fervent righteous preacher, "The prisoner is dangerous, highly skilled, shows evidence of motivation, opportunity, and action in the brutal murder of Aldwin Geldorf Ransom." He started walking around the floor making eye contact with everyone, "There is no other indicated choice but guilty!" He pointed at Hermione, who still had not responded to any noises in her environment.

Harry was jumping up and down shaking his head and pointing at Dawlish, silently.

Scrimgeour stood officiously, "We vote! The clerk will call the roll."

Harry stood glaring at everyone that voted guilty, almost in a panic as the end drew near.

The count was just over the line.

Scrimgeour spoke out in fervour, "The suspect is found guilty!"

Half the crowd went wild with what sounded like blood-lust. The other half looked shocked and bewildered.

Fudge stood at the Minister's podium as the noise subsided, "Members of the Wizengamot, let the record show that we can rise above the banal and violent criminals and have restraint and mercy. I recommend banishment from the magical world!"

The bloodthirsty crowd jumped at the prospect of ripping away a muggle-born's magic, snapping their wand, and ejecting them from the magical world. Leaving another muggle free to be abused.

Harry stood with no breath, no expression, no thought, no heartbeat.

Fudge raised his wand, "Members, a show of wands?"

An obvious majority of wands were lit.

Scrimgeour cracked the gavel self-righteously, "So be it! Banished!" He pointed the gavel at Hermione.

Dawlish waved his wand at Hermione and the chains receded.

The obscuring spells evidently ended as Hermione looked around like she just woke up.

Aurors lifted her to standing and started dragging her toward the doors at the back.

Harry could not let this stand! This was the ultimate in injustice! He jumped over the railing and down to the floor of the chamber and he started moving toward Hermione. He yelled to her in his pain, "Hermione!".

Hermione looked up and saw him, "Harry!" She broke away from the Aurors while their attention was drawn to Harry. She ran toward him with short fast steps limited by the chains. She grabbed his shirt and pulled him into the best hug she could and leaned in to whisper in his ear, "Come find me."

Harry's arms encircled her, she leaned back and kissed him passionately holding his face with her hands, the chains from her wrists clinking between them.

Harry was shocked – and responded desperately in kind.

Their magic responded and flowed about them desperately.

Harry saw over her shoulder the Aurors aiming their wands and spells leaping out. He picked Hermione up and tried to spin her around so he could put up a shield ...

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Harry woke up laying on the floor and Dumbledore waving his wand at him, enervating him. He jumped up looking around, "Where is Hermione!?"

Dumbledore shook his head slightly.

Harry looked at him in abject shock, "She's gone?"

Dumbledore nodded slightly, grimly.

Harry turned to the chamber, which stared at him silently, holding their breath.

Harry was crushed. Tears started down his face, he roared an inarticulate scream at the injustice of it all, he pointed at Dumbledore and screamed, "You bastard! You didn't lift a finger to help her! You're my magical guardian, you could have let me speak and I could prove she didn't do it!" After Harry's explosion in Dumbledore's office at the end of fifth year, he was still in a very bad place toward Dumbledore. Harry turned and pointed at Scrimgeour, "And you! You talk about justice? You refused to hear anything about justice! I killed that Death Eater, not Hermione! But you wouldn't let me speak!" Harry turned to Fudge, "And YOU! The worst! The COWARD! The bought and paid for MINISTER!"

Fudge reacted before anyone else, "Mr Potter!"

Harry swept his hand over the entire chamber, "AND ALL OF YOU! BIGOTED COWARDS! I killed that Death Eater in self defence! But you refused to let me speak! Hermione was innocent but you would not let her speak! She's too injured to do anything Dawlish accused her of. You destroyed the best student in Hogwarts out of bigotry! She was *innocent!* I'm done with the wizarding world! You can all burn in *Hell!*"

The entire chamber gasped.

Harry pointed toward an evilly smirking Malfoy and spoke to the Wizengamot. "I will not defend you against Death Eaters or Voldemort!"

Dumbledore panicked, "Harry, you can't!"

Harry yelled at him, "No! You let this happen! YOU HAVE BETRAYED ME!"

"Harry, listen to reason!"

"NO! I will have nothing to do with you!" He turned to the chamber, "ANY OF YOU!" He swung his arm over the crowd.

Dumbledore tried to use magic on Harry but Harry fended it off with an expanding accidental wandless shield that hit everyone nearby and knocked them back, including Dumbledore. Harry ran out of the chamber before anyone could react. He put on his cloak and ran the rest of the way out of the Ministry, through the floo to Grimmauld Place. He kept going until he was in his room, his face in his pillow, sobbing.

His world was destroyed. There was no recovery from this. His best friend had been effectively murdered. Destroyed. He just cried.

Exhaustion eventually caught up to him and pushed him into sleep.

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When Harry finally woke up late that afternoon, he still couldn't decide whether he should rage and go ballistic on the wizarding world, or just crawl in a hole and cry forever. To lose his best friend in such an unjust way was just – unfathomable. Harry knew he could not let this stand. He had to do something. Hermione would be obliviated and would not remember the wizarding world, or Death Eaters. They would come for her and she wouldn't even know what they were. It was unconscionable for him to abandon her. He had to help her. To protect her.

His mind started whirring with the thoughts of what he needed to do. The wizarding world had betrayed them, therefore they meant nothing to him. He would abandon them to their fate. But first, he would need some help. He sent Remus a Patronus message pleading, demanding, he come and help him, "Remus, I need your help. If my parents meant anything to you, I need you to help me. I have decided to abandon the wizarding world. I'm at Sirius' house. Please come as soon as you can." He would need Remus' help planning how to help Hermione.

Then his stomach dropped; Hermione would not remember him either. His brain blocked completely. How would he be able to help her if she didn't remember him at all? But – how did they obliviate her and her parents? They would need to replace all those memories with something. Maybe he could go talk to a Mind Healer at St Mungos and ask, theoretically, what they did and how it worked. But – how could he help her? Particularly since he was under-age.

A Patronus flew into Harry's room and Remus' voice came out, "Harry! I'll be there in an hour. Don't do anything foolish. Let's talk about this. Stay there!"

Harry took a long deep breath. Help was coming. But he had so much he needed to do, to figure out. But – he only had to wait an hour. He needed to calm down. An hour wouldn't be that long. His body paced the room, his mind paced the room, he went round and round, endlessly.

A knock on his door. Harry opened it. "Remus!" He hugged Remus barely keeping the sobs out of his voice.

"Harry. What happened?"

Harry launched into the tale of going to Hermione's house, of helping her recover, of her parents, of the – overwhelming peace he felt with them ... And the attack ... And her kangaroo trial and banishment. He was sobbing by the end. "Remus, I am going to abandon the wizarding world and help Hermione. But I will need your help to do that. I don't know enough about – a lot of things."

"But, Harry, how can you abandon the wizarding world?"

Harry stood up and growled, "Those bastards abandoned me! They set up Hermione and denied her any form of justice! They've made their choice and I'm done with them!" He started poking Remus' chest with his finger with each syllable, "They can burn in Hell!"

Remus held up his hands in surrender, "Ok, Ok. Hold on. I understand you're upset. But what can you do to help Hermione? She is cast out. She won't remember you – or anything. And she will be a muggle so the Statute of Secrecy applies to her. You can't tell her anything!"

"I don't care. I need to be there for her. I need to be part of her life in order to protect her. The Death Eaters know where she lives, they are going to be out for her blood and I have to protect her. She has saved my life many times. I must do this!"

Remus deflated and slowly nodded, "Ok. First off you need to become just a muggle to her. Any violation of the Statute is a treasonable offence. It will allow the Death Eaters to arrest you, throw you in Azkaban, and then they will be able to do anything to her too."

Harry pleaded, "Yes, I understand. But, I need you to help me figure out how to get back into her life. Maybe I can go to St Mungos and ask a Mind

Healer how they obliviate someone. How do they replace all those years of memories with something else?"

Remus looked at his watch, "Ok. But it's a little late for that, today. But - there are probably a lot of other things we need to figure out, too." He paused looking at Harry, "Have you told Dumbledore any of this?"

Harry growled, "Oh, yes. I was in the Wizengamot chamber after they took Hermione away. I yelled at them all. Told them all to burn in Hell."

Remus groaned and covered his face, "I bet that went over well."

Harry sputtered, "Yes. Dumbledore tried to hit me with some magic. I deflected it and ran out. I don't care what he says. He betrayed me too. He didn't lift a finger to help Hermione."

"Maybe he couldn't?"

Harry spit out angrily, "Maybe he couldn't. Why not? He never explained it to me. Because of his ideology? Well, then to hell with his ideology! Hermione is more important to me than his ideology." Harry's eyes blazed at Remus. As he calmed down he became more determined, "Dumbledore has been avoiding me all last year. He won't train me, he won't answer my questions, he told all my friends to not send me any mail or reply to any mail from me all summer! Did you get my owl yesterday?"

Remus was looked rather shocked, "No, I didn't."

Harry looked even more grim, "So, he's got my mail blocked too? I sent owls to you, McGonagall, Dumbledore, even Fudge. No response from anyone. And now Hermione is banished." He looked lost.

Remus sighed heavily and wiped his face with his hands, "Ok, what else are you thinking?"

Harry started pacing again, "I'm done with my OWLs, I want out of Hogwarts. It means *nothing* to me any more." He turned to Remus, "Can I



be emancipated?"

Remus was trying to keep up with Harry's intellectual race, "Yes, I think so. Gringott's will know for sure."

Harry looked off into the distance, "I need to learn more about magic – and I need to learn the rest of everything about being a muggle again. So I guess I still need a NEWT or maybe a Mastery in DADA – or some equivalent. And I need a driver's licence, a muggle credit card – a passport, probably – what do you think?" Harry made a worried noise and looked down at his clothes, "I suppose I'll need a real muggle wardrobe, won't I?"

"Yes. Well – I think a lot depends on what we can find out from St Mungos and Gringott's tomorrow. But, as you said, you already have your OWLs so being done with Hogwarts is easy. We just need to see if you can be emancipated."

Harry looked into Remus' eyes with the most serious, desperate look, "Remus, I need you to train me, tutor me in magic. I will need to defend Hermione against a lot of Death Eaters. I would imagine that means even more than just a Mastery in DADA. I'll need healing, warding, detecting traps, – everything. Can I hire you as a tutor?"

Remus shook his head, "Harry –"

"No! I need you! I need more than just you on weekends! Hermione's parents will also need defending. – I need you to be part of this project. And I don't care what it costs!" Harry struggled to maintain his composure, "She means *everything* to me!"

Remus looked at Harry's desperate face, his burning eyes, and melted, "Yes. I can see that. I will help, with everything I have."

Harry resumed his tense pacing, "Wards on her house, on her parents practice, we need to make some protective jewellery for her, and them –"

"Harry, remember, no magic in muggle areas."

Harry scoffed, "To hell with that. Diagon Alley is in Muggle areas. So is St Mungos. As long as the Statute of Secrecy is maintained then the Ministry shouldn't have anything to say."

Remus raised an eyebrow, "You may have some convincing to do."

Harry growled, "It's what we need to do, so – we'll do what we need to do and argue with them when they notice." His pacing started looking more like stomping.

Remus pulled him back with a change of subject, "What do you think Hermione will be trying to do?"

"Well ... Imagine if she never heard about magic before. I imagine she would be headed for Uni somewhere."

Remus nodded slowly, "So that means you should be ready to do that too?"

Harry stopped and turned to Remus with some trepidation, "If I can. I'm not as smart as she is. I don't know if I can keep up with her."

Remus nodded, thinking.

Harry sat down heavily, "Should I be Harry Potter? Or should I change my name?"

Remus started to say something.

"I should stay Harry Potter. Why bother changing. No one in the muggle world knows me as famous."

"Harry, slow down."

Harry jumped up, "I can't! I need to fix this!"

Remus sighed, "Ok, let's break this up into several categories. Your life, her life, and her parents."

"I don't care about my life -"

"Yes! You need to! If you don't you won't be able to protect hers!"

Harry stopped and covered his face. He breathed slowly and deeply, with tension. "Ok."

"You remember the safety talk they give on airplanes?"

"I've never been on an airplane."

Remus sighed again, "Ok. On an airplane they explain the safety features of the airplane and one is if there is an explosive decompression - say a window breaks. Oxygen masks automatically drop down and you put them on. But suppose you have a small child and you selflessly try to put the child's mask on first - but the child is panicking, their ears are hurting, and they're fighting you. But flying at 12k metres - about 36 thousand feet - the air is so thin you have about 10 to 15 seconds of effective consciousness. If you waste that time fighting with the child you are both toast. You have to put *your* mask on first."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"You can't defend her if you're dead! You must be alive and healthy in order to defend her!"

Harry took another slow deep breath, "Ok. Ok." He sat down again. "I'm so panicked I can hardly see straight."

"Yes. All the more reason to develop a plan, so you don't have to think when things go bad, just execute the plan. You've thought about it all beforehand, while you're sane."

Harry held his head in his hands, elbows on his knees, "But I'm not sane."

"You will be. Let's go through this. We start with your life. You need training in magic of all sorts. Almost Auror training, DADA, healing, warding, magic

detecting, apparition license, and probably more."

"Hermione had this expanded bag that she kept all kinds of stuff in – in fact I have it – what did I do with it?" He sat up and looked around.

"Harry, the most important tool for you to have – more important than any other bit of gear – is your brain."

"But that bag had everything."

"The best gear in the world does you no good if you don't know how to use it, or if you don't even know you have it."

Harry flopped back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. His voice came out distorted from behind his hands, "Ok."

"Panic is your enemy, Harry. It robs you of your brain. That's why you make a plan while you are not panicked. Then, when the panic wants to land, you just execute the plan that you've already made. No time to think, no time to plan, no time to panic, just go with the plan."

Harry sighed again, "God, I'm going to be horrible at this."

"No, you're going to be good at this. You're working all this panic out of your system. You now just need to focus on planning and learning. As well as magic training you need muggle training. Driving, physical conditioning, credit cards, finances, the muggle personal security techniques and tactics, things like that. And we need to figure out what Hermione is doing, where she is going, and how you can get back into her life. You can let me worry about protecting her parents."

Harry's voice was still muffled behind his hands, "Ok."

"Look, Harry, you work on two lists, one of what you think you might need to know in magic and the other in what you might need to know in the muggle world. There is an Order of the Phoenix meeting here tonight after dinner. I'll go to that and see what they are thinking."

Harry sat up, "Don't mention that you've seen me."

"I'm sure Dumbledore knows you are here."

Harry turned his face away, "I don't want to talk to him."

Remus shrugged, "I don't think I can stop him from trying."

Harry dropped his head and shook it, "No, I imagine not. Don't worry about it." Harry looked at Remus, "We may need to move out of this place if Dumbledore can't control himself. Go get a flat somewhere."

Remus nodded slowly, "We can go to my cottage if it gets too difficult here. At least for now. Though, I suppose if Hermione goes to Uni somewhere we will need to move closer to her."

Harry nodded tiredly.

Remus looked at his watch, "Let's get some dinner before the meeting starts so you can hide during the meeting."

Harry stood up, "Yes, that's a good idea." They moved into the kitchen where Harry asked Kreator for some light dinner. Kreator mumbled and grumbled while he worked. It drew Harry's attention – and then his brain kicked in. Maybe Dobby can watch Hermione for a while. At least until Harry and Remus can get their act together enough to take over.

The food came and went but Harry's mind was still stuck on the idea, and if it could work.

Remus stood up, "Order members will start showing up any time now."

Harry jumped up, "I'll just make my exit to the library until the coast is clear." Harry walked out of the kitchen after dinner intent on his latest idea. He moved into the Library for some quiet.

**Remus Lupin, 19:00**

Remus moved into the main room for the meeting and found a seat. There weren't any Order member there yet. He sighed tiredly. He was still so confused about Harry's arguments. He had some good points. But – Dumbledore ... He hadn't noticed when Order members had started to fill in the seats around him. He shook his head to get it working and moved his seat over to make room for Severus to sit down next to him.

Severus looked meaningfully at Remus, "Potter seems to have really stirred the pot, this time."

Remus nodded, "Yes. Kicked everyone *right* where it hurts."

Severus glanced toward the front door as Dumbledore walked in, "A temper tantrum? Or more?"

Remus paused, "More. The two people that Harry cared about most in this world – are now casualties. I don't know if it will be possible to turn him around."

Severus looked to be about to say something when Dumbledore stopped in front of Remus.

Dumbledore was quiet, delicate, "Remus, have you talked to Harry?"

Remus nodded, "The last few hours."

When Remus did not look like he would continue Dumbledore asked, "Do you think he will be able to get over this?"

Remus considered slowly, "I don't think so." At Dumbledore's deflated expression he continued, "Look – I will not go against Harry, regardless of my opinion of his choices. I will continue to support him. He's all I have left."

Dumbledore breathed, "We'll talk again later." He moved to the front of the room. The room was quiet before he got there, all eyes riveted on him.

Dumbledore's voice was quiet, serious, "If you have seen the papers today, you have heard of my - failure to protect Miss Granger."

Silence was heavy on everyone.

"I am afraid that this was - one straw too many for Harry. He has - at least initially - rejected me - us."

Molly was lightly crying, "Miss Granger is - gone?"

Dumbledore nodded, "The sentence was carried out immediately."

Molly was dabbing her eyes with a cloth, "She was so nice, even if she didn't understand our ways. But - Harry must move on. It will not do for him to dwell on the past."

Remus frowned at Molly so quickly abandoning Hermione. "Molly, she is not dead."

"She might as well be. She is not longer part of our world. Harry can't talk to her any more."

Remus almost choked, "Why not?"

Molly looked confused, "She's a muggle now."

Remus was incredulous, "What, she has lost the power of speech?"

"Well - no, but she is -"

"Untouchable?" Remus was now obviously frowning.

Molly was now frowning at Remus, too.

Alastor growled quietly, "Potter has a duty. Every war has casualties. He needs to get back up again."

Remus almost smiled. That was quintessential Moody. But not likely to sway Harry.

Tonks asked the obvious, "What do we do without Harry?"

"We lose." Arthur, usually the optimist, spoke quietly.

Dumbledore tried to hold up the group, "We give him some time. And I will try to talk to him again."

Remus sighed heavily, "I think we are missing a central point. Miss Granger once said that Harry has a 'saving-people-thing' where he will save anyone from anything, even to his own detriment. And now, one of the most important people in the world to Harry is in danger. And we –" he waved his hand around the room, "– the wizarding world, not only failed to protect her, we *put* her there. I don't know if we can dissuade him from his quest."

Severus spoke quietly, "And what is this quest?"

"To continue to protect Miss Granger from Death Eaters. He is focussed solely on that."

Dumbledore looked ashen, his voice a hollow whisper, "I seem to have miscalculated."

Remus did not fully understand what he meant by that, but he said it like it was the height of understatement.

The group was quiet for a few moments, until Dumbledore gathered himself, "Remus, please stay involved with Harry."

Remus nodded silently.

Dumbledore turned to the group, "Thank you for your dedication. I will call again when I have something to report."

The group slowly started rustling to get up.



## Harry Potter, 19:10

Harry sat down in the library chair in front of the large desk. He could hear the Order members beginning to gather in the main room. "Dobby?"

Dobby popped in, "The Great Harry Potter calls Dobby? What can Dobby do?"

Harry looked seriously into Dobby's eyes, "Dobby, today the Wizengamot banished Hermione from the magical world."

Dobby gasped, "They banished her?"

Harry nodded, "They took away her magic and her memories of Hogwarts, of us, everything. It was completely unjust."

Dobby started shivering, "No ..."

Harry reached out and put his hand on Dobby's shoulder, "Dobby, I need to protect her. Death Eaters are going to be hunting her and I need to protect her. But it will take me a while before I'm able to do that. Can you watch over her until I'm ready?"

Dobby's face washed through a series of emotions, "Dobby can not protect her. Dobby can not act against wizards, or ..." He shivered.

"Dobby, no. I don't want you to protect her, I need you to watch over her and let me know if she is in danger. Come tell me and I will protect her."

Dobby started to calm down a bit, "Yes, Dobby can do that."

"Also - her parents will likely be in danger too. Can you watch over them too?"

Dobby looked unsure, "I can -" Then his face lit up, "Can I get Winky to help?"

Harry smiled, "Yes, if she will help."

Dobby popped away instantly.

Harry had only taken two breaths before Dobby popped back with Winky.

"Dobby brings Winky. Can The Great Harry Potter bond with Winky, too?"

Harry chuckled, "Winky, would you be willing to help guard Hermione and her parents with Dobby?"

Winky looked a bit confused, or maybe a bit too much butterbeer. She looked back and forth between Harry and Dobby. "Yes, but that's not very much to do."

Harry smiled, "I'm just getting started. I'm sure I can find things for you to do."

Winky smiled, grabbed Harry's hand and with both hands smashed it on top of her head and held it there. She started to mumble some strange phrases. A glow rose and fell from Winky. She let go of his hand with a huge smile and more present eyes, "Winky is now a Potter elf."

Dobby hugged her quickly.

Harry chuckled, "Ok. I need you two to watch over Hermione and her parents. If any bad wizards come near them, then come tell me or Remus so we can defend them. But, remember, Hermione and her parents have been banished and do not remember you or even that magic exists, so you can't let them see you. Alright?"

Dobby and Winky nodded.

Winky was hesitant, "What did they do?"

"Nothing! The Wizengamot was being evil. It was completely unjust. – And, maybe you can let me know occasionally, what they are doing? I will try to become part of her life again and it would help a lot."

They bowed and Dobby said, "We will watch." They popped away.

Harry sighed – but before he could finish the sigh Dobby was back.

"They are safe in their house eating dinner."

"Thank you –"

Dobby was gone again before Harry could finish.

Harry sat in the chair at the desk in the library, elbows on his knees, head in his hands. He was embarking on – an impossible journey. To hold off all the Death Eaters who may come calling, at any time they want, while keeping it all secret from Hermione sounds – just impossible. But he knew Hermione would not hesitate to do the same for him. So he must do that for her.

The door to the library opened slowly and Ron poked his head in, "Harry?"

"I'm here."

Ron came in slowly, trying to gauge Harry's mood. "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry stood up and all his urgency came back in a rush, "Ron, we need to help Hermione. We need to protect her. The Death Eaters know where she lives now. They will come after her." He started pacing.

Ron shrugged and spoke quietly, "There is nothing I or anyone can do; it's against the law."

Harry stopped and shook his head, "What? It is not against the law. As long as she is alive then there are a lot of things we can do."

"But she's a muggle who can't know about magic. There is nothing we can do."

"There is! A lot we can do. A lot we *need* to do." He started pacing again.

Ron shook his head in confusion. But on Harry's third pace Ron asked in frustration, "Look, Harry, does Hermione mean more to you than I do?"

Harry froze, his face paled, he turned and glared at Ron, eyes burning into his, for a long time.

Ron started to boil and sputter; the implication was obvious.

Harry baldly said, "If you have the disloyalty to ask me that question, then the answer is yes, she does now." Harry turned his back and walked out without looking back.

Ron just yelled at Harry's back, "Harry!"

Harry walked into the rest of the house, heading for the stairs to go to his room, and ran straight into the Order meeting breaking up. Silence dropped heavily as all eyes landed on Harry.

Harry decided to take a page from Malfoy, as his angry look deepened, and sarcasm dripped from his tone, "Have a good meeting?"

No one moved, so Harry started toward the stairs.

"Harry?" Dumbledore's voice was soft.

Harry stopped with one foot on the stairs. He turned and looked at everyone.

"Harry, we need you."

Harry growled, "So does Hermione."

Molly was showing herself to be amazingly insensitive, "You can't help her any more, she's -"

Harry blew up, "The hell I can't! What is it with you people? All those without magic are now invisible? They don't exist any more?" He started back toward the stairs, "Even 'The Light' is bigoted here."

Moody burst out, "You have a duty!"

Harry spun around, "A duty to whom? The Ministry? Where was the Ministry's duty toward justice? Where was the Ministry's duty toward a fair society? Besides, you are the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot." Harry pointed at Dumbledore, "Why is Voldemort *my* responsibility? Just because some prophecy from a fraud says so?" Everyone gasped. Harry's frustration boiled over again, "No!" He pointed at Dumbledore again, "You are in charge of the government, you and the government are responsible for it." Harry started to walk away.

Dumbledore broke in, "What about the Order?"

Harry turned again, "I *am* supporting the Order." At everyone's disbelief, he continued, "I'm not going to kick you out of *my* house." He waved his hand around the room, "Unless you try to interfere with my protecting Hermione."

Dumbledore tried again, "Harry, what if I took responsibility for Miss Granger's security? Will you come back to Hogwarts?"

Harry paused for a few moments, "No. That is not a workable solution."

"Why not?"

"Because I want to be involved in her life. And it would also require me to *trust* you. Too late for that. You had your chance. Several chances – Hermione *and* my parents! See how well all *that* turned out."

Dumbledore winced, "Harry, what about the wards protecting the Dursley's?"

Harry blew up, incredulous, "You're trying to get me to choose between Hermione and the Dursley's? Then they lose completely!"

"You would abandon them?"

"Yes! Hermione is *infinitely* more important to me than they are."

"But they are your family."

"No! They have *never* been my family because I was never part of *their* family! I'm just forced to live there sometimes. Well, now I don't need to any more."

"You will destroy the protections around them – and around you."

Harry glared like ice into Dumbledore, "The Dursley's have never protected me, cared about me, or given me anything but pain and bruises. Why should I do anything for them?" The temperature in the room dropped a few more degrees as Harry's voice got quieter, "By the way – where were you while I lived in the cupboard under the stairs at the Dursley's?"

A few soft gasps came from a few Order members.

Dumbledore looked shocked and confused, "Why would you place such importance on Miss Granger? Above the entire wizarding world in Britain?"

"Everyone has lines they won't cross. That line was mine. My *last* line. The only line that really meant anything to me – and you *missed it!* Did you notice it, at all, as you jumped right over that line? Did you care that it was someone's life? That it was also *my* life?" Harry shook his head, "Doesn't look like it. Well – that's why I don't care. Because Hermione was evidently the only one to care about *me!* So I guess I will be the only one to care about *her.*"

Dumbledore tried his last card, "Harry, the political situation is quite delicate. The Wizengamot could turn against you quite easily."

Harry barked a laugh, "Ha! They already did. But let me make it even clearer; do *you* really want to be my enemy, right up there with Voldemort?" He glared for a moment, then turned and ran up the stairs to his room and crashed on the bed. He was trying to breath and relax. His shuddering breath would not seem to slow down.

Harry heard a knock at his door. "Harry, it's Remus."

"Come in."

Remus came in, closed the door, and sat down in the chair at the desk, "Harry, I'm sorry."

Harry shook his head, "Remus, I'm so done with the wizarding world. I want out. Away from this garbage. I need to help Hermione and as my honorary uncle, as all that I have left of my family, I need you to help me protect Hermione."

Remus nodded, "Yes. I was rather aghast at the Order's casual dismissal of Hermione. I will fully support you in protecting her."

"I can't stay here with the Order breathing down my neck. I think we need to go to your cottage for now."

Remus nodded, "We can go to my cottage. Is tomorrow soon enough?"

Harry nodded, then smiled, "You know, Hermione supported me, helped me, kept me sane throughout all the messes I got myself into over the last few years. Dumbledore lied to me; about Sirius, about the prophesy, about my parents."

"Dumbledore was trying to protect you."

"I disagree. He was only trying to protect the secrets he was keeping from me and others. He didn't protect me from all the things the Dursley's did to me."

Remus looked concerned, "Harry, this seems so out of character for you. Why are you rejecting Dumbledore and the Order so strongly?"

Harry thought for a moment, "Like I said earlier, everyone has lines – lines that they don't cross. Well, Dumbledore just jumped across all mine. Particularly all the important ones. Hermione called it my saving-people-thing. You know, I've put up with a lot that he's done to me. I didn't really understand that it was him that did those things to me until recently." He

shrugged, "I've come to terms with that. But - now I understand what he's done to Hermione. And that, I can not countenance. He has stepped over the line and is now on the wrong side. If he has the gall, the nerve, the temerity, to do all that to her and to me, then I have no patience for him. He obviously has no moral compass, no lines that he won't cross. I will have nothing more to do with him."

"Or do you mean that the lines he will cross are not the same as yours?"

"Doesn't matter. He obviously never bothered to figure out where *my* lines were. I'm supposed to follow his lines - without him actually telling me where they are - but he doesn't have to be concerned with *my* lines? Nope. That's definitely a problem in our relationship. He never even *asked* where my lines were."

"Doesn't he know better than you?"

"Does he? Who voted him as God? Me and my opinions are just swept under the rug? I mean nothing to him? Or - am I just some kind of tool to him? To be used, abused, and discarded? He's already thrown away Hermione."

"Aren't there casualties in a war?"

"Yes. And I guess now I'm one of them, along with Hermione."

"Couldn't you be making a big mistake?"

"Sure. You've never made any mistakes before? Maybe it is a mistake. I'm not allowed? Why? Who am I, that I'm not allowed to make a mistake? I'm not given that privilege?"

"You are a child of prophesy."

"So you're telling me I *must* bow before the Almighty Magic? I don't get any choice in this? And again I ask, do I mean nothing? Does Hermione?"



"Doesn't Magic know best?"

Harry growled loudly, "Look, if you're going to deify Magic, then if Magic really cares about this, then Magic can get off it's arse and fix it."

"What about 'The Greater Good'?"

"Who gets to define what's greater than what? Just Dumbledore? And don't tell me Dumbledore is equal to Magic. I've lost faith in his definition."

Remus sighed and wiped his face tiredly. Then he nodded, "Ok."

Harry sighed, "Remus, I'd rather not fight about this any more. I have a direction I've chosen and it's going a different way than Dumbledore. I need to start moving my direction. I can't let Dumbledore derail me any more with old arguments. So – first we find out what the oblivators have done. Then I imagine Hermione will be trying to sit her A-Levels, then the GCSE's, and try to get into Uni somewhere. She can likely get into any Uni she wants. I'm not sure I can do that. Though, I suppose if she needs to hire a tutor, maybe I can participate in that?"

"If for no other reason than allow you to stay with her. I also think you need to get a new wardrobe, get a mobile phone, learn how to drive a car – even *buy* a car."

Harry chuckled, "Yes, all those muggle things."

"Let's not forget learning magic in order to defend Hermione from Death Eaters. Warding, Healing, duelling, the list is pretty long."

"Oh – I talked to Dobby during the Order meeting and he will watch over the Grangers for us, and let us know if there are dangerous wizards around, so we can go defend them. That will give us a bit of time to get ready. We won't have to pull guard duty tonight."

Remus was smiling, "Excellent! I think it all starts with a visit to St Mungos and then Gringott's tomorrow morning. First thing, right?"

Harry yawned, "Yes. Find out what the obliviators did and what budget we have for this project. Get all of our paperwork set up. Muggle documents, and all that."

Remus stood up, "Get some rest, Harry. We'll start this in the morning." He patted Harry on the shoulder and left.

**Saturday, 20 July, 1996, 08:00**

Harry was standing at the front door boiling mad. The Order members who were present had not left him alone when he got up. It was all he could do to be somewhat polite. Mostly it was just a cold angry shoulder.

Remus walked up and looked to Harry, "You ready for this?"

Harry nodded forcefully, on the verge of angry, "Definitely."

"Ok. Let's go talk to St. Mungos." Remus lead Harry out onto the front porch, then put his arm around Harry's shoulder and apparated them to the front lobby of St Mungos.

Harry turned and walked up to the receptionist. "I need to talk to a Mind Healer."

The receptionist was taken aback, "Well – Ok. What about?"

Harry's anger and impatience boiled out, "Because I'm crazy! Why else?"

Remus chuckled, trying to cover over her gobsmacked expression, "Harry, let's try that again." He turned to the receptionist, "We are researching the career path and processes of an Obliviator and mind Healer for a school project. Is there one available we can talk to?"

She looked askance at Harry, as Harry glanced at Remus, "I'll ask, just a moment." She left to find the answer.

Remus shook his head, "Harry, not everyone is at fault for what happened to Hermione."

He responded heatedly, "They're not? I haven't gotten much in the way of help from many in the wizarding world. Mostly just resistance and betrayal!"

"And if the Mind Healer is willing to help? Are you willing to give them a chance and be nice to them?"

Harry gritted his teeth, took a few deep breaths, and nodded tensely.

The receptionist came back, "Mr Potter, Healer Cranston is willing to see you. Third floor, room 326."

Harry nodded shortly and started toward the stairs.

Remus was trying to keep up.

Harry stopped at the right door and knocked twice.

"Come in."

He opened the door and found a tall lean man, pleasant face, sandy-brown hair stepping out from behind a desk and extending his hand.

The man flinched, like he'd been struck, he put his hand to his head, then recovered with some effort, "Good afternoon, Mr Potter. I'm Healer Cranston. Please have a seat." He indicated a few chairs around a low table.

Remus smoothed things over, "Healer Cranston, I'm Remus Lupin, a friend of Harry's parents." He shook hands with the Healer.

Harry and Remus sat down.

Healer Cranston sat down across the table from them and spoke very calmly, "Mr Potter, I see that you are about to boil over. Can you tell me what the problem is?"

Harry huffed out a breath and waved his hand impatiently trying to calm down, "Harry. Call me Harry. I need to know how someone is obliviated of several years worth of memories. What do you replace them with? How can I get back into someone's life who's had their life obliviated?"

Healer Cranston took another breath and looked intently at Harry, "This is about your friend – who was just banished from the wizarding world?" He got a pained look, "I'm sorry, Harry. That is extremely difficult. First, let me say that your friend – Hermione is her name? – as she is no longer considered magical, she is not covered by my Healers Oaths of confidentiality. She is no longer a possible patient so I can tell you what you need to know. Also, since my Healer's Oaths to heal and do no harm are more ethical than legal, that means that I am still interested in helping someone in the best way I can. Even if that means transcending what would seem to be merely legal."

Harry almost collapsed as he let go of a lot of his anger, "Thank you. I need to be involved in her life again in order to protect her from the Death Eaters that will be hunting her." His desperation blazed like a torch.

Cranston nodded, "Yes, I see. If the Obliviator was at all skilled, and most of them are, then part of the magic that removes her memories conditions her to be very open to hints and suggestions of how to replace the memories that are now gone. Sort of an enforced gullibility or suggestibility on what to fill into her missing memories. So for you to be involved in her life again, all you need to do is to tell her what to 'remember' about your previous time together. She will then fill in the blanks and believe what you tell her. Just be sure to have normal names for magical things. Also, we do give her some basic hints as to her past, for example a standard 'alternate memory' we use is we tell her she has spent the last five years at The Cromwell Academy, which just went bankrupt due to an administrator embezzling all the funds and destroying all the school records as they ran. A very exclusive private boarding school in a big castle, that was founded in 1655 by Oliver Cromwell. Though, in her memories, we change the title of Care of Magical Creatures to zoology, and things like that."

Harry nodded in amazement at the answers he was getting.

"Most of what you want to do, will depend upon you to 'play the role' of you being her friend, and push your way in. Assume you are friends, because you *are* friends. Even if she has some difficulty remembering from time to time. You must remember for her."

Harry looked a bit intimidated, "Ok. But she has had her magic bound. Won't she have accidental magic now and again?"

Cranston shook his head, "No. You can not rip out someone's magic without killing them, it's too much a part of them. When someone's magic is bound, particularly in the case of a banishment, all their magic is captured and directed into two functions only, to reinforce the obliviation spell and the binding spell. That binding, that restricting what their magic can do, is permanent. Her magic will only ever reinforce the obliviation spell and the binding of her magic for the rest of her life."

Harry held his head in his hands, "How can they do that? That's just – so evil."

Cranston nodded slightly, "My Healers Oaths are in direct conflict with that function so I can not do that. Obliviators are Aurors, not healers. Though they need to periodically report to us and we can rescind their status as Obliviators if we find they have abused anyone."

Harry looked up darkly at Cranston, then shook his head and looked down, "The evil was in the Wizengamot and the Auror in charge, not the obliviator."

Cranston nodded, "That is very gracious of you to acknowledge that."

Harry looked rather contrite, "What else do I need to know?"

Cranston looked at him for a long while, "First, taking any action against the obliviation or the binding is treason. To break those would likely result in a death sentence against you, and if you succeeded in breaking the

binding or obliviation, it would also likely result in a death sentence for your friend because bindings are quite unreliable when applied a second time. Second, you are now bound by the Statute of Secrecy. For her and her parents. Do not violate any of those."

Harry glanced at Remus, "Yes, I've heard that before."

"Third – if you – run into any problems, you can come back and ask me more questions."

Harry's gratitude came through and he nodded with a significantly calmer smile, "Thank you, very much."

Cranston nodded, "Good luck, Mr Potter. I think you'll need it."

As they left St Mungos, Harry was still brimming over with questions about how this whole thing could work, "Can we go visit Gringott's now? I still have so many questions."

Remus nodded and apparated Harry to the the steps of Gringott's. They walked in and went to the last teller on the right, the Accounts Desk.

The goblin didn't look up, "Name."

"Harry James Potter."

The goblin's eyes popped up and bounced back and forth between Harry and Remus, "Mr Potter, come this way."

"I want Remus to come too."

The goblin stopped, "He cannot. Only you can come."

"But I need him to help me figure out about emancipation."

The goblin's eyes narrowed at Harry, "You need to discuss that with your account manager. Once that is done, Mr Lupin may be able to attend."

Harry and Remus nodded to each other.

"Come this way." The goblin was off, seemingly on a footrace with Harry following closely, through a seemingly endless amount of hallways with random unmarked doors. The goblin stopped and knocked at a random door. Harry's eyebrows rose as he thought the process was not unlike the entrance to the Department of Mysteries; magically changed every time you passed through it. Harry smirked, and wondered who copied who?

"Come!"

He opened the door and Harry walked in. Bookcases full of ledgers lining the walls, a short wide desk with seemingly an acre of space raised up on wood blocks so it was comfortable for Harry. A chair in front and a goblin behind.

"Mr Potter. I'm very glad to finally meet you." The goblin hopped down from his tall chair and came around to shake Harry's hand. "My name is Clawhammer."

Harry bowed, "Mr Clawhammer, I'm honoured to meet you." He sat down in the chair as Clawhammer indicated.

As Clawhammer was returning to his chair, Harry dove in, "Mr Clawhammer, I understand that there is the possibility that I can become emancipated?"

Clawhammer froze and looked at Harry for a moment, "Yes, you can. Is there a reason this topic has come up for you?"

Harry's anger started rising and his voice turned quiet and menacing, "I have decided to abandon the wizarding world. They have betrayed me too many times. I have completed my OWLs, what else do I need to do to be free of them?"

Clawhammer's eyes started to get very big as the enormity of what Harry was saying sunk in. "Mr Potter, are you sure? That – is quite a drastic step

to take."

Harry just kept getting angrier, "They just banished my best friend from the magical world. Completely unjustly. I must defend her. I will *not* go back to Hogwarts."

Clawhammer took a long slow breath to settle his nerves, then determination settled in, "Very well. We can arrange that."

"I'd like Remus Lupin to help me, can he be in this meeting?"

"Let us enact the emancipation and then he can join us for further discussions."

Harry nodded.

"As you are the last Potter, the option to claim your inheritance and be emancipated as been available since you were 14. To accomplish this you need to put on your Head of House Signet rings, and if the rings accept you, it is done."

Harry looked questioningly, "That's all?" Then he turned angry, "And why haven't I ever heard of this before?"

Clawhammer stiffened, "Not through our inaction."

"No, not yours. Dumbledore's."

Clawhammer remained silent.

Harry sighed and shook his head, "What if the ring doesn't accept me?"

Clawhammer looked unsure, "It depends on how nice your parents were. There could be no reaction or – if there were – stipulations on the headship of the House, then any number of penalties could be visited upon you. Up to and including death."

Harry looked shocked.



"It's not likely. Your parents were quite nice. But Sirius Black's family would have killed him if they had followed through with their threats."

Harry blew out his breath, "And you question why I want to abandon the wizarding world?"

Clawhammer smirked, "Question it? No. Surprised? Aghast? Fearful? Yes."

Harry looked confused, "Why?"

Clawhammer started to show his own anger, "The stupidity of those bastards never ceases to amaze me. That's all they have ever done is piss on you. I'm glad to see you have come to your senses." He reached in his desk drawer and pulled out a small box, opened the lid, and showed it to Harry.

Harry paused as his brain caught the words, "Fearful?"

Clawhammer also paused, "Do wizarding humans who deify magic in order to avoid their responsibility deserve your protection? And if you won't, who will? These do not bode well for wizarding Britain." He set the box on the table in front of Harry.

Harry mumbled unsure, "Sometimes they're nice to me."

Clawhammer glowered, "When it doesn't cost them anything. They have forgotten honour."

Harry didn't know how to respond to any of that. He looked in the box and saw two large ornate rings, "Do I just put them on?"

"Yes. The simpler one is the Potter Family ring; put that on first. The second ring is the Black Family ring."

"The Black Family ring?"

"Sirius Black made you his heir before he died."

Harry slapped his hand against his forehead, "Ok." He put on the Potter Family ring and felt the magic tingle up his entire body. It was warm, like a hug. He shivered in response.

"Give that a minute to take hold. There is always – a bit of – speculation on what the Black Family ring will do – but you do have ancestors who were Blacks so it should be safe."

Harry looked reprovingly toward Clawhammer, "Such confidence."

Clawhammer grinned and motioned for Harry to put on the ring.

Harry picked it up and put it on. He felt a sharp stab on his finger, "Ow!" And a bit of a headache coming on. Then a much bigger tingle over his body. "Oh, that was quite a tingle."

Clawhammer was now smiling, "It seems to have accepted you after a moment. I think the Potter magic and the Black magic were at odds for a moment but they seem to have come to an agreement."

Harry's eyes grew, "Ah – ok. Why does all this have to be so complex?"

Clawhammer smirked, "Because complexity always expands to fill the brain-space available."

Harry nodded sheepishly, "Or overflow it?"

Clawhammer chuckled, "Yes. It is one of humanity's most notable traits. The constant temptation to – optimise everything and therefore increase the complexity." He paused, "Now that you are recognised as an adult, would you like Mr Lupin to attend?"

"Yes, please."

Clawhammer waved his hand, "He will be here momentarily." He started pulling out papers and handing them to Harry, "Here are your latest Potter

account statements. Would you like to merge your Potter and Black holdings?"

Harry shook his head, "No, I think all this is complex enough. Please keep them separate for now, until I can figure out which way is up."

"Very well. May I ask why?"

Harry thought, "Because - I want to preserve evidence. I want to know the truth about all the history and the families."

Clawhammer nodded slowly, "Yes. I can see that."

A knock came at the door and Clawhammer called out, "Come!"

Remus came in.

Harry stood up and hugged him.

"Mr Lupin, please have a seat." Clawhammer conjured a chair next to Harry's. "I'm just giving Harry a copy of all his account statements."

Remus looked confused, "All? How many are there?"

Clawhammer smiled slightly, "There are a number, actually. The Potter business accounts, which include a number of muggle bank accounts, two Potter vaults, a Peverell family vault, a few Black Family accounts, the Black Family vault."

Remus wilted when he heard about the Black Family accounts, "Oh, yes."

Harry's eyebrows rose, "Can we get a summary of all the bits together as well as statements for each set of accounts?"

"Yes, not a problem." He pulled out a thick stack of papers and thumped them down in front of Harry. "The top set are a combined summary of all your holdings. I suggest you take some time to look over all of that and come back with more questions so we can start dealing with all the mess."

At Harry's confused expression he continued, "There have been no adjustments to any of these accounts for a decade. There is a lot to catch up on."

Harry almost whispered to Remus, "I feel like McGonagall just assigned a lot of homework over the break."

Remus and Clawhammer laughed.

Harry swallowed hard, "Ok. We'll take this all away and look it over and come back. What else do we need to do?"

"You need to familiarise yourself with everything in all those accounts. We will need to decide if there are any changes needed to all the investments, all the properties need to be surveyed for any repairs and whether you still want them all, there are a significant number of artefacts, heirlooms, and books that you may want to divest yourself of, since some of them are quite nasty. Including a few house elves that have become unstable – and dangerous. Not to mention – a few *businesses*." He practically spit that last word.

Harry sighed heavily, "Wow. That's going to take a lot of time."

"Yes, particularly since there are some significant histories attached to some of those artefacts."

Harry frowned, "That does not sound like fun."

"No, but quite necessary."

Harry stood up, "Thank you, Clawhammer. I hope to be back in a few days. – Oh, how do I get out of Hogwarts?"

Clawhammer stopped and blinked, "I will withdraw the costs of your sixth year from Hogwarts. Just don't show up next year."

Harry paused, "Also, can you get me a passport, drivers license, and all that?"

"That would not be good."

Harry looked surprised, "No?"

"If I get them for you they will be magical documents, that the magical government will control. If you are breaking away from them, you need a muggle birth certificate and use that to get real muggle documents directly from them."

Harry's eyes went wide, "Yes. That is what I need."

Clawhammer nodded, "I'll have it for you next time."

Harry extended his hand, "Thank you."

Clawhammer stood up and shook Harry's hand.

Harry was quite relived as they were leaving the bank, but by the time they side-along apparated into the park across the street from Grimmauld Place Harry was nervous again. "Remus - can we not spend much time here?"

Remus looked at him for a moment, "Anyone specific you want to avoid?"

Harry sighed heavily, "Everyone. I'm done with the arguments. I have a plan, a direction, I just want to start moving."

Remus took a slow breath, "They will see this as you abandoning them."

Harry's dropped his head. Then he looked up with a pained expression, "You think I just running away?"

Remus looked just as conflicted, "I know some of them think you are. But - I don't know if I can say one way or the other." He sighed again and looked at Order HQ, "I'm not the best person to ask. Dumbledore saved my life." At Harry's confused look, he continued, "I'm the only werewolf to ever

attend Hogwarts and he allowed that, and concealed it. I am forever grateful for that."

Harry hung his head again, "I'm sorry."

"Harry, don't take that on."

Harry shook his head, "You know, when I look at the Order - and everyone involved I'm incredibly conflicted. And it's so confusing! But then I think about Hermione and all that goes away. I know what I must do. And - I don't know whether I'm right or I'm wrong, but - I just have to do this. I owe my life to her so many times over."

Remus looked at Harry as a small smile began to grow, "Then let's do this."

Harry nodded with a small smile and they started across the street. They were able to get in, pack their stuff, and apparate out with minimal glares or disappointed looks. It was a relief to Harry. They landed next to a narrow country road, with a narrow dirt drive disappearing into the thick trees and brush crowding in.

Remus pointed up the dirt track, "This way." They stepped over a chain that hung across the track and came to a stop after 5 meters, "You need to wait here for a few minutes. I need to add you to the wards at the wardstone. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"You can't add me from here?"

Remus turned and smiled, "Those ward designs are way too susceptible to - manipulation. This way is much more secure." Remus started again.

Harry stood in the dirt drive and looked at the trees, the thick undergrowth, listening to the birds. It was quite peaceful. The main road was no longer visible, the house wasn't yet visible. Just an overgrown track with trees overhanging.

"Harry!" Remus' voice came down the drive, "It's safe now."

Harry hurried up the drive, through the dense trees and around a few turns to come to a small cottage surrounded by overhanging trees.

Remus motioned him inside, "It's not much but it will do for a while. Until we know what the score is."

It was a one bedroom cottage. A small kitchen, a loo, and a living area.

Remus smirked and pointed into the living area, "You even have your choice of couches."

Harry chuckled, "Sounds good."

Remus pointed at what looked like a closet door next to the loo, "That is the door to the basement. It's been expanded quite a lot and we will be using it as a training area."

"Very nice."

"Shall we find some lunch?" He turned and started toward the kitchen.

"Dobby!"

Remus looked back at Harry confused.

"If I don't let him help he will find - things to do. I need to - share with him."

Remus smirked as Dobby popped in.

"Yes, Master Harry Potter sir? Do you need some lunch?"

Harry nodded, "Some simple sandwiches would be wonderful, Dobby."

Dobby bowed and popped into the kitchen where the sounds of creation came wafting out.

Harry moved into the sitting area, carefully considering both couches.

Remus took a chair watching Harry's deliberations. Like a dog circling twice before laying down.

Harry finally sat down, "This one."

Remus looked like he was humouring Harry. "Excellent choice."

Harry had a teasing smile, "These things are important."

Remus nodded slowly, "Sure."

Dobby popped in with a tray and set it on the low table in front of Harry's couch.

"Thank you, Dobby. Looks wonderful."

Dobby bowed and popped out.

After Harry's first bite of sandwich he started rummaging in his pockets, pulling out his trunk, setting it next to the couch, and expanding it. Along with the papers from Clawhammer. "I guess I should look at all this stuff." His expression turned serious.

Remus nodded, "Clawhammer will have listed everything as either an asset or a liability, in a financial sense, but you need to categorise them again as assets or liabilities in broader senses. Things that will be useful, things that will be dangerous. Politically or otherwise."

Harry nodded slowly as he started perusing the papers. He reached into his trunk to find a pen. He started making notes on the papers.

Remus left him to his deep dive into discovering the complexities of finance.

Harry was actually fascinated. This was the means that would allow him to protect Hermione. Without all this – he would have nothing. And so would Hermione. This was of vital importance to understand.



Two hours later Harry sat back in the couch and groaned, covering his face with his hands.

Remus came back and sat down in the chair, "Absorb it all already?"

Harry picked up the stack and pushed it toward Remus, "Well, basically. I want to check my understanding against what Clawhammer has to say. But it looks like money will not be a problem for this project. Or – much of anything."

Remus smiled indulgently, "I wouldn't imagine, given Sirius' family money." Remus considered Harry, "Have you thought about taking up the Black Headship? What that would mean?"

Harry looked a bit confused, but also rather angry, "I already have the family ring." He held up his hand and wiggled the ring.

"But what about the Wizengamot seats, the 'position in society', the power of the Black name?"

"I'd rather not get drawn into that disaster. It would be too easy to get sidetracked and waste time in endless arguments. I'd rather no one knew there even was a Black 'on the throne', so to speak."

Remus smiled with a touch of Marauder, "There could be opportunities for – mischief."

Harry gave a shrug of acknowledgement, "Maybe. There seems to be enough shady stuff going on in that pile of papers. I don't imagine I will be able to leave that sit. And taking any action will expose that *someone* is now head."

Remus' brows came together as he picked up the pile of papers, "Hhhmm. Yes, I think you're right." He started looking through them all.

Harry shook his head in frustration, "I don't want to play their game. Or play by their rules. Or even acknowledge them. All their self-importance is

completely empty to me. All they want is to be seen posturing while Tom runs around and kills people."

## **4. Another Chance To Start Over**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 9901**

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Another Chance To Start Over**

##### **Hermione Granger**

**Saturday, 20 July, 1996**

It was a normal summer Saturday morning for Hermione. A bit of sleeping in. A slow breakfast. Until she remembered again what happened at the end of the year. And why she was completely in shock, because of her very prestigious and exclusive boarding school having gone bankrupt and closed suddenly after the end of the year. The Cromwell Academy, founded in 1655 ended suddenly and ignominiously at the end of this last year. Specifically, because one of the administrators embezzled all the money. And destroyed all the records of everyone's schooling for the last 5 years. Her parents were equally in shock. They had come to the school a few weeks ago and picked her up as normal with no hint of problems. It was so completely unexpected. Leaving so many huge unknowns for them. She normally had one more year left to attend. But now that was all gone. Somehow, that caused her to almost break down in tears whenever she thought of it – but why? It didn't make sense. It was just a school. But she was surprisingly, inexplicably, emotionally affected by it all.

Her and her parents had planned to spend the day regrouping, to plan the next steps to get her back on track to enter Uni in a year or two. She would need tutors to make sure she could re-take her A-levels and then pass her GCSE's before applying to a University. She had time, though her scores may not be as high as she would have liked. But it was yet another chance to start over. To do things better. To make even more friends. Hopefully just a few months of preparation, test taking, then she could move into Uni housing and start on her path again. She could hardly wait. But first, breakfast.

She was down in the kitchen by ten – such was her definition of laziness these days. "Good morning, Mum." She hugged her mum over her shoulder as she sat sipping her tea at the kitchen table.

"Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?"

Hermione stopped and thought, "Well – yes, I guess. I'm still in shock I think. It catches me every so often and – It can be very difficult." She started moving toward tea with determination. She stopped, "Not to mention – very strange dreams." She shook her head and continued.

"Yes, these kinds of major life-changing events can hang over you for weeks."

Hermione turned to her, incredulous, "Hippogriffs? And – trolls in the castle?" She shivered.

Emma laughed, "Well – no accounting for nightmares ..." She shrugged.

Hermione sighed and turned back to her tea.

"Must have been something you ate or ... But we'll get through it and start again. It's not all that bad of timing after all. You have time for some tutoring, retaking your A-Levels and then the GCSE's. It'll work out."

Hermione sat down at the table with her tea and a smile, "I hope so. I can't wait to get started."

"We'll make some calls on Monday and get started finding you some good tutors."

Hermione looked off into the distance, eyes alight, "Which schools do you think I should apply for?"

Emma smirked, "Getting the cart before the horse? You have to take your GCSE's first."

Now Hermione was looking decidedly innocent, "And when has taking tests been a problem for me?"

Emma rolled her eyes, "Since never. I suppose the bigger question is what you want to study?"

Hermione's face lit up playfully, "Everything!"

Emma played along and looked concerned, "Now, hold on -"

"But it's all so interesting! I can't decide!"

"You can't, but our bank account can."

Hermione put on a playful pout to stop the world.

Emma smiled, "One degree at a time, dear."

Hermione looked mock offended, "One at a time? Where's the fun in that?"

"It's this quite challenging game called 'someone else's pound'. We pay for the first degree and then you get someone else to pay for all the rest."

Hermione got a challenging look, "Hhhmmm, let me think." She started tapping her chin while thinking, "Which school costs the most? They will then have the richest boyfriends who can then help pay for my next degrees."

Emma just chuckled, "Oh, dear. Higher education in Britain will not survive."

Hermione reached out and patted her mum's hand patronisingly, "Higher education will be just fine because all my boyfriends will be paying to fix it." Her smile was devious.

Emma just laughed.

Dan came into the kitchen with a concerned look, "Boyfriends? What's all this, then?"

Emma jumped in, "Hermione and all her adoring fans have a plan for fixing British higher education."

Dan stood still and looked confused, "Maybe I don't want to know?"

Hermione turned to her mother, "See? I got my smarts somewhere." Her eyebrows lifted in a show of 'I told you so'.

Emma just smiled, "Yes, dear."

Dan sat down and started fixing his tea, a morning ritual that was perfected over decades of practice and study. And almost uninterrupted once he was established on 'the path to tea'.

Hermione's tea cup clinked as she set it down in the saucer, she sighed, "Another chance to start over." She smiled intently, "And do it better this time."

Emma's eyebrows came together in concern, "What about all your friends at Cromwell?"

Hermione's brows matched her Mum's, "I have no idea. - I guess I'm not likely to see them again." Her face paled and her eyes dropped, "I keep thinking ... It's like ..." She broke out in a huge smile, "But I'm sure there will be lots more."

Dan sipped his perfect tea and sighed, "Well, let's go to a bookstore and get some test-prep books for all these A-Levels and GCSE's and all that. Shall we?"

"Yes!" Hermione stood up and started moving. She stopped and turned back, "I suppose this means I need to get my driver's licence earlier, too. Now that I'm out of Cromwell two years early, I guess I'll need it now."

Dan and Emma were caught. Dan recovered first, "Yes, I suppose so." He smirked, "I can't see taking that test being a problem, can you?"

Hermione sighed tapping her chin again with a growing sly smile, "No, but - let me think - BMW? Audi?"

Dan sat up straight, "Oi!"

Hermione laughed and skipped out of the room, back up to her room to finish getting ready for their book expedition.

Emma's indulgent smile gave testament to where her sympathies lay.

And Dan's adoring smile at Hermione marked his susceptibility.

**Harry Potter, 09:00**

**Sunday, 21 July, 1996**

Harry was relaxed. More relaxed than he had been in a long time. Strangely enough, even more relaxed than when he stayed at Grimmauld Place with Sirius. To be cramped in Remus' small cottage, sleeping on a couch, eating breakfast at a small barely-fits-one table, was actually nice. Probably because he had purpose. Direction. A focussed goal. His smile grew.

"Well, ready to get this ball rolling?" Remus had a challenging grin.

"Sure. What's the order of the day?"

"First, we start with apparition. Learn today, license - some other time." He waved his hand absently.

Harry came to nod in spite of his nerves on that subject.

"Second, more driving practice, since your driving test is Tuesday. And along with that maybe some car shopping. But, the next big issue is getting a set of mobile phones for us."

Harry sat back shocked, "Oh – I guess so. I hadn't thought of that. And we'll still keep the charmed mirrors?"

"Yes, we still carry the charmed mirrors too."

Harry's smile grew, "Cool. I'll go for that. And I'm buying, right?"

That stopped Remus completely.

Harry mounted a preemptive strike, "You are using this for work, yes? That work being keeping me and the Grangers alive, right? Then I pay for it."

Remus took a long slow breath – and gave a grim nod.

Harry smiled, "Thank you. This is what you've been doing for the last so-many years, right? Personal security services for the rich and famous? Like me?"

Harry's overly innocent smile was pushing Remus' buttons. Remus gave in and started to chuckle, "Yes. But I guess that means – in a weird way – that you work for me as I train you how to do the job of protecting Hermione."

Harry laughed, "Deal. Partners in crime – or – whatever gets the job done."

Remus stood up, "Ready?"

"Ready." Harry got up and they moved toward their day. And it was a normal day. At least for most other people in and around London. But never having had freedom, or the self-determination that some amount of money can bring, or a specific goal in life, Harry thought it was brilliant. It felt good. He felt – like a real person. The last vestiges of the kid under the stairs were dropping away as he built his future. It was strangely intoxicating.

Until the end of the day, when Harry ran out of energy. So much was happening that was new, it took all he had to make decisions. He flopped



down on his couch at Remus' cottage and almost fell asleep before Remus called him into the tiny kitchen for dinner.

They ate in silence. A testament to how tired Harry was.

Until Remus broke the silence, "Go on, Harry. You look tired. I'll take care of this."

Harry nodded numbly and sat down on his couch – and fell right to sleep.

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"Harry."

Harry woke to Remus shaking his shoulder, "Huh?"

"You should get ready for bed – properly."

Harry sat up and took a deep breath, "Right." He looked around blearily trying to gather his wits to move. "What time is it?"

"Almost eleven." Remus headed back to his room.

Harry groaned and rubbed his face. He startled when he heard a pop.

"Master Harry Potter, sir." Dobby was wringing his hands standing in front of Harry.

"Dobby! What's the matter?" Harry was now wide awake.

"A bad wizard is at Miss Hermione's house. In the back yard."

Harry jumped up, "Tell Remus." He apparated to Hermione's front yard without even grabbing his coat. The house was dark. He ran a spell to reveal magical people; Hermione was in the house upstairs, and another in the back, behind the carriage house. Harry put a silencing spell on the house to not wake the Grangers with any magical fight. He disillusioned himself and started running down the drive toward the carriage house in the back. He kept close to the side of the house and stopped at the back

corner, just behind a shrubbery. He waited, looking for any movement. After a moment he ran another revealing spell. Someone was crouching behind the hedge at the back corner of the carriage house. The DE was almost covered by the front corner of the carriage house as the alignment of the two buildings did not match, so Harry silenced his shoes and started running toward the carriage house, around the back side, to get behind the person.

Harry peeked around the corner of the carriage house and saw the person starting to stand up and raise their wand. The white Death Eater Mask was clearly visible on their face. Harry started to move away from the back of the carriage house to come behind the Death Eater.

The Death Eater started running spells to test for wards and other magic.

Harry's anger spiked as he got closer and the mask became more obvious.

The DE evidently had his own sensing magic since he turned quickly as Harry got closer.

Harry let loose with four quick bludgeoners as hard as he could. They cracked the DE's shield, and smashed his face and upper torso. The DE was thrown backwards, bounced off the hedge, and landed hard in front of Harry. Harry summoned the DE's wand and snapped it. Pulling up his left sleeve showed the Dark Mark. Harry pulled off the mask but did not recognise the man.

Remus' Patronus came flying up to Harry, "Harry, is everything alright? I'm behind the carriage house."

Harry turned and waved at Remus.

Remus came and stood looking at the DE, "I don't recognise him."

"Me neither. He either wasn't very capable or he wasn't expecting any response. He never touched me."

Remus nodded, "That's good. I'll wrap him up and set up a port-key path into the dungeons at Grimmauld Place. Complete with a doorbell to let the Order know we have made a 'deposit' for them to deal with."

Harry chuckled, "That's nice. Make Dumbledore deal with them."

Remus spun ropes around the DE, "We'll work out a protocol for dealing with things like this. All the things we need to remember, like cleaning up after any fights, depositing them at Order HQ, and all that."

Harry nodded, "That would be great. A set of standard procedures would really help."

Remus grabbed the ropes and apparated with the DE to Order HQ.

Harry sighed, then looked through the hedge to the back of the house. All was still quiet. He took down the silencing charm and stood for a moment thinking. This may be the norm for his life now. But the thought of Hermione being attacked by one of these Death Eaters hardened his resolve. He apparated back to Remus' cottage.

Remus was back in less than ten minutes, "Ok, Harry. I've set up a keyhole in the wards so we can portkey any captured Death Eaters directly into the dungeons, and a bell will let them know they have someone to deal with. Just set a portkey into the garden shed in the back garden and the DE will end up in the dungeon."

"Excellent. Thanks Remus. I really didn't want to go over and talk to anyone there. It's still – just too raw, yet. I start to boil just thinking about it."

Remus sighed, "Yes. Leave it to me."

"Thanks. Ok, now I'm tired again." Harry headed back to his couch.

**Hermione Granger**

**Monday, 22 July, 1996, 09:00**

Hermione came downstairs in the morning before nine, ostensibly to look for breakfast, but found her Mum in her home office. "Good morning Mum." She gave her a hug over her shoulder as Emma sat in her office chair.

"Good morning, Hermione. You are in luck, today. I got a number of names of tutors from the school you would have gone to if you hadn't gone to Cromwell and I even got some from the admissions office at Cambridge. So I'm about to start calling them and see when they can meet with us. – Evidently, since we are outside the normal recruiting schedule for universities, everyone has lots of time."

"Oh, very nice. I can hardly wait. – I suppose I should get moving, then. In case they can come today."

Emma looked at her appraisingly, then a grin, "Will it be a race? Can I get them here fast enough to catch you out?"

Hermione laughed, "Sure. See what you can do. I'll be ready." She took off for the kitchen determined to be ready.

Emma turned, "Oh! I think the tutors we get can talk to us about some of the entrance requirements for Uni, but there is no substitute for going and visiting schools. So I will try setting up appointments to go take tours of a few in the next week or so. So don't fill your social calendar too fast." She grinned at Hermione.

Hermione rolled her eyes, just a bit, "Yes, that would be wonderful. I'd love to see Cambridge – even if it's just for fun."

Emma secretly smiled, that she thought Hermione would be rather surprised next week.

### **Harry Potter, 10:00**

Remus sighed, "Ok, I think that's enough about wards for today. Now it's time to learn to drive." He stood up.

Harry looked rather nervous, "Wait – we're moving from a crash course in warding to a crash course in driving? Think there might be a problem with that?"

Remus chuckled, "Nope. About the same actually. Let's go learn how to *not* crash the car. I think you've got the warding stuff off to a good start. It's the driving part I'm more worried about. Driving a manual shift is a lot more work than an automatic."

"I've seen it done, for a long time."

Remus smiled, "Seeing it done, and doing it, are very different things."

"I'm a natural on a broom. You don't think I'll be a natural in a car?"

Remus shrugged, "Could be. But you have to prove it to me. Just like you have to prove it to the licence examiner tomorrow afternoon. And no magic. You actually have to be able to do it for real."

Harry sighed and got up, "Ok. Let's do this. What do I need to know?" They started for the door.

"You need to get the feel of it. There is significant coordination and timing involved. It's quite a lot to put all together." Remus unlocked the car and made Harry get in the drivers side, "Alright, take a look at the shifting pattern. Now push in the clutch and hold it – yes the left pedal. The brakes are the middle pedal. Now put on the brakes and start the car."

Harry turned the key and it came alive – with only a bit of grinding as he held the key too long.

Remus started pointing, "Get used to moving the stick from first through fourth gear, and reverse. That movement needs to become automatic for your arm. Now, put the stick back in first and slowly let out the clutch until the car starts to move. Notice where that point is in the swing of the clutch pedal. You need to remember that point, that distance from the top of the pedal."

Harry nudged the car several times by letting out the clutch pedal, "Ok, got that."

"Alright, now let's move us forward to the end of the driveway. Get the feel for how first gear moves the car. You need to know the limits of first gear on the low end of speed and the high end, so you have a good feel for when to shift up to second gear."

They came to the end of the driveway. The small back country road was clear.

"Alright, move out, let's go left. Go ahead and shift into second."

Harry started them moving and pushed the car into second gear with slow definitive actions.

"Now, without changing the speed of the car, shift back and forth between first and second gears."

Harry tried and it caused the car to jerk faster and slower each time.

"Notice that you need to rev the engine up to put it back down into first gear. Notice that engine speed. Remember the sound. When you come to a corner you can just hit the brakes or you can downshift, which puts you in a better position to accelerate out of the curve, but you need to match the speed of the engine to the gear you are moving into. So when you downshift you need to rev the engine up to match the gear so there is a smooth transition, not a thunk and a jerk. That takes a lot of practice to get very smooth at that. Just keep shifting back and forth between first and second. Keep trying to make that transition smooth, ok? Worry about smoothness now, speed later."

Harry concentrated and moved. The sound, the motion, the feel of it. He moved, the car moved, they blended, they negotiated, they came to an agreement.

Remus pointed at the curve coming up, "Notice the curve ahead, you want to brake for the curve before you get to the curve. Try not to brake during the curve, it can throw off the car's balance in a high-speed turn and bad things can happen, particularly if the roads are slippery or wet or you find an obstacle in the road. Brake going into it, accelerate going out of it. Don't brake in the middle of it unless you have to, and that should be considered an error."

They spent the next few hours honing Harry's reflexes, ears, and back-side to feel the car and tune himself to it. By the end of it Harry was having a blast.

### **Hermione Granger, 15:00**

The doorbell rang right at 3pm. Hermione jumped up and ran to the front door and pulled it open, "Hello?"

The woman standing primly on the porch, a felt wide-brimmed hat with a flower in it, tweed coat, mid-calf length dress, and buckled shoes, looked at Hermione with interest, "Good afternoon, miss. Are you Hermione Granger?"

Hermione smiled and curtsied with a bit of a flourish, "Yes, ma'am. I'm so glad you could come so fast. I can hardly wait to get started." She stepped back and motioned the woman into the house.

The woman entered and watched as Hermione shut the door, "My name is Mrs Teddington. If I may ask, you seem to be out of the usual schedule for college entrance processes, how did you come to this?"

"I was attending Cromwell Academy -"

Mrs Teddington looked quite confused, "I've not heard of that school."

Hermione waved it away, "It was a small very exclusive boarding school that just went bankrupt because an administrator embezzled all the funds and destroyed all the academic records of all the students as they ran. Left

us in quite the predicament. So we need to start again. A-Levels, the GCSE's, and applying for Uni."

Mrs Teddington looked scandalised, "Well – that – is quite the mess. But we should be able to get you back on track soon enough. We are not in the middle of the usual rush for admissions, so you have my full attention."

Hermione motioned toward the kitchen, "Let's start by introducing you to my Mum, Dr. Emma Granger." Hermione held out her hand toward Emma.

Emma stood up, "Good afternoon, Mrs Teddington, is it?"

Mrs Teddington shook hands with Emma, "Yes, very glad to meet you. Your daughter was just explaining your – difficulties with your previous school. Quite the interruption, that sounds like."

Emma frowned, "Yes, five years of records are all gone." Emma motioned, "Please, have a seat."

Mrs Teddington sighed, "Yes, well – I think we can fix that easy enough." She sat down and pulled out some papers, "What I have here is an old practice GCSE test that you can take which will give me a very good idea where you need to invest some time in studying – and where you may not need to."

Hermione smiled, "Oooh, I love tests. They are so much fun."

Mrs Teddington gave Hermione a concerned glance but didn't slow down, "Well, no time like the present – if you like, you can start on this now."

Hermione's eyes grew in size and intensity, "Yes, that would be wonderful."

"Alright." Mrs Teddington put the stack of papers upside down in front of Hermione, pulled a sharpened pencil from her bag and set it down. She glanced at her watch, and smiled, "Ready?"

Hermione nodded impatiently.



"Go."

Hermione dove into her favourite activity – learning. The test was very difficult, but it was fascinating too. It hinted at so many things to learn. She actually had to stop and think several times. It was invigorating. Finally, she was done. She looked up. Mrs Teddington and Emma were talking like old friends about the various entrance requirements of schools and the reasons behind them. She would have just listened but Emma noticed.

"Done already?"

Mrs Teddington looked a bit suspicious.

"Yes, I'm done." She pushed the stack of papers toward Mrs Teddington. "Will you be able to grade it now?"

"Yes, I will. Let's see what we have." She pulled out more papers and started running down the pages comparing the answers. She spent some time reading Hermione's essay answers and made a few marks here and there. Then she set the papers down and looked at Hermione quite seriously. "Do you know what field of study you would like to go into?"

Hermione just smiled, "Everything!"

Emma chuckled, "Hermione, remember the game called 'someone else's pound'? We pay for the first degree and you find someone else to pay for all the rest?"

Mrs Teddington looked thoughtful, "Even the first degree may not be a problem. Let me look at this test in more detail and I will give you a study plan and all the materials to study. Then, in a week or so, I will schedule an appointment for you to take a real GCSE."

Hermione blinked a few times, "Don't I need to take A-Levels too?"

"Not if you can get GSCE scores like these. I can come back tomorrow morning with a plan and a set of textbooks, if that's alright?"

Emma was a bit surprised, "Yes, that would be fine."

Mrs Teddington stood up, "Excellent, I'll get it all set up." She spoke to Hermione, "Start thinking about what school you'd like to attend."

Hermione was blinking again, "Ok. Tomorrow morning, then."

Mrs Teddington was gone.

### **Harry Potter, 16:00**

Harry rubbed his face trying to push back the tiredness, "Remus, is it time for dinner yet? My brain is leaking numbers out of - everywhere."

Remus smirked, "Yes, it's getting close. Let's go over the financials again after dinner. We have a few more things to look at before we go to Gringotts tomorrow morning."

They both got up and started moving toward some food that was supposed to resemble dinner. It actually worked, mainly because Dobby got involved, but it was quite the dance in the tiny kitchen in Remus' cottage. Food significantly helped them all.

Then back to another hour of studying the business dealings of the Potters and the Blacks. Particularly the Blacks because it seemed needlessly complex. Maybe purposefully - and illegally - complex. But they probably got as far as they could by themselves, without the expert eye of Clawhammer.

Then Remus called a halt, "Alright, that's enough of that! Now we need to go over the ward scheme for the Granger's house and practice so we can set them up as fast as possible tonight."

Harry was unsure, "Ok, but why fast?"

"I'm afraid that setting up the wards in a non-magical area will draw the Aurors to investigate. Then we will have a hard time justifying magic in a

non-magical area."

Harry looked frustrated, "Hmf! Ok, let's give it a go."

They spent the next two hours diving into the specifics of setting up and interacting with the wards they planned to set up. It was a rather complete set with emphasis on sensing more than defending. Before they knew it, it was time to go set them up at Hermione's house.

Remus stood up, "Ready for this?" He grabbed the ward design papers and the wardstone.

Harry stood up nodding, "Yup, lets get this over with."

They each apparated to the Granger's driveway. It was very dark. The trees hanging over the road, the sparsely populated neighbourhood with occasional street lights.

Remus whispered, "Let's start by checking if there is any new magic in the area. Run the set of detection spells we talked about today. As many as you can remember."

Harry ran through a good set. "Wait, what's that?" One spell showed something new.

Remus ran a few more, "Hm. Well, look at that. That's a spell to detect any apparitions within the area. I don't remember that being here before. I think we are probably being watched." He started looking around.

Harry's nerves took a huge jump as he started looking and listening.

Remus came back into focus, "Ok, let's get this done. Next, let's put a silencing charm on the house so we won't wake them up." He set the spell and they immediately started burying the wardstone near the front porch, oriented properly toward north to align with ley lines in the area. It only took them another 20 minutes to get all the wards up, keyed to their own magical signatures, and powered on. It would take another few days for

the stones to be 'conditioned' to the magical load and their magical saturation limits to be fully expanded. Then Harry or Remus could finish powering them up completely.

Remus sighed as he stood up again, "Right! That's done. Now let's test them a bit." They started back toward the road.

Two pops sounded at the end of the drive. Two men in robes appeared, "You! We're Aurors! Stay where you are!"

Remus stopped.

Harry kept on and spoke out strongly, "Yes? What's up guys?"

"Who are you?"

"Harry Potter. That's Remus Lupin."

The lead Auror pushed hard, "This is a muggle area. You can't do magic in a muggle area."

Harry was not buying it at all, "Really? Why not? The Leakey Cauldron does it."

"That's a magical area."

Harry pushed back hard, his frustration leaking out, "Not the front door. That's magic in a muggle area. If they can do that, then I can do this. These are protective wards that protect against magicals and are unknown to any of the muggles anywhere nearby. They are not significantly different than the Leaky Cauldron uses."

The Auror took a moment to consider, "So - why do you need them?"

Harry felt he could back off the pressure a bit, "My best friend lives here. She was banished from the magical world last week - completely unjustly! But Death Eaters know she lives here now, so I need to protect her."

Both Aurors did not seem convinced and started to argue. Until a gong rang out, followed by a thud.

Remus pointed to the side yard, "Death Eater!"

The DE stood up rather wobbly, looked at the Aurors, and started to run behind the house.

The Aurors ran after him.

Remus smiled, "That gong was the DE bouncing off the anti-apparition ward. Must have hurt."

"I hope so."

The Aurors came back after a few minutes.

Harry was a little smug, "Did you get him?"

The lead Auror shook his head, "No, he fell on the wet grass and must have injured himself because he set off his injury-triggered portkey. We couldn't tell where it took him."

Remus nodded, "Probably behind a ward somewhere."

Harry pointedly said, "This is the third attack by Death Eaters on this house in four days."

The Auror nodded, "Yes? Well, you've proved your point, Mr Potter. I'll not complain about the wards."

Harry was grateful, "Thank you. And you'll let the department know they are here now? As you can see, we are likely to get some activity here. And we will be doing the same thing again, to their family business in a few minutes."

"Yes. I'll put it in the reports for the next shift. Good night Mr Potter, Mr Lupin." They popped away.

Remus breathed deeply, "Well, that turned out better than I thought. Ready to do the wards on the Granger's practice?"

Harry nodded and they popped away.

**Tuesday, 23 July, 1996, 01:00**

Harry landed in the back alley, next to Remus, behind the Granger Family Dental Surgery. It was a modern single-story building in the centre of their shopping district sandwiched between other shops. "Where are we putting the wardstone?"

Remus looked up, "In the centre of the roof. We just set it on the roof. That will centre the wards on the property. The only issue is how to get up to the roof this first time." He looked around until he found a huge rubbish bin, "We can climb on that."

They worked their way up and over to the centre of the roof.

Remus pulled the shrunken wardstone out of his pocket, unshrunk it, and positioned it to match the local ley lines. "Ok, here we go." They set up all the wards in the same configuration as the house.

They were back to Remus' cottage by two.

Harry was looking tired now, "Ok, I'm done."

Remus nodded, "Yes. Set your alarm for seven. We meet Clawhammer at nine."

Harry groaned and headed for his couch.

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Harry startled awake, "What?"

Remus was standing over him, "You slept through your alarm. You're only 10 minutes past the alarm so far."

"Ahh!" Harry covered his face with his hands and yawned, "Ok. I'm up." He got up and started building forward motion.

Harry was amazed they were ready on time. They apparated directly to the Diagon Alley apparition point. The walk to Gringotts was invigorating in the chill morning air, the street was quiet, the sun bright. And, of course, Harry noticed something he'd never noticed before; the sound of a jetliner departing Heathrow intruding into the 18th century wizarding world. He wondered if they noticed. Did they have any idea what that was? Did they care? Just some unexplained natural phenomenon? The human capacity for rationalisation and denial was truly frightening – assuming you didn't rationalise it all away. And deny that you were. Harry took a deep breath and looked around the street to pull his brain out of that rabbit hole.

They started up the steps of Gringotts. The bank was warm, familiar with the echo of shoes on marble, almost empty of customers. The last teller on the right was not looking up.

"Harry James Potter to see Clawhammer."

The Goblin looked up, surveyed both of them, several times, "Come this way." The Great Goblin Footrace was on again, winding through hallways, careening around corners. Harry tried to slow down a bit, just to test if the Goblin was trying to pull him or if Harry was pushing him. But it didn't seem to matter. They stopped at a random door and the Goblin knocked.

"Come!"

Harry and Remus rushed in and sat down trying to settle their breathing.

Harry looked a little frustrated, "That was a fast trip to your office."

Clawhammer laughed, sounding like a bag of rocks, "Ah, yes. The power games of the young and hungry."

Harry looked closely at Clawhammer, "And you don't play those games any more? You do seem more relaxed than most Goblins."

Remus gave a warning cough at Harry's forwardness.

Clawhammer sat back in his chair, "I'm getting old and I'm secure in my position. These games grow – tiring. Most of my 'power games' are just reflexes at this point. But I think, if you know our true history, then you can understand as we are a traumatised people. It – skews our viewpoint."

Harry grinned, "Traumatised? Yes, I sympathise. But it seems you still carved quite a nice niche for yourself with owning the wizarding economy."

Clawhammer was grinning too, "Yes, Ragnok has been brilliant." He sat forward and looked intently at Harry, "And I can't wait to see what you have in mind, Mr Potter."

Harry nodded, "First off, I want this guy –" He pointed at Remus, "to be my employee and pay him a good salary."

Remus growled, "Harry."

Harry smirked at him, "This is going to be a full-time job so don't think you won't earn it." He turned serious, "I need you, Moony. Thank God I ended up with the smartest and sanest Marauder."

Remus chuckled, "Ok, ok. I give."

Harry nodded to Clawhammer, "Make it his normal fee rate."

Remus jumped in, "Minus 20% for volume discount and preferred account status."

Harry frowned with a touch of humour, "You insist on fighting me on this?"

Remus grumbled and smiled, "Ah, steal all my fun."

Clawhammer marked in his notes, "Done."

Harry shook his head then pulled out his sheaf of papers and plopped them on the desk, shuffling through them. He sighed as his anger gathered,



"I noticed some – unusual numbers – in the Black accounts and businesses."

Clawhammer's grin became a leer, "Yes? How were they unusual?"

"There was income reported from one of the businesses but no deposits were made from that business into any Black accounts."

"Good catch, Mr Potter. That business is a partnership with the LeStrange family and all the profits from that business have been flowing exclusively to the LeStrange family. That flow of funds has been happening for decades. That means that either the LeStrange's have been stealing the Blacks blind or the Blacks have been participating in a money laundering scheme."

Harry was building a towering rage, "So this looks to be a much bigger problem than I thought."

"Yes, that is a small part of the flow of funds in the general direction of Voldemort."

Harry was now barely controlling his anger, "So, how do we go about waging economic war on Voldemort?"

Clawhammer looked positively fierce, "Do you want to be subtle about it, or go at it hammer and tongs?"

Harry took a deep breath, knowing the gravity of these next few steps, "I would like, ultimately, to stop *all* flow of funds in his direction, at least from the Black accounts. But – I would like to do it – subtly, so he does not realise it is me until it is too late. Maybe you can make it look like the LeStrange's got a bit greedy and were holding out on Voldemort?"

Clawhammer chuckled, "Excellent."

Harry tilted his head, thinking, "Actually, can you start some fights between some of the Death Eaters while you're at it?"

Clawhammer laughed, "What was I saying about power games?"

Harry was starting to get excited, "And, by the time you are done, I don't want the Black estate to be involved with any business with any Death Eater. And if you can destroy those businesses in the process, all the better, even if it means a loss for the Black accounts."

Clawhammer looked overjoyed, "Brilliant."

Harry looked at Clawhammer very intently, "And I give you a free hand to rape and pillage those bastards through the Black accounts."

Clawhammer burst out laughing, "It's been a long time since we have participated in raping and pillaging, Mr Potter. It's usually considered against the law now days."

Harry shrugged, "So call it 'mergers and acquisitions'. Just burn them down."

Clawhammer laughed and took a while to regain his normal business composure. "With pleasure, Mr Potter."

Harry drew a breath, then let it out under tension, "Are there any businesses anywhere in this portfolio that are – legally questionable, or rapacious and nasty that are not involved with Death Eaters?"

"One particular one stands out. It is a forced House Elf breeding factory."

Harry dropped his head in his hands and groaned, "Oh, God, no."

"It hasn't been performing well since it has had no real supervision in the last ten years. And that probably means that the managers are stealing from it."

Harry was burning with anger, "I want you to fire the workers, save the elves, and destroy that business. I don't want to sell it to anyone, I want it to stop operating and make sure no one can continue operating it."

Clawhammer nodded and marked something in a ledger, "What do you want to do with the - current crop of elves?"

Harry could only sit and breathe as he thought. "Any idea how big it is?"

Clawhammer shook his head.

Harry sat up, "Where is it?"

Clawhammer held out a paper with the name and address.

Harry took it, "Winky!"

Winky popped in next to Harry, "Yes, Master? What can Winky do?"

Harry handed her the paper, "I need you to go look at this business and tell me how many elves are there."

Winky looked at the paper and her eyes grew very large. She started to shake, "Master - what will you do with this?"

"I just found out that I own this business and I will not be involved with slavery. I want to destroy this business but I need you to figure out how to save all the elves that are there."

Winky looked very guilty and afraid, "Master - we - elves have been ... We have been hiding what happens there."

Harry looked at Winky closely, "Have you been saving the elves there?"

Winky nodded and swallowed hard, "We - try to save as many as possible."

"If I shut down the business, can you save all the elves that are there?"

Winky nodded with tears in her huge eyes.

Harry turned to Clawhammer, "Do it. Burn that business down." He turned back to Winky, "Go save them."

Winky popped away.

Harry hung his head and sighed.

Remus put his hand on Harry's shoulder, "That is very honourable of you Harry."

Clawhammer looked quite serious, "Yes, it is."

Harry looked up with a burning determination, "I don't want to whitewash the Black family history, but I *will* clean up it's future."

### **Hermione Granger, 10:00**

Hermione was up, dressed, had breakfast, and waiting impatiently for Mrs Teddington to arrive – with books! New textbooks for her to study. Might as well be Christmas! She got lost thinking about everything until the doorbell rang. She jumped up and ran past the clock. It said 10:00. She pulled open the door, "Good morning, Mrs Teddington." She practically pulled Mrs Teddington inside.

"Good morning, Miss Granger. I take it you are anxious to get started?"

"Yes. I'm so excited, I'm about to explode."

Mrs Teddington was enthralled by Hermione's excitement.

Of course, so was Hermione, "What books do you have for me?" They started moving toward the coffee table and sat down on the couch.

Mrs Teddington started pulling books out of her overly-large bag. "These are books that are overviews of their subjects, but they are aimed at rather advanced students so they go into a good bit of detail on their subjects." She pulled out at least 12 to 15 books.

Hermione looked almost disappointed, "Will you be back every month with a new set of books?"

Mrs Teddington was confused, "Every month? Why?"

"Because these books won't last me very long. I'll need a new set soon."

Mrs Teddington looked at Hermione for a moment, then relaxed, "Oh, no. With any luck you will be accepted by a university for this fall."

"What? But - why? I wasn't expecting to get into Uni until next year."

Mrs Teddington smiled, "The GCSE is not supposed to be a barrier to entry, it's meant to be an indication of how successful you will be in any given university. To show the university who they should snatch up *first*, who they will need to compete over with other schools. How hard and fast they will need to move to secure your attendance."

Hermione was shocked into silence.

Mrs Teddington continued, "Here is a list of subjects for you to study up on. Here are the textbooks to give you that information. Your official GCSE test is scheduled for five weeks from today. That's the earliest I could schedule it since we are so far outside the normal timing. If you apply yourself you can probably begin moving into your favourite Uni this October."

"But - isn't it too late? Won't their dorms be full already?"

Mrs Teddington laughed, "They will find room. For the best students, they will always make a way."

### **Harry Potter, 11:00**

Remus dialled his mobile, "I'll start at the practice first." The phone started ringing.

Click. "*Granger Family Dental Surgery, how may I help you?*"

"Hello, my name is Remus Lupin. I was hoping to be able to talk to one of the Doctor's Granger about their daughter's school? My ward went to the same school."

*"Oh – yes. Let me see who is available. So sad about what happened."*

"Yes, quite the shock for all of us."

*"Yes. – Emma is available, let me forward you to her office."*

"Thank you."

Another click, and more ringing. *"Hello, this is Emma?"*

"Hello, Doctor Granger, this is Remus Lupin. I'm calling for Harry Potter, Hermione's best friend from Cromwell Academy."

*"Oh! Yes. I'm so glad you called. Quite the shock, that."*

"Yes, who would have thought. We were interested in talking to you about your plans for Hermione now that Cromwell is defunct. Maybe we could arrange a time in the next few days to compare notes and ideas on some next steps? And Harry doesn't want to lose track of his best friends."

