Summary

From the moment Charlie left Hogwarts, he'd heard about Harry Potter. The longer time goes on, the more their lives become intertwined and the more Charlie can't keep himself away (8 year age gap be damned).

This is an AU, but uses as many elements from canon as possible. It follows the order of the books but is mostly from Charlie's perspective. Up until later chapters of the story, this all could feasibly exist within the canon universe.

Don't be turned off by the 'Underage' tag, I just wanted to cover my bases. Also note the story is only rated at Teen. That being said, if that's a trigger for you then protect yourself and pass this one by. I hold no grudges :)

Notes
Drarry is my OTP, but I am also obsessed with Harry/Charlie and there is a serious lack of fics for that ship. This story does not lie within the same universe as any others I have written.

NOTE: This is now a COMPLETE fic. Enjoy!
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

I mean no disrespect to JK Rowling and I promise to treat her characters kindly (they belong to her, after all).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1991, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie,

I hope you’re happy with yourself, leaving me alone with four of your brothers. FOUR! The term has barely begun and already Fred and George have started their pranks. Percy is his usual self, but maybe you could write to him? I walked in on him the other day reading a book called *Perfected Who Gained Power*. I know he’s always been a prat, but I just want to make sure he’s doing alright. As for your littlest brother, you’ll never guess who he’s befriended; Harry Potter! The boy-who-lived! Your family will never cease to amaze me.

I really do miss you, mate.

Don’t let those dragons get the best of you,

Ollie Wood

Ollie,

Fred and George have been that way since birth and you know it.

As for Perce, thank you for letting me know. I’ll write to him and make sure he knows I’ve always got his back. Think you can keep your eye on him for me? I promised my parents I’d keep them safe and I’m not about to break that promise because I’ve moved away.

THE Harry Potter? How does Ronnie do it? That boy lucks himself into more situations…

Give the team my best (be honest- you’re going to hold tryouts by the end of the week).

All my best from Romania,

Charlie W

Charlie,

We had tryouts last week (you were right- I held them two days after I got your letter) and I was feeling confident about every position except yours. The twins are our Beaters; Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell, and Alicia Spinnet are our Chasers; yours truly is Keeper; but no one was even half good at finding the Snitch. I left the position to-
be-filled but before I could even figure it out the perfect Seeker landed in my lap.

I was in the middle of DADA (which is being taught this year by Quirrell, but he’s gotten weird) when McGonagall herself pulled me out of class. I thought for sure I was in trouble for helping the twins spell Penelope Clearwater’s underwear on the door to the Great Hall, but as soon as I walked out she started talking about Harry Potter. Apparently, Hooch left the firsties during a flying lesson, and one of them took a Remembrall off another one and threw it, and who gets it into their head that they should chase after it? Harry Potter of all people! McGonagall saw the whole thing from her office and hauled him off straight away to see me! She’s ignoring the rule where firsties can’t play for houses just so he can be on our team. I played a few Seekers games with him and he has so much pure talent it’s amazing. You have to see the kid. Think you could come in for a match?

I just can’t believe it.

Ollie Wood

Ollie,

My mum told me that Harry didn’t even know how to get onto Platform 9 ¾, so I wonder how he knows to play Quidditch so well? Just curious.

I am glad you have such a good team this year. I was more than a little worried about leaving you alone, but now I can rest assured you’ll be just fine.

I’m deep in my studies at the sanctuary and won’t be able to make it back (not to mention international portkeys cost a fortune). Maybe ask Tonks?

Only great things from the land of dragons,

Charlie W

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is short but the story has to start somewhere. Later chapters will be longer, have no fear.
More letters, but a year later.

1992, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie,

We need your help! Hagrid went and got himself a dragon egg, and now the thing has hatched and there's no way he can raise a baby dragon at Hogwarts! He could get fired and he doesn't deserve that (even if he does make terrible decisions). It's a Norwegian Ridgeback and Hagrid has named it Norbert. It bit me the other day but Pomfrey took care of me before the venom could set in. Please don’t tell Mum.

You have to help Hagrid! Can you come get the dragon? Please? We’re desperate.

Ron

Ronnie,

This is serious. Are you sure it’s a dragon? Of course you’re sure, you were bit by it…sorry for the stupid question. Hagrid has never known when to stop. I think it’s because he looks so scary but is really loveable on the inside. He just wants all creatures who seem big and scary to have the same chance. I’ll run and tell my boss as soon as I send this letter off with an owl.

Don’t you worry. I’m going to fix this. I’m your big brother, so that’s sort of my job.

Hang in there,

Charlie

Charlie,

Thank you sending your friends to get Norbert. Harry, Hermione, and Neville got caught (by that knob Draco Malfoy) for being at the Astronomy Tower after hours. They lost 50 house points apiece and had to serve detention with Hagrid (though that part was only bad for Malfoy). The whole school is being just awful to them but they don’t know what really happened. Harry and Hermione know that we all did the right thing, regardless of consequences.

I hope Norbert is settling in well.

Ron

Ronnie,
I am so sorry! I never meant for your friends to get in trouble! Please give them my sincerest apologies.

Norbert is currently in the nursery part of the sanctuary. All orphaned and otherwise abandoned dragons are kept there with some specialists. I’m not studying there right now so I won’t regular updates, but I have been informed that Norbert will be just fine.

Good luck on your exams!

Charlie
Charlie drops down into the chair next to his youngest brother. “Hiya, Ronnie! Enjoying our holiday?”

Ron wrinkles his nose at the old nickname. “I’m a teenager now, do you think you could drop the ‘Ronnie’?”

“Of course, Ronald.”

Charlie reaches over and ruffles Ron’s hair. Ron shoves him off but can’t keep the scowl on his face. “Just ‘Ron’ will work, thanks.”

“Is that what your girlfriend calls you?”

“Have you been talking to George and Fred again? I don’t have a girlfriend, so you can ignore their stories.”

“You’re just too easy to mess with. How are your friends, though? I mean, after everything that happened this year…” Charlie lets his sentence drop off, unable to find the words he’s looking for.

Ron kicks the dirt around with the toe of his shoe. “I was so worried about Gin. When Harry figured out she was the one down there, I just… I thought I was going to lose her. And Hermione was still petrified in the hospital wing. She’s so smart, Char. She’s smarter than me and Harry combined. Without her help, I was sure we were going to be lost down there forever.”

Charlie shudders. “I still can’t believe that not only is the Chamber of Secrets real, but that you and Harry were down there with—’He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. You’re kids! You all could have died!’”

He holds back tears and looks away from Ron. He’s the big brother and is supposed to be strong, but he almost lost Ron and Ginny and he’s so glad they could take this trip together but this is the first moment of peace they’ve had since the summer started and suddenly he can’t hold it back. “I’m sorry!” Charlie chokes out.

Ron is taken aback. Charlie doesn’t cry! Charlie tames dragons! “Uhh…” he blurts, for lack of anything better to say.

“I’m sorry,” he says again as he wipes the wetness from his face. “Seriously, it just got to me for a second. I would be ruined if something happened to any of you.”

Ron nods once, thinking about it. Then he shrugs. “You can thank Harry. I used to think he was the reason we get into so much trouble, but he’s always the one saving us.”
“According to George, you were the one to save him last summer.”

“Those muggles are awful to him, Char. You have no idea.” Ron smiles then at the memory. “We flew Dad’s car and Mum went completely mad but we got him out of there. He’s basically a Weasley now.”

“Is he as good at Quidditch as Ollie says he is?” Charlie has heard about Harry’s skills from the twins as well, but he needs the distraction.

“You would never know that Harry thought magic wasn’t real until two years ago. He was born to fly. McGonagall broke the rules to let him play, so that should tell you enough right there. I bet he plays professionally, just like Ollie.”

Ron goes on to give a glowing report of Harry’s entire Quidditch history, as well as the history of their friendship at Hogwarts. Charlie lets him go on, listening to the fond way that Ron recalls his best friend.

Ginny walks up to them a while later and her eyes light up. “Are you talking about Harry??”

“Awww, does someone fancy Harry Potter?” Charlie teases her.

She turns bright red, folding her arms and scowling. “That’s not very nice.”

He just shrugs and gives a cheeky grin. “You do have good taste, Gin.” She runs out of the room covering her face.

Ron’s face flushes almost as dark as Ginny’s. “Charlie!” he cries out. “That’s my best mate you’re talking about! And you’re both blokes!”

“Two blokes can fancy each other, Ron. They can do a lot more than that, too, but you may be a bit too young to start thinking about that.”

“GAH! STOP!”

Charlie just laughs at his brother. “Alright, I’ll stop. I was only teasing anyway. I think thirteen is a little too young for me. Besides, I don’t want to compete with Ginny. She’s damn scary sometimes.”

Chapter End Notes

I posted the first three chapters together and will update periodically as I edit the rest of them.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This is a longer chapter and it starts off the portion that takes place during Goblet of Fire.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1994, The Burrow

Dear Mum,

My international portkey is set for next Thursday. I will be taking one week of time off from work, and then a return portkey is set for the following Thursday. I am looking forward to seeing the family before the Quidditch World Cup. Give my best to everyone!

Your (favorite) son,

Charlie

Charlie watches as his parents, Ron, Fred, and George step one after the other into the floo. He gets a little worried when he sees the flames turn from their normal green to a deep blue color just as George disappears. He calls for Bill and tells his brother what he saw. They’re still standing there discussing the possibilities when the fireplace flares green again and Fred walks through holding onto a Hogwarts trunk. George steps out quickly after him holding an owl cage. The pair step aside but right away start talking about something in hushed tones.

Next comes Ron, who immediately turns around to face the floo. He widens his stance and holds his arms out as if he’s bracing for an impact. Charlie suddenly understands when Harry Potter comes stumbling out and directly into Ron’s arms.

“Cheers,” Harry mumbles as he dusts off his pants.

“No problem, mate. I remembered how bad our trip to Diagon was last year.” Harry tries to laugh it off, but he doubts it’s convincing.

Charlie walks forward, but Harry’s attention is pulled away by the twins asking him about toffees and cousins. This is followed by more laughter (real this time) and the arrival of their parents (who scold the twins for being mean to Harry’s muggle family). Then Molly shuffles them upstairs so that Harry can get settled before supper.

Bill elbows Charlie and nods his head towards their dad. “Oh! Dad. I saw something strange when you all went through the floo. The flames turned blue. Any reason why that would happen?”

“The short story is: the Dursley’s fireplace had been boarded up. I believe the flames turned blue because so many of us were stopping up the floo system.”

“Who boards up a fireplace?”
Arthur sighs. “That’s where the story gets long.” He gestures from Bill and Charlie to sit. Molly gives his temple a kiss and goes into the kitchen to start cooking. “I don’t know what Ron has told you boys, if anything, but Harry has not had a good life. He has been under the care of his aunt and uncle since he was an infant, but they are neglectful and borderline abusive.”

“Borderline?” Bill says incredulously. “Fred told me about the bars on his window last summer! That’s not borderline anything!”

Arthur shushes him and lowers his own voice in turn. “Molly and I are working on getting him out of there, but Dumbledore is convinced there’s something with his aunt’s blood that will keep him safe.”

“Safer than here?” Charlie scoffs, “Impossible.”

“I feel like there are plenty of places that would be safer, but they are his legal guardians and according to both wizarding and muggle law that means there’s not much we can do. At least his uncle has agreed to let Harry spend the rest of the summer here, so that’s something.” Arthur stands and stretches his back. “Why don’t the two of you make sure the kids are settled in upstairs and then relax. Your mum will call you down when it’s time to eat.”

Bill and Charlie do as suggested, following the sound of chatter up the stairs to Ron’s bedroom. Hermione- who had been hanging out with Ginny- is sitting on the floor and rolling her eyes at the twins’ antics. Ron is sprawled out on his bed and Harry is sitting on the end of a small camping bed. Bill introduces himself to Harry and then excuses himself in favor of his own room. Fred and George pick up Ginny between and then carry her out as well. All that’s left is Ron, Hermione, and Harry. Charlie can’t help but feel like he’s interrupting them, but Ron tells him to sit down and quit lurking in the corner like a creeper.

Charlie sits down next to Harry on the camping bed and holds out his hand. “I’m Charlie. I’ve heard a lot about you over the past few years.”

Harry shakes Charlie’s hand and blushes at the compliment. “I’m not that interesting, I promise you.”

“You saved Gin, and Ron and ‘Mione, as well as survived a basilisk attack.” Charlie is amused by the way Harry’s cheeks flush darker with each thing he mentions, so he keeps going. “Not to mention you were the youngest Seeker in the last century of Hogwarts’ history, you were able to earn the respect of not only the centaurs but also a herd of hippogriffs, and my parents would love nothing more than to adopt you as their own son.”

He regrets those last words the moment Harry’s face lights up. “Do they really?” He turns to Ron with a look of pure hope. “Can they do that?”

Ron cringes. “I don’t think they can, mate.”

And that’s all it takes for Harry’s face to crumble. “Oh…”

Charlie quickly stands up, stammering his apologies. He feels like a complete and total berk and wants nothing more than to take back the last five minutes. Three years of waiting and that’s what he says to the Harry? He curses to himself the whole way down the stairs.

Bill’s bedroom door is open so he sees Charlie walk past and calls to him. Charlie ignores him in favor of slamming his own door shut and throwing himself onto his bed. He casts locking and privacy charms up as an afterthought and cranks up the wireless. The Weird Sisters aren’t his band
of choice, but they play loud enough to drown out his thoughts.

He doesn’t know how much time has passed before Pigwidgeon flies in through the window and drops a note on his lap. It’s from Bill and it says to come to the kitchen for supper (and to quit moping around). He quickly shoves Pig back out the window before unlocking his door and heading down the stairs. There is only one seat left, so Charlie sits between his father and Percy with Fred across from him.

The meal is delicious and the conversation is light. Charlie can see Bill giving him side-eye the whole time, but he is able to ignore it by asking his father about work. In turn, Arthur asks Charlie about his dragons. Molly keeps making *tsk* noises from her end of the table whenever he mentions something dangerous, but he’s used to that by now.

After supper, Charlie offers to help clean up and everyone else is shuffled off to bed by Molly. Bill knows that Charlie is avoiding him but lets it slide this time. He is only going to get to see his brother for a week so he wants to be able to enjoy it.

As the last plate slides into the sink, Molly wipes her hands on her apron and turns to get a good look at her son. “Something is bothering you,” she says.

It’s so simple and on-the-nose that Charlie laughs. “I never could keep anything from you growing up.”

She pats him on the cheek. “You were always the first to fold. Now, tell me what’s weighing on your mind.”

Charlie sighs. “It’s Harry. Dad told us…well, he told us everything. He such a good person, and now I find out he’s had a really hard life. It’s a miracle he’s not as mean as his muggle family is.”

“I know, baby.” Molly pulls him into a close hug. Charlie is shorter than Bill, Percy- and now even the twins since they’ve hit their growth spurt- so he still fits nicely, broad though his shoulders may be. “I wonder sometimes what may have happened if we had been just a few minutes earlier to King’s Cross. I doubt the poor boy would have even made it to the platform. And bless Ronald’s big heart; he could have easily let him walk right on past his compartment on the train, but he made sure Harry had a place to sit.”

Charlie closes his eyes and lets his mother sway him gently side to side. His brothers would tease him if they knew, but Charlie always enjoys when she does this for him- even as an adult. It makes him instantly think back to when he was little and it was just him and Bill. Being the oldest son, Bill seemed to bond naturally with their dad. They did everything together. Charlie, on the other hand, always favored their mom. He was excited when their mom’s belly rounded with the new baby, but disappointed when the new baby meant less time with her. As he got older he understood it was normal for all kids to feel that way when new siblings were born. He just learned to value what time he did get with just the two of them.

She eventually pulls back and tells him to go get some sleep. He thanks her for the comfort and bids her good night before heading to his room.

That night, Charlie tosses and turns. Everything that happened during the day just keeps flitting around his head like a Snitch. He grabs his wand and casts a Tempus charm. It’s already after midnight so he decides to just cut his losses and go make himself some tea. He pulls on cotton pajama bottoms over his pants, opens the door, and slips out making sure to avoid the squeaky floorboard.
Charlie tiptoes into the kitchen and fills the kettle. He sets it on the stove and uses his wand to light the fire underneath. Just before it whistles he pulls the kettle off and extinguishes the fire. He reaches for a tea cup to set on the table, and that’s when he’s startled by someone he didn’t notice was sitting there.

“Hi,” Harry says quietly.

“Merlin’s tits!” The porcelain cup Charlie was holding crashes to the floor.

Harry jumps out of his chair. “I am so sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you! I’ll buy a replacement cup, I promise. I understand if you guys kick me out. I’m sorry!”

“Woah, woah, woah! Slow down there, Harry.” He pushes him by the shoulders until he’s sitting in his chair once again. Then, Charlie walks over to the broken pieces and gives his wand a wave. “Reparo,” he says and the pieces swirl around in the air before righting themselves into the shape of a tea cup once more. “See? No harm done. No one will be kicking you out. You’re alright.”

“Oh,” Harry breathes out with equal parts relief and awe, “magic. Sometimes I forget.”

Charlie has known plenty of other muggle-born witches and wizards, and none have been so baffled by casual magic as Harry is. Instead of commenting, however, he just offers a shrug. “It happens. Now, would you like a cuppa?”

Harry nods, so Charlie pours one for Harry and then retrieves another tea cup for himself. He dumps in a spoon of sugar and a dollop of cream before offering them both. He notices that Harry only takes the cream. They both drink the warm beverage and sigh in contentment. Charlie is wracking his brain for something to say, but everything he thinks of sounds stupid. Thankfully, he’s saved by Harry.

“Sorry about freaking out,” he says without making eye contact.

“Don’t think another minute on it. Seriously. It’s already forgotten.” Harry picks at a stray piece of thread that’s come loose from the cloth covering the table, so Charlie continues. “I actually want to apologize for earlier. I…it was insensitive of me to make light of your…guardianship situation… and I didn’t mean to cause any hurt feelings. My family loves you and that’s all you really need to know. When us Weasleys get ahold of someone, we don’t let go.”

Harry finally looks up and meets Charlie’s gaze. Even behind his round glasses, Charlie is taken aback by the utter green-ness of Harry’s eyes. He’s sure many people have noted their striking color before so he refrains from commenting.

After a moment, Harry gives a sad smile. “I shouldn’t have gotten my hopes up about what was clearly just a kind sentiment. I know the Dursleys are my guardians, awful though they may be. Dumbledore knows how they are. You know McGonagall wouldn’t let me go to Hogsmeade with everyone else because my uncle didn’t sign my permission slip? She knows how they are as well and she still wouldn’t see past it. I mean, wizards may be ahead of muggles in some respects but at least muggles have child protective services.” He shakes his head as if to knock loose the negative thoughts. “Sorry, I guess what I’m trying to say is apology accepted though not required.”

“Cheers.” Charlie lifts his tea cup and drains it while trying to think of something else to say. Coming up with nothing, he reaches for the kettle for a refill. He doesn’t miss the way Harry’s eyes follow his movements and track his muscles. Charlie hadn’t expected an audience, but he’s shirtless and it’s the middle of the night so he decides to put on a show. He flexes his bicep more than strictly necessary for picking up a tea kettle and watches Harry’s eyes widen. Not able to help
himself, he sets the kettle back down and leans across the table. “Something caught your eye?”

Harry’s cheeks turn pink and he nearly chokes on his tea. “Scars,” he says between coughs.

“Oh.” Charlie starts berating himself in his mind for being so pathetic. He just tried to seduce his little brother’s fourteen-year-old friend by flexing his muscles in his parents’ kitchen. How gross can he be?

“You don’t have to talk about them.” Harry’s soft voice pulls Charlie out of his mental anguish. “I don’t like when people ask me about my scar so I understand.”

Charlie tries to stop himself but he quickly looks up at Harry’s lightning-shaped scar before looking back into his eyes. “I don’t mind. Any one in particular?”

Harry points to the one across his left shoulder. “The one that’s an angry red color. Did that happen recently?”

“Yeah, it was a Hebridean Black dragon. He caught me with his tail. It’s got this arrow-shaped spike on it and I was too focusing on other things. He thought I was after his mate so he did what he does best and sliced me open.” Harry gasps, clasping his tea cup tighter in between his hands. That makes Charlie laugh, the sound ringing out in the still of the kitchen. “You’re not afraid of dragons, are you?”

“Norbert was scary enough. I’d hate to be on the wrong side of a creature that could do—” he waves one of his hands at Charlie’s shoulder “—that!”

“Thankfully, accidents like this are few and far between at the sanctuary. We treat our dragons properly and in return they don’t kill us.”

“But—it tried to!” He has both hands flat on the table now, fingertips white where they dig in.

“You sound like my mum.” Charlie sets his left hand on top of Harry’s and holds his right hand aloft. “I promise you, Harry Potter, that I am in no mortal danger from my dragons and your worry is for naught.”

Harry relaxes minutely as the weight of Charlie’s hand- as well as his words- pacify him. After a minute of just looking at each other, Harry slips his hands free and picks up his tea cup once more. The tea has gone cold but he drinks it down anyway. Her pours himself more and only after adding more cream does he look at across at Charlie. “Got any more stories?” he asks.

Charlie smirks. “How many do you want to hear?”

“I’ve got all night,” Harry says and tucks his feet up on the chair underneath him as he settles in.

Harry wakes up the next morning in a warm cocoon of blankets and body heat. He snuggles down into the blankets and sighs. He hasn’t woken up this comfortable and rested in a long time. The sound of people walking around outside the bedroom door draws his attention. It must be time to get up, so Harry rolls over to see if Ron is still asleep. What Harry finds, however, is Charlie. In the same bed. Breathing softly mere inches from his own face.

He sits up as fast as he can and throws the blankets off his legs. Charlie grumbles, but stays asleep as he pulls the blankets around himself and rolls over to the face the wall. Harry’s heart is thudding in his chest. This clearly isn’t Ron’s room where he fell asleep, so how did he end up here? It all comes back to him in an instant. He was too stuck in his own thoughts (and Ron was snoring
loudly) to sleep so he snuck downstairs where he found Charlie making tea. They stayed up talking and...actually, Harry doesn’t remember what happened between the talking and now. He must have fallen asleep, but why did Charlie bring him in here? Harry flushes at the implication, and quickly darts out of Charlie’s bedroom.

Harry hasn’t even gotten two stairs away when Hermione catches him. “What are you doing still in your pajamas? And where is Ronald? Are you two seriously not ready yet?? Go! GO!!”

He runs up to Ron’s room and throws open the door, shouting for his friend to wake up. They do as Hermione ordered and dress as fast as they can. Molly already has breakfast ready for them when they get to the kitchen (eggs and sausage between two rolls). Harry has to look away when he spots the tea kettle on the stove. “Where are the others?” he asks Hermione.

“Bill, Percy, and Charlie are apparating straight to the tent. Mr. Weasley is going to take us via a portkey since we’re still too young to apparate. He says that’s how Charlie travels between the Burrow and Romania, since they let you go much farther than the floo system. Also, where we’re going doesn’t have cottages or any sort of buildings with a fireplace.”

“Right you are, Hermione!” Arthur says as he walks up behind them. “The boys sure are lucky to have you in their classes. Now, we’re going to be meeting up with our neighbor Amos and his son. You probably know him, Harry. He’s a Seeker at Hogwarts. Plays for Hufflepuff.”

“Cedric Diggory?” Harry asks.

“That’s the one! Amos can’t stop talking about his son beating the Harry Potter in Quidditch!”

“Dad,” Ron interrupts. “Harry played Hufflepuff during the game where the Dementors attacked. That hardly counts.”

“Ah, yes, well, perhaps we don’t mention that, yeah?” And just like that, Arthur has a smile back on his face. “Fred! George! You stick with your brothers no matter what. I’m going to take these three to the portkey. We’ll all meet up at our campsite. And for Godric’s sake, no spelled sweets!” The door shuts to the sound of their laughter.

Bill doesn’t bother to knock on his brother’s door (if Charlie wanted people to stay out, then he would add locking spells). He tries the doorknob and it turns freely so he swings the door wide to find Charlie still curled up in bed, arms wrapped around a spare pillow. Bill walks in, not even bothering to quiet his steps, and shakes Charlie’s shoulder. He mumbles something but it’s incoherent at best. Bill tries again and he swears Charlie presses his lips to the pillow before blinking open his eyes.

“Goo’mornin’,” Charlie says sleepily. Then he seems to realize that he’s talking to a pillow and sits up in his bed. He swivels around and glares.

Bill raises an eyebrow in amusement. “Having a good dream, were you?” Charlie tries to swing a pillow at him but there’s no heat in the gesture. Bill doesn’t miss the way Charlie also tries to discreetly slide a hand down to cover his groin. “It happens to the best of us, Char. Mum just sent me in to tell you we’re leaving in fifteen. She’s got breakfast saved back for you but if you don’t hurry up she may be persuaded to give it to her favorite son instead.”

Charlie huffs, “I’m her favorite, so win-win.”

“Well, either way you need to get up. We’re in charge of apparating the twins via side-along.” Bill gets up then and walks towards the door, but stops before leaving. “And do take care of your
Harry and Cedric walk through the campsite discussing Quidditch. Cedric is polite enough to keep up more than his share of the conversation, as Quidditch facts are more Ron’s forte than Harry’s, and Harry is extremely grateful. They move on to the upcoming season at Hogwarts. Amos is sure that Cedric’s going to be the Hufflepuff captain, but Cedric isn’t convinced. Harry has never met someone who is so modest before. He tells Cedric that he agrees with his dad, and that Hufflepuff would be lucky to have him. Cedric bumps his shoulder into Harry’s playfully so Harry bumps back. The pair continue their conversation and friendly jostling until they get to the area that Mr. Weasley reserved.

Percy, Bill, and Charlie are putting the finishing touches to the first tent when they hear their father approaching. They wave at Arthur and Amos, but otherwise stay quiet to let the two men finish up. Charlie then looks around them.

“Who’re you looking for?” Fred asks from his left.

“Are you missing Ickle Ronniekins already?” George says from his right.

Charlie is about to shove them away when Bill comes to his rescue. “I saw Ludo Bagman a few tents over and it looked like he was taking wagers on the match.” The twins fall for his bait and quickly jog off to find the Director of Magical Games and Sports.

“Thanks for that,” Charlie tells him. “Do you want to get the other tent from Dad?”

“Ron’s got the other one so we’ll just have to wait for- ah! Here they are now.” Bill points to where Ron and his friends are just walking up over a ridge. “Is that the Diggory boy walking with them? He sure has gotten tall.” He gives a shout and waves them over.

They say goodbye to the Diggorys and set up their other tent. Harry marvels at the expandable charms they have placed on them, making them bigger on the inside. (“Like the TARDIS!” Harry exclaims, though only Hermione knows what he’s talking about.) The younger ones say they’ve seen some friends from school and ask if they can go back to chat but Arthur tells them it’s time to find their seats in the stands. The match is lively and fun- no matter how high up their seats are- and Charlie no longer worries about what happened with Harry the night before.

It takes everyone a while to settle down after the match, but eventually they fall asleep to the sound of Ireland fans celebrating their victory.

But then the sound turns from joyous to terrified. Screams. Explosions. The crackling of fire. Charlie is up and off his camping cot before he even knows what’s going on. He has his wand at the ready, half expecting his boss to run in and start giving orders like she does during emergencies on at the dragon sanctuary. Then he remembers where they are. He shakes his dad awake, then Bill, then Percy. They immediately run to the other tent and wake everyone else. They leave Fred and George in charge of the younger three and then go to offer their assistance to those who need it.

The Dark Mark appears in the sky and Charlie has never been so scared (not even when the young Hungarian Horntail he has been training tried to make a meal out of him). As soon as they convince Mr. Crouch that there is no way any of them cast the Dark Mark, Arthur gathers up everyone and shoves them towards their return portkey. Mr. Diggory and Cedric are not around but Arthur says
this was always the plan and they all hold on as they’re pulled back to the Burrow.

Molly holds everyone close and makes them tea and frets over them for as long as she can. She is reluctant to let anyone even go upstairs to clean up or rest. Arthur is able to eventually calm her down enough and he takes her to the living room where the pair sit on the sofa together for some time. Percy floos to the Ministry as soon as he has a change of clothes. The twins lock themselves in their room, probably plotting how to spend their earnings. Ron, Ginny, Harry, and Hermione go up to Ron’s room.

Bill and Charlie are just getting used to the quiet calm of the kitchen when an owl flies in. Bill recognizes it immediately and takes the letter. The owl flies off without a reply. He unfolds the parchment and scans quickly before refolding it and placing it in his pocket. “It’s from my team. Word has made it to Egypt and we’re being reassigned. I have to report in, but I want to be here when the kids go off to Hogwarts. This is no time for me to be halfway across the globe.” He goes off to talk to their parents and make plans.

Charlie figures he should probably be around as well, so he writes a letter to his boss at the sanctuary and calls for Pig to fly it off to Romania. The next morning he gets his reply:

Charlie,

You’re actually going to stay put for the time being. We can’t authorize any international portkeys right now and we’ve increased our security for added protection. Stay with your family until you see your siblings to the Hogwarts Express. Then, you may begin your journey back via broom.

I am sorry this is such a pain, but we have to be cautious. The Minister and the Headmaster still want to proceed as planned so that is another issue to take into consideration.

Enjoy your extra time off and relax while you can. It’s going to be an interesting year!

Morgan

September 1st arrives quickly, and the trip to King’s Cross is tense. Charlie swears he doesn’t breathe until the kids are all on the train. Once back at the Burrow, Molly prepares one final lunch for her oldest boys before they’re set to go back to their jobs. Percy and Arthur go to the Ministry for a half-day of work and Bill also leaves for an errand (though he doesn’t specify).

Charlie offers to help his mother clean up after the meal, though he would have done so even if he weren’t the only other one home. She waits until the last of the dishes are in the sink before asking him, “So what now?”

He sighs. “I’m going back to Romania, but I promise you’ll see me before you know it.”

“You always say that.” Molly fights back the tears that are filling her eyes.

“Dad already knows, but Fudge and Dumbledore have a big surprise set up and the trainers at the sanctuary are helping them out- myself included- so I’m serious this time when I say you’ll see me soon.”

Molly hugs her son tightly. “I always miss you, Charlie. No matter how long.”

He goes upstairs to gather his few belongings and then treks out to the garden shed to find the best
broom they have stashed away. He has a long trip ahead of him and his broom is back at the sanctuary. Molly meets him at the gate with a bag of sandwiches. Charlie tries to refuse, knowing there won’t be much left if she gives him all of that, but she insists.

There is a strong breeze and the wind makes her fringe flutter around her face. “You keep safe. I don’t know what I would do if I lost one of you.”

Charlie leans in and gives a warm squeeze. “Hogwarts is the safest place for them right now. Percy and Dad have the Ministry for protection, and Bill has his whole team. I’ll be okay with my dragons, Mum. I promise.”

She chokes back a sob as he shrinks his parcels and mounts his broom. He takes one last look around the Burrow, gives a smile to his mother, and heads back home to Romania.

Chapter End Notes

In case it wasn't obvious, nothing untoward happened between Charlie and Harry. Charlie is better than that.
Chapter 5

1994, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie is just finishing up his rounds through the outer boundaries of the sanctuary when a familiar little owl flaps tiredly towards him. He reaches out his Seeker hands and catches Pig out of the sky. “Hullo there, little one. Did Ron really send you all this way?” Pig gives his wings one more exasperated flap before collapsing into Charlie’s palms. He holds the owl close to his chest and aims his broom towards his cottage.

As soon as he steps through the doorway he is worried to find another owl already waiting for him. “Oh no. Not you too, Errol. At least you seem a little less worse for wear.” Wanting nothing to do with the owl in Charlie’s arms, Errol drops his post- a startlingly red piece of parchment- and takes off (though it does take him two tries to get through the open window). Charlie carefully lays Pig down on his table as unties the letter.

Charlie,

Fred & George swear you’ve known about the Tri-Wizard Tournament for months now. Is it true? I wish you would have told me, especially since you told the twins.

Harry somehow got his name in the Goblet of Fire even though there were loads of restrictions. He’s not telling me how he did it either. I guess that’s how my brothers are now; keeping secrets from me.

I suppose if you know, then that means dragons are involved. Think you could tell me in what way? Or am I not worthy of that information either?

Make sure Pig doesn’t die.

Ron

Charlie sighs and rubs a hand down his face. Of course Ron feels left out, but the twins weren’t even supposed to know. No one was supposed to know! He sets that letter aside and decides it best to leave a possible response for another day.

Then he picks up the Howler left by Errol. With no use avoiding the inevitable, he breaks the seal and braces for his mother’s voice.

“CHARLIE! HOW DARE YOU KEEP SUCH A SECRET FROM YOUR MOTHER! THE TRI-WIZARD TOURNAMENT WAS BANNED FOR A REASON! IT'S UNNECESSARILY DANGEROUS! AND ONCE I FOUND OUT, I FIGURED AT LEAST MY OWN CHILDREN WOULD BE TOO YOUNG TO PARTICIPATE- BUT NO! SOMEHOW HARRY GOT HIMSELF ENTERED AND DUMBLEDORE IS CLAIMING THAT THERE’S NO WAY FOR HIM TO FORFEIT!” There’s a pause where Charlie knows his mum is trying to calm down. “DID YOU KNOW THIS COULD HAPPEN? DID YOU KNOW THAT HARRY- OR ANY OF YOUR BROTHERS FOR THAT MATTER- WOULD BE ABLE TO COMPETE? AND SINCE YOU’RE INVOLVED, DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE GOING TO MAKE DRAGONS A PART OF IT?! I JUST… I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO TO KEEP HIM SAFE! I NEED TO KEEP HIM SAFE, CHARLIE!”

He can hear the desperation in her voice at the end, but he’s still trying to process the rest of what
she said. Ron had mentioned the same detail, but how could Harry be a champion in the
tournament? Charlie was told only students that were of-age would be able to participate. Knowing
that even the twins would be kept away from the competition was part of why he agreed to help.
But Harry? Harry is always throwing himself headfirst into whatever danger he can find. He
doesn’t need any extra reasons to do so. If Dumbledore won’t help, then Charlie is determined to
find someone who will.

Professor McGonagall,

Do you have a spare moment this weekend that I could come in and speak with you? I’m afraid it’s urgent.

Respectfully,

Charlie Weasley

Charlie,

Saturday morning at eleven o’clock finds me with no obligations. I will meet you at the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade, as Hogwarts is currently housing more than its share of visitors.

I hope you are staying safe.

Minerva

Charlie arrives at the Three Broomsticks at half ten. He greets Madam Rosmerta and orders a pint of Butterbeer, even though what he could really use is several shots of Firewhisky. He downs it and orders another, but makes sure to sip it until McGonagall arrives.

At exactly eleven o’clock, the pub doors open and McGonagall walks in. Charlie thinks she looks no different than the day he first stepped foot into Hogwarts, graying hair still pulled back in that severe way and robes still a gaudy tartan print that she somehow manages to make work. She gives a polite nod to Rosmerta and then spots Charlie at a small table. She sits and he offers her a drink. McGonagall declines saying, “I still have duties at the castle. Now, what was so urgent that you had to come all the way in from Romania to see me?”

“Well, Professor-”

“Minerva,” she interrupts.

“What?”

“You’re a grown man, Charlie. You’ve been out of school for four years and I think it’s due time you call me by my given name.”

With a nod, he clears his throat and starts again. “Well, Minerva, it’s about Harry Potter.”

He glances up at her but doesn’t find the shock he expected. Instead, she gives a terse laugh. “Charlie, you are not the first Weasley to come to me about that boy since it was announced. Do not expect me to be so surprised.”

“How can you let him do this?” Charlie yells louder than he means to. “I mean, Dumbledore is one
thing; he’s always been a few pieces short of a full chess set. But you have more common sense than the rest of the staff combined!”

McGonagall raises a brow. “I think there was a compliment in there somewhere, so thank you, but I’m telling you the same thing I told your mother: there is absolutely nothing I can do. It is simply out of my hands.”

Charlie slams his fist down on the table. “Stop lying! You’re not a liar!”

“It’s not a lie, Charlie. I’m sorry.”

“Then it’s an excuse! There’s nothing you can do?? There’s always something that can be done!”

She folds her hands neatly in front of her. “Then what do you suggest I do?”

“Make it so he can’t participate!”

“And how do you suppose I’d do that?”

“I don’t know. Lock him in his dorm?”

McGonagall’s face clouds over. “Since you seem so invested in Harry’s safety, then I assume you already know about his muggle family?” Charlie says yes, so she continues. “Then you should already know that they locked him in a cupboard under the stairs for the better part of his childhood. Do you think I would actually consider lowering myself to be just like them? All for the sake of his supposed safety?”

Charlie’s face turns red and he fights the urge to look away. “But-”

“No. I’m afraid there simply is no solution. The Minister and the Headmaster refuse to budge and they outrank me.” She then lays her hands overtop Charlie’s rough, calloused ones. “I know that all of you care about Harry- and he needs that, now more than ever- but do you really think I don’t? Do you not remember the way I looked out for you when you were having a hard time adjusting in your fifth year? Do you think I won’t do everything in my power to keep that boy safe? I had to leave him at that awful place thirteen years ago and I’ve regretted it ever since, but my hands were tied then and they’re tied now. I will never stop watching out for Harry. I promise you that.”

They sit there for a minute or so before McGonagall gives Charlie’s hands one last pat. “I’m proud of you,” she says quietly.

Charlie’s brow pinches together in confusion. “You’re proud that I pulled you away from your job and yelled at you?”

This time McGonagall’s laugh rings out loudly in the smoky pub. “No, I could have done without that. But I’m proud that you’re willing to protect Harry. If Sybil Trelawney’s predictions are to be believed, then tough times are coming and we need to be ready to stand up for what we know is right. I have no doubt that you are ready for any trouble that might come your way.”

“I just hope Harry is ready.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

This starts with Ron's point of view just because I think he's misunderstood at this part of GOF. I love Ron and his feelings are valid.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1994, Hogwarts

Ron makes sure to glare at Harry and the rest of the stupid Gryffindors that are acting like he’s Merlin’s gift to the school. What a prat. He can’t even sit in the Great Hall anymore and pretend to eat supper. He throws his fork down with a clatter and stomps out of the room. Ron doesn’t even make it ten steps into the corridor before he’s being pulled into a supply closet. He wrestles against his attacker and gets in a few good punches before he’s let go.

He holds up his wand and casts Lumos to brighten the small space. “Charlie??”

Charlie is rubbing the spots on his chest where Ron punched him. “Yeah, it’s me. I didn’t mean to freak you out but you completely ignored me when I called your name. Is everything okay?”

“Didn’t you get my letter? Pig came back without it, so I thought…”

He wracks his brain trying to think of what the letter had said. It was before the Howler and before his meeting with McGonagall, so the details are kind of fuzzy. “I did, but I’ve been busy.”

“Well, let me catch you up: Harry found a way to put his name in the Goblet of Fire and he didn’t tell me. Then, he was picked as a fourth champion because of course he was. And through it all, he refuses to tell me how he did it. We’re supposed to be best friends! He’s supposed to trust me!”

Charlie puts his hands on Ron’s shoulders and gives him a gentle shake. “Get over yourself! Why would Harry even want to be in the Tri-Wizard Tournament?”

He shrugs him off. “He loves the attention, I guess.”

“Seriously? Ron! In all the time you’ve known Harry, when has he ever wanted attention from anyone other than you??” Charlie ignores Ron’s grumpy silence and keeps pressing. “He’s freaking out and you should be too. He could die! This could literally kill him, and you’re acting like a baby.”

Ron wants to keep fighting back but he’s just so tired of it. “What can I do?” he finally asks.

“Tell him to meet Hagrid tomorrow night after curfew. And make sure he takes his Invisibility Cloak. We’re going to make sure Harry knows what he’ll be up against.”

“Dragons?”

“Good guess, little brother. But we have to do this carefully.”
Hagrid is busy trying to impress Madame Maxine, but Harry can’t look away from the dragons. That’s when he notices a familiar ginger walking his way. He removes his Cloak and gives a wave.

“Charlie?” he asks softly. “Am I going to have to fight these dragons?”

“We were told to bring four dragons, and there’s four champions, so I figure they’ll only have you go up against one of them.”

All of the color drains from Harry’s face. “I don’t think I could kill one.”

“No one will be *killing* any of the dragons, Harry. I’d never allow it.”

“Then what am I supposed to do? You’re the dragon expert. Help me! Please!”

“Calm down, Harry. Just avoid their teeth. And their talons. And their tails or horns. And-”

Harry bends over at the waist and dry heaves. “Not helping, Charlie,” he wheezes out.

Charlie walks over and rubs Harry’s back until he calms down. Then he offers to escort him back to the castle since Hagrid is otherwise occupied. Harry nods and gathers his Cloak into his arms. Together, they walk back in silence. Charlie continues with him through the main doors and up the staircase and all the way to the portrait of the Fat Lady.

He stops Harry before he can give the password. “I believe in you. We all do.” And before Charlie can think of all the reasons why this is a bad idea, he pulls Harry into a crushing hug.

Harry makes an undignified squeak, but then he sinks into Charlie’s arms. He relishes the feeling of Charlie’s soft, well-worn flannel. He tries to memorize the way he fits so easily against Charlie’s chest. The sound of footsteps approaching breaks them apart, and with a tentative smile Harry gives the password and leaves Charlie standing alone in the corridor.

Charlie wishes he could sit with his parents in the spectator stands during the First Task, but he has to stay with the dragons and the other trainers from the sanctuary. Harry is last to go and of course he’ll be up against the most dangerous dragon. Charlie stands at the ready with his co-workers as the Hungarian Horntail chases Harry around the arena. He watches Harry jump on his Firebolt and take the egg faster than anyone else. When the Horntail is back in her cage, Charlie feels like he can finally breathe again.

“Anything else Dobby can be getting you, sir?”

Charlie can’t believe this house elf. He’s wearing what looks like a small girl’s sundress, mismatching socks, and light-up trainers. The little elf looks at him with oversized green eyes and Charlie instantly thinks of a very different set of green eyes and has to look away. “This food is wonderful. I appreciate you making me a plate even though I am no longer a student.”

“Dobby would do anything for one of Harry’s Wheezies!”

Charlie hears a chuckle from behind him and turns around with an explanation already on his tongue. It dies in his mouth when he sees Harry in the doorway to the kitchens. “Thank you for treating my friends so well, Dobby.”

“Harry Potter! Harry Potter!” Dobby pulls on his ears in excitement. “Dobby heard you was fighting a dragon, sir! Dobby was afraid but Dobby was not to be helping you!” He latches on to
Harry’s legs as if he’s still afraid Harry could get hurt.

Harry tries to push the elf away but finds his efforts futile. He gives up and just hobbles over to the stool next to Charlie. “Do you think I could get whatever you made up for Charlie? I’m starved.”

Dobby makes a high-pitched squealing noise and pulls on the hem of his sundress. “Dobby would like nothing more!”

Charlie watches as Dobby runs around the kitchens, shooing off other elves as he goes. “Do I want to know why this Hogwarts house elf seems to be at your command?”

“I got him freed from the Malfoys back in second year.” Harry waves it off as if it’s nothing but Charlie is impressed. “I’m surprised you haven’t taken the dragons back yet.”

“Morgan- my boss- decided it would be best if we stay here the night and let our dragons calm down a bit. They’ll be easier to transport in the morning.”

“Ah,” Harry says as a heaping plate of food is set before him. “Thank you, Dobby. You can leave us now.” The elf scrapes and bows the whole way out of the room.

The two eat quietly for a while, just enjoying the calm after a hectic day. “Tea?” Charlie asks to break the silence. Harry nearly chokes on his treacle tart. “Sorry!” Charlie apologizes emphatically.

Harry waves his hand. “It’s not your fault. I just…didn’t expect it, is all.” They fall into silence again as Harry tries to work up enough nerve. “Charlie…that night…thank you. For listening to me. For making me feel normal.”

“You aren’t normal, Harry; you’re extraordinary. And after today everyone knows it.”

Harry mumbles to himself, but then seems to remember something. “Oh! Speaking of things being different after today,” He pulls his arm out of his shirt sleeve and shows off the puckered red scar on his shoulder. “They wanted to put more burn salve on it but I wouldn’t let them. I wanted to keep it. To remember. And-” Harry pulls every ounce of bravery he has and looks Charlie in the eye. “-and that way we’ll match.”

Charlie barely breathes out, “Harry…” He reaches forward slowly and lets his fingers hover above the mark on his shoulder.

“It doesn’t hurt. I didn’t take the burn salve but I did take the pain-killing potion.”

That’s all the permission Charlie needs to ever so gently run his fingertips over Harry’s skin. It’s warm and soft and he knows his fingers must feel like gravel in comparison. Harry shudders and Charlie pulls his fingers away as if they’re on fire. “Did I hurt you?” Harry shakes his head side to side, so Charlie continues running his fingertips up and down his arm.

Harry revels in the feeling, relaxing into it. He gets so relaxed, in fact, that he lets out a big yawn. Charlie breathes out a soft laugh. “You’ve had quite the day. I probably shouldn’t keep you up anymore.”

He wants to protest, but knows that Charlie is right. “Help me back into my shirt?” he asks with a shy smile.

Charlie doesn’t consider himself inexperienced. He had a steady boyfriend nearly all of sixth year. He’s gone to muggle pubs to pull blokes. He’s also had more than his fair share of snogging and groping in dark corners. But he’s never had this level of chaste intimacy with anyone before. He
isn’t even sure if that’s what Harry considers this to be, but it certainly feels that way to Charlie.

He holds the sleeve of the shirt out as Harry slides his arm back into it, wincing once. “Alright, so maybe it hurts a little,” Harry admits.

Charlie walks him back to the Gryffindor common room just like he did a week ago. This time, however, Cedric Diggory is standing there waiting. Harry holds up one finger to Charlie and jogs forward to talk to Cedric. Charlie watches them exchange in polite conversation before sharing a quick hug. He fights down the heavy feeling that settles in his stomach when they do. Cedric acknowledges Charlie with a quick nod as he walks past him and down the staircase.

“I told him about the dragons the day after you showed them to me,” Harry says, bringing Charlie’s attention back around to him. “He was thanking me for the help, and asking if we wanted to work together on the Second Task as well. I don’t even want to think about that for a while, but I’m glad I’m not in this by myself.”

“He’s a nice bloke,” Charlie admits. “Bill, Percy, and I all spent time playing over at the Diggory’s when mum needed time away from us. Now that I think about it, we were over there a lot after the twins were born.” Harry yawns again and Charlie mentally kicks himself for keeping Harry out this late. He gives a dramatic look at his watch before saying, “I’d better get back to my dragons. You, uh…you have a good sleep.”

Harry lifts an eyebrow in amusement. “‘Have a good sleep’? Maybe you need the rest more than I do.”

“Oh, shut it,” Charlie says, giving Harry a light punch in his not-burnt shoulder. He fully plans on turning around and walking straight out of the castle, but Harry grabs his arm and pulls him in for another hug. Charlie lets it go on for as long as he can before reluctantly pulling away. “Would you…” he clears his throat and starts again, “Would it be okay if I write to you sometimes?”

“Yes!” Harry says all too eagerly. “I mean, yeah I’d like that. It seems Ron and I are speaking again and that’s good, and there’s always Sirius but he’s still on the run, so it would be nice to hear from you.” He looks up through his eyelashes and adds, “If you’re not too busy.”

Charlie loves his enthusiasm. “I’m never too busy for you.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm taking care of my niece and nephew this weekend and they're "too old for naps" so most likely I won't have the time to post an update until Monday. Sorry, but thank you all for reading and commenting!
1994, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Dear Harry,

I hope this isn’t too soon to write to you, but you said I could. All of the dragons are back in their enclosures and the whole tournament will soon be a distant memory to them.

How are you recovering? I know you have the Yule Ball coming up, so hopefully you’re not too sore to dance the night away. Have you already asked somebody? I’m sure the whole school is falling over themselves to go with you. In fact, there’s three schools worth of students who would be lucky to have you to themselves for a night.

I know I was only there for a week, but I already miss being around you and the castle. Before I discovered my love of dragons, I used to imagine living at Hogwarts when I got older. I guess that’s a silly daydream made for a child. Who would want to live at a school forever?

I wish you were coming to the Burrow for the hols, but I know you’ll enjoy the festivities.

Yours,

Charlie

---

Charlie,

Your comments are very flattering, but I assure you that I do not have anyone queuing up to go to the Yule Ball with me. Ron blurted out that Hermione should go with one of us (how long will it take him to realize he fancies her?) but Viktor Krum already asked her. Then I asked Ginny to go with me just as friends and she said Neville already asked her. Ginny suggested I ask her friend Luna? But I don’t know her. I’d rather not go at all, but as Hogwarts champion I have to attend. I also have to dance! Like, an actual real ballroom-style dance! What am I going to do, Charlie? This is way outside of my comfort zone.

I’m glad the dragons are doing well. I would hate for them to have lasting damage all because of some competition. Does the Hungarian Horntail I fought have a name?

And that’s not a silly daydream. I’d give anything to stay at Hogwarts forever (except for holidays at the Burrow, of course), especially if it meant that I never had to go to Privet Drive ever again. Maybe one day.

Take care,

Harry

---

Harry,

I asked Morgan about your dragon and she said they’ve always just called her ‘The Horntail’. She
said you’re free to name her since you bested her in such a humane way. You certainly do have a way with people, because I’ve never seen my boss be that nice to anyone since I’ve met her.

Maybe you should go with Ginny’s friend. She usually has good taste in people. I have to admit I was little worried that one of the boys from Durmstrang would snatch you up and you’d never look back at me twice, seeing as most of them were so muscled and fit.

Sorry this is short, but a new recruit left an enclosure unwarded and I spent the whole day chasing after the hatchlings that got out.

Thinking about you,

Charlie

Charlie,

What have I done? I honestly don’t know what came over me, but during supper I looked over at Cedric and suddenly I was overcome. I stood up in front of the entire Great Hall and asked him to go to the Yule Ball with me. I meant as friends, but it doesn’t matter in the long run. Everyone got silent and waited for him to give me an answer. He said no, he was already going with Cho Chang (she plays Seeker for Ravenclaw). Everyone laughed at me. It was horrible! He apologized but the damage was already done. I’m such a disaster! Fred and George are right. At this point, there’s not going to be anyone left! How can you look at me and still want to spend time with me? Apparently no one else wants to.

Can you name the dragon Bryony? I appreciate being given the honor.

Take care,

Harry

Harry,

I never want to hear you put yourself down like that. Everyone is under just as much pressure as you are to find a date, so you’re all feeling the same way. If you really don’t care who it is then just ask around your house. I’m sure there’s someone left (contrary to what they’d say, Fred and George are not the authorities on everything). And since there’s only a few days left, maybe help out Ron while you’re at it?

I like the name Bryony. I’ll tell Morgan first thing in the morning.

I’m going to send this letter with another owl from the sanctuary. Hedwig looked a little tired when she got here today (probably from how much we’ve been using her). I’ll feed her well and let her sleep the night before sending her back your way. And then I’ll be at the Burrow for a bit so she won’t have as far to go.

Wish I could be there,

Charlie

Chapter End Notes
I changed Harry asking Cho to Harry asking Cedric because I read GOF and thought that Harry would have tried ANYTHING to avoid asking a girl to the ball. To me at least, it seemed like when his friends kept pushing it and pushing it he just cracked and said the first name that he could think of: Cho. But that's just my theory.
Chapter 8

1994, The Burrow

A bread roll soars across the table and smacks Charlie in the face. He jumps in his seat and glares at Bill, who is laughing hard and pounding a fist on the table. Molly makes a *tsk* sound but Arthur is fighting his own amusement.

“What was that for?” Charlie demands.

Bill dabs at his eyes with a napkin before answering. “You were staring off into the distance and I just wanted to get your attention. What’s got you so distracted?”

“He’s probably thinking about whoever he keeps getting letters from,” Percy says in between bites.

Charlie suddenly finds the food on his plate very interesting, putting his sole focus into pushing the meat and veg around. When Bill starts pushing him for more information, he figures the meal is over. He hands his plate to Molly, thanks her for cooking, and then heads up to his bedroom.

Once he calms down later in the evening, he comes back downstairs to join his family in the living room. That’s when he hears Molly say softly, “You should stop pestering him, Bill. We’ve all had quite the year.”

“Charlie is just usually so jovial around Christmas, but now he seems…lackluster. He hardly even smiled when we opened presents yesterday. I’m worried about him, is all. I don’t know why his usual enthusiasm is gone. And if Percy is right, then why wouldn’t having a friend write to him make him happier?”

“That’s fine, but at what point did you think throwing bread at him was going to help? Sometimes I feel like the two of you never really grew up.”

Charlie steps into the room and makes his presence known. “Hullo, Mum. Dad. Bill. Where’s Percy?”

Molly stands up and taps on Arthur’s shoulder so he’ll join her. “He is writing some correspondence for work. Your father and I are going to turn in for the evening. Don’t stay up too late.” She kisses each of their cheeks and leaves the room with Arthur’s arm around her shoulders.

“Subtle…” Bill says with an eye roll once they’re gone. Charlie laughs so he takes that as a good sign. “Can we talk?”

“I suppose,” he says and joins Bill on the sofa.

Bill isn’t sure how to start but then he notices Charlie staring off towards the window again. “What do you keep thinking about?”

Charlie tilts his head to one side. “What do you mean?”

“Like I said at supper, you keep getting distracted. So…what do you keep thinking about? Was Percy right?”

He never gets the chance to answer, however, because Hedwig starts tapping at the window. Charlie jumps up from the sofa and lets her in. She holds out her leg so he can untie the newest
letter from Harry, then she flies to the wooden perch that the Weasleys have installed by the kitchen door.

Bill looks from Charlie and Hedwig and then back again. “Why didn’t Ron send Pig?”

“Well um-”

“Unless it’s not from Ron. Is it from Harry?”

“You see-”

“Were you expecting post from Harry?”

“I, uh-”

“Was that who Percy was referring to? What is going on, Charlie??”

“Well maybe give me a chance to answer!” Bill holds up his hands in apology and sits back on the sofa again to wait. Charlie paces up and down the room in front of him, all but wringing the parchment in his hands. “It is Harry. We’ve been writing to each other since after the dragon task.”

“About what? I mean, he hardly knows you.”

Charlie thinks it over a moment and decides to tell Bill the truth. They’ve always been close and he trusts him to not overreact. “It started the night before the Quidditch World Cup. I couldn’t sleep and apparently neither could Harry because we both ended up in the kitchen in the middle of the night. We talked for hours and then-” Charlie cuts himself off.

Bill’s eyes widen comically. “Please tell me you didn’t push yourself onto him. He’s a child!”

“I’m not some sort of pedo!” Charlie yells back. “Merlin…” Bill has the decency to look apologetic, so Charlie shakes his head and tries to give him another chance. “I actually tried to be the mature one and send him back to Ron’s room but he asked if he could stay with me. I let him- and nothing happened, I swear- but he must have regretted it anyway because he slipped out before I woke up without saying a word. After the madness at the World Cup there were other more important things to worry about, so we just never talked about what happened.”

“So how did you get from that to this.” He gestures to the partially crumpled parchment still in Charlie’s hand.

Charlie rubs his neck and sits down next to his brother. “The Tri-Wizard Tournament. I spent that week at Hogwarts and I was able to talk to him some more. We had a…moment…the night of the dragon task, and I asked Harry if he wanted me to write to him. He said yes and now here we are.”

“Charlie, Charlie, Charlie…” Bill says with a slow shake of his head, but when he looks up there’s a soft smile on his face. “Is there no one your own age? In Romania? With perhaps a little less life-threatening baggage? That isn’t our baby brother’s best friend?”

“I didn’t exactly plan for this to happen.”

“Just be careful. He is only a boy.”

“Stop reminding me,” Charlie groans. “I just want to be there for him. It’s all innocent, I promise.”

“I trust you to not do anything without his consent. You’re a good guy, Charlie.” Bill reaches out and pulls his brother into a side hug. When he moves away he asks, “Do you think Harry could
introduce me to Fleur Delacour? She’s the champion from Beauxbatons and- don’t give me that look!”

Charlie just shakes his head with a laugh. “I’ll ask.”

He waits until he’s in the privacy of his locked and warded bedroom before he opens the letter from Harry. Charlie spells the parchment smooth since it got crinkled during his interaction with Bill. When he breaks the seal and unfolds it on his desk, a photograph falls out. He picks it up and smiles at the set of images captured on film. It’s Harry and a beautiful Indian girl dancing at the Yule Ball. She is significantly more graceful than Harry and it’s obvious that she’s helping him through the steps. He’s concentrating so hard not to mess up; it’s endearing. Charlie sets the photo up against a stack of books and opens Harry’s letter.

Charlie,

You’ve probably already seen the photograph of me and Parvati. Colin Creevey still runs around with his camera (though he no longer tries to organize a Harry Potter Fan Club), so I asked him to get one of us dancing that I could send to you.

You were right about asking someone from my own house to the Yule Ball; that’s how I ended up going with Parvati. She was a good sport about the whole thing and even had her twin sister Padma go with Ron, though that ended in disaster. I told her I didn’t really want to dance- besides the one the champions had to do- so she went off with a boy from Beauxbatons with no hard feelings. Padma, on the other hand, slapped Ron for ignoring her and staring at Hermione (who looked stonking gorgeous) the whole night. I would have included Hermione’s picture too but I already sent it off to her parents. I was able to talk to Cedric just briefly before he ran off with Cho, and he gave me a hint about what we need to do with our dragon eggs before the next task. So that’s good.

The Yule Ball wasn’t as bad as I was expecting it to be, but I would have rather been at the Burrow. How was Christmas? Thank your mum for the fudge. And thank you for the wand holster. I like the thigh placement better than the one I used to wear on my forearm. It will probably come in handy for the rest of the Tournament. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to get to a shop and get you anything. Ron mentioned you just had a birthday as well, so I’ll have to make it up to you later.

Give your family my best,

Harry

Charlie reads the letter through a second time, imagining the way Harry would roll his eyes when talking about Ron but go all soft when talking about Hermione. He sets it aside after his second read-through and gets out a fresh sheet of parchment to pen his response.

Harry,

I’m glad you had fun at the Yule Ball and I loved the photo you sent me. (Parvati sounds like a really nice girl and you two looked good together. If I’m being honest with myself, I’m a little jealous that she got to dance with you- even if it was just the once.) I’ll have to find a frame for it so I can hang it up at my cabin.
Speaking of cabin, I’m going back to Romania after the first of the year so I won’t be able to see you compete in the Second Task. I’m really sorry and I wish I could, but my parents will be there and Bill has actually quit his job so he’ll be there with them. He said he would keep me filled in on your progress, but I’m sure you’ll do great (especially with the help Cedric’s giving you).

I’m pleased that you like your gift, but don’t think you have to get me something in return. Even if you weren’t busy I wouldn’t have been expecting anything. Just use it well and I’ll be happy.

And so you know…I told Bill about us. Not that we’re an *us* necessarily, but I told him about what happened at Hogwarts and that we write back and forth. He won’t tell anyone so you don’t have to worry about that. Oh! Before I forget, he also wants to know if you can introduce him to Fleur at the next task. Feel free to tell him to bugger off.

Thinking of you,

Charlie
Dear Charlie,

I already sent my patronus off to tell you all is well, but I promised I would also write down in complete detail what happened today.

The task was set at the Black Lake and the champions had a clue from the last task that told them something important was taken from them (this was supposed to be kept secret but, of course, nothing is secret for long at Hogwarts). Ginny came over when she saw us and said she was worried because she couldn’t find Ron or Hermione. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that’s the ‘something important’ that was taken from the champions.

Fleur executed a flawless Bubble-Head Charm, but she got caught by grindylows fairly early on and didn’t finish. I made my way towards her to congratulate her excellent charms work, and she seemed very taken with me (if I may say so myself).

Cedric was the next one out of the water, having also used the Bubble-Head Charm, and he rescued his girlfriend. I guess you had no reason to be jealous of him, little brother. He’s clearly not after Harry.

Viktor Krum partially transfigured himself into a shark. I give him high marks for creativity, and for rescuing our dear Hermione. It was at this point I realized my theory was correct. Ron was clearly down there for Harry, and isn’t that just sweet?

Harry was down there a really long time and we were all starting to get worried, but finally he surfaced with not only Ron but also Fleur’s little sister. He was awarded extra points for “moral fiber”. You sure know how to pick them, Char!

Now, I don’t want you to freak out but I spoke with Ron later and he said Harry wasn’t dealing so well with the whole thing. Who knows what he encountered in that lake, and who knows what was going through his head when he saw his best friends tied up down there. I don’t know if you should write to him about it or if that will just make it worse…I’m just passing along what Ron shared with me.

I hope that was enough details. Maybe I could start a career as a reporter? Oh, that’s another thing: I know you don’t get the Daily Prophet all the way up there, but it’s probably a good thing you don’t. Skeeter’s lies about Harry have gone from bad to worse. I’m starting to wonder how much more he can possibly take.

Take care little brother,

Bill

Chapter 9

After getting the letter from Bill, Charlie grows increasingly insufferable to be around. He snaps at the new recruits he’s in charge of. He argues with his co-workers. He complains about group meals and staff meetings. He even botches what should have been a simple task of moving a Welsh Green from one pen to another, which results in the dragon escaping and terrorizing a nearby village until they can bring it back in.
It’s after that particular incident that Morgan decides she’s had enough. She waits until she knows Charlie is back at his cottage and then barges in on him (not even pretending to knock first). “WEASLEY!” she shouts into the two-room building.

Charlie lets out a panicked scream and quickly covers himself. “Have you gone mad?! I’m completely starkers! Why didn’t you knock??”

Morgan conjures a towel and throws it at him. “Well maybe you’ll learn to stop walking around naked, then.”

“That doesn’t really answer my question! Why did you barge in here and yell at me?”

“In case it’s slipped your notice, we’ve all had quite enough of your piss-poor attitude. You’re clearly cheesed off about something. Do you need to talk it out or would you rather fight it out?”

“Can I at least put some clothes on?”

“I don’t know,” Morgan says with a smirk. “I’m rather liking the show.”

Charlie gives a low growl before he can stop himself. His eyes narrow and he can tell the moment Morgan realizes she went too far. She holds both of her hands up. “Alright. Just make it quick.”

He grabs the clothes he was planning on wearing to bed and takes them into his small bathroom. After he’s dressed he leans against the counter for a few minutes to purposely make her wait longer. His own boredom wins out, however, and he leaves the safety of the small room.

Morgan is holding the framed picture of Harry and Parvati. “P-put that down,” he stutters as he strides quickly towards her.

“Ah, I was wondering if this might be about a boy. It always is, isn’t it? Though this one seems a tad more ‘boy’ than I was expecting.”

Charlie goes red but there’s not really anything that he can say to make the situation seem any better. He knows from talking to Bill what she must think of him.

“It’s alright,” Morgan continues as she finally sets the photo down. “I’m not here to judge you. I am here, however, to talk to you about the recent change in your behavior.”

He slumps down into the only other chair at his small kitchen table. “I feel like I’m back at Hogwarts. Shall I call you Professor while I’m at it?”

Morgan throws her head back in a laugh. “Ha! I think we both know I’d be pants at teaching. There’s a reason I’m not in charge of the academic part of this place. I only want to deal with people once they know what they’re supposed to do. You know, like not letting dragons loose…”

Charlie cringes. “Look, I said I was sorry and I’ve made it up to almost every family in the village. There’s still two more I’m visiting next week and-”

“I know you’re sorry. But it doesn’t change the fact that my best dragon trainer has gone all wonky.”

“I’ve not ‘gone all wonky’” he says, pouting like a child.

“A dragon escaped on your watch!”

“I said I was sorry!!”
“FINE!” She throws her hands up in defeat. “Fine. I won’t bring it up again. But let’s talk about this seriously, yeah? This kid,” she gestures towards the picture of Harry, “has got you all turned around. You don’t know your arse from your elbow at the moment and it’s affecting the safety of everyone around here. I don’t care what’s going on with the two of you, I just want to know what I can do to help fix you.”

He’s quiet as he lets her words sink in. “Could I make a request?” he asks in a small voice.

“I may not grant your requests, but you are always free to make them.”

“Can I have a weekend off? I need-” Charlie clears his throat, but keeps his eyes trained on the floor. “I think I just need to see him. I need to know he’s okay.”

“I will allow it under one condition.” Morgan waits until he is looking up and making eye contact with her. “The next time you’re having a hard time dealing with something, you come talk to me about it instead of letting yourself slowly implode. I don’t care if it’s personal or if you think it’s petty or small. This clearly went on for far too long and I won’t be having more incidents like this on my sanctuary. If it happens again- and I don’t care how good of a trainer you are- you’ll be gone faster than you can blink.”

He has to resist the urge to throw his arms around Morgan and hug her. “Thank you,” he says earnestly. “Seriously, thank you.”

“Eh, it just means you owe me now. What weekend do you want to take?”

“I’ll have to write to him and ask when he’s free.”

“You do that.” She stands up and stretches out her legs. “I’m going to go drink enough honey mead to put down a hippogriff.”

Charlie hardly waits a minute after she’s gone before he grabs a piece a clean piece of parchment.

Harry,

I have a lot to say but I want you to get this as soon as possible so I’ll keep it brief.

First, I want to say congratulations on your tie with Cedric. Bill told me what happened and you’re probably sick of people fawning over you but I just love how you hold onto what makes you such a good person, even in the face of danger. You deserve to win.

Second (and maybe now that I think of it this one should have come first), thank you for saving my brother. I know he probably wasn’t ever in any real danger but it is still comforting to know that Ronnie has you looking out for him.

Third, I need to see you. It’s sort of killing me. Is there a Hogsmeade weekend coming up soon? My boss has given me some time off and I’d love to use to see you. I apologize if this sounds desperate. I’m not trying to pressure you or anything; you surely have better things to do than spend your only free time with an old man.

Please let me know what you think,

Charlie
Charlie,

You have wonderful timing. Our next Hogsmeade weekend is this Saturday. (I’m meeting up with Padfoot, but that’s in the morning so I’ll be free all afternoon.) Oh! I hope that’s not too short of notice! If you can’t come this weekend, I’ll sneak out or something another weekend. I…I think I need to see you too. Scares me to say it, or, well, to write it. There’s just so much I want to say and no one here understands me like you do, even my best friends. Speaking of which, Ron is still suspicious of who is sending me so much post. I know you told Bill but I don’t know if I’m ready to tell Ron. He has a short temper and I know he would fly off the handle before taking the time to really listen to me. I’ll have to tell him something if I’m meeting up with you, but I suppose I’ll think of a plausible excuse. Or I could always distract him with sweets.

And you’re barely 22! That hardly makes you an old man. And even if it did, I don’t think I’d care.

Let me know if you can make it on Saturday. I really hope you can.

Harry

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Harry,

I think Morgan just wants to be rid of me, because she gave me Friday through Sunday off. I’m sending correspondence to Aberforth at the Hog’s Head. It’s a little grungy and I’d rather stay at the Three Broomsticks (plus I like Madame Rosmerta better), but there’s less chance of us being bothered there. I’m going to visit Mum, Dad, and Bill on Friday and then check-in at the Hog’s Head that night. I still don’t want to pressure you, but whenever you want to see me I’ll be there.

I can’t wait,

Charlie

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Charlie,

I felt a bit daft reading your letter because I wanted to giggle like I see Lavender and Parvati do when they read Witch Weekly (or any of the girls do when Viktor Krum walks by). Is the food any good at the Hog’s Head? Let’s meet there for lunch around half twelve, and if we want to go somewhere else we can.

I can’t wait either,

Harry
1995, Hogsmeade

Charlie floos directly from the Burrow to the Hog’s Head. There are a few patrons in the dark, dirty pub but none of them look up at his arrival. He nods to the bearded man standing behind the bar before approaching. “Aberforth,” he says in greeting.

“Charles Weasley,” the man replies. “You still planning on staying two nights?”

He nods, saying, “I’ve brought payment.”

Aberforth snorts derisively. “Oh, have you now? What a concept.”

Charlie all but throws the money at the counter. The only thing keeping him from storming out entirely is the knowledge that he gets to see Harry tomorrow. He tells himself this several times.

Aberforth slaps a key down, matching Charlie’s enthusiasm. “Room 14,” he says without even touching the proffered coins.

“Cheers.” Charlie picks up the key and shoulders his bag.

Once safely inside room 14, he can’t help but think he’s made a mistake in staying here. A layer of dust and dirt seems to be covering everything. And, though Charlie doesn’t consider himself a neat freak, he just can’t stand it. He spends the next hour casting a strong Sourgify on everything in sight. Finally, he feels like the room is clean enough to set down his bag. He looks at his watch and sighs when he sees it’s not even late yet. Charlie decides to take a walk around Hogsmeade to waste some time.

He peeks inside the front window of Madam Puddifoot’s Tea Shop and shudders at the overly pink decorations. The place hasn’t changed since he took Tonks there as a joke back in their fifth year. He figures Harry wouldn’t be interested in going there tomorrow, especially since it’ll probably be overrun with Hogwarts couples. Charlie moves on quickly.

Next, he heads to Honeydukes. Charlie doesn’t have too much of a sweet tooth, but who can resist the temptation of an entire shop dedicated to chocolates and other treats? Honeydukes will also be full to bursting with students tomorrow so he doesn’t want to pass up the chance. Charlie buys Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans for Ron, Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum for Ginny, Exploding Bonbons and Fizzing Whizzbees for the twins, Treacle Fudge for Harry (everyone in the wizarding world knows Harry’s favorite is anything treacle), and Pumpkin Pasties for himself. Not wanting to leave anyone out, he picks up a few Sugar Quills at the last minute for Hermione. He pays for the sweets and then goes to the local owlery to send them off to everyone at Hogwarts.

Charlie wanders around Hogsmeade some more, going in and out of shops and making polite small talk with some of the other patrons. At one point he thinks he sees McGonagall going into the
Three Broomsticks, so he decides to go back to his room at the Hog’s Head before he runs into anyone else.

Sleep doesn’t come easy. He may have scourified the bed, but it’s not nearly as comfortable as his own back in Romania. He opens the novel he purchased at Tomes and Scrolls to help pass the time, but he can’t seem to focus on the words. He re-reads the same page four times before he throws it off the foot end of the bed with a growl. Charlie wants to go down to the pub (where he knows Aberforth is still standing behind the bar) but figures that may actually make his nerves worse. Exhaustion finally wins out, however, and he falls into a deep sleep.

Charlie wakes the next morning to a banging on his door. He stumbles out of bed and pulls open the door, staring into the face of a stranger. He blinks his eyes to try and clear the fog out of them, but he still doesn’t recognize her. “Uhh…” is all he manages to put together.

The witch looks surprised, then embarrassed, and then she giggles as she looks at his state of undress. “Sorry,” she says to him, not sounding very sorry at all. “I was looking for my friend and I guess I got the wrong room. Lucky me!”

Charlie follows her line of sight and it’s at that moment he realizes that he answered the door in his pants. He lowers his hands quickly to cover himself up. “Good luck with that,” he tells her and shuts the door to the sound of more nervous giggles. He leans against the door and groans, wondering if this sort of thing happens to other people as much as it happens to him. Then he checks his watch and is startled to see that it’s almost noon. He cleans up, changes into comfortable clothes, and then goes out front to wait for Harry.

Charlie watches in amusement as hordes of teenagers run around Hogsmeade. He was right about Madam Puddifoot’s; he can see couples holding hands and swapping sweet kisses as they walk in and out of the tea shop. Part of Charlie thinks maybe he could have that with Harry, and he lets that part go wild as he daydreams.

He’s brought back to reality by the sound of familiar voices, and he backs into the shadows while he listens in.

“Ron, really, I’ll be fine.”

“But what if Malfoy and his cronies come back and give you a hard time again?”

“So what if they do? Malfoy has been a prat for as long as I’ve known him. I think I can handle ignoring a couple of insults.”

“Hermione could always punch him again.”

“Ron! I will do no such thing! Unless he does something to deserve it, of course.”

“He always deserves to be punched in the face; he’s Malfoy.”

“Guys…just go enjoy the rest of your day. I’ll be back late, but I have my Invisibility Cloak so I promise I won’t get into any trouble.”

“Just don’t be afraid to ask for help from someone if you really need it.”

“I will, Hermione, but I don’t think it will be necessary. Now, go. I’ll see you at breakfast. Don’t give me that look, Ron. You know it doesn’t matter what time I come back; you’re dead to the world when you sleep.”
As soon as he sees Ron and Hermione turn the corner, Charlie steps out from the darkness and looks for Harry. What he finds is endearing. Harry is standing on the other side of the street, rocking his feet from toe to heel and biting his bottom lip nervously. Charlie walks towards him, hoping he looks more confident than he feels.

“Hullo,” Charlie says, and he might have to invest in a Pensieve because he wants to re-live this moment again and again. Harry’s smile grows to the point where it hurts his cheeks. His eyes brighten and it’s as if time freezes.

“Hi, Charlie.” The two stand on the side of the street just smiling at each other until a group of girls walk by. They point to them and titter, which makes Harry’s face go red. “Let’s go someone away from everybody. Please.”

“Anywhere in particular?”

