

Back With a Vengeance

Chapter 1

Harry stood before the massive gathering of Death Eaters deep in the Forbidden Forest, hidden only by the thin fabric of his invisibility cloak. In the center of the mass of dark cloaked figures, there was a clearing occupied by a lone, pale figure pacing back and forth slowly. The paper white skin of his bald head and exposed hands and feet, lit only by the small streams of moonlight filtering in through the branches overhead, contrasted sharply with the midnight black cloak covering his tall, thin body. Bright red eyes, gleaming with barely contained malice, stared unseeingly into the distance as the followers surrounding him waited in uncomfortable anticipation.

Harry gripped the stone in his hand tightly, clinging to it like an anchor to stop himself from fleeing.

"Can they see you?" he asked quietly.

"No, only you can see us," his father told him.

"Stay with me?" He asked vulnerably in a soft voice.

"Always," his mother said reassuringly, her ghostly hand resting with a very real, comforting weight on his shoulder.

Around him, the transparent figures of his parents, Sirius, and Remus reached out to touch him gently, silently offering their support. Sucking in a deep breath, he took strength from their presence and slowly removed his cloak. Adrenaline coursed through his veins, heightening his senses and allowing him to perceive the world around him with stunning clarity. His limbs trembled, sluggishly struggling to make even the simplest movements. Still, Harry forced himself onwards, the crunch of dried leaves under his feet the only sound in the unnaturally still forest.

Voldemort and the thousands of Death Eaters surrounding him all turned at the sound of his approach. The sea of black cloaked witches and wizards parted silently, staring intently as he walked past them into the clearing. He stopped several feet away from Voldemort, and not even the wind dared to breath as green met red for the last time.

“Harry Potter.” Voldemort breathed, staring at him in a mixture of contempt and surprise.
“Come to die.”

“Get on with it.” Harry said strongly, back straight and chin high.

Even as his hands shook and his legs trembled, he refused to show his fear. He clutched the Resurrection Stone desperately in his fist, its sharp points digging painfully into his palm. Even though he dared not look back, he could feel his family standing just behind him, their presence warm and comforting in the face of the cold hatred he faced.

Voldemort raised his wand, a victorious smirk stretching his thin lips as his eye glittered malevolently.

“Avada Kedavra!”

As the writhing, bright green spell rushed towards him, Harry closed his eyes, an odd sense of calm coming over him as he accepted his fate.

Blinking his eyes open, he found himself laying on a white floor in an endless white room. Sitting up, he immediately noticed that all the aches and pains he had felt endlessly for the last few months were gone, his cuts and bruises healed as if they never happened. His clothes were also clean and in perfect shape, not a stitch frayed or stain to be found. Climbing to his feet, he spun in a slow circle as he looked around, only to see endless white fog.

“Harry.” a hauntingly familiar voice called from behind him.

He spun around to see his mother stepping out of the fog only a few feet away, a soft, loving smile on her beautiful face as she opened her arms invitingly.

“Mum.” he whispered; his voice thick with emotion.

Harry slowly walked towards her, worried what he was seeing might not be real. Reaching out with one hand, he touched her arm. Relief flooded him when she felt warm and solid to the touch under her white gown. Tears prickled at his eyes as he wrapped his arms around her gingerly, and they flowed freely when she hugged him back. Somehow, her embrace managed to be both tight and gentle at the same time as she held him close.

“My brave, wonderful boy. I’m so proud of you.” she whispered in his ear.

Harry let out a bark of laughter through his tears, warmth flooding him as he heard the words he had longed to hear all his life.

“I missed you so much.” he told her thickly, his face buried in the crook of her neck.

Harry inhaled deeply, trying to commit the flowery scent of her soft, dark red hair to memory.

“I missed you too, sweetheart.” she told him, rubbing his back soothingly. “I love you, Harry.”

“I love you too, mum.”

They stayed like that, hugging each other for a long time before they finally pulled back. When they did, Harry stared raptly at his mother's face, mesmerizing every detail from her small, thin nose, to her high cheekbones, to her shining green eyes, so similar to his own. Lily smiled lovingly at him and reached up to wipe a tear off his cheek with her thumb.

"I'm so sorry life was so hard for you, Harry, but your father and I couldn't be more proud of everything you've done." she told him with an affectionate smile.

Harry grinned hugely and looked over her shoulder for his dad. Behind her, he saw only more white fog stretching on endlessly into nothing and frowned.

"Where's dad, and Sirius?" he asked.

Lily looked at him sadly.

"I'm sorry, sweetie. Only one of us was allowed to come see you." she said apologetically.

"What do you mean?" He asked, looking around in puzzlement. "Where are we?"

"We're in between life and death." Lily said. "Think of this like a waiting area before you move on."

"But, I'm dead. Aren't I?" he asked, his brow furrowing in confusion.

"Not exactly." his mother said. "It's a bit more complicated than that."

Of course, it was, Harry thought to himself, when were things even normal for him? He wished there was some place comfortable for them to sit down. He had a feeling this was going to be a long conversation.

Just as he finished that thought, the fog around them swirled and moved, as if pushed by a wind he couldn't feel. Slowly, it coalesced and changed color, until they were standing in the Gryffindor Common Room. It looked exactly as he remembered it from his sixth year, complete with a fire crackling merrily in behind the grate.

His mother smiled brightly at him as she took his hand and led him over to his favorite couch in front of the fire. They sat slightly turned to look at each other, their knees touching while she clutched his hand in her lap.

“You know how Voldemort left a piece of his soul in you when he tried to kill you, right?” she asked.

Harry nodded, listening closely.

“Well, since the Elder Wand sees you as its master, when he tried to kill you this time, instead of the curse attacking your soul, it attacked his.” she said.

“So, I'm not dead?” he asked, still confused.

“You have a choice, but I have more to explain first.” she said, waiting for his nod before continuing. “There were a lot of factors that brought you here, from the Horcrux inside of you, to the Elder wand not obeying Voldemort, to you sacrificing yourself to protect the school. On their own, none of that would have saved you, but together, not only did you potentially save yourself, but you saved the school as well.”

“How?” Harry asked, worried after being reminded of his friends. “Voldemort and his snake are still alive, and now the Elder Wand will work for him.”

Lily squeezed his hand and smiled proudly at him.

“Because you sacrificed yourself for them, just like I did for you. But, where I was only able to protect you, you were able to protect the whole castle. Thanks to you, no dark wizard will ever be able to hurt anyone at Hogwarts again, not without their curse being reflected back at them.” she told him.

