

I ain't Lucas or Rowling.

Chapter 1: Questions Asked and Mysteries Solved

Harry groaned as he tried to straighten up from the ball he'd curled into after Vernon had tossed him into his cupboard. His head was pounding, and the scar on his forehead was particularly throbbing, having caught a direct blow from Vernon's knuckles. His eye was also black and blue, and his nose felt broken.

While this wasn't the first time Vernon had beaten him like this, this was one of the worst beatings Harry could remember and his mind was all of a jumble. "But it really was an honest mistake." He groaned to himself while he began to crawl towards the small blanket that he called his bed in one corner.

It had been an actual mistake too, though it was Harry's rather than the teacher as Harry had tried to imply. Almost since the day the Dursleys had been forced to send him to school Harry had been very careful to get lower scores than Dudley. The beating he had gotten in primary the first time he brought home an assignment sheet with a 'Fantastic!' sticker on it had stayed with him.

But scoring lower than Dudley particularly in Reading and Writing took a lot of effort. And this time Harry had made a mistake, he had put down what he thought was the wrong answer on a vocabulary quiz, but it turned out it had been the right one.

*Of course the teacher's comment on **finally** seeing some improvement from a boy she knows is smarter than he lets on in his tests had added to the effect of the 'little freak' scoring better than 'my dearest Duddykins.* Harry scowled at that thought. The beating had begun with Aunt Petunia, and had continued when Vernon came home in a bad mood about something from his work at Grunnings. Worse it was a Friday, so neither of the Dursleys had to worry about keeping where his injuries wouldn't show.

Harry wasn't very bothered about any of the injuries to his chest or back, Harry knew he'd be healed by Monday, it had happened before. His head throbbing like it was though, that was worrying. Worse he was beginning to get flashes of dreams, but they felt a little too real to be dreams, they were almost like memories, full sight, sound and sensation memories.

Pulling the rag he called a blanket over himself Harry groaned, curling up into a ball again. *Bugger me, they really worked me over this time, the last time I've felt this way was...* Suddenly Harry's thoughts ground to a halt, as he remembered that incident.

Dudley and his gang of bullies had decided that they didn't want to run after Harry any longer, and had taken to throwing stones at him instead. One of them had caught him in the cheek, and Harry had feared that they would put out his eyes if they continued to fling stones at him.

Before this how Harry had escaped them that time was hazy, but now it came through bright and clear and almost his mind. He had run away, only to find that the alleyway he had run into near the school was a dead-end. He had heard them coming, had felt the pain in his cheek, had heard them shouting, "20 points for the eye, 50 points if you can hit the freak's scar!"

Harry had panicked trying desperately to think of how to get away, how to reach a safe place. He heard one of them shout to the others, ducked as a rock had hit the wall behind him, and suddenly, Harry was no longer in the alleyway, but up on top of a roof nearby.

The memory was so vivid now! He could remember the feel of the shingles under his feet, his old hand-me-down sneakers so thin on the bottom he could actually feel each shingle in turn as he skated a little down the side of the slanted roof. He remembered with a wince the pain he felt when he desperately grabbed onto a chimney to stop himself from losing his footing.

He could even remember the sounds of the three bullies below him shouting angrily at one another about how they had missed him. But after that the memory faded back to nothing. No like how memories from years ago faded, like the ones from his earliest years, which he could no longer tell were dreams or real memories, but simply nothing. Yet the rest of his memory of the incident was so clear...

"But, but that couldn't have happened. People can't just disappear from one place and appear somewhere else. Can they?" he said aloud staring up at the sloped ceiling of his covered, using some of the vocabulary he never would use in school or anywhere else where it could get back to the Dursleys. "That's like something out of that Star Trek show. But I didn't have any kind of teleportation device or anything."

The memory was so real, Harry thought, falling silent for a moment. It was a real memory, just as real as the memory of the beating I just took, or the recipes I've had to learn over the years. I don't have that good of imagination, do I?

Then an odd thought occurred to him, possibly made from this latest beating. *Could this be why, could I really be a freak? Could the Dursleys know about my ability to pop or whatever, and that's why they hate me?*

Harry knew his so-called family hated him, he had seen far too many normal families and how they acted, even to relatives rather than their own children, to have any doubt on that score. What he had never been able to figure out before was **why**!

He did everything he could to get on their good side, he cooked their meals, and he knew it was a better cook than Petunia by this point. He did all the chores he was assigned. Petunia had gotten some awards for her roses of late because he was able to clear out all of the bugs and weeds that would harm them. Then when 'Freak' was sent to school and found out his name was Harry Potter, he still routinely tried to make himself as small and unobtrusive as possible after that first incident.

Yet nothing worked and still the Dursleys hated him. The beatings had become less over the years simply because Harry was now spending most of his time at school or the municipal library, and Vernon and Petunia in particular were leery about giving people the 'wrong idea' by marking Harry where it would show in public.

Yet this could be the reason why they called him the freak. "But is it just because I can do that? I can't control it, whatever it was, I was just so scared." He said aloud again, bringing one finger up to rub at his scar wincing at the pain of it. Suddenly he stopped, pulling away his finger and then touching his nose and eye gingerly. Then despite the pain he began to smile...

OOOOOOO

Two days later was Monday, and Harry eagerly rushed out the door after preparing breakfast for the Dursleys, grabbing up an apple and some grapes from a bowl set on the table. None of the others save Petunia occasionally ever ate from that bowl so it was safe enough, it was simply there because the Dursleys thought it was normal to have a bowl of fruit on their dining table.

By the time Dudley tromped onto the bus waiting for them at the corner Harry had ensconced himself in the seat directly behind the driver, and had already finished eating. Dudley glared at him for a moment, but knew better than to try anything on the bus. The bus driver didn't care who you were, if you caused trouble he tossed you out. Dudley had seen it happen to a few older students, and it had stuck with him since.

The school day passed interminably for Harry until recess was announced. Then while all the other kids raced outside, Harry made his way to library. There Ms. Hicks the school librarian smiled down at him. "Hello Harry, what can I help you with today?"

Her smile turned sad as Harry flushed in happiness at her tone. It said something about his home life that simply speaking to him nicely caused Harry to feel so much

happiness, and she made a mental note yet again to start up a file on him. Little did she know it would not be the first time she or any of the other teachers had done so. But nothing would come of it, again.

"Good morning Ms. Hicks." Harry replied politely. "I'd like to use one of the computers if that's all right? I'd like to look something up."

"You sure you don't want to look it up in one of the books?" Ms. Hicks asked even as she stood up from her desk, leading Harry over to one of the computers, one that allowed him to watch the doorway since she knew he felt more at ease that way. She winced when Harry flinched at her gentle touch on the top of his head. Yes, she really did need to start a file on him.

"I don't think I'll be able to find what I'm looking for there, Ms. Hicks." Harry replied, still respectfully, but inching away slightly from the older woman. Some of the teachers had tried to act friendly with to him in the past, one had even asked if Harry would like to see if he could find a new family. But that teacher had suddenly moved away, and whenever the other ones started to ask questions, that too stopped abruptly, Harry didn't know why.

"All right, I know I can trust you on them, just don't stay in here all recess okay?" Ms. Hicks said smiling. "Boys need their exercise."

"Yes Ms. Hicks I will." Harry replied, sitting down at one of four computers in the library while Ms. Hicks went back to her desk.

The computers were a gift from a rich donator, and were almost brand-new, and they had access to the World Wide Web. Harry had heard Vernon remark on the WWW, how it was all newfangled technology and would never amount to anything. Harry disagreed though he kept it to himself of course. He believed the World Wide Web would continue to grow, just like computer technology.

After a few minutes, Harry leaned back, frowning. He couldn't find the information he was looking for, but that did not dissuade him. The WWW was so new after all, the information just might not be available yet on it. It would just have been faster than trying to find the information in books. Thanking Ms. Hicks he left the room, but did not go outside, instead taking refuge in the classroom until recess ended.

After school Harry did not head back to Privet Drive, avoiding Dudley and his gang with the ease of long practice while racing to the refuge of the public library. The librarians there were all no nonsense sorts who didn't care who someone's family was

or what you looked like. If you made noise or acted out in their library, you were out on your ear and would not be allowed back in.

After asking for help once again he was directed towards a section of books on health, though he ignored the ones that were supposedly for his age group, searching the others diligently. Eventually Harry found a book that covered some of the wounds Harry knew he had taken. They also told how long it would take a normal person to heal from them. After a moment, Harry had to lean back in shock. *Is that right?*

According to the books, Harry healed hundreds of times faster than humans were normally supposed to. Athletes and those with perfect health of course healed faster than those without perfect health, but even so Harry knew he wasn't an athlete, and he didn't exactly have good hygiene since he wasn't able to really have a balanced diet. The occasional granola bar, a stolen sandwich when he could get away with it, and fruit was basically all he could eat outside the occasional cafeteria meal at the school which was free with enrollment, else Harry knew the Dursleys would not have paid for it.

*So not only do I heal faster than someone with my diet and general health should, but I heal faster than **anyone** should! It's not perfect like that comic book character what's his name, Wolverine? Harry had seen that comic book occasionally among Dudley's collection. His doesn't leave scars, but this does. My, my healing factor I suppose, it just keeps me alive and relatively whole. But, but **how**, why?*

Those were the thoughts that kept ringing in his head as Harry made his way back to the Dursleys. Petunia met him at the door, grabbing his shoulder firmly as the doors closed. "It's about time you came home! Dinner time's barely an hour away and you haven't even started, get cooking!" She growled, pushing him towards the kitchen then going back to her favorite pastime of spying on her neighbors.

As Harry entered the kitchen he heard her mutter. "That's the same mailman that came by yesterday, and he's not the normal one assigned here either, I wonder... that would be such a scandal!"

Harry shook his head sadly then put what he just heard out of his mind as he quickly fell into the routine of fixing one of the Dursleys' huge dinners. He was even able to sneak some for himself since Petunia was the only one at home and she was busy staring out the window trying to see what was going on behind the curtains next-door, not having noticed that the mailman had come and gone long since.

Dudley came home soon after that but headed up to his room without bothering Harry. He knew that if he did bother Harry when he was cooking the food would be late, and if there was one thing that Dudley took seriously it was food.

A few minutes later Vernon was home and Harry quickly made his way out of the kitchen saying "dinner on the table." With that he rushed over to his cupboard opening and closing the door quickly once he was inside.

Vernon glared after him then shook his head, muttered "Freak", and made his way over to the table, where a heavy steak and kidney pie waited, along with some garlic bread sticks.

"He's not the only one." Petunia said, shaking her head as she set down. "I think Mrs. Cripps next-door might be having an affair!"

In his cupboard Harry took out the food he'd grabbed, several bits sticks, as well as a pen he had stolen from the small table next to the kitchen door that held the phone and a few books. Pulling his small incredibly tattered bookbag out, he turned to a precious page of the one notebook he had, which had to last him all of his classes all year-long, and wrote down in very tiny scribbles what he had discovered.

He made a note of putting down the name of the book he had looked up the information on healing down as well since it might prove helpful in the future. Then in the light of the one sparking overhead light that was in the cupboard he leaned against the wall of his cupboard and said aloud "What else? Think, think like a scientist conducting an experiment, like the older boys do, taking note of changes in their plants."

For a moment Harry couldn't think of anything, and scrubbed his hands through his hair irritably. Then he pulled them away gasped. "My hair, that's it!"

Petunia had been forced to give him a haircut before this school year began because the first form kids were going to have photos taken and she refused to let him have a photo taken with his normal messy hair. Not because she cared what he looked like, but because she worried what people would think of her and her family.

It'd been horrible, a misshapen thing with half of his head almost sheared off and the other half just a little longer. But the next day when Harry woke up to go to school, his hair had grown back to its normal disheveled appearance. Petunia had ranted and raved about it, but thankfully Vernon had already left for the day for an early-morning meeting. He'd also come home in a good mood, and Harry only had taken a few light slaps upside the head after school from Petunia.

"But I couldn't control that, and I didn't control the teleportation either." After a few moments thinking about that he thought to himself: *Maybe that's because I didn't know about them? Now that I do can I control it?*

Harry decided to see if he could control his hair first figuring that would be less dangerous. He could all too easily remember the fear that he felt hanging onto the chimney as he stared down at the alley all that way below him.

He waited, breathless with anticipation and eagerness while the Dursleys finished their meal then watched television for a few hours before trooping off to bed one after another. As usual Petunia rapped on the door to his cupboard shouting "the dishes better be done before I wake up tomorrow Potter!"

For some reason when she said Harry's last name, she put as much vitriol in the word as Vernon or Dudley could the word 'freak' at their worst. Harry had no idea why that was, nor any inclination to ask. "Yes, Aunt Petunia." he replied simply, politely as always.

He heard a sniff then listened as she followed her husband up the stairs above him, the creaking of the steps under Vernon's weight almost drowning out the noise of her own passage. Then he moved out of the cupboard and into the kitchen, diligently doing the work that Petunia had ordered him to do. After that and feeling very daring, he made his way back towards his cupboard, then closed the door, but remained outside.

He waited there in the dark of the hallway breathless at this little bit of rebellion as the noise above subsided slowly, Vernon and Dudley falling asleep. Petunia would remain awake reading her fashion magazines for a few minutes before turning in. It was the same every night, staid and above all normal, just the way the Dursleys like it.

But Harry, Harry wanted change. He wanted it so desperately he could taste it on his tongue, and whatever this was, whatever made the Dursleys think him a freak, he was willing to grab it with both hands and run with it if he could. With that in mind Harry slowly made his way back down the hallway and into the small bathroom set by the laundry room on the other side of the hallway from the stairs.

Trembling slightly Harry closed the door, wincing at the slight click when the catch caught despite his best efforts. Thankfully the hinges were well oiled, something Harry had been ordered to do a few weeks ago. With the door closed, Harry pulled off his shirt stuffing it into the area directly underneath the door in an effort to keep the light from showing just in case. Then he turned on the light, and stared at himself in the mirror.

Harry's face was thin, just this side of malnourished. He had huge spectacles on his face, which barely fit his face and Harry knew that they didn't actually help his vision all that much these days, if they ever had. His green eyes stared at his reflection, and Harry absently brushed the hair off of his forehead so that his lightning scar was visible.

He stared at it for a moment as he always did at times like this. Petunia had told him he'd gotten it in the car wreck that had killed his drunkard parents, but Harry didn't believe it. Oh, the scar might've come from something like that, but he didn't believe his parents were drunkards.

He sometimes remembered their voices, though whether from dreams or memories he no longer knew, nor cared. A deep baritone and light feminine voice laughing and someone else barking, either a dog or someone whose laughter was like a dog's bark Harry could never tell. Sometimes, those memories were accompanied by flashes of color, red, brown, and sometimes green, though those memories were never good ones.

But right now Harry was a boy on a mission, and he shook his head from those thoughts, staring at his hair in the reflection. *How do I do this?* Harry had no idea, so he simply stared at his hair, trying to will it to change trying to imagine it a deep purple or green, but it didn't work, he couldn't keep the image in his mind. Then he tried something simpler, simply trying to imagine it longer, concentrating on that idea while gritting his teeth.

It took forever, the image wavering in his mind as he stared at the reality in the mirror, but slowly the hair actually changed, becoming longer, now falling past his eyes. "Oh wow!" He whispered excitedly, using all of his self-control not to shout or jump around in joy. Yet the moment he stopped concentrating on it his hair quickly shifted back to normal, shrinking as he watched.

But even so, Harry knew he had done it and knew it was possible to do it again. He took a step back, grinning so widely his mouth hurt from the unusual exercise. *I might be a freak, but at least I can control it a little! Am I, am a mutant then? Or is this something else?*

In the comic books mutants normally had one power, or several connected ones like Susan Storm. But Harry couldn't see a connection between being able to grow his hair, or possibly do more to it than that, and being able to teleport from one place to another.

Harry went to bed that evening still thinking about that, and the next day at school stared in shock at the answer directly in front of him in the book he was reading in mandatory reading. The teacher had innocently suggested it to him a few minutes ago. It was the Sword in the Stone, a book that was quite a few levels above Harry's known level, but the teacher had an idea that Harry's reading level was actually quite a bit higher than he let on.

"Magic..." Harry murmured, so low no one else around him heard it.

That evening Harry made notes again in his little notebook, as usual his small neat writing using every bit of space, frowning thoughtfully. *If it's magic, can I do other things? Best not to test that idea. Maybe try to control the hair first, then the teleporting?*

That evening and for the next few evenings Harry snuck out of his cupboard into the bathroom and began to try to manipulate his hair. He found that some changes became easier with time. After a week Harry was able to change the color of his hair yet he couldn't change the style without concentrating on it. When Harry stopped concentrating on his hair color, it tended to stay for a time, but he couldn't change his hairstyle and couldn't even make it grow without his concentrating on it. He wondered why, and made notes on this bit of research in his little notebook.

After two weeks of experimenting with his hair however, Harry was prepared to branch out. But he didn't have nearly as much luck in this area as with his hair. There was a huge difference between imagining his hair being somehow different to trying to imagine himself somewhere else than he currently was. He couldn't keep the image in his head long enough, couldn't concentrate hard enough to make the magic come out, or whatever.

This all changed when one day Harry was walking to the library. He was intent on looking up anything that could possibly help him figure out a way to concentrate more when he heard a voice behind him. "Hey Harry, guess what time it is?"

Harry turned quickly, staring as Dudley, Piers and a few of their friends came up behind him. "It's Harry Hunting time!" Dudley said, his piggy face smirking maliciously at his cousin. "But we figured we'd give you a head start this time, you've got 10 seconds to run, then we're coming after you."

To one side of Dudley, Piers laughed with all the malicious happiness a young bully could contain. "Better get a move on freak!"

Harry didn't need telling twice and raced off down the streets. He initially attempted to make for the safe haven of the public library but Dudley had taken a shortcut and gotten there ahead of him blocking off that safe zone, forcing Harry to run away in another direction until he was lost in the alleyways behind the small shopping area.

He found himself in the back of the supermarket wishing fervently that the door to set one side would open, but knowing he wouldn't be that lucky. Behind him Harry heard their voices as they rounded the corner. "You know it's been a while since we've had throwing practice Dudster, and the freak does make a good target!"

Harry cringed inside then desperately began to try and climb up over the little wall between him and the back of the supermarket. But Harry wasn't a very good climber never having had much practice and not having much upper body strength either. He was barely halfway up the wall when a stone caught him in the shoulder. "40 points right off the bat!" Dudley gloated behind him.

Harry winced as he fell to the ground, holding his shoulder in agony. He looked around desperately for an escape, but the four boys were standing in a row in the alleyways entrance, all of them holding small stones. Piers tried his luck next, and Harry dodged to one side. "Damn it, stay still freak!"

