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The Power of the Mind ORIGINAL

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THIS HAS BEEN REWRITTEN AND IS BEING POSTED NOW. CHECK OUT MY PROFILE TO READ THE, HOPEFULLY, IMPROVED VERSION. What if instead of running to the Leaky Cauldron after blowing up Marge, Harry had elected to stay in Muggle London for the summer. How does one change make a difference? Features an Independent and Powerful Harry.

Rated: Fiction T - English - Adventure - Harry P., Daphne G. - Chapters:

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1. Chapter 1

Standard Disclaimer : I don't own anything you recognise. JK does along with the respective owners of anything else you might recognise that isn't from the Potterverse. I don't like writing one of these at the beginning of every chapter so this one covers the whole story ok lawyer people? Just a quick note this is all shifted forwards so that instead of being in 1993 this is happening now, with all modern technology etc available. Read and review but most importantly enjoy. Comments, suggestions, ideas, whatever most welcome. Enough of my babble, on to the story!

Chapter One

Harry Potter could feel the blood pounding in his ears. He didn't think he

had ever been this angry before in his life. It was as if every little bit of frustration and torment that had been inflicted upon him had built up and was finally released. He watched as the already sizable frame of his Aunt Marge continued to inflate as it worked its way out of the house, bouncing off the ceiling, before it reached the open conservatory door. He felt no regrets. He knew he should, but he simply didn't. He tore through the house towards his pitiful excuse for a room, intent on grabbing his few possessions and getting the hell out of this bloody house. He grabbed the few clothes that vaguely fit him and stuffed them into his trunk. Then came his most important items, hidden under a loose floorboard; the invisibility cloak that was his father's and the photo album given to him by Hagrid. They were the only connections he had to his long since departed parents and therefore highly treasured by him. All that was left was his various magical equipment; luckily the majority of this was permanently in his trunk so that his paranoid and magic phobic uncle wouldn't confiscate it.

Once it was all packed away with the exception of his wand which he tucked in his pocket before thinking better of it and holding it out in front of him. He headed downstairs cautiously, expecting Vernon to have some sort of nasty surprise for him. He wasn't disappointed as when he turned the corner from the bottom step he spotted a meaty fist heading towards him from out the corner of his eye so he promptly ducked. The bellow of rage mixed with the crunching impact told him that while he had escaped, the wall had not been so lucky.

"You put her back; you put her back this instant." Vernon screamed at him through the pain, spittle hitting Harry in the face.

Bringing his wand up so that it was pointing in Vernon's face he let loose some more of his anger. "No she deserved it, she deserves that and more

now if you don't want me to curse you, you are going to get the hell out of my way right now."

Vernon cringed at the sight of the wand and the mental dilemma was clear to see, he desperately wanted to hurt Harry but he didn't want to risk getting hit by any 'freakish spell'. Before any decision could be reached Harry stormed out of the house into the clear night sky and started walking, or rather marching, as far as he could from Number 4 Privet Drive.

It was only once he reached the play park that he started to cool off a bit and began to wonder what kind of situation he had got himself into this time. Looking at it objectively, he had little to no money on him, no place to stay and carrying a trunk and a bloody great birdcage with a Snowy Owl in wasn't exactly inconspicuous either. The lessons of the last two years had been learnt the hard way and Harry now knew that rushing in without a plan was the way to get yourself killed. In fact if hadn't been for Fawkes, the events in the Chamber of Secrets would have killed him. After his experiences with the Ministry last year where Dobby's hover charm caused him to get a letter about underage magic, he was sure that this time he was no going to be expelled even if he didn't use a wand.

Mentally shaking himself out of the dark thoughts that were threatening to engulf him at the prospect of being expelled from the only place he had ever been able to call home. First things first he needed a place to stay, for that he needed money. He had some; probably enough for one night somewhere giving him the chance to get to Gringott's to take out some more money from his vault. He did consider going to the Leaky Cauldron but dismissed that almost immediately as he would very quickly be recognised there and he turned into the Ministry. No he was

much better off going into Muggle London, it would be cheaper and there was far less chance of him being recognised. Decision made however that did leave the slight problem of how he was going to get to London in the first place. A noise behind him made him turn sharply with his wand raised, just as he was about to scan the undergrowth for any threat there was a bang behind him that caused him to topple over his trunk.

"Welcome to the Knight Bus emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard, I am your conductor, Stan Shunpike." Harry stood up and looked at the pimply and gangly youth in front of him.

"Can this go anywhere?" he asked.

"Sure can, sept for underwater, can't do nuffing underwater."

"Can you take me to the Strand in London please" Harry remembered one of the roads that led off of Charing Cross where the Leaky Cauldron was. He figured this was close enough to the entrance to Diagon Alley as to be easy but far enough away that he was still unlikely to be recognised.

"That'll be 12 sickles please, 14 if you want a toofbrush. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't" said Harry as he handed over the 12 sickles and headed towards a seat.

The journey was quite possibly one of the most unpleasant of Harry's short life. The bus weaved and dodged through traffic at blinding speed with no seeming concern for the passengers. They were all thrown around so that when they finally reached Harry's stop he was covered in bruises. How on earth that woman had slept through the ordeal he would never know. Thanking his lucky stars that he had made it to his destination in pretty much one piece, he exited the death trap and gave an incredibly false farewell to Stan. However Stan didn't seem to understand that Harry would happily never see him or his dam bus again.

Stepping out into the clear night air, Harry breathed in deeply, the sense of freedom hitting him for the first time. He knew full well he still had a long way to go to properly attain that status but he had made a positive step towards it. Thinking about it made him feel good, he had always been self reliant, having had no choice in the matter thanks to the Dursley's, but this was a whole other level. Ah well first thing's first he thought, somewhere to stay for the night. To this end he started walking up The Strand, scanning each side of the road for any suspicious people that could be magical as well as somewhere cheap to stay.

After a five minute walk he spotted what he was after, a small and slightly dirty looking building with a flashing sign outside that read 'vacancies'. Several of the letters didn't work and the whole place looked thoroughly unappealing but Harry figured it was for one night only and he was only going to sleep so what the hell. He walked in purposefully, with far more confidence than he actually felt, and headed to the front desk that was currently occupied by a bored looking teenage girl with large headphones, blue hair and a nose ring. Harry had never seen anything like this, the magical world being conservative to say the least, and he was intrigued. So much so in fact that he realised he had been staring at the nose ring and not paying attention to the girl.

"Oi are you listening to me runt? Do you want a room or not?" her voice was sharp but not exactly harsh.

"Sorry, spaced out for a minute there. How much is a room?"

"£15 a night for a single. That don't include breakfast or any of that crap mind you."

Harry looked in his wallet and assessed the contents. "I'll take a room for two nights please." He figured this would give him more than enough time to consolidate his position and visit Gringott's to get some more

money and move in somewhere slightly more appealing.

"Here you go squirt." She said handing him a key with a number three on it. "By the way nice owl." She smirked obviously hoping to embarrass him.

Harry simply smiled back, took the key and replied "nice nose ring."

Feeling he had done quite well out of the exchange he turned away without seeing the girls reaction and started walking in the direction of a sign directing him to room number three. It was only a short walk and on finding the room he opened the door and walked in.

A polite way of describing it would be basic. However Harry really wasn't expecting anything different and as far as he was concerned it was a pretty nice room, a darn sight bigger than his old cupboard. The day's exertion's catching up with him he dumped his trunk, let Hedwig out and collapsed on the bed, quickly falling asleep with all his clothes still on.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter Two

Waking the next day Harry stretched out his stiff muscles. It seemed £15 a night didn't get you a particularly comfortable bed; thinking about it sleeping with all his clothes including his shoes still on couldn't have helped matters. He looked at the old digital clock next to the bed, seeing it read 8.26am. Or at least that's how he interpreted the number; it had several bars missing in some of the numbers.

Harry walked over to the sink, a bathroom also outside the realms of a £15 room, and splashed water onto his face. He looked up into the mirror and this is where a problem hit him. While he had got away with Stan not recognising the night before, it was clear for all to see that Stan wasn't exactly the pinnacle of intelligence and there was no way Harry could make it all way through Diagon Alley to Gringott's without some

interfering busybody recognising him. He stared at his reflection trying to find a way around this problem before a brainwave hit him.

He headed to the front desk hoping that this would work. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the same blue haired girl lounging at the desk with her headphones on. Walking up to her he waited for her to remove her headphones and took a deep breath.

"I have a slight problem and I was wondering if you could help me? It's going to sound a little bit odd but I hope you will be able to help." She simply quirked an eyebrow at him waiting for him to continue. He swallowed the lump in his throat. "I'd like you to dye my hair, something bright that isn't black and..." he paused steeling himself, the idea had seemed such a good one in his room "I'd like to borrow some of your clothes." Her mouth had dropped open fully now and Harry could see exactly what she was thinking, before she could unleash the verbal tirade that was building he carried on quickly. "No, not like that, I mean just some clothes that could pass for boy's clothes. I'm not explaining myself very well am I?"

"Not even slightly squirt so you better get explaining and quickly before I get angry and, guest or not, you really don't want to see me angry."

"Well you see I've kind of run away from my Aunt and Uncle's house and I need to go get more money. I have a bank account you see from when my parents died but I don't want to be recognised by anyone. My Aunt and Uncle have a lot of friends around here so if I get spotted they will try and take me back and that's not going to happen." Not bad he thought I almost believed some of that, maybe because most of it was true in a twisted sort of way.

She looked at him suspiciously "I know that isn't the whole truth but you know what I don't really care. Oh I believe you're a runaway, seen

enough of them come through here to recognise that but there's more.

Don't worry I said I'd help you, plus I'm training to be a hairdresser so any willing victim is welcome." Her eyes glinted at this making Harry wonder what on earth he had let himself in for.

Looking around and seeing nobody she hollered "MUM I'm helping a guest so I can't watch the front desk you will have to do it." Hearing a faint response she shrugged and grabbed his hand and dragged him out the back to the staff area, plonking him down in a chair. "I'm Rachael, your hairdresser for the day and what can I do for you today sir?" She curtsayed mockingly.

Fighting back a laugh Harry replied "I'm Harry and well I don't really know what I want, definitely need to dye the hair to a different colour but other than that I'm tempted to leave it up to you although I'm not sure I trust you" he said the last part with false suspicion.

Rachael laughed, "don't worry I won't do anything too bad. Now how do you feel about Mohicans?" Seeing his face she laughed again, a rich throaty sound, "I'm kidding, now if we want to hide you we are going to need to cover up that scar, while it is pretty awesome it's also very distinctive."

"Don't I just know it" Harry muttered.

"Ok I have the perfect idea but we will deal with colour first. Now since you have such dark hair we are going to have to bleach it blonde first.

We leave that for a little while and then we dye over the top of that with whatever colour you want. May I suggest a bright green to draw attention away from those lovely eyes of yours?" Harry blushed and nodded his acquiescence. "Excellent I'll get started then."

The next few hours passed in a blur for Harry, chatting to Rachael about everything and nothing, as well as a lot of time about music. Rachael was

scandalised when Harry couldn't name his favourite band or even anyone he liked so she had taken it upon herself to educate him. Her taste was wide and varied, everything from the mellow and relaxing reggae of Bob Marley to some speed and death metal bands whose names quite frankly scared him. I mean what sort of band calls themselves Cannibal Corpse for Merlin's sake? Harry found that he did actually enjoy quite a lot of it, particularly some of the less extreme metal bands, and came away with a new appreciation.

Throughout the whole process Harry found he was forbidden from looking in the mirror, he had tried to argue against this but found that Rachael never seemed to really listen. Therefore once Rachael announced she was done butterflies were well and truly making a nuisance of themselves in his stomach. "OK Rach I'm ready let's have it." With a flourish she revealed the mirror and Harry was gobsmacked, the image before him looked nothing like it had this morning. It was for one thing a toxic green colour and sort of spiked up all around apart from the front where it was slicked down, sweeping over one eye and coincidentally, or maybe not, right over his scar.

"Its a bit of an emo style but to be honest with the slicked down bit over one eye its perfect to cover you up. All you need now are a few different clothes and nobody would have a clue who you are. What do you think of it?"

"I like it, I love the colour. It's certainly different, nobody would recognise me now." He turned to Rachael, "Thank you so much you're an excellent hairdresser, so can I borrow some of your blokey clothes?"

"Yeah come on let's see what we can find."

Reaching her room Harry paused at the door not sure if he was allowed in. "Come on you daft sod I can't let you borrow any of my clothes if you

don't come inside." Harry laughed and walked in eyeing the messy room with all the walls covered in posters of bands that he had heard just this morning as well as one entire wall filled with CD's.

Rachael was already over at the closet flicking through and muttering to herself. Every so often something would be thrown in the general direction of the bed. Harry simply sat down to wait, knowing already it was pointless to try and interrupt her.

Finally there was a pile that Rachael deemed sufficient and she walked purposefully over to him and started eyeing him up and down. "I don't think I have any jeans that would fit you so unless you're up for wearing a skirt..." Harry shook his head vigorously, no. "Well then do those jeans you have on have any sentimental value? Because if they don't our best bet is to rip them off at the knees, get you a big old pair of boots, a band tshirt and stick a hoody on top. Sound like a plan?"

Harry nodded his agreement and soon found himself with his already tatty and ripped jeans even more ripped, just below his knees. He had put a Parkway Drive tshirt on after making Rachael turn around, having really got into their music downstairs and was left choosing between a Metallica hoody and a Pantera one.

"Just pick one, what are you a girl?" Rachael had clearly lost patience with the clothes selection process. Harry grabbed the Metallica one and picked up the biker boots that had been presented to him. They were a bit big so he let Rach know he was going to his room to pick up another pair of socks to fill the inside of the boots out a bit more.

Once he reached his room he went straight to his trunk and rummaged around for a pair that wasn't too foul when he came across something that made him laugh out loud. His invisibility cloak. He could have just worn that and not had to go through all this effort. He silently cursed

himself for being a daft sod again. But once he thought about it he realised he had had more fun this morning than in a long time so it was by no means wasted time. Plus he would have had to have taken it off in Gringott's in order to talk to a goblin. Knowing his luck that would have been when all the Aurors on duty for the day just happened to be inside the bank. An acceptable pair of socks was found and so the boots were on and the ensemble completed. Harry looked at himself in the mirror, assessing his new look. He liked it, he wasn't sure about the hairstyle but he liked the clothes and the new colour of his hair. He resolved to try if possible to stay in Muggle London so that he could get away with doing something that didn't have something over half his face.

He made his way downstairs after putting his wand in the baggy pocket at the front of the hoody to say goodbye to Rach for the day. She was at the front desk with an older woman Harry assumed was her mother.

"Alright Rach I'm off out now I'll probably see you later on if you're still around." Turning abruptly he exited the front door hearing Rachael's mother ask her if Harry was her boyfriend, shutting the door just in time to hear her indignant squawk.

Chuckling to himself he ambled down the street in the direction of the Leaky Cauldron, ignoring with practised ease the stares and looks he was getting from passersby. He even laughed out loud when a middle aged couple walking towards him took one look and crossed to the other side of the road. This was the life he thought, the easiest way to be left alone. Course I still get the stares but this is far more entertaining than the hero worship I normally get.

The Leaky Cauldron itself looked just the same as it had when Hagrid had brought him there in first year. Walking purposefully through the door he ignored everyone in there including Tom the barman, he didn't want to

take any chance of anyone recognising him, and made his way to the entrance to Diagon Alley. Tapping the bricks in the right order with his wand he watched as the Alley revealed itself with all its hustle and bustle. As it wasn't so new Harry wasn't staring around at everything like a gawking child but there were still a few things that captured his interest such as the large crowd of people around Quality Quidditch Supplies. Shaking off the urge to go and have a look himself he snaked through the crowds towards Gringott's.

3. Chapter 3

AN - Thank you all so much for your response so far, it has been pretty overwhelming. Special thanks to everyone who reviewed, particularly those who offered me suggestions some of which improved on my ideas and have been implemented in later chapters. Hopefully this chapter will start to show you the direction in which this story is going. Once again cheers for reading - hope you enjoy the new chapter and remember to review if you feel like it, if not no worries I wont hold it against you.

Chapter 3

The entrance was still one of the most impressive things Harry had seen in the wizarding world including the warning poem on the doors.

Striding to an open teller Harry waited until the goblin looked up.

"Greetings I would like to make a withdrawal from my vault however I don't have my key. Is there a way I can confirm my identity in private?"

The goblin looked at him over the desk, suspicion etched onto his face.

"And why would I want to do that?"

Harry looked around him and saw nobody close or watching him so he discreetly shifted his hair to reveal his scar. The goblin's eyes widened slightly "hmm interesting, know this young sir, if you are lying about

your identity, the goblins will take great pleasure in punishing you." His eyes shone maliciously at this.

"Agreed sir."

"OK then follow me." The goblin, Snagtooth as he introduced himself, led Harry to an office.

As Harry walked in he spotted a goblin behind the desk he recognised

"Griphook it's good to see you again."

Griphook looked confused at this "do I know you?"

Before Harry could respond Snagtooth cut in "that is what we are here to determine Account Manager. This boy claims to be Harry Potter and asked me to verify his identity in private. He accepted that if he wasn't who he said he was that the goblins could punish him.

Where Griphook's face showed confusion before it now held disbelief "Mr Potter is that really you?" Harry nodded. "Well you certainly have changed haven't you? Well to confirm your identity all you need to do is to prick your finger with this knife and let a droplet of blood fall onto this parchment." Harry looked fascinated by this and did not hesitate to let a drop fall onto the parchment.

After a few seconds the blood started to writhe around like a snake and formed first into letters and finally into coherent words.

Name - Harry James Potter

Parents - James Charlus Potter and Lily Marie Evans

"So it is indeed you what can I do for you Mr Potter? That will be all Snagtooth I will call if you are required." Snagtooth bowed and retreated from the room.

"Well firstly please call me Harry, Mr Potter makes me think I'm about to get in trouble." Griphook nodded for him to continue. "Well let me give you a bit of background, I trust this will all stay confidential?"

Griphook nodded again "Certainly Harry we at Gringott's are bound to keep our customer's dealings secret."

"Excellent. Yesterday I left the care of my Aunt and Uncle after I somewhat inflated another Aunt so that she may have ever so slightly floated away." Griphook burst into laughter at this, it wasn't a pleasant sound but Harry figured it was better than silence. "Having already had dealings with the Department of Underage Magic for something that wasn't my fault I decided it was better to get out of there before I did something slightly worse and got expelled. I am assuming from the fact that I didn't receive a letter straight away that I haven't been expelled. Last time the letter arrived immediately."

"I believe that is correct Harry, if you did not receive a letter then we must assume you are not expelled however I sense there is more to the story."

"Yes well I don't really want to be found by anyone, if they do they will just send me back to the Dursley's" he shuddered at this "I hate it there and after Aunt Marge, well I think I'll be lucky to reach Hogwarts alive."

"Surely you exaggerate a little bit, they can't be that bad Harry?"

Harry didn't say anything; he simply looked at Griphook, weighing the options up. Coming to a decision he removed first the hoody and then the tshirt before slowly turning around to reveal his back.

Goblins are a warrior race and as such Griphook had seen a lot of wounds that resulted in impressive scars however he had never seen anything like the back of Harry before. It was a rippling mass of white and shining scars that crisscrossed and layered on top of each other so much in places it was raised by over a centimetre.

"My Uncle started off with a belt but after the age of six he figured it wasn't making enough of a point so he moved onto something that I

believe is called a cat of nine tails. A leather whip with nine cords of leather, all knotted to cause maximum damage. One stroke will take the skin off; it takes maybe ten before you reach bone. Trust me I know this from experience." Harry was emotionless during this; his normally shining emerald eyes were dead and lifeless.

Griphook half raised a hand as if he wanted to touch the scars before putting it down quickly realising that the gesture could be misinterpreted. "I can't believe it, I would like to ask if those were real but that's more because I don't want to believe they are. How can this have happened? Even amongst goblins you are famous how could you have been treated this way?" Harry simply shrugged and started to put his shirt back on. "Harry" Griphook's voice was soft, almost compassionate, "I will talk to my Chief about this, I may be able to persuade him to get some of our top healers involved. If all goes well they will be able to remove all of those from your back. I make no promises but I will do everything in power does that sound good to you?" Harry raised his eyes from the floor for the first time "you would do that for me?"

"Certainly. Now if only we had access to your parent's wills then we would know for sure but I can't imagine they would have wanted you to go to your Aunt and Uncle's if that was the result."

"What do you mean my parent's wills?"

"Well Harry since Halloween when you defeated Voldemort the wills of your parents have been sealed by the Ministry. No goblin knows why or who exactly did it and we lack the power to gain access to them. All I can tell you is that you have access to your trust vault and there is the family vault you can usually access at age 17. In the absence of wills we assume that everything goes to the next of kin which is you so whatever bequests

that your parents made have been ignored. This is not necessarily a bad thing for you as it may mean you get more than you would have before although this does mean that your parent's final wishes are not being observed." Griphook shrugged "there is no legal onus on you to do so but should you gain access to the will, which you should be able to at 17, you can still carry out the bequests as stated by your parents."

Harry nodded to this "in regards to my family vault. You said usually at 17 would it be possible for me to access it now or at the very least take a look around it?"

"There are special provisions set up if you are the last member of a family line, which you are. These state that you can access your family vault from 11 but you can't take any of the money until you are 17. This means that you can take any of the books, paintings, furniture or heirlooms that you wish."

"Can I go and look at them now?" Harry's voice trembled at the prospect of seeing if there was anything from his parents in the family vault.

"You can indeed Harry and while you are doing that I will talk to my Chief about you visiting our healers."

"Thank you Griphook I don't know how to repay you for your help."

"It is unnecessary Harry, now Snagtooth will take you down to your family vault and then to your trust vault."

Harry followed the goblin from the room, leaving Griphook trying to shake himself from his thoughts. It was only a short walk from the office to where the infamous Gringott's carts were kept and the trip was made in a slightly awkward silence. Harry felt like he ought to make conversation, even if it was inane platitudes, but he couldn't think of anything. The trip itself was very similar to Harry's first experience, with many twists and turns, far too many to count. Compared to the location

of his trust vault, the cart seemed to be taking them deeper into the cavernous expanse that was the Gringott's labyrinth.

Finally the uncomfortable journey came to an end in front of a pair of large double doors. It looked to Harry a bit like the blast doors he had seen when he had snuck a look at the television when Dudley was watching the original Star Wars. The unlikely duo paused in front of the doors, both looking at the other expectantly. Harry realised at this point that he was supposed to be doing something but he had absolutely no idea what.

"Umm am I supposed to be doing something Snagtooth?"

"Ah I apologise Mr Potter I forgot that you have never done this before. This is one of our more secure vaults, more secure than your trust vault and as such no key is needed. To unlock the door you must put your hand into the recess there" he said gesturing to an area on the left hand door.

"What will it do?" Harry enquired.

"Well once you put your hand inside, a small needle will release and prick your palm, allowing several droplets of your blood to be recognised by the door. The door itself is attuned to the Potter family and it will be able to recognise if you are worthy of entering the vault. It is purely based on family line so as the last of the line you will have no problems entering."

Harry shrugged and walked towards the door, confidently placing his hand in the recess. He gasped slightly in shock as the needle shot into his palm before retracting along with some of his blood. He removed his hand and watched in amazement as the small hole in his palm closed over. He shook his head ruefully; he really should stop being amazed by magic by now. His attention snapped to the doors as they creaked and

groaned, as some sort of locking mechanism that had lain dormant for years released, allowing the doors to swing open.

Harry's heart was beating a brutal tattoo in his chest, he couldn't believe he could well be about to see something from his parents. He held his breath in trepidation as the doors slowly unlocked. What was revealed was a large open expanse of rocky room, interspersed with piles of Galleons, there wasn't really much else. Harry couldn't help but be slightly disappointed by the lack of variety of the contents of the vault the list given by Griphook of furniture, heirlooms, books or paintings. He realised that he had been hoping that somewhere there would have been paintings of his parents like the ones of the former Heads of Hogwarts in the Headmaster's office. Money he expected although there probably wasn't as much as was in his trust vault, maybe three quarters that amount. Snagtooth looked a little shocked by this as well.

Seeing his mask slip for an instant, Harry turned to the goblin. "What is it Snagtooth? Why are you shocked by this?"

The goblin grimaced slightly muttering about dam observant humans "it is not that I am shocked exactly Harry, but I expected there to be more in the vault. You see the Potter's are an Ancient and Noble House and as such would have accumulated a large number of heirlooms, at the very least jewellery. Traditionally the Potter's have always been a warrior family and so I would have expected there to be armour and weapons in here as well. Why this isn't the case I have no idea. Perhaps the reputation does not meet up with reality, without looking at the actual accounts I have no idea."

"Would it be possible for you to do that then? Look at the accounts I mean? I realise there should be enough money in here to last me a lifetime but from what I've heard from some of my classmates it seems

like there should be more. I'm just not sure I trust the Ministry not to have plundered something."

"I can't look at the accounts Harry; I am not senior enough however Griphook should be able to. In fact the Potter's should have their own Account Manager but at the moment I'm not entirely sure who that is. I can find out for you though."

"That sounds good" said Harry absently, beginning to wander around the vault. He stopped in front of a trunk that looked worn but still expensive. It had some sort of crest on the lid but Harry couldn't make out what it was. "Can I look in here Snagtooth?"

"Of course you can Harry, it's your vault after all."

Harry nodded and knelt to open the lid. Inside was a collection of leather-bound books. Picking one at random, he looked at the cover to see if there was a title. There wasn't so he opened it to the first page and on the inside cover there in elegant script was his father's name and under that was written "journal year 5." Harry sucked in a deep breath, there were 30 of these books in the trunk, were they all his father's? Deciding that whoever had written them they would be well worth investigating, he replaced the book where he had pulled it from. He stood up, trying to work out how he was going to get the trunk all the way back to his hotel. Snagtooth provided the solution though.

"I believe if you touch your wand to the crest it will shrink the trunk to a manageable size, small enough to fit in your pocket and will cause no damage to the contents. Do not worry about being underage, this is not actually doing magic, it is an inbuilt function of the trunk."

Harry nodded gratefully and shrunk the trunk before placing it in his pocket. "Can we go to my trust vault now? Unless there is some way of getting money out without having to physically cart all the money

around with me?" Harry looked questioningly at his guide.

"Well Gringott's does make pouches available to customers, for a fee of course. These pouches link directly to a vault and allow you to withdraw however much you desire in either muggle money or Galleons, providing of course it does not exceed the total available in the vault."

"That sounds great, how much will it be for one of those?"

"You will have to discuss that with Griphook. If there is nothing else do you wish to return to his office now?"

"That would be great, thank you Snagtooth"

"Not at all Harry" surprise once more flitted across the goblin's face at receiving thanks. "I believe that you are going to do great things for the magical world." Harry looked taken aback by this statement before smiling genuinely at Snagtooth.

The journey back to Griphook's office seemed much quicker to Harry for some reason, perhaps it was his imagination. Walking slightly unsteadily from the cart's speed, they made their way into the office through one door just as Griphook came through the other. "Ah excellent timing Harry. You will be pleased to hear that I have spoken to my Chief, Ragnok, and he has agreed that you need to be seen by a healer and under the current circumstances it would be best if you saw a goblin one. Is this alright with you?"

"That's fantastic Griphook, it's so much better than merely alright." His eyes shone with pure delight.

Griphook chuckled "if only all of your kind was as trusting towards us as you. Most wizards would never consent to having 'filthy animals' use their magic on them."

It was Harry's turn to laugh "well I think we can safely say I am not most wizards. When would I be able to visit the healer?"

"An appointment has been set up for you tomorrow morning at 9am, who knows how long it will take to heal you properly so it would be best to have as much of the day as possible. Simply come up to the desk and ask for me and I will escort you inside. Was there anything else Harry?"

"Yes actually Snagtooth mentioned about pouches you provide that are linked to a vault. Would it be possible for me to get one of those?"

"I think we should be able to manage that Harry, it will however be 10 Galleons." Harry nodded his agreement to this and so Griphook reached into his desk pulling out a handsome black pouch. "I need for you to put a drop of blood onto the pouch just here so that I can tie it to you and you alone."

While he was in the process of letting a drop of his blood fall on the pouch Harry spoke up again. "Snagtooth also mentioned that the Potter account should have its own manager, do you know who this is?"

"Unfortunately I do not however I can make enquiries if you wish?"

"Would it be possible for you to take over from whoever it was? It's just that you are someone I know and trust whereas I've never met whoever the manager is at the moment."

"That is certainly possible Harry and I must say I am honoured that you have chosen me."

Harry waved away his thanks embarrassedly "it's nothing Griphook; I think you are the best person for the job. Would it be possible for you to have a look through the accounts and see if everything is in order?"

Snagtooth seemed surprised at the lack of content in the family vault so could you look into that please?"

"I will do just that Harry and should have everything ready for you by the time you return tomorrow morning. All I need from you is your signature here, authorising me as your new Account Manager. This is a blood quill

so it will hurt when you sign but will heal almost immediately so there is no need to worry."

Harry signed the parchment happily, grimacing slightly when the quill cut into his own skin. He fervently hoped he wouldn't have to use that dam thing too many more times. "Thank you for all your help today Griphook and I'll see you tomorrow morning at 9."

"The pleasure was mine Harry, until tomorrow."

Harry slid the pouch into his pocket alongside his trunk and made his way out of Gringott's. He was tempted to go shopping in the Alley but his curiosity over what the journals contained won out and so he made his way through the crowd, ignoring the stares, back through the Leaky Cauldron and to the hotel.

Just as he was coming through the entrance he heard a scream from his left and the sound of a breaking glass. He whirled immediately, wand pointing towards the possible threat.

4. Chapter 4

AN - A nice quick update for you, I have been thoroughly motivated by the response and the positive reviews (hint hint) so thank you all very much for that. Enjoy.

Chapter 4

"What the hell is Harry Potter doing here in my hotel?" The voice came from an older woman who was walking out from the back office by reception.

"How do you know who I am?" Harry shouted back, not lowering his wand at all.

"You were messing with your hair and I could see the scar. Nobody else has a scar like that"

Harry had to admit that this was probably true, it was a distinctive scar

and she sounded very scared. Far too much so for her to be a Death Eater or anything similar, so he lowered his wand slightly. "Are you a witch then?"

The woman shook her head and was about to speak when she was interrupted by the arrival of Rachael. "What was that scream Mum? What the bloody hell is that stick in your hand squirt?"

Harry looked at the woman, waiting for her to answer.

"To answer your question Harry no I am not a witch, I am a squib. Could you please lower your wand, I promise I mean you no harm."

"Mum what are you on about? What is a squib?" the woman sighed at this.

"Why don't we all head out back, I can put on some tea and explain this in relative comfort rather than stood around here." The two teenagers agreed and followed the woman, who introduced herself to Harry as Julie, into the kitchen.

There followed a crash course for Rachael, all about the magical world and Harry's status within it.

"So why did you run away then?" having absorbed all the information and eventually accepted it Rachael had turned her attention to Harry again.

"I must say I am curious about that as well" added Julie.

Harry therefore launched into his own story, telling them about how he lived with his relatives who disliked him and about the incidents of the previous day.

"Why do you not just go back to them?" asked Julie "I'm sure they will have calmed down by now and your aunt will have been put back by now."

"I'm afraid you don't understand Julie, they will kill me for this. I don't

think I can ever go back there."

Both Julie and Rachael looked sceptical at this and so with a sigh Harry prepared to show them his back as well. It was amazing how the simple act of admitting it to one person, well goblin, had freed him up to talk about it or perhaps it was the prospect that he could be free of the scars by this time tomorrow. Either way it was definitely easier to tell the story this time.

The two women couldn't believe anything like this had happened, certainly not to the well mannered young man in front of them. They both had tears in their eyes and Julie was scurrying to a cupboard, grabbing a bottle of whiskey. She neglected the glass and took a pull straight from the bottle.

"How is this possible?" she whispered after she had finished coughing. Harry simply shrugged and said "I may have understated how much my relatives dislike me." He found himself enveloped in a hug from both sides, both women weeping slightly. Harry found himself in the unusual position of trying to comfort them, his mind registered that this wasn't exactly the way it was supposed to be, but he had long since shed his last tear over his cursed relatives. "Its ok, I'm off to Gringott's tomorrow morning to visit a goblin healer and they are hopeful that they will be able to do something about the scars."

"How are you so calm about all this?" Rachael asked in wonder.

"Don't really know, I guess it's just something I'm kind of used to now. Once you have had something for the majority of your life you begin to accept it." He shrugged again "it's just the way it is."

"Harry," Rachael looked at him with her eyes shining from tears, "I want to help you." She paused here, collecting herself "I've always wanted a little brother." She looked away a little embarrassed "well I had one but

he died when he was only young. I guess that's why I helped you so readily the other day, you reminded me a little of how he could have turned out. Anyway what I'm trying to say is if you have any problems or need any help I'll be here for you."

Harry was truly touched "I'd like that Rach. I've never really had anyone I could call family, at least not that I remember." He took a deep breath "thank you. For everything. Now I'm sure you two have a fair bit to talk about and I'm pretty knackered so I'm going to take a nap for a bit and then have a look at some of the journals I picked up. I'll see you later."

With that he stood up and walked to his room, suddenly feeling mentally drained. A nap sounds perfect right about now he thought and so he did just that.

He awoke a couple of hours later feeling hungry so he decided to go to the McDonalds he passed on his way to the Leaky Cauldron earlier on. One Big Mac later he was ready to start on the journals. A quick look at the inside cover of each showed that of the 28 journals, 18 were his father's and 10 his mother's. Of James' there was one for each year at Hogwarts, four from his pre- Hogwarts days, three detailing the Marauder's pranks and the remaining four were James' notes on the subjects that Harry assumed had interested him namely Transfiguration, DADA and warding as well as an Animagus journal. His mother's collection also had one journal for each year as well as three for Potions, Charms and an extensive one on Ancient Runes. Harry had absolutely no idea where to start and so after some deliberation he put aside the pranking ones as well as James' pre-Hogwarts volumes. Deciding that the subject journals might be a little advanced for him he started on the Hogwart's journals, his Dad's first year first followed by his Mum's first and so on. He settled back, making himself comfortable and lost himself

in his parent's world. In fact he got so engrossed that by the time he was a third of the way into his Mum's first year and he looked across at the clock, it read midnight. Knowing he had a big day tomorrow, he set his alarm and settled down to sleep.

He awoke after one of the best night's sleep he had managed in years. He got up washed and dressed in the same clothes as yesterday. Making a mental note to buy some of his own clothes so that he didn't have to keep borrowing Rachael's, he walked downstairs pausing only at the front desk to book his room for another week with Julie at the front desk. Assuring her that he would be perfectly fine making his way to Gringott's on his own took a bit longer than he would have hoped but at the same time it gave him a warm feeling inside to know that someone cared. Stopping again at McDonalds for a breakfast he realised that these were not as nice as the normal fare. Another mental note made to find somewhere slightly more healthy to eat, particularly around breakfast time, he continued his walk to Gringott's.

Being still early in the morning, the lines at the tellers were still low and so Harry had no difficulty in walking up to an empty one, asking for Griphook. He was slightly early so he mentioned to the teller that if Griphook wasn't ready for him, he would be sat over on one of the available waiting benches. The goblin looked at him strangely when he said this but he shook it off. He may not have looked it but inside Harry was in turmoil with nervousness. All his doubts were surfacing in the form of questions running through his mind. What if they couldn't heal it? What if they refused to do it? What if they laughed at him?

It took Griphook three attempts to break Harry from his dark thoughts.

Harry looked up apologetically "sorry Griphook, just a little bit nervous."

"That's quite alright sir, if you would come right this way."

Harry looked at him questioningly as to why he had slipped back into formal address, before Griphook subtly indicated the surrounding people. Harry nodded in understanding and smiled his thanks before following the goblin.

Instead of going to the office like yesterday, Griphook was leading them into the medical office that was towards the rear of the bank. Very few humans ever went this far into the bank and those that did were usually on their way to something unpleasant, never to return.

"First of all I am taking you to have a scan done on you so we can assess any and all damage that you have incurred over your life." Griphook said by way of explanation on their journey "after that depending on the results you may be treated then or there may be things we need to prepare before you can be treated appropriately."

Harry nodded mechanically, paused before the door that Griphook had walked through, took a deep breath to steel himself and walked inside. After all the dark grey rock of the previous parts of the bank, it was a shock to be in a white and sterile room, it could have been a part of any hospital with its stainless steel and white contents. There were two goblins stood around a low bed, one obviously the assistant of the other.

"Ah Mr Potter if you would be so kind as to remove all of your clothes apart from your underwear and lie on the bed then we can get started."

The elder goblin's tone was firm and one that brooked no argument.

Harry wondered idly what it was that bred healers to all be such no nonsense individuals, Madame Pomfrey was the same. He complied without comment, hissing slightly as the cold of the bed hit his naked back. "Now I am going to cast some diagnostic spells so that we can fully assess you and what needs to be done. Don't move, it will only throw the results off."

Harry lay motionless and silent for what seemed like an eternity as the wizened goblin chanted in a low guttural tongue and moved in his hands in a complicated pattern. The young wizard was getting thoroughly uncomfortable as his healer seemed to be getting more and more angry, a snarl plastered across his face. It was therefore no surprise that Harry flinched horrendously when the goblin turned abruptly and started shouting what could only have been swearwords in whatever language he was speaking, before throwing a tray of instruments against one of the pristine walls. The assistant gaped at his superior while Harry was recovering his composure.

"What is it Master Healer? What's wrong with me?" Harry's voice was quiet and seeped in nerves.

"It is barbaric and they say we are animals! How can this have been done to anyone, especially a child?" The goblin continued to rant before seeing that his patient was shrinking back into the bed with every sentence.

Modifying his tone to something more calm he turned to his patient "you have had several blocks placed on you and your magical core from a young age. Alone these would have limited you to around 15% of your total power, not to mention blocking some of your abilities entirely.

However this is not all. The scar you have on your forehead is much more than just a scar, it is a portion of Voldemort's soul and is acting as a leech on your powers. With you already down to a mere 15% this leech has caused your core to compensate by growing exponentially in order to fuel both you and the leech. To put it mildly it has supercharged you so that now, even with the blocks, you are one of the more powerful wizards. Perhaps more powerful than most adults, with growing still to do however you would never get close to either Voldemort or Dumbledore. It could well be that once the blocks are removed you will

be the most powerful wizard since Merlin, if not more powerful. It is very hard to know if this is the case though. Aside from the binds on your core, your intelligence has been curbed and you have an eidetic memory that has also been suppressed." Seeing Harry's look of confusion he explained "that means that if you read or hear something once you will remember it. Also you have some metamorph talents that have been blocked. That is the ability to change your appearance at will. It is very difficult to know how talented you are at this without some experimentation on your part. Some metamorphs can change everything about themselves from hair colour and length to height and weight, while others may only be able to change their eye colour. What we are going to do then is take you down to the ritual room and remove the leech as well as all the blocks on you and your abilities. This will make your core unstable for a while as it readjusts to having much more power available to it. Therefore you will not be able to cast any form of magic for at least a month."

Harry had been listening enraptured and responded for the first time by shrugging, "that's ok I can't use magic until I got back to Hogwarts in September anyway. Will I be able to practise the metamorph thing though?"

The healer nodded. "I would suggest you do so. Control can only be achieved through practise. Are you staying somewhere where you can do this in privacy?"

"I am. The people I'm staying with know about me and magic, or at least they do now, so it won't be a problem."

"Ok then well if you're ready Mr Potter we can move this to the ritual room and get started. Once the ritual is done I will give you some potions that will correct all the damage from malnutrition. Between the potions

and removing the leech, your vision should also be corrected."

Harry couldn't believe that all of this was really happening, so much so that he actually did pinch himself while they were walking to the ritual room before laughing at his own stupidity. The ritual room itself was a circular chamber with a stone altar in the centre, surrounded by a multitude of circles filled with various runes. He was directed to the altar and told to lie on it, face up.

"Now Mr Potter this is going to be an unpleasant experience for you, I know you are no stranger to pain but nonetheless you will not enjoy this." Harry simply gritted his teeth. "First we are going to remove the leech because that is the hardest part and once that is done, it will be easier to correct the other issues."

The healer waved forward six other goblins dressed in cloaks from the shadows. They began a dirge like chant that ululated, rising in volume before falling in a repeating cycle. As the chanting reached a fever pitch Harry began to writhe uncontrollably on the altar, by all rights he should have fallen off, but some invisible force was keeping him there. Harry felt as though he was going to split in two, that whatever the goblins were doing was going to tear him apart. The pain was agonising, it was constant rippling waves of fire passing through every muscle, every bone, every single cell of his body. Just when he thought it couldn't get any worse, it felt like a hammer blow hit him directly on his famous scar. His mouth tore open, wordless screams filling the chamber but still the goblins continued their own chanting, the tempo increasing. Had Harry been able to, he would have seen the skin around his scar bubbling as a black mist began seeping out. The mist was collecting inside a ball of pure white light. It wasn't going without a fight though, it was almost as if it knew that destruction was imminent. First it tried to return to its

host, when this failed it made a move towards one of the goblins, intent on survival by any means necessary. Slowly but surely it was being defeated though, shepherded into the orb that was floating over Harry. As each tendril wormed its way into the orb, it flashed briefly as the mist was neutralised.

As the ritual progressed the orb grew brighter with each part of the mist that entered it. By the time the final strand entered, the orb was pulsating with a glare so bright that it hurt your eyes to look anywhere near it. Harry's throat had long since screamed itself hoarse but there was no abatement, to pause now would be disastrous. With a final flash that temporarily blinded everyone in the room and a wave of magic that knocked all the goblins present over, the orb disappeared, leaving Harry free of its cancerous effects. Had he been conscious at this point Harry would have begged for a respite before continuing, however he was currently dead to the world. With only a brief pause for the goblins to ingest whatever the goblin equivalent of a pepper-up potion they were back to it.

The chanting was different this time, more rhythmic, almost tribal. Harry was no longer twisting and writhing but rather was perfectly still as a soft blue light encompassed him, spiralling, caressing. Soon the air began to fill with the crackle of raw, untamed magic as the bindings were forced to relinquish their hold. Harry's new hair abruptly changed colour again to a deep red this time, before turning to purple and lengthening, then turquoise before cycling too fast through colours and lengths to keep track of. The scars all over his thin frame began to wriggle like snakes, slowly burrowing back into the body they adorned. The only one that was unaffected was the remnant of the hole where the basilisk fang pierced his arm in the Chamber of Secrets. His body also began to

lengthen; the height lost thanks to the lack of food in his childhood was beginning to return. Also the thin frame was no longer quite so thin; it was wiry now with a hint of muscle. The ribs had a covering of muscle and fat and were no longer visible. Externally nothing was happening to Harry's eyes but internally was another story. The blue light was repairing the ravages of a childhood spent in the dark and wearing glasses that weren't prescribed, forcing the eyes to strain. As one the goblins finished their chanting, the rituals having healed as much as they were able to. The exhausted boy was still unconscious and would remain so for several hours yet before awakening ready to start a new chapter in his life.

5. Chapter 5

AN - Thank you once again for all the reviews, particularly Othala and ubetiburn who both gave some very good and helpful suggestions. Sorry if I dont use all of them but some have already made their way into the story. One thing I would like to make clear was that when Harry was reading he only read James' first year and some of Lily's, no more than that. Sorry if that was unclear anyway onwards and upwards!

Chapter 5

It was in fact almost four hours before Harry woke again. His muscles rebelled as he tried to stretch the aches and cramp out of them. While he was doing this he took in his surroundings. It seemed as though he was back in the white room he was taken to first. He was all alone. However just as he was making to sit up, the door opened and in marched the goblin healer. Curses foiled again he thought and made to lie back like a good little patient.

The healer must have followed his train of thought "can you get up Mr

Potter?" Harry shrugged slightly before nodding. "Well do so then. I don't want you cluttering up my room." This was unexpected; Harry wasn't sure how to deal with a healer that wanted him to get up as soon as he was ready. This was an alien concept compared to everything he had experienced previously. Deciding that it was what he wanted anyway so why was he complaining he dutifully sat up, wincing a little as his body protested. "Good, now Griphook wants to see you so if you will put your clothes back on and the return to his office when you're ready. You do remember the way don't you?" Harry fully appreciated that 'when you're ready' meant at least ten minutes ago and so he hurriedly got dressed and left the room after thanking the goblin profusely.

The hallways were deserted and so it took very little time at all for Harry to reach Griphook's office, even if he was feeling stiff and walking was still a bit awkward. Knocking once he entered and gratefully sat in the chair he was offered. "You wanted to see me Griphook?"

"I did indeed Harry. I went through the Potter accounts as you requested and it seems I have an answer as to why they are in their current state. Prior to your father taking over the Lordship there were indeed a great number of heirlooms such as jewellery and armour in the vault as well as substantially more in the way of liquid capital. However with your father's ascension in the year after he graduated Hogwarts he began selling off the majority of the contents. This money was then funded into something called the Order of the Phoenix. Do you know what this is Harry?" Harry shook his head. "Well it is an organisation set up by Albus Dumbledore in order to combat Voldemort. In fact it would appear that it was almost entirely bankrolled by your parents, from what I have seen of its account there are very few, if any, other contributors. It is thanks to this that the Potter account is now at perhaps a twentieth of its previous

valuation. Payments have continued every year, large amounts even though Voldemort has disappeared. It seems that there is some form of document that allows Dumbledore to remove, and I quote, 'any amount of money he deems necessary' from the main Potter vault. Your trust vault is unaffected."

"That can't be right, how is this possible the war ended on that bloody Halloween? Is there any way of getting it back? How can Dumbledore be stealing from me?"

Griphook shook his head grimly "I'm sorry Harry while it was incredibly financially irresponsible of your parents to allow access in this way.

There is absolutely no way of reclaiming any of the money, property or heirlooms."

"Wait property?"

Griphook's face took on an even more sour look. "Yes Potter manor was sold to one Elphias Doge. However it burned down shortly after." Harry was about to interrupt again when Griphook held up a hand to forestall him. "In terms of all the heirlooms, Dumbledore either sold them and deposited the gold into the Order account or merely removed the item to the Order account. Again there is no way of reclaiming any of the value or items, as what was done was perfectly legal. However I do find it hard to believe that your parents would be so careless as to allow what has basically amounted to outright plundering of their, and by extension your, accounts. Perhaps they were trusting of the wrong man; it would certainly appear that the so called 'Leader of the Light' is not as light as he would have himself known to be."

The revelations were getting to be too much for Harry, he had to get up and walk around to escape the crushing weight that had settled on him.

"Let me guess, this Elphias Doge is an old friend of Dumbledore's and he

paid a lot less than market value for Potter Manor?" Griphook nodded.

"And this fire, I'm going to guess that it was not very long at all after, perhaps within a week? Then insurance was claimed because of course it was one of the rampaging hordes of Death Eaters that burnt it down?"

This last was said with utmost scorn. "Of course nobody would question it if the great Dumbledore says it's so, even though I'm betting there isn't a single other pureblood manor that was even attacked let alone burnt to the ground by the pureblood bigots that make up the Death Eaters. It wouldn't make sense to do that; it would alienate their prime support.

Am I able to block Dumbledore's access to the vault, or do I have to be an adult?"

"Unfortunately your suspicion is correct; there is nothing you can do until you are emancipated. Dumbledore has tied this up very well and unfortunately for you, perfectly legally."

"And I am guessing again that the only person who can allow me to be emancipated early is Dumbles. How am I doing so far Griphook?"

"I would say that all sounds fairly likely so far, of course nothing can be proved about all his wrongdoings."

"Oh I appreciate that. There is however a solution."

"And what is that may I ask Harry?"

"I'm going to destroy Albus Dumbledore" Harry said in a calm voice. It had the sound of an ominous resolution and Griphook couldn't help but think that this moment would go down in the history books as the moment that changed the wizarding world forever. Of course in these histories there would be crackling lightning behind Harry Potter along with rolling thunder so not everything could be taken entirely seriously.

"Well if that is indeed the case I have a suggestion. In order to make optimum use of your new memory skills and intelligence, it would be

best for you to learn a branch of magic called Occlumency. It is a way of organising your memories into a more efficient system allowing far easier access and better recall. With your memory and intelligence unlocked, this is the best way of easing the transition. In fact if you don't do it, you could find yourself getting overwhelmed by your own mind. I'm willing to bet that you already have the beginnings of a headache already from just the increased speed at which you can think."

Harry just nodded "it is a little bit overwhelming. Will I be able to pick these books up in Flourish and Bott's or are they more specialised?"

"There will be some books in that shop but not a very wide selection. However it should be enough for you to rein your mind in until you can pick up some more in depth books."

Again Harry nodded, "I have another question though. Is there such a thing in the magical world as a public library, you know one where you borrow the books for a specific length of time and then return them?"

"In the magical world there isn't such a thing, that would allow knowledge to fall into just anyone's hands and the purebloods don't want that. However I believe that some enterprising muggleborns created a magical wing in the British Library right here in London. I don't know how good a collection it is, as for obvious reasons I have not visited but it is better than nothing."

"Indeed it is, I think I will be spending a lot of time there over the summer. How do I get in to the magical part of the library?"

"I'm not sure but I would guess that there would be signs that are charmed so muggles can't see them, much like the Leaky Cauldron is."

Before Harry could respond in any way there was a knock at the door and a harassed looking goblin walked in holding three vials of different coloured liquids. Griphook took them from the underling without a word

and dismissed him with a gesture. "These are your potions that will correct the remaining damage from your relative's treatment of you. Take the blue one first thing in the morning and the red and green ones just before you go to bed. The vials are charmed to be unbreakable and will refill on their own for the required 30 doses. After those 30 doses you should be back to your optimum condition. If there is nothing else Harry?"

"That's more than enough, thank you for all your help Griphook and could you pass on my thanks to all those who participated in the rituals I would be most obliged." Harry took the vials from Griphook before giving him a small bow and made his farewells, leaving the office and bank.