*"That sounds wonderful –"*

"That and Harry has some jewellery that Hermione's roommate found that Hermione missed at the end of term and he'd like to return them to her."

*"Oh – excellent. Let me check my schedule. – How about tomorrow afternoon? Say, at two? At our home? Do you know where that is?"*

"That would be very nice, thank you. Yes, we'll see you then."

*"Very nice to hear from you Mr Lupin. We'll see you tomorrow."*

Remus closed his mobile and turned to Harry, "All set up."

Harry let out his breath and started breathing again, "Oh, man." Harry covered his face with his hands and groaned, "I'm going to go crazy. I can hardly wait – but I can hardly handle it. I'm completely stuck."

Remus chuckled, "It'll be fine. You take one look at her and you will be back to normal."

Harry turned serious, "Or I'll break down sobbing all over her."

Remus shrugged, "We'll see."

"Make a complete fool of myself."

Remus smirked, "Complete? Or just partial?"

Harry pursed his lips, "You're mocking me."

Remus was smiling now, "Just helping with the 'complete' part."

Harry started laughing, "Yes, why not. Just get it over with. Might as well enjoy it."

"I'm sure you will. It's not every day you get to help someone rebuild their life."

Harry flashed anger and mumbled, "Damn wizards." He took a long breath and let it out, "I'm so glad I'm able to do this. Imagine if I hadn't finished my OWLS yet? I'd be stuck at school."

"Well - not really. As a member of a Noble House you could hire tutors at home. It wouldn't be any different than now."

Harry just growled, "I take it that option is not available to muggle-borns?"

Remus shook his head sadly.

Harry wiped his face with his hand to reset his brain, "Ok, what protections are we going to put on these bits of jewellery?"

"Well, I have quite the list." He pulled out a big piece of parchment. "We have anti-flame charms, automatic bubblehead charm, anti-blunt-force charm regardless of whether that is a cricket bat, a bludgeoning hex, an

explosive pressure-wave, or the effects of gravity. An anti-puncture charm for arrows, bullets, knives, or a piercing hex. A charm to keep her from falling faster than 3m/s. An injury-triggered portkey combined with a stupefy so if she's injured she will portkey to a nearby hospital, but will be stupefied so she won't remember how she got there. Health monitoring charms, tracking charms, and anti-owl-post charms."

Harry was confused, "Anti-owl-post charm? Why?"

Remus frowned, "So no one can send a bomb or a portkey through owl post."

"That is quite the list. How long will all that take?"

Remus shrugged with a sneaking smile, "I don't know. Depends on how fast you are."

"Me? Remus, you rascal. Ok, fine. What are the spells?"

Remus pulled out a giant Hermione-sized tome and thumped it on the table, "You'll need to find them. There all in here somewhere."

Harry growled, "Did you misunderstand when I asked for 'help' earlier?"

Remus smiled deviously, "I'll be helping. You see, this book has several different versions for each one of those spells we need. I will help you look through them and help you decide which version would work best given the magical saturation limits of the bit of jewellery we've got. You see, we won't be able to control which bits of jewellery Hermione will decide to wear each day, so each bit needs to carry all of the charms, in one version or another. Some versions of the charms will not all fit on one bit, so we need to pass out different spells to different bits. Should be a fun exercise."

Harry looked suspicious.

Remus continued, "Learning how to mix and match spell types and capabilities, particularly given narrow magical saturation limits, is very



important."

Harry sighed and wiped his face tiredly, "Ok, fine."

A few hours of working away gave them several lists of spells to put on each given bit of jewellery. Now it was just down to applying the spells. Straightforward, but time-consuming. And Harry was taking much-needed breaks.

Harry sat back on the couch, leaving his wand on the table, and letting out a huge breath, "All that magic is tiring."

Remus nodded, "Yes. But –" He pointedly pointed at Harry's wand, sitting on the table.

"Oh!" Harry sat up and put his wand back in his wand-holster on his arm. "Sorry. Forgot that again."

Remus nodded again, "Yes, it's easy to do. So maybe you need to remember that developing this habit of never setting your wand down anywhere could save Hermione's life?"

Harry's eyes went wide, "Yes."

"Or yours, which at this point is virtually the same thing, because if anything happens to you she becomes defenceless."

"Yes." Harry had to become more diligent in maintaining these habits. He tried to shift the conversation to get it off some of his larger difficulties, "So, I've been trying to come up with a story for me."

"Story?"

"What role do I play? What is my 'image', my – the part I'm playing. What am I to her? To her parents?"

Remus nodded slowly, "Yes. You can't be an orphan, or emancipated, because there would be no reason for me to be here. I think I need to be

'your man', keeping an eye on you while your parents are away on significant long-term business. Business that is worth a lot of money, that's why I'm here, and why you were going to such an exclusive boarding school. So, let's think. I think you need to be a very nice rich-kid. You have your own car, wear relatively nice clothes, but not over-the-top expensive. But now that Cromwell is done you will live with me. Your parents have a big place on the Continent somewhere." Remus paused, "I miss anything?"

Harry thought, "Ok. I'm Hermione's best friend from Cromwell -"

Remus smirked, "Not boyfriend?"

Harry glared at him, "No. That would not be fair. As much as that might simplify things - just - no. I couldn't do that to her."

"Ok. I think you need to keep things at Cromwell as close to Hogwarts as you can - with the translations from magic to muggle - so you can keep it all straight. Otherwise you will get yourself all confused. And she is smart enough to catch you."

"No kidding. In a heartbeat."

"Ok, we'll give them our mobile numbers. But, since Cromwell has shut down, we are looking to move to a new flat and it's all packed up in boxes. So Hermione can't come to our house yet. My cottage is just too magical, and so is Grimmauld Place. Other than that, I think we need to play it by ear when we figure out what they are planning. Right?"

Harry nodded, lost in intense thought, trying to imagine all this.

Remus sighed, "Harry, I think it will get easier as we establish ourselves in our roles. It will eventually turn into 'normal' for us."

"I'll just stay Harry Potter so I can stay sane. And, since I'm not famous in the muggle world, it shouldn't be a problem."

"Will you tell her about all your other friends at Hogwarts?"

Harry sighed heavily, "No. Well – I have to mention Parvati Patil, because I have her finding Hermione's jewellery, so I can 'return' it to her. But otherwise, no."

Remus looked at Harry, "So – what happened with Ron?"

Harry grew angry grinding his teeth, then huffed trying to let go of his frustration, "Ron – is still too selfish. Too immature to be part of this."

"He didn't want to help?"

"He got too jealous."

Remus looked closely at Harry, "You talked to him about this?"

"Argued is more accurate – during the Order meeting. I asked him to help in saving Hermione and he just gave up immediately. Thought there was nothing anyone could do to help her. Then he thought I was picking Hermione over him. The disloyalty in that just blew me up." Harry shook his head sadly. "I can't wait around for him to grow up."

Remus grimaced, "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry looked off into the distance, "Ron is the ultimate middle-child. He was squashed between all of his brothers and his baby sister, the darling of the family. Yes, she had to learn to defend herself against all those brothers, but she had all the attention, all the 'specialness', even more than the rest of her brothers. Ron was overshadowed by everyone – even though he can beat anyone into the ground with only one chess piece. On the other hand, Ron grew up with all these people around constantly – and took it all for granted. He has no idea what it means to be alone."

The implications of that statement for Harry made Remus' jaw clench. "Well, let's get some lunch before your driver's test at 2. Yes?"

The driver's test was stressing Harry out until Remus told him to look around at all the other drivers on the road. Every one of them passed the

test. And considering the calibre of most drivers on the roads, it should be simple for him. Harry had to admit that he probably couldn't be all that bad. So, with a huge breath and some quidditch reflexes, he dove into the test and passed with flying colours. Harry now had in his possession, the piece of paper that set him free on the roads. And wasn't that a scary thing. He found Remus waiting by the car and shook the paper at him, "Do you think they have any idea what they've just done?"

Remus chuckled, "I'm sure they'll find out soon enough. Along with your insurance company. And the bank."

Harry looked at the sky and groaned loudly, "Why is everyone in such a hurry to grow up?"

Remus smiled innocently, "Must be an inherited disease, or something." At Harry's confused look he elaborated, "It's like calling pregnancy a sexually transmitted disease."

Harry looked terminally confused, "What?"

Remus got in the car on the passenger side, "You're driving."

Harry chuckled and covered his face, "Oh, man." He shook his head, got in, and looked confused, "Ok. What's next?"

"Clothes shopping."

"Gah!"

Remus shook his head, "We need to get you something reasonable before you go see Hermione tomorrow."

Harry's eyes grew, "Oh. Yes. I don't want to look like a - a ragamuffin, do I?"

"It's part of the role you play. Gotta look the part."

Harry sighed like he was about to die, "Ok. Let's get it over with." They headed off to get some basic clothes, and come to find out, Harry actually enjoyed the process. Mainly because he'd never really done it before, he'd just listened to Dudley and Ron gripe about it. But he came to appreciate it, particularly with the results he saw at the end of it all. He looked amazing. Like someone else. Some imposter. He decided he would not complain for the second part of the process, where he got a much more complete wardrobe. That was next time; he didn't want to strain any shopping muscles too soon.

They were late getting home. Thanks to Dobby they didn't starve before dinner at almost 8pm.

It was after ten at night and Harry was having a hard time staying awake as he sat on the couch, when Winky popped into the cottage, standing in front of Harry. "Winky! What's happening? Were you able to save the elves?"

She looked distraught, tears in her eyes, "We saved - more than half."

Harry's insides melted, "Not all of them?"

She spoke haltingly, tears came streaming down, "Some - had been there a long time - and when their duty to - save as many as possible was done, they - decided not to - continue."

Harry's jaw dropped, "Not to - continue?" He swallowed with difficulty as his voice broke, "How many did you save?"

She whispered, "Only about twenty."

He choked back a sob, "I'm sorry, Winky." He couldn't fight the tears as they rushed out. "I wish I'd known of this earlier."

Winky patted Harry's shoulder, "The elves are grateful to Harry Potter for saving as many, and for stopping this."

Harry moved to hug Winky, his voice a broken whisper, "I don't want to be a wizard any more, Winky."

Winky pushed back and looked in his eyes, "You must. You must save Miss Granger. And others. It's what you do. It's why you are the Great Harry Potter, as Dobby says."

"I don't feel great."

Winky held his face in her hands, "It's not what you feel, it's who you are. You must be you."

Harry's face was contorted in confusion, "I don't know who that is."

"Are you Dumbledore?"

Harry's eyebrows ticked together, "No."

"Then stop trying to be. Give up trying to be someone else and be Harry Potter."

Harry looked plaintive, "But I don't know who that is."

"You don't have to. Just be." Winky stepped back and popped away.

It was the first time in many years that Harry Potter cried himself to sleep.

## 5. Harry's Reintroduction

CHAPTER SIZE: 14072

### Chapter 5

#### Harry's Reintroduction

#### Harry Potter

Wednesday, 24 July, 1996, 09:00

Harry got in the car next to Remus. His hands were shaking, his stomach was a mess. Strangely adding to his stress was his new clothes. He wasn't used to wearing things that fit. He felt – overdressed. But Remus insisted so he just had to swallow it for the duration. It was going to be a long drive to Hermione's house, in distance and emotions.

Remus started the car, "You're a Gryffindor, Harry."

"Was. Not any more. I certainly don't feel like one now."

"You will. You'll rise to the challenge and be fine."

Harry glumly sighed, "It's worse than a first date or something."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

Harry complained to the world, "But I have to do this."

"Just keep thinking about defending her. Those reasons will help drive you along, because this is not just something you want, this is something she *needs*. You are trying to save her."

"Right. I'm trying to save her. Got it. My saving-people-thing in action. Let it run wild." His face started to crumple, "But – what if I fall apart?"

"You can always explain it away as shock over your school closing so badly. That your life changed so abruptly."

Harry really started whinging, "She won't know me. She'll look at me like some weird stranger."

"No, she won't. I've already planted the idea that you are her best friend. Remember the magical suggestibility? She may get a little spaced-out looking as she absorbs your hints, but that is a good sign because that means she is listening to you."

"Ohhh, this is going to be so hard."

"Just you wait. You'll take one look at her and you'll be fine. Because it's Hermione! You know her, and – she loves you, Harry."

Harry was incredulous, "What?"

"Harry, I've seen how she looks at you. She loves you. Don't talk yourself out of this. I think she is the best you will ever find. Don't let her get away."

Harry could barely speak, "You think so?"

"Definitely."

"But she can easily find someone better."

"I don't think so, Harry. No one else knows her like you do. And I think you're pretty special."

Harry had no idea what to do with that concept. Hermione could love him? Why? Intellectually, he could understand that it might be possible, but – no one *loved* him. Why would they? He supposed that maybe his parents did. But they were supposed to – weren't they? But in the end, it didn't make any difference, Harry needed to protect her. She had done so much for him, he could do no less for her. He stuffed the idea into his back pocket to be looked at – some other time.

The drive was lulling. As they got closer the seriousness rose up. Harry's determination solidified. He imagined her being attacked and – his focus



drew in. He could not let her be hurt. After all that she had done for him. Even if she didn't remember any of it.

Remus turned off the road into Hermione's house.

Harry stomach dropped. This was it. He took a deep breath and held it.

Remus turned off the car and started to get out.

Harry let out his breath and started moving. The movements took on their own strength. The movements pushed him. Like a down-hill slide. They just kept going.

Remus leaned forward and rang the bell – then quietly stepped back – leaving Harry in front. Harry didn't notice.

The door opened – and Hermione stood there.

Time stopped.

"Harry!"

Her smile ripped away Harry's insecurity, "Hermione!" They crashed into each other. Harry was quietly laughing and sobbing at the same time. "Hermione, I'm so glad to see you again." Hermione-hugs were back in his life.

Hermione pulled back and looked at him, soaking him in, "Harry, how have you been? Come in and tell me." She pulled him in as Emma came up behind her.

Emma held out her hand, "Harry, it's good to see you."

Harry was holding back tears, "Hello, Mrs Granger. It's good to see you again. And this is Remus Lupin – he keeps track of me while my parents are away."

Remus stepped up and took Emma's hand, "Good afternoon, Dr Granger."

Remus and Emma dropped away from Harry's attention as he turned back to Hermione. She looked gorgeous, and his heart jumped to see her again.

She reached out and pulled him further into the room, to sit on the couch, "Harry come tell me how you have been?"

Harry started on his surreptitious re-telling of their last few years of time together. Their adventures at school, the background information about 'Cromwell weekends' when they got to wander the local town, their exploring the area of deep forest next to the castle, and the beautiful lake nearby. Hermione looked a bit glazed, dazed, and slightly confused as she listened – and absorbed – all the history that she didn't know.

Harry noticed Remus doing the same for Emma. Telling her about Harry's 'parents' being architects and living in Singapore while managing the building of a set of giant skyscrapers for the last several years.

Harry ran out of stories, "So – how have you been?"

Hermione's smile faded a bit, "I've been shocked, of course. It's like –" Her eyes wandered into the distance, "– like – I'm missing something. It's such a deep shock." Her voice faded out and her face looked pained. Then her smile came back brilliant, "But I've been studying! We hired a tutor, Mrs Teddington, and she gave me a lot of textbooks and she gave me an old GCSE test to practice on. It was so exciting!" Her voice became conspiratorial, "She even said that I may be able to get in Uni this fall! I can't believe it! I will take the real GCSE test in about five weeks and if I get good enough scores she says I can move into Uni this fall term!"

Harry was shocked – but he shouldn't be because this was Hermione, after all. But this certainly moved up their plans. "That's awesome! Do you know where you'll go?"

"No, it all depends on what scores I can get on the real test. She keeps saying that I might be able to go to any university I want – I can't believe that, but I suppose I need to prepare for the possibility. I think – maybe –" Her eyebrows rose in over-the-top hope, "Cambridge?"

"Can you introduce me to her? Maybe I can do that too? I could even help split the costs."

She grabbed his arm playfully with both hands and shook it, "Yes! Harry we'll study together. She can give you that test too. Here, look at these books." She started pulling books out of piles on the low table in front of the couch and shoving them at him, "These are all advanced overviews of subject areas that I need to study. They are so fascinating." She was glancing through some of the pages.

Harry's stomach flopped again. He was not likely to be able to keep up with her. But he had to try.

She pulled a few books from the pile, "Here. I've read these already. You can start reading these. I'll give you the rest when I finish with them."

Harry was skimming the introduction of one book, "Hermione, this says it's an introductory text for Masters Degree students."

She stopped, "Really? Well, no wonder they're so exciting."

"Won't you want to read them again?"

"Oh, I already have. At least twice. I'm on to this other set now." She leaned back, dreaming into the distance, "I can't wait to move into Uni. I will just melt with all the books in the giant library. And the Professors to ask questions of. And -" Her smile became sneaky, "- all the boyfriends. There must be hundreds. Thousands. I'll collect them all." Her eyes were distant, playful. She looked back at Harry and laughed. "Who knows! Life is so huge right now! Cromwell collapsing seems like it was a good thing for me."

Harry was nodding with a smile, and a rock in his stomach. Hermione talking flippantly about collecting boyfriends was quite out of character. What had that damn oblivator done to her? He remembered the jewellery. "Oh, I almost forgot." He started digging in his pockets.

Hermione came back to earth and watched as he pulled out a few small boxes.

"Here, your roommate, Parvati Patil, found these in your dorm after you had packed up. She said you left these behind." He started opening the boxes to show her the jewellery he and Remus had charmed, warded, and thoroughly stuffed full of magic to protect her.

Hermione gushed over them, "Oh, I'm so glad she found these. I've missed them and didn't even realise they were gone." She hugged him again, "Thank you, Harry." She started putting some on immediately.

Harry smiled as the mild compulsion charm tuned to her magical signature caused her to put them on. Maybe he should have put some anti-boyfriend charms on them too. He shook his head, this wasn't about boyfriends, this was about keeping her alive and safe. So she has the chance to read all those books and change the world. This was about him doing *his* duty, not him manipulating her life.

Harry startled as a hand rested on his shoulder.

Remus spoke quietly, "We should go, Harry. It's almost 4."

Harry shook his head, "Four? Already? How'd that happen?"

Hermione held his arm again, "Oh, please come back tomorrow. We can start studying in earnest. Can you?"

Harry smiled like he'd come home, "Yes, definitely. How about 10?"

Hermione started pushing books toward him, "Yes, wonderful. Here, take these books with you. We can discuss them in the morning. Right? Then we can start on this set." She put her hand on the next stack of books.

Harry was fumbling with a set of three and trying to stand up while nodding along. It felt like it was taxing his limited brainpower.

Hermione was not one to slow down, "Mum, Harry needs to come over tomorrow and help me study. We'll be starting on that stack of books at first. Then that next set. Alright?"

Emma was trying to keep up with the whirlwind that was Hermione, "That sounds good. I have patients in the morning, but I'll be back after lunch."

Harry stood up, "Thank you Mrs Granger, I think this will really help."

Hermione stood up and almost fell over with a grimace, "Ouch!"

Harry grabbed for her hands to steady her, "What's wrong?"

She sighed, "That Lacrosse injury I got at the end of term still catches me. Where the stick hit me clear across my body?" She motioned from shoulder to opposite hip, "It still bothers me. I run out of energy too easily." She straightened up and reached for Harry and pulled him into a hug, "Harry, I'm so glad you came. This will make studying this summer so much better."

"Me too."

Remus clapped Harry on the shoulder, "Thank you, Emma. I'll talk to you tomorrow afternoon about sharing Mrs Teddington's expense."

"Wonderful, thank you Remus."

One last quick hug from Hermione before Remus and Harry went out the door.

Emma sighed with a growing smile, "Hermione, you failed to mention quite how good looking Harry is."

Hermione sighed too, "I'd forgotten myself. But I intend not to forget again."

Harry slumped into the seat in the car, "Ohhh, that was nice. It's so good to see her again."

"Yes, I think you are off to a great start." Remus started the car.

"What did you talk to Emma about?"

"Just like you, I was trying to subtly give her background on what the oblivator took away. I think it worked perfectly. And she's excited about sharing the costs of the tutor for you. She is of the opinion that Hermione will likely get into any Uni she wants this fall. Mrs Teddington told her that was very likely, given the results of her practice test." He pulled out onto the main road.

"Oh, man. I'm not likely to be able to keep up with her."

"That's fine, Harry. That would give you more flexibility in following Hermione around and protecting her without you having to go to class."

"Oh! Yes, I guess so. I was stuck on the idea of taking classes at the same time. But it would be easier not to."

Remus smiled, "Hermione looks excited enough to explode."

Harry chuckled, "Yes." He turned quiet and got lost in thought.

"What are you thinking, Harry?"

Harry sighed, "That damn oblivator did something to her."

Remus focussed on that, "Yes? What makes you say that?"

"She is much more open and relentlessly positive now. She started joking about all the boyfriends she could collect at Uni. That is very out of character for her."

Remus nodded slowly, "Well, having half your life's memories ripped away, and the magic causing you to be more suggestible than normal could cause some significant personality changes in anyone. Not to mention if the oblivator took pity on her and decided to 'fix' a few traits that he thought needed fixing."

Harry was quiet and tense.

"What's wrong?"

"She won't need me any more. She's so gorgeous, and now so lively and outgoing rather than shy, she'll have guys following her around like hunting dogs."

Remus smiled behind his hand trying to hide it, "Yes, maybe. But remember the magical suggestibility could wear off in a month or two. Hopefully, by the time you get to Uni, it will have worn off and she will be more normal again."

"I guess it doesn't matter. I'm there to protect her no matter what."

Remus nodded trying to control his smirk, "Harry, remember you have a huge advantage over everyone else. You know her better than anyone."

Harry nodded slowly, "Did you notice that she got tired at the end? It sounds like the oblivator gave her a story to explain her damaged health from Dolohov's spell. She told me it was an accident of getting hit with a Lacrosse stick across her body that she hasn't fully recovered from. I wonder if they put some kind of spell on the scar to make it less visible."

Remus got lost in thought, "Hmm. I'm thinking - if we can surreptitiously do some healing magic on her every few days to help clear up that spell damage."

"Not potions. Those are too foul tasting to be 'surreptitious'."

"No, it would have to be some sort of healing spell. You'd have to learn to cast it silently, and hopefully she wouldn't feel it. I'll give it some thought."

"Thanks, Remus."

Remus looked at Harry with a smile, "Well, the plan is launched. That means we need to now start your training too. I need to teach you all the

'personal security business' that I know how to do. We start that tomorrow morning." His smile kept getting larger.

Harry kept getting more nervous, "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Remus didn't say anything.

"Remus?"

Remus' smile just kept getting larger.

**Thursday, 25 July, 1996, 08:00**

"Oh, God! Remus, you're killing me!"

"Again, Harry. Don't lose your focus."

In his tiredness, Harry tripped and fell with a thud on the mat covering the floor of Remus' basement. He lay still, breathing like a dragon, "Remus – why – are we – doing this – again?"

Remus smiled indulgently and spoke mechanically, "Magical power is dependent upon your physical health, your endurance, and your ability to process oxygen. It's all wrapped up together. You need to get healthy. Quidditch practice is nice, but way too limited in terms of physical movement. And, to have any advantage over strong magical people, you need to be good at something they are not; physical combat, movement, which includes dodging, a whole range of abilities."

Harry was still breathing too hard to stand up. At least he was sitting up now.

Remus glanced at his watch and nodded, "Ok. Done for the morning. We will do this every morning until Hermione goes to Uni. Then you need to continue doing this from now on. No excuses! This is what will allow you to defend her. Along with all the strategy, tactics, and spell-work we will also be doing."



Harry nodded slowly and started to move to his knees. He shook his head at Remus, "Up at six, do this until 8, then off to Hermione's to study, then learning magic at night –" He slumped back on the floor, "This is going to kill me."

Remus smiled, "In the first few days – maybe. But after that, you will get so much better, so much faster."

Harry nodded out of habit more than agreement, "Ok."

"Ok, shower and breakfast. Alright?"

Harry stood up and started the slow climb out of Remus' very expanded basement under his small cottage in the woods. He couldn't wait until this painful first part of the training was over. Not only did it hurt, but he hadn't yet increased his skill at defending. Not that he was horrible at defending before, but now everything hurt when he moved, so he was effectively at an even lower skill level. But the real sobering issue was he was beginning to learn about all that he *didn't* know. That was scary.

Dobby had a huge breakfast done by the time Harry was out of the shower. Harry was slightly embarrassed to feel like he was competing with Ron for the 'biggest meal' award. But he couldn't help it.

They were on the road to Hermione's house with time to spare. Harry was driving Remus' car, for good practice, with his temporary drivers licence.

"When I took the drivers test we used the cottage as my post address? So my official licence will show up there?"

"Yes. I can set up some magic on the post box to forward the post to whatever flat we rent near which-ever university Hermione gets into."

Harry frowned, "This could get very complex."

"Yes, living in both worlds significantly increases the complexity. But like anything else, you get used to it."

"You've been doing it for – ten years?"

Remus nodded, "My life is in the magical world but most of my employment comes from the muggle. But now, we will be leaving most of magical life behind and going almost exclusively muggle. Except for our defensive activities. Those are much more effective as magical."

Harry's brain was stuck on a question, "But if we only defend with magic, aren't we playing on their turf? Playing to their strengths? Can't we add some muggle defences, ones that they won't understand?"

Remus looked at Harry and smiled, "Yes, we can. I've been using the advantages of magic in my muggle world personal defence contracts, so I guess we should use the advantages of science in our magical fight." Then he frowned, "But, that also means Hermione might be able to see our defensive efforts much easier."

Harry nodded slowly as he thought, "Yes, I suppose. If she's paying attention. But the magicals won't have a clue."

Remus got a marauder grin, "I guess I have some work to do. Research the newest technological security techniques." His smile grew, "I know some people I can call and get some answers." He then turned back to Harry in some alarm, "But talk about adding complexity. This will explode that problem."

Harry smiled back, "Consider it an education? I'm just hoping for every advantage over the Death Eaters I can get."

Remus huffed, "I suppose. Time to up my educational standards."

Harry turned onto the small lane that lead to Hermione's house. The trees covered the lane from both sides like a tunnel. It was beautiful. The sun was playing dodge with the clouds and created a constantly moving, changing texture on the road and Harry slowed down as he drove through it. He turned into the drive and stopped the car. He was so excited to be here with Hermione. He felt – free. He was looking forward to the future.

He pulled out his backpack, with all the books Hermione pushed at him yesterday, from the back seat of the car and followed Remus to the front door. Remus rang the bell.

The door burst open, "Harry!"

"Hermione." Harry was crushed by a Hermione-hug again, and he couldn't be happier.

She pulled him into the house, leaving the door open for Remus, who was completely forgotten.

Emma came out of the kitchen, "Good morning, Harry, Remus."

Remus closed the door, "Good morning, Emma. I talked it over with Harry's parents and they are quite happy to share – if not more – of the costs of Mrs Teddington with you."

Emma looked confused, "More?"

"In case Mrs Teddington's fee goes up more than twice for any reason. Your current costs shouldn't have to go up due to Harry's involvement. In fact, they *should* go down."

Emma smiled appreciatively, "Well, thank you. That is very appreciated. She should be here soon. Tea?"

Remus nodded and smiled, "Yes, thank you." They moved to the kitchen.

Harry sat on the couch trying to keep up with the whirlwind known as Hermione.

"I'm now done with these books, so you can start on them next. Have you finished the other set? I have some more reference books upstairs that I wanted to ask Mrs Teddington about when she gets here. Do you have any you are studying too?"

Harry was nodding and mumbling as he could hardly slip the worlds in edgewise. Hermione paused and seemed to be waiting for an answer. But which question? "Ah, yes, I'm -"

The doorbell rang and Hermione popped up and moved to open it, "Mrs Teddington! Welcome."

Mrs Teddington, with a similar set of dress, hat, and shoes as before, almost like a uniform, came in the door, "Miss Granger, thank you." She saw Harry sitting on the couch, "Ah, you must be Mr Potter. Mr Lupin called and warned me of your involvement." She gave him a critical eye, that turned into a mischievous smile.

Harry stood up and extended his hand, "Mrs Teddington, I've heard so much about you." He glanced at Hermione with a sneaking smile.

Mrs Teddington smiled and glanced at Hermione too, "I imagine you have."

Hermione had already moved on to sorting through the books on the table.

Mrs Teddington turned to Harry, "Well, Mr Potter, I have a practice GCSE test for you." She started pulling papers out of her large bag.

Harry's face paled with fear. In no way would he be able to keep up with Hermione without some significant study and he did not want to be exposed as some sort of fraud. That could ruin all his plans before they even start. "Um, Mrs Teddington, I'd like to ..." He turned to Hermione, "Hermione do you still have those GCSE test prep books?"

She looked up from sorting the books, "Yes, let me get them for you." She got up and went up to her room.

Harry sighed and turned, "Mrs Teddington, I am fully aware of how brilliant Hermione is and - I will not likely be able to keep up with her without some significant preparation. Could we wait a few weeks before I try that test?"

Mrs Teddington smiled, "Yes. A few weeks." She looked up the stairs, "She is a very rare find." She turned back more seriously, "What is she to you?"

Harry swallowed hard, "Everything." He chuckled at her dour look, "Consider me the family puppy – I just follow her around." The joke seemed to fall flat, along with his smile. He found himself feeling defensive, "We have been best friends at Cromwell for the last five years."

She looked at him, considering, then nodded.

Hermione came downstairs with the test prep books, "Here they are. Are you going to take the test today?"

Harry took the books, "In a week or so – when I go through these a bit." Seeing her concern he continued, "I'm not quite as brilliant as you, Hermione."

"You can be, Harry. I know you can."

He smiled a little nervously, "I'll certainly give it a go." He felt like a fraud.

Mrs Teddington nodded resolutely, "Right! You had questions, Miss Granger?"

Hermione's brilliant smile lit the room.

### **Friday, 26 July, 1996, 08:00**

"... 28 ... 29 ..." Harry stopped his pushups gasping, holding his position at the top, before dropping for his last, "Uhhh, ... 30!" He collapsed on the floor gasping in the smell of the mat. He rolled over on his back, his arms flopping on the floor like over-done noodles. These morning physical workouts and martial arts training were killing him, but he was desperate to succeed.

Remus walked by and sat in the chair near Harry's weights, "Not bad for only working out for less than a week. Give it a few more weeks and you'll

be good for twice – three times as much with less stress."

Harry was still gasping and could only shake his head by rolling it back and forth on the floor. Not enough breath built up for words.

Remus stood up, "Alright, hit the shower and we'll be ready to go."

Harry tried to fit a few words between his struggle to breath, "Yeah ... shower ..." He started moving toward the stairs – at first on his hands and knees, then he made it to standing at the stairs railing, then a stumbling climb up. Thank God the shower was magical and had an unlimited supply of hot water. All he had to do was keep from inhaling it all as he stood under the water still gasping. Another 20 minutes and he was out and getting dressed. He had to admit – if very quietly – that he was starting to feel a lot better about his health. If pressed, he might even admit that Quidditch practice was nothing compared to this. It made him feel accomplished. Harry walked into the main room to his couch and grabbed his book bag.

"Ready?"

"Yes. Thank God for Hermione's study sessions. She has saved me, yet again, from all this ridiculously healthy exercise."

Remus chuckled, "I'll be sure and tell her. You're driving." He threw him the keys.

Harry caught them by surprise, "Me? I'm tired!" Now Harry developed a grin and started some very practiced whinging, "My arms are tired from all those pushups – I don't think I can drive."

Remus looked seriously at him, "You need to learn to press through it. Because someday you may need to, and you need to know that you can."

Harry's eyebrows rose as he took a long breath, "Ok, good point." The trip to Hermione's house was quickly becoming a normal commute for him. The drive gave him a chance to think while his hands and part of his brain

were occupied. Something that he'd come to appreciate. It flowed by like a river.

Remus broke into his thoughts, "I think tomorrow would be the best day to try to buy a car for you. That and more clothes shopping if we can do it."

Harry looked at Remus with a growing smile and some underlying tension, "What's the budget for that?"

Remus shook his head with a smirk, "That's what you get to figure out. It's your money."

Harry looked disappointed, "But how am I going to decide?" He frowned as he thought, "I mean - it's not difficult to make decisions about buying clothes because I don't really care that much. They're just not that consequential, but - I've never had to make a decision on anything so large."

Remus winced, "Ok, I strongly suggest no convertibles, no motorcycles, nothing brand new, nothing exotic, nothing to draw too much attention. Just a car. It gets you from here to there, reliably. Right?"

Harry nodded, and looked relieved, "Right." Luckily, that was a problem for tomorrow. Today, his next foot landed in front of the other. One step at a time.

Harry pulled into the Grangers drive and stopped the car. As he got out Remus came around to the other side of the car.

"Harry, I need to run some errands today, so I will be back by 4pm to pick you up. Alright?"

Harry looked surprised, "Oh. Ok." He handed Remus the keys.

"Call me if you need anything."

Harry nodded as Remus backed out of the drive and disappeared – in a very normal way. He moved to the front door and rang the bell.

"Harry!" Hermione was calling his name before she got the door fully open. They shared a quick hug as Hermione pulled him inside. "How far did you get through the books yesterday?"

Hermione's excitement was infectious, which helped settle his nerves over his slow progress last night, "I almost got through my first reading last night. Just a bit more to finish it."

She looked surprised and a bit worried, "Your first reading?"

Harry chuckled a bit, "Well – my study style is a bit different than yours. You read through 3 times fast, where I read slowly through once and take notes."

She relaxed, "Oh, yes. That's right, I'd forgotten."

And again Harry's Fraud-Meter was hitting the pegs hard as he lied yet again. He kicked himself and swore he would work harder to keep up with her more. "Are you on to the third set of books now?"

"Yes, my second reading."

Harry made a choking noise.

"What? They're so interesting!"

"They must be –"

"And there are so many more to go –"

Harry coughed into his hand – subtly.

Hermione sighed apologetically, "I know, I go so fast. I can't help it."



Harry held her hand and spoke reassuringly, "And I wouldn't have it any other way. Just – give me a chance to catch up, yeah?"

She chuckled, "Yes. I will." She pulled him toward the couch, "Come on, I've only got a few chapters left on the last book in this set and I want to get it done before lunch."

He laughed, "Oh, yes! Fix the world before lunch! Then we can do it again tomorrow."

She giggled as she sat down and pulled him next to her, "Oh, you monster. You love this and you know it." She grabbed her book and opened it.

Harry smiled at her fondly – particularly since she was right, he was starting to really enjoy this. Though, maybe because of who he was working with more than the actual process. Silence settled gently on their joint study session as they started reading.

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"Harry?"

"Huh?" Harry took a deep breath as he woke up. Hermione was standing over him with her hand on his shoulder and looking deeply into his eyes.

"You fell asleep."

He rubbed his eyes, "Oh. Sorry." He noticed her very concerned look, "Ah – Remus started me on a new exercise program in the last few days and he's killing me. He thinks it soooo funny."

Hermione rolled her eyes, "He does seem like the type to get too much enjoyment out of something like that."

"Yes. A real rascal, that one."

She sat down and picked up her book, "I'm almost done and it's still before lunch, so I have a few minutes left." She dove in for the home stretch.

Harry breathed for a moment or three, then got up to try to wake up more. He wandered into the kitchen and remembered making scones – was it only a week ago now? He smiled at the memory and started in. He had his scones in the oven and was starting on making sandwiches when the scones really started to smell good.

"Harry! What's that smell?" Her voice came in from the living room.

Harry smiled deviously, "Smell? You smell something?"

She came into the kitchen and stopped with her eyes wide, "What are you doing?"

"Trying to wake up. But this is usually called 'cooking'. Would you like to help?" He smiled challengingly.

She stood and stared at him in total amazement, "You know how to cook?"

"I dunno. You'll have to tell me." He held out the plate of sandwiches to her.

She took the plate absently, staring at him. After a moment she blinked and focussed, "What's that smell?"

Harry popped open the oven to check, "Scones. They are almost ready." He picked up the bowl of sweet drizzle from the table, ready to do the drizzle on them. "Want me to show you how?"

She gasped, "Yes!"

Harry nodded as he pulled the scones out of the oven, "Ok, you get to do the drizzle. Give this just a minute to cool a bit."

"How did you learn to cook?"

He shrugged and turned toward the scones trying to hide his Fraud-Meter, "My Mum and Dad showed me a few summers ago. They said it would be a good skill to have, particularly if they were busy or – out of the country. –

That and because I was always hungry when I was growing up." It was the truth, he was always hungry when he grew up, but for very different reasons. He buried his face in checking the scones to hide his embarrassment.

"I've always wanted to know how to cook but - I just never could round up the skill for it." She smiled sheepishly and spoke quietly, "Being able to burn water seemed more my skill."

He turned with a big smile, "Well, I can help with that. Maybe we can start a cooking class?"

Her eyes lit up until a nervous smile took over, "I - ah, don't want to strain your teaching skills. Dad has tried to teach me - several times. And it didn't go so well."

Harry smiled at Hermione's admission, "I think we can figure it out. Here -" He handed her the bowl of sweet drizzle, "Just drip this stuff across each of these scones like this." He picked up the spoon from the bowl and moved it across a scone in a Z pattern a few times. He handed the spoon to her, "Give it a try."

She took the spoon and filled it with drizzle, holding it over the target scone. Hesitation stalled her motion.

"Just drip it across a few times."

More hesitation, "But it might not be even."

Harry smiled as her perfectionism peeked out, "I guarantee it won't be perfect. It's not *supposed* to be perfect. If you wanted perfect you'd use a knife and spread it across. But it's supposed to be random. Part of the surprise." He smiled at her insecurity and spoke gently, "Hermione, there is no wrong answer for this one."

She huffed and rolled her eyes at him, "Yes, but -" She huffed again and started drizzling. It came out clumped more on one side.

Harry pointed at the heavy side, "Oooh. That side's *perfect!*"

She huffed in a chuckling nervous way, "Yes, I can see that."

He smiled, "Just wait until you taste it."

"Ok." She put the bowl down and picked up the scone Harry drizzled, "I'll try this one." She took a bite, "Mmmf! Gees r gud!"

Harry broke out laughing – again. He couldn't tell her that was the exact same thing she said the last time he made scones – back when she still had her memories. He tried to keep laughing so he didn't break down crying. Damned wizards.

"MmhhmmHhhmmff!" Hermione was trying to keep scone bits from escaping around her smile.

Harry could barely control himself as the humour and the irony clashed fiercely. All he could do was laugh – trying to cover his anguish.

She again started throwing scone-bits his way.

This only made it harder for Harry. He had to push himself to keep laughing, then started feigning his need to use the loo, where he could break down quietly and regain his composure in safety. It took him a few minutes.

When he came back they took the sandwiches and scones back to their reading spot on the couch and started back in with fresh determination.

Until the phone rang. Hermione jumped up to answer it.

Harry was back in his reading trying desperately to catch up. Until Hermione sat down.

"Well, it looks like Mum and Dad had a few emergencies to handle in the afternoon so they will be a bit late. They might be home by 5pm."

Harry's smile grew. He looked at his watch. It was 3pm. Remus was due sometime after 4pm. "Ok. How about we make dinner for them?"

Hermione blinked in confusion a few times, then started to smile, "You'll show me?"

"Sure. That will be fun. Let's do it." He got up and headed for the kitchen.

Hermione sat still, confused, "Now?"

Harry's voice came back from the kitchen, "Sure, it will take almost that long."

She got up and followed him into the kitchen. She watched him pulling pots, pans, utensils, mixing, and serving bowls out of the cupboards. Then he started pulling boxes and jars of food from the cabinets. "You might want some paper and a pen to take down the recipe."

"Oh, yes!" She ran to her parent's home office and got a pen and paper. "Ok, how do I start?"

Harry started pointing at the ingredients as Hermione wrote them down. He then started on the procedures, showing her and telling her; the mixing of ingredients and the cooking. She was racing to keep up and keep things straight. As he was making the food, he was talking her through some of the steps, he was also pulling out the dishes and utensils and setting the table. And finally explaining which food went in which serving dish.

Harry stood back and looked around, "And - that's it!"

Hermione looked in awe, "That's it?"

"Yup. Just serve in these serving dishes and eat."

Hermione blinked at him as the doorbell rang. She was caught in her amazement.

Harry went and let Remus in the door, "Hi Remus!"

"Harry, how was – oooh, something smells good."

Harry led him into the kitchen, "Yes, Hermione and I made dinner. Her parents are going to be a bit late so we stepped in to help."

Hermione turned with a glazed look, "*Harry* stepped in. I just watched."

"And she wrote out the recipe. You'll have it down in no time."

She laughed, her eyes rather overwhelmed, "No, I don't think so."

Harry was smiling like a loon, "Sure you will." He looked to Remus, "Shall we? Everything here is all set."

Remus nodded.

Harry moved to give her a one-armed hug, still sitting in her chair, "I'll see you tomorrow – Oh, no – I guess I won't see you tomorrow. We have to run some large errands tomorrow. I'll see you Monday, then?"

She took a moment to catch up, "Ah – yes. That would be great."

"Ok, tell your parents hello for me." They moved toward the door.

Hermione stood up and looked at the food in awe – and took a few nibbles – and turned to watch in pure amazement as Harry and Remus walked out the front door.

Harry waved with a big smile as he closed the door behind himself.

Remus had a Marauder grin as he got in the car, "So – you're worming your way into her parents hearts, now?" They started down the lane.

Harry chuckled, "I guess – well, no, actually I'm just repeating what I did a week or so ago. But they don't remember it." He started to growl at those damn wizards.

Remus was still smiling, "That smelled *really* good. You're going to win them over in no time."

Harry waved through the front window at a car driving the other direction, "There go the Grangers."

Remus shook his head and chuckled, "Your parents certainly never had a courting anything like this. Your Dad was pants in the kitchen. The house elves kept him alive."

Harry looked at Remus with a painful hunger, "Did Mum know how to cook?"

"Yes, but she was usually too busy with – everything you can imagine, so the house elves were kept busy. – Until they went into hiding. Then they lived a pretty quiet life."

Harry's chest hurt. He looked out the window and mumbled, "A quiet life." He didn't see the beautiful trees, or the warm setting sun.

Remus evidently noticed Harry's quiet, "What's that?"

Harry rubbed his face and sighed deeply. It took him a few moments to speak, his voice a quiet monotone, "I feel like my life has been lived at the end of a whip. A crack at every jarring turn – and death, mostly. First being born magical into a nice family – Crack! My parents are dead and I'm being thrust onto my muggle relatives to become their house elf. Crack! Then thrown back into the magical world to be their famous little chew-toy in first year. Crack! Professor Quirrell, dead. Back to summer in the non-magical. Back and forth every year – Crack, crack! Cedric and Sirius; dead. Crack! Hermione banished and thrown out of the magical world by a growing war. All because of the evil of a few wizards who thought it was their right to decide the fate of others." He laughed darkly, "A quiet life sounds nice."

Remus looked hollow. Pain stained his face as he glanced at Harry.

Harry turned to Remus, cold anger burning in his eyes, "I will give them no quarter. No mercy. I consider this self-defence. I will not pursue them, but if they come at me or mine, they will get all that I've got."

Remus nodded silently.

The sound of the car and a bit of rain took up the conversation as they made their way through the roads and villages. The hum of the engine, the hiss of tires on rainy roads, and the clicking of windshield wipers covered over the deep silence.

As they came to Remus' road and his cottage, motion started again. They stepped out of the car into a light rain and into the house. The sounds of creation were already emanating from the tiny kitchen, where Dobby was at work. Harry made his way to his couch and flopped down with a sigh.

Remus sat in the chair opposite, "What topic do you want to start with?"

Harry looked confused at the break in his thoughts.

Remus suggested, "We can do healing, concealing, wards, stealth, magic detection - where do you want to start?"

Harry growled in frustration, "Everywhere - with all of it. All at once. I want it all yesterday." He balled his fists in anger.

Remus thought through what Harry would likely run into first. "Alright. Let's do this not by subject but by complexity level. We'll go through all of the topics at the same time but we will increase the complexity level of everything we go through over time."

Harry nodded, "That would be nice."

They spent the next hour talking about the strategies and tactics for how to use magic. Not what it does, or why, just how. All the spells, the forms, the structures of magic and how to get them to function. And most importantly, how to build sets of magic into structures to provide a



function. Interactions between functions. Harry had never thought of being able to manipulate magic like this. It started to become – mechanical. Forces, levers, gears – it got him thinking.

After a few hours, Remus dropped a set of papers full of scribbles on to the book Harry was reading. Harry blinked at it, then looked up, confused.

"That is the spell you need to use to help heal Hermione's spell damage."

Harry looked back at the paper intently, "Man, where did you dig this thing up?" He flipped through the pages, "This thing is huge."

Remus grinned, "That's the cut-down version. The original was almost two paragraphs, but I was able to shorten it a bit. So now it's only a wordy haiku."

Harry looked aghast, "Shorten it? How can you shorten a spell?"

Remus laughed, "With some difficulty. But Hermione doesn't have liver damage so I figured you could drop that part."

Harry looked intimidated, "Are you sure this will work?"

"Sure. As long as you can perform it correctly – and quietly. – And with enough control so you keep it a bit underpowered or she might notice the feeling of magic. Do this every day or so for a month and she will be all healed."

Harry was incredulous, "But it's a paragraph! How can you be subtle with this?"

Remus smiled with no guilt, "Practice. I've got a training dummy downstairs that will make noise if you use too much power or if the magic is not shaped properly. At least I think I can get it to work."

Harry didn't look convinced.

"I don't imagine you will get that down for two weeks, at least."

Harry sighed tiredly. He sat looking at the spell trying to sound out the pronunciation. The wand-motion diagram, being written alongside the spell pronunciation, started to look like multi-staffed choir music. Except the wand motions near the end of the spell started looking like the conductor trying to stab the lead soprano.

Harry was distracted and missed what Remus was saying, "What?"

"The next issue to deal with is your wand."

Harry involuntarily glanced at it, "What's wrong with it?"

"It's visible."

"Ah, that's - normal?"

Remus seemed to love playing with Harry's straight-lines, "Yes, we need to fix that. I'm building a magical mirror. I haven't completely figured it out yet, but the purpose is to reflect a magical spell back to where it came from."

Harry looked quite confused, "Is this supposed to be a shield?"

"No. You need to disillusion your wand so no one can see it except you. The critical point being that *you* need to put the disillusionment spell on your *own* wand, because if *I* put the spell on your wand, *you* couldn't see it. Well - how do you put a spell on your own wand? You send a disillusionment spell at this mirror and it reflects back to your wand. The end result is that you can use your wand in public and no one will see it. They may see your spells, so you'll have to think carefully about that, but no one will be able to see the wand."

Harry just stared at him, "Remus, you are brilliant."

Remus shrugged with a grin, "Just trying to live up to the Marauder Ethos." He sighed as he thought, "We will need to disillusion our wands every few

weeks so we will need to keep this mirror around and use it a lot. So it's worth the effort to develop the spell."

"Ok. That sounds quite useful."

By 10pm Harry was well into building lists of charms and spells that might work on his glasses, and by extension, the charms and spells to go on his watch and his wardstone-phone. At least it was a first run-through – a test version. He started to figure out what would – and more importantly – what would not work. His mind was whirring even though he was completely worn out.

"Alright, Harry. That ought to do it for tonight. We have to buy you a car tomorrow, and believe me, that is exhausting."

Harry looked disappointed, "Can't you just go find me something?"

Remus looked almost ready to give in, "It is part of your muggle education."

Harry sighed, "Yes, it is. Ok. I'll do it."

Remus nodded decisively, "Good night, Harry." He headed off toward his room.

Harry got ready for sleep – and then remembered his commitments to Hermione on studying her books. He was so tired, his arms felt like almost falling off. But he promised and he didn't want to disappoint Hermione.

He sat down and started into reading his books.

Harry didn't notice Remus moving his book to the table and covering him in a blanket a few hours later.

### **Sunday, 28 July, 1996**

It was Sunday morning, Harry's one day off a week where he could sleep in, catch up on rest, have time to think about – anything. Of course, now that

he had a moment to think, that's all he could do. His mind was playing catch-up for the entire last week, going blindingly fast. Then an idea hit him again, one he'd had earlier in the week and only now had time to think – or act – on it. He sat up on his couch and heard Remus pattering quietly in the tiny kitchen. He got up to ask Remus about his new car he'd just bought yesterday. Except it was only new to him. It was a four-year-old 1992 3 series BMW four door hard top with blue-grey paint. Not that Harry had any real understanding of whether it was considered popular, or sporty, or fancy, or – anything. He liked it. He didn't know if it was considered expensive or not. He just needed a car. And he got a good deal on it because it had a few smaller dents and scrapes on the paint, not that he really noticed. He liked the way it moved. It was the next best thing to his broom. And that reminded him – he pulled his broom out of his trunk, shrunk it, and set it with his wallet ready to put in his pocket when he got dressed. Yesterday, he had realised that he needed to keep his broom on him at all times. He moved to the kitchen.

"Hey, Remus?"

Remus turned from making some tea, "Good morning, Harry. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, very nice. Except my brain is going nuts."

Remus' grin grew, "Before breakfast? That's a bad sign."

Harry chuckled, "Yea, a bad habit I picked up from Hermione."

"Ok, what's got your brain heading around the twist?"

"I was thinking about putting a wardstone in the car and powering up some defensive wards on it. What do you think?"

Remus came to a halt and stared at his tea for a moment. "That's – an interesting idea. Except – now that I think about it I don't think you should."

Harry looked confused, "Ok. What am I missing?" He crossed his arms and leaned against the counter.

Remus frowned as he gathered his thoughts, and his tea, and moved to the small table, "There are a lot of complexities for wardstones, only one of which is orienting the wardstone to align with ley lines in the area where the wards are established. If you put your wardstone in a car that moves, it will change orientation, which will decrease the strength of the wards when the ley lines conflict. But more importantly, one of the very old, and crude, attacks on ward systems was to lob a wardstone with conflicting wards at another set of wards. If you have tuned your ward-bomb properly you can get both sets of wards to trigger a cascade failure and explode. Quite catastrophically."

Harry looked pained, "Ew."

"The key phrase being 'tuned properly'; that is not easy and there are a number of ways to design a ward scheme to defend against that. But having a set of strong defensive wards moving around in a car and you happen to drive through - or even too close to - a set of wards attached to some magical Manor House, particularly an old set, you could run into real problems. Not to mention that the strong defensive wards might interfere with the operation of the car. For example, the wards on Order HQ are really nasty and borderline illegal, but they stop short of the property line so you won't likely be driving a car up onto the property and interfere with them."

Harry sighed, "Yea, that sounds like a bad idea."

"Well - not necessarily. You could put up wards that are mainly sensing wards. Those are much more passive in nature and weak enough not to interfere with electronics and things, or be affected by ley lines. Those would not likely interfere with any existing ward scheme you might run into."

Harry got a sly smile, "Wow, a really fancy car alarm."

Remus chuckled, "That works. But it does give you a much bigger passive range to detect hostile intent and Death Eaters in the area."

"Assuming I'm near my car."

"And you likely will be. You won't usually very far from your car, even at home. And I'd say it's not any different than what we want to do at Hermione's flat at Uni."

Harry's eyebrows rose and he nodded, "Ok. That sounds good. I think I can fit a wardstone of about the size of a brick under the passenger seat."

Remus smiled, "Ok, write down all the sensing wards from the set we installed at the Granger house and let's put those on your car. Let's experiment with that, then when Hermione gets to Uni we can do the same with a wardstone for her flat. Hide a small one in among her things."

"Ok, cool. I'll add that to my list."

Remus paused, "And another thing I was thinking about -" He got stuck thinking, glazed into the distance, absently scratching his chin.

Harry could only wait so long, as his grin grew, "Thinking can't be *that* dangerous, can it?"

Remus blinked at him, then started to smile, "No, it's quite revolutionary, actually. Something you should try."

"Har har."

"I was thinking about your glasses. I think you should keep them."

Harry frowned and looked confused, "Keep them? I thought getting rid of them is very easy."

"It is, but having glasses also presents an opportunity. We can spell them like crazy to let you see magic around you. Like Dumbledore's glasses."

Harry eyebrows rose, "Oooh, yes. That sounds great."

"The spells are rather obscure, and not many of which are in that giant spell book we've been using for ward construction. So I collected some from some books in the Black family library." He held out a paper, "Here is a large list, not all of which will fit on your glasses due to magical saturation limits. But take a look at them and we can start working out how to fit as many as possible, and which ones, on the glasses you've got. If we need more saturation, we can either change the glasses or modify something to up the saturation limits."

Harry started perusing the list, "Wow, there is some interesting stuff in here."

"Yes. Though some charms are not as applicable as others, so we won't use all of them. But I included them because I thought they showed interesting possibilities. We may be able to customise some and develop some of our own. Some that might be *very* useful."

"Do you think we could ask Moody about what charms he's put on his magical eye?"

Remus chuckled, "I've asked him before. He has told me some of the simpler charms, and they're included in that list, but he won't tell me any of the really complex one's he's used. He says they are custom 'trade secrets' and won't share."

Harry huffed, "The man is a rascal."

"He did say that the biggest issue was not the set of spells, but knowing how to use them most effectively. And what you could infer from what different combinations of spells can show you."

Harry looked at Remus, "Hmm. I suppose so. This may take some experimenting."

Remus leaned back in his chair, "You know, what if you carried a small palm-sized wardstone with sensing spells on it and charmed it to look and act like a cell phone. Different ringtones could be different kinds of alerts. That could effectively expand your magical saturation limits for sensing spells. Combine that with your glasses showing you the magic on that wardstone – that no one else can see – and you could have a very powerful set of sensors."

Harry started to smile in sly satisfaction, "Oooh, now *that* sounds like fun."

"Yes, imagine a map displayed on that stone showing you the direction and distance of recent apparitions."

Harry's eyes got big, "Yes! That would be very useful!"

"That also suggests that we will need to protect your glasses so you can't lose them or break them."

Harry sat up and looked excited, "Man, this is going to be so cool!"

"And that reminds me – I was thinking of a charm – call it a 'tether' charm – on your wand holster that if you get more than 2 metres from your wand it will summon your wand back to your wand holster. So you can't lose it, even if you're not conscious."

"Ah! Hold on. I need to write all this down!" Harry got up and ran for some paper and a pen.

Remus tilted his head, "I suppose you could do the same thing as the wardstone with your watch, with a different set of sensing spells."

Harry's voice came wafting back into the kitchen, "Wait! Hold on! Don't lose that thought!"

Remus turned to look toward Harry, "You know, I think I just may need to break down and get glasses soon, too. This is sounding very useful. The charmed glasses become the display device for everything else."



Harry came back and sat down with paper and pen, "Ok, we have spells on glasses to display magic, and a small wardstone that looks like a mobile phone that magically displays the results of sensor spells, that only the glasses can see, and the same for a watch with a different set of sensing spells. What else?"

"Different ringtones for different types of alerts, different colours for different kinds of magic detected."

"And – what did you call it? – a tether charm?"

Remus nodded thoughtfully, "Yes, a tether charm. A distance-triggered summoning charm on your wand-holster to summon your wand if you get too far away from it. Probably on your glasses, too."

Harry was writing furiously, "This is going to be so cool!"

Remus smiled, "So let's cure your eyes so you're not blind if you do happen to lose your glasses, and then make your glasses just clear, with no prescription. Then you need to determine the saturation limits for your glasses. And the watch, and the wardstone-phone."

"Wait –" Harry sat up and looked off into space, "What happens if Hermione puts on my glasses? Will she see all the colours of magic?"

Remus blinked a few times, "Oh – yes. We also need to key the magic on your glasses to your magical signature, so she can't see it."

Harry sighed at all the additional workload, "Ok. And determine the saturation limits of my watch." Harry's pen was scratching away.

"You remember the formula for the size and density calculations for different wardstone types?"

"Yes – well, I can look them up."

"Let's start with a stone no bigger than your mobile, then we can adapt it if we have need to."

Harry stopped and thought, "Then I'll need to determine the magical energy requirements based on the needed sensitivity level for a given sensing radius. For every spell. – Ooooh, this is going to get complex."

"Yes. Just keep in mind that you might be able to get a combination of spells to do many more functions, when they are combined."

Harry looked overwhelmed, "Oh, man."

Remus smirked, "Harry, just start by looking at what spells are interesting, and what they can show you. Let's plan what you need to sense. Then we'll worry about how to get it all to work."

Harry sighed, "Thanks, Remus."

### **Monday, 29 July, 1996**

Harry was trying to button his new shirt. He had to stop and give his arms a few moments rest. His hands would shake too much if he didn't rest occasionally. Remus' exercise program was really starting to bite. Everything hurt as he moved, which made him tense up, and only made it more painful. The worst was the shaking when his muscles got too tired. He just had to take things slowly, give them a rest, breathe a bit, then he could keep going.

He shook his arms out and noticed his reflection in the mirror. He still got caught every time when he looked in the mirror. He almost didn't recognise himself. New clothes that fit? And looked good? That wasn't him. His eyes had always hopped over his own reflection in the mirror, avoiding what he knew he looked like – a ragamuffin.

Now? He felt like an imposter, now that he'd gotten a real wardrobe. It's very nice – but he was not used to it. The clothes felt good – but funny – or he felt funny in them. He felt somehow more real – and at the same time

like an imposter. Particularly with this cool little car he bought on Saturday. It has a few dents and scrapes but it's almost as fun as his broom. He felt like an actor playing a part now. But he is determined; he's fine with acting as Hermione's friend, but he is not fine with merely acting as her protector. He must be very good at protecting her, but he wants to be more too. More than just acting as her friend. Even – more than just a friend – but his mind jumped away from that delicate thought.

"Ready?" Remus came out of the kitchen.

Harry finished gathering his things and nodded, "Almost."

"You look good."

Harry paused, then shook his head, "It's so weird. I get confused every time I catch myself in the mirror."

Remus turned grim and took a slow calming breath at Harry's reaction – the implications of that statement being rather grim – but he didn't say anything.

Harry picked up his coat, "Ok, ready!"

Remus nodded, "Good. Have fun at Hermione's. I've got some things to get done. I'll see you back here by about five?"

Harry sighed his nerves, then nodded, "Back at five."

"Drive careful."

Harry smiled nervously, since this was his first time driving to Hermione's house in his own car – by himself. He nodded again, "Ok, I'm off." He headed out to his car. He could see traces of the colourful magic misting around it. The initial testing of the sensing spells on the wardstone brick under the seat and the first set of spells he was experimenting with on his now non-prescription glasses. Again, it was so weird to be able to see

when he took his glasses off. Mostly he didn't notice it, which meant he could easily forget he wasn't wearing his glasses.

He started his drive to Hermione's house. It was just over an hour each way. It gave him time to think. To organise his brain. To sort the important things in his life now: Hermione, her parents, Remus – and that's about all. This last crack of the whip had dropped a lot of cares from his life; school, Quidditch, NEWTs, friends – Ron. He winced with guilt as he thought of Ron. But he couldn't worry about that now. His life had focussed down – and left Ron behind. Or, more accurately, Ron had refused to move when Harry's life had been interrupted by the next crack of the whip. Yet *another* casualty of the whip.

Harry changed from the M25 to the M23 down toward Crawley. His guilt-reflexes were in a fine showing today. He was worrying about Dobby and Winky watching over Hermione and her parents. He needed to hurry and learn more magic to free them up from that task. He worried that he was asking too much of them. But he didn't think he was ready to take that job over, yet. Hopefully in the next week? Three?

He pulled into Hermione's drive and parked in front of her house. He pulled his book bag out of the back seat – only fumbling with the lock on the back door a bit – and walked to the front porch. The door popped open before he got there.

"Harry! Is that a new car?"

Harry stopped, smiled, and glanced back at it, "Well – it is for me – it's about four years old. I just got it Saturday."

She looked at it calculatingly, then smiled at Harry, "Can we go to the office supply store today? I'm out of paper and notebooks."

"Sure. I could use some too." He waved at the car, "Now?"

She gave him a slightly desperate look, "After some tea?"

Harry chuckled and started toward the porch with a big smile, "That's a good idea. The world only functions with requisite amounts of tea."

She looked concerned as she pulled him into the house with a grin that grew challenging, "Do you think I'm 'tea'-sing you?"

He heard those quote marks and matched her challenge, "No, I'm just 'tea'-tering on the edge of studying."

She groaned as they came into the kitchen. She started to put the water on for tea.

Harry sat down at the table and watched her in fascination.

She set out two cups and sat down next to him, "Harry – I'd like to thank you again for making dinner for us on Friday. My parents were very impressed, and very appreciative. It was very sweet of you."

Harry displayed his limited imagination and repeated himself, "Anything for you, Hermione." Mesmerising green eyes and all.

She smiled, a bit embarrassed with pink cheeks, "Well, thank you, Harry. It was very good food." Her smile grew, "Do you cook for Remus?"

He shook his head, "No, we're both too busy most of the time."

"He's your uncle?" She got up when the kettle whistled.

"Honorary. He was one of my parents friends in school."

She nodded, "What does he do – normally?"

"Well – for now he keeps track of me. But normally he's a personal bodyguard, mostly for important people on the Continent."

Her eyes grew large. She poured the tea into their cups.

"That's why he started me on a new fitness program. He thought I was getting lazy."

"How is that going?" She sat down and started stirring.

Harry groaned and covered his face, "I thought I was in shape! Nooo! Not at all. But I'm beginning to see some improvement now."

Her face turned concerned, "But - why did you agree to it?"

He stopped and thought, "It was a challenge. I'd never done anything like that before. Not to this level. I wanted to know that I could. And - I'm still alive - so far." He shrugged. He sighed with his eyes closed after his sip of tea.

She watched him appraisingly, "That must take a lot of determination." Her brow wrinkled in appreciation of her tea.

He chuckled, "Yes, it's quite difficult. But it's also quite rewarding. I'm amazed that I feel so much better, even though it hurts, too."

She glanced at her watch, "Oh, we should probably go get those notebooks."

He nodded and stood up, "That will be fun." He looked at her with raised eyebrows, "And lunch?"

Her eyes lit up, "That would be fun, too. Let's." She stood up and started getting ready.

They went to the office supply store for notebooks, fish and chips at a small pub, Hermione wanted to check her favourite bookstore for some books referenced by her current set of study books, and they happened to spend a lot of time wandering in the High Street. It was wonderful.

Harry's mobile rang and he almost jumped out of his shoes, "Hello?"

Remus' voice came out, "Harry, did you need more milk?"

"Remus, yes, that would be fine."

"Ok, got it." He hung up.

Hermione was staring at Harry in abject amazement, "- A mobile? You have a mobile?"

"Yes. Do you have one?"

Hermione shook her head, still looking amazed.

"Why not? I think it's a basic safety issue."

Hermione looked a little disappointed, "My parents think it's rather extravagant. And not that useful."

Harry took a deep breath and let it out as he nodded, "Yes, they've never had one so they don't know how useful they are. I think it's a basic safety issue. I think you should have one." He looked at her cautiously determined, "I'll buy you one. And pay for the service."

Hermione was back to being amazed, "- But - That's expensive!"

Harry shook his head, "No, not for your safety. I tell you what, I'll buy it and pay for the plan but it will be completely in your name that you completely control. You can take over the plan any time you want. But I think you should have one."

She looked unsure, "I'm not sure my parents will be happy with that."

Harry shrugged - and smirked, "They can be mad at me. I don't mind."

She looked hopeful, "You really don't mind?"

"No. What kind do you want?"

Her smile illuminated the world, "Can I look at yours?"

He chuckled and handed it to her, "This one is not the top of the line. It's relatively basic but it has the most stable signal and longest lasting battery. I - and Remus - spent a lot of time talking to some very knowledgeable people about it. It's what I would recommend for you."

"Ok. What can it do?"

Harry pointed down the street, "There is a shop just down there. Let's go see." He started explaining its features as they walked. Within 20 minutes Hermione had her very own mobile phone - and Harry had her number programmed into his phone - and his into her phone. She was busy programming her home phone and her parents practice into it. Harry happened to notice those numbers and included them in his phone, as well.

"Ice cream?"

Hermione looked up, "What?" Surprise coloured her expression.

Harry pointed down the street, "Ice cream?"

She followed his hand - and a smile broke out, "Yes. That would be amazing."

They started down the street until Harry's phone rang and startled him, "Hello?"

Hermione's laugh was in stereo.

Harry turned to her and broke out laughing before he hung up, "I get the impression you're going to have a lot of fun with that."

"Oh, yes. I love it already! Thank you, Harry." She gave him a big hug.

Their ice cream was wonderful. It brought such joy to Harry's heart to give to Hermione. It was like he had never felt anything like this before. He just wanted to do this forever.



Hermione looked at her watch and sighed, "Harry, it's almost four. I'm afraid we have wasted the entire day here."

He smiled at her concern, "I think it was brilliant! I think we needed a bit of a break."

She hugged him, "It was brilliant! But we should get back before my parents get home and start to worry."

They started back toward the car. Harry nodded, "Yes. But remember, that's what mobile's are for."

Her eyes lit up, "Yes, they are. Oh, this will take some getting used to."

"Here. Give it a go." Harry held out his closed hand, palm down, to Hermione.

"What?" She reached out and Harry dropped his car keys in her hand. "What!"

"You drive home. You probably need the practice, don't you?"

"Harry!"

Harry's teasing grin was peeking out, "What? You probably need the practice to keep your skills up, so you can try my car. When is your test?"

She just stared at him like a fish. "- Not until August second."

"Go ahead."

She huffed and shook her head in amazement, "Harry, you are too much!" Her smile gave her away. "Fine. I could use the practice."

He had moved to standing at the passenger door with a challenging smile.

She huffed with a nervous but determined smile. She unlocked the car and they got in. They spent a good amount of time as Harry pointed out

important controls and Hermione adjusted the mirrors, the seat, the seatbelt, her hair, the mirrors again. She finally sat still, gripping the wheel like a life preserver.

Harry could see her nerves were running a bit high. He remembered her standing over her broom trying to get it to fly – and desperately wishing it wouldn't. He smiled fondly at her and spoke quietly, smoothly, "Just take it slow. One action at a time. Concentrate on each action."

She looked at him with shock overlaying her fear, "How do you know me so well?"

Harry chuckled, his voice slow and steady, "Five years at Cromwell. Just take one step at a time and let the separate steps slowly build into a flow."

She tried to huff at his suggestions — but it came out part sob. She took a deep breath and breathed out, "One step at a time." She gathered her fierce concentration and started the car. "One step at a time." She checked the mirrors and put it in gear. She kept repeating her mantra, "One step at a time" all the way home. But it became more confident the closer they got.

She pulled into her driveway and stopped the car, turned it off, set the brake, and collapsed with an exhale. "I did it."

Harry's smile was huge, "You did. Every bit of it. Your fear – conquered!"

She sputtered at him, "Until next time."

"And it will get easier every time." He got out of the car.

Hermione followed and gave him back his keys – along with a huge hug.

"Harry, you got a new car?" Emma was standing on the porch, looking quite surprised.

"Yes! On Saturday." He was smiling at her shock.

"And you got Hermione to drive it? How did you manage that?"

"Muumm." It was almost a groan.

Harry was chuckling, "That universal motivator known as 'guilt'."

"Harry! You did not. You were quite supportive." Hermione playfully slapped his arm as he came to the porch.

Harry made whinging painful 'ow' faces as he silently rubbed his arm in mock distress.

Hermione huffed, grabbed his upper arm and pulled playfully, "You, Mr Rascal, are about to get in trouble."

Emma looked a bit concerned, "Where did you go? We were rather worried when we got home and you weren't here."

Hermione's excitement came out in a rush, "We went to the High Street, to the office supply for some notebooks, the bookstore, lunch - we ended up spending most of the day there." They walked in the house.

Dan was sitting on the couch perusing the piles of books, "There you are. Did you have fun during your study break?"

Hermione was letting out all the tension, "Oh, yes! Lunch, ice cream - and Harry bought me a mobile! It's so fun! Look how -" She had missed the explosion of tension blowing through the roof - until the silence landed. Her face paled and she looked back and forth between her parents and Harry.

Harry had the grace to look embarrassed.

"You what?" Dan's voice was deceptively calm, and worse yet, quiet. "That is quite an extravagant gift, young man."

Hermione was stuck watching ping-pong, back and forth.

Harry smiled sheepishly, "Actually, I consider it a basic safety issue. Compared to her safety it's quite inexpensive. – That and I want to be able to call her any time." He chuckled nervously, "This afternoon is a prime example."

Dan was now much less sure, "How so?"

"We weren't here when you got home. You could just call her mobile and find out where she was. You wouldn't have to wait, not knowing."

All the tension drained from the room. Dan even started to smile, "I never thought of it that way. It all just seemed so over-the-top extravagant until now."

Harry began to relax, "And the mobile is in her name, completely controlled by her. I just send money for the bill. She can take it over any time she wants."

Dan looked again sharply at Harry, "That's still rather expensive."

Harry chuckled, "It all comes out of my parent's expense account. Them raking in all that money building those skyscrapers in Singapore." He had his fingers crossed behind his back, with his Fraud-Meter hitting the pegs.

Dan's expression was turning a touch embarrassed, "Well, thank you, Harry. That's very thoughtful of you. But I think we should take over the costs – at some point here." He looked to Emma, "When we figure it out."

Emma started to smile, "We might have to break down and get a few more." Her eyebrows rose in a smiled challenge to Dan.

Dan laughed, "Ok, yes I guess we will." He turned back to Harry, "Shall we go out for some dinner? Can you join us, Harry?"

Harry was taken aback, "Uh – Sure. I'd love that."

Emma jumped in, "And can you get a hold of Remus, too? Dan would like to meet him."

"Sure! I'll just give him a call." He held up his mobile and wiggled it.

Dan and Emma chuckled as Hermione rushed to give them both hugs.

Harry called Remus, who not so surprisingly was not far away, and they arranged to meet him at their favourite pub. Dan asked Harry to drive – no pressure, of course. Dan said he was interested in how these German cars worked – or maybe how this English kid got the German car to work, and how well. Harry wouldn't complain – or risk acting unsafe in any way. He was just overjoyed to be included. They talked cars all the way to the pub.

Remus was waiting in front of the pub.

"Remus!" Harry got out of the car and gave him a quick hug. "Remus, this is Dr Dan Granger, and you've met Dr Emma. Dan, I present to you, the inimitable, Remus Lupin."

Emma chuckled, "Hello, Remus."

Remus extended his hand, "Doctor – and Doctor. Glad to meet you, Mr Granger."

Dan chuckled as he met Remus' hand, "Dan, please. I understand you keep this guy out of jail?" He glanced at Harry with a grin.

Remus barked a laugh, being caught by surprise.

Harry groaned and covered his face.

"Daaad." A long-suffering tone dripped from those words. With a touch of a smile.

Emma chuckled, watching the kids.

Remus shrugged with a growing grin, "It keeps me very busy." He winked at Harry.

Harry finally caught up and sighed dramatically, "Such fine parental examples for me to live up to."

Remus leaned over conspiratorially, "Shall we go inside? I see the Bobbies circling the block."

Harry looked around, "Where?"

Dan chuckled and clapped Harry on the shoulder, "Better get inside before you catch a cold or something."

Hermione pulled on Harry's arm toward the door, "Come, Harry, let's leave the oldsters to their own brand of humour."

Harry's voice was fading as they moved through the door, "But I was just warming up to it -"

Dan smiled, looking toward the door where Harry and Hermione had disappeared, "Nice kid."

Remus smiled fondly after Harry, "The best. Even if I do say so myself."

Dan turned to Remus, "If you don't mind me asking, how did you end up taking care of Harry?"

"I was best friends with his parents when we were in school. I didn't have much to do to take care of Harry when Cromwell was still functioning, just be the local parental-equivalent. But after Cromwell collapsed, it became full-time."

Dan looked concerned, "Harry didn't go to Singapore to be with his parents?"

Remus bobbed his head back and forth, "He did for a few summers but he never liked it. Now - he really doesn't want to."

"And his parents don't want to come back?"

"Oh, yes, they do. But after another year – or maybe two – they'll be able to fully retire. It's been a very difficult choice."

Dan nodded, looking toward the door, "Yes, I can imagine." He turned back to Remus, "What do you normally do?"

"Personal security for high-value customers on the Continent, mostly. It keeps me busy."

Dan's eyebrows rose, "Were you SAS?"

"No, but I was taught by several former SAS."

Emma broke in, "We might want to catch up with the kids before they run up a huge bill."

Dan and Remus chuckled and they moved inside. They found Harry and Hermione sitting at a large table in the back. The food was wonderful, the company even better. It wasn't until much later that things became difficult, as Harry saw them. And it was all Remus' fault.

They had been discussing To-Do lists and Remus had shrugged about his plans for the week – and let the cat out of the bag, "But I've still got a few things to finish before Wednesday."

Hermione tilted her head in curiosity, "What's Wednesday?"

Remus looked at her blankly for a moment, "Oh! – Sorry. Wednesday is Harry's birthday."

Hermione gasped.

Harry looked quite embarrassed, "Remus –"

Hermione grabbed Harry's arm, "Are you going to have a party?"

Harry raised his eyebrows sheepishly, "Wasn't planning on it."

She was aghast, "Why not?"

Harry shrugged, "Well – the flat is mostly all packed up in boxes waiting to find out what Uni we are moving near. There's only small trails through the piles of boxes."

She sighed deeply with a disbelieving look, "Well! We will just have to have it at our house."

Harry looked a bit pained, "Well – But no presents!" He held up his finger pointedly.

Hermione almost exploded, "What!?! No way! I am not agreeing to that."

Harry's expression was one of consternation.

Dan leaned over conspiratorially, "You're going to tell the moon to stand still?" He nodded toward Hermione, "Might as well let it go on it's way."

Hermione developed a triumphant smile.

Harry sighed against everyone else's smile, "Ok, fine."

Dan nodded to Harry, "Good man." He turned to everyone else, "Alright, Harry's birthday party at our house at 4pm Wednesday. Right?"

Everyone nodded resolutely. Except Harry. He looked sheepish.



## **6. The Whip Is Drawn For Another Stroke**

A/N: It's been pointed out to me (by mesmerandum85, thank you!) that I got the GCSE and the A-Levels exactly backwards. So - just hold your nose and go with it, ok? Just think of it as a clerical error - or spelling. Or something. :-) Also, just to add to everyone's confusion, in the US you take the GCSE test to get into Graduate school. I'm sure the tests are quite different but the acronyms have collided, and thus part of my confusion.

**CHAPTER SIZE: 16725**

### **Chapter 6**

### **The Whip Is Drawn For Another Stroke**

**Harry Potter**

**Tuesday, 30 July, 1996**

Harry leaned over gasping during a break in his morning workout. He was amazed that it was actually getting better. He was less dead – can he say that? – than he had been in the past doing these things. He chuckled; the workout was killing him – but he felt more alive than ever. His language was getting strange in this next crack-of-the-whip in his life.

"Harry, I think we need to think a moment about your larger strategy for defending Hermione."

Harry could finally stand up and start moving a bit to cool down, "Yeah? What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that there are whole classes of magic that you will not be able to use. Mainly I'm thinking of large and destructive spells like reducto's, bombardarda's and such. You will be in exclusively muggle areas and those would be too hard to cover up, not to mention too dangerous to be around when they are used in crowded areas."

Harry nodded slowly, "Yes. I need to stick to small-scale spells; a piercing hex, a close-range bludgeoner, things like that."

"Yes. You need to be fast, small, and silent. The longer a fight goes, the more likely someone will notice and need to be obliviated or will get injured. You must win the fight as fast as possible. Thinking is much more important than any brute force because brute force is of limited use to you."

Harry stood still and thought, "So, potentially, taking the time to think something through – before attacking – could shorten the fight if I can do it right."

"Yes, I think that's a good approach."

Harry sighed and started walking again, "I was thinking along those lines a few days ago. I do not want Hermione to have to be obliviated a second time, so I have to win each fight quickly and quietly. Without her seeing anything."

Remus' eyebrows rose in amazement, "That – is understandable, but it also sets a ridiculously high bar."

"Yes. We'll see how long I can maintain that – assuming the attacks keep getting worse. I'm hoping that, if I'm successful enough, that the DEs will get bored and give up after a while. Or I'll run out of them." Harry was wearing a circle in the mats as we walked around the room, cooling off.

Remus looked a bit depressed, "Harry, let's extrapolate based on my experience in the last Voldemort war. The salient point was that he had won that war – until you stopped him. He was winning, and he likely will this time, too. If he wins he will then be able to throw all his weight at you, Hermione, and her parents. He can pick his time and place and do anything he wants and he won't care that he will endanger the Statute of Secrecy. He certainly didn't last time. What that means is that at some point you are going to have to bail out of England and take Hermione and her parents with you."

Harry stopped and hung his head in seeming defeat.

"It also means that – if Voldemort has taken over the Ministry by force, he is not likely to have good relations with the ICW, so you might be able to claim refugee status and apply for asylum. Then you might get the ICW to ignore the banishment judgement against Hermione. And maybe you can get around the Statute of Secrecy by claiming an unjust conviction. But – I don't see much hope of avoiding this kind of a result."

Harry shook his head and started circling the room again. He kept shaking his head in what seemed to be a hopeless situation. No answers or brilliant ideas came to him. Brilliant ideas were Hermione's department – and she wasn't able to help. It was all on him.

Remus let out a sigh, "I think we don't need to have an answer for those problems right now. But I think we need to keep thinking about them."

Harry stopped and nodded to Remus, "Yes. I'll keep thinking about it."

Remus gave him a moment to catch up and then continued, "On another note, I have a suggestion for you."

Harry's eyebrows rose in acknowledgment.

"You will be operating almost entirely in muggle areas, potentially with muggles all around. So you can't just disillusion yourself, someone will notice you disappearing. And you won't always be able to duck into an alleyway, or around the other side of a building to disappear either. So I suggest you have a set of spells to use in sequence to enable you to disappear anywhere."

Harry looked suspicious, "Ok, what are you thinking?"

"Suppose you're standing in an open area with lots of people around and a DE apparates somewhere nearby. You need to start walking – any direction is fine – then you start powering up a gradual notice-me-not over just a few seconds, then add in a gradual disillusionment spell. Once that's done

you can do anything. The result will be that you will leave any muggles who are watching with the impression you walked out of the area, not that you disappeared in the midst of them."

Harry chuckled, "Like a muggle magician. Give them a suggestion and let them run with it while you do something else."

"Exactly. But, you also need to remember that Hermione is still magical. Her magic is bound up, but she still has it. So she can see through anti-muggle glamours, muggle-repelling charms, and muggle notice-me-nots. You have to use the universal versions of those spells."

Harry covered his face with his hands and groaned, "Yes. This is getting more complex all the time."

What wasn't complex was his study with Hermione. It was brilliant. The highlight of his day. He made lunch, he started the basics of some dinner, leaving the last bit for the Grangers to finish up. It settled his nerves, it gave him confidence. It gave him a future to dream of.

After dinner Harry started in on his complex magic studying. He had been trying to concentrate on one subject area at a time and rotate them, but he kept getting diverted with questions. He'd start looking at one subject, run into questions relating to other areas, and the next thing he knew he was on a completely different part of magic. It was all incredibly useful stuff and he was still learning all the things he wanted to – it just wasn't organised at all. But – maybe that was ok? The one thing that was good out of his chaotic approach was that he loved it, and he was going fast. Ok, that was two things, but he was learning very fast. He didn't know how to stop.

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

Remus came down the stairs into the basement and sat in the chair next to Harry's, "How has your practice on Hermione's healing spell been going?"

"Ah." Harry nodded in thought, "I have the spell working correctly and I've got it all memorised and smooth. Now I'm trying to phase out my voice and leave a silent pronunciation. I think if I can get my voice to be silent – I can already hide the wand movement by disillusioning my wand – then I just need to reduce the power. And that may come as a consequence of going non-verbal, so – I'm getting close."

Remus nodded, "Good." He handed Harry a stack of papers, "Here is that list of possible spells I have found on charming your glasses."

"Oooh! Yes, very cool!" Harry started flipping through the pages.

"There are a few that look really good, just as they are. Those are in the first group in the list. Those are kind of a must. Then comes a second group that we will need to experiment with. The third group is interesting and we might be able to do something with them, but I'm not sure. And I'll try the same thing on my new set of glasses, too."

Harry was getting lost in the papers, "Very cool. I'll start on these –" he look at his watch, "in maybe an hour. Another hour to play with these and then I'll have to start on Hermione's homework." His eyebrows rose and his jaw dropped in feigned amazement, "She's going to kill me as I try to keep up with her."

Remus chuckled, "Remember, there is this thing call 'sleep' that you're supposed to pay attention to."

Harry looked confused, "Hmm. You remember how to spell that?"

Remus smirked, "Nope." He patted Harry's shoulder and headed up stairs.

**Wednesday, 31 July, 1996, 16:00**

Harry sighed with underlying tension as he got dressed. He knew there was no reason to be nervous. But knowing and doing were different things. He entered the kitchen with his hands wound up in a knot.

"Harry. There you are. Happy birthday, Prongslet."

Harry tried to smile.

Remus scrunched his eyebrows into a bunch, "What's up, Harry?"

Harry sighed, "It's - the birthday party."

Remus now looked confused, "What's wrong with the birthday party? It's your birthday. What's to be nervous about?"

Harry's expression carried two stone worth of tension. He sighed, started to speak, sighed again, and looked away, "Look, Remus - drawing *any* attention to myself in the Dursley household is a very bad thing. It's much better if I don't exist! No one sees me and no one notices me."

Remus started to growl with the implications. Hot eggs dripped down the spatula onto his hand and he turned back to the skillet to hide his anger.

Harry wasn't looking at Remus, "So - a birthday party - as much as this is something completely different, in a different location - is - difficult."

Remus gritted his teeth, crushed the spatula handle in his fist, and took a long breath to calm down. His voice caught up to him, "But the Grangers are nothing like the Dursley's." He looked at Harry for his reaction.

"No, not at all. But they feel like family. Not that the Dursley's *ever* felt like family. But it's - too similar? It's too - I don't know." Harry collapsed in to a despondent sigh. "I don't know how to relax."

Remus turned back to the eggs he was cooking and tried not to bend the skillet. "Have a seat, Harry. These are almost done." It gave him a few seconds to think. He served the eggs onto plates and set them on the table. He handed Harry a fork, "Now eat."

Harry sighed and started poking the eggs.

After a minute Remus could think again, "I think you need to go to Hermione's and study for a few hours. That will calm you down and then we can have your party."

Harry bobbed his head in confused indecision, "Yeah – probably. It's worth a try. I certainly don't want to mess up the party. Hermione is so excited about it."

"Good. Concentrate on that. Get a calming draught to take with you in case you need it."

Harry nodded toward his eggs as he played at eating them.

"But first," Remus thought about what he needed to do and it brought back his control, "I need to go get your birthday presents."

Harry's head came up, marked with confusion, "Presents? Plural?"

That statement threatened to derail Remus' calm, "From me, your parents, your Uncle Ralphons."

Harry looked askance, "Uncle what? I don't have an uncle – do I?"

Remus started to smirk, "No, but that doesn't matter, does it?"

Harry sputtered, "No, but – but wait, it does matter. Then I have to explain this mystery-uncle to Hermione."

Remus looked slyly at Harry, "Hhhmmm, might need to think fast." He stood up, "Ok, I'm off to get the loot. Don't be late to Hermione's. See you there!" Remus was out the door in a flash.

Harry groaned and covered his face, "Uncle whatever-his-name – Remus!" He shook his head and finished his eggs. "Ok. I'm on my way."

The drive was calming. The movement was lulling. He could think clearly now. Remus was right. He needed to focus on the studying – with Hermione. His mood lightened just thinking about her. He turned into her

drive and parked the car. He grabbed his backpack and was out of the car still on autopilot.

"Harry!" Hermione stood on the porch, arms wide, "Happy birthday!"

Harry stopped frozen – until a huge smile split his face, "You remembered."

"How could I not remember!" Her voice was covered in incredulity. "It only happens once a year. The entire year leads up to it. How could I possibly forget?"

"Ah – life? Reality? And everything?" He looked rather challenging.

She looked challenging back, "Oh, no. No, can't be. Reality doesn't work that way. Harry, what are you doing just standing there? Come inside where it's warm."

Harry started moving with a huge smile. "But I was looking forward to studying."

"Oh, we'll do that too. We must study. It's an integral part of the structure of the Universe." She pulled his arm into the house.

They settled down to studying. Just what Harry needed to calm his nerves and set his brain to rights. Harry was now in a different place. A calm, settled, and safe place. In no time at all, Remus and the Grangers showed up.

Harry noticed the sound of a car. He looked up, "Someone's here." He huffed playfully, "What could they possibly want? Maybe it's a tax collector? A garden inspector?"

Hermione tried not to let his whinging distract her from her purpose in life; study. Her sneaking smile gave her away. She whispered at him, "Harry, shhh. You're destabilising the Universe again."



He snickered and whispered back, "Ok, I won't say anything. Even if the house starts to burn I won't -"

She looked at him with fire in her eyes, "Harry!"

Harry just kept whispering, "Right. Can't dislodge the current reality. Dr Who would scold us."

Harry was saved by the front door opening, "Hermione. Harry. How was your day?" Dan came in first.

Harry's voice was desiccated, "Studios."

Hermione scoffed, "Harry was destabilising the Universe."

Emma sighed dramatically, "Children. No destabilising the Universe. It's bad form."