Harry blinked at her and worked his mouth soundlessly a few times before he was finally able to get his words out.

"I-I don't understand." he said staggered by what she was telling him.

"Sacrifices make for incredibly powerful magic, and not just giving up your life. It's the intent that matters far more than the act itself. Think of all the times you fought, all the times you were willing to selflessly trade your life for the lives of your classmates and professors. All of the blood you've shed over the years, all the pain you've suffered to protect that school, it all adds up. Whether you decide to go back or not, with the sacrifice you just made, no innocent soul can ever be harmed by dark magic so long as they are within the wards Hogwarts." Lily explained.

Harry stared at her in open mouthed shock, staggered by what she was telling him. It took a few seconds for it to really sink in, and when it did, relief flooded him. A wide grin stretched his lips before a short laugh broke free, followed shortly after by another, and another. Soon, he was laughing madly, tears falling from the corners of his eyes. It took a few seconds for him to calm and sit back on the couch with his eyes closed, his lips upturned in a peaceful smile. It was finally over. His friends were safe.

It was only a matter of time before Voldemort fell to his own curse for a second time. Surely his friends could kill the snake before he was able to come back again. It may not have been entirely over, but he had faith that Ron, Hermione, and the rest of his friends could finish Voldemort once and for all.

"So, my friends will be fine. That means I can stay here, with you. I can see dad and Sirius again." Harry said excitedly.

Lily smiled softly at him, but he thought he saw a flicker of sadness in her eye.

"If that's what you want." she told him as she traced random designs across the back of his hand with her finger. "But there is another option."

"I could go back." Harry said quietly.

"Won't you miss your friends?" Lily asked, staring into his eyes. "There's so much more to life than what you've experienced. Finding love, having kids. I know life has been hard for you, son, and I'm so, so sorry for that, but there are things you can do when you're living that you'll never get to do being here."

"I will miss my friends." he admitted quietly. "I just-I've always wanted to meet you. I've always wanted my own family, and I know so little about you and dad. I..."

Harry trailed off thickly, his voice choked with emotion as his throat tightened. It was an impossible decision. Stay with his parents and leave behind his friends to live and grow without him or leave the family he yearned for his entire life after finally finding them against all odds.

Lily scooted over so that her hips was touching his and hugged him around the shoulders, her lips brushing his temple tenderly. Harry closed his eyes and leaned into her embrace, pressing his cheek against her soft, silky hair.

"There is a third option." A female voice said suddenly.

Mother and son leapt to their feet and Harry placed himself in front of his mother protectively. His hand shot to his side to reach for his wand for his wand, only to discover that it wasn't there. Gritting his teeth in frustration, he glared at the woman standing in front of him.

Wearing a white, flowing gown just like his mother, she looked to be in her forties with long, straight brown hair, hazel eyes, and a pretty, heart-shaped face. She smiled at him and raised her hands in the air.

"Peace." she said in a gentle voice. "I mean you no harm."

"Who are you?" Harry asked, watching her cautiously.

Lily moved his arm from holding her back and stepped next to him. She looked at the woman curiously but didn't seem concerned.

"My name is Dalhia. I'm what most people refer to as Death, but that's not important. I'm here to offer you a third option."

Harry and Lily looked at each other in surprise for a moment before turning back to Dalhia.

"What's the third option?" Lily asked.

"When Voldemort made his Horcruxes, he broke the very laws of nature. You did us a great service by stopping him. Even as we speak, your friends are finishing what you started." she said.

With a wave of her hand, the Northern wall swirled, quickly morphing into a round, spinning silver disk. A moment later, shadowy figures could be seen moving within the silver pool on the wall, gradually focusing into a clear view of the devastated front courtyard of Hogwarts. Harry stepped closer, looking closely for faces he recognized.

Students and teachers stood shoulder to shoulder in front of the castle, determinedly staring down the much larger force of black robed Death Eaters surrounding them in a semi-circle. In the no-man's land between them, stood the tall, pale figure of Voldemort. With a flick of his wrist, the massive, battered form of Hagrid was yanked forward by an invisible force. He stumbled forward with a covered bundle in his arms, tears streaming down his face and soaking into his beard.

"Harry Potter is dead!" Voldemort shouted triumphantly.

As the defenders of Hogwarts cried out as one in denial, the barely human wizard pushed out his hand, sending the cloak covering the bundle in Hagrid's arms flying away. Even though they were worlds apart, Harry, his friends, and professors, all gasped and fell silent as they stared in

shock at his limp, lifeless body. It was quite surreal, looking at his own dead body while feeling perfectly alive. With one final wave of his hand, Voldemort sent his body sailing like a ragdoll through the air to land just a few feet in front of the Hogwarts line.

“NOOOOO!”

The pained, devastated scream that left Hermione’s throat was heart wrenching as he watched her take two steps forward before collapsing to her knees next to his body. Great, heaving sobs racked her chest while her fists clutched his dirt covered shirt tightly. One of her hands reached out to stroke his cheek in a surprisingly tender, almost loving gesture. Voldemort and his Death Eaters laughed darkly as McGonagall rushed forward and knelt down next to Hermione, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

“You have lost!” Voldemort shouted, causing silence to fall except for the occasional snuffle or sob.

Lifting his wand, he waited for a moment before a small, brown blur flew into his hand from the castle.

“There will be no more Houses! There is only Slytherin.” he said loudly.

Sneering, he floated the Sorting Hat into the air and blasted it with a ball of fire from the tip of his wand. With the rim alight, smoke trailed behind the Hat as it flew forward to land at the feet of Neville Longbottom. Neville stomped out the flickering flames and bend down to pick up the hat, rearing back in fright when the snake, Nagini, darted towards him with a hiss.

“Surrender now, and your lives will be spared.” Voldemort shouted with his arms spread and a malevolent smirk stretching his thin lips.

“We’ll never surrender to you.” Hermione growled angrily while glaring up at him with reddened, puffy eyes.

“Come on, Neville.” Harry whispered encouragingly. “The Hat, look inside the Hat.”

As if guided by his voice, Neville turned the Hat over in his hands, examining it closely. Harry saw a flash of silver the same moment Neville did, and excitement course through him. With wide eyes, he reached into the Hat and curled his hand around the hilt of Gryffindor’s sword. He looked from the snake to Voldemort cautiously, visibly working up his courage.

“You can do it.” Harry whispered as Lily grabbed his hand and clutched it tightly.

