

Let's Try That Again

1.

Harry sipped his drink and rubbed the back of his neck. It was too late to take a nap, but too early to go to bed. This was the first year all of the kids were in Hogwarts. He and Ginny would have the house to themselves. In fact, to celebrate Ginny had bought him a special vintage of whiskey.

His eyes were getting heavier with every passing moment. He moved to put the glass down only to realize he couldn't move his fingers. Harry's head flopped to the side. His tongue felt thick in his mouth. Pulses of darkness threatened to overtake his vision.

"Harry." Ginny spoke from somewhere in the room. "Can you hear me?"

A spike of worry mingled with hope pushed against the darkness. He could see her moving nearby. She kneeled in front of him.

"Damn it, Harry." She yelled at him. "You weren't supposed to drink that until Christmas."

He vaguely felt her shaking him.

"I had it all planned out." She let go, letting him slump forward. "It would be a charmed card saying it was from Ron. I'd take a picture of you holding it up." Ginny kicked the chair. "Hold it together, Gin. This can still work."

Harry stood up as he watched as his wife stomped out of the room. The flood of numbness was gone. What should have been a moment of relief was soured when he looked down. His body was crumpled on the floor.

"That was disappointing." A woman said from behind him.

Harry turned to face the source. A young woman stared back at him. She looked familiar in the sort of way as someone he saw going about his day. An accidental shared look in the lobby, pressing the elevator button on a hurried morning. He wouldn't spare a second glance on any normal day.

"I know you." Harry said slowly.

"We've worked closely for a long time." A coy smile played on her lips as she nodded.

Their eyes met. A flash of their interactions in the past rushed through his memory. She was there for his parents, she took Quirrell, she watched as Harry stumbled away from the basilisk, she glared at the dementors. Time and time again, she appeared in his life.

"Death." Harry stated.

"Nice to see you again, Harry." She smiled back at him.

"Again?" He asked.

"You were almost mine more than you know." She walked around him, sitting in the chair by his body.

"There are the big ones, of course. Getting bitten by the basilisk, facing down a horde of dementor, and all those times with Riddle and his minions. But it's the little ones that everyone forgets. You have no

idea how many times you almost died during Quidditch. Or how often the basilisk venom running through your veins saved you from being poisoned. This isn't the first time that your beloved wife has tried to dose you."

"When was the first?" He asked.

"Your honeymoon." Death replied. "It was going to be a tragic accident. She is really sold on the tainted gift idea."

They were interrupted as Ginny entered the room. She had a wand he had never seen before. A few small spells later had a charmed gift tag affixed to the bottle. She then removed all aspects of her magical signature from the bottle. Ginny went through the process with practiced ease.

"Why?" Harry asked.

"She's been dosing you with love potions for years." Death hopped up, she patted him on the shoulder. "Memory altering ones too. The kids are yours, but not hers. She didn't want to ruin her figure."

"Who's the mother?" Harry asked.

"Hermione." Death stated.

Harry's heart sank. "She stole that from us?"

"No." Death started to walk away. "She was in on it."

Harry turned to look at her. "What?"

"Her kids are yours too." Death said. "A little blood magic and their hair turned out red instead of black."

"Ron?" Harry asked.

"He's clueless." Death waved a hand at him to follow. "He'll probably be dead within a year. I think they're trying to pin this on Ron, and have it come out that he discovered the truth about you and his wife." She shrugged. "It's not the most elegant plan, but it fits Ron."

Harry followed her for a bit. He realized a moment later that the room wasn't big enough for the distance they had traveled. Pulling himself back to the present he found that they were in a different kind of study. It was a mashup of the Gryffindor common room and the break room at the Ministry during his training days. Death flopped down into a comfy chair.

"What happens now?" Harry asked.

"That is up to you, oh Master of Death." She giggled. "You can move on from this mortal coil, or I can send you back."

"Send me back, how?" Harry sat in a chair facing her. "Going back to a murderous wife and someone I thought was my friend isn't something I find appealing."

"I would hope not." She rolled her eyes. "I can send you back to any moment you have died before."

"You said I had almost died." Harry narrowed his eyes at her.

"Almost died." She wiggled her fingers. "Dead for a moment or two. Same difference."

Harry sighed. "Fine. What are my choices?"

"That's what I like about you, boss." She hopped up. "You roll with the punches. Think on your feet."

Harry lifted his glasses and pinched his nose.

"Look here." Death pulled a book from a nearby shelf. "These are your options."

Harry opened the book. Instead of a list like he had expected each was a snapshot in time. The first was him as an infant, the air around him was tinted the telltale green of the killing curse.

"No thanks." He flipped to the next page.

"I cut out the little moments." Death added. "It would be a waste to send you back to that time you almost choked on oatmeal."

"A waste?" Harry asked. "That sounds fine to me."

"I might make this look easy, but it takes a lot out of me." Death huffed. "The Deathly Hallows channel a small portion my power. Such a small moment would have devastating consequences."

"How?" Harry asked. "I'm choking on oatmeal one moment, and the next I'm fine."

"I'm sending your essences, your soul as it is now, back to a point in time. Not only that, but dying has removed all those blockages, potions, and compulsions. And, that chunk of Tommy Boy is going to burst once you head back. Shoving all of that into a mostly full you would, for lack of a better analogy, pop you like an overfilled balloon."

"I get what you're saying about potions, but compulsions and blockages?" Harry asked.

"One second." Death turned back to the nearby bookshelf. She flipped through some before pulling out a scroll that looked like it was about to flake away. "Here."

Passive Magical Core Syphon - Horcrux (Tom Riddle)

Core Output Limiter - Spell (Albus Dumbledore)

Loyalty Compulsion (Weasley) - Potion (Albus Dumbledore)

Loyalty Compulsion (Dumbledore) - Potion (Albus Dumbledore)

Cynicism Compulsion (Lordship) - Potion (Albus Dumbledore)

Love Potion Poisoning - Stage One - Potion (Molly Weasley)

Love Potion Poisoning - Stage Three - Potion (Ginny Weasley)

Family Magic Limiter - Spell (Albus Dumbledore)

Active Magical Core Syphon - Spell (Albus Dumbledore)

Residual Memory Damage - Spell (Albus Dumbledore)

Compounded Memory Damage - Spell (Hermione Granger)

Emotional Focus - Contempt - Aura (Albus Dumbledore)

Emotional Focus - Dismiss - Aura (Albus Dumbledore)

Emotional Focus - Impulsive - Spell (Albus Dumbledore)

"Holy fuck." Harry whispered.

"Yeah." Death nodded.

"Can you explain some of this?" Harry asked.

"Like what?"

"Most of it." Harry leaned back in his chair.

"The horcrux was blocking your magic." Death pointed at the item. "There was a constant part of your magical core that was fighting against it. As you can see, Dumbledore didn't help things. His spell not blocked more of your growth but actually stole some of it. It's impressive spell work honestly. A little slip up would have made it so you didn't have access to your magic."

Harry gave her a blank look.

"Here." She pointed at the other list. "All of the effects by Dumbledore were done with master level implementation. His potions left no residual damage, his limiters didn't raise any alarms, and his auras are so subtle that no one would even question it. You aren't the first person he's done this too. This type of proficiency only comes from a lot of practice. The only reason he left any memory damage was from due to Hermione poking around."

"What is an emotional focus aura?" Harry asked.

"It's like a cloud that surrounds you." Death explained. "Anyone who come in contact with it will have their contempt and dismissal enhanced. It won't make someone who was in love with you suddenly hate you. It locks onto those small doubts, those little annoyances, and feeds them."

Harry blanched. A flood of moments in his life rushed to the front of his memory. Every time teachers and neighbors just ignored the signs when he was at the Dursleys. How often the entire student body of Hogwarts turned on him for any reason. The blatant loathing Snape held for him, and how no one did anything about it. As much as he hated to admit it, he could understand the Ministry wanting to discredit him. They were scared but sending dementors after him and allowing Umbridge to torture students was so far beyond that.

"Fuck. Shit. Jesus." Harry muttered.

"Fuck, shit, Jesus is right kid." Death booped him on the nose. "Any other questions?"

"All of that will be gone when I go back?" Harry asked.

"Yep."

"And how do I stop it from happening again?" Harry looked up at her. "Dumbledore will notice something has changed. He will want to fix it as soon as he could."

"You're the Master of Death." She stood up, spreading her arms. "You are beyond mortal men."

Harry looked up at her.

"Fine." She grumbled. "Now that you have properly activated your privileges as 'the master of death' you will be protected from such meddling. Just say your Potter Family Ring has mental shields."

"The 'master of death' stuff will stop Legilimency?" Harry asked.

"Hard to read the mind of a dead man." Death grinned.

Harry put the scroll down. He began to flip through the options again. The next choice after his baby picture was the time he choked on the snitch. It was tempting, but he did not want to deal with Quirrell again. Oddly enough, the next choice was a moment after killing the professor. He showed it to Death.

"The specter of Tom hit you full force." Death explained. "For a moment, you were mine."

Harry nodded. He turned the next page and laughed. Young Harry was hanging from the door of a flying car. He had forgotten about that. Second year was tempting. He could stop the basilisk before it got too far. However, death did say the venom running through his veins had actually prevented him from getting poisoned.

He looked at the next point in time. It was one he remembered well. The younger Harry held the diary in his lap, Fawkes sat on his shoulder. A tear was suspended in the air between the phoenix and the open wound on his arm. He slipped his finger onto the page, bookmarking it for later.

The moments after that were moments that stuck out in his mind, but slightly altered. A dementor held him by the shoulders, Remus had him by neck, the dragon was faster than he expected, the gillyweed didn't kick in fast enough, then the killing curse hit him instead of Cedric.

Harry took a deep breath. He tore his gaze from the book, trying to bring himself back to the moment at hand. It didn't help much, he was dead, looking through the worst moments in his life.

He flipped back to the basilisk.

"This one." Harry showed death.

"Are you sure?" Death asked.

Harry nodded.

"Brace yourself." Death raised her hands with her palms open toward him. "It was nice to finally meet you. Just do me a favor."

"What's that?"

"Don't hurry back." Death smiled at him.

2.

Harry sat on the cold stone floor in the Chamber of Secrets. The freshly dead basilisk lay nearby, and Ginny was just beyond it. Fawkes sat on his shoulder. He could already feel the tears touching the wound on his arm. Last time, this was where the phoenix took him back to see Dumbledore. There was a couple of things he needed to do first.

He held up the sword and willed it away. This time he wasn't going to part with it. Once he was strong enough, he walked over to the Sorting Hat. Tucking it under his arm he turned his attention to Ginny. He was tempted to just leave her there. She had dosed him with love potions, tried to kill him multiple times, and actually succeeded once.

Harry sighed. That was future Ginny. Right now, she was just a scared child.

Something dripped across his eyes. Harry wiped it away to find his hand touched a thick slime. He looked at his hand to see it covered in a tar-like substance. It took him a moment to realize it was the horcrux. Another realization followed quickly after.

He could feel his magic. Sure, ever since he had held a wand he felt it, but the difference was drastic. It was even stronger than before he died. His magical power thirty years in the future was like a meandering river, now it felt like a tidal wave that hit with each heartbeat. Harry pushed his mental shields into place. Years of training helped him tap his magic back down. Masking his signature, or completely hiding it, was a helpful tool when hunting down rogue wizards.

"Fawkes." Harry turned to the bird. "Could you give us a lift out of here?"

The phoenix chirped in reply. It hopped over to Ginny, grasping her with one claw before awkwardly flapping back to Harry. He smiled at the bird; it bonked its beak against his forehead. In a flash of fire, they vanished.

Only to appear in Dumbledore's office. Lucius Malfoy stood nearby, for a moment a look of pure terror flashed across his face. Years of Pureblood training kicked in instantly, hiding the emotion behind a mask of annoyance. Dumbledore looked at Harry expectantly, trying to appear as though he had planned this all along. Harry noticed that Ginny wasn't with him. Somehow Fawkes had dropped the girl off elsewhere.

It was like... Magic.

"It was a basilisk." Harry stated. "I've taken care of it. The enchanted diary too."

Harry placed the diary on the desk in front of Dumbledore. The two wizards stared down at the boy. He was covered in dirt, grime, blood, and basilisk saliva.

"Well done, my boy." Dumbledore smiled at him.

Harry felt the pressure of magic pressing against his mind. It wasn't a full spell, just a gentle compulsion.

This is Malfoy's fault. All Slytherin were evil

He wanted to slap Dumbledore. Sure, the man thought that Harry was under his control, but that was just lazy.

Harry looked at Lucius. He did his best to glare at the older man. It was then that Harry noticed a familiar shape standing nearby. There, hiding just out of view, was Dobby. Harry felt a swell of intense emotion. The crazy elf was alive!

Of course, none of it had happened yet. Hedwig, Fred, Tonks, Remus, and Sirius. They were all alive. He tuned out the rest of the conversation. Harry didn't look away from Dobby. It was only when Lucius stormed out of the room that he started to pay attention.

Harry chased after the blond wizard.

"Mister Malfoy." Harry called out.

Lucius turned on his heel, glaring down at the boy. "Mister Potter."

"You don't know, do you?" Harry asked.

"Know what exactly?" Lucius looked bored.

"He never died." Harry said.

Lucius squinted, studying him. "Who?"

Harry sighed. "Tom Riddle. Voldermort. Your old boss."

"I have no idea what you are talking about." The older Malfoy started to turn away.

It was odd. Last time he was sure that Lucius had drawn his wand. It had to have been the influence of the aura. Annoyance, anger, and indignation enhanced to blind rage.

"He gave you the diary for safe keeping." Harry called. "You're in danger. Your entire family is."

Now Lucius spun to face him. Still, he had yet to draw his wand. "Are you threatening me, boy?"

"No." Harry's voice turned cold, letting just a taste of his true power loose. "You will address me as Mister Potter or Harry when we are speaking."

Lucius blanched at the sudden flood of magic pressing against him. "Forgive me, Mister Potter. I allowed my emotions to get the better of me."

"Thank you." Harry inclined his head. "We should continue this conversation somewhere private, and after I've had a shower."

Lucius nodded.

"Meet me at Kings Cross at the end of the year." Harry walked by Lucius. "Surely you must know somewhere we can speak that respects privacy."

"Of course." Lucius was beginning to regain his composure.

"Before I forget." Harry stopped just behind the man. "I find myself in need of a house elf." He looked at Dobby. "This one will do."

"Pardon?" Lucius cocked his head to the side as he stared at the boy.

"Your elf." Harry repeated letting another bit of power out. "As payment for my warning, and a show of good faith. Give him to me."

"Certainly." Lucius croaked out. "Dobby, I release you of your service to House Malfoy and bequeath you to Harry Potter, Heir of House Potter."

Dobby looked from Lucius to Harry. The elf let out a loud screech as he pulled Harry into a tight hug. A swirl of magic surrounded them. When it faded, Dobby stood straighter, his skin had a healthy sheen to it, and his ears had shrunk slightly, but looked more solid.

"Dobby is proud to serve Great Harry Potter." The elf hopped up and down.

"I will take my leave." Lucius stated.

"I look forward to our next meeting." Harry watched the older wizard walk away. He turned his attention to Dobby once they were alone. "Dobby, you work for me, you are not my slave. As my employee you are to be paid for your time as well as given days off and regular breaks." Harry looked down at the dirty pillowcase the elf wore. "You will need a proper uniform too."

Dobby sprang forward, wrapping Harry in another tight hug. "Great Harry Potter is truly a great wizard."

"Let's discuss your pay." Harry managed to choke out. "One galleon a day."

"Agreed." Dobby shook his head. "Seven galleons a year."

"What?" Harry snapped.

"Seven days in a week. Dobby knows this." Dobby nodded sternly.

"There are more than seven days in a year." Harry countered.

"Mister Harry Potter cannot trick Dobby." The elf crossed his arms. "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. That's seven. No more days than that in a year."

Harry rubbed a hand over his face. It didn't help the headache that was starting to form. Instead, it smeared the grit and grime across his skin.

"I need a shower." Harry grumbled.

"Dobby can take you to the shower." The elf said.

"No thank you, Dobby." He chuckled. "I do have an assignment for you. Go to my trunk and try on my clothes. Shrink them to fit you and set aside the style you feel most comfortable in. Then I can work on creating your uniform."

"Dobby cannot have clothes." The elf yelled.

"Dobby." Harry glared at the elf. "You are my employee. Employees have uniforms and a strict dress-code they must abide by. Failing to follow this will result in punishment. You are a representative of House Potter, and I will not have you walking around in rags."

Dobby's ears drooped. "Understood, Great Harry Potter, sir."

"You will need pants, socks, shoes, and a shirt." Harry stated. "I should have a style or two of each for you to try on. Set aside something comfortable that still allows you to accomplish your daily tasks."

Harry took stock of where he was in the castle. It was quite a walk back to the Gryffindor tower, but that was where his clothes were. The prefect bath was closer, plus a soak sounded wonderful.

"First." Harry stopped the elf. "Bring me a fresh set of clothes once I'm done with my bath."

"Of course, Harry Potter sir." Dobby popped out of sight.

"We still need to discuss days off and breaks." Harry muttered.

He trudged along until he came to the prefect bath. The password was the same, which made him wonder if it ever changed. If not, he knew where he was going to go from now on. Harry stripped off his clothes, dropping them on the floor as he went. He didn't like making more work for the house elves at Hogwarts, but right now he was too tired to care.

Harry started the water to fill this tub then headed to the showers. Soaking in a tub the size of a pool sounded amazing, but he didn't want to be surrounded by a cloud of filth. He finished washing up just in time for the tub to fill. There had to be some sort of enchantment for it to happen so fast. Not that he was complaining.

He let out a long sigh as he settled into the hot water. Harry basked in the feeling for a long moment. He could have been tempted to take a nap. With his luck that would lead to him drowning. Technically, he had died twice already today.

That thought sobered him right up. Ginny had poisoned him, Hermione had helped, and at some point, Molly Weasley started dosing him with love potions. The multitude of manipulations and betrayal from Dumbledore were honestly much more dangerous, but the others were personal. These were people he counted as friends, family really.

He needed to make some changes, but he had to be smart about it. Dropping Hermione as a friend and cutting off the Weasleys would cause too much of a fuss. This upcoming summer was when the Weasleys went to Egypt. He could use that as an excuse to distance himself from them. It could work with Hermione too, depending on how much she decided to write.

At what point had Hermione turned against him? Was it always like that? What caused it? Would it still play out that way with the auras removed? Lucius not drawing his wand was already a change.

He could figure out all of the emotional stuff later. Right now, he needed to focus on what he could do. He could capture Wormtail, that would change quite a few things. Sirius wouldn't see the picture and escape. But he still needed to get Sirius out safely. Knowing what he knew now, he wouldn't put it passed Dumbledore arranging an accident.

Oh no, Sirius was supposed to be released, but a rogue dementor kissed him instead.

Fudge probably wouldn't even cause much of a fuss. Sirius not getting a trial would look horrible once it came to light.

Sirius needed to escape, so Harry could get him somewhere safe. While that is happening, he could get someone to try to find the trial notes for Sirius. Then he could work toward getting his parents will read which would name Wormtail as the secret keeper. Once that came out, Harry could present the traitor, alive and well.

The problem being, how could he get Sirius to escape? Seeing the picture was what drove him to try. Which was odd, since he could have left at any time.

"Fuck." Harry growled.

Sirius was a very... passionate man, a nudge to follow his urges would have been all too easy for a master like Dumbledore. A bit of compulsion to chase after Wormtail, then another dose to keep Sirius feeling guilty enough to stay in prison. Only seeing Wormtail again would kick in the initial drive.

He would have to let things play out as they did the first time. Once Sirius had escaped, and Harry was back at school, then he could capture Wormtail.

"Great Harry Potter sir." Dobby said softly.

"Yes?" Harry turned to see the elf holding a stack of clothes.

"These are for you." Dobby set one pile on a nearby stool. "These are the ones that Dobby likes." The elf stepped closer, showing off the clothes he had picked out.

Harry smiled so wide it hurt his cheeks. Dobby had taken the uniform command literally. There the elf stood in Harry's quidditch jersey, pants, and shoes.

"Great choice." Harry laughed. "Pop over to Madam Malkin's. Order four uniforms in your size. One for daily use, one for warm weather, another for cold weather, and one for formal events."

"Anything else, Harry Potter sir?" Dobby perked up at the praise.

"Could you pack up my things and get them ready to go?" Harry asked.

3.

Harry stepped out of the Prefect Bath feeling refreshed. There wasn't much he could do right now. This summer was when things would really kick off. All he could do now were side projects. His first stop off was the Room of Requirement. The diadem sat in the center of a table waiting for him.

He summoned his sword and sliced it in half. The blade slipped through the diadem, as well as the table that it rested on, with ease. Three horcrux down already, four to go. The sword vanished as he stepped back out into the hallway. He could get to the locket once Sirius was back. The cup was in the Lestrage vault, but the goblins were a wildcard. That left the ring and the snake.

Last time, Dumbledore couldn't resist the pull of the ring. It led to his death, which Harry was fine with. Unfortunately, that would mean he would have to wait a few years for Dumbledore to finally do something. Harry wasn't sure he could take the old man in a fight, even with access to the entirety of his magical power.

Of course, that was his Gryffindor side talking. Running headfirst into danger was going to get him killed. Harry needed to be patient, to plan things out. He had to wait to capture Wormtail until next year. That little voice in the back of his head that pushed him into action was silent. Harry hated to admit it, but Dumbledore knew what he was doing. He had never once thought to question the impulse to jump to action. It was as much a part of him as the color of his eyes. People knew him for acting first and thinking later.

Harry knew there was a list of people who needed to die. Not just for revenge, but to better the world.

He stopped.

Shit.

For the greater good and all that? Was this how it all started? His choices were clearly the best. But then how did that differ from him killing the basilisk, or Quirrell, or Voldermort? He wasn't trying to

manipulate things to give himself power. He didn't have a personal agenda to push, or an ideology to force on the world.

Harry was cleaning up a mess that Dumbledore had made. After all, he was the chosen one. Now it was his turn to actually have some choice in his life.

Dumbledore needed to die because he played with people's lives. Voldermort needed to be put down because he was a rabid dog with less sense. Umbridge needed to die because she was pure evil. The Death Eaters wouldn't go without a fight. He had spent quite a few years after the war hunting them down. In fact, things would go a lot easier now with all that he knew and since they wouldn't be expecting an attack.

Once they were all dealt with, he would be done. His life would finally, truly be his own.

"Harry, mate!" Ron yelled.

He looked up to see the gangly redhead running toward him.

"You did it!" Ron yelled. "You saved her."

Harry nodded, allowing Ron to pull him along. He had been wandering around without paying much attention, out of habit he must have found his way closer to the infirmary. It was one of the places in Hogwarts that he could get to while half-dead, that he knew from experience.

He paused for a moment, seeing the petrified students. That was something he had forgotten about. Dumbledore had sent everyone home before the students had fully recovered. He felt a small tug of worry when he saw Hermione.

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath. There was no telling when her betrayal started. Not only had she been his best friend, but she had stood beside him when even Ron abandoned him. Then again, Ron seemed to do that a lot.

His train of thought was interrupted as a swarm of red hair surrounded him. He felt arms pulling him into a tight hug. From what he could hear, it was Molly, but the sweater and her chest muffled things.

"Misses Weasley." Harry managed to say. "I need to breath."

"Of course, Harry Dear. Thank you, thank you so much for saving my little girl." Molly pulled him in for another hug. "The thought of her alone with that monster. You brave boy."

Harry took a step away and was finally able to see the entirety of the Weasley family had gathered. Even Bill and Charlie had shown up. They wouldn't be introduced for a couple of more years, but he could vaguely recall them last time. To be perfectly honest, with all the Weasleys in one place it was easy for one or two to get lost in the shuffle.

"She needs a mind-healer." Harry said. "A cursed item was draining her. It was using her as fuel. There is no telling what that was like for her. Everyone saw she had been acting strangely through the year."

"There's something different about you." One of the twins said studying him.

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good." Harry shot them a devious smile.

The pair went rigid for a moment. Molly pushed them out of the way, giving the duo a hard look.

"Harry, my dear." Molly pulled him into another hug. "Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to me. To our family."

Harry let his mind wander as she continued to hug him. This was a life debt. They had to know. The Weasleys weren't influential Purebloods, but they were still Purebloods. He could call it in right now and demand payment. The only choice they would have would be to hand Ginny to him. She would become his property for all intents and purposes.

The thought of being saddled with Ginny for another lifetime wasn't appealing. He had no idea how long it would take her this time to find the right poison to do him in.

"Mister Weasley, Misses Weasley." Harry slipped out of yet another hug. "This is a family moment. Even though you have been incredibly kind to me, I will step away. The Farewell Feast is only a few hours away and I need to pack my trunks."

Molly studied him for a moment.

"Thank you, Harry." Arthur spoke up in the momentary silence. "Once we get settled in at home, we will send an owl. We don't want you to have to spend one moment more than you must with your Aunt and Uncle."

Harry gave a practiced smile and nodded. He had forgotten about his aunt and uncle. That was an issue that needed to be handled right away. He wasn't going to allow them to treat him like they had in the past.

Before Molly could recover, Harry dashed out of the infirmary. At first, he headed toward Gryffindor Tower. He slipped into an empty classroom once he was far enough away. Harry slumped into the nearest desk. Dealing with Molly Weasley was emotionally draining. Not to mention that holding in his newly unbound magical energy was starting to wear him out.

He took a deep breath and let it out. As he did so he let a bit of his magical power loose with it. Instantly he could feel his energy return. The soreness in his muscles and the tender patches where Molly had gripped him were gone. Dozens of little aches and pains that he had acquired through his childhood had vanished. His vision, however, was blurry.

Harry took off his glasses and began to wipe them on his robe. His vision sharpened once they were clear of his face. It didn't take a genius to figure out that his magic had healed him. Not only that, but it also healed him on a level much grander than it ever had before.

Suddenly not having his glasses would cause unwanted questions. He poked out the lenses before setting them back in place. After the war he had seen a specialist that made some enhanced glasses for him. They weren't on the same level as Moody's eye, but they were still impressive. Harry made a note to see the specialist again... for the first time.

Harry took a moment to set a shield over his magical output. It allowed him a little bit more room to work with. He took a couple of deep, calming breathes before stepping out into the hallway. There was a feast to attend.

4.

Thankfully, the feast was without drama. Slytherin won the house cup, which he didn't care about. It was funny to see the entire Gryffindor table react so loudly though. For a moment he thought that the evening was going to devolve into a massive food fight. If they twins had been there, it probably would have.

The next day Harry stepped onto the Hogwarts Express. He found an empty cabin before settling in. There would be time for making new friends in the coming year. Right now, he had to focus on what he could accomplish this summer. It wasn't until he saw Lucius Malfoy waiting at the station that he remembered setting up a meeting with the man. The regal woman standing next to him Harry recognized as Narcissa Malfoy nee Black. She had always been an attractive woman. Right now, she was a beacon of cold beauty.

Draco stopped before his parents. He looked to his father, who motioned for the boy to join his mother. Harry approached once the pair had split off.

"Shall we?" Harry asked.

"Of course, Mister Potter." The stiff posture and sneer had returned. "I know somewhere we can chat without prying eyes."

The man must have convinced himself that their previous meeting had been a fluke. Clearly, Harry Potter was not as powerful as he felt in that moment.

Lucius led him away from the station. They didn't cross the barrier. Harry had a brief thought about his uncle waiting for him on the muggle side of things. He dismissed the idea, turning his full attention to Lucius. The man didn't take Harry as a true threat.

It was a certainty that Lucius had some sort of trap planned. The pureblood wizard didn't even bother to look back at the boy. Harry took the initiative. He disillusioned himself and crafted an image of himself a few feet away. The false Harry followed his actions flawlessly. Its only downfall was that it couldn't interact with the world around it. It was an image and nothing more.

Lucius led him to an ornate set of double doors. A doorman stepped out, looked Lucius over, and opened the doors without a word. The real Harry followed off to the side while fake Harry stood directly behind the older wizard.

The interior of the building was a mixture of an old fashion gentlemen's club and a smoking lounge. Lucius led them to a private meeting room. Once the door closed, the blond wizard spun on Harry. His wand pointed right between the eyes. Of the false Harry, that is.

"Talk, boy." Lucius commanded.

Harry flicked his wand, casting a silent disarming charm. He caught the dislodged wand as he dropped the invisible charm. Lucius gawked at the sudden change of events.

"Tommy boy left you the diary for safe keeping." Harry stepped around Lucius to find a row of comfy looking leather chairs. He picked one facing the door and sat. "What you may have not known was that the diary was the first of seven horcruxes."

Lucius dropped into a chair across from Harry.

"You not only failed in a simple order, but you also allowed a soul anchor to be destroyed." Harry spoke slow and clear. "Tom isn't dead. He had six other horcrux set. He remains on this mortal coil until all of these are destroyed."

"Why are you telling me this?" Lucius asked breathlessly. "I could turn you over to the Dark Lord. Your capture would certainly solidify a place among his scholars."

"If he didn't decide to just kill you, that is." Harry countered. "He's coming back. I've already fought him again. He had possessed Quirrell, and I was able to kill him, momentarily."

"Again." Lucius said. "Why are you telling me this?"

"You need to protect your family, and yourself." Harry stated. "When he gets a body again, you know he's coming for you. If not to outright kill you, then to ruin you while you serve him. He'll drain your vaults dry and set you up for the fall. You need to keep your family safe." Harry paused. "This isn't completely altruistic. The more you step away from him, the more resources he will lose. We both know that if he comes back, it won't be good for anyone. How many pureblood lines did he end last time?"

Lucius sat back in his chair, rolling the thought around as Harry waited. Malfoy studied the boy in front of him for a long moment. Lucius nodded.

"If you need my help, don't hesitate to contact me." Harry stood. "Otherwise, stay out of my way and I'll stay out of yours."

He smiled and apparated silently to Privet Drive. Harry wasn't looking forward to coming back, but part of it was curiosity. In the past he had never had the chance to study the protections that were supposed to be in place. Once the war was over, he had no desire to ever come back.

Harry appeared across the street across from the house so he could get a good look at the wards. He let his magic loose, feeling his very being relax. A slight bit of focus brought the wards into view.

He ground around him began to shake the longer he studied. There were layers of mail blocking wards, as well as a network of obscuring spells. Anyone, muggle or magical, looking in would see a perfectly normal family. Not only that, but it also had a lingering effect. No one would consider the Dursleys to be anything but your average suburban family, for at least a few days afterwards. Underneath all of it was a modified compulsion spell that repeated the phrases 'different is bad' and 'magic is wrong'. It wasn't keyed to anyone, meaning that even he would feel the need to shy away from speaking about magic while there.

That was it. Nothing to actually protect or hide him. There wasn't even something as simple as a monitoring charm. No wonder no one knew when he had known he had left after blowing up Marge, or when the Dementors attacked, or when Fred and George literally busted him out. There was no reason whatsoever for him to come back here for all those years.

Years as an auror had trained him in many things. Ward breaking was one such thing that he had a knack for. It made him wonder how much better he would be if he had studied it in school. Focusing his magic into blade, he sliced through the wards, carefully deconstructing it. As tempting as it was to simply smash through it, the sudden release of magic was too easy to track.

The air around him crackled with energy as he strode across the street. He took a deep, calming breath to get his magic back under control. There was no way he could face his aunt and uncle. Accidentally blowing up the house was an actual option with how much power he now had. Harry braced himself, then opened the door to the house.

"Who is it?" His uncle yelled from the kitchen. "Boy, is that you?"

Vernon Dursley stomped out of the kitchen, heading straight for Harry. His approach slowed as he got closer to the boy.

"Where have you been?" He barked. "I wasted my afternoon going to that train station and you weren't there."

The older man stopped out of arms reach. Vernon didn't feel the usual urge to hurt the boy. Sure, it was annoying that he had wasted a trip into the city, but it wasn't that big of a deal. He had managed to swing by the office to pick up some paperwork, so it wasn't a total waste.

He scrunched up his brow as he studied the boy. Harry was underweight, dressed in rags, and simply waiting for something. Vernon didn't like the boy, but they did get a monthly payment of ten thousand pounds. That alone was worth having Harry around. The kid was quiet, well behaved, and worked his ass off around the house. He was a freak, like his parents, but he didn't rub it in their faces. In fact, he didn't do any of that freakish stuff around them.

"Sorry." Harry said. "It won't happen again."

"See that it doesn't." Vernon grumbled.

The old man walked back toward the kitchen. Something had changed, like a headache had finally stopped.

"Tomorrow, we're taking you to the store." Vernon called over his shoulder. "You look like a transient dressed like that."

Harry watched his uncle walk away. There was a warring storm of emotions brewing in his chest. A mixture of relief and confusion was swirling around a molten core of anger. His uncle wasn't suddenly a saint, but he wasn't abusive either. Vernon had raised his voice and that was it. No hitting, screaming, or threats. On top of that, his uncle wanted to get him new clothes tomorrow.

It was all because of Dumbledore. The nights he went hungry, all the broken bones, and all the beatings. Without the aura Dumbledore had placed, none of it would have happened. The hostility and anger weren't caused by the spell, it could only magnify the feelings already present. A small exposure had made a composed Pureblood draw a wand on him, ready to cast the killing curse while inside a school and near the Headmasters office. How could Vernon and Petunia stand up to years of constant exposure.

He was going to kill Dumbledore. Forget bettering the world, this was revenge pure and simple.

Harry took another long, slow breath. He was going to have to rethink his entire approach to his family. This one interaction had thrown him for a loop.

Aunt Petunia stepped out into the hallway from the living room. She came to a stop, mid-step as she saw Harry. A myriad of emotions flashed across her face in a matter of moments. She took a shaky step toward him, then another. Harry tensed as the woman practically ran at him. She wrapped him into a tight hug and sobbed.

Her sister had once been her best friend. She had idolized her, and as much as she hated to admit it, begged to be magical just like her. Lily was dead. Her sister was dead. Here was her nephew, the last little bit of her sister still in the world. What was she doing to him? How could she treat him like this?

"I'm sorry." She sobbed. "Oh, dear Harry. I am so sorry. You have her eyes. My God, why did I never tell you that before?"

Petunia grabbed him by the hand and pulled him upstairs. She stopped in front of 'his room', her progress came to a sudden stop as she looked at the door. Petunia took in the locks and the pet door. She turned to face Harry again, pulling him into another tight hug. She burst into the room, pausing for a moment as she saw Dobby waiting inside.

She took a moment to compose herself. "Hello."

Dobby tilted his head to the side as he looked at the woman.

"Do you work for Harry?" She asked.

Dobby nodded.

"Could you help me move Harry's things to his new room?" Petunia asked. "This simply won't do a moment longer."

Harry stared at his aunt. He had seen many things over the years, but this had caught him completely off guard. Dobby looked to Harry. He nodded. The elf disappeared, as did his things.

"This will be the new guest room." Petunia said. Her words came out faster than usual. "I'll have your uncle get rid of this junk. It would go faster if Dudley and you helped. There's no rush."

She led him downstairs to the guest room. "Marge won't be happy, but she never is. The bed down here is bigger, nicer too. We'll need to get you some new bedding. Curtains too." She scrunched up her nose as she opened the door. "It needs to be aired out too. Smells like old dog and cheap perfume."

Harry nodded; his brain couldn't form words just yet.

"We'll have to make a trip to the store tomorrow." Petunia crossed the room, opened the window, and pulled the curtains down. "Will this be big enough for your owl?"

"I think so." Harry managed to say.

"Do you want to sleep upstairs tonight?" Petunia asked. "We can keep the window open to let it air out. By tomorrow night we should have it ready for you."

"Thank you, ma'am." Harry said.

"No." Petunia snapped. Her hands slapped over her mouth. "I'm sorry, dear. No ma'am. No miss. Aunt Petunia, or auntie. I will not answer to anything else."

She squeaked as Harry's trunk and clothes appeared in the closet. Dobby settled next to Harry.

"Thank you." Petunia knelt down to speak to Dobby. "We haven't been properly introduced. My name is Petunia Dursley, I'm Harry's aunt."

"Dobby be Great Harry Potter's elf." Dobby said slowly.

"It is nice to meet you, Dobby." Petunia wiped the tears from her eyes. "I'm sorry, I must look a mess. I've never met an elf before. Do I curtsy?"

"No." Harry smiled. "You're doing great. Dobby works for me. Kind of like a butler."

Petunia smoothed her dress as she stood. She stepped forward and grasped the sides of Harry's face. Petunia kissed him on the forehead.

"You wonderful boy." She held him tight. "You have done so much for us. Suffered. My dear. I am so sorry. Please, I know I don't deserve it, but I will work toward earning your forgiveness."

Harry cleared his throat, trying to clear the sudden tightness that had settled in it. He rubbed his eyes, trying to figure out why his glasses were fogging up. His fingers came away wet.

Petunia finally let him go. "I'll get started on dinner. Or would you prefer if we ordered out? We could have a welcome home dinner."

Harry shrugged.

"This is going to be Harry's new room." Petunia turned to look at Dobby. "It needs to be prepared, as you can see. Is there any chance you'd be able to help?"

Dobby looked to Harry. Harry nodded.

"Dobby will take care of it." The elf nodded.

The front door opened then slammed shut.

"Dudley is home." Petunia said.

Harry stepped out into the hall. Dudley looked at him.

"Hey, Harry." Dudley said before heading up the stairs. "When did you get home?"

"A few minutes ago." Harry answered.

"I'm going to order take-away." Petunia said. "What did you want?"

Dudley stopped at the top of the stairs. "Pizza sounds good. You, Harry?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah, pizza sounds good."

5.

Harry found himself sitting at the dinner table with his aunt, uncle, and cousin. He honestly couldn't remember if this had ever happened in his previous life. His head was spinning, he desperately wanted his wand within reach, and the fact that no one was talking made it all the more awkward.

"How..." Vernon started. "How was your year?"

"Me?" Dudley asked.

"Yes." Vernon nodded quickly. "And Harry too."

"Pretty boring." Dudley shrugged his shoulders. "The weather was shite through football season and there wasn't enough interest to get ruby going."

"Language, Dudley." Petunia gasped.

"Sorry, mum." Dudley blushed.

"What about you, Harry?" Vernon finally managed to look at him.

"Thank you for asking." Harry said carefully. "I know how much talking about magic makes you uncomfortable."

Vernon shook his head. "No, no. I asked about your year."

The man paused, seemingly shocked by his own words. Petunia and Dudley looked at Vernon as well.

"Harry." Petunia turned to look at him. "Something changed, hasn't it?"

Harry nodded. "I don't know how much you were told about the 'protection' that was placed around the house."

"Not much." Petunia whispered.

"I learned something new recently and was able to take a closer look." Harry explained. "There wasn't any sort of protection in place."

Vernon blanched; Petunia gasped.

"Instead, there were spells in place to compel anyone in the area to think being different was wrong, and that magic was evil." Harry explained. "There was something similar cast on me as well. Spells to make people focus on negative feelings around me and to doubt everything I said." Harry cleared his throat, trying to clear the lump that was forming. "Today, I was able to remove those spells."

Vernon sat back in his chair. Petunia wept openly. Dudley stared at his cousin.

"I can already see how you're changing." Harry continued. "You obviously can too."

"Harry Hunting. My friends and I..." Dudley said.

"It wasn't you." Harry whispered. "At least not all of it. The spells can't create something from nothing, but with how long you were exposed, even the littlest things would become so much more." He paused. "It wasn't just you. The spell cast on me affected everyone around me, the wards around the house served to amplify it."

"I broke your arm." Vernon choked out. "How many times? Four? No, more than that. I'm a monster."

"I smashed your hand with a pan." Petunia sobbed. "Your head, I left razor marks all over your scalp."

"This was magic?" Vernon looked up at Harry.

Harry nodded. A familiar feeling of dread began to form in the pit of his stomach.

"Who did this?" Vernon growled.

"Albus Dumbledore." Harry replied.

Petunia gasped. She sprang from her chair and wrapped Harry into a hug. He had no idea she was so affectionate.

"That was the man who sent you here." Vernon said. "I remember the note."

"He was the one who put the spells on me too." Harry continued.

"Why?" Petunia held him tightly. "Why would he do this?"

"The wizard that killed my parents." Harry's voice came out muffled. "We're connected. I'm the one who has to kill him. I think Dumbledore was setting me up to die while doing it. That way he'd get me and Riddle out of the way without having to put himself in danger."

Vernon stood. Harry tensed as the man walked over to him.

"This was a lot to take in. We can speak more in the morning." Vernon cleared his throat.

Harry watched as his uncle hurried out of the dining room. His aunt was still holding him in a hug.

"Mate." Dudley whispered. "Um... I... I am so sorry. I'll talk to my mates. You're my cousin."

"Thank you, Dudley." Harry smiled at him.

"Maybe we can talk more tomorrow?" Dudley asked. "This magic stuff sounds wicked."

Harry nodded. "Do you think you can get your mum to let me go?"

Dudley laughed. He stood and grabbed his mother gently by the shoulders.

"Come on, mum." Dudley said. "Harry needs to breath."

"Right." Petunia let Harry go. She placed a kiss on his forehead. "Right."

"I think we all need to get some sleep." Harry offered.

Petunia nodded.

"I'll put away the leftovers." Harry said.

"I can help." Dudley looked around the kitchen. "Where are the containers?"

"Cupboard beside the fridge, bottom shelf." Harry answered.

This sparked another sniffle from Petunia. Harry stood up. For the first time in his life, Harry hugged his aunt. She practically collapsed onto him.

"It's okay now." Harry whispered. "It wasn't you."

He let her go. Petunia hurried out of the room. He could hear her heading upstairs.

"Um." Dudley walked over to the table holding a couple of plastic containers. "I'm not really tired. Do you want to play some games? I got a Nintendo in my room."

"Sure." Harry nodded. "That sounds fun. You'll have to show me how to play though."

The containers disappeared from his hands, a moment later the fridge opened, and the pizza-filled boxes were set in place.

"Wicked." Dudley said. "Can you do that to my room? It's a mess."

"I didn't do that." Harry said. "Dobby!"

The elf appeared. Dudley let out a little yelp of shock and hopped away from the new arrival.

"Sorry." Harry chuckled. "Dobby this is my cousin, Dudley. Dudley, this is Dobby, he works for me."

"H-Hello." Dudley stuttered.

"Does Harry Potter need Dobby?" The elf asked.

"Thank you for putting away the leftover."

"Dobby is happy to serve." Dobby smiled broadly.

"It's a little scary for my family when you do it without them seeing." Harry continued. "When possible, please stay visible. To Dudley and Petunia, for now. We'll see how Vernon takes it and go from there."

"Of course, Great Harry Potter, sir." Dobby turned to the table and began tidying up.

"Did you still want to play some videogames?" He turned his attention to Dudley.

"Sure." Dudley whispered.

"Dobby, would you like to come with us?" Harry asked.

"Dobby doesn't know what these games are, but Dobby is very excited to learn." The elf hopped happily in place.

"We have to wait until tomorrow for my new bedding." Harry explained. "I'm going to be sleeping in my old room tonight." He paused. "I wonder if we could make a trip to Diagon Alley tomorrow too."

6.

Dobby turned out to be a very fast learner. The elf thoroughly trounced both boys in Street Fighter 2 and had grown quite attached to Zangeif. Harry, Dudley, and Dobby stayed up late into the night taking turns playing through Super Mario World. Technically, Harry was in his forties, but this was the most fun he had ever had with his cousin. Harry fell asleep on the floor to the sounds of Dobby muttering about ice stages.

He woke up the next morning to find he had been tucked into his bed. The smell of freshly cooked bacon drifted through the house. Harry changed into some fresh clothes before making his way to the kitchen.

Aunt Petunia was at the stove. A plate piled high with pancakes rested on the counter beside her. Next to it was one with bacon and another with sausage.

Dudley and Vernon weren't down yet. The most surprising thing was the stack of mail waiting for him in the living room. They were neatly sorted into stacks. Maybe he had been a little impulsive taking down all of the wards.

"Good morning, Harry." She gave him a broad smile. "Take a seat, it's just about done."

"I can still help." Harry took his place at the table. "I enjoy cooking."

"That would be wonderful, dear." Petunia put a plate of pancakes before him. She kissed him on the top of the head before getting back to the stove. "Eat up. We have a long day of shopping ahead of us."

Harry sighed. He knew he needed new clothes, and he looked forward to sleeping in his new bed, but an entire day of shopping sounded tiresome. Out of habit he reached for his coffee cup, only to find it wasn't there. He had taken to drinking it his first year as an auror. Tea was great for a slow release of caffeine, but coffee had that punch he needed to wake up.

"Aunt Petunia?" He turned to look over his shoulder at her.

"Yes, dear?" She asked.

"Is there coffee?" He asked.

"Coffee?" Petunia blinked. "They let you drink coffee at school?"

"Kind of." Harry chuckled. "Dobby!"

"Yes, Harry Potter?" Dobby popped into being next to him.

Petunia jumped at the sound. Dobby turned to look at his aunt. The little elf's face went hard.

"Dobby is to be doing the cooking." The elf turned back to Harry and wagged a finger at him. "Dobby is a good elf, Dobby be doing the cooking, cleaning, and gardening."

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry said. "I'm more than happy to let you take care of the cleaning, but I enjoy cooking and gardening. Plus, we're in a muggle neighborhood, we can't have people seeing."

"I'm sorry, Dobby." Petunia spoke up. "I didn't realize you wanted to cook. If you would like, you could handle dinner tonight."

"We're going to have a lot of bags from shopping to bring in and sort later." Harry added. "I saw how good of a job you did with the mail."

This seemed to mollify the elf. Dobby nodded. "Dobby sorted them by name, removed the charms and curses, and gave Mistress Hedwig plenty of water and treats."

"You are an excellent house elf, Dobby. That wasn't why I called you." Harry continued. "Do you think you could make me a pot of coffee?"

"We don't have a coffee maker." Petunia cut in.

Dobby shot her a look. "Dobby will."

The elf disappeared. Vernon came in a moment later. He gave Harry a nod as he sat down. The man had the morning paper tucked under his arm. It was something so small, but it hit Harry deeply. He had countless memories of being yelled at over the morning paper. To go get it, blame for it being wet, missing, or late. His uncle had got it on his own since all the spells and compulsions were removed.

"Once we're done with breakfast, we'll head to the shopping center to get you sorted." Vernon said. "Dudley should be down shortly. Don't mind if he tags along, do you?"

Harry shook his head. "Not at all."

Petunia froze. She opened her mouth to speak but was silenced when a new kettle appeared on the stove. A jar of ground coffee beans rocked into place on the counter next to it. Harry smiled as a freshly poured cup slid into place before him.

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry said.

"That was the... elf?" Vernon asked.

"Yes." Harry nodded. "That isn't what it was about, but I should have mentioned him. Dobby, would you come here for a moment?"

"Harry Potter calls?" Dobby appeared next to him. "Does Harry Potter not like the coffee?"

"It's great, Dobby, thank you." Harry patted the elf on the shoulder. "Dobby, this is my Uncle Vernon. Uncle Vernon, this is Dobby. He works for me. He's basically a magic butler." He turned to face Dobby. "In the past my family and I have not had the best relationship. We are working to fix that. There were spells and compulsions in place for them to treat me poorly. I'm going to look into setting up protection so it won't happen again, could I have you keep an eye out for any sort of changes?"

"Of course." Dobby nodded his head. "Dobby will protect Harry Potters new family."

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry smiled at him.

Dobby glared at the food on the table, then disappeared.

"That will take some adjustment." Vernon shook his head. "What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"I'm going to setup some wards as protection to prevent others from influencing us again." Harry cut in. "We can't let Dumbledore know we're free of his meddling."

"Isn't he the headmaster of your school?" Dudley asked.

"Yes." Harry nodded. "Unfortunately, moving to a different school would bring too much attention. He would have us all charmed more than ever before to follow his every command. We have to play this safe for now."

"I don't like the idea of having to deal with that bastard at all." Vernon growled.

"Vernon, language." Petunia gasped.

"I don't either." Harry admitted. "Right now, he's too powerful. He holds a high office in the British Magical Government, as well as the international one too. There are quite a few people who don't even think to question him. He has people loyal to him installed in the government, law enforcement, and those among the general populous."

"How does one man hold so much power?" Vernon asked.

"People think he killed the magical equivalent of Hitler." Harry said.

"Did he?" Dudley asked.

"Kill? No. But he did capture him." Harry said. "What people don't know is that they were partners, romantically as well, and that Dumbledore only took action because their side was losing."

"They're side?" Petunia asked.

"He has made sure no one alive knows of his involvement." Harry continued. "Dumbledore has carefully crafted the story of his greatness. Don't get me wrong, he is a powerful wizard. The way he constructed the wards around this house, and the spells he used on me, were masterful. It would take years for me to be able to defeat him in an all-out fight."

"Harry." Petunia grabbed his hand. "You shouldn't have to defeat some powerful wizard."

"We'll be safe here once I get new wards in place." Harry patted her hand.

"Are you sure about setting up new wards?" Petunia asked. "You said you had just started learning about the protection magic."

"My professor says that I'm a natural." Harry lied. "I have books that I can reference as well. If nothing else, I can hire someone to get everything in order."

"Okay." Vernon took a deep breath. "Send the letter once you've got the protection settled. How much will this cost?"

"I'll cover it." Harry said.

"Unacceptable." Vernon cut back. "This is a family expense. Besides, we can use the monthly allowance to pay for it."

"Pardon?" Harry narrowed his eyes at his uncle.

"Ever since you were dropped on our door." Vernon said. "Ten thousand pounds a month."

He had been dressed in rags, given scraps, and forced to sleep in a bed that wasn't fit for an animal, and they were getting thousands of pounds a month. His magic flared, causing the dishes on the table to float. Harry had to take a series of deep breathes to calm himself. He concentrated on lowering the plates slowly.

Petunia and Vernon shared a long look. The woman moved faster than Harry had thought possible. Petunia picked him up from the chair and pulled him into a bearhug. He could feel hot tears dropping onto the top of his head.

Harry froze. He had been hugged more times in the last twenty-four hours than he had in the first twelve years of his life. Harry was still adjusting to the sudden hugs from Petunia, but this was too much for his brain to process. She was a lot stronger than he had expected.

"Let's all of us have breakfast, then we can head in to do some shopping." Harry said.

Harry wasn't sure if he had ever regretted his words as much. A quick trip for some new clothes and bedding turned into an all-day event. Petunia insisted on getting him multiple outfits for every season. She seemed to get more affectionate as the day went on. Harry had to clean her lipstick off his cheeks more than once. Dudley then made sure he had the right sort of 'real' clothes. Even Vernon helped him get a couple of business formal type outfits.

It got even worse when they moved on to the bedding. Harry was happy with updating to some simple colors, he stuck to gold and red. Petunia was all too happy to oblige. She picked out sheets, blankets, comforters, pillowcases, and new pillows. Dudley dragged him into a couple of different sports shops for some posters, then a comic store for some more. When he realized Harry had only read the occasional discarded issue, it turned into an hour-long dive into various comics. Vernon, as it turned out, was an avid reader. He pulled Harry into a bookstore, and they came out with a stack that would make Hermione drool.

They made it home around dinner time to find a large meal waiting for them. Dobby had pulled out all the stops for his first night cooking for them. The elf packed away the new clothes and made the bed while they ate. Harry was too tired to think by the time he fell into his new bed.

7.

Harry woke up early the next morning. He felt a warm weight pressed against his side. Looking down he discovered Petunia cuddled up against him. At some point in the night, she had joined him in bed. She had even managed to slip under the covers with him. He stared at her for a long moment, trying to process what he was seeing. After a moment, he slipped out of bed, leaving her there to sleep.

There was a fresh set of clothes hanging on the back of the door and a steaming cup of coffee waiting on the kitchen table. A nice breakfast was already complete with slight shimmer in the air above the dishes let him know they were under stasis charms. It wouldn't be going cold any time soon. From experience he knew that after a couple of hours it lost a bit of flavor, but it should be fine for now.

He finished his cup of coffee and gave the growing stack of mail a passing glance before heading outside. Setting new wards were too important to put off any longer. He started by walking the property, marking it in his mind. Once that was completed, he began to work on the spells and charms he wanted to place. Harry started with a simple set of protection wards. They would track any unmarked magical signatures that entered or exited the area. Then he set about layering obscuring and confounding charms targeted to Death Eaters he knew of, Dumbledore, and his most loyal minions. It wasn't on the level of a Fidelius charm, but it didn't need to keep everyone away. With that layer finished he started working on a more complex set. These were targeted for defense against compulsions. It wouldn't hold up against the Imperius curse, but anything short of that would get pushed off.

Once that was all finished, he headed back inside for breakfast. Dudley looked up at him as he sat at the table. The boy looked half asleep.

"I've got new wards in place." Harry said as a fresh cup of coffee appeared before him. "Thank you, Dobby."

Dudley grunted something that almost sounded like 'morning'.

"Why are you so tired?" Harry asked.

"Dobby wanted to play more videogames." Dudley yawned. "I had him turn down the sound, but he's just so loud."

Dobby gave a small blush as he stood next to the table.

"Dobby is sorry, Dudders." The elf said. "Videogames are the most fun Dobby has ever had."

"We'll get you your own TV and system where you don't have to keep Dudley awake." Harry patted the elf on the shoulder.

Dobby hopped around the room making loud, happy noises.

"Dobby." Harry said firmly. "You're being too loud."

Dobby stopped, his shoulders slumped, and his ears drooped. "Sorry, Master Harry Potter, sir. Dobby will be quiet now."

"Oh, stop it." Harry shook his head. "You don't have to be silent, just turn it down a little. It's early."

Dobby perked up. He continued his hopping dance around the room, this time mouthing the yells instead of letting them out. Harry chuckled as he finished off his food.

"Now." Harry wiped his mouth off as he stood. "I need to look through some mail."

Harry braced himself as he sat down in the living room. He floated the first stack of letters over and began to sort through. Very quickly he came up with three piles: fan mail, official business, and other. The first two categories were easy to spot, but the third was tricky. Once the war was over and he had moved into his own home these types of letters started to appear. They look like official documents, but they were actually business proposals. In his previous life he hadn't paid much attention to them. He had been happy with his little piece of things and was more than rich enough to worry about things. This time, though, it didn't hurt to look.

First, he opened the fan mail. That pile got separated into another subset of stacks: fan mail, love letters, and book fan mail. Someone out there had taken the opportunity to write a series of books about his life. He had read them once the war was over. They were great stories but in no way did they have anything to do with his actual life.

"Dobby." Harry called.

The elf walked into the room. His large eyes scanned the letters with a hungry look.

"I have a job for you." Harry didn't wait for the elf to speak. "I've sorted my mail into different categories." He took a moment to point them out. "Could you please set the rest of them in the same way? Let me know when you're done. I need to write some responses for these. Make a list of names so

I can send them out." He turned to look to Hedwig. "I'm sorry, girl, but this is going to be too big of a job just for you."

Hedwig ruffled her feathers and pointedly looked away from him.

"Don't be like that." Harry said. "I'm going to make enough copies to send out to each of these letters. You'd drop from exhaustion before you got through the first stack. I care too much about you to let something like that happen."

Hedwig turned her head slightly to look at him.

"You are my girl, Hedwig." Harry cooed. "You know that. If I could, I'd have you carry every letter I ever write. Actually, that's not true."

Hedwig hooted.

"I would want you with me." Harry smiled at her. "When you weren't hunting, you could ride around on my shoulder. You'd live a life of luxury like a queen deserves."

Hedwig settled down, preening ever so slightly.

"Do you want to come with me while I write the letters?" He asked.

Hedwig hopped off her perch and glided to rest on his shoulder. She took extra care not to squeeze too tight as her claws were deadly.

"I love you, Hedwig." Harry leaned his head against her.

She nipped at her hair.

"Come on." Harry laughed. "I've got letters to write."

He returned to his new room. Petunia was gone and the bed was made. He wasn't sure if she did it or if Dobby got to it first. This new Petunia certainly was an adjustment. He paused in front of his desk to give Hedwig a chance to decide where she wanted to go.

Hedwig hopped off his shoulder and settled nearby. Harry arranged three pieces of parchment. He set to work getting a standard reply written for each category. Hedwig would listen to him read the drafts out. She would give a little hoot if she liked them or nip at his hand if it wasn't good enough. Once they were complete, he tucked them into a pocket and returned to the living room.

"Dobby, do you have the list ready?" He asked.

"Right here, Harry Potter." The house elf held up a long sheet of parchment.

Harry sighed. He poked his head into the kitchen to find Petunia drinking a cup of tea.

"Aunt Petunia?" Harry said.

"Harry dear." She turned a bright smile to him, she waved him over.

He stepped in, knowing what was coming. She pulled him into a hug. Harry wasn't sure if he imagined it, but he could have sworn her hands drifted a little lower than they should have.

"I need to make a trip to Diagon Alley." Harry took a step back, but she didn't let go. "I don't know how long it will take. I'm going to be sending a lot of mail and setting up a few filters to slow things down."

"Thank you for letting me know." Petunia kissed him on the cheek before finally letting him go.

Harry took a step back. He gave her a little wave before disappearing with small pop. A moment later he appeared in the designated area in Diagon Alley. Harry tucked his glasses in his pocket and took a quick look around. There were a decent amount of people roaming around, but it wasn't as crowded as the school rush. Luckily, he blended in with the crowd easily enough. He was dressed in fresh muggle clothes, wasn't wearing his glasses, and didn't have any of his usual group with him. Spotting his black hair among the horde of Weasley gingers was almost as iconic as his scar.

It was a short and uninterrupted walk to Gringotts.

"Excuse me, master goblin." Harry inclined his head. "I have need of mail services. I also need to speak with my account manager."

"Name?" The goblin at the desk asked.

If there was one thing that Harry had learned through his life was that the goblins were not to be annoyed. They had proven themselves a powerful force multiple times through history. Plus, there were three types of people never to piss off: those who controlled the money, those who made the food, and nurses. Some people would say doctors, but they were wrong.

"Harry Potter. Lord of House Potter and heir of House Black

The goblin didn't even blink. He held out a silver dagger. "Drop of blood."

"Don't let it touch you." Harry held up his hand.

The dagger blurred, stabbing into the outstretched palm, and back in a moment. Harry watched as the wound on his hand closed instantly. A line of blood slid up the length of the knife. The goblin studied the blade.

