Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

by GhostDragon42

Summary

When Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley wake in the aftermath of the Chamber of Secrets with a mysterious tattoo burned into their necks, they are understandably scared for their lives. But when the true nature of the mark is revealed, they are forced on an epic journey to discover just who placed the Gemini Curse upon them, and why.
Disclaimer:

“Ghost, you stupid idiot! Get off your ass!” Ghost, panicking at the sound of his girlfriend’s screams of rage, jumped to his feet and dived behind the black leather couch as a bolt of ominous purple light streaked overhead.

“Yes, dear?” He called from his hiding place, desperately thinking of what he had done. He started ticking off dates on his fingers. It wasn’t Valentine’s Day. It wasn’t Mother’s Day. It wasn’t anyone’s Birthday… at least he didn’t think it was.

“You almost forgot the disclaimer!”

Ghost’s face went pale. He knew he’d forgotten something. Frowning, he looked up at the clock on the far side of the room.

“Don’t worry Miracle, I’ve got it covered!”

Miracle, a woman with green eyes and long blonde hair, accented by red highlights at its tips, stuck her head, and her phaser borrowed from the Captain Piccard of Earth 1231, over the couch. Ghost gulped and turned towards the window behind him. It was not a normal window, as instead of looking out on the Pacific Ocean outside the house, it looked out onto a sea of red liquid dust, punctuated by the occasional sphere of blue light that would float past.

Looking at the window like he was on the Office, he cringed as Miracle’s phaser pressed against his neck.

“The world of Harry Potter, its characters, locations or creatures are all the property of J.K. Rowling, a goddess among mortals I could never hope to emulate. I merely wish to thank her by playing in her sandbox.”

Ghost smirked.

“Now, sit back, relax, and enjoy the….” Ghost was cut off by a phaser blast to the back of his head.

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**Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse**

**Act I: The Prisoner of Azkaban**

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**Act I, Chapter 1: The Gemini Rune**

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” Anneliese Celestial stated as she walked down the cold stone floor of the Chamber of Secrets.

“So, what? We should just leave them down here to die?” Clara Hunter asked her. The red-haired woman walked confidently three steps in front of Anneliese, golden robes trimmed in white
“Yeh but they won’t die, will they? That’s not how this timeline works. Don’t tell me it’s not. I was a Harry Potter fangirl long before you ascended Clara.” Anneliese pointed out. To a mortal, Anneliese Celestial was a sight to behold. Dressed in a flowing white strapless gown, with crystal blue eyes, honey blonde hair and wings made of crackling silver energy protruding from her shoulders, she appeared like an Angel in every sense of the word. The word Angel was, of course, the perfect word to describe the woman, because that was precisely what she was.

“The Great Destroyer reaped massive destruction across all of creation, and it’s our fault! You’re going to let this world decay into the Dark for the sake of the Accords?” Riker Celestial, Anneliese’s brother, snapped from his position to Anneliese’s right. He was dressed in dark blue, and red armour with a dark cloak slung across his shoulders, and a strange symbol of a four-pointed star over his chest, only the fourth arm of the star appeared to be broken.

“You cannot possibly be blaming yourself for what happened,” Anneliese exclaimed as they neared the centre of the chamber, where the body of a giant, dead, snake lay prone on the floor.

“I’m not blaming myself thank you very much. I’m blaming us, plural. If we had just paid more attention to what was happening at the World Forge, we could have prevented all this.”

“Can we please stop arguing and just do what we came to do?” Clara asked as she walked around the serpent’s giant head, stepping gingerly over a ruby-encrusted sword covered in black venom lying on the ground.

Hidden by the snake’s body were three figures; a boy with messy black hair, a girl with long red hair like Clara’s, and a magnificent bird with red and gold feathers who was standing guard over the two children. Discarded half a meter away, was a black book with a fang from the dead creature plunged through its centre.

“This is exactly what happened in the original timeline you do realise. Why aren’t they awake?” Anneliese asked.

“I don’t know.” Clara pulled a metal rod carved with runes from her robes and waved it over the two unconscious figures. “My only guess is that they’re suffering from the same damage that the others we have visited are. The Destroyer is nothing if not cunning, and It has left its taint across the Orrery of Worlds. It knew full well who to target. The Multiverse’s greatest heroes. You were there when we had to heal the Superman of Earth 0. If someone that powerful and important to the cosmic balance could be tainted by It, what chance do they have?”

Anneliese sighed and ran a hand through her hair.

“The Multiversity Accords expressly forbid what your about to do, you do realise that.”

“Who cares! This is a matter of life and death. And besides, the Multiversity cleared the League of Heroes to do everything in its power to rectify the damage done. At least we don’t have another Incursion Crisis on our hands. That was a nightmare,” Riker groaned.

Clara had apparently ignored both of them and proceeded to drain a strange tattoo of a black dragon breathing a red phoenix wreathed in flames from its mouth from her arm and into the tip of her silver wand. She placed the tip over the red and green scar on the boy’s arm and let the ink flow beneath his skin. The injury vanished, replaced by the strange marking. The sorceress moved to the back of the boy’s neck and began to trace a new pattern. It was two vertical lines, bisected by two horizontal lines so that it looked almost like the Roman numeral for two. Turning to the girl, she traced the same
pattern onto her neck, before stepping back and sliding her wand back into her robes.

“I’ve done everything I can for them. Let’s hope it’s enough to save this world.”

“We’ve done enough damage to the timeline of this world as it is. We need to go.” Anneliese said, before vanishing in a flash of white light.

“Bloody Angels,” Riker moaned before he too vanished.

“Harry! Ginny!” A voice called from the other side of the chamber, and, with a grin on her face, Clara Hunter disappeared from the Chamber of Secrets in a swirl of golden dust.

Of all the dreams that Harry Potter could remember having, the one he was having right now was definitely the strangest, and that was saying something. He was standing on a sandy shore, waves crashing around his bare feet. Harry had never seen the ocean, so he wasn’t entirely sure how he could be seeing it in a dream. He was also sure the sea surrounding Britain was very cold, so why the water was nice and warm around his toes, he honestly had no idea. Across the ocean, however, was what looked like a city. And a magnificent one at that. Silver towers soaring into the sky, all of them seemingly floating on crystal clear water. Gliding around the towers were a dozen Dragons and Phoenixes of different colours, sizes and hues. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. But he felt so lonely. Like there was something deep inside that was missing from him. And every part of his mind screamed at him that the thing that was missing was inside the city. And he had no way to get to it. The ocean was so vast, and Harry did not know how to swim. Nor was there any bridge between the beach Harry was standing on, and the silver city across the sea. So, Harry was forced to stand in the shallows and stare in longing and awe at the towers. And he was forced to watch in horror as the sky above the city darkened, and lightning flashed from the clouds, falling down upon the tallest tower, obliterating it in a flash of light.

Harry screamed as he snapped his eyes open and bolted upright. His hand instantly went to the mark on the back of his neck. The black ink burned to the touch. Harry groaned and fell back against the misshapen pillow of his bed in the smallest bedroom of number 4 Private Drive. This was the fifth time he had watched as the Silver City was destroyed from above, and he couldn’t for the life of him figure out how to get there. He just knew that if he could get to the city, he could find out what the force was after, and repel it. And maybe, just maybe, if he reached the city, he could find whatever piece of him was trapped inside.

Harry wasn’t sure how he knew exactly, but he did. He knew ever since he had woken up after the first dream in the hospital wing, that something had vanished from him down in the Chamber of Secrets. He felt this near-constant sense of loss. It was always there, gnawing at the back of his head. Or more accurately, the back of his neck. That had also been a shock when he woke up in the Hospital Wing. According to Professor Dumbledore, the black ink tattoo had been on both his and Ginny’s necks after Ron had found them unconscious in the Chamber. The Headmaster had no idea how it had gotten there, or what it meant. He had tried to remove them, but everything he had tried had sent him flying back across the room. Dumbledore believed that the tattoo was some form of
curse bestowed upon the pair in Tom Riddle’s final moments, similar to Harry’s lightning bolt scar being a relic of Voldemort’s first attempt to kill him as a baby.

The scar gave Harry the power of Parseltongue – the ability to speak snake language – and the power to sense when Voldemort was nearby. So, the question Harry constantly asked himself was whether Voldemort’s latest curse would give him any new ones. Harry was still conflicted over whether the tattoo was actually a curse. Sure, the sense of longing and depravity he constantly felt was annoying and uncomfortable, but it also didn’t seem like the type of curse Voldemort would use. Wouldn’t a person like Voldemort – supposedly the most powerful Dark Wizard of the century – use a curse to inflict pain on the bearer, like his scar did? Harry wasn’t sure, but he felt there was more to the tattoo than he or even Dumbledore knew. There was also the question of why Ginny had the same mark in the same place. Was it a coincidence? Or was it something else? He needed to talk to Ginny when he saw her again, to see if she was experiencing similar or different effects.

A sharp throbbing brought his attention to his right arm. Madam Pomfrey called it Phantom Pain, caused by the Basilisk Venom he had taken in before Fawkes the Phoenix had healed him. Despite the lack of a scar, or any trace of the venom in his system, the point on his arm where the wound had been gave the occasional twinge of pain. It was nothing compared to what his Uncle used to do to him, but it was annoying.

Realising he wasn’t getting back to sleep, Harry rolled on his side and looked at the alarm clock. It was three in the morning. Damn.

Suddenly there was a tap on the window. Hedwig, Harry’s owl companion, was hovering outside the window, a large package in her claws. Frowning, Harry opened the window and let the snowy owl inside. Hedwig dropped the box on the end of the bed before landing on her perch, tucking her head under her wing, and going to sleep.

Harry sat back down on his bed and picked up the package. It was wrapped in brown paper with a letter taped to the front. Harry’s birthday had been a few days ago, so why he was receiving presents now was weird, to say the least. He had also sent Hedwig away, as Aunt Marge was currently staying in the house, and Harry refused to risk his Aunt’s wrath by having her around. Harry opened the letter and gasped when he realised who it was from.

Dear Harry

I’m sorry this is so late, I didn’t know when your birthday was, and Ron wouldn’t tell me. He said, “Why would Harry want a present from you?” and stormed off. But anyway. As you already know, we’re in Egypt with Bill at the moment, and the day we got here him, and Charlie sat me down and asked me about everything that happened last year. It wasn’t very fun, but I found it sort of therapeutic, in a way. Their approach was certainly better than Mum’s method of forgetting it ever happened or Ron and Percy’s of treating me like I’m made of glass. Bill was especially interested in our tattoo. I told him how we have no idea what it is or how it got there, and that Dumbledore didn’t know either and was going to look into it. Then Bill said that had to be... well, he used a rather vulgar word I don’t think I should repeat, but he said that Dumbledore had to be lying, because Bill recognised the mark instantly. He said it’s a rune called Gemini and it means “together” or “bond”. Apparently, Ancient Runes can have different meanings depending on the context of their drawing or something. I’m not really sure. He also said it’s one of the most powerful runes known to Wizard-kind because it’s one of the twelve Zodiac Runes. Bill’s a curse breaker, and he got an Outstanding on his Ancient Runes NEWT, so he knows what he’s talking about. I also told him about the weird stuff that’s been happening to me since I woke up. Not like the Diary. But still weird. Professor Dumbledore has visited me three times since we woke up in the Hospital Wing. And every night after he visits, I have the same dream. That I’m trapped in a city with silver towers that I’ve
never seen before, and every time I’m there the city gets attacked by something. The first time it was a tidal wave, the second time an invasion of some kind, the third an explosion in the centre and the fourth another flood. It’s like the dream is trying to get me to search for something in the city, but every time I try, it gets attacked before I can find it. Charlie thinks it has something to do with the Gemini Rune, that maybe it’s trying to send me a message of some kind. He says Dragons communicate like that sometimes. It’s one of the things he’s researching at the reserve. There’s also the feeling of longing that seems to be always stuck with me. I can’t shake it. It’s like a piece of me is missing, and I’m trying to find it.

Bill says he’s going to keep researching, and he’s agreed that if Dumbledore is lying to us that keeping it secret from him is a must. We need to know why he lied, and what else he’s keeping from us. He did get blown across the room when he tried to remove it, so it’s definitely something he doesn’t like. But who knows what it means for us.

Either way, I think we need to talk when we see each other again.

Attached is my late birthday present to you that I’m sending with Hedwig, who showed up out of the blue today as I was trying to convince Errol to take it to you. Your owl is really smart just saying. It’s a book on Ancient Runes, particularly the Zodiac Runes. I have Bill’s old copy, so I figured you should have one to and bought one at a flea market here while Mum wasn’t looking. I didn’t know whether you’re taking Ancient Runes this year and figured if you are it could help, or if you aren’t it could be interesting to learn more about this. I also put a small necklace I found with the twelve zodiac symbols on it in with the book. It’s not much, but I thought you might like it.

Hope you had a good birthday.

Love Ginny.

So, Ginny was experiencing the same things he was. And he would bet all the considerable money in his vault that those dreams she was having coincided precisely with his. And why would Dumbledore have lied? He definitely needed to know more about the tattoo, or the Gemini Rune as Bill had called it. Putting the letter aside, Harry ripped away the wrapping paper to reveal a book with a gold and white cover, with the words Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations by Riker O’Neill embossed across the front.

Placing the book in his trunk and promising himself that he would read it as soon as Aunt Marge was gone, he quickly bundled up the wrapping paper and shoved it in the bin. As he did so, a small golden amulet fell onto the floor. Picking it up he smiled as he admired the simple gold chain. It was a circular pendant with twelve small white symbols around the outside. There were several dents and marks in the metal, but he put the necklace around his neck anyway. He lay back on his very uncomfortable bed and drifted off to sleep, the smile never leaving his face.
Harry stood alone on Magnolia Crescent wondering what exactly he was going to do now. He had just run out of Privet Drive after blowing up his Aunt Marge for insulting his parents. And he felt good. Really good. He had this odd sense of freedom mixed with pride and satisfaction. He hated Aunt Marge, and he hated the Dursley’s, and now he had given them a piece of his mind. A tiny bit of payback for all the years of torment. And he was proud of himself for standing up to them. The only problem, he had nowhere to go. The Weasley’s were still in Egypt so the Burrow wasn’t an option and Hermione was in France. He supposed he could go to Hogwarts, but the school was closed for the summer, and the only person there was another person he didn’t want to see: Dumbledore. The man who had lied to him about the Gemini Rune stuck to his neck. So where could he go?

Then the realisation hit him. He was a criminal. He had just used magic to blow up his aren’t. Underage magic. He had already received one notice from the Ministry about using Underage magic, now he would be expelled from Hogwarts for sure.

A searing pain ran through his arm, and he looked down to see a black marking start to trace its way over his skin, before vanishing before he could get a good look. Shaking his head to clear it, Harry stared at his arm. The pain was gone, and there was no evidence of any marking, so he assumed it had just been a trick of the light combined with a bout of Phantom Pain.

Well, if he was already going to be expelled, what could a little more magic hurt? He couldn’t go back to the Dursley’s. He couldn’t go to the Burrow. He had nowhere to stay. Unless he made one. But to do that he would need money. And for money, he needed to get to Gringotts, the Wizarding Bank. Harry opened his trunk and burrowed around in it for his money bag. He still had about a hundred Galleons and fifty pounds from his last visit. That should be enough to get him to the Leaky Cauldron, the pub that hid the entrance to Diagon Alley, the Wizarding district of London. Pulling out the money bag and shoving it in his pocket, Harry fished around for his other most prized possession. His father’s Invisibility Cloak. Pulling the silvery cloak from the trunks innards, he shoved that in his other pocket before shutting the lid. Holding his wand, he pointed it at the trunk. The shrinking spell was a third-year spell, but he had read about it in his Charms textbook, and he was reasonably good at Charms. The only problem was he had never tried it before.

Taking a deep breath, Harry held his wand steady.

“Reducio!”
A tingling erupted in Harry’s arm, and the trunk, with everything inside it, shrunk to the size of a peanut.

“Yes!” He cried, jumping up and down in the air. He scooped up the shrunken trunk and slipped it into his pocket. Now he just needed a taxi.

The rune on the back of Harry’s neck suddenly burned a white-hot pain, and Harry jerked around involuntarily. Standing on the sidewalk was a shaggy-haired black dog. The pain in his arm intensified for a second and Harry raised his wand at the creature. But the pain vanished as fast as it appeared, almost as if it had decided that the dog wasn’t a threat.

Lowering his wand, Harry pulled the Invisibility Cloak out of his pocket and draped it over his shoulders. He placed a finger over his lips and winked at the dog, before pulling up the hood and vanishing.

Harry trudged along the road for a few blocks until he reached the train station. Thankfully it wasn’t too late at night, so there were still some taxis parked out front. Stealthily removing his cloak, he hoped in one, gave the driver all the muggle money he had and asked him to get him as close to Charing Cross Road as he could. Thankfully for Harry, despite going ten pounds over, the driver brought him all the way to the Charing Cross Tube Station. Harry was surprised, as Uncle Vernon had always said that Taxi drivers were stingy with their fares, but Harry figured that may have been because Uncle Vernon was always rude to them. Also, his excess weight may make him cost more than an ordinary person.

Harry walked up the road and breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the familiar sign indicating the Leaky Cauldron hanging off a run-down building. Ducking back beneath the invisibility cloak Harry walked into the pub behind a rather tall witch that looked like Professor McGonagall, the Transfiguration teacher at Hogwarts. Harry carefully avoided bumping into anyone and made his way out to the brick wall behind the inn. Taping the bricks in the pattern burned into his mind, Harry slowly made his way into Diagon Alley, hoping beyond hope that Gringotts was still open this late. As he walked down the alley, he couldn’t help but notice the numerous wanted posters plastered across the walls.

Have you seen this Wizard?

Below it was a picture of the same man Harry had seen on the Dursley’s tv.

Sirius Orion Black

Wanted on 14 accounts of Murder!

Known Supporter of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named!

Do not attempt to approach!

Notify the Ministry of Magic Immediately if seen!

Fortunately, it seemed his luck would hold: Gringotts was open. Harry pulled off the Invisibility Cloak and slowly walked inside the white marble building. Stepping up to a teller, he tried very hard not to let his voice crack.
“Hello. I was wondering if I could head down to my vault if it’s not too late of course.” The Goblin at the teller looked up from his paper and stared at Harry with dark beady eyes.

“Name.”

“Harry Potter.” The goblin’s eyes’ went wide, and he turned around and shouted, “Griphook! Mr Potter has finally arrived, please alert Director Ragnok immediately.” The goblin turned back to a very confused Harry. How had they known he was coming? Had the ministry alerted them to his underage magic and they were going to hand him over? Harry couldn’t help but notice that every other goblin and wizard in the bank was now staring at him.

“If you would follow me, Mr Potter, we’ve been expecting you.” The goblin hoped down from his desk and beckoned Harry through a door in the wall behind him. Harry followed him down a short corridor with marble walls before arriving at a stone door. It swung open silently, and Harry stepped inside.

He was in a large round office, with a roof so tall it had to be enchanted because Harry couldn’t even see it. It was lit by five torches in brackets around the walls, and the desk and chairs in the centre of the room seemed to be made from solid gold. Behind the counter was another chair, but this one was high backed and encrusted with jewels. This was a room built to impress, and to intimidate.

“Take a seat, Mr Potter, Director Ragnok will be here shortly,” another Goblin, who stood next to the desk said. Harry recognised him as the goblin that had taken him down to his vault in his first year: Griphook. Harry sat down on one of the golden seats. They were much more comfortable than they looked.

“Um, Mr Griphook, have I done anything wrong?” Harry asked as the stone door slid shut behind him.

“It is simply Griphook Mr Potter. And no, not that I am aware of at least. There is simply a rather urgent matter that the Director must speak with you about. In fact, your arrival is somewhat later than we expected, considering we did issue you a summons in the last week of May.”

“May?” Harry exclaimed, “I haven’t received any mail from Gringotts if that’s what you mean by a summons.” Griphook frowned.

“That is a serious issue in and of itself, Mr Potter.” Standing at the back of the room was another Goblin. He was taller than Griphook and dressed in some type of armour designed to look like a muggle business suit.

“At any rate, it is good to finally make your acquaintance. I am Director Ragnok. I run the British branch of Gringotts International Wizarding Bank Services.” Ragnok walked up to Harry and offered him a hand. Harry, trying very hard not to show any weakness of any kind, gripped the hand firmly.

“It’s an honour to meet you, Director.” Ragnok smiled before moving to sit in the high-backed chair behind the desk.

“Mr Potter, unless I am very much mistaken you received the Gemini Rune on May the 30th of this year. Is that correct?”

May 30th. The day of the Chamber of Secrets.

“That’s correct.”
“May I… May I see it?” Ragnok seemed to hesitate slightly, his voice hitching in what Harry could only describe as anticipation. Harry showed his neck to the Goblin and could easily hear the gasp of amazement that slipped from his lips.

“Incredible,” Ragnok whispered

The rune seemed to heat up as the Goblin stared.

“My apologies Mr Potter, it is very rare to see a human with a perfect runic symbol marked upon them, the Gemini Rune even more so. I do not know whether you are aware of this, but the Gemini Rune, of all the Zodiac Runes, indeed of all the runes ever drawn, is the most difficult to produce in its perfect form, as it requires two exact marks upon two synchronised hosts. It is an honour to witness. Forgive me for asking, as it is none of my business, but who marked you? and why?”

Harry felt his stomach sink. Yet another thing that made him different from everyone else.

“I don’t know. I woke up with the rune in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts after I saved Ginny Weasley in the Chamber of Secrets. Ginny has one too. Exact same place, exact same image.” Harry told him.

Ragnok frowned again, “That is yet another cause for concern. Unfortunately, I do not think I can help you with that. The other concerns, I can aid you in,” Ragnok said, sitting back in his seat.

“You mentioned Miss Ginevra Molly Weasley as the other individual bearing the Gemini Rune. That aligns with our own records. You see Mr Potter, upon yours and Miss Weasley’s receipt of the Gemini Rune, our records forcibly updated themselves. It would appear, thanks to the connection you now share through the Gemini Rune, Miss Weasley now has access to your vaults.”

“Vaults?”

“Indeed. She can now access, only with your permission of course, your trust vault, which has been updated to 2,000 Galleons per year refreshing to account for the second user. She also has access to the Potter Family Vault. However, she, like yourself, cannot legally enter this vault without your legal guardian until you reach the age of majority or seventeen years of age.”

Woah. Not only did he have a second vault that he didn’t know about and couldn’t access without a guardian –whoever that was supposed to be considering he doubted it was his Aunt or Uncle – but Ginny could now use his Trust Vault too. It wasn’t that he minded much. It was more that he had a second vault that belonged to his parents that no one had bothered to tell him about.

“It would seem that you also had no knowledge of the Family vault either.” Ragnok sighed, “This is going to be a lot of paperwork.”

“Just out of curiosity, who is my guardian?” Harry asked.

“One Sirius Orion Black,” Ragnok stated, and all the blood drained from Harry’s face.