Face set with determination, Neville suddenly yanked the gleaming, silver sword out and tossed the Hat to the side. Gripping the handle with both hands, he lifted it over his shoulder and charged Nagini with a yell.

“RAHHH!”

Nagini, who was watching Hermione closely, jerked and turned her head. Neville swung with all his might, the polished blade shimmering in the light of the moon as it sliced through the air towards her neck. There was barely a sound as the razor-sharp blade cleaved through Nagini’s thick scales smoothly, separating the snakes head from its body and sending it tumbling to the ground. Neville stumbled slightly as he tried to stop his momentum and stared in shock at the sword in his hands.

“NOOOO!” Voldemort bellowed in rage as his eyes shimmered brightly and magic swirled around him maliciously.

Voldemort and Neville both stared at Nagini’s body as it writhed and contorted on the ground for several seconds before it slowly stilled. When it finally collapsed and lay unmoving, a black, ghostly mass leaked from the severed neck. It hovered for a breath and a loud, unearthly shriek echoed throughout the silent grounds before it dissipated, fading like smoke blown away by the wind.

Voldemort turned to glare venomously at Neville, his face twisted with uncontrollable rage. Slowly, he raised his wand as the ground trembled under him, pebbles dancing and bouncing around his pale, bare feet. Neville swallowed thickly but stood his ground bravely and raised his wand.

“CRUCI-”

Voldemort’s roared incantation was interrupted when Hermione stood a began to fling a steady stream of silently cast spells at him. Her wand danced with startling speed while multi-colored lights effortlessly leapt from the tip of her wand. With a determined glare, Hermione marched forward, forcing Voldemort to defend as she used her prodigious knowledge to rain spells down upon him.

Harry smiled as Neville joined in, followed a moment later by McGonagall. A second after that, a dozen members of the DA stepped forward and added their spells to the barrage. Voldemort was forced to hide behind a large, purple dome that flashed and sparked as dozens and dozens of spells impacted the surface with a sizzle. Behind him, the Death Eaters shuffled anxiously and moved to step forward, only to stop when their master held up his hand, causing them to stop.

“AHHHH!” Voldemort’s cry echoed over the din while thrusting his arms forward.

His shield expanded rapidly and shot outwards like a shockwave, knocking the entire front row of Hogwarts defenders off their feet. Hermione, a couple of steps closer than everyone else, climbed to her feet quickly and leveled her wand at him again. Voldemort flicked his wand contemptuously, ripping Hermione’s from her hand easily. She glared at him defiantly, back straight and chin held high.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” Voldemort shouted with his wand aimed at her chest.

The familiar acid green streak of the Killing Curse sailed towards Hermione with frightening speed, and Harry gripped his mother’s hand tightly as his heart leapt to his throat. Displaying her incredible courage, Hermione continued to glare fearlessly at Voldemort as the spell

barreled towards her. Just before it hit her, there was a blinding flash of white light and a sound like thunder shook the ground.

The Killing Curse, writhing and spitting angrily, was suddenly hurled back at Voldemort with even great speed than before. Dark Lord Voldemort, the most feared wizard in the world, barely had time for his eyes to widen in fear before his own curse slammed into his chest. Everything froze, not a single witch or wizard on either side dared to move as they stared in shock. A heartbeat later, Voldemort slowly fell backwards, his face etched in a mixed expression of fear and horror as his body hit the ground with a dull thud.

"Harry." Hermione breathed, a small, sad smile on her face.

Turning around, she faced McGonagall and the rest of the Hogwarts defenders.

"It's Harry." She told them softly. "His sacrifice. It's protecting us just like his mother's did for him. They can't hurt us."

"Are you certain, Ms. Granger?" McGonagall asked.

"Positive." she said with a nod before smiling fondly. "it's what he's always done."

Reaching up to her chest, Hermione opened the top two buttons of her shirt and held it open to reveal a lightning bolt shaped, bloody mark on her chest. Tracing it softly, she smiled sadly while her eyes swam with unshed tears.

Suddenly, a high-pitched scream of rage carried across the gap between armies. Bellatrix Lestrange stormed forward quickly with a crazed, furious gleam in her violet eyes as her wild black hair bounced around her face.

"I'm going to cut out your heart and eat it you filthy little Mudblood!" she yelled.

Hermione turned to face the insane witch, but Neville stepped in front of her, shoulders square as he glared at her angrily.

“You’ll have to go through me first.” he shouted at her.

Bellatrix growled furiously as she stalked forwards, wand raised in front of her.

“Avada Kedavra!” she shrieked.

Neville stood resolutely still, not even bothering to raise his wand as the curse hurtled towards him. Just as with Hermione, there was a flash of white light, and it was reflected back at her with tremendous speed. A look of insane laughter was etched on the beautiful but crazed witch’s face as she collapsed to the ground motionless.

Neville hissed in pain and pulled down the collar of his shirt to find a lightning bolt shaped scar just below his collar bone. A rumble of whispered uncertainty rolled through the Death Eater ranks as she shuffled nervously. McGonagall patted Hermione and Neville on the shoulder as she walked past them and walked halfway between the two groups before raising her wand to her throat.

“Hogwarts will never surrender!” she shouted, her magically amplified voice carrying out onto the grounds. “You cannot harm anyone in this school. Throw down your wands now, and I give you my word you will be given a fair trial.”

She paused and waited to see if anyone would comply. More worried whispers rippled through the Death Eaters, looking lost and directionless without their leader. Huffing angrily, McGonagall raised her wand to her throat once more.

“Students, take aim! Stunners on my mark!” she yelled commandingly.

Forming into lines, the students of Hogwarts leveled their wands at the massive army of Death Eaters, each and every face a mask of focused determination.

A single, lone Death Eater broke ranks, Disapparating away with a loud, echoing pop in the silence of the moment. That single act led to a mass exodus from the castle grounds as dozens more Disapparated or turned to run.

“Fire!” McGonagall roared.

A sea of red Stunning Hexes flew past her, the air crackling with magic for the combined spells. All of them hit their mark, and a score of black robed witches and wizards collapsed to the ground within moments of each other. From there, the Hogwarts defenders continued to fire spells, stunning as many Death Eaters as possible until the last one had left, and the day was won.

“As you can see,” Dahlia said, drawing Harry and Lily’s attention. “Even should you choose to not return; your actions will inevitably lead to Voldemort’s defeat. For that, we are in your debt.”

Dahlia bowed her head gratefully. When she straightened back up, she waved her hand and the scene in the silver pool changed to the forest, where he and Voldemort lay on the ground, surrounded by his followers. This image, however, didn’t move.