"They will be with you shortly." The goblin turned to face the next customer.

It was dangerous to claim all titles, but he needed access to his family vault. The influence wouldn't hurt either. Usually, a wizard couldn't claim their lordship until they were at least fifteen years of age, but there were exceptions when they were the last member of their bloodline. It was yet another thing he had learned after the war and one of the many, many things Dumbledore had kept from him. He could trust the goblins to keep it quiet. They didn't care about wizard politics.

"Mister Potter." A familiar voice said.

Harry turned to see Ragnok. He had to school his face and remind himself that this was the first time that they had met.

"Master Goblin." Harry inclined his head. "Are you my account manager?"

"Yes." The goblin studied Harry for a long moment. "We have needed to speak for quite a while now. You have not replied to any of my messages."

"That's one of the reasons I'm here." Harry smiled. "There was a mail blocking ward on my home. It's been removed, but I have a lot of responses to send. Fans that have gone years without a word, business that need to be handled, and others as well."

"Understood." The goblin turned, motioning for him to follow.

Ragnok paused, once they were alone in the office. "There is a cloud of death around you."

"I was recently bitten by a basilisk." Harry shrugged.

"I do not enjoy jests." The goblin narrowed his eyes at Harry.

"Saved by phoenix tears." Harry rolled up his sleeve to expose the jagged scar on his forearm. "I've been told my blood is just as deadly now."

"Do you know where the corpse is?" Ragnok leaned forward to examine the scar.

"It's in the Chamber of Secrets under Hogwarts." Harry fixed his sleeve. "I would be glad to show you where, if you could recommend a team to harvest it."

"I will have a team assembled." Ragnok wrote a note on a piece of parchment that folded itself up and zipped out of the room. "Now, what can I help you with?"

"A few things." Harry said. "I need to claim my lordship, close out all keys to my vaults other than my own, and claim my heirship of House Black. Once that is done, I need to have my parents will read."

"I will have the Lord Potter and Heir Black rings brought at once." Ragnok wrote another note. "I can handle your vault key presently. Your parents will have been sealed and will require some time."

"Understood." Harry nodded. It wasn't a shock, another one of Dumbledore's little things. "There is another issue I would like to discuss."

"Go on." Ragnok waved a hand.

"Defeating Tom Riddle, or Voldermort as he likes to be called, created a number of horcrux." Harry explained. "One is currently in the Lestrage Vault. By right of conquest, it's mine."

The goblin studied him for a moment. "If it is located in the Lestrage Vault, then we will bring it here shortly." Ragnok paused. "You understand it needs to be destroyed. We do not meddle in wizard affairs, but that is not magic we will allow to remain."

"I've destroyed three already." Harry summoned his sword. "One was located in my forehead, the other was a diary, and another had been placed in the Ravenclaw Diadem. Riddle has placed a horcrux in an artifact from Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin. The Hufflepuff cup, is the one in the Lestrage vault. I will be disposing of them shortly."

"May I inspect your sword?" The goblin asked.

Harry nodded. He placed the blade on the desk in front of the goblin. Ragnok leaned forward. The thin fingers of the goblin traced patterns in the air above the weapon.

"Do you know what sword this is?" Ragnok asked finally looking up.

"The Sword of Gryffindor." Harry replied. "I pulled it from the Sorting Hat to kill the basilisk."

"Interesting." Ragnok muttered. "It has another name: Caliburn." The goblin paused. Upon seeing that Harry did not know what it meant he continued. "It's also known as Excalibur."

Harry stared blankly at Ragnok. "You surprise me, Master Ragnok. I didn't know goblins made jokes during business transactions."

"It's no joke." The goblin replied.

"I thought Excalibur was a myth." Harry sat back in his chair.

The goblin stared at him blankly.

"Merlin and Morgan le Fay are credited as being one of the first magical users in Europe." Ragnok said. "Why would Excalibur be a myth?"

"Does that mean I'm a distant relative to King Arthur?" Harry asked.

"There are many reasons why you would be able to wield Excalibur." Ragnok leaned back in his chair. "We would need an inheritance test to be sure."

"For a fee." Harry added.

"For a fee." Ragnok nodded.

Harry thought for a moment. He was saved from having to make the choice by the arrival of a group of goblins. One held two boxes that he knew from his first time around held the rings for Potter and Black. The group that followed carried a thick glass box with the Hufflepuff Cup inside.

"The rings." Ragnok tapped the desk.

The other goblin set them on the desk. Harry opened the boxes. He slipped the Potter Lordship ring on as well as the Black Heir ring. Once that was completed, he plucked the sword from the desk and stalked over to the glass box.

"Is this box important?" Harry looked over his shoulder at Ragnok.

"Enchanted glass to help contain the tainted magic anchored in the artifact." The goblin replied.

"Take the fee from my vaults." Harry sliced through the box and the cup in one stroke.

I could get used to that. It's a shame that swords aren't practical these days.

A puff of black smoke jumped from the cup. It screamed as it disappeared.

"Three more to go." Harry dismissed the sword. "Now, about that Inheritance Test."

8.

"Unlike a normal Inheritance Test." Ragnok waved a hand at a golden bowl sitting on the desk between them. "This will take seven drops of blood and seven days. Once completed the results will reach much farther than the standard test."

Ragnok produced a thin silver dagger. He offered it to Harry. He took it and held his hand over the bowl. The blade pierced his finger painlessly. Exactly seven drops of blood fell into the bowl. The tip of the dagger glowed, sealing up the puncture with nary a tingle. His blood swirled around, spread along the inside, and covering much more surface than seven drops should have. Ragnok placed another gold bowl atop the first, creating a perfect orb.

"I look forward to hearing from you in a week." Harry offered the blade back to the goblin. "Thank you for your time, Master Ragnok."

"And yours as well, Lord Potter." Ragnok stood.

Harry walked back out into the lobby. He took a look at the time to see that it hadn't hardly been an hour. That left him with plenty of time to explore. It was nice to see the Alley again before the worst of the war. Businesses that he didn't ever remember were open and thriving. If there was one place, he definitely needed to visit it was the bookstore. So many texts were outlawed or simply gotten rid of once things picked up. Tom's people weren't the only ones limiting the available knowledge. The ministry was quite proactive in removing any sort 'improper' material.

He stopped in the doorway when the sounds of a struggle came from inside. Muffled curses, an odd sort of growl, and the occasional tearing of paper made him smile. Third year, Hagrid was now the Care of Magical Creatures teacher and that meant the Monstrous Book of Monsters.

Harry strode into the shop. The clerk looked up as he entered, giving the stack of books in front of him just the opening they needed to attack. Harry moved quickly, stroking the spines on the books closest to the clerk. They settled down with a contented purr. He moved on to the rest as the clerk watched in stunned awe.

"How?" The clerk managed to whisper.

"Stroke the spines." Harry tapped the side of the crate. "The instructions are on the box."

The clerk leaned over to see a piece of parchment glued to the crate. It was a bit hard to make out since it was upside down. The clerk blushed as they noticed a large arrow pointing to the floor with text reading 'This Side Up'.

"Oh." The clerk cleared their throat. "Thank you for the assistance."

"No problem." Harry smiled. "I can't imagine what that would have been like once students got their copies."

The clerk blanched. "What can I do for you?"

"Hogwarts Third Year books." Harry picked up one of the, now content, books and began to pet it. "I was going to take a look around as well. Do you have any charmed bags? I'm planning on getting a lot."

"No." The clerk slowly shimmied away from the crate. "There is a luggage store just a few shops over. They have bags, satchels, and trunks with all sorts of charms."

"I'll go grab one while you get my order together." Harry continued to stroke the furry book. "Do you mind if I take this one with me? I'll be right back."

"Go ahead." The clerk sighed once they were a safe distance from the crate. "That one is yours, on the house."

"Thank you." Harry smiled. He plucked a galleon from his pocket and flipped it to the clerk. "Seems you dropped this."

The clerk caught the coin. They looked from it to Harry and then back at the gold piece.

"I'll get right on that order." The clerk pocketed the coin.

Harry petted the book as he walked to the baggage store. It wasn't all that different now than it was in the future. Once it was rebuilt anyway. Harry grabbed a new trunk with decent storage with a linked satchel. Anything he put in the bag would be organized into the trunk. It only worked with things that could fit through the opening, but it was still incredibly convenient. With that done he returned to the book store.

The clerk smiled at him as he entered. They gave a small wave to the stack of books on the counter.

"That was fast." Harry gave an appreciative nod.

"You saved me from death by a thousand papercuts." The clerk chuckled. "You're my new favorite." They held out their hand. "Morris Morrison, at your service."

"Harry Potter." He shook it.

The clerk froze. His eyes traveled to Harry's forehead then slowly grew.

"Mister Potter, sir." Morris straightened up their hair. "Please, forgive me. I didn't mean any sort of disrespect."

"Morris." Harry sighed. "Stop."

The clerk froze. Harry reached over and plucked a stray piece of paper that had tangled in his hair.

"Call me Harry." He fed the little slip of paper to his book. "Potter, if you must, but don't freak out. I'm here, alone, and trying to keep a low profile."

Morris nodded. "Got it."

"How much was it?" Harry motioned to the books.

"On the house for you Mister Potter, sir." Morris practically shoved the books at him.

"Morris." Harry tried not to glare at the clerk. "I'm not a 'sir', I'm not even thirteen yet. Take a deep breath."

Morris did. His face slowly began to turn red.

"And let it out." Harry shook his head.

The clerk did.

"Feel better?"

Morris nodded. "Sorry about that. I've read all of your books. Last year I was too busy running around for that fraud Lockheart that I totally missed you coming in."

"Oh." Harry sighed. "The books. They are complete and total fiction." He paused. "I don't actually know who wrote them. Fun read, but not true at all."

"You were trained since birth by the ghost of Merlin?" Morris looked at him hopefully.

"Sorry, no." Harry shook his head. "That would be wicked though."

Morris seemed to shrink just a bit. "You aren't betrothed to a Veela princess, are you?"

Harry shook his head.

"That makes sense." Morris sighed. "You're not even a teenager. Veela allure wouldn't do anything for you yet."

Harry patted him on the shoulder. "Sorry, mate. I'm just Harry."

Morris took a deep breath. He straightened up his posture and put his salesman face back in place.

"You said you were looking for some other books." Morris stepped out from behind the counter. "What can I help you find?"

"Spells, information on lordships, and history." Harry counted them off. "Etiquette would be a good idea as well. Do you have anything on Hogwarts that isn't written for Hogwarts students?"

"Follow me." Morris was in his element now. "I hope that bag has plenty of space."

9.

The bag was enchanted, Harry knew that, but he swore it felt heavier. Morris had turned out to be an excellent resource. He guided Harry to everything that he had asked for and more. Books on Pureblood Etiquette, the History of Magical Britain, spell books of all sorts, three different studies on Hogwarts, some on wards that Harry had never seen before, and even a travel guide written by Stephen King. His stories were actually tales of caution, but Muggles loved it as fiction. There were dozens of books that had disappeared in the future. Harry got them all.

Luckily, the trunk was enchanted too. He was able to carry it without any issues. He continued on with his school shopping. Last time he had done it while he stayed at the Leaky Cauldron. He didn't plan on running away this time around. The trip went by quickly once he finished in the bookstore.

Harry sighed as he pulled the trunk toward the Leaky Cauldron. Diagon Alley had protection up to prevent unauthorized travel. It wasn't as intense as it was in the future, but it was enough to be annoying.

He strolled through the tavern without making eye-contact with anyone. Only someone looking for him would recognize him without his glasses and his scar no longer inflamed. Harry stepped out into Muggle London and paused. A dark shape loomed just on the side of his vision.

Harry turned to see a large black dog watching him. It sat in an alleyway, staring at him. A mixture of feelings swelled within his chest. As much as he wanted to rush over and hug Sirius, he couldn't. He

didn't have a solid plan on what he was going to do this year. Explaining everything to Sirius, especially freshly escaped from prison, would not help matters at all.

Plus, the old dog would appreciate a good prank.

Harry bent over slightly and patted his legs. "Come here girl."

Sirius cocked his head to the side. He looked around to see if there were any other animals in the area.

"Come on, girl." Harry cooed as he slowly approached. "It's okay. Do you have an owner?"

Sirius let out a little woof and slowly took a step closer. He was certain this was Harry, but there was something not quite right. Sirius wrote it off as the fact that he hadn't seen his godson since Harry was in diapers. He stayed in character, cautiously sniffing the outstretched hand before leaning in for a pet.

"Good girl." Harry moved in closer, using both hands to pet him. "No collar? You're all skin and bones. What's a fancy lady like you doing all alone?"

Sirius let out a small growl.

"Sore subject?" Harry paused. "Would you like to come home with me? You'd get a bath, some good food, and a nice warm place to sleep."

Sirius forgot himself for a moment and hopped up, licking Harry across the face. Harry laughed.

"Okay, okay. That's enough." Harry stepped away. "This is going to be loud. I need you to stay calm."

Sirius settled back on his haunches. Harry pulled out his wand. A moment later the Night Bus appeared with a loud crack. The attendant and driver were a couple of wizards that Harry had never seen before. They looked like he should still be in Hogwarts.

"Night Bus, Day Service." The wizard said in a sing-song voice. "We charge extra for pets and familiars."

"That's fine." Harry handed the wizard the fare. Sirius followed closely as they found a spot.

The day service swapped out the beds for dining tables.

"You missed breakfast service." The attendant said. "It's still an hour before lunch. I could get you some tea if you'd like."

"No thanks." Harry shook his head.

The attendant shrugged before taking a spot behind the driver. Harry spotted a newspaper nearby with the picture of the Weasleys on the front. He picked it up. The Weasleys in the photo seemed to recognize him. They waved excitedly. Ron especially.

Sirius growled as he noticed Scabbers. The attendant looked up at the sound.

"It's okay, girl." Harry petted his head softly. "It's just a moving picture. They're not really here."

"Is she going to be a problem?" The attendant asked.

"She'll be fine. The picture moving upset her." Harry played at covering Sirius' ears. "I don't think she's all that smart."

Sirius huffed and looked away. Harry had to stifle a laugh.

"Here we are." The driver called out.

Harry looked up. Sure enough, they were outside the house.

"I didn't even feel it moving." Harry blinked as he stood.

"You shouldn't." The attendant shook his head. "The driver on the night shift is a few years past retirement if you ask me."

"Practically drives itself." The driver spoke up. "No clue what that barmy old man does to it."

"Thanks for the ride." Harry placed two galleons on the table as he left.

Harry led Sirius around to the back of the house. They were hidden by a decent fence and the neighbors' hedges. As much as the people in the area loved gossip, they were desperate to avoid it. He pulled out one of his new spell books. It was focused on daily magic. Harry didn't plan on setting up a magically automated dishwasher, but it was always a good idea to have some unexpected spells handy. Most people only thought the 'powerful' spells could hurt people. In truth, with the right application, anything could be deadly. The Killing Curse was scary because it couldn't be blocked by magical means. Dodging it, or physically blocking it would work, but most wizards didn't think like that. Years as an Auror had showed him there were a lot of small things that magical folk overlooked.

Once he found the right page Harry drew his wand. He created a low, wide bathtub from the ground. Harry looked to Sirius.

"You need a bath before I take you inside." Harry motioned to the tub. "It will be quick."

Sirius sighed and climbed into the tub. He thumped down into a sitting position. Harry smiled. He held out his wand and summoned some water. The warm, clean liquid flowed over Sirius. Harry swore he saw the old dogs' eyes roll back in his head.

Harry created a brush from the nearby grass.

"I can't create soap yet." Harry began to run the brush through the tangled hair. "I could summon some, but that means it comes from somewhere. Can't risk anyone seeing it."

Sirius was lost to the wonders of a nice warm bath.

"You need a name."

Sirius snapped to attention.

"You certainly are a pretty girl." Harry cooed.

Sirius chuffed. Harry stopped his brushing.

"Oh, you're a boy." Harry tried to sound natural. "I'm sorry. It was hard to tell under all this matted hair."

Sirius glared at him. Harry stifled a laugh, focusing on brushing the tangled knots. He lifted up a foot.

"You certainly have big feet." Harry worked some water between the pads. "Your feet are like all pads." He stopped. "That gives me a great idea for a name."

Sirius perked up.

"You've got big, padded feet." Harry continued. Sirius held his breath. "I'll call you Slippers."

Sirius' mouth dropped open. Harry coughed.

"Dog breath." Harry shook his head. "Nah, Slippers isn't right." He went back to cleaning Sirius. "Name. Name. Name. You kind of look like a Grim, but that's a bit on the nose. Midnight would work, but again, on the nose. Could go with something ironic like Tiny, or Snowflake."

"Oh, Harry you're back." Petunia opened the backdoor. She stopped mid-stride as she saw the dog in the tub. "What is that?"

"It's a dog." Harry replied. "He followed me home. I want to keep him. With Dobby around it shouldn't be any trouble to take care of him. I can take him with me to school too. It would be nice to have some extra protection."

"You're settled on this?" She slowly approached.

Harry nodded. "I'm trying to come up with a name for him."

"Oh?" Petunia came to stand beside him. "He's a regal looking fellow." Sirius gave her a doggy-smile. "How about Prince?"

Sirius gave a small bark in appreciation.

"I don't want to give him a big head." Harry replied.

Sirius looked at his godson and sighed.

"He makes me feel safe." Harry let the joke drop for a moment. "How about Rook? Like the chess piece."

Harry looked to his godfather. Sirius nodded.

"Rook it is." Harry smiled. "Welcome to the family. Let's get you dried off and some food in your belly. I can feel your ribs."

10.

Rook/Sirius took to muggle life relatively well. Harry had his fun teasing him, so he made sure to give him actual food. No kibble or canned stuff, that would have been too much. At night Rook/Sirius would sleep nearby or at the bottom of his bed.

At those times Harry took to telling him his life story. The previous version. He was going to leave out the death and time travel. In fact, he wasn't sure who he was going to tell or if there was anyone he trusted. Previously, he would have said Hermione, but she was in on the plot to kill him.

He told his godfather about his life growing up. Harry had to take care to leave out some parts. He couldn't risk Sirius doing something rash to his relatives. Things with them were steadily getting better. Sirius was very interested about his years at Hogwarts.

Harry made sure to spend a lot of time telling him about Hogwarts. It was hard, talking about his 'friends' hit a sour note. He had avoided them once he was out of the chamber. There were just too many questions that he didn't have the answers to when dealing with them. How was Ron affected? When did Hermione start her plotting? Had they been spelled?

Instead, he focused on his classes. He mentioned the house rivalries, quidditch, and the classes he liked. Harry couldn't help but smile when Rook/Sirius perked up at the mention of the twins' pranks.

The next week fell into an easy groove. He started running in the mornings, using Rook/Sirius as an excuse. In reality, he needed to get healthier. Now that he was eating regularly, and his magical power weren't being blocked, he needed to be more in tune with his body. It helped guide the newly unlocked power coursing through him.

Morris had guided him to a treasure trove of books. Harry learned spells, solidified his ward work, began to learn rune crafting, and was able to study the history of the magical world. The last time around he hadn't given much thought to the history of the magical world. By the end of the war most of the books on it had been removed or heavily edited.

The previous night Harry had fallen asleep reading *Spells for a Traveling Wizard*. It was a book he would have killed to have in his previous life. He snapped awake at the sound of a bird squawking.

Harry froze, halfway to sitting, as he took in the sight before him. Hedwig was guarding the window from an owl that desperately was trying to enter the room. Every move forward was blocked either by a swift peck or a smack of the wing.

"Hedwig." Harry moved over to her. "They're just doing their job."

She turned to look at him.

"I know." Harry sighed. "It's your job, but they didn't know that."

Harry snatched a treat from the tray nearby and held it out to the owl. Hedwig gawked at him as he took the letter from the owl.

"They have had a hard morning." Harry held her gaze. "This is an urgent letter from the goblins."

Hedwig looked away, suddenly finding the backyard more interesting.

"Rook." Harry strode over to his dresser to pick out clothes for the day. "Want to go for a trip?"

The large dog hopped up. He let out a happy bark.

"We're going to Gringotts." Harry explained. "It's a bank run by goblins. Be on your best behavior. I'd rather not start a war with them because you decided to pee on the furniture."

Rook/Sirius grunted. Harry hurried to the kitchen. Dobby was hard at work at the stove. There were four plates of eggs, bacon, sausage, and some freshly made hashbrowns waiting at each spot. Another spot on the floor for Rook was set as well. Each one shimmered ever so slightly to show they were under a stasis charm.

"Dobby." Harry crossed his arms and glared at the elf. "Today is your day off."

"Yes, Harry sir." Dobby did his best not to look at the wizard. "Today I get to do what I want. Dobby wants to cook." He pointed to the stack of pancakes, waffles, and omelets on the counter nearby. "Dobby is cooking like Harry sir does, no magic. Harry sir was right, this is fun."

Harry tried, and failed, to suppress a smile. "What are you planning on doing with the leftovers?"

Dobby stopped. He looked at the stack of food. His face scrunched up.

"Dobby... will..." the elf drew the words out as he looked around the room. His bright eyes saw the letter Harry was holding. "Deliver the food to..." He squinted. "Gringotts. Yes, Dobby will deliver the food to the goblins at Gringotts."

"You're cooking breakfast for the goblins?" Harry crossed his arms.

Dobby nodded, making sure not to look anywhere near the boy. "Harry sir was not to bother Dobby on his day off."

"That is true." Harry smiled. "As it turns out, I have some business with the goblins today." He eyed the plate of food. "It looks delicious, but I don't think they'd be happy if I was late."

Dobby snapped. A freshly baked biscuit zipped over to the plate. An egg, a slice of cheese, and a few pieces of bacon slipped inside. It was nearly wrapped up in a napkin. Harry plucked the breakfast-to-go from the table and tucked the sandwich in his pocket. He had taken the time to charm all of his muggle clothes with expanding storage and small protections.

"Well, Rook." He looked to the dog. "Ready to find out where I come from?"

The dog cocked his head to the side.

"I'll explain on the way." Harry headed out to the street. "We're taking the Night Bus. I'm not doing any sort of magical travel on an empty stomach."

Rook woofed in support.

The bus pulled up a moment later. Harry smiled at the attendant. It was the same duo as the last time.

"Welcome to the Night Bus, day service." The attendant recited. "Where are you headed?"

"Gringotts."

The driver and the attendant snapped awake once they heard his voice. It paid to be nice to people in the service industry.

"Right this way." The attendant guided him into the bus. "Anything you need? Tea, coffee, bowl of water for you companion?"

"We're fine this morning."

Harry slid into the plush seat as Rook hopped up on the other. The attendant spared a look at the dog.

"She's certain looking healthier."

"He." Harry corrected. "Under all that hair and grit, he was a boy."

"Rather handsome one too." The driver chimed in.

Rook/Sirius looked over at Harry with a satisfied doggy-grin.

"Don't say that." Harry laughed. "You'll give him a big head."

Rook/Sirius scoffed.

"Didn't get to introduce ourselves last time." The attendant said. "I'm Stephen Laurie and this here is Hugh Fry."

"Nice to meet you." Harry nodded to each. "This handsome devil is Rook. I'm Harry Potter."

The bus swerved.

"You're serious?" Stephen asked.

"No." Harry shook his head. "That's my godfather. I'm Harry."

Rook/Sirius jolted at the joke.

"You're really Harry Potter?" Hugh asked.

"Yes." Harry nodded. "Don't get weird about it please. Keep quiet and you're looking at a tip every ride."

11.

"Have you been staying up on the news?" Stephen asked.

They were currently stopped at a red light. The trip to London was taking longer than usual. It was the middle of the day on a work week, so it wasn't unexpected. Hugh didn't drive like a half-blind maniac, so the trip took longer than ten minutes. By car, a muggle one, it was about two hours to London. The Day Shift of the Night Bus did it in thirty minutes, usually.

Harry shook his head. "I live with Muggles. Trying to explain everything that happens in the magical world is a headache."

Stephen nodded. "You haven't seen this then?"

The young man held out a copy of the Daily Prophet. A mugshot of Sirius Black stared back out from the front page.

"They say he's the first person to ever escape Azkaban." Stephen said. "Are you worried about him?"

"No." Harry shook his head.

"He was you-know-who's top man." Stephen continued. "They say he's the one who told him where you lived."

"Bullshit." Harry snorted. "Sirius Black is my godfather by magically binding contract. He'd be dead before he could touch his wand if he wanted to hurt me."

Stephen's mouth dropped. Rook slipped over to sit beside Harry.

"But..." Stephen held up the paper. "They say he killed a dozen muggles and his best friend."

"They also say I live in a castle and have three veela wives." Harry shook his head. "Listen. I've seen the contract. It's ironclad. He couldn't kill me or conspire against my parents without paying with his life."

"He was their secret keeper." Stephen pointed to the part of the article.

"The magic that sealed the contract would have killed him before he could get the words out." Harry shrugged. "I don't know if he killed those muggles, or his friend, but I know he didn't betray my family."

Harry fell silent for a moment. He petted Rook as the scenery passed. A couple of people had gotten on, which had caused a slight detour and pulled Stephen away. Hugh checked his watch, then put some speed on. The bus pulled to a stop outside of Gringotts.

"Sorry about him." Hugh spoke softly.

Harry nodded. He took a step down, then turned around. Two galleons appeared in his hand.

"Nope." Hugh looked away. "Not this time."

"This isn't a tip. It's payment for services." Harry placed the coins on the dash. "Anyone who talks about Sirius Black, you tell them what I told you. Tell them Harry Potter himself gave you this information."

"You're serious?" Hugh looked from the coins to the young man.

"No." Harry chuckled. "Like I said, that's my godfather. I'm Harry."

Hugh shook his head. "I'm going to have to watch my words around you, aren't I?"

Harry winked at him.

"Keep paying me like this and I'll have my own car service." Hugh muttered as Harry stepped off the bus.

"Did you hear that?" Harry looked down at Rook as they walked. "His own car service. That would be kind of cool. Think I could hire him?" He sighed. "Actually, it would probably be too dangerous for him if I hired him as my private driver."

Rook woofed.

"I like cars." Harry replied. "They are by far the best form of transportation. Sure, it's slower, but I don't mind. Just imagine me strapping you to my broom for a trip into town."

Rook groaned.

"Exactly."

"Lord Potter." Ragnok stepped up as he entered. He spared a small look to Rook.

"Goblin Ragnok." Harry gave a small bow.

"Follow me." The goblin turned and walked away without a look back.

Ragnok led him to the same room as before. There was a low couch that looked to be the perfect size for a certain dog. Rook gave a woof in thanks and settled in.

"You are welcome." Ragnok took his seat. "Your companion is an interesting one."

"I will take that as a compliment." Harry smiled. "We are here to discuss the results of the inheritance?"

"Indeed."

Ragnok waved a hand, summoning the golden orb. He tapped the orb twice. It levitated in the air between them before unrolling and spreading out wide. A family tree stretched out incredibly wide.

"These are all your relations." Ragnok explained. "Even by the slightest bit, going back to the beginning of your family line."

Harry's name glowed, a line reached up along the pathway, guiding his gaze to the very top. Two names pulsed.

"Chwyfleian Llyn and Myrddin Wyllt." Harry looked to Ragnok. "Apologies, Master Ragnok, those names mean nothing to me."

Ragnok smiled. "Roughly translated, Wandering Woman of the Lake and the man legend has come to call Merlin." With a wave of a hand the tree spread out from there. "It's quite a distant relation. Eventually the line crossed with Pendragon which went on to intersect with Gryffindor then eventually Peverell, as you know became Potter."

"I hit all the big ones." Harry chuckled. "Does this mean I really am the next coming of Merlin?"

Ragnok cackled. "No. Merlin had quite a few children with plenty of women along his lifetime. He is nowhere near as prolific as Genghis Khan, but he is the progenitor of at least two dozen family lines."

"It does look like I am related to Arthur." Harry muttered.

"Again." Ragnok clarified. "Not as rare as you expect. Legends rarely include the children of scullery maids and camp women."

Ragnok tapped the edge of the golden sheet. It curled up into an orb again. The goblin handed it to Harry.

"The sword may have recognized your bloodline." Ragnok returned to his seat. "More importantly, it recognized the quality of person you are."

Harry blinked. He looked from the golden orb to Ragnok.

"Thank you, Ragnok." Harry cleared his throat. "That means more than you know."

Ragnok inclined his head. "Is there any other business we have to discuss today?"

Harry thought for a moment. "Is there a way to get a copy of the contract my parents made with Sirius Black?"

"Their will is sealed." Ragnok shook his head.

"Not their will." Harry slipped the orb into his pocket. "The contract making him my godfather."

Ragnok smiled. "That, I can do."

Harry stepped into the house and waited. A moment later Petunia rushed from somewhere to gather him into a hug. He had come to learn to just let her get these out. She seemed to be trying to make up for all the years she had missed. Luckily, the wandering hands and sneaking into his bed had stopped. He wasn't sure where that had come from. It was something he didn't want to have to deal with. He had more important things to do.

This upcoming year was when Wormtail ran back to his master. Somehow, the rat knew how to find Riddle, even though he had been a rat for more than ten years. Harry knew before the World Cup in a couple of years that Riddle would be in his fathers' mansion. Either Riddle was hiding out at the mansion currently or Wormtail knew his hiding spot. Sure, he couldn't be there right now.

Harry extricated himself from Petunia's hug. "I have another meeting in a couple of days that I have to do on the magical side of things."

"Thank you for telling me." Petunia stepped away to straighten up her dress. "How did Rook do out among people?"

Harry looked to find Rook curled up on Vernon's favorite chair. The two had entered into a battle over the comfy recliner. Harry smiled. Vernon tried to act angry, but Harry had caught his uncle tucking Rook in when the dog fell asleep in the chair. Now that he thought of it, the only time in his past life that Vernon seemed to perk up was when Ripper was around. The fact that his sister came with the dog was something he endured.

The thought caused mental whiplash. Aunt Marge was supposed to visit this summer. Blowing up at her, pun intended, had led to him spending time in Diagon Alley. Now, though, he had no idea. He shook the thought from his mind. There were bigger issues to focus on.

"I'm going to be doing some reading in my room." Harry called as he headed down the hall.

He settled onto his bed with a new spell book. With the blocks that Dumbledore put up gone, and the chunk of Riddle out of his head, he found that learning magic was so much easier. There were some things that he was re-learning, but even those just seemed to click. Unfortunately, he could feel that he wasn't as powerful as his older self. He was probably more powerful than most of the students at Hogwarts, even the seventh years, but he couldn't touch Voldemort or Dumbledore yet.

Harry put the thought from his mind and turned his focus to this upcoming year. Riddle was still a specter. At some point between now and next summer he gained a quasi-body and took up residence in the Riddle Mansion. Crouch Jr would also escape shortly after the World Cup.

It felt like everything wasn't going to actually happen until next year. With Sirius safely settled in as Rook there wouldn't nearly be as much excitement. Except for the Dementors.

Harry groaned. He had forgotten about them. The Patronus spell was great at chasing them away and warding them off. Last time he was able to drive off a sizable number, with his power increase he could probably push out even more.

Hermione, the one from his old life, had theorized that Dementors, while creatures, were closely related to the undead than ghosts. Somewhere between a poltergeist and a revenant with a bit of bogart. Unlike popular media, the undead were a rather limited bunch. Ghosts that came in a variety of strength

and lasting intent. Vampires weren't actually dead, it was a transformation similar to a werewolf, but without the transition back. Dementors though, they were tricky. There were many unproven rumors on how to kill them, but nothing concrete.

The only thing that Harry could think of was creating his own spell. He wanted something that would hurt them, something that would make them fear him. Killing them was the ultimate goal. In his previous life they had gone rogue more than a few times, even after Voldermort had been defeated.

Expecto Patronum. Harry rolled the spell around in his head.

Roughly translated 'I expect a guardian' from Latin. Most modern-day spells used a variation of Latin in the incantation. They weren't always direct translations as they had changed over the years. In truth, the Latin wasn't important. It was the intent and the focus put into the words that guided the magic into a spell. Using Latin just made it feel more magical. Speaking the words backwards, rhyming, or a chant worked just as well.

Harry didn't want a guardian; he wanted a warrior. Better yet, he wanted to be the warrior. Diffindo was the Severing Charm, which could work if he could figure out how to target ghostly targets. Sectumsempra was a possibility as well. Then there was Reducto, which could turn things to ash or mist. That sounded most promising. Focusing it on a Dementor, though, that was the trick of it. He couldn't practice the spells now; his wand still had the Underage Magic trace on it. That and there weren't any Dementors around to try it out on.

"Yet another thing I have to wait to see." Harry grumbled.

He put his book away in the trunk and stretched out on his bed. There had to be something he could do about Wormtail this year that wouldn't alter the timeline too much. On top of that, there were still a few Horcrux that he needed to deal with. Now that he thought about it, this was all just the tip of the iceberg. Sure, Riddle was a priority, but the blame for the war didn't rest solely on his shoulders. Killing him early wouldn't slow things down and remove a very dangerous threat. His followers wouldn't just disappear without him to guide them. A good portion of his old life was dealing with Death Eaters that were all too happy to continue on without Riddle around.

Harry sighed. With the knowledge from his old life, he could work down a list of targets. The element of surprise would be on his side. It would be highly likely that their security wouldn't be as powerful.

"Harry Potter, sir." Dobby said in a loud voice.

Harry sat up. "Yes?"

"Dobby has been calling you." The elf tapped his foot. "Dinner is ready."

"I was lost in thought." Harry slid off the bed.

"Lost in a nap." Dobby giggled.

"That too." Harry yawned. "I have a lot on my mind."

Harry sat in a private room waiting. Rook lounged nearby, seemingly uninterested in whatever was happening. A gentle knock at the door preceded it opening. The familiar, if slightly younger, face of Rita Skeeter stole a look into the room. Her eyes locked onto Harry before she scanned the room to see they were alone, and a wide smile crossed her face.

"Mister Potter." She beamed hurrying into the room. "I was shocked to receive your letter. Honestly, I half expected this all to be a cruel joke."

Harry sat up in his chair. One thing he had not thought about taking over his younger body were the awakening hormones. Mentally, he was an adult, but physically, his body was in the stride of puberty. He couldn't help but admire the way her iridescent green dress hugged her curves.

Rita sat down across from him. She quickly putted out a quill and parchment that began to scribble.

"Rita Skeeter. Interview with Harry Potter." She stated. "May I ask you about Sirius Black and your thoughts? How do you feel about a group of Dementors being assigned to Hogwarts?"

Harry held up his hand. The quill froze in place.

"Miss Skeeter."

"Rita." She cut in.

"Rita." He nodded. "I'm fine with a dicto-quill, or handwritten notes, but I'm not going to continue this interview with one of those."

Rita gave him an impish grin. "You're a clever one."

She plucked the quill and replaced it with a standard dicto-quill. "Rita Skeeter. Interview with Harry Potter. Please state your name for the record."

"Lord Harry Potter. Heir to the House of Black." Harry stated.

Rita gasped. "Do go on."

"That is the issue I wanted to discuss with you today." Harry continued. "Sirius Black is my godfather by way of magical contract. The document is simple to acquire. I have no idea why it wouldn't have been brought up as evidence. Any half-competent representation would have done so at his trial."

"Indeed." Her eyes flashed. "I don't mean to insult you, but even with the power behind your name, there are those who would question the validity."

Harry produced a parchment. "This is a copy of the contract. I picked it up from Gringotts this morning. It states in simple terms that Sirius Black is to look after me as though I was his own son if something were to happen to my parents. Not only that, but his magic would also be stripped if he harmed me, or conspired with others to do harm to me."

He slid the parchment over to her. "That would make it really hard to sell my parents out to Riddle. Don't you think?"

"Riddle?" Rita asked.

"Voldemort." He clarified. "His name is Tom Riddle. He's a half-blood, you can look that up in the student records at Hogwarts."

Rita flinched at the name. "Are you certain?"

"He told me himself." Harry shrugged.

"You spoke with he-who-shall-not-be-named." Rita gasped.

"A shade of his." Harry clarified. "This previous year a diary with a powerful enchantment gave power to a sliver of his spirit. It latched onto a victim and leached the life from them. Once he gathered enough power, he used it to release a basilisk to attack muggle-born students. Just like he did about fifty years ago."

"You're saying that the ghost of Tom Riddle, who is the true name of..." She took a breath. "Voldemort. Summoned a basilisk and attacked the school."

"Just this past year." Harry nodded. "People don't know?"

Rita shook her head.

"How?" Harry stared at her. "Students were petrified. One almost died. I almost died fighting the basilisk."

"You fought a basilisk?" Rita practically yelled.

"Don't worry." Harry patted her hand. "I killed it."

"Harry. May I call you Harry?" She continued without letting him reply. "You're, what, twelve now? You want me, and the rest of Magical Britain, to believe that you not only fought and killed a basilisk, but you spoke with a specter of V... *Him* and lived to tell the tale?"

Harry rolled up his sleeve to show the new scar. "This is where the basilisk fang bit into my arm." He ran his finger along the top edge. "This is where the phoenix tears landed to fight off the venom. I'm in talks with Gringotts to harvest the basilisk. I can get a copy of paperwork for that if you'd like." He paused. "I could probably take you down there with a photographer too."

Rita stared at him. She looked at the quill furiously writing his words.

"If a portion of what you are saying is true-"

"It is." Harry sighed.

Rita took a deep breath. "I did not expect this at all. A fluff piece about The Boy Who Lived and how he was dealing with the escape of the man who killed his parents. That's the piece I was ready to write. I come in here and not even ten minutes you've given me proof that Sirius Black might be innocent, you dropped the history of the most feared Dark Wizard of our time, and then you just happen to finish up telling me about how you killed a basilisk that was terrorizing Hogwarts. This is going to make my career. No more gossip column. Real journalism." Her eyes took on a predatory edge. "If you were a couple of years older... Mmm, the things I would do to you." She paused. "Strike that from the record."

"Don't tempt me." Harry took a deep breath.

"Your thirteenth birthday is this year?" Rita leaned back in her chair.

Harry nodded.

"If I remember correctly, and I do, the last living Lord of an Ancient and Noble house can claim their full place once they turn thirteen." She looked over him like a piece of meat. "It's one of those old rules set in place to protect bloodlines in danger of dying out." Rita leaned forward, staring into his eyes. "Look me up handsome."

She stood.

"Leaving already?" Harry asked.

"You've given me a lot to research." Rita shot him a sultry grin.

"I trust you won't turn this into a fluff piece?" Harry met her gaze. He let a touch of his true power pulse as he spoke.

Rita shuddered. "No fluff needed, sugar. You're sweetened the pot plenty."

With one final hungry look, she fled the room. Harry chuckled. He looked over at Rook who was staring up at him. Harry tried to keep calm. He had grown so accustomed to Sirius/Rook be around that he hadn't even thought before revealing how powerful he truly was. Even then, he didn't let it all out.

"I'm almost a teenager." Harry shrugged. "I can show off for older women."

Sirius/Rook woofed.

"Oh please." Harry shook his head. "Like you've never done anything stupid to impress a bird." He paused. "Do dogs try to impress ladies?" He shook his head. "I do not need to start thinking about the courting habits of canines."

Sirius/Rook let out a short series of barking laughter.

"Laugh it up, fuzzball." Harry sighed. "There's a magical pet store a few stores over that would love to give you a fancy new look. I hear they have a special where they can dye pet hair to whatever color you want. You'd look very pretty with pink fur and a poodle cut."

The dog stopped. He glared up at Harry as he let out a sound that wasn't quite a growl, or a whine but somewhere in the middle.

"You know I'm bluffing." Harry laughed. "I'd have to be seen with you."

Sirius/Rook scoffed.

"Are you looking forward to coming to Hogwarts with me?" Harry asked.

The dog instantly perked up.

"Don't go into the forest." Harry warned. "It's infested with giant spiders."

Sirius/Rook chuffed.

"It's true." Harry said. "I saw them with my own eyes. They tried to eat me and my friend Ron. We were saved at the last minute by an enchanted car." Harry stopped. "Damn that sounds weird to say."

The duo fell into an easy silence.

"I rented this room for another hour." Harry finally broke the silence. "I didn't expect her to rush out like that. They're supposed to be bringing by some food soon too." He looked at his companion. "Mind if I tell you my strange life so far?"

Sirius/Rook hopped to his feet. The dog deftly sat in the chair that Rita had recently vacated. He put his paws on the table and leaned forward looking intently at Harry.

Harry cleared his throat. There was an odd lump forming in it that was making it hard to speak.

"So." He let the word out slowly. "The night my parents died I was dropped off at my aunt and uncle's house. I didn't find out until I was eleven that they were killed by an evil wizard. Magic was just something in storybooks and my relatives hated it. Any time I did accidental magic I would get punished."

Sirius/Rook growled.

"They're different now." Harry put a hand on Sirius' paws. "You've seen them yourself. It wasn't their fault. I found out recently that there was magic placed around the house, and on me, that made them like that. Not just them either. It was a subtle series of spells that made people focus on the negative aspects of interacting with me."

Sirius/Rook tilted his head to the side.

"A powerful wizard put them on me when I was a baby." Harry explained. "It wasn't until I claimed my Lordship that the enchantments were broken."

Sirius whined.

"It gets worse." Harry sighed. "The wizard that did it was incredibly skilled at magic that altered people's minds. Changing their memories, influencing their behaviors, and all that. I think that plays a part why Rita didn't know about the basilisk. There were students who were petrified, people had to know." Harry shook his head. "My relatives changed once the enchantment was broken. It was drastic too."

"That's just something I found out recently." Harry continued. "I got my Hogwarts letter. Hagrid, he's a half-giant and works at the school, took me to Diagon Alley. We went shopping. He bought me Hedwig as a birthday present. Hagrid is a little." He thought for a moment. "I don't want to say stupid, more absentminded. He doesn't realize that most people don't find deadly animals to be cuddly. Being half-giant gives him a soft spot for creatures. He's the one who let the giant spiders loose in the forest."

"My first year he also put a Cerberus in the school to guard the Philosophers Stone. He also tried to hide a baby dragon in his shack." Harry chuckled. "For some reason Dumbledore, that's the Headmaster at Hogwarts, decided to put the Philosophers Stone in the school for safe-keeping. The evil wizard that killed my parents was after it to heal himself. He had possessed one of his followers that managed to get a job teaching at the school. Long story short, we fought, I killed him, and the stone was safe."

"I wonder if people know about that." Harry muttered. "I'll mention it to Rita the next time we talk."

Sirius woofed.

"What?" Harry tried, and failed, to contain a blush. "She's a good resource if she's on my side."

Sirius stared at him.

"Fine." Harry rolled his eyes. "She's hot. Back to the story. I killed the possessed teacher, Riddle, that's the evil wizard's real name, was turned back into a smoke-specter type thing and fled. No idea where he is now. I asked Dumbledore to stay at the school over summer, my relatives were still under the spell and they were not people I wanted to be around. He said no. I went back to their place to find that my uncle had put bars on my window and locks on the outside of my door. Dobby, before he worked for me, showed up and warned me not to go back to Hogwarts."

The elf in question popped into the room.

"Harry Potter called?" Dobby asked.

"Sorry." Harry said. "I'm telling Rook here my life story and your name came up."

Dobby nodded. "Dobby tried to protect Master Harry Potter. Dobby dropped a cake on a muggle lady and then turned the doorway into stone."

"You also charmed a bludger to chase after me." Harry added.

Dobby winced. "Dobby thought it was a good idea at the time."

"I know." Harry chuckled. "You were desperate to protect me. You're an amazing friend, Dobby."

Dobby smiled brightly. "Thank you, Harry Potter, sir. Dobby will be going back home now."

"See you in a bit." Harry waved at the elf. He turned back to his furry audience once Dobby vanished.

"Back to the story. Turns out my elf friend was trying to protect me from his former master, Lucius Malfoy."

Sirius growled.

"I know. His name even sounds like a bastard." Harry smiled. "Lucy slipped an enchanted diary into a student's basket when they weren't looking. That was the one I told Rita about. It was the first horcrux that Riddle had made all the way back when he was still a student at Hogwarts. Back then he released a basilisk, just like this time, but the first time he managed to kill a student rather than just turning some to stone. He left notes around the school about 'The Heir of Slytherin'. A few days later I learned that I was a parseltongue, and guess what? Slytherin was one too. Naturally, everyone suddenly thought I was the one turning muggle-born students to stone. They seemed to forget that my mother was a muggle-born and I was good friends with one too." He stopped. "That was probably some of the spells put on me too. Not all of it. Like I said, it made people focus on the negative things." Harry shook his head. "Long story short, with some help I figured out where the basilisk was, went down, and killed it. It kind of killed me in the process, but I got better. Phoenix tears are amazing. I used the basilisk venom to destroy the horcrux and that about catches us up."

Sirius sighed.

"I know." Harry leaned back in his chair. "Saying out loud sounds crazy. Now Sirius Black has escaped a magical prison, which was supposed to be impossible. The magical government is scrambling to catch him, and someone had the bright idea to allow Dementors around the school." Harry groaned. "It took me all of five minutes to find out that Sirius was my godfather. Everyone knew that he was friends with my parents. They say he was their secret keeper. Why wouldn't they check the records? Not only that, my parents' will is sealed for some reason. Someone is putting a lot of effort into keeping the truth hidden. I think it's the same person who put the spells on me, or at least someone working with them."

Someone knocked on the door. Harry was up out of his seat with his wand drawn. He had pulled the chair in front of him at some point.

"Lunch service." The voice came from the other side.

"Come in." Harry took his seat but held on to his wand.

14.

Harry sat back with a smile on his face. True to her word Rita had done a lot of research. She started with the basilisk attacks at the school last year, then continued on to expose Tom Riddle as the summoner of the beast the first time. From there she chained the travesty of justice, Hagrid being charged with the crime without any real proof and transitioned it into current events. She had published a copy of the contract Sirius and the Potters had signed at Harry's birth. It didn't take long for her to discover that there hadn't been any trial. Each article came out at the first of the week. This provided time for the public to discuss the issues and do their own digging before she pushed on. She sent a copy to Harry before it was released.

Rita had exposed the multiple mishandling of justice. She had even turned her attention to the missing Wormtail without any prompting. Sirius escaping was starting to look less like a crime and more of a wrongfully imprisoned man trying to regain his freedom. The fact that Sirius was the Head of a Noble and Ancient House helped spur people into action.

Unfortunately, the dementors were still scheduled to be stationed at Hogwarts. The public outcry about the basilisk attack and the other dangers at the school that shortly came to light actually helped solidify the order. Harry had hoped that they would have simply increased security by stationing a couple of Aurors, but apparently, that was expecting too much. Luckily, the Kiss on Sight order on Sirius had been recalled. Now there was a kindly worded request for him to contact them for further investigations.

Fudge and his people were scrambling. During all this the Minister found himself without his greatest ally. The Malfoy family had vanished. Their manor was stripped clean, even the wards had been removed. It was almost like no one had ever lived there in the first place. When Fudge sent someone to investigate the place hadn't been touched in over a month, which, was right about the time that Harry had met with Lucius at the start of summer break. Really, that was a footnote in the chaos that was unfolding.

This year was shaping up to be something completely different than he had expected. There was no telling what Wormtail would do. The one thing Harry knew for sure was that he still needed a way to deal with the dementors. They were something tangible to focus on for now. Everything else would just have to come as it may.

Harry had taken to leaving copies of the paper out for Sirius to read. He suspected his godfather swapped over to his human form when the house was asleep. From the way Dobby acted around Rook, it was almost certain the house elf had encountered Sirius but couldn't say anything. Technically, Dobby also worked for Sirius since Harry was Heir Black. Harry had noticed a couple tumblers of fire whiskey set out after Vernon had gone to bed.

The Weasleys were due back in the next few days. Last time around he had been at Diagon Alley by now. Aunt Marge hadn't visited which left Harry on the backfoot. Mrs. Weasley almost certainly would want to drag him along for school shopping. He had already completed all of it, plus he needed to distance himself from the family.

He didn't trust himself around them. Finding out Molly and Ginny had been dosing him with Love Potions angered him on a level he could not properly explain. He had kept busy, not allowing himself to dwell on things. Thinking about Ginny led to thinking about Hermione, which then turned to all the lies he had thought were truth. How often did they alter his memory? When did they start? When did Hermione get in on it? It would make sense that she would be the brains of the operation.

Harry had been focusing on Voldemort, the horcrux trail, and the dementors. Those were tangible problems. He needed to kill Nagini, destroy the ring, and finally the necklace. Nagini being the most challenging. After that he could kill Voldemort. Once that was done, he would start on taking apart the Death Eaters. Before all that he needed to come up with a way to kill the dementors.

Dealing with Hermione, Dumbledore, and the Weasleys were the hard part. Never once had he suspected Hermione to betray him on such a level. They had multiple children together and he couldn't even remember a moment they spent in each other's arms. That thought hurt him more than he expected. In some twisted way did she love him? Was that what started it all? Her loving him, but not being able to have him.

It was too much to think about.

The Weasleys were, in theory, easier to deal with. He would simply allow them to drift away. Ron would throw a fit about something and all he had to do was let him stew. Harry would avoid Ginny, perhaps even push her toward another. Fred and George were the hardest part of that puzzle. As much as he hated to admit it, he didn't spend near as much time with George after the war. If nothing else, they were the brothers he never had. Being around George was too painful.

Dumbledore. Just the thought of the man made his teeth clench. He was of two-minds on how to deal with the bastard. One, he could let Dumbledore kill himself with the ring again. There had to be a way to remove the horcrux while keeping the curse intact. The other option was simply to kill the old man. Problem being that Harry wasn't powerful enough to take the man on in a fight just yet. He would also need Dumbledore around until he finished off Riddle.

Harry was brought out of his thoughts by a wet nose brushing against his hand. He looked down to see the worried gaze of Sirius/Rook staring at him.

"I'm ok." Harry scratched his godfather behind the ears. "Just trying to solve a problem."

The dog let out a string of vocalization.

"Talk it out with you?" Harry asked.

Sirius barked.

"Fine." Harry turned to face the dog. "The dementors. Given my luck, they are going to come after me. Trouble finds me." He tapped his chin. "There's a spell, Expecto Patronum, that can chase them off. It takes a lot of power, and I don't know if it would keep them away from me more than a few moments."

Sirius chuffed.

"Plus, it's not just me they are going to go after." Harry continued. "I need something that can hurt them. Something that could even kill them."

Sirius sat up. His jaw worked but no sound came out.

"Yeah." Harry flopped back onto his bed. "It's not an easy task."

Sirius hopped up onto the bed. The dog settled in beside him. Harry absently began to pet him.

"The Patronus spell requires the caster to call on their happiest memories." Harry continued. "It fights off the dread and hopelessness. If I keep on that train of thought, I need something that harnesses that happiness and turns it into a weapon." He rubbed the bridge on his nose. "An English to Latin dictionary would help. I can find the words to focus my intent."

Harry sat up. "What do you say? Up for taking a trip to town?"

Sirius/Rook hopped onto the floor. His tail wagged quickly.

"It's a nice day." Harry looked out the window. "Let's walk."

15.

Harry sat in the back of the car with Rook beside him. Vernon and Petunia were in the front to see him off. Dudley was at the house, enjoying a rare day of free reign over the SNES. Dobby had already moved Harry's trunk to the dorm.

His aunt and uncle walked with him up to the pillar.

"Are you sure about this?" Petunia looked at the pillar.

"Yes." Harry nodded. "I just walk through it."

"But." Vernon motioned to the brick pillar. "It's solid."

"Trust me." Harry smiled. "Rook, want to show them?"

The dog let out a little woof and trotted over. He disappeared through the pillar. Harry smiled at the shocked expressions on his relatives faces.

"And no one notices?" Vernon asked.

"Not unless they are looking for it." Harry replied. "Thank you for coming with me." He hugged his aunt and shook his uncle's hand. "I'll see you in June."

"We're doing something special for your birthday this year." Petunia said. "No arguing this time."

"The cake was nice." Harry said.

"I'm sure you have friends to invite." Petunia ran a hand through his hair. "Maybe a lady-friend?"

"Love is the one magic that has eluded me." Harry pressed a hand to his forehead and looked up to the ceiling.

"Be safe this year." Vernon stepped forward and patted his shoulder. "I have many, many years to make up protecting you."

Harry found it hard to talk. A lump had quickly formed in his throat. He pulled his uncle into a hug. Vernon stiffened for a moment before patting Harry on the back.

"You're a good lad, Harry." Vernon cleared his throat. "We'll miss you."

Harry wiped his eyes. "I've got to go, or I'll miss the train."

He hurried through the barrier without another look back. Even after a couple of months the change in his family was hard to identify with his past. His family. Not once in his old life had he thought of the Dursleys as family. It lit a fire in him, seeing another part of his life that Dumbledore had stolen.

The old man would pay.

Harry pushed the thoughts away as he made it to the train. He tracked Sirius/Rook down. It didn't take long; the big black dog was sitting in the cabin with Hermione and Ron. A sleeping Lupin rested in the far corner. Sirius/Rook stared at the resting werewolf.

"Harry!" Ron yelled as Harry entered the cabin. "You didn't write me back. Did your relatives burn the letters? This dog won't leave the cabin."

"You've been crying." Hermione cut in. "Did they hurt you?"

"No." Harry shook his head. "Got some grit in my eyes and that's my dog." He nodded to Remus. "Who's that?"

"Remus Lupin." Hermione read off the briefcase. "I think he's a professor."

"Never heard of a professor riding the train." Ron said. He had already gotten a sandwich out from his bag and started to eat.

"Where did you even get that?" Harry asked.

"My trunk." Ron patted it. "Do you want one? Mom made three."

"No thanks." Harry replied quickly. He didn't trust anything that Molly Weasley made.

"How was Egypt?" Hermione cut in. "Did you see the tombs? What about the museums? Did you take the tour of the pyramids?"

"Let me breath." Ron snapped.

Harry sat back and watched the exchange. The brief moment of nostalgia shifted to a sour feeling that grew with each passing word. He started to absently stroke Rook as he stared out the window. The conversation blurred into white noise as the two began to argue without even noticing his silence.

He couldn't blame Ron for his part in things. If anything, Ron was just as much of a victim as he was. Hermione, though. He still had no idea how to deal with her. This was the year she had the time turner, maybe he could use that to push her away. Question her about her classes and push until it became an issue. It wouldn't be out of character for him to rush into things without thinking. A skeleton of a plan began to form. The time turner, that was the key. He could steal it from her, claim he was protecting her from herself, and just let things go from there.

"Why are we stopping?" Ron asked. "It's too soon to be at Hogwarts."

"There's something moving outside the train." Hermione said.

Harry stood and drew his wand. "Stay here."

He stepped out into the hall and waited. It didn't take long for the first dementor to appear. Harry felt the dread and fear pressing into him. He pushed it away, focusing on the love he had felt in his life. Much to his shock, Vernon, Petunia, and Dudley came to mind.

"Serenitas Ferrum." Harry growled out the spell.

A lance of pure white energy ripped through the air, tearing a hole through the dementor. It let out an ear-piercing screech. It twisted in place, trying to flee. Harry pushed more magic into the spell. He flicked his wrist, adjusting his aim and decapitating the creature. The cloaked form crumpled to the floor. Harry spun around, facing the dementor that had come to investigate.

The fear he felt from the dementor was directed at him in a completely different manner.

"Come and have a go, if you think you're hard enough." Harry gave a predatory grin.

The dementor fled. He waited a moment to see if it would return, or call for reinforcements. When none came, he walked over to inspect the dead dementor.

"By right of combat, I claim my prize." He scooped up the corpse and tossed it over his shoulder.

"Dobby."

"Harry Potter, called?" The elf asked popping into the space nearby.

"Take this to the goblins." He held out the dementor. "Ask them to process it."

Dobby looked from the dementor to Harry. "Master is great and powerful."

"Not 'Master', but I'll settle for 'boss'." Harry chuckled.

"Yes, boss." Dobby took the corpse, then disappeared.

Harry looked up to see the cabin doors open. Everyone was watching him, including Remus and Sirius/Rook. Harry dusted off the frost that had gathered on his shirt.

"Anyone seen the trolley?" He asked. "I could go for a spot of chocolate."

"I have some in my briefcase." Remus said.

"Thank you." Harry walked over to him and held out a hand. "Harry Potter."

"Remus Lupin." The werewolf shook his hand.

"How did you do that?" Hermione yelled.

"That was bloody brilliant." Ron was just as loud.

"I did a lot of reading over the summer." Harry shrugged.

"Harry James Potter." Hermione snapped. "That is not an answer."

Harry felt that fire building from within. He set a cold glare on her.

"Do not treat me like a child." His voice came out flat with no emotion.

Hermione shivered and shrank from his gaze. "Sorry."

"It's a bit cramped in here." He stood up. "I think I'll see if I can find an open cabin." Harry looked to his godfather. "Want to come, Rook?"

The dog looked from Harry to Remus.

"Catch up when we stop." Harry looked to Remus. "Careful, he's got huge pads for feet. Mud and grit cling to them."

Remus flinched. The man took a closer look at the dog beside him. Harry stepped back out into the hallway. He took a deep breath, pushing that fire down. It needed to be contained for now, letting it out now would ruin things. Killing the dementor would already cause some issues.

"Dementors, check." He mumbled as he walked down the way. "Hermione, possibly check."

He looked in to see a mostly empty cabin with a couple of stunned Gryffindor students in it. The trio of Katie, Alicia, and Angela seemingly just started at each other. Harry knocked on the door. They jumped at the sound.

"Mind if I join you?" Harry asked.

"No." Katie scooted over. "Feel free."

"Thanks." He smiled at her and took a seat. "So, how was your summer?"

They stared at him blankly. He started to laugh.

16.

Harry ignored all the stares and whispers in the Great Hall. Dumbledore had done his introduction, the feast had started, and Sirius/Rook wondered off. Harry noticed Lupin slipped out shortly after. He waited a few minutes but calmed down when he didn't hear any sort of explosions or screams. A part of him was worried about Remus. It was likely that the werewolf had been influenced by Dumbledore as well, though non-humans had some extra protection. It was an advantage he now had as well, considering he was technically back from the dead.

"Harry." Hermione whispered.

He looked at her, settling a cold stare on her. She shrunk back.

"Professor Dumbledore is staring at you." She said softly.

"I know." Harry went back to eating, not even bothering to dismiss her.