Harry gestures to his shoulder bag. “I brought some food for us when I heard that the Hog’s Head isn’t exactly a reliable place to eat. I was thinking maybe we could have a picnic?” He says it like a question and then starts to ramble. “I mean, if you want to, that is. When we were coming back from meeting Padfoot I saw a nice park near a row of houses. We’re not technically supposed to leave the shops but I’m also not supposed to even be seeing you right now so-”

Charlie puts a finger to Harry’s lips to get him to stop. “That’s a great idea. Lead the way?”

Harry nods and points to his left where a lane winds through the village. He asks Charlie about the dragon sanctuary as they walk together. “Is it silly if I ask after Bryony?”

Charlie laughs lightly. “Of course not. She’s doing well. Her eggs are actually due to hatch any day now. Maybe over the summer hols you can come to Romania and visit her.” After a pause he adds, “And me.”

“That would be nice,” Harry says hesitantly, “but that’s only if I can get the Dursleys to let me go.”

“Oh.” Charlie feels awful for mentioning it now. “I’m sorry. I should have thought before I said anything. I didn’t mean to bring up negative feelings when we’re supposed to be having a nice time and-”

Now it’s Harry’s turn to stop Charlie’s rambling with a finger to his lips (it has the added benefit of stopping his walking as well, as they’ve made it to the small park). “It’s fine. And we’re here.”

It’s still a little chilly, it being early spring, and the ground is damp so Charlie pulls out his wand and spells a small area warm and dry while Harry pulls several containers of food out of his bag. When Charlie comments on how much he brought, Harry explains that Hermione has been practicing her expanding charms after being inspired by their tents at the Quidditch World Cup.

They dig into potatoes, roast, and steamed vegetables, all charmed to stay warm. It’s not exactly standard picnic fare, but it’s delicious all the same. Charlie moans around a mouthful of food. “Let me guess,” he says in between bites, “a certain freed house elf put all of this together for you because he’s obsessed with catering to your every whim?”

Harry huffs out a laugh, but looks at the ground and fiddles with the grass by his knee. “Don’t tease. Dobby’s the reason I made it through the Lake Task.”

Charlie tilts his head to the side in question. “What did he do?”

“Well,” he gives a sigh, “it was the morning of and I still didn’t have a way to breathe underwater.
Hermione’s best idea was to transfigure myself into a submarine. I suppose I could have asked Cedric and he probably would have told me, or at least given me a hint of where to look to find out for myself. But I went to bed the night before with no plan. When I woke up, Dobby was standing on the end of my bed and he shoved a handful of this slimy green stuff at me and told me to use it at the lake. It made me grow gills and it webbed my fingers and toes, which was a surreal experience. Neville told me afterwards it was Gillyweed, but it’s not as if I ever want to use it again.” Harry finally stops picking at the grass and looks up at Charlie. “Without him, I’d still be under the Black Lake.”

Charlie picks up Harry’s hand and holds it in his own. “You inspire such loyalty.”

Harry has to look away again, but this time it’s because he feels his face warm and he knows he must be blushing. “Alright, enough of that.” He pulls his hand back but gives Charlie a shy smile before finishing his lunch.

They lounge in the soft spring grass, snacking on small fairy cakes and watching the clouds soar by. Harry moves at some point so that his head is resting on Charlie’s chest. He likes the warm, firm feeling of it. Charlie runs his fingers through Harry’s hair, laughing when they get tangled in the mass. Only when the sky starts to cloud over and get dark do they consider getting up.

They are almost back to the shops when it starts to rain. They run under an awning to stay dry and realize they’re in from of Madam Pudifoot’s. Charlie jerks his thumb towards and window and teases, “Want me to take you in there?”

Harry gives a very unimpressed face. “There are many places I’d like to go with you, but that is not one of them. I mean…look at it in there! How is that fun for anybody involved?”

Charlie laughs until Harry’s face slides back into a smile again. “I was only teasing, but you’re right. I was there once and it was an experience I’d not like to have twice.”

“What ideas for what we should do now that it’s raining?” Harry rocks back and forth on his feet again.

“We could grab a butterbeer? And I’m pretty sure Rosmerta has a chess set.”

“I’m utter pants at chess,” Harry admits.

“She might have draughts,” Charlie suggests with a smirk.

“Sure, because I’m five years old.”

Charlie laughs again and pulls Harry down the street by his hand. When they get to the Three Broomsticks, Harry looks around and is pleased to find that he is the only Hogwarts student around. Charlie tells him to pick a seat and goes to the bar. He finds Harry a few minutes later at the table in the back corner. His back is to the door so no one would assume it’s Harry Potter sitting back there. Charlie sets down two butterbeers and a wooden box.

Harry groans when Charlie opens the box down and he recognizes the familiar red and white discs. “You actually expect me to play draughts?”

“We can make it interesting with a wager. If you win then I have to do one thing you say, no questions ask. Same for you if I win.”

Harry shakes his head at the absurdity of what they’re about to do, but ultimately agrees. He holds out his hand to shake Charlie’s and says, “Deal.”
The game lasts almost an hour (though that’s including the break they take so Charlie can refill their drinks) and it’s hard fought, but in the end there are only red pieces left on the checked board.

“I win!” Charlie exclaims with a fist thrown in the air.

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry grumbles as he flicks one of his pieces at Charlie.

They gather the pieces and place them back into the wooden box they came from. Then Harry excuses himself to go to the bathroom. Charlie goes up to the bar so he can return the board game to Rosmerta. A soft cough and a tap to his shoulder gets his attention. He turns around to find the same woman who knocked on his door that morning.

She pushes a loose piece of hair behind her ear and bats her eyelashes. “What a surprise!” she purrs. Charlie nods to be polite but otherwise ignores her. She doesn’t give up, though. “Don’t be like that, handsome. I just think it’s serendipity we meet again. How about I buy you a drink?”

“Thanks, but no thanks. I’m…here with someone.”

“I don’t see anyone.” She leans into Charlie’s personal space. “I promise I could show you a good time.”

He puts his hand on her arm to push her away, but then from the corner of his eye he sees Harry shove his way through the crowded pub and out into the street. A few murmurs of “is that…” can be heard from some of the pub patrons. Without even so much as a look back at the witch, Charlie chases after him.

Harry is so busy inside his own head that he doesn’t hear Charlie calling after him. Charlie is jogging to catch up, and when he finally does he has to grab Harry’s shoulder to haul him to a stop. “Where are you going?” he asks as he pants for breath.

Harry wrenches his arm free. “What does it matter? You can go back to her, you know. I won’t stop you.”

“What are you talking about?” Charlie asks desperately.

“The witch who was all over you. Don’t worry; I get it.” Harry starts walking again.

Charlie runs in front of him on the path and puts his hands up. “STOP! She’s nobody. I don’t even know her name. She knocked on my door this morning by accident and then when she saw me again tonight she offered to buy me a drink. But I told her I was already with someone.”

“You did?” He looks up with wide, unbelieving eyes.

“I did. I know we haven’t talked about it yet, but we’re obviously…something…even if we never figure out what that…something…is, it’s not…nothing. At least, to me it’s not nothing.”

The side of Harry’s mouth ticks up in what could almost be a smirk. “That was the most confusing thing I’ve ever heard.”


After a moment Harry takes a step forward and asks, “What do you want me to do?” When all Charlie does is narrow is eyes on confusion, he clarifies. “You won our wager, so you get to ask me to do one thing and I have to do it. No questions asked.” He takes another step forward and
lowers his voice. “So, what do you want me to do?”

“Let me kiss you,” Charlie all but whispers.

They’re so close that Harry can feel when Charlie exhales. “Is that all?”

“For now.”

Charlie leans in and—just like everything else has been with Harry—the kiss is gentle and chaste and so overwhelming that he wonders how he’s ever lived without it. He pulls back slightly to get a different angle and then leans in again. Harry meets him in the middle this time and it’s even better. He tilts his head and their noses bump, which makes Harry laugh, which in turn makes Charlie laugh, and then they’re leaning against each other with just their foreheads touching.

“Is that all?” Harry asks again.

“Spend the night with me.”

Harry pulls back so fast that Charlie stumbles. Thankfully, Harry reaches out his hands to stop him from falling to the ground.

“You can say no,” Charlie assures him. “You already fulfilled our wager. And besides, I wouldn’t make you do anything you didn’t really want to do regardless of some silly bet. I was just thinking maybe it would be nice. Like back in August.”

Harry is quiet for so long that Charlie starts to think he’s ruined everything. “I’m sorry. I’ll just walk you back to the castle grounds and then—”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Of course. I’m so sorry. Let’s just get going and you’ll be back before—”

“I mean, yes I’ll spend the night with you.”

Charlie’s smile is blinding, even in the growing darkness of dusk. He slides his hand into Harry’s and they stroll together back towards the Hog’s Head. Charlie pauses outside the door and tells Harry to put on his Invisibility Cloak. “I’m not embarrassed of you or anything. I’m just trying to protect you. This way, no one can tell Rita Skeeter that they saw Harry Potter going into a pub with a grown man when he should be at school.”

Harry knows he’s right but he still hates hearing Charlie put himself down like that. He quickly puts on the Cloak and follows closely behind Charlie as they walk through the pub and up to where his room is. Once safely inside, he takes the Cloak back off and tucks it safely into his expandable bag.

Just as he wonders what he should do next, Charlie hands him a pair of pajama bottoms. “I just duplicated the pair I brought with me. They won’t be nearly as comfortable so I gave you the originals. There’s a small washroom through that door. You can go first.”

Charlie takes the time that Harry is in the washroom to change his own clothes. He wasn’t lying. The pajama bottoms are stiff and a little itchy, but he doesn’t want to make Harry uncomfortable by sleeping in just his pants. Harry walks back in and tucks his clothes inside his shoulder bag before walking towards the bed. He sets his glasses on the side table before sliding between the blankets.
“It’s cleaner than I expected,” he says when he notices Charlie is watching him.

“Yeah, well, you’re welcome. It took a lot of scourgifying to make it that way.”

Harry laughs softly and beckons Charlie to join him. They were both exhausted the last time they did this, so Charlie doesn’t remember being this nervous then. He slips in next to Harry and wiggles around. It makes Harry laugh some more. “Comfortable?”

“That’s enough cheek out of you,” Charlie says with faux-grumpiness. Then he rolls over on his side and faces Harry. “You look good without your glasses,” he says seemingly out of nowhere before backpedaling. “Not that you don’t always look good! It’s just such a difference.”

Harry worries his lip between his teeth. “Hermione told me that there’s a muggle procedure that they’ve just patented in the United States that uses lasers to correct your vision. She said my vision is so bad that I would probably be a good candidate for it. I have been considering using contacts, or at the very getting least a better pair of glasses.”

Charlie can’t help it. He leans forward and plants a kiss right on the tip of Harry’s nose. When Harry wrinkles his nose up, it’s Charlie’s turn to laugh. “Sorry, couldn’t help myself.”

Harry smiles at that and scoots closer to Charlie. “Are you cold?” he asks.

He isn’t, but he gets an idea. “I am. Do you know of a way to keep me warm?”

Charlie knows what he’s doing, but can’t find it in himself to care. He opens his arm and pulls Harry towards him. Harry sighs and relaxes into it. Within minutes, the sound of Charlie’s heartbeat and the soft motion of his breathing lull him to sleep.

Harry wakes up slowly, wrapped in the soothing warmth and pressure that is Charlie. He wonders what time it is but not enough to get his wand and check. He closes his eyes and settles back down with a happy smile on his face. A few minutes later his eyes snap open. He realizes that he didn’t have a single nightmare or vision. He didn’t wake up with a burning pain coming from his scar. It was the best night’s sleep he’s gotten in a year. Maybe two.

“Why’re you up so early?” Charlie mumbles beside him.

Harry likes the way Charlie’s chest rumbles against his cheek. “I promised Ron and Hermione I’d be back for breakfast. Plus, I’ve always been an early riser.”

Charlie stretches with a groan and then- without even opening his eyes- he says, “That’s a deal breaker.”

Harry swats at his shoulder and gives an exaggerated gasp. “One night and you’re done with me already? I see how things are!”

Charlie rolls over and pins Harry to the bed. “I’ll never be done with you,” he growls and bends his head down to kiss him. He isn’t thinking about the fact that they’ve only ever kissed twice before. All he’s thinking about is proving to Harry that he wants him. He licks across Harry’s bottom lip and then nibbles along the same path.

Harry gasps for real this time and manages to get out the word, “Breakfast!”

Charlie pulls off and lays on his stomach so that he can catch his breath and have a chance to calm down. “Sorry,” he turns his head to tell Harry. “I should have asked.”
“You don’t have to ask. And I liked it, I just really need to get back.” Harry puts on his glasses and reluctantly kicks off the blankets. “I’m going to go change my clothes.” Then he surprises Charlie by leaning down and giving him a peck on the cheek before going into the washroom.

Charlie rolls onto his back and stares at the ceiling, trying to believe that this is real. He hears the sound of water running and decides he better get changed before Harry comes out. He pulls out a pair of thick denim jeans, a white undershirt, and a warm green and blue plaid flannel. It’s usually what he would wear when working (with dragon hide gloves and heavy boots), but he doesn’t own many other kinds of clothes.

Harry walks back into the room in the same things he wore yesterday. “I guess I didn’t think this through. At least I have my school robes I can throw on top when I get to the castle.”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t people to think you were out all night. They might get the wrong idea.”

Harry hums. “I don’t know. They might get the right idea.”

Charlie pushes him out of the room before he does something like shove Harry against the wall and snog him until he definitely misses breakfast. Harry dons his Invisibility Cloak so Charlie can return the room key to Aberforth. He keeps it on until they are away from the village and almost back to the school grounds, though he still holds Charlie’s hand the whole way.

When they get to the main gate Harry turns to Charlie and thanks him.

“You have plenty of time for that, Harry. You’re young.”

Harry looks at the ground as he scuffs his toe through the gravel. “There’s always some kind of danger and I try to not let it get to me, but sometimes I think I may not actually live that long. I want to take in as much as I can now.”

Charlie holds Harry’s face in his hands. “Listen to me. You are not going to die. You have too many people looking out for you and willing to help you. All you have to do is turn to us and ask us. We’ll always be there for you.”

Harry suddenly throws his arms around Charlie and squeezes him tightly. He can’t stop the tears from flowing down his face. Charlie rocks him side to side and rubs big circles into his back, just like Molly always does for him.

He waits until Harry is no longer hiccupping before pulling away. “You should get back,” he tells him. “You know Ron will tear up Hogwarts looking for you.”

Harry gives a watery smile, nodding as he wipes at his face with the back of his hand. “Write to me?” he says, as if he still doubts Charlie’s affections.

“Of course.” He gives a soft kiss to Harry’s forehead before nudging him through the gate. He watches until Harry takes the bend in the path that leads up to the castle. “Because I care about you more than I probably should,” Charlie whispers to himself. And that thought alone scares him more than anything.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

warning: serious angst ahead

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1995, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

“What do you mean I can’t have the weekend off?” Charlie yells.

“I mean exactly what I said,” Morgan yells back. “In case you’ve forgotten, not only do we have two pods of dragon hatchlings to tag and get reintroduced to the herd but we’re also sending a team to go retrieve that Chinese Fireball that was reported. I need all hands on deck! So, no; you can’t have the weekend off. I’m sorry.”

Charlie pulls at his hair in frustration. Harry’s letters have become increasingly worrying and he has a bad feeling about the Final Task. “I can’t just abandon him! I have to go.”

Morgan slaps him across the face. “Pull yourself together, Weasley! I know you’re concerned about your boyfriend but you have a job to do here. And you’re bloody good at your job. He’ll be okay, and when there’s less chaos here then I’ll gladly give you as much time off as you want.”

He knows she’s right but it doesn’t make it any easier. He’d much rather be at Hogwarts with Harry and his family. But since that’s not an option right now, Charlie decides to pour all of his frustration and worry into his job. He’ll focus on the hatchlings and work until he’s exhausted and then maybe he won’t lie awake at night wishing he wasn’t alone. It’s the first time in five years that Charlie has felt homesick.

Harry,

I wish I could be there for you tomorrow, but Morgan just won’t let me leave. She says they need me here- and she’s probably right- but I just can’t help feeling like I’m not where I’m supposed to be.

I know you’re more than ready for this whole thing to be over, and you only have one more task to go. You’re going to be brilliant and win that cup for Hogwarts and make everyone proud. I just know it.

My parents will be there, as will Bill (though he may spend the whole time staring at Fleur). They’re going to let me know what happens as soon as it’s all over, just like last time.

Morgan said when things slow down I can take off as much time as I want. I’m going to use that time to take you somewhere. Anywhere you want to go. You won’t have to worry about the Dursleys or anything else. You just have to make it through this.

Yours,
He starts to write ‘I love you’ so many times he loses count, but in the end he leaves the letter as is. He finds one of the sanctuary owls and sends it off to Harry. Then, he pushes down the cold feeling in his stomach and walks towards the dragon nursery.

There is a pounding on his cottage door in the middle of the night. Thinking that it’s Morgan or another one of his co-workers, Charlie reluctantly drags himself out of bed and shoves his feet into his boots. The last person he expects to find on the other side of the door is Bill. His face is ghostly white and his eyes are rimmed red like he’s been crying. Charlie’s heart sinks. “Please, no. No, no, no! Bill, please tell me he’s okay.”

“He is,” Bill says in a thin, shaky voice.

“Then what-”

“Voldemort.” Charlie is used to hearing Harry say the name by now but hearing Bill say it makes the blood in his veins run cold. “He’s back, Charlie. He’s really back. He killed Cedric- tried to kill Harry- it was in the maze- a portkey- they came back- Cedric was dead- Harry-”

“Where is he?” Charlie pleads.

“Hospital wing. Pomfrey is seeing to him now. Mum’s there with him. Ron and ‘Mione are there, too. Dad’s with Amos.” Bill starts to whimper and that gets Charlie tearing up. Together, the brothers move to hold each other. They take the chance to support each other as they both cry, but then it’s time for action.

“How did you get here?” Charlie asks.

“I apparated as far as I could, gave myself a few minutes and then apparated again. It’s bloody exhausting but I couldn’t exactly get a portkey.’’

“Think we can floo into Hogwarts if I open an international connection?”

Bill thinks for a moment before giving his wand a flourish. A large silver lion glides out and looks at him expectantly. “Go to Poppy Pomfrey,” he tells it. “Tell her to open the floo to her quarters. We’ll be coming through in ten minutes. Go.” The lion bounds through the cottage once before going straight through the wall.

Charlie stares at his brother. “You really are a Gryffindor through and through.”

“Because of the lion?” Bill says. “You’ve seen it before. Why the sudden interest?”

Charlie shrugs as he casts his own spell and a silver fox slinks around him. It moves as if to nuzzle against him before Charlie waves his hand to shoo it away. “It just seems much grander than mine, I suppose. And I don’t know how to send messages.”

“I’ll teach you.”

“Thanks.”

The brothers sink into silence as they wait for the ten minutes to be up. At exactly ten minutes, Charlie activates the floo and throws in a handful of powder. “Let’s hope this works,” he says to Bill. “Hogwarts. Hospital Wing.”
Madame Pomfrey is pacing her quarters when the floo flares green and Charlie steps out. He moves out of the way in time for Bill to walk out after him. Then, she uses her wand to seal the floo off once more. “He’s this way,” she says and leads them into the next room.

Charlie has to hold himself back from running to Harry’s bed. He bites the inside of his cheek to contain himself as he follows behind Madame Pomfrey. Even though Bill has already told him that Harry will be just fine, Charlie can’t stand the sight of Harry lying motionless in the hospital bed. A gasp slips out before he can stop it and he gains Ron’s attention.

“Charlie?” he asks, rubbing tiredly at his eyes. “What’re you doing here? I thought you couldn’t get away from work.”

“I…” Charlie doesn’t know what to tell him.

“I brought him,” Bill says, placing a comforting hand on Charlie’s shoulder. “I thought we could give you guys a break. You really should go back to your dorms and sleep.”

Ron nods and shakes Hermione’s shoulder to wake her. “Sorry I dozed off,” she says. “Oh, I didn’t know your brothers were here.”

“They just got here. They’re going to sit with Harry tonight.”

Hermione nods. “What about your mum?”

Ron turns to Bill and Charlie then. “See if you can get her to sleep in one of the spare beds. She wouldn’t listen to us earlier, but she may do it if you guys ask.”

“We’ll watch over both of them,” Bill assures him.

Ron and Hermione say goodnight and leave the hospital wing. Bill jerks his head in the direction of the mother. “I’ll take care of her. You sit with Harry.”

Charlie can do little more than bob his head and fall into the seat that Ron left open. He can hear Molly give a weak protest before letting Bill guide her to the bed on their left, but he never moves his eyes from Harry. He jumps when Bill sits down beside him. “He looks so small like this,” Charlie says with a thick feeling in his throat.

“He’s just sleeping, Char.” Charlie nods but doesn’t look up. “I’m going to go find Dad. I’m sure he needs help with the Diggorys.” Charlie nods again. “I know you’re going to ignore me, but try and get some sleep. You’ll be no good for him if you’re dead on your feet.” Bill hopes he could at least get a small chuckle out of Charlie, but he just continues to sit there and stare down at Harry. Bill sighs and heads for the doors. “I’ll see you soon, little brother.”

Charlie doesn’t know at what point he fell asleep, but he snorts awake when someone sits down next to him. “Mum? You’re supposed to be sleeping.”

“I could say the same thing to you.” Molly scoots closer and wraps one of her arms around Charlie’s shoulder.

“When can we take him home?” She sighs and Charlie has a feeling he knows exactly what that means. “Are you serious? Dumbledore can’t possibly think it’s still a good idea to send him back to those people.”
“It’s the safest place now that- not that he’s back.”

“So it’s true then?”

“The Minister won’t believe Harry’s story, but yes.”

“I’ll quit my job and-”

“You can’t, Charlie.”

“Bill did!”

“And Bill is about to start his new job at Gringotts so that he can work to have the goblins on our side. You have to stay where you are so you can do your part and gather as many people as you can.”

“You think there’s going to be another war?”

“Worst case scenario? Yes.”

“And Harry?”

“He’s going to need all of us doing everything we can so that he doesn’t carry the weight of it on his own.”

Charlie squeezes Harry’s hand tighter on one side and his mum on the other.

Harry wakes the next morning with an awful taste in his mouth. He smacks his lips and groans. Madame Pomfrey is standing next to him an instant. She offers a glass of water and says, “Dreamless Sleep has a terrible aftertaste but it does the job. How does your arm feel?”

Harry moves to pick up his left arm only to find it trapped. He looks down and recognizes the familiar mop of orange hair fanned out over it. “Uh, Charlie?” he says as he shakes his arm.

Charlie pulls his head up with a snap and looks around the room wildly. “What! Sorry!”

Harry smirks as he moves his arm around. He tells Pomfrey, “It seems to be okay. A little stiff but that may just be from Weasley sleeping on it.”

Pomfrey lifts an eyebrow in amusement, then reaches for Harry’s arm to inspect it herself. “Seems to have healed nicely. No scar. Please bend at the elbow.” Harry does as she requests. “Any pain?” He shakes his head no and she drops his arm back down. “I’m going to give you another antibiotic potion just to be sure, but everything is looking good.” She hands him a vial and Harry chokes it down, chasing it with the remaining water. Then she moves on to tend to Fleur and Viktor, whom Charlie just realizes are the other patients in the ward.

As soon as she’s gone Harry casts a Muffliato charm and asks, “When did you get here?”

“As soon as I could,” Charlie says. “Bill came to me and I thought- well, I thought the worst. This is the second-worst thing that could have happened, but I’m just so glad you’re alright.”

Harry’s eyes well up with tears. “Cedric…”

Charlie leans over as far as he can to wrap his arms around Harry. “I know. I’m so, so sorry.”
Harry scooches over on the hospital bed to make room for Charlie to sit next to him. “I’m going to give my winnings to his parents,” he says. “It’s the least I can do.”

“I’m sure you did everything you could to save him.”

“I didn’t even get the chance. Voldemort said to kill him and they did and…that was it.” He starts to shake and Charlie holds him tighter. “I saw my parents,” he says after his breathing calms back down. “It was the first time I’ve heard their voices since I was a baby.”

Charlie doesn’t know what to say so they just continue to hold each other. With a quiet voice Harry says, “They’re going to make me go back to the Durlseys’, aren’t they.”

“Harry…”

“In your last letter you said you would take me wherever I wanted to go. Please don’t let them make me go back.”

Tears escape from his eyes and fall into Harry’s hair. Charlie sniffs loudly in an attempt to keep them back, but it doesn’t work. “I would love nothing more than to do that.”

“But…”

“But…there’s no way Dumbledore will let me.”

“Because he’s made such good decisions this year and kept me sooo safe,” Harry says sarcastically.

Charlie holds on a little tighter. “I know.”

“I’ve run away before. I could do it again.”

Charlie wants to agree. He wants to grab Harry, throw him over his shoulder, go far away together, and never look back. But he thinks about the conversation he had with his mum the night before. “We all have a part to play. Mine is back in Romania, and yours is here with your family.”

Harry growls and shoves at Charlie until he moves away from him. “Leave.”

“What? I thought-”

“Just leave! You clearly don’t want to be anywhere near me, so go!”

“But-”

Harry scrabbles for his wand and points it at Charlie. “Don’t make me tell you again!”

Charlie is so confused and hurt, and he wants to stay and explain to Harry what he meant, but it’s at that moment that Ron and Hermione come running into the ward. Charlie stands up from the bed and backs away slowly. Harry is busy being smothered by his best friends, so Charlie takes the opportunity to slip out without being noticed.

Chapter End Notes

This probably isn't necessary (and feel free to skip my rant) but I feel the need to
defend Harry here. This poor kid has lived through more than I can even imagine. To
be honest, I don't know how he's still a functioning person after the basilisk and the
diary down in the Chamber of Secrets let alone the dementor attacks and the time
turner event from Prisoner of Azkaban. And now he just had to watch Voldemort get
resurrected WITH HIS OWN BLOOD and Cedric was murdered right in front of him.
Harry is a mess. And all that the adults in his life do is lie (or lie by omission) and act
like they can't help and the ones that actually WANT to help are told they can't. No
one will ever make me believe that Molly and Arthur didn't fight tooth and nail to get
custody of Harry, and it wasn't even a legal reason why they couldn't! Dumbledore just
had the theory about Lily and Petunia's blood protections and but I was never
convinced because Harry still got hurt in their care. I could go on but I'll just say he
definitely has trust issues and deep psychological trauma and even though it's not
Charlie's fault, Harry's actions are completely justified.

That being said... it gets better, I promise.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

I'm going out of town (family reunion, big festival, lots of driving) but I didn't want to leave you guys on that cliffhanger!

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1995, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie spends the summer months actively avoiding his family. Molly sends him letters asking how he’s doing and when he’ll be visiting next. He responds to each one saying that he’s gotten busier and won’t be able to make the trip any time soon. Bill also writes, giving updates on his new job and his wooing of Fleur Delacour. He can tell that Bill wants to ask questions, but knows that Charlie will just find a way to not answer them. Harry sends him nothing.

He writes to Harry once, just after the end of the school term, when it all went to hell. Charlie says how sorry he is for not being able to fulfill his promise of taking Harry away from the Dursleys. He says how sorry he is for making Harry feel abandoned. He says he how he wishes he could be there for him during Cedric’s funeral. How he wants to hold Harry and make it all better. He pours his heart out until he feels raw and gaping. His owl comes back carrying nothing. He doesn’t write to Harry again.

On July 31st Charlie tells Morgan he’s sick and can’t work. She looks at him like she knows he’s lying, but lets him take the day off anyway. He pulls down an old bottle of elfin wine he was gifted a few years back and drinks the entire bottle. That gives him just enough courage to be reckless. He sends Harry the gift he’d bought with the intention of giving it to him at the end of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Charlie wraps the book entitled So Ewe Want To Bee An Animagus? and sends it off with one of the sanctuary’s owls. When he gets back to his cottage, he decides he’s still too sober to deal with his own thoughts. A bottle of firewhisky fixes that right up. He has the worst hangover the next day, but Morgan makes him work anyway (though she is nice enough to give him patrol duty so that he doesn’t have to be around other people).

He’s still feeling bad for himself a few days later when Errol taps on his window. Figuring it’s another letter from his mum, Charlie isn’t too keen on reading it. He unties it from Errol’s leg and tosses it on the bench in his kitchen. It isn’t until his free afternoon the next day that he remembers it setting there and decides he’s put off reading it for long enough.

Charlie,

Harry and his cousin were attacked by two dementors in Little Whinging. Harry fought them off, but now he might get expelled for doing underage magic and exposing magic to muggles. Dumbledore is making sure he will get a proper hearing. I don’t know the date yet but will let you know as soon as I do. Our friends will be moving him to another place soon. If you plan on coming in, send word to your mother or me before you do. We won’t be at the Burrow. Maybe it’s the additional time I’ve
been spending with Alastor, but I have the strangest urge to tell you to have constant vigilance.

Arthur

Charlie just can’t believe it. If he had taken Harry somewhere else, none of this would have happened. But what were dementors doing in Little Whinging anyway? And how does Harry always seem to find himself in these unbelievable situations? Charlie doesn’t think that they would actually expel someone from Hogwarts for saving his cousin from a dementor, but Fudge didn’t believe Harry when he said You-Know-Who was back so evidently the man has no sense.

He considers asking Morgan for more time off, but ultimately decides against it. Harry made it abundantly clear that he doesn’t want Charlie around anymore, and it’s not like there’s anything he could do to help at this point. He’d just be in the way. Besides, he’s starting to make progress recruiting a small group and witches and wizards for the Order. He takes a day before he sends his reply to Bill instead of their dad.

Bill,

They’re not really going to expel him for that, right? He was just defending himself.

I don’t think I’m going to make it in. Our friends may be growing in number soon and I don’t want to lose those connections.

Look out for Harry, will you? I know he wants nothing to do with me, but I still care about him. This whole thing seems like just the excuse he needs to give up on everything.

Sorry I haven’t written more. It’s just been tough.

Charlie

Charlie,

They tried to screw him over! They changed the time and place of his hearing, but Dumbledore got word of it just in time and was still able to speak on his behalf. Harry was cleared of all charges and he’ll be with us at headquarters until school starts. Hermione is here, too.

I know there’s no point is asking if you want to come for a visit. Or if you want to talk about what happened. Or if you want me to give you some advice. But I feel the need to do so regardless. I’m your big brother and it’s my job to be there for you.

If it changes your mind at all, Harry seems equally as miserable (and I really don’t think it has anything to do with the magic or the hearing). He keeps hiding out and refusing to talk to anyone other than Padfoot.

Try not to wallow too deeply in your self-loathing.

Bill

Bill,
You were right; there was no point in asking.

I will wallow as I please.

Charlie

Charlie,

Seriously? That was worth sending an owl all this way?

At least I have good news to return to you. Hermione and Ron have been chosen as Prefects. Mum is beside herself having four Prefects (five, if in the future Ron decides to man up and marry that girl) in the family now, though I wouldn’t bring that up with Fred and George.

And while I don’t think I’m making much progress with the goblins at work, I’m definitely making progress with Fleur. We have another date this weekend. I’m taking her to a fancy dinner and dancing place. I think it might be time for me to think about officially courting her.

Are you sure you won’t rethink making the trip down here?

Bill

YOU ARE GOING TO COURT FLEUR AND YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD TELL ME IN A LETTER? HAVE YOU GONE MAD IN YOUR OLD AGE AND FORGOTTEN THE PACT WE MADE? YOU ARE DEAD TO ME, WILLIAM!

Charlie,

Was the howler completely necessary? And we made that pact as children! Did you really think we were going to meet sisters and get married at some grand double wedding? It sounds like something out of those novels written for bored housewives. And you don’t even like women!

I thought you of all people would be happy for me.

Bill

Dear William,

I regret to inform you that your letter could not be delivered as intended due to the fact that you no longer have a relationship with anyone at this location. Please refrain from sending further post in this manner.

Regretfully,

Charles Weasley

Charlie is too busy dancing around his cottage to Celestina Warbeck (a guilty pleasure that carries over from his childhood, due to his spending so much time with Molly) to notice his fireplace flare green, signaling an incoming guest. That’s the excuse he gives, at least, when he spins around and lets out an otherworldly shriek upon seeing someone standing there.
“Bloody hell, Bill!” Charlie clutches at his chest and wills his heart to stop pounding.

His brother laughs so hard he has to sit down on the worn sofa to catch his breath. “You probably won’t believe me,” he says once he’s calmed down, “but I really didn’t mean to scare you like that. Though I am glad that you still have your floo set up for international travel. But don’t get me distracted! I’m quite sore. I told you something that I had barely even admitted to myself. I mean, I think I’m in love with the woman I’m going to spend the rest of my life with and you denounce our brotherhood?”

Charlie scrubs at his face and grumbles, “I’m not pissed enough for this.”

That makes Bill give a worried glance around the cottage. He doesn’t see an incriminating pile of liquor bottles of anything, but he’s concerned nonetheless. “Is that something that’s been happening a lot lately?”

Charlie joins him on the sofa with a sigh. “Less than I’d like, but more than I’d admit to.” Bill gives a pained expression and opens his mouth, but Charlie cuts him off before he can say anything else. “I promise I’m fine. Or, well, no I’m not, but I will be. It was worse at first. Now it’s just sort of…a dull ache.”

“That doesn’t exactly sound better, Char.”

The brothers sit together in a heavily weighted silence before Charlie offers another loud sigh. He rolls his head around dramatically to look at Bill. “So. Fleur.”

A soppy grin spreads across his face. “Yeah. Fleur. She’s bloody amazing.”

“That doesn’t exactly sound better, Char.”

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“That doesn’t exactly sound better, Char.”

The brothers sit together in a heavily weighted silence before Charlie offers another loud sigh. He rolls his head around dramatically to look at Bill. “So. Fleur.”

A soppy grin spreads across his face. “Yeah. Fleur. She’s bloody amazing.”
After his chuckles have subsided Charlie tells him, “If you’re going to be courting Fleur, then you’re going to need my help.”

“Is that so?”

“Oh, yes. You’re basically helpless in the ways of love. I think you will need to come here at least once a week so that we can talk about it.”

Bill knows what he’s doing, but he’s so glad that Charlie is showing interest in them spending time together that he doesn’t care. “Once a week, huh? I think I could find the time for that.”

“Only because you so desperately need me.”

“Of course.”

“Not because I’m terribly lonely and I miss you.”

“That doesn’t sound like the Charlie I know.”

“Just so long as you don’t tell Mum and Dad about this.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Charlie surprises Bill by jumping the distance between them on the sofa and hugging him. “Thank you,” he whispers into Bill’s ear before pulling away. “Now go away so that I can get to sleep. Some of us have important jobs that require us to be alert and rested.”

Bill rolls his eyes and bids him goodnight before going back through the floo. Charlie watches the green flames die before looking around his cottage and wondering what to do with himself. Contrary to what he told Bill, he doesn’t have to work the next day. He decides to take the opportunity to clean the place from top to bottom. Using a combination of magic and old-fashioned elbow grease, the place is sparkling in no time.

Only one cupboard drawer remains untouched. Charlie knows that the narrow drawer holds every letter Harry has ever sent him, a dozen letters he’s written to Harry in the last five months but never sent off, and the picture of Harry and Parvati from the Yule Ball. He just can’t find it in himself to open the drawer, let alone dispose of its contents. Charlie decides it’s a problem best left for another day.

Chapter End Notes

Funny story for any of you who watch Supernatural. I was trying to find a tag for 'alcohol as coping mechanism' and what popped up was 'Winchester Coping Mechanism' which I almost added because same thing right? (I laughed until I realized how sad that is.)
Chapter Notes

It was such a relaxing weekend! And I really wasn't going to update until tomorrow, but then I saw how short this chapter was. (It probably could be attached to the next one but I think I originally separated them because of the change in setting? Who knows what I was thinking.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1995, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Bill is sleeping on Charlie’s sofa after one of his visits runs longer than intended, when he’s awoken by an incessant owl tapping at the cottage window. Bill looks at his still-sleeping brother and shakes his head in amusement. He opens the window to let the owl in and is more than a little surprised to see his own name on the parchment.

“CHARLIE!!!”

Charlie is on his feet in an instant. He grabs his wand and stumbles over to the where Bill is standing. The sight he finds shakes him to his core. Bill looks worse than when he showed up at his door after the Tri-Wizard Tournament. “Bill,” he says cautiously, “I want you to hand me whatever that is. Slowly.” Bill does as asked, shaking as he goes. Charlie takes the parchment and reads:

Bill,

Your dad has been attacked. He’s already been taken to St. Mungos, and your mum is on her way to pick up the kids at Hogwarts. I’m still not sure about the details, but I was told he would be dead if not for Harry. Do you think maybe you could talk Charlie into coming in? I know he’s busy with his dragons, but word around headquarters is you’ve been spending time with him lately.

I’ll see you soon,

Tonks

By the time he’s finished reading, Bill has snapped out of it and is pacing in front of the fireplace. Charlie throws a few spare sets of clothes into an empty rucksack and joins him. They floo directly into the hospital and ask the first mediwitch they see where they can find their dad.

Arthur is in rough shape when they get to his room, but he promises them that just seeing them there is lifting his spirits. They sit together until Molly and the kids burst into the room, followed behind by Tonks and Moody. Tonks grabs Charlie and pulls him into a quick hug. “We have so much to talk about,” she whispers into his ear before taking her post at the door. Bill and Charlie go out to sit in the small waiting area at the end of the corridor.

It’s already the early hours of the morning when Arthur’s healers kick everyone out. Moody pulls Charlie aside and tells him, “I’m going to apparate you to our headquarters. Don’t give me that
look, boy. It’s under a Fidelius and you won’t be getting there on your own.”

Charlie looks at Bill for some backup, but finds only amusement. “Fine,” he concedes.

“It ain’t a party for me either, boy, so get over it.” And with that, Moody snatches his arm and they twist away.

Chapter End Notes

More tomorrow, I promise :)
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1995, 12 Grimmauld Place

“So, what do you think?” Bill asks once he and Charlie are settled into one of the dusty, old bedrooms.

Charlie looks around with a grimace. “This is the headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix? It’s dreadful. And that’s coming from someone who lives in a two-room cottage on a dragon sanctuary.”

Bill huffs out a laugh. “I forgot you’ve always been a germaphobe. We’ve all been doing our part and cleaning out rooms when we have the time. Unfortunately, since the kids have gone back to Hogwarts there’s been significantly less of us with spare time. Just be thankful I transfigured a second bed in here for you.” Bill starts changing out of his trousers and into a pair of pajamas.

“Ah,” Charlie says while still looking mildly disgusted. “I have to write my boss and tell her what’s going on so she doesn’t think I’m just skiving off work. Is it safe to send an owl from here?”

“How do you think I send post to you?” Bill says incredulously. “Of course it’s safe. Pig and Hedwig are both here by now I’m sure, so just take your pick.”

Charlie steps out of the bedroom and as soon as the door closes he realizes he has no idea where he would find the owls, let alone parchment and a quill. He doesn’t want to just start opening doors so he wanders downstairs. He finds the kitchen, but it’s not empty. The person he’s been equal parts hoping and dreading to talk to is sitting at the long table with an oversized mug of tea in front of him.

“Oh,” Charlie says softly.

Harry doesn’t even turn around. “It was bound to happen sooner or later.”

“I guess. I just figured I…I don’t know.”

“Do you need something? Or is this just more of our shared inability to relax?”

“I need to tell Morgan where I am. You wouldn’t happen to know where I can find some parchment?”

Harry still doesn’t turn around. “The Library has a desk that probably has what you need. Go up one floor and it’s on your right.”

“Cheers.” Charlie turns around to leave but stops himself and swivels back on the balls of his feet. “Is it going to be like this forever?” he asks Harry’s back.

“I don’t know about ‘forever’ but this is the most I can give right now.” Harry stops talking so Charlie thinks that’s it but then Harry says, “Charlie?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for the book.”
“Oh. Y-you’re welcome.” Charlie waits a moment, just to be sure that Harry is well and truly done talking this time, but the room remains quiet. “Good night,” he all but whispers.

Morgan,

You read the Daily Prophet so I’m sure you’ll know soon enough, but my dad was attacked last night. I’m spending a few days with him and my family.

Thanks for understanding,

Charlie

Charlie,

How much of a tyrant do you think I am? You can have off through the first of the year. I’ll find someone to cover your shifts. Just be there for him.

Morgan

12 Grimmauld Place is strange and living there is an adventure all on its own. Charlie takes to wandering the halls, cleaning as he goes. He opens doors and cringes at the state of disrepair that he finds. The others come in and out helping him paint walls, clean carpets and upholstery, and give the whole place a fresh start. Sirius keeps saying that it’s unnecessary (it’s obvious he has no desire to do the work himself), but Charlie catches him looking at the now-clean rooms with approval.

Charlie has minimal interaction with Harry:

“Can you pass the pepper?” “Sure.”
“Is Bill back yet?” “He stopped by, but then left again.”
“Has Molly made anything for tea?” “No. We’re on our own today.”
“Doing alright?” “As good as can be expected.”

Charlie is starting to think things will never stop being tense and awkward, until the night that he finds the Black Family Tapestry. He has his wand pulled back and is about to cast a strong cleaning charm when Sirius steps in and tells him to stop. “This tapestry has so many protective charms woven in, I wouldn’t dare cast anything at it.”

“I was just trying to clean up these dark spots. Any idea what happened?”

Sirius scowls, but not at Charlie. He runs his fingers along the place where his picture once sat. “Oh, I know exactly what happened. My dear mother took pride in blasting off anyone whom she felt no longer deserved to be part of the Black Family.”

“Geeze, Sirius, I’m sorry.”

“Save your breath. I couldn’t have been prouder to be stricken from the tapestry. The Potters took me in- treated me as one of their own- and I never looked back.”

“The Potters?”

“Yes, you know, the family of the boy with the unruly mop of hair and the round glasses who is currently hiding out in my childhood bedroom?”
Charlie levels a glare at Sirius that could melt ice. Sirius only laughs, which makes Charlie want to scream. “Thanks for the satisfying conversation,” Charlie bites out sarcastically. “I’m going to go find another room to clean.”

“Wait.” Sirius stops him before he can run away. “Can I talk to you frankly about Harry?”

Charlie folds his arm and juts out his jaw defiantly. “I don’t know, can you?”

He sighs. “Alright, I deserve that. I just think you should know that Harry told me about everything.”

Charlie’s palms start to sweat and he fights the urge to wipe them on his pants. He shoots for unaffected when he says, “It’s good he has someone he trusts.”

“Sure, yes, of course, but I want you to understand that he told me everything.”

“What are you on about, Sirius?”

“Cedric’s death was hard on him; harder than he likes to let on. He’s also getting visions that we’re pretty sure are straight from You-Know-Who. Add to that, he’s serving abusive detentions from Umbridge for doing little more than breathing… let’s just say he doesn’t have the time to process his feelings. That’s a luxury he can’t afford.”

Charlie doesn’t know the details of Umbridge’s detentions, though the kids have not stopped complaining about her since they’ve been back. He decides to corner Ron later and ask him about what she’s been doing to Harry. But for now, he just shrugs. “Is there a reason you think I need to know this?”

“Don’t play dumb. It’s not a good look on you. Just, go easy on him.” Then Sirius claps him on the shoulder and leaves Charlie to his thoughts and his cleaning.

Christmas is subdued. There are a few presents and a wonderful meal, but the weight of uncertainty of what is to come dampens the mood. He doesn’t even bother to celebrate his birthday. The night before the kids go back to Hogwarts, Charlie’s inability to relax (as Harry calls it) causes him to wander the old house. He wants to say he’s surprised to find Harry in the kitchen, but he isn’t that just his luck?

Harry looks up at Charlie and slides over a second cup of tea. Charlie walks into the room and picks up the still-warm cup. “Stasis charms,” Harry says with a hint of wonder. “Brilliant.”

Charlie huffs a single laugh and hesitantly sits down across from him. “So,” he says with no idea where to continue.


“Oh?” This is safe territory. Books. But then Charlie remembers that he gave it to Harry for his birthday in July. “D-did you…like it?”

“Not exactly a book you read for enjoyment, but it was…enlightening.”

“Do you think you’ll train to be an Animagi?”

“Maybe once things calm down.” Harry winces at his own words. He had no intention of bringing up everything that’s going on.
“Ah, well, that’s probably for the best, I suppose.”

“Charlie.” Harry looks at him directly for what feels like the first time in a long time. “I just want to apologize for the way I treated you. You never deserved that.”

“No, Harry, really. It’s my fault. I did the same thing the first time we met, remember? I promised you something I never had the ability to follow through on and I’m sorry.”

Harry looks back down into his teacup, as though he can read the leaves like in Trelawney’s class. Charlie mentally kicks himself for bringing their conversation to a grinding halt. They sit there, with only the sound of them sipping tea, until a bang from somewhere in the house gets their attention. “That sounds like it came from the room I’m sharing with Ron. I better get back up there.”

Charlie can feel Harry slipping through his fingers but he doesn’t know what to do to stop it from happening. “Wait!” he shouts when Harry is almost to the stairs. Harry walks back into the kitchen and looks at him expectantly. “Goodnight,” Charlie says for lack of anything better coming to mind.

Harry gives a small smile, but it’s filled with so much sadness that it breaks Charlie’s heart to look at him. “Have a good sleep,” Harry says and then leaves him alone in the cold kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure where I got "Charlie doesn't like germs" from, but I know at least from a literary perspective I like characters that have traits that are surprising or opposite from what you might expect. So while big, tough, dragon handler Charlie doesn't care about getting messy while he's working with a Chinese Fireball, he'll definitely scrub himself and his clothes as soon as he's off the clock. [I think that's why I like Arthur Weasley in the books so much because he's all soft and sweet with his wife and kids, and he loves Muggle things, and he really cares about his job...but he jumped Lucius Malfoy and started punching him IN PUBLIC!!! It was the last thing you'd expect from him.]
This one was fun to write (not the angst, but the later parts). I hope you like it!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary**

There is a small dining hall on the sanctuary where the staff can come to eat meals if they want. There is no schedule for who cooks what and when, but somehow it just works out that there is always food enough to go around. After coming back from his holiday in London, Charlie starts going to more group meals with his co-workers. His self-imposed isolation is no longer fulfilling in the way it had once been. Their newest rotation of student recruits doesn’t think anything of it, but the veteran employees stare at Charlie strangely for the first few weeks. But by mid-February it seems the novelty has worn off, as Charlie is now a daily participant in at least one shared meal.

Charlie wakes up one morning with a craving for Belgian Waffles. It’s a Sunday and he isn’t scheduled to work, so he gets out of bed earlier than he might otherwise and makes his way down to the dining hall. He puts on one of the cheeky aprons that hang on a hook in the kitchen. This one is neon pink and says *Ask Me About My Hot Buns.*

He clanks around the bright kitchen, getting out what he needs. Flour, eggs, sugar, butter, vanilla, start fire on the hob, set waffle press on hob to preheat. Cooking is procedural and predictable and Charlie has taken to it like a fish to water. It has the added benefit of giving him something else to focus his time and energy on.

He turns on the wireless and hums along to a peppy pop song while he waits. Once the waffle press is hot Charlie starts the process of pouring the batter, closing the press, flipping the press, waiting two minutes, opening the press, and removing the finished waffle. Pour, close, flip, wait, open, remove, repeat. He refreshes his warming charms every so often, keeping an ear open for people in the dining hall.

Soon enough, the sound of quiet morning chatter makes its way into the kitchen. Charlie levitates the overflowing platter of waffles and sends them into the dining hall, following quickly behind with the syrup, cream, and fresh fruit. There is a cheer when he sets everything down on the table and Charlie grins. This is always the best part, when people eat and enjoy his food. He thinks he finally understands why his mum doesn’t mind cooking for large crowds all the time.

He puts two waffles on his own plate and takes a seat across from Morgan. She is reading the Daily Prophet, just like she always does, and doesn’t give more than a grunt when he says good morning. It’s obvious when she smells the waffles, though. She drops the newspaper onto the table and inhales, closing her eyes as a smile creeps its way onto her face. “I don’t know how we survived before you started cooking here. I don’t know what changed your mind, Weasley, but I’m bloody glad it did.”

Morgan takes a waffle on her plate and piles it high with berries. She adds a healthy dollop of cream and practically drowns it all in syrup. She shovels a huge bite into her mouth and moans, making more than one person at the table blush. “Sorry,” she says around another bite, “this is just
so good.”

Charlie lets the compliment warm him as he digs into his own plate. Morgan is in the middle of a joke about a wizard and a herd of goats when Charlie’s fork clatters the stone floor.

“Yeah, sure, just throw that wherever!” Morgan teases, causing the whole table to laugh. But she gets worried when she sees the way his face has gone pale. Quieter, so that only Charlie can hear, she says, “Oi. You alright?”

He is staring at the Daily Prophet’s ‘Lifestyle’ section. He knows from his mum and sister that it should really be called the ‘Gossip’ section, so he never to look at it too closely before. But today, staring right at him from the center of the page, is Harry Potter. Ignoring Morgan’s question, he grabs the paper up from the table. “Charlie?” she asks, growing more concerned by the minute.

“Can I have this?” he asks with wide eyes.

“Sure.”

The word has barely left her lips when Charlie clutches the Prophet to his chest and sprints out of the dining hall. He runs the whole way back to his cottage, not even noticing the way his chest heaves with the effort. Once inside he locks and wards his door as well as turns off the connection to his floo. He sits on his sofa and holds the newspaper in his lap. He doesn’t have to read it. He can burn it and pretend like he never saw the picture. He can turn it into an origami bird or something and give it to Morgan, playing off the whole thing as a joke. But he’s not a wimp. He can do this. It’s just a silly gossip article. Surely he can read it and not be affected.

Charlie unfolds the Daily Prophet and holds it out at arm’s length. The title makes him roll his eyes, but the further he reads the more he clenches his teeth.

Is the Boy-Who-Lived the Boy-Who-Steals-Girlfriends?

Harry Potter was seen yesterday at Madam Puddifoot’s Tea Shop (conveniently located in Hogsmeade, Scotland) on what appeared to be a date with none other than Cho Chang, girlfriend of recently deceased Cedric Diggory. Potter and Diggory seemed chummy last year during the Triwizard Tournament. Potter claimed that You-Know-Who was to be blamed for Diggory’s death, but there were no witnesses to verify his story. Was this his plan all along? Maybe he was just using Diggory as a way to get closer to Miss Chang. For all of those ladies out there whose hearts are breaking right now just knowing that the Boy-Who-Lived is taken, don’t send those howlers just yet! According to another patron of Madam Pudifoot’s, it was reported that the date was not going well. Potter was seen making Miss Chang cry on more than one occasion and she fled the shop without him. But we were sent a photo from another source, and their kiss looked plenty heated to us (see above photograph). So the real question is, what made Miss Chang run out on Potter? Did she discover his dastardly plan? Or is Potter just that awful?

Charlie looks at the moving picture. He looks at the way Harry’s eyes flutter closed as he leans in to kiss Cho- the same way they did when he kissed Charlie- and then at the shocked look on his face as Cho runs away from him. Charlie looks at the tacky decorations of Madam Pudifoot’s that they made fun of when they were in Hogsmeade together. Harry had said that he never wanted to set foot in there, but maybe he just didn’t want to set foot in there with him.

He watches Harry kiss Cho over and over again until he starts to see white spots in front of his eyes. The next thing he knows, there is a shooting pain going through his left hand and up his arm.
Charlie blinks to focus and finds that he’s punched his hand through the wall next to his sofa. He tries to uncurl his fingers but he can’t without nearly fainting from the pain. So, broken then. He casts a quick reparo on the wall (clumsily holding the wand in his right hand) and then weighs his options. He could go to the first aid station on the sanctuary, but he knows the injury will be reported to Morgan. He could go to the healer in the nearest wizarding village, but it’s a weekend and he feels bad making someone come in on their day off. He decides that flooing into St. Mungos will be best. He opens his floo to international travel and throws in the powder. “St. Mungos. Patient Admission.”

An hour later he’s lying in a bed singing *A Cauldron of Hot, Strong Love* by Celestina Warbeck, loopy from the pain potions. There’s a light knock on his hospital room door and someone walks in. “Oh my gosh it’s Bill! Oi! Jennifer! Look who’s here! It’s my brother Billiam!”

The mediwitch who escorted Bill into the room gives a light laugh. “Yes, Mr. Weasley. You told me to fire call him for you.”

“Aren’t you just the sweetest thing?” Charlie says with a blissed-out smile on his face. “Bill! Have you met Jennifer? She’s the sweetest thing! It’s too bad I don’t fancy birds or I’d ask her to marry me!”

“Ha-ha-ha,” Bill says nervously, not really laughing at all. “What have you gotten yourself into, little brother?”

“Not so little,” Charlie says seriously. His eyes are wide and smile is gone, but only for a moment. Then the goofy grin is back and he’s starting to giggle. “There’s a lady in the room. We shouldn’t be talking about-” he leans in and says in a stage whisper that’s not a whisper at all, “-our willies!”

Bill groans and looks at the mediwitch with pleading eyes. She backs out of the room quickly with a flimsy excuse, and Bill has never been so thankful. Charlie has already said enough to keep her on top of the gossip-pool for a week. He walks over to where Charlie is now giggling furiously while hanging half off the bed.

“Hey there buddy,” Bill says as he sits on the floor to get eye-level with his brother. “Want to tell me what happened?” Charlie shakes his head and pouts. “Please? Come on…we’re brothers. We tell each other everything.”

Charlie suddenly sits up in the bed. “You’ll hate me.”

Bill unfolds himself and moves to sit across from him. “Impossible. I could never hate you.”

“Even if it was really stupid?”

“Fred and George do stupid stuff all the time, and I have never once hated them.”

“I punched a wall,” he says with no preamble. Bill’s eyebrows fly up into his fringe. Thankfully, Charlie doesn’t seem to notice as he’s too busy fiddling with the blanket covering his legs.

“Was there a reason why you punched the wall? Or were you just trying to prove that you were the toughest dragon handler in Romania?”

“Pfft- I’m the toughest dragon handler in the world.”

“And you avoided the question. Tell me why.” Charlie puts his face into his hands and makes an awful whining noise that would be more appropriate coming out of a dying kneazle. Bill puts a
hand on Charlie’s leg in an attempt to comfort him. “Come on. I already promised I wouldn’t hate you. Just tell me. I know it’s hard but if you tell me then I can help you and then it won’t seem so bad.”

Charlie slowly lifts his head. “I saw Harry in the Prophet.”

“The daily Prophet is pure rubbish. Don’t believe anything it says!

He shakes his head so profusely he gets dizzy and has to lay down again, this time with his head pillowed on Bill’s legs. “There was a picture. It was real. Every awful word. He was on a date with some girl- a Hogwarts student that’s his age, and isn’t that just the worst part?- and they were kissing and it was terrible.”

Bill runs his fingers through Charlie’s hair. “I’m so sorry, Char. I thought things were going better?”

“They weeeerrrrreeee!!!” he whines, rolling until he’s hardly on the bed at all. “I’ve been socializing at work. I’ve been cooking. Did you know I’m good at cooking, Billiam? I guess all those years with mum made something sink in to my thick head after all.”

“That’s great! I’m glad.”

“But then there he was; right there on the newspaper page. Mocking me.”

“That may be a bit of an exaggeration.”

“No, no, no, no, no! It’s an under exaggeration if anything. I should have flung myself off the top of the nearest building.”

“Charlie!”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean that. Don’t worry, Billiam. I have no desire to off myself.”

“That’s good to hear. And please stop calling me Billiam.”

“Isn’t that Ronnie’s middle name?”

“That’s ‘Billius’.”

Charlie snorts. “The poor sod. He sure has the chips stacked against him between that nose, those freckles, and that name.”

“You literally have the same nose and freckles.”

“But my name is Charles Gideon Weasley. Men don’t hear that name and laugh. They hear it and quiver in their pants.”

“Ew, stop.”

Charlie dissolves into another fit of laughter. When he calms down he sits back up and fixes Bill with a serious expression. “I don’t want to go back home just yet.”

“Well that’s good, since I’m taking you back to headquarters for the night.”

“Yay!” Charlie cheers.
“I’m going to go out on a limb and guess that since you came all the way here to get a broken hand fixed, your boss has no idea what’s happened.”

“I knew she would be mad.”

Bill sighs for what feels like the hundredth time since he walked into his brother’s hospital room. “I’ll send an owl and let her know what happened. Nope! I don’t care how many sad faces you make. You’re not getting out of this one. You’ll have to own up to what you did.”

Bill helps Charlie stand and walks him over to the patient discharge desk. He signs all the forms that Charlie is unable to because of his bandaged hand, and guides him to the nearest floo. They haven’t traveled through the floo system together since they were little kids, and it’s a tight squeeze, but Charlie has never been more grateful for his brother than he is right now. Bill waves off the questions that everyone has when they step out at 12 Grimmauld Place. He thinks about putting Charlie in one of the spare bedrooms, but he wants to keep an eye on him so he puts him in his own bed (again, sharing a space they haven’t since they were small).

Charlie wakes up the next morning with a groan. He stretches out and that’s when he feels the pain. It’s so strong that a wave of nausea hits him. He jumps out of bed and moves to run to the toilet when he realizes that he’s not in his cottage. The last 24 hours comes rushing back at him in an embarrassing series of flashbacks. He bends over and vomits all over the wooden floorboards and his own two feet.

“So help me, Charlie, if there is even a speck of sick left on that floor I will end you,” Bill grumbles from the bed.

Charlie reaches for his wand with his left hand, but then has to switch it to his right before he can vanish the mess. He scourgifies the floor, then does the same to the trousers he wore yesterday and even his own skin, but he still feels disgusting so he chooses to take a bath. The pipes clang and he has to keep casting warming charms, but an hour later Charlie feels much more human than he did when he woke up.

He walks back to Bill’s room but his brother is gone. He rifles through Bill’s wardrobe to find something that might fit him. He ends up with a pair of drawstring sweatpants (that he has to roll up at the ankle) and an old shirt that has stretched out with age (that he just manages to fit over his broad chest and shoulders). Charlie has never been so glad that socks fit everyone, regardless of body shape.

The walk down to the kitchen is quick, now that he knows the way, and Charlie just wants a cup of strong coffee. An overly-amused Tonks is sitting at the kitchen table waiting for him. “Wotcher! I heard you clomping around up there and knew you’d be down soon enough.” She slides a plate of pastries his way. “Your mum makes the best sweets.”

Charlie thanks her, taking a chocolate croissant with him as he starts flinging open cupboards looking for coffee grounds. It takes him four tries before he finds them. It isn’t until he takes a huge gulp of his hot beverage that he finally relaxes. He plops down across from Tonks with a sigh. “Anyone else around?” he asks.

“Nope! Just me. And you.” She steals the other half of his croissant, and Charlie doesn’t blink or try to stop her. He just reaches for a sugar glazed fritter and keeps on as if nothing happened. “Wow. I guess there’s some truth to the saying ‘some things never change’. For a moment it felt like we were back in the Great Hall!”
Charlie squeezes his eyes shut and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Please don’t mention Hogwarts.”

“Aw, what happened to the Charlie who wanted to live there? Or does this have more to do with a certain Boy-Who-Lived than it does that ol’ castle?”

He moves to thump his head on the table but thinks better of it, remembering the way he got sick earlier. He flips Tonks two fingers instead.

She just laughs. “Come on! You came to me back in fifth year when you were sure there was something wrong because you got a chubbie during Quidditch practice. You’re already ahead now because there’s nothing more embarrassing than that!”

“Oh gods! Why would you bring that up? And stop making it sound like I got hard because of Quidditch! It was because of the locker rooms after Quidditch practice.”

“Whatever makes you feel better. Now, spill.”

And spill Charlie does. He tells her everything from last year to last night. He finishes by holding up his purpled left hand.

“Well, I have good news for you. Harry is most definitely not in love with this girl. I think he’s just trying to fit in and be normal.”

That word pulls up a memory in the back of Charlie’s mind. “He’s mentioned that before- his desire to just be like everyone else.”

Tonks nods sagely. “And what’s more normal than a heteronormative dating ritual like tea at Madam Pudifoot’s?”

“That place has not changed,” Charlie says with a scowl. “I still can’t believe you made it the whole night and won that bet.”

“Oh, yee of little faith. You underestimated me then and you underestimate me still.” They sit together in companionable silence, save for the sound of them eating pastries. When the plate is empty Tonks asks, “What are your plans?”

“I think I’m going to take more pain potion and then get in a short nap. Then, I have to go back and face my boggarts.”

“Your strong, Charlie. If anyone can make it through this, it’s you.”

“If only I was strong enough to not get myself into these problems in the first place.”

“Eh. That sounds like a boring way to live.”

Charlie smiles at his friend. “Never change, Tonks.”

And because she loves to give him a hard time, Tonks deliberately changes her facial features to resemble a duck.

Chapter End Notes
So I know that was super cliche with Charlie being "high" on meds but like I said at the beginning, it was fun to write.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

This chapter gave me so much trouble. For a while it was one chapter, then two, then three, then one again. There are new people- some important, some not- and a lot happens. Just stick with me.

This takes place roughly from mid-February through late-April for beginning and middle, and the letters at the end go through May (if you care or are following along with the canon that closely).

1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

After Charlie’s hand heals, Morgan pulls him from field work and reassigns him to training. She wants him to shadow one of the instructors. “I think this will be good for you,” she tells him. “You’re good at what you do, but I also think you could be good at teaching. You’ll be working with Tamsin Bleu.”

On the day he is supposed to report to his new post, Charlie wanders the corridors of the training facility looking for his new boss. This building wasn’t there yet when he took his courses. He studied in empty cottages, outdoor amphitheaters, and open fields. He’s not one of those people who complains that “the old way of doing things is always better,” but the thought crosses his mind as he twists and turns through the maze of corridors in the new building.

He passes people who look vaguely familiar, but he doesn’t know anyone by name. He may not have been very social until lately, but at least he knew the people he worked with. Frustrated with not being able to find Tamsin’s office- and worried that he’s going to be late on his first day- he stops someone and asks where to go. They give Charlie directions and he follows them to a bright purple door with the words ‘Bleu’s Bureau’ written in glittery silver paint. He thinks the design is something Ginny would have liked when she was little.

Charlie puts his fist up to knock on the door but it opens before he even has the chance. “Hiya! You must be Charlie!” A small woman with an American accent and polka-dotted robes shoves her hand out. He takes it and says hello. “It sure is nice to meet ya! Come on in!”

He wants to ask if she’s going to yell everything she says, but decides to ask a more polite question instead. “I worked with an American a few years back. Did you go to Ilvermorny too?”

“I’m not American, though that’s a common misconception. I’m Canadian! And I was all set to go to Ilvermorny until my application for international study was accepted by Castelobruxo. I’m so glad my dad pushed for them because they better prepare their students for the field of Magizoology which, as you can imagine, is what I was focused on! Coffee?” Charlie waves his head no, so she keeps right on talking. “Okay! Now let’s talk about what exactly I do around here!”

By the time Tamsin is done giving an overview of her daily duties and responsibilities, Charlie’s head in spinning. “I don’t remember this being so involved from the student side of things,” he says, overwhelmed.
Tamsin gives a loud, deep laugh (deeper than her small size would suggest she’s capable of) and says, “I get that! I’ve been teaching for so long that sometimes I forget what it must seem like to someone on the outside. Not that you’ll be on the outside for long! None of my courses meet on Tuesdays, so your first official day will be tomorrow! Any questions?”

Charlie isn’t sure what will take longer to get used to: The new job placement or the speed at which Tamsin talks. “No questions right now, though I’m sure I’ll have plenty tomorrow.”

She laughs again. “I have no doubt about that. Well, take the time today to get the lay of the land! I use Lecture Hall C for everything except my genetic theory course. That’s in Laboratory 2. This is going to be awesome; I just know it! I’ll see you bright and early tomorrow!”

And with that, Tamsin jumps up from her seat and opens the purple door for Charlie. He thanks her for being so welcoming and shakes her hand once more. Then he heads over to the dining hall for lunch, where he hopes someone has already started cooking.

Charlie’s first day in the training facility goes well enough. He meets Tamsin in the morning (“bright and early,” she keeps saying) and she walks him down to Lecture Hall C. She explains to the recruits that Charlie is working as her TA from now on.

The first course on their timetable is Classification of Dragons, and Charlie enjoys that one a lot. He is incredibly knowledgeable, and Tamsin has him answer the recruits’ questions as he is able to. They get into some good discussions and Charlie finds himself excited for their lesson the next day.

The second course is a little more boring. It’s a historical look at how wizarding law has changed the breeding of dragons. Tamsin can see his eyes start to glaze over as she’s teaching, so she talks to Charlie afterwards about the nature of the course. “Everyone in that group has a background in law. That’s why they are all a little older than the rest. It may not be the most interesting, but the information is incredibly valuable for their field.”

They take a small break for tea and then it’s back into Lecture Hall C for the third course. This one is Social Behavior of Dragons, and it holds Charlie’s interest better than the last. In fact, he asks to borrow some parchment from a recruit about halfway through the lesson and starts to take notes of his own (much to Tamsin’s delight).

He invites her to the dining hall for dinner, where they set times and days to plan lessons together. Morgan smiles to herself as she watches Charlie talk animatedly with Tamsin. She knows she made the right choice sending him to her.

Charlie thought for sure moving to teaching meant leaving his dragons, but he’s relieved to find that’s not the case. In fact, going to see the dragons gives him something to do with his spare time other than sitting in front of the fireplace and waiting for Bill to visit. And it’s only two weeks into his placement when Tamsin suggests something else to do with his free time.

An older wizard (whom Charlie later finds out is Lewis, who teaches the other dragon law courses) pops his head into Laboratory 2 on a Friday afternoon while Charlie and Tamsin are cleaning up. “Hullo, Tams. Are you bringing the boy with you tonight?”

“Good evening, Lewis! I hadn’t got around to asking him yet, but I will now! Save us two seats?”

He shakes his head fondly. “You know there’s always plenty of seats, but yes. I will save one for
you as I always do.”

“Thanks!” she calls as his head dips back out of the lab. Then she dusts off her hands and leans back on an empty work table. “Care to get drinks with some of the staff? I know we’re all old, but I think you’d enjoy it!”

“I suppose,” Charlie says thoughtfully. “Though I’ve promised my brother- and myself, if I’m being honest- that I won’t drink as much.”

“Oh! Don’t worry about that! We just go down to Andrei’s Pub in the village for a few hours to unwind from the week.”

Charlie nods. He’s been there before. It’s a little rough around the edges, but patronized almost solely by locals living in the village and employees of the sanctuary. He’s probably seen Tamsin and the others there before and he just never knew who they were. “Alright. Sounds like fun. And you’re not that much older than me…”

“Awesome! And thanks for the compliment, but I’m in my thirties. I’m going to get out of these,” she gestures to her robes, patterned with wildflowers today, “and then apparate there! Do you want to go together or just meet us there?”

“I’ll go ahead and meet you there. I’ve been to Andrei’s a time or two so I know the way.”

Charlie stands in front of his wardrobe for a few minutes trying to decide how nice he should dress up. He decides on denims and a plaid flannel, just like the ones he wears every day. It’s not like he’s trying to impress these people. They’re just his co-workers; they should accept him the way he is. He wets his hair in an attempt to tame it, locks his cottage door, and then apparates to the pub.

When he walks in he greets a few locals (he got to know just about everyone after the incident last year when he let the dragon escape) and then joins the group in the back corner. Tamsin pats the seat next to her, so that’s where Charlie sits. She introduces Charlie to the rest of the staff and while they ask him some questions to get to know him, Charlie doesn’t feel like he’s the odd man out. He opts for a pint of lager instead of something stronger, and he thoroughly enjoys his evening. And when they ask him the next week to come along again, he doesn’t hesitate to say yes.

A month later, Charlie is eating lunch in the dining hall when Morgan sits down next to him. “How are things going, Professor Weasley?”

Charlie nudges her playfully with his shoulder. “They don’t even call me ‘Professor’ during lessons.”

“But you’re liking it?” She asks the question casually but Charlie notices the way she’s pushing her food around her plate nervously.

“Yeah, I really am.”

Morgan’s face lights up and she breathes out heavily in relief. “Good. I had the feeling you would, and I’ve seen you getting along with Tamsin, but sometimes I can’t tell with you.”

“I guess after six years, you know me better than I know myself.”

“Oh, do I? Then, is it safe to say you want to come out with us on Saturday?”
“Andrei’s?”

She shakes her head. “Not this time. We’re flooing into Bucharest. The guys on retrieval found a new nightclub that they want to check out, so we’re making a weekend of it. You in?”

Charlie twirls the fork in his hand absentmindedly. “They wouldn’t care I came? I mean… I’m still invited? Even though I’m not working with you guys anymore?”

“Of course you are! We didn’t stop liking you just because you’re with other people now. You’re acting like we’re some jealous ex-lovers.”

He can’t help but laugh. “Alright, count me in.”

Saturday night finds Charlie walking into the staff lounge where Morgan said they would meet up. “Looking good, Weasley!” He is wearing a tight pair of leather trousers and a fitted maroon button-down shirt, which earns him a few whistles from his friends. That dispels any worries he had about not fitting in with them anymore.

“Give it a rest, you lot!” he tells them, but he never stops smiling.

Eugene is the current head of dragon retrieval- and also the one who discovered the new nightclub- so he tells everyone the floo location. They travel in pairs for safety, since arriving at a new or unknown location is always a risk. But everyone steps out into a small room where they can already hear the thumping beat of club music. Eugene explains that the club is open to muggles as well, hence the room for floo travel, and then shows them the door.

They file into the main room and immediately someone shouts for drinks. Charlie offers to buy the first round. He figures that way he can control what is in his hands. He goes to the bar and, being there are muggles around, he’s not sure what exactly to order. After a moment of indecision he asks, “Can we get something strong, but that won’t kill us?” The woman behind the bar laughs and pours their drinks into the little glasses. Charlie pays her (thankful that they know what to do with his sickles) and takes the shots over to the standing tables his friends are at. Everyone cheers and downs their drinks, then they split up. Some go straight out to the dance floor while others make their way to the bar.

Charlie stands at the table watching everyone have fun. He’ll dance eventually, he just wants to get reacclimated to this before he dives right in. Jana (who works in the dragon nursery) sidles up to him and pokes his side with her finger. “Why are you standing here all by yourself, Charlie?” She has to yell over the music to be heard, but he can tell she’s truly asking and not just teasing him.

He shrugs. “I haven’t done this in a while. It’s like when you wade slowly into a pond so that your body gets used to the temperature of the water. I figure I’ll stand here for a bit and then I’ll slowly make my way out there.”

She gives a pout that he figures is supposed to look sexy, based on the way she bats her eyelashes. “Come on, Charlie!”

“Has it been so long that you forgot I’m gay?”

Jana huffs and folds her arms over her chest. “How could I forget that the fittest guy I know will never be into me? Now, get your cute arse onto that dance floor! Who knows… you may catch someone’s eye while you’re out there.”

Charlie rolls his eyes but lets himself be dragged along. He can’t remember how long it’s been since he pulled, but it’s been long enough that the idea seems absurd now. His friends wave when
they walk up but otherwise keep dancing. Charlie takes a minute to listen to the music and then starts moving his hips to the beat.

“See?” Jana says as she circles around him. “Like riding a bike!” She dances with Charlie for a until the end of the song, at which point she moves on to someone else.

All of the girls take turns dancing with him. Charlie figures it’s because he’s “safe” and he can’t really fault them for wanting to have a good time without being afraid their dance partner will take advantage of them. After his sixth song in a row, he’s sweating and begging them to take a break. He shuffles off to the standing tables they had when they first got there, but another group has already commandeered them. Charlie goes to sit at the bar instead.

The same woman is working behind the bar when he asks for a water. She fills a tall glass with ice and then with water, which Charlie is thankful for. He downs half of it in one go and then sips the rest as he looks around the club. There are plenty of attractive men, sure. But he doesn’t even know what he’d say to one of them. He’s almost 24 but some days he feels much older.

When his water is gone he leaves a tip on the bar and rejoins his friends. The current song has a driving beat and it’s loud enough to block out his thoughts. Charlie gets so into dancing that he closes his eyes, just moving to the song. He is one with the music. That it, until he feels a hand run down his chest.

His eyes fly back open and zero in on the culprit. A guy about his height with styled brown hair is dancing in front of him, arm extended where it’s still touching his chest. He’s definitely good looking, with tanned skin and a slim waist. Charlie can see Jana giving him a thumbs up from over the guy’s shoulder so he figures, why not? He lets the stranger touch him and move him and after a while he lets himself touch back. As the song changes he pulls the man closer and just loses himself in the feeling of the music.

A new song starts and the guy turns around to grind himself back against Charlie. Charlie gasps at the contact and the guy turns his head to give him a wink. He turns fully around then and throws his arms around Charlie’s neck. He leans in close and yells over the music, “Is that your wand or are you just happy to see me?”

“That’s the oldest line in the book,” Charlie answers with a laugh.

“Maybe, but since you didn’t comment on the wand I take it you’re a wizard too. So maybe the line works, just not for what you’d think.” He gives another wink and goes back to dancing.