“Isn’t… Isn’t he a criminal?”

“Perhaps. As far as I am aware, Mr Black was never given a trial. He was simply captured and thrown in prison. I do know that Mr Black was a good friend of your father, as he visited this bank many times with James Potter as both children and adults.”

“By why would my Dad be friends with Voldemort’s greatest supporter?”
Ragnok grinned, “Another interesting question. Would it perhaps interest you to know that Mr Black was cast out from his family at 16 because he refused to follow its dark traditions? That doesn’t seem like someone who would support Voldemort to me.” Harry couldn’t help but notice that Ragnok said Voldemort’s name without flinching.

“So, you think he’s innocent?”

“I do not know what the truth is Mr Potter. But, I would advise you to keep an open mind.” Ragnok looked down at his paper.

“I will endeavour to discover why you are not receiving messages from Gringotts and make it a top priority for the bank's security. If your mail is being intercepted or monitored be sure that the culprit will be dealt with. If you wish to learn more about Ancient Runes, I would suggest Riker O’Neill’s Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations. It is quite expensive, but it is an excellent read and by far the best source of information on the topic.”

“I already have a copy but thank you,” Harry said. The book was expensive? But Ginny said she got it at a flea market. That warranted a point in their much-awaited discussion the next time he could see her. That and the vault thing.

“Excellent. If that is all, Griphook will show you to your trust vault. Be sure to come in again sometime before school resumes to see if we have made any progress.” Ragnok nodded to Griphook before snapping his fingers. A door appeared in the wall behind him, probably leading down to the vaults.

“Thank you for everything Director,” Harry said as Griphook led him away.

“A pleasure Mr Potter. A pleasure.”

After a quick ride on the Gringotts carts that had Harry wishing they came with buckets, Griphook led him to his Trust Vault. Harry opened the door with his key and stepped inside. The piles of gold hadn’t moved an inch since he had last been inside. Harry had only been inside the vault once before, and at the time he had been rather focussed on marvelling at the sheer size of the piles of money, but now, after everything that had happened that day, marvelling at the gold was the last thing on his mind.

The Gemini Rune was not binding him to Voldemort like Dumbledore had said. Instead, it was a bond with Ginny somehow. He just didn’t know how or why. Then there was the whole family vault no one had told him about, but he decided worrying about that could wait till later. He wouldn’t even be able to access it until his last year at Hogwarts. Also, someone was intercepting his letters from Gringotts. Not good. Of course, then there was the whole he may have been expelled from Hogwarts and now didn’t have anywhere to stay thing. He supposed he could stay at the Leaky Cauldron for the night, but he would have to be gone in the morning. Where would he go then?

Harry was absent-mindedly putting as much money into his pouch as he could so he could be excused for not noticing the small silver box sitting behind the money pile until he kicked it with his boot. It was a small rectangular box, like a jewellery box, and tapped to the top was a note that said, ‘Don’t let anyone see this! Love Mum.’ Forcing the small ball of excitement down, Harry picked up the box and his money pouch and left the vault.

Once he was back on the surface, he exited the bank with a friendly wave to Griphook and made his way to the Leaky Cauldron. The barkeeper, Tom, was more than happy to give Harry a room for the
night. He paid in advance and followed the elderly man up-stairs to a room. The room itself was nice enough. A single bed, a desk and chairs, a small wardrobe and a window. It was about twice the size of his bedroom at Privet Drive. As soon as Tom closed the door, Harry pulled out the box and placed it on the desk. He opened the lid, and his heart plummeted when he saw the only thing inside was a small silver amulet. The charm had a symbol that looked kind of like the letter A, but without the cross-bridge and with a circle above the apex. Harry ran his finger over the pendant and couldn’t help the frown that crossed his face. He had hoped that it was maybe something from his parents, a letter maybe. But it seemed like good news was not something Harry was going to come by today. The only other thing in the box was a piece of scrap paper that said the word ‘Home.’ Yawning, Harry ran his finger over the symbol.

“Home?” he whispered to himself as he stared at it. Then, as he said the word. The symbol glowed a brilliant white, and everything around him seemed to blur, the dark colours of the room blurring together, before being replaced by new brighter ones. Then everything came back into focus, and Harry realised he was not in Kansas anymore.

He was standing in a brightly lit room, with white, red and gold painted walls. On the carpet was the image of the Gryffindor lion mid-roar. The room he was in was like an entrance hall. There were four doors around the room, all different colours and all closed. Dangling from the roof was a small chandelier. Slowly moving down the hallway, Harry saw that, mounted on the wall, was a large clock like the one in the Weasley family living room. Except the names and locations were all different. There were six golden arms attached to the clock labelled: Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, Prongs and Jewel. Unlike the Weasley clock, these arms didn’t have pictures. The arm marked Moony was pointing at the words, Running on the wild side – whatever that meant; Padfoot was pointed at the word Mortal Peril; Wormtail was sitting on Abroad; and Prongs and Jewel were both pointed at Lost, but it looked like someone had written the word Forever next to it in black ink.

Harry was smart enough to realise that Prongs and Jewel were his Mum and Dad and that Lost Forever was a nice way of saying Dead.

Turning to the left, Harry walked into what appeared to be a kitchen. It was much nicer than Aunt Petunia’s kitchen; with a muggle dishwasher, a stove, a large oven, three cauldrons of different sizes, both a walk-in pantry and walk-in fridge, a large dining table and an elegant granite bench with several bar stools beneath it. The only weird thing, there was an open beer on the counter. Keeping a firm grip on his wand, Harry picked up the beer. It was definitely a Muggle brand, but it was quite warm, so it had been sitting there for a while, meaning the last person to use it had left some time ago, most likely in a hurry. Harry proceeded with his wand held out in front of him as he made his way across the kitchen into a large and very comfortable living room, with a large and very nice television mounted on the wall above a similarly large fireplace. On the opposite wall, was a window.

Harry peered through the window and gasped. There was a backyard Quidditch Pitch and a pool just outside. Harry couldn’t see past the pitch, but it looked like there was some sort of magical barrier. Harry decided he’d explore it later. He needed to make sure the place was empty first. Turning around, Harry made his way back to the hallway with the clock and turned right. It was a long hallway with a number of closed doors, each with a plaque on it. The first said Laundry. Opening the door, Harry indeed saw that there was a washing machine, dryer, sink, ironing board and a small bathroom inside. The next door was a much larger bathroom. It had a shower, toilet and a rather impressive jacuzzi that Harry promised himself he would use later. It even had a baby change table, that Harry realised with no small degree of sadness was probably where he had lain at one point.

The next few doors were bedrooms with names on them. The first, with a plaque that said Moony was by far the cleanest. There were a number of empty bookshelves, and the four-poster bed looked
like it hadn’t been used in a very long time. The second bedroom belonged to Wormtail. It was also quite clean, but the level of dust on the furniture, or rather, lack of dust, said that someone had been in there. Padfoot’s room had definitely been used recently. The bed was messy, and there was a copy of the Daily Prophet dated to two days before sitting on the desk. There was also a photo frame with three people. Harry recognised the photo instantly, he had the same one in the album Hagrid had given him at the end of his first year. It was of his mum and dad at their wedding, standing next to a man with short cropped black hair and a small goatee. Harry wondered who the man was, and a part of him hoped that he would return soon so he could get some answers. Back peddling out of the room and closing the door behind him, Harry continued down the hall.

There were three more doors in the hallway. The first said Prongs Jr on its plaque. Harry hesitantly opened it, hoping beyond hope that it was not what he thought it was. The door opened with a creek of non-usage and Harry held back a choke at the sight. A white crib was in the centre of the room, with a mobile featuring small brooms and snitches hanging above it. Several toys, including a small broom, were scattered across the carpet. In the corner was a pile of nappies in plastic bags. Harry slammed the door shut rapidly. He skipped the door that said Prongs and Jewel. He couldn’t face what he knew was on the other side of that door.

The last door had a simple plaque of gold that said, Harry. Taking a deep breath, Harry pushed the door open. The room was mostly empty and reminded him of the dorm rooms in the Gryffindor Common Room. There was a large four poster bed that looked even more comfortable than his bed at Hogwarts, a walk-in wardrobe and a small ensuite bathroom, identical to the other rooms, were accessible via doors in the wall. A window hung above the bed that looked out over the Quidditch pitch. There was a small desk with a single piece of paper resting on it in the corner. With shaky steps, Harry picked up the letter and sat down on the bed.

My Beautiful Boy

If this letter is still sitting on your desk when you arrive at Home for the first time, then something has gone terribly wrong. I can imagine you’re probably very confused, and I would be shocked if you weren’t. The place your standing in is called Home. It’s a place that we built together. Your father, Sirius, Remus, Peter and I that is. It exists within a parallel pocket dimension (that’s a piece of folded space-time in case you’ve never watched an episode of Star Trek or Doctor Who) and can always be accessed through the charm with the Home Rune etched upon it I assume you found in your trust vault. The doors in the main hall go to the four permanent anchors that keep this place from drifting off into the Aether. They go to a) behind the portrait of the floating city in the Sixth-floor corridor of Hogwarts, b) behind the bookcase in the Potter Family Vault, c) an archway in Hyde Park (careful of Muggle’s when using that one); and d) in the alley behind the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade. You can use each location to get inside by finding the Home Rune, (the same one that’s on your pendant) placing your finger on it and saying the password ‘Marauders Forever.’ It’s cheesy I know, Sirius came up with it. If all four of those anchors are destroyed, GET OUT OF HERE IMMEDIATELY!!! This place will literally be lost forever, you will never be able to get back to Earth.

Now that the technical stuff about Home is out of the way, I wanted to say that, if your anything like me, then you’re probably blaming yourself for whatever has happened to us. IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT!! Do you understand me, Harry! Voldemort is the one that killed us, not you. I can only hope that the final moments of my life were spent protecting yours. I think I’ve found a way to protect you if the worst should happen, but I have no idea whether it will work or not. If you’re reading this, I think it’s safe to assume it did. I want you to know Harry, that I am so, so proud of you. You are my darling boy, and I want the whole world for you. I want you to grow up, go to school, ace your classes, pull some pranks, find a girl, go on dates, win the Quidditch and House Cup, sneak into Hogsmeade, fall in love, marry that girl and finally start a family of your own. The
world is your oyster, and I want you to know that I am sitting here with your Dad in front row seats cheering your name louder than anyone else.

I pray that we managed to take He-who-must-be-hyphenated with us when we went, but, if, as Dumbledore fears, it is your responsibility to take down that sick bastard once and for all, I still want you to live your life. You’ll defeat him and all his cronies, and you’ll do it with a smile on your face the Marauders way. Then you’ll do all the things I said above, and I won’t take no for an answer young man!

Just so you know, I have written another letter for that special woman in your life, but it is hidden from you using a complex charm I picked up in the Department of Mysteries. Only the love of your life will be able to find it, so don’t even bother going to look for it.

Remus is calling for me, I think baby you just chucked up on him. Just so you know, you are so adorable. So, I’ll sign off here. You’ll figure out how Home works don’t worry. To leave, just hold your amulet and say “Return.” It will take you straight back to the place you were when you entered. If you found this place on your own, lock it up before you leave. Just in case. Check behind the clock in the entrance hall and you’ll see how.

I love you my darling, and I wish you all the love and good luck I can.

Love Mum.

Harry didn’t know how long he sat there, staring at the letter as he cried himself to sleep.
It soon became apparent to Harry that his greatest fear would not come to pass.

After waking up in the Home, Harry had pulled himself together and used the Amulet to return to his room in the Leaky Cauldron. Thankfully, the question of where he was going to stay had been eradicated. So, after adding the small amulet to the chain around his neck that Ginny had sent him, Harry had proceeded to explore Diagon Alley more thoroughly. He bought enough groceries to restock the pantry and fridge and replaced the potions ingredients. He had then disappeared into London where Hedwig had found him and transported to Home. The strange thing? No Owl had visited Harry to inform him of his expulsion, and it had been 24 hours since he had blown up his Aunt.

Harry spent the next week both exploring London, finally buying himself a few sets of clothes that fit correctly and getting used to the reality of the Home's existence. Harry discovered four more rooms at the end of the bedroom hallway: A library that Hermione would go nuts over; a gym full of Muggle equipment that Harry figured he should probably start using; a large empty room with several runes on the floor that Harry assumed was for spell casting; and a potions lab that would make even Professor Snape jealous. In Harry's opinion, the greatest treasure contained in the Library were his parents' textbooks. He had found his mother's third-year Charms, Arithmancy and Ancient Runes books as well as her second-year Charms book and his father's third year Transfiguration book. There was also a collection of books in a separate case that appeared to be written by the mysterious Marauders themselves. Try as he might, Harry had been unable to discover the reasons for his parents' nicknames, or who they corresponded too. There were no pictures or papers in the house that connected faces to codenames.

He did, however, know the identities of the other residents.

Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black. It turned out Ragnok had been telling the truth. Sirius was a good friend of his fathers. Harry wasn't sure what to think about that but decided he would follow Ragnok's advice and, if Harry were to ever meet the man, he would give him the benefit of the doubt. Remus Lupin's hand was the only one that ever moved on the large clock. His hand frequently jumped between work, a place called the den, and school. As Black had been in prison, and Pettigrew seemed to not be in the country, Harry assumed Lupin must have been Padfoot, as he was the only logical person who could have used the Home any time recently.

Harry did, however, follow his Mum's advice. Hidden behind the family clock was a set of dials that changed the 'settings' of the Pocket Dimension. It was relatively simple to operate. All he had to do was set the largest dial to Amulet Only, and the place was put on lockdown. There was also a setting that allowed Owls in and out, so he activated that to allow the much-dreaded Ministry owl eventual entry, and so that Hedwig could come and go as she pleased.

But the Ministry Owl never came. It was as if his underage magic had not even been detected. Harry resolved after a week that he would show up at the Hogwarts Express, and if they tried to arrest him,
he would use the Amulet to return Home before they could snap his wand.

Harry spent most of his time in the Home doing two things: using the Quidditch Pitch to practice his Seeking, and reading through *Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations*.

He was correct in his observations the first night. There was a barrier surrounding the house. Harry wasn't sure whether it was magic or something else, but it had a faint blue light and pulsed like water. And it enveloped the property like a dome. Harry assumed this was the edge of the Pocket Dimension. The pitch did have a broom shed with some brooms in it. But they were all quite old, and none could match his Nimbus 2000. The shed also had a collection of balls, Quaffles and Bludgers, but Harry was more interested in the two Snitchs. One was a standard Snitch like the one they used at Hogwarts, the other was a professional level Snitch. Harry had a lot of fun chasing after and catching that one.

*Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations* was very interesting. It spoke about dozens of different languages from dozens of lost civilisations. It had lists of Egyptian, Greek, Norse, Aztec, Elven and Dwarven runes, along with short biographies of their cultures histories, and why they were no longer around. There was even a whole chapter on a group of people called Inhumans that Harry had never even heard of. Chapter 13 concerned the subject of Space-Time and the impact that different runes could have on it. Harry had checked the Library and found another copy of Riker O'Neill's book on the shelf with lots of notes in the margins of that chapter. But the chapters Harry found the most interesting were Chapters 24 through 36. The Zodiac Runes.

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**Chapter 29: The Gemini Rune**

*The Gemini Rune, also known as the Binding Rune, the Twin Rune or the Bond Rune, is one of the most challenging runes to produce. Its function is to bind two objects together on a subatomic (magical, for those of you who are stupid) level. It synchronises the vibrations of the two objects, creating perpetual and infinite harmony between the two.*

**Possible functions include:**

- Short or long-distance communication
- Teleportation between two locations
- Dimensional anchorage
- Wormhole creation
- Energy Transference
- Imprisonment
- Horcrux Creation

*Like the other Zodiac Runes, the Gemini Rune can be used on people, but it requires two consenting recipients who already exist at a similar wavelength. The rune is exceedingly difficult to create, and only a perfect rune will operate correctly if used on a person.*

**Possible functions include:**

- Empathic Connection
- Energy transference
- Enslavement
- Soul-bonding
- Teleportation
Use of the Gemini Rune is highly dangerous and not recommended, even by me. There are numerous other ways to produce the effects of the Gemini Rune. As a result, usage is very uncommon. Once created, the Rune cannot be removed, and its power will only be disabled once both host objects or persons are destroyed or killed.

Possible Side-effects of using the Gemini Rune:

- Mental Insanity
- Power overload
- Spontaneous combustion
- Superiority complex
- Dependency disorder
- Instant Death
- Slow Death
- Painful Death
- Lots and lots of different forms of instant, slow and/or painful death (Get the idea?)

Suffice to say, Harry was very, very scared for himself and Ginny.

The book was very interesting, so much so in fact that Harry actually finished it within a week. So, he started reading his mother's Ancient Runes textbook as well. Admittedly his favourite part of the book was reading his mother's notes in the margins. There were also a number of notes in another hand that he didn't recognise, but it looked masculine judging by the roughness and the deeper indents.

Eventually, two weeks after he had left the Dursley's, Harry wrote a letter to Professor McGonagall asking if he could change from Divination to Ancient Runes. This would be the ultimate test. If McGonagall replied, then Harry hadn't been expelled as he feared. If she didn't answer or replied asking for his location so he could be arrested, he had bigger problems than Ancient Runes.

So, when Harry received a reply from Professor McGonagall the next day applauding him for his decision, Harry was understandably thrilled. He also concluded that, somehow, the Gemini Rune allowed him to bypass the restriction on underage magic, although how and why were up for debate, as the book mentioned nothing about it.

So, for the next month, Harry made use of his new-found freedom. He explored Diagon Alley, read through the books in the Home, stared at the Firebolt on display in Quality Quidditch Supplies, ate at Florean Fortescue's Ice-Cream Parlour, stared at the Firebolt on display in Quality Quidditch Supplies, finished all his homework, and stared at the Firebolt on display in Quality Quidditch Supplies.

He also explored the four anchors. As his Mum had said the first door, which was red, opened into Hogwarts. Harry didn't dare actually step through the door as he didn't know whether Dumbledore had a means of detecting who was in the castle at any given time. The yellow door entered into the Potter Family Vault. Harry didn't risk stepping through this one either, as Ragnok had stated he couldn't enter without his guardian, and Griphook had told him what happened to people who entered Gringotts vaults they weren't supposed to the first time he had visited the bank.

He did enjoy exploring through the green door, which opened into Hyde Park. As he stepped through, the door and the home vanished, replaced with a simple stone archway in a large park. None of the nearby Muggles seemed to notice him appearing out of nowhere, so Harry assumed
there must be Notice-me-not charms surrounding the arch. He found the home rune etched into the stone nestled between a crack and some graffiti. There was no way someone would notice it wasn't meant to be there.

The last door, which was blue, exited into an alley in the fabled village of Hogsmeade, which lay just beyond Hogwarts. Harry knew that, without his permission slip signed, he wouldn't be allowed to exit the castle with the other third years. This door, however, would allow him to bypass the gates altogether and give him an easy way of entering the village without permission. Harry decided not to explore the town yet, opting to wait for Ron and Hermione so they could do it together.

The night before Harry was set to return to Hogwarts, he found himself standing on the beach once more. Tiny objects were buzzing around the city, attacking the dragons. Explosions rocked the towers and lightning fell from a black sky. Throwing caution to the wind, Harry began to run out into the waves, the pain in his arm burning more than it ever had before. The water was much shallower than he expected, so Harry kept running, wading through the waves as he made his way as close as he could to the city. The central tower exploded, collapsing to the ground, and the Gemini Rune stung worse than even the Basilisk fang.

"NOOOO!!!!" Harry screamed, gripping his arm as he watched in horror as the city began to sink beneath the waves. Harry stared down at his arm and gasped. Inked onto his arm, clear as daylight, was a sparkling black dragon, a shimmering scarlet phoenix emerging from its mouth, and it was blazing with light. Not thinking about how stupid it was, or how the thought of having yet another mark on his skin made his hair stand on end, Harry threw his arms forward toward the city, trying to lift it above the water. Then, as if some god had answered his prayers, the water around the city began to boil, the city started to right itself, and a magnificent translucent barrier shimmered into being around it. The buzzing creatures were repelled from the city and turned towards where Harry stood, alone and waist deep in the ocean. Standing his ground, Harry held his hands up. He had to protect the city as long as he could. And if Ginny was somehow inside like her letter suggested, then he would make damn sure he protected her too.

Harry jerked awake in a cold sweat. The alarm clock on his desk was screeching at him to get of bed. He had finally gotten close to the City, but he had arrived too late. The Gemini Rune continued to burn on his neck. If the Gemini Rune was a connection to Ginny, Harry would bet that she had had another dream, and had woken at the same time he had. That constant sense of longing was feeling even more pronounced than usual as well.

Sitting up, Harry's alarm clock said 8am. Half an hour and he would be meeting with Ragnok to see what he had found over the summer. Pulling a set of his new clothes, Harry made his way to the kitchen, where he had a quick bite of toast. Before long he was standing in the entrance hall in front of the clock. Moony, Padfoot and Wormtail's hands were all now pointed to travelling. He quickly turned the settings back to unlocked, as he wasn't sure whether the amulet would work within the school wards. Stepping back, Harry placed his hand on his mum's amulet.

"Return," he whispered, and everything began to blur. Harry closed his eyes and counted to five. He
opened his eyes and grinned, he was standing in the alley between Madam Malkin's and Ollivanders. Stepping out of the lane, Harry made his way to Gringotts. As soon as he stepped inside, Griphook stood up from one of the tellers and beckoned him over.

"Ah, Mr Potter. I was hoping to see you today."

"I can't stay long I'm afraid," Harry told him.

"Not to worry. Director Ragnok assumed as much and, as he will be away on urgent business most of this morning prepared these in anticipation of your arrival." Griphook handed Harry two envelopes with gold ink on the front. One addressed to him, one addressed to Ginny.

"If you would give this to Miss Weasley when you meet her Gringotts would greatly appreciate it. It would appear as though the same person who is intercepting your mail from us is intercepting hers as well. Director Ragnok has already dismembered five goblins discovered to be a part of this rather nasty business and is in the process of discovering just how deep the corruption within our own ranks has gone. Rest assured we will not rest until it is burnt out." Griphook gave Harry a smile that could probably curdle milk at that point, so he wisely took the letters, thanked the Goblin and departed as quickly as possible.

Making his way out the front door of the Leaky Cauldron with the intention of taking the Tube to Kings Cross, Harry was stunned to see a three-story purple bus sitting on the sidewalk. A young man in a purple waistcoat was calling down the street.

"Knight Bus!! Knight Bus!! Un way trip to Kings Cross yu lot! All on board ow, we're leaven in five."

Shrugging his shoulders, Harry hopped on the bus. There were no seats: instead half a dozen brass bedsteads stood beside the curtained windows – it was also twice the size of what it appeared outside. Wondering when he would stop being amazed by magic, Harry took a seat on one of the spare beds on the ground floor. The driver, who was sitting in a very comfortable armchair, turned back and nodded at him with a large toothless grin.