Ron looked between his two friends. He didn't seem to understand what was going on and wasn't sure he really wanted to know. Ron had spent enough time around his parents to recognize a storm brewing. The best thing for him to do was to stay out of it.

Harry closed his eyes. He took a slow calming breath. When he opened his eyes he noticed something was missing. Hermione didn't have cat hair on her robes. They hadn't gotten together to go shopping together, which meant she must have not gotten her pet. If that was the case, Wormtail wouldn't have a scapegoat for his sudden disappearance.

"Where's Scabbers?" Harry asked.

Ron jumped. "Oh. Uh... He's in my room. He hasn't been feeling well lately. Why?"

If Wormtail didn't know Sirius was at Hogwarts, what would he do? Once Sirius and Peter saw each other, even in their animagus forms, they would recognize each other. Sirius was going up to his room. Wormtail was in the same room.

"Fuck." Harry jumped out of his seat.

He dashed out of the Great Hall. Years of having the Marauders Map had taught him quite a few shortcuts. He made it up to the tower in record time. Harry burst into the common room to see Lupin holding a fully human Wormtail at wand point. Sirius was bound and gagged on the floor, glaring at both of them. All three stopped to look at Harry as he entered.

Wormtail saw his chance. The chubby man was surprisingly nimble. His spindly fingers wrapped around the end of Lupin's wand. A quick yank disarmed the distracted werewolf. Wormtail shifted from terror to triumph as he pointed the wand back at Lupin. The brief moment of his victory was shattered as a powerful stunning spell slammed into the side of his head. Wormtail went down hard, crashing through a table as he fell.

"Harry!" Lupin yelled.

"MURREE." The still-gagged Sirius called.

Harry took a deep breath. "Could someone please tell me what the bloody fuck is going on?"

"Language, Harry." Remus chided.

"Fuck off, Professor." Harry cut back. "I come back to find the man suspected of murdering my parents bound on the floor while you are pointing a wand at a man who is supposed to be dead."

"Hm ahsz uh proint." Sirius said.

Harry inclined his head. "Even the wanted murderer agrees with me."

Sirius smiled through the gag. Harry took the brief pause to bind Wormtail and retrieve Lupin's wand. He held it out to the professor.

"He's not a murderer." Lupin took the wand. "Stupid and impulsive, yes. A murderer, no."

Sirius scoffed. A ghost of a grin flashed across Harry's face.

"Has anyone seen my dog?" Harry asked. "He's big with black fur."

Sirius looked over at Lupin. Remus shrugged. The human form of Sirius shifted into the canine form of Rook. Harry stared at the dog. Even after all these years seeing an animagus transform was still weird.

"Is that why you only pooped when Vernon had to pick it up?" Harry asked.

Rook gave him a goofy dog grin. The grin stayed on his face even after he returned to human form. His bindings, however, were gone.

"What about him?" Harry pointed to Wormtail. "Where did he come from?"

"He turns into a rat." Remus said. "He was hiding out in your dorm room."

"Ron's going to be crushed." Harry shook his head. "We need to call the DMLE."

"We can get Dumbledore--"

"No." Sirius cut in. "I don't trust him. Floo Amelia Bones."

"You don't trust him?" Lupin asked.

Sirius looked to Harry. "It's a long story that should be discussed off of Hogwarts grounds. Let's take him to Hogsmeade. Once there we can contact her." He gave Harry a small smile. "I was hoping to meet you face to face on better terms."

Harry returned the smile. "You've been getting steak strips and ear scratches; I think that's a pretty good introduction."

Sirius laughed. "True. We can talk more later. Be careful around the old man. Don't look in his eyes."

His godfather kicked Wormtail in the stomach. The bound man yelped.

"We know you're awake." Sirius growled. "Try to run and I swear by your shifty eyes that I'll cut the rest of your fingers off."

"Did you search him for a wand?" Harry asked.

"No." Sirius shot a look to Lupin. "Cover me."

Sirius roughly searched the wiggling Wormtail. He found a familiar looking wand hidden in the ratty jacket. Pun intended.

"Nice call." Sirius nodded to Harry. "Come along, Moony. We need to get somewhere safe to talk."

"You be careful too." Harry called after them as they left. "Get somewhere safe as soon as you can."

"Yes, mum." Sirius called back as the painting closed.

Harry shook his head. He turned his attention to the common room. His mouth set into a hard line as he looked at the paintings on the wall.

"You will mention none of this to Dumbledore." Harry commanded. "Anyone who does will soon discover how flammable their canvas is. Do you understand?"

The subjects nodded.

"Spread the word." Harry slowly turned to face each one. "Tell Dumbledore and his people nothing about anything I do this year."

"He's the Headmaster." One of the paintings said softly.

"And I'm Harry Fucking Potter." He growled. "It's simple. Serve Dumbledore against me, and we find out if destroying your home painting gets rid of you as well. Go about your lives, ignore me, and you're safe. Understood?"

The painting nodded.

"Thank you." Harry gave a small bow. "Excuse me. I need to clean up this mess."

17.

Harry woke up the next morning. He took some extra time to enjoy the bed. Hogwarts had the best beds. He had no idea how they did it, but they were amazing. Even with his new bed at the Dursley's it was still better. His old bed, in the past... or his future, whatever it was, wasn't bad. Ginny was hard to share a bed with. She hogged the covers and constantly pushed him further toward the edge of the bed. Except for when she was pregnant. The memory fractured and shattered. Nights with Hermione cuddled against his chest overtook the false images of Ginny.

He sat up, swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and held his head in his hands. They had stolen his life. What happy memories did he have that were true? How often did they mess with his mind? What other parts of his life would just melt away when he thought of them?

Harry took a deep breath, focusing on how the air felt in his lungs. He let it out, shifting his attention to the room around him. That hadn't happened yet. It wouldn't happen this time. Better to leave the country and let it burn than to have his life stolen again.

Harry trudged to the bathroom. The last embers of his good mood rekindled under the hot water. He found a fresh set of clothes waiting on a stool nearby when he got out. Dobby appeared as he finished getting dressed.

"Where is Boss' Rook?" Dobby looked quickly around the room.

"Turns out he is Sirius Black." Harry shook his head.

The elf let out an exaggerated gasp. "Dobby had no idea."

"How long have you known?" Harry chuckled.

"Dobby just said that Dobby had no idea." The elf looked up at the ceiling to avoid Harry's eyes. "Harry Potter sir might need to have Madam Poppy check his ears."

"You don't say." Harry felt a swell of warmth for the elf.

Dobby started to squirm.

"What did the goblins have to say about-"

"Dobby is sorry, Harry Potter sir." The elf leaped forward, pulling Harry's legs into a hug. "Dobby knows that Rook is Sirius Black. Dobby saw Sirius Black at Dursleys house, but Sirius Black ordered him not to say anything to Harry Potter."

Harry returned the hug. "Dobby."

"Yes, Harry Potter sir?" Dobby still wouldn't look at him.

"Look at me, Dobby." He said gently.

The elf looked up at him. His big eyes were full of tears.

"Do I look mad?" He asked.

Dobby shook his head.

"Do you know why?" He asked.

Dobby shook his head again.

"I trust you, Dobby." Harry gave the elf another hug. "If Sirius Black had any sort of evil plans for me, I know you would have told me."

"That is true, Harry Potter sir. Dobby would have told you where Sirius Black was buried."

Harry let out a loud laugh. "You're a good friend Dobby."

Dobby wiped his eyes on Harry's pant leg. "Harry Potter sir really isn't mad?"

"Now I am." Harry scoffed. "Look at my pants, they've got Dobby snot on them."

Dobby snapped his fingers. "Harry Potter sir is very dramatic."

"I'm dramatic?" Harry's jaw dropped.

Dobby cackled as he disappeared with a pop.

"That's it." Harry grumbled. "You're getting a day off tomorrow. With pay."

Dobby popped back in front of him. "Harry Potter sir isn't being fair. Dobby has laundry to do. Harry Potter sir has a lot of summer clothes that are smelly."

"Nope." Harry crossed his arms and turned his head away from the elf. "You brought this on yourself. Day off with pay."

Dobby muttered before disappearing again. Harry shook his head. That was one strange elf.

With his good mood firmly in place he headed down to the Great Hall. Today was the first day of the new school year. He'd be getting his schedule, again. Not that he could remember what it was supposed

to be this year. He stopped when he entered the Great Hall. The Gryffindor table was mostly empty. Over the summer he had gotten into the habit of waking up early. This prevented Dobby waking him up from sneaking in his room after cooking breakfast to play Street Fighter. It also gave him time to handle some of the fan mail each morning. The backlog, even with love potions, marriage proposals, and scams filtered out was imposing.

Harry moved beyond the table to get a look at the other houses. Sitting alone at the Ravenclaw table, he found Luna. Even in the school uniform there was something about her that was almost mystical. She looked like she should have a set of iridescent wings and a dress made of moonlight. In his old life he didn't meet her for a few more year. That would have to change.

As he got closer to her, he noticed that she was wearing a robe that was too small. As were the rest of her clothes. She was a wisp of a girl, but the uniform looked like it was supposed to be on a doll rather than a second year.

"Good morning." Harry stood across from her. "May I sit?"

"Of course, Mister Potter." Luna smiled up at him.

"Thank you." Harry took up a spot on the bench. "Mister Potter?"

"That's the proper way to address adults." Luna plucked a powdered donut from a nearby platter.

"And I'm an adult?" Harry asked.

"You were." Luna took a big bite. "Time travel leaves all sorts of Gibbles and Whangdoodles around people. Not as much as you. They are just swarming all over you."

"That makes sense." Harry set himself up with a plate of eggs, bacon, and some biscuits. "Why is your uniform so small?"

"Vermicious Knids." Luna said between bites. "They keep shrinking my clothes. Odd that. They usually stick to the jungles. Much too cold for them in Scotland."

Harry waved his hand in front of her. Her uniform adjusted to fit.

"Thank you, Mister Potter." She plucked another donut from the plate and offered it to him.

"Call me Harry." He took the offered treat. "Let me know if it happens again."

"Thank you, Harry." She bopped around in her seat. "Are we friends again?"

"I would like that." He found himself smiling broadly.

"Mister Potter." Professor Flitwick stopped beside him. "I don't have your schedule."

"Of course not." Luna shook her head. "This is still his dimension."

The half-goblin nodded before turning to Harry. "You need to head back to the Gryphindor table for now. It is nice to see Inter-House Comradery again."

"Thank you, Professor." Harry waited for Flitwick to move on. "Could I convince you to start up a dueling club this year? A grandmaster such as yourself would draw quite a few interested students."

Flitwick stopped mid-stride. "Mister Potter, how would you know that?"

"I spent the summer catching up on my reading." Harry gave a small grin.

"We will see." The professor continued to hand out the schedules.

Harry made it back to the table from McGonagal to give him his. He let out a long sigh.

"I forgot about divination." He muttered.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Parvati cooed from nearby.

"Two galleons says I have my death foretold at least once." Harry shook his head.

"I wouldn't take that bet." Fred said. "Harry almost dies at least once a year." George continued. "Saying he's facing death isn't reading the future." Fred added. "It's just facts." The twin said together.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Harry chuckled.

"We do need to talk." George leaned in, speaking low. "Managing Mischief and such." Fred matched the hushed tone.

"Agreed." Harry held up his schedule. "I can talk after Moony's class."

The twins stared at him. "Moony?" Fred gasped. "As in Moony, Padfoot, Prongs, and Wormtail?" George spoke faster.

"Remus Lupin." Harry motioned to the professor. "His name is basically Moon Moon. Not that hard to figure out."

The duo stared up at the professor in awe. They sat back down and started to speak in overlapping whispers.

Harry sat back with a satisfied grin on his face. This was going to be a fun year. His mirth was interrupted by a letter falling on the table before him.

Mister Potter,

I request an audience this afternoon after classes.

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore

P.S. I do so love luminous lollies

"It was going to happen sooner or later." Harry mumbled.

18.

Hagrid's first class went smoothly without Malfoy there to mess things up, and the bookstore employee knowing how to calm the books. Most of the students thought the Monstrous Book of Monsters was pretty awesome when they didn't have to fight it. Hagrid may have unwittingly been a tool for Dumbledore, but Harry still felt a warm glow from the smile on his friends' face.

Harry had a hard time being around Hermione. Seeing her pop up constantly through the day due to the Time Turner was starting to grate on his nerves. Luckily, he didn't have Potions or Divination until the next day. Having to deal with Snape, Trelawny, and Hermione would have been too much. The first day of the year was almost complete. All he had to do was get through the meeting with Dumbledore.

"Luminous lollies." Harry said before the gargoyle could ask.

The statue gave a little huff as the passage appeared. Harry looked up at the gargoyle.

"I'm sorry." Harry said. "I shouldn't take my frustration out on you. Would you like to hear a riddle?"

The gargoyle flopped down to sit cross-legged on its perch. "Proceed."

"There are two groups of horses, one in a paddock and one free." Harry held up his index finger on each hand. "One group starts singing 'Don't Fence Me In' and the other begins to sing 'Wide Open Spaces'. Which group sings which song?"

Harry headed up to the stairs as the gargoyle began to mumble to itself.

"Come in." Dumbledore called before Harry could knock.

"You wanted to see me?" Harry stepped into the office.

"Take a seat." Dumbledore gave a warm smile as he motioned to the open chair. "Lemon drop?"

"No thank you." Harry sat. "I would say that it's a record to get called in on the first day, but last year I was in here before the feast was over."

"Indeed." Dumbledore chuckled.

Harry felt something press on his mind. His years as an auror had taught him to recognize the signs of Legilimency even without the protection Death had given him. A rush of heat sparked within him. Using mental magic on a minor was not only frowned upon, but illegal.

Dumbledore stared at Harry for a moment longer.

"Did you need something?" Harry felt the pressure once more.

"Yes." Dumbledore said the word slowly. "What do you know of Sirius Black?"

"He is my godfather." Harry lifted up his hand to show the Black Heir ring. "Also, the head of the Noble and Ancient House of Black."

"You claimed your Heir ring?" Dumbledore sat back in his chair.

"Yes." Harry willed the Potter ring to appear as well. "Now that I'm thirteen, and the last living Potter, I am now Lord Potter as well."

"Are you sure that is wise, Harry?" Dumbledore leaned forward.

Harry could feel the pressure on his mind increase.

"These last two years have taught me that I need extra protection." Harry nodded. "The rings provide defense against magical and legal attacks."

"You are not old enough to take the Potter seat." Dumbledore's eyes glanced at the two rings. "I can help you chose a proxy until you are seventeen. Arthur Weasley, for one, would make a great representative."

"Thank you for the recommendation." Harry gave a short nod. "I need to arrange a meeting to get everything settled. I'm still learning how to deal with the political side of things."

"Of course." Dumbledore smiled, his grandfather act slipping back into place. "I'm not overly fond of the bureaucratic aspect of our government myself. Since you are a student, we can handle that for you."

"No thank you."

The words wiped the smile off of Dumbledore's face. "Pardon?"

"As Lord Potter, I need to learn how to take care of these things on my own." Harry said. "If the papers are to be believed, my parents' will is sealed, and I will need to work on that."

A brief flash of frustration crossed the Headmasters face. Dumbledore schooled his expression with impressive speed.

"Ah yes, the papers." Dumbledore straightened up in his chair. "It is rather disappointing such news of Hogwarts has been spread so publicly. Did you have something to do with that?"

"Disappointing?" Harry tilted his head to the side. "It should be old news. The basilisk was last year. Parents and students would have been talking about months ago."

"The news changes quickly and the public can forget just as fast." Dumbledore waved the train of thought away. "Digging up the past will unearth old wounds. Rita Skeeter is doing the wizarding world no favors."

"Except for getting the Kiss On Sight order for Sirius Black removed." Harry was beginning to tire of this conversation.

"The dementors. Yes." Dumbledore nodded. "Many students claim to have seen you singlehandedly slay a dementor on the train."

Harry laughed.

"There is no truth to it then?" Dumbledore gave a jolly smile. "Even Professor Lupin said something of the kind."

"Professor Lupin was asleep in the cabin." Harry shook his head. "I admit that I stepped out to protect my friends, I couldn't let them get hurt." He sighed. "Killing a dementor. I didn't even know what they were called until this summer. That would mean in the past few weeks I somehow came up with a spell that no one else has created to kill that creature. I doubt even Hermione could do that."

Dumbledore studied him for a long moment. "I can understand you wanted to protect your friends, Harry. However, I must caution you against facing a dementor. They are some of the most fearsome creatures that are known to exist."

"Facing a basilisk was more than enough monster fighting in my life." Harry stood. "If there is nothing else, I will take my leave."

"Of course." Dumbledore stood as well. "Just because the papers say that Sirius Black might be innocent doesn't mean you don't need to be careful. He spent years in Azkaban, there is no telling what that has done to his mind."

"Hogwarts is the safest place in the world." Harry paused in the doorway. "Right?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Right."

Harry headed back down the stairs. A small hand tugged on his shirt collar as he got to the bottom.

"The horses in the paddock are singing, don't fence me in and the wild horses are singing, wide open spaces." The gargoyle crossed their arms. "Right?"

"Nope." Harry smiled up at the gargoyle.

The stone creature blanched. "But... how?"

"Horses don't sing, mate." Harry winked before he turned and walked away.

Harry laughed at the gargoyle began to curse loudly.

19.

The next day Harry sat in Potions and waited. He had no clue how he was going to handle Snape. Dumbledore may have had use for him, but Harry didn't. Not only was Snape a deplorable human being, but he was also a shit teacher. Neville was a prodigy when it came to herbalism. With any other teacher that would have carried over to him being rather good at potions. Knowing what herbs and plants work together, their reactions to certain stimuli, and proper care would be amazing knowledge to tap into. Instead, Neville was terrified to go near a cauldron.

Harry tapped his fingers on the table before him. Hermione sat with Ron across the small divide. With Draco gone it left the class with an undeniable fate. A Gryffindor and Slytherin were going to have to sit together. Now that he wasn't really a thirteen-year-old the bitter rivalry between the two houses was rather trivial.

He didn't care that he was sitting next to Millicent Bulstrode. She was quiet and her book had notes in the margins that reminded him of the used potions text he had used last time.

"As you know." Snape appeared from the shadows in the front of the room. "Potions are a delicate balance of skill and genius. Starting next year, you will be able to choose what courses you will take. Only a few in this class should consider continuing on. The majority of you will simply waste my time."

The hook-nosed professor scanned the students. His gaze lingered on Harry and Millicent.

"Potter." Snape sneered. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Currently, I'm waiting for you to actually teach something." Harry sighed. "Have been for a couple years now."

The class seemed to freeze. No one made a sound.

"Fifty points from Gryffindor." Snape growled. "I would give you detention but that would mean I would have to spend more time with you."

"If you'd prefer, I could just leave now." Harry countered. "I'm sure I'd be better prepared for my OWLS reading the texts in the library than being constantly insulted by you."

"Another fifty points from Gryffindor." Snape practically screamed.

"I'll make a deal with you, Severus." Harry began to pack his bag. "I will try to find a spell to find what crawled up your ass and died if you drop your pathetic infatuation with my mother. Deal?"

Snape's mouth dropped. Harry tucked the last of his books away. He was out of the classroom before Snape had regained enough mental capacity to begin yelling. The last time around, his skill in potions dramatically improved once he had a new teacher. Having another lifetime of experience put him ahead of the curve. He wasn't sure if he remembered enough to be able to pass his NEWTS, the OWLS though, those he could handle.

Harry strolled up to the seventh floor. After a moment he stepped into the Room of Requirement. It took the shape of a small office with fireplace. A small dish of floo powder sat nearby. He hadn't expected to react to Snape in that way. Knowing everything that Severus had done, would do, and the motivations made it a test of will not to simply curse the sorry excuse of a man into a puddle of goo.

He had to remind himself that even though he was more powerful than before, he still hadn't caught up with his older self. The air around Hogwarts was thick with magic. His core greedily drank it in, making up for lost time and expanding his power with every passing minute. Not only that, but he had noticed that every time he experimented with magic, he got stronger. It was like working a muscle.

Right now, he just needed to burn off some energy. What better time to wrap up some loose ends?

"Riddle Mansion." Harry tossed the powder into the fireplace.

The color shifted to green. Harry stepped through. It had taken longer than he liked to admit, but he had finally adjusted to traveling via the floo network. The trick was to walk into it just like walking on an uneven path. It still wasn't something he enjoyed, but at least he didn't fall on his ass all the time.

Harry stepped out of a large fireplace. He found himself in a rundown sitting room. It didn't look like anyone had been here for a while. The only time he had seen in previously was in a vision. It was just as depressing as he remembered it. He paused, listening for any sound of habitation. Aside from the occasional skitter of mice the place was quiet.

He sighed. It would have been too easy if Nagini was here. As it was, he could still deal with the ring. The mid-morning sun helped him navigate through the mansion. He found the front door chained from the outside. Using his magic wasn't an option. It would leave behind a trace, and he didn't want to tip Riddle off that anyone had been here. Floo Travel didn't leave a trail. It did, once upon a time, but that had been taken care of once more people began to use it.

The front window had a pane of glass partially broken. A couple of kicks completely cleared the shard from the frame. He pulled his robe tight, making sure it didn't catch, and made it out into the front yard. It wasn't as ragged as the mansion. The caretaker hadn't been killed yet.

Harry strolled along to the back of the mansion and down a small hill. The Gaunt Shack was tucked away in the corner of the property. It was in the middle of a cluster of half-dead willow trees. The hanging branches tangled up on the roof, forming thick thread that looked like desiccated snakes. He rolled his eyes.

"Cold." "Hungry." "Ah! Giant!"

Harry stopped as the sound of voices reached him. He smiled as he saw a few little snakes slithering around.

"Hello." Harry spoke softly. ***"I'm not going to hurt you. Can you move out of the way so I can open the door?"***

"Speaker?" "A speaker!" "Giant! FLEE!"

Harry chuckled. The trio of snakes moved out of the way. One of them disappeared in the nearby bushes. He stepped up to the door. The curses and wards made the air feel like sludge.

"Open."

"Who dares-"

"Open, now." Harry commanded.

The door popped as the old hinges worked. He stepped to the side and waited for it to open all the way. Once it was complete clear he could feel the pull of the curse. It was obvious that this was a trap. He had no idea how Dumbledore could have fallen for it.

Harry crossed the small space to where the magic was the strongest. He held out his hand over the warped board in the corner. A small pulse of magic launched the ring from beneath the floor into his outstretched palm. Goopy tendrils of a curse wiggled around. It called to him, desperately pleading for him to put it on.

He shook his head. Harry tossed the cursed piece of jewelry into the air. He summoned the sword and sliced the ring as it fell. The piece of soul gave a tortured moan as it faded away.

"Another one down." Harry let the pieces fall. "That just leaves the locket and the snake."

He made sure leave the shack as he found it. Harry jogged the short path up to the mansion. Carefully, he climbed through the window and navigated back to the fireplace. A small dish of familiar powder was tipped over near to the side. Harry gathered up as much of the dust as he could.

"Hogwarts." He called, then stepped through.

Unlike the first time, this landing was rough. He launched out of the fireplace. Only instinct had him tuck into a ball. He rolled for a bit before colliding with something hard. Once the room stopped spinning Harry found himself resting on his shoulders with his knees nearly touching his face.

"What are you doing?" A stern voice snapped nearby.

Harry slid to the side, He steadied himself before trying to find who was talking. His gaze settled on Madam Pince, the librarian.

"I dropped my glasses." Harry stood, dusting himself off.

"And that explains you coming out of the fireplace, how?" The raven-haired woman glared at him.

"That is a very good question." Harry looked over from her to the fireplace. "Has anyone ever told you that you have pretty eyes?"

Madam Pince blushed. "Nice try. You're a few years too young for that to work."

"I'll be sure to try it next year." Harry winked at her.

Her cheeks turned a brighter shade of red. "Go on, get out of here."

20.

Oddly enough, Harry didn't get in trouble for leaving Potions. It seemed that Snape was happy with the arrangement and didn't report it. Harry used the class period to catch up on his reading. Madam Pince didn't seem to mind his company, though she still was quick to shush him and made sure he was treating the texts with proper care. The Hogwarts library was an amazing resource, even with Dumbledore's edits to the material at hand. Harry thought of the free period as independent study. He brushed up on his runes, ward construction and breaking, and delved into textbooks long forgotten of the core subjects. It was a tragedy how much information was simply lost to time. There were entire chapters in Transfiguration that were no longer covered, including dueling techniques and further rituals similar to becoming an animagus.

He really hit the jackpot when he found a textbook for dueling. Apparently, it had been part of the curriculum at some point. In his past life he had been an accomplished duelist, his time as an auror demanded it. Still, there were little tips and tricks that he could incorporate into his style.

When he wasn't in the library he was in the Room of Requirement. Not only was it a secluded place to push his magic further, but it also contained years of lost things. There was more jewelry than he ever expected, as well as socks. Never a matching pair though. Textbooks, diaries, and notebooks were another thing the room had in large quantity. He only delved into the diaries and notebooks that weren't cursed. If he recognized the name as a living wizard, then he would set it aside to return to them. The cursed ones he ignored; they weren't worth the time.

The only thing half-way interesting was when the dementors were recalled to Azkaban. After that it was two months before something happened. By then he had settled into a pattern of classes, independent study, quidditch, and avoiding Hermione. She was persistent, but her bloated schedule helped add some distance. He couldn't think straight when she was around. Part of him just wanted to yell at her and find out why she had betrayed him. Logically, he knew it wouldn't solve anything and he would just come off raving mad. That part he could deal with. It was the stolen memories that hit the hardest. Flashes of their nights together, followed by a muddled patch in the morning. They must have slipped something in his morning cup. That train of thought circled right back around to wanting to interrogate her.

She wasn't that Hermione, yet. Maybe she would never become her. It still hurt. At least Ginny made sense. She wanted Harry until she had him but didn't want to give up the lifestyle. Ending a magical marriage wasn't as simple as going to court to file for divorce. She would have been locked out of the Potter vaults, especially when it came out that she wasn't the mother of the children. If he wanted, he could push for Line Theft. Her reputation would suffer, which would probably have led to her quidditch career tanking. It didn't leave her with a bright future. Harry didn't like it, but he could follow the logic.

This cycle of mental and emotional anguish was the reason he was happy when McGonagall pulled him away from lunch one day. She didn't speak as she led him to her office. Once inside he found Sirius, Remus, and Amelia Bones waiting.

"Harry." McGonagall cleared her throat. "This is Amelia Bones, she's the lead auror for the Ministry. She has something to discuss with you."

"What's this about?" Harry schooled his expression to one of confusion. "Why is professor Lupin here?"

"Please sit." Amelia inclined her head to the open chair. "Have you been keeping up with the news?"

"I haven't gotten my copy of the Daily Prophet in about a week." Harry took the seat as he spoke. "I've sent a letter asking why but I haven't heard back."

Amelia shot McGonagall a tight look. "This is Sirius Black. Until recently he was thought to be one of the people responsible for your parents' death. As it turns out, he is innocent on all charges, as well as your godfather. The responsible party has been apprehended, charged, and was kissed yesterday."

"I knew he was my godfather." Harry nodded at her. "The goblins keep exquisite paperwork."

"Indeed." Amelia smiled at him.

Harry felt his chest flutter. Damn, teenage hormones.

"Sirius is your legal and magical guardian." Amelia continued. "We thought it would be a good idea to get some time to speak."

"Well." Harry chuckled. "He spent the summer with me, in a sort."

"I've registered as an animagus." Sirius turned to Amelia. "This summer I was watching over him in that form." He looked to Harry. "Thank you for not naming me Slippers. Rook wasn't a bad call, but I got by Padfoot when I'm a dog."

Harry nodded. "I'll have to remember that. Why is Professor Lupin here?"

"I'm a friend of Sirius." Remus looked down at his feet. "Not a very good one."

"Stop it, Moony." Sirius sighed. "I was in prison for murdering our friend. I have already forgiven you for being an idiot."

Remus shook his head.

"You were friends with my parents?" Harry asked.

Remus nodded.

"Why am I just meeting you now?" Harry asked. It was always a question he wanted to know. Unfortunately, the war was more pressing than heartfelt conversations.

"I have a condition." Remus looked to Sirius. "Having me around wasn't an option."

"The werewolf thing, right." Harry said.

The adults in the room gawked at him.

"Please, it's not hard to tell." Harry motioned to Remus. "He eats like he's starving but it skin and bones. He gets grumpy a week before the full moon, disappears for a couple of days, and then comes back looking even more ragged than before."

Sirius laughed. "You get your brains from Lily."

"Thank you for keeping it a secret." Remus gave him a tired smile. "Werewolves aren't looked up in a kind light."

"It's pretty obvious considering how the Ministry treated Hagrid last year." Harry returned the smile.

"What happened with Hagrid last year?" Amelia asked.

"He was blamed for basilisk attacks." Harry shifted his gaze to her. "It's the same thing that got him expelled and his wand broken when he was a student. There was never any proof. He's half-giant so no one cared when he was put in Azkaban. Aside from my friends and I, that is."

"He was put in Azkaban?" Amelia's mouth pressed into a tight line.

Harry nodded.

"If you will excuse me, it seems I have some matters to attend." Amelia moved with surprising speed. One moment she was standing by McGonagall's desk and the next she had tossed powder in the floor. She disappeared with a flash of green flame.

"It was nice meeting you." Harry called after her, but she was already gone.

"You're a bit young for her, pup." Sirius smiled at him. "Can't fault you on your taste in women."

"Sirius." Remus and McGonagall said at the same time.

Sirius laughed. "Want to go get some lunch? I'm starving."

21.

Harry jumped as the painting of Walburga Black began screaming.

"Shut up your trap, you old bat." Sirius yelled back. "Sorry about that. I can't seem to get the painting off the wall."

"Have you tried putting a case around it?" Harry asked. "Muggle museums use them to protect older paintings. Seal her up in glass and put some silencing charms on it."

"I'll have to try that." Sirius gave him a happy grin.

Harry looked around. Grimmauld Place looked about the same as he had last seen it. The main difference was that the thick, dark curtains had been removed from the windows. The fresh sunlight fought valiantly against the ever-present shroud of darkness. It was cleaner than he expected, but still had a long way to go.

"Why did you want to have lunch here instead of at Hogwarts?" Harry asked.

"Let me show you to the kitchen." Sirius led him to the room to find Kreacher at work at the stove.

"Kreacher, lunch for my guest."

Unlike the entryway the kitchen was warm and inviting. The dining table was new, the floors were clean, and the smell of fresh baked bread drifted through the air.

"Nasty Blood Traitor Master wants lunch for half-blood." The house elf grumbled.

"He doesn't seem all that happy here." Harry nodded to the elf.

"He's just mad I took down the house elf heads." Sirius groaned.

"House elf heads?" Harry had forgotten about that.

"My mother, she would mount the former house elf heads on the wall like trophies." Sirius shuddered.

"She was a right nutter."

"Place of honor." Kreacher grumbled louder this time.

"You could set him free." Harry offered.

"He knows too much about the Black family." Sirius shook his head. "Plus, my brother loved the old creep. I can't bring myself to get rid of him."

"You had a brother?" Harry asked.

"Regulus." A sad smile crossed his face.

"Master Regulus." Kreacher said at the same time.

"We got off track." Sirius cleared his throat. "You asked why I wanted to speak to you here. The answer is simple. I don't trust Dumbledore."

"Professor Dumbledore?" Harry had to fight the wave of relief that sparked within him. "Why?"

"For one, he knew I was innocent and didn't do anything about it." Sirius growled. He took a breath to calm himself. "After a stint in St. Mungos it was discovered that I showed signs of multiple manipulations. The Imperius Curse isn't the only way to control someone, but it takes a skilled hand to do it without causing lasting damage."

"And you suspect Dumbledore?" Harry pressed.

Sirius hadn't been there for the conversation with his aunt and uncle. Harry didn't think eagerly agreeing to resist Dumbledore would make sense at this point in time. That would lead to questions he didn't want to answer yet.

"I was there when you spoke with Skeeter." Sirius motioned for Harry to sit. "You mentioned that people just seem to forget the basilisk and other things that go on in the school. That takes someone with a lot of power and the knowledge on how to use it."

"Ok." Harry took the seat offered. "What about the Ministry? It could be them."

"They may have had a hand in it." Sirius nodded slowly, rolling the thought over. "My money is on Dumbledore. He has the house elves, ghosts, and paintings keeping an eye out. On top of that there are the wards for the school. You said yourself that your paper isn't arriving. A simple order from him and all the mail stops." He took a breath. "Ask yourself, pup, how did a troll get into the school? How did a possessed teacher? Why did it take a year of waiting to treat the basilisk victims? Mandrakes are a common potion ingredient. There's a shop in Hogsmeade for Merlins' sake."

Harry took a deep breath. "Then what do we do? You said it yourself, he's very powerful and has the knowledge to back it up."

Sirius tilted his head back and laughed. "Lily's brains and James' fire. You're dangerous, pup."

Kreacher set food out on the table.

"Thank you." Harry said.

"Half blood thanks Kreacher." The elf bobbed his head.

"Shut it." Sirius rolled his eyes.

"There's more that I didn't get to tell Skeeter." Harry scanned the room to make sure there weren't any new paintings on the wall.

"We're safe here." Sirius had a steady edge in his voice that Harry had never heard.

"What do you know about horcruxes?" Harry asked.

A loud crash followed quickly by broken glass echoed in the kitchen. Harry looked over to see Kreacher staring wide-eyed at him.

"Soul magic." Sirius said. "Nasty stuff. Why?"

"Riddle, Voldermort, whatever, he made seven them." Harry brushed his bangs back to show his scar.

"This was one of them. The basilisk venom killed it. When I talked to the goblins about it they found another hidden in the Lestrage vault. He used Helga Hufflepuff's cup. I found the diadem of Ravenclaw, it was one too. I'm certain that if we could find an artifact from Slytherin that would be one too."

"Why do you think he made seven?" Sirius asked.

"Anymore and the soul just shatters." Harry explained. "What's the point of being almost immortal if you're less than a ghost?"

A heavy silence settled on the room. Only the tinkling of broken glass being swept broke the hold.

Harry locked his gaze onto Kreacher. "You know something, don't you?"

Kreacher disappeared with a pop only to return a moment later. The old elf held the Slytherin locket out in front of him.

"Master Regulus made me promise." The elf began to sob. "Kreacher failed. Kreacher can't destroy it."

"Put it on the table." Harry stood up.

Kreacher did. Harry summoned Excalibur. With a flick of his wrist, he sliced the locket into two pieces. A thin wisp of black smoke drifted away with a scream.

"Your promise is fulfilled." Harry banished the sword.

Kreacher collapsed. The old elf curled into a ball, weeping.

"You have a sword?" Sirius asked.

Harry laughed. "After all that and you want to know about the sword?"

"You created a sword out of thin air." Sirius said.

"I summoned it." Harry held out his hand for it to appear again. "It's the Sword of Gryffindor, or Excalibur, whatever you call it, I used it to kill the basilisk. Now it's mine."

"Excalibur?" Sirius shook his head before letting out a shaky laugh. "You are the right kind of dangerous we need. Once Voldermort is handled we can move on to the real threat."

"Dumbledore." Harry gripped the sword tightly.

22.

Harry was a little lost now that he was back at Hogwarts. He didn't know what to do now, without an escaped madman terrorizing the school or Malfoy getting sliced up by Buckbeak. He found his classes to be too easy. Sirius still bought him the Firebolt, which he thought a nice piece of luck. The only real change was getting space from Ron and Hermione. It was easier than he expected. Ron got jealous about the Firebolt, so he stormed off and Hermione was so focused on her doubled schedule that she hardly knew what day it was.

Logically, he knew that he should reach out to make other friends. He found it hard to relate with his classmates. At thirteen their worries were about dating, quidditch, and gossip. Harry did notice that he caught quite a few interested looks from girls, but that felt wrong. Mentally, he was in his thirties. There was the option of dating older students. Again, it was a bit hard to connect. Sixth and Seventh years were the youngest he was willing to go.

Instead, he just focused on learning. And Quidditch. He had forgotten how much he loved the game. Without the Dementors the Gryffindor team went undefeated. When he wasn't in the library he was on the field. He even managed to slip his way in the air when the other Houses were practicing. They weren't happy about it at first, but then he started teaching all of the Seekers how to improve their game. They didn't stand a chance against him, but it made for some amazing games between the other houses.

In a way that was way too fast and somehow excruciatingly slow, the year came to an end. Harry found himself waiting in line to get on the Express. He had made it to the early rush, just after breakfast. There was still a couple of hours before departure. A good portion of the students were in a last-minute panic of packing. This put Harry among the group that were actually prepared to go which gave them the first pick at open cabins.

He was halfway down the first cabin when he found Luna. She was sitting cross-legged on a seat reading. Harry knocked on the door before sliding it open.

"Hello, Mister Potter." Luna smiled up at him.

"Miss Lovegood." Harry returned the smile. "May I join you?"

"Of course." She scooted over on the seat and patted the spot beside her.

Harry slid his trunk onto the basket above before taking the offered spot.

"How was your year?" Harry asked.

Luna thought for a moment. "Different."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"I can't say how, but what happened this year wasn't what happened this year." Luna swung her legs over his lap, using the wall as a backrest. "No ripped paintings, the dementors were scared of you, and no one thought to cuddle Mrs. Norris."

"Does she like cuddles?" Harry asked.

"She likes to be scratched behind her left ear, not her right." Luna nodded.

"I'll keep that in mind." Harry noticed she was barefoot. "Where are your shoes?"

"In my trunk." Luna replied. "The year was not this year because of you."

Harry nodded. "Yes. Are you alright with that?"

"Yes." She went back to reading. "This year was definitely better than this other year."

Harry leaned his head back. "Can I tell you something that I should have told you before?"

"Before this year or before you were you now?" Luna asked, she tilted the book just enough to see him.

"Something I should have told you last time." Harry met her eyes.

"I'm not that Luna." She shrugged. "I can still listen, but she won't hear you."

"I know." Harry started to rub her feet absently. "I missed you."

"I'm sure I missed you too." Luna wiggled a bit higher, so her feet were on his lap. "Luna understood, just like I understand."

"How much do you know about where I come from?" Harry asked.

Luna scrunched up her face in thought. "It's gone now. When you came back here the there was no more."

Harry closed his eyes and let out a long breath. "That hurts. Should it hurt? There were so many lies."

"Sometimes I see Luna who didn't lose her mother." Luna patted his leg with her foot. "She's not me, but she is Luna. That Harry was you, but the Harry you are now is also him. That's not something I can answer."

"Thank you, Miss Lovegood." Harry found his voice coming out a bit rough.

"You are welcome, Mister Potter." Luna tipped the book back up. "You'll get the map soon."

"I had completely forgotten about it." Harry laughed.

The words had barely left his mouth before the door to the cabin opened. Fred and George popped their heads in.

"Luna." One said. "Harry." The other said at the same time. "You two know each other?" Their voices mingled as one.

"Of course." Harry scoffed.

"Harry fixed my clothes and gives excellent foot rubs." Luna didn't looked up from her book.

The twins stood in the doorway for a moment. They looked at each other, sharing a silent conversation.

"May we join you?" Fred asked. "For a moment that is." George continued. "There is a matter we would like to discuss with you Harry." Fred finished.

"Moony and the map." Luna tapped Harry's leg with her foot. Harry replied by tickling her toes. Luna dropped the book and glared at him. "Mister Potter."

"Don't tickle Luna." George clicked his tongue. "We learned that the hard way, right Fred?" Fred shook his head.

"You're Fred, he's George." Harry pointed to each twin. "Miss Lovegood, stop poking me with your feet and I won't tickle you."

"Deal." Luna's expression dropped back to her normal dreamy setting. "I've lost my place."

"What are you reading?" Harry asked.

"Stephen Kings' North-Eastern American Creature Study." Luna replied nonchalantly.

"Please promise me you aren't going there this summer." Harry said.

"Of course not." Luna shook her head. "We went last year."

Harry shook his head. He turned his attention to the twins. "Moony and the map?"

"Right." They said in unison. "You were right." Fred sat down across from them. "Lupin was Moony." George sat down as well, copying Luna's position, putting his feet on his brothers lap. "His name is Wolf

Wolf, not Moon Moon." Fred corrected. "Bit sloppy of you, mate." George pointed his foot at Harry accusingly.

"My translation was wrong, but the answer was the same." Harry shrugged. "A map?"

"You already know about it." George returned his foot to his twins lap. "You said so last year." Fred added. "We solemnly swear we are up to no good." They said at the same time.

Harry smiled broadly. "I couldn't help myself."

"Tell us what you know and the map is yours." Fred pulled the parchment from George's pocket.

"Again." Luna added.

The twins looked to Luna. "What?"

"That map will be his, again." Luna repeated.

"That's our Luna." George said. "Always knows more than she does." Fred gave her a proud look.

"She's not 'your' Luna." Harry arced an eyebrow at them.

"Oh?" Fred asked. "Is she your Luna?" George motioned to her feet.

"If she would have me." Harry turned toward Luna.

"You're a bit old for me, Mister Potter." She giggled.

"You." Harry squeezed her foot. "Are worth the wait."

"I think we walked in on something here, Forge." Fred said. "Agreed, Ged." George looked from the duo to his twin. "Little Luna has enchanted poor Potter."

Harry laughed and shook his head. "You want to know what I know. Lupin is Moony, Sirius Black is Padfoot, my father was Prongs, and Wormtail was Peter Pettigrew."

"The Marauders." The two said in a hushed tone saved for words of praise.

23.

"Hey there." An all too familiar voice said from nearby.

Harry's head snapped up, finding the source immediately. Death sat lounging across from him. It looked like they were still in the cabin, but he couldn't feel the train moving.

"How?" Harry groaned. "Did I spontaneous acquire a peanut allergy? Did I sleepwalk off the train? Did someone strangle me with my tie? How?"

"Easy there." Death chuckled. "You're not dead. I just wanted to talk."

"Oh." Harry blushed. "So... how's your day?"

"Great!" She smiled brightly. "Thanks for asking. It's usually 'I'm too young' or 'not like this'. No one ever asks how I'm doing."

"That's disconcerting." Harry sighed.

"It's a thankless job." She shrugged her shoulders.

"What's up?" Harry settled back into the cushion.

"You had a busy year." She smiled at him. "You killed a dementor, destroyed all but one horcrux, and managed not to die."

Harry laughed. "Once the first two were done it was the hardest part was staying awake in class."

"You could just test out of Hogwarts." Death offered.

"That would bring too much attention from Dumbledore." Harry shook his head. "He wants to control me. Proving Sirius was innocent and claiming my titles is suspicious enough already."

"You're going to have to fight him sooner or later." She countered.

"I'm more powerful than I was, but I'm not where I can defeat him." Harry sighed. "Plus, he's got the Elder Wand."

"No, he doesn't." Death shook her head.

"I've seen him with it." Harry spoke slowly.

"You've seen him with a wand made of elder wood." Death clarified. "You collected all three, you hold the title 'Master of Death'. They belong to you. Just like your sword, call them and they will appear."

"And Dumbledore suddenly finds himself without a wand." Harry arched an eyebrow.

"The wand he has now is powerful, it is made of elder wood, but it is not the Elder Wand." Death explained. "Just like that stone you destroyed. It was a powerful magical item, but it was not the Resurrection Stone."

Harry let the information settle. "Is that what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"No." Death said cheerily. "I wanted to let you know that since you've changed the time-line I've had a pleasantly slow year. That's how I've been able to visit you now."

"There have to be hundred of people dying every day." Harry scrunched up his brow. "Just from natural causes, not even considering random accidents."

"I'm not the only Death." She explained. "We're an entire pantheon unto ourselves, though we do have connections to others."

"That makes sense." Harry said slowly. "Glad I could help, I guess."

"It was a nice break in the pace." Death stood up and stretched.

Harry couldn't help but admire her taut body. Damn teenage hormones. He met her eyes to see her grinning. She shook her head.

"Caught you looking."

Harry blushed.

"I'll see you around." Death stepped over to the door. She looked over her shoulder and blew him a kiss.

Harry startled awake. Luna had already adjusted in her seat to prepare for his movement. The twins had left shortly after giving him the map but there was someone else in the cabin with them. An older girl, she was dressed in stylish robes that weren't from the school, which meant she lived in the wizarding side of the world rather than the muggle. Her face looked familiar, but his half-awake brain was having trouble placing her. He took in her full appearance.

She was slender, athletic, and her robe was cut to accentuate her form. Her skin had a sun-kissed tone to it that meant she spent a lot of time outdoors. The only magical types that did that were quidditch players. Her long, black hair was pulled back into a tight braid.

"Harry Potter." The girl purred. "Last year I was discarded to the reserves when Malfoy bought the team brooms. I didn't expect any better this time. And yet." She paused, her eyes traveling over him slowly. "Not only am I playing in every game, but Harry Potter decides to give the other houses extra lessons. Thanks to you, and Malfoy disappearing, I played my best year. I got an offer from the Kestrels."

His brain finally came up to speed. Alyn Lind, seventh year seeker for Slytherin.

"That's fantastic." Harry smiled at her.

"I would love to thank you." She leaned forward, running her tongue over her lips. "If we were alone."

"I don't mind." Luna scooted over to free Harry from her legs.

Harry looked to Luna then to the Alyn. She smiled and it sent a shock straight through Harry right to his groin. His dick was happy to answer the call. Alyn dropped to her knees, a flick of her wrist unbuckled his belt and opened his pants. Grabbing the front of his boxers, she pulled them down, and wrapped her fingers around his shaft. A couple of strokes and he was painfully hard.

"Nice broomstick." She cooed.

Harry trembled as she leaned forward, placing a brief kiss on the tip of his cock. He groaned, forcing himself not to grab her head. Her tongue circled around the sensitive tip. He felt his hips buck as she took him into her mouth. Harry ran a hand through her hair, pushing gently, feeding more of his cock into the wet heat of her mouth. Her shiny, pink lips slid around his thickness as he fought to push deeper. He could feel his end quickly approaching.

"Going to cum." He grunted.

Alyn pulled his cock out of her mouth and before to stroke his spit-soaked shaft. She looked into his eyes as her hand moved hard and fast. Harry moaned as he reached his peak. Long streaks of cum burst forth. Alyn tried to move out of the way. The first shot was so powerful it landed in her hair, the next traced a line across her cheek. She giggled as she watched several more shots launch from his pulsing cock, this time pointed away from her.

She smiled as she looked at puddle of cum on the floor. "Thanks for warning me."

Harry nodded, panting and unable to speak. Alyn slowed her strokes, milking the last bit of cum out of him. She drew her wand. A flick of her wrist and the mess was cleaned up. She tucked him back into his pants, taking the time to use her hands rather than magic. Alyn stood, adjusting her robes before leaving.

"It's bigger than I thought." Luna said.

Harry jumped, practically forgetting she was there. "Thanks?"

"Nice looking too." Luna went back to reading her book.

Harry chuckled. This train ride was definitely better than last time.

24.

Harry got off the train and froze. It felt like something heavy had hit his chest. His vision began to cloud up. There waiting for him he found Petunia, Vernon, and Dudley, all dressed nicely and looking around excitedly. Next to them stood Remus and Sirius. Vernon was talking quite animatedly with Remus who seemed to be rather involved in the conversation as well. Petunia and Sirius were talking in whispers, causing Petunia to giggle every so often. Dudley, on the other hand, simply gawked at everything.

His cousin was the first one to see him. Dudley nodded, and walked over to him, trying to look cool while also clearly excited to see him.

"Mate." Dudley pulled him into a quick hug. "This magic stuff is brilliant." He leaned closer. "And the birds that go to your school. Are you sure I can't come with you?"

Harry laughed. "Trust me, D. You don't want to. This is the first year that no one has tried to kill me."

Dudley's face went hard. "You need some muscle, you let me know."

Harry cleared his throat and wiped his eyes. This was the cousin he could have had for years. The family he could have had. It took everything he had not to take the train back to Hogwarts and kill Dumbledore. Only the hard truth that he wasn't powerful enough yet stopped him. A quick sneak attack might work, but the old man was crafty enough to have something prepared for that.

"Harry!" Petunia called. She waved him over. "Sirius and I were catching up. It's been years." She paused. "Where is Rook?"

"Uh." Harry looked to Sirius.

Helpfully, his godfather shrugged.

"He stayed at Hogwarts." Harry said slowly. "Decided that he liked the forest nearby. I think he found a lady friend."

Vernon clapped his hands. "Haha! The chair is mine!"

"Please, dear." Petunia shook her head. "You were moping around for days after they left. And don't tell me it was just Harry you were missing. I saw you sitting on the couch when you thought I wasn't looking."

Vernon blustered and blushed. "He was a good dog." He finally muttered.

Harry sent a sly grin to Sirius.

"We were discussing where you were going stay this summer." Sirius chimed in.

"What did you come up with?" Harry asked.

"My place still needs some finishing touches." Sirius said. "The glass case worked great, by the way."

"Yes, thank you." Remus shook his head. "The headaches."

"How about you spend the summer with your aunt and uncle, we can pick you up for the World Cup, and next year you can stay with me?" Sirius said.

"World Cup?" Harry asked.

"You caught that, eh?" Sirius smiled broadly. "I've got some tickets to the World Cup. I'm not missing it this year. You, me, and the mongrel here. Box seats."

"That sounds wicked." Harry said. He shot a guilty look to Dudley.

"No worries." Dudley waved the look away. "Tried to make heads or tails of the game for the last hour. No clue how that works. What's the point of the rings if the gold one ends the game?"

Harry laughed.

"Harry." Fred spoke cautiously. "Are you alright there?" George asked.

The twins had moved up to flank him, a step behind to either side ready to step in if needed.

"Fred. George." Harry turned to the twins. "This is my aunt Petunia, uncle Vernon, and cousin Dudley. The vagabond there is Sirius Black, my godfather, and you know Professor Lupin."

"Remus." The werewolf said with a nod. "A professor no more."

"You're okay with this?" George whispered. "They had bars on the windows, mate." Fred matched the tone.

"It's a long story." Harry turned and gave them a smile. "Thanks for looking out, but it's no problem at all." He looked over to his aunt and uncle. "Would I be able to invite Fred and George over this summer?"

"Of course." Petunia smiled broadly. Her smile took a dastardly turn. "We'd love to hear any stories you have of Harry through the years."

"We have those." The twins said in unison.

"On second thought." Harry turned back to the twins. "Nope. Not happening."

"We aren't hooked up to the Floo." Petunia said. "I don't trust it with all this Voldermort business."

Her face went hard after she spoke. Vernon put an arm around her waist, pulling her close.

"Not the time to talk of such things." Vernon turned a concerned look to the twins. "Send an owl and we'll get something arranged." He looked to Harry. "I'm going to take Petunia out for some air. Dudley knows where we parked."

"Fred! George!" Molly Weasley yelled from a distance that didn't require such volume. "There you are! Oh, Harry dear, how are you?" Molly looked over at Sirius with a small touch of unease.

"Fine." Harry turned to look at Dudley. "Where did they park?"

Dudley looked at him funny. He shrugged. "I'll show you."

Sirius and Remus fell in beside them as they walked.

"Don't like her much, pup?" Sirius chuckled.

"She's overbearing, loud, and treats everyone like a child." Harry had to push down the anger that was building inside. "I wouldn't be surprised if she slipped Arthur a potion before they got married."

"That's not an accusation to say lightly." Remus shot Harry a worried look.

"Have you seen the man?" Harry shook his head. "He's a kind, caring, and curious. He's a completely different man when she's not around."

"He wouldn't be the first man beaten down by a woman." Sirius sighed. "Molly was quite the looker back in her day."

"That's not something I ever needed to know." Harry shuddered.

"It's true." Remus' voice had a touch of humor to it. "She was a year or two ahead of us, but I do remember how nicely her sweater fit."

"How she managed to get her skirt so short without getting in trouble I will never know." Sirius said in a dreamy manner.

"I should have gotten you neutered over the summer." Harry grumbled.

Remus howled with laughter.

"That's not funny, pup." Sirius glared at him. "It's bad enough that your uncle was in talks to have been stud a few litters."

"Like that wouldn't be the first-" Remus was stopped by a stinging hex to his foot. "What?"

"Finish that sentence and the summer of our sixth year will be next." Sirius tried to look angry at Remus.

"You wouldn't dare." Remus stared right back.

"So, there we were, fresh off the Express when Moony here gets an idea." Sirius started.

"Me?" Remus practically yelled. "It was you and Prongs!"

The two men broke down into a hushed argument. Harry looked over to Dudley. His cousin shrugged.

"Why would my dad want send him out to stud?" Dudley asked after a moment.

Harry found himself smiling again. This was already a better summer than the last time.

25.

The first thing that Harry noticed about the house was how clean it was. Not just the dusting and vacuuming, but all the extra junk had been removed. Ugly furniture, except for Vernons chair, had been replaced by better quality items that looked like they were made in the last couple of years rather than a decade ago. The second thing he noticed was that they had redecorated his room. Unlike in the past, when that meant locking his school supplies away, they had added it to the décor around the house. A Gryffindor banner hung on the back of the door and a few of the pictures from his album were now nicely framed and placed around the room. Not only that, but he saw a few new pictures as well. Photos of Lily growing up were added not only to his room, but to the hallway as well.

Harry felt that same punch in his chest. A large lump formed in his throat. Tears clouded his vision.

"Do you like it?" Petunia stared at him with an expectant, nervous look in her eyes.

Harry couldn't speak. He nodded as tears began to stream down his face. Petunia wrapped him in a tight hug. She kissed the top of his head.

"We have so many years to make up." She whispered. "So many years."

Harry looked up at the sound of Vernon clearing his throat. The man had red puffy eyes and was dabbing them with a handkerchief.

"Sorry." He smiled at them. "I didn't mean to startle you. These blasted allergies just snuck up on me."

"I know something that will help." Harry untangled from his aunt and pulled Vernon into a hug.

"Nope." Vernon managed to croak out. "Just getting worse. I think I need to lie down."

Harry nodded. He wiped his own tears as he looked over at Dudley. His cousin shook his head.

"I'm just made of sterner stuff." Dudley puffed out his chest.

Harry patted him on the shoulder. Dudley practically yanked Harry off his feet, pulling him into a hug. His cousin began to cry the loudest of all.

"Blasted allergies." Dudley managed to say. "Dad had the right idea. Need to lie down."

"Of course." Harry cleared his throat, trying to get the lump to leave. "Allergies are horrible this time of the year."

Petunia watched her son hurry up the stairs. She sighed. "The Dursley men have always had strong..." She smiled. "Allergies. It's good to see Vernon acting like himself again."

"Are you going to be okay with me living with Sirius?" Harry asked.

Petunia took a deep breath. "It will be an adjustment, but yes. He needs you as much as you need him."

"I'll make sure you're protected." Harry said firmly. "I'll add more protections and wards before I leave. It would be a good idea to put some on your car as well. Maybe craft you some personal charms too."

"That's for another day." Petunia beamed at him. "Get settled in your room and we'll figure out what to do for dinner. Vernon's doctor wasn't happy."

"It looked like he had lost some weight." Harry nodded.

Petunia nodded. "We have started taking walks around the neighborhood each night. Unfortunately, we've had to adjust our diets some."

Harry winced. He could remember the summer of half-melon lunches and soggy salad dinners.

"Nothing too drastic." Petunia chuckled. "Less red meat, more greens, and one glass of wine at dinner."

"Thank Merlin." Harry sighed. "I didn't want to have to sneak out to get good food."

"Harry James Potter." Petunia tried to sound stern but compared to her old voice it was laughable. "Are you implying that I am a bad cook?"

"Of course not." Harry laughed. "I'm sure that whatever you cook would feed the garden quite nicely."

"Such cheek." She pursed her lips at him. "I was going to take it easy on you." An evil look crossed her face. "How was your year? Any girls we should know about? Is it time to have the talk about the birds and the bees? I don't think Vernon is up for it, so I'll have to. You see, when a man and a woman-

"Nope." Harry plugged his ears. "Not happening."

He tried to escape up the stairs, but his aunt followed right behind. Petunia cackled with glee. A shiver ran up his spine. Bellatrix Lestranger's laugh had nothing on Petunia.

"I give, I give." Harry turned on his aunt.

Petunia smiled triumphantly. The expression on her face softened.

"Did you have a good year?" She asked.

"Yes, actually." Harry nodded. "No one tried to kill me, I'm doing great in all my classes, and I was able to sneak onto the quidditch field every other day."

"You stayed out of trouble?" She pressed.

"Trouble usually finds me." Harry sighed and shook his head. "Yes, no trouble this year. I spent a good portion of my time in the library."

"That's wonderful." Petunia said. "Any girls?"

"I thought that session of torture was over." Harry groaned.

"That was pestering." Petunia corrected. "This is sincere curiosity."

"How can I say no to that?" Harry sighed. "No. No girls. I kept to myself this year. It was nice not being the center of attention."

Petunia scrunched up her brow as she looked at him. "Why would you be the center of attention?"

"I'm something of a celebrity in the Magical World." Harry explained.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but why?" She asked.

Harry closed his eyes. "The night my parents were killed, Voldermort tried to kill me too."

Petunia gasped.

"There is a spell, it cannot be blocked by magical shields and kills almost one hundred percent of the time." Harry pointed to the faded scar on his head. "Except it didn't work on me. When he cast it at me, it bounced back and hit him instead. Due to that, I'm the Boy Who Lived. No one considers that I'm famous for the night my parents were killed."

Petunia wrapped him in her arms.

"On top of that." Harry continued. "Someone decided to write a series of books about my life. Grandiose tales about me living in a castle, slaying monsters, and basically being the modern Merlin."

"We need to get you a solicitor." Petunia grumbled.

"I'll get it settled once things have settled with Sirius." Harry squeezed her and then let her go. "His treatment by the Ministry caused a backlash from the public and they've had to go through years of legal history to check for any other miscarriages of justice."

"You certainly live an exciting life." Petunia shook her head. "Let's hope the next few weeks here are simple enough to recover."

"I hope so." Harry took a breath and let it out. "It's been a long day. Did you want to get some take-away?"

Dobby popped in next to them. "No. Harry Potter sir and families be eating the dinner Dobby made." He crossed his arms. "Dobby heard Tuna. Healthy, tasty food. No take-away."

"Tuna?" His aunt looked at the elf.

"Pe-Tuna." Dobby pointed at her.

"Pe-toon-ya." She enunciated.