There’s a brief moment where Charlie thinks he shouldn’t be doing this, but why not? Harry went on that date with Cho. He’s probably going out with someone else already. And they apologized to each other. Charlie always said they were something, but not anymore. He’s free to do whatever he wants with whomever he wants. So why shouldn’t he enjoy himself? New job, new outlook, new Charlie.

Charlie moves his hands from the guy’s hips to his face and pulls him in for a harsh kiss. Their teeth clack together, but he doesn’t let that stop him. There’s nothing chaste or gentle about it and he feels alive. Clearly the stranger feels the same way because he’s attacking Charlie’s mouth like it’s his job.

They break apart only when they hear Charlie’s friends catcalling from across the dance floor. “Want to get out of here?” he asks. Charlie nods emphatically and he laughs. “Alright, your place or mine?”
“Well, I have a tiny cottage on the dragon sanctuary up north so…”

He laughs again. “Mine it is.”

Charlie says a quick goodbye to his friends, telling them not to wait up. They tell him to be careful and to check in with someone in the morning, and then he scurries to the room with the floo.

“What’s your name, by the way?” Charlie asks when he walks in.

“You can call me Stefan.”

The way he words it makes Charlie think it’s not his real name, but telling a stranger a fake name is probably not a bad idea. “I’m Gideon,” he says, only stretching the truth a bit.

“Well, Gideon, are you ready for me to rock your world?”

Charlie can’t help but laugh. “Again with the cheesy lines?”

“You’re still here, aren’t you?”

“Good point.”

Stefan throws in a handful of floo powder, calls out the location, and then pulls Charlie in after him as they get yanked away. The last thing Charlie recalls with any clarity landing in a small flat and Stefan jumping him as soon as their feet touch the floor.

Charlie is snuggled in his warm bed when he hears the telltale tapping of an owl at the window. He groans and pulls the pillow of his face, wondering why owls always find him in the middle of the night. Maybe it’s the distance? Then he hears soft chuckling beside him and rips the pillow away again. He rolls over and finds himself face to face with the man from the night before. Stefan. A quick look around the room and Charlie realizes he’s still at Stefan’s flat.

“You can go back to sleep if you want,” Stefan says quietly. “I’m just going to go let that owl in before my neighbors see.” And Charlie must still have a panicked look on his face because he adds, “Or you can go. I won’t force you to stay if you’re that uncomfortable.” Then he gets up and walks over to the window.

Charlie watches his backside as he walks away. Then he sits up and winces. He’s more sore than he thought he would be, but it has been a long time since he got laid. He’s trying to decide whether he should go back to sleep or just leave now when a familiar little owl lands at his feet and makes the decision for him. “Pig? What are you doing here?”

Stefan is walking towards him holding a letter and looking more confused by the moment. “You know that owl? Then, this must be yours.” He holds out the folded parchment with ‘Charlie’ scrawled across the front.

He takes it and gives an embarrassed shrug. “Heh, um, yeah. That’s…me…”

Stefan gives him a knowing smirk but doesn’t say anything. He just picks up the owl and gently sets him on the windowsill. Pig gives a loud hoot in Charlie’s direction and then flies off.

“I guess I should…go…”

Stefan just keeps on smirking.
“Last night was…”

“Just go,” he finally says with a laugh. “And thanks for the great time.” He gives one final wink as Charlie steps into the fireplace.

He floos straight into his cottage and immediately shuts off the connection. Because he knows that someone will come looking for him if he doesn’t, he sends a message to Morgan with his patronus letting her know that he got back okay (he’s never been so thankful that Bill taught him how to do that). Then he locks the door, draws the shades, and burrows down in his bed with no plan to come out anytime soon.

Charlie wakes up again sometime in the afternoon. He takes a hot shower and then makes himself some tea. That’s when he sees the letter from Ron sitting on the bench where he left it.

Charlie,

I missed you at Easter. We celebrated at headquarters again. Well, maybe ‘celebrated’ isn’t the best word, but at least we got a week away from Umbitch. Man, do I want to kill her. Harry does too, though I suppose he has more of a right to than anyone. He’ll get the honors should the occasion arise.

It’s not all bad news, though. McGonagall has been meeting with us to give advice on our future careers. I told her I wanted to play for the Chudley Cannons and she thought it was a joke! Once she realized I was serious she laughed for nearly four minutes straight. She honestly laughed, Charlie!!! It was so embarrassing. Once she composed herself she handed me a pamphlet about the Auror program. I know Tonks is an Auror and she’s pretty much the coolest person around (besides being friends with you, but no one’s perfect), so I wasn’t too offended by McGonagall suggesting I could be like her. What do you think?

Hermione came back with ten different career pamphlets and she’s been taking notes on the pros and cons of each job. Only she would give herself homework over something that’s not even for a course. When Harry talked to her he said he wanted to be an Auror, too. It would be great to be partners with Harry in the Auror program. We could work together! McGonagall supported the idea and said he would do well, but also gave him a pamphlet about teaching. I know Harry thinks of Hogwarts as his home but I don’t understand how anyone could want to live there forever.

I hope everything is going okay with you. How is Norbert? OH SWEET MERLIN HOW COULD I FORGET TO TELL YOU… Do you know what Hagrid’s done now? He found his half-brother WHO IS A FULL GIANT and he’s keeping him tied up in the forest! He’s already on thin ice with Umbitch and then he goes and does this? He’ll never change.

I feel like Harry, sitting in the Library writing long letters. Though I never did figure out who he was writing to…oh well. He hasn’t done it since last year so I guess it doesn’t really matter now.

Hope to hear from you soon,

Ron
Ronnie,

Awww my wittle bruver missed me? Sometimes I forget about all the little things like that when I’m all the way out here, so sorry I didn’t get in to see everybody. All teasing aside, I miss you too. (Don’t tell Perce, Fred, or George, but you’ve always been my favorite little brother.)

I think you’ll be a great Auror. Magic always came so naturally to you- I think that’s why you could use my old wand, at least until it broke. How did that happen again?

I’m not surprised to find that Hermione is taking the career search as seriously as she is. I think she puts that much thought and planning into everything she does, no matter how big or small.

As for Harry, I think he’d make a great Auror as well (and yes, working with him every day would be great) but I’m not surprised McGonagall thinks he’d make a great teacher. At Christmas he told me he was already helping a group study for DADA, so it sounds like he’d be well suited for the job.

You know, I’m actually helping teach a few courses right now. It’s a long story, but my boss moved me after I- well, after I had an unfortunate incident that resulted in a broken hand. I wasn’t sure at first but now I really like it. At the end of the summer I’ll decide if I want to keep working in the training facility or move back to my field work with the dragons.

I hope you guys are hanging in there. I know Umbridge is a disaster, but just look out for each other. And maybe tell McGonagall about Hagrid’s brother? I’d hate to see him canned for something like that.

Charlie

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Charlie,

You should come teach at Hogwarts! Well, not right now, but maybe when Umbridge is gone (let’s hope that DADA curse holds out and she’s gone by summer). Would you live at Hogwarts? What would you teach? I love Hagrid, but he’s not the best teacher. Maybe you could take his Care of Magical Creatures classes and he could just focus on not getting kicked off castle grounds. Umbitch already did that Trelawney. It’s not like I’m Trelawney’s biggest fan, but even she deserves more dignity than she was given. Thankfully Dumbledore showed up and she gets to keep staying here, even though she can’t teach anymore. Man...how many people think of Hogwarts as their home? Maybe Harry would do well here afterall.

Ron

P.S. I don’t think I should send Pig anymore. Romania is a bit too far for him to travel because of his size. I’ll just rotate which Hogwarts owl I use.

P.P.S. My wand broke when I accidently drove Dad’s flying car into the Whomping Willow, remember?

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Ron,

I just got the most frantic, angry howler from mum but it didn’t make much sense. What exactly did Fred and George do??
Charlie

P.S. That’s a good idea. It’s what I do with the owls here as well.

P.P.S. How could I forget! That story was legendary.

You wouldn't have believed it, Charlie!! It was bloody amazing!! They've been pulling pranks on Umbridge (like making swamps in the corridors so no one can get through and setting off whiz-bangs outside of her office) and making sure that everyone can get their hands on Skiving Snackboxes in case they come down with “Umbridge-itis”. They went too far and Umbridge said she was going to “show them what happens to wrongdoers at Hogwarts” and they just left!! They up and left, setting off fireworks and telling everyone that their shop was going to open soon in Diagon Alley!! Like I said: bloody amazing.

It’s no surprise that mum has gone mental. I’m sorry she got to you, too. Did she think you had talked them into it or what? Merlin…you should have seen it. They’re my heroes.

Ron

Ron,

That *is* bloody amazing! Good for them. I always felt like school wasn’t really for them anyway. It’s not that they were bad at it, they just have always been meant for something different. I’ll have to write to them and see how things are going.

Good luck on your OWLs!

Charlie
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

This takes place at the end of June/the end of Order of the Phoenix.

Disclaimer: I do play chess. That being said, I taught myself with instructions printed off of the internet. The last time I played a real person my brother yelled at me halfway through for not calling check.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

“Queen’s Knight to C3.”

“You make that start every time!”

Bill just shrugs. “I like the predictability. Your move.”

“King’s Knight’s pawn to G5.”

“And you call *me* predictable! You’ve been countering with that since Dad first taught us to play.”

He moves a pawn.

“I don’t think I’m as predictable as you think.”

He gives Charlie a questioning look. “I have a feeling you’re not talking about chess.”

Charlie moves a pawn of his own. “I’ve been helping teach at the training facility.”

“Since when?”

“Since I broke my hand. When I came back Morgan transferred me. I thought it was a punishment at first but I kind of like it.”

Bill bends over to pick up the pieces of his broken pawn. “I’m glad you’re liking the change. Is it going to be long term? I know Morgan likes to move you around.”

“I still haven’t decided. Ron thinks I should go teach at Hogwarts.” Charlie looks up to catch his reaction, but Bill doesn’t really give much of one. “What do you think?”

“Is there even an opening? Ha! Gotchya with my rook.”

“I don’t know. I haven’t asked because I really haven’t thought that far. But do you think I’d be good at it?”

“Char, you’re good at everything you do. It’s kind of frustrating actually.”

“Knight to Queen’s Bishop. Awww, thank you big brother.”

“Besides, didn’t you have some dream about living there as a kid?”
“You don’t think that’s dumb?”

“Not if it’s what you really wanted to do. Damnit! I used to be good at this game.”

“Guess you’re just getting old.”

“Tell me about it. I’m going to be a married man.”

Charlie drops the pawn he’s holding. “Bill…What are you saying?”

“I, uh,” Bill scratches at his cheek but he can’t keep the smile off of his face. “I proposed to Fleur.” He grins from ear to ear.

“That’s…Bill! That’s fantastic!” The chess board is quickly forgotten as Charlie gets up and apparates them both straight to Andrei’s Pub. He buys Bill a celebratory drink as they sit down amongst the locals. And with their game no longer stealing their concentration, Charlie is able to grill Bill for the details.

“Well, it was really simple; downplayed,” Bill explains. “I’ve been courting her for almost a year so it just made sense that this was the next step. She even knew it was coming. That didn’t make it any less terrifying, though. I swear I was shaking so badly I almost dropped the ring.”

“I just can’t believe it. My brother- married.”

“Engaged,” Bill corrects him, “but I understand. I can hardly believe it myself.” Then he looks at Charlie earnestly. “I just want all of you to be this happy someday. Has there been anyone in your life right since the last time we talked?”

Charlie all but chokes on his drink. “Just a one-off. And it was already a couple of months ago.”

Bill raises his eyebrows in surprise. “Oh really? Do tell.”

“You seriously want to know? It’s not like we’re still seeing each other.”

“Don’t tell me the graphic bits, but at least tell me who he is and where you met him!” When Charlie still looks like he’s not sure, Bill is quick to add, “I’m already engaged. I’m just living vicariously through your bachelorhood now.”

“Alright, I guess. My old team took me with them to a dance club they found. This fit bloke came up to me and we dance and then we snogged a bit. He used some line that I thought was stupid but he realized I was a wizard, too. And then we…well, that’s the graphic bit.”

“AT THE CLUB?”

“NO! We floo’d back to his flat. I didn’t mean to stay but we fell asleep after.”

“Were you at least safe?”

“Merlin! Come on, Bill! I’m not a kid! And you’re not Dad. Of course I was safe. Not even just in bed. I gave him a fake name, too.”

“Let me guess: Billiam.” Bill laughs at Charlie’s confused expression. “You kept calling me that when I came to pick you up from St. Mungos!”

Charlie buries his face in his hands. “I had the feeling I was being embarrassing throughout that whole ordeal. I have these little slivers of memories from that night, and most of them involve the
mediwitch laughing at me.”

“It was great! I can tell you more of the highlights later, but finish your story. You gave him a fake name, you shagged safely, and then what?”

“Pig woke us up, actually.”

“Ron’s owl?”

“Yeah, little thing sure is smart. I recognized him, but that’s how I was made. I had told Stefan my name was Gideon but the letter was marked to Charlie. He was a good sport about it. He told me I could leave.”

“He kicked you out? That’s rough. Especially considering-”

“Don’t say it!” Charlie interrupts. “He wasn’t throwing me away and holding his wand at me until I left. It was nothing like that.”

“I just worry about you,” Bill says quietly. “I’m glad you were able to put yourself out there, even if it was just a one-off. And I’m glad you’re liking your new job. You just seem like you’re in a better place than a year ago.”

Charlie fiddles with his empty glass, rocking it around in a circle on the table. “I thought I would only ever be happy with Harry. But at the same time, I thought I’d explode from pent-up frustration. I still care about him. I’m pretty sure I always will.

“Right-place-wrong-time sort of thing?”

“I suppose.”

“Then there’s always the chance it will be the right time in the future.”

“I just don’t want to get my hopes up and miss out on living my own life.”

Bill finishes his drink and sets his empty glass down next to Charlie’s. “It sounds like you’re figuring it out alright to me. Come on, let’s get out of here.”

But neither of them make it up out of their chairs before a large silver bear lumbers towards them. They hear their father’s voice say, “The kids are in trouble. The Order has been called in to the Department of Mysteries to save them. Come to Headquarters as soon as you can.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this is short and ends with a cliffhanger (sorry) but I’m participating in GISHWHES and it starts tomorrow, so I know it’s going to be a crazy hectic day. If I get the chance to update again tomorrow then I will, but the next few chapters may be spread out if I get too busy. It’ll all be back to normal by next Saturday :)

You guys are awesome. Thanks for sticking with me. And thank you for reading and liking and commenting!!
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

It's super early where I live but I wanted to get this up before I got too busy to even think about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, 12 Grimmauld Place

Bill and Charlie pace the kitchen until Molly yells at them to sit down. “You’re making me more nervous, and I’m already nervous enough as it is!”

“Sorry, mum,” they answer in chorus.

Arthur pats them both on the shoulder as he walks to the hob and sets another kettle to boil. “The Order is going to make sure they all get back. Nobody needs to worry.”

“What were they even doing at the Ministry in the middle of the night?” Charlie asks.

“Do you think it has something to do with You-Know-Who?” Bill adds.

Arthur just shakes his head. “We don’t know right now, but hopefully we’ll find out soon.” He looks towards the front hall, as if trying to wish them into existence.

Charlie makes it through two cups before he can’t take the waiting any longer. He slams his fist on the table and stumps out of the kitchen. Bill calls after him but he ignores him and heads up the stairs. He opens the door to the Library and turns on the wireless. It’s nothing but static but he leaves it on in hopes that the background noise will help drown out his spiraling thoughts.

Bill gives it ten minutes before he follows after Charlie. He gives a light tap to the Library door and then slips inside. “You doing okay?”

“Have we heard anything yet?”

“Charlie…”

“Don’t ‘Charlie’ me! They’re out there and who knows what’s happening! They could be-”

Charlie looks sick to his stomach as he pinches his eyes shut. “Harry, Ron, Hermione. Do they know who else is with them?”

“Dad said there’s three more. We’re pretty sure Ginny is one of them.”

Charlie makes a pained noise and turns away so Bill won’t see the tears that threaten to spill over.

“Kingsley was doing his rounds at the Ministry when he called for backup. Tonks, Moody, Remus, and Sirius went off to get help. They’re going to be okay.” Bill sounds like he’s trying to convince himself just as much. “They’re all going to be okay. Come back down with us? Mum is beside herself.”
Charlie takes a few more minutes to compose himself, leaning up against the built-in bookcases for support. Then he follows Bill back down to the kitchen. He pulls a chair over next to Molly and wraps her in his arms. Her shoulders shake and she sniffs into Charlie’s shoulders. He can be brave for her. Besides, it’s not like he’s the one out there fighting who knows what.

It takes another kettle of tea before they hear word from the Order via Tonks’ jackrabbit patronus. “The kids are safe. Sirius didn’t make it back, and you can guess that Harry isn’t taking it well. We’re all at Hogwarts being healed by Pomfrey. She left the floo open for your immediate arrival.”

They jump up from their places and practically run to the sitting room floo. Arthur opens it for international travel and they go through one after the other, stepping out into the Poppy’s quarters just as they did a year ago. They gasp at the state of everyone in the ward.

Molly runs to Ron first, as his hospital bed is closest. Arthur is at Ginny’s side before she can blink. Bill makes his own way to where Hermione, Neville, and Luna are.

“Charlie!” Tonks throws her arms out, beckoning him over. She is crammed onto the same bed as Remus (who is fast asleep) so she swings her legs out to stand up.

“Don’t you dare, Miss Tonks.” Madame Pomfrey isn’t even facing them, but she always seems to know when her patients are out of bed. “You chose to share that space with Mister Lupin and that’s where you’ll stay.”

Tonks grumbles as she sits back down and leans against Remus once more. She waves Charlie over again and when he steps close enough she pulls him down into a crushing hug.

“Tonks.” His voice is muffled because she has his face crushed into her hair. “I’m happier than anyone that you’re alive and well but can you please let me breathe?”

She reluctantly pulls away. “Sorry, but tonight has been rough. And it’s been entirely too long since we’ve talked.”

“I know. It’s my fault, sorry.”

“It’s not just you. I’ve been avoiding telling you about…” she jerks her head towards Remus.

Charlie raises an eyebrow critically. “Really? How long has that been going on? And isn’t he significantly older than you?”

She blushes, the red color reaching all the way up and continuing through her hair. “It just sorta happened. Call it convenience, or being stuck in that awful house for hours on end. But we talked and then talked more and then I kissed him and then we talked some more. And don’t you start on me too! When has age difference ever bothered you before?”

“Should we be talking about this right next to him?” Charlie asks in a whisper.

The smile slides off of her face as she shakes her head slowly. “He’s taken a double portion of Dreamless Sleep. Pomfrey was afraid there wasn’t anything else to be done for him right now.”

“What happened?”

Tonks checks behind Charlie before she lowers her voice even further, so much so that Charlie has to lean in just to hear her. “Sirius was killed. He was knocked into the veil and he’s gone. Remus… well, Remus didn’t exactly take losing the last of his best friends very well. And the only thing he wanted to do was comfort Harry.”
Upon hearing his name, Charlie looks around the ward. “Where is he, by the way?”

“Dumbledore,” she answers at her normal volume as she leans back. “There was more that happened, but Harry will have to give you the details himself.”

Charlie worries his lip as he looks back around the ward again. His eyes are practically glued to the doors until Tonks punches his shoulder.

“Go get him,” she says. “He needs you.” He starts to protest but Tonks cuts him off. “Trust me. Sirius was the last of his family, even if he wasn’t family by blood. He’s sure to be feeling distraught and just…lost. So, go to Dumbledore’s office and get him.”

He gets up and pulls the blankets up to cover both her and Remus. Then he makes his rounds through the ward. He hugs Ron and Ginny close, does the same to Hermione, and then meets Neville and Luna. He tells Bill to cover for him, and then makes sure that everyone is otherwise preoccupied as he slips out of the hospital wing.

Charlie is on his way to Dumbledore’s office when he comes across Nearly Headless Nick. “Sir Nicholas!” he calls.

The ghost floats over and greets him in return. “Charles Weasley, how good it is to see you!”

“I’m sorry, Sir. I’d stop and chat if I could, but I’m on my way to see the Headmaster.”

“Oh, he just finished up a very important meeting.”

“Do you know who he was meeting with?”

“I do believe he was speaking with Harry Potter.”

“Have you seen him since? It was actually Harry I was hoping to find.”

“He was walking towards the seventh-floor corridor last I saw.”

“Thank you, Sir Nicholas! I promise to return and have a proper chat soon!” Charlie gives a salute and then takes off in a jog. The staircases cooperate with him and he makes quick time up to the seventh floor. He steps out onto the landing and looks around, trying to catch a glimpse of dark hair or glasses. He has to choose which way to turn and, completely at random, decides to go left. At the end of the corridor he finally sees Harry. He’s pacing in front of a blank wall and murmuring under his breath. Charlie approaches silently, tiptoeing as he goes. But just as he is about to call Harry’s name a door appears on the formerly-blank wall. Harry rips the door open as hard as he can and practically runs inside. Charlie is quick to follow.

Charlie’s eyes go wide as he closes the door quietly behind him. He can’t believe that what he’s seeing is real. It seems as if they’ve stepped into a meadow, filled with tall grasses. The sound of a brook trickles in the distance. Charlie could swear he feels the sun warming him and a gentle breeze waft across his skin. But as he looks further out he can still clearly see the walls and ceiling of the castle (though the latter appears to be enchanted like the one in the Great Hall). He walks further into the room but is stopped abruptly by a wand poking into his back.

“Stop right there.”

Charlie’s heart nearly stops beating. “Harry?”

The wand is gone from his back but only due to Harry moving slowly around to face him. His arm
is still extended and he's still pointing his wand menacingly at Charlie. “What are you doing here? How do I know it’s really you?”

Charlie holds up his hands innocence. “I’m here because everyone said you hadn’t come to the hospital wing yet. And I swear it’s really me, Harry. You can put down your wand.”

Harry’s wand arm is shaking now, like he can barely hold himself together. “Prove it! Prove that you’re really who you say you are!”

“I-I’m Charlie!” he stutters. “I live in Romania on the dragon sanctuary.”

“Everybody knows that!” Harry looks manic, crazed in a way that makes Charlie want to reach out to him. “Tell me something only he would really know!”

“I’d deny it to my last breath, but I know every Celestina Warbeck song by heart. Bill caught me once dancing around my cottage as I sang one of her songs.” Harry lowers his wand, but only a few centimeters, so he keeps going. “I’ve loved dragons ever since I learned about them but it used to be my dream to live at Hogwarts. I’m thinking about studying to become a teacher because even though I’d miss my dragons, it’s been rewarding working with the recruits in the training facility.” Harry’s wand drops further. “We went on what I considered to be our first date on a Hogsmeade weekend. We had a picnic and got caught in the rain, then we played draughts and you had me laughing harder than I have in a long time. You spent the night with me and I couldn’t stand to let you go the next morning.” His arm is all the way at his side, hand barely holding onto his wand anymore, but Charlie isn’t about to stop now. “You sent me away last June and I regret every day that I didn’t fight harder to get you back. It broke my heart at Christmas because I was trying to find a way to tell you how much I care about you, but you couldn’t even stand to look at me. I’ve never once stopped thinking about you. Not one day goes by that I don’t wonder how much better my life would be with you in it.”

Charlie stands there listening to the tall grasses move back and forth in the wind. He stares at Harry and waits for him to say or do something- anything. Finally, those eyes that haunt his dreams look up and meet his own. They’re filled with tears and rimmed with red.

“Charlie,” Harry whimpers. His wand hits the ground, completely forgotten, as Harry charges forward and clings to him like a drowning man to a life preserver. Loud, ugly, heart-wrenching sobs fill the air. Charlie holds his close, his own tears falling near-silently in comparison. He rocks Harry back and forth, rubbing circles into his back and giving the close physical contact he so clearly is needing. Just as Charlie thinks a sofa or something comfortable to sit on would be nice, a large cushion appears on the ground. He moves slowly into a sitting position, pulling Harry along with him.

It’s some time later that the sobbing slows down and grows quieter, until there is no sound other than their breathing and the soft breeze still blowing through the space. Harry finally uncurls his fingers from their grip on Charlie’s shirt. He attempts to smooth out the wrinkles he made but Charlie stops him with a calm touch on the hand. Instead, Harry wraps his arms around him so they are holding each other now. He tucks his head back under Charlie’s chin and revels in the comfort.

Charlie is the one to break the silence. “This looks sort of like around the Burrow. Where are we?”

Harry turns his head so that he’s not mumbling into Charlie’s chest. “The Room of Requirement. Dobby told me about it. We used it for DA meetings until Umbridge caught us. It takes the shape of whatever you need it to.”

“You needed the Burrow?”
“I told it that I needed to feel better. Sort of vague, but I have always felt better at the Burrow so I suppose the room understood me after all.” Harry falls quiet again, but then he pulls back just enough so he can look up at Charlie. “And it let you in. The room must have known that you would make me feel better.” He puts his head back down and nuzzles lightly into his chest, which makes Charlie laugh despite the circumstances.

“Pretty smart room you’ve got here.”

Harry thinks he could sit here forever like this, but then he remembers that real life is waiting for him just outside those doors. He sighs loudly. “You probably want me to tell you what happened.”

Charlie shrugs noncommittally. “I’m more than willing to listen, but I will by no means demand you to tell me. I think you’ve had enough of people making decisions for you for one lifetime.”

“Making decisions for myself is what got me into this mess.” He squeezes his eyes shut and wills the tears to stay away. “It’s my fault that he’s gone.”

Charlie notices that he doesn’t say the words ‘Sirius’ or ‘dead’ but chooses not to comment. “No it’s not.”

“Everyone keeps saying that but it’s not true! It’s not! You weren’t there! You don’t understand!”

Harry moves to get up but Charlie holds him down. “I won’t force you to stay, but please don’t run away from me again. You say I don’t understand, so help me understand.”

“I got another vision like the one at Christmas when I saw Nagini attack your dad. Only this time, it was a trap. Dumbledore said that Voldemort used me. He used the fact that I am a decent human being and care about people to trick me into thinking Sirius was in trouble at the Department of Mysteries. But he wasn’t! It was a trap and I got him killed!” Harry starts crying again, but this time when Charlie goes to comfort him he’s stopped. “NO! I don’t deserve to be coddled! My godfather is dead because of me! I hardly got to know him! We were just getting to be a family, and now he’sgone!”

Charlie ignores Harry’s self-deprecation and reaches out for him anyway. Harry swings his arms to keep him away. Charlie reaches again and Harry lands a punch directly in the center of his chest. Still, Charlie persists. He lets Harry slap and punch at his arms and chest until he finally gives up the fight. He slumps to the ground where Charlie is more than ready to hold him. The crying doesn’t last as long this time, so the two sit together in silence instead.

“He possessed me,” Harry says after a long while.

“Who did?”

“Voldemort.” He can feel Charlie shudder against him. “You’re just like Ron. He hates when I say his name.”

“Yeah, well, just goes to show how strong you are.” Harry doesn’t respond. “But regardless, what makes you say he possessed you?”

“There was…pain…indescribable pain. And then he- he made me say things. Horrible things. He made me beg Dumbledore to kill me. And the worst part was, I would have welcomed it! Anything to stop the pain. But he made me keep talking and moving and my only thought was that at least if I died I could be with Sirius again. And my parents. Then it was over.”

Charlie’s eyes are wide as saucers. “Harry, I think you fought off the Imperius Curse being cast by
one of the strongest wizards of all time. That’s…”

“Impossible?”

“Incredible.” Charlie moves to cradle Harry’s face in his hands. “You are stronger than anyone I’ve ever met. You have had nothing but pain and responsibility heaped on you your whole life and yet you are the most compassionate, altruistic, good-hearted person. I’m honored to know you and privileged to be someone you trust. I’m sorry that I ever hurt you.”

“You couldn’t hurt me; not really. I’m the one who hurts everyone around me. I mean, where are all my friends right now? In the hospital wing because I got them hurt with my carelessness. I just can’t bare to face them.”

“Then stay here.” Harry tries to dislodge himself from his hold, but Charlie doesn’t let him go anywhere. “I’m serious! I’ll let Bill know I found you and you’re okay, but that you won’t be coming to Madame Pomfrey until morning.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“Why not? Don’t you think you deserve to have something be easy just this once? You made a meadow inside a castle just by thinking about it! Seem pretty easy to me.” Harry still looks unconvinced so Charlie leans close and whispers, “Stay with me?”

Harry wishes he could fight it, but the more he tries the more he finds he doesn’t want to fight it. Not anymore. “Is that all?” he asks, knowing that Charlie will understand.

“For now,” he answers with a smile, proving that Harry was right.

Chapter End Notes

In the book: Harry went to Hagrid's after he talked to Dumbledore. I skipped that part because my story needed him up by the Room of Requirement. The only thing that really happens during that time anyway is that Hagrid tells him that it's not his fault that Sirius is dead (which Dumbledore and the portrait of Sirius' relative already did). I let Charlie do that instead of Hagrid. Sorry, Hagrid.
Charlie wakes up slowly to a tickling sensation in his hand. He flexes his left arm and finds it hard to move because of the way he’s cradling Harry close to him. He wiggles just his fingers to try and alleviate the pins-and-needles feeling but it doesn’t help. Sighing, he attempts to free his arm altogether. He stops when he realizes that the strange sensation is coming from the way Harry is running his fingers softly over Charlie’s knuckles.

“Tickles,” Charlie mumbles as he buries his face into the back of Harry’s neck.

“Sorry,” he answers, not sounding sorry in the least. He continues touching Charlie’s knuckles gently. “These scars looked new and I was just wondering how you got them, especially since Ron says you’re not even working with the dragons anymore.”

“He told you about that?”

“Our future careers have been all anyone can talk about since we met with our heads of house. Ron is so proud of his older brothers and their career endeavors, you included. Every time he got a new letter he’d brag about you for days.”

“It’s just assisting an instructor. He probably made it sound like more than it is.”

Harry rolls over to face him, bringing Charlie’s arm around him as he goes. “There’s nothing wrong with teaching, but now I’m extra curious how you got these scars. Get a lot of textbooks thrown at you or something?”

Charlie takes the opportunity to avoid answering the question by looking around them. At some point during the night, the room changed from the tall-grassed meadow to a cozy bedroom. They are lying on a large four-poster bed made of a rich, dark mahogany. A fireplace crackles against one wall (even though a fire is hardly necessary for June) for ambiance. The cream colored blankets are luxurious and soft, nicer than anything either of them has ever owned before.

He looks back at Harry to find him waiting patiently, as if he’d be perfectly content to stay like that for as long as it takes Charlie to answer. “It’s embarrassing.”

“Like having your every move documented incorrectly by an insane reporter embarrassing, or just being rejected in front of the entire student body embarrassing?”

“Harry…”

“Relax, I’m joking.” And then as if an afterthought Harry adds, “Mostly.”

Charlie sighs. “It’s ironic you should bring up reporters, because it happened when the article about your Valentine’s date in Hogsmeade was in the Daily Prophet.”

Harry drops Charlie’s hand and leans up on his elbow. “I thought you didn’t read the Prophet.”

“I don’t. It’s rubbish. But Morgan does, and while we were eating breakfast one morning I saw the
article. Actually, I saw the picture first but now that I say it I suppose it doesn’t make a difference.”

“And…the newspaper injured your hand…how?” Harry asks, eyebrow raised critically.

Charlie has to look away. He rolls onto his back and stares at the ceiling. “That’s the embarrassing part. I took the Prophet and ran back to my cottage, where I read the article. It just made me so mad. How could they say those things about you? And her, for that matter! You’re just kids.”

“You read the article, got mad, and then what? So far that doesn’t sound too embarrassing. I still feel like you’re leaving something out.”

He puts his hands over his face but keeps talking. “I couldn’t stop looking at that picture of the two of you. I was so jealous, yet at the same time mad at myself for being jealous because here you were finally with someone your own age and I should have been happy for you but that just made me more mad and then more jealous. It spiraled until I couldn’t see straight and then the next thing I knew I had punched a hole in the wall. I ended up in St. Mungos with a broken hand.”

It’s quiet in the room- save for the crackling of the fire- as Harry processes what’s just been said. Charlie waits what feels like an eternity for him to say something. And then he’s suddenly being pounced on. Harry is straddling Charlie’s waist and pulling his hands away from his face. “Let me get this straight. You were jealous of possibly the worst date in history; so jealous, in fact, that you broke your hand because you punched a wall.”

Charlie nods, pure shock keeping him from doing much else.

“At no point did you think you should…oh, I don’t know…owl me and tell me how you felt?!”

“I- I- what?” Charlie’s mouth is gaped open like a fish now.

“You know, owls? Those little winged animals that have been trained to carry post back and forth across distances? I have a snowy one I like to call Hedwig. Your family has one that seriously needs to be put out of its misery.”

“I know what an owl is.” He wants to be mad but he secretly enjoys this fiery, sarcastic side of Harry and hopes he’ll have the chance to see it more.

Harry picks up a pillow and hits him for emphasis. “Then why-” hit “didn’t you-” hit “tell me-” hit “sooner??” hit, hit, hit.

Charlie throws up his arms in defense. “Oi! Stop it!” It’s not that the pillow is hurting him, he’s just more than a little surprised at the turn of events. He manages to get the pillow away from Harry and he throws it across the room, only for Harry to grab another.

“I’m so-” hit “sick of-” hit “people not-” hit “telling me things!”

Charlie snatches the second pillow away much easier, and then chucks it away with the first. “Now will you let me answer?”

Harry folds his arms and says haughtily, “By all means.”

“Alright, well, I guess the reason why I didn’t say anything was because I figured you didn’t want to hear from me. We were living in the same house for two weeks over Christmas and what little conversation we had was so awkward it was painful! And then you were clearly dating other people, so I didn’t want to make things worse by reminding you of how much you didn’t want to even speak to me.”
Harry groans. “That whole thing with me and Cho was doomed from the start. I thought—actually still do think—she’s beautiful. She hadn’t been handling Cedric’s death well either, so I figured we could help each other out. Her friends misunderstood my invitation to spend the day together at Hogsmeade, but I went along with it because she’s a good person. There’s worse ways I could have been spending a Saturday. Although, now that I think of it…perhaps not. It was a disaster from the beginning. I wasn’t lying when I told you I never wanted to even go inside Madame Pudifoot’s. It was so overly pink and there were cherub decorations that kept showering confetti down on us. It was in my tea as well, so I couldn’t even enjoy that part. And then I went to kiss her and she started crying. The kiss was wet and awful and I hated every minute of it. I wanted nothing more than to run out there, but she beat me to it. And then someone got it on film and blabbed to the press. Trust me when I say I would have much rather been playing draughts with you than anything else that happened that day.”

Charlie puts his hands on Harry’s thighs. “I’m so sorry. Here I was feeling bad for myself, when you were feeling even worse.” Harry places his hands on top of Charlie’s, and that’s when Charlie notices that Harry has some new scars of his own. “What in the hell is that?”

Harry pulls his left hand back as if it’s on fire. “Nothing.”

“No, no. I told you what happened to my hand.”

“And then I told you about my awful date. We’re even.”

“What if—” Charlie breathes out heavily, not sure if he wants to share this story but knowing it might be the only way for Harry to trust him. “What if I tell you about my own…date…and then you can tell me about what happened to your hand?”

“You’ve been seeing other people?” Harry asks timidly.

“Please, just, does that sound fair? A story for a story? It’s been working so far.”

Harry nods so Charlie sits up and gently helps him off his lap. They sit next to each other as Charlie recalls the night at the dance club in Bucharest. He tells Harry about Stefan, though he leaves out the graphic details and just vaguely hints at their evening activities. Harry takes it all in with wide eyes. When Charlie finishes his story, he realizes how empty he feels thinking about that night. It was fun in the moment but he’ll never see Stefan again and he doesn’t want to. He’s definitely not old, but he’s starting to think that one-offs are a young man’s game.

“So is it just blokes for you then?” Harry asks after Charlie is done.

That isn’t the question he is expecting, but it’s one he has an easy answer for. “Yes. I found out in fifth year, thanks in large part to Tonks and McGonagall helping me through it, but it took a while to be comfortable with it.”

“I think I like both. It’s not like I’ve had a lot of experience or anything obviously, it’s just what I think.” Harry fiddles with the hem of the blanket. “Do you, umm…”

“You can ask me anything, Harry.”

“Do you enjoy…doing that…with guys? I mean, does it actually feel good?”

Charlie wants to laugh but he also doesn’t want to hurt Harry’s feelings. He decides to be as honest and open as possible. “It didn’t the first time. Or the second. Or probably the third either. I was young and neither of us knew what we were doing. There was a lot of fumbling and…jabbing. But it got better as I got older and was with people with more…experience.”
Harry fails at holding back his giggles. “I’m sorry!” he says when he sees the affronted look on Charlie’s face. “Remus tried to talk to me about it and sounded just like you. Sirius’ attempts weren’t much better.”

Charlie figures it’s a good thing that he can say Sirius’ name again, but doesn’t comment on it. “What do they know about the joys of gay sex?”

Harry’s face turns bright red at the candid question and avoids Charlie’s eyes, though he does answer him. “Sirius was asking me about what happened between us, and that got us on the topic of preferences and he told me about himself. That’s another part of the reason his family disowned him, because he doesn’t like women.”

“And Remus?” Charlie is just being nosey now but he can’t find it in himself to care.

“He said he likes both. Apparently he and Sirius tried being together back in their Hogwarts days, but it just didn’t work out for them. Remus is with Tonks now, though they both like to pretend they’re not.”

“I know. She told me in the hospital wing. Speaking of which…”

Harry groans. “I was hoping you’d forget and not make me go.”

“Sorry, but you know Madame Pomfrey better than most. We’re probably lucky she hasn’t come barging in here, magical room or not. Just stop in there and let her check you over. And let your friends stop worrying too.”

“I know you’re right, I was just trying to avoid it a little longer.”

“Tell you what; I’ll let you stay here just a bit more if you tell me about your hand.”

“You just won’t let that one go, huh? Well, there’s not much to tell.” Harry rubs the back of his left hand absentmindedly. “Umbridge made me serve detentions all year, but the first time I went to her office I thought I got off lucky because I just had to write lines. She made me use her quill and it didn’t take long to figure out why. As I wrote, there was a searing pain in my hand. She was making me write lines in my own blood. They healed up, but it scarred after an entire term of writing the same thing over and over again.” He tentatively holds out his hand for Charlie to see.

Charlie runs his thumb carefully over the scratchy handwriting that he’s come to know. ‘I must not tell lies’ is forever carved into his flesh. “She’s despicable,” he says, never letting go.

“We left her at the mercy of the centaurs yesterday, so all we can do is hope that she gets what’s coming to her.”

“House elves, hippogriffs, centaurs…any other species you have control over that I should know about?”

“I flew a thestral all the way to London,” he says as if it’s nothing.

Charlie can’t help but laugh. “Of course you did. Maybe you should come work at the sanctuary. You’d probably have the dragons eating out of your hand within a week.” Harry shrugs but he has a proud smile on his face. “Alright, sorry to burst your bubble but you have an appointment to keep.”

Harry swings his legs off the bed and stretches his back as he stands. “I suppose I should let them know I’m not dead.”
“Don’t even joke about that,” Charlie says, suddenly serious.

“Fine. But you are coming with me, right?”

Charlie grabs Harry’s hand as they walk towards the door. “And risk sending you in there alone? Never.”

Madame Pomfrey is scolding Harry before he even gets both feet inside the ward. She all but shoves him onto the open bed next to Hermione, only pausing her rant to cast diagnoses spells. She hands over one vial of potion and taps her toe impatiently while Harry drinks it.

“How can I have a glass of water to wash down that awful taste?” he asks when the vial is empty.

“No,” Pomfrey answers with pinched lips. “You made me worry all night about you, so you can deal with the bad taste in your mouth. Consider it your restitution.” She stalks away to tend to another patient behind that is hidden behind a screen.

Harry looks to his friends for some backup, but most of them are looking at him with thinly veiled amusement. “You dug your own grave with her, mate,” Ron says from a few beds over.

Molly shushes Ron and runs over to Harry to dote on him. She pets his hair and wipes imaginary smudges off of his face, all while scolding him in a quiet but firm tone. “We were so worried about you, Harry. How could you leave us all here waiting? The last anyone knew you were Dumbledore. Oh, that man! I’d like to give him a piece of my mind.”

“Now, now, Molly. Let’s let go of Harry’s hair and be calm.” Arthur places his hands on her shoulders and leads her away from his hospital bed. “He seems to be alright, so I say we just give him time to rest up. I think Ginny asked for more water and you don’t want our only daughter to go thirsty, do you?” Arthur guides her to the other side of the ward and Harry has never been so thankful for the Weasley patriarch in his life.

Bill and Charlie offer to stay on-watch, seeing as the Auror Guard and members of the Order are all injured or otherwise occupied. Madame Pomfrey pretends to be inconvenienced, but she sets up extra chairs without even being asked to. “Just don’t interfere with my patients,” she says as she finishes her rounds. “Especially you, Charlie. I expect Mister Potter to get his rest today.” And with that final warning she retreats to her private quarters.

“Geeze,” Charlie breathes out once she’s gone. “Who pissed in her tea?”

Bill swats him in the back of the head. “You did, you berk! You should have brought Harry back as soon as you found him, but nooo...you had to go and whisk him off to who knows where and do who knows what.”

“It wasn’t like that.”

“Do you think she or anyone else in here cares? They just wanted to know he was safe! And you made me cover for you. You owe me one.”

“I owe you more than that by now, I’m sure.”

“Oh, you bet you do! Which is why you’re going to clean out your old bedroom so that Fleur has a place to stay when she moves into the Burrow with me.”

“When who does what now?”
“You and I were sort of interrupted yesterday so I never got the chance to tell you, but Fleur thinks that it would be a good idea to spend more time with everyone before we get married. She doesn’t know anyone- except for Harry- that well and family is really important to her. I think Mum’s going to love her.”

Charlie makes a pained expression at Bill’s last statement. “Do you really think Mum is going to be okay letting another woman into her domain?”

“That’s why it’s important for her to get to really know Fleur.”

“Have you asked Mum or Dad yet?”

Bill gestures broadly across the ward. “We’ve been a little busy.”

Charlie tsks and shakes his head slowly. “You are so in for it.”

In the middle of the afternoon, Madame Pomfrey releases Neville and Luna. The others have to stay at least another night. She gives Harry another potion that makes him drowsy, and it’s while he’s sleeping that Ron starts complaining of being bored. “I understand why Ginny has to stay here with her broken ankle, but why can’t I go? This is awful! Just lying here. The best days of my life are wasting away before my very eyes.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little dramatic?” Charlie says to him. “Besides, you’re still covered in welts.” He rolls his eyes because Ron has always been like a whinging baby when he’s sick or injured in any way. Then, he gets an idea. “Dobby!”

There’s a loud crack of apparition and the house elf is standing before him. “What can Dobby be doing for Harry’s Wheezy?”

“Oi, I’m supposed to be his Wheezy!” Ron complains. “Since when are you his Wheezy, Charlie? That’s not fair!”

He ignores Ron completely. “Thank you for coming, Dobby. We’d really appreciate it if you could fetch a couple things from Gryffindor Tower.”

“Dobby will be doing that, sir.”

“Ron wants his chess set. Ginny wants-”

“My copy of Quidditch Quarterly, please!” Ginny chimes in from her bed.

“And Hermione wants-”

“You to stop using Dobby for your own gain.” Hermione looks very cross, despite her state. “He’s a living creature with thoughts and feelings of his own. He’s not some servant for you to order around.”

Dobby starts to pull on his ears. “Miss has been trying to set the elves free all year. They don’t want to be free! They like to be here! Please make her stop!”

“Way to go, Hermione,” Ron admonishes. “You know how he gets when you bring up S.P.E.W. and yet you did it anyway.”

“Ronald, nothing is ever going to change if we don’t start the change ourselves.”
“We’re stuck in these beds and all Charlie was asking was for Dobby to help us out!”

“And all I’m saying is that it’s selfish and we shouldn’t!”

Dobby becomes increasingly agitated as Ron and Hermione argue back and forth. He ends up on the ground in the fetal position, banging his head against the stone floor. “Will the two of you just stop it already!!” Charlie yells and the bickering stops. “Hermione, that’s grand that you want to help the elves but it seems like Dobby’s made it clear where he stands on the issue. And Ron, didn’t we teach you better than to yell at a lady?” They both fold their arms indignantly and turn away from each other with a pout. “Dobby, if you don’t want to you don’t have to, but would you mind fetching those few things from dorms?”

Dobby wipes his eyes and sniffs his nose loudly. “Dobby would be happy to.” And with a shaky hand, he snaps his fingers and disapparates. He returns less than a minute later and hands the chess set to Ron (who immediately calls Bill over as he sets up the pieces), the magazine to Ginny (who thanks Dobby and opens it), and a large book to Hermione.

Her arms uncurl and she looks down at the book in surprise. “How did you know to pick this for me?”

“Dobby knows Miss likes to read, and this one was on Miss’s bed.”

“Thank you,” she murmurs, face red with embarrassment.

“Miss is very welcome.” Dobby bows to the floor. He raises his hand as if to snap his fingers, but then walks over to Harry’s bed instead. He gently touches the blankets and takes a moment to look at Harry. “Harry Potter needs his friends,” he says quietly so that only Charlie can hear.

“Why is that?” he asks in return.

“Dobby once kept Harry Potter from his friends to save him, but now Harry Potter is to be facing even greater danger and Dobby can’t help.”

“We’ll do everything we can to keep him safe. I promise.”

Dobby nods his head, long ears flopping. “Thank you, Wheezy.” He pats Charlie’s leg and then disapparates.

The kids sleep on and off through the day. Madame Pomfrey walks through the ward and checks on her patients, being sure to glare at Charlie each time. (She’s not really mad, but she wants him to understand the gravitas of the situation.) Tonks comes back once her Auror duties are done for the day and she brings Remus with her. His eyes look sunken in and there are dark bags around them, but Remus talks to Ginny, Hermione, and Ron as soon as he walks in. Then he glances at Harry’s still-sleeping form before beckoning Charlie over to an empty corner of the ward so that they can have a chat.

“How is he doing?” He looks over at Harry as he says, “Bill told me that you found him last night but I was gone before you brought him back.”

“Medically, he’s alright. Merlin only knows how he could fight off an Imperius Curse that strong and have no repercussions.”

“Oh, there will be repercussions,” Remus says sorrowfully, “even if they are not medical. Harry was already having nightmares. I can’t imagine what all of this is going to do to him.”
“He blames himself.” Charlie doesn’t have to even mention Sirius. He knows that Remus knows exactly what he’s talking about.

“He shouldn’t.”

“That’s what I told him. Apparently that’s what Dumbledore told him as well. I’m not so sure he believes us.”

“Over Christmas Harry told him that he wanted Sirius to adopt him, raise him as his own. But Sirius said no. Sirius—” Remus chokes on the word. He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose. “He knew that his life wouldn’t be long and he didn’t want Harry to lose another parent. But I don’t think it mattered in the end.”

Their attention is drawn then to Harry, who is starting to move around in his bed. Charlie wants to go to him but he’s stopped by Remus. “Sirius never had a problem with the two of you. He thought you could give him the care he so desperately needs.”

“Alright…”

“I was the one who encouraged him to let you go.”

“What?!” Uncaring of their environment or Remus’ current emotional state, Charlie pushes him hard. “What is wrong with you?!”

A worried Tonks walks quickly their way but Remus waves her off. He casts a Muffliato around them before answer Charlie. “I realize now that I was wrong.”

“You bet your arse you were wrong! Were you the one who encouraged him to see other people as well?”

“Look, I know you may not think it now but it seemed the best for Harry at the time.”

“How could being away from me be what’s best for him?”

“You’re too old for him!” Remus closes his eyes and breathes deeply before continuing. “I’m sorry. That isn’t fair of me to yell at you. But that’s the way I feel. Harry just wants to be normal, and having an illicit relationship with someone your age is not normal.”

“It sounds to me like you’re just projecting your own insecurities on him. Is it the fact that you’re a werewolf and you’ve never felt like you fit in or the fact that you’re currently in your own ‘illicit relationship’ with someone much younger?”

“Don’t you dare lecture me.”

“Don’t you dare lecture me!”

“Charlie?” The sound of Harry’s groggy voice stops their argument dead. Charlie rushes over to him and sits on the edge of the bed. He picks up Harry’s hand and just barely resists from giving it a kiss. “How are you feeling?”

“Still tired. Whatever Pomfrey gave me knocked me out cold, but the dreams woke me up.”

“I’m so sorry. What can I do?”

Harry slides over to make room on the bed. “Just sit with me. I never have nightmares when you’re here.”
Charlie sits on the bed and holds Harry until he falls asleep again, which doesn’t take long. It isn’t until Charlie looks up that he becomes aware of everyone watching him.

There is a tense moment where no one moves or says anything at all but then Ron breaks the silence by shouting, “It was you!” All Charlie does is give a confused shrug, but Ron isn’t paying attention to him anyway. “Hermione! Remember when Harry was writing those long letters and receiving post all the time last year? It was Charlie!”

Hermione tries to shush him but Ron is on a roll. “I knew that owl looked familiar when I was writing to Charlie after Easter, and now I know why! Bloody hell. It all makes sense now. Except Harry’s piss attitude at the beginning of term. Wait, did something happen between you guys?”

“No, no. You don’t get to shut me up. When were you going to tell us? Wait a minute! Bill! Why aren’t you acting so surprised. Did you already know?”

Bill places a firm hand on Ron’s arm. “For the love of all that is holy, Ronnie, read the room.”

Hermione looks furious, Charlie looks uncomfortable, Ginny looks crestfallen, Bill looks exasperated, Remus looks irritated, but at least Tonks looks entertained by the whole thing. “Sorry, Charlie.” Ron says eventually. “In your defense, Harry would probably have already hit me with something if he were awake.”

Just then- as if on cue- Madame Pomfrey walks out of her quarters to check on everyone again. She administers more potions to Hermione, and lets Ron and Ginny know that they will most likely be free to go in the morning. She claps her hands and food appears for the students.

“I think it’s time for me to go,” Bill says to Charlie. “I told Fleur I’d be back to take her to supper. You’re staying here, I assume?”

Charlie nods. “Tell her I say hello. And that there will be a clean room waiting for her at the Burrow whenever she’s ready to move into it.”

“Cheers.” Bill ruffles his hair and then takes his leave.

Remus plays chess with Ron until the kids fall asleep. Then he takes his post by the doors to the hospital wing and that leaves Tonks inside the ward. She sits in the chair next to Harry’s bed and talks to Charlie until he too falls asleep, completely exhausted from the emotional day.

Chapter End Notes

I hate writing house elf syntax, but I like Dobby far too much to cut him out of the story.

That’s it for Order of the Phoenix! Half-Blood Prince is completely done and I’m just puzzling out how to get to the end of Deathly Hallows (it’s hard when most of your
characters are on the run or in hiding).
You guys are being so patient and I appreciate it! GISHWHES is just taking a lot out of me this year.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie,

Ron told me everything on the train ride back to London. He said he would have told me sooner but we were a little preoccupied with the Farewell Feast and packing up our things to go home. Plus, he figures I kind of deserve to be kept waiting after how long it was until he found out about us. I guess I should have trusted that my best friend would be supportive. He’s got us practically married off, by the way. He keeps saying how I’ll finally get to be his brother now.

Thank you for staying with me while I slept. I wasn’t just saying that, about not having nightmares when I’m with you. It’s true. Before our time in the Room of Requirement, I hadn’t had a restful night’s sleep since we stayed at the Hog’s Head. I miss you already.

I also miss Sirius. I guess this is what war is like, losing people you care about but having to soldier on anyhow. I hate it. I wish I had never heard that stupid prophecy. I wish I could choose my own destiny. Voldy can go suck knobs.

Harry

Harry,

Ron has a good head on his shoulders. He reminds me a lot of Bill, so I’m not surprised he was supportive. George and Fred should be as well (I’m sure they know by now even though they are focusing on running their shop).

You don’t have to thank me for staying with you. If I had it my way, I’d never let you go. But I have to ask; does this mean you want to make things official? You’re not even sixteen yet and I don’t want to push you into something that you’re not ready for—something that you think you’re ready for but only because I’m interested and it’s convenient.

I hope those relatives of yours are treating you better. My dad told me that Kingsley really leaned on them— and Ron told me that Dad gave a few threats of his own—but you let us know if we need to send in a rescue team.

Have you thought about talking to Remus? I feel bad about fighting with him, because I know everything he said came from a place of love. He really cares about you and Tonks says that losing Sirius has been hard on him too. I think he’d like to hear from you.
And I can almost guarantee that You-Know-Who has never been insulted quite like that! You’re amazing.

Charlie

Charlie,

Thank you for being cautious where my feelings are concerned, but I don’t just find you convenient because you’re interested. If anything, you’re probably the least convenient person I could be with (except maybe Malfoy but let’s not even think about that). Now that the Ministry has finally accepted that Voldemort is back, I have the feeling that things are going to get a lot worse a lot quicker. I know a war isn’t the best time to start something between us but what do we have to lose? Plus, I can’t stop thinking about my parents. They were already together but they found out they were having me in the middle of the first war. I wish I could ask them how they were feeling, but I can only imagine. Everybody my age was born during the war, so in comparison nothing else seems quite as scary.

I took your advice and wrote to Remus, and you were right. His reply came so quickly! I think it’s going to be good for both of us to talk about Sirius together. He did tell me about your fight in the hospital wing while I was sleeping. Thank you for defending me, but I get why he did what he did. And I wouldn’t go back and try to change things even if I could. Hermione had a Time Turner back in our third year and I never want to meddle with time again. We learned that everything happens for a reason. I think I needed to experience things with Cho, even if that went horribly wrong.

How are things at the sanctuary? Are your courses on break for the summer? And how are Bryony and her hatchlings doing?

Harry

Harry,

We were lucky during the first war. Mum and Dad kept us pretty well sheltered. They shipped us off to Aunt Muriel’s a lot. I was still quite young at the time, but I remember how worried Mum was when she was pregnant with Ronnie. I just thought it was because she didn’t want a repeat of the twins. Now, looking back, I think it was because of everything going on. I agree with you; if they could make it through that, then we can make it through this.

Who let a couple of thirteen-year-olds use a time turner?!

Things are good here. We had a break between terms, but we don’t get summer hols like a regular school. I’m still helping Tamsin with her courses, which is fine, but they’ve also given me a study group to lead as well. They call me Mister Weasley and everything! It’s all a bit strange if I’m honest.

Bryony is doing great! Her hatchlings were reintroduced to the herd last year and they’re also doing well. They’re not quite full grown yet and they still roughhouse like little ones, but they’re strong. All except one. He’s on the small side and doesn’t like to interact with the others. Morgan is concerned of what might happen if he doesn’t bond with at least one of the herd. I try to spend time with him on the weekends (that’s one perk of teaching; no weekend shifts) and he always just looks so sad.
It’s good to hear that Remus is talking to you. Tonks wrote to me just the other day saying how he already looks a little brighter. The healing process is slow, but it’s good that you have each other.

Charlie

Charlie,

The oddest thing happened today. I was sitting in my room (being quiet and pretending I don’t exist) and Dudley walked in. I instantly tensed up, figuring he was going to beat me or something, because it’s not like he ever just stops by for a chat. But that’s exactly what he did! He claimed he was simply bored because all his friends are gone on holiday. It was unnerving. I asked what he wanted to talk to me about and the oaf just shrugged, so I let him off the hook by asking how things were going at his school. Dudley said that attending Smeltings was a lot harder than he thought it was going to be. I really don’t think Dudley is stupid so much as my aunt and uncle never make him use his brain at all. But anyway…Dudley was complaining about not passing some exams he needs to move on with his courses. I told him that the same thing happened to me with Potions and his eyes near bugged out of his head. I don’t know what he thought we did all day at Hogwarts, but apparently coursework and exams was not part of it. Uncle Vernon eventually called for him and he ran out of my room so he wouldn’t get caught speaking to me, but all in all it was sort of nice to have a decent conversation with ‘Big D’.

Harry

Harry,

After everything that you, Ron, and my parents have said about your family…I’m stunned! I don’t know what changed his mind- maybe he truly was just that bored- but that’s incredible. Maybe there’s hope for your cousin after all?

I liked Potions, but I’m afraid I share your dislike for Snape. Some days I wondered if he truly dislikes his job. It’s obvious that he has a passion for the subject matter, but maybe it’s working with children that he doesn’t like? Or working at Hogwarts? But then why not leave? He could easily open an apothecary and he’d make a fortune I’m sure (he might need to hire someone to speak to the customers for him but hey nobody’s perfect). Don’t you need your Potions NEWT for the Auror program? I don’t mean to make you sore, I just don’t want to see you give up on your dream.

Charlie

Charlie,

I wouldn’t get your hopes up about Dudley. He hasn’t looked me in the eye since that day. Oh well, it was nice while it lasted.

How did you know that I want to become an Auror? And, yes, I need Potions, but Snape only lets in those who get an O. Of course Hermione did. And Malfoy- that git. Ron and I will just have to enjoy ourselves a free period while they slave away over a hot cauldron for The Greasy One.

Harry
Harry,

Ron told me all about your meetings with McGonagall. Has Hermione settled on a career or is she still making her pros and cons lists? I’m sure that everything you’ve done over the last five years has to count for something in the eyes of the Auror program. That’s real life experience! That’s way better than…how did you put it? ‘Slaving away over a hot cauldron’?

And again with the clever nicknames! Just be sure you never call Snape that to his face.

Do you know what you might want for your birthday? Tamsin is going to cover my study group for a few days so that I can meet you at the Burrow. Dad said that Dumbledore is going to be the one to escort you there. The Headmaster must really be worried that something bad is going to happen.

OH! And Fleur has moved into the Burrow with Bill, and according to Ginny things are not going well. All Ginny did in her letter was complain about Fleur’s supposed ‘attitude’. You’ve met her before; did you think that Fleur was bossy or pushy? Honestly, it sounds like Gin is a little jealous of the attention not being on her for once. She’s the baby AND the only girl so she’s always gotten whatever she wants. Gin swears that Mum isn’t too happy either, but I guess we’ll have to see for ourselves.

Charlie

P.S. I borrowed a camera from another instructor and took photographs of Bryony and little Hal. At least, that’s what I call him. I thought you might like one of each.

Charlie,

There’s an old science fiction film I saw once (well, Dudley was watching it and if I craned my neck just right I could see half the screen from where I was doing chores) about astronauts. They’re in space and their ship is named Hal. It has a personality all its own and it sort of goes mad. Regardless, Hal the dragon is adorable. He is a bit small- especially compared to Bryony- but I have a good feeling about him. Thank you for the photos of them both.

I was outside this afternoon and burst into tears when I saw a shaggy dog. It looked just like Padfoot, Sirius’ Animagus form. Maybe I’m just not cut out to be an Auror. They have to see death all the time. Surely they don’t cry at the slightest reminder.

Ron told McGonagall he wanted to play for the Cannons. I didn’t say anything, but I have considered being Seeker professionally if a team would actually want me. Oliver Wood has stopped by Hogwarts a couple of times to check in on us, and he says he loves playing for Puddlemere. I’m sure they don’t care about Potions NEWTs or other rubbish like that.

You don’t have to get me anything for my birthday. You already gave me that wand holster and the Animagi book (which I’m re-reading now), and I’ve never gotten you anything in return. It will just be nice to be at the Burrow with you and your family. They’re so much more a family to me than my own. Only two more weeks!

And Fleur always seemed like the nicest person, at least when she spoke with me. You may be right about Ginny overreacting. Your Mum has also been known to blow things out of proportion. I’m sure they will be getting along just fine by the time we get there. I wouldn’t worry.
Harry,

Ollie has always lived for Quidditch. You should have heard him when I left Hogwarts. He was whining on about how Gryffindor would never win again! I was good, don’t get me wrong, but I wasn’t that good. Although, a few teams did scout me my seventh year. But by then I already knew what I wanted to do. Sometimes I regret never playing Quidditch again, but I wouldn’t give up my dragons unless it was the offer of a lifetime.

Aurors aren’t gods, Harry. They are just people with a job to do and they all handle pain and death differently. And this wasn’t just some random person who died from a case you’re working on. This was your godfather. Maybe since you’re already writing to Remus you could write to Tonks as well and ask her what being an Auror is really like. She won’t lie to you, that’s for sure.

I don’t buy you gifts expecting one in return. Mum always taught us that you give what you can no matter how small and no matter what the other person has given you. So I’ll get you a gift if I bloody well please.

Hang in there one more week.

Charlie

Charlie,

He did it again. I was doing a final check to make sure I had everything in my school trunk, and Dudley walked in. He covered his eyes when he looked into my trunk- like he was going to burst into flames or something just by seeing magical items- but asked if he could come in and chat again. I told him yeah and closed my trunk up. We talked for even longer than last time. He asked why I never spent my birthdays with them and I laughed. Turned out, he was serious! I know he’s trying to be nice so I didn’t want to offend him (even if he deserves it after years of torture) so I just said that you lot threw me a party at the Burrow and it would be rude to turn it down. Dudley nodded but didn’t say anything else about it. Just before Aunt Petunia came looking for him, he asked if I could show him some magic since he wasn’t conscious to see it the year before. I told him I could get into serious trouble if I ever used magic and I don’t think he believed me. He looked really let down about the whole thing. I still can’t believe this is the same Dudley who used to hold me down and punch me since I was old enough to try and run away from him.

Dumbledore is coming to get me tomorrow, so just send Hedwig along to the Burrow. She’s a smart girl; she’ll get there if you tell her.

I can’t wait to see you. And everyone! But especially you.

Harry

Chapter End Notes
I'm a sucker for subtle changes in Dudley :)

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1996, The Burrow

Molly pulls Harry into a comforting-if not smothering-hug as soon as he walks into the kitchen. “You’re late! Professor Dumbledore promised that he was going to bring you straight here. What did he do? Where did he take you?”

“I’m fine, Mu-Molly.” Harry hopes she didn’t hear his near-slip up. He loves the Weasleys, but he doesn’t know if he’s ready to call them anything other than their given names (she gave him permission to drop the ‘Missus’ and ‘Mister’ years ago). “He just wanted me to meet Professor Slughorn. He’s going to be teaching Potions this year.”

“Oh, I suppose that’s alright then. But I really wish Albus would have just said something to me! That man…” Molly trails off, muttering to herself as she readies a pot of tea.

Harry hears talking coming from the living room so he leans close to listen in.

“He’s pulling away from me,” Tonks says sadly.

“Is it because of Sirius?” Charlie asks.

“At least partially. Things were better for a while, but now that the full moon is getting close he’ll hardly even talk to me. He’s not a monster. He’s just a man that has had bad luck when it comes to life.” In barely more than a whisper she adds, “I love him.”

“Have you told him that?”

“Yes! Over and over. But it’s like he doesn’t believe me, or doesn’t want to believe me.”

“Well, keep telling him. There will come a point where he has no choice but to believe you.”

Harry tiptoes back to the kitchen table just as Molly sets down the kettle and several tea cups. He thanks her and adds cream to his before settling in. She is just about to join him at the table when Tonks and Charlie walk in. Tonks gives a light pat on the shoulder before telling Molly that it’s time for her to go. Molly walks her to the door as Charlie surprises Harry by leaning down and giving him a quick kiss. It’s over before Molly turns around and the only indication that anything happened is the stunned look on Harry’s face.

“Is the tea too hot, dear?” Molly asks in concern, giving Harry the perfect out.

“Oh, yes, I suppose it just…caught me off guard.” He looks at Charlie with a pointed look.

Charlie acts innocent. “Better be careful and let it cool a smidge before you hurt yourself.”

Molly nods in agreement before opening cupboards and getting some food together for the three of them. She doesn’t see Harry stick his tongue out at Charlie, or Charlie sticking his tongue out as well in retaliation. When she comes back to the table carrying two plates (one with sandwiches and one with the chocolate biscuits she knows Harry likes with his tea) she smiles at the two and is none the wiser. The three talk about the current state of the Ministry until Arthur returns home.
Charlie is more than a little surprised at the way his parents greet each other. Molly demands that Arthur answer some passphrase correctly before she’ll let him into the kitchen, and she has the do the same in return. “What’s all that about?” he asks.

“The Order decided it was necessary with Harry staying with us. You never can be too sure if someone really is who they say they are, or if they are simply Polyjuiced to look like someone else. We all have questions that we ask each other to determine we’re actually ourselves.” Arthur eagerly takes a cup from Molly.

“Sounds a little extreme.”

“I don’t know,” Harry says. “They might be on to something there. Hermione made Polyjuice for us back in our second year, and she didn’t even have a proper work station. If she can pull it off at twelve using stolen ingredients in an abandoned Hogwarts bathroom, then anyone can.” He takes a sip of his tea, making sure to blow on it thoroughly first. “Besides, I did the same thing to you when you found me in the Room of Requirement back in June.”

“I suppose you’re right. Still a strange sight to witness your parents talk to each other that way, as if they don’t trust each other.”

Molly slides her hand across the table and sets it on top of Charlie’s. “It’s not that I don’t trust your father. It’s everyone else that I don’t trust. Anyone could have ambushed him when he was coming out of the Ministry. All they need is a lock of his hair and I’d never know the difference.”

“But let’s not worry about that!” Arthur says with forced cheerfulness. He claps his hands together once. “We have a big day ahead of us tomorrow. Harry’s turning sixteen! And your Hogwarts letters are due any day now. Maybe we’ll have more Prefects in our family.”

Harry laughs. “I don’t think Ginny wants to be a Prefect. She’s too good at that bat bogey hex of hers.”

“That girl,” Molly scoffs. “She’s going to be the death of me! Her only concerns are Quidditch and running around with boys!” Then she looks at Harry sweetly. “Maybe you could convince her to settle down a little this year?”

“Me?” Harry laughs harder this time. “I don’t think I could get Ginny to do anything she wasn’t already planning on doing. She’s got more nerve than anyone I know.”

Arthur joins in laughing as Molly sighs. “Right you are, Harry. My little girl is strong. I think she’s got her brothers to thank for that.” He winks at Charlie before draining the last of his tea. “Come, Molly. Let’s get to bed so that you can be up to help Fleur in the morning.”

Molly turns a bit pink at the mention of Fleur. “I won’t have her trying to run my home. And she has such things to say!”

Arthur helps her up from the chair and guides her out of the room, all the while listening to her soft ranting and chiming in with periodic ‘mhmm’s and ‘I know’s.

“Is Fleur really causing that many problems?” Harry asks as soon as they’re out of ear shot.

Charlie pulls a face. “I like Fleur. She has a lot of opinions, and she’s not afraid to speak her mind. Which is great! But Mum doesn’t think so. Neither do Hermione and Ginny, I’m afraid. They’ve been calling her ‘Phlegm’ behind her back.”

“Yikes. How is Bill taking it all?”
“He was a tad oblivious to it all. I had to pull him aside yesterday and point out how angry Mum was getting. He said he’ll start running interference between them, so I guess we’ll have to wait and see how that goes.”

Harry bobs his head a few times and then finishes his tea. He carefully rests the cup on the table, and Charlie is on him the moment Harry’s hand leaves the cup.

Charlie was planning on taking things slowly, but Harry is having none of that. He nibbles gently along Charlie’s lip, which makes him gasp. Harry uses that opportunity to deepen the kiss. He thrusts his tongue into Charlie’s mouth, where he can still taste the too-sweet way that Charlie drinks his tea. Harry grunts at the awkward angle he has so he swings his leg up and over Charlie’s lap, straddling him. This puts them in much better snogging position.

Charlie winds his arms around Harry’s waist and pulls him closer. This brings their hips together in a spectacular way, making them both groan. Harry buries his fingers in Charlie’s hair. He pulls lightly with one hand just to hold on, but when Charlie gives a purr of approval he does it again. Charlie pulls off of his mouth with a smack and before Harry can complain he attacks his neck next. Harry throws his head back to bare more skin. Charlie licks and sucks, smiling proudly as small spots of red and then purple bloom from under Harry’s chin down to his clavicle.

Harry is thankful for Charlie’s strong arms holding onto him, otherwise he’s likely to have fallen over. Just as he rucks up Charlie’s shirt so that he can get his hands on the wide expanse of muscle hidden underneath, the sound of someone clearing their throat makes them both freeze. Harry whips his head up to stare with wide, owlish eyes but Charlie leans his head against Harry’s shoulder with a soft whimper.

“Sorry to…interrupt,” Arthur says with more than hint of amusement. “Although maybe it’s a good thing I did. Another minute or so and I’d have had to cast an Aguamenti on the both of you like crups in heat.”

“Daaaaad,” Charlie whines, holding out the vowel like a petulant child.

“Alright, I’ll stop. But the two of you are going upstairs.” Harry climbs off Charlie’s lap and they walk towards the staircase. “To separate rooms!” he adds, making them blush as they run off.

Charlie pulls Harry past his usual door and outside of Percy’s. “Fleur has my old bedroom so I’m bunking with Percy. Hermione is with Ginny, so I’m guessing you’re with Ron.”

“We could hide in the twins’ old room,” Harry suggests.

“And wake up with who knows what rejected and failed experiments maiming me? No thanks!” Charlie just stands there for a moment, holding Harry’s hand.

“Did your Dad already know about us?” Harry asks quietly.

“Not unless Bill or Ron told him and never said anything to me.”

“Did he already know that you’re…”

“Gay? Yeah. Bill is responsible for that one. Said something in passing once about my boyfriend and Dad heard.”

“Was he mad?”

“No. Is that something you’ve been worried about?”
Harry sighs and starts to swing their connected hands back and forth absentmindedly. “I wasn’t sure if it was accepted or not in the wizarding world. It’s not so much with muggles.”

“Well, there are purebloods who are against it because there’s no way to produce a natural-born heir. Big surprise, I know. And there’s a lot of older witches and wizards who disagree simply because it ‘wasn’t done’ in their time, which is a load of bollocks. But you’ve seen how Ron and Bill have reacted, like it’s any other relationship.”

“What about your Mum? Does she know?”

Charlie rubs the hand not holding Harry’s through his hair. “She knows basically everything about me, but that was the one secret I’ve kept. I don’t even know why because I’m not ashamed of the way I am. And she’s never done anything but love us, but I’ve never just come right out and told her. Not even when I broke up with my boyfriend at the end of sixth year and moped around the house all summer. I lied and told her it was about losing the Quidditch Cup. I’m pretty sure she saw right through that, though, so who knows.”

From downstairs they can hear the grandfather clock chime. Harry starts to smile. “It’s officially my birthday.”

“So it is,” Charlie says with a yawn. “We can talk about this more in the morning, yeah?”

“Of course.”

He leans down and gives Harry a peck on the cheek then whispers in his ear, “Happy Birthday, Harry Potter.”

Harry practically floats up the stairs to Ron’s room.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY HARRY!!!”

Harry makes an undignified squeal as he throws his blankets back and jumps to his feet.

“Wheresthespider?” Ron asks, still mostly asleep.

Harry rolls his eyes at his best friend. “There’s no spiders, Ron, but it’s reassuring to know that if there were something after me you’d still be sleeping.”

“Mmprumph,” is the only response he gets.

Laughter draws his attention back to the source of the birthday cheers. Ginny recovers first. “Sorry to startle you, Harry. We just wanted to make sure you were up for your special birthday breakfast!”

“I’m getting a special birthday breakfast?”

“We let Molly have a lie-in so that we could use the kitchen,” Hermione explains. “So you just put on some clothes and we’ll go down and get the food started.”

“Or you could just go like that,” Ginny says with a giggle.

Harry looks down and realizes he never put his pajamas on the night before. He’s standing in front of the girls in just his pants!

“Ginny!” Hermione slaps her arm playfully and then shoves her out of the room.
He doesn’t fail to notice the way Ginny keeps looking at him until the last possible moment. He gives a shudder, hoping that she won’t be a problem for him this year like she was back when they first met. “Ron. Ronald.” Harry tries to wake him up but he doesn’t budge. “THE SPIDERS, RON! LOOK OUT FOR THE SPIDERS!”

“AH! AH! WHERE?!” Ron tosses back and forth until he’s finally conscious enough that he opens his eyes. “That is not funny, Harry!” He clutches his blanket to his chest, which is still heaving from the scare.

“It’s my birthday,” Harry says with a shrug. “Consider that my gift.”

Ron throws his pillow at him, but Harry dodges out of the way and it misses him. He laughs the whole time he puts on his clothes and even has he leaves Ron’s bedroom and goes downstairs. He stops laughing, however, when he sees the buffet laid out on the kitchen table. “Woah,” Harry breathes. “You guys were busy!”

But it’s not Hermione and Ginny standing on the other side of the kitchen table. It’s Fleur. “Zis was zee least I could do for you, ‘Arry! Joyeux anniversaire!”

She gracefully moves around the table to give Harry a hug and to pull a chair out for him, encouraging him to sit down. Harry has to hold himself back from filling his plate entirely with flakey croissants. He picks up one to start and then takes a sip of a delicious, chocolatey coffee beverage.

“This is wonderful!” Harry praises. “Did you make all of this?”

Fleur smiles serenely at him. “I deed. I know zat Molly usually makes lots of meat and grease, but zis is traditional to ‘ave in France for celebrations.”

Harry nods, not being able to do much else with his mouth full, and then reaches for more. He is too busy piling fresh fruit and cream onto his brioche to acknowledge Bill entering the room.