Hermione whispered to Harry, "See! I told you."

Harry could barely hold on to his demeanour and not explode in laughter. This 'ridiculousness contest' was becoming a recurring theme between them. One they both loved.

Harry's next move was interrupted by another car, "Another car? Who could that *possibly* be?"

Hermione's sly smile cut through, "It's probably Poirot and his *leetle grey cells*. He always shows up at the right time."

Harry looked confused, "Who's Poy-ro?"

Hermione's chin dropped in indignation, "Harry, I'm going to have a word with your parents. They have raised a deprived child."

Harry mumbled, "Deprived is better than depraved." He got up and answered the door - to see Remus, "You're not Poy-ro."

Remus smiled, "No, but I know all about *leetle grey cells*. Do you want me to put on the accent?"

Harry looked back and forth between Hermione and Remus with a suspicious look, "I think you're mocking me."

Hermione huffed and pointed at Harry, "Remus, we need to fix this child. He knows nothing of *leetle greycells*."

Remus looked sad as he put his hand on Harry's shoulder, "Oh, that's sad, but easily and enjoyably fixable. Want to help me get some things from the car?" He started back.

Harry followed him, whispering, "Remus, what's this Poy-ro joke?"

Remus kept chuckling, "A TV detective from Belgium with a funny accent who always figures it all out. His name is Hercule Poirot and he is obsessive about everything."

Harry smiled fondly looking back toward Hermione, "Now that makes a lot of sense."

Remus handed Harry a set of boxes and picked up another large flat box, "Ok, let's get this inside before I drop it." He started for the house as Harry closed the car door and followed him in.

As Harry followed Remus into the kitchen, song broke out.

"Happy birthday to you..."

Harry turned three shades of red and covered his face.

Hermione pulled his arm and negotiated his landing on a chair at the end of the table.

As the song continued, a big knife started cutting sections of cake, which landed on plates, paired with forks, and pushed in front of Harry.

While not the first birthday party Harry had ever experienced, it was by far the best.

Hermione leaned over and kissed his cheek, "Harry birthday, Harry."

Remus shook his head at Harry as he sat down, "Sorry, no kiss on the cheek from me, Harry."

Snickers wandered about as everyone else sat down.

Harry started placing pieces of cake in front of everyone. He wanted to bawl and cry – but that would have blown his cover. So he had to maintain his iron grip on – anything he could manage to control. It came across as touching and sweet. "Thank you. This means a lot to me."

Dan smiled, "You mean a lot to us."

Harry almost lost it. He only held on by the barest of margins because Remus set a box on the table in front of him.

"This is from your parents. They had planned to be here and surprise you, but one of their larger sub-contractors tried to short their work. So your parents had to stay and verify all the sub's work to date to get the project back on schedule."

Dan grimaced, "Ouch. That's a huge amount of work."

Remus nodded, "Oh, yes. They were very upset when they found out. They are shorting the sub's pay in penalty. Above and beyond the contract penalties for substandard work."

That was just the distraction Harry needed to regain control, "Oh, that stupid sub. My parents have become very good at punishing sub's who flagrantly misbehave." He hid behind a piece of cake.

Remus nodded, "It's likely that sub was pushed by some of the organised crime groups in the area. No one in their right mind would jeopardise a

contract that large to shave a few pounds off."

Everyone shivered at the thought.

Remus patted the box, "They thought you could use this."

Harry smiled at Remus knowing it was him who picked out the present. He picked at the wrapping until Hermione sighed at him in exasperation at his games, then he opened the box. he pulled out a watch. And not just any watch. A very expensive watch that looked like it might have dive functions, or navigation functions. "Whoa. What all does this do?"

Remus chuckled, "Well - it doesn't do tea, but just about everything else." He reached in the box and pulled out the instruction book and set it down in front of Harry. A miniature phone book. "Hopefully you can read that fine print. I can't any more."

Harry smirked, "I'm not sure I can either. That will take some investigation."

Remus placed another smaller box on the table, "This one's from me."

Harry grabbed it up as an appropriate distraction - with another bite of cake. He opened the box and pulled out a set of gloves and a scarf, "Oh, yes! This will be awesome in Fall. Thanks, Remus!" He tried them on, hiding in the scarf and peeking out. He started mumbling words through the scarf, then pulled it down after everyone looked confused, "Very warm. This is going to be great."

Emma handed him a squishy wrapped paper package.

He ripped it open - and a warm knitted hat fell out, "Yes! Now I'm complete! I will be warm this fall and winter. Thank you." He put it on with the rest and started looking like a mummy.

Hermione was struggling to contain a snicker.

Dan handed him a very small box.

Harry's interest was caught on the small box. He unwrapped it: the box said it was a Leatherman multi-tool. Of course, he didn't know what that was until he took it out of the box and found a very complex knife with a lot of things on it. "Look at that! Knife, saw, screwdriver, pliers, a file –" He looked at Dan with teasing, "– Is there a sonic screwdriver in here?"

Everyone laughed as Dan shook his head.

Harry kept looking, "Wow, look at all these things on here. Where did you find this?"

Dan smiled, "The right kind of camping store has them."

"This is amazing."

Then Hermione handed him a small box, a bit bigger than a box of playing cards.

He shook it; it didn't rattle. But it was rather light.

Hermione huffed with a grin, "Harry, open it."

He resisted the urge to go agonisingly slow – and ripped the paper off it. "A first-aid kit?"

"You always managed to get hurt at Cromwell. You seemed to spend more time with the school nurse than some Professors. This may come in handy."

A tingle ran up Harry's spine. How did she know that? He hadn't told her that. Yes, it was true, but how did she know that? He glanced at Remus, who also seemed to be a bit shocked.

He needed to act appropriately so he smiled and shook the box, "You know me too well. This will be very useful. Thank you."

**Thursday, 1 August, 1996**

It was a normal morning for Harry – until he remembered what happened at his birthday party yesterday. He ran out to find Remus in the kitchen, "Remus."

"Harry, Good morning. You look a bit tense. What's up?"

Harry sighed, "I remembered about what happened at my party yesterday. Hermione gave me that small first-aid kit – because she remembered that I was always getting hurt at Cromwell. But I never told her that. How did she know that? She even said that I spent more time with the school nurse than with some Professors. Which was actually true at Hogwarts! But how did she know that?"

Remus looked concerned, "Yes, I caught that too."

"Did the obliviators miss something? Is something leaking? Or slipping – or whatever?"

"I can't imagine anything 'slipping'. That just doesn't happen. Particularly in conjunction with a Binding. But miss something? I'm not familiar enough with the details of the process – particularly such an extensive process – to know if that's even possible."

"Is there someone we can ask? Go back to – Healer Cranston, was it?"

Remus nodded, "Yes, I can stop by and ask in the next few days."

Harry stood tensely, thinking. Then he sighed, "Thanks, Remus. It just doesn't make sense. And, maybe it's nothing – but maybe it's not." He wandered back to his room to get ready for his morning workout.

After his workout, breakfast, and driving to Hermione's house, his days were developing into a very comforting schedule. And so fun! Harry was starting to teach Hermione to cook as they made lunch most days, and sometimes made dinner for the Grangers.

Of course, the largest surprise was that studying for the GCSE was actually turning out to be fun! Probably due to who he was studying with – but it was still fun.

But that wasn't all. After he got home the work really cranked up. Remus ran a very intensive program in real-world duelling, magical combat, physical combat, magical detection, warding, magical healing, non-magical first-aid, sometimes called wilderness medicine, Auror tactics, field healer training, field logistics supply for a Hit Wizard Squad, all the potions, gear, and supplies needed by a Hit Wizard Squad. He loved it.

Strange how that had become normal. But he was obsessed. He had to be. Hermione depended on him.

Finally, as he flopped into bed at the end of the day, he thought of all the fun things they got to do recently; go out for ice cream, go to a book shop, go to a stationery store, walk the footpaths, go out to dinner with the Grangers and Remus occasionally. It was a dream that he never wanted to end.

**Friday, 2 August, 1996, 10:00**

Harry parked his car in the drive at Hermione's house when he noticed she was standing on the porch waiting. She looked anxious. He got out, "Good morning!"

"Good morning, Harry."

He cautiously asked, "What's wrong?"

She sighed heavily, "My drivers test is scheduled for today at one, but my parents had some difficult cases that came up this morning and probably won't be back in time."

Harry smiled, grabbed his backpack and started for the porch, "Ah, no problem. You can use my car."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, no problem. We can go to lunch."

She looked a bit sour, "Maybe after? I'm – a little nervous. Lunch before would be ..."

"A rock?" Harry smiled. Just like her broom-riding test.

She nodded and pulled him inside, "Thank you, Harry. It would take forever to reschedule it."

"A test and celebrate with lunch. The only complexity is – where?"

Hermione smirked, "Well, there is the business of a driving test, first. But there is a Thai restaurant near the High Street that I absolutely love."

Harry's eyebrows rose, "Thai? I don't think I ever had Thai."

She gasped, "Never had Thai? – That's – so sad! We have to go! How did your parents never take you to Thai food? And they live in Singapore? And you've been to Singapore? How did you never eat Thai food? –"

He interrupted her intensity, "Sure, let's go."

"Except –" She looked sour again, "In the mean time my nerves are dancing about."

He motioned to the couch, "Let's study some. That will help."

She took a breath, relaxed and smiled, "Yes. You know me too well."

They studied peacefully until Harry glanced at his watch, "Well, about time to go."

Hermione's eyes came up from her book – with dread. She sighed in resignation, "Ok."



He stood up, "Do you want to drive to the test?"

Panic set in her eyes and she shook her head, "No, please. Too much all at once."

They gathered their things and started out the door.

She stood waiting as Harry unlocked the car, "I'm normally so good at taking tests." She shook her head.

He looked fondly to her as he started the car, "Yes, but kinaesthetic subjects are not normally your best, though you can become very good at them, with practice."

She looked at him with wide eyes, "That's very insightful, Harry. Where have you seen me become good at kinaesthetic subjects?"

Harry was about to say duelling but choked at his almost-mistake. His stomach dropped as he thought madly for an alternative – He thought of her 'injury'! "Lacrosse." He pulled out of the drive.

She sighed in realisation and nodded.

"You still have your fear of heights but you got pretty good at Lacrosse." In Harry's mind 'Lacrosse' equated to magical duelling.

"I suppose."

He smiled at her unease, "Just give it some practice and you'll be brilliant, just like everything else."

She blushed, "Harry."

He glanced at her in feigned amazement, "What aren't you brilliant at?" He turned out onto the main road.

She frowned, "Lots of things."

He looked at her seriously, "Like what?"

She huffed, "Well – like you! You're so good at – at knowing what I need and how to help. I just seem to be pants at that." She almost pouted.

Harry stared at her and almost missed a turn, "How can you say that?"

She looked depressed, "I'm just not that good at things like that."

He turned into the testing centre car park, stopped the car in the parking place reserved for the driving test and looked seriously at her, "Hermione, you're looking at what you think is my strength and comparing it to what you think of as your weakness. That's not a productive comparison." She started to protest but he kept going, "You – and I, for that matter – can be good at anything! It just depends upon how much time and energy we want to put into a given subject. Right?" He looked closely in her clouded eyes, "Right?"

She huffed again, "See? There you go." She smiled mischievously.

He smiled, "And so can you."

She sighed and got out, "Ok. You're right."

Hermione was predictably perfect on the written test – and nervous on the driving test. But she passed.

Hermione came out of the test with her temporary license – and collapsed in his arms, "Harry."

"You did it!"

"I missed a few on the driving."

"So did I." Not that he could remember what, but he must have missed something.

She leaned back and looked surprised, "You did?"

"Sure. Most people do. My examiner said learning to drive is an ongoing process."

She laid her head back on his shoulder, "Thank you, Harry."

He buried his head in her wild hair, "Anything for you, Hermione." After a few very pleasant moments his stomach rumbled.

She chuckled.

"Did you mention something about Thai?"

She stepped back and started pulling him toward the car, "Yes, let's go! It's wonderful."

He smirked, "Are you driving?"

"No!"

**Sunday, 4 August, 1996, 17:00**

Harry was finally ready and able to sit down to dinner with Remus. He felt, finally, that he could wear his glasses safely. Without losing his lunch, or tripping over everything, or his eyes hurting within about 15 minutes. He felt accomplished – and stupid at the same time. Accomplished because he finally figured out how to set up the spells on his glasses to see magic. Yet stupid because it only took him all weekend! First problem was making the charms too strong so he couldn't see out of his glasses at all. Then the colours were too bright and opaque, so you saw the magic but not the magical object. Then the colours kept moving way too much and making him dizzy.

Harry huffed just thinking about it. It was endless fiddling to get something even basically functional. The interactions between the collection of spells caused everything to be unstable. Change one thing on one spell and all sorts of other things got all messed up. But they weren't supposed to

interact! There were supposed to be clear lines delineating one spell from the other and what they do. No! It was enough to make Harry hate magic.

Until Remus gave him a clue. This small little hint, one that he didn't remember hearing anywhere in his Hogwarts career. That small little issue known as 'Intent and Will'. If you are applying a set of spells to an object and you are thinking about how they may interact - then they *will* interact! If you do NOT think about them interacting - then they *WON'T*! Who the hell designed this crap, anyway!

His frustration was overflowing. Boiling. Curling his hair! It didn't need to look any messier than it already did! Why did magic hate him?

Harry just had to walk away for a while and walk around the outside of the cottage. In the rain. For an hour.

"Harry! You need to come inside now! You'll catch dragon pox or something dumb." Remus had poked his head out the front door, trying to get Harry to see rationality.

Harry had deflated. His shoulders dropped, his head drooped. He shook his head as he started toward the cottage, "Ok. I'll come back. For Hermione."

Remus started attacking him with drying charms, warming charms, cleaning charms, and the like as he walked through the door. "I'm sorry, Harry. I thought you knew."

He shrugged, "I'm sure Hermione knew. I just - never caught on to that little tid-bit."

"But you got something to work now?"

Harry sat down at the table and sighed tiredly. He saw Remus' magic as tinged with a lot of yellow due to his 'furry little problem', like his eyes. "Yes. When I wear the glasses, magic looks like a coloured fog surrounding an object. A translucent fog, so I can still see the underlying object. The stronger the magic, the brighter and thicker the fog. The colour reflects

how harmful the magic is. The shape of the fog relates to how sensitive it is, and in which direction. Any motion in the fog indicates how 'active' the magic is, which relates to how unstable or volatile it is."

Remus looked rather confused, "I'm having a difficult time understanding what that may look like."

Harry nodded since he had a devil of a time figuring it out. "Well – imagine the worst possible spell for an object. A curse on an object that will kill you, that's a very bright red fog. A healing charm would be blue or green. Size and shape indicates the volume or area covered by the magic. If the fog is rippling, flashing, or moving, that indicates how unstable the magic is. Or how – I guess you'd call it – how trigger-happy the magic is. How easily it wants to react."

Remus was now smiling, "Excellent, Harry. Truly excellent."

"At least it works now. I won't be heaving and leaving chunky lunch-puddles all over everything any more."

Remus grimaced and looked away, "Harry. You're worse than Sirius."

Harry gave him a suspect look, "You trying to tell me I'm Maraudable or something?"

Remus looked a bit pained, "Where did you get this tendency to mangle the English language so? Neither Lily nor James would have ever done something so – heinous."

Harry frowned, "Must be the Doosleys. They've warped me beyond impair – compare – I mean, repair."

Remus frowned even more, "So, what do you have left to do on it?"

Harry shrugged, "Just learn how to use it. How do I figure out what it all means? And how do I react to what I can see?"

"Why would that be so hard? It sounds pretty straightforward."

"It is, with only one bit of magic on an object. But when you have many complex sets of magic applied to one or more things, you get overlapping colours, obscured colours, and interactions between different magical spells on the same object can cause motion that is only indirectly related. It gets crazy real quick and unraveling all that can take a while. Just being in this house is like living in a brown fog because of the volumetric wards. One really cool thing is that I can see the magic on something that is hidden, like your wand in your pocket. The magic extends through your clothes giving it away."

Remus looked quite impressed, "Truly excellent, Harry. Hermione would be proud."

Harry smiled at that. She probably would be – in between her squeals of excitement. He wished he could show her. But – who knows – maybe someday. Then he remembered, "Oh, did you get a chance to talk to the mind healer at St Mungos? About Hermione's strange memories?"

Remus nodded, "Yes, I did. He said it can't slip. Nor can you 'miss' something because you obliviate by event, or by subject matter. If the obliviator obliviates 'magic' they get all of magic."

Harry was still frowning, "But that memory was not specifically about magic."

"Yes, it doesn't make sense to me either. I'm just telling you what he told me."

Harry shook his head in confusion, "I don't understand."

**Monday, 5 August, 1996, 08:00**

Harry was buttoning the last button on his shirt after his morning workout and shower, anticipating his breakfast quite keenly. He moved to filling his pockets with all the accoutrements of modern life; keys, mobile, wallet,

wand-holster and wand, backup wand-holster and wand, wardstone-phone, his magically charmed watch, charmed glasses – all the 'normal' things. He smiled at his new definition of 'normal'.

"Harry? This looks important."

Harry turned at the sound of Remus' voice and headed toward the kitchen, "What's that?"

Remus was pointing at an owl outside the kitchen window, "It only wants to talk to you." A Gringotts owl. With a baleful glare and an impatient hoot.

"Oh, boy. An owl with a scowl. Looks serious."

Remus chuckled, "Old jokes never die, they just get Sirius."

Harry shook his head and called out to the owl, "Alright, I'm coming." He moved to the window and upon opening it, the bird launched at him and practically threw the letter at him, then flew off. Harry held it up to show Remus, "Official Gringotts. Addressed to –" he turned it over suspiciously – and his voice fell in resignation, "Lord Black."

Remus grumbled darkly and turned to serve breakfast at the small table.

Harry started opening the letter as he sat down. He unfolded it and started reading, "Ah, crap! The Wizen-idiots have summoned Lord Black. Via Gringotts." Harry tilted his head, "– So that means they don't know I am Lord Black, they just see evidence that someone is acting as Lord Black. Damn! I do *not* want to talk to them."

Remus slowed his eating, thinking, "I don't think you can get out of it. What day?"

"Tomorrow at 10. But do I have to let them know who I am?"

"Maybe not. I think you should go talk to Clawhammer. I imagine he will know what's going on. And he may be able to help. By the way – I won't be

able to go with you. I will need to stay outside the bank – and the Wizengamot session tomorrow – to be able to respond to any attacks on the Grangers."

Harry nodded slowly and rubbed his upset stomach, "This is not what I need right now. But yes – I'll go see Clawhammer first. After food." He started in on his pile of breakfast. Within twenty minutes Harry was grabbing his coat – his black leather muggle coat, just out of antagonism – and getting ready to apparate to Gringotts. Harry called out to Remus in a jaunty voice, "I'm off to Gringotts. If I'm not back in two hours, destroy the world, alright?"

Remus stuck his head out of the kitchen with a disbelieving smirk, "Riiight."

Harry popped out and landed at the Diagon Alley apparition point. His left ear blocked up because of the barometric pressure difference between Remus' cottage and Diagon Alley. It unblocked on his third try at yawning. He started toward Gringotts – and immediately had to slow down. His magical glasses were so full of colour he was afraid he would trip over something. He had to consciously try to ignore all the colourful fogs surrounding just about everything. He kept walking, trying to see through everything. This was going to take some significant getting used to. His attention was focussed quickly by the danger of his surroundings, by everyone staring at him.

Today, even at this early hour, his fame was worse than it had ever been. Everyone stopped and stared at him, following his passage down to Gringotts. Some were curious, some looked angry or resentful, some looked fearful. Harry resisted the urge to indicate his displeasure with universal hand-signs. These people were not his responsibility. Harry reminded himself that his first job was to not become an easy target. He met no one's eyes, acknowledged no one, but kept his head on a swivel – including looking up at the balconies and windows of the upper levels. He remembered Remus' admonishment, "*The two things that most easily get you killed in a hostile environment – standing still and not looking up.*" Harry never stood still and never took a straight line.



Until he got to Gringotts; there was no way around the choke-point – the murder-funnel – of the front door. He just hoped that by watching the Goblin guards closely he could get some hint that something might be happening behind him and he should duck – or something. He approached the door from the side and sighed as he stepped through the front door – and still side-stepped away from the doorway to make a more difficult target.

The colours of magic he saw were fascinating, clinging to everything in ranges of colours, some with moving spots, others dim and barely visible. He would have loved to stop and look at everything but it was too dangerous. Particularly inside the bank. Even the floors glowed with magic, not that he had time to stop and investigate.

He whispered to the Goblin at the accounts desk, "Harry James Potter to see Clawhammer."

The Goblin responded in kind, "This way." All the doors, hallways, and passages were never the same twice through to Clawhammer, even going in or out. And the colours were mind-boggling. He wondered if any of Gringotts customers even looked at the never-the-same passages. Was this game of subterfuge and power totally lost on all Gringotts customers? An extravagant waste? Or a petty game of insult? The Goblin knocked twice on a door covered in swirling colours.

"Come!"

Harry entered a different room, with different books and shelves, and a different desk. Also, a set of couches on either side of a low table. He bowed, "Clawhammer, thank you for seeing me." Harry could see a grey-blue magic clinging to Clawhammer.

Clawhammer stood up from his couch and offered his hand, "Lord Black. I'm glad you could come so soon."

Harry took it with a wince, "Please, just Harry. I'd rather no one knew that I am Lord Black."

Clawhammer smiled and bowed lightly, "Just Harry." He sounded disbelieving, then chuckled, "You are safe here as Lord Black." His smile dropped, "But the Wizengamot has other ideas." He indicated the other couch to Harry and they sat.

Harry grimaced, "I wanted to – prevail upon your good nature –"

Clawhammer started chuckling again.

Harry kept speaking in spite of his embarrassment at his stilted speech, "Even go so far as to dare your wrath and – ask for your advice." He sighed in defeat. He knew he was asking a lot from the normally quite aloof Goblin Nation.

"Good nature? I must be failing in my old age if you think we have *any* good nature. But self-interest? You can depend on that. In this situation our interests align with yours. And, given your pivotal position in the upcoming conflict, I will let you know when our interests do not align with yours." He gave Harry a significant look, "But not necessarily why."

Even with that caveat, Harry felt quite honoured at his forthright comments, "Thank you. Could I be straightforward enough – no, gauche enough – to ask you to explain your perspective on this summons of Lord Black to appear before the Wizengamot?"

Clawhammer nodded – and thought for a time. "Have you read any of the papers lately?"

"No. I am completely focussed on my goal. I don't want to get distracted with – meaningless things." Clawhammer looked incredulous, so Harry continued, "Remus has tried to draw me into reading the articles but – I don't care what they think."

Clawhammer's eyebrows rose and a small smile grew, "Well. Your abject rejection of the wizarding world has cast doubt on – *everything*."

Harry frowned, "Some don't seem to have any doubts. They just attack me."

"Ah, that is their obvious reaction, but they attack because of the insecurity of their doubt. Even Voldemort."

Harry huffed, "Voldemort? Doubt? I thought madness was incompatible with doubt."

"Megalomaniacs want to climb on top of the tallest building. If that tallest building then turns out to be merely a dustbin, well -" He shrugged.

Harry's frustration at the indirect metaphors was growing, but he remained patient. Clawhammer must have sensed his frustration.

Clawhammer's voice became low and sinister, "Let me get to the point. The Wizengamot has been teetering on the edge of a knife for years. Balanced between Light, Dark, and Fools. This balance has been a constant fight between Dumbledore and Malfoy. Then Voldemort comes back and begins to tip that balance toward war. Dumbledore had kept you in reserve. Hidden. You, with your significant reputation, built up to beyond human - by him - has been a balance to, and a bulwark against the fear of Voldemort. Now you have removed your support for Dumbledore, but also thrown Voldemort's victory into doubt, by taking the shine off his prize. Because, previous to your rejection, your stature had made his prize so much taller. So, in your absence, he desires to bring back some of the shine - by summoning Lord Black. He will try to test Lord Black, to pull you to his side, to - bring back greatness to his quest. After all, to conquer an anthill is not a worthy task for the 'greatest' of wizards."

Harry held his head in his hands, covering his face, "My God! This is all just sickness! These bastards just play incessant games for dominance. Just a giant pissing-match that ends up killing people!"

"These high stakes give the prize a - special aroma." Clawhammer's voice was full of dark cynicism.

Harry leaned back and glared at the ceiling, "So the best way for me to interrupt this pissing match would be to destroy the wizarding world?"

Clawhammer chuckled, "Yes, that would be quite effective - if a little costly."

Harry smiled a bit, "Well, I guess don't have to actually burn anything down, just take the shine off it. Or threaten to."

Clawhammer's smile grew, "The Black family is one of the Sacred 28. One of the founding families in the Wizarding Compact that forms the foundation upon which The Wizengamot, the Ministry, the very government of Wizarding Britain is built. Without it, there is no prize for Voldemort to win. The only thing left would be the very difficult and unpleasant task of - *governance*." Clawhammer grimaced at the word, "No fun at all."

Harry was shocked and didn't know what to think, so he took a step back, "I do not want them to find out I am Lord Black."

"No. That would ruin the surprise. Here." Clawhammer snapped his fingers and a set of papers appeared in his hands and he handed them to Harry, "This will give you the ability to maintain your anonymity."

Harry glanced at the pages full of complex spell diagrams and arithmancy. His eyes widened at the mere thought that Clawhammer would share magic with him. The implications could be huge.

"As you say, you may not have to actually destroy anything, just the threat may be enough."

"Who knows that I am Lord Black?"

"No one outside these walls. Sirius Black was quite discrete. His will was handled strictly internal to Gringotts, and a select few at that. Though Dumbledore probably suspects. But he would never tell anyone. He never tells anyone anything."

Harry huffed bitterly.

"Dumbledore is also quite insecure. Thus he never risks telling anyone anything, since they may disagree. Or interfere. It dilutes his perceived power."

Harry looked at Clawhammer for a good long look, "I am very grateful for your sharing your insights – but, could you explain the rationale for this? What do you think I should try to accomplish with this threat?"

Clawhammer drew a large smile, "Mainly, you are just kicking them in the teeth and setting them back. They will run off to their various masters and consult for some time before they decide to come back and ask again. The reality behind dissolving the Wizarding Compact would be that the Ministry – the government of Wizarding Britain – would collapse. The ICW would need to step in – in other words, send troops – to enforce the Statute of Secrecy. This would put a *serious* dent in Voldemort's ability to take over Wizarding Britain. It would draw entirely too much attention to his activities too early in his game."

"Sounds wonderful. Why should I *not* do this?"

"You would never be able to put it back. Wizarding Britain would become – and remain – an ICW Protectorate, like some other areas around the world."

Harry's anger burst forth, "But would it then be functional? Safe? Honourable? Honest?"

Clawhammer's smile did not fade – but hardened, "Most likely. But you would lose a significant amount of self-determination. The ICW representation for Protectorates are not as locally tailored to the needs and culture of the populace."

"That doesn't sound half bad."

"You would lose Hogwarts."

Harry sat stunned, "Why?"

"ICW Educational Standards would restructure it, replace most of the traditions, professors, and curriculum. And likely the castle."

Harry took a metaphorical step back and thought. Replace Hogwarts? Did he really care? Was Hogwarts a net-gain for Wizarding Britain? A force for change? Or did it merely reinforce the bigotry? Those were hard questions. Ones he didn't have the patience or energy for. He shook his head in tiredness, "I have no idea."

Clawhammer nodded, "Good. Those decisions should not be made by just one person – even if it may be tempting."

Harry was lost in thought for a few moments.

Clawhammer picked up the silence, "You see, to even bring up the threat of wiping out the government would change the game, because it reframes the problem, the possibilities, the choices. It also establishes Lord Black as an equal to Voldemort. That may be all that's necessary. A shot across the bow."

Harry looked rather suspicious, "And escalate the conflict?"

Clawhammer raised an eyebrow, "Voldemort is already heading for war, how do you escalate beyond that?"

Harry sighed deeply, "I suppose we will see."

"Yes. I wish you luck with this."

Harry stood up, "Clawhammer, I thank you for your insight. It is invaluable."

Clawhammer rose and extended his hand, "And I thank you, Lord Black."

Harry chuckled as he shook his hand, "Well, keep an ear out for any large explosions tomorrow morning. Oh! – Did I mention that I'd like Hermione

Granger to inherit everything if something happens to me? Well – leave some for Remus Lupin – and the Tonks, now that I think of it. They should probably be brought back into the Black family. And throw Bellatrix out. And ...” He shook his head at all the ideas the topic brought up.

”I will begin setting that up and we will discuss it more later.”

Harry left the bank with a lot to think about. His watch said it was almost 10, so he needed to call Hermione and let her know he would be late. But that would have to wait until he got outside the shooting gallery known as Diagon Alley. At least, given that the effective range of most spells was no better than a pistol, he only needed to pay attention within about 50 metres. People went back to staring at him. It was unnerving – but mainly because it was rather unusual, even for him.

Harry apparated to Remus' cottage and gathered his study materials. He dialled Hermione's number. He was tense; he hated being late, especially for Hermione.

”Hello?”

Harry immediately calmed down hearing her voice, ”Hi Hermione, this is Harry.”

”Harry – is something wrong?”

His smile came through his voice, ”Just some complications to deal with at the bank. But that's all done and I'm on my way.”

”Oh, good. I'll see you in a bit?”

”Yes, I'll be there in time to make lunch.”

Hermione laughed, ”Yes, come to save me from starvation.”

”Oh, yes. Think about what we should make. I'll show you how.”

Hermione sighed, ”Wonderful. I'll be waiting.”

"Bye." "Bye."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief and grabbed his stuff. Out the door, into his car, and on the road. He was moving – but he still had an hour to think. The questions gnawed at him. He spent most of his time trying to pull his anger at the Wizengamot and the Wizarding world out of the equation. He wanted to have a rational thought process around this problem, but it was resisting his efforts. His thoughts kept getting caught into walking into the Wizengamot Chamber and burning it down; no discussion, no warning, just flames.

But as he got closer to Hermione's house, he came to see his dreams of flames would do nothing. It was depressing because he had no other ideas as of yet.

Then he turned into Hermione's drive. He sighed in relief and a smile crept onto his face. It felt like he had come home. He gathered his stuff hurriedly and got out.

The door opened, "Harry."

Harry smiled, "Hermione. Are you hungry yet? Any thoughts on what we should make?"

She sighed and rolled her eyes ruefully, "No. I mean – yes, I'm hungry, no, I have no idea."

Harry kept walking forward with a sneaking smile, "Hmmm – how about – biscuits?" He noticed the blue-green fog of magic surrounding her closely, only extending about 3 centimetres from her.

She gasped, "Harry, you can't – those aren't –"

"They will be quite edible so they will qualify as food."

"Yes, but – you can't eat just biscuits!"



"Of course not." His smile started sneaking out beneath his faux outraged tone.

She huffed, "Harry - I don't think we have all the ingredients."

"You do, unless you've used them since Friday?"

"We do? Mum bought biscuit ingredients?" She stood confused, lost in amazement.

Harry stopped in front of her as she stood in the doorway, "I can show you - if you think it wouldn't destroy your concept of the universe."

She looked at him blankly, then slapped his arm playfully with a sputter, "You! Mum has baked biscuits before. - Or Dad, actually."

His smile got larger as he enjoyed her confusion. She was so cute when she was confused. He was about to melt. "So, your Dad is the secret anarchist in the family?"

Her eyes focussed on him in consternation and she pulled his arm into the house, "Come on, you. Let's get started. But we need to make something real, too. We can't make *just* biscuits. Mum would have a melt-down."

Harry smiled mischievously, "Perfect. The biscuits will likely melt, too. We can all melt down together."

She looked at him disconcerted.

His smile got bigger, "One big glop of biscuit-goo."

She rolled her eyes in amusement, "Focus, Harry. Less talk, more baking."

They settled on some sandwiches as well as biscuits. Harry was amazed, not to mention Hermione, when he found some chocolate chips, not knowing how these 'controlled substances' came into the house. Regardless, they settled on oatmeal chocolate chip biscuits.

The other thing Harry noticed was that occasionally, Hermione's magic would start to ripple and move. He only noticed it a few times. Then he started experimenting and found that whenever his left arm came within half a metre of her, her magic would start to move. Then he remembered that he had Hermione's wand in a wand holster on his left arm, as a backup. He decided he needed to talk to Remus about this. In the mean time, biscuits were baking, and the smell was beginning to drive them both crazy.

The biscuits were done cooking long before Hermione's parents got home. But Harry had to pull Hermione out of the kitchen and back to studying before she ran over her biscuit-limit by a factor of two. Or more, if he didn't keep an eye on her.

They both had a wonderful time studying, much to Harry's amazement. It was so much the opposite of the drama and empty strife of the Wizengamot and the wizarding world in general. It was just what he needed now. And, he realised, he genuinely enjoyed learning. The world was full of fascinating things if he would only allow himself to become interested. Particularly when his interest in something would not be used against him by the Dursley's. The freedom to follow his curiosity and let it run free was truly amazing. Was he just a chameleon, or was he really more like Hermione than Ron? Maybe his friendship with Ron was influenced by his lack of friendship with Dudley. His normal human desire to be accepted by Dudley. But – that might be a bit too far. But, honestly, there felt like some sort of – emotional echo there. He'd think about it.

Harry noticed the sound of a car door, footsteps, muffled voices, footsteps on the porch, a key in the lock. He smiled. Hermione's parents were home.

The door opened, "Good afternoon, Harry, Hermione. How was your day?" Emma came in, followed by Dan.

Hermione pulled her eyes up from her book and took a big breath, "Good afternoon. We've been studying –" Then she came alive, "And! Harry made biscuits!"

Harry had been watching her wake up from her deep study zone and come back to the here-and-now. "Well, yes, but you helped."

Dan got a look in his eye, "Biscuits, eh? Who's idea was that?"

Harry and Hermione subtly pointed at each other.

Dan laughed.

Emma looked suspicious.

Harry and Hermione both broke out laughing when they noticed they had both sold out the other.

Dan was smiling suspiciously, "I see. Well, really the question is – were they any good?"

Harry looked to Hermione who nodded profusely, "Wonderful!"

Harry looked back at Dan apologetically, "I think we've got a cookie monster on our hands."

Hermione was incredulous, "Me? Who was it who ate half the batch before it ever got into the oven?"

Harry smirked and held up a finger to make his point, "Taste testing."

Hermione huffed.

Dan chuckled.

Emma grumped, "And did you leave any for us?"

Harry and Hermione matched nodding heads.

Emma seemed mollified, "Well, we'll give them a try and let you know."

Dan was still chuckling, "Well, Harry, can you join us for dinner?"

Harry looked sad, "Ah – thank you but – I had promised my parents I would keep an eye on Remus for them – keep him out of jail, you know. I should check up on him."

Dan and Emma started chuckling.

Hermione started to smirk, "He does seem the type, doesn't he? A bit of a rascal?"

"You would not believe." Then Harry remembered, "Oh – by the way, I will be late again tomorrow. I have to finish cleaning up a mess at the bank again tomorrow. I'm not sure how long it will take, so – don't wait for me."

Hermione nodded with a touch of concern.

Dan's eyebrows rose, "Ah, those can be difficult. Hope it goes well."

Harry nodded, "Yes, thank you. I'll see you tomorrow." He picked up his bag and was attacked by a Hermione-hug.

One he revelled in. He whispered to Hermione, "Thank you. I needed that. This one tomorrow is going to be a big one." He probably shouldn't have mentioned that – but it slipped out.

She stepped back from the hug, "Come as soon as you can."

"I will. See you." He was gone quietly out the door. The drive to Remus' was a solitary affair. They didn't usually feel that way, but today it did. A long lonely trip into the late afternoon sun. With the weight of the Wizengamot sitting on his stomach. But at least he would have the chance to talk to Remus about it after dinner. They would probably spend the evening strategising and planning. That made him feel better. The only interruption to the trip was his momentary panic at the 'low fuel' light coming on, and the mad dash to find some petrol along the route. Yet another thing he had to remember to keep track of. He sighed at the craziness of his new life; all the complexity of both worlds.

Remus – or Dobby – had dinner waiting for him when he got home. Remus was good enough to hold off his interrogation until after the food was done and Harry had a moment to catch his breath. But that could only last so long.

"So Harry. What did Clawhammer have to say?" Remus' smile was quite intense.

"He said a few important things. I don't know which I would consider the most important, but let me start with his perspective on why this was happening. I'll paraphrase a bit – he said basically this situation is a pissing contest between two megalomaniacs; Voldemort and Dumbledore."

"What!?! Where did he get that?"

Harry held up his hand, "Let me finish, I did say I was paraphrasing."

Remus took a deep breath and crushed his anger.

"Voldemort is a megalomaniac who wants to conquer Wizarding Britain. Dumbledore has been holding off Malfoy's efforts to further that agenda. One of the ways he has been doing that is by balancing the fear of Voldemort with the legend of 'The-Boy-Who-Lived', suitably amplified by Dumbledore. With Voldemort back and me 'abandoning' Dumbledore, that has thrown just about everything into question. Including Voldemort's conquest of Wizarding Britain, since one of the things that would make his victory so sweet is conquering my reputation."

Remus started to interrupt.

"Clawhammer said that Voldemort's megalomania drives him to conquer big things. As he says, an anthill is not a fitting quest for the 'greatest of wizards'. He suggested I, as Lord Black, should threaten to destroy the Wizarding Compact –"

Remus' jaw hit the floor with a thud, "What!?!"

"- because it would take away the shine from Voldemort's prize, namely Wizarding Britain. It would turn it into an anthill. And -"

Remus had again started to interrupt.

"- if the Wizarding Compact were destroyed it would leave Wizarding Britain as a Protectorate of the ICW, who would then send in troops to maintain the Statute of Secrecy, which would block Voldemort's efforts to conquer much of anything. It would effectively stop the war - at the cost of our culture." Harry waited for the explosion.

Remus was still breathing, calming down, trying to come to grips with what the Goblins seemed to be planning. Remus started to tremble, "This is a level of politics that I - we - no one is prepared for. To play with nations like playthings to be tossed about - is - not something I'm comfortable with."

Harry nodded slowly, "Yes. I'm not either. But at the same time, there is a certain - rationale to it. I think the big question is whether Clawhammer's estimation of Voldemort's response is correct. At first, I didn't think so, but think about the Triwizard Tournament. Voldemort spent a year building a complex scheme to get hold of my blood to build himself a new body. During the height of the Tournament, no less. He certainly does have an element of the showman to his efforts."

Remus cocked an eyebrow and thought, "Yes - but - you can't just destroy Wizarding Britain on a whim and hope it helps stop Voldemort."

"No, but do I need to destroy it? Or merely threaten to?"

Remus shook his head, "Just a threat is useless. You have to be ready to use it or it means nothing. That is an unbelievably dangerous escalation of the conflict."

"Yes, I asked Clawhammer about that too. Given that Voldemort is already heading toward war, how would this be escalating anything beyond that?"

It's already going to be bad enough. If this can stop the war, can it be that bad?"

Remus stopped, stilled, thinking.

Harry got lost in his own thoughts, "I suppose – if I bring the issue up to the Wizengamot tomorrow, then I get to frame the subject the way I want to. I get to set the stage and the argument. I get the advantage of making the first move." He sunk back down into his thoughts.

Remus tentatively poked Harry for his thoughts, "How would you take advantage of that?"

Harry frowned, "I'm not sure yet."

Silence settled on them as they wandered the paths of possibilities.

"Oh –" Harry interrupted, "Clawhammer gave me some spells to hide my identity when I go to the Wizengamot tomorrow."

Remus did a double-take, "He what?" His voice was breathless.

Harry dug in his pocket and pulled out a sheaf of papers and handed them to Remus, "He said this set of spells should be able to keep my identity safe. And if it works, I'll be *very* grateful. I do not want the Wizen-idiots to know I am Lord Black."

Remus was perusing the parchments like some kind of holy book, "I've never heard of the Goblins sharing magic with *anyone* before. Ever!"

Harry smirked into the distance, "I was thinking about that. What if the Goblins had a very secret group of Goblins that would search through old family vaults to find and collect old family magic from grimoires, and such. They would need to keep it absolutely secret, even within the bank – but it would be a very smart thing for them to do, to maintain some balance of power with the Wizarding government."

Remus' jaw hit the floor again. He struggled with the idea of Goblin stability – and credibility, then finally spoke, "I suppose it would." He started looking at the parchments again more eagerly, "Maybe there are some clues as to where this magic came from."

"Do you think it will work?"

Remus looked at him, "Only one way to find out. We need to try it out and test it." He started setting the parchments out on the low table in front of the couch, "Wow, this is very sophisticated magic. There seems to be several – three, four, five? – parts to this. The parts are ordered in how they are applied." He paused unsure, "It's like – five spells wound together into one big one. You have to – keep several spells in play before you finish any of them." He started to get more excited, "It's like you need to suspend your intent for one spell while you start another – and another – before you tie them off at the end."

Harry laughed, "So it's like quantum mechanics; the intent of the measurer changes the measurement? That's – way too deep for me. I'll have to ask Hermione about that." He shook his head in amazement. Then a crushing sadness landed on him when he realised he couldn't ask Hermione.

Remus missed quantum mechanics and went straight to magic, "It's like when you twine several fibres together – or weave threads into a fabric. I've heard hints about this before. The weaving of magic into combined interlocking structures. But it's beyond a Mastery." His voice trailed off into distant imaginings.

Harry's sadness had blossomed into a bitter rage at the barrier erected by the magical world between him and Hermione. Their world had been split into his and hers, and he can't share any of it with her. He must lie to her constantly. Hide from her.

Remus turned back to the parchments and whispered to them, "But the interlocking mechanism – what is the common – linkage? The point of connection between the individual spells? Merely intent?"



Harry burned with anger. Did he care one whit for the magical world? Those bastards are busy creating their own disaster – and working damn hard at it, should he care?

Remus started mumbling, "The possibilities – this means – unbelievable ..."

Harry's anger dropped suddenly as he realised that the barrier between them would fall if they married. He may not be able to restore her memories but he could at least share his world. And then anger rushed back. Him 'sharing his world' would be a constant reminder to Hermione of all that she used to have and can no longer have.

Remus turned to Harry, "Harry, this means –"

Harry jumped up and yelled, "To hell with the magical world! Bugger them all! Those bastards have earned this!" He picked up his coat as he headed for the door to find some space.

"What? ..." Remus had missed something. "Harry, what happened?" He got up and followed Harry out the door into the cold dark forest and stars.

Harry was standing still looking into the trees like he could see the entire forest.

"What happened, Harry?"

Harry took a deep breath and let out his deep rage, "I've –" he waved his hand in confusion, "– come to realise the profound barrier the wizarding world has put between me and Hermione." He turned pleading to Remus, "I can't share anything that I am with Hermione. I have to lie to her – for the rest of my life!" He breathed his anger and frustration, "Even if we married, I could share my world but it wouldn't be her world! It would only serve to remind her of what she used to have and can no longer have!" He turned and looked away.

Remus wilted, "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry turned back in rage, "I'm going to burn those bastards to the ground! All of them!"

Remus looked crushed, his voice soft, "Me? Neville? Luna?"

Harry turned away like he'd been slapped. A few ragged breaths and a broken "No" stuttered out.

"I'm afraid you can't fix that, Harry."

Harry turned back, his voice broken, but as strong as hammer blows, "But I will not abandon her!"

All Remus could do was nod in the face of the gale of magic Harry was erupting.

Harry slowly moved into the cottage, his hands deep in his pockets, his head hanging down.

Remus moved to catch up, "Harry, I'm afraid you need to learn this magic tonight, so you can use it tomorrow morning."

Harry pulled himself together, because Hermione depended on him surviving this. They spent two hours learning the combined spells and testing the results.

"Harry, there is one more point I want to bring up about this."

Harry was looking tired now, "Yes?"

"Tomorrow, you will be facing the entire Wizengamot, likely the Department Heads, the press, probably everyone. There will be people there who will be closely related to the Black family. People who know more about the Black family and its history than you do."

Harry deflated a bit, "Yes. I imagine."

"And, there will be people there who know you."

"Me?"

Remus shrugged, "Dumbledore will have his eyes glued on you."

Harry nodded in tired acknowledgment, "Yes."

"You need to act like a true Black, not Harry Potter. You must change your word choices, your sentence structure, your walk. The way you stand! Otherwise someone will recognise you."

Harry nodded, looking even more tired.

"There is a special entrance for members of the Sacred 28 families, but they will ask to verify your identity, so I would suggest you not use it."

Harry frowned, "So – any suggestions on how?"

"I suggest you go to the Ministry at 8AM to take your apparition test, take the test, then don't leave afterward. Apply your disguise then go to the Wizengamot at 10. That will make it much harder for anyone to connect you, and your apparition test, to Lord Black."

Harry nodded slowly, "That will work."

Remus sighed as he thought for a moment, "The Black family has been ruthless, vicious, very Dark, and *fiercely* independent. Commit to nothing, answer no questions with a definitive answer, tell them they have no right to ask about matters internal to the Black Family. The Summons has been fulfilled by you merely showing up. You need to do nothing more than that. You do not need to defend your position, the fact that you are wearing the Headship ring of the Black Family is enough, particularly since it would kill any imposter. All you need to do is touch the shield of the Wizarding Compact set into the wall of the Wizengamot chamber, which is below the Chief Warlock seat, and it will prove your veracity. – Or you could destroy it, which would destroy the Wizarding Compact."

Harry looked calmer.

"I think the goal here, should be to deflect their interest, to get them to leave you alone."

"We are talking about the Wizengamot, right?"

Remus sighed and started chuckling, "Yes."

"Right. Thanks, Remus. This all helps a lot."

Remus nodded resolutely, "Right, I think it's time to get some rest for the big day."

Harry mutely nodded and started getting ready.

**Tuesday, 6 August, 1996, 06:00**

Harry woke up with a gasp, shot up on his couch. Sitting with his breath rushing. He was trying to calm down when his alarm went off. He groaned and started toward the inevitable. At least he wasn't running Remus' torture gauntlet this morning. He was dressed and ready to leave by seven.

Remus came in the kitchen and sat at the small table, "Alright there, Harry?"

Harry stood breathing looking out the kitchen window, into the thick trees, "I guess."

"I think – that as long as they don't find out who you are, I don't think you can go very wrong."

Harry breathed, and nodded tensely. "I just need to be – nasty. Dark."

Harry stood, Remus sat, and looked at each other. Neither knew what to say.

Harry breathed again, "Right. Best get on with it."

Remus nodded.

Harry moved to the grate and pinched a bit of floo powder and called out, "The Ministry of Magic." The green flames and nausea (and the endless swirling colours) carried him away until it dumped him out on the floor of the Ministry atrium. He got up hurriedly and brushed himself off, all the while mumbling about damn wizards. He took a moment to look around at all the colours, shapes, and the slight fog of very old magic. Layer upon layer. He shook his head and had to keep walking to not miss his test.

It was relatively quiet this early. He went through the line at the security desk and gave the reason for his visit, "Apparition license test." He was passed through the checkpoint and headed for the lifts and the fourth floor. He was early, but that meant if there were any gaps in the appointments he would go faster. He waited. His nerves making his jaw hurt.

The apparition test was easy. Particularly since he had been apparating around for a few weeks now. He left the office and headed for the loo. He sequestered himself in a stall and started his transformation. He took off his wizard robes leaving a set of muggle-style leather clothes, complete with studs. He added a black ski mask to make sure. Then he applied the magic from Clawhammer. This made him look like a spectre in a thick heavy black cape that covered his shoulders to the floor, with a very deep hood. No one could see his face and his voice was distorted. Then came his invisibility cloak, and a few silencing spells to hide his footfalls, the rustling of his clothes, and the sound of his nervous breathing. He walked out of the loo to the stairs and down to the entrance to the Wizengamot Chamber floor. At the end of a long curving hallway that bent around the Chamber was the Door for the Accused. He did not want to enter in the door of 'honour' that all the other Wizengamot members entered at the top of the gallery so they could be seen entering. He did not want to claim any honour. He found an out-of-the-way corner and stood quietly waiting for his appointed time. He could hear the noise of conversations coming in through the Door for the Accused.

With about five minutes left, two Aurors came down the hall and took up positions beside the double-doors. They looked bored – and nervous. Both

were young, probably 25, less than 30. Probably fresh out of the Auror Academy. One tall with brown hair, one shorter almost blond.

The blond fidgeted, "They said Lord Black was to show up. Think he'll show?"

"No idea. No one's seen or heard from anyone who could be Lord Black for at least a decade."

Blondie chuckled, "So they think a Summons will work, do they?"

"Games. Just games. Regardless, he won't be entering the Wizengamot Chamber through *this* door."

Harry moved down the hall to just out of sight around the bend and took off his invisibility cloak. He heard a loud but indistinct voice calling out the official opening of the Wizengamot session echoing through the passage.

Harry heard the blond, "What do we do if he shows up?"

"We're just here to open the doors, mate. That's all we do."

"Right."

Harry heard that loud voice call out, "The Wizengamot summons Lord Black!"

The blond now sounded nervous, "Well, he ain't here."

The other one sounded bored out of his brain, "We just stand here, mate."

Harry waited to a count of five, took the silencing spell off his shoes, and started walking calmly, his heels clicking, echoing in the stone hallway. He made it around the curve of the hall and almost all the way to the threshold before the Aurors registered who he might be.

The blond almost jumped out of his skin and drew his wand, but didn't point it, "Who the bloody hell are you?"

The bored one at least had the presence of mind to jump to attention, "Lord Black?"

"Yes." Harry bowed. His distorted voice sounded strange.

They stared at each other, until Harry waved his wand underneath the cape and the doors opened for him without the Aurors moving. The two Aurors moved to a semblance of attention beside the doors. Harry started his walk into the lions den. He walked slowly, calmly. The sharp click of his heels echoed in the expectant silence. The mumbles of the Wizengamot started almost immediately. Surprise, confusion, and confused stares dominated. Harry stopped in the centre of the chamber where the Seat of the Accused was normally placed. Harry took a moment to look around. The Wizengamot was packed, with members, press, department heads. Evidently everyone wanted a look at the new Head of House Black. And any fireworks that may ensue.

Dumbledore sat in his seat, impassive, his eyes glued sharply on Harry.

Fudge looked perplexed. He was obviously expecting Lord Black to appear out of the crowd and enter the Black Family seat reserved for him, probably accompanied by a triumphant processional march. Fudge stood up, "You are Lord Black?" He sounded surprised and a bit disbelieving.

Harry pitched his voice calmly and a bit menacingly, "I am Lord Black. I have been Summoned. I have fulfilled the Summons." He turned to leave. He made it three steps back before the mumbles rose up and Fudge sputtered, "Lord Black, wait! - We would like to ask you a few questions."

Harry stopped. He counted to three and turned to face Fudge, "You can ask all the questions you want. I don't have to listen, nor answer." He turned and started back toward the doors, which were still held open.

Dumbledore's voice called out, "Lord Black, the Wizengamot needs your leadership in this difficult time."

Harry slowed down and stopped, turned slowly, "Flattery only means something when the source carries respect, Chief Warlock."

Mumbles, both confused and angry, ran about and died in insecurity. No one knew quite how to take that statement.

Harry threw them a bone to egg them on, "You have nothing I or the House of Black want or need. I am only here to tell you not to summon me again."

Now the angry mumbles burst out and crested like a wave in shallow water, crashing on their equally shallow egos.

Fudge was still standing as he sputtered and huffed like a fish. He gathered his composure, "Lord Black, we are in need of your experience, your perspective, -"

"My *power*?" Harry's interruption was deliberately rude and set Fudge back.

Confused mumbles and a few chuckles ran about and slowly faded.

Harry decided to rub it in, "Let us be clear on who needs whom. Because that, of course, sets the costs and who pays. - Just to ensure you understand, that would be you." He waved his gloved hand indicating the chamber.

The mumbles started out shocked and quickly ran up to anger. Angry outraged voices stood out above the dull roar. None of them amounted to anything intelligible.

Harry's anger at their self-righteous posturing leapt. He pushed magic into his voice and yelled over the noise, "I tire of this farce! You fools play endless games of posturing and posing and do nothing! The world is ready to burn and you sit there preparing to set the match!"

The roar of angry voices rose up and swallowed what sanity was left. Most of the gallery stood waving their arms with clenched fists. Dumbledore



stood up and worked his gavel hard but could not be heard. He relented and shot a few cannon blasts toward the ceiling to break the wave. The blasts flared with bright red magic as the sound faded. Eventually it tapered off and Dumbledore aided his voice with magic to rise above, "Lord Black, you obviously have an opinion. Would you share it with us? In a less incendiary way?" His voice was steady, like speaking to a student.

Harry smiled and waited for quiet. He looked around the chamber at all the angry glares, the sardonic smiles, the fearful faces. When it was quiet enough he started, "Voldemort -"

Cries and gasps jumped out at the name.

Harry yelled at them, "FOOLS! - You quail at a name? A few fabricated syllables?"

Fudge sputtered, "He's dead! Only that fool child Harry Potter and Dumbledore support that preposterous claim!"

The noise jumped up and Harry over-rode it, "Have you not seen the signs of Magic? Have you not tested the Currents of Foretelling? Have you not paid attention to anything? Are your eyes only on the mirror, posturing and preening?"

The noise level changed abruptly to unsure mumbles and faded out. Insecurity that Lord Black may know something they don't took hold.

He started walking around the floor of the chamber looking at all the members, "Voldemort -" He paused slightly for the expected cringe-fest, "has told many people here that he will pass out power and positions to important families. No! He will pass out subjugation to ALL families. And he's already started with many of you!" He started pointing around the gallery, "Slaves!" He spat the word.

Rage burst forth and drowned out rational thought in a wave that built and crested several times.

Dumbledore went straight for the cannon blasts to regain control.

"Members will refrain from interrupting the proceedings. Lord Black has the floor."

"How do we know he is Lord Black?" An angry member stood and pointed at Harry.

A wave of mumbles that verged on growls rose and settled as Dumbledore stood, "Lord Black, the valid question has arisen. How can you prove you are the real Lord Black?"

Harry pulled the blue-glowing Potter family ring from his finger under his cloak. He held out his hand, poking from under the cloak, to display the deep violet glow of the Black Family Head of House ring.

The same member pointed again, "How do we know that is the proper ring?"

Dumbledore made a motion toward the question, suggesting it was valid and needed to be answered.

Harry walked forward to approach the bronze plaque, glowing with deep violet magic, set into the wall underneath the Chief Warlock podium commemorating, and embodying, the Wizarding Compact in the form of a Ward of Binding on the plaque. The magical ward which bound the Sacred 28 Families and upon which all the rest of the magic of the Wizengamot and Ministry was dependent. Mumbles began to rise as Harry approached the plaque and his intention became clear. When he touched the Black ring to the plaque a violet glow that was seen by all pulsed out, with a matching gasp from the gallery. Harry started walking back to the centre but took a circuitous route, looking more closely at the members as he made his way.

Harry stopped in front of Lucius Malfoy and stared at him. Not that Lucius could see his face or eyes behind Harry's obscuring cloak. "Mr Malfoy. As much as I find the impact of muggle culture on wizarding culture a problem, your master and his depravity will kill us all. Tell your master the House of Black will never submit to slavery!"

Another roar of noise rose up, but from only a few members.

Lucius was thinking fast, the emotions flitting across his face displaying his desperation, "My master? I have no -"

Harry broke out in rage, "You have subjugated your house to Voldemort for power! And you, who has so little imagination, has traded your family for a position under an insane third-rate despot! The Malfoy name will die with this next war!" Harry could barely push his voice over the top of the roar of incoherent anger that rose up. But amongst the wave there were a number of sober eyes watching and listening as well.

Malfoy stood fuming, breathing his rage, with an undercurrent of - fear.

Harry stood, watching the rage burn itself out. He turned back to the centre of the floor. When Dumbledore's cannon blasts started to take effect Harry pushed his voice again, "I have one last point to make!" He waited a few more moments for a semblance of calm, "The lack of imagination in Wizarding Britain is *staggering*! You follow the muggles around copying their inventions with no imagination of your own! Where is your creativity? Where is your testing of the forms of magic? Have you done anything new, discovered anything new, in a millennium?" The chamber was shocked into silence. A pin, having been dropped, would be embarrassed at it's own noise. "The Purebloods complain about the impact of muggles on wizarding culture but they have offered nothing as an alternative. They are bankrupt! All of wizarding culture is bankrupt! Thus we are left with only the impact of the muggle-born on wizarding culture, because they have more drive, more vision, more imagination!"

The pathetic mumbles wandered about ineffectively, barely hiding an undercurrent of embarrassed rage.

Harry stepped into the gap left in their thoughts, "I have said my piece. Do with it what you will." He pushed his magic into his voice, "Do not summon me again!" The echos bounced.

Malfoy was desperately searching for something to say to recover his 'dignity' – in reality, his arrogance and his influence. "Lord Black, you are a member of this body. We all serve the people. We all have duties to our positions."

Harry broke out in a vicious chuckle, "You arrogant liar! There is no truth in you!" Harry turned away and started speaking to the rest of the chamber leaving Malfoy fuming, "I tell you all now, if you summon me again –" he turned and pointed at the bronze plaque and pushed his voice, "I will destroy the Wizarding Compact!"

Gasps, shock, and disbelief filled the chamber. Except for the silent confusion of those who had no idea what that meant.

Dumbledore stood up, rage building in his face.

Harry grabbed the silence, "Do any of you know what that would do? It would dissolve the Wizengamot! And the Ministry! You would be left as a Protectorate of the ICW! Leaving Voldemort's prize in ashes!" Harry glanced meaningfully at Malfoy, "Especially since the ICW would send in troops to maintain the Statute of Secrecy! And that would burn Voldemort's dream of conquest to the ground! Not to mention it would destroy all the structures that keep the Purebloods in power. But it would also save your fat arses! The war would be over before it ever started! And you might live to see another day." He gave them a moment to understand their weakness. Their vulnerability and what it may cost them.

Dumbledore breathed into that silence, "You would destroy all that is Wizarding Britain."

Harry turned to Dumbledore, "Which do you prefer, to lose your culture and save your lives? Or to condemn your children to die on the altar of your culture? If you'd like to live, summon me again and I will end this farce!" Harry turned and his heels clicked throughout the chamber as he walked back to the double-doors at the back of the chamber. The two Aurors had slack jaws, still standing holding the doors. He walked around

the corner, put on his invisibility cloak and disappeared out of the Ministry building unnoticed.

Harry was boiling with anger his entire way back to Remus' cottage. At least he had the hour drive to Hermione's house to calm down. He didn't want to inflict any of his anger on her. He didn't even see Remus before he started driving. He didn't worry about it too much since he didn't want to inflict his attitude on Remus either.

Harry just tried to focus on where he was going. To see Hermione. Away from the wizarding world. Back to sanity. He smiled. This is what he needed. And he will defend it to the last. Even if it means going against the Statute of Secrecy and Hermione's Banishment and pulling Hermione and her parents out of England.

By the time Harry pulled into Hermione's driveway he was smiling, thinking of studying, of Hermione's bright eyes at the prospect of learning new things.

The door opened as Harry got out of his car. "Harry! You're here."

He smiled like the end of a storm, "Yes. It's all fixed. - I guess I forgot to call and let you know. I'm just so glad it's all done. Back to normal." Harry didn't care that his Fraud-Meter was pegging again. He was home.

"That's good to hear."

"What should we make for lunch?" He pushed the conversation away from anything tense, to put as much distance between them and the problems. "How about some bangers?"

She looked like she was thinking, "How about - something asian? From Singapore?"

Harry stumbled a bit, "I'm afraid I don't know anything from Singapore. My parents taught me to cook over here, before they left, and I didn't learn anything the few times I was there. All I know is normal foods from here."

She gave him a short pout, "Ok, that's fine. I was just hoping ..."

He chuckled trying to cover the subject up and move on, "Maybe someday."

She pulled him into the house, "Someday, it is. But what about today? I'm hungry."

Harry's eyebrows started to rise and his smile started to grow, "Well – how about some scones? Or muffins?"

Her eyes lit up, "Muffins? Really? You make muffins?"

Harry started to smile like a rogue, "Well – sometimes they do just start falling from the sky, but –"

"Oh, you!" She playfully slapped his arm and peeked out the window sporting her own grin, "I see no muffin-clouds ready to start raining."

Harry had the hardest time not reaching for his wand and challenging that statement. "No, not yet. I guess we'll have to make our own, then."

They started toward the kitchen as Hermione asked, "So you have a recipe for muffin-clouds?"

"Oh, yes. They're so light and airy. And, if we're lucky, we'll get a rainbow muffin." His grin was challenging.

"Riiiiight. I'll wait for the taste."

They made a double batch so Hermione's parents could be sure to have some.

After their muffin escapade Harry and Hermione got back to studying. Until dinner time. It was wonderful, for most of it.

By the end, Harry was distracted, staring off into space. Hermione asked him what's wrong. Harry pleaded tiredness. He was reminded again of

what they have done to Hermione and her parents, and by extension, to him. His rage didn't settle, it grew cold.

By the time he got home he was back to being angry again. It was, in a way, satisfying to harangue the Wizengamot for all their stupidity, but it ultimately left him empty and frustrated, because it didn't fundamentally change anything. He was still hunted, and Hermione was still banished. All the conflict was just depressing because it served no purpose and didn't fix anything.

## **Remus Lupin**

Harry came in the door and flopped down on his couch with a tired huff.

Remus poked his head out of the kitchen, "Is that you, Harry?"

Harry paused, startled, "Yes, I'm back. You got your new glasses all working?"

Remus ducked back inside, "Yes. I'm still getting used to them. I understand what you mean by 'dizzying', now. I almost broke my shin on the basement steps, earlier."

"Ah." Harry smiled, only half awake, "Steps are dangerous. They should be outlawed."

Remus poked his head out of the kitchen again, with a concerned look, then smiled when he saw Harry looking exhausted sprawled on the couch. He popped back in the kitchen. He and Dobby were trying to negotiate joint custody of the noodles – and Remus was losing. Dobby was still very polite – so far – but he definitely had strong opinions about food. At least the vegetables were already done.

In about ten minutes Remus came out to wake Harry for dinner. Harry was still sprawled on the couch, asleep. Remus froze as he looked down at Harry. He could see a discolouration in Harry's magic. A tingle of fear ran up his spine. Harry's magic was, generally, predominantly green with a hint

of blue – except around his head, and particularly around his scar. There was an undercurrent of very dark red surrounding his head growing darker to a point of almost black on his scar. Another tingle ran back down his spine as he took a slow deep breath to regain his self-control. Something was very wrong with Harry's scar. He moved closer to see. There was a very fine point of blackness that seemed to swirl and boil out of his scar. He stood up with fear electrifying him. What the bloody hell was this?!

Remus turned away and took a few steps trying to control his breathing. He didn't know what this was – but it was not good. Then his throat tightened up. If his spelled glasses can see this then shouldn't Dumbledore's spelled glasses be able to see this? Dumbledore had never said anything about this. And Moody, with his magical eye. Remus started pacing, trying to calm down.

"Uh." Harry startled and struggled to sit up. "Oh, man. I think I fell asleep." He rubbed his face.

Remus grabbed his self-control with both hands and put on a smile, "I was just about to wake you up. Dinner is ready." He moved back into the kitchen thinking furiously. He didn't want to say anything to Harry until he knew more what this was. He swallowed his discomfort and dread and plastered on a smile and an even voice. It's not like Harry could see that blot reflected in a non-magical mirror. A normal mirror didn't reflect magic, only light.

Harry came in and sat down at the small table, trying to wake up.

The red tinge around Harry's scar seemed to be smaller. Remus wanted desperately to change the subject, "So, you're still alive. What happened at the Wizengamot today?"

"Mmmff." Harry started eating mechanically, only half awake. "Not much."

"I didn't hear any explosions."

Harry shook his head, "No. No one bothered me."



"No one figured out who you are?"

Harry shook his head.

Remus' eyebrows rose between bites. He thought he'd attack from a new angle, "Hermione was ok?"

Harry nodded between bites.

"Were you late to Hermione's?"

"I got back by noon."

The silence dragged on, "Was Dumbledore at the Wizengamot?"

Harry nodded again, still focussed on his dinner.

Remus' voice became covered in amazement, "No one said anything?"

Harry shrugged, "A lot of noise and fury. No actions."

Remus paused, "Harry -"

Harry glanced up, "Hm?"

Exasperation flowed in Remus' voice, "What happened?"

Harry sighed and focussed back on his food, "I bitched at them. They were pissed. I walked out. No one touched me, saw me, anything." Harry finished cleaning his plate and rubbed his face tiredly, "I'm really tired. Today - was a very hard day." He sounded exhausted and a bit depressed. He shook his head, "I really need to sleep." He got up and headed for a crash landing on his couch.

Remus sat back in thought. Of all the things they were facing - everything just got a lot worse. He'd have to check tomorrow on what happened in the Wizengamot. The papers would say - to some degree of accuracy. But

this blackness in Harry's scar? He would talk to Dumbledore. At the latest, Friday was the next Order meeting.

Of course, Remus couldn't resist going out to peek at Harry's scar again. He noticed that when Harry was asleep the dark red stain was larger, the boiling blackness was larger. And Harry had a silencing charm around him. Remus sighed in realisation – for nightmares. Remus couldn't look any more. He had to retreat and get some sleep.

### **Wednesday, 7 August, 1996, 09:00**

Remus had been going crazy yesterday because he couldn't get two words in a row from Harry about the Wizengamot session. Harry just didn't seem interested in any of it. Remus finally just gave up asking Harry. Not to mention being distracted by the weird magic surrounding Harry's scar. Another giant to-do list item.

After Harry left for his study session with Hermione, Remus sat in his kitchen reading all the articles in all the newspapers he could get his hands on – several times. The enormity of what they said – and the continuing ramifications of the fallout – was breathtaking. Harry's performance was truly profound in its effect. He had challenged the foundations of wizarding culture in Britain. Thrown cold water on the pureblood agenda. Threatened prominent Death Eaters to their faces in public. Threatened Voldemort directly, in front of everyone. And drew all the oxygen in Britain to the fictitious persona of Lord Black, Head of the Ancient House of Black. Covered in mystery and implications, he had changed – just about everything. And critically, and most subtly, the name Harry Potter was nowhere to be found in any article of any paper.

And, Harry had left the stark choice hanging; abandon your culture, your history, and live, or die along with your culture.

There was no other topic to discuss. And Harry was still not interested in any of it.

## **7. On The Road To Uni**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 12257**

### **Chapter 7**

#### **On The Road To Uni**

A/N: And obviously, this title is not an allusion to that old saying 'On The Road To Ruin'. At all. Honestly, never.

#### **Harry Potter**

**Thursday, 8 August, 1996, 11:00**

Harry was sitting on the couch at Hermione's house trying to concentrate enough to catch all that the book he was reading was implying. It was – difficult. He now had an even greater appreciation for Hermione's brilliance as he struggled with all this – and Hermione breezed through it all. Except – his stomach started growling. And it wouldn't stop. He took a deep breath trying to renew his concentration on the book when he heard the magical gong, the sound that was keyed so only he or Remus could hear, indicating a violation of the house Hostile Intent ward. His head went up and he started looking around. Hermione was sitting next to him reading blissfully.

He got up and mumbled something about going to the loo. As he walked, he looked at his wardstone-phone and it showed him two magical signatures somewhere in front of the house. He closed the door on the loo, disillusioned himself, and apparated to the roof of the house. He looked around and found two Death Eaters, hiding under the grey fog of a poorly formed disillusionment spell, standing in front of the low fence at the street. The glow of their red magical signatures made them ridiculously obvious, even as they stood just outside the edge of the brown-tinted spherical house wards. They were working some kind of orange-coloured magic between them. Harry was not noticed.

Harry took a second to plan his attack – and attacked with all his ferocity. He apparated right behind them. They started to turn but Harry put up a shield and jumped toward them. His shield bumped into them throwing them off their balance. They each got a spell off, into his shield, then he kicked through his shield into the jaw of one of them. The other he blasted with several bludgeoners. Then more bludgeoners to the first one. They were out. Or more, since close-range bludgeoners of such power were – messy.

Harry ripped their sleeves to expose their Dark Marks – and was caught by motion. He looked closer and saw a dark red fog surrounding a black spot on the DE's arm, in the centre of the Dark Mark. A black spot that boiled like dark thunder clouds. It was fascinatingly ugly. He tore his eyes away and wrapped them up in ropes, snapped their wands, tucked the wand bits into the ropes, and portkeyed them off to the Order HQ dungeons. He performed one last check of the area for anything amiss, like if something fell out of their pockets. He vanished the blood, and apparated back to the loo. He stopped the disillusionment spell, checked himself for dirt or blood splatter, and washed his hands. He caught his image in the mirror and froze as his Fraud-Meter started hitting the pegs. His stomach sunk as he thought of what he was doing. And where this was likely to go. Then he thought of what those Death Eaters would do to Hermione or her parents and he angrily crushed his worry, and walked back to studying.

Except, his stomach was still growling. So he diverted to the kitchen to make some sandwiches. He got a text from Remus asking about the alarm and sent back a text telling him all clear. He would need to remember to include a text to Remus in his standard cleanup routine. Trying to send a Patronus message would be too visible to Hermione.

So far, this had all been rather easy. But only because the DE's that have attacked so far have been less than capable. If someone competent were to show up – it could be bad. He absolutely did not want to have Hermione obliviated again, for any reason. Of course, this just upped his need to never make a mistake and always win. Maybe raise the bar a bit too high.

But what could he do? He had to try. So far, a ferocious fast attack was key for him to win.

He spent the time making sandwiches trying to calm his adrenalin reaction. He was back to studying with a plate of sandwiches in 15 minutes. And the best part was Hermione's brilliant smile as she saw the sandwiches – and nothing else amiss.

## **Remus Lupin**

**Friday, 9 August, 1996, 19:00**

Remus made it to Order HQ, what he thought was a few minutes early. It turned out to be a very full meeting. He found a seat near the door having gotten there rather late, given the topics. Of course, seeing through the veritable fog of magic colours surrounding *everything* was a bit of a shock.

Dumbledore stood up at the head of the table and the room came to quiet and stillness. Dumbledore looked tired, his voice quiet, "Thank you for coming. As I'm sure you have all heard, we have had a major interruption to the world as we know it. Lord Black has resurfaced after over a decade of absence. In the Wizengamot chambers on Tuesday, he threatened to destroy the Ministry." No one spoke, no one moved. "He does have the ability to follow through with that threat."

The silence only got heavier.

"Who is he?" Molly interrupted quietly.

Dumbledore indicated Molly's question, "Does anyone know?"

Everyone looked at everyone else.

Remus noticed that Dumbledore did not give any opinion or suspicion as to who he thought who Lord Black was.

Arthur spoke softly into the silence, "I think the more important question is whether his assertions are correct. What effect would destroying the Ministry have on Voldemort and his plans? And could those threats be inducements for Voldemort to act?"

Albus nodded and looked to Snape, "Severus? Have you heard anything?"

Severus was sitting in the back across the room from Remus, with a very dark purple magic except for red around his left arm. He looked pensive, "My understanding is that Voldemort is completely enraged. I have not been in his presence since, luckily. A number who have – have not survived the meeting intact. Voldemort has started a very intense intelligence gathering campaign to find out who Lord Black is, with no success that I have heard."

"You were not summoned?"

"No, but I was asked by Mr Malfoy if I knew who Lord Black was, or if you knew, Professor. I said no."

Dumbledore nodded, "I have been hounded by reporters from every news organisation on who Lord Black is. The Wizengamot and Fudge have made several formal requests of the Goblin Nation to reveal what they know. The Goblins have not bothered to reply. Fudge had been considering ordering a tax audit of one of the Black Family businesses to force him to come out and defend it. But the business he chose was recently shut down and he hasn't found another to attack yet."

Shack broke in, "Scrimgeour has put together a group of Aurors to research his identity. No leads yet, as I've heard. Though – it's evidently becoming rather uncomfortable for the Tonks as they are the closest link – other than Belatrix and Narcissa – to what is left of the Black Family."

Remus winced. He'd have to tell Harry.

Dumbledore turned, "Fletcher? Are there any rumours in the – less savoury parts of society?"

Fletcher smirked, "Oh, lots 'a rumours, but none that I'd put any stock in. Just wild guesses, is all that is. Recreational speculation, ya might say."

Severus spoke into the silence, "As Arthur says, Voldemort's plans have been completely upended. They all must be re-examined as the game has changed. -"

Arthur snuck in, "Why do they think so?"

"- Because Voldemort's goals are now in question. If there is no Ministry to conquer, he is looking at having to create one from nothing. That is a lot more work and requires - *creativity*. If there are ICW troops on the ground here, then he is fighting a very different fight. Toward very different goals, requiring very different means. He will become Grindelwald in every respect."

Dumbledore's voice got even quieter, "What do you see that indicates this?"

"He has just sent out requests for fighters to the Continent. This was always on the plan, but now it is happening before visible hostilities have begun. This threat from Lord Black has just raised the stakes - and I would say, brought forward his fight with the muggles. He was always going to go there, but - I think he feels they are a weaker target and can possibly be turned to aid his side."

Mumbles ran about the group.

Moody grumbled, "He's losing it. What can muggles do?"

Severus looked at Moody darkly, "Then you have not been paying attention. They have *significantly* increased their capabilities since the Grindelwald days."

Moody laughed, "They can't do anything against magic."

Severus' face turned even darker, "Then, by definition, you are vulnerable precisely because you don't know. You are blind."

Dumbledore's eyebrows rose.

Moody looked darkly fearful. And a bit embarrassed at being called out on his own 'CONSTANT VIGILANCE' stance.

Severus continued, "I suspect Voldemort is reviewing all his plans and resourcing in light of the changed landscape. He is - essentially - starting over in his planning. And, I think, moving up all his timetables."

Moody now looked very focussed, "Moving up his timetables?"

"If the ICW is going to move in troops, then Voldemort needs to win before then. In any way he can. That means a tighter focus on the Ministry and more resources applied faster and earlier. Voldemort needs to become the de facto Ministry before the ICW can make their move. Only then can he hold them off."

In the tense silence, Dumbledore turned to Remus, "Remus, how is Harry?"

"Harry is doing quite well. He is mastering a significant amount of magic and muggle topics. I dare say he is approaching Miss Grangers level of brilliance in his studying." He paused to enter what might be a delicate topic, "And - as I'm sure you have noticed - Harry has started to use his skills to defend Miss Granger. You have evidently seen his - 'deposits' - to the Order HQ dungeons."

Molly gasped, "Harry put those people in the dungeons? A significant portion of them have been dead! You must stop him! He is too young for that!"

Dumbledore spoke up before Remus could respond, "Yes, I too have been greatly concerned with the level of injury these captures have sustained."



Remus growled, "They were not intended to be 'captures'. Harry was only focussed on defending Miss Granger. Have any of them *not* had the Dark Mark?"

Albus was again pushing hard, "This is quite out of character for Harry and is not appropriate for someone his age. You must stop him."

Remus was starting to get a little angry, "Then I suggest you'll need to speak with the Death Eaters to have them structure their attacks in less violent ways, Professor."

A few snickers snuck around the group. And a dark grin from Moody.

In the tense silence that followed, Remus took a bit of a leap, "Professor, you seem little concerned with Harry or Hermione's safety. I will train Harry into every area of defence and offence that is available. I have no concern for any of the Death Eaters who come attacking. My only concern is for Harry and Hermione's continued health and safety."

Dumbledore looked angry – or maybe embarrassed. Regardless, he shut the meeting down. "That is all for now. Please continue your current assignments. I will call again when the situation changes."

Dumbledore started moving toward the door and Remus moved to intercept, "Professor – Professor Dumbledore?"

Dumbledore looked quite stressed, "I can't stop to talk, I have a few very pressing issues that are waiting for me."

"Do you have time to meet with me later? Say, this weekend? It's very important."

Dumbledore paused only a second, "Sunday at eleven, in my office at Hogwarts."

"Thank you, Professor."

Dumbledore was gone and Remus sighed heavily. Then he noticed Moody watching from across the room. He moved toward him. Moody saw him coming.

"Good evening, Remus. I notice you now have magically charmed glasses."

"Yes. I wanted to ask you about that. I'm not sure I have the spells set up quite right. What do you see when you look at someone magical?"

"Usually a fog of colour surrounding them. The specific colour that I see is related to their character. Every Death Eater I see is crimson or dark red. Everyone in this room is either blue or some combination of blue and green. Except Snape, who is dark purple."

Remus nodded slowly. He noticed Moody didn't mention seeing Snape's Dark Mark. He tried to ask the next question casually, but it probably didn't work, "What do you see when you look at Harry?"

"A normal blue-green. Do you see anything different?"

"I see a number of unusual things on a number of people."

"Ah, when I started charming my eye I had some problems like that. I asked Albus about it and he helped straighten my charms out and now I don't have those problems."

"You changed your set of charms?"

"No, Dumbledore did. He said there were some spell interactions related to magical saturation limits on this eye that I hadn't counted on. I haven't had any problems since."

Remus nodded sagely, "Ah, yes. I'm probably having similar problems. Thanks, I'll take another look." That was not what Remus wanted to hear, but it also made a lot of sense. Sense in terms of Dumbledore preventing Moody from seeing what was wrong with Harry's scar. This little fact made him growl most of the way home. He suspected that Dumbledore was

playing some game with Harry's life, or magic, or both. And this could *not* continue!

Remus apparated home and landed on his front step. The wind was moving the trees in gusts as he stepped through the door, "Harry?"

Harry looked up from reading on his couch. He looked barely awake, "Hm?" He took a deep breath to wake up. "How was the Order meeting?" He yawned.

Remus walked over and took the chair across from him. He sighed, considering what to tell Harry, "Well - Lord Black has completely pissed off Voldemort."

Harry started chuckling.

"To the point that he has damaged some of his own supporters."

Harry sat up still chuckling through his words, "Brainless bastards. When will they learn?"

Remus was smiling too, "Except - a problem came up."

Harry froze - and focussed, "What happened?"

"The Tonks, as the last major connection to what is left of the Black Family, are being hounded by reporters - and worse."

"Damn!" Harry stood up and started pacing. After the second circuit he moved to the pile of financial papers on the couch end table, "Do we have a Black property we can hide them in?"

"Lots, but that would not be hiding them."

Harry looked confused at Remus.

"Belatrix is also a Black. And so is Narcissa."

Harry stopped and thought, "We threw Bellatrix out of the family, right?"

"Yes, but both of them still know about all the Black properties."

Harry turned back to the papers, "Ok, how about a Potter property?"

Remus sat for a moment, thinking. "That would be good for them but bad for you. They will know you are Lord Black."

Harry covered his face with his hand. He turned to Remus, "Lord Black needs to visit them – and provide a new shelter for them."

Remus nodded. "And I can't go with you because I'm too connected to you."

Harry's brain was racing, he turned back to the papers, "Do we have an old, little-known Black Property we could fix up?" He looked to Remus, "Do you know how to do the Fidelias?"

Remus nodded, "I'll do it and you be the Secret Keeper because Lord Black needs to tell the Tonks."

Harry smiled, "Good. Now all we need is to figure out the property." He started digging through the papers again.

"Ah – Harry?"

Harry looked up from his hunting.

"Don't you have your practice GCSE test tomorrow?"

Harry wilted, "Yes."

"So Lord Black needs to visit the Tonks this evening."

Harry sighed, nodded, and started digging again, "Yes. No rest for the wicked." Harry held up a paper, "How about this one?"

Remus looked at it, "Ah – how do you put a high-rise tower flat under the Fidelias? I think it would be better to use a free-standing structure on it's own land."

Harry started looking again, "All those properties are rather large and well-known. The flat is rather small."

Remus frowned, "Ok, let's give it a try."

Harry held out his hand to Remus and used the Black Family Ring to portkey them to the flat. And inch of dust and very stale air greeted them. The puff of dust rose up until Harry started some cleaning spells. "Gah, this place is horrible."

Remus started to join in, "Yes, but we don't have much time. I need you to stand here." Remus pointed to the middle of the floor, where Harry moved. Remus made a quick survey of the flat making sure Harry was standing in the centre. "Right! Ready for this?"

"What do I need to do?"

"Don't move until I say so."

Harry nodded.

Remus started walking around the flat mumbling to himself and waving his wand. His circuitous route took him around the perimeter of the outside walls. Remus eventually came back to Harry, his voice getting louder until he touched the top of Harry's head with his wand.

Harry felt like Remus had broken an egg on top of his head and the yolk was running down his hair and his body, covering him. He shivered when it stopped.

Remus looked like he was blind, "Now, Harry, you need to tell me the secret so I can see where I am."

"Ah! Yes, we are at The Burton Tower Flat."

Remus blinked and looked around, "Excellent! It worked."

Harry turned to him, "There was some question?"

Remus grinned mischievously, "I'm always amazed when magic actually functions." His smile dropped, "But now - I'm rather exhausted. I'll see you back at the cottage."

Harry nodded as Remus popped out.

## **Harry Potter**

Harry applied his Lord Black magic and used the Black ring to portkey to the Tonks home. Since he had reinstated them in the Black Family, their house was now considered a Black Property, because it was under the protection of House Black. He landed outside a small house on a normal street. He was immediately mobbed by wizarding reporters so he put up a shield like a bell jar around him. They crashed into it like waves against a pier support. He could see the muggle notice-me-not spells around just about everything magical in the area. He moved up the walk with the horde following, assaulting him with questions. The horde stopped at the wardline but Harry held out his Black Head of House ring to the wards and passed through. He walked up to the steps and saw Nymphadora standing guard in front of the door on the top step, her hair cycling through colours. He stopped at the bottom of the steps, put up an obscuring and silencing charm, "Good evening, Nymphadora."

She did not look trusting, "You are Lord Black?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

Harry bowed, "To welcome you back into the Black Family."

"And why the bloody hell would I want that?"

"I can provide protection from this lot." He turned and glanced out at the rabble.

"You'll protect us all the way to Voldemort?"

Harry broke out laughing. A harsh sound under the distortion. "The Black Family bows to no one. Especially an insane murderous despot. I offer sanctuary to you."

The door opened and Ted and Andromeda stepped out.

Dora motioned toward Harry, "Lord Black, here, wants to welcome us back into the Black Family." Her tone was derisive and untrusting.

Harry bowed again, "I offer you the protection of House Black."

Andi glanced at Ted, "Please, come inside." They moved into the main room where Andi turned to him, "How can you protect us against my sisters? You are no protection against a house divided."

"Bellatrix is no longer a member of House Black. You will need to advise me on what Narcissa's status should be."

Dora spoke up, "But Bellatrix still knows of all the Black properties."

Harry chuckled, "Not when they are put under the Fidelias."

All the Tonks' eyebrows rose and looked among themselves.

Andi now looked conflicted, "I haven't talked to Cissa in years. I don't know how to judge that."

Harry stood thinking for a moment, "I think we can wait to decide that. The Fidelias should be good enough to start." Harry heard a gong. He pulled out his wardstone-phone and it showed him three red-tinged hostiles a

ways down the block, "Death Eaters are near. I'm sorry we don't have the luxury of discussions. Kreature!"

Kreature popped in and bowed, "Yes, Master?"

Harry turned to the Tonks, "Are you ready?"

It was a difficult silent deliberation, then Andi nodded, "We will go."

Harry turned to Kreature, "Pack up everything in this house and put it in storage. Then be prepared to serve these members of House Black. Do not let anyone know where they are."

Kreature bowed and popped away.

Harry pulled out a slip of paper and handed it to Andi, "Read this. It is a portkey to take you there. My apologies – it will need a bit of cleaning up."

Andi looked suspicious, "You're not coming with us?"

"No, I will go deal with the Death Eaters."

Dora shook her head, "Not without me."

"No, you protect your parents." Harry turned and walked out of the house. As he stepped outside the wards the news hounds were back pushing against his reconstituted shield clamouring questions at him. He moved down the street and saw the Death Eaters walking toward him. He pointed toward them and spoke to the reporters, "This is my fight! Everyone stay back."

A gasp was heard from the reporters as they turned and saw the DEs. They melted away quickly. They knew this was going to be a show.

Harry yelled out as the DEs got closer, "You come to attack the House of Black?"



The three DEs stopped in a semi-circle five metres away and one spoke, "No, we've come to take you to the Dark Lord."

Harry started building up a spell with his wand under his cloak. This needed to be impressive with the media watching. The DEs started moving toward him again. He poked his wand out from under his cloak and let off the biggest, widest, most powerful bludgeoner he could. It glowed as it raced toward the DEs like an explosive shockwave.

The DEs tried to shield – or duck – but it was no use. They were blasted back five metres and lay still.

Harry stood breathing for a moment, trying to recover his energy. He heard the pop of apparitions from a number of wizards showing up.

"Stop! We're Aurors!"

Harry pulled out his Black ring and portkeyed to the front porch of Order HQ. Then portkeyed into the tower flat. A puff of dust rose from the floor as he landed. He looked around and saw three wands pointed at him from behind couches and furniture. "Everyone alright?"

Dora stood up from behind a plush chair, but did not lower her wand, "Yes. What happened with the Death Eaters?"

"Your compatriots showed up just as I was leaving, so you can ask them. Or you can wait for the papers tomorrow, since everyone was watching." He turned around looking at the flat, "I'm sorry it's in such bad shape. But it was the best I could think of." He turned back to Andi, "Let me know if you come to a decision concerning Narcissa – and I suppose her son. Assuming he hasn't taken the Dark Mark yet."