"Pet-Tuna." Dobby nodded. "Healthy, tasty dinner be ready soon."

"You've created a monster." Harry chuckled.

26.

Strengthening a magical core was similar to working a muscle. It required time, dedication, and effort. The quickest way to do it was to drain every bit of magic out, as safely as possible, then let it refill. The only problem being that there was a fine line between safely draining a magical core and destroying it. Pushing too hard would actually cause it to shatter and kill the wizard or witch in the process.

Along the same principle, but with more control, there was something akin to strength training. The environment also played a part. Using magic in an area full of ambient energy, like Hogwarts or Diagon Alley, was like using lower weight, while doing the same exercises in an area with little to no ambient,

Privet Drive for example, was the equivalent of using much heavier weights. The lack of ambient magic meant the magical core had to replenish itself.

The fastest way to drain his magical core would be a quick workout of high-powered spells early in the day. Then, while his core recovered, Harry could turn his focus to his physical training. Keeping his body healthy helped things along as well.

Unfortunately, that wasn't an option. Not only would this draw a lot of attention, from the muggles in the neighborhood and the DMLE. They might not be able to track wandless magic, but the amount of energy he would need to dispel was significant.

Instead, Harry focused on small, precise wandless magic. Using a cutting spell to peel an apple and then summoning the seeds from the core, writing letters by directing the quill with his magic, and transfiguring random items around the house.

Petunia had found an old box of tin soldiers that they had bought for Dudley years ago. With a bit of concentration, Harry was able to animate the figures. It quickly became a game that took over the wide coffee table in the living room. There three colors, one for Petunia, Dudley, and Vernon. They would instruct Harry how they wanted their troops to do, and then he would move them. The soldiers were limited to blades and arrows, their muskets and cannons worked a little too well. Vernon's chair had a spattering of burn marks now. They had also added a couple of old mugs, a bundled-up sock (much to Dobby's horror), and a stack of coasters to vary up the landscape.

Even with all that, it still wasn't pushing his magic as far as he needed. On a whim, Harry tried to change his hair color. Much to his surprise, it had worked. He wasn't a metamorphmagus like Tonks. She could change effortlessly with a thought. Any changes he made took considerable focus and magical power. This discovery led to a new evening ritual. Harry would spend about an hour in front of the mirror cutting his hair, changing the color, then growing it back out and returning the natural shade. Once exhausted, he would shamle to his bed and pass out.

He didn't trust his skill enough to mess with anything more. Changing his bone structure, even the cartilage, was no easy feat. The skin was even more complicated. He did have success with his fingernails and toenails. Harry could trim, grow, harden, and sharpen them. Having claws at will was something he was going to keep a tight lid on.

Harry could already feel a noticeable change by the end of the second week. Just in time for the twins to visit. Much to Arthur's joy, they took muggle transit to the house. Harry stood out on the front lawn watching as a cab pulled up in front. Arthur stepped out, a bit ruffled but still grinning like a loon, followed by a just as messy Fred and George.

The twins opened the boot of the cab to get their bags. They were only staying for the a few days, but they came prepared. Harry watched them struggle to get their bags out for a moment before coming over to help. The twins were skilled in a great many things, packing things without an expansion charm was not one of them.

"And how much was that?" Arthur leaned back speak to the cabby.

Harry didn't hear the amount, but he did see Arthur hand the cabby a wad of cash. Considering the exchange rate from galleons to pounds, even a couple hundred was pocket change. The cabby quickly hopped out of the car and scrambled to help them unpack.

Arthur turned around to admire the Muggle neighborhood. He gave a wave to Mrs. Figg, which would have been suspicious, except Arthur then waved at every person he saw. The man was having a blast.

"He's been grinning like a loon since we got off the train." George chuckled. "It was the same as one of ours." Fred shook his head. "Better graffiti though." George turned to his twin. "Leagues ahead of the Express." Fred nodded. "Might need to get a telephone machine to call all those numbers." George smiled.

Harry didn't even try to fight the smile that crossed his face. His attention shifted to Arthur as the man began to approach the house. The mans' broad smile began to falter as he got closer. His foot came down just a bit too fast, causing him to stumble for a step. He stared at his sons, then Harry, and finally down at his hand. His left hand. Arthur's face scrunched up in grief Harry had only seen once before.

"He crossed the wards." Harry muttered.

He slipped between the twins, carefully approaching the man.

"Arthur." Harry spoke softly. "Come inside, so we can talk."

"Harry?" The mans' eyes snapped up to him. They were red, filled with tears.

"It's a lot." Harry continued to move closer, holding his hand out with the palm up. "It was for me too. Come inside, we can talk. It's safe."

Arthur straightened up, there was a strength there that hadn't been before. He nodded. The man grabbed the bags and strode purposefully toward the house.

"What happened?" Fred asked, his voice void of the usual cheer it had.

"Do you two feel any different?" Harry asked.

Fred looked to George, who shook his head. The twins looked back to Harry and shrugged.

"That's a relief." Harry whispered. "Let's talk inside."

Vernon opened the door as Arthur got closer.

"Arthur, I believe?" His uncle held a hand-out. "Haven't been properly introduced, Vernon Dursley."

Arthur shot a questioning look to Harry. The young man nodded. Arthur shook the offered hand. Vernon took in the sight of the man.

"You too, eh?" Vernon sighed. "We'll fix you a cup of tea."

Harry headed inside with the twins a step behind him. Vernon had already led Arthur into the kitchen. Harry closed the front door behind them, then locked it with magic as well as the deadbolt. The twins shared a silent conversation before moving deeper into the house. The trio made it into the kitchen just as Arthur and Vernon were sitting down. Petunia humming to herself, reading a newspaper.

"Pet." Vernon spoke softly. "Could you make a pot of tea?"

Dobby popped into the room. "Dobby is on tea duty today."

Vernon laughed. "Dobby, my good elf, would you make us a pot of tea?"

"Take a seat." Harry offered the stunned twins.

An uneasy silence settled on the room, only broken by the sound of Dobby griping at the electric kettle.

"Last year." Harry started. "I was bitten by a basilisk while rescuing Ginny. The venom killed me for a moment. Instead of dying, it destroyed a horcrux that had latched onto me. Once it was gone, I started to see things, and remember things, that had been kept from me. When I got home, back here, I put wards in place to protect myself and my family. Protection against compulsions, memory charms, and other mental magics." Harry motioned to his aunt and uncle. "You can see how much that has changed things."

"What does that have to do with dad?" George asked.

"Think you know already, George." Fred whispered.

"The potions, compulsions, and memory charms have been removed." Harry gazed at Arthur.

Arthur made to speak but had to clear his throat a few times before the words could come out.

"Boys." The man looked to his sons. "I love you, and your siblings with all my heart. I truly do."

"But not, mom." George whispered.

Arthur shook his head. "How?"

"Not sure." Fred shrugged. "Could be the twin thing." George added. "Can't be compelled." Fred continued. "Mind games just don't work on us." George nodded. "We've tried to tell you before." Fred's voice dropped to a whisper. "You always forget." George matched the tone. "Always." They said in unison.

"Molly?" Harry asked.

The teacup in front of Arthur shattered. A bubble appeared around the explosion, putting the pieces back together.

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry said.

"One sugar for Vernons, cream for Tuna, and coffee for Harry Potter sir." Dobby moved around the table with ease. "Frog and Gourd want tea? Mister Wheezes?"

"No thank you." Arthur managed after a deep breath. "Yes. Molly." The name dripped with venom.

"Years upon years. Compulsions, potions, and memory charms." He looked to the twins. "How long would it take me to forget?"

"An hour at most." Fred waved off the cup of tea. "Most of the time quicker." George nodded, holding up two fingers for sugar.

"Anything from Dumbledore?" Harry looked over to Arthur.

The man shook his head. "How long will this... clarity last?"

"If you trust me." Harry said. "I can make sure it stays."

"How?" Arthur met his eyes. "My trust is fragile right now."

"Three ways." Harry said. "The easiest, and messiest, would be a divorce. One test from the goblins and it's done. The second, more complicated, would be to create a magical contract that binds Molly for harming others. You would have to get her to sign it though."

"Nothing that can be done before leaving the protection of the wards." Arthur sighed. "Divorce would destroy our family."

"You said three." Vernon spoke for the first time.

"It requires Arthur to trust me completely." Harry kept his gaze on Arthur. "Swear fealty, as the head of House Weasley, to House Potter. You would be under my protection, regardless of where you are."

"That doesn't sound too drastic." Vernon shrugged.

"It would mean that I would control House Weasley." Harry shifted to look at Vernon. "Any attack, from within or otherwise, would be seen as an attack on House Potter and the magic would react in kind."

"It would kill her." Arthur whispered.

"Almost certainly." Harry nodded.

"Well." Fred grabbed the flask from his father's jacket pocket, poured a good shot into George's teacup, and downed it. "That's some shit." George finished.

"What about the wards you drew around the house?" Petunia asked.

"They wouldn't work long-term." Harry answered. "Two to four weeks, depending."

"And they need blood." Arthur took the flask back and added some to his tea.

"No." Harry shook his head. "They can be done without blood. Ink works just as well. They would just need to be in a place she wouldn't see."

Arthur chuckled. "Anywhere from the neck down then."

"You two don't..." Harry let the words hang.

"Harry." George scoffed. "There are certain things a child doesn't need to know about their parents." Fred shuddered.

Arthur smiled at his sons. "No. Maybe for an anniversary or birthday."

"Alright." Harry rubbed a hand across his face. "I'll draw some runes on you. Don't count on them lasting more than two weeks. Is that enough time?"

Arthur let out a long, tired sigh. "It will have to be."

"Whatever you decide, dad." George smiled at his father. "We are with you." Fred finished. "Ginny too." George added quickly. "Maybe Ron." Fred continued. "Not sure about Percy." George shook his head. "Not sure what went wrong with that one." Fred shook his head as well, their movements syncing up.

"Follow me, Arthur." Harry stood. "We can get this finished and move on to happier things. You're in a Muggle house, surrounded by Muggle things, with actual Muggles to talk to."

Arthur smiled. "That is true."

27.

Harry applied the protection runes to Arthur. Even in such a time, he couldn't help himself. Harry placed the runes on his lower back, effectively given Arthur a magical tramp stamp. He had to force himself not to giggle. Harry would probably never tell anyone about it, and he doubted Arthur knew what one was. This was little prank was just for him.

Arthur stayed for dinner, much to Dobby's delight. They found that Muggle alcohol didn't have as much of a kick to magical folk. Petunia, Arthur, and Vernon nearly finished off a bottle of fine whiskey Vernon had saved for special guests with only Arthur remaining conscious. The man had a pleasant buzz but was far from knock-out drunk. He had taken the Night Bus home, just to be careful.

Fred and George were rather impressed with the coffee table battlefield Harry had arranged. With their help, they created five new armies of twelve troops each from random bits and bobs they found. The twins also transfigured the rarely used loveseat into another table. This one was sculpted to have a landscape all its own complete with a couple of small mountains, a forest, and a river. Fred and George could control their troops, Dobby moved his, and Harry moved his own as well as Dudley's. They still took as a turn-based game. Dobby was the first one out, preferring the tactic of simply charging at whichever enemy was in front of his troops. The elf nearly cackled with glee when he nearly knocked Harry out of the game. His downfall came from neglecting the terrain. Harry's final squad had the high ground. By the end of that skirmish Harry only had three troops left.

Luckily, Dudley was making a rather impressive string of hit-and-run battles with the twins. Naturally, Fred and George teamed up. They had thought Dudley to be easy prey. Unfortunately for them, his cousin had a deep love of military history. He split his twelve troops into pairs, used the forest to spread out their numbers. The twins were so busy focusing on Dudley they didn't realize that Harry had defeated Dobby and was on his way before it was too late. His trio of troopers picked off their soldiers outside of the forest, leaving them fighting a battle on two sides.

Sure, Harry only had three troops, but Dudley had been whittling down their numbers. The twins started out with twenty-four and were now sitting at ten. Dudley had five left, still in the forest, and Harry had three.

Fred and George retreated from the forest. With them each having a turn they were able to leap-frogged through the tree, providing defense to the troops as they moved. Harry used the time to reposition his trio across a stretch of open field, settling in for their final battle. There wasn't enough time to put the river between the approaching soldiers and his or get to a better location. Dudley, continued to harass the fleeing troops, though didn't manage to actually thin their numbers.

The final battle came down to remaining troops from all four armies battling it out on the open ground. Fred and George had the numbers but had to hold off Dudley's commandos and Harry's warriors. The cousins fought valiantly, but in the end, the twins came out victorious.

"Should we clean this up?" Dudley asked.

"It will stay like this for a few more hours." Harry was hit with a wave of exhaustion. He looked at the clock to see that it was nearly four in the morning. "Once it changes back, we can clean it up."

"You know, Harrykins." One of the twins said, Harry was too tired to care which.

"This is an interesting little game you came up with." The other continued.

"Give us a bit of time to work on it and we could take the world by storm."

"Sleep first." Harry yawned. "We can talk after breakfast. Let me show you to your room."

Harry led them upstairs to what had once been his room. Now, it had been cleaned and redecorated as a guest room. The queen size bed had been replaced by two twins for their stay. Harry still had no idea where Dobby slept. The elf swore it was somewhere safe and with enough space. He suspected the attic. As long as the elf was happy, that was what mattered.

"It's been a busy day." One of the twins said. "First you save our family. Then you spoil us with fresh sheets."

For once, the duo didn't finish the others' sentences. The fact that one had passed out the moment he hit the bed probably had something to do with it.

"Not sure I saved your family, mate." Harry whispered. "Felt like I broke it."

"It has been broken for a long time." The still-awake twin said before slipping into bed. "Night, Harry. You're a good friend."

Harry wanted to think his misting vision was due to his need for sleep, but even he didn't believe that. He had potentially shattered the Weasley family, and they thought he was a good friend. Would they think that when their parents split, or worse? In the end, it was up to Arthur.

He wasn't sure how he made it downstairs and into his room. His next conscious thought was the smell of bacon. Harry got out of bed to find that he hadn't changed out of the clothes he had worn yesterday. He slipped on some fresh ones before heading to the kitchen. Fred and George were sitting at the table, looking much more awake than they had a right to be. Dudley was practically asleep in his chair. His aunt and uncle were elsewhere.

"Dobby, could I have you grab a couple of Hangover Potions." Harry yawned. "They are going to need them once they are up and about."

"Dobby did last night." The elf smiled at him.

"You are amazing, Dobby." Harry returned the smile.

"Now, Harrykins." Fred put down his fork before speaking.

"We're saving up to start our own business." George was practically bouncing with energy.

"Our own shop that will blow Zonkos out of the water." Fred was starting to get excited as well.

"We'd like to add in that game of yours as well." George said.

"When did you come up with this?" Harry asked.

"Last night." George answered.

"About the time Dobby started cackling." Fred added.

Dobby let out another cackle. "Dobby almost had you, Harry Potter sir."

"It was over Dobby. I had the high ground." Harry shook his head.

"Harry Potter sir underestimates Dobbys power." The elf rubbed his hands together. "Next time, Dobby will be victorious."

"Dobby." Harry couldn't help but smile. "I am glad you are on my side."

"Of course, Harry Potter sir." Dobby instantly swapped back to his usual self. "Harry Potter sir is a great wizard and Dobby is honored to work."

A brief flash of holding the lifeless elf in his arms hit him. Harry stood from the table. He pulled a very shocked Dobby into a hug. Dobby happily returned the embrace even if he was confused. The elf pulled a sock from his pocket, one that looked suspiciously like one that Harry had lost a week ago. He held it out to Harry to use as a tissue.

Harry laughed. He took the offered sock and dabbed his eyes. The twins and Dudley watched, more than a little confused. His cousin looked to Fred and George, who shrugged.

"Right." George said once Harry returned to the table.

"We could sell it in different variations." Fred pressed on.

"As well as fold out tables that have a variety of terrain." George said.

"Each set would come with two armies included." Fred looked to his twin.

"Twelve each for the standard game." George pulled a piece of parchment from his pocket.

"These are our notes." They said as one.

"Wow." Harry looked down at the long list. "That sounds great. Give me a chance to read it later?"

"Of course." They nodded, moving in sync.

"Now." George leaned in.

"Do we need to Harrykins the wonders of female companionship?" Fred smiled as Harry blushed.

"You're a young wizard, Harrykins." George pressed.

"Caught the eye of more than a few witches." Fred wiggled his eyebrows.

"Wizards too if you swing that way." George grinned.

"But you haven't so much as looked at a bird." Fred sighed dramatically.

"Pushed sweet Hermione away too." George added with equal drama.

"It doesn't feel right." Harry tried to think how to phrase it. "I'm..." He motioned to himself.

"The great and powerful Harry Potter." Fred mock-bellowed.

"The Boy Who Lived." George waved a hand as though introducing Harry to a crowd.

"I hate that title." Harry rubbed a hand over his face.

"There are no birds in the area?" George asked. "Muggle ladies who don't know?" Fred asked.

"You've got the bad boy rep to back you up too." Dudley added. "Girls love trouble." His cousin motioned to the basilisk bite. "And scars."

"Fine." Harry groaned. "I'll look for a muggle woman."

He froze when he realized what he had said. The twins shared a devious glance.

"A woman he says, Fred."

"Not a girl, George."

"Harry likes the older ladies."

"Yes." Harry took a deep breath. "I like older girls. Sixth and seventh years, maybe. A bit older than that."

"Say a professor?" Fred grinned.

"Not dear Minnie." George had the same expression as well.

"He did say older." Fred pointed out.

"A little older." Harry held his head in his hands.

"Want to pursue Astronomy?" George pressed in.

"Or Arithmancy?" Fred didn't let up.

"Maybe runes instead?" George leaned back in his chair.

"You two are worse than Petunia." Harry muttered.

28.

There were certain things in his life that caused instant regret. One of those things was showing Fred and George videogames. While they had been interested in the game Harry had inadvertently created, they were over the moon for the SNES. Harry had planned to take them to the cinema, maybe out for some pizza, and show them around the muggle world. Instead, the twins were hooked. They learned quickly and were trouncing Harry and Dudley in Street Fighter. Only Dobby could defend the honor of Number Four Privet Drive. George and Dobby ignited a fierce rivalry that lasted almost until dawn.

It wasn't until Arthur appeared to get the twins that they finally took a break. Arthur tried to put on a brave face, but it was clear there was something wrong. Harry told himself that he shouldn't feel guilty, that it was Molly who did this to the family. Still, it hurt to see the man in so much pain.

"We'll talk later." Arthur gave Harry a tired smile.

For once Arthur didn't want to go via muggle transportation. Dobby popped them to the Burrow. The elf was gone for a bit longer than expected. When Dobby returned, he looked worried.

"What happened?" Harry asked his friend.

"All the Weasleys are sad." Dobby trudged over to Harry and gave held his arms out for a hug.

Harry bent down and scooped the elf up, holding him tight. Dobby began to sob loudly.

"Misses Weasley isn't going to be Misses Weasley for much longer." Dobby said after a good long cry. "Arthur is sad, Harry's Ron is sad, the little Gin is sad, Frog and Ged tried to be happy for the Weasleys, but it didn't work."

Dobby began to sob once more. Harry winced as the elf used his shirt as a hanky.

"Do you want to take the day off and help around their place?" Harry asked softly.

Dobby nodded.

"That's perfectly fine." Harry rubbed the elf's back. "I'm sure they would like that. Talk to Arthur, ask if there is anything he needs. Let me know if you want to spend longer over there, ok?"

Dobby slipped out of his grip. "Thank you, boss."

The elf disappeared with a small pop.

"Was that Dobby?" Petunia asked stepping into the hallway.

"Yes, he's going to be with the Weasleys for today. Maybe a little longer." Harry explained. "Arthur wasn't in the mood to talk, but I've gathered that he's going with the divorce route."

"That poor man." She sighed. "He's a kind soul."

Harry nodded. "I'm going to give them a couple of days before I check in on them."

"That's a good idea." His aunt gave him a small smile. "It will give us time to get a gift basket together. You said he liked muggle things?"

Harry nodded once more. It was still odd to hear his aunt use words like that so casually. Petunia grabbed the keys from the hallway table.

"I'll be back in a bit." She called over her shoulder.

Harry watched her go. There was something he was missing. He couldn't put his finger on what it was, but whatever it was dangled just out of reach. Petunia and Vernon had been in a lot better mood after speaking with Arthur. He hadn't hung around while the trio finished off the whiskey, so he didn't know the details of their conversation. Honestly, he had avoided getting too close. The pain hit a little too close to his previous life and led a train of thought he didn't want to explore.

His old life was still fresh in his mind, but it was disconnected. It was like watching a movie rather than actual memories. He wasn't sure if it was a coping mechanism to distance himself, or if he was settling into this life. Small moments were starting to fade. His future after Hogwarts was a jumble of potion saturated falsehoods. The years fighting Voldermort followed by chasing down the remaining Death Eaters were the sharpest.

The timeline had already been altered to an extreme extent. Sirius was free, his relatives were actually family, Pettigrew was out of the picture, and there was only one horcrux remaining. The knowledge from his previous life wasn't going to be of use for much longer.

Unfortunately, that meant he was going to need to stop relaxing and get to work. He needed to figure out how to deal with the powerful Death Eaters. The heavy hitters in politics, finance, and battlefield specialties. Harry wanted to believe that Malfoy was out of the picture for good. With Lucius at the helm, they weren't nearly as big of a problem. Narcissa was the one that knew how to make things happen. Removing her reason to swap sides meant that she posed a very real threat. However, Lucius was a slave to his pride. Letting his wife have control was not a move he would ever willingly make.

Harry needed to decide how he was going to handle the situation. Discrediting them, exposing the corruption, and using the legal system would take a long time. They could stall the process, or make it completely disappear. The more violent and depraved of the Death Eaters targeted muggles or muggle-born which meant most of the Purebloods didn't give a rat's ass about it.

Killing them made the most sense. Going in to his fourth year put him on a time crunch. If things stayed close enough to his old life, then Riddle would regain a body at the end of term. Once that happened Harry bet that fighting the Death Eaters would be tricky. Right now, they were unprepared and there was no reason to expect an attack.

He had five days before Sirius would pick him up for the World Cup. Harry needed to get to work.

"Oh boy, here I go killing again." Harry muttered.

29.

The first thing he had to do was find where all the prominent Death Eaters were. Azkaban held some of the worst but breaking in to kill them would require a lot of preparation. Unfortunately, he didn't have the time for that. He also couldn't make too many waves just yet. Going after the Death Eaters that weren't as public was the best course of action.

"I need a wand." Harry muttered.

"You have a wand, boss." Death chimed in.

Harry looked up to see her lounging on his bed nearby. She was showing up a lot more recently. He wasn't sure if it was a good sign, but he didn't mind the company.

"I can't use this wand." Harry twirled his wand along his fingers.

"Not that one." Death shook her head. "This one."

With a flourish she produced the Elder Wand. Harry looked from it to her. He shrugged.

"That works." Harry took it, feeling the sudden rush of bone-deep chill that came with its power.

"Thanks."

"No problem." Death winked at him.

"I don't mind the company, but what are you doing here?" Harry placed his wand in his new chest.

"You're about to put some numbers on the board." Death didn't seem offended. "It saves me a trip being close to you."

Harry crossed the room to stand next to her. He held out a hand, reaching out to touch her. There was a slight tingle where his fingers were supposed to make contact, but there wasn't any touching.

"Stop it, that tickles." She slapped at his hands, sending more tingles where her hands passed through his arm.

"I just wanted to make sure I wouldn't hurt you if things get crazy." Harry shook the tingles from his hand as he pulled back.

"Aw, thanks boss." Death smiled brightly at him. "So, who are we going after first?"

"I'm going to pick off the ones that won't be missed first." Harry tapped his chin. "Macnair, would be a good place to start. He's the easiest to find as well. Avery, I think he works at the Ministry. Selwyn, I'm going to make him suffer, just have to find him. Yaxley would be a bit high profile, but he needs to be taken out before he can cause too much damage in the DMLE." He paused. "Greyback too. Just need to be careful not to get bit. Though being a werewolf would be kind of cool."

"Maybe next time." Death said.

"What?" Harry looked to her.

"Nothing." She shrugged. "Go on."

Harry scrunched up his brow, studying her. After a moment he continued. "The Carrow's, they shouldn't bring too much attention. The Nott's too. Crabbe and Goyle should be easy to find."

"That's nine known Death Eaters." Death added. "People will notice."

"Can't be helped." Harry shrugged. "The ones in Azkaban are another matter."

"Really?" Death slipped off the bed and began to explore his room. "They're all in one place, locked in cells. That's like shooting fish in a barrel."

"Not sure how I'd get in, avoid the dementors, and get out without being caught." Harry replied.

"Why?" Death asked. "Just pop in, zap them, and pop out."

"There are wards." Harry shook his head.

"Oh, right." Death practically skipped over to his side. "I didn't give you the full rundown." She wrapped her hands around his arm. This time he actually felt her touch. "You are kind of dead, which is why mental magic won't work on you anymore. More than that, you're kind of death too."

"Kind of death?" Harry tilted his head to the side. "That... what?"

"The Master of Death thing." She rolled her eyes. "Not so much a master, more like a co-worker. Basically, anytime you die you have the option to go back and try again. You're not immortal, you can still die, but once you're bored with that, you can join the ranks of Death."

"Anyone who collects the Hallows can do that?" Harry asked.

"Nope." Death wiggled closer to him. "This is nice. I haven't been able to touch someone in so long." She slipped her arm across his shoulder. "In the dimensions where the Hallows exist there is only one set."

Whoever collects all three, or however many there are, it changes, holds them. The items return to Death once the carrier joins the ranks."

"Wow." Harry stumbled over to the bed. "That's... that's a lot to take in."

Death helped him settle. "Yeah. We try to spread the knowledge out. Otherwise, it's overwhelming."

Harry took a couple of long, deep breaths. He focused on his surrounding, trying to ground himself. He could feel the bed he was sitting on, hear Dobby cursing at Mario, smell the slight lemon scent of the cleaner, and see the ceiling above him.

"Okay." Harry sat back up. "Good to know. What does that have to do with wards?"

"They can't hold you." Death shrugged. "Didn't you think altering the wards around the house was a little too easy? They were set by Dumbledore, a guy who knows what he's doing, and you sliced through them like a hot knife through butter."

"You mean I could just apparate into Hogwarts if I wanted?" Harry asked.

"Hogwarts. Azkaban. The girls locker-room." Death counted off the options.

Harry laughed. "Thanks, I needed that."

"Happy to help." She smiled at him. "You ready to bust some heads?"

"Yeah." Harry nodded. "I think I am. How do I do this then? I've never been to Azkaban how it is now. It changed a lot once it was rebuilt."

"Think of a person rather than a place." Death suggested. "Got one?"

"I've got the perfect one." Harry smiled at her.

Without a sound he disappeared. A moment later he appeared in a grimy cell. The smell of salt water was overpowered by body odor and other things that he didn't want to think about. A woman covered near the bars spun to stare at him.

"Bellatrix." His voice came out flat, completely void of emotion.

"Who are you?" The woman pressed her back against the bars.

Her eyes darted around the cell. Seemingly finding something, she began to shimmy toward her right. Harry let the full force of his magic loose. Bellatrix stared at him in wonder.

"I don't think we've met." She whispered.

Harry shook his head. He stalked across the cell toward her. She tried to push herself away from him, only realizing what she was doing when the bars started to grind into her spine. There were many things Bellatrix had seen but never experienced before. Peace had always eluded her. Love, actual love, not the twisted version her family or even the Dark Lord gave her was something she could hardly comprehend. Fear though, she had plenty of experience with. Bellatrix reveled in fear. There was a glorious warmth that spread through her when she saw that pure, primal emotion staring back at her.

This, though, this was fear like she had never known.

"Not in this life." Harry came to a stop. He held out the Elder Wand, pointing it directly between her eyes. "I don't get the appeal."

"What?" Her voice had a shiver to it.

"This." He waved his free hand between them. "Seeing you so scared, holding all this power over you. I don't understand why you like it so much."

"I'm not scared." Bellatrix screamed.

"That's where you're wrong." The wand disappeared from his hand. "You're terrified. I get that now. You've always been terrified. Poor, broken Bellatrix. Just needs someone to protect her. A great, powerful wizard to keep the fear away." He sighed and shook his head. "How utterly consumed were you once you found out your Dark Lord was gone?"

"You know nothing." She screeched.

The rage boiling inside her spurred her into action. She raced across her cell, ripping the bone-shiv from the piled straw that was her bed. Bellatrix turned, ready to pounce on the intruder only to find him standing directly in front of her.

She was launched off her feet. An unseen force slammed her against the wall. Her vision blurred. The figure in front of her seemed to split into a trio.

"I'm sure in some other life you found that powerful wizard." Harry pointed a finger at her. "Someone to love you, maybe someone that could heal you." He snapped his fingers, sending a blade of pure magic toward her. "But this isn't that story."

Her head dropped to the ground. Harry let the body fall. He turned to see a dementor standing outside the cell. It stared hungrily at where the corpse had fallen.

"Attracted by the fear?" Harry asked.

It turned its attention to him. Frost spread across the floor of the cell, directly toward where he stood. Harry flicked his hand, summoning the Elder Wand as he did.

"Serenitas Ferrum." He spoke.

The spell bisected the dementor. Harry looked down at the wand.

"You certainly pack a punch." He chuckled.

A sense of warmth spread from the wand up his arm.

"Ready to get to work?"

Another rush of warmth. An hour later the population of Death Eaters and Dementors at Azkaban had been drastically reduced. Harry retraced his steps, making sure to transfigure the dementor corpses into something manageable. He would need to take them to Gringotts before they changed back.

"Feel better?" Death asked.

"This wasn't about feeling better." Harry brushed a bit of frost that had accumulated on his sleeve. "I can't deny revenge played a part, but this was pest control." He scanned the empty cells. "Did I make too much of a mess?"

"I've seen worse." Death laughed. "Wizards keep death clean, for the most part. It's the Muggles that come up with the nasty stuff."

"I need a shower." Harry sighed. "What time is it?"

"No clue." Death shrugged.

"Tempus." Harry held up his wand. "Oh, shit."

It was eleven-thirty at night. Petunia was going to be worried sick.

30.

Twenty Death Eaters Found Dead in Azkaban
Dementors Flee
Ministry In Chaos
By Rita Skeeter

Selwyn placed the Daily Prophet on the table in front of him. This was not good for his appetite. It wasn't surprising that the convicted Death Eaters were still a target. Most likely a couple of the guards decided to take revenge. It wasn't like someone killed twenty of them in one night. The deaths were probably discovered because of an inspection or something.

The pureblood couldn't figure out how they had gotten rid of the Dementors. More fanatical surviving Death Eaters had wanted to bust out their captured comrades. The only thing stopping their plans were the Dementors. At least he wouldn't have to listen to their half-baked plans.

Selwyn wasn't a fanatic, or an idiot. He didn't believe that Voldermort was ever coming back. The Dark Lord had a good run. He was the rallying point for the purebloods, the real progress was now. The wounds were fresh enough that as long as their plans weren't overt almost certainly succeed. The 'Light' would hem and haw, but behind the scenes deals would push the agenda through.

"Pert!" He yelled for his house elf.

He waited a moment. The creature didn't appear. He gritted his teeth. The elf was going to pay for this.

"PERT! GET OUT HERE NOW YOU DISGUS-" The words froze in his throat as the door to room opened.

A young man stood in the doorway with a wand pointed at him. Selwyn tried to speak, only to find that he could hardly breath.

"Not very sporting, is it?" Harry lowered his wand, releasing his hold on the Death Eater.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my house?" Selwyn spat the words and pounded on the table.

A flick of his wrist brought his wand into his hand. Selwyn moved smoothly, aiming it at the intruder. A cruel smile crossed his face as a cloud of blood filled the space between them. His expression changed

from victorious to confusion as the air cleared. The young man was in one piece without a single drop of blood anywhere.

Selwyn moved to cast another spell. It was then that he realized he wasn't holding his wand. That required a hand to hold it and hands needed arms to attach to a body. He had neither. The table in front of him was covered in crimson.

Harry kept his arm level. He tilted his head to the side, studying the man. Having to constantly hold his magic back had made him a bit sensitive to the natural flow. Right now, the magical energy within Selwyn was leaking out of the wound. It drifted out of him, mingling with the ambient magic in the room.

Reaching out with his own magic, Harry latched onto the thread. He pulled, drawing the magic from Selwyn's body. The man began to scream, his skin lost turned ashen, shrinking. Harry twirled the string of magic closer. Time seemed to freeze as the thread touched the tip of his wand. The slow drift of the magic shifted into a storm, racing along the Elder Wand and into his arm. Harry could feel the new magic mingling with his own. He felt a small surge of power as it settled into place.

The husk that was Selwyn dropped back into the chair.

Harry looked from the drained corpse and the Elder Wand. He had always heard about people dying when their magic was taken away. Harry wondered what that process entailed.

"Death." Harry called.

The girl appeared. She was lounging on a nearby chair at the table.

"These are nice seats." She wiggled in the chair.

"What just happened?" Harry asked.

Death looked over to the husk. "Oh, you absorbed his magic."

"Did the wand do that?" Harry nodded toward the wand.

"Nope." She shook her head. "That was all you."

"Can everyone do that?" Harry spun the wand, it disappeared once it finished the second rotation.

"Yeah." She hopped up from the chair and strolled over to the body. "It's risky though. You have to reach out with your own magic and try to pull it from the other person. The stronger one wins, but you don't know who that is until the connection."

Death held out her hand. A mote of light drifted out from the husk and settled into her palm. She tucked it into her pocket before turning back to him.

"You're a powerhouse." She plopped into another chair. "Finding someone stronger would be rare, but I wouldn't chance it."

Harry nodded.

"Who's next on the list?" Death asked.

"No one for now." Harry sat down with her.

"Oh?" Death leaned forward. "Why not?"

"Voldemort comes back this year." Harry said. "A bunch of his followers are there. There will all be in one place. Hopefully, Nagini will be there too. I destroy the last horcrux and take out a few of them at the same time."

"You're confident you'll be able to take more than one on at a time?" She asked. "Not to mention Tommy Boy?"

"I was able to hold him off and escape last time." Harry leaned forward, dropping his voice to a whisper. "Don't tell anyone, but I'm stronger and I've got years of experience as an auror."

Death motioned to zip her mouth. "How much trouble were you in?"

"Dobby covered for me." Harry smiled. "I love that little elf."

"Oh?" Death smiled. "What did he say?"

"I had to go to talk to the goblins." Harry shrugged. "It was simple enough to work. Petunia said that I needed to check-in if I was going to be later than ten."

"I would have thought he'd pile up the blankets in your bed to make it look like you were sleeping." Death chuckled.

"He did." Harry shook his head. "It didn't work so well since I had been gone since lunch and Petunia caught him bringing more blankets in from the laundry."

Death gave a happy sigh. "Things are going to start picking up this year."

"Yeah." Harry nodded.

"Are you going to change the tournament?" She asked. "You can take out Crouch before he sets it up."

"Last time I was terrified." Harry thought for a moment. "I'm actually looking forward to it this time. I want to work out the tasks in a different manner. Flying a broom against a dragon was a really bad idea. So was the gillyweed. The only thing that I actually did well in was the maze."

"Are you excited for the world cup?" Death pressed.

"I'm excited to spend time with Sirius when he's not a wanted criminal." Harry countered. "What happened to him last time? I mean, after the veil."

"He died protecting you." Death patted his hand. "To him, there was no greater thing he could do. He passed on to whatever comes next."

"Whatever comes next?" Harry asked.

"I'm Death, not Afterlife." She shrugged. "Come on, let's get out of here before the house elf wakes up."

"Good idea." Harry pushed the chair away from the table.

With a thought he was gone.

31.

Petunia, Dudley, and Vernon stood in the front yard with Harry. His trunk was packed, Hedwig was waiting on her perch, and they were all waiting for Sirius. Since they weren't hooked up to the Floo network they had to come up with alternate means of transportation. Sirius said he had something arranged but wouldn't say what it was.

"Harry." Petunia pulled him into a hug. "You will always be welcome here. This is your home when you want it."

Vernon pulled him into a hug once Petunia let him go. "We expect updates. A letter a month at least. I've asked Dobby to look into getting an owl for ourselves." The stern words were undercut by his red, puffy eyes.

Hedwig ruffled her feathers at the mention of another owl.

"Oh?" Harry looked to her. "You want to deliver their messages too? You'd fly here every morning then back to me?"

She considered him for a long moment before turning away with a huff.

"She'll allow it." Harry chuckled.

Dudley gave him an awkward hug that was reserved for siblings since the dawn of time.

"Put in a good word with some of those birds, eh?" Dudley stepped back.

"Dudley!" Petunia gasped.

"What's your type?" Harry dropped his voice low.

"Harry!" Petunia shifted her attention to him.

Dudley had cleaned up his act a lot this summer. Harry liked to think he had a part in it. Not only was his cousin getting healthier, but he was kinder as well. People around the neighborhood noticed as well. The younger kids in the area didn't run when Dudley approached, and the rumor mill were practically starved for source material. At least the sort originating from Dudley's misadventures.

A horn honking brought their attention to an approaching car. It was a luxury town-car. The only thing that set it apart from the other vehicles were the blacked out rear windows. On the side was a logo for Fry's Executive Taxi Service. It came to a stop in front of the house.

Hugh Fry, dressed in a muggle suit, hopped out and opened the rear door. Sirius stepped out. The months as Rook and his recent freedom had been good to him. He looked healthier than he had ever was last time. There was even a sparkle in his eyes that Harry had only seen in pictures.

Lupin got out a moment behind him.

"Siri, Remus." Petunia wiped her tears away and gave them a smile. "Hello."

Harry watched as Remus crossed over into the wards. The strained, polite smile on his face vanished. His eyes actually flashed yellow for a moment as his expression shifted through confusion, rage, and sorrow.

"That goat fucking bastard!" Remus roared.

Hugh jumped at the sudden shift in the soft-spoken passenger.

"The wards." Petunia shook her head.

"I made sure to strengthen the protections." Harry looked back at her. "I don't want someone coming after you."

"Did he actually fuck goats?" Dudley asked.

"You know..." Harry thought. "I don't know."

"You mean it's not just a common wizard insult?" Vernon asked.

"No." Sirius shook his head.

"Should we do something about him?" Petunia asked motioning to Remus.

"Give him a moment." Sirius waved it away.

"Thank you for the concern, Padfoot." Remus glared at his friend.

"Please." Sirius shook his head. "I've seen you calmly disembowel a moose. When you're worked up like this it's the furniture that pays the price."

"A moose?" Harry asked.

"Prongs, Remus, and I traveled around North America summer of our sixth year." Sirius explained. "Did it the muggle way, for the most part. Hopped a plane, took a train, and rented an automobile. Thought your dad was going to kill us when he got behind the wheel."

"You let my dad drive?" Harry gawked. "An English, Pureblood wizard?"

"It was a good idea at the time." Sirius laughed.

"Harry." Remus walked over to him with purpose. "I owe you so much more than an apology. You as well Sirius."

"No." Harry met the werewolves gaze. "You don't. It wasn't you. Everything that has happened is his fault, not yours." He turned to his family. "He took our lives from us. Family, friends, love. All of it gone for his plans."

"Well." Sirius clapped his hands. "As enlightening as this has been, we do have a schedule to keep."

"Really, Padfoot?" Remus looked to his friend.

"Yes." Sirius nodded with a smile. "There are some people Harry needs to meet before we go."

"Go where?" Harry asked.

"The camp." Sirius answered, his attitude switching to one of nervous excitement.

"The camp? What camp?" Harry looked over to Remus, but the werewolf was still in his own world.

"I've reserved a spot at the World Cup for the week." Sirius was literally bouncing now. "We're going to spend the next seven days surrounded by witches from all over the world!"

Harry smiled so hard his cheeks hurt. "You old dog."

"Sirius." Petunia gave him her best 'mom' voice. "You aren't just going to be chasing women. You're supposed to be spending time with Harry."

"Petunia." Sirius turned his giddy energy to her. "Of course, I'm going to be spending time with Harry. How else is he going to learn how to woo a witch?"

Petunia tried to stay stern. She was almost successful until Vernon let out a loud guffaw.

"Get moving, you lot." Petunia shook her head.

"I'll send for Dobby once we're settled." Harry said.

Hugh slipped by them as they spoke. He loaded the luggage into the trunk and placed Hedwig in the car. The driver made sure to give Remus a wide berth. For his part, Remus was muttering and growling under his breath.

"Is he going to be alright?" Harry asked looking over at Remus.

"A scratch behind his ears and he'll be right as rain." Sirius replied.

Remus glared at him. The expression melted away into a smile. Harry gave his family another quick round of hugs before heading toward the open car door.

"Flea bitten mongrel." Remus snapped.

"Leg humping mutt." Sirius quipped.

"That was one time." Remus glared at him as he got into the car.

"One time?" Harry asked.

"Well, you see, around the full moon-" Sirius started.

"Shut it!" Remus cut in.

Harry slipped into the back of the car. He stopped to take in the surroundings. On the outside it looked nice, on the inside it was akin to a small yacht.

"Nice." Harry nodded appreciatively.

"He mentioned a car service the last time we took the bus." Sirius explained. "I added a bit to his funds to help get things settled. We can't hire him full time, it's dangerous like you said. I've already put in a good word around the Ministry."

"Why would you be at the Ministry?" Harry asked.

"I'm Lord Black." Sirius gave him a cheesy smile. "Do you think I'd let the seats on the 'Mot go to waste?"

"Didn't think you were the type." Harry shrugged.

"Thanks to you and those wards I'm thinking for myself these days." Sirius gave him a genuine smile. "I'm proud of you, pup."

"Enough mushy stuff." Harry cleared his throat. "What is the plan for today?"

"I'm going to introduce you to the good side of my family, then we're off to the camp." Sirius grinned.

"The good side of your family?" Harry asked.

"I'm as shocked as you are." Sirius chuckled.

32.

Sirius led Remus and Harry along the row of tents. Just like last time they were anything but inconspicuous. They passed an auror dealing with the man in charge. The poor muggle running the campground was already looking a bit confused. Harry knew what constant exposure to Obliviate could do to a person.

He stepped up to the auror in charge of the man. "There's a better way to handle that."

The auror, whom Harry didn't recognize, shot him an annoyed look. "Do tell."

"Create a logical fallacy loop." Harry explained.

"What?" The auror scrunched up his face at the words.

"Here." Harry stepped up to the muggle. He waved his wand in front of the man's face, subtly ripping off the Jedi Mind Trick motion. "*Fraudulentiae Cogitatio*."

The muggle blinked. His eyes scanned the campground around him. He shook his head, then went back to talking to people as they arrived.

"What did you do?" The auror asked.

"Like I said, it's a logical fallacy loop." Harry explained. "When he sees something magical his thoughts remind him that magic isn't real, therefore what he saw wasn't real. He'll remember it as a trick of the light, or that he was sleep deprived, or something like that. It should last for about three days. Cast it again after two, just to be safe."

"Who are you?" The auror asked in awe.

"Harry Potter." Harry winked at the man before rejoining Sirius and Remus.

"Where did you learn that?" Sirius whispered.

"I've done a lot of reading up on mental magics." Harry explained, which wasn't exactly a lie. It just so happened that he learned the spell ten years in the future. "I picked up a bunch of books over the summer to expand my spell work. You'd be amazed at all the things that are overlooked or ignored these days." He looked from Sirius to Remus. "Almost like someone is trying to limit the knowledge that gets out."

"No." Remus muttered. "How could he get away with that?"

"I'm sure that the Purebloods were perfectly happy to restrict the knowledge to others." Harry shrugged. "It's not like they wouldn't know it, what with all the family grimoires and such. All Dumbledore's would have to do was look the other way and we know how good he is at that when it fits his plans."

Sirius clapped his hands.

"Enough of that." He said loudly. "We are here to relax and have some fun. Harry, this is the World Cup. Over the next few days witches from all over the world will come here. There will be drinking, dancing, singing, and hearts to steal. Shops, restaurants, and buskers will do their best to tempt you to spend your coin."

"Sirius." A female voice said from nearby. "You're nowhere near the tent."

Harry turned to see Andromeda Tonks standing nearby. The smile on her face was brighter than any Harry remembered. A pang of regret hit him. He hadn't spent near as much time with her or Teddy as he should have. Harry latched onto the train of thought and pushed it down. That was not going to happen this time.

"Harry." Sirius hopped between Harry and Andromeda. "This lovely woman is Andromeda Tonks. My favorite cousin."

She looked at him. Her eyes were full of hope and love. Last time they hadn't for a few more years. Things were a bit of a whirlwind around then, but he didn't remember her so vibrant. She was beautiful. Andromeda looked quite similar to Bellatrix, except she wasn't half-starved, filthy, nor out of her mind. Her hair was black, rather than blonde, like Narcissa, but Harry could see the resemblance.

"Hello." Harry smiled at her. "It's nice to meet you."

"No. That will not do." Andromeda stepped closer, wrapping him into a hug.

Harry froze for a moment. There was something familiar about her. Not just from his former life. The feel of her arms around him, her smell. It was a distant memory that he couldn't tease into the light. For once it wasn't some sort of memory charm that he had to fight through, but simply the flow of time.

"I." Harry returned the hug. "I've met you before?"

Andromeda put him at arms-length but held onto him. She nodded.

"James and I were friends growing up. Lily was too once they were married." Andromeda stared at him in wonder. "You used to love to play with my hair when I held you."

It was the first time, in either life, that he had heard this. The words rang true though. Something about her felt like family, more than the memories of his other life.

"I'm sorry." Harry spoke softly. "I don't remember."

"You were a year old at most." Andromeda chuckled. "If anyone, you'll remember Nymphadora."

"Oi!" A young woman called from nearby.

Harry turned to see Tonks moving toward them. Her hair shifted from long and black, to curly red, and then short, spiked pink.

"Don't call me Nymphadora." She groaned and rolled her eyes.

"It's your name." Andromeda sighed. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Wotcher, Harry." The young woman turned to face him. "Tonks. Don't call me Nymphadora."

Harry froze. She was here. Logically, he knew he would be meeting her again soon. Tonks was part of Sirius' family, even if she wasn't here today, it would be in the next year. Still. She was here. Alive! Right in front of him.

There was something more to it. A feeling like the one when he had seen Andromeda.

"Nummy?" Harry whispered.

Tonks blushed a bright shade of red. A flash of memories played along his mind. The little girl with rainbow hair, his imaginary friend that he had forgotten. How had he forgotten her?

"You're real?"

"You remember!" Andromeda practically sang.

"Shut it." Tonks grumbled.

"That's no way to talk to your mother, Nymphadora." Sirius chided.

Her wand was out in a flash. Sirius hopped up as a short zap hit his foot.

"That goes for you too." She glared at the older man. Her face softened as she turned her attention to Harry. "Yes. I'm real. Call me Tonks."

"What's wrong with Nymphadora?" Harry asked.

"You get one." Tonks shifted her wand to his feet.

"Can I call you Nym?" Harry asked softly.

"Fine." She huffed. "Come on. The tents are over this way."

"Do you go to Hogwarts?" Harry followed after her. He didn't spend nearly as much time in his old life talking to her. With this new connection, he wasn't going to make that mistake again.

"No." Tonks led him toward a couple of tents. One of which could have passed for a luxury muggle tent, and the other that looked like an inflatable castle but made of actual stone. "Guess which one is Sirius'?"

Harry nodded to the castle.

"Ding. Ding. Ding." Her hair flashed gold as she spoke. "Give the boy a prize."

She opened the tent belonging to her family and motioned for him to come in.

"How long have you been out of school?" Harry asked.

"This will be my... third year?" She wrinkled her nose as she thought. "You're starting your Fourth year?"

"Yeah." Harry nodded.

"Then, yeah, third year out." Tonks stood beside him.

The main entry of the tent was a cozy living room with a small kitchen at the back. Two doors rested on the other walls. Harry didn't say anything as she subtly adjusted her height a bit to be taller than him. Thanks to a healthy diet and exercise Harry wasn't the malnourished runt he had been. Unfortunately, the damage had been done already and he was never going to be the tallest out there. At best he would be lithe and at worst he'd be a stick figure.

"What do you do then?" Harry asked.

"First year as an auror." Tonks answered happily as she crossed to the small kitchen.

"How do you like it?" He followed her.

"There is a lot of paperwork." She sighed. "I'm one of the rookies so we don't get a lot of the exciting cases. I patrol the alleys, do a week of guard duty on the island, and then do it all over again most of the time." She pulled a couple of butter beers from the small fridge and handed him one. "I did get to help with the Azkaban clean-up. That was pretty wicked."

"Read about that in the Prophet." Harry nodded thanks as he took the bottle. "Was it as bad as they made it out to be?"

"Worse." Tonks shook her head. "Never thought I'd see a dementor hiding in fear."

Her hair had shifted from bright pink to an ash gray. The spikes slumped against her scalp.

"Ever thought of changing careers?" Harry asked.

"What's that supposed to mean?" She snapped at him.

"You sound like you aren't having much fun." Harry shrugged.

"It's not what I thought it would be." Tonks huffed. She took a swig of her drink before looking up at him. "You really remember me?"

"Pointy nose and rainbow hair." Harry smiled softly at her. "Thought you were my imaginary friend."

Her nose sharpened out to a point and her hair began to shift through a myriad of colors. Harry couldn't help but laugh.

"Is that why you never wrote back?" She asked softly.

"I never got any letters." Harry scooted over to her. It felt natural to give her a hug.

"I thought you hated me." Tonks squeezed him. "You didn't even look at me in your first year."

"Nym." Harry held her tight. "Sirius and I need to talk to you, and your parents, about something important. It will explain a lot. I just have to make sure you're safe first."

She scoffed. "I'm supposed to be the one protecting you."

"Is the wedding back on?" Sirius asked as he bounded into the room.

"What?" Harry looked over to his godfather confused.

"Nymphadora." Sirius scolded, as he wisely dodged her curse. "You shouldn't keep secrets from your betrothed."

Harry looked back to Tonks. Her hair was now bright red and spiky. Tonks burst out of the hug. She chased Sirius around the room sending little zaps from her wand after him. A moment later Remus, Andromeda, and Ted entered the tent.

"I'm lost." Harry looked up at Andromeda.

The trio didn't seem surprised by Tonks chasing Sirius. Remus shook his head as he promptly exited the tent. Andromeda and Ted crossed the small space to stand in front of Harry. He hadn't gotten to know Ted much in his last life. At one point he was sure they had to have had a conversation, but it was hard to think of something solid. Ted was a little shorter than Andromeda. He wore the aged smile lines on his face proudly.

"Harry." She smiled at him. "This is my husband, Ted."

"Nice to meet you, sir." Harry held out his hand.

"None of that." Ted pulled Harry into a hug.

Harry awkwardly patted the man on the back.

"Sorry." Ted blushed a bit. "Forgot you don't know me. I can't tell you how many times we had to rescue you from Nymphadora."

"Not you too, dad!" Tonks yelled.

"I'm a little lost." Harry spoke slowly. "Sirius said something about a wedding and being betrothed. Now you're talking about rescuing me."

Andromeda, Sirius, and Ted laughed. Tonks glared at the three while Harry stood getting more confused by the moment. Apparently, there was a lot about his life he still didn't know.

"She was your Nummy, and you were *her* Harry." Andromeda explained after a moment. "There were a few times where you somehow found yourself tucked in my purse when it was time for us to go home."

"Not to mention all the times our little Dora told us she was going to marry you." Ted added.

"I was six." Tonks huffed.

Harry smiled at her. He took in the moment around him. The feeling of love filled the room. His expression hardened.

"Sirius." His gaze met his godfathers'. "We need to tell them everything."

Sirius let out a long sigh. "I know. Let's get it over with."

33.

Sirius and Harry told them everything. Well, everything except the fact that Harry was a time-traveling soon-to-be avatar of death. Not even Sirius knew that, and Harry had no intention on ever telling him. Or anyone for that matter.

The evening was willed with raised voices, tears, quite a bit of cursing, and finally settled into an expanded alliance. The Tonks family were going to take extra care to prevent mental manipulation. They didn't have near as much exposure to Dumbledore, but it didn't hurt to be safe. Andi, Ted, and Nym had thoughts on who they could trust. It wasn't until Tonks mentioned Moody that Harry realized how quickly things were moving.

Harry excused himself after a long discussion. The fun night had turned into an impromptu club meeting. He knew that it was just a matter of time before someone came up with a name for the group. Magical folk loved naming things.

As much as Harry wanted to simply pass out after such a tiring day, he found he couldn't sleep. Sirius had shown Harry to his room in the castle tent. The interior was ridiculous, but he expected nothing less from Sirius. There was something else that was bothering. A little idea he had that wasn't quite in focus, but it wouldn't leave him alone.

Tonks had mentioned Moody. This year Barty would capture the old man and take over his life via Polyjuice potion. Doing so would allow him access to setting Harry up for the Tri-Wizard Tournament. He could stop all of it simply by killing Barty. It wasn't just that. There was something else. The changes were already making things hard to figure out. Last time around he'd be having the dream about Tom killing the old man about now.

Would they still be at the mansion?

"Death. Do you have a moment?" Harry said.

"What's up?" She asked plopping onto the bed near him.

"Am I interrupting?" Harry asked.

"Nope." Death held out a hand, wiggling her fingers. A few coins she had hung in the air where her hand had been. "We're talking on Dream Time right now."

"Explain please." Harry watched as the coins didn't shift at all.

"Dream time, how time moves in dreams." She snatched the coins as she hopped to her feet. "Death uses a variation of it as well. You know." Her casual clothes swapped out to those of an elaborate classical dress. "To sleep! To dream! No more! And in that sleep of death what dreams may come!"

Her clothes changed back into her previous casual outfit.

"I'm sure that will make sense when I'm not so fucking tired." Harry grumbled.

"Mental fatigue sucks." Death nodded. "What did you need?"

"I need to find Nagini, she's the last horcrux." Harry said. "Last time, she was with Voldermort at the old Riddle Manor. With everything that has changed I don't know if they are still there. There's no guarantee that she's with him right now."

"Then just pop over to where she is." Death shrugged. "Just like you did with Bellatrix."

"Would that work with Nagini?" Harry asked.

"Death isn't limited to humans." She paused. "Or witches. Wizards. Whatever. They're basically still human."

"Thanks." Harry smiled and shook his head at her. "Looks like I've got some work to do."

Harry shifted off his bed and stood. He summoned Excalibur, closed his eyes, and concentrated on Nagini. The world around him shifted in an instant. It was colder, the air had a musty smell to it, and the creaking of wood surrounded him.

He opened his eyes to find that he wasn't in the mansion at all. Harry was standing on the deck of a rickety old boat. One that was sailing along the clouds. Nagini was curled up around a bundle of clothe that tucked against the side of the boat. She appeared to be sleeping. Harry scanned the immediate area. Nothing looked familiar. The only other person was a glassy-eyed witch that was holding onto the rudder. She didn't appear to even know Harry was there.

Harry spun the sword blade down and stabbed it through the top of Nagini's head. She was dead before she knew what had happened. A thin wisp of smoke bubbled in the air before fading away with hardly a scream.

"I'm sorry." Harry whispered.

"Who is there?" A shaky, thin voice spoke from nearby.

Harry felt himself tense. He held Excalibur up at the ready, waiting for an attack. That voice. He knew it well. It was the very same one that the abomination that was Voldermort had used in his dreams.

§Nagini! Where are you?§

Movement near the dead snake caught his attention. The bundle was moving. Harry hooked the edge of the clothe with the blade and tugged it free. The twisted thing that looked up at him was none other than Voldermort.

"Tom." Harry blinked. "I didn't expect to find you here."

"Potter?" Potato-mort hissed. "What are you doing here? Where is Nagini?"

"Funny story." Harry squatted down to get a closer look at the creature. "I've been destroying the horcrux you had created, and she was the last one. Now that she's dead, you are a sad sack of whatever you are."

"Lies!" Riddle cried.

"You know, I've always wanted to ask." Harry uncovered Riddle completely and propped him up so they could see each other. "Are you an idiot?"

"You will not speak to me in such a way. I am Lord Voldermort!"

"You are Tom Riddle. I would say junior, or the second, but we both know that's not true." Harry dismissed Excalibur. "You're what, sixty or seventy years old? You've been chasing immortality since you were a kid and a horcrux was the best you could come up with? A squib could live until they're over a hundred with hardly any effort. A wizard of your supposed caliber should have been able to hit at least

one-fifty. That's before potions regimens to improve your health, charms, magical artifacts, and creature magic brought into the picture."

"You know nothing of me and my goals!" The Dark Lord Potato Head screamed.

"It's a shame, really." Harry sighed. "You probably would have inadvertently saved the world if you'd managed to kill Dumbledore."

"What?"

"Old twinkle-eyes has been playing the long game." Harry summoned Excalibur as he stood. "He's set you up to be the next dark lord he vanquishes. I, sadly, die while fighting you. He steps in, saves the day, and once again is the next Merlin. Hell, they might even start calling Merlin the first Dumbledore."

"We can work together to stop him." Voldemort hissed.

"He would never see that coming." Harry nodded. "But there's one problem with that plan."

"What?"

"I really want to kill you." Harry brought the blade down.

Tom Riddle, the Dark Lord Voldemort, had just enough time to understand the words before Excalibur sliced through his warped form. An expression of sheer terror was forever etched into its visage. Harry felt the boat under him lurch. The witch that had been guiding the boat had slumped over. She was dead, he could see that now. The magic that was keeping her animated had stopped once Riddle died. Now, the rickety old boat was rushing toward the ground.

Harry wasn't sure how far, or how long, the fall was going to take. He thought of the room in the tent and appeared there a moment later. Harry dismissed Excalibur. He needed a shower, some fire whiskey, and a couple days of sleep. Not in that order.

He trudged through the hallway in search of the bathroom. It took a couple of tries, but eventually he found a gently lit room with a claw-foot tub. Harry gave a short chuckle as the tub began to fill with water. He stripped off his clothes and settled in.

It was done. The last horcrux had been destroyed. Voldemort was dead. The future life that he had known was completely and utterly gone. There were still a few people that needed to pay for their past-future-current sins, but they were scattered without Voldemort to rally behind.

Fenrir Greyback couldn't be left alive. Not to mention a smattering of Death Eaters. Umbridge. There was no way that he was letting her live.