The man in the purple coat jumped back on board, strolled down to where the driver was sitting, and tapped on the glass between him and the rest of the bus.

"Take'er away Ern," he said, and the bus suddenly lurched forward, throwing Harry from his feet.

"Yah, take it away Ernie, it's gonna be a bumpy ride!" Harry jerked his head towards the new voice. Hanging from the drivers rear-vision mirror, was a shrunken head with buttons for eyes and black pipe cleaners for hair.

Harry stared out the window and gasped. They were racing along Shaftesbury Avenue, somehow not hitting a single car, despite the fact that the bus was most definitely moving at over a hundred miles an hour. Harry was seriously reconsidering that toast he had eaten earlier.

"Choo ain't never ridden the Knight Bus 'ave ye kid?" the man said, staring at Harry with a raised eyebrow as if everything was completely normal. Harry shook his head.

"Well den, welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board, and we can take you anywhere you want to go. My name is Stan Shunpike, conductor. That's our driver Ernie Prang." Stan said, pointing to himself, then to Ernie.

"What choor name then?"
Harry was spared answering as the bus swerved up over the sidewalk, but it didn't hit anything; lines of lamp posts, street signs and bins jumped out of its way as it approached, and back into position once it passed.

"But the Muggles?! Can't they see us?" Harry asked as he regained his bearings.

"Muggles? They don't see nuffin do they?" Stan directed his question at Ernie, who shrugged his shoulders before spinning the wheel, sending the bus lurching again.

"Ernie!! Little old lady at twelve o'clock!!" The shrunken head screeched. Harry looked out the front window, and sure enough, in the centre of the road, was an old lady with a walker, slowly crossing the street. Ernie slammed on the emergency brake, and the bus skidded to a halt. Harry flew forward, face-planting on the glass in front of him. As Harry started rubbing his nose in pain, the shrunken head began counting down.

"Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven, Six, Five, Four, Twee, Twee and a half, two, one and twee-quarters… Yahhhh!!!" The bus shot forward again, and Harry fell back against the bed.

After another minute of weaving and screeching, Ernie slammed on the breaks again. Harry managed to avoid face planting, barely, by holding onto the bannister so tight his knuckles went white.

"Kings Cross," Stan said, gesturing towards the door. Standing on shaky legs, Harry made his way outside, several witches and wizards stepping off behind him. In that moment, Harry had never realised how good having solid ground beneath your feet could be.

The Knight Bus sped off down the road with a bang, and Harry made his way into Kings Cross.

The ride on the Knight Bus had taken longer than Harry had thought it did, so he quickly made his way through the throng of people and through the barrier to platform nine and three quarters. Jumping aboard the scarlet steam engine as it began to take off, Harry saw Mr and Mrs Weasley waving at a group of redheads sticking their heads out the window near the front carriage. Harry looked into the last compartment and saw a single man wearing a shabby set of wizards robes which had been patched up in a number of places. He appeared quite sickly, and his hair had a tinge of grey to it. Deciding he wouldn't get any better than this, Harry decided to wait for Ron and Hermione, who would no doubt be moving down the train looking for him.

Leaning against the wall, Harry pulled out his necklace. The amulet with the home rune was still dark and unassuming, but Ginny's Zodiac pendant seemed to have taken on a new shine. It reflected the sunlight beautifully off the golden body, making the white symbols seem to glow with their own light. A sharp twinge suddenly ran through his arm.

"What's the matter, Potter? Admiring a piece of crappy jewellery? I always knew you laid on the whole poor person look so the Weasel wouldn't get jealous, but it looks like you've finally given up and bought some new clothes. Why keep that though?" Harry looked up and inwardly groaned. Draco Malfoy and his cronies, Crabbe and Goyle, were standing in the corridor with smug looks on their faces.

"Speaking of which, where is the Weasel? Did his family blow all their money in Egypt and now they can't afford school fees? And what about the Mudblood? Still recovering from last year?"
Harry cracked a smile. This was going to be fun.

"Malfoy? You might want to turn around." Malfoy scoffed and raised his eyebrow.

"Think I'm stupid do you Potter?"

The sound of someone clearing their throat behind him, caused Malfoy to lose all the colour in his face. He slowly turned around to see Percy Weasley standing behind him in his Hogwarts robes, Head Boy badge pinned to his chest. Standing behind him were Fred, George, Ron, Ginny and Hermione. Harry locked eyes with a grinning Ginny, winked at her and gestured to the wall. Ginny nodded and pulled Hermione and Ron to the side, Fred and George, seeing what she was doing, copied their movements. Now it was just Percy, Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle in the hallway. A perfect target.

"Mr Malfoy, I believe I just heard a rather vulgar word that just so happens to be looked down upon at Hogwarts leave your mouth. Do you perhaps have any reason to use such profanity?" Using Percy's arrogant attitude as a distraction, Harry placed his finger on the wall opposite and drew a downward vertical line followed by a right slanting diagonal line, followed by a left slanting diagonal line. He then lifted his finger off the aging paint and flicked his hand towards the four boys. The Aquila rune Harry had explicitly memorised for this purpose glowed a faint white, a burst of wind rushed down the corridor, and Draco, Crabbe and Goyle went flying forward. Goyle faceplanted on the floor beneath Fred and George, who both kicked him for good measure. Crabbe landed on his ass, and a loud snap indicated his wand had been in his back pocket when he hit the ground. As for Malfoy, he went straight into Percy, falling right on top of the redhead, knocking his glasses to the floor, where they promptly snapped.

The entire train carriage was dead silent for a moment. Then Ginny burst out laughing. Harry and Ron soon followed, and in five seconds flat, the whole carriage, including the people who had stuck their heads out of other compartments to see what was going on, we're all caught in laughing, giggling and coughing fits.

Malfoy slowly stood to his feet, his face bright red, and spun to Harry, putting his wand in his face. Harry simply raised his hands in the air, still laughing.

"You did that!" Malfoy snapped.

"How could I have possibly done it? My wand is still in my jacket pocket. How could I have removed it without being seen, cast a spell, and replaced it, without being seen?" Malfoy turned even redder.

"Stupi…"

"Mr Malfoy!" Percy snapped, pulling himself to his feet, "Thirty points from Slytherin for pulling a wand on a classmate. Put that away and return to your compartment. Now."

Malfoy, arm shaking, and jaw clenched at being told what to do by a Weasley of all people, lowered his wand and stalked back the way he came. Crabbe and Goyle scrambled to their feet and followed him with their tails between his legs.

Fred and George slid down the wall of the train, ending up in heaps on the floor, their entire bodies racked with laughter. Ginny was staring at Harry with pure admiration in her eyes, and a mischievous smile on her lips. He had no doubt she knew exactly what he did. Hermione was staring at him, stunned, trying to figure out what had happened. Ron was clapping in awe as he tried desperately to control the hiccups that were escaping his mouth. Percy just sighed and ran a hand...
through his hair.

"For what it's worth, nice job putting Malfoy in his place Head Boy. It won't do much good though, Snape will just give him fifty points to compensate once he goes and whines to him," Harry told him, before pulling his wand and casting Oculus Reparo on Percy's broken glasses. He picked them off the floor and handed them back to the boy, who had a slight rosy tint to his cheeks.

"Professor Snape, Harry. You're not wrong though. Maybe it will make some of the younger Slytherins listen to me. Well, you can only dream."

Percy straightened his robes, rubbed his badge to ensure nothing was obscuring its shine and gave his brothers a quick smile.

"Well, I must be off to the prefect's cabin. I'll see you all sometime during the journey I suppose, knowing you lot," Percy said, looking down at Fred and George, who were still trying to compose themselves. He turned on his heel and strutted out of the carriage.

"Bloody hell. That was a way to start the year," Ron exclaimed.

"Seriously Ronald," Hermione scolded him.

"Good to see you too Ron. How was Egypt?" Harry asked, walking over to his best mate and slapping him on the back.

"Wicked. All the mummies and tombs were incredible. Even Scabbers enjoyed himself." Ron said as Ginny tried to pull Fred and George off the floor.

"Brilliant. What about you Hermione? How was France?" Hermione pulled Harry into a quick hug before releasing him.

"Oh, it was wonderful, we went skiing in the alps for a bit, then I took Mum and Dad into the magical district of Paris. There's so much to learn about, I ended up writing another roll of parchment for my History of Magic Essay on top of the two I'd already written. I brought back a book on it if you're interested."

"I'll add it to the library," Harry said casually, watching Hermione's face. She did not disappoint. She lit up like a proverbial Christmas tree.

"Library? What library?"

"Mine. You're going to love it," Harry told her, a massive grin on his face.

"You have a library? How? Where? I thought you were stuck at the Dursleys the whole holiday…"

"Speaking of the Dursleys Harry, how did they treat you. No bars on the window this year?" Ron interrupted.

"Oh no. You do not get to interrupt Ronald. Harry questions, answers. Libraries are more important than… Wait. Ron, did you just say bars on his window?" Hermione's smile was gone, her voice faded to a whisper. Her eyes were fixed on Harry, her message abundantly clear.

"I promise I'll answer both of your questions later. It's a long story." Thankfully, Ginny had finally managed to get Fred and George to their feet.

"Harry! How did you… do whatever it is you did?" George asked. You could tell the twins were
still recovering as they neglected to talk in twin-speak.

"It was Aquila, right?" Ginny piped up, squeezing between the twins.

"Exactly. Just drew it onto the wall and bam! A blast of wind to knock Malfoy and his buddies over, right into Percy. Crabbe's wand was an added bonus."

"Aquila? What's an Aquilla?" Hermione asked, looking from Harry to Ginny and back again.

"And how does Ginny know about it?" Ron asked.

Harry grinned.

"Why don't you all step inside and I'll tell you a story," Harry said, gesturing to his compartment.

Harry, the four Weasleys and Hermione managed to squeeze inside. Fortunately, the compartment seemed larger than normal. Hermione stated that the cabins increased their size to fit the number of occupants. She'd read about it in Hogwarts: A History.

"Who do you reckon he is?" Ron asked, pointing at Lupin.

"Professor R. J. Lupin," Hermione said matter of factly.

Harry's stomach lurched in his chest, and it wasn't from the movement of the train.

"How'd you… You know everything I swear," Rom muttered.

He had been best friends with his parents. But which one was he? Padfoot? The clock had said that Padfoot had been in Mortal Peril most of the time. Was that why his clothes were so tatty?

"Yeh Ronald," Fred said, shaking his head.

Wormtail? Had he been overseas like Ron and Hermione were?

"Obviously," George added, rolling his eyes.

Or was he Moony? Harry intended to find out.

"Oh, enough you two," Ginny said, taking a seat next to Harry. He couldn't help but notice that the Gemini Rune warmed up when her hand brushed his leg.

"Do you recon he's asleep?" Ron asked.

"Seems to be," Hermione said, peering over at the man in the ragged cloak.

"Good. Well, I suppose the first thing I should tell you, is that I didn't spend the summer at my Aunt and Uncles."

"What!" Hermione exclaimed. Ron quickly shushed her, gesturing to Lupin.

"Way to go Harry, but…" Fred began.

"why did you leave?" George finished.
"I kind of accidentally inflated my Aunt." Everyone stared at him with different expressions. Fred and George were trying not to break out in laughter again. Hermione looked outraged. Ron seemed very confused. And Ginny had a massive grin on her face.

"How weren't you expelled?" Hermione finally asked.

"I don't have the Trace," Harry stated, a smile creeping onto his face as Fred and George's faces moulded into identical mischievous smirks.

"…How?" Hermione whispered. She appeared to be somewhere between awe and disappointment.

"I think it has something to do with this." Harry bent his head, revealing the Gemini Rune marked into the back of his neck.

"The tattoo you and Ginny got after the Chamber?" Ron said.

"Yep."

"Wait, does that mean I don't have the trace either?" Ginny asked.

"Probably," Harry confirmed. She jumped to her feet and pumped her fist in the air.

"Yes!" She exclaimed, before proceeding to dance around the compartment.

"Ginny, you are so helping us craft new pranks over the summer break next year," George stated.

"Only if I get prank exception." She stated, waging a finger at the twins. Fred and George seemed to have a silent conversation that involved a lot of hand waving and eye-rolling, but eventually, they turned back to their hyperactive sister.

"We…"

"…Accept," they stated.

"Double yes!" Ginny pumped two more fists in the air, before sitting back down. It seemed as though a permanent smile had been plastered on her face.

"That is so not fair." Ron moaned.

"Trust me, Ron, if you knew about the side-effects, you wouldn't be so upset," Harry said. The atmosphere in the carriage took a 180-degree turn.

"You read the book then," Ginny stated.

"Where do you think I got the Aquila rune from?" Harry told her, grabbing the second years hand, giving it a slight squeeze. Her smile had vanished. The Gemini rune let out a soft warmth through Harry's neck.

"What book? Is it from the library you mentioned? And how does Ginny know about it?" Hermione rambled.

"What side-effects?" The twins asked, their faces taking on a deadly serious tone.

"Mental Insanity, Power overload, Spontaneous combustion, Superiority complex, Dependency disorder, Instant Death, Slow Death, Painful Death and lots, and lots of different forms of instant, slow and/or painful death." Ginny recited solemnly. She turned to Harry.
"I memorised that bit," she whispered.

"Me too," he said, giving her hand another squeeze.

"The book is called *Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations by Riker O'Neill*. Yes, it was in the library, but I only found it later. Ginny found a copy and sent it to me from Egypt. She has Bill's old copy," Harry stated.

The compartment was very quiet for a long time.

"So, have you figured out what it is?" Ron asked eventually.

"Yeh. It's called a Gemini Rune. It's essentially a means of bonding two objects or people together for a variety of different purposes. I don't know what ours is supposed to do," Harry admitted.

Hermione frowned, "But Professor Dumbledore said…"

"Dumbledore lied," Ginny stated, "Bill recognised it the second he saw it. It's one of the twelve Zodiac Runes, the most powerful runes in the world. There's no way Dumbledore didn't know what it was."

Deciding to move the conversation away from its morbid direction, Harry began to narrate his escape from Privet Drive and his arrival at Gringotts.

"This is for you by the way," Harry said, pulling the letters Griphook had given him from his pocket and handing Ginny hers.

"I don't know what's in it. Griphook gave me them this morning. I haven't even read mine yet either."

Ginny broke the wax seal and pulled out the letter.

"Dear Miss Weasley," Ginny read aloud, "My name is Director Ragnok. I am responsible for the British branch of Gringotts International Wizarding Bank. It is my duty to inform you that you have been caught up in a corruption scandal at Gringotts bank. As a result, your personal information has been compromised. Please be advised that as compensation, One Thousand Galleons has been added to yours's and Mr Potter's joint account with us…" Ginny trailed off.

"Joint account?" she asked. Harry scratched the back of his neck.

"Yeah, the Gemini Rune gives you access to my Trust Vault, because it binds us together. It also gives you access to my Family Vault, but neither of us can legally enter it without my legal guardian, who just so happens to be a wanted murderer." Harry said with a shrug, awaiting the inevitable explosion.

"What!?"

"Who!"

"She can't accept that!"

"Awesome!"

Harry sighed.

"My legal guardian is Sirius Black." Ignoring the exclamations of shock outrage from the others,
Harry focussed on Lupin. The man fidgeted slightly at the mention of Black's name. Not enough to be noticeable to anyone who wasn't looking for it. But Harry caught it. Remus Lupin was awake and listening.

"I know, I know. It's crazy. But listen, Black was one of my dad's best friends. And Ragnok says he was never given a trial. Just picked up off the street and thrown into Azkaban. He was also a Gryffindor. I think there's more to the situation than we know. I'm not saying he's innocent, just that I don't think we have all the facts."

Ginny it seemed, had continued reading silently while everyone fumed. She was now staring at the paper in anger.

"Someone has been intercepting our mail from Gringotts?" She asked.

"Yep. I'll give you three guesses." Harry told her. Ginny's eyes darkened, and Harry thought rage was a good look on her.

"Albus Dumbledore," she whispered.

"Ding, ding, ding we have a winner."

"Ragnok says here that he's, um, dismembered five goblins already for aiding whatever is going on and he expects to find more. So, what do we do?"

"Don't know. We won't be able to speak to him until the end of the year." That was not strictly speaking true, as Harry could use the Home to travel from Hogwarts to Hyde Park and catch the Underground to Charing Cross easily. But he didn't want Lupin to know that he had access to it. He would show the others the Home once they arrived at Hogwarts.

Suddenly the train jerked as if someone had hit the brakes.

"We can't be there yet?" Hermione whispered, the previous conversation forgotten.

Harry and Ginny stood up and poked their heads out the compartment door. The train jerked again, and the duo fell backwards, landing back on the seat. Ginny on top of Harry. Ginny blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Sorry," she said.

"Don't worry about it," he told her as she quickly sat up and buried her blush in her hair. The others had apparently not noticed, as, at the same moment, all the lights in the train had flickered out.

"We must have broken down," Fred and George said.

"Ouch! Ron that was my foot!" Hermione exclaimed. Ron had climbed over her to stare out the window.

"There's something moving out there," he whispered, "I think somethings come aboard."

Then suddenly, as if someone had turned on a very powerful air-conditioner, the temperature on the train plummeted, and frost began to gather on both the compartment door and the outside window. A cloaked figure moved in front of the door and Ginny shrunk into Harry's chest. Hermione and Ron had bunched up against the window while Fred and George sat frozen.

Pain began lancing down Harry's arm. The same pain he had felt in the dream as the city began to
A hand that looked as though it belonged on a corpse reached out and opened the door. The... thing... on the other side was like a nightmare come to life. A sense of inescapable dread and fear rose up like a flood within him as he stared into where he assumed its face should be.

The creature stuck its cloaked head inside the compartment, and a soft white light filled the room. The pain in Harry's arm and neck reached a crescendo, and he glanced down at his forearm. There, glowing for all the world to see, was the mark of the Dragon and Phoenix. The creature, as if sensing Harry as the greatest threat in the room, focussed on him, and let out a long shuddering breath. The cold in the room intensified even further, and Ginny whimpered into Harry's chest. But all Harry could hear was screaming. A woman's scream. High pitched and desperate. Another white light burst into the room, this one much brighter and much more violent, but Harry couldn't see where it was coming from. All he could see was darkness and a flash of green.

When Harry woke up, he was floating in water. Panicking, he pushed himself up and realised he was in the ocean. The City was floating nearby, but it was dark, and there was no light inside the buildings this time. They were all dark, and there were no Dragons or Phoenixes in the skies. Harry took a deep breath and plunged forward. Maybe he could reach the City before the inevitable this time. He trudged on, beckoned forward by the sense of longing, which was suddenly so much stronger than in the waking world, and the Gemini Rune, which was like a hot poker prodding his neck.

With every step, the City got closer and closer, until the silver towers were so close he could make out individual balconies. He took another step, and the ground vanished under him. Harry sank beneath the water and desperately began reaching for the surface, trying to kick his legs to force him up. He broke the surface, and took a massive gulp of air, before reaching out for the bluff he had stepped away from. Finding it, he pulled himself back into the shallows and knelt in the sand, desperately trying to get his breath back.

Then the screaming started.

"Not Harry!! Please! Not Harry!! Take me!!!" A light flashed in a tower near the edge of the city and Harry stared in horror as a green light lit up the room.

"Harry!!!" another, more familiar voice screamed, and Harry wrenched his eyes away from the tower, where the same laughter that had haunted his dreams since before he could remember was now cackling freely and stared at the city's edge. Standing on the edge of the floating platform was Ginny, dressed just as she was on the train. Advancing towards her was an image he knew all too well. A teenage boy with sleek black hair wearing Slytherin robes. In one hand was a white wand, in the other, was a black and green Diary.

The Gemini Rune blazed in fury as Harry watched Riddle force Ginny closer to the ocean.

"GINNY!!!" Harry yelled, "Don't let him force you from the City!"

Ginny spun around and saw him.

"Harry!"

"I can't get to you! It's too deep! You have to stay there! You have to fight him!" He yelled, but even as he said the words, they felt hollow. Everything was cold. Hope was nothing here. It had deserted
A long shuddering breath grated out from behind him, and Harry spun around. Standing behind him was the creature from the train. But this time his arm was not burning, and no rune illuminated. The creature grabbed Harry's throat with its decaying hand and forced him beneath the water.

Harry and Ginny jerked awake with simultaneous screams of pure fear.

"They're awake!" Harry heard Madam Pomfrey's voice exclaim. Sliding his glasses back onto his face, he found himself in the garish white of the Hospital Wing and realised that Madame Pomfrey, Professor McGonagall, Professor Lupin and Professor Dumbledore were all standing at the foot of his bed. In the bed opposite him, was Ginny.

Lupin pulled a bar of chocolate from his pocket and snapped it in two, before handing half to each of them.

"Eat, it'll help counteract the effects," Lupin said, gesturing to the chocolate.

"Finally, a Defence teacher who actually knows what they're doing," the nurse mumbled as she placed another large block on the bedside table.

"What… What was that thing?" Harry asked as his voice came back to him.

"It was a Dementor, one of the guards of Azkaban. It was searching the train for Sirius Black under Minister Fudge's orders, which he refrained from informing me of," Dumbledore stated. Gone was the twinkle in his eye and every line on his face was tense.

"Mr Potter, Miss Weasley, I'm afraid I must depart for now. I leave you in the capable hands of Professors Lupin and McGonagall, as well as Madame Pomfrey. I need to have words with the Minister." With that Dumbledore turned on his heel and walked out the Hospital Wing doors, robes billowing behind him.

"What happened?" Ginny asked.

"The both of you had a very severe reaction to the Dementor on the train and fainted. I forced it away, but when the two of you wouldn't wake, I used an emergency portkey to transport you both here. The train should arrive in a little under an hour," Lupin said, sitting on the edge of Harry's bed.

"Why were we affected when the others weren't?" Harry wondered.

"The Headmaster believes it's a complication due to the um…" Professor McGonagall trailed off.

"Gemini Rune," Ginny mumbled, rubbing the mark on her neck, which was bright red and inflamed. Harry ran his hand over his own mark and realised it was similarly raw.

"What?" McGonagall said, turning to face Ginny.

Harry's stomach went south fast, and he spun to face Ginny. However, Ginny seemed to have recovered from her faux pause faster than Harry would have thought possible.

"My brother Bill, he's a curse breaker, he says it's called the Gemini Rune. Apparently its really rare,
and he's going to keep researching it." Ginny covered. Not a lie, but a long shot from the truth.

"Well, I'm glad you've discovered some information. I shall inform Albus when he returns so he can pursue this new avenue of research."

Harry glanced at Lupin, but the man, who Harry realised was much younger than his appearance would suggest, wore a blank mask. He knew Harry and Ginny knew more than they were saying, but he didn't say anything. There was no way he couldn't be one of the Marauders.