"How?" Andi looked concerned.

Harry took a moment, "I'll be back every few days to check on things."

Andi took a breath to calm down, "Why have you brought us back into the House of Black? I thought I was done with that."

Harry stood still for a moment, "I can not change the Black Family history, but I *will* change it's future."

Dora was frowning, "Who are you?"

"It's better you don't know, right now. Be safe." He popped out before any more dangerous questions could be asked.

**Saturday, 10 August, 1996, 10:00**

Harry's nerves were running high. He sat at the Grangers dinning table as Mrs Teddington set out the paperwork for his practice GCSE test. His Fraud-Meter was going crazy! He was dreading the thought that he would be discovered as a poor student and would be rejected by Hermione – or her parents. But he had been learning a lot in the last few weeks. He just had no idea if it would be enough. He glanced into the living room to see Hermione sitting on the couch absorbed into reading.

"Ready?" Mrs Teddington held up her timer and pushed the button, "Go!"

Harry turned over the first sheet with a huge sigh and started in. He wasn't normally very good at tests. But he had to become better. So he threw his all into it.

Several hours later Mrs Teddington's timer dinged.

Harry took a deep breath and looked around, "Is time up?"

"Yes, Mr Potter. Let's see what you did." She picked up his papers and started correcting them.

He got up and walked around the back garden trying to remember how to breath again. It was a warm day. A beautiful day. But he couldn't help being reminded of the depressions in the grass – and the blood – where the first

Death Eaters landed as he attacked them. Where he had the contest of wills in his apparition-duel with the Death Eater – and his severed hand. He shook his head to clear it all. How irrevocably life has changed in just a few weeks.

"Well, Mr Potter, you did quite well."

Harry turned to look at Mrs Teddington leaning out the back door, "Really?" He ran inside to the table where Mrs Teddington had sat down, and he sat next to her.

She spoke rather confidentially to Harry, "Yes. Your scores are quite good compared to any student applying to University during a normal application cycle. I'm – not sure they will be good enough to keep up with Miss Granger."

Harry let out a huge breath, "That's fine. I know she is brilliant and I wasn't expecting to be able to keep up with her."

She nodded in reflection, "Yes, Miss Granger is – phenomenal." She looked to Harry, "My guess is that you might be able to get in next year to the same university as Miss Granger, during the normal new student uptake but I think it unlikely that they will be able to find a place for you at this late date."

Harry smiled in relief, "Yes. I understand. It's not a problem."

"You could quite likely get into another university this fall."

Harry shook his head, "No, thanks. I'll follow Hermione, wherever she goes."

"Are you sure? There are a number of good universities you could probably get into now."

"Yes, I'm sure. I've been chasing her for years, I'm fully aware of how brilliant she is."

Mrs Teddington smiled at him in consideration, "Good. Well, you just keep chasing her."

Harry just smiled and nodded, "Always."

"Right!" She stood up, "Your formal GCSE test is scheduled for 10 September. You keep studying like you have been. I'll stop by and check on you again in a few days, alright?"

"Yes. Thank you, Mrs Teddington."

She left to talk to Hermione and Harry laid his forehead on the table and sighed. He was relieved – and in shock. He passed the test. He had a month to study for the real test, but if he can do well enough not to look like a fool on this one, then he can likely survive the next one. And, as Remus said, it would be easier to protect Hermione if he didn't actually have classes to go to at the same time. He smiled into the table. This might work out as he needed everything to work out, after all.

"Harry?" Hermione sat down at the table next to him.

Harry sat up, "Yes?"

She looked apprehensive, "Mrs Teddington said you may not be able to get into Uni at this late date. Or at least, the same one I may get into."

Harry smiled, "Yes, that's fine."

"What will you do? Will you pick another Uni?"

Harry shook his head, "I'll wait for next year."

She looked very sad and her voice quiet, "But I wanted you to come with me."

Harry smiled hugely, "Oh, I'll be there. I'll follow you –" The words slipped out before he noticed, and he didn't want to sound – too needy, so he

added, "- I'll mooch off of your notes for the classes this year, to get ready for next. Just like at Cromwell."

She chuckled, "Yes, just like Cromwell."

"Remus is looking around for flats at all the likely suspect universities, so the minute we know which you get into then we will sign on one of them nearby and start moving. And I'll keep studying."

Her face settled into relief, "That would be very nice. Will you be able to help me study?"

Now Harry was looking confused, "Help you study? How do I do that?"

She waved her hand toward the couch, "By sitting and reading with me. It makes a big difference not to be - alone." Her eyes held a touch of hollowness.

Harry smiled and nodded, "Yes, I'll be there. Always."

She smiled and stood up, "Alright, one more month to study before our real GCSE test. There is so much left to read, I can hardly wait." She grabbed his left shirtsleeve and pulled him toward the couch.

Harry slipped his wand out of his holster and worked the gentle underpowered healing spell that Remus found to heal Hermione's spell damage from Dolohov. It was weak enough that, if it weren't for his charmed glasses he never would have seen it, certainly not Hermione. And given that Hermione was facing, and pulling him, toward the couch, she didn't see it or feel it given her movements. Harry could see the blue glow flow like a big blue blob toward her and cause her magic to flare up blue with a red tinge momentarily as Dolohov's spell fought back against it. Then her magic faded back into her normal swirling multiple colours, with a slight undertone of dark red around her scar. He sent another spell just to be sure - and maybe to catch up for lost time.

Hermione turned to him with curiosity in her eyes, "- Did you say something?"

They stopped in front of the couch. Harry blinked at her, "Me? I was lost in thinking about the books so - I don't think I said anything."

She looked thoughtfully at him for a moment, then shrugged, "Which book are you reading now?"

He held it up, with his page marked at more than half way through.

"Oh, yes. That was such a good overview. It really sparked my imagination. Do you like it?"

"Yes. But it's taking me a while - it's so deep. It touches on all these other subjects. I have to keep a dictionary with me to look up all the new words that are used - and some of them aren't even in the dictionary! - It's slow going."

She pulled on his arm to sit next to her, "Yes, it was so fun." She took a moment to change topics, "I asked my Mum to arrange for tours of a number of Universities in the southern part of England. Namely Cambridge, University of Bath, Oxford, University of London, Bournemouth University. Unfortunately, they aren't very prepared for tours at this late date so all our tours are set for after our GCSE test."

Harry had never thought of taking a tour of a university, since he had never considered attending any university. It was something he had never paid any attention to, since it seemed so far outside his possibilities. "That sounds like fun. I've never been to a University before."

Hermione's mouth dropped open, her eyes filled with horror, "Never? Why not?"

Harry realised his mistake - a bit late. He shrugged, "I may have, when I was much younger, but I don't remember it now."

Hermione looked mollified, then smiled, "Well. We'll fix that. You'll be attending one soon."

He smiled thinking of helping Hermione, and watching over her, "I'll get the best introduction to Uni anyone could find. You'll be able to show me all about it."

She blushed, "Harry. Of course I'll show you around. I can hardly wait." She got lost dreaming into the future.

## **Remus Lupin**

**Sunday, 11 August, 1996, 11:00**

Remus approached the gates of Hogwarts with trepidation. He stopped before he entered and took a deep breath and let it out slowly. This was a meeting that could change the course of his life. But he had to go through with it. Even if he didn't have a good feeling about it.

All the indications he had, pointed in the wrong direction. But he owed it to himself, to Harry, even to Hermione, to go through with this and get real answers. And those answers may be painful – incredibly painful. But he had to have the truth.

He made the momentous decision and stepped across the threshold, into Hogwarts grounds. He started up the path, what may be an irreversible path. He was here to meet with Dumbledore about what he could see magically in Harry's scar. He had thought this meeting through endlessly in the last few days. The possible answers that Dumbledore may give, and what those may imply.

He opened the doors into the Entry Hall.

For once in his life, he saw a positive aspect of his 'furry little problem', as Sirius would call it. He was, because of it, immune to the effects of legillimency and a number of other mind-magics. It was of no comfort, given the stakes involved.

The gargoyle in front of Dumbledore's office flared in colours as it jumped aside. The stairs started moving, coloured like rising smoke.

"Come in Remus."

Remus opened the door into Dumbledore's office.

"Good morning, Remus." Dumbledore was behind his desk, as always.

"Tea? Lemon drop?"

Remus shook his head.

"Please, have a seat. Tell me what you need."

Remus sat and took a deep breath.

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow with a sardonic tone, "It can't be that bad, I'm sure."

Remus smiled – for a moment. "I've come to ask you about the charming of your glasses."

Dumbledore's eyebrows rose and he pulled off his glasses to look at them.

"I have started to charm mine but I have run into some problems – I see – more than I would have expected."

Dumbledore put his glasses back on, "Ah, yes. If I remember correctly, Alastor had similar problems with his magical eye. He had over-estimated the magical saturation limits on his eye and was having some spell interactions that gave him too much information. More than was actually there."

Remus nodded, "Yes, he mentioned that."

"Ah. If you'd like me to take a look at it, I think I can bring some balance to the set of charms you are using."



"The problem is that there is only once instance where I see more than I expect to see."

Dumbledore's face started to droop.

"Harry's scar."

Dumbledore's lips turned white as he became tense.

"It looks a lot like a few of the Dark Marks I have seen on various Death Eaters. A red tint to his magic surrounding his head and a black spot behind his scar that roils and boils with active magic."

Dumbledore forced a smile, "I don't see anything like that. If you can bring him in I can take a look."

Remus' stomach sunk, but he kept his voice low and even. "You know what this is. I'm asking you, for Harry, to tell me what this is."

Dumbledore sat motionless.

Remus refused to give, so he continued to sit, waiting. The tension level rose with every passing second. And with it, Remus' determination not to give. Because every second he waited pointed to something bad for Harry.

Dumbledore finally moved, his voice a hoarse whisper, "I can't."

Remus growled and stood up, "Then we are done." His tone indicated more than just this meeting.

"Remus - please, do not touch that. It could kill Harry - and maybe you. I ask you, do not look into this!"

"That is precisely why I *must!*" He pulled the door open and left.

**Remus Lupin**

**Monday, 12 August, 1996**

Remus was out of options. It was a desperate feeling but he could not think of any other ideas. Dumbledore refused to help, the Ministry under Fudge was more of an enemy, he knew no one in the Department of Mysteries ...

He walked up the steps into Gringotts absently. He dearly hoped Harry would not see his actions as any sort of betrayal. Not that Harry could see the problem, unless someone else told him. No magic reflected from a mirror so he only saw his optical reflection, not his magical reflection.

The Special Accounts Teller mumbled, "Name."

"Remus Lupin to see Clawhammer."

The Goblin looked up and his eyebrows ran through a series of expressions before he settled on distrustful, "What is this about?"

Remus stumbled for an answer that made sense, "I am concerned for Clawhammer's client's health."

The goblin's eyes settled, "Come this way." He was off into the warren of hallways.

Remus was striding to keep up. Until a random door, where the Goblin knocked.

"Come!"

Remus entered the usual office, with slightly different furniture and bookshelves, "Clawhammer. Thank you."

Clawhammer stood up, "Mr Lupin. What is this about Mr Potter's health?"

They both sat down as Remus drew a deep breath and settled his nerves, "I - hope that Harry is not upset with my taking initiative, but - and I hope ..."

Clawhammer looked directly at Remus, "We are all concerned with Mr Potter's continued good health, Mr Lupin."

Remus nodded distractedly, "You see –" He pulled off his glasses and held them up, "I have recently spelled my glasses to be able to see magic. Or, more specifically, the magical energy that leaks off of all charmed, conjured, or otherwise magical objects."

Clawhammer's eyebrows rose, "Sounds interesting. I take it you see something interesting?"

Remus handed his glasses to Clawhammer, "Yes, take a look."

Clawhammer put them on, "Gah! How do you see anything with these?"

"It takes some getting used to, but it has proven to be very useful. Except ..." Remus looked distance rubbing his chin.

Clawhammer took off the glasses and looked at them closely, "You see something about Mr Potter?"

"Well – I can see – among other things – Dark Marks. They look to be a red fog around a black boiling spot behind the tattoo."

Clawhammer looked darkly at Remus with disbelief, "You're telling me that Mr Potter has a Dark Mark?"

"It looks like one. Behind his scar." Remus touched his own forehead.

Clawhammer dropped the glasses on the desk and sat back in shock.

"Dumbledore knows what it is but refuses to tell me anything. Except he has hinted that it could kill Harry. And that I shouldn't look into it."

Clawhammer got up and started pacing, and mumbling angrily.

"Mad-eye Moody had spelled his eye similarly to these glasses – but Dumbledore modified the spells – I think to hide Harry's scar from Moody. Moody doesn't see Dark Marks either."

Clawhammer stopped and looked angrily at Remus. "That sly bastard." He started pacing again, "Mr Potter is critical to – everything! This is very concerning."

"Do you have any ideas what it might be?"

Clawhammer was still pacing, "No, not my specialty. But I will have a specialist here next time you bring Mr Potter."

Remus nodded, "I will try to bring him here in the next few days." He smirked, "If I can drag him away from Miss Granger."

Clawhammer's expression softened, "I will be ready."

Remus stood up, "Thank you, Clawhammer." He left the bank feeling a huge relief.

## **Harry Potter**

**Wednesday, 14 August, 1996, 22:00**

Harry was confused. He sat on his couch studying his healing magic – and it was going well – but he was still confused. He hadn't seen Remus much in the last few days. Not that this was a problem so much as – unusual. He thought that Remus must have some deep project that has captured his attention.

Harry sighed and redoubled his efforts into the book on healing magic. He wished he had paid more attention to healing magic before now. It certainly would have been useful given all the injuries he managed to collect. But then, given his history of injuries, he was learning this stuff *quite well*.

Harry's reading was interrupted by the gong. The hostile intent ward at the Granger's house. He stood up, checking his gear, about to apparate when a second, and third gong sounded. Then a fourth. His stomach jumped with nerves; he'd never faced four in an attack on Hermione before.

Harry apparated to the roof of Hermione's house. He pulled out his wardstone-phone and checked for magical signatures. Four were clumped in a group near the back of the property and Hermione was below him in the house. He watched and waited for them to reveal their plans.

He had expected them to spread out and surround the house. That was their usual plan. This time they started moving as a closely-spaced group up the side of the property on the opposite side from the carriage house. Harry's usual plan was to allow them to isolate themselves and he would then attack each one separately. With them clumped together they made a nice big target, but Harry couldn't use any big spells to hit them all at once; it would be too loud. That thought reminded him to put a silencing charm on the house.

He watched them move forward – and got an idea. They were not separating, but he could separate them. He apparated to the back of the property. From there he could see the house was quiet and dark. He took aim on the one DE in the back of the group. Harry put a silencing charm on him and then summoned him. The DE came flying toward him, then Harry hit him with a bludgeoner. He fell like a rag-doll near the back of the property.

Harry apparated to the other side of the property near the carriage house and targeted the next DE in the same way. Two down.

But the two remaining DEs noticed that two were gone. They dropped into a crouch and started looking around.

Harry apparated back to the roof and waited. The two DEs were starting to panic. And argue about what to do. One wanted to attack immediately, the other wanted to run. The Runner turned and started walking away but the Attacker stood up and lifted his wand.

Harry needed to move fast. He shot some piercing hexes and apparated behind the Attacker. The piercing hexes forced the Attacker to move and be off balance. He was easy to hit since he was off balance.

Harry heard a spell behind him and started to dive for the dirt, but was hit in the shoulder by a glancing blow that threw him to the ground. He rolled over and sat up and sent a set of bludgeoners at the last DE and got him with two.

Harry sat still breathing heavily. His shoulder was quite painful. He started to look at it and saw that it was not some sort of burning curse. After he caught up on his oxygen needs he started running his recently acquired medical magics. No curse damage, just some broken bones.

He got up slowly to clean up the mess. He sent each of them off to Order HQ and cleaned up the yard of any blood or dropped DE masks. He was checking the last bits when a Patronus message came flying in from Remus, "Harry, I'm here." Harry looked to the direction the message came and saw Remus waving from 30 metres away. Harry motioned him over.

Remus apparated next to Harry, "Are you ok?"

Harry pointed at his injured shoulder, "I caught a glancing blow. Broke a few bones, but no curse damage."

Remus nodded seriously, "Let's go home and fix that up."

Harry nodded tiredly, took down the silencing charm on the house and apparated to the cottage.

Remus was just behind him, "Let me take a look at that." He started running diagnostics and came to the same conclusion as Harry. "Ok. This should be fixed by morning." He sighed and looked at Harry, "I caught the end of that fight. What do you think could have been done better?" He summoned the medical kit and started fixing Harry's shoulder, pulling out anti-bruising ointment and bone knitting potion.

Harry waited patiently for the healing magic to work, "These four DEs all stayed together, which is the opposite of what I've seen them do before. So I started picking them off one by one. I'd put a silencing charm on the one in back, summon them, and hit them with a bludgeoner. That worked for

the first two. The last two noticed and were too alerted for me to attack without a lot of risk. So I waited. One wanted to abandon the mission, the other wanted to attack. I thought it was going to work out when the one started walking away, except the one who wanted to attack started attacking and I had to act. I got the attacker but the guy who walked hit me from behind."

Remus handed Harry the bone knitting potion, "Yes. That was a hard spot to be in. What do you think you could have done better?"

Harry was struggling to think through the pain, "I suppose, since they were in a clump, a nice big target, I could have found a nice quiet area-affect spell to hit them all with at once."

"Yes. Good. You also could have started attacking them when they were farther away from the house. I think the real mistake was waiting. Giving them time to do anything. That allowed them to get close enough to start attacking the house. The house is your Achilles Heel. If they get to the point of attacking the house then you are way behind and on the defensive. You have to take them out as they are getting prepared. Before they get close to ready to start attacking."

"Yes. I got preoccupied in waiting for them to separate so I can attack them serially."

Remus was applying a spell to Harry's shoulder, "That also suggests that we should increase the radius of the Hostile Intent Ward and the Anti-Apparition Ward."

Harry smirked, "Yes, make them walk! Earn their ability to attack. And give me a lot more time to take them out farther away from the house."

Remus nodded and handed Harry a pain potion.

**Thursday, 15 August, 1996, 11:00**

Harry parked his car in front of Hermione's house a few minutes early. He grabbed his book bag and got out, locking the car.

"Harry!"

Harry turned and saw Hermione standing on the porch wearing her coat, "Hermione! Good morning."

"Good morning, Harry. Do you – by any chance ..."

Harry's smile grew as Hermione struggled with the point she was trying to make, "Yes?"

"You do? Oh, I'm so glad."

"Wait – hold on. What just happened there?"

She sighed, "I'm – about to climb the walls today. I was wondering if you feel up to – a diversion? Today?"

Harry started laughing, "Yes, I could do with a diversion. What did you have in mind?"

Her eyebrows rose and her hand motioned absently over her shoulder as she paused, "Ah – how about a walk on the local footpaths?"

Harry renewed his chuckling, "Yes, that would be wonderful." He turned back to his car, "Maybe I should get my coat? There's a bit of drizzle in the air today. Do you think?"

"Yes, wonderful. I've just – run up to here –" She held her hand over her head, "with sitting and reading. I guess I'll have to admit there is actually a limit to how much studying I can actually do. Much to my own amazement."

"And mine, too. And here I was just gearing up for another stint. I might miss it. What *ever* should we do?" He stepped up on the porch his smiled giving away his teasing.



She swiped at his arm, "Oh, you! I know you. You've been doing much better lately but you still have a ways to catch up to me. I – just need a break today. I can't sit on the couch for another afternoon." She looked pleadingly at him.

He came up to her, "That sounds wonderful. Lead the way."

She closed the door and pulled his arm, "This way." She pulled him around the back, behind the carriage house to the back of the property. "There's a footpath that just skirts the back of the property here. It's quite nice, particularly on days nice enough to not need knee-high mud boots."

"Which is only about 40% of the days?"

She laughed, "No, much better than that. This land has good drainage so not too muddy most days. Only on the downpours do we forgo a walk. Dad loves the footpaths. We walk them a lot. It's so relaxing."

"I've never gotten to myself, –"

Hermione gasped and gave him a concerned stare, "Never?"

He shook his head, "But it sounds wonderful."

She held onto his arm and directed them down the path, "Where did your parents live – where did you grow up?"

He smiled fondly at her, even as his Fraud-Meter was banging the pegs at his words, "In a very small village called Godric's Hollow."

She looked confused, "Never heard of it."

"No, it's one of those 'if you blink you'll miss it' places. A couple buildings on the road and many more hidden in the trees. That's about all. But we moved away from there before Primary. Then we lived in Little Whinging. Cookie-cutter boxed-lunch housing. My parents hated it, particularly being

architects. That's why they dove at the chance to build something overseas. And it turned into quite the success."

"When do you think they will come back?"

Harry bobbed his head back and forth, thinking, "If things work out, they may be able to come back in two years – and retire completely! That is what they really want. It's been a hard trade-off for them. Hopefully they'll make it." Harry smiled as his Fraud-Meter was still bending from straining against the peg. He noticed a muscle in the centre of his rib cage that seemed to start hurting every time his 'fraud-meter' started hitting it's peg.

Hermione paused as she considered, "Well – I guess I can understand the impulse. But – maybe not." She frowned.

He smiled, "I guess it depends on how much you like what you do. They don't have all that much fun building skyscrapers. They'd rather build fancy houses."

"Then why don't they?"

"The big money is in the skyscrapers. They are incredibly good at the details of building huge buildings, but they don't enjoy it that much. But it can give them true freedom. That's what they want."

"Is that what you want?"

He shrugged, "I don't know what I want, yet. I don't even know what I don't want. I'm still building a world so far. It will take me a while before I know those kinds of answers."

She looked at him appraisingly, "That is a lot deeper than I expected, Mr Potter."

Harry shrugged as he heard the peg on his Fraud-Meter clink as it broke completely off and the hand went spinning. He smiled, "I think you should be careful of being too easily impressed. I hope to do much better." He

tried to redirect the conversation quickly, "So what are your goals? Do you know what you want to study?"

She sighed, "I don't know what to study. I'm rather stuck on that one. Everything is so interesting! I - I'll have to give a lot of things a try, I think. As far as goals? None of those either. As you said, you really should know what you want - and what you don't - before you can attempt that question. And I just don't, yet."

He smiled and got excited, "I think you're only young once so give it your all now. Go for all you can and grab the snitch!"

She blinked, "Snitch?"

Harry smacked his forehead, "Oh! - sorry. An obscure Dungeons & Dragons game reference - with this little game piece called a snitch. Most people have never heard of it." He took a deep breath to re-inflate his heart and lungs as he just about lost it all with that mistake!

She looked strangely at his D&D reference.

Harry was just so glad he had overheard Dudley talking about how weird D&D games could get. And, of course, the irony was killing him.

"You used to play D&D?"

"Not much. Some blokes I knew in Primary did. They drug me into it a few times. I more picked up the language because they were always talking about it." His broken Fraud-Meter pushed him to change the subject again, "Were you going to take another trip to France this year?"

Hermione blinked in surprise at the sudden shift, "No, Cromwell messed that up. It threw us off. And then Mum thinks there is a possibility that I might get accepted into Uni this fall -" She shook her head in bewilderment, "- Not likely that I can see - but - maybe next year. Have you been to the continent?"

Harry thought of launching into his prepared story of his parents having a big house on the Continent and then realised it would be foolhardy. Hermione knew too much about France to be able to lie about something like that. "No." He felt a bit embarrassed that he was left painting a rather small picture of his life. One that she might find suspicious. But to lie about that would invite questions he couldn't answer. That would be worse.

"You haven't?" Her voice was breathless, "Why not?"

Harry decided to skirt a little closer to the edge of truth, "My parents haven't been that well off – until recently. That's why they are rather intent on being able to retire early. They want that security. Whether they actually retire or not – I don't know. But the ability to? That's important."

She nodded knowingly, "Yes, I can see that. I can't imagine retiring, but I can see the need for security."

They made their way over a fence with stair steps on either side and along a path marked by the ages. Literally thousands of years of human traffic. Under comparatively young trees that towered overhead and shaded the path, it had changed little. Tracks that have bowed only to the impacts of freeways and railroads. And the occasional airport.

"So what are your dreams?"

Harry almost stumbled, on the verge of panic. Harry's problem was he didn't have any dreams, other than to stay alive. His only thoughts were to protect Hermione so he hadn't thought any further than that. It all just reminded Harry of what he didn't have; any sort of normal. She just kept dancing on his wish to be normal, and didn't even realise it. She was now 'normal' and he still couldn't be anything close to 'normal'.. It just made Harry more and more angry at the DE's, at Voldemort, at Dumbledore, at Fudge. And he had to hide it all from Hermione.

At least he had given a question like that a minimum of thought for a good lie. He took a deep breath and dove in, "I think – engineering of some sort. Whether that be electrical, mechanical, electronic – I don't know. But –

something concrete, definitive, stable. I'll start that way at least." He shrugged.

She looked at him intently, "Do you know why?"

He took a long breath to think, "I've always been interested in how things work – but even more than that – how we make use of things, technology. How do you build the layers of civilisation, the interlocking parts that make it all function?"

She nodded in deep contemplation.

"Why do you ask?"

She frowned a bit, "I'm trying to figure out what I'm interested in. How do I even decide? I'm interested in so many things."

Harry smiled, "Yes. What would you do with that knowledge?"

She looked at him confused, "What would I do with it?"

"What problem would you try to solve?"

She blinked into the distance, with some surprise. Then glared back at him, "Injustice."

Harry smiled huge, "Then law, politics, social sciences, international relations. Something like that."

Her eyes grew intently focussed on him, "Yes."

"Now, there's a lot that bumps up against those subjects. Everything from art, to economics, to healthcare, to – just about everything."

"Why do you mention all those subjects?"

"Because nothing happens in isolation, and I think to be good at an area you have to know about everything else nearby, so to speak. You need to

be able to connect how other subjects intersect."

"You think there is value in that?"

Harry nodded, "In one of the books we've been reading, it talked about the process of learning a subject in depth. And how deep that tended to go in the modern world. And I got to thinking. Academia seems to value depth of knowledge, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Partly because depth is easy to measure. But with the amount of knowledge available now, that means you will be *very* deep but also *very* narrow, because there are practical limits on how much you can stuff into one brain. So, as a balance - I think there must be value in breadth of knowledge too. I think it would allow you to put together ideas from many disparate subjects and use them in new ways and for new problems. To synthesise new ideas from old ones. Unfortunately, breadth of knowledge I think would be hard to measure, and therefore, hard to determine a value."

Hermione was staring at him blankly, with a touch of amazement.

"What?"

"Harry - that - that's - brilliant ..." Her voice trailed off as her eyes wandered off into the distance of deep thought.

Harry watched her brain crunch through the problem and her small smile grew into a beacon. Until she squealed and pounced on him in the biggest Hermione-hug he had experienced in a long time. "Whoa! What's this for?" But he joyously returned the hug all the same.

She held on and whispered, "Thank you, Harry. That is exactly what I needed to hear."

He whispered back, "Anything for you, Hermione."

The delicious hug went on for some time, until Hermione leaned back and looked at Harry with a big smile - until a flutter of wings, a flash of white, and a soft barking caused her to duck - and squeak.

Harry looked perplexed until he felt a weight on his head, "Hedwig! Where have you been, girl?" He tried to look up.

Hedwig fluttered unsteadily, trying to balance on Harry's messy top of hair. She barked at him constantly in a steady stream of admonishment.

Hermione started to stand up looking at Harry like he was mad, "Harry – what – ?"

Harry chuckled and tried to stand still as Hedwig danced on his head fluttering and barking, "Hermione, this is Hedwig." He was madly trying to imagine a tale he could spin to explain this huge violation of the Statute of Secrecy – by Hedwig! "You see ..."

Hedwig continued to flutter from Harry's head to his shoulder and back, constantly making little barking noises and nipping his ear playfully.

"Harry – she's unbelievably beautiful – but – is she tame?"

Harry just kept chuckling, "Well – sort of. Her nest fell out of a tree when she was an egg in the back garden before I started at Cromwell. I raised her and – when she hatched she imprinted on me. Every so often she finds me and gives me what for."

Hermione started to reach up, "Will she bite?"

Harry was about to answer when Hedwig fluttered over to land on Hermione's shoulder and started rubbing her head on Hermione's ear, still making small barking noises. Hermione froze – and started giggling at Hedwig's tickling and she slowly reached up to try to pet Hedwig.

"No, I don't think so." Harry's glasses showed him a blue glow of magic from Hedwig interact with Hermione's blue-green glow of magic. His smile was so huge it almost hurt.

Hedwig fluttered up and flew back onto Harry's head, flapped her wings a few times and flew off silently through the trees.

Hermione stood gobsmacked watching Hedwig fly off, "You never told me you had a pet owl!"

"Well - I don't think you could call her a pet. And - I guess I forgot since it was so long ago. And I don't see her that often."

Hermione turned to look at him with wide eyes and a growing smile, "You are pretty amazing." She moved to hug him.

Harry shook his head against her wild hair, "Not as amazing as you. Not even close."

"Harry." She pulled him around and started moving back toward the house with their arms around each other. "She obviously likes you."

He shrugged, "Yea, I'm basically mum. Or - dad, I guess."

She looked at him with a considering smile, "That's so sweet."

Harry couldn't stop smiling. Hedwig just made his day - and didn't blow his cover. But he was beginning to think Hedwig had just played a huge prank on him.

Remus Lupin

Friday, 16 August, 1996

Remus was about to leave his cottage in the morning when he heard a tapping at his kitchen window. Harry had left about twenty minutes ago, so it probably wasn't for him. He opened the window and the quite conspicuous Gringotts owl threw an envelope at him and bolted. He caught it and opened it impatiently. It said he was to come to Gringotts alone. Now. To see Clawhammer.

Remus grabbed his coat and apparated to Diagon Alley immediately. He walked impatiently down the alley almost growling at those in his way. The goblin at the Special Accounts Desk was standing, waiting for him.



"Mr Lupin, this way."

They stopped at a very different set of doors where the goblin knocked.

"Come!"

Remus entered a very large room lined with guards – with Clawhammer and Ragnok, King of the Goblin Nation standing at one end. Ragnok was very large and imposing, wearing armour and a sword. Remus stopped and bowed. And stayed bowing.

Ragnok spoke like the rumble of a dragon, "Mr Lupin, Please come forward."

Remus moved forward with dread, "Ragnok. I am honoured."

"We have some very important things to discuss."

A tingle ran up Remus' back and he could barely get his voice to work as realisation started to land, "I take it you know what Harry's scar is?"

Ragnok nodded, "I can only discuss it with you after you perform these oaths." He held out a set of parchments.

Remus took them and started reading, "What? I can't do these. I need to be able to support Harry."

Ragnok nodded, "Yes, I understand. These are the standard oaths we require of Gringotts employees. You should consider yourself lucky. We can forego several more oaths because of your status as a werewolf prevents you from being at risk from illegitimacy."

Remus breathed carefully, "Alright. But I still need to be able to support Harry."

Ragnok was still being amazingly calm, "Yes. And I can guarantee you will continue to do so."

Remus took another long breath, "You know what this is?" At Ragnok's blank expression he tried again, "I want to know that my going through all this is actually worth it."

"Yes, we will explain it all after you have completed those." He pointed at the oaths.

Remus finally gave in, "Alright." He held up the papers and read out the oaths. At the end of performing them he was feeling rather wobbly and sat down in a chair conjured by Clawhammer.

"Very good, Mr Lupin. You were still standing by the end of all that. Quite good."

Remus was working to maintain eye contact with his tiredness, "Ok, so now that you own my soul, can you tell me what's going on?"

Ragnok nodded, conjured two chairs for himself and Clawhammer. "What I'm about to tell you is of the utmost sensitivity. No one must know about this. And if it does get out, it could destroy Gringotts - and that would mean we would destroy you."

Remus was now sitting up again. He nodded, breathing deeply to get his energy back.

"We - the Goblin Nation - have had a very secret group, an intelligence gathering group, that would infiltrate old family vaults and look for new and interesting magic to collect. Basically, very similar to our efforts in tomb excavations."

Clawhammer covered his face and groaned, then mumbled something in Gobbledegook.

Remus broke out laughing.

Ragnok and Clawhammer were - surprised.

Ragnok asked, "You find us circumventing our own oaths as humorous?"

Remus was now smirking, "No, it's just that Harry made an off-hand guess that you might have a group doing just that. He thought it would make sense. I thought he was crazy."

Ragnok started to smile, "He did, did he? The rascal. Well." He took a breath to gather himself, "We also scan every customer that enters the Bank. We know every person who has a Dark Mark in the wizarding world. That means that this group of ours knew about Harry's scar."

Remus burst out, "And when were you going to tell Harry?"

Ragnok burst too, "When we figured out how to deal with it." He took a few seconds to calm, "We have not figured that out yet." He sounded depressed.

"But what is it?"

Ragnok was thoughtful, "We have never seen one quite like this before, in a living container. They are usually only seen in very old Egyptian tombs and they require the destruction of the container. But that can not happen with Mr Potter. We must find another way. The truly surprising implication of this is that there may be a number more of these. And we must find them. Every one of them."

"This is something Voldemort did? When he killed Harry's parents?"

"Yes. Harry's scar contains a shard of Voldemort's soul."

Remus burst out, "Oh, God!"

Ragnok nodded, "We think it was created accidentally because it is – incomplete, because the ritual was interrupted. Because of that, it is also not protected like Voldemort's other soul shards, nor is it attached as well. This presents opportunities – and complications."

Remus was almost faint, "Is Harry in danger from this - thing?"

"It is called a horcrux. Luckily, it is a very small shard. Not strong enough to be a risk of possessing Mr Potter, but enough to be a drain on his magic - and impacting his eyesight. The end result is that Mr Potter, having grown up with this constant drain on his magic, is much stronger magically than others of his age. But we must remove that soul shard and destroy all the other soul shards or Voldemort can not die."

Remus was trying to keep up, "You mentioned complications?"

"In one way, Harry is - or could be - quite safe from Voldemort. You see, Harry is one of Voldemort's soul anchors. Voldemort can not kill him and remain as well anchored. But, Voldemort does not know this yet. If he did, he would try to capture Harry and hide him. That would be a disaster for us all."

Remus held up his hands, "Wait - wait! You said the implication was that there may be more of these - and then you said the one in Harry is not protected like Voldemort's other - horcruxes. That does not make sense."

Ragnok smiled, "Very good, Mr Lupin. Yes, I was trying to be - circumspect with our information. Need-to-know, and all that. We have seen another of these horcruxes made by Voldemort. In one of the vaults owned by a Death Eater. It is very well protected and will be very difficult to deal with. We know he has made more than one, we just don't know how many, yet. Or where they are kept."

Remus shook his head and wiped his face slowly, "How can I help?"

"By keeping Harry alive."

Remus was rather incredulous, "You do realise what he has sworn to do?"

"Yes. And we agree with his decision. We see Miss Granger as key to Harry's survival."

Remus was on the verge of angry, "Every week or so he ends up fighting several Death Eaters."

"Then please, train him well. And be there to support him."

Remus sighed, "Yes, absolutely. How long until you know more?"

Ragnok looked frustrated, "We will – need to try some experiments. We may need to develop some new magic."

Remus' eyes grew, "If I can help, please let me know."

"Yes, we will. For now, do not tell Harry anything about this. And if you need anything, contact Clawhammer."

Remus started to scowl, "You realise that Harry has broken with Dumbledore precisely because Dumbledore has kept a lot of secrets from Harry. I don't think keeping secrets from him is wise."

Ragnok looked – pensive, "Yes, I understand and agree. The difficulty is that Mr Potter must have a strong will to survive. I am afraid that telling him about this too early would be – too much – too fatalistic, *particularly* before we have an answer to this problem. That is why Miss Granger is so important. She gives him great reasons to want to fight and live. She – and you – will keep him alive."

Remus nodded tiredly.

"We will call you when we have a solution – or at least an idea. Likely we will need to see Harry, to investigate further. And we will disclose this to him at that time."

Remus nodded like he was exhausted. He started to leave when he stopped and turned back, "I will not be happy if you require Harry to take the same level of oaths as you have required of me."

Ragnok stared intently at Remus but didn't say anything.

Remus tried again, "There are such things as 'trust' and 'good faith'. I understand the need to protect your intelligence gathering, but requiring those oaths of Harry before offering any help borders on extortion. Dumbledore was guilty of violating Harry's trust. Please, do not make the same mistake."

Ragnok took a moment, then nodded, "Then we don't mention our intelligence gathering group and how we came by that information."

Remus nodded, then turned and left the bank. Damn! He did *not* want to become a Gringotts Employee. But – Harry needs this.

## 8. The Wheels Begin To Move

CHAPTER SIZE: 14600

### Chapter 8

#### The Wheels Begin To Move

Harry Potter

**Sunday, 1 September, 1996, 11:00**

It was Sunday, Harry's day off. And it was an anniversary that he didn't want to think about. The day of the Hogwarts Express. He will miss it. But – so would Hermione. He couldn't *imagine* riding to Hogwarts without Hermione. Neville would be there, and Luna, Ginny – and Ron. He rolled over on the couch and covered his head with the pillow. His emotions were all over the place, splashing about. He didn't know what to *think* – he just *felt* bad. It *felt* like a day of mourning for his life lived at the end of that damn whip. At least he could suffer in silence without dragging Hermione down with him.

He sighed. Even though Remus pushed him to take a real day off, he would still study Hermione's books. It was his one opportunity to make significant progress catching up. And it would take his mind off of Hogwarts and set it back on where it needed to be – his and Hermione's future.

He got up with a heavy sigh and started his day. His smile started to grow as he thought about it.

**Tuesday, 10 September, 1996, 09:00**

Harry stood with Remus outside the Wimbledon Test Centre. It was one of the few that was still holding exams at this late date. Of course, it was threatening rain with a bit of a breeze. A gloomy day for a gloomy event. Except – Harry realised it wasn't actually all that gloomy of a subject. It was actually rather hopeful because it marked movement toward a goal that Hermione dearly wanted. That made it a wonderful day.

Hermione and her parents had just found a parking space. Hermione got out first, "Harry!" She came up and gave Harry another Hermione-hug.

Harry whispered into her ear, "Good morning, Hermione." He would never get enough of those Hermione-hugs.

Hermione stepped back with a hopeful excited smile that almost broke Harry's heart. This was the reason Harry would gladly walk into a hoard of Death Eaters.

"Are we ready? Is it time? I can hardly wait." Hermione could barely stand still.

Harry tried to look stern, "Yes, I'm feeling quite testy today." But his sneaking smile drew other smiles.

"Oh, you!" Hermione took a playful swipe at him, "Come on. Why wait when there are tests to take. Let's go!" She started pulling Harry by the arm.

Harry was feeling a lot more confident than he expected. Particularly given his results on the practice GCSE, and that not getting into Uni at the same time as Hermione was going to be fine. He could – almost – relax and enjoy seeing Hermione so excited. But – tests were never his thing.

The test was gruelling, and hours long – or so it seemed. Harry just lost track of time and concentrated on his test. At the end, when the bell rang, he let out a huge breath and tried to work the kinks out of his neck and shoulders. He looked around for the first time and noticed Hermione was not in the room. He smiled, she had probably finished ages ago. He took his test papers up to the front and found his way out to look for Hermione.

Hermione, her parents, and Remus were waiting in the lobby. Harry was able to sneak up on them, "I'm done."

"Harry!" She jumped up and hugged him, "How did you do?"



He sighed dramatically, "I'm alive. All else is negotiable."

Everyone grinned.

Dan stood up, "Well, should we go find some lunch to celebrate this rite of passage?"

Harry looked confused, "Right of passage? I could have sworn I took a hard left." He held his hands up, pointing left and right, looking off into a growing smirk.

A frustrated huff from Hermione and a finger wagged in his face put an end to that sad attempt at humour.

**Friday, 13 September, 1996, 11:00**

Harry was sitting on the couch next to Hermione as they both read. At least they were both reading for pleasure instead of study. Harry had pushed for a break from study for a while and Hermione reluctantly agreed. Harry was back to reading *The Lord Of The Rings* again. The real GCSE tests were done and they were waiting for any response on Mrs Teddington showing their test results to various Universities. If it wasn't for their pleasure reading Harry would be going nuts waiting. Even though the attack on Frodo at Weathertop had affected him strongly. It felt somehow – too familiar.

Harry's stomach was starting to think about lunch when Hermione's mobile beeped.

She startled and then picked it up, "Hello?"

Harry could hear the voice on the other end.

*"Hello, Miss Granger?"*

"Yes, speaking."

*"This is Mr Mendelson, I'm the Admissions Officer for Cambridge University and Mrs Teddington has brought us your GCSE test scores. I must say we are very impressed and would like to offer you a position at Cambridge this fall."*

Hermione sputtered for a moment, "WHAT?"

*"It is a little sudden, I understand, and we are looking for a place for you in one of our colleges. With the short notice we're not sure which college will have a space, but rest assured we will find a way. Unfortunately that means that we may not be able to offer you the choice of colleges, but we will definitely find away."*

More sputtering, "Yes, but – that's fine, but –"

*"Is there anything we can do to help you make a decision?"*

Harry whispered to her, "Scholarship?"

Hermione turned to Harry in confusion, "What? Scholarship?"

*"Ah. Yes, I'm prepared to offer a 50 percent scholarship at this time."*

Harry clenched his fist in triumph.

Hermione turned back to the phone, still confused but desperate not to miss her opportunity, "No, no – I mean, yes – I mean – YES! I accept!"

*"Wonderful! Thank you Miss Granger. I will have one of my staff call you in the next few days with details of your acceptance, the timing, and such. Everything else can wait. Do you have any questions for me?"*

Even more sputtering, "Well – Ah – Harry! Did Mrs Teddington show you Harry Potter's GCSE test results? He took the test the same day with me."

*"Ah, yes. And I'm happy to say that Mr Potter has been accepted at Cambridge –"*

Harry's eyes almost fell out, his jaw hit the cushions.

*"- but unfortunately we have not been able to find a place for him for this year. But he has been accepted next year along with our normal uptake of new students."*

Hermione deflated, "Yes, I understand. Well, thank you for trying."

*"You're very welcome, Miss Granger. I'll have someone call you in the next few days."*

"Yes, thank you. Goodbye." She looked at Harry with sad eyes.

Harry looked like a fish, his jaw bobbing up and down, "I got accepted?"

"But only for next year, I'm sorry, Harry."

"Sorry? Why? I'm absolutely flabbergasted that I got accepted at all! Next year is fine! I'm just - I mean - wow ..." Harry's eyes kept glossing over in amazement.

Hermione started to get excited again, "I should call Mum and Dad. They'll want to celebrate, probably with dinner out. Can you come with us?"

Harry's smile just kept getting bigger and his eyes glossier, "Yes. That will be fun. Remus will die laughing."

She looked concerned at him, "Remus is rather strange, don't you know?"

Harry just started laughing.

She asked deceptively lightly, "Are you going to call your parents?"

Harry's smile and laughter dropped, "Yes." He looked at his watch and tried to keep his voice light, "It's the middle of the night over there. I'll call later."

She looked at him with concern.

He smiled at her, "Are you going to call your parents? Somehow I don't think your mother will be surprised."

Hermione rolled her eyes lightly, "She is a bit over-the-top."

"But I think she's correct."

"Harry." Another eye-roll. And a sheepish grin. She picked up her phone and started dialling, "I need to call Mum. She'll want to make dinner reservations."

Harry watched her dial with the biggest of contented grins.

**Saturday, 14 September, 1996, 23:30**

It was 23:30 and Harry was falling asleep on his book. It was only the second Lord of the Rings book and not study materials, but he couldn't stay awake. Until he heard the gong. Well, it was a soft gong. But still, it was a Hostile Intent warning on the Granger house, even if it wasn't very definitive. He sat and waited for a more definite signal – and almost fell asleep again. He stood up and started moving.

Another small gong. He started shaking himself awake, in case there was more. Pacing around the room was helping wake him up but it wasn't helping Hermione much.

He started moving getting his gear in order. He put on his jumper, he gathered his coat. He found his gloves and put them in his coat pocket. He put on his warm hat. He was ready.

But now his nerves were all wound up. And nothing was happening. Or was there? He decided he needed to make sure. He apparated to the Granger house. He was standing on the roof. It was dark, cold, a bit of a breeze making the trees and the fallen leaves rustle. He checked his wardstone-phone and found four DEs in a clump to the South. He looked and could just see some red glow of magic outside the installed ward's sensor range,

along the footpath. They didn't seem to be moving – like they were waiting. He ground his teeth. He wasn't going to wait for them.

Harry apparated to the edge of the property, behind the carriage house. They were still bunched in a tight group. He set a silencing spell, a light translucent bubble over the house and turned on the wards, which made a muddy dark bubble just over that. He started moving slowly toward the DEs position. His magic glasses said they had not moved yet.

He watched and waited. They were bunched together and if he didn't want to deal with all four at once he needed them to separate.

Two started moving toward the house – and they separated. One toward each side of the house. Harry was closer to one. He apparated behind them, silenced them, summoned them, and hit them with a bludgeoner. The DE fell in a lump. The summoning and bludgeoner spells displayed no light when they were fired, so no one saw him. He ran a quick health diagnostic and found no life.

He found the red glow of the other DE and apparated near them. They were approaching the house. His apparition wasn't silent enough and the DE crouched down and started looking around. Harry lifted his wand to attack when the DE apparated. The pop of apparition came from his left! He fired a bludgeoner and jumped right. The bludgeoner hit, but a spell came down from above and Harry barely got a shield up in time. Luckily he had turned or he would not have seen the spell at all. There was a DE on a broom overhead! He saw a streak of the DE's red magic and the broom's yellow magic swooping up through the trees.

Harry looked to find the other two DEs. He couldn't see them. He puled out his wardstone-phone and it showed him two red points moving toward the house. He apparated to the front of the carriage house. The DE came around the side of the carriage house and fired a spell. Harry jumped to the side and it missed, but he had jumped toward the carriage house, which left him crouched against it with only one direction to move. He fired a fire hose of piercing hexes that hit the DE's shield, cracked it, broke

it, and hit the DE. He was down. But the flashes of light of the hexes were like a beacon, pointing at him.

He jumped away from the carriage house as a bright flash came down from above. He screamed as he was hit in several places by the shrapnel from the explosive hex as it hit the paving stones and blew a hole. He kept rolling away hoping to hide from any more spells.

He saw a red streak of magic above him and fired another fire hose of wide cutting hexes up at the DE. The string of bright streaks flashed across the sky, missed the DE and hit the upper branches of the trees sending cut branches raining down over the yard.

Harry apparated to the back of the house looking for the other DE. He found him at the side of the house working some orange magic to break the wards. Harry fired a string of piercing hexes at the DE and hit him with several. He was down and out of the fight.

But there was still the DE on the broom. He couldn't see them so he pulled out his shrunken broom and took to the air. The trees at night were deadly obstacles at any speed. His best bet was to go up above the trees and look for the red glow from above. He aimed at the area of the most clear view of stars and shot up with his arm over his head. He got a few slaps with branches but his main concern was getting that other DE before he was stopped by his injuries.

Unfortunately, it was a clear night so when he got above the trees he saw the lights of the town from most directions. The red glow of a DE's magic was hard to see. He went higher and looked down against the dark trees. There! Near the house. Now all he had to do was get back down there without killing himself in the tree branches. He started moving closer slowly. He noticed he could watch the front porch light of the house and look for the areas clear of tree branches. He found a clear spot and dove for the porch light. Once below the tree canopy he flew around the house until he came up fast on the DE bending down over the last one he hit. Harry fired a

firehose of piercing hexes and hit the DE with several. A spell came back but was way behind him. The DE fell and didn't get up.

Harry came back around and landed. Both DEs were dead. He put away his broom and breathed a sigh of relief. He was afraid to find out how badly he was injured. It hurt a lot, but he was afraid it would hurt even more if he found out how bad it was. He started wrapping up the two DEs quickly and sending them off to Order HQ. He needed to find the other two. He remembered one in front of the carriage house. He was afraid to apparate in his tired injured state so he walked quickly over and almost tripped in the hole in the paving stones. He wrapped up the DE and sent him off. He was puffing now. Tiredness was landing hard. He breathed for a few minutes, then repaired the hole in the paving stones.

Finding the first DE took a few minutes. But he found him behind the carriage house and sent him off. Now he was really tired.

A Patronus message from Remus flew up, "Harry, where are you?" He sent one back, "Behind the carriage house." It was a rather weak spell.

Remus came running around it, "Harry. Are you alright?"

Harry was breathing hard, shaking, and starting to get dizzy, "Not so good."

"Ok, first let me get you home. Then I can come back and clean up."

Harry nodded as Remus grabbed his arm and apparated him to the cottage. Of course, Harry fell on the ground and yelled in pain.

Remus levitated him into the house and started working on his injuries, "Harry, you got hit by a lot of something. All over your back side."

Harry was starting to come down from his adrenalin high and crash hard. He mumbled, "Must clean up - blood stains - and - fallen tree - branches - and - and ..." He was out.

**Sunday, 15 September, 1996**

Harry woke up slowly. Until his back hurt – then he remembered and sat up – and gasped in pain. After breathing for a moment, he looked around and heard noises coming from the kitchen, "Remus?"

Remus poked his head out of the kitchen, "Harry! You should still be sleeping."

"What happened?"

Remus abandoned what he was doing in the kitchen and came out, "You were torn up quite a bit on your back. Just embedded stones and dirt. You should be fine by Monday."

"Did you get everything cleaned up at the Granger's house?"

"Yes. Well – I went back again in the early morning light to make sure. You made quite a mess. It looks like someone went crazy pruning the trees all over the property. Luckily it's coming on fall and the trees are bare, so it's much less obvious. Hopefully they won't notice."

Harry sighed tiredly, "There were five of them. Four on the ground and one on a broom overhead. He almost got me a few times."

Remus' eyebrows rose, "Ah. That explains the flying broom I found."

Harry nodded, "I'm glad you found that. I completely forgot. Was there much more I missed?"

Remus shrugged, "Finishing touches on repairing the hole in the drive and damage to the carriage house, more fallen branches to vanish, a lot of blood I couldn't see in the dark, and removing the silencing spells and turning the wards back to standby."

Harry sighed even deeper, "Thanks. That was a hard one."

"Just in case, I put up a low powered wide area notice-me-not spell on a tree in the garden. Hopefully, that will keep them from noticing too much



damage."

Harry smiled, "Ah, maybe you can show me that one?"

Remus nodded, "Sure. I take it the broom rider was a surprise?"

"Yes. He must have been high up because I never saw him until he fired on me. Luckily I was facing the right direction or I would have been hit right off."

Remus grimaced, "You couldn't see him with your glasses?"

"I could, but only when he was close enough – like below the tree tops. I don't know how he kept from running into the trees at night."

Remus sat and thought a moment, "Maybe I can find a wide-area *hominem revelio* type of spell."

Harry nodded, thinking, "Yes, one for magicals and one for non-magicals. I may need the non-magicals version at Cambridge some day."

Remus' eyebrows rose, "Yes, I can see that. I'll take a look and see what I can find. Oh – and we had a night vision spell in school – Ah – I'll look in my notes. Can't remember."

Harry laid back down, "Thanks Remus."

Remus got up slowly, scratching his chin, thinking, and wandered back to his kitchen project.

**Wednesday, 18 September, 1996, 18:00**

Remus was late for dinner. Harry was setting it out on the little table in the kitchen. He was almost ready to call Remus' mobile to find out what was happening when the door opened.

"Harry? I got it!"

Harry peeked out of the kitchen, "Got what?"

"A flat near Cambridge, just a few blocks from Hermione's College."

Harry's face lit up, "Yes?"

"Yes! - Oh! You have dinner."

Harry started chuckling, "Yes, I let Dobby help - or - he let me help. Let's eat first and -"

"And then we can go see the new place." He sat down, seemingly more excited than Harry was.

Harry jumped into his seat, "That would be great! What do we need to do to it before we start moving in?"

Remus sat, thinking, "Actually - nothing. We can pack some necessities and take them over tonight."

"Yes!"

"We don't actually need to be moved in and functioning in the new flat before school starts so that gives us some time. We don't have to rush."

Harry sat thinking, "When's move-in day?"

"Move-in day at Cambridge is Friday, September 27. So almost ten days."

Harry nodded slowly, "Yes - Oh no!" He covered his face with his hand.

"What's that?"

"I'm afraid we're going to have to move - at least the big things - into the new flat by hand."

"By hand?"

"We need to be seen moving in. We can't just 'appear' out of nowhere. We probably don't need to move everything visibly, but at least the big things. And that will mean hiring a lorry and everything."

Remus looked confused, "I don't think I've ever had to do that before."

Harry nodded, "Me neither. But we have some time to figure it out."

Remus got lost in thought.

Harry got lost in thought too, "And that reminds me. I think I need to spend some time at school to – get the lay of the land – so to speak. If I'm going to defend Hermione on that territory, I need to know it inside and out." His gaze turned serious to Remus.

Now Remus looked serious, "Yes. I might suggest we spend a few evenings there exploring."

"And a map. I'll need a good map of the buildings and such. What's in each building."

"Yes. And spend some time there getting used to the traffic patterns, car parks, maybe scope out some apparition points, some watch-points on some of the rooftops."

Harry started looking thoughtful, "What if we set up wardstones in critical places with Hostile Intent Wards on them? We could lock the whole place down. No Death Eater could get near her without us knowing."

Remus sat nodding appreciatively, "Depends on what buildings her classes are in, but yes." Then Remus started to smile, "You think all this will draw the attention of the Ministry again?"

Harry started chuckling, "Yes, likely. But after a few attacks in that environment do you think they may want to help?"

"Hmmm, that's an interesting point. They might, at that." Then his smile dropped, "If they still exist by that point."

Harry's head swivelled to Remus with a pained look, "That bad?"

Remus nodded shortly, "Won't be long at this rate."

Harry breathed deeply as he rubbed his face with his hands, "How do you see that going?"

Remus got lost in thought as he ran around the speculations for a few moments, "You know, ever since Madam Bones was murdered at the beginning of summer, all sense of restraint and balance has been removed from Fudge and he has been careening from one catastrophe to another. I think he is a large contributing factor in the decline of Wizarding Britain at this point. Dumbledore is trying to hold it all together, but ..." He shrugged.

Harry took yet another large breath to combat his growing tension. He was facing enough with defending Hermione. He didn't need the Ministry collapsing around him, too. All he could do was shake his head in frustration.

"Have you thought more about what might be the trigger point to pull Hermione and her parents out of England?"

Harry rubbed his face and groaned, "Well - I haven't thought about the trigger so much as how to go about it. I think - whenever we decide the time is right - we just grab them and go. I don't imagine we will be concerned with the rules by that point, or trying to be subtle, we just need to run. We can explain everything to them after we've bailed out. Do you have any ideas on how to get out of England? Or to get into - somewhere else?"

Remus nodded, "I've had to deal with a few - actions like that in the past. I know the details. I'll set up a few possible paths for us."

"Can you tell me - at least some of the details?"

"The first step is getting an expanded steamer trunk with a flat inside. That allows them to travel in comfort and safety. Beyond that, I need to do a bit of planning."

Harry nodded slowly, "I really hope we don't have to do that. That would destroy all of Hermione's plans. Throw her life into a huge mess with no way back to normal. Yet again!"

Remus was rather hesitant, "You realise that the best way to deal with that is if you two got married. Then she and her parents could know about magic legally."

Harry huffed and shook his head, "Yes. Well - maybe. That would have to be up to her. I won't force that on her."

Remus smiled, "I don't think that would be much of a problem."

Harry smiled as a warm feeling coursed through him. He didn't want to mention how amazing that felt.

**Thursday, 19 September, 1996, 10:00**

Harry turned onto the lane leading to Hermione's house. Ever since their real GCSE test they had continued their habit of reading - and some studying - during the days. But most of it had been reading for pleasure. Harry was loving the Lord of the Rings. He'd never had the opportunity to read something - anything - just for fun. It was - so - freeing, joyous, expanding? He couldn't think of enough words. No wonder Hermione was hooked on reading.

Harry turned into the drive and parked his car. The door opened and Hermione came out of the house as he was getting out of his car with his bag of supplies.

"Good morning, Harry!"

"Good morning, Hermione. How are you today?"

She had a huge smile on her face, like she was waiting for something, "I'm good. What have you brought?"

"What? Oh, this?" He held up the bag, "Oh - just - a project. Something to do." He stepped up onto the porch, "To teach you to cook."

She started looking intrigued, "What project?"

He gave her a rogue's smile, "This thing called - a 'cake'."

She squealed and wrapped her arms around his neck in a Hermione-hug.

Harry was struggling with holding on to the bag - a little. Mostly he just loved the hug. The bag would have to look after itself. "Hermione, do you think I could possibly forget your birthday? Just about the most exciting day in the entire calendar?"

She stepped back with that smile still firmly in place, but a bit of embarrassment in her voice, "Harry." She turned to the bag, "What's in there?"

He started to grin, "Chocolate hazelnut cake."

She gasped, "You got my favourite?" She squealed again and started another Hermione-hug.

Harry gave a muffled reply while being buried in her arms, "Yes. But we will have to learn how to make it."

She freed one arm, pulled open the bag and looked deep inside, "And maybe add some things?"

He smiled roguishly again, "Maybe."

She pulled him in the house, "Wonderful. Let's start! We wouldn't want it to be late."

In two hours, even with lots of instruction on baking, the cake was done. Harry spent the next few hours studying – and defending the cake from sneak attacks. Then Hermione's parents arrived home a bit after three and gave Harry a break from defending the cake. By four Remus had shown up and the party began in earnest.

Everyone sat down in the living room, Dan and Emma on arm chairs, Harry and Hermione on the couch, and Remus perched on a dining room chair.

Hermione was unusually quiet, looking a bit embarrassed by all the attention.

Dan and Emma had brought out a large bag with presents.

Harry had pulled a few out of his 'cake bag' and put them on the low table in front of the couch.

Remus had brought a large bag.

Dan began the proceedings with a glint in his eye, "I'd just like to mention that seventeen years ago today –" he glanced at Emma with a sneaking grin, "– in the middle of a nice breakfast –"

Emma frowned – almost, "Oh, you!"

Dan kept on, "– Someone almost pulled my arm out of its socket and yelled 'it's time! Let's go!'. And a few hours later –" He motioned toward Hermione, "And ever since, life has been a never ending joy."

"Daaaad."

Everyone chuckled as Hermione covered her face with her hands and groaned, trying to hide a smile.

Harry chuckled at Hermione's discomfort, "And then, almost twelve years later, I got to share in that joy."

"Harry!" Hermione started pushing and pulling on Harry's upper arm in embarrassment.

Harry sighed, motioned with his hands grandiosely, "And the world is a better place!"

Hermione's index finger found Harry's neck just below his ear.

Harry squeaked and collapsed on the couch with everyone laughing at his lack of control.

Dan redirected everyone by handing Hermione a nicely wrapped box, "Here, start with this one."

Harry took a deep breath to regain his oxygen level and sat up to watch the opening.

Hermione was meticulously unwrapping the paper without tearing it, one little bit at a time.

Harry's hands kept sneaking closer, "Do you need some help with that?"

"No!" She pulled the box away and kept picking at it. With a grin towards Harry. It was becoming obvious that she was teasing Harry.

And he was struggling to maintain control. He reached for one of his own small boxes, "Can I help with this one?"

"No, no, no! That would be cheating."

"But - if you don't hurry up -" He started crinkling the paper like he was unwrapping it.

She huffed at him, "Harry!"

He sighed and gently put the box back on the table.



Eventually Hermione ran out of paper to unwrap and pulled off the paper, "Oh - a pen and - What's this?"

Dan smiled, "That is a mechanical pencil and an eraser. They were quite popular with all the upper year engineering students when we were in school. A very nice way to take notes. You never have to stop and sharpen the pencil and no ink to smear."

"Ooooh, very nice. I can hardly wait." Hermione started pulling them out of the packaging and playing with them. Until Dan put another wrapped box in front of her. This time she started unwrapping much faster. The package looked like a softbound book, until it was unwrapped, "What's this?" A pad of light green paper with soft grid lines covering it.

"That is a pad of engineering paper. It's perfect for taking notes, drawing diagrams and the like. To go with the pencil set."

Hermione's eyes grew, until she started to squeak, "Mum! Dad! I'm going to Cambridge! I can't believe it!" She started pulling on Harry's arm because he was within reach.

Everyone else was busy laughing.

She grabbed the next package in reach. It was a larger one of Harry's. The paper came flying off. "A backpack?" She started opening all the zippers and looking in all the pockets. "Look! It's like a mobile office! Places to keep everything!" She was showing them to everyone. "Pockets, and spaces, and - Harry this is wonderful." Her hands flashed into every pocket gauging their size.

Remus nodded, "They seemed quite popular on campus when I was wandering around looking for a flat."

She started putting the pencil set into a pocket.

Dan moved another box closer, "This will go in there too."

Hermione ripped off the paper and gasped, "A calculator? Look, trig functions! And *all* the scientific functions!" The box came off and the calculator found it's pocket. Along with the instruction book.

The next gift was a planning and calendar book, then a new watch, paper, notebooks, pens, sticky-notes, paper clips and clasps, folders, tape, office supplies galore. All of it went into the backpack.

Hermione hugged the backpack, "Mum! Dad! I'm going to Cambridge! I can't believe it!"

Everyone was giggling along.

"Oh -" Harry remembered, "I forgot to mention that Remus and I are moving into our new flat in Cambridge this weekend, so we will be - rather involved."

Hermione nodded with a touch of teasing, "Well, we'll survive - I suppose."

Emma took pity on Harry, "Not a problem, Harry. We need to go shopping for Hermione's dorm supplies this weekend, too."

## **Harry Potter**

**Sunday, 22 September, 1996, 10:00**

Harry and Remus each sat down heavily in an uncluttered chair among the piles of boxes in their new upstairs flat near Hermione's College at Cambridge. Puffing from the exertion of hauling the surprisingly heavy, bendy, floppy mattresses up the stairs into the flat. Like trying to move an unconscious walrus up the stairs.

Remus, with his werewolf strength, did not seem to be too winded, Harry noticed. But then, neither was he. Particularly since these were some of the last large things they carried up those stairs.

Remus evidently noticed, too, "You're doing much better Harry."

Harry smiled, "Yes. I love it, actually. I've never been so capable before. It feels very good. Thanks, Remus."

Remus smiled and stood up, "Well, I'll go take the hired lorry back. We can move the rest in a little bit at a time – the easy way." He picked up the keys and headed to the car park.

Harry sat looking at the piles of boxes when an alarm on his wardstone-phone warned of a magical entering the wards. Harry stood up and turned toward the door to the flat which was still open. He frowned in confusion; the hostile intent ward didn't trigger. Hermione was keyed into the wards so she would not set it off. And she was still at home.

A man in a normal business suit – and the blue-green glow of magic – peaked in the flat door and knocked on the door casing, "Hello?"

The man was rather tall, light hair, no glasses. Harry readied his wand and emptied his hands out of reflex. His glasses showed the colour of a wand showing through the man's trouser pocket – not in his hand.

Harry tried to smile and act relatively normal, "Yes?"

Harry's voice caught the man's eye, "Ah. Mr Potter. Do you have a minute?"

The guy was probably 25 to 30. Harry's eyebrows bunched up at hearing his name, "Sure."

The guy stepped in and held out his hand, "My name is Wallace Bonderson. I work for MI5." He held up an ID badge in his other hand.

Harry looked at it with slightly suspicious eyes and shook his hand, "Call me Harry."

He nodded, "I need to talk to you about the wizarding world."

Harry's eyebrows ticked up as he nodded slowly, he moved to close the flat door, "Does MI5 know you're magical?"

Bonderson smiled, "Oh, yes. I'm actually a Hogwarts graduate, class of '88 with a Mastery in DADA – and a muggle-born. But I work for MI5 and we are very interested in what's happening in the Wizarding world in Britain. Particularly the struggles you are having."

Harry was incredulous, "Me? Why?"

"Because Voldemort is winning and will explode his fight into the muggle world soon, even more than he already has. We need to stop all this. Permanently."

Harry's expression turned dark, "Not my problem."

Bonderson chuckled, "No, it's not. But you seem to be involved whether you want to or not. We'd like to talk to you about what we know, what you know, compare notes, maybe talk about strategy? Particularly since you seem to be rather key to the wizarding world."

Harry sighed, "Sure – but I have some pressing higher priority issues I'm dealing with right now."

Bonderson smiled a bit tensely, "Yes, we've heard. And we will support you in that." He handed Harry two business cards, "If you have any problems, call me. We'd like to help with your problem, basically because they're all wrapped up together. And feel free to give one of those to Mr Lupin, too."

Harry nodded and glanced back and forth between Bonderson and his card, "Ok, we've got a bit of time. What do you need?"

"We've heard about – your difficulties with Professor Dumbledore."

Harry's eyebrows rose, "Yes? How did you hear about that? That's not widely known."

"We have – a few sources."

Harry's eyebrows rose higher, "So then you know why I won't work with him?"

"Yes. And we sympathise, since we can't get any information out of him either. What do you know of what Dumbledore is hiding?"

"He told me there is a prophesy that links me with Riddle."

Bonderson looked confused, "Riddle?"

"Tom Marvolo Riddle. Voldemort's real name. Hogwarts class of '44 I think."

Bonderson's eyes grew bigger, and more intent.

Harry continued, "The prophesy says that I and Riddle are locked in a fight to the death and that only I can kill him. At least, that's what Dumbledore thinks. I think it's rubbish, myself, and I refuse to participate in it. Let Dumbledore deal with it."

"Damn! That's hard."

Harry frowned at him, "You believe in it?"

"No, but that's irrelevant if everyone else does."

Harry huffed, "The bastard waited how many years to tell me this little factoid? And he's known about this since before I was born? This was the reason my parents were killed."

Bonderson sighed and thought for a moment, "Do you have any knowledge of how Riddle is still alive?"

Harry's voice took on a load of bitterness, "No. Dumbledore wouldn't tell me anything – kept saying he's trying to protect me. That I'm not ready for that knowledge. The sanctimonious patronising bastard." He sighed heavily, "But I think there were a lot of clues."

Bonderson's eyebrows rose in prompting.

"In my first year, the DADA professor was possessed by Riddle. I ended up killing the professor, in self-defence, and Riddle flew off as a wraith. In second year, Riddle tried to possess a girl through a diary he created when he was a student at Hogwarts."

A tingle went up Bonderson's spine and his eyes grew to match, "Really! Through a diary? - When he was a student?"

Harry nodded, "She wrote in it and it wrote back, tried to steal her life force and give himself a new body."

"Now *that's* interesting." Bonderson's hard glare wandered off into the distance of thought.

"Yes, and then there's the fact that my scare hurts when Riddle is near - it can even break open and bleed."

Bonderson's eyes almost fell out as he looked closely at Harry's scar.

Harry grumbled, "That - and I can tell if Riddle has strong emotions. Even see what he is seeing, sometimes."

Bonderson paled a bit and spoke absently, trying not to give away any of his suspicions, "Some very important clues."

Harry looked at him closely, "If you figure it out, will you tell me?"

"If I'm allowed to. For the record, I think you deserve to know."

Harry smiled with sarcasm, "Thanks. Gee, someone who actually trusts me. Wow."

Bonderson smirked, "Thanks for the clues. I'll let you know if I find anything."

The pop of apparition sounded from Remus' bedroom.

Bonderson nodded toward the bedroom, "Sounds like Mr Lupin is back."

Remus walked out of the room, moving gracefully, on edge, "Hi Harry. Who's this?"

Harry turned to Remus and smirked, "Remus, meet Wallace Bonderson, MI5."

Bonderson held out his hand, "Mr Lupin, I'm very glad to meet you." He held out his badge in his other hand.

Remus' eyes grew in suspicion. He took his hand, "Please to meet you. When did MI5 start hiring magicals?"

Bonderson smiled, "Soon after the end of the last war. That was handled so badly we were asked to keep an eye on the magical world. And now it seems that's paying off."

Remus still didn't look trusting, "And your goals?"

Bonderson nodded, "We want to help. We can't wait for it to get as bad as it did last time. We think the wizarding community needs to be a lot healthier than it has been. The propensity for Dark Lords is way too high."

Harry chuckled.

Remus only looked more intently, "And your ideas?"

Bonderson smiled, "We are open to ideas. What do you think?"

Remus took on a tinge of confusion, "Why do you care about my ideas?"

"That's what democracies do. They collect ideas, swirl them around, and use the best. We are particularly interested in the ideas of those who are working toward a healthier society. We'd like help with your effort because we think you are keys to the future."

Remus was looking less and less trusting.

Bonderson seemed to catch on, "Well - I'll let you think on that. Harry has my card. Don't hesitate to call if you think I can help. Call any time." He shook hands all around and walked out.

Harry sighed, "Well - the term 'dog pile' comes to mind."

Remus broke out laughing, "Yes, I suppose it does."

### **Wednesday, 25 September, 1996**

Harry was jolted awake and found himself sitting up on his couch. The sound of the Hostile Intent ward gong fading. It was dark. He lit his wand and started a time spell; 2AM. "Gah! Can't these idiots choose a normal time?" He threw off the blanket and gathered his things, put his shoes on. In two minutes he was standing on the Grangers rooftop. He put up a silencing spell on the house and activated the wards.

He could see nothing obvious at first glance. He pulled out his wardstone-phone and saw a red dot to the South coming toward the house. He looked and could see no tell-tale red glow. That was surprising, he should be able to. Evidently, this DE had very good control of their magic leaking out, but not their hostile intent leaking out. And they were very well concealed. To the point of very good invisibility, since he could see no shimmering or stuttering visual effects, even with the night vision spell Remus had found. Then he noticed the red glow of leaking magic spread over a rather wide area, which made it very diffuse and hard to see. Not to mention it didn't give a precise location.

Harry watched the glow slowly move toward the house. It was surrounding the carriage house now.

He smiled as he saw a rain barrel standing next to the corner of the carriage house collecting rain from the gutters. The red glow started moving toward the back door of the house, covering most of the garden. He apparated next to the barrel and levitated some dirt, then some water and made a nice mud pie - and exploded it to cover the entire garden.



"Ah!" A female voice yelled out. And the shape of someone standing in the garden next to the wardline.

Harry shot out a flurry of spells as he moved away from the barrel; bludgeoners, summoners, cutting spells, incarcerous, expelliarmus, piercing hexes.

Lots of shields and a few spells came back but they weren't aimed well. The DE started moving toward Harry and into the centre of the garden.

Harry kept up his barrage of spells and added in something he just read about last night; an inverse bubble-head charm. It covered your head and started pulling the air out of your lungs, which started pulling the oxygen out of your blood due to the vacuum. The key was to cast it invisibly so the victim wouldn't know to cut it off. Harry kept dodging, shielding, and moving as his spell barrage kept going.

Within five seconds the spells got weaker, in another two they stopped. Harry stopped firing at that point. After nine seconds the DE fell to their knees. By 11 they were down. Harry shook his head; oxygen deprivation really was a critical weakness.

Harry walked over and ran several finite incantatem spells. The DE became visible, along with a boiling Dark Mark. Harry shook his head. A very pretty woman – with the ugliest snarl on her face. He sent a stupefy, an incarcerous, broke her wand, and sent her off to Order HQ.

Harry started looking around for damage to the garden. Not much, except that grafted apple tree that Emma talked to Harry about. The grafted limb was broken and hanging down. Harry tried to heal it and – it might live. He'd check on it again in the morning when he came to read with Hermione. He stopped the silencing charm and set the wards back to passive. But now – it was back to bed.

Then he stopped – and noticed that no Aurors showed up to investigate all the powerful offensive magic that just went flying. They hadn't for a while

now. That was concerning. He'd ask Remus about it in the morning. A pop and the garden was quiet and empty again.

### **Thursday, 26 September, 1996**

Harry woke up at a noise. It was early, just after six. More noises, must be Remus. He got up and wandered into the kitchen, "Remus?"

"Harry! You're up early. What's up?" Remus was moving toward tea.

Harry hummed tiredly and sat down, "I'm – beginning to move. What are you up to?"

"I've got a few things to arrange for Hermione's move-in day tomorrow."

Harry nodded, "I – had a question come up, last night."

"Last night?"

"There was an attack at the Granger's last night. Nothing too difficult, but – I noticed that, with all the nasty magic from the fight, no Aurors showed up. At all."

Remus became serious and sighed, "Yes. The Aurors have seen a significant increase in large displays of magic. These displays show up on the Big Board and usually a set of Aurors are dispatched to investigate. But some of those large displays were far away from anywhere and were just an attempt to ambush the Aurors. After losing a few Aurors, Scrimgeour decided to stop responding to large displays unless they were in magical areas."

Harry growled, "The coward. That means Hermione – and me – have been abandoned."

Remus nodded grimly, "Yes. And all muggles. They've lost a few inexperienced Aurors, mainly by being isolated."

Harry sighed and covered his eyes, "Anyone else missing?"

"Mundungus Fletcher has disappeared. But we have no idea why."

Harry grunted, "I suppose it's only going to get worse."

"Yes. Much worse."

**Friday, 27 September, 1996, 06:30**

Harry woke up – to – some noise. He looked around in the dark and gathered his brain. Oh! Hermione's move-in day! He sat up still in the dark. He lit his wand and ran a time spell; 06:30. Well, at least he didn't have to do his normal work-out today. Moving would probably be work-out enough. He started moving.

He was starting breakfast with Remus by seven. He turned to Remus, "So, you're going to be riding a broom on overwatch for us?"

"Yes. And then at some point, when the Grangers go back home, then I will be following them home."

Harry sighed, "Yes, and then my private war begins."

Remus smiled, "I think we – and you – are pretty well prepared. We've set up wardstones, we've scoped out watch points, walking, flying, and even apparition routes. I think, barring some large change, we have the home-turf advantage on this one."

Harry nodded slowly, "Yes. But also, everything to protect and everything to lose."

Remus sighed, "Such optimism. You'll do fine – as long as you don't get distracted by all the pretty girls at Uni." His trademark smirk was growing.

Harry scoffed, "There's only going to be one at that Uni."

Remus smiled knowingly. "That's fine. Just remember, minimal everything. Minimal damage, minimal spell energy – in fact minimal magic is the

safest. If you have to physically punch them in the nose, at least you've trained for that too."

Harry nodded in acknowledgment, "Yes, I just can't mess up once, or it all goes to hell."

Harry's dark look caused Remus to chuckle, "We'll see. Ready?"

Harry nodded and started gathering his things for the day. By eight he was out the door and on his way to Hermione's house. At least the drive was calming, focussing. He had a chance to think. To prepare for the day. Potentially a very stressful day. Because he didn't know what he would be facing. Yes, he had the lay of the land, but – he didn't know how he was going to deal with DE attacks like he had been at Hermione's house. Particularly since Cambridge didn't sleep. There was no quiet hour, no off-switch for that town.

He pulled into Hermione's drive and parked. Dan already had his Range Rover parked near the front door and was starting to bring Hermione's things to pack in the car. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Harry. I'm glad you're here. I'm not sure all Hermione's things can fit in here."

"Really? That's – a lot of stuff. Well, I won't have any passengers so we can stuff my car full."

Dan looked confused, "Really? I had thought Hermione would want to ride with you."

Harry smiled, "No, she should ride with you. I'll get to see her a lot in the next few months. You need your time with her."

Dan smiled appreciatively, "Thanks, that would be nice."

Harry moved to open his car doors and the boot, "Stuff whatever you want in here."

Dan looked at the Range Rover, "Oh, yes. Maybe I'll be able to see out the back." He started moving a few things to Harry's car to lower the gunwales in his.

"Harry!" Hermione came out the front door carrying a few large bags.

"Hermione, here let me help." He took the bags to his car and stuffed them in the boot because they were bulky but light. He smiled at her, "You've got a lot of stuff."

She smirked, "And where do you think I got so much stuff?" She nodded at Dan, "Mr you-just-might-need-this."

Harry chuckled and sighed, "I will not get in the way of a Dad's right to spoil his child."

Hermione's eyes flashed in mock anger, "Spoiled? Where?" She started poking him.

Harry was desperately trying to block, "Here - wait - wasn't there more to bring?" He started moving toward the door with Hermione chasing him.

Dan came out the door with his arms full.

"Whoa! Careful!" Dan missed the first step so Harry and Hermione caught him from a tumble.

Dan was puffing, "You know, I'm getting too old for moving. Next time, we hire someone."

Harry smiled, "Well, how about you concentrate on packing the cars and we'll bring the stuff to you."

Dan let out his breath, "Now, that's a good idea."

In less than an hour both cars were full and proportioned properly between them. Everyone sat down for a moment to rest up before they started the long trek to Cambridge.

Harry sat down with a tired huff, "How long does it take to get to Cambridge?"

Emma got there first, "About two hours."

Harry looked dubious, "Through the wilds of London?"

Dan nodded semi-seriously, "And clear out the other side. It's been known to take days - if something goes wrong." He gave them the gimlet eye.

Hermione smirked, "Should we hire a local guide?"

Harry mock-gasped, "I could get Remus to act as security!" He could imagine Remus trying not to chuckle. And probably standing not too far away.

Emma drug them all back to sanity, "Well, shall we start the trip to Uni? Wouldn't want to be late for classes."

Hermione looked a bit incredulous, "Mum, classes don't start until Tuesday."

Emma grinned, "See? We better hurry."

Everyone got up, locked the house, and bundled up in the cars and started the train rolling. It was a long quiet trip for Harry. But he felt so satisfied. He was going to Uni with Hermione. Her dream - and to a good extent, his too. He was amazed at how he had been able to pull this disaster of Hermione's banishment out of the fire. Life looked pretty nice right now - if he didn't look too closely. He - just didn't want to think about Voldemort and the wizarding world right now.

They pulled into the car park nearest Hermione's dorm. There were cars and parents and students moving stuff in. Harry had been able to park next to Hermione's car. He got out as Hermione was digging in her purse.

"Harry, here, you have this." She handed him a card.

"What's this?" He took it and looked at it.

"That is a parking permit for your car."

Harry blinked a few times, "How did you get a parking permit for my car? I called the other day and they wouldn't give me one because I'm not a student until next year."

She smiled knowingly, "Since I never got around to buying a car, and you're nice enough to drive me around everywhere, I got a parking permit and put down your license instead of the one I don't have."

Harry laughed, "You always think so far ahead. Thank you." He put it in the window of his car.

Dan came around the Range Rover, "Let's make a scouting run up to the flat and see where to put things before we start schlepping things, shall we?"

Emma broke in, "Dan, why don't you and Harry do that while Hermione and I go to the College office, check in, and get a key."

Dan smirked, "Oh! Might need a key, huh. I guess we can wait." He leaned back against the car while Emma and Hermione figured out which way to go. Once they were on their way Dan turned to Harry, "Harry, I don't think I need to mention anything, but, it would really help me stay calm if you could keep a close eye on Hermione. Make sure she's safe and all?"

Harry smiled slightly embarrassed but none the less determined, "Yes, absolutely. I can guarantee that."

"Excellent. Thank you." He sighed, "This has been her dream, for so many years. Why here and not Oxford, I don't know, but I won't complain at all." He smiled.

"I was thinking about that as we drove up. I'm so glad she has been able to rise out of the fire of Cromwell and straight into this huge success. It makes

up for all the mess that Cromwell created."

Dan smiled, "Yes. Who would have guessed? As long as she can keep up with it all."

Harry laughed, "Oh, yes. She is so unbelievably brilliant at this stuff. She will soar in this environment." His smile knew no bounds.

Dan smiled at Harry, "Hermione says you are brilliant in your own way."

Harry shrugged, "I guess, in my own way. I'm very different than Hermione, so - I have my moments."

"How so?"

Harry took a deep breath, thinking, "I think you could characterise the differences analogous to strategic verses tactical. She's more strategic and I'm more tactical - in a way. Her brilliance is so broad she looks at everything all at once. Me? I have this - talent - this intuition for identifying what is important and zeroing in on that. She gets rather frustrated with me that it comes so easy sometimes. That I seem to take these leaps, these shortcuts that she doesn't understand all the time. But - her talent is so huge. It's a joy to watch her grind a problem to dust. And I can't do what I do without her talent."

Dan smiled and looked at Harry, really looked at him, "That's brilliant, Harry. That shows me so much. Thanks."

"We were talking about that a few weeks ago. She was confused at how much she wanted to study, so many subjects. And I was telling her how I had read about the the distinction, particularly in academia, between breadth verses depth of knowledge. That I thought there was fundamental value to be found in breadth of knowledge, not just depth of knowledge. That the breadth allowed for synthesis of knowledge and ideas between subject areas that depth never would. I think that is where her true brilliance lies."



Dan's eyes were full of amazement, lost in imagination and joy. He was nodding his head slowly, "Wow."

"Harry, we got the key." Hermione came up and gave him a hug, "Come on, we've got a room to conquer!"

Harry chuckled, "You mean invade?"

"Both! Let's go see."

They all started moving, but Harry let everyone else lead. He didn't want them to know he had scoped out the flat days ago. They climbed the single set of stairs up to the flat. Hermione knocked on the door and waited. It only took a moment and someone opened the door.

"Yes?" A blond girl with blue eyes, taller than Hermione looked out the door.

"Hello, I'm Hermione Granger, and -"

"Roomie!" Hermione was engulfed in a hug from the girl. "Come in! We have so much to talk about. Come in, all of you. I take it you all belong to her?" She looked at everyone else and pulled everyone in, "I'm Jane Osterman." She stopped at Harry, "Are you a younger brother?"

"This is Harry Potter, my best friend. He'll be around a lot." Hermione was overwhelmed and running to keep up.

Jane looked at her with a teasing smile, "Collecting them a little young are you?"

"Well - I'm only seventeen -"

"Oh! Snuck in early, did you? That's always fun. You are her parents, I take it?"

Emma was the only one to keep up, "Yes, Drs Emma and Dan Granger. What are you studying?"

"Me? Biology, though I haven't figured out what kind, yet. Going to give it all a try and see where it takes me. Are you starting here too, Harry?"

Harry was smiling up a storm at Jane's energy, "I've been accepted for next year."

"Really? Trying to get a head start?" She sighed and shook her head still with that teasing smile, "Kids these days."

Hermione had to ask, "How old are you, Jane?"

"Me? 18, but it's always fun to tease the young cute ones. So this is the living area. Couch, chairs, table, all that normal stuff. Here is the kitchen and table. We haven't figured out how to divi that up yet. Come, see the room. Everyone else will be back in a few minutes, I'm sure."

They walked into the room shared between Hermione and Jane. Two twin beds, two dressers, two desks and chairs. A closet divided in half. Basic, functional, and sturdy.

Jane jumped in, "By right of conquest – and I got here first – I choose this bed." She sat down on it, "Unless you want to renegotiate?"

Hermione was chuckling, "No, that's fine."

The front door opened to significant noise.

Jane jumped up from her bed, "Oh, sounds like everyone is back. Come and meet the crew. They are so nice."

Everyone was pulled along in Jane's wake.

Jane's voice interrupted the procession at the front door, "Everyone, this is our new roomie, Hermione Granger, all of 17, so I'm not the youngest any more. This is Rene Manascou." Long dark hair, dark eyes, shorter than Hermione. "She's 19 and studying – engineering? Did I get that right?"

Rene smiled at Jane's energy, "Yes, this is my second year here."

Hermione heard the slight accent right off, "Bonjour, je suis très heureux de vous rencontrer." ("Hello, I'm very glad to meet you.")

Rene laughed, "Très agréable! Ce sera une joie de parler avec vous." ("Very nice! It will be a joy to speak with you.")

Jane picked it up again, "And this is Cathrine Lannier." Medium length brown hair, blue eyes, taller than Hermione. "You are 24, right?"

Cathrine seemed quiet but not afraid to keep up with Jane, "Yes. I'm a PhD student in physics and applied math. And this is my boyfriend, Daniel Mattson." Tall, dark hair, dark eyes, and a scruff of dark beard. "He's 25 and a PhD student in Computer Science."

Daniel bowed slightly, with another quiet smile.

Jane kept going, "These are Hermione's parents, the doctors Emma and Dan Granger - what kind of doctors?"

Emma jumped in, "Dental surgery."

Jane's eyes grew fearful, she covered her mouth and squeaked.

Everyone laughed.

Jane tried again, "And, everyone, this is not Hermione's younger brother, this is Harry Potter. He has been accepted here for next year."

Harry couldn't resist, "Yes, for this year my course list includes Hanging About, Goofing Off, and following her around." He motioned toward Hermione. "It's very technical." He nodded seriously.

Chuckles wandered about.

Daniel had a sharp smile, "Hermione, I'm impressed. Your first year here and you already have a minion." He motioned toward Harry. "What are you studying?"

Hermione took a breath, held it in confusion, and let it out, "Everything!"

Her smile was so big everyone could only laugh. And Harry knew they all thought she was joking.

Dan brought them all back, "Well, we have a lot of things to move and a few hours to drive so we should get to it. Before it's my nap time." His grin was contagious.

Cathrine nodded, "Well, then. Let's all dive in and help."

Everyone started for the door. Twenty minutes later and all Hermione's things were stacked in her room. Now all she needed was to get them all organised. But it was time for the Grangers to drive home before the commute turned bad – or worse than it already was.

Hermione hugged her parents, "Mum, Dad, thank you. I am so excited I can hardly stand it." A few snuffles made her point thoroughly.

Emma could still talk coherently, "You're very welcome, dear. Call if you need *anything*, alright?"