Harry took a deep breath. He let the hot water loosen his muscles. Killing them wasn't just about revenge. Revenge did play a big part, but there was more to it than that. Removing them from the equation meant that he could focus on Dumbledore. The old man knew how to stack the deck in his favor. If Dumbledore was using Voldemort and the Death Eaters as a way to keep the focus away from him, then it only made sense to get rid of them.

Voldemort was dead.

This was just the beginning.

34.

Harry ran through his evening routine of draining his magical core. He cycled through hair colors, lengths, and styles as he felt his limit quickly approaching. Harry used the last bit of focus to return his hair to its usual style. The next step in the process most of the time was him staggering to bed and passing out.

This time, something was different. He could feel his magic coming back at a much faster pace. The normal fatigue was nowhere near it had been yesterday. He hadn't felt any change once Riddle was dead, so it had to be something else. The only thing he could rationalize was the ambient magic. Privet Drive was practically barren, recharging his core took hours. Here, surrounded by all these witches and wizards, he was filling back up much faster.

Harry slipped out into the seating area. He wasn't tired enough to go to sleep and his thoughts were keeping him too focused to relax. Voldermort was dead. There was no reason to allow Moody to be replaced, he could take care of Barty in the next couple of days. Without a figurehead the remaining Death Eaters were too focused on their own designs than to work together. Even with Voldermort alive there were clearly defined factions.

If Barty didn't replaced Moody, then no one would put Harry's name in the goblet. That meant no tournament. Which most likely meant he wouldn't become friends with Fleur, or Krum. Losing their friendships was more of a blow than he had expected.

Ginny had tried to keep Fleur at a distance, but Bill was her favorite brother and spending time together was unavoidable. He and Fleur had become quick friends once everything had settled down. They were both outsiders surrounded by the Weasley's. Even Hermione fit in better with them. Fleur and Harry were the ones always having to adjust. He had learned French instead of letting their quasi-isolation ruin the family gatherings.

And then there was that kiss under the mistletoe.

Harry jolted upright.

The kiss.

~ Then ~

"I have been waiting for you to that again for so long." Fleur whispered. Her fingers trailed along his lips.

"Again?" Harry held her beautiful, hungry gaze with his own.

They were at the Burrow. It had been rebuilt after the war. Harry had even pitched in a decent amount of gold to get it looking better than ever. He hadn't planned on paying for so much of it, but Ginny had asked him over morning coffee.

"Your birthday." She playfully hit his chest. *"I thought I had left more of an impression."*

"My birthday this year?" Harry asked.

The smile on her face drained away. *"You don't remember."*

Harry shook his head. He closed his eyes and concentrated, trying to remember something about his birthday. Something about Fleur being there. He found nothing. Only a vague impression of the day.

"There you two are." Hermione hurried over to them with a broad smile. "Some wine for you Fleur, and Eggnog for you Harry."

"Thank you." Harry took the offered drink. He sipped it while he thought. "Hermione..." The question he wanted to ask drifted away.

His perception of the memory shifted, watching from the outside. Ginny huffed as she found Hermione standing near a dazed Fleur and Harry.

"Again?" Ginny snapped.

"You're getting sloppy Gin." Hermione scolded the younger woman. "Today, Halloween, his birthday. That's three you owe me. The potions aren't lasting as long. It has to be something with her not being human. Her allure must be interfering. Get your brother to stop coming over or convince him to let me up her dosage."

"I've tried." Ginny grumbled. "He won't listen and thinks that mom's potions work just as well as they did when they got together."

"Don't blame me if the next egg she lays comes out with silver hair and green eyes." Hermione twisted the knife. "If that happens, you can kiss the Potter fortune goodbye."

"And I'm sure you have a suggestion?" Ginny glared at Hermione. "I'm not ruining my body and my career by popping out a couple of kids."

"It sounds like you could use a partner." Hermione paused, making sure Harry took another drink.

~ Now ~

Harry gritted his teeth.

"It's not them." Harry repeated the phrase over and over. "They're just kids."

If he could give the Dursleys the benefit of a doubt, then Hermione and Ginny would get one too. He had no clue what Dumbledore had done to them. Not to mention Molly. It sounded like she may have done some work for Bill as well. That made Fleur falling for Bill make so much more sense.

He needed to check in on her soon. Just to make sure she wasn't causing trouble. She didn't like Fleur, so it made Harry think that it was Bill who was to blame for that. Harry sat back, thinking about all he knew about Bill.

Bill Weasley was a curse breaker for Gringotts. He married Fleur and they eventually had a child. They had setup something of a safe house for people on the run during the war. Beyond that, he didn't know much about him. Even the holidays they spent together over the years that weren't tinted with memory altering didn't bring up much.

Fleur though. He could see her in his memories over the years, fading. Their eyes would meet and there would be so much hope behind them. A soul deep sorrow always replaced it.

Another life stolen.

Harry wouldn't let his selfish desire to have her in his life ruin hers. He would miss her, but Fleur deserved better than to get pulled into this mess.

He hopped to his feet. A brief moment concentrating on Barty Crouch Jr had his vanish from the sitting room. Harry found himself standing near a thin wizard. The man was well-groomed, wore nice clothing, and seemed to be healthy. Barty was lounging on his plush bed, reading a book that was brand new. All in all, the Death Eater was living in a golden cage.

The locked eyes. Barty sprang forward, throwing the book at Harry. It sailed harmlessly off to the side. The Death Eater pulled into a roll, dashing to the other side of the room before tumbling over an old writing desk.

"The butcher of Azkaban comes for me, eh?" His made voice had a Scottish lilt to it.

"My reputation proceeds me." Harry followed the mad dash with his eyes but stayed in place. "You were a Ravenclaw, right?"

"Ooh." Barty laughed. "Someone's done their homework."

"Do you like puzzles?" Harry asked.

"I'm a Ravenclaw therefore I must like puzzles?" Barty snapped in reply. "You like to hear yourself talk, does that make you a Slytherin?"

Harry sighed. "In my old life I was an auror. I worked a lot of high-profile cases. They like to hand them to me because it looked good in the papers when Harry Potter solved a case."

"Harry Potter?" Barty popped his head up to look at him. "Eh, the chosen one himself. Killed all my mates on the island and now you've come for me. What's this about being an auror? You're a bit young, ain't ya?"

"In another life." Harry waved the question away. "I get the standard ones. Leftover Death Eaters trying to become the next Dark Lord. Some wizard who thought they were the first one to ever try to take over the world. The random murder. That sort of thing."

"You're as batty as I am." Barty stood. When Harry didn't move to attack, he hopped up onto the desk and sat with his feet hanging off.

"If you knew what I knew, you'd be so much crazier." Harry laughed. "There was this one case, that I had that was causing a panic. A magical serial killer. Not some dark lord, but an actual serial killer."

Barty crossed his legs and listened. "This is the most entertainment I've had in years. Last time was when ol' Trixie remembered a full song from the Weird Sisters and belted it out for three days."

"I cut her head off." Harry shrugged.

"Go on ya' mate." Barty chuckled. "The story?"

"Right." Harry nodded. "The thing was the killer wasn't using any The Killing Curse. The curse specifically made to kill people. They would leave the remains of their victims in two piles. One for the bones and the other for everything else."

"Ohhh." Barty bounced in his spot. "How did you catch him?"

"Her." Harry corrected. "A witch. Third daughter of a Pureblood that didn't have any future once she got out of school. They didn't have the money to set her up with an apprenticeship, so she did... independent study of sorts."

"A Ravenclaw after my own heart." Barty beamed with pride.

"Exactly." Harry smiled at the Death Eater.

Their eyes met for a brief moment as they shared a smile. Barty froze as he realized that the young man in front of him was much more dangerous than he had ever experienced before.

"She would remove the bones completely from her victim." Harry continued. "No cuts, claw marks, or burns. Every single one intact. Just outside of the body."

Barty watched as Harry raised his hand, pointing a finger at him. "Do you know what she was doing?"

The Death Eater shook his head.

"*Accio Hyoid*." Harry spoke clearly.

A splash of blood erupted from Barty's throat as a small bone flew over to Harry's waiting hand.

"She learned the common latin names for the bones of the human body." Harry explained. "Piece by piece, starting with the Hyoid. That way her victims could cast spells, call for help, and were too panicked to think straight."

Barty held his hands up to his throat, trying to keep the blood in.

"We would have never caught her except she had to go to Muggle London to buy the books she needed." Harry watched as the Death Eater continued to struggle. "They don't have the same sort of books in Diagon Alley. Blocking the summoning spell is possible, you just have to know the counter charm, and what they are summoning."

Barty struggled to his feet. He stumbled over to Harry, one hand against his bleeding throat and the other reaching out for the bone.

"She came peacefully once I caught her." Harry stepped to the side, just out of reach. "She told me that she'd do the hands next. The bigger bones took more power and focus. They were easier to get once the person was dead. Otherwise, their struggling would cause the bones to break."

Harry watched Barty collapse on the bed.

"I never understood her fascination with keeping the bones intact." Harry shrugged.

Barty stopped struggling. Harry flicked his wrist, decapitating the corpse. That would hopefully disguise what had really killed the Death Eater. Harry dropped the bone near the loose head. He disappeared before it hit the ground.

Harry walked back to the bathroom and washed his hands. He took extra care to make sure that he hadn't missed any blood. Then, just to be sure, he used a cleaning charm to give himself a once over. He was going to need to plan better if he wanted to continue his nighttime excursions.

Riddle and Barty were dead. It had been a productive day.

35.

It had been a busy summer. Harry had inadvertently saved Arthur Weasley, destroyed all of the horcruxes, killed quite a few Death Eaters, stopped Barty from replacing Moody, and killed Voldemort. He deserved a couple of days off.

The fact that he was now surrounded by witches from all over the world had nothing to do with it. For that matter, the fact that he was now a raging ball of hormones was not a factor at all.

His old life was starting to fade into memory. With all the changes he had made his past experiences were practically useless now. There was no one to enter him into the Tournament, Voldemort was dead, and there were only a few scattered Death Eaters that he had to clean up. The thought of not being in the Tri-Wizard was a little bitter-sweet. He wasn't sure how to approach Fleur without the champion connection. Would she dismiss him as just another hapless suitor? Would her life be better without his involvement? Without the Tournament and the Weasleys, there wasn't a reason for them to cross paths.

Deep thoughts like that were not going to help his mood. He needed some fun and there were plenty of options right outside the tent.

"Come on Harry!" Tonks was bouncing with energy. Her hair was flashing between bubblegum pink and neon blue. "There are two games later and I've got a month of pay burning a hole in my pocket."

Tonks burst into his room and froze. Harry stood, completely nude, beside his bed. Her eyes roamed over his body taking in his lithe form, the various scars, and his... other features. Harry chuckled as her hair went from pink to bright red.

"Are the Blacks *that sort of* Pureblood family?" Harry asked.

Her eyes snapped up to look him in the face. She chuckled, visibly relaxing at his joke. Her hair shifted back to the standard pink.

"Give a girl a little notice next time." Tonks fanned herself. "My innocent eyes are not prepared."

"I doubt that." Harry rolled his eyes.

"You dare question my innocence?" Tonks scoffed.

Harry turned to face her, giving her a taste of full-frontal. "Nym, I will be severely disappointed in the wizarding community if you haven't been shagged yet."

"I think that's a compliment." Tonks did her level best not to look down.

"It was." Harry nodded. "Casual?"

"Yeah, haven't had an actual boyfriend in a while." Tonks sighed.

"Clothes, Nym." Harry laughed. "I don't want to look like a moron on my first real outing."

"Oh." Tonks blushed. "Right. Yeah." She waved a hand at her outfit. "Something like this works."

Harry checked out her outfit now that he wasn't concentrating on teasing her. She wore a pair of Muggle jeans, a T-shirt for a band he didn't know, and had on a pair of boots. Tonks noticed him checking out her footwear.

"Boots are for the best." Tonks explained. "We're going to be doing a lot of walking in crowded areas. You'll need something to protect your toes."

"Noted." Harry gave her a mock-salute. "Are you going to watch me get dressed?"

"Don't mind if I do." Tonks strolled over to his bed. She hopped into it, landing on her back and spreading out her arms. "This isn't fair. My bed sucks."

"It's big enough for two." Harry said.

The words just rolled out of his mouth. He turned, trying to appear casual as he hurried over to his wardrobe. Harry busied himself getting dressed.

"Mister Potter." Tonks said in a scandalized voice. "Do you always invite strange women into you bed?"

"Not as strange as you." Harry looked over his shoulder and shot her a sly grin.

Tonks huffed in faux outrage. She hopped out of his bed once he was dressed. He held out his hands to give her a look at his outfit. It wasn't too different from hers. Muggle jeans, boots, and a simple light blue T-shirt.

She tapped her chin as she studied him. Tonks nodded.

"Acceptable." She stepped closer, running a hand through his hair. "You should grow your hair out a bit. That slightly-wild look you've got would look better with some length."

"Give me a moment." Harry closed his eyes.

He concentrated, focusing his magic, guiding it to his hair. A slight sheen of sweat covered his brow. Tonks gasped as his hair grew a couple of inches.

"You're a metamorphmagus?" Tonks gaped at him.

"No." Harry shook his head. "It takes a lot of focus to do something like that."

"How did you figure that out?" She asked.

"I can't use my wand over the summer." Harry shrugged. "I didn't want to lose touch with my magic, so I was experimenting. Changing my appearance wears me out, but it's like working a muscle."

"Most people can't do any sort of human transfiguration without a lot of training and a wand." Tonks shook her head. "You do make things interesting."

Harry chuckled. "You have no idea." He offered her his arm. "Ready?"

The next hour was spent wandering around the campgrounds. They bought breakfast from a passing cart selling some sort of pastry that looked like the lovechild of a cinnamon roll and a croissant. It was one of the best things Harry had ever tasted. The vendor was happy to provide a card for future orders.

Sirius joined them once they hit the international section. He introduced Harry to the ladies at the Salem League of Witches. Two of which blushed constantly being around Sirius. The ladies giggled like schoolgirls when the old dog smiled at them.

"Story for another time." Was all Sirius said.

His godfather looked torn between going with Harry and staying with the witches.

"We've got a few more days here." Harry laughed at the man. "Have fun. Nym is showing me around."

The crowd got thicker as they moved into the Merchandise area. Teams from all over the world had set out booths to sell jerseys, posters, banners, and all sorts of things. The players on the National Teams were recruited from the domestic teams similar to the Muggle Olympics.

"Harry!" A female voice called.

Tonks stepped closer to him. He scanned the crowd as a girl with short black hair jogged over to them. It wasn't until she got closer that he recognized her. She wore a Kestrels jersey and there was the slight tan line along her face in the shape of goggles.

She pulled up short as she saw how close Tonks was to him.

"Alyn Lind." Harry motioned to the approaching young woman. "This is... Tonks."

"Girlfriend?" Alyn asked.

Harry looked at Tonks. "Family slash bodyguard."

"About time!" She laughed turning to Tonks. "You'll have your work cut out keeping him safe. Did he show you the basilisk scar?"

"Basilisk?" Tonks turned to Harry.

"I'll tell you later." Harry blushed. "What are you doing here?"

Alyn pointed to her jersey, she turned to show him her name on the back. "They've got us doing autographs and peddling goods. We're not a top tier team like the Harpies so we don't have all that many sponsors. Any money earned today goes to upgrading the teams brooms. Firebolts are not cheap."

Harry smiled at her.

"I've started the last three games of the season!" Alyn hugged him. She sighed. "I know it's because they recruited Lynch and wanted him fresh for the tournament. Still! Three games as a rookie!"

"That's awesome!" Harry smiled at her. "I should get an autograph now so I can brag about it when you're out there next year."

Alyn blushed. "Did you want to see my tent? Our tent. The teams tent."

Harry looked to Tonks. She gave him a wink.

"I'd love to." Harry smiled at Alyn.

36.

Alyn led Harry passed the merch table to a bright green tent with the Kestrel logo on it. The thing could have actually been a muggle tent, one used for outdoor events rather than recreational camping. It wasn't until they stepped inside that the magical aspect were revealed. The entry way was a large lobby with boxes of merch stacked in rows.

"Alyn!" A young man called.

Harry saw her shoulders droop. The guy hurried over. He wore a jersey like Alyn. The guy had long blonde hair pulled back into a tail and had an athletic build that was on the bulkier side. The guy smiled brightly as he hurried over. If he had to guess, Harry would have placed him as a Beater. A Keeper needed to be able to move quickly in a small space, a larger frame wasn't the most suitable.

"Jenner." Alyn said flatly.

"Who's this?" The guy, Jenner, asked.

"A friend from school." Alyn replied. "I'm showing him around."

Jenner looked at Harry. His face scrunched up for a moment.

"Second year?" He asked.

"Sure." Harry rolled his eyes.

"Jenner." The guy held out his hand. "Reserve Beater. I've been showing Alyn the ropes since she's a rookie. I'd be happy to join you. Probably know more about the place too."

Harry looked to Alyn. She had a thinly veiled annoyed expression on her face. He shifted back to Jenner, his eyes dropping to the extended hand.

"No thanks." Harry shook his head. "Ready?"

Alyn smiled. "Ready."

She led him out of the lobby, leaving Jenner standing there with his hand still out. Alyn quickly stepped through a door to the side. The two stood in a short hallway.

"I hate that guy." She muttered once the door closed behind them. "He has one year on me and thinks he knows everything. Hasn't even played in a real match but gave me 'tips' after all three of mine. He's constantly trying to push in on interviews too."

Harry wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close to him. Her eyes went wide as he kissed her deeply. Alyn giggled as they broke apart.

"You were going to show me where your room was?" Harry asked.

"Yes, yes I was." She smiled as she grabbed his hand.

Alyn quickly pulled him along. "That's the showers." She said at the first door. "Managers office." She pointed out the second door. "Ladies Bunks. The guys are on the other side. Fraternization between teammates is looked down upon."

She opened the door to show him a room with six beds, three on each wall. They were separated by a three-quarters wall. Alyn led him to one of the beds in the middle. The wall had a couple of pictures that from Hogwarts as well as some newspaper clippings.

"We'll be alone for a bit." Alyn sat on her bed.

"Are you okay with someone discovering us?" Harry asked as he joined her.

"They've seen me naked in the showers." She leaned in, nibbling on his ear. "I'm fine with it if you are."

"That is a nice visual."

She gasped as Harry pushed her onto her back. He kissed her neck and his hands slipped under her jersey. His fingertips traced the outline of her abs as they traveled upwards.

"Mister Potter." Alyn breathed. "What type of girl do you take me for?"

"One that I'm going to give a limp and a smile." Harry replied.

"Prove it." She grabbed the bottom of her jersey, pulling it off in one fast motion.

Harry paused, taking in her body. Her athletic stomach had the ghost of abs. She wore a sports bra that held her breasts tightly. Harry kissed her flat stomach, nibbling on her bellybutton. Alyn let out a sharp moan as his teeth brushed against her skin.

"That's new." She whispered.

His hands stayed in motion, slipping her bra up to expose her breasts. He sat back up to appreciate the view. Her chest was larger than he expected. Her pert, button sized nipples made them look even bigger. He didn't have a catalogue of bra sizes readily available to compare her measurements. It didn't matter, they were gorgeous.

"Freezing up?" Alyn teased.

"Works of art deserve to be admired." Harry smiled at her.

She chuckled. "Take that shirt off. I want to feel your skin against mine."

Harry was happy to fulfil her request. He tossed his shirt off near hers.

"Sweet Morgana." She whispered as her eyes traveled along his chest.

He looked down to see her tracing the various scars on his skin.

"Stories can wait." Harry kissed her. "I have a promise to keep."

Harry kissed her cute, little nipples. His hands traveled down her sides, hooking along her pants, and sliding to the front. He began to work on her buttons, adding a bit of suction to his kisses. The only thing she wore now was the wrist-brace that contained her wand.

He needed to remember to pick one of those up for himself.

"There are spells to get the clothes off faster." Alyn giggled.

"I know." Harry finished with her buttons. He grabbed her pants and yanked them down. "I like doing it this way."

Harry shifted lower, placing his head between her legs, setting them atop his shoulders. He smiled when he saw her panties had an embroidered snitch on them. Looking up, he locked eyes with her. Harry placed mouth against the thin fabric over her pussy.

"Those are in the way if you're going to do what I think you're planning." Alyn held his gaze.

He adjusted his mouth, finding the top of her slit, and began to hum. Her legs shot out straight, her muscles tensing, as the vibrations traveled through her body.

"By Maeve's clit, what was that?" Alyn moaned.

"Resonance." Harry grinned wickedly up at her.

"Whatever it is, do it again." She breathed.

Harry repeated the process. This time moving his mouth up and down in small motions. Alyn gripped the sheets, her mouth open in a silent scream.

"Where did you learn that?" She managed to say as Harry paused to take a breath.

"A girl hums during a blowjob and it feels amazing." He explained. "Figured it would work the other way too."

Alyn drew her wand. A flick of her wrist vanished their remaining clothes. He had no idea where they went. At the moment he didn't really care.

"Fuck me." She growled.

Harry kept her legs on his shoulders as he raised up. Her hand reached down, grabbing his shaft, and guiding him to her wet lower lips.

"You've earned the smile." She locked eyes with him as she slid the crown of his cock along the length of her pussy. "What about that limp?"

Harry gave her a wry smile as he pushed forward. Alyn moaned as he steadily pressed inch by inch into her warm, wet pussy.

"Oh Merlin, you're huge." She moaned.

Harry leaned forward, placing a soft kiss on her lips. She shuddered as he bottomed out in her. They locked eyes. Harry stayed hilted inside of her, letting her adjust to his size. Alyn leaned forward, placing her forehead against his. She nodded. He began to pull back, stopping once only the head of his cock was still inside. They moaned in sync as Harry began to press forward once more.

He grabbed onto her hips, picking up the pace. His steady, hard thrusts rocked her body. Harry pulled her hips to meet him, clapping their bodies together. Alyn pulled him closer, pressing her forehead against his and running her fingers through his hair. Harry groaned as her tits bounced against his chest, dragging her hard nipples along his skin. Her pussy desperately tried to pull him back in with every thrust. He slammed into her faster and harder, his mind set on getting her to orgasm first.

Alyn moaned loudly with every thrust as she grabbed a handful of his hair, gripping it tightly as she began to buck underneath him. He took that as a good sign. His whole body hammered away with everything he could. Every thrust was met with a resounding slap.

"Cumming." She muttered before trailing off into gibberish.

Harry tried to hold on, but the feeling of her pussy milk his cock pushed him over the edge. Their lips found each other, kissing each other deeply as they rode out their climaxes.

Alyn rolled to the side, taking him down to the bed. She breathed in short gasps. True to his word, a smile played across her lips. Harry pulled out of her, laying on his back. He pulled her close against his side. Without a thought she tucked his arm under her head to use as a pillow. She draped a leg over him as they basked in the afterglow together.

After a moment she let out a little giggle.

"What?" He asked.

"I just fucked Harry Potter." She continued to giggle. "I would be in so much trouble if I was still at Hogwarts. I can picture the look on Snape's face."

"He is the last person I want to think of right now." Harry said. The image of an outraged Snape flashed in his mind. He started to chuckle. "Okay, that would be pretty funny."

"Too bad I don't have a camera." Alyn sighed. "No one is going to believe me." She held up a hand, miming taking a picture. "Harry and Me. With an arrow pointing between my legs. Harry's cum."

Harry shook his head. He froze. "Uh, I forgot to ask. Are you on the potion?"

"A bit too late for that." Alyn laughed. "I'm on contract with the Kestrels." She said after a moment, as though that explained everything.

"What does that have to do with things?" Harry asked slowly.

"The first three years I have a No Pregnancy Clause in my contract." She explained. "It doesn't make sense for a team to sign a rookie just for them to get knocked up halfway through the first season. All the teams do it these years. Think about it, have you heard of one of the Harpies having kids before they retired?"

An intense anger began to build in his chest. Ginny had never mentioned that. She knew he wanted a family. He was upfront about that. Ginny asked for his support in her quidditch career, saying that they could keep trying and she'd take time off once she was pregnant.

It was just another lie. She never planned on having kids while she in the pros.

"Are you alright?" Alyn interrupted his thoughts.

"Yeah." Harry looked over to her, giving her a smile. "Had to tap down that moment of blind panic."

She laughed. "We should get dressed. Someone is going to start looking for me, probably already have."

Alyn slipped out of the bed. She scanned the area for her clothes. Harry grinned as she shuffled over and started to get dressed.

"Smile and a limp?" He asked.

"You didn't disappoint." She nodded. "Next time I'll be ready."

"Next time?" Harry got out of bed to find his clothes as well. "I like the sound of that."

Once they were both dressed Alyn led him back outside. She winked at him as they split off. Tonks was waiting nearby. She looked incredibly bored and annoyed. Harry saw the reason as he got closer. Jenner stood beside chatting away.

"You ready?" Harry asked stepping up in front of her.

"Yes." She practically yelled.

"But..." Jenner said.

"Why were you talking to that guy?" Harry asked as they walked away.

"He asked if I was a Kestrels fan." She sighed, rolling her eyes. "I said they were better than the Cannons but not my team. Then he started to 'explain' the game of Quidditch to me."

"Should I hex him?" Harry asked.

"Already did." Tonks shot him a sly grin. "Just something small."

"Oh?" Harry waited for her to continue.

"I turned his socks into bread." She said happily. "He didn't seem to notice."

Harry smiled broadly at her. "Where to now?"

"I don't know." She chuckled bumping her shoulder against his. "Any other professional quidditch players you plan to bed?"

"I wouldn't say no if the Harpies have a station."

Tonks and Harry spent the rest of the day exploring. Sirius popped back up a little after lunch looking properly disheveled and sporting a silly grin. Lupin was with him. Harry had to hold back a laugh when he realized the werewolf was making a concentrated effort to stay upwind.

Sirius showed them to his favorite international cuisine among the many food stalls. Harry had expected something simple, maybe a steak with a bone in it. It turned out that Sirius loved Thai food, the spicier the better. Lupin, on the other hand, wouldn't even come close to one of the stalls and constantly shot Sirius glares.

After that they split back up. Harry was happy to see Sirius so alive. He didn't know if it was the time as Rook, the wards, or a steady string of casual encounters, but his godfather looked better than he ever had the last time through.

"I need a nap." Tonks groaned as they headed back to their tents.

Harry gave her a tired smile. "That sounds wonderful. Can I join you?"

"If we're sleeping together, we're doing it in your bed." Tonks froze once she spoke.

"Nym!" Harry gasped.

"Cuddling!" She said a little too loud. "I meant cuddle."

"Auror Tonks, is there a reason you're yelling about cuddling?" A stern, yet amused female voice spoke from nearby.

The duo looked toward the source to see a statuesque red-headed woman nearby. She had an amazing body, and her large breasts were the sort that people wrote poetry about. Her outfit was well put together, classy, and still showed off just a bit of her figure. More than anything, it was the ghost of a smile that made Harry ravish her.

"Madam Bones." Tonks stiffed, snapping to attention. "I... uh..."

"Relax, Nymphadora." Amelia Bones spoke casually. "We're both off duty."

Harry noticed the brief flush of bright red that ran through Tonks' pink spikes.

"Harry Potter, I presume?" Amelia asked turning her attention to him.

The way she said his name sent a shock right to his cock. Damn hormones.

"Yes, ma'am." Harry bowed slightly.

"Amelia Bones." She replied with a nod. "My niece Susan is in your year."

"Hufflepuff." Harry replied with a smile. "Is she here?"

"Somewhere." Amelia gave him a rare warm smile.

"We haven't spoken beyond working together in Herbology. This year I want to start making friends beyond Gryffindor." Harry said. "Would you tell her I said hello when you see her?"

"Of course." Amelia replied. "She'll be sorry she missed you."

"His tent is just over there." Tonks chimed in. "The castle across from the discreet green one."

Harry rolled his eyes. "I didn't pick it."

"Sirius?" Amelia asked Tonks.

There was something the way that she said it that made Harry want to know more. Tonks not-so-subtly elbowed him before he could speak.

"Ready for that nap?" Tonks asked.

"Yes." Harry let out a heavy sigh. "It was nice to meet you Madam Bones. Please excuse us."

"It was nice to meet you as well, Mister Potter." Amelia inclined her head.

Tonks pulled him away.

"Don't flirt with my boss." She grumbled.

"I make no promises." Harry said with a sly smile.

"You're worse than Sirius." Tonks shook her head.

"Please." Harry scoffed. "Like she'd go for me."

"What about that Kestrel girl?" Tonks asked.

"Like you said, Nym. A girl." Harry shook his head. "I doubt my considerable charms would work on a woman."

"And that makes me?" Tonks stepped in front of him, blocking entry to the tent.

"My Nym." Harry wiggled his eyebrows at her.

Her pink hair went a bright shade of red. She shook her head.

"Come on, lover boy." Tonks stepped into the tent. "I wasn't kidding about that nap. Or the cuddling."

Harry followed after her. Even in his tired state he had to admit she had a nice bum. Tonks looked over her shoulder, catching him looking. Harry blushed but managed to make eye contact.

Tonks shucked off her coat once they were in the room. Harry closed the door, by the time he turned back around she had stripped down to her T-shirt. Harry's eyes traveled up her lovely legs. He could see a flash of blue of panties.

"Enjoying the view?" Tonks asked.

"Very much so." Harry let out a slow sigh.

He crossed the space between them, setting his hands on her hips. Tonks laughed and placed the flat of her palms on his chest.

"I can't sleep in pants." Tonks shook her head.

Harry took a breath. It came out shaky. "Understood."

He casually stripped down to his boxers. Tonks giggled.

"What?" Harry arched an eyebrow at her.

"Looks like she was a biter." Tonks motioned to his shoulder.

Harry walked over to the mirror. Sure enough, there was a couple of hickeys along his neck and collar bone. He trailed a finger over them.

"I didn't even notice." Harry shrugged.

"You should get rid of those if you're planning on hooking up with anyone else." Tonks slipped into the bed. "It's fine with a steady girlfriend, but not so much when you're single."

"Good point." Harry nodded.

He made sure she wasn't looking when he windlessly and silently healed them. Harry joined her in bed. He slid behind her, pulling her close, and resting his arm over her side.

"I think you're too short to be the big spoon." Tonks mumbled as they settled into each other.

"In that case, I'm your backpack not the big spoon." Harry nuzzled the back of her neck.

Tonks shuddered.

"Sleep well, Nym." Harry whispered.

"Mhm." She replied.

Harry felt her go limp. He smiled as her breath slowed. Now, in the quiet, his mind started to roll heavier thoughts. Alyn had mentioned Snape. There wasn't a reason to keep him alive with Voldermort dead. Harry would have never named one of his kids after the bastard if he hadn't been compelled.

That had Hermione written all over it. His 'tragic backstory' was being an asshole to the girl he was obsessed with then taking it out on everyone when she didn't fall at his feet and profess her love. Harry hated to admit it, but Snape was a Potions Master and a good duelist. The slimy bastard would be a pain to deal with once Dumbledore turned his sights on Harry.

He had no doubt that Dumbledore would target him. The old man had been suspicious since last year. Once Dumbledore found out that Voldermort was dead the only person who could rival his power was Harry. As it stood, Harry couldn't publicly oppose Dumbledore just yet and he wasn't close to being able to take him on in a fight.

Harry needed to gather allies in the political arena and private sector. He also needed to focus on growing his magical power. Kicking down the door and blasting the old goat wasn't a viable plan, even if when he was stronger. Harry couldn't deny that a part of him wanted to duel Dumbledore, just to see how he stacked up to someone touted as the Second Coming of Merlin.

He shook his head gently as to not wake up Tonks. Back on to the original train of thought. Snape. There didn't seem to be a downside to killing him. He was a Death Eater, hopefully, whoever investigated it would count it with the Azkaban Massacre. Harry would just need to make it obvious that Snape had been killed because of it.

Harry chuckled darkly. After a lifetime as a Auror he was now a serial killer. He was going to need to put some thought into things if he wanted to keep the appearance up. Popping all over the world to take down Death Eaters wouldn't make sense. International travel required documentation, having them turn up dead all over the world would raise too many questions. He'd stick to the remaining locals, which meant Malfoy was safe for now.

Umbridge didn't have the dark mark. She was worse than a Death Eater. Chopping off her head was too good for her. It also wouldn't fit the theme. Serial killers really loved their themes. Not so much as to be cartoony but they all had some sort of requirements.

Tonks moaned in her sleep, pressing her wonderful ass against him. Harry smiled. These were thoughts for another time. He was on vacation.

38.

"Wake up, lovebirds." Sirius called from the doorway.

Harry sat up, blinking the sleep out of his eyes. Tonks had rolled over at some point and draped a leg across his waist.

"What?" Harry swayed in his spot.

"It's dinner time." Sirius clarified. "We're going to have a family meal."

"Ok." Harry slumped back into bed.

"Nope." Sirius laughed.

A moment later both of them were splashed with ice cold water. Tonks shot up, her wand-hand moving like crazy as she cast spell in every direction. Her wand was safely tucked on the bedside table. In reality she was flailing around spouting off half-slurred spells. Sirius retreated from the doorway, cackling like a madman.

"Sometimes I really hate that guy." Tonks grumbled.

Harry rolled out of his now drenched bed.

"Thanks for the nap, Nym." Harry yawned. "I don't think I've slept that well ever."

"You're a pretty good cuddler yourself." Tonks smiled at him. "Hold still, I'll dry us off."

She plucked her wand from the nearby table. A swish and flick dried their clothes and the bed. Now that they weren't drench the two found their clothes. Harry hugged her, placing a soft kiss on her shoulder. Tonks looked away, focusing on getting her belt settled and hiding the blush on her cheeks.

"What was that?" She asked.

"Just felt right." Harry shrugged.

"Let's see what's for dinner." Tonks paused at the doorway. She scanned the area beyond, then cast a couple of detection charms before stepping out. "You can never be too careful around Sirius."

"I'll try to remember that."

Harry waited until she was out of the room. He held out his hand, summoning his wand. It sailed through the air, landing perfectly in his palm. Harry sighed and tucked it into his pocket. He needed to pick up a forearm holster. Having his wand in his pocket felt sloppy.

They entered the dining room to find Sirius, Andromeda, Ted, and Lupin waiting for them as well as two others. Harry smiled as they turned to face him. Neville gave a shy smile. His grandmother simply glared at him.

"About time, sleepyheads." Andi chuckled. "You almost missed dinner."

"I blame Harry." Tonks said as she took an open seat. "He's just too damn cuddly."

"Language Nymphadora." Her mother scoffed.

Tonks grumbled something under her breath.

"Neville, Madam Longbottom, it's nice to see you." Harry gave both a nod. "What are you doing here? Sirius said this was a family dinner."

"The houses of Longbottom and Potter have been allies for many generations." Augusta replied in a polite tone that was bordering on snide. "Since you are the last remaining Potter, House Black is arranging a meeting to renew those bonds."

"Dumbledore." Sirius said in explanation.

"Ah." Harry nodded.

"What's wrong with Professor Dumbledore?" Neville asked.

"He's the bad guy, Neville." Harry said as he took his seat. "Practically everything after Grindelwald leading up to the war was due to his machinations."

"That's quite the accusation, Lord Potter." Augusta studied him.

"He had a direct hand in creating Voldermort, through deliberate in-action and agitation." Harry continued. "He uses considerable amounts of mental magic to manipulate those around him and turns a blind eye when it suits his plans." He took a breath. "He had layers of charms and spells placed on my person altering my personality, how people perceived me, and limiting my magic. On a more personal level, he arranged himself to be my magical guiding and has sealed my parents will. He crafted wards around my relatives house to increase aggression, obscure those who were inquisitive, and set it so my own magic was feeding into it."

"We've done some digging." Sirius added. "The times when Dumbledore is absent from the 'Mot coincide with times that the Dark faction has pressed through laws that limit the exposure muggle-born have to the magical world."

"As well as those steadily turning half-breeds and non-humans into criminals for simply existing." Lupin added. "Hagrid found this out previously when he was thrown into Azkaban on hearsay alone."

Augusta nodded. "And your plan for dealing with him? Storm Hogwarts and drag him out by his beard?"

Harry laughed. "Tempting."

"We don't have a plan yet." Sirius said flatly. "We're collecting proof, gathering allies, and preparing for the future. As it stands, he has too much power to oppose outright. There are too many who follow him without question."

"He's focused on Voldemort right now." Harry added. "We can use that."

"Why aren't you worried about him?" Augusta asked.

"Someone is going around hunting Death Eaters." Tonks answered. "The ministry downplayed the assault on Azkaban. There wasn't a single Death Eater left alive. A few that managed to avoid getting locked away have turned up dead as well."

"Who else have you gathered as allies?" Madam Longbottom asked.

"We'll tell you that once you sign a contract." Ted spoke up.

"If I refuse?" She asked staring at the man.

"You'll find it hard to remember anything that happened after your stepped foot inside." Sirius gave her a feral smile.

The severe old woman nodded. "I'll sign, as will Neville."

Neville nodded quickly.

"You'll know our allies, as they will know you, but you will be unable to reveal them." Ted explained.

Madam Longbottom signed the parchment before passing it to Neville. Her eyes flashed as the knowledge settled into her mind. She made an approving noise. Harry snagged the parchment and added his signature. A neatly place list faded into view with his name sliding into the last spot.

He recognized a couple of names. Amelia Bones and Griselda Marchbanks being the ones that stood out the most. Harry stopped as he went along the list. He had to read one name a couple of times before it sank in. Professor Filius Flitwick. Harry smiled. That man was a sneaky one.

"I will approach some other parties who are less than pleased with Dumbledore." Madam Longbottom seemed to relax by the slightest margin.

"And now for dinner." Sirius clapped his hands.

The food appeared on the table before them.

"So." He smiled broadly. "Who do you think is going to make it to the Cup?"

39.

Neville didn't care about quidditch, and his gran wasn't keen on being around so many people. They had left after dinner.

Harry hadn't seen the Weasleys at all during the time leading up to the match. The spot where their tents had been last time were taken by an enterprising group that had turned it into a small café.

It made sense with their life going crazy so recently. Still, he would have liked to see the twins. Harry had planned to lose a bet on who would win the game. That way he could make sure they had enough money to start their shop without his winning at the end of the year.

The big game was just as exciting as Harry remembered. They had almost same seats. Being there with Sirius and not having to deal with Malfoy just made it all the better. Fudge almost approached Harry but decided against it once he saw Sirius was with him. Winky was missing as well. Sirius held out better than Harry expected against the Veela allure, but he still grinned like a drunk pervert.

Harry was tense afterwards, just waiting for the Death Eater attack. It didn't come. Apparently, they were hesitant to show when someone was going around killing marked members. It made him wonder who was attacking last time.

Regardless, it was the perfect night to do some more cleaning. Plenty of people had seen him at the game. Tonks had made it clear she intended to cuddle with him all night. After that nap she had stayed over for the rest of the trip. Sirius had booked a portkey in the afternoon, so they had plenty of time to get ready.

Harry snuggled up to Tonks, waiting for her to go to sleep. Once she was out, he slipped out of bed. She grumbled a little but stayed asleep. Harry shuffled quietly to the bathroom. Getting dressed would have caused too many questions, so he stayed in his sleep clothes. Tonight, he had opted for pajama bottoms rather than just his underwear. He closed the door and locked it out of habit. If Tonks woke up, then it would make sense that he had needed to heed the call of nature.

A moment later he stood in the cramped reading room of Severus Snape. The man in question froze, a glass of amber liquid just short of touching his lips. Harry flicked his wand, clearing the nearby chair of debris and sat.

Severus put the glass on the small, scratched table beside him.

"Potter." The man sneered at him. "What are you doing in my home?"

Harry didn't fail to notice that Snape was carefully drawing his wand.

"I wanted to speak with you." Harry looked around the room.

"This is outside of my office hours." Snape locked eyes with him.

Harry could feel the man trying to invade his mind. He didn't flinch, truth be told, he was curious what would happen. Snape maintained eye-contact. Sweat began to gather on his brow.

"How?" Severus slumped back in his chair, breathless.

"If you promise to listen to what I have to say, I will tell you." Harry offered.

"Fine." The man snapped.

"Ever since you first saw me you cast me as some evil thing in your mind." Harry relaxed into the chair. "I was just another reminder of the love that was stolen from you. Everything had been handed to me. I acted like I was so much better than everyone. I demanded the rules bend to me."

"Get to the point, Potter." Snape spoke through gritted teeth.

"The truth of the matter is that there was no love to steal." Harry sighed. "At one point, Lily may have thought of you as friend. I don't understand why that's such a bad thing. I would die for my friends. I have died for my friends."

Snape didn't speak. The rage radiated off of him.

"Imagine that like, Severus." Harry continued. "Imagine that smile never fading. That love she would have felt for you, her best friend. The family she chose. Lily as your lifelong friend. She would have invited you to her wedding, probably as a guest of honor. Your kids would have grown up together."

Harry watched the words sink in. Snape reached for his drink. He downed it in one go.

"What does this have to do with anything?" Severus asked.

"You were wrong about everything." Harry stood. "Except for one thing."

"And what is that?" The glare returned.

"I am better than you." Harry sliced his hand horizontally in front of Snape.

Severus blinked. His mind trying to catch up. He opened his mouth to speak only to find his voice wasn't working. His head fell into his lap. The light faded from his eyes.

Harry reached down, ripping Snape's sleeve to expose the Dark Mark. With that done he disappeared and reappeared in the bathroom back at the camp. Harry washed his hands. Then checked himself over to make sure there weren't any stray strands of blood.

Tonks scooted over as he slipped back into bed.

"My Harry." Tonks mumbled as she wrapped draped her arm and leg over him.

Harry kissed her forehead.

One more Death Eater claimed by the Butcher of Azkaban. The name needed work. Not that he'd need it once this mess was done. There weren't many more Death Eaters left in Magical Britain. Aside from them the only other people he planned to kill was Dumbledore and Umbridge. Harry hoped that he wouldn't have to kill any of the Order of the Phoenix. Dumbledore wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice each and every single member if he thought it would further his plans.

Tonks, Lupin, and Sirius weren't attached to them this time around. He wasn't sure about Arthur. Fred and George would stand with him if Harry asked. Hopefully there wouldn't be a reason for Fleur to even join this time around. Hestia was an unknown, as was Moody and Shackbolt.

Harry really didn't want to have to face down McGonagall or Hagrid. They were faithful to Dumbledore. He'd probably have to kill Molly. No great loss there. Mundingus too.

His thoughts were interrupted as Tonks shifted in bed. Her leg hooked his own, pulling him closer to him. She lifted her arm then began to gently stroke his chest.

"Shh, shh." She whispered. "It's okay. You're safe."

Harry wasn't sure if she was dreaming, or if she felt his muscles tensing up. Either way, he settled into her touch and was fast asleep.

40.

"I'll miss you, pup." Sirius hugged Harry tightly. "Do you have everything? Trunk, wand, sword?"

"Funny." Harry rolled his eyes. "I'll miss you too. Don't get in too much trouble while I'm gone."

"I would never." Sirius clutched his chest in shock. "At least, I won't get caught."

The two looked very much like father and son. They were both dressed a muggle style with slacks, dress shirts, and oxfords. The shoes were made of dragonhide, and their clothes were made from acromantula silk. Sirius was dressed all in black, save for a pair of red cufflinks. Harry had a bit more color going with slate gray slates, brown dragonhide shoes, and a sky-blue shirt. Sirius had taught him the wonders of high-quality clothing during their time together.

"Are you going to show up for the tasks?" Harry asked.

"And miss a chance to see you?" Sirius scoffed. "Of course, I'll be there. Shame they aren't doing quidditch this year."

"You'd think they'd do something about that." Harry shook his head. "How many seventh years are going to lose out thanks to this stupid tournament?"

"I can pull some strings and get something for this summer arranged." Sirius rubbed his chin. "Merlin's nipples, we could make it a weeklong tournament for the House Teams. Like the world cup, but for the amateur division. People could use some fun these days."

"Remind me to introduce you to Fred and George Weasley." Harry said.

Sirius looked interested. A rush of students passed by.

"No time to talk." Harry sighed. "I need to find a cabin."

Harry gave Sirius one last hug before he got onto the train. His trunk was the size of a matchbox in his pocket. It was sealed there until he activated a rune for extra security. He didn't think someone would try to actively steal it, more that he didn't want to lose it.

He slipped on the back of the train and slowly made his way forward. A mixture of first and second years were scattered through the first car he explored. The next was mostly third years with a few second years mingled in as well.

Harry found Luna sharing a cabin with Ginny, which was shocking because the Weasleys usually were one of the last students to arrive. There was a slight twinge of sorrow when he saw the look on Ginny's face. He had to fight the urge to comfort her. Luna met his gaze. His hand hovered over the latch to open the cabin. She shook her head. Luna raised a small hand, pointed the direction he was going then held up two fingers. She shot him a wink as she shoed him away.

He shrugged and moved down two doors. The shade was down. He knocked and opened it to find Hermione. She looked up at him, her eyes going wide.

"Harry." She squeaked.

Harry closed his eyes. Luna had set him up.

"Please." Hermione's voice was high and desperate. "Please. Don't leave."

Harry sighed. He stepped in, closing the door behind him.

"Please, talk to me." She scooted over, trying to give him as much space as possible. "I know you were upset last year, but you haven't talked to me in a year. I tried to send you letters."

Harry settled into the seat. He stared at the floor.

"Look at me." She was crying now.

"Why would you do it?" He finally looked up at her. "Why?"

"What did I do?" Hermione pleaded. "I'm sorry, please tell me."

Harry stared her down. His magic flared with as his emotions raged.

Hermione froze. "Are you really Harry?"

He chuckled. "I'm Harry."

"I don't understand what is going on." Hermione tried to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Harry's hand sliced through the air, fingers pointing at the door. A bolt of magic vanished the seams, making it a stretch of wall rather than a door. Hermione gawked at the display of wandless magic.

"You betrayed me. Played with my memories for years." Harry took a deep breath. "You helped her steal my life."

"How did you know?" Hermione whispered.

Harry tilted his head to the side. "How did I know what?"

"Misses Weasley, she asked me to give you potions during school when she couldn't." Hermione began to cry again. "She said Dumbledore told her to do it. That he knew what was for the best."

Harry leaned back. He chuckled. It turned into a mad laugh that could rival any dark lord. His eyes welled with tears as he continued. Hermione stared at him like a cow looks at an oncoming train.

"I didn't know that." He wiped the tears from his eyes. "I was talking about my old life."

"You're not making sense." Hermione said. "I'm sorry. I was just doing what I was told."

Harry took a deep breath then let it out. He had to concentrate on holding in more laughter. Seeing Hermione staring at him like he was crazy. Hearing about how she had already began to warp his mind even before working with Ginny. He pulled his magic back, setting it carefully in place to continue his charade.

"I killed him." Harry said after a moment.

"Who?" Hermione tucked her legs up onto the seat.

"Voldemort." Harry smiled at her. "Cut him in half with a sword. I killed a lot of Death Eaters too."

"You attacked Azkaban." She whispered.

"And Snape." Harry added. "Can't forget about him. Cut his head off right in his living room."

"Why are you telling me this?" Hermione didn't bother reaching for her wand. "Are you going to kill me next?"

Every single ounce of emotion drained from his face. He locked eyes with her. Staring so deep through her that the primal part of her brain was screaming.

"That would be too quick." His voice was cold, calculated. "Anything I torture I could think of wouldn't be enough." The Elder Wand appeared in his hand as he pointed it at her forehead. "I'll let you ruin your own life."

Three drops of clear liquid emerged from the end of the wand. They pooled together before stretching out in a thin line. Hermione watched in horror as it extended toward her. The liquid touched her the side of her brow, sliding through her skull, and coming out as a massive, swirling tangle of silver.

The terror on her face faded, replaced by wonder.

"Memories." Harry said. "Three drops for three years."

Harry flicked the wand, sending the silver liquid out the window and scattering it to the wind. The few droplets that remained were taken back to an ant nest. For years afterwards the colony had perfect recollection of the time Ron vomited slugs.

The Elder Wand made returning the door even easier. With that done he banished it to wherever it went when he wasn't using it. Hermione stared out the window. She blinked slowly for a few seconds. Harry watched as she shook her head.

"Harry, right?" She asked with an eyeroll.

Harry nodded.

Hermione sighed. "I'm trying to read. There should be plenty of open cabins elsewhere."

Three years of memories. Every moment they spent together as friends. Gone. She was the Hermione before the troll again. Harry was impressed by the Elder Wand. It had taken the moments that made their friendship but left everything else. To her, Harry was just another member of Gryffindor.

He stepped out into the hall. The lock clicked the moment it closed behind him. Harry moved to the next car. He found an open cabin and dropped down onto the seat. Harry pressed his forehead against the glass, closing his eyes. He didn't want to cry.

That didn't stop the tears.

41.

Harry had managed to pull himself together when there was a knock on the cabin door. He opened it to see a Slytherin first year waiting. The kid was practically shivering while she looked up at Harry.

He smiled softly. "Are you ok?"

"Professor Slughorn requests your presence in the VIP car." The girl held out a paper invitation.

"Slughorn." Harry mumbled. "That's new."

It made sense. With Snape dead they needed a new Potions Professor. Harry nodded to the student.

"Thank you." A smooth motion flipped her a galleon.

She caught it. Her eyes widened as she realized what it was. The girl zipped off down the corridor without another look back.

Harry straightened up his clothes. He took a deep breath, focusing his magic on cleaning himself up. Showing up with puffy red eyes wasn't how he wanted to start the year. Last time he encountered Slughorn things had been too messy to properly appreciate the situation. The old professor seemed to know everyone, and they all owed him some sort of favor. With the Tri-Wizard this year Slughorn had probably volunteered for the potions position the moment it opened.

Voldemort was dead. There were still a decent number of Death Eaters that needed to be dealt with, but that was something he could space out through the year. This new future was one he hadn't given much thought. Having someone like Slughorn around could be rather useful. Harry wasn't going to be an auror this time. There was more to life than handling dark lords.

Harry headed to the VIP car. It looked a lot like it had last time. Slughorn greeted him warmly. They had a nice meal while the professors let people know about the Slug-Club. He also managed to drop a famous person's name for every hobby or interest someone mentioned. Slughorn knew everyone.

It was just the distraction that Harry needed. There were no intense conversations to be had, no betrayals to unearth, or battles to fight. Without a Dark Lord hanging over his head, Harry found Slughorn to be a vast resource of knowledge. The man randomly spouted out things to impress that would have taken ages to learn. Family history, current whereabouts, and career milestones all casually mentioned so he could look good in front of this new crop of prospects. Slughorn even managed to tell everyone about the Tri-Wizard Tournament by way of bragging about being approached as a potential judge. Harry repaid the information by letting him know about the Quidditch Tournament Sirius was arranging over the summer. That got the old man very interested.

Harry excused himself as they got closer to the school. He promised that he would attend one of the Slug-Club gatherings. When he got back to his cabin, he found Luna waiting for him. The girl was already changed into her uniform. She made no move to leave when Harry began to put his on. Once he was finished, she patted the seat beside her. Harry took the offered spot and let her curl up on his lap. She trailed one hand through his hair and the other held him tight.

"I was rather cross with you earlier." Harry finally said.

"It needed to happen." Luna nuzzled his chest.

"You do know we're almost there." Harry asked.

"You're strong enough to carry me." She replied.

Harry stroked her back. "Can you tell me how to beat him?"

"No." Her voice was getting softer. "I can tell you what is, what isn't, and what was. Your was is different than my was. Your is will make the worlds is new again."

Her cute little snores cut him off before he could ask another question. She was limp against him as he carried her off of the train and found an open carriage. He caught a brief glimpse of the Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny but didn't say anything to them. The twins weren't their usual selves. He didn't want to intrude on their family time.

Daphne and Astoria Greengrass joined them with Tracy Davis slipping in as well. He hadn't been introduced to them yet, so he gave them a polite smile in greeting. They spared a quick look at Luna but didn't say anything. Now that they were here Harry noticed that there was a noticeable amount of Slytherin students missing.

Last time around he had met the Greengrass sisters at one of the Ministry gatherings. He couldn't remember which, they all blurred together even without any sort of memory altering magic. They were strictly on a polite work greeting basis. Tracy, he met due to her opening a small café in Diagon Alley. They made the best hot cocoa during the cold winter months.

"Luna." Harry whispered as they got closer to the castle. "You need to wake up."

"You didn't hold me enough." She replied. "Not in your was."

"I will in this is." Harry kissed her on the forehead. "If you go back to sleep now you will miss the welcome feast."

Harry got out first once the carriage stopped. He helped each of the girls down. They gave him nods in thanks before joining the rest of the Slytherins at their table. It was even more noticeable now. There were at least twenty students missing. Considering how small the class sizes were in recent years that was a sizable chunk. It seemed there were at least a couple gone from second on through seventh. They were lucky that there wouldn't be any quidditch this year. He doubted they would have enough for a full roster.

It didn't take him long to realize the ones missing all had ties to Death Eaters. Nott, Goyle, and Crabbe were gone as was Pansy and Millicent. The Carrow Twins were still here, which surprised him. They were in their second year now. Blaise was practically the only male student in his year.

Harry would need to check, but it looked like his kill list just got a lot shorter. If they had left the country, then he couldn't chase them. It would cause even more attention to be drawn to his actions.

Another shock was seeing Moody already at the front of the Hall. His magical eye was zooming all over the students. It stopped for a moment longer on him before moving on. The real Moody didn't seem as jumpy as the fake. He was coiled to strike, but he wasn't jumping at shadows.

Harry sat through the opening announcements and the sorting. The twins seemed to come alive once they heard that quidditch was canceled this year. A familiar glimmer in their eyes returned when they found out about the Tournament. Hermione had already made an impact by snapping at Lavender and Parvati when they had asked about her summer. Ginny stuck close to Ron. Neither paid much attention

to him. Judging by their change in demeanor he wondered if something had happened beyond what he knew.

Dealing with Hermione made approaching them less daunting. He would wait though. Let them settle into the routine of the school year.

"What about you, Harry?" Seamus asked.

"Hm?" Harry shook his head, coming back to the present.

"Are you going to enter the Tournament?" Dean pressed.

"No. I'm looking forward to a nice calm year." Harry smiled broadly at them. "Let someone else face certain death this time."

The two scoffed. With the feast over the students split off to head to their common rooms. Lavender and Parvati appeared on either side of him.

"What was this about you cuddling a little Ravenclaw on the train?" Parvati asked.

"Has a lucky lady snared the heart of the Hogwarts Heartthrob?" Lavender asked.

"Hogwarts Heartthrob?" Harry chuckled. "Ladies, I don't have a girlfriend and I haven't ever had one."

"The ladies will be happy to hear that." Parvati giggled.

"Feel free to ask me if you'd like to take a walk around the lake." Lavender stroked his forearm.

Harry shot her a crooked smile. "I'll keep that in mind."

"I'm free whenever." Lavender leaned in, practically purring in his ear.

"Don't get greedy, Lav." Parvati wagged her finger at her friend. "A lot of ladies have been waiting for a shot at Harry."

"And I'm just finding this out now?" Harry chuckled.

"You're finally free of Granger." Parvati slipped her arm in his. "She was scaring everyone off."

"You've cleaned up nicely too." Lavender took his other arm. "Clothes that actually fit. You're walking around with your head held high. Confidence looks good on you."

"Thank you for noticing." Harry inclined his head. "I'm sure you'd look even better on me."

The two giggled. All things considered; this year was looking up.

42.

Harry looked down at his schedule. "I forgot to swap my classes."

"Why would you want to do that?" Ron asked. His usual energy hadn't returned, but he was talking more. "Divination is a breeze."

"Do you remember last year?" Harry scoffed. "Trelawny predicted my death on a weekly basis."

"Well." Ron drew the word out. "You do almost die a lot."

Harry laughed. "How are you feeling?"

"It's rough." Ron whispered. "So much has changed. She was dosing all of us with potions."

"Fuck." Harry blanched.

"Language, Potter." Hermione snapped. She wasn't sitting next to him, but she was nearby. "I won't have you losing us points."

Ron looked at Hermione, then back to Harry. "Potter?"

Harry shrugged. "Are you going to be alright?"

"I think so." Ron nodded. "Fred and George have been keeping our spirits up. They told me about that game you came up with. Sounds wicked."

"We could probably convince them to give us a free set." Harry said after a moment. "We play a couple of games in the common room, and they'll sell out in no time."

Ron smiled. "Missed you, mate."

Harry returned the smile. "I missed you too." He was shocked to find he meant it.

"What's this I hear about you and Luna Lovegood?" Ron asked.

Harry studied his old friend. The simmering jealousy was gone.

"It's complicated." Harry shrugged.

"And you and Lavender?" Ron grinned at him.

"Possibly Parvati too." Harry scanned the room for a moment. "There are a few others I wouldn't mind finding in a broom closet."

"You're a dog." Ron shook his head.

"I'm a young man surrounded by interesting and attractive girls." Harry shot him a smile. "I intend on taking advantage of that. What about you?"

"I'm not so sure about all that." Ron's face dropped. "This summer kind of put me off of it."

"Take your time but stay strong." Harry patted Ron on the shoulder. "I know how it feels to have your world shatter. You've got friends and family that care about you. It's ok to lean on them from time to time."

"That's rich coming from you." Ron scoffed. "Mister I'm going to face a basilisk on my own."

"I took you with me." Harry put on a faux offended tone. "If you remember you saved us from Lockhart trying to wipe our minds."

Ron perked up. "I did, didn't I."

"Come along, young Weasley." Harry walked ahead with stately strides. "We have my death to foretell."

Ron laughed and hurried to catch up.

Divination wasn't nearly as bad this time around. He kept sending smoldering looks at Lavender and Parvati. When they weren't engrossed in the class, they were constantly giggling. They didn't actually talk, but Harry was hopeful they would soon.

Potions played out eerily similar to the first class Slughorn had the previous time through. They weren't at OWL level classes yet, so Harry didn't need to borrow a book. He wondered if he would need to use it this time around. If he wanted to be an auror after school, then he would need to keep on with Potions. Except he didn't want to do that anymore.

He was on his way back to the Great Hall for lunch when he felt an arm slip around his waist. Harry turned to see Parvati. She had a sly smile on her face. A gentle nudge changed their direction from the Great Hall to a nearby broom closet.

"Well?" She asked nodding to the closed door.