"Well, the feast will be starting soon, so I suggest the two of you make your way down to the Great Hall. Oh, and Mr Potter, I applaud you on your choice to change from Divination to Ancient Runes, a much more worthy discipline in my personal opinion. What made you decide to change at the last minute, if I may ask?"

Harry pointed at his neck, "Well, I figured I've got one stuck to my neck, so I may as well learn as much about it as I can. That and, well I found out my Mum used to do Ancient Runes, so I wanted to give it a try, to see if I can be a little bit closer to her. If that makes any sense." He told her.

McGonagall smiled, "It makes all the sense in the world." And with that, she turned and left the Hospital Wing.

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**A Message from Ghost and Miracle:**

"Hey, honey?" Miracle said, placing her twelfth-century eagle feather quill (that they had stolen from the actual twelfth century) back in the Inkwell. Ghost looked up from his seat in the library, where he was still working on inventorizing the books they'd saved from Alexandria last week.

"Yeah?"

"I've just done a bit of research. Did you know we only know three people in Ginny's year?" She said in astonishment.

Ghost raised an eyebrow.

"That can't be right," he said, moving to look at her parchment.

"Wow. Sucks to be her doesn't it?"

"Kinda does yeah," Miracle admitted. Ghost tapped a finger on his chin a few times, seemingly deep in thought.

"You know what?" He said eventually, turning to look out the strange window that stared out over the expanse of red mist. "I think we need to go find her some friends, don't you?"

Miracle grinned, eyeing the look of determination that flitted into Ghost's eyes. Then she turned to the screen, a very noticeable blush gracing her cheeks.

"I love it when he gets that look…" She whispered to the Reader. Then Ghost dropped the inventory on Miracle's desk and jumped out the window into the infinite unknown.
Updated Disclaimer:

Ghost and Miracle leapt across the building as a spray of bullets showered the rooftop.

“This story has had awesome reception so far hasn’t it?” Miracle exclaimed, vaulting up the fire-escape the duo just landed on.

“It’s fantastic. And I love the reviews too. Keep them coming guys!” Ghost yelled, though who he was yelling to wasn’t entirely clear.

“This is the Central City Police Department. Surrender the anti-matter generator, or we will be forced to open fire!” A tall black man yelled into a speakerphone as the two writers ran across the roof, dodging air-conditioners and cable antennas as they went.

“You know, that’s incredibly stereotypical?” Ghost told his companion.

“Your point being?” Miracle said, tapping her wrist mounted web-shooter that she definitely did not steal from one of the Spider-people. She grabbed Ghost by the arm and jumped clear of the roof, swinging around the building and into the open window of someone’s apartment.

“Nothing dear. Nothing at all.”

“Good. Cause we’re late for the disclaimer and you know how Crystal gets if we’re late,” Miracle said, wagging her finger at him.

“Don’t remind me,” Ghost muttered. The brown-haired man wearing Ravenclaw Hogwarts robes stepped over a Lego replica of the Death Star and crossed to the door, totally ignoring the twelve-year-old boy sitting on his bed in complete shock. Whether his shock was from the two writers that just swung into his apartment, or from Miracle – who’d insisted on wearing a fez and a bowtie for this particular adventure – was up for debate.

Suddenly, the smell of ozone filled the tiny bedroom, and a man in a red suit was leaning against the wall.

“Did you really think you could steal something from the Marvel Universe, then run through my backyard and I wouldn’t notice?” The Flash asked. Miracle squinted at him. Was this one blonde or brown haired? Then she frowned. It didn’t really matter. She’d always jump a Flash if given the option.

“Time to go I guess. Harry Potter and the Wizarding World belongs to JK Rowling. Marvel Comics characters, events and places all belong to Marvel Comics and Stan Lee, may his soul rest in the halls of the great creators.” Ghost admitted, whipping a tear from his eye. Then he grabbed Miracle, who was about to start drooling at the thought of Speedster abs, and clicked his heels together three times.

“There’s no place like home.”

Then the duo vanished, leaving the very confused Flash of Earth 1 behind.
Harry and Ginny stopped short on one of the moving staircases as they made their way towards the Great Hall.

“Ginny, do you actually want to go down to the Feast?” Harry asked her. The Dementor, plus the dream, had kind of destroyed his appetite.

“I don’t think I could eat anything if I tried,” She admitted.

Harry grinned, “Follow me then, I think I have just the place to talk.” Harry grabbed Ginny’s hand and pulled her back up the stairs. They climbed up to the sixth floor, ignoring the nosy portraits that asked what they were doing, and ran down a corridor not too far from Gryffindor Tower. It was near the highest point in the castle, with a large open window that looked over the battlements. The hallway itself was not overly long, less than fifteen metres if Harry had to guess. But the interesting thing was, there was only one portrait hanging on the wall. A portrait of a city of silver towers floating on an ocean of water.

“Merlin!” Ginny breathed. Harry frowned, before realising just what had enthralled her. It was a perfect replica of the city in the dream.

“I never saw it from this side before,” he whispered. Shaking his head, Harry ran his hand over the frame of the painting. Sure enough, at roughly the height of a doorknob, was the Home rune. He placed his thumb over it, whispered the password, and the painting swung inward, revealing the entrance hall of the Home.

“Woah!” Ginny exclaimed as Harry stepped through the translucent, shimmering barrier and into the pocket dimension. Ginny, staring wide-eyed, followed him inside.

“What is this place?” Ginny asked as the painting, which from this side looked like a red door, sung closed behind her.

“Welcome Home,” he told her, a massive grin on his face.

“What?”

“This is where…” Harry trailed off. His eyes were locked on the clock.

Moony and Wormtail’s hands were both now pointing to School. Padfoot was back on Mortal Peril. So that made Lupin either Wormtail or Moony and meant Padfoot was Sirius Black. Sirius was the one who had used the Home shortly before Harry had arrived. He had just missed him. Now if only he could figure out what gave them the names, then he could figure out who Lupin was. Another question was, where was Pettigrew? And why was he at Hogwarts?
“Harry?” Ginny said, placing a hand on his shoulder. Ginny’s touch, combined with the warm tingle that ran through the rune on his neck, snapped him out of his funk.

“Sorry. Come on, I’ll show you the main room, then I’ll finish the story I started on the train.”

It took a good hour for Harry to explain the Home to Ginny. He showed her the letter from his Mum explaining what the pocket dimension actually was and gave her a tour of the building. He also told her about the Marauders and his suspicions about both Professor Lupin and Sirius Black. Ginny was a good audience. Laughing, gasping and crying in all the right places. They eventually ended up sitting in the common room outside the library with a copy of Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations sitting on Harry’s lap.

“Thanks for the necklace by the way. I really appreciate it,” Harry told her, pulling the chain with its two pendants out from beneath his shirt.

“You did save my life last year. It was the least I could do,” she said with a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“I’ve been meaning to ask, but didn’t want to say anything in front of your brothers, how are you, all things considered. I know you said you were doing better in your letter but, I just wanted to see you and talk to you properly,” Harry asked.

Ginny turned away, using her hair to shield her face from Harry’s gaze.

“It was hard at first. I had nightmares every time I closed my eyes. I just couldn’t stop thinking about it. Not to mention this,” she ran her hand over the mark on her neck, “the idea that I was still connected to… him… after everything, just made me feel violated you know. But after Bill and Charlie sat me down and talked it through with me, it was like, like this massive weight was lifted off my shoulders.” Ginny turned back to Harry, staring straight into his eyes. Harry couldn’t help but gaze into her deep chocolate orbs.

“I know its cheesy but, I’d much rather be connected to you than… V… Voldemort.” Ginny shuddered as she said the name. Harry grabbed her hands and grinned.

“Congratulations, you’re the only person besides me, and Dumbledore I’ve ever heard say his name out loud. Fear of a name only strengthens our fear of the thing itself. I’m not afraid of Voldemort or his name. I’ve already faced him three times and won. You faced him for an entire year without letting him take you down. As horrible as it sounds, I hate to think of what might have happened if it had been someone weak-willed who got that Diary, instead of you,” Harry told her. Ginny beamed up at him, a sparkle blooming in her eyes that Harry thought was utterly magnificent.

“Really?” She asked, voice trembling.

“Definitely.” Harry turned back to the book and traced the image of the Gemini Rune on the page.

“This is our mystery, this little marking. We need to figure out what it’s doing to us. What it has to do with the dreams. Why Dumbledore lied about it. And most importantly, who put it on us in the first place.” He said.

“I love a good mystery,” Ginny replied, a smirk breaking across her face.
“It’s gonna be fun.”

Ginny’s first week of second-year classes were strange, to say the least. She learned in her first class on September 2nd (which happened to be a Thursday that year), Potions, that Malfoy – seemingly in revenge for getting his father kicked off the school board of governors – had spread the rumour that she was behind the attacks the previous year. The Slytherins had latched onto the story and took great joy in sneering at her and reminding her that it was all her fault. At first, she couldn’t figure out what Malfoy’s point was aside from embarrassing her. That remedied itself very quickly. First, Colin had moved to sit as far away from her as possible, then Demelza had moved to sit with him, and most of her classmates followed until she was literally sitting with a ring of empty seats around her. Although he didn’t come right out and say it, Ginny could tell Snape was in full agreement of Malfoy’s comments and she swore she saw his lips twitch slightly when she saw the gits plan working brilliantly.

By Herbology, which she had with Hufflepuff, the story was across the entire school. She couldn’t even bring herself to go to the Great Hall for lunch, instead making her way to the Sixth-floor corridor to make a sandwich in the Home. After lunch, she had Charms with the Ravenclaws, which made her breathe a sigh of relief. At least she could sit next to Luna in Charms. Luna would never judge her. So, as she made her way into Professor Flitwick’s class, she spotted her blonde-haired friend helping a boy with black hair into a seat. The boy placed a white stick against the desk, before quietly thanking Luna and pulling out his textbook, which didn’t actually seem to have words written in it. Another boy with long sandy hair sat down opposite him and slapped him on the back.

Shrugging, Ginny made her way over to the desk on the other side of Luna’s.

“Do you mind Luna?” She asked hesitantly.

“No. Everyone else seems to be full of Wrackspurts today, so it’ll be nice to sit with someone who doesn’t,” she said dreamily. Ginny – who was fluent in what she liked to call ‘Luna Speak’ – took that as a ‘yes’.

“Luna? Who’s that next to you? I can't place her voice,” the black-haired boy stated. He didn’t actually look at Luna as he said it, instead staring straight forward quite rudely. He was wearing a pair of red tinted glasses over his eyes.

“Oh, that’s Ginny, she lives near our house, she was my first friend. She’s lovely,” Luna exclaimed as Ginny blushed bright red.

“Well then, any friend of Luna’s is a friend of mine,” the boy said, finally turning his head towards Luna, and by extension Ginny. He held his hand out over Luna’s desk and gave the two girls a smile. The glasses prevented her from seeing his eyes. Ginny raised her eyebrow at Luna, who was now looking at her with her glassy eyes.

Ginny reached out and took the boys hand awkwardly.

“Nice to meet you…”

“Matthew. Matthew Murdock. But my friends call me Matt. A pleasure to meet you to Ginny,” the boy said. The handshake was the weirdest she had ever experienced. Matt seemed to be feeling her hand, running his thumb over her palm and his fingers over her wrist.
“You’re a pure-blood, right?” the sandy-haired boy asked, leaning behind Luna. “Don’t mind Matt, he’s blind, so he learns by touch. He’s committing the feeling of your hand to memory, so he recognises it later.” Ginny breathed a slight sigh of relief as the confusion drained from her face. Matt frowned and let go of her hand.

“Sorry if that was a bit creepy, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“Don’t worry about it, I don’t mind really. You do what you need to do,” Ginny said with a smile.

“Foggy Nelson,” the sandy-haired boy stated, giving her a wave. Whatever Ginny might have said after that was lost, as at that moment Professor Flitwick walked into the room and began the class.

Friday wasn’t much better. She had Double Herbology in the morning where she sat on her own once more, and History of Magic with the Ravenclaws in the afternoon. She sat with Matt, Foggy and Luna again. They appeared to be the only ones in her year who didn’t believe the rumours. Either that or they just hadn’t heard them yet, as she could tell the trio kept mostly to themselves. She wasn’t sure whether it was because of Matt’s disability, Luna’s inherent weirdness, or their collective desire for privacy.

She spent most of the weekend in the Home with Harry, Hermione and Ron (who Ginny assumed Harry had shown the brilliant place sometime during the week, as they didn’t seem overly surprised by its existence) looking through the Library for more notes on the Gemini Rune. Or, more correctly, Hermione spent the entire weekend running through the Library like a seven-year-old on a sugar rush, while Ron made use of the Quidditch Pitch, Ginny did her homework, and Harry flitted between helping Hermione, flying with Ron, and doing his own homework. Harry bequeathed his Mum’s second-year textbooks – which were all perfectly preserved in the Marauders Library – to Ginny, showing her all the helpful hints his Mum had left in the margins. She had been completely awed by the fact he was willing to trust her with something so precious and promised to keep them in excellent condition.

Monday was when things got really weird. She had double Potions first up, which was never fun. Snape took a grand total of 25 points off her during the class for numerous perceived slights. She had actually, despite the lack of help and constant sneering from her supposed professor, made a rather good potion, and Snape had been forced to give her an E at the end of the lesson. Thankfully her cauldron exploded after he had marked it. The detonated potion made her the last person to leave the room when the bell rang and, as she made her way towards the stairs leading out of the dungeons, she heard someone call her name.

“Weasley!” Ginny spun around and saw a girl with long black hair wearing Slytherin robes standing behind her.

“Yes?”

The girl, whose name Ginny couldn’t remember, pulled a lock of hair behind her ear.
“I just wanted to say, I’m sorry about what Malfoy did to you last year. It’s foul, and if I’d have known what was happening, I would have tried to help, consequences be damned.” The girl spun on her heel and stalked back down the corridor.

“Wait! What’s your name?” Ginny called to the retreating figure.

“Jessica.” Then she vanished around a corner, leaving a speechless Ginny behind her.

Ginny spent the entire rest of the day thinking about the confrontation, to the point where she barely registered the news that Malfoy had been injured in Care of Magical Creatures, or that the old bat Professor Trelawney had predicted Harry’s death, despite Harry not even being in her class.

It was Tuesday at lunch, while Ginny was sitting at the kitchen bench in the Home nibbling on a sandwich that Harry walked in carrying his book bag.

“Why aren’t you eating in the Great Hall?” Harry asked her, sliding onto the seat next to her.

“I could ask you the same,” She retorted.

“I left my Runes book in here last night.” Sure enough, sitting on the bench was his Ancient Runes textbook. “Your turn.”

Ginny sighed, knowing there was no way to get out of it.

“I’m hiding,” she told him.

“I figured that much out for myself funny enough.”

Ginny rolled her eyes.

“Is it about those stupid rumours Malfoy was spreading?” He asked. Ginny took another bite of her sandwich.

“I tend to just ignore gossip and stuff like that, after everything that’s happened to me over the last two years. Is it really that bad?” Harry placed a hand on her chin and tilted her head up to face his. She knew he could see the unshed tears in her eyes.

Harry let go and ran a hand through his hair.

“Don’t worry, I’ll fix it.” He tapped his finger on the table a few times before grabbing his book and making his way to the door. He stopped short in the hallway,

“Make sure you’re in the common room after dinner tonight.”

So, after eating dinner with Matt, Luna and Foggy, Ginny made her way up to the Gryffindor Common Room, to see just what hair-brained scheme Harry had cocked up. She sat herself down on one of the couches by the fire and tried to make herself as invisible as possible. Five minutes after her arrival, Harry walked through the portrait hole with Ron, Hermione, Fred and George behind him. Harry took a deep breath and nodded to one of the twins. George (at least she thought it was George,
she couldn’t be sure from her current angle) threw a firework up into the air, which promptly exploded, covering everyone in the room in pink glitter. Everyone turned toward the twins, who bowed and stepped back behind Harry.

“Alright. Now that I have your attention, there is something about last year that needs to be set straight.” He exclaimed, letting his voice carry through the dead silent room as Ginny tried to bury herself deeper inside the cushions.

“It has come to my attention that some of you, and I’m not going to name names, actually believe the story being touted by the Slytherins. None of whom were actually there. So, I’m going to set things straight. Because I was there, and I’m the only one who knows what happened from start to finish. The thing attacking people last year was not a student. It was a fifty-metre-long Basilisk. How do I know this? Because I killed it in the Chamber of Secrets. The Heir of Slytherin was Voldemort.” The entire room flinched, and Harry rolled his eyes. “Ginny Weasley, who Malfoy is blaming for the whole thing because he’s mad he can’t get away with whatever he wants anymore, stopped the Basilisk from killing its victims. When Voldemort found out, he kidnapped her and dragged her down to the Chamber, where Ron and I rescued her, and I killed the snake with the help of Professor Dumbledore’s Phoenix. Any questions?”

The room remained dead silent. Not even the portraits moved.

“Good.”

With that, Harry walked over to where Ginny was unsuccessfully trying to die of embarrassment and sat next to her. He then pulled out his Transfiguration homework and quill and began to finish his essay.

Slowly, chatter started to begin in the room again, and the atmosphere went back to normal.

“You didn’t have to do that,” she said pointedly.

“Yes, I did. I’m not going to let Malfoy get away with spreading false rumours. I won’t do it. And I’m certainly not going to let one of my friends get caught in the crossfire.” The Gemini Rune, which had been relatively quiet all week, sizzled against her neck. But it wasn’t a painful burn. In fact, it was quite soothing.

“Thank you, Harry.”

“Don’t mention it.”

A Message from Ghost and Miracle:

Ghost smiled brightly at Miracle, who was sitting on a bean bag in the corner of the room, stroking her dog – a small Highland Terrier named Pirate – as she sulked.

“Done. That’s Act I and Act II completed. We’re getting into the exciting stuff now my love,” Ghost exclaimed, incorrectly diagnosing the source of her woes as Netflix’s Daredevil being cancelled.
earlier that day.

“That’s great darling,” Miracle sighed. It was only now that Ghost realised Miracle was wearing a very short skirt… and no panties. Evidently, she was more disappointed about not getting to shag The Flash than he thought.

Knowing full well it was a bad idea, Ghost opened a drawer and pulled out a vial of Super-Soldier Serum, and his wand. Desperate times called for desperate measures. Making sure to save his progress, Ghost jumped up, and levitated both Miracle and her dog into the upstairs bedroom, completely ignoring the dogs incessant yapping. Then he ran up the stairs himself and stopped at the door.

“There are going to be 10 chapters per act, with at least seven acts planned. Whether they’re all in this one, or we split it into a sequel, who knows. Just get ready for a long and bumpy ride,” He turned back to the bedroom, before grinning maliciously at the audience, “I know I am!”

Then he winked at the audience, skulled the serum, and slammed the door closed.
On the morning of Halloween, Harry was feeling very good about himself. The past two months had been particularly enjoyable. Defence Against the Dark Arts with Professor Lupin was by far his favourite class. Lupin was just so much fun. He always knew exactly what to say to make the class laugh, was a brilliant teacher, and he didn’t assign lots of homework. In fact, Harry could only remember one class where he had assigned them homework, and it was only a foot-long essay on Redcaps which Harry finished in less than half-an-hour.

His parents’ textbooks were making all his classes particularly easier as well. His mother was a genius at Potions. Even Professor Snape couldn’t deny that Harry’s potions work had soared that year.

Although Harry could say very assuredly that he was not very good at Transfiguration, with his father’s help, he was getting a steady stream of Exceeds Expectations on most of his essays. Harry also accepted that he was never going to be any good at Herbology.

However, Hermione was very pleased by his increased performance in History of Magic of all subjects. He still fell asleep in practically every class Professor Bins taught, but he absolutely loved reading his father’s History of Magic text. Not so much for the content, but for the notes in the margins. There were three sets of handwriting all over the book. One was a heavy set, but relatively clean hand he assumed was his dads. The second was light and very neat, and Harry had almost fallen out of his chair when he realised that Professor Lupin wrote on the blackboard in the exact same style. The last was scrawled and barely legible – Harry assumed this was Sirius Black’s handwriting but couldn’t be sure as it could also be Pettigrew’s. The notes were so funny he often cracked up laughing in both the Common Room in Gryffindor Tower and the Study Room outside the Library in the Home. The plus side of this was Harry actually read the book and completed his Essays so he could read more of the notes left behind by the mysterious Marauders.

Care of Magical Creatures was relatively boring. Hagrid had lost all his confidence after the incident with Malfoy and had them learning about Flobberworms almost every lesson. Harry hoped his friend would regain it soon, as Hagrid did not do ‘depressed’ very well.

Ancient Runes was a big surprise. He was actually enjoying the class almost as much as Professor Lupins. Professor Babbling, who taught the class, was very upbeat and enthusiastic in her teaching and was always willing to help if Harry struggled with a translation. Hermione was incredibly impressed by Harry’s devotion to Ancient Runes. He actually paid attention in every class (a significant achievement, given his track record) and received O’s on almost every piece of work. He won the third top mark in the cohort for the memory test Babbling surprised on them one class towards the end of October, with only Hermione and Daphne Greengrass beating him.
Professor Babbling had pulled Harry aside after his first class and, similarly to Ragnok, asked to see the Gemini Rune on his neck – apparently Professor McGonagall had mentioned it when she informed her of his decision to switch classes. He had told her of his research into the rune from Riker O’Neill’s book, and she had confirmed it as fact. She admitted that she didn’t know a lot about the Zodiac Runes specifically, but that if she came across anything interesting, she would inform him of it immediately, to which Harry was incredibly grateful. He also learned, quite painfully, that his spells were much more powerful. This became apparent in Charms when casting the Ascension Charm resulted in him crashing into the roof and ending up in the Hospital Wing for the second time in a week. Professor Dumbledore assured him it was most likely a side-effect of the Gemini Rune and instructed Professors’ McGonagall, Lupin and Flitwick to be extra careful when teaching him new spells. Harry wasn’t sure he believed the Headmaster, as nowhere in his research did it say that the Gemini Rune boosted the bearer's power at all. Harry had a feeling it had more to do with the Dragon and the Phoenix that kept appearing on his arm before vanishing, but Harry had only seen it one time since it lit up the Hogwarts Express: in Professor Lupin’s class, just before his Boggart transformed into a Dementor.

Harry’s friendship with Ginny was also growing. While he didn’t spend every moment outside of class with her, he did enjoy spending time with her. She often did her homework in the Home and came to him with any Charms or DADA questions she didn’t understand. She had also stolen his copy of Ancient Runes Made Easy and his Rune Dictionary on multiple occasions for some light reading.

The only part of his life that had Harry completely mystified was Hermione. She was doing twice as many classes as Harry and Ron were, and she was studying around the clock to ensure she got Outstandings on every test and essay. That was on top of her continued cataloguing of the Marauders Library, which she insisted needed to be done as apparently, no one had thought to do it before her. That was the one mark against Harry’s mother that Hermione had. Lily Potter’s organisation skills left much to be desired. Harry, Ron and Ginny all agreed that she was taking on too much, but any attempt to convince Hermione of that fact was met with a huff and her storming off.