“You’ve seen what will happen should you choose to stay. Should you choose to go back to the time you left, this is where you will go. You can go back, help your friends finish Voldemort once and for all, and live out the rest of your life however you choose.” she said.

Harry looked at the scene without really seeing it. Before, he had been seriously considering staying with his parents and finally getting to know them. Now though, after seeing how his death affected his friends, and Hermione in particular, he was leaning toward going back. He glanced over at his mother who was still holding his hand, torn on what to do. Lily gave him a soft, understanding smile and stroked the inside of his forearm.

"You said there was a third option." Harry said.

"Yes." Dahlia said, giving him an apologetic look. "But first, we own you an apology. There is a very strict rule that we are forced to follow. Once you are on this side of the veil, you can never directly interact with the world of the living. It would take too long to explain why but suffice it to say that it's to protect both of our worlds. Because of this, we have to use mortals to do our work for us. While we can't interact directly, we can create opportunities and nudge them in the direction we want them to go. Just like you did with your friend Neville."

Harry looked at her sharply, his brow furrowed as he tried to understand what she was talking about.

"There is one golden rule we must always follow. We do not interfere with free will. When you told Neville to look at the Hat, you put that thought in his mind, but you didn't force him to do it. In the end, it was always his choice."

Harry's eyes widened as he understood. He wasn't sure how he felt about influencing his friend like that. But it had helped in the end, right?

"That's what you did with Harry, isn't it?" Lily asked, breaking Harry out of his thoughts.

He stared sharply at Dahlia as she nodded her head.

"You did that?" he asked angrily. "You put me in all those dangerous situations?"

"No." she told him calmly. "We merely gave you the information for you to decide what to do for yourself. We showed you what Quirrell was up to, but it was your choice to go after him. The same with the Chamber of Secrets. It was always your choice to fight Voldemort, we merely put you in a position to do so."

"But why me?" Harry asked frustratedly as he ran a hand through his hair.

It was a question that had bothered him since childhood. Out of everyone in the world, why did these terrible things always happen to him.

“Because you’re strong.” she told him. “You were the only person strong enough, mentally and magically, that could help us. No one else could have succeeded. You were our only chance to stop Voldemort.”

“What if I had failed?” he asked in trepidation.

“Voldemort would have slowly taken over the world with a reign of darkness that would last for seven hundred years before we would get another chance to stop him.” Dahlia answered.

Harry sighed and sat back down on the couch. His mother sat down next to him, rubbing his back soothingly as he came to grips with the idea that someone he had never met had planned out and guided his entire life. Dahlia walked over and sat down across from them silently, giving him time to order his thoughts.

“What about Severus?” Lily asked softly in trepidation. “Did you show him the prophecy?”

“We...gave him the choice.” Dahlia said with regret.

“You-” Harry growled furiously.

“Harry, sweetheart, don’t.” his mother said gently.

“But, mum, it’s their fault you died!” He yelled angrily.

“No.” Lily said firmly. “Severus chose to tell Voldemort knowing full well what would happen.”

"But..." he said helplessly.

"It's alright, Harry. I know it's hard, but if I have to give up my life to save millions, maybe billions of people from suffering at the hands of Voldemort, then that's a trade I'm willing to make. You would do the same thing, and you know it." she told him.

Harry tried to think of an argument but gave up with a sigh when he realized she was right. His mother smiled at him and gave him a kiss on the temple. Not quite ready to let go of his anger, he glared over at Dahlia.

"Can you tell us what this third choice is already?" he asked rudely.

"Certainly." she said, unperturbed. "Given what you have suffered we are willing to send you back to your first year at Hogwarts, with all of your memories intact. You'd be able to stop Voldemort much quicker and easier with your knowledge of the future, saving a lot of lives in the process."

"Could I save Cedric, and Sirius?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes." she said.

"What about my parents?" he asked, looking over at his mum.

"If they wish to go back, one of them may." she nodded.

"Just one?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Yes, I'm sorry, but that's all we have permission to send back." Dahlia said apologetically.

"Who is we, exactly?" Lily asked with narrowed eyes.

"The powers that be, gods, magic manifest in physical form." she said with a shrug. "Honestly, I'm not really sure what we are."

"Mum?" Harry asked, looking at her with a hopeful gaze.

Lily sighed and drummed her fingers on her leg as she thought.

"Can I talk to my husband first?" she asked Dahlia.

"Of course."

With a wave of her hand, the silver pool on the wall grew until it was big enough for a person. The image once again morphed and changed until it showed an image of his father looking at them in surprise. Getting over his shock, he waved at Harry excitedly and tried to step through, only to be stopped by an invisible force.

"You can speak with him. I'll wait with Harry until you've reached a decision." Dahlia said.

Giving Harry a pat on the leg, Lily stood and walked over to the pool and spoke quietly with James. Harry tried to listen in, but everything he heard sounded muffled and indistinct. It was a surprisingly short time later that his mother blew her father a kiss goodbye and returned to the couch.

"I'll be going back." she said, smiling brightly at Harry.

Dahlia nodded with a small smile. "If you're both ready?"

Lily looked at Harry questioningly and got a nod in return. Turning back to Dahlia, she opened her mouth, but paused for a moment.

“Are there any other changes we should know about?” she asked with narrowed eyes.

“A few here and there, but we’ll leave those as a surprise. I promise you’ll enjoy them.” Dahlia said with a small mischievous smile.

His mother sighed but didn’t push for answers.

“Alright, we’re ready.” she said, squaring her shoulders.

With a smile and a snap of her fingers, Dahlia and the Common Room around them faded back into fog that quickly grew more and more dense. Lily grabbed Harry hand and held it tightly as they were totally enveloped by the fog, and everything went white.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

An incessant, sharp tapping woke Harry from his sleep. Rolling over in his warm, soft bed, it took several seconds for his sleep addled brain to remember what had happened. As his memories returned, Harry sat up sharply in bed and looked around the room. He knew he had never been here before, but he also knew he was in his bedroom in Coventry. It was if two sets of memories were warring in his mind. He could clearly remember his old life growing up with the Dursleys, but he just as clearly remembered growing up in Coventry with his mother and... sister?

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The renewed tapping brought Harry out of his conflicting memories of the past and back to the present. Looking over at the window, where the sound was coming from, he jumped to his feet when he saw a familiar white, feathered face and intelligent amber eyes looking back at him.

“Hedwig!” Harry exclaimed joyously.