As his headache was only getting worse, Harry decided that the Occlumency books were his number one priority and to that end he weaved through the other shoppers, towards Flourish and Bott's. The shop itself was relatively empty for which Harry was eternally grateful because it meant he had pretty much free reign to locate the books required and browse a few others that looked interesting. He had already decided that apart from the Occlumency ones, he wasn't going to buy any books before he was able to go and see the selection at the British Library.

It took him longer than he felt it should have to find the books he was after and when he did, he was a little disappointed with the lack of choice. In fact there were only three books. Remembering how much importance Griphook had placed on learning this branch of magic he decided to purchase all three. It couldn't hurt to get as wide a range of views about the subject as possible, besides it had sounded incredibly interesting and useful when Griphook had mentioned it. He did idly

wonder whether he would be able to do a 'Hermione' now and recall specific lines of the text on demand, the goblins seemed to think so. She would be pleased; she was always nagging him to put more effort in with his studies. Perhaps he would even read Hogwarts a History so she wouldn't feel like the only one. Definitely something to look into once he could get to the library.

The teller at the desk was obviously bored with his job and didn't even look at Harry when he asked for the money for his purchases. Harry tucked the books under his arm and walked calmly from the shop intent on making it back to the hotel and getting started on reading them in order to stop his infernal headache. By the time he reached the front desk he was in no mood to deal with questions from Rach and her mother so he tore past them on the front desk, saying that he was fine and he would explain everything tomorrow.

It was only once he reached his room that he realised this had been incredibly rude and unfair on two of the only people to actually care about his well-being. However he felt it was too late to go back now, he would just apologise profusely tomorrow and explain. Priorities first though and that meant reading the books Occlumency. He examined all three titles and decided which one was going to be the best introduction. Not really knowing he ended up with the tried and tested method of picking randomly and hoping for the best. His head was now almost splitting but despite this he still found that he could read and understand the book far quicker than he had ever been able to before. Previously it would not have been uncommon for him to have to read a paragraph three or even four times before it sunk in and even then he could turn the page and completely forget whatever was on the prior page. Now however the words were seamlessly flowing into his mind and lodging

there quite comfortably.

After finishing the first chapter in record time he had a basic grasp of how to begin to meditate in order to find his inner mindscape. This was the area inside his own mind in which his consciousness was stored, everything that made him, him. This involved taking deep calming breaths, withdrawing and blocking out all external influences, focusing internally. This was no easy task with his head throbbing perpetually but with a little difficulty he eventually managed it. He knew the next step was to create a mental construct in order to house all of his memories. It had to be somewhere familiar, somewhere he felt safe. In fact he needed to be more than familiar with it; he needed to know it intimately, inside and out. Harry's first thought was Hogwarts however he dismissed this quickly as after all that had happened there, safe wasn't exactly how he would describe it. The solution came to him in a flash, it was simple he berated himself for not thinking of it before. It was in fact already a construct within his mind, it was his dream home. He had created it during the long and lonely nights in his cupboard, somewhere he could escape from the pain, the suffering and the anguish.

Unlike most dream homes it was not a gigantic mansion with endless grounds; it was a simple two storey cottage with a comfortable sized garden. Rather than being large and ostentatious, it had a quiet elegance about it that immediately showed to any onlookers that it was the home of a wealthy person, but one who appreciated that understatement was better than trashy and flashy. Harry had from a very young age been exposed to his Aunt and Uncle's manoeuvrings towards being considered rich and powerful. Everything they both did was concentrated on status and the perception of others. Because of this, when the property market started to boom and there was an explosion of property programmes on

the television, Petunia in particular became obsessed with them. Not only did she religiously watch every programme she could, she also subscribed to every magazine she could, leaving them conspicuously on the coffee table so that any visitor would be sure to see them. Thanks to this Harry had every opportunity to read them and absorb all their tips, and so he was actually very in tune with all of the latest trends in property fashion. At first he did it merely as an escape from the reality of his life but as the years passed he found he quite enjoyed the whole process and he took great pleasure in retreating to his mental sanctuary to plan every room right down to the smallest detail.

All of this made his dream house perfect for the purpose, he knew it perfectly, of course he did having created every aspect of it, and more importantly its very reason for existence was to provide safety and comfort for him. Satisfied with his decision, Harry pulled the house and its garden into his mindscape and bedded it in, laying strong foundations. This was as far as he had got in the book so it was time to return to reality and continue reading. The first thing that struck him was that his headache had diminished to a dull ache rather than the all-encompassing pain it had been before, so far so good he thought. The next realisation hit him like a train when he started reading and found he was reading whole pages in seconds. He pushed the book away from him in shock and a tiny bit of fear. This couldn't be possible, it just couldn't. On closer inspection it appeared it very much could be possible, Harry could recall every last word on a page that he had read in less than four seconds. Somewhere in the back of his mind a line crept up from a programme he had watched on television once. Something about the conscious mind being able to process sixteen pieces of information a second while unconscious could process eleven million. If he remembered correctly the

character that had said that could read something crazy like twenty thousand words a minute so maybe it wasn't quite as scary as he thought it was. The rational part of his mind was telling him that he was taking comfort from a fictional programme about what was possible and this was stupid but this was quashed by the rest of him that recalled the programme being almost entirely based on scientific facts. Shutting off this mental debate before it got truly started Harry decided to continue his study of the Occlumency books.

He had finished the first book and was well on his way to finishing the second when he yawned widely. Looking at the clock and realising it was after midnight, Harry wisely decided to get some sleep and so he downed his two potions, stripped and got into bed. Besides according to what he had read so far he could continue working on his mental construct and organising all his memories within during his sleep. From what he understood he needed to create a system within to store and categorise his memories. It was an incredibly personal choice and varied from person to person but Harry had chosen to arrange his in the form of books that were kept in the library on the second floor, looking out over the garden. There would be books for his subjects, books for good memories, books about specific people and of course books for the bad memories. These would be tucked away on the top shelf for the time being. He had of course read about the ability to create mental defences so that nobody but him could access his memories but this did not seem to be a huge priority at the moment, arranging his mind into a well oiled machine was the first step. He knew for anything that if the first step was not done properly then anything added later would not be as effective. Take a house for example, no matter how wonderful and strong the walls were, if the foundations were weak then the walls would crumble

eventually. However on a strong base, even weak walls would stand a much better chance against whatever could be thrown at them, be that the elements or simply the ravages of time. It was with this thought in mind that Harry went to sleep, determined that he would base his life on strong foundations from now on.

6. Chapter 6

AN - Hello once again this chapter has been giving me a lot of trouble, I've written and rewritten the thing but I'm still not really happy with it. So to make up for it I thought I would upload 2 chapters instead to distract you all! Thanks again - read, review, enjoy.

Chapter 6

Upon waking Harry felt a sense of peace washing over him, caressing his mind. All trace of yesterday's headache was gone for which Harry was extremely grateful. He grimaced slightly as his stomach rumbled loudly, he had been so caught up in his Occlumency work he had forgotten to eat again, good thing the Dursley's had taught him to survive on very little food he thought ruefully. The flickering clock in his room read just after 9am as he downed his morning potion. Harry caught sight of himself in the mirror and admired his new, scar-free body. In his haste to quell the pain in his head he had almost forgotten that he was a healed man now. Tears threatened to leak from his eyes as he ran his hands over the now smooth areas of his back that he could reach. The scars had been there so long, he could barely remember a time when he had been able to do this and not feel roughness. He examined every inch of his body that was exposed, he was still skinny but there were no longer ribs poking out and he had started to gain muscle tone. From his body type, Harry assumed he was never going to be one of those bulky, muscle bound giants unless

he was in the gym all day every day and he certainly had no desire for that. However he did think that the effects of the ritual and the potions regimen should allow him to gain a pretty lithe and muscled body thanks to his years of manual labour and now Quidditch training. Progress was already being made on that and the world was more and more in focus with his glasses on. At first he had thought this incredibly strange as the healer had said that the ritual and potions should improve his vision. However he had now worked out that his glasses prescription had been so bad that the improvements were taking him towards his prescription, before hopefully healing his eyes completely.

He pushed aside his hair to check on the most famous of his scars and his mouth dropped open in shock. It was scabbing over as if it was a fresh cut that was healing. Maybe this meant that it would finally heal fully so he wouldn't have to walk round with people gawping at his forehead all the time. That would certainly be a relief.

He pulled on the clothes from Rach for the third day in a row scowling at the thought, realising that he really needed to go shopping. Seeing as he had no clue about things like that he immediately wondered whether Rach would be interested in showing him some good places to go.

Probably not he thought, why would a 17 year old girl want to hang out with an almost 13 year old boy? Well it was worth a try even if it didn't work out. To that end he wandered the now familiar corridor towards the main reception, hoping she would be around.

It wasn't Rachael but rather Julie at the front desk when he arrived. "Hi Julie sorry I was so abrupt with you both yesterday. Is Rach around?"

"She is but don't think you're getting away that easily, you promised us answers today and I am going to hold you to it." Julie's voice was filled with concern but with an underlying tone of steel, she was not going to

be deterred in this matter.

Harry sighed good-naturedly "ok if you find her I'll explain to you both, I'd rather not do it any more times than I have to."

In short order they were all sat in the kitchen with cups of tea, the bottle of whiskey, unopened, but within arm's reach of Julie should it be required. Harry quirked an eyebrow at the bottle.

"Hush you, what you said yesterday nearly finished me off, I don't want to have anything happen again without appropriate medicine in reach."

Harry laughed at this "you should be alright today Julie, there were no major revelations this time. In fact there were a few things I almost expected." And so after gentle prompting from both ladies he began. He explained all about the ritual, the leech and its effects. This elicited gasps and Julie's hand twitching towards the bottle. However they calmed once he had confirmed that all trace of it and the blocks had gone.

Dumbledore and his legalised plundering came next. Calming them down this time took rather longer than previous, as Harry explained "sure they were technically my things but I look at it this way it gives me the motivation to go out and make something for myself, I can't just sit back on previous members of my family's accomplishments. This way when I become one of the most successful people in the world, I'll know that I earned it, nobody else and not for having my parents die while I survived. No it will be from my talent and the sweat off my back. Plus it will make my destruction of the meddling old thief all the more sweet."

Finally Harry explained his new mental abilities and why he had run from them both last night rather than explain what had happened.

This all done he leant back in his chair waiting for the onslaught of questions. It never came. This confused Harry slightly; in his experience anything like this would have bred hundreds, if not thousands, of

questions from Hermione and Ron. "Umm do you guys have any questions?"

It was Rachael who answered "no not really, all seemed pretty clear to me. So long as all the medical issues are all sorted now, they are all sorted aren't they Harry?" Her voice promised a lengthy 'discussion' if he had been anything less than truthful. He smiled slightly.

Wordlessly he stood up and removed his shirt to present his cleared back, hearing gasps from over his shoulder. "Magic really is a wonderful thing" said Julie "really makes me wish I had been born with it. It's so frustrating to live on the outside of it, knowing such wonders are possible and that your family can do them but by some quirk of nature you can't."

This gave Harry pause for thought, was this how it was for Petunia? Was she jealous of her sister? Is that why she treated him the way she had?

Well he would never know now, he certainly had no intention of ever seeing the Dursley's again. "I'm sorry Julie it must be hard for you."

"It is" she replied "but you get used to it, to be honest most of the time you forget about it, it's only very rarely that it comes up in my life."

Harry was feeling decidedly uncomfortable now "you know I can find another place..."

"Of course not dear, don't be silly" she admonished him lightly.

"Honestly it's no bother."

"You will do no such thing young man. I'd never hear the end of it from my daughter but more importantly we like having you here. It's good for me; I have to learn to accept that magic is something I will never be able to do. I should have got over this long ago." Her tone of voice brooked no argument and her eyes were flashing at Harry, daring him to continue arguing.

"Well in that case would it be possible for me to reserve my room for the

rest of the summer? I'll need to leave on the morning of the 1st of September so from now until then, is that ok?"

Julie's face broke into a rather large smile, only eclipsed by that on the face of her daughter. "I think that would be great, we would love to have you."

"Excellent that's me sorted for the rest of the summer, definitely a weight off my mind." He abruptly changed tack as he remembered why he had come downstairs in the first place. "Hey Rach you know I can't keep stealing your clothes and as all mine are about three times too big I was wondering if you would maybe want to, I dunno, go shopping with me? I mean I know nothing about clothes and where to get them so I could use your help. Course I'm sure your busy and everything..."

"Harry, you had me at shopping." Seeing his look of incomprehension she sighed, "It's from a film, never mind. I really am going to have to train you in pop culture; we are making progress with music, the important question is what do you know about comics?"

"Umm not much, I know of Batman but that's about it."

Rachael's jaw fell at this latest news "well we can't have that, but we will deal with that later. Come on! It's shopping time" she shouted this last part as she grabbed Harry's arm dragging him from the room.

Harry had just enough time to see Julie's amused grin before he was forcibly removed from the kitchen. "What the bloody hell have I let myself in for" he muttered.

"The best day of your life" she called over her shoulder, he rolled his eyes.

As it turned out it wasn't exactly the best day of Harry's life, although he did enjoy it. No the day achieved a different title, that of the most tiring day of his life. Who knew shopping would be such an epic task? Harry

certainly didn't. When they finally returned to the hotel lobby after the marathon session that had lasted a whole day, Harry probably had enough clothes to last him for the rest of his life. Throughout the day Rachael had helped him to create his own style of dress based on what he liked. Of course some of the things that he had liked he was told in no uncertain terms that he was very wrong and he didn't in fact like the item. Harry soon found in these instances it was best to just agree, on several occasions he almost slipped into the stock phrase that most men need to learn for these situations 'yes dear, whatever you think is right'. Rachael seemed to sense this and had remarked on more than one occasion that he was becoming very well trained, Harry wasn't entirely sure whether this was a compliment or not but decided to hope for the best and guess it was good. Harry's new style was a bit of an odd mix between similar things to those he had borrowed from Rach and a surfer/skater type set of clothes. So he had bought a lot of band t-shirts, mostly heavy metal bands, some more brightly coloured t-shirts from surf brands, several pairs of jeans, two different pairs of Converse and some skater shoes. His favourite purchase was a toss up between one of the several pairs of rather loud and brightly coloured board shorts he had bought or the leather jacket that had set him back quite a lot but he couldn't help but be drawn to.

Harry dumped all of the bags on the floor and flopped onto the bed, exhausted. The fact that he would unpack tomorrow was his last thought before he fell completely asleep.

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

The next day became the first incarnation of Harry's new routine. He awoke, downed his potion, had a shower in the communal bathroom

along the corridor, dressed, wandered downstairs, said good morning to whoever was on the front desk and had breakfast at a little cafe three doors down on the other side of the street. It was a small, simple place but they did excellent food and the staff were friendly and happy to help. Breakfast done, Harry would return to his room and start to read. Today's task was to finish the Occlumency books and get started on his mental defences. This was completed successfully by mid afternoon, his mind now protected from most intrusions, at least he hoped so, there was no real way of testing it. He would like to see anyone try and get through the layers of traps, blind alleys, fake walls and magical guardians he had installed though; it would be an entertaining experience.

The important job completed Harry was free to return to his parent's journals. Part of him knew that he should be disappointed in his parents for allowing Dumbledore's whole scale destruction of their legacy but he couldn't, in his heart he believed that Dumbledore had manipulated them, just as he had Harry. The journals certainly contained some eye openers, who would have thought from his treatment, Snape had been one of his mother's closest friends. Snape had never given any indication that he held Harry in anything less than utter contempt so what had happened to make him this way? Sure his father had pranked Snape a lot but these had been retaliations for the bullying Snape had done to those weaker than him. Harry was pleased that his father had struck back at bullies rather than becoming one himself as it would have been very possible for him to be.

The answer to this mystery came during his parents fifth year, he read all about how his mother had tried to save Snape after his father had caught him in a prank and been thanked by being called a mudblood. Harry didn't initially know what this was but his mother had explained it in her

journal and Harry felt a rage at Snape as Lily's hurt and pain spilled out of the pages. It was after this that Lily started to become closer to James before they eventually started going out at the beginning of seventh year. He had to laugh at the love struck ramblings about how great Lily would be as a girlfriend that James had wrote all the way from first year until he eventually got together with her. It then changed to how great it was to have as a girlfriend. It was abundantly clear that his parents loved each other very much, what was also interesting is that both of his parents were incredibly good students. James was not the textbook definition of a great student of course, he put in hardly any effort but he was blessed with a natural talent that allowed him to understand the work very quickly, particularly the practical work. James' written work was apparently not quite to as high of a standard but this was more than made up for by Lily's written work. Just reading at the amount of effort she put in on background reading was more than equal to Hermione's. His father could when he was motivated, for example his work on becoming an Animagus with his friends. This was obviously not a simple process judging from the amount of work mentioned in the journals. It was after finishing all the journals for the Hogwarts years that Harry decided one of the best ways of honouring his parents would to be the best student he could possibly be. He was sure that had his mother lived, she would not have been satisfied with the results he was currently achieving. He also realised that his option choices were not the best for any future. Lily had spoken fondly about Ancient Runes classes and also Arithmancy while James had enjoyed Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. Harry was currently down to do COMC and divination and so he resolved to owl Professor McGonagall to see if she would change his Divination to Ancient Runes and Arithmancy. He had no interest in doing

Muggle Studies as, judging from prior experience of wizarding knowledge of muggles, it was likely to be woefully out of date and a waste of time to someone raised in the muggle world. It took hardly any time to write out the short note but when Harry looked to Hedwig's cage he found she wasn't there, having not returned from the nights hunting. However at that very moment a large white object appeared through the window, looking at Harry expectantly.

"Well aren't you a clever girl, you know it's almost like you could sense that I needed you." Hedwig just cocked her head at him and held out her leg for him to attach the note. Harry laughed, gave her feathers a quick rub and tied it on. The Snowy Owl hooted gratefully for the scratch, took a quick drink of water from her bowl and flew out of the window into the early night sky.

Remembering his promise from the other day to build strong foundations first, Harry realised that if he was going to do the best that he could do he needed to go over his books from the first two years so that he could be sure he understood everything in them before getting started on the next years work. It was this therefore that dominated his next day as he reread, or in some cases read for the first time, his textbooks from the previous years. He was only interrupted by a rather strange letter from Professor McGonagall.

Dear Mr Potter

I have received your letter about your wish to change your electives and confirm that this will indeed be permitted. I'm glad to see that you are going to take your studies more seriously and I look forward to seeing the results in my own class, your parents would be most proud of you.

On a more personal note I wish to enquire as to your whereabouts as the Headmaster has been trying to contact you for almost a week now. All his

attempts at sending letters and locating you have failed as the owls simply fly around confused for brief period before returning to Hogwarts. I know he wishes you to return to Privet Drive however I feel that so long as you are prudent it would be better for you remain away from them. I know you do not enjoy your time with them and as for safety if the Headmaster cannot find you then it seems just as likely that he-who-must-not-be-named will be similarly rebuffed. However I will again caution you to be sensible wherever you are and do not take any risks. I would very much like to know where you are but should you choose not to let me know I will trust in your judgement. I am putting a lot of faith in you Mr Potter as I feel you have earned it over the last two years but do not make me regret my decision. If you need any help do not hesitate to send me an owl.

Yours sincerely

Professor McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress, Hogwarts.

Harry sat for a long time digesting this letter. What was it that made it so important for Harry to return to the Dursley's? According to Dumbledore it was the blood wards, the things that protected him at Privet Drive, but surely they should have protected him from the Dursleys as well. Why didn't they? Protection for one person against anything that seeks to harm them is indiscriminate. If they were unable to protect him from his 'family' then who's to say they would protect him from Voldemort or any of his followers. There had to be some other reason for it but for life of him Harry could not see it. After the discoveries at Gringott's Harry now appreciated that not everything Dumbles did in relation to him was for Harry's benefit. He tried to look at it logically, what does Dumbledore stand to gain from having me at Privet Drive? Well if I'm there I have no access to the wizarding world that is not allowed by him. This means no

access to Gringott's and therefore no discovery of his theft from me. Is that all though? Surely I would have found out about it all when I hit seventeen anyway so he would have needed another plan at that time. Unless of course I wasn't supposed to last that long. Harry laughed to himself at this. But then he thought about it for a moment and the laughter died on his lips. Could that be the endgame for Dumbledore? A miserable childhood for ten years until the wise old grandfather swoops in and rescues me in order to introduce me to a whole new world. A world that I am famous in. A world where I am liked and treated well for the most part. A completely opposite world to the muggle world.

The whole setup seems to be working towards making me feel indebted to him, even the supposedly anonymous return of my father's invisibility cloak, but why? Ok wait back up start again. I feel in debt to Dumbledore so what do I do? Harry paused here, thinking, well I guess I do whatever he wants, that feeling of obedience that came from the Dursley's where anything and everything was punished would help here. So it's a case of making me do whatever he says, possibly leading to me dying before seventeen. And why would he want to remove me young? Well the normal reason for something like that would be that I was some kind of threat, either to him or his way of life. Would I be a threat? Well yes actually thinking about it, Dumbledore's fame and power is based around his defeat of Grindelwald. As Voldemort is obviously after me for some reason it stands to reason that I am going to be the one expected to beat him. Harry briefly wondered why this would be but dismissed the thought for the moment. Assuming I did defeat Voldemort I would have the same level of fame as Dumbledore as the vanquisher of a dark wizard but mine would be the more recent, within the majority of the population's living memory. The public are a fickle bunch and so Dumbledore's popularity

would be transferred for the most part to me. Could it really be as simple as that? A popularity contest? No there must be more, popularity equals power, combine that with my apparent status as a Lord of an Ancient and Noble House and I would be a major threat to Dumbles retaining his own power.

But wait I was also blocked magically, could that have been him as well? Harry snorted, who else could it have been, its unlikely to have been my parents and nobody else has had access to me for any length of time.

That bastard must have done it right after my parents were killed. We live in a society where magical power is a determinant of social standing along with parentage, people with more magical power are treated better than those that don't, its almost like an unconscious hierarchy. Those that are more powerful are listened to more freely and their suggestions taken more seriously by everyone else.

So that's it I'm a threat to Dumbledore for three separate reasons, one I am likely to be the figurehead of the defeat of Voldemort if not the actual defeater, two I am a high status Lord and three I have a lot of magical power. Combine all these together and I would likely be the figurehead of the English magical world for decades if not longer. I wonder how that translates to the rest of the world? Harry made a mental note to do some research on other countries to see how they fit into the magical world.

Now the question is what I do with this idea, while I do have some facts, the rest is supposition. First I need to keep away from Dumbles as much as possible, even if he is not responsible for all of this he has definitely stolen from me and that is enough for me to cut him out. Secondly I need to find out exactly who placed the blocks on me and who suppressed my parent's wills. And finally I need to train myself so that I can take advantage of the opportunity that my status and power presents me,

perhaps I can even drag this world kicking and screaming into the 21st Century.

Harry then redoubled his efforts at studying and so it took him only another day before he had finished, including his parents notes on the various subjects they had been interested in. He didn't understand everything they would write about but that was understandable as they were often discussing and analysing sixth or seventh year spells if not higher. However he did understand the concepts they were talking about. He had already got the impression that they were both smart individuals, now he knew that his parents were both geniuses. His mother in particular had been incredible; her Ancient Runes journal was an absolute goldmine of possibilities. It appeared that before she had been killed she was working on a way to use runes to power muggle items and allow them to work in magic rich environments like Hogwarts or even the average wizard's house. Harry knew that any electronic item that was around magic, even background magic, would eventually fry, its circuits exploding. The possibilities for anyone who could actually manage to make muggle electronics work in the magical world were huge; he immediately resolved to pursue this as a tribute to his mother. Of course the massive potential for commercial gains was a slight motivation as well.

Harry pondered how he should reply to McGonagall, if at all. Should he tell her everything? No, too much chance of Dumbledore getting hold of the information somehow. He did feel that he should tell her something, she could be a very useful ally to help him gain total control over his life. She had made the first step in trusting him, in fact Harry realised she was the first adult to do anything even remotely like that. He decided that would write back but he would not reveal everything.

Dear Professor McGonagall

I apologise for running away as I did however I am safe, far safer than I have ever been before. I am very grateful that you trust my judgement. That really means a lot to me however I am not going to tell you where I am. While I trust you, I unfortunately do not trust others around you and I am afraid that they may not have intentions for me as good as your own.

I'm afraid I have no idea why none of his letters have reached me. I have not received any letters at all since I left the Dursleys apart from your own, perhaps only Hedwig is able to find me, I don't know. If you have any thoughts on the matter I would like to hear them.

I was also wondering if it would be possible for me to get a copy of the list for the third and fourth year books early. I would like to read ahead and push myself as much as possible over the summer. Don't worry I am not doing any practical magic; I simply want to get a good handle on the theory before I get to Hogwarts. I would also very much appreciate if you had any suggestions for other books that were not on the list of required books but would help me understand each subject in greater depth.

Many thanks

Harry Potter

He looked over the letter satisfied that it fit his purpose. It told her a little information as well as seeding a few small doubts. The careful flattery was a rather good touch as well if he said so himself and the book list alone would be a valuable addition to him even if she didn't mention any additional books. He gave it to Hedwig and sent her on her way again.

Judging by the previous reply, he would get her return letter during the night so having completed his nightly routine including potions, he went to sleep. Hoping that he would be able to go to the British Library the

next day and that its selection would be large.

As it turned out he was correct, McGonagall had indeed replied during the night. She had included the lists all the way up to seventh year with a note "to push yourself as much you can, Lily was an exceptional student and James could have been if he had put more effort in. He was merely an excellent student." The rest of the letter contained a few basic ideas as to why the owls were being diverted but none of them seemed to be very likely. There was also a long list of books for each subject, including his electives, which were not on the booklists. Harry smirked as he saw that Transfiguration had almost double the number of books as the others. Before unlocking his mind he would have struggled to read all of those books in ten years, now he felt confident that he could read these and many more before he returned to Hogwarts. There was however one more part of the letter that contained important information.

"I do not know if you are aware but the wizarding world is currently in turmoil over the escape of one Sirius Black from Azkaban prison. Again you may not be aware of this and I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news but I feel it is right that you know. He was a close friend of your parents throughout school, so much so that he was named your godfather, and when they went into hiding it was Sirius that was given the key to keeping them safe. You see Dumbledore cast a charm called the Fidelius which makes one person the Keeper of a secret. They, and only they, may reveal the secret to others. The secret in this case was the location that parents were hiding. As is obvious, Sirius revealed the secret to his master and so he-who-must-not-be-named came to Godric's Hollow to kill you. Sirius was later confronted by another of your parent's friends, Peter Pettigrew, however Sirius killed him and twelve muggles, landing him in Azkaban. Nobody knows how he escaped but I tell you this not so that you will go out looking for him but so that you are aware

of the dangers. Stay safe Harry."

Harry couldn't believe it, he felt numb all over. How could Padfoot have done that, after all they went through as the Marauders? There must have been some mistake. Harry rushed to his father's post-Hogwarts journal and flicked towards the end, scanning faster than he had ever done before. Somewhere it must say what the hell happened because it couldn't have been Padfoot, it just couldn't have been.

After a frantic three minutes of reading Harry spotted something that made his heart leap for joy. His parents hadn't used Padfoot; they had used him as a decoy and used Wormtail thinking that nobody would suspect him. Harry was delighted, until he thought of the implications; Sirius had spent twelve years in Azkaban even though he was innocent. That wasn't possible McGonagall said that Dumbledore had cast the spell so he must have known who the secret keeper was why hadn't he done something? Harry slapped himself on the forehead and berated himself for being an idiot. Of course he knew, he deliberately let Sirius rot in that hellhole because otherwise Harry would have been able to live with him, free of the Dursleys. If he had been free of the Dursleys then he would not have been downtrodden and looking for a saviour and Dumbles plan would not have worked.

This was the final straw for Harry, he had disliked Dumbledore before for his theft and manoeuvrings, but now he hated him. He snatched a quill and parchment and tore through a letter explaining what he had found in his parent's journals, how Sirius had to be innocent and it was Pettigrew who was secret keeper not Sirius. On a spur of inspiration he asked if McGonagall had been at the trial. He had a sneaky suspicion that Dumbledore under his guise as 'Leader of the Light' would have rushed through a vague trial or not given Sirius one at all in order to ensure an

innocent man's imprisonment. Perhaps this would make her dig a little deeper in the whole affair and get over the innate trust in Dumbles that the whole country seemed to be cursed with. He wouldn't hold his breath for that though and sent the letter off with Hedwig once more.

8. Chapter 8

AN - Hi all been a bit of a wait sorry about that, I was feeling nostalgic and so I bought a cheap ps2 and a few games so that has dominated quite a lot of my time. My bad, I'll get back to writing now I've got that out my system a bit. Here's the latest chapter for you as usual read, review, enjoy. As was pointed out to me by a reviewer I did say at the beginning that this was set in the present day rather than canon time period but in case that wasn't clear or you forgot I'll say it again now. Cheers for pointing that out to me tumshie, I hadn't thought of it.

Chapter 8

With the letter sent off to McGonagall there was nothing he could do to help Sirius other than to wait for a reply. Well actually there was, he could see what he could find out about the magical legal system, if there was one that wasn't whoever bribes the most wins. To do this he needed the British Library, and so praying that it would have what he needed he took the now empty trunk that he had taken from the vault and shrunk it so he would have somewhere to put any books he would borrow. Then he began to walk the short distance through central London. His clothes and hair ensured that he was given a wide berth, not that his clothes were that shocking today, a Pantera tshirt and a pair of jeans with his skater shoes, admittedly his hair was bright green but still. He was going to wear his leather jacket but it was too lovely a day for that and he couldn't justify looking cool over being at a comfortable temperature,

besides in his opinion he looked pretty cool anyway. This was proved to him when a couple girls who looked about fifteen smiled at him and giggled, from out of nowhere he flashed a smile back and was pleasantly surprised when the giggling renewed. That was a nice stroke to the ego, he thought.

It took less than 30 minutes to reach the front of the Library, it was hard to miss the massive red building. The inside was even more impressive than the exterior, filled with masses of computers and rack after rack of books on floor to ceiling shelves. Harry looked around, mouth open wide at what he could see. It was a hive of activity, how on earth was he going to find his way around here?

This was actually less challenging than he had first believed, the library was well signposted and just as Griphook had suggested, there was a section marked for magical books. The signposts led to a rather ramshackle door set into a wall that was being ignored by everyone else. Harry walked up to it confidently and opened it to reveal an absolute treasure trove. It was huge, there must have been thousands of books here maybe even as many as the Hogwarts library. He walked up to the desk where a white haired witch was snoring lightly. Looking around for a polite way to wake her other than shouting at her, he spotted a small bell and rang it. The witch jumped up, looking around frantically.

"Merlin's beard young man you gave me quite a shock there. You here for some books?" Harry nodded that he was indeed. "Well you have come to the right place then" she said chuckling. "Don't get many people in here, that's why I was sleeping. Sorry about that. Now what are you after, anything in particular?"

"Yes I was wondering if you had some books on Wizarding Politics and Law?"

She looked him up and down appraisingly "what's your name young man?"

Casting around desperately for inspiration Harry mumbled, before a name hit him "Darrell. Darrell Abbott." On one hand Harry was quite pleased with himself for thinking of a name relatively quickly but on the other he was furious with himself for not anticipating that he would need a false name.

"How old are you dearie? It's just we don't get many children come in here, let alone for books like that."

"I'm 14" he lied, "I'm interested in this stuff because my dad is a lawyer and I want to know about what he does and surprise him with what I know." He smiled at her winningly.

Despite his pauses, the woman seemed to accept that this was indeed his name and his reason for wanting the books and so directed him to a section of the book cases that held some very thick and ancient looking tomes.

"Was there any particular one you would recommend as a good introduction?"

The woman looked thoughtful for a couple of seconds before pulling a book from the middle shelf and handing it to Harry "this book by Teague is probably the best, it might be a little complicated though will that be ok?"

Harry waved off her concerns politely and took the book. "Is it possible for me to borrow books and then return them at a later date?"

"Of course it is dear. Do you have a library card?" Harry shook his head negatively. "Not to worry we can soon sort that out. Now all I need is a few details from you and we can set one up for you."

Harry obliged with a set of invented details that were fairly close to the

truth but not entirely accurate. "Is there a limit to how many books I can take and how long I can keep them for?"

"You may take a maximum of 12 books for a period of three weeks. Once you return those books you may take a different 12 for another three weeks and so on."

"And will this allow me to take books from the muggle side of the library as well?"

"Indeed it will, you may take another 12 books from the other side at the same time as magical books, again for a three week period."

Once more Harry's eyes lit up at this, he would be able to get started on understanding muggle electronics so that he could finish his mother's work. He decided to get muggle books first, then bring them into the magical section so that he could unshrink his trunk and put them in, away from muggle eyes. The librarian was quite happy to hold onto the law book while he went to satisfy his muggle book needs.

This ended up taking longer than he would have hoped as there was just so much choice on what to get. If the magical library was large, it was utterly dwarfed by the muggle side, with millions of books just waiting to be read. Harry didn't know how long it would take him to read the 12 books he had picked as some were quite technical but he thought that by the time they were finished he would understand the physics of electricity and the way electronics work. He had also picked up two books on programming for computers, figuring that a laptop that worked around magic would be very useful indeed and the ability to design his own programmes for it would be invaluable.

Carrying all the books was difficult but eventually Harry made it back to the magical section, put the books into his trunk and shrunk it again.

After getting the law book from the librarian he wandered into the maze

of shelves and began his search amongst the magical section. This was rather quicker than the muggle area because Harry was currently more interested in only one section rather than many. That's not to say that he wasn't interested in many topics, nothing could be further from the truth, however he had his priorities at the moment, namely Sirius and getting him cleared. The only thing that distracted him from this goal was a book on Metemorphagi that he simply couldn't pass up on.

He returned to the librarian, he learnt her name was Sheila, and presented his selection for her to scan with her wand. Harry looked on with interest as each book's information appeared in a large leather bound ledger on the desk after every time she scanned it with a date in three weeks time next to the title and his name in the borrower column. Thanking her gratefully he put the books into his trunk, shrunk it and returned home. He almost stumbled at this, when did he begin thinking of the hotel as home? He had only been there for a week. Shows how highly I viewed Privet Drive doesn't it, he thought disdainfully.

Adding lunch to his routine was simple as there was a wonderful pub that served food on the route back from the library. It was a matter of seconds to walk into the bathroom and remove one of the muggle books from his trunk so that he could read while his order was being cooked. He was always careful to read muggle books in the pub and not any of the magical ones, today's was a textbook about physics.

Returning to the hotel he would spend a few minutes talking to either Julie or Rachael before cocooning himself in his room, reading as fast as he could, absorbing everything. If he had thought he was reading fast when he first started after unlocking his mind, it had nothing on him now. He powered through all 24 of the books by the next morning.

Admittedly he had barely stopped at any stage, including toilet breaks

and eating breakfast at the cafe over the road but even so this was an impressive feat.

And so from that day on that was how his days would go. Wake up, breakfast at the cafe, read some more, walk to the library, drop off books, pick up new ones, large lunch at the pub, yet more reading until he would eventually go to sleep and then repeat. Harry had found that eating a good sized breakfast and then a large lunch at around 2-2.30pm was more than enough to see him through the day comfortably.

Harry had begun to practise his metamorph abilities but it was hard going. The books weren't really much help as it was a non metamorphagus that had written most of them and the one he did find by a metamorph was rather vague, the instructions boiled down to one word, concentrate. However Harry persevered and could now change his eye colour, hair colour and length. Therefore he had decided that the hairstyle he wanted was a fairly long one, coming down to his shoulders. This length somehow managed to overcome the standard Potter trait of untameable hair, it was now fairly straight but not perfectly so. Harry quite liked it, there was also the added benefit that he could change the colour back to black as his famous scar was almost fully healed. At the moment it was still visible slightly and so Harry wore a bandana which covered his forehead but allowed his hair to fall down his neck out of the back. When he wore his leather jacket Harry thought he looked a bit like one of the motorbike riders he had seen riding through London sometimes. All he needed was some tattoos to complete the look, he thought, maybe some time in the future he would get some.

It had been nearly four days before Hedwig returned once more with McGonagall's reply. Harry had been starting to get worried about her safety, terrible thoughts had been flying around his mind like

Dumbledore trying to place a tracking charm on her to find him and her being killed in the process or even Dumbles killing her in frustration or to hurt him. Thankfully none of this had happened; it appeared McGonagall had kept her away from the Owlery. Her letter was encouraging as well. It started off by wishing him well and a happy birthday for the next day but then the important things started. It would seem that his professor had taken what he had written to heart and begun some digging of her own. Harry had indeed been correct in that Sirius had never received a trial or at least not one that McGonagall had been able to find in her extensive search. She had contacted Madam Bones who was the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and neither had been able to find any record. Harry wondered if this Madam Bones was a trustworthy person, he guessed she would have to be if McGonagall trusted her. If she was then she could end up being incredibly useful, Harry decided to take a bit of a gamble and write to her explaining what he knew from his parent's journals. He knew from his extensive law reading that if she wanted as Head of the DMLE she could call anyone to a retrial or in this case trial providing there was enough evidence to make reasonable doubt on any previous decisions. This could be Sirius' ticket to freedom and there would be little Dumbles could do to stop it, providing veritaserum was used to ensure truthfulness. Again this was within her right as Head of the DMLE to demand. He would mention that in his letter even though she probably already knew but better safe than sorry. He sent off the letter before returning to McGonagall's letter. It continued wishing him the best and hoping that the list of books she had provided had been useful. They certainly had, Harry had gone into Diagon Alley and purchased this years and next year's books and had already finished them. One of the Ancient Runes books had been a

dictionary of Norse Runes and Harry had discovered that just by reading the dictionary and the pronunciation guide he was fluent in the language. Curious he had tried this with French to see if the skill translated to muggle languages. It did and Harry's next trip to the library was definitely going to include some dictionaries and language guides from all the major muggle languages. Harry thought that the ability to speak all of these languages would be a massive help for his rather ambitious business plans.

Already he had worked his way through university level physics as well as a huge amount of electronics. His computer programming knowledge was also high but he needed a computer to actually be able to practise and try out some ideas. This was going to be his birthday present to himself tomorrow. He went to sleep reading a book on Egyptian hieroglyphs, his mind working through the many possibilities his thirteenth year would hold.

Harry's plans for his birthday were based on his experience of the day, namely that nobody knew it existed and so nothing would happen.

However Julie and Rachael had other ideas. They were lying in wait when he walked down the stairs and jumped out on him shouting "Happy Birthday", nearly giving him a heart attack. They then took him over to the cafe over the road, insisting that they bought him breakfast. It was without doubt the best birthday of Harry's life already and it wasn't even midday yet.

"So what are your plans for the day squirt?" Rachael enquired as they were just finishing their hearty fry up.

"Well I was going to go into the city centre and buy myself a decent computer and maybe a few other electronic goodies. I must admit I don't really know what's good out there though."

"Well speaking as your educator in all things music you should get an iPod, it stores thousands of songs that you can listen to at any time just like this one" she said pulling her iPod from her pocket.

"Also you have to get an iPhone. It's possibly the best thing out at the moment, it's a mobile phone but it does so much more than just making phone calls. You can go on the internet and it's got all these cool app things, you should definitely get one of them." Rachael's face was lighting up with excitement about the whole thing, Harry had to admit it did sound pretty cool.

"Alright I might get one of those then, it sounds useful."

"Of course it is, if you get one and can make it work around magic then you can text me while you're at school and not have to use Hedwig.

Because you are going to keep in contact aren't you?" her voice had taken on the threatening tone that Harry had begun to know very well. It was one that left him absolutely no choice but to agree.

"Of course I'm going to keep in contact, hand on heart" he said as Julie smiled knowingly at him.

"Like you had a choice" she said laughing as her daughter fake pouted.

Harry smiled at her, "of course I didn't have a choice but that doesn't mean I wouldn't have kept in contact anyway, you guys have become like family to me. You are probably the first people since my parents to actually care about me for me, not for being some celebrity and for that I am forever in your debt, so thank you from the bottom of my heart." His eyes were moistening but he was holding himself in check far better than the two women who both had tears rolling down their cheeks.

"You've become like family to us as well Harry, it's going to be very odd not having you around when you go back to school in September."

"Yeah we're going to miss you, promise you will visit?" Rachael looked on

hopefully.

"I will, you can count on that. Now a shopping spree awaits so I will see you lovely ladies later on. Thanks again for breakfast" and with a hug from each of them he set off into town.

His first port of call was a phone shop, Rachael's enthusiasm had really rubbed off on him and so he was going to get himself the latest iPhone.

However once he saw the price he realised that if he was going to experiment on a phone it had better be a cheaper one than that.

Therefore he ended up buying two cheap and cheerful phones that he could experiment on so that they would work around magic as well as the latest iPhone.

It was a similar story in the computer shop where he ended up buying a cheap laptop and the best one they had in stock. The store assistant was practically jumping around in glee when Harry had walked in saying he wanted the absolute best laptop that money could buy. Harry's eyes widened so much when the assistant went through the laptop's performance stats that he thought his eyes were going to fall out. It was an easy decision and he only winced slightly at how much it was going to cost. The assistant also threw in a portable hard drive and a few accessories such as a wireless mouse as the purchase was so large.

Harry's final stop was at the Apple store where he bought a small iPod shuffle and a 160gb Classic. Spree completed he raced home eager to start on modifying them all to be able to work around magic. He already had a fair idea how to charge the batteries with runes alone thanks to a few experiments with a television remote. It was going to be the shielding that was going to be the challenge. He wasn't worried though, he knew he could get it done.

9. Chapter 9

AN - Hey everyone well it would appear I'm back been a while - sorry about that! Here is a new chapter for you hopefully with more to follow soon. I did have a laugh at one review telling me off for providing free advertising for Apple - personally I agree but they are the most well known of the type of electronics I am including and so as a lazy shortcut I just said they were Apple products rather than actually describing them figuring everyone would know what I meant. I will say this one more time so everyone is clear after a few reviews saying I've included electronics that are far too advanced for the canon timeline. I know, I have said several times, and I want to make this very clear -

THIS IS SET IN MODERN TIMES I AM NOT FOLLOWING THE CANON
TIMELINE

Thankyou for your attention and your words of praise and encouragement - much love.

Chapter 9

Despite Harry's confidence in his abilities it took longer than he had hoped before he had a breakthrough in his quest to magic proof muggle electronics. By the end of his birthday he had successfully manipulated carving the rune clusters so that they created the power for all of his new toys without the need for electricity. However after this early success he hit a brick wall on how to shield the insides. It would seem that the more runes that needed to be carved, the more complicated it was and the more accurate you had to be. In fact it took another two weeks and two trips to the phone shop to buy cheap phones (the cheapest of the electronics he was working on) and a grand total of 14 fried phones before he finally managed to make them workable. The big test was whether he could take his latest prototype into Diagon Alley and still

have it work in there.

It was this he was doing now; he had Rach's number inputted ready to text her to check everything was in working order as he walked through the Leaky Cauldron. Anyone who had been watching him would have been suspicious of this school child in brightly coloured surf shorts and a band tshirt staring intently at a small object in his hand. They would have been even more suspicious, if not outright shocked, when the object made a buzzing noise and the child let out a huge whoop of triumph before rushing out the exit of the Alley, back into muggle London.

Throughout his engineering of the phones Harry had kept up his reading, dividing his day between reading in the morning and working on his project in the afternoon and evening. He now considered himself to be well versed in all of his subjects for the year, having read all of the suggested books on McGonagall's list as well as his textbooks up to fifth year. He was tempted to go further but his priority at the moment was on his projects, magic could wait another fortnight until he was back at Hogwarts. He had also finished a fair amount of the politics and law books in the library, most of what he was reading now just repeated themselves. He had paid particular attention to business related law and how things were copyrighted in the magical world. It was a difficult process and by no means a perfect one. As he didn't have much faith that these laws would be enforced if enough money changed hands he had taken it upon himself to build a runic cluster that would destroy all traces of his work on the inside of his electronics if it was tampered with. This should prevent anyone being able to copy them the old fashioned way and there was also an anti-duplication cluster that prevented a spell doing it. Harry hoped that this would ensure that no competitor would be able to copy his work and nobody would be able to buy one and then

duplicate it to sell it themselves. The market should be entirely cornered and ripe for plucking.

He had also continued to read from the muggle side of the library extensively. He was now proficient, if not fluent, in French, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Portuguese and Italian. He thought that between those and English he would be able to communicate with the vast majority of the world's population. Perhaps the most useful language he had learnt was in fact one that nobody speaks any more, Latin. It was the basis for several of the modern languages he had studied, but more than that it was the route of the majority of the incantations for spells. Harry fully expected knowing Latin to benefit him hugely once he returned to Hogwarts. Many engineering books had also been absorbed, everything from computing to mechanical. These had given him even more, spectacular ideas that he wished he had the capital to pursue. The idea of improving magical transportation was high in his mind but he lacked both the funds and the space to experiment with this.

He had not received a reply from Madam Bones of the DMLE and, as he assumed no owls were able to find him, he decided to send a quick note to her to check if there was any progress. If there was Hedwig would be able to bring the reply back to him. Hedwig had been getting rather bored with just waiting around in the centre of London so she was glad for the chance to send a message, nipping his fingers affectionately.

Task completed he returned to improving his test laptop. At the moment it worked but it could only be kept on for an hour at a time before it needed to be shut down to stop it exploding. So Harry was checking and rechecking the runes to see if he had made a mistake. He didn't think that he had but there must be something wrong, perhaps the chemical

makeup of the battery was different from the phone batteries he had been modifying and this would have an effect on the runes. He lost himself in the work until he was interrupted by Hedwig's return. He reached over and took the letter from her, giving her an owl treat.

Dear Mr Potter

Thank you for your letter, I have been trying to contact you for the previous week. Minerva told me that no owl could find you but I wasn't convinced until five separate owls failed to deliver a letter. In relation to Sirius Black and his escape, he has not been sighted however I am confident that he will eventually be captured so that he can be brought to trial. I have tried to find ways of contacting him to convince him to turn himself into my custody.

I would also ask if it was possible for us to meet so that I can view your parent's journals as some of the main evidence in this case. I know that you are avoiding the clutches of Albus Dumbledore and to that end I am willing to give my Witch's Oath that I will not reveal your presence to him, or any of his agents, or that we were meeting.

I eagerly await your owl's return and hope that we will be able to meet and bring aid to Sirius. Any suggestions you may have we will be most welcome.

Regards Amelia Bones

Head of the DMLE

This was a big decision for Harry to make; did he trust Madam Bones to keep her word? Her offer to give a Witch's Oath would suggest that she would be trustworthy; of course this could be a bluff to make him think so. In the end it came down to whether or not he trusted his gut feeling, his gut was telling him that she was trustworthy and so he decided to reply in the affirmative. He would be prepared to leave quickly though, at any sign of danger. He would take his invisibility cloak and be ready to throw it on and disappear. If she proved herself then he would try and

help her get in contact with Sirius, Hedwig had never yet failed to deliver a letter and hopefully Padfoot would read a letter from him. He also thought it best to meet her in the muggle part of London, there he would hold the advantage of being able to blend in far better and knowing his way around much better as well. Harry thought long and hard about where would be best before eventually settling on Trafalgar Square. It was perfect. It was busy, which would make it difficult for Madam Bones to capture him if she was being false, and it was also far enough away from the Leaky Cauldron to be outside of her comfort zone. The letter said that he would meet her alone at midday the next day but Harry knew he would be there at least half an hour earlier to observe and check for any potential traps or other people meeting. In preparation Harry got out the appropriate journal and put a book mark on the relevant page before going back to working on his laptop for the rest of the day. He eventually slumping into bed mentally exhausted as throughout his work, he was running through scenarios in his mind of what could go wrong and how he would counter them.

Therefore it was a highly prepared Harry that emerged the next morning, his subconscious had worked overdrive through the night analysing potential problems and solutions. This was another benefit of his Occlumency work; he could now physically sleep yet leave his mental faculties working on problems. One would think that this would stop the body getting proper rest however it seemed to Harry that he was channelling his mind so that instead of dreaming it was working. He did appreciate that he couldn't do this all the time as his mind would need to rest as well, to keep in top condition. However if there was a problem that was really bugging him or, like today, a situation that required deep thought then he would leave his mind 'on' so to speak.

Harry's potion regimen was almost finished and he was now at an above average height of 5 foot 7. It was amazing what years of neglect had done to his body, before he had been one of the shortest and overall smallest in his year, but now Harry thought he would probably be the tallest. Another major change from the potions was that all of his hard manual work in the garden at Privet Drive had paid off in spades, he was now quite muscled. Not a body builder by any stretch of the imagination, but he certainly had a well toned and lithe body, like a spring coiled for action. However the biggest improvement of all was that of his vision, it was now nearly perfect. He was sure that the final four days of potions would correct what little blurriness there was. He was already doing without his glasses all the time now and couldn't wait for the entire world to be completely in focus, for perhaps the first time in his life.

Despite all his planning and running through scenarios, Harry was still nervous as he set out for Trafalgar Square. There were so many things that could go wrong that he couldn't have anticipated, he just hoped that he had done enough. He took up position on the steps above the actual Square because this would give him a good view of the whole area with very few blind spots. The letter had said to meet Madam Bones by the fountain to the left of Nelson's Column, the huge structure that dominated the Square. As far as Harry could see there was nobody else staking out the area, nobody that didn't blend in to the hustle and bustle of tourists. There was also no distinct shimmering effect that came from anyone using a disillusionment charm or a poor version of his own invisibility cloak.

Madam Bones herself arrived at ten minutes to midday and walked purposefully to the fountain and sat on the edge. To a casual observer she seemed a normal tourist having a rest from the day's exertions, however

Harry could see that she was aware of all her surroundings, constantly searching for threats. He watched her carefully for any sign that she was in contact with anyone else around the Square, if she was then they weren't making any form of direct contact. At precisely midday Harry left his lookout post and casually sauntered through the crowd towards Madam Bones. He sat down next to her and stretched.

"Madam Bones, I'm glad you decided to come alone however I would be very grateful if you would make your Witch's Oath as we discussed." He had expected her to be a little surprised but her reaction was far beyond simple surprise, she nearly fell backwards into the fountain. In fact she would have done so had Harry not grabbed her arm to steady her.

