

**Release that Witch...
and Wizard?!**

Disclaimer: All characters here are at least 18. Hogwarts starts later, so by the time Harry arrives, he's 19. Cheng Yen (陈嫣) was in her mid-20s before waking up in the 21-year-old body of Garcia Wimbledon. Witches gain their first awakening upon adulthood, at 18 years of age.

Story Starts

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Chapter 6.3 -

**The Witch's Cooperation
Association**

The witches stared. Harry stared back.

Firelight painted their faces in shifting orange—scared faces, confused faces, angry faces, and a few that hadn't decided which of the three to settle on. Girls barely into their adulthood huddled behind older women. Someone near the back clutched a cooking knife as though it would do anything at all against a man who was currently standing inside a bonfire without so much as a singed eyebrow.

He could work with scared. Scared listened. Angry was trickier, and confused was frankly his natural habitat.

And looking at them—really looking, at the white cloth strips on sleeves, at the hollow cheeks, at the way even the angry ones kept a full body-length between themselves and anything that might be magic they didn't understand—Harry found he could almost sympathise with medieval Europe. Both sides of it. The Muggles who'd hunted anything different, and the witches and wizards who'd learnt to hate them right back. Fear did that. Fear built pyres and called it justice, and apparently that held true across realities.

Though, to be fair to his own lot, the actual witches and wizards burnt at the stake back home hadn't actually died. They'd used the Flame-Freezing Charm—the very same charm currently making the fire around his ankles feel like a thousand feathers dragged across his ribs—and stood there giggling while the flames tickled. Wendelin the Weird had enjoyed it so much she'd let herself be caught forty-seven times under various disguises. Half of them hadn't even bothered with disguises. They'd been baiting Muggles for sport, which was precisely why the Wizengamot had eventually written laws against Muggle-baiting. Hard to maintain the Statute of Secrecy when Barnabas the Barmy kept getting himself arrested on purpose so he could cackle theatrically from inside an inferno.

No, the real tragedy of the burnings was that most of the "witches" who actually died screaming had been ordinary Muggle women. Midwives. Herbalists. Widows with unfortunate cats. And then there'd been the handful of genuinely magical idiots—drunk wizards who'd gone baiting and forgotten to apply the Flame-Freezing Charm, or slurred the incantation, and discovered the hard way that fire didn't care how funny the joke had been.

One of them had managed to Apparate out mid-burn. Splinched himself spectacularly. Left an entire leg behind in the flames, smoking, while he reappeared three counties away and bled all over a fishing village.

That particular wizard had decided the Muggles owed him a leg's worth of grievance and spent the rest of his life collecting the debt with interest—through piracy. Edward Teach. The Muggles knew him as Blackbeard, and they'd never once questioned why his beard appeared to be literally on fire during boarding actions, or why cannonballs kept curving away from his ship as if embarrassed to hit it.

Teach had later married into the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Black, and his treasure—several decades of the Atlantic's finest plunder—had transformed the family from merely old into a political juggernaut. And because the man had spent his career navigating by the stars, charting the Americas with a sextant in one hand and a wand in the other, he'd started the

family tradition of naming children after stars and heavenly objects. Sirius. Regulus. Bellatrix. Andromeda. Every constellation on the Black tapestry traced back to a one-legged drunk who'd forgotten a Flame-Freezing Charm. Though Narcissa—the MILF that she was—wasn't named after a celestial body, or at least he couldn't think of one that was related to her name.

Which technically made Blackbeard Harry's something-great-grand-uncle by adoption. Sirius would've loved that. Sirius had probably known that and saved it for a birthday Harry never got to have—

"Ha-ha-ha—Harry!" The voice behind him cracked between laughter and fury. "Ha-ha—please!"

He blinked. Turned.

Nightingale still stood amid the flames, golden hair whipping in the fire's updraught, tears of helpless laughter streaming down her face while the charm tickled her from boots to collarbone. Her violet eyes promised murder.

"Oh—oops." Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "Got lost down memory lane. I was thinking about medieval Europe, actually—back home, ordinary folk used to burn magicals at the stake too, only most of the people they actually burnt weren't—"

"Ha-ha-ha—get—ha-ha—me out—haha—of here!"