Dan reached out and gave Harry a hug too, "You too, Harry. We'll be around every so often, alright?"

After her parents left, Hermione sat on the edge of her bed and looked at the piles of things to be organised with very large overwhelmed eyes.

"Harry?" She looked up at him and smiled, "Let's go out – for a walk – you can show me where your flat is."

He looked confused at the piles.

She was faster than his question, "I need a bit of sanity about now. Shall we?"

He chuckled, "Sure. It's just a few streets over." Harry noticed that Hermione was quiet as they walked, preoccupied, and held on to his arm.

"What are you thinking?"

She looked up at him quickly and sighed nervously, "I'm so overwhelmed. I have been dreaming of this for years and – I don't know what to do with myself. I'm here! It's real! – What am I to do?"

He smirked, "Enjoy it?"

"Yes, but – I'm afraid it won't live up to my expectations. Or – I won't live up to – this place."

He chuckled, "Take it from me. You have nothing to worry about."

She looked unsure, "You think so?"

"I know so." He looked at her, with her insecurity. "Hermione, I know you, I've known you for how many years? You have never failed to succeed beyond everyone's expectations, even your own."

She looked at him unsure for a moment, then smiled, "Yes, you're probably right."

He pointed up a set of stairs, and they turned to go up, "New environments are always difficult at first. But you will grow into it quite quickly. It's just a matter of getting used to it. Of learning the territory." He unlocked the door to his and Remus' flat. Two bedrooms, large windows, rich oak floors – and boxes stacked everywhere. "We haven't gotten very far unpacking yet."

She looked around, "Is Remus here?"

"No, I think he's out running errands or something."

She turned and gave him a big Hermione-hug, burying her head in his shoulder, complete with a quiet sob or two.

He hugged her as closely as he possibly could, "Hey, what's the matter?"

"Stay with me, Harry."

"Yes. Always." The solidity of her in his arms was amazingly comforting.

"What happened?"

Her voice was quiet, a whisper, "I don't know. I don't understand. I – just need you. More than ever."

"I am here for you, whenever, wherever, however you need me."

She leaned back and looked at him desperately, with a tearstained face,

"Do you need me?"

"Yes! I can't do without you. I need you, too."

She collapsed back into her hug, her face in his shoulder. Another whisper,

"Don't leave me."

"No. Never." They stood hugging for a long time. Harry started swaying and humming an anonymous tune rather like a lullaby. He held on to her for dear life. It was a memory that he would cherish for years.

"Harry?" A hoarse whisper as she started to gather herself and dry her eyes, still hiding her face.

"Yes?"

"Can we explore around campus a bit? Maybe find some of the buildings I will be going to?"

"Yes. That will be fun. Do you need the loo?" She nodded so he pointed toward it.

She disappeared to regain her composure. It only took a few moments. She came out and held on to his arm as they headed out the door in search of adventure – quietly.

Harry played tour guide, because he had done so much research into how to defend Hermione's territory.

It was when he got back to his flat for dinner with Remus that he truly exploded. He was boiling, pacing in the kitchen, "Remus, so help me God, I could kill that damn obliviator! It's evil! Just plain evil!"

"What? What happened?"

"That damn obliviator did something to Hermione. When we went back to her flat she started joking, talking about collecting all the boyfriends on campus. Except I could tell she was trying to make it into a joke, when it was actually much more serious. That is so far outside her normal personality. That obliviator did something to her!"

Remus was trying to clean his paperwork off the table so Dobby could set out dinner, "I agree that obliviation is - distasteful, but don't you think it's necessary, in some cases?"

Harry turned with a scowl, "Hiding a memory? Maybe. Changing someone's personality? Who do they think they are? Who authorised that? Was that just the whim of the obliviator? What are the regulations surrounding that? Where is the line between obliviation and Imperious!? The obliviator is still forcing their will on another human being! How is that any different than an Imperious?"

"It is officially sanctioned, through proper government controls."

"Ha! Since when have you trusted the Ministry? They do such a bang-up job with werewolf rights."

Remus hung his head and mumbled, "So much for my attempts at modelling adulthood."

Harry ran over the top of him, "I think it's evil! And I think that taints all of wizarding society. The cavalier attitude that says 'we can do this, therefore we will'. And all the idiotic justifications of the Statute of Secrecy. It's just

fear used as a rationalisation for worse things! Or – I bet it's even worse. Are the rules for obliviation less stringent when muggles are the victims?" He ran out of energy and sat down at the table.

Remus sat down across from him and tried to be conciliatory, "Was that painful to watch?"

Harry put his head in his hands, "Unbelievably painful. At some level, in her subconscious, she knew what was happening. Earlier in the afternoon we came over here so she could see where our flat was and she broke down. Asked me not to leave her."

Remus' voice was quiet, hollow, "I'm sorry, Harry."

"I'm coming to hate the wizarding world, Remus."

Remus took a long tired breath, "You certainly have enough reasons to."

"We have been given the unbelievable power of magic and we use it like a toy. Playing games with people's lives. It's evil!"

"You think magic is evil?"

"No, but people are. And all of wizarding society is set up to allow all these abuses. We're not good enough to be trusted with magic, Remus. It's too big for us."

"Too big for us? Or have we not risen to the challenge yet?"

"Both. The education we get at Hogwarts is so bad. Where are the classes on the ethical use of magic? Civic responsibility? Even just the legality? We got none of that. Hand us all a nuclear weapon, show us how to use it, and turn us loose! You've got to be freaking kidding me!"

Remus' eyebrows rose, and he started nodding reluctantly, "Well – won't magic become like any other technology?"



Harry huffed angrily, "We can hope. Better than letting it become another religion. That would be the *worst*." He began to calm down a little, "I agree the best would be if we started treating magic like any other technology, but even so, can we be trusted with it? Isn't there always the risk that we find some significantly advanced technology and rush to abuse it? Isn't power humanity's fundamental weakness?"

Remus sighed, "But isn't humanity's desire for power rooted in insecurity? Remember that old statement of 'all sin starts out as a valid need and gets blown way out of proportion'."

Harry chuckled, "Oh, yeah. Then we develop our neuroses into personifications of God. We get to invent any religion we want, and justify it as 'God told me to'." Harry sighed and tried to calm down, "I don't care what justification is used to cross that line, the fact remains that line is crossed way too easily in the wizarding world."

Remus covered his eyes with his hand, "Mental illness has, and always will be, a fundamental problem."

Dobby interrupted Harry's rant and started placing food on the table. Harry focussed on the food and finally started to calm down. The anger and frustration finally draining from him.

It was half way through their meal when Remus spoke up, "We need to put a wardstone near Hermione's flat tonight. Maybe on the roof."

Harry nodded, "Or maybe just a rock in the landscaping. Either way, the sensing wards need to be very large. Give me time to react."

Remus nodded, "We'll take a look. One of those should work."

### **Sunday, 29 September, 1996**

Harry wandered out of the loo at their new Cambridge flat, still drying his hair. He moved to his room and started filling his pockets with all his usual

gear, to get ready for the day. He dropped the towel back into the loo and made the few steps into the kitchen.

"There you are. I knew your nose would get you here on time." Remus set a plate of food on the table.

The smell was practically making Harry growl as he sat down. "Oh, man."

Remus sat down and they danced around each other, filling their plates – and Harry tried not to compete with Remus, who was busy pushing food on Harry.

After half the food was gone Harry could think well enough to begin to ask questions, "You said we needed to go to Gringotts today?"

Remus glanced up, "Yes. It's a rather important meeting. It's likely to take most of the day."

Harry's eyebrows rose, "Ok. I guess we should start early then. What's it about?"

Remus tried not to look at him, "We need to wait until we get there."

Harry blinked a few times, then dove back into his food.

They did a basic cleanup of the kitchen – until Dobby pushed them out so he could take over – and do it correctly. They were walking up the steps to Gringotts before nine.

The Special Accounts teller was standing next to the desk waiting for them, "This way, Mr Potter." He started off into the warren of rigid little passages all alike.

Harry looked at Remus with surprise; He had always had to practically bash the Goblin over the head before he would recognise him. Now the Goblin was standing, waiting and watching for him.

The passages kept going. Harry was starting to wonder if the Goblin got lost. Harry certainly was. Finally, they stopped at a big set of double-doors where the Goblin knocked.

"Come!"

The doors opened to a very large room with Goblin guards at intervals along all the walls. At the far end was – an ornate golden throne. With a Goblin on it and another standing next to it. Harry recognised Clawhammer standing next to the throne.

Remus stepped a bit farther forward than Harry and bowed low, "Ragnok, may I introduce Harry Potter. Harry, this is Ragnok, King of the Goblin Nation."

Harry's eyes almost fell out as he bowed low. He whispered, "Remus! I would have dressed better if you'd told me!"

Ragnok chuckled like a bag of rocks and stood up, "Mr Potter, no matter. We have important work to do today."

Remus looked contrite, "I – ah – didn't tell him anything."

Harry was now gaping at Remus, "– You what?"

Ragnok laughed more, "Mr Potter. We have some serious things to discuss that can not be discussed outside this room. That is why Mr Lupin could not mention anything. And they concern your scar." He point at Harry's forehead.

Harry's eyebrows were crowding that scar, "Ah – What about it?"

Remus sighed, "If I may, Ragnok? Since I was not able to prepare him?"

Ragnok nodded, "Yes, go ahead."

Remus took another deep breath, "You see, Harry – when I charmed my glasses to see magic – I saw magic. A lot of it. Much more than I thought I

would. For example, one of the Death Eaters I captured had a Dark Mark."

Harry nodded, "Yes, I noticed that red haze and black boiling magic surrounding a Dark Mark, too."

Remus took another breath and nodded slowly, "Well – I saw another red haze and black boiling magic – surrounding your scar."

Harry paled, gasped and spoke breathlessly, "What?"

Remus put a hand on Harry's shoulder, "I went to ask Dumbledore about it, but he refused to tell me anything, even though he obviously knew what it was. With no one else to ask, I came to Clawhammer who said he would have a specialist here to look at it the next time we were in. But Ragnok called me in and gave me some quite surprising news. And now we are here to talk about all that."

Ragnok conjured some chairs for everyone to sit. "Come, sit, and I will explain." Everyone sat while he started pacing as he talked. "You see, Mr Potter, you are very special in the wizarding world. And in a blatant attempt to engender favour and cultivate your support, we are willing to proactively help you."

Harry's eyes were still large, but his voice carried a tone of caution, "I've never known Goblins – except for Clawhammer, here – to be proactively helpful."

Ragnok smiled at Clawhammer, "Yes, we like to set our customer's expectations properly."

Harry was shaking his head in confusion, "But – Why am I special?"

Ragnok nodded, "You have the great misfortune to be mentioned in a Prophecy."

Harry sighed, covered his eyes, and whispered angrily, "Damn prophecy."

Ragnok started again, "You see, we see war coming. A war we don't see Wizarding Britain surviving, and one that will eventually land on us – unless you intervene."

Harry's voice turned desperate, "But I hadn't planned on 'intervening'. Those bastards have earned this, let them deal with it. I'm only interested in protecting Hermione."

Ragnok smiled, "Yes, we understand. But, unfortunately, there are a few – complicating circumstances that make that stance very difficult." He motioned toward Harry, "Particularly your scar. We would like to help you with that."

Harry looked quite conflicted and took a few moments to respond, "So – what can you tell me about my scar?"

"We have seen these things before, in our excavations in ancient Egypt. But never in a living container, we –"

Harry's frustration boiled over, "What *is* it?"

The guards on the walls stirred and Ragnok froze.

Harry sighed to calm down, "Look, you want something from me, and I'm hanging out in the breeze, here, and it sounds like I've got something nasty embedded in my head. I'm trying to save Hermione. And I don't mind helping you along the way, but – what is this thing and what does it *mean*?"

Ragnok nodded again, "You have a shard of Tom Riddle's soul embedded in your scar. It's called a horcrux, or a soul anchor. It keeps Tom from completely dying."

Harry sat back and looked faint, "The connection. The visions." Harry continued after a moment, "I sometimes see what Tom is seeing, what he is feeling."

"Yes. And if Tom becomes aware of it – this connection – then he will be able to see your thoughts. Possibly even possess you."

Harry growled and covered his face, "He knows about it. He possessed me for a short time during the battle at the Ministry. That's how he got me to show up at the Ministry, was by sending me images through this 'link'."

Ragnok sighed tiredly, "Ah. You see, the soul shard in your scar was never made into a complete horcrux. It is a small shard, which means that it is unlikely that it will ever be able to possess you itself. The ritual that creates a horcrux provides a sealing of the soul shard into the container and would normally be accompanied with a lot of magical defences. This one has none of those, because we think it was accidental. Tom never got to complete the ritual, assuming he was even trying to perform the ritual. – Besides, why put a soul anchor in a container that will eventually die? Not to mention – put it in the very enemy he wants to kill? It doesn't make sense."

Harry looked horrified, "How do we get it out?"

Ragnok paused, "We think removing it will be simple because it wasn't sealed and there are no protections on it, but there are other complications."

Harry growled, "There are *always* complications with Tom."

"Yes, you see, we think Tom made a number of these horcruxes, and until we find and destroy all of them, he can not die. Nor will you be able to hide from him, no matter where you go or how you hide. With this connection he will always be able to find you."

"How many?" Harry was sounding very determined.

"We are here to look at your scar and find out. Luckily, with your scar, we can see how many there are and find all the rest of them straight away because it is not defended as the others are."

Harry looked a bit confused, "The others?"

"We have already found one other in one of our customer vaults. It is *very* well defended."

Harry looked ready to jump up and start the process, but he stopped, "Ok – what do you want from me?"

"Well – from both of you. You see, we will not be able to send out our Goblin curse-breakers to find and destroy these horcruxes; they would be too obvious and cause too much antagonism if we did. Unless the war has progressed far enough that no one will notice. So we would like to send you, Mr Lupin, and one of our human curse-breakers with you. I think you know him; Bill Weasley?"

Remus blinked and sat up, "Yes, I do."

"As for you, Mr Potter, for now all we need is to investigate your scar."

"And later?"

"We are unsure, at this point. But we are not asking for any oaths or specific commitments because your goals align with ours to a very large extent. Namely, the replacement of the the Wizengamot with – something more honourable, and worthy of supporting – and less antagonistic toward us. We may ask for more later, but it will be a request, not a demand."

Harry looked at Ragnok for a moment, "Well – you have guessed correctly in that I do hate unfairness, and I have seen the unfairness with which the wizarding world treats the Goblin Nation. So you will have my support."

"Thank you, Mr Potter. For now, we should investigate your scar." Ragnok made a motion and one of the guards opened a door and in walked another Goblin, a very old one. Ragnok stood up, "Master Vernehmer\***1**. Thank you for participating. You do the Goblin Nation a great service."

The old Goblin bowed quite stiffly, "Ragnok, I live to serve. How may I help?"

Ragnok held out his hand toward Harry, "Mr Harry Potter seems to have a soul shard from Voldemort lodged in his scar. We need you to investigate."

The old Goblin's eyes got big as he looked at Harry, "Well. That explains a lot. My condolences, Mr Potter."

Harry sat with growing fear.

Ragnok spoke to Vernehmer, "We know that the soul shard in Mr Potter is one of possibly a number that Voldemort has made. We need you to find out how many and where they are. We must destroy them all."

Vernehmer stood looking at Harry for a few moments, until he conjured a table, "Mr Potter, climb up on this table and let me have a look."

Harry got up and laid down on the table. Remus stood up, "Master Vernehmer, I had charmed my glasses to see magic and that is how I noticed it. Would you like to look through them?" He held them out.

Vernehmer held them up to look through them at Harry, "Oh, yes! Gah! That thing is ugly." He glanced at Remus, "Nice charms. Let's see if I can see any links." He started walking around Harry's head, peering under and over all sides. "Yes, there are - a number of links." He started mumbling like he was counting, "It looks like - gods! - seven links, including to the Main Shard. What a fool! To so disfigure and damage your soul for such a broken and incomplete measure of immortality." He shook his head as he stood up and turned to Ragnok, "I will need to get a few instruments to find out where they are." He handed the glasses back to Remus with a slight bow.

Ragnok snapped his fingers in the air and a guard ran over. Vernehmer and Ragnok had a discussion in Goblegook for a moment before the guard bowed and ran out the door.



Vernehmer turned to Harry, "Mr Potter, when each soul shard was split off, each one was at a different age with different experiences, and therefore, a slightly different magical signature. This makes the links that I can see identifiable. So I can record the signatures and the distance and directions the links go, and we should be able to trace them down and find them all. Particularly since the shard in your head is not protected in any way. I very much doubt the others are unprotected."

The guard ran back in with a large intricately carved wooden case and set it down next to Harry's table.

Vernehmer opened the case and pulled out a very large magnifying glass. "Right. Let's get these signatures." He looked through the glass at Harry and started mumbling and jotting notes on a conjured parchment. After at least ten minutes he stood up, "Well, that should do it." He held out the parchment, "Here are the signatures, the distances and directions to each shard. Once you get close, this is the list of spells to trace them further, find them, and confirm their identity."

Harry sat up, "Um – can we get rid of this one now?" He was pointing his finger at his scar.

Ragnok made an unsure noise, "I think – if you don't mind, we can wait a bit? If Tom moves one or more of the horcruxes, then your scar is the easiest and most reliable way to find them again."

Remus looked apologetic, "I can see waiting a bit, but the longer that goes, the more risk of Tom finding out about the link and attacking Harry through it."

Vernehmer broke in, "Not to mention that Tom could transfer this one from Harry to something else."

Ragnok nodded slowly, "Yes. We must balance these risks. Let's see how fast we can collect these horcruxes. The faster we get them, the faster we can remove the one in Harry."

Harry sounded very nervous, "And no risks with that?"

Vernehmer nodded, "Very little."

Ragnok stood up, "Excellent. Thank you very much, Master Vernehmer."

Vernehmer bowed, picked up his case, and walked out.

Ragnok sighed, "Let me schedule a meeting with Mr Weasley for Monday, if you can be there?" He looked to Remus.

Remus nodded to Ragnok, "Yes." Remus turned to Harry, "I suppose we will need to impose on Dobby and Winky to watch over the Grangers while I'm busy."

Harry made an unhappy noise, "I had hoped they wouldn't have to do that again."

Remus shrugged to Harry, "Watching is not hard, as long as you can handle the defending part."

Harry sighed tiredly and nodded. His life just kept getting more complex.

\*1 Vernehmer is German for 'interrogator'.

## 9. Harry's Private War

CHAPTER SIZE: 14153

### Chapter 9

#### Harry's Private War

#### Harry Potter

Tuesday, 1 October, 1996, 09:00

Harry practically ran down the steps from his flat, taking the steps two or three at a time. Remus was already gone, off to Gringotts to start their errant lost-soul hunt-and-destroy mission. But he was off on his own mission. To go with Hermione to find her first class. That brought a huge smile to his face as he imagined her smile. He was early. Her class was at 11 and it was only 9, but he knew that Hermione would be very early and he had to get to her flat before she either exploded or left without him.

As he turned the corner of her building and started across the car park, he could see her standing outside her door waiting for him.

"Harry!" Hermione saw him and started waiving excitedly.

Harry couldn't resist and started jogging toward the stairs up. Hermione met him at the bottom.

"Harry." A big Hermione-hug caught him.

"Hermione, are you ready for this?"

"Yes! Let's go!" She pulled his arm and started toward the shuttle bus stop down the street. She was practically squealing. "Harry! I can't believe it! My first class."

Harry couldn't stop laughing as he watched her eyes light up with enough excitement to power all of Cambridge.

"We can't be late, Harry. We don't know how long the trip will take, so we need to leave early. And we can't be too early, that's just impossible. We need to hurry!" She started pulling him faster.

Harry was melting watching her be so excited, "Ok. Look, here comes the shuttle. We won't miss it."

She stood bouncing on her toes with her backpack over one shoulder and arm wrapped around Harry's arm.

Harry didn't stop laughing all the way on the ride to their stop and Hermione alternated between smiling at him and willing the shuttle to go faster. When they got off the shuttle it was only a short walk to the correct building. The only reason they slowed down was, for one, they were over an hour early, and two, Hermione got lost looking at all the buildings dripping with history. She stopped to read every plaque or sign that displayed the history of the buildings. This part of campus was new territory, after all.

And for Harry too. He started looking at the buildings for watch-points on the rooftops, the streets, the small car parks scattered here and there. If she had to be here for classes, then he may need to defend her on this ground.

After exploring the building, inside and out, and finding the classroom, Hermione settled down to people-watching on a bench outside the door to the building.

Harry sat next to her, watched her, watching people. Most everyone was much older than either of them. Everyone purposeful, determined, and focussed. It was exciting to watch, let alone be part of. Then Harry remembered the book he read during their study time about literature. About the universal human search for meaning. The draw toward significance. This was it. This was the example of that process being lived out in this place, by these people. The study, the research, on a world stage. To have the opportunity to make a difference in the world. This was what Harry had never had the opportunity to be part of. Except the bare

beginnings at Hogwarts. This was so much bigger than Hogwarts. Hogwarts was unique and interesting in it's own way, with magic being a big part of that, but this was another level entirely.

A group of people came out the door, some talking, some moving fast.

Hermione looked at her watch, "Well, that looks like it's time." She got up with her backpack on her shoulder. "What will you do?"

He shrugged as he stood up, "Explore. Look at the notice boards. I'll be here when you're done."

She looked a bit embarrassed that he would be waiting, with nothing to do. "Thank you, Harry. For coming with me. For supporting me. You're wonderful."

He smiled, "So are you."

Her brilliant smile brought out the sun, before she left to enter the building.

Harry stood staring at the door. How was he possibly going to maintain his focus on protecting her? To maintain his focus on her – simple. But to protect her required him to watch everything else. That could be excruciating. He sighed and thought he'd better get started while he had the opportunity. He surveyed the building, the roofs, the loos. That was probably key, since he would need to duck into them to 'disappear' a lot. He found all the entrances to the building, every stairwell and closet. He even practiced his fade-out and fade-in disappearing spells and apparating to the roof to check out the sight lines over the area. It was a very productive hour. And a model for every day that first week.

### **Wednesday, 2 October, 1996**

Harry was sitting on the couch reading. It was getting late and he was about to go to bed when the front door opened, "Remus! What's happening?"

Remus looked exhausted. He grunted and moved toward a chair and sat down heavily.

"You look – well, bad. I haven't seen you since Monday."

Remus took a deep breath to start his mind working, "Bill and I have been – working on the one in a vault. It was Helga Hufflepuff's cup. A priceless artefact and some of the most sophisticated magic in existence."

Harry's eyes got big, "Really? What are you going to do with it?"

Remus growled, "We had to destroy it!"

Harry made an angry noise.

"We could find no way to clean off all of Voldemort's protections on it, so the only thing we could do was destroy it."

"Oh, God."

"It took us all day Monday to get it out of the vault. Then we spent all day yesterday studying it. Then – today we – destroyed it." He shuddered.

"Sounds bad."

He nodded, "It's the worst magic I've ever felt. It tried to – seduce us. It was horrible. And it – screamed – when we killed it." He shuddered again.

Harry paused for a moment, "Good."

Remus' eyes focussed on Harry with a bit of concern.

"I have zero sympathy for that bastard. In fact – I'm glad."

Remus nodded slowly, "Yes, no sympathy. Just – horror. It leaves a stain – that's hard to get off."

Harry nodded, "You taking the day off tomorrow?"

Remus shook his head, "No. Maybe later. We want to grab all the easy ones fast. But – we thought this was going to be an easy one." He shook his head again.

Harry just nodded.

Remus looked at Harry, "How are you?"

"Fine. Settling into a routine. No attacks yet. Not even any pings on the wards. But I'm surveying all the buildings around her classes. Entrances, exits, sight lines, all of it."

Remus nodded, "Excellent. I haven't had a chance to read any news, so I have no idea what's happening."

Harry shrugged.

Remus was struggling to keep his eyes open, "Well – I'm done. Sleep now." He got up and headed for his room.

Harry was soon to follow.

### **Thursday, 3 October, 1996**

Harry stood surveying the large open area in the latest library Hermione had discovered – and had decided to attack and conquer. He turned deciding which direction to start his defensive mapping effort. With Hermione fully occupied at the card catalogue, he took two steps on his chosen route when his watch made a noise – the noise from the hostile intent ward on the Granger's practice. Fear froze his insides. He turned and saw Hermione still contentedly focussed.

Harry started walking toward the door and started his fade-out spells. He ducked into an empty book isle, put on his invisibility cloak, silenced himself, and apparated to the roof of the Granger's practice. He looked at his wardstone-phone. It indicated two hostiles moving down the back alley. He moved to the parapet at the back and peeked over. He saw the grey fog

of disillusionment covering the two red blobs of magic from two DEs. Their disillusionment was well-formed so he couldn't see the DEs, just their magical fog. So he couldn't see which way they were looking or facing. But they were moving slowly down the alley, seemingly casually, toward the Granger's back door. As they got closer he could see the black spot of their Dark Mark on what should be their left arm, and the agitated magic of their wands in what looked like their right hands, giving a hint of which way they were facing.

He ducked below the parapet and moved behind it down the roof until he was just beside them. Just as they passed underneath him he stood up and fired a bludgeoner straight down on top of them. A dull thud.

That was – messy, but effective.

He quickly apparated down into the alley, put up notice-me-not spells, wrapped them up and sent them to Order HQ, then started the cleanup and repair on the alley. Within a few minutes he was apparating back to the front of the library and running his fade-in spells.

His stomach was starting to loosen its death-grip on his breakfast as he spotted Hermione at a table in the centre of the library. He smiled seeing her completely absorbed into a set of books, but his Fraud-Metre was insisting on knocking the pegs as the memories of what he'd just done were clashing with the serenity of his surroundings. He moved toward the loo to wash his hands a few times. Just to see if it would help him calm down. In case there were any blood stains.

### **Friday, 4 October, 1996**

Remus came in the door to the flat looking tired and nervous.

"Remus! How's it going?" Harry was sitting on the couch just about to get up and head to bed.

Remus sat down across from him, "Not so good. We were hunting down another one and – it wasn't there."



Harry's eyebrows rose, "Not there? Did we get the wrong location."

"No, it's been moved."

"What? – It's been moved in – the last four days?"

"Yes. We could see a lot of magic residue in the area, some really nasty stuff too. Just an old shack in the middle of nowhere. But no horcrux. It looks like it used to be there, but not now. We need you to come into Gringotts tomorrow morning and track where it went."

"Could Tom have figured out what we're doing?"

Remus sighed and thought, "I – don't know. If the others are still in place, then not likely. If they've all been moved – then we're screwed."

Harry looked pale, "We just have to keep looking."

"Yes."

"So – we get Dobby to watch for us?"

Remus stopped, then shook his head, "No, because they can watch but not defend. So I still need to be free to defend, and that means outside the bank."

Harry sighed, "What time?"

"At nine would be best."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, "Ok. I best get some sleep while I can."

Remus nodded tiredly, "Me too." He started to get up – and then stopped, "How is Hermione?"

Harry smiled in his memories, "Absolutely overjoyed. One attack on the Granger offices yesterday, but I was able to deal with it during one of her library sessions. Otherwise, everything is fine."

Remus sighed, nodded, "Good. I'm sorry I had to abandon you with that."

Harry shrugged, "You're helping in very critical ways."

Remus nodded, and started to look tired. "I think I'm done."

They both got up and started toward some rest.

### **Saturday, 5 October, 1996**

Harry got to the bank a good bit before nine. The Special Accounts teller was waiting for him.

"This way, Mr. Potter."

Harry followed as the teller moved quickly. Harry chuckled, "You're going to have to figure out how to be mean to me again. I'm getting too used to your good customer service."

The teller glanced back with his own grin, "Oh, we're very creative at that. Unfortunately, you're being entirely too helpful to treat you that way." The Goblin looked a bit challenging.

Harry nodded, "Well, let's hope I can keep that up."

The teller knocked on a set of large double doors.

"Come!"

The door opened to Ragnok's throne room, surrounded by guards, with Clawhammer and Vernehmer standing next to him. And Bill Weasley.

Harry wasn't sure where Bill stood on his running away from the wizarding world. He bowed deeply, "Ragnok, Master Vernehmer, Clawhammer. And Mr Weasley."

Ragnok, nodded, "Harry, I'm glad you could make it on such short notice. Master Vernehmer will look at the shard and Mr Weasley will be learning

about the process."

Vernehmer waved his arm and an examining table appeared, "If you would, Mr Potter?"

Harry climbed up on the table and settled in.

Vernehmer pulled out his very large magnifying glass and started looking at Harry's scar. This time he was mumbling in Gobledgook. Bill and Ragnok were answering back. Vernehmer handed the glass to Bill who looked closely, nodded a number of times, and commented to Vernehmer.

Vernehmer consulted a parchment, "Well, Mr Potter. It would seem that the horcrux in that shack was actually destroyed. And all the others have not moved. This is very good news."

Harry lifted his head and sighed, "Excellent."

Vernehmer waved his hand, "You may get up, Mr Potter, we're done for today."

Harry jumped up and the table disappeared, "Well - isn't it of concern that someone else is looking for them too?"

Ragnok shook his head, "Only marginally. As long as they are destroyed, we don't care who does it."

Harry still looked concerned, "You don't think someone could have just found it?"

Bill shook his head, "Not and lived to tell about it. These things are guarded quite ruthlessly. Someone broke through all the protections - without dying - and carried it away."

Harry nodded slowly, "The only person I would suspect who would do this is Dumbledore."

Ragnok looked a bit frustrated, "Yes, I would agree. Chief Warlock Dumbledore has many games he is playing. But no matter. As long as these things are destroyed and Tom becomes mortal again I have no concerns how it happens." He stopped and thought, "Well – unless Dumbledore does something stupid and tips off Tom that he knows about these horcruxes."

Harry nodded, "I guess so. Do you need anything else from me?"

Ragnok shook his head and looked questioningly toward Vernehmer, Clawhammer, and Bill.

Vernehmer and Clawhammer bowed.

Bill looked concerned, "Harry – do you think Dumbledore knows about this – partial horcrux?"

Harry frowned, "Yes. Since the day it happened. Remus and I think he changed the spells on Moody's magical eye to keep him from seeing this."

Bill looked even worse, "And he hasn't told you about this?"

Harry shook his head, "He told me, at the end of last year, about a prophesy between me and Tom Riddle. But nothing about this." He pointed at his scar.

Now Bill was starting to look angry, "I can not abide that."

Harry nodded, "Yes. Neither can I. That's another reason why I've left."

After a moment of silence Ragnok bowed slightly, "Thank you Mr Potter."

Harry bowed in return, "Thank you, Ragnok, Master Vernehmer, Clawhammer, and Mr Weasley."

Ragnok motioned and one of the guards lead Harry back out to the lobby of the bank. He was back at his flat and heading for Hermione's before ten.

**Monday, 7 October, 1996**

Harry was confused. He woke up, but – why? Then he heard the gong. The hostile intent ward on Hermione's flat! He hopped out of bed and ran a time spell; 2:30 in the morning! Luckily, Harry had started sleeping in the clothes to be more ready to respond. He slipped on his shoes, started stuffing his pockets, and grabbed his coat. He silenced himself and apparated to the roof of Hermione's building.

He pulled out his wardstone-phone. It showed a DE moving along a side street, walking by Hermione's building. He thought they might miss the turn and keep going. Then he could go back to bed because they had no idea where they were going.

But – no! They turned slowly down the street toward Hermione's building. Stupid DE! He apparated to a rooftop nearer the DE. The DE was covered in the grey magic of a notice-me-not, but it wasn't that well formed; he could see the DE's mask. The red fog of their magic and the boiling black of the Dark Mark left no room for ambiguity.

He made sure the magic hiding him was good and apparated down to the street about 3 metres behind the DE. The DE evidently heard him and apparated down the street 20 metres before Harry could attack. The DE was now standing nearer to Hermione's flat than Harry was. This was not a comfortable situation for Harry. He apparated back to Hermione's roof, standing above the DE.

The DE stood still. It was dark but the colours of magic were quite visible in his glasses. The DE seemed to be waiting.

Harry was frustrated. The DE was waiting and thereby keeping Harry awake. He was getting impatient. He started trying to think of something to do to change the situation.

The DE apparated back down the street to where Harry had popped in behind them.

Harry apparated down to the street below him, where the DE had just been. He waited, watching. The DE did not move. So Harry started walking toward the DE. As he got closer he could see the Dark Mark and the swirling magic of their wand – evidently in their left hand. They were facing toward Hermione's building.

As Harry got to about 10 metres away he started slowing down. He saw magic starting to build in the DEs wand. Harry tensed.

A flaming whip came out of the DEs wand and came flying across the entire area.

Harry dove for the cobblestones as the Flamewhip passed over him, curling his hair with it's heat. As soon as it passed Harry jumped up in the air as the whip came back and scorched the stones where he had just been. Harry landed and immediately apparated to about 5 metres directly above the DE and launched a big bludgeoner straight down. As he fell, he apparated back to the roof above Hermione's flat. There was no more magic to be seen in the street below.

He apparated down and investigated. The DE was dead. It was no one he recognised. He wrapped them up and sent them to Order HQ. He looked about and sent detection magic over the area looking for any evidence of what happened. He let out his tension as he apparated back to his flat.

He noticed that Remus was not back yet. His stomach turned to worry. He stood and realised how important Remus was to him. How much he depended on Remus. Not just his training or his ideas. But just that he is here. A friendly face that cared. About Harry. About Hermione. He realised how lucky he actually was. He hoped Remus was OK.

He went back to bed.

**Tuesday, 8 October, 1996**

Harry was about to fall into bed when he heard the front door open. Since there was no hostile intent ward and no magical ward trigger, it must be

Remus. He opened his door and found Remus collapsing into his chair, "Remus. How's it going?"

Remus grunted. He looked tired, "Not so good."

Remus took too long to answer so Harry tried again, "What happened?"

Remus shook his head, "More Aurors lost, a few Order members missing, fights in Hogwarts, some attacks on light-siders."

Harry turned somber, "Anyone we know?"

Remus shook his head, "No. I heard from Bill, from the Order, but he gave me minimal details."

Harry nodded slowly.

Remus got up with a groan, "I think I'm done. 'Night Harry."

"Night, Remus."

### **Wednesday, 9 October, 1996**

Harry set down a plate of sandwiches on Hermione's table next to her book. She looked up with a big smile, "Harry, you are a mind-reader."

He smiled and nodded and sat down across from her, "I have a few skills."

"Mmm. Very nice." She got distracted by the sandwich and momentarily forgot her book. "Mmm. Hmmm, hmm, hmm." She was pointing a finger at him making word-like humming sounds in leu of real words that required embarrassing herself as she ate.

"Mmmmmm." Harry replied sagely.

Hermione smirked, swallowed, and laughed, "Harry. I just remembered that there is a book I need to find in the nearby library – the big one."

Harry looked mock afraid, "But – we can't leave the sandwiches undefended. Someone will attack them."

She looked at him questioningly, an eyebrow rose delicately, "Really." A very dead pan, that one.

He sighed, "Ok. They'll have to grow up some day. Might as well be today." Another dramatic sigh.

She pointed a finger at him, "You need something to do."

He now looked afraid again, "I'm quite busy, honestly."

"Right." She got up and started packing her papers, "Let's give you one more thing."

He stood up, "Where are we going, again?"

"To the library."

"Oh. Ok." He started wrapping the sandwiches and hiding them in the refrigerator, in the back, behind something. Hoping they would still be safe when they got back. Because he'd only had one, after all.

They made it out the door and down the stairs.

Hermione held on to his arm. A fact that calmed his nerves like nothing else in the world.

"I have a paper due on Friday and I saw a reference to a book that covers the subject. It's by an author that is quite well known but this book isn't. I want to see what's in it."

Harry nodded sagely, "Probably pages. Well – might be paper, too. And I bet some ink." He looked at her. "Ya think?"

She combined a smirk with a frown and regarded him like he was a curious case. "I think I need to find even more for you to do."



"I could be your research assistant."

She got a huge smile, "Ohh, I can keep you very busy."

They walked up the steps into the library. The shrine to intelligence. The vault of all knowledge.

Hermione settled down into reading her book and Harry wandered about looking at all the paintings, the spine-tingling book titles on the spines of all the books. He was having fun. Until the Hostile Intent ward alarmed on the Granger house.

He took a long breath. No one was home at this time of day. Still, he can't chance it. He looked between books on a shelf and saw Hermione reading peacefully on a table in the centre of the library. He had to make this fast. He started toward the door and started his fade-out spells, then a silencing charm, and apparition to the front of Hermione's parents house, just across the street from the end of the drive.

He looked around. No one was in sight, even by magic. The wards were still intact. He decided to get closer. As he got halfway down the drive he noticed some bright red magic on the porch, near the front door. As he got closer he could see significant motion circling around the large red splotch. He was afraid to get too close as the motion was a large area. But the red colour was more intense toward the centre of whatever this thing was.

He stood watching it; this thing that looked like it was reaching out for him. Remus had shown him how to check for magical traps but this didn't look like any of those.

Harry backed off. He sent a Patronus Message to Shackbolt. "Auror Shackbolt, I've found what I'm afraid is a magical bomb at Hermione Granger's house. Can you please come and look at it?" He sent it off.

Within two minutes two pops sounded. Shack and Tonks appeared in the drive.

"Wotcher Harry."

Harry smiled at the irrepressible Tonks, "Tonks. Shack. Good to see you again."

Shack nodded, "Harry, you're well?"

"Can't complain. Well - except for this. I've never seen anything quite like this before. Someone set off the Hostile Intent wards on the house and this is all I found."

Serious gazes focussed on the porch.

Shack started some spells near it, then started moving them closer. "Oh, crap."

Tonks ran some of her own, "What?"

Shack pulled both of their sleeves back away from the porch, "That is a huge bomb. And I don't recognise the trigger for it." He pulled them out to the street. "We need to call in some specialists."

Tonks looked affronted, "What specialists. We're all the Ministry has."

He nodded in acknowledgment, "The Department of Mysteries is all that's left. I think they'll want to have a look at this."

Harry's eyebrows rose, "Well - maybe I'll let you specialists handle this part. I'm on protection detail."

Tonks nodded, "How's she doing?"

Harry smiled, "Wonderful. She's made it into one of the best University's in the muggle world. She's loving it."

Shack smiled, "Well, keep it up, Harry. You're keeping the Order quite busy dealing with all your 'deposits' in HQ."

Harry turned serious, grim, "Sorry you have to deal with all that."

He laughed, "Don't be. It keeps us busy with no risk. We just clean up the mess. Which is about all we ever do anyway."

"Well, I better get back before she notices I'm not where I'm supposed to be."

Tonks hugged him, "Be safe, Harry."

Shack put a hand on his shoulder, "Yes, stay safe, Harry."

Harry nodded, because that's about all he could do without his voice cracking. He took a few steps, started his fade-out spells, apparated back to the library, and started his fade-in spells. He sat down next to Hermione.

"There you are. I couldn't find you a minute ago."

He smirked, "The loo."

"Ok, I'll forgive you – this time."

"How was the book?"

She frowned, "A bust. On a completely different topic." She sighed. "There were still more of those sandwiches, weren't there?"

His smile rose, "Yes. And I know just where they're hidden."

She smiled and got up, "Good. You can show me."

**Friday, 11 October, 1996**

Harry came in the door to his flat, struggling with the sticky door key. It was after nine PM. He was startled by Remus sitting in the chair. "Remus! You're back. How did it go?" He moved to sit on the couch.

Remus took a deep breath to catch some energy, "Good – but – very tired. We found out quite a story on the this latest one."

"Where did you find it?"

Remus chuckled, "Of all places – we found it in Order HQ."

"What!?"

Remus smiled tiredly, "Yes. It seems that Regulus Black, Sirius' younger brother – who was a Death Eater – turned traitor against Voldemort and stole it."

"Whoa! How did you find all that out?"

"Kreature told us. Regulus found out what Voldemort was doing and found the horcrux – but it cost him his life. He made Kreature promise to take it and destroy it, but Kreature couldn't complete that task."

Harry shook his head in wonder, "What was it?"

"It was Slytherin's locket."

Harry was gobsmacked, "Hogwarts Slytherin – as in – Salazar Slytherin? That one?"

"Yes. No great magical artwork on this one, just Voldemort's nasty protections, so not a *great* loss."

"Huh."

"Voldemort got better at protecting his later creations so we had to destroy this one. Hopefully some of the earlier ones may be salvageable."

Harry shook his head, "No one in Order HQ noticed what you were doing?"

Remus shook his head, "Nope. Well – we took the locket back to the bank to destroy it. They scream bloody murder when you kill them."

Harry thought for a moment, "So, this is number three? Out of seven?"

"Three out of six. Only three left to go, but the last one is going to be very difficult. I don't know how we're going to be able to handle it, because it's at Malfoy Manor along with Tom."

"Where is the next one?"

Remus made a face, "It looks like the next one may be – somewhere near Hogwarts."

Harry sat up, "Hogwarts? – Would it help to have the Marauder's Map?"

Remus sat up with a huge grin, "Hell yes! That still exists?"

Harry started to smile, "Of course. It's been powering pranks at Hogwarts for years."

Remus broke out laughing, "The Marauder Legacy lives on!"

Harry ran into his room to dig the map out of his trunk. He was back in a few seconds, "Here. This should help significantly."

"Oh, yes. I thought I was going to have to recreate it, or something. That would not have been easy after all these years."

Harry held it back for a moment and looked sceptical, "You sure I can trust you to act responsibly with this?"

Remus kept chuckling, "No way! I'm way too old for responsibility."

"Oh, ok." Harry handed him the map and sat down in his chair, "So – what's happening in the magical world?"

Remus sighed to change gears, "Well – Malfoy and Fudge are claiming that Dumbledore and the Progressives are trying to destroy the Ancient and Noble Houses through tearing down the traditions of arranged marriages, tearing down the traditions of commerce – in other words 'magical

servitude' or the system of Oaths of Fealty to the Noble Houses, and by taking away ancestral lands through inheritance taxes – even though the 'traditionalist' view considers every inch of the British Isles to be owned by one of the Ancient and Noble Families. And they want it all back."

Harry broke out laughing, "What?! That's insane!"

"That's the argument that pushes Voldemort's agenda. They hide racism behind economic terms and ideas and they get a lot of people who are afraid of change to back them. People who would normally run the other way if they called it 'racism'."

Harry sighed, "That is so round the twist! With everyone having grown up with completely wrong views perpetuated by the horrible Muggle Studies program at Hogwarts they have no idea how wrong they are."

Remus shook his head, "Nope. The number of actual Death Eaters is rather small. But DEs are the shock-troops, the SS Troops that assassinate people that stand in their way. Outspoken people like Augusta Longbottom. –"

"Is she alright?"

"Yes, she was attacked and had some property damage but she survived."

Harry just groaned, "This is all so evil."

Remus nodded, "It's like Fenrir Greyback. He terrorises magical people and is used as the example of where progressive policies lead, when in fact he is supported by the traditionalists to simply keep the argument alive. He is the whip of fear used to drive the people back toward tradition. And it's all a lie."

"That's so twisted and evil."

Remus nodded sadly, "Understand that this is a human problem and not strictly a magical problem. The Fascists of WWII did the same. Hell, the Soviets were even better at it. They made history and truth the slaves of

propaganda. And yes, there were wizards involved in all that, but they didn't invent it."

Harry stood up and started pacing, his hands stuffed into his pockets, "Remus, you're depressing me."

"Sorry. It's not a comforting picture."

Harry stopped and looked at him, "So what is?"

"This is a contest of ideas. Ideas are like viruses; they're contagious. They spread and they change the hosts."

"That's not helping."

Remus chuckled, "But the ideas are in competition. The better ideas win out. They are proven better through the improvement of people's lives. People vote with their feet and choose between these competing ideas. Yes, bad ideas can have successes – mainly by isolating their hosts so they can't tell they're stuck with a bad idea, but they ultimately lose because the bad ideas can't fulfil their promises. The bad ideas don't actually work nearly as well as the good ideas."

Harry breathed a big sigh, "Ok, that's a bit better." He paused, "Wait – so the Statute of Secrecy is one of those isolating things that keeps people from knowing their stuck with the bad idea that is the Wizarding World."

"Yes. The Statue of Secrecy is all about fear and fear is one of the main drivers of all this."

"Gah! What idiots."

Remus smiled, "It's getting late. Why don't we leave that subject on a high note and get some sleep."

Harry nodded slowly and headed to bed, "Night Remus."

"Night Harry."

## Harry Potter

**Monday, 14 October, 1996**

Harry sat at the library table reading as Hermione sat across from him researching for one of her class papers. At least Harry was trying to read. His eyes kept wandering to Hermione – and getting stuck. She was incredibly distracting. Every so often he would give in and just stare. Luckily, Hermione was involved enough – or used to it enough – that she didn't notice it any more. He turned back to his book for another effort at reading it.

He got two more pages into it when his wardstone-phone made a noise. He stood up and mumbled something about taking a phone call outside. Hermione barely noticed. He started walking toward the door, started his fade-out spells, then looked at his magical detection spells on the wardstone-phone. It showed someone magical approaching Hermione's flat. But no hostile intent ward trigger. That was confusing, since her flat was quite a way away from the library. He apparated to the roof of Hermione's building.

Harry was shocked. There, walking toward the building, was Dumbledore. Harry groaned. He should have known Dumbledore would be back to try to recruit him again. Could he avoid this? Could he just go back and hide with Hermione in the library?

Dumbledore stopped walking and looked up at Harry, even though he was disillusioned. Of course! He has charmed glasses too. He can see Harry's magic. Damn. He steeled himself for the encounter and apparated to the car park and started walking toward Dumbledore.

Dumbledore smiled, "Harry, my boy. How have you been?"

Harry did not smile, "Professor."

"And Miss Granger?"



Harry's face just got angrier as he remembered the profound barrier that her banishment placed between them. He didn't say anything.

Dumbledore's face dropped, "Is she - alright?"

Harry's eyes got even harder, "Nothing beyond banishment. And the huge barrier you have placed between me and her."

Dumbledore looked confused, "Barrier?"

Harry growled, "I must lie to her constantly. About who I am, about huge parts of my life. For the rest of my life."

"Unless you - married, then -"

"Yes, and then constantly remind her of all that has been taken from her. All that she can no longer do."

Dumbledore's face paled. Emotions washed over his face in a parade fear, realisation, and doubt. "I'm sorry, Harry. It seems that all my decisions lately have been - not very good."

"Not when you make decisions for people, no."

Dumbledore looked deeply at Harry, "You do not think people need guidance in making decisions?"

"Guidance is not the problem, removing their choice, or worse yet, removing the consequences of their choices, is the problem."

Dumbledore looked rather intense, "Young people should not have to suffer the pain of poor choices when others know better."

"And if they don't believe you know better? If the only way for them to learn is to experience the natural consequences of their choices?"

Dumbledore smiled sadly, "To save them from the permanent damage that some bad choices bring is necessary."

Harry took a deep breath and shook his head, "Professor, you dance around and say nothing. What do you want?"

Dumbledore's smile dropped, "I would like to apologise. To say I'm sorry."

Harry's expression turned complex, "Does that apology include repairing the damage?"

Dumbledore looked confused.

Harry huffed, "Will you reverse the banishment and the binding? Restore her memories?"

Dumbledore balked, "Harry, I -"

Harry almost yelled, "That conviction was shite and you know it! Fix it!"

"I can't."

"Then your apology is empty! It means nothing! That conviction was completely a lie! I killed Aldwin Ransom in self defence, not Hermione. You're in charge of the damn government! You need to fix this!"

"It's pointless, I can not reverse the binding."

Harry stopped and stared angrily at Dumbledore wondering what happened. How did everything go so wrong? "Then I have nothing more to say to you." He turned and started walking away.

"Harry, does this mean that much to you?"

Harry turned and yelled, "It means everything to me!"

"You would abandon the Wizarding World?"

Harry took a few steps back, "Yes! The Wizarding World has no concept of responsibility or accountability, they just push everything on some vague

concept of 'magic'. They have abandoned reality. I'm only concerned for what I have any control over and that's protecting Hermione."

"Harry -"

"NO!" Harry stalked away trying to find a place to walk off his rage before going back to Hermione.

**Thursday, 17 October, 1996**

Harry stepped out of Hermione's door and waited for her to lock it behind her. "How many pages did your paper end up being?"

Hermione smiled at him slightly embarrassed, "Oh - only 12 pages."

Harry chuckled, "Your professors are going to get used to this. Either that or their going to give you a word-limit."

She frowned playfully at him and pulled his arm, "Come on, let's go. I can't be late for class and still turn this thing in."

"I heard this student talking about a grading system for papers yesterday. They called it the 'stairwell test'. The professor takes all the papers they get and throws them down a stairwell and see which one goes the farthest, because it's the biggest and heaviest. That one gets the A."

Hermione looked scandalised, "That's - that's - very funny." She leaned against him and pushed him faster down the street, "I'll just have to get heavy paper, then."

The shuttle buss stopped at the curb, but Harry almost panicked. The bus had a bright red magical glow - a big bomb - with a swirling active trigger peeking out from inside. Like the one that was on Hermione's parent's porch a few days ago. He dropped his backpack on the street, "Wait - I dropped it." He reached out and held her hand to stop her from moving closer. He fumbled picking it up as he thought what to do with this. He picked up his backpack, popped his wand out of his wand holster, moved in

front of Hermione and blocked her view, then sent a set of light cutting spells at the front tyre of the bus. It sprung a leak and went flat rather quickly.

Groans came from all the students nearby.

The driver got out and looked at the tyre, "Well, I'll have another bus here in about 15 minutes." The driver started dialling their mobile.

Hermione groaned, "Today of all days."

Harry was angrily looking at that bus. Given that this looked to be the same type of bomb as on the Grangers porch, that meant that someone capable was now involved. And they hadn't stopped. It was obviously triggered to go off at either his or Hermione's magical signature, so everyone else was likely safe from it. He just needed to get the Aurors here to deal with it. He pulled her back down the street, "Here, let's take my car. I can drop you off and find a car park."

Hermione smiled, "Would you? That would be wonderful." They headed back for the car park in front of Hermione's flat, where Harry parked his car, with Hermione's parking permit. Harry smiled – and sighed – as they moved away from the bus.

After he dropped her off Harry sent a Patronus message to Shackbolt letting him know to search for the bus with a magical bomb on it. Then he needed to start adding more magic sensing wards around the area. He had to catch this one fast.

### **Friday, 18 October, 1996**

Harry made it home to his flat by eight after having dinner with Hermione and her roommates. He hadn't seen Remus in a few days. Until the door opened, "Remus! There you are! I thought I'd need to send out a search party."

Remus grumbled and collapsed in to his chair. He covered his face and tried not to yawn. "Oh, this one is killing me."

Harry chuckled, "No, you're supposed to be killing them."

Remus grumbled again, "We snuck into Hogwarts fine, and we tracked the horcrux to the seventh floor – and can't find anything! We're completely stuck. We've been wandering around the seventh floor for two nights and can't find anything."

Harry sighed, "Oh."

Remus looked at him seriously. "Ohhh? – As in – that reminds me of something?"

Harry chuckled, "Yes. You see – there's a secret room on the seventh floor. Were you near a tapestry with some crazy knight trying to teach trolls to dance ballet?"

Remus was about to boil over with frustration, "Yeeess!"

Harry looked a bit sheepish, "Sorry. This room isn't listed on the Marauders Map, so I guess the Marauders never found it?"

Remus just looked ready to explode, "I don't remember anything unusual in that part of the castle."

Harry nodded knowingly, "It's called the come-and-go room. Or sometimes called the Room of Requirement. You need to walk back and forth in front of the tapestry three times thinking of the room you need and a door will appear."

Remus' face started to drop, "You're kidding! – And it just appears? What are the limits on this?"

"Just about no limits. The castle can create just about anything you need. But there is a specific version of the room that you might want to ask for

called the Room of Lost Things. It's a giant store room – and I mean *giant!* – that contains all the things lost or forgotten at Hogwarts by all the students or staff over the last thousand years. I bet you Galleons to golf balls it's in there."

Remus looked like he couldn't decide whether to strangle Harry or hug him.

"We used it as a secret DADA training room last year. But I bet you could just ask for 'the room with the horcrux', too."

All Remus could do was to sigh, cover his face in his hands, and say a muffled, "Tomorrow." He groaned as he stood up, "But now sleep."

### **Sunday, 20 October, 1996**

Harry got back to his flat just before midnight. He had finally finished setting up all the new wards on the area. He hoped these new wards that sensed volatile magic instead of merely hostile intent would catch this bomber. The bomber had evidently been able to sense the hostile intent wards and avoid them, so maybe this would be a surprise.

Remus still wasn't home from his Hogwarts mission. Harry sat in his chair to gather his wits for any last minute planning before flopping in to bed. Now all he had to do was catch this one. But it also made him nervous since these bombs were rather sophisticated magic.

**BONG!**

Harry jumped up. That was the Volatile Magic ward signal. He pulled out his wardstone-phone to check which ward was lit up: the street between Hermione's flat and the Shuttle bus stop at the end of the street. He set his fade-out spells and a silencing charm and apparated to the roof above the bus stop.

He looked down and saw in the street the red glow of a DE and the growing writhing orange glow of the trigger being constructed. He was

about to apparate down to the street when he thought of the trigger. What if the trigger would react to his magical signature?

Harry thought furiously. He could not let this guy get away. Standing on the roof he sent a small tracking charm down to the red DE. Then followed it immediately with apparating to 5 metres above the DE and sending a bludgeoner straight down, then apparating to the bus stop.

Harry looked toward the trigger and it was now gone. No magic in that spot. But he noticed a red glow coming from behind a shrub across the street. The shrubs were lining a brick wall that extended down the street. He waited. Within a few moments the red glow started moving behind a line of shrubs, down the street. He stood still and waited a bit more.

Harry apparated to the roof above and across the street from the red glow. When the red glow got to the corner of the wall and the end of the shrubs it came out onto the street. The red glow of a DE stood in the street, then apparated away. Harry pulled out his wardstone-phone and found the DE had moved two streets away.

Harry apparated to a roof above the street and saw the red glow of the DE walking toward the building where his flat was. They stopped at the bottom of the stairs to his flat and started the orange writhing glow of a trigger being constructed. Harry apparated to the street just around the corner from the bottom of the stairs. Maybe this DE wasn't as competent as he thought.

Harry peeked around the corner and sent a Stupefy at the DE. His magic evidently set off the trigger, which sent the DE flying a few feet away. Harry sent another Stupefy but the DE blocked it and sent a flame spell back. Harry ducked behind the corner. When the flame stopped he ran around the corner and saw no DE. He then saw the red glow of a DE moving through the car park. Harry ran after him. The red glow shot across a lawn and Harry sent a Summoning charm.

The DE came flying – or – something did. It had a red glow but it was not the size of a man. Harry hit it with a bludgeoner and it landed in the centre

of the car park. There was no more red glow.

Even so, Harry approached cautiously. "Well, Peter. It's about time." He aimed a vicious kick at the dead DE's head. And hurt his foot. He needed better boots for kicking DEs. Peter Petigrew was laying – rather messed up – in his human form in the middle of the car park. For this, he wanted some official acknowledgment, so he sent a Patronus Message to Shackelbolt, "Auror Shackelbolt, I have captured Peter Petigrew. In front of my flat."

Within two minutes Shack apparated into the area as shown by Harry's magical sensing wards.

"Mr Potter. What do you have?"

Harry pointed at Peter, "He was setting up magical bombs like the one on the Granger's porch a week or so ago. Here is his wand." Harry picked up Peter's wand and handed it over.

Shack ran a spell trace on it, "Oh, yes. This is the trigger we found on that bomb." Shack ran a spell on Peter, "Well, we don't need to look for him any more. Thank you, Harry."

Harry nodded, "It's too bad that vengeance never lives up to it's expectations."

Shack chuckled, "That's true. Well, let me clean up this mess and I'll make sure this gets into the press."

"Thank you." Shack – and Peter – were gone in ten seconds.

**Monday, 21 October, 1996**

Harry came home after eight in the evening and noticed the light on in his flat. He stopped and thought, no complaints from the wards – must be Remus! He burst through the door and found Remus in the kitchen making some food, "Remus! You're back!"



"Yes, finally."

"It's been almost a week. What happened?" Harry sat down at the table.

Remus sighed in remembrance, "We found it. It was Rowena Ravenclaw's diadem."

"Whoa!"

"Yes, 'whoa'. And it had an unbelievably nasty compulsion on it to get you to put it on – and thereby become it's victim as it possessed you – and would then eat you."

Harry shuddered, "Yea, seen that before. What did you do with it?"

"We got it out of Hogwarts, without much excitement. We took it back to the bank and spent two very long days cleaning it off. This was one of his earlier creations and it was still ridiculously complex. But we did clean it off – and kill the horcrux – without destroying all the magic on it."

"Will the Goblins let us have it back?"

Remus looked at Harry with a smirk, "Yes – but only after they've had a chance to study it, and probably copy it."

Harry chuckled, "Yea, why not? They're being very helpful with all this."

Remus nodded, "I think they may give it to you."

"Me? Why?"

Remus frowned, "Well, they certainly won't give it to Fudge. Or Dumbledore."

Harry bobbed his head in understanding, "I suppose. Maybe 'Lord Black' could return it as a gift, or something."

Remus chuckled, "That might work." Then he stopped and thought, "But let's not let it disappear into the Department of Mysteries forever. They seem to claim rights over everything interesting and no one ever sees it again."

Harry frowned, "Hmm. Maybe it needs to go in a museum or something. Maybe Lord Black needs to have a museum." Harry leaned back in his chair, "You know, Lord Black seems to be a pretty interesting guy, don't you think? Maybe he needs to be seen more - but still every bit the mystery. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Remus started laughing, "You know, I've always thought that the most delicious pranks are the long-running pranks."

Harry started to smile deviously, "Hmmm."

Remus became serious again as he sat down at the table with his food, "This was number four out of six. There's only you, and one more left. But this last one is going to be very difficult because it's hidden somewhere inside Malfoy Manor."

Harry sat up in surprise, "Wait - Dobby used to work for the Malfoy's. I wonder if he still has access through the wards?"

Remus froze - then a smile started to grow, "Oh, you're kidding." He broke out laughing. "I'll talk to him."

Harry nodded.

Remus looked at him, "So how are things around here?"

Harry's face lit up, "Oh - I haven't seen you in a few days. Well! You will be quite happy to hear this one."

Remus' eyebrows rose in anticipation, "Yes? What's this?"

"You remember that bomber I've been fighting?"

"Yes? Did you get him?"

"Yes – but I'll give you 15 guess as to who it was."

Remus' eyes got very big, "I'll have no idea."

"Petigrew."

"AHH!" Remus jumped up and gave Harry a huge hug, "YES! YES! Poetic justice of the first order!"

### **Wednesday, 23 October, 1996**

Harry and Hermione rushed through the doors into the warm building toward her next class.

Hermione shivered, "Oh, it's a bit cold out today." It was overcast, a bit breezy, and threatening rain. She stopped a few metres down from the door, with the rest of her classmates, waiting for the current class to let out.

Harry stopped next to her, "The heating bills for this building must be enormous with everyone going in and out of the building so much. The doors seem to be open more than not."

She looked at him questioningly, "That's a rather unusual observation. What brought this on?"

He looked at her and blinked a few times, "I guess I inherited my parents architect genes." He smiled in triumph with his answer.

She gave him a suspect look, "Evidently."

The classroom door opened and students streamed out.

She bumped her shoulder into his, "See you in a bit." She moved into her class.

Harry stood watching her go. Her wild hair looking so – Hermione.

He was jolted out of his reverie by the sound of his wardstone-phone indicating an approaching magical. He pulled it out of his pocket and it showed someone magical – but no hostile intent warning – approaching the front door of the building. He turned and went to meet whoever it was at the door. He made it 5 metres out the door when he noticed Wallace Bonderson walking down the path.

"Harry, how are you today?" Bonderson extended his hand.

Harry met it, "Good. Any excitement lately?"

Bonderson's smile dropped quite a bit, "Well – I think I found out what Dumbledore wasn't telling you."

Harry's eyebrows rose way up, "Really?" He wanted to hear it from Bonderson, as a test.

"You see – we suspect – and would need to verify to be sure – that Tom may have put something in your scar."

Harry nodded heavily, "Yes, we found that out too."

Bonderson almost stepped back, "How did that happen?"

Harry took a tense breath as he thought about it, "Remus had charmed his glasses to see the magic that leaks off of all magical objects and he saw something strange in my scar. So he went to talk to the Goblins about it."

Bonderson's eyebrows rose again, "And they were helpful with it?"

Harry smiled sadly, "Yes. As gruff as they act, they seem to have a good streak of enlightened self-interest in them."

"Good to know. What did they find?"

Harry huffed in frustration, "It turns out my scar has a shard of Tom's soul stuck in it."

Bonderson's face almost melted. He whispered, "Yes, I was afraid of that. But without a test I couldn't be sure."

"The Goblins confirmed it. They're called horcruxes, and they keep Tom from completely dying. They anchor his soul to this plane of existence unless they are all destroyed. You have to murder someone to create each one. He made seven of them."

"Seven!" A string of mumbled angry words followed.

Harry nodded, "Remus and Bill Weasley have destroyed a few of them. They have a few more to go. Then I can be rid of this one." He pointed at his scar.

Bonderson considered for a moment, "Let me know if you need *any* help with that? In fact, let me know if you need help with *anything*."

Harry looked at him confused, "Why?"

Frustration and anger peaked out of Bonderson's expression, "Personally, I have little faith that the wizarding world will be able to remain healthy. MI5 would really rather not have to pick up the responsibility of managing the wizarding world, but I think we're going to have to."

Harry looked a bit suspicious, "Are you muggle-born?"

Bonderson smiled, "Yes. I was shut out of the wizarding world, so when MI5 asked me to join I jumped at it." He looked suggestively at Harry, "They pay very well."

Harry grinned darkly, "I just want to be alive."

Bonderson smiled, "We can help with that, too. That's our job."

"How?"

"Well, first off, your parents got you a muggle birth certificate, which means we can consider you a British Citizen, as opposed to a strictly magical person who we don't know anything about. The same with Miss Granger. This means that you are under the protection of the Crown. We can act to defend you." Bonderson glanced around the area, "I have a few people keeping an eye on things, for now. But let's keep talking. I have access to a lot of resources."

Harry looked at him considering. "Yes. I could use all the help I can get."

"Call my number any time. That gets the Dispatch Centre and they can get a hold of me, or anyone I have nearby."

Harry noted that down in his brain. "I can talk to them about magic?"

"Yes, everyone involved in my group knows. Some are magical, some aren't. The ones who aren't have protective charms on them."

That could save his life – and Hermione's. "I'll remember that."

Bonderson mobile rang, "Hello? – Yes? – He what? – No, no. – Right." He pulled the phone away from his ear, "I have to go, Harry. We'll talk again later?"

"Yes, definitely."

Bonderson nodded and walked off with the phone stuck to his ear again.

Harry did not have any idea how this was all going to work out.

**Friday, 25 October, 1996**

Harry stepped off of Hermione's steps in front of her flat and jogged to catch up to her. "Which paper are you working on today?"

"History. It's fascinating! I've found so much stuff on this topic I'm going to have a hard time keeping to his size suggestions."

Harry smiled, "He actually instituted size restrictions?"

"No, not restrictions – he calls them 'focus limits', trying to get us to focus on what's important. I wish he wouldn't, but – I'll try to be focussed."

They turned the corner around her building and started along the path that lead to Hermione's favourite library. It was a beautiful day – for October. Lots of clouds that rushed through the area leaving behind lots of wet-puddles and sun-puddles.

Harry watched her out of the corner of his eye, "So which is your favourite class, so far?"

Hermione huffed, "Favourite class? All of them. But if you mean meaningful – I guess I'd have to say history. It's the scaffolding on which I hang everything else I learn. The framework that keeps it all organised."

Harry nodded in understanding, "Yes, it's too bad a lot of history classes are taught topically rather than sequentially." He remembered Binns glossing over everything but the Goblin rebellions.

"Yes, that does make it difficult. But if I listen closely I can put it all back in order."

Harry smiled. That is pure Hermione.

Hermione glanced at him, "What are you studying today?"

His wardstone-phone made a noise. He stopped in his tracks. The noise indicated a magical with hostile intent in the area. "Ooops. I forgot my book at my flat. Why don't you keep going and I'll catch up to you? I'll just be a few minutes."

"Oh, Harry. Alright. See you in a few."

As he smiled she turned and started walking again. Harry turned back and ran his fade-out spells and checked his wardstone-phone. It showed a DE

had apparated about 100 metres behind them on the path. The path curved through copses of trees and he couldn't see them. He pulled out his broom, unshrunk it, and flew into the air. He spotted the DE – or the red fog of the DE – near a turn in the path and dove on them. Just as he was about to shoot his bludgeoner the DE apparated away. He swung around and saw them closer to Hermione at the next curve in the path. They were apparating along the path toward Hermione! He kicked the broom into high gear and raced after them.

Harry blasted a bludgeoner down at the DE as he whipped past them. As he swung around to see – they were gone. Just a spot of flat grass. He stopped and started looking around – and found their red fog of magic back down the path. He swooped in and landed on the path between the DE and Hermione. He shrunk his broom, put up silencing, notice-me-not, and muggle-avoiding spells on the area. Then he removed his disillusionment spells.

The DE removed his disillusioning spells too, "Ah, Mr Potter. Just who I was looking for."

There was about 30 metres between them. Harry started walking forward. He didn't say anything.

### **Hermione Granger**

Hermione only made it another 10 metres when she heard a squawk and a fluttering of feathers. Then she squawked as a brilliant snowy white owl swooped around her and landed on her head. "Hedwig, is that you?"

Hedwig fluttered to Hermione's shoulder and started a stream of barking and rubbing her head against Hermione's ear.

Hermione broke out laughing as Hedwig tickled her. She could barely speak under Hedwig's onslaught, "Hello Hedwig. Harry was just here a minute ago."

Hedwig kept barking and fluttering around Hermione's head and shoulders.



Hermione was still chuckling, "You are so cute, what am I to do with you? I wish I had something to feed you."

Hedwig obviously agreed.

## **Harry Potter**

The DE sent a purple spell.

Harry side-stepped it, then started a spell that Remus taught him; it caused three duplicate images of him to step apart. The limitation on the spell was that the images all moved in lock-step but given that he was walking on level ground it was very effective.

The DE stopped when Harry turned into four copies.

Harry and his copies kept coming and kept veering away from each other. All of them lifted their wand preparing to strike.

The DE sent that purple spell against the left-most copy of Harry.

Harry jumped to the left – and all his copies jumped to the left – and the spell missed. Harry was starting to pick up speed.

The DE conjured a flamewhip and swept it across the area.

Harry dove for the ground – along with his copies – as the whip passed over him. He jumped up and ran to his left, started his fade-out spells, jumped on his broom and flew up.

The DE moved toward where he saw Harry disappear. He put on his own disillusionment spell and sent a *Hominem Revelio* to find Harry. But it was wide because Harry was already on his broom.

Harry could easily see the red magical fog of the DE. He dove on the DE and let off a wide bludgeoner, which meant it was under-powered.

The DE yelled as he was hit by the bludgeoner. It knocked him down but he was not out. The DE got up and apparated about 15 metres away and started limping back the way he came.

Harry could still see the fog and dove after him and crushed him with another bludgeoner. This one was full strength and caught the DE squarely. The DE appeared and the red fog of magic was gone. Harry landed next to him. He didn't waste any time, he just wrapped them up, broke their wand and stuffed it in the ropes, then sent them to Order HQ.

He checked himself for injuries or damage to his clothes. He had a bit of a burn – or melt actually – on the sleeve of his coat. He repaired it, then started walking toward the library to meet Hermione. He already had the book he 'forgot' so he just tried to catch up. He came around the last corner and saw Hermione standing on the path with Hedwig fluttering about her head. He broke out laughing.

Hedwig immediately heard him and took off to land on Harry's shoulder.

Harry, Hermione, and Hedwig met in the middle.

Hermione reached up to pet Hedwig, "She landed on my shoulder soon after you left. And she was so captivating I didn't get very far."

Harry was scratching Hedwig's chest, "Yes, she's usually quite captivating."

Hedwig fluttered back to Hermione's shoulder, bumped heads, and flew off into the trees.

Harry and Hermione both laughed all the way to the library. It was enough to dampen Harry's memories of the fight.

**Tuesday, 29 October, 1996**

"Harry. Harry!"

"Mfff."

"Harry, wake up."

"Remus, it's dark." Words smushed through a pillow.

A chuckle, "It's always dark in the morning. That's why they call it 'morning'."

Harry stirred and rolled over, "You're back. What happened?" His words sounded dipped in sleep.

Excitement came rushing out of Remus' voice, "Dobby found the last horcrux. It was a bloody huge snake! We took it to Gringotts and killed it. Now we can get rid of that thing in you. This morning! So, it's time to get up and get moving."

Harry sat up, "Bloody hell." He rubbed his eyes and took a long breath, "Ok." He got up. Soon he was dressed and sitting down to breakfast. "How's Dobby?"

Remus sat down at the table, "Fine. He won't talk about it much, but he says he's fine."

Harry nodded in sympathy, "Anything else happening?"

Remus sighed in thought, "Well - one thing I heard. Evidently this came originally from Professor Snape. Bill told me about it. It seems that you have become known as -" He looked sheepish at Harry with a bit of a grin.

"What?"

Remus started chuckling, "- As The Dark Lord's Punishment - or The Dark Lord's Anvil."

"*What!?*"

Remus broke out in laughter, "Sorry - Every time I hear that -" He just kept going.

Harry looked about ready to burn the flat down. "Remus." A warning tone in those two syllables.

Remus regained control and shook his head, "Evidently, every time Voldemort has an underperforming Death Eater he sends them to attack you or Hermione as punishment for screwing up."

Harry scoffed angrily, then started chuckling, "Ok, fine. At least he's sending me his junk DEs. I don't have to fight the most capable." His expression turned frustrated again, "Maybe I should feel slighted?"

"Well - until he runs out of the least capable. Or he decides to end the game and sends someone very strong. Like himself."

Harry sighed, "Yes. But don't tell anyone about this. That's all I need is another freaking title!"

Remus started a devious grin, "So - you're feeling *entitled* now, are you?"

Harry glared at Remus, then stuck out his tongue.

Remus broke out laughing again.

Harry looked at his watch, "Hermione has her 11 o'clock class today and I'd rather not miss it, so I'd best get this over with."

Remus nodded, "I'll keep an eye on things. Let me know how it goes."

Harry stood up, "Yup, I'll give you a call." He gathered all his 'modern accoutrements' into his pockets and headed for Gringotts.

It was a little after eight that Harry was walking into Gringotts. The Special Accounts Teller was waiting.

"This way Mr Potter."

Harry followed, looking at the passages all alike and yet always different. Then an idea hit him and he blurted it out before he thought better of it,

"Do you create these passages new every time someone passes through them?"

The Goblin stopped dead, Harry almost ran into him. The Goblin turned and glared at him, "An interesting speculation. I am not able to confirm or deny anything related to bank security."

Harry held up his hands in surrender, "Just thinking out loud."

The Goblin's words were slow and threatening, "That is not a safe thing to do."

Harry took a breath, "Right."

The Goblin started moving faster and came to a set of double doors and knocked.

"Come!"

Harry entered and bowed, "Ragnok, Master Vernehmer, Clawhammer, and Mr Weasley."

Ragnok's voice was smooth and sounded like a pleased purr, "Mr Potter. Welcome. Did Mr Lupin inform you of our purpose today?"

Harry wryly pointed generally toward his scar, "Amputation?"

Ragnok broke out laughing, "Yes, but only that free-loading bit of Tom that is unwelcome."

Harry bowed dramatically, "I am here to help."

Vernehmer took over. He waved his hand and conjured an examination table, "Up here Mr Potter."

Harry scrambled on the table, "Is this going to be like getting a haircut?"

Ragnok's chuckle was a rumble.

Harry raised his head to look at them, "I mean - I'll feel lighter after this, won't I?"

Vernehmer looked at Ragnok, "This is what humans refer to as *humour*, is it?" Bone-dry words.

Now Bill was chuckling, too.

Harry shook his head, "No, this is called extreme relief! Get this thing off me."

Vernehmer pulled out his large magnifying glass, "Let's make sure Tom hasn't tried to create any more of these abominations." He started moving around Harry's head. "Not that there was enough left of his soul to fracture any further." A few more angles to view, "No. Only one link. All the rest are gone." He reached into his case and pulled out a glass pipe about half a metre long and thinner than a finger. "Now, this is the tricky part. So don't move." He held the tube in one hand and the magnifying glass in the other. He was looking through the glass while he held the pipe vertically over Harry's scar, almost touching it. "Now, Mr Weasley."

Bill carefully touched his wand to the glass pipe and mumbled something.

Harry felt a momentary disorientation like vertigo.

A black smoke rose out of the pipe and a horrified scream came with it - but faded to nothing as the cloud dissipated.

Vernehmer was still frozen, looking through his glass. "That's done it. All clear." He stepped back. "Get up slowly, Mr Potter."

Harry shivered violently for a moment, "Whoa. I feel like I could float away." He sat up - and wobbled, holding on to the edge of the table. "Oh, yea. Definitely go slow." He swung his legs over the edge and breathed deeply. "Ohhh, man, this is great! I feel - new. Full of energy."

Vernehmer nodded, "This is your new normal, Mr Potter. That soul shard was a leach – a significant drain on your magic. That means you need to be careful. Everything you try to do will be very over-powered until you acclimate yourself to this new power level."

Harry slowly slid off the table like he was afraid to fall. He stood up straight with a huge grin. "Oh, yes!" Then his expression turned worried, "Ok, but do I run the risk of splinching?"

Bill spoke up, "Not splinching but you may be a good bit louder than normal."

Harry nodded, "Ok, I can deal with that." He bowed, "Ragnok, Master Vernehmer, Clawhammer, and Mr Weasley. Thank you very much."

Ragnok spoke for the group, "Mr Potter, we look forward to a very productive future."

### **Wednesday, 30 October, 1996**

Harry was running a bit late. Not that it was all that pressing, but he just loved spending time at Hermione's flat. "See you, Remus!" He was heading for the door.

"Got a hot date?" Remus' smirk was poking out of the kitchen.

"Always!" He opened the door – and froze, "– Ah, bloody hell!"

Remus came out the kitchen almost at a run, "What?"

Harry pointed, "A Gringotts owl – with another scowl." He turned accusingly to the owl, "I take it you have another summons?"

The owl was sitting on the railing of the open walkway in front of the flat, surrounded by a grey fog of notice-me-not spells. It flicked it's wings and hooted impatiently.

"Fine." Harry held out his hand. The bird flipped the letter at him and flew off. Harry caught it and moved back inside. "Yup. To Lord Black." He dropped his head in abject frustration.

Remus was about to explode, "Yes – but before you die standing there – open it up and make sure. Maybe it's just Clawhammer jerking your chain."

Harry looked up and chuckled, "He would, wouldn't he?" He ripped it open, "Ah, the bastard! He summoned me again!" He dropped the letter in Remus' hands and started pacing, "That brainless idiot! What the hell is he thinking? What game does he think we're playing, here?" He stopped and glared at Remus, "Well, screw it! The Wizarding Compact is done! I'm done with these fools. Kick Tom in the ass, too. Just throw a spanner in the whole damn thing."

Remus stood looking wilted.

"I've been complaining that nothing has changed since twenty years ago, so – now I'm going to change it! All of it! Burn it down." Harry started pacing again, at a more normal rhythm, "Ok. Well, I guess we're going to find out." He stopped and covered his face with his hands, his voice muffled, "I've got to calm down. I'm late for Hermione. I can't go over there like this." He started breathing big slow breaths, then looked at Remus, "Well, I guess I've got today to think more about it." He moved grimly out the door.

Remus stood with nothing he could say. He honestly couldn't blame Harry. The whole thing was just a giant disaster. He shook his head, "Yes, tomorrow should be interesting."

### **Thursday, 31 October, 1996**

Harry sat on his bed after his alarm went off. He was trying to gather the determination to face the day. Bad enough it was the day he most hated; the day his parents died. But now he has to go to the Winzgamot and kick those idiots in the teeth.



Remus stopped by his door and leaned in, "Alright there, Harry?"

Harry nodded, "Yes. Just the worst day on the calendar and Dumbledore has to go and dance on it."

Remus looked confused, "The worst day?"

"The day my parents were murdered."

Remus was still confused – until it landed. He groaned as it landed hard. "I'm sorry, Harry. I was out of the country when that happened. I guess I never put the date into an anniversary."

Harry nodded, then stood up, "I'd better get moving or I'll tell the world to bugger off and climb back into bed."

Remus smirked and let Harry go. He didn't think anything he could say would improve anything. He did ask Dobby to make a good breakfast for Harry, since he was having such a hard day, and would for a while yet.

Finally, Harry was ready to leave.

Remus asked, "What reason are you giving for going into the Ministry building today?"

Harry froze – and deflated, "Oh. I forgot."

Remus sighed, "You could say you are going in to see the Vital Records Office. Get a passport or something."

Harry smirked, "Or to see the Department of Mysteries. It's not like they'll tell anyone if I did or didn't show up."

Remus frowned, "Except they are the one group who may be able to see through your disguise. If they take any interest."

"I suppose getting a passport is as good an excuse as any. I'll just get another real one later."

"Ah – no. If you get a magical one then it will show up as already being issued in the muggle records. If you want to get a muggle one that is not controlled by the magical government, then go straight for the muggle one. Don't get a magical one."

Harry sighed, "Ok, how about if I go ask to see a copy of my parents will?"

Remus nodded, "That will work."

Harry nodded, "Ok, then I'd better get a move on. Who knows how long *that* will take." He gathered his things, his coat, and everything and apparated to Diagon Alley. Then floo'd to the Ministry. Everything went to plan – except the Record Office had no will for his parents. But now, there was no avoiding the coming disaster. He headed for the loo to change.

As Harry entered the curved hallway that ran around to the Door for the Accused, Harry pulled off his invisibility cloak and cancelled the silencing charms on his clothes. The click of Harry's heals filled the passage as he walked toward the Door for the Accused. This time, the same two Aurors were standing at attention. Both Aurors bowed, the tall one spoke, "Lord Black, you're back."

Harry bowed in return, but said nothing. He stood waiting for the summons. He was early. Dumbledore's voice rang out opening the Wizengamot Session. Then his voice continued, "Members of this body, we are in dire need. We will not last without help. I realise this is a risk, but I see no other alternative. Therefore, I must – I Summon Lord Black!"

The noise in the chambers exploded. This was obviously a surprise to most of the Wizengamot members. The noise continued unabated. The noise level began to drop, Harry stepped forward, "Gentlemen."

The Aurors pushed open the doors and stood at attention.

Harry began walking into the chamber and the noise level rose the farther into the chamber he moved. This time, he stopped only a third of the way in, because Dumbledore stood on the floor of the chamber in front of the

Wizarding Compact. Harry noticed he was wearing a glove on his right hand. And he did not seem to be using it.

Dumbledore's voice rose above the noise, "Lord Black, we need your help." The noise dropped to low mumbles.

Harry matched Dumbledore's voice, "You need my help? Or you need a backbone?"

The mumbles were overtaken by nervous chuckles.

Dumbledore shrugged, "At this point – they are equivalent."

"And you are willing to gamble the Wizarding Compact to get it?"

Dumbledore became intensely nervous, "We are losing. We need your help."

The mumbles took on a fearful tone.

Harry's voice rose in anger, "And what is different this time from twenty years ago? You have made no changes and you expect a different result? When you let murderers wander among you? And you kiss their feet?" Harry's arm motioned toward Malfoy. "I have no expectation that my involvement would change anything!"

"We are too evenly matched, we –"

"NO! You are unwilling to make the hard decisions! Nothing will change until YOU change! All of you!" He waved his arm across the chamber.

The noise level jumped for a moment.

Harry's voice rose in anger again, "What did I say would happen if you summoned me again?"

Dumbledore sounded desperate, "No! You must not!"

Harry's anger was boiling. He flicked his wrist and his wand popped into his hand.

"LORD BLACK!" Lucius Malfoy's voice rang out over the swiftly rising noise. He stood in his family seat, the chamber fell silent, "That is very ill advised."

Derision dripped from Harry's voice, "Ah, the two Dark Lords agree. How quaint." Harry started moving slowly away from Malfoy, aiming for a clear shot at the Compact behind Dumbledore.

Dumbledore's face looked shocked to be supported by Malfoy - and accused of complicity by Harry - or who he thought might be Harry. The irony was a little thick.

Malfoy moved toward the stairs leading to the chamber floor, "This is not the way."

Harry started chuckling, "Chief Warlock, how is your stomach as you stand with Malfoy? Are you really going to join a slave of the Dark?"

Malfoy's face turned red as he stepped onto the chamber floor, "The integrity of Wizarding Britain must be maintained."

Harry kept chuckling, "Orders from Voldemort, I take it? What else did he order you to do, Malfoy?"

Malfoy moved slowly to form a triangle with Harry and Dumbledore.

Harry was burning with anger, "Mr Malfoy, I have some very nice boots too. Would you like to lick them as well?" Harry pointed at his shoes. "Or the fact that there is no blood on them does not interest you?"

Malfoy's eyes almost turned red as he struggled to remain calm, "No blood on the hands of the Black Family? That is not very believable."

Harry turned to face Malfoy fully, "Ah, does Mr Malfoy desire an honour duel? But – where is your honour, Mr Malfoy? Still laying with the slaves in Malfoy Manor?"

Rage spiked in Malfoy's eyes as a set of spells leaped out of his wand.

Harry moved away from Dumbledore and fired a chain of spells back.

Malfoy blocked and started another set of spells.

Dumbledore yelled, "STOP!"

Harry ignored him, sidestepped Malfoy's spells and sent another set back. This time he slipped in a few aimed at the Wizarding Compact.

Dumbledore was shocked and blocked them. He was not expecting that. He sent a few spells at Malfoy.

This started all three sending spells at each other. It escalated.

Harry was moving, Dumbledore was not, Malfoy was evidently more enraged than thinking.

Harry kept them both busy, goading them. None of Harry's spells were very dark, just very powerful, and not benign. The fight continued to escalate with spells getting more deadly and faster paced.

Malfoy sent another set at Harry.

Harry jumped away from Dumbledore and let the spells pass, but as they passed he sent an Expelliarmus through their path toward Dumbledore. Dumbledore noticed a second too late. Dumbledore's wand came flying toward Harry. Out of reflexive Quidditch skills he caught the wand in his left hand. The shock of the wand landing was electric. It felt like the wand grabbed his left arm and pointed at Malfoy. The desire to hit Malfoy leaped in Harry and the explosion of magic that burst out of the wand was like a starburst, an immensely bright ball racing toward Malfoy – it hit him, shield

and all, and blasted him back into the wall of the Chamber. Malfoy fell to the floor in a heap.

Harry was shocked. He froze. Until another red stupefy spell came at him from Dumbledore. He jumped aside and the wand in his left hand responded, almost on it's own, like a reflex. The spell was another starburst that went racing toward Dumbledore.

Dumbledore tried to move and put up a large shield. Both failed. He flew back a few metres to land on his back.

Harry stopped, shocked again. He only just stopped himself running to help Dumbledore, as Dumbledore started to stand up slowly.

Dumbledore moved in front of the Wizarding Compact again, his voice was tired and broken, "Lord Black, you must stop!"

Harry took a breath to focus again, "Why?"

Dumbledore was just above a whisper but it carried over the silence in the chamber, "Because it is irreplaceable! We will never be able to put it back!"

"And you think having this Compact will help?"

"Yes!"

"How? With all the Death Eaters, all the bigotry and hatred against muggle-born, how does the Compact make things better?"

"It leaves us unified -"

"Bollocks! Not when the Death Eaters and Voldemort have committed their lives to their goals. It solves nothing. *You* have solved nothing! You must *defeat* them! Their ideology, their goals, and their methods must be rejected utterly! And given that their lives are already committed to this, by submitting to the Dark Mark, then life and death are in the balance; yours

or their's. That is the language they have already committed to, and the only language they will understand."

Dumbledore looked dejected, "Yes. I will try. Please - leave it intact."

Harry thought for a long few moments, then turned and walked out, his heels clicking on the stones, both wands still in his hands. No one spoke to him as he disappeared from the Ministry under his cloak.

## **10. Harry's War Turns Public**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 11772**

### **Chapter 10**

### **Harry's War Turns Public**

#### **Remus Lupin**

**Friday, 1 November, 1996**

Remus sat again in his chair after Harry had left for Hermione's flat. He had collected every newspaper he could find because Harry had no interest in delving back into the arguments of the Wizengamot. He just wanted to move forward, which meant he would not discuss anything with Remus. Not that Remus faulted him, the Wizengamot was such a time-waste. Whenever Harry was pressed for an answer, all he would say is, "I have a mission. I will not be distracted from my mission!" In truth, Remus thought Harry looked a bit shaken.

But Remus needed to know the score. And the score he found was dizzying. Malfoy – dead. Dumbledore – beaten. The Wizarding Compact – still intact, but with an existential threat still hanging over it.

He dove into the details of the articles. Malfoy was blamed for starting the fight. The press clearly absolved Harry or Dumbledore for starting it, describing it as a forced honour duel. They were less clear on any blame for Dumbledore's injuries. Of course, some articles called stridently for the arrest of Lord Black for the murder of that fool Malfoy. And a few articles called for Lord Black to become Minister of Magic. One article in the Quibbler blamed Dumbledore for everything by insisting on Summoning Lord Black, after he had clearly stated what he would do.