"Gladly." Harry opened it and let her enter first.

She reached back, grabbed the collar of his shirt, and pulled him in with her. Even in the dark their lips found each other. Her hands ran along his chest, pushing his robes out of the way to get a better feel. Harry groaned as her fingers massaged his muscles. He returned the favor by groping her firm ass. She squeaked in shock.

"How far do you want to go?" Harry asked through deep breaths.

Parvati paused. He wondered if he had killed the mood.

"Are you hoping for a blowie?" She asked.

"I didn't want to push you." Harry replied. "I'd strip you naked and take you if you're ready."

She giggled. "I'm sure you would."

"If you'd prefer." He kissed her neck. "I could lick your pussy instead."

Parvati shivered against him. "Really?"

"Lift up your skirt, drop your knickers, and find out." Harry nibbled on her ear.

"Just your tongue." She shimmied her panties down below her knees.

"Next time I'll use some fingers too." Harry said as he dropped down.

"Next time?" She giggled. "Rather bold of you to OH FUCK."

Her hands grasped his hair as his tongue made contact. Harry pushed her legs open a bit more to get better access. He covered her pussy in long, slow licks. Each one ending with a swirl around her clit. Her curly bush tickled his nose as he continued.

Parvati fell back, letting the wall support her as her first orgasm rocked her body. Before this she had only had a disappointing encounter with a boy over the summer. He had tried to finger her but had no technique and didn't understand the importance of lubrication. She had given him a quick hand job to

get him to finish. They didn't talk after that. He strutted around like a prize rooster while she warned the other girls if they were curious.

This was on a completely other level than that. His tongue explored her lower lips, finding all the spots that made her moan. Then he would cycle between each one before dipping his tongue into her honeypot. She had no idea how long they were in the broom closet, or how many times she had been driven to orgasm.

If he had asked, she would have hopped on his cock without a second thought. Harry was a gentleman though. He didn't press her into more. His tongue was more than enough. They were definitely going to do this again.

"Enough. Enough." She panted.

Harry placed a gentle kiss on her clit before standing. He bent down, carefully guiding her panties back into place. Parvati practically growled in desire as his fingers trailed along her thighs.

"Thank you for a wonderful time." Harry kissed her lightly on the lips.

"I didn't do anything to you." She was having a hard time staying upright.

"Don't worry." Harry kissed her again, deeper this time. "I enjoyed myself a lot."

She absently noted the slightly sweet flavor of his tongue. Parvati rested a hand on his chest to steady herself.

"Do you want me to go out first, or do you?" Harry asked.

"I don't care who sees us." Parvati sighed. "And I need some help walking."

Harry chuckled. "Happy to help."

43.

Moody was waiting in the classroom when the students arrived. The man was gnarled and scared but still gave off an air of competent violence. He waited for the students to be seated.

"Your books are a resource." He started. "I have chosen them personally. The knowledge and spells within are will greatly strengthen your understanding of Defense. Before each class you will read two chapters and write a summary. I do not care for length, what I care about is your understanding of the subject. I want what you think is right, what is confusing, and any questions you have. Most importantly CONSTANT VIGILANCE."

Harry smiled.

"Now." Moody tapped the chalkboard beside him. "Defense against the dark arts starts with defense. Today we will be discussing multiple levels of protection."

"Sir." Seamus asked raising his hand. "Are we going to learn any offensive spells?"

"Finnigan, right?" Moody looked at the boy. "If you never learn anything more than a stunner but live to see your grandchildren, I will be a happy man. Defense is not just for you, it's for those around you. Keeping yourself and others safe."

He scanned the classroom before him. A wicked smile played across his scarred face.

"Practical lesson in order then?" Moody's wand was in his hand in a flash.

The man began silently casting spells at the students. Harry tossed up a shield, moving to intercept.

"Neville." Harry called. "Get them out of here. Hermione, protect them. Ron. Dean. Stunners."

The group moved without question. Neville had most of the students out into the hall with Hermione covering them with a shield while Ron and Seamus sent stunners at Moody. Harry kept his shield between the professor and the students.

Harry felt the first spell hit his shield. It was a simple stinging jinx, followed by a few other nearly harmless spells. Moody started to laugh. The spells stopped. He slapped away one last stunner before walking back to the chalkboard.

"Good instincts, Potter." Moody smiled. "Ten points to Gryffindor for each of you. Weasley, get your classmates back in here."

The students came back in. A moment later Neville appeared leading McGonagall and Flitwick.

"Alastor." McGonagall stared at the old auror.

"Minerva." Moody inclined his head. "Lovely to see you."

"Mister Longbottom tells me you were attacking students." She set her cold gaze on him.

"Practical lessons." Moody explained. "Ten points to Gryffindor, Longbottom. Another ten if you can explain why you went to these specific professors?"

"Professor Flitwick is a champion duelist." Neville said softly. "Professor McGonagall, well, she'd do anything to protect us."

McGonagall blushed. "If that will be all, I have a class to teach."

Moody tipped his head to the two professors.

"Now." Moody turned his gnarled smile to the students. "What was more important? Trying to hit me with spells, or getting to safety?"

"Making sure the others were safe." Harry replied.

"Exactly." Moody tapped the chalkboard. The word DEFENSE appeared on it. "You can't fight back if you're dead. What are the most common shielding spells?"

"*Protego*." Hermione chimed in. "And *Protego Maxima*."

"Good. There are more variations on the spell." Moody tapped the board and the charm appeared.

"*Protego Duo* is stronger than the basic spell but not as strong as the Maxima variant. Casting a charm

that needs more power than you have access too will not only cause the spell to fail, but it will also exhaust your magical reserves for a period of time. *Protego Horribilis* protects a selected area. It was developed for use in large scale battles. Similar to that is *Protego Totalum* which is used to stop intruders as well as spells in an area. This can be handy while out in the wilds. The most powerful and deadly variation. *Protego Diabolica* creates a ring of black fire that will burn any enemy to ash in a moment while leaving allies safe. It is considered a dark charm and was a favorite of Gellert Grindelwald. Any others?"

"*Resulto*." Ron offered.

"Protects against bludgeoning spells and physical damage. Good." Moody added that one to the board. "Five brothers, bet you learned that early."

"*Boucle*." Daphne Greengrass offered.

Harry turned back to look at her. There were so few Slytherin left that he had forgotten she was there.

"French origins, small but great for mobility. It's not as effective as parrying a spell, but it can be used as a bludgeoning spell in close quarters if you know how." Moody added that as well. "Good. Now. Let's get some practice."

Harry liked this version of Moody much more than the fake. He was a surprisingly good teacher. The last time through his impression of the man was less than stellar. Sure, Moody was a force to be reckoned with, but he didn't seem the type to teach beyond yelling. This time, it was easy to see the Alastor Moody that trained aurors for years.

"Class dismissed." Moody called after a bit of time. "Chapter one and two summaries due at the beginning of class. Potter, stay for a moment."

Harry gathered up his supplies as he waited for the room to clear.

"Good thinking back there." Moody gave him a firm nod. "Tell me why you made that call."

"Neville is braver than he realizes, he's smart too. I knew he'd get them somewhere safe and get help. Hermione knows her spells, she'd keep them covered until they got out of the hall. Like you said, Ron has five brothers, he knows how to cast stunners fast. Dean could be a damned good duelist with how fast he is. I focused on your wand and your movements to intercept and block your spells."

Moody stared at Harry for a long moment. He nodded.

"It burns me up that you know so much." Moody sighed. "I fought beside your mother and father last time Voldermort raised his head. Your father was good, but your mother was scary."

"Thank you, professor." Harry gave him a firm nod.

"I was half-dead when they got attacked." Moody's voice softened. "Lost my leg in an ambush and got hit with a nasty curse that practically had me done. I would have given my life for them. After Catarina died, I was a broken man, full of hate, and I used it to make any Death Eater I came across suffer. Seeing your parents, how much they loved each other, seeing the love they had for you. It was like looking at the life I lost. Merlin be damn, I should have been there."

He felt his heart break as Moody, the more fearsome auror in memory, began to cry. Harry pulled the man into a hug. He remembered in his last life, Moody showing him a picture of his parents. The expectant look on his face. It made sense now.

"Thank you, sir." Harry whispered. "You knew my parents?"

Moody nodded.

"What would they say if they saw you talking like this?" Harry asked.

Moody snorted. "James wouldn't say a damn thing. He knew better. Your mother. Lily would tear me up one-side and down the other."

"Thank you for telling me, sir." Harry gave the man a firm hug.

"This doesn't mean you're excused from the homework." Moody straightened up.

"Wouldn't dream of it." Harry smiled.

"I've heard about your adventures." Moody said, stopping Harry in his tracks. "The ones in the past and your recent discovery of broom closets."

"I..." Harry blushed brightly.

"Be careful." The growl in his voice was back full force. "Black doesn't need to be a grandparent. CONSTANT VIGILANCE."

44.

Harry poked at his breakfast. Today was the day the other schools were arriving. Classes had been canceled since no one was expected to be able to concentrate on anything. There was also a last-minute dash by the army of house elves to get the castle in order. Tapestries were cleaned, paintings were straightened, and the suits of armor were given a shine. It was rather disconcerting to hear a hollow suit of armor giggle.

Aside from Hermione, everyone was buzzing with excitement. Harry couldn't join in either. Last time Fleur and Krum became friends after the war. Krum actually had a wicked sense of humor and got along wonderfully with George. Now that he thought about it, he had never seen Krum with a date. He arrived at the various gatherings alone, carefully avoided the approaching women, and seemed to gravitate to Harry, or George if he was there. It wasn't until later years that he was accompanied by an assistant. Harry couldn't remember his name, but he knew that the man had taken up residence with Krum.

Harry shook his head. They were roommates. How had he missed that? He looked over at George, trying to think if there were any signs he had missed with him. He didn't think so.

"I get to witness the first smile of the day." Lavender said cheerfully from beside him. "And here I was thinking I'd need to pull you into a closet to get you out of your funk."

"In that case." Harry scowled and dropped his voice to a grumble. "I'm grumpy."

"We do have a free day." Lavender leaned into his side. "Do you want to take a walk by the lake?"

An exacerbated groan from nearby caught their attention. Hermione rolled her eyes at them before going back to her homework. She wasn't exactly sitting close to them, but she was near enough to be present.

"Problem, Granger?" Harry sighed.

Hermione pointedly looked away.

"She's been like that all year." Lavender studied the bushy haired girl. "Do you know what's going on with her?"

"We've stopped talking." Harry shrugged.

He slipped a hand under the table and swirled his fingertips along the exposed patch of skin just above her knee. Lavender jumped and giggled.

"You were saying something about taking a walk?" Harry gave her a smoldering look.

She nodded. "Just need to grab my cloak. It's chilly out."

Harry stood up, he drew his wand, pointing it toward the door. "*Accio Cloak.*"

A moment later a thick cloak flew into the room, zooming overhead. Harry caught it and handed it to Lavender.

"Thank you." Lavender cooed as she put it on.

"Mister Potter." McGonagall called. "Five points from Gryffindor for using magic outside of the classroom."

Hermione glared at him.

"Ten points to Gryffindor for perfect execution of an advanced spell." She continued. "Well done."

"Thank you, professor." Harry inclined his head.

He offered Lavender his arm. "Shall we?"

"We shall." Lavender giggled.

They strolled out of the castle and leisurely began their walk around the lake. Lavender stole a kiss or two as they walked. Harry slipped his arm around her waist, pulling her tight. He felt her breath catch.

"Are you ok?" Harry asked.

Lavender nodded.

"Lav." Harry stopped, turning her to face him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Her voice came out high and fast.

Harry arched an eyebrow at her.

"Fine." She huffed. Lavender looked away from him as her cheeks began to flush. "I've never done this before."

Harry tilted his head to the side.

"I know, I've heard the rumors too." Lavender rolled her eyes. "I'm a slag who can't keep her legs shut." She looked back at him. "I kissed a boy on the train my first year. He was older. The rumors started before we got to Hogwarts. He didn't say anything to stop them. By the end of the feast, I had snogged an entire cabin of fourth years." She sighed. "I couldn't fight it." She shrugged. "So, I decided to own it. I talk a big game, and I flirt a lot, but I've never done more than a kiss on the train in my first year."

Harry hugged her. He placed a kiss on her forehead. Thinking back when she snogged Ron the last time around it was messy. He had thought it was due to Ron not having any experience, now he knew it was because both of them were lacking.

"No rush." Harry held her close. "You can say you're one of my ladies. That should keep the dogs away from you."

"One of them?" Lavender playfully slapped his chest.

"I'm the Hogwarts Heartthrob." Harry gave her a cheesy grin. "Or so I'm told. It would be a disservice to the female population."

Lavender giggled. She stole a quick kiss.

"That was nice." Harry smiled at her.

He slipped his arm back around her waist as they continued their walk.

"What do people do on these walks?" Harry asked. "I know a broom closet isn't exactly comfortable, but it's warm."

"Been in many broom closets?" Lavender poked his side.

"A gentleman never tells." Harry looked away. "The lake is too cold for a swim; not like you can go skinny dipping with so many people around."

Lavender gasped. "Mister Potter."

"Miss Brown." Harry purred. "I guess we could set out a cloak on the ground. Still really exposed. Not to mention cold. Maybe two cloaks?"

"The trees would hide us from wondering eyes." Lavender motioned to the edge of the forest.

"No thank you." Harry shook his head. "I've seen what lives in there."

"Unicorns?" Lavender asked, her eyes shined up at him.

"And centaurs." Harry added. "Really big fucking spiders."

He paused. There was a colony of acromantula that were being held back by a single aging patriarch. Once he died, there was nothing stopping them from swarming the entire forest. Then the school. Considering how effective the wards had been in the past, they didn't fill him with confidence.

They had to go.

"Probably some Rouses as well." Harry added.

"Rouses?" Lavender asked.

"Rodents of unusual size." Harry replied.

Lavender shuddered. "I don't care for mice, or rats. Ferrets are fine though. They make excellent familiars."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"They are wicked smart and fast too." Lavender continued. "Most weasels are. Feeding them can be an issue. They only eat meat, and you can't have bunnies anywhere near them."

"You know a lot about weasels." Harry smiled at her.

"I've always wanted a mink as a familiar." She sighed. "They are expensive."

"Are there any difference between magical ones and mundane?" Harry asked.

"Magical ones are smarter. They can change color too. Mostly just for cosmetic purposes." Lavender continued. "In the wild they use it as camouflage while hunting."

"Hm." Harry nodded.

"A girl can have more than one interest." Lavender shot him a look. "I find Divination fascinating. I know I don't have the sight, but it's fun. Reading tarot, palms, and casting bones isn't really about telling the future. Even the more complicated magics can't do that. Only seers have that ability. It's about reading the signs of the present to predict the future. You can learn a lot by knowing where you stand."

"Damn." Harry breathed out. "I might have to stop flirting with you and pay attention in class."

Lavender stuck her tongue out at him.

"Careful." Harry grinned at her. "That is a really cute tongue."

She blushed.

"Ready to head back inside?" Harry asked. "It's cold out here."

"One moment." Lavender pulled him to a stop.

She leaned forward, pressing a kiss to his lips. It was a step beyond chase but didn't go further. Harry was left slightly dazed as she stepped away. Lavender giggled as she ran back to the castle.

"Damn, she's adorable." Harry shook his head as he followed her.

The walk had lifted his spirits. By the time he got back into the Great Hall Lavender was already sitting with Parvati. They giggled when they saw him and went back to talking in quick, hushed whispered.

"Taking a ride on Lavender, eh?"

Harry turned to see a Hufflepuff leering nearby.

"Justin, right?" Harry asked.

The guy nodded. Harry moved closer to him, as to share a secret.

"If you talk about Lavender like that again I'll stuff your head so far up your ass you'll taste your molars." Harry whispered. "Spread the word. Yeah?"

Harry straightened up. He patted the frozen boy on the shoulder before walking away. Lavender looked up at him as he passed. He gave her a wink.

45.

"Hey, Harry." A girl said from nearby.

Harry turned to see Katie Bell heading over to him. The Gryffindor common room was sparsely populated. Most of the students were getting ready for the arrival of the other schools. The courtyard was filling up with people trying to get a first look. It was still a couple of hours away and he wasn't in a rush. He had already seen the carriage and ship arrive once already.

Katie was an athletic girl. She had brown hair in a pixie cut. Harry had the privilege of seeing her in her quidditch uniform, which showed off her figure much better than the school robes. She was slim with sleek muscle that served her well as a chaser. They had lost contact after school last time around. She was good enough to go pro, but with all the chaos there weren't many scouts looking for new talent.

"Hey, Katie." He smiled at her. "What's up?"

"I heard something interesting about you." She dropped down next to him on the couch, practically on his lap.

"I am an interesting person." Harry gave her a sly smirk. "What have you heard?"

"Thanks to your attention Alyn Lind signed with the Kestrels." Katie bumped his shoulder with hers. "Why? What did you think I was talking about?"

"She did sign with the Kestrels on her own." Harry shook his head. "Saw her at the World Cup. She started the last three games of the season."

Katie grinned at him. "Avoiding the question, I see."

"I have no idea what you are talking about." Harry shrugged.

"From what I've heard." Katie dropped her voice into a whisper. "You've finally discovered the popular function of broom closets."

"I'm sorry, Katie." Harry sighed. "My adventures in explore broom closets are vastly inflated. As of yet, I've only been in one with a singular girl who I will not name."

"Good luck with that." Katie laughed. "Parvati is telling everyone who will listen how you turned her legs to jelly."

Harry shrugged. "I guess you'll have to decide if you believe her or not."

"Well." Katie sighed. "I'm just going to have to see for myself."

She hopped up from the couch. Her hand shot out, grabbing his loosely by his tie. Katie quickly led him up the stairs to his room. She paused in the doorway, studying the beds. Luckily his roommates weren't around.

"This one?" She pointed to his bed.

"Good guess." Harry nodded. "What are we doing here?"

"Broom closets are too cramped." Katie led him over to his bed. "I like to stretch out."

She pushed him onto the mattress and climbed up next to him. A quick tug closed the curtains, blocking them off from any outside audience. She straddled him, resting her tight ass on his crotch. Her hands deftly worked the buttons on his shirt.

Harry leaned back, smiling as she worked. She pulled his shirt up, running her hands along his chest.

"Sweet Morgana, Harry." She purred.

Katie leaned forward, kissing his nipples, alternating from one to the other. Harry gasped. Her teeth dragged along, teasing them to hardness.

"What are you doing?" Harry moaned.

"You are delicious." Harry pulled his shirt off as she peppered his neck with kisses.

She sat back, pulling off her sweater. Her warm, pant clad pussy ground against his hardening member. Katie moaned, rocking back and forth, pressing down onto him.

"Harry." Katie locked eyes with him. "Can I ride your broomstick?"

"Are you sure?" Harry asked.

"Get your clothes off now or I'm going to tie you up and make you beg." She growled.

"The downside being?" Harry asked.

Katie's wand was out, and their clothes were off in record time. Harry took a moment to admire the nude form now sitting atop him. Her muscles were tight and lean, like a gymnast. A strip dark brown hair guided his eyes to her lower lips. He reached up, cupping her breasts, finding they weren't quite a handful.

"Boys." She shook her head.

He pinched her nipples, getting a small yip in reply.

"Scoot up." Harry said.

Katie looked at him for a moment. "Pretty sure I'm supposed to scoot back."

She reached around, fondling his hardening member. Harry grabbed her by the hips, pulling her forward, and placing her pussy within reach. Katie squeaked as his tongue made contact.

"What are you doing?" She asked, sliding forward so her legs were practically straddling his head.

Harry ran the tip of his nose along her strip of pubic hair. She giggled. He gripped her legs, pulling them open just a bit more. Her giggle turned into a moan as he began to stroke her pussy with his tongue. He found her clit, circling it with his tongue, and making her begin to rock atop him. She tasted amazing. Somewhere in the back of his mind he wondered if it was a magical thing.

Katie looked up to the ceiling, letting out a long moan. Her legs closed in on his head, blocking out all sound, but he could still feel the vibration. If rumors were already starting about his adventures, then he wanted to make sure they were bordering on legendary.

§ *Scream my name* § He hissed onto her clit. Parseltongue was a wonderful skill.

"FUCK." Katie screamed.

Close enough. She slumped back as the muscles in her body tensed then released. The entire length of her pussy was now within reach. Harry pressed as much of his tongue into her as he could.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. OH FUCK." Katie chanted as he fucked her with his tongue.

Harry pulled away from her drenched slit. "Now you can scoot back."

Katie wobbled as she righted herself. She slid back along his chest. Her strip of hair tickled along his skin. She reached back, grabbing his shaft, angling him up, and pressing back into him. Katie's eyes fluttered as the head of his cock slid inside.

"Go slow." She breathed.

Harry nodded. He pulled her down into a kiss. She shuddered as their tongues touched, her body relaxed, letting her slide down until their hips touched. Harry let out a contented sigh as she settled. Their kisses slowed, becoming gentler as she adjusted to him.

Katie raised her hips, feeling ever bit of his cock. She paused at just before the head, pushing back down along his length. The kisses stopped. Katie sat up, placing her hands on his chest. She gave him evil grin before she began to ride him hard and fast.

"Almost there." Her voice had dropped into a whisper. "Keep going. Don't stop. Almost."

Somehow her pace increased. Harry bent his legs, thrusting into when she bottomed out. She let out a wordless scream as her body began to buck above him. Harry kept the pace fast, fucking her deep and hard as she rode out an orgasm.

"Close." He growled out.

"Fucking cum Potter." She slammed down onto him.

Harry grabbed her hips, pushing deep into her as he let loose. His entire body tensed as his orgasm rocked through him. Katie let out a shuddering moan as pulse after pulse shot into her, filling her up. She leaned down, kissing him again as he stilled.

"Damn." Katie giggled. "You sure can show a girl a good time."

Harry laughed with her.

"What now?" He asked.

"I need to go get a shower." Katie leaned forward, kissing him. "You should have one too. Unless you want to smell like sex for the rest of the day."

"I mean us." Harry chuckled.

"I know." She rolled her eyes. "I'm not looking for a boyfriend." Katie watched him. "Are you ok with that? I like you Harry and I'd like to do this again. Just not exclusively you."

"I get it." Harry nodded, then shot her a sly smile. "Especially with the special guests arriving today."

"Exactly." She giggled.

Harry gave her a quick kiss. "I'm not going to go spreading this around."

"I trust you, Harry." Katie sighed.

"Thanks." Harry smiled at her.

"I am going to tell everyone." She smiled back at him. "Where are my clothes?"

46.

Harry stood with the other Gryffindors waiting for the visitor's arrival. Ron stood beside him, the twins were behind them, pressed against his other side was Lavender and Parvati. Somehow the two of them had managed to wiggle close enough. Katie bell was with Angela and Alicia, every now and then they'd look over at him.

Everyone around was buzzing with excitement. Harry couldn't join in. The closer it got to the carriage arriving, the deep a sense of sorrow seeped into his being. He was running through ideas on how to approach Fleur, none of them seemed like they would actually work.

She was always cold when she was here last time. He could offer his cloak. Which would come off as another allure drunk idiot trying to impress her. He could approach her as a fan of dueling, but he knew how uncomfortable dealing with fans could be. Harry could let her know about Professor Flitwick and his past as a champion duelist. Considering last time through she was in talks about apprenticing with him for charms she probably already knew that.

The only thing he could think of that brought them together was the tournament.

"What is that?" Ron asked pointing to the sky.

Harry followed his motion to see the approaching carriage. He smiled at the reaction of the students around him. The ground shook as the carriage landed. Harry had to admit it was still quite an impressive entrance. He shook his head at the sudden rush of whispers as the half-giant headmistress stepped out of the lead carriage. Three lines of students followed in formation behind her. They tried to hide it, but quite a few of them shivered in the evening air.

He caught a glimpse of silver-blond hair. Harry forced himself to look away, focusing on the other students. The group walked in a matching rhythm, much too elegant to be marching. Harry was curious

to see that there were quite a few young men with them as well. He hadn't paid attention all that much last time. There were more girls, but the guys were there.

He heard Lavender and Parvati whispering about a couple of them. Lavender blushed when he looked at them.

"You're free to flirt and ogle as you please, Lav." Harry whispered. "I'm not going to be mad. Pretty sure we're not dating."

"I'd hope not." Parvati laughed. "Bell has been bragging all afternoon."

Harry blushed. That got the duo giggling.

"You and Katie?" Ron asked leaning closer to him.

"You'd have to ask her." Harry shrugged.

"Good on you, Harrykins." George said.

"A gentleman never tells." Fred added.

"Harry Potter, gentleman of the broom closets." George continued.

"Harry Potter, Hogwarts Heartthrob." Fred said.

Harry hid his face in his hands.

"Something's in the lake!" Someone shouted.

"Thank merlin." Harry muttered.

The crowd turned to watch the pirate ship breach the water. Harry still had no idea how they did that. The lake was a self-contained body of water. Not only that, but there were also a couple of villages of aquatic people, and a giant squid to take into account.

"It's Krum!" Ron yelled. "That's Victor Krum!"

"Calm down, Weasley." Hermione said flatly. "He's just a quidditch player."

"Just a..." Ron looked over at his former friend. "Victor Krum is one of the youngest professional quidditch players in the world. He's broken records that have been held for years and he's still a rookie!"

"Let it go, Ron." Harry patted the ginger on the shoulder. "She doesn't understand."

"You got to see him play, right?" Ron asked. "Was it everything you hoped for?"

The usual jealousy was gone from his voice. Harry had to smile.

"He was ok." Harry shrugged.

Ron's eyes went wide. Harry tried to hold out as long as he could.

"He was brilliant!" Harry laughed. "I swear he knew exactly where the snitch was from the moment the game started."

"I wish I could have been there." Ron sighed. "We were going to go, but then..."

The smile on his face dropped. Harry bumped Ron with his shoulder.

"I'm living with Sirius now." Harry said softly. "He's a quidditch fanatic. I bet we could rope him into a couple of games this summer." He sighed. "Not the Cannons though. They're horrid."

"Hey!" Ron glared at Harry.

"Be nice to Ronny." Fred shook his head.

"He might have horrible taste in teams." George added.

"But he's still our little brother." They said as one.

"They're a good team!" Ron protested.

The group filed into the Great Hall. Dumbledore made his welcomes speech. The Goblet of Fire was unveiled as well as the twenty-four-hour time limit to enter. Harry sat facing away from the Ravenclaw table to avoid looking at Fleur.

"Pardon." A familiar voice that sent a shiver down his spine and a knife to his heart said.

He turned to see Fleur.

"Are you finished with that?" She asked, motioning to the dish of food on the table.

"Go ahead." Harry scooted out of the way. "A word of advice." He continued. "The house elves aren't the best at French cuisine. If you're looking for quality, you will be disappointed. They are rather adept at Italian food."

"And 'ow would I go about asking them?" Fleur raised an eyebrow at him.

Harry pulled out his wand. He tapped the table three times and waited. A moment later a house elf appeared next to him.

"Young master calls?" The house elf asked.

"Would I be able to have a dish prepared?" Harry asked.

"Of course, young master." The house elf smiled at him. "What you be liking?"

Harry looked to Fleur.

"Cacio e Pepe." Fleur said.

"Cacui e Pepe." Harry repeated. "For her, if you please."

The house elf disappeared with a pop.

"Merci." Fleur nodded to him before returning to her table.

"How did you do that?" Ron asked.

"Hm?" Harry looked at his friend.

"You summoned a house elf." Ron waved his hand to where the elf had been.

"Hogwarts a History." Harry smiled at him. "Tap the table three times with your wand and wait. If there is an available house elf, then they will see what you need."

"Pretty sure she's a veela." Lavender whispered.

Harry nodded. "Wouldn't be surprised."

"You aren't drooling." Lavender said. "Unlike some."

Harry looked to Ron, but he seemed fine. It was Dean and Seamus that were had drunk-like smiles on their faces. He turned to Ron. The ginger wasn't even flushed.

He looked back to Lavender and shrugged. That seemed to satisfy her. She turned her attention back to the food on the table. It seemed everyone around them was rather skeptical about this new menu. The 'French' dishes were all but untouched in favor of the common selections. Even the choices that were meant to be Bulgarian were more popular.

Harry waited until those around him were distracted.

"Ron." Harry whispered.

His friend looked up at him.

"You didn't have any reaction either." Harry kept his voice low.

Ron shook his head. Now there was a slight blush on his cheeks. Considering how hard the ambient allure had hit him last time, that raised some questions.

"Have you been feeling any...different, since you had the potions and stuff cleared?" Harry asked.

Ron looked around to make sure no one was paying attention. He nodded. Judging from the multiple adjustments in Ron's attitude it looked like Molly hadn't just been dosing Arthur. Harry leaned in closer.

"Blokes not birds?" His voice was barely loud enough for Ron to hear.

Ron's eyes went wide. He stared at Harry for a long, tense moment. Ron nodded. Harry's vision went white. Molly Weasley, or whatever her name was going to be, deserved to be punished. Changing a person to that extent required multiple potions that were incredibly powerful and dangerous. Now that he thought about it, Ron's legendary appetite was a symptom of overexposure.

"Anyone gives you trouble, you let me know." Harry said.

Ron sighed. His entire body relaxed as he smiled at Harry and nodded.

"Please tell me that's why you like the Cannons." Harry grinned.

"Hey!" Ron yelled.

"Mister Weasley." Professor McGonagall snapped.

"My fault professor." Harry spoke up. "I insulted his team."

McGonagall shifted her glare to Harry. If there was one thing that she could understand that bridged generations, it was team loyalty.

"Five points from Gryffindor."

47.

The next evening every single student was packed into the Great Hall. Harry had tried to keep his spirits up, or at least make it look like it, but his mind kept wandering to Fleur and Krum. Well, now that he knew Ron was into guys and so was Krum, he had toyed with the idea of trying to set the two up. He wasn't sure if that was a good idea though. Ron did seem to be better now that he was free from Molly, but he was still a huge fan. That created a power imbalance in any relationship from the start.

Harry had made an effort to sit facing away from the other tables during meals. Luckily, the visiting students attended classes in their respective transportation. In truth, the tournament wasn't doing all that well for getting the students to mingle. Granted it had only been a day. His memory of the last time through didn't help, he had been too focused on staying alive to pay attention.

The crowd came to a hush as Dumbledore stepped up to his podium.

"The Goblet has chosen the champions!" He called.

The room erupted in cheers. A slip of paper lifted from the goblet. Dumbledore plucked it from the air.

"For Beauxbatons, Fleur Delacour." Dumbledore announced.

Everyone cheered, Harry did notice that some of the French students didn't appear so happy. A couple were even crying in disappointment. Fleur stood, with her head held high she leisurely strolled to the chamber off the Great Hall. Harry had to smile at that, she appeared to be calm, cool, and collected but he could see the little skip in her step.

Another slip of paper floated up out of the goblet.

"For Durmstrang, Victor Krum." Dumbledore called.

The Bulgarian students erupted in cheers. A number of Hogwarts students did so too, just as loud. Harry smiled over at Ron who was clapping.

"For Hogwarts." Dumbledore caught the paper. He paused for dramatic effect. "Cedric Diggory."

The Hufflepuff table went nuts. Harry clapped along too. Happy to see the young man alive.

"Now that the champions have been selected there will be a weighing of the wands in one weeks..."
Dumbledore paused as another slip of paper drifted up before him.

Harry felt a lead weight settle in his chest.

"Harry Potter." Dumbledore read.

The hall was silent. Harry stood, he looked up at Dumbledore.

"Are you sure?" He asked.

"The goblet doesn't lie, Harry." Dumbledore shook his head sadly.

"For what school?" He asked.

"There is no school listed." Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Please join the other champions in the chambers."

Harry looked back at the Gryffindor table. Utter confusion played across his face.

"I didn't enter." He blinked a couple of times. "How is this possible?"

Everyone at the table stared at him, a blanket of dread covered them.

"We'll get your through this." Katie spoke up.

"Something is very wrong." Ron added.

Harry nodded. "This shouldn't happen."

He walked to the other room in a daze.

"Do we need to go back?" Cedric asked as he entered.

"My name came out." Harry replied flatly.

"What?" Cedric rushed over to him. "How?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. I didn't go anywhere near the goblet."

Fleur studied him. Victor didn't seem to mind. Madam Maxine and Karkaroff were with Dumbledore. Both were yelling. Harry had heard the argument before. The only difference being that Snape wasn't there to add his oh-so-helpful commentary.

"Harry." Moody snapped his fingers in front of his face to get his attention.

Harry looked up. "Hm?"

"Did you put your name in the goblet?" The grizzled man asked.

"No." Harry shook his head. "I have no idea how this happened."

This didn't make sense. Barty was dead, so Moody hadn't been replaced. Voldermort was dead, so he wasn't pulling the strings. Most of the Death Eaters in the country were dead as well. At least this time it seemed like people believed him. At least some of his house was willing to trust him without the layers of aura's that had been placed on him.

"You have to compete." Dumbledore sighed. "The goblet has formed a magical contract that has bound your magic. You must complete the tournament, or it will strip our magic from you."

Harry looked up at the Headmaster. The usual twinkle in his eyes flashed when their gaze met. Dumbledore hit a brick wall, but it was a two-way street. Harry glimpsed into the old man's mind for a brief moment.

Dumbledore.

Harry shouldn't have been surprised. He had made too many waves to go unnoticed. Claiming his lordship and freeing Sirius were big enough. Losing control of Lupin and the Weasleys was too much. The old bastard was going to catch on sooner or later.

"Don't worry, Headmaster." Harry spoke through gritted teeth. "No one blames you. The goblet was under your care, but whoever did this was too clever."

The twinkle in Dumbledore's eyes dimmed for a moment. Moody turned his glare to Dumbledore, as did Madam Maxine and Karkaroff. That would get them thinking.

"Right." Crouch cleared his throat. "Unusual as it is. His name came out of the goblet, he has to compete. There will be a weighing of the wands in one week. Once that is completed the champions will be excused from classes to prepare for the upcoming tasks. There will be three. One to test your courage, one to test your cunning, and one to test your resourcefulness. The Daily Prophet will be there to cover the event. Good luck champions."

Harry stood up from his spot. He wandered back to the common room in a daze. A crowd waited for him. As opposed to last time, they had pressed the tables together, and almost looked to be holding court. The quidditch team, aside from a couple, were waiting for him. Harry slumped into a chair facing the group.

"I watched every single person put their name in the goblet." Angelina said firmly. "I was even there with these two tried to sneak by with an aging potion."

The twins smiled proudly.

"You didn't enter." She stated.

"Thank you." Harry found a tightness in his throat. "You don't know how much that means to me."

"Harry." Angelina leaned across the table, taking his hand. "We've been teammates for three years now."

"It would be four if they hadn't canceled this season." Alicia snarked.

"Last year you spend time with the other teams to coach their seekers." Angelina didn't comment on the interruption. "That doesn't sound like something a cheater would do."

"She was right ticked off at first." Katie chimed in. "Changed her tune when Alyn got recruited."

Angelina glared at her. Katie smiled at her.

"We're with you Harry." Angelina turned back to look at him.

Harry cleared his throat. He slipped off his glasses and wiped his eyes.

"Speaking of quidditch." Harry smiled at them. "Sirius is putting together a summer tournament to make up for missing this season."

The entire team perked up at the news.

"Only you, Harry. Only you." Angelina chuckled.

"I'm going to bed." Harry trudged up to his dorm.

He flopped onto the bed. After a couple of minutes, he realized he was still dressed. Grumbling, he stripped down to his boxers. He didn't care enough to put on his night clothes. A storm of emotions raged inside of him.

Dumbledore had entered him into the tournament. Why? Was he trying to kill him? Test him? Did the old bastard know that Riddle was dead? Harry wouldn't put it passed him to have some way to track Voldermort.

Another part of him, one much larger than he'd ever admit, was excited. Not only would he get to do the trials again, but he had a reason to talk to Fleur and Victor. There was a chance he wouldn't lose his friends. Cedric was going to survive this time. He would make sure of that.

"Shit." He muttered. "I need to tell Sirius."

Harry was asleep before the thought had taken root in his mind.

48.

The next morning Harry went downstairs to find McGonagall waiting in the common room.

"Come along, Mister Potter." She left, not waiting to see if he would follow.

She led him down a few corridors that were only used as shortcuts. A moment later he found her waiting at the doorway to a classroom that hadn't been used in years. Harry stepped in to find Sirius, Moody, and Professor Flitwick.

Oddly enough, she didn't follow him in.

"Something to tell me, pup?" Sirius sighed.

"I meant to let you know last night." Harry gave him a shy smile. "I fell asleep before I could."

"Someone is trying to kill you." Moody cut in.

"That happens a lot." Harry sighed.

"Enough cheek." Moody snapped. "We don't have much time to get you trained. I'll handle the defensive bit, Filius will be teaching you advanced dueling, and Sirius..." The old auror looked at the man. "I don't know what he's going to be doing."

"I've got my own bag of tricks." Sirius wiggled his eyebrows at the old man.

"Thank you." Harry looked from each one. "I'm not supposed to get help."

"You're not allowed help from your school." Professor Flitwick corrected. "You were not listed with a school; therefore, we are not breaking the contract to train you. Technically, in that sense, you're not a student of Hogwarts during this tournament."

"I appreciate it, thank you." Harry gave a firm smile. "What about Professor McGonagall?"

"She can't." Moody growled. "As Deputy Headmistress she is contractually bound to support and enforce the orders laid out by the Headmaster."

"That explains a lot." Harry said slowly.

"We will get a schedule arranged for you in the coming days." Moody continued. "You're free to skip your classes. I'd suggest spending time in the library. I'll be teaching you more advanced techniques than the ones in class."

"As will I." Flitwick added. "Though I would prefer you attend my class as well. Charms are much more than just for dueling."

He turned to look at Sirius.

"I bought a flat in Hogsmeade." His godfather explained. "Can't miss it, black and white brick building in the newer side of town. Come visit when you'd like."

Harry nodded. Hogsmeade was split into a few different districts, even though it was a small town. There was the founding area with older buildings that were made from thick cut stone and aged wooden supports. The roofs were tightly packed thatch that had been enchanted many times over the years. A half-circle around that was an area of housing mostly made of wood and stone. The magic that went into constructing the houses meant that updating them wasn't that big of an issue. They didn't have to worry about adjusting for electricity or new utility lines either. It wasn't until the commercial park of town that the buildings were a bit more modern. Tightly packed brick buildings, almost like they had been cut out from a city and plopped down in Hogsmeade, marked newer apartments, housing, and businesses. Zonko's had a nice corner store that was a smaller version of the shop in Diagon Alley. In the future, the future that was, Fred and George had bought out the space for their shop.

"I'm sure having a contingent of gorgeous French witches nearby had nothing to do with it." Harry shook his head.

"Harry." Sirius gasped dramatically. "Why would you think so little of me?"

Harry shot him a flat look.

"Durmstrang has quite a few ladies with them as well." Sirius chuckled.

"Enough of that." Moody snapped, but his tone lacked any real bite. "Let's get to breakfast and we can work out this schedule."

"Sounds good to me." Sirius clapped his hands. "Sneaking out of the castle to get to Hogsmeade. Brings back memories."

He shifted seamlessly into Padfoot before sauntering over to the door. Harry scratched the top of his head as the dog passed by. Padfoot gave him a goofy doggy grin. Harry opened the door. McGonagall was nowhere in sight. It was yet another thing that made him despise Dumbledore. Overlooking the multitude of injustices through the years would have been torture for her.

Harry was going to enjoy taking the old bastard down. He just needed to figure out how.

The noise in the Great Hall dropped noticeably when he entered. Harry sighed. At least they were glaring at him this time.

"Harry!" Cedric called out to him.

His eyes snapped to the young man.

"Come join us!" Cedric waved him over.

It wasn't until he got closer that he realized Cedric had gathered the two champions with him. They sat toward the front of the Hufflepuff table with just a bit of space between them and the rest of the students. Krum served as a barrier between Fleur and the rest of the students.

"Thank you." Harry gave Cedric a genuine smile. "How did you sleep?"

"I was too excited." Cedric beamed. "I think I passed out around three in the morning."

Krum nodded. "My English not so good. Hear no speak good."

"Got it." Harry gave him a friendly smile. "What about you, Fleur?"

The young woman studied him for a moment. He could feel the constant allure that she exuded. It was something she had to continuously keep in check, like keeping something tightly in her grip through every waking moment.

Harry looked at Cedric. The Hufflepuff was slightly dazed around her but seemed to get himself under control. Still, it looked like a struggle. Krum didn't seem to have any problem being around her. Fleur seemed to sense this, but not in a way that she did with Harry. The urge to ask her about how Veela interacted with gay men was a hard one to deny.

"I wrote a letter to my sister." Fleur admitted after a moment.

"You have a sister?" Harry asked. "Older or younger?"

Fleur seemed shocked that he was talking instead of drooling over her.

"Younger." She replied.

"Do you mind if I practice my French with you?" Harry asked slipping into the language.

"No." She smiled at him. *"Are you still learning? Your accent isn't bad at all."*

"Thank you." Harry replied returning the smile. *"I had a good teacher."*

"You didn't enter your name." Fleur said it as fact.

"No." Harry shook his head. *"Someone is trying to kill me. It happens."*

"It happens?" Fleur asked.

Harry thought for a moment. No one had tried to kill him last year, aside from the dementors, which he handled.

"Twice since I've been in school. Once when I was a baby." He counted them off on his fingers.

Fleur stared at him. *"The world knows of The Boy Who Lived. I did not realize it was a title that had been tested further."*

Harry chuckled.

"What do you think the tasks will be?" Cedric asked. "No fair cutting out the champions who don't speak French."

"My French is better than my English." Krum gave them a rare smile.

Cedric sighed before the four of them began to laugh.

"Did you have an idea?" Harry asked Cedric.

"Courage, cunning, and resourcefulness." He repeated. "Cunning sounds like a puzzle. Courage could be anything. Same with resourcefulness."

"They could drop us in the wilderness, and we have to make it back to safety." Harry offered. "For resourcefulness."

"The people watch that 'ow?" Fleur countered.

"No clue." Harry shrugged.

"Face down angry mother for courage." Krum added. "Enough broom! Do homework!"

The group burst into laughter.

"I got to see you play in the World Cup." Cedric said.

Krum tilted his head to the side. "Play Quidditch?"

"Seeker." Cedric replied. "Harry too. I'm not too shabby, but Potter here is a terror on a broom."

Krum looked between the two. He turned his attention to Fleur.

"Non." She shook her head. "I am a duelist."

"One of the best in her bracket." Harry added.

The other three turned to look at him.

"What?" Harry blushed. "I can follow Quidditch and dueling. Victor is the youngest professional Seeker in years. Professional duelist clubs are frothing at the mouth to get Fleur's attention. Last but not least, Cedric here is an enchanting prodigy."

"Wow." Cedric sat back.

"Da." Krum nodded.

Fleur gave him an appraising look.

"Have you spoken with Professor Flitwick?" Harry asked her. "He's a former world champion."

"Merci, Monsieur Potter." Fleur replied.

"I'm sorry." Harry blushed. "That was forward of me. I apologize, Miss Delacour."

Professor Slughorn was over the moon that Harry and Cedric were both in his class. Not in the same year, but still. The man was practically glowing with anticipation. There were so many people that he tried to name-drop when either were in earshot.

Harry would have thought it was funny if it wasn't directed at him. He was certain he could get Slughorn to tell him every task if he asked casually. The professor was amazing at networking, this year was just too much for the older man to keep up. With the visiting staff and students to meet, not to mention the various reporters popping up, he was a kid in a candy store.

Luckily, the Weighing of the Wands was during his potions class. Otherwise, Harry was certain that Slughorn would have stopped mid-lesson to schmooze. The professor was eager to let him go, in fact, it seemed like he wanted to follow Harry to the event. Slughorn just couldn't help it.

Rita Skeeter was waiting in the tent when Harry got there. She wore a shimmering green dress-robe that hugged her curves nicely and her glasses looked to quite expensive. Unlike last time, she had a confident looking photographer who didn't leer constantly at Fleur. There was also a younger woman who hovered nearby that Harry took to be her assistant.

She smiled and gave him a little nod when she saw him. The introductions were the same as last time, as well as the weighing. Harry was pleasantly surprised when Rita sat down with each champion for an interview. There was a smaller tent nearby setup especially for her.

When it was Harry's turn, he found that her assistant and the photographer were not with Rita. There was a fancy looking quill that hovered over a piece of parchment.

"Mister Potter." She gave a sultry look. "Please, take a seat."

"Thank you, Miss Skeeter." Harry inclined his head.

"Call me Rita." The woman winked at him. "Thanks to your tips I'm a real reporter these days."

"I've noticed." Harry smiled at her. "Isn't covering the tournament a bit beneath you now?"

Rita scrunched up her nose for a moment. "A little, but then how would I get to see you?"

"I hope that quill hasn't started taking notes yet." Harry gave her his best charming, crooked smile.

"Command activated Dicto-Quill." Rita practically purred. "It won't start until I tell it. Naturally, I'll have you look over the interview before it's published."

"I'm impressed." Harry said.

"Harry." She pouted. "I thought you've forgotten about me. It's been two years since we last spoke. Not a single letter."

"My apologies, Rita." Harry placed a hand on hers. "That was not my intention. How could I make it up to you?"

"Exclusive interview rights." Rita replied quickly.

"Done." He smiled at her. "And here I thought you'd ask for a mistress contract."

Rita gasped in faux shock. "Mister Potter."

"Miss Skeeter." Harry swirled his fingertips along the back of her hand.

"Another time." She straightened up in her seat. "I am here on assignment."

Harry adjusted his posture as well. "I enjoy this professional side of you."

"Behave." Rita giggled. She cleared her throat, slipping into her serious voice. "Introduction. Tri-Wizard Tournament. Fourth Interview. Rita Skeeter. Please state your name."

"Harry James Potter." He supplied.

"Thank you agreeing to this interview, Lord Potter." Rita said.

"Please, call me Harry." He gave her a polite smile.

"Harry." She smiled in return. "There is quite a stir about you being named a champion. Dumbledore himself set the protections. How did you enter?"

"I didn't." Harry replied. "As you said, Headmaster Dumbledore set the protections himself. I'm a decent student, but I don't have that much skill. Plus, I had no desire to enter the tournament in the first place."

"Oh?" Rita asked. "You didn't want a shot at glory and riches?"

"No." Harry laughed. "I was looking forward to cheering on Cedric."

"Cedric Diggory, the other Hogwarts Champion." Rita clarified.

"THE Hogwarts Champion." Harry made sure to speak that line clearly. "When my name came out it wasn't attached to any school."

"Interesting." Rita's eyes flashed. "Are you excited for the upcoming tasks?"

"My goal is to make it out alive." Harry chuckled.

"Come now." Rita cooed. "You aren't the least bit interested in competing?"

"The only competition I'm interested in is the Quidditch House Cup." Harry replied. "That's not an option this year."

"Oh?" Rita asked. "Could you expand on that?"

"Sure." Harry leaned forward. "Each of the four houses have a Quidditch team. Players run from second to seventh years. We play in a tournament for the House Cup. Scouts for professional teams usually show up to check out any upcoming talent. They don't have that chance this year."

"That sounds rough." Rita didn't seem all that worried.

"My godfather and I are Quidditch fans." Harry continued. "He came up with the idea for a summer tournament to make up for this year. It gives the graduates a chance at getting picked up by a team."

"I'll pass that along to my colleagues in the sports section." Rita chuckled. "Is there anything you would like to add about the Tri-Wizard Tournament?"

"I fully support the other champions. They were chosen to represent their schools. My name coming out was just a continuation of the string of incidents I've had here at Hogwarts." Harry added.

"Thank you, Harry. I appreciate you taking time for this interview." She paused. "Script End."

"Is that it?" Harry asked.

"Yes." She answered. "I'll have my assistant send you a copy before it prints."

Harry stood. He held out his hand to help her up. Once Rita was on her feet, he pulled her close to him.

"Are you busy this Friday night?" Harry asked.

"I can clear my schedule." Rita purred.

"Join me for dinner?" He asked. "There's a little place in Hogsmeade that I'd love to take you."

"Consider it a date." Rita replied. "I'll send you an owl in the morning."

"Wear something that's simple to take off." Harry kissed her on the cheek. "I'll look forward to your letter."

50.

Harry watched as Hedwig landed before him. She held out her leg and gave it a little shake. He smiled as he untied the letter. The stack of bacon on his plate was pillaged the moment her leg was free. He read the note then slipped it into his pocket.

"Harry." Ron yelped.

He looked over at his friend. Ron's hands shook as he held up a letter.

"It's a letter, Ron." Harry said.

"Come off it." Ron scoffed. "It's from my brother, Charlie."

"Is everything alright with Norbert?" Harry asked.

"Should be." Ron shrugged. "Hagrid writes him at least a week to check up." He shook his head. "Not important. Charlie mentioned you."

"That's odd." Harry shook his head.

"He says you had better read up on dragons." Ron whispered. "I think he means that the first task has something to do with them."

Harry paused. That made sense. Ron hadn't told him about the letter last time. A wide smile crossed his face.

"Why are you smiling?" Ron smacked his shoulder. "Did you hear me?"

"Yeah." Harry turned the smile to Ron. "I'm just glad you're my friend."

Ron blushed.

"Do you mind if I tell the others?" Harry asked.

"Of course not." Ron shook his head. "Rather not have them get cooked because I didn't share a letter."

Harry patted his friend on the shoulder. He pulled out a short sheet of parchment.

Meet in courtyard in ten minutes

Important ~ Harry

He tapped the sheet. The text copied itself two more times. He tore it into thirds, then tapped each one. They folded up into the shape of an airplane before taking off.

"Come on." Harry stood up from the table.

"But." Ron looked down at his plate.

"Snag a piece of toast." Harry sighed.

The two of them hurried out while Ron chomped on his piece of toast. They made it outside with a couple of minutes to spare.

"What are we doing?" Ron asked.

"We're going to talk to the others." Harry replied.

"Why am I here, then?" Ron asked.

"Because you're the one who told me." Harry motioned to the letter. "You deserve the credit."

"Oh." Ron blinked. A goofy smile crossed his face. "Thanks."

"Hey Harry." Cedric called as he walked over. "What's this about?"

"Give it a moment." Harry replied. "The others need to get here."

"Harry." Krum nodded as he approached. "You said important?"

Ron stared at Krum, frozen in place.

"Victor, this is my friend Ron." Harry patted his friend on the shoulder. "He's a big fan. Give him a moment and his brain will start working again."

"Hey!" Ron glared at him.

"Monsieur Potter?" Fleur was flanked by two other ladies from Beauxbatons.

He didn't recognize them, but he had been a little busy last time around.

"This is my friend, Ron Weasley." Harry introduced the ginger. "His brother Charlie wrote him a letter today."

"That's nice." Cedric said slowly.

"He works at a dragon preserve." Ron added. "His note says that Harry should brush up on dragons."

"Merde." Fleur grumbled.

"Da." Krum nodded.

"Dragons?" Cedric asked. "We're going to have to fight dragons?"

"Probably not fight." Ron offered. "Especially if Charlie is working with them. Dragons are a protected species."

"Plus, deadly." Krum added.

"They can shrug off stunners and most offensive spells." Harry said. "I'm going to plan for distraction and whatever defense from fire I can find."

The other champions nodded.

"What about eyes?" Krum suggested.

"Bad idea." Ron shook his head. "That would only work if you had a few others with you. It usually takes at least five wizards to subdue a dragon."

Krum nodded thoughtfully.

"Thanks for the heads up." Cedric sighed. "And here I was thinking I wouldn't have to study so much this year."

The Hufflepuff waved to the group before heading back inside. Fleur was speaking in rapid-fire French to her friends. Krum looked from the trio to Ron and Harry.

"Like Quidditch?" Krum asked.

"Of course!" Ron laughed. "You're bloody brilliant."

"Wanted to be Keeper." Krum shrugged.

"Really?" Ron stared at Victor for a long moment.

"Ron's a pretty good keeper." Harry offered. "He's not on the house team. Our usual Keeper graduated last year. Ron would probably be playing if we had a season this year."

Ron blushed.

"Want to fly?" Krum asked Ron.

"I have class." Ron's shoulders slumped.

"You've got an hour before dinner." Harry suggested. "Right?"

Ron nodded happily.

"Good." Krum smiled. "See you then."

Krum walked away. Ron tried to speak but his words came out in a jumble. He turned to Harry, his eyes were wide.

"I don't have a broom." He croaked. "The school ones are horrible. I'll look like a moron."

"Use mine." Harry laughed. "Stay calm. Don't show off too much."

"Why did you tell him I was a Keeper?" Ron squeaked.

"Because you are." Harry smiled at his friend. "Do you think I've forgotten all those games at your house? Look, I'm not saying you're going pro. It's a common interest."

Ron nodded. He took a couple of deep breathes.

"Try to talk about other things than quidditch." Harry suggested. "Ask how he likes Hogwarts. What does he miss? That kind of thing."

"Wait." Ron froze. "Is this a date? No, it can't be. He's Victor Krum."

"Ron." Harry grabbed his friend by the shoulder, turning so they were face to face. "I love you like a brother, mate. You can do this."

"I can do this." Ron nodded.

"Just remember who introduced you two when you need a best man." Harry squeezed his shoulder.

Ron nodded. "Right." He stopped. "What?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Potter." Fleur asked as she moved closer.

"Please, call me Harry." He tried to smile, but his heart ached a bit too much to be genuine.

Fleur studied him for a moment.

"Harry." She continued. "Why tell us this?"

"It's the right thing to do." Harry replied. "You would have done the same thing."

"Why would you say that?" She asked.

He could feel the familiar warmth of her allure. Ron was too busy mumbling to himself to notice. Harry met her gaze. He arched an eyebrow.

"You were chosen as a champion." Harry replied. "Call me a romantic, but I'd like to think the cup considered your character as well as your skill."

"Do we know each other, Harry?" Fleur asked.

"Maybe one day." Harry looked away, trying to hide the growing ache inside. "Excuse me, Miss Delacour, I need to get my friend to his class."

"Please, call me Fleur." She rejoined her friends.

51.

Harry waited outside of the Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop. He wore muggle attire, black silk slacks and a white dress shirt. It was tidy and tasteful. He held back a smile as he watched Rita approached. Her face screwed up in confusion as she looked at the building behind him. She had indeed dressed to impress.

Rita wore a shimmering dark green dress that wrapped around her. It looked like it was held on with a single red ruby button.

"I have a table reserved." Harry bowed as she approached.

"How...nice." Rita tried to keep a pleasant expression on her face.

Harry laughed. "I'm sorry. I couldn't help it."

Harry led her along the street to a nicer residential area. She slapped his shoulder playfully.

"That was not funny." She tried to scold him.

He wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her closer. She shivered as his breath tickled her neck.

"I will make it up to you." Harry whispered. "You look lovely."

"Thank you." Rita blushed. "You look rather dashing. I'm not usually a fan of muggle clothing."

"Really?" Harry asked. "I find it much more comfortable."

The two walked in companionable silence as he led her to three story building. It was a mixture of Victorian architecture with wizard aesthetics.

"This doesn't look like a restaurant." Rita paused at the door.

"It's not." Harry opened it and motioned for her to enter. "My godfather and I own this building. The bottom floor is split into a study, a dining area, and a kitchen. We each have a floor for living quarters."

Harry led her into the kitchen. It was stocked with professional grade equipment, including stainless steel countertops. A table set for two rested in the center of the closest wall.

"My house elf is a wonderful cook." Harry pulled out a seat for her. "But I wanted something more intimate."

Harry pushed her chair in before moving over to a cabinet. He pulled out two covered plates.

"I cheated a little and cooked this earlier today." Harry placed one in front of her.

He removed the cover, letting a wave of steam rise from the food. Rita looked down at the artfully arranged food.

"I apologize for the lack of wine." Harry sighed. "I know nothing about it and didn't know what would go well with the dish."

"You made this?" She asked.

Harry nodded. He took his seat across from her.

"When you invited me for dinner, I thought you were trying to get me into bed." Rita looked at him like he was on the plate.

"I am." Harry returned her gaze. "I'd be a poor host if I didn't offer you something to eat first."

"So confident?" She asked.

Harry gave her a roguish grin. "You'll find out soon enough."

They ate in silence. Shooting each other smoldering looks between bites. Once he had finished, Harry placed his silverware on his plate. He carefully cleaned his face off just in case. Rita's eyes never left his. She placed her napkin on the table.

He stood, crossed the space between, and offered her his hand. Harry pulled her into a searing kiss. His tongue pressed into her mouth. She moaned as she began to kiss him back. He led her upstairs to his floor. Rita was vaguely aware of a door opening and closing.

Rita found herself pressed against the door. Harry's dexterous fingers undid the gem on her dress. The shimmering green clothe fell to the floor in a spiral and exposing her naked form. He paused for a moment to take in her glorious body. Her breasts were bigger than he expected, with only a slight bit of sag. Rita's hips gave her a wonderful hourglass shape that just begged for him to grip them.

One of his hands gripped her hip while the other found her breast. He caressed her nipple with the pad of this thumb, before rolling it between his fingers. She moaned and leaned into his hand. Rita gasped as she felt his teeth trail across her nipple. Harry grinned. His gently bit her nipples, alternating from one to the other. Slowly pulling them as he withdrew his mouth.

She reached down guiding him to her lower lips. He pushed into her, stretching her tunnel in a wonderous way. He bit down on her shoulder. The contact sent her over the edge. Her body shook against him. Harry began to piston into her faster. Rita moaned, leaning her head back. She lost herself, riding the waves of pleasure. She leaned forward, burying her face in his shoulder.

"Bed." She moaned between thrusts.

They both groaned as he pulled out of her. Harry picked her up, she wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her to his bed. He yelped as she managed to get him onto his back. She straddled him, capturing his shaft between her lower lips. Her arousal allowed her to glide along his length with ease. She cooed and ground into him each time the head of his cock brushed her clit.

Rita reached between them, angling his member as she rocked forward. They both moaned as his cock slipped into her. The two of them stayed like that for a moment, savoring the feeling. She placed a series of quick kisses along his jaw and down his neck. He groaned as he felt her teeth against his skin.

She pounded down into him, her hips moving as fast as she could. Harry thrust up to meet each downward motion. Rita leaned back; her eyes closed tight as her cunt fluttered around him.

"Cumming. Oh, fuck. I'm cumming." She screamed.