"Merlin, don't do that again, you scared the magic out of me!" she hissed at him. Harry had to bite his tongue to stop himself laughing at her indignant expression. "How did you sneak up on me anyway? You aren't using magic are you?"

"I am not, however I must insist of the Oath before this conversation continues."

She nodded and removed her wand slightly "I Amelia Bones swear on my magic that I will not knowingly betray Harry Potter to Albus Dumbledore or any of his supporters. I also swear not to reveal anything said to me unless given permission by Harry Potter." The tip of her wand glowed briefly showing that the Oath had been successful.

"Excellent, now we have that out of the way how about lunch? I know I'm hungry." She again nodded her agreement and they walked to a nearby restaurant.

They took a table and Harry immediately got down to business, removing the journal and flicking to the bookmarked page. "Here is the page that I mentioned where my parents say that it was Pettigrew rather than Sirius

that was to be secret keeper. I know in itself this is not proof that Sirius was innocent, nor that he is innocent of killing Pettigrew however if he didn't have a trial originally then it is possible that he could be innocent of all charges and I want to make sure. There is however a problem, you are aware that I do not want to be found by Dumbledore but you do not know why." He then went on to explain about Dumbledore placing him at the Dursleys, the will suppression, his wholesale destruction of Potter assets and his manipulations at Hogwarts all while eating a pleasant meal. "So you see I am sure he has a plan for me, one that almost certainly involves my death, but I can neither prove it nor work out exactly what it is or his reasoning."

Amelia Bones had seen and heard a lot throughout her career as an Auror and then Head of the DMLE however this was uncharted waters for her. She had never trusted Albus Dumbledore, believing that defeat of one dark wizard did not mean that you were qualified to take up the mantle as the country's political and social compass. This was a completely different ball game to taking up roles that he was unsuited for, this was active manipulation of an entire country to fit his own ends, all centred around the boy, no young man, that sat in front of her. She made the distinction because her own niece Susan was the same age and rather mature for it, but she was made to seem childish by the level of maturity displayed by Harry Potter. She had been sceptical about meeting him, thinking him too young to be able to have a real or worthwhile opinion. The first shock to this view was him sneaking up on her; nobody had done this in years. You don't live long as an Auror, particularly not in wartime, if you cannot detect people sneaking up on you.

The second shock to her viewpoint was his outright maturity and refusal to discuss anything without her offered Oath; she thought that he would

have left had she refused. Then there was his story, it all made sense in a twisted way and he had no reason to lie to her. He had offered to take an Oath himself on its truth but she had stopped him before he set off the underage magic detectors. During his tale little things that had always bugged her began to make sense such as how did anyone know what happened that Halloween night if only Harry, his parents and Voldemort were present and three of these were dead and the fourth couldn't remember. The answer was that someone must have released the details and the only person who could have done this was Dumbledore. Had he not done so Harry would have been perfectly able to live in relative obscurity in the wizarding world, safe from reprisals. Dumbledore had created the very situation that he sought to 'protect' Harry from.

She sensed that there were details he was not sharing with her such as how he looked so different from Susan's many descriptions. She had always commented on his small and skinny frame, tatty clothes and unfashionable glasses. The Harry in front of her was tall for his age and she could see muscle definition when he moved his arms, he had no glasses and his clothes were different but looked to be new. The two images did not match up and so obviously something had happened to him over these summer months.

"Harry have you thought of any way of convincing Sirius to come in peacefully? That is at the moment the main problem we are having."

Harry considered briefly "I can send him a letter, my owl has never failed to deliver a letter, she doesn't need an address. From what my parent's journals say his natural curiosity will not allow him to leave the letter unopened. I will not trick him however by putting a portkey in there or anything similar. I will tell him to present himself at your home if that is agreeable? I know you are trustworthy and it is better if he is in contact

with as few wand happy Aurors that could be loyal to Dumbles as possible. Is this agreeable?"

Amelia gave her consent and her address for Harry to pass on. "I will contact you when I have a reply from Sirius, it may take a while though, I do not know where he is or what sort of state he will be in after eleven years in Azkaban." Amelia privately agreed with this as a problem, she had seen what even a month in that prison could do to a person's mind. Merlin only knew how sane Sirius would be, from what she remembered he had never been the most balanced of individuals.

Harry was impressed with Madam Bones, or Amelia as she had insisted he call her. She was an intelligent woman who thought through all the possibilities and what was most in her favour, she had treated him as an adult, listened to him and gave his opinions equal weight to her own. Yes she was definitely going to be a valuable addition to his cause. After paying for the meal he made his polite farewell, saying that he wanted to send the letter as soon as possible to his godfather.

10. Chapter 10

AN - Had another chapter, considered making you wait, decided I may as well post it - aren't I lovely! Anyway enjoy the return to Hogwarts

Chapter 10

Dear Padfoot

I, Son of Prongs, do solemnly swear that I am up to no good and that all I am about to write comes under the Marauder's Oath of Truth amongst Brothers. I have read my parent's journals and so I believe that you were not my parent's secret keeper, of course I don't know if you killed Wormtail or not, even if he did deserve it. I am also sure that you never had a trial and so I have spoke to Amelia Bones who is now the Head of the DMLE and she has given her Oath

that if you turn yourself over to her at her home at Bones Manor in Norfolk she will guarantee you a fair trial, away from Dumbledore's influence and with veritaserum.

If you do not reply to this letter then I will be forced to assume that you are guilty of all offences and as much as it pains me to do so I will cut contact with you. There is so much I want to say to you but I do not want to get too involved only to be disappointed, I hope that you will present yourself to Madam Bones so that we can get to know each other and be the family we were supposed to be.

Yours Harry Potter

Son of Prongs

Sirius Black could not believe it as he looked at the Snowy Owl that was perched just inside the cave he was currently hiding in. It was a letter from Harry. This was enough to send him into raptures, an actual letter from his godson, but even more than that it was a letter that said he believed Sirius to be innocent. Harry must have been being cautious because for all he knew Sirius could still have killed the rat and all those muggles. Sirius accepted this, he would have been cautious in Harry's position too, but under all the formality there was a palpable sense of hope. The line about being a family tore at Sirius' heart; it was something he too desperately wanted.

His godson was obviously a smart kid because he had thoughtfully included a piece of parchment and a muggle biro for Sirius to reply with. The owl was still regarding him with slightly distrustful eyes as Sirius grabbed the pen hungrily to reply, feeling for the first time in many years a sense of hope filling his emaciated frame as he wrote his brief reply. It was a shouting and cursing Harry that Hedwig returned to with her precious cargo, he just couldn't get the laptop to work properly.

Everything he tried seemed to fail for some unfathomable reason. He looked up at Hedwig's announcing hoot and blanched slightly at her accusatory stare.

"Sorry girl I'll keep my language under control." She gave a satisfied hoot and stuck her leg out for him to remove the letter. Harry did just that and scanned it quickly. It was short and to the point, Sirius claimed innocence and was on his way now to Amelia's to present himself for a trial. He obviously didn't want to let himself get too attached either, in case he was sent back to Azkaban. Harry's cynicism fully appreciated that actual innocence or guilt was not necessarily a factor in the findings of the Wizemagot with its unfortunate levels of corruption and nepotism and it would seem that Sirius knew this as well. Quite sensibly Sirius had not given any indication as to where he was and so Harry had no idea how long it would take him to get to Amelia's house in Norfolk.

The final two weeks before Harry was due to return to Hogwarts passed remarkably quickly. Harry still had no news on Sirius; however he dismissed most of his worry about this. Had he been caught it would have been all over the news, he must just have been further away from Norfolk than Harry had anticipated. He had continued his reading at great pace and had finally got the laptop to work after much swearing and many false starts. He had begun the design process for a few programs that would help with his study of magic. The main problem that would require his immediate attention at Hogwarts was to find a way to build some sort of magical wifi receiver as he was sure that Hogwarts would be outside the range of every wifi and without this he wouldn't be able to connect to the internet. Again he had some ideas on how to get this done but he needed to be able to use magic to be able to transfigure some materials so that they could form the receiver.

The night before the 1st Julie and Rachael insisted that they all go out for a meal together to celebrate the new and improved Harry's re-entry into the magical world. He could tell that both women were worried for his safety and it was a new feeling that constricted his chest when he thought about this. It certainly was nice to have people who care about you. He presented an entirely confident and unconcerned visage to the both of them but inside he was worried about how people were going to react to the new version of Harry Potter and what Dumbles had up his garish sleeves. He had been furiously plotting over the last two days of how he could take the first steps towards removing Dumble's influence from the Hogwarts students. It was by no means an easy task but Harry had several ideas depending on whether Dumbles tried anything at the Sorting Feast which was the most likely time. He would be in for a nasty surprise if he tried Legillimency on Harry, he had made his defences nigh on impenetrable, or at least he thought so. The standard magical defences that he had created previously had been ably augmented with a combination of muggle technology and some of the things he had read in some of Rach's collection of comic books. For instance adamantium was now used liberally as a barrier and there were no less than three Iron Man suits patrolling the outer areas of his mental construct. Should any magical get through these defences, as unlikely as this was, they would still be required to have an intimate knowledge of how computers work. For that was where his memories now were, hidden behind layers of protection and code within a super computer in his internal library. He was certain that he could defend against mental intrusion however he was worried that Dumbles would corner him somehow and reapply the blocks along with liberal use of a memory charm. He had however discovered a method in one the Occlumency books he got from the

library. It was a way to create what was effectively a backup of all of a person's memories within a separate part of the mind, one that could not be touched by the standard memory charm. Ideally these memories were updated daily and had a safe word that released them back into the consciousness. Harry's newfound sense of paranoia meant that he religiously updated his backup and said the Parseltongue password at least three times a day. Of course with no way of testing this short of actually being obliviated he had no real idea if it would work so he resolved to try and avoid any potential situation where this could be a problem. Fundamentally this meant making sure that he was never alone with just Dumbles. More of his overall plan needed to go into action before he could even consider himself able to risk this. Therefore he resolved that if Dumbles ever called for a meeting, he had two choices, refuse to attend or to make sure McGonagall was present at the very least, if not a few other teachers. Hopefully this would be enough to counter Dumbles mind control techniques but Harry wasn't going to count on it. He had learnt that caution was a trait he needed to develop, while there was a time and a place for the rash Gryffindor response of rushing in, it was not all the time. Harry had to develop the Slytherin side of his conscious, in fact he needed to cherry pick the best virtues from each house and amalgamate them into a well rounded and balanced individual. This would be the key to success for the future.

The meal itself was a wonderful time filled with laughter and joking, proving just how far Harry had come in the short time with his new friends. Part of him wanted to call them family but he didn't think that either side were really at that stage. Harry did try and pay for his own meal at the very least but he was quickly shot down in tones that brooked absolutely no argument, he knew by now it was worthless even

trying. The three of them walked home in the late summer evening chatting casually, trying to avoid the big goodbye that was looming on the horizon. In fact they put it off completely until the next morning, both sides making excuses. Harry that he needed to pack still (true) and Julie and Rachael that they had much to do for the next day at the hotel (not so true). However they all knew that tomorrow they would have to finally swallow their emotions and say goodbye for the year.

Packing was easy for Harry with the aid of his new trunk and the use of his old one as well. His clothes, the majority of his school things and less important items went into his old trunk as usual, while his electronics collection and associated tool kits, along with his invisibility cloak, photo album and various journals went into the new shrunken trunk. This could then go into his pocket with the money pouch, his ever present iPhone and his rapidly filling iPod. He had taken Rach's music instruction to heart and had put all of her cds onto the iPod and had started downloading a few other bits and pieces, he wasn't sure whether his favourite band was In Flames or Parkway Drive but Machine Head's newest album was certainly making them a challenge for top spot. His taste had developed so that he was listening to songs and bands that were laden with guitar riffs and solos. In fact he was unconsciously trying to play along with them, pretty much all the time, with his trusty air guitar. He intended to build himself a guitar when he got to Hogwarts as a little side project to blow off some steam when one of his other projects got too frustrating.

Everything was packed with plenty of time to spare and so he went to sleep at a sensible hour, unusually he didn't fall asleep with a book in his hands. Thanks to this he woke up fresh on the morning of September 1st, allowing more than enough time to go and make a proper farewell to two

of the most important people in his life downstairs. The goodbyes themselves were tearful and heartfelt and Harry was forced to promise more times than he could count that he would call, text or email whenever he could. He tried to point out that he wouldn't be able to email for a while as he wouldn't be able to access the internet until he built his wifi receiver but it fell on deaf ears. He shook his head ruefully and chuckled at how both women had a fantastic ability to ignore statements they didn't want to hear.

The journey to Kings Cross was uneventful; he treated himself to a taxi rather than his usual walk because he couldn't be bothered to lug his trunk the whole way. He had sent Hedwig on this morning and shrunk her cage into his new trunk, thus avoiding the usual stares that accompanied the journeys of Hogwarts students. The station itself was busy as usual and he weaved through the crowd towards the platform. The barrier looked less daunting this year; he just hoped that Dobby wasn't interfering like last year, that would be annoying. He wasn't and the trip through was easy, almost casual. He walked purposefully to the train and unloaded his trunk; he wasn't given a second glance by the families saying their goodbyes. As usual this raised a bitter taste to his mouth as he thought on all he had missed out on throughout his life but he ruthlessly quelled this as he found an as yet unused carriage. He stored his trunk, removed a book, put his iPod in and began to read. The peace and tranquillity was briefly interrupted by a few people poking their heads into the carriage but none of them stayed until the familiar bushy hair of Hermione appeared. She too was about to remove herself when Harry, looking on amusedly, decided to speak up.

"Alright Hermione how's things?"

She let out a little shriek before launching herself at him, speaking at her

customary hundred miles an hour. "Harry! Where have you been? We have been so worried? Why haven't you replied to any of our letters? Or sent any to us? It was very foolish of you to go running away like that without telling anyone where you were. You could have been hurt or killed or had to sleep in a ditch. Dumbledore has been out of his mind with worry, we all have. You look so different what have you done to your hair? And why are you wearing those ridiculous clothes?"

Harry was taken aback by the onslaught although one part he did manage to digest, he hadn't sent any letters to his best friends. He had taken for granted that none of their letters would be able to reach him but he could still have sent a note or two to them with Hedwig. He hadn't even considered doing so, even more interestingly, now that he thought about it, he hadn't really missed them like he usually did. The detached part of his mind guessed that this was because he was for the first time enjoying a sense of independence on his own but another wondered if there might be more to it than that. He was saved from having to reply by the entry of Ron to the carriage.

"There you are mate. Where have you been, Mum's been going spare? What in Merlin's name are you wearing mate?"

"Well I went shopping over the summer, found some clothes that I actually like for once."

Ron looked sceptical at this, as if nobody could like things like Harry was wearing. "What's a Pantera when its at home then?"

"Its the Spanish word for a Panther" retorted Hermione automatically, Ron still looked confused. "Its a big black cat but what that has to do with Cowboys from Hell, I have no idea." This last part was almost painful to her if her voice was any guide.

Harry snorted "It does mean that literally, means that in Italian as well in

case you were interested, but more importantly it's also a muggle band, an awesome one actually and Cowboys from Hell is the title of one of their albums, here have a listen." He handed over an earphone after flicking to the title track on his iPod. Hermione looked flabbergasted for some reason and Ron still looked confused, eying the headphone with no clue what it was.

"You can't listen to music here, any electronic won't work around magic" she finished in a superior tone.

With a shrug Harry simply pushed the headphone closer, "mine do. I've got loads of stuff that works around magic, here check this out" he said tossing his iPhone over.

"Bu...bu...but that's not possible. Electricity doesn't work around magic."

"Ah but it does my dear Hermione if you know how to fix it so that it will. I've got a laptop in my trunk that will work perfectly, even connect to the internet if I can work out how to fix it up." He smiled at her.

"Harry James Potter you will tell me this instant how you are doing this and who you stole these from." Hermione threw the earphone whose music was so offensive to her back at Harry.

"Why do you assume I stole them?" Harry was starting to get annoyed here; while he liked Hermione, he wasn't going to tell her how he had managed to do it after weeks of hard work just because she demanded it.

"Well these are expensive things and you couldn't have bought them, you don't have enough money. Plus there's no way you could have done this on your own, you must have had help and then taken them from whoever did the work. I should report you."

"And why would I not be able to do this on my own?" Harry's voice had taken on a dangerous edge now.

"Well you just couldn't, I mean you aren't very smart are you? Without

me, you and Ron would have struggled to get all of your work done last year."

Harry stood up, eyes blazing "Is that what you really think? That without you, I'm nothing, too stupid to tie my own shoe." Hermione said nothing which was damning enough in Harry's eyes. "Get out" he shouted "get the hell out of the compartment before I show you some of the curses this idiot can manage to perform."

"What's going on?" Ron murmured.

"Quiet Ronald, can't you see that Harry has become a thief, taking credit for other peoples work. First whoever actually made those electronics and then me for all the work I did for the pair of you over the last two years." She screeched viciously, standing up and taking Ron's arm, dragging him from the compartment.

Harry was raging now, his wand was out and he was running through curses in his mind. "Fine, both of you get out, if that's what you want you crazy egomaniac bitch. I'll show you this year just how smart I actually am and then you'll be sorry Miss 'supposed smartest witch of her generation'. And when you come crawling back you better have a bloody good apology. Are you going Ron? You have to make a choice, it's me or her, stay or leave, I don't care which but do it now."

"Come on Ron let's leave this idiot and see how well he does without us to drag him out of every mess he gets himself into." Ron looked back and forth between his best friend and the girl he was starting to become a bit interested in, silently debating. In the end as is usual with teenage boys, one organ comfortably outvoted the other and he shrugged and followed Hermione from the compartment.

It took some time for Harry's rage to dissipate; his hands were shaking in anger, knuckles clenched, ready for a fight. At this point he had two

choices, he could listen to some relaxing music to calm himself or he could put the heaviest stuff he had on his iPod on and embrace the anger. It is perhaps highly fortunate for Malfoy that Harry chose the first option. It was inevitable that Malfoy would make his customary visit to bait Harry and his friends. Malfoy's first clue that all was not normal came when Harry was sat alone, he knew that the Weasel and the Mudblood would have had time to find Potty by now and so he was taken aback. However he wasn't one to fail to take advantage of a situation where he outnumbered his target three to one.

"Alright Potty, sat here all alone are we? Where are the Weasel and the Mudblood?" Draco drawled.

Harry said nothing, he didn't even react, he just sat there swaying slightly in a lazy rhythm with his eyes closed. Draco was highly perturbed by this turn of events, he was used to everyone paying him the attention he commanded and deserved. Even more disconcerting was the fact that he could see some strange string things coming from Potter's ears. What the hell was going on?

"Oi Potty I'm talking to you!" he tried again but still absolutely no reaction, Draco simply didn't understand. He then decided to try a less subtle approach, quite a difficult thing as it happened, as despite Draco's pride in his Slytherin heritage, he had about as much cunning and understanding of subtlety as a brick thrown through a window. He pulled out his wand and mentally ran through a select few interesting curses, trying to decide which to use first, however he was interrupted before he could begin.

"Must we always do this Draco, why can't we just agree to leave each other alone? Surely you have better things to do than to wander into every train carriage until you find me before insulting me, rather poorly I

must add, before we eventually fight? It doesn't benefit either of us. So how about it, can we agree to just leave each other alone?" Harry took one earphone out to wait for the reply from Draco, he really hoped his answer would be favourable however he held very little hope that it would. This was quickly proved accurate as Draco raised his wand to let loose a curse. Harry sighed and flicked his own wand while saying *expelliarmus*, disarming Draco. Crabbe and Goyle stood there foolishly, awaiting instructions and so Harry took advantage, throwing Draco's wand into the hallway. The two trolls followed it as if they were chasing a stick, allowing Harry to close the carriage door and practise one of the wards he found in his dad's journal. It was a very basic one that would be broken in less than a second by anyone who knew anything about wards, however Harry was fairly certain that apart from a few sixth and seventh years no other students would be able to. Perhaps now I'll be left in peace for the journey he thought.

11. Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Harry was staring blankly out the window of his compartment as the train began to slow, running through some more ideas for his projects. They could only be about five minutes from Hogsmede Station and so he quickly put his robes on and waited patiently for the train to come to a halt.

He left his old trunk in the compartment where it would be collected as usual but he kept his new trunk in his pocket, he wasn't about to let that leave his sight. He walked with the crowd towards the horseless carriages, stopping briefly to wave to Hagrid who cheerfully waved back. Harry wasn't entirely sure Hagrid had recognised him but was pleased nonetheless. Normally at this point he would share with Ron and

Hermione; however this wasn't an option as he caught sight of the two of them. Hermione was obviously in full flow at Ron, who was nodding along dumbly.

There was a carriage near him that only had two occupants and so he decided that was probably his best option. He had to meet some new people soon. This gave him a shock to the system, have I really been that isolated that without those two I have nobody I can call a friend in the whole school? Bloody hell it is, that's ridiculous, definitely need to do something about that, starting with these two.

He climbed into the carriage and saw two girls in front of him, one blonde and one brunette. "What the hell are you doing in here Potter?" the blonde sneered at him.

"Er well I thought I would take a carriage up to the school, I saw there was only the two of you in here and hey presto, here I am." He attempted a winning smile but this was coldly ignored. He noticed now that both girls had Slytherin robes on. Ah, he thought, this may be why there is a problem, stupid house system.

"I am aware that there are two of us here, why are you not with your little Gryffindor friends?" the blonde was staring at him intently now. Harry grimaced at the mention of his 'friends'. "Let's just say we are having some problems, ones that I don't really want to get into but I think they could well be permanent. I have recently come to the conclusion that I have been severely isolated with those two and so I am trying to branch out and meet some new people. Lucky for you, you both get to be my first attempt."

The brunette giggled before a glare from the blonde silenced her. "Let's start at the beginning, my name is Harry Potter, pleased to meet you" he said extending his hand towards the blonde. She looked at it disdainfully.

"But you are a Gryffindor and we are Slytherin's, we can't be friends, why are you talking to us?"

"Can I let you both into a little secret" he said motioning them forward before glancing around furtively. Despite themselves the Slytherin's leaned forward, "the house system is bullshit" he smiled at their outraged expressions.

"How can you say that about centuries of tradition?" Blondie said.

"Quite easily, it is fair to say that the house system makes everyone have certain preconceptions about anyone from a house as soon as they hear which one. For example the stereotype is that all Slytherin's are evil. Now this cannot be true, you aren't evil are you Miss...?"

She ignored his question about her name "Of course I'm not evil."

"Yet you are in Slytherin so by rights you should be if we believe the house traits and stereotypes. Also have you heard of a self fulfilling prophecy? It applies here because if you tell a bunch of eleven year olds that if you are in Ravenclaw you will be a bookworm, then even if they wouldn't have been before then they will be more likely to turn into one. Same principle with the Hufflepuff's and loyalty. I'm willing to bet that they aren't all loyal to each other but because they are in Hufflepuff, they feel like they should be, so they begin to be so. That is why the house system is bullshit." He leaned back contentedly as the two seemed to be trying to digest what he had just said, perhaps he had actually had an impact, he certainly hoped so.

"So what about you? You are the Gryffindor Golden Boy, you fit the stereotype of your house perfectly. You are reckless and foolish, you don't think anything through, you just go charging in."

"Hmm" Harry considered how best to answer this, "that's completely true and it has taken me two years to work that out. I think it's probably

because I knew so very little about my parents, apart from how I looked like them and that they were both in Gryffindor. I guess I clung to this and tried to be the absolute perfect Gryffindor I could be, as a way of getting a bit closer to them." He stared into space, lost in his own thoughts for a moment and therefore missed the hastily whispered conversation between the other occupants of the carriage. He was jerked from his deliberations by a hesitant voice.

"My name is Tracey Davis and this scowling girl is Daphne Greengrass" it was the brunette who spoke and Daphne was indeed scowling, although not at Harry but at Tracey.

"Pleasure to meet you both. You shouldn't scowl like that Miss Greengrass, it will create lines that would spoil your pretty face." Harry cringed mentally at this, what the hell was he saying, where did it come from? This wasn't going to end well he thought.

However the expected explosion didn't materialise, Daphne stopped scowling immediately and turned an expressionless mask towards him. Tracey, on the other hand, giggled behind her hand and gave Daphne a not so subtle elbow to the ribs which earned her a brief glare.

"I've been telling her that for years but she never seems to listen to me, maybe you have some sort of special gift Potter."

"Please call me Harry, surnames seem so formal and I hope we can be friends, or at the very least acquaintances that are happy to stop and have a chat every now and then. That sound agreeable to you two?"

The girls exchanged a look that seemed to contain a whole conversation, Harry idly wondered how girls did that, before they both nodded at him with only slight reluctance from Daphne.

The carriage chose this moment to pull up at the large wooden doors that marked the threshold of Hogwarts "excellent, I look forward to getting to

know you both better sometime soon however now the feast calls to me and I must answer its summons." He swiftly exited the carriage with an impressive swirl of his robe, he thought it was impressive anyway, he would swear blind he had seen Daphne roll her eyes though. Putting this from his mind he ambled through the doors, towards the Gryffindor table.

His improved mood was soon ruined by his former friends who were sat in their customary place, glaring at him. Harry didn't give them the satisfaction of retorting, he would show them both how wrong they were about him. He simply went to a different part of the table, one that happened to contain the only other people he knew well in Gryffindor; his Quidditch teammates.

"Alright troops how's it going?" Silence greeted his jaunty question as he plonked himself down next to Oliver Wood the Captain and opposite the three chasers who as usual seemed to be attached at the hip. It was Angelina, the centre of the six legged chaser machine, who broke the silence.

"Umm Harry why are you sitting over here with us? You don't normally, not that we mind of course, we're just a bit curious" she said hurriedly. Harry grimaced "I've had enough of those two idiots down there," he said indicating Ron and Hermione, "they severely hold me back, I mean I've played on the same team as all of you for the past two years and I know barely anything about any of you. It's ridiculous and so I've decided that I'm going to branch out and get some real friends, ones that don't doubt my word or are self righteous little bitches."

"Finally caught on have you." Everyone turned to stare at the usually mild mannered Alicia. "What? You were all thinking it."

"Yeah I know we were Leesh but you're normally so nice to everyone,

they must have really pissed you off for you to say that." Katie's mouth twitched into a little smirk as she said this.

"Yeah they really do, they are always going on about how much better they are at everything than everyone else, especially you Harry. I don't know how you stayed friends with them as long as you have."

"Hmm to be honest I didn't know about that, although now you say it I can definitely believe it. It seems that, horror of all horrors, Malfoy was actually right that first day on the train." The team looked at him sceptically, the Weasley twins with outright shock so Harry endeavoured to explain. "He said to me that I should be very careful on who I make friends with, that some wizards are better than others. Now admittedly he was talking about purity of blood and that crap but in terms of character Ron and Hermione were probably the worst people I could associate with." He grimaced here and looked to the twins, "I'm sorry guys I know he's your brother but..."

Harry didn't get a chance to finish his sentence as Fred cut him off "it's ok we're pretty sure he was adopted anyway or maybe dropped on his head a few too many times"

"Yeah he needs to do a lot of growing up before he's worthy of the noble Weasley name" George continued, striking, what he must have considered, a thoroughly noble pose. Fred of course copied him before both were given a quick punch to the ribs from the collective chasers and told in no uncertain terms to sit themselves down. They did so with a quick grin towards Harry who briefly wondered why it was that women seemed to take it upon themselves to ensure that any male within sight 'behaved'. He mentally shrugged before settling down to wait for the sorting to begin making idle chat with his teammates about their summer's, he didn't really say anything about his own other than it "was

alright" causing the girls to roll their eyes.

As usual Harry could feel a fair amount of pairs of eyes trained on him throughout the sorting however he studiously ignored them all, particularly as he strongly suspected one of them to be Dumble's. There were no noteworthy students included in the sorting however Harry had resolved to keep an eye on all of them and at the very least learn the names of all the Gryffindor first years. This was for completely selfish reasons as the simple act of remembering someone's name endeared you to them more than many other actions, it was a trick he picked up from reading of muggle politicians.

The feast itself was as enjoyable as ever however this year it was not as much of a relief to Harry as it had been previously. It certainly was amazing what one summer of healthy eating and the goblin's potion regime could do for an adolescent body. This was proved midway through the feast when Katie turned to him hesitantly, as though wanting to ask something but not really sure how.

"What is it Katie? You obviously want to ask something so spit it out" he asked teasingly.

"Its just that, you have changed so much over the summer I hardly believe its you." She blushed slightly "I'm not saying they are bad changes, you just seem so much happier and healthier than before."

Harry took a deep breath in and Katie looked at him nervously, "I'm sorry I've offended you, ignore me."

"No I should have expected it really, there have indeed been a lot of changes and I'm not going to go into how they all came about but basically it boils down to me finding out a bit more about myself, my life and my most of all my parents. After I found out all of these things I've made a conscious effort to live up to their expectations and live my life to

the fullest. Maybe someday I'll tell you all about it but I'm sure you would end up quite bored." The team nodded their agreement and talk quickly turned to Quidditch. This was something Harry could definitely get used to, people who simply accepted when he wanted to stop talking about something. Ron and particularly Hermione would never allow him this basic right and would constantly badger him until he told them everything.

After a thoroughly enjoyable meal including two helpings of his favourite treacle tart, Harry leant back in contentment to wait for Dumbledore's inane rambling so he could go to bed. As expected the announcements from the Headmaster were meaningless platitudes that Harry comfortably ignored until he heard two words that made him sit bolt upright "Professor Lupin". Could it be? Harry looked along the line of teachers and saw a prematurely aging man that fit his father's descriptions of Moony, albeit one aged by a good twenty years. His furry little problem must be taking more of a toll than before, Harry thought. This was good news, hopefully within the year he would have a good relationship with both of the remaining Marauders and so for the first time he was really looking forward to Defence Against the Dark Arts.

Interrupting his thoughts was the scraping of benches that signalled the mass exodus of students to the common rooms. Ambling along comfortably alongside Oliver Wood, Harry spent the time trying to convince his Captain that practises five times a week was a little excessive even if it was his last chance to win the Quidditch Cup. By the time they reached the common room Harry was hopeful that it would be limited to four times a week maybe even three if they were really lucky. Shaking his head at the obsessed boy he walked to his own dorm, took out his trunk, unshrunk it and put it at the end of his bed. He was

beginning to think that this year would be one of the best of his short school career when such thoughts were quickly dashed by the entrance of one Ron Weasley.

"Alright mate what was up with you on the train? You made Hermione so mad I've had to listen to her rant for ages so you owe me one." Ron made his way over to Harry before his eyes rested upon Harry's new trunk sitting next to his old one. "What's that? Is that another trunk you have got there?" Harry nodded affirmatively not wanting to get into an argument over something so petty, however it was too late for that. The danger sign that was Ron's ears going red was already there and Harry sighed in annoyance. "Where did you get that from then? One trunk not good enough for you is that it?"

"Ron I will say this once and once only, you are not my parent, you cannot decide what I own or how I spend my own money. If I want to buy a new trunk for myself then I will do so. As it happens I didn't buy it, it was my parent's trunk but even so this is none of your concern."

However Ron was past the point of listening he just launched into a rant that involved some words that Mrs Weasley would have severely punished. Harry sighed again and simply silenced the redheaded fool with a wave of his wand and a muttered *Silencio* before turning away to go to bed. It was only his Quidditch reflexes and ones honed by years of avoiding his Uncle's fists that allowed him to dodge the ginger bullet that came towards him. Ron had his wand out but since he had been silenced he couldn't cast any spells so he opted for the physical approach. Had this happened last year then the much taller and stronger red head would have beaten Harry comfortably however things were different now, if anything Harry was taller than Ron and he was certainly stronger. Even more than that Harry had spent years being the punching bag of large

groups of boys much bigger than him, thanks to this he had a very good appreciation of fighting however he had always lacked the size and strength to overturn such overwhelming odds. But this wasn't him against six or seven bigger kids, this was him against one person, one who was smaller and weaker than him.

If there had been a professional fighting instructor watching Harry's response, he would have been disappointed and bemoaned a lack of technique and control. However if there had been someone who had been in street fights as opposed to controlled bouts he would have been impressed with the savagery and economy of movement displayed by the dark haired boy. Every action was calculated to cause maximum pain with the least amount of effort, there was no honour in Harry's approach he just knew to put Ron down hard and fast. Within five seconds Harry had broken several of Ron's fingers, ruptured a kidney and knocked him unconscious with a brutal head butt.

There was silence throughout the third year boy's dorm and Harry shook his head a little bewildered. "I'm sorry Ron I didn't want to do that but you left me no choice, you should know by now not to attack me from behind." He turned to his frozen dorm mates "don't worry guys I'm not going to hurt any of you I just wanted him to leave me alone. A few things have changed and it seems I was very much mistaken when I put all of my trust into that git and the harpy. I know I've pretty much ignored you all since I got here and I'm really sorry for that I would like to get to know you all a bit and make up for lost time. I hate to ask this but could one of you take him to the hospital wing? I would but it would create some awkward questions, I didn't mean to hurt him so badly I just had a bit of a flashback to a less than pleasant time."

Neville was the one who stepped forward and picked Ron up to deposit

at the hospital wing "don't worry Harry we all saw you were just defending yourself, it was him who threw the first punch."

Seamus was nodding along and Dean was looking at him with a mixture of fear and awe. "Where did you learn to fight like that Harry? It was incredible" asked the dark skinned boy.

"Well I will say that's the first fight I've ever won. Every time before this it's always been my cousin and a few of his mates ganging up on me. I've never been in a fair fight before, seems they are a lot easier if you're used to trying to defend yourself from six or seven at a time."

Dean snorted at this "remind me never to get on your bad side" he muttered.

"Duly noted" Harry grinned "now if you will excuse me I'm going to go to bed, I'll see you guys in the morning. Goodnight." A few basic wards on his trunks and bed curtains later and he was led in bed mentally going over his Occlumency work in preparation for whatever the next day might throw at him.

12. Chapter 12

AN - Hello all sorry its been a while I got distracted by a plot bunny that wouldn't leave me alone so I have started another story however I am not intending to post it until it is completed. What are people's thoughts do you want me to post what I have so far and update whenever I finish another chapter? Or would you prefer it all up completed even if thats ages away? Or do you not care at all and think I should shut up and get on with the new chapter?

Whatever your thoughts I would be delighted to hear them, as always read, review, enjoy

Chapter 12

The fallout from Harry's actions the previous night hit him rather sooner

than he personally would have wished. The first thing that happened came in the form of a screaming banshee with frizzy hair that screeched at him about how he was going dark and was a nasty little liar, a vicious boy and she was going to tell McGonagall on him. Harry calmly ignored her saying "Hermione I do not need to justify myself to you, I was defending myself, he attacked me while my back was turned. Now if there is nothing more I'd quite like to go have some breakfast."

Continuing to ignore her furious tirade he exited through the portrait alongside Neville who looked shocked at his presence. "Neville I meant it last night when I said I wanted to get to know you all a bit better, I hope we can become friends. It's something that should have happened at least two years ago but hopefully we can make up for lost time, why don't you tell me a bit about yourself I know hardly anything."

Slowly and hesitantly Neville started to open up about himself and his life. It took a lot of coaxing from Harry but by the time McGonagall started handing out the year's schedules after breakfast, Neville seemed to be growing in confidence a little. "Mr Potter I want a word with you. What's this I hear about you putting Weasley in the hospital wing?"

Harry rubbed his temples, "would it be possible for me to talk to you in private Professor McGonagall? I promise I will explain but the explanation will involve a few things I would rather remain private."

McGonagall looked at him sceptically "alright Potter meet me in my office directly."

Harry nodded, looked at his schedule and groaned that it read History of Magic first up followed by Potions with the Slytherins. He told Neville to save him a seat in both and that he would meet him as soon as he could. Neville nodded as he watched the enigma that was Harry Potter make his way out of the Great Hall.

After a brief pause to pick up his potions things, Harry stood outside McGonagall's office. He was sorely tempted to wait inside but thought that might be pushing his luck a little bit so he leant against the wall to await his Head of House. He didn't have to wait long as he spotted her marching towards him and beckoned him inside with a crook of the finger. He followed her inside and sat down in the offered chair.

"Explain." One word. That's all she said but it held a threat of so much more. He took a deep breath and began explaining a little of his home life, skipping the worst of it just giving her enough detail to make her understand. He explained Dudley and his gang's torments ending rather lamely with "and I was just kind of back with all of them when Ron attacked me and I sort of lost it. I only hit him twice but I guess it was a bit harder than I should have done."

Professor McGonagall was just sat there, lips held in a tight white line, hands quivering in fury. Harry recognising the danger signs started edging away, looking for an escape before she exploded, however he wasn't quick enough. "That bastard! I told him they were the worst kind of muggles but did he listen? Of course not, he never bloody does!" She visibly took a large breath to calm herself before continuing in a more normal tone "I'm sure that's only half the story as well, don't worry I don't want to know. To be honest I'd rather live in ignorance of how badly you were treated so that I don't go down there myself and curse them all into oblivion followed swiftly by Albus bloody Dumbledore."

Harry panicked at this "no don't do that. I am fully aware of all things he has done to me and is still doing but he is far too crafty and too powerful to attack in a front on manner."

"There's more?" McGonagall roared.

Harry winced and nodded. "Before I tell you I'm going to need your

Witch's Oath to never reveal anything I tell you unless I give permission and that you will do nothing about it unless I say so. That means no charging off to curse Dumbles. I know this is a lot to ask but trust me it is necessary and having you attack him immediately in your anger will serve no purpose."

McGonagall looked at him as if seeing him for the first time, what had happened to the sweet, innocent boy she had first met two years ago? There was a hard edge to him now, one that commanded, no demanded respect. She couldn't believe she was doing it but before she had time to think it through clearly she was making an Oath very similar to the one Amelia Bones had made. In return Harry took out his wand and made his own Oath that everything he was about to say was true to the best of his knowledge. Ignoring her shocked look he then explained his summer so far particularly everything he had found out at Gringott's about the state of his health and Dumbledore's manipulations of his accounts. He showed his metamorphic abilities and explained his new mental faculties as well saying that in terms of theory he was easily up to fifth year. Finally he showed her his new electronics that he had modified. Having finished he leant back watching for his Professor's reaction.

There was none, she was sat in a stunned silence. She shook herself "so you are saying there was a bit of he-who-must-not-be-named in your scar? And that it was leeching off your core? As well as the most extensive set of blocks I have ever heard of? And Albus is the one who cast the blocks?" Harry had been nodding along to every question but the last.

"I have no proof it was him but honestly I can't think of anyone else who would have done it. It is possible that my parents would have bound my metamorphagus ability until I was older but the rest they would not have

done. More to the point there was no mention of any form of bindings being placed on me in either of my parent's journals and believe me I have studied them extensively and damn near everything else was written about."

She couldn't deny that everything pointed towards this being an accurate assessment of events. She definitely understood now why he had asked for her Oath to not charge off and attack Albus, although at the moment she was far too shocked to do much of anything at the moment. "Ok Harry I think its best if you go to class now I need to digest everything you have told me before we decide what the best course of action to take is." He looked up surprised at this. "Yes that is correct I did say we. You have proven yourself a capable young man and after all it is your life we are talking about now get yourself off to History, although I doubt Cuthbert will have noticed your absence."

Harry grinned and left to go suffer through the rest of Binns' deathly boring lecture, luckily he had missed almost half of it so it wasn't as bad as it could have been. He thought that the visit to McGonagall went quite well, in fact now he thought about it she hadn't even punished him for beating Ron to a pulp, she must have been too shocked by everything. He shrugged if she punished him fine, he deserved it for his slightly disproportionate response but he certainly wasn't going to remind her. She was also right when she said that Binns wouldn't have even noticed him not being there and so he walked in and casually sat down next to Neville, ignoring the death glares emanating from a newly healed Ron and Hermione. He leaned over to Neville and muttered "wake me up when this ends" and winked at him before putting his head down on his desk, promptly falling into a deep meditative state.

He was awoken by a tentative poke that could only have come from

Neville, deciding to have a bit of fun he moaned "five more minutes" and was rewarded with some chuckling. "Alright fine I'm up honest." He couldn't help but be intrigued with how this next class would go. Of course, Snape would still hate him, hell had not frozen over, but he was now far more prepared and knew the next three years worth of the potions syllabus inside out as well as a great many little hints and tips he had picked up from his mother's journal. Hopefully this would give Snape far less ammunition to punish him, only time would tell.

The lesson began in customary fashion with Snape sweeping in before flicking his wand at the board where instructions for the potion appeared and Snape barked out "begin." However after this it all started to take a trip to the surreal, at least for Harry anyway. Snape was gliding around the dungeon on his normal route, taking points from Gryffindor's and giving them to Slytherin's when he reached Harry's cauldron. Due to the odd number of students in the class Harry had ended up working alone and so when Snape swept past he was expecting the worst but it never came, Snape merely nodded and continued. Harry was nonplussed, this had never happened before. He was so shaken he nearly forgot to take his cauldron off the fire at the appropriate time but luckily he had just enough wits about him to manage it. The lesson progressed and Harry felt he was doing well, his potion was the correct shade of pale blue, obviously his mother's tips were working well. It came to the end of the class and time for them to hand in their completed work in vials. Snape came round to collect them and uttered one word when he collected Harry's effort. One word that shattered Harry's current grip on reality. One simple word. "Good." He nearly dropped the vial in his shock. He packed up his things on auto pilot and walked mechanically to the Great Hall for lunch. It was midway through his second sandwich that he

finally absorbed what had happened. Clearly everybody else in the class had been too busy concentrating on their own work to notice the terrifying events that had taken place at Harry's work station. Something needed to be done to correct this and so Harry went to the only place he could think of, McGonagall's office to see his Head of House for the second time in the day.

He knocked and heard a gruff "enter".

"Umm Professor McGonagall I think something is terribly wrong."

"What? What are you talking about Potter?"

Harry noted the return to Potter from Harry this morning. "Well its going to sound a bit odd but its Snape."

"Professor Snape."

"Yes well I'm not sure it is. I've just had potions and he didn't shout at me, he didn't take points and worst of all he actually complimented me. Now this may not sound like much to you but I would have happily laid all of my worldly possessions in a bet that the apocalypse would happen before Snape complimented me. And no before you say anything I am not exaggerating in the slightest, since I first met him he has belittled me, abused me, tormented and mocked me all because I look like my father. Today, nothing. Either it is not him and its an impostor or more worryingly he has had a complete personality transplant." Harry paused here, his mind in overdrive. "Or perhaps this is actually his personality and he has reverted, I don't know but something is definitely wrong. Please just come with me you will see what I mean."

"I know I'm going to regret this but alright lead on Potter."

"Thank you Professor you will see what I mean I promise." The journey to the dungeons was stilted and held in complete silence, neither party really knowing what to say. "Here we are watch this" Harry said as he

walked into the office next to the dungeon that was Snape's. "Professor Snape sir I have a question?"

"Yes Potter what is it?" Snape's tone was mildly irritated but that was just his normal tone. Harry made a face at McGonagall as if to say 'see what I mean'.

"Well I was just wondering if anything happened to you over the summer, its just you seem different sir?"

"Not that I am aware of" he said sarcastically "but you on the other hand, you have obviously worked hard over the summer. You appear to be finally living up to your mother's ability that was a good potion you brewed today."

At this Harry nearly collapsed to the floor, he had been complimented twice by Snape, this was definitely not a dream. He muttered his Occlumency safe word in an attempt to reassure himself that his was really happening.

"Oh bloody hell I wonder if that's it? Time to find out if it really works I suppose. Yes I think it must be that, it would fit in with his manipulations. Now Professor Snape I'm fairly sure you can do Occlumency am I right?" Snape nodded confused but a little intrigued.

"Right, good, you are the studious type so think very carefully did you create a mental backup with a safe word in case your memory was ever tampered with?"

Harry's only clue that he was on the right track was the widening of Snape's eyes before he muttered a word to himself too quietly for anyone else to hear. McGonagall looked utterly confused at the direction proceedings were taking.

"Oh Merlin what have I done?" Snape cried out before following Harry to the floor, curling up in a ball weeping.

"What the hell?" Harry looked to McGonagall for guidance but found nothing helpful coming from the older woman. "Sir? What is it sir?"

"Oh god Lily I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I didn't know, I didn't want to, he made me do it."

Always a man of action Harry bolted to the store, grabbed a calming draught and brought it back to Snape. "Here Sir drink this, its just a calming draught." Snape didn't move so Harry poured it down his unresponsive throat. The change was immediate, his whole body relaxed and the weeping stilled to almost nothing.

"Thank you for that Harry I needed it although I'm sure you will wish you hadn't given it to me soon."

"Why is that then Sir?"

"Because I was the one that told the Dark Lord the prophecy. The prophecy that led him to attack you and kill the best friend I ever had."

He sighed, lost in memories. "There's so much I need to tell you, to explain but first Minerva could you check to see if I have any spells on me to influence the way I feel about people, I now remember Albus putting some on me but not what they were."

McGonagall nodded and moved her wand in a complicated pattern before gasping "You have multiple spells on you tied to certain magical signatures including the largest loyalty charm I have ever seen, keyed to Albus. There is also a hatred charm with what seems to be Harry's magical signature." She frowned "but it isn't, not anymore. Mr Potter, somehow your magical signature has changed any ideas how this could have happened?"

Harry thought about it "I have two possible reasons or perhaps a combination of the two. Firstly the ritual at Gringott's that removed all the blocks and more importantly the leech from my scar. Secondly the

events of the Chamber of Secrets at the end of last year. While I was down there I was first bitten by the Basilisk," both Professors gasped at this and McGonagall nearly had a heart attack when he showed her the scar, "this was then neutralised by Phoenix tears courtesy of Fawkes. Perhaps this combination of two immensely potent magical liquids entering my bloodstream had an effect? Tests would need to be done but that is of little importance at the moment."

"Agreed Mr Potter although I would very much like a sample of your blood for testing at some point." Snape appeared to be collecting himself more and more as the seconds ticked on.

Harry nodded his assent "now Professor, why don't you tell us your story?"

Snape took a deep intake of breath, visibly steeled himself and began.

"There are so many things that nobody knows, so much that has been changed. How much do you know about the relationship I had with both of your parents Harry?"

"Well as I know it you were my mother's first magical friend, this lasted until a certain incident in fifth year where she stopped an overzealous prank from my father and you called her a mudblood. From there the relationship fell apart and as far as I'm aware was never repaired or renewed. In terms of my father you had an intense rivalry with him based almost entirely on jealousy on both sides and competition for my mother's affections. This spilt over onto the rest of the Marauders and lasted for the entire of your school life. As my father describes it, you were both very talented, much as it pained him to admit it, and you were one of the few that could actually give him a challenge in terms of duelling even if he didn't approve of some of the curses and hexes you would fire. Personally on this I marginally disagree with him, as far as I

can see there is no light or dark, only intention matters. You can kill someone just as easily with a first year charm, Wingardium Leviosa, by dropping them out a window as you can with the killing curse, but that's beside the point really. Again as far as I know you had no contact with either of them after graduation. Is this about right?"

"There are accurate parts in that version of events. Indeed we did have a fierce rivalry that was based on mutual jealousy and the great friendship with your mother did indeed end with that shameful incident in fifth year. However where it changes from the generally accepted timeline is that I finally managed to apologise to your mother just before we graduated and we began to rebuild our friendship. Nobody knew about it because Lily wasn't sure how James would react so we told nobody.

When your mother got engaged she wanted me to come to the wedding and so she told James, he insisted we meet to clear the air, all of us. Me, Lily and the Marauders. We met just before their wedding and it was a promising meeting, we had all matured greatly from our school days and I think there was a genuine chance we could have become friends, maybe even good friends in time. However this is when Dumbledore found out about our burgeoning friendship and began his cursed manipulations.

The day before the wedding he cornered me and obliviated the meeting and all the progress we had made. It appears he must have also implanted some suggestions that caused me to commit my second most shameful mistake, I joined the Death Eaters." He rolled up his sleeve to show the tattoo, grimacing when he saw it. "Now that I have my correct memories back I know that I would never have joined, I'm a half-blood myself for Merlin's sake. I didn't go to the wedding and I would guess that His Royal Dumbleness must have obliviated your parents and the Marauders so they didn't recognise my absence. Next on my list of crimes

is perhaps my greatest, there was a prophecy made. I am doubtful that it is a real one, it is far too convenient. Albus implanted it in my mind and made me take it to the Dark Lord, it talked about the one person who could defeat the Dark Lord. It read '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..' This is what made the Dark Lord attack your parents, to get to you. It's my fault they're dead." He broke down again here and started shuddering.

Harry didn't know what to do, he had very little experience of how to deal with anyone crying let alone his emotionless potions professor. So he did the only thing he could think of, he walked over to the sobbing man and hugged him. Snape stiffened at first before he began clinging onto Harry as if he was a tree branch in a maelstrom, the only thing that could keep him afloat.

"It's ok Sir, I don't blame you. Had you tried to tell me any of this last year I would never have believed you but I have seen Dumble's manipulations for myself now. I did think that nothing more would surprise me when it came to what he was willing to do to suit his own ends but it seems I was wrong."

13. Chapter 13

A/N Hey all not sure if I'm really happy with the second half of this chapter, has been a bit of a sod to write the way I want it to. I'm sure many people will have questions and say it doesn't make sense but never fear I have a plan! Yes that is right I finally have a plan for all that I'm going to write rather than just a few basic events and no idea how to get from one to the next. Hopefully this should improve the fluency and increase the speed of updates but I make no promises. Anyhow as always read, review and enjoy.

Chapter 13

Harry wasn't sure how long he sat with Snape but it was nearly the end of lunch by the time he left the dungeons. They had decided that to avoid tipping off Dumbles, Snape had to continue in his previous torment of Harry in public. McGonagall didn't like this one bit now she had heard from both sides the level of antagonism but eventually agreed. Just before leaving for his afternoon class of Runes he had one request for the two professors "could you visit Lupin this evening in private so that he can get his memories back and then fill him in on what has happened? I'd tell him myself but I've no idea how he would react without being able to check him for Dumble's spells, plus I don't really want to go through it all again. You can fill in Professor Snape at the same time if that's ok?"