These calls were not in serious consideration, but everyone was clear that Dumbledore had been defeated. This was a larger shock than the death of Malfoy. It shook the world, as their hero was defeated. Their protector was shown to be – limited, not up to the match of Lord Black let alone



Voldemort. It threw open the question of the stability of Wizarding Britain. Who was left to defend it?

They did credit Dumbledore for convincing Lord Black to leave the Wizarding Compact intact. But the quotes of Lord Black were damning in their conviction of the Wizengamot, the Chief Warlock, and Wizarding Society in general, not to mention his scathing indictment of the Pureblood agenda. The shocking hero of the day – if he could be called a hero, with all his mystery and secrecy – was Lord Black. Even if no one could find him or ask him any questions, or knew who he was.

The world was again moved to a new balance point, a new all the old foundations of strength and surety were being washed away.

## **Harry Potter and Remus Lupin**

**Monday, 4 November, 1996**

Harry gasped and shot up in bed. The sound of the hostile intent ward was fading as he started to get up. His time spell said 02:36; he grumbled. Since he had started sleeping in his clothes to speed up his response time, these night-time attacks had gotten easier. He filled his pockets, put on his shoes, his coat – he was ready.

"Harry?" Remus' voice came from the other room.

"What's up?"

"Is that the ward on Hermione's flat?"

Harry had pulled out his wardstone-phone. It showed one DE approaching from the Southwest. "Yes." Then another gong from the ward and another DE appeared on the wardstone-phone. Harry moved into the main room as two more gongs started up.

Remus came out of his room mostly dressed, "That's four?"

Four DEs were shown on the wardstone-phone, "Yup. Approaching from four different directions."

"You have more recent experience with this than I do, since I have been busy with the horcruxes. What do you suggest?"

Harry nodded and only thought for a moment, "I want you to go to the roof of her flat and be the last line of defence. Don't let anyone get close. I'll pop around and get the DEs. They are nicely separated."

Remus nodded and kept getting dressed.

Harry popped out to the roof above the shuttle bus stop. That was nearest to the closest DE. He looked at his wardstone-phone; it said the DE was one block away. He apparated to the roof above where he thought the DE was. He looked around and saw the red glow of a DE buried in the grey fog of a disillusionment spell. Unfortunately, the disillusionment spell was a good one so he couldn't tell which way the DE was facing. But the DE was proceeding in a direction – and not likely walking backward.

Harry did not want to waste time waiting for the DE to put themselves in a good spot to attack. He had three more to attend to. He planned two apparitions, one to deliver the attack and one to retreat to a safe landing.

Harry apparated to 5 metres above the DE, let off a bludgeoner straight down, and apparated back to the roof. He looked down and saw the DE had apparated back about 30 metres. The DE must have sensed his apparition somehow. He will have to try a different approach for this one.

But he can't be captivated by one DE and let the others get too close. So he looked at his wardstone-phone and picked the next closest DE and popped to a roof near them. He could see the second DE walking down the street by the red glow leaking out of a badly-formed grey fog of disillusionment. Harry tried something new. He silenced himself, then apparated down to the street behind the DE, and started running toward the DE. He could see the Dark Mark boiling on their left arm, and the swirling magic surrounding

their wand in what looked to be their right hand, which meant they were facing away.

He got to within five metres when the DE's wand started coming around to defend. Harry sent a bludgeoner and knocked the DE a few metres down the street. He wrapped them up broke their wand, and sent them off to Order HQ. One down.

He popped back to the rooftop and checked his wardstone-phone. He apparated to a rooftop nearest the third, the next closest DE. He saw them walking. He tried his apparate to mid-air, bludgeon, and apparate away trick. And this time it worked. He sent them off to Order HQ and looked to the fourth, the next DE.

He apparated to the rooftop nearest his next victim and looked around. His wardston-phone indicated a direction – but there was a tree in the way. He couldn't see the DE. He popped to the rooftop across the street. Now he could see them. And the DE could see him because they had just stopped walking. They just stood in the street waiting.

Harry decided he couldn't waste time so he apparated back toward the first DE. He checked his wardstone-phone and had to apparate to a rooftop another street over. Then he could see the DE walking down the street in the direction of Hermione's flat. But the DE took a wrong turn. Evidently they were still looking for Hermione's flat.

Harry apparated down to the street behind and around the corner from the DE. He started running toward the DE to attack, but the DE turned and sent a set of cutting spells. Harry dove for the cobblestones and sent another bludgeoner, which intersected with another set of cutting spells from the DE. The wider bludgeoner disrupted the cutting spells, acting in effect like a shield! So Harry got up and kept running. He sent a stream of bludgeoners at the DE, swallowing their cutting spells until one of his bludgeoners finally hit them. He quickly wrapped them up and sent them off.

He checked his wardstone-phone for the last DE and apparated to a rooftop nearby. He saw the red glow of the DE sending spells at the blue-green-yellow magic of Remus. Harry tried his apparate to mid-air, bludgeon, and apparate away trick. He looked back and saw the DE was down so he popped down to the street.

"Harry, are you alright?"

"Yes. We got them all."

Remus sighed, "What was that spell chain you just did?"

Harry was busy wrapping the DE up and sending them off, "I apparate to mid-air about 5 metres above them, send a bludgeoner straight down, and before I fall too far I apparate back to the rooftops. It's doesn't always work."

"Damn! That's excellent!"

Harry took a breath, "Ok, that's done. Back to the flat?"

Remus nodded and they apparated back to their flat.

Remus turned to Harry, "That's a great trick."

"It works pretty well, unless they're paying attention or they have a sensor spell sensing my apparition."

Remus nodded slowly, "So what is your general strategy for dealing with DEs?"

"I use bludgeoners a lot, rather than, say, a piercing hex because they are larger and cover more area in case the DE tries to move. You have to be very accurate with a piercing hex, not to mention if you miss you may hit something behind the DE. Bludgeoners also dissipate after a short distance so they limit unintended damage. But you have to be close to use a bludgeoner."

"Why not use a petrificus totalis?"

"I don't want to leave them the time and ability to think and to try to escape the spell in some way. I want to incapacitate them as fast as possible." Harry sighed as he saw Remus' worried look, "Remus, I can see their Dark Mark and the red glow of their tainted magic. I have zero compassion for these people."

"But – as Dumbledore has said – they've made a mistake."

"Yes, they made a mistake. And they've decided to continue to try to make more mistakes by attacking Hermione. So I will stop them as fast as I can."

Remus nodded. "It's confusing. I'm always worried about going too far."

Harry took a long breath and turned away, "As we should be. But they've had their chance to walk away. I think, with my rules of engagement, it's well within the bounds of self-defence. "

Remus looked at Harry with concern and nodded, "Well – sleep."

Harry nodded and started moving.

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Harry sat down at the library table across from Hermione as she took notes for her research paper. He watched as she wrote notes completely focussed on her topic. He could see the wheels of her brilliance rolling though all the facts and figures to align, straighten, collate the minutiae.

He was startled out of his reverie by his wardstone-phone. He pulled it out under the edge of the table. It showed a magical approaching, but no hostile intent trigger. He got up mumbling about the loo and headed for the doors. He didn't even bother with his fade-out spells.

As Harry walked out of the front door he saw Bonderson walking toward him.

"Harry, good to see you again." He held out his hand.

Harry shook his hand, "Mr Bonderson."

"How are you doing these days?"

Harry blinked a few times as he thought back, "Actually, very good."

Bonderson smiled, "Yes? I'm told you've been rather busy lately. What happened?"

Harry smirked at him, "If you remember, last time we talked we had found out that Tom had made a bunch of horcruxes and we were tracking them down?"

Bonderson nodded, "Yes, I remember. How has that been going?"

"We got them all, including the one in me. Tom is now mortal again."

Bonderson gave a huge sigh, "Damn! You just saved our backside! We owe you for that. You and Remus?"

Harry shook his head, "Well - Remus with the help of Gringotts."

Bonderson sighed in realisation, "Ah. Who is your contact in Gringotts?"

"Ragnok."

Bonderson did a double-take, "Ragnok? You're kidding?"

Harry smiled, "They have been very helpful."

"Can you - I need to talk to them but haven't been able to find the right contact to initiate - proper discussions."

Harry nodded, "Well, I can try to talk to them next time I'm there. Though - I suspect that they know you're trying to establish contact with them."

They don't seem to miss much. I suspect they are holding you off for some reason."

Bonderson sighed tiredly, "Yes, I think you're right. I just don't know how to - improve the situation."

"I'll ask next time I'm there."

"Thank you. Also - I wanted to ask you - Sirius Black was your Godfather, right? Wasn't he the last Lord Black? Do you know who the new Lord Black is?"

"I don't know whether Sirius became Lord Black or not. I think - Remus said that Lord Black pulled the Tonks into hiding. And Remus is still in the Order as is Dora, so I think I can get a message to Remus to give it to Dora, and I imagine she can probably get it to Lord Black."

Bonderson reached in his pocket and handed him an envelope, "Here, please pass this on to him."

Harry stuffed it in his coat pocket, "Is it time sensitive?"

Bonderson shook his head, "Just trying to make him an offer. Or start some communications."

Harry thought that Bonderson was a lot better to deal with than Dumbledore, so he decided to ask and see what Bonderson would tell him, "So what do you think is the current status of the Wizarding World in Britain?"

Bonderson's eyebrows rose, "Well - not good. We don't think the Ministry is going to last much longer. We are trying to talk to as many Aurors as we can and convince them to work with us when the ministry falls. Some will stay with Tom, some will go with Dumbledore and the Order, and hopefully some will go with us. But that's quite delicate. We don't want to be seen as hastening the fall of the Ministry or trying to subvert the Aurors too early.

Or let Tom know we are even involved at all. So we're setting up our communications channels first, and being very discrete about it."

Harry was surprised he got such a good answer, "Do you have a plan for dealing with Tom?"

"We do. The difficulty is that we have to be very sure of our target and our success. It needs to be a surprise because if we try to take him out – and miss, then he will turn on the non-magical government immediately. They are not ready for that. So we need to wait and make sure we can end this once and for all."

Harry nodded, "And you never established communications with the Order?"

Bonderson shook his head, "No. Dumbledore would not respond. We have tried to establish some communications with some Order Members – or who we suspect are Order Members. You, Remus, and a few others. Just in case."

"Well – I'm a bit of a special case. I'm in the Order but not bound by the secrecy oaths, so I can tell you who I know is in the Order."

Bonderson's eyes grew, "*That* would be *very* helpful." He pulled a paper and pen out of his pocket and handed it to Harry, "Can you give me a list?"

"Sure." Harry started writing names and what he knew about them. Like the Weasley's living in Order HQ.

As Harry kept writing, Bonderson started talking, "We don't think the ICW will be effective in any way. Particularly not with Dumbledore still as the Supreme Mugwump. Of course, MI5 doesn't want the ICW involved either. Yes, the ICW could provide troops but the ICW would extract too much of a penalty from the British Wizarding world in compensation. And I know Tom doesn't want the ICW involved. Not until he's ready to attack them."

Harry stopped and thought, "Have you talked to Professor Snape?"



"No, should we?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, Professor Snape is a double agent in Tom's DEs. He's on this list." He pointed at the paper. "He's loyal to Professor Dumbledore, for some reason. But I don't know how completely. Or why. But he is definitely a prickly character so approach carefully."

Bonderson's eyebrows were bumping his hairline, "That would be damn useful." He huffed, "And that would make perfect sense. He was always such an arse in potions."

"It was even worse for me; he hated my guts because he hated my dad. I think he was in love with my mum."

Bonderson's eyebrows were floating again, "Well. That's interesting."

Harry handed him the paper, "These are all that I know about."

"Thank you very much, Harry. We will try to be very careful with these."

Harry nodded, "They're good people. They're just attached to Dumbledore so I won't work with them."

"Thank you, I need to get this list back to the office. I'll see you again soon."

Harry nodded as Bonderson turned to leave. He looked around the area. No one else was nearby, just a few students walking by the building. Hermione had been spending so much time in this library he decided to put up a magic-sensing wardstone on the roof of the building. He looked up and saw a nice stone parapet and thought one of those stones would do nicely. It only took him about 10 minutes.

Harry stood looking out at the morning, as people walked by below on the path. It was a bit grey, but the sun popped in and out occasionally. His wardstone-phone made a noise indicating someone magical entered the area. It indicated a direction and Harry looked. Harry smiled. Arthur Weasley was strolling along the path leading to the building. Harry did his

usual apparate-and-fade-in to pop unnoticed to the path to meet Mr Weasley.

"Harry. It's good to see you again." Arthur's smile was genuine and warm.

Harry saw Mr Weasley's magic as the usual blue-green glow, "Mr Weasley, I'm very glad to see you again."

"You look good. Very good. And Miss Granger is well, I hope?"

"Yes, very happy being here. And all the family?"

"All are well." A yellow tinge passed through Arthur's magic and his smile became a bit more serious, "Ginny misses you."

Harry's guilt reflex poked him in the stomach, "I'm sorry."

Arthur took a short nervous breath, "Well – I've been concerned about you and hadn't heard anything, so I thought I'd stop by and see how you are doing?"

Harry smiled sadly, "I'm doing good. The attacks are manageable, so far. Hermione is loving being here. It's been her dream to be here."

Arthur's face turned a bit more serious and another wave of yellow passed over his magic, "Do you think you could see your way back to the magical world?"

Harry frowned. That yellow wave of magic just before uncharacteristic questions from Mr Weasley made Harry angry. Because it had the ring of compulsion magic. "No. I do't think I will."

Arthur was sad, then brightened up, "Well – I'd invite you to the Burrow but – it burned down in an attack a while ago. We are all at Order HQ now. But I'm sure everyone would love to see you again."

Harry smiled again, "That would be nice."

"We have quite the crowd there, now." Another wave of yellow and a change of expression, "We could use your perspective and skills."

Harry's stomach sunk watching Arthur – simple, straightforward, genuine, honest Arthur being manipulated. "Mr Weasley, I've spelled my glasses to show me the magic that leaks off everything that magic has touched."

Arthur's expression focussed more seriously on Harry.

"I can see most people's magic as a blue-green glow around them. And as we've been talking, three times a yellow haze has washed over your magic as you've made specific statements. The yellow haze of compulsion magic."

Arthur's face blanched and slowly turned shocked.

"I don't hold that against you, by any means. I still value you and your family, greatly. I'm just sad to see you manipulated so."

Arthur's faced settled into a deep shock that he was trying to hide, "I'm very sorry, Harry. I would – never do that to you. I sincerely apologise. I – my House owes you a debt – an honour debt."

"Why? You are just as much a victim as I am. Why should your House be in debt because of something dishonourable someone else has done?"

Arthur struggled, "Because – it's –"

Harry finished for him, "Not your fault."

Arthur nodded slowly in acceptance, "Yes. I think – I need to go before I say anything else – dishonouring. You are very gracious, Harry."

Harry smiled and leaned forward to give Arthur a hug, "Say hello to everyone for me."

Arthur left with a lot of very complex emotions washing across his face.

Harry could not escape the contrast between his meeting with Bonderson, and with Arthur. Bonderson made him feel like an equal. A partner. Arthur – indirectly – made him feel like a tool, to be used and discarded.

Once Arthur was gone Harry opened the letter to Lord Black.

*Lord Black:*

*We have a proposition for you. We would like to work with you to fix the disaster that the Wizarding World in Britain has become. It needs to be healthy enough to effectively resist the sickness of evil wizards. Our group has significant resources to put behind this task. Even more than you do. But we need a method to effectively reach the community. You can help us with that. Please send a message back the way this one came to begin that dialogue.*

*You can call me Emmy Fife*

Harry chuckled at the name; saying it too fast sounded like MI5. This would take some thinking. And maybe an opportunity? Harry turned to find Hermione and begin his advocacy campaign for the sanctity of lunch.

**Wednesday, 6 November, 1996**

Hermione was explaining something about her class she had this morning but Harry was not able to follow it. He was – distracted. Hermione's eyes were alight with fascination and discovery as she told him the story of what she was learning. Harry was absolutely captivated by her beauty. The way her eyes flashed, her hands filled the spaces between her words, and joy exuded from her very skin. He was completely lost – except for some automatic reaction that caused him to nod and mumble agreement at the right times in the ebb and flow of the – conversation.

But also, Harry was exhausted. The attacks had been speeding up, with more DEs, and less sleep. A background level of tension that never seemed to go away.

Hermione said something that drew him back to her, "Yes?"

"Are you ready?"

"Always. What are we doing?"

Hermione coughed to hide a chuckle, "If you're done with lunch, we need to go to my next class."

"Oh – yes. I'm ready." He stood up and collected his backpack.

She picked up her backpack and started out of the sandwich shop on the long trek to her next class, "Harry, my roommates are gathering for dinner tonight and Rene is cooking. Did you want to help? She might be able to show you some French cooking."

Harry lit up, "Oh, definitely! I'll be there to help. That will be exciting. Do you know when she is starting?"

"No, but I think she has a class at this time too."

Harry nodded, "We'll see when we get there."

His wardstone-phone made a noise. A hostile intent noise. Harry tensed, and pulled it out. It showed three magicals catching up from behind, "No, I don't want to take that call. But I do need a loo. Oh – but you still have class now."

Hermione nodded, "That's fine. I do know the way by now. You can meet me after class."

Harry was barely holding on. Another attack in broad daylight! He forced a big smile, "Ok. I'll meet you there."

She nodded and kept walking.

Harry gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. He turned and started his fade-out spells, then apparated to the roof. His wardstone-phone showed

three DEs generally following Hermione, the closest being about a block behind her and gaining fast. That did not leave him enough time to go after the last one. His normal 'Devil take the hind-most' tactic. He would have to catch the first one before they got close. He looked in the indicated direction and saw the grey fog of a simple disillusionment spell, and the red of a DE.

By this time the DE was almost below him. He decided to strike fast, with his pop-bludgeon-pop. He planned his locations – and jumped. At the end there was no red, and no grey disillusionment spell. He quickly popped back, disillusioned the DE, wrapped him up, and sent him off. One down, two more to go. He popped back to the rooftop.

His wardstone-phone indicated the next two were about even with each other, but on opposite sides of the street and gaining on Hermione. he looked and she was still walking, unaware.

He tried his pop-bludgeon-pop trick – and the DE was gone. He looked around and his target had apparated about 20 metres back. But the other DE was closer to Hermione. He apparated right behind the one closer to Hermione and started a stream of bludgeoners. The DE started a stream back – and was keeping up. So Harry started circling the DE. The DE didn't notice that Harry's spells were coming from a new direction – and the bludgeoners hit him hard.

The last DE apparated next to Harry and fired a spell. Harry barely got a shield up fast enough. He apparated up to the roof and looked back down.

The DE had apparated toward Hermione!

Harry apparated down the street near the DE and started running. He silenced himself. The DE must have thought he got away because he was concentrating on catching up to Hermione. It wasn't until Harry was three metres behind the DE that the DE started to turn and Harry fired his bludgeoner. The DE went down hard. Harry disillusioned the DE again, just as Hermione glanced back – and turned back to keep walking.

Harry wrapped up the DE and sent them off. Then he apparated back to the other lump of DE and wrapped them up and sent them off. Just to be sure he checked his wardstone-phone again and saw no threats. He sighed and took a moment to breathe. That was not fun. They had him running.

At this point, Harry pulled out his shrunken broom and flew after Hermione to follow her on his broom.

### **Thursday, 7 November, 1996**

Harry decided to let Lord Black out to play and kick up some dust – or whatever might be mixed in that dust.

*My Dear Emmy Fife,*

*I understand your frustrations. We might even agree. But to know this, the details must be fully explored. Let us start with goals. You have stated a few: to heal magical Britain, and to apply resources to accomplish this. But unless your pockets are infinite, they will not likely to succeed as stated. My goals are somewhat simpler: keep these idiots from impacting me and mine! This farce has been going on for nearly a millennium. I see no existing factor that would change that in any meaningful way. Throwing good resources after bad will not make any impact without key changes.*

*1) Can wizarding society be opened up while maintaining the Statute of Secrecy? It is counter-intuitive. Particularly when you have people like me, who are interested in being left alone.*

*2) Can wizarding government be inextricably tied to non-magical government? And kept synchronised? They must acknowledge their interdependence.*

*3) Can you keep the ICW out of our hair? Unless you plan on trying to spoon-feed the ICW as well?*

*Personally, I am of the opinion that – currently – humans are not mature enough for the responsibility of magic. Unless you were to completely*

*restructure magical society starting with mandatory education of strict standards that emphasise community, responsibility, and duty.*

*Your biggest sceptic,*

*Lord Black*

Harry sent the message off with Hedwig to relay to Mr Bonderson via Gringotts.

**Saturday, 9 November, 1996**

Harry woke up to the sound of the gong, "Damn. Not another one." He struggled to get up and started getting his stuff together.

Remus poked his head in the door, "The hostile intent ward?" He was looking rather blurry-eyed.

"Yes. My wardstone-phone says only one, but if you could sit on Hermione's roof and be defence, I'd appreciate it."

Remus nodded and moved back to finish getting dressed.

It was almost 03:00.

Harry grabbed his coat and apparated to a rooftop near the DE. Down in the street was one magical signature. It was a mix of red and blue-green. This magical was standing in the street, just waiting. After a few moments of no movement, Harry decided to get a bit closer; he apparated to the street about 10 metres away from the Magical.

"Dawlish! What the bloody hell do you want!" Harry was seeing red, metaphorically. As well as seeing a Dark Mark on his arm, and red running through his magic.

Dawlish started to smile rather evilly, "You."



Harry popped his wand out of its holster and ran a bunch of silencing spells, "So – you failed, then?"

Dawlish turned angry, almost raging, "I will redeem myself. Or should I say – you will redeem me."

"Must have been bad if Tom sent you to me."

Dawlish started circling, "Who?"

"Tom Marvolo Riddle. The half-blood bastard you are enslaved to."

Dawlish started to huff and puff, "I will tell him what you've said."

Harry started circling too, "I've said it all before to his face. I take it you don't have the guts to?"

Dawlish sent a set of spells that Harry dodged, "Ha! Guts? I'm no fool."

"Sure you are. You're Tom's fool! That's what that Dark Mark signifies. Didn't he tell you?"

Another set of spells came toward Harry. And he dodged again. But he was moving closer.

"Tut tut, Dawlish. You should always read the fine print when you sell your soul into slavery."

Dawlish growled in rage and started slinging spells of all kinds.

Harry blocked some, dodged, and then started a stream of bludgeoners and started moving closer.

Dawlish's spells were being disrupted – mostly – by the bludgeoners. A few Harry had to dodge.

As they got closer the spells got more intense until they were standing less than five metres apart.

Then a few spells came down from above and caused Dawlish to flinch and a few of Harry's bludgeoners hit hard. Dawlish flew back eight meters and landed like a rag-doll – with no glow of magic.

Remus apparated to the street, "Harry, what the hell were you doing?"

Harry was puffing hard and staggering slightly, "Something – I've – never – done before. Fight a – standup – duel."

Remus reached out and held Harry's arm to stabilise him, "What were you doing to stop all his spells? It didn't look like a normal shield."

"Bludgeoners – disrupted all – his spells. Then the first – mistake he makes – will kill him."

Remus laughed, "I didn't know bludgeoners would do that."

Harry leaned down with his hands on his knees, "I think the – air pressure wave – in the bludgeoner – disrupts the spells. Acts like a shield. The problem is that – once you start with that, you can't stop or you die. – Neither of you can."

Remus shook his head, "Well – I'd better get him wrapped up and sent off."

"Wait –" Harry moved to Dawlish, conjured a note and stuck it in the ropes.

Remus just watched, "What's that?"

Harry smiled angrily, "Just a note that says 'I told ya so!'."

"I don't understand."

"Dawlish was the piece of shite that convicted Hermione and here he's got a Dark Mark."

Remus leaned down to look, "Damn! The bastard!"

Harry sent Dawlish off to Order HQ. "Ok, I'm back to bed."

**Monday, 11 November, 1996**

Hermione was studying at her dining table in her flat. Harry was at the counter quietly making lunch. He smiled to himself, if he can be quiet enough he can get it all done and set it next to her on the table as a surprise. He grinned just thinking about it. He tried to hold back a chuckle – he was playing such a game – but it was just too fun to surprise her. Just a bit more ...

He set the plate of sandwiches down next to Hermione.

She didn't notice.

He set a glass of water and a napkin next to her and sat down across from her with his own glass. He sat there looking at her. He was so lost – so hooked. He just stared at her. She was altogether too beautiful. He couldn't look away, even if he had a reason to. He just smiled.

She noticed and looked up, "Harry?"

"Yes?"

She noticed the plate of sandwiches and her eyes grew, then a smile, "Harry! You made lunch."

Harry's smile matched, "Yes."

She picked up a sandwich and was about to say something when Harry's wardstone-phone made a noise.

Harry held up a hand, "Oops, phone call." He got up and moved toward the door. It was indicating a magical had wandered into the area, but no hostile intent trigger. He ran his fade-out spells as he walked down the stairs, apparated to the roof, and looked at his wardstone-phone. It indicated someone walking down the next street over. He apparated to the roof of the next building and saw Professor Dumbledore walking toward him. He groaned. And sighed. But he didn't see any way around it.

He apparated to the street and started his fade-in spells as he walked toward Albus.

"Harry. I'm so glad I found ..." Dumbledore's face dropped as he fixated on Harry's scar with wide eyes.

Harry stared at Albus and said simply, "Yes Albus? Something wrong?" His expression turned angry, "Notice something different, do you?"

Albus started looking like a fish.

Harry pointed at his scar and spoke with a cold rage, "Were you *ever* going to mention this to me?"

"Harry - how -"

Harry pointed again at his scar, "This was a betrayal, Albus. *Another* betrayal. You knew about this since my parents deaths. And you never said anything."

Albus still looked like a fish - with words, "I was - there was - Harry, how did that -"

Harry laughed darkly, "Oh, you want me to tell you? I should tell you but you won't tell me? No, I don't think so."

"Harry I need to know."

"No, you don't! It's been taken care of. Stay away from me!"

"But how?"

"Quite easily. Go away!"

"I must know."

"And I should have known, too! You should have told me!"

"Harry - I was trying to ..."

"What, Albus? You were trying to what? To 'protect' me again? To give me a childhood? Before what? Before I had to die?" That little joke popped out before he thought about it.

Albus' face blanched.

So did Harry's. The realisation that Harry's joke was not a joke enraged him. He popped his wand into his hand. His voice came out through gritted teeth, "Albus, go away before I kill you."

Albus swallowed hard and watched Harry's wand move toward him, "Harry - can we talk about this?"

"Not! Now! Go! Away!" Harry's wand started to glow.

Albus caught the clue and walked away.

It took Harry over an hour of walking around to calm down enough that he could go back to Hermione.

**Tuesday, 12 November, 1996**

"Remus?" Harry stood up from finishing his 50 pushups, still breathing hard.

"What's up, pup?" Remus was catching up on the day's Daily Prophet, sitting at a small table in his cottage's basement training room.

Harry hesitated, "Well - yesterday, after Hermione's 2pm class -" He looked confused, "We were going to drop by the stationery store on the way back to her flat - to get some pens and more paper, when -" Harry's brain ran into more confusion.

Remus started paying attention, "Yes?"

"We were playing around and Hermione started racing me toward the car, and – she got there first."

Remus raised his eyebrows, "That is earth-shattering." Dry desert winds blew his worlds toward Harry.

Harry huffed at Remus, "Yes, except the car was locked – and she opened it." Harry wandered off into the distance again.

Remus' eyebrows rose further, "Sounds – amazing?"

Harry sighed, "I had to unlock my door. She didn't. I don't know how she did it."

Remus got a bit more serious, "And you suspect what?"

Harry shrugged, "Accidental magic? I've done it before, myself. Just at the beginning of summer."

Remus' eyebrows crashed into his hairline. "That – is not supposed to happen."

Harry focussed back on Remus, "No. But – it may not be unique. I haven't been watching that closely – but it may have happened before. I'll have to keep a better eye out for it."

"You do that. If she's having accidental magic – this could be a big problem."

Harry looked worried and shook his head in disbelief, "Yes. I'll let you know if I see anything again." He started up the stairs for his shower – then stopped and turned back to Remus, "I ran into Albus yesterday."

Remus' eyebrows came up, "Yes?"

"He admitted to me that he knew about the soul shard in my scar since the day of my parent's death. He seems to have been under the impression that I had to die because of it."

Remus jumped to standing, his eyes starting to fill with yellow, his fists were shaking.

"He wanted to know how it was dealt with. I refused to tell him. To be quite honest? – I almost killed him. I never want to see him again." Harry turned and slowly made his way upstairs.

Remus was left shaking.

## **Remus Lupin**

### **Wednesday, 13 December, 1996**

Remus sat down in his flat and turned on the WWN. He needed to hear if the rumour he just heard was true.

*"– are waiting for our reporter, Rita Skeeter, to find Harry Potter. He has been missing for several months and we finally have a clue to lead us to him. Again, this is Dalby Gosling, of the WWN, waiting to hear from our reporter, Rita Skeeter. Rita, are you there?"*

*"Dalby, this is Rita. Can you hear me?"*

*"Yes, Rita, we can hear you. Have you found Harry Potter?"*

*"Yes. I'm about to apparate to his location. I can see him hiding in a muggle area."*

*"Ladies and Gentlemen, we are about to hear directly from Harry Potter, in his own words, why he has disappeared from the Wizarding World. Go ahead, Rita."*

*"Right. Wish me luck."* The pop of an apparition sounded over the WWN.

Harry heard a pop and his wardstone-phone apparition alarm. He drew his wand and turned to face his attacker. When he saw who it was he put up a silencing and a notice-me-not charm over the area.

"Well. Hello, Harry Potter."

"Rita Skeeter. What the bloody hell do you want?" Harry could see a floating quill and parchment following her, scratching away taking down their conversation. He flicked his wand and the parchment and quill burst into a flash of flame.

She glared at him, her voice angry, "I've come for an interview. It only took me a week to find you."

"Really? You're that bad at searching? I'm not hiding, Rita."

She sauntered closer, "You have dropped out of the wizarding world."

"Yes. I didn't realise that constituted 'hiding'. I have no interest in talking to you, Rita. Go away."

"Why not? I'm the best chance you have of telling your story!"

Harry laughed, "You forget that I already know how you lie, manipulate, and abuse your victims, Rita. I've been your victim too many times already."

"I do not! I am an honest broker of information!"

"Ha! You're a cheat! An unregistered animagus who sneaks up on her victims! Abusive, vindictive, a liar, a power-hungry small-minded vicious *bitch!*"

"You would attack me? That's rich. You are running away! Hiding in the muggle world! You have abandoned us!"

"I'm not hiding, Rita. The wizarding world in Britain is not my responsibility."

"What? You're the Boy-who-lived!"

"That doesn't mean I carry any responsibility for anything!"



"Won't The-Boy-Who-Lived protect Wizarding Britain? After all we've given you?"

"Ha! All I've gotten from the wizarding world is pain! Sorry, Rita, I have other people to protect."

"Who could be more important than all of Wizarding Britain?"

"I'm protecting the most brilliant witch that the wizarding world unjustly discarded; Hermione Granger."

"Why? She was convicted of murder and Banished. She's just a muggle now."

"I killed that Death Eater, Aldwin Ransom! In self defence! She had nothing to do with it."

She screeched, "That was justice!"

"That was a lie! Minister Fudge, Director Scrimgeour, Auror Dawlish, and the Wizengamot threw away justice and Banished her because of lies. Did you know I found Dawlish with a Dark Mark last week?"

She choked, "You're lying!"

"No one would listen to me, or her. So, I won't listen to you."

Panic started to seep into her voice, "Harry! You can't abandon us!"

"Why not? You abandoned Hermione, and now me. There is no justice in wizarding Britain."

"How can you say that?"

Harry huffed, "Lots of examples."

"Like what?"

"Did you know my Godfather, Sirius Black, was innocent?"

"WHAT? He was convicted!"

Now Harry was getting heated, "No, he wasn't! He never had a trial! Look it up! Peter Petigrew was still alive two months ago!"

"He was killed years ago by Sirius Black!"

"No, I killed him in October when he attacked me! He was a Death Eater and *he* betrayed my parents to Voldemort in 1981, not Sirius!"

Rita was starting to lose her composure, "What? That can't be true!"

"Sirius made Petigrew the Secret-Keeper in '81. Petigrew admitted it to me! I told that son-of-a-bitch Fudge all about it a year ago and he refused to listen to anything I said. Or even investigate!"

"But - Minister Fudge -"

"All those Death Eaters who claimed they were Imperioused? Like Malfoy? They lied! You can only get the Dark Mark if you willingly participate in the ritual. And the ritual must include them murdering an innocent! Fudge was bribed and let them all get away with it!"

She sounded very desperate, "But the Wizengamot must have been deceived!"

"Half of the Wizengamot *are* Death Eaters! The wizarding world in Britain is broken! Corrupt! Evil! I will have nothing to do with it!"

She started to sob, "But He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will swallow us all!"

"Not my problem. Voldemort is the Wizengamot's responsibility. That's the function of governments, to protect their people. You and the people of wizarding Britain chose that government, so you get the government you deserve. Not my problem."

"Harry!" She started to break down and sob.

"Go away, Rita. I have more important things to deal with."

She screamed and raised her wand to attack him.

"*Expelliarmus, incarcerous.*" Harry's spells took away her wand and wrapped her up in ropes.

She screamed, "Harry, let me go!"

Harry tucked her wand into the ropes, then touched the ropes, "*Portus.* Here, Rita, you can tell Dumbledore all about it. I'm not interested. *Activate!*" Her scream cut off as the portkey took her away.

*"- Rita? Rita? - Ladies and Gentlemen, we seem to have lost contact with Rita Skeeter. - Um - I must say that - if even half the things Harry Potter said are true - then the wizarding world in Britain is in deep trouble. The accusations -"*

The sound cut off as Remus shut off the WWN and ran out the door to find Harry.

## **Remus Lupin**

**Thursday, 14 November, 1996**

Remus had just finished his breakfast, and Harry was already out for Hermione's early class, when the Order Alert came through. His stomach turned into a rock. He turned on the WWN.

*"- do not yet have any official statements but we have had contacts with a few Aurors who said that early this morning a large force of Death Eaters attacked the Ministry building. Evidently the fighting was fierce with a number of deaths. But without definitive names or numbers we can not say much. Wait - one of my assistants is handing me a note - it seems - we are getting unconfirmed reports that Minister Fudge is dead. These reports are*

*from reliable sources but none were first-hand accounts. If true, that would make Rufus Scrimgeour acting Minister until confirmed by the Wizengamot."*

Remus shivered as he realised this was the moment he was dreading. The fall of the Ministry of Magic. He started texting Harry what he was hearing.

*"We can report that the Floo System is down and the protective wards around the Ministry are now down. While none of these observations are conclusive they paint a very bad picture -"*

## **Harry Potter**

Harry and Hermione were walking back to the shuttle bus stop after Hermione finished her class. Hermione was waxing poetic about the wild twists and turns of history. Harry was fascinated at the story, and the telling – or the teller. Both, honestly.

His phone buzzed with a text message. He stopped dead and paled looking at his phone. It was happening. Now. After all this time the Ministry was falling to Tom. And Fudge was dead. He took a long tense breath.

"Harry? What's wrong?" Hermione put her hand on his arm.

Harry looked blankly at her, trying to imagine a story, "Ah – my parents got in a car accident."

Hermione gasped.

"They're fine, but – the car is – done." Harry took another long breath and wiped his face with his hand.

Hermione gave him a long hug, "I'm sorry."

After a moment Harry squeezed her, "We should go. I may need to – do things at the bank."

"Right." Hermione looked seriously at him, "Anything I can do to help?"

Harry shook his head with a tense smile, "Remus is dealing with most of it, so far." They started for the shuttle bus so he could start replying to the storm of texts coming from Remus.

## **Remus Lupin**

*"- and let me recap what we know so far. The Ministry has been attacked early this morning by Death Eaters. While not confirmed to our journalistic standards, it is a rather inescapable conclusion. We have unconfirmed reports that Minister Fudge and Director Scrimgeour are dead. We do have confirmed reports from our reporters in Hogsmeade that Hogwarts is now under siege with a large force of Death Eaters surrounding the school. Hogwarts wards are now fully active, something we have not seen for twenty years. We, at the WWN, think this would be unlikely if the status of the Ministry was still in question. And we - wait - I'm looking out my window - I can see spellfire and smoke at the Daily Prophet offices, which are about five shops down from the WWN offices in Diagon Alley. - Ladies and gentlemen, I see Death Eaters moving down Diagon Alley toward the WWN office. - It does not - I think we - The WWN is going off the air." The sounds of spellfire could be heard in the background. "This is Dalby Gosling singing off - and abandoning ship." All sounds were cut off.*

Remus could barely stand still as tingles ran up his spine. They were now living in an occupied country. What the Nazi's and Grindelwald could not manage, Voldemort had completed. He started texting Harry again. They needed to start thinking about getting the Grangers out of Britain. And Harry.

## **Harry Potter**

After they made it back to Hermione's flat, Harry texted Remus, "On my way 2 u." He turned to Hermione, "I need to go help Remus. He's - a bit tense right now."

Hermione hugged him, "Yes. Come back when you can? And call me if you need anything."

Harry smiled, "Definitely." He turned and made it home in 30 seconds.  
"Remus. What's happening?"

Remus sat down in his chair with a thump, "It's all gone."

"What's all gone?"

"The Ministry. Voldemort is now in charge. The Daily Prophet has gone dark, the WWN has gone silent. Hogwarts is under siege with it's wards fully up. Most of the Aurors are in hiding."

"Wow." Harry sat down.

"I haven't talked to anyone in the Order, but I did get an alert from them."

Harry looked untrusting, "Would it be worth the effort to go see what they know?"

"Yes, it would. I'll go to Order HQ this evening and see what I can find out. Shack or Dora will likely know a lot. Moody too."

Harry nodded slowly, "I can't imagine anyone else who would know more than them."

Remus shook his head and then paused for a moment, "Harry, we need to get the Grangers out of here. – And you! Voldemort will be after you very soon. He's got nothing to distract him from this."

Harry clenched his teeth and looked at his hands, "I'm not sure. I think Tom will have his hands full for a while."

"What makes you think that?"

"I think he will be busy with Hogwarts and in building a new Ministry."

"I don't think you want to wait until he gets his act together before you try to sneak out of Britain. That will be too late."

Harry sighed. Remus had a point. "How were you thinking of doing this?"

Remus sighed as he thought, "The easiest is to go muggle in some way. But the longer we wait the more wizards he will have watching those paths."

"What magic routes were you thinking of?"

He paused, "That's now one of the more complex issues. When the Ministry fell, all the International Customs and Border Protection wards were still intact. If they had thought ahead they should have destroyed all those. But - now Voldemort controls them all. He will be able to control everyone who wants in or out of Britain through magical means."

Harry winced, "Ok, what were you thinking for non-magical?"

"The Channel Tunnel, a ferry to France or Ireland, or we can fly I suppose."

"How about conjuring a hot-air balloon?"

Remus looked blank.

"Or could we use a feather-light charm on a car and drive it to France? No magic involved in moving there, just in allowing the car to drive on the water to get there?"

Remus still looked blank, "I have no idea."

"Is it any magic at all that crosses the wards? Or only the magic that propels you across the wards?" He sighed, "Hermione would know."

Remus frowned, "It can't be any magic at all, or you'd have your wand confiscated as you crossed on a ferry. I know that doesn't happen."

Harry smiled deviously, "So a confundus charm on the Grangers and a feather-light charm on the car and off we go to France?"

Remus looked dubious, "Well - except if there's a high wind on the channel. That could blow your car all the way to Greenland like some metal

tumbleweed."

Now Harry looked pained, "Yea, not so good."

Remus scrunched his eyebrows, "If I remember right - I think the Ministry gets notified whenever anything magical passes the wards, it's only when magic propels you across the wards that your transport gets redirected to a customs office."

"So that means we can send Hermione's parents to France via muggle means with no problem, but Hermione and I can't even go via muggle means without them knowing."

"Well - I think they get notified - but is anyone paying attention?"

Harry tilted his head, "Do the wards extend down into the ocean? Or is there a limit on how high the wards go? I can't imagine them being spherical. That would take an unbelievable amount of magic to cover the entire island in one ward."

Remus had a thoughtful look, "I think the wards actually redirect the magic of your transport spell and turn it into an apparition to the Customs office. So they turn your own magic against you. That reduces their power needs. But I think the wards are like a segmented ward-fence. A series of distinct wards that ring the island. So we might be able to find a gap between segments. And that would suggest that you might be able to go over the top of them by flying muggle, but brooms can only go so high."

Harry jumped in, "How high? I've never been very high."

"The strength of your magic, which limits how high you can fly, is dependent upon your ability to process oxygen. So your magic starts to weaken as you go up in altitude. Your magic starts to suffer at 2k metres. By 3k your magic is down by half, by 4k metres it's almost gone."

Harry's eyebrows rose as he lodged that set of facts into his brain.



Remus went on in lecture mode, "That's why an inverse bubblehead charm is so effective. It pulls the oxygen out of the air, which pulls it out of your lungs and even out of your bloodstream. Five seconds and someone's magic is almost down to nothing. And the spell is invisible so the victim may not even notice it's happening."

"Where did you hear about that?"

Remus chuckled, "Actually, in your third year. Hermione came to me with that same question of how high, and in the process of finding an answer we both figured that out."

Harry's smile would have lit London, "That is awesome." After a few moments of sublime admiration Harry's brain came back to the flat, "I should go back and reassure Hermione that things are OK."

Remus nodded, "Yes. I'll go make an information run to Order HQ. Be back before it gets too late."

"Thanks, Remus." Harry got up and started back to see Hermione. He knocked on her door.

"Harry! How are your parents?" She stood aside for him to enter.

Harry plopped down on the couch and Hermione sat next to him, "They're shaken, but ok. Remus is more wound up than they are."

Hermione chuckled, "Isn't that the way it works?"

"Yes. He said they will take the rest of the day off and be back at it tomorrow. They will be fine, I just need to figure out how to calm Remus down."

"How are you?"

He took a long slow breath in and out, "I'll be fine. Just – should get some sleep." He shook his head in tiredness.

She reached over for a hug, "You've been looking rather tired lately, Harry. I'm worried about you."

Harry revelled in the hug, "Oh, I'm sorry." He chuckled, "Don't worry about me, I just sort of mumble along."

She looked suddenly serious, "I always worry about you."

Harry started feeling a bit nervous – he shrugged to hide it, "I don't mean to be worry-able."

She looked askance at him, "– Worry-able?"

He smiled, "Is it not apropos?"

Now she had a frowning smirk, "Is that even a word?"

He smiled, "Sure. Sounds, syllables, meaning, it's all there. What more do you need?"

She looked aghast, "Correctness?"

He threw up his hands in playful mock frustration, "Ah! Correctness is over-rated. It functions, that's what matters." His distraction was working. She was beginning to smile.

She huffed at him in her own playfulness, "Except if we can't agree on the function! Then it doesn't. Maybe you need to get some rest?"

She caught him stifling a yawn, "Yes. That would be nice."

She stood up, "Right! I don't have class until eleven tomorrow."

He sighed and stood up again, "Ok. I'd better go check on Remus again. Make sure he hasn't worn a path in the carpets."

She chuckled, "I'll see you tomorrow, Harry."

He leaned in for another hug, "Absolutely."

On his way back, Harry got a text that Remus got back to the flat. Harry bust open the door, "Remus! What's happening?"

Remus was sitting in his chair, "It's not good. A third of the Aurors are dead, 10 of them went with Voldemort, and the rest all joined the Order. Dora, Shack, and Moody all are lightly injured but will be fine. Order HQ is still secure - everyone is huddled in HQ - but no one knows what to do or where to go. Dumbledore hasn't been seen at HQ yet but he was at the Ministry earlier. Everyone thinks he's probably at Hogwarts now. Voldemort has picked a stooge to head the Ministry, a guy named Pius Thickenesse. The Floo system is still down, the Knight Bus is not running, Diagon Alley is still a burnt mess, Hogsmeade is empty. The ICW hasn't even woken up yet. The Wizengamot doesn't even exist any more." He shook his head in complete dejection, "The only one taking any action is Voldemort."

Harry sighed his defeat, "Damn."

### **Friday, 15 November, 1996**

"What!?" Harry sat up in bed as the sound of the hostile intent alarm faded. His clock said 3AM. "Ah!" He wiped his face with his hands and he breathed some intelligence back into his brain. He got up and finished getting dressed.

Remus poked his head in the door, "That's Hermione's hostile intent ward?"

"Yes. I couldn't tell if it was one DE or a bunch."

"Well - let's go find out." He turned back to his room to get dressed.

Harry apparated to Hermione's roof and pulled out his wardstone-phone. It showed him four DEs in a clump moving down the street a block and a half away.

Remus popped in next to him, "What's the score?"

Harry pointed down the street, "Four DEs in a clump. Block and a half. If they stay in a clump, this will be difficult. We need to separate them, pull them apart."

"Come at them from different directions?"

Harry nodded, "Pick them off. I'll take this side, you take the other?"

Remus nodded and apparated away.

Harry apparated to a rooftop closer to the DEs. Harry could see the red of four DEs walking closely together. He planned out his pop-bludgeon-pop locations and jumped. He used a wide bludgeoner, which wouldn't have much power but would sure give them all a headache. And unnerve the hell out of them. When he landed at his destination he heard cries and running. They broke like billiard balls running in all directions. Harry picked the nearest and apparated down to them. A few bludgeoners and they were down. He popped back up and looked for the next. He popped down and had to duck a spell. He completely focussed on this DE and started popping around. Every time he popped the DE would turn at the sound and fire something. Harry added a silencing charm and popped directly behind them. A bludgeoner and they were done. He popped to the rooftop again.

Remus was fighting a DE half a block down. Harry apparated down to the street across from Remus. Harry thought he would try something new and hit the DE with a *patrificus totalus* from behind. The DE was frozen in place standing like a statue. Harry and Remus walked slowly up the the DE, who was looking more panicked with each step.

Harry asked Remus, "Did you get the other one?"

Remus nodded to Harry, then looked to the DE and drawled unconcerned, "Well. Runcorn. What a surprise. You've always been such a waste of time."

Remus paused thinking, "Should I bother to ask you any questions? Or should I just set you on fire now?"

Runcorn's eyes jumped back to panic.

Remus got into his face, looked him in the eye, and let his wolf peek out, his eyes turning a bit yellow, "Or maybe I'll just practice – ripping."

Runcorn started breathing hard and straining ineffectively.

Harry moved around into Runcorn's sight.

Runcorn's eyes grew. With a touch of greed.

Harry asked mildly, quietly, "How many people have you killed?"

Runcorn's eyes went back to fearful. His face paled.

Harry's voice took on some anger, "How many of them were children?"

Runcorn's eyes now looked back in his memory.

Harry got close and whispered, "Do you think you deserve anything but a slow painful death?"

Runcorn's eyes took on a Dementor cast. Sweat popped out on his forehead.

Harry pulled Runcorn's wand from his hand, snapped it, wrapped him up in ropes, pointedly stuck the wand bits in the ropes and said, "*Portus. Activate.*"

Remus turned to Harry, "Where did you send him?"

"Just Order HQ, but I thought I'd add some spice to his time there. Let's clean this mess up and get back to sleep."

**Saturday, 16 November, 1996**

Harry stumbled into the kitchen – and groaned so loudly it was a borderline yell.

"Harry, what's the matter?" Remus came in.

"Another owl with a scowl." He huffed a breath and moved to the window. The Gringotts owl threw the letter at him.

*Lord Black,*

*I am shocked. I had no idea you would be so progressive in your views. We think the problems of Wizarding Britain are manageable, because we must. It's either that or it will die. We choose to work to fix things.*

*We think the ICW can be placated, managed, and kept at arms length. Particularly if we are successful at our reforms of Wizarding Britain because Wizarding Britain will become undeniably successful.*

*As for the warping effect of the Statute of Secrecy, we think it can be managed through education. Yes, the education will take time, so there is no time to waste.*

*The area where we think there will be difficulties is with old families – like yours. We want to ask you to assume a leadership role and help move the old families into a new world. Just as you suggested, to foster responsibility, duty, and service organisations.*

*We want to build a new wizarding society, organised around something larger than families. Not replacing them, building on top of them. We hope you can help us create a Renaissance in the Wizarding World, to move forward into new areas, to borrow ideas from those parts of the non-magical world that will be able to help grow the magical world.*

*Sincerely,*

*Emmy Fife.*

Harry sighed deeply and let it out slowly. He wiped his face and started writing his response on the back of Bonderson's letter.

*My Dearest Emmy,*

*Sounds wonderful. Sounds like all too much of the wizarding world – too much hand-waving and not enough details.*

*Details, Emmy. I need details. How, in what order, and don't forget to include the problems. Because there are a lot of them. About 50 thousand problems in Britain alone.*

*Are they worth the excruciating difficulty? I'm still struggling with that. I dare to hope – but don't expect much. I've seen too much, for too long.*

*Please – prove me wrong – with details.*

*Lord Black*

**Monday, 18 November, 1996**

Harry was sitting in Hermione's flat reading – or watching her read – and thinking deeply about how to pull the Grangers out of Britain. He dreaded the thought of tearing their lives apart so completely – again. It just seemed so – bad. They, and Hermione in particular, had finally achieved one of her life-long dreams; going to Uni – and Cambridge, no less. It felt so horrible to even contemplate destroying all that. Because it would be permanent – again. He didn't think he should –

Harry's wardstone-phone made a noise indicating a magical was entering the area. But no hostile intent warning. He got up and left the flat, while Hermione was still reading, he started his fade-out spells as he walked down the stairs and apparated to the rooftop to survey the area. His wardstone-phone indicated someone on the next street over. Harry apparated to the roof of the next building.

There was Dumbledore walking down the street toward Hermione's flat. At least he was wearing something half-way presentable with no concealment spells. Harry, still concealed, apparated down to the street, and started fading the disillusionment and notice-me-not as he walked toward Dumbledore. Harry put up a silencing charm around them.

Dumbledore stopped, he looked very stressed, "Harry, we need you."

Harry's anger grew, "Am I your crutch?"

"Harry, innocents are dying."

"Don't put that on me! Tom is killing them, not me. And *you* are failing to stop them!"

"But you are the only one who can stop him."

Harry laughed rather patronisingly, "Oh, Albus. Has the very idea of magic skewed your worldview so much that no one has any agency any more? That only 'Magic' makes decisions and we are all pawns to be pushed around?" Albus started to say something but Harry interrupted, "You do realise that I don't trust you at all?"

Albus stopped and looked at him a bit bewildered.

"You have lied to me my whole life!"

Albus couldn't seem to break away from his talking points, "Harry, no one can stand up to Tom! He is too powerful."

Harry huffed and relented for the moment, "No individual can stand up to an A-bomb either. But a society can. Is Tom the only person in the world who can make decisions? Tom and Magic? No one else? All the rest of us do not exist?"

Albus sounded strained, on the edge of a breakdown, "Harry, you make empty arguments while people die."



Harry threw up his hands, "What is it with you and heroes, Albus? Tom is some kind of hero? Or a god? And you want me to be a hero too, and fight him? No! If the wizards of Britain won't defend themselves then they are not worth defending!"

Albus broke in with a pleading tone, "But Tom is too powerful. No one can stand against him."

"No *one*, no. If Tom is as powerful as 100 normal wizards, then go find 100 normal wizards."

"Harry, it's not that simple. Magical combat ultimately reduces to individual combat."

"You've got to be kidding!"

"Grindelwald would apparate to each combatant and destroy them individually with overwhelming force. The only way to fight him was one-on-one, with someone equally powerful."

Harry almost came unglued, "So you're still fighting Grindelwald!? No wonder the wizarding world is so screwed."

"Harry, I'm not powerful enough!"

"And you think I am?"

"Harry –" He choked, his voice became a hoarse whisper, "I'm dying." He held up his gloved right hand and started to pull off the glove. His hand was a blackened ruin. A mummified skeleton of blackened bones up to the middle of his forearm. Harry's glasses showed him a dark grey magical cloud surrounding it, a black magical smoke rising slowly from it.

Harry's stomach sunk. That was not a lie.

"I – made a mistake, and – I can't stop this. It will kill me."

Harry took a long breath and ran his hand through his hair, "How long?"

"Severus thinks I have maybe a year. I think he is - hopeful."

"How did that happen?"

Dumbledore looked painfully conflicted, "I can't say - until you come back to us."

Harry's anger jumped and burned, "More secrets, Albus? You just seem to collect them. Is this an addiction with you?" Harry stared at him for a moment, then motioned toward his hand, "You're running out of time and you're still hoarding secrets? I will not deal with any more secrets. I'm done with your secrets, Albus."

Dumbledore was starting to break down, "I've made too many mistakes -"

"Yes, we just don't agree on which ones."

"Harry -"

"NO! You're lying to me! You're keeping secrets from me! I'm done! You stay away from me! And don't you dare come anywhere near Hermione - or I will defend her. Even against you!" Harry stood his ground and glared at Albus, "Go away, Albus."

Albus started to say something, a few times.

"Go - away - Albus."

Dumbledore turned and walked away looking very defeated.

Harry had to walk around the block a few times before he could dare go back to Hermione. After a few laps he was better. He sat down at her table.

Hermione looked up and stopped, "Harry, are you alright?"

His tension came back. He sighed sounding defeated, "The stress of my parents jobs - can be difficult for them. It - spills over occasionally."

She looked at him seriously, then reached out her hand for his, "I'm sorry."

Harry smiled and squeezed her hand, "Should I have made more sandwiches?" The plate beside her only had one left.

She smiled too, "Not for me, that one's for you."

"Mmmm." The plate was empty.

## **11. The Public Turns Of Harry's War**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 10208**

### **Chapter 11**

#### **The Public Turns Of Harry's War**

##### **Harry Potter and Hermione Granger**

**Wednesday, 20 November, 1996**

Harry followed Hermione off the shuttle bus to her class. "When did you get your paper done? I don't remember seeing you work on it."

She looked a bit embarrassed, "I - stayed up a bit late to finish it."

Harry had a touch of a smile and nodded knowingly, "Ah. Like - all night?"

Hermione looked indignant, "No! Just - quite a while. But it's done now." She smiled.

Harry smiled too, "That's excellent."

She looked concerned at him, "What are you going to do?"

Harry patted his own backpack, "I brought a book. Studying for next year."

She smiled at him proudly, "Very good Mr Potter."

Harry chuckled, "I'm glad you're so easy to please."

She wagged a playful accusing finger at him, "We'll see. I've got to go now. Be back in a bit." She turned and headed for the classroom.

Harry watched her go with the deepest of contented smile. Until his wardstone-phone made a noise. He pulled it out; it said a magical was approaching from along the walkway, but no hostile intent warning. He turned and looked.

He saw Bonderson walking toward him.

Bonderson held out his hand, "Mr Potter. How are you holding up?"

Harry shook his hand, "It's - difficult. But we're alive. That's what matters."

"Good, good. Have you been able to keep an eye on the news?"

Harry frowned, "Only indirectly. Remus tries, but I'm only so interested, given my distraction." He nodded toward Hermione's class.

Bonderson nodded, "You know that the Ministry has collapsed? Tom is now trying to rebuild the Ministry?"

Harry nodded grimly, "I haven't heard much about Tom trying to rebuild."

Bonderson smiled darkly, "Neither has Tom; he's foisted the problem onto someone else."

Harry chuckled, "Yea, stuff rolls downhill."

Bonderson smiled - for a moment, then became serious again, "The Aurors - what's left of them - are split between the Order and Tom."

Harry frowned again, "Have you been able to make any progress convincing Albus to work with you?"

Bonderson shook his head, "Dumbledore won't talk to us."

Harry almost growled, "He's only got a year left and he still won't make allowances?"

Bonderson looked confused at Harry, "A year?"

"A few days ago Albus stopped by to try to convince me to work with him again, but he still refused to tell me anything. So I told him no. I will not work with all his secrets. But he did tell me one thing - he's dying."

"What?"

"He said he'd made some kind of mistake – didn't say what. But he showed me his right hand. It looked like it was burnt to the bone up to mid-forearm. He said whatever did that is killing him and he can't stop it. He said he's only got about a year to live."

"Damn!" Bonderson kept mumbling angry words and walking in circles. He stopped and turned back to Harry, "No wonder." At Harry's confused look he elaborated, "Every indication we have suggests that the Order is heading for collapse. A lot of serious arguments recently. No one can agree on the way forward. And Albus seems to be fixated on you."

Harry huffed in frustration and nodded, "Yes, that's for sure."

Bonderson looked at Harry quite seriously, "So, what are your plans going forward?"

Harry pursed his lips in thought, "To be honest, Remus has been bugging me that I need to plan for eventually taking the Grangers to the Continent, because at some point Tom will come after them – and me."

Bonderson paused, "Will you?"

"Plan? Yes. I'm reluctant do take that step, for a bunch of reasons. But I'm not sure I can argue against it for very long. The risk is too great." He shook his head.

Bonderson nodded slowly, then turned back, "The planning is good, but can I ask you to talk to me before you take that step?" Harry started to look upset, so he started again, "Well, go ahead and pull them out, if you decide to, just let me know you're doing that?"

"Why?"

"Because we are moving against Tom –"

Harry growled, "I will not be your weapon."

"No. We'll deal with Tom, that's our job. Particularly now that he's mortal. We want you to be the light that draws everyone back. We want you to pull it all back together again once we get rid of Tom."

Harry sighed, "Well, that's a better answer than Dumbledore had. But do you think anyone will listen to me after I've rejected them so many times?"

Bonderson shrugged, "Better than Dumbledore, who has proven to be incapable. And -" He gave Harry a significant look, "You know - we can gin-up a PR department pretty quick. Fix your image problem." He grinned mercilessly.

Harry got a pained look, "I'll think about it."

Bonderson chuckled, "Thanks." He nodded toward the classroom, "I think our time is up for now."

Harry looked over and saw Hermione was coming toward them. His smile was huge.

Bonderson smiled and held out his hand, "Hello, Miss Granger, I'm Wallace Bonderson, of MI5." He held out his MI5 badge in his other hand.

Hermione looked a bit intimidated but shook his hand, "Hello. Do you know Harry?"

Bonderson smiled, "Yes, just trying to recruit this guy. He's playing hard to get." His smile continued as he put his hand on Harry's shoulder.

Harry smirked and sighed dramatically, "I'm a wanted man."

Bonderson chuckled, "That's for sure. I'll call you later, Harry. Nice to meet you, Miss Granger." He nodded to her and walked off.

Hermione looked at Harry in some alarm, "Harry, what does MI5 want with you?"

He shrugged, "I'm talented. Want to get some lunch?"

Hermione just kept looking at Harry as they walked toward some lunch, "And how did he know my name?"

Harry shrugged, "He's MI5, they know everything."

"How long have you known him?"

"I met him when we moved in."

She looked confused as they walked toward lunch.

Harry pushed the conversation in a new direction, "How was class? The professor still confused?"

**Thursday, 21 November, 1996, 09:00**

Harry walked out of his room after his abbreviated exercise routine, shower, and filling his pockets, toward breakfast.

Remus sat at their table looking out the window in the kitchen, "Ah, Harry. I think you're becoming quite popular."

Harry stopped, "Huh?"

Remus pointed out the window. A Gringotts owl – with a scowl – was sitting in a tree.

Harry took a long breath, "Wonderful." He walked to the window and opened it. The owl, with its grey post-owl obscuring spells, flipped the letter at him and flew off. Harry groaned, "Yup. Lord Black." He turned back and sat down at the table.

Remus looked frustrated and concerned as he waited for Harry to finish reading the letter.



Harry started a mumbled string of cursed words as he handed the letter to Remus.

*Lord Black,*

*I require your formidable talents and resources for the next stage in the rebuilding of WizardSupremacy in the world.*

*You are Summoned to the Wizengamot Chambers Saturday, November 23, 1996 at 10:00.*

*Emperor of Wizarding Britain,*

*Lord Voldemort*

Remus groaned and shook his head, "This is not good."

"But he's not actually the Wizengamot. He can't magically force me show up. He just sounds like he can."

Remus bobbed his head back and forth, "No, I don't suppose he can."

"So I don't have to show up. I don't even have to reply. He still doesn't know who I am."

"No, but you might be able to get some information out of him if you reply."

Harry breathed his frustration, "Ok. I'll send back a terse note and see what he says. There's no way in hell I want to get anywhere near that fool." He started writing a reply on the back as Hedwig landed on the back of the chair next to him, "Oh, you are so smart! Thank you, Hedwig. Take this to Gringotts and let them deliver it, OK?" Hedwig rubbed her head against Harry's ear then flew off out the window.

Remus looked concerned, "What did you write?"

"I said 'Why would I want to meet with you?' It's not a straight 'bugger off', but it's certainly not – cordial."

**Thursday, 21 November, 1996, 17:00**

Harry stood up as the students came streaming out of the classroom. Hermione broke off from the flow and bumped into him as he wrapped her in his arms, "You look tired."

She sighed, "Yes. The workload is piling up." They started down the hall, "I've got three papers due next week. A test the week after. And I suspect I'll be getting another assignment in History soon."

"Ooooh, sounds bad. So I guess we can't go to the beach tomorrow?"

She scoffed, "Beach? That's hours away –" She stopped as she saw his smirk, "Right. Just for that, you are going to help me."

"Don't I always?"

"That means a net gain, Mr Potter, not a net loss." She gave him the 'eye'.

He chuckled, "Ok, I promise to be as gainful as I can." They exited the building onto the wet walkways.

She smiled a disbelieving smile, "I'll hold you to that."

"Good. You can hold me as long as you want."

She scoffed again and swiped at his arm as he dodged ahead, chuckling. His wardstone-phone made a noise of a hostile intent warning. His face fell. He pulled out the wardstone-phone to check.

"Aren't you going to answer that?"

He shook his head, "Not that one. Just a sales call." He looked at her and tried to show a smile, "But I could use a loo about now." He looked around at the buildings in the area, "You think this building has one?"

"I'm sure it does. Whether you can use it? Or even find it? - I have no idea."

He pulled her toward it, "Let's go see."

They wandered through the building until they found a set. Harry suggested Hermione make use of the lobby of a Department for the duration. Then Harry ran into the loo, locked himself in a stall, put on all his fade-out spells, then he apparated to the roof of a nearby building. His wardstone-phone indicated a DE was one block west heading toward Hermione's building. He apparated to the roof of a closer building. He looked down and saw the grey fog of a well-formed disillusionment spell covering the red glow of a DE. He watched the DE step into an alcove in the side of a building that was right on the path where he and Hermione were going to walk by.

Harry growled in massive frustration. The DE placed himself in a very defensible location - in broad daylight! On a well-traveled path! And Harry only had limited time because Hermione was waiting for him.

It took him a few moments to get an idea. He apparated down to the street level about 10 metres from the alcove on the same side of the street. He put on a glamour to make himself look like a 60-something professor, tweed coat and all. He reached down and put a small pebble in his shoe so that he would consistently walk with a bit of a limp, then he joined the throng of people walking by, though he was now walking back toward Hermione. He could see the Dark Mark and the DE's wand that indicated he was facing Hermione's direction. As he got almost in front of the alcove he surreptitiously sent a gentle inverse-bubblehead charm. No reaction from the DE. He slowed his walk and started counting. At the 12 second mark the DE's disillusionment charm started to falter. By 16 seconds the DE started to fall and be exposed. Harry moved closer and sent a disillusionment charm, did his own fade-out spells, and as he got closer, he sent a stunner.

By this time Harry could see the DE. He broke his wand, wrapped him up in ropes, and sent him off to Order HQ. Harry sighed that this turned out to be one of the easier attacks to deal with.

He apparated back to the loo, collected Hermione, and continued walking back to Hermione's flat.

**Thursday, 21 November, 1996, 21:00**

Harry walked in his door by 9PM. It had been a long day already. He sighed as he headed for his chair – when he noticed, "Remus!"

"Mmfff!" Remus startled, "What?" He'd fallen asleep in his chair.

Harry moved to sit down, "What's up today?"

Remus growled, "The Order exploded today."

"Ouch! What happened?"

"They finally came flying apart because they couldn't agree on anything and Dumbledore was doing nothing. They were taking no steps against Voldemort." Remus seemed to get lost in his memories.

Harry waited for a moment, "So what happened after the explosion?"

Remus came back and focussed, "Most everyone moved to working with MI5. Only a few people stayed with Dumbledore. Some of the real old-timers."

"Wow. I guess I need to talk to MI5 again."

Remus sighed angrily, "Dumbledore has become completely irrelevant now. He could be such a positive influence – but he's gone off the rails."

Harry shook his head sadly, "Dumbledore has never figured out how to rise above his own issues. That is a very sad epitaph."

Remus looked angry, "And for all the people following him."

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger

**Friday, 22 November, 1996**

Harry followed Hermione as she opened the door into her flat. It was getting dark as it was after 4pm. Jane Osterman, Hermione's roommate was sprawled in a chair reading.

Hermione sprawled in the chair next to her, "Hi Jane. How was your day?"

"Good. I survived all my mid-terms. So far."

Harry stood chuckling.

Jane smirked at him, "You are not helping, Mr Lay-about."

"Sure I will. How about dinner on me. Celebrate surviving mid-terms."

Jane and Hermione's eyes grew.

Jane got there first, "Yes! Where?"

"How about that pub – it's near the – what's it called?"

Jane stood up, "I don't care, let's go." She grabbed her coat.

Hermione's smile matched as she stood up, "Fine by me."

They started on their three block trek through the cold darkness. The pub was busy. They found a table in the back partially hidden behind a stack of chairs.

"Well, what would you like?" Harry held out a menu he had picked up at the door.

Everyone made their choices and Harry went to order.

Jane gave Hermione an eye, "You're so lucky, Hermione."

Hermione looked confused, "Oh? Why is that?"

Jane chuckled, "Harry is so nice."

Hermione smiled, "Yes, he is." Her smile dropped, "But I'm a little worried about him. He's looking so tired lately. And stressed."

Jane nodded a bit more seriously, "Yes, I've noticed too. Do you know why?"

Hermione shook her head, "I - I don't know."

"What does he do all day?"

Hermione still looked confused, "He's with me most days. He goes to class with me, to the libraries and studying. This is pretty new for both of us so we're still getting acclimated."

Jane looked concerned, then smiled, "So how is your first term?"

Hermione's eyebrows rose to her hairline, "Oh my! I'm so excited I can hardly stand it. This is so much fun! All these classes - and all the libraries. I'm going crazy."

Harry came back carrying food, "Here we are." He set a tray down and everyone started moving plates and drinks off the tray. As he sat down Jane dropped her challenge with a smile.

"So, Harry - how is your term going?"

He sat up, blinked, and ran with it, "Good. I'm having a blast. I will own this place next year."

Hermione gave a challenging smile, "After me, Mr Potter."

Harry smiled roguishly, "We'll see."

Serious conversation was interrupted by serious food. And serious mumbles of appreciation. They talked of classes, and professors, and grading systems, and – anything else that wandered through their heads. To Harry it was brilliant. Every bit as good as Hogwarts. Maybe better.

As they left the pub they passed four guys standing near the door having a loud conversation with the manager, with a few lurid glances at the girls as they passed. Harry barely caught, out of the corner of his eye, the slight wave of yellow magic as he followed Hermione and Jane out the door. Two steps later he heard a growl behind him and instinctively ducked. A fist passed over his head mussing his hair. Harry spun to the right, with the attacker behind him, and rammed his right elbow into the guy's ribs; he heard a crack and a yell. The guy kept going and fell behind Harry. Harry jumped back away from the door.

Three more guys came out the door. Harry dodged out of the way of the second. The third and fourth were moving toward Hermione and Jane. The second guy turned and came back toward Harry. Harry ran forward, put his left foot against the guys stomach, who instinctively grabbed it. Harry used it as leverage and twisted, brought his right foot up over the guy's arm and hit him soundly in the ear. The guy went down hard. Harry kicked the guy's head again.

Hermione screamed. A guy was holding her neck.

Harry ran at full speed and rammed into the guy in the kidney with his outstretched pointed elbow. The guy screamed and let go of Hermione. Harry kicked the back of his knee as he pulled back on the guy's collar. The guy fell back and Harry dropped his entire weight onto the guy's chest with his knees. Several large cracks and a yell. Harry followed up with a kick to the head.

Jane screamed as she slapped at the guy who was holding her arm.

Harry jumped on the last guy's back, standing on his hips, boxed his ears, grabbed his chin, pulled it back and hit his throat. The guy yelled and fell back as Harry jumped off, but the guy didn't fall. The guy pulled a knife

from his boot and came at Harry. Harry grabbed the guy's wrist with both hands to control the knife and pulled the guy forward while twisting around. The guy fell forward with Harry wrapping the guy's arm backwards around his body breaking his elbow. Harry landed on the guy's back. The guy lost the knife. Harry rolled and elbowed him in the lower back with his right elbow, then rolled left and hit him the the back of the neck with his left elbow.

Harry jumped up into a fighting position. The first guy was starting to move toward Harry again, but he was moving more slowly. Harry jumped in the air and kicked the guy in the head and the guy landed like a rock.

Harry froze. Hermione was sitting on the ground, Jane was leaning back against a parked car in a defensive position. No one else was moving. Just a few groans. Harry spun at a noise.

A guy who looked like a student, warm coat, T-Shirt, jeans, trainers, moved slowly forward, "Mr Potter. Very nicely done." He held out an MI5 badge.

Harry read the badge, "Agent Jamison?" He straightened up and looked rather frustrated, "You were standing there the whole time - and you didn't help?"

Jamison smiled, "You didn't need *any* help. But I'll take care of these guys. It was clearly self defence. No problems."

"Uh - thanks."

Jamison turned, "Miss Granger, Miss Osterman, are you alright?"

Both nodded with dazed looks.

Jamison prodded one of the guys with his shoe, "And these guys - none of them are actually students. They just try to look like students."

Harry took a deep breath and mumbled, "Damn." It meant the DEs had 'recruited' them to attack with compulsion magic. That made his task a lot



more difficult because magic didn't warn him of these guys. His current wards only detected hostile intent in magicals. He'd have to fix that.

Harry reached out his right hand toward Hermione – and noticed there was blood dripping from it. He pulled it back and looked at it.

Hermione squeaked, "Harry, you're bleeding!"

Harry saw a cut on the back of his hand, "I guess that guy got me with his knife. I have some stuff at home to deal with this."

Noises started to come from the guys on the ground as they started to move.

Jamison nodded, "Go ahead Mr Potter. You won't be seeing these guys again." He pulled out his mobile and started dialling.

"You work with Bonderson?"

"I report to him, yes."

"Well, he knows where to find me if there are any questions."

Harry turned to the girls, "Shall we?" He held out his left hand to Hermione.

Hermione looked shaken, "Harry, what was that?"

He shrugged, "Just some drunk idiots." They started moving down the road.

Jane looked at him like she'd never seen him before, "Where did you learn to fight like that?"

He shrugged and took a deep breath, "Adrenaline works wonders."

Jane did not buy it, "Yes, but who was that guy – Jamison, you said?"

"Agent Jamison, he's with MI5."

Jane was not slowing down, "He knew you."

Harry tried to lighten things up and chuckled, "Yea, he's trying to recruit me."

She looked sceptically at him, "You're not even seventeen yet."

Harry kept chuckling, "They're starting early."

Hermione pulled up his right hand and tried to look.

Harry pulled it away and hid it, "It's OK. I've got stuff at home for it."

"Harry, it's still bleeding. You're leaving a trail." She pointed back along the road.

Harry chuckled, "Ok, here we are at your flat. Let me go wrap this up and I'll be back in a moment, Ok?"

Hermione started to say something.

"I'll be back in a few moments, OK?"

She huffed nervously, "Ok." She and Jane started up the stairs.

Harry headed to his flat to stop this thing from stinging and dripping. A few healing spells to fix things, a large bandage to make it look real, and he was all fixed up. But should he go back? Would it stir up more discussion and questions? Or should he stay away and let the excitement die down first? He decided to call Hermione and let her know he was fine but sore and bruised and he could use a hot bath. He reassured her he would be back in the morning.

She said she understood. She was so wonderful. Meanwhile, he would have to disillusion himself and go keep an eye on her flat until he got all the wards adjusted to include non-magical hostile intent.

## Harry Potter

**Saturday, 23 November, 1996**

Harry was sitting at the table in the kitchen Sunday morning steaming and stewing.

Remus walked in and stopped, "What's wrong?"

Harry pointed out the window.

"Oh. Another Gringotts owl." He aimed a smirk at Harry, "Are you punishing the owl?"

Harry's smile peeked out, "No. Just not excited on what it likely says." He sighed and got up to accept the letter. Dread dripped from his words, "Yup. Lord Black." He opened the letter. It had one sentence on it.

*"Because the Tonks would like to see you again."*

"Damn." Harry handed the letter to Remus. "I need to go see if he has broken through the Fidelias."

"OK, but hold on. If he hasn't, and he's only bluffing, then we need a plan."

"What are you thinking?"

"So - What if he doesn't know how to find them yet. But suppose he had someone put a tracking spell on Dora, say. She's safe if she's in the flat covered by the Fidelias, but if she wanders out then she can be tracked. At least at that point he can start to get a picture generally where the flat is and have people watch the area. So if the Tonks are still safe in the flat then we need to move them out quickly."

Harry nodded slowly, "So this is a dry run for the Grangers?"

Remus nodded, "In a way, yes. I'll go buy a trunk-flat, one of those expanded trunks with a flat in it. I'll put a month worth of food in it. You

get dressed up as Lord Black and take it to the Tonks. You get the Tonks to go into it. I'll do Fidelias on the trunk with you as the Secret Keeper. You tell me the secret, then go in and tell them. Then I can take the trunk to Paris and rent a flat. Set up the trunk in the flat."

"How will you get to Paris?"

"I'll fly muggle. If I pick the right airport to fly out of, say Birmingham Airport, then the plane will climb high enough, fast enough, to go over the top of the segmented ward-fence of the Customs Wards before it tries to cross them. Then no one will know."

Harry nodded, "Ok, get three trunks and we'll do the Tonks now."

Remus started moving. He was back with three trunks in half an hour.

"Any problems?"

Remus looked a bit nervous, "I hope not. I - had to pay a bit extra to - ensure that the - authorities were not alerted at this - strange purchase."

Harry growled with a frown.

"I let the guy know that if my additional remuneration was not honoured - I would be back. And I let my eyes turn a bit yellow."

Harry chuckled, "Did he catch the clue?"

"Yes. So, I'll put the extra two trunks in my room. Here is the trunk for the Tonks. Text me when you want me to come do the Fidelias."

Harry stuffed the trunk in his pocket and began putting on the Lord Black magic. It only took him two minutes this time, "Right. Here I go." He apparated into the entryway of the flat. "Hello? Lord Black, here."

Dora poked her head around the corner, hair turning colours, "What do you want?"

"Are your parents here?"

She looked a bit disconcerted, "Yes."

"Good. Unfortunately, Voldemort is looking for you – by name. I think you need to get out of here."

Dora looked confused, "We've seen nothing. Why do you think so?"

"He sent me a summons. I asked why would I want to see him. He said, and I quote, 'Because the Tonks would like to see you again.' He obviously does not have you, but I imagine he thinks he is close to finding you. Do you have any tracking charms on you?"

"No. I check every time I come back."

Harry sighed, "Can he track you because you are related to Narcissa?"

Dora's eyes grew, "Oh, shite. I think he can. It's not very accurate, or fast, but I think he can."

Harry pulled the shrunken trunk out of his pocket, "Here is an expanded trunk with a flat in it. And a month's worth of food. You move into this, I put it under the Fidelias, then take it to Paris and you will be safe."

Dora's eyebrows rose, "Yes, I suppose that will work. Let me talk to my parents." She disappeared into the rest of the flat and came back with Andromeda and Ted in a few moments.

Andromeda bowed lightly, "Lord Black, Dora says we are not safe here?"

"That is my fear. Voldemort has threatened your safety in trying to get me to meet with him. I think we need to stop that threat by moving you to Paris in this trunk." He pointed at the trunk on the floor. It unshrunk into a normal steamer trunk.

Andromeda looked at Ted and Dora for a moment, "Yes, we will go."

Harry pointed at Dora, "That also suggests that you should not come back here to participate in the fight. You are too vulnerable."

Dora huffed rebelliously, "But -"

Andromeda reached out, "Dora, please. He's right. You can be found too easily."

Dora collapsed into a sigh, "Ok. I'll send Shack a Patronus message."

Harry motioned toward the trunk, "From Paris, please."

Within an hour Remus was on his way to Paris with a few stowaways.

Harry sat down and penned a response to Tom, "*I don't see the need.*" Then he sighed as he realised he would need a new 'conduit' to pass messages to Lord Black. He smiled as he thought of Kreature. He just needed to make sure Kreature didn't give away the fact that he was Lord Black.

### **Sunday, 24 November, 1996**

Harry stood looking out the front window of their flat into the cold evening, "Remus, I've been noticing things."

"Yes? What sort?"

"Small things - Strange things." He turned and looked at him, "And I'm now sure of it - Hermione is having accidental magic."

Remus stood still, concerned, "That can't happen, Harry."

"Remus, think about it. During the trial she's facing obliviation and binding her magic and she knows it. What do you think she would do?"

"I don't know what she *could* do. What *anyone* could do."

"Really? Couldn't she try to do a limited obliviation of some of her own memories? Bind some of her own magic such that the official obliviator won't see it and won't lock it out? That way it could wear off over time by itself? Maybe be less than permanent? Or less reliable because it's a second-time binding?"

Remus took a deep breath, "Oh, man. But – she wouldn't have had any practice at that. How would she know how?"

"Desperation. That would go a long way for her. She gets most spells right the first time anyway. I think she could be pretty effective with it."

Remus shook his head in amazement, "But – that would have to be wandless, too."

Harry stood looking into the distance, thinking, "Imagine if she had a race with the obliviator locking up her own memories and magic before the obliviator could – at the same time as the obliviator was trying to. How much could she lock up faster than them?"

"Harry – she'd be competing against an experienced trained Ministry Obliviator. How could she compete with someone like that?"

"Again, desperation pitted against complacency. She's excellent and they're mediocre? And they underestimate her?"

Remus raised his eyebrows, but still unsure, "I suppose." Remus sat up, "Harry, you can't have anything to do with unlocking her memories or breaking the binding. That's treason."

Harry barked out a laugh, "And what is their deliberate travesty of justice? And with Tom in charge? What does any of that mean? He's not the legitimate government." He shook his head at Remus' building tension, then sighed tiredly, "Yes, I know. But I won't have to do anything. If her memories come back on their own and her magic – or at least some of it – comes back on it's own. All I have to do is keep her alive and be around and – she will eventually come back to me." Harry smiled wistfully.

Remus stared at him in deep concern. After a few moments, Remus came back, "Harry, I think it's getting to be time – past time – to consider pulling the Grangers out of Britain. It's getting too dangerous. Tom will turn his attention to you at any moment."

Harry started to fidget and respond.

"Harry, listen to me. You're getting very tired. So tired you're starting to make mistakes. And all it takes is one mistake and you could lose everything. – *She* could lose everything."

Harry grimaced and closed his eyes in exhaustion. It took him a moment to gather his energy. He spoke slowly, tiredly, "I can't imagine taking Uni away from Hermione; she loves it too much. Not to mention it feels like a betrayal and she would hate me."

"Better angry at you than dead."

Harry dropped his head, then looked at Remus, "Not yet. Maybe – soon."

Remus reluctantly nodded, "Just send me the word when it's time."

Harry sighed again with significant tension, "Ah – Remus?"

"Yes?"

"I've – been – having a discussion – a correspondence – with someone. As Lord Black."

Remus' eyebrows rose up, "Do they know you are Lord Black?"

"No. I've been sending letters back and forth discussing the future of Wizarding Britain with MI5."

Remus sat back in his chair, "Really. I bet that has been enlightening."

"Yes. I don't know what to think. They are trying to convince me to help them restructure wizarding society. And I'm trying to get details out of



them."

Remus nodded, "Details are good, but does it sound positive?"

"Yes."

"So – what's the problem?"

Harry huffed, "I'd expect it to sound positive. To sound wonderful! I – just don't know if I have enough hope for – what they're suggesting."

Remus looked at him for a while, "Yes. I know what you mean. Hope is hard to come by sometimes. But what else can you do? Give up?"

Harry sighed in exhaustion, "I could walk away."

"From Neville? And Luna?"

Harry dropped his head in his hands, "But I don't think I can carry everyone."

"Ah! No, you can't. So let MI5 carry it. That's what they want to do, isn't it? They just want you to help back them up?" Remus sighed, "Look, Harry, the world isn't your responsibility. It's MI5's responsibility. You can help them, but it's their job, not yours. Let them make the decisions."

Harry looked up – with – hope? Was that what this was? It felt – like Hermione. He chuckled. Maybe he could do that. "Ok. I'll put together another note to them."

## **Hermione Granger**

**Monday, 25 November, 1996**

Hermione was sitting on the couch in the main room of her flat reading her history book when a gaggle of noise came down the walkway outside, and then exploded into her flat. Her roommates came in talking and chatting. She looked up and smiled as their sound was full of fun.

"Hermione! Everyone's here! Is Harry here? Can he make dinner for us?"  
Jane pronounced.

Everyone laughed and made noises of agreement.

Hermione had to shake her head sadly.

Cathrine moaned, "Oh, sad he's not here. He's the best cook of all of us."

The questions came fast and furious.

"Where did he learn to cook like that? And he's so young."

"Hermione, can you call Harry and suggest he make us dinner again? I can promise him calculus tutoring next year."

"Oh, that was so good yesterday."

"Hermione, you are so lucky."

"He's pretty nice, isn't he? He just looks so tired lately."

"Why, what does he do all day?"

"Follows you around, mostly?"

Jane whispered loudly, "And beats up bad guys..."

A few chuckles snuck out.

Hermione had to admit it, "Yes, I worry about him a lot too."

Rene said quietly, "He doesn't look young any more. He just looks tired. And rather tense."

Daniel spoke up, "It's those MI5 people. They're involved in this somehow."

Hermione spoke softly, and everyone listened, "Yes, they are definitely involved, but coincidence is not causation."

Daniel pushed again, "But they know what's going on."

Hermione nodded, "Yes, but I get the impression they want to help – but can't figure out how."

Daniel's eyebrows rose, "Are Harry's parents some sort of national security asset?"

Hermione's eyebrows rose, "He said they are architects building large skyscrapers in Singapore."

Daniel's eyebrows rose further, "You said he lives with some bloke nearby?"

"Yes, his name is Remus Lupin. He was a friend of Harry's parents in school. As he says, he does personal security for high-value individuals on the Continent."

Daniel's eyebrows couldn't go any higher, but they tried. "Do you realise how suspicious this all sounds?"

Hermione's eyebrows now scrunched up, "I suppose. Harry has said that Remus has started him on an exercise program."

Daniel breathed deep and slow, "Training. For what? And this Remus is MI5 too?"

Hermione shook her head, "No, I don't think so. Bonderson said he was trying to recruit Harry."

Jane asked, "Who's Bonderson?"

"The MI5 guy I met."

Cathrine sighed, "But he cooks so very nicely. If we can get him to cook for us Daniel can interrogate him."

Everyone chuckled.

## **Harry Potter and Daniel Mattson**

**Tuesday, 26 November, 1996, 17:00**

Harry was standing at the stove, making the main dish of dinner for Hermione and her roommates. Cathrine was setting out plates. Jane was setting out glasses. Rene just came in late from class. Hermione was dispensing the utensils.

Daniel was looking over Harry's shoulder, "You're good at that." He sounded a bit surprised.

Harry smiled, "It's strange where you can pick up skills these days."

Daniel took a moment to look at Harry, then asked, "So, Harry, what are your plans?"

"My plans? I don't understand."

Cathrine had finished the plates and moved back to the couch.

"Harry, you're not in school. Where is your life going? You just seem to be hanging out following Hermione around. I don't see any forward motion for you. What are you doing with the rest of your life?"

Jane finished the silverware and moved to the couch talking with Hermione.

"Gee, Dad." Harry started chuckling at Daniel's 'look', "When the school Hermione and I were attending died, we were off-schedule for the normal entry to Uni. But Hermione's test scores were good enough to get in early. Mine weren't, so I'll have to wait until next year."

"So - what are you doing until then?"

Harry thought a bit glumly and some honesty popped out of his exhaustion, "In the mean time, I'm just Hermione's body guard." He'd tried to be flippant and make a joke but he was getting too tired for jokes.

Daniel looked disbelieving, "By who? Why? Why is she in danger?"

Harry frowned, he'd said too much and Daniel guessed too much. He tried to smile, "I - can't say. To any of those questions. But I will protect her - with everything I have." Harry must be *really* tired, he was saying way too much.

The honesty in Harry's voice - almost desperation - was shocking. Daniel looked deeply at Harry for a few moments, then nodded, "I can see that. Good. She deserves it. Deserves someone like you watching over her."

Harry nodded, "But - don't say anything to anyone."

Daniel smiled, "Nope. I wouldn't want to make your job any harder. - Is that what that MI5 guy is all about?"

"MI5 guy?"

"Yeah, that MI5 guy that Hermione talked about meeting the other day. The guy said he knew you."