Harry couldn't control himself anymore. He thrust into her as hard and fast as he could. She pulled him into a kiss, sending him over the edge. Harry gripped her hips, grinding her down on him, reaching the deepest he could as he erupted. She started shaking as pulse after pulse began to fill her.

Rita rested atop in. Enjoying the sensation of being filled with his cum. Her eyes drifted closed as she felt her entire body relax. She looked at him with fuck-drunk eyes and shivered. His hands guided her into onto her hands and knees.

Harry grabbed ahold of her hips. He thrust forward as he pulled her back. Rita babbled as he began to fuck her again. Harry hammered into her. She lost herself, riding the waves of pleasure. Her body shuddered with a string of small orgasms.

She bucked under him, turning her face back to the bed to muffle her voice. Harry continued on, taking his time to savor her. Much too soon he felt his himself getting close. He sped up, slamming himself into her. She babbled nonsense as he continued on. He pulled her hips back to meet him with each thrust. Harry held her tight against him as he filled her with his cum.

They collapsed on the bed, Harry laying atop of Rita. His cock slowly started to deflate inside her. After a moment it slipped out, followed by a stream of cum. Harry rolled off of her, resting on his side facing Rita. She reached over and ran a hand through his hair.

"Worth the wait?" Harry asked with a smile.

"Ask me in the morning." Rita turned around, wiggling her bum to signal she was ready for spooning.

"Gladly." Harry slid closer to her, wrapping an arm around her stomach, and pulling her closer.

52.

Unfortunately, both he and Rita had other places to be in the morning. Harry had to get back to Hogwarts before too many questions were asked. Rita had a job. While she was covering the tournament, she was also focusing on the impact it had to local and international affairs. Harry was quite pleased how things were turning out for her this time around.

As much as Harry would have liked to stay around Hogsmeade, he had training. Flitwick and Moody started out working with him separately. Now, they ran their training at the same time. Moody teaching him defensive spells and tactics while Flitwick expanded his offensive capabilities. It basically came down to the two professors casting a barrage of spells at him, then telling him what he did wrong as they picked him up.

It wasn't going to help much against a dragon, but it was still a learning experience. Even with his years as an auror he was picking up new tricks. He belonged to them on Saturday, and they worked him until he could hardly stand, then they pushed him even harder. It was the only time Harry was able to truly let loose with his power. He held nothing back and neither did they.

By the time dinnertime rolled around, Harry felt like every muscle in his body was jelly. This was the last weekend before the first task. Instead of a respite, they piled even more onto him.

Sundays he spent with Sirius, training and just being together. His time with his godfather last time around was tragically short. Now, Sirius felt like an actual relative. Not a parent so much as an uncle. While Sirius wasn't as an accomplished duelist as Flitwick, or experienced as Moody, he did have access to the Black Family spells. They had developed some truly scary genius charms. Dozens of ways to disable, kill, or torture and even more strategies on how to do so incredibly fast. Harry was shocked to find that most, if not all, of the charms originated in something seemingly harmless.

A drying charm, something taught to first years and thought to be harmless, had been altered and advanced to a Blood Removal Charm. It literally dried out the plasma portion of the targets blood. Another charm, the Consuming Mist, stemmed from a maintenance charm used in novice enchanting.

Originally, It created a fine cloud of mist that removed excess debris for precise detail work. A simple tweak switched focus from wood or stone shavings to skin and bone.

The hard part was learning the spells without being able to cast them on a real target. It was inhumane to use any sort of live creature, or person. They worked with training dummies. Sirius would take him the charm, use the dummy, and then explain what it would do to something that was alive. As gruesome as it was, Harry loved it. No wonder the Black Family had such a fearsome reputation.

Remus wasn't exactly pleased with the training, but that didn't stop him from joining in. Harry hadn't told them he had dealt with Voldemort. That would lead to too many questions. Regardless, they knew there was a conflict on the horizon. Taking on Dumbledore was a more daunting task. The man was crafty, connected, and incredibly powerful. He was overt in a way Riddle could only dream about. Their group had already started to make moves behind the scenes on his political power. Nothing major, just picking away at the edges and probing for weaknesses. They had to move carefully; people followed him with righteous loyalty.

As it turned out, Sirius knew how to play the Pureblood game. The traditional faction was ecstatic to have an old family back, the neutrals hoped to curry his favor, and the so-called progressive faction thought it was obvious that Sirius would back them. It wasn't questioned that Sirius was seen with all three. Deals had to be done somehow.

All of it was a great distraction for the week leading up to the first task. Too soon Harry found himself in the tent with the other champions. None of the group even pretended to be shocked by the announcement of facing a dragon. They were, however, taken by surprise when it was explained that they had to steal an egg from a nest.

Harry got the Horntail again, of course. The trio of champions weren't nearly as nervous as last time around. They each had their plans and tactics. Harry had managed to talk Krum out of attacking the dragon this time. All four champions were tight-lipped on their strategies. It was a competition after all.

Krum took up residence in a corner of the tent. He was muttering something under his breath in Bulgarian. Fleur was pacing while twirling her wand along her fingers. Harry had to suppress a smile; he had seen her do the same thing many times in his past life. When she didn't have room to pace the twirling would become more intricate.

The memory sent a sharp pain through his being. Had they been in love? Was it a simple dalliance? Stolen kisses for the thrill of it all. They wouldn't be the first to do such a thing. Two restless people in unhappy marriages finding a brief moment of solace in the arms of similar soul. Harry wanted to believe that. It was easier to push away. There was nothing to keep them together after the tournament.

Fleur left at some point. As did Krum. Soon he was alone in the tent. He hadn't even noticed.

"Harry, it's your turn." McGonagall called from the tent exit.

Harry nodded. She stopped him just before he stepped out.

"Be careful." She brushed a stray strand of hair out of his eyes only for it to fall back into place.

"Professor, I'm always careful." He gave her a crooked smile.

"That's what I'm worried about." McGonagall shook her head.

The crowd erupted as he walked into the arena. He could hear the announcer working them up. The title of The Boy Who Lived was tossed out, as well as Lord Potter, and a couple others that he ignored. He watched as a shield circled the raised stands, muffling the crowd to a whisper.

Well. Now or never.

§ Excuse me! § Harry shouted.

§ Speaker? § A rumbling voice replied, there was a feminine edge to it that caught him off guard.

Of course. He shook his head. Nesting mothers.

§ May I approach? I have no ill intent. § Harry waited for a moment.

§ I am chained, my nest is exposed, and the scent of fear is thick. Your intent means little. § The dragon roared.

§ Do you want me to remove the chains? § Harry asked. He still hadn't moved from his spot.

There was a long pause.

§ Why would you do such a thing? § The dragon spoke carefully.

§ A show of good faith. § Harry moved closer, stepping out before the dragon.

The sharp, shrewd eyes took every detail of him in. Harry saw her fore and back legs were chained, but she still had some range of movement.

§ Proceed. § The dragon said.

§ I have to summon a sword. § Harry kept his hands out wide as he moved closer.

The dragon growled. Harry froze as he could feel the temperature raise.

§ My magic isn't strong enough to break the chains. The sword will. § Harry explained.

The rumbled grew louder. Harry shut his eyes. Time to do something stupid.

Harry summoned the sword, he dropped to a knee in front of the dragon and placed the sword point-down before him. Even through the noise barrier he could tell the crowd had gone silent.

§ I, Lord Harry James Potter, do swear on my magic and the sword Excalibur that I mean you no harm. §

The dragon froze, watching as a whirlwind of magic encased Harry for a moment before fading away. Harry let out a breath as the heat eased away.

§ Proceed. § The dragon inclined her head ever so slightly.

Harry stood. He calmly moved closer. With quick and efficient movements, he sliced through the chains. He banished the sword the moment the last one was done. The dragon straightened up, shaking its newly freed limbs.

§ Thank you, Speaker. § The dragon shifted, clearly placing herself between Harry and the nest.

§ Please don't fly away. § Harry chuckled as he hopped up on a nearby boulder. § The wizards at the sanctuary would kill me. §

§ They treat me and my sisters well. § The dragon nodded. § We are no longer hunted, we have sufficient food, and my eggs will grow strong. § She let out a puff of smoke. § Unless they move my nest again. §

§ They placed a false egg among them. § Harry explained. § It's a test to see if I can retrieve it. §

The dragon studied him for a long moment.

§ You are barely more than a hatchling. § The dragon huffed. § What chance do you have against me? §

§ I know! § Harry waved a hand at the stands around them. § What am I supposed to do? Rush in casting spells that will, at most, annoy you and hope for the best? §

§ I like you, hatchling. § The dragon chuckled.

§ Thank you. § Harry bowed to her. § May I retrieve the false egg? §

§ You must do me a favor first. § The dragon's tone shifted serious.

§ Gladly. § Harry nodded.

He slipped off the boulder and moved around to the gate where the keepers were waiting.

"She wants me to tell you that if you move her nest again, she will make sure everyone knows to poop near the cabin." Harry called out to the workers. "Also, they are tired of the yaks. She enjoyed the 'crunchy sheep' and would like to have them again."

The nearby dragon-keeper nodded.

"Hey, you're one of the kids from when we smuggled out the hatchling a few years back." One of them called.

"Yeah." Harry smiled broadly.

Harry returned to stand before the dragon.

§ I let them know. § Harry bowed.

§ Then the false egg is yours, after I examine it. § The dragon shifted to the side to allow him access.

Harry carefully walked over to the nest. The golden egg was in the center of the clutch, of course it was. He stopped at the edge of the nest, not making a move further.

§ It's the gold one. § Harry pointed at it.

The dragon stared at it. § It calls to me. §

§ I just have to retrieve it. § Harry looked over at her. § If you would like, I can return it to you shortly. §

§ I would like that. § The dragon purred. § In legends past, there were tales of dragons and your kind mingling. The offspring were said to be quite powerful. §

Harry blushed.

§ I don't know how to change into a dragon. § Harry rubbed the back of his neck.

§ Your kind are not the only ones who can change form. § The dragon leaned closer to him. She took a deep breath, practically pulling him off his feet. § Powerful indeed. §

Harry cleared his throat. § May I? I should be able to return it to you this evening. §

The dragon stepped away, allowing him access.

§ Thank you. § Harry bowed.

Harry carefully plucked the egg from the nest. He gave one more bow to the dragon before leaving the arena. Even after passing through the sound barrier, the crowd was practically silent. Madam Pomfrey waited outside of a medical tent. She stared at him as he walked over.

"Did you want to look me over?" He asked.

53.

Harry stepped in the medical tent followed by Madam Pomfrey. Cedric was resting on a bed. He was the worst of the bunch. Krum was slightly singed, but otherwise looked alright. Fleur was glaring at the edge of her robe that was now charred black.

"What happened?" Harry asked.

"Cedric tried to distract the dragon by transfiguring some stones into dogs." Madam Pomfrey explained.

"He did a bit too good of a job and they were afraid of the dragon. They provided just enough of a window for him to grab the egg. It didn't last long enough, and he caught a flash of dragon fire. He's resting now, but I was prepared."

Harry turned to Fleur.

"I sang to it." She waved at her dress. "It snored in its sleep."

Harry smiled at her. "Rather the robe than you."

She inclined her head. Harry looked to Krum.

"Use fireworks as distraction." Victor explained. "Kept dragon busy. Almost broke chains."

Fleur had come closer to study him. She arched an eyebrow once she didn't find a single bit of ash or singed clothing.

"I spoke to her." Harry explained.

"You spoke?" Fleur asked.

§ I'm a parseltongue. § He replied.

She stared at him for a moment.

"I didn't know if it would work." Harry shrugged. "It was better to try."

"What was plan b?" Krum asked.

"I hadn't thought that far." Harry rubbed the back of his neck.

Madam Pomfrey glared at him. Harry avoided her gaze.

"Has anyone fiddled with the egg yet?" Harry held up his.

"Non." Fleur shook her head.

Harry examined it. He turned it around, pretending to consider how to open it.

"Here." Krum pointed to a latch on the side of the egg.

They all flinched as the egg began to scream. Krum quickly snapped it back closed. Fleur put her egg down and glared at it.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked.

"That is the language of the mer-folk." Fleur had slipped into French without realizing it.

"Do you have a lot of dealings with them?" Harry asked.

She shook her head. *"I am veela. A being of fire and air. We do not do well with water."*

"Water puzzle." Krum stared at the egg.

"It sounds like normal stuff when under the water." Cedric chimed in. His voice was slightly slurred.

Harry was shocked to see the young man was even awake.

"You need rest." Harry chided.

"Ha." Cedric pointed a hand at Harry. "I don't have a reservation. Unlike some!"

Fleur and Krum looked from Cedric to Harry.

"Mister Diggory." Madam Pomfrey hurried over to him. "I told you to rest."

Professor McGonagall poked her head into the tent. "They are announcing the scores."

Harry looked over to Cedric who was trying to get to his feet.

"Would you be able to help me?" Harry asked.

He crossed to the bed and helped Cedric stand. Krum took the other side while made sure the way was clear. The four emerged from the tent together. Cedric waved a lazy hand at the crowd as they cheered. It threw off his balance, almost bringing the trio down until Fleur caught slid into place, adding extra support to Harry's side.

Harry didn't pay attention to the scores. He was focused on how close Fleur was to him. Shutting his eyes tight he tried to catalogue how she felt against him, her smell, and the natural heat of her body. Hidden memories of laughter, soft touches, and shared glances played along the back of his mind. He could recall dancing with her under the stars while she had tears in her eyes.

Desperately, he wished the memories were something more solid. Years upon years of charms and potions had stolen the details.

"Harry." Victor's voice cut into his thoughts.

Harry looked up at him.

"Need to get Cedric back." Krum motioned to the tent.

Fleur was cursing in French under her breath. She helped guide the trio back into the tent. Fleur turned to him once they had Cedric back in bed.

"That was horrid." Fleur snapped.

"I'm sorry. I..." Harry stuttered.

"Why are you sorry? You are the one who has been wronged!" Fleur interrupted.

"Hm?" Harry replied so eloquently.

"Score." Krum said. "You are last."

"Oh." Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts. "I was busy trying not to drop Cedric."

"I'm not heavy!" Cedric chimed in. "My mom says I'm handsome."

"And you are." Harry said calmly. "The rocks were slick, and I was having a hard time keeping balance."

"Da." Under his breath Krum added. "Balance hard when focus on woman."

"Shut it." Harry chuckled.

Fleur laughed as well. Harry tried, and failed miserably, not to blush. The sound of someone politely clearing their throat brought their attention back to the tent flap. Rita Skeeter, her assistant, and her photographer were waiting patiently for them.

"I understand Mister Diggory isn't up for an interview." Rita nodded to where Cedric lay.

"I'm fine." Cedric said, a little too loud.

"The four of you made quite the statement appearing together like that." Rita smiled but continued.

"Would it be possible for us to get a photo of the four of you together?"

The trio looked to Madam Pomfrey. She nodded. They got into position around Cedric. A bit of shuffling got everyone in the frame, including Madam Pomfrey. It only took two shots for Rita to be satisfied.

"Thank you." Rita smiled broadly at them. "If you're up for it, I'd love to schedule an interview with each of you."

"I'm ready." Cedric sat up. He visibly tottered to one side before settling back into the bed. "My favorite color is strawberry."

"Cedric." Harry patted him on the shoulder. "Trust me on this. Get some rest."

Cedric looked up at Harry. "Okay."

The Hufflepuff passed out.

"We'll be going." Rita whispered. "Thank you again."

Harry waited until they had left before he turned to the other champions. "Is it possible to share the egg? I promised the dragon I would give the egg back to her."

Fleur and Victor stared at him for a moment.

"I will." Fleur patted the top of her egg.

"Thank you." Harry inclined his head to her.

He cradled the egg under his arm and headed back out toward the arena. The dragon keepers were moving the eggs back into a protective carrier under the watchful eye of the Hungarian Horntail. They hadn't managed to chain her back up.

§ I'm back. § Harry called.

The dragon spared him a quick glance before returning her attention to the nest.

§ Would you like me to put this with your eggs? § Harry asked holding up the gold egg.

§ Yes. § The dragon didn't look at him this time.

§ Is everything ok? § Harry set the gold egg beside one of the others that had already been settled.

§ This is my first clutch. § The dragon glared at the keepers. § I will not loose a hatchling to incompetence. It is bad enough I must deal with this weather. §

§ Would you like me to tell them something? § Harry moved to stand beside her.

§ I request the one in green with the orange hair. § She nodded. § He seems the more skilled. §

Harry scanned the area for the wizard she was talking about. After a moment he found Charlie Weasley standing by an opening in the arena. The wizard was watching them moving the eggs with almost as much intensity as the dragon.

"Hey, Charlie." Harry called.

"How's it going, Harry?" Charlie didn't move from his spot.

"She wants you to be the one to move her eggs." Harry made sure his voice was loud enough for everyone to hear. "She says you're the one she trusts to do it right."

The other dragon keepers looked from Harry to the dragon and finally to Charlie.

"It would be an honor." Charlie beamed proudly.

The dragon visibly relaxed as the other keepers backed away. She chattered as she watched Charlie begin to handle her eggs.

§ A guy could get jealous. § Harry chuckled.

§ Hush, hatchling. § The dragon snapped, but it lacked any real anger. § He is skilled, and I want the best for my eggs. §

§ How did dragons and wizards breed? § Harry asked.

The dragon sputtered and shook her head. She looked everywhere except for at him.

§ Dragons can change their shape. § She said, still avoiding looking at him. § It takes a considerable amount of power and skill. §

§ Wow. § Harry bobbed his head slowly. § May I have your name? §

§ I will tell you. You may not have it. § The dragon stated.

§ Thank you. § Harry bowed to her.

§ Sunrise in Mist. § The dragon said proudly.

§ It is nice to meet you, Sunrise in Mist. § Harry replied. § I am Harry Potter. §

§ It is nice to meet you as well, Harry Potter. § She bowed her head to him. § Excuse me, I must observe my eggs. §

§ Of course. § Harry said. § His name is Charlie Weasley. §

54.

Harry didn't realize how tired he was until he got back to the common room. The victory party was in full swing when he arrived. He lost count of how many people told him he had been robbed with the points. Others finally agreed that parseltongue was an awesome skill to have. Quite a few ladies let him know that they would happily let him practice on them if he needed.

Finally, Harry found his way up to his bunk. He stared at it longingly before he stripped out of his clothes. The elves were amazing, but he didn't want to wake up smelling like this. Harry stumbled into the showers. He let out a loud, long moan as the hot water cascaded over his body.

He couldn't figure out why he was so tired. The task hadn't been anywhere near as physically demanding as last time. In fact, the hardest thing he had done today was help Cedric out of the tent. Talking with the dragon had been stressful at first, but that had faded rather fast.

It hit him all at once. Last time he had Hermione, every step of the way. She had been there when everyone else had turned their back on him. His fellow Gryffindors changed their tunes once he completed the task, but she never wavered.

Harry turned off the shower. He wrapped himself in a towel and began to trudge to his bed. Too late, he noticed he wasn't alone. His hand reached out, summoning his wand, his muscles tensing, waiting for the attack.

"Harry." Angelina spoke from near his bed. "You're safe."

"Angie?" Harry's brain was having whiplash trying to adjust to the new development. "What are you doing here?"

She was dressed in a long T-Shirt with the Harpies logo on it. Her hair hung loosely around her shoulders.

"Come here." She opened her arms to him.

He didn't protest. Harry strode quickly over to her. She wrapped him in a tight hug. Her hands stroked through his hair. She hummed a soft melody as she held him.

"Let's go to bed." Angela stepped away, leading him to his bed.

Harry dropped his towel, not caring if he was naked. It didn't seem to alarm Angela either. She pulled back the covers to let him get in. Once he was settled, she slid in behind him. Harry closed his eyes as he felt her arms wrapped around him.

The warmth, from her being nearby and her care, was too much. He didn't realize he was crying until he took a breath. Angela began to pet him, gently stroking a hand through his hair. She didn't ask any questions, or offer any empty platitudes, she simply held him.

There was so much he didn't think about, so much he wouldn't allow himself to think about. He hated to admit it, but he missed his old life. Morgana, he missed his kids. He hated that he hadn't thought of them until now. They were gone. Maybe he'd have children in this life, but it wouldn't be them. Not to mention the kids he only recently found out were his.

He missed his friends. He missed his house. He missed the way Ginny would kiss him for luck before each game. He missed the sounds of the family at the weekly dinners.

It made no sense. In the last year alone, he had saved countless lives. Voldemort was dead. Only a few stragglers remaining Death Eaters were still alive.

Albus, Rose, James, Hugo, Teddy, and Lily were gone.

At some point he fell asleep. His dreams were a tangle of memories from a life that no longer was. He woke up, naked, but not alone in bed. Angelina was gone. Luna had taken her place. She was curled up against his chest, over the blankets.

Her bright blue eyes stared back at him as he woke up.

"When did you get here?" Harry asked.

Luna produced her wand from somewhere. She tapped his lips. He felt something wet and minty swirl around his mouth before fading away.

"I snuck in after Angelina left." She kissed him on the forehead. "I miss them too."

"You've never met them." Harry tilted his head to the side.

"I didn't, but Luna did." She shrugged.

"That makes sense." Harry nodded.

"I always make sense." Luna smiled at him.

"True." Harry sighed. "Thank you for checking on me."

"You haven't checked on me." She grumped.

"I'm sorry." Harry kissed her on the forehead. "I didn't expect the tournament this year."

"The old goat fucker is a crafty one." Luna spoke in such a sweet, dreamy tone that it took a moment for her words to process.

Harry laughed. "You could have warned me."

Luna shook her head. "Is and was, sometimes maybe, but never will be."

"Fair enough." Harry sighed. "That means prophecies are junk then?"

Luna rolled her eyes. "You can't lay an egg, that doesn't mean a dragon can't."

"Do you think Sunrise will try to woo Charlie?" Harry rolled onto his back.

Luna snuggled up beside him, using his chest as a pillow. She went silent for a long moment.

"Red-scaled Hungarian Horntail." She whispered.

Luna lifted her arm, her fingers twirled in the air. After a moment she placed her hand by her ear. She sat up sharply. Her eyes went to the window.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked.

"She sleeps in the lake." Luna whispered. "She waits." Her bright blue eyes turned to him, they were unfocused, seeming to look right through him. "Your blood calls to her." Her eyes cleared. She giggled. "I can lay eggs."

Harry nodded.

"That was not pleasant." She snuggled back into place. "Nargels are horrible gossips."

Harry kissed her on the forehead. "I'll try not to make you lay any more eggs."

Luna hummed in contentment.

55.

"Shit." Harry muttered.

"What's up?" Ron asked, looking up from his breakfast.

Dumbledore stood from his place at the head table.

"A reminder." The old wizard spoke loudly. "The Yule Ball will be open to fourth year and above. Third year students may attend as a date. It will take place on the evening of December Twenty-Fifth, Christmas Day."

"I forgot about that." Harry grumbled.

"What's so bad about a ball?" Ron asked.

"Who am I supposed to ask?" Harry countered.

"Uh..." Ron scanned the table around them.

"Exactly." Harry sighed. "Are you going to go?"

Ron froze. He thought for a long moment before shrugging.

"Not like I can ask who I want." Ron said quietly.

"Why not?" Harry asked.

Ron gave him a flat look.

"Oh, right." Harry winced. "Ask someone as a friend?"

"Like whom?" Ron grumbled.

"Uh..." Harry scanned the table around them.

"Exactly." Ron sighed.

"What about a witches witch?" Harry dropped his voice to a whisper. "That way you don't give a girl false hope, but you can both still have a good time."

"Do you know any?" Ron replied.

"Give me a moment." Harry spoke quickly.

Harry saw Parvati and Lavender whispering together. The duo would break into a fit of giggles before getting back to their conversation. Harry slipped next to Lavender.

"Ladies." Harry greeted them with a nod. "I need to discreetly request some information."

"Ooo." Parvati's eyes flashed. "I like discreet requests."

"This stays between us." He said seriously.

They nodded.

"Do you know any witches who prefer the company of witches?" Harry asked. "Perhaps one that would like to attend the upcoming Yule Ball but can't with the one they'd like."

The duo studied him for a moment. Lavender sighed. She slipped Parvati a sickle.

"A pleasure." Parvati giggled.

Harry tilted his head to the side.

"Honestly." Parvati sighed. "You aren't asking for yourself and your friend of yours is acting differently now that a certain red-haired tyrant has been dethroned."

"You're good." Harry smiled at her. "I can trust you to keep it quiet?"

"Of course." Parvati looked insulted. "I'm a gossip and information is a resource. Still, that is not my secret to tell."

Lavender nodded sagely in agreement.

"I've underestimated you two." Harry said quietly.

"That's the point." Lavender smiled smugly at him. "We'll get back to you at lunch."

"Thank you." Harry tipped an imaginary hat at them.

He slipped back to Ron. The ginger stared at him for a long moment.

"What just happened?" Ron asked.

"I'm using the best resources available to ensure the quality of your options." Harry replied.

Ron sighed. "I think this is the first time I've ever been excited to go to class."

Harry nodded in agreement.

The morning classed passed slowly. He paid the minimum attention to get through until lunch. The question of who he would take was annoying him. Harry was quite aware that taking someone to the Yule Ball would most likely put them at the bottom of the lake in the next task. Unless they went with Ron again. At least this time he'd want to rescue him.

He wondered who they would pick for Krum this time. Harry hadn't been keeping track of Hermione since the train and he doubted the two would cross paths this time. There was a month before the Yule Ball. Luckily, he knew how to dance. Years of compulsory gathering from the Ministry had required he learn.

Harry idly wondered if Fleur would go with him. She had offered to share her egg. It was a friendly gesture. Fleur still called him Monsieur Potter, though. That didn't sound like she was interested in anything other than a fair competition.

Then again, he owed Parvati a good night. He had been a horrid date last time. Harry nodded. He would ask Parvati first. Hopefully she would say yes.

Harry managed to get through morning classes. He waited at the table for Parvati and Lavender arrive. The duo hurried over to him once they made it to the Great Hall. They sat down beside him, one on each side.

"Any suggestions?" Harry asked.

"My sister, for one." Parvati stated.

"I didn't realize she preferred witches." Harry mumbled.

"She's not interested in witches or wizards, but still would like to go and have a nice time." Parvati answered. "It would take some pressure off if she went with someone who wasn't trying to grope her all night."

"Any others?" Harry asked.

The two looked offended.

"In case she says no." Harry sighed.

"She won't." Parvati countered. "I've already talked to her about it."

"I'll talk to my friend then." Harry smiled at her. "Thank you."

"No problem." She replied.

"Would you like to go with me to the ball?" Harry gave her his best roguish smile.

"Yes, I would." Parvati replied primly. "My dress will be red, please dress to match."

"Black goes with everything." Harry winked at her.

The girls managed to keep composure until Harry moved to join Ron. Once he had his back turned they broke into a fit of giggles. Ron looked up once he got close. The ginger waited expectantly as Harry sat.

Harry couldn't help it. He took his time getting settled in his spot. Then he carefully adjusted his plate before examining the food available.

"Oh, come off it." Ron grumbled.

Harry cackled.

"They suggest asking Padma." He said finally. "She wants to have a nice evening without getting groped all night."

Ron turned around so he could see the Ravenclaw table. He looked over the gathered students until he found the girl he was searching for. Ron stood once he found her. Gathering his courage, he strode over to the Ravenclaw table.

Harry watched intently. He couldn't hear from this distance, but they were both smiling. Ron hurried back over. He shot Parvati and Lavender a thumbs-up.

"I've got a date." Ron smiled at him. "Thank you."

"No problem." Harry returned the smile. "Now we just need to get you something to wear."

"Shit." Ron grumbled.

"Don't worry." Harry patted him on the shoulder. "I can ask Sirius to bring a tailor to get you fitted."

"Mate." Ron shook his head. "I can't ask you to do that."

"It's a good thing you didn't ask then." Harry shrugged. "I couldn't call myself your friend if I didn't make sure you looked good."

"Thanks." Ron mumbled.

"No problem." Harry patted him on the shoulder. "Ready for Divination?"

"Very much so." Ron smiled wickedly at him. "I've predicted your death three separate times already. Each one gets me extra points."

"Glad I could be of service." Harry deadpanned.

56.

Harry stared at the curtains on his bed. He had been caught up with this school year to focus on what else needed to be done. There were still Death Eaters, or worse, out there that he hadn't dealt with. Taking them out not only rid the world of horrible people, but it also removed the option for Dumbledore to use them in the future.

Fighting against Voldemort was one thing. He wasn't exactly subtle and figuring out his plans was almost insultingly easy. Dumbledore, now that was a horse of a different color. Harry had no idea what the old bastard wanted to obtain. With Voldemort out of the way, all that Dumbledore would have to do was enjoy his position. He already held too much power. Not to mention he controlled how the upcoming generations of witches and wizards were taught. Sure, the Board of Governors could overrule him, but that never seemed to stick. Dumbledore had already made a move by entering him into the tournament. It made him wonder what was waiting at the end of the maze this time.

Right now, the best he could do was focus on the remaining targets. He couldn't attack any Death Eaters outside of Britain without drawing too much attention. The fact that a good portion of Slytherin hadn't returned this year showed that those Death Eater families had fled. He wasn't sure how the Dark Mark worked with Riddle dead. Did it just disappear?

If the mark was gone it might encourage the remaining Death Eaters to come back. They might think they would be safe without it. Harry would have to move fast if that was the case. They would scatter again once the returning Death Eaters were discovered dead.

He would figure that out as it came. Now, he had something important to do.

Harry slipped his cloak on and closed his eyes. When he opened them, he was assaulted by shades of pink that should have never been allowed to mingle. Harry scanned the area, finding Dolores Umbridge sitting at a table sipping tea.

A quick inspection revealed that her house had no protections or alarms.

He watched her for a few moments. The toad had a few files spread out on the table. He leaned over, taking a quick glance. They all pertained to regulation of muggle-born and non-human people. Each file was worded in a way that it basically stated that muggle-born witches and wizards weren't human. They were almost word for word the decrees that had been put into action once the ministry had fallen.

Harry stared at her. She had a happy little smile on her face as she flipped through the files. Umbridge was a special kind of evil. A festering rot that took root but was easily overlooked. Who would worry about an annoying politician when there was a madman trying to take over the country?

He pulled out a chair across from her and sat down. Umbridge froze, seeing it move seemingly on its own. A flick of the wrist turned her wand into splinters. Harry carefully put away his cloak once that was done.

Umbridge reached for her wand, only to find it destroyed. She glared at him. Her mouth opened as to scream. Harry held up a hand, stopping her voice before it could come out. She still tried to scream, not even a whisper came out. Umbridge turned, trying to escape.

A flick of the Elder Wand closed, and locked, all of the doors. The windows disappeared. She turned to look at him in horror. He motioned for her to sit. The pink toad wore an expression of terror and indignation.

Harry locked eyes with her. He could feel a sloppy attempt at invading his mind.

"Sit." He commanded.

Umbridge startled at his voice. She hurried back to her chair.

"Do you know who I am?" He asked.

"Harry Potter." She seemed shocked her voice had returned.

"Do you know why I'm here?" Harry pulled the tea kettle closer. He sniffed it. "Earl Grey?"

She nodded. "No. Why are you here?"

Harry poured himself a cup. He added a bit of sugar as he stirred it.

"I'm here for a cup of tea, obviously." Harry took a sip. "I prefer coffee most of the time. Tea just seems better for company."

"It's a fresh brewed kettle." Umbridge relaxed a little, but her voice still trembled. "Anything else?"

"There is a..." He forced himself to say the word. "Professor at Hogwarts that is hurting students. I realized you were the perfect person ask advice."

"Oh." Umbridge perked up at that. "I will do all that I can to help. What is going on?"

"They are using blood quills on students for minor offenses." Harry had to force himself to stay calm.

Umbridge squinted her eyes in thought. The only change in staff had been the return of Slughorn, who would never do such a thing due to it ruining his reputation, and Moody. Harry could almost see her thought process.

"Is this a new member of staff?" Umbridge seemed to delight in the idea punishing Moody.

"Yes." Harry nodded. "In Defense."

"Tell me more." She happily took a sip from her cup.

"Anyone who questions their methods, lack of qualifications, or voices the slightest concern is punished." Harry continued. "Blood quills are just the beginning. They have stripped students of privileges, put in place new rules, and taken control of almost every aspect of the school. Dumbledore is powerless to stop it."

Umbridge giggled. Harry hated that sound.

"I don't trust Dumbledore to take this to the ministry." Harry continued. "He thinks he knows better than Fudge."

Umbridge scowled at that.

"I fear I'm going to have to take action." Harry sighed. "What do you suggest?"

"It is good you have come to me." Umbridge patted him on the shoulder.

Harry was going to have to replace this shirt.

"The ministry is well aware of Dumbledore's grandiose self-image." She continued. "If you do take action, the ministry will support you."

"Thank you." Harry forced a smile. "That means a lot to me. How would you suggest I handle this?"

Umbridge gave a theatrical pout. "You're going to have to kill him. You would be doing the world a favor and be more of a hero than you already are. The ministry would investigate, of course. We would need proof of their misdeeds as well."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "I've considered torturing them the way they tortured the students."

"No." Umbridge tutted. "You must not soil yourself in such a way. That will make it look like this was done out of revenge. You are doing the right thing. It should be seen as such."

"Thank you." Harry stood. "That really helped clear things up."

Harry sliced his wand through the air in front of Umbridge. She blinked in shock a moment before her head rolled off her body. It tumbled onto the floor behind her, coming to a stop against a garish pink counter. Harry took his time arranging the decrees that she had prepared so that they were easily seen.

He looked around the room, making sure he hadn't left any sort of trace. The cloak would hide his presence from any magical tracking. Anyone trying to follow the magical signature of the wand would come up empty. Similar to Excalibur, the Elder Wand only appeared when he summoned it.

With Umbridge down that left one more important target handled. Now he just needed to figure out how to kill Greyback.

57.

Harry had an extra hop in his step the next morning. He hadn't felt like this the other times he had killed Death Eaters. Even taking out Riddle didn't make him happy. With Umbridge gone the sun shined brighter, the air tasted sweet, and nothing could bring him down.

That was until a hand grabbed his shirt-collar and pulled him into an abandoned classroom. Harry rolled out of the grip, coming up with his wand at the ready, only to see Hermione by the door. She was staring wide-eyed at him, her hand still held out like she had his collar in her hand.

She closed the door. He recognized the silencing and privacy charms she cast on it a moment later.

"What do you want?" Harry asked slowly.

"You did something to me." Hermione glared at him.

Considering what had happened on the train, she shouldn't know anything about him. He hadn't altered her memories; he had simply removed them. There wasn't anything to recover, they were gone.

"Pardon?" Harry cocked his head to the side.

"In Defense, you ordered me to move, and I did." She started to pace. "Then during the first task, it felt like there was a vice on my chest. Now, I can't stop thinking about you. You're in my dreams."

"What am I doing in these dreams?" Harry asked.

"None of your business!" She snapped.

Harry relaxed. "Go on, tell me. Death defying feats?"

"No." Hermione shook her head. "Don't be silly. We aren't friends. We've spoken a handful of times since school started."

"Then what?" Harry waved his wand, clearing the dust from the desks before hopping up on one to sit.

"Tell me, Miss Granger."

"Don't mock me, Potter." Hermione snapped.

"I would never." Harry said flatly.

"This next task." Hermione pressed on. "I've been doing research. Comparing the last few tasks for the previous tournaments. It will test your endurance and speed. Given that the prize in the first was an egg that speaks Mermish, it will have to do with the lake. The Bubble Head charm is a good option, but it's too fragile. You'll need to focus on transfiguration, or a potion."

"You're worried about me?" Harry asked.

"No, of course not." Hermione waved him off. "You've obviously done something to me. I'm the smartest witch in school so I'm a resource you've managed to acquire."

"You're humble too." Harry chuckled.

"Tell me I'm wrong." Hermione glared at him.

"You're wrong." Harry shrugged. "I haven't done anything to charm you or compel you to assist me."

"Lies." Hermione snapped. "I told you, you're in my dreams. I can't stop watching you. The way your body moves." Her voice dropped to a whisper.

"You've got a crush on me." Harry flinched.

"Then I'll just have to get over this childish infatuation so I can live my life again." Hermione spat. "I'm not here for romance, or friends. I am the best, and I will show those Pureblood morons that this Mudblood is better than all of them."

She stalked over to him. Harry wasn't sure where this was going. He froze when she pulled him into a kiss.

"What are you doing?" Harry asked sliding off the desk.

"The best thing to do is to get it out of my system." She was starting to breathe hard.

Hermione pulled him into a deep, desperate kiss. She ground her body into his. Harry didn't fight it this time. He kissed her back, wrapping his arms around her waist, and pulling her tight. Memories of his old life flashed through his mind. How many times had they kissed?

He didn't want to admit it but having her in his arms felt right. Her betrayal had gone on longer than he had ever thought. She had been slipping him potions for Molly for years. Yet his body still wanted her.

Harry lifted her off her feet. She instantly wrapped her legs around him. Their tongues wrestled for dominance. Harry finally won when he set her on the old teachers' desk. A twist of his wrist sent her panties flying across the room.

Hermione stared at him through hooded eyes. She growled, attacking his neck with rough kisses, licks, and bites. Her hands desperately undid his belt, working to get his pants down. She let out a jubilant scream as her hand wrapped around his hardened member.

Harry pulled back from her. She reached out for him, trying desperately to keep her hold on his cock. He pushed her hands away, then flipped her around, bending her over the desk. Hermione moaned as she felt his fingers trace along her lips.

"Tell me what you want." Harry commanded.

"I want you to fuck me." Hermione growled.

Harry stroked her slit, finding her clit from memory, and swirling his fingertip around it. She whined at his touch, desperately pushing back against him, needing it to be harder. Slowly, softly, he stroked her clit before languidly trailing his fingers along her lips.

"You're a fucking bastard." Hermione grunted. "Fucking fuck me already."

"You don't want me to make love to you?" Harry asked innocently.

He gently eased a single finger inside of her. She groaned as he began to pump it steadily back and forth.

"Whisper sweet nothings into your ears." Harry leaned forward and kissed the back of her neck. "Treat you like a princess."

"This isn't love." She growled. "You've enchanted me. This is your fault."

"I've done no such thing." Harry added another finger. "You know it. I've avoided you all year. We haven't talked." He added a third. "Studied together." He picked up his pace. "Or anything."

Hermione grunted, pushing back into him.

"What does the smartest witch in Hogwarts want?" Harry dragged his teeth along the back of her neck. "What does the brightest witch of our age need?"

"Fuck me." Hermione yelled.

Harry straightened up, adjusted his cock, and thrust into her in one stroke. Hermione screamed, long and loud. Harry gripped her hips, pounding away without letting her calm down. He slipped up her skirt to admire her firm ass as it bounced with each thrust. The fingers that had just been inside of her raked over her skin. He pulled her cheeks further apart, getting as deep as he could.

"Fuck me. Right there. Right there. Don't stop." Hermione babbled.

Harry leaned forward, placing a firm hand on the back of her head, as he continued to thrust into her. Hermione let out little squeaks with every thrust.

"The brightest witch of our age, begging for cock." Harry clicked his tongue.

Hermione moaned, her first orgasm rocking her body.

"Is this helping?" Harry gripped her hair, pulling her back towards him. "Is your brilliant idea of fucking your infatuation out working?"

"Nnnnooo." Hermione managed to say.

The desk underneath them began to screech as it was pushed across the stone.

"Not so smart, eh?" Harry sighed.

He slowed his pace, reducing the power in his motion, until it was only her thrusting back into him. Hermione whined as he pulled out of her.

"Turn over." Harry commanded.

Hermione did without question. He put her legs up on her shoulders and sank back into her.

"Yes." Hermione cried.

Her hands reached out to him, trying to pull him closer for a kiss. Harry shook them off. He stared into her eyes as he began to pick up his pace.

"You're going to show those Purebloods morons how much better you are than them?" Harry asked.

She nodded, her legs wrapped around him, trying to pull him deeper.

"That's not going to work." Harry shook his head.

Hermione stared up at him, confused.

"You're not going to do anything of the sort." Harry leaned down; his lips just short of touching her.

"Kiss me." Hermione begged.

"No." Harry replied.

"Why?" Hermione whimpered.

"Not until you beg me to be my breeding sow." Harry lifted his head back as she tried to chase his lips.

"Kiss me." Her voice was full of desperation.

"Beg me." Harry thrust hard and fast, then slowed back down. "Please, Lord Potter, use me. Breed me. Show this worthless muggle-born her place."

"No." She whispered.

"We're done here." Harry straightened up; his hands reached up to unwrap her legs.

"No." Hermione cried.

"What do you need to do?" Harry gripped her hips, holding her in place.

Hermione stared up at him. She looked away.

"Please." She whispered.

"Go on." Harry commanded.

"Please, Lord Potter, use me." She continued.

"Continue." His voice was hard.

"Breed me. Show this worthless muggle-born her place." Hermione looked back at him, meeting his eyes. Hers were full of hope and desperation.

Harry dipped his fingers down between them. He rubbed along her clit before gathering some moisture on his fingertips. Hermione shuddered at the touch. She watched as he drew a design just below her bellybutton. It glowed before fading away once the pattern was complete.

"This is a counter-charm." Harry explained. "It will negate any contraceptive potion, or spell."

Hermione gasped.

"You will provide me with sex any time I wish." Harry ordered. "I will not make you debase yourself. Yet. You will, however, drop whatever you are doing to attend to me. Do you understand?"

Hermione nodded.

"Every Saturday you will go to Madam Pomphrey and request a pregnancy test." Harry continued. "Once you know are with child, you will report to me. From there, you will withdraw from Hogwarts and be relocated to one of my properties. Do you understand?"

Hermione nodded.

"You are now mine." Harry's voice was hard. "Hermione Jane Granger. Do you submit to me?"

Hermione shuddered.

"Yes." She screamed.

"Good." Harry gave her a feral smile.

He captured her lips in a hard kiss. Harry slammed down into her, making the desk shake with each impact. Her walls fluttered around him. Hermione's eyes were closed, her mouth open in a silent scream.

Harry could feel his orgasm building. Hermione found her voice. A low, guttural moan pitched higher as he continued to thrust. She met each plunge with her own. Hermione leaned her head back and screamed. Her entire body locked up as an even larger orgasm tore through her. He went faster, pushing deeper until he reached his limit.

Harry growled as his orgasm hit. Hermione mewled as his cum filled her. Her legs relaxed, practically dropping off his shoulders. They were spread open, displaying her leaking pussy. She watched as he stepped away, using her discarded panties to clean himself.

"Put those on." He tossed them back to her. "Remember what I said. Whenever I ask."

"Yes, Lord Potter." Hermione whispered.

Harry hated how good that felt.

58.

Harry spotted the other champions once he stepped into the great hall. The good mood was trying to hang on, but the encounter with Hermione was starting to sour it. Honestly, he was a little disappointed in himself. There were probably other ways to handle her. As much as he hated to admit it, he missed her.

He needed some positive interactions to even it out.

Harry joined the other three champions. Cedric and Krum were sitting on the same side of the table leaving the open spot by Fleur. Harry sat next to her, giving the trio a polite smile in greeting. Words were a bad idea since they all seemed to be busy.

Fleur froze. She stared at him. Her pupils dilated. She didn't stop looking at him until he had finished his food. Harry tried to ignore it. With her sitting right beside him it took some effort.

"You've had sex." She whispered, leaning in so only he could hear.

Harry blushed. As covertly as he could, Harry sniffed himself. There wasn't a lingering smell of sex on him. He was starting to wonder about how different Veela were to witches and wizards. He idly took a peek at her plate, trying to see what she was eating. There was an untouched egg in its shell and a slice of ham.

He nodded.

"My allure, it does not tempt you." Fleur slipped into French. Her words came faster. *"I thought you were interested in wizards, like your redheaded friend and Victor."*

Victor looked up at the mention of his name.

"I prefer the company of women." Harry replied, also in French.

She looked over at Cedric. Even though he hid it well, the Hufflepuff was still affected. He had a slight blush to his cheeks, and he was doing everything he could not to look at Fleur. Cedric was resisting it, but not immune.

"Please keep that quiet." Victor spoke up. *"I am not ashamed, but the world is not kind."*

"Of course." Harry nodded. *"It is not mine to share."*

"Yes." Fleur nodded. *"I appreciate your company."*

"Thank you." Victor relaxed.

"I still don't speak French." Cedric deadpanned.

"Have you found a date for the Yule Ball?" Harry asked.

"I've asked Cho Chang." Cedric smiled at him. "She's the Ravenclaw Seeker."

"She's good." Harry admitted. "Is she planning on going pro?"

"I think we all want to." Cedric chuckled. "Did you ask someone?"

"Parvati Patil." Harry replied. "She's in Gryffindor. Her twin sister is in Ravenclaw."

"Yes." Victor added. "Have date. Girl from school."

Harry looked expectantly at Fleur.

"No." She sighed. "I have been asked by many boys. Those that can speak when I am close anyway."

"Damn." Harry thought for a moment. Oddly enough, Ron would have been an option this time around.

"I can't think of anyone to suggest. I know a few you would want to avoid."

"I probably know them already." Fleur stated dryly.

The conversation stalled.

"I've got class." Cedric hopped up.

"I should go as well." Fleur stood; she shot a look to Harry.

"Allow me to escort you to your carriage?" Harry asked.

"Will your girlfriend be jealous?" Fleur asked.

"She's not my girlfriend." Harry shook his head as he stood. "We get along well together."

She paused for a moment.

"Merci." Fleur inclined her head.

Victor stood without speaking and strolled away. Harry couldn't help but smile. Most people saw Krum as standoffish and cold, in reality he was just liked his privacy. That and he wasn't confident in his English.

Harry offered his arm to Fleur, which she took, before they headed to the carriage.

"How are you able to resist me?" Fleur asked.

"No clue." Harry replied.

They continued on in silence for a bit.

"Did you figure out the egg?" Harry asked.

"It is a riddle." Fleur sighed. "Whatever the answer, it will have to do with the lake."

"Figured that part out once it started screaming in Mer-mish." Harry scoffed. "Not sure they thought that one through. The crowd will just be watching the water. Plus, the lake is cold all year."

"Wonderful." Fleur shook her head. "I hate swimming."

"Isn't France famous for its beaches?" Harry asked.

"Splashing around in the water is not the same as swimming." Fleur countered. "I prefer a pool that I can see the bottom."

"Fair enough." Harry nodded. "I would happily invite you to swim, if I had a pool."

Fleur studied him for a moment. "Are you flirting with me?"

"A little." Harry smiled at her.

"I am a Veela." Fleur stated.

"I figured that out, yes." Harry nodded.

"Only those not attracted to women can resist us." Fleur continued. "That or those exceptionally powerful."

"Do you want to know a secret?" Harry whispered, leaning closer to her.

Fleur nodded.

"I'm very powerful." Harry said in mock-severity.

"Clearly." Fleur rolled her eyes.

Harry looked back at the castle. They were far enough away for any sort of magic to be overlooked. The Forbidden Forest was absolutely saturated with ambient energy. Any detection charms or devices would have a hard time distinguishing the source of any fluctuations.

He sighed, letting his shield drop just for a moment. Fleur rocked in place as his magic washed over her. She stared at him wide-eyed.

"How?" Fleur blinked a few times, trying to catch up with the information she just learned.

Harry held a finger up to his lips. "Shh. It's a secret."

Fleur stumbled as they began to walk again. Harry slipped an arm around her waist to provide support.

"Are there male and female Veela?" Harry asked.

"No." Fleur shook her head. "Veela are only female. Any offspring will be female as well."

"Are wizards the only men that Veela are compatible with?" Harry asked.

"No." Fleur shook her head. "We are not exactly human, nor are we creatures. However, we are able to... mingle with either. Within reason as any child will be Veela."

Fleur regained her feet, but made no movement to remove his arm.

"Do all Veela have blue eyes?" Harry asked.

"Yes." Fleur answered. "Why?"

They came to a stop in front of the carriage.

"I was just wondering if there could be a Veela with green eyes." He gave her a roguish smile before walking away.

59.

Harry sat in the library, he had reread the same line a good three times and still couldn't say what it was. He had never been bored at Hogwarts before. Even the quiet moments were filled with anticipation. Sure, the eventual movement against Dumbledore was on the horizon, but it wasn't as messy as Voldemort. The old bastard wasn't above causing some chaos, only it was through different channels with an elegant subtlety.

Preparing for the tournament gave him a free pass to skip classes. He had been taking full advantage, spending most of his time on independent research in the library or his personal collection. There were so many things that he hadn't learned until after Hogwarts. Being an auror was a crash course in multiple disciplines. Most pressing was the history of the magical world.

Harry wondered if Dumbledore kept Binns around to keep more recent events obscured. Grindelwald was pretty much only mentioned as part of the list of Albus' accomplishments. The fact that he was still alive was never brought up. Stories of the war had become just that, stories. It wasn't until he was an auror that he found out anything more about the war than just the 'Grindelwald bad, Dumbledore Good' version.

His boredom was taking his mind on odd tangents. There was still a couple of weeks before the Ball, he already had the second task figured out, and there was nothing to distract him. He had looked the restricted section over only to be greatly disappointed. The books from the Black family library made it look like the children's section.

What had taken up so much attention last time around? He didn't think he spent too much time on the egg. It wasn't until Cedric gave him some advice that he even figured it out. Not that it even mattered if they solved the riddle. The task was at the lake, they were told to retrieve something, and that was it. It wasn't like it was a scavenger hunt or something that required them to follow clues. This entire tournament was a mess.

Did his classes take up that much time? Even with his training with Flitwick and Moody he had time. They couldn't just ignore the other students to focus on him full time. Even with his status as a champion he couldn't slip away to spend time with Sirius. Hogsmeade was too close for him to simply pop over without word getting back to Dumbledore.

"Malfoy." Harry snapped his fingers.

Draco was always good for entertainment. However, it was Lucius that held actual value. The Malfoy patriarch had taken the warning to heart. A man who could disappear like that was good to have as a resource. Harry stood up, taking a quick look around, before pulling out his cloak. Once he was out of sight, he thought of Lucius, and disappeared.

Harry found himself standing in an ornate office. He scanned the area. Lucius sat behind a large desk reading over papers. The man wore horn rimmed glasses, his hair was now cut short and dark brown, and he was dressed in a muggle business suit.

He took another look around the room. There wasn't a single magic item in sight. Harry strolled over to the window behind Lucius to get a view of outside. He had only seen it in pictures, but he recognized the skyline of New York City.

Harry moved back to the other side of the desk. He took off his cloak with a swirl as he sat in one of the chairs before the desk.

Lucius jumped out of his chair, scrambling for his cane, and dodging to the side.

"Nice reflexes." Harry gave a small nod.

"Potter?" Lucius was breathing hard as he focused on the young wizard. "What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"I can't just visit an old friend?" Harry asked.

Lucius slipped his suit coat off, carefully setting it aside. He rolled up his sleeve to show his untouched forearm.

"Does it have anything to do with this?" Lucius asked.

"In part." Harry nodded.

Lucius took a calming breath. He took the time to fix his sleeve, as well as putting his suit coat back on. Malfoy returned to his chair, regaining his usual calm. He placed his cane within reach, subtly removing the top to keep hold of his wand.

"Of course." Lucius narrowed his eyes. "Old friend."

"How are the wife and kids?" Harry asked.

"Adjusting." Lucius replied shortly. "Is he dead for good this time?"

"Yes." Harry smiled at him. "Sliced him in half with Godric Gryffindor's sword."

Lucius stared at him for a long moment.

"You're serious?" He spoke slowly.

"No, that's my godfather." Harry chuckled. "I couldn't help it. Yes, Voldemort is now just Mort. What is Draco up to these days? Hogwarts is so quiet, and pleasant, without him around."

"He's attending classes in a private school in the city." Lucius answered. "It is more... inclusive to the Muggle world, but we are adjusting. I find suits to be much more comfortable than robes."

"That's understandable." Harry nodded. "How is Narcissa? Do I need to ask Sirius to return her to House Black?"

Lucius narrowed his eyes. "She is doing well."

They settled into a comfortable silence. Well, comfortable for Harry. Lucius was visibly tense.

"How did you find me?" Lucius asked after a long moment.

"It's magic." Harry gave him a bright smile. "I don't have to explain shit."

Lucius sighed. "If there is nothing else, I have work to do. Good day."

"Did you hear about Azkaban?" Harry asked casually.

"Yes." Lucius tried to hide the annoyance in his voice. "The slaughter of over twenty prisoners did make international news."

"There were a few other killings they think are attached to it." Harry drummed his finger on the arm of the chair. "Snape, some ministry employee named Umbridge, and Bart Crouch Junior. He was supposed to be dead a few years ago. That was a mess."

"Severus is dead?" Lucius dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Head lopped off like the others." Harry nodded.

Lucius studied him. "It was you."

"Me?" Harry asked in faux shock. "Someone who could get inside of Azkaban undetected, slaughter all of the Death Eaters, and twelve Dementors, before leaving would have to be incredibly powerful."

The muscles along Lucius' jaw tensed.

"Someone that powerful could potentially rival Dumbledore." Harry continued casually. "We both know how he hates competition."

Lucius relaxed a little.

"Dumbledore is a champion of the Light." Lucius leaned forward. "Why would anyone go against him?"

"Some could say that he holds too much power for one person." Harry sighed. "Some would say he had an active hand in creating Voldermort and the resulting conflict. Others might mention how he altered the perception of his involvement in the war with Grindelwald. Certain individuals might want to just kill the bastard. Regardless of the reason, they would need allies."

A silence settled in the room.

"I assume you will be in contact?" Lucius returned to the work on his desk.

"Same time next week." Harry nodded. "Ta."

With that Harry disappeared and reappeared in his dorm room.

"Damn. I should have gotten a souvenir." Harry grumbled. "Next time."

Popping in to scare the hell out of Draco might be fun too.

Contrary to all of his big talk, he couldn't stand to look at Hermione. Sex with her was like an alcoholic having a drink. It helped that she was avoiding him at all costs as well. Flashes of their encounter sparked long bouts of delving into obscured memories. They weren't whole, moments and feelings more than anything.

The best thing he could do was focus on this life. Dealing with Dumbledore was on the horizon, though he didn't know when, and there was still the tournament to finish. He would make sure that Cedric survived. Keeping Fleur away from Bill was important as well.

Harry paused. Currently, it was lunch on Saturday. He looked up and down the table. Ron had changed considerably once Molly's influence had been purged. Harry was a bit curious what, if any, changes Ginny had gone through.

Oddly enough, he couldn't find her. He hadn't heard anything out of the ordinary. She wasn't disappearing like she had during her first year. None of her classmates mentioned her missing. She had to be going to classes. Still, he couldn't find her.

"Hey, Ron." He said quietly. "Where's Ginny?"

Ron flinched. He looked at Harry with sorrow filled eyes.

"She's next to the twins." Ron mumbled.

Harry turned his attention to them.

"Where?" Harry asked.

"Next to George." Ron didn't look at him when he spoke.

Harry examined them again. Angelina and Alicia sat to one side of the twins. There was a girl he didn't recognize on the other. Harry's eyes widened, he turned to Ron. She had curly, dark brown hair. The girl was tall and thin, like she had gone through a sudden growth spurt. It was her nose that he recognized.

"That's Ginny?" He asked, trying to keep his voice down.

Ron nodded.

"All of us went for a potion cleanse." The boy spoke softly. "Mum... Molly, was a genius with potions. It took a week to clear all that she'd done."

"I'm sorry." Harry gave him a one-armed hug.

"Ginny and Bill aren't dads." Ron continued. "The twins says that Percy too, but that's just them."

"Woah." Harry took a deep breath and let it out. "Topic change?"

"Yes, please." Ron nodded.

"We could head in to talk to Sirius." Harry offered. "He could probably get a tailor over fast to get your robes in order."

It wasn't a Hogsmeade weekend, but there were benefits to being a champion. Technically, he could skip all of his classes this year if he had wanted. He could also leave Hogwarts to pursue knowledge and

resources for the tasks. That was a fact he had learned this time around from talking with the other champions. It had been an option when he had competed previously, but he hadn't been told.

"That sounds wonderful." Ron gave him a weak smile.

Harry pulled out his mirror. "Sirius."

"What's up, pup?" His godfather asked.

"Mind if Ron and I visit?" Harry angled the mirror to get his friend in view. "I promised to get him some new robes for the Yule Ball."

"Of course." Sirius smiled back at them. "Shoes as well?"

Ron nodded. "Please."

"Stop that." Sirius wagged a finger at him. "This isn't just about you getting new threads from the goodness of our hearts. You're Harry's friend. It will look back on him if you show up in rags."

Ron scrunched up his brow in thought. The redhead didn't like to accept help. Even with the potions gone, he saw it as weakness. Framing things so that it wasn't kindness helped him accept it. He looked to Harry who gave him a firm nod.

"Understood." Ron grumbled.

The duo finished up lunch. Harry noticed that Hermione quickly dashed out of the hall after a small meal. That was fine by him. He wasn't sure he trusted himself to be alone around her. His train of thought was interrupted by a slight tingle on the edge of his consciousness.

He turned to see Fleur approaching.

"Miss Delacour." He gave her a small bow.

"Mister Potter." She inclined her head. "Where are you headed?"

"My friend and I are heading to town." Harry motioned to Ron.

"May I join you?" She asked.

Harry looked to Ron. His friend shrugged.

"Gladly." Harry smiled at her.

The trio strolled out of the castle. Carriages were only available during Hogsmeade weekend, meaning they had to walk. The day was nice enough and the roads were well maintained. Fleur subtly sniffed in Harry's direction. He noticed but didn't say anything.

"You said you were a Keeper, Mister Weasley?" Fleur asked.

"You can call me Ron." He said as a bright smile crossed his face. "Mister Weasley makes me think I'm in trouble." He perked up at her question. "Yes, I play a Keeper. I'm trying to make the team this season. Do you play?"

"*Non*." Fleur shook her head. "Flying on a broom does not feel right."

"But... quidditch." Ron had too many thoughts trying to get from his mind to his mouth.

"After a certain age, Veela are able to shift into an avian form." Fleur explained. "We can fly under our own power. Switching from that to a broom is too jarring. For me at least."

"I guess that makes sense." Ron didn't look all that convinced.