McGonagall nodded her assent and watched the remarkable young man depart the classroom, having once more shattered her perceptions about the world. That made twice in one day, this was becoming a bit too much of a habit for her liking.

The young man in question was digesting the turn of events for himself as he walked to the Ancient Runes classroom on the fourth floor. He wondered how many people were going to be in the class, it didn't look like it was a particularly popular subject judging from the lack of books in Flourish and Blotts. Never mind, he had more than enough access to many more books at the magical part of the British Library not to mention his practical experience already.

As it turned out he was correct in his assumption that it wasn't going to be a well attended class. There were only seven others present.

Unsurprisingly Hermione was one of these which was unfortunate but aside from her there were three Ravenclaws, Padma Patil, Terry Boot and a little Asian girl he wasn't entirely sure he had ever seen before. There

were no Hufflepuffs and the class was rounded out by the two Slytherin girls he had met earlier along with a final Slytherin, the haughty and proud dark skinned boy, Blaise Zabini. The desks in the class were grouped in pairs and Harry was immediately disturbed that he might end up sitting with Hermione if he didn't take action. He had already met two of the three Slytherins and so he walked over to them, having rather cleverly worked out that there were three of them and this was an odd number so he could sit next to one of them. The Slytherins watched him approach, Tracey and Blaise glanced at each other, smirked and then rushed to a table leaving Daphne on her own. She scowled at them which only incited them to smile back sweetly.

"Now Daphne what did I say before about scowling" Harry said teasingly. Seeing her glare turn to him he quickly modified his tone to one of utmost politeness. "Would you do me the honour of sitting at a table with me Miss Greengrass?"

She glanced around helplessly, looking for any other option but none was forthcoming so she sighed and reluctantly sat.

"There that wasn't so bad was it?" she glared at Harry's attempt to make light of the situation. "Look I'll be good I promise, I just hope this class is interesting."

Despite herself Daphne was intrigued, Potter had shown no inclination towards schoolwork that she had ever seen before. "How come you are in here anyway? I would have expected you to take the easy options like divination and muggle studies."

Harry snorted. "That was old Harry, this is new and improved Harry 2.0" he answered.

"2.0? What in Merlin's name does that mean?"

Harry's attempt to explain naming conventions for computer

programming was interrupted by the entry of the Ancient Runes Professor, Bathsheba Babbling. Babbling was a middle aged woman with a kindly face and an abundance of laughter lines.

"Welcome class to Ancient Runes. This is one of the most demanding subjects that you will study at Hogwarts and one of the most under appreciated. Runes can be used for many different purposes and are the basic component of all wards as well as many enchanted objects. As there are so few of you I expect you to ask any questions you may have, whenever you feel you need clarification. Now as we are an even number, the person you sat next to now will become your study partner. I expect you to work together throughout this year and help each other as needed." Daphne groaned at this while Harry chuckled to himself. "This year we will be primarily focused on understanding the primary runic language of Nordic and will be working on translations. Next year will include Ancient Greek and Hieroglyphics as well as beginning your practical work. In fifth year we will be doing a project in pairs where I will expect you to draw your own runic cluster in order to achieve an effect."

It was now Harry's turn to groan. Daphne turned to him "what's the matter Potter all of it sounding too difficult for you? Wishing you had taken an easier class I bet" she said scornfully.

"Quite the contrast Daphne this is going to be so easy, it's going to be incredibly boring."

Babbling obviously caught the end of his statement as she whirled to fix Harry with a stare. "Oh boring you say?"

"Unfortunately Professor yes it will. You see I worked quite a lot on Runes over the summer and I feel I might be a bit in advance of your plan."

"Harry James Potter sit down and stop interrupting the teacher you little liar." The spite in Hermione's tone made everyone in the classroom stare at her in shock. The friendship between the two and Ron was legendary even if some didn't understand it.

"Ooh all three names, consider me suitably chastised now" Harry retorted sarcastically garnering a laugh from his classmates. "The fact remains Professor if that's all we're doing I can probably do fifth year now."

Babbling looked sceptical to this fact. "Ok Professor, you don't believe me, that's fair enough, draw a rune, any rune and I'll translate it for you." She did just that and Harry confidently asserted that it was the rune for strength. The process was repeated several times with Harry answering every question correctly until Babbling drew a final rune.

"Now Professor that wasn't very nice, that isn't even a Nordic rune, that is Sumerian and it means hope with the accent on the upward flick meaning that it translates to a hope for future knowledge."

By this point the entire class was looking at him in awe and Babbling seemed shell shocked. "Yes... um... well that is absolutely correct take 30 points for Gryffindor Mr Potter" she replied absently before handing out a worksheet for everyone. "Use your dictionary to translate as many of these runes as you can until the end of the lesson. I'll be... I need to think for a bit" she finished lamely.

As soon as Babbling turned away to sit at her desk, Harry was fixed with a steely eyed glare causing him to gulp slightly. "Yes Daphne something I can help you with?"

"Don't you give me that. How did you know all of that stuff?"

"Well I worked hard over the summer once I decided which subjects I was going to be taking. I may have read a few extra books here and there."

She snorted disbelievingly "fine but you are going to help me with this

worksheet. We are partners remember."

Harry burst into laughter "oh so now we're partners, before you couldn't wait to get away from me."

"I don't know what you're talking about Potter now what does this one mean?" There was the tiniest hint of amusement dancing behind her violet eyes.

It turned out to be an enjoyable lesson for Harry, surprisingly he found he enjoyed Daphne's company when she wasn't insulting him. Even then he took it with a pinch of salt because now he had begun to notice the signs, he could see she was one of those people who didn't really mean everything insulting she said, she just found it amusing and took it upon herself to make sure he didn't get a big head. In fact by the end Harry was fairly sure that he was going to enjoy the class for the year, Daphne was very intelligent and picked things up quickly but unlike certain others in his acquaintance didn't feel the need to crow about it. She pushed herself throughout the class and they were easily the first pair to finish the exercise. Professor Babbling hadn't returned to the world of the living and was still hunched blankly over her desk so the class took it upon themselves to leave once time was up.

And so that was it for day one of classes for Harry 2.0 as he had christened himself. It had gone well but had been interrupted so it had really only been Runes where he had the opportunity to fully flex his wings. He reflected at dinner that it had been a good day as he sat back observing the banter between the Weasley twins and the chasers. He took advantage of the homework free evening to text Rach to update her on the happenings. He was of course roundly scolded for taking so long to contact her but after she had got that out of her system they settled back for a good natured argument about whether or not Metallica had sold out

or not since their original albums. Harry maintained that they had evolved over the years and this was perfectly acceptable in a band but Rach would have none of it and asserted that they needed to be shot for inflicting the travesty that was the St Anger album on the public. It was quite amazing in fact that such a simple difference of opinion could descend into such a debate and so it was that Harry didn't actually get to sleep until past midnight after he had learnt a very important skill in arguing with women. Sometimes it is much easier to just agree, even if you knew you were in the right.

Harry was yawning at the breakfast table when a note suddenly appeared on his plate. He recognised the ornate, looping script immediately; Dumbledore. This was what he had feared, with some trepidation he took the note and began to read. It was only a short note saying that Dumbledore wished to see him that evening at 7.30 in his office. Harry's mind immediately went into overdrive thinking about how he was going to play this. His first thought was to refuse to go but that would almost certainly tip Dumbledore off that Harry was aware of his manipulations. The balance needed to be struck between being safe from Dumbledore modifying his mind but not tipping the old man off. McGonagall was probably his best option here as she was his Head of House as well as Deputy Head so had a legitimate reason to be there as well as the power to back it up, not to mention she was staunchly on his side. Mentally scanning his timetable he found to his delight that he had Transfiguration after lunch giving him the perfect opportunity to enlist her aid. Before that though he had Herbology, knowing how good Neville was at the subject he resolved to work with him in the greenhouse.

This proved to be a wise move as Neville was full of useful little hints and tips that could only have come from an instinctive grasp of the subject

matter and a love of plants. Harry wondered why Neville wasn't better in Potions because a large amount of the ingredients used were plant based and so Neville should know what they would do. Was he really so lacking in confidence that Snape's berating cause him to forget all of this instinctive knowledge? Perhaps Snape would tone that down now he was free of the mind manipulations of Dumbledore, however similar to Harry he had to keep up some of the act with Neville, it would be too suspicious otherwise.

Transfiguration was easy as expected, a firm grasp of all the theory allowed Harry to turn his pebble into a snail on the very first attempt earning 10 points and a rare smile from McGonagall. It had been incredibly amusing to watch the look of absolute hatred on Hermione's face as he was awarded the points and to watch her increasing frustration as she couldn't do the spell herself. The final straw came when her ire overflowed and caused the pebble to explode earning herself a nasty looking cut to the forehead from a shard as well as 5 points lost and a detention. Harry gained a sharp look from McGonagall when he outright laughed at Hermione's crestfallen face after she had earned the detention but he was not punished. Harry returned to helping Neville, who was having difficulty controlling the power of his attempts.

At the end of the lesson Harry hung back to talk to McGonagall and to strategise for the meeting.

"I don't know if you have heard Professor but Dumbledore sent me a note this morning at breakfast to meet in his office at 7.30 this evening. No doubt he wants to know where I was over the summer but I'm worried about what he might try. I was wondering if you would be free to join me for the meeting to try and make it run smoothly?"

"That sounds like a sensible idea, it shouldn't be too difficult to explain to

him why I'm there. We will have to be wary of him attempting mind manipulation though. How are you going to explain your absence from the Dursleys to him?"

"I was thinking of playing the scared, naïve orphan card. The less he learns about my newfound desire for educational prowess or mental capabilities the better."

McGonagall nodded her head thoughtfully "that does indeed seem to be the best course of action. What if he does try anything?"

"I have faith in my shields but perhaps we should arrange a visit to Snape so that he could counter any spells placed on us without our knowledge. Dumbledore doesn't know about Snape breaking free and would never think that he would aid us."

"True, true, in fact I barely credit it myself and I was there. I will enlist the aid of Severus and I'll meet you outside my office at 7.20 we can make the journey to Dumbledore together."

"Damn I hadn't thought of that, we would be vulnerable on the walk there. In fact we would be vulnerable all the time just walking around the halls, maybe we should set up these meetings daily to make sure we aren't under any spells." Harry was becoming more frantic as he continued, his mind inventing all sorts of horrific potential scenarios.

McGonagall chuckled lightly to herself, 'it was nice to see there was still some hint of a child within the boy'. "You are becoming as paranoid as Alastor Moody."

"Who? And it's not paranoia if they are really out to get you."

"Never mind it's not important maybe I'll introduce you someday and you'll see what I mean. I don't think daily meetings will be necessary Mr Potter. Dumbledore rarely leaves his office, if he was to be spotted in the halls it would be commented on by all around and that would

immediately put us on our guard. No, the only way he has access would be in private meetings or at meal times when there is the entire school as a witness."

Harry was unconvinced but had to concede that she made a valid point; most students would never see Dumbledore with the exception of meals. All that remained now was to wait and see what would happen at the meeting later on.

As 7.30 rolled around Harry was becoming noticeably nervous, so much so that he had to do some calming exercises to get his pounding heart under control. He looked to McGonagall next to him as she muttered 'Jelly Slugs' which was apparently the password to Dumbledore's office. She seemed calm on the surface but he couldn't help but wonder if she too was petrified underneath her mask. The gargoyle moved aside revealing the spiral staircase.

"Ah Harry my boy come on in and Professor McGonagall as well what a delightful surprise."

Harry had to admire the old man's acting skills; there was no hint of sarcasm beneath his words.

"To what do I owe the pleasure Minerva?" his tone was lightly interrogating, demanding an answer.

"I was coming to drop off some paperwork when I met Mr Potter and he invited me to tag along for this meeting. I hope that's alright Albus."

Despite her words, it was clear that she was going to stay whether Dumbledore wished it or not.

"That's quite alright Minerva. Now Harry I'm sure you have guessed the reason I have asked you here this evening. It was very dangerous of you to run away from your relatives as you did this summer, we were very worried about you."

Harry took a deep breath, 'here goes nothing' he thought. "I know sir it's just that they were so horrible to me and I couldn't take any more. I wasn't really thinking when I ran away I just needed to get away and then when I found out about Sirius Black being on the loose I knew I had to hide. He sounds like a dangerous man and if he was Voldemort's right hand man he would probably come after me." Harry thought it was a masterful performance, eyes slightly downcast, the slight hitch in his voice every now and then. He just had to hope Dumbledore was convinced.

Dumbledore steepled his hands and peered over his half moon glasses. "I understand Harry, I really do, but it is very important that you stay with your relatives, it is for your protection." Harry almost snorted aloud at this but managed to maintain control. "I must admit I am curious as to where you stayed over the summer, will you satisfy an old man's curiosity?"

"I'm sorry sir but they say the fewer people who know a secret the better, what if I needed to go there again? If it stays secret it makes a good place for me to hide from people like Voldemort who want to hurt me." Harry wondered if he'd overdone it slightly with the subtle dig at the Headmaster but it appeared not.

With a sigh Dumbledore replied "well I can see you aren't going to tell me but remember Harry it would be a poor way to honour your parent's sacrifice, if you were to do something dangerous that got you killed. Something that could so easily be avoided if you were at your relative's house. I hope that one day you feel you are able to share the secret with me." His whole demeanour screamed out to trust him, especially his twinkling eyes.

Harry made an indistinct noise that could have been interpreted in many

different ways. "If that's all sir can I go?"

"Certainly my boy" he dismissed him indulgently.

"I'll take my leave as well Albus, goodnight" added McGonagall already on her way out before Dumbledore could reply.

"Well that was strange" Harry broke the silence as the pair walked to Snape's office for him to check them out. "He didn't seem to want anything; I can't believe he gave up so easily on where I was, it doesn't make sense."

McGonagall nodded pensively "you are right. I'm not sure I approve of his attempt at using guilt to make you behave but other than that his actions really did seem like someone who was trying to protect you. Perhaps we are missing something. We may know more once Professor Snape has checked for any charms on us."

As it turned out they knew even less after Snape had run the diagnostic charms three times because they hadn't believed the results. Nothing. Absolutely nothing had been done to them. It just didn't make sense what was Dumbledore's game? He hadn't tried Legillimency, at least not so either had noticed, and Harry felt confident that he would be able to notice an attack even if he couldn't necessarily defend against it. There were no charms on them. Dumbledore hadn't even pushed Harry to tell him everything. It was a conundrum, make no mistake.

14. Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Halloween. Harry hated Halloween. Nothing good ever happened to him on the cursed day. He wondered what awful thing was going to occur this year. He looked back over the last two months, it had been mostly good, certainly two of the best months he had ever had at Hogwarts so he was about due a turn of bad luck. He had managed reconnect with Remus

Lupin his Defence against the Dark Arts Professor also known as Moony and one of only two remaining Marauders. Moony had told him a lot of stories about his parents and it was nice to find out a bit more about them than he had previously known. He had also been in contact with Padfoot through Hedwig. Padfoot had made it to Madame Bones' house and was currently staying in one of the guest rooms, recovering from his long imprisonment in Azkaban followed by months on the run, living rough. They didn't speak often as Sirius was on a fairly extreme regimen of potions and a great deal of rest. Harry could tell from his letters that he was beginning to grow impatient to escape the clutches of the healer Madam Bones had brought in to care for him, under strict oath of course. They were hopeful that he would be well enough to have a trial before Christmas and that Madam Bones would be able to complete the required political manoeuvring to get it done by then as well. Apparently she had already struck a blow against Fudge during the summer as the idiot had tried to get dementors placed at the school. Thanks to her efforts though this had been blocked. Harry shuddered to think what might have happened had those foul creatures been around a school full of defenceless children.

He had managed to make friends with people from all around the school. He had in fact gone from someone with only two friends, and he used that term in its loosest possible sense, to someone with many different friends of different ages and houses. Hufflepuff had been the easiest to begin his quest for new friendships and it had been Neville of all people who had introduced him to Hannah Abbott and Susan Bones in Herbology. He of course recognised Susan's surname and made the connection that Madam Bones was her Aunt. Both girls were shy at first but once coaxed out of their shell were good fun and Susan's temper

could be incredibly amusing on the rare occasions that she did unleash it. From there he had made friends with the other Hufflepuffs in his year with exception of one called Zacharias Smith, the boy's arrogance having thoroughly put Harry off. An older Hufflepuff called Cedric Diggory had also become a friend, well perhaps more of an older brother. Cedric often came and made sure that the Hufflepuffs were doing ok and that they didn't need any help and Harry had been extended the same offer. Harry had taken this to heart and offered himself in a similar role to the younger Gryffindors.

The Ravenclaws had taken a little bit more time to crack but once they had realised Harry's performance in class had not been a fluke, they hadn't been able to contain their curiosity. Harry now took part in a study group with a few of the Ravenclaws such as Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, Padma Patil and the quiet Chinese girl who Harry now knew was called Su Li. The group met two nights a week and they helped each other out with whatever work needed completing at the time. It was a productive arrangement for all involved and Harry enjoyed the experience of having people he could bounce ideas off of.

However Harry was most proud of the progress he had made with the Slytherins. He and Daphne made a very good team as it turned out. After their initial success in Ancient Runes it had been Daphne that had taken the initiative in Arithmancy and joined him at a desk making them partners in that as well. While Harry was still far ahead of everyone in Runes, Daphne was catching up rapidly with his help. The opposite was true in Arithmancy where Daphne was an absolute prodigy and it was with her help that Harry was the one catching up. They also met up once a week along with Blaise Zabini and Tracey Davies in their own mini study group that concentrated on those two subjects. While all three of

the Slytherins were still more reserved than Harry was used to, their barriers had started to break down. Harry found that Daphne was most reserved of the trio until you learned to read her, particularly her eyes; they were where her true emotions could be discerned with practise. Tracey was far more free, always willing to laugh and always had something to say. Blaise, on the other hand, was much more reticent but possessed an incredibly dry wit along with a sarcastic and cynical view of life.

Progress had even been made with Malfoy. After the incident on the train Malfoy seemed to have take Harry's advice to leave each other alone to heart. This was further increased in the very first Care of Magical Creatures lesson where Hagrid had introduced them to hippogriffs, a strange creature that was a cross between an eagle and a horse. They were very proud animals and Hagrid had warned the class against insulting them. Malfoy however had not been listening and had managed to insult the hippogriff he was working with. It was only thanks to Harry's quick reactions that allowed him to summon Draco out of the way before Buckbeak's talons could connect. Malfoy had even gone so far as to give Harry a nod of thanks. Since then both teenagers stayed out of each other's way and were happier for it. However this didn't stop Malfoy from continuing his sniping towards Ron and Hermione. In fact now Harry could view it as an outsider he could fully appreciate how childish it was. Harry did feel that it was actually Ron who was the main cause of the arguments as Malfoy had already proven an ability to ignore if prompted, a skill Ron lacked in every conceivable way.

While Harry had been steadily accumulating new friends, his old friends had steadily become pariahs within the school. Without Harry as a buffer, Hermione had become more and more isolated thanks to her

insistence that she knew best. She had tried to force her way in to several conversations while Harry was present, breaking just about every social convention in existence, however this had not worked well at all. It was unfortunate for Hermione that she had tried to barge into a conversation that Harry was having with Susan just after Harry had explained Hermione's reaction to him on the train in. Needless to say Hermione's show of disloyalty to her friend had not sat well with the fiery Hufflepuff and Hermione had forced into a very painful trip to the hospital wing. Hermione was also far from flavour of the month with her dorm mates after a huge argument about the merits of divination. Harry privately agreed with her that divination was a bit of a waste of time as a lesson as you either had the gift or you didn't. However he could just imagine the superior tone in which Hermione had delivered her opinion and it was frankly bad manners to belittle something that someone else enjoys, especially to their face. For all Hermione delighted in berating Ron for his lack of tact it was actually her that was far worse.

Ron had supported Hermione throughout and had tried to turn the Gryffindor boys against Harry due to him consorting with the enemy, namely the Slytherins, however they were having none of it. Neville in particular had become a firm friend of Harry and his staunchest advocate. He knew Daphne and Blaise from the Pureblood social gatherings that his Grandmother had taken him to and he thought the two Slytherins were alright, even if he had little contact with them. It was amazing to see the progress Neville was making thanks to Harry giving him a little encouragement and help when he needed it. Harry wasn't as close with Dean and Seamus but they had a few games of Gobstones together and Harry had also been a part of Dean's disastrous attempt to teach them Poker. It probably would have been more

successful had Dean actually been able to remember the ranking of the hands rather than making it up on the fly. So after one too many inconsistencies in which hand was the winner for Seamus to take, it had descended into a boisterous pillow war.

The Gryffindor Quidditch team had become closer as well and Harry had even been able to influence Oliver enough so that one of their four practices per week was a team building one rather than a traditional training session. Despite what Wood liked to maintain it was not really a practise but rather all of the team meeting up and talking, playing games, whatever took their fancy. The results had been clear to see in training as all the members in the team seemed to be able to instinctively know where everyone else would be at any one time thanks to their new closeness. Wood was practically skipping with glee at how well the practices were going and none of them could wait to showcase their superior teamwork in the first game against Slytherin.

However it wasn't all working on his social life, oh no Harry 2.0 was still plugging away at his school work. It was obvious to all of his professors that Harry was far in advance of his peers but he wasn't boastful about it, he was quite happy to sit back and allow others the opportunity to answer any questions. He found himself acting as a teaching assistant as he finished the assigned work so quickly that he would be drafted in by his friends to help them. Harry didn't mind this at all; in fact he rather enjoyed it as he found immense satisfaction in being able to help one of his friends achieve something they had been struggling with. Not to mention being asked to explain something to someone else really helped him to get it clear within his own mind. The professors had at first been wary of this but after a few lessons they felt Harry had proved himself and were happy to let him continue. In a bid to stretch him they would

sometimes set him different homework to the rest of the class or suggest additional reading or even a spell from later years for him to work on, on his own. The exception to this was potions where Snape still put Harry in numerous detentions but these were not punishments but rather opportunities for Snape to push Harry's potions knowledge and push him he did. Snape demanded excellence from the work and Harry had to really work himself to meet the standards but he was improving in leaps and bounds. The relationship between the two was also improving as both put the past behind them and developed a healthy respect for each other. Harry was also delighted to hear many stories from Snape about his mother, something that the Marauders didn't focus on so much. Thinking of Lily was still painful for Snape but he found that talking about her and sharing his memories allowed her to live on and this dulled the loss he felt.

Harry hadn't really been focusing on his personal projects but that's not to say he hadn't made decent progress. He had managed to build the wifi receiver that Rach had been bullying him to get done and so was able to speak to her online using his laptops inbuilt webcam. He had begun building a program on there to manage his money so that he could track his income and outgoings as well as analyse the muggle stock market to see if there was a company he should invest in. This was exceedingly difficult and there were so many permutations to consider that he had been forced to develop a stress relief method. First he had experimented with transfiguration in order to build himself the perfect guitar. Next he had tested out many charms in order to keep the guitar in tune and keep it in good condition. He desperately wanted an amp and pedals so he could use an electric guitar however he had no way of getting hold of them and the transfiguration was beyond him at the moment so he stuck

with an acoustic guitar until he could pick up the required materials.

There were plenty of videos available on the internet to teach him how to play and he found just strumming away very calming, almost hypnotic.

His mental abilities helped him a great deal because he could memorise the chord patterns easily and after hearing a song once or twice and seeing the notes written out he could usually replicate it. It was much more difficult for him to create his own music so when he wasn't playing a song written by someone else he would just strum chords rhythmically.

It appeared that Harry's fears for the day were well founded as at the Halloween feast he was presented with a note from Dumbledore once again calling Harry to his office. Harry swore bitterly, drawing a reproachful glare from the chasers, particularly Angelina the unofficial mother hen of the trio. He apologised briefly but did not elaborate on what had upset him. The feast was almost over and Harry's bad luck was in full effect as McGonagall had already departed, leaving him no way of reaching before the meeting. The note had stressed 'straight after the feast'. This was bad, very bad indeed. He couldn't go to Snape and McGonagall was out of reach. Moony, of course how could he have been so stupid as to forget his other ally within the school? He scanned the staff table once again but Moony wasn't there. He let loose a torrent of curses that had Angelina reach over and smack him round the head.

Tonight was a full moon; of course Moony wouldn't be there. It was like the planets had aligned for him to have the absolute worst day. The worst thing was he couldn't find a way out of his predicament, not without making it so obvious that a blind chicken could spot that he was no longer toeing the party line.

The feast was, to all intents and purposes, finished as the last dregs of the student body filtered out of the hall. He sucked in a fortifying breath and

made his way cautiously to Dumbledore's office.

"Enter" Dumbledore's voice reverberated through the spiral stone staircase.

Harry walked in, his eyes flicking around the office as if curious as to what was there. He noticed Fawkes was conspicuously absent from his perch. "You wanted to see me sir?" he asked with a slight questioning lilt in his voice.

"Yes I did Harry. Sit down." Harry did so but he kept up his study of his surroundings, keeping track of the old man with the corner of his eye.

"Now Harry are you ready to tell me where you were over the summer? I think I have waited long enough for you to come to your senses and stop this foolish notion of keeping a secret."

Harry shook himself; this was a different tactic from Dumbledore that's for sure. "Um no sir, I don't think I am." There was a flash of something in Dumbledore's eyes and it wasn't the standard twinkle. No this was something different, something Harry had never seen there before. Was it anger? Perhaps, but the old man's body betrayed no other sign of it.

"Now Harry I think we can both agree that it is for the greater good that I am made aware of your plans. How else am I supposed to keep you safe, as I did all those years ago?" Harry fought to keep his expression neutral but in his hyper aware state he noticed a slight tightening around the eyes of Dumbledore as he said 'safe'. It was so brief that Harry thought he might have imagined it but he had learnt not to dismiss his instincts over the years.

"I'm sorry sir but I'd really rather not" he replied flatly. It was now that he felt a slight pressure on his Occlumency shields. He broke the marginal eye contact quickly and stood up, not caring that he had revealed his hand, he just knew he had to get out of there sharpish. "If that's all sir I

have a lot of homework to do." He got up and made to leave. He got half way to the door.

"Sit down boy I haven't finished with you yet." There was steel laced throughout the command from Dumbledore. Harry ignored it and decided that time was up so he turned tail and bolted from the office, dodging the closing gargoyle statue.

He ran to McGonagall's office as fast as he could and started pounding on the door. It opened to reveal an irate McGonagall but her expression softened as she saw the panic on Harry's face, morphing in to one of concern.

"Well Potter what is it? What's happened?"

"I had a meeting with Dumbledore. Check me for spells." Her eyes widened as she did so, finding nothing, as the whole story came spilling out, about the demand for information.

"He was so different, just because you weren't there. I can't believe it."

"It was very foolish of you to go in there alone Potter."

"I know, I know. I thought I could handle it and get away without alerting him that I knew about him. I was stupid and overconfident but at least my Occlumency shields held. It's just so strange. It was only tiny little things, so small I almost thought I'd imagined them but even his mannerisms were different." McGonagall turned to him sharply. "Yeah, I've never seen his eyes do anything other than twinkle before but they did today."

"Are you sure?" McGonagall asked.

Harry grimaced slightly "I can't be one hundred percent but it's close to that. Something to keep an eye on, perhaps?"

"Perhaps indeed Mr Potter, I shall let the others know. I must say it's not something I've ever noticed before but then if the signs are as slight as

you say, we have never had reason to look for them before. Anyway off to bed with you Potter."

"Thanks professor, for everything, not just this. I really am grateful you know, that you saw fit to trust me all those months ago." With a final smile he closed the door behind him and returned to the Gryffindor tower and to bed.

15. Chapter 15

AN - Hello all sorry about the wait for this one but I have been ridiculously busy finishing off my degree and studying for my exams however these are all over now, finally four years of uni done! Hopefully that will leave me more time to do some writing but as I am starting a new job who knows when my next update will be. Now as for the last chapter some things I have noticed in reviews and in the fanfic universe in general that slightly confuse me. Why is it that every single character in the Harry Potter universe can be 'bashed' or whatever it is called but it seems that Hermione cannot? This is not a criticism of people who don't like it, that's fine you're all entitled to your own opinion, I just don't see why she is considered to be some sort of saint in pretty much all of the fanfics I have read. Even the ones where she does betray Harry it is never her fault. I'm not really expecting an answer here, it is merely my rhetorical rambling so feel free to ignore my rubbish and continue with the story. As always - read, review, enjoy.

Chapter 15

The first Quidditch match of the season always drew great attention from the inhabitants of Hogwarts. Not only was it the start, but it was also the game between the two biggest rivals in the school. Gryffindor and Slytherin never really had a friendly relationship between them

throughout the year but in the weeks leading up to the game, it became positively murderous. Hexes were exchanged regularly between the more militant supporters within each house. However despite all of this Harry managed to maintain a cordial relationship with the majority of Slytherins in his year. This may be because Daphne had absolutely no interest in the sport of Quidditch and Blaise tolerated it even if he didn't particularly enjoy it. Tracey was the only one of Harry's Slytherin friends that actually enjoyed the sport but she insisted that Malfoy's incessant boasting in the common room made her want him to lose. Well she had actually launched into a diatribe that had Blaise sniggering and Daphne primly turning up her nose at some of the more violent suggestions Tracey put forth. Harry found it all amusing but was privately very glad that they felt that way. He really enjoyed their company and felt disappointed in himself for ignoring them as potential friends for the first two years of his Hogwarts career.

Malfoy may have been boasting in his common room but he didn't do so in front of Harry. In fact Harry barely saw the blonde boy as he seemed to be taking extra care lest they bump into one another. The same courtesy was not extended to Ron however and Malfoy seemed to take great pleasure in engineering situations where he would provoke the ginger fool within the range of Snape. Thus when Ron inevitably lost his temper, Snape was immediately able to put him in detention. Harry shook his head, bemused, after Ron had fallen for the same trick for the third time within the space of a week. For all his vaunted chess skill, he had no idea how to avoid such a simple ploy; it was almost like taking sweets from a baby.

The morning of the match was grey and cloudy but the sun was trying to force the clouds away with a limited amount of success. The nerves Harry

used to feel before every match were almost gone, now that he was beginning his third season as a starter. Wood was still hovering around the breakfast table insisting that every member of the team eat, all the while refusing to touch anything himself. The Weasley twins were cracking jokes and making the chasers laugh. It was a familiar routine, a comfortable one and it bred confidence in the team. They all knew what was expected of them and had worked hard to make sure they would achieve it. They walked to the changing rooms together amidst cheers from the Gryffindor table. It was almost as if the door to the changing room was the border where jokes were left the other side. Each team member grew silent as they walked in, focused on what they were going to do. Harry had put his iPod in with some thrash metal on. It was working well as he could feel himself psyching up for the match to come. The silence was only broken by the cheers from the rapidly filling stands as the spectators got into it up as well. Wood touched Harry on the shoulder making him remove his headphones.

"Alright team. You all know what the plan is; you don't need me to go over it again. We are the best team and we deserve to win. We have had some bad luck but that's in the past, doesn't matter one jot. All that matters is this match. Today. Today we win and give every other team something to fear for when we play them. This is the one so hands in the middle. On three. One. Two." Wood's three was drowned out by a wordless cheer from the other six members of the team. They jumped onto their brooms and burst out onto the pitch, doing a quick lap in formation before going to their starting positions.

What followed would be talked about at Hogwarts for many a month as one of the most impressive performances by a school team in memory. The Weasleys had the Slytherins under phenomenal pressure from the

beginning as launched bludger after bludger with impunity. The Slytherins simply couldn't withstand the onslaught and were forced into whatever area of the pitch that the twins desired. The almost telepathic connection between the Gryffindor chasers had always been a big part of their success but this was at an almost unbelievable level during the match. They didn't need to look where they were passing and it was done at such speed that the poor Slytherin keeper had no idea which one of them had the quaffle most of the time let alone be able to stop it. Harry had been working with the girls in training and he too would join in on some of their plays. Wood had instructed him only to do this if they were over 150 points up or if the opposition seeker was otherwise occupied. In this game both were quickly true as Malfoy was in an almost constant evasion of bludgers, leaving him no time to breathe. Such was the domination that the scoreboard very soon read well over 300 points in Gryffindors favour before Harry was barked at by his captain to find the snitch. It took him only another 15 minutes before he spotted a flash of gold which he quickly chased down, making a simple catch unopposed to bring the final score to 520 - 30. It was an absolute whitewash and the Gryffindor supporters cheered themselves hoarse as they celebrated their team.

The party went on long into the night in the common room and was marred only slightly by an ugly scene involving Ron. He was quite obviously consumed with jealousy at Harry's popularity within the house. Harry was laughing along with Lavender and Parvati when it happened. The seeker was a little uncomfortable as they kept leaning in and using any opportunity to touch him but not uncomfortable enough to move away. It was perhaps this that sent Ron over the edge as he stormed over and forcefully put his arm around Lavender. The disgust was clear on her

face as she tried to remove his arm but couldn't.

"What are you doing Ron? Let go of her." There was a pause in the festivities as almost everyone turned to watch what was going on, Harry's loud pronouncement drawing their attention.

"I'm not doing anything she doesn't want. Look at her all over you like some scarlet woman."

"She clearly isn't interested Ron so let go before I make you" said Harry firmly but with menace.

"Oh so that's how it is, famous Harry Potter is allowed as many girls as he wants but the rest of us don't get a look in." Ron had a sneer Malfoy would have been proud of fixed on his face.

"You know that's not the case you prat. These aren't 'my girls' or anyone else's, they are their own people" he answered incredulously.

"Come away Ron you idiot you're embarrassing yourself and more importantly us" shouted George, moving towards his younger brother.

During this exchange Ron's hand had been steadily moving southwards down Lavender's back until it reached an area that drew an indignant squeal from the blonde girl. With an expression of thunder she turned and drew her knee back before shooting it forward aimed at a very sensitive area. It connected with the target area and Ron crumpled with a groan. There was absolutely no sympathy forthcoming from any person present and the twins grabbed a foot each of their brother and hauled him off for a quiet little chat, one which Ron certainly wasn't going to enjoy. The twins may have been pranksters but they were gentlemen at heart, to women at any rate, thanks to extensive 'lessons' from the chasers.

With a shrug at his former friend's fate Harry resumed his talk with the girls and they were soon joined by Dean and Seamus allowing the

conversation to flow, long into the night.

Harry had Runes again on the Monday following the Quidditch and as was now customary he met the Slytherins outside the classroom. Of course Tracey was the first to congratulate him on his team's performance.

"Oh Harry it was sooo impressive" she said fluttering her eyelids comically. "Seriously though some of those moves your team pulled off were professional level and the chasers, those girls were awesome. I still don't see why girls aren't allowed to try out for the Slytherin team. It's a travesty..."

"We know Tracey you talk about it all the time. You know if you really wanted to change it why didn't you try out?" Blaise asked her slyly.

"Because they wouldn't let me anywhere near the team so what would be the point in trying out" Tracey replied a little flustered.

"Of course that's the reason" the dark haired boy answered snidely.

Sensing that Tracey was going to fly into a rage again thanks to Blaise's prodding, Daphne interrupted. "It was nice flying Potter."

This pulled everyone up short. "Daph are you feeling alright? I don't think I've ever heard you compliment Harry." Tracey asked her friend with mock concern, holding a hand to Daphne's forehead.

"More to the point can't I just once have you call me by my name instead of Potter, I've finally managed to get Tracey and Blaise to do it so why won't you?" Harry tried the puppy dog look but it failed miserably.

"You should be happy that I talk to you at all Potter, I'm still not sure you are worth my time of day." This statement led to much eye rolling from the other three as they walked into the Runes classroom, heading to their customary seats.

As usual Hermione was already there and was currently talking the ear

off of her partner Su Li. Harry felt exceedingly sorry for the quiet girl, she had drawn the short straw as someone had to sit next to the bossy Gryffindor. At the study group with the Ravenclaws Harry heard Su repeatedly complain about her Runes partner but she didn't have the confidence to say anything during class. Harry was working on improving this; he had even got her to swear once although you could have heated a room with the force of the girl's blush afterwards. Su looked over to Harry with a plaintive look on her face, Harry shrugged and mouthed 'sorry'.

Professor Babbling launched into her planned lesson, Harry didn't really pay attention though. He knew Daphne would and that Babbling would likely come to them after she had finished setting the rest of the class a task. As expected she did just that leaning against the desk of her two favourite students.

"Now I know you weren't listening Harry" Daphne glared at her partner, "but I can assure you that it was a task both of you are perfectly capable of already. So in light of that I'm going to ask you both to work on these Celtic runes, translate them and then suggest what this cluster could be designed to do." Professor Babbling deposited a sheet of parchment in front of the pair with a complicated array of symbols on it.

The pair worked together comfortably, arguing good naturedly as well as sniping at each other all the time. If anyone who didn't know them, heard the things they were saying, they would assume the two hated each other but in reality this was their way of encouraging each other. As they progressed towards the end of lesson it was clear that even this extra work was too easy for the pair of them and so Harry made a decision.

"Hey Daphne I've got something I want to show you later on" she quirked her eyebrow, "no nothing like that. Get your mind out of the gutter! It's

something you will be interested in though I promise; meet me at 4 after classes in the usual place and I will explain all."

"This had better be worth my valuable time Potter or I'll hurt you."

Harry rolled his eyes at the threat "yeah yeah sure Daph see you later."

"Don't call me Daph you imbecile" came her shouted reply as they left the classroom, going in different directions.

Harry chuckled as he walked to Charms, unfortunately a presence made itself known, breaking his good mood.

"Are you ready to apologise to me yet?"

"What on earth are you on about Granger? Why would I need to apologise to you?"

"For all the rude things you have said to me and about me. However luckily for you I am willing to forgive you so long as you promise to stop copying other people and taking credit for their work" she finished magnanimously.

"Are you really so deluded? I don't copy anyone; it's all my own work. Is it so difficult for you to believe that someone might be smarter than you?" he said scathingly.

"But I'm the smartest witch of our generation, everyone says so, I've heard the teachers calling me it" she said confidently.

Harry scoffed "even if that was true, which I doubt, it may have escaped your notice as you were too busy living in a complete fantasy world but I am a bloke." Confusion marred Hermione's face. "Let me put it in simple terms so you can understand. You could be the smartest witch in our generation, however that makes no mention of wizards does it? Every single wizard in the world could easily be smarter than you. Well perhaps not Ron or Crabbe and Goyle, but everyone else."

The bushy haired girl reeled as if she had been slapped "but...but..."

"But nothing. If you can't accept that I am smarter than you then fine, it makes no difference to me. Sure I needed your help in first and second year but I was an emotionally stunted child and you were a socially retarded bookworm, we suited each other well. However I've grown up now, you obviously haven't; you are a crutch I've long since outgrown. Perhaps if you grow up and quit living in a world of your own creation we can work to rebuilding our friendship. But until then you will continue to be alone, disliked by everyone else in our year, a social pariah. Think about it." He turned and walked away. He hoped this would provide a wakeup call but somehow he doubted it, she was too stubborn, trapped in her own belief of omniscience.

She didn't follow him to Charms, in fact she didn't turn up at all to the class but Harry hardly noticed. He wouldn't admit it to anyone but he was nervous over the meeting with Daphne later. The plan was to tell her about some of the work he had done on the electronics and see if she was willing to help him or had any ideas. Hopefully she wouldn't laugh at him.

Charms passed in a blur for Harry as he went to the usual place for meeting the Slytherins, just outside the library. Daphne was already there.

"Hey Daphne if you'd like to follow me I'll take you where we are going."

"Where are we going? I thought we were going to the library."

"No we will be too loud in there and I don't like too many people knowing what I'm up to."

Daphne's curiosity was definitely piqued now and she followed Harry to an abandoned classroom along the corridor. She struggled to maintain her neutral mask when Harry removed a shrunken trunk from his pocket and enlarged it. The items he removed further increased her confusion,

she knew a little about the muggle world but not enough to identify them. However her eyes soon widened and the mask slipped entirely once Harry began to explain what all of them did and how he had enchanted them to run without electricity as well as shielding them from magic. Her mind was in turmoil as she put a headphone in her ear cautiously. She recoiled quickly when some sort of music blasted from it suddenly making Harry burst into laughter earning him a patented death glare. The thing that excited her most was the laptop and the programs Harry was in the process of creating. The potential was unbelievable and she already had ideas fighting for attention in her mind.

"This is amazing Harry. I can't believe you have done this, it's going to revolutionise the magical world."

"Ha you called me Harry" he said childishly, doing a little dance.

"That's what you took from what I said? Prat" she replied aiming a swipe at him which he dodged easily.

"Of course. I've been trying to get you to call me that for ages now.

Seriously though I'm glad you didn't laugh at me, I half expected you to, you know."

"Normally I would but this is incredible. I think you might even have earned the use of your first name providing of course that you keep me involved" she fixed him with a hard stare.

"Of course, I wouldn't have told you otherwise. I'd like your help with this money program I'm writing. You were trained to take over management of your family's finances weren't you?"

She nodded affirmatively and so began a productive few hours where the two went over what Harry had completed already and worked out the kinks as well as improving it. It proved to be a wise move on Harry's part to include Daphne as she was full of ideas, picked up on problems he

didn't even know existed and made suggestions he would never have thought of. As she had absolutely no idea what was possible on a computer and what wasn't, she had no limits placed on her imagination. Her best, in Harry's opinion, was to first create a database of every potential potions ingredient as well as its effect on a potion using Arithmancy. Then to input how different ways of stirring and the actual brewing process affected the potion. They had already learnt in Arithmancy that every potion could be broken down into pure numbers to analyse it. However it was very complicated and time consuming and so it was rarely done. Harry could immediately see the potential to create a program that would analyse these variables to improve every potion to its purest, most effective form. However Daphne was thinking far more ambitiously than this, her idea was that the program could invent an entirely new and perfect potion based on what the desired result was. Harry was shell shocked. Theoretically, if done right, this could mean that every potion possible in existence would be contained within a program of their creation. They stayed up long into the night, well past curfew, flushed with the possibilities of their ideas.

16. Chapter 16

AN - Just a quick notice, while reviews are always appreciated, flames are not. If you don't like my story fine, I couldn't care less but stop reading it. Don't harp on to me about how I'm just writing clichés and I suck as a writer. If you think you can do better, write your own damn story. Anyway rant over, enjoy.

Chapter 16

After their lengthy initial meeting, Daphne and Harry continued to meet regularly in order to refine their ideas. Before they could start on the potions project, Harry wanted to get his money manager program

finished and he used the opportunity to teach Daphne some of how he went about enchanting the objects. He didn't tell her everything and he wouldn't unless they had some sort of formal agreement to become partners. This was looking more and more likely though, one could almost say they were already but it went unspoken that they wanted to wait a bit before committing formally. Both Blaise and Tracey had commented on the fact that they were spending more time together but their probing was ignored by Harry and Daphne.

Aside from this little of note had happened at Hogwarts, Harry's guess that Hermione would be too stubborn to change was proved correct as she returned to classes acting exactly as she had before. Maybe someday she would change but it would likely be too late by the time she was shocked into action and Harry regretted this. That didn't mean he was going to force her to change though, no if she wanted to be miserable then he would let her do so.

Classes continued on with Harry working further and further ahead, garnering much praise and many house points for his efforts. Hufflepuff had played Ravenclaw in the second Quidditch game of the year and the Ravens came away with a close victory. It was a tentative performance from teams, though, as both had one eye on their upcoming match with the rampant Gryffindor team.

The only thing to break the comfortable monotony was a letter Harry received from Sirius telling him to expect a summons in the not too distant future ready for his trial. The intention was to keep the trial a secret from Dumbledore until the actual day. Harry was going to be the only witness called so he wouldn't be surprised when the summons arrived out of the blue. Harry couldn't wait; the prospect of a free Godfather that he could live with was the cause of major excitement.

Sirius hadn't outright said it yet, not wanting to tempt fate, but it was perfectly obvious from his not so subtle hints that he wanted Harry to live with him as soon as he was cleared. He just hoped that the Wizemagot would do the right thing and clear Sirius.

Harry had avoided Dumbledore as much as he possibly could since their previous meeting and so the day when the eagerly anticipated summons did arrive at the end of breakfast, was almost the first time he had looked at the Headmaster. Dumbledore received the message at the same time as Harry. He didn't betray much, just a slight contemplative frown as he read it. Looking round he spied Harry with the same official looking letter and nodded to himself.

He left his chair and walked over to Harry, who tensed at his approach. "I take it you are going to be present at this trial my boy?" He didn't wait for Harry to reply. "Well then I wish you the very best of luck and I hope the right result is achieved."

He didn't seem disturbed at all by the news and this worried Harry greatly, had the old man found out and already put in place a plan to block or disrupt the trial? Well there was nothing for it now but to go and hope that whatever measures Madam Bones had put in place would do their job.

Immediately following breakfast he followed McGonagall to her office where he was due to take the floo from.

"Well good luck Mr Potter, you are excused from all of your classes today, let's hope the result is favourable."

"Thanks Professor, I'll be back later" he said throwing the floo powder into the fire.

The Ministry atrium, where the floo fireplaces were housed, was a cavernous, grey expanse and it was dominated at one end by a large

statue. Before Harry could see what it was though he was greeted by an imposing, ebony skinned man.

"Greetings Mr Potter, my name is Kingsley Shacklebolt and I have been sent here by Madam Bones to escort you to the courtroom for the trial."

He had a deep calming voice that Harry couldn't help but feel relaxed by.

"Hello Mr Shacklebolt, I take it you are an Auror?" Kingsley nodded in confirmation. "Well lead on then sir, do you know how long it will be until the trial begins?"

"They should be starting about now Mr Potter."

The rest of the journey was made in silence and the tall Auror brought Harry to a waiting room, gave a quick bow of the head and left him there to wait. All of Harry's nervousness came to the fore again as he was left with time to ponder. He wasn't allowed into the court room for the trial itself only for his stint as a witness.

It was almost an hour before Shacklebolt returned to lead him into the witness stand.

"You are Harry James Potter?" came the business like tone of Madam Bones.

"I am" Harry replied.

"You are of the belief that Sirius Orion Black is innocent of the crimes he is accused of, could you explain to the court briefly why this is?"

So Harry explained what he had found in his parents journals about them changing the secret keeper to Pettigrew and using Sirius as a decoy. He answered the questions as simply and concisely as he could and in short order was escorted from the court room. It was very frustrating, he still had no idea whether Sirius was going to be cleared or not. He settled down to wait again for the result, his nerves jangling.

One hour passed then a second before Auror Shacklebolt exited the door

again, causing Harry to leap from his slumped position.

"What happened? Is he free?"

Shacklebolt smiled briefly, "why don't you ask him yourself?"

"Sirius" Harry shouted charging towards the man.

"Harry" Sirius managed to choke out from Harry's arms wrapped tightly around his neck. "Harry you gotta let go, I can't breathe." Harry released him instantly and looked at him in concern.

Sirius was a tall man with long black hair and steel grey eyes. He was skinny, like he had just recovered from a long term illness, which Harry supposed Azkaban was.

"What happened? Tell me everything," Harry demanded.

Sirius chuckled lightly, muttering "just like your mother" before taking a deep breath, steeling himself. "Well the good news is that I'm free, the baboons of the Wizemagot gave me Veritaserum, truth potion, and while under that I told them the story about how we switched secret keepers. Also about when I confronted the dirty rat and the bastard shouted that I'd betrayed Lily and James before blowing up the street and killing those muggles before the bugger transformed and ran into the sewer."

"Why did it all take so long then? I've been sat out here for hours."

"Yes well you know politicians, never say one word where ten will do.

But the longest part came when I explained the rat was at Hogwarts."

Harry gasped. "Yeah that's why I escaped, I saw him in a picture in the Prophet on a Weasley's shoulder. They were going to Egypt or something."

"Scabbers? Scabbers is Pettigrew? Oh for the love of Merlin I've been sharing a room with that traitor for three years. Did they catch him?"

Sirius shook his head "they tried, several Aurors went to Hogwarts but through a combination of standard Ministry incompetence and the

Weasley boy being a moron the rat was able to escape" Sirius spat the last word out as if it was the foulest word in the English language.

"Ron let the traitor escape? I'll kill him." Fire blazed in Harry's eyes, so much so that Sirius almost took a step back.

"You know this Ron?"

"Thought I did. He was my best mate but I've finally realised he's a jealous idiot with the idea set in his mind that the world owes him."

Sirius looked about to say something and was hovering on the edge of it but Harry interrupted him. "Doesn't matter I'm shot of him now, killing him won't solve anything. What are your plans now you're free? Where are you going to live?"

"Well I haven't wanted to think about it too much, didn't want to jinx the trial. I guess I'll go to Gringotts and find out whether or not my darling mother disowned me or not. Actually she should be dead by now" he visibly brightened at this thought before seeing Harry looking at him curiously. "You must understand Harry I hated her with all of her talk of blood purity and prejudice, and she hated me as much as her black heart would allow to feel anything. Anyway until I go see the goblins I don't really know, I guess I'll have to find somewhere to stay."

"I have the perfect place so long as you don't want ridiculous levels of luxury."

"Depends how you define luxury. At the moment I define a window as luxury" Sirius replied wryly.

Harry was torn between hugging his Godfather again and laughing, a very strange combination of feelings. "Well its where I stayed over the summer, it's in the muggle world so you should be able to avoid the sheep of the public until they get it clear in their mind that you are innocent. Julie and Rach will be delighted to have you and its right next

to the entrance to Diagon so you can sort out your living arrangements from there."

"That sounds great, well once I get on my feet and get a house sorted do you? You know? Want to...live with me?" Sirius' face was such a mixture of pitiful hope that Harry couldn't help but laugh.

"Of course I do you daft sod." It was the relief on Sirius' face that made Harry break down into laughter this time. "Come on I'll take you to the hotel and introduce you."

And so they went to the hotel and Sirius watched bemused as Julie and Rachael attacked Harry, pulling him into strangling hugs. His smirk was quickly dashed when Harry explained to the two women that Sirius was very important to him and needed a lot of looking after having been ill, to get him back to full health. The looks the two gave Sirius made him think of Madam Pomfrey on her most interfering day and this didn't bode well for his freedom.