But today was Halloween. The worst day of Harry’s year. Harry had a plan to make today the best Halloween he’d ever had. Which wouldn’t be hard considering the last two had been interrupted by a troll and a giant snake. So today, despite Hermione’s objections, he was planning to use the Home, and his invisibility cloak, to bypass the school's security and go into Hogsmeade.

“Are you sure you want to do this Harry?” Hermione asked him for what had to be the tenth time that morning as they sat at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall.

“Hermione, he’s said the same thing every single time you’ve asked him. What makes you think he’s going to change his mind now?” Ron asked, rolling his eyes as he shoved another piece of bacon into his mouth.

“Because maybe this will be the time he comes to his senses,” Hermione snapped.

“Come on Hermione. I told you what Ragnok said, and you’ve seen the evidence in the Home first hand. Odds are, even if Black finds me out there, he’s not gonna kill me.” Harry pointed out as he put his fork down.

“I know. It’s just… Dumbledore and McGonagall don’t think it’s a good idea and they’re a lot smarter than us.”

“Well I don’t trust Dumbledore, and Halloween is the worst day of the year for me Mione, you’ve
“Alright. But if a deranged murderer tries to kill you while we’re in the Three Broomsticks I’m going to make sure I say I told you so before you die,” she said.

“Fair enough,” Harry replied, grinning ear to ear.

Harry glanced down at his watch. “You guys should get going. I’ll meet you in the alley.” Harry stood up and made a hasty retreat from the Great Hall. He made a show of walking towards Gryffindor Tower in case anyone was watching, then made a beeline for the Sixth Floor Corridor. Slipping inside, he quickly made his way to the bedroom to grab a warmer jacket from his wardrobe but stopped short when he saw Ginny jumping up and down in the library. Containing his laughter, he padded into the large room. Ginny was trying unsuccessfully to pull a blue-covered book off the tallest shelf.

“Need a hand?” Harry asked her as he leaned on the door frame.

“MEEEEEK!!” Ginny screamed and tried to spin around and pull her wand, all the while still in mid-air. The result was her falling straight back into the bookshelf, a grey tinted spell flying from her wand and into the roof, and the entire wooden shelf, Ginny, and the books inside it collapsing in a heap on the floor. He tried. He really did. But there was no way he could do it. Harry fell to the floor unable to breathe he was laughing so hard.

“I hate you, Harry Potter. I want you to know that before I kill you,” Ginny moaned as she tried to pull herself out of the pile of books.

“At least I have… Hermione to… avenge me.” Harry breathed through his laughter, “After all, you did just damage a perfectly catalogued section of her beautiful library.”

All the colour drained from Ginny’s face, and Harry cracked up again.

“I’m only joking,” Harry eventually said. He pointed his wand at the broken shelf and rotated it counter-clockwise.

“Reparo!” The shelves restored themselves, and the books flew back into place.

“Thank Merlin,” Ginny exclaimed. Then she turned to Harry, a murderous glint in her eye.

“Don’t you ever sneak up on me again Harry Potter, or you’ll get a taste of my Bat-Bogey Hex! You just missed it today, don’t push your luck,” She exclaimed, placing her hands on her hips for emphasis.

“Alright alright I surrender,” he said, holding his hands in the air.

“Pst! Harry! You there mate!” Ron’s voice echoed down the hallway.

Harry turned to Ginny.

“Tell you what, how about I make it up to you,” Harry said with a smirk.

“Oh yeah, how you gonna do that?” Ginny asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Easy, I’m gonna take you to Hogsmeade a year early.”

Ginny’s face lit up like Christmas.
“Grab a jumper from my room quick,” he said, and together they raced out of the library. Ginny pulled the first jumper she saw from Harry’s wardrobe, and Harry threw his Invisibility Cloak over the pair of them. They crept to the blue door and slipped out into the crisp morning air.

The Hogsmeade side of the door appeared very old and very out of use. The handle was rusted, as was the door frame, and the wood was rotting away. It was the perfect hiding place. Etched into the stone wall beside it was the Home Rune: a letter A without the cross bridge with a tiny circle above the apex.

“Harry? You there?” Ron asked. He was standing in the middle of the alley staring at the door that just swung closed on its own. Hermione was at the entrance keeping a lookout. Harry raised his hand and placed a single finger over his lips. Ginny nodded her head in understanding, the smile still on her face.

“Yeah I’m here, let’s go.” Harry, Ginny and Ron met up with Hermione, and together they walked out onto the main street of Hogsmeade.

They spent hours wandering through the village. It was like something out of a fairy tale. All the small stone houses with their thatched roofs and lit torches in brackets on the walls. Not to mention the blatant use of magic everywhere. They visited Honeydukes Sweet Shop – where Ron used up half his allowance to buy sweets as Hermione scolded him about dental hygiene, Zonko’s Joke Shop – where Ginny literally begged Harry to buy her some Dungbombs, Smoke Pellets and Sparking Crackers, and the Three Broomsticks Pub where the foursome tried Butterbeer for the first time.

Harry and Ginny made a fatal error at this point, as they forgot to sit down at the same time, and Harry slipped off the bench and hit the floor with a thud, pulling the invisibility cloak with him. Hermione was furious at Ginny for disobeying rules and scolded the redhead for five minutes before Ginny threatened to hex her. Ron just laughed, congratulated his sister for achieving something even the twins hadn’t, and sculled his Butterbeer, to the amusement of the others when he started hiccuping.

Unfortunately, they had to make a hasty retreat when Hagrid came inside, spotted Ron and Hermione, and almost sat on the invisible Harry and Ginny. The duo took their Butterbeer tankards, exited the pub and slipped back into the alley. Ginny whispered the password to activate the anchor, and they stepped back into the Home, closing the door behind them. Harry put Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark on the Television in the Lounge Room, and together they sat down and finished their drinks. Ginny kept pausing the movie to point out locations she recognised from her trip to Egypt in the summer.

It did not take Harry long to realise that Ginny seemed to have inherited her father’s love of everything Muggle. Harry had to try really hard not to laugh at Ginny’s amazement at the “felly-vision,” and he even gave her a basic explanation of how it used plugs to run on electricity that came from a generator outside the house to give to Mr Weasley next time she saw him.

Ron and Hermione came in just as the movie finished, and Hermione pouted that she hadn’t been able to watch with them. She rectified the situation by making them all watch Star Wars – one of her favourite movies. However, whereas Ginny could understand most of Raiders of the Lost Ark, both Weasley’s were utterly baffled by the concept of travelling in space, and Hermione and Harry had to pause the movie multiple times to explain the basics of science, which they knew nothing about. Despite their confusion, they did enjoy the movie, and everyone had a magnificent time.

The Feast was as delicious as always. With dozens of variations of pumpkins and more sweets than Harry could count. At one-point Fred threw a small pumpkin he charmed to explode at Ron. Ron
then chased Fred around the table a few times before Hermione was able to calm him down long enough to cast a cleaning charm on him, while Harry, Ginny, George and the rest of the Gryffindors laughed at them.

Harry was just about to chalk the day up as his first successful Halloween when the quartet arrived at Gryffindor Tower to find a rather large traffic jam cued up on the platform beyond the portrait of the Fat Lady.

“What’s going on?” Ginny asked, trying to peer over Colin Creevey, who was standing in front of her – and who was possibly the only second year actually shorter than she was.

“Neville’s probably forgotten the password again,” Ron stated, rolling his eyes.

“Hey!” Standing behind them was Neville and a tall heavy-set dark-skinned boy from Ginny’s year whose name Harry couldn’t remember.

“Let me through please,” came Percy’s voice as he tried to push through the crowd, “excuse me I’m Head Boy.” Harry slipped in behind Percy and used him to reach the front. When he saw the portrait, Harry cursed. He should have known better than to jinx himself. Hermione, who Harry hadn’t noticed following behind him, grabbed his arm and gasped.

“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered.

“What is it? I can’t see?!” Ginny exclaimed, still bouncing up and down. “Ohh bugger it,” she muttered, before jumping up on Ron’s back and using his shoulders to push herself up above the sea of heads. Ron grunted but didn’t fall over. Apparently, he had experience with her doing that.

“Holy crap.”

“Somebody get Professor Dumbledore. Now!” Percy yelled.

“I’m here,” Dumbledore’s voice exclaimed. Everyone spun around so fast that Ginny fell right off Ron’s shoulders, careening straight into Neville, who promptly fell flat on his arse.

“Sorry,” she said, not taking her eyes off Dumbledore.

The Headmaster stared at the painting before turning around to Professor McGonagall, who had followed behind him.

“Professor McGonagall find Mr Filch and round up the ghosts.”

“Oh, there’s no need for ghosts almighty Headmaster sir,” a cackling voice echoed overhead. Peeves the Poltergeist had just floated through the wall the Fat Lady’s Portrait hung on.

“Saw it all I did.”

“What happened?” The Headmaster asked, staring at the transparent spirit.

“Tall fella wearing a not so nicey jacket comes running up the stairs and starts beggan the Lady to let her in he does. She says no and, well…”

The portrait of the Fat Lady had been slashed to pieces, and the Fat Lady herself was nowhere to be found.
It was Harry who figured out how Sirius Black entered the castle.

It was two days after Halloween, the first time he managed to escape the ever-watchful eye of the teachers, who were constantly walking him between classes and Percy, who it didn’t take a genius to figure out was following him on orders from his mother. Harry trudged his way to the portrait on the sixth floor and stopped sharp outside. There was a tiny scuff of mud on the wall beneath the painting, almost as if someone had tripped as they stepped inside. Harry quickly opened the door and slipped inside, before stopping dead still in the hallway. The clock hands had moved. Padfoot’s hand was now pointed firmly at School, and Moony was back on Running on the Wild Side. There was no denying it. Black was still on Hogwarts Grounds, and he had used the Home to get inside.

Harry panicked. He raced around the entire property, checking every nook and cranny for signs of Black’s existence. His bed had been slept in again, most likely the night of the break-in, and some of the food and drink were gone as well. He would need to use the Hyde Park Anchor to go into London and restock next weekend. At least if he knew Black was at the school, he couldn’t get to him in London.

He quickly warned the others. Ron wasn’t too worried, he said if they locked the Home then he would just find another way in. Hermione wanted to put the entire place on lockdown. The only thing that made her agree with Harry’s decision to leave it unlocked, for now, was that she would lose access to the Library if he did close it. Ginny merely shrugged and said, “It’s your heritage, it’s your decision. I trust you.”

Harry’s anxiety grew even worse that afternoon when Professor Snape took what was perhaps the worst Defence Against the Dark Arts Class Harry had ever endured, and that included all of Lockhart’s classes the previous year. It wasn’t that Snape had all but verbally flayed Hermione for answering his own question, or that he had given Ron detention for defending her, or even that Snape had taken great pleasure at attacking and ridiculing Professor Lupin’s teaching style the whole time. It was what Snape had taught them that had Harry brooding over. He had made a massive show of making them read about Werewolves and then assigning an essay on the ways to recognise and kill them. So, Harry had sat down and written the essay that night in the living room in the Home, firmly intending to get an O just to spite the sneering potions master. It wasn’t until one in the morning that Harry put down his quill, in the belief that the essay was absolutely perfect. As he walked through the entrance hall on the way to his bedroom, he caught Moony’s hand moving from Running on the Wild Side – where it had been all day – back to School. Hermione often called him oblivious, and Ginny frequently accused him of missing important details, but he wasn’t an idiot. Harry was very good at seeing the big picture from scattered pieces. And after tonight, he had a feeling he knew the reason for Professor Lupin’s nickname a little better.

Harry woke up halfway through breakfast the next day. The day of the first Quidditch match of the year. He raced up to the Common Room to grab his broom and change into his Quidditch robes before running down to the Great Hall. The rest of the team was already there, and Harry noticed for
the first time that there was a thunderstorm raging outside. He managed to force a piece of toast down his throat before following Wood, the twins, Alicia, Angelina and Katie out the doors, into the pouring rain and down to the Quidditch Pitch.

“Everyone come here, quick,” Harry said as they stepped into the change-rooms soaking wet. He pulled out his wand and cast one of Ginny’s favourite charms – a Warming Charm she had learned from her mother – on each of them.

“Merlin’s beard! Thanks, loads Harry,” Wood exclaimed, rubbing his arms.

“I could kiss you right now, Harry,” Katie breathed, eyes rolling back in her head as the charm took effect.

“Normally it would last for about fifteen minutes, but, as I’m sure every one of you has heard the story of me getting my head stuck in the ceiling in Charms class, that one should last somewhere around thirty,” Harry said through chattering teeth. He waved his wand over his head and sighed as the familiar feeling of steaming warmth flooded through his veins. He grabbed his Nimbus 2000 and followed the team out onto the pitch.

The match, despite Ginny’s warming charm, was by far the worst he had ever played in. He couldn’t see a thing, which not only made it practically impossible to spot the Snitch but very hard to dodge the hurtling bludgers as well. Nor could he even hear Lee Jordan’s usually highly entertaining commentary or the cheering of the crowd. It got so bad at one point that Katie was actually struck by lightning, forcing Madam Hooch to call a timeout. So, when the Hufflepuff Seeker, Cedric Diggory, spotted the Snitch high above the stadium, Harry pushed himself forward and hurtled into the sky. He had to finish this, and he’d be damned if he’d let Cedric Diggory beat him to the Snitch. As he rose, he noticed that the Warming Charm was wearing off. Cedric was about a foot in front of him, arm outstretched, as thunder rolled in the clouds above. Harry could barely see as the rain smashed down around him. His glasses were fogged over, and his hair was drenched. His entire body felt like it was frozen. The cold was all-encompassing, almost as if it were seeping into his soul.

Pain flared in Harry’s arm, but he was too focused on trying to stay on his broom to care. He couldn’t even see the Snitch, but he could see the blurred outline of Cedric, and he could feel the build-up of ice on his broomstick handle. Then he saw it. Another blur, this time black, sweeping through the sky beneath them. The thunder vanished from Harry’s ears, replaced by an eerily familiar voice.

“Not Harry!! Kill me instead! Please no!!”

“Cedric…” Harry tried to warn the other boy, but his mouth felt like lead. The Gemini Rune was burning in violent pain, making his head throb, and all the while, the screaming continued.

“No! Please!”

Two more black blurs flashed through Harry’s vision, his arms went slack, and everything went dark.

“Stand aside, you silly girl!

“NO! Not Harry!!!! I won’t let you hurt him!!”

“Avada Kedavra!!!!!!!”
Harry pulled his head up above the waterline. He was still in his Quidditch Robes, the Snitch and his broom floating in the water a few meters away. He pulled himself to his feet and shook his head. The Gemini Rune was still burning, making him feel like someone was trying to drill into his head. He looked down at his arm. Sure enough, the Dragon and Phoenix tattoo was there. But it seemed dark, the colours washed out and faded.

“Harry!” Ginny’s voice called out. Harry spun towards the city. Standing at the edge of the platform was Ginny. She was in soaking wet Hogwarts robes with a bright red and gold scarf around her neck. On her left hand was a large pointer finger that said, “Go, Harry!” – one of the Twins products.

“Ginny! Stay there! Do not leave the city!” He yelled.

“Can you get here?” She asked. He looked over to the broom, floating in the water.

“I can try.” He grabbed the broom and jumped on. He flew out across the water, but his Nimbus felt slower than normal.

“Poor little worthless Ginny Weasley. Still desperate for Harry Potter: her knight in shining armour, to save her. He can’t save you from me. I’m a part of you now.” Harry stared in horror as all the colour drained from Ginny’s face and her body began shaking uncontrollably. She slowly turned around and stared the teenage incarnation of Tom Riddle in the face. Harry pushed his broom as fast as he could go, but it was like moving through mud.

“Oh no, all alone! What can you do to me, Ginny Weasley? What can you do against the might of Lord Voldemort reborn!” Riddle’s figure seemed to blur. It grew taller, lankier. His skin took on a whitish sheen and his nose flattened to slits. His eyes went from deep brown to blood red. It was the face that was on the back of Professor Quirrell’s head. The face he saw in his nightmares. The face of Voldemort.

Ginny screamed, her wand fell from her fingers, and she edged backwards as the adult form of Tom Riddle advanced.

“Ginny don’t let him force you from the city!!” Harry yelled.

“Oh, we can’t have that,” Voldemort said, red eyes gleaming in malice. He flicked his wand and let out a string of hissing.

“Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four!”

The ocean beneath Harry began to churn, and he gulped as a large green body rose up from the depths.

“Say goodbye to your hero,” Voldemort cackled. The basilisk launched itself up from the water, and Harry dived away from the snake’s fangs, hitting the water with a splash!

Harry jerked awake as vomit rose up in his throat. He turned away from the bed and threw up on the floor opposite him.
“Harry?” Ginny’s trembling voice whispered into the darkness.

Harry reached for his glasses and found them on the bedside table. He slid them on his face and saw Ginny sitting upright in the bed opposite shaking uncontrollably. They were in the Hospital Wing, and it was completely dark. But there was a foul aroma on the air like something was burning.

“Yeah, it’s me,” he told her. He could see the rune on her neck from here, as it was glowing bright red and letting black smoke into the air.

“You're…” his voice cracked. It was hoarse as if he had been screaming, “Your rune is smoking.”

She pointed at him, “So’s yours.”

He raised his hand to his neck and touched the rune.

“Ahh!” he exclaimed, jerking his finger away, “Not a good idea.” He stuck his finger in his mouth in an attempt to cool it down.

“Did you…”

“Have another dream? Yeah,” he finished.

“That… that thing… that Tom turned into… that’s… that what he looks like… isn’t it?” She stuttered.

“Yeah. That’s what he looks like in my dreams. Looks like our nightmares are combining forces now. They really don’t want us inside that city.” Harry rubbed his eyes and stood on shaky legs. He edged over and sat down beside her. Ginny placed her head on his shoulder, gripped his hand in a vice, and started crying into his pyjamas, which someone must have grabbed from his room for him.

They sat there for so long Harry lost track of time, but eventually, their runes stopped smoking, and Ginny cried herself to sleep on his shoulder. Harry gently lay her head down on the pillow, but even in her sleep, she wouldn’t let go of his hand. So, Harry lay beside her, pulled the blankets over them both and slowly drifting into a deep sleep of his own.

When Ginny woke the next morning, she was very warm and very comfortable. She thought that was perhaps the best sleep she’d had since the Chamber. Refusing to get up and ruin the moment, she snuggled deeper into her pillow, which felt rather unlike a pillow now that she thought about it. Dismissing that errant and frankly annoying thought, Ginny sighed and placed her arms around it. The pillow was an odd shape, but she didn’t really care because it was nice and warm. The rune on her neck purred with gentle heat, and she felt herself slowly being dragged back into the blissful oblivion of drowsiness.

“You can see it too, can’t you?” a whispered voice from somewhere on Ginny’s left side said.

“Oh yes. It’s quite magnificent. I could hear it a floor away. Gorgeous music.” That was Luna’s voice, the conscious part of Ginny’s mind supplied, but the unconscious part was somewhat firm in its belief that listening to voices was a rather stupid thing to do at the moment, as sleep was much
more important.

“I keep meaning to ask Matthew, but how did you learn to see?” Luna’s voice asked.

“The accident,” the other voice, which must have belonged to Matt, stated solemnly.

“Must be the Nargles,” Luna said.

“Must be.” Matt didn’t sound very convinced. There was a creaking of wood on stone, and three taps that Ginny had learned to associate with Matt’s White Cane – the long white staff he used to help him walk.

“He’s waking up, you can see it in the colours,” Matt stated. The tap, tap of Matt’s cane was followed by the skipping of Luna’s shoes and the creaking of the wooden door. Ginny’s pillow let out a soft sigh and snuggled closer to her, which Ginny found rather odd. Deciding that maybe this pillow had been charmed by the twins, Ginny cracked open her eyes and found herself staring into the light blue striped pyjamas of one Harry James Potter.

“EEEEEKKKK!”

Ginny moved to turn away as her face burned red as a tomato. The only problem, the sheets had become twisted around them during the night, and Ginny’s attempts to move only herself resulted in both her and Harry falling off the bed and crashing to the stone floor, Harry on top of Ginny. Never in her life had she been more embarrassed than she was right now. The bright red of her cheeks was not at all aided by the Gemini Rune, which seemed to be vibrating even more now the pair were even closer than before.

“Urghhh, what happened, I can’t see a thing.” Harry muttered. He rolled slightly and slipped off of Ginny, landing with a hard grunt on the cold floor.

“Ow.”

Mortified, Ginny pulled herself to her feet and frantically searched the bed for his glasses. They were sitting delicately on the bedside table. She passed them to Harry, who quickly slid them back onto his face. As if suddenly realising what happened, Harry’s face went beet red, and he looked up at Ginny, who was wearing her own pyjamas, in horror.

“I am so sorry!!!” He exclaimed, “It’s just… last night you… you fell asleep, and you wouldn’t let go of my hand, and then I fell asleep and then I slept so well I didn’t even realise you were there and then…..” Harry’s voice broke into a series of mumbled rambling.

“It’s ok. Relax Harry,” Ginny told him, holding out a hand and pulling the distraught boy to his feet. “That was the best sleep I’ve had in a long while too.”

“Ah! You’re finally awake! I was wondering when you two would come around,” Madam Pomfrey said walking out of her office with two chocolate bars.

“Mr Potter how many times do I have to ask you to stay out of trouble before you decide to listen?” the matron asked, handing one of the blocks to Harry, who immediately took a deep bite.

“I think you should probably just get a plaque made up for me,” Harry stated with a shrug.

Ginny frowned, “how long have we been asleep?”

“Two weeks, Miss Weasley,” Professor Dumbledore stated as he walked through the hospital wing
doors.

“Two weeks!” Harry exclaimed, all the colour draining from his face. Ginny, who wasn’t entirely sure her legs would support her own weight, sat down on the bedside and grabbed the bedpost.

“Indeed, I was as shocked as you are. The mark upon your neck is causing more problems than I thought. From what I have been able to discern, the Gemini Rune appears to be reacting very violently to the Dementors presence. I am unsure as to exactly why this is and am working as well as I can to determine a solution,” Dumbledore stated, before pulling out his wand and conjuring a fluffy pink armchair, which he promptly sat down in.

“Headmaster what… what exactly happened?” Ginny asked. “I remember Harry flying up into the storm chasing Cedric, then the rune started burning, then nothing until I… until I woke up this morning.” She didn’t think it a good idea to tell him that she had woken up the previous night after the dream.

“The Dementors have become rather restless guarding the school. I have been denying them contact with the veritable buffet that exists within the Castle, and they decided the Quidditch match was, too good to resist, as it were.”

Harry gulped.