"Can you fully transform?" Harry asked. He quickly added. "If that's not too personal of a question."

"It is fine." Fleur let out a small laugh at his uncertainty. "*Oui*, I can. Gaining control is a sign that a Veela has reached maturity." She held up a hand, her fingers shifted into talons. "The transformation is not an easy one for younger Veela. It is draining and they are driven more by instinct."

"That sounds like a mix of an animagus and a lycanthrope." Harry said thoughtfully.

Fleur shrugged, somehow making the little motion appear graceful.

"As I said, Veela are not fully human." Her talon shifted back to a hand.

"I feel like I'm learning something new every time we speak." Harry chuckled.

"*Merci*." Fleur laughed with him. "I prefer this to people assuming that Veela are creatures driven only to seduce wizards away from their wives."

"Yeah. If my Quidditch career doesn't take off I'm tempted to study Veela." Ron spoke up. "Before we spoke, I didn't realize how wrong people were."

"There have been scholars who have attempted such things." Fleur turned her attention to Ron. "We do not have a good history with them."

"Oh?" Ron asked.

"The approached Veela as creatures, rather than people." Fleur's voice turned cold. "They would assume that since we are similar to Sirens or Harpies that we were lesser."

"All while they ignored the fact that humans are similar to gorillas or chimps." Harry scoffed.

Their conversation paused as they made it to Hogsmeade. Harry led them to the residential area where Sirius lived. The interior was tastefully decorated with furniture that was high quality without being flashy. Each room had been expanded enough prevent it from feeling restricting but remained cozy.

The tailor was already waiting. Harry recognized them as a worker he had seen at Madam Malkin's. They didn't speak, simply directing Ron to a raised platform. The tailor studied the boy for a long moment, turning him this way and that.

"This will take a while." Sirius turned to Fleur and Harry. "Tea?"

Harry looked to Fleur, who nodded. Sirius led them into a tidy kitchen. Much to his surprise, Sirius didn't seem all that influenced by Fleurs allure. The Veela appeared to notice as well.

"Padron me for asking, Lord Black." Fleur said.

"Sirius." He cut in.

"Sirius." Fleur smiled. "Are you an animagus?"

"Yes." Sirius replied, matching her smile. "How did you know?"

"Your scent." She replied.

Sirius raised an arm and sniffed. Fleur giggled.

"An underlying scent." Fleur corrected. "You also appear to be able to resist my allure."

"The lord ring helps." Sirius held up his hand.

Fleur nodded.

"Why would the animagus matter?" Harry asked.

"It's along the same lines to how werewolves are more resistant to mental magics." Sirius explained.

"Becoming an animagus means you're not exactly human anymore. It gets more pronounced the longer you spend in your animal form."

"Huh." Harry nodded. "I wonder what my form would be."

"Knowing you?" Sirius chuckled. "A dragon or something else as wild. As long as it was supposed to be impossible."

Harry couldn't argue.

"I would say a raven." Fleur suggested.

"I could see that." Sirius nodded.

"I'm not sure I'd like that." Harry said after a moment of thought.

"Oh?" Sirius asked. "You love flying."

"Exactly." Harry replied. "Fleur mentioned that using a broom didn't feel natural to her. I love flying too much to give that up."

"You would have your own wings." Fleur countered.

"I like having hands while I fly." Harry chuckled.

"Hm." Sirius considered. "A cat."

"Really?" Harry tilted his head to the side.

"A black cat, naturally." Sirius chuckled. "You're clever, hard to kill, and sneaky. We could always start the process to find out."

"I don't think I have time for that." Harry sighed.

"True." Sirius nodded. "We should rescue Ron."

"It's only been a few minutes." Harry said.

"Exactly." Sirius laughed. "He'll be drowning in fabric and held in place by pins."

It wasn't quite that bad. Ron had three different color strips draped over his shoulders. Measuring tape slithered along his body as the information was marked on a piece of parchment by a floating chalk pencil. A tome hung in the air in front of his face. Harry could see the pages displayed pictures of various styles of suits and robes.

"Help." Ron squeaked.

61.

Harry and Ron waited at the bottom of the grand staircase. The ginger was wearing a set of expertly cut red robes with gold accents. Not only did it go well with his complexion, but it was also tastefully styled in Gryffindor colors. The other option had been green and red, which everyone thought was a bit silly considering it was for a Yule Ball.

They had originally planned to meet their dates outside of the common rooms, or inside for Parvati's case. It wasn't until both girls had their dresses that they decided they would rather have a grand entrance.

Harry watched as the other students arrived with their dates. He was shocked to see how many Slytherin that were attending had intermingled with the other houses. Without the looming threat of Death Eater spawn, they were free to acknowledge the relationships they had to hide previously.

That train of thought died once Padma and Parvati appeared at the top of the stairs. She wore a red sari with gold details. A tantalizing flash of her mid-drift was exposed as she moved. It was the same outfit she had wore last time around, but it still looked amazing. He hadn't given her the proper attention and that was a crime. Padma wore a similar sari, with blue and silver detailing. They both looked amazing.

"Wow." Ron offered Padma an arm as he spoke. "You look wonderful."

"Thank you." She gave him a shy smile.

"And what about me?" Parvati asked as she to come to a stop before Harry.

His mouth hung open. He tried to say something, anything, but the only thing that came out were odd not-quite words. Parvati giggled. She placed a hand on his chin and guided his mouth shut. Her touch trailed along his jaw as she pulled away. It sent a shiver through his body. The group split apart. Padma and Ron headed to the Great Hall while Harry and Parvati took their places with the other champions.

Victor's date was someone from his school. Harry didn't think that he'd actually seen the two together up until now. She was tall and quite striking, looking like a Viking in a gown. Judging by the muscle on her exposed arms, it didn't take much imagination. Cedric was with Cho, like last time. Fleur had settled again for Roger Davies. The guy was a step away from drooling as he followed her around.

"You should ask her next time." A familiar voice said from his left.

Harry jumped. He turned to see Death nearby. She wore an expertly cut red dress that showed off just enough of her leg to border on scandalous. Her hair was done up in elegant curls. Once Harry was able to tear his eyes away from her, he realized everyone around them had frozen.

"You look lovely." Harry said, giving her a genuine smile.

"Thank you." She replied. "As do you, good sir."

"What are you doing here?" He asked. "Sorry, that came out harsher than I intended."

Death waved it away.

"I get it. Death shows up and everybody freaks out. Go to a masquerade wearing a red mask one time..." She trailed off into a mutter.

"That's not going to happen tonight, right?" Harry asked. "I owe this girl a decent date."

"Nope." Death replied with a bright smile. "Just wanted to pop in for some dancing. Thought I'd let you know before you saw me out there."

"I appreciate that, thanks." Harry inclined his head.

Death winked at him. She strolled away and time began to move once more.

"Champions." McGonagall called. "Gather round."

She went through the same speech as last time. Dinner at the table of honor, announce the champions, and start the dancing off with some the fancy stuff. Harry nodded along.

"You do know how to dance, right?" Parvati asked as they entered the ball.

"Mostly." Harry replied. "How thick are your shoes?"

Parvati scowled at him. The small smile stole any sort of heat that it was supposed to contain. They did a slow circuit around the dance floor that ended in a bow to the main table. With that completed they settled at their seats.

"Yes." Harry answered. "I know how to dance. To the formal stuff at least. When the actual music starts, then I'm absolutely rubbish. Some flailing around like an electrocuted chipmunk and trying not to smack anyone nearby."

Parvati let out a loud laugh. She tried to cover her mouth to muffle it only to end up snorting. Harry couldn't help but join in.

"What's so funny?" Cedric asked from his seat on the other side of Harry.

"Nothing." Harry said quickly.

Parvati slapped him lightly on the shoulder. "You made me snort. Tell no one."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Harry shrugged.

"Exactly." Parvati nodded. "Do you think Padma will have a good time?"

"That's sweet of you." Harry smiled at her. "Probably. I have no idea if Ron knows how to dance, but he was excited."

"Padma will make him look good." She said. "She makes dancing a work of art."

"It occurs to me that I didn't ask if you knew how to dance." Harry eyed her suspiciously.

"Mister Potter." Parvati gasped. "I am an excellent dancer. I will have you know that only three of my last instructors have had their toes mended."

Harry chuckled. It was already a better date than last time around. Not only that, but the company was much better this time around. In Crouch's place was some Ministry worker that Harry didn't recognize. Ludo Bagman had pulled them into a conversation and was trying, very loudly, to extol his Hogwarts years. The poor soul. Crouch hadn't been seen since his sons death, which was no great loss. Professor Slughorn was in absolute heaven as he networked with the various guests.

Soon the food was cleared away and the dancing began. As with last time, the champions started the dance. Roger Davies was cognizant enough to get through, Fleur had to lead, but that was for the best. He followed her back to the table in a daze.

Ron and Padma were one of the first couples on the dance floor. Parvati had undersold her sister's skill. The girl moved with almost supernatural grace once the music started. He danced for a while with Parvati before returning to the table for a rest. Fleur looked annoyed, though she was hiding it well enough. It was an expression that brought a multitude of hazy memories to focus.

"Do you mind if I ask her to dance?" Harry whispered to Parvati.

She smiled at him and gave him a small nod. He smiled at her in return. Harry tried to tamp down the memories of stolen kisses and longing looks. Fleur's eyes snapped up to him as he approached. He held his hand to her. Without a word, she took it.

Harry didn't trust himself to speak and Fleur hadn't tried to start a conversation. His hands knew where to hold her. Her body melted against his. The crowd around them faded. They no longer danced to the music, moving to their own.

Something wet touched his cheek. Harry blinked to see that Fleur had placed a kiss on his cheek. She looked deeply into his eyes.

"Who are you?" She whispered.

Fleur fled from the Great Hall. Harry stood there for a moment, trying to get his brain to work again. Once he was able to function again, he sought out Parvati. Dread settled in his very being, he had meant to give her a wonderful night and instead had ended up practically embracing Fleur like a lover.

Parvati stood nearby. The expression on her face was not angry, or even disappointed. There was a slight tinge of sadness around her eyes. She walked over to him. Her steps were steady, precise, and planned.

"Let's call it a night." She spoke quietly but he had no problem hearing her.

Harry escorted her back to the Gryffindor Tower in silence. He was trying to wrap his head around what had happened between him and Fleur. Harry couldn't figure out how to explain it to Parvati. There had to be some way to salvage this evening for her.

"Harry." Parvati finally spoke as they reached the painting. "I had a wonderful time. Thank you. My plan for tonight was to take you up to your bed. But, after that..."

Harry wanted to say something. He opened his to speak only to find he couldn't figure out the words. She held up a hand to stop him.

"There is something between you and her." Parvati continued. "I like you, Harry. I do. You're funny, courageous, and your tongue is so fucking amazing."

Harry chuckled.

"That, you two out there, was beyond a fun roll in the sheets." She sighed. "Find her as fast as you can. You had better send her head spinning or I'm going to be very cross with you."

Harry nodded. Parvati crossed her arms and glared at him.

"Oh, you mean now?" Harry asked.

"YES!" Parvati yelled. "I get it now. There wasn't any magic involved. The curse didn't work on you because your head is too thick."

"Hey." Harry scoffed. "I'm going. I'm going."

The painting swung open, and Parvati stomped through.

"Someone is going to get shagged rotten tonight!" Her muffled voice called. "You! Finnigan! Get your pants off and get upstairs!"

"Yes ma'am." Seamus called back.

Harry chuckled. All things considered; the night was still a better date than last time. Now, all he had to do was find Fleur. The Map was in his trunk and he didn't think he'd be able to sneak in to grab it. The carriages were his best bet. Thankfully, he knew which one belonged to her.

62.

Harry moved through the castle at a steady speed. He wasn't sure what he was going to say to Fleur. Being sent back in time by Death was hard to believe even in the magical world. Plus, he didn't want to let that information out just yet. If at all.

He didn't bother looking back in on the Ball. Instead, he went straight for her carriage. He paused once he was outside. His hand hovered in the air just in front of her door.

The door opened before he could knock. Fleur stared back at him for a moment. She grabbed him by the collar and pulled him inside.

"Tell me." She growled as she led him over to her bed. "Who are you?"

Fleur pushed him onto his back. She straddled him before he could sit up. The look on her face was not one of arousal. It was intense, focused, and bordering on anger. If this was her method of interrogation, then he would have to suffer through it.

"I can feel you." Fleur continued.

"You are sitting on my." Harry countered.

She glared at him.

"My magic reaches out to yours. It feels familiar." She kept her eyes locked on his. "If you will not tell me, then I will find the answers on my own."

Harry could feel her pressing against his mind. She huffed in frustration when she couldn't gain access.

"That was rude." Harry mocked.

"Then tell me what I want to know." She snapped.

"So far you've asked me who I am." Harry shrugged. "I'm Harry. People think I'm so great hero, but I'm just me. I don't know what else to say."

"Who are you to me?" She poked him with a finger to accentuate each word.

"Currently? Your captive." Harry replied with a sly smile.

"You know what I mean." Her eyes flashed gold.

Harry dropped the smile. "I am your friend."

Fleur studied him for a long moment. Slowly, she shifted off of him. She nodded to herself.

"That will do, for now." She said without looking at him. "I need some time to think this over. Goodnight."

Harry stood, he gave her a genuine smile before he left her carriage.

"That wasn't a total disaster." A familiar voice said.

Harry jumped at the sound, his wand was out and pointed toward the source on instinct. He groaned when he saw Death standing nearby.

"I thought you'd still be dancing." Harry put his wand away.

"I thought you would be busy with a private dance." Death chuckled.

They walked in companionable silence for a while.

"What's the plan now?" She asked. "You've been laying low for a while."

"I need to let the people working behind the scenes make some progress." Harry replied.

"That's boring." Death huffed. "When was the last time you killed someone? Tonight, would be the perfect cover."

"Are you saying you want more work?" Harry chuckled.

"I don't know if I made it clear, but I'm not the only Death out there." She countered. "Right now, you are my charge, just in case you get bored and decide to join the ranks early. That leaves me with a LOT of free time."

"Fine." Harry rolled his eyes. "Which Death Eaters are still alive and in the country?"

"You killed a lot of them in Azkaban, but now it's time for more cleanup." Death clapped her hands happily. "Alecto and Amycus Carrow." She counted off on her fingers. "Avery and Nott Senior."

"What about Greyback?" Harry asked. "I've been meaning to take him out."

"He's somewhere in Russia at the moment." Death shrugged.

"I'd hate to ruin a perfectly good suit." Harry looked down at his clothes. "I'll get changed and then we can go."

Death bounced with giddy energy.

~ § ~ ♪ ~ § ~

Harry made his way up to the Gryffindor Tower. A few tired students saw him arrive and head up the stairs. He averted his gaze when he got to his dorm. Seamus had closed his curtains for privacy, but Harry didn't want to chance it.

He took off his suit before slipping into bed and drawing the curtains. Harry made sure to seal them with a few privacy charms before continuing. The last thing he needed was some random girl sneaking up to join him after some liquid courage.

A quick thought popped him to his room in Privet Drive where he grabbed a change of clothes. Another jump took him to Ron's room at the Burrow to get dressed. He didn't want to risk anyone seeing him during the night.

Once properly dressed, Harry appeared in a forest somewhere in Russia. There was a village nearby. Judging by the architecture, it was magical rather than mundane. His quarry was perched on a branch a few feet away.

The werewolf reacted instantly, leaping at Harry with surprising speed.

Greyback was more wolf than man. His hands were permanent claws, the lower half of his face bigger than it should have been to accommodate his many sharp teeth. The clothes he wore were mismatched and torn. Most likely they came from the people he had killed rather than his own wardrobe. A late-night monster movie made real.

He had mused that being a werewolf would have been interesting. If it was to happen, it wasn't going to be Greyback who did it.

Harry dove to the side, summoning Excalibur as he moved. He brought the sword up in a flash, clipping Greyback on the flank. The blow didn't do much more than annoy the werewolf. Greyback kicked off another tree, launching back at Harry leading with his claws. He dove under the werewolf, pulling himself into a roll before hopping back to his feet.

Greyback clawed a tree, using it to shift his momentum and spin back to face Harry. The trees were working against him in the fight. He needed to get to an open area with more space. Unfortunately, the clear space between the forest and the village was now behind him. He would have to expose his back to the werewolf to get there.

That was not a good idea.

His train of thought was interrupted as Greyback rushed him. Harry sliced the sword upward, causing the werewolf to veer off to the side. It had saved him from getting tackled, but the searing pain along his ribs let him know that he hadn't been as successful as he had thought.

Staying still was going to get him killed.

Harry slapped himself mentally. Fighting with a sword didn't mean his tactics for using a wand were useless.

The air popped as he disappeared. He appeared behind Greyback, swiping the blade low. The werewolf let out a growl-filled scream as one of his legs just below the knee was cut away. Greyback braced himself against a tree, spinning himself to face where the attack had come from just in time to see Harry disappear.

Harry appeared on the other side, chopping through the arm braced against the tree. Greyback lurched with the support gone. His shoulder slammed against the tree. The werewolf lashed out with his remaining hand, trying to guess where Harry would appear next. Having attacked from his blindside the previous two times, Greyback swung his arm wildly behind him.

Greyback spun, losing his balance now that he lacked two limbs. The werewolf landed on his back. He stared up at Harry, still trying to reach him with his claw. Greyback snapped his teeth at him, as though that would somehow work.

"I expected more." Harry sighed.

The pure hatred that looked back at him was beyond words. Greyback thrashed around even harder, spurred on by the feral need to kill his target.

Harry shifted his feet and brought the sword down, beheading the werewolf. He waited. Killing a werewolf usually made them revert to their human form. Greyback didn't change.

"You could take the head." Death chimed in as she appeared beside him. "He's got a huge bounty."

"How would I explain that?" Harry asked.

"Good point." Death sighed. "You should get that looked at."

The pain along his ribs flared back to life. Harry winced, placing a hand against it. He sent his sword away.

"I can't exactly go see Poppy for this." Harry spoke through gritted teeth.

"Guess you'll just have to die." Death shrugged. "Oh, woe is you."

"It's not that bad." Harry scoffed.

"How often do you think headless here washed his claws?" Death prodded the body.

"Good point." Harry sighed, which caused him to wince again.

Harry closed his eyes. He disappeared, leaving Greyback to rot. A moment later he appeared in the sitting room of Sirius' Hogsmeade apartment. His godfather was instantly beside him.

"Harry!" Sirius yelled. "What happened? Did Voldermort attack?"

"No." Harry said through gritted teeth. "Greyback."

"He's at the school?" Remus yelled.

Harry hadn't noticed the other man. To be fair, he was having trouble concentrating.

"No." Harry shook his head. "Found him. Killed him. Can you stop the bleeding?"

"We need to get you-" Sirius started to say.

"No." Harry interrupted firmly. "This stays between us."

"You're going to explain this." Sirius said as he led Harry to the couch.

"Stop the bleeding, then talk." Harry chuckled.

63.

Harry winced as the needle pulled on his skin.

"Hold still." Sirius grumbled.

"I'm trying." Harry said through gritted teeth. "It's been a while since I've had stitches."

"We'll save that story for another day." Sirius huffed. "Care to tell me why you were fighting Greyback on your own? Or at all!"

"I found out where he was, and I went to go kill him." Harry replied easily.

"That's it?" Remus asked, staring at him flatly.

"That's it." Harry nodded, then winced.

"I told you to stay still." Sirius ordered. "Please, Harry, please tell me why you decided to go attack him on your own? Then, you pop up here out of the blue! I didn't even know you could apparate."

"I've been keeping it a secret." Harry said.

"That makes sense." Sirius nodded. "Hell, I'm proud that you've learned it on your own. That sounds like something your dad and us would do. I can even understand going after someone dangerous. You're not the type to just let evil do its thing. Greyback. Alone!"

"I didn't have the time to get help." Harry lied like a liar. "If I didn't go after him myself, right then, my chance would have vanished. I'm fine. It's not a full moon. He didn't bite me."

Sirius gave him an annoyed look as he snipped the end of the suture.

"You're not fine." Remus cut in. "Those were deep. You've lost a lot of blood."

"And I took potions to get replace it." Harry countered. "I know, wounds from a werewolf can't be healed with magic. It will take a while, but I will be fine."

He gritted his teeth as he got his shirt on. Sirius and Remus did not look convinced.

"I never thought I'd be happy they cancelled quidditch." Harry muttered. "That reminds me. I've been talking up the Summer Quidditch thing all year. Any news?"

"I've got a stadium arranged, a couple of sponsors lined up, and a VIP box for scouts." Sirius answered. "Don't try to distract me. We're not done talking about this."

"Are you sure he's dead?" Remus asked in a hushed voice.

"I cut his head off." Harry answered. "Not even a werewolf can survive that."

"Damn." Sirius chuckled. "Remind me never to get on your bad side."

"He's dead somewhere in a forest." Harry continued. "It will probably take a while to find him. I couldn't claim the bounty without raising way too many questions. I'm supposed to be at the Yule Ball tonight."

"Did you end up taking Hermione?" Remus asked.

Harry's face hardened. He shook his head.

"What's the story there?" Sirius asked.

"You know how Molly was dosing her family and me with potions?" Harry asked.

The two men nodded.

"Hermione was helping her dose me." He tried to keep his voice even. "Molly told her it was Dumbledore's order, and she didn't even question it. We're not on speaking terms anymore."

"Damn, pup." Sirius grimaced. "How are the rest of the Weasley brood taking it?"

"Ron is doing well." Harry answered. "The twins too. They found out the hard way that Ginny and Bill aren't Arthur's kids. Ron told me the entire family went for a potion cleanse."

"Oh." Sirius dropped back into his chair. "Damn."

Harry nodded.

"The twins had a plan to get a shop started." Harry continued. "I hope this doesn't throw off their goal. They are geniuses. Once I win this Tournament I'm going to invest in their store."

"You're going to win it now?" Remus asked with a weak smile.

"Without a doubt." Harry winked at the werewolf. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I need to get back to the dorm and get some sleep."

"No more going off alone." Sirius said. "I know I can't stop you, but take me or Remus with you. Hell, take both of us."

Harry gave them a mock salute and disappeared. Sirius got out a bottle of strong liquor. He poured a glass for each. Being of Muggle origin, it didn't hit as hard, but it got the job done. Remus was halfway through his second glass when he paused.

"Wait." He said slowly. "You can't apparate into Hogwarts."

"It's Harry." Sirius waved off the thought. "Don't question it."

~ § ~ ♪ ~ § ~

The Tournament saved Harry from having to explain his sudden lack of energy. He had to take it easy to make sure his stitches didn't tear. To prevent that, he setup in the library and began to study. The selection was rather impressive. He somehow found his way to the magical creatures' section of the stacks. There he found books on rare and forgotten things that Hagrid would have loved to learn about.

Harry checked out quite a few of them to show his friend later. One of the books was all about humanoids. It covered gnomes, pixies, faeries, and distant cousin of house elves called Oompa Loompa. The weirdest one so far was a Scandinavian off-shoot of gnome that had blue skin and lived in mushroom groves.

He even found a short excerpt on Nargels. Luna was incredibly pleased with the news, until she read the entry that listed them as creatures of myth. After that, she decided that she would need to start her own bestiary to get things right.

All too soon the second task approached. Ron disappeared the same as last time. It made him wonder who Krum was going to rescue. Hopefully, things would go smoother this time. He actually had a plan.

~ § ~ ♪ ~ § ~

The morning was just as cold as he remembered it. This time Cedric was beside him rather than Fleur. Harry had dressed warmer, having his new on-call tailor make an enchanted version of a wet suit. It had some runes stitched on it for temperature regulation, ease of removal, and a few to enhance his movement underwater. It also did wonders to hide his new scars. The wound Greyback had given him took a long time to heal. It would have been easy to see that they were new. The stitching Sirius did was a little wonky too.

Fleur had been avoiding him since the Yule Ball. She would purposely sit on the other side of the table when the champions ate together and she didn't look at him when they spoke. He tried not to let it bother him. The situation was his own making. He couldn't stop the feeling that came from being around her. The subtle yearning for closeness. A familiarity that whispered something more.

"Champions, are you ready?" Bagman yelled.

They nodded.

"Go!" The word was accentuated by an explosion from his wand.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, ladies." Harry held out a hand before they could jump in.

They stared at him; their focus shattered. Harry flicked his wand at the edge of the platform. A plank of wood launched up high above their heads. When it came crashing back down in the water it had taken form of a gondola.

"If you would care to join me?" Harry offered.

Cedric started to laugh, which made Krum join in a moment later. Fleur shook her head while trying to hide a smile. Harry took a step closer to the long boat and held out a hand to help each of his fellow

champions get in. Once they were all set, he climbed aboard. Another piece of wood from the platform shifted into a long paddle.

"When the moon hits your eye. Like a big pizza pie." Harry sang loudly with a horrible Italian accent.

The three in the boat stared up at him in confusion as a smattering of laughter spread around the crowd.

"That's *Amore*." Victor added.

"Excellent!" Harry cackled. "Will one of you cast the Point Me spell please?"

"What is that?" Fleur asked.

"It's a locator spell." Harry replied, giving her an odd look.

"*Non*." She pointed out to the water. "That."

Harry followed her gesture to see something streaking toward the boat. It wasn't the giant squid, Cuddles was much too timid to approach them. As whatever it was got closer, it became clear it was a group rather than a single creature.

"Prepare for impact!" Harry yelled.

Harry tapped the collar of his wet suit. A fish-bowl helmet covered his head as the creatures collided with the boat. He hoped the other champions had enough time. The creatures crashed into the boat, breaking it in half. Harry caught a clear view of one of the things as it erupted from the water.

Grindylows.

That didn't make sense. Sure, they were vicious, but they kept to themselves. Come to think of it, they were rather aggressive last time as well. People had written it off as them reacting to Fleur's heritage. This was more than that. Maybe it was the previous time as well.

The enchanted suit couldn't keep out all of the cold from the water. It wasn't as bad, but the temperature change was still noticeable. That made him worry about his fellow champions even more. Jumping in from the dock was one thing, being tossed into the freezing water without a chance to prepare was a different barrel of fish.

Harry scanned the area, trying to find the others. Krum had transfigured himself into the same part-shark form as last time. Cedric and Fleur had managed to get their bubble head chairs in place as well. There were at least half a dozen creatures swarming around them.

The moment of distraction cost him. One of the grindylows raked their claws across his lower leg. It followed it up by latching its teeth on his ankle. Harry brandished his wand, quickly bisecting the creature and kicking it off. His blood drew their attention, making them forget about the other champions.

Harry pointed his wand at the approaching group. He sent a ball of condensed magic into them. It exploded as it got close to them, sending the creatures tumbling at high speeds in random directions.

Later, they would find out that one of the grindylows was launched up out of the water before landing with a loud *SLAP* of a bellyflop.

With that encounter dealt with, they continued on to get their hostages. It seemed like everything had calmed down until they got to the Mer-People village. Last time, the underwater folk weren't happy about them being there, but ignored them for the most part. This time, they were outright hostile. Toward Fleur at least.

A couple of the warriors charged her once she was in sight. She caught a spear to the side before anyone knew what was going on. Harry reached her a moment later. The spear was barbed and couldn't be pulled out without causing even more damage. Even with the Bubble Head Charm it was clear she was screaming.

Harry caught the next spear that had been aimed at her neck. He sent it back at the warrior, taking off its leg. The first tried to charge at Harry to attack but was held back by a larger one. They exchanged rapid words before the big one turned its attention to Harry. It motioned to the village.

Fleur tried to swim on. Each motion caused the spear to open the wound a little more. Harry stopped her. He pointed up to the surface. Fleur looked at him desperately, pointing to the village. Harry shook his head. He pointed to himself, then to her and finally to the village. A mix of panic and pain flashed across her face. Harry drew an X over his heart. That seemed to mollify her.

She raised her wand and shot sparks above her. The space where she had been emptied, wrenching Harry forward as the lake moved to fill the void. It was not a comfortable sensation. Harry turned his focus to finding the hostages. The other two had already been rescued, leaving Gabrielle and Ron. Harry smiled at the sight of his best friend. Having him back meant more to him than he had expected.

Harry untied Ron and tossed him over his shoulder. The same bigger warrior from before tried to step in when he moved to Gabrielle. Harry glared at the warrior. He nodded at the spear, unimpressed. The warrior relented, backing away. Harry kept the warrior in sight out of the corner of his eye. He untied Gabrielle and cradled her close to his chest with one arm while the other held Ron in place over his shoulder.

The trip back was awkward. It took longer than he intended as well. This time around, neither hostage woke up, which was a nice change. He set Ron on the dock first before carefully climbing up while holding Gabrielle. Once again, he didn't make it back in time. This time, he didn't care about the score. It didn't matter when he entered the maze with Voldemort dead.

Fleur didn't kiss him this time. She was too busy getting her wound treated. Madam Pomphrey saw the claw marks and bite on his leg and had him in a bed in record time. His wet suit came off without a struggle thanks to the enchantments. She gave him a quick glare when she saw the uneven stitching on his side but didn't say anything.

"They are going to announce the scores." Ron sat nearby wrapped in a warm towel.

"I don't care." Harry chuckled. "I'm not taking a girl for a walk around the lake for the rest of the year."

Ron laughed at that.

"A walk around the lake?" Fleur asked. Her own bed was nearby.

"Traditional Hogwarts date." Harry explained. "We don't have many options while stuck on campus."

"Ah." Fleur nodded. "I thought you meant sex."

Ron cackled like mad as Harry blushed.

64.

No one bothered to pay attention to the lake after the second task. The Durmstrang ship had lost most of its shine. Walks around the lake had been unofficially banned after the uncharacteristic Grindylows attack during the task. As such, no one cared to watch the lake on the night of the new moon.

A lone, graceful figure strode out of the water. Her skin, clothing, and hair were dry even though she had been submerged in the lake mere moments ago. She stood on the shore for a moment. Her skin was smooth, blemish free and pale. Her long black hair hung tussled down to the middle of her back. Red, full lips slipped into an amused smile as she beheld the castle before her.

The sounds of the night went quiet as she held up her hand. A raven swooped out from the forest to land deftly along her forearm. It cocked its head from side to side before it nipped at her arm.

"Hello." The bird cawed.

"Hello, beautiful." The woman cooed. "Will you swear to my service?"

The raven nodded. A swirl of magic surrounded it. The already intelligent bird felt its mind expand.

"Mistress." The raven inclined its head in a bow. "What will you have me do?"

"Find the one who holds the sword." She said as she stroked the bird.

"As you will." The raven leapt from her arm and sped off toward the castle.

"Now." She turned her attention to the lights of the nearby town. "Let's see how the world has changed."

~§~§~§~

Harry woke up but didn't move. Something felt different. There was a charge in the air like to moment before a static discharge. He was in his bed. In the dorm. Alone. Ron was off to the side snoring away. He could sense the other guys in their usual spots as well. Carefully, he slipped out of bed. He summoned his wand then thoroughly scanned the room. Everything was as it should.

He kept alert, even though he didn't find anything. Constant Vigilance and all that.

As much as he hated it, he had to put his wand away for a shower. He could use magic without a wand. All of his practice had done wonders, but there was just something comforting about having a wand in his hand. He told himself that he could summon the sword at will, as well as the Elder wand. Truly, he was never unarmed.

A swordfight in the showers would be rather awkward, though. His mind conjured images of a battle among the stalls. Pirates starred in the daydream rather than knights. They just seemed to fit better. He wondered if there were any classes, or instructors, he could take to use the sword efficiently. So far, he

had only used it once in an actual fight and he didn't plan on fighting monsters on a regular basis. Maybe he could carry over the style to his dueling.

He made it out into the common room before his dormmates, even with the daydream swordfight. Harry came to a sudden stop when he saw Hermione in the common room. She desperately looked around for a way to escape.

A sense of rock of dread settled in his stomach. Harry sighed.

"Sit." Harry ordered as he pointed to a chair by the fire.

Hermione ducked her head as she scuttled over to the seat. Harry walked over and took the chair across from her. He sighed. She didn't look up at him. Her breath was fast and shallow.

"I didn't handle the situation with you well at all." Harry shook his head.

Hermione looked up at him at that.

"Tell me." Harry said in a tired voice. "If you found out someone you thought was a friend had betrayed you. Not just once, but for years. What would you do?"

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"Answer the question." Harry ordered.

"I'd make them pay." Hermione said quickly. "Friendship should be treasured, not tainted."

"When I look at you, it's all I can see." Harry stared through her. "You were my friend, Hermione. I thought you were my best friend. But you betrayed me."

Hermione scrunched her brow at that. She shook her head.

"We have never been friends." She stated.

"I took your memories." Harry said flatly. "You should know that it can be done."

Hermione nodded. She rubbed the side of her head.

"How many?" She whispered.

"Three years." Harry replied. "Someone told you to slip me potions and you did. You messed with my mind, it made sense to return the favor."

She stared at him for a long moment. He could almost see her going over her memories. From the look on her face, she found many places where things didn't line up. She gritted her teeth.

"I let my emotions get the best of me." Harry interrupted her thoughts. "Every time I look at you, I see the girl I thought was my friend. It breaks my heart every time I remember your betrayal. Hermione Jean Granger, I dissolve your service to House Potter. It would be too soon if we never crossed paths again."

"What about my memories?" Hermione asked as she regained her voice.

"I could try to restore them." Harry shrugged. "If you'd like."

He held up a hand before she could speak.

"You would remember that you betrayed me." He paused. "That you threw away our friendship. When I confronted you about it, do you know what you said?"

She shook her head.

"How did you know." Harry quoted. "Do you want to remember that life?"

Hermione glared at him. Emotion raged behind her eyes for a moment before it faded.

"No." She whispered.

"We're done." Harry stood. "Leave me alone and I'll do the same."

Hermione nodded.

~§~§~§~

The third task approached much too fast for his liking. Voldemort was dead, as were most of his followers, but there was still a lingering dread. Harry was almost completely certain that it was Dumbledore that had been behind his entry this time. The strange behavior from the grindylows proved that he had not taken a passive role in things. Subtle, but not passive.

There was the slight chance that it was someone else. He couldn't think of anyone. It wouldn't be the first time in his life when someone completely out of nowhere turned out to be the mastermind.

Harry worked on his physical conditioning when he wasn't in the library. He ran laps around the quidditch pitch. No one bothered to stop him. The maze was covered in a thick mist, so it was impossible to learn the layout. There would be traps, creatures, and all that if it held to the same pattern. The tasks hadn't changed, which meant he wasn't completely blind.

Cedric, Victor, and Fleur joined him after a couple of days. Unlike the previous tasks, they didn't talk strategy. They knew it was a maze, but anything else was speculation. He could see they were just as focused as he was. Cedric frequented the library as well. The other two most likely had resources at their disposal as well.

Fleur had warmed to him. She still avoided him, but at least she was polite about it now. They had superficial conversations. He didn't press the issue. She deserved a life without being tangled up in his drama. There was no need for the Order of the Phoenix to form again, which meant there was little reason for her to stick around. That would prevent her from meeting Bill. Harry hoped that without access to Molly that Bill couldn't slip her, or anyone, a potion. There was a branch in France even if Fleur got the same job at Gringotts.

He would only step in if Bill managed to cross her path. Harry had learned later in life that he actually enjoyed potions. Not only that, but he was also rather good at it. As an auror, he learned how to make a quick and dirty purifying draught that could cleanse a person from harmful potions. It was tasteless, which made it easy to give to someone in the throes of a love potion. They wouldn't willingly take something that would stop the feeling. It was ironic that the best way to treat a person who had a potion slipped to them was to slip another one. A vague statement of 'Tea makes everything better' before he gave whoever the drink covered his bases.

"Harry." A voice cut through his thoughts.

He looked up to see it was Parvati.

"Hey." He gave her a tired smile.

"That's it." She sighed. "Come with me."

Parvati took him by the hand and began to lead him down the hall. They passed a couple of empty classrooms before they came to a painting of a door. She knocked on it three times, paused, and knocked once more. The door inside the painting swung open to show a cozy lounge. Parvati pulled him inside. She pushed him down onto a comfy couch before she took a spot next to him.

"Where are we?" He asked as he took in the room around them.

The comfy couch they currently sat on was flanked by a couple of chairs. A desk along the far wall was covered in fabric and sewing supplies. There was a bed that looked like a smaller version of the ones from the dorms behind the couch. The main difference being that it didn't have the four-posts or canopy to block things out.

"This is my workshop." She scooted over to the end of the couch. "Only Lav and Padma know about it."

Parvati patted her lap. Harry took the hint and laid his head on her thighs. She began to run her hands through his hair. He felt a wave of relaxation flow over him.

"That feels nice." Harry said as his eyes began to flutter.

"That's the point." Parvati chuckled. "You're an idiot."

"Hm?" Harry had to fight to keep his eyes open.

"You and Frenchie haven't hooked up yet." Parvati explained while she continued to run her hands through his hair.

"She deserves her own life." Harry mumbled. "I don't want to trap her here."

"Being with you isn't a trap." Parvati whispered.

Harry drifted off to sleep.

The dreams started out vague and formless. Flashes of half-formed thoughts mingled with the abstract. Suddenly, he found himself on an island that was surrounded by mist. The ruins of a castle were scattered along the ground. Pieces of what had once been stone walls were partially submerged. He wondered how big the island had been before it started to sink. Or was it that the water rose?

This didn't feel like a dream. It lacked the overbearing dread that the connection to Voldemort. Still, Harry could tell this was different than a normal dream.

The mist parted and a gorgeous woman strode through. She wore a black dress that hugged her curves in all the right places. Her deep blue eyes met his. He braced himself for a mental attack, but none came. She strolled around the ruins before she stopped before a low wall. Gracefully, she hopped up onto it to take a seat.

"You are the one who carries Excalibur." She stated.

Harry nodded. She studied him. Her eyes roved over his body. Something in the way she looked at him changed. A sly smile crossed her face.

"You are a man out of time." She shifted her gaze to the mist.

He didn't respond. The energy he felt from her was the same that had woken him up weeks ago. That building static in the air. The feeling teased the edge of his mind. He could almost place it, but it was always just beyond his grasp.

"You have me at a disadvantage." Harry spoke finally.

"That I do." She giggled. "I can see his blood in you. It's the eyes."

"Who?" Harry asked slowly.

"A person I once knew." She waved off the question. "I have to say, the world has become much more interesting since I've been gone."

"What's your name?" Harry asked.

"What is yours?" She countered.

He knew enough to know that a name had power. It was a bad idea to give his name to her without a bargain. Similar to how he spoke with Sunrise, he had to state it without relinquishing control.

"You may know my name, but you will not have it." He said firmly.

She tilted her head back and let out a musical laugh.

"Clever." She gave him a small nod. "Let us not discuss our true names. What should I call you?"

Harry thought for a moment. He wanted something that was from himself, not something another had inspired. That removed any connection to his scar. People always commented on his eyes. Even this woman had. He didn't want to use that a link to that either. It wasn't something he had done, or earned, it simply was part of him.

He had always wanted to see what he would become as an animagus. Ever since he learned that his father and friends had become animagus the thought stuck with him. They each had names to go along with their animal forms as well. Many hours were spent musing about what his form would be. He could imagine himself as a black cat.

"Lucky." He said with a small smile.

"Nice to meet you, Lucky." She returned the smile. "You can call me Aderyn."

"Nice to meet you too." Harry said. "Your magic feels different."

Aderyn nodded. Harry waited for her to speak. She didn't provide any further explanation.

"How are you here?" He asked.

"I sought the one who held the sword." She replied easily. "Here you are."

"Why were you after the sword?" Harry pressed.

"Now, that's a question that cannot be answered without a bargain." Aderyn leaned forward.

His eyes flashed to her cleavage. Her smile took on a predatory edge. Damn teenage hormones.

"Trade an answer if you want one of your own." She teased as she shimmied a little farther forward.

"Ask your question then." Harry kept his eyes on hers.

"When next we meet." She leaned back. "I'll see you soon."

65.

"She made the magic itch." Luna groused as she sat next to him.

The other champions stared at Luna for a moment. They had thought themselves adjusted to her unique conversations, but she had proved them wrong once again.

"I know." Harry nodded. "Do you know her name?"

Luna shook her head.

"What are you talking about?" Cedric asked slowly as he braced for the answer.

"The woman that's not in the lake made the magic itch." Luna replied.

"Oh." Cedric waited to see if she would say more.

He looked to the other champions when she didn't continue. They were just as confused as he was. Their group had increased in size since the ball. Cho now sat with Cedric, Luna was always near Harry, Ron had become quite close with Victor, and Parvati, along with Lavender, had attached themselves to Fleur. She was a more than a little shocked at first but had learned to accept their friendship.

Gabby had insisted on staying with Fleur. Harry didn't miss the vast multitude of shy looks the girl would send him. Their parents had taken up residence in a carriage of their own near where the Beauxbatons were settled. Gabby was eleven, which meant she was able to attend classes with the other Firsties. She could speak and understand English thanks to an interrupter spell. It wasn't perfect. There were significant gaps in regard to common slang as well as the more technical terms. It was odd to hear the occasional phrase in French pop up in conversation without any warning.

"Harry?" Cedric asked.

"You don't feel it?" Harry asked in reply.

Cedric shook his head. Harry turned his attention to the others in a silent question.

"It feels like my ears are going to pop." Gabby spoke up.

Fleur nodded. Harry motioned to the duo as though that answered things.

"That doesn't help." Cedric muttered.

"Fleur and Gabby are Veela." Cho patted her boyfriend on the shoulder. "It makes sense that they'd be able to feel things we couldn't."

"How does that explain Harry and Luna?" Cedric asked.

"It's Harry and Luna." Cho replied with a shrug.

"That's fair." Cedric sighed. "Does anyone have new information on the task?"

"No." Victor groaned. "Today. Yesterday. All same. No information."

"It's tomorrow." Cedric said in what he would claim wasn't a whine. "How do we not know anything? What was the point of the other tasks if there aren't any clues?"

"Maybe you should do some research." Parvati spoke up.

"Yes." Lavender added a little too quickly. "Split up for better results. Victor could take Cedric to the library on the ship and Fleur could take Harry to her carriage." She squeaked and shot Parvati a glare.

"The library in the carriages. You know, her library carriage."

"That's a good idea." Cho nodded. "I'll take Ron and Luna to search the library here."

"Hey!" Ron groaned. "I didn't agree to studying."

The three witches glared at him. Ron froze.

"On second thought." Ron said carefully. "That sounds like a great idea."

"I could go with Harry and Fleur." Gabby chimed in.

"NO!" All three witches said at once.

Gabby flinched.

"Sorry, Gabby." Parvati soothed. "The champions should work together. We can share our discoveries at dinner."

"You could come with us." Lavender smiled brightly at the younger girl.

"What are you going to do?" Gabby studied the duo.

"We're designing enchanted athletic gear for everyone." Parvati answered proudly. "We saw the suit Harry had. It would be good if everyone had something like that."

Gabby thought it over for a moment. Parvati and Lavender gave her pleading looks. Finally, she let out a dramatic huff and nodded.

"You will need my help with the style." Gabby sniped.

Parvati glared at the little girl. Lavender bumped her shoulder.

"Thank you." The Indian witch said through gritted teeth.

The group around them dispersed before Fleur could argue. In a matter of seconds, it was just the two of them. She stared at him for a moment.

"Shall we?" She asked with a sigh.

"Of course." Harry smiled as he stood.

Fleur led him out of the Great Hall. They walked in loaded silence. The topics of cosmetic conversation had already been exhausted at lunch. There was a limit on how many times they could ask 'how are you' without being obviously strained.

Their path veered from the main carriage to one farther down the line. Fleur stopped in front of one that didn't seem to have a door. She tapped it twice with her wand to summon steps and a door. Without a look back, she stepped inside.

Harry followed. He had expected the carriages to be charmed. There was too many students to be able to fit comfortably even with how large the carriages were. He had not expected to be led into what could only be a bedroom.

The door closed behind him on its own.

"We need to talk." Fleur turned to face him.

Harry nodded.

"What is this between us?" She asked.

"May I sit?" Harry motioned to her bed.

She nodded. Harry thought for a long moment. There was only so much he could say without telling her everything. Somewhere along the line he had decided not to share the story with anyone. Luna knew, sort of, but the future had been changed too much for it to matter anymore.

"In another life, we were in love." Harry whispered.

"In another life?" Fleur asked.

Harry nodded.

"I've known since we met. Flashes of smiles. Gentle touches. A stolen kiss under the stars. Dancing." He continued. "I didn't want to trap you in feelings that aren't yours as you are now."

"That is what you decided, for my sake?" Fleur stood in front of him with her arms crossed.

"What was I supposed to do?" Harry asked. "Hello. I'm Harry Potter. We've never met, and we're surrounded by a hundred other boys trying to get your attention, but we were in love in another life. How does that sound different from any of the other lies they have all told?"

"A Veela would sense the connection." Fleur huffed. "Just like the change in magic. Veela are more aware than *other* witches."

"And you would want that?" Harry asked with a huff of his own. "This echo from another life?"

"A Veela does not love easily." Fleur arched a perfect eyebrow at him. "It is not an *echo*, as you say. It is an ache. There is an emptiness that I did not know until I met you. If I loved you in another life, then I will love you in this one."

"How is that different that a compulsion?" Harry asked, finally putting to words the thoughts that wouldn't allow him to speak to her. "How is the hold this other life has over you, over us, anything more than a manipulation wrapped in flowery words?"

"Ah." Fleur noticeably relaxed. "Is that all?"

Harry opened his mouth, but confusion kept the words from coming out.

"You worry about control, mine and you own." Fleur explained as she moved closer to him.

She leaned forward. Their lips touched in a gentle caress that sent a warmth to his very core.

"Tell me." She whispered as she leaned her forehead against his. "Do I appear to be a woman possessed? Has my free will been stripped? Am I mad with lust?"

Harry shook his head. He did not trust his voice. Fleur paused to kiss him again. It grew deeper, but she pulled back before it could become more.

"When the tournament is complete." She kept her voice to a whisper. "We will continue this conversation, 'Arry."

He shivered as she said his name.

"Now." She giggled as she pulled away. "Let me show you the library. This maze must have guardians."

~§~§~

Harry stood beside the other three champions. The entry to the maze loomed ahead of them. He swore the crowd was larger this time. Regardless of all the preparation, the physical training, and the effort put in by the others, he was on edge. Last time, this had been a big turning point. Cedric had died, Voldemort had returned, and things went downhill fast.

He told himself that there was no reason to worry now that Voldemort was dead. Of course, with Tom out of the game that left Dumbledore to still deal with. The old man had been too quiet as of late. It felt like he was in the eye of the storm rather than truly safe.

Maybe he could feel the change in the air too. That would be enough to give anyone pause. It had grown to a steady hum. He knew it had something to do with the woman from his dream. She hadn't contacted him beyond that first encounter and he had no way to reach out to her. He wasn't sure if that was a good idea.

All of that had to be put aside. The Third Task had arrived. He hoped that they had prepared enough for everyone to come out alive at the end of the night. Harry didn't want anyone else to reach the cup before him, just in case it was a trap once more. Last time, he had let his noble spirit lead the way. A hand offered to Cedric in solidarity resulted in the young man as a corpse.

Four large banners stretched over the top of the maze. Harry thought they would have learned from the Second Task. No one could see down into the maze from the stands. He shook his head, it wasn't his problem.

"The Champions will enter one at a time." Bagman's voice was loud before the charm. "There will be a one-minute gap between each entry."

Harry bounced on his feet. He shook out his arms and rolled his shoulders. The new clothing felt great. Lavender and Parvati had done a wonderful job. They had kept the enchantments simple. Instead, they put their considerable skill in the design and function of the clothing. It was light, but he had seen it stand up to a piercing hex. Each champion wore one. The other three had their school crests and colors while Harry had the Coat of Arms of House Potter.

"Entering first." Bagman yelled. "The Champion of Hogwarts! Cedric Diggory."

Cedric waved to the crowd. He had a confident smile on his face that would look great on the front page of a special edition. The guy was good with people. Harry truly counted him as a friend this time around. He was going to do everything to make sure he survived the night.

"Entering second." Bagman continued. "The Champion of Durmstrang! Victor Krum."

Victor gave a short wave to the crowd as well. They went wild. The small motion was a show of his improved confidence compared to his usual stoic interactions with crowds. Harry had watched as the rather closed off young man began to grow accustomed to his own prowess.

"Entering third." Bagman paused. "Tied at third! The Champion of Beauxbatons! Fleur Delacour. The Champion of House Potter! Harry Potter."

There was a small jolt of energy in the air. Harry tensed, ready for an attack. Next to him, Fleur shifted her stance as well. The energy in the air had shifted again. He gave her a steady look. She held his gaze as she gave him a nod.

"Mister Diggory, are you ready?" Bagman yelled.

Cedric nodded.

"On your mark." The boisterous wizard raised his wand. "Get set." He shot a flare of bright red sparks into the air. "Go!"

Cedric took off like a shot. The entrance to the maze sealed shut behind him and a new one opened farther down the stretch.

That was new. The movement was almost lost on him with everything else going on. Above the maze, the banner with the Hogwarts crest swapped to a screen. The view was from behind Cedric at a steady distance and angled just enough to show what was ahead while it kept him in frame.

Harry stared at the sight in awe. He had never seen something like this in the magical world before. Even in the other time through, there hadn't been anything. This had the potential to revolutionize the magical world.

His thoughts were interrupted by a loud bang. Victor took off. The entry to the maze shut after him and two more opened farther down the line. Fleur looked over at him. She motioned to the one on the left. He nodded.

Harry saw Bagman raise his wand. He took a deep breath a moment before the signal sounded. It was time to see what the maze hid. Fleur took off to the passage on the left. He headed to the right.

The solid slam of the entry made him stutter a step. It sounded like stone, not a plant. Something told him this wasn't transfiguration. He scanned the area to see the hedge had been replaced by a ancient looking stone bricks. His eyes lifted to the sky to find a ceiling instead of stars. This was not what the maze had looked like for Cedric or Krum.

He tapped the tip of his boot against the floor. It felt like stone. Not an illusion. The air felt different too. He knew how it felt to be trapped in an enclosed space. There was a subtle scent on the air that didn't bode well. It was a mixture of lingering sweat, old blood, and the leavings of a wild animal.

Harry flexed his wrist for his wand to pop into his hand. He had to hand it to Dumbledore. This wasn't something he had seen coming. The magic around him felt different. Old and wild similar to the deep parts of the Forbidden Forest. He forced himself to focus. If this was still a maze, then the answer would be at the center.

He set forward at a jog with his wand still in his hand. The passage split into three, he took the one to the right. A subtle rumble caused him to pause. The passage behind him had been replaced by a wall.

"Of course, it's a shifting maze." Harry muttered.

He continued on. The walls would close behind him with every new passage and turn. This wasn't a maze; it was a labyrinth. The words were interchangeable in the mundane world. In the magical world, there was a distinct different. A maze was simply that, a puzzle to be solved while a labyrinth was a magical construct with the sole intent to trap those inside.

They were made famous by a commonly known myth of the...

"No." Harry came to a stop.

Dread replaced annoyance.

A Minotaur. How could they justify a minotaur? Where dragons were powerful and dangerous, they were intelligent. There were some who considered them sentient beings. A minotaur, however, while cunning, was a monster pure and simple. They were vicious and would go out of their way to eat living humans above all other options.

An explosion of nearby magic rocked the walls. It was quickly followed by a bestial bellow that made a part of him want to run and hide. He had hoped to keep his power hidden for the upcoming conflict with Dumbledore. The old man had proven once again how cunning he was. Harry could chose to let the others face the beast, or show the goat fucking bastard something.

He heard Cedric let out a ragged, pained scream. Visions of his dead form spurred Harry into motion.

"Point me, Cedric." He commanded.

The wand swung to the right. Harry took it back into his grip and pointed it at the wall. Elemental Magic was a difficult school to master. There were many different approaches around the world. Some of the more successful methods seemed to contradict each other. In truth, it was the simplicity that caused the complications.

Like attracts like.

Harry drew the outline of a door in the air before him. The stone shifted away to open before him. He let out a rough breath as it settled into shape. Simple did not mean easy.

One more wall brought him to a desperate scene. Cedric was backed into a corner, the remains of one of his arms hung at his side. It ended in a jagged stump just above his elbow. Between them stood a monster that was at least ten feet tall. He wasn't sure if it was taller than the troll back in first year, but it was definitely built different. The troll would almost look comical when placed beside the creature. Its back was toward Harry, but the unmistakable sound of teeth on bone was loud enough to echo through the passage.

The beast looked over its shoulder at him as it chewed on the lower part of Cedric's arm. Cunning malice took in the sight of the new wizard. It considered Harry as it continued to munch on the arm.

"Harry." Cedric grunted out. "Run. Leave me."

"You know I can't do that." Harry shook his head.

Harry sprang forward. He sprinted directly toward the creature. It watched him approach with a detached curiosity. Harry dropped into a slide as he went by. A rope of flame wrapped around the creatures' knee. Harry yanked hard as he hopped back up to his feet. The minotaur didn't fall, but it wasn't happy either.

The mingled stench of burned flesh and hair preceded an angry, pained roar. Harry let the rope of fire go once he reached Cedric. He turned to face the beast and shield the other wizard from further attack. Cedric looked even worse now that he was close. The blood from his arm had hid another wound on his ribs. It was only due to the wall that he was still upright.

"What are you doing?" Cedric gawked at him.

"Saving you." Harry replied without a look back. "Where is your wand?"

"His stomach." Cedric spoke just above a whisper.

"Take mine." Harry ordered. "See if the sparks still work."

It was a testament how out of it that Cedric was that he didn't even argue. The Hufflepuff took the wand. He held it up and shot sparks. Cedric disappeared before the spell had finished. A bone-shaking roar filled with outrage erupted from the minotaur. The look of curiosity had been replaced by a feral rage. He wasn't sure if it was from the flame rope, or Cedric's escape.

Harry held out his hand. He couldn't summon the Elder Wand, that would be too much. The sword, however, was something that everyone already knew about. The familiar grip formed in an instant. He held it before him in both hands. A detached part of his mind noted that there was something different about it. This was not the time for an inspect though.

The beast charged.

In his previous life, he had studied history of magical Britain and most of Europe. His adventures had led him to fight many dark lords through the years. Monsters were not in the usual rotation. Most dark

lords preferred to have minions rather than beasts. It took too much time and technique to handle magical creatures.

With the creature before him and the wall at his back, there was only one thing to do. Harry charged as well. He doubted he could slide by him again. Being a monster did not mean the minotaur was stupid.

The minotaur lowered its head to bring its horns in line. Harry jumped, a push of magical force sent him higher than he should have been able to reach. He kicked off the top of the monsters head a moment before it crashed into the wall.

Harry twisted in the air. He brought the sword down as he fell. The blade sliced through the muscle and raked along bone. Another roar, this one with a touch of shock emitted from the beast. Harry stayed in motion. He sliced at the knee he had targeted before. The enchanted blade easily cut through joint rather than rebounding against bone.

The minotaur lurched to the side as its balance shifted. Pain, shock, and anger kept the creature in the fight. It turned back to face Harry. The motion was led by a large hand that moved way too fast. Harry was backhanded with such force that it sent him rolling end over end down the passage. He rolled to a stop in the middle of a chamber.

"'Arry!" Fleur yelled.

His head spun as he turned to face her. Thick threads of webbing hung off his shoulders. Her uniform had quite a few slashes and melted patches but appeared intact.

"*What happened?*" She slipped into her native French without realizing it.

"Minotaur." Harry grunted out.

She helped him to his feet. Any further questions were interrupted by the arrival of Victor. The side of his face had a large discolored patch that would turn into a nasty bruise. One eye was swollen shut and he walked with a limp.

"Golem." He offered before they could ask.

"Spiders." Fleur replied.

"Minotaur." Harry motioned over his shoulder.

Thankfully, the passage behind him had sealed. He did not look forward to fighting the minotaur even while it was injured.

"Cedric?" Victor asked.

"Sent him back." Harry scanned the area.

It was empty, aside from a pedestal in the center. The Goblet of Fire rested in a silver cage.

"Where is key?" Victor directed the question to Harry.

"Huh?" He turned his attention back to the others.

Both of them held a key.

"I didn't get one." Harry shrugged.

The duo looked at each other. Only one of them could win. Victor smiled at Fleur or tried to at least. The motion made him shudder in pain. He waved to the goblet.

"You are most intact." Victor said to Fleur.

"I'm intact." Harry scoffed.

"No key." Victor countered.

Harry nodded. Fleur looked between the other two.

"Go on." Harry gave her a roguish smile. "You earned it." He paused. "Just, be careful. We don't know if there is more."

Fleur nodded. She unlocked the cage and grabbed the cup. The maze around them shook. Stone walls fell away as the chamber rose. They found themselves on a raised platform surrounded by a cheering crowd. Harry felt a ball of tension slowly begin to ease.

In the center of the platform stood Fleur. She held the cup above her head with a bright smile. The crowd cheered so loud he could feel it. They had made it. The Third Task was done. Harry cheered along with the rest of them.

Cedric hobbled over to join them. The remains of his arm had been wrapped in glowing bandages, as was his side. Medics rushed over to examine Harry and Victor. He tried to wave them off, sure he didn't have more than a few bumps and bruises.

"Mister Potter." The familiar voice of Madam Pomphrey stopped his protests. "You have a bleeding head wound. I have no doubt you have quite a few broken bones as well."

Harry felt the side of his head. It came away bloody.

"Huh." Harry grunted. "I didn't even realize."

"Now stop fussing and let me look you over." Madam Pomphrey led him toward the medical tent.

Harry came to a sudden stop. Madam Pomphrey said something, but the words were lost on him. The woman from his dream stood nearby. She stared back at him with an amused smile. The world around them seemed to slow as she approached. She wore a rich purple muggle suit with a black shirt. Her previously wild black hair was pulled back in a tight tail.

"Harry Potter." She said, that jolt of power from before the task pulsed again. "A wonderful show."

"And you are?" Harry forced himself to focus on her.

"Morgan." She held out her hand, palm down.

Harry took it and placed a kiss along her knuckles.

"Just Morgan?" Harry asked as he met her eyes.

"Le Fay." She replied.

The magic around her felt old, deep, and powerful. He didn't doubt her. Time stopped. Literally.

"That's new." A familiar voice said from beside him.

Harry looked over at Death.

"Yeah." He nodded. "I was not expecting that."

END PART 1