"Oh - yeah. They've been trying to recruit me. But - I'm a bit focussed now." He nodded toward Hermione.

"They know what you're doing?"

"Yup, they want to help. Maybe they can." Harry shrugged.

Daniel sighed, "Look, Harry, aren't you a little young to be involved in MI5-kinds-of-things?"

Harry chuckled, "Actually, I thought they were a little old to be involved in my stuff. But – maybe it's a second childhood. Or a mid-life crisis?" He chuckled, "Anyway, I think it's time for dinner."

Daniel nodded and watched Harry set the food out and their opportunity for quiet conversation ended.

## **Harry Potter**

**Wednesday, 27 November, 1996**

Harry watched as Hermione walked toward her class. His smile was a conflicted combination of delirious and worried. Harry's wardstone-phone alarmed on a magical, but no hostile intent. He turned and saw Bonderson approaching. He held out his hand, "Bonderson."

"Harry. Everything alright?"

Harry nodded with some weight. "The Order blew up last week."

Bonderson nodded, "Yes. We picked up most of the fragments. Thank you for giving us those names. We were able to integrate everyone very nicely."

Harry sighed in relief, "What are you going to do with them all?"

He smirked, "We are in the process of forming a Ministry in Exile. Getting ready to pick up the bits when we get rid of Tom."

"Any success with that?"

Bonderson frowned, "No, not even close to enough. Tom has been hiding in Malfoy Manor too much. We can't see him well enough to know we can hit him in there. That and the wards are too much for normal methods without risking Tom getting away. Well – short of a tactical nuke but that would be a bit *too* obvious."

Harry chuckled, then turned sober, "Who's left working with Dumbledore?"

Bonderson's eyebrows rose, "Almost no one. The only person of interest, shall we say, is Mundugus Fletcher. His contacts in the underworld would be useful but I think he was afraid of exposure."

Harry shook his head, "I don't think he'd be all that useful."

Bonderson sighed, "The most difficult is that it looks like the Tonks have disappeared. No one has seen Dora for a while."

Harry winced, "Damn." He'd have to start using his new information path to Lord Black. He decided to push a bit, "How effective has MI5 been against Tom?"

Bonderson nodded with a smile, "We've been able to capture or kill over 40 DEs. We could have done a lot more but we needed to make sure these actions couldn't be traced back to MI5." He chuckled, "We are in first place in the body-count competition with just over 40, you are currently sitting at second with 35 that we know of, and the Aurors are in third place with 20."

Harry looked stone-faced.

Bonderson turned away from that difficult subject, "I would like to suggest to you that it's getting time to pull the Grangers – and yourself – out of harms way."

Harry shook his head in frustration, "I'd really rather not. It would irrevocably disrupt the Granger's lives."

"So would death."

"But they can never be normal again. *I* can't be normal again."

"But you're not normal now."

"Well – no. But almost. This is the most normal I've ever been."

"With a body count of 35?"

Harry turned away and looked painfully guilty, his voice took on some anger, "I started my body count at age eleven."

Bonderson winced, "Look, Harry, it's MI5's job to do the hard stuff. Let us pull the Grangers out. You can go with them. You can even pretend to be normal. We'll take all the not-normal on us."

Harry sighed, "Maybe at the end of term. That's only 3 weeks away."

Bonderson saw Hermione come out of the building, "We'll talk more, but if you change your mind at any point, we'll be there in a flash."

Harry was smiling at Hermione.

"Mr Bonderson, was it?" Hermione came up and shook his hand.

Bonderson smiled, "Yes, good memory. How have you been? Enjoying your classes?"

"Just wonderful. Can't wait for this guy –" She bumped her shoulder against Harry's, "– to start next year."

Harry was smiling like a loon.

Bonderson chuckled, "Yes, me too."

Hermione looked confused, "But you're still trying to recruit this guy?" She glanced at Harry.

Bonderson chuckled, "Yes. The best ones always take a long time to land."

She started a challenging smile, "A fishing analogy?"

Bonderson kept chuckling, "Yes. We work in such strange areas, that's all we have are analogies. It makes for a coded language." His eyebrows bobbed like a cartoon villain.

Hermione chuckled, "Right. The strange methods and trade-craft of MI5."



Bonderson was genuinely laughing now, "Excellent! Now I'll have to start recruiting you, too."

Hermione covered her face, "Oh, what have I done."

Harry reached an arm around Hermione's shoulders, "And on that note, I think it's getting on lunch, don't you?"

Bonderson was still chuckling, "Good idea. I'll talk to you again, Harry."

Harry and Hermione nodded and started back home.

### **Wallace Bonderson and Daniel Mattson**

Bonderson stood watching as Harry and Hermione walked away. He noticed someone walking toward him, focussed on him. Dark hair, dark eyes, tall, about 25. He recognised him as the boyfriend of Cathrine Lannier, one of Hermione's roommates, "Good morning, Mr Mattson. You look like you have a question?"

Daniel's eyebrows rose way up, "Ah – Yes. You know who I am?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

Daniel sighed and gathered his thoughts, "I'm concerned about Harry." He nodded in the direction Harry and Hermione went.

Bonderson's eyebrows rose, "Yes? To be honest, so am I."

"So, what is MI5 doing to help him?"

Bonderson smiled, "You've been talking to Miss Granger."

Daniel nodded, "Harry seems a little young to be involved in whatever he's involved in that needs your help."

"Yes, he is. But let me be very clear. You need to stay far away from him and what he is involved in. You are not prepared or trained for anything

like that."

"And Harry is?"

"Yes. Please, do not get in his way."

"He's only 16. How trained can he be?"

"Talents come in all shapes and sizes. Prodigies too. You know all about that, don't you? Starting your PhD at 18?"

Daniel raised his eyebrows and nodded slowly, "Ok. What are you doing to help him?"

Bonderson smiled, "Sorry, that's classified."

Daniel looked like he wanted to ask more.

"Mr Mattson, knowledge can be dangerous. Even asking questions can be dangerous. They could cause us to have to get involved in ways we'd rather not. But rest assured, we are very involved. Both of them are *very* important."

Daniel took the hint and nodded, "Good. Glad to hear it." They shook hands before Daniel walked away - with tingles running up his spine.

### **Thursday, 28 November, 1996**

Harry came into the kitchen in the morning already tired and grumpy. The pace of attacks was wearing him out. Then he noticed the Gringotts owl and he growled and almost screamed.

Remus came in, "What's wrong?"

"That!" Harry pointed at the owl.

"Oh." Remus sighed and sat down.

Harry trudged over and opened the window. The letter practically glued itself to his hand. He opened it and immediately started growling again. He handed it to Remus.

*Lord Black,*

*I am summoning you again, for Friday, November 29, 1996 at 10:00. You would not want to become a hunted enemy of the Dark Lord if you do not attend me.*

*Emperor of Wizarding Britain*

*Lord Voldemort*

All Harry could do was cover his face and breath slowly. "Ok, it's time for Lord Black to live up to his family history." He turned the letter over and started writing.

*Aren't you a bit too busy to be distracted by me? Isn't Hogwarts more important than I am? Or the ICW?*

*You fool! The Ancient and Noble House of Black has no need for an idiot like you! Go back to buggering your slaves, you worthless half-blood of the degenerate House of Slytherin!*

Remus groaned and covered his face as he read over Harry's shoulder.

And of course Hedwig showed up just in time to see the note as Harry was finishing it.

Harry held out the letter to Hedwig, "To Gringotts, Hedwig. Not to Tom, alright?"

Hedwig made barking, almost laughing sounds as she took off out the window.

**Harry Potter and Hermione Granger**

**Friday, 29 November, 1996, 20:00**

Harry was walking in bliss. Hermione held onto his arm as they walked down the street. It was a bit of a blustery evening with blowing leaves and dripping trees. The rustle of the breeze in the trees came and went, making musical phrases out of sighs and breaths of the wind through the trees.

"Harry, are you doing anything this weekend?"

He shook his head with a silly grin.

"I was thinking we could go home to my parents house for the weekend. I could use a bit of a break before we head into final exams. Would Remus miss you terribly?" She had a sly smile and her eyes were full of mischief.

He chuckled, "I think Remus can handle being alone for a few days."

"He won't melt or anything?"

"Well - we put him in the freezer for a bit and he should be fine. Keep him from melting."

She chuckled, "He won't mind?"

"He's used to it. He gets emotional every so often so he's used to the freezer." Harry was holding onto his composure with both hands.

She laughed, "I was talking about him missing you."

"Oh, that? He *might* notice I'm gone."

She shook her head at his silliness, "Ah. We can -"

Harry turned and froze. The hostile intent ward alarmed. Fear landed hard. This was the worst possible time.

"Harry? What's wrong?"

He tried to smile, "Ah - I need to stop by a loo - let's go this way?" He turned down a side path and pulled Hermione along. "I think that would be wonderful."

"Yes? Maybe tomorrow morning?"

"Sure. It's not like my calendar is overflowing."

She smiled, "Should I call for an appointment?"

"Wellll - I'm mostly competent with my calendar." His wardstone-phone alarmed again. He pulled it out and glanced at it. A hostile about 20 metres behind. He changed to a new path, "Oh - I think there's a loo down here."

"This way? I don't remember what's down this way. What's wrong Harry?"

Harry checked his wardston-phone and the hostile was out of range. He sighed and slowed down, "Must be something I ate earlier." He patted his stomach with a bit of a grimace. This DE had followed their movements, which meant they were rather capable, which means they are more dangerous than any Harry has faced so far.

Hermione didn't look very convinced.

They entered a park with an area of garden. There was a separate building as a loo for this section of the park. Area lights from the loo lit the space. It was likely the best place Harry would find. His wardstone-phone alarmed again. He stopped and turned to her with a serious, nervous, a fearful look, "Hermione, I need you to do me a favour. I need you to go into the loo over there and stay there until I call you on the mobile and say it's safe to come out."

Hermione was fearful at his emotions, "Why, Harry?"

"Because I need you to be safe. Please? There is a guy following us who is not good."

"Who? Why? What's going on Harry?" She sounded shaken.

He sighed heavily and pulled out his last desperate lie, "I - I'm contracted with MI5. I do some projects for them. This guy is after me. Please, listen to me?"

She swallowed hard, "Ok."

"Quickly, I'll call you on your mobile when it's safe."

She moved into the loo.

Harry locked the loo door with a spell, put up protection spells on the loo, anti-muggle spells, silencing spells, and notice-me-not spells on the area. Unfortunately, the loo was too close and would be inside all his silencing spells. He turned and stood in the path waiting - only a few seconds.

A shadow walked into the garden. It was black, with a dark red buried inside the dark fog. There was the agitation of the DEs wand and the boiling of their Dark Mark. Harry let his wand behind his back point toward a stone in the path behind him and he quietly put up a cage ward on the area. He built it up slowly so it wouldn't be noticed. It would lock them inside the ward until Harry took it down - or he died. He did not want this DE to get away. He huffed in frustration; he forgot to send Remus a text and ask him to come help. A bit late now.

"Potter."

"Come to lick my boots too? You're out of luck, I haven't stepped in anything you might find tasty recently."

The DE raised their wand and started circling.

"So - even you failed? Must have been bad if Tom sent you to me."

Only the sound of footsteps. A red star of a reducto came flying out of the DEs wand.

Harry jumped aside and a small tree behind him exploded loudly and the branches crashed down. He tried his jump-bludgeon-jump spell chain. He screamed as he landed with a deep cut in his leg.

The DE had apparated eight meters away. He'd evidently figured out what Harry was trying to do and sent a cutting spell up at him. Luckily Harry's bludgeoner had disrupted most of his cutting spell or he would have lost the leg. Harry hopped up on one leg and sent a reducto at the stone path in front of the DE. The explosion was huge but the DE had already apparated away.

Behind him! Harry turned and started firing a stream of bludgeoners. A stream of spells came back at him. Until part of one got through and nicked his shoulder and he fell with a scream. He rolled out of the way of a spell. Out of reflex he grabbed the backup wand he had in his back pocket, the one he took from Dumbledore. The wand was electric! It grabbed his left arm and rush of anger at the DE flooded him. A starburst came out of it, while he was still laying on the ground.

The starburst hit the DE and blew him back 5 metres with a deafening explosion. The trees moved with the shockwave.

Harry started to get up – and so did the DE. Harry sent an inverse bubblehead charm at the DE.

A stream of spells came from the DE, Harry started his bludgeoner stream in return. It was deafening, sounding like a heavy machine gun. He started moving around the DE, changing the direction his spells came from.

The DEs spells started to visibly weaken within a few seconds and then Harry's bludgeoners landed hard and the DE was blown down like a rag-doll.

Harry stood breathing hard.

Pops of apparition started around him. His wardstone-phone indicated magicals – but no hostile intent.

"Harry! Are you alright?" Remus came toward him.

Shack, Gawain Robards, and a few more Aurors came over. A few more pops as more showed up.

Harry started healing his leg and shoulder. "Just a few scratches." He winced and groaned to prove his point.

Robards leaned over the DE and yelled out, "It's Dolohov! You got him!"

Shack put a hand on Harry's shoulder, part in congratulation, and part to keep him upright, "That's excellent. We'd been looking for him since Voldemort broke him out of Azkaban in January, but hadn't been able to find him yet."

Harry had started to repair his clothes as Bonderson walked up, "Bonderson, everyone, I've got Hermione locked in the loo over there and I need to let her out. But this damage needs to be fixed up before I do."

Shack turned, "Right. On it."

Bonderson motioned, "Shall we let her out?"

Harry ran a spell to take down the cage ward and started stiffly hobbling toward the loo, "I don't want to have to obliviate her yet again."

"Mmm." Bonderson nodded, "I understand. I'll help explain."

Harry stretched his stiff leg and unlocked the loo door. He rang Hermione's mobile, "Hi Hermione. It's safe to come out now." The line clicked and the door burst open with a bang.

She looked panicked, "Harry! What the bloody hell happened?!"

"Miss Granger –" Bonderson was completely ignored.

Hermione landed a hug on Harry and wouldn't let go. A few quiet sobs snuck out.



Harry held her and whispered, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You were never supposed to be involved in any of this."

Hermione's muffled tear-stained voice came out of his shirt, "Harry. I thought you'd died."

Bonderson's smirk could be heard, "Miss Granger, Harry here is much tougher than that. But I'd like to apologise to you. This was never supposed to happen around you. I'm very sorry we weren't here soon enough to stop this."

She jumped out of Harry's arms and her fear and rage came roaring out guided by an accusing finger pointed at Bonderson, "You should have stopped this! Why was he involved in anything! He's under-age! You are supposed to protect him!"

Harry was trying to pull her back into a hug, "Shh-shh, It's alright. He was trying, but these bad guys were really bad."

She wasn't deterred, "Why didn't you have people stationed around here?"

Bonderson nodded calmly, "We do. But you're right, they still got through."

Harry tried again, "He was trying but I insisted."

She turned on him, "Insisted? On what?"

"Because you were living your dream at Uni. I didn't want them to take that away from you."

She blinked, "Me? What does this have to do with me?"

Harry deflated and turned his head away, "Because of me. You're friends with me, that puts you at risk. I'm sorry."

She landed another hug. She whispered, "I'm sorry, Harry."

Bonderson interjected, "We'll clean up here, Harry. I'm very sorry, Miss Granger."

Harry nodded to Bonderson, then turned to Hermione, "Come on, let's go home." He pulled her down the path toward home.

Hermione did not let go as they walked. After half a block she asked, "Harry?" She stopped and turned to him with significant tension, "I – keep having this dream –"

His eyes became fearful, "Dream?"

"Over and over, the same dream. We are in a huge round stone room – with tiered seats. It was dim and – I ran up to you and – kissed you – and I said something to you –"

He nodded, "Yes." A statement. Not a question.

Her face paled, her eyes were fearful, she whispered, "What did I say?"

He smiled sadly, "You said – 'come find me'."

Hermione screamed and started to fall.

Harry caught her and let her down to sitting on the walk. She was gasping, and crying. She was starting to become hysterical as she tried to stand up and get away.

Harry helped her up and held on, "Hermione it's all right."

She looked at him in fear, "Harry – Harry –" Her eyes were huge and she couldn't stand up straight. She was starting to hyperventilate.

Harry held on, "Hermione you're safe, it's all right."

"No! They'll – they're – Harry, help me!"

"Yes, I'm here. I'm still here. I won't leave you."

"Harry, what happened? They – they –" She froze mid-thought – then jumped up, grabbed his coat, and yelled in his face, "They obliterated me!"

He smiled like a rogue, "And did a piss-poor job of it."

She froze and starred wide-eyed into his eyes for several moments, barely seeing him. Then she shook him and his coat with all her might and yelled, "Those fucking bastards! Those evil fucking bastards! I'll kill them!"

Harry held on, "It's too late."

That was enough to stop her, "- What?"

His face turned serious, "They're dead already."

She looked at him for a moment, then dove in for another hug, "Harry." She started crying again. This time the tears didn't stop.

"Come on. Let's go home." He started walking slowly toward home still wrapped in a hug. He noticed Remus, Shack, Robards, and Bonderson walking a discrete distance behind.

## 12. The Power She - Doesn't Have

CHAPTER SIZE: 11572

### Chapter 12

#### The Power She - Doesn't Have

#### Harry Potter and Hermione Granger

Friday, 29 November, 1996, 22:00

"Harry?"

"Yes?" They had made it half a block toward Hermione's flat.

"Is - is magic real?"

Harry smiled, "Yes. Hogwarts, Buckbeak, Fluffy, Snape, McGonagall, all of it."

"I'm so confused. I remember some things - and then I don't remember them - but I remember remembering them. And -"

"Sounds like you're still fighting part of the binding."

She stopped and looked at him for a moment, "Are you sure? It wasn't just something I imagined?"

He smiled, "Yes. We both lived it together. Cromwell was the imagination."

She sighed and dove back into her hug. Another ten steps and she stopped, looked up, "Cromwell was ...?" She sighed and fell back into her hug. "I'm confused."

Harry nodded, "I can only imagine. Basically, everything I said about Cromwell was a distortion of Hogwarts."

"It's not what you said that's the problem, it's what my brain imagined that's the problem. I have all these – bits of imagination that –" She leaned back and looked at Harry in amazed realisation, "– are incomplete. They are incomplete because they are invented."

Harry nodded, "Yes. I guess we shouldn't have given you so much background to feed your imagination."

"So – what else am I imagining?"

Harry chuckled, "Cromwell Weekends were really Hogsmeade Weekends."

She gasped and looked at him, "Hogsmeade ..."

"Your Lacrosse injury was really the fight at the Ministry and Dolohov's spell injury."

She stopped and felt across her body, "It's gone."

Harry smiled, "Remus came up with an obscure spell that I used on you at least once a day for over a month that cured it. It took me almost two weeks to learn it well enough that I could do it voicelessly. It was a paragraph long."

She looked at him in amazement for a moment, then dove back into her hug, "Thank you, Harry." A few more steps and she stopped and looked at him again, "And I didn't imagine you taking the GCSE test with me?"

"Nope. That was fun."

She smiled, "Fun? Now you're really confusing me. Since when is studying fun for you?" They started walking again.

He smiled and spoke quietly to her, "Since you started studying so hard. It was the easiest way for me to stay involved with you. And it became a lot of fun."

Harry and Hermione approached the stairs up to her flat – when Hermione froze.

Harry looked concerned, "What's wrong?"

She sounded tense, "I can't go back there right now. I'm too upset and confused and – I may blurt something out. Can we go to your flat for now?"

"Yes." They turned and started toward Harry's flat. Hermione was still wrapped around him, sniffing occasionally.

"Harry, what's happening in the wizarding world?"

Harry didn't know how to answer that, "What do you remember?"

"I'm – still rather confused. I think there are still holes in my memories – and some holes that come and go. I can remember remembering things – that I can't remember now. But – I think I was able to save most of my memories of magic and Hogwarts – and you. But I don't think I was able to save much about the Wizarding World – or politics."

Remus, Robards, Shack, and Bonderson caught up to them. Remus opened the flat door.

Remus spoke as they passed him in the doorway, "You may be fighting the binding still. Or part of it."

Hermione stared at him for a moment. Then she looked at Harry with a bit of amazement, "Your parents are architects in Singapore? That's very inventive."

Harry started chuckling.

She started looking around, "I'm sorry, I don't remember your name."

"Auror Gawain Robards, Miss." He bowed.

Hermione turned back to Remus, "And – you're still Remus Lupin, right?"

Remus nodded with a smile.

"And – Shack?"

"Auror Kingsley Shackelbolt, at your service." He bowed. "Though the Auror Service doesn't actually exist any more."

She looked at him like he said something embarrassing.

Harry pulled her to the couch and sat down, "The Ministry has fallen. Tom is running things now."

She gasped.

Shack knelt down next to the couch, "Miss Granger, I need to ask how you circumvented the Binding. We may be able to reverse it, or at least it's worst effects."

She concentrated, "I had been experimenting with Occlumency for some time. As part of that, I would experiment with timed obliviations of myself or obliviations with a keyword. So when it came to the official Binding, I was a step or two ahead of the Obliviator using keywords. I would do several obliviations of different parts of my memories, all with the same keyword. That would mean that if I was interrupted, I would succeed in a number of memory areas instead of having to succeed at all of it or get nothing. Then I tried to bind my own magic to a different function, so if anyone looked at the Binding it would look fine. My magic would be bound – just not to the correct function. If I happened to get it wrong then I still might be fine because it would be a double-binding, which would eventually fail on it's own."

Remus asked quietly, "If I may ask – what function did you bind your magic to?"

Hermione gave a sneaky smile, "I bound my magic to maintaining my health."

Remus looked confused, "But - it does that anyway."

She smiled, "Yes. A nice easy thing for it to do. No coercion required."

Shack looked amazed, "Alright, but - how did you fool the Obliviator while she was doing it?"

"Legillimency, a wandless confundus charm, and a bit of obliviation on her. We had quite the tussle initially. But by the end she didn't notice anything amiss."

Shack and Remus started laughing.

Harry just sat and stared in awe.

Shack shook his head, "Amazing. If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to check if the binding is still there?"

She nodded and looked in his eyes.

Shack waved his wand for a bit, then nodded, "You have two limited bindings, yours and the Obliviators. Both are still functioning. They overlap in the areas of magic they bind, so that portion will likely fail at some point. I don't know how long."

Harry spoke up, "I suppose we can test it." He held up his left arm and ejected his backup wand; Hermione's wand.

"Ah! My wand! You saved it!"

Harry handed it to her, "I saved all your other things too."

She melted holding her wand, hugging it to her.



She started to hold it out to use it but Shack grabbed her hand and held it, "I think you should wait given the existing bindings. There will likely be a conflict and that could be – quite painful."

She sighed and nodded, "Ok, I'll wait. Harry, what about my parents?"

He smiled, "They are fine. We have a lot of wards protecting their house and practice. There hasn't been an attack on them for quite a few weeks now."

Her eyes got big, "An attack?"

Harry nodded, "There were about five attacks on them a number of weeks ago, –"

Remus snuck in, "Seven."

Hermione whispered, "Seven?"

Harry tried not to notice, "– but Remus and I defended them."

She looked unsettled, "So – were there attacks on me?"

Harry nodded, "Yes."

Remus smirked, "Harry defended you mostly. I was busy with something else, until recently."

Hermione looked between Harry and Remus, "Who attacked?"

Remus smirked as he pointed at Harry.

Harry shrugged, "Just random Death Eaters, except one was Peter Petigrew and this last one was Dolohov."

Remus started chuckling.

Hermione took notice and pinned him with a glare, "Remus. Explain."

Harry groaned and covered his face.

Remus conceded to Hermione's glare, "Harry – and you, evidently – have become known as 'Voldemort's Anvil'. Or 'Voldemort's Punishment'. If Tom has a DE that screws up he makes them attack one or the other of you as punishment. Harry has won every fight, quite clandestinely."

Hermione sat up and looked at Harry like he grew another head, "How many?"

Harry shrugged, "I wasn't keeping count." Harry started glaring at everyone, trying to intimidate them from answering any further.

Hermione also glared at everyone else, trying to intimidate them to answer further. Shack and Robards shrugged – and Remus, eventually. Bonderson had a smile.

Hermione cleared her throat and gave a glare worthy of McGonagall's protege, "Mr Bonderson, care to share with the class?"

Bonderson's smile grew larger, "Oh, I think Mr Potter's body-count is 35 so far."

Remus whispered an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

Robards and Shack exchanged shocked looks.

"Ah!" Hermione landed on Harry with a hug, "I'm sorry."

Bonderson continued, "It is the considered opinion of MI5 Legal Council that Mr Potter is involved in wartime actions and is thus shielded from the threat of civil prosecution. He has been included in our activation of forces by competent authority. As have been the members of the Aurors Service as they have been absorbed into MI5 and similarly with the members of the Order of the Phoenix. And, ah – not to mention being self defence."

Remus interrupted, "What do you consider the status of the Death Eaters?"

Bonderson raised an eyebrow, "All marked Death Eaters are considered Foreign Enemy Combatants by definition, due to having a Dark Mark and they can't be determined to be British Citizens. Their status is declared verifiably guilty by having wilfully submitted to the Dark Mark, and the statements and actions that comprise that ritual."

Harry sat up, "So - what do you consider Hermione's status?"

"A victim of persecution by an extrajudicial proceeding. Any and all judgements by the Wizengamot are considered null and void pending review by competent authority."

Harry was about to explode, "So she can go to St Mungos and have the binding and the obliviation reversed?"

"Yes. Though - it would help to have a letter from the Crown ordering this - to make sure they understand. The problem is that St Mungos is under threat by Tom's forces. So that will have to wait for the resolution of the conflict."

Harry was still smiling like a loon.

Bonderson cleared his throat, "Ah - one thing I would like to suggest." He waited for everyone's attention to gather, "The Grangers - and Harry - should be taken into protective custody for the remainder of the conflict."

Remus nodded, "I agree."

Harry looked at Hermione, "I guess I have no complaint, depending on the security arrangements."

Bonderson started texting on his phone, "Your parents will be in hiding within an hour. I'll send someone to pick up your things. A car will be here in a few minutes."

Harry looked a bit suspect, "A car? Why would we drive? Why not portkey?"

Bonderson shook his head, "Way too easy to trace magically. By going non-magical you drop off the face of the earth."

Harry bobbed his head back and forth, "Ok. Do you need me to add you into the sensing wards I have set up?"

Bonderson shook his head, "No, we can take over those. You've got almost the whole campus covered. And it's likely that DEs will continue to show up so I'll have some people stationed here to keep things quiet."

Remus cleared his throat, "Do you want me to go with Harry?"

Bonderson smiled, "Actually, if you would work with Shack and Robards, here, that would really help."

Shack motioned toward Bonderson and spoke to Remus, "He's basically Head of the DMLE at this point. His boss, a guy named Gerald Greyson, is basically Minister of Magic now. At least until we get it put back together again. Until then, we're the Ministry In Exile."

Bonderson started moving toward the door, "Alright, the car is here."

Harry got up and gave Remus a hug, "Thanks, Remus. You be careful."

"You too, Prongslet. And don't let Hermione out of your sight."

Hermione huffed as Harry shook his head emphatically. Harry pulled Hermione's hand and followed Bonderson out the door.

Bonderson lead them down to the car park in front of the building where a large Land Rover was idling with just it's parking lights on. They got in and the driver started off.

Hermione asked, "Are we going to be able to see my parents?"

Bonderson turned around from the front seat, "Yes, you will all be in the same location. It should take us almost an hour to get there."

Hermione sat and watched the lights of the traffic and the shops pass by as they made their way through the darkness. She seemed tense, focussed. "Harry, can you tell me your perspective on what's been happening?"

Harry sighed and submerged into thought for a few moments, then he started speaking hesitantly, "After – we tried to save Sirius in the Department of Mysteries, a number of the attacking DEs were arrested, Tom was exposed and Fudge had to admit Tom was alive. Then Dumbledore sent me back to Hogwarts and – I was so angry I trashed his office. He then told me about the prophesy."

Bonderson's eyes grew and he pulled out some paper and started taking notes.

Hermione interrupted, "This was the one that said you had the power to defeat Tom?"

Harry nodded in frustration, "And it said Tom and I were locked in a fight to the death. This, of course, did *not* help my mood. Then Dumbledore sent me back to the Dursley's for a few weeks. Then you called and convinced me to come help you recover from your injuries." He sighed into his memories, "That was a week of bliss. Then the DEs attacked your house."

"How many?"

"Six. I injured all of them to some degree, and I was injured by one of them. The last one tried to apparate me somewhere – but I tried to apparate somewhere else. I did not land where I was trying to go, or where he was trying to take me, but I did take his hand with me."

Bonderson chuckled.

Harry wiped his face trying to gather his thoughts, "I had to summon the Knight Bus to take me to St Mungos and they wouldn't let me go until the next morning."

Bonderson asked, "How were you injured?"

Harry frowned, "A cracked femur."

Bonderson winced, Hermione groaned.

"Dobby told me you were in the Auror cells so I went looking for your parents. They were gone, but I found your wand, and I collected all your things and my things into your bottomless bag. Then I tried to see you in the Auror offices, but no one would let me see you, or anyone else. I wrote letters to Dumbledore, McGonagall, Remus, even Fudge, but no one replied."

Hermione nodded, "I think Dumbledore had your mail blocked."

Harry huffed in anger, "Then at the trial Scrimgeour claimed he was too busy and let Dawlish run the trial. Dawlish wouldn't let you speak, or me, and the Wizengamot went along with his load of tosh. – I found Dawlish with a Dark Mark two weeks ago. – They convicted you and as they were leading you away I jumped down to the floor of the Wizengamot and you came running. You said 'come find me' and they hit us with stupefy's. A few minutes later I was revived and you were gone. I yelled and screamed at Dumbledore and the entire Wizengamot. Told them all to burn in hell. That I would not defend them, that they were evil. Then I ran out."

"Where did you go?"

"I went to Order HQ. I sent a Patronus message to Remus and asked him to come. We talked and I convinced him to help me protect you. He started training me in physical fitness, hand-to-hand combat, magic of all sorts, wards, healing, magical combat, everything. We went to the Mind Healers at St Mungos to ask how they obliviate someone of most of their lives. They told us because, since you weren't 'magical' any more, you were no longer covered by their confidentiality oaths. Then we came and visited you to talk about 'Cromwell' and your future plans."

Hermione smirked, "And I drug you into studying for the GCSE."

Bonderson started chuckling again.

Harry smiled, "Yes. It was exhausting – but also a lot of fun. I learned a lot during that time."

"That's when you started defending me?"

"Yes. It was a slow escalation. Now it's every few days."

"And Remus? What was he doing?"

Harry sighed heavily and wiped his face again, "Well – that's another story. I had charmed my glasses to display the magic that leaks off of any magic in the area."

"Can I see?"

He shook his head, "I had to add a restriction for my magical signature only, so you wouldn't accidentally see magic through my glasses."

Hermione huffed a pout that caused Harry to choke.

"But I can create another set of glasses for you."

Bonderson chimed in, "I'd love to see that too."

Harry nodded, "The real difficulty was that Remus created a set of glasses too. That allowed him to see my scar – which had what looked like a Dark Mark in it."

Hermione almost exploded, "What!?"

"It looked like a red glow surrounding a small black boiling blob of magic. He went and asked Clawhammer to help investigate my health. Well – come to find out, Tom had made these things called horcruxes. Seven of them. He would murder someone and perform a ritual that splits off a portion of his soul and attaches it to an object, which binds the rest of his soul to this plane of existence. It gives him a measure of immortality."

Hermione's voice was faint, "You are a horcrux? Your scar?"

"Well – not really. I was a failed horcrux. Unintended. A shard of Tom's soul was lodged in my scar but it was not bound as securely as a real horcrux nor as protected because he never got to finish the ritual – assuming he had even planned to do the ritual. But given there was a linkage between all the soul shards, Remus, with the help of Gringotts, was able to find all the others and destroy them. Then they destroyed the one in me, so Tom is now mortal again."

Her hand was shaking, "Did ... What ..." She sighed, "I get the impression there is more?"

Harry frowned, "Yes. Dumbledore knew about this since the day my parents died and never told me, or anyone. And he changed the charms on Moody's magical eye so he wouldn't see it. He evidently thought that I had to die in order to deal with it."

Hermione turned to look straight into Harry's eyes with enough intensity to strip the charms off his glasses, "I'm going to kill that wrinkly old bastard."

Harry nodded, "It's too late. He's dying; got himself cursed somehow and only has about a year left to live. The Order of the Phoenix has collapsed. He's become completely irrelevant now."

She looked at him with concern, "Why are you making excuses for him?"

"Because I don't want you to be contaminated by his problems. And yes, I was ready to kill him earlier too, but now I just want away from him. I don't have enough capacity to take on his issues, too."

She looked at him for a long while, then sighed, "Alright." She turned to Bonderson, "So, Mr Bonderson, what are your next steps?"

"We are waiting for Tom to show himself. He's been hiding in Malfoy Manor for quite a while. We can't hit him until we know with certainty that we can kill him, because we can't risk him surviving and attacking the muggle government. So we need to wait for a clear shot."



"Have you thought of driving him out of Malfoy Manor?"

Bonderson's eyebrows rose, "Yes, we've talked about that, but he holds all the advantages there. Unless you have a suggestion?"

She nodded, "Attack it with a force that pumps Carbon Monoxide into the Manor."

He looked confused, "How would Carbon Monoxide help?"

"It's a colourless, odourless gas and takes away their ability to use magic."

Bonderson's eyes grew to saucers, "You're kidding!"

"Your ability to use magic is like your colour vision; they're both very dependent on your ability to process oxygen. That's why you can only fly to less than 3k metres on a broom. Not enough oxygen up that far. And at night your colour vision is gone long before you get to 3k metres."

Harry smiled at her, then turned to Bonderson, "My house elf used to work for the Malfoy's. He knows a tunnel that goes under the wards and into the dungeons. And he knows the layout of the Manor."

Bonderson smiled, then started laughing, "Oh, yes!" He started texting on his phone. But then he stopped dead, "Wait - is that chemical warfare?" He frowned deep into thought.

Hermione frowned too, "Is teargas?"

Bonderson made a noise, "Hmm. Good point." Then he started texting again, "I'll have to ask."

The rest of the trip was quiet, almost motionless as the world passed by underneath them in the dark, except for Bonderson's texting fingers and the steady glow of his mobile. Harry barely noticed the car turning into a large gate with a fence and a guard post. The driver showed a badge and the guard saluted and opened the gate. The car moved through narrow

dark lanes through dense trees. They broke out of the trees into what looked like an old unused airfield with old unused hangars on weed-encrusted taxiways and runways. The lights outside the buildings were dim and spare. No one could be seen outside. The car came to a stop between several old buildings.

Bonderson came alive, "Well - this is it. Let's get inside so we're not seen."

They walked in a door in the side of the huge hangar, into an office area with more dim lights.

Bonderson lead them to a small room with a few old well-used government-issue office chairs. "If you'll both wait here for a few moments, there are some people who you need to meet." He smiled as he backed out the door and closed it.

Hermione melted into Harry in a tender hug, "I keep having memories come and go. One minute I remember us doing something and then the next I only have an echo of a memory. Something I can't quite reach."

Two knocks came at the door and it opened.

Hermione turned, "Mum! Dad!" She fell into their arms.

Mumbled words enveloped them in soft comfort and silent warmth for a few moments.

Bonderson poked his head in the door after them, "We'll have a planning meeting in about an hour and we'd like you to attend."

Harry nodded.

Dan looked up, "Harry. You're here."

Hermione bounced back to Harry and manoeuvred him to a chair and pushed him into it, taking the next.

"Good evening Mr Granger. Have they told you anything?"

The Grangers sat down as Dan continued, "Not much but – I have a pretty good idea what's going on."

Harry and Hermione looked confused.

Dan and Emma chuckled before Dan continued, "You see – when Hermione first told us a few years ago about what the wizarding world could do – obliviations and all that – I started keeping a diary of all the things she told us about the wizarding world. Just in case. We've been reading it to – catch up – on everything that's been taken away from us."

Hermione's jaw was hanging, "How did the obliviator not find out you did that?"

He just kept smiling, "I kept the diary at the practice. In my mind that kept the knowledge of the diary in a separate sphere from family, and I hoped it would be missed if obliviators ever came by. And I only updated it there. Given how carefully we compartmentalised our lives, to not let the practice over-run our lives, I only thought about the diary at the office."

Emma nodded with a grin, "I had my own version to corroborate his."

Hermione was shocked, "So you've known about what happened for longer than I have!"

Dan chuckled, "Yes, I guess we have. How did you find out?"

Hermione just kept staring, getting her bearings, "Just this evening, Harry had to defend us against this Death Eater and – it touched a memory. I had been having this dream over and over. It involved Harry and – it seemed so real – it wouldn't let me go. So I asked Harry about it. I had locked up my own memories before the obliviator could get to them and I'd used a key phrase that would release them – and Harry remembered it."

Dan looked a bit sad, "So you have all your memories back?"

Hermione shook her head, "No. I have most of them, but I still have some of the binding that keeps trying to hide my memories. They – come and go every so often. And that means I still don't have my magic back."

Emma asked, "What have you been doing, Harry?"

Harry shrugged hoping the topic would pass.

Hermione huffed, "Harry has been defending us."

Dan and Emma sat up in their chairs.

Harry shrugged again.

Hermione looked at him seriously, "How many did Bonderson say there was? Thirty five?"

The Grangers gasped.

Dan mumbled incredulous, "Thirty five?"

Harry shrugged – but at Hermione's gimlet eye, he nodded reluctantly.

Dan started to look uncomfortable, "Where?"

Harry sighed, "Your home, your practice, Hermione's flat."

Dan swallowed hard, Emma looked green.

Dan shook his head, "That's – one every few days?"

Harry shrugged again, "Not really. Sometimes they came in groups of two or four. It's been faster lately."

Dan grimaced, "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry reached out to Hermione's hand and spoke strongly, "I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

Emma asked, "Do you have to do it any more?"

Harry looked around the room and sighed, "I don't think so. The MI5 guys keep saying that I don't have to be involved. In fact, because we are under age, we *can't* be involved – beyond self defence."

A knock came at the door and it opened. Bonderson poked his head in, "The planning meeting is forming. Can you participate?"

Harry stood up, followed by Hermione.

Dan looked to Bonderson, "Just a planning meeting?"

Bonderson nodded.

Harry nodded to Dan, "We'll be back in a bit."

Bonderson motioned to all of them, "Let me show you to your quarters."

They followed him out of the tiny office, down the hall, into the huge hangar.

Bonderson pointed at several rows of large boxes standing near the wall, "Those are expanded steamer trunks. Each is a three-bedroom flat. Yours is the last row, third from the right end."

Dan and Emma hugged Harry and Hermione, then moved to get settled.

Bonderson motioned them to follow to the other side of the huge space where an arrangement of desks, lights, computers and screens filled an area against one wall, surrounded by half walls and covered by a roof inside the hangar. Three very large screens were arranged on the wall. A group of people were working the desks and complex data was displayed on the large screens.

A very large table surrounded by chairs stood a bit outside the area of desks. They moved toward the table. People were starting to gather from all over the hangar and from the desk area.

Bonderson started corralling the troops, "Alright, everyone. Let's get started."

Harry recognised a lot of the faces as they found seats.

Bonderson started the meeting, "Right. Next to me is the leaders of the Auror contingent. Master Auror – retired – Alastor Moody, Auror Shackbolt, Auror Robards, and Remus Lupin. I'm Wallace Bonderson, muggle-born with MI5, acting as temporary head of the DMLE. This is Gerald Greyson, Director of the Strategic Relations Directorate in MI5, who is acting as temporary Minister of Magic. Next we have Lieutenant Laferty who heads the SAS groups here. Lieutenant Gordon of the Royal Marines. Navy Commander Chesterton, Air Force Major McMaster. Our liaison with MI6 is Mr Hallston. We have liaisons with the Home Office with Ms Jess and Social Services with Ms Searston. And Mr Norton is our liaison with the Home Office Emergency Management group. And Healer Stanhope is head of St Mungos. Finally, we have Hermione Granger and Harry Potter."

All eyes swivelled to Harry and Hermione, with a few surprised mumbles to match.

Bonderson broke into everyone's stare, "I've called this meeting because Miss Granger has come up with a brilliant idea. As background, we have not been able to figure out how to dislodge Tom Riddle from Malfoy Manor because he held all the advantages at that location. Because he has been hiding in Malfoy Manor we have not had any opportunity to hit him. Well, Miss Granger's idea reverses that. I think we will be able to attack that facility with a force that carries with it tanks of Carbon Monoxide."

Mumbles and nods came from all the non-magicals. Confusion from the magicals.

Bonderson explained, "You see, Carbon Monoxide is a colourless, odourless gas that binds to the haemoglobin in blood. Basically, every magical who breaths Carbon Monoxide loses the ability to use magic for a number of hours."

Gasps came from all the magicals, except Remus. He had a devious smile and nodded toward Hermione.

Bonderson spoke up, "One caveat, anyone who breathes too much Carbon Monoxide can die."

Healer Stanhope stood up, "We need to know how to counter this, and detect it before you begin."

Bonderson nodded, "Yes, definitely."

"And," Harry broke in, "My house elf used to work for the Malfoy's and knows every inch of the Manor."

Every military member started grinning and chuckling.

Harry stood up, "Dobby?"

A pop was barely heard next to Harry and a voice, "Yes?" Dobby was invisible.

"Dobby, you can show yourself."

Dobby appeared next to Harry.

"Dobby, can you show us a plan of Malfoy Manor? We need to plan an attack on it."

Dobby looked surprised, then developed a menacing grin. He waved his hand and in the centre of the table a full colour three dimensional model of Malfoy Manor and the surrounding grounds appeared. The floors separated and lifted up so everyone could see an exploded replica of the Manor. Complete with furnishings and pictures on the walls.

The military members stood up and leaned in to stare intently, pointing and mumbling. So did the Aurors.

Bonderson turned, "Dobby, can you give us a description of the areas in the Manor?"

Dobby nodded and started pointing. As he did so, areas of the building lit up with colours, "This is the West Dungeon. Most of the prisoners are here."

"How many?" Healer Stanhope stood up again.

"There is room for 45. There may be some in the East Dungeon also." Dobby highlighted the East Dungeon.

Before everyone could ask more questions Harry stood up, "Dobby, please help them, but you are not allowed to endanger yourself." He gave Dobby a significant look.

Dobby nodded silently.

Harry looked around, "Well, I think you all have a very good start. I wish you well with this."

Nods and smiles around the table as Harry pulled Hermione to their trunk.

Bonderson came up as they were about to climb down the stairs, "Harry?"

They stopped and turned.

"Harry, can you get another message to Lord Black? Remus says he can't since Dora is now out of the country."

Harry's eyebrows rose up in surprise, "Uh - it might take me a minute to think, now that the Order has fallen apart." He stood for a moment gripping Hermione hand hard, desperately hoping she wouldn't say anything, "I think - let me try. Kreature!"

It took a few moments before Kreature appeared. And he looked suspicious, "Yes, Sirius' Harry Potter? What do you want?"



Harry leaned down and spoke plaintively, "Do you think you can carry a message to Lord Black?"

Kreature looked even more suspicious.

Harry motioned toward Bonderson, "He has a message that Lord Black needs to see. Can you take it to him?"

Kreature looked untrusting toward Bonderson, "Just a message?"

Bonderson nodded and held out an envelope.

Kreature ran magic over the envelope. "Very well." He took the envelope and popped out.

Harry stood up, sighed, and looked at Bonderson, "I guess we'll see if that works."

Bonderson smiled, "Thank you, Harry. That really helps us. I think we are making progress with Lord Black. He seems to be much more progressive than we thought."

Harry's eyebrows rose and a nod, "I can't say that I've met – whoever it is, so I can't give you any opinion. What do you think he can do?"

Bonderson slowly considered, "We are hoping he can gather the old families together. To lead them back on the right path and away from the Blood Purity perspective. He does not seem dogmatic, so – we'll have to see."

Harry nodded, "Well – if I can help, let me know."

Bonderson nodded, "Thanks, Harry."

As Bonderson turned and left Harry pulled Hermione down the stairs.

"Harry, what was that all about?"

Harry turned as he stepped off the stairs and engulfed Hermione in a hug, "Thank you for catching my clue, to not say anything."

She nodded, still confused. Then raised her own eyebrow to indicate an answer was necessary.

He smiled, "You see - no one knows I am Lord Black - and Lord Black has been rather busy lately."

Her eyebrows rose higher and she sounded very suspicious, "What has he been doing lately?"

Harry started to chuckle, "Oh - you know - threatening Tom in public, things like that."

Hermione's eyes got serious fast, "Harry James Potter, what have you done?"

He nodded toward the couch with a big smile, "Come, let me tell you a story. I even have some visual aids, if you'd like." His smile kept getting bigger. "And some new magic you will absolutely go crazy over."

Hermione pulled him determinedly, "Story, Harry. Let's hear it." She pushed him into a chair next to the couch where Dan and Emma were sitting. Hermione sat on his lap.

Emma looked askance, "Hermione, dear, aren't you impeding his telling his story?"

She never took her eyes off Harry, "I'm making sure he can't get away without telling the whole story."

Harry was laughing with enjoyment, "Never."

Hermione poked his chest, "So - tell me about this Lord Black business."

Dan asked, "Who's Lord Black?"

Hermione poked Harry's chest, her eyes never leaving him, "Harry is, but we don't want anyone else to know. So – story."

Harry's smile dropped a bit, "The Wizengamot summoned Lord Black. They had no idea who Lord Black actually was, and the Goblins wouldn't tell them. So they just blindly summoned Lord Black. I had to show up as part of the magic of the Wizengamot, but I didn't have to show my true identity. The Black Family ring would verify I was Lord Black. And the Goblins were nice enough to give me some magic to hide my identity."

Hermione was looking quite incredulous, "They just gave you some magic?"

"Yes, a series of spells that completely hid who I am. It worked perfectly. I can show you."

Hermione froze for a moment, "After the story. Ok, so what happened?"

Harry started to smile deviously, "I showed up, insulted everyone, threatened – just about everyone, and threatened to destroy the Wizarding Compact."

Hermione gasped, "You what?"

Emma asked, "Ah, Hermione, what's this Wizarding Compact?"

Hermione rushed through a paragraph of history without taking her eye off Harry, "It's a vow of Binding that was created sometime before the 800's that holds together the Sacred 28 Families that formed the Wizengamot, and the Ministry. All of the magic of the Ministry is built upon that Wizarding Compact."

Harry was chuckling, "Yes, I'd had a conversation with Clawhammer about the political backdrop behind what the Wizengamot wanted. He suggested that if I threatened to destroy the Wizarding Compact, this would 'change the game' completely. Because if I did destroy it, the Ministry would collapse, the ICW would declare Britain an ICW Protectorate and move in

troops, which would stop the war with Tom. I told the Wizengamot not to summon me again or I would destroy the Compact."

Hermione looked dumbfounded.

Harry kept chuckling, "It certainly stirred the pot."

Hermione blinked a few times to catch up, "Ok - how did that go?"

Harry nodded once, decisively, "It worked. Lord Black and his threat were the only topic in Wizarding Britain for weeks. And evidently Tom was infuriated because he had to start planning all over again."

Now Hermione looked confused, "But was there any resolution? Any definitive action taken?"

Now Harry shook his head in amazement, "No - well, yes. A week or so later they summoned me again."

Hermione's eyes grew again, "Who the hell did that?"

"Dumbledore. But he didn't tell anyone he was going to. So I went planning to destroy the Compact."

Hermione stood up and started pacing. She kept stopping and looking at him - then starting pacing again. "Ok - you have completely upended the state of Wizarding Britain - even by just threatening that." She turned to him almost accusingly, "And you can do that? Just - destroy it?"

"As Lord Black, one of the Sacred 28 Families that formed the Compact, I can."

"And no one knows you are Lord Black?"

"Nope - well, you all, Remus, and a few of the Goblins. But Harry Potter is just about the only path to get a message to Lord Black. Me and the Goblins. Since Sirius was my Godfather it's a plausible explanation."

She sat down on his lap again, "Ok - so what happened the second time?"

Harry hesitated and sighed, "I - started a fight in the Wizengamot Chambers." Those words hung in the air until Hermione was about to explode. He started again, "Well - I had insulted Malfoy the first time - and again this second time - so he attacked me. Dumbledore was trying to defend the Compact. And - it ended up being a three-way fight with me, Dumbledore, and Malfoy. It ended up with Dumbledore defeated, Malfoy dead, and I walked out without destroying the Compact."

Hermione covered her face with her hands, fell against him, and made incoherent noises until a muffled, "Oh. My. God!" came out.

Harry couldn't stop chuckling, "Sorry. Sorry." In a few moments he recovered, "Well - and then a few weeks later, Rita Skeeter showed up outside one of your classes."

Hermione sat up in panic, "What?!"

"You were in class and she showed up. Come to find out later, she was acting as a reporter for the WWN. She was broadcasting our conversation back to the WWN and they were sending it out live. Of course, she didn't tell *me* that. So I was - rather blunt."

Dan and Emma started chuckling.

Hermione started chuckling, "Oh, you're kidding!"

"I - told her - and by extension all the rest of Wizarding Britain, to bugger off. That I was not responsible for anything. Fudge was bribed, Sirius was innocent, Petigrew was alive - at least a few weeks prior, and that I would not defend them against anything. It wasn't my job."

Hermione just sat in abject amazement staring at him.

Harry shrugged, "With me saying all that, with Lord Black making a mess, and with MI5 saying I'm too young to be involved, no one has mentioned

the name of Harry Potter in months! I'm free! I can be normal! I don't have to be involved! We don't have to be involved! MI5 says it's their responsibility to deal with Tom, not mine."

A slow smile grew on Hermione, "You monster!" She dove in for a hug. "I leave you alone for a few weeks and look what you do!"

Harry returned that hug and spoke tenderly, "You have *not* left me alone. You have reminded me again what it's like to be *normal*. And I want to *stay* normal. And that means – I don't want to go back to the wizarding world. I want to stay at Cambridge, with you."

She sat up and looked at him seriously.

"We can still study magic. I've learned a huge amount in the last few months, with Remus teaching me, but I don't want to be 'The-Boy-Who-Lived' any more."

She started a slowly growing smile, "You know – I think we can do that. And I think Lord Black will help us."

"I know he will. Just tell me how."

She started tapping her chin with a growing smile, "Ok, let's start with the letter from Bonderson to Lord Black."

Harry smiled at her energy, "Kreature!"

Pop. "Yes, Master." He held out the letter from Bonderson.

"Thank you, Kreature." He opened the letter as Kreature popped out.

*Lord Black,*

*I appeal to you as a member – a founding member – of Wizarding Britain. We are running out of time to save the institutions, the culture, the people of Wizarding Britain. We need your help to save this Nation. Specifically, we need you to convince your fellow Ancient families to reject Voldemort. To*

*turn away from bigotry in all forms. Every member of Wizarding Britain is irreplaceable – even muggle-born's – when the magical population is shrinking as fast as it is. If Wizarding Britain – if even magic itself – is to survive into future generations, then we cannot waste any magical blood on pointless fights over some imagined measure of 'blood purity'. Do not think that Voldemort really cares about blood purity, since he is a half-blood himself. He is using the pureblood bigotry as a cynical ploy. We need you to rally the Ancient Houses against Voldemort.*

*Let me know if you need anything from me,*

*Wallace Bonderson,*

*Acting Head of the DMLE*

Harry passed the letter to Hermione, "Well. I think we know what we need to do." He got up and pulled some parchment out of his – Hermione's – expanded bag and moved to writing at the table.

Hermione handed Bonderson's letter to her parents and leaned over Harry's shoulder and watched him write.

*Wallace Bonderson,*

*I agree. I will start now.*

*Lord Black*

Harry pulled out another parchment and started on his next letter. Hermione made some suggestions, and luckily, magic can erase ink quite effectively.

*An open letter to all of Wizarding Britain,*

*Wizarding Britain stands at the precipice of destruction. We must act to save ourselves – to save Magic itself. Because the magical population in Britain is shrinking rapidly, particularly in the face of a new war. We can not*

*afford to lose any magical blood – even muggle-borns. Or Magic will die out!*

*Let me be very clear. The only way to save Magic in this world is to reject Voldemort! If you insist on caring about blood purity, then understand that Voldemort is a half-blood! He is a liar! He does not care about blood purity! He will destroy the 'pure' families too, if they don't bow to him.*

*I am Lord Black, head of the Ancient House of Black. I will not submit to subjugation to a degenerate House of Slytherin! No Ancient House should submit to slavery, to anyone. Let alone to the in-bred, unstable, and insane dregs of the House of Slytherin!*

*The true Ministry of Magic is operating in Exile on the soil of Wizarding Britain. Voldemort's ministry is an unlawful insurrectionist rabble that will kill you for the fun of it. Do not submit to Voldemort! Defend your family! Defend your land! Do not submit! Stand up for Magic!*

*Lord Black*

Harry sighed with resignation as he handed the letter to Hermione, "Well, that should stir things up."

Hermione handed the letter to her parents, "Good. They could use some stirring up."

A knock came at the door to their trunk.

Hermione moved to the bottom of the stairs, "Come in."

Remus came down the stairs, "Harry, Hermione, Dan, and Emma. Everyone alright?"

Everyone nodded.

Dan picked up a grin, "So, Remus – you're a werewolf?"

Remus stopped short, "– Yes. Did Hermione tell you?"



Harry started laughing, "No –" He pointed at Dan, "– but there is where she got her intelligence. They kept a diary of all the things they learned of the Wizarding World. They've been reading about it for weeks in spite of the obliations."

Remus' smile just kept growing, "Amazing."

Dan held out the letters, "So – Harry has decided to blow up the Wizarding World. Maybe you'd like to check over his bomb-making skills?"

Remus did not know how to deal with that, so he just started reading the letters. His eye got bigger as he read. "Oh, man ..." He wiped his face, "You know what you need –" He wiped his hand across the letter, "– you need a title on this. Call it The Black Manifesto."

Hermione pulled it back and wrote the words across the top.

Harry sighed, "Ok, that works. But we still need to keep it quiet that I am Lord Black. So I'm thinking I need to have the elves deliver these letters as if from Lord Black. Like, Kreature delivers Bonderson's, a copy to Hogwarts, and St Mungos. Dobby can deliver a copy to Malfoy Manor and Gringotts. Winky will post copies outside every magical business in Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade, and anywhere else."

Hermione hummed in thought, "I think you should have Kreature deliver a copy to Gringotts because you want him to tell Gringotts to route all mail to Lord Black through Kreature. No direct owls to you."

Harry eyebrows rose, "See? I told you she was the smartest."

With a pop, Kreature appeared, "Master."

Harry leaned over to see Kreature better, "Kreature, what's up?"

"Master, Gringotts sent a letter that was forwarded from – Tom."

Harry stood up, "Oooh, This could be bad. He's been after me for a while now." Kreator handed the letter to Harry, who opened it.

*Lord Black,*

*I will summon you one last time. But this time, I think you will come. Because I have discovered a few things recently. Things you may find interesting. Primarily, that not only is the Wizengamot magic and the magic of the Ministry dependent on the Wizarding Compact, but so is most of the magic that maintains the Statute of Secrecy in Britain.*

*So. I summon you for 10:00 tomorrow morning or I will destroy the Wizarding Compact.*

*Your new Master,*

*Lord Voldemort*

*Emperor of Britain*

"Oh, God." Harry handed the letter to Remus.

Hermione, having read the letter over Harry's shoulder, took a very tense breath, stood up and started pacing.

Everyone was groaning as they read it.

Hermione stopped and turned, "Alright. This means the attack on Malfoy Manor needs to happen tonight. We need to keep Tom off balance and very busy."

Harry sighed and pulled out more parchment, "Ok, another letter to Bonderson."

*Wallace Bonderson,*

*Today I received this letter from Tom. We can not let him destroy the Wizarding Compact. I did not realise that there is a significant amount of the*

*magic that maintains the Statute of Secrecy is tied to it. I think we need to keep Tom busy and off balance, enough that he forgets about the summons. I am enclosing a copy of the Black Manifesto I will be posting around Britain. It should get a response from Tom. I will not show up for his summons.*

*Lord Black*

Hermione nodded as she read it, "I think we need to send that to Bonderson immediately. He needs as much time as he can get to set up the attack. Remus, can you go and be talking to Bonderson when he gets this letter and strongly encourage him to attack Malfoy Manor tonight?"

Remus smiled, "Right." He got up and climbed the stairs.

Harry put the set of letters together and called Kreator to deliver them. He put his head in his hands and groaned, "It's all a bit too much."

Hermione put her hand on Harry's shoulder comfortingly, "What was this magic you were going to show me?"

He grunted, took a long breath and stood up. His wand danced and his magic spun as he worked the spells from Gringotts for Lord Black. It was a stanza worth of spell and the effect was immediate. Harry disappeared into a black spectre. "It's quite effective." His voice came out distorted.

Dan and Emma were shocked.

Hermione looked at him critically, "Add in a few bits of tattered cloth fluttering in an unseen breeze and a bit of cold dread and you'd be a cute little dementor."

Harry's chuckle came out like big rocks in a metal barrel.

"Can I see the spellwork?"

Harry canceled the spells and started digging in Hermione's expended bag to pull out the sheaf of parchments that defined the spell sequence. He held them out.

She dove in greedily as she started pacing, reading, absorbing. After a few moments she started chuckling. She stopped pacing and looked at Harry, "This is brilliant." She started pacing again, head in the pages. With little chuckles breaking loose every so often. Until she stopped with a gasp and wide eyes. She stared into the landscape of her ideas seeing the entirety of the topology. The possibilities. Then she broke out into a smile and a laugh, "Oh, Harry. We can fix this!"

"Is it broken?"

"It's only one strand. It's linear. We can braid it. Or - crochet." Her eyes unfocussed for a few moments.

Harry started a sly smile, "And for those of us less visionary?"

She smiled with a glare, "This is a set of spells that are started, suspended, and completed linearly, one at a time, in order. Well, what if we vary the order of completion so there is an interlocking aspect to the composite spell?" She paused, "You see, when you try to dismantle a spell, to stop it, you start by attacking the ends of it."

Harry did not sound convinced, "Where did you hear that?"

"Not in class, in a book I borrowed from McGonagall. You see, spells are somewhat like stories; they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's hard to disrupt a spell in the middle because the ends protect it and reinforce it."

Harry choked on a chuckle, "You mean the ends justify the middle? - Or the means? Or - ?" He had a sly smile.

Hermione huffed at him, "No. Spells are like stories because they are created through a construct of 'intent and will'. Thoughts given substance

and physical action. And, because some spells are of indeterminate length, you start the spell, run it for a while, then stop it. Each step can be a different act of will. Well – what if you bury the ends of it into the middle of another spell? What if all the spell ends are buried in the middle of another spell? Like a Gordian knot?"

Harry's eyes grew large, "Like a fabric? Knitting with magic?"

"Yes. Or – a woven belt." Her eyes unfocussed as her thoughts ranged over the possibilities. Then she moved to the table and started writing on some conjured paper.

Harry smiled at Dan and Emma and whispered, "Good things come to those who wait."

"I heard that."

Chuckles mumbled about.

Harry couldn't wait long, "Remus said this set of spells was way beyond a Mastery."

Hermione spoke absently as she studied the spell, "It is, but only because this kind of complex compound spell is not used. The complexity is too hard when you can just run the spells in sequence. To interweave them is not worth the effort. Unless you need this level of complexity. – Or more."

Harry sounded confused, "So there is no advantage to this level of complexity?"

"Oh, there is. This spell set would be very difficult to break because of the intertwining. But I think laziness creeps in. Why bother when separate spells works just fine?"

"Ok, so what are you hoping to do with your changes to this spell set?"

She looked at him seriously, "The original set obscures your identity, but does nothing to protect you. If I can change the twining into weaving and add in a shield – or maybe two different kinds – then you will be very well defended too."

"*That* would be brilliant."

"I just need to figure out how to suspend – no, that still works. Ah! The original spell set was one-dimensional along the time axis. I just need to do two or more dimensions along the time access. But how – ?"

Harry's eyebrows stayed firmly stuck to his hairline as Hermione's implications kept rolling in. Harry whispered helplessly to Dan and Emma, "I have no idea."

Hermione didn't notice Harry's aside, "Oh! Not *spacial* dimensions along the time axis – dimensions of *intent*. I just need to define the dimensions of *intent*, and – they can be anything." She kept mumbling and staring into space, "The obscuring can remain as is – the defence – the shields can be the other dimension."

Harry shook his head in wonder, "I guess when magic is made out of 'intent and will' then everything is constructed out of thoughts. And thoughts can be anything."

Hermione looked at him with an intense stare, "Yes, and that means you must have the intelligence to precisely control your thoughts." Her gaze wandered away, "So everything becomes a thought experiment. – Which becomes real." She huffed angrily, "So where is the real reality? What's the difference between reality and – magic? Or – where did 'reality' come from? Or – who's reality is it?" She lapsed into a faraway stare.

Harry's eyes unfocussed, "Ok, we've gone down the rabbit hole now. How do we get back?" Harry came back into focus, "Now, hold on. My glasses show me the magic that leaks off of everything that's got magic on it. That should show us the difference between reality and magic."

Hermione's expression turned pained, "Harry, do your glasses show you elf magic?"

Harry now looked shocked, "Ah - no. I just saw Dobby's image of Malfoy Manor - with no colours from his magic."

"Elf magic is different than ours. Who's to say that all this -" she waved her hand around the room, "- is not someone else's magic?"

Harry started to feel faint and held up his hands in surrender, "Wait - wait - I can't handle that."

She sighed sadly, "Yes, one thing at a time; first we need to solve Tom Riddle."

Harry blinked a few times, and shook his head to clear it, "So, any ideas?"

She turned to him, considering, "What do you want, Harry?"

Harry looked confused, "I'd like it that he can never threaten us - or anyone else - ever again."

"In the immediate situation, yes, but what about in the larger view? What is your ultimate wish? If you could have anything, what would it be?"

Harry looked hollow, "My parents."

Hermione nodded, "Do you think Tom cared about his parents?"

Harry startled, "Cared? Does he - *can* he - care about anyone?"

"Yes, that could be true. He seems to hate his dad, but his mum? Is there a part of him, down deep, that would love to have a mother?"

Harry took a moment, "Why are we even asking this?"

Hermione took a deep breath, waited a moment, and delicately asked, "Harry, you and Tom have had very similar childhoods - but came out very

different. At some point, Tom made a decision that changed course for him. But – is there not the possibility that – at some level, you are still very similar?"

Harry was looking stressed, "Well – I suppose. Why does it matter?"

"Because if you cared about your mother, wouldn't there be a possibility that Tom cared about his mother?"

Harry's face dropped, and paled, "You want to use his mother against him?" He looked upset, "Isn't that – rather low?"

"I'm looking for weak points. I'm also concerned about you. You are obviously concerned about the ethical nature of using very sensitive weak points against him. Would he be that concerned about using these kinds of things against you?"

Harry closed his eyes, dropped his head, and sighed, "No. He's already done that. I'm sure he considers those 'weak points' as unacceptable weaknesses."

Hermione frowned, "Who else would have known him? They may have some understanding of him?"

"Dumbledore. He was transfiguration Professor at Hogwarts when Tom was there. He taught Tom."

"I think we need to talk to Dumbledore."

Harry huffed, "He will love that." Then he tilted his head in thought, "But – isn't MI5 responsible for Tom now?"

"Yes. I'm making contingency plans, in case they can't get him in time, or he gets away."

Harry nodded, "That's a good idea."

Hermione deflated, "Ok, I'm about done for tonight."



Harry stood up, "I want to go talk to Bonderson about the raid on Malfoy Manor. I'll be right back." He ran upstairs and found Bonderson in the middle of a clump of people. Some of the people made room for him to approach.

Bonderson noticed him, "Harry, what's up?"

"Um - I just wanted to find out how the planning for Malfoy Manor is going?"

Bonderson smiled, "It's very good. We are on for 02:00. We have all our people briefed and they are getting ready now."

Harry was rather intimidated with all the important people in uniforms around, "Ah, what's the plan - if I can ask?"

Bonderson nodded, "We are sending a joint team of Aurors and magical MI5 people, along with a few non-magical SAS to run the CO tanks. Then we will have two AC-130 Spectre Gunships orbiting the Manor at 5k metres to keep anyone from getting away. And the Navy has a missile frigate with cruise missiles waiting - just in case things get out of hand."

Harry's eyebrows were stuck in his hairline, "Wow - that's a lot."

"That and a cordon of Marines and some SAS snipers around the edges to make sure no one gets away."

Harry was trying to keep up, "Um - Hermione was trying to plan for - just in case - if Tom attacks us. And she wanted to know who knew Tom best - to ask some question of them - and that seems to be Dumbledore. We'd like to ask him to meet with us, but we don't know where would be a good place. Um - any suggestions?"

Bonderson's eyebrows rose, "That poses quite an interesting opportunity. We've been trying to talk to him for a number of months and he hasn't responded. If you can get him to show up, then after you are done, we would like to talk to him. Would that be acceptable?"

"Yes. That works."

"Excellent. How about at your flat in Cambridge? I assume he knows where that is?"

"Generally, yes."

"I'll have a driver available for you tomorrow morning to take you there and back. Hopefully, tonight will go well and I will be able to go with you."

Harry nodded, "Thank you." He headed back to send the message to Dumbledore, then find some rest.

### **Saturday, 30 November, 1996**

Harry's alarm went off seemingly too early. He checked – it wasn't early. He took a deep breath to gather his energy and got up. He started making some breakfast just as Hermione came out of her room in the Granger's trunk.

"Harry." Hermione wrapped her arms around him and watched him cook over his shoulder.

"Good morning. Sleep well?"

She shook her head, "Too many intertwined and confused memories and dreams."

He leaned over and kissed her cheek, "What are you thinking with this meeting?"

"Just hoping Dumbledore will give us something useful."

After a quick breakfast they rushed upstairs to find Bonderson sitting at the meeting table. He looked dirty, bloody, exhausted.

Bonderson cleared his throat, "Harry, Hermione. Ready to go?"

Harry sounded incredulous, "Are you ready for this? Are you ok? How did it go?"

He smiled, "It was exhausting, but I think we've succeeded. They're still mopping up. I can tell you more later. For now I need to sleep on the drive to be ready to do battle with Albus."

Harry chuckled, "Ok. We can wait."

Bonderson stood up, "Good. Lets get moving before I fall asleep standing here."

They found their driver and started the journey. Bonderson was asleep quickly.

Harry turned to Hermione, "Do you know what questions you want to ask Dumbledore?"

"Yes. But will he answer them?"

"All we can do is ask."

The car stopped in the car park for Harry's flat and the driver woke Bonderson. He groaned and got out, "Well, ready for this?"

Harry and Hermione shrugged and climbed the stairs into the flat and started making tea.

Bonderson plopped down in a chair.

As Harry brought out the tea he asked, "So how did it go last night?"

Bonderson moaned into his tea, "Very good. We accomplished what we needed. We destroyed the building and made it useless to Tom. We killed or captured almost all the DEs we could find. We think only a few got away, but that's probably OK, too. The panic they will spread will be very useful."

Harry looked tense, "At what cost?"

Bonderson sighed, "Surprisingly small. The CO really made a huge difference. We will start planning the attack on the Ministry building in the next few days."

Harry didn't relax.

Bonderson noticed, "Remus is fine."

Harry let out his breath.

A knock at the door.

Everyone stood up, tense.

Harry opened the door, "Dumbledore, thank you for coming."

"Harry." Dumbledore stepped in the door and looked around – until he met Hermione's cold piercing stare. He looked to Harry, "Would you introduce me?"

Hermione beat him to it, "Good morning, Professor."

Dumbledore looked shocked at Harry, "You've broken the binding."

Hermione stepped into his face, "Don't jump to conclusions, old man. I did that myself."

Dumbledore only got more confused, "But, you can't –"

"You haven't earned the right to ask me anything."

"Albus!" Harry stepped up to match Hermione, "The Ministry has fallen, Tom is in charge, everyone is fighting for their lives, and all you care about is this?" His tone practically spitting on Albus.

Albus looked angry, "Laws should not be thrown out like they never existed."

Harry hadn't backed down, "And I'd hope you'd care more about people than laws." Harry took a breath and calmed himself, "I need to know of Tom's vulnerabilities. Particularly emotional vulnerabilities. Are you going to help, or not?"

Albus grew cold, bitter, "I think you're a little late, Harry."

Harry ignored the statement and continued to stare at him, waiting.

Albus sighed, "I think there would be nothing Tom would have any emotion for, other than hate. I suspect that Tom may have used magic to blunt any emotional weaknesses, binding his own emotions to block any empathy."

Hermione smiled darkly, triumphantly.

Harry noticed and bowed slightly to Dumbledore, "Thank you, Professor."

Bonderson stood up from his chair, "Professor."

Albus' voice grew colder still, "Mr Bonderson."

Bonderson formed his question, "Do you know about the roots of old family magic? Specifically, does it exist independently of the family members? In the houses and land? In other words, if the family members die, does the magic exist for long in the houses and lands, or does it stop?"

Albus paused, then waved his hand dismissively, "It is of no importance."

Harry practically yelled, "Yes! It! Is!"

Albus is taken aback as Harry came nose to nose with him.

Harry continued, "Albus, Bonderson is the only one making any progress toward defeating Tom. A subject where you have failed."

Albus turned to Bonderson with a concerned questioning look.

Bonderson spoke quietly, "Malfoy Manor is now destroyed. Would you like to know what we found in Malfoy Manor? The number of dead and broken bodies of all the captives?"

Albus was shocked. And confused, but went along with the question. He fell into lecture mode, "The demands of magic are high. When someone receives the headship of an Ancient House the demands of the position cause drains on their magic that can be substantial, even crippling. It all depends on how big their lands are, the extent of protections, specifically the wards, balanced against the size of their family. For example the Black family is small, therefore the support, the magic, from other family members is minimal, yet the amount of property, and the associated wards are a huge drain. Some large and old family heads can become almost a squib when they inherit due to the drain to support all the wards on all the properties, the house elves, the upkeep on all the properties that is usually done by magic. But, specifically to your question, at the death of the last family member, the magic lingers for a time but there is no direction to it. It becomes static. It will fade for all practical purposes in a few days."

Bonderson nodded slowly, "So, if by accepting the Dark Mark, the old houses have subjugated themselves to Tom, do they now support him with magic from all the family members?"

Dumbledore nodded, "Yes, they do."

Bonderson frowned, "Then, in reality, removing all the DEs actually removes a lot of direct support from Tom. We don't need to attack him directly, just attacking his DEs significantly weakens him. Brings him back down to the size of a normal wizard."

Dumbledore grimaced, "Yes. Unless a female is allowed to rise to the headship or a regent, though that is a rare family. But you end the history of Wizarding Britain. You weaken all of us."

Bonderson glared angrily, "Weak is better than dead."

Dumbledore grew angry again, "But not for them. You take away their ability to turn away from the Dark."

Bonderson matched his anger, "I think they've had enough opportunities for that and they missed every one."

"But -"

Bonderson almost exploded, "You care more about the Death Eaters than their victims?!"

"To die in their darkness is irretrievable -"

"Too late now! They've had their chances! They've made that choice many times! And I will lose no sleep over their demise."

Albus responded, "I'm afraid I can't accept that."

Bonderson looked darkly suspicious, "The Ministry doesn't exist any more."

Albus looked affronted, "I am still the Chief Warlock."

Bonderson was exasperated, "Why do you care? You are king of nothing! - You see, the people of Wizarding Britain have just moved to this thing called 'democracy'. They have voted with their feet. They have joined *me* to defeat Tom."

Dumbledore looked angry, "We shall see."

Bonderson smirked, his voice smooth and lyrical, "Ah, and now we come to it, the next Dark Lord rising. Come to challenge *me* now? Now we see your true colours, Albus? Your friendship with Grindelwald finally showing through? Ready to *become* Grindelwald?"

Dumbledore's face paled as he realised what he'd said, what he'd almost fallen into, "Ah - no." He sighed heavily, "I've been Chief Warlock too long." He shook his head sadly as he glanced at his gloved right hand, "No, I think my time is over." He turned to Harry, "Harry, I think I need to give

you something – something that is actually part of your heritage." He held out his hand with a disk-shaped stone with a curious mark carved on it.

Hermione gasped, "It's the mark of Peverell."

"Yes, it is. The Peverell family were one of your ancestors, Harry."

Harry picked it up, "Thank you, Professor."

"I think I need to go now. I wish you well with all your endeavours. – For us all." Dumbledore left the flat looking quite old and frail.



## **13. And The Powers He Knows Not**

**CHAPTER SIZE: 9898**

### **Chapter 13**

#### **And The Powers He Knows Not**

A/N: Yes, this is the bad luck chapter 13 for a reason. But this is also, in fact, the Prime Chapter.

#### **Harry Potter and Hermione Granger**

**Sunday, 1 December, 1996**

Harry wandered. From place to place, between people and activities. He was vaguely aware that he was dreaming. Sometimes strange, but generally pleasant. No stress, no conflict. In that way it was – very strange. He almost didn't notice when he 'woke up'. Assuming he actually did. He couldn't be sure. At some point the sound of plates and – Harry gasped and sat up wide awake – Breakfast! He forgot! He jumped up and stumbled out the door and found Dan and Emma sitting at the table huddled protectively around a pot of coffee.

"Good morning, Harry." Dan looked a little surprised. "Were you hungry?"

"Ah –" Harry stood in his nightclothes, fumbled around looking for something to say, when a bit too much truth popped out, "I forgot to make breakfast."

Emma smirked at his confusion.

Dan's attention was caught, "Is this something you had planned?"

"Ah – I always – I mean – it's what I ..."

A bit of enlightenment, then further curiosity touched Dan's eyebrows, "I seem to remember something in my notes, near the end. I got the

impression you cooked for us a lot during the last weeks?"

Harry's face relaxed and smiled as the memories came back, "Yeah. That was fun."

Dan smiled and patted the chair next to him, "Come and tell us what you cooked."

Harry moved in a daze toward the safety of the chair. He could focus on that, "I made breakfast – and scones – with drizzle – and muffins and –" He came into focus, "And you were going to show me some pastry things from the Continent."

Dan's smile broke out, "Ah, now that would be fun. And now that you're up –" Dan gave him a raised eyebrow, "None of us have any magic to work the stove. Remus was nice enough to wander by and do a bit of coffee magic or we would have been in dire straights."

Harry's smile grew until it was ready to break, "Ah, I see. Well, let me –" He got up and started toward the stove, when he stopped and turned back with a concerned look, "Actually, I think I need to share."

Dan and Emma looked confused.

Harry smiled, "I need to share the work with Dobby or he feels left out. Dobby!"

Pop. "Yes, Master?" Dobby flashed an expectant grin and waited patiently.

Harry started chuckling, "Dobby, we would be honoured if you could make us some breakfast through your excellent cooking."

Dobby bowed, "Master is too kind. At once." Dobby started a small tornado of whirling pots, pans, and ingredients flying in formation through spouts of flames to land on a flotilla of plates moving inexorably toward the table. The plates all landed in unison at every place, "Breakfast is served."

Harry laughed, "Bravo! Bravo, Dobby. You show me up again."

Dan and Emma's chins almost touched the plates in amazement.

Dobby bowed, "I should wake Miss Hermione or she will miss it all." He popped away.

Within seconds Hermione's bedroom door opened and a bleary-eyed head of wild hair poked out, "Did I hear breakfast?" She squinted in the bright light.

Harry flashed mischief at Dan and Emma, "Yes. I think there is some left."

Dan tried to mediate, "There is definitely coffee."

"MMmmfff." Hermione shuffled toward the table in her flannel nightclothes looking exhausted.

Harry now looked concerned, "What happened? Couldn't sleep?"

Hermione plopped down in the chair, "Working on spells."

Harry blinked several times, "But - you can't use your magic yet. We need to have a healer check to make sure it's safe."

She shook her head tiredly, "No. But I need to work on creating more spells that will manipulate O<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. And the spell weaving on your new disguise for Lord Black. You need to help me test them."

Harry smiled with contentment, "Yes, that will be fun. Oh! And I need to make you a set of magical glasses."

Harry pulled off his glasses and handed them to Hermione, "Here, try these on for size."

Hermione put them on and Harry gazed into her eyes - and kept gazing.

Hermione raised an eyebrow, "Uh - Harry?"

"Huh? Oh, yes, sorry. Got distracted, there." He took the glasses back and focussed carefully as he duplicated the glasses and made them just a touch bigger. "There. Try those."

She put them on and Harry gazed again, "Yes – gorgeous."

Hermione sputtered, "Harry."

Dan chuckled, "Aren't they? Just like her Mum's."

Hermione sputtered again, "Daaad!"

Harry tried to suppress his mischievous grin and started applying all the spells he had put on his own glasses.

Hermione's eyes kept getting wider as Harry kept going – and going.

Harry sighed tiredly, "Ok, I think that does it." He picked them up and put them on. "Oh yes! Here try these." He held them out for Hermione.

"What all did you put on them? I didn't recognise most of those spells." She took the glasses and waited for Harry's answer.

"It's quite a large set of spells, many of which are very obscure. And sometimes we needed to adapt them a bit so the magical saturation limits of the glasses would work out. And, of course, the 'intent' of the castor had me pulling my hair out for most of a weekend until I figured out how to reduce the spell interactions."

Hermione's eyes kept getting bigger, "Harry – that's very sophisticated magic. You've never been that – detailed at magic before."

Harry chuckled, "Yes, but I had to *become* that detailed." Harry's voice turned serious, "There was no room for sloppiness in my private little war to protect you. There was no room for a single mistake – to even cause you to be obliviated a second time. Your lives depended on it."

Hermione's eyes teared up as she hugged Harry "I'm sorry."

Harry returned the hug and smiled, "Don't be. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It was worth every injury."

Hermione squeaked and drew back, "Injury?"

Harry shook his head at his slip-up and at Hermione's reaction, "Nothing much and magic took care of it all. Why don't you try the glasses?"

Hermione sniffled as she sat back and looked at Harry.

Harry was trying to distract her, "They will take some getting used to."

She took a deep breath to gather her focus and put them on, "Oh! Wow!" She stood up and started turning around, "Harry, this is fantastic! I can see everything!" She started moving around the room looking closely at things. She waved her hands trying to touch the colours. "The colours move."

"Magic reacting to your magic. The colours show how dangerous the magic is. Red is very dangerous, orange less so, blue or green is safe and could be healthy. The more active the colours are, the more motion you see, the more dynamic or volatile the magic is. You can see my wand, even while it's in my pocket, is full of quite active magic. A Dark Mark is a red haze surrounding a black boiling blot of darkness on someone's left arm. Death Eaters have a pervasive red colour to the magic that surrounds them. Normal wizards have a blue or green glow around them. A grey fog is usually a disillusionment charm."

"Yes, I can see -" She pointed, "What's that?"

Harry looked at his hand, "Oh - those are the Head of House rings for the Potter and Black families. I have the rings disillusioned so you can't see the rings, just the colours of the magic on them and the grey disillusionment around them." Harry pointed to Dan and Emma, "Did you notice?"

Hermione turned and paused, "What?"

Harry smirked, "Your parents both have a slight glow to them. You got your magic from both of them."

Hermione gasped to match her smile, "Yes!" She ran over to hug them both.

"That means you're not really a muggle-born, more of a – squibble-born." Everyone matched Harry's smirk.

"Harry." Hermione's bone-dry voice carried a hint of threat.

Harry's smile got bigger, "Yes?" Innocence personified.

A knock came at their 'door' at the top of the stairs.

Dan spoke out, "Come in!"

Bonderson came down the stairs, "Good morning, all. I'd Like to ask if Harry and Hermione could attend a meeting we will be having in about an hour. We are going to be planning our attack on the Ministry building and we'd like your input on our plans."

Harry looked rather wary.

Dan frowned, "You realise Harry is still under-age."

Bonderon smiled, "Oh, yes. He is not allowed to participate in this attack. We just want his thoughts since he has fought more DEs than almost anyone. Particularly since he has survived all that quite successfully."

Harry smiled very relaxed, "Sure."

Hermione nodded too.

Bonderson nodded, "Thank you." He started up the stairs.

Harry started chuckling. At everyone's pointed look he elaborated, "I don't have to carry any responsibility – for any of this. That is so nice."

Emma nodded seriously, "Just remember that."

Hermione still looked nervous, "It's not the responsibility that I worry about. Tom doesn't care about who is responsible. He may still be after Harry."

Harry sighed, "Yes, probably right."

Hermione nodded decisively, "Right. We've got an hour."

Harry smiled, "Yes, but food first." He motioned toward the table. "Before it gets cold." He ran a spell to heat it all up again.

Within an hour Harry and Hermione were climbing the stairs.

Hermione held on to his arm, "Harry, I have a number of spells that I think are ready to show them. But I don't think we should show them anything related to the spell weaving I'm planning for your Lord Black disguise."

Harry shook his head, "No, I'd rather no one knew anything about anything related to Lord Black."

Hermione stopped at the top of the stairs, "I've got a few more changes to test out with your new Lord Black disguise. Hopefully we can work on that later today?"

Harry chuckled, "I think we have all day, since I'm free of all this."

Hermione looked at him seriously, "Harry, what is your luck normally like?"

He frowned, "Ah - yeah." He sighed, "Best be prepared, I guess."

She nodded to him, "Yes. I think we need to spend some time improving your disguise."

Harry looked desperately to her, "And what about you? You don't have your magic back yet."

"I can hide under your invisibility cloak."

Harry breathed his tension, "That's a good disguise but it doesn't defend you at all."

Hermione nodded in thought, "Maybe we can come up with some derivative spells from your Lord Black set that you can put on me."

Harry smiled, "Ok. That would be good."

Hermione pulled on his arm toward the meeting, "So what new techniques have you used against the DEs?"

"Well, this one I call the 'pop-bludgeon-pop' works against less capable DEs. I think of it as one big spell. I apparate to about five metres above a DE, send a bunch of bludgeoners straight down, then immediately apparate to another location. It didn't work that well against Dolohov, but a lot of others it did."

Hermione looked at him with surprise, "That's brilliant. Why didn't it work against Dolohov?"

"I'm not sure. But the nice thing about bludgeoners is that they can act as a shield. Something about the air pressure wave the spell creates interferes with any spell that comes back from the DE."

Hermione stopped, "Really?"

Harry nodded, "I would sometimes start a constant stream of bludgeoners toward a DE, and they would start a stream of spells aimed at me. The first person to slip up lost. Quite convincingly."

Hermione looked faint, "Harry James Potter, don't you every do that again."

He looked a bit confused, "It's quite effective."



"Yes, but it's do or die. Once you start that you can't stop until one of you dies, and I couldn't handle you dying!"

Harry looked apologetic, "Ok. I'll try not to do that again."

After a minute of staring at each other, Hermione pulled his arm toward the meeting, "Please, Harry. I can't risk losing you."

Harry smiled trying to cover significant emotion, "Neither can I."

"Alright, let's get started." Bonderson called out to gather his troops. Everyone moved toward a seat around the table. "This is our planning meeting for our upcoming attack on the Ministry of Magic Building. I'll start with some basic introductions. To my left we have the Auror contingent, lead by Master Auror Retired, Alastor Moody, and his second Kingsley Shacklebolt, including Remus Lupin, who is an intelligence specialist. Then we have the SAS teams lead by Major Hereford and his second Lieutenant Laferty. Then Commander Chesterton of the Royal Navy. Lieutenant Gordon of the Royal Marines. Then Mr Hallston, our liaison with MI6. Major McMaster of the Royal Air Force. We have liaisons with the Home Office with Ms Jess and Social Services with Ms Searston. And Mr Norton is our liaison with the Home Office Emergency Management group. And Healer Stanhope is head of St Mungos. And lastly, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger."

Everyone's eyes roamed over the participants, gauging and measuring, until they landed on Harry and Hermione, with a number of questioning looks.

Bonderson did not seem to take note, "Let's start with the basics of the building. It is in the centre of London, at least nine floors underground, with no easily assailable entrance, and some formidable defences. We don't know how far down it goes because the lowest levels are occupied by the Department of Mysteries and no one here knows how deep they go. We do know that there are three secret entrances that are known by members of this group. There maybe more, which could be used against us if they allow assailants to get behind us. This facility is over 900 years old

and may have many surprises for us. And, because it's in the centre of London, that means no AC-130 Spectre Gunships, no cruise missiles, no helicopters, and no tanks. That does mean small teams only. Small arms only. Though, because it's underground, grenades are authorised but no significant explosives. We don't want to collapse any of it." Bonderson started to sound exasperated, "And that goes double for flame throwers. You might *need* all the oxygen you will burn up with those." Chuckles, good-natured grumbles, and a few frustrated sighs followed from the Marines and SAS teams.

Bonderson waited for quiet, "Before we get into studying the map we have, I have one significant advantage over the DEs that Miss Granger has developed. We used it to great effect when we attacked Malfoy Manor a few days ago. If you were involved with that you know that we used Carbon Monoxide to temporarily deprived the DEs of their magic."

The Aurors stood and clapped.

Bonderson asked, "Miss Granger, do you have anything to add to that?"

Hermione stood up, "I've been working on a number of spells that manipulate oxygen in the atmosphere. One to pull all oxygen in a space toward you, another to push it away, and one to change all free oxygen in an area into Carbon Monoxide. I'm not done with that last one yet. Hopefully by the end of the day. The others Harry will teach the Aurors."

The SAS commander asked, "Why would you want to push oxygen away from you?"