“Is this what happens when I leave my fiancé alone?” Bill teases. “Are you leaving me for Harry?”

Fleur sweeps over to Bill and gives him a sweet kiss on the cheek. “I could never leave you. I seemply wanted to do my part for ‘Arry’s special day.”

“As long as there’s some for me?”

Harry waves his hand and beckons Bill over. “I could eat it all myself but then I’d never want to eat again. Please. Take as much as you like.”

Bill sits down and carefully picks food for his plate, but then he hands it off to Fleur and has her sit next to him. Fleur thanks him and pours his tea. Bill thanks her in return and it’s only then that Bill gets food for himself. Harry likes watching how the two of them interact. It’s certainly nothing like the way Uncle Vernon orders Aunt Petunia around, and it’s even different from the way Arthur simply expects Molly to do all of the cooking (not that there is any comparison between Vernon and Arthur).

Charlie arrives next, plopping down next to Harry and immediately digging in to the food. Harry laughs at his poor table manners. He figures it must be because he doesn’t have his mum telling him how to act when he’s in Romania.

Molly walks into the kitchen just then with a surprised look on her face. “Oh my goodness! The girls certainly outdid themselves this morning. Happy birthday, Harry.” She gives his shoulders a
squeeze. “You must remember to thank Hermione and Ginny if you haven’t already.”

“It was Fleur,” Harry tells her.

Molly’s mouth opens and closes repeatedly, not unlike a fish. “YOU?” she finally blurts out. Bill and Charlie both give Molly a critical look, but she is focused entirely on Fleur. “You’ve never once offered to cook before! I’ve asked countless times.”

“Mum,” Bill warns.

“I ‘ave zees ‘andled.” Fleur stands to face Molly. “I was being a gracious ‘ost, like you always are to me. To everyone! I weel not be made to feel sorry for making ‘Arry a meal.”

“Did you even ask us anyone? Ginny and Hermione had plans!”

“Zey came in ‘ere and yelled and zen zey were gone. Zat ees not my problem.”

Bill stands up then to defend Fleur. Eventually Arthur hears the noise and comes to the rescue. He takes Molly back out of the kitchen for a chat. Between the copious amounts of food and the argument taking place on either side of him, Harry no longer much of an appetite and he politely excuses himself to go in search of the girls. There is a heavy silence left in the kitchen when he walks out into the garden.

“I didn’t know it was this bad,” Charlie says quietly.

Bill is standing next to Fleur with his arms wrapped around her, gently rubbing circles into her back. “It’s been building. Mum just has a certain way she thinks things should be and people should act. Their personalities clash is all.”

“Well, I’m really sorry for the way she just treated you, Fleur.” She gives Charlie a grateful look. “I think you and Bill are great together, and this food is amazing.”

She gives her head a light bow in thanks.

By mid-morning, everyone has calmed down. Hermione apologizes to Fleur for yelling earlier. Ginny grumbles along, but it’s obvious she isn’t actually sorry. Molly doesn’t apologize so much as go way over the top fussing over everything Fleur made. She gives exaggerated compliments and forces everyone to thank Fleur even if they already did. Harry can’t decide which is worse: this, or the arguing. Neither are ideal and he just wants the rest of his birthday to be peaceful.

Ron finally makes it down to the kitchen and is completely oblivious to everything that conspired. “Is there anything to eat?” he asks.

Harry holds his breath, but Ron’s question actually starts to relieve some of the tension in the room. Before anyone can answer, Ron spots the plate that’s been left for him. It’s overflowing with pastries and he dives right in. Molly tsks in frustration as his poor manners (if only she’d seen Charlie before, Harry thinks to himself) and then ushers everyone into the living room so that Harry can open his presents.

“I say it every year…you guys don’t have to get me anything.” Harry is always blown away by the generosity that the Weasleys show him. They have little to nothing extra and yet they always make him feel like he’s worth everything they spend (whether it be money or simply their time).

“And we say ever year that we want to anyway. It’s rather like a circle. I’d just go with it at this
point, mate.” Ron claps him on the back and then finds an open seat next to Hermione.

Harry opens another book about Animagi from Hermione, a Chudley Cannons poster from Ron and a Puddlemere United poster from Ginny, and a tin of treacle toffee from Molly and the rest of the Weasleys. Charlie hands over a plain envelope from himself, but before Harry can open it there is a knock at the door.

“That should be Remus and Tonks,” Arthur explains as he stands up and goes to the door to let them in. Everyone gets to witness the arduous process of verifying their identities before they can be allowed inside the Burrow.

Tonks and Remus both give Harry warm wishes and then take their seats in the living room. Remus clears his throat before looking solemnly at Arthur. “I see that Harry has already opened his gifts, so I hope this is as good of a time as any to tell you this.”

“No Order business, please,” Molly begs.

“I’m sorry, but this is important. Garrick Ollivander was taken.”

“That makes two in a week,” Bill says with concern. “First Florean Fortescue and now-”

“Stop!” Molly cuts her son off. “I said no Order business! This is not conversation suitable for a birthday!”

“This is a war, Molly.” Remus runs one of his hands through his hair nervously. “And I feel like we’re chasing vapors. No one knows anything. People just keep disappearing.”

“Or showing up dead,” Tonks adds in.

Molly orders Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny out of the room and out to the garden. She warns them to stay together and not wander off, but they’re not to return until she fetches for them. Back inside the house they discuss Igor Karkaroff’s corpse being found.

Charlie waits until they’re done before asking, “Do you think it’s still okay to take Harry to the sanctuary? I know he’d really like to see the dragons.”

“I don’t know,” Arthur says as he casts a worried glance at his wife, who is uncharacteristically quiet. “It’s far enough away from Britain that one day should be okay, but I’d feel better if you had another member of the Order with you.”

“What do you think, Mum?” Charlie knows that he’ll never get to take him if Molly doesn’t approve.

“I just want that boy to have a regular childhood,” she answers quietly. “If you have an Auror escort, then I don’t see why not. You can always floo directly back here if you need to.”

“I’ll go!” Tonks volunteers. “I’d like to see some dragons. I can also talk to Mad-Eye or Kingsley to help me wrangle up an international portkey. We can give it to Harry as an added emergency plan.”

Charlie wants to throw his arms around her. He sticks with a simple, “Thank you thank you thank you!” instead.

Molly waves him off. “Go get the kids and then you can tell Harry the good news. And no more talk of disappearances or corpses! I mean it. I want them all to be as sheltered from this as
possible.”

“We’ll do what we can but this is a war.” Remus reminds her. His eyes go misty as he remembers
the last war. They were but children themselves.

Charlie finds the kids outside in various states of boredom. Hermione is lying on the ground flat on
his back, Ron is digging at the dried dirt with the heel of his trainer, and Harry and Ginny are
tossing a rock back and forth. They all look up when Charlie walks over.

“Are the wee ickle babies finally allowed back in with the adults?” Ron asks in frustrated tone,
kicking at the ground harder with his shoe.

“Oi, I’m not the one who kicked you out,” Charlie says in his defense. “Blame our mother.” And
then he hands the plain envelope back to Harry. “You left this in the living room. It’s your birthday
gift from me.”

Harry quirks an eyebrow but doesn’t say anything as he takes the envelope and tears open the seal.
He slides out the piece of parchment and begins reading what Charlie wrote. A smile steadily
grows on his face as he goes and Charlie can’t help but smile himself as he watches.

“Is this completely serious?” Harry asks when he’s done. “This isn’t some prank? Fred and George
aren’t going to jump out from behind a tree with a toy dragon or something?”

Charlie laughs at the mental image. “It’s one hundred percent serious.”

“What is it, Harry?” Ron asks as Hermione starts to read over his shoulder.

He hands the letter to Hermione and says, “Charlie is taking me to Romania to see the dargons!”

“Wicked,” Ron says, giving a high-five to first his brother and then Harry. “I’ve wanted to go since
Charlie first started working there.”

“Do you have a camera?” Hermione asks. Harry shakes his head no but Charlie says yes. “Take
pictures. I’m not as big a fan of dragons as Ron but the sanctuary sounds fascinating.”

Ginny folds her arms and sticks out her bottom lip. “Why does just Harry get to go?”

“It’s his birthday.” Charlie reaches over to try and ruffle her hair but she pulls away. “What’s
gotten into you?”

“I just think it’s a little unfair that you’re the only one that gets to spend time with him on his
birthday.”

If Charlie didn’t know any better, he’d say Ginny was jealous. “When I came out here you were
playing toss-and-catch together. Plus, you get to see him every day at school. This is just one day.
One part of one day, really.”

Harry looks uncomfortably back and forth between them. Hermione notices, thankfully, and is able
to step in and save him. “This is all very generous of you, Charlie. When are you leaving?”

“As soon as Tonks can secure an international portkey. She’s going with us as ‘protection’ because
Mum insisted, but also she’s just dying to check out the dragons.”

“Can we go inside now?” Ginny grumbles.
“Oh, yeah. I guess I forgot to tell you that.” Charlie manages to get a hand on top of her head as she walks past, but she shrieks and dives out of the way again before he can muss up her hair.

Ron gives a low whistle once Ginny is inside the house. “Boy is she going to be in a right snit when she finds out you two are together.”

“I thought it was just me!” Charlie says with a humorless laugh. “She really seemed jealous, didn’t she?”

Ron groans. “It’s like second year all over again, really. She hasn’t shut up about Harry since the term ended. She goes on about how he was so brave at the Ministry and he’s so strong to have battled You-Know-Who and how he’s so dreamy when he’s not even trying.” He gives a full-body shudder. “I never want to hear my sister talk about anyone like that, least of all my best friend.”

“She really says all that?” Harry cannot believe it. Ginny has never showed any interest in him before, except for when she was younger but that was just a silly crush.

Hermione pulls an unimpressed face- complete with eye roll- as she nods. “Only all the time. Staying in the same room with her is maddening. I have to agree with Ron. I don’t want to think about either of you in that way.”

“Not even me?” Ron asks dejectedly.

“Do you want me to call you brave and strong and dreamy, too?” she simpers. “Is that really what you want to hear?”

Hermione’s cheeks turn pink even as she plays off the whole thing as a joke, but Ron has her beat. His entire face flushes and he stammers. “I-I-well-”

Charlie has to laugh. In a sing-song voice he warns, “Be careful what you wish for, Ronnie.”

Ron stutters around some more before stomping off. Once he’s out of ear shot Harry says to Hermione, “That wasn’t very nice.”

“Maybe not,” she replies, “but if he expects me to just shower him with silly praise, then he has another thing coming.”

“You’re going to make him work for it, aren’t you?”

She gives Harry a sly grin. “It’s like I said back in fourth year; if he doesn’t want me to go with someone else, then he’ll just have to ask me himself.” She taps Harry on the nose and then walks triumphantly back to the house.

Charlie is looking at Hermione’s receding form with admiration. “She’s something else. You figure Ron ever gets clever enough to figure her out?”

“I think it’ll take someone else dating her first for him to puzzle it out. It might go quicker if it’s someone he despises, but I doubt even Hermione would go so far as to purposely date someone that Ron dislikes just to make him jealous.”

“That sounds more like something Ron would do.”

“And it would blow up in his face.”

“Naturally.”
Harry laughs at the thought. He thinks that Ron and Hermione would be good together, but he knows that neither of them is without faults. Charlie on the other hand... “You really did pick out the perfect gift for me,” Harry says as he hugs Charlie close and nuzzles into his chest. “I’m glad you ignored me when I said don’t get me anything.”

“Technically, I didn’t actually get you anything. I just knew how much you wanted to see the dragons. And how much you need to be away from everything, even if just for a day.”

He hums in agreement. “If only Tonks didn’t have to come with.”

“She’s just going to be there in case there’s trouble, which I doubt there will be. It’s in another country and it’s filled with loads of dragons. Someone gives us trouble and all we have to do is let Bryony loose on them.”

“Do you think we can persuade Tonks to give us some time alone while we’re there?”

He chuckles at Harry’s suggestion. “She’s rather stubborn, but I think that something can be arranged.”

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Tonks sends word that Kinglsey has gotten them an international portkey, though they’re not going to use it to get to Romania. Charlie came in via floo so the international connection to his cottage is still open. They’ll go through, eat dinner at the sanctuary, and spend the night there. Charlie will give them a tour of the training facility the next morning after breakfast and then they’ll get to see the dragons. Tonks arrives before supper and immediately launches into her explanation of their security measures, including all emergency plans. Arthur takes the opportunity to pull Charlie aside and talk to him father-to-son.

“If last night was any indication of the sort of relationship you and Harry are currently engaged in, then I want you to promise me that you will put all of that aside for the day. While you are gone, you and Tonks will be acting as his guardians. Nothing else. His safety is of the utmost importance. Do you understand?”

Charlie is taken aback by the seriousness of the situation. He hadn’t thought of it that way before. “I promise, Dad. I wouldn’t do anything that might jeopardize Harry’s safety.”

“Good. I trust you, son, but I also remember what it was like to be your age. Now that I think of it, I was already married and had two sons at your age!”

“How could I forget! It’s all Mum talks to me about these days.”

“You know,” Arthur says thoughtfully, “you should consider talking to her about Harry when you get back from-”

“No.” Charlie is sure his mother would not be pleased if she found out.

Arthur sighs. “Just think about it.”

Charlie rejoins Tonks and Harry in the living room. “You ready?” he asks as he picks up a handful of floo powder.

Harry shoulders his bag and gives a big smile. “Ready!”

Tonks stands stick straight and pulls her hand up to her forehead in a salute. “Aye, sir.”
“I can always change my mind,” Charlie threatens, but he immediately takes it back when he watches Harry’s face fall. “Just about her,” he amends with a wink. The smile is back on Harry’s face almost instantly. Charlie almost sighs with relief.

“Weasley Cottage. Romania.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a head's up...it will be a few days again.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Real quick, thank you for the comments!!!!!! Especially the last chapter; they just poured in and I can't even put into words how grateful I am.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Charlie steps out of the floo and at the last moment remembers that Harry doesn’t do so well traveling this way. He turns around and braces himself just as Harry comes tumbling out and into his arms. Harry looks up at him with surprised eyes and a crooked grin. “Thanks for catching me,” he says softly.

“I’ll never let anything happen to you,” Charlie responds just as softly.

“Get a room, you two.” They are both so busy staring into each other’s eyes that they don’t see- or even think about- Tonks coming out of the floo after them. She rolls her eyes and uses her wand to disconnect the floo. She checks the door and two windows before asking about food.

Charlie looks at his watch. “We can go down to the dining hall. Someone is bound to have cooked something by now. And worst-case scenario, we cook something ourselves.”

“You cook?” Tonks looks at her best friend like she’s never met him before.

“What did you think I did for meals?”

She lifts her shoulders. “I don’t know. I just kind of figured your mum took care of it.”

“If I’m staying at her house, then sure. But I’m a grown man living on my own. I cook.”

“Fine, I believe you. Just know that now you’ll have to show off your culinary skills.”

“You just want to eat.”

“Duh, I already said that.”

Harry laughs at the way the two go back and forth. It reminds him of Ron and Hermione, but without the unresolved romantic/sexual tension. Tonks wraps her arm around Harry’s shoulder and drags him over to the door. “Let’s go, dragon man. You can give us the short tour on the way to the dining hall.”

Charlie shakes his head as he opens the door and leads the way.

A wonderful smell is already wafting out of the kitchen when they walk in to the building, but there’s no food just yet. Charlie spots Morgan at a small table by herself so he walks her way knowing that Tonks and Harry will follow. “Hullo, Morgan.”

“How goes it, Weasley?” she asks without even looking up from the Prophet.
“You’re still reading that rubbish?” he asks in return, pulling Harry down next to him and motioning for Tonks to take the other seat across from them.

Morgan finally looks up from the newspapers when she notices they’re not alone. “You have guests?” She looks then from Tonks to Harry and her eyes go wide. “Important guests?”

Charlie rubs at the back of his neck nervously. “Morgan, this is my friend Tonks. She’s an Auror.” Tonks gives a cheery wave and flashes her hair neon green. “And this is my…Harry.”

“Oh, I know who that is.” Morgan says.

Harry’s cheeks turn pink. “Nice to meet you, ma’am.”

“Ma’am?! How old do you think I am??”

“Er…” Harry looks to Charlie for help.

“Don’t answer that,” he says with a roll of his eyes. “Be nice, please?” he asks Morgan.

Morgan huffs. “Where’s the fun in that?” But then she looks to Harry and says, “I’m only teasing. It’s nice to meet you too. For a while there I thought I’d never get to the meet the boy who made our Charlie punch a wall.”

Just then, Jana comes out of the kitchen with platters of grilled sandwiches and bowls of mixed vegetables. Each bowl seems to be spiced differently, ranging from simple salt and pepper to aromatic turmeric and cardamom.

“Woah,” Tonks breathes out in admiration. “This is bloody amazing. No wonder you come here to eat!”

“If you’re hanging around another day, you’ll have to convince Charlie to cook,” Morgan compliments as she spoons veg onto her plate. “If he weren’t so good with dragons I’d say he was pursuing the wrong career.”

Harry watches Charlie preen under her praise. He’s proud of his…his what? Charlie didn’t say and Harry doesn’t know for sure either. They enjoy their meal, making idle chatter as they eat (mainly between Morgan and Tonks as they tease Charlie relentlessly). Charlie discreetly slides his hand under the table and onto Harry’s knee. He doesn’t slide it upwards, just applies a gentle pressure that Harry realizes he finds comforting.

When Morgan stands and wishes them all a good evening, Charlie takes their plates back to the kitchen and thanks Jana for the meal. Tonks and Harry are already waiting by the door by the time he’s done. Tonks has a pleased look on her face and Harry is bouncing on the balls of his feet. They leave the dining hall and head back.

“I’m going to do a perimeter check and then set up at your kitchen table,” Tonks says when they get to Charlie’s cottage.

“What do you mean ‘set up’?”

“I’m here as Harry’s official Auror Guard, so I’m taking the night shift.”

Harry doesn’t want anyone to be inconvenienced because of him. “You have to sleep, Tonks.”

“I will, Harry, just not tonight. Charlie is going to sleep tonight and then tomorrow while you’re off
being sickeningly adorable together, I’ll get to snooze.”

“I still don’t like it…”

“Well too bad!” Tonks punches his shoulder and starts checking around the outside of the building.

Charlie opens the front door and gently nudges Harry through. “She’ll be alright,” he tells him.

“I know,” Harry says grumpily. “I just hate thinking that I need the protection so badly that people are willing to lose sleep over it.”

“You’re worth it,” Charlie tells him sincerely. He pulls Harry to him and holds him close.

Harry struggles to get out of Charlie’s hold, but he ends up laughing. “I’m trying to be cross, here! You can’t just hug the grumpiness away.”

“I don’t know; it seems to be working okay to me, but maybe I need to try harder.” He leans in and nuzzles against Harry’s neck, making him sigh. And while he’s thoroughly distracted by that Charlie sneaks a hand down to tickle his side. Harry squeaks and tries to pull away again. “See, now I’m getting mixed signals.”

Harry looks right into his eyes then and says, “How’s this for clarity?” and yanks him in for a scorching kiss. It’s so scorching, in fact, that they don’t hear the door open.

“Oi! I was gone for five minutes! I wasn’t serious about you two getting a room, because there’s only two rooms here and I am not staying in the bathroom while you two have your fun.”

Charlie reluctantly lets Harry go, but not without a final peck on the nose. Then he helps Tonks set up some of the dark detectors that she brought along. (“They’re from Mad-Eye,” she explains.) Meanwhile, Harry takes the opportunity to snoop around the cottage. He turns on the wireless as he walks past and tunes it to the first station he can find playing music. He peeks his head into the bathroom to check out the facilities and walks quickly past Charlie’s bed. He ends his self-guided tour back in the small kitchen. That’s when he sees the picture of himself and Parvati from the Yule Ball. Harry picks it up and watches himself stumble over his own two feet—as well as both of Parvati’s. “You kept this?”

Charlie walks over to him and leans against the bench. “Why wouldn’t I?”

Harry keeps his eyes on the photograph. “I’m not even sure why I sent this to you.”

“I’m glad you did.”

He sets the framed picture back down where he found it and turns slowly to Charlie. “Why me?”

“I’ve asked myself the same thing countless times before.”

“And what have you puzzled out?”

“That I don’t have a single clue as to why. But I can’t say that I care. You mean a lot to me and the rest is unimportant.”

Harry wants to believe him, but very few people in his life are free from ulterior motives. His gaze moves from Charlie to a drawer that is sticking out at an odd angle. There are corners of parchment hanging out and it looks overfilled. He reaches over to open it and Charlie starts to panic. “No wait!”
But it’s too late. Harry is opening the drawer and picking up the large stack of folded and crumpled parchment. “What is all this?” He unfolds the top one and sees it’s a letter written to him from Charlie. He wrote it a year ago and never sent it. The same goes for the one underneath that, and the next one too. “How long?” When Charlie doesn’t answer, he repeats himself. “How. Long.”

“Ever since you threw me out of the hospital wing last summer,” Charlie blurts out. “I wrote you once and never heard back so I told myself I’d never write again. Unfortunately, my heart disagreed with my brain. I never stopped wanting to talk to you. I just stopped giving you the chance to ignore me.” He expects Harry to look sad or ashamed or something in that zone. What he doesn’t expect is for Harry to lift one corner of his mouth in a smirk.

“So these are technically mine?” He asks with a gleam in his eye.

“Yes…” Charlie says slowly. Maybe it just comes from a lifetime of living with Fred and George, but he feels like he’s walking into a trap.

Harry takes the entire drawer full of letters and runs straight out of the room. He lets out a giggle as Charlie chases after him, but he has too much of a head start and gets to the bathroom before Charlie is even close. The door shuts in Charlie’s face.

“What are you doing? Harry? Harry!” He pounds on the door but it’s no use. He lets his head fall against the door in defeat. “Just- don’t judge me too harshly, yeah?”

“Go away,” Harry says from inside, but he doesn’t sound angry. “Let me read in peace!”

Tonks is laughing at him from the kitchen table, so Charlie doesn’t really want to go in there and join her. He decides to change into his pajamas and relax instead. He’s reading on the couch in just a pair of sleep pants when Harry finally leaves the bathroom.

“Thank you,” Harry says as he holds the stack of parchment out in front of him.

“Why are you thanking me?” Charlie asks, still thinking this must be part of a trick or something.

Harry throws the letters to the floor. “Incendio!” They burst into flames and Charlie yelps. Thankfully, they burn out quickly and Harry vanishes the ashes. He swings himself up on the couch to straddle Charlie’s lap. He takes the time to run his hands over Charlie’s bare chest and shoulders like he wanted to do back at the Burrow. “Thank you for not giving up on me. I read them all and even when you were mad at me- understandable though it was- your feelings never changed, did they?”

Charlie leans close until their foreheads are touching. “Not once,” he breathes out.

Harry turns his head just to check if Tonks can see them, but she’s gone. “Where did Tonks go?”

“She’s on a perimeter check, so we only have a few minutes.” He toys with the bottom of Harry’s shirt.

“Think we can transfigure a partition or something?”

Charlie laughs at his eagerness. “I don’t think so. She’d just see it as a personal challenge. But let’s get you into something more comfortable and go to bed.”

Harry gets his pajamas out of his bag, but only puts on the sleep pants. He wants to have as much contact with Charlie as possible while he has the chance.
“Just so we’re clear, I promised my dad that we wouldn’t mess around while we’re here.”

Harry pouts as he slips between the blankets. “Does that mean no snogging?”

“Oh, there will be plenty of that don’t you worry,” Charlie says with a smirk as he slides in next to him.

Tonks pauses when she reenters the cottage. She can tell that Harry and Charlie are in bed, but it seems they have cast a modified disillusionment charm and a strong muffliato. She turns her chair towards the door to give them more privacy and takes out the book she brought along to occupy her time. She’s glad that they’ve finally found a way to be happy together, and hopes that she and Remus can find a way as well.

The next morning Charlie relieves Tonks of her duty. She crashes face down on the sofa without even changing out of her robes. He levitates the top blanket off the bed to cover her with. This has the added benefit of rousing Harry from his sleep. When asked how he slept, Harry admits that it was another nightmare free night. Charlie couldn’t be happier.

They take turns using the bathroom and changing their clothes, but both end up brushing their teeth at the same time. Charlie indulges his fantasy as they stand side by side. He can imagine starting every day like this. Maybe at Hogwarts, if Harry would still want to live there, but anywhere would be fine. They would wake up in each other’s arms; naked, if he had any say in the matter. They would lazily go about their morning routines, moving around each other with ease. Charlie would make breakfast while Harry drank his tea. Or vice versa. They’d hear the sound of little feet running towards them. Kids? Best not to think about that. Crups? Something small for sure. Charlie doesn’t even realize how long he’s been off in his dream world until Harry elbows him. He looks in the mirror above the sink and Harry’s reflection smiles back at him. Charlie spits out his toothpaste and then asks about breakfast.

“Do you want to help me cook for everyone at the dining hall? It’s okay if you don’t want to. You can just keep me company.”

Harry is still smiling. “I like cooking. My aunt and uncle used to force me to do it, yet the truth is I never minded so much. I could have done without them punishing me for burning the rashers, but it was easier to sneak food if I was the one making it.” Charlie is giving him that pitying look that Hermione and Molly always give him when he talks about living at the Dursleys. “Don’t say it. I know my life wasn’t ideal. I’m over it. So. Breakfast?”

Charlie doesn’t think he could ever be as strong as Harry, but that’s a big part of why he loves Harry. “Let’s go.” He takes Harry’s hand in his and they make the walk to the dining hall at a leisurely pace.

Once there, they don aprons (Charlie reaches for the Ask Me About My Buns one again and hands Harry a yellow one that reads Fork Off) and then decide what to make.

“What ingredients are there?” Harry asks.

“I think there’s some sort of replenishing charm on the cupboards because everything I’ve ever needed has been in there.” Charlie points to the large one on the left. “That’s the one with the cold things, and the rest of the supplies are scattered around.”

“So we can make anything?”

“What do you have in mind?”
What Harry ends up making is a huge fry up. There’s beans, toast sausages and bacon, tomatoes and mushrooms, eggs, and he even patties up potatoes for hash browns. When Charlie teases him about not having any black pudding he turns up his nose and says, “They always have that at Hogwarts but I think only McGonagall eats it. And Ron, but he’s hardly a reliable judge.”

Charlie starts carrying platters out into the dining hall and he’s met with cheers. He waits until all of the food is out and then makes sure to drag Harry out with him. “Your breakfast is courtesy of this man here, so shower him with your praise.”

Harry laughs as everyone thanks him with full mouths, “At least I know where you get your horrible table manners from,” he says to Charlie as they sit down to eat.

After breakfast, Harry is more than ready to see the dragons. But first Charlie takes him to the training facility to meet Tamsin. Harry likes her. She’s quirky and outspoken and fun and he tells her as much. He also thinks that she and Luna would get along quite well. “Have you ever read the Quibbler?” he asks.

Tamsin’s eyes crinkle as she grins. “I love the Quibbler. Why do you ask?”

“I know the daughter of the publisher; Luna Lovegood. I think she would absolutely love to meet you. Her father, too.”

Tamsin writes down her full name and position at the sanctuary on a scrap of parchment and hands it to Harry. “You give this to them, and that way if they want to get in contact with me they can. I would love to hear from anyone with their kind of passion.”

Harry thanks her and Charlie takes him off to finally see the dragons. They stop at the nursery first. There are only two hatchlings, but Jana lets Harry into the pens with her and lets him feed one. She offers the same to Charlie but he chooses to observe instead. He realizes that he forgot to bring the camera and tells them that he’ll be right back. He jogs to the cottage to get his camera - where Tonks is still snoring face down on the sofa - and then jogs back. What he finds makes his shake his head in wonder. Harry is sitting on the ground while two Green Welsh hatchlings climb on and over him. Charlie quickly takes a picture to preserve the moment.

Jana gives Charlie a wink as she helps Harry stand up again. She makes sure that he’s out of the pen before locking the gate and putting the protective wards back up. Harry is already pacing by the door, waiting to go see Bryony. Charlie thanks Jana profusely. “No problem. He’s a natural.” And then she stretches up to whisper in his ear, “And quite fit. Nice work.”

Charlie practically runs out of the sanctuary, pulling Harry behind him. He uses a tracking charm to figure out exactly what part of the sanctuary Bryony is in at that moment, and then takes Harry to a broom shed. “She’s farther out today. Care for a fly?”

Harry takes the broom (an old Cleansweep Five) and eagerly mounts up. “Breakfast, dragons, flying. Could this day get any better?”

Charlie leads him out to the near-edge of the sanctuary. “When I was on patrol duty I would do this every day. It was great for a while.”

“What made it not-so-great anymore?”

“Honestly?” Harry nods expectantly. “You. I just didn’t want to be alone anymore. Breaking my hand was probably one of the best things to happen to me, since that’s when Morgan moved me to the training facility.”
“I like Tamsin. I’m glad you’re paired with her.”

“Me too.”

The rest of their flight is in peaceful silence, save for the wooshing noise of the wind blowing past their ears. Charlie can tell when Harry finds Bryony because he hears him gasp.

“Has she gotten bigger since the Tournament?”

“A little. I guess motherhood can do that to a woman.”

“Don’t let your mother catch you saying that!”

Charlie laughs and points his broom towards the clearing where Bryony is currently resting. Harry follows and the pair land softly in the grass.

“Hey there, girl,” Harry says to the dragon as he takes a step forward. He looks back at Charlie with a huge smile but it dies quickly when he sees the face Charlie is making. “What? Should I back away?”

“I don’t know. Why did you make that hissing noise at her?”

“Hissing noise?”

“Yeah, did you not hear yourself do it?” Harry shakes his head slowly back and forth. “Alright. Well, she doesn’t seem angry so I guess you can keep going. Slowly now.”

Harry takes another step in Bryony’s direction. “Hey, it’s me. Harry. Do you remember?”

“STOP!” Charlie is panicking. “You were doing it again! Stop hissing at her!”

It dawns on Harry as he turns to Charlie again. “Do dragons have a language?”

“Do- what? I suppose they do but why does that-”

“I’m a parslemouth. It freaks Ron out. It freaks a lot of people out, actually. But when I talk to snakes I can never actually tell that I’m speaking it. It just sort of happens for me. If dragon language is anything like snake language, maybe that’s why the words are coming out me that way.” Charlie can only stare. “She doesn’t seem upset. Do you think I could try talking to her in parseltongue? I promise if there’s any sign that she’s mad I’ll stop.”

Charlie looks at the dragon who is eyeing them suspiciously. “I just keep hearing Mum barking at me because I let you do this, but fine. Yes. I trust you.”

Harry nods and faces Bryony once again. He steps slowly towards her, talking in low tones. Charlie can’t tell what he’s saying because it all sounds like soft hisses to him but it’s obvious that Bryony at least partially understands. Charlie is alarmed when she opens her mouth and starts making growling noises. But other than that she doesn’t move. Then Harry speaks again, except now the sound is a little less hissing and little more guttural.

“Merlin’s pants,” Charlie mutters under his breath. “He’s talking to her.” He can’t help but feel pride. His…boyfriend? They really have to figure that part out...is actually talking to a dragon. He was only kidding when he said Harry could have the dragons eating out of his hand in under a week, but maybe it wasn’t really a joke.

By now Harry is so close to Bryony that he can reach out a hand and touch her snout. She moves
and Harry jumps but she surprises him by simply nuzzling against his hand. He stands still and lets her make the choice to touch him. He can’t believe he’s touching a real live dragon (at least, one that isn’t a baby). He pantomimes for Charlie to take a picture and then tells Bryony that there will be a flash of light and not to worry. It won’t hurt her. Charlie takes the picture and then joins Harry at her side.

“I told her you wanted to touch her, too.” Harry explains. “She said she remembers you. She likes you better than ‘the one who fell’? I don’t know who that is.”

“He was a stupid trainee,” Charlie tell him without taking his eyes off the dragon. She bends her neck down so that her spiked head is right in front of Charlie. He’s touched dragons before but never like this. This is like petting a crup. He stretches his hand out and gently touches her scales. They’re warm and firm and they move like tiled skin. He huffs out a laugh at the absurdity of the whole thing.

Bryony makes gentle growling and snuffling noises and Harry flushes before responding.

“What did she say?” Charlie asks.

“She said that I’m lucky to have a mate that is so gentle.”

“And what did you say?”

“That I know.”

They stay with Bryony until they hear tiny roars in the distance. She stands up and shakes out her giant wings. Charlie doesn’t even have to ask Harry this time. “She says it’s her hatchlings. They either need her, or they only think they do, but either way she’s going to them.”

“Tell her thank you from me. I appreciate this more than you could ever imagine.”

Harry passes the message along to Bryony and then he and Charlie retreat to their brooms to get her room to take to the skies. And what a sight that is. Her wingspan alone nearly blocks out the sun, and as her body rises Charlie stares in wonder. In that moment he understands why Hagrid wanted to raise a dragon for himself. He wouldn’t mind one of his own if the experience was anything like this.

He finds Harry’s gaze aimed at him instead of the dragon. “Thank you for the best birthday present I’ve ever gotten.”

“I don’t know; mum’s treacle toffee is bloody good.”

Harry takes Charlie’s hand and squeezes before leaning into his side. “Just another minute, and then we can go back.”

“A minute, forever; who’s counting?”

But eventually they do get on their brooms. They fly back slower than they did on the way out, catching a glimpse of Bryony’s hatchlings on their way. Charlie points out Hal and Harry is surprised to see just how much smaller he is than the rest. He makes a mental note to talk to Hal the next time he visits. Next time. Harry hopes he’ll live to see a 'next time'. When they get to cabin they find Tonks awake and freshly showered. “How was your morning, boys?”

“I don’t have the words.” Harry still has a dreamy smile etched onto his face. He’s starting to think it’ll be permanent, and he doesn’t mind one bit.
“Those must be some dragons!” Tonks gives Charlie a wink. “But I’m ready, so whenever you are we can open the floo and go back home.”

“Weren’t you going to see the dragons yourself?”

“Maybe another time. I really needed that extra sleep.”

Harry picks up his bag, already packed from this morning, and waits by the fireplace next to Tonks. Charlie takes a long look around the cottage and tries not think about how different it’s going to be when he comes back here all alone.

“The Burrow. Ottery St. Catchpole.”

Chapter End Notes

Because OF COURSE Harry can talk to dragons. (Personally, I think Harry has so much raw magical power inside of him. I think he has abilities beyond what most witches and wizards can do.)
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Just short and fluffy. I wish everyone had a Molly Weasley in their life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, The Burrow

Hogwarts letters arrive just as Molly is serving the lunch that she and Charlie made.

“They’re here!” Ginny yells up the staircase to anyone and everyone.

Hermione rushes down to the ground floor, while Harry and Ron follow behind her with far less enthusiasm. Ginny hands out the post as they sit down at the kitchen table. Harry is congratulating his friends on keeping their status as Prefects when a piece of red and gold falls out of his own Hogwarts letter.

Ron is the first to spot it. “Blimey, Harry! McGonagall made you Captain!”

Harry picks up the Captain’s Badge and runs his thumb over the intricate stitching. “I haven’t truly played since our third year. I’m surprised she trusts me.”

“She doesn’t have a reason not to,” Hermione responds. “And neither the Tournament nor Umbridge’s ‘Educational Decrees’ were your fault. Professor McGonagall knows that.”

Charlie places a warm hand on his shoulder and Harry looks up at him from his seat. “Besides, you’re the best Seeker they’ve had since I was there. You deserve this.”

The words of his friends make Harry’s heart swell. Even amidst the horrors of an impending war, he can always count on the Weasleys (and Hermione) to be there for him.

“Being Captain is almost better than being a Prefect,” Ron admits around a mouthful of food. Molly gives him a glare that could melt the paint off walls so he swallows before continuing. “You don’t have all the responsibilities like we do, but you still get to use the Prefects’ Bathroom.”

“Oh, yes!” Hermione nods along emphatically. “I know you were in there once to figure out the clue with the dragon egg, but it is so nice to be able to relax in there after a long day of studying.”

“Among other things,” Charlie whispers into Harry’s ear low enough so that no one else hears. Harry snorts pumpkin juice out of his nose and gives Charlie a punch to the shoulder in retaliation.

After lunch, Hermione offers to check over Harry and Ron’s summer assignments and both gladly take her up on that. Ginny tags along for lack of anything better to do, so Charlie is left alone in the kitchen with his mother. They fall into their easy routine of cleaning up and he turns on the wireless in hopes of finding some music. Instead, it’s a report about another muggle bridge ‘collapsing’ due to the Death Eaters. Molly tsks and reaches over Charlie to shut the wireless off.

Charlie feels uncomfortable in the silence that’s left behind, so he tries to think of a topic that his mother would be willing to talk about. “Harry really liked the dragon sanctuary.”
“I figured he would,” Molly replies. Then she walks into the living room, motioning for Charlie to follow. Once they’re sitting down she looks to the stairs before going on. “That doesn’t mean I didn’t worry about him the whole time you were gone.”

“He was with either me or Tonks- or both of us- the entire time. There was nothing to worry about.”

“If I don’t worry about him then who will??” Her question ends in almost a yell.

“I will. I do. Pretty much every day he’s away I worry about him. But I promise that as long as I’m here, he’ll be alright.”

“You can’t promise something like that. Not during a war.”

Charlie says quietly, “I’d give my life for him, Mum.”

Molly considers him as though she’s trying to solve a riddle. “Does he know?” she finally asks.

“Does he know what?”

“Does he know how you feel?”

“Does he know how you feel about him?”

This is what Charlie has been avoiding since he was fifteen years old. He doesn’t know why it scares him so much, but it’s hung like a weight between him and his mother for too long. His father is okay with it. Bill, Ron, and the twins are okay with it. (He’s never told Percy outright but he’s always been clever so he probably figured it out on his own by now, and he’s never said anything against it so Charlie can only assume he’s okay with it too.) He just can’t shake the feeling that admitting it to her will let her down, and that’s the last thing he wants to do. But he can’t keep this up anymore. He takes a deep breath and steels himself.

“Yes, he does.”

“And does he feel the same way about you?” she asks without pause.

“Yes, he does.”

Charlie can’t look at her. He just can’t see the disappointment in her eyes. He’ll never bring home a bride-to-be to meet the family. He’ll never have a grand wedding ceremony. He’ll never have little miniature copies of himself running around livening up the house, calling his parents Gran and Gramps.

Molly reaches over and wipes the tears away before he even realizes that they’re trickling down his cheeks. “Why are you crying, sweetheart?”

“I just don’t want you to be upset with me,” he sniffs.

“And what do you think you’ve done to make me upset?”

Her voice is soft and Charlie wants nothing more than to be small again so that he can crawl into her lap. “I don’t fancy women.”

More tears bubble up and can’t stop them. Though he may no longer be small, she pulls him into
her side and he buries his face into her neck anyway. She rubs his back and makes soothing noises, letting him cry it out. When his tears have slowed and his breathing is less ragged she starts speaking softly again. “Did you really think I’d be angry with you for that?” He nods, not willing to speak just yet. “Charles Gideon Weasley,” she scolds him without raising her voice or changing her tone, “How little you think of your own mother. Fred and George have blown up parts of this very house and I don’t love them any less. Did you really think I’d find fault with you just because of who you love?”

“I’ll never be like Bill.”

“I already have a Bill. I want you to be Charlie.”

“Even if-”

She interrupts him. “Even if you did something horrible. And this- caring about Harry, or any man for that matter- isn’t horrible. It’s just part of who you are.”

“But-”

“No ‘but’s. You’re my beautiful boy. You definitely need a haircut and it’d be nice if you shaved your face and visited more often, but I would never want you to change what makes you you.”

Charlie lets her continue petting his head until his back gets stiff from bending at such an odd angle. He sits up and leans heavily against the back of the sofa. “How long have you known?”

“Since you broke up with that boy at the end of your sixth year.”

“You knew about that?!”

“Now what kind of mother would I be if I didn’t know about my children’s lives?”

“But- but- why didn’t you ever say anything?”

“And how would that conversation have gone?”

“I don’t know!” Charlie throws his hands in the air in exasperation and lets them plop down on either side of him. “I guess I should have just said something years ago.”

Molly gives a light shrug. “I don’t expect any of your brothers to come to me and tell me that they’re straight, so why would I expect you to come to me and tell me you’re not?”

Charlie knows that he got lucky with his parents. There are plenty of people who wouldn’t be so open-minded as they are. There’s just one more thing that he has to know. “Are you okay that it’s Harry?”

She heaves a sigh, letting the air out slowly as she thinks of the best way to say this. “I’ve always wanted what’s best for him. It’s obvious that you want the same. I know that you’re a good person and would make a good partner for anyone lucky enough to earn your affection. And how could I disapprove of him? He has such a big heart and has shown our family such love.”

“But…”

“But nothing. I simply worry that he’s still quite young.”

He looks at the floor. “Trust me, I know. I’ve gone back and forth about it with him and we’ve come to an understanding. He’s been through more than most adults have in their whole lives. He
obviously still has to finish school, but we don’t want to give each other up just because of that.”

“I probably don’t need to say this, but I will anyway. Don’t you dare do anything to hurt him. You protect him with your life. Or else.”

Charlie snaps his head up. “Or else what? I’m your son!”

“I don’t care who you are. Harry deserves to be taken care of. He deserves to be loved. You do that, and you won’t ever hear any complaining from me.” Molly pats his knee twice before lifting herself from the sofa and walking towards her bedroom, leaving Charlie alone and wondering how he ended up on that end of his mother’s threat.

Charlie has to leave before the annual trip to Diagon Alley. He really wishes he could stay, especially with how much more dangerous the excursion will be this time around, but he has to get back to Romania. He tells Harry as much but it doesn’t seem to brighten his mood any. The night before he’s set to leave, Charlie is lying in Percy’s old bed reading when he hears a tap at the door. Charlie uses his wand to unlock the door and open it revealing Harry standing nervously on the other side. He slips into the bedroom and shuts the door again, but doesn’t move any closer.

“Going to stand there all night?” Charlie challenges.

Harry grins and quickly joins Charlie in the narrow bed. “Maybe not our best idea,” he says with a laugh as he struggles to stay on.

“Just wait.” Charlie uses his wand to expand the bed into one a little more suited for two people. “There we have it.”

“Ahhhh,” Harry sighs as he relaxes next to Charlie.

The two snuggle close, just enjoying being pressed together. Charlie wishes he could freeze time to preserve the moment. It isn’t until Harry laughs that he realizes he said it out loud.

“As much as I’d like to stay like this, I’d also like to experience being Quidditch Captain. And Potions without Snape. And school in general now that Umbridge is gone. Last year was pretty much a waste.”

“I want you to experience all of that too. And as much as I’d love to stay like this, I’m also looking forward to getting back to work. It turns out that I like teaching people about dragons.”

Harry yawns. “We’re both going to be so busy. What if this is the last I see of you until Christmas?”

Charlie plants a kiss onto his forehead. “Then I’ll know that nothing bad happened and you were actually allowed to be normal for once.”

“Pffft, normal is overrated.” He yawns again.

“Get some rest, Harry.”

He moves his head side to side even as his eyes close. “Wanna stay up with you.”

“I’ll be here when you wake.”

“Promise?” The word comes out slurred.
“Someone would have to do an awful lot to keep us apart.” Harry’s only response is a hum so Charlie’s last thought is but whispered into his hair. “Just let them try.”

Chapter End Notes

Arthur and Molly are parenting goals.
1996, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Harry,

Tonks told me about what happened on the train! She said you’re alright so please tell that’s true.

And why do you insist on instigating fights with Draco Malfoy? The Malfoys and the Weasleys have never gotten along. I hate to generalize an entire family, but they’re not the sort to be trifled with.

Other than that nasty business, I hope you are settling back into Hogwarts well enough. Let me know how Quidditch try-outs go.

Stay safe,

Charlie

Charlie,

I’m fine. Malfoy broke my nose but I’ll admit that it probably wasn’t the best idea to hide under the Invisibility Cloak. I would have ended up back at King’s Cross if not for Tonks. Why does the train go all the way back to London anyway? Where do they store it when it’s not transporting students? Why is nobody else asking these important questions??

As for classes, there’s good news and bad news. The bad news is that Snape has made it impossible to enjoy the one class I’m really good at. The only bright part of last week’s lesson was that I accidently spoke instead of using a wordless shield charm and knocked Snape into a wall. He gave me detention but Dumbledore wants me to meet with him during that time instead.

The good news is that I can take Potions after all! Slughorn only requires have an EE to get into his Advanced Potions. It sort of stinks that Ron and I don’t have a free period but I’m glad that I could still be an Auror if I wanted to. Because I definitely want to. I think. Regardless, since Ron and I didn’t have books Slughorn told us to just borrow old ones out of the cupboard. I got one that looks like it was used by a hundred different people but there’s all sorts of notes scribbled into the margins. They were really helpful and for the first time I’m actually doing well in Potions. I won a vial of Felix Felicis for brewing the best potion! Hermione thinks I cheated, using the notes written into the book, but I think she’s just mad that I’m better than her for once.

Ever heard of any stories about a Half-Blood Prince?

No try-outs yet,

Harry
Harry,

I can honestly say that I’ve never thought about the Hogwarts Express that much before but now you’ve got me curious. I’ll ask Dad and see if he knows. I can also ask him about the Half-Blood Prince. That’s not a story Mum ever told us, but maybe it was just something she didn’t want us to know. Is there a specific reason you’re asking? If I knew a little more I may be able to help.

I’m glad that you are one step closer to being an Auror- if that’s what you want to do. And don’t feel pressured to make that decision any time soon. I’m just relieved that you don’t have that option taken away from you because of a silly test score.

Snape really cheeses you off, doesn’t he? Just be careful and try not to let him get to you. I don’t want to hear that you’ve been stuck in detentions with him instead of getting to enjoy time with your friends. And what did Dumbledore want to meet with you about? Mum doesn’t trust him and quite frankly I’m not a huge fan after the past few years either.

Yes try-outs yet,

Charlie

Charley,

FINE! I DID TRY-OUTS! I don’t know if I can handle being in charge like this though.

Ron made the team. Ginny did too. She, umm…I want to be completely honest with you…when I told her I’d picked her as Chaser, she kissed me. I pushed her off right away and made it clear that there would never be anything between me and her. Please believe me.

I’m sorry,

Harry

Ginny,

Stay away from him.

Ron,

Congratulations on making the Quidditch Team! I’m proud of you, little brother.

Charlie

Harry,

Relax, I’m not mad at you. I had a feeling she’d try to put the moves on you at some point this year. It’s really my fault for not telling her that we’re together.

You’re going to be an amazing captain. I’d stake my reputation as Romania’s number one dragon
trainer on it.

Charlie

Charlie!

You should not have written that to Ginny! I don’t know what you said to her but she was so angry! And you know how she gets when she’s angry… As she was stomping her way out of the Great Hall she hexed Michael Corner just for looking at her wrong! What if your mum finds out?

Why are the women in our lives all so scary? I mean, there’s Ginny and your mum. Hermione cast a Confundus on McLaggen during try-outs so that he would miss more goals than Ron (oops…don’t tell Ron that). Your old boss Morgan seemed rather unpredictable as well.

Has your new term started yet?

Harry

P.S. I just saw Ron send a letter off to you. If he mentions anything about…me… just…don’t believe him.

Harry,

I just told her to back off. And I don’t care if she says something to our mum because I already told her before I left the Burrow. I hadn’t planned on it, but Dad kept pushing me and I was alone with her and she’s always been able to read me. She’s known about my preferences for a long time and she’s cautiously okay with the two of us being together. She just wants what’s best for you. I thought she was going to make me swear an Unbreakable Vow to keep you safe or something, but she didn’t go that far.

Hermione cheated for Ron?? Isn’t she all about fairness and following the rules? And Ron still has no idea about her feelings for him? He’s so thick.

Way to change the subject, but yes our term has started as well. I am officially teaching Classification of Dragons. Tamsin is still in there with me just in case I need the support but I’m in charge of lessons and assignments and exams and everything. It’s quite a lot of pressure, truth be told, but I like it.

Good luck on your opening match against Slytherin! Tell Ronnie the same from me.

Charlie

P.S. What should I not believe? The bit where he caught you wanking to my picture?

Charlie,

WE WON! Ron was great. He needed a little encouragement; I pretended to put my vial of Felix Felicis into his juice this morning and that was all it took. Hermione was so mad (you’re right, she usually is all about the rules and such) but after the match I told her and Ron that I never actually did it. Ron is a bloody good Keeper all on his
Ron was upset that Hermione didn’t believe in him, so he tried to make her jealous by snogging Lavender Brown in front of everyone in the common room (we were having an after-game party to celebrate, so the entire house witnessed it).

And he’s not the only one trying that tactic. I have run across Ginny snogging by friend Dean Thomas at least three times in the last week. She’s doing it on purpose. I just hope she really likes Dean and not just stringing him along. She and Ron got into a huge fight because he doesn’t like public displays of affection, but then she reminded him about Lavender- and the fact that Hermione has probably also kissed Viktor Krum back in our fourth year. It got ugly fast. Ron said some really nasty things and Ginny met him insult for insult. I don’t have the patience for this drama. Thank you for being blissfully drama-free.

And I hope all goes well with your course! I’m sure you’re amazing.

Harry

P.S. It’s embarrassing! Although I blame you for even sending me that photograph. You knew what you were doing when you took it. And he’s your brother!!! He should have been embarrassed too, but he just laughed at me!

Harry,

Oh no…Ronnie…

You said it over the summer, that he would do something idiotic like this. I just hoped that he would do a little bit of growing up before then. And I hope your friend Dean doesn’t hurt by Ginny just because she has some growing up to do too. I don’t remember any of our other brothers being like this at Hogwarts. I definitely wasn’t. I didn’t like the drama as a teenager, either, and don’t like it any better now. I guess we’re just a good match.

Thank you for the vote of confidence. Some days are better than others- just like any job- but I love the content and the recruits are willing to learn for the most part. For the first time I feel like a proper teacher.

Got any plans for my birthday?

Charlie

P.S. I’ll take the blame. It’s not like I don’t think about you when I’m alone.

Charlie,

Sorry it’s been a while but I never realized how hard these advanced courses were going to be. I’ve never been a stellar student, and I have less time than ever now that I have regular meetings with Dumbledore. I’ll tell you about those when I see you over the hols.

I never thought I’d say this, but I’m worried about Draco Malfoy. We ran across him in Diagon Alley before school started and I think his Death Eater dad has gotten him into some serious trouble. I don’t know for certain, but I’m fairly certain he’s becoming a Death Eater himself. My friend Katie Bell was cursed by a necklace that I saw Malfoy with. And he’s been wandering the school at night. Tonight was
Slughorn’s party (more on that in a mo) but Snape pulled him aside and said that he promised to make sure he’s safe. Malfoy snapped at him that he didn’t need to be protected but honestly he looked scared to death. We’re just kids. How can their side be recruiting kids? Although, it’s not much different from what Scrimgeour and Dumbledore were trying to do with me.

The rest of Slughorn’s party was a disaster. I took Luna because a lot of the girls at school have been flirting with me non-stop. It’s horrible. Romilda Vane has been one of the worst. She even tried to slip me a love potion. DON’T SEND HER A HOWLER OR SOMETHING! It was bad enough with Ginny. It’s not worth it to get her mad at me too. But anyway, I took Luna and we saw Hermione there but she didn’t bring Ron. She brought McLaggen. I thought Hermione was above all this, but she went and brought the one guy who would make Ron explode. Have all my friends gone mental?

At least I get to see you at the Burrow in a few days. In fact, send Hedwig there once she gets a chance to rest. And I know you were probably just teasing, but of course I have plans for your birthday! What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn’t?

Harry

P.S. Well, maybe you can show me while we’re together.

Chapter End Notes

I know this is really short but the next chapter is reeeeally long, so it'll all even out.
Chapter Notes

Okay, I’m going to level with you- I almost changed the rating because of this chapter. But then I did some revising and I feel confident that it can stay as is. (Writing explicit scenes just isn’t my style.)

Regardless, I really like this chapter and I hope you do too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1996, The Burrow

Charlie is the last one to the Burrow on Christmas Eve. Ron and Harry are playing chess in the living room while Ginny glares at them. Bill and Fleur are sitting close on the sofa. He isn’t sure where the twins are, but Remus and Tonks are having a conversation with Arthur in low voices in a corner of the room. He steps out of the floo and greets his family.

“Charlie!” Harry is on him in an instant, chess game forgotten.

“Hey there.” Charlie only gets a moment to enjoy their hug before he’s screaming out in pain.

Ron pulls out his wand and vanishes the bats that fly out of his brother’s nose. “WHAT THE HELL, GINNY?!”

She has a murderous look on her face and her wand is still pointing directly at Charlie. “Don’t act like you’re okay with this,” she says to Ron, never moving her eyes from where Harry is now comforting Charlie. When Ron doesn’t answer she’s forced to look his way. “Seriously? Am I the only one who sees how wrong this is?”

“Ginny…” Arthur warns.

“I can’t believe this!” She throws her arms in the arm and lets them drop to her sides with a slap. “How is everyone okay with the way they throw themselves at each other right in front of me?”

“You’re with Dean,” Harry spits out. “Shall I owl him and tell him your feelings have changed?”

Ginny pales at his comment and she sputters, trying to find a decent response. She can’t stand the judgmental looks coming from around the room, so she growls and fires a stinging hex at Harry before stomping away.

“Are you both okay?” Arthur asks as he stands up.

Harry rubs his left side where the hex hit him. “Yeah, I’ll be fine. What about you, Charlie?”

“Right as rain. Boy is she good at that bat-bogey hex.” Charlie twitches his nose around just to be sure.

Arthur pats them both on the shoulder. “I’ll be speaking with her, don’t you worry. Go get some egg nog from the kitchen and try to relax.”
Charlie takes Harry’s hand and leads him into the next room. Molly is busy cooking, but she waves a small towel over her shoulder when they walk in. “Hello, boys. What was all the excitement about?”

“Nothing,” Harry fibs.

Molly stops what she’s doing but doesn’t turn around just yet. “It didn’t sound like nothing.”

“He’s just being nice and trying to spare Ginny’s feelings,” Charlie explains. “She hexed the both of us.”

Her eyes are filled with fire when she finally turns to face them. “She. Did. What?”

“Dad’s taking care of it. Think we could have some egg nog?”

Molly nods. She doesn’t know how she let her daughter get this bad. She decides then and there to put more effort into stopping to Ginny’s attitude.

“Mum? Everything alright?”

“Of course, sweetheart. Keep an ear open for the timer?” She gestures to the stove and leaves the two of them alone in the kitchen.

Harry takes a drink of his egg nog and gives a low hum. “This is strong.”

“Dad must have made this batch,” Charlie says with a laugh.

“It’s good.” He tips his glass back and downs the rest.

“Woah, take it easy with that.”

“Think anyone would notice if we slipped off before dinner?”

Charlie pulls Harry onto his lap. “Unfortunately, I think everyone would. Especially after that show Gin just put on. Afterwards, though…” He latches onto Harry’s neck, peppering the golden skin with bites and kisses.

Harry groan turns from pleasure to frustration when the timing charm that Molly set on the stove goes off. “We should get that before it burns. Ron will never forgive us if we ruined supper.”

“When did you become the sensible adult?”

“When did you become the randy teenager?”

“When did both of you become so nauseating?” Ron playfully mocks them as he walks into the kitchen. “No, please, stay where you are. I’ll get the food before it’s destroyed.”

“I told you,” Harry whispers to Charlie as he stands up to help set the table.

The aroma of Molly’s delicious cooking draws everyone into the kitchen for supper. The twins come in from outside (they inform Charlie that they were just looking around their Dad’s garden shed for new ideas) and Arthur and Molly return from talking to Ginny, who sits as far away from Harry and Charlie at the table as she can. Bill gives a special toast thanking his family for opening their hearts to Fleur this year. Everyone clinks their glasses and digs in to the meal.
After supper, Arthur invites Harry and Ron to join him in the garden shed to see the new muggle device that he wants to show off. Remus asks to have a private conversation with Charlie and the two go up to Percy’s old room, where Charlie is once again staying. There is one chair already in the room so Remus transfigures a second out of the desk.

“I wanted to check in and see how you’re doing recruiting people for our side,” he says when they’re both seated.

Charlie was expecting another lecture about Harry. He’s glad for the surprise topic. “The other dragon handlers- my friends- are committed to the cause. They’ve told me that whatever help we need, when the time comes, they’ll be there.”

“Good,” Remus says looking relieved. “That’s very good.”

“To be clear, we will not under any circumstance bring any dragons into battle. We are not barbarians and we will not be putting them or anyone else in danger by doing so. My old boss, Morgan, just wanted me to make that clear.”

“Of course, Charlie. I would expect no less from you.”

“Thanks.”

“What about local villagers? Do they seem sympathetic to You-Know-Who?”

Charlie scoffs. “Definitely not! Though I can tell that they’re more than a little disaffected to the Ministry. I’m not sure they’re on anyone’s side but their own.”

“That’s what I’ve encountered with the werewolves as well. There are some, of course, that are loyal to Fenrir Greyback. They see him as a role model. But the smaller packs- especially those with families of women and children- do not think that either side will protect them. At this point I just hope that I can keep them from falling into allegiance with Greyback.”

“Tonks says you’ve been living among the werewolves. How are you handling that?”

Remus wants to trust Charlie but isn’t sure if he can. “It’s been…difficult…for many reasons. I feel certain urges when I am with the packs. It’s worse during the full moons, of course. I hate spending so much time away from Dora, but I’m doing what must be done.”

“I wasn’t trying to accuse you of anything,” Charlie says softly. “I can’t even imagine what you go through.”

“At least I have her.”

“For now.” Remus looks at him with fear in his eyes, so Charlie tries to help. “I mean, she loves you. I know she’s told you that. But you have to let her love you. Tonks is a Hufflepuff through and through. She’s loyal to the end and she wouldn’t even think of deserting you. You have everything. Just…don’t let it slip through your fingers.”

“Sometimes love just isn’t enough,” he says, gaze turned to the floor.

“And sometimes it is.”

There’s a knock at the door and since Charlie never set the wards, it swings open when the knob is turned. “Oh!” Harry startles when he sees the pair sitting so seriously. “I can come back…”
“That’s alright, Harry. Charlie and I were just finishing up.” Remus offers his hand and Charlie shakes it. Then he stands and ruffles Harry’s hair as he walks out of the room.

“What was that all about?” Harry asks as he closes the door and sits in the chair that Remus just vacated.

“We were just catching up.”

“Well, there was no yelling so I suppose that’s an improvement.”

Charlie laughs which makes Harry smile in return. “So, what crazy contraption was my dad bragging about this time?”

Harry’s face turns red and he wipes his sweating palms onto the legs of his trousers. “That was just his excuse for getting Ron and me alone with him.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. He, umm…he wanted to talk to us ‘Father-to-sons.’ That should have been enough for me to figure out we were in for it. But it’s Christmas! I was distracted by the holiday spirit!”

Charlie’s eyes go wide first, and then crinkle in amusement. He remembers his father having those conversations with him and Bill a lot when they were around Harry’s age. “And what exactly did he have to say?” he teases.

Harry’s head swivels around to face Charlie’s. His eyes are pleading, desperate. “I’d rather not repeat it.”

“Ah. So it was about sex.”

“Stop! It’s bad enough I had to hear it once tonight.”

Now, Charlie knows it can be embarrassing talking about that with parents but he thought that Harry had been hinting over the past few months that he was ready to move things forward in their relationship. But the way Harry is acting gives him pause. He has to remind himself that Harry is new to all of this. “I’m sorry. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“No, it’s not you. It’s just that your dad thinks we’re doing…that… and we’re not. Not that I don’t want to! But-”

“It’s strange to think that he’s thinking about it?”

“Exactly! At least Ron created a distraction by making a fool of himself. He tried to argue that he and Hermione weren’t even close to doing anything and your dad had to remind him that he’s dating Lavender and not Hermione. You should have seen him!”

“Ronnies is so hung up on that girl. Why does he insist on trying to make her jealous?”

Harry shrugs. “I think he was just happy to have someone show him interest. I’m not saying that Hermione was wrong in any way- she has every right to act however she pleases- but she has to know by now that Ron is simple. He needs someone to throws themselves at him and shout, “I FANCY YOU!” for him to get it.”

“And Lavender was willing to do that.” Charlie doesn’t ask it like a question. He knows his little brother well enough (and he knows what Harry has already told him in his letters). “Oh well. This
is one of those lessons he’ll just have to learn the hard way.”

“I just hope he doesn’t drive me mad in the meantime.”

“Aww, need a little stress relief?” Charlie can’t help it. Harry wasn’t wrong earlier when he accused him of acting like a randy teenager. He’s been dreaming about spending some time alone with Harry since they were together last.

Harry, thankfully, seems to be on the same page. He leans closer while the side of his mouth tilts up. “What do you have in mind?”

“I believe in your last letter you mentioned wanting to see what I did when I was thinking about you.” Charlie loves the way that Harry tries to fight the blush rising on his cheeks. He crosses the room, leaning over Harry as goes. “Or, we could try something different. Perhaps whatever it was my dad warned you against?”

“Charlie!” Harry buries his face in his hands. “I really don’t want to think about your dad right now.”

“That’s fair.” He moves to the edge of the bed. “Let me see if I can take your mind off of that.” He takes his jumper off over his head, swinging it to the floor. “How’s this?”

“Charlie…”

“Harry…”

“I just…promise you’ll stop me if I do something wrong?”

Charlie can’t help it. He laughs. Which, of course, Harry misinterprets and gets flustered. He gets up and starts moving to the door in shame. “No! Wait!” Charlie calls him back and tries to get his giggling under control. “I’m sorry!”

Harry stops but refuses to look at him. “Just let me go, Charlie. Please? This was a mistake.”

He’s at the door, standing behind Harry, in an instant. Charlie hesitantly puts his hands on Harry’s shoulders and bends to talk low in his ear. “I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

“Then why did you laugh at me?” Harry rips away from his grip, only to realize that Charlie wasn’t even holding him in place.

“I’m sorry. I just can’t believe you think you could do something wrong.”

“I’m not perfect, Charlie. I might be ‘The Chosen One’ but I’m just a person. I could easily mess up and hurt you. And I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself if I did.”

“Look at me.” He says it like a command but his tone is soft and hopeful. Harry slowly lifts his head to make eye contact. “I don’t care about what some stupid prophecy says or what the Daily Prophet has decided to call you. You’re just Harry, and I know that you would never hurt me on purpose.”

“Maybe not on purpose, but it’s still a definite possibility. I don’t exactly know much about-” he gestures between them.

“Then we’ll start slow. You show me what you like and I’ll show you what I like. I’m not so blind with lust that I’d let you do something that would hurt either of us.”
“Promise?”

“Of course.” Charlie places a soft kiss to Harry’s mouth. “I’m sorry I laughed the first time you asked. It’s perfectly normal to be nervous and I went and messed everything up. I want you to be able to trust me.”

“I do trust you,” Harry admits. “I’m sorry I got so worked up. You’re right…I was, or well, am, nervous. We’ll just…go slow.”

“Yeah,” Charlie kisses him again, “slow.” He slides his hands under the hem of Harry’s t-shirt.

Harry lifts his arms so that Charlie can pull it up and over his head, and then their mouths are back together before it even hits the floor. They’ve done this before. He can totally handle this. Harry is so absorbed in their kissing that he doesn’t notice they’re moving until the backs of his knees hit the bed. He gasps and Charlie leans away.

“Are you okay?” he asks sincerely. “We can stop.”

“Shut up,” Harry responds as he reaches his arms around Charlie’s shoulders. He lets himself fall onto the bed, dragging Charlie with him. They land in an uncoordinated pile and Harry lets out a snort. “Sorry!”

Charlie just smiles down at him. “Who’s laughing at who now?”

“Whom.”

“What?”

“Hermione corrects me all the time. It’s ‘who’s laughing at whom’.”

“I should probably be concerned that you correcting my grammar does nothing to turn me off.”

Harry goes to laugh, but the sound dies on his tongue as Charlie starts nibbling his way down Harry’s chest. He wants to be self-conscious but all coherent thought comes to screeching halt when Charlie loosens Harry’s belt.

There’s a knock on the door and Charlie swears he’ll hex whomever it is into oblivion if only he can find where he left his wand. “WHAT??” he shouts.

“Geeze, sorry mate.” It’s Ron and at least he’s smart enough to keep standing on the other side of the door. “Just looking for Harry because Mum sent us all upstairs.”

Harry looks at Charlie with wide eyes, so he answers for him. “He’s bunking with me, Ron.”

“Oh. I kind of figured after the talk Dad had with us…” Ron lets the thought trail off.

Harry clears his throat to make sure he doesn’t sound debauched. “We’ll talk tomorrow, okay Ron?”

“Yeah, alright.”

They listen to him ascend the stairs towards his own bedroom. Then, Charlie looks at Harry in question. “I won’t hold it against you if you want to go talk to him.”

“This probably makes me a bad person, but I really don’t. He’ll still be confused about his feelings in the morning. I, however, am in no way confused.”
“So, what you’re saying is you want me to keep going?” Charlie traces his finger along his stomach, where skin meets pants.

Harry reaches down and takes his wand out of his pocket. He quickly casts a few privacy charms on the door, and then drops his wand onto the bed covers. “There. Now keep going.”

Charlie gives him a cheeky grin. “There you go again, being the responsible adult.”

“Yes, yes, and you’re the randy teenager but right now I’m also the randy teenager so I’d greatly appreciate it if you’d keep going.”

“Well, when you put it like that how could I refuse?”

Charlie wakes up the next morning with a mop of unruly hair in his face. He puffs out a breath but it does little to help. He could just roll over but he doesn’t want to let go of Harry, who is currently wrapped around him in an imitation of an octopus. One of his legs is nestled between Charlie’s and if Harry were awake he’d be able to feel just how much Charlie is enjoying this.

He closes his eyes in an attempt to savor the moment by going back to sleep, but then he can hear the twins doing their usual Christmas morning routine. It always starts off with whiz-bangs of their own design, and then they start it in the screaming yo-yos. It isn’t much after that when Charlie sees the first of the bubbles come in through the door. How Fred and George managed to charm the bubbles to not only go through solid surfaces but also to penetrate warding spells, he’ll never know. They truly are too clever for their own good.

Harry makes a noise of discontent after the fourth whiz-bang explodes and pulls the covers up over their heads. Safely inside the cocoon of blankets, Charlie kisses Harry’s forehead sweetly. A smile makes its way across Harry’s face before he opens his eyes. This close, and without the obstacle of his glasses, Charlie gets lost in their color. They are flecked with grey and brown but that only seems to make the green greener.

“What are you thinking about?” Harry asks him in barely more than a whisper.

“Just how much I hate your glasses.”

Harry’s shoulders shake softly as he chuckles. “I’d love to vanish them, trust me, but I need to get something better before I do. I’m practically blind without them.”

Charlie mouths along his jaw and up to his ear. “You sure seemed to do okay without them last night.”

“Charlie!” Harry blushes just thinking about what they did the night before. He definitely liked it. So much so, that he’s sure wanking on his own will never be enough for him again. In fact, he doesn’t know how anything will ever be enough for him again if it’s not with Charlie. That thought should scare him, but instead it comforts him in a way that nothing else has recently.

“What are you thinking about?” Charlie asks, mimicking Harry’s earlier question.

Harry’s response is to roll over so that he’s on top of Charlie. He looks down at him with such affection that it makes Charlie’s heart swell. But then Harry gives a wicked grin as he move his hips. Charlie lets out a groan that makes him hope the silencing charm Harry cast last night is still working. Harry seems to be thinking the same thing. “We should probably make this quick,” he says with another glance at the door.
“Ha! I don’t think that’ll be a problem for me.” Charlie’s next groan is quickly swallowed up by Harry’s kiss.

Harry insists on taking a shower before he can join everyone else downstairs so Charlie lets him go, deciding to cast some scouring charms on himself instead. He changes into the pair of rolled-up sweatpants he borrowed from Bill after he broke his hand and the navy blue sweater his mum knit for him with the letter C on it. Foregoing shoes or slippers, he just puts on a thick pair of wool socks and pads down to the kitchen.

He hums *A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love* as he makes up two mugs of hot chocolate (knowing Harry prefers the sweet drink in the morning to tea). He gives a light kiss to Molly’s cheek as he reaches around her to pluck a few rashers out of the pan. She scolds him for not being more careful but there’s no fire behind her words. She’s just glad to see him so happy. She watches fondly as he takes two plates and fills one with all the foods he knows Harry likes best.

“You made orange treacle muffins?” Charlie asks his mother as he picks up the biggest one for Harry. “It’s been years since you’ve had out that recipe.”

“Well, there’s only so much treacle toffee I can stand to make.” She tries (and fails) to hide yet another smile as Charlie bites into one and makes a pleased sound, giving her a thumbs up. “Go eat in the living room, sweetheart. I’ll send Harry your way when he gets down.”

He lifts what’s left of his muffin into the air in thanks as he levitates the full mugs and plates into the next room. He picks a seat next to his father and carefully sets the dishes down on one of the small tea tables that they set out for just this occasion. Eating a full meal in the living room is simply not done. But this is Christmas. *The rules can be bent for one day,*” Charlie remembers his mother saying when he was little.

Ginny, Harry, and eventually Ron make their way down for breakfast. Molly joins them only once she is sure that everyone else has enough to eat. Hermione floos in just as they are about to start trading gifts (modest in number again this year) and room is soon full of laughter and holiday cheer. Harry opts to sit next to Ron after accepting his breakfast from Charlie, but the two keep sharing looks and smiles across the room. Bill notices and quickly makes an assumption at what they’ve been up to. Hermione notices as well, though she at least is willing to wait and ask Harry later before jumping to conclusions of her own. Fred and George keep Ginny distracted by showing off their latest inventions. Arthur is pleased that everyone is so happy, especially in comparison to the somber setting of last Christmas. Molly mentions that it could only be more perfect if all of her children were here.

As if on cue, Percy unexpectedly steps through the floo. He greets his parents and then the rest of the room in turn. The floo flares green once more and none other than the Minister of Magic steps out. “Mum, Dad, everyone…this is Minister for Magic, Mister Rufus Scrimgeour.”

Arthur stands quickly and shakes Scrimgeour’s hand. Molly, Bill, and Fleur do the same. Percy kicks Charlie’s foot and gives him a glare. He jerks his head towards the Minister and Charlie rolls his eyes. He doesn’t know why Percy has brought the man to their parent’s home on Christmas, but he has a feeling it isn’t just for a friendly meet-and-greet. He doesn’t budge until his dad gives a pleading look of his own. Charlie reluctantly stands and shakes Scrimgeour’s hand. It’s cold and bony and he doesn’t like it one bit.

“I’m sorry to intrude upon your home on Christmas, but I wanted to speak with Mister Potter. Percy, here, explained that Mister Potter joins your family for the holiday and that you wouldn’t mind if we stopped by as well.”
“Of course we don’t mind,” Molly assures the Minister. “Harry, dear. Minister Scrimgeour would like to speak with you. Perhaps you could go into the kitchen for some privacy.”

“I think a turn around the garden will do us just fine,” Scrimgeour amends.

Harry doesn’t say anything but he stands and follows after him, giving a critical look as he goes. Charlie wants nothing more than to join them but he knows that it’s best to let Harry handle this one on his own. Percy immediately starts raving about how great the Ministry is and how amazing his job is now that Scrimgeour has taken over.

“Minister Scrimgeour has been working diligently with the Aurors to arrest all known Death Eaters, and the public needs to know that they can trust the Ministry!” Percy speaks with conviction. “He wants Harry to work with us so that the public can see that we’re a united front taking a stand against You-Know-Who.”

Charlie starts to complain but Ron beats him to it. “Is this the same Ministry that claimed Harry was a liar for two years?”

“That was…an unfortunate misunderstanding,” Percy says slowly, as if he’s making sure he doesn’t speak out of line. “A misunderstanding that was perpetrated by Dumbledore, who was overreaching his authority as Headmaster of Hogwarts.”

“Watch what you say, Percy,” Bill warns him. “We may not agree with everything that Dumbledore has done, but he has always supported Harry.”

“You are entitled to your wrong opinion, but the Ministry is done supporting Dumbledore! He is a foolish old man and he has done nothing but cause trouble for us! He may have sided with Harry in the past but only because it suited him to do so. The Ministry is looking out for the good of all, not just the good of him.”

The room is eerily quiet as Percy’s rant ends. Charlie has never heard his brother sound so cold and distant before.

“Son.” Arthur reaches a hand towards him but Percy steps back. The hurt across their dad’s face is enough for Charlie to lose his head. He jumps at Percy and knocks him to the floor. Percy never enjoyed roughhousing or wrestling like he and Bill did growing up, and Charlie is definitely stronger now than they were as kids. He easily pins Percy down. He pulls his left arm back and punches him square across the nose. Percy screams and tries to free his hands so that he can block his face, but finds that he can’t. Charlie pulls his arm back a second time but is yanked away before he has the chance to strike again.

Bill and Ron are flanking Charlie, each one twisting an arm so that he has no choice but to stop resisting. George and Fred are kneeling down to help Percy up. Fleur rushes out of the room to grab a wet towel and Molly frets over Percy’s bloody nose.