Running over to the window, he lifted it open and held out his arm. Hedwig swooped in and landed on his shoulder, rather than his arm, affectionately nipping at his ear.

“You have no idea how much I missed you.” he said, running the back of his finger over her soft feathers.

“Harry?” a familiar voice called out loudly from the hallway outside his door.

“In here mum!” Harry called back, a huge grin on his face.

Lily, dressed in a light blue bath robe, swung his door open quickly and stumbled to a stop, looking at him questioningly.

“Mum, look! Hedwig came back.” he told her excitedly.

His mother smiled softly and let out a relieved sigh as she walked up to him.

“Thank Merlin. I thought I was going insane with all these new memories in my head.” she told him.

“Yeah, tell me about it.” he agreed.

Giving his mum a one-armed hug, he went through some of his new memories while she smiled at Hedwig and thank her for taking care of him. One thing about his sister, Jasmine, was bothering him.

“Hey, mum?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“Um, if Dad didn’t come back, then who’s Jasmine’s...” Harry trailed off awkwardly.

Lily looked at him with a smirk as she watched him squirm uncomfortable for a moment.

“I was pregnant before he was killed.” she told him and chuckled at the look of relief on his face. “In fact, I haven’t even had date since that night, and I don’t plan to either.”

“Mum, have you seen my red shirt?” a familiar, yet unfamiliar voice called out through the house.

“I’ll be there in a minute, Jasmine.” Lily yelled back before turning to Harry. “Well, ready to go start our new lives?”

“Yeah.” Harry said with a contented smile.

He was finally going to get a chance to live the life he always wanted. How could he not be ready?

His mother smiled and gave Hedwig’s crest one last stroke before walking to the door, only to stop with her hand on the knob.

“Oh, and Harry?” she said, turning back with a smile. “Happy birthday!”

Chapter 2

Harry had the best summer of his life spending time with his mother and sister. Jasmine looked like a younger version of his mum, with long red hair and bright green eyes. Though she looked like Lily, she acted far more like James, but without the small streak of cruelty his father had shown growing up. Jasmine was just as into Quidditch as Harry, and often enjoyed pulling a good prank. In a way, she reminded him of the Weasley twins, all the life of the party and looking for a laugh.

It was a bit difficult in the beginning for both Harry and Lily to get used to their now lives, although it was slightly harder for Harry. It took a few days for the memories of the lives they lived in this time to feel more like memories they lived, and less like watching the memories of strangers that looked like them. It felt like they were adjusting to a whole new world, and that was how Harry often thought of it in his head. Jasmine had noticed them acting oddly the first few days and remarked on their sudden closeness more than once.

Harry explained it away by telling her his was going to miss them when he went off to Hogwarts in September, but he wasn't completely sure she bought it. Still, Harry refused to feel embarrassed about spending time with his mother after waiting so long to meet her. He got answers to so many questions that had plagued him over the years. Even simple things, like what her career was and her who her friends were had eluded him for so long, it was a relief to finally find the answers.

His mother had been training to be an Unspeakable, someone who worked in the Department of Mysteries researching the most arcane and complex magic imaginable. She took time off when she was pregnant with Harry and ended leaving again only a few months after returning when she learned of the prophecy.

He also learned that in their old world, most of his mother's friends had been killed, or worse in the case of Alice Longbottom. Fortunately, here, her closest friends Alice and a witch he had heard mentioned before, Marlene McKinnon, were both alive and well. They often came to visit, bringing over Neville and Marlene's daughter Olivia, who was the same age as Jasmine.

Harry was also happy to see his mother was good friends with Andromeda Tonks, and that, despite the difference in age, Tonks and he were close.

There were so many changes to the world around him, both small and large, that it felt disconcerting at times. Tonks, for instance, while still older than him, was only three years older, rather than the seven-year difference he was used to. Hogwarts starting at eighteen was probably the biggest change he had noticed so far, with the obvious exception of his mother being alive. A handful of other people had also survived or escaped horrible fates and live normal lives.

Some things were still the same, sadly. Voldemort had still attacked his home on Halloween, killing his father and attempting to kill Harry. Here, however, he had only stunned his mother before turning his wand on Harry. Dumbledore had always talked about how his mother's sacrifice had saved him, and he wondered what had caused the spell to rebound this time. With so many things different, it was hard to guess.

With his mother surviving the attack by Voldemort, she had been able to tell the Aurors and Dumbledore the truth about switching secret keepers, and Sirius was never arrested. Pettigrew had fled and was still on the run. He wondered if he was still pretending to be the Weasley's pet rat. That would make catching him fairly easy, he thought.

Resolving to worry about Voldemort and Death Eaters once he got to Hogwarts, Harry spent most of his time during the summer with his family.

All too soon, it was time for him to head to King's Cross station to board the Hogwarts Express.

"I'm going to miss you." Harry said, hugging his mother tightly.

"I'm going to miss you too." Lily said tearfully.

As soon as they separated, Jasmine, unusually emotional, rushed forward to hug him just as tightly.

"You'd better write." she told him; her stern tone ruined by a snuffle.

"I will." Harry promised.

The horn sounded, signaling the train would be leaving in one minute. With one last goodbye, Harry grabbed his trunk and boarded the train. As it chugged away from the platform, Harry leaned out of the door and waved before slipping inside. Pulling his trunk down the aisle, he was looking for a place to sit when he spotted a familiar face. Hermione was sitting in a compartment alone, her nose buried in a copy of *Hogwarts, A History*. Harry couldn't help but smile, remembering their first meeting. He knew it would be painful to talk to her when she didn't remember him, but he couldn't resist talking to her.

Sliding the door open quietly, he poked his head inside.

"You mind if I sit here, everywhere else is full." he said, smiling as he parroted Ron's first words to him.

Hermione looked up from her book. "Help yourself." she said.

Stepping inside and closing the door behind him, he lifted his trunk onto the rack and sat down across from her.

"I'm Harry, by the way." he said, holding out his hand.

"Hermione." she said.

As she took her first good look at him, her eyes landed on his distinctive lightning bolt shaped scar and her brown eyes widened.

"You're Harry Potter!" she gasped. "I've read all about you."

"Er, yeah." Harry said, rubbing the back of his neck.

"I'm sorry, that was terribly rude of me. I was just surprised. I mean, I knew you'd be going to Hogwarts this year, but..." she trailed off, looking a bit embarrassed.

"It's alright." he told her with a smile. "Just don't put too much stock in what's written about me in books."