"Now see here," he shouted "I'm not sick. Let go of me woman! Damn it! Harry! You little bugger come back here and get me out of this mess."

Harry just laughed at his Godfather's predicament and said his goodbyes to the retreating forms, promising to keep in touch, as they dragged Sirius to a room to get him set up and nursed to full health.

Harry flooded back to Hogwarts from the Leaky Cauldron, still chuckling at Sirius' indignation at being manhandled to a room. It wasn't until he got into bed that night that he thought about Dumbledore and whether or not he had tried to block Sirius' trial. In his excitement to have his Godfather free he had forgotten to ask Sirius what had happened.

"Where were you yesterday? I almost had to sit next to Granger in Runes" Daphne's accusatory tone broke Harry from his inner thoughts, trying to plot Dumbledore's next move.

"I was... well I was out. I'll explain later. I'm sure you have a lot of questions that you have been dying to ask me." He looked into her violet eyes earnestly. "I trust you Daph; you deserve to have some answers. Meet me in the usual place again after classes today."

She nodded her acquiescence and they began the lesson of the day, studying the magical properties of the date they were born on.

Harry took a deep breath. This was a big step for him, telling someone about his life, all of it. Not even Ron or Hermione knew everything about what happened over the last two years at school, let alone his home life.

'Well no time like the present' he thought.

He began with a brief overview of his time spent with the Dursleys, leaving out the worst of the abuse. Daphne's normally stoical mask cracked at the revelations, she couldn't believe things like that happened and certainly not to Harry Potter. She listened enraptured as he told her about the Philosopher's Stone and his confrontation with Voldemort.

Sympathising, when he confessed that he was briefly tempted to see if Voldemort really could bring his parents back before he regained his senses. She almost reached out to hug him when he told of his guilt over killing Quirrell. Her heart ached when he was patted on the head like a good little minion and sent back to a literal prison during the summer, with nobody to help him deal with that guilt. She heard his worries, his sense of self loathing when nobody would believe that he wasn't the heir of Slytherin in second year. She wanted to curse Granger and the Weasel then, why hadn't they helped him? Supported him? Anything? Then she was truly gobsmacked when he told her how he went into the Chamber of Secrets knowing full well there was an ancient basilisk in there. She half admired him and half wanted to berate him for being so damn foolish. The revelation that Voldemort was Tom Marvolo Riddle, a half

blood born to a near squib and a muggle made her laugh out loud. The pure delicious irony, that the Death Eaters that preached blood purity above all else followed a half blood with a muggle father, was almost too much for her to take. Her amusement was soon quashed as he told her of his battle with the basilisk including the part where he should be dead if it wasn't for the phoenix. She reached out and pulled up his sleeve to reveal the scar dominating both sides of his forearm. Lightly running her fingers over it she marvelled at how he had managed to survive at only 12 years old. She never even noticed the light shiver that her gentle ministrations caused. Lost in her own thoughts she abruptly returned to reality with a light blush covering her normally pale cheeks. In a bid to deflect notice from this she blurted out the first thing that came to her mind.

"Are you telling me there is currently an ancient basilisk corpse lying under the school doing nothing but rotting?"

Harry shrugged "I guess so, can't imagine anyone else can get in there. Why?"

She hit him lightly on the arm. "You dolt. Have you any idea how rare they are let alone all the wonderful potions ingredients you can get from a corpse and its all yours."

"All mine?" he frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am, it's the right of conquest, 'he who slays the beast, owns the beast' is the actual wording I think. Can we go look at it? Please?"

Harry laughed at her bright eyed enthusiasm, "alright but it's not very nice down there and I can't imagine it smells particularly good either."

"Seriously a girl's bathroom?" Daphne was incredulous that the most searched for place in all of Hogwarts had its entrance in a girl's bathroom.

Harry opened the chute using Parseltongue and was about to jump down before Daphne stopped him.

"Don't you think it's a little odd that the great Salazar Slytherin would have a giant slide as the entrance? Try some other Parseltongue words to get a ladder or something."

"As you wish milady" Harry gave a mocking bow and dodged her swipe at him easily. It turned out that 'Stairs' was the word required for an easy way down to the Chamber leaving Daphne with a smug look on her face as she cast lumos and began to walk down.

The expected smell wasn't there when they walked into the Chamber proper. In fact it looked exactly as it had those months ago, with the basilisk lying dead and the scars of the battle evident on the stonework around the Chamber. Daphne gasped seeing the basilisk itself, it looked to be sleeping rather than dead. It looked in perfect condition. It was violently proved not to be asleep when Harry walked up to it and without ceremony kicked it in the side of the head. She nearly strangled him for that and her temper wasn't improved by him ignoring her threats and giving her that ridiculous lopsided grin.

"So what now you've seen my dead basilisk?"

"Well it is called the Chamber of Secrets" Harry looked at her blankly.

"Secrets as in plural, more than one. Honestly for a smart guy you can be incredibly stupid. Let's have a look round and see if there is anything else interesting down here."

So began a search of the Chamber that turned up nothing until Daphne made Harry open the statue that the basilisk emerged from. Daphne poked her head in cautiously and started to cast all sorts of basic diagnostic spells while Harry looked on getting more impatient by the minute. So much so that he slipped past her and started muttering 'open'

in Parseltongue around the walls until a doorway opened about halfway down the passage. He grinned at Daphne and received a lecture for rushing in like a headless moron, which he calmly ignored. He was getting rather good at doing this he noted.

The revealed room was very dusty and looked like nobody had used it for centuries. This boded well as it was unlikely Riddle had found it. The exploring duo were jerked from their study of the room and jumped a mile when they heard a voice from the blackness.

"Well it's about time one of my heirs managed to find me in here."

"Holy shit a ghost" Harry swore.

"I'm not a ghost you slack jawed inbred I hope you're not my heir if you can't tell the obvious difference between a portrait and a ghost."

"S'dark" Harry mumbled as if to justify himself.

Daphne rolled her eyes and increased the power in her lumos spell, lighting the entire room. It was a spacious potions lab for the most part with two doors at the far end, behind assorted potions equipment and a multitude of jars. On the left hand wall was an 18" by 12" portrait of a man with long black hair and piercing blue eyes. He looked to be working at a copy of the potions laboratory they were in now.

"Well then let's have a look at you both, which one of you is my heir?"

Daphne and Harry exchanged a glance before Harry replied, "well I guess I'm the closest. I'm not actually your heir; at least I don't think I am. I got the ability to speak Parseltongue as a 'gift' from your heir, or the person who is claiming to be your heir anyway."

Salazar Slytherin looked at him bemused. "You had better start from the beginning."

17. Chapter 17

AN- Two chapters in one day, I am spoiling you! I probably don't say

it enough but thank you for the wonderful reviews, they really do help. Makes all the effort worthwhile when you hear that somebody enjoys your work so thank you all.

Chapter 17

The talk with Salazar was interesting for several reasons. Firstly, and most importantly for Daphne, was the information that the history of Slytherin House was fatally flawed. It was not purity of blood but rather purity of heart that was prized by its founder. In fact Salazar was disgusted by the stories Daphne told him of the state of his house. It appeared to physically pain him when he heard of Riddle's quest for the culling of muggleborns. Salazar insisted that he was not prejudiced in this way, rather that the muggleborn population in his time were a burden as they required teaching, not only to read and write, but also basic English and hygiene at its most fundamental level. Presumably the stories of Salazar 'hating' muggleborns extrapolated from here, as time twisted the original story. The thing Harry found most interesting in the long conversation with Salazar was the sheer variety and complexity of swearing in Parseltongue. Salazar was already a highly creative curser in Standard English but when Parseltongue became involved it was almost an art form. This was best demonstrated when Harry called Salazar Sal for the first and only time. The diatribe launched at him left Daphne open mouthed at the filth pouring from Salazar's mouth let alone once the Parseltongue started. All in all Harry was suitably chastised and Salazar's name was never shortened again.

Exploration of Salazar's laboratory, now referred to simply as the lab by Harry and Daphne, took some time as they had to wade through centuries of dirt and mess. Of the two doors at the end of the lab the first led to a living complex with a bedroom with en suite and a sitting room/

study with a huge collection of dusty tomes in the library area. Harry practically drooled at the prospect of all the knowledge contained in these ancient books. The other door led to a compact duelling area with a collection of dusty swords and slightly battered armour. This was going to be useful as a place for Harry to practise all the spells he had read about, in private, away from prying eyes. In fact the whole place was an absolute goldmine of a find. It was perfect as a base that nobody but Harry and those he allowed could get in. It had excellent facilities, so much so he barely needed to leave.

The problem with this over the following weeks was that he would often lose track of time, absorbed in one of the many books or arguing with Salazar about some forgotten aspect of magic. He would end up staying in the lab so late that by the time he noticed the time he was too lazy to go back to the Gryffindor tower and so would just kip in the lab's bedroom. The only thing that the lab lacked was a supply of food.

Daphne privately thought that it was a very good thing that the lab did lack this; otherwise Harry would never leave its confines. It wasn't only Daphne that noticed Harry's conspicuous absence from a normal timetable outside of lessons. On a rare occasion that Harry spent in his own dorm Neville confronted him, albeit very hesitantly.

"Um Harry. I was wondering, you know, where it is exactly that you go all the time? I mean you hardly ever seem to spend the night here anymore. Or if you do you come in so late and are up by the time we all wake up. You don't have to tell me but I just wondered and wanted to make sure you were alright."

Harry thought about it briefly, he didn't really want to share the lab's existence with anyone but Neville deserved an answer. "I appreciate your concern Neville, but I'm just off studying, nothing exciting. I have a mild

case of insomnia so I find it hard to sleep. So instead of lying in bed awake I figured I may as well do something a bit productive."

Neville nodded his understanding. "So long as you're ok and not doing anything too dangerous, Merlin knows you get in enough trouble as it is."

Harry pouted comically "now Nev that's hardly fair. I don't go looking for trouble I just seem to attract it a little bit. Goodnight Neville, I'm going to try and get a decent night's sleep tonight."

Under Salazar's direction Daphne and Harry got a crash course in how to rend a large magical animal for potions parts. Much as it pained Salazar to admit it, he wasn't too angry with Harry for killing his pet. As soon as he found out what his previous heir had used her for his ire switched away from Harry and he was forgiven. Salazar taught them both how to put ingredients under stasis like all of the bottles and jars were in the lab.

The skin would apparently make high quality armour as it was marginally more magically resistant than dragon hide but was far lighter and more flexible, allowing a much larger range of movement. However growth charms couldn't be applied to it so Salazar recommended that Harry wait until he had finished growing before having any of it made into armour if he didn't want any going to waste. The meat was packed into trunks, according to Salazar the goblins liked magical meat and so Harry was going to try and sell it to them. The organs were so big they had to be put into barrels rather than jars and Salazar and Daphne were bouncing with glee at the prospect of experimenting with such large specimens. Never before had a basilisk this large been harvested and so they were entering unknown territory, not knowing the full possibilities of what some of its parts could do.

Most nights Harry would talk with Sirius through his webcam and Sirius would use Rach's computer. Harry still teased his Godfather about the

first time he had tried to use the laptop and the girlish scream he had unleashed at Harry appearing in the screen. Between laughs Rach and Harry tried to explain but it was easier to just allow Sirius to call it magic and leave it at that. The news that the infamous Sirius Black was innocent produced shockwaves throughout the wizarding world but most people seemed to blame Barty Crouch as opposed to Dumbledore, leaving Harry to curse the inability for anything to stick to the old man. Of course he had been properly apologetic to both Sirius and Harry, claiming that he had only done what he thought was best. Harry didn't believe it for a second but he had to admire the twinkly bastard's acting skills.

Despite his many vehement protests that he hated being trapped in the hotel under the care of Julie and Rachael, Sirius had made no real effort to leave the hotel. He had been to Gringotts, under supervision of course, and was apparently the last surviving male member of the Black family and so was to become Lord Black of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. Sirius wasn't particularly keen on this idea but was steadily being bullied into accepting it by Harry. 'Merlin knows I need an ally on the Wizemagot' Harry thought. He had also inherited the Black family house at 12 Grimauld Place but Sirius was leery of returning to his hated childhood home. It had been Julie that brought him round to the idea of living there. She explained that if he hated it so much in its current state then why didn't he change it to whatever he personally liked? Sirius got an unholy gleam in his eye at the prospect of destroying every last snake motif and painting everything red and gold. It appeared Sirius hadn't really matured at all since the end of Harry's parents journals. He still loved pranks and practically the first thing he had wanted to hear from Harry was whether or not he had managed to play any good ones. Harry

hated to disappoint the man-child but he had been a bit too busy to delve into the Marauder legacy properly. He did however want to get hold of the Marauder's Map that he had read about in the journals. Having not been able to find it anywhere Harry had toyed with remaking it but hadn't got round to it yet. According to Sirius, though, it was in Filch's office after he confiscated it in their final year. Harry wasn't entirely sure how he was going to get in there so figured he needed to bring in some expert advice.

"Fred, George I find myself in need of some help. Would either of you two fine gentlemen be interested in helping me out?"

"Sure Harrikins what do you need from the great."

"And noble."

"Pranksters extraordinaire."

"The Weasley twins."

"Guys what did we talk about before? No twin speak. I need to get into Filch's office; there is a particular item in his confiscated drawer that I want."

Both twins fixed Harry with deadly serious looks now. "What sort of an item would this be Harry?"

Harry hesitated, he didn't really want to share with the twins after all it was his father that had made the map but if they were going to help him they needed to know.

"It's a map. You know that Sirius Black was really good friends with my dad right? Well the two of them and a couple of their friends made a map of Hogwarts while they were at school. It shows all the secret passages and everyone is labelled on the map as well."

There were now identical expressions of shock and awe on the twin's faces now. "Your father and Sirius Black were part of the Marauders?"

"How do you...? You found the map didn't you? Why am I even surprised? How long have you had it? Where is it?"

"Patience Harry." With utmost reverence, Fred or possibly George pulled a slightly tattered piece of parchment from his pocket and presented it to Harry.

"I solemnly swear I am up to no good" intoned Harry, placing the point of his wand against the parchment. Lines immediately began to snake across the surface, forming into a perfect plan of the school grounds. A wide smile broke across Harry's face.

"How much do you want for it?"

Fred and George shared a quick look before Fred spoke "it's yours. It's a family heirloom; all that we ask is the chance to meet Sirius. Which one is he anyway?"

"Padfoot. Sirius is Padfoot, my father was Prongs. You know Moony already, he's Professor Lupin. Please try not to bug him too much. I tell you what, why don't you both come round sometime over Christmas, I'll be with Sirius and I'm sure Moony will visit quite a lot."

Looking like all their Christmas' had come at once, the twins happily agreed and practically skipped away to cause some unknown mayhem.

It wasn't just the twins that Harry invited to visit over Christmas. With Sirius' permission Harry called somewhat of a war council with Professors McGonagall and Snape as well as Madam Bones. Remus was of course spending most of the holiday with them as well under the insistence of Sirius. Harry was really looking forward to seeing what Sirius had done to Grimauld Place, his new home he thought excitedly. Dumbledore had not made his feelings known either way at Harry leaving at Christmas which was a little surprising but as time went on Harry found he cared less and less what the old man thought. The meeting itself was set for the

first Saturday after they left Hogwarts.

Harry was desperate to see Sirius again so instead of taking the train all the way back to London, he had bullied Remus into side along apparating him to Grimauld Place. The place finally being judged habitable enough to move into the day before Hogwarts let out. The place was apparently under the very best wards that magical Britain had to offer, courtesy of the ever paranoid Blacks. Harry packed his trunks and appeared at Remus' door at 9am sharp, the time Remus had said they would leave.

"Alright there Harry? What can I do for you this morning?" Remus pretended casual confusion at Harry's arrival.

"Don't toy with me Moony! Get a move on I want to see my Godfather."

Remus chuckled and they walked to the outskirts of Hogsmede where the wards ended, allowing Remus to apparate. The feeling of apparition was highly unpleasant for Harry, particularly as baggage but all thoughts of hexing Remus left his mind as he saw Sirius burst from the doors of a large terraced house.

"Harry!"

"Sirius!" They leapt into a crushing hug with Remus looking on fondly until he was beckoned in by Sirius, joining the three way hug.

"Come in, come in. See what wonders I have achieved with this filthy old house." Sirius swept them in grandly through the double doors.

The interior was anything but filthy, it was bright and airy and decorated tastefully in a variety of complementary creams and whites with gold highlights and every so often a red accent like the curtains.

"Bloody hell Padfoot did Azkaban magically give you some sort of taste in decorating?" exclaimed Remus.

Sirius looked a little sheepish, rubbing the back of his head. "Well I might have had a little bit of help. I was going to do everything red and gold

but I was talked out of it. After I saw one room that she decorated I just let her get on with it. But there is still some red and gold so all is not lost." He brightened at the thought.

"Who helped you?" Remus asked.

Harry interrupted Sirius' reply "It was Julie wasn't it?"

"Might have been" mumbled Sirius.

Remus looked delighted before what Harry had come to call the Marauder glint appeared in his eye. "Padfoot's got a girlfriend, Padfoot's got a girlfriend" he chanted childishly.

"I do not. She was just helping out."

And so began a day and evening of much hilarity and playful mocking.

Stories were exchanged and drink flowed, although it was Butterbeer in Harry's case with the exception of a glass or two of mead after the evening meal. The meal itself was a veritable feast, simple fare but delicious. However it was served by the surliest waiter in the world.

Kreacher the house elf was the polar opposite of the hyperactive Dobby, constantly muttering about blood traitors and something about a portrait that Harry didn't understand.

When he asked Sirius about it, the older man gave a deep belly laugh and explained that his mother had put a portrait of herself in the entrance hall with a permanent sticking charm. It resisted every single attempt to get rid of it until Julie lost her temper at being called 'a useless squib waste of space' one too many times and grabbed a nearby sledgehammer, smashing the portrait in the face. She then proceeded to knock down the entire wall with the portrait still attached and screaming at her with Sirius looking on in amazement. Needless to say Sirius was slightly more mindful of not upsetting Julie from that day forth.

The next morning Harry emerged from his brand new room, one that was

at least three times the size of the one he had at the Dursleys. It was a little blank at the moment but Sirius insisted that this was so he could decorate it however he wanted and thoughts were already flying through Harry's mind about putting a huge television in, if he could work out how to shield it from the ambient magic of course.

The kitchen revealed a very bleary and hungover Sirius along with a worryingly chipper Remus. Considering he had drunk just as much as Sirius, perhaps a little more, Harry had been expecting an equally hungover teacher. However it seemed that being a werewolf had one definite advantage, you could still get as drunk as a normal person but the metabolism was such that the poison of the alcohol was absorbed before morning hence no hangovers. This was a useful skill and Harry wondered if it would be possible to recreate this somehow, he would definitely need it later on in life if Sirius' half baked plans from the night before came to pass.

"How about we explore the house a little bit? I've only seen a bit and there looks to be loads" Harry asked.

"Yeah Sirius I've only seen a bit as well, I want to see what Julie did to the place" Remus mocked.

"Alright, alright let's go" Sirius mumbled.

Sirius soon forgot his discomfort as he launched into being a tour guide with typical vigour and many flourishes. The house itself had five floors including a converted attic as well as a large basement that was full of junk at the moment. Sirius claimed that it was junk anyway but Harry had the feeling that some of it was probably quite valuable. The first floor was the formal entertaining area with a massive formal dining area with a long table that could seat over 150 people. On the other side of the large entrance hall was the ballroom for dances and balls, a

Pureblood tradition according to Sirius. The second floor started the actual living area, it contained a large kitchen and the small dining room. Small was a bit of a subjective word here as the room was large enough to comfortably sit twenty. There was also a sitting area and a room that had very little in it apart from some portraits and a large tapestry showing the family tree. Sirius didn't know what to do with this room so had left it empty. The third floor held the impressive Black family library, one that was almost as large as Hogwarts by the look of it and had both Remus and Harry salivating. It also marked the beginning of the guest rooms with three decent sized rooms present. The fourth floor was entirely guest rooms with nine of varying sizes and opulence, most having en suites. Finally the fifth floor was for family with Harry's room along with a permanent 'guest' room for Remus. The floor was dominated by the master bedroom with bathroom and next to it was the Head of the Family study that contained all the financial information of the assets held by the Blacks. Sirius hadn't gone through everything yet, in fact he hadn't even begun and quite clearly wanted to put it off indefinitely. Harry however saw a golden opportunity to test his new financial management program. Sirius was sceptical until he found you had to input information once and then the program worked everything from then on. The idea of doing less work sold Padfoot immediately and so they went to buy a top of the range PC for the study.

It was a good job they took Remus along to the computer shop as Sirius was a nightmare to keep under control, much like a hyperactive toddler he was everywhere at once, touching everything and playing with it. Seeing the manager beginning to lose patience Remus calmly explained that Sirius was a little bit 'special' and was hard work but it did him good to be out in public. The manager nodded understandingly and after the

purchase had been made presented an incredibly bemused Sirius with a lollipop. Only once Remus explained over a cackling Harry, exactly why Sirius had received the lolly did the Animagus get angry but it was soon abated as he realised he had a free lollipop and it was orange flavour so he didn't really care.

Sirius and Remus looked on in fascination as Harry began his modification of the PC using runes to shield it and recreate electricity magically. Remus could follow some of what was going on and began to understand more as Harry explained. Sirius however was lost and soon gave up and disappeared mysteriously for several hours while the work was being completed.

He returned eventually and categorically refused to answer any questions as to where he had been which of course only made Remus and Harry more suspicious. Allowing Sirius to think he had pulled the wool over their eyes, they began to sort some of the financial information. Sirius actually proved to be very knowledgeable about it all as he had been groomed from a young age to take over the lordship. With Sirius and Remus working through the paper and Harry inputting the data onto his program, installed from a USB stick onto the PC, they made good progress. Sirius did insist after three hours that they stopped and had some fun as he refused to work for any longer than that causing Remus to shake his head fondly at the stubborn old dog.

That evening Harry lay in bed, worn out but happy. Life was good.

18. Chapter 18

Chapter 18

War Council might have been a rather excessive way of describing the meeting that was to take place over lunch, but it certainly had that feeling. Remus had made sure that Sirius had any memory blocks

removed and charms pertaining to loyalty to Dumbledore removed from him as soon as he was free from Azkaban. Of course Sirius and Snape still argued a lot but it was much better natured, in fact Harry thought that insults were actually the only way the two could communicate. Sirius was particularly fond of alliteration and took great pleasure in forming long and complicated phrases to hurl at Snape. Unfortunately the concept of the sentence actually making sense was often sacrificed in order to add as many alliterative words as possible. Snape, meanwhile, would attempt to make as cutting a statement as possible with the fewer words the better. McGonagall gamely struggled to keep the two under control and focused on task but she was outmatched, particularly once Remus joined in with a too innocent face.

Surprisingly it was only really Harry who could keep everyone in line and prevent the bickering. Firstly, to make sure everyone was on the same page, Harry explained all that he had discovered at Gringotts, the leech being removed as well as the blocks and all the happenings at Hogwarts since he got there. Sirius had to be physically restrained from going to curse the Dursleys or Dumbledore; he wasn't too sure which he wanted to hex first. Madam Bones dropped her monocle from her eye during the telling of the story causing snickers around the table before the formidable witch quelled them with a glare. Once everything had been explained and everyone was up to date Harry opened up the floor to anyone.

McGonagall was the first to speak. "After Harry's second meeting with Dumbledore this year I have kept a much closer watch on him. I must admit, for the most part there is absolutely no indication that he is capable of any of the things we have talked about. Now before you say anything Harry I do not doubt you, I fully believe you, it's just that Albus

seems to be exactly what we know him as; the slightly eccentric, old man who wants the best for everyone. However very, very occasionally there is something else there, his speech patterns are very slightly different, for example he always calls me 'my dear' yet there was one time he didn't call me it once. This was the time when he wanted to marginally adjust some of the changes we were due to make to the running of the school. What was really strange was that he wanted to change something that he had been so keen on when we had met previously. I can't make head nor tail of it and I would never have noticed it if Harry hadn't mentioned about it before."

Harry nodded thoughtfully "he always calls me 'my boy' yet the time he tried Legillimency on me, he didn't say it once. I agree Professor, there's something very odd going on here but I can't work it out. Does anyone else have any thoughts?"

They did. Back and forth the discussion went for hours with many theories, some sensible others patently not, until Madam Bones made her excuses saying she had paperwork to catch up on. McGonagall and Snape followed soon after leaving Harry, Remus and Sirius alone.

"Well we have worked very hard today, what do we want to do for fun?"

"Padfoot we haven't really worked, we sat around eating and talking while you and Severus sat there sniping at each other" Remus attempted to explain but Sirius was having none of it.

"Let's go to Diagon Alley, I'm sure Harry needs to buy some presents particularly for a certain Miss Greengrass" he nudged Harry in the ribs very unsubtly while winking at him.

"Shut up Sirius. But for once you are right I do need to buy some presents but obviously not for mangy mutts who can't keep their nose out of other's business."

Sirius maturely stuck his tongue out at Harry and dashed off to get a coat and some shoes for the trip. Harry looked at Remus.

"Are you sure what you said in the computer shop isn't actually true? I've never met a bigger man-child." Remus' response was simply to laugh and shrug.

"Alright before we go shopping I need to stop at Gringotts. I've got some business with the goblins" said Harry patting his jacket pocket where there were currently five trunks shrunk filled with basilisk meat. He kept one full trunk and a part one for himself for experimenting on in the potions lab, although he did have to admit that he was extremely curious what basilisk meat tasted like.

"Fine fine, Remus you had better go with him make sure he doesn't get into trouble. I have a few things I need to do quickly. I'll meet you in the alley at some point." Sirius shrugged, "don't really know when but it's not a very big place so shouldn't be too difficult to meet up again." With that he was gone, apparating somewhere known only to himself.

"I wonder about him, I really do" said Remus, shaking his head. "Come on let's sell some stuff to the goblins."

They walked up to the desk and Harry waited for them to be beckoned forward by a clawed finger. "Hello I'm Harry Potter I have some business with Griphook my Account Manager, is it possible to meet with him?"

The goblin looked up briefly, weighing and measuring Harry before calling for a goblin to take them to Griphook.

"Good morning Harry what can I do for you today?" asked Griphook as they were ushered into his office by the harried goblin escorting them.

"Morning Griphook, I hear from a reliable source that goblins have a taste for rare magical meat. I happen to have a rather large supply of some exceptionally rare meat and was wondering if you were at all interested?"

"You have piqued my curiosity Harry what sort of meat are you talking about?"

Instead of answering, Harry pulled one of the trunks from his pocket, enlarged it and showed it to Griphook.

"Interesting it is not any kind of meat I recognise by sight or smell. Might I be permitted to taste a sliver?"

"Sure go ahead." Griphook took out a wicked looking curved blade from a desk drawer and shaved off a thin slice of the meat. He smelt it, held it up to the light, all the while muttering to himself, before finally taking a bite. A look of pure ecstasy came across his face along with a widening of his eyes.

"Well Harry I don't know what it is but it's delicious. The flavour is delicate yet has a hint of maturity; one can almost taste the magic. What is it?"

"Basilisk. Probably about a thousand years old, give or take a bit. Killed it in the Chamber of Secrets."

Griphook was astonished, "you killed a thousand year old basilisk at the age of 12? It must have been huge?"

"Probably closer to 70 feet than 60" Harry answered casually.

"And you say you wish to sell us some of the meat. May I enquire as to how much?"

"Well each trunk holds 275 cubic feet and I have six full ones and a part full one. I wish to sell five of the full ones at this time, if you want them that is?"

"We most certainly do want to buy all of it as well as first refusal on any of the rest of the meat should you choose to sell it. I need to talk to the Manager to see how much we can offer you for it. I am confident we will want it all and more. If you would wait five minutes I will have an

answer for you."

Then totally breaking every Gringotts policy, the excited goblin rushed off leaving Harry and Remus alone in the office.

"That went well I thought. I wonder how much they will give me for it"

Harry remarked dryly.

"Judging by Griphook's reaction I would imagine a hefty amount."

They passed the time waiting by discussing what they were going to get Sirius for Christmas until a slightly flustered Griphook returned.

"Ah good you're still here. I shouldn't have left you here but I was so excited" Griphook blushed slightly, not a pleasant sight at all, highly disconcerting in fact. "The Manager has authorised me to offer you 5000 Galleons."

"Is that per trunk? So that's 25000 Galleons?" Harry said working it out quickly in his head.

"No, no you misunderstand me Harry that's 5000 Galleons per cubic foot."

Harry whistled appreciatively while Remus' eyes goggled. "So that's 275 cubic feet per trunk, 5 trunks, 1375 cubic feet total. Bloody hell that's 6,875,000 Galleons! That's like £35 million. Well £34,375,000 to be precise."

"Indeed. We would also like to offer a further 125,000 Galleons to secure the option to buy any more of the meat you wish to sell before anyone else has the opportunity. We will of course pay the same price for any of that meat that we buy."

Harry thought about it very briefly, it seemed like a good deal to him.

The goblins were probably taking advantage slightly but Harry accepted that, it was still a lot of money and went a long way to beginning the repair of the Potter accounts.

"Alright Griphook you've got a deal. I trust that the Galleons will be

deposited in my Trust vault as opposed to the Main Potter vault so his Royal Dumbleness can't get his filthy hands on it?"

"Of course Harry I will see that the transfer is done immediately."

"Excellent, well I suppose you will be wanting these then" Harry said, removing the other four trunks from his pocket, enlarging them and presenting them to Griphook. He chuckled at the greedy glint in the goblin's eye.

"Yes indeed. As always Harry, a pleasure doing business with you."

"Well that settles the argument we were having anyway. I now have more than enough money to get all that stuff for Sirius."

Remus nodded, "I guess you do indeed. I'm still not sure it's entirely a good idea though, I mean from what you have told me I can see Sirius getting hooked very easily."

"Ah come on Remus it's just an Xbox and flat screen television, what can possibly go wrong? Come on lets go get that now and get it delivered, electronics don't cope well with being shrunk. Actually now that I think about it there's a big electronics shop not far from Grimauld Place. Do you reckon you can use your super werewolf muscles and carry it from there?"

"Super werewolf muscles? Did you really just call them that?"

"Look Moony stop being a pansy, can you carry it or not? It's a yes or no question."

"Yeah alright I can carry it, with my super werewolf muscles. I swear you and Sirius are spending too much time together you know."

Harry shrugged the abuse off and soon was the proud owner of a 60 inch flat screen TV which Remus carried easily back to the house and stashed it in Harry's room. A quick trip to the game shop yielded quite a selection of games including something called Guitar Hero which looked pretty

fun. Remus counselled buying only a few but Harry was having none of it and bought twenty games that looked good, as well as the Xbox 360 itself. To most people this would seem like wildly excessive generosity however Harry fully intended to be playing these games as often, if not more, than Sirius so it all worked out in the end.

Harry sent Remus on a wild goose chase looking for a left handed screwdriver, which he insisted he needed to fix the TV, while he bought a top of the range phone for the belligerent werewolf and one for Sirius as well. His purchase was complete by the time a swearing and cursing Remus returned having been laughed out of several shops.

"Come on Remus lets go get a few more presents in Diagon Alley. I need some for a few people at school."

The girls were easy to buy for they just got assorted jewellery but Harry's male friends were slightly more difficult. The twins got an assortment of pranking items from Zonko's; Neville got some rare seeds of various plants for his extensive greenhouses at Longbottom Manor, Cedric and Wood got vouchers for Quality Quidditch Supplies, the Ravenclaw boys got Flourish and Blotts vouchers of course and Blaise got several rare books on magical creatures as that was his favoured subject. Harry thought about buying for Snape and McGonagall but he really had no idea what to get them so he left it.

Hedwig was kept exceptionally busy in the days leading up to Christmas, delivering presents to Harry's friends and waiting for their gifts to him.

Harry was building quite a collection of gifts but he still had no idea what Sirius was getting him, or what Remus was for that matter. There was nothing for it but to wait until Christmas.

The days did pass eventually, even if they did seem to take twice as long as they should. Harry was bouncing off the walls with excitement, for the

first time in his memory he was going to have Christmas with people who cared about him, a real family. Sirius wasn't much better and Remus had to force him to go to bed on Christmas Eve otherwise he would have stayed up all night.

Harry planned on sneaking out of his room in the morning to wake Remus and Sirius up exceptionally early, however he had not counted on his Godfather having exactly the same idea. They met in the hallway, each moving covertly to the others room, and both burst into laughter on spotting the other. By unspoken agreement they both moved to Remus' room and eased open the door. Harry lobbed a couple of fireworks in and Sirius conjured a bucket of water to fall on the unaware Remus. It worked perfectly, the fireworks startling Remus out of sleep so he stared wildly around the room panicking, just in time to receive a full face of ice cold water. The torrent of curses from Remus' mouth would have made Salazar nod approvingly as the immature pranksters fled, giggling.

"Good morning Moony. Good to see you had a bath; it's nice that you want to look your best for presents."

"Shut up Sirius, just remember it's the full moon in a couple days and I'll get you back then."

Sirius' smirk rapidly faded at this prospect leading Harry to wonder what exactly those two got up to on full moon nights. Shrugging it off, he moved to the stack of presents and began the rather impressive task of handing out and unwrapping the multitude.

Harry received all sorts of gifts from his friends everything from chocolate (Hannah) to new seeker arm guards (the collective Gryffindor chasers). The twins gave him some prank items but these looked to be homemade, the note insisted they were safe but Harry was unconvinced and resolved to wait until he spoke to them. Blaise and Tracey had

clubbed together and got him a professional potioneers knife kit. From almost everyone else he received books about a wide variety of topics, some of which looked very rare so Harry couldn't wait to dive into them. The two surprises came first from Susan who gave him a silver ring that fit perfectly on his thumb. It was about a cm wide and had snitches engraved on it, Harry loved it. His other surprise came from Daphne and was a necklace made of leather with a single tooth hanging from it as a pendant. The accompanying note said that it was the smallest fang from the very back of the Basilisk's mouth that had all of its poison removed and was shaped and polished. It was beautiful and Harry put it on immediately.

Remus gave him his next present, Harry looked at it slightly confused, it was a thick leather jacket with the Marauder's logo on the back. However where there had once been a rat, there was a lily taking its place. It wasn't until Harry opened his first present from Sirius that it became a bit clearer, it was a helmet.

Sirius looked at him apologetically "I didn't really want to get you a helmet, but apparently it's the law to wear one now. Anyway you need a reason to wear that silly thing and here it is."

He produced a package from behind his back and with a dramatic flourish unshrunk it. Harry opened it at lightning pace to reveal a beautiful chrome and black motorbike.

"Sirius, wow, that's awesome! Aren't I a little young though?"

"Nonsense it has all the top of the range charms on it, anti-lock braking, super sensory, never tip etc. You would have to try really hard to fall off of it, believe me I tried. Now for my best invention yet, well slightly your mothers as well, but it was my idea. When you ride this nobody will question that you aren't old enough to do so, it's a modified notice-me-

not charm so that they still see the bike but don't see the rider. I had one on my bike when I first got it when I was 14 but I don't really need it now so I took it off once I got it back from Hagrid."

"Wait does that mean this one flies as well?" Harry asked excitedly.

"Of course it does! What sort of use is a motorbike that doesn't fly?" Sirius scoffed.

"Sirius this is brilliant, we can go riding together and everything. Now it's time for your present. You know the room you never go in? The tapestry room? Well I have found a use for it, follow me."

Needless to say Sirius was gobsmacked by the TV and Xbox in there.

Harry patiently explained what it all was and what it could do leaving Sirius wide eyed in wonderment. He quite clearly wanted nothing more than to dive right in and start playing but with a magnificent effort he turned away.

"Come on Harry I have a couple more presents for you. Now I heard some dreadful rumours that Draco Malfoy bought his way onto the Slytherin Quidditch team last year with the best broom on the market. Of course this is wrong on so many levels, a Malfoy spawn will not have a better broom than my Godson so I got you this."

"Bloody hell Sirius that's a Firebolt, it's an international broom."

Sirius shrugged "Moony has seen you fly, he says you're better than your dad and he could have played for England if the war hadn't screwed everything up. I'm sure you can handle it, I'm looking forward to coming to see your next game. Now I have one more present for you, to be honest it's just as much a present to me but still." He handed Harry an official looking envelope, Harry looked at it curiously and opened it. "Its Guardianship papers signed by Fudge himself. Nobody and I mean absolutely nobody can overturn them now. Harry? Are you alright?"

Harry was utterly blank. He should have expected this of course but this was official, someone wanted him, Sirius actually wanted him, wanted them to be a family. He leaped up and grabbed Sirius in a tight hug.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you."

"Shh it's alright, come on Kreacher can get us breakfast and then I can destroy you at box thingy."

19. Chapter 19

Chapter 19

The rest of the holidays passed without too many incidents.

Unfortunately Remus was right and Sirius was well and truly addicted to Xbox within a couple of days. It was incredibly amusing for Harry to sit and watch the utter concentration on his Godfather's face as he slowly worked out how to use the console and control the characters. The Animagus got really involved in the games, so much so that he leant which way he wanted the car to go in racing games, he ducked and said 'ow' when he was shot at in the shooting games and danced around the room like a lunatic when he was playing Guitar Hero. Harry tried to teach him to play real guitar on the one he made but it was a lost cause as Sirius did not possess anywhere near the patience required.

"Yeah but I can play a whole song straight away on the Xbox why would I want to spend ages practising?"

Harry despaired sometimes. At least he too was getting to play, in fact him and Sirius made a particularly good team on the shooting games when they decided to play co-op. At least until Sirius got bored of teamwork and shot him in the back.

The twins visited and got on famously with Sirius and Remus, once he was outside of Professor mode. It turned out that the homemade joke items were made by the twins themselves, Sirius was very impressed.

Remus was as well until he questioned them as to how they were capable of such impressive magic yet still managed average grades. The twins were utterly unrepentant and claimed they could probably pass their NEWT practical's now with flying colours and the theory with average marks. It was just that school work didn't really interest them, it was pranks and more specifically inventing them that did. Even Remus had to admit that it was some highly impressive magic and the four began to bounce ideas off of each other with occasional input from Harry.

Sirius took Harry out on his bike for the first time, an experience they both thoroughly enjoyed even if they did have to stop twice to ring Remus to reassure him that they weren't dead in a ditch. Their ringing and vibrating pockets had annoyed both of them. Speaking of over protective parental figures they also visited Julie and Rachael where Harry had to endure many questions about whether he was eating properly and had all his homework done. Harry rolled his eyes but dealt with it in good humour before he disappeared to Rach's room to see her new cds and to show off his guitar playing ability a little bit. Harry expected Sirius at the very least to follow him rather than sit and talk like a real grown up but he didn't. In fact during dinner Sirius was acting very bizarrely, not once did he fling any sort of food at Harry, he hardly swore and he only had one glass of wine before switching to soft drinks. Harry couldn't make head nor tail of it and Remus refused to answer when he asked about it.

The one blot on their perfect holiday was the discovery of a locket in one of the rooms. It had obviously been hidden and Sirius was about to throw it out as it had a snake on the front. However before he had the chance to Kreacher came in screaming about 'Master Regulus'. Regulus was apparently Sirius' younger brother who joined the Death Eaters and died

during his service. Kreacher had a different view of events though and slowly the true story began to emerge with Regulus going to a lake somewhere and swapping this locket with a fake. Kreacher wasn't too clear on what it was but one thing was obvious that whatever it was, it was incredibly important to Voldemort. They had no idea what it could be, other than it emanated dark magic, nor who to ask until Harry remembered Salazar. Surely the founder of Slytherin would be able to identify it.

All too soon it was time to return to Hogwarts, this time Harry was going to have to take the train, much to his consternation. With trunk shrunk in his pocket, Harry and Sirius rode their bikes to Kings Cross. Harry had wanted to take his bike to Hogwarts but even Sirius had put his foot down at this idea. It was hard to know whether Harry or Sirius was more shocked at this turn of events. With a manly hug and much backslapping the two parted ways with Harry walking to the train, waving over his shoulder.

Harry soon found a compartment that was empty and settled himself in for the long and boring journey. His peace and quiet was soon interrupted by the arrival of a furiously blushing Susan who wanted to thank him for the bracelet he sent her. She proudly showed that she was wearing it at the moment and wrapped Harry in a tight hug when she saw he was wearing the ring she sent before fleeing the compartment. Harry quickly came to the conclusion that girls were all mildly insane and returned to his quiet contemplation.

This was soon dashed once more as Harry's Slytherin friends bundled their way into the compartment. He sighed deeply knowing that with Tracey present all hope of quiet was gone. As expected she launched into a monologue about everything that happened over Christmas, asking

everyone questions but giving them no real time to answer. She did eventually pause for breath long enough for Blaise to speak.

"Yes. Yes. No. Maybe. Italy to see my grandparents. Was ok. Yes thank you. No. Yesterday. Glad you liked it. Yes. No. If only."

Tracey looked at him nonplussed "What?"

"The answers to all of your questions. You finally gave me a chance to answer them so I thought I had better do so in a block to make sure I got them out."

Daphne was trying desperately to hide a smirk at Tracey's blush; Harry on the other hand wasn't even trying and was openly laughing at her.

Tracey pouted. "Fine if you're all going to be like that I won't say anything, not a word. Absolute silence."

"Tracey, shut up" Blaise had lost patience and sent the brunette into a sulk.

Seeing that it was about to descend into bickering again Daphne turned to Harry. "Can I talk to you in private for a minute?" Harry nodded and put up a quick privacy ward, grinning apologetically at Tracey and Blaise. The good thing about Slytherin's was that they didn't even question it. He motioned for Daphne to begin. "I've been thinking a lot about the program idea. It might be too big a project for just the two of us. We need some people with expertise outside of our own areas. You bring the computer knowledge, I bring the Arithmancy but we need Potions and ingredients knowledge."

Harry found himself nodding along in agreement, "I suppose you have some people in mind?"

"Of course. Tracey is the best in our year at Potions despite what Malfoy would like to believe and Blaise's speciality is magical creatures. Both of them are trustworthy and know how to keep secrets."

"Makes sense, two things to add though. First I'd like to bring Neville in on this as well, his knowledge of Herbology is second to none and I trust him as well. Secondly I'd like to formalise our little arrangement. I'm thinking 35% control for each of us and 10% for each of those we bring in as well as a binding agreement to never share the knowledge unless there is a majority vote in favour. What do you think?"

Daphne looked pensive. "I agree it probably is time to formalise it all and nobody can deny Longbottom's skill. What about the electronics side of it?"

"Well I thought a separate agreement for that 70:30 in my favour as the majority is my work however I am open to negotiations. Again a non disclosure clause included, there is also a patent filed and the runic cluster that destroys the item if it is tampered with to prevent any unauthorised copying. I've been thinking a lot recently about whether to sell them or not. The market is certainly there but I don't really want to give up our advantage of having the stuff when nobody else does."

"Hm I agree. I think it is better to wait several years until we are ready produce the phones and such in large numbers. Let's be honest at the moment we could modify, what 20 a day between us if we work without stopping? That's nowhere near enough to meet expected demand. Then we need to consider distribution networks and where to sell them.

Realistically I think we are several years away from being able to market the idea properly."

"That's true, we should look into setting up a company, how much capital we need and so forth."

"Indeed. I'm sure we can do some research into that. So shall we interrupt those two before they start fighting again?"

"Yeah I guess so. Might take a long time to explain it all to them. Tell you

what I'll go grab Neville so we only have to explain once."

"Agreed off you go then, chop chop." Harry gave a mock salute and left the compartment to search for Neville.

He returned shortly with a rather confused Neville in tow and proceeded to ward the door and put up some anti eavesdropping spells once everyone was inside. Daphne had very kindly allowed him to explain so as he sat down, Harry found himself looking into three sets of confused eyes and one rather smug violet pair. He sighed and began the long explanation.

Once the initiates got over the idea that a muggle invention could be used for magic, all three were very interested in joining the project.

Harry shouldn't really have been surprised at their initial reluctance; they still gave him very odd looks whenever they saw him listening to his iPod. It wasn't long before they all waxed lyrical about the potential for what could be done with the information collated, even Neville began to grow in confidence after initial reluctance to join in. Tracey in particular seemed fascinated by the possibility of improving existing recipes or substituting ingredients to make them as efficient as possible. The journey flew by in a blaze of creativity and planning. It was determined that each would research a different aspect, Blaise and Neville would research animals and plants respectively and their use in potions. Tracey would focus on the potions themselves, Daphne would concentrate on the Arithmetic analysis of potions and Harry would begin designing the program itself. They would reconvene at a later date and share their findings.

Harry was eager to reach Hogwarts so he could talk to Salazar about the locket currently hidden in his trunk, carefully wrapped up. On arrival at Hogsmede Station he dawdled as they exited the compartment, telling

Daphne to meet him after the feast so they could go down to the lab. She readily agreed and they joined a horseless carriage with the others.

At the feast for those returning, Harry was thanked multiple times for the presents he had sent out and he returned their thanks warmly. It seemed that he had chosen well for everybody and this gave him a warm feeling in the pit of his stomach. This was only added to as the feast began in earnest and he attacked the delicious food with gusto.

Daphne was surreptitiously waiting for him outside the hall, clinging to the shadows. Using a shortcut Harry had discovered on the map they quickly made their way to the Chamber and began the familiar routine of entering it. They had reinforced the roof along the passageway at the bottom of the stairs and Salazar had shown them how to activate a rune array that bathed the entire area in light. As opposed to the slightly creepy grey-blue mist that permeated the Chamber before it was now filled with a warm and inviting light so that you could see the vastness of the architecture.

After greeting Salazar and exchanging short pleasantries, Harry moved to the important part of the conversation.

"Salazar, I was wondering if you might be able to help me? You see over the holidays I found this locket in my Godfather's house." He continued to outline the story gleaned from Kreacher about its theft by Regulus from Voldemort and the fact that nobody could tell what it was other than it gave off an exceptionally dark aura and magic.

Salazar was nodding along, "let me see this locket, I may be able to shed some light on it."

Harry removed his trunk from his pocket, resized it and removed the locket from its protective covering. As soon as it was unwrapped Salazar hissed in recognition before swearing mightily.

"That filth, that cur, that evil, jumped up little mongrel. I'll castrate him, I'll crucify him." And so it went on, leaving Harry and Daphne open mouthed, wondering what could have set him off this way.

It was some time before Salazar regained the power of coherent conversation. He looked out imperiously from his portrait at the two curious faces looking up at him.

"Harry would you be so kind as to cast the revealing spell I taught you before Christmas."

Harry did so and a plume of black smoke appeared over the locket, forming into strange symbols Harry did not recognise. Judging by Salazar's frown he didn't recognise them either.

"Er Salazar what is it? Why did you react so strongly?"

Salazar took a deep breath "I did so because that is my locket, it was made for me by my wife. It was the last present she gave me before she died of Dragon Pox. I had it enchanted so that only someone who spoke Parseltongue could open it." Seeing Harry was about to do exactly that he screamed "Stop! You do not know what that animal has done to my locket. Neither do I for that matter but it is dark, dark magic, the blackest. Those symbols are like nothing I have ever come across before but at a guess I would say the locket has some relation to necromancy. Really we need to speak to Godric, he was always better at these sort of things than me."

"Godric Gryffindor?" Harry exclaimed loudly, shocked to the core.

"Of course what other Godric would I be speaking about you halfwit?" he replied dryly.

"There's no need to be rude" Harry grumbled while Daphne snickered.

"It's just we wouldn't have thought Godric Gryffindor would have involved himself in dark magic, it doesn't fit his image."

Daphne sniggered, "oh this is priceless, imagine the faces of your housemates if we ever told them that the 'most evil snake' himself needed to ask the bastion of all things light Godric Gryffindor for advice about a dark object because Godric had far more knowledge and experience." She even used the air quotes gesture and looked at Salazar apologetically when she referred to him as the most evil snake.

He glared at her half-heartedly before replying. "I don't see why you're so surprised considering how different the stories are of me compared to the reality. Why should Godric or any of the other founders be any different?"

Ever the practical one Harry interrupted before Daphne could begin plotting how to break this information to the Gryffindors. "Well then we need to speak to Godric, does he have a portrait or a secret room like you?"

Salazar looked thoughtful, "he may have his own secret area however it is by very definition secret so I wouldn't know about it. However I think your best bet is likely the Room of Requirement. Now clearly there are no known portraits of any of us around the school but we all had one made. This leads me to believe that someone hid them, after I put my portrait here in the lab, and the best place for that is the Room of Requirement, sometimes known as the Room of Hidden Things. It is a room on the seventh floor, in the third corridor, West Wing. To access it you must walk along the corridor three times while thinking of the room you require. In your case you would want the room where things are kept hidden. A door will appear in the wall and this leads to the room itself. There is no telling what sort of state the room will be in or how much stuff is in there. You should be aware that due to the magic of that particular configuration of the room, summoning charms will not work.

Therefore you will have to do the searching the old fashioned way, by hand, the possibilities of what you may find in there are endless though." Harry looked over at Daphne to see a look of utmost excitement that he was sure mirrored his own. As if communicating silently they both turned saying hasty goodbyes to Salazar and practically charged from the room, leaving the founder to grumble to himself, his eyes fixed on the locket lying abandoned on the table.

They raced to the seventh floor finding the correct corridor. It was short and contained very little apart from a tapestry of someone that looked to be trying to teach trolls to dance. It was Harry who began to pace up and down in order to reveal the room. They waited with bated breath as a door appeared, hesitantly they stepped towards it and Daphne opened it cautiously. Through the gap they could see a huge Cathedral like room, filled to the brim with piles and piles of stuff. It was ever so slightly arranged as it appeared to have several different corridors through the chaos, each row balancing precariously with a gap wide enough for three people to walk comfortably abreast between each one. The rows went on and on, stretching out either side of the main entrance and extending a long way back, so far in fact that the two explorers couldn't see their end. The implications of the find were just starting to hit Harry, this was over a millennia's worth of stuff that for one reason or another people wished to keep hidden. There was no way of knowing what treasures could be here, thought lost for all time, waiting for them to discover. Of course by the same token there could be some incredibly dangerous items hidden within the mass of junk.