Hermione nodded and gathered her explanation, "A normal atmosphere is 21% oxygen. If the oxygen level goes over 25% you can't put a fire out, if it goes below 16% you can't start a fire. That can be a defence against fire. And if held for more than 10 seconds, a magical in that area can't use magic. Because as a magical's blood-oxygen level drops to 90% their magic starts to be affected. By 85% it's down by more than half. By 80% their cognition is significantly affected and their magic is gone. But that is very short-lived, unless you use Carbon Monoxide, which can last over an hour.

Also, if a magical is using a bubblehead charm, the charm maintains a breathable atmosphere by pulling breathable elements out of the surrounding atmosphere. If there is no oxygen in the surrounding atmosphere, the bubblehead charm will eventually run out of oxygen. Your removing O2 from the atmosphere will still disable them, but it may take longer."

Everyone clapped as Hermione sat down.

Bonderson continued, "One change we've added to your kit. We have received delivery of small, 10 litre compressed 95% pure oxygen canisters with a mask attached. These canisters are sold to pilots as a portable oxygen boost for high altitude flying in unpressurised aircraft. They will give you an easily portable supply of oxygen for this fight."

More clapping from everyone.

"The force structure will be 2 Aurors teamed with each SAS team of four. The Aurors will be your guides, as if you were in foreign territory. The Aurors and SAS teams will be equally ranked."

Grumbles started up. The SAS commander jumped in, "That is a recipe for disaster."

Bonderson smirked, "Under normal circumstances, yes. But this is anything but normal. This must be a cooperative effort. Yes, this leaves room for clashes based on a lack of a chain of command. But any 'chain of command' would normally be based on training and we have done none of that. All you've had is a briefing on magic. We have vastly different capabilities, methods, strengths, and weaknesses. A chain of command, without significant experience to base it on, would lead to significant errors. So we need you to be flexible and work cooperatively together."

The SAS commander tried again, "So how are we supposed to work this?"

Bonderson nodded, "The Aurors have done this a few days ago with the attack on Malfoy Manor. Most of the SAS teams are new to this; only two

teams were involved with Malfoy Manor and they are now assigned to missions attacking DEs elsewhere. You should talk to them on the details of their experiences as they come back. But let me explain a few things. As your briefing said, magic has an effective range of no better than a pistol. Now, that pistol may fire a mortar round or a flame thrower, but it will not go more than 50 metres, and even less with any accuracy."

The SAS commander jumped in, "You don't have to be accurate with a mortar round."

Bonderson smiled, "No, but a mortar round will be just as much of a danger to them as to you in the enclosed underground spaces of the Ministry Building."

Harry jumped in, "The DEs are stupid enough to do just that."

Bonderson smiled and continued, "Understand that you will be fighting underground where there are almost no distances more than 50 metres. But the SAS short M4 carbines give you an advantage in that they are significantly more accurate over any distance you will see in this fight. So that suggests that you stay near the back where distance is an advantage to you, and a safety for you. As part of that, you will be issued under-barrel grenade launchers. Also, machine pistols, which are excellent for close quarters. Oh - and because you will be underground in stone rooms, you will be issued noise suppressors for all weapons."

Everyone clapped at that one.

Harry looked confused, "Not a silencing charm?"

Remus jumped in and pointed at the SAS commanders, "These guys don't do well with completely silenced weapons. It throws them off so having some noise matches their expectations and their reflexes."

Bonderson continued, "Alright, we are up at 04:00 tomorrow morning, we move out at 04:45 to get in place. We attack at 05:17 on the dot."

Harry coughed in disbelief, "Why 05:17?"

Bonderson smirked, "Because it's Prime Time, of course."

Harry scoffed,

Hermione grumbled.

Bonderson shrugged, "The Aurors insisted on it."

All the Aurors sat with silly grins.

The SAS commander broke the silence, "I understand why all of us are here – except I don't understand why two teenagers are involved in this." He pointed toward Harry and Hermione.

Bonderson smirked, "Miss Granger is a consultant for magic only, is under-age, and can not be involved. Mr Potter is also here as a consultant only, is also under-age, and will not be involved in any further action. But Mr Potter has the highest bodycount of DEs of anyone in this room. What was it, Harry – 36?"

Harry shrugged dismissively, hiding his embarrassment.

The commander's eyebrows rose, "Ok, I'm game. What wisdom would you impart to us, Mr Potter?"

Harry took a deep breath and let it out slowly, "First, the majority of DEs are quite dumb. They mostly know magic but they have no concept of physics – and that extends to the secondary effects of physics, like the shockwave of an explosion in an underground stone room. They are mostly overconfident bonehead goons. The skilled ones are scarily good at magic, on a par with the Aurors, but they still know nothing of physics. They are brutal and will torture you as soon as look at you. Never surrender to them and never submit to a hostage situation.

"I was restricted to specific strategies because I was working alone in non-magical areas, sometimes defending against multiple attackers. I couldn't make loud noises or be very destructive because it would be too hard to hide. So I had to be fast, lethal, and silent. For example, when I was facing a set of DEs alone I needed to get them to separate so I could attack them one at a time. For this to work I would have to know the territory inside and out. If they didn't separate, I would apparate behind them, silence the one behind, summon them then bludgeon them in mid-flight. Pick them off one at a time.

"You won't have those limitations, so when they group together – and they will – you can hit all of them at once with a grenade. The DEs have no group training. They are individual cowboys who can't refrain from competing and working at cross-purposes. That makes them weak, but also wildly unpredictable. Also, if you happen to get close, the DEs have no physical training, in either stamina or hand-to-hand combat. Hit them once and they fold." Harry started to get intent into his subject, stood up, and started pacing, "They will not attack until they are within 20 metres. They've never had to deal with any weapons with significant range, so they have no idea how vulnerable they are. They think they are safe if they are beyond 30 metres. But they can apparate so they see distance as no difficulty. And you need to be on guard for that. A DE can appear behind you at any time. All they have to do is see you and they can be behind you in an instant. But, with your Aurors, so can you. I suggest you do not use smoke, or teargas. It warns them of the types of attacks they can expect. You don't want them to be thinking about gas at all."

Harry stopped and paused for a moment, "I think my biggest advantage was spelling my glasses to see the magic that dissipates off all magical people and objects. I could see the Dark Mark on someone's arm under their clothes, the wand in their pocket, the red taint to their magic because they are a DE, even behind a disillusionment charm. Traps and bombs are blazingly obvious."

Moody growled, "Hold on – you can see a Dark Mark?"

Harry frowned, "Yes. I presume Dumbledore can see them, too."

Remus jumped in, "Dumbledore admitted to me he could, but he hobbled your eye so you couldn't see them because it would also show you Tom's soul shard in Harry's scar."

"Bah!" Moody stood up and started pacing, "The bastard!" He turned and stopped, "So, he knew everyone with a Dark Mark in the Ministry and didn't say anything?"

Harry nodded, "I presume so. He could see the soul shard in my scar and you obviously couldn't."

Moody roared, "That makes him complicit! I'll kill him!"

Harry's intense voice cut through, "He was hoping for redemption for them. But there is no redemption without repudiation and there is no repudiation possible for them in this life, the magic locks that out. Maybe they can find it in the next. But, Dumbledore's only got a few months left to live."

Moody went back to pacing and growling a string of very colourful words.

Bonderson spoke up, "Alright, let's get back on topic. Because Tom has subjugated old families, he gets magical support from all the people in those families. To counteract this we have SAS units attacking known DEs. These ops started yesterday and are running continuously, until we run through all the families we know about. Anyone with a Dark Mark is a target. For the attack on the Ministry Building tomorrow morning, we will have a smaller force attacking the main entrance as a diversion and three more equal-sized forces attacking through the back doors we know about. The initial intelligence shows the DEs have put traps everywhere but they are not consistently applied or all-encompassing. There are holes. I have the intelligence report on each back door that lists an initial set of traps they found. Study those."

Harry broke in, "Do you need me to make magical glasses for the teams?"

Remus shook his head, "I gave them the recipe for my glasses. They've been using them for two days now."

Bonderson continued, "Each team will have an SAS trooper with a canister of Carbon Monoxide with 80 cubic feet compressed to 200 bar. That is not nearly enough to flood the Ministry Building so you need to use it sparingly. Used intelligently, a little can go a long ways. Along with Miss Grangers oxygen manipulation spells you should be able to hobble them quite effectively."

Moody stopped his pacing and turned, "You'll teach us those spells?"

Hermione pointed to Harry, "My magic is still bound. Harry will teach you."

Moody nodded tensely.

Bonderson clapped his hands, "Right! Thats the overview of the plan, now we dive into the details. Harry and Hermione, if you have more to do on those spells, we will be ready for them by about 5 this evening."

Hermione stood up, "We'll be back at 5." She pulled Harry toward the trunk. "I want to finish that last spell for them and then I need to teach them all to you. Before lunch."

"Anything you need, Hermione."

"Then, we need to start on the improvements to your Lord Black disguise."

"That sounds like more fun."

They spent the entire day studying and practicing. It was exhausting – and thrilling! Harry could keep up with Hermione now! He understood what she was saying! He felt so accomplished.

Hermione hummed in indecision.

Harry looked over Hermione's shoulder as she worked on the terms for some of the second-dimension spells. He pointed, "That term –"



Hermione glanced up at him, "Yes?"

"It's a good approximation but it really needs to be two terms."

She looked at it confused, "Yes, it is an approximation. What makes you think it isn't good enough?"

He bobbed his head back and forth with a frown as he thought about it, "When I was trying to spell my glasses to see magic I kept beating my head against an immovable wall. The spell interactions were killing me, particularly with the narrow magical saturation limits of my glasses. Until Remus just *happened* to mention in passing that I needed to *think* about the spells separately, as they were applied, in order to reduce the spell interactions. And that means that using separate terms for each spell is a more accurate calculation. And in such a tightly interrelated system, such as this, accuracy will make all the difference."

She paused and looked at him, then back at her calculations, then back at him, "That's brilliant, Harry."

He looked at her with surprise, and touched his forehead, "Well – I don't know about brilliant – but I have this flat-spot on my forehead to remind me that I shouldn't beat my head against the wall any more."

She chuckled and erased the term, "Right. Two terms it is." She started writing again.

Hermione paused in her writing out the explanation of their design of the spell weaving, "Harry, is it true – what you said about staying at Cambridge with me?" She leaned close to him.

Harry looked up from the book he was reading, "Yes, absolutely."

"Are you sure?"

Harry sighed and thought, "I don't think I owe the wizarding world anything. It's a mess. Yes, there are some people I'd miss – Luna, Neville –

but we can see them whenever we want to. I just don't have the need or the desire to stay in the wizarding world. I'm still rather mad at them all."

"What about Ron?"

Harry growled, "Someday, when Ron grows up. – Maybe."

"What did he do?"

"He abandoned you the instant you were banished – he talked about you like you'd died or something – and then he got jealous when he thought I was picking you over him."

Hermione groaned and covered her eyes.

Harry shook his head, "In a lot of ways, Ron is just as much a fan-boy as Ginny was. Except she had enough sense to grow out of it."

Hermione looked at him with concern.

"You know, in the last few months I've learned a huge amount about magic. And I still want to learn more, but I don't need to be involved with wizarding culture to do that. I think I like how boring the non-magical world is."

Hermione chuckled, "Yes, me too."

"And –" Harry's voice turned serious, "I will go wherever you go."

"Oh, Harry."

He smiled at her, "You said something – the day before your house was attacked."

A small smile grew on Hermione, "Let me see – 'Ron and I would never work out, I see that now. And you're twice the man Ron is.' That it?"

Harry looked in her eyes with the deepest luminous green, "Yes. I want to live up to that."

"You already have. A long time ago."

"Then I guess I need to stop being so dumb, because I want *you*. All that you are. Past, present, future. You are everything to me. I can't exist without you."

Hermione whimpered and grabbed Harry in a hug, sniffing into his shoulder.

Harry whispered into her hair, "I have been so thick for so long. I was too afraid to ask, to look too closely at you, to see *you*, because you have always been so important to me. I was afraid that I would mess it up and you would leave me."

Hermione whispered back, "I won't leave you, Harry."

"I won't leave you, Hermione. Never." He leaned back, looked in her eyes, and tucked her hair behind her ear, "I have dreams now. A life that I want to live – and it all revolves around you. I can't go anywhere else." A hitch in his voice and a touch of panic, " – If you'll have me."

"Yes, Harry. Silly boy. I've followed you around for how many years?"

He smiled, "Wait – who's followed who?"

She chuckled, "Right. So – what dreams do you have?"

Harry turned bright red and mumbled something.

"What was that?"

He tried again with a broken voice, "Children."

Hermione turned red, laughed, and wrapped Harry in a hug, "Yes. Definitely." She pointed a finger into his face, "But I get to set the number

since it's my body that takes all the strain."

Harry nodded through his red face and couldn't put words together. Or swallow effectively.

"What else are you dreaming of?"

He scrunched his eyebrows and nervously shrugged, "Your being at Cambridge started all this off. But I'm only starting to think beyond staying alive."

She pointed her finger back into his face, "You had better plan on it! None of this heroic dying to save the world, business! They don't deserve that."

Harry turned sober, "But you do."

She huffed, "That's different! And that's not a plan, that's desperation. It's much more important that you be alive to support your children! You, of all people, know how important that is."

Harry covered his face with his hands and groaned.

Hermione sighed, "Harry, dying is not allowed. For me or you."

Harry dropped his hands and shook his head in desperation.

"We've both found a life to live and I want to live it! With you! So we both need to survive all this. Right?"

Harry blinked a few more times as her message sunk in. Then a smile crept in - and kept growing.

Hermione's smile grew along with his, "So - what ideas have you had lately?"

"Well - I've been accepted to Cambridge. So I suppose I ought to attend before they discover what they've done and change their minds."

She chuckled, "What do you think you might like to study?"

Harry let out a long breath, "I have no idea."

She nodded, "There will be time for that. What more of magic do you want to study?"

He nodded decisively, "Healing. There's more I need to know to keep you alive."

She smiled, "We'll learn it together. What else?"

He huffed in confusion, "I have no idea. Maybe – music? Music is something I have no idea about."

"Excellent. Let's do it. Do you want to learn to play an instrument?"

He looked confused, "Doesn't that take years?"

"Yes. You've got a lot of years left to live. What would you like to play?"

He kept blinking, "Ah – I don't – guitar – maybe drums – violin – piano – I have no idea."

"Travel? Would you like to travel?"

He blinked a few times and his eyes lit up, "Yes! That would be fun."

"Where?"

He sputtered, "– Everywhere! I haven't been anywhere, so I want to go everywhere!"

"Ok. We'll do it. Now – name something that you don't understand how it works – and you really want to know."

He sat back in thought, "Well – electricity. I know how to use it, but how does it work? Or – flying! Airplanes."

"You want to learn how to fly them? Or design them?"

Harry blinked again, "Both!"

Hermione sat back and smiled, "Good. Let's do it."

Harry looked overwhelmed with all the ideas.

Monday, 2 December, 1996

Harry was interrupted by this – noise – but he was trying to ignore it ...

The noise kept bothering him.

Then he understood. It was his alarm. He sat up and moaned. It was morning. Well – it was still very dark, which meant it was after midnight – but certainly not daylight.

"Harry, it's time to get moving. They will leave in less than an hour."  
Hermione's voice came through his door.

He moaned again and wiped his face, "I'm moving now." And he did. Just not very fast. It took him a few deep breaths to get his brain working. He was picking up steam as he thought about the Aurors and SAS teams attacking the Ministry building soon. He opened his door, all showered and dressed in good time; 20 minutes.

Hermione was in the kitchen gathering food, "Good morning, Harry. I thought I'd gather some food so you could put something edible together. It's not like I'm going to make anything."

He smiled, "Ah, but you could. Remember the things I showed you before you were banished?"

She looked like she was thinking hard, "Really? I'm not sure ..."

He shrugged, "No problem." He started in making something. It was approaching 04:15. They were climbing the stairs by 04:35. They could

hear Bonderson's voice as they neared the top of the stairs.

"- And teams 11 through 15 are on the second backdoor, with Teams 16 through 21 on the third backdoor. Do not approach the backdoors or start to dismantle any traps until the start time. Then go as fast as you can. Being subtle at that point is not very useful for Backdoor Teams 1 and 2. Backdoor Team 3, per the intelligence gathered, should try to be subtle, but use your judgement on that. You may find more traps than the Intelligence suggests. The Front Door Teams should start blasting away right on time. Keep them pinned down, do not let anyone escape. The SAS members of Teams 1 and 2 can start putting up the obscuring maintenance tent over the Phone Box early, then at Start Time the Aurors can begin expanding the space inside the tent, then put up Duelling Wards inside the tent to contain all magic, then SAS Team 3 can blow the door and start dropping explosives in the hole. Everyone needs to maintain radio and mirror silence until the Start Time. No exceptions!"

Bonderson moved around the group, "Remember, Start Time is 05:17:01! Not 05:16:59! After the Start Time each team is on their own, you are free to adapt and change your strategies and tactics. Your objectives should not change. How you achieve them is up to you. If you achieve your objective call in and request a secondary objective from the Ops Centre. If you persistently lose contact with the Ops Centre and can't get to your objective, portkey back here. But!" He held up his finger to make his point, "No friendly fire incidents. Do you hear me? None. We can't afford any of that." He walked around the groups glaring at them all, "You all have injury-triggered portkeys that will bring you to the Infirmary." He pointed to the far corner of the hangar, behind the steamer trunks. "You all have *significant* advantages over the DEs. This is urban warfare, some of the most difficult warfare of any kind. But you hold the advantages. Use them! Right! Form up! Move out!"

Harry spotted Remus with Shack and an SAS Team. He ran through the crowd and landed a hug on Remus.

"Whoa, there Prongslet. I'm getting delicate in my old age."

"Old age, my foot! It's just orneriness."

Remus chuckled, "That's my skill set."

"What team are you?"

"Backdoor 3, Team 16."

Harry spoke quietly as Hermione came up and joined the hug, "You be *careful*, Moony. You're all I have left."

Remus got quiet and serious, "I will. I have plans. Goals. I will be extra careful. And you resist the urge to get anywhere near any of this. Right? You have no responsibility with this. You are under-age."

Harry smiled, "Don't I know it! I'm free!"

Remus smirked and looked to Hermione, "Feel free to knock him out if he gets any strange ideas."

Hermione smiled and nodded, "Will do. Be *careful*."

Remus nodded, "Always. Back in a few days at most." He patted their shoulders, turned and walked over to his group and they portkey'ed out.

Harry stood holding on to Hermione watching where Remus had disappeared.

Hermione tugged on his arm, "We should go to the Ops Centre and listen in."

Harry nodded and they moved behind the large conference table to the desk area, defined by the half walls and roof over the Ops Centre. Three large projection screens lined the back wall. The middle screen showed video camera views of the square with the Ministry Phone Box and surrounding areas. Desks were arranged in a semi-circle facing the screens. The desks were each full of radios, computer screens, and a mirror. Two people per desk, one desk for each major group; Front Door, Backdoors 1,



2, and 3. Everyone was wearing headphones with mics attached. All was quiet and tense with a huge clock on the wall counting down the seconds. Bonderson stood on a low platform with a table in the centre back of the area watching everything. Several more people stood with him.

Harry found two unused chairs and pulled them to the left side back of the room, sat down with Hermione – and waited. It was excruciating. Waiting for the Third Task to start was not this bad.

At 05:10 the view of the Ministry Phone Box changed. A few men in work uniforms wheeled a case to the box and started erecting a pop-up tent, complete with obscuring side panels, covering the box, like they were going to fix it. They finished at 05:16 and disappeared inside. The seconds kept moving – but they were agonisingly slow.

Harry breathed quietly, "- 57 – 58 – 59 –" They waited – and saw nothing.

Then the radios started up. The desk operators started quietly speaking into their radios and typing. Another large screen on the right front wall lit up and a running set of lines of text with different background colours started scrolling up the screen as Radio Operators typed them in. The text lines were status reports from the groups colour-coded. Remus' Backdoor 3 group was in dark green background with white text. Harry watched and pointed at them as they scrolled by.

Occasionally, Bonderson would push one of several buttons on a box on his table and speak into his mic. One of the people at Bonderson's desk worked the computer with the status of each group and team arranged in boxes on the large left side screen on the front wall.

It was almost 09:00 when Harry started hearing noises outside the Ops Centre. The sounds of yelling. Everyone else was wearing headphones and didn't seem to notice. Harry stood up and pulled Hermione up, "Something's wrong."

Gunfire started outside the hangar.

Harry started pulling Hermione out of the Ops Centre, "I think we need to get out of here."

"Harry, you need to put on your Lord Black defence."

He stopped and pulled out his invisibility cloak, "And you need to put this on. Let me do your defences." He started running the complex spell weaving on Hermione, including a bubblehead charm, until he nodded when he was done.

A burst of automatic weapons fire from outside.

Hermione started putting on the cloak.

Harry was halfway into his Lord Black spell fabric when there was an explosion outside that rattled the metal walls of the hangar. He was able to finish the fabric just before the Ops Centre blew up and part of the hangar wall and roof collapsed. His spell fabric protected him from flying bits of metal, glass, and wood.

"Harry, lock the trunks!"

Harry sent spells at the trunks to lock them closed, and then put a silencing spell over Hermione, "You are now silenced so no one can hear you. I can just see a bit of magic that leaks out from under the cloak to keep track of you. Now go hide behind the trunks!" He watched as her bit of glowing magic moved toward the trunks.

"Well, Lord Black, I finally get to meet you. Too bad this is to your detriment." Tom had walked through a small gap in the main hangar door, passed the rubble of the Ops Centre.

Harry slowly turned to face him, his voice turned sarcastic and cutting, "Well, look what the cat drug in. At least you could have dressed up for the occasion."

Tom slowed down and started to growl, "You decided to stoop to the muggles, have you?"

Harry played him, "Someone has to lead them. Would you like to watch and learn? It is something you have aspired to, isn't it?"

Tom started to turn red, "Now you will die."

Harry burst out laughing "Tom, where did you get this delusion?" He apparated across the hangar to have Tom face away from where Hermione was hiding. A bit of Hermione's glow of magic could be seen coming out of the offices built into that side of the hangar. She was moving toward Tom! Harry started walking toward Tom to keep his attention, "Shall we dance? I'm sorry, I shouldn't presume – can you?"

Tom fired a spell at Harry.

Harry jumped to the side and the far wall of the metal hangar started glowing, melting, and dripping.

Hermione's glow came up right behind Tom – as her hand came out of the cloak with a spray can of CO. She held it out and was evidently dispensing it.

Harry started moving to the side to turn Tom further away from Hermione, "That was impressive, Tom. Should I critique your form?"

Tom fired another spell that glowed bright orange.

Harry started to jump out of the way but it exploded in front of him – he shook his head and realised he was laying on the floor near the back wall. The wall had a hole in it. He got up, struggling with the bright orange spots in his eyes, "Tom! That was very good. Now you need to try that with a bit more power to have the desired effect. Should I show you?"

Tom growled, "Why aren't you dead?"

"Practice, Tom. You must practice to be good at this game." Harry apparated to the middle of the back wall.

Tom apparated to the centre of the hangar.

Hermione's glow of magic started moving toward him.

Tom's voice growled, "Let's try this, shall we?" He sent another huge ball of magic toward Harry.

Hermione hadn't reached Tom yet, so Harry tried his pop-bludgeon-pop trick. He needed to be very fast.

Tom's spell took out another section of hangar wall.

Harry's bludgeoners didn't seem to be effective, but neither was he injured, "Tom, you are making a mess. Have you no finesse?"

Tom looked to be on the edge of rage, "I will kill you!"

Hermione was getting close to Tom again.

Harry started moving back where he had been, turning Tom away from Hermione, "Keep trying Tom. You might get it some day."

Tom threw up an anti-apparition ward over the hangar then started building a spell.

Harry started levitating bits of metal junk above Tom, "Oh, Tom?"

Tom looked up as Harry dropped the metal.

Tom jumped to the side, toward Hermione.

She pulled the spray bottle out and aimed it at Tom. The crashing metal covered any sounds Hermione might have made. Tom was about to release his spell.

Harry moved left quickly,

Tom let lose his spell. A huge flaming ball.

It came racing at Harry. He instinctively pulled his backup wand as Tom turned into some sort of black smoke and flew at Harry. Harry's left arm jerked up and a large bright ball of light came out and connected with Tom's spell – and exploded.

Harry landed near the back wall of the hangar.

Tom was nowhere to be seen.

Harry jumped up and looked for Hermione's magical glow. He found her over near the trunks. Her glow started moving. Harry started looking for Tom. A pile of rubble started moving to Harry's right, then flew up.

Tom rose to standing. He pointed and yelled, "You! I will kill you!"

"There you are, Tom. I was beginning to worry. I think you'll need to try harder." Harry's left arm came up again and another huge ball of bright light went racing toward Tom.

Tom started running to his right as the ball tracked toward him. He stopped and conjured a huge rock and a shield behind the rock. The rock exploded sending dust and rock bits in every direction. Bits of metal from the hangar walls and roof came raining down as Harry stood up again. He had been blown only about 3 metres from where he was when the spell exploded.

Tom was standing on the other side of the dust cloud covered with dust and a few small cuts on his face. He glared daggers at Harry.

Harry could see Hermione's glow moving toward Tom. Harry needed to keep Tom focussed on him so he started stalking toward Tom slowly, "Are we done playing around, Tom? Shall we finish this? Are you ready to embrace death?"

Tom started to growl as he began raising his wand, "Everyone else can have death. I have risen above it."

Harry's left arm started raising, "Oh, but you haven't. I've destroyed all your horcruxes, Tom. You're mortal again."

"What?! -" Tom sputtered and his wand stopped.

Harry shot a spell at him. And another to take down the anti-apparition ward.

Tom almost got hit as he popped out of the way, then he shuddered, "NO! You lie!"

Harry chuckled, "Hufflepuff's cup in the vault. Ravenclaw's diadem in the Room of Lost Things. Me. Your snake. All seven."

"NO!" Tom started to shake.

"Death is standing in front of you, Tom. He always has been. You just postponed the inevitable."

"NO!" A group of spells came out of Tom and put more holes in the walls as Harry popped above Tom, shot a set of bludgeoners down, then popped to the other side of the building. Tom wiped a bit of blood from his forehead and turned toward Harry.

Harry's woven spells had blocked what Tom sent at him, "Some people see death as an escape from the pain of their lives."

"Fools! They know nothing of Death."

"But what if it's not? Could it be - not an escape - but a solidification of what you've made your life into?"

Tom spat again, "And some see Death as Judgement. But they know nothing. *You* know nothing!"

Harry smiled, "So then – what *have* you made of your life, Tom? Just hatred? That's all that's left of you?"

"YES! I am HATE! That is what I am. That is *all* that I am!"

"No room for love?"

"Love is weakness! Dependence!" Tom spat.

"And you would be alone?"

"Yes! I have always been alone. I need no one."

"Don't you need to rule over someone? Your Death Eaters? Don't you need them?"

"They are things. Objects. A convenience. They mean nothing. You, on the other hand, are a worthy opponent."

"So you need me?"

"Ha! I need your death."

"Then why are we spending all this time talking."

Tom growled and spat a spell at Harry and it put a hole in the wall of the offices as Harry moved a few metres to the left, away from Hermione.

Harry continued stalking to the left, "This is obviously important to you. Who will you be if you are absolutely alone?"

"I will –" Tom hesitated and glared at Harry. He took a few large breaths.

"Who are you, Tom? When no one is around, who are you? Down deep, who are you, really?"

"Oh, Tom. What have you done?" Harry turned to see a woman standing near Hermione's barely-seen magical glow. Blond hair, slightly cross-eyed,

hands covering her mouth, wearing a white floor-length dress, looking at Tom on the edge of tears.

Tom looked incredulous, "Who are you?"

Her voice was soft, "I'm your mother."

Tom froze glancing between the woman and Harry. Hermione's glow started moving away from the woman toward Tom's side. Tom threw a spell at the woman – it passed right through her and started a chair on fire.

Harry noticed the spell wasn't as powerful as his earlier spells.

"Oh, Tom. My poor baby."

Hermione's glow stood next to Tom and her hand brought out the spray can. She moved closer.

The woman reached out toward Tom, "You never should have magically bound your emotions, Tom. That destroyed you."

Tom scoffed, "That saved my life! I could function again."

The woman slowly shook her head, "All that did was cement the damage, the pain, deeper into you. It did the opposite of heal you."

"Who needs healing? I became the most powerful wizard in the world!" Tom's words started to develop a slur.

"You threw away your character, Tom. You became a monster. An animal. A mindless –"

"NO!" Tom was struggling to remain calm and in control, "Power is everything! I can defend myself!"

"Not against your own emotions."

Tom fumbled to a halt, "- I - I'm - losing control -"



Harry sent a stupefy and hit Tom square in the chest.

Tom collapsed.

Harry turned to the woman, "Who are you?"

"My name is Merope Gaunt. I am - was - Tom's mother."

"What are you doing here?"

"You summoned me."

"I what? How did I do that?"

She smiled, "You don't know?"

"No idea."

She started chuckling, "You are the Master of Death."

Hermione gasped and pulled off the cloak standing next to Harry, "What?!"

Merope chuckled again, "You have united the three Hallows. The Invisibility Cloak, the Elder Wand, and the Resurrection Stone."

Harry pulled out the wand, "This? This is the Elder Wand? I got this from Dumbledore." Harry looked up at her, "And the stone."

Merope turned serious and motioned toward Tom, "Please, give him some time to think about what he's done. Him Binding his own emotions in order to be stronger was the biggest mistake he made in his life. I ask you to let him learn a bit before you send him on."

Harry shook his head, "MI5 won't let me make that decision. If it were up to me I'd just - let him sit for another century or so. I can't kill him while he is defenceless. His life - was too much like mine."

"Thank you. I'll talk to him, since I've got a lot of time."

Hermione looked pained, "What will you talk to him about?"

"About the fact that his life was stacked against him in so many ways. Especially the Prophecy. It boxed him in and guaranteed his eventual failure. And he didn't look closely enough to notice. And all he did was make everything worse with every decision he made. All because he turned away from any positive emotion. So all he had left, for himself and everyone around him, was negative. It showed in everything he created. He could have been so great." She looked to Harry, "Like you."

"Me?"

"Yes. In some ways, he helped make you great. Not in a nice way or a helpful way. He forced you to be great. It was that or die. But you did. You took the better choices."

Harry looked angry, "I hope you don't mind if I'm not grateful."

She laughed, "I don't mind. It was a very hard lesson. But it's over now. He can't hurt anyone else. Thank you." She faded out.

Harry turned to Hermione, "Any idea how to wrap him up so he can't do anything?"

Hermione looked to Tom with surprise, "Hhmm. That is an interesting question. He's too good at wandless magic for anything normal."

Voices and footsteps came from outside.

Hermione started putting on the cloak, "Harry, unlock my parents trunk."

Harry sent the spell as Hermione's magical glow moved toward it. She disappeared inside.

More noises as people started picking through the metal rubble of the now trashed Swiss-cheese hangar.

Shack came through a hole in the wall, "Lord Black. What happened?"

Remus followed him in. Along with a team of SAS troops.

Harry coughed, trying to put his Lord Black persona back together, "We had a bit of an - argument." He motioned toward Tom laying on the floor.

Shack gasped and shuddered in fear, "Gods! Is he dead?"

Harry ran a set of healing diagnostics that showed unconsciousness and the effects of CO, "He's not going anywhere."

Remus worked his way forward through the mess, "Lord Black. I see you've saved us all." His voice was serious but the twinkle in his eye was full Marauder.

A few groans could be heard coming from under the pile of the Ops Centre remnants.

Harry motioned that way, "I think there are people who need help under all that mess."

The SAS team started digging through the rubble.

Harry turned back to Shack, "If you can keep track of this one, I need to deal with some very important things."

Shack looked overwhelmed, "Yes - we'll take care of him. Thank you, Lord Black." Shack bowed and Remus followed.

Harry ran the spell to unlock all the trunks and apparated into Hermione's trunk.

"Hermione!" He started unwinding the disguise of Lord Black to become merely Harry Potter once again.

"Harry! We did it! It's done!" She hit him with a full-body hug that almost knocked him over.

Harry could only laugh.

She pulled on him, "Harry, let's go outside and help."

They ran up the stairs and out into the disaster of a mess of the trashed hangar. Other people were starting to come out of the other trunks and help.

"Remus! What happened?" Harry was working his way through the mess.

Remus engulfed him in a hug, "Prongslet. You're alive."

"So are you. What happened? Why are you back so early?"

Remus shrugged, "The DEs were so bad, they just folded under the intense pressure of the Aurors and the SAS teams. They just couldn't handle it. Particularly without Tom there." He looked at Harry and Hermione, "So – Lord Black saved us all." That Marauder glint was back in Remus' eye.

Harry looked at him with a touch of a smile, "That's what I heard – I wasn't there."

Remus chuckled.

Hermione stepped too close and got absorbed into a three-way hug.

After a moment Harry started pulling toward the Ops Centre, "Let's go see if we can help. I'm itching to try some of those healing spells I spent so much time studying."

## 14. After The Last Crack Of The Whip

CHAPTER SIZE: 10424

### Chapter 14

#### After The Last Crack Of The Whip

#### Harry Potter and Hermione Granger

Monday, 9 December, 1996

Harry tried valiantly to hold on to his temper – and his nerves. He held Hermione's hand like a lifeline as they rode the lift down to the Minister's office level in the newly reconstructed Ministry Building. The lift was full, since they'd just repaired it after the battle. But this new improved model expanded to fit the number of people so crowding was not a stress. The lift stopped and all four walls disappeared so everyone who wanted to, got off easily. The walls reformed and the lift disappeared leaving a large open reception area.

Harry looked around, "Ok, this is all different."

Hermione pointed left, "I think it's this way." She pointed away from the direction most people took.

They came to a sign above a set of ornate double-doors that read "Minister of Magic" They opened the door to a very elegantly furnished waiting room with a number of people sitting in the various chairs and the receptionists desk in front of the door leading to the inner sanctum.

Harry pulled Hermione's hand left, "Remus."

Remus stood up and pulled them into a hug, "Hey kidlets. How are you?"

Harry sighed, "We're here." He sounded stressed.

Hermione chuckled, "He's being a bit melodramatic."

Harry started whinging and patting his pockets, "Where's my calming draught?"

Remus and Hermione chuckled.

The receptionist came over and said, "The Minister will see you now."

They followed her to the doors and passed through to another elegantly decorated office.

Bonderson met them at the door, "Harry, Hermione, and Remus. I'm so glad you could come. Please, have a seat. Tea?" He motioned toward a set of chairs around a table.

Everyone nodded at the suggestion of tea. Harry needed something to play with.

Bonderson snapped his fingers and a tea set appeared on the table, "Ah – tea. The House Elves are so unbelievably good at that."

Everyone sat down around the table and started their ritual for a proper cup.

Hermione gave him a look, "House elves?"

Bonderson smiled, "The Prime Minister is insisting we fix the House Elf curse. Now that we have the Unspeakables and the Department of Mysteries properly subdued into a service organisation, it won't be long now."

Harry grimaced, "Ouch. That must have been painful."

Bonderson chuckled, "For some. We just change the hiring criteria and it will balance out in time."

Harry looked confused.

Remus came to the rescue, "Well – shall we say that – 'like hired like' and they ended up with a lot of overly-focussed, undisciplined, amateurs with no sense of responsibility."

Harry chuckled, "Ah, a sign-post for the Wizarding World."

Everyone took their first sip and indicated their pleasure.

Bonderson sat back in his chair, "Lord Black, thank you for coming."

Harry startled and rattled his cup in the saucer, "– What?"

Remus leaned over and whispered behind his hand, "The Goblins spilled the beans."

Bonderson chuckled, "Your secret is safe with me, Harry." He coughed, "Though I about died when I found out."

Harry groaned, laid his head on the table, and mumbled, "I just wanna be normal."

Hermione patted his shoulder, "You've always been normal, Harry, we just need to convince the world that you are normal too."

Harry sighed, "They always insist that I'm not normal. So I want Lord Black to be the hero and no one knows I'm Lord Black. I want Harry Potter to disappear. I don't want to be The-Boy-Who-Lived any more."

Bonderson nodded, "That's exactly what I wanted to know. And we can do that. It becomes very easy when you keep up the Lord Black disguise. A few appearances here and there. Lord Black can be the Guardian of the Wizarding World – and you can stay normal."

Harry huffed, "Fine. I guess I'll have to tell the Tonks, at least." He was eager to change the subject, "So, what happened with Tom?"

Bonderson sighed heavily, "The secret National Security Courts sentenced him to death for sedition. We tried – but it didn't work."

Mumbles, chokes, and coughs – a number of them – surrounded the table.

Hermione came back to sanity first, "So the prophecy is true? That only Harry can kill Tom?"

Bonderson shrugged, "Evidently. Since Harry didn't kill Tom during the fight at the Ops Centre – we can't seem to kill him. And we can't let Harry do it since he's under-age, and even worse, the laws are such that we can only try once – or twice because everyone didn't realise nothing failed the first time."

Silence and stillness covered the table – until Harry stirred, "So what happens now?"

Bonderson sighed tiredly, "We are having the Unspeakables build a cell deep under Azkaban. One that he will never be let out of, and can't possibly escape from, because no one will be able to open it, from inside or out."

Harry scoffed.

Bonderson held up his hands in surrender, "That's what they tell me."

Harry thought for a moment, "What about the Dementors?"

Bonderson shook his head, "The Prime Minister has ruled that they can not be used as punishment and the Department of Mysteries has been directed to find a way to make that species – or whatever it is – assuming it's even alive – go extinct."

Harry smiled, "Excellent."

Bonderson sighed and looked rather serious, "We certainly don't need the Dementors for Tom. We removed the binding on his emotions, and – he hasn't stopped screaming since."

Everyone winced and groaned at that news.



Bonderson smiled, "So there is some good news."

Everyone waited, and Bonderson revelled in the suspense. He pulled out a piece of paper (muggle printer paper) and handed it to Hermione, "The Crown has directed St Mungos to restore you and your parents memories, to restore your magic, and has overturned your conviction as unlawful."

Hermione's eyes almost fell out.

Harry squealed, wrapped his arms around her, and started kissing her cheek endlessly.

Remus just sat there chuckling.

After a moment Bonderson drew their attention back, "Take that paper to the Head of St Mungos and they should fix everything.

Harry breathed, "Thank you."

Bonderson smirked, "What else could we do? You both saved us all. And – it was suggested that you both receive an Order of Merlin First Class, but that would paint you with entirely too much attention, and we can't really do it quietly."

Both Harry and Hermione nodded vigorously.

Hermione smirked, "You could give it to Lord Black."

Harry shrugged, then frowned, "But what about Hermione?"

Hermione shook her head, "I'm not a citizen of the Wizarding World any more."

Bonderson sighed and settled into deep thought, "Yes, you're right. You'll have had your magic reinstated and the conviction overturned, but your status as a witch has not technically been restored. Easy enough to fix, I suppose."

Hermione frowned, "But what am I missing by not being a full witch? Are you going to deny me access to Diagon Alley?"

Remus spoke up, "No, but the Wizarding World is a very small town. Someone would find out eventually, and that would limit your standing in the community. You would be seen as an outsider."

Hermione frowned even more, "Do I care? I'm not planning on going back."

Harry looked sad, "Let's not close that door prematurely. – Let's think about it."

Hermione nodded reluctantly.

Harry turned back to Bonderson with a grin, "So – what's happening with the Wizarding World? Are you tearing it apart yet?"

Bonderson smirked at Harry's glee, "Yes, but no one's likely to notice. Most of the inner workings of society were so opaque that no one knew how it all worked anyway. We are going to open it all up. The Wizengamot members will be elected, based not on territory, but on strict population numbers they are assigned to represent, regardless of location, since location means almost nothing to magicals. The part we're having trouble deciding on is what services the Wizarding government will provide. The list that the previous government supplied was – rather incomplete with some 'services' being rather useless. Just make-work departments. So we start with the old list of services and start from there, adding and subtracting. That and adding modern ethics and corruption rulings to match non-magical society."

Hermione's eyes were lit up, "How exciting."

Bonderson nodded, "If you've got any ideas, let me know."

Hermione got a predatory grin and nodded.

Bonderson turned to Remus, "So, Remus, I hear you've gotten a promotion at Gringotts, is that right?"

Remus chuckled, "Yes. They've opened a new diplomatic group aimed at being the primary negotiator for all the other sentient magical species to the Ministry. You'll be hearing a lot from them soon."

Bonderson groaned, "Oh, gods. That's all I need."

Remus chuckled, "Actually, I think it will be good. No one has taken any responsibility or even notice of the other species, until now. It's long overdue."

Bonderson looked overburdened, "Yes, it's just that their negotiating style is so aggressive." He chuckled, "I'll probably agree with them most of the time. Who knows, maybe it can become collaborative." He looked speculatively at Remus, "Are you going to be involved with the werewolf community?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. I can hardly wait. Let's fix that disaster."

A knock came at the door and the receptionist leaned in, "Minister, your next meeting is here."

"Thank you, Elaine." Bonderson stood up as Elaine disappeared, "Well, I'm very glad to hear things are working out and I look forward to strong-arming Lord Black into helping." His grin was infectious.

Harry just laughed.

**Sunday, 5 January, 1997**

Harry sat at his kitchen table. It was a cold Sunday morning. Hermione's classes started tomorrow morning. The war was 'over' – to some degree – but Harry wasn't willing to risk it, yet. He would still run his normal

protection screen around Hermione. He just had to convince her it was important. "Hermione, I still think it's important."

Hermione sat in the next chair, "If you think so. I'm just sad it takes up so much of your time."

He smiled, "What else have I got to do? I've got 10 months before I start classes. And you are so much more important than – anything! I will not skimp on your safety."

Hermione sighed – and smiled, "Ok. But! Now that I have my magic back, I want you to show me how you do all this. Your spells, your wards, your look-out spots, everything. I can help. Who knows, maybe I'll have to protect you when you start classes."

Harry smiled indulgently, "I would welcome the help. Do you want to share my workout schedule, too?"

Hermione's eyebrows lifted, "You have a workout schedule?"

"I do. You can try it too."

Hermione's eyes wandered into the distance for a moment, then came roaring back, "Yes!"

Harry smiled up a storm, "Excellent. Tomorrow morning at 6." Harry pointed into the main room, "That expanded steamer trunk is my workout room. We'll take it easy to start. But for now, before you start your classes, we should go out and see the wards and such."

Hermione smiled with a fire of learning, "Let's do it."

Harry stood up – and stopped, "Did you get your exams worked out from last term?"

"Yes. Bonderson arranged for the Crown to send a letter to the University saying that I –" She waved her hand vaguely, "– did something amazing for

the Crown and asked that I be allowed to take another set of exams for last term's classes. I need to talk to them and set it on the calendar but it should be easy. I just want to get it over with, before my new classes get crazy with work."

Harry grabbed his coat, "Ok, let's start with my fade-in-fade-out spells so you can disappear anywhere."

Hermione was in her element.

### **Wednesday, 14 May, 1997**

Harry moved down the hall toward the Minister's Office right on time at 8:45. He did not expect a fun visit. Remus mentioned yesterday that Dumbledore had died the day before. Harry hadn't been listening to the wizarding news, so he'd missed it. He suspected that this meeting had something to do with that, but he had no idea what. And the worst part was that Hermione had class so he was on his own today. No fun all the way around.

Harry walked into the waiting room and Bonderson's receptionist was waiting for him, "Mr Potter, please go in." She held the door open.

Bonderson stood up from his desk, "Harry. How are you, today?"

Harry sighed, "Ok." He felt strangely emotional today. This was not normal for him. But - death was never easy.

Bonderson motioned toward the chairs around the table, "Tea?"

Harry shook his head and sat down.

Bonderson sat, "I asked you to come in a few minutes early because I wanted to ask you something. Dumbledore had given instructions for his funeral service and he had asked for you to officiate the services - with this." He handed Harry a roll of parchment.

Harry looked at it like it was a snake. Reluctantly he took it and started reading. His eyebrows wandered about, rose and fell, twisted and bunched. He sighed in exasperation, "I can't read this. It sounds like a very polite list of grievances mixed in with a lot of apologies."

"Do you want to officiate?"

"No. I won't do that. I'm not the person to do that justice. Nor do I want that level of attention."

Bonderson nodded, "I agree but I thought I should give you the opportunity. A few other people are going to join us to talk about it, so we can work it out."

"Do I need to be here for that?"

Bonderson took a long breath, "The others know you were requested and why, so it would be good to talk to them about it."

"Who's coming?"

A knock at the door, "That should be them."

The receptionist leaned in, "The rest are here."

Bonderson stood up and nodded.

The receptionist disappeared and in walked McGonagall, Shackelbolt, and Aberforth Dumbledore.

Greetings and subdued pleasantries were exchanged as everyone sat down. No one took tea in the somber atmosphere.

Bonderson dove in, "Well – Harry has declined the honour of officiating. And he agrees with me that Albus' letter is not – appropriate for such a public service."

Aberforth grumbled quietly, "Albus always was a bit of a pompous ass."

A few smiles almost came to the surface.

Aberforth sighed, "Why have anything large at all? Why not just a private service? I'd be fine with it."

Bonderson leaned back in his chair, "I think we have an opportunity. This service can be fundamentally about the times we've all lived through and the end of that age, marked by his passing. As his life was one of public service, so can his death. So, if you all agree, I'd like to make this a service about all of us surviving this last war, and everything that lead up to it. About all the great things he did - and a few of the messes he made. I think he needs to be seen as a bit more human than he has been."

Aberforth almost groaned, "Ariana, Grindelwald, his 'Greater Good' crap."

McGonagall looked uncomfortable, "You don't think his 'Greater Good' was correct?"

Abe huffed, "His 'Greater Good' was his name for the road to Hell that was paved with all those good intentions. His 'Greater Good' wasn't specific enough. It left too much room to abandon all kinds of good people in the ditches. We argued about this for years. I think it needed to be the "Greatest Good" because it needed to apply to everyone, not just those where it was convenient. You're not actually going to get there but you need to damn well try or it becomes all too easy to abandon a lot of people and call it 'Good Enough', and that's never good enough."

McGonagall nodded slowly, "Yes, I see. I would agree that this service can be useful to a lot more people than just Albus. Albus was an icon of this last age. He was too big to have a personal funeral. It needs to be something for everyone. And if we can use this to fix a few of the things he left undone, then let's do that."

Bonderson nodded, "Are we able to have the service at Hogwarts?"

McGonagall nodded, "We should include the students."

Harry groaned.

Everyone stopped and looked at him.

Harry sighed, "Going back to Hogwarts – will be difficult."

McGonagall asked, "Why?"

"Because I didn't finish my NEWTS. Neither did Hermione."

McGonagall suppressed a smile, "Harry, I think you will be surprised. A lot of people there think what you did was heroic. I don't think you will be judged for the choices that were forced upon you."

Harry took a long breath, "Well, I can always hide in the back, I suppose."

McGonagall hid a small smile, "If you think that will work."

Bonderson smiled at Harry's worries, "So, Hogwarts at 10:00?"

McGonagall paused, "Make it 11:00. Then we can offer lunch to everyone after."

Bonderon smiled, "Excellent. Anything else?" No one said anything, "Then, this Saturday at Hogwarts at 11:00. Thank you all."

Everyone got up and started moving. Harry moving the fastest.

### **Saturday, 17 May, 1997**

Harry stood in his formal dress robes, in the main room of his flat, gripping his hands to hold them still. He held them tight against his stomach in the vain attempt to hold his stomach still. Again he asked himself, why did he want to do this? Going back to Hogwarts just seemed like a failure. The only thing that kept him focused ahead, instead of focused on bailing out, was Bonderson's point that this service was for the Wizarding World in Britain. It was a memorial for all those who died, for all those who have lost someone. It was a turning point in history. A mile-post. And Harry



could definitely get behind that and support it. He felt better as he focused on that.

Hermione came out of Harry's room dressed in her formal robes, "How do I look?"

Harry's mood flipped completely around, "Gorgeous!"

Hermione chuckled, "You are so easy to please." She leaned into him.

"I can go anywhere if you're with me."

She smiled and kissed his cheek, "Well, then we'll have to go a lot of places, won't we. Shall we start with this one?"

Harry called out "See you there, Remus!"

A mumble came back from his room.

"Harry, you should apparate us. If I do it, you'll likely fall down, as usual."

He chuckled, "Yes, it's the safest."

They popped to about 50 metres from the gates of Hogwarts. They could see a line forming at the gates.

Hermione looked sadly at Harry, "You really are threatened by this, aren't you?"

He sighed heavily, "Yes. I feel like such a failure. No NEWTS, I've abandoned the wizarding world and called them all names."

She started pulling him forward slowly, "Harry, I think you're feeling this way because you stepped outside of the success structure as defined by the wizarding world. But you have stepped into the success structure as defined by the non-magical world. And stepped rather high up, regardless. And - you have accomplished some profoundly successful things even in the wizarding world. You have nothing to worry about."

Harry bobbed his head back and forth in indecision, "Oh – I suppose."

"Harry, I do not measure you by either success structure. You are infinitely more special to me than anyone else here. And, to only measure yourself by someone else's standard of success will never allow you to be happy. You must be happy with yourself independent of anyone else's standard."

Harry smiled, "You are brilliant. All I need to do is figure out how." He grinned at her as they joined the end of the line.

She grinned back, "I didn't say it would be easy."

They stepped up to the gates, to find Professor Flitwick greeting the guests, "Mr Potter, Miss Granger, welcome. I'm so glad to see you."

They nodded as they moved through the gates toward a large semi-circle of chairs arrayed on the lawn around a platform and a small mausoleum behind it. The seats were filling up fast. Harry pulled Hermione to a set of chairs near the back to one side. It was only a few minutes before the ceremony started.

Bonderson stepped up to the podium, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are gather here today to honour the life of a man who touched us all. Without exception, his life has touched ours and marked turning points in world history."

Harry got lost thinking about Dumbledore. The amount of history that his life covered. The key decision points that shaped the world.

Harry was drawn back to the present as Bonderson called McGonagall up to talk about Dumbledore's contributions to Hogwarts. He was the longest-serving headmaster Hogwarts has ever seen. And his leadership in establishing the Order of the Phoenix during both wars.

Harry again wandered off to reviewing his relationship to Dumbledore. The grandfatherly figure who affected Harry's life so strongly. In both advice – and the captivity of Privet Drive.

Bonderson again brought Harry back as he took over telling about Dumbledore's – challenges; his friendship with Grindelwald before the war, then his capturing Grindelwald, his teaching Voldemort when he was in Hogwarts. The story was obviously new to many.

Bonderson's tone changed and brought Harry back to the present.

"Albus Dumbledore was one of the most capable and productive leaders the Wizarding World has seen in a very long time. He was not without his limitations and mistakes, but no one was untouched by his life. One of the more difficult aspects of an influential life. That for good or bad, people are affected. So we celebrate the life of Albus Dumbledore and the passing of this age. That Dumbledore's life marks the closing of so many chapters in our history. Let us now turn our eyes to the renewing and the developing of the new world that we can create. As I'm sure Albus would want us to, let us now build a *better* world for everyone. Thank you all." He moved to greet others on the podium as they stood up.

The audience began to stand and greet one another.

Harry and Hermione stood up and stepped out of the row of chairs. Neville was a few rows up, waved and started coming back.

Neville wrapped Harry in a big hug, "Harry! It's so good to see you! Thank Merlin you're alive." He stepped back, "And – Miss Granger, how are you?"

Hermione was able to speak first, "Hi Neville. We are good. Alive is good."

Neville looked surprised, "You remember me?"

Hermione chuckled, "Yes, who could forget the brave and stalwart Neville Longbottom."

Neville turned to Harry disconcerted, "You've coached her to say the wrong things, Harry."

"Wrong? Why do you say that?"

Neville frowned at Harry, "Brave, Harry? Come on."

Harry and Hermione laughed.

Hermione spoke up first, "Actually, Neville, I took steps to save my memories before I was obliviated, and then St Mungos restored all my memories, and my magic."

Neville's face lit up, "Really? I hadn't heard that before."

Hermione whispered to him, "We've kept a bit of a low profile since the end of the war."

Neville gave Hermione a big hug, "That is awesome!" He stepped back, "Are you going to come back to Hogwarts now?" He looked between Harry and Hermione.

Hermione shook her head, "No. I'm enrolled in Cambridge, now. It was my dream before I learned about magic and once I got in, I can't bear to leave it."

There was a slight squeal as Luna came running up behind and wrapped Hermione in a hug, "Hermione! You're back!"

"Luna! How are you?" Hermione turned around and returned the hug.

"I'm good. I've been Snorkack hunting here at Hogwarts!" She whispered loudly, "They've been hanging around Professor Snape since the end of the war."

Everyone laughed.

Another squeal and Ginny came running up and gave Hermione a hug, "Hermione! You're here!"

"Ginny! Hello. How are you?"

"Harry!" Ginny jumped from Hermione to hugging Harry, "You absolute romantic, you! I died when I heard what you'd done by running off to protect Hermione." She stepped back and looked at him from a few angles, "You look good. No extra scars, you're not limping, still got all your appendages –" She turned to Hermione, "– He does, doesn't he?"

"Ginny!" Hermione yelled in shock while everyone else broke out laughing. Except Neville and Harry, who were turning colours.

Ginny grinned at Harry, "Evidently that's a 'yes'."

Harry just covered his eyes as Hermione groaned.

McGonagall came up to the group listening.

Ginny turned back to Hermione, "You got your memories back? And magic?"

Hermione nodded.

Ginny asked worriedly, "Did you get attacked too?"

Hermione turned somber and nodded.

Ginny gasped, "Do tell."

Hermione sighed, "Only once. Harry, my roommate, and I went to a muggle pub for dinner one evening and as we were walking out the front door we were attacked by four big guys. They were muggles who were under compulsion magic to attack us. Harry beat the snot out of all of them without magic."

Groans and mumbles bobbed about the growing group.

Harry held up his hand and pointed to it, "See? I added another scar to my collection."

Hermione grabbed his hand and looked closely at it, "You said you'd fixed it – oh, I can barely see it." She wagged her finger in his eyes, "No more scars!"

Luna sounded playful, "Inventoried them all, have you?"

Laughter and Hermione's red face were the response.

Until McGonagall stepped in, "Miss Lovegood do you have anything more constructive to offer?"

Luna smiled in a mysterious knowing way with those big innocent eyes, "Yes. Later."

Professor Snape walked up to the group with a following of students from Slytherin, including Draco and Narcissa. Snape bowed, "Mr Potter, Miss Granger, I'm very glad to see you both are still alive."

Harry stiffened, "Professor, Thank you. I'm quite amazed myself."

Snape got an expression that actually looked like a smirk, "Relax, Mr Potter. I don't have to play the role of stern angry Death Eater any more. I am now free. Much like yourself."

Harry chuckled, "God, yes, I'm free. And I am just as amazed that you are still alive too. How did you manage that?"

Snape gave him a suspicious look, "As I understand, I have Lord Black to thank for that. Would you happen to know anything about that?"

Harry shook his head and looked at Hermione (and away from Snape's eyes), "No, I can't say that I've ever met him. And I suppose I should be just as grateful."

Snape grew a bit of a smile, "I must admit that I heard quite a number of stories about your activities during last summer and fall. Not that they could be considered all that accurate, since no one survived to tell the tale.

But one, in particular, was a spectacularly nasty bit of garbage named Antonin Dolohov. Care to confirm or deny anything?" Snape looked – challenging – with a bit of tongue in cheek. Or maybe playing to his audience.

Harry became instantly somber and hard-eyed, "Dolohov. He was a real head-case and the most difficult DE I faced, right up there with Petigrew."

McGonagall interrupted, "Petigrew was good at anything?"

Harry smirked, "He was good at traps and bombs, that was all. – Which, now that I think about it, was probably all Remus' fault." He pointed at Remus standing behind McGonagall.

Remus looked thoughtfully confused, then changed to reluctant acknowledgment, "I did teach him about traps."

Harry started again, "Some of his designs looked rather familiar. I was lucky enough to catch him in the act of setting them up. But Dolohov was following me and Hermione as we walked through a muggle area. This was while Hermione's magic was still bound and she had not recovered her memories yet. I kept changing our direction and he kept following, so I lead us into a park where there was a loo in a separate building. I convinced Hermione to hide in the loo and I locked the door so she couldn't get out and I put up silencing charms."

Hermione jumped in, "Which didn't cover the loo. The explosions had me jumping out of my skin."

Harry started to get quiet and intense, "He walked into the clearing. He was covered in a black cloud, but I could see his Dark Mark and his wand because I had charmed my glasses to display the magic that leaked off of all magical items."

"Like Mad-eye Moody's eye? Very impressive. Care to share those charms?"

"Ah – you should ask Auror Shackelbolt. I gave him the recipe. It's about fifteen charms that were slightly modified in order to fit on the glasses. But because I could see his Dark Mark and his wand, I could tell which way he was facing and where he pointed his wand. This was important because I couldn't see him, just his magic." Harry smirked, "To start the fight off properly, I taunted him."

Snape smiled, "What did you say?"

Harry frowned, "I don't remember the details now. Mainly just that he must have screwed up bad for Tom to send him to me."

Snape laughed, "That's accurate. Please, continue."

"We traded a few spells and blew up a few trees, then I tried one of my tricks. I would apparate to about 5 metres directly above him, send a bunch of bludgeoners straight down, and apparate away."

Snape looked amazed, "And that worked?"

"It had worked against others, but he had evidently put up a shield when I first apparated. He fired a cutting curse straight up at me, which hit my leg badly."

Hermione gasped, "You didn't tell me that!"

Harry shrugged, "I was able to fix it quickly."

Snape turned to his students and said intently, "Healing spells! Know them!"

Harry nodded absently, "After a few more spells we ended up in a death-match."

Snape looked askance, "What was this?"

"Well – first off, I slipped in an inverse bubblehead charm on Dolohov, which pulled all the oxygen out of his lungs, which cut off his magic in



about 20 seconds. But, generally, I would move in close to the DEs and start sending an unending stream of powerful bludgeoners as fast as I could. Dolohov started sending a stream of spells back. My bludgeoners, with an air pressure wave in front of each spell, would disrupt all his spells. And his, mine."

McGonagall gasped, "Bludgeoners will do that?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, but I call it a do-or-die spell-chain because the first person to make a mistake dies." He snapped his fingers.

Flitwik broke out laughing, "Bravo! Bravo! That is definitely new."

McGonagall looked horrified.

Ginny covered her face and whispered, "Gods, Harry."

Snape looked amazed, "Mr Potter – that is nuts!"

Harry laughed, "But very effective. Most DEs couldn't keep up the pace. They always hickuped and lost. Particularly if I started moving and changed the direction my spells were coming from. If they weren't paying attention they would lose quickly."

Hermione hugged him, "Harry, no more of that!"

Harry returned the hug, "No, no more of that."

After a moment of silence, Snape changed the subject, "Any plans for further education?"

Harry smiled, "I start Cambridge in the fall."

Snape coughed, "You got in to Cambridge?"

Harry smiled, "Yes, this next year. Hermione got in last year."

Snape started chuckling, "Very good, Miss Granger, I would expect that from you, but Mr Potter? I am amazed."

Harry burst out laughing, "You're amazed? I'm flabbergasted!"

Everyone broke out laughing.

Snape spoke decisively, "Mr Potter, I would like to apologise to you for my treatment of you over the years. I needed to play the roll of the 'loyal Death Eater' in front of my students. My hostility toward you was not entirely faked due to your father, because having a bit of truth improves any lie, but in any normal situation I would never act on those feelings, particularly in such an obvious and gauche manner. But that was part of the roll. I ask your forgiveness."

Harry took a deep breath and noticed Hermione was beaming at him. He held out his hand, "Professor, I accept. Though I must ask your forgiveness for my behaviour also."

Snape shook Harry's hand, "No, you deserve my thanks, since you played your part well. In essence, you saved my life. And wasn't it my intention to provoke that in you?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, but I'm embarrassed that I fell for it."

Snape had a bit of a challenging smile, "That just proves my acting skills." He overrode all the chuckles when he turned to his students, "But shouldn't we all try to rise above the banal? Is that not a more Slytherin trait? Ambition is good but not at the expense of subtlety. Both are important otherwise you are just brutes with no refinement."

Harry nodded with thoughtful concern, "Yes, Tom had mentioned -" He waved his hand vaguely, "- during one of our many clashes - that he had magically bound his emotions to remove the 'weakness' of those emotions. All except hate, that is. That set him on the road to becoming a monster."

Snape's eyebrows rose, "Gods, no wonder. That explains a lot." Snape shook his head, "What a fool. That one act gave him great power – or should I say it took away all restraint – but also took away all his wisdom. Balance. Judgement."

Harry nodded, "Add in the prophesy and he was almost guaranteed to lose."

Snape asked quietly, "May I ask, now that it is no longer important, if you could recite the complete prophesy?"

Harry took a deep breath and spit it out.

*"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who havethrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."*

Snape considered slowly as his students mumbled their confusion, "Mr Potter, what do you think was the 'power the Dark Lord knows not'?"

Harry hummed, "A number of things, actually. Dumbledore thought it was love, but I think you could put a whole list forward; physiology, physics, the courage to face death, the power of having a soul that wasn't sliced and diced to nothing, or having a complete emotional capacity."

Draco jumped in, "Fizzi-ology? What's that?"

Hermione spoke up, "Physiology is the study of the human body. Specifically, most of the Death Eaters were defeated because none of them understood the effects of Carbon Monoxide on magicals."

Draco was lost, "Carbon – what?"

Hermione continued, "Carbon Monoxide is where one carbon atom is bound to one oxygen atom. It binds to your blood and prevents oxygen from being carried throughout your body. Without enough oxygen you very quickly lose the ability to generate any magic."

Draco mumbled, "Never heard of it."

Snape smiled, "Precisely. Tom never had either, thus his failure." He turned a suspicious eye on Harry, "Are you saying the prophesy was meaningless since you did not defeat Tom?"

Harry blinked in confusion.

Hermione jumped in, "But Tom didn't defeat Harry either."

Harry started to chuckle, "The imperfection of our understanding of semantics? The wobbly-ness of language? The woolly-ness of – Magic?" He shrugged, "I have a resolution I'm happy with." He put his arm around Hermione, "I'm here and he's not."

Chuckles mumbled about the group.

Hermione got a far away look in her eye, "Also, Neville fit the prophesy and could have been attacked by Tom, but Tom chose Harry instead. Could Tom have chosen wrong? I think the whole business of prophesies are so woolly as to become useless. I have no trust in our ability to understand their true meaning."

Neville started coughing, "Why did he not choose me?"

Harry shrugged, "You're a pureblood and I'm a halfblood. I guess that makes me more expendable."

Hermione frowned, "Or he thought Harry was more of a threat, since Tom was a halfblood too."

Harry shrugged again, "Regardless, it's all done now."

"Is it?" Snape's voice was challenging and hard-edged again. "He *is* still alive."

Harry looked at him calculatingly, "What makes you think he could come back?"

"The conditions that allowed his first and second attempts have not been done away with. Until they are solved, he, or someone like him, can come back."

"You are exactly right." Bonderson stood at the outside of the circle, "That is why I'm grasping this opportunity to change things so completely. We can not afford to leave anything as it was to make sure wizarding culture is healthy enough to withstand the next 'Dark Lump' who gets a wild idea."

Snape nodded, "What makes you confident that you can change things enough?"

Everyone was riveted on Bonderson. He took a moment to formulate his answer, "One of the most fundamental differences between the magical and non-magical worlds is scale. The magical world is like a small town and the non-magical world is like a huge city. The magical world is about 1000 times smaller than the non-magical. In very basic terms that means the non-magical world requires a degree of professionalism and rigour in order to function that is not required in the magical."

Snape came back, "You are saying that magicals are fundamentally less capable?"

Bonderson shook his head, "Not less capable, only less experienced. They have not been challenged to develop this level of skills because our society is so small."

"So how do you plan to develop this level of skill?"

Bonderson smiled, "By teaching about it and demanding it. The education in Hogwarts is currently narrow and parochial, and culturally deprived. We

must expand the curriculum to include languages, cultures, legal studies, political science – even civic responsibility. The Statute of Secrecy prevents non-magicals from knowing about us, but we should *not* be ignorant of non-magicals. That must become our challenge. To exceed non-magical skill levels."

Snape slowly smiled, "Excellent. If we can't stay ahead of non-magicals then we don't deserve to hide behind the Statute of Secrecy. If we can, then I think we have a chance."

Bonderson nodded, "It starts with Primary education for magicals and runs through Hogwarts to include a research University. Where magic is rigorously studied and developed to it's fullest capability. A level of professionalism that we need to strive for. We can not afford to let the non-magical world have more excellence than we have. Or we will die."

"Bravo! Bravo!" Flitwik started the applause, which grew to include everyone.

When the group calmed down Luna stepped in to the centre and spoke strongly, "These are the changes we need, to make the wizarding society healthier! But we also need to make changes to hide from the non-magical! The Wizarding World is about to be blocked in. Surrounded by the capabilities of non-magicals. Magic is at risk of being exposed in a way we have never dealt with before."

Harry sighed, "Yes, technology. The Internet. Video cameras everywhere. I had to change all the spells I used in my defence of Hermione because Cambridge has video cameras and infrared security systems everywhere."

Luna motioned toward Harry and Hermione, "This will be their next contribution. Saving the Wizarding World again, by being the bridge between worlds. They will develop the new way we hide."

Stunned silence set in.

Snape roused first, "Mr Potter, what were you going to study at Cambridge?"

"Engineering of some sort."

"Good. Get a PhD. We will need to add engineering and science to Hogwarts."

Draco rose above the mumbles, "But why?"

Snape pushed hard, "Because Miss Lovegood is correct. If you have been paying any attention to non-magicals you will notice that their technology is jumping by leaps and bounds. We do not have that much time left before we will not be able to hide any more. We must be prepared and we are currently hundreds of years behind. Now that that fool Tom Riddle is no longer bolloxing everything up, we can focus on learning new ways of hiding."

Bonderson spoke up, "Absolutely correct. There are a number of ways certain parts of the non-magical government can help us stay hidden, but that will only last a short time. We need to move fast in order to stay ahead of the every-day non-magical. Everyone will be able to see magicals in ten or twenty years if we don't change."

Tension and disbelief struggled through the group.

Snape bowed his head, "Minister. What are you planning?"

Bonderson frowned, "First, kick the Department of Mysteries in the backside – again. They need to get their act together fast. More long-term, we need to develop our Merlin University of Magic. As I said earlier, a research university to organise the study of magic. Hopefully, Miss Granger and Mr Potter will be able to help establish that for study beyond Hogwarts."

Harry covered his face and grumbled, "Damn, I think we've just been promoted."

Hermione burst out laughing and hugged Harry. Followed by everyone else laughing.

Luna gave them each a consoling pat on the shoulder, "Competence is it's own worst reward."

Harry noticed Adelain Delacour, Assistant to the French Minister of Magic, and Fluer's father, standing behind Bonderson thoughtfully nodding slowly.

### **Wednesday, 1 October, 1997**

Harry was sitting at the table in his flat, just finishing breakfast. He was planning out his day, when a frantic knocking at his door had him standing and rushing to his front door. "Hermione – good morning."

"Harry, are you ready yet?"

"Yes – actually I am. I thought your first class wasn't until 2 or 3, or something."

"It is, but –"

Harry pulled her in the door and into a hug, "What's the matter?"

She sighed slowly to calm down, "This is your first class at Cambridge."

"Yes, it is –"

"And I just want it to go well."

Harry chuckled, "It will. You do realise that I've had an entire year of the best tutoring all about Cambridge that I could ever ask for."

She gave tense shuddering breath, "Yes, but – Harry, I'm so excited. You'll be taking classes here – with me."

Harry softly laughed and hugged her, "Do you remember all the hostile-intent wards I showed you last term?"



"- Yes -"

"And all the look-out spots on the rooftops I showed you?"

"- Yes, but -"

"And all those fade-in-fade-out spells I showed you?"

She huffed, "Yes. But this is so important, and - I want this to be fun for you."

Harry laughed, "Oh, this is the most fun I've ever had in my life. - Except maybe that time at your parents house before the obliviation, but -"

"Harry, I'm serious."

Harry hugged her tighter, then ran his fingers over her shoulders, loosening the tense knots he found there, "Would you like to come with me?"

"Yes!"

"Wonderful. Shall we go?"

She silently tapped a spot on her shoulder with a bit of a grimace.

Harry found a big knot and started working it, "That's a bad one."

Hermione groaned as Harry worked to fix it.

"How's that? Better?"

She sighed, "Yes. Much. Thank you."

"For what?"

"For - everything. My knight in shining armour, who saves me all the time."

Harry rested his forehead against hers, "Any time. It's what I live for."

She stepped back and pulled him toward the door, "Wonderful. Let's live this direction. You don't want to be late for your first class."

Harry chuckled, "Never."

### **Friday, 7 June, 2002**

Harry and Hermione slowly walked hand-in-hand back to Hermione's flat after their graduation ceremonies and all the officialdom of paperwork was dealt with. They were still wearing their cap and gown, complete with tassel flapping them in the cheek as they walked.

Harry smiled enough to strain his jaw, "Did you see Remus in the crowd?"

"Yes. He looked like he was about to explode."

"So were your parents."

Hermione laughed, "I thought my dad was going to hyperventilate."

Harry chuckled, "Your Mum was not far behind."

Hermione chuckled, "Please, decorum *must* be maintained."

"How long do you think it will take for them to notice?"

"About five seconds. Mum does not miss things like that."

Harry laughed. They started up the stairs to Hermione's flat.

Hermione opened the door and a cheer went up. They were engulfed in a stream of hugs and laughter – until a scream rent the air, "Hermione, what's that on your finger?!"

"Mum, it's called a ring."

"Yes, but it's on **THAT** finger!"

Hermione's smile rose to match the atmosphere, "Yes, it is. Harry gave it to me during the ceremony."

Emma was shocked into silence.

Dan put an arm around Harry's shoulders, "That's rather sneaky, Harry."

Harry developed a sly smile, "See what you can learn in four years of college?"

Dan nodded with a matching smile, "Important life skills."

Emma blinked, then caught up with intensity, "Ok, when?"

Harry and Hermione shared a knowing look.

Hermione drew it out, "Well – mid November."

Emma gasped, then smiled, "We have a wedding to plan, let's go!" She started pulling them all out to their graduation celebration dinner, which just grew in importance.

Harry called out, "Come on, Remus. You can't get out of this."

Remus smiled calmly, "I wasn't planning on it."

Harry put an arm over Remus' shoulders, "Good, Best Man."

Remus coughed, "Hey! How did that happen?"

Harry's sly smile just kept going, "Standing too close and not looking busy enough. It's a dangerous thing."

Remus kept laughing as they closed the door.

**Thursday, 1 September, 2009**

"Activate!" Harry landed upright and still holding everyone's hands. "We made it!"

"Daaad. It's magic. We always make it." James Daniel Potter, age six, with all the snark of a 26-year-old, set his father straight.

"James, remember your first spell? How it *didn't* go like it's supposed to?" Lily Emma Potter, age four, with all the brains of her mother, and then some, informed her brother of his inaccuracies regularly.

"Children. It's the first day of school." Hermione redirected their attention.

Both James and Lily gasped and turned to look at Dumbledore Primary, where James was starting.

James leaned into pulling his mother by the hand, "Come on, Mum. Let's go see!"

They all walked to the classroom to meet Mrs Tennenbaum, James' teacher.

"Good morning, and who are you?" Mrs. Tennenbaum leaned down to ask James.

"I'm James Daniel Potter!"

Tennenbaum gasped, "Are you really? I've heard a lot about you."

James looked up, "Daaad, you didn't!"

Harry shook his head in mock fear, "No, I didn't. It was probably Uncle Remus." He nodded his head convincingly.

James turned back to Mrs. Tennenbaum, "It's not true! Uncle Remus has this really wild imagination, and it's not true!"

Mrs Tennenbaum nodded desperately, "I'm sure he's joking, James. Would you like to wear a name tag?"

"A what?"

She pointed to her name tag, "Like this? Can you write your name and make a name tag for yourself?"

"Oh, that's easy." He started writing on a tag with a big blue pencil and the end of his tongue peaking out.

She stood up straight again, "Mr and Mrs Potter, thank you for coming. He should be ready to pick up a little after two PM today. We have a class picture scheduled after the end of class today."

Harry and Hermione nodded, but before they could respond, Lily spoke up, "Are you going to teach him anything? Or do you just keep him busy and out of Mum's hair?"

Harry and Hermione were holding back grins. And sharing eye-rolls, and head shakes.

Mrs Tennenbaum broke out laughing – and James gave Lily a glare. "Oh, yes, dear. He will be much smarter by the end of the day. And who are you, dear?"

"I am Lily Emma Potter and I'm four!" She held up four fingers, "I should probably be here too, 'cause I help James stay org-an-ised. He needs it."

"I do not!" James went back to writing.

Mrs Tennenbaum kept laughing, "Yes, dear, I'm sure you're very helpful. But he's supposed to figure these things out by himself. That's what he's supposed to learn here."

Lily looked at James doubtfully, "Maybe..."

Mrs Tennenbaum gasped, "Oh! I love your hair, Lily. How many colours can you make it turn?"

Lily frowned up at her hair as it cycled through a range of colours, "Uhg. I can't do anything with it. It just does what it wants."

James glanced over at her and whispered, "Just like the rest of her."

Lily poked her tongue out at James, who smirked and went back to writing.

Harry caught up finally, "Thank you Mrs Tennenbaum. We will all be back at 2pm."

"Excellent." Mrs Tennenbaum just kept smiling.

Hermione leaned down and spoke to James, "You be good, James. Be nice."

James reached out and hugged Hermione and Harry and went back to sticking his name tag onto his shirt - upside down. "There!"

Mrs Tennenbaum clapped, "Excellent! Now you can go inside the classroom, James. We'll start the class in a minute."

Harry and Hermione waved and they moved back down the hallway.

At the entrance hall Harry leaned down, "Ok, Lily, are you ready for another portkey?"

She nodded with the utmost confidence, "Oh, yes. I'm used to them now." She sighed with all the boredom of an experienced commuter.

Harry stood up and held everyone's hand, "Activate!"

They landed at the Security Desk in the Ministry Building to check in. It was a much more streamlined process than all those years before when Harry and Hermione first came here. They walked to the lifts and took one to the second level.

A voice was heard, "Second level. Minister's Office and Wizengamot Offices."

Lily asked, "Is that voice new? I don't remember it since last time."

Hermione smiled, "It is new."

Lily nodded decisively and started pulling with both hands, "Come on, it's this way."

Harry and Hermione could not contain their smiles as they watched Lily lead them down the hall like she lived there.

There were a number of people in the Minister's office waiting area.

Lily got to the Assistant's desk first, "We're here to see Mr Minister."

Sarrah, the Minister's Assistant's smile was huge, "Are you? Do you have an appointment?"

Lily looked back, "Do we need an appointment, Mum?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do we have one?"

"Yes, dear."

Lily started to turn to Sarrah, then turned back to Hermione, "Are we on time?"

"Yes, dear."

Lily threw her arms wide, "We're here!"

No one in the room kept a straight face.

Sarrah coughed to hide her chuckles, "Let me see if Mr Minister is ready." She got up and poked her head in the door then came back, "He'll see you now."

"Great!" Lily started toward the door.

"Ah - Lily." Harry called.

Lily turned and huffed, "Do I have to stay out here again? He has much nicer toys in there."

Smirks filled the room. And a few more coughs.

Hermione lead Lily to a chair in the corner of the room, pulled out of her bottomless bag sheets of paper with line drawings, and a box of crayons, "You can colour us some pictures. You stay in this room and don't bother anyone, they have work to do. We will be back in just a little while. Alright?"

"Yes, Mum." Lily looked glum until she saw the pictures and she gasped, "Oh, new pictures! These are much better." She held up a paper, "What's this?"

"That is a fish. See the bubbles coming out of it's mouth? Here's it's tail." She ran a finger outlining it.

"Oh." Lily looked at it with consternation, "Bubbles are blue, aren't they?" She started colouring with determination.

Harry and Hermione made a B-line for the office because they knew their time was limited. Sarrah opened the door.

"Harry! Hermione! Good to see you again."

"Kingsley. Good to see you too. It's been a while." Harry shook his hand.

"Yes, they haven't thrown me out yet. Maybe someday I'll get lucky. Have a seat." He motioned toward a meeting table in the corner. "Tea?"

Hermione sighed, "I could use some. Parenting is rather like herding cats."

Kingsley chuckled, "Or herding Wizengamot members?"



Harry held up his hands in surrender, "Ok, you win. That's decidedly the more difficult job."

They chuckled and leaned back with tea.

Shack asked, "So – how many degrees have you collected so far?"

Harry chuckled, Hermione frowned teasingly.

Harry answered, "I only have my Bachelor's and a PhD in experimental physics, while Hermione now has one Bachelor's in Engineering, one PhD in Nonlinear Systems Design, and three Master's: Education, Public Policy, and International Relations."

Shack raised his hands, "Brilliant! Even if I don't know what that all means, it's brilliant! I'm sure." After everyone's chuckles he started again. "We have the legalities worked out with Hogwarts Board to use some of the land behind the castle for Merlin University of Magic. We will start construction on two buildings initially, but in the mean time we have an unused part of Hogwarts castle you can use. I'm still trying to round up a few more Board members for MUM – only two seats left. So – you might be ready to open up a few curriculum tracks maybe next year? All the legalities will be worked out sometime this year, so –" He shrugged, "- Start working out an initial budget."

Harry sighed, "Unbelievable, Shack. That's awesome."

Hermione bunched her eyebrows in concern, "Any progress on the Department of Mysteries?"

Shack huffed, "Actually, yes. They have agreed to become part of MUM. And you are free to test them and give them new assignments as you need."

Hermione gasped, "How did you get them to agree to that?"

He smiled like a cat with a canary, "I told them that the Department of Mysteries budget was moving to MUM and they needed to move with it or their pay would drop. – And they didn't read the fine print."

Hermione groaned, "They will not be happy when they catch up with that."

He shrugged, "They need to learn to earn their pay. 'Responsibility' is the name of this government."

Harry was slowly nodding, "Yes, we may actually be ready to start some curriculum tracks next year. Minerva has made great progress on our suggested changes to Hogwarts curriculum. We should have some good students coming up soon."

Shack gave them a considering look, "So – which of you is President of MUM?"

Harry and Hermione both pointed at each other.

Shack burst out laughing, "You two need to work on your stories a bit."

Harry and Hermione now started chuckling at each other.

Hermione turned a bit sober, "Our biggest challenge is going to be fading out of our respective research groups."

Harry was nodding seriously.

Hermione continued, "We think the best way is to form a research start-up but then all our students will be dying to join us. A lot of people are pinning a lot of hopes on us."

Shack nodded, "Yes, on this side too."

Contemplative silence fell on them for a moment.

Harry sighed, "Maybe we can go on a long vacation and – not come back?"

Hermione frowned, "Hhmm. To throw a mystery at our students would be throwing petrol on a fire. They'd break the Statute of Secrecy looking for us." She shook her head in fatalism, "I think we're going to have to maintain both worlds – for a while at least."

Harry nodded, "Yes, our research papers are being cited a lot. – Unless we faked some debilitating illness. We're not dead, just useless."

Hermione nodded slowly, "That might work. Something contagious – and scary. Ebola or something." An evil grin starting.

Harry started to grin, "Viral-induced cancer."

Hermione's eyes flashed, "Something we picked up in Borneo on our vacation."

"I know, H57-N106. We just discovered it ourselves, and fell victim to it in the heroic attempt to save our children. And the world."

Shack looked concerned, "Ah – I think my next appointment is here."

They all chuckled, Shack rather nervously.

Harry nodded in satisfaction, "Well, shall we go collect our child?"

Hermione stood up, "Right! Before she breaks something."

Harry stood up and smiled, "Or she's charmed the arms off of all the people in the waiting room."

Shack laughed again, "Oh, that would be brilliant. Does she need a job? Being Special Assistant to the Minister at age four would look good on a CV."

Harry laughed, "Oh, that's dangling meat in front of a Thestral. I think we should wait a few years."

Shack looked tired, "But I was hoping to retire soon. She could probably do this job better than I am."

Hermione shook her head, "You are brilliant at this, Shack. You encourage the right people and throw roadblocks in front of the wrong ones."

"Thanks. That means a lot to me. I've learned a lot from Bonderson and the MI5 people. They have been a huge help."

### **Thursday, 10 January, 2019**

Harry made his way down the stone passage, the light of his wand exposing the rough stones dark with dripping moisture. He stopped. He could hear Tom singing softly to himself, his voice carried down the stone tunnel. Harry started walking again, over the uneven stones.

Tom stopped suddenly at the sound of Harry's shoes on the stones as he walked down the passageway to the end of the cave.

Harry came to the room with a light in the centre, about 5 metres square. The Chrystal walls of the prison cell were clear, beautiful, unblemished, with a bed, sink, and toilet inside. Harry walked in the room, conjured a chair and sat down, "Tom."

Tom relaxed a bit, "Harry. It's been – how many years?"

They stared at each other for a long time.

Tom croaked out, under significant tension, "Why are you here?"

Harry breathed out, looked around, looked back, "I'm not sure."

Silence settled in, and Tom relaxed, until he whispered, "You were right."

Harry looked up, "About what?"

"Everything."

Harry looked suspiciously at him, "Angling to get out?"

"No! No, no." Tom held up his hands and started shaking, "Please, don't do that." His shaking got worse, "I couldn't handle that." He wrapped his arms around himself.

Harry looked confused, "Why not?"

Tom started wheezing, "This is all I know - now. It's - safe here. I couldn't handle the outside. There are - people - out there. They would ..." He turned his head away and started to cry. "I can't."

Harry looked guilty, "Have I destroyed you?"

Tom sat back shocked, "Did you want to?"

"No."

Tom sighed and relaxed, "No, you did not. It might have been easier if you'd done that. Well - simpler. But - you have given me something - that I'd never understood, I couldn't even imagine it. I had ..." Tom stumbled to a stop, his eyes glazing into the distance, thoughts flitting across his eyebrows.

Harry grew impatient and whispered, "What was this?"

Tom looked hollow as he focussed on Harry, his voice a ragged broken whisper, "Mercy. I'd missed it completely. I had no idea."

Harry was feeling uncomfortable. He was feeling - less. Harry nodded.

Tom started shaking again, holding himself, "Harry, please - don't turn me out. Please ..." His shaking grew, tears starting, "Please - don't make me leave. I'm not ready."

Harry didn't know what else to say. He shook his head, got up - and paused. He turned back, "Tom, you've changed."

Tom started to say something – then, "I'm not sure. All the memories of all those people – they still haunt me – they still *stain* me. How much change could possibly be enough?"

Harry sighed, "I don't know anyone who could answer that. For you or me."

Tom whispered, "I'm sorry."

Harry nodded, "So am I." Harry left.

Two days later Tom Marvolo Riddle died.

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- The End -

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A/N: Thank you all for coming along for the ride. To be able to create something that brings joy, amazement, and mental stimulation to so many people is heartwarming and humbling. Thank you for sharing your enjoyment in your reviews.

Before everyone starts howling that I am making some sort of political statement about capitol punishment, let me state that I am not. What I am suggesting is related to that old statement 'if all you have is a hammer, then everything starts looking like a nail'. The implication being that all the magicals have is magic, so that is all they look at; it blinds them unbelievably. But while we gather a lot of self-righteous satisfaction at seeing the magicals caught in their stupidity, understand that we can be just as caught, in our own ways. For instance, we want the vengeance of a proper execution for crimes of Voldemort's stature. But I'm asking the question, is it actually vengeance? We can consider it vengeance in terms of the remaining populace's repudiation of Voldemort, but we still have no idea what is on the other side of that execution. I'm asking the question, can life in prison actually be a worse punishment? (This is a rhetorical

question, you don't need to spam me with hate-reviews. :-) Mainly, I thought this was a more interesting ending. To give a more complete picture of the caricature that Voldemort had become. To explain the development of a magical human into such a monster.

Let me also state that Voldemort was hugely evil. In these fictions he murdered hundreds of people and was responsible for more. He was also hugely powerful because he swindled magical support out of a lot of magicals. But he could still be brought down by simple means applied intelligently. It is, in it's own way, the most powerful rebuke that he fell to such simple means. And Harry's refusal to kill Tom while he is defenseless is an indication of Harry's strength and intelligence in empathy; his 'saving-people-thing'.

The conflict with Tom, in this story, is largely a backdrop for the conflict of world-views and values between the magical and non-magical. Because we all love laughing at the magicals caught in their small-minded worldview. But, as I said, it is also meant to be a cautionary tale of our own propensity for rationalization and denial. We can be just as blinded, caught in the assumptions of our own worldview. Thus, science fiction and fantasy stories, that try to stand outside of our own limited worldviews, can ask the questions and imagine the possibilities and can save us all from our own limited worldview.

One more small point, while I'm on a roll. In the field of computer science there is an old joke about the nature of randomness. If you had an infinite number of monkeys, typing on an infinite number of keyboards, for an infinite amount of time, at some point, one of them will type out the complete works of Shakespeare. This also applies to Fan Fiction; every possible story in the multi-verse. So join your local Union of Random Monkeys today! Help create the multi-verse by writing Fan Fiction! GO TEAM! :-)