"Hah that makes it even better!" said one of the other boys whose name Harry didn't know. "Let's add 10 points to each hit we get when he's movin' around like that!"

"This is like an arcade game, only better!" laughed Dudley, throwing a stone.

Harry ducked again, hearing the whiz of the stone as it flew by his head, his eyes now widening in fear behind his glasses. *Got to get away, got to get away! Have to get away!*

After a brief argument about turns, the four boys in front of Harry all hurled their stones as one. Harry closed his eyes wishing himself elsewhere desperately with all the concentration he could muster in his fear-fueled state.

And suddenly he was. Harry collapsed to the asphalt in the small parking lot alongside the library. He was in an unused corner with a small tree in it, where Harry had fond memories of napping a time or two when Dudley was busy elsewhere. He stood up, shakily, and tried to move away from the tree he was leaning against only to frown when he looked down at his hand, which **wasn't there!**

Harry brought up his other hand to his mouth to hold back the scream as he saw that his hand was gone, old habits of holding in his cries in fear of getting punished worse

coming to the fore. He began to hyperventilate, wondering what happened. *How did, d-did I leave it behind? Is that even possible?*

Suddenly he heard loud popping noises all around him, and odd man in very odd clothing, appeared. One of them pointed at Harry. "This must be the one George," He said, moving over to Harry quickly. "Worst case of accidental magic I've ever seen, whoever heard of a youngster being able to apparate?"

"We'll see what the other team has to say about that." The man so addressed said, moving over towards Harry with his hands held out calmly. "Calm down boyo, we're here to help you. Don't worry you'll have your hands back like new, Wood and Alders will fetch it quick, just keep calm okay? Don't scream, the more attention you bring, the more work you make for us understand?"

The voice wasn't angry or confrontational, simply matter of fact and somewhat sympathetic, though not as friendly as the first voice. Still Harry calmed down, taking his mouth away from his hand. "Yes sir."

He tilted his head up to look at the man, his hair falling back from his forehead for a moment and both men gasped. "Harry Potter!" said the one whose name hadn't been mentioned yet. "Well I guess that explains it then, though why were you trying to apparate?"

"Who's he staying with anyway?" said George scratching his chin thoughtfully. "Headmaster Dumbledore never said, no matter what the Wizengamot tried to threaten him with. All he would say was that he was safe, remember?"

At that moment there were two more pops and two more men appeared, one of them holding Harry's missing hand gingerly. Harry was astonished to note that the hand and his own arm looked as if they were simply taken apart like a Lego toy, there was no blood or pus or anything!

"Here's the lad's hand." said one of them, a large man with bull shoulders and a Scottish accent. "Poor bugger."

"What's wrong Wood?"

The man so addressed didn't respond just yet. Instead he moved through the other men, kneeling down in front of Harry. "We're you bein' bullied laddie?"

Harry hesitantly nodded his head and the man nodded back. He turned back to look up at the other man even as he held out his missing hand to Harry, pushing it against the

stump of his wrist while addressing the men all around. "There were four brats bigger than this young'un all of them holding rocks, and shouting out how 'the freak' went and disappeared on them at the initial locus." He said his tone grim. "Some blood on the wall of the alleyway they were standing intoo. They get you anywhere laddie?"

"My, my shoulder sir." Answered Harry hesitantly.

"Ach well, we'll deal with your hand first then your shoulder. By the by, is this the first time this has happened?"

"What do you mean Sir?"

"The bullying laddie." Scottish man said, holding Harry's arm gently while another man ran what looked like some kind of stick, or maybe a wand like in the books he'd been reading, along the arm there.

"Flex your hand and fingers for a bit, we need to know if it's connected right?" The man with the wand, George, said. Watching as Harry did so he smiled. "Good, now flex your wrist." Harry did so, and both men smiled. "Good, now for the shoulder."

Over Harry's feeble protests his shirt was removed, causing hissing among the men as they saw his back. Harry always tried to curl up into a ball whenever Vernon began to beat on him, and his back had almost always taken the majority of the damage. As such he had scars that crisscrossed his back, many from a belt buckle or belt, some from a poker, some from Vernon's fists opening up the skin on his back.

"W-what, by Merlin, Morgana and Maeve, what is this?" said one of them, one of the two that hadn't been named. "This is Harry-ruddy-Potter damn it! Who in their right mind would, would do that to him!"

The one called George simply methodically healed Harry's shoulder then said something Harry couldn't understand before running his wand over Harry's back, frowning as a light at the wand's tip changed from blue to red. "This is all so old I don't think I can reverse it." He said, shaking his head.

"That's abuse that is!" said the one called Wood, standing up at and glowering around at the others, giving off the impression of a volcano that was about to erupt. While Harry pulled on his shirt, he tried to make himself smaller, knowing nothing good ever came from this much attention.

"Oh dear." said an elderly voice, from behind the crowd of men. "This is a problem."

"Professor!" Said one man turning and staring as Harry did the same at a man who looked as if he was Merlin come to life from a few pictures of him Harry had seen in various picture books about King Arthur. Though upon reflection, Harry felt that Merlin would not wear a bright green robe with pink polka dots on it.

"I applaud you for your quick reaction time gentlemen, it's such a sad state of affairs when bullying gets out of hand among young boys isn't it? Now, I will take it from here and take young Harry back to his family, and have a stern talking to with them and with the youths in question."

At this three of the men nodded their heads somberly, willing to entrust this newcomer with Harry's safety for some reason Harry didn't understand given how they'd acted before the others however Wood sounded angry as he confronted the old man. "Headmaster wha' is goin' on here!" He said pointing angrily down at Harry who flinched a little at the finger. "This isn't a case of bullyin', this is..."

By that time the old man had stepped in amongst the man, and Harry watched as a wand appeared in his hand faster than Harry could blink. The wand looked different from the other two Harry had seen so far. It had little bumps along its length, which looked almost like knuckles sort of or lumps on a tree. Before any of the men could do anything, he intoned "Obliviate!" and Harry knew no more.

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Harry looked around his cupboard, trying to remember how he came to be there for a moment before he remembered that he had hurried home, which was odd since he never used the word 'home' to think about Privet Drive. He fixed dinner and then moved into his cupboard, though for some reason his mind seemed to try and supply the word 'room' for a moment before being taken over by reality.

Though the reason for his desire to enter his cupboard so quickly escaped Harry. He had a niggling impression that he had thought of something he wanted to read, but Harry didn't have any books, the school library didn't let book go home unless the family paid a fee, and the Dursleys would never do that. And he couldn't get a library card without his guardian's okay.

Shrugging, Harry simply decided he must've wanted to go over his notes from class for some reason, and pulled his small dingy backpack open pulling out his very tattered notebook. Reading through the last few pages however Harry frowned. *Has someone been into my notebook?*

There were notes there that Harry didn't remember making, but as Harry looked at him, he saw they were in his handwriting! *Why would I do that, I don't have enough room in here to waste on imaginings, and they're in pen too! I can't even erase them!* Harry scowled angrily throwing the notebook down onto his bed, shaking his head in leaning against the wall of his cupboard. But his eyes kept on going back to the notes, as he tried to work out why in the world he would've done that.

He couldn't remember doing it, which was another odd thing. Harry knew he had a decent enough memory, certainly better than Dudley's, or indeed any of the other students in his class. Once he wrote down something himself, he remembered it. *Why'd I do that?* He thought scowling angrily. *And in pen too!*

Yet his eyes continued to stray to it, until finally he sighed. *All right, there's an easy way of checking to see if this is anything but some weird craziness that I can't remember.*

That evening Harry snuck into the bathroom and stared at himself then down at the notes before staring back up into his image in the mirror. He concentrated, and after only a few seconds he watched in shock as his hair began to change color.

It really does get easier over time then! With that thought in mind Harry quickly made his way back to his cupboard, turned on the hanging light and began to read the notes he had made avidly.

A few hours later Harry was still awake, frowning in thought as his finger tapped the word 'magic' among his notes, where it had been underlined and even circled. He'd read through his notes several times, and felt he understood what he'd been doing, but one thing continued to bother him. *How did I forget about it?*

Harry worried at that problem for several minutes without coming to a solution, however a sudden thought came to him as he looked down at one of the first notes, which read 'could the Dursleys know about this, is that why?' *If that's so Harry thought, then could other people know? But if so, how would they have made **me** forget about all this?*

After a moment he came up with a solution that to his young yet intelligent mind made sense. *There could be other magic users around. And I suppose there could be spells dealing with the mind, though if so, could there be magics against that kind of thing too? But, but why wouldn't someone want me to know?*

Sighing, he put that thought aside. *Too little information, nothing I can do about that. But, if they don't want me to know about magic, what does that mean? Could*

they want me to be normal, or could they just want me to be weak? Harry was used to people wanting him to be weak, the Dursleys did everything they could to beat him down. This was the first time that Harry thought there might actually be a reason behind it, rather than just something about him that set them off.

Once that thought began, there was no stopping it. *The Dursleys said my parents died in a car crash, but what if they didn't, what if they had enemies, and what if those enemies are now looking for me? Then magic might be the only way to fight against them.* Harry's face firmed in a way that a young just turned 10-year-old boy's face, no matter how intelligent or adult he had to act at times, should have been able to.

But does that mean that the Dursleys are either enemies, or are simply pawns like in chess? Shrugging his shoulders on that, Harry realized that either spelled trouble for him if they found out that he knew about his magic.

He decided to go through his notes again, trying to figure out what bit of experimentation had alerted whoever it was that had taken his memories. After a moment he stopped, frowning. *So I moved from trying to do something with my hair to, to teleportation? That's a huge leap! But teleportation doesn't have a lot of notes here. So that must've been what alerted whoever it was.*

But if what I can do is really magic, why would be limited to just stuff I can do with my hair or teleportation? Magic isn't limited, that's part of what makes it magic, right? With that thought in mind Harry grinned, but then took out a pen and wrote a very small message to himself just in case. 'Yes these pen messages are from you, no you are not crazy, signed Harry Potter,' and the date afterwards.

With that done Harry spent the rest of the night writing down thoughts of what he could do with magic. It wasn't a very long list, but the list of things he **wanted** to do with magic was. In particular one was underlined. That note said 'figure out a way to hide your notebook.'

If whoever it was that had taken his memories came back and they found out about his notebook somehow then he'd lose all of his work. That had to be stopped, and that didn't even include Dudley. He routinely messed with Harry's stuff, especially his school stuff just because he could.

Harry spent the next two few days spending all of his free time in the library going through every book that had magic in it, the Sword in the Stone, Island of the Mighty, the Prydain chronicles, though he did have some trouble with that one, and many, many more. He even tried his hand at some of the older teen books, including some Terry Pratchett books.

Feeling greatly daring Harry also tried one of the nearby comic stores, despite it being one of Dudley's main hangouts. He had to run away from another bout of Harry Hunting after that, but was able to get away cleanly.

One idea that stuck out with him was that wizards in many books could make themselves unseen. The most interesting was Granny Weatherwax's, which was a sort of 'uninteresting field' that she could project, simply becoming part of the background. It didn't seem to stand up to a lot of exercise or something of that nature, but Harry felt that had a lot of potential for hiding his notebook.

That evening Harry once again spent a sleepless night staring down at his notebook, somehow trying to force to become invisible or unnoticeable. It didn't work. Sighing, he laid it beside his school books before reaching up to the hanging light. Only to stop, staring from the school books to the notebook. "If I can't make it unnoticeable, could I disguise it?"

The next day at school Dudley finally cornered Harry for the first time in days. He knocked Harry down from behind, spilling all of his school stuff out of his bag. "Watch where you're going Potter!"

He laughed, stepping forward to break several of Harry's pencils as he walked through the clutter, reaching down quickly to pick up a book. He frowned however when he noticed that it had the school stamp on it and with a huff threw it down again. Ms. Hicks was hell on anyone who damaged her priceless books, and Dudley had learned that she was one of the teachers that actually listened to the freak for some wouldn't be worth it to do anything to a school book.

Just then one of his friends shouted at him from the cafeteria entrance. "They've got pizza Dudley, come on!"

Dudley raced off as fast as his pudgy legs could carry him, while behind him Harry breathed a sigh of relief. He picked up his notebook, the cover and spine of which he had changed to look like a book from the school, a picture book the class had been reading lately.

Harry bent down to pick up his stuff while all around him the other students of the school moved around him with the ease of long practice, some of them even snickering while others simply shook their heads. Harry however allowed himself a small smile. *It worked!*

Over the next few weeks Harry began to experiment, doing small little things to see what was possible and what wasn't. Of course when he noted what wasn't he simply

put down 'yet'. The books he'd read that all dealt with magic were so wide and varied he was unwilling to say that anything was impossible with it. He also got far better at changing his hair color, though he still couldn't do anything about its normal scruffy appearance.

Eventually he even could do things with his clothes, though that was much harder. After the first time where he had changed how his clothes looked, their colors and the shape of them, he almost collapsed from exhaustion. That was an important learning experience: that magic took something out of him. His change of clothes and hair however was worth it because they allowed Harry to move around the neighborhood in relative safety for the first time since Dudley and his friends wouldn't mess with a child they didn't know.

That kind of thing brought trouble, as it had the one time they tried it with an exchange student, who did not only fight back, but blabbed to his parents. *Those were good few days*, Harry thought to himself as he remembered them. Dudley, Vernon and Petunia were all walking on egg shells, because apparently the transfer student was the son of some army man who'd just gotten medically discharged. But it faded after a while when that family moved away to a better area, and things went back to normal.

With his new looks Harry explored areas where he hadn't dared to go before for fear of Dudley and his gang, in particular the nearby park, which backed a small but overgrown national park. In there Harry found an area where no one could see him, and he began to use that place for some of his experiments, continuing to keep his notes as he went as well as he could.

From changing how things looked or their size he moved on to levitating things, which was surprisingly **much** easier. Harry reasoned that changing something was much harder than simply moving its place in the world. He started with one small pebble, then graduated from that into four small pebbles, holding them up at the same time, then moving them around each in a different way. It was hard, and it really strained his mental muscles, but even so afterwards Harry felt elated, somewhat tired, but not as much as that first time he'd changed the way his clothes looked.

Over the next few months after that, Harry's experiments got more and more varied. He learned that emotions powered the spells somewhat at one point when he began his experiments after a particularly ugly bout of teasing from Dudley and Vernon when he hadn't been allowed to escape into his cupboard after fixing them dinner. When Harry, entering his cupboard saw his little stones piled into a corner he scowled angrily at them, and then waved his hand hard, not expecting anything to really happen because he wasn't concentrating very much.

When the stones zoomed off away from that corner into the other one with small 'spang' sounded as they hit the wall he gasped in shock. The sight also calmed down somewhat, and he frowned. "Emotions," he mused to himself, then moved over to sit down. From that point he decided to experiment a bit with the emotions, though not much.

That was because when he tried to use anger again, he found it more difficult to control himself afterwards, and decided that that experiment was one area he didn't want to go got angry all the time at the smallest of things from Harry's point of view, and he always took that anger out on Harry. Harry did not want to be like Vernon in any way, shape or form.

On the other hand, happiness also seemed to be able to power certain spells, though the effect was **weird**. When he was levitating his pebbles, gesturing with one hand as he sometimes did because that helped him concentrate, he brought to mind the feelings of joy that he'd felt when he first realized that the notes about magic in his notebook were real. Instead of powering the spell however, making the task easier or perhaps even making the stones fly up higher, a silvery sheen began to appear around him, but it only lasted for a few moments before Harry collapsed into exhaustion.

When he came to a few moments later he shook his head groggily. "All right, so anger is easier, but harder to control, and happiness, maybe good feelings in general, are harder to use but their effect is weird." He grinned to himself for a moment then pulled out his trusty notebook. "You learn new things every day."

OOOOOOO

Months went by like this, with Harry becoming better and better at controlling his magic, and with certain things becoming easier and easier. *It's like a muscle*, Harry thought to himself more than once. *The more you use it, the easier it becomes*. Where before he had only been able to levitate four pebbles, each the size of his pinky, now he was levitating four far larger stones, each the size of his before Harry had trouble concentrating for very long, that too had become easier.

If only I could do something permanent about my hair but that seems beyond me so far, he thought to himself, stopping in a small hidden alcove by the Park entrance right behind where it became the normal park area to change back into normal Harry. Clothing he could change for a few hours before they began to change back, but his hair always went back to normal quickly if he stopped thinking about it. Once his clothes and hair were back to normal Harry hurried home, eager to get his chores over with and head into the cupboard before Vernon got home.

Today that plan didn't work. The moment the door opened Petunia grabbed his shoulder and hustled him into the kitchen smacking him upside the head for emphasis. "About time you got home you lousy layabout, get to work on dinner! Vernon had an important meeting today, and I want everything pristine and perfect for when he gets home is that understood!" She emphasized every word with a smack on the head, but Harry took it stoically. At least she wasn't using a frying pan as she had on more than one occasion.

"Yes Aunt Petunia." He answered dutifully. "What exactly would you like?"

"Fried chicken, gravy and potatoes! Good, hearty food. Now get to work. Honestly, with all we've given up to put clothes on your back!" With that she hurried off, heading up the stairs.

Harry shook his head sadly watching her go. He honestly didn't know if the Dursleys were his enemies or not, but they certainly hated him. Yet for some reason he just couldn't find it in himself to hate them back. They were just so, so pitiful! So happy to keep going in their normal, small lives, so certain in their worldview that they couldn't even understand that someone else could see the world differently. It was so **small** of them that though he loathed and feared them, he couldn't hate them, instead pitying them.

He smirked to himself even as he moved over towards the freezer. *Of course, that doesn't mean I'm going to stop working on my magic and as soon as I can figure out a way to get the hell out of here!* That was the dream that had powered a lot of his investigations into magic: the idea that he would eventually be able to get away from the Dursleys.

He knew he wouldn't be able to do it quickly. After all, if someone else with magic was his enemy, he couldn't really use magic all the time to get away from them, or else he might draw their attention back to him. But even so, he could use it as a starting point, which was why he was so frustrated about his hair.

Over the next hour or so Harry busied himself cooking, finding a certain sense of peace in the task, which he always did. Despite the fact that he never got to eat most of the food he made, there was something soothing about going about his business, knowing that none of the others in the house would dare bother him while he did it.