“The Dementors, perhaps sensing you were the easiest target due to your position in the clouds, attacked you and Cedric. Mr Diggory was seconds away from being attacked himself when he described a ‘great burst of white light’ emanating from the rune upon your neck. It forced the dementors away, but you fell from your broom. I caught you and dispelled the remaining creatures. Your friends Miss Granger and Mr Weasley alerted me to Miss Weasley’s condition, and young Mr Cage carried you to the hospital wing. Miss Granger, Mr Weasley, Messrs Weasley, Miss Lovegood, Mr Murdock and Mr Nelson have all been in to see you multiple times.” Dumbledore stood up from his seat, which promptly vanished.

“As the Dementors have seemingly taken quite the likeness to the pair of you, Professor Lupin and I have agreed that teaching you the Patronus Charm, a spell to fight off the Dementors, is imperative. The Christmas holidays start in four days, as such I have taken the liberty of relieving you of your remaining classes. You will need to see your teachers to receive any makeup work to be completed over the break. In the meantime, if you could come to my office every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 10 o’clock, Professor Lupin and I will begin teaching you. I have spoken to your parents Miss Weasley, and they have agreed that your spending the holidays here to undertake these classes is of the utmost importance. Until Thursday.” Dumbledore bowed slightly and, with a twinkle in his eye, departed the hospital wing, leaving two very flabbergasted students behind him.

“Well, there’s nothing wrong with you, so you can both head back to your common room. But I want you to come straight here if you feel in any way off.” Harry and Ginny nodded before rapidly making their exit from the Hospital.

They walked down the hallway, piecing together everything Dumbledore said.

“I’d wager it was the invisible rune on my arm that made that light, just like on the train,” Harry eventually said as they walked down the Fourth-Floor corridor.

“That’s what I was thinking as well. The question is, does he know and is he lying? Or does he genuinely think it’s the Gemini Rune?” Ginny replied.

“I don’t know, but either way, they don’t like the Dementors one bit. This is more than just us having
bad reactions, this has to have something to do with the runes like he said.”

They rounded a corner and stepped onto the Grand Staircase as the bell sounded the end of first classes

“At least we’re going to have the private lessons to learn how to stop them,” Harry pointed out.

“Oh yeah, Mum is going to be so proud,” Ginny laughed.

“Weasley!” a sharp voice called out. Harry and Ginny spun around to see Jessica standing on the staircase behind them, nervously looking around for other people.

“Jessica? What is it?” Ginny asked, confused at the girl’s antics.

“I don’t have a lot of time,” She whispered. Then she turned to Harry and looked him dead in the eyes, “Potter, Malfoy knows your awake, he’s scared half the first year Slytherins into telling him practically everything you do. He’s been planning some sort of prank since the Quidditch match that involves the Dementors somehow. I don’t know what it is, or when he’s going to do it, only that he’s gotten a couple of people in the older years in on it.” A laugh echoed down the hallway, and Jessica spun around. A set of rushing footsteps were moving towards them.

“Thanks for the warning, but why are you helping me?” Harry asked.

Jessica turned back to Harry and Ginny, “I have a debt to pay.” The Slytherin girl bent her knees and jumped up in the air, only she went higher than Harry had ever seen anyone jump before. She had launched herself so high she caught hold of the railing of the stairs above. Harry and Ginny stared in total shock as she pulled herself over the railing and vanished.

“Your friends with a Slytherin?” Harry muttered in astonishment, whether from the jump or Jessica’s presence itself Ginny wasn’t sure.

“I’m not really sure,” She admitted as Fred and George ran around the corner.

“Ahh! Harry old chap…”

"... and dearest Ginevra..."

“...good to see you both…”

“...alive and well.”

“Those Dementors really do a…”

“...number on you don’t they!” The twins exclaimed.

Ginny grinned, a plan forming in her mind.

“Say you two, if I just so happened to have knowledge that Malfoy has a prank planned on Harry sometime soon, could I trust a pair of renowned pranksters, such as yourselves, to prank him first?”

Fred and George lit up like Christmas had come early.
The holidays did not exactly feel like holidays for Harry and Ginny. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning they met with Professor Dumbledore and Professor Lupin in Professor Lupin’s office to practice the Patronus Charm. Lupin had procured a Boggart for the duo to practice with. Due to both the creatures themselves and the horrifying dreams they brought forward, Harry and Ginny were understandably terrified of the things, so the Boggart transformed into a Dementor upon seeing them.

Christmas was now slowly approaching and while Dumbledore and Lupin were both incredibly impressed by Harry and Ginny’s progress, neither could produce more than a faint white mist. The Phoenix and Dragon Rune on Harry’s arm didn’t seem to care much about the Boggart Dementor. Ginny thought it was because the Boggart couldn’t actually hurt them, so it didn’t perceive it as a threat. Harry wasn’t sure what to think. Between the Anti-Dementor lessons and their continuous search for more information in both the Hogwarts Library and the Marauders Library on both Dementors and the Zodiac Runes, Harry and Ginny were utterly exhausted by the end of each day and were often found falling asleep in the common room or the Home. Hermione had caught them both asleep on Harry’s bed in the Home at one point and had screamed rather loudly.

In fact, the only person who seemed to have taken on more work than Harry and Ginny was Hermione. She was constantly studying in either the Home or a corner of the common room she had appropriated. Harry swore it sometimes seemed as though she was in both places at once.

It got so bad that she had constant rings around her eyes and ignored anyone who tried to talk to her. It was all Ron, Harry and Ginny could do to force her to sleep at night.

Harry was rereading *Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations* in the Common Room when he had an idea. It was probably a terrible idea, but it was an idea none the less. Pulling himself up from his seat, he made his way over to Hermione’s self-appointed ‘corner’.

“Hermione, I’ve got an idea,” Harry said, tapping her shoulder. Her nose was buried in her Muggle Studies textbook.

“No now Harry,” Hermione said mechanically.

“But it’s a really good one,” he tried.

“That’s nice,” she told him as she continued to scribble with her quill.

Harry sighed, time to pull the big guns, “Hermione I finished the Ancient Runes assignment before you.” Harry winced as his friend instantly spun around with a stunned look on her face.

“Impossible, show it to me, you must have done it wrong, I’m only half way through mine, are you sure you’ve finished it…” Hermione’s look of shock was replaced by annoyance as she saw him barely keeping his laughter in check.
“Honestly Harry, that’s not nice. Not nice at all,” she said pointedly.

“I’m sorry, but I really do have an idea that might help you handle everything,” he told her.

A sparkle appeared in her eyes as her lips twisted into a smile.

“How?” she asked hesitantly.

“Close your eyes.” Hermione furrowed her brow but followed his instruction. Harry opened the book to the right page and made sure he had the image memorised, before pulling out his wand. He grabbed Hermione’s left arm with his free hand and held it out, so the inside of her arm was facing upwards.

“Don’t flinch,” he told her. She nodded her head. Harry steadied his hand and placed his wand tip against her bare arm.

“Scribo,” he whispered, and his wand tip glowed a faint gold. Taking a deep breath, he began to trace. A curved vertical line with a flare at its peak, a short diagonal line adjacent to the first, then a straight horizontal line with a flick at the end. Harry let out a deep shuddering breath of relief and extinguished his wand.

“You can open your eyes,” Harry said, taking a series of breaths to try and calm his racing heart.

Hermione cracked her eyelids and stared in shock and horror at the black tattoo now resting beneath her skin, without so much as a burn to indicate its placement.

“What did you do?” She asked slowly, her voice low and venomous.

“Read this,” he said handing her the book. Hermione snatched it and stared at it. She flicked the page, then the next, then the next, then the next, then the next, before looking up at him.

“Harry! I can’t believe you just did that!” She exclaimed. She grabbed her arm and almost dropped the book.

“Hermione, you just read the whole chapter,” Harry pointed out, a Cheshire grin spreading across his face.

“Obviously.” She said irritably. “What are you smirking at! You just gave me a bloody tattoo, and it didn’t even do anything!”

“Hermione you read it in about ten seconds.” Hermione’s look of outrage vanished. She looked from the rune to the book, to Harry, then back to the rune.

“What did you do?” She asked, her voice tinged with awe rather than rage.

“I don’t know how you’re taking all these subjects, or why you’re pushing yourself so hard, and I know I can’t convince you to stop without making you have a go at me, but I can give you some extra tools to help you do it. Maybe now you’ll be able to handle your course load. I don’t know how long it will last, or how well it will work. You’re not supposed to even try to draw runes until sixth year, and well, I just drew a Zodiac Rune so who knows what could happen?” Harry smiled at her as she turned back to her Muggle Studies book and began giggling. She started flipping through her book, changing page every few seconds, a massive smile plastered on her face, while Harry turned back to Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations.
Chapter 26: The Pisces Rune

The Pisces Rune, also known as the Knowledge or Wisdom Rune, is one of the most useful of all the Zodiac Runes. It was revealed upon his death that Albert Einstein, the famous Human Physicist and discoverer of Special Relativity (Purebloods gloss over here) actually had the rune branded upon him as a child by persons unknown (ten galleons says it was someone with self-esteem issues and a fetish for black clothing).

This rune, unlike most of the other Zodiac Runes, is more effective when used on a person than an object. When used on an object, the subject will permanently retain all information stored within it more efficiently than even the most advanced Data Processor. However, the rune does not aid in the ability to contain or extract information from the subject, so using it on a rock isn’t going to do much.

Using the rune on a person is much more productive. Application of the rune increases the bearer’s ability to retain and process information, bestowing upon them the magical equivalent of an eidetic memory. The subject will remember with perfect accuracy everything learned while the rune is active.

Possible functions include:

- Enhanced Memory
- Encyclopaedic Knowledge
- Accelerated Probability: The power to predict the outcomes of and what choices one could make.
- Causality Perception: The ability to perceive and understand all-cause and effect relations.
- Hypercognition: The power to perform complex mental operations beyond those of an ordinary human mind.
- Parallel Processing: The ability to carry out multiple thought processes at once.

Usage of the Pisces Rune does not increase the user's Intelligence, merely their ability to process and retain gathered information. In other words, if an idiot uses the rune, they will still be an idiot. The Pisces Rune also does not, despite any propaganda that contradicts what follows, bestow increased mental power or ability on the bearer. The Rune does not alter brain patterns.

Functions the Rune will not bestow:

- Telepathy
- Telekinesis
- Precognition
- Technopathy
- Clairvoyance

Usage of the Pisces Rune is relatively simple and is one of the easiest runes to draw. The Pisces Rune is NOT PERMANENT! It will fade over time. As such, any mistakes made in the creation of the rune are not overly dangerous, they will merely limit its potency and lifespan. The Rune can also be easily removed manually through the use of the ‘Eradicus’ Spell mentioned in Chapter 1: Ancient Runes – What the Fuck are They and How do I Draw Them.

Possible Side-effects of using the Pisces Rune:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Addiction: Due to the temporary nature of this rune, addiction to its effects are a risk.
Intuitive Aptitude: A dangerous mental condition by which the afflicted can instantly learn and understand the complexity of their environment, leading to social detraction, migraines, sociopathic thoughts, psychopathic thoughts and actions and complete mental breakdown.

Thanks to the Pisces Rune, Hermione apparently finished all her remaining work in three hours, as she was back to her usual cheery self by dinner.

Unfortunately, Hermione’s miraculous return to normal—aside from her constantly thanking Harry and wearing a not too subtle red hair scrunchy around her forearm like an armband to hide the rune—did not solve all the other problems Harry still had to deal with.

Hermione and Ginny steadfastly refused to let him go into Hogsmeade, and Harry had begrudgingly agreed that they were probably in the right. Every Gryffindor was reminded of Black’s violent attack on the Fat Lady every time they attempted to enter the tower, which was now guarded by the annoying Sir Cardogan, who kept challenging people to duels. Opening the Hogsmeade Anchor was not an option. Padfoot’s hand on the clock continued to point to School, except once, when it had moved to Diagon Alley temporarily, before returning to School once more. Thankfully, Hermione had agreed to buy his presents from the village for him, on the proviso she not tell anyone what they were.

Harry was also having a hard time deciding which broomstick to get as a replacement for his Nimbus 2000, which had blown into the Whomping Willow after he had fallen from it.

Hermione’s new memory powers did come in handy during the quintets crusade to help Hagrid save Buckbeak the Hippogriff’s life. Her ability to remember completely everything she learned was a huge help in searching through trial information. She sat in a chair for fifteen minutes, read three books concerning the operation of the Wizengamot – The Wizarding Parliament – then took an hour explaining it to them while simultaneously writing notes they could all refer back to later. Harry had to admit her lectures were much better than Professor Binns.

Harry was also worried about was Jessica’s warning. Malfoy hadn’t played a single prank on Harry, despite the Twins charming the forks at the Slytherin table to attack him and turning his uniform pink. Ginny also quite proudly and vocally claimed credit for making the blonde git jump up on the Slytherin table on Christmas Eve and start belting out Christmas Carols.

Harry really wanted to talk to Jessica again, but she had apparently gone home for the holiday break, as had Ginny’s friends Matt, Luna and Foggy and most of her roommates. The only second-year Gryffindor besides Ginny who had stayed was Luke Cage, the boy who had carried her to the Hospital Wing after the Quidditch Match. Ginny had made a point of thanking and apologising profusely to him, all the while turning cherry red. The twins had fallen off the couch in hysterics, Ron had looked about ready to murder the poor boy, and Percy applauded her for showing proper respect and decorum. Harry and Hermione, taking the safer and more entertaining route, had helped her take revenge by vanishing all four of her brothers’ clothes in the middle of the Common Room, leaving them in nothing but their boxers, to the great amusement of Angelina and Alicia.
For Harry, Christmas morning arrived early and loudly.

“Presents!!!” Ron yelled, throwing a pillow at him. Muttering several unsavoury words at his best friend, Harry pulled himself to his feet, bundled up his presents in his arms and trudged downstairs to meet the others. Fred and George were sitting with their eyes closed. They had apparently been Ron’s first victims. Harry dumped his presents on the floor and plunked down near the fire.

“Ronald Weasley, get your thrice accursed arse down here where I can hex you!!!!!” Ginny screamed, storming down the girls-staircase, wand in hand. Harry ducked down behind the back of his chair as Ginny stormed up to the boys’ dormitories in her green and yellow floral print dressing gown that clashed garishly with her hair.

“What’s Ginny going on about?” Hermione asked as she walked down the staircase with her own presents, Crookshanks slinking down beside her.

“She’s trying to murder Ron,” Harry supplied, poking his head up and patting the seat beside him. Hermione delicately placed her packages on the ground and sat down.

“ARGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!” Ron’s scream was followed by a thud and a crash as he came sliding down the stairs on his face.

“That explains that I suppose,” Hermione said with a shrug.

“Waddiwasi!” Ginny cried, running down the stairs behind him.

Ron scrambled to his feet, but not fast enough to avoid the high-speed pillow that careened into his face, which then exploded in a cloud of feathers.

“That’ll teach you to wake me up in the morning before I’m good and ready!” Ginny huffed and stormed back up to her dormitory.

“Well that was an entertaining start to the morning,” Fred stated while George just sat with his mouth open.

“George, close your mouth,” Ginny stated as she walked back into the Common Room with her presents. She stepped on Ron, who was still on the floor trying to spit feathers out of his mouth and sat on the other side of Harry. Harry and Hermione couldn’t help but edge slightly away from her.

“So,” Ginny said, a cheery smile on her face, “who wants to go first?”

Harry and Hermione both received Weasley jumpers that year. Harry’s was red and had a golden Gryffindor Lion knitted on the front. Hermione’s was violet with a light blue book on it. Ginny and the Twins took great delight at laughing at Ron, whose jumper was maroon – his least favourite colour – again. The entire group also laughed when Ginny and George realised their jumpers had been in the wrong packages. George refused to take Ginny’s jumper off, wearing it across his chest like a crock-top. Ginny was fine with it as she liked George’s green jumped better than her yellow one anyway.

Hermione gifted Harry an old book titled Runes and the Stars, and Harry gave her an immaculate copy of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe with gold tinted pages and beautiful illustrations he had been holding onto since his stay in London. Harry and Ron gave each other three packets of
Chocolate Frogs. Harry bought Ginny a set of silver earrings with emeralds embossed inside them, which earned him a very un-Ginny like squeal and a very tight hug which left both of them blushing to the amusement of Hermione, Fred and George. Ginny’s present was a blue and white knotted friendship bracelet with a lapis lazuli at its peak she had made herself. Harry immediately slipped it on his wrist then kissed Ginny on the cheek and hugged her right back, ignoring the catcalls made by the twins, the knowing smirk on Hermione’s face and the look of absolute fury on Ron’s. Then it was the Twins turn. George picked up a thick square-shaped package wrapped in pink from Harry.

Missing the wink Harry sent Ginny’s way, George ripped the paper open, and a cloud of black smoke burst out. When it finally cleared, George’s hair was all standing on end, and his eyebrows were a big bushy white, prompting everyone – including himself – to burst out laughing.

“You’ve just been pranked by Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs,” Harry exclaimed, clapping his hands standing up and taking a bow. The package slipped from George’s hands, hitting the floor with a thunk. Fred and George were now staring at Harry, jaws slack and mouths hanging open.

“Was it something I said?” Harry asked them.

“How do you…”

“know the Marauders?” they asked in awe. Harry frowned and pointed at the package. Fred bent down and tore the paper away, revealing a red book with a golden title:

_Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs_  
_Purveyors of Aid to Magical Mischief Makers_  
_Are Proud to Present_  
_The Marauders Handbook_

“The Marauders were my Dad, Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew and Professor Lupin. They were all best mates at school… wait a minute, how do you know about them?” Harry asked, suddenly confused.

Fred, who was still staring in shock at the book Harry had retrieved from the Marauders Library, pulled a piece of blank parchment from his pocket and handed it to George, who took it, opened it, and placed it on the coffee table. He pulled out his wand and whispered,

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.”

Tiny black lines began to trace their way across the parchment, filling the entire paper. At the top was scrawled in his father’s hand:

_Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs_  
_Purveyors of Aid to Magical Mischief Makers_  
_Are Proud to Present_  
_The Marauders Map_

Harry’s jaw fell open. It was a map of the entire castle, with every corridor and every secret passage outlined. But the truly incredible thing was, sitting right in the room marked ‘Gryffindor Common Room’ were six tiny black dots labelled; _Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Ronald Weasley, Fred_
“Holy cricket,” Hermione gasped, “this thing shows everyone…”

“Everyone,” George confirmed.

“Where they are,” Fred added.

“What they’re doing,” George continued.

“Every minute of every day,” they finished together.

“It’s bloody weird how you can do that,” Ron muttered.

“The Handbook talks about a Map, but I could never figure out what it was,” Harry muttered, staring at the names. Professor Dumbledore was in his office, pacing.

“Where’d you get it?” he asked.

“Well… when we were in our first year, young carefree and innocent –,”

Ginny scoffed.

“– well, more innocent than we are now at least.”

“we got in a spot of trouble with Filch for dropping a Dungbomb, and dragged to his office…”

“and inside what do we notice but a draw that’s marked Confiscated and Highly Dangerous.”

“You didn’t!” Hermione exclaimed.

“So, while Georgy boy here drops another Dungbomb, I reached into the drawer and pulled out the first thing I got my hands on; a ratty old piece of parchment,” Fred narrated

“Imagine our disappointment,” George moaned.

“But we didn’t give up. There had to be a reason this piece of paper just happened to be in that draw. So, we started casting revealing charms on it, and low and behold the Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs start insulting us!”

“Took us four months and a lot of insulting to figure it out, but eventually we cracked the password, and this became the ultimate secret to our success.”

As the twins narrated their legendary exploits, Ginny was staring at the map, brows furrowed.

“What’s wrong with my name?” She asked them.

Harry glanced back at the map. Sure enough, her name only read ‘Ginevra …’, there was no last name.

“Don’t know. It started doing that after the Chamber last year.”

“We spent hours staring at it, trying to find the bloody thing, but it turns out even the Marauders didn’t know about it.”

“Well that makes sense, none of them were Parselmouths, and you have to be one to get inside. The entrance is in the second-floor girls' bathroom,” Harry said off handily, still staring at the map.
Professor Lupin’s name was labelled Moony and was floating in his office.

“That’s weird,” Fred muttered.

“We did see some kid called Tom Riddle go in there one time,”

“Didn’t think anything of it though.”

“We assumed he was a firsty got lost,” George said, frowning. Harry glanced at Ginny who had gone white as a sheet. She nodded slightly, and Harry pulled out his wand, tracing the words Tom Marvolo Riddle in the air. He then flicked it slightly, and the words rearranged into the foreboding message: *I am Lord Voldemort.*

Fred and George both went deathly pale.

“The Map must have detected you weren’t in control of your actions and recorded it as You-Know-Who instead,” Hermione whispered, staring at the map with a critical eye. Hermione’s statement seemed to make Ginny feel a whole lot better, as Harry caught the small smile that appeared on her face. He wasn’t sure what it was that did it, but he was glad it did.

“It must be your neck thingy, could be interfering with the signal or something,” Ron said, answering Ginny’s original question.

“Must be…” Ginny said softly, but Harry could tell her thoughts were miles away.

“Harry, we don’t mean to be rude but…”

“Where on earth did you get this?” George asked, holding up the Handbook. Harry grinned and pointed to the Sixth-Floor corridor.

Harry led the twins, with Ron, Hermione and Ginny trailing behind them, up to the painting of the silver city. He placed his thumb on the Rune and whispered,

“Marauders Forever.” Fred and George grinned as the portrait swung open, revealing the Home. They made their way inside as Harry told the twins all he knew about the Marauders and his suspicion that Sirius Black might be innocent. As they made their way into the lounge room, they stopped dead. Sitting on the counter was a long, thin package in dark paper.

Harry walked hesitantly over to it and picked up the card sitting against it.

*Dear Harry*

*Sorry I’ve missed the last twelve Christmases. Hopefully, this goes a little way towards making it up to you. Don’t believe everything you hear about me. It’s a long story that deserves to be told in person.*

*Padfoot*

Harry tore away the paper, and everyone’s mouths fell open in awe.

Sitting on the bench was a brand-new state of the art Firebolt.
“GO HARRY!!!!!!” Ginny screamed as a red gold blur zoomed past her seat in the stands, followed sharply by another blur, this one blue, bronze and white.

“I’ll admit, your boyfriend is a very good flyer,” a voice said from behind her.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” She said, staring at the raven-haired boy as he flew circles around Cho Chang, the Ravenclaw Seeker.

“Keep telling yourself that.”

Ginny spun around to see Jessica, wearing a set of gold and red robes with her hair coloured Weasley red.

“Wow!” She exclaimed, “defected to the Lions have we Jones?”

Jessica smirked, “Not a chance Weasley, not a chance. I’ll support you lot over Ravenclaw any day, but I’ve got an ulterior motive for my disguise I’m afraid.”

The Gryffindor stand erupted in cheers.

“Gryffindor lead by eighty points to zero, and look at that Firebolt go! Potter’s really putting it through its paces now. See it turn – Chang’s Comet is just no match for it. The Firebolt’s precision-balance is really noticeable in these long –”

“JORDAN!!! ARE YOU BEING PAID TO ADVERTISE FIREBOLTS????!!!!!” McGonagall’s scream rang across the pitch.