Harry could already see Daphne's mind churning at a frightening pace and was suddenly very glad that the train returned them to Hogwarts on a Friday so they would have the weekend to get back into the swing of

the castle before lessons resumed on Monday. It was clear that Harry was getting very little free time this weekend, at least until this room was thoroughly explored. The slightly maniacal glint in Daphne's eye promised that.

20. Chapter 20

Chapter 20

It took all of Harry's considerable ability to convince Daphne that they didn't need to immediately start exploring everything. So after a cursory examination of the room they both returned to their dorms with the promise to meet again in the corridor at 6 the following morning. Harry sank into his bed and fell asleep calculating how long he could survive Daphne working him to the bone over the weekend before he keeled over from exhaustion.

"Look Daphne I know you're keen to start cataloguing all of the stuff in here but I think our priority is to find the portraits if we can. Once that is done we can work on everything else. It's been here for hundreds of years, it's hardly going to run away if we don't finish it all this weekend."

Reluctantly Daphne agreed and they started planning various ways of finding the portraits. Unfortunately Daphne had a habit of overcomplicating things and so was advocating going to the library to find a spell that would search for the portraits for them. It wasn't until Harry suggested that they simply walk up and down each column shouting for the Founders and see if their portraits replied. The Slytherin looked at him unconvinced when he advocated this but he soldiered on. Starting at the left hand most row they began walking down it calling out for the three Founders but mostly Godric. By the fifth row Daphne was glaring at Harry, by the twelfth he was sure the glare was going to burn a hole through his skull. By the time they reached the seventeenth row

Daphne looked ready to commit murder until her homicidal thoughts were interrupted by a deep voice from somewhere to their right.

Suppressing his smug look Harry walked towards the voice, calling out occasionally to it.

"Is that you Godric? Where are you?"

"Yes it's me, we're over here somewhere, there's a sheet over us."

"Ok well keep shouting we're almost there. Is the sheet white?"

"I don't know you plebeian its covering us completely so funnily enough it's a bit too dark to actually see the colour."

"I can see why he got on so well with Salazar" Harry muttered to himself and began shifting items carefully from the area where the noise was emanating. A tatty and dirty white sheet was covering something that looked to be the same size as Salazar's portrait. That had to be it.

Daphne was sulking as again Harry's simple idea had worked better than her complicated one and so she refused to help him move things, claiming she was supervising. Harry didn't really mind though, it was easier with only one person trying to move things. Eventually enough of the surrounding items had been cleared that Harry could remove the sheet covered package from its resting place.

With a flourish he whipped the sheet off of the portraits revealing three gilded frames of an equal size with Salazar's. Harry leant each one carefully against the row of stuff under the watchful eyes of the frame's occupants.

"Greetings my name is Harry Potter and this is my companion Daphne Greengrass. We were told about this place by a companion of yours, one Salazar Slytherin." Bowing slightly he stepped back taking the opportunity to study the portraits.

On the left was a man, obviously Godric, dressed in full armour with a

sword Harry recognised strapped to his back. His brown hair fell just below his neck and a short beard adorned his face along with an ugly scar that ran from above his left eye, over the bridge of his nose and onto his right cheek. In his painting Godric was standing at the top of a tower, leaning on the ramparts with the Gryffindor emblem on a flag flapping lazily in a breeze. All things considered he was a far more intimidating sight than Salazar and Harry hadn't thought that was possible.

The middle painting was of a regal woman in a library. Harry guessed from this that it was Rowena Ravenclaw. She was a statuesque woman with wavy black hair and beak of a nose that looked slightly too large for her face. That's not to say she was ugly, in fact she was very attractive once you looked at the whole face rather than just concentrating on the nose. Her brown eyes had a depth and wisdom to them and her long eyelashes seemed to exist solely to make sure those eyes caught every single detail.

The final painting was of a large woman with honey coloured curls arranged artfully, presumably Helga Hufflepuff. On first glance she appeared fat but on a closer look she was merely big in every respect. Taller than Rowena and with an ample bosom she looked a giant even in a 12" by 18" frame. She was situated in what looked to be a basic copy of the infirmary with a bed and various potions. Harry shuddered at the thought of this woman nursing anyone back to health; at least with Madam Pomfrey he could talk his way out of confinement for bed rest eventually, he didn't think anyone could escape Helga so easily.

"How have you spoken to Salazar?" Rowena demanded.

"He left a portrait in the Chamber of Secrets ma'am."

"Indeed, I take it that you are his heir then, he would have made it so only direct descendants could enter, no doubt with Parseltongue."

Harry shook his head negatively, "no I am not his heir however I can speak Parseltongue. I gained the gift when I defeated Salazar's last heir when I was a baby."

"How is this possible?" interrupted Helga.

Harry shrugged, "not entirely sure, I think my mother did some kind of ritual so that upon her death I would be protected. When I was hit by the killing curse it reflected back at the caster and some part of him broke off from him and attached itself to my head in the form of a scar. It was leeching from my magic to fuel itself and in return I gained some of his abilities as well as a connection to him."

"You speak as though he is not dead" Godric questioned thoughtfully.

"He is not. I have fought him twice since that night in differing forms, he is a disembodied spirit. We were hoping that you might be able to help us here Godric, Salazar said that you were a dark magic expert." He nodded. "Well we found a locket that was apparently very important to Voldemort, Salazar's heir, and it oozes dark magic but we have no idea what it is."

"Where is this item?"

"Down in the lab in the Chamber. If we shrink you, you won't be damaged will you?"

"Not immediately however staying in shrunken form damages the inherent magic in the portrait after a long period of time." Rowena replied, slipping into lecturing mode.

"Ah well it's only down to the second floor then I'll enlarge you again."

The portraits agreed and avoiding the students leaving from a late breakfast Harry and Daphne walked casually to the lab. If Daphne was curious to find out what exactly the locket was then it was nothing compared to Harry's burning desire to know. To be perfectly honest he

was expecting an impatient wait while the three newly found portraits caught up with Salazar but that was not the case.

Salazar gave a curt nod and greeted the arrivals, one which they returned just as shortly. Seeing the confusion on the student's faces, Rowena endeavoured to explain.

"You must understand that while it has been a very long time since we saw each other in reality, the magic of the portrait means that we also remember it being only yesterday that we saw each other. The passing of time within these gilded confines is a very odd beast, not at all linear. It would make a fascinating study for someone."

Harry nodded his understanding and turned to the locket to show it to Godric. He picked it up from its resting place, feeling the same sense of unease he did the first time he handled it.

"This is the locket Godric; could you tell me what it is?"

Godric was frowning as he looked at the locket. "Isn't that your locket Salazar?" Salazar nodded tightly. "Hmm do you know the Revelio charm Harry? Well could you cast it on the locket then?"

Harry did so and the same symbols rose from the locket eliciting puzzlement from everyone except Godric who had an expression of growing horror on his scarred face.

"No it can't be possible. To make more than one breaks the tenets of magic." He shook himself lightly and turned his attention to Harry's confused visage. "This object has been turned into a Horcrux. Put simply, a Horcrux is an object that works as a container for a portion of the soul. Theoretically so long as the object exists, its owner cannot die. However the theory is fatally flawed, it does not prolong life beyond its natural span therefore the caster will still die of old age naturally. Its real disadvantage is that once a portion of the soul leaves the body, it takes

with it an equal portion of the creator's sanity and humanity. The real problem is that this Voldemort character has created more than one of these items. You see magic is a semi sentient force, which is why intent is so important for spells, and as such it has balances and checks to keep its users in line. To make one Horcrux is frowned upon to put it mildly but in all my research I never found a way to manipulate magic so that more than one could be made."

"Does that mean that you made one Godric?" Daphne asked hesitantly.

"I did indeed. As a magical exercise it was a fascinating experience however not one that I would choose to repeat." Harry was staring at the Founder with something akin to disgust on his face. "Oh don't look at me like that. If you are fighting the Dark Arts and evil in general you must be prepared to make sacrifices. Quite clearly it doesn't stop you dying of old age otherwise I would still be alive now wouldn't I? You aren't one of those idiotic people who believe everyone deserves a second chance? That you should never kill, not even in defence of your own life?"

Harry shrugged, "I don't know. I never said never kill but surely a line must be drawn otherwise you are just as bad as they are."

"Now listen here you foolish little boy." Godric was truly angry now, his face twisting with rage, "just because a person kills does not make them evil. It is war. People die. There is a vast difference between killing someone before they can kill you or hurt an innocent and actively torturing someone for the fun of it or raping a family for pleasure."

"You've killed. Are you evil?" Salazar fixed a stare on Harry.

"What are you talking about I haven't killed anyone" Harry answered.

"Quirrell" Salazar simply replied.

"That was an accident" Harry said unconvincingly.

"No it wasn't and you know it wasn't. When you told me about that night

I could see that you knew exactly what you were doing when you grabbed his face. Yes it was self defence but it was done with the intention to kill and until you admit that to yourself you will not rest easy."

"Fine. Now you said he made more than one of these objects, how many?"

"I know you're changing the subject but think about what Salazar said, he's right you know. In terms of the number of Horcruxes it is impossible to tell. They can be anything, the only real way of telling that an object might be one is that it gives off a dark aura. In themselves they are not dangerous to anyone unless you are in prolonged contact with one. If that happens then the soul piece can assert itself over the person and begin to take their body for their own."

Daphne gasped "Harry, the diary."

Harry cocked his head, "do you think that was one?"

Daphne nodded, "think about it, you said it possessed the Weasley girl after she spent time writing in it and in the Chamber the memory itself said it was draining her."

"Merlin you're right. Well that's good news I've already destroyed one, could that be the 'other' the symbols showed?"

"No the symbols show that there is currently at least one other Horcrux currently in existence in the world. He must have made at least three in total."

"Ah well at least we know about them now. Daphne where did you put the basilisk fangs so I can destroy this one?"

"No!" screamed Godric and Salazar as one.

It was Salazar who spoke first. "Don't you dare destroy my locket, there must be a way of removing the soul piece without hurting the container.

Godric rode right over the top of Salazar's concerns "If you destroy it then we have no link to the others. It does not matter if the soul is split, it is still inherently linked. It should be possible to perform a ritual that will destroy all of the Horcruxes at once. It won't however kill the final piece but if we design the ritual properly then it should prevent the remaining piece from severing his tattered soul any further."

"Design?"

"This is unknown areas of magic, as I said it shouldn't be possible to make more than one of them. He must have delved incredibly deeply into the Dark Arts therefore there will be no ritual in existence capable of doing what we need it to. Congratulations you get to learn about rituals from me and Rowena but not now though. Now we want a talk with our brother here so off you go, we have several centuries to make up for."

"Ok. Thank you for all your help, we'll see you soon." Harry may as well have been speaking to a wall as the Founders completely ignored him, lost in their own conversation.

Shaking his head Harry followed Daphne out of the Chamber and up the stairs. "So, back to the Room of Requirement?"

Daphne eagerly agreed and they returned to the room which somehow looked even more intimidating in size now.

"How do you want to do this Daph? There's so much stuff in here."

"I think it's best if we start at one end and work methodically, organising as we go. I think the real question is whether we try and sort it all here or move it somewhere else."

"What all of it?" Harry said incredulously.

"Perhaps eventually. The problem is a lot of the stuff is broken so it would be easy to ignore but it could be very valuable if we could repair it. I think we need to sort it here in a very basic way and then send it

somewhere else where we can do it more thoroughly. What do you think?"

"I know just the person to help us out. Hang on let me give him a call, hopefully he will pick up. It's ringing" he said for Daphne's benefit.

"Ah so its that button, I always get confused with that cheers Jules" Sirius' voice came in faintly, apparently he still needed someone to answer his phone for him. "Hello Sirius Black speaking. Marauder, wrongfully imprisoned hero, legend throughout the known world and all around fantastic person. How may I help you?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Sirius I need you to do me a favour. Can you get a hold of a load of trunks with expansion charms on the inside. They have to be able to shrink without damaging any of the contents as well."

"Why do you need any of those? You already have a trunk" Sirius asked curiously.

So Harry explained the events since he got back to Hogwarts with the discovery of the Room of Requirement and the Founder's portraits as well as Godric's revelation that the locket was a Horcrux and all that entailed. By the end Sirius was silent, processing the information dump he received.

"Sirius? You alright?"

"Yeah I'm fine just a bit of a shock really hearing the lengths people will go to for immortality. I'll go get you a few trunks now and send them to you, once you have filled a few send them back to me and I can unload them in the basement."

"No don't do that, there's far too much stuff to fit in the whole house let alone the basement. How about you go and rent a cheap warehouse somewhere, might even be better to buy one if the price is right. What we really need is an expert to go through everything and see what's

worth keeping and what isn't because to be honest we haven't a clue about most of it."

"I'll see what I can do, I'll go talk to Griphook now, see if he has any ideas whether it's better to buy or rent. Don't worry I won't tell him why we want it."

"Actually hold on let me talk to Daphne a minute I'll call you back in a minute. What do you think Daph?"

"I think that might actually work, the warehouse that is. We definitely need at least one person who is an expert to go through this stuff. Some of this furniture could be incredibly valuable or it could be tat and I wouldn't know the difference. I'm inclined to let the goblins, or rather Griphook, know what you want it all for. He may be able to suggest someone to do the assessing. No doubt he will try and get a Gringotts employee to be involved but we are better off hiring our own person to avoid Gringotts getting commission on everything we sell" she responded thoughtfully.

"Plus having property to our name can only help for our plans for the future."

"Our name?"

"Yeah well I think it's time for our company to begin properly. I've been thinking about the electronics side of the idea, at the moment we are basically taking someone else's work and customising so it works with magic. Wouldn't it be better to take the basic idea and make our own design and manufacture it eventually? That way we will wholly own the process and product meaning we can charge whatever we like. Also I think I've identified a potential goldmine in the magical world. Currently there are no factories, mass producing items, everything is done in small artisan type operations. I was reading a muggle book on economics over

the summer and they have this concept called economies of scale, basically this means the more of an item you produce, the cheaper each item will cost to produce. If we could find a way to mass produce magical items we could undercut every other producer out there and still make a massive profit. In fact we could supply the whole magical world. Things like wands we couldn't do because they need to be handcrafted but potions, books and ingredients we could do, not to mention our own electronics as well."

"Wow you have really thought about this haven't you?"

Harry blushed slightly, "yeah there is so much potential out there and I don't want any of it to go to waste."

"So buy a warehouse if we can and we can begin to grow from there."

"Yes the question is where do we want to set up a base. We want everything to be relatively close otherwise it increases transportation costs."

Daphne looked thoughtful, "not necessarily. We could use House Elves. Distance is no object to them so it wouldn't make any difference where the items needed to go. The problem will be getting hold of enough elves to be able to use them effectively. You must understand Harry that House Elves have been a jealously guarded status symbol for the pure-blooded elite. Very few exist outside the bond with a family and if they do they won't last for long."

"What! Why is that?"

Daphne looked confused at his reaction but shook it off, "House Elves are parasites for want of a better word. They can only live by siphoning off some of our magic through the bond. Without the bond a strong elf will survive maybe five years, perhaps ten in a magic rich environment. However they are good parasites as the relationship is more symbiotic,

they gain magic from us and we gain a devoted and powerful servant that wants nothing more than to please us."

"So Dobby is going to die then? What have I done?"

"Who is Dobby?"

"Lucius Malfoy's former House Elf, I helped free him after the Chamber of Secrets incident, he threw Malfoy 20 feet when he was about to curse me" Harry chuckled at the memory.

"Interesting. House Elf magic is a fickle thing. I think this Dobby will have a tentative bond with you now and should you choose to complete the bond you will have your own House Elf. Try calling him and see what happens, if I'm right he will appear here."

"Ok Dobby are you out there?"

Immediately there was a pop and the odd little creature that Harry remembered well from last year appeared in front of them, bouncing with typical excitement.

"Great Harry Potter calls for Dobby. What can Dobby do to help?" his squeaky voice at an even higher pitch than usual.

"Calm down Dobby, Daphne here just explained that House Elves need a bond to survive and that you might have formed a tentative bond with me when you were freed is this right?"

Dobby didn't need to speak to confirm that this was the case, his head was down and he was shuffling a foot absentmindedly, the very picture of a naughty schoolboy caught red-handed. Harry got down on one knee so he was level with the elf.

"It's alright Dobby, I'm not angry. In fact would you like to complete the bond so you would be my House Elf for real?"

Dobby looked up, hope shining on his countenance. "Dobby would like that very much. I, Dobby, pledges his life and magical core to the service

of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter" he intoned formally before looking up at Harry expectantly.

Not really knowing what he was supposed to say Harry guessed, "I, Harry James Potter, do accept the pledge of Dobby and in return offer my own life and magical core in friendship to Dobby the House Elf."

There was a gasp from Daphne, apparently Harry had done something wrong. Dobby, on the other hand, was wide eyed and had begun glowing. The bright white nimbus surrounded the elf, forcing Harry and Daphne to look away. While they were shielding their eyes they heard a deep chuckle that sounded altogether nothing like Dobby. They looked back and their mouths dropped open.

Where Dobby had been almost three feet in height and skinny he was now a little over four feet tall and heavily muscled. He practically glowed with vitality and his body coiled like a crushed spring, waiting to be unleashed. Instead of the unsightly rags he was dressed in before he had a pair of neat trousers and a sleeveless vest top, both in black.

"Dobby you look, different. How do you feel?"

"I feel good, thank you Harry." Instead of the high, squeaky voice the elf now possessed a deep bass rumble.

Daphne was still shell shocked at Dobby's change and it seemed the change in voice was all too much for her and she slumped to the floor, sitting dazedly.

"How come you have changed so much?" Harry asked curiously.

"When you pledged your life and core to me, magic changed and improved me to my optimum condition. It also allowed me to understand your wants and desires, hence why I call you Harry instead of Master, because I know that is what you would prefer."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, "makes sense to me. Daphne are you alright?"

She nodded mutely but made no attempt to get up. "fair enough. Dobby do you think you would be able to take all of the stuff in this room somewhere else if we found somewhere to take it?"

"Dependant on the distance it could take as little as a day to transport it all however the further it needs to go the less I can take per trip which would push the total time upwards."

"I'll give Sirius a call and get him started on buying a warehouse to store all this stuff. Er Dobby what exactly do you all the time?"

"Don't worry Harry I will be able to find something that will benefit you, if you need me just call me and I'll pop to you." And with an almost silent pop he disappeared leaving a rather bemused Harry to make a phone call to his Godfather.

21. Chapter 21

AN - Hi all sorry this update has been so long in coming, I've been working 12 hour night shifts. While this leaves me plenty of opportunity to think up new ideas for plots and stuff, it leaves hardly any time at all when I have the inclination to do much other than sleep let alone write! If anyone was interested I have three new story ideas, one where Harry reads about the Spartans at primary school and rationalises his abuse to mean that he is in the Spartan school, another which is a mild sort of crossover with Anita Blake but one that doesn't use any of the characters just the world and some of the concepts in that universe and a final one where Harry loses the plot and turns very dark not to mention many ideas for the sequel to this. However I have tried to restrain myself from starting any other projects until this story is finally finished, it shouldn't be too long we are coming towards the end now it is just a case of finding the time and motivation to put the ideas onto paper.

Anyhow enough of this rubbish on with the story, as ever read,
review, enjoy.

Chapter 21

After the phone call was done, Daphne had recovered enough to explain to him in great detail exactly what was wrong about what he had done. Apparently he should have just pledged his magic as opposed to his magical core. When Harry mentioned that he didn't really see what the difference was he was treated to a good twenty minutes of berating from Daphne. It turns out that in witches and wizards, magic was something akin to blood, necessary for survival and should said magical person lose a lot of it very quickly then they could be in serious danger. However magic would regenerate relatively quickly, enough to get the magical back on their feet. On the other hand the magical core was more like the heart or perhaps something even more important as any damage to the core could be catastrophic. A strong magical could survive some damage to their core and if the initial shock didn't kill them then they would eventually heal even if it did take years.

Therefore should Dobby die, the portion of Harry's core could well die with him, of course thanks to Harry's core Dobby was much stronger and thus harder to kill. Daphne wasn't 100% sure what would happen really but the risk was certainly high enough and so he was made to promise never to do anything like this again and to pledge his magic as opposed to his core. As much as Harry would like an army of super powered House Elves it was far too dangerous to do so, at least without numerous experiments, experiments Harry was sure he wouldn't be allowed to do. Despite this slight hiccup the newly formed company, Marauders Inc, took off at an impressive rate. Sirius spoke to Griphook and between the two of them they located an abandoned warehouse in London, near the

docks. It required a bit of fixing up and so Dobby was deployed to sort it out. Warders were also contracted to increase security and to hide any traces of the magic inside from reaching any surrounding muggles.

The search for employees was a success as well, in fact the first was a goblin who had been part of the team of warders working on the warehouse. Ripfang had started his career for Gringotts as a curse breaker working on the ancient ruins in South America before transferring to the more prestigious area of the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. He had later returned to the London branch to work as a warder however he had recently become disillusioned with the lack of excitement within his current job and was looking for a new challenge. His experience in all types of ancient artefacts not to mention his curse breaking abilities would be invaluable and Harry was happy to have him aboard.

The next employee found was a twenty-something Muggleborn witch called Jess. She had fallen victim to the rampant prejudice within the magical world as she had been rejected several times by the ministry. This was despite the fact that Jess knew very well that they had hired several of her Pureblood classmates after she had applied and every one of them had much poorer grades than her. She also had the distinction of being the only student in the last fifty years who had taken the History of Magic NEWT and achieved an O grade on it. She loved books with a passion but was very knowledgeable about all different types of antiques and historical items so this would be incredibly useful and anything she didn't know, she would happily look up.

The final member of the team was another Muggleborn called Steve.

While Jess had taken the legitimate route after leaving Hogwarts, Steve had taken a slightly different path. Griphook claimed that he was a

'salesman' and was very good at what he did. He had this uncanny ability to make anyone believe that they honestly and truthfully had to have whatever it was that Steve was selling and to eke out the best possible price for any item. Harry still didn't really know what it was Steve had spent his career after Hogwarts selling but he got the impression that it was very rarely an item that actually belonged to Steve or to the people he was selling it for. Harry was initially leery of trusting Steve but Griphook insisted that his oath would prevent Steve from acting in a way that wouldn't benefit Harry and that was good enough for Harry.

Over the course of a week Dobby transported all the items from the Room of Requirement to the refurbished warehouse and set it in some semblance of order for the trio working there. Every so often one of them would call Harry with an update on their progress. Jess was banned from giving these updates as she tended to get very distracted by whatever item she had just been working on and completely forget about everything else. Her enthusiasm was good though and made a useful counterpoint to the cold businesslike manner of Ripfang and the mercenary practicality of Steve. Between them Harry was confident that the unlikely trio would make sure that everything that could be saved would be, everything that they might want to keep would be kept and everything else would be sold for the absolute best price.

Now that Harry was excused having to clear the Room of Requirement he had plenty more opportunity to work on the Potions Analyser Program. He was making good progress on forming the basic outline for the database, with the appropriate parameters inputted it was just a case of linking this to the actual analysis portion that he was struggling with. He hadn't actually put in any of the ingredients information yet as he was relying on the other members of the development team for that. He

probably could do it but it made sense to play to the strengths of everyone involved now that they were included.

The headache the program was causing was minimal in comparison to that which a certain Hufflepuff witch was creating. Susan Bones had taken to spending a lot of time with Harry, sitting with him at mealtimes at the Gryffindor table and next to him in the classes Gryffindor shared with Hufflepuff. This wasn't entirely a new thing nor was it what was confusing Harry though, no what made no sense was that whenever he would say anything remotely funny Susan would laugh. Now Harry had no illusions, he knew he was on occasion funny, but not that funny. In fact some of the things she laughed at even he didn't think were amusing. She had often sat with him before but never with this amount of regularity or quite as closely. He did briefly consider phoning Sirius to ask him what on earth was going on but he quickly rejected that notion as Sirius would either mock him mercilessly or confuse matters even more, perhaps even a combination of the two if Harry was particularly lucky. What he needed was someone who could translate the strange actions into something he could understand. Then the answer came to him, it was so simple he couldn't believe he hadn't thought of it earlier. Daphne was also a teenage girl surely she would be able to interpret the madness perpetrated by a member of her own species.

The opportunity to speak to her came when they were doing some especially difficult Transfiguration homework in a tucked away corner of the lab, away from the bickering Founders portraits. For some reason Harry was incredibly nervous and didn't know how to bring up the topic. He was saved by Daphne outright demanding to know what it was that was wrong with him. He explained the situation with Susan as best he could before leaning back and looking at her expectantly. She didn't say

anything immediately and so he said "well?" impatiently.

"It sounds to me like she likes you."

"What?"

Daphne rolled her eyes, "she likes you, finds you attractive, maybe thinks you're boyfriend material."

"Oh."

"Oh? That's all you have to say for yourself?"

Harry shrugged, "I don't know, it's not really something I've thought much about."

Daphne hesitated slightly, "well do you like her?" It came out in a rush, like pulling a plaster off quickly.

Harry shrugged again, "don't know. How do you know if you like someone?"

"Well I'm not completely sure but I would imagine that you want to be with them all the time, feel happier when they are around, feel swooping feelings in your stomach around them." She blushed lightly but Harry wasn't watching her, he was staring at the wall blankly.

"But that's how I feel about you" he mumbled before his eyes snapped to Daphne to see if it had been quiet enough to escape notice.

Judging by her wide eyed expression it hadn't escaped her sharp hearing.

"Do you mean it? Do you really mean it?"

Harry rubbed the back of his head uncomfortably, "well yeah, I mean look at you, you're beautiful. Not just that though, you're smart, witty, great to talk to" he trailed off. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything. I didn't mean to, it just came out."

"Harry shut up and kiss me you fool."

Mouth hanging wide open he took a deep breath to steady his jangling nerves. Harry summoned every ounce of his Gryffindor courage and

leaned towards Daphne. She met him half way and they kissed. Her lips were like nothing he had imagined before, they were soft, velvety almost, and they tasted slightly of the perfume she always wore, the scent he associated as uniquely Daphne. It was only a light chaste kiss but as Harry began to pull away he felt a jolt run through his body. It was not an unpleasant feeling but it certainly was a surprise. It was followed by a warmth rushing through every cell of his body; it reminded him of the first time he held his wand. He leaned back to see if Daphne had felt it too and he hadn't imagined it.

She looked as confused as Harry felt, "what was that?" she asked.

"I don't know, is it supposed to happen?"

"I don't think so, was certainly odd though. Come here and let's see if it happens again." She had a mischievous glint in her eye that Harry wasn't sure he had spotted before but he obligingly leaned in again.

This time this kiss was slightly deeper and lingered a touch more as both became more comfortable. There was no jolt this time but there was a pleasant warmth, almost like the remembrance of the hot sun beating down or sitting in front of a warm fire on a winters evening.

Reluctantly Harry pulled back, "much as I would like to carry on, maybe we should find out if that warmth thing was normal?"

Daphne pouted a little but resumed her seat. "Who do you want to ask?"

Harry pondered this, 'did he want to ask Sirius and risk confusing information and a whole heap of mocking? Hmm no probably not. How about a teacher? No that's a stupid idea. Well what about the Founders portraits? Likely still get mocked there but at least the information would likely be accurate. Yes that's the best course of action.'

"Ask the Founders they will probably know and they will be discrete about it."

Daphne nodded agreeing with his logic so they stood up and entered the main part of the lab where the portraits were now set up. Said portraits were currently in the middle of another argument about something or other, frankly Harry didn't want to know what.

"Um guys I was wondering if you could help me with something?"

Always the more helpful of the four, Helga turned to him. "What is it dear?"

"Yes dear what is it?" Salazar asked mockingly before quieting at a formidable glare from Helga.

Suddenly with all four staring at him, asking the Founders for help seemed like a very poor idea to Harry but he couldn't back down now.

"Well you see the thing is me and Daphne kissed."

"Finally" interrupted Rowena.

"Say what?" Harry was utterly bemused.

"You two have been dancing around each other for weeks that we have seen and I don't doubt that you had been for months before that. What brought this rather surprising moment of clarity for the pair of you?"

"Um well I was actually asking her for help about a different girl"

All four burst into laughter, Godric had almost fallen over he was laughing so hard.

Rowena looked at him with a half smile playing on her lips, "only you, Harry, could go to a girl asking for advice about another girl and end up kissing the first."

"I'm not even sure if that's an insult or not" Harry grumbled before shooting a light glare at a conspicuously silent Daphne. "That's not the point. The point is that when we kissed we both felt a weird jolt thing." Suddenly the Founders were serious, Rowena fixing them with a gimlet eye. "Describe it" she commanded.

"Well it was kind of like how it felt when I first held my wand." Daphne nodded in agreement with Harry's description.

Rowena smiled, something had obviously been confirmed to her, "congratulations."

"Um why are you congratulating us?" Harry asked. He couldn't help but feel a hint of nervousness as he awaited her answer.

"Magic itself has blessed your union, you should be very proud it is an extremely rare gift."

"What like a soul bond?" Daphne blurted out, breaking her silence. "I thought they were only in stories?"

"Of course not, don't be a fool. Magic cannot suddenly join your soul with another's just from one measly kiss. Oh stop scowling Harry you're a teenager, trust me it wasn't that good a kiss. You will get better but not yet. No what it means is that the magic in each of you is highly compatible with the other. It is rare in the sense that you two have found each other, however every single person has at least one person out there who they are compatible with. Normally however these two people never meet and those that do, have often gotten married soon after. This leads to the stories about so called soul bonds resulting in unbreakable marriage between the two. It is perfectly possible that there may be several other witches or wizards out there for each of you. This gift does not guarantee that you are absolutely perfect for each other and that you will spend the rest of your life together, just that it is far more likely that you will be happy together than it is for a normal couple."

"Hang on Rowena you said that I could be compatible with another witch or wizard but I only like girls. I'm not gay." He blushed.

Rowena shrugged, "so? You may not like other males but that makes absolutely no difference to what your magic is compatible with. Magic is

genderless. That's probably another reason why such blessings are rare."

"That makes sense. Is there anything else we should know about the link?" Harry asked.

Rowena thought about it briefly before replying, "not really. Just remember that while the link is rare and makes you more compatible, it is not the be all and end all. Do not allow it to dominate your lives, allow your relationship to develop naturally."

Both teenagers nodded at the advice before Harry decided to change the direction of the conversation. "While we are here has there been any progress with the ritual design for Voldemort's Horcruxes Godric, Salazar?"

Salazar looked to Godric to answer who dutifully did so. "There has been a bit of a stumbling block I'm afraid. While we have almost worked out how to invoke the links between each of the separate soul pieces, we are a long way from being able to destroy them. It would be helpful if we knew the exact number we were looking for but as that is impossible we are making do with the information we have. I am hopeful that we will have a completed ritual ready to perform before you leave the castle at the end of the year."

"That's good to know, at least we are making progress. Daphne, now that small interruption has been cleared up, how about we continue on from where we left off?"

The reactions to Harry and Daphne beginning to date were remarkably similar to the Founder's, disconcertingly so. Had everyone seen that they liked each other apart from themselves? Blaise certainly thought so and it was hard to tell Tracey's view as she appeared only able to communicate by squeals, much to Blaise's chagrin. The others that Harry spoke to regularly seemed pleased for him and congratulated them on finally

opening their eyes to see what was clear for everyone else. The Weasley twins took it one stage further, of course, and began referring to the couple as 'Milord and Milady' along with deep and over elaborate bows. They threatened to begin curtsying but a glare from Daphne made them stick to bowing.

Even Harry, with his pretty poor appreciation of the emotions behind people's actions, could tell that Susan was slightly hurt by the turn of events. However after a day or so of moping she suddenly brightened and came over and congratulated the two of them. Harry wasn't sure how to act around her so he asked Daphne and was told to just act normally. He was also rewarded with a kiss on the cheek, he wasn't sure why though and when he asked Daphne just chuckled and replied, "for being you." This cleared up nothing but Harry decided it wasn't worth worrying about, frankly there were other things occupying his mind at the moment.

22. Chapter 22

AN - Hey sorry for the delay been busy at work but I've got a week off so hopefully I will finish Harry's third year by the end of the week. Anyhow on we go.

Chapter 22

Very little actually changed in the dynamic between Harry and Daphne, now that they were officially dating. Harry began to understand why everyone had thought they were blind for not seeing it, as the only real change was that they often held hands and occasionally kissed. The Hogwarts community was also surprisingly tolerant of a relationship between its most famous Gryffindor and a Slytherin. Perhaps Harry's work at reaching out to people in different houses was starting to overcome decades of barriers. All things considered Harry was the

happiest he had been in memory, topping even the excellent Christmas he had.

Ravenclaw played Slytherin in the first Quidditch match of the New Year and the Ravens narrowly defeated the Snakes thanks to an excellent catch by Cho Chang from right under Malfoy's nose. However the majority of the school had only watched this with half an eye as they were eagerly awaiting the match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff. Frankly nobody expected anything other than an absolute blowout in favour of Gryffindor, not even the Hufflepuff team.

After Transfiguration on a surprisingly crisp late February morning, McGonagall asked Harry to stay back briefly.

"What is it Professor?" Harry asked curiously.

"In our meeting over Christmas you brought up certain concerns over the Headmaster's behaviour, inconsistencies you might say. Well I just thought you ought to know that I have been keeping an eye on him and I have to conclude that you are absolutely correct. More so I believe he is becoming more erratic. He called me to his office the other day but when I got there he didn't seem to know why I was there. Oh he tried to hide it but I could see through his bluster. In fact last week he sent me a note saying he wanted to remove a specific clause from the Hogwart's Charter. A clause that he worked long and hard to get added not six months ago." Harry frowned, "it doesn't make sense Professor. There seems to be no discernable pattern, no end game to his actions. What is he aiming towards? What does he hope to gain?"

"I don't know, I wish I did but I just can't work him out anymore. I'm sorry I can't be more help."

Harry waved her apologies off, "it's ok Professor, it's good information to know, even if I don't really understand it."

Daphne didn't understand it either when he updated her later that evening but he could tell she was running it through that fabulous mind of hers, looking at every single angle. While he may not be able to spot something, if there was any hint of an end game he had faith that Daphne would pick it up. With Daphne keeping the Dumbledore situation in hand, Harry redoubled his efforts to finish off the potions program. It took him several days of near constant effort over a weekend but finally he pronounced it 'done'. All that was needed was for the others to input all their Arithmetic data about the ingredients and potion creation processes.

This too was completed in shifts once Harry sat everyone down and explained exactly what they had to do. He found it interesting that despite being purebloods with no experience of technology prior to him introducing it to them; they managed to pick it up very quickly. Slowly but surely they added all the necessary data, it was no mean feat to include every ingredient not to mention the different methods of preparing each one. It was deadly tedious work, even if it was necessary. So much so that Harry found himself thankful, for the first time, for the fanaticism of Wood when it came to Quidditch. The Gryffindor Hufflepuff game was drawing near and despite being overwhelming favourites Wood would not allow any of them to even contemplate becoming complacent. The four or five times a week practices gave Harry a much welcomed excuse not to spend his free time incessantly typing although he couldn't get out of it completely unfortunately.

It was the day before Harry's Quidditch match that Daphne sent Dobby to collect Harry to announce that the last bit of data had been entered.

Harry excitedly through down his half finished Herbology essay and prepared himself for Dobby to pop him down to the workshop. Everyone

else was already there and there was a palpable air of excitement in the room.

"It's all done then?" Harry asked.

Blaise nodded and gestured towards the empty seat in front of the computer. "Well get on with it then" he said hiding a grin.

Harry flashed a crooked smile and took the offered seat. "What potion shall we test first then?" he enquired to the room.

As usual Tracey was first off the mark, "try something simple like the Boil Cure potion that we made in first year."

Harry nodded and tapped away at the keyboard briefly before hitting enter. A small progress bar appeared on screen along with the word 'Analysing'. They waited impatiently, watching the bar creep towards 100% before it flashed once and a small menu appeared offering three options. First was 'most efficient brew', second was 'most effective brew' and finally was 'cheapest brew'. He clicked 'most effective' and a recipe appeared on screen. He looked to Tracey to see her reaction to the recipe and was rewarded with a gasp followed by feverish murmuring.

"No porcupine quills...stabilises without the need for a base...anti clockwise after the initial simmering."

Ever the practical one Blaise looked towards the end to see the cost per litre. He blinked once and looked again to make sure he hadn't imagined it. "Bloody hell 74 Galleons a litre for 100% effectiveness."

This pulled everyone up short, the normal brew would cost around 2 Sickles at most for the same volume. Tracey pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"It's the Moonglow petal" Neville said, "it's an extremely rare plant from the Congo jungle. A whole flower would easily cost 500 Galleons."

In response Harry clicked the 'cheapest brew' option. The recipe changed slightly leading to a cost of 3 Knuts per litre but an effectiveness of only

68%. Not a bad score by any means but not as impressive as 100%. Harry then tried 'most efficient' this came out at 4 Sickles per litre but had a rating of 94%. This led to an evening of playing with the sliders and many different recipes to see the differences. Tracey couldn't contain herself and had set a cauldron up to begin testing some of the recipes to make sure they worked in reality as opposed to just on a screen. It was midnight before Harry begged off to get some sleep before the game tomorrow, leaving the others to their playing.

The predicted blowout over Hufflepuff came to fruition in resounding fashion. Rumours of a professional scout drove Wood to new heights of keeping. Despite a fairly impressive Chaser trio for Hufflepuff, Wood refused to let a single goal in. Harry privately believed that Wood simply needed to glare at the approaching Quaffle for it to decide not to trouble his hoops let alone save it. Cedric Diggory, the Hufflepuff Seeker, had obviously attempted to practise joining in with the Chaser plays as Harry had done against Slytherin but he didn't have the same knack that Harry had so it fell a little flat. Deciding to push his Firebolt to its absolute limit for its maiden match, Harry led poor Cedric on a breakneck tour of the field in a series of feints and dives. In fact Harry was having so much fun that he almost forgot about actually looking for the Snitch. So much so that it was only blind luck that the little golden ball popped up in front of him as the Gryffindor Chasers took the score just past 700. Laughing in delight he whipped a hand out in a flash and snared the tricky little ball to bring the game to a slightly anticlimactic end.

The ensuing party lasted long into the night in the Gryffindor Common Room with dancing and an impressive amount of contraband alcohol that had been smuggled in. The twins tried to get Harry to take what they thought would be his first shot of firewhiskey. However they had not

counted on the fact that Harry had spent almost a month with potentially the most lackadaisical guardian about these matters, Sirius. He had already experienced his first shot or two of firewhiskey and would no longer be surprised by its potency. So with a wink he took the proffered shot, downed it and held it out for another one showing no effects at all. Harry had never seen both twins gobsmacked before but he was treated to the sight now until he was dragged away to dance by Katie. Despite his vehement protests he spent most of the night dancing with the various girls he knew in the tower, only escaping late on. Harry thoroughly enjoyed the party although he did wish that Daphne could have been there as well.

He met up with his girlfriend the next day in the Great Hall after a lazy Sunday morning breakfast. He swept her into his arms and planted a kiss on her lips causing her to lean into him and giggle slightly.

"So Daph, what do you want to do today?"

"I don't know Harry, how about a walk around the lake?"

He quickly agreed and they left hand in hand. They spent most of the journey until they were half way around the lake in companionable silence, enjoying the early spring sunshine and the signs of new life surrounding them. They came to a stop under their favourite tree and by unspoken agreement sat down, Harry leaning against the gnarled trunk and Daphne leaning against him with his arms wrapped around her.

They talked mostly of inconsequential things until Harry began fishing for compliments.

"And what did you think of my spectacular Quidditch performance yesterday?" he said with a grin.

Daphne rolled her eyes, "oh it was fantastic of course but it was a little bit difficult to keep up with."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked interestedly as despite playing the game it was rare that he watched it from a fans perspective. In fact even the school games he mostly just watched the Seekers and ignored the rest.

"Well there's so much going on at once. Say for example you're off in one of your crazy dives over one side of the pitch but on the other the Chasers are doing some intricate passing move and in the middle the Beaters could be whacking a bludger. It's very difficult to keep up with it all at the same time."

"Sounds like they need replays."

"What? What's a replay?"

"In Muggle sports that are on TV, if something interesting happens they show it again, sometimes at a slower speed. Actually...hold on a second."

His face twisted into an expression of deep thought, one that Daphne knew was pointless to interrupt.

After several minutes of obviously deep thought from her boyfriend, with his lips moving soundlessly, Daphne lost patience and elbowed him in the ribs.

"Ow what was that for?"

"For ignoring your girlfriend. Now what set your mind off?"

He took a deep breath, marshalling his thoughts. "Well first I was thinking about whether it would be difficult to make a wizarding version of television. In itself that shouldn't be too difficult just a case of building the sets and modifying the signal that the Wizarding Wireless Network sends out so that it sends pictures instead of just sound. Then that got me thinking of what would be shown on there. Now, in the Muggle world, sports are a huge industry. Hundreds of millions of people sat down to watch the last World Cup Final for football. Some club teams have an

annual turnover of hundreds of millions of Galleons so I was wondering how that would translate to Quidditch. I'll be honest despite playing the game I know hardly anything about the leagues around the world."

"Well the British and Irish League is the oldest and most prestigious in the world I know that much. However the standard is actually not that high as is evidenced by the England team being rubbish, they might not qualify for the World Cup this summer. The Irish are pretty good though, they might actually have a shot at winning the Cup. The problem is that the British teams only allow British players to play for them. The owners are all old Pureblood families that believe in the Pureblood supremacy malarkey and by their estimation foreigners are only slightly above Muggleborns."

Harry's eyes positively lit up at this. "So what would happen if someone, say the last remaining heir to an old Pureblood family wanted to buy one of these teams and would allow the best foreign players from all over the world to play for them? How would the Quidditch fans take this?"

"Well I think the fans would love it, they want to see the very best players play for their team. The British players would hate it because they would no longer be able to coast by and receive adulation while playing poorly however the foreign players would love it. The reputation of the British League is so high, pretty much every player around the world would chew their arm off to get to play in the League but they know they would never be allowed to. But Harry what's the point? Sure it would be fun to own a team but it would be a colossal waste of money."

"Ah but that's where you're wrong my dear Daphne, all you need is a large range of merchandise and a worldwide presence. That combined with winning a lot equals a huge amount of profit. Come on we need to talk to some experts."

"These two? These are the experts?" Daphne looked sceptically at the wrestling pair of Seamus and Dean rolling around on the floor pummelling each other.

"Trust me. Oi you two quit cuddling I need to talk to you."

Seamus looked up and Dean took the opportunity and a solid punch to the Irish boy's ribs. Dean stood up while Seamus was left on the floor wheezing.

"What do you need to talk to us for Harry?" Dean asked.

"Yeah what for?" said Seamus as he stood up and promptly stamped on Dean's foot while rubbing his ribs.

"Will you two stop fighting for one minute" Daphne glared at the pair of them, promising real pain if they didn't.

Seamus and Dean snapped into identical poses of attention and saluted

"Sir, Yes Sir."

Harry merely rolled his eyes knowing the two best friends were almost as difficult as the twins to control. "I want to speak to you both because between the two of you, you know pretty much everything about Quidditch and Football. Now Daphne informs me that the British League won't allow foreign players to play for their teams is this about right?"

Seamus nodded "yeah the owners hate foreigners, won't let 'em near the League."

"Interesting now Quidditch has transfers I assume? How much is the most expensive player sold?"

Seamus wracked his brain for a bit, "that would be Aiden Lynch, Irish Seeker, signed for the Tornados for 85,000 Galleons last year."

Harry frowned "doesn't sound like much." Daphne and Seamus looked at him aghast but Dean just looked thoughtful.

"It's not when you consider Ronaldo went to Madrid for £80 million a few

years ago" Dean said to looks of utter shock.

Doing a quick conversion in her head, Daphne's mouth dropped open, "that's 16 million Galleons" she exclaimed.

"Bloody hell you could buy every team in the League and still have plenty of change left over with that."

"So in your professional opinion Seamus if someone bought an old team in the League and transferred in the best players from around the world, would they win the League and more importantly would they be accepted by the fans?"

"The fans would love it and if you could get the players then they would destroy every team in the League at the moment."

Dean looked at Harry shrewdly, "at first I thought you were trying to do an Abramovic and buy success but that's not it is it? No you're trying to create a wizarding version of Man United or Real Madrid aren't you?"

Harry smiled "Dean my friend you have hit the nail on the head. From what I know of Quidditch teams around they have very little in the way of infrastructure, just think if I could build a set up like United or Madrid with Reserve teams and Youth teams."

Dean's eyes widened now, "they would dominate for decades. Couple of preseason tours to America and the Far East, change of kit every year and the owner would be loaded."

"One final thing Seamus, of the teams in the League which is the one with the best worldwide reputation? Doesn't matter if they haven't won anything in ages."

"Well Puddlemere is the eldest, formed in 1163 and they probably have the best reputation around the world. They had a lot of success in the 19th Century and some in the 40's but very little since. Actually thinking about it they are owned by the Wilkes family and if rumour is to be

believed they would be happy to unload the team. The current Head hates Quidditch by all accounts."

"Perfect" Harry smiled a remarkably feral smile, "now if you will excuse me gentlemen I need to call my Account Manager. Keep this quiet and I may well have a job for the pair of you if all goes well."

"Yeah Griphook that's fine I'll send Dobby along in a minute to pick up the papers. Oh I have to come myself? Ok well I'll get Dobby to pop me to Gringotts and I'll sign the papers. Yeah it's no problem so long as nobody finds out I can leave Hogwarts. Thanks for getting this all sorted so quickly over the last few days. Well I'm sure the Wilkes' will be kicking themselves for letting it go so cheaply in a couple years. Ok see you in a minute." Harry pressed the hang up button on his phone and spotted Daphne looking at him amusedly. "What?"

"Nothing Harry you go off and have fun, I can't believe you bought Puddlemere for only 200,000 Galleons. Go on shoo."

"Yes Ma'am" he said playfully and called for Dobby.

A routine trip of an hour later including a few papers to sign and an update for Griphook, Harry returned the proud owner of Puddlemere United. He decided to leave things as they were for the remainder of the season which ended in May and begin to make the ambitious changes over the summer.

He was updating the immensely excited duo of Seamus and Dean over dinner when they were distracted by the sound of steadily rising voices from the Staff table.

"He left today, I know he did."

"Control yourself Headmaster" McGonagall shouted.

"He is the one that must be controlled; it is for the Greater Good. I cannot allow this attitude to continue." Dumbledore was practically foaming at

the mouth, his eyes darting along the Gryffindor table wildly.

"Mr Potter did not leave the school premises, now sit down" McGonagall's Scottish blood was heating up rapidly.

Harry tried to shrink down to avoid the open mouthed stares of about half the school, the other half were firmly fixed on the raging form of the Headmaster.

"I know the little brat did, where are you Harry Potter? Come out, come out wherever you are." By now Dumbledore had drawn his wand.

"Albus Dumbledore put your wand away this instant!" McGonagall screeched.

"Albus Dumbledore? I am not Albus Dumbledore. I am Gellert Grindelwald!" and with an insane cackle he began flinging spells.

AN - So how do you like my little twist? To be perfectly honest I have most of the next chapter written but I'm going to be evil and wait at least a few days to post it because frankly I'm interested to hear what your thoughts are how many of you guessed that one?

23. Chapter 23

AN - I know I said I would wait a couple days but I got caught up in all the reviews and felt a little mean when I had a perfectly nice chapter sitting ready for you so enjoy.

Chapter 23

With a speed born of desperation Harry dived backwards to avoid a sickly yellow looking curse that impacted with the table. Everyone around the room was frozen in a combination of fear and shock that the great Albus Dumbledore was no more, but rather the most feared Dark Lord prior to Voldemort. They had all grown up hearing of the famous battle between the two but apparently the stories had been wrong. Flitwick was the first to recover, proving that he was once a World

Duelling Champion. He flicked his wand out and began launching a many coloured chain of spells at the Headmaster who almost absentmindedly batted them away with no more concern than he would a fly. By now McGonagall had recovered from her shock and was screaming in Gaelic as she began transfiguring any item close by into wolves, lions, bears, any animal with a predator's instinct and layered with the compulsion to attack Albus, Gellert, whoever it was. Remus was not far behind and he was flinging spells with a dangerous look in his eyes. The wolf inside him was begging to be unleashed; thankfully the full moon was almost two weeks away. Snape too had begun to launch curses that looked almost as dark as some of those coming from the Headmaster

Almost all the students were cowering under the sturdy forms of the house tables, shielded from the worst of the spellfire. With contemptuous ease the Headmaster was duelling the four teachers and keeping them all on the back foot while still hurling curses at Harry who was using every ounce of concentration and his lightning reactions to prevent himself from dying what would be a very painful death judging by the colour of the curses.

However not all the students were cowering, some had stood up and began to fire their own spells at the Headmaster. Neville was at the forefront of this with a grim determination etched onto his face as he threw the most powerful spells he knew over and over again.

Dumbledore was still laughing, his eyes no longer twinkling but rather shining with anger and the desire to hurt and kill. It was clear to see why he had long been known as the most powerful wizard and the only one Voldemort feared. Remus was hit with a blasting curse as Dumbledore began a methodical assault on the teachers. The werewolf launching backwards into the wall before coming to a rest, still.

Then Harry knew anger. He too began to join the attack, standing shoulder to shoulder with Neville, flexing his monstrous magical core. The students looked on in wonder as Harry began firing spells twice the size of Dumbledore's at the old man. The old man belied his years as he dodged or shielded everything that was coming towards him, all the time returning fire. Harry knew he didn't have anywhere near the knowledge or skill to beat Dumbledore but what he lacked in finesse, he more than made up for in raw power, enough to keep him occupied.

Daphne too was standing up, hatred on her countenance as she attacked, her hair whipping back from her face. 'Merlin she's beautiful' Harry thought as he snuck a glance over towards her.