"Someone's testy. Are you on your—" He caught himself. "No. No, wait. A wise bird once told me never to ask a girl about her mensies. Ravenclaw. Literal bird on the door knocker, gives excellent advice." He tilted his head. "I'm honestly surprised you haven't asked how I got past the God's Locket of—"

"HARRY!"

"Right. My bad. Here."

His wand appeared in his hand, and he gave it a lazy twirl.

The fire died. Not smothered, not doused—simply gone, every flame snuffed between one heartbeat and the next, leaving behind woodsmoke and a crowd of witches blinking at the sudden dark. Cold rushed back in where the heat had been. Another flick, and the stake at Nightingale's back dissolved along with the rope binding her to it, unravelling into a flock of white butterflies that spiralled upward through the cave, wings catching the light of the remaining torches. Gasps rippled through the assembly. One of the younger girls reached out towards them, wonder cracking through her fear.

Then the butterflies folded back into a bundle of rope and a wooden stake, which clattered to the stone floor beside Nightingale's feet.

Several witches flinched at the noise. The young girl looked personally betrayed.

"Sorry," Harry told her. "Waste not, want not. My aunt was very firm on the subject."

Nightingale stumbled forward off the scorched pyre, wobbling on legs that had spent the last several minutes being tickled into uselessness. Harry steadied her by the shoulder, then paused, a thought surfacing.

"Hang on. Did you ever mention your name was Veronica? I distinctly remember 'Nightingale.'" He turned the name over. "Veronica. Lovely, that. Very aristocratic. Though I'm docking points because it's got 'Ron' hiding in the middle of it, and I've historically had poor luck with those." He leant in, mock-serious. "Important question, Veronica—are you prone to bouts of irrational jealousy? Storming off? Abandoning your friends in a tent in the middle of a—"

A vein ticked visibly at her temple.

Harry grinned wider.

"Harry." Her voice came out flat and dangerous. "The witches Cara sent after you. What happened to them?"

"Oh—them." He waved a dismissive hand, wand still in it. "They were very uncooperative. Wouldn't sit down for tea, kept trying to stab me. One of them threw an actual boulder, which, credit where due, was a genuinely impressive party trick."

He flicked the wand over his shoulder.

The air behind Nightingale shimmered, a Disillusionment sloughing away like water running off glass—and five witches lay revealed on the cave floor, sprawled in various positions, all of them limp.

The assembly erupted. Cries went up—names, Harry assumed, shouted by sisters and friends—and several women surged half a step forward before terror yanked them back, caught between rescue and self-preservation.

"Murderer!" someone shrieked. "He's killed them!"

"Oi—no." Harry turned to face them, both hands raised, wand pointed at the ceiling. "Nobody's dead. They're sleeping. Look—" He gestured at the nearest one, a stocky witch whose chest rose and fell in slow, peaceful rhythm. A faint snore escaped her. "See? Perfectly sound. Better sleep than she's had in months, I'd wager, given the accommodation around here. No offence to the caves. Lovely caves. Very... mineral."

He swept his wand in a broad arc, and five thick mattresses popped into existence beneath the sleeping witches, each one lifting its occupant gently off the cold stone. Then, with a slow lift of the wand, all five mattresses rose into the air and drifted across the cave towards the crowd—a small aerial procession of snoring women on floating beds—before settling down at the front of the bewildered assembly, soft as falling leaves.

Nobody moved to touch them for a long moment. Then a grey-haired witch dropped to her knees beside the nearest mattress, pressed two fingers to the sleeper's throat, and looked up at the others with her mouth open.

"She's warm," the woman said. "She's just... asleep."

"Told you." Harry pocketed his hands—coat pockets, proper ones, thank you very much. "No one can say I'm not a gracious host, even to people who throw boulders at me."

"The stick."

Cara's voice sliced through the murmuring. She'd regained her feet at the far side of the cave, green hair wild, one arm flung out towards Harry in accusation. Whatever composure she'd carried before—the serene mentor, the prophet of the Holy Mountain—had burnt off entirely, leaving something raw and hungry underneath.

"That stick—it's a magical artefact! A relic! That's what grants him power—no man can wield magic, it's the stick, don't you see?" Her voice climbed, cracking. "He must have plundered it from some ancient witch settlement! That is our legacy—our birthright, stolen and sullied by a man—seize it! Take back what is rightfully ours!"