That serenity ended the moment Vernon got home. Harry could almost feel it in the air even before the man trooped in. The screech of the tires as he drove into the garage, the sharp slam of the car door, told Harry that something had happened at

work and Vernon was once again angry. *And it's a Friday*, Harry thought, his heart sinking. *Oh please, just this once, let him have found some other outlet for his anger.*

Petunia and Dudley could sense it too, remaining quiet throughout dinner as Vernon bellowed about some topic or other on the news, angrily masticating his food as he stared at Harry who he'd ordered to remain in one of the kitchen corners glaring at him hatefully. Worse he drank heavily, which was never a good sign for Harry.

He was almost tempted to bolt for his cupboard now. Once he was inside his cupboard Vernon rarely went to the effort of opening it and dragging him out to beat him. But the way Vernon's attention kept on coming back to him throughout the 'conversation' meant that would be a very bad idea.

Finally Petunia broached the subject that had been on her mind almost visibly the entire dinner. "So dear, did you..."

"No I bloody well did not!" Vernon bellowed angrily, slamming his fat hands down on the table and getting up explosively fast for all of his bulk such was his anger. "We didn't impress the client enough with our 'character', whatever the bloody-fuck that means!" Vernon growled turning and throwing his beer bottle at Harry.

The beer bottle hit his head causing him to fall to the ground with a cry. "It's all your damn fault! Ever since we took you in all you've done is suck the energy out of my life!" Vernon bellowed, moving over to him and kicking the down Harry repeatedly. "I've been stuck in that one job, have never been able to go higher, always passed over! Your freakishness rubbing off on me, making other people look down on me!"

Harry screamed and cried as the blows kept on coming, and they didn't stop anytime soon. By the time Vernon was finished venting his anger on Harry, Harry knew that his arms were broken from where he had been holding them above his head, his head was bleeding severely from where it had been caught by the beer bottle, and his back was a mass of bruises.

He cried out as Vernon grabbed him by the shoulder roughly dragging him through the house and throwing him into the cupboard. "Freaks like you don't deserve more! You can stay in there until Monday or rot, I don't care which!"

Harry lay on the floor of his cupboard groaning aloud. He'd never been able to figure out how to accelerate his healing, he couldn't control his magic that much. Now though, his mind was consumed by a single thought. *I have to get out of here! Anywhere somewhere else anywhere else but here.* With pain fueled concentration Harry began to bring his magic to bear on that wish, pouring all of his willpower all of

his magic into it. *They'll kill me eventually if I stay here any longer, have to go have to get away, need to find a real home, need to find a real family!*

Suddenly as he was concentrating on his own magic, it connected to something else, something magical around the house. Harry had no idea what it was, he could barely sense it, but as his own magic powers began to fade he grasped this new source of energy, sucking it dry in a single moment to power his pain and grief and fear fueled wish. ***Get me away from here!***

With a loud clap of sound the cupboard was suddenly empty, leaving only the faintest trail of Harry's blood on the ground as Harry Potter disappeared from not only Number 4 Privet Drive, not just from the United Kingdom, but Earth entirely.

OOOOOOO

At the same time that Harry disappeared, or actually right before that when his magic instinctively reached out to that other nearby source to drain it dry, a small silvery object on a high shelf began to whistle and tweet on a shelf in a castle somewhere in the moors of Scotland. An elderly man, looked up in sudden alarm. This was the same man that had appeared to take his memories away as well as those of the men who had helped Harry after his teleportation accident, though Harry couldn't remember anything from the incident.

Moving with far more speed than a man his apparent age should be able to, he pushed himself away from his desk rounding it quickly and moving over to the number of devices and odd gewgaws that lined the shelf. Before he could get there however the small device that had initially whistled a warning suddenly shattered, flinging small shards of silver everywhere.

Quickly the man raised a hand and a shimmering energy field appeared in front of him. The shards of the explosion smacked into it falling harmlessly to the ground, and then the shield dissipated. After the last of the pieces fell to the floor the man pulled out his wand from one of his many pockets, running it over the devices while frowning. Turning he stared at a large bird with fiery plumage sitting on one shelf. "Fawkes to me." He ordered crisply.

The bird obeyed alighting on his shoulder, and a second later the office was empty. Seconds later he appeared without even the slightest hint of sound in the Dursleys backyard. With a single gesture from his wand, the man disappeared from anyone's normal senses, while the bird alighted on a nearby tree.

Looking around him he moved quickly to one of the corners of the garden, then gasped before hurrying to each of the other corners. In each corner he found the same thing, a small flat stone, crumbling quickly to dust. They had previously been so well hidden no one would have been able to find them, but that didn't matter now. The old man stood up from the last corner, and if anyone had been there to see, they would have noticed how his eyes seemed to gleam with unnatural light as he looked around him in consternation and growing worry.

The wards are gone! Not just the blood wards, but the unplotable and anti-mail wards! And not just gone, the very magic that made them has been somehow drained! But how could that be?! As long as the boy lives here the blood wards should still be viable and taking power from him, and I have never heard of anything that could simply drain magic from wards like that, not so quickly at any rate.

Resolutely the old man moving to Number 4's backdoor and without a pause teleporting through it easily after a single glance through it's window. He made to move past Petunia who was cleaning up dinner muttering angrily about the 'freak jinxing them', which caused the old man to frown even more, pausing in his steps.

He looked around the house, his frown turning into a scowl when he didn't see a single thing that showed there was a second boy living here. All the pictures on the wall were of a boy and a man who resembled one another strongly and the woman in front of him.

None of them showed the young boy he had seen so many months ago after that irritating incident. *What is going on here? Where is the boy?* Wanting an answer to that question, he lifted his wand, pointing it's tip at Petunia. "Immobulious!"

The woman stilled instantly, but before she could do more than gasp, another spell hit her. "Silencio! Now Petunia, let us see what has been going on here..." With that the old man moved her around from the sink to where he could glare into her eyes over his small spectacles.

After a moment he pulled back, his scowl much more pronounced as he moved off, leaving her where she was for a moment. Quickly he opened the cupboard he had seen in Petunia's memories, looking inside and gritting his teeth angrily at the blood.

Staring at the cupboard he made a small gesture with his wand. The air inside the cupboard shimmered for a moment in glaring pink and white light, so much he blinked in shock. *Signs of an apparition, but it also looks uncontrolled. Could the boy have attempted another blind jump? But then where would he have gone, and what happened to the blood wards?* He began to wave his wand again, but most of what he

got was flooded out by the magical residue of the apparition. *Some uncontrolled magic, that's to be expected, but... I can't get anything else here blast it, the apparition residue is too powerful!*

With that thought, the man moved out of the cupboard, standing upright with a creak from his knees and back. Still, even that tells me something. Such a powerful residue could only have been made by a long distance jump. But how long a distance is the question, I've never seen such a powerful splash before...

With a sigh, he moved back over to Petunia, scowling angrily at the woman as he glared into her frightened yet belligerent eyes. "I left your nephew here thinking that you and your husband would abuse him somewhat, but this, this is too far by half! Forcing a boy as young as seven to cook for you, constant beatings? There is treating him as an unwanted guest, and then there is outright cruelty! And now, because of you and your family the boy has run off to who knows where and the blood wards are gone, nothing I can do could bring them back!"

Something in the woman's eyes told him she was happy the boy was gone, and the man smiled thinly behind his beard. "Well Petunia, if the boy is no longer here, then the money your family received to take care of him is no longer required." The woman paled slightly even immobilized, an interesting feat, though her pallor continued to worsen as the man went on. "If you are very lucky I will not be forced to share the news of what happened here with anyone else. If word gets out that you abused my world's savior, well..." he shrugged eloquently. "The so-called 'freakishness' the boy was responsible for will be the least of your worries."

"Goodbye Petunia, I do hope nothing happens to you and your family because of this night's business..." With that Albus walked off, only cancelling the spells on Petunia only as Fawkes alighted on his shoulder. By the time the woman had enough breath to scream, he was gone.

Back in the castle in Scotland, the man sat down at the desk, writing out a short message which he handed to Fawkes. The bird disappeared with it, and the man stood up, gathering up the small devices that had been on the same shelf as the one that had exploded. Waving his wand over them, he scowled as none of them responded as he expected them to.

After a moment he shook his head, speaking aloud to the empty room. "Not one of them working, which means that all of my tracking spells on the boy are gone. Could they have been drained like the blood wards, or did something else happen there? Still, there are other ways to find him."

He stared off into the distance, thinking hard, then tapping his fingers together. *Still if I cannot find him, there needs to be both a scapegoat, and a secondary plan. The scapegoat, or rather scapegoats will be simple enough. But the secondary plan, that might prove more difficult.*

After a moment he got up again, moving to pick up a large piece of blank parchment, stuffed into a book on a shelf as if it was being used as a bookmark. He tapped it with a finger, intoning "All I do is for the Greater Good."

A second later the parchment was no longer blank but filled with scrawls, some kind of mathematical formula filling up half of it, and several notes in different languages filling the rest of it. After a moment the man nodded, smiling thinly. *Three to four years then until he is strong enough to do anything. And I cannot imagine any of his servants would go in search of him, not any of the ones free anyway, good. That gives me time to see if I can find the boy, and also to prepare a replacement if I cannot.*

With that in mind, he gestured with his wand and a small silvery bird that resembled Fawkes appeared. "Minerva, could I speak to you for a moment please, something has come up." With that the silvery creature shot off, passing through the door at the far end of the room.

For a few minutes the man bustled around the room, filling up a small bag with far more things than it should have been able to hold. He stopped however as a faint ting echoed in the room. Working his face for a moment he assumed a sad expression. "Come in Minerva."

The door opened revealing a tallish woman in a tartan green robe. She was a somewhat elderly woman, possibly just out of middle aged, with a stern face that made her seem older and wearing a witch's hat on her head. "You wanted to speak with me Albus?"

Albus smiled at her wanly. "Yes Minerva, I hate to do this to you but I'm afraid I will not be here for the next few months. As such you'll have to handle any of Hogwarts paperwork that needs doing. I fear a friend from Asia who I have corresponded with for many decades is dying and I wish to do what I can to make his final days as happy and comfortable as possible."

Even while Minerva gave him her condolences, Albus was already making plans to see if he could find Harry Potter, thinking of the places he would have to visit and the rituals he would have to do to pick up his trail. Yet for all the effort Albus would put into it, his search would be in vain.

OOOOOOO

Harry hadn't really used a spell to teleport away from his cupboard since even if he knew one he couldn't have concentrated enough on it to do anything. It had simply been a blind, all-encompassing need to get away as far away as possible. In response to this soul deep wish his magic had gone haywire somewhat, grasping the blood wards and draining them to further power Harry's own magic, shattering something inside of him at the same time to hurl him further away from his starting point. But this was magic, and magic was tricky. So he was transported much, much further than anyone would ever have expected.

Magic was not as easy as even practiced practitioners thought however, there was always a price, and regardless of the wished powering the barely formed magic, Harry should have died, the magic sucking him dry just like the wards. Yet there was more than just Harry involved, more than just his inbuilt magic, or even the magic of the blood wards. There was also the power of prophecy, not just one prophecy, but many. Not just on earth, but several others, some darker, some lighter.

The Powers-That-Be rarely involved themselves in the doings of mortals, no matter how powerful. Prophecies were how they tried to shape those mortals' steps, and they did even that very rarely. Primarily because it was like setting a small stone loose onto a gigantic pond, you could never predict how the ripples would move, effecting one another and the water around them in unusual ways. Yet sometimes, there came a chance to change things that was just too good to pass up. So it was now.

And in Harry's case there was also something else there to be taken. Something else to balance the scales and allow him, if he so choose to return to life. But even then, he had to be given the choice.

Harry woke to a feeling of someone running their fingers through his hair gently. There was someone humming softly nearby while his head was laying on something soft and warm. He had never felt the like before. No one had ever touched him like this except for a few of the teachers occasionally. He opened his eyes quickly, trying to get away, but found his body wouldn't obey his commands.

Even so the humming stopped and a gentle hand touched his cheek. "Easy Harry," said a female voice. "Don't move just yet." The voice sounded scratchy with disuse, yet there was also something in it that told Harry that the user had been crying.

With great effort, Harry opened his eyes and looked up into a young woman's face. She looked in her early 20's, if that. Her face was gorgeous, better looking than any woman he'd ever seen outside TV shows, though he'd be at a loss as to explain why.

She had red hair cascading down her shoulders and emerald green eyes, a shade that Harry had only previously seen in the mirror, though on the woman they were red rimmed and tear-streaked. The woman's face looked as if she had been dealing with tremendous grief for years, and the smile she wore as she stared down at Harry was happy, yet fragile and almost scared.

Harry didn't understand why she would be scared of him. "Who..." he paused faltering as his eyes locked on hers. "I, I know you..." he said, trying to lift a hand to touch the woman's face. He wasn't even able to lift his hand more than an inch, but somehow the woman guessed what he wanted and reached down, picking up his hand from where it had been flopping and brought it to her cheek, nuzzling into his palm. "I know you..." he said again, his fingers twitching against her cheek. "But, but how?"

"I'm your mother Harry, Lily, Lily Potter nee Evans." The woman said softly watching him with trepidation. She feared that he would immediately flinch away from her, reject her because of the life he had led.

But Lily needn't have worried. For all the hate he had seen in his life, for all the loathing and fear and disgust that the Dursleys heaped on him, Harry had only wanted one thing: to be loved. And that was the emotion he saw in this woman's face as she stared down at him in, he was slowly realizing, her lap. His own eyes began to brim with tears not of sadness but joy. "M, mum?"

With a cry the woman leaned down, burying her head into his chest as her arms went around him where he lay on her lap. Harry tried his best to return the hug, but he was so **weak**! This was 60 or 70 times worse than the first time he tried to change how his clothes looked. But even so, Harry was too happy to care he couldn't move, simply basking in one of his dreams come to life all around him.

The moment was too emotional to last, and yet it lasted more than long enough for Harry, who was beaming up at the woman through his own tears. "But, but how! Petunia said you died in a car crash! How did you really die? I know that isn't how, but why, I mean..."

"Calmly Harry." Lily replied, leaning back up and staring off into the distance for a moment before she turned to look down at him again, a wide smile on her face now that her son had accepted her. "There is **so much** I need to tell you! I don't know how long we have though. I've been allowed back to talk to you because of what you did and because of... of other things. You see there is a prophecy, there was a prophecy before you were even born about..."

Lily paused shaking her head. "No, that's not the way the right place to start. Your father and I were magic users Harry as you've discovered." Suddenly the smile on her face widened into a grin of pure joy as she reached down hugging him again pulling him up so that his head rested against her chest rather than in her lap. "My little scientist, I was so proud of you when you began your experiments!"

Harry blushed a little, both in pleasure and embarrassment. His mother was a very good-looking woman after all, and though he hadn't actually noticed it before she was wearing some kind of skintight leotard thing, but all in white. Weird.

Above him Lily noticed Harry's uncomfortable this and smiled sadly. "Sorry love, I know this is making you uncomfortable, but I wasn't actually dressed my best when I died, and you can't change your clothing after you die, or are sent back or whatever, I'm not exactly clear what I am right now." She smirked a little, gesturing down at her body. "Your father had fun tastes, shall we say?"

"Too much information." Harry muttered, trying to raise his hands to cover his ears, but still not having enough energy to do so. Even so, despite his consternation he reveled in the light tinkling tone of his mother's laughter.

"You're right I suppose." She smirked even wider. "Now if this was happening while you were going through puberty I wouldn't let you go with just that."

"Still, we have more important things to talk about." She went on more seriously even as Harry squirmed in her hug. "We were both magic users, but the magical world is separate from the muggle world, the non-magical world, and yet some of the problems in it are sort of the same as in the human world. Do you know what racism is?"

Harry nodded and Lily smiled. "Of course you do, my bright son, so smart!" With that she hugged him again, and Harry's smile widened as he reveled in the love of his mother..

She pulled away after a moment, staring down at him. "Anyway, there was a movement among what is known as purebloods, who felt that magic should only follow family lines. That's so much idiocy in my opinion, but I was born to non-magical parents. I was also very intelligent, if I say it myself. I was called the brightest which of my generation." She smirked a little. Not that it was hard against most of the pureblood witches and wizards. There were a few that were quite intelligent, but they were still stuck in, well they didn't understand the scientific method, or how it could be applied to magic. You've used a bit of it since he discovered magic Harry, testing and the ability to keep notes and see what works what doesn't and what works better."

Harry nodded then froze in his mother's grip when he realized what that meant. "Does, does that mean you've, you've been watching me?"

Lily nodded somberly, reaching with one hand from Harry's back to stroke his hair in a calming gesture. "Yes Harry, I've watched you all for your life, and I am so, so sorry! You should **never** have gone to my sister, the moment she married that Vernon pig, she was removed from my will, and they were never in Jame's! But well, I don't know what happened, I haven't been able to watch anything of the world aside from you, so..." she shrugged.

"I have enemies in the magical world." Harry said calmly, far too calmly for a 10-year-old boy talking about such a serious matter in Lily's opinion, but given the life he'd led it was almost inevitable. Indeed the fact he had accepted her so easily was more surprising. "I've sort of known that, though I don't know **why**!"

"I'm getting to that though I think you should keep that in mind. Anyway, I married what was known as a pureblood, your father James Potter." Lily smiled wanly. "We were happy, even if he was a bit of a jackass when he was younger he grew out of it eventually and became a decent man. I could tell you some stories, but I don't know if we have time for them. Anyway, there was this war on, and your father became a magical policeman, an Auror right out of school, while I went to work as a spell researcher."

Harry's eyes brightened and he opened his mouth to speak but Lily laughed gaily, before covering his mouth with a gentle finger. "I know Harry, and I wish we had more time, I really do, your ability to control what should've been only accidental magic is astonishing especially without a focus, and turns a lot of the research I was working from on his head. But don't know if we have time for that. So back to business."

After that Lily went on much more crisply. "You have to understand that the racists were in power in a lot of the government, oh there were factions fighting against them, and quite a few of the magical policeman fell under that category." Her smile widened, taking on an almost vicious edge. Your father had a friend named Sirius, and the two of them had a partner named Rufus Scrimgouer. They and their team leader were some of the most dangerous Aurors on the force. Because of that they were being targeted by, I suppose you could call him a cult leader, or a terrorist leader anyway."

"He'd taken on this name though we never figured out his real name..." Lily paused again as she realized was rambling. She took a moment to compose herself and went on. "The racists had a leader named Voldemort, who espoused violence against

anyone who was not pureblood, against anyone frankly who was a danger to his taking over. I don't even know if he really believed in that pureblood stuff or was simply using it, he seemed more power-hungry than bigoted."

"In any event since the government couldn't be trusted both your father and I joined a sort of paramilitary group. We did our part, and I even fought several times, though I wasn't as good at it as your father." She smirked suddenly, waggling her fingers a little. "Though spell creation did give me a bit of an edge, since most wizards are lazy and tend to stick to only a few spells in combat."