“Take him upstairs,” Arthur orders. “And don’t let him come back down. I’ll be up in a few minutes to talk to him.”

Charlie hates that his dad won’t look at him or even say his name. He lets Bill and Ron drag him upstairs, all of the fight leeching out of him as they go. They get to Bill’s room and all but toss him into the overstuffed chair by the window. Charlie slumps down and looks anywhere but at his brothers. When neither of them say anything, Charlie speaks up. “Go ahead. Yell at me. I deserve it.”
“I’m not mad at you,” Ron says. “I’m only mad you got to hit him first.”

“Ron!” Bill admonishes, rubbing his fingers into his temples. He pulls his long hair back and looks around the room for something to tie it up. Once his hair is in place, he sighs and drops down onto his bed. “What are we going to do about Percy?”

“I say we start with another couple of blows to the head. That might rattle his brains loose a bit, and then maybe he’ll start thinking clearly again.”

Charlie has never appreciated Ron more. Bill, on the other hand, doesn’t find the humor in the situation. “I mean it! That was not our brother down there. I don’t know who he’s turned in to, but that is not the Percy who used to read quietly by the fire in the Gryffindor common room. That is not the Percy who knew he could beat me at chess within five moves, but played out the game anyway. That is not the Percy whose nappies I helped change.” Bill sniffs loudly and wipes a hand across his face.

“I’m sorry, Bill. I didn’t mean it.” Ron sits down next to Bill, though it’s obvious he’s unsure of how to provide comfort. “He’s always seemed like a prat to me, but I’m sure Dad will talk some sense into him. And it’s not like Harry would actually agree to be the poster-boy of the Ministry.”

Charlie knows that last statement was meant for him. “I know how Harry feels about the Ministry, but I also know his weakness for the people he loves. I was just worried that with Percy saying those things he’d buy into it too.”

“Love isn’t a weakness,” Ron says wisely. “Dumbledore told Harry that after last year. It’s Harry’s compassion for those he cares about that will keep him from believing the lies of the enemy.”

“Percy isn’t the enemy,” Bill grits out.

“No, he’s not. But right now he’s got to sort out his priorities.”

There is a tap on the door but Arthur doesn’t wait for a response before opening it. “Out,” he commands. Ron and Bill quickly leave them alone.

“Dad-” Charlie starts but he’s cut off.

“No. You listen to me. I know that tensions are running high and what Percy said was so far out of line he wasn’t even anywhere near decent.” Arthur doesn’t sit. He chooses to pace the narrow room. “You were too young to remember what happened before. This is what it’s like during a war; brother against brother. But you have to keep your wits about you. I will not lose my sons, especially not to each other! It’s no secret that Percy has never fit in with the rest of you. So now, he has a job that makes him feel wanted and powerful. But I have faith that if we remain open and show him that he is always welcome here, the Percy we know and love will come back to us.”

“Bill said it was like listening to a different person down there. How can you be so sure he’ll change his mind?”

“Because what’s the alternative? Losing him forever? I refuse to let that happen.”

Until that moment, Charlie never knew where Bill got his quiet confidence from. Their dad was amazing. He was a natural born leader, but he did it all without you thinking he was doing anything. Charlie has always loved and respected him but he’s never felt so much pride in Arthur before. “Dad…” he wants to say something but can’t find words adequate enough.

Arthur offers him a crooked smile. “Father-to-son, I can’t condone what you did. Man-to-man,
however, I’m glad you stood up for Harry. And that’s one bloody good left hook.”

Charlie throws words out the window altogether as he jumps up from his chair and shocks his dad by pulling him into a tight hug.

Percy and the Minister are already gone when they venture back downstairs. Charlie apologizes, feeling like he’s ruined their holiday. But Molly shushes him and passes around cups of egg nog. It’s stronger than Charlie remembers it being the day before, but he has a feeling that everyone could use the extra kick right now. Molly turns on the wireless before settling in next to Arthur, Ron and Bill set up their chess pieces, Ginny challenges the twins to a game of Exploding Snap, and Hermione and Harry draw silly pictures with her new self-inking quill (which can be charmed to write in any color).

“I guess I need a hobby,” Charlie says to Fleur, who nods in agreement.

“Your mother taught me how to kneet.” She holds knitting needles and a ball of yarn aloft. “Per’aps you could learn?”

Charlie laughs but fetches another set of needles from the cupboard where he knows his mother keeps them, picking out a shade of ball of bright pink yarn that reminds him of Tonks. He sits back down next to Fleur and she starts going through the process of casting on. He catches the soft look his mother is giving them out of the corner of his eye, and he knows that any lingering tension between the two women is now well and truly gone.

By the time Ron starts asking about supper, Charlie has a lumpy pink monstrosity hanging from one needle. Fleur’s project (which looks much more like a scarf than his own) has perfectly even rows of burgundy. She catches Charlie looking and says, “Zees ees for my ‘usband-to-be. Eet ees traditional to trade geefts before ze wedding. I am ‘oping to ‘ave it done by zen.”

“It’s beautiful,” Charlie says honestly. “But the yarn isn’t shimmery, so how come your finished stitches look that way?”

Fleur winks. “Zat ees a secret.” Then she lowers her voice, “I am part veela. I zink zat ees why Molly does not trust me.”

Charlie is surprised, but quickly shakes it off so as not to offend her. “I wouldn’t worry about that anymore. You’ve shown us you care about Bill. And taking interest in her hobbies? You’ve definitely won Mum over.”

“Good.” Fleur smiles and continues to knit slowly but confidently.

Charlie lets his eyes slide over to Harry and finds him looking back. He lifts his hand in a little wave that makes Charlie shake his head to hide his smile. As much as he wants to go to Harry, he lets himself enjoy this time with his almost-sister-in-law instead.

Supper is subdued, though the meal itself is quite grand. Molly really went all out with the cooking. She calls everyone’s attention as they settle in. “Bill made a wonderful toast last night so I’m not going to try and top that, but I would like to say a little something. Uncertain times lie ahead.”

“Way to bring the room down, Mum!” George shouts.

“Oh, hush and let me finish.” She waves her napkin at them both. “Though uncertain times may lie ahead, we are always a family. That includes Harry, Hermione, and Fleur as well. Today you saw
what can happen when we forget what it means to be a family.” Arthur grips her hand, giving reassurance through his touch. “It doesn’t make any of us bad. It just makes us human. So, in the days to come, let us always remember to stick together. Family first.”

“To family,” Arthur finishes sedately, raising his glass.

“To family!” they respond in kind.

Harry doesn’t even pretend to go to Ron’s room that night. He and Charlie silently get ready for bed, holding hands when they can and standing close when they can’t. It isn’t until they’re snuggled down under the covers that Harry speaks.

“I turned down the Minister’s offer.”

“I had hoped you would.”

Harry rolls to face him. “Hermione told me that you punched Percy in the face.”

Charlie sighs. “Not one of my prouder moments, that.”

“Thank you for standing up for me. Scrimgeour claims to be on my side, but he’s no better than Fudge. He hates Dumbledore and, while I know the Headmaster isn’t perfect he’s still the only chance I have.”

“Chance at what?”

“Defeating Voldemort. He’s been…” Harry worries his bottom lip as he convinces himself to share this part with Charlie. “I’m not supposed to say, but Dumbledore’s been showing me memories. Some are his own and some belong to other people and they’re all about Voldemort. Or, well, Tom Riddle. That’s his given name.”

“Does anyone else know about this?”

“I tell Ron and ‘Mione what I can. I don’t want to lie but I also don’t want to put them in harm’s way by telling them too much.”

“And Dumbledore thinks that showing you these memories will help you…defeat You-Know-Who…how?”

Harry sighs. “He thinks that if I know more about who he was when he was just ‘Tom’ then I’ll be able to outsmart him. There’s just so much missing that we don’t know. Like how there’s something that’s been keeping him alive, but we don’t know what. Dumbledore had a memory from Professor Slughorn but it was altered so it wasn’t true. I’ve been tasked to get the real memory from him when I come back from the winter hols.”

“That’s a lot of pressure to put on you, Harry.” Charlie has to clench his teeth to keep from yelling. “He should not be doing this to you.”

Harry runs his hands up and down Charlie’s arms trying to get him to relax. “It’s alright. I believe Dumbledore when he says that this memory is important. I want to have every advantage so that when the day comes where I have to face Voldemort again, I’ll be ready.”

“You’re braver than anyone I know.”

“Says the man who risks his life working with dragons.”
“Says the man who walked up to a dragon and pet her snout.”

“Says the man who willingly chooses to be with the man who walked up to a dragon and pet her snout!”

Charlie laughs, the anger he felt moments before fading away at Harry’s silliness. “That I do.”

Harry wraps his arms around Charlie’s chest and throws a leg over his hip, sighing as he gets comfortable. “When do you have to go back?”

“I have a few days. Why? Are you plotting something?”

“Oh, I have plans for you.”

“I should probably be scared, but I’m mostly turned on.”

“Good,” Harry says with a yawn that ends in a smile. “Because that’s exactly what I had planned.” He yawns again and then adds, “Tomorrow.”

Charlie listens as Harry’s breathing evens out. Only once he’s sure that the boy is asleep does he close his own eyes and follow him into quiescence.

Chapter End Notes

I once had an composition professor tell me that I wasn’t allowed to use big words when small ones would do, but how can you resist using beautiful words like 'quiescence'? I can use whatever words I please.

Oh! And I must give credit where credit is due; Percy’s line of ‘you’re entitled to your wrong opinion’ is from the horrible reality show Dance Moms. One of the moms said it and I thought it was the funniest thing I’d ever heard.
Chapter Notes

Harry is...not at his best during this part of Half-Blood Prince. It made writing this chapter extremely difficult.

These letters are between several different people, and I tried to keep it as organized as possible.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

1997, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

Dad,

I went to talk to my teaching partner, Tamsin, today and she had a guest. It was Mister Lovegood. I introduced myself and he said it had been some time since he saw you. He said he that he always liked speaking with you and expressed his interest in seeing you soon. And he asked that you bring something muggle with you. He seems like a good guy. Is there a reason you haven’t visited him lately? In fact, is there a reason we never had the Lovegoods over like we did the Diggorys? Hopefully I’m not prying.

Charlie

Charlie,

Your mother always found Xenophilius a bit daft. I daresay I like the man! He has outlandish stories, sure, but so many people call my work faff that I’m not put off by that. Thank you for passing on his message. I’ll send him an owl and hopefully stop by in a few days. As for why they weren’t over more…well, I already mentioned your mother’s opinion of him, and then there was an unfortunate accident. His wife, Pandora, passed away. Xeno never really had that same spark after that. I hope that time has treated him well. The kids are friends with his daughter now (I don’t know if you remember Luna; she was one that snuck off to the Ministry last spring) so if nothing else that will give us something to talk about. Maybe Amos would like to meet with us as well. I worry about him.

Thank you for passing along the message, son. Stay safe.

Your Dad

Harry,

How is the new term going? I know you can’t give me details about your meetings with the Headmaster, but I hope you’re making progress with the task he’s given you. Ron mentioned apparition lessons, so also let me know how that goes! Romania is too far to apparate in one go, but it’s always fun to have that sort of freedom.
You remember how Tamsin gave you her name to give to your friend Luna and her father? Well, I walked in on them the other day—nothing bad! That sounded bad—but according to Dad, Mister Lovegood hasn’t been the same since his wife died. But I saw him happy and smiling and wanting to meet with my Dad (which they haven’t done in years). I guess what I’m trying to say is, thanks. Whatever you saw in Tamsin when you met her, I’m glad it led you to giving her a friend.

I miss you. I keep waking up wrapped around my pillow and each morning is more depressing than the last.

Charlie

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Charlie,

I thought I’d be excited about apparition lessons but I’m not. It’s mostly theory and we’re not even allowed to practice for a while still. Ron is just excited because his birthday is coming up soon. He’s bloody lucky he has an early birthday. Neville and I are literally the last to do anything. I guess I should be more chipper but Draco Malfoy has been driving me mad lately. He never sleeps. He just wanders around the castle doing…well, I don’t know what exactly he’s doing but I know it’s not good! I mean, it has to be bad because even Snape was trying to talk him down from it before the hols. And sometimes Malfoy just disappears altogether. How is that even possible?? The map has never let me down before. I just need to figure out what Malfoy is doing and then I’ll be able to relax. Oh, and get that stupid memory from stupid Slughorn!

I’m sorry. I just really want to be anywhere other than here. Well, no. That’s not true. I just really want to be with you. I miss you too. If I had my way, I’d move to Romania right now. Fred and George left Hogwarts without finishing their NEWTs and they’re doing great! Maybe that could work for me, too. No pressure from Dumbledore, no pressure from the Ministry, no pressure from my Quidditch team. This year was supposed to be fun but it’s turning out to be just like every year before; a disappointment.

At least Luna’s dad is having a good time. I’m happy for him and Tamsin. I knew that they would get along. When I asked Luna about it, she just smiled in that ethereal way she does and said that some things were meant to be. It was all a little cryptic, but I nonetheless have to agree.

Since you don’t have to work on the weekends, perhaps you could come watch our next Quidditch match? It’s not until the beginning of March but just knowing you’d be there might give me the motivation I need to keep going.

Harry

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Harry,

I want to be sympathetic, but that was the single most dramatic letter you have ever written me. I guess even the great Harry Potter is still a normal sixteen-year-old being run by his emotions.

Ron has always loved his birthday a little too much, but I know that being the youngest of six boys can be tough. He was never afraid to voice his dislike for our hand-me-down clothes or toys. Even his first wand was an old one of mine. His birthday was the one day out of the year when he felt just a little more special. (Don’t say to him anything because I don’t want it to go to his head, but
Mum has always favored Ronnie over the others; me notwithstanding, of course.) Just let him be a big head and enjoy his day. And yes, that includes him bragging about practicing for his apparition license.

Why are you so obsessed with Draco Malfoy all of a sudden? Though, now that I think of it, you did talk about him a lot during your first term as well. Is there something going on that I should know about?

And I suggest that you stop mentioning specifics of what the Headmaster is having you do. I understand that you were venting your frustrations, but what if someone had intercepted your letter before it got to me? Hedwig is easily the most recognizable owl. We had some magizoologists in for a lecture series and one of them specialized in owl training. He said that your rise in fame has made all little children want to have a snowy owl just like ‘The Chosen One’. I wouldn’t want something to happen to you- or to Hedwig- because you were careless and didn’t watch what you were writing. Merlin, I sound like my dad. I’m not trying to lecture you! I promise! Oh, geeze. This is the last thing you need. I’m sorry. Just, ignore the part where I sound pompous and take from it my warning to be more careful.

I love you. Even if I am trying to dig myself into an early grave.

Charlie

Charlie,

How can you say that so easily? Everyone who has ever said they loved me has died. First my parents and then Sirius. I’m not worth the pain.

And no! I am not obsessed with Draco Malfoy! Ron keeps saying the same thing and I’m sick of it! What do I have to do to prove that he’s up to something without everyone thinking I want to get in his pants?!

I noticed you failed to mention the Quidditch Match. I guess I shouldn’t have offered.

Harry

Charlie,

I’m so sorry. I regretted everything I wrote as soon as I sent Hedwig off. I’m writing as quickly as I can in hopes that you get this not too long after the first letter. Hedwig is fast, though, so hopefully you don’t hate me in the meantime. I’m sorry. It’s just that, my first attempts at talking to my Professor (since I shouldn’t name names, you’re completely right) have not worked in the slightest. Quidditch is still stressful, and now Ron has started whining to me about Lavender like he didn’t bring all of that on himself by dating her in the first place!

But there’s one part I don’t regret saying. I’m not obsessed with Draco Malfoy. I really would like for everyone to just shut up and leave me be. So I watch him on the map; what’s the big deal? He’s up to something and it’s my job to figure out what.

I’m sorry. Please don’t be angry forever.

Harry
Harry,

Relax. It’s going to be okay. I’m not angry with you. You are under more pressure than anyone else your age. You have every right to express your feelings. Would I have liked it if you didn’t take it out on me? Sure. But I’m strong enough to take it. Besides, it was just a letter. It probably would have hurt a lot more if you’d been saying all of that to my face. Then again, if we were face to face then I would have been able to help more.

I promise to stop pushing about Malfoy. You have your reasons and it doesn’t have to be any of my business. Just don’t try to take on everything yourself. Nothing good ever comes from that. I do have one question, though…what is this map you keep mentioning that you’re watching him with? Sounds creepy.

Of course I’ll come and watch your match; I couldn’t say no to you. And if you need to write to me less, I’d completely understand.

Charlie

Charlie,

Have I mentioned that you’re the greatest and I don’t deserve you?

The map is called The Marauder’s Map. My dad and his friends (Sirius, Remus, and fucking Peter Pettigrew) called themselves ‘The Marauders’ when they were at Hogwarts. Dad, Sirius, and Pettigrew became unlicensed Animagi so that they could be with Remus during full moons. They made a map of Hogwarts that’s enchanted. It shows where everyone is and it even shows secret passageways. That’s why it’s so frustrating that I can’t find Malfoy on the map. The only time it’s ever *not* shown someone was when…oh my god. I know where Malfoy is going. The Room of Requirement doesn’t show up on the map!!! But what is he doing in there?

I’m sorry. I really shouldn’t be spending all of my time thinking about him when I could be thinking about you. Which, just so you know, I’ve been doing quite a lot. If you know what I mean. And writing to you is one of the bright spots in my life. I wouldn’t give it up for anything.

Harry

Charlie,

Something happened at Hogwarts. I didn’t catch all of the details, but Ron was poisoned. He’s alright- thanks to Harry- and now he’s recovering in the hospital wing. Dad told me that Madame Pomfrey said she wasn’t going to let the entire Weasley family in like last time (I have the feeling she means you, specifically) so we’re not to come in. He’s going to be just fine, but it’s awful that it happened on his birthday. I think I’ll send him some sweets to cheer him up.

Try not to freak out like I know you’re doing. You won’t do Ronnie any good by getting caught sneaking into the castle.

Bill
Harry,

Bill told me that you saved Ron from getting poisoned?? He also told me that Pomfrey put a Weasley-ban (or, more likely, a Charlie-ban) on the hospital wing. What happened???

Charlie

Charlie,

Remember how I told you how all the girls wanted me to ask them to Slughorn’s party at the end of last term? Well, they kept showering me with gifts and I tried to vanish them all but apparently a box of chocolates from Romilda Vane got missed. Ron’s birthday gifts were tossed about and he found the chocolates and thought they were from him (you know how his sweet tooth is). He hate half the box and thought he was in love with Romilda! It’s lucky Lavender wasn’t around to hear him go on. Apparently Romilda laced the chocolates with a love potion in hopes that I’d eat them and fall deeply for her. Anyway, when I figured out what had happened I took Ron to Slughorn who fixed him up. Everything seemed to turn out alright. But then Slughorn brought out this bottle of mead to celebrate and when Ron drank some he started choking! It was poisoned (because getting dosed once on your birthday isn’t bad enough). I gave him a bezoar and got him to the hospital wing. He’s going to be alright, I just feel like it’s my fault. I should have taken him to Pomfrey straight away instead of to Slughorn. And I should have done a better job of vanishing those silly gifts!

One good thing that came out of all this is that Hermione finally admitted how she felt about Ron. Now she just has to tell him (though I think he understood when he woke up to find Hermione holding his hand and not Lavender).

Oh no! I just realized that I have to find a new Keeper for our match! I’m going to have to pick McLaggen, aren’t I? I suppose he was quite good at try-outs. I’ll just have to convince Hermione not to jinx him again. At least I’ll get to see you after the match.

Harry

Mum,

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but Madame Pomfrey told me I had to do it if I wanted to stay past visiting hours…Harry will be keeping Ron company in the hospital wing for a few days. There was an accident at the Quidditch match today. Ron’s replacement was a total berk and he was so busy trying to order everyone around that they were all distracted and Harry got his head cracked open! Madame Pomfrey patched him right up but, as I said before, he’ll have to stay in the hospital wing. At least he and Ron can commiserate together.

Charlie

CHARLIE WEASLEY!

MY BOY WAS INJURED AND YOU CHOSE TO TELL ME THROUGH A LETTER?? YOU COULD HAVE FLOO’D HERE AND TOLD ME IN PERSON! THAT’S THE LEAST I DESERVE! AND IF POPPY TELLS YOU TO LEAVE THEN YOU NEED TO RESPECT HER
Charlie,

I did it! I got the memory! I can’t believe it worked! Ron told me to use the Felix Felicis and it worked! I completely forgot about that little vial; it’s been shoved in the back of my trunk since I pretended to give it to Ron before our first match. Ugh, I’m depressing myself just thinking about Quidditch. I’d rather think about how I got the memory! I had to go to a funeral for a giant spider (why does Hagrid keep such weird pets?) but I got it!

Harry

Harry,

I know how hard it’s been for you, so it’s good for you to have this success. I just hope you remember that there’s nothing that the Headmaster can force you to do. You have the right to tell him no at any point.

Giant spiders? Do you mean an Acromantula? How in the world did Hagrid keep one as a pet??

Charlie

Charlie,

It’s ironic you should mention choice…the Headmaster (feels weird not just writing his name) reminded me of that exact thing once we watched the memory. I want to do this. Maybe I was prophesized and maybe I wasn’t. If I have the chance to take Old Nose-less down, then I will.

And I am this close to figuring out what in the hell Draco Malfoy is doing in the Room of Requirement, but the room won’t let me in! I can’t imagine what Malfoy could require bad enough that it would keep me out.

Maybe I should amend my earlier statement. I’m not exactly sure that Aragog- yes, I know the spider by name because Ron and I already had a run-in with him during our second year, your dad’s car actually saved us but that’s another story for another time-was a pet. It seemed more like he just put up with Hagrid. Hagrid befriended Aragog back when he was student here. I guess I could see feeling bereft if an old acquaintance dies, but throwing a funeral for a bloodthirsty Acromantula? Nope.

Harry

Harry,

Just be careful. I’ve said it before, but messing around with Malfoys never ends well.

Hagrid has a beautiful soul. He just wants all creatures to be loved.

Sorry so short today. I’m MARKING PAPERS. I guess that makes me a real teacher now.
Hang in there.

Charlie

Charlie,

I’ve never written to you before but I didn’t know where else to turn. I’m incredibly worried about Harry. He did something bad, something involving that textbook from ‘The Half-Blood Prince’. I don’t know what. He hasn’t told us, but I can tell. He’s hidden it away and is sharing with Ron now, and the boys say that he isn’t sleeping. Draco Malfoy has been suspiciously absent from our lessons and I think it may have something to do with him. I’m not trying to rat on him, I’m just scared. Dumbledore has been having more frequent meetings with Harry and I don’t like it one bit. In fact, he’s going to be with him again in a few days and all Harry said was that it would be much longer than his past meetings. Can you please talk to him? He trusts you. And right now, I trust you more than Dumbledore.

Thank you,

Hermione Granger
(and Ron! she wouldn’t let me write anything but I nicked her parchment just as she was about to tie it to Pig)

Charlie,

It’s time. Come to Headquarters as soon as you get this, but take the floo to your parents’ first.

Remus

Chapter End Notes

CLIFFHANGER! The next chapter has action and gore and death and everything else interesting.
Ahhhhh!!!! I meant to update so much sooner, but I started back to work and that wouldn't be such a big deal but I had to use my flash drive to bring something from my home computer to my work computer and then promptly left the flash drive there for five days in a row. Hopefully the really long chapter makes up for the delay.

:)
dragons?”

Bill chuckles and hitches his thumb at Charlie. “That would be this one. I’m Bill. I’m a cursebreaker for Gringotts.”

“Nice to meet you, Bill. And that means you’re…”

“Charlie.” He shakes Durwin’s hand.

“Nice to meet you, Charlie. As an Auror, I make it a habit to never go into the fray with someone I don’t know. Seeing as we don’t have time to get a drink together, I figured I should at least know your names.”

“I’m Luna.” Durwin gives her a strange look, but she doesn’t seem to be bothered by it. “Ernie was just telling me that he likes the way that the Felix Felicis makes him feel. I said that I always feel a little tingly, so I can’t tell much of a difference really.” Again, Durwin just stares. “I’d blame the Nargles, but that’s not fair to them.”

Ernie looks like he wants to melt through the floor, but thankfully Charlie comes to his rescue. He bursts out laughing. There is a very serious threat of Death Eaters breaking into Hogwarts, and this girl is talking about feeling tingly! He understands now why Harry would want to be around her (as well as why Tamsin gets along with Mister Lovegood). Luna grins from ear to ear as Charlie continues to laugh. “You’re brilliant, Luna.”

“Leave it to Charlie to laugh during a raid,” Tonks teases as she walks over to them. But then she lowers her voice so that only he can hear. “How are you really doing, though?”

“Me? I’m alright.”

She raises an eyebrow critically (and with her Metamorphmagus abilities, she’s able to raise it abnormally high). “You can’t be serious…the kids told me that Harry has been distant and strange for a while now. That hasn’t bothered you? You’re not worried about where he is right now?”

“I mean, sure, yeah. I’m always worried. I think I’ve just learned to push those emotions to the side, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to function during everyday life. Harry is always in some kind of danger. The most I can do is be here now.”

Tonks glances over her shoulder to where Remus is standing next to Hagrid. “I guess I understand that.”

“He’ll come around.” Charlie reaches a hand out in comfort but then the door to McGonagall’s office bangs open. Professor Flitwick is on the other side. “They’re here!”

All of the sudden, Tonks is back into her Auror-mode. “Moody! Jenkins! Your groups will take the seventh floor. If they’ve already descended lower, send me a patronus. McGonagall! Hagrid! Your groups will cover the fifth floor. Be sure to watch Dumbledore’s office carefully. Shacklebolt! Flitwick! Be ready on the ground floor and along the staircases. If there are any students about, disarm and body bind before putting them somewhere safe. We can always dole out punishments later but we can’t justify hurting children. Any adult is fair game. If they’re here and they’re not supposed to be, we take them down. Any questions?” The room quiet though it’s filled with an intense energy. “Alright. Let’s go!”

Everything moves pretty quickly after that.
“Stupefy!”

“Expeliarmus!”

“Avada Kedavra!”

“Look out!” Charlie is pulled to the ground by Ron as a killing curse whizzes over their heads.

Ron throws up a strong shield charm to protect them while they’re down. Charlie is impressed that Ron did so non-verbally and wonders if he even noticed he did so. Suddenly he pictures his brother doing this all of the time. Charlie makes a mental note to tell him later how good of an Auror he’ll be. They take a quick look to make sure the way is clear, and then they’re up and running in opposite directions down the corridor.

Charlie is doing his best, but he’s been off of field work for too long (not that dragon handling is anything like wand dueling). He casts more shields than anything and every time he hears a dark curse or hex he looks around frantically to make sure that the kids are okay. One Death Eater is lying dead on the floor. Charlie doesn’t know who he is or who killed him but he’s just glad it’s not one of their own. He manages to disarm one man, though his face is obscured by a mask so he doesn’t know who. He immediately snaps the wand and throws it away. He watches Moody and Jenkins double-team a Death Eater until there’s blood oozing from his arms and legs, though the man never gives up fighting. He can see people on the staircases and running in and out of classrooms. It’s chaotic, but the chaos is on both sides. They keep pushing the Death Eaters back and Charlie starts to feel like they’re making progress. So of course that’s when it all goes to hell.

There’s a scream that freezes him to his very core.

His vision goes spotty. His ears feel like they’re stuffed with cotton. His arms and legs are suddenly made of lead. The whole world is moving in slow motion and he can focus on nothing other than the werewolf attacking his brother. Charlie doesn’t know how he got from where he was to right next to Bill, but later he’ll be told by more than one observer that he just disappeared and reappeared across the room. Accidental magic, they’ll say. All he knows is that he’s filled with a rage he hasn’t felt before.

Forgetting his wand entirely, Charlie aims a kick at the direct center of the werewolf’s stomach. This forces him off of Bill and makes him stagger away a few paces. But then the werewolf (a voice in his head that sounds an awful lot like Remus provides the name ‘Greyback’) bares his teeth and growls at Charlie. Charlie knows it’s stupid to stay and fight, yet there’s no way he’s backing down. Greyback leaps at him and tackles him to the floor. Charlie punches and kicks and scratches and fights back as hard as he can. He imagines that this is just a dragon that needs to be put into submission, but even dragons don’t fight like this. He feels an intense pain across his arm and then his side and when he looks down he sees that Greyback has used his teeth to rip open his skin. There’s so much blood. Charlie wants to keep going- if nothing more than to avenge Bill- but it’s becoming harder and harder to keep up.

And then there’s nothing.

He thinks he’s dead or at the very least unconscious and, quite frankly, he’s relieved. But then his senses come back to him in startling clarity. Charlie’s still on the stone floor of Hogwarts. He looks to his left and Bill is lying there next to him. His face is mangled and Charlie turns his head to avoid getting sick from the sight. He can hear shouting; something about the Astronomy Tower. And then it’s quiet. Blissfully, painfully quiet.

Charlie tries to move. At first it hurts so much he just lets himself fall back down. “Bill,” he rasps out. “Oi, Billiam.”
The only response is a weak moan but to Charlie it sounds like music. “Bill,” he says again. He flings his left arm out and it hits a leg. “I’m here, Bill. I’m here.”

“So am I,” an angelic voice says. Then he’s being smothered by long blonde hair. “Professor! Charlie and Bill next, please!”

It’s Luna. She hums a tune, despite the circumstances, and waits patiently for Flitwick to get to them. Charlie wants to ask her to move a little further away so that her hair isn’t tickling his face, but he doesn’t have the energy. Flitwick eventually makes it over and carefully casts stasis charms on both Weasleys. Then he asks Luna to help him levitate them to the hospital wing. Charlie doesn’t like the feeling of his limbs dangling helplessly. He watches the ceiling glide by and just hopes that everyone else is in better shape than they are.

The next thing he knows, he’s being gently lowered onto a hospital bed and then Madame Pomfrey is fretting over him. Charlie doesn’t take it as a good sign when the woman has to wipe tears from her eyes upon seeing Bill. But ever the professional, Pomfrey casts a series of spells and gets to work.

Charlie is too drowsy from the potions to focus on much, yet he still makes note of every time the hospital doors bang open. He knows he’s seen all of the students walk in unscathed. Harry was smart to give them his Liquid Luck. Remus and Tonks look alright, as do the other Aurors. The only people he hasn’t seen are Harry or Dumbledore. Are they still gone? Do they even know what’s happening to the school? And where did all of the Death Eaters go? Charlie groans and holds his head. Too much thinking is making it hurt.

“Mister Weasley, I’d think you’d know by now that I don’t like my patients overexerting themselves.” Madame Pomfrey is back. She’s casting more spells to check on his progress. “I want you sleep. Actually, why aren’t you asleep? I’ve certainly given you enough potions by now.”

“Bill?” he asks, voice rough and slow.

“He is following orders and resting.”

“Did he have a choice?”

“Not really. His injuries are quite severe. Though you should know it would have been much worse had you not been there. But I gave him the same potions I gave you.”

“Harry?”

Madame Pomfrey’s lips pinch together tightly. “You need to rest.”

Charlie tries to fight it but it’s not even five minutes later that he falls asleep.

A mournful wail wakes him up. A crowd is gathered around one of the beds at the far end of the ward. The sad song is coming from a phoenix. It cries and then flies off, leaving the room in a depressing state. There is sobbing from more than one person, sniffs and cries ringing out.

Charlie sits up in his bed, wincing at the pain but finding it much less than earlier. He looks over at Bill and gasps at the bandages crisscrossing his face, neck, chest, and arms. Charlie’s own right arm and side are bandaged but it looks nothing like the state his brother is in.

“My boys!” Molly shouts as she runs across the ward and hesitantly pulls Charlie to her. “My
sweet, sweet, boys! I should have been here! I told Arthur we should have been here to help!”

Arthur bypasses their beds momentarily to gather up Ron. He walks with him over to where Charlie and Bill are so that they can all be together. Molly is still smothering Charlie’s face in teary, wet kisses so he pulls her off and lets her cry into his own shoulder instead.

Ron sits cautiously on the edge of Charlie’s bed. “What happened? You were okay when I left you.”

“Werewolf.” Charlie knows that’s not enough of an explanation but right now he doesn’t really know any more than that.

Ron’s eyes go wide. “They have a werewolf on their side? That’s not good.”

“Obviously.”

“Does Lupin know?”

Charlie goes to shrug but ends up crying out in pain. “Yes. Is he here?”

Ron nods and walks off, bringing Tonks and Remus back with him. Tonks gasps and covers her mouth with her hands. Remus’ face pales and he looks like he’s going to be sick. “Greyback,” he spits out. When he gets confused looks he clarifies. “Fenrir Greyback is working with the Death Eaters. H-he’s the one who turned me.”

Molly’s sobs start building in volume again. Arthur clenches his jaw to steady himself and then asks, “So are they…?”

He can’t bring himself to finish the question. Thankfully, Remus knows exactly what he’s asking. “No. It isn’t a full moon so he wasn’t transformed. He does have more power over his abilities than I do, however, and based on the injuries sustained he must have had the claws and teeth from his wolf form. Charlie and Bill will likely gain a strong appetite for raw meat. Perhaps they’ll feel discomfort from the lunar cycle. But Greyback did not succeed in either killing them or turning them.”

Charlie lets out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding. “Oh thank Merlin.” Then he notices the faraway look in Remus’ eyes. “Sorry, Remus.”

“No, please. There’s nothing you can do to change my past, so don’t feel like your relief will insult me. Trust me when I say that I am just as relieved as you that neither you nor your brother will suffer the same fate as me.”

Tonks tries to offer him comfort but Remus stalks away. Charlie gives a sympathetic look and lets her go after him. Then he waves Ron closer and asks him about Harry.

Ron checks to make sure their parents are preoccupied with Bill before answering. “He’s with Hermione right now. They’re destroying the Half-Blood Prince book.”

“What was with that?”

“It’s an old potions textbook that had little notes written in to improve upon the potions and whatnot, but it also had some original spells. Harry tried a few and it was fun at first. But then we’re pretty sure Harry used one that was dark against Malfoy.”

“Hermione mentioned.”
“Yeah, she had the idea to write to you. But anyway, Harry just found out tonight that it was Snape. His mum’s name was Prince and he’s a half-blood? Seems a bit odd, giving yourself a grand nickname like that, but I guess You-Know-Who did the same thing. But Snape just came out and told Harry it was him. Now Hermione is helping Harry destroy the book.”

“Probably for the best.”

“Agreed.”

“You’re not telling me something.”

Ron nods to the bed that’s still surrounded by mourning people. “Snape killed Dumbledore. Harry told us.”

“What?!” Several people look in their direction and Charlie has to awkwardly wave them all away so he can continue talking to Ron. “He can’t be dead.”

“I know, right? And Harry saw it happen.”

“No…”

“First Sirius and now this.”

“Cedric.”

“What?”

“Cedric was killed right in front of him. His parents too.”

“It’s no wonder he’s not coming back.” Ron slaps a hand over his mouth as soon as the words are out. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you that. Though I’m sure Harry would have told you at some point. Just… act surprised when he does?”

Charlie is still trying to process this. “What will he do?”

“Not sure yet, but I’m going to offer to help him of course. And seriously don’t tell Mum! She’ll go mental when she finds out, and I hope to be far away when it happens.”

“Of course.” Charlie yawns, the motion alone causing his head to pound again. Madame Pomfrey brings him another potion and makes Ron get up off of his bed. Charlie drinks it down without complaining and lets sleep take him over once more.

He hears the voices before he’s well and truly awake.

“I want you to be prepared for the real possibility that he won’t be the same person you fell in love with.”

“I do not care! Do you zink I am so shallow zat I only see beauty? I love heem, scars or not.”

“Just like I love you, Remus.”

“Dora… I am but an old werewolf with nothing to offer you.”

“All I need in return is you. And that is something you’ve always had.”

“Leesten to her, Remus. You warn me to love my ‘usband no matter what, but you do not take your own advice.”

“Please. Let me love you.”

“And ‘e ees going to need your help in the coming weeks. You ‘ave to show heem zat zis ees
Charlie lets himself wake fully, pushing himself to a sitting position. Fleur notices and tells him that Bill was conscious for a while before falling asleep again. He is healing well and Madame Pomfrey believes that they’ll both be alright (all things considered) within a few weeks, though they will be sporting some lovely new scars. Charlie asks again about Harry but he has apparently been avoiding the hospital wing just like he did they year prior. And this time, Charlie can’t go searching for him.

Due to the amount of potions still being fed to him at regular intervals, Charlie doesn’t stay alert for long. The next time he wakes up it is to a quiet and dark ward. He doesn’t know what time it is but figures it to be after midnight, if the lack of light coming in from the windows is anything to go by. He hears a noise that sounds like the doors closing quietly but doesn’t see anyone so just figures it’s his hopeful imagination. But then it feels like there’s a presence next to him even though the space is empty. Charlie immediately thinks of the Invisibility Cloak. “Harry?” he whispers into the air.

Sure enough, the hood comes down to reveal him. His hair is wild (though that’s nothing new) and his eyes are rimmed with red. His skin looks sunken in and grey and it just about kills Charlie to see Harry this way.

Harry looks at the bandages that still adorn his arm and side. “Ron told me. I’m so-”

“No.” Charlie cuts him off. “You will not apologize for this. You are not responsible for the evil in the world.”

“But if I-”

“There is literally nothing you could have done. You’re not allowed to be sorry for this.”

“But-”

“Nope. I simply won’t have it.”

“Charlie.” He looks so broken. It doesn’t matter what Charlie says, Harry will always feel the weight of everything on his shoulders. “I can’t stay here.”

“Why not?”

“There’s going to be a funeral. I can’t be here for that.”

“Then stay with me instead.”

“They’ll make me go if they see me.”

“I’ll stop them.”

Harry scoffs derisively, but steps closer to Charlie’s bed. “How?”

“I’ll tell them to bugger off and leave my boyfriend be.”

“I don’t think that’ll work.”
“Well I don’t think anyone would dare tell you no right now.”

He’s thoughtful as he moves close enough that his knees bump against the mattress. “Really?”

“Trust me. Ron alone would make sure that no one came near your if that’s what you wanted.”

“I just want to sleep.”

“How long has it been?”

“Since before I left with D-Du…the Headmaster.”

“You’re not going to like this, but Pomfrey could give you some Dreamless Sleep.”

Harry shuffles from one foot to the other, chewing his lip and considering his options. “Normally
I’d be against it. But I really just want this,” he taps on his head, “to be quiet for a while.”

“Madame Pomfrey!” Charlie calls.

The light in her quarters comes on and she quickly strides out. She sighs in relief upon seeing
Harry. “Mister Weasley, I have to thank you for getting Harry here sooner this time.”

“He wants Dreamless Sleep,” he says, cutting through her attempt at levity.

“And I’m sharing a bed with Charlie,” Harry adds.

They give her credit for not screaming at them both. She nods once with pursed lips and tells Harry
to lie down so that she can scan him for injuries. She has a downturned face when she sees the
results of the diagnostic spells but doesn’t comment, just fetches the necessary potions and
administers them to Harry. It’s less than a minute until Harry is asleep so Madame Pomfrey is still
there. She says to Charlie, “Please let me know if he ever tells you what happened tonight.”

“I will pass it along. Thank you for not pushing him.”

“I know what my patients need, and that doesn’t only apply to medicine.” She then makes her
rounds between the other hospital beds, leaving him to drift back off to sleep.

Charlie was right. No one makes Harry attend Dumbledore’s funeral. All he has to say is that he
doesn’t want to go and suddenly there’s a whole army of people defending his right to skip it.
Rufus Scrimgeour tries to gain access to the hospital wing so that he can speak to Harry but
Madame Pomfrey yells at him and makes it clear that there will be no visitors until she says so
(completely ignoring the fact that the ward is already filled to the brim with visitors, but what the
Minister doesn’t know won’t hurt him).

Harry asks Hermione and Ron to sit with them and casts strong a strong Muffliato over the space
so that no one will overhear the sensitive information. He tells them about the horocruxes (some of
which Hermione and Ron already knew but Harry couldn’t risk sending in a letter to Charlie) and
that he’s going to complete Dumbledore’s mission by searching for them instead of coming back to
Hogwarts. Ron confirms what he told Charlie the day before my telling Harry that he’ll join him
wherever he goes. Hermione seconds that. Charlie starts to say that he’ll go too but Harry tells them
all that it’s something he must do alone.

“Says who?” Ron looks personally offended by Harry’s statement.

“Look around you, Ron! Look at how many people got hurt because of me. Look at how many
people are DEAD because of me! I can’t let anything else happen to any of you.”

“I made the choice to be here,” Charlie says.

“Did you make the choice to get torn apart by a werewolf?” Harry counters.

“Actually, yes.” They all gasp so he explains about Bill. “I saw my brother getting attacked so I did what I knew I had to do. I took his place. Thankfully we’re both going to make it through this. But if I had died then at least I would have died knowing I kept him safe.”

“Which is exactly why I have to go alone!”

Ron and Hermione make extended eye contact while Harry is glaring a hole through the end of the bed. Charlie watches them and thinks he can see the gears turning in their brains. Their tacit conversation goes on for a minute more before they both nod. “At least come to the wedding,” Ron pleads.

Harry thinks about before saying no. “It will put everyone in danger.”

“We’ll disguise you,” Hermione offers. “You know I’m good with Polyjuice and the twins have glamour potions that they sell at the shop. We can make you look like a Weasley cousin for the day. Please? It would mean a lot to everyone, especially if we won’t be seeing you for a while.”

“Alright,” Harry finally agrees. “I’ll go to the wedding. But then I’ll have to leave.”

“We understand,” Ron says all too casually. He and Hermione then excuse themselves under the guise of packing up their belongings, promising to pack up Harry’s as well. Charlie desperately wants to know what plan they’re cooking up but he knows better than to ask in front of Harry.

Once they’re alone, Harry goes silent and purposely leaves space between him and Charlie which is no small feat on the narrow bed they’re sharing. Charlie reaches for his hand but Harry pulls away. “Don’t do this to me again,” Charlie begs.

“They’ll kill you.”

“That’s just an excuse.”

“I can’t do that. I can’t condemn you to death because I’m being selfish.”

“What about me, huh? What if I want to be selfish?”

“We can’t.”

“Just…” Charlie says the one thing he know he shouldn’t say, “Just stay with me until the wedding.”

“We’ll just be putting off the inevitable.”

“So?”

“It’ll make things harder than they need to be.”

“So?” he asks again. Charlie knows he’s right, but he just needs to give Harry time to calm down. He’s sure that he can talk him into staying once he’s being more rational. “You’re making this decision without my consent, so do this much for me. Give us until the wedding. We deserve at least that.”
Harry wants to say no. He wants to keep resisting and putting more space between them. He wants to run away and never look back. But right now he wills himself to look into Charlie’s eyes and that’s all it takes for him to agree. “Fine. But you’re not going to change my mind.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” Charlie leans in them and wraps himself around Harry.

“Charlie…” He looks nervously around the hospital wing but there are blessedly few people around. Harry lets himself relax minutely and reciprocate the hug. “I’ve missed you,” he whispers. “There were so many things I wanted to tell you but I couldn’t.” His shoulders start to shake and he knows he’s going to cry but he can’t stop it. “I did things.”

“Shh. You can tell me later.”

“Bad things, Charlie.”

He shushes Harry again. “I’m here. I love you.”

And that’s the tipping point. Harry cries and Charlie whispers soothing reassurances into his ear. Harry finally lets himself be comforted for the first time in six months.

Charlie and Harry spend the whole next day together in the hospital wing. They move to a bed further away from Bill so that he can have some privacy with Fleur. Madame Pomfrey periodically checks over Charlie’s wounds (the superficial ones have already healed though the deep tissue underneath still has a ways to go), but otherwise leaves them alone. Harry runs his fingers gently over the new scars, making Charlie shiver.

“Careful with the ones on my side,” he says with a chuckle. “They’re still rather tender.”

“I know you don’t want to hear it, but I’m sorry.”

“Really, it’s fine. Just a few scars.”

Harry pulls his hand away like it’s on fire. “They’re not the first scars I’ve given this year.”

Charlie slides his hand over and then intertwines their fingers together. “I meant it before when I said I love you. No matter what. But you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

He doesn’t want to. He has to. It’s eating him up inside. “Malfoy- no, Draco. I think I should call him by his given name after everything that’s happened. Besides, I’ve never really understood all that business with haughty formality.” Harry clears his throat and tries again. “Draco was becoming erratic. Every waking moment that I didn’t spend thinking about Riddle and Dumbledore and horocruxes, I spent stalking Draco. He was assigned a task last fall- fixing that vanishing cabinet- and he was so close to completing it. And he was getting away with it right under the noses of all the professors! I couldn’t let him succeed! But he always had Vince and Greg around like bodyguards. Then one night I caught a break. I saw him on the map. Alone. In the third floor girls bathroom.”

Harry is starting to shake, so Charlie squeezes his hand to ground him. Harry breathes in and out through his nose and settles down, giving a hand squeeze of his own before going on with the story. “I went in and saw him crying. I’ve seen Draco do a lot of things, but never cry; even when I caught the Snitch before he did! I thought that maybe if I could just talk to him… but as soon as I said his name he swirled around and had his wand out. I hear the curse. He was going to crucio me and I panicked. I cast the first thing I could think of: a spell from the Half-Blood Prince’s book. Sectumsempra.”
“Ron told me that the Half-Blood Prince is really Snape?”

“I didn’t know it at the time, but yes. All I knew was that the curse was written into that book with the inscription ‘for enemies’ and that moment, Draco was my enemy. But as soon as I felt the magic go through me and my wand I knew it was dark. I knew it was bad and I couldn’t take it back! So I stood there and watched it slice in Draco. It cut through his clothes and his skin and his muscles. There was so much blood, Charlie! I could have killed him!”

Charlie grabs his wand and nonverbally casts privacy charms around them but then lets Harry fall against his side and sob. Careful not to put too much stress on his wounds, he leans them both back onto the mountain of pillows they’ve accumulated. “It’s alright. You didn’t kill him. Madame Pomfrey healed him just like she heals all of us.”

“But he’ll always have to live with the scars! Every time he looks at his chest he’ll remember what I did to him!”

“How do you even know he has scars?” Harry is suspiciously quiet. Charlie looks down and notices the pink tinge in Harry’s cheeks. “Come on; you can tell me.”

“I swear I wasn’t just perving around, but I wanted to make sure he was really okay so I snuck into the Slytherin boys’ dorm after he left the hospital wing and I saw him changing his clothes. He made sure no one else was around- no one he could see, at least- but I saw the evidence of what I did clear as day. Draco’s chest was marked with thin silver scars. I did that to him.”

“He also egged you on by trying to hurt you first.”

“Maybe, but I could have taken it. I’ve fought off an Imperious curse from a powerful dark wizard. I doubt Draco’s Crucio would have done much. He wasn’t really in a state to mean it.”

Charlie smiles to himself because only Harry would come out of a duel thinking that he was being too harsh when it was the other person who started the whole thing. He plants a kiss right on Harry’s forehead. “You are amazing, Harry Potter.”

“Then why couldn’t I stop Dumbledore from dying?”

“Because as amazing as you are, you are just one person. And from everything you’ve told me, Ron, and Hermione, I’d say that Dumbledore knew exactly what he was doing. He walked up to that Astronomy Tower knowing he wouldn’t be walking back down.”

“Draco couldn’t kill him. He took the Dark Mark, he rebuilt the vanishing cabinet and let in the Death Eaters, he had Dumbledore disarmed and at his mercy, and he couldn’t do it.” Harry chews on his bottom lip and his brow furrows as he thinks the whole scenario through for the hundredth time. “I’m starting to think that it was always meant to be Snape. We overheard him make an unbreakable vow to protect Draco. I think that’s what he was doing.”

“So he’s a good guy now?” Charlie can’t believe the change of heart. Harry has done nothing but complain about Snape for the three years they’ve known each other. The only person Harry ever spoke worse about was Umbridge, and even then Snape was only a close second.

“NO! No. Maybe? No, definitely not.”

Charlie laughs, despite the tense topic of conversation. Harry glares at him but it just makes the laughter stronger. Charlie soon has to hold his side because it hurts from the jerking movements. “Sorry,” he says once he composes himself again.
But Harry’s not mad. He’s missed the sound of Charlie’s laughter. A smile slowly makes its way across his face. “I don’t know what Snape is, but he’s definitely NOT a good guy. He’s tortured Neville to the point that he’s his boggart! And no good person would ever tell the press that their co-worker was a werewolf so that he’d lose his job.”

“Is that why Remus stopped working here? He never said.”

“Yep. I know my dad and his friends used to mess with Snape when they were kids but outing Remus is inexcusable. He can’t argue away that one. I just don’t trust him, no matter what the rest of the Order says.”

With the heavy feeling no longer on Harry’s chest, he and Charlie settle in and spend the rest of the day just holding each other and whispering about the future. Ginny, Hermione, and Ron come in after supper to gather Harry and travel out to the train station. Harry reluctantly extracts himself from the bed after one final kiss.

Charlie promises to write but Harry says it probably wouldn’t be safe. “I’ll send my patronus, then. Every day if I have to! I won’t let you go the whole summer with no contact from the outside world.”

“I won’t be able to send one back,” Harry says sadly. “I’m not yet of age.”

“It’s only until the wedding,” Hermione chimes in. She sets a comforting hand on Harry’s shoulder and leads him to the door, wishing Charlie to get well soon as they go.

Ron rubs Charlie’s head just his brothers always did to him growing up. “We’ll see you at home, yeah?”

“As soon as Pomfrey lets me go.”

Ron nods grimly. “Mum will be in tomorrow, I’m sure. She just wants to wait until we get home first.”

“I figured. She worries about you kids.”

“Oi! I’m seventeen.”

“You’ll always be my kid brother, Ronnie.”

Ron makes another disgruntled noise but his smile betrays him. “I’m going to go catch up with ‘Mione. I’ll see you when you’re better.”

And then Charlie is left alone with Ginny. She looks unsure of herself for a moment before nearly leaping at Charlie. “I’M SO SORRY!” she cries as she squeezes her arms around his shoulders.

“Aw, Gin…it’s alright.”

“But I was so mean to you! I hexed you on Christmas!” She is sniffling and scrubbing at her eyes as they overflow with tears.

“Really, Gin. I’m not mad. Go on. You don’t want to be late.”

She cautiously removes herself, trying not to jostle his injuries too much. “Thank you for being so nice to me.”

“We’re family.”
“You punched Percy.”

“And you made bats fly out of my nose.”

The corner of Ginny’s mouth twitches. “Good point.”

Charlie knew it was just a silly crush and that she’d eventually get over it. He’s glad that she’s seen the error of her ways. “Now go. I’ll be home soon enough. Until then, you can think of ways to make it up to me.”

“Charlie!”

He smirks as she rolls her and eyes and leaves, stopping at Bill’s bed to tell him goodbye on the way. When she’s gone Charlie calls for Madame Pomfrey and asks to borrow some parchment. He uses one piece to pen a letter to Tamsin, then calls for Dobby to have him send it off with a Hogwarts owl. He uses the other piece to start planning a way to convince Harry to stay.

Chapter End Notes

So much dialogue and cuts, but if you’ve ever been heavily medicated then you know how it feels to slip in and out of consciousness. Also, Charlie being present in the story really starts to make a difference beginning with this chapter.

(Unpopular opinion: I hate Snape. I think that JK Rowling put a lot of thought and effort into him as a character, but he’s not a hero in my mind. Two of the many reasons are right there in this chapter. And there’s no way in hell that Harry would have named a kid after him!!! You are free to disagree. I know I’m in the minority.)
1997, Romanian Dragon Sanctuary

As soon as Madame Pomfrey clears Charlie for floo travel, he’s headed to the sanctuary to get his affairs in order (promising Bill that he’ll be back within a day if all goes well). His first stop is to Tamsin at the training facility. He thanks her for covering his course and study group before settling in on the comfy chair that sits across from her desk. She doesn’t push him to speak, instead going about her marking until he’s ready.

“I don’t think I can stay,” he finally says.

Tamsin sets down her marking and gives her full attention to Charlie. “Under normal circumstances I’d lecture you about responsibility and seeing things through and not letting down those who rely on you, but these are hardly normal circumstances.”

Usually everything Tamsin says is yelled with enthusiasm, so it’s more than a little strange for Charlie to see her so serious. “I love it here. I wouldn’t be leaving for any other reason.”

“I know.” Her fond smile puts him a little more at ease. “I’m prepared to finish your course. What do you want me to tell them?”

“I discussed this with my family, and we think the best thing for everyone would be to fabricate a small lie. The Death Eaters already know that I work here but they don’t know in what capacity. We should tell the recruits that I was transferred back to Morgan. That will keep them safe because they’re no longer associated with me and it will also keep the Death Eaters from looking for me because they’ll think I still work here.”

“Where will you actually be?”

“I’ll be with the Order. That could mean a variety of places.”

“And what of after the war?”

Charlie tries to imagine what life might be like after the fighting is over, but things have gotten so complicated lately that nothing specific comes to mind. He ignores the part of him that says he’ll finally have time to be with Harry as he doesn’t think that’s what Tams was asking about. “I don’t know,” he answers honestly. “I’ve never imagined being anywhere else. Then again, I’ve never imagined being ripped into by a werewolf either and yet here we are.”

The pitying look coming from Tamsin is so out of character that it makes Charlie sick to see. He stands up before she can say anything that will make him feel worse. “Thanks for everything, really. I’m sorry I haven’t been more reliable.” He turns around and all but runs to the door.

“Charlie! Wait!” And that sounds enough like her usual self that he complies. She is up from behind her desk and across the small office in a flash. “I’ve been nothing but proud since you started working with me. Remember that there’s always a home here for you. Anything you need from me, just ask. I’ll do what I can.”

“Thank you.” He bends down and gives a polite kiss to her cheek. “For everything.”
He opens the door and steps out into the corridor before turning around and looking back fondly at the purple and silver that he’ll always associate with Tamsin. He gives a short wave and then starts to close the door, only to be stopped once again by her yelling. “I almost forgot! I’ll see you in a month at your brother’s wedding!”

“You will?” he asks, head tilted in confusion.

She bobs her head up and down rapidly. “Xeno wrote your family and asked if he could bring me along! I kept meaning to say something to you but there was never a good time. But I can’t wait! I love weddings! Does your brother’s new wife like pets?”

For the first the time since coming back Charlie smiles. *This* is the Tamsin he knows and loves. “I’ll ask her and let you know.”

“Discreetly, of course!”

“Oh course.” He reaches over and hugs her. “I’ll see you later, Tams.”

It’s already lunch time so he heads over to the dining hall to find Morgan. She is thankfully already there and sitting at a small table by herself off to the side, so Charlie manages to sneak past the other handlers without being spotted. He slips into the seat across from her and says hello.

“Nice to see you still in one piece, Weasley.”

That’s more like it. He doesn’t need pity; he just needs normality. “Nice to be in one piece, Morgan.”

She pauses eating to give him a grin before continuing her lunch. “Need something from me? Or just popping by to show your ugly face.”

Charlie glances around to make sure no one is listening in. “I need you to cover for me,” he leans forward and whispers. Morgan sets down her sandwich and watches him expectantly. “Tamsin will be telling the recruits that I’ve been transferred out of the training facility and back over to you.”

“I take it you won’t really be back on my schedules?”

“Actually, it might be best to keep me on rotation. Obviously make sure you have enough people to cover shifts first, but then throw my name on wherever. That way it will seem as if I’m still here.”

“Do you want me to call an emergency staff meeting this afternoon?”

“You can, but I’d rather not stay. I’m technically healed, but my brother got it worse than me and I promised him I’d be back sooner rather than later. You can tell them whatever you need to. I don’t want to put anyone in the positions of being a target to the other side.”

“We’re adults, Weasley, and you’ve been preparing us for this over the last year. We’re ready when you need us. I’ll call everyone together and make sure we’re all still on board with the plan.”

“And the villagers?”

“Their opinion is unchanged since you met with them last. I don’t think we can count on them to fight a battle in another country for a Ministry that does not respect them.”

Charlie could not be more thankful for everything Morgan has been doing in his absence. “You’re
“Tell me something I don’t know.” She winks and then dissolve into giggles.

Charlie doesn’t feel hungry, but he stays through the meal until Morgan is done eating. She walks him back to his cabin and even helps him back his things. “I’m leaving most of this behind,” he tells her, “but feel free to have someone else lodge here. I’ll just take my clothes and a few personal items.”

“Like anyone would want to stay in this smelly dump,” she teases. Then she walks into the kitchen and brings him the photograph of Harry and Parvati. “How’s he doing?” she asks as she hands it off.

Charlie hasn’t spoken to Harry since the Hogwarts Express took him away a week ago, apart from his promised daily patronus. He packs the picture into his knapsack. “Not good, but he’s determined to keep going.”

“Well you look out for him, alright? And yourself. I don’t want to read any more stories in the Prophet that make me want to punch a wall.”

“Come on…that was the one time!”

Morgan swats him on the arse and chuckles at his embarrassment. “I’ll leave you to it. Best if I don’t even know you’re gone; plausible deniability and all that. I’ll just assume you’re out patrolling the borders.”

He lets her get halfway across the cottage before he stops her. He wants to thank her for taking in a wide-eyed kid who knew nothing past the fact that he loved dragons. He wants to thank her for being a constant in his life during the years when things seemed most turbulent. “Morgan…”

She turns around and the corner of her mouth tilts up. “If you’re going to confess that you’ve been in love with me this whole time, save your breath. I always knew.”

And he shouldn’t be surprised that she won’t let him be serious for a moment, but he appreciates what she’s doing. “How’d you know? You got me.”

She throws her head back and laughs. “You’re one of the good ones, Weasley. Come back to see me when this all over, yeah?”

“Of course.”

“Cheers, mate.”

Charlie stands in the middle of the room and watches her go, not being able to stop the feeling of finality despite her request to meet up again later. He’s lived in this cottage for almost as long as he was at Hogwarts. The sanctuary is as much his home as any place. He pivots and looks around the main room and tries to commit every detail to memory before making sure that the floo connection to his fireplace is closed off. The portkey in his pocket glows warm, signaling that it is time to be activated.

He’ll be taking the portkey to a safe house that the Order has set up and then apparating to the marshlands of Ottery St. Catchpole. From there, he’ll walk on foot until he gets to the Burrow. The process is frustrating but necessary. Charlie shuts the door to his cottage and doesn’t bother locking it behind him. He wishes he could say goodbye to the dragons but knows that he doesn’t have the time. It’s just another thing that will have to wait until later. With a heavy heart, he takes the
charmed dinner fork from his pocket and whispers the incantation to activate it.

He winces as he lands on the sandy beach. He doesn’t want to waste a lot of time sightseeing, but Charlie does spare a glance at the beautiful little cottage adorned with shells. The Order certainly knows how to pick safehouses. He wouldn’t mind living here if he had to. But the afternoon hours are slipping away and he just wants to get home to his family. He turns on the spot, the pull of apparition twisting behind his stomach.

Charlie once again winces as he lands in the tall grasses. He casts a direction charm to figure out which way to walk and within an hour the tall, lopsided form of the Burrow looms in the distance. Charlie picks up the pace and before he knows it he’s standing across from his dad at the edge of the wards.

“What did your mother do when your accidental magic caused her flower garden to burst into flames?” Arthur questions him at wandpoint. He looks exhausted.

“Dad, please. It’s been a long day.”

“Answer the question, Charlie, and it’ll all be over.”

“She said, ‘It’s about bloody time. I hated tending to those bloody things.’ I was shocked because Mum always gets upset about cursing.”

Arthur drops his arm immediately and pulls Charlie in for a hug. “I hate doing that. I hate it,” he whispers into his son’s shoulder. Then he stands back up straight, using one arm to usher Charlie toward the house. “At least you’re home now. Your mother will be pleased. And Bill. Did you get everything sorted in Romania?”

“Yes. Everyone will think I’m still there.” Charlie lets himself be hugged tightly by Molly and asks if he can just go up to his room and sleep until supper.

“I’d like to keep your room for when Fleur comes back, but Percy’s is still open.” Molly’s voice catches on the name of her wayward son. Arthur shoos Charlie up the stairs before she starts crying.

Charlie drops his bag off in Percy’s old room but then crosses to Bill’s. He knocks once and then lets himself in. Bill is curled up on the bed but he’s not sleeping, just staring off into the distance. Charlie takes the chance to look at his brother’s face. The jagged scars that run across his features catch the light. The skin is pulled taught and still looks new and pink. He has to force himself to stop staring. “Mind if I join you?”

Bill must not have heard the door because he startles at Charlie’s voice. “Sorry, didn’t see you there.”

“Not a problem.” Charlie crosses the room and sits on the edge of the bed. “I’m knackered.”

Bill scooches over to give him more room. “I was thinking about taking a nap myself. You can stay if you want.”

Charlie doesn’t comment on the fact that they’re two grown men trying to fit onto one single bed. They’re both craving the comfort of closeness right now anyway. He lays down next to Bill and it’s quiet though not peaceful. Charlie closes his eyes in hopes that his exhaustion will pull him under. “Thanks for coming back,” he hears Bill whisper.

“I said I would,” Charlie replies without opening his eyes.
“Yeah, well. Never can be too sure, I guess.”

Charlie doesn’t like his tone. He cracks one eye open and rolls his head so he can look over at Bill. “She’s coming back. She just went to France to see her family before the wedding. They’re all coming here in a month, and Fleur said she’d check on you before and after her work hours at Gringotts as soon as she’s returned.”

“Sure.”

“Bill, come on.”

“I know. Sorry.”

“Just sleep, alright? Things will seem better after some rest.”

“You sound like Mum.”

Charlie snorts and in his best worst impression of Molly he says, “I HAD BETTER NOT COME UP THERE AND FIND THE TWO OF YOU OUT OF BED! YOU’LL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING YOUR POOR MOTHER IN!”

Bill laughs and Charlie can see his body finally relax. “She’d murder you if she heard you do that.”

“Yeah, not my best.” They share another smile but then Charlie yawns loudly. “Sorry, I really am quite tired.”

“I am too. Sleep well.” Bill rolls over to the face the wall, and Charlie waits until he hears Bill’s breathing even out. Only then does he let his own eyes slip closed.

Chapter End Notes

I do feel bad for taking Charlie away from his dragons but he’s more than just his job. And besides, Tams and Morgan would both gladly have him back.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1997, The Burrow

“But why so many decoys?”
“It’s just in case we’ll be followed which we have to assume we will be.”
“Whose idea was that anyway?”
“Mundungus came up with it.”
“We can’t trust Mundungus Fletcher!”
“He’s not even here!”
“He’s a member of this team.”
“He’s a thief and a swindler!”

Charlie has had it with all of the arguing. The Order is meeting to finalize the plans for moving Harry safely from Privet Drive, but no one can agree on the details. It’s not productive and it’s grating on his last nerve.

“ENOUGH!” he shouts and the room falls silent. “I don’t care who came up with the ruddy plan! Do we all agree that we need to keep Harry safe?” There are nods and murmurs of consent. “Then we’re doing it. End of story.”

“What about Mundugus?” Ron asks angrily. “Harry will be furious if he’s part of the team that comes to get him.”

“Then I’ll go in his place. We don’t even know where he is, so leaving him out of the final plan is probably for the best. Now, does anyone have preference for partners?”

Tonks slides a piece of parchment across the kitchen table and over to Charlie. “You can add your name in place of Fletcher, but I wrote up pairings that seemed to make the most sense.”

Charlie reads aloud from the list. “Harry with Hagrid, Hermione with Kingsley, Ron with Tonks… stacking the deck there aren’t we Tonks? George with Remus, Fred with Dad, Fleur with Bill, and me with Moody.”

“How are we going to travel?” Hermione asks. “I’ve never been much good on a broom.”

Tonks answers her. “Hagrid will be bringing a few thestrals and Buckbeak. I’ll be on my broom. Are you good for that, Ron?”

He nods emphatically. “I fucking hate flying by thestral.” Molly swats at the back of his head.

“I’ll take Buckbeak,” Remus says. “He and I were forced to bond while Sirius kept him as a house pet.”

The rest claim either brooms or thestrals until all that’s left is Charlie. “I’ve brought my broom with me so I’m set as well. Is everyone ready?”

“I don’t think we’re ever truly ready for something like this,” Hermione says wearily.

“Perhaps not.” Tonks stands for dramatic effect. “But Harry needs us. He’s miserable in that house,
especially with not being able to safely send or receive owls over the last month. And Kingsley and Doge have reported back that the Dursleys are still causing trouble, even though they’ve explained to them the dangers of staying in Surrey. This is our one chance to get him out of there and it’s not going to be easy. We must be willing to give everything.”

Ron stands up next. “Harry would die for me, and I for him. I’m ready.”

Then Hermione joins him. “Me as well.”

The twins stand together. “For Harry!”

Remus looks appreciative of their enthusiasm. “For Harry.”

“For Harry!”

“For Harry!”

“For ‘Arry!”

“For Harry!”

Moody rolls his eyes (both natural and mechanical) at them all but finally stands as well. “And people call me mad.”

Tonks grins, hands on her hips. “Alright, you lot. We leave in two days.”

They apparate to the end of the lane and quickly move down Privet Drive by cover of disillusionment charms. Moody bangs his walking stick on the door to Number 4 and Harry opens the door to the small, empty house. He looks relieved as everyone pours in. Ron, George, and Fred go upstairs to gather Harry’s things, as they’ve all been there before and know the way. Remus, Hermione, Arthur, and Bill cast a series of spells on the house that will hopefully give them more time.

Harry grabs Charlie by the hand and takes him through the kitchen and into a small room that once served as the Dursley’s dry pantry. Charlie doesn’t even get to say hello before Harry is holding his face and pulling him in for a searing kiss. It quickly deepens as Charlie backs him into the wall. Harry licks into his mouth, mapping it with his tongue like he never wants to forget a single spot. Charlie moves his arms lower on his back and between that and the wall behind his shoulders, Harry is able to hop up and wrap his legs around Charlie’s hips.

“Gods, I missed you,” Charlie gasps out as he pulls away from Harry’s lips.

“Seeing your fox appear in my room once a day was the only thing that kept me sane.” Charlie licks up Harry’s jaw and gives a soft bite just below his ear. Harry whimpers, throwing his head back so that it thunks against the wall. “So glad you didn’t let me push you away again.”

Charlie growls at the very thought before attacking his mouth again. Then Harry moves his hips just so and Charlie almost drops him. Thankfully, he braces his arms just in time and they stay upright. “Warn me before you do that.”

“Oh, you mean this?” Harry does it again and Charlie has to bite down on his own lip to keep from yelling out.

He’s just about to divest them of a few layers of clothes when the door to the pantry is wrenched
open and the tiny room is suddenly bathed in light.

“I found them!” Tonks calls over her shoulder before giving them a wink.

Harry untangles from Charlie, moving a hand to cover himself when he catches Tonks’ line of sight. “Er, maybe give us a minute?”

She laughs at his discomfort and pulls her wand out. She casts something nonverbally at them both, and it’s a weird feeling that makes Harry shiver. But at least he’s no longer embarrassed to walk into a room full of his family and friends. “Where did you learn a spell to do…that?”

“The Aurors,” Tonks says like it’s obvious. “We have to be ready to be called in at a moment’s notice. There’s always someone who gets caught in the middle of a good shag. Hence, the spell.”

“Strange.” Harry wrinkles up his nose. The more he learns about the Aurors, the less the career seems appealing to him.

Tonks just laughs. “Now get out here. We’re ready for the next part.”

Charlie and Harry leave the pantry and join everyone else where they’re waiting in the living room. They get a few raised eyebrows for their disheveled appearance, but no one bothers to comment.

Moody walks behind them and plucks some hair from the back of Harry’s head and drops it into the Polyjuice.

“Ow!” Harry rubs at his head with a scowl. “What exactly is the plan, here?”

“You’ll see,” Moody grunts as he hands off the Polyjuice to Ron and it gets passed around the room. Harry is forced to watch Ron, Hermione, Fred, George, Fleur, and Charlie drink the potion and transform into copies of himself before his very eyes.

“I…what…?”

“It’s simple,” Hermione’s voice comes from one of the Harrys. “If we all look like you, then anyone that spots us won’t know which you is really you.”

“But…they could come after you!”

“You think we haven’t thought of that, mate?” Harry would know Ron’s voice anywhere. “We know what we’re getting ourselves into.”

Charlie leans over and gives Harry a quick kiss to his cheek. Harry screws up his face and jumps away. “I don’t want to be kissed by myself! This is too much.”

They all laugh at his reaction, but then Moody knocks his walking stick on the floor to get their attention once again. “You all look like Harry, so it’s time to move. Hagrid’s waiting outside with the animals and that bike of his. We’ll only have one chance once the protections are lifted, so stay vigilant.”

Harry stops by the cupboard under the stairs on his way through the front hall. He opens the door and ducks his head under for the last time. He feels a hand on the middle of his back and knows it’s Charlie. He lets the warmth give him strength enough to stand up again and shut the cupboard door for good.

Once out on the front lawn, Harry hugs Charlie and promises to see him at the Burrow. Hermione and Ron give him hugs next, and then Harry is climbing in to the side car of Sirius’ old
motorcycle. “Wait! Where’s Hedwig?”

“We sent her on ahead,” one of the twins tells him. “She seemed happy to get out of here. She’s probably more than halfway to the Burrow already.”

Harry lets out a breath. “Good. Thanks for thinking of her.”

“We know how much you love that bird,” the other twin says. “Don’t know what you would do if something happened to her, and quite frankly I don’t want to find out.”

Kingsley gives a whistle and everyone takes to the sky.

Immediately they are surrounded and outnumbered by Death Eaters. Charlie finds himself up close and personal with You-Know-Who. This is nothing compared to what he experienced at Hogwarts in June. There are no mild hexes; only the killing curse. Charlie dodges one from Voldemort before Moody sends up a shield charm around them both. “Show me that you’re as good of a flyer as Tonks says you are!” Moody shouts over the noise of the battle.

Charlie angles his broom up in a steep climb with Mad-Eye right behind him. They get so high that their ears pop and then suddenly change course, flying directly into the path of three oncoming Death Eaters. Moody fires jinxes left and right. Charlie takes care of the shields this time. He even bumps his broom into one of them as they pass, and that split second of imbalance is all it takes for Moody to hex him clean off his broom. Charlie whoops as he watches the Death Eater fall. He shouldn’t be happy for someone to die, but these aren’t innocent people.

“Nice moves, boy!” Moody compliments. “But let’s not celebrate just yet. There’s still plenty more to take down, and we have to make sure Harry gets clear of here!”

“Got it!” Charlie takes off again, deciding to try the same tactic with a group that is after Hermione and Kingsley. They have success, watching another two Death Eaters fall to the ground, yet the battle still continues. Charlie tries to keep an eye on where Harry and Hagrid are, but there is simply too much else going on. Eventually, the area has been cleared out enough that they are able to continue on to their assigned check points.

Charlie and Moody crash into the tall grass surrounding the Burrow. Moody is up faster than Charlie expects someone with only one real leg should be able to, but he supposes there’s a reason the man is a Senior Auror. Charlie pulls himself to standing much slower but is able to catch up to Moody soon enough. They are greeted at the edge of the wards by Molly and Ginny.

Ginny launches herself at Charlie. Molly tries to stop her so that they can verify that it’s really them, but she’s just relieved to see her brother again. “You’re the first ones back!” she tells him as she squeezes him tightly.

“We are all taking portkeys from different places, so we won’t get here at the same exact time.” Then, quieter so that their mother doesn’t hear, “We were ambushed as soon as the protections were lifted but Moody and I made sure everyone got out.”

Ginny holds on a little tighter and Charlie lets her.

There’s a rustling in the grasses just a few minutes later as Harry and Hagrid walk toward the house. Harry gets a similar greeting from Ginny before he falls into Charlie’s arms. “Tonks’ parents patched us up. We’re both okay.” Then he calls for Hedwig, who swoops down and lands on Harry’s shoulder with a soft hoot. She nuzzles into Harry’s hair and playfully nips at his ear. Harry chuckles and reaches across to pet her feathers. “My smart girl. I knew you’d get here.”
They hear Remus calling for help before they see him. He’s supporting most of George’s weight, so Charlie runs over to help him get George into the house. Molly fusses over him and tries every healing charm she can think of to fix his ear.

“Would Skele-Gro work?” Harry suggests.

“Ears don’t have bones. They’re made of cartilage.” Harry hadn’t even realized that Hermione and Kingsley were in the house with them now, but of course she would know that.

“I’ll just have to do what I can. All of you go wait outside for the others and give me some room to work.” They can hear Molly speaking in a soft, soothing tone to comfort her injured son.

Arthur, Fred, Bill, and Fleur all arrive within a few minutes of each other. Everyone looks exhausted but unharmed. They continue to wait for what seems like an eternity until finally Ron and Tonks approach the Burrow. Now that everyone has been accounted for, Kingsley and Moody leave so that they can continue with their regular Auror duties.

After checking on George (who is patched up and resting on the sofa, though still missing one ear), Charlie leads Harry upstairs and into Percy’s old room that he now thinks of as ‘theirs’ because of how often they’ve shared it. “Tomorrow, Fleur’s parents will be here and we won’t be able to share a room anymore,” Charlie informs him regretfully. “Mum and Dad are giving them their room, they’re taking this one, I’m bunking with Bill since Fleur has my old room, and you’ll have to stay upstairs with Ron.”