Hermione smiled back at him, relieved he wasn't offended.

"Excited about Hogwarts?" he asked.

"Of course! I can't wait to start doing magic. It's all just so exciting, isn't it!" she said, her brown eyes sparkling. "There so many different kinds of magic and history to learn. Do you know anything about Hogwarts or the professors? I mean, I know this is your first year too, but I thought, living in the magical world, you might know something."

"I know a bit." Harry said with a smile. "What do you want to know?"

As expected, Hermione bombarded him with questions. He answered all of them happily, and even got in a few of his own. From what she told him; her life was pretty much the same as he remembered. About an hour into their conversation, the door to their compartment was thrown open.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here? Potty and the Mudblood." Malfoy drawled.

Behind him, Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson laughter nastily. Across from him, Hermione bristled. Even if she didn't know what the word meant yet, she was smart enough to know when she was being insulted.

"What do you want Malfoy?" Harry asked calmly.

After everything he had been through, Harry wasn't bothered by the boy's petty insults. He also knew that no matter how much he pretended, he would never be as dark and cruel as his father.

"Just thought I'd give you a friendly warning." Malfoy said with a smirk before turning serious. "What your back Potter, mummy's not here to protect you anymore."

Crabbe and goyle cracked their knuckles threateningly, while Malfoy did his best to look imposing before turning to Hermione, his nose wrinkling in disgust. She opened her mouth to say something, but before she could, Harry stood. With blinding speed, he drew his wand and had it pointed lazily at Malfoy's chest. Startled to find himself at wand point, he backed up half a step until he bumped into Crabbe and Goyle.

Twirling his wand so the tip was facing him, Harry reached down and grabbed Malfoy hand. Slapping the hand of his wand into the blonde boy's hand, he raised his arm up until Malfoy had Harry's own wand aim at his chest.

"Go on." Harry said.

"What!?" Malfoy asked incredulously.

"You want to kill me? Well, go on, here's your chance." Harry said, holding his arms out the side.

"Are you insane!?" Malfoy yelled, completely throw by the situation he found himself in.

“Curse him, Draco!” Parkinson cheered excitedly.

“Yeah!” Goyle grunted, his eyes glinting cruelly.

Harry kept his gaze lock on Malfoy as he stood confidently. He could see fear and uncertainty in his silver eyes. For several long seconds, he continued to stand there as the tip of his wand began to shake in Malfoy’s hand. Feeling his point was proven, he snatched his wand back, tucked it in his pocket and sat back down in his seat.

“So, what house do you think you’ll be in?” he asked Hermione.

She worked her mouth silently, staring at him incredulously. Looking pale and shaken, Malfoy pushed Crabbe and goyle out of the way and fled the compartment, ignoring the questions of his friends as they followed after him.

“That was incredible.” Hermione said finally, staring at him in awe. “How did you know he wouldn’t curse you?”

“Malfoy’s a git, but he doesn’t have it in him to kill.” Harry said with a shrug.

Hermione shook her head and sat back in her seat, looking at him curiously.

“What does Mudblood mean?” she asked quietly a few seconds later.

Harry sighed.

“It means dirty blood. There are some older families that think Muggleborns shouldn’t be allowed in our world.” he told her reluctantly.

“Oh.” she said, looking troubled.

Thankfully, the snack trolley came by just then, and Harry bought sweets and drinks for the both of them. That lightened the mood, and they were able to get back to their old conversation

“You never did tell me what house you want to be in.” he reminded her.

Several hours later, they arrived at Hogsmeade. Making their way over to Hagrid, they boarded a boat where they were joined by Neville and Ron. Together, they rode the boats up to the castle and waited anxiously for the sorting to begin.

“How do you think they’re going to sort us? It’s not a test, is it?” Hermione asked nervously.

“It’s not a test, just relax Hermione, you’ll be fine.” Harry reassured her.

“Fred and George told me we have to fight a troll.” Ron said, his face pale.

Harry smiled as the theories of how they would be sorted grew more and more ridiculous. Hermione noticed and narrowed her eyes at him.

“You know, don’t you?” she accused him quietly.

Harry glanced around to make sure no one else was listening, and leaned in closer to whisper to her.

“It’s a hat made by Godric Gryffindor. It reads your mind and picks the best house for you.” he told her.

Hermione bit her lip nervously.

“What if it puts us in a house we don’t want.” she asked.

“It won’t.” he said with certainty.

Before she could ask him anything else, McGonagall returned and ushered them into the Great Hall. He smiled as he watched his classmates gaze in wonder at the ceiling. They walked up between the tables until they stopped in front of a three-legged stool holding the ratty looking Sorting Hat. Standing in front of them, McGonagall started reading their names off of a scroll.

Name after name, everyone went to the same houses as he remembered. When it was his turn, Harry walked up, and McGonagall set the hat on his head.

“My, my, you’ve certainly been through a lot.” The hat’s voice echoed through his head.

“I’d appreciate it if you’d keep that to yourself.” Harry thought back.

“Of course.” the hat said. “Now, let’s see...It seems pretty clear where you belong. Better be...”

“Gryffindor!” the hat shouted aloud.

The Gryffindor table broke into loud cheers, Fred and George among the loudest, as he joined their table. He took a seat with the rest of the first years and looked around the hall while the sorting continued. Tonks caught his from her place at the Hufflepuff table and stuck her tongue out before giving him a wink. Harry smiled back and continued looking around. When his eyes landed on Professor Quirrell, he felt a small tingle in his scar, but none of the sharp, intense pain he had experienced in the past. It seemed that despite no longer having a Horcrux inside of him, he still had some kind of muted connection to Voldemort.

As the sorting came to an end, Harry was lost in thought. He would need to start figuring out a way to finish Voldemort once and for all. He made a note to write to his mother for advice after the feast.

For the next few weeks, classes went normally, and Harry found himself incredibly bored relearned the lessons he had taken years earlier. Still, he was careful not to look too good in class. Not only did he not want to raise suspicion, but he also didn't want to be placed in a higher year away from his friends. On the upside, homework was much easier for him this time around.

On Halloween, Harry did his best to keep Ron from insulting Hermione after class and breathed a sigh of relief when he succeeded. His friends wouldn't be in danger this time, he promised himself. Still, by dinner, his stomach was in knots, and he only picked at his food. His plans rarely worked out, and Halloween was never a good day for him.

That thought turned out to be prophetic when he saw Ron enter the Great Hall with Neville and Seamus, his ears red, and Hermione nowhere in sight.

"Where's Hermione?" he asked sharply.