"The Order was led by one of the most famous men in the magical community, named Albus Dumbledore. He was our headmaster at school, and yes..." she said smiling down at Harry when he opened his mouth. "There is a school of magic, several actually though your own studies have either turned some of the noted theories on their heads or simply ignored them." She went on much more softly leaning down to kiss him on the forehead right over his scar. "My little genius."

Harry flushed with pleasure, and Lily leaned back, stroking his hair again as she continued to hold him to her chest. Harry felt some of his strength returning, and tried to raise his arms to hug her back, but was only able to squeeze her arms lightly despite his best efforts. Even so, Lily smiled down at him, and that was enough.

After a moment however she shook her head and went back to business. "There was a prophecy, and in the magical world those things are taken **very** seriously. Albus believed it, and convince your father and I to go into hiding."

She frowned then remembering those months, and Harry lifted one hand touch her cheek gently pulling her back to the here and now. "Anyway, we agreed to it, fearing what would happen to you."

"What was the prophecy?" Harry asked intently.

"'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...' (Order of the Phoenix)" Lily intoned solemnly.

She watched as Harry frowned his way through it then smiled as he said "but that sounds, that almost sounds like you have to believe it to make it exist, he'd have to mark me right?"

"The word you're looking for is self-fulfilling, and yes that was one of my arguments against it, but there were signs that Voldemort was a firm believer in prophecy long before that. And if he believed it, whether or not we believe it wouldn't matter." Harry nodded understanding her point, and Lily went on. "And he did mark you that night," she said softly, brushing his hair off his forehead and tapping it gently.

"What," Harry paused then went on gamely. "What happened that night?"

He felt Lily shudder, her hands tightening around him. "I, I don't want to talk about it just yet. Maybe if we had more time I would, but not now. In any event, he did more than give you that scar Harry. In fact, if he hadn't done what he did, and if everything else had happened as it did, you would have joined me on the other side."

"Wait!" Harry exclaimed, almost pushing out of her grip before his strength failed him again and he fell against her chest. He flushed in embarrassment for a moment before shaking his head. "You mean we're **not** in the afterlife?"

"No, we're in... call it the waiting room I suppose, the area between life and death. The amount of power you poured into your wish should have cost you your life Harry, but I as I said Voldemort did more than just give you that scar. He left a bit of his soul in you."

With gentle hands, Lily turned Harry until he was staring off to the side, and he gasped in shock. Everything around them was white and seemingly blank, even the floor they were sitting on wasn't really there, just more grey, almost like sitting inside and on a cloud. But now Harry was able to see something that was so out of place it was beyond jarring. It was looking nothing more than a mass of black pus, oozing darkness and vileness into the air all around it. "W-what is it?!"

"A piece of Voldemort's soul," Lily replied. "I'm not certain if he meant to, or if it was something he had been doing all along, but he cut a bit of his soul off when he tried to kill you. That piece stuck to you when the power of his killing curse spell backfired on him."

Harry shook his head. "Wait, I, I don't understand. First of all, what is a killing curse, and what do you mean it bounced off me? I was a baby, I couldn't do anything!"

"For that you have me and your father to blame." Lily replied, solemnly her arms still around her son.

"To thank you mean, if you say this Voldemort person..."

"If we hadn't died, if we had somehow figured out a way out you wouldn't have gone to the **Dursleys**!" Lily snarled that name. "We should've figured out some kind of emergency teleportation that could bypass any ward put up!"

After a moment Harry reached up and touched her face again. "A lot of books use this phrase, hindsight is 20/20, I don't know what the 20/20 part means, but I've been told that it means looking back you always see more than when things are actually happening. We're not all perfect, and I don't blame you for the Dursleys." His eyes hardened noticeably. "I blame them for being them, and for whoever ignored your will and put me there."

"Yes, that's an interesting point..." Lily said to mostly to herself, even as she hugged her son in thanks for his forgiveness. "Anyway, the Potters had a massive collection of books about ancient spells, including some about things that were no longer allowed in society, like blood based magics. When I sacrificed my life for you, I completed a charm which protected you from all harm."

"A, And the killing curse?" Harry asked.

"I'm not going to talk about that right now." Lily said shaking her head sadly. "You'll learn that in due time I suppose, I'm sorry but even now the memories are just too raw."

Harry nodded, understanding. "So that thing over there is a piece of this Voldemort and it's going to die in my place?"

"Well that is the other side of what I'm here just tell you. You see, you have a choice. All of life is about choices Harry, the Powers-That-Be are very big on choices. Even in cases like this."

"And what are my choices?" Harry asked, though a part of him already knew.

"You can either allow yourself to fade, and magic will take both you and that portion of Voldemort's soul. You'll eventually be reborn somewhere in a new life, but of course you won't remember any of this. That piece of soul over there doesn't have that choice, it will be removed from the great wheel entirely. That's part of the penalty for trying to split the soul as Voldemort did."

"And my other choice?"

"To return to life wherever your spell took you. I don't know everything about what you'll face if you do, the Powers-That-Be aren't that generous. But your life will be

hard, harsh at times and fraught with danger. But I can also say that the rewards will be beyond even your imagining. She smiled warmly. I wish I could say you would find happiness, but that's another one of those choice things, all up to you really.

Harry very slowly pushed himself out of his mother's grip, standing on his own two feet in this wide expanse of white to stare at the vile thing that had been in his scar. "Was it in my scar, or was it in me, my own soul?" he asked almost absentmindedly.

"Sort of both." Lily replied with a wince, watching him anxiously, none of her own thoughts on what she wanted him to do showing on her face. "It was getting stronger all the time, as were you. Someone placed magical bindings on you. That kind of thing is normally done to children when they first exhibit their powers to stop them from doing so much accidental magic they hurt themselves. But the binding was slowly being, absorbed I suppose by that bit of soul, as well as leaching magic off you."

Looking to the side Lily frowned angrily. If only she had been able to watch more of her son's life, from right after her death rather than since the first time he had thought of her which was several years later. Then maybe she would know who that enemy was. She had suspicions, and coupled with the fact that she had seen Albus turn up and Obliviate not just Harry but a team of Obliviators made her even more suspicious of him.

But that in itself wasn't enough, since Albus hadn't said anything after and had indeed implanted memories in Dudley and his gang of bullies to make them stop picking on Harry. They hadn't held long, and he had never spoken to Petunia or Vernon, but was that simply absentmindedness or something more sinister?

Then there is the Will to consider. What happened to Sirius, The Longbottoms, or even Rufus? I don't really want to know how Harry would've turned out if Rufus raised him, he was a little too job and status-oriented to make a good parent, but he would have been worlds better than Petunia and her family of pigs!

Lily wasn't certain if Albus was conditioning Harry for some reason, or just was neglectful of what hiding Harry away from the magical world was costing her son, but she wasn't exactly happy with him whatever the case. She dearly wished that she was a real ghost rather than some kind of disembodied personality stuck following her son around, because if she was a ghost, she could go to Hogwarts and wring Albus' neck for what he was doing to her son.

While Lily was thinking about that Harry was thinking about what he had learned so far, and about the pros and cons of the two choices. In the end however his very

nature rebelled against the idea of not taking up the challenge. "I want to go back." he said. "I want to see this new place I've found, maybe explore, maybe learn. I'm used to hardship, that doesn't frighten me and danger doesn't either not really. Not so long as I can fight back." he smirked and his fingers flex a little. "Will I have to hide my magic?"

"I don't think so, though I can't say for certain." Lily said smiling sadly if proudly at her son. Already the white area around them was fading as the Powers-That-Be had heard Harry's choice the instant he thought it. The thing that was Voldemort soul screamed as he began to dissipate, becoming so many little particles of darkness which then flared as they were consumed.

"I am proud of you Harry." she said, even as she felt the tug on her self/soul/body begin, pulling her back to where she had been before Harry had tried his desperate gamble. "Know that I will continue to watch over you, that I love you and that I am proud of you whatever you do with your life!"

At those words Harry turned suddenly, his eyes wide. "No!"

Lily felt his magical reach out for her, his soul connecting to hers here in this place. "Harry don't! It won't..."

"I don't care! I just got in my mother back, I just got a **family** back! You think I'm going to give you up, **NO!**" With every word Harry poured more of his willpower into his magic, trying to hold Lily's soul personality or whatever portion of her that was in front of him where it's was, trying to fight against whatever was trying to return her to the afterlife. His magic followed his desperate plea once more, slowly tying Lily's soul to his own.

Reality around them shimmered, then the white dissipated, and suddenly Harry found himself on a hard, solid ground much unlike the strange texture of the floor of the place he'd been just moments before. Various aches and pains told him he was still alive, and his eyes were crusted over, but even so his pains weren't nearly as bad as they had been, signifying that his healing ability had begun its work, though still had quite a bit left to do.

These new sensations made Harry realize that the only sensations he had really felt in that other place had been his mother's touch. With that thought his eyes popped open, and he looked around wildly "Mum?"

"Still here." Lily mused from nearby, and Harry felt something lightly ruffling his hair, not so much a touch as a breeze. "In some fashion anyway. You know, I was just

thinking about what I'd like to do if I was a ghost, and now I am one." Despite the lightness of his words, there was something in it that said she was happy to still be with Harry despite her shock that she was.

Harry turned in the direction of her voice quickly, seeing both his mother and what was directly behind her. She was still in the same clothing that she had been in that other place, and she was glowing slightly, like ghosts always did in movies or stories. But the strangeness of that was nothing next to the happiness of simply seeing her, even in ghost form. "It worked!"

"Yes it did, and if you keep on doing things that ought to be impossible Harry, I think I'm going to have to simply disregard everything I've ever learned about magic. That would be irritating." Lily said then laughed a tinkling sound in the air. "Still, I can't complain, can you?"

Wordlessly, Harry shook his head. He'd dreamed of this, dreamed of having a conversation of his mother, of knowing he was loved. Even looking at her and knowing that he wouldn't be able to touch her, this was beyond his wildest dreams. His grin widened so hard it hurt, and he continued to smile even as the pains in his body began to pile up again.

Lily also was grinning wildly at him, though inside she was also somewhat sad that her husband would never be able to feel this. *Still, at least I'll be here to watch over our son James, whatever form I have to take to do it.* After a few moments however she got control of herself and looked around. Then she whistled in shock. "Harry, I think your spell took you a **lot** further away than I realized."

Harry looked where she was looking, and stared up at five moons in the sky then around at a forest of weird glowing crystals around him. It was the crystals that allowed him to see it all, everything else was pitch black, as if the sun didn't exist here. He laughed quietly shaking his head. "It reminds me of my cupboard before Vernon allowed me to put in my hanging light, but with a much better view." Then he shivered a little as suddenly his body clamored for attention, the cold hitting him like the fist of a god. "It's freezing here!" he said shattering his teeth chattering.

Lily turned back to him quickly. "Watch my finger!" she said crisply, "this is the spell for a warming charm." She gestured with her fingers in a series of flicks, then watched as Harry shakily did the same correcting him twice before he got it right then intoned the spell.

"Normally people do it with a wand, you've shown so much aptitude towards wandless magic it shouldn't bother you. The words and gestures will help you concentrate!"

Harry nodded then did the gesture again along with the words. He had to do it two more times before getting it right his teeth and body beginning to shut down from the cold, his fingers and toes already blue with cold. His teeth were chattering so much he barely got the words out. Yet when the spell hit, it flooded his body with warmth, banishing the cold quickly.

"That's better." He said with a sigh. Then he smirked at his mother. "You know you're a good teacher, I think that's going to come in handy here."

Lily laughed, reaching out to ruffle his hair, but her fingers passed right through his hair. Even so Harry smiled widely at the gesture, though both their eyes strayed up and around to the odd geography around them. "Wherever here is Harry, wherever here is."

Chapter 2: Surviving and Meetings

An interminable time talking while walking in a single direction brought Harry and Lily to a small ridgeline, but there was no sign of any kind of habitation. Wherever they were, there weren't any people. Harry barely noticed this though, still entranced by the sheer pleasure of having his mother nearby, plying her with questions about her life.

She still wouldn't answer any serious questions about his father or their life together, not yet. Those questions should be answered in a much nicer environment, where he could curl up in a big chair and listen rather than have to walk watching his surroundings for threats. Even so, she touched on his group of 'bullies' as she called them or 'bullies that came good, the Marauders'. "Just because something is funny to you," she said finishing one detail in particular that had her eyes flashing with anger even at the memory "Does not mean that it's funny to everyone, particularly the victim."

Harry nodded, understanding that point easily enough. After all, Dudley and his friends thought Harry Hunting was fun, and Harry certainly didn't. Looking around he only then began to register that his heating charm was beginning to fade. Harry quickly redid it then looked around. "We have to find some kind of shelter or something. Er, at least for me anyway."

"Yes those kinds of charms do tend to wear off over time. And we'll need to find some food for you too. Unfortunately you can't eat anything you transfigure, it won't have the nutritional properties of actual food. Mind you, there was such a thing as the Transfiguration Diet."

"Transfiguration?" Harry asked not having asked any magic-related questions yet. "What's that?"

"That's the school of magic that deals with fundamentally changing one thing to another. A charm for example how you changed your shirts color, while an example of transfiguration would be how you changed your clothing's size. There are a few areas like that where the two disciplines overlap." Lily frowned thoughtfully as she hovered in the air next to Harry, moving with that breezy gait of ghosts. She'd attempted to simply walk, but she didn't actually move, so floating was the only thing she could do.

"I think looking back on it that a lot of the spells in Transfiguration in particular were more concentration aids than anything else. It's more about the ability to control the image in your head and then juxtapose that image onto reality."

Harry didn't know what juxtapose meant, but he could understand what it meant from the rest of the sentence. "That's what I did! It was **really** hard the first few times, but it got easier each time I did it."

"Which might be why the specific spells came into being. Wizards are not people who like dealing with difficult things or concepts." She shook her head sadly. "Remember this Harry if you ever have to interact with wizards. Wizards are lazy, they find a way to do something once with minimal effort, and if they find an easier way to do something the original is slowly lost. It's a mode of thought that seems to infect even muggle-born given enough time."

She had other lessons to impart about the wizards, but she wasn't certain that Harry would ever be returning to Earth. The Powers-That-Be had not been very helpful in that area, possibly realizing that Harry would attempt to bring her with him, and not wanting to influence events further. She feared that he would however, and Lily would do all she could to prepare Harry for that eventuality, and for everything else that might come his way.

With a shake of her head Lily brought her mind back to the here and now. "So, shelter."

Harry looked around, then up at one of the crystal structures. Looking into himself in a way he couldn't quite describe, Harry decided he didn't really have enough magical energy yet to try to transfigure anything that big. So he was forced to climb up a crystal standing on the top of it for a moment to look around for anything he could use as cover.

Laughing lightly Lily fluttered up next to him shaking her head as she reached out with an ephemeral hand to brush Harry's hair gently. "You know you could've just asked me to do that right?"

Harry twitched, looking away not wanting to say out loud that he had not yet really gotten used to the idea of someone wanting to help or at least going out of their way to help him. The teachers at school were sometimes kind to him, but that was so haphazard it hadn't really sunk in.

With the two of them looking in different directions, they soon covered the entire area, but didn't see anything very helpful. "Why don't you stay here and I'll see exactly how far from you I can get Harry, see if I can find any shelter." Lily said, still ruffling his hair. Harry nodded shyly, and Lily leaned in to buss his cheek with her ghostly lips before moving off. Harry watched her go, hoping that she would return quickly.

She was back about five minutes later, frowning thoughtfully. "Well the good news is I can get I'd say about a mile or so away from you, which means I'll be of use as a scout. The bad news is, I only found one place that looks like shelter, and it's already inhabited."

"By an animal or a person?" Harry asked as he climbed down from the crystal. It wasn't smooth like the crystals he had seen in pictures in the library or in some of the older kid's science classed. It was rough under his fingers with a few handholds here and there, and the fact it was glowing definitely helped. It also had small growths that almost looked like branches, and even leaves though it took Harry a few minutes to realize that was what they were.

"Animal, though it's almost your size. It almost reminds me of a badger, but not quite, more like a badger crossed with an ant or perhaps a beetle, since it does have some horns or something like them around its mouth."

Harry shuddered a little. "Are you sure there's only one?" he asked anxiously. Facing a horde of ants his own size did not sound fun to him.

"Yes, don't worry, I made certain to check. It's this way." She said gesturing slightly to the right of the route they had been following through the forest of crystals.

"Do you think we'll be able to scare it off, or, or kill it?"

Lily winced a little. "I don't think so, just judging from the fact it's burrow looks permanent it won't want to give it up without a fight. I'm afraid you'll have to scare it off, or, or you might have to kill it. I'm sorry Harry. It's the best I could find."

Harry shuddered again, a full body shudder this time but after a moment his gaze firmed and he nodded resolutely. Seeing this Lily nodded her head, once again leaning down to kiss him on the forehead. "Be strong Harry, I can teach you a spell that'll help. Though I don't know if you'll be able to do it without a focus."

"It's all right mom, at least this place is better than being with the Dursleys." He didn't notice her Lily's wince at that, or how she shook her head her emerald eyes brimming with unshed tears for a moment. She shook them off however, and went on to describe the spells she was hoping Harry could use.

Several moments later, Harry didn't know how long it took since telling time here was impossible, he felt he had the spell down. He gestured with the sharp flick of his fingers, and a bright red ring shot out from them slamming into a crystal across from the route he was walking. "Stupefy!"

"Excellent Harry!" Lily exclaimed, clapping her ethereal hands. Honestly, she hadn't thought Harry would be able to do it, but the concentration skills he had learned over the past few months while he was experimenting with his magic had stood Harry in good stead, so he didn't seem to need a focus, at least not so far. That was astonishing and coupled with the rest of what Harry had done Lily decided that maybe what she thought of as the basic laws of magic might not be so much laws as assumptions wizards had made over time, with only a few of them being true unbreakable rules.

She shook her head, wishing to think about that later but right now she had to get her son undercover somewhere. *And maybe get him some food to. What was that spell Professor Flitwick told me about that checks food for poisons?*

The two of them, James and Sirius were all drunk at the time. They had just come back from an excursion in Africa to make certain that the witch doctors there weren't going to join forces with Voldemort. After a few drinks James had asked the diminutive professor how he had made certain that the food the witch doctors gave them wasn't poisoned.

It had been, but Flitwick still negated the poisons easily enough, and he and the witch doctors had all laughed as if it was all good fun. Sirius had too Lily remembered. He said something about his family that James simply nodded at while it had shot past

Lily, until James explained it later. She had been appalled at the time, but right now that wasn't important.