“Sorry Professor!”

“Innocent question here, but why do we only ever use that guy as Commentator?” Danny asked, turning to Ginny and Luke. Ginny had chosen to sit with Luke and his best friend Danny Rand, a Hufflepuff, during the match as she was still furious at Ron for blowing up at Hermione a few days previously. Both Ginny and Harry admitted that Crookshanks probably had eaten Scabbers, but they were both mad at Ron for his refusal to even talk to Hermione because of it, and Ginny was giving him a firm cold shoulder. Hence her decision to sit with Luke, who she had made friends with after the rather awkward moment she had thanked him for carrying her unconscious body up to the Castle after the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff match.

“I don’t know. He’s Fred and George’s friend.” Ginny shrugged. She was still trying to comprehend Jessica’s red hair, which if she was honest made her look quite hot in Ginny’s opinion.
“I think he has character,” Luke said, watching as Cho blocked Harry from chasing the Snitch.

“THIS IS NO TIME TO BE A GENTLEMAN, HARRY!!!!” Wood yelled.

“Is everyone in your house this over the top?” Jessica asked, squeezing between Ginny and Luke to lean on the barrier.

“Pretty much yeah,” Ginny admitted

“Who are you exactly?” Luke asked, seemingly realising Jessica was there for the first time.

“Jessica Jones, Slytherin House,” Jessica said, winking at the tall boy as his jaw dropped open.

“So, what is this ulterior motive?” Ginny asked her sort-of friend. She wasn’t sure what they were to be honest.

“Malfoy’s prank is gonna go down in about…” She looked at her watch, “five seconds.”

Cho squealed as Harry accelerated skyward, pointing down to the pitch below. Three tall, cloaked Dementors were moving onto the field. Ginny frowned. The Gemini Rune remained cold. Nor could she feel the familiar all-encompassing chill that followed the foul creatures. Harry looked down, reached into his shirt, and pulled out his wand.

Ginny beamed.

“He’s gonna do it!” She whispered.

A bright white light shot forth from Harry’s wand, arcing down towards the Dementors.

“YES!!!” She screamed as the light solidified into a giant ethereal Stag, which then ploughed straight into the Dementors, sending them flying backwards in all directions. The Stag stood regally over the fallen bodies before winking out of existence. Madam Hooch’s whistle sounded, and Ginny looked up at Harry, who was floating above the pitch, wand and Snitch in hand as the stadium roared.

“HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH!!! THAT’S 150 POINTS TO GRYFFINDOR!!! GRYFFINDOR WINS BY A STUNNING MARGIN OF 240 TO 10!!!” Lee Jordan’s magically amplified voice boomed out to the stadium.

“What the fuck was that?” Luke muttered, still staring at the prone figures of the Dementors on the ground.

“Come on!” Ginny yelled, grabbing Jessica’s hand and pulling her through the crowd, which was now pooling out onto the green. Ginny, with a reluctant Jessica trailing behind, made her way to the front as Harry landed on the ground. She couldn’t help her stomach rolling as she saw Angelina, Alicia and Katie all kiss Harry on the cheek. Fred and George hoisted him onto their shoulders.

“Ruddy brilliant!” Hagrid announced, pushing his own way through the crowd of people.

“Look!” Jessica said, pointing to the Dementors. Professor McGonagall and Professor Dumbledore were standing over them, scowling fiercely. Ginny, Jessica, Luke and Danny finally made their way over to Harry.

“That was brilliant Harry! You caught the Snitch and cast a full Patronus in one shot!” Ginny exclaimed, bouncing up and down.

“Let go!” Jessica said, finally yanking her hand out of Ginny’s. “That’s gonna leave a bruise,” She
“It was full corporeal?!” Harry asked, his face contorting into astonishment.

“Indeed, it was. A giant Stag. Magnificent Harry, really magnificent.” Professor Lupin had somehow made his way through the crowd to stand beside him and was now clapping Harry on the back.

“The Rune didn’t even warm up though?” Harry said.

“Yeah, that’s because they weren’t actually Dementors,” Jessica said, staring at the cloaked figures.

“Detention for all of you, and Fifty points from Slytherin each!” McGonagall shouted in rage. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and Marcus Flint were all lying on the ground trying to disentangle themselves from the robes.

“I will be informing your parents of this blatant act of unsportsmanlike behaviour, and you shall be banned from attending Quidditch matches for the remainder of the year,” Dumbledore stated, shaking his head at them.

“Look at Malfoy’s face!” Ron cried from Harry’s other side, laughing his head off.

“You don’t know how good it is to see that blonde ponce taken down a peg,” Jessica said wistfully.

“Nice hair Jess,” Harry said, smirking at the Slytherin.

“Don’t get used to it.”

“But what was that thing you shot at them?” Luke asked.

“A Patronus. It’s basically an anti-dementor. We’ve been trying to get the spell right since the last match,” Ginny explained, gesturing to herself and Harry.

“That’s a tough spell to learn,” Danny stated in amazement.

“That’s the first time I’ve managed it fully,” Harry stated, hopping down from Fred and George’s shoulders. He put one arm around Ginny’s shoulders, and the other around Jessica’s.

“Party in the Gryffindor Common Room!!” George yelled, and the entire pitch took up the cry, slowly piling out of the stadium and up to Gryffindor Tower.

The party in the Gryffindor Common Room lasted long into the night. With a little help from Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs, Fred and George procured two kegs of Butterbeer from the Three Broomsticks, and Harry and Ron used the invisibility cloak to bring up armfuls of food up from the Kitchens.

Ginny spent most of the party with Hermione and Jessica, laughing at the Twins and their repeated and failed attempts to hook up with the Chasers. Harry tried to join them, but every time he began to make his way over, some other well-wisher would interrupt, or he would be dragged away by Ron, who was still determined to ignore Hermione. No one questioned Jessica’s presence. Her disguise
was incredibly good, and Ginny was glad the mysterious and overly sarcastic girl had the opportunity to enjoy herself.

It was close to 12 in the morning, and the three girls had consumed rather large amounts of Butterbeer by the time Ginny gathered the courage to ask the question that was eating away at her.

“What do you have against the other Slytherins? I don’t mean to be rude, but I just don’t understand it. The Jones’ are an old Pureblood Family, almost as old as the Blacks and Malfoys, and I know they supported Voldemort in the last war. So why are you willing to hang with us, let alone help us?”

Hermione flinched slightly, but Jessica just sighed and rubbed the back of her neck. For the first time, Ginny noticed what looked like a scar or burn hidden by her long locks.

“It’s… it’s a long story I don’t like telling.” She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I like being a Slytherin. I’m proud of it. I believe in its principles. Ambition? Cunning? That’s all me. But the house is practically run by Malfoy and his dad's money. He controls almost everyone through bribes and fear. Slytherin isn’t evil. It’s just misguided. What You-Know-Who and his Death Eaters did in the name of Pureblood supremacy is vile. It’s not even justified. There’s no proof that Muggleborns are less powerful or corrupt. Hell, look at Granger here, she’s probably the smartest chick in the school aside from some of the Seventh Years maybe. Malfoy, Parkinson and Nott have nothing on that. Potter is probably the most powerful person this side of Dumbledore, and he’s a fricken Half-Blood! It’s all bullshit. I don’t agree with it, and to be honest, I’d rather side with the side that’s gonna give a shit about me at the end of the line.” Jessica took a long swig from her Butterbeer tankard, then looked down into it with a frown.

“Damn. I thought there was more in here,” She muttered.

Ginny couldn’t help it. “You know Voldemort is a Half-Blood,” she said innocently.

Jessica’s tankard fell from her hand, bouncing along the floor, where it bumped into Crookshanks, who then pounced on it.

“You're shitting me.” Ginny shook her head.

“Oh, that is rich! How do you know!” Jessica exclaimed, leaning over the table.

“I got very well acquainted with his teenage self-last year,” Ginny replied.

“It’s true,” Hermione said, rubbing the red armband with a Gryffindor lion that Ginny had sewn to cover the Pisces Rune. “His real name is Tom Marvolo Riddle. The words ‘I am Lord Voldemort’ are just an anagram of his name.”

“Wow. Imagine if that had come out while he was still alive! The Pureblood idiots would have ditched him in an instant!” Jessica beamed. Ginny and Hermione looked at each other, their smiles slowly fading. They looked back to Jessica in time to see all the mirth drain from her face to be replaced with deep-seated horror.

“He’s not dead is he?”

“Nope. According to Dumbledore, his disembodied spirit is hiding in Albania,” Harry said, pulling a chair and sitting down beside them. “I stopped him from coming back in my first year since then he’s been out there trying to find another way to regain his body. My bet is he’ll figure it out sooner rather than later. Maybe I’ll pass my O.W.L’s before he tries to kill me again, but I don’t like my chances.”
Jessica sat stoically in her seat for several minutes. Then she looked up, her face as if it had been chiselled from stone.

“When he does, I want you to know that I’ll stand beside you. My guts telling me that you’re our best shot at stopping him. Not the fuckwits at the Ministry. Not Dumbledore. You. And I’ve learned to trust my gut. You need inside info on the Slytherins, I’m your girl. You need someone to help you take down Malfoy and his blonde-haired twit of a father, sign me up.” She held her hand to Harry, who grinned and took it in a firm grip.

CRASH!!

Everyone spun around to see Professor McGonagall storming into the Common Room in a dressing gown and a hair-net. One look at the scowl on her face and everyone scrambled up the staircases to their dormitories. Jessica followed Ginny up to her dorm, thanked her, and slumped down on the spare bed. Ginny lay down on her own bed and drifted off to sleep with a smile.

Harry jerked awake as a bolt of pain lanced through his arm. The Phoenix and Dragon Rune was glowing faintly in the darkness. Harry quickly put his glasses on, grabbed his wand and wretched the curtains open.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRGGGGGGHHHHHHH!!!!” Harry jumped out of bed as Ron’s scream lit up the room. Both runes were flaring now as Harry locked his eyes on a retreating figure bolting towards the door.

“Impedimenta!” He shouted, and a blast of blue light shot from Harry’s wand. The figure ducked, and the spell hit the wall. The man ran out of the dormitory and Harry gave chase.

“Black! Sirius Black! With a knife!” Ron bellowed as Harry ran down the stairs, wand outstretched in front of him. He rounded the corner into the common room and launched another spell at Black, who was just about to run out the portrait hole.

“Incarcerous!” Black rounded Sir Cardogan’s portrait, the spell missing him by mere centimetres. Harry charged across the Common Room and ran out onto the staircase beyond.

“Stop!” Harry yelled as Black ran down the stairs to his right. Harry bounded down them, missing two steps at a time.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry cried. Black flattened himself against the wall as the bolt of red light zoomed past him, and Harry got his first look at the man. He looked like he had been through hell. His face was shallow and gaunt, his scrappy black hair was matted and stringy and his clothes, while obviously not the prison robes he once wore, were torn in several places. And in his outstretched hand was a wand.

A twinge ran through his arm, and Harry dropped to the floor.

“Stupefy!” The beam of white light soared over Harry’s head.

“Petrificus Totalus!” Harry retorted, but Black had already vanished down the Sixth Floor Corridor.
Swearing, Harry pulled himself to his feet and followed. He rounded the corner just as the painting of the Silver City swung closed. He bolted to the canvas and pressed the Home Rune.

“Marauders Forever!”

The portrait swung open, and Harry jumped through the barrier, wand raised. The blue door opening into Hogsmeade was hanging open, a cold draft blowing into the entrance hall.

“Damn it!”

Harry slammed the Hogsmeade Anchor closed and stormed over to the clock.

“I didn’t want to do this Sirius, but you haven’t given me any other choice,” Harry whispered to himself as he placed his hand on the silver dial hidden behind it.

“Harry?”

Harry spun around to see Professor Lupin standing in the hallway behind him. His wand pointed straight at Harry’s face.

Sighing, Harry twisted the dial to “Amulet Only” and listened as each door clicked, locking Harry and Lupin inside.

“Hi, Moony,” Harry said, sinking to the floor and leaning his head against the wall.

Ghost: I was going to end it there, but Miracle wouldn’t let me. She’s mean like that.

“How long have you known?” he said, a look of shock on his face as he dropped his wand to his side.

“Since before term this year,” Harry admitted.

Lupin walked over and sat down next to Harry.

“I accidentally inflated my Aunt and ran away from the Dursley’s. I found a box in my trust vault with this amulet inside.” Harry pulled his necklace from beneath his pyjama shirt, and Lupin’s eyes widened in recognition.

“Lily’s Pendant. She told us she lost it, shortly before they went into hiding. Had James, Sirius and I panicking for days, trying to figure out if anyone had found it. Not that they could use it without the passcode of course, but still, it was a pretty big security risk.” Lupin laughed and placed his head back on the wall.

“I stayed here for most of the holiday break,” Harry said. “I didn’t even know who any of you were. There were five names and five nicknames. The only piece of evidence I had was the clock. That and the fact that Padfoot’s bed was the only one that had been used any time recently. I figured out who Mum and Dad were pretty quickly.” He picked up the clock and stared at Prongs and Jewel, still pointed at Lost Forever. “But I had no idea about the rest of you. All I knew was that Sirius was a fugitive who never got a trial. I learned about you after we met on the train. Figured out the whole werewolf thing after Snape set his stupid essay. Running on the wild side? Seriously?”

Moony laughed again. “That was your dad’s idea.”

Harry smiled.

“Wormtail is a blank though. Process of elimination makes him Peter Pettigrew, but…” Harry
sighed, handing Lupin the clock, “all I know is that he’s somewhere in the school.” Lupin stared at
the clock in confusion.

“Peter’s been in the school the whole time?” he whispered.

“Yeah. His hand never moves. Yours alternates, Sirius’s jumps around a bit but stays on school for
most of the time, but his is always pointed at school.” Harry frowned.

“Except when I first got here. It was pointed to Abroad over the holidays,” he amended.

“That’s not possible.”

“Why?”

Lupin looked him in the eye.

“Because Peter’s supposed to be dead. Sirius killed him the day after your parents died. That’s why
he was in prison, he killed Peter and thirteen muggles with one curse. All they found of him was a
finger.” Harry’s jaw dropped open.

“But if he’s alive…”

“If he’s alive who knows what actually happened,” Moony said.

“Ragnok was right. Sirius is innocent!” Harry exclaimed.

“Who’s Ragnok?”

“The head goblin of Gringotts. I talked to him over the summer break,” Harry quickly explained.
“That’s how he got the Firebolt. The goblins let him into Gringotts because he’s innocent.”

“Sirius gave you the Firebolt!” Lupin cried, but Harry was already on his feet. He rushed into
the kitchen and opened one of the draws. The Christmas message from Padfoot was sitting on top of an
old address book. He handed the note to Lupin, who quickly read it over. He ran a hand through his
hair.

“If Peter is alive, and Sirius is innocent as this goblin claims, then why keep trying to break into
Gryffindor tower?” Lupin wondered.

“I don’t know, but we need to find out before the Dementors or the Aurors catch him. If he is
innocent, we can’t let them send him back to Azkaban.” Harry said. He glanced down at his watch.

“I need to get back to the tower, McGonagall will be looking for me. She probably thinks Black has
abducted me or something. Which, given my record, is not an unrealistic assumption,” Harry
admitted. Lupin grinned.

“Come on.”

They hung the clock back where it belonged, and opened up the passage back into the school.

“You realise this door is going to lock behind us, right,” Harry said.

“Yes. Right now it’s for the best that only you can get inside. That way we know you have
somewhere you can go if Sirius catches you and he is every inch the murderer the Wizarding
community believes he is.” The painting slid closed, and Lupin led Harry back to the Common
Room.
“None of you have seen Potter?” McGonagall was saying.

“No professor, Harry was gone when we woke up,” Ron replied hesitantly.

“It’s alright Professor McGonagall. Harry’s right here,” Lupin said as they stepped through the portrait hole, ignoring Sir Cadogan’s attempts to goad them into battle.

“Potter! Where were you!!”

“I... I saw Black in the dormitory Professor, and I chased after him. I almost hit him with a couple of spells, but I lost him in... on the Grand Staircase,” Harry told her, thinking on the spot.

“I heard the commotion and found Harry near the Third Floor. I just missed him.” Lupin said. Harry looked past McGonagall and saw Jessica hiding behind Ginny and Hermione.

“Well, Mr Potter, that was exceedingly stupid of you. But knowing you, I shouldn’t be surprised.” The elderly witch sighed and ran a hand over her face. “Professor Lupin, if you wouldn’t mind waiting here to ensure Black doesn’t return. I need to report this to Professor Dumbledore immediately. Black is most likely long gone, but the Castle must be swept nonetheless.”

“No problem Professor.”

McGonagall all but ran out of the portrait hole.

“Ok, I want all of you to head back to your dormitories, so I can do a quick headcount, make sure no one else has vanished. Once I’m done, you can all come back down, and I’ll call the House Elves to rustle us up some food.” As Lupin was talking, Harry locked eyes with Fred and George and mouthed ‘get the map’. They nodded and scurried up the stairs with the rest of the boys.

Hermione, Ron, Ginny and Jessica refused to go anywhere without Harry.

“Was it really Black, Harry?” Ron asked.

“Yep. Definitely him. He used the Home to escape. I’ve put it on complete lockdown. The only way inside now is via the amulet.”

“But why would he go after Ron?” Hermione questioned.

“We don’t know,” Lupin replied.

Fred and George came running back down the stairs, a blank piece of parchment in their hand. Harry grabbed it and placed it down on the coffee table. Lupin pulled his wand and pointed it at the parchment.

“I solemnly swear I am up to no good.”

“Harry was right...” Fred whispered in awe.

“you really are Moony.”

“Teach us oh great one!” They begged.

“He’s gone,” Lupin said, ignoring the twins. “If Pettigrew was here, he must be in his Animagus form. It was the one bug we could never quite figure out, that and the Ghosts.”

“Who’s Pettigrew?” Hermione asked.
“We’ve never seen any Pettigrew,” Fred and George said.

“Didn’t Black kill Pettigrew?” Jessica whispered.

“We think he’s still alive, and that Black might be innocent, but we don’t have solid proof,” Harry quickly told her.

“What’s an Animagus?” Ron asked.

“An Animagus is a person who can transform from human to animal at will. The Animagus form is unique to the user.” Hermione explained

“Peter is a rat Animagus, Black is a large black dog. James was a large Stag, that’s how we all got our nicknames.” Lupin said, staring at the map.

“Do you mind if I keep this for a bit? I’ll return it as soon as I can. But if my old friends do return to the castle, I’m the best equipped to take them down. Sirius can’t use the Home to get in anymore, so he’ll have to get in the long way.”

“No problem Mr Moony sir,” the twins said, holding their hands to their heads in a mock salute.

Moony grinned.

“Mischief Managed.”
Ginny, Matt, Luna, Luke and Danny rounded the corner and slammed straight into Harry and Hermione. The duo was sprinting at high speed, and the resulting collision landed Harry, Hermione, Ginny and Matt flat on the floor.

“What in Merlin… What are you doing?!” Ginny yelled, pushing a heavy breathing Harry off her and helping Matt to his feet. Luna grabbed his cane while Luke and Danny steadied him.

“Sorry Ginny, but it’s really important,” Harry said, jumping to his feet with Hermione.

“Important? Wait this is another famous golden trio adventure isn’t it!” Ginny exclaimed, adrenaline flooding her system.

“Harry, we have to go!” Hermione said, grabbing Harry’s arm. Harry looked from Ginny to Hermione, then back to Ginny. She stared into those deep green eyes, practically begging him to bring her in. Harry took a deep breath.

“Do you trust these guys?”

“Yes.” She said without hesitation.

“Good. Here’s what I need you to do. Hermione and I just came from the future. Don’t ask me how. What you need to do is get to the Defence Against the Dark Arts Classroom. Wait for Professor Lupin to leave. Then Snape will come round. Make sure he doesn’t see you. Wait for him to leave. Then go inside and grab the Marauders Map. It should be on Lupin’s desk. Once you have the map, wait for the name Padfoot to appear in Professor Flitwick’s office on the Seventh Floor. Thirteenth window from the right of the West Tower. Once he’s in there, wait for Fudge to leave. Then break in and give him this.” Harry pulled his necklace off and placed it in Ginny’s hand. He curled her fingers
around it, and Ginny nodded her head. She wouldn’t fail him.

“Once you’ve done that, get the hell out of dodge. Make sure you’re somewhere with a lot of witnesses. That way if Snape tries to blame you or us for Sirius’s escape, and he probably will, you have an iron-tight alibi. And whatever happens, you MUST. NOT. BE. SEEN.”

Harry looked back into her eyes. The steely determination flashing through the green made her knees go weak. Harry smirked – it was the look she loved most on him, the look he got when he was about to do something very, brave, very noble and very stupid. Like saving little girls from Dark Lords. Harry leaned forward and kissed her cheek, and Ginny thought she might just drop to the floor. The only thing keeping her upright was pure adrenaline at this point. Then he turned away, grabbed Hermione’s hand and ran down the corridor.

“Wait!” She called. The duo stopped and turned back.

“What are you going to do?”

If it was possible, Harry’s smirk got even larger.

“We’re going to save a Hippogriff and catch a Rat.” They turned a corner and vanished. Ginny forced herself to take three very deep breaths. Then she turned back around to see her four friends staring at her expectantly.

“You don’t have to come with me if you don’t want to,” she said, clenching her hand around the necklace.

“If you wanted people who would ditch you at the first sign of danger, you need different friends,” Matt said evenly. Then he picked up his cane and snapped it in half. Then he snapped it again, packing it down to the size of Ginny’s hand. He placed it inside his robes and grinned.

“What’s the fastest way to Professor Lupin’s office from here?” Luke asked.

“Fourth-floor corridor. Down the stairs near the History of Magic Classrooms. Across the Suspension Bridge, then into the Defence Tower.” Danny said.

“Let’s go.” The quintet spun on their heels and raced down the hallway, Danny and Ginny in the lead. Ginny didn’t even question how Matt was running without his cane. Nor did she ask when they started leaping down the stairs three at a time, and Matt didn’t even trip once.

They pushed open the door onto the third floor and ran into the three people they didn’t want to see the most. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle. Only Malfoy had blood dripping down his chin, and his hand was hovering over his face. The Slytherin ponce sneered as he saw them.

“Oh look. It’s Potter’s girlfriend and her band of losers. A lunatic, a blind kid and a Mudblood. No wonder Potter likes…” He didn’t get to finish. Luke stepped forward and punched Malfoy straight in the gut while Matt jumped up against the wall with one leg and kicked Goyle in the head with the other. Crabbe’s pants constricted so tight you could see his less than considerable genitalia, then he dropped to the floor like a puppet with its strings cut.

“So, he was overcompensating, somehow I don’t think anyone is particularly shocked,” Luna said, her wand pointed lazily at Crabbe.