“I guess we’ll just have to make the most of it, then.”

Harry wakes up the next morning to Charlie’s warm hands and mouth already on him. “Happy Birthday,” Charlie tells him before proceeding to give him the most relaxing sort of pleasure that Harry has ever experienced.

After returning the favor, they lie tangled together in sated repose. “Happy Birthday,” Charlie says again with a kiss on the nose.

“Cheers. Wish every day could start like that.”

“No reason why it can’t,” Charlie says wistfully.

“Except the whole, ‘I’m leaving to go hunt down a madman’s horcruxes’ thing.”

“After that, then.”

Harry doesn’t respond. He simply snuggles in closer and Charlie doesn’t miss the way he holds on tighter. They stay like that until there’s a knock on the door and then Hermione’s voice floating through saying that Harry should come get breakfast and open his presents.

Harry’s head pops up. “Presents?”

Charlie laughs at his eagerness and pushes Harry out of the bed. He tumbles down and complains of bruising his bare bum on the wooden floors, but it’s drowned out by Charlie’s continuing laughter. They playfully shove each other back and forth as they get dressed and make their way downstairs to where everyone but Ron is already awake and eating.

The Delacours have already arrived and Harry is pleased to greet them all. Gabrielle gives him a big hug and reminds everyone of how Harry saved her in the Black Lake. Monsieur and Apolline
Delacour thank him and say how much they’ve heard about the Boy-Who-Lived from their daughters. Harry beams under the praise but assures them it was no less than anyone else would have done in his position.

Molly hands Harry a plate of food and a small, wrapped box. Harry unties the ribbon and carefully removes a watch. He can tell that it’s not new because of the faded strap and dented metal backing. He doesn’t want to seem critical of any gift he’s been given, but he can’t help but wonder why she bothered with it.

“It was my brother Fabian’s,” Molly explains before going back to her cooking.

“It’s tradition when you come of age,” Charlie tells him quietly. “Why do you think Ron kept showing off his new watch all spring?”

Harry shrugs. “I just thought he liked how nice it looked. His must have been new.”

“It was. Mum knew Ron would complain about yet another hand-me-down. He deserved to have something all his own for once in his life. She knew that you, however, would appreciate the sentiment of this belonging to family.”

“But I’m not related to Fabian, am I?”

“Not by blood but you’re one of us, Harry. You always will be a Weasley.”

Harry holds out his wrist and the watch so that Charlie can help him with the clasp. He admires the timepiece as he eats, but halfway through his eggs he stands suddenly and crosses the kitchen to stand at Molly’s side. “Mum,” he says quietly.

“What’s that, dear? Need more of something?” she replies without thinking.

“Mum,” Harry says again, louder this time.

And this time, Molly hears. She drops her spoon against the side of the pan and turns slowly to face him. “Oh, Harry…” tears well up in her eyes, but they’re the first of many happy ones to be shed over the next two days. She holds her arms open and lets Harry step forward into her embrace. She presses him close and murmurs into his ear how proud she is of him and how much she loves him. Harry nods after each remark, wiping his own happy tears into her shoulder as he does so.

When he eventually pulls away from the only mother he’s ever really known, he notices that they’re alone in the kitchen except for Charlie. He’s leaning against the far wall with a smile on his face. “The Delacours wanted to give you some privacy,” he tells them.

“That was very thoughtful,” Molly coos. “I shall have to thank them properly.” Then she walks into the next room, presumably to do so.

“I think you just made her the happiest woman on earth,” Charlie says after she’s gone.

Harry sits back down to finish his breakfast and waves over Charlie to join him. “I didn’t mean to make a big deal out of it. I just wanted her to know how I felt. Though I can’t help feeling like I’m letting my own mum down by replacing her.”

“Loads of people have more than two parents. It’s less prevalent with wizarding folk, especially purebloods, but with half-bloods and muggle-borns I know it’s becoming more common to have step-parents and such.”
“Never thought of it that way.” Harry takes a large gulp of pumpkin juice. “I still wish there was a way I could talk to my parents and let them I love them.”

“That’s called necromancy, mate.” Ron walks into the kitchen and overhears Harry. “And it’s considered the worst of the dark arts, horcruxes aside. Pretty much anything having to do with cheating death in some way.”

Harry spits juice across the table. “I wasn’t talking about raising people from the dead, Ron! It’s just a turn of phrase!”

“Oh. Carry on, then.”

Harry watches Ron pile food onto a plate and immediately start to stuff his face. He wonders how his best friend can go from sounding intelligent to looking like a farm animal at feeding time in less than a minute.

Charlie spends the rest of the morning trying to get Hermione and Ron alone so that he can ask them what they have planned to stop Harry from running off, but he can’t seem to catch a break. It isn’t until Remus and Tonks arrive that he finally has a chance. Remus takes Harry outside for a chat, so Charlie quickly grabs Hermione and Ron and drags them upstairs to ask about their plan.

“What plan?” Hermione responds nonchalantly, examining her nails.

“Hermione…” Ron gives him an apologetic look. “We have to let him know.”

She narrows her eyes and wags her finger in warning. “You can’t tell Harry. Promise me.”

“Come on, I won’t-”

“Promise me!”

Charlie jerks back from the force of Hermione’s demand. She is in his face, giving Molly a run for most-strict-woman-in-the-house. He puts his hands up in defense and says, “Alright, I promise! I promise.”

“Good.” She folds her arms across her body. “I’ve got a bag with undetectable extending charms on it and it’s filled with everything we might need for a horcrux hunt. I want to be ready at a moment’s notice.”

Ron nods his head from where he stands next to her. “We’ve got Dad’s tent, sleeping bags, enough clothes to keep us for weeks, some basic healing supplies, and I swear Hermione’s got half a library shoved in there.”

“Honestly, Ronald. It’s necessary to be as prepared as possible. We have no idea what we’re going to come across.”

“I know; I wasn’t mocking you. I think you’re brilliant.”

Charlie watches the two smile shyly at each other and wonders if they’ve actually admitted how they feel about one another. But then there’s a noise from outside the door and the moment is over. Charlie clears his throat. “Umm, am I invited along?”

“What about your job?” Hermione asks.

“I sort of…quit.”
“What??” Ron’s eyes bulge in a manner that would be funny if not for the current circumstances. “You love your job! And what of the other people you work with? You said they were going to help us fight.”

“I do love my job, but right now my place is with Harry. I’m pretending to still work there so that no one thinks that I’m a threat. And my friends are still committed to the cause. I made sure of it before I left.”

Hermione watches him critically. “If you’re sure, then I’ll just need clothes from you and some extra supplies- definitely another sleeping bag- to accommodate a fourth person.”

“I can do that.”

“Just make sure Mum doesn’t see you packing,” Ron warns him. “If she catches even a whiff of what we’re about to do…”

“Of course. I’m not stupid.” Charlie would like to keep his life, thank you very much.

“Then it’s all settled. Bring your clothes and everything else up here and I’ll make sure to get it in my bag. Now, I’m going to go back down so we’re not suspected of sneaking off.” Hermione leaves, closing the door behind her with a quiet snick.

Ron watches her go with a goofy smile on his face. “She’s certainly something, isn’t she?”

“You going to make a move or what?”

“I don’t think this is really a great time.”

“Is there ever a right time to tell somebody you love them?”

“LOVE?!”

“Come on, Ronnie…I see the way you two are together.”

“Well, sure, but, love?”

Charlie laughs and slings an arm over Ron’s shoulders. “Don’t worry, you have plenty of time to figure it out.

Then they can hear Molly’s muffled voice ring out. “Ron! We need you downstairs! Charlie, too, if he’s with you!”

Ron opens the door and hollers back, “Alright, Mum! We’ll be right there!” Then he turns back his brother. “I wanted you to come along. Hermione wouldn’t let me ask, so I’m glad you did.”

They walk downstairs together and are surprised to find Hermione and Harry sitting at the kitchen table across from the Minister of Magic. Rufus Scrimgeour stands to greet them. “It’s good to see you again, Mister Potter, Mister Weasley. Please have a seat and we can begin.”

The Minister removes a pile of parchment from the inside pocket of his blazer and slowly unfolds them. He then proceeds to read Dumbledore’s will. In turn he hands Hermione a copy of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Ron a metal tube called a Deluminator, and Harry a golden Snitch. Then he asks Harry once more to become the public face of the Ministry. Harry refuses and Scrimgeour shows himself out.

“Well that certainly was interesting,” Charlie says to break the silence. “What’s with the junk?”
“The Headmaster must have had his reasons,” Hermione surmises.

Ron opens the Deluminator and syphons all the light out of the room. “Yeah, just wish I knew what those were.” Then he releases the light and watches it fly back to its various sources. “At least mine is fun, I guess.”

Harry holds the golden, winged ball out in front of him. “Call me a prat, but I’m…underwhelmed. The Sword of Gryffindor would probably have been helpful to have around. This? Not so much. It’s just a Snitch.”

The rest of the day is split between various visitors stopping by to wish Harry a ‘Happy Birthday’ and making preparations for the wedding that’s only two evenings away. Charlie continues to keep the plan a secret, though it’s made easier by the fact that he and Harry are no longer sharing a bed.

Bill and Fleur’s wedding is beautiful. Bill looks better than he has since the attack at Hogwarts and Fleur seems to practically glow. It’s as if their very presence comforts the other. They are perfectly matched.

Tamsin greets Charlie warmly, having come with the Lovegoods just as she said she would. Charlie gets to talk to Xenophilius more and he finds himself enjoying their conversation. Luna somehow knows exactly which person is Harry, even though he’s been glamoured to look like the other Weasleys.

Harry keeps his distance from Charlie, just in case one of the guests wonders why two relatives are acting in a more-than-familial way, but he fully plans on getting him alone after the party is over. He wants to show Charlie how much he likes the way he looks in his fitted dress robes.

Hermione spots Viktor Krum talking to the disguised Harry, so she joins them to make sure that Viktor doesn’t suspect anything. They get deep into conversation and—unknowingly to them—Charlie and Ron are glaring from across the crowded dance floor.

“Just go over there,” George says suddenly, making them jump.

“And stop making everyone uncomfortable with your jealousy,” Fred adds.

“Pfft! I’m not jealous.” But nobody believes Ron.

Charlie rubs at his face. “I can’t help it. I mean, just look at the way he’s hanging on to Viktor’s every word. That should be me he can’t look away from.”

“He always looks at you like that,” Fred tells him.

“Kind of disgusting, actually,” says George.

Charlie shoves at the twins, which starts all four brothers pushing and jostling each other. Their laughter is cut off by a silver lynx that speaks Kingsley’s warning: “The Ministry has fallen. Scrimgeour is dead. They are coming.”

And then there’s nothing but chaos.

Charlie reaches for Ron but he’s already running to Hermione. He starts towards them but is stopped the sound of his mother calling his name. He looks at Harry and then back to Molly. She and Ginny are backed into a corner surrounded by cloaked figures. No, no, no this cannot be happening. He closes his eyes and tries to justify his decision. When he opens them again,
Hermione is looking at him expectantly. He shakes his head and watches as she grabs onto Ron and Harry. The trio disappears and Charlie’s heart sinks. But then Molly calls for him again and he runs to her aide.
1997, Shell Cottage

Charlie wakes up to the sounds of the sea. There’s the wooshing of the waves, the rustling of the reeds, and the soft cry of the gulls being carried by the breeze. It should be peaceful but it only reminds Charlie of everything he left behind.

He takes a walk along the beach to help clear his mind. Upon his return, he catches the end of his father’s patronus message. “…don’t send a reply. It may not be safe.” Charlie watches the giant silver bear bow his head before lumbering off.

“Why did you say that??” he nearly yells as he stomps through the sand.

Arthur turns around with a start, but recovers quickly. “For the exact reason I told them, it isn’t safe.”

“But I need to know that they’re alright!”

“It’s all we can do right now.” Charlie balls up his fist and almost swings it into the side of the cottage, but Arthur grabs his arm and holds it steady. “I’m sorry, son.”

Charlie pulls himself free and stalks back down the beach. He drops down onto the sand and doesn’t bother moving when the water laps at his feet, dampening his shoes and the bottom of his trousers. Thankfully, no one follows him for quite some time.

It’s Bill that brings him lunch later in the day. Charlie thanks him, but sets the plate down on the sand still untouched. Bill sighs and folds his long legs to sit down next to him. “How long ago did they make their plan to run off?”

“Hermione and Ron came up with it at Hogwarts after Dumbledore’s death.”

“And when did you decide you weren’t going with them?”

Charlie draws his legs closer to his body, wrapping his arms around them and resting his chin on top. “Last night. I was going to leave but then Mum called my name. There was Death Eaters all around her and Gin. I couldn’t just abandon them. At least Harry’s got Ron and Hermione to protect him.”

“Charlie…I’m sorry things got so messed up. Dad told me what you heard him say and while I happen to agree, I think you’re forgetting something.”

“What’s that?”

“Harry may not be able to send a message back, but you can still send one to him. I know it’s not what you really want to do but I figure it’s better than nothing.”

Charlie snaps his head up. “I did that all summer. You think it’s safe?”

Bill shrugs. “I’d say so. It’s only Harry’s patronus that is recognizable to everyone. Just make sure you send it to Ron or Hermione. We don’t know what kind of tracking has been placed on Harry.”
He pats Charlie on the shoulder and stands up. “I’ll give you some space.”

“Thanks, Bill. You’re sort of the best big brother ever.”

“You’re not so bad yourself.”

Charlie watches him retreat to the cottage. Once he’s alone, he pulls out his wand and calls forth his patronus using the memory from the morning of Harry’s birthday. The fox runs a few circles around Charlie before standing at the ready. “Go to Ron Weasley. Tell him I hope you’re all safe. I’m sorry that I didn’t come along. I just couldn’t leave mum and Ginny without cover. We’re all safe now. I want to join you but I don’t know if that’s possible. I’ll do what I can to help from here until I see you again. And…I love you. That’s for, well, you know.” He wipes at his eyes before remembering to order the fox to, “Go.”

Members of the Order arrive a few weeks later to prepare Ginny for Hogwarts. Hagrid and McGonagall bring the supplies she’ll need and a few pairs of school robes. They promise to take care of her while she’s at the castle because while it’s safer than most places, they are uncertain of how much will change now that Snape is the new Headmaster.

Tonks finds Charlie out on the beach in what has become his ‘usual spot’. She tells him that she’s pregnant and she isn’t sure how to feel. “I’m obviously happy. I never thought I’d get Remus to marry me, let alone start a family with me. But now he’s done both. It’s just…”

“The worst possible timing?” Charlie provides.

She huffs a laugh. “You could say that, yeah. But I’d rather have it with him now than never. Your parents and mine were both married and raising kids during the last war. If they can do it, then so can me and Remus.”

“I have the feeling you can do anything you put your mind to, Tonks.”

He lets her lean her head against his shoulder. “You’ll be godfather, of course. You and Harry.”

“Two godfathers?”

“Why the hell not. It’s not like Remy and I have done anything else in the traditional way. He’s a werewolf, I’m a Metamorphmagus, he’s sixteen years older than me, I’m an Auror, he’s on the run from the law, not to mention the fact we eloped and didn’t even have a proper bonding ceremony and now are expecting our first child in the midst of a war. What’s two godfathers in the grand scheme of things?”

Charlie chuckles and gives a kiss to the top of her purple hair. “This is why I love you, Tonks; you always keep things in perspective.”

Arthur still goes into work at the Ministry. He wants everything to appear as normal as possible for the time being. Every morning Molly begs him to bring Percy home with him at the end of the day and every day Arthur returns home alone. He says he’s seen their middle son, but that he has no interest in joining them.

Then one day Arthur comes home with reports of Death Eaters gathering on Grimmauld Place. He thinks that there’s a good chance that Harry, Ron, and Hermione are holed up there if they’ve caught the attention of the Death Eaters.
“I’ll go,” Remus volunteers.

“NO!” Charlie shouts. “It should be me!”

Remus sighs and rubs at his temples. “Charlie, you already said that you’d escort Ginny to King’s Cross on the first. If you’re seen out too much than someone is going to realize you’re no longer working in Romania.”

“Then I’ll go to Grimmauld Place and you can escort Ginny to King’s Cross.”

“No, I can’t. The Ministry has passed so much anti-werewolf legislation that they would arrest me on the spot and probably arrest Ginny as well just for being with me.”

“But…but…”

“I know you want to see Harry but we don’t even know for sure that he’ll be there. It’s just a guess right now.”

Charlie knows that Remus is right, but he’s still too disappointed to admit it in front of everyone. He throws his chair back and storms out of the cottage, going out to sulk in his spot on the beach. By the next morning he’s calmed down enough to ask Remus to pass along a message for him, but he’s already gone by the time Charlie looks for him.

Remus comes back later that day and refuses to talk to anyone. Tonks chases after him and they lock themselves away in one of the upstairs bedrooms for the rest of the evening. Tonks comes out to talk to Charlie. She tells him that he found the trio at Grimmauld Place, but that Harry and Remus got into a fight. “It must have been pretty bad because Remy is refusing to move.”

“I’m sure whatever Harry said he didn’t mean.”

“Oh, I know. I think Remy does, too, but it doesn’t make it hurt any less.”

“I’m going to go join them tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is the first,” Tonks reminds him.

Charlie curses and pulls at his hair. “Okay, fine. I’ll make sure Ginny gets on the Hogwarts Express and then I’ll go straight to Grimmauld Place.”

“Just be safe.”

“Of course.”

He considers sneaking away but knows that it’s possible that this might actually kill his mother. Instead, he waits until after supper to tell everyone that he’s leaving. He assures Ginny that he’ll see her off, but makes it clear that he will be joining the trio and will not be coming back. The rest of the evening is understandably somber.

They arrive at Platform 9 ¾ the next morning at half ten. Charlie is reluctant to let Ginny on the train right away. He makes her wait with him as her friends arrive. Charlie recognizes Neville, Luna, Parvati and her twin sister, Lavender, and Ernie. A short boy with a thick Irish accent is there, as well as a very tall boy with dark skin. Charlie knows neither of their names but they seem to be friends with Ginny. They all stand around and chat, nervously looking over their shoulders at the others on the platform- especially the Slytherins.
“I wonder why Malfoy’s dad isn’t here,” Ginny ponders aloud. “He usually doesn’t miss an opportunity to gloat about how wonderful his son is.”

Neville grimaces at Charlie before looking back at Ginny. “Didn’t they tell you? He was one of the Death Eaters killed the night Harry was rescued from his aunt and uncle’s house.”

“What?!” Ginny turns on Charlie then. “How come you never said anything!”

“I didn’t know! I swear!” Charlie backs up a couple of steps. What’s with the ladies in his life, seriously? “It’s not like Moody ever gave me a final body count or anything.”

They all glance over none too subtly, watching Draco and his mother approach the train wearily. The pair both look far too thin and even a little sick. Charlie thinks of the way Harry spoke of Draco last June- with pity. Even earlier than that Harry wrote in his letters that he felt bad that Draco was being recruited by the dark side. Charlie can’t even imagine the lengths he would go to, to keep his mother safe if he and Molly were in the same position as Draco and Narcissa.

The whistle blows at five to eleven and Charlie ushers them all over to the train. “Stick together. Keep your heads down. Constant vigilance and all that.”

Ginny gives him a hug, and then so does Luna. Charlie doesn’t question it. He waits the remaining four minutes until the train pulls away nervously bouncing on the balls of his feet. As soon as the smoke clears he heads to the apparition point. But before he can even get there, his father’s silver bear stops him with a message. “Don’t go to them, Charlie. There was a break-in at the Ministry. I saw them. They got what they were looking for and have moved on to the next. Come back immediately. We have to leave.”

Charlie gets to the Shell Cottage and the only one he finds there is Bill. “I sent them on ahead,” he tells Charlie. “We’re going to Aunt Muriel’s.” Without another word, he apparates with his brother and they land outside of their great-aunt’s house.

Arthur tells them about seeing the trio racing through the Ministry with dementors and Death Eaters hot on their trail. “I’m not going back there again,” he says sadly. “There’s nothing left of the Ministry anymore.” (Later, Arthur will tell Bill and Charlie about the way Percy looked horrified to see the trio being attacked by Ministry officials. He waits to tell them alone because he doesn’t want to get Molly’s hopes up, but it’s a good sign as far as he’s concerned.)

They’ve been at Aunt Muriel’s for a month. One month of doing nothing. There’s not even a calming beachfront to distract from the fact that they are officially in hiding. The only bright spot is George and Fred’s business. They have had to abandon their shop in Diagon Alley, but they are still accepting mail-in orders. Charlie loves to watch them plan and create their Wheezes. But he can’t spend the rest of his life like this. He longs to get out and actually help win this war.

His chance comes when Moody and Tonks show up to check on them. Tonks shows off her slightly-rounded belly, though it still looks more like she’s put on a few pounds rather than she’s pregnant.

“Yeh, yeh, we know of your condition,” Moody barks condescendingly (though Charlie thinks he uses his harsh tone to cover up his genuine concern for her). “That’s why we’re here. We got a tip that You-Know-Who is hunting down wandmakers. We think Gregorovitch is next, and Tonks is in no shape to go across the continent right now.”

That’s all Charlie needs to hear. He immediately volunteers to go to Germany with Moody to help
protect Gregorovitch, his family, and anyone else that may possibly get caught in the path of Voldemort’s quest.

“Are you prepared to fight?” Moody asks him.

“Yes.”

“Are you prepared to not come back?”

“Do you know something you’re not telling me?”

“No, just a reality of the job.”

“Then, yes. I am prepared to not come back.”

Moody’s mechanical eye zooms in on Charlie as though it’s studying him. “Good. We leave in one hour.”

Charlie packs his bag and then says goodbye to his family for the second time.

Chapter End Notes

I was too busy apologizing for the end of the last chapter to say: for those of you keeping track I have killed Lucius (not sorry) and an extra unnamed Death Eater, and saved Hedwig and Moody. I feel the need to keep balance in the universe.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone for reading and liking and commenting and sticking with me!!!

This chapter used to be a bunch of little chapters but when I went back to edit I realized I was missing the point of the story. So I shoved them all together into a mega chapter that spans several months. Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1997, Germany

They’re too late to save the people who lived in Gregorovitch’s old home. Voldemort killed them looking for the wandmaker, even though they had no connection to the man. They do, however, manage to get to Gregorovitch in time. Moody whisks him away to a safehouse that Charlie doesn’t know about, leaving Charlie behind to make his shop look like the wandmaker was kidnapped or killed.

Charlie feels bad about destroying so many wands, but he knows that wands can be replaced whereas people cannot. He lets out his frustrations on the shop, blasting shelves with curses and hexes, sending wood and cardboard flying, sparks and confetti raining down around him. He’s so absorbed in his stress-relieving destruction that he almost gets caught. Thankfully, Voldemort isn’t known for his subtle entrances and Charlie hears the shattering explosions before he sees him.

Charlie runs out the back door and disapparates to a small park in the next town over (Moody made him visit it beforehand so that they’d have a check-point far enough away).

Charlie waits in the park until nightfall but still Moody does not show. He has no idea where the safehouse is, so he’s forced to hunker down for the night. Charlie finds a tree with low enough branches that he can climb it. Once up high and at least partially shielded by the sparse, orange leaves, he casts a disillusionment charm knowing that Moody’s mechanical eye will be able to find him regardless. Then he casts a cushioning charm on the copse of branches and puts on the extra jumper from his bag.

Moody still isn’t there by morning, so Charlie decides to leave his tree and walk around. He keeps off the main roads and instead takes to wandering through the countryside. Charlie used to think that there was no difference between a muggle home and a wizarding home but he knows now how wrong he was. The wizarding homes seem to buzz or vibrate with their magical energy, especially in the secluded quiet of the country. Charlie thinks he’s just grown too accustomed to the way the Burrow feels to notice it anymore.

He considers stopping at some of the wizarding homes, but he doesn’t know if he’d be welcomed or killed on sight. The decision is made for him when he is stopped by a man in a field. Charlie had been too busy looking at the cows grazing to notice him standing there.

“Halt. Wer bist du?” the man says to him in German.

“Uhh…sorry. I’m English. I know a bit of Romanian, but that’s it.” He may have just put a target on his back but he figures he could always pretend to be a very lost tourist.
“I said, oo are you?” the man asks again, this time in heavily accented English.

“Gideon. Charles Gideon.”

“Vere did you come from Gideon? Und vat are you doing here?”

“I was traveling and I’ve seem to have lost my companion.”

“Town is zat vay.” The man points down the road in the direction from which Charlie had already come from. “Be careful out here. Zere are bad man afoot.”

“Thanks.” Charlie turns around and starts to walk back when the man calls after him again.

“If zey come by here, I vill tell zem I zaw you.”

“Who?”

“I zink ve both know oo I am sbeaking of. It is not zafe to be out ven he is zo cloze.”

Charlie narrows his eyes at the man. He has a sour feeling in his stomach and wants to disapparate, but he can’t risk the man seeing him if he’s a muggle. He decides to ask one more time, “Who?”

The man waves him closer and then speaks in a near-whisper, “Voldemort.”

Charlie hears the sound of incoming apparition but doesn’t hang around to see who it is. He has an imagination and can guess who would show up the moment the name ‘Voldemort’ is uttered. He disapparates to the only place in Germany he can think of: Dresden. A few years back he was part of the team that retrieved a Norwegian Ridgeback from just outside the city.

It turns out that Dresden is a little too far to apparate to all in one go, but Charlie gets to an outlying village in one piece (exhausted though he may be). He takes off running as fast as he can manage. He zig-zags his way through the forest he landed in until he stumbles out into a clearing and can get a good look around. He can see a castle on the top of a mountain overlooking the village, and several lanes of homes lay before him. They all have identical white walls and tiled roofs and it paints a pretty picture against the green and orange leaves of fall.

No longer able to run- and not wanting to draw further attention to himself- Charlie slows to a sedate stroll as he reaches the cobbled road. He finds men and women going about their daily routine. There are no children running around so it must be a school day. Charlie’s stomach starts to rumble and he looks for a nearby pub. Eventually he finds one with the name Schröter painted on the front.

Just before entering the pub, Charlie casts a glamour on himself to make his hair look blonde. He knows the bright red will make him stand out even more and wishes he would have thought of doing this sooner. New hair in place, he opens the door and slips inside. A few patrons are scattered throughout the dimly lit room and no one pays him any mind besides the woman behind the bar. Charlie takes a seat in front of her and nods in greeting.

“Was kann ich Ihnen bringen?” the woman asks him kindly.

Charlie goes through the same explanation of being English and losing his traveling companion and not knowing any German. The woman smiles warmly at him hands him a simple menu. She points to something called Tüffel un Plum and roughly translates it as ‘potato stew’. That’s good enough for Charlie, so he nods his head and orders a bowl.
She brings it out a few minutes later and he devours it. When it’s empty she points to the bowl and then back to the kitchen. Charlie doesn’t know if she’s offering a second helping or just to take his dirty dishes away, but either way he nods his head. He’s pleased to see it was the first option. Charlie takes his time eating the second bowl of stew, savoring the interesting combination of flavors and letting it fill him up.

It isn’t until his spoon hits the bottom of the dish once again that he realizes he has no way to pay her. He has knuts and sickles, sure, but that’s wizarding currency that’s really only accepted in and around the United Kingdom. He used them to pay at Andrei’s back in Romania but that was because they were used to employees of the sanctuary being from all over the world. But Charlie doesn’t want to just run out and not even attempt to pay her. Maybe he’ll get lucky and this woman has never seen English currency before. Maybe she won’t know the difference.

Charlie slides the coins out of his pocket in an amount that he thinks is fair for two bowls of potato stew and hands them over. The woman looks at the coins strangely before picking them up to study them. Her eyes grow wide when she sees the symbols. She smiles at him again and motions for him to follow her. Charlie knows that this could be a trap, but this woman is acting nothing like the last man he encountered.

With one hand on his wand, Charlie follows her behind the bar and through a door that he can only assume is marked for employees only as it leads into the kitchen. She hands the coins to the man at the hob and he sets his utensils down to look at them. She speaks excitedly in German and then the man walks towards Charlie.

“Do not worry. I am wizard, too,” he speaks slowly in broken English. The man brandishes a wand of his own and levitates a dish of schnitzel across the kitchen.

Charlie could cry he’s so relieved. “Thank you. I didn’t even think about not having any German or muggle money. I was just so hungry.”

“Vat you doing here?” he asks.

Charlie knows he should be more cautious, but he just feels like he can trust these people. He decides to tell the truth. “My partner and I were rescuing the wandmaker Grogorovitch. I assume you’ve heard of him?”

“He made mein vand. He is zafe?”

“Yes. My partner got him to a safe place. But I got separated from them.”

“Zorry. Can I help?”

“I don’t know.”

The woman taps him on the shoulder and talks rapidly in German again. Charlie waits for the man to translate. “Ve haffe heard of rezisdance in Bruzels. But zat is far. Too far to apparate.”

“Do you have a broom? I would pay you for it, of course.”

“Ja. Sday here. I vill get it und return soon.”

While Charlie is waiting the woman fills his bag with apples and bread and other foods that will keep, and then she returns to the front of the pub. The man is back in under five minutes, handing Charlie an old Tinderblast - a brand he’d only ever read about and never used before. He tries not to make a face but has the feeling he doesn’t succeed in hiding his disappointment.
“Zorry,” the man says, “is all I haffe.”

“No, no, it’s great, really. Just never seen one in person before.” Charlie digs in his bag for the two galleons he brought along just in case. He finds them and offers them in return for the broom but the man just shakes his head.

“Keep gold. Be vell und do good.”

“Thank you. I would sincerely be lost without your help.” He offers his hand to the man instead of the money. “Charlie Weasley.”

The man shakes his hand firmly. “Bernhard Schröter. Und mein vife Lisette.”

“Thank you again for your generosity. I will not forget the kindness you’ve both shown me.”

He leaves through a back entrance shown to him by Bernhard. Charlie swings a leg up over the Tinderblast and pushes off from the ground. The balance leaves a lot to be desired, but Charlie is good on a broom and he’s able to compensate easily enough. It hovers steadily above the ground. He leans forward to get the broom moving before leaning to one side and then the other. The turns are much wider than on his own broom, but, again, he’s able to make the necessary corrections to his movements. The last thing he checks is speed. There’s a reason why professional Quidditch teams never used this particular broom. It is slow. But Charlie would rather be flying on a slow broom than walking on foot.

Charlie eventually makes it to Brussels after two solid weeks of flying. His arse hurts and he doesn’t care if he never flies again. He shrinks the broom and tucks it into his bag before walking around the city and looking for any sign of a wizarding sector like Diagon Alley. He thinks he’s found something when a shabby door appears only as he steps in front of it.

Discreetly holding his wand in his hand, Charlie opens the door and feels the comforting hum of the magic of the building surround him. He follows along a narrow corridor until it opens up into a large hall filled with witches and wizards. Some turn and look at Charlie but most keep about their own business.

A middle-aged man with a scraggly dark beard steps forward and greets Charlie. “Welcome, friend. I’m Elias Baert.”

“Charlie Weasley. Where exactly am I?”

“You’re at the hub of the official wizarding resistance.”

Charlie narrows his eyes. As glad as he is to have found them so quickly, he’s a little wary of how easily they made themselves be known. “I thought you’d be harder to find. And how is it you already seem to trust me?”

Elias chuckles knowingly. “The door is charmed to only let itself be seen by those who have no desire to cause us harm. The corridor is also set with traps. You made it through both unscathed, so I know that you’re one of us.”

Charlie tells him about his time in Germany, ending with Bernhard suggesting he come to Brussels. “I want to be useful as much as I can.”

Elias hums and taps his chin thoughtfully. “Are you willing to travel more?”
“Yes. My family is in Britain and ideally I’ll be able to return to them at some point, but for now I will go wherever I am needed.”

“I have just the job for you.” Elias leaves him briefly to speak with a witch on the other side of the large hall. She hands over a piece of parchment and Elias thanks her before returning. He gives Charlie the parchment and it contains a list of locations on the southern coast of the isle, all of which have suffered Death Eater attacks. “Most just have property damage but some of the smaller villages have been completely decimated. Each place has a name next to it. That will be your contact person. We have already verified that they are on our side.”

Charlie duplicates the list and hands the original back to Elias. “Thank you for trusting me with this. I will do as much as I can. I promise you.”

Elias offers him a small lunch to show his appreciation. Charlie pockets half of the sandwich for later and then shoulders his bag once more. He figures there’s no use in hanging around when there’s work to be done. On his way back through the hall, several people stop to shake his hand and thank him for his help. Charlie leaves feeling like he could take down Voldemort all on his own and figures that was probably their goal.

Charlie travels on foot when he can, but continues to use his borrowed broom when necessary. He tries to keep his mind on the task at hand, but Harry is always in the back of his thoughts. It’s worst at night when the air is cold and lonely. His first stop is in Calais, where he takes a muggle ferry across the English Chanel to the port-town of Dover. (Charlie made sure to exchange his one of his galleons into muggle money before leaving Brussels.) He doesn’t like the boat ride, but it’s better than spending more time on the Tinderblast.

He sticks to the coastline and travels from one village to the next, asking for the contacts given to him by Elias. He is met with gratitude everywhere he goes even if he cannot offer much more in the way of help than rebuilding walls and chopping wood for fires. He takes traveling advice and listens for bits of gossip and news, hoping to hear something about Harry but also hoping to hear nothing because that will mean they’re still safely in hiding. He learns about groups of wannabe bounty hunters that call themselves ‘Snatchers’ that round up muggle-borns and others wanted by the Ministry for the reward money.

Talk of Snatchers only increases the further Charlie travels west along the coast. He stops in at pubs every night- always with different glamours- and eavesdrops on conversations. It’s at a shabby inn in Brighton that he hears a familiar voice order a drink. He swivels around in his seat and tries to find its source. A tall man with nondescript brown hair and brown eyes is standing at the bar. Charlie would recognize those freckles and that nose anywhere.

Not wanting to startle him, Charlie waits until the man is seated before walking over and sitting at the table next to him. “Psst,” he whispers to get the man’s attention. “Psst! Ron, it’s me.”


Charlie has to laugh because of course that’s the first thing Ron says after not seeing him in almost five months. He moves to the seat across from Ron. “Yeah it’s me. And you look just as strange, I assure you. Where are the others?”

Ron’s face clouds over. “I don’t know. Her concealment charms are too good. I can’t find them.”

“How long ago did you get separated from them?”
“A month? Two?”

“What have you been doing all this time?”

“I could ask you the same thing.”

“Finish your drink and we’ll get out of here.”

“Where will we go?”

“I paid for a night when I first got here. Room 7. I’ll go first and you follow in a few minutes. Tap four times on the door, pause, and then tap once more.”

Ron just nods, so Charlie gets up and heads for the corridor that leads to the lodging. He gets into his room and starts pacing back and forth. Time moves so slowly that Charlie is sure something went wrong and Ron’s not coming, but then he hears the correct series of taps on the door and opens it to let his brother into the room. As soon as the door is closed they both cast a series of locking and silencing charms and then check the room to make sure they are well and truly alone. Only then does Charlie draw his brother in for a hug. “I’ve been so worried about you, Ronnie.”

“At the beginning, I kept thinking you were going to come find us. We were at Grimmauld Place for so long. And then Remus came and we were sure you’d be right behind him. But then the timing was right to break into the Ministry and we haven’t stopped running since.”

“I wanted to,” Charlie tells him. “I wanted so badly to go to you. But Remus made me take Ginny to King’s Cross instead, and then after the train left I was warned by Dad to not go after you. From there we went to Aunt Muriel’s, which was awful, and then Moody came and asked if I wanted to help him with a mission. Tonks couldn’t go because she’s pregnant.”

“Really? Wow. What a time to have a baby.”

“Oh, she knows. She told me I was godfather, though. Me and Harry. But anyway, I went with Moody in her place to rescue Gregorovitch. I got separated from them and then someone called in the Death Eaters by saying You-Know-Who’s name so I ran. A couple in Dresden helped me out and sent me to Brussels, where I worked with a group of resistance fighters. Then I crossed through France and over the strait to Dover, and now I’ve just been going along the coast helping where I can and picking up as much chatter as possible.”

“Harry, Hermione, and I found a horcrux in the Ministry. It’s the real version of the locket that Harry and Dumbledore retrieved in June. Turns out that whoever wears it has dark thoughts and it was driving us all mad. I wasn’t strong enough. I-I-”

“It’s alright, Ron.”

“No it’s not! I abandoned them! They tried to talk me down but I accused them of having an affair in return. I know Harry wouldn’t do that to you, and I also know that I have no claim on Hermione since I never told her how I felt, but I couldn’t help it! I let the horcrux take over and it drove me away from them!”

Ron starts to sob and Charlie wonders if this is the first time in two months that he let himself grieve. He tugs Ron down to the edge of the bed so that they can both sit. Then he tucks Ron against him and rocks him side to side, humming and patting his back like their mother would do. After a while the tears subside and even the hiccupping stops.

“This wasn’t your fault, Ron. It would have happened to anyone. It’s dark magic.”
“I know. But now they’re gone and I don’t know how to find them back.”

“We’ll figure it out. Together.” Charlie yawns. “First thing in the morning.”

Ron nods and starts to take off his outer clothes. He climbs into bed when he’s down to just his pants and socks. Charlie does the same, with the addition of a thin t-shirt. They’re both asleep within moments of their heads hitting their pillows.

It’s in the quiet of the morning that Ron hears it. “What’s that?”

“What’s what?” Charlie asks, throat still scratchy with sleep.

“That voice.”

Charlie is quiet, ears trained for any small sound, but he hears nothing. “There is no voice.” He rolls back over and tries to get a bit more rest.

“There it is again!” Ron gets out of bed and digs through his bag. He extracts his Deluminator from the depths and holds it to his ear. “It sounds like it’s coming from here, but it’s no louder.”

“What are you-”

Ron cuts him off. “It’s Hermione!” He opens the Deluminator and a ball of light floats out, though it doesn’t go to any source in the room like it usually does. It just hovers in front of him.

“Have you gone mad? I still don’t hear anything.”

“I don’t think so. It has to be her. I-I think I’m supposed to follow the light.”

“Didn’t Hermione say that Dumbledore gave you those things for a reason? Maybe that’s its purpose after all.”

“Will you go with me?”

Charlie doesn’t even hesitate to say yes. They pack up their meager belongings and head out straight away.

For days they wander, hiding out in trees and evading Snatchers. The temperatures are freezing and Charlie wishes more than anything to out of the wind. He is sure he’ll never feel his fingers again. But Ron’s confidence never falters. Every time he releases that little ball of light, his face brightens and his shoulders relax. Charlie wishes he could hear and feel whatever it is that keeps Ron going.

They’re in the Forest of Dean when Ron spots Harry’s patronus. “Charlie! Look!”

But Charlie is confused. “Harry’s is a buck. You know, antlers and such? That’s a doe.”

“Then what’s it doing out here? Do you know anyone with a doe?”

“No.” The doe doesn’t give a message. It seems to be watching them. “Maybe it was cast for protection but without any dementors around it’s confused?”

“Do they work that way?”

“I don’t know.”
Ron considers the silvery form still standing before them. “Think we should follow it?”

“Could be a trap,” Charlie warns him. He’s had enough traps for one lifetime, thank you very much. “What is your ball of light telling you?”

“It’s the same as it’s been this whole time.”

“Alright, then. Let’s go. Wands out.”

The two brothers walk carefully towards the doe. It turns and heads further into the forest, so they follow behind. The doe leads them to a frozen lake before disappearing altogether. Ron points to a pile of clothes near a small hole in the ice.

“Is that my jumper?” Charlie questions as they get closer.

“I’d recognize those ratty trainers anywhere,” Ron says, voice laced with hopefulness. “Those are Harry’s. And before I left, he’d started wearing some of your clothes - the ones you had Hermione pack in her bag. It has to be him.”

“But if those are his clothes…DON’T TELL ME HE WENT DOWN THERE!”

They race over to the hole in the ice and sure enough there’s a dark form struggling in the water. Charlie lies down so that his lower body is still on the ice but his upper body is leaning over the hole. He reaches his arms in and hisses at the cold, but fights through the pain. He stretches and feels around until his hands hit flesh. Charlie grabs on and pulls, but Harry is fighting against him. “Help me, Ron!”

Ron kneels down and thrusts his own arms into the hole in the ice. Between the two of them, they easily extract Harry from the freezing water. Ron rips the necklace from where it has a tight grip on Harry’s throat and then pries Harry’s fingers from the hilt of a sword. “Blimey, Harry! What got into you? Diving into a frozen lake with a horcrux and the Sword of Gryffindor?”

Harry is curled up in Charlie’s lap, shivering in nothing but his soaked pants. “S-s-saw the s-s-sword d-d-down there. F-f-forgot ab-about the l-locket.”

“I suppose at least we can destroy it now.”

“Y-y-you do it.”

Ron looks reluctant to leave his side, but Charlie promises to take care of Harry. He casts warming charms on him and begins drying out his clothes.

“M-m-missed you. S-s-s-so much.”

Charlie shushes him. “We can talk later.”

As he helps Harry dress, they watch Ron walk the locket over to a stump and sets it down. He hauls the heavy sword up onto his shoulder and rears back. It’s at that moment that the locket opens and a suave voice starts talking about every single one of Ron’s worst fears. They are helpless. Ron has to fight this battle himself. They wait in tense anticipation as Ron’s anger grows. He gives picks the sword up over his head and charges at the locket with a battle cry. He smashes it into the locket and suddenly it’s all over.

Harry clutches his forehead in pain. “He knows,” he grits out. “He knows we destroyed it.”
Ron comes over, tip of the sword dragging on the ground as he goes. “We should get back to camp. I’m sure we’ll have company soon enough.”

Charlie helps Harry stand and then lets him lead the way back to their tent. Hermione’s jaw drops when she sees the three of them walking towards her. “What- where- how-”

“I think we broke her,” Charlie jokes to Harry, who laughs in return.

“Hiya, Hermione.” Ron stands before her nervously. He drops the sword and opens his arms as she walks near him, fully expecting a hug. He is caught severely off guard by her first punch.

Hermione lets loose all the pain and frustration she’s been holding onto since Ron left them. She punches with both fists, hitting his stomach, his chest, his shoulders, anywhere she can reach. Charlie casts a shield to protect him and Harry pulls her away.

“Get off me!” she yells, struggling against Harry’s hold. “He deserves it! And YOU!” She points at Charlie accusatorily. “You’re next!” Harry drags her into the tent still kicking and screaming.

Charlie looks at Ron incredulously. “A hug? You really thought she was going to hug you?”

“Wha- I mean…Harry hugged you!” Ron splutters.

“He was literally freezing and I was warming him up! I don’t think that counts as a hug!”

“I guess I figured she’d be happy to see I was back, is all.”

“And somewhere deep down I’m sure she is, but right now she’s also incredibly angry with you.”

Ron stares at the ground miserably. “What can I do?”

“Give her time.” Ron starts to argue but Charlie cuts him off. “I mean it. Give her time to accept that you’re back and that you’re not going to just leave her again.”

And it does take time- a lot more time than Ron would like- but Hermione eventually comes around. Charlie wakes up one night to the sound of talking outside the tent. Ron had been on the overnight watch and a quick glance around the tent confirms that the other person out there with him must be Hermione. Charlie sneaks over to the flap to listen in.

“So you tried to come back right away?”

“Of course! But you and Harry were already gone. I’d no idea where you went and no safe way to track you down.”

“How’d you find us this time?”

“Charlie found me first, actually. And then I heard your voice coming from the Deluminator. I don’t know why and Charlie couldn’t hear it. It was like it was just for me. A little ball of light came out and hovered in front of me so I followed it and your voice back here. Trust me, Hermione. I regretted what I did as soon as I was gone. It was that stupid locket. I could never leave you. I love you.”

“Oh, Ronald…I love you too.”

Charlie jumps back from the tent flap. He’s proud of his brother but doesn’t really need to hear more. He climbs back into his sleeping bag, which is positioned directly next to Harry’s. Charlie wiggles so that he is flush to Harry’s side and falls asleep once more.
In the morning, Hermione and Ron are cuddling together outside of the tent. Charlie offers to take over guard duty and they eagerly let him. Harry comes out to sit with him a few minutes later. They’ve slowly been sharing their experiences and making up for lost time.

“Have I mentioned how happy I am that you’re back?” Harry says with a smile.

Charlie chuckles and uses one arm to pull Harry close. “Only about a hundred times, though I could stand to hear it once more.”

Harry tugs on the sleeves of the borrowed flannel he’s wearing. “Don’t tell Hermione but things were bad for a while there. It was just the two of us for so long and everything she did set my teeth on edge. One day all she did was offer to cut my hair and I yelled at her for constantly harping on me about it. She’s one tough bird, but I could tell I hurt her feelings.”

“She knows it was just because of the locket so I wouldn’t worry about any lingering resentment. And besides, I like the long hair so it was totally worth it.” Charlie gives him a wink.

By afternoon, Ron and Hermione have both awoken and they join the boys outside. Hermione shares her suspicions about the strange symbol that keeps showing up. Charlie recognizes it immediately. “That’s the sign of the Deathly Hallows,” he tells them. “I saw Mister Lovegood wearing it at Bill’s wedding so I asked him what it meant. Turns out it’s a topic he knows a lot about.”

“We should go to him, then,” Hermione suggests.

“I agree with Hermione!” Ron says too quickly. They all stare at him in amusement. “I mean, we should take a vote. And I vote that Hermione is right.”

“Smooth,” Charlie teases. “But I have to admit that’s a good idea.”

Harry doesn’t look convinced. “Can we trust him? I don’t need anyone else to betray us.”

Hermione rests a hand on his shoulder. “I know where you’re coming from, but what other choice do we have?”

Harry sighs. “Alright. Let’s clean up and go to the Lovegoods.”

Charlie takes the lead once they get to Ottery St. Catchpole. He knocks on the front door of an oddly shaped home but is concerned by the shell of a man that opens the door. “Mister Lovegood? Sorry to call on you without any warning, but we were wondering if you had a moment to talk about the Deathly Hallows?”

Xenophilius looks over Charlie’s shoulder and if he’s surprised to see the other three there then he doesn’t show it. “Of course. Luna’s just stepped out so I have some time.”

He invites the four into his home and guides them up the spiral staircase at the center of the room. They sit on mismatched sofas but Xeno paces the room, looking out the windows every few seconds.

“Is everything alright, sir?” Hermione asks. “We can wait until Luna comes back, if that’s better?”

“No, no. Now is good.” He looks out the window again. “What was it you wanted to know?”

“We want to know more about the Deathly Hallows,” Charlie repeats, growing increasingly
worried about how unhinged Mister Lovegood is acting.

“The same symbol from your necklace has been written on my book,” Hermione tells him. “And then I saw it on a grave marker in Godrick’s Hollow. What is it?”

For the first time since they walked in, Xenophilius looks at them directly. “Do you know the story of The Three Brothers?”

Hermione holds up her book in answer and so he has her read from it. Charlie and Ron zone out halfway through because they’ve heard it so many times before, but Harry’s full attention is on the story. Xeno starts to pace the room at a more frantic pace. When the story is over he tells them how some people think the story is based on the real lives of the Peverell brothers and that the three objects are real. He doesn’t know what the rest of the room knows: Harry already owns the Invisibility Cloak of legend.

Xenophilius looks out the window again. “Would you like to stay for supper?” He doesn’t wait for a response. Instead, he just takes the spiral staircase back down to the kitchen and leaves them alone.

“Something is very wrong with him,” Charlie says as soon as he’s gone.

Ron snorts. “How can you tell? He’s always like that!”

“No,” Harry says emphatically. “Charlie’s right. Why would he let Luna out by herself? Especially considering everything going on?”

“Do you think she’s being locked up somewhere here in the house?”

“I don’t think so, but I’d like to take a look around just to be sure.”

Harry and Charlie take the spiral staircase up to the top floor while Ron and Hermione stay to look around the living room. The bedroom upstairs is obviously Luna’s. Harry marvels at the intricate paintings on the ceiling. His own face looks back at him as well as the faces of Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Neville. Spiraled throughout like a chain is the word ‘friends’ painted in gold. Harry’s liked Luna since the beginning but now he realizes just how badly he needs to figure out what’s happened to her.

“Everything is covered in dust,” Charlie says after a lap around the room. “There is no way Luna’s been here. Do you think she stayed at Hogwarts over the hols?”

“I hope so. But why didn’t her dad just tell us that, then?” Harry feels sick.

“Harry!” Hermione calls from the floor below. “HARRY!!”

Harry and Charlie are back down the stairs with their wands out in an instant. They find Hermione holding a copy of The Quibbler and shaking. Harry takes it from her and again his own face looks back at him. ‘Harry Potter: Undesirable No. 1’

“I’m so sorry.” Nobody saw Mister Lovegood come into the room, but he must have heard Hermione yell.

“You don’t have to do this,” Charlie says to him.

“Oh, but I do. They took her. They took my Luna and said they were going to hurt her. So, I’m deeply sorry but I have to do this.”
“NO!!!!!!!” All four of them scream over him as he says the name they’re not supposed to say.

They can already hear the Death Eaters coming.

Charlie grabs Xenophilius by the shoulders. “Let them take me as a consolation prize. I’ll keep Luna safe. Go to Tamsin. Let her help you.” Xeno’s eyes are unfocused and he still looks a little crazed. Charlie shakes him. “Oi! Do you hear me? Go. To. Tams.” He finally nods his head and Charlie is moderately convinced that he’ll follow through.

Then he turns to the trio. “Go without me.”

“What? Charlie, no! I won’t leave you again!” Harry has hold of Charlie’s arm and is trying to pull him towards the hole that Hermione just blasted into the floor.

“I have to make sure that they don’t kill him.”

“But they’ll take you!”

“I’ll be alright. Besides, if they take me then I can help Luna and whomever else they’ve got escape with me.” Charlie leans in and kisses Harry briefly, wiping the tears from his cheeks. “I came back to you once; I’ll do it again.”

Harry feels like he’s dying. Ron comes over and grabs him, hauling him over to Hermione. Charlie gives the three a final wave and then they’re gone. The Death Eaters bombard the house with curses, one of which hits an artefact on the wall that explodes. Charlie casts shield charms around himself and Xeno until the debris has settled.

Just like Charlie thought, the Death Eaters let Xenophilius go after confirming that the trio really was there. Then they take stun Charlie before taking him back to their headquarters.

Chapter End Notes

Ack! Sorry! I didn't realize that like three chapters in a row end sad, but I promise things get better. (And as far as motivation for having Charlie stay...I never really thought that the Death Eaters would just let Xenophilius live. I mean, the golden trio got away!)
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

I had a wedding to go to this weekend (the fifth of the summer- and I've still got one more to go to next month!) and wasn't going to update, but I got more editing done so... yay! chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1998, Malfoy Manor

Charlie comes to on a cold, damp floor. He picks up his head with a groan. Whatever they hit him with was strong. He looks around but it’s hard to see much in the dark. He figures he’s in a basement or a cellar, but then he notices the bars. A dungeon. Great. Sitting is difficult with his head still spinning yet Charlie refuses to succumb to the urge to just lie down and never get up again. He struggles to a seated position, leaning against the stone wall to his left.

“How are you doing, Charlie?” an angelic voice asks him.

He knows that voice, but he can’t find out where it’s coming from. “Luna? That you?”

She giggles softly. “Yes. I’m to your right, but if it’s too hard to move then just stay where you are. I can hear you just fine.” He grunts his thanks. “That’s Mister Ollivander in the corner of your cell- though he’s rarely conscious for long considering his injuries- and Dean is in here with me.”

“I don’t know Dean.”

“He was with us at King’s Cross.”

“I’m tall and brown,” Dean says casually.

Charlie huffs a laugh, holding his head in pain afterwards. “Nice to meet you, Dean. Sorry I never got your name before.”

“It’s no problem. Griphook is also here, by the way. He’s a goblin and we were on the run together with Ted Tonks for a while. The rest of our group was killed, save for us two. Just figured I’d tell you since Griphook isn’t one for sharing.”

Charlie hears a grunt from somewhere else in the dungeons and assumes it’s the aforementioned goblin, but he’s more focused on the part about Ted. “Mister Tonks is dead?”

“Yeah. His wife as well. They tried to use her to get to him and when that didn’t work they just... well, you know. Did you know them?”

Charlie’s chest constricts painfully and he chokes back a sob. He opens his mouth but no words come out, just a pitiful whine. Thankfully, Luna explains for him that Charlie is best friends with their daughter. Dean gives his apologies and condolences and then the dungeons fall into a heavy silence for hours.

Charlie must have fallen asleep because he wakes up when the sound of metal hinges grating
together echoes through the room. A sliver of light can be seen before it disappears once more. Footsteps ring out as someone walks towards them. Charlie stands up, feeling much better than he did before, and finds himself face to face with Draco Malfoy.

“Hello, Draco,” Luna greets him. “Back so soon? I don’t want you to get caught sneaking us food.”

“They’re out on a raid,” Draco says to placate her. “Only a few stayed behind and everyone but my mother decided to drink themselves into a stupor. She’s watching the door for me.”

Draco thrusts his hand through the bars of Charlie’s cell, proffering some crusty bread and a large wedge of cheese. Charlie looks warily at the food, so Luna assures him that it’s safe. “Draco’s been taking care of us since we got here.”

“It’s the least I can do,” he says as though it’s nothing. Charlie knows that Draco is risking his life just to bring them this and he admires his bravery. Draco hands him more food for Ollivander, then goes to everyone else, and then circles back around to Charlie. “I’ve never met you, only your weasel brother and your sister with the bat-bogey hex.”

Despite the circumstances, Charlie finds himself laughing. “I’ve been caught at the wrong end her wand before.”

“Has Granger ever punched you in the nose?”

“No?”

“Well then, I’ve still got that on you.” If Charlie didn’t know better he’d say that Draco was joking around. But then a tap sounds on the door and all the humor leeches out of him. Draco looks at Luna and says, “I don’t know when I’ll be back so make it last.”

“Thank you, Draco, as always.” And with one more nod in their direction, he scurries away.

A few days pass. And then a week. And then another week. Charlie tries to keep track of the passage of time but it’s hard when they’re stuck in the dark. He talks to Mister Ollivander, Luna, and Dean about anything and everything. The unspoken agreement is that they don’t talk about escaping. It’s useless and bringing that up will just make things feel worse. In the silence, Charlie thinks about Harry. He wishes they were still together, even if that means they were stuck in the freezing forest again.

Draco brings them food when he can. Narcissa takes his place when he can’t. Charlie is starting to think that this isn’t so bad, if it weren’t for the fact that they’re begin held prisoner indefinitely. But he doesn’t realize that things are only the way they are because Voldemort is still out trying to gather up wandmakers.

Everything changes the night the door is thrown open and two Death Eaters stalk right up to Charlie’s cell. They unlock it and grab hold of him. While they haul him up the steps one of them says nastily, “The Dark Lord has been wanting to meet you.”

Charlie doesn’t give him the satisfaction of responding.

They take him to what appears to have once been a sitting room, where You-Know-Who himself is seated atop of a large throne. Charlie is thrown to the ground at his feet.

“Well, well. Look what we’ve found.” Voldemort’s voice is wheezy and deep, making Charlie shiver. “I’d know you anywhere.” Charlie moves to stand but before he can get one foot flat on the floor, he’s hit with a spell that makes him drop down again with a groan of pain. “Stay in your
place, blood traitor! Or I will show you what real pain is.”

“What do you want from me?” Charlie grits out between his clenched teeth.

“SILENCE! I don’t want anything from you! You see, just having you here will be enough. Harry Potter will certainly come for his beloved, even if it means walking up to the front door of the Manor and knocking.”

Charlie feels the bile rise up in his throat. He spits on the floor in disgust, and that’s when he gets the idea. “Potter? Beloved?” He spits again for show. “He doesn’t care what happens to me.”

Voldemort’s laugh is just as terrifying as his voice. “Do not lie to me, boy. I can see into his mind, into his heart. You are all he’s thought about for some time.”

“He’s lying to you.” Voldemort’s laugh dies in this throat and Charlie takes that as a good sign. “He knows you can read his thoughts. He’s known for years. So he’s giving you false images.”

“Preposterous! I am the greatest wizard to ever live! He doesn’t have the power to do that.”

“Just like how he didn’t have the power to throw off your Imperious?”

Gasps echo throughout the room. Of course Voldemort never told his followers what happened; it would make him seem weak. Charlie’s victory is short lived as Voldemort casts the Cruciatus at him. He convulses in pain on the floor, trying not to yell. Charlie gets a second of reprieve before it happens again, and then a third time, and then he can’t stop the scream that rips from his throat. This seems to satisfy Voldemort and he stops the curse, leaving Charlie panting to catch his breath.

“HE LIES! Harry Potter has no such power! Get him out of my sight.”

Charlie is quickly- and none too gently- taken back to the dungeons. He collapses in a heap next to Mister Ollivander. Luna manages to shove something through the bars separating their cells and it hits Charlie’s legs. He reaches for it and feels softness against his fingers.

“Draco was able to sneak it in after they took you away,” Luna explains. “He had the feeling you’d need it after what they were going to do.”

Charlie grunts in response and manages to wrap himself in the blanket before passing out entirely.

He wakes some time later to the sound of the dungeon door banging open again. He moves as quickly as possible, removing the blanket and curling his body around it. The Death Eaters take Mister Ollivander this time. They can hear his screams even all the way down here, and Charlie feels horrible for being relieved that it isn’t him this time. It seems to go on forever and then suddenly there’s nothing but quiet ringing in their ears. Then Ollivander is unceremoniously thrown back in his cell. Charlie waits until the door is shut behind the last Death Eater before sliding over and wrapping the blanket around the old man’s still-shaking body.

“We have to do something,” Charlie says into the darkness.

“Like what?” Dean asks.

“I don’t know. But we can’t stay like this forever. It’s only a matter of time before You-Know-Who gets tired of waiting and kills one of us.”

Dean kicks the bars. “You think we don’t know that?? We’ve been here longer than you have! We know full well what’s going to happen to us!”
“We can’t know for certain, Dean,” Luna says softly. “Harry could still save us. I believe in him. You used to.”

“Yeah, well, look where we are, Luna. There’s not much room for hope down here.”

She hums, seemingly unaffected by his pessimistic words. Charlie sighs and pinches his eyes shut, willing himself to fall asleep so that he doesn’t have to think about their helpless situation for a few hours.

Charlie isn’t sure how much time has passed when they hear a commotion from upstairs. They can’t tell what’s going on but Charlie assumes another prisoner will be added to the dungeon soon. Sure enough, the door opens and two people are pushed down the steps. The Death Eaters don’t even bother to lock them inside a cell, they just shut the heavy metal door and leave.

“Blimey, Luna is that you?”

“Ron?” Charlie presses himself to the bars to get a look at his brother.

“Charlie? Mate, Charlie’s here!”

Charlie is then face to face with someone who’s been horribly disfigured. “Charlie! Is that really you? My glasses are in Hermione’s bag.”

“Harry? What happened to you?!”

“I saw you getting tortured and then Ollivander. It was just too much and I wasn’t thinking and said his name. They found us and brought us here. Hermione did this to my face at the last moment in hopes that they wouldn’t recognize me. They even made Draco and Narcissa come out to identify me but neither of them could tell who I was.”

Ron sucks in air through his teeth and rocks back on his heels. “I hate to say it, mate, but there’s no way Malfoy didn’t know it was you. I mean, you may be all swollen but I’m certainly not and neither is Hermione. Malfoy knows us. He lied to keep us safe, though why is beyond me.”

“He’s been bringing us food,” Charlie tells them. “And he snuck in while I was being tortured to give Luna a blanket for me.”

“Malfoy did all that?” Ron huffs. “No way.”

Luna tries to convince him that Draco is on their side, but it takes Dean chiming in for him to start believing. “They’re right, Ron. Malfoy told us that he and his mother are only pretending so that You-Know-Who doesn’t kill them. They have risked everything to help us.”

“Fine. So Malfoy’s good now. It doesn’t change the fact that we’ve got to come up with a way out of here.”

“There’s no way out,” Charlie says bitterly.

“There has to be some way.”

“We have no wands!”

“Then let’s think of something else!”

Their argument is cut short by the sound of Hermione’s high-pitched wails. Ron runs up the steps
and pounds on the metal door at the top, screaming to anyone who will listen to let her go and take him instead. Harry has to forcibly hold Ron’s arms to his sides and pull him away from the door. “You have to be brave for her, Ron. You can’t freak out.”

Ron stops fighting against Harry and slides to the floor, crying out every time he hears Hermione as though he’s sharing in her pain. There’s nothing that any of them can do for him and it’s awful.

Harry walks over to Charlie’s cell and reaches his hand through to hold Charlie’s own. That’s when Charlie notices the leather pouch tied to his belt. “Got anything in there that could be useful?” he asks.

Harry unties it and passes it through the bars. “Have a look for yourself. I doubt anything will help us now.”

Charlie pulls it open and the first thing he sees is a sliver of mirror. He thinks it strange that Harry would carry this around, as he’s not usually a vain person. Charlie looks into the mirror and his own reflection is not what’s looking back at him. The eyes are steely blue, not golden brown. “Harry…what is this?”

“It’s a piece of a mirror from Sirius.”

“Who’s on the other side?”

“The other…what? What do you mean?”

Charlie turns the shard and Harry gasps at what he sees. “It’s not possible.”

“Who is that, Harry?”

“Dumbledore.”

Charlie doesn’t think he knows his old headmaster’s eyes well enough to recognize them on their own, but he looks into the mirror piece again. The person turns their head and the dark gray hair gives Charlie pause. “I think you’re right. Well, sort of. I think it might be Dumbledore but not Albus. It’s Aberforth.”

Harry gasps and pulls the shard to him once again. “Do you think he can hear me even though I don’t have the whole mirror?”

“I don’t know. Maybe?”

“Aberforth!” Harry shouts at it and the reflection turns to face him again. “Aberforth! We need help! We’re in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor! Please!” And then the image is gone.

Harry stashes it back into his pouch when he hears the door open. Peter Pettigrew unlocks all three cells but takes Griphook first. “We need you to determine the authenticity of a certain sword,” he tells the goblin, “but then I’ll be back for the rest of you.”

Luna and Dean run out of their cell as soon as he’s gone. They hug Harry and Ron and give the short version of their stories, but they’re interrupted by a loud crack.

“Dobby is here for Harry Potter!” the little elf cries triumphantly.

“Dobby! Take Dean, Luna, and Mister Ollivander to Shell Cottage and then come back for us.”

Dobby bows low before taking hold of all three. They are gone with another loud crack. Now all
that’s left is to rescue Hermione. Ron, Harry, and Charlie head for the door but they’re stopped by Peter Pettigrew. He uses his metal hand to choke Harry until Harry invokes a Life Debt. Charlie watches in astonishment as the metal hand turns towards Pettigrew and kills its owner, but doesn’t have time to comment as Dobby is now waiting for them at the top of the steps.

They run upstairs with Pettigrew’s wand and hear the end of Griphook’s lie about the sword. Greyback is there and he growls menacingly at Charlie and threatens to finish what he started in June. Bellatrix promises him that he can have both Charlie and Hermione and that’s enough to send Ron and Harry into a frenzy. Ron disarms Bellatrix and tosses the wand to Harry and then the pair disarm everyone else in the room, including Draco. Dobby creates a distraction by unscrewing a chandelier from the ceiling, but then Bellatrix has Narcissa’s wand and she presses it to the Dark Mark on her arm so that she can summon Voldemort.

Harry is overwhelmed by the pain radiating from his scar. He staggers across the room to his friends but ends up bumping in Draco instead. “Give me my wand,” Draco begs.

“No. There’s more important things right now,” Harry tells him, eyes still watering from the pain.

“You can’t leave me with nothing! I have to be able to protect my mother!”

“Get off me, Draco!”

It catches him off guard that Harry would call him by his given name. He takes advantage of Harry’s current weakness by shoving him to the ground and trying to rip the wand from his hand. Harry resists, and the pair roll across the floor. Charlie can only see this ending one of two ways, and he refuses to let it be in defeat. He looks at Harry and Draco wrestling over the wand and knows they won’t have enough time if they wait. He waves over Ron- who is supporting Hermione’s dead weight- and then he shouts, “Dobby! Now!”

Bellatrix’s glare turns into a devious grin as her knife spirals through the air. But it never reaches its intended target. They’re already gone.

Chapter End Notes

I'M SORRY I KILLED ANDROMEDA!!! It just never made sense to me that they would kill her husband and not her. Sure, she was a pure-blood but she was a 'blood traitor' and I don't think the Death Eaters would have been choosy (especially at this point in the war). Maybe I'm wrong, but the damage is done and the story must go on.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

This chapter should tie up all the loose ends and cliffhangers and questions from the last chapter! I really like this one and I hope you do too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1998, Shell Cottage

They land in a heap on the dunes. Charlie is the first to recover. “Everyone alright?” he asks.

“Where am I? What did you do??” Draco’s panicked voice rings out.

“I’m alright,” Harry says as he sits up. “And Draco, you’re at an Order safehouse called Shell Cottage. Bill Weasley and his wife Fleur live here.”

“I don’t bloody care who lives here!” Then Draco lets out an otherworldly shriek. “I’ve been stabbed!”

Harry gracelessly pulls the dagger out, much to Draco’s displeasure. Then he heals the small wound with a charm that Hermione taught him during one of the long, cold nights they were stuck in that tent. “All patched up,” he says calmly.

Draco looks is arm over and makes a face of moderate approval before scowling once more. “I should be surprised or shocked about my own aunt stabbing me, but I’ve seen what she’s capable of.”

“To be fair, I don’t think she was aiming at you. It was more likely one of us.”

Draco knows that Harry is right but he certainly won’t admit it. “What were you thinking, Potter? My mother is going to be killed because I ran away.”

“You didn’t run away,” Ron argues as he staggers over with Hermione. “It’s more like we kidnapped you, actually. And you should be blaming Charlie, if anyone. I’m going to take ‘Mione inside now. And I think that’s Griphook over there face down in the sand. Thanks for your help, Dobby.”

“Yes, thank you, Dobby,” Harry reiterates as he looks around for the elf.

Dobby steps out from behind a copse of tall reeds. “Dobby will always be there to help Harry Potter and his friends.” Then he snaps his fingers and he’s gone.

Harry holds the wand out to Draco. “I’m sorry I wouldn’t give it back. It’s just that mine got broken and it’s been awful without one. I didn’t even think what it would mean for you to be without one as well.”

“Right, well, next time be a little bit less of a Gryffindor and think before you act.” Draco snatches the wand out of Harry’s hand and inspectes it.
Charlie shakes his head at the blonde before looking at Harry. “Will you be alright here with this one? I should probably make sure Griphook isn’t dead.”

“Go on. We’re fine.” Harry waits until Charlie is gone before talking to Draco again. “Charlie, Luna, and Dean told me what all you did for them and I just wanted to thank you.”

“I couldn’t very well let them die. I’m not a monster.”

“I know, Draco. Thank you.”

“Why do you keep calling me that?”

“Because it’s your name.”

“You’ve always called me ‘Malfoy’ before, and it’s not like we’re friends.”

“Aren’t we, though? You refused to identify me back there.”

“Just because I don’t want you to die either doesn’t make us friends.”

Harry snorts as though he doesn’t believe a word of it, which makes Draco fold his arms haughtily. “Look, Draco…if you want to go back to the Manor I won’t stop you. I really never meant for this to happen. Charlie just saw an opportunity and took it.”

“I…” Draco runs his fingers through the dry grass they’re still sitting on. “I don’t want to go back. And as worried as I am about my mother, I know she’d kill me herself if I showed up there again after getting a chance to get out.”

“So you’ll stay?”

“For now. Though don’t expect us to get all chummy. I refuse to call you Harry.”

“Of course, Draco.”

“Though I suppose ‘Harold’ would do,” he continues as though Harry never even spoke.

“But that’s not my given name.”

“Too bad.” Draco stands then and brushes the sandy soil from his trousers.

Harry scrambles to his feet. “You can go ahead on in if you want. I’m going to check on Charlie and Griphook. Alright?”

“I think I can manage to walk a few meters without an escort, Harold.”

Harry thinks he should be frustrated, but after hearing everything that Draco has done for his friends he can only laugh. Why didn’t he realize how funny Draco was when they were in school? He probably should have laughed off Draco’s antics- like the ‘Potter Stinks’ badges- but he was too busy listening to Ron and everyone else about how evil Slytherins were just because of a 1 in 4 chance they were sorted into that house. Harry and Draco acted the way everyone wanted them to. He thinks back to that first night at Hogwarts, when Draco reached out his hand and Harry refused to shake it. It feels so childish looking back, his blatant refusal. But things are different now. So very different. Harry watches him take long strides through the reeds before stepping into the cottage.

“Need any help?” he asks Charlie as he walks towards him.
Charlie has Griphook thrown over one of his shoulders like a sack of flour. “No, I’ve got him. It seems the fall knocked him out. I’ll have Fleur set him up in one of the bedrooms and hopefully he’ll come to soon enough. How was your chat with Malfoy?”

“Odd. But things between me and Draco have never been normal, really.”

Harry holds the door open for Charlie so that he can carry the goblin in unhindered. Bill is rushing around the small kitchen checking on Ron, Hermione, Dean, and Luna but he looks up when they walk in. “Oh, thank Merlin you’re here, Charlie. Tonks has been driving us all crazy. Put down whatever it is you’re carrying and go find her, please.”

Draco slips from where he is leaning against the wall in an attempt to look aloof. “Tonks? I thought they…” He gulps and his face pales.

Bill glares at Draco. “It’s their daughter, Nymphadora, but don’t you dare call her that.”

“Or maybe you should,” Ron says with an amused smirk. “I know I’d love to see her reaction.”

Charlie hefts the goblin higher up on his shoulder and ignores the bickering. “This is Griphook. Is there an open room I can leave him in until he wakes up?”

Bill jerks his head towards the staircase. “First door on the left, where Mum and Dad stayed before. Fleur is already tending to Ollivander in the one on the right.”

“And where’s Tonks?”

“The sitting room.”

Charlie starts up the stairs with Harry right behind him. They tuck Griphook into the bed Bill directed them too and let Fleur know that he’s there. Then they go back down to the sitting room. When they walk in, they can see Tonks’ bright pink hair over the top of the sofa. “Bill, I swear you had better be bringing me sweets or you may as well just turn around and leave again.”

“Er,” Harry says and that’s all it takes.

Tonks whips her head around and her face lights up. “HARRY! CHARLIE!” She struggles to stand up and Charlie rushes to her side to help. Harry’s mouth drops open when he sees her rotund shape. “Surprise!” she says and points her index fingers at her belly. Then she punches Charlie in the shoulder. “Wait a minute, have you really not told him?”

“It’s a long story, Tonks. We haven’t even seen each other since just after Christmas.”

“What have you been up to, Charlie?”

“More than you can imagine.”

“You’re huge!” Harry blurts out.

Tonks and Charlie look at him as if he’s got flobberworms crawling out of his ears. And then they start laughing. Hard. Tonks has to sit back and down and cross her legs for fear of wetting herself from the force of her laughter. Charlie is laying on the floor, holding his sides and howling as tears stream down his face. Harry gets redder and redder as his embarrassment grows. He moves to flee the room but Tonks gasps for him to come back.

“I’ll stop- just- don’t go!” she gets out between giggles, and then she pats the seat next to her on
the sofa. “Sorry, Harry, you just don’t know how good it feels to let go like that. It’s been…a very trying time and you made me feel like my old self again.”

“Umm, well, you’re welcome?”

Tonks beams at him. “Now since you’ve gotten that out of your system, we want you to be the godfather. You and Charlie both.”

“But…Tonks, I…what if something happens to me? I don’t want to let down someone before they’re even born.”

“Well, he’ll be born any day now so unless you plan on offing yourself within the next week then I say you’re fine.” Harry isn’t amused so she changes tactics. “I know that you and Remus fought about him wanting to leave me behind to help you in your mission. You thought he was abandoning his unborn child, but really he was trying not to abandon you. Remus was just trying to do what he thought Sirius would want him to do.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that it was reckless.”

“Do you think I didn’t know what he was going to say to you that day? We’re married! We make these decisions together! I was willing to let him go if it meant he could protect you like a godfather should.”

“Do you swear to stay with him instead of fighting, should the occasion arise?”

“Harry, I can’t swear that and you know it. I’m an Auror and a member of the Order. It’s my job to protect other people including my son. It’s not like I want to run off and get myself killed, but I believe in the greater good.”

Harry looks to Charlie. “And how do you feel?”

“Honored,” Charlie says simply. “Merlin forbid something happens to either Tonks or Remus, but I’d give anything for their child even though I haven’t even met him yet.”

Tonks winces and holds out a hand to Harry. “Here. He’s moving around again. Want to feel?”

Harry lets his hand be positioned onto her taught baby bump. Sure enough, he feels a strong movement underneath the skin. “I…” he can’t think of adequate words.

“It’s just us now,” she says to him quietly. “Remus and I and our little one. We’re all alone. Will you and Charlie be part of his life? No matter what happens?” Harry finds himself nodding. Tonks gives him a lopsided grin. “Good. Now tell me about your travels.”