After a moment, she brought the spell's incantation to mind, and crossed her fingers hoping that she remembered the gestures right. Those she was much rockier on, as she confessed to Harry a few moments later as they crested another small rise in the land and could stare down into the dell where she had seen the animal and its burrow. "We were all a little tipsy I'm afraid, so you might have to experiment with the gestures, but after you're finished the spell, the meat should either glow yellow for good, or purple for poisonous."

Harry crouched down, staying low so as to not present a target if the animal was looking around it, though if it could see much with the only light coming from the crystals around them he didn't know. Lily hadn't been very helpful in describing what the animal could or could not do, only what it looked like. Why purple and yellow? And did the animal see you?"

"No it didn't, I passed right through it and it didn't respond at all. It might be sleeping for all I know, but it looked dangerous so be careful Harry." Harry Lily said seriously. "As for purple and yellow, I have no idea."

Harry nodded, and began to make his way forward still crouching down using what cover he could. He was good at hiding, though being on this end of a hunt was kind of strange. And there wasn't a lot of cover available here either. Eventually he was near enough to see the hole in the ground that Lily had directed him to. The hole looked big enough for him though Lily's ghost might have to stay outside else her body would be with both him and the ground around it.

But as soon as he entered the small clearing around the hole, the creature burst out of its cage possibly hearing Harry's shoes on the gravel of the ground around.

The beast was actually a bit larger than Harry had expected after seeing its burrow, though Lily had warned him it was. If it stood on its hind feet, it would be as large as Harry and quite a bit wider. It did indeed look like some kind of mole with fur along its chest and arms, but it also had armor plates all along its back, which looked more like a grub than a beetle's, at least in Harry's opinion. *I suppose I've spent more time around bugs than my mother, aren't girls supposed to be afraid of bugs or something anyway?*

That thought was at the back of his mind however the rest of Harry's mind was busy controlling his body. Because the creature didn't just have armor plates on his back, it had long claws at the end of its paws, and the snout that emerged from under a bit of

armor plate had wide mandibles open and slashing together. It was also racing straight at Harry, crossing the distance between them very fast indeed, moving on four of its six legs.

Harry performed the swish and flick of his fingers that Lily had taught him pointing at the creature. "Stupefy!"

The first attempt was weak, only staggering the creature a little and it kept on coming. Now Harry could hear angry chittering coming from it. "GRAAHGRAAH!"

Harry quickly did the spell again, but it didn't work this time any better than the last even though the red circle looked much more powerful as it zoomed through the air. "It's not working!"

"Try to put more power into it!" Lily instructed urgently, moving forward as if to bar the creature's way automatically, only for the thing to pass through her without even noticing. She turned her face now a rictus of fear as it dawned on her that the creature was much tougher than she had expected, and that her son was in danger right in front of her and she couldn't do anything about it.

The third spell staggered the thing, and staggered from side to side shaking its head, which allowed Harry to hit it twice more with two more Stupefys. But the creature threw them off, and was on Harry before he could try again. The thing's claws sought Harry's side and chest, but he ducked away reflexively, reflexes honed by years of Harry Hunting standing him in good stead.

Desperately Harry grabbed the beast with his magic like it was one of his stones back in his hideaway then hurled it towards a few crystals. He was so scared he put as much power as he could into the spell, and the thing whistled through the air until it slammed with a boom into the crystal, shattering some of them.

It also impaled itself on bits of the crystal. Harry watched falling to his knees and gasping a little as the thing began to bleed out its legs still moving spasmodically as it shrilled a high-pitched scream.

"Harry!" Lily flew through the air towards her son wishing desperately that she had hands, going down to her knees and looking into his face. "Harry, are you all right?"

"I'm fine." Harry whispered, shaking his head. "Just really tired." With a groan of effort he pushed himself to his feet, moving over and grabbing up a small crystal from where the creature had impacted, holding it like a knife as he moved on towards where the body had fallen. He prodded the beast, but it didn't react, going still as he

watched. Its back had been penetrated in seven different places, one of which was directly in back of its head, and he sighed in relief. "That thing was a lot tougher than I thought."

"It was a lot tougher than I thought too Harry, but I am so proud of you, you were magnificent!" Lily said, throwing her arms around him in the universe's most ethereal hug.

Yet Harry still felt it, and that was enough. He smiled up at her before gesturing at the creature. "What should we do with it?"

Harry knew next to nothing about woodcraft, but he knew that dead bodies tended to smell, and that smell tended to bring predators. Though they hadn't seen anything living yet besides his creature, he wasn't willing to take the chance.

"Try the spells on it first. The meat might be edible, and maybe the fur could be made into a coat or something." Lily frowned, unhappy at the fact she really couldn't do anything other than instruct her son in the spells.

Harry did the spell, and watched in confusion when the body of the creature glowed a mix of purple and yellow. "Ooookay, what does that mean?"

Lily winced. "I'm afraid that probably means that while it isn't poisoned, the meat itself is poisonous to you. Damn, that probably means we'll have to keep moving quickly, so you should take some time to rest at least."

Reluctantly Harry nodded, though Lily was not looking at him still looking at the body. "Could... I hate to suggest this, I know it's going to be a disgusting process, but do you think you could carve out a bit of its meat and set it aside, part of the underbelly I mean, then cast a spell on just at that?"

"You think that's there are some bits that could be fit to eat?" Harry asked as he went to work grimacing as the thing's blood and pus immediately spurted out of the cuts he was making in its underbelly. It steamed in the air, and it was a lot warmer than Harry had expected.

"Well, some creatures have poison glands, or other things like stomach acids that are poisonous." Lily responded shrugging her shoulders and looking away, gagging.

After a moment he had a section of the meat off the creature, setting it aside and endeavoring not to look at it even as he cast the spell Lily had taught him. It glowed

yellow after a moment. Harry blanched but nodded his head. "Well, um, then we just have to find a way to make fire..."

"You're a wizard Harry!" Lily laughed, turning back to him with faint smile. "Trust me, fire and light aren't going to be an issue. I'm going to fly up past these crystals things to keep watch just in case anything else heard the noise. We have no idea about the senses of animals around here, or how far noise can travel through these crystals. We've been talking for a while and haven't seen anything, but it's better to be safe than sorry."

Harry frowned, not liking having his mother leave him like that, but nodded understanding the necessity. While Harry went to work, Lily hovered in the air about forty feet above him, staring all around them. *There doesn't seem to be anything else around, which is both good and bad.* Bad because it meant that there was no life either, intelligent life anyway. Which meant they were really on their own here, or rather Harry was, since Lily didn't need anything in the way of survival needs.

Down below Harry methodically butchered the edible is best suited with his makeshift crystal knife and little to no knowledge of how to actually do it. He also took a bit of the creatures blood. Scanning it with the spell and seeing it glow yellow Harry grimaced, then changed a bit of it into water. It began to freeze almost immediately, but Harry was able to get a few sips of it, grimacing all the while. The taste was simply foul, despite Harry having changed the blood to water, something had come through.

After that, Harry peeled off several strips of meat, laying them aside and continually going over them with spells. He eventually had what looked like enough to feed the Dursleys for at least a day, and he hadn't gotten into anything poisonous yet. After that he looked up at his mom. "I'm done."

She came down from where she had been hovering, nodding. "I suggest you grab the corpse with that spell you were using to hold it in place then throw it as far away from you as possible. Just in case there are scavengers. I'll follow it, and if scavengers don't go after it we can come back tomorrow to harvest anything else we can think of. The cold of this place should preserve the rest of the meat as well."

Harry nodded, lifting the corpse off the crystals, shaking his head. He hadn't liked killing the creature, but it really was the beast or him. With both hands raised to help him concentrate he held it up in the air, then moved them to one side and made a pushing motion, sending it through the air to land elsewhere.

After a moment Lily returned and he smiled up at her, cutting off a yawn. "Now what?"

Lily told him the spells to create fire, particularly Incendio which created a stream of fire, the size of which was variable with the power you put into it. Even now exhausted as he was Harry's stream was rather larger than Lily expected, which she made a mental note of. Her son was quite a bit more powerful than she was, or even James she suspected.

That was interesting, and she wondered how much of that was chance, and how much of it was the fact he was supposed to be the equal to the Dark Lord. Say what you would about anything he did, but Voldemort was easily the most powerful wizard alive in terms of raw magical potential. Dumbledore and a few others had him beat for control of course, which was very important in terms of actual ability, but power was important too.

Harry tried to bring the meat in conjunction with the fire still coming out of his hands, there not being anything around here that he could actually burn. The crystals simply reflected the fire off them, even the leaves. Though they did glow brighter afterwards, which was interesting. After a moment he was able to do it.

After a second he picked it up gingerly, holding his nose with his free hand before biting into it. Harry gagged, but it wasn't the worst thing he'd ever eaten. He chewed, then swallowed. "Has sort of the taste of, of well, bad fish. But I can eat it I guess."

Lily nodded morosely. "I hope it's got some nutritional value, if not you're going to be in a very bad way soon, Harry. We'll need to move on quickly, but for now let's get you under shelter, okay?"

Harry nodded, and with the rest of the meat floating a foot off the ground behind him made his way over to the entrance to the burrow. Inside it was actually quite a bit roomier than he had expected, but thankfully there weren't any eggs or anything of that nature to indicate that the creature had a mate or children. It was also quite a bit warmer inside. The small burrow was lined with leaves from the crystals, which seemed to hold in the warmth better than mere stone, and there were several patches of fur here and there as well. With those and a single heat spell the small den was actually comfortable, since it sort of reminded Harry of his cupboard only more circular and with much better lighting thanks to a Lumos spell.

There was actually a little room for Lily as well, though she had to scrunch up or else she would be phasing through the ground around the den. She watched as Harry came in, then put the meat down at the far side of the room. He burnt another strip, now showing much more control over the Incendio spell than before, holding the flame up from one palm while gingerly holding the meat over it in the other.

"Eat a little more Harry then try to get some sleep. Tomorrow, ah..." Lily laughed. "Hehe, I don't even know if there is a daytime here yet, but still, we'll want to move on fast I think. This place, there's no way you could survive here for very long."

Harry nodded, but Lily went on before he could say anything. "I'll teach you a conjuration spell to create a blanket for herself. I don't know if you'll be able to do it though since you're so tired."

Harry thought for a moment then shook his head. "If conjuration is worse than... transfiguration you said, changing things?" Lily nodded and Harry went on. I shouldn't chance it now." He yawned again and suddenly seemed to slump as the adrenaline wore off. "I, I don't think I'm going to care anyway." He said murmuring softly now. "I'm so tired I could fall asleep sitting up."

"Get some rest Harry." Lily smiled lovingly, reaching out with gentle hands to ruffle his hair with ethereal fingers once more. "I'll keep watch, don't worry."

Slumping against the wall of the burrow as he continued to chew the strange meat Harry nodded. But he was so tired he fell asleep between one bite and the next, the meat dropping from his fingers as his head drooped to one side. Within moments he was deeply asleep.

Sighing sadly, Lily looked at her son, reaching out with a gentle hand to stroke his cheek. *Sleep well Harry. I'll watch over you. As I should've been doing all along.*

OOOOOOO

The next day Harry woke up, somewhat groggy and somewhat unsure of where he was. Then it all came back to him, and he opened his eyes widely, pushing up off the wall of the den to stare around him. "Mum?!"

Lily appeared from the small entrance to the burrow, smiling at him and Harry felt his body relax. So not only was it all not a dream, but his mother really was with him! Whatever else happened, that was worth any price to him. He breathed a sigh of relief, then shivered a little, before renewing his heating charm with relief.

His stomach gurgled at him, indicating that it needed some fuel, which Harry began to fix while Lily told him that she hadn't seen anything move throughout the night. Afterwards she said "Like I said last night Harry, I think we need to move on quickly. I have no idea if that meat will give you anything your body actually needs to keep going, but we need to find some people if at all possible, and I have a spell that might help."

"It isn't normally used for such broad terms, but I hope it can work. Or no..." Lily said snapping her fingers. "We'll do something a little different." After Harry finished eating, he picked up the small crystal he had used as a knife, holding it flat on his palm. "Visualize the effect, then hold your other hand over it, and say 'point me another human'."

"Isn't that a little too unclear?" Harry asked looking up at his mother.

"Vague, and yes, but it's the best we can do. We could maybe do something like civilization if that doesn't work, or maybe the nearest habitation."

Harry tried the first two without success, but the third worked, and the piece of crystal spun for a second before it pointed South and West and slightly down. This meant that the civilization was around the planet slightly from the place they were currently in, though not directly down, which was good. Lily didn't think Harry would be able to make it if the only bit of civilization on the planet was on the other side from where they were currently.

"We might want to cancel it and triangulate once we reach the corpse of that beast from last night. That way we can see how far around the surface the nearest habitation is." She mused. "Though I'm already thinking of a theory about this planet since we haven't seen the sun yet, and yet there is life here..."

"What's your theory mum?" Harry asked as he crawled out of the burrow. He felt refreshed, really refreshed, and a little more energetic than he normally would really, though his body was still hungry.

With Lily bobbing along in front of Harry leading him towards the course she explained her theory. "Most planets have a diurnal cycle, which is night and day. But if this planet doesn't have that, if the planet has the same portion of the world facing the sun, then that face would become far too hot for civilization. But there would be a small area between the two different sections where life could be possible."

Harry nodded understanding, though he really only had a vague idea of what Lily was talking about. The two of them continued to walk for a time before finding the corpse, which was as Lily had left it for the most part. With Lily's advice Harry began to take the rest of the beast apart, taking all the furry bits and making a coat out of it that at least covered his shoulders and head. The armor he also took off, using it to cover his arms just in case.

Once done with the creature's corpse he cast the Point Me spell again, and the two of them began to move in the direction indicated. Despite not knowing how far he had to

travel Harry was in a happy mood. He had a whole planet to explore, and he had his mother with him, which was more than he had ever dreamed possible. Lily too was happy, and smiled down at him through the light of his Lumos spell and her own glow, then began to tell him more about magic and the magical world.

Weeks later their happiness was fading because the two of them were becoming more and more worried. Harry had eked out the food from that first animal, and had slain another one for its burrow and food using the Incendio spell Lily had taught him. Whatever natural defense the animals had against the effect of the Stupefy spell, it did not extend to being set on fire. Harry had winced the entire time, but this was a real survival situation, and he endured it.

Worse was the fact that he had to change the blood into water again, and the taste was still vile, almost making him throw up. But despite his transfiguration skills, both the meat and blood lacked something his body needed. Harry could feel in a way he couldn't quite describe that his magic was slowly taking over running his body. It was a bad thing because that left him with far less magic, and it was getting worse as time went on.

It had been fourteen sleep cycles since they had seen the last burrower when Lily, scouting ahead, finally spotted something ahead of them. Light on the horizon, more light than Harry had seen since arriving on this planet. It soon resolved itself into light shining over a mountain in the distance. In fact after last few 'weeks' in near total darkness the light positively blinded Harry, and he was forced to cover his eyes, tearing off a bit of his shirt to cover them for a moment.

Next to him Lily shook her head, for once grateful that she wasn't alive, since that meant her eyes were unaffected by the sunlight in the distance. "Well, at least we found the sun." she said lamely.

OOOOOOO

It took them another ten of Harry's sleep cycles to find the first sign of civilization they had seen since arriving here. By that point Harry was barely able to use his magic, so much of it was devoted to keeping his body running. This was made even worse because of the debilitating heat and the scorching sun above them. That made going harder, but thankfully the end of their journey seemed to be at hand.

Harry was now hiding behind the large outcropping of rocks staring down from his position at what was obviously a small metal door set into the side of the mountain over what was probably a cave or a tunnel of some kind.

"We have to get in there." Lily said worriedly, standing out in the open since no one could see her ghostly body. "I can feel it in the air, something is changing, some kind of storm or other."

Since coming to this world both Harry and his mother had begun to feel things like that. Lily put it down to the fact that the magic on this world or in this star system wherever they were was so much more powerful than back on Earth. It was a strange phenomenon, especially to Lily. She had lived in Hogwarts, one of the five most magically charged areas on Earth, but here, the entire planet had more magic than there. She couldn't describe it better than that, but it had been helpful several times in avoiding danger.

This was particularly true since coming into the sun-ward area of the planet. It'd helped them avoid one of the most dangerous creatures that Harry or Lily had ever seen, a fifty foot tall monster with six spear footed feet, long whip-like tentacles and massive jaws. Whatever that creature was, it was obviously the alpha predator of this area of the planet, and neither of them had any desire to see if Harry's growing skills with magic would stand up to it.

The magic also had two more surprising features. After a few days Lily was able to actually solidify parts of her body for a few seconds allowing her to touch Harry however briefly. She still couldn't interact with the rest of the environment, but even that little bit was enough for them to be thankful for.

They both also felt that the magical aura of the planet was also the only reason why Harry was still alive. Even given his own magical strength Harry could not have lived for this long on his own magic, but the magic of the environment kept on filling him up second by second, allowing him to keep going.

But even that had its limits, and looking down at him now Lily knew those limits were close. Harry's face was thin and parched, his skin burned red, his eyes despite being covered, and his arms evening when covered by his makeshift jacket was thin and unhealthy looking.

"I know." Harry replied, his voice weaken and parched. "But we can't just try to break in. That door's probably that heavy to keep out those monsters. Whoever is in there, we can't just let them in."

"I know but..." Lily bit her lip then floated down to kiss Harry on the cheek. "Wait here Harry, I'll be right back." With that she zoomed off, not stopping when she met the metal door, simply floating through it and the rocks around it. The door was heavy, but not exactly large.

On the other side it was obvious to that this was some kind of protective cover over an air vent, which was closed at present. When Lily looked closely she noticed it was disused, bits and pieces of it here and there rusted, possibly making it immovable without a lot of there was no one around, and the small air shaft kept going deeper into the mountain.

She looked around using a mental trick she had learned during her marriage to James to memorize the layout of the area, hoping that her desperate plan worked. Harry wouldn't survive more than another few days out there if that and she refused to let him die. *No, no way, we haven't come this far just for my son to join me in the afterlife!*

With grim determination she continued her mental exercise until she was certain she knew every square inch of the area around her, then phased back out the door. She stopped however with her head out the doorway, staring at her son. "Harry, I thought I said..."

Harry shook his head quickly, pointing back up the mountain slope at the sky. Lily turned and stared up into the sky aghast. It was like a heat haze was gathering directly above them. And now that she was out of the cavern even she could feel it, the magical aura of the planet warning them of danger.