Dumbledore spotted this and followed his glance towards Daphne. With a triumphant smile he flicked a deep purple spell at her, catching her unawares.

Time stood still for Harry as he watched everything in slow motion. The curse flew at Daphne and he willed her with every fibre of his being to move or shield or something. But she didn't. Surprise now covered her beautiful face as she sank to the ground in a heap.

Harry screamed at her to get up but she didn't stir. Now Harry knew rage. Magic crackled in the air as he lost all sense of self and threw himself at the smug face of Dumbledore.

Wand forgotten he surprised the old man by charging straight at him.

Dumbledore reacted instinctively and a hail of arrows flew at the enraged boy. Three struck him in the chest but he didn't even flinch, just carried on charging, rage clouding any pain. Dumbledore raised his wand again to fire a darker curse but it was too late the boy was on him.

Blows rained down upon the Headmaster as he desperately attempted to defend himself. He tried to bring his wand to bear but one of Harry's

backswings knocked it from his hand. 40 or maybe 50 years ago he would have still been able to beat the boy in a physical contest but time is the enemy no man can conquer and it had worn him down. Combine that with the adrenaline coursing through Harry's body, not to mention the rage. The oh so beautiful rage, seeping into every cell, strengthening it. Every hurt, every crack of the whip across his back, every beating from Dudley and his gang was channelled into the punches. Harry didn't even register that the spells had stopped flying but he did notice that someone had their arms around his waist and was bodily lifting him from the unconscious form of the Headmaster. Instinct took over, someone was trying to stop him and that couldn't be allowed so he head butted his attacker, causing the arms to loosen enough for him to escape and return to the object of his rage.

Harry's hands were covered in blood now, some from the cuts in his knuckles but most from pounding the bloody ruin that was formally the face of the Headmaster. As each blow hit more blood splashed onto his shirt and up onto his snarling face. His arms were getting tired now but he wasn't going to stop. Then the world went dark.

"I had to stun him Black; he was going to beat a man to a pulp in front of hundreds of witnesses. Don't look at me like that mutt, I don't care how deserved it was, it would still be murder."

"Shut it Snively you're just bitter because he broke your nose."

Harry cracked an eye open to see his Godfather squaring off with Snape.

"What happened?" he croaked out. Instantly both men stopped fighting and Sirius rushed to the bedside.

"Well you stopped Dumbledore or Grindelwald or whatever. How much do you remember?" concern tinged Sirius' normally boisterous voice.

"We were sat eating and then I dodged a spell. Dodged lots of spells and

then...Daphne! Where is she? Is she alright?"

"Calm down Harry, getting all agitated isn't going to help her" Sirius replied calmly.

Harry, however, was not so calm. An expression of utter defeat was plastered on him. "You didn't say 'she's fine' first. People always say she's fine unless they are really hurt or dead." He looked up into Sirius' steel grey eyes. "Please tell me she isn't dead at the very least."

"She's not dead Harry. But you're right; she's in a bad way. She's in St Mungo's with her parents by her side. Before you even think about saying anything you are not going to see her yet. Not until Madam Pomfrey has checked you over and made sure those arrows have done no permanent damage."

"What arrows?" Harry asked stupidly.

Snape snorted, "what arrows he says, the three arrows that were embedded in your chest and sticking out the other side, remember them?"

Harry shook his head, eliciting another snort from Snape.

"Be that as it may" said Sirius with a sideways glare at Snape, "you were very hurt and Madam Pomfrey needs to check they were just normal arrows rather than ones coated in poison or Merlin knows what else. It's best if you rest Harry, take some of this Dreamless Sleep potion, I'll see you in the morning."

Harry obediently took the vial and knocked it back, happy to escape his own morbid thoughts.

The Infirmary was bathed in pale, early morning sunshine when Harry opened his eyes again. Everything ached and the bandages around his chest were tight and constricting. Turning to the side was even an effort but he was rewarded with the sight of Sirius draped over a chair at his

bedside, a line of drool escaping the Animagus' mouth. This caused a chuckle to rise unbidden to Harry's lips but it was soon stifled as it hurt too much to laugh, physically and mentally. As if his body knew what a supreme effort it had been to simply turn over, Harry felt his eyes growing heavy once more and he settled down to sleep. However, free from potions, this time his sleep was no longer dreamless. He woke briefly to Sirius holding his thrashing form down as he screamed wordlessly and Madam Pomfrey tried to force another vial down his throat.

It was dark when Harry woke again; he dimly noticed that his chest was free from bandages. He wondered how long he had been out of it. The scabs on his bruised form looked like they were days old at least, but by his reckoning it would only be 24 hours. He shifted gingerly and was pleased to note that it didn't hurt anywhere near as much as before. He took a deep breath and forced himself upwards into a sitting position. It was times like this that he was glad he no longer wore glasses as he would have had to spend the last minute, fumbling awkwardly to be able to see. He looked around to see if Madam Pomfrey was around, hunger was gnawing at his stomach and he would quite like to correct that. She was nowhere to be seen, however, so Harry called for Dobby.

"Harry, how are you?" the elf asked.

Harry shrugged minimally, "not really sure Dobby, its all a little fuzzy at the moment. I am hungry though so could you get me something light to eat? I'm not even sure what I would like, so make it a surprise for me please."

Dobby nodded and bowed slightly, "of course Harry." He paused briefly before speaking again, "its good to see you awake Harry" and with that he popped away.

He returned quickly with a covered tray. "I was tempted to bring you soup as that's no doubt what Madam Pomfrey would give you, however I know how much you hate it. So instead I bought a little bit of antipasti. Lush ripe tomatoes, several different slices of ham, fresh ciabatta and a few other little bits and pieces. Eat what you can and then say 'done' and it will change into a bowl with any leftovers turning to soup. We wouldn't want you to get in trouble with the Demon Matron now would we?" Dobby winked and popped away to Harry's chuckles.

True to Dobby's word the tray did indeed turn into a bowl of what looked like tomato soup to Harry once he had finished eating the delicious food. It also had the benefit of being food you had to concentrate on and make yourself, thus drawing Harry's focus away from worrying about Daphne. But the meal was done now and Harry's worries returned full force, she just had to be ok, he didn't know what he would do if she wasn't. He couldn't sleep anymore so he sat up running through his ideas and plans in his mind. He had to occupy himself somehow and this seemed the best way.

Dawn was peeking through the drawn curtains when Madam Pomfrey made an appearance. Seeing him awake she immediately hustled over to his bed and began running some diagnostic charms. He waited for her to finish before speaking, she didn't take well to interruptions.

"Well Mr Potter, I'm happy to say you're a lot better. You should be ready to leave sometime this morning."

Harry looked at her doubtfully, "this seems a little sudden for you Poppy."

"How many times have I told you not to call me that? Anyway it isn't sudden, you were unconscious for 4 days."

"Why was I out that long? It was only a few arrows and I'd woken up

once already."

She looked faintly embarrassed now, "ah well as to that, we kept you stunned so you could heal without the pain of nightmares." She laid her hand gently on his shoulder, "there's only so much Dreamless Sleep can do before it stops becoming effective. I'm sorry Harry but it was for the best."

Harry visibly steeled himself, "and Daphne? How is she?"

Madam Pomfrey sighed, "she is in St Mungo's. The curse that hit her was a modified Bone Withering curse." She hesitated before seeming to come to a decision, "I know you're strong Harry so I'm going to tell you exactly what is happening, please don't interrupt me." Harry nodded his assent, his heart in his mouth. "The Bone Withering curse is a nasty one but this modified one is especially bad, it eats away at the bones and once they are dust it spreads to the flesh. To prevent its spread the healers have dosed Daphne with the Draught of Living Death and put her in stasis. They will then proceed to vanish a small number of her bones at a time before re-growing them with Skele-gro. Once these are re-grown they will move on to the next group of bones. It is a long and arduous process that requires pinpoint precision. However I will not lie to you, even that may not cure her and even if it does she only has an even chance of waking up from the Draught of Living Death. I'm sorry Mr Potter, Harry, but the team at St Mungo's are doing everything they can."

Again Harry nodded, his heart not really in it. "Can I go and see her?"

"Certainly, Sirius should be here soon and I can let you go into his care.

The new Headmistress has decided that you are excused class for at least a week, but take as long as you need. I believe her exact words were 'he's so far ahead of everyone anyway he could not bother coming back until 6th year and still be ahead.'" She smiled tightly at him.

"So what happened to Dumbledore?"

"A story for another time, he's in custody and won't be hurting anyone ever again. Don't you think on it, you concentrate on getting yourself fully healthy again."

Feeling a little better now that he knew Dumbledore was neutralised Harry sat back to wait impatiently for Sirius to arrive. In reality it was less than half an hour until he poked his head around the door, but to Harry it felt like days.

"Ah Harry you're awake, Madam Pomfrey says you're ok to leave."

"Sirius thank Merlin you're here finally. Come on we need to go to St Mungo's and see Daphne."

"I know calm down. I bought some clothes for you, unless of course you fancy running into her room in just your underwear?" Sirius waggled his eyebrows.

Harry blushed and held out his hand for the clothes. Ignoring Sirius' smirk he snatched them and went behind a screen to change. They were not his normal clothes, they were the ones Rach forced him to buy as 'good' clothes. Designer label jeans and a fitted shirt that he rolled the sleeves up on and left the top two buttons undone. He looked around for his trainers but Sirius instead threw the polished black Italian leather shoes at him.

"Why the fancy gear Sirius? Where are my normal clothes?"

"Well young Harry as you are likely to be meeting the parents of your girlfriend then I thought it best for you to make a half decent impression. Of course I can always go and get your ripped jeans and Slayer tshirt, I'm sure that will make an excellent impression."

"No, no that's alright, these will do fine. Stop laughing or I will help Moony get you neutered."

Sirius stopped laughing.

Despite his many injuries over the years Harry had never actually been to St Mungo's so he was surprised that once you got past the charmed entrance to hide it, it looked remarkably similar to every other hospital he'd ever seen on TV or otherwise. Somehow he had expected it to be really different to so called normal hospitals. The receptionist directed them the Spells and Curses department on the third floor. Daphne had a private room and Harry stood outside the closed door, internally panicking. Sirius saw his nervousness and put a fatherly hand on his shoulder. Harry drew comfort from the simple gesture and knocked on the door. A feminine voice called for him to enter from inside.

He tentatively opened the door and immediately spotted the woman who could only be Daphne's mother. They looked almost identical, they could be twins let alone sisters. His eyes swept to Daphne, lying in the bed. She looked so pale and peaceful she could almost be dead. He supposed she was in a way, in a state of living death.

"Ah you must be Harry, my daughter has spoken often of you." The lilt of Mrs Greengrass broke through Harry's despairing thoughts and he forced himself to look at the woman.

"Yes I am, pleased to meet you Ma'am, though I wish the circumstances could be better."

"Nonsense and don't call me Ma'am, makes me feel old. You must call me Anastasia." Her smile took any of the sting out of her words.

Harry smiled back tightly and moved towards the bed, "How is she?"

Anastasia sighed "getting there. The Healers are making progress, they have finished re-growing her lower legs and her upper legs are currently half grown. They believe it will take another two weeks at least before they can begin to think about bringing her out of her sleep. Now come on

tell me about yourself, I want to know about the person so captivated by my daughter and the one who has stolen her heart."

Harry blushed and began his story. Helped along by Anastasia's gentle questioning, they talked long into the day, each occasionally glancing at the still form of Daphne.

Sirius hadn't entered the room with Harry, not that Harry noticed. He left to get an update on the Dumbledore situation and returned in the evening to find Harry and Anastasia sharing a simple meal, likely courtesy of Dobby, still talking.

"Sorry for interrupting but we really should be getting back otherwise Poppy will be after my blood."

Harry stood up and held out a hand to Anastasia, "it was a pleasure to meet you Ana, thank you for the talk. I'm sure I will see you again soon and meet Cyrus and Astoria as well."

Anastasia ignored his hand and pulled him into a light hug. "It was good to meet you too Harry. I'll see you soon, look after yourself."

Sirius apparated them back to Hogwarts and led Harry to the Headmaster's, no Headmistress', office Harry corrected himself. Sirius mumbled a password that Harry wasn't paying enough attention to catch, lost in his own thoughts.

"Harry, how are you doing?" asked temporary Headmistress McGonagall, although most believed it only a formality that she would confirm to the position permanently.

Harry shrugged eloquently and sat in the offered seat in front of the desk.

"Well that's to be expected. Now Sirius you have been to see my predecessor today, what have you learnt?"

Sirius took a deep breath and noted Harry perking up to hear his story.

"It is a difficult one to explain. As you know he is in St Barnabus', the

mental hospital near Manchester. The staff there have been assessing him near enough nonstop since he woke up there. He is kept in magic suppressing cuffs at all times and is on a heavy regimen of potions. One of these potions allows the barriers around the mind to fall away to a trained Legillimens as well as making the patient compliant to questioning. Through this they have begun to piece together the story. To do so you need to go back to Albus' childhood. He has a younger brother and also a younger sister, Ariana. Ariana was the youngest and before she went to Hogwarts some local Muggle children found her doing accidental magic and tried to force more out of her. When she couldn't they turned on her and set upon her leaving her a danger to everyone else. Her mind rejected magic and she couldn't control it, she needed constant supervision. Fast forward the story to the summer after Albus graduated, another young man came to Godric's Hollow, Gellert Grindelwald. They spent the summer together and became the closest of friends however towards the end there was an argument and Grindelwald used the Cruciatus on Aberforth, Albus' brother. Presumably Ariana heard the commotion and came to investigate. It would appear she tried to help but she couldn't control her magic properly and became dangerous to the other three. It becomes unclear here but we know that Ariana died a painful death when a spell from somebody hit her and reacted poorly with her swelling magic. Now we need to skip forwards again to the events of the duel between Albus and Grindelwald. All eyewitnesses agree that it was an epic duel but what they didn't know is that right at the end once Albus had disarmed Grindelwald and forced him to the ground, Grindelwald swore on his magic that it was Albus who killed his own sister."

"Did he?" Harry interrupted, hanging on tenterhooks.

Sirius shrugged, "maybe, maybe not. Grindelwald didn't do any more spells to prove he still had access to his magic and Albus killed him straight after anyway. An Oath on his magic lost him nothing, he knew he was going to die anyway, yet it was one last spit in the face of his conqueror. Anyway the Healers believe that the belief that he was responsible for his sister's death along with the trauma of staring into his best friend's eyes as he killed him caused his mind to fracture. To rationalise the crushing guilt his mind created a separate personality, Grindelwald, which was responsible for all those actions. The Healers have spoken to both sides of Albus and agree that they interact in very distinct ways. It would appear that the Dumbledore side has no knowledge of what the Grindelwald side does when it is in control. However the Grindelwald side has access to the Dumbledore side's memories."

"So it was the Grindelwald side that did all those things to me and the Dumbledore side was good? Is that what you're saying?" Harry asked again.

Sirius repeated his shrug. "Who knows, it is clear that times of trauma and stress weaken the barriers between the two and allow Grindelwald more control. However that is not to say that every 'bad' action was Grindelwald and every 'good' was Dumbledore. The line is very blurred, we may never know where one ended and the other began. At least this does explain why there seems to be very little consistency in Albus' actions."

"So why now? Why did the Grindelwald side act on Harry in such an unsubtle way?" asked McGonagall.

"Ah well as to that; remember what I said about stress weakening the barriers? Well Albus has been suffering from Dementia for a while now

which further weakened them on a permanent basis, hence why he has become more erratic all year, even under the control of the Dumbledore side."

Harry leaned back in his chair, trying to digest what he had just heard. It was strange, despite it all, he still had no idea why Albus had acted as he had. In fact more questions were added, no longer was it simply trying to work out the motivations but trying to decipher which personality was in control. It was enough to give anyone a headache.

"So basically just to cope with the guilt and whatever, his mind created a whole entire different personality." Sirius nodded in answer to Harry's question. "Wow, the mind is a scarily powerful thing."

AN - Well there you go, I never said last chapter was the only twist!

I have to say I'm very happy that there was such confusion over the Dumbledore/Grindelwald situation although a few of you clever souls did guess what was happening. Hopefully this part at the end clears up all that confusion though if you have any questions don't hesitate to ask and I will do my best to answer. Cheers for your support, it means a lot. Next chapter shouldn't be too far off.

24. Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Harry was still trying to process all the information when he went to bed that evening, so much so that it kept him awake. He wasn't entirely sure if this was a bad thing or not. On the one hand he felt terrible having not slept at all. All of his aches and pains seemed magnified in his still weakened body. However, by not sleeping, he had avoided the dreams that seemed to plague him after the fight. He was too proud to go and ask Madam Pomfrey for a Dreamless Sleep potion and anyway the Matron had insinuated that they were becoming less effective on him as

it was. Harry presumed this was due to prolonged use over the years after his fight with Quirrell in first year and the Chamber of Secrets last year. He carefully picked his way through his still sleeping dorm mates and headed for the shower in an attempt to wash some life into his haggard appearance. The hot water soothed his aches and holding his head under the stream of water made him forget everything apart from the rhythmic pounding on his skull. It had a hypnotic quality that Harry had always enjoyed.

Feeling marginally more human he emerged and mechanically dressed. It was still only 6.15 in the morning, far too early for breakfast in the Great Hall so he went to the Lab to busy himself with work to keep his mind occupied. During his long night of contemplation he thought he had found a way to build a wizarding version of a television but he roughly pushed this aside. What was the point of it? Who cared if he could build something that would increase his finances? That wouldn't keep him, or anyone he cared for, safe. No, he had neglected that side of his studies in favour of pointless things. At the moment it appeared Dumbledore was out of the picture, but what if he escaped? Never underestimate the power of magicals to screw even the simplest of tasks up. And then there was Voldemort to consider. Battling him twice in his first three years of school was certainly enough to prove to Harry that he was still out there and would not rest until someone put him down for good, like the rabid dog he was.

So he delved into his collected Defence Against the Dark Arts books as well as a few found in Salazar's library that were slightly more Dark Arts than Defence Against. He moved into the chamber proper and conjured several vaguely human shaped targets and set to with a will. He knew he had the raw power to trouble anyone in a duel, the other day had proved

that. What he lacked was the repertoire of spells and the ability to channel that power. He resolved to ask Professor Flitwick how he managed to that chain effect on his spells, but first he needed to learn some more curses and to work on his control. So he threw spell after spell at the targets.

Time meant nothing to him, only the burning desire to be better than he was before, to be able to protect his loved ones. Sweat poured down his muscled form, he ditched his shirt after it became sodden and interfered with his casting. Dimly he heard his phone going off in the pile of discarded items. He blocked it out; all that mattered was his wand and the targets.

He didn't notice it at first but his wand seemed off somehow. At first he passed it off as his imagination or just the feeling of doing new spells, but as time went on he was more certain that his wand felt different somehow. Frowning at the offending item he walked to his abandoned shirt, legs feeling surprisingly unsteady now he had stopped casting. He idly glanced at his watch as he slipped it on, only 8.30. Just over two hours and he felt weak already, well that would have to change as well. He checked his phone and frowned again, 23 missed calls what the hell? All of them were from Sirius. What could he possibly want him that badly for within two hours? Then he noticed the 24 hour clock in the corner of the screen, 20.30. Ah, not just over two hours then but just over fourteen. That would explain it.

Putting his shirt on he left the Chamber to search for Sirius. He didn't have to look far as waiting outside the entrance was an irate Sirius with a similarly angry Remus.

"Where the hell have you been?" Sirius growled.

"In the Chamber, obviously."

"Don't you get smart with me, do you have any idea how worried we've been?"

"I am getting smart as it happens. I've been stupid for too long now, wasting time on pointless things."

"What are you talking about Harry?" asked a marginally calmer Remus.

"Everything, I've been wasting time on stuff that doesn't matter. Wasting time playing Xbox with you two or making stupid potions programs when I should have been getting stronger, maybe then I would have been able to protect Daphne. Hell, I even spent a whole day doing nothing but watching the Star Wars films back to back with you. What bloody good did that do anyone?" Harry was shouting by the end of the tirade.

"Well if that isn't the stupidest thing I have ever heard in my whole life, I don't know what would be." Sirius upped his volume to beat Harry's.

"I'm glad you mentioned Star Wars, there's a quote that you should remember. 'Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.' In your case it is fear of losing someone close to you. You cannot let it consume you or you will tread a very dark path." Remus spoke softly, eyes fixed on Harry.

Harry rounded on him. "Oh and what would you know about it?"

Amber eyes flashed. "What would I know about it? Let's think about it shall we? Me, a dark creature, treated with fear and disgust by the population. At Hogwarts I find a few people who don't care about my curse, my first friends. And you think I know nothing of the fear of abandonment, that despite it all they would shun me for what I am?"

You've had a hard life to be sure, but you do not hold a monopoly on shitty childhoods. Even my own parents hated me, were afraid of me.

Their only son and they flinched when they looked at me."

"And my parents used the Cruciatus to express their displeasure at my

actions. A curse that causes unimaginable pain, cast on a four year old because he wouldn't kick a Muggle child. Cast out by my own family but still mistrusted by everyone else because of my hated surname. Do you think I never feared that I too would be abandoned again? And then to top it all, twelve years in Azkaban with nothing but my fears and very worst memories for company."

Harry looked stricken, his anger fading as quickly as it had risen. "I...I didn't..."

"Of course you didn't. You didn't think. Everyone has fears, everyone makes mistakes, not that I think you did make a mistake. Look, Daphne got hurt, there was nothing you could have done to stop it. You cannot blame yourself. The only person to blame is Albus. Nobody else." Sirius, too, had quelled his anger. "Now could you please tell me what you have been up to all day, as if I couldn't already guess."

"Training down in the Chamber." He sighed deeply. "I just felt so helpless in the hospital looking at her lying on the bed, looking like she was dead. I couldn't sleep last night, kept thinking I should have been quicker, should have done better. There was something weird though. My wand feels different, I thought it was because I was casting new spells but even when I cast ones I've done a hundred times they felt a bit off."

Remus and Sirius shared an unreadable look before Remus replied. "Off in what way?"

Harry thought briefly, trying to find the right words to describe it. "Sort of like I was using someone else's wand. It worked alright but I needed to force it a little bit to get it to do what I wanted."

"Come with me, we needed to visit Minerva anyway but I think I may have the solution to your wand issues" said Remus.

"Ah good evening Sirius, Remus and Harry, please sit down."

Already McGonagall had begun to make the office her own. Gone were the strange silver instruments that littered Dumbledore's office and in its place were shelves and shelves of books. Harry spotted the stand that he had seen Fawkes on before in second year but as before the Phoenix was elsewhere. He briefly wondered what had happened to the bird but drew his attention back to the conversation between Remus and McGonagall.

"So we think that when he disarmed Albus something happened with Albus' wand, do you still have it here?"

"I do indeed, here it is."

Remus turned to Harry, "here you go, hold onto this and see if it feels better than your own wand."

Harry looked at him sceptically but reached out and took Dumbledore's wand from his grasp. Immediately a rush, of what Harry now recognised as magic, swept through his tired body. It revitalised him, its power a seemingly infinite well, pooling underneath his skin, aching to be unleashed. It begged to be used, with this he could level mountains, he could do anything. His train of thought was broken by Sirius' hand on his shoulder.

"Since we have already done one movie quote today, I think another is appropriate here, 'with great power comes great responsibility'."

"What's happening? This is Dumbledore's wand isn't it? So why does it feel like it's mine now?"

Sirius answered this, "it would appear that this is no mere wand but rather the Elder Wand, the famed Deathstick. Supposedly one of the Deathly Hallows along with the Stone of Resurrection and the Cloak of Invisibility, presented to three brothers as gifts from Death himself. I always thought the story a myth, a fairy tale told to children but perhaps not."

"So you're telling me that this is the most powerful wand in the world?"

"Maybe, but I'm inclined to think that it just channels the magic of the person that it has given its allegiance to, better than any other wand. It is simply an object, no more powerful on its own than a rock or a leaf. It is its wielder that gives it power, nothing else." Remus said thoughtfully.

Harry looked at it in wonder. He looked up at McGonagall, "Remus mentioned that you wanted to see me anyway, aside from the wand thing I mean."

"Indeed Harry, I wanted to make you an offer. I thought it prudent to see if you wanted to stop going to classes until after Easter. As you know it's only two weeks until the holidays and frankly you're so far ahead anyway it makes little difference if you missed the time. It gives you the opportunity to get your head straight and spend some time with Miss Greengrass. What do you think?"

"That would be... good Professor, thank you. Would I stay here or could I go with Sirius?" Harry asked gratefully.

"The choice is yours, personally I would suggest Sirius' as it would get you away from the inevitable questioning and rumours in the school."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, "when can I go?"

McGonagall chuckled, "whenever you wish Mr Potter. Give my best wishes to Miss Greengrass when you see her and I shall see you after the Easter break."

Harry smiled for the first time since he had woken up. "Thank you Professor. Come on Padfoot let's get out of here."

Dobby was dispatched to fetch Harry's trunk and things from his room and they flooded out from McGonagall's office to Grimauld Place. It was only once they landed that Harry realised just how hungry he was, hardly surprising as he hadn't eaten in almost 24 hours. Luckily Kreacher had

prepared a delicious meal for them and Harry set to with abandon.

Thoroughly full he pushed his plate away and made his excuses, moving up to his room and falling onto the bed, exhausted. He slept poorly but at least he did manage some sleep.

The next morning he wandered downstairs at around 9 having given up trying to sleep. Sirius was already at the breakfast table tucking into a Full English. Harry excused himself from that and ended up with a couple of poached eggs and toast courtesy of Kreacher once more.

"Sirius can we go and see Daphne again today?"

"Sure thing Harry" Sirius mumbled through a mouthful of bacon. "Let me finish this up first and then we can go once you're changed. Remember wear something respectable" he smirked mockingly.

"Yeah, yeah whatever" said Harry going to shower and get dressed.

As it happened there was no need to get dressed up as there were no other visitors to Daphne's room when they arrived. Sirius left to give a little privacy and Harry began to talk to Daphne's still form. She couldn't hear of course but it was cathartic for Harry to release all his worries. He held her hand and told her how sorry he was for letting her down, all the while imagining her berating him for saying such things.

It was this scene that the Greengrass family walked in on. Harry hadn't heard the door open and so he jumped out of his skin when Anastasia said "Hello Harry."

He held a hand to his pumping heart and took a deep breath to calm himself. "Hello Anastasia. And this must Mr Greengrass and Astoria." He thought about calling the tall man Cyrus as his wife had instructed him to do but thought it better err on the side of caution. Truth be told he was also a little intimidated, for Cyrus Greengrass was well over six feet tall and just generally big. He wasn't fat and nor did he look particularly

muscled but he was obviously one of those people who are just naturally large. He had piercing blue eyes that seemed to be weighing and measuring Harry at the moment. Harry stepped forward and offered his hand nervously. Cyrus studied it briefly before enveloping it in his own giant paw. Harry fought the urge not to wince from the man's grip.

"Call me Cyrus." He had a deep voice and his tone gave nothing away as to his feelings for Harry.

Harry nodded in recognition but still backed away slightly nervously.

Anastasia spotted this and aimed a swipe at her husband.

"Be nice! Don't you dare go pulling the overprotective father routine."

Cyrus turned a level gaze to his wife. "Of course dear."

She snorted and turned back to Harry and her daughter. "How is she?"

Harry sighed, "no change really. They are making progress with the potions regimen but its slow going. I just..." his voice broke here and he lowered his head, emerald eyes glistening with tears. "I'm so sorry."

"Nonsense, I thought we went over this last time. It was not your fault and never will be. You cannot blame yourself. Now come here."

It was a measure of how lost Harry was feeling that he went to her arms without protest, tears that had been threatening to fall now came in earnest as he clung to her like a branch in a maelstrom.

Cyrus Greengrass was in a quandary. Despite his wife's opinion that the Potter boy was good for Daphne, he did not think so. She was his baby girl and nobody would be worthy of her affections. Add to this the more vicious and vindictive aspect of his personality believed that it was this boy who had failed her, put her in this state. Yet here he was sat next to her bed, looking every inch the broken man echoing those same opinions. Even a blind man could see that Harry cared a great deal for Daphne and was struggling with the guilt. Whether this guilt was deserved or not was

of a lesser concern. The point was how he dealt with this and whether the two of them could make a life together. Several things that his wife had let slip made him think that there was more to the story than he was being told. It would be highly unusual for the very first relationship two people got into would turn out to be the one and they would end up married, particularly at this young age. He himself had dated quite a few different girls before Ana and he knew she had been quite the wild child, abhorrent to the idea of settling down before they got together. Yet his wife seemed to be perfectly content for the two teenagers to be a couple from here on out. It didn't fit with his current understanding of the situation so he must have missed something in one of those secretive conversations his wife and eldest daughter had held by letter. It still smarted that he wasn't allowed to read a letter from his own daughter in his house.

He looked back to the sobbing boy and decided to wait and see how he dealt with the situation from here on. As much as he wanted to forbid his daughter from ever seeing the Potter boy again, he knew his wife would never allow it. That's not even considering how angry Daphne would be with him. As Harry leaned back from his wife he took a good look at him. It was difficult to judge as he was sat down, but he looked to be healthy and taller than average. He sighed, he was going to have to give the boy a chance.

"I'm sorry for being such a pain" Harry said embarrassedly as he pulled away from Anastasia, his tears subsiding.

"You are not a pain dear, so don't even begin to think that."

Harry nodded but he clearly doubted her sincerity. "Well I'll just leave you here with Daph, I should be going anyway and I don't want to get in your way."

Anastasia glared at Cyrus who looked on bemusedly, trying to interpret her unspoken demand. Obviously there was something he was supposed to do here but he wasn't sure what. Deciding to take a shot in the dark he looked up to rapidly retreating boy, "stay. I'd like to get to know the young man who thinks he's good enough for my daughter."

He looked to his wife and her expression was one of approval but tinged with irritation. Presumably he had got most of his task right but done something slightly wrong; women were a pain he decided.

"You're wrong. I don't think I'm good enough for your daughter. Never have and probably never will but she's got it into her head that I am and frankly I can't argue with her. She gets this stubborn set to her shoulders and I know I've lost whatever the argument was. Course she doesn't call it an argument, it's a 'discussion'."

Despite himself Cyrus snorted. "She gets that from her mother. I don't think we have had an argument since we were married but we have had plenty of 'discussions'. One day I hope to win one of them." He smiled wryly, which only increased when he saw his wife's crooked eyebrow. It looked like there would be another discussion later on when they got home. He looked forward to it.

25. Chapter 25

Chapter 25

After the initial awkwardness was dealt with between Harry and Cyrus, they slowly came to enjoy their conversations together. Harry respected Cyrus' opinions and ideas about the magical world. He was a Pureblood but not a supremacist, from an old family but not one with a title. It was an interesting perspective on some of Harry's ideas for example his plans for the expansion of his new Quidditch team. Cyrus couldn't believe what a huge industry sports were in the Muggle world, far outstripping all the

magical industries combined on its own.

It crept up on Cyrus but he came to respect Harry. He was a young man with supreme drive and intelligence. It pained him to admit it but he had been wrong, here was someone who would be perfect for his little girl. Sure he had faults, but they were balanced perfectly by Daphne and her faults in turn were balanced by him.

Daphne was progressing well, or so the healers said anyway. The majority of her bones had been vanished and replaced; it was only her neck and skull left. Her skull was the most difficult part of the whole treatment because it had to be done in sections, requiring supreme control on the part of the healer. Harry was still visiting every day, although for less time as Sirius was making it his mission to distract Harry from sitting and moping at her bed all day, every day. It was a difficult balance for Sirius to strike, he needed to let Harry visit her and get over his guilt but he also needed to prepare him ever so gently for the possibility that she may never wake up from the Draught of Living Death. Harry wasn't much like Sirius, so he couldn't go with his normal plan for distraction; alcohol and debauchery. Harry was far more driven and so with a few suggestions from Remus, Sirius set about distracting Harry with work and learning more magic.

The acquisition of the Elder Wand threw Harry's control over his magic right out of the window when he first started using it. Sirius had already been impressed by Harry's power but now, quite frankly, he was in awe of it. Harry was overpowering every single spell he was using and didn't seem to be able to stop. While this may be useful in a duel situation it was useless for day to day living. For example he levitated a feather through three floors with a simple Wingardium Leviosa. Sirius took him right back to the beginning of Hogwart's education and with much

patience set to controlling the flow of magic. It was difficult but in the long run would be invaluable for Harry. Varying the power of spells was something not usually taught at Hogwarts. It only came up if you went on to a Mastery, so Harry was once again learning something far beyond his age range, albeit enforced this time as opposed to through curiosity. Having a goal distracted Harry from drowning in thoughts of Daphne lying in her hospital bed. He was grateful to Sirius for taking the time out to help him and for not trying to force him to take a break and have fun too often. They still had fun together, watching a film or playing Xbox, but after an hour or so Harry began to get antsy and distracted. Sirius recognised this and would move them back to working on spells.

The one distraction that Sirius planned that didn't work out was taking Harry to visit Ripfang and the others sorting through the Room of Requirement stuff. Rather than be interested in all the fascinating items the trio had discovered, Harry couldn't help but think about how Daphne would react to everything, how excited she would be. He lasted less than half an hour before he ended up storming out of the warehouse. Sirius found him nearly an hour later leaning against some railings, watching the boats travelling up and down the Thames. Knowing it was pointless to do anything else he took Harry to see Daphne in St Mungo's straight after so he could work through his feelings. Privately Sirius worried what would happen if Daphne didn't wake up; visions of Harry tearing the country apart in a bid to escape his grief filled his thoughts. The worst thing was he had no idea what he could do to help avoid this, beyond hoping the situation never arose.

It was today, D-Day, the day they tried to wake Daphne up. Her treatment had been a success, all her cursed bones replaced with brand new ones, even her skull. To say Harry was nervous would be an

understatement of epic proportions. Sirius had given up trying to calm him and let him work his nervous energy off by pacing up and down. They were waiting for 9am so they could go to St Mungo's and be first on the scene for her waking, or not as the case may be.

They apparated at 8.58 when Harry couldn't wait any more. He was so distracted he didn't even complain about the feeling of side along apparition as he normally did. Barely pausing, he weaved through the people in reception, following the well trodden path to Daphne's room. Cyrus and Ana were already waiting outside the room when Harry arrived. They greeted each other quickly but all were distracted, lost in their own thoughts. Some time later, a healer poked her head around the door, interrupting the silence, and Harry's heart flew into his mouth. This was it. The woman wasn't smiling, was this good or bad?

"If you would like to come in, she's just waking up now. Try not to overwhelm her, she could still be a little dazed and confused."

A broad smile worked its way onto Harry's face and he slumped against the wall, steadily sinking down in it in pure relief. Cyrus and Ana entered the room to see their daughter but Harry hung back, wanting to give them some privacy. Cyrus looked to have been expecting this and frogmarched Harry into the room. Ana was crying tears of joy at seeing her daughter awake. She hugged Daphne gently as if frightened she would break. Ana eventually let go and Cyrus moved in wrapping Daphne in an enveloping embrace before he too stepped back. Harry was frozen; he didn't know how to cope with this. There were so many things he wanted to say, needed to say, but they had flown his mind as he gazed at the beautiful girl in front of him. Cyrus gave him a light push in the back and he stumbled towards her before catching himself and clutching her tightly.

"I'm so, so sorry" he whispered in her ear as he held her.

She pushed him back, fire in her eyes. "And what are you sorry for?"

"Well, it's my fault, you know..." He flinched as she pushed him back and punched him squarely in the chest.

"Now you listen here you bloody idiot, it is not your fault. And if you say it is again, so help me, I will curse you to within an inch of your life. I will talk to Godric and get him to teach me the most painful curses he knows. If you even dream of treating me any different, treating me like glass, I will hurt you so badly your worst nightmare will seem like a fond memory."

At this stage, old Harry would have nodded in agreement but not really meant it. He would have done exactly what she warned him against, treated her like glass. He would have tried to protect her and by doing so, by trying to cage her, he would have lost her. However this was new and improved Harry, one who had grown physically but most of all mentally and emotionally over the last year. New Harry now just about accepted that it really wasn't his fault, that sometimes bad things happen. And so rather than nodding without meaning it, he pulled his girlfriend into a searing kiss. He didn't care that her parents were in the room, he was practically drunk on the joy of her being awake and back in his life.

They were interrupted by a cough from Cyrus. He may approve of Harry but that didn't mean he wanted to see things like that. He wanted to be able to live in a fantasy land where she wouldn't do anything like that until she was at least 40. Anastasia, on the other hand, was positively beaming in delight. Before she could say anything though, the chief healer bustled into the room.

"Right that's enough, she needs rest. Go on, get out and let me treat my patient." He ushered the Greengrass parents and Harry towards the door.

Clearly bedside manner was not a requirement of being the chief healer and identical expressions of anger adorned Cyrus and Harry's faces.

Before they could release some of their anger, Ana grabbed them both and escorted them out.

"Don't you go looking at me with that face of thunder, either of you. He may be an odious little man but he is right, she has only just woken up and needs rest. We can come back later." Her tone brooked no argument whatsoever.

Harry's anger faded as quickly as it had risen. "Makes sense. I think I might wait until tomorrow to come visit again. Make sure she's rested up enough and to give you two some time alone with her." He held up a hand to stall their objections. "I know you don't think it's necessary but I'd feel better if it worked out that way. I feel so much better just seeing her up and shouting at me again that I don't think I'd be able to sit with her for any length of time anyway. I need to go and burn some energy off. Cyrus, Ana, always a pleasure." He gave a slight incline of the head, the merest hint of a bow, and walked off whistling a jaunty tune.

Cyrus looked at Ana, slightly bemused by the turn of events. She just stood there, a knowing smile playing across her lips.

"Come on husband, let's go and tell Astoria the good news. She will be dying to visit her sister now that she is awake."

The entire day Harry felt as though he was walking on the clouds. As if to rejoice along with him the sun was beaming down with unseasonably hot weather. He couldn't remember but he would swear that it was grey and dull this morning before he walked into St Mungo's. Now everything seemed brighter, colours were sharper and he could hear birds chirping over the sound of the hustle and bustle of the crowds. Sirius was standing just outside the exit of the hospital, leaning against a lamppost. He didn't

need to ask how everything had gone, Harry's expression told him everything he needed to know.

"She's up and about then?" he asked conversationally. Harry's smile only grew, so much so that it looked as if his face may split in two. "Needs her rest I suppose. How about we take the bikes for a spin around the countryside somewhere and get some decent lunch in a pub somewhere? Relax a little, enjoy the sunshine?"

"Sounds good Padfoot, maybe go to the coast? It seems like a day to see the sea."

"Now you're talking" Sirius whooped and clapped Harry on the back.

"Come on let's get going, today is a day of celebration."

It certainly was a day of celebration. They did indeed take their bikes to the South coast and spent an enjoyable morning whipping through the lanes and along the coastal roads all the way down to Cornwall. Caught up in the thrill of life, they pushed their bikes close to the limit through the sunshine. It was only thanks to the numerous safety charms that the bikes actually managed to make some of the corners at the speeds they were travelling. Around 1pm they came to a country pub and a quick application of glamour to Harry made him look 18 so that the two of them could share a meal and a pint. The steaks were cooked to perfection and the local cider had a kick to it that had even Sirius wide eyed at its potency. One pint quickly became two and by the time they had finished their meal, they were in no condition to ride anywhere so Sirius simply apparated them back to Grimauld Place. They then sent Dobby out for supplies and started a marathon Xbox session all the while continuing to polish off more of their store of alcohol. Sirius refused to start a bottle of firewhiskey, claiming that was only for when you wanted to get absolutely hammered. In his, self proclaimed, expert opinion muggle

alcohol was far better for a night out as it wasn't as powerful. Harry agreed, it was certainly a lot more pleasant to take the occasional drink from a bottle of beer than to down a shot of throat-burning spirit.

It was soon evident to Harry that drinking alcohol adversely affected a person's coordination (who knew?) as both his and Sirius' ability to play Xbox suffered. Giving up they started watching films while Dobby served them a surprisingly junk food laden meal. Chicken wings, ribs and a giant pizza as well as sides and a continuing flow of alcohol. Unbeknownst to either though, Dobby had started to sneak in the occasional alcohol free beer for the pair. As the night wore on the ratio of alcoholic beer to non alcoholic altered so that by 10pm, they were only getting alcohol free.

Dobby watched them both fondly from the doorway, as they both cheered at Rambo taking on a whole army by himself, spilling copious amounts of beer in the process. It was good to see Harry acting like a child, well perhaps child wasn't the right word. It was good to see Harry having fun. It was after midnight when the inebriated pair dragged themselves off to bed.

Harry's first ever hangover was nowhere near as much fun as his first drinking session. Stumbling down the stairs towards the kitchen, he silently vowed never to touch a drop of alcohol ever again, no matter how special the occasion was. Sirius was already at the kitchen table, bleary eyes fixed on his greasy fry up. Harry plonked himself down opposite and grunted in response to Sirius' muttered 'morning'.

His stomach rebelled at the mere thought of food but he knew he really ought to eat something. He was interrupted from his thoughts by the arrival of Dobby, carrying a pale blue vial.

"Morning Harry, feeling a little fragile are we? Here you go this ought to clear you up straight away." Dobby had the ghost of a smile playing

across his face.

"Make...better?" Harry croaked out and at Dobby's nod, he grabbed the vial and drank it. Amazingly it quelled his stomach, the thumping in his head faded to nothing and his dry mouth disappeared. "Wow that's amazing Dobby, what was it?"

"Hangover cure Harry."

"Where's mine then?" Sirius looked indignantly at the elf.

"You however, are old enough to know better. So no cure for you until at least midday. What was that Sirius? I didn't quite catch that. Nothing? Excellent because I could always allow you to recover naturally."

"You know I think I prefer normal House Elves, they are more eager to please and less of an annoyance" Sirius grouched.

Harry laughed at his Godfather's discomfort and got started on his newly arrived fry up with a will.

He was halfway through when Sirius suddenly looked up from his breakfast, face adorned with what Harry called 'the Marauder look'. As quickly as it appeared, it faded to a look of such over the top innocence, that anyone would be suspicious.

"Oh Dobby. How about if I have something really important to talk to my Godson about? You wouldn't want me to get some of the details wrong because I have this easily cured, little teensy headache would you?"

"And this is something so important that it couldn't possibly wait until after midday?" Dobby asked with a straight face.

Sirius scowled briefly before remembering he was being innocent and the wide eyed look reappeared. "Oh it is vital, would I lie to you?"

Dobby tapped his chin in an exaggeratedly thoughtful manner. "Well if it is that important I suppose you should have the hangover cure as well. But just remember next time I won't be so easily swayed." He handed

over a second pale blue vial which Sirius grabbed and drank greedily.

As soon as Dobby turned his back Sirius began doing a dance to celebrate his success. Harry rolled his eyes at how easy it was to fool his Godfather, despite him being a 'legendary prankster'.

"So, Harry. Don't really know how to start this but the sooner I let you know, the more time you have to think about it."

Harry looked up in surprise. "You mean you actually do have something important to talk to me about?"

"Of course I do, I've been putting it off for a while but now is as good a time as any really. You see Harry, I can't have children. The years in Azkaban combined with the fact my parents were first cousins has left me...sterile." He forced the last out with grimace.

Harry was confused "ok, while that is terrible, what does it have to do with me? Wait that sounds really harsh I didn't mean it like that."

"It's ok Harry that is the right question to ask. Given the choice I wouldn't have told you, far too bloody embarrassing. Anyway, you see the Blacks are an Ancient and Noble family like the Potters and as such they have a lordship. Because I am...well you know...I can't become Lord Black, even though I am the next in line. Therefore it will pass to you, my heir when you come of age. Now here's the interesting part. As your guardian I can get you emancipated on your 14th birthday. This means that you would be wholly in control of your own finances, you could choose where you live, be free to do magic whenever and so on. I could emancipate you for the Black title and this would automatically gain you the Potter title as well. Now before you start jumping around with excitement there are issues with this. Firstly you personally would be liable for any debts you would incur or either family has already incurred. Personally I doubt this will be a problem as I know the Blacks aren't in debt and the fact there

was any money in the Potter vault suggests that neither are they.

However by becoming emancipated you would become eligible for any marriage contracts that are currently dormant. Again I'm fairly certain that the Blacks don't have any contracts that haven't been fulfilled because otherwise I'd have had to marry, and I know your parents wouldn't have signed one. However that doesn't take into account the decade or so that Albus was your guardian for all intents and purposes. I wouldn't put it past him to have signed one for you, although Merlin knows what he would get out of it."

Harry was deep in thought, "can't we just ask the goblins if there are any debts or contracts? Surely they would know."

"That would be the easy route however they aren't allowed to reveal the status of debts or marriage contracts to anyone other than the Head of the family. So you can't find out until you become the Head and by then it's too late, they already apply."

"So if I agree to this Albus might have set up a contract with some random girl and I'd have to marry her straight after my 14th birthday?"

"That's not to mention the clauses and stuff that could be in the contract, hell it's possible that you would have to take her surname. However fear not your rather smart and incredibly attractive Godfather has a way out of it. It is possible to write a marriage contract that supersedes any others that may exist. It requires a rather unique set of circumstances though, for example that the person must be the last remaining member of an Ancient and Noble House, so far so good. Also the person that signed the possible other contracts on your behalf must be either dead or incapacitated, again fine as Albus being thrown in the Loony Bin counts as incapacitated. Now all you need is to find a girl, and thanks to our Ministry's arcane laws she needs to be a pureblood. Now where oh where

could you possibly find a girl like that?" Sirius smirked at his rapidly thinking Godson.

"Wow, so basically there might not be any contracts but if there is and I don't do this I will have to abide by them. If I do sign a contract with Daphne then I will have to marry her what, straight away?"

Sirius shook his head, "likely within a year of the signing so basically some time before your 15th birthday."

"I'll have to talk to Daphne about it before I even begin to think about it for myself." He got up from the table and went to shower muttering,

"what a conversation that's going to be."

'What a conversation indeed' Sirius thought, 'don't think I'll stay for that one, who knows how violent it could get.'

26. Chapter 26

Chapter 26

It is perhaps surprising that Sirius was quite correct in his assessment of how the conversation would go in terms of violence. However the actual aspect of the violence was a long way from the mark. Harry too, had been expecting to dodge one of Daphne's impressive right hooks and so after he finished explaining the situation to a stone-faced Daphne, he unconsciously edged backwards. He turned to flee when he saw her rising from her hospital bed but he wasn't quick enough to escape. She grabbed him, flipped him to face her and pulled him into a toe curling kiss. Harry tensed at first but was soon overwhelmed by the feelings, allowing himself to sink into the kiss.

It could have been seconds or even hours before they finally broke apart, leaving Harry fighting to regain his breath.

"Er what were we talking about again?" Harry asked sheepishly.

Daphne giggled, "You were asking to marry me. Although I must say you

need to work on your delivery, it was certainly lacking in romance."

"And you're fine with this?" Harry spoke cautiously, it seemed as though he was in the clear but he'd been wrong before.

"Of course I am you idiot. Would I have kissed you if I wasn't more than fine with it?"

Harry shrugged eloquently causing Daphne to shake her head in exasperation.

"Look Harry we have spent the last six months or so spending near enough every day together. Of course we argue and all of that stuff but we get along really well, we even share compatible magic for Merlin's sake. This will work, we will make it work. I know we're young but I..." she trailed off.

Harry looked deep into her eyes, "I love you Daph."

She eyes shimmered with tears and she pulled him into another breathtaking kiss, releasing him eventually and hugging him tightly.

"I love you too" she whispered in his ear.

They pulled apart but not too far and they remained holding hands. "I spoke to the Healers before I came in to see you and they think you're ready to leave the hospital. So I floored your parents to ask if they would let me take you out of here and spend the day together, there are a few things I want to show you. They are fine with it so come on let's get out of this place, hospitals give me the creeps."

"Where are we going?" Daphne was very confused as Harry led her straight past the fireplaces in the entrance hall of St Mungo's.

"Trust me, it will be fun."

Daphne looked at him sceptically as he walked into a nearby alley, took something out of his pocket and enlarged it.

"You expect me to get on that with you?"

"It's only a motorbike Daph, I'm a good rider honestly. Here just put this helmet on and hold on, it's nearly impossible to fall off believe me I tried."

He pouted at her until she gave in and took the proffered helmet, pulling it onto her head. She swung her leg onto the bike, behind Harry, and held onto him for dear life.

"Not so tight Daph, I'm not going to go fast. Just sit back and enjoy the ride."

Against her better judgement, she did just that. Harry guided the bike away at a sedate pace to get her used to the feeling and moved into the traffic.

A twenty minute journey later Daphne was slightly disappointed that Harry seemed to be slowing down. She wouldn't say it outright but she had thoroughly enjoyed being on the back of the bike and had silently been urging him to go a bit faster. They pulled up outside a nondescript looking building near the Thames. It was surrounded by a wire fence that looked to be in slightly better condition than the fences around any of the other nearby buildings.

Harry unlocked the gate with a key from his pocket and grabbed her hand to pull her inside.

"Welcome to the first official business site of Marauder's Inc. This is the building where all of the stuff from the Room of Requirement is currently in storage and is being sorted." He had a mischievous gleam in his eye as he watched Daphne's eyes light up in understanding and her start to fidget as she itched to go exploring. Laughing lightly at her, he beckoned her inside.

The outside may have looked a little rough but the inside was a different story. The entire area was well lit by huge lamps on the ceiling as well as

standing lamps that could be moved to where they were needed. Near the entrance there were three large desks arranged in a U shape facing towards each other. Each desk was distinctly different in its contents, with papers, books and other curious items covering their surface. However each did have a large swivel chair on wheels and a computer set up.

Currently only one of these chairs was occupied. Peering intently at his computer screen, Ripfang didn't even hear the two enter the warehouse. Harry lightly coughed causing the goblin to jump slightly. He hid it well though and calmly spun his chair to face the intruders, not quite able to stop the slight smile as he did so.