Ron looked down at his plate while Neville and Seamus exchanged an uncomfortable look.

"Where is she?" Harry demanded.

"Well..." Neville started. "Ron got into a bit of a fight with her-"

Not bothering to let him finish, Harry stood and bolted out of the Great Hall. There was no need for him to ask if they knew where she was, he already knew. Cursing under his breath, Harry took every short cut and secret passage he knew to get to the girls' bathroom in the dungeons as fast as he could. Without bothering to knock, he barged into the bathroom and skidded to a

halt. Hermione, her eyes red from crying, looked up from where she was standing next to the sink. Next to her, Tonks was patting her back comfortingly.

“Harry! What are you doing here?” Hermione asked in surprise.

“You do know this is the girls’ bathroom, right?” Tonks asked teasingly with a raised eyebrow.

“We need to leave. Now!” Harry said.

“What’s wrong?” Tonks asked, going from teasing to serious in an instant.

“There’s a Troll in the castle. Now, come on.” he said urgently.

As he spoke, he saw them stare wide eyed at something over his shoulder just before a foul stench assaulted his nostrils. Drawing his wand, Harry spun and barely got a shield up before the Troll’s tree branch like club slammed into it. Even though the shield protected him, the force of the blow sent him flying across the bathroom. Slamming back first into the tile covered wall, he grunted in pain as he hit the floor. His vision went blurry from the impact, and he struggled to get to his feet.

Hermione screamed in terror as the nine-foot-tall Troll bared its teeth and roared at her and Tonks. She stood still in shock at the massive club descended rapidly towards her head.

“Protego!” Tonks shouted.

Her shield sprang up just in front of Hermione, stopped the club from hitting her and deflecting it into a sink next to her. The porcelain shattered into a thousand pieces and water sprayed onto the floor from the broken pipe. Tonks was flung backwards from the force of the blow. She slammed into the frame of the stall behind her, a sickening *thud* coming from the wood where the back of her head smacked into it before sliding to the ground, dazed.

Hermione backed up against the sink, her wand trembling as she aimed it at the Trolls chest. Harry scrambled to his feet just as it raised its club over its head.

“Carpe Retractum!” he shouted.

Like a lasso, a golden, pulsating thread of magic flew from the tip of his wand and wrapped around the club. As the troll tried to swing it down, Harry grunted as he used his magic to hold the club in place. The Troll gave a grunt of its own, this one in confusion. Doing an odd, uncoordinated pirouette, the Troll spun to face Harry. Following the golden thread with beady brown eyes, it growled angrily when it spotted it connected to his wand.

“Mine!” Harry yelled, yanking then club.

Normally, he would have been no match for the strength of a fully grown Mountain Troll, however, aided by his spell, he was nearly able to wrench it from its hands. Roaring in fury, the Troll yanked back, but the club stayed tied to Harry’s wand.

“Mine!” Harry yelled again, yanking on the club.

Hermione helped Tonks to her feet, and they stared incredulously at the ridiculous argument taking place in front of them. Back and forth, like a tug of war where only on person pulled at a time, Harry and the Troll fought for the club.

With a low growl, the Troll planted its feet and furrowed its brow in concentration, preparing to yank hard on the club.

“Fine, you can have it.” Harry said.

Just as the Troll pulled, he dropped the spell. As if in slow motion, he watched as the Troll’s face went from triumph when he pulled the club free, to puzzlement when it continued at high velocity towards its face.

THUD!

The club smashed into the Troll's face, sending two thumb-sized teeth clattering to the tile floor as it swayed on its feet.

"Run!" Harry yelled to Hermione and Tonks.

Tonks and Hermione scrambled out of the way as the Troll teetered back and forth precariously. Like a tree, the Troll reached a tipping point and toppled over, gravity accelerating it towards the ground. It crashed to the ground, vibrating the ground under their feet. Harry breathed a sigh of relief as Tonks and Hermione came to stand next to him, staring at the Troll in shock.

Just when it seemed to be over, the sound of running footsteps, rapidly growing closer, announced the arrival of the professors. Snape was the first to come bursting through the door. Slipping on the wet floor, he flapped his arms wildly to keep his balance, but failed and fell on his ass. Tonks covered her mouth to suppress a snort of laughter as McGonagall walked into the bathroom, wand raised and ready, only to blink in surprise at the unconscious Troll.

"Is it safe to come in, Minerva?" Dumbledore asked outside the room.

"Yes, the girls are decent," she replied.

Dumbledore peeked cautiously around the corner before entering. Cursing under his breath, Snape climbed to his feet, water dripping off of his soaked back and sleeves.

"What happened here?" McGonagall demanded.

“Ron and Hermione had a fight, so I came to check on her.” Harry explained. “I heard Professor Quirrell yell about the Troll, and I knew I had to warn her. Tonks was already here, but the Troll showed up before we could leave.”

“You expect us to believe that you single handedly took down a fully grown Mountain Troll without so much as a scratch?” Snape asked skeptically.

“It’s true professor. We would be dead if it wasn’t for Harry.” Tonks said.

“Ms. Granger?” McGonagall asked.

“He’s telling the truth, professor. The Troll would have killed me if Harry didn’t stop it.” she answered.

“You’re certain he saved both of your lives?” Dumbledore asked, eyeing them intently.

“Yes, sir.” they answered in unison.

“I see.” he said, stroking his beard. “Ms. Granger, would you please take Harry and Ms. Tonks to the Hospital Wing. Professor McGonagall, if you could contact their parents?”

“Parents?” Harry asked in surprise.

With all of the accidents and injuries at Hogwarts, he had never known the professors to call in someone’s parents unless it was extremely severe.

“I will explain shortly.” Dumbledore said.

Before Harry could question him further, the Headmaster turned at left. Harry sighed in frustration, feeling like he was missing something. McGonagall ushered them out of the bathroom, and he followed Hermione to the Hospital Wing.

“Thank you for coming to check on me.” Hermione said once they were out of earshot of the professors. “And for saving me from the Troll.”

“Yeah, thanks mate, that was impressive.” Tonks said, her grateful smile turning mischievous. “I think that deserves a hug.”

Tonks wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged his head to her chest. Harry found his face sandwiched between her breasts and tried to pull back in surprise. She laughed at his weak struggling, growing her already impressive bust to button threatening proportions.

“My hero!” she exclaimed theatrically, swaying her chest back and forth.

“Tonks!” Hermione yelled, scandalized.