Extreme danger. Even as she stared up into the sky she began to see a pattern beginning to form up there. And the wind though Lily couldn't feel it began to pick up, causing Harry's hair to ruffle and then nearly blow him off his feet forcing Harry to hold onto a small bit of metal outside the door.

"I need to get in there now!" Harry said, and for once his voice sounding small and scared. The force of nature going on above them was doing that where none of the other dangers they had faced since arriving wherever they were had. Not even that first creature had made him so frightened for his life.

Lily forced her hands into solidity, gritting her teeth in concentration to solidify so much skin, holding his head in her hands. "Harry," she said calmly, "look at me. I have a plan, but you need to be calm and able to concentrate, can you do that?"

Harry stared into his mother's eyes through the thin strip of cloth covering his own, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly as he began to calm his mind. He entered a sort of semi-meditation frame of mind for a moment as his mother had taught him over the past few weeks, the first step in learning how to do Occlumency, the art of organizing and protecting the mind. After a moment Harry nodded and Lily let her hands fall

away from his face with relief. Keeping her hands solid like that had been exhausting beyond anything Lily could remember from when she was alive.

"All right Harry, I am going to ask you to close your eyes while I tell you about what we're going to do. You're going to have to visualize this exactly, and when we're done, you're going to try to apparate yourself to the other side of the hatch."

Harry blinked, frowning for a moment before he nodded. Concentrating for a moment he decided he was strong enough to try this, if only just. Though that wasn't the only problem.

They'd talked about apparition based on the notes Harry had taken on teleportation, and his mother had filled him in on it what had happened when he lost his memory. The two of them had debated what the old man who she recognized as Albus could've been up to, but haven't come up with any satisfying answer. Lily was somewhat reluctant to call him an ally or an enemy for his actions that day, while Harry was unwilling to see him as anything but an enemy.

That was neither here nor there right now. The idea of splinching himself again, as his mother put it, was the thought that was dominating his mind at the moment. But if it was either that or standing here and facing that storm...

Resolutely Harry nodded. "I trust you." he said firmly, then closed his eyes not seeing the bright smile his mother's face. After a second however she got down to business, describing the inside of the tunnel as well as she could, including the height of it and everything else she had seen. When she was done Harry recited it all back to her, with Lily correcting him quickly but calmly, her own eyes staring up into the growing storm above them. The heat was also rising exponentially, and Harry was beginning to sweat profusely despite the cooling charm his mother had taught him, wincing despite his covering at the wind and the impact of the heat on him.

After a moment they were ready and Lily said. "All right Harry now focus on that image and then slowly superimpose yourself into it. Concentrate on it until you have your entire body perfectly then merge the two images. Wait until you have it exactly right, with your body perfectly aligned into the new image, then pour your magic into it and make it happen."

Lily repeated her instructions several times as Harry went through the mental process, then after a moment he nodded, sweating now from more than the rising heat, even though that was becoming so much his skin was blistering despite his clothes. "All right now!" With a loud pop Harry disappeared from where he had step stood, and

Lily frantically looked around, breathing a sigh of relief as she noticed that he hadn't left anything behind.

With that thought she turned, phasing through the doorway just as the storm hit behind her. Behind her the heat storm hit, cyclone level winds blasting the landscape as the heat rose beyond 300°C, baking and burning, killing anything living in its path.

Inside the tunnel Harry was on his knees, gasping as the magical exhaustion hit him. Apparating like that had really, really drained him, but Lily looking down at him and then back at the door knew they couldn't stay here. "Harry," she said urgently reaching down and gently running her ghostlike hands through his hair. "We need to go, we need to get further away from the surface of that heat storm, it's going to eventually start sending heat through the door, you can't be here when it does, even a little bit of that will kill you!"

Harry looked over his shoulder at her, pulling off the cloth around his face then wearily summoning up a small very dim little ball of light in one hand. "Lead the way."

As he walked, Harry pulled off bits of clothing, wringing them out over his mouth and sucking hungrily at the sweat, as he had been doing for days, it being the only source of water on the light side of this planet. That would be the first priority Lily knew. It amazed her that Harry's magic had been able to keep him alive so long, but water and food would be a definite priority.

An interminable amount of time later they were far enough away from the surface for Lily to let Harry rest, which he did so slumping against one of the walls of the small tunnel, falling asleep almost immediately. Lily bit her lips again looking down at her son, knowing how close he was to just burning out, whatever his own inherent magic or the magic of the world around them could do.

With that in mind Lily left him there, heading further down the tunnel, trying to discover everything she could about this place. Eventually she began to hear sounds ahead of her, including, and this made her smile happily when she realized it, noises that were obviously voices.

The end of the tunnel she was in was blocked off by a heavy boulder, causing her to wince realizing that Harry would have to try to apparate through it again. The other side of it was at the back of what, Lily figured out quickly was some kind of small hovel or poor area. There were several dozen alien creatures around, all of them living in small makeshift huts set haphazardly against the side of a far larger tunnel than the small air shaft Harry had been trooping through.

The aliens were somewhat human looking, two arms, two feet what were obviously mouths, ears and eyes and all that. But they didn't seem to have any hair on their heads, instead having two long tentacle-like things coming out of the back of their skulls and draped down their backs. A few of them had what were obviously tattoos of some kind scattered across their bodies, and one or two of them were exchanging words in a language that she could not understand.

Judging by the breasts two of the group had, they were females, but the rest were all males of various ages. One of the females was youngish, the other wrinkled and old looking, like one of the men in the area.

All of the aliens wore rags further indicating that this group wasn't exactly well-to-do. Though there were bits and pieces here and there that hinted at the fact that maybe there were richer groups around, and some of the tools she saw being used to cook or to mend clothing looked strangely high-tech. What was also interesting to Lily was the fact that their teeth were obviously that of omnivores, which was a good sign and led into the most important thing.

That important thing was they also had some food with them. Some kind of soup was bubbling away over a fire along with strips of what looked like meat and what looked like an oddly green and white spotted bread of some kind was being cut into slices nearby. There were even four of what were obviously meat animals of some sort kept in a small walled off area. None of the aliens looked well fed, but they certainly looked better than Harry did at the moment. And honestly, with her son so close to death, Lily would not have cared overmuch if they looked like they were starving unless they were children.

Her attention was diverted from the food when there was a sort of whispered shout from further down the tunnel. She watched in puzzlement as the young female quickly hid herself in one of the huts, the entrance to which was quickly boarded up by one of the males.

A moment later another group of the same type of aliens entered the small area. This gang wore more clothing and seemed much better fed than the first group, all whom sat very still as the newcomers swaggered of them walked straight up to one of the other aliens, a heavy hand slapping into the other ones chest and sending him to the ground.

The downed alien didn't make a protest, save whimpering a little and trying to say something trying to make himself smaller. The newcomer continued to growl at him, before reaching out with a proprietary hand, grabbing up the largest piece of meat on the fire.

For all the magic that the wizards and witches of Earth ever developed, why did no one ever try to figure out a way up to create a translation spell? Hell, why didn't I? Lily thought shaking her head. This was obviously some kind of gang or other, and the squatters couldn't fight them, so obviously gave into their demands.

Thankfully after a moment the group of thugs seemed satisfied and moved back off down the tunnel. Lily watched as the squatters breathed sighs of relief, including the young woman who stuck her head out from her hiding place.

She watched as the guard who had obviously warned the others of the gangsters arrival walked up. He said something to the young woman who nodded back, reaching out to stroke one of his tentacle-things lightly, which caused him to smile slightly, it's tip winding around her hand for a moment. Then he turned back, moving further down the corridor while she hurried over to remove the soup she had been tending from over the fire.

Lily followed the guard, coming to a small unobtrusive and well-hidden barricade at the end of the tunnel, where he stood hidden in the dark of the tunnel staring out into the first fully lit tunnel Lily had seen so far, which this one intersected. From here she could hear some sounds in the distance in both directions, though it was noticeably noisier in one direction than the other.

She decided to head in the direction of the least noise for now, quickly coming out into what was obviously some kind of underground factory or other which is obviously seen better times. A lot of the machinery she could see, whose purpose she couldn't understand, looked ancient, rusting in places and obviously worn down. There was also a harsh tang of rust in the air, further hinting at the age of the place.

So, squatters living on the edge of a rundown area, understandable I suppose if not exactly a good sign for Harry and I. She refused to think about the fact that it was just Harry that really needed food and water to survive since she was a ghost. Worse, Lily could possibly continue on if Harry died even if he didn't immediately join her. That was a horrifying thought on many levels, and she refused to do well on it.

She spent a few moments zooming through the ancient looking factory, finally understanding what they were building here. It looked as if they were building small batteries and small handheld devices of some kind, though not quickly, and not in very large numbers. Though Lily decided to put the low output down to simply the age of the machines rather than the workers themselves, who seemed to go about their jobs efficiently At least from her perspective which admittedly wasn't worth much.

Possibly this place could be gang-owned I suppose, but nothing we can do about it, not right away at least. Lily had a firm grasp of right and wrong, and about law and justice and she detested bullies. That had been one of the many reasons why she'd kept on turning James away for so long until he finally changed his tune during their senior year and become a man rather than a little boy.

She turned, making her way back down the corridor quickly, moving towards the other end of it. After several smaller areas each with other groups of squatters or gangsters, she finally broke out into an area that looked well-to-do, with far better lighting, better-looking housing, and better looking clothing on the people all around.

The men she saw around now wore full-body clothing of decent design if rather drab in color and more than half of them seemed to go around armed, which Lily wondered was a defensive reaction or a societal thing. *If those monsters we saw outside can get in here sometimes* she shuddered at the very idea of what one of those beasts could do in close confines like this.

And it was close, even here in the better areas the cavern was only about two or three stories tall and about 600 feet across. She estimated this would be the equivalent of a mid-range suburb or so, and she hoped that the higher she got into the interior of the mountain the better it would look. But even that thought was set aside due to the main issue she was seeing as she looked around.

Many of the women around her wore skimpy clothing of the kind that she knew would cause her son issues, which rather amused her frankly. But what didn't was the fact that it might not be their own choice. More than half of the women Lily saw around her wore collars, or possibly other things over the tentacles on their heads, signifying what could be slave status. *That isn't good* she thought grimly. *Not good at all.*

OOOOOOO

Harry awoke in darkness, his light of having gone out long since, but the gentle humming of his mother, and the familiar warmth of having her near made him smile despite the dire straits he still knew he was in. He opened his eyes slowly, getting accustomed once again to the darkness all around them, not even lit by the luminescence of the crystal growths as the night side of the planet had been. "Mum?"

Lily's humming broke off quickly and she hovered in front of her son, glowing ethereally giving enough light for Harry to see. "How are you feeling Harry?" she asked solicitously.

"I'm all right," he lied then winced a little as she cocked her head her lips forming into a frown. "All right, I feel really weak. Not as weak as I was out there, the magics filling me up again I suppose, but..." he shrugged.

He watched while Lily bit her lip then asked, "Do you think you could apparate again?"

Harry felt his magical core inside himself for a moment before replying cautiously. "It, it would depend on how far."

"Not as far as you did to get in here, the small cave-in further down the air shaft isn't very thick. But if you can get to the other side of the rock, we might be able to steal some food."

"From who?" Harry asked.

Lily went into detail on what she had seen on the other side as the two of them moved through the tunnel, heading towards the end of it. Harry wasn't happy about the idea of stealing from a group that seemed so down on their luck as the squatters Lily described, but realized he really didn't have any choice, his body was close to giving out on him despite his magic's best efforts.

"We'll have to wait until it's night out there or whatever, the sleep cycle or something like on spaceships." Harry asked, shaking his head. His hunger and his bodies slow descent into shutting down was beginning to effect his mind, and he knew he wouldn't be able to wait very long before trying to teleport through the rock. If he did, he might lose the ability to concentrate enough to pull it off.

"I understand, but before we do that you'll have to figure out a way to hide you. I know you already know how to silence your footsteps, but I think you need to figure out a way to blend in." Lily could have taught him a charm to do this, but she was interested in what Harry would come up with alone or with just a little help anyway.

She also didn't want Harry to become dependent on her as the font of all magical knowledge. That was why she had taught him only the barest number of spells while out in the wild, letting him work out how to do a lot of other things for himself. It had worked so far, and she was certain it would this time too.

By the time it they had got into the rock at the end of the tunnel Harry had figured out how to create a chameleon effect coupled with a low powered 'boring' field as Harry put it, that even made it hard for Lily to concentrate on him as he walked along. Those

spells coupled with his silencing himself would allow Harry to sneak around relatively unnoticed.

When they reached the rock Lily went through it while Harry waited, and then came back with a detailed description of what was on the other side. This was a really dangerous process, because normally apparition could not be accomplished except to a place the person in question had already been, but given the fact that Harry's survival relied on it, Lily was forced to try again and hope they did the impossible a second time.

Thankfully Harry was still able to concentrate enough to get through it, appearing on the other side still disillusioned and still silenced falling to his knees in the small open area between the two huts on either side. Lily zoomed through the rock quickly, leaning down to kiss him on the cheek. "Well done Harry!" she whispered joyfully. "I'll be right back, I'll see if I can thought find where the food is."

She did so quickly, coming back and directing him into one of the huts on the right side of the tunnel. The hut's doorway wasn't a door at all, just a small very thin piece of cloth hung up to cover the entryway. Two of the locals were asleep inside, two of the older looking squatters. Lily quickly directed Harry where to go, still using the light of her body to light his way since she had proven on her earlier expedition that the locals couldn't see her.

They found the food quickly enough. Harry grabbed as much of it as he could hold in his hands before exiting the hut quickly, stuffing them into his pockets. From there Harry followed Lily down the corridor, then slightly out into the next corridor. Thankfully at this time of 'night it was empty.

Despite the smell of the food not being anything he had ever smelled before, his stomach seemed to understand that it was food! Indeed his stomach was beginning to growl at him by the time he left the watcher behind them so loudly Harry was afraid it would break through his silencing spell. With Lily moving back and forth down the corridor to watch out for other aliens coming up, Harry quickly began to scarf the food down, not even noticing the taste at first.

When he did he gagged a little but used to the meat of the animals on the night side as he had become, it wasn't actually that bad. The bread was a little spicy and far different in texture than normal bread, but still was easily the tastiest bit of the meal.

As soon as the food was in his stomach Harry immediately began to feel it doing his body a world of good, feeling some of his magic receding slightly while the rest of the magic that was so busy keeping him alive went to work sending the nutrients to where

they needed to go far faster than they normally would ever have been able to. He was still starving after eating a little bit he had been able to take from the squatters, but even that little was enough to give him some more energy to work with now. With that in mind Harry moved after his mother in the direction of the main area, hoping that they could find some more food.

That first night was utterly centered on finding food and water, with the second being far harder to find than the first. There was no water fountains, no open pools, nothing of that nature. Eventually Harry found some containers that contain some kind of green liquid, which Lily said looked like alcohol of some kind. Harry transfigured it into water with relative ease and drank greedily, and for the first time in weeks was beginning to feel better.

He did have to dodge some of the aliens occasionally, but his chameleon, boring and silencing spells worked, allowing him to continue to explore. Eventually they found a small out-of-the-way alcove in one of the more well-to-do areas, and still covered in the dissolution spell Harry bedded down there, smiling faintly as his mother stood in front of him staring down into the cavern protecting him as he once again fell asleep.

OOOOOOO

Other the next week or so Harry began to move around the corridors, continuing to steal food whenever he could, regaining his magical strength quickly. They still had problems however, simply because they didn't understand the local languages. This was a problem even after Harry and Lily saw their first humans, moving through one of the upper caverns. Both of them had smiled in happiness at seeing humans, realizing this meant this planet, or whatever, had regular contact with human. But they had frowned when the human male seemed to buy a local female, exchanging a grim look before following him silently.

They soon entered the largest cavern Harry had ever seen or even dreamed of. It looked larger than a football stadium, it looked so large that it could eat football stadium for lunch. Yet as large as it was, it was still full and still very busy and very noisy. Inside there were different species moving about, including humans, some others, the locals and more that Harry could see from where they were hiding along the edge of it.

But what really filled the cavern were dozens of what could only be spaceships of different models. Harry looked up and his mother in astonishment, then began to grin. "To boldly go..."

Lily shook her head sighing sadly. She had never really liked Star Trek, or at least not the show, the books were better. The uniforms were so stupid looking, especially for the women, skintight uniforms, really? *And of course now here I am as a ghost wearing the equivalent. Except my version was a marital aid. The irony, it burns, it stings.*

The human they had followed into his cavern moved off toward one of the ships, followed by the seemingly obedient female local. "That's not good." Lily murmured, knowing that only Harry would be able to hear her.

When her son looked up at her Lily frowned then went into detail. "She's not fighting it, she looks obedient, almost as if this was normal." She frowned angrily. "Either she's been indoctrinated by birth, or all the women in this society are slaves." She watched as Harry scowled at the very idea smiling at her son's ire at the thought.

He might look like James for the most part, but in some ways he's all mine, she thought laughing silently in her head, remembering Harry's reaction to some of the tales of James she had shared. Despite how good a man he had become, James Potter had been a right prat for the first few years they had known one another.

"We'll need to think about what that could mean, and what this means." she said waving her hand at the ships in the future. "But let's get you back to 100% before that okay?"

Harry nodded, and the two of them made their way back through the large doors that separated this hangar bay from the rest of the caverns of the mountain.

And so it was for the next two weeks or so. Harry concentrated on scrounging food and water, eating and recovering as much as possible until he was back to what he felt was the best he could get. Yet his body wasn't the body shape he had left Earth with. That body had been somewhat malnourished, making him small for his age, and he had been somewhat weak as well.

But thanks to his need to rely on it for so long Harry' magic had seemingly taken the opportunity of time Harry to fix some of the problems of his was now at least 3 inches taller than he remembered being, and Harry knew he was stronger than he had been. Where before he was simply malnourished and weak, he now possessed a certain wiry strength, and while he wasn't exactly the height of fitness, he was certainly far better, even if he didn't much more endurance than he had before. His eyes were also healed, which had happened sometime during their moving across the planet's surface. And his skin, which on the surface had been red and angry looking after the weeks spent out in the sun, had healed to a nice healthy tan.

After Harry returned to full health, Lily began to tell him more about magic, though still no new spells, since he seemed to make up his own, sometimes better versions with only a few hints. His transfiguration grew by leaps, not bound by any spell but his own imagination and ability to picture the effect. By the end of two days at full health their little hideaway more resembled a small bedroom complete with bed, covers and doorway, which was hidden further by more spells on it.

Watching as Harry levitated several large rocks in the air before changing them into cups and various dishes she shook her head with a laugh. "I'm really looking forward to teaching you what I remember about runes Harry, but I think we need to concentrate on the here and now first. Do you have any idea on how to break the language barrier we're running into?"