Some time later there is a soft tap on the sitting room door. It swings open and Draco is standing on the other side. “I hope I’m not interrupting, but I was wondering if I could see my cousin?”

Tonks cranes her neck to look at him. “Yah, come in,” she says curtly.

Draco enters the room fully then. It’s obvious to the rest of them how out-of-place he feels. He’s even fidgeting, something quite unbecoming of a pure-blood Malfoy. “I-” he stops to clear his throat, though it’s most likely that he only does so to stall for time. “I would like to have a chat, if that would be alright?”

She lifts one shoulder in a shrug and gestures to the only other open chair in the room. As Draco rounds the sofa and gets a look at her, his eyes nearly bulge out of his head. He quickly composes
himself and gives a stiff, “Congratulations.”

All Tonks replies with is, “Cheers.”

“Perhaps we should leave you two alone?” Charlie says in a questioning tone. Tonks nods and that’s enough for him. He stands and Harry stands with him, leaving the room in a tense silence.

“I’m sorry about your parents,” Draco says after they’ve gone.

“I’m sorry about your dad.”

“I’m not.”

“Oh?” Tonks raises an eyebrow, imploring him to go on.

“Lucius made every wrong decision possible, starting with entrusting our lives to a megalomaniac and ending with attacking a sixteen-year-old boy because said maniac told him to. As far as I’m concerned he deserved exactly what he got.”

“Yeesh.”

“Indeed.” Draco unnecessarily straightens the collar of his shirt and brushes imaginary lint from his sleeve. “I only regret that I didn’t see Lucius for what he really was sooner, but I was blinded by my forced obedience. All this time we could have been a family. I could have grown up knowing that my mother had two sisters. As it was, I didn’t even become aware of your existence until I stumbled upon the true Malfoy Family Tree in an enchanted book when I was thirteen. The tapestry that hangs in the Manor is full of lies.”

“You really didn’t know?”

“Of course not! A half-blood metamorphmagus? My father pretended you didn’t exist and my mother went along with it so he wouldn’t take it out on her or me.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to trust you just yet.”

“I understand.”

“What are you doing here, anyway? I mean, I figure Harry wouldn’t let you tag along if you were a threat, but you have to know how curious I am.”

“Well, I didn’t so much ‘tag along’ as ‘was forcibly apparated here’ but I’m not complaining. I’m glad to be free of that hell-hole. I just wish my mother was here as well.”

Tonks can tell just how much Draco cares about Narcissa. She thinks he truly would do anything to protect her. She just hopes that the ‘anything’ doesn’t include betraying the cause.

Hermione, Ron, and Harry have to decide what to do next. Hermione finds a long, dark hair on her jumper that she thinks belongs to Bellatrix and suggests that they use Polyjuice to break into Gringotts. Harry thinks they should sneak into Hogwarts. Ron is torn between siding with his two best friends. Charlie helps them make their decision by reminding them that Griphook is upstairs and when he’s well again he’ll be able to help them with Gringotts, so they should probably do that first and then go to Hogwarts.

In the meantime, Mister Ollivander gains enough strength to talk to them about the Elder Wand. Charlie apologizes for not being able to get to him before the Death Eaters did, but Ollivander is
just glad to hear that they were able to save Gregorovitch. “I gave up his name to You-Know-Who. I tried not to, but the curses just kept coming and coming. I would have never forgiven myself had they killed him. So thank you for keeping him safe.”

“Were you friends?” Hermione queries.

“No, no, nothing like that, I’m afraid. I just didn’t want to see an innocent man be killed because of me. You-Know-Who still believes that killing an owner of the wand will give him power over the wand, even though I have told him time and again that there is simply no evidence to support that theory. The story of The Three Brothers is a myth. It may be based on the real lives of the Peverells but the fact remains that wands do not work that way.”

“How does one gain ownership of a new wand, then?”

“You must win it in a duel. Most times a simple disarming spell will do.”

Harry starts to think aloud. “So you’re saying that since I disarmed Draco back at Malfoy Manor, then I’m now the true owner of his wand?”

“Perhaps,” Ollivander answers cryptically. “Some wands are more reluctant to change allegiances than others.”

“And what of other wands that Draco had control of?”

“What do you mean?”

“He disarmed Dumbledore, so am I now the owner of that wand as well?”

“Perhaps,” the old man says again.

“What’s all this about, Harry?” Hermione wants to know.

“You-Know-Who was obsessed with finding the Elder Wand. We already know that he took it from Dumbledore’s grave. But what if he’s not even the true master of the wand? What if Draco is? Or me? That could mean the difference between winning and losing this thing.”

Ron cuts in. “I thought the key to winning was horcruxes. Now it’s wands?”

“No, you’re right,” Harry says shaking his head. “We definitely still need to find the last three horcruxes. Thank you, Mister Ollivander.”

“Good luck.”

Griphook is far less helpful. He reveals very little and the only way he agrees to get them into Gringotts is if they promise to give him the Sword of Gryffindor in return. They promise, for lack of a better idea.

Remus arrives and it’s not even a day later that Tonks’ waters break. Bill goes to Aunt Muriel’s to fetch his mother. Molly had agreed to come and help her through the birthing process since St. Mungo’s was out of the question. He takes Dean with him, who asks to stay with the Weasleys since Shell Cottage really isn’t big enough for this many guests at once (though Ron suggests that his real motivation for going is getting to see Ginny again).

With help from Molly, Fleur, Hermione, and Luna, Tonks gives birth to Edward Remus Lupin on the sitting room floor. Tonks and Remus thank everyone and, after spending time together as a
family first—they offer snuggling privileges to Harry and Charlie. Harry is afraid he’ll drop the warm, wiggly bundle but Charlie wraps his arms around Harry’s to help support him. Charlie boasts at being a professional baby-handler.

Over the course of the next few days everyone gets a chance to hold Teddy. Even Draco is given permission, as he and Tonks have been getting to know each other better, but he politely turns down their offer. He mostly sits on the beach and stays out of the way.

The night before they’re set to leave, Harry begs Ron and Hermione to sleep in the tent so that he can be alone with Charlie. There’s been plenty of time for them to talk; now is the time for doing, not talking. Charlie has already divested Harry of his clothing and is quickly working on his own when the door swings open.

“Granger, I was wondering if I could bend your ear about—” Draco freezes mid-sentence.

Charlie freezes mid-zip.

Harry yelps and grabs the nearest pillow to cover himself with.

There is an awkward moment where no one moves or says anything, and then Draco flushes from his neck all the way up to his hair. He plays it off by giving a whistle and saying, “Who knew the Boy-Who-Lived likes to take it up the arse.”

“Watch it,” Charlie warns him as Harry groans and covers his face with his hands.

“Eh, what do I care? It takes a poufter to know a poufter.”

“Draco,” Harry says imploringly. “As enlightening as this has been for both of us, can you please give me and Charlie some time to ourselves?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll just…go find Granger, I suppose.

“You might not want to do that, either,” Charlie says with a grimace. “Harry sent her and Ron to the tent and they’re probably taking advantage of the privacy.”

“For Salazar’s sake! Is this mating season or something?” Draco exits the room grumbling about how much easier his life would be if he weren’t stuck on the beach with a bunch of randy Gryffindors.

When he’s gone, Charlie leans against the bed post with a sigh. “Still in the mood?”

Harry laughs humorlessly as he reaches for his discarded pants. “I’m afraid not, sorry. I just wanted to spend one last night together.”

“You planning on going somewhere?” Charlie teases as he changes into a pair of sleep bottoms.

“No, but who knows what’s going to happen next.” Harry fiddles with the edge of the blanket to avoid looking him in the eye.

Charlie gets into bed and takes Harry’s hands in his. “I flew a shite broom for over 1400 km and wandered through a freezing forest for weeks to get back to you. No matter what happens next, you’re stuck with me. Go it?”

“You may need to remind me occasionally.”
“Every day if I have to. For as long as it takes.”

“I like the sound of that.”

Charlie sleeps well but Harry does not. He’s far too nervous about the days to come. Just before dawn he hears voices shushing each other and then quiet footsteps moving around on the floor below. With so many people living in one small cottage there always seems to be someone awake. Being careful not to knock into Charlie’s lightly snoring form, Harry climbs out of bed and puts on the pajama bottoms that had been discarded the night prior. He pads downstairs as silently as possible and follows the whispers into the kitchen where Tonks, Draco, Luna, and Fleur are all crowded around the wooden table.

“No, no, no. That part there sounds too polite.” Draco is wagging his finger at the piece of parchment between them.

Fleur takes the quill and rewrites a few lines. “‘Ow is zat?”

“C’est magnifique!”

“Merci, Draco. Tout pour aider.”

Tonks groans as she rolls her eyes. “Alright, you two, we get it; you both speak French! It’s the language of love! Can we get back to this ransom letter or what?”

“Ransom letter?” Harry could smack himself for letting his mouth give him away. They all turn and look at him like he’s intruding upon something secretive. “Who exactly are we kidnapping?”

“Draco, of course,” Luna responds breezily.

“We’re kidnapping him…from…ourselves…?”

Draco drops his head back and makes a choking sound. “Honestly, Harold, how you ever won the Tri-Wizard Tournament is beyond anyone’s understanding. They should have snapped your wand years ago.”

As soon as the words are out of his mouth he regrets them. He jerks his head back and starts to apologize, but Harry cuts him off. “Just…explain to me what’s going on, yeah?”

Tonks hands the parchment to Harry and he scans over it quickly to avoid any further remarks about his intelligence. He has to admit, they’ve done a great job of making it sound like it was the Order’s plan all along to steal Draco away from Voldemort’s lair and use him for their own nefarious purposes. Harry returns the letter and tells them how impressed he is.

Fleur whistles for Hedwig, whom has been staying with them during Harry’s absence. (Upon his return Harry feared Hedwig would not recognize him anymore or be loyal only to Bill and Fleur, but the first thing the owl did was land on Harry’s shoulder and stay there until he had to forcibly remove her. Harry would never doubt his clever bird again.) The owl swoops in from her perch in the attic and holds out her leg. Fleur attaches the letter and then tells Hedwig to take it to Arthur at Aunt Muriel’s home.

“We don’t want anything to happen to your precious owl, so we’re going to have her take it there and then the rest of the Weasley clan will see that it gets into the right hands,” Draco explains to Harry.
Again, Harry is impressed by how thoroughly they’ve planned everything.

Tonks slaps her palms on the kitchen table and waves everybody up. “Mad-Eye is coming first thing to take Ollivander to the safehouse with Gregorovitch. Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Charlie are taking Griphook to break into Gringott’s- good luck with that, by the way. So what are your plans Luna? Draco?”

Luna looks at Draco expectantly. All he does is nod in her direction so Luna answers for them both. “We’d like to stay, if Bill and Fleur would have us.”

“But of course!” Fleur claps her hands together. “I love ‘aving you both ‘ere weeth us.”

Draco flushes and looks down as he murmurs his thanks as Luna reaches over and hugs Fleur.

Everyone goes their separate directions but Draco stops Harry before he can get too far. “Take this,” he says as he shoves his hawthorn wand into Harry’s palm.

“Draco, I can’t. You were right back at the Manor. I can’t leave you with nothing.”

“Take it. I don’t need it here. And besides, as entertaining as it would be to see you run into a battle empty handed you have to have something to duel with.”

“Ron has the wands we stole from your aunt and the other Death Eaters. I’ll just use one of those.”

“But it won’t be good enough! You disarmed me! It’s yours now!”

They argue back and forth until Draco threatens to break the wand in half so that Harry will finally just take it. Harry thanks him and holds it almost reverently. “Thank you.”

“Just don’t make me regret it, Harry.”

One side of Harry’s mouth lifts into a smirk. “You just called me ‘Harry.’”

“And I already regret it.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this is a Harry/Charlie story but I just love Draco so much. Without Lucius around, I think he and Narcissa would finally have been free to make their own decisions as you see here.

AND DOBBY LIVES!!! because of course be does.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

A little action-y, a little fluffy, a little obvious. Not my favorite writing but necessary for what comes next.

Thanks for reading!! We're nearly there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1998, Gringotts Wizarding Bank

The distance between the Leaky Cauldron and Gringotts has never seemed farther to Charlie than it does right now. Ron and Charlie flank Hermione. The former pair are glamoured to look like foreign Death Eater associates and the latter is polyjuiced into Bellatrix Lestrange. Harry and Griphook follow closely behind under the Invisibility Cloak. Charlie tries to mimic the threatening glare that Ron gives each person they pass, but his younger brother is just better at playing the part. He settles on a neutral expression instead.

Getting into Gringotts is surprisingly easy, all things considered. There are Ministry guards at the doors and the goblins are suspicious when Hermione presents Bellatrix’s wand, but all it takes is a quickly-cast Imperious by Harry to get Bogrod to take them down to the vault. (Charlie knows he’ll have to check on Harry later and make sure that he’s okay with having just used one of the unforgivables, but for now he pushes that to the side of his mind the best he can.)

Charlie’s mouth falls open as they step into an entryway for several of the deeper vaults. Before them is a Ukrainian Ironbelly dragon that nearly fills the room. It becomes apparent that the ‘clankers’ Bogrod brought with him are used to keep the dragon from hurting them. Charlie growls low in his throat as he tells them they goblins must have trained the poor beast to associate the clanking noise with pain. Griphook confirms his suspicions.

“That’s barbaric!” Hermione exclaims.

Ron puts an arm around her and promises, “We’ll do what we can, but our first priority is to find the horcrux.”

She throws Ron’s arm off her and reels back. “Our first priority should be to save everyone! That includes house elves, goblins, and even dragons!”

“But we won’t even have a chance to save everyone if we can’t-”

“SHHHHHH!” Charlie shushes and waves his arms around to get them to stop arguing. “Look.”

Harry is walking towards the Ukrainian Ironbelly and making soft noises.

“What is he thinking?! Charlie! We have to stop him!”

Charlie shakes his head with a knowing smile. “Harry knows what he’s doing. Trust me. Trust him.”
They watch as he approaches the dragon slowly with his hands at his sides. He makes guttural noises; slightly hissing and slightly growling. Charlie recognizes it as the same sounds Harry made when talking to Bryony. The dragon grunts and opens its mouth. Charlie holds his borrowed wand in his hand just in case the dragon decides that it’s had enough, but he hangs back and gives it a chance. Harry accios one of the clankers into his hand and the dragon rears back on its hind legs and roars with indignant fury. Hermione gasps and buries her face into Ron’s neck, who looks at Charlie nervously. But then Harry vanishes the clanker and shows off his empty hands. The dragon drops back down and stares at him so Harry says something and then does it again. He summons another clanker and vanishes it before the dragon’s eyes, showing off his empty hands once more.

The dragon snuffles low in its throat and sets its head on the ground at Harry’s feet. Harry keeps talking quietly as he reaches forward and places one of his hands on the dragon’s snout, skin standing out dark against its pearly gray scales. He pats gently and murmurs in soothing tones for a while more, then bows to the dragon before walking backwards to the others. He lets himself breathe a sigh of relief as soon as his friends are pressed around him.

“How ever did you figure it out?” Hermione asks.

Harry just shrugs. “It’s like when I’m speaking parseltongue; it just happens. Charlie and I found out I could do it when he took me to the sanctuary on my birthday.”

“Bilmey, Harry! The press would have a field day if they knew you could not only talk to snakes but also dragons!” Ron says, still with disbelief.

“So let’s hope they don’t find out.” Then Harry turns to Hermione and tells her, “I promised we’d set him free when we were done here. I figure we need a way out anyway, and he said he’d take us.”

Griphook sneers. “As lovely as this all is, I believe you’ve wasted enough time out here. By now our arrival is surely known throughout the bank. They are probably already after us.”

They break into the Lestrange vault and manage to get the next horcrux, a cup that once belonged to Helga Hufflepuff. And just as Griphook guessed, they are indeed met in the entryway by countless guards firing hexes. Ron tries to get the Sword of Gryffindor from Griphook but the goblin races away with it as a curse smashes the wall next to them.

“Forget the sword!” Harry yells over the cacophony of noise. “I have a back-up plan! Just get to the dragon!”

Harry and Ron provide cover as Hermione and Charlie cast spells around them. The progress is slow but they do make it unscathed. Once seated on the dragon’s back, Harry blasts the chains holding it to the floor and it stretches its impressive wingspan gratefully. The dragon flaps its wings but they hit the walls on either side and so it must climb instead. Hermione thinks to use strong sticking charms to keep them from falling off. The dragon breathes fire which will surely maim- if not kill- many of the guards before starting its ascent.

Ron and Charlie blast through the top of carven which gives an open space for them to go through. It stretches towards the ceiling and pushes through the glass. After crashing through and escaping onto the roof, the dragon pauses for only a moment to shake the debris from its head and back. Harry talks to it again, praising its efforts and encouraging it to finally spread its wings and take them all away from here. The dragon flaps its wings into the fresh air for the first time since it was a hatchling and then takes to the sky.
Over the noise of the rushing wind, Charlie casts his patronus and has it send a message. “Go to Melanie Morgan. Tell her: We’re on our way with a Ukrainian Ironbelly. It’s been imprisoned and tortured in Gringotts and is in rough shape, but we’re flying on its back and it seems to be doing okay. See you in a few hours. Go.”

Ron is closest and overhears Charlie’s message. He waits until the fox slinks off before commenting. “You were planning on taking the dragon to Romania? How will we even get it there? It’s not like we can steer.”

“Have Harry ask it.”

Ron taps Hermione on the shoulder who in turn gets Harry’s attention. They pass the message along and Harry nods, giving a thumbs up back at Charlie and then leaning forward to talk into the dragon’s ear. Harry leans back to ask Hermione a question which causes her to produce her wand and cast a location charm. She shows it to Harry and Harry talks to the dragon once more. They abruptly lean to right and Charlie is thankful for the sticking charms that Hermione thought of back at Gringotts.

“How long do you think it will take?” Ron asks after another twenty minutes of flying.

“At least a few hours,” Charlie tells him, “though to be fair I’m not sure because I’ve never flow on top of a dragon before. Regardless, I’d settle in and relax if I were you.”

He nods in understanding and then tilts his body as far forward as the sticking charm will allow so that he can lean his head on Hermione’s shoulder. Charlie wishes he could be up front with Harry so they could enjoy the flight a bit more, but since that’s not an option he just tries to take in the sights.

Just like when flying the Tinderblast, Charlie’s backside is completely numb by the time they get to the sanctuary. He slides off the dragon’s back and hobbles over to where Morgan is waiting with the other handlers.

“How in the world did you manage to not only find an Ironbelly, but also ride on it all the way from London?”

“About that…” Charlie rubs the back of his neck. “We don’t want it to get out, but Harry can talk to dragons. He sort of talked it into not killing us in return for setting it loose. Then he gave it directions and it flew here.”

Morgan shakes her head with a laugh. “I suppose I should be surprised but from everything you’ve told me and I’ve read in the papers, he could do anything and I’d just accept it.”

Charlie is relieved that she doesn’t ask more questions, just points towards the containment that they’ve prepared for the dragon. Harry has to convince it that it will still have plenty of room to fly and run and stretch out, but the dragon does eventually move into its new home. It nuzzles its snout against Harry’s chest before lumbering off into the distance.

“Thank you,” Harry tells Morgan earnestly.

“All part of the job,” she assures him as she chucks him under the chin.

Harry, Charlie, Ron, and Hermione go to Charlie’s cottage to decide what to do next.
“We have to go to Hogwarts,” Harry tells them. “The skeleton of the basilisk is still in the Chamber of Secrets. Its venom is our only chance to destroy the horcrux since Griphook ran off with the sword.”

“You did promise him he could have it if he got us in to Gringotts,” Hermione reminds him.

“I know, I just sort of hoped he would forget.”

“How are we getting into Hogwarts?” Ron asks. “From what Luna and Draco said, Snape has the place monitored and no one is allowed out of the castle.”

Harry pulls the Marauder’s Map out of his bag. “We’ll go through one of the secret passages.”

Hermione considers this. “The Shrieking Shack?”

“I don’t think we can; Snape knows about that one. And besides, it will only take us as far as the Whomping Willow. The one in Honeydukes would be better because it goes all the way into the school.”

“Didn’t you tell us about a stone slide at the beginning? How would you get up something like that? And speaking of stone slide…how can we going to get back out of the Chamber of Secrets? Last time, Fawks flew us out.”

Harry isn’t sure how to answer Ron, but Charlie thinks of something. “Brooms! I have the broom that Bernhard loaned me and we can borrow others from Morgan. That will get us up any areas too steep to climb.”

“Good idea,” Harry praises. “So we’ll split up once we get inside. Ron, Hermione, you’ll go to the Chamber of Secrets and destroy the Cup. Charlie and I will go looking for the next horcrux.”

“Do you have any idea what it is or where it’s hidden?”

“No, but through You-Know-Who’s visions I saw something blue and bronze with an eagle on it so it has to be in Ravenclaw somewhere. We’ll go up to the tower and search there first.”

“Luna talked a lot about Rowena and Helena Ravenclaw while we were locked up in the dungeon. Could either of their portraits be hung at the school?”

“I believe Helena is the ghost of Ravenclaw house,” Hermione answers studiously. “Though she’s usually just referred to as ‘The Grey Lady’.”

“I know of the Grey Lady. Everyone was always afraid of her so I guess we just never bothered learning her real name.”

Ron’s eyes shoot open like he’s just remembered something. “Like Sir Nicholas! He hates when people call him ‘Nearly Headless Nick’ instead of his name. Maybe that’s why she’s so scary—she’s just cross.”

“Then we’ll have to keep that in mind.”

Just then a knock sounds at the door. Charlie tells the others to stay put as he crosses to the cottage. He opens the door and is pleased to find Tamsin and Xenophilius on the other side. He greets them and ushers them into the cottage, resetting the wards after they step inside. Ron jumps up as soon as he sees Xeno and stands in front of Harry and Hermione as if to protect them.
Charlie forces him to stand down. “I’m sure Mister Lovegood doesn’t mean us any harm.”

“Quite the opposite,” Xenophilius assures them. “I am here to apologize more fully. With time and distance- and Tamsin- I’ve been able to see that I acted exactly as they wanted me to. I should have stood up to them and said no, but I was so afraid for Luna. I should have known that no matter what I did they would never follow through on their promises. I put you all in needless danger and I’m sorry.”

Harry looks at the man before him. He seems completely different than he did a few months prior. His golden hair is shining again, not to mention cleaned and combed; his clothes are mended and pressed; his eyes are sad but no longer sunken in and dim. Harry figures he never really blamed Mister Lovegood for trying to protect his daughter. It’s something he imagines Molly and Arthur doing for their children, and it’s far more love than he was ever shown by the Dursleys.

“I don’t blame you for anything,” Harry tells him.

Xenophilius is relieved. He asks if there’s anything he can do for them. Harry thinks about it and then says, “Just be ready. We’re headed off to Hogwarts and… I think this is it. I don’t know what’s going to happen but I know that I don’t want anyone else getting hurt. If you’re at the ready here, then one of us can send word and then you can round up everyone who is willing to help.”

“Of course we can do that,” Xenophilius says with an enthusiastic nod. “We’ll lead the charge like a herd of angry erumpets!”

Harry laughs because that’s exactly the sort of answer Luna would have given him. Soon they’re all laughing and the room is much more comfortable without the heavy tension between them.

“Thank you, Mister Lovegood.”

“No, no. Truly this is the least I can do to begin making up for my actions.”

Tamsin is practically beaming at Xenophilius. She leans up on her tiptoes to give him a peck on the cheek. Then she turns to everyone else. “We’ll leave you all to complete your preparations. Good luck.”

Charlie sees them back out so that the four can try to get some sleep. Hermione transfigures the sofa into a bed and then Ron helps her move it into the kitchen area. Harry fashions some partitions (like he wanted to when they shared the cottage with Tonks) by hanging blankets from the ceiling like curtains. Little is said as they settle in to sleep. Harry wraps himself around Charlie as though they’ll never have another moment together, and Charlie tries to provide as much comfort as he can while they still do.

“Goodnight,” Hermione says softly and Harry responds in kind.

Tomorrow may be uncertain but at least for tonight they can rest knowing that they still have each other.

Chapter End Notes

I am really exciting about the final battle scenes, though!! Coming soon :)
1998, Hogsmeade

They never make it to Honeydukes. The Invisibility Cloak isn’t big enough to cover all four of them so the Death Eaters are on them as soon as they arrive in the village. Ron stuns three right away and Harry disarms another. Hermione and Charlie stand back-to-back and cast their patronuses at the Dementors heading their way. And just when all hope seems lost, a strong curse is heard and the rest of the cloaked figures fall to the ground. Standing across the lane is Aberforth. He waves them over and into the Hog’s Head. Once inside, he leads them into a hidden cellar to wait.

“Alright, you lot,” Aberforth calls out gruffly after a few minutes. “They’re gone; no thanks to your conspicuous arrival. Have you no sense?” He opens the cellar door and then turns away, still grumbling to himself about his brother not teaching them anything useful at that school of his.

“Thank you, Mister Dumbledore,” Hermione says politely.

“You can thank me once you’re safely hidden away in the mountains. I’ll send word to Hagrid and he’ll be waiting for you in the morning.”

Harry shakes his head firmly. “We aren’t hiding anymore. We’ve come to fight.”

Aberforth tells them that he no longer trusts Albus’ plans. Upon further prompting he also tells them about their family’s past, starting with their father’s imprisonment and ending with their fight against Grindelwald and the death of their youngest sister Ariana. “I want you to truly understand what it means to fight for ‘the greater good’ because I saw firsthand how easy it is to lose sight of what is important.”

“I’m prepared to finish what Dumbledore started. I refuse to give up now.” Harry thinks he can see Aberforth’s resolve start to crumble. “We know you’ve done so much to help us already. Just one more thing and you can wipe your hands clean of us. Please.”

Aberforth sighs. “What can I do?”

“There’s a secret passage into Hogwarts,” Charlie tells him. “We need to get to Honeydukes without being spotted.”

“Oh, that’s long since been found. There’s only one way into the school anymore.” Aberforth then has the portrait of Ariana to go. She returns to her frame followed by none other than Neville, who appears in real life as the portrait swings away to expose a tunnel.

Neville greets them warmly and helps them up into the tunnel. Charlie is last to go and before he does he turns back to Aberforth. “Call together the Order. Let them know that it’s time.”
“I will. Regardless of what I said about Albus, I do not wish any of you harm. Forgive me for not having the faith in Harry that you do.”

“You’ve helped us now. That’s faith enough.” Charlie gives one last nod and then hops up into the passage to join the others.

The walk through the tunnel is long, but it gives Neville time to explain what has been happening at Hogwarts in their absence. They’re appalled to hear what the Carrow twins have been forcing the students to do, but proud of Neville and some of the others for standing up to them and refusing. They step out into an open hall crammed with hammocks and cots and students from Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw.

Harry and Hermione make the rounds, talking to the students and providing them hope and comfort. Ron and Charlie hang back to speak with Neville. Seamus joins them and he is uncharacteristically quiet.

“Everything alright there, Seamus?” Ron asks, concerned.

“I'm almost afraid te' ask, but 'av ye 'eard from Dean at all?”

Charlie assures him they have, and that he’s okay. “He was in the Malfoy’s dungeon for months—along with Luna— but Draco brought them food until we were able to escape. He’s with the rest of our family now.”

Seamus is very obviously relieved, though he scowls when Ron once again teases about Dean wanting to be with Ginny. Charlie follows after Seamus when he stomps away to a corner of the room.

“Ignore Ron,” Charlie tells him. “I hardly have to remind you, since you’ve lived with him for six years, but he’s rather unobservant and likes to prattle on.”

Seamus blinks once but gives no other indication that he’s heard him, Charlie decides on the direct approach. “Does Dean know how you feel about him?”

“What??”

Got it, then. “I thought that might be the case. But there’s nothing to be worried about where my sister is concerned. Ginny was only seeing Dean to try and make Harry jealous.”

“I know. Who do ye think had te’ pick up the pieces when she broke things off?”

“And you still didn’t tell him?”

“Didn’t seem the right time.”

“Well they’ll be here soon enough. You can always tell him then.” Charlie puts a hand on Seamus’ head and ruffles his hair as he would any of his younger brothers, then walks over to where Harry is in the middle of a heated conversation with a group of his friends.

“But you can’t deny them refuge because they were sorted Slytherin!” he hears Harry argue.

“Crabbe and Goyle’s fathers are Death Eaters!” Lavender complains. “And what of Malfoy? He’s been your nemesis since your first day here! You picked fights with him all the time.”

Harry’s cheeks go pink at the reminder. “I know that and it was wrong of me!”
Neville is slightly calmer, but still just as insistent that they’re in the right on this one. “You weren’t here, Harry. Snape is worse now than he ever was and the Carrows are even nastier. The only ones that get away with anything are the Slytherins, and that’s because they’re all pure-blooded. We just can’t risk letting them in here. It’s risky enough as is.”

Charlie can feel Harry’s magic humming around him like an aura. He has to help diffuse the situation before something bad happens. “You’re right,” he tells Neville. Harry whips around tries to glare a hole straight through Charlie. “You’ve done everything you had to so that these kids could stay safe. You’re every bit the Gryffindor that the hat thought you were.” Neville stands taller, holding his shoulders back and his head tilted high. “But Harry is right, as well. We have to go finish what we started and we’re bound to get caught doing so. At that point, it will be up to you to lead everyone into battle- and I mean everyone, including the Slytherins who are willing to help.”

“How will I know who’s truly on our side?”

“I can help with that,” Draco says as he strides casually over to them.

Everyone in the room gasps as they watch a flood of Weasleys and other Order members enter from the secret passageway in the wall. Neville has his wand pulled and pointed at Draco. “What are you doing here??”

Draco masks his surprise by holding out a hand and pretending to inspect his fingernails. “Has no one told you yet? It’s all been an act, at least since my father was killed. And before that I was just doing what I had to so that my mother would not be harmed.”

“So, what? You’re one of us now?”

“Ask Harold if you don’t believe me.”

Neville turns his head to look at Harry but his wand is still aimed right at Draco. Harry shrugs sheepishly. “I was going to tell them, Draco, only I hadn’t gotten to that part yet. But, yeah. It’s true, Neville. He’s no saint or anything-”

“Of course not! He’s got the bloody Dark Mark!” Neville yells.

“I did what I had to do!” Draco yells back.

“QUIET! THE BOTH OF YOU!” Luna- the last person that anyone would ever suspect of raising her voice- shouts above their din. “Trust him, Neville.”

Neville gapes and then rushes over to pull her into a crushing hug. He’s not seen her since before the winter hols and he feared the worst. She hums sweetly as she pats his back but eventually pulls away and says, “He’s the best chance you have of winning them over.”

“And you trust him?” Neville all but whispers.

“With my life.”

“Then I’ll do it. I won’t dare take my eyes off him, but I’ll do it for you.”

Ron clears his throat to get everyone’s attention. “Here’s the plan: Hermione and I have to go down to the Chamber of Secrets; Neville and Malfoy are going to round up the Slytherins that are on our side; and Harry and Charlie need to find something that belonged to Rowena Ravenclaw, though they don’t know what.”
“We can help,” Luna offers of herself and Cho Chang.

“Harry, Charlie, and Luna and Cho are going to find the artefact,” Ron amends. “And before sunrise, the rest of you need to get everyone who is underage out of the castle.”

“And wha’ of us who are of age?” Seamus asks.

“You’re welcome to stay and fight.” Harry says, garnering everyone’s attention. “Though, I won’t force anyone who doesn’t want to. Remember that this isn’t about blood purity or political gains or even right and wrong anymore. This is about saving the world, and not just the wizarding parts.”

Applause breaks out so loud that Harry is tempted to cover his ears, though doesn’t for the sake of appearances. He asks Neville where the exit is and waits by the door as a flurry of movement fills the room. He’s soon joined by Neville, Draco, Hermione, Ron, Charlie, Luna, and Cho. “Ready?” They nod. “Alright. Good luck, everyone. If all goes well, we’ll be meeting back here by morning.”

“And if all doesn’t go well?” Neville asks.

“Then we do what we always do when all hell breaks loose,” Harry winks at Ron and Hermione. “We make it up as we go and hope for the best.”

Chapter End Notes

A little bit of Dean/Seamus because they are so adorable.

I know it's not in the books, but I love the line in the eighth movie where Harry is ignoring Luna and she just cracks and yells, "HARRY POTTER YOU LISTEN TO ME!" It's such a great moment and I used it to inspire my version of Luna in this scene. Also, the last line is another slight homage to the line from the eighth movie. "We plan, we get there, all hell breaks loose." For all that I don't like that movie (it is so different from the book) it has some great lines.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

First, I cannot thank everyone enough for the love. This is the longest thing I’ve ever written and it has the most kudos and comments and it’s just amazing. I’m so appreciative.

NOW ON TO THE FINAL BATTLE! It’s split into different chapters, though. So this is like part one of the end. I took inspiration from both the books and movies but be aware that many details are changed because that’s what happens when characters are dead or alive or present or absent that weren’t before.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1998, Hogwarts

Neville & Draco:

“Let’s start at Gryffindor Tower and work our way down,” Neville suggests and then walks away without waiting for a reply.

Draco hustles to catch up to him, and then matches Neville’s long stride. He’s more than a little impressed at the bravery Neville has developed over the trying school year. He is, however, getting annoyed at the way the Gryffindor keeps giving him the stink-eye as they walk through the corridors. “Can you stop it?”

“Stop what?” Neville asks, slowing up a little.

“Stop looking at me as though I’ll kill you at any moment.”

“Well, some habits are hard to break.”

“I never would have killed you, even at my worst.”

“Felt like it sometimes.”

Draco lets that sink in as they approach the portrait of the Fat Lady. Neville gives the correct password and the portrait swings open, but Draco stops him before he can climb through. “I’m sorry. I know just the words aren’t enough but give me a chance to prove it.”

Neville gets right in his face and they stand nose-to-nose for a very tense moment. This is his childhood bully standing before him; the boy who tortured him for no reason. But after everything Neville’s been through in the last year, the Draco from his memories seems like nothing more than a pesky nuisance- a mere fly at a picnic- and now he’s apologizing and wanting to make up for his actions. Who is Neville to cast the first stone? “Fine; I’ll try to stop treating you like the enemy.”

Satisfied, Draco follows after Neville. Once in the common room, Neville pulls a Weasley Whizbang out of his pocket and sets it off. The noise is exactly what’s needed to wake everyone up and get them downstairs in a hurry. Neville tells one the Prefects to go to McGonagall and the others to start herding everyone down to the Great Hall.
From there, they cross to the other side of the castle to enter Ravenclaw Tower. Draco solves the riddle easily enough and the door opens for them even though they are not Ravenclaw students. Neville repeats his performance with the Whiz-bang, once again speaking to the Prefects.

The entrance to Hufflepuff is new to Draco but Neville has been there before and knows exactly which barrel to tap in what way to gain access to the common room.

By the time they make it down to the Slytherin dungeons, the castle is loud and alive with action. Draco approaches a stone wall and gives the last password he knows off from his time at school. Thankfully it still works. He is already though the doorway when he realizes that Neville is no longer behind him.

“Everything alright, Longbottom?” he asks with genuine concern in his voice.

Neville visibly tries to shake off the bad feeling he has. “Yeah. Let’s do this then.”

“Just let me do the talking.”

Draco is not surprised to find some Slytherins still awake and lounging about the common room. (Quite frankly, he was shocked that the other common rooms were devoid of students. Were they always that way? Or just under the new regime? Regardless, it is comforting that at least one thing has not changed.) The Slytherins jump up and greet Draco. Some ask if he was really kidnapped by the Order. One eyes Neville suspiciously. Draco has Neville hold off on the Whiz-bang for now, and instead sends these students to wake everyone up. It works just as well.

Pansy is one of the first ones to reach him. She throws herself at him and yells, “DRACO!”

Neville has to hold an arm to Draco’s back to keep him from falling over by the sheer force of it. Draco chuckles. “Hello, Pans. I’m glad to see you well.”

“We were told you’d been taken! How did you manage to get away?”

“That’s sort of a long story.”

Just then, Pansy notices Neville standing awkwardly to the side. She turns up her nose. “And what is he doing here?”

“Parkinson,” Neville says without any trace of emotion in his voice.

“Longbottom,” she sneers.

Draco clicks his tongue at her. “Be nice, darling. He’s here to help.”

The room quickly fills, though some students- Crabbe, Goyle, Blaise, and the Carrow twins most notably- are suspiciously absent. Neville steps forward. “Right. I’m here to tell you that Harry Potter is back. He’s going to lead the fight but he needs everyone behind him. Malfoy talked some sense into us and made us realize that it was wrong of us to not offer you our protection sooner. If you’re not yet seventeen, we’ll help you get out of the castle and to safety. If you’re of age and would like to stay and help us fight then we’ll proudly have you.”

“Oh, I don’t think so!” Alecto Carrow cackles from behind him.

Draco turns around in time to see her press her wand to her dark mark. “NO!!”

Neville stuns her and she falls to the ground, but it’s too late. Voldemort is on his way. “Go to the
Great Hall,” he tells the Slytherins. Nobody moves until he orders, “Now!”

Draco has Neville place a full-body bind on Alecto Carrow while he and Pansy make sure that the dorms are fully empty. Then they meet back in the common room before racing up the nearest staircase and towards the Great Hall. When they get there, they find it already packed with students and professors and members of the Order. Then they hear Voldemort’s voice ask them to hand over Harry in return for their safety. Pansy suggests they do as he says to protect themselves.

“Give it a rest, Parkinson!” both Draco and Neville shout at the same time.

They all stare uncomfortably at each other for a moment before Neville says, “I should…go over there, I think.”

“Yes, of course.” Draco says and turns around to avoid the strange look Pansy is still giving him, and that’s when he spots Crabbe, Goyle, and Blaise sneaking down the corridor. He tries to make his way out of the hall without being seen. It’s slow going and takes some time but eventually Draco is out in the corridor and he immediately takes chase.

Draco catches up with them outside of the Room of Requirement. He waits until Crabbe and Goyle have already gone inside and then rushes forward to stop Blaise.

“Holy hell, Draco! Where have you been?”

“At home, then kidnapped, then not really kidnapped but pretending, then back here. But that’s not important right now. What are you doing with Vince and Greg?”

“I’ve been keeping an eye on them. They’ve been sort of lost without you, and I know their dads have been sending them missions from You-Know-Who. They’re our friends and I don’t want anything to happen to them just because they’re impressionable.”

“A mission?” Draco looks nervously at the door to the Room of Requirement, and then sighs. “Why does it always fall on us, Blaise? I suppose we had better get in there and stop whatever stupid thing they’re about to do.”

Ron & Hermione:

“Oops,” Ron says with an embarrassed chuckle.

“You remembered a stone slide but not the fact that you needed Parseltongue to get in??”

“Aw, come on, Hermione… I was twelve! You were petrified and my sister was in danger, not to mention we had that tosser Lockhart with us and more trouble than we knew how to deal with. I’m lucky I remember anything at all.”

“You’re right, but it still doesn’t change the fact that we can’t get in.”

“So that means we have nothing to lose, right?” Hermione nods at him, wondering where Ron is going with this. “Then let me try something.”

Ron steps up to the tap adorned with a snake and does his best to imitate the hissing he’s heard Harry do. It doesn’t work at first, so he tries to think of the pattern of sounds that Harry used to open the locket. The sink seems reluctant to move at first but then starts to jiggle before sinking through the floor altogether, giving way to a sloped stone shaft.
Hermione watches, eyes wide with disbelief. “How…What…”

Ron just shrugs and gives a lopsided smile. “You want to go first? Or shall I?”

“I’ll go, but don’t think we won’t be talking about this later.”

Ron has to laugh as she stoically lowers herself to the floor and lets herself fall through the opening. Ron waits for about half a minute before letting himself down as well. He lands at the bottom of the slide to find Hermione still sitting on the pile of bones and shed snake skin. “You were really down here?” she asks with a disgusted look on her face.

“Yup. Pretty nasty, isn’t it?” He helps her off the ground. “Come on, this way. I can still see the pile of rocks.”

Hermione is torn between disgust and utter fascination. She can’t believe her two best friends came down here by themselves (essentially) just to save Ginny and the others that had been petrified. They follow the tunnels to where they open up into the main chamber and are both shocked by what they find. A massive snake skeleton lies across the damp floor in front of a grotesque statue of Salazar Slytherin. As they walk closer the size of the snake really seems to rattle Hermione.

“Is that…I knew that the basilisk was big, but that…how did…Harry was just a child!” She has to fight back the tears stinging her eyes. Her poor friend. She knew but she didn’t truly understand until this moment.

But then Ron pulls her into his arms. “It’s okay, ‘Mione. It was years ago. He’s fine and Ginny’s fine. Sure, Lockhart’s mad now but he was always a bit mad even before my wand backfired on him. I just wish I could have been in here with him so he didn’t have to be alone.”

“Where does Harry always find the strength to keep going?” Hermione asks in between sniffs.

“He’s always been that way. I guess living with the Dursleys all those years was important after all; it made him strong.”

Ron kisses her and then they walk over to the basilisk skeleton hand in hand. Hermione carefully reaches her slender arm into what’s left of the snake’s mouth and removes a fang. “Should we get extra?”

“Harry will need something to destroy whatever it is he and Charlie find. Not to mention the last horcrux, which we don’t even have a clue about yet. Let’s each take two.”

Hermione puts the extras into her bag and then sets Helga Hufflepuff’s cup down on the floor. “Go ahead and destroy it,” she tells Ron.

He shakes his head and passes over the basilisk fang. “I killed the last one. It’s only fair you get a chance.”

With none of the hesitation that he expected, she takes the fang and plunges it into the cup. The gold turns back and smoke pours out from where it’s been stabbed. Ron pulls her to standing and they run backwards as the cup hisses and sizzles. The sound of someone screaming can be heard growing louder and louder and then nothing. Ron cautiously walks forward and kicks the now blackened and twisted cup. It looks pretty well destroyed, so he picks it up and drops it into Hermione’s bag. “Let’s get out of here.”

Once back at the bottom of the stone slide, Hermione removes a broom from her bag and unshrinks it. “Mind if I ride with you? You know I’m quite awful at flying.”
“Are you just looking for an excuse to wrap yourself around me?” Ron teases.

“Oh, you!” Hermione swats him playfully with the broom and Ron gets a sudden vision of them twenty years from now, joking around together in their home like he’s seen his own parents do, surrounded by kids and warmth and love. She must see something cross his face because she lowers the broom and asks, “Ron?”

He can’t quite put it into words. He opens and closes his mouth a few times and then forces himself to return to the present. “Sorry.”

“Where did you go?”

“Nowhere we can’t go again, when all this is done.”

“Because that’s not cryptic.”

Ron trades the fangs for the broomstick. “Just get on, love.”

She swings a leg over the broom and settles in behind Ron. “Promise you’ll tell me someday?”

“With a little luck, I’ll be able to show you.”

Ron kicks off from the ground and they head up the shaft and back into Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Hermione uses her wand to open the doors and they continue flying, since it will be faster than going on foot. They get to the Room of Requirement just in time to see Draco and Blaise going in.

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**Harry, Charlie, Luna, & Cho:**

“I’m sure it’s Rowena Ravenclaw’s lost diadem,” Luna says confidently.

Cho rolls her eyes. “That may be, Luna, but it’s lost. That doesn’t help Harry.”

“Everything that’s lost is not gone forever. It can always be found again.”

“And where would we even start? The castle is huge, if it’s even here at all.”

“It’s here,” Harry tells her. “And we were thinking the Grey Lady-

“Helena Ravenclaw,” Charlie reminds him about using her full name.

“That’s right. We were thinking Helena Ravenclaw might be able to help. Since you’re both Ravenclaws, do you know what part of the castle she usually haunts?”

Luna and Cho both nod. “The north courtyard,” they say together.

Charlie asks if they can show them the way and the four head out at a brisk pace. They’re nearly there when they hear the sound of fighting. They come to a stop just before a bend in the corridor and Harry peeks carefully around the corner. McGonagall is dueling Amycus Carrow.

Harry doesn’t wait before he charges forward, yelling and holding his wand aloft. Charlie watches the entire thing in slow motion. McGonagall loses focus for just long enough that Amycus’ curse hits her in the shoulder and knocks her to the ground. The fire in Harry’s eyes increases tenfold and Amycus must see it too because suddenly he looks terrified, frozen in place.
“CRUCIO!” Harry may not have been able to execute the unforgivable against Bellatrix two years ago but he certainly has no problem now. Amycus screams and writhes in pain on the ground. Charlie knows why Harry is doing what he’s doing, but he has to put a stop to it.

He throws a shield charm around Amycus and Harry wheels around. His breath is coming in heaving gasps. “What do you think you’re doing??”

“You have to stop, Harry.”

“But he was hurting her!” Harry’s eyes are filled with tears and his voice breaks.

“She’s fine. Look.” Charlie forcibly turns Harry by the shoulders so that he can see Cho and Luna helping McGonagall to her feet.

McGonagall winces as she stands, but otherwise looks every bit the imposing woman she always has. “While I thank you for defending me, Mister Potter, I assure you I will live. He has shattered my arm but I believe you have first-hand experience with the ease of which Madame Pomfrey can mend bones.”

Charlie stuns Amycus and places him in a full-body bind. “Luna, Cho, please help Professor McGonagall to the Hospital Wing and then join everyone else. Harry and I will continue on.”

“Please tell Helena that I say hello,” Luna says.

“Good luck,” Cho tells them, and they both walk away supporting McGonagall between them.

Charlie and Harry continue on to the north courtyard where, sure enough, they find the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw. Harry asks her about her mother’s diadem and Helena tells them all about how Tom Riddle tricked her into handing it over to him. Then he turned it into a horcrux. When he asks where it is now, Helena tells them to check in the ‘Room of Hidden Things’ and then disappears.

Harry complains about feeling like he’s running in circles as they make their way back to the Room of Requirement once more. They kick out the few people still in the room and then Harry goes through the process of clearing his mind so that he can properly ask the room for exactly what he requires of it. After three passes, a door appears and he holds his breath as he opens it. Charlie is right behind him them and he gasps at the amount of junk the room is holding.

“I’ve been here before,” Harry almost whispers. “We were getting rid of the Half-Blood Prince book and…the room gave us this. That means I’ve seen it. I’ve walked right past the horcrux and never even knew it was there. I was too busy being distracted by Draco and Dumbledore and Snape to even notice. I could have ended this last year!”

He doesn’t even realize he’s trembling until he feels the warm weight of Charlie’s hands holding him still. “Harry, how were you to know? And even if you had found it, we’d still have to go find the cup and whatever the last one is!”

Just then Harry drops to his knees, clutching his forehead and screaming out in pain. “He knows! The cup is destroyed and he knows where we are! He knows we’re going to find it!”

“He knows! The cup is destroyed and he knows where we are! He knows we’re going to find it!”

“Fight it! You’re stronger than he is! I saw how mad he gets when he thinks you’re going to win. He’s afraid of you. Fight him off! You can do it!”

Harry tries to focus instead on Charlie’s voice. He floods his mind with Charlie. Their first kiss, holidays at the Burrow, going to the sanctuary and meeting Bryony, playing draughts at the Three Broomsticks, Charlie pulling him out of the
freezing water, Charlie, Charlie, Charlie.

And then the pain is gone and Harry is left panting and sweating on the floor. His vision is swimming but it soon focuses on the scruffy, freckly face that he knows and loves. “Charlie?” he says but it comes out in little more than a rasp.

Charlie conjures a glass and quickly fills it with a sloppy Aguamenti. Harry takes the glass and guzzles it, spilling down his shirt without a care. He gasps for breath by the time he finishes it Charlie vanishes the empty glass. “Better?”

“Much, thank you.” Harry is able to sit up the rest of the way and he glances around at the tall piles of unwanted, lost, and hidden junk. “Any idea where to start?”

“Nope. I didn’t even know this was here.”

Harry stands up with help from Charlie and they just start wandering between the piles. “I guess we can just walk until I feel something, like I did with the cup and the locket. Oh! One good thing about those visions, I know that his snake- Nagini- is his final horcrux.”

“That thing is terrifying. While I was at Malfoy Manor I saw it coiled around his feet.”

Harry almost gets sick remembering how Voldemort had used Nagini to pretend to be Bathilda Bagshot. “Let’s just focus on one at a time. I think we passed a bunch of statues wearing wigs over this way. That’s as good a place as any for a tiara to be, right?”

Charlie and Harry pass stacks of books, parchments, shoes, odd paintings and sculptures, writing desks, cushions, dishes and glassware, and even a precarious tower of chairs. Then Harry hears it. A crackling, hissing, static-y sort of noise that he’s come to associate with the horcruxes. It’s faint, so he makes Charlie stop so he can hear better. He follows the sound as it grows and finally he sees it perched atop a decorative pillow. Charlie gives him a boost and just as Harry has the diadem in his grasp they hear a low voice say, “Hold it right there, blood traitors.”

Of all the people for Voldemort to send after him, Crabbe and Goyle should be at the bottom of the list. Although, Harry figures he’d rather face the two dimmest henchmen in existence than someone like Bellatrix or Greyback.

“Leave me alone, will ya fellas? I’ve had quite enough of you over the last six years.”

“I don’t think so,” Goyle says with a creepy smile. “The Dark Lord is going to be right proud of us when we bring him the Chosen One.”

“Might even promote us to full-blown Death Eaters,” Crabbe adds.

“Especially if we bring in you and your boyfriend.”

“Might even make us his right-hand-men.”

Harry snorts. “You can’t really be that stupid. He’s just using you!”

They raise their wands threateningly. “Don’t you dare speak a word against him.”

“Oh, come off it. You cannot honestly believe all of that rubbish. You used to follow Draco around like lost crups and now that Draco isn’t on your side anymore you’re following anyone that’ll have you.”
“Take that back!”

“No!”

“AVADA-”

“STUPEFY!” “EXPELLIARMUS!”

Crabbe and Goyle’s bodies hit the ground with a pair of dull thuds. Charlie and Harry look first at each other and then across the room for their saviors. Standing with their wands still out are Draco and Blaise.

“How did you know we were here?” Harry asks them.

“I didn’t,” Draco says, still looking rather surprised to be holding two extra wands in his hands.

“We were following them here,” Blaise explains more helpfully.

Charlie looks down at the two boys in a heap on the ground. “And these are…friends of yours?”

“Unfortunately.” Blaise waves his wand once more and casts full-body binds on both Crabbe and Goyle before levitating their bodies. “Go and do whatever it is you must. Draco and I will take care of these two.”

Hearing his name seems to snap Draco back to reality. He casts his own levitation spell to help relieve some of the strain from Blaise. “Go play hero, Harold.”

“Harold?” Blaise questions with a raised eyebrow.

“I find it best not to ask,” Harry tells him with an eye roll, though his smirk gives away his true amusement.

Charlie and Harry are almost out of the room when Hermione and Ron come zooming in on a broom and knock them over. Hermione gladly hops off and digs one of the fangs out of her bag. She hands it to Charlie and declares that it is his turn to kill a horcrux. Harry sets down the diadem and Charlie stabs it with everything he has. Just like the cup, it smokes and hisses and turns black and twisted as the basilisk venom destroys it beyond repair. Once safe, Hermione tosses it into her bag with everything else.

“Five down, and only one to go!” Harry feels like they might just be able to do this without anyone else getting hurt, but the wishful thinking is to be short lived. They’re walking back down the staircases when they start to hear the fierce battle already in progress.

Everywhere they look they see their friends and loved ones fighting Death Eaters that have finally gotten in to Hogwarts. Charlie is shocked to see Percy there dueling alongside Fred, both of them facing off against the newest Minister of Magic- and his boss- Pius Thicknesse. Charlie runs between the two in time to hear Percy joke about this being his resignation. Fred doubles over laughing just as a hole is blown through the side of the castle. Charlie dives to the side and then everything goes black.

As the dust clears, Charlie finds himself pinned beneath rubble. “Fred!” He prays to any deity listening that he was able to knock his brother out of the way in time. “Freddie!” Still nothing. “Percy! Harry! Anyone!” Why is no one answering him? Charlie starts to panic, flailing as much as he can whilst being half-crushed under the weight of the stones. Water splashes his face and he startles, eyes focusing on the faces suddenly above him.
“Oh, thank Merlin he’s alright!” It’s Percy. He starts throwing off the smaller pieces from Charlie’s chest as Harry and Ron levitate the larger ones from his legs.

“Why didn’t any of you answer when I called for you?” Charlie asks as his lungs fill back up with air.

Ron glances down at him worriedly. “You weren’t saying anything, Charlie. You were hyperventilating and then…what did you say the other thing was, Hermione?”

“You were having a seizure,” he hears her say from somewhere at his side. “It’s common in people who have received a major shock to their body, such as an entire wall falling on them.”

Charlie tries to sit up. He feels his throat catch when he sees the giant stone block at his side

“What’s Fred??”

Percy gently pushes on his shoulder to get him to lie down again. “He’s just on the other side of that block in much the same state as you, but he wouldn’t have us free him until we had you out. He says you pushed him out of the way of the worst of it.”

“FREDDIE!” Charlie calls out.

“Yeah, Char?” a weak voice responds.

“How are you?”

“A fair deal better than I’d be without you, I’d wager.”

Charlie can’t help but cry. “I thought I’d lost you!”

“Can’t keep a good man down and all that.”

Once all of the rubble is off of Charlie, Percy helps him slowly sit up while the others go to dig out Fred. They can hear Hermione talk Fred through wiggling his fingers, hands, wrists, elbows, and shoulders. All seem to be in working order. His legs are another story. The right one is definitely broken and he has so much pain in the left that he can’t move it. Charlie also sustained injuries to his lower body, though they seem to be more superficial and he’s able to stand with help.

George carries Fred in his arms in a bridal-hold because even injured and in the middle of a battle the twins retain their silly nature. Percy helps support Charlie’s weight and says he’ll see them all to the Great Hall, where Madame Pomfrey has now relocated her medical supplies.

Harry wants to go with them, but Charlie makes him stay with Hermione and Ron. “You have to go kill Nagini. I’ll be with Pomfrey and McGonagall and my brothers, you don’t have to worry about me. The most important thing now is to take down that snake. Then it’ll just be you and him.”

“And what if I’m not strong enough?”

“You are.” Charlie kisses him and Harry can’t help but feel like it’s for the last time.

Chapter End Notes

IT’S NOT! THEY’LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN! I promise.
Also, Fred lives and so does Crabbe. I kind of understand how Rowling must have felt because killing characters is hard (even if they've already died canonically).
Hogwarts, 1998

Harry, Hermione, and Ron make their way to the Shrieking Shack- the last place Harry saw Voldemort in his visions. Along the way, they pass groups of students and professors fighting against groups of Death Eaters. They also pass Charlie’s friends and co-workers from Romania, doing their part just as they promised they would. They can’t stop but they try to help as they’re running. Harry disarms a few Snatchers, Hermione stuns Greyback to get him to stop attacking Lavender, and Ron casts his patronus to clear the way.

“Look out!” Hermione warns as they dodge a giant. Harry hears a familiar screech and looks up in time to see Hedwig lead a parliament of owls straight at the giant’s face. They dig their talons into its skin causing the giant to roar and become distracted.

They finally get to the Shrieking Shack and decide to peer in through the ground floor windows before entering. And it’s a good thing they do because they see Snape kneeling at Voldemort’s feet. Ron slips an Extendable Ear through one of the shattered panes so that they can hear better.

“My Lord,” Snape says in an even and calm voice thanks to years of practice, “the wandmakers have all told you the same thing. You must defeat a person in battle to win over their wand.”

“But Dumbledore is dead. I stole it from him so it should be mine.”

“Yes, My Lord.”

Voldemort glares down at Snape. “You killed Dumbledore.”

“Yes, My Lord.”

“You must be the true master of the Elder Wand.”

For the first time, Snape does not sound confident. “I-I do not know, My Lord.”

An eerie, twisted sort of grin spreads across Voldemort’s distorted face. “Oh, I think you do.”

“Please, My Lord-”

He cuts off Snape with a dry laugh. “You’re begging, Severus? I was going to kill you but I don’t think I can be bothered anymore.” He orders Nagini to attack Snape and then apparates out of building, taking the snake with him.

The trio rushes in as soon as he’s gone. They stare down at Snape in complete shock, as there is
blood everywhere. They hear a gurgling sound as Snape tries to speak. “Pot-ter…”

“We need to stop the bleeding!” Harry tells the others.

Hermione frantically digs through her bag for their extra clothes. She pulls out some of Charlie’s flannel over shirts. “Here, hold these to the worst spots.”

“Pot-ter…” Snape says again.

“I’m here, Professor. We’re trying to help.”

“Not…time…just…” He coughs, more blood trickling down his chin. “Just…take…them…”

Harry looks at Snape’s empty hands in confusion. “Take what, Professor?”

“His tears, Harry,” Hermione points out. “They’re silver like memories.”

She withdraws an empty vial from her bag and gives it to Harry, who collects the memories and pockets them away.

“Let me…see…”

“See what?”

“Her…eyes…one…last…”

“No!” Harry still doesn’t think Snape is a good person, but no one deserves to die like this. “Stasis charms!” he orders his friends.

Hermione gives him a pitying look. “Harry, I don’t know if that will help.”

“Stasis charms! Now! And then we take him to Pomfrey! If he’s doomed to die either way, then at least we go on knowing that we did everything we could! Hurry!” He’s hysterical, but he knows he won’t be able to calm down if Snape dies on their watch.

Between the three of them, they stabilize Snape and begin the arduous process of moving him back to the castle. Ron keeps looking over at Harry with a mix of awe and bemusement. Halfway there they hear Voldemort’s next public statement, to gather their injured and mourn their dead. He benevolently agrees to kill no one else if only Harry would turn himself over.

“Don’t even think about it, mate.” And when Harry starts to protest, Ron won’t have it. “You’re always willing to risk your own life before even considering another way. When we get Snape here into Pomfrey’s care then we’ll talk about our options, yeah? No running off by yourself.”

“I’m not a child,” Harry grumbles.

“We know that, mate, but sometimes you act as though no one would morn you. I know for a fact that I’d go mental if something happened. You’re more than my friend; you’re my brother.”

The Great Hall is a somber scene. They bring the near-dead Snape to Madame Pomfrey, and she takes over their stasis charms with the help of Luna. Harry searches the room for Charlie and finds him standing with Tonks and Draco. He runs over to join them only to stop short at the foot end of the cots they’re standing between. To one side lies Remus and to the other, Moody.

Harry was closer with Barty Crouch Jr. pretending to be Moody than he ever was with the real Auror, but Remus… Harry is screaming before he can stop himself. Charlie has to catch him before
he crumbles to the ground. “I’m sorry!” he keeps repeating between loud sobs, “I’m so sorry!”

Charlie tries to talk him down but it’s as though Harry can’t even hear him. Draco quickly casts muffling and disillusionment charms around them because he figures it wouldn’t be good for morale if everyone saw Harry losing it. Charlie is appreciative of Draco’s quick thinking, but he continues to feel helpless when it comes to the sobbing bundle in his arms.

It’s Tonks, bless her heart, that takes Harry herself and sits with him on the floor. “Hush, now, Harry. Things will work out.” He thrashes his head back and forth in contradiction to her words. “Yes, they will, you’ll see.”

“How can you say that? It’s your husband! And what about Teddy?!”

Tonks tightens her hold. “You promised me you’d be there for him, remember? Are you telling me that you’re going back on your promise?”

“No, but-”

“He’ll know his father. I have no doubt that you’ll make sure of that.”

Harry can feel her own tears dripping onto his hair and he feels bad for not comforting her when she’s clearly mourning. He doesn’t want to let Tonks down or for her to think that he’s insensitive, so he turns his body to be able to hug her back. “I will, Tonks. Remus should be here to see him grow but if he can’t then I’ll make sure to do everything I can to make up for that.”

“Remy would want nothing more.”

“I’m sorry, Tonks.”

“I know. But you still have a job to do. Theirs is done.”

Charlie and Draco help them up from the floor. Harry can’t look at the bodies, so instead he focuses back on Tonks. “Where is Teddy?”

It’s Draco who answers, “He’s safe with Fleur and Mother Weasley.”

Charlie looks at Draco, then Harry, then back at Draco. Then he starts laughing. “‘Mother Weasley’? Has she told you to call her that?”

Draco’s cheeks tinge pink but he quickly covers with his usual tone of superiority. “Well, no. She wanted me to call her ‘Molly’ but that’s not exactly proper, now is it?”

“And she heard you say it?”

“Of course. I said good-bye to her before we all left and she didn’t comment on the name.”

Charlie snickers some more. “Oh, that’s good. I have to tell the others.”

“Focus, Weasley. There are more important things.”

More important things, like the vial that Harry just now remembers is in his trousers pocket. He makes a flimsy excuse of getting some air and then all but dashes out of the Great Hall. He’s moving so fast and is so focused on the task at hand that Charlie isn’t able to catch up to him until he’s at the base of the staircase to the Headmaster’s office. “What are we doing here?”

Harry startles at the sound of Charlie’s voice. “Snape gave me some memories. It must have been
important because he gave them to be on his dying breath.”

“Snape is dead?”

“Not sure yet but it doesn’t look good. We held him stable as we brought him here. Hermione thought it was likely he wouldn’t make it but I had to try.”

“Did he leave a Pensieve for you here or something?”

“Dumbledore had one when it was his office. I’m just assuming it’s still there.”

Charlie holds out one hand. “Together?”

Harry has never been more thankful for Charlie. He even manages to crack a small smile.

“Together.”

After viewing the memories, Harry sits down on the stone steps inside the Headmaster’s office. Charlie makes sure to the remove the memories and bottle them back up before sitting down as well. He doesn’t push Harry to talk, just waits for him to be ready

“That was my mum,” he says, quiet in the small office.

“I could tell.”

“Because of the eyes?”

“No, because of her spirit.”

“Oh, well, good. I never want to hear about her eyes again. Snape said it to me after he gave me the memories. He wanted to look into my eyes and pretend it was her.”

Harry shivers and Charlie is worried that he’ll start crying again. “That’s messed up.”

“Tell me about it. I can’t believe they were ever friends.”

“From what I could see, they were only friends until he showed his true colors.”

“My dad and his friends were quite awful to him, I’ll admit, but I’ve had bullies my whole life too and I didn’t run to Voldemort because of them.”

“I guess you’re just stronger than he was.” They fall silent again, but Charlie has to know what Harry is thinking. “So what’s next?”

Harry is suddenly on his feet and across the room, staring out the narrow window at the Forbidden Forest.

“Harry?”

He rubs the heels of his hands into his eyes and groans. “I have to go, Charlie.”

“Talk to me. Please.”

He turns around slowly, and Charlie notices the resigned look on his face. “You saw what Dumbledore told Snape. I have a horcrux inside me. And the only way to end it is for Voldemort to kill me; to kill it.”
“There has to be another way. We’ll talk to Hermione and-”

“There is no other way. He’ll never be able to be killed while that part inside me lives on. I will go turn myself over to him and that way no one else will have to die. No more children will lose their parents. I do this and all that’s left is the snake.”

Charlie is across the room in an instant. He pulls Harry against him and clings on with all he has, pressing his face into Harry’s neck. “You don’t have to do this,” he says into the warm skin there. “You’ve done enough.”

Harry holds on tightly, savoring the closeness. “If I don’t, it’ll never be over.”

“But if you do…” Charlie doesn’t have to say it.

“I know.” Harry plants a kiss on the side of his head. “You’ve changed me, Charlie. Sometimes I wonder what things would have been like without you. Ron and Hermione are my best friends, but I’ve told you things I could never tell them. Sirius told me to trust you with my feelings, and I’ll always be glad that I did.”

“Without you, I’d probably still be doing my solo rounds at the sanctuary and pulling random one-offs when the loneliness got to be too much. I’d rarely see my family.”

“Don’t give up teaching. And take care of Bryony. And Hal. And the new dragon. And be there for Tonks and Teddy.”

And that’s all Charlie can take. If he lets Harry keep talking then he knows he’ll just try to change his mind. Charlie removes himself from Harry’s arms and wipes at his face with his shirt sleeve. “I’m going with you.”

“No! They’ll kill you like they did Cedric when he came with me to the graveyard!”

“Then I’ll go with you as far as I can. I refuse to let you do this alone.”

Harry nods his consent. “But when I say you can’t go any further, you have to listen.”

“I’ll take every second I can get with you.”

Charlie’s smile is watery and sad when he reaches for Harry’s hand.

They walk together through the castle, bypassing the Great Hall (no good can come from Harry seeing the dead and injured another time). Charlie asks if Harry wants him to go find Hermione and Ron, but he declines so they continue out the front door of the castle. The Forbidden Forest looms before them, as dark and imposing as its always been. Harry leads them towards a clearing but stops when they are still a few hundred yards away. He tries to gather the courage to say everything that is running through his mind. Thankfully, Charlie is patient as ever and waits for Harry to be ready.

“Here,” Harry says as he unties the small pouch from his belt and passes it over to Charlie. “There’s no use in taking anything with me.”

“Are you sure there’s nothing in here you want?” Harry opens the pouch as Charlie holds onto it. He shuffles some of the items around and withdraws a Snitch. “Is that the one Dumbledore gave you?”
Harry nods. “It says ‘I open at the close’ and I think this is as ‘close’ as it gets.”

“How does it open?”

Harry doesn’t answer with words. He brings the Snitch up to his lips and they both watch, entranced as it opens to reveal a secret chamber. Harry takes out the small black stone that was hidden inside and holds it aloft. “The Resurrection Stone.”

Charlie’s eyes fly wide. “As in, one of the Deathly Hallows? That’s the real thing?”

“Looks like it.”

“You have the Invisibility Cloak and the Resurrection Stone?”

“You do, now. The Cloak is in Hermione’s bag, but just ask and she’ll give it to you.”

“And the Stone?”

Harry worries his bottom lip. “I wonder…” he whispers to himself. He turns the Stone over in his hand three times and then gasps as images of his parents appear before him.

“What? What’s happening??” Charlie asks in a panic.

“It’s…It’s…Mum? Dad?”

Charlie can’t see or hear the ghostly memories but he can tell by Harry’s reactions that the Stone has worked.

“Sirius, I wish we had had more time.”

Charlie clenches his teeth. He has to let Harry do this on his own but it’s tearing him apart to just watch, helpless.

“Remus, I’m so sorry. Teddy will never forget you. Charlie and the rest of the Weasleys will help Tonks even if I can’t.”

Charlie breaks. He steps up to Harry and puts a comforting hand on his lower back.

“Stay with me? Please? Charlie can’t, and I need to keep going.”

Harry nods and then turns to Charlie. He throws his arms around his neck and kisses him with everything he has. When he forces himself to pull back, he swipes at his eyes and all but shoves the Stone at Charlie. “My parents are going to go with me. Sirius and Remus, too. I won’t be alone.”

“Good. Thank them for me.”

“No matter what, don’t come after me. I would never forgive myself if they killed you, too. Go to our friends and tell them what must come next.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too. That’s why I have to do this.” And with one final lingering look Harry strides off between the trees to meet his end.

Charlie waits, clutching Harry’s pouch to his chest. He isn’t sure what he’s waiting for but he just can’t seem to get his feet to move. He listens intently but hears nothing but the sounds of the forest.
A few minutes pass and still Charlie stands sentry.

And then there’s a flash of green.

Chapter End Notes

1) I’M SORRY FOR THE MAJOR CLIFFHANGER! But we already know that Harry makes it out okay.
2) I love that a group of owls is called a 'parliament'.
3) I waffled back and forth about killing Remus, but I really can't see him being happy unless he's finally reunited with his friends. He made what he could out of his time with Tonks but he never truly was himself again.
4) The implication is that Moody saved Tonks, so that's why she's still alive even though Remus isn't.
5) Snape will be resolved next chapter. Sorry if you want to know right now, you'll have to wait.
6) I have to go to a training/work retreat this weekend so I won't post again until early next week. Sorry in advance for the wait!
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

Minor trigger warning: A character briefly considers killing himself. It's entirely non-graphic and all just hinted at, but I want everyone to be aware. Protect yourselves!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1998, Hogwarts

“Charlie? That you?”

He blinks his eyes rapidly, trying to clear them of tears so that he can figure out who is calling his name. But he can’t stop seeing the green flash of the killing curse no matter how much he blinks. Fighting against the heavy feeling in his chest, Charlie looks around him and tries to piece things together. How did he get back to the castle? He only remembers running blindly through the forest. And who is calling his name again?

A hand lands on his shoulder. “Charlie? Are you alright?”

Charlie gazes into the face of his former teammate. “Ollie,” he breathes out.

“Where’ve you been? Your brothers have been going mad looking for you. Did something happen?”

Charlie lets himself be pulled along by Oliver, though he doesn’t answer any of his questions. He can’t; that will mean thinking about what happened to Harry and he’s not ready to do that yet. Oliver seems to understand his need to be silent right now, and doesn’t press further. He walks him through the rubble-filled courtyard and into the Great Hall.

Ron comes jogging over as soon as they walk through the doors. “You found him! But where’s Harry?” He only has to look at Charlie for a second to figure it out. “No.” He starts breathing faster. “No! I told him to talk to us before just running off!”

His voice gets louder and draws the attention of Hermione and the rest of his friends. “Ron,” Hermione says softly, “What is all the yelling about?”

“This git-” Ron accentuates the word with a punch to Charlie’s chest “-let Harry run off and play hero!”

“Don’t hit me,” Charlie growls through his clenched teeth. “And don’t act like you’re the only one who cares about him.”

“Boys…”

“No, Hermione! He said he would protect Harry but instead he let him go and offer himself to You-Know-Who!”

Tears are welling in Charlie’s eyes but he’s too angry to let them fall. “Oh, come on, Ronnie! You claim to know him better than anyone, so you should know that it was always going to end like
this! Harry is too good to let people die for him!”

“I bet you didn’t even try to talk him out of it! What do you care? You’re almost thirty! You have a job just waiting for you! Surely it won’t be too hard to find another boy to take advantage of!”

“YOU TAKE THAT BACK! I LOVE HARRY!”

“HE WAS MY FRIEND FIRST! AND NOW YOU’VE KILLED HIM!”

Charlie charges at Ron and knocks him to the stone floor with a grunt. Being caught off guard, Ron yelps at flails at first but quickly gets his bearings and starts swinging. Charlie counters Ron’s attack with punches of his own. They roll around wrestling, hitting, slapping, and yelling at each other. The group standing around them stares down in surprised silence.

Hermione snaps out of their shared trance first and starts organizing some damage control. She sends everyone- except Neville- away with a task. As soon as the area is clear, she directs Neville to stand over Ron while she stands by Charlie. “On three, hit him with a stinging hex and then pull him back. Ready? One. Two. Three!”

Ron lets loose a string of expletives that would make a Snatcher blush, but Neville doesn’t let it bother him. He hauls Ron to his feet and holds his arms tightly behind his back.

“Let me go!” Ron struggles to pull away.

“I will knock you out if I have to,” Neville says calmly. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten about first year. I think I’m still entitled to one free shot at all of you.”

“But he-” Ron makes a choking noise as he tries to hold back a sob.

“This isn’t about Charlie.”

Ron’s lip starts to tremble. He lets out two shaky breaths. He goes limp in Neville’s arms. “He’s… he’s gone. He can’t be gone, Nev. It’s Harry.”

Neville lets go of his arms but doesn’t move away. He lets Ron lean against him for support. Hermione, having already helped Charlie to his feet, nudges him towards Ron in hopes that the brothers can help each other instead of fighting. But before anyone can move further they hear Voldemort’s amplified voice announce that Harry Potter is dead.

Ron doubles over and lets out a soul-wrenching scream. Neville reaches for him but thankfully Charlie is already there. The brothers hold each other as they finally let themselves feel. Charlie lifts an arm for Hermione to duck under and join them. They can’t change what’s happened but they can certainly be there for each other. They hardly notice the addition of another set of arms as Neville joins them, then Luna, Ginny, and several more of their friends.

All through the Great Hall sounds of pain and sadness and frustration and desperation can be heard.

“This can’t be real,” Draco says to Tonks with utter denial. “He has to be lying. There’s no way he’s killed him.”

“That poor boy,” Madame Pomfrey whispers as McGonagall holds a hand over her mouth to muffle her sobs.

Arthur drops down onto the empty cot next to Fred with George and Percy flanking him. Bill puts
on a brave face and gently sets a hand onto his father’s shoulder. None of them speak, for there are no words.

Filled with guilt, Slughorn thumbs the rim of his hat as he tries to get the courage to do what he thinks he must. He stands up and looks for the simplest path out of the hall. Aha! One of the side doors is already open. It will be easy to slip out and go down to the potion ingredients closet, where he has a sample of Angel’s Trumpet petals. All he’ll have to do is eat one and-

Aberforth steps in front of the door to stop Slughorn. “Stay,” he says in a tone that implies doing the opposite will have firm consequences.

“Out of my way, Aberforth. You don’t know what I’ve done, what I have to do.”

“Stay.” This time it is just a bit softer, more imploring. “If you want to make things right then you stay. What you’re thinking of doing will serve no one but death.”

It takes more than a few minutes, but eventually Slughorn nods his head and lets Aberforth guide him back over to the other professors.

“They’re coming!” Lee Jordan shouts from across the hall, causing groups to break apart and all heads to turn towards him. “What are we going to do?”