Laughing, Tonks let him go and shrank her breast back to their natural size. Harry’s face was beet red as he straightened up, his glasses sitting lopsided on his face. Not really sure how to react, he marched determinedly down the hall, ignoring the snickers behind him.

Arriving at the Hospital Wing, Madam Pomphrey treated them for minor injuries, and a mild concussion in Tonks’ case. Right as she was finishing up, Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall arrive with Lily, Andromeda, and Hermione’s mother, Emma Granger.

Immediately, Lily rushed over to Harry.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?” she asked.

"I'm fine, but something else is going on." he said quietly.

"I know, come with me." she said, pulling him to the far side of the room by the hand while Emma and Andromeda checked on their daughters.

"I'm so sorry I didn't remember this sooner." Lily said as soon as they reached the last bed.

"Remember what?" he asked, his stomach churning with unease.

"Life debts work differently here." she said. "They create a much stronger connection between people. Essentially, it means you'll be linked for life with anyone you save."

"What!?" Harry hissed.

"It's not as bad as it sounds, it doesn't turn them into slaves or anything, but it does enhance any positive feels they have for you." she explained.

"Bloody hell." Harry groaned.

"This isn't necessarily a bad thing, Harry, just different." Lily said, rubbing his back as Harry put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"What should I do?" he asked.

"Nothing." his mother said. "Just treat them as you normally would, continue being a good friend, and let things develop naturally. Come on, let's get back to the others."

Sighing, Harry stood up and followed Lily back to the rest of the group. Before he could sit, Emma rushed up to him and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug.

"Thank you so much for saving Hermione." she gushed gratefully.

"Uh, you're welcome." Harry said, patting her back a bit awkwardly.

Emma pulled back and smiled at him, her hands resting on his upper arms.

"I'm so glad my daughter has a friend like you. She writes home all the time about how nice you are." she told him.

"Mum!" Hermione yelled, her cheeks going pink.

Harry felt himself blushing as Emma chuckled and sat back down next to her daughter. Andromeda came up to him and gave him a hug as well. Once everyone was seated again, Dumbledore addressed the group.

"First of all, I would like to apologize for the danger your children were in. We are investigating how a Troll managed to get into the castle and we are confident nothing like this will happen again." he started. "I can assure you, instances like this are highly unusual at Hogwarts."

Not anymore, Harry thought, hiding a smile.

"Are you sure Hermione will be safe here?" Emma asked.

"I give you my word, we will do everything we can to keep your daughter safe." Dumbledore said diplomatically.

"This really is a safe place." Andromeda jumped in. "And this is the best place for her to learn about magic. Pulling her out now will only make her a danger to herself and others."

"I'm staying mum, I can't leave now. There's so much to learn." Hermione said pleadingly.

Emma sighed and held up her hands in surrender.

"You're old enough to make your own decisions now, I just want to make sure you're safe." she said, patting Hermione's leg.

"I promise you Mrs. Granger, your daughter will be safe in our care." Dumbledore assured her. "Now, while we're all grateful for Harry heroic actions, it does complicate things slightly."

"How?" Emma asked.

"Albus." His mother interrupted before he could answer. "Maybe it would be best if Andy and I told her."

Professor Dumbledore actually looked a bit relieved at the offer and quickly nodded.

"If you have any questions, I'll be in my office. Professor McGonagall can show you where it is." he said.

As the Headmaster left, Lily turned to Harry and Tonks.

"Why don't you two go get some sleep, Hermione will be up in a bit." she told them.

Knowing better than to argue, Harry and Tonks left the Hospital Wing after saying goodbye to their mums. They walked through the halls in companionable silence for a couple of minutes, until the staircase. Tonks put her hand on Harry shoulder, stopping him from going up the stairs.

“Seriously Harry, thanks for the rescue.” she said sincerely.

“Don’t mention it.” he told her with a smile.

To his surprise, Tonks cupped his cheeks with both her hands and kissed him suddenly. After a moment to get over his shock, Harry wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her back. He couldn’t tell how long they stayed like it, it felt both like an eternity and far too brief at the same time. When they finally broke apart, Tonks grinned hugely, her hair cycling through the entire rainbow before settling on bright purple.

“I’ve wanted to do that for a while.” she admitted with a wink. “Good night, Harry.”

“Night, Tonks.” Harry said softly as he watched her sashay down the stairs, stumbling slightly halfway down.

Shaking his head with an irrepressible grin on his face, he resumed his walk to Gryffindor Tower.

When he got there several minutes later, he sat down on the couch across from the fireplace and opened a magazine while he waited for Hermione. It was another three hours, just a few minutes before curfew, that she finally returned, a small stack of books in her arms.

“Hermione?” he called out softly.

Luckily, the common room was nearly empty, most students were in their dorms getting ready for bed. Only Harry and a few older students remained.

“Oh. Hi, Harry.” she said nervously.

Harry felt his throat tighten with worry that he may have just lost his best friend before she truly got to know him. It was only a small relief when she set her books down and sat next to him on the couch.

“Did my mom explain everything?” he asked.

“Yeah, she did, but I went to the library to do some research.” she said, indicating the pile of books.

“I'm really sorry, Hermione.” he told her.

“Don't be.” she said, placing her hand on top of his. “It not your fault. Don't get me wrong, I really appreciate what you did, it's just...”

“You don't like not being in control.” Harry finished for her.

“Exactly.” she said with a nod.

“So, are we okay?” he asked worriedly.

“Oh, Harry. Of course, we are. I'm not mad at you, I'm just a bit...I don't know, confused, nervous, take your pick.” Hermione said, running a hand through her bushy hair in agitation. “I just need to understand more about this before I'll know how I really feel about it.”

“I understand.” Harry said, although he doubted that he really did. “But just so you know, you're still my friend until you want that to change.”

“Thank you.” she said gratefully with a small smile. “I need to get to bed. I'll see you in the morning?”

“Definitely.” he told her.

Hermione smiled brightly and leaned forward to hug him tightly. Harry hugged her back, feeling a bit better but still a bit concerned. As she pulled back, Hermione turned her head and kissed him on the cheek. Pulling back sharply, her eyes widened, and her cheeks went pink, as if suddenly realizing what she had done. Harry could only blink at her in mild surprise.

“G-Goodnight Harry.” she said before standing quickly and gathering her books.

“Goodnight, Hermione.” he said as she rushed off up the stairs to the girls’ dorm.

Sighing, Harry climbed to his feet and trudged off to bed, lost in his thoughts. Sometimes, it really felt like fate just loved messing with him.