That was the largest issue facing their continued attempts to learn more about wherever they had ended up. Neither of them had an ear for languages, so couldn't understand anything that any of the alien said to one another. Despite this, they were able to pick up the fact that there were at least three different languages spoken on this planet.

One of them was obviously related to another, and the two Potters decided that might be simply the difference between the local spoken language's formal and informal styles. The third language however was obviously the one spoken by all of the alien races, a kind of trade language. That meant that should be the one that they learn. Neither of them however had any idea of how to go about doing so.

"I don't know," Harry said frowning thoughtfully as he put his new plates and things down in a small cupboard. He'd have to renew the spells in a day or so just like everything else in here, but until they began to revert they would be as useful as everything else had transfigured in the past few days. He still couldn't change something else into food though. "I think we need some kind of starting point, um, like that stone that's supposed to translate all those languages. I saw it on a history show once when the Dursleys were all out."

"Rosetta stone, and that's a good idea. There are spells that can help you figure out someone's intent or emotions but I don't know if they would work on aliens though." Lily said. "Maybe if we could find some kind of textbook or something we could figure something out by trying to match the printed word with the sounds we hear from the locals..."

"That sounds really, really hard, and kind of haphazard." Harry frowned. "But it gives me an idea. I bet they have something like primary school or the like, where they teach kids right? Let's see if we can find something like that."

Unfortunately that was harder than it sounded. For one thing, there was no such thing as a school for young kids here, though they found what was obviously a class on engineering: a large group of the locals and a few other races standing around a large machine while someone pointed out parts on it and two more worked on repairing it. For another, a lot of the population seemed to be enslaved to the rest, including some of the aliens who were obviously not locals. As such, their educational level was nil. It wasn't just the women, slavery seemed to be a main staple of the planet's economy.

"Why is that, do you think?" Harry asked softly, staring down at what was one of the richest looking areas they had so far explored. As usual he was hidden under several dozen spells, all of them intent on hiding his presence.

"I don't know, maybe this planet doesn't have any other resources it could use as capital. The locals are pretty good looking after all." Lily teased, having noticed her son blush a few times when faced with some of the local girls his own age or a little older dressed in their skimpy clothing. But then she went on more seriously. "I don't like it, or what it says about the universe in general that such a thing is accepted, but there's nothing we can do about it. And we still haven't figured out a way around the language barrier."

Harry frowned in turn, but then paused as he noticed something. Below him a group of slaves both old and young were being led toward one of the large mansions built into the rock all around them. One of the youngest was a blue color they hadn't seen before among the locals, whose skin colors seemed to range from white, to yellow to green for the most part.

But that wasn't what had caused Harry to stop speaking. That was the fact she was staring directly up at Lily! At first Harry thought it was him, and quickly checked himself, but found all his spells still in place. None of the other locals up to this point had done anything to indicate they even felt Lily's presence, but the young girl, despite being pulled along now, continued to stare. "Mum... that girl, she can see you!"

"Who?" Lily gasped, then looked in the direction Harry was pointing. "Hmmm... could she be a magic user? Magic users would be able to see me. Maybe they are just incredibly rare here, or perhaps they just aren't organized."

"I don't know, but I think we just found a way to start learning the local language." Harry grinned. "Just have to come up with a way to let her see me, and no one else..."

OOOOOOO

Elsewhere in the mountain a small cruiser was arriving. It was a Consular class out of the Corellian Star System, which was known as much for its bizarre nature as for the fact its denizens composed some of the best, and most combative, spacers in the entire Republic. The Consular however was not a merchant or combat ship, though it could serve those roles. No, it was known primarily as a diplomatic ship, and this one was painted the red of neutrality as was usual on those missions. But the Consular class was also predominantly used by the Jedi Order, as was the case with this one.

Some called the Jedi troublemakers, some called them a quasi-religious order devoted to meddling with things that they shouldn't. Others thought that they were troubleshooters of the Republic, and respected or loathed them for it, while still more looked up to them as a source of honor and dignity in the galaxy. It really depended on what planet you were on and what the Jedi were there to do really, just like normal police in many ways.

On this planet it caused some looks of consternation and anger from the rest of the spacers in the massive hangar bay high up the mountain, and more than one of them hurried away rapidly. Most of them however simply went about their business, those closest nodding to the two men who were walking down the gangplank of the ship. Whether that was because they had nothing to fear from them or because they knew that running would attract the Jedi's attention none could say.

"Master Tholme, I still don't understand why this one smuggling operation is of such import that it would require two Jedi to look into it, especially on a planet like Ryloth." Said the younger male turning to the older obviously continuing a conversation that must've started inside the ship. He was a wild haired young man, with the traditional apprentice knot falling down one side of his face, but with black, lanky hair falling down all around to his shoulders as well. He had a bright yellow bar of some kind of tattoo straight across his nose, a sign of the particular subset of humanity he represented, the Kiffar.

He was shaking his head as he walked down the gangplank his eyes looking around keenly. "If the Republic is going to allow this planet to continue to use the slavery of its own people as its main export, they have to realize that that's going to open the door for other illegal ventures."

"It comes down to politics my padawan," replied the older man in a calm tone of voice. He was slightly taller than his fellow, though the youngster obviously had growth still to look forward to. Tall thin and with prematurely graying hair, he radiated a sense of calm, controlled purpose. Yet even he was looking around interestedly, his senses spreading out. "It always comes down to politics. Some of the animals that are being shipped around are endangered and are from planets that follow

the Republic's laws on such issues. They put pressure on the Senate to do something, and the Senate turned to us."

"And the senators still say they don't need a galactic peacekeeping force?" said the padawan shaking his head. "Master Tholme, that's ridiculous. And why did they send us here of all places to start searching? Finding something like that will be like finding, finding a single needle in a pile of them master!"

"Because Ryloth is where some of the evidence leads us to believe the operation is centered." Said the master still calmly, but now turning sharp eyes on his padawan. "You are anxious Quinlan." he stated bluntly. "You have been since he entered orbit. Why?"

"I, I do not know master." said the now named Quinlan humbly, bowing his head, though even so his eyes were still searching around. "The Force is trying to tell me something, but I cannot...I feel drawn somewhere though I can't seem to localize precisely where or why. Only that there is something I must do here, or maybe someone I need to find."

"And is that all you feel? My own senses are telling me something entirely different." Tholme replied, frowning in thought. The Force here felt strange, not dark, not warped, but strange. There was almost a loving warmth to it, a sense of happiness. He had never felt the like before, and the odd ripples were strange as well.

Could this be related to that massive splash of Force that was felt a few standard months ago? That splash of Force power had been felt by almost every Jedi in the galaxy, but it was so powerful the epicenter of it couldn't be found even by the best of them.

"It's hard to get a read on." he said aloud. "It's somewhere nearby, but nearby as in a mile away, or less? Spread your senses out my padawan, and tell me what you think."

Quinlan did so, hoping that this would also give him a chance to discover more about the feeling that apparently only he was getting of the two but it didn't work. Instead he got a glimpse of what his master was feeling and his eyes widened, cutting back to his master's face. "The Force is, is happy master? I don't know how best to describe it other than that. I didn't think that the Force itself could feel emotions like that."

"It has been known to occur on occasion, though not quite like this." Tholme replied, shrugging his shoulders and moving towards the giant hatchway leading deeper into the mountain that housed the main settlement of the Twi'leks. "There were a few instances of such occurring in the past, though I think that the last one was at least

four or 500 years ago. The only one who would now would be master Yoda I suppose. Set that aside for now, we have a job to do. After that, we can stay around and see if we can satisfy our curiosity."

The padawan nodded, hurrying after him fingering a long cylinder that was resting on his belt for a moment when he noticed the looks that he they were getting from some quarters. *Like finding a single needle in a pile of them*, Quinlan thought, shaking his head. *Still, if it wasn't a tough job, they wouldn't need Jedi for it.*

OOOOOOO

Aaylas'ecuras'ecura sighed sadly as she moved around her small room among the slave pens. It was separate and somewhat nicer than the others, which made her feel guilty when she thought about it. Yet even so, it was still a cage, and she was still a slave. Sent here to be a slave by her own uncle, ostensibly to hide her from their clan's enemies, but after more than two years she was beginning to think that maybe there was some other reason why.

But now her thoughts were not on her captivity, but on the human ghost-woman she had seen. A human ghost here was a question in and of itself, humans were rarely taken as slaves, at least as far as she knew. And how would one of them become a ghost anyway? And why couldn't no one else see it?

The ghost-woman had simply been hovering there in plain sight above one of the mansions, her mouth moving as if she was talking to someone. But it'd been obvious that she had seen Aaylas'ecura noticing her, because after a moment her eyes widened and she had looked straight at Aaylas'ecura. *I wonder what that was?*

Her thoughts ended abruptly when someone tapped on the cage door of her cell. She turned, expecting one of the guards to be there summoning her in her master's name for some reason or other, only to see a small human boy, taller than she was and possibly a little older, but not by much. He waved at her and she hesitantly waved back, wondering where he had come from.

Could he be an escaped slave, but there's no collar on him, and the slave masters always put those on all the non-twi'leks. Twi'leks like her didn't require it so much, since most of them had been brought it up into slavery.

Aaylas'ecuras'ecura watched as the human boy raised a finger to his lips in the universal gesture for silence, then waved to one side. From out of Aaylas'ecura's range of vision the ghost-woman appeared, smiling gently down at Aaylas'ecura waving her

hand. Aaylas'ecura waved back even more shyly, but looking between the two her eyes began to widen at the mystery that was happening here.

"See, I told you she could see you!" Harry said looking up at his mother in triumph.

Lily rolled her eyes and nodded. "All right Harry I believe you, now what are you going to do?"

"This." Harry said with a grin, and teleported through the bars with only a faint pop. His mother gaped at him, shaking her head in astonishment. Harry was really, **really** good at that, he hadn't even had to concentrate for long now that he could actually see what was in front of them. *Oh sure, teleporting like that at so short a distance isn't anything to write home about, but he's **very** young to be so good at it already.*

Aaylas'ecura backed away quickly, her mouth opened but the boy gestured for silence again and pulled out from a bag what looked like a children's reader. Aaylas'ecura cocked her head, watching as the boy pointed at it and his mouth saying something in a language she didn't know.

"I can't speak the local dialect, so I'm trying to teach myself." Harry said conversationally, keeping his tone light and conversational, knowing that the girl must've been frightened by his sudden show of magic. "I was wondering if you'd like to help?"

"Harry she can't understand you." Lily rolled his eyes.

"I know," Harry replied "but I think she can point and say things can't she?"

Lily nodded, thinking it a very inefficient way of you learning a new language, but they were really at their wits end right now and she was impressed and proud of Harry's problem solving skills. *One more sign that he is not the average wizard.*

The boy opened the picture book, pointing at the first picture and saying a word. The picture was that of a food animal, and Aaylas'ecura frowned, before understanding dawned. "You can't speak Ryl?" she asked aloud, watching as the boy stared at her blankly. She switched to Galactic Standard, which she was learning, and spoke hesitantly in that language. Still nothing. *But then where did he come from? Everyone from off-world speaks Galactic Standard, don't they?*

Still she understood now what he was asking. And said "that is a Rycrit, Rycrit!" she repeated pointing at the picture.

The boy smiled lopsidedly, and Aaylas'ecura found herself smiling back. *This is kind of fun!*

He put the puncture put down, and slapped his chest saying "Harry."

Aaylas'secura did the same to her own chest "Aaylas'secura."

The boy frowned trying to say her name as two different names, then saying hesitantly "Aalya, Aayylaa, Aayla?"

The girl nodded. "Close enough." She'd been told humans tended to do that, taking apart the two portions of the Twi'lek name as they did their own.

Harry nodded "Aayla." Then he gestured at himself and the ghost woman and said "Human."

That took a bit more time before Aayla got it and she nodded tapping her own chest again. "Twi'lek."

Harry smiled again, raising a thumbs up gesture to her to which Aayla did the same. Then she looked around, wondering why no one else was hearing this. The boy smirked, seemingly understanding what she was wondering, and wiggled his fingers. Suddenly underneath his fingers there appeared a small furry thing of some kind.

At first Aayla thought it was an animal and backed away quickly, but it didn't move and the boy picked it up, tossing it to toward her. She caught it cautiously, feeling it's fur against her hands, and giggled a little. "It's furry!" she exclaimed, holding it up to her face and rubbing her face against it for a moment.

Harry watched her with a smile on his face, then gestured around. Harry teleported back through the doorway, then back again into the small cell. "Magic."

Aayla looked at him thoughtfully then shrugged her shoulders. Such things were children's stories, but she understood what he was trying to say. So she nodded her head. "Whatever you say, strange human Harry." She smiled, her lekkus' tips waving excitedly. Whatever this was, it was a lot more fun than simply going to sleep or playing on the reader her master allowed her.

The boy smiled, not understanding her words but her tone. Tone and body language were the same for humans and Twi'leks, only missing the subtle gestures of the tentacles that were in point of fact a whole other language on their own. Still humans didn't have tentacles, poor things, so couldn't be asked to know about them.

He turned to the ghost woman, and began to speak in that language that Aayla couldn't follow. "What do you think mum, should we take her with us? Or should we just keep coming back every night?"

"What do you mean take her with us?" Lily asked.

"Well she's a slave isn't she, she'd want to be free right? And I can find enough food for the both of us easily enough."

Lily nodded thoughtfully, also understanding this would be a chance for them to strike back in a small way against what they thought of as a great wrong: the fact that slavery was so pervasive here. "I suppose, and she is a magic user, she can see me easily enough, and she's able to talk to you too before you put up that silencing spell." Harry had figured out how to create his own version of a muggle repelling charm easily enough. "All right, but teleporting between the bars with another person is going to be a lot more difficult Harry."

Harry nodded, then turned back to Aayla who'd been watching the conversation but unable to follow it. He gestured at the book that he had brought along, then at himself then at Aayla, moving his fingers back and forth between the two of them. "You teach me this," he said gesturing down to the book again "and I'll get you out," he went on, gesturing out past the bars.

For a moment Aayla cocked her head, trying to figure out what he was trying to say, but after another repetition she got it. "You want me to teach you how to talk, and you'll, you'll get me out of here?" She asked hesitantly, standing up from where she had been sitting on the floor of her cell and moving forward, gesturing out past the bars then pointing at Harry and herself.

Harry did the same, then back at the book before holding out his hands palm up.

"So in return for me teaching you, you'll get me out?" For a moment Aayla frowned at that. She had it much better than most of the other slaves here, but she knew it would be only a matter of time before she was sold to another owner, and not that long a time any longer either. Rutian Twi'leks like her were very rare, and there was always a buyer out there who didn't care about the age of the slave so long as they were past the fresher-training stage.

For a moment her thoughts went to her uncle who had sold her to her Hutt master supposedly in an effort to hide her, or so he said. Then she shrugged her shoulders, but she had become certain that was a lie over the years. *And besides, it has been so long since something new and interesting happened! Whatever this is, it is both!*

So Aayla nodded her head eagerly and reached forward with her own hands to clasp Harry's. Harry grinned at her, pulling one hand away to point up to his eyes and closing them for a moment squeezing them tight before opening them before indicating Aayla with that hand. But he didn't let go of her other hand. After a second Aayla nodded closing her eyes. For some reason she trusted this boy, and the strange ghost-woman.

There was a moment of disorientation, and she opened her eyes quickly, only to gasp aloud as she realized they were now outside her cell. She looked back into it, then at Harry and grinned. She nodded her head rapidly. "Good!"

Harry smiled and turned as did Lily, who reached down to ruffle his hair with her fingers for a moment before leading the way off while Harry made several strange gestures around Aayla, covering her with spells. With that he began to pull her along, having to pull quite hard when Aayla noticed a guard further up the passage moving towards them. But then she noticed he wasn't looking at them, almost as if he couldn't see them.

Harry leaned in whispering in her ear "Magic."

The girl looked at him, then mouthed the sounds. "Ma'gic." She grinned and nodded her head, then hastened on with Harry out of the Hutt's mansion, avoiding vid-recorders where the ghost-woman pointed them out. Aayla reasoned that whatever strange ability the boy was using couldn't work on electronics.

Soon after that Aayla found herself in a small but very neat and very comfortable hideaway. It had some food set up on top of a cabinet that looked to be part of a wall, plates and other things all around. A large bed rising out of the ground dominated the small room, complete with soft mattress and even blankets. She trailed her fingers along the blanket for a moment, looking all around her in wonder, a wide, happy smile on her face.

Harry smiled back at her and said simply "Welcome to my home. I always wanted a big, comfy bed, and then I found out how to transfigure things, so here we are." With that he moved over to the food, cutting up some kind of meat animal that Aayla hadn't seen before. Actually, it was simply transfigured Twi'lek cuisine, but Harry had got into the habit of transfiguring it to things he recognized as food, chicken in this case.

He held it out to her, and she reached forward without hesitation, plucking it out of his fingers and chewing on it then smiling happily at the taste nodding her head. Harry nodded back, while behind them the ghost woman entered. Aayla and Harry both turned, and she smiled down at them in a way that made Aayla look away shyly.

There was something happy and very kind about that smile, something Aayla had never seen before.

She looked up as she felt fingers on her forehead, and gasped in shock seeing Lily gently touching her lekku near her head, but with that same kind of smile on her face. Then the ghost woman gestured at herself and said "Lily."

Aayla nodded dutifully. "Lily".

The woman smiled and gestured towards the bed. "She's definitely magical Harry. You might want to teach her a bit about how to perform some spells just in case."

"You don't think she'll need a focus? You always made it sound as if that was a must for most wizards and witches."

"She might, but even learning that would be a good thing, don't you think?"

Harry nodded then pulled out the children's reader again and sat on the bed, gesturing Aayla to sit next to him. "That's a good idea, but first I think we need to start to learn how to talk to one another don't you?"

Having not followed the conversation and not really caring, Aayla sat cross-legged in front of him and the language lessons began.

OOOOOOO

"I assure you that your search is in vain, all of my goods are above board! My books and even the two cargo freighters here at present are open for your perusal of course, but you won't find what you're searching for among my goods." Said the Twi'lek in front of Master Tholme, one Pol'secura, head of the Secura clan.

He was a Rutian Twi'lek, and a somewhat obese one, a sign of wealth and power among his people. Given the conditions here on their home planet the Twi'leks very rarely had more food than what was the minimal requirement, one of several reasons why they had been so eager to sell themselves into slavery for interstellar trade.