Neville joins him by the door, casting a sonorous charm to be heard without shouting. “This isn’t over just because Harry is no longer with us. He may be dead but we go on in his name, just as we go on in honor of everyone we’ve lost. We can’t let You-Know-Who win now. We will fight. Until we have nothing left, we will fight.”

The battle cry has been sounded and the people respond to Neville with cheers. Emboldened, he holds his head high as he walks out of the Great Hall and leads everyone into what will surely be their final battle.

Voldemort stands just inside the entrance to the castle. The remaining Death Eaters fill in around him, blocking the large wooden doors. Voldemort speaks to the crowd, telling them of how cowardly Harry was to run away and turn his back on his friends. Then he orders Hagrid, who is carrying Harry’s lifeless body, to set him down so that everyone can see their precious ‘Chosen One’ now. “It’s over,” Voldemort says to the crowd with a cold chuckle. “You have failed and now you will bow down to me. Blood traitors will be dealt with, and there will be no more houses to divide us.” Voldemort summons the Sorting Hat and lights it on fire to prove his point.

Neville and Charlie charge at him and everything seems to happen at once:

Curses and hexes start flying from all sides, throwing the entrance hall into chaos.

Harry jumps up from his place on the ground, quickly casting a shield charm over himself and Hagrid. The half-giant hugs Harry as his body shakes with relieved sobs.

Narcissa calls for Draco to come over to where she and Bellatrix are standing. He’s almost there when the sound of the killing curse stops him cold. Voldemort has his wand pointed directly at Draco, with a disgusting grin on his face. In what seems like slow motion, Narcissa pushes Bellatrix in the way of the curse and her body drops dead to the ground. Voldemort practically howls in frustration. Draco grabs Narcissa’s hand and apparates her over to Tonks, where he knows she’ll be safe.

Charlie pushes his way through the battling to get to Harry’s side. He has to practically pry Hagrid
off of him but then he finds himself staring into the face he thought he’d never see again. “How…?”

Harry smiles up at him. “Not sure, but I sure am glad to be here.”

Charlie huffs a small laugh and claims Harry’s mouth with his own. They hardly have a chance to enjoy their reunion, however, because a curse whizzes past Harry’s left ear and breaks them apart.

“Right,” Charlie says with another laugh, “we still have a fight to finish.”

Neville extinguishes the still-burning Sorting Hat and finds the Sword of Gryffindor inside. Ron sees him with it and tells him to kill Nagini. Neville nods his understanding and makes a flying leap with the Sword drawn. He easily beheads the snake, and watches as the severed halves smoke and broil grotesquely.

Voldemort’s angry scream makes Harry flinch in anticipation of the rush of pain that always comes through the connection in his scar. But nothing happens. That’s when Harry realizes that it was all real; the horocrux inside him is well and truly gone. Charlie must realize it at the same time because he squeezes Harry’s hand and says, “Go finish him off.”

Harry seems reluctant to go, even after everything that’s happened, so Charlie reminds him that he’ll still be here when he’s done. Harry gives him a peck on the cheek before stepping out into the area that has been cleared around Voldemort. Harry addresses him as Tom and explains that he should just give up because the Elder Wand will never truly be his. Everyone looks on in wonder, for only Harry would try to talk logic to a madman. (Charlie thinks he’s never been more in love with Harry than he is right now.) Predictably, Voldemort ignores him.

“Avada Kádavra!” “Expelliarmus!”

Both sides look on in shock. Charlie’s jaw drops and he thinks that maybe Harry has himself a death wish- a second death wish- or something because he has not honestly used a disarming charm against the greatest dark wizard of all time. But he has. And it works! Voldemort’s curse rebounds back at himself and in an instant his body collapses on the stone floor of the castle.

A few Death Eaters manage to get away, but the rest are detained. Everyone is trying to get to Harry to congratulate him or shake his hand or just be in his presence. Charlie can tell how uncomfortable he is and shoves his way towards him, only to be stopped by Luna on the way. “I’ll create a diversion,” she tells him with a knowing smile.

Charlie thanks her and whisks Harry out of the sight of the others when Luna shoots multicolored sparks out of her wand (supposedly in celebration). “Where do you want to go?” he asks Harry as soon as they are away from the noise.

“I don’t want to leave, but I don’t want to be around everyone right now. How about the Room of Requirement?”

They jog up the staircases, barely noticing the parts of the castle crumbled and destroyed, before standing in front of the blank wall on the seventh floor. “Got something in mind to ask of it?” Charlie says with no small amount of cheek.

Harry just smirks. “I may have an idea or two.”

Chapter End Notes
Short and sweet, but I didn't feel the need to re-hash most of the story. I just focused on the parts that were changed and/or important.

There's no "Epilogue" as far as 19-years-later (I sort of hate the Epilogue, and by sort of I mean completely) but there is definitely more story to come. Thanks for sticking with me.
1998, The Room of Requirement

It’s easy to lose track of time in a room with no windows- one that can magically transform into a sunny meadow regardless of the natural environment outside. For the first time in Harry’s life, he doesn’t feel the urge to look for a clock or check his watch. He isn’t worrying about what might come next. He isn’t tensed up and constantly on alert, waiting for danger to cross his path. His mind is finally quiet. Mostly.

Charlie is as patient as ever, maybe even more so now that he is no longer afraid that this moment with Harry will be his last. The only thing he is sure to do is keep Harry in some kind of contact with him at all times. Currently, their fingers are intertwined as they lie in the soft meadow. Every so often Charlie will rub his thumb over Harry’s hand, as though just to remind him that he’s still there.

Harry sighs deeply. “I guess we should be getting back to reality soon.”

Charlie rolls on to his side to face him. “Why’s that? No one’s come looking for us. Everyone is safe. Don’t you think it’s about time you get to relax?”

“I suppose.” He stays on his back, staring into the puffy-clouded sky in hopes that a sense of peace will eventually come to him. “I just can’t stop thinking about Dumbledore.”

“Even when we-”

Harry cuts him off with a loud, deep laugh. “No, no. Trust me. When we did that, you were the only thing on my mind.”

“Thank goodness for small favors.” Charlie throws a triumphant arm around Harry and slides him closer, nuzzling his nose into the side of his neck. “You know I won’t make you tell me what happened, but if it’ll help then I’m all ears.”

“It’s just… I don’t think you’d believe me even if I did tell you.”

Charlie hums. “You’ve never given me a reason to think you’re lying before. Just try me.”

And so Harry proceeds to tell him about everything that happened once he walked up to the Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest. Charlie listens without comment, though he does show his surprise at many of the details. When it’s all over Harry asks, “See what I mean? I didn’t know what to think at first and it’s not really any easier to process now.”

Charlie leans up on one elbow to get a better look at Harry. “Did you really die?”

“I think so. Dumbledore said I had a choice, that I didn’t have to come back. After talking to my parents and Sirius and Remus, a part of me thought it might be a relief but I don’t know what would have happened had I decided to…go on.”

“I’m glad you came back,” Charlie whispers, then places a gentle kiss to his lips.
Harry smiles up at him. “I am, too. It was the right choice.”

“And the horcrux?”

“The horcrux was destroyed because the container- me- was damaged beyond repair. I knew it had worked when Neville killed Nagini. It was the first time I couldn’t feel how angry Voldemort was.”

“I could see it on your face. You looked relieved.”

“You have no idea. For the first time in my life, it’s just me up here.” Harry taps his head for emphasis. “Not that I suddenly know what I’m doing or anything like that. I’m still just as lost as ever, only without the looming threat of someone trying to kill me and take over the world.”

“You still have plenty of time to figure things out; you’re only seventeen. And you’ve got me to help.”

Harry tugs on Charlie’s arm to get him to lie down again, then immediately wraps himself around him. He’s nearly asleep when he thinks of everyone waiting for him downstairs. “Did you tell anyone where we went?”

“No, but Luna knows we snuck off. I’ll send Bill my patronus and let him know we’re both okay.”

Harry sits up with a giant smile. “Let me! I bet it’s easy now that the piece of dark soul is gone!” But when he pulls out his wand he freezes. “Oh… I forgot. I disarmed him of the Elder Wand.” He holds it out for Charlie to see.

“You have the most powerful wand ever created and you forgot?” Charlie starts laughing at the absurdity of it all. “You actually have all three Deathly Hallows! And you don’t even care!”

He has to hold a hand to his side as laughs even harder. Harry is less amused. “Why should I care? The only one I really want is the Cloak. Although, I don’t have a wand anymore- which reminds me, I should return Draco’s wand as soon as I can. I still feel bad I took it. Do you think Mister Ollivander will make me a new wand just like my old one? I kind of miss it.”

Charlie ponders it aloud. “The Elder Wand is the most powerful wand in existence, right? And you still have the pieces to your old wand, right?”

“Hermione has them in her bag, but where are you going with this?”

“What if you used the Elder Wand to fix your old wand?”

“Can it do that?”

“We could always ask Ollivander. Or Gregorovitch. I sort of helped save his life.”

“Yes, Charlie, you were very brave.” Harry teases with a sarcastic roll of his eyes. “But let’s worry about that in the morning. For now I’ll just use Draco’s wand.” He quickly sends his silver stag to Bill, letting him know that they will meet up with everyone the next day, and then lies back down next to Charlie. The last thing he says before closing his eyes is, “I was right. It was easier now.”

“I think everything will be,” Charlie says hopefully.

Hermione and Ron are already waiting for them outside of the Room of Requirement the next day. They’re hugging Harry before he’s even all the way out in the corridor. “I’m so glad you’re
“Alright!” Hermione squeals as she squeezes him.

Ron ends his own hug by affectionately ruffling Harry’s hair. “Yeah, mate. You can ask Charlie, I lost it when I heard that you’d…well, you know.”

“What happened to you out there?” Hermione asks with the concerned look that he’s come to accustomed to over the years.

Harry sighs and looks down at his feet. He wants to trust his friends with the details but he feels raw from going through it all with Charlie the night before. He decides to go with the basics. “Voldemort killed me. It destroyed the horcrux. Then I killed him.”

A snort escapes Charlie before he can stop it. Harry gives him an unamused glare, which only makes Charlie snort again. “I’m sorry!” he claims, not sounding sorry at all. “Your blunt summary took me by surprise, is all.”

Hermione’s eyebrows fly right up to her bushy hairline. “He killed you? But then how are you standing here right now?”

“Not sure.”

“That’s all you’re going to give us?”

She turns to Ron and motions for him to back her up, but Ron is one hundred percent siding with Harry on this one. “You can tell us when you’re ready. We’re just glad you’re alive. Right, Hermione?”

He nudges her with his elbow to drive the point home. She obviously still wants to know, but is willing to give Harry the time and space he needs. “Right,” she says reluctantly. “Will you come down to the Great Hall, at least? They want to see you.”

“Who’s ‘they’?” Harry asks, already dreading the answer.

“Everyone.”

That’s what Harry was afraid of. “I don’t want to shake more hands, ‘Mione. There was a reason I turned down the Ministry all the times they tried to use me as a spokesperson; I’m just not good with people! Signing autographs and schmoozing…that’s just not me. Besides, I don’t want to be thanked for killing someone- even if he was evil. I’d like to forget the whole thing even happened, if I’m being honest.”

“At least come talk to our friends,” Ron tries to convince him.

Charlie squeezes Harry’s hand, trying to give him the support he clearly needs. And it must work at least a little because after a minute with his eyes closed he relents and agrees to see Neville, Luna, the Weasleys, and Draco.

Ron looks around nervously as the mention of the last name. “Umm…Draco and his mum were taken away by the Aurors last night.”

“Why?” His grip on Charlie’s hand becomes almost painful.

“Tonks tried to stop them- so did Luna and Dean- but they just wouldn’t hear it. Draco has the Dark Mark and his mum was involved with the Death Eaters. I heard she pushed her own sister in front of the killing curse, too.”
“But they’re not bad! They’ve been helping us!”

No longer dampened by a fragment of Voldemort’s soul, Harry’s magic crackles around them. Charlie cautiously takes a step back (though he never lets go of his hand). “Relax, Harry. We can go straight to the Ministry and talk to the Aurors.”

“I don’t give a bloody fuck about the Ministry!!” he snaps. “This isn’t fair.”

Hermione gently sets a hand on his arm. “They’ve asked Kingsley to be the new Minister. He’ll listen to you if you go and try to set things right.”

Harry hangs his head. “Alright. Let’s go down to the Great Hall and get that over with quickly, then I’m going straight to the Ministry.”

He wasn’t wrong in assuming that everyone would want to shake his hand. It’s complete pandemonium from the moment he enters the Great Hall. The whole place breaks into applause and cheers. Ron and Hermione have to walk in front of him to clear the way, and Charlie fends off anyone walking close to them. Harry thanks Neville for being brave and taking charge in their absence, and especially for killing Nagini when he wasn’t able to.

Neville just laughs. “It was about time I stepped up and proved to the myself that the Sorting Hat didn’t make a mistake seven years ago.”

“You’ve always been brave, Neville. You stood up to us when we were eleven and the whole school hated us.”

“Pfft. That was out of fear, not bravery,” he insists.

Harry shakes his head fondly. “Any idea what you want to do next?”

“Tonks suggested I should be an Auror, but I think I may take Professor Sprout up on her offer to have me apprentice for Herbology. This year has been hard on my Gran and she doesn’t need to be worrying that I might get hurt every day at work.”

“That’s great, Nev.” Harry gives him a pat on the back and then says goodbye, with the promise that they’ll all meet up again soon, and then goes off in search of Luna.

She’s fairly easy to find, being the blondest person in the room (another reminder to Harry that he still has to go save Draco). She’s with her dad and Tamsin. Harry thanks them for everything they’ve done and again asks Luna what her future plans are.

“Dad and I want to travel. There are so many interesting creatures to research! And Tamsin says she’ll meet up with us on weekends and breaks, so that will be lovely!” She smiles at the woman and Charlie swears he’s never seen Tams look so happy.

By the time Harry makes it over to where the remaining Weasleys are congregated, he is more than ready to leave. Though his legs are healing nicely, Fred is not yet walking around. He and George have spent the morning planning how they are going to renovate Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes once they get the chance to get back into Diagon Alley and they already have the outline for an entirely new line of products. Percy apologizes to Harry for his behavior the past few years. He knows he has a long way to go to make it up to everyone, but he wants to work at it and that’s enough for Harry. He leaves them with the promise that he’ll stop by the store to ‘check on his investment’.

Harry is heading for the exit when he hears a voice call to him that he can’t ignore. Professor
McGonagall is no longer laying in one of the hospital beds, Harry has the sneaking suspicion that she’s supposed to be. “Mr. Potter,” she greets, stern as ever.

“Yes, Professor?” He’s expecting a lecture about being reckless or something, but he could not be more wrong.

McGonagall takes two steps towards him and then stops, wrapping her boney arms around his torso. “You did us proud,” she whispers into his ear. “And thank you for trying to save Severus.”

Harry has been afraid to ask about Snape because he knew it was a long shot that he’d live once the stasis charms were dropped, but hearing the praise from McGonagall is enough to dampen the blow. He moves to hug her back but she’s already pulling away again. Not one for showing more emotion than necessary, McGonagall steps back again and smooths down her robes to give her hands something to do. Harry can’t help but smile. It seems some things will never change and that’s comforting in its own way.

She waves him off. “Now go on. I know how much you don’t like crowds. But if you ever feel like you want to come back, you’ll always have a home here at Hogwarts.” Harry turns around and follows after Hermione and Ron, but McGonagall stops Charlie before he can go with them. “The same goes to you, Charlie. I know you love your dragons but I also know you once loved it here. We’re going to have some changes in the coming years and you’ve always been on my list. If you’re interested, of course.”

Charlie beams at her. “I have been thinking about it. I’ll talk with Harry and let you know.”

“There’s no rush.” She gestures around her at the visible destruction of just this one room. “We need to rebuild the castle before we consider rebuilding our staff.”

Charlie thanks her again and jogs off to catch up with Harry.

Chapter End Notes

Snape still dies, but Harry did everything he could so he definitely has a clear conscious there.

I know there's still a lot of loose ends to tie up, but the next two chapters should take care of everything!
1998, The Ministry of Magic

Harry stalks into the Ministry like he owns the place (and like he didn’t just break in last fall with Hermione and Ron). He isn’t surprised to find that the Ministry has a lot of rebuilding to do, but he is surprised to find that he doesn’t feel bad about it. He has zero good memories of this place and thinks an overhaul may be just what is needed to give everyone a fresh start. He is conscious of everyone’s eyes on him, as well as Charlie’s presence behind him, but keeps his gaze focused straight ahead like a horse with blinders on. Hermione gave them a map of the Ministry the day before so that they would know the way.

Once outside of the Minister’s office, Harry only knocks one time and does not wait for a response before opening the door. If Kingsley is shocked by Harry’s abrupt arrival then he does a good job of pretending he’s not. “Ah, Harry and Charlie! Come in! What can I do for you?”

“I’m here to get the Malfoys released,” Harry says with no preamble.

Kingsley actually laughs at his request. “You should know better than anyone that I can’t do that.”

“And why is that?”

“Lucius Malfoy was a known Death Eater-”

Harry interrupts him, “And now he’s dead!”

“Yes,” Kingsley continues, “but Narcissa and Draco continued in his footsteps.”

“No they didn’t!”

Charlie puts his hands on Harry’s shoulders and forces him to sit down in one of the chairs across from Kingsley’s large mahogany desk. Then he addresses the Minister much calmer. “He’s right. While the Death Eaters invaded Malfoy Manor and made it their new headquarters, Draco actively stole food and other supplies to sneak to the prisoners being held in the dungeons. He risked his life to save ours. Narcissa helped when he could not.”

Kingley rubs a hand across his shiny head with a sigh. “Is there anyone else that can testify to this?”

“Luna Lovegood, Dean Thomas, and Garrick Ollivander. Griphook was there as well but he’s no longer alive to give his story.”

He summons a quill and parchment to take notes. When he’s all caught up he asks Harry, “Is there anything else?”

“No they didn’t!”

“Narcissa lied for me. She told Voldemort that I was dead so that he would think he won and take my body back to the castle. If she hadn’t done that, then I have no doubt Voldemort would have killed me. Again.” Harry feels a hand on his knee and gives Charlie an appreciative nod.

Kingsley finishes scratching out the details and then folds his hands in front of him. “Narcissa
Malfoy never got the Dark Mark. If you can get the other witnesses to testify to what she did at the Manor- as well as Harry’s account- then you may just be able to convince what’s left of the Wizengamot that she doesn’t deserve to be sent to Azkaban.”

“And Draco?”

Kingsley sighs some more. “That one may be harder. Regardless of what anyone says, the proof is there on his left arm. He was a Death Eater.”

“To save his family!”

“I believe you, Harry, but it’s not me you’ll have to convince.”

He’s quiet, but Charlie has an idea. “Do you have a list of those currently sitting on the Wizengamot? As well as any open seats?”

“I can get that for you, gentlemen. Just give me a day or so to track down the files.”

Harry clenches his fists at his side. “And what happens to Draco and Narcissa in the meantime?”

“Everyone who was taken into custody after the Battle at Hogwarts is currently in holding cells in a lower level of the Ministry. They are being given adequate food and water, I can assure you, and there is also a cot in each cell.”

This seems to pacify Harry enough to consider leaving. He stands up abruptly, almost knocking his chair over in the process. “Send word to us as soon as you’ve found the list. If I don’t hear from you in two days then you can expect to find me right back here, at which point I won’t leave until you’ve followed through. And I want to be informed of each and every Death Eater’s trial.”

Kingsley can no longer mask his emotions. His eyebrows fly up his forehead. He leans back in his chair and folds his arms, giving Harry an appraising look. “Are you planning on exonerating them all?”

“Absolutely not,” Harry scoffs. “Except for the Malfoys, they all deserve everything that’s coming to them.” And with that, he turns and exits Kingsley’s office leaving Charlie to hurry after him.

Charlie waits to say anything about Harry’s demeanor until after they’ve left the Ministry. But once back out on the streets of London, he finds he doesn’t need to. Harry leans into Charlie, boneless as the fight leeches out of him. “I’m sorry about all of that back there. That isn’t me.”

“It was a little unexpected, but it was kind of hot.”

“Charlie!” Harry slaps a hand across his chest, but there’s no heat in it. “I just wouldn’t be able to live with myself if something happens to them. Not after everything they’ve done. I mean, they kept you safe during those months. That alone means the world to me.”

“They kept you safe, too. And I know you’ll be able to keep them safe in return.” He kisses the top of Harry’s head. “Now, where do you want to go while we wait?”

Harry wants to get away from everything but he can’t exactly go far if he’s waiting for news from Kingsley. “What about Grimmauld Place?”

“Sure, just promise to keep that creepy house elf away from me.”

“Oh, Kreacher and I have an…understanding, of sorts. I don’t think he’ll be giving us any more
trouble from now on. And besides, I can always call in Dobby if we need help.”

Charlie lets out a loud laugh. “I am his favorite Wheezy after all.”

Harry has the feeling that they won’t be alone at Grimmauld Place for long, and suggests to Charlie that make the best use of their time until the others inevitably arrive. And by ‘make the best use of their time’ Harry means ‘shag in every room in the house’. Charlie certainly isn’t complaining, though he is a little concerned that someone will show up unannounced and walk in on them. This leads to the decision that all further activities should take place inside rooms with doors.

And it isn’t long before Charlie’s concerns are proven valid. They are lounging around after breakfast when they hear knocking at the front door. Charlie suggests they take bets on who it is, which makes Harry laugh even though he doesn’t take him up on the offer. He cautiously opens the door just a sliver (he can’t give up on his common sense just because Voldemort is dead) and is relieved to see that it’s Tonks. Of all the people, she’s one that Harry actually wants to spend more time catching up with and she might also be able to help them rescue Draco and Narcissa from the Ministry.

“Wotcher, Harry! Can me and the little hobbit come in?”

That’s when Harry notices that Tonks’ arms are full of blankets and what he assumes is Teddy. He pulls the door open quickly and lets them in. “You’ve read Tolkein?” he asks amusedly.

“Of course! Who hasn’t?”

“Most wizards and witches?”

Tonks glances down at baby Teddy with a wistful, far-off look. “My dad grew up muggle and he read me all sorts of muggle books growing up. I’m hoping to find his old copy of The Hobbit so I could read it to Teddy.” Her voice trails off, but then she plasters on a too-big smile. “That’s actually why I’m here. I want to go through my parents’ house and salvage what I can. Would you watch Teddy while I’m gone?”

“Uhh…”

Charlie walks up alongside Harry with a chuckle. “We’d love to, Tonks.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with this?” Harry looks at her nervously, chewing worrying his bottom lip. “Isn’t he still quite young to be away from you?”

“It will just be for a little while. And if he could survive without me for a few days with Fleur and Molly, then he can certainly make it a few hours with you two.”

“What about…milk?” His face goes pale as he asks the question, which of course makes Charlie and Tonks laugh at his expense.

“I’ll feed him before I go. And I’ll leave some formula with you just in case something happens.” Harry gives her nothing but a vaguely confused head tilt. “It’s a powder you mix with water that can take the place of-” she stops mid-sentence. “Harry, are you scared to be left alone with Teddy?”

He splutters, “I-but-no-well-you see…”

Tonks does the only thing she thinks will help Harry get over his nerves. She sets down her bag,
asks him to hold out his arms, and then gently passes over baby Teddy. Harry stares wide-eyed at the warm, squirming bundle that he’s holding and dumbly says the first thing that comes to mind: “Blue.”

Charlie hooks his chin over Harry’s shoulder to get a good look at Teddy, and sure enough the baby is sporting a wispy tuft of blue hair. He grins up at Tonks. “I didn’t know he inherited your gift.”

“I didn’t either, until yesterday. He can’t control it or anything but it’s still a good sign.”

“Remus would be proud,” Harry says quietly.

“He certainly would.”

Tonks leans down and plants a kiss onto Teddy’s forehead. Then she asks for a piece of parchment so that she can write a list of everything she wants to look for in her parents’ home. Charlie walks her to the library, leaving Harry alone in the foyer with baby.

Harry doesn’t know what to do at first. He takes a small step to his right but then stops as soon as Teddy starts to wiggle. His arms tighten slightly and he attempts another step. The wiggling doesn’t get any better but it also doesn’t get worse, so Harry figures his best move would be to get to the sitting room sofa as soon as possible. He takes quick but hesitant steps and lets out a sigh of relief when the sofa is in sight. How can Tonks entrust him to take care of something as precious as her child? Teddy is the only member of her family still alive and he’s so fragile. Harry looks down at him again, watching fingers flex and eyes blink.

“What are you thinking about, I wonder?” Harry jumps at the sound of his own voice. He didn’t mean to say that out loud, but now that he has he doesn’t want to stop. “Do you think about your mum? The earliest dream I ever remember having was of my own mum. I know you don’t know it yet, but yours is bloody brilliant. Your dad was too. He was best friends with my parents. They’re all together now. At least, that’s what I like to imagine.”

He won’t cry. He can’t. Because then Teddy will cry and then they’ll be a sodding mess and Tonks will never trust him again. “But you’ve got us now; me and Charlie. We’ll be here for you when your mum is getting on your case— even though she’s probably right to be— or when you just need someone to listen without judgement.”

Harry risks moving on his arms out from under Teddy so that he can have a free hand to run gently across his hair. It’s so soft and fine! And the color seems to ripple as he touches it. “You’re two months old and you’re already amazing. All I can do is fight evil wizards and almost die in a forest.”

“That’s not all you can do,” Tonks challenges from the doorway.

Harry’s head whips around to face him. “I didn’t hear you come in.”

She snorts. “Obviously. Charlie says you only talk like that when you think no one is listening.” She crosses the room and joins them on the sofa, gently running a finger across Teddy’s sweet face before taking him from Harry.

Harry turns his head as Tonks starts to feed Teddy. She knows he’s uncomfortable with it, even after all the time spent together at Shell Cottage, so she uses a small terry cloth to cover herself. “You can turn around now. And I meant what I said; you’re more than what you say.”

“I never finished my courses or sat my exams.”
“No one did this year. And some people never do, yet they’re still successful. What about Hagrid? Or even Newt Scamander? You can’t let your education define you.”

“The author of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them never finished school?”

“He was expelled from Hogwarts.”

“I never knew that.” Harry lets that ruminate in his head before asking, “Do you think the sanctuary would hire me without any exams?”

“I’m not sure. That’d be a good question for Charlie or maybe his boss. Why? Are you considering working in Romania?”

Harry ducks his head when he feels his face heat up, but his smile never fades. “All I know is that I want to stay with Charlie. I’ll work wherever I’ll be useful.”

“You have plenty of time to figure it out. You’re still young.”

“That’s what Charlie said!”

They both laugh, though Tonks is careful as to not disrupt Teddy’s eating. The little boy finishes up and falls asleep. Tonks pats his on the back until he releases a rumblly burp and then hands him back to Harry so that she can get ready to go. She leaves Harry the bag with nappies and extra clothes, kisses Teddy on the forehead, and then goes to find Charlie. Harry can hear them talking and then the front door is closed and locked.

Charlie pops his head into the sitting room and says, “Oh, there you are!”

“Shh,” Harry whispers. “He just went to sleep.”

Charlie tiptoes in and slowly lowers himself onto the sofa. Harry’s arm starts to tingle so he carefully switches Teddy to his other arm, but he feels more comfortable holding him now than he did when Tonks first arrived. Charlie swears to him that it gets easier the more you do it. Harry still seems unsure yet when Charlie offers to take Teddy from him, Harry hands him over reluctantly. At least this way Harry gets to watch the effortless way that Charlie rests Teddy in the crook of his arm. He sees the natural ease that Charlie has when interacting with Teddy. It makes Harry think about the practicality of their future.

“Do you want children, Charlie?”

He can’t look Harry in the eyes. “Um. Well…”

“You don’t have to answer. Forget it.” Harry stands up and stalks out of the room. Charlie calls after him, but he just gives a flimsy excuse about starting on something for lunch.

In the kitchen he asks Kreacher to bring him something to cook and of course Kreacher misinterprets Harry’s request. So when he returns with a whole chicken and an armload of root vegetables, Kreacher is very upset that Harry tries to take them from him. Harry yells at Kreacher and sends him away, and then immediately regrets it. Add that to his embarrassment from his conversation with Charlie and Harry is ready to take out some frustration on the meal he prepares. He decides to make bread as well just so he can really dig his fingers into the dough.

Harry has calmed down significantly by the time Charlie walks into the kitchen an hour later. The bread dough is rising, the chicken and vegetables are roasting, and a cup of tea is ready for Charlie before he even gets to a chair.
“What are you wearing?” Harry asks as he slides the saucer of cream over to Charlie.

“It’s something Tonks gave me right before she left.” He pulls aside one flap of the fabric sling to show a sleeping Teddy within. “It’s been spelled to keep him supported and close body contact is good for his development.”

Harry runs his fingers across the dark grain of the tabletop. “You sure know a lot about babies.”

“Look, Harry…I’m sorry about earlier. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable and I don’t want you to think I want kids like RIGHT NOW. But you asked and I wanted to be honest. So…yes, eventually I want a family. But right now? Of course not. I want to enjoy being with you and I want to help you figure out what you want to do with your life. Hell, I want to figure out what to do with my own life. Kids are somewhere far, far in the future.”

“Alright.”

“Alright?”

“Yes!” A timer beeps and Harry gets up to roll and shape the bread dough into small loaves. “I get it, Charlie. I sort of freaked out, but I get it. I’m sorry for running away instead of just talking to you.”

Charlie gets up to lean against the bench next to Harry while he works. “It’s okay if you don’t feel the same. I won’t push you into something you don’t want.”

“And I thank you for that. I’ve just never thought about it before. I’ve never had a reason to think I’d live long enough to start a career or get married or have kids. But now…it’s like anything is possible and that’s scary.”

He leans in to kiss Harry, careful not to squish Teddy between them. “We’ll take it one step at a time. And if you decide later on that there’s things you do or don’t want, then we’ll talk through it together.”

Tonks gets back just as the bread is being set out to cool. She breathes in the comforting smell and lets her nose lead her to the kitchen. Teddy has woken up from his nap and Tonks stands in the doorway watching Charlie play with him. He’s blowing raspberries on Teddy’s tummy and neck, making the baby kick and giggle. Harry leans down over him and Teddy reaches his chubby arms up, tangling his fingers in Harry’s already messy hair. Harry gently untangles himself and mock-scolds him. He straightens his back and that’s when he notices Tonks.

She walks into the kitchen and makes grabby hands at Charlie. “Give me my baby.”

Charlie lets the boy go and then helps Harry set the table. The chicken and vegetables are good- as is the freshly baked bread- but there’s so much left over that Charlie jokes about putting Kreacher out of work altogether. Still feeling guilty about how he treated him, Harry calls for the elf and asks for help putting everything into containers and keeping them under stasis charms. Kreacher seems pleased to be allowed to help this time so Harry figures they’re on the mend.

Tonks thanks them for watching Teddy and for the food before saying goodbye. Harry asks her where she’s going to stay. “Bill and Fleur are letting me stay at Shell Cottage until I can find a more permanent place.”

“What if you stay here? There’s more than enough rooms. And it would let them have their home to themselves again.”
“Are you sure, Harry? I don’t want to intrude…”

“You’re not intruding,” Harry assures her. “And we don’t really have a plan beyond the next few days, so you may end up having the place to yourself.”

Charlie nods his head in agreement. “Besides, it’s the perfect excuse to see our godson more.”

“I’m going to go back for tonight and mull it over. I’ll let you know what I decide. But no matter my choice, I want you to know that I appreciate the offer.”

Having Teddy around is nice but it’s a distraction from Harry’s mission to get Draco and Narcissa released from Ministry custody. He and Charlie sit down for the rest of the afternoon to hash out their plan. They are still waiting on the Wizengamot lists so that they can figure out who will be on their side and who will be harder to convince. Kingsley still has one more day to fulfill Harry’s request, but Harry would almost rather barge back in and demand their release without going through the proper channels. Only his respect for Kingsley stops him from doing so. Harry trusts that he isn’t lying about the proper treatment of those awaiting trial.

Having eaten such a heavy lunch, they aren’t properly hungry come dinner time. Charlie suggests they go for a walk around the neighborhood instead. Harry admits that being outside was always his escape growing up. It was where he felt free. He enjoys it even more with Charlie at his side. They hold hands and take in the sights they never bothered to before. There’s a small park across the road, a larger one just a few blocks away that has a metal playset for children, a tall brick church with carillons ringing on the hour, busy roads and empty roads, and rows upon rows of houses. Harry wonders if any people within are aware of what transpired just a few days ago. Do they know that he saved them? Will they live their whole lives without a single inkling that magic is real? And right underneath their noses?

Charlie bumps his shoulder into Harry’s to jostle him out of his deep thoughts. “Care to share with the class?”

“I was thinking about how nice it is to just be ‘Harry’ for once, not a baby of prophecy or ‘The-Boy-Who-Lived’ or ‘The-Chosen-One’. Most likely none of these people know who I am at all. It should make me feel insignificant but I’m really just relieved.”

“You were meant to make your own path.”

“Voldemort didn’t think so.”

“And look where that got him!”

“True.”

Harry leans up against a wrought iron fence and lifts his face up to summer sky, letting the slowly sinking sun warm his skin. He looks so peaceful that Charlie doesn’t want to interrupt. He does, however, have a whole list of rooms they haven’t broken in yet. He shakes the hand that is still intertwined with Harry’s to get his attention. “Let’s head back, yeah?”

A great grey owl is waiting for them on the stoop of 12 when they return. Harry releases it of its parcel and the owl flies off with a low hoot. It’s the list from Kingsley. Their walk back had been slow and leisurely, but now Harry has a renewed energy about him. He all but drags Charlie into the house and upstairs to the library.

Before they turn in for the night, they have their plan.
Kingsley is obviously expecting them the next day. His office door is already open and he’s perched on the edge of his desk, arms and legs folded in a laid-back manner. “Good morning Harry, Charlie,” he greets before they even have a chance to knock.

“We want to call an immediate meeting of the Wizengamot,” Harry declares.

Kingsley is trying to school his features but he can feel one corner of his mouth start to slide upwards. “I had a feeling you would.” When Harry tilts his head in confusion he clarifies, “I already called them in. Trials are set to start in two days and it looks like the Malfoys are scheduled first.”

“Oh.” Harry was ready for a fight. “Thank you.”

Charlie has to pinch his lips together to keep from laughing along with Kingsley.

They take the lifts down to the courtrooms, checking the schedule posted to find the one where the Death Eater trials are being held. Outside of the chambers they discuss their strategy one more time.

“Remember to emphasize the importance of the roles they both played in you being able to kill Voldemort.” Harry jerks back as Charlie actually says the name. “As far as they’re concerned, you never could have done it without Draco and Narcissa.”

“Got it,” he says, recovering quickly. “I’m going to talk directly to Abbott, MacMillan, and Rosier because they are most likely to side with me already, and I’ll appeal to the mums with the story of Narcissa will to do anything for her son.”

“Stand up straight and speak clearly.” Charlie straightens Harry’s tie, wondering not for the first time if they should have gone shopping for something nicer than his old Gryffindor one.

“Thanks, Dad,” Harry teases.

“I didn’t realize you were into that sort of stuff.” Charlie gives a swift pat to Harry’s bum.

Harry spins around to make sure no one else saw that. “Charlie!” he chastises with a shove at his chest.

His grin is unabashed. “Just loosening you up.”

“You can loosen me up later,” Harry grumbles, but then goes red when he realizes what the double meaning of his own words. “Just go find a seat!”

With how fast Kingsley moved everything along, Harry did not think there would be a crowd. But it seems as though half the wizarding world has shown up to see the Malfoys pay for their crimes.

Draco and Narcissa are brought into the chamber bound by their wrists. Harry thinks they look alright (well, as alright as one can be when being kept in a holding cell for a week). They seem better off than Charlie, Luna, Dean, and Ollivander were after their stint in the Manor dungeons. Harry asked Dean and Luna to come today and speak on Draco’s behalf, but both chose to give statements instead. Luna’s wrote hers on a special type of parchment that is able to verify the identity of the writer. Dean gave a personal interview to a solicitor the day before. It counts for something but Harry still wishes he weren’t the only one speaking today.
Kingsley clears his throat and opens the Malfoy’s trial. His secretary reads off their charges and then the Head Auror presents the evidence submitted both for and against them. Then Harry is called down to the floor to give his statement. The entire chamber comes alive. Every person in attendance was speculating if the ‘Savior of the Wizarding World’ was there to participate or to simply watch. Now the moment of truth has come.

Harry steps behind Narcissa and Draco and gently sets a hand on each of their shoulders. He takes a deep breath and starts his prepared speech. Draco seems stunned when Harry says he would be dead without his help, though he quickly masks the emotion with a neutral expression. Narcissa—the clever woman that she is—looks humble and bats her eyelashes and generally makes herself seem small and meek despite the fact that she defied Voldemort and pushed her own sister in front of the killing curse.

Charlie thinks he can tell when each member of the Wizengamot has made their decision. Faces either turn soft or stony and he crosses his fingers that more are in their favor by the end. Harry is slightly flushed by the time he finishes speaking. He removes his hands from the Malfoys, bows slightly to the Wizengamot and thanks them for their time. With his head held high he retreats back to his seat next to Charlie. Only Charlie knows the way Harry’s hands shake when he holds them in his own. He presses a quick kiss to Harry’s forehead and then the waiting begins.

What feels like an eternity later, the speaker of the Wizengamot stands with Kingsley. “Narcissa Malfoy is sentenced to one year of monitored house arrest. Draco Malfoy is cleared of all charges.”

The room is in uproar as every witch and wizard in the room reacts to the verdict. Harry runs back down to the floor and throws his arms around Draco, shocking everyone but no one more than Draco. He hugs Narcissa next, though he does so with much less vigor.

“We can never thank you enough, Mister Potter.”

“It’s ‘Harry’, please, and it’s the least I could do.”

“She’s right, Harold. They didn’t listen to Nymphadora when they took us away but they listened to you. I just wish Mother didn’t have to stay in the Manor for a year.”

Harry gets an idea. “What if I could talk them into letting her stay at her ancestral home?”

Draco’s eyes narrow. “I just said-

“I know, but that’s the Malfoy Manor and she’s only a Malfoy by marriage.”

“And you just happen to know of a Black property that’s fit for her to live in?”

Narcissa clears her throat primly. “I believe Harry is speaking of my late aunt’s rowhouse in Islington. I heard that you inherited it from your godfather.”

Harry confirms that Sirius did indeed leave it to him. “Charlie and I wouldn’t mind, and we already invited Tonks and Teddy to stay with us as well. Kreacher is warming up to me but I bet he’d love to have a real member of the Black family there again.”

“I don’t want you to get her hopes up, Harold. Is that really something you think you can do?”

“I hate being ‘The Savior’ almost as much as I hated being ‘The Chosen One’ but if I can use it to help people, then I’m going to use my clout until no one cares about the name Harry Potter ever again.”
Convincing Kingsley take surprisingly little effort. Now that the Wizengamot has moved on to the Death Eaters who deserve lifetime sentences in Azkaban, they haven’t given a second thought to Narcissa Malfoy. Harry has to agree to releasing the Fidelius charm from 12 Grimmauld Place, but he considers it a non-issue now that they don’t have to hide

Harry goes with Draco to collect their wanted possessions from Malfoy Manor while Charlie helps Narcissa get settled in on the third floor. Tonks shows up two days later with Teddy and a bag filled with their shrunken-down belongings. Narcissa doesn’t waste any time apologizing for her past transgressions. It takes a while but Tonks slowly warms to her just as he has to Draco.

Ron and Hermione come to visit after they return from Australia. Harry and Charlie offer them the only remaining free bedroom. The house is full and Kreacher is beside himself with glee now that there are chores to be done and people to serve. He clearly favors Narcissa and Draco, but he’s not the cantankerous pain that he was before.

When it comes time for Tonks to go back to work, she has no shortage of babysitters. Ron goes with her because he’s already been accepted into the Auror training program. Hermione makes regular trips to the wizarding library and that Harry never even knew existed, so that she can be prepared to go back to Hogwarts in the fall. Harry, Draco, and Charlie periodically go up to the castle to help with the rebuilding process. But no matter what everyone is doing and where they go during the day, it is an unspoken rule that everyone returns to Grimmauld Place for dinner. They’ve become this peculiar unit and though things are not perfect by any means, they’re all starting to feel more stable than they have in years.

Chapter End Notes

I want to make it clear that Charlie IS NOT expecting Harry to be a parent at 17. Harry is just realizing that Charlie had a normal childhood and is at the age where a lot of people are already married and becoming parents. He's panicking because their age difference is very apparent to him now.

There's a time jump next. And I just can't leave the story at 41 chapters because odd numbers are weird, so I am going to have an epilogue after all (though there will be a definite lack of awkwardly-named children and it won't be nineteen years in the future).
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

The fluffiest fluff to ever fluff! Because I'm a sucker for a sappy ending.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1999, Hogwarts

“As Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, I welcome you students, parents, families, staff, and esteemed guests to our Seventh Year Celebration. Before we begin, let us take a moment to remember those we lost just one year ago.”

Heads are bowed and more than a few sniffs are heard, loud against the moment of silence. Hermione squeezes Harry’s left hand while Draco presses his shoulder into Harry’s right side. They help ground him so that he doesn’t fall into the bottomless pit of sorrow that still opens up from time to time inside his chest.

“Today is particularly exciting because we are celebrating the end of formal education for not just one, but two groups of students. I have watched a lot of students learn and grow but I can honestly say that I have never been prouder. They have shown me how resilient the human spirit can be. They have shown me what it takes to truly forgive. They have shown me that no matter how much we are knocked down and torn apart, there is always a way to rebuild as long as we work together.”

Ginny reaches forward a row to ruffle her hand through Dennis Creevey’s hair. Ginny and Neville spent the year looking out for Dennis. He’s not the only returning student who lost someone important to them, but he was exceptionally close with his brother and he feels the loss acutely.

“This time of year is bittersweet for me, but I look forward to all the good that our students will do out in the world. Hogwarts has always been known for preparing witches and wizards for whatever their chosen career path may be. Some will become healers.”

Hermione sits up taller in her seat.

“Others will work for the Ministry.”

Blaise receives some jabs from Draco and Harry, because they still can’t believe the boy with the devil-may-care attitude wants to have a stuffy government job for the rest of his life.

“Some will be teachers.”

Harry makes eye contact with Neville from across the room.

“And others will marvel us with their Quidditch prowess for years to come.”

Fred and George whoop from the audience and Ginny gives them a salute of gratitude.

“But every student who leaves here will always have one thing in common: They will always be a part of the Hogwarts family.”
The hall courtyard erupts into applause and cheers.

“Without any further ado, I would like to announce the names of the Seventh-Year and Eighth-Year students whose time at Hogwarts has come to an end. Please come forward to accept your certificate of completion and to give your poor, old, Headmistress a handshake.”

Flitwick reads off the names one by one, in alphabetical order regardless of house. Harry doesn’t know why his palms are sweating as they get closer the Ps but later Charlie will tell him it has something to do with the most significant chapter of his life (at least so far) ending. When Harry’s name is called, the noise is almost deafening. He tries to block it out and just focus on the woman standing at the front of the crowd.

McGonagall is holding a rolled up piece of parchment in her left hand and her right hand is extended in wait, yet Harry ignores both in favor of crushing her in a hug. He feels bad about the punch of air he hears leave her body, but then McGonagall is hugging him back and all is forgiven. When Harry finally pulls away she has to remove her spectacles and wipe at her eyes before handing him his certificate of completion.

The rest of the names go by in a blur for Harry until he hears ‘Ginerva Weasley’ followed by ‘Blaise Zabini’ and he knows they’ve reached the end of the ceremony.

“Even though you’ve sat your NEWTs and finished your coursework, know that your professors will still be here to support you. If you can’t remember the exact wand movement or potions ingredient then all you need to do is send us an owl. Of course, you can send owls for other things as well. Come back to watch a Quidditch match or to give a lecture. Send care packages to homesick first years or sleep-deprived fifth years. Do good, Be good. And remember that Hogwarts will always be here to welcome you home again.”

Everyone is on their feet clapping and cheering and crying. Harry is mobbed my Weasleys, with Molly reaching him first. She already has Ginny under one arm and pulls him in by the other. After that, Arthur, George, Fred, and Percy congratulate him in turn. Then Ron is there (he had to go to Hermione first or risk insulting his fiancé) and finally Charlie, who kisses him deeply despite their surroundings. Blaise looks amused and decides to claim a kiss of his own from Draco.

“Oh, come on,” Ron groans at the two pairs. “At least ‘Mione and I have the decency to keep to ourselves. The least you could do is pretend like you’ve got some decorum.”

“Ah, Ronald, I see Hermione is still teaching you more of her big words,” Draco drawls in the bored tone he knows always gets on Ron’s nerves.

Blaise tsks mockingly. “Don’t tease, darling. Weasley and Granger were kind enough to use a silencing charm last time they ‘kept to themselves’ so we can return the favor I’m sure.”

Hermione, as it turns out, is rather open about her private life. Ron, on the other hand, turns beat red in a way that clashes with his hair and freckles (something which Draco is always quick to point out) every time it is so much as mentioned.

Harry shakes his head at their predictable antics. “Will you ever stop?”

“I’ll stop when it ceases to get a rise out of Ronald.”

“And I’ll stop when the bloody ferret-”

“I know you play chess together.” Both Ron and Draco stare mutinously at Harry like he’s a traitor, but he remains unaffected. “Just admit that you secretly get along.”
“I’d rather get splinched again,” Ron snarls as he takes Hermione by the arms and drags her off towards Neville and Ginny.

Harry turns to Draco expecting an equally biting remark but finds a rather disappointed look upon his face. “Do you actually want to be friends with Ron?”

Draco rubs at his forehead, fighting off the feeling of the oncoming headache that often accompanies time spent with Weasleys. “I…I think so? He’s really not so bad if you can get him to shut his trap, but when he talks he’s so bloody irritating he makes me want to hex him into oblivion!”

“He’s been like that his entire life,” Charlie says solemnly. “Like any other realization, he’s the last to make it and it’ll hit him like a ton of bricks when he does.

Harry advises, “Just give him time to figure it out. One day he’ll start calling you ‘mate’ every other sentence and then you’ll never be rid of him.”

Draco isn’t convinced but he doesn’t push the issue. He and Blaise excuse themselves to go find where their mothers are, no doubt trying to once again plan a bonding ceremony for the two men.

Charlie is almost knocked off-balance as a toddling Teddy crashes into the back of his legs. “Ha!” Teddy yells triumphantly as he pats the back of Charlie’s legs.

Charlie picks up the boy and swings him into the air, making him giggle and clap his hands. Then he hefts Teddy to his hip and looks for Tonks. She is still making her way over from where she was talking to Narcissa.

“You always know just where to find your uncles, don’t you?” she teases Teddy.

“Ha,” Teddy says proudly, patting Charlie on the shoulder and then lurching towards Harry to do the same.

Harry catches him before he tumbles out of Charlie’s arms and balances him on his own hip. Teddy is still too young to properly control his abilities, but they’re becoming less random. Harry loves watching the way his hair turns black and shaggy just like his own whenever he gets to see him. It’s particularly cute when Charlie is around because then Teddy’s face gets sprinkled with freckles as well.

Tonks gives them time to play before asking, “So, when are you boys leaving?”

“Ha ba bah?” Teddy once again proves that he understands much more than he is able to verbalize.

“That’s right,” Harry tells him. “Charlie and I are going bye-bye.” Then he directs to Tonks, “Hannah’s convinced Tom to close down the Leaky for tonight so the whole gang is going to go there and get pissed. Then after a well-deserved lie in, we’re going to Romania so Charlie can pick up his itinerary. We have an international portkey scheduled for tomorrow and we should arrive in Halifax in time for dinner.”

“You’re still going to be back in time for us to celebrate your birthday, right? Teddy is very excited.”

Harry tickles the little boy still in his arms. “Yes, Charlie keeps reminding everyone that we have to be back by the 31st.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing!” Charlie sweeps Teddy up in a big hug, smacking a kiss to his
cheek. “We’ll miss you, Teddykins.”

Harry gives his own goodbyes to Teddy before they hand him back to Tonks. “You’ll be okay at Grimmauld Place?”

“Cissa and Ron have lived with us all year- and now Draco and Hermione will be there as well- so don’t worry about us. You two just enjoy your trip.” They give her one last wave as she walks away with Teddy but at the last moment she turns around and shouts, “DON’T DO ANYTHING I WOULDN’T DO!”

Charlie wakes up the next morning to the sound of Harry retching from the en suite in his quarters. He chuckles and reaches for the misty purple vial of hangover cure that he left on the side table the night before. Leaning on the door frame, he holds the vial out and waits for Harry to pick up his head and see it.

Harry moans and rests his forehead on the toilet seat. “Why didn’t you stop me?”

Charlie barks out a laugh, making Harry whine. “Are you kidding me? You were standing on a table with Seamus singing that ridiculous song about Ron, and when I told you to get down you just yelled in my face that you were- and I quote- ‘showing everyone what the bloody savior is capable of’.”

“I really said all that?” He cringes and reaches a hand out for the vial.

Charlie uncorks it and hands it to him. “You really did. But I think that was just the alcohol talking.”

Harry chokes the potion down and drops his head back onto the toilet seat. “Just leave me here to die.”

“Oh, right, because Firewhisky can do what Voldemort couldn’t.”

“Uuuggghhh don’t say ‘Firewhisky’ please!”

He nudges Harry’s leg with his foot. “That potion will kick in soon and we’ll need to get going. I know we planned on asking Dobby pack us some food, but I have a better idea.”

“I thought we didn’t have to be at the sanctuary until later?”

“You’re right, but I want to make a stop somewhere else first.”

The small German village is as picturesque as Charlie remembers it being. He’s glad that this time he is not alone and not on the run. He eagerly leads Harry down the cobbledstone lane towards a building painted green with gold letters labeling it Schröter. Charlie is all but running the rest of the way, taking Harry’s hand as they approach the door. He opens it almost reverently. Charlie is relieved to see Lisette behind the bar, having not thought of what to do if she wasn’t working today.

Her eyes light up as soon as she sees Charlie. “Bernhard!” she calls to the kitchen. “Komm schnell!”

A back door bangs open and Bernhard walks out, wiping his hands on his apron as he goes. “Was ist es?” he asks his wife.
She gestures towards Charlie excitedly and a smile breaks out across Berhard’s face. “Charlie Veasley!” He rushes forward to shake his hand. “Und Harry Potter!” He shakes Harry’s as well. “Vat you doing here?”

Charlie glances around the pub and finds it empty save for one man sleeping in the corner. He turns his back to the man and unshrinks the Tinderblast before handing it to Bernhard. “I wanted to return your broom and thank you again for letting me borrow it. It kept me safe and got me back home. You didn’t let me pay before but can I please pay you now?”

Bernhard takes the broom but shakes his head with a fond smile. “Sday und eat.”

Charlie concedes, figuring he can always leave the money he exchanged after they’re done eating. Bernhard goes back into the kitchen to make them their early lunch. Lisette serves fizzy drinks in the meantime. Her English is still no better, but neither is Charlie’s German so they’re at an impasse. She leaves them to wait as she finishes setting up for the lunch rush.

Harry is smiling at Charlie with a soppy look on his face. “What?” Charlie asks.

“It’s just nice, is all.”

“What?” he asks again.

“You. This. Sometimes I forget you had a whole other adventure while we were separated during those months. I’m glad you had these people to help you.”

Bernhard brings their lunches out and tells them that it’s rouladen and käsespätzle. Lisette fusses over them until Charlie and Harry both convince her (with overly-large smiles and exaggerated head-nods) that the food is delicious and that they are more than pleased. When they’re done Lisette ushers them around back to talk to Bernhard while she tends to the other patrons in the pub. Charlie leaves a pile of coins that he had exchanged especially for this reason at the bar and ignores Lisette’s sound of surprise as they slip into the kitchen.

Bernhard sets his utensils down so that he can give them each another hand shake. Charlie feels the urge to pull him in for a hug, catching the man completely off guard. He gets choked up when he once more tells Bernhard, “Thank you.”

“Be vell und do good,” he repeats from the last time Charlie was leaving.

“Take care of yourself. And Lisette.”

“Und baby.” Bernhard puffs out his chest, proud as any father-to-be should be.

Charlie can’t help getting misty eyed at the news. He hugs Bernhard one more time and congratulations him. Harry gives him another wave as they exit through the back door. They walk until they are outside of the village and away from muggle eyes, then Charlie apparates them both to Dresden where he still has a contact willing to let him use the floo network. Harry shouldn’t be amazed that Charlie has left such a good impression everywhere he’s been, but it warms his heart to know how good of a person his boyfriend is. By the time they step out of the floo in the training facility, Harry feels like he’s fallen in love with Charlie all over again. By the time they take their portkey to Halifax, Harry knows this to be a fact.

Tamsin is responsible for setting up Charlie’s tour of Canada. He gives lectures in wizarding districts and training facilities all across the country, starting in Nova Scotia and ending at the dragon reserve in northern Alberta. Charlie loves it because it makes him feel like he’s back at the
training facility teaching with Tams again.

Harry finds it interesting no matter how many times he’s heard him speak about the same thing. He wanders off to explore at each new place they go, buying souvenirs and picking up trinkets to preserve the memories.

There’s only one of Charlie’s lectures that he misses in its entirety. Hermione and Blaise teamed up (much to Ron’s disdain) to get Harry the paperwork needed to see a muggle doctor in the United States. Whilst Charlie is speaking in Vancouver, Harry apparates across the border to avoid customs and finds Doctor Anderson’s office. He evaluates Harry’s eyes and recommends him for the laser procedure that Hermione told him about a few years prior. With a little persuasion in the form of money- Harry offers him triple the normal cost- he schedules Harry for the following day. Charlie meets him at a hotel in Seattle and at eight o’clock the next morning Harry gets his eyesight fixed. They spend the next week lazing around the hotel while Harry introduces Charlie to the wonders of muggle television and film.

The Alberta dragon reserve is nice, but it makes Harry want to see Bryony. When he says this, Charlie only laughs. “You’ve seen her once a month over the entire last year! She’s going to get spoiled.”

“I don’t think I can really spoil a dragon…”

“Mikhailo refuses to come near Morgan or any of her team.”

“That’s not my fault! He was imprisoned in the bowels of Gringotts for his whole life!”

“I’ve seen him literally eat out of your hand.”

“It’s not my fault I can speak his language and they can’t.”

“Not to mention Hal struts around and gives orders to his siblings now.”

“And that’s a bad thing why?”

“He was the runt!”

“Yeah, well, runty guys can grow up and prove themselves. Just asks Neville.”

Charlie rubs at his temples but he’s not really mad. He loves watching Harry interact with the dragons. It made his decision to leave them behind and teach at Hogwarts that much easier. He wasn’t confident with his choice at first and struggled with feeling like he was letting Morgan and Tamsin down by leaving, but Harry helped him through his moments of doubt. Now, Charlie can’t imagine being anywhere else than at Hogwarts. His childhood self would be jumping up and down if he knew what the future held.

“And don’t act like you don’t miss them while we’re gone,” Harry continues. “You may not be able to understand her but Bryony is always pleased when we are there. We, not just me.”

“She is?” Charlie asks dumbfounded. He knows the dragon has a special bond with Harry but he has no idea that Bryony cares for him as well.

“She is. So let’s get this last lecture done with and we can go back to Romania and visit her before my birthday.”

“Ahh, yes. The party you pretend like you don’t want,” Charlie teases him.
He scoffs. “I really don’t, but Tonks has been pushing it and getting Teddy all excited I’m sure. Who am I to spoil a little boy’s fun?”

“And you’re sure that this has nothing to do with another little boy who never got a birthday party growing up?”

Harry digs his foot into the dirt. He clenches and unclenches his fists at his side. Charlie does this sometimes; he pushes repressed thoughts and feelings back to the surface when Harry would rather they stay dead and buried. “I don’t care about that,” he grits out.

Charlie holds up his hands in defense. “Alright. I’ll drop it.”

He kisses Harry on the cheek before going into the lecture hall which, of course, makes Harry seethe even more. How dare he say something like that and then leave? Who is he to make an assumption about a part of Harry’s life that he wishes he could forget? It doesn’t matter that Charlie is one hundred percent right. At least that’s what Harry tries to convince himself of.

When the lecture hall clears out and Charlie thanks the organizers for inviting him, he goes in search of Harry. He finds him sitting on the ground with his head leaning back against a tree. “You ready to go see your dragons?” he asks as he walks up. Harry’s eyes don’t open but somehow Charlie knows he’s heard him.

“You were right,” Harry says simply.

Charlie is cautious. Harry could be talking about anything. And even though he hopes it’s about what he left him with, he doesn’t want to push the issue and be wrong. “Right about what?”

Harry sighs but still doesn’t lift his head or open his eyes. “You know what about.”

“Oh?” Charlie shoots for noncommittal but knows it comes out sounding hopeful.

“Don’t play dumb. The Dursleys were awful and I never had a birthday party and I don’t think I deserve one. Happy?”

Charlie drops down in the grass next to him. “Of course I’m not happy. You don’t think you deserve something as simple as a party thrown by your friends. Why would that make me happy?” He cradles Harry’s face in his hands, forcing him to focus his bright green eyes on his own. “You deserve every happiness. You’ve suffered enough.”

Harry leans his forehead against Charlie’s. “I want to be happy,” he whispers.

“Then what would make you most happy right now?”

Molly is waiting for the kettle to boil when a knock sounds at the door. She opens the door and immediately has an armful of Harry. She looks over her shoulder to where Charlie is closing the door behind them. He gives his mother a nod, as though to say everything is alright but Harry needs this. Molly pats Harry’s back and sways until he starts to pull away. And that’s when she finally gets a good look at him. Only a month has passed but she hardly recognizes the young man standing before her.

Harry’s unruly hair had grown long during the months he spent on the run with Hermione and Ron. After killing Voldemort, Harry chopped it all off to give himself a fresh start. As it grew back he got some fashion advice from Parvati and Lavender and started wearing it somewhere in-between and even uses a little styling product especially made with magical ingredients to help it stay...
manageable. Now it has once again grown out but it looks good and he wants to keep it longer like
this. Add to all that, the laser procedure for his eyes was a success and he no longer needs his
glasses. It’s no surprise that Molly reacts as though she’s only seeing him for the first time.

The whistling of the kettle pulls them apart. “Would you like some tea, Harry?”

“Yes, please.”

“You’re quite welcome. Charlie, dear, please go fetch your father. I believe he’s out tinkering in
his garden shed.”

“Of course, Mum.”

“Sit, Harry. Fill your mum in on everything that’s been going on with you.”

Harry’s birthday party is not quite what he imagined, but everything he could have hoped for. It’s
just their little Grimmauld Place family. Tonks and Narcissa made a banner that Teddy ‘helped’
color, and Hermione and Ron spent the past month working with Molly to learn how to make some
of Harry’s favorite treacle sweets. There are some gifts from their other friends but the largest is
kept back for last.

“This is from myself and Blaise,” Draco says as he levitates the tall box so that it leans against the
wall. At full height it’s just a pinch taller than Harry is.

Harry rips into the paper, more than a little curious about what the two have gotten him. He lifts
away the lid and stares at the contents with disappointment. “I know you disapprove of my
wardrobe, but did you have to get me all black robes? I don’t want to look like Lockhart or
anything but they could have a little color to them.”

“It’s ironic you should mention our old professor,” Blaise drawls. “We got you those for your new
job. You simply must be taken seriously and nothing says serious quite like classic black.”

“My new job?”

Draco rolls his eyes. “The student are going to walk right over you, Harold.”

“Students?”

“Is there an echo in here? Or have you simply lost your head? Yes, your new job as Defense
professor at Hogwarts where you will most certainly be teaching students.”

Harry’s gasps. “WHO TOLD YOU??”

“You did, mate.” Ron looks between the others for support. “At the Leaky? After our ceremony?
Right before you left with Charlie?”

“Harry, I believe you were too intoxicated to remember,” Hermione explains softly. “You’ve been
gone so you haven’t seen, but the Daily Prophet has been publishing nothing but the news since the
night you told us. Apparently McGonagall has been hounded by people trying to send their children
to Hogwarts just so that they can have the famous Harry Potter team them. She’s had to turn away
so many and the castle will likely be at capacity for a while.”

Harry is still gaping. He wanted to tell everyone in his own way, but apparently ‘his own way’ is
standing on a table in a pub. “I…I…“
“I think the words you’re looking for are ‘thank you’.”

“Draco!” Narcissa admonishes, but her son just shrugs.

Charlie finishes getting ready for bed only to find Harry lying atop the covers still fully clothed. He unlaces Harry’s trainers and pulls them off his feet and decides to leave him in the comfortable joggers he’s already wearing. He turns off the lights and slides into bed, pulling the covers up around himself and Harry at the same time.

They’re awoken in the morning by Teddy smacking his little hands on their door and yelling, “HA! HA!”

Harry stretches out like a cat with a groan he can’t hold back. “I love that kid,” he grumbles, “but he has no concept of what ‘too early’ is.”

Charlie’s laugh is rough with sleep. He reaches for his wand and makes the door swing open, allowing Teddy to toddle up to their bed. Harry reaches over the side and plucks the boy between them. Teddy is content to lay between his godfathers, especially once Harry summons one of his toys from the other room.

Tonks pops her head in to see if they’re okay with him or they want her to take him away. Charlie tells her it’s okay and lets her get ready for work. Then he leans up on one elbow so that he can look over Teddy to Harry. “How are you this morning?”

“How are you this morning?”

“They’re excited for you. In their own ways,” he adds, remembering the awfully boring robes that Draco and Blaise went through all the trouble to pick out for him.

“I know, but why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t tell you because I honestly didn’t know. I was either in the toilets or at the bar getting more drinks, but whatever the reason I never heard you say anything.” To put a positive spin on it he says, “Just think of it this way: now you don’t have to call everyone together and tell them. They already know! And the press? It’s old news by now.”

Clearly uninterested in their conversation, Teddy takes his stuffed dragon and hits Harry in the face with it. Harry splutters but Teddy just giggles and stuffs one of the dragon’s wings into his mouth to slobber on.

“Thanks, Ted,” he says dryly.

“You think you’re ready?” Charlie asks him after a bit. “This is a pretty big step in your life.”

Harry’s hand pauses momentarily but then continues its path through Teddy’s soft, pink hair. “I think so, as long as I’ve got you by my side.”

“Nothing could keep us apart.”

“Ha,” Teddy says, not wanting to be left out.
The Epilogue is all that's left! And fair warning, it will be a few days until it's posted.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

This is it! The Epilogue that I swore I wasn't going to write but then changed my mind and did anyway.

A special s/o to: Pashkiradoki_83, Vladimir_Mithrander, bobito, Lytebrytehbrid, and Stargirl1061 for all of your comments!!! I loved talking about the story and Harry Potter in general. You guys rock!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2005, 12 Grimmauld Place

“Georgiana!” Harry yells upstairs. “We’re meant to be at the Burrow in five!”

“I’ll be down in a minute!”

“That’s what you said ten minutes ago!”

“Well this time I mean it!”

He has to resist the urge to growl. Georgiana has been living with them since the summer after her first year at Hogwarts, and she tests Harry’s patience daily. Harry closes his eyes and wonders how this could be the same timid girl who knocked on his office door three years ago.

“Professor Potter?”

Harry looks up from his marking to find a quiet, Gryffindor first year standing half-hidden in his doorway. He and Charlie split the house duties so he’s used to the new students coming to him with their problems. He smiles and motions for her to come in to the small room. “Hello, Georgiana. Take a seat. What can I help you with?”

“Well, umm, I was just wondering…” she trails off nervously.

“You can talk to me about anything,” he says in a soft, soothing voice. “Or I can find a female professor, if that’s what you need?”

“No, no, it’s nothing like that. I just, er, well… I wanted to know if I was allowed to stay at Hogwarts?”

“Over the winter hols? Of course. I used to stay here every year.”

Georgiana ducks her head picks at the hem of her jumper. “And Easter?”

“A lot of students choose to stay here during that break. It’s much smaller and the older ones are preparing for their OWLs and NEWTs.”

Her voice is so small and frail it nearly breaks Harry’s heart when she asks, “And the summer?”
His chest constricts and his throat feels like it’s closing. He remembers every awful moment at the Dursleys. Getting locked into his room. Getting beat up by Dudley’s gang. Having to lock Hedwig in her cage. Not getting to use magic. Never seeing his friends. Working until he was too tired to eat the meager scraps that Vernon and Petunia let him have. No. This is not about him. This is about the girl sitting across from him.

Harry slows his breathing down and wills his eyes back open. Already dreading the answer he asks, “Why don’t you want to go home in the summer, Georgiana?”

She shrugs but gives no answer.

“Georgiana.” Harry gets up, walks around his desk, and kneels down beside her. “I didn’t want to go home either. Hogwarts has always been my only true home. I get it. You can trust me.”

“I don’t have a home,” she finally tells him. Her big, brown eyes are shiny. “I lived at the orphanage before I came here. And now that I’ve been here…” One lone tear rolls down her cheek. “I don’t want to go back. I can’t go back.”

While Harry offers his shoulder for her to cry on, he imagines every awful scenario possible happening at the orphanage. He thinks of Tom Riddle and wonders just how close Georgiana and the others are to becoming just like him. When she’s quieted down, Harry asks her what the orphanage is like and thankfully it’s nothing as bad as he was picturing. They simply have too many children and not enough of anything to go around. Harry isn’t exactly sure what he can do to help but if there’s one thing that being rich and in a position of power has taught him, it’s that you can’t go wrong throwing an obscene amount of money at a worthy cause. But he can worry about that later. Right now, he has to help Georgiana.

“Tell you what, let me talk to Professor McGonagall and I’ll see what we can do. Alright?”

She sniffs and wipes her nose with the back of her hand. “And she’ll listen to you?”

Harry huffs a laugh. “I wouldn’t put it like that, but the Headmistress will be open to talking about solutions. I can promise you that.”

Georgiana came to live with Harry and Charlie at Grimmauld Place that summer. It was definitely strange at first- especially when Harry was just recently gone his own teenage years- but slowly they all learned how to function as a cohesive unit. Charlie was the natural parent that Harry knew he would be, and Giana blossomed under their care. She started her second year a much more outgoing individual. And it was during Christmas of her second year that, in front of all the Weasleys, she asked Harry and Charlie to officially adopt her (becoming the moment that Harry recalls whenever he needs to cast his patronus). Harry wasn’t sure about passing on his ‘Potter’ name to anyone, so he spoke first with Charlie and then asked Molly for permission to use the Prewett name for their daughter. He never realized how easy it would be to make so many people happy at the same time (and without even having to kill someone to do it).

Feeling much calmer now, Harry calls upstairs once more, “One minute! No excuses!” Then he walks into the sitting room and grumpily leaning his elbows on the back of the nearest chair. “We’re going to be late,” he complains to Charlie.

This isn’t the first time they’ve been in this exact position. Charlie knows he should be more
empathetic but he can’t help himself from laughing. “You know Mum won’t care. She’ll just be happy to see the kids.”

“Gran Molly! Gran Molly!” Wesley chants, bouncing up and down at his place next to Charlie.

Charlie reaches down to ruffle the boy’s hair. “That’s right, Wes. We’re going to see Gran Molly and everyone else at the Burrow.”

“For Papa’s birthday!!” he finishes with more bouncing.

Wesley has been living with them for less than a year but, being that the boy is only five years old, he’s taken to calling Charlie ‘Daddy’ and Harry ‘Papa’ already. His adoption isn’t even official yet but Wes is very much a part of the family. He and Teddy get along like a house on fire, and he looks at Victoire like she hung the moon. Draco finds it endlessly funny that the boy’s name could very well end up being Wesley Weasley, but the joke always falls flat when they look at Wes’s happy face.

“I told you it would only take a minute.” Georgiana is dressed in the jumper that Molly knit for her two years ago and a pair of denim jeans.

Harry wonders what could possibly have taken her so long to get ready, but chooses to keep his mouth shut about the issue. “So you did. Cheers.”

The scowl she gives is very reminiscent of the one Charlie makes every morning when Harry wakes him up. Harry hides his smile as to not upset her any further. He just pushes everyone toward the floo so that they can get going already. Charlie picks up Wes and they go together. Georgiana insists she can do it on her own. That means Harry is the last one through and by the time he stumbles out into the living room of the Burrow, Molly already is hugging the kids close to her. Hermione admonishes them for being late (of course, parenthood wouldn’t slow down ‘the brightest witch of her age’) but the others don’t mind.

Molly and Ron (who has turned out to be a good chef, much to Hermione’s delight) prepared a huge lunch full of Harry’s favorite foods, and so everyone sits down to enjoy a delicious— if not loud— family meal. After the plates have been cleared they relocate to the living room to give Harry his birthday presents. It hasn’t gotten any easier for Harry to accept gifts, but he’s gotten better at reminding himself that they’re doing it out of love. He just makes sure to spoil them back come Christmas.

Ron and Hermione give him a hand-written certificate for one free weekend of childcare. Charlie waggles his eyebrows suggestively, making half the room groan and the other half laugh. Then Ron clears his throat. “I, umm…I’m free to get Wes and Teddy after they’re done at their primary school, too.”

“How can you do that?” Charlie asks with narrowed eyes. “Did you get sacked?”

Ron bites his lip at and looks to Hermione, who pats him on the knee encouragingly. He takes a deep breath and says, “I talked to Robards and…I quit.”

“But you love being an Auror,” Percy says in disbelief.

“And you’re bloody good at it,” Tonks adds.

“I know,” Ron looks over at the small, wrapped bundle in Arthur’s arms, “but just the thought of leaving Rosie makes me mental. I went on one overnight assignment and came home nearly crying. I talked to Hermione right away about quitting.”
Bill reaches over to ruffle Ron’s hair. “I’m proud of you, little brother.”

Ron waves him off but can’t hid the blush behind his freckles. “Alright, alright; enough about me. This is Harry’s big day.”

“It’s just my birthday,” Harry protests, but then someone is shoving another present into his hands.

He gets drawings from Teddy and Victoire, samples of all the new Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes courtesy of Fred and George, a tin of treacle fudge from Molly, some broom cleaning supplies from Tonks, and a set of books that he had been eyeing for a while from Percy. Arthur makes a big deal out of giving Harry a tabletop pinball machine. He refuses to say where he got it from, so it leads Harry to believe that it’s a confiscated item that he took from his job at the Ministry.

Harry sits surrounded by his family and the small tokens that they’ve chosen to show they care. He watches everyone talk and play and laugh, and he thinks that it can’t get much better than this. But then Charlie kisses his cheek before walking into the next room. He returns carrying something large and wrapped in shimmery red paper. The room falls silent as he stands in front of Harry expectantly.

“What’s that, Charlie?” Harry doesn’t like being put on the spot like this. “And why didn’t you bring it out with the rest?”

“I know how you feel about this stuff so I was going to wait and give it to you at home, but I just couldn’t put it off anymore!”

“What is it?” he asks again.

“Open it and find out.”

It’s obvious that Charlie is near to bursting with nervous energy, so Harry takes pity on him and starts to unwrap the present. It’s a simple frame and Harry turns it around to see what photograph Charlie had enlarged. But it’s not a photograph at all. It’s a copy of Georgiana’s adoption records. Harry likes this a lot. He runs his fingers over the glass above his and Charlie’s signatures. And then he notices the second document in the second half of the frame. His head tilts in confusion as he reads over a second adoption record, this one for ‘Wesley Potter’. Charlie has already signed it and all that’s missing is his own name.

Harry’s head snaps up to Charlie. He opens his mouth to ask but he can’t get the words to come out. Thankfully, Charlie already knows. “Blaise pushed the paperwork through for us. I already planned on framing Giana’s, but this worked out perfectly. All you have to do is sign it and send the duplicate back to Blaise. I know the first time you said you weren’t comfortable with using the Potter name, but Draco has a point that the name ‘Wesley Weasley’ is just asking for trouble. And besides, Fleur and Hermione already gave the world more Weasleys so I think-”

“I love it.”

Charlie’s mouth tilts up on one side. “Really?”

“Really!” Harry jumps up from his seat and throws his arms around Charlie’s neck. Everyone cheers, clapping and whooping. Harry has to yell into Charlie’s ear to be heard. “Does Wes know yet?”

Charlie shakes his head. “Nope. I thought I’d give you the honor.”

Harry calls for Wesley and Georgiana, then picks Wes up and holds him between them. Charlie
slings an arm around their daughter. “We have some good news.”

“Are we going to have more sweets??” the boy asks hopefully.

Harry throws his head back and laughs. “No, sorry. We’ve had enough sweets for one day. This is different good news. We just found out that you’re going to be staying with us forever!”

“Yay!”

Charlie isn’t sure that Wesley really understands what’s going on, but he’s happy and Harry’s happy and Georgiana is holding them all tightly with a smile of her own. So the future can bring whatever it wants, because Charlie’s not going to give this up for anything.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH for reading and commenting!!!! I see each one (I get email alerts) and appreciate each one more than you can ever know.

I'm in the process of writing another story (it's Harry/Draco but other than that does not have any of the other traditional pairings). I want to get it all done before I start posting any parts of it, so it'll be a while. Plus there's that whole "work" and "real life" thing...whatever that is.

I hope everyone stays well, and thank you again for reading! :) :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!