"Morning Rip, good to see you're still enjoying the spinning chair. How is it going in here today?" Harry asked, desperately trying to keep from laughing at the stern look he was now on the receiving end of. Any other goblin looking at him like that and he would be worried but he knew Ripfang well enough now to know when he was actually angry as opposed to his normal grouchy.

"That girl has got to go" he exclaimed, throwing his arms skyward.

"Ah" said Harry, deciding to push his luck a little, "and which girl would this be then Rip?"

"You know full well who I mean. She flits around like an overactive cave fly. It's impossible to get anything done while she's making a racket and interrupting everyone's thinking."

Harry nodded solemnly. "I'll talk to her. Found anything interesting lately?"

Ripfang's annoyed expression disappeared and was replaced with a slightly creepy smile. "We have come across an axe that may be the long lost weapon of the Great Goblin Zagrod. I need to do some tests to make

completely sure but I am hopeful. If it is indeed the legendary weapon, Skullcleaver, then the Goblins will pay handsomely for its return.

Alternately if you gifted it back then you would gain vast amounts of favour with the Goblin Nation. The choice will of course be yours. How it came to end up at Hogwarts I have no idea, the last we know of Zagrod is that he was fighting the Dwarves somewhere in Scandinavia."

"Sounds interesting Rip, keep me updated if you confirm that it is indeed that axe. I'll go and talk to Jess. See you later."

Daphne was slightly bemused by the whole situation. Seeing a goblin on a spinning office chair and using a computer had temporarily thrown her. Seeing said goblin then proceed to glare at her boyfriend, but him completely ignore it, had only added to her current confusion.

As they got around the corner, out of earshot, she turned to Harry. "Why weren't you worried when he glared at you like that? Goblins can be incredibly dangerous."

Harry shrugged it off, "Nah it's just Rip, he's always like that. Same thing with Jess. He complains bitterly about her every single time I speak to him but if I actually did fire her, as he constantly suggests, he would be livid with me. He's very protective of her; it's almost like an exasperated father with an incredibly precocious child. Come on lets go find her, see what she's done to annoy him this time."

They wandered through the maze of different items. According to Harry there was a system in place, at least he was told there was, but it just looked a mess to Daphne. All around them were different things, you never know what you would see next as you turned a corner. There might be an antique cupboard, an abandoned trunk, potions vials or a hundred other things that Daphne couldn't even begin to recognise. Finally they reached an area that actually looked to be vaguely

organised, or at least more so than the rest of the warehouse. There were bookcases stretching right around a twenty square metre area. There were some books on the cases but most seemed to be stacked on the floor inside the square.

"This is Jess' domain. She is currently trying to organise the thousands of books into some sort of order. I'll let her explain. Hey Jess you got a second?"

A blonde head poked around an especially large and dusty pile of books. She pushed her glasses back onto her nose as they had slipped down again and walked over, giving Harry a hug.

"Harry so good to see you and this must be the lovely Daphne. Hi I'm Jess, Chief Librarian of this dusty little corner. Oh you must come and see this book I've just found, it seems to be the original, handwritten notes from Yarlington, detailing his trip through the Amazon rainforest studying the plants there. It must be 300 years old at least but it's in remarkable condition and the diagrams are beautiful."

She looked to be about to explain more about the book but Harry held up his hand to stem the flow. "Jess, what have you done to upset Rip this time?"

She shrugged and wrinkled her nose, "nothing as far as I know. We were having such fun yesterday, he found a scroll written by a contemporary of Ptolemy and we were looking through it together."

"Well can you try not to annoy him, you know how he gets."

"Of course" she scoffed, "but I'm always careful not to interrupt him now, especially after the telescope incident."

Harry rolled his eyes, it was nearly impossible to keep the two of them from arguing or coming into conflict. They simply saw the world in two completely different ways.

"Anyway Jess do you want to explain to me and Daph how you're getting on here?"

She smiled radiantly and rolled up her sleeves. "Of course. So, I've managed to collect most of the books into this one area now, although there are a few dotted around here and there. At the moment I'm going through each individual book and categorising it by subject. Each bookcase here has a clever bit of magic that we discovered that allows the books on it to be stored in a pocket dimension. This increases the capacity of each bookcase by about one hundred times but doesn't change the size of the bookcase at all. This gets over the major drawback of space expansion charms. Each bookcase is now a different subject although some, like charms, have been further divided into different areas like duelling and so forth. There are books going back hundreds of years but there is quite a lot that are the same. For example there is usually at least five of any book that was a core textbook for more than a year. That's not to mention something like Hogwarts a History, there must be 150 copies of that around. Interestingly though different editions say different things, it's only in the last century or so that Slytherin has begun to get such a horrible reputation in the book. Before that the books were essentially fair although usually a little biased to one Founder over another. You can track the different authors or editors throughout the years if you want. For example the editions from 1643 to 1692 are favourable towards Gryffindor, and then they change and for the next 84 years are more favourable to Hufflepuff. It is a fascinating study of the different things each author chooses to emphasise over another."

"I should very much like to read these different versions sometime" said Daphne.

"Of course, after all they are your books. I'm just glad I have the chance

to play around with them, even for a short while." Her face fell here before she forced a smile again.

"What is it Jess?" Harry asked.

"Oh its nothing, I'm being silly."

"Jess."

"Oh it's just you're going to sell all of these wonderful books and I won't get a chance to read them all."

"Jess, while we are going to sell some of the books, we are only intending to sell the duplicates. Everything else is going to form the start of the Potter Library. A library that it is likely you will have full access to, if not be in charge of. You heard Daphne, she is just as excited as you to look at the different editions of Hogwarts a History and I can't wait to read some books that have been thought lost for centuries." His tone was gentle but it was clear he was not going to be dissuaded from this course.

"You really mean it?" Jess asked plaintively.

"Of course" answered Daphne and she was immediately grabbed in a fierce hug by the blonde. She might only have been small but she had some strength to her.

After a few seconds Jess let go with a horrified look on her face, "oh God you have just come out of the hospital, I haven't hurt you have I?"

Daphne laughed, "No, I'm fine. I got the all clear today; after we have finished here I'm going home."

Jess, too, laughed in relief and grabbed Daphne's hand to lead her off to some wonder in the library. Harry chortled at the sight. "Will you be alright here for a while Daph? I'm going to go look for Steve."

Daphne waved her hand absently; too engrossed in the tattered book she was being shown. Harry knew he might as well be invisible for a while now and so swiftly took his leave.

Steve was in the process of directing Dobby to move different items as they were currently in a tangle. His ever present cigarette was tucked behind one ear while another one hung from the corner of his mouth as he gesticulated wildly. If Ripfang and Jess made an amusing pair then that was nothing compared to the double act formed by Dobby and Steve. "What are you doing you long eared cretin? I said move the red thing not the blue." Steve shouted in the direction of a pile of junk.

There was no verbal response from the pile but an elf shaped hand emerged with one particular finger raised in salute in Steve's direction. Steve was about to respond when he spotted the arrival of Harry. "Alright Boss?" he asked, flicking the ash from his current cigarette.

This was another quirk of Steve's; he refused to call Harry, or anyone else, by their actual name. It was always 'Boss' or 'Sunshine' or most confusingly 'Dave'. When asked why this was, Steve merely shrugged and answered 'don't rightly know Dave'. Harry had given up and learnt to accept it although he did still laugh whenever Ripfang was referred to as 'Sunshine'.

"Not too bad Steve, how are things coming along down here?"

He was about to reply when his attention snapped back to Dobby, "left, I said take it to the left Dave."

"That is the left, cant you tell left from right? Want me to write it on your hand so you can tell the difference?" Dobby shouted back.

"Well I want you to take it to the other left then Shorty." Steve responded before looking back to Harry. "It's going alright, could do with a bit more intelligent help but I can make do with Dave over there. Pretty much everything is nearly sorted now into different sections. Not a lot more I can do then until I get some stuff from the other two to sell. Probably be years before that happens though, they take ages to look at every single

little thing rather than say it's a chair and move on."

"That's because they are actually interested in the historical value of each item and not the monetary value like certain mercenary scumbags like you" said Dobby as he returned from depositing whatever it was that he was carrying.

Steve looked thoughtful, "you're probably right Dave." He flicked his cigarette again, "now come on, this time actually move the red one."

Harry left them to it. They might only be able to communicate through abuse but they made a very effective team and were very good friends underneath the bluster. Already they had saved each other's lives in their time working together. Dobby had pulled a cursed ring off of Steve after it caused him to light on fire and Steve had tackled Dobby out of the way of a falling cabinet from an unstable pile of stuff. Of course neither had ever thanked the other for this but Harry knew for a fact that Steve had found a bottle of 25 year old single malt whiskey on his desk the next day and Dobby had found a brand new pair of high quality dragon hide gloves.

He walked back at leisurely pace to where he had left Daphne in Jess' slightly erratic care. He meandered through the piles of stuff, pausing now and then to look at something that had caught his eye. He might not be too interested in the furniture at the moment but it would come in handy in the future when he got a place of his own. He caught sight of a gilded corner of a picture frame and idly wondered if there was anyone as interesting as the Founders in the liberated painting. Daphne and Jess were hunched over a pile of books, talking excitedly. He looked on in amusement before clearing his throat slightly, startling the pair.

"How are you getting on?" he asked.

"Oh it's wonderful; there are so many wonderful books here. Some have

been thought lost for centuries, it's so exciting. I could stay here and look through them all for hours."

Harry grimaced slightly, "I don't think that will be possible. I promised your parents I'd have you home this afternoon." He saw her face fall so he added quickly, "but we can come back tomorrow if it's ok with them.

That will give the guys here a chance to organise a proper tour to show us the most interesting things and we can begin deciding what we want to keep and what to sell."

She looked about to argue but then seemed to agree with Harry's idea.

"Fine, but we are definitely coming back tomorrow."

"Of course, come on let's get going before your Dad hunts me down."

They were about to leave when Ripfang stopped them. "Harry I have been wondering what exactly your plans are for this facility and us, once we have finished sorting these items?"

Harry paused thoughtfully. "At the moment I have no particular plans, surely that is quite a long way off though isn't it?"

Ripfang nodded, "in a way yes but also no. I have been considering this problem and I may have come up with a solution. Despite our differences we work well together here and this has been a most satisfying few months. However at our current rate we are almost certain to finish before the end of this year. I believe that with a few additional staff and some investment, this could become the premier organisation to deal with ancient artefacts and antiques. The use of Muggle technology already gives us a huge advantage over the likes of Gringotts when it comes to research and cataloguing. However with a little work on your part you could adapt some more Muggle technology to allow us to actively search for more ruins. For example I have been reading of a Muggle technique called Geophysical Surveying. This allows them to find

structures far below the ground so that they know where to dig. With some modification this could search for wards or magical traces and could be the key to finding long lost places like Atlantis."

Harry goggled, "really? Atlantis?"

Ripfang shrugged lightly, "it is well documented that such a place existed however we have no real idea where it could be other than under the sea, nor what wards could be hiding it. Gringotts has been searching for centuries but has come up blank. Atlantis is merely the tip of the iceberg, who knows what else could be out there that we currently have no idea exists?" His eyes lit up at the prospect of all the hidden treasures.

Harry whistled, his mind too running through possibilities. "Rip, this sounds like a fantastic idea but I'm not sure I currently have the capital on hand to invest in this. However, and you must keep this a secret, I will be taking up my Lordship on my birthday at the end of July. This will give me full access to the Potter accounts, such as they are, but more importantly the Black accounts. This will provide in influx of capital that I can use to develop a few ideas I have and begin making some more money. I tell you what, why don't you begin a little research on how we could set this all up. I'm talking the full works; potential costing, an idea of staffing, projections for how long it would take to get up and running, everything. I would be less concerned about monetary returns on this project as the potential for gains in knowledge outweighs it. However that does not mean that I would want the project to be a black hole that keeps sucking in money with no benefit."

"I will begin right away. Progress in here should increase now that you can visit, as we will have a little more guidance as to what we are keeping and what we are selling."

"Sounds good to me, we'll see you tomorrow Rip." He held out his hand

which the goblin took and shook firmly.

27. Chapter 27

AN - Hey everybody sorry for the long wait I've been crazy busy with work but I've finally finished this book. One more chapter which I will upload later today and that's it. I must say I am very proud to have finished and thank you all for waiting while I've messed around trying to finish up chapters. Frankly I'm not happy with it all, there are parts where I know I've been lazy and skipped things I wanted to write to flesh out certain characters in order to progress the story quicker. Also I read back the beginning now and it seems poor so I have decided that in conjunction with writing the sequel (yes there is a sequel in the pipeline!) I will be rewriting this story however while I do this I will leave this story up. In fact I will probably leave it up even after I've rewritten it just to keep some of your lovely comments! Anyhow as I said thanks for sticking with me and enjoy the rest of the story.

Chapter 27

"I talked to my parents about the marriage contract."

"You did what?" Harry spluttered.

Daphne looked at him scathingly, "well I had to do it at some point. If you want to get it all set up before your birthday we need to begin soon, it is only four months away."

Harry mentally counted off the time on his fingers, perhaps it was four months. Still that seemed like a long time. "Yeah I guess, how did they take it?"

"Once I explained it all to them they were ok with it. Well Mother was over the moon as soon as I mentioned it; she didn't particularly care about the reasons. Father took a bit longer to come around to the idea

but then that's not too surprising as he didn't know about the whole compatible magic thing. I assumed Mother had told him but apparently not. Once he heard all the reasons and had repeatedly asked me if I was sure it was what I wanted, he seemed fine with it."

"So what happens now, do I go and see them?"

"Definitely not," Daphne looked scandalised. "That would be the height of bad form. Negotiations have to take place between guardians. You or I being involved would be a huge breach of etiquette."

As with the majority of Pureblood social conventions, Harry was left confused but he decided not to voice his bewilderment. Daphne saw right through it though and launched into an explanation that served only to further confuse him. Something about Heads of House and division of status.

"Don't worry, my parents and Sirius will have it sorted and then there will be a formal dinner between the families to confirm it."

Harry sincerely doubted it would be that easy, it never was when he was involved. They were currently having lunch, taking a break from going through legions of items. For some reason Daphne seemed a little hesitant about something that Harry couldn't place.

"Daph what is it? You look like you have something on your mind."

She fixed him with a stare, internal debate raging inside. The silence stretched on for several seconds before she spilled out in a rush, "where are we going to live when we are married?"

Harry was taken aback. This was not something he had even remotely considered although he supposed he probably should have. "I don't really know." He wanted to ask her what she thought but he sensed that she really wanted his opinion. "I guess I would like for us to live together but where exactly I don't know. I mean there would be space at Grimauld

Place but I think I'd prefer a place of our own." He offered the suggestion hesitantly, not at all sure how Daphne would receive it.

She beamed at him, "I would like that, Sirius doesn't need us underfoot whenever he finally brings that girl home. Will you inherit any properties once you become emancipated?"

Ignoring the first question, "I don't think they are still together, I haven't seen him disappear off anywhere like he was over Christmas. I don't want to ask him about it though." She glared at him and remembering the second part of the question he continued. "No, the only residential property in the Black portfolio is Grimauld Place and although it looks good I don't think I'd like to live there. In terms of the Potter inheritance, Dumbledore sold off Potter Manor to one of his cronies and then it 'mysteriously' burnt down within a week and they collected the insurance." Daphne patted his arm but he barely noticed. "Even if it is only ruins I would still like the land back, it's my heritage" he murmured. "Well why don't we get it back and rebuild Potter Manor on the grounds? That way we would stay true to your heritage and we can have a place of our very own." She chuckled to herself, "if nothing else it would give us somewhere to put all that damn furniture we have collected."

"At the moment we have lots of outgoings and very little coming in. Even more so with all the plans we have in the pipeline. I know I have the Basilisk money and there will be more coming in from the inheritances, but we need to assess that before we start any more projects off. We should start getting some income from the sales of the Room of Requirement items that we don't want but that might only fund the Quidditch team initial setup. If we are going to build, or rather rebuild, Potter Manor I want to do it justice and for it to have room for a family." He blushed at Daphne's look of surprise before she too blushed at the

implications and gained a slightly dreamy smile.

"You're right, if we're going to do something we need to do it right. I'm sure Sirius won't mind us staying at Grimauld once we are married and if we need a few years to rebuild our capital before we can afford to build a house." She leaned over the table and planted a kiss on him, "doesn't mean we can't start planning what we want though and putting aside some things to go in it."

Harry smiled, stood up and took her hand in his as they walked back to the warehouse to do just that.

There was only a week left before they finally returned to Hogwarts and the duo spent the majority of each day in the warehouse, deciding what they wanted to keep and what Steve could sell. Steve was ecstatic; he had been looking forward to getting his hands on some of these items since he first started. The challenge of selling things for the maximum possible return always excited him. As he had little idea what the value of each individual item was, Ripfang had helpfully provided a list of guide prices for what each item would be expected to fetch as a minimum. Steve, of course, took this as a direct challenge and aimed for at least half again as his personal minimum goal.

Harry and Daphne had looked at Ripfang's list of minimums too, and were astounded at how much some of these items were worth. A vase that both considered hideous and gaudy was labelled with 1.15 million Galleons as a minimum as it was a mint condition example of Pierre Pottery from 15th Century France. This was by no means the most valuable piece either and if Steve could back up his level of confidence then they would very quickly have enough to build the biggest Manor in the entire world. Of course they didn't want anything like that but they didn't intend to scrimp on what would be their home for the rest of their

lives.

Over the course of the week the warehouse began to take a more organised look. Where before Harry had to be told that it had been sorted, he could now tell that it had been. He could even work out what the system was and negotiate his way through the maze fairly easily. Jess continued with her books and left it to Steve and Ripfang to escort Harry and Daphne from place to place. Ripfang would explain each item or say if it needed more research, the couple would then decide if they wanted to keep or sell. If it was to be kept it would be moved to the storage area and if it was to be sold, it would be moved to Steve's newly set up area. Slowly but surely the area became clearer and it became easier to see what still needed looking at.

With only a few days to go Steve had a surprisingly good idea. They really needed another person, someone who had knowledge of muggle antiques and muggle auctions. This was currently a gap in the team's knowledge as Ripfang knew magical artefacts, Jess was knowledgeable about magical books and antiques and Steve knew how to sell things to magicals. It could well be that something they were passing straight over because they didn't recognise it as being made by a magical could be incredibly valuable in the muggle world. Steve only knew the channels to sell to other magicals, legitimately anyway, and so they needed someone to help them with this. Steve was dispatched to the internet to research and try to recruit someone. It was doubtful they would find someone immediately so they would have to delay any sales until they could find anyone. This didn't particularly worry Harry as he knew it was more important to maximise the value of each item.

That evening Harry mentioned to Sirius that he was looking into the idea of getting back the land that Potter Manor had been on and asked if he

had any thoughts. Sirius knew nothing other than it was sold by Dumbledore to Elphias Doge and was located in the rolling Yorkshire Dales. Sirius didn't offer any suggestions but said he would have a think about it and see what he could do. Harry was a little frustrated at Sirius' lack of help but was soon distracted when it was mentioned that the Marriage contract had been finalised and would be officially signed at dinner at the Greengrass' on the Sunday before their return to Hogwarts. This drove all thoughts apart from panic from Harry's mind. He wasn't even sure why exactly he was panicking, he loved Daphne and he thought she loved him. He certainly had no problem with the idea of spending the rest of their life together and raising a family. He supposed at a mere 13, albeit nearly 14, years old he was a bit young to be thinking like that. However it made sense to him, he had always wanted a family to call his own for as long as he could remember. Cyrus and Sirius were providing the father figure he craved and Ana was definitely taking up the role of mother figure. Remus was also a favoured uncle and Daphne was his partner in all things, his other half. He guessed in a way he would be glad once the contract was signed as that would make it all definite and practically irreversible. Perhaps it was just the waiting that was making him panic, the fear that somehow it would all fall apart. Watching this internal debate in his Godson with half an eye, Sirius too was deep in thought. He needed to do something to help Harry out; perhaps it was time to finally accept his family name and embrace all that came with it.

Despite Harry's nerves about the whole event, the formal dinner went off without a hitch. He finally got to meet Daphne's little sister, Astoria, who was a miniature clone of Daphne. She veered between bouts of uncontrollable shyness in the presence of Harry and Sirius and moments

of pure cheek. Cyrus and Ana tried to tell her off for these moments but they were undone by Sirius laughing hysterically and him encouraging her from then on. Harry expected the Greengrass parents to scold Sirius but apparently they knew him from their school days and so understood that to do so would only encourage him. With Sirius' gentle coaxing, Astoria emerged from her shell and showed herself to be an intelligent young girl. She was due to start Hogwarts in September and Harry made a mental note to keep her well away from the Weasley twins, that's if Sirius didn't manage to corrupt her enough on his own. Her wicked sense of humour and innocent looking face would be a deadly combination with Fred and George's knowledge of magic and creativity.

They left Greengrass Manor with their bellies full and with Harry looking forward to returning to Hogwarts the next day. He had missed the place and definitely missed seeing his friends. It made quite a change from previous years as he had only missed Ron and Hermione, now the list was far longer. In fact his former best friends had almost dropped out of his thoughts; he barely saw them anymore, despite sharing a room with one of them. Well in reality he didn't spend every night in his dorm room as he still slept in the Lab quite often but even so. He assumed they were still in the same classes as him but then again he didn't pay a whole lot of attention as he was always far ahead of what was being taught.

He met Daphne at the platform as arranged and they said goodbye to their respective guardians before walking to the train hand in hand.

There were not many people on the train as the vast majority of students chose to stay at the school for the Easter holidays so they had a compartment completely to themselves. Daphne took out her notebook that she had been working on since their conversation about houses.

They had begun to think about what they would want in a house and the

very loosest of plans was steadily taking shape in their minds. Of course this was only basic thoughts at the moment as the location wasn't even secured yet.

As they pulled up to Hogsmeade station they left the train, intending to walk slowly up to the school, enjoying the early April sunshine in the evening. However this was not to be, as soon as they stepped off the train they were assaulted.

"Where the bloody hell have you two been? Have you any idea how worried we have been about you morons? Don't even think about speaking, I'm not done with either of you. How dare you just disappear without saying anything to us. We knew Daph was hurt but nobody would tell us anything, we tried to get in contact with you Potter and not a single bloody owl would go to you. We thought you were dead Daph and you didn't even have the common courtesy to let us know otherwise."

Tracey paused for breath, eyes aflame with rage while Blaise stood behind her, arms crossed and a look of extreme disapproval on his face.

"Trace... we..." Harry wasn't allowed to finish.

"Did you ever stop to think about anyone else? All we know is that Dumbledore goes mental and attacks you, you beat him to a pulp and Daph gets cursed. She disappears almost immediately without a by your leave and then you go sometime after. We tried to get into the Lab to see if you were there but of course we couldn't get in. Eventually we hear that Daphne is in a coma with some curse on her so the obvious answer is to use the potions program that we have spent months developing but we can't bloody get in to look at it." Tracey was screeching by the end of this current tirade.

Harry's eyes were downcast, "I'm sorry Trace I didn't even think about the potions program."

"Of course you didn't" she screamed in his face. Daphne was in tears at how remiss they had been in not informing their friends they were ok. Blaise put his hand on Tracey's shoulder, disapproval still etched on his countenance as he looked at Harry and Daphne. "That's enough Tracey, let them explain then I can decide how badly to curse the pair of them." And explain they did. Well Harry more than Daphne as she was in no condition to explain anything. Half way through the story it appeared Tracey forgave them or perhaps forgot her anger, as she threw herself into Daphne's arms and the two wept. Harry took this as a cue to make the journey to the school as it was getting rather dark. He led the way to the Lab and after quickly saying hello to the Founders, got everyone settled to continue the explanation. Blaise decided in the end not to curse either of them but it was a close run thing. After much crying Tracey and Daphne came to agreement and forgave each other and Harry had a lesson that he no longer had to rely on himself all the time, sometimes others out there have good ideas that can help. His resolve to stop blaming himself was also tested strongly but it came through in the end. Leaving Blaise to oversee the continuing conversation between Tracey and Daphne, Harry went to Salazar and began the laborious process of changing the password away from Parseltongue to something anyone could use. They discussed in depth the best way of doing this. Rowena's suggestion of wards that would recognise an individual's intent and magical signature was shot down as impractical causing her to turn her back in a huff and refuse to help any more. Harry didn't notice the others leaving as he continued to work at making the entrance accessible to people other than just him. He finally finished at nearly three in the morning, having just enough energy to crawl to the bed and crash out unconscious.

He awoke just in time to run to breakfast before he was due to start his lessons for the day. However as he was sat down tearing through a full plate of food he was interrupted by the looming shadow of McGonagall. He swallowed his mouthful, "Morning Professor."

"Good morning Mr Potter, I would be much obliged if you and Miss Greengrass would join me in my office following breakfast. Do not worry about your first lesson it has already been cleared."

Harry nodded his agreement and caught Daphne's eye across the Great Hall. She shrugged indicating she didn't know what it was about either. They finished at almost the same time and walked to the Headmistress' office, speculating as to what it was about. They came to the conclusion that it had to be something to do with the Marriage contract but they had assumed that they would be keeping that quiet.

"Sit down Mr Potter, Miss Greengrass. Over the holidays I have been talking to the collective Professors and it is clear for us to see that currently you are far and away ahead of your peers. Therefore I have several potential options for you. Firstly we do nothing and you continue to work ahead at your own pace, leaving you to graduate at the normal time. The second option is to accelerate you both so that you do your OWLs next year as opposed to your fifth and to do your NEWTS the year after that. This would then leave you two years where you would act as an Assistant to the other teachers while studying for one or more Masteries. The final option available to you is much the same as the second except instead of working for Masteries after you have done your NEWTs in fifth year, you would be allowed to graduate. Of course one of you could take one option and the other a different, although somehow I doubt this." She gave a wry smile. "Either way the choice is yours, we will be happy to support the pair of you whichever option you choose."

"Do we need to decide right now?" Daphne asked.

"Of course not. Whatever you decide you will still have to take your normal third year exams at the end of this year which I have no doubt you will both achieve extremely good results in. I will need a decision from you by the end of the year though. Now off you go the pair of you."

They left McGonagall's office deep in thought; both had immediately discounted the first option but were unsure whether the second or third choice was the better. They resolved to meet after classes and discuss it in the Lab. Harry escorted Daphne to her class and left her with Tracey and Blaise but not before giving them a bit of parchment with a single phrase written on it, 'son of Prongs'. This was the new password to get into the Lab and it had taken him ages to think of one suitable. It needed to be something memorable but something that nobody else was likely to guess. To be honest he still wasn't happy but frankly by three in the morning he had given up and decided that would do. He could always change it if somebody thought of something better.

The day passed slowly for Harry who only had half his attention on the lessons at most. He was thinking about the options offered by McGonagall. By the middle of his final class he had decided that he favoured the third option. His reasoning was that he had so many plans that required his attention that graduating and leaving school early would be preferable. He didn't need a piece of paper to say he had a Mastery in something, he could just learn on his own. If the mood took him later in life he could always come back and take one or two. He wasn't sure what Daphne would think, he had a slight feeling that she would favour getting Masteries but it could go either way.

It turned out he was wrong, she had come into the Lab clearly prepared to argue her case for the second option. She had expected him to want to

take the Mastery route. They laughed easily at how each had been wrong about the other causing Blaise to mock them briefly. They took no notice and once Neville arrived he joined Blaise and Tracey in testing out the limitations of the potions program. Neville and Blaise would work the program while Tracey had at least three cauldrons on the go at any one time. Clearly they had been itching to do this for a while and Harry felt extremely guilty that through simple oversight he had denied them this. While they were doing this Harry took Daphne to one side and they began plotting how they were going to approach their Quidditch venture with Puddlemere. Daphne knew a little about Quidditch but not a great deal, actually neither did Harry when it came down to it. To correct this Harry wanted to involve Dean and Seamus on a more permanent basis but Daphne was sceptical. Of course it wasn't like they were going to put the two in charge of the team but they needed a starting point. The most important thing would be to get a manager on board who agreed with their vision. Once this was achieved the rest should become a lot easier. Daphne vaguely remembered a coach from a few years ago who left the Arrows in a fairly spectacular way. She couldn't remember exactly but she thought he had been Muggleborn and had once again fallen foul of the Pureblood prejudices. They talked for about an hour before working on some of their studies. Eventually Daphne conceded that they needed some help on who would be the best to approach for this and so Harry would talk to the sport nuts in his dorm when he got back. He kissed her goodnight and left her, Neville and Tracey working in the Lab. Blaise had gone back to his dorm earlier, citing homework.

He found the two he wanted in a corner of the Common Room, unsurprisingly in the middle of a heated argument. "Right you two, quiet. Remember I said before about my ideas for Quidditch?" Two nods. "Well

they are a go and I would like to hire the two of you as consultants. First thing I would like you to do is to give me a ranked list of the best five people you can think of to be the Manager. Remember they have to embrace the muggle methods we are planning on introducing so no Pureblood traditionalist, no matter how successful they have been." Two more nods. "After that I want the greatest fantasy team you can think of, with at least two people for each position. Your only restriction for this is that they have to be currently playing for a team somewhere in the world. Money is no object. With me so far?" A further two nods. "Right if you can get this to me by the end of the week I'll give you 10 Galleons each. Remember I want a thorough job, not just putting down the first names you think of."

"Don't worry Harry we won't let you down" said Seamus.

"Does it need to be two players for each position or can there be more?"

"It's just that we will never agree and it could take weeks before we whittled it down to just two" asked Dean thoughtfully.

"Fair point" said Harry, "as long as you can justify each person I'm happy, remember I said at least two. That doesn't mean to say I want a list of a hundred people for each position, I'm talking the very best in the world here."

"Right you are, we'll get right on it" saluted Seamus.

Harry rolled his eyes but he knew it was money well spent, the two would be extremely thorough and Dean had very quickly grasped what Harry was after and he would keep Seamus on task.

28. Chapter 28

Chapter 28

After the excitement prior to Easter, the days settled into a comfortable routine for Harry and Daphne. They let McGonagall know of their

decision to accelerate their schooling but not continue onto Mastery. She was slightly disappointed but not at all surprised with their choice. She knew very well that they had ambitious plans that would require a great deal of attention. The pair of them were given a blanket option to miss any class they wanted in order to self study, which they took advantage of regularly. They didn't do it all the time as they liked to be with their friends. Also with some classes like Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures they needed to be there for the practical element. Others like Charms and Transfiguration they barely attended, checking in occasionally with McGonagall and Flitwick to make sure they were on the right track.

This gave them plenty of time to work ahead, their plan was to be competent with all the spells up to at least the end of fourth year before the year ended. This would give them a good start on their course load next year. In certain subjects like Runes they were already far beyond this and had been working on NEWT level problems since February. As well as working ahead they continued their work on creating a fully magical mobile phone as opposed to taking a muggle phone and adapting it to run on magic. When they hit a brick wall in this work they added to their basic plan for Potter Manor as they were already calling their prospective house, no matter where it would end up being built.

Steve had found himself a partner in the selling business, a squib, Peter Bishop. Pete had been working in the antiques trade for nearly 40 years, working as a valuator for Sotheby's and Christie's before moving away from those and setting up his own business. He had recently sold his business for a healthy profit and was looking for a new challenge; all in all he was perfect for the position. He and Steve were working overtime to plan out their schedule for what they would put on sale, where they

would sell it and when. It was not so simple as to put everything on for sale at once, the idea was to trickle the items into the market so that they did not saturate it and drive prices down.

The final Quidditch match was also drawing near, driving Wood into a frenzy as usual. Harry was enjoying the training though, as it was a physical drain rather than the mental one he had been experiencing recently. The team was working exceptionally well together, as they had been all season. While the Twins had always enjoyed a near psychic connection, this now extended to the rest of the squad. Even Oliver found it difficult to pick on things to criticise after each practise; this didn't stop him from trying of course. Harry had been thinking about it for a while and was debating whether or not to attempt to recruit Oliver for Puddlemere. On one hand there was absolutely no way Oliver was the best keeper in the world but on the other he was young, dedicated and was easily the best at Hogwarts, the premier school in Britain. He asked his resident Quidditch consultants and according to Seamus, Oliver was good, very good. He was not ready to be a starter yet but in a few years would be pushing for international representation, assuming of course he worked hard at it. Harry had snorted at this; there was very little chance of the fanatic inside Wood to do anything other than work exceptionally hard.

With one final practise before the match the next day Oliver called them all in early from their game. He gave a rousing speech aimed at inspiring them to greater heights of play. In his own way Oliver was a supreme motivator, he wasn't particularly a shouter but his calmly delivered words held a passion few could match. The team left together talking quietly before retiring to bed early. The Common Room was surprisingly quiet as the Quidditch mad Gryffindor house tip toed around to avoid

disturbing the team.

Waking in the morning Harry felt the familiar mix of nerves and excitement settle in his stomach. The ratio had changed from his very first game where it was almost entirely nerves and the barest breath of excitement. Now it was confidently leaning towards excitement. He ate a basic breakfast under Oliver's watchful eye. In the changing room they moved mechanically, getting ready like a well oiled machine. They all knew their jobs and would go out and do them to the best of their ability. Outside in the Stadium there was an expectant hush as the teams were announced, ready for the game to begin. Sitting in the Teachers box alongside Moony, Sirius had never experienced an atmosphere like it at a school game.

"You must remember Sirius, Gryffindor have absolutely destroyed Slytherin and Hufflepuff in their first two games. Ravenclaw need an absolute miracle to come even close. Combine that with the fact that it's the Gryffindor captain's last game and he will have them fired up. I am not exaggerating when I say that this Gryffindor team could give any British Pro team a hell of a close game right now, let alone when they fully develop."

Sirius looked at Remus sceptically; he knew Harry was good but really, play against professionals?

As the match progressed Sirius was extremely glad that he hadn't voiced his doubt out loud. Never mind match the Pro teams, they could bloody well beat them. He stared open mouthed as Harry broke up play after play by the Ravenclaw chasers and still managed to lead the opposing seeker on a merry dance. That duel ended abruptly when he caused her to plough straight into a stand after Harry feinted and pulled up his broom at an impossible angle for the suicidal speeds he was travelling. It

wasn't like it was just Harry that was playing incredibly either. The chaser trio for Gryffindor were scoring with consummate ease; quite how one of them had managed to put curl on one of her shots, Sirius would never know. Wood had little to do but he showed off the key attribute of a great keeper, one that can do very little for long amounts of time but still come up with the big save when required. Combine that with the Twins playing like demons and the result was never in doubt. How Sirius laughed when the red heads played ping pong with the two bludgers at the same time for over a minute, before suddenly launching them both at a gaping Ravenclaw beater. The poor guy didn't stand a chance; he dodged one but caught the other flush on the shoulder, ending his game. Mercifully Harry too decided this was the signal for the end and within five minutes he had swiped the snitch from directly beneath the broom of a thoroughly petrified Ravenclaw chaser.

1020 - 0. It was hardly fair really. So many records were set that poor Lee Jordan couldn't keep up with trying to announce them all as the game ended. Highest score ever, largest margin of victory, individual top scorer for Angelina, most assists for Katie, the list went on. For perhaps the first time after a Hogwarts Quidditch match, every single supporter rose to their feet and cheered the Gryffindor victory. They knew they had seen something special today, something that would be talked about for years and years to come.

Riding the wave of euphoria, the party went deep into the early hours of the morning in the Gryffindor Common Room. Harry excused himself around two in the morning, knowing that he was due to meet Daphne the next morning and she would have his hide if he was late.

They had been intending to revise for their rapidly approaching exams but this plan was dashed as they entered the Lab.

"It's ready" shouted Godric from across the room. They dropped what they were doing and walked to the portraits. "The ritual is finished, although as expected it will not kill the pieces, only locate them all."

"When can we do it?" Harry asked, struggling to keep his excitement from overwhelming him.

Clearly he failed as Salazar smirked at him. "Whenever you're ready."

"Excellent" Daphne too had a broad grin fixed on her face. "What do we need to do?"

"It's actually surprisingly simple, all you need to do is draw these symbols around a circle exactly 13 inches in diameter. Show them the paper Salazar."

Salazar held up a piece of paper with a complicated set of designs on it.

Daphne looked at him confused.

"How are you able to do that within your portrait? The magic should constrain you from being able to change your surroundings."

Salazar drew himself up pompously, "I am the great Salazar Slytherin, do you really think I would be tied down by such pitiful concerns?" He conspicuously ignored the sniggering Godric in the background.

Elbowing Daphne lightly to shut her up, Harry answered. "Of course not, we should really stop being surprised by the wonders you can achieve."

He said this with a completely straight face that quite obviously didn't fool any of the Founders, apart from Salazar who seemed to consider it his due.

All morning they drew and redrew the circle and symbols until finally everyone was satisfied with them. The next stage was to put the locket in the exact centre which was frankly easier said than done. After this a compass was placed between the locket and the bottom of the circle. The idea of the ritual was that it would take the information from the linked

soul parts and transfer them to the compass. Then someone would be able to pinpoint the exact locations through this. To help this, the user could tap the bottom of the compass with their wand to cycle through the different soul pieces. Also the user could tap the top of the compass with their wand to get an exact distance to the current soul piece it was pointing to. The ritual would not be able to provide a map or anything like that but Harry was quite happy with what would be available to them. The final step was a long and complicated string of Latin that needed to be chanted three times. Salazar held up another piece of paper for them to copy down and went through it so many times that Harry thought he could probably do it without the script in front of him, not that he would risk it.

Finally after a full day's work they were ready to start the ritual.

Everything was in place and both Harry and Daphne knew their task.

Godric in particular looked on keenly, searching for even the slightest hint that something wasn't quite right as they began rhythmically chanting the Latin. The first time through the sequence they were a bit nervous but everything appeared to be going perfectly and so they both gained confidence. By the time it was over they were fairly flying through the chant. As they finished the last word they looked expectantly at the compass. But nothing happened. They exchanged a glance, clearly both had thought there would be some sort of flash of light or something like that.

"So is that it? Is it done?" Harry asked Godric hesitantly.

"Pick up the compass and see" came the reply.

Harry did just that and looked at the bronze compass expectantly.

Nothing happened. He looked down in disappointment before he was interrupted by Daphne.

"Maybe you need to tap the bottom with your wand to activate it for the first time?"

The Elder Wand snapped to his hand from its holster and lightly tapped the bottom. To everyone else's eyes still nothing happened but to Harry's there was suddenly a set of eerily glowing numbers, floating above the dial. Daphne couldn't see anything but the change in Harry's expression was enough to tell her that something positive had occurred.

"What's happening Harry?"

"It worked" he said with a smile that lit up his face. "Let's see how many of these cursed things there are then." He tapped the bottom of the compass again after memorising the current set of numbers. A brief pause and he tapped again, and again. Daphne looked on with bated breath as Harry got a face of utmost disgust on his face as the tapping continued.

"So how many then?" asked Godric.

"If you include the Diary that is already destroyed and the locket here, then six in total. Combine that with the part of his soul that still had to remain in his body and he split himself into seven parts, I wonder if that has some special significance. After all seven is a very powerful magical number, all primes are."

Godric nodded in agreement. "I wonder if he had that in mind from the beginning. The traditional Horcrux creation method splits the soul exactly in half. Therefore it would follow that each time he split his soul, the remaining part would become a progressively smaller percentage of the original. For example the first time he would have half in his mortal body and half in the horcrux. However by the second he would only have a quarter of the original in his body, a quarter in the second Horcrux and the remaining half in the first Horcrux. Do that enough to have seven separate parts and the amount in his original body would be tiny."

"0.015625" said Harry distractedly. "I wonder if that's how I 'vanquished' him. His body was already so unstable and when he tried to curse me, it backfired somehow?"

Godric was doubtful this was the case but kept his opinions to himself.

Daphne merely shrugged, "doesn't really matter in the long run. The important thing is we know he has these Horcruxes that are still out there and they need to be destroyed."

"Yeah you're right, as usual. I'm just getting distracted over nothing.

When do we go looking then?"

"We?" Daphne asked dangerously.

"Yeah we, it needs to be done and who else is going to do it?"

She neglected to give a verbal answer, just pummelled him on the arm.

"Ow! What was that for?"

"Because, you moron, you are 13 years old how do you expect to beat the protections put on these by one of the most powerful Dark Lords of all time? Not to mention his fifty years minimum extra experience. We will hire a professional to do it, someone with experience and knowledge. And if you try and go along with them, so help me I will tie you down myself and leave you somewhere inconvenient."

Harry looked about to argue but then he caught sight of her steely determination and resigned himself to a lost argument. "Fine, but they better be good." With that he stalked off.

"Leave him be Lass." Salazar interrupted Daphne before she went to follow. "From what I understand of his life, he is used to relying solely on himself. It is a bit of a shock to the system when you realise you don't have to do this anymore." He gave a sidelong glance to his fellow Founder's portraits. "It can take some time for a person to break the habit, even when they do have people to help them."

He said nothing more but Daphne understood.

As far as Daphne could see, Harry completely disappeared off the face of the earth for the rest of that day and the one after. She didn't go looking for him, trusting that he would come back when he was ready but she was sorely tested.

Finally, on the third morning, he was waiting for her in one of his secret passages along the route from the Slytherin dorms to the Great Hall. He stepped out as she was walking past. After her heart had returned to its proper placement after trying to leap from her mouth, he pulled her into a deep hug. No words were spoken but it meant almost as much to her as the first time he told her he loved her. They walked to the Hall hand in hand and both felt an even deeper connection to the other.

Although they were beyond the third year syllabus, this did not stop either from studying almost constantly for the upcoming exams. There were no more distractions to keep them from their work. Of course just because they were taking the third year exams, didn't necessarily mean that they were studying third year material. Their subjects varied on a whim and as usual the Founders were an invaluable aid whenever they wanted to discuss some esoteric branch of magic. It was a fair bet that one of the four would know a little something about it, if not be an expert. Very occasionally Harry felt slightly bad about hoarding all this knowledge for himself, but only for a short period of time before he shook it off.

The exam schedule for the school had been a bone of contention for generations. The Exam Board set it so that the fifth years and seventh years took their exams first. Their reasoning was that this gave them enough time to mark them and have the results ready for soon after the time the seventh years graduated. The rest of the school would then take

their exams after the more important ones were out of the way. This seemed like an eminently sensible idea to Harry as the graduating seventh years needed to know their results as soon as possible for any job they wanted to take after they had finished school. However the teachers and the majority of the fifth and seventh years did not agree. The students wanted as much time as possible to cram before the exams themselves and the teachers bemoaned the fact that they lost almost a month of teaching time in the most important schooling years. There was no way to satisfy everyone and judging from what Harry observed so far, tradition would win out in the end. Take the dates of the school year for example. The year always started on 1st September, broke for Christmas on 20th December. They returned on 10th January, broke for Easter 25th March and came back again 10th April. Without fail the year would then end on 31st May leaving them exactly three months of Summer holidays. This system paid absolutely no attention to which day each of these dates fell upon, nor where Easter weekend was that year. It was not unusual for Easter weekend to fall well outside of the actual Easter holiday but it was a quirk that was barely thought about by the magical world.

At first, Harry had thought this lack of attention to Easter was because magicals did not pay any mind to Christianity. However, despite the many conflicts with the Catholic Church, there were a great many magicals that would call themselves Christian, even if they didn't necessarily practise the religion. Amongst the older families the general consensus was one of scorn for the 'upstart religion'. They still worshipped the old Pagan Gods as they claimed their ancestors had for thousands of years before them.

This was something Harry was interested in, he had a slight theory that some of the early 'Gods' were in fact Witches or Wizards taking advantage

of impressionable muggles but of course he had no proof. In their quest for normalcy the Dursleys had taken great pleasure in announcing to anyone who would listen that they went to Church every Sunday. This association tainted the religion for Harry because if they could act as they had towards him and claim to be Christian he didn't want to have anything to do with it. Realistically he knew the Dursleys were not a representative example of anything but it was something he couldn't get over.

Harry took a perverse kind of pleasure in seeing some of the less academically inclined members of the school panic over the upcoming exams. Well in reality, mainly a certain ginger boy he shared a dorm with who was badgering an increasingly frazzled Hermione to get her to do his work for him. It kicked off one night in the Common Room as Ron made another attempt and Hermione snapped, letting fly with a string of decidedly unpleasant curses. Ron was carried to the Hospital Wing as Hermione was dragged out by the new Head of Gryffindor, Professor Sinistra, the Astronomy teacher.

When she returned almost an hour later, Harry watched her walk to her dorm, really looked at her for the first time in months. She had been crying but aside from that she looked ill. She looked haggard, as if she barely slept in months. Where before this would have been a great cause of concern for him, he now felt nothing except a mild curiosity over what could be causing her to be looking like that. He reflected briefly on how much things could change in less than a year before shrugging and returning to his Transfiguration book.

As expected, exams were an absolute breeze for Harry and Daphne. Less so for their close friends but with the help of the couple, they too found it relatively straight forward. The confidence Neville was displaying was

translated into less panic about the exams. Harry remembered in first year, a profusely sweating Neville, eyes wide with fear, waiting to go in for their Charms exam. This year's Charms exam saw the same boy leaning casually against the wall, talking quietly with Tracey as they waited to go into the Hall.

Their final exam was History of Magic, which Harry thought was unnecessarily cruel as they were all itching to finish and it was easily the most boring of the exams. The weather too was mocking them, as it was scorching hot outside and the finished fifth and seventh years had taken up residence around the lake. Every single minute of the two hour exam seemed to crawl by and when McGonagall finally called time there was a spontaneous cheer from the students. As one they rose and sped from the Hall, to try and claim what space they could in the sunshine. Harry and Daphne spent the remainder of the day led on the grass together, talking about inconsequential things and watching the occasional wisp of cloud crawl over their heads.

And that was how the remaining week of the term went, lazing around in the sun and generally relaxing and recharging. It made a bit of a change as normally neither of the two could go for any length of time without working on their projects at the very least. This was a fact that Blaise took great pleasure in pointing out, expecting a reaction. However Daphne ignored him and Harry merely shrugged, saying that they would be very busy over the summer holidays and so this was effectively their summer vacation. Needless to say Blaise and Tracey were incredulous, as was everyone else who was told. Even the hardworking Hufflepuff contingent of Susan, Hannah and Cedric were surprised at the dedication of the pair. Unsurprisingly at the final feast, Gryffindor won the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup had been effectively theirs since before

Christmas.

It was the morning before they were due to take the Hogwarts Express to London when there was a rather rare event, Harry received a letter.

Hedwig swooped down and dropped off a thick envelope with a delicate, calligraphy address. Harry didn't quite know what to make of it until he spotted the Gringotts seal on the back. He tore it open and quickly scanned through the letter. Confusion painted itself onto his face, this couldn't be right.

Dear Mr Potter,

It is my duty to inform you that Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore passed away last night. In his will he names you as his heir and the sole benefactor of all his estate. Please present yourself at Gringotts London Branch at your earliest convenience. Failure to arrive within seven days of receipt of this letter will result in total forfeiture of all bequests to Gringotts Bank.

Regards Twinblade

Head of Inheritance Department

Why on earth would Dumbledore leave everything to him? The one person who had done more to hurt Harry than any other was suddenly being nice? It simply didn't make sense. His breakfast lay forgotten as he contemplated what was going on here, was it another trap? He was so deep in thought that he didn't notice everyone else start to leave until Neville tapped him on the shoulder.

"You alright there mate?" he asked concerned.

Harry shook himself, "yeah fine mate, just some strange news."

Neville didn't pry, something Harry was very happy about as they walked to the Dorm to pick up their things. They were just about to enter when Harry felt a vibrating in his pocket, his phone was ringing.

"You go on ahead Nev I'll be with you in a minute, just need to take this.

Hello? Sirius?"

"Hey Harry, how are you doing?"

"Not too bad, a little confused, but good. There's nothing wrong is there?"

"No nothing like that. Did you by any chance get a letter this morning?"

"How did you...Sirius. What did you do?"

"Me? Nothing. I'm hurt that you would even consider that I could be responsible for..."

Harry cut his over the top protestations off. "Yeah I'm sure. So what did you do?"

"Later. I'll tell you later in private."

"Ok Sirius, I'll see you later. You picking me up at the station?"

"Yeah I'll be there, see you later."

Harry hung up thoughtfully. Sirius had obviously done something and from the sounds of it, something morally questionable, if not outright illegal. Strangely this didn't bother him in the slightest. Perhaps it would if it was anyone other than Dumbledore but then again perhaps not.

He collected his belongings and followed the crowd down to the carriages. He met Daphne along the way and tried his best to answer her immediate barrage of questions.

"Daph, let's get on the train first before you give me the Spanish Inquisition."

She huffed but said nothing more until they were onto the train. She cast a privacy charm and fixed him with a demanding stare.

Harry explained as best he could what the situation was, unfortunately he didn't know very much. Aside from a few basic facts everything was supposition. There were many varied theories before Harry called an end to the brainstorming as the latter ideas had become a touch ridiculous.

The rest of the journey was passed more pleasantly as they discussed

summer plans with Neville, Tracey, Blaise, Susan and Hannah. They had made the decision to send the potions program back with Tracey as her house was the easiest for Neville and Blaise to get to. They wanted to continue their experimentation and try out some new theories. Frankly with all they had planned, Harry and Daphne were perfectly happy to delegate some of the research to the trio. They all arranged to meet up over the holidays and Harry promised to get a phone for each of them to make it easier to keep in touch.

The train pulled into the station with Harry in a contemplative mood. This time last year he had been a young boy, still traumatised by the events at the end of the year. He had no support network and all he had to look forward to over the summer was pain and abuse. What a difference a change in attitude could bring.

He looked around the platform and spotted Sirius standing with Cyrus and Ana. He felt Daphne reach out and take his hand as they walked over together.

"So Sirius, would you care to explain?"

29. AN

I normally hate these non chapters so I apologise in advance. As you may have noticed this story has been quiet for a long time. Part of this was a major writers block and a loss of enthusiasm. However the majority was because I was rewriting the story to change some of the things I didn't really like about the original, making a few things clearer and generally cleaning the whole thing up. If you fancy you can check out my profile and read the rewrite.

Cheers Tom

Внимание! Этот перевод, возможно, ещё не готов.

Его статус: идёт перевод

<http://tl.rulate.ru/book/100904/4563107>