"I rather think you're right, however we have to be thorough." said Master Tholme, not allowing any of his real thoughts appear on his face. The Twi'lek put out so many waves of anxiety, which spiked when they mentioned what they were here to look for, that it was obvious they had found at least one of the people involved in the endangered animal trade.

That would allow them more time to hunt down whatever the local disturbance in the Force was. The joyful feeling in the Force had grown since their arrival, and now he too was feeling a sense of purpose here, much like his padawan. Whatever their official purpose, the Force was hinting that there was more here to be discovered, perhaps someone as well.

And the sooner we finish our investigation, whatever the outcome of that, the sooner I can devote all of my time to that search along with my padawan's. Even now his padawan was moving through the caverns of the Twi'lek city, trying to sense whatever it was that the Force was hinting at.

The Twi'lek smiled at Tholme's words, then frowned as one of his aides entered. "Why are you interrupting us!?" he barked.

"Clan Leader," the Twi'lek said in Ryl bowing his head, his tentacles twitching and agitation. "The Hutt is on the line."

Pol frowned, gesturing at the Jedi master. "Forgive me, but I have to take this. Politics, you understand."

"Often the Order's bane as well." Tholme replied sagely, nodding his head. He could feel another spike in Pol's emotions, sudden tension and anxiety a palpable wave to his senses, and wondered what had gone wrong somewhere else for the Twi'lek. As Pol left, the Jedi master sat down in his chair, closing his eyes and concentrating, sending his consciousness out through the Force to follow the man.

Soon enough the Twi'lek had hurried into a small communications room. "What is it, you know you're not supposed to be contacting me!" He said in Huttese, a language that Tholme had learned as a matter of course, since he preferred to work on the Outer Rim of the Republic, where Huttese was almost as universally spoken as Galactic Standard.

"We have a problem. Your niece is missing. She was gone from her cell this morning, without anyone the wiser. I've had the guards on duty last night flogged for that, but I have no lead on where she went."

The man gaped at the HUD and astonishment. "How could a young girl of nine have escaped from your slave pens!"

With that Tholme pulled his senses back frowned thoughtfully. *Interesting, very interesting, I think I just found a target for my padawan's side of this search.*

OOOOOOO

For several local days Harry and Aayla learned together, with Aayla teaching Harry many of the words and even some of the sentence structure of the Twi'lek people. In turn, on their second day together Harry began to teach Aayla how to concentrate, indicating that it was the first stage of teaching her magic.

That was incredibly difficult to get across thanks to their inability to communicate well, but Aayla was very intelligent and understood what Harry was trying to explain, and even had something to show for it quickly. Before that second day was done, she was able to hover a small pebble a few inches above her hand.

While Aayla was giggling and dancing around in delight, chanting "ma'gic" to herself Lily shook her head. "I don't know what it is here Harry, but I think the magical aura of the planet itself is somehow easier to use than Earth's. That and her own power are the only two explanations I have for Aayla being able to learn so quickly."

At hearing her name, Aayla turned, staring up at Lily with a wide smile on her face, as she held up the stone. A second later it began to float above her palm again, and Lily clapped her hands, making a sound only they could hear. "Well done!" Lily smiled, and watched as the girl flushed in pleasure at the positive reinforcement even if she couldn't understand the words.

Harry nodded with a smile. "Maybe that, or maybe magic users have been wrong about when to start teaching magic before this."

"I think it's possibly all three. Well, in any event, I think that you need to head out and find some more food for the two of you. For such a small thing, she eats more than you do these days." Lily laughed, reaching out to ruffle her son's hair.

"Okay." Harry smiled at Aayla, then made a motion toward his mouth. "Food. Harry, get." That was about as good as Harry could do with his current ability to speak what he had learned was called 'Ryloth.'

Aayla looked at him, before she nodded and set her pebble down. Then she moved to stand beside him, looking at Harry expectantly. Lily frowned. "I think Aayla wants to go with you."

"Well, I can cover her with the spy special I guess," Harry said, speaking of the number of spells Harry had come up with to help him move around without being seen. "If I were Aayla I don't think I'd like to be left behind too."

"That's either there dear, but alright. This way I can go along as usual anyway to keep an eye on you."

With that Harry nodded at Aayla, gesturing around the two of them. "Speak, I hear, Twi'lek no." He said, substituting the word for the local species with the word 'other' since he didn't know that one yet. After a moment, Aayla understood what he said and nodded her head, still grasping his hand.

Leaving Harry's small hideaway the two children made their way through the mountain's interior moving toward the small area among the richest zone where Harry knew they would find food stalls. Aayla looked around her avidly every step of the way, never having been allowed out save on the Hutt's land.

She eagerly gestured at some of the foodstuffs on sale, watching as Harry stole a few things with on one the wiser. The two of them split a frozen bar of Ryloth Ice cream, a hideously expensive treat that Aayla had always wanted to try, while they moved through the crowd.

After about an hour however their fun was interrupted by a deep baritone roar, followed by the screams of those nearby.

OOO About an hour previous: OOO

Pol Secura's position as head of Clan Secura was not a secure one. While one of his brothers had died, the other, Lon, was still around, and while young, was well liked both inside the clan and out. Worse from the Republic's perspective was Pol's illegal contraband trading, including the issue the Jedi were here to look into.

But Pol's position in the clan itself was so tenuous he had gotten rid of his older brother's daughter, Aayla, in such a way to enrich himself and to make it seem as if she had been hidden away to protect her from the clan's enemies. But if Lon or any of the rest of the clan learned he had sold her to a Hutt, the consequences for Pol would be dire. So he and the Hutt in question, whose name was Lirraca, had decided to cut their losses.

"Are you certain of this master?" said a medical droid, entering a large cage, holding in one of its hands a blanket that Aayla would have recognized. Its other hand, a multi-tool, was open to the syringe, and a drug of some kind was already percolating through it. "Once used, TZ1-052 will make any further training of the subject impossible."

"Do it droid." Said Lirraca the Hutt, an obese slug of a creature, speaking via a communicator set onto the droid's head. "It must be done, and it is not the loss of the wampa that I regret. Shame, she would have made me a pretty profit down the line." With the Hutt equivalent of a sigh, the crime lord cut the connection, opening the cage behind the droid and the doors to the outside of his underground mansion at the same time.

The droid gave an electronic snarl that was his version of a sigh, and then proceeded with what he had been ordered to do. He moved toward the sleeping creature, first waking it up by holding a piece of meat under its nose. The massive mountain of dirty white fur growled, and chomped on it with serrated teeth, ripping and tearing.

After it was finished its meal, the droid silently held up the blanket taken from slave Secura's quarters. "Seek and kill." It intoned in a sort of hypnotic, droning tone. "Seek and kill." It went on in this vein for several moments, until the wampa was blinking it's eyes and shaking it's head, trying to sniff out the trail already.

With the command imbedded in the semi-trained wampa, the droid swiftly jabbed in the syringe, pumping it full of the drug underground gladiators everywhere in the Republic called 'Brainbash', because while it would give the body an immense boost, it would also destroy the person's brain if taken in all but the smallest doses. Even for the massive creature's weight, what the droid had just injected was more than large enough to destroy what little mental acuity it originally possessed.

The droid backed away rapidly, watching as the wampa's eyes went bloodshot, and it roared. "RAAAROOOOO!" A second later it heaved at its chains, all previous training gone, it's entire being now centered on the last thing it remembered, a scent, the smell of its prey. And nothing would be allowed to get in its way.

The droid began to back away rapidly, watching as the restraints on the wampa strained against its enhanced strength. "Oh dear." Before the droid could leave the cage, the beast's chains broke and it charged forward. "Oh deaaaazzzzhghghsh....."

Moments later the wampa was gone, roaring its way out of the Hutt's mansion, leaving a trail of destruction, though not death, Lirraca having pulled all his people out of its way. Almost immediately after the creature left some of those servants droids and slaves, went to work, making it look as if the creature had escaped without any kind of aid, even supplying a few dead bodies just in case.

But before they could get to the wampa's cage and dispose of the medical droid, Quinlan got there first. Master Tholme was a master at covering his presence and had passed on this skill to his padawan, who was using it to the utmost now. Once in the

cage Quinlan reached down, touching the medical droid's mangled head, closing his eyes. After a moment he frowned, setting it into a small pack he carried on his back. The next thing Quinlan touched was the blanket.

The Kiffar people were unique in that some of them were born with the ability to use psychometry, the ability to see images of the past taken from an object. Quinlan was remarkably gifted in that area, and it served him now, as did the Force. Suddenly in that moment Quinlan knew, he knew what, or rather who, he personally was here to find, the image of the young blue-skinned Twi'lek girl appearing in his mind with a clarity he had never seen before.

And he also knew that she was in danger, the Force was practically clamoring for his attention. Dropping the blanket back to the floor Quinlan hurried out of Lirraca's mansion, using his skills at covering his presence until he was out and on the maddened wampa's trail.

OOOOOOO

Aayla and Harry both turned staring through the crowd, before Harry quickly grabbed Aayla, pulling her down to hide under one of the stalls with him. This was actually more to get them out of the way of the running crowd than to hide them from sight. The spells Harry had put on the two of them would still hide them from sight if someone bumped into them (and given the chaos around them Harry doubted anyone would really notice) but the spells wouldn't protect either child from being trampled under by the crowd.

Lily hovered above them, frowning angrily. "I don't know what's going on you two, but stay put there, alright Harry? I think I see a better hiding place than under that stall, but we might need to wait for the crowd to disperse a little more.

The two of them watched for a moment, with Aayla clutching at Harry's hand, then gasping as the thing which had caused the chaos came into sight. "Wampa!" Aayla had seen the monster before, since her master used wampas as sort of guard dogs on his property. At that thought, an ugly idea came to her. *Could the Hutt be using the wampa to try and track me?*

Desperately she reached out, pulling Harry's face toward her. "Can someone smell us?"

Harry looked at her blankly, his brows furrowing at the look of fear on Aayla's face. But he didn't understand what she was saying. Aayla sniffed audibly, pointing at her nose, then at Harry and her own chest, before pointing out at the wampa.

She watched as Harry's eyes widened and he nodded understanding. Harry didn't know why Aayla was concerned about the thing she called a wampa, but it seemed as if she was worried it would scent them. He tried frantically to think of a spell that would cover their smell.

He never got the chance. Above them Lily gasped. "Harry watch out, I think it's...!"

By that point the wampa had smashed through what few people were still in the area, the rest having rather sensibly run away rather than fight it. In this area of the city, very few people went around armed, a sign of the wealth of the area this now worked against the people living there. Now with its real prey near the beast ripped the top off the stall, reaching forward for the two children hidden under it. "RAAHHH!"

Frantically Harry gestured up with both hands, using the same spell Lily had taught him before his fight against the burrower on the night sight of the planet. "Stupefy!" A red circle which to Aayla looked like some kind of stun bolt flew out his hands at the wampa, slamming into the wampa with enough force to throw it several feet backwards head over tail. Yet even so it didn't knock the wampa out. The monster, got to his feet angrily roaring a challenge.

Harry gestured again, throwing a nearby rock at the wampa, concentrating hard. Midair it seemed to shimmer and change, just like the plates Harry had enlarged the evening after he had helped Aayla escape. It turned into a slim knife which embedded itself in the wampa's shoulder, causing it to roar and stumble to one side right into another red blast of some kind.

Aayla stared to one side as she Lily's voice shouting something. The ghost-woman had found her way up to a top of a nearby home cut out of the rock of the cavern. Now she was floating there, gesturing toward what might be a small hiding place up there. "Harry, levitate the two of you up to this roof, that thing doesn't look like it can climb sheer rock!"

Harry nodded, and grabbing up Aayla's hand again, he gestured down at the ground of the cavern below them with his free hand. A second later the two of them were suddenly in the air flying over the wampa's charge. Instead of grappling with its prey the beast lammed headfirst into the wall behind their former position.

The two of them floated higher into the air until they alighted on to one of the rooftops of buildings around them. Aayla stared around her in amazement, never having expected Harry could fly before this. She laughed, gripping his hand hard, while Harry smiled at her, setting the two of them down on the roof by his mother.

Below them the wampa began to look around for its prey angrily. Then suddenly it turned, staring at a young human male who was stepping out into the corridor from another room, staring first at it then up at where the two children. Were still visible, then at Lily, his eye's widening. Lily noticed this and gasped. "Harry, he can see me too, I think he's another local magic user!"

Harry and Aayla both looked at the young man, who Harry guessed was in his teen years somewhere. He was a wild looking sort of fellow, with a bar of a yellow tattoo of some kind across his nose, and long hair down to his shoulders. He wore simple clothing, a robe of some kind, but it wasn't his looks or his clothing that made Aayla gasp. It was the cylinder at his waist, the sign of the Jedi. "Jedi!"

At that cry the man turned stared up at them, smiling slightly and waving. The wampa however had enough of being ignored, and charged. Before the creature could cover even a single step, the young man's lightsaber was in his hand and activated. He whirled, the sword at chest height coming around and bisecting the creature from the waist. By the time the wampa realized it was dead, the Jedi was to one side of its collapsing body, not even getting any blood on his cloak.

With that done, he turned to stare up at the ghost and the two children. "Hello children, I heard your call for help, though it appears as if it wasn't necessary."

"Oh I don't know Quinlan, I think you did a decent enough job, and thanks to your efforts we have enough evidence to take both the Hutt and Pol Secura under arrest. We might even make the charges stick, at least on Pol." Said another voice, and Lily and the two children turned their heads to see another human male walking up from behind the first.

This human was obviously older, and where the young one gave off a wild feel, he gave off an aura of calm control. He smiled at the younger man, then nodded, and both of them leaped up quickly onto the surface of the rooftop next to them. The older man stared at Lily, while the younger seemed to find Aayla fascinating, though admittedly the opposite could be said too. Aayla was staring at him as well, though not, Lily felt, in anything but simple fascination.

The older man bowed profoundly to her. "Milady, you are the first Force Ghost I have ever seen. I am Jedi Master Tholme, and this is my padawan, Quinlan Vos. May I ask your name?"

Lily smiled back, speaking in her own language. "I'm sorry, I can't understand you." The man frowned in consternation at not understanding her, and she shrugged her shoulders moving over to Harry, ruffling his hair with a few of her fingers, a sight that

made the older man gasp. "I think they're wizards Harry, or the local equivalent. Maybe we can ask them to help our own learning along."

The boy responded in that same kind of language, while Tholme looked between the two of them. Quinlan pulled his eyes away from the young Rutian Twi'lek, looking at his master. "Master, what does this mean?"

"I think my young padawan, that we have solved one, perhaps two mysteries only to find even more." Tholme glanced at the Force Ghost, the boy, and the young extremely talented Twi'lek girl. Tholme had arrived in time to see the boy fly, not Force Jump, but fly, something that very few masters could do for very long. He wondered if that was all, and was determined to find out.

A Force Ghost of a woman whose face I have never seen in the archives, a boy who can already consciously use the Force who resembles her and who seems to speak the same tongue, along with a young Force user of respectable strength. And both children having the looks of those who have led hard lives, the boy in particular. This has been a most interesting day, and will be the first of many I feel.

With that thought, Master Tholme went to his knees in front of the two children. "I know not what you are saying lad, and I have honestly no idea how you went so long without being found. But" he said holding out his hand "I can tell you have had a hard life. But if you trust me, I will aid you."

The boy looked at him uncertainly, gently nudging Aayla behind him as if protecting her. This made Aayla feel warm and fuzzy inside, making her hold onto his hand all the tighter. She felt a connection to the young padawan Quinlan, but Harry had saved her from her life of slavery, had taught her many things already, and had saved her just now from the wampa.

Harry turned slightly to stare at Aayla, who stared back into his eyes, then up at Lily, who smiled at them both. "We have to start trying to trust someone Harry, and this is the first human we've seen who wasn't obviously connected to the slave trade, and he did apparently intend to help you. Plus, Aayla seems to know what these two are, which counts in their favor as well."

After a moment Harry turned from her to stare at the two 'Jedi' who hadn't moved from their positions, the older one still on his knees still holding out his hands. Finally he looked down at Aayla then moved his head slightly indicating the two men. "Do you trust him?"

Even though she didn't understand the words, Aayla somehow knew what Harry was asking, and without hesitation moved around him, still holding his hand in hers tightly as she held out her own hands towards the older human male. He smiled, allowing their palms touch but not taking her hand in his still holding out his other hand towards Harry.

Harry stared into his eyes, and the human male stared back calmly, a faint smile on his face still as he held out his hands. After a second's hesitation, Harry reached forward taking Tholme's hand in his own. Only now did Tholme allow his hands to squeeze the child's children's. He nodded at them, standing up and then nodded at the Force Ghost. "In that case, I think we need to head back to my ship. I have a protocol droid there, and the first thing you need to do is to teach the two of you how to speak Galactic Standard. I have no idea how you can't speak it my lady, but I am certain that there is a lot more going on here than I can understand right now."

Somehow the Force ghost seemed to understand a little bit of that, not the words but his intention and she smiled, reaching down again to touch the heads of the two children gently, which made them both smile up at her. Then she nodded at the two human males and floated down to the ground.,

Quinlan nodded in turn, moving forward to pick up Aayla into his arms, stopping a moment to stare into her eyes, as she did the same. Looking at them Tholme smiled. *The apprentice bond, interesting.*

He turned to do the same with the last youngster, only to find that the young boy had already jumped off the roof, floating down rapidly to join the Force Ghost. Both of them waved at Quinlan and Aayla, and Quinlan jumped after them, landing easily while Tholme shook his head, staring down at the emerald eyed boy. *Yes indeed, interesting days abound.* With a snort of laughter, he too jumped off the roof, joining the very odd group below.

End chapter

Yes, I know I changed Aayla age here, making her a nine year old rather than a two year old. I always thought that the whole 'we don't take kids older than their toddler years was idiotic. It doesn't take that long to brainwash kids, and you don't have to start that young, look at what the Nazi's did in WW2 with their Hitler Youth Program, or today and child soldiers. It makes it easier of course, since they don't remember having any ties to family, but it isn't necessary, just a good guideline. I will cut out time later during the training years, which will be different yes.

As you can see, this would be a very different story than my Ranma/SW crossover. I won't say it would be a 'fix it all' universe, but certainly Harry and Lily's interaction with the Jedi Order would have profound changes on both sides. The problem will be to decide how many of those changes should seep out to the Sith, and how large those changes will be as time goes on. This would also be a full universe merge, rather than simply taking a character (or two) and implanting them in the SW universe.

Obviously Dumbledore here is manipulative, though I haven't decided yet if he is evil, hope that it was ambivalent here. Pairings would be Aayla/Harry obviously, with maybe two more girls added later.