Nobody seized anything. The assembled witches looked at Cara, then at Harry, then at the five peacefully snoring examples of what had happened to the last group who'd tried.

Cara didn't need them.

Something moved in the shadows near the cave wall—a ripple of scales, fast and silent—and before Harry registered the strike, a snake's head whipped up from the floor beside him, jaws closing around his wand, and tore it clean out of his hand.

"Oi!"

The snake flowed back across the stone in a blur of black scales, delivering its prize to its mistress. Cara snatched the wand up and clutched it against her chest with both hands, cradling it, her eyes gone wide and fever-bright.

"Yes." Her breath shuddered out of her. "Yes—I can feel it—the power in it, singing—with this, we no longer need to hide, we no longer—"

The wand vanished.

Not dropped. Not snatched. One instant her fingers were white-knuckled around the Elder Wand; the next they were clutching empty air.

Cara stared at her own hands.

Harry raised his right hand, snapped his fingers, and the wand reappeared between them with a soft pop, settling into his grip like a bird coming home.

"Nope." He wagged it at her. "This one's mine. Bonded, actually—came to me when I reunited it with its two companions. Though my last wand chose me as well, when I was eleven—long story, involves a very creepy shopkeeper and a lot of exploded flowerpots. And that one was made with materials from a phoenix that gave a pair that connected to—well, let's just say a very distant relation of mine—so it was a family matter on top of everything else. Though why am I talking about my old broken wand? And why did I just realise that Voldemort is like a very distant—no, we're not going there. Anyway—" He shifted his weight, settling into the posture he'd seen McGonagall use a thousand times—chin up, shoulders back, about to explain something to people who ought to have read the assigned material. "In fact—and pay attention, because this is the important bit—I don't actually need the wand to do magic. I was just used to waving a stick."

He opened his hand. The wand dissolved into him, sinking beneath his skin the way it always did, and he swept his empty palm through the air in a grand, theatrical arc.

Nothing happened.

Harry looked at his hand.

Blink.

He shook it, the way one shakes a torch with a dying battery.

Blink. Blink.

The entire cave watched him stand there, arm outstretched, producing absolutely nothing. Somewhere in the crowd, a witch coughed.

Blink. Blink. Blink.

"...Ah." He lowered the arm. "Yeah. Forgot. When the wand's inside me and I'm standing within range of a God's Stone, the whole—" he gestured vaguely at himself "—arrangement stops working. Bit of a design flaw. I keep meaning to write it down."

He glanced sideways. The God's Locket still hung against Nightingale's chest, its dull surface drinking in the torchlight, quietly strangling every scrap of ambient magic inside its radius.

'Nice one, Potter. Nothing undermines a demonstration of ultimate power quite like your ultimate power switching itself off.'

The solution was obvious. He took a dozen brisk paces forward, out of the stone's radius—and the entire front rank of the assembly took a dozen equally brisk paces backwards, an unconscious wave of retreat rippling through the crowd, older ones pulling the younger ones behind them.

He decided not to take it personally. Mostly, he succeeded.

"There. Much better." He rolled his shoulders, felt his magic flood back into his fingertips like blood returning to a numb limb, and waved his hand.

Six monkeys erupted into existence in the space between him and the crowd.

Small ones—capuchins, more or less, though he'd never claimed his conjured wildlife was zoologically rigorous—and every one of them flung its arms skyward and shrieked, in perfect unison:

"MOGWAI!"

The monkeys then descended upon the assembly and did what monkeys everywhere have always done: they swung off shoulders, yanked at headscarves, rifled through pockets, and screamed "MOGWAI! MOGWAI!" at

anyone who made eye contact. A witch shrieked as one perched atop her head and began grooming her hair with tiny critical fingers. Another spun in circles trying to dislodge a monkey that had attached itself to her back like a furry rucksack. The grey-haired witch by the mattresses swatted at one with genuine violence, which the monkey took as an invitation to dance.

"See?" Harry spread his arms over the pandemonium. "All natural. No stick required. Wandless, wordless, one hundred per cent genuine male witchcraft—wizard, technically, we say wizard where I'm from—though admittedly that may be due to—"

His knee buckled.

He pitched forward a step, catching himself, and turned to find Nightingale directly behind him, having just planted her boot in the back of his leg. She jerked her chin sharply over her shoulder, gesturing behind herself, and turned to show him.

"Oh?" Harry's eyebrows climbed. "Are you inviting me to look at your—"

"Harry!"

And then he saw it. Her hands. Still lashed together at the small of her back, rope biting into her wrists, exactly as they'd been on the pyre. He'd vanished the stake, vanished the fire, vanished the rope that had wrapped her body, conjured mattresses and monkeys and delivered a lecture on wand theory—and left her trussed like a market hen the entire time.

"Ah." He winced. "Oops. Forgot that. And the God's Stone as well, apparently. In my defence, there's been rather a lot going on."

The wand rose out of his palm and reformed in his grip. One precise flick severed the rope, which slithered off her wrists and dropped to the floor. A second flick, and the God's Locket unclasped itself from around her neck and floated up into the air between them, rotating slowly, inert and ugly.

Nightingale rolled her wrists, working the blood back into them, and her form flickered—there and gone and there again—as she tested the Mist and found it answering.

"Better?" Harry asked.

"Better." She flexed her fingers. "How? The stone should have—"

"Yeah, so, the locket can't shut me down as long as the wand's already out and in my hand—same with the cloak, if it's on me first. It's when the stone's on me before I can summon either of them that I'm properly stuffed. Order of operations. Like they never got the memo about the merger, so they only know how to strangle what they can see." He plucked the floating locket out of the air and shoved it into his coat pocket, where it could sulk harmlessly against the lining. He willed his cloak to wrap around it so as not to affect Nightingale. "Anyway. Confiscated. For science."

"We need to go." All the humour had gone out of Nightingale's voice; she was already scanning the cave, cataloguing exits and threats. She raised her voice over the diminishing monkey chaos. "Wendy! Tia! Come with us—now, both of you. I don't think Cara will—"

"Oh no you don't, traitor."

Cara's voice cracked across the cave like a whip.

Harry turned—too slow—and saw the shadows beside Wendy's feet move.

The snake struck from nowhere, a blur of black scales and blue stripes erupting from the darkness at Wendy's side, and its fangs sank deep into her forearm before anyone could shout a warning. Wendy cried out and staggered, wrenching her arm back, but the damage was done—two puncture wounds welling dark, the flesh around them already draining of colour.

"No!" Nightingale's composure shattered. "Harry—quick—get Tia, we need to leave, now!"

Harry moved.

Wand in one hand, free hand splayed—both swept forward together, and a tempest exploded outward from him, a wall of conjured gale that howled through the cave and flattened everything in its path. Witches went sprawling. Torches guttered and tore sideways in their sconces. Cara's snake was ripped off the ground mid-slither and flung against the far wall. The monkeys, caught in the blast, tumbled end over end and popped out of existence one by one, each vanishing with a final indignant "mogwai..."

"Stupefy! Stupefy! Stupefy!"

Three bolts of red light lanced through the wind-torn air—one dropped a witch who'd been scrambling towards Wendy with a raised knife, one caught the snake as it recovered its coils, and the third slammed into the ground a foot in front of Cara, spraying stone chips, a warning rather than a mercy.

Tia stood frozen in the chaos, golden eyes enormous. Harry crossed the distance in four strides and scooped her clean off her feet, one arm under her knees, the other behind her shoulders. She yelped and grabbed his collar.

"Sorry—no time for introductions—Harry, pleasure, you can hit me later." He angled his wand back at Wendy, who'd sunk to her knees, cradling her arm. The flesh around the bite had gone grey-black, the darkness crawling towards her elbow in visible threads beneath the skin.

"Mobilicorpus!"

Wendy rose off the ground, limp and pale, floating horizontally at waist height. Her eyes had lost focus. Her lips moved without sound.

"Nightingale!" Harry shouted over the dying gale. "Let's go!"

Nightingale was already there. One hand seized his forearm in a grip hard enough to bruise; the other closed around Wendy's floating wrist, anchoring her to the chain.

Harry caught one last glimpse of the cave—the scattered witches picking themselves up, the sleeping five still snoring peacefully on their mattresses

through the entire battle, and Cara on her knees amid the wreckage of her congregation, face twisted, one hand outstretched towards them.

Then Nightingale grabbed them and pulled them into the Mist—

—and the four of them vanished.

Behind them, echoing off empty stone, Cara screamed.

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End

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