“I’m certainly not,” Jessica exclaimed, running down the corridor with her own wand drawn. Ginny shook her head and looked down at the necklace in her hand. They didn’t have time for this.
“Come on!” She said, stepping over Malfoy, who was groaning on the floor. She grabbed Jessica’s arm and pulled her down the corridor, Matt, Luke, Danny and Luna following.

“Oh, not again. What is going on?” Jessica moaned, slapping Ginny’s hand to free herself.

“We’re on a mission,” Ginny stated simply.

“What?”

“Harry’s given us a mission to save the world! It’s very exciting.” Luna said, skipping alongside the others. How she could skip at such a high-speed Ginny didn’t know, but she didn’t question it. Luke pushed open the heavy wood doors, and the team ran across the bridge, only stopping once they were in the large circular room on the other side.

“This is it. The Defence class is just up there,” Ginny whispered.

“How do we know if Snape’s left yet?” Luke asked.

“He hasn’t,” Matt said. “He’s still inside… he’s coming out now! Move!” Matt pulled the group into the shadows beneath the spiral staircase. Sure enough, Snape, cloak billowing out like a bat as per usual, ran down the stairs before disappearing in the other direction.

“How the hell did you know that?” Jessica stammered.

“Explaining later, lifesaving now!” Ginny ordered, ducking out from behind the stairs and bolting up the tower. She wretched the classroom door open and raced across the room. She thought she saw Matt backflip off one of the tables but ignored it. She ran into the office and sure enough, lying open on the desk, was the Marauders Map. Ginny, Jessica Jones, Danny Rand, Luke Cage, Matthew Murdock and Luna Lovegood were all floating in the DADA office. A dot marked Snivellus, whom Ginny assumed was Snape, was storming out onto the grounds. Down near Hagrid’s Hut were Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Albus Dumbledore, Cornelius Fudge and Walden McNair were making their way to the Second-Floor corridor, presumably heading to the stone gargoyle that guarded the Headmasters Office.

“That’s incredible,” Danny whispered.

“Ok. We have the Map, now we have to get to the Seventh Floor and rescue Padfoot. Quick question, who’s Padfoot?” Matt asked from his position at the door.

“Padfoot is Sirius Black,” Ginny answered without thinking. She was staring at the map, looking for Black. Snivellus vanished off the Map after entering a secret passage beneath the Whomping Willow.

“And we’re saving him why?” Luke inquired

“Because Harry and Lupin think he’s innocent. Clearly, something’s happened between now and the last time we saw Harry that’s solidified that view,” Jessica theorised.

“He said he came back in time. How is that possible?” Danny asked.

“Time-Turners can send you back in time, but I don’t know where he’d get one,” Luna said.

“Hermione. She has one,” Matt stated.

“What!”? Ginny shouted, spinning around.

Matt frowned, “She didn’t tell you?”
“NO! Why on earth did she tell you!”

“She didn’t. I can hear the constant ticking it makes whenever Hermione’s around. Took me a while to figure out what it was actually. I thought it was just a watch at first, but then I realised the aura was all wrong.” Matt said all that with a completely straight face. Ginny sighed and looked back to the map. Questions had to wait. The mission came first.

Suddenly Moony, Padfoot, Wormtail, Harry, Hermione, Ron and Snivellus all appeared at the foot of the Whomping Willow.

“Ok. I’m not saying I believe in any of this, but I’d wager that’s the present-day version of Harry and Hermione,” Jessica said, pointing to the names that just appeared. The ones by Hagrid’s Hutt had vanished.

Then, as if the Map were malfunctioning, Moony’s name suddenly started flickering. Padfoot’s dot flashed for a second as well, before vanishing altogether. Then Wormtail’s followed suit. Now it was just Harry, Hermione, Ron and Snape.

“I hate this…” Ginny muttered.

“Guys, McGonagall’s headed this way. I can hear her boots, we need to move!” Matt exclaimed, before jumping clear off the railing and landing without so much as a stumble on the floor.

“Show off,” Danny muttered as they quickly followed him. They ran out of the office and down the stairs, ducking onto the lower third-floor corridor.


“Seventh Floor, Professor Flitwick’s office,” Luna supplied.

“This way,” Danny said, lighting his wand and pointing down the dark corridor. They ran down the hall before stopping sharply outside a portrait of a priest. Ginny looked down at the map and saw a tiny speech bubble appear above her name saying, *Flibbertigibbet*.

“*Flibbertigibbet*,” Danny said, and the portrait swung open.

“What? I get around.” He said before climbing inside. They ran up a seemingly infinite steep spiral staircase. Ginny completely lost track of time as they ran in the dark. Eventually, the staircase levelled off, and Danny pushed another portrait open.

“Where are we?” Jessica asked.

“Seventh Floor on the East side. Flitwick’s office should be down there to the right.”

The group had just begun to make their way slowly down the hallway when the Gemini Rune flared to life.

“Argh!” Ginny screamed, dropping to her knees.

“Holy crap!” Jessica exclaimed. Ginny didn’t even need to look to know the rune was smoking again, the aroma of burning skin told her just fine.

“Not again,” Luke muttered, dropping to his knees beside her.

“Harry… Dementors…” Ginny breathed. Her muscles were seizing up, her head was pounding, the rune was agonising.
“I… I can’t… You have to… Jess…” Ginny’s eyes rolled into the back of her head, and she knew no more.

Jessica watched in shock and horror as Ginny crumpled unconscious in Luke’s arms. The rune on her neck was letting out black smoke, and the skin around it was burnt black. Jessica shivered and resisted the urge to reach up and stroke the burn on her back. Focus Jessica. This is the moment you’ve been waiting for. The moment to prove herself. She bent down and pried the necklace and the map from Ginny’s hands. Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Padfoot, Ron Weasley and Snivellus were slowly making their way back to the castle, and by the formation of the dots, Jessica would bet that Snape was levitating them somehow. The future versions of Harry and Hermione, and Moony and Wormtail had not reappeared. If she had to guess, she’d say they were all in the Forbidden Forest, beyond the maps boundary. She couldn’t remember if it was a Full Moon tonight, but it could explain the flickering dot.

“What do we do now?” Danny asked.

Jessica took a deep breath.

“We complete the mission.” Jessica looked up and saw a large wooden door carved into the wall, opposite a tapestry of a man and some dancing trolls.

“Luna, take Ginny in there and stay quiet. Luke, Danny, Matt and I will get Padfoot.” Luna nodded, hooked her arms beneath Ginny’s shoulders and dragged her into the room, pushing the door open with her back. Jessica looked back to the Map. Snivellus and Filius Flitwick were escorting Padfoot towards the Seventh Floor flanked by two nameless dots, coming up on the other side of the floor to them. Harry, Hermione and Ron were all in the Hospital Wing and… she breathed a sigh of relief. The future versions of Harry and Hermione were running through the clocktower courtyard.

“Okay. Padfoot is on his way. Be very, very quiet.” Jessica said, before slowly creeping towards the corner.

“I can’t believe you managed to catch him, Severus.” Flitwick’s voice carried down the hall. “The Minister is sure to award you the Order of Merlin for this.”

“Not if we have anything to say about it,” she muttered.

“Indeed.” A door was pulled back on its hinges, and a dull thud indicated Sirius’s unconscious body falling to the floor.

“He’ll be safe here for now. No student will be up here this late. And if they are… well, I do say the Dementors will frighten them off.” Flitwick said, locking the door. She silently cursed when she realised he had cast a locking spell. The two sets of footsteps moved back the way they came, and the map confirmed their exit. The only problem, the two nameless dots were standing guard outside the office.

“Now what?” Luke asked. Jessica shrugged. There was no way she could do a Patronus charm without any practice. She doubted she even had a happy enough memory to create one.
“Leave the Dementors to me,” Danny said, shrugging off his robes and letting them pool on the floor. He rolled up the sleeves of his muggle t-shirt and turned the corner.

“What in God’s name is he doing?!” Matt exclaimed.

A massive CRACK! erupted through the corridor beyond and Jessica, Luke and Matt followed Danny.

Danny was standing in the middle of the corridor, just beyond the doorway to Flitwick’s office, his palm extended vertically. Glowing gold energy was crackling off it.

“Hurry up! I can’t hold it for more than a moment!” He snapped. Shocked out of their daze, Matt, Luke and Jessica ran to the door. Matt pulled his wand, pointed it at the lock and said, “Alohomora.”

Jessica tried the door handle, but it remained stubbornly closed.

“That’s kinda the only unlocking spell I know,” Matt said.

“Me too,” Jessica admitted.

“Good thing I’ve got a more hands-on approach,” Luke said. He cracked his knuckles and punched the door. The wood blasted off its hinges, hurrying back and splintering into a dozen pieces on the far wall. Jessica and Matt crept into the room, wands at the ready.

“Padfoot?” Jessica whispered.

A hand snapped out of the dark and wrapped around Matt’s neck. Matt stamped his foot down on Black’s foot, grabbed the arm restraining him, and flipped the man over his head. Black face planted into the stone floor.

“Ow.”

“Padfoot we don’t have time, Harry sent us with a gift.” Jessica helped the gaunt-looking man to his feet and handed him the necklace. He looked down in confusion for a moment, before comprehension dawned on his face.

“Thank you,” he wheezed, “now get out of here quick before Fudge and Snivellus come back.” Sirius placed his hand over the darker of the two pendants attached to the necklace, whispered the word “Home,” then vanished.

Not taking the time to celebrate, Jessica grabbed Matt and pulled him out of the room. She pointed her wand at the door and said, “Reparo!” The door rebuilt itself and Jessica allowed herself to breathe a sigh of relief.

“We’re not out of the woods yet,” Luke said, pulling her behind him.

The two Dementors were bearing down on Danny, whose energy shield was failing.

“Go!” he shouted as the golden wall cracked down the middle and shattered.
Ginny woke up on the ground, silver towers soaring into the sky.

“Oh come on!” She exclaimed, pulling herself to her feet. This was the worst possible moment to be back in this infernal place.

She pulled her wand and looked around.

“Ginny!” Harry’s voice cried out. She followed the voice and saw a pale hand holding onto the edge of the grey metal platform the city sat on.

“Harry!” She started to run towards him, but a loud CRACK! rent the air. Tom Riddle, just as she remembered him, was standing between her and Harry, pale white wand in one hand, sickly green diary in the other.

“My Dearest Ginevra. Oh, how the universe loves irony. See, this is almost the complete reversal of what really happened isn’t it. Here you are, the reluctant hero, and there is your lover in need of rescue. Poetic, don’t you think?” Riddle gave her a sickening smile that made Ginny’s blood run cold.

“The only problem, you aren’t the famous Harry Potter, are you? You can’t save anyone. You’re pathetic and tainted. Do you honestly think someone like him, could care for someone like you?”

“Don’t listen to him, Ginny! You have to fight him!! This is your battle!!”

“The Basilisk is coming Ginevra. So, who dies first?” Tom raised his wand at her… and a music the like of which Ginny had never heard filled the air. A beautiful blue and white phoenix soared from above, and Ginny could suddenly hear Luna’s voice in her head.

“Ginny, you need to wake up. There are Dementors out there, I can hear them. You’re the only one who can do the Patronus Charm. We need you…”

Ginny squared her hips and raised her wand.

“You do asshole! Expelliarmus!” A blast of red light shot forth from Ginny’s wand, but Riddle batted the curse away.

“No wonder I chose you. You're weak and pathetic. Easy to control. Goodbye Ginevra. Avada Kedavra!” Green light hurtled towards Ginny, but she was more focused on catching the green covered book flying through the air. She snatched it from the sky and threw it straight into the path of the curse. The Diary collided with Voldemort’s spell, and exploded in a burst of black smoke, a vile scream of pain filling the air.

The dust cleared, and Tom Riddle was nothing but a set of robes lying on the ground. Ginny jumped over them and ran to Harry. He was hanging onto a jutting ledge, the Basilisk circling the water below.

“Grab my hand!” She cried, leaning down over the edge. Harry grinned and swung his free hand up. She caught it and heaved with all her might. Harry grabbed another ledge closer to ground level and used it to scramble up and over.

Together, the two teens stood up and stared out over the ocean. A ray of sunshine burst free from the storm clouds overhead, bathing them in light. Ginny grabbed Harry’s hand and gave it a tight squeeze. Harry held up his right arm, exposing his second rune to Ginny for the first time. It was a black dragon curling around his upper forearm, but instead of breathing simple fire, a bright red phoenix issued from its mouth. The rune blazed forth with golden light, and a magnificent
shimmering golden shield rose up around the city like a dome.

“When you find me on the other side, trust me.” She said, with a smile.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asked her.

“You’ll know.” Ginny closed her eyes, and the silver city faded away.

“We’re not out of the woods yet,” Luke said, pulling Jessica behind him.

The two Dementors were bearing down on Danny, whose energy shield was failing.

“Go!” he shouted as the golden wall cracked down the middle and shattered.

Matt grabbed Danny’s shirt and pulled him back.

Every nerve in Jessica’s body felt like it was freezing. Her breathe was steaming in the cold air of the hallway. She tried to will her legs to move, but just didn’t have the energy. She was so tired. The white mist swirling around her was so inviting.

“It’s okay Jessica. Don’t worry. Everything will be alright. This is all for a good cause…” her mother’s voice whispered in her ear.

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!!!”

A bright silvery white stallion smashed through the fog, blasting the Dementors, and the cold, down the hallway.

“Come on!!” Ginny’s voice cried. Wait? Ginny!! Jessica, Matt, Luke and Danny spun around to see Ginny standing in the middle of the hallway, her wand glowing with silver energy, the Gemini Rune blazing with golden light that made her hair look like it was on fire.

“Jessica come on!” Luke exclaimed, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her towards Ginny and away from the Dementors.

Luke pulled her around the corner where Luna was waiting, holding open the door she had dragged the unconscious Ginny behind earlier. Matt yanked Danny inside, Luke and Jessica following. Ginny came in behind and Luna slammed the door shut, letting out a ragged breath.

“That was almost as fun as fleeing from a herd of stampeding Crumple-Horned Snorkacks,” The pale girl stated, slumping against the door.

Jessica looked down at the map. Snape, Fudge and McNair had just entered the corridor.

“What!!!!” Snape bellowed.

“What could have happened?! He was right here!”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”
Snape’s screams of rage echoed through the entire tower.

“POTTER!!!!!!!!!!!”

“Poor Professor Snape. He seems quite distraught. Do you think if I offer to help clean out the Nargles from his office he’ll feel better?” Luna asked innocently.

The six promptly collapsed to the floor in uncontrollable laughter.
“And its Gryffindor in possession again. The Slytherins are doing everything they can to take out the Gryffindor chasers. It’s like they’re not even trying to score!” Lee Jordan shouted as Harry hurtled towards the grass, eyes locked on the glint of gold he had seen not a second before.

“JORDAN! What did I tell you about non-bias commentating!!” McGonagall snapped.

“That it’s not as much fun?” Lee asked innocently.

A whistling sound was coming from his left. Harry corkscrewed on the Firebolt, narrowly missing the bludger that shot past his ear. He looked down, but the Snitch had vanished. Harry flicked a glance over his shoulder. Malfoy was right behind him. Harry grinned, if he couldn’t catch the Snitch, then he’d have some fun with Malfoy instead. Harry kept accelerating down, using the Firebolt’s incredible speed to stay just out of the Slytherin seeker’s reach. The turf was coming fast, and Jordan sounded like he was having a heart attack.

“Look at that Firebolt go! I’ve never seen acceleration like that, Malfoy can barely keep… Wait a second, Potter looks like he’s going to plummet straight into the ground!! ABORT! ABORT!!”

Harry kept going. Twenty meters… ten meters… he could see the blades of grass now. He reached out his arm, he had to make this look good after all. Five meters… Harry jerked his broom up, spinning himself around so he was upside down. His back grazed the grass, but his broom never touched the ground. He pushed his broom up and soared back into the sky at an almost vertical angle. Whether it was Malfoy’s fault, or his broom’s, Harry couldn’t tell, but the Slytherin had crashed face first into the ground. He lay in a crater of dirt, his broom cracked down the handle and sticking out of the earth at an odd angle. From what Harry could see, his arm was in a bad way, but he looked okay.

“HOLY SHIT!!!!! Harry Potter just executed a perfect Wronski Feint!!!” Lee screamed. McGonagall was in too much shock to even think about correcting his language. In fact, the entire stadium seemed to be, as there wasn’t a single sound coming from any of the stands. Well, almost the entire stadium.

Angelina, Katie and Alicia were streaking down the field towards the Slytherin goals, Angelina with the Quaffle in hand. The entire Slytherin team were staring at Malfoy’s crater, not even noticing the danger they were in. Angelina pulled back her arm and sent the Quaffle flying straight through the centre hoop.

“YES! YES!!!!” Wood screamed, throwing his fist in the air. The Gryffindors seemed to take this as a signal because a second later they were all on their feet screaming his name.
“POTTER! POTTER! POTTER!”

Harry turned towards them and grinned like a madman. Standing in the back row were Professor Lupin, Hagrid and a large shaggy black dog.

As soon as they were released from the Hospital Wing, two days after the attack, Harry, Ron and Hermione raced to the Sixth Floor Corridor. Praying to every god that he knew, Harry placed his hand over the Home rune and whispered, “Marauders Forever.” The painting swung open to the sound of raucous laughter.

“And so then James and I levitated each other back down into the Ravenclaw common room, and chest bumped – the knickers still in our hands!!!” Sirius’s voice exclaimed, and the room burst into laughter again. Harry turned to Ron and Hermione, grinning like an idiot. Then he turned on his heal and raced around the corner. The clock hands of Moony and Padfoot finally pointed Home.

“You're forgetting the best part!” Remus wheezed as the trio rounded the corner.

“That was the best part!” Sirius defended, taking a long pull of a glass bottle full of brown liquid that seemed to be on fire. Remus, Fred, George, Ginny, Matt, Jessica, Luke, Danny and Luna were all sitting around him at the kitchen bench on bar stools, mugs of Butterbeer in their hands.

“No. The best part was that when you chest bumped, you miss-timed it and fell backward into the bookshelf. Sent the whole thing crashing to the ground, waking up the entire house! We had to run like hell to escape after that! Thank god for the map, or we would have been toast!” Remus exclaimed. Ginny’s Butterbeer came flying back out in all directions, spattering all over the table, Sirius and Remus.

“Did you get the knickers?” Fred asked, a look of awe on his face.

“Oh, you bet we did. One pair each from each house. They’re framed in the Library, should still be there!” Sirius barked, the brown liquid sloshing as he held the bottle up in the air.

“They most certainly are not!” Hermione exclaimed, stalking forward, stunning the inhabitants of the room, who hadn’t realised they had even arrived. “I got rid of those horrible things when I inventoried the library! And you! Giving a bunch of second years Butterbeer! I expected more from you Professor Lupin!” Lupin, who still didn’t look back to his usual self, fell right off his chair, landing in a heap on the ground.

“Oh look…”

“it's Prefect Hermione…”

“Everybody hide your pranks!” the twins finished together.

“That is really creepy. You know that right?” Jessica said, looking between the two Weasleys. Fred and George mock bowed, and Jessica rolled her eyes.

“Sirius, you made it!” Harry beamed, making his way over to Sirius. He looked a lot better, evidently having changed clothes and showered. He had also shaved and cut his hair. He still looked sunken and pale, but the lifeless look had vanished from his face.
“Thanks to you and your friends yeah. I honestly don’t know what I would have done without you.”
Sirius, swaying slightly, jumped off his seat and pulled Harry into a hug, which he hesitantly returned. There were only two people he would let hug him without permission. Hermione and Ginny. Hermione because she wouldn’t stop however many times he asked, Ginny because whenever she did the Gemini Rune glowed with warmth, and he found he quite enjoyed the sensation.

“Ok, now everyone’s here,” Sirius said, releasing Harry and sitting carefully back on his seat. “Can somebody tell me what in the name of all that is holy is going on around here?”

Harry turned to Ron and nodded sharply. The redhead smirked and pulled a jar out of his robe pocket, placing it on the bench. Inside was the petrified form of Scabbers, aka Peter Pettigrew, aka Wormtail.

Harry shot towards the front row of the Gryffindor stand. Ginny was standing with Hermione, Ron, Luke, Matt, Foggy, Luna, Danny and a once again red-head Jessica, her finger pointed upwards. Floating just above her head, was the Golden Snitch.

“GO HARRY!!!!”

Harry swooped over the crowd, plucking the Snitch from the air and winking at her. Ginny blushed a shade of red Harry found particularly gorgeous as the Gryffindor’s, seeing what was sitting between his index finger and thumb, screamed louder than they ever had before.

“HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH!!!!!! GRYFFINDOR WINS THE QUIDDITCH CUP!!!!!!!” Lee shouted his voice hoarse and started breaking down into the magical microphone.

The rest of the team rushed over to him, crashing their brooms against his.

“We won!” Oliver cried, his voice shaking as he clapped Harry on the shoulder. Then he turned to Alicia and snogged her in mid-air as the team hovered over the stands. Harry looked down and saw Luke standing beneath him. He winked and let himself fall from the broom. Luke caught him without flinching, as Harry knew he would.

“Ok, ok. So. Let me get this straight. You two almost got eaten by a giant snake and came out of it with some sick tattoos that give you freaky dreams, react violently to the Dementors and seemingly have minds of their own.” Sirius said, pointing between Harry and Ginny.

“That’s right,” Harry said, laughing at his simple explanation of the Gemini Rune. Sirius turned to Hermione.

“You have perfect memory because you let Harry experiment on you...”

Hermione scoffed, “He didn’t exactly ask permission first.”
“… and you’re a genius.” Hermione shut right up after that.

“You accidentally had a mass murderer as a pet,” Sirius continued, gesturing to Ron.

“Didn’t need to rub it in,” he mumbled. Sirius laughed and clapped the redhead on the back.

“You’re their twin brothers who are renowned pranksters, and you rescued our map from Filch in your first year,”

The twins nodded their heads so fast Harry thought they might fall off.

“Excellent, men after my own heart. Thank you for rescuing my baby.” Remus scoffed, but Sirius ignored him, turning towards Matt.

“Your blind, but can sense the ambient magic in your surroundings,”

“Bout sums it up,” Matt said, leaning back in his seat.

“And you’re the same, but instead of see you can hear it?” Sirius asked, looking at Luna, who was staring glassy-eyed at her empty Butterbeer mug.

“Mmmmm,” She murmured. Jessica lightly grabbed Luna’s shoulder and the blonde’s head slowly lifted upright.

“Luna? How many Butterbeers have you had?” Danny asked as Luna began to slide backwards. Danny and Jessica quickly pushed her back onto the seat.

“Only sevvvven,” she slurred. Remus’ eyes bugged out of his head.

“Seven?! How did I not notice that?”

“Because I put a shot of Firewhiskey in your Butterbeer Moony,” Sirius said sheepishly.

“You what!” Whatever Padfoot would have said was drowned out by the sound of Luna’s head hitting the table with a soft thunk.

Everyone stared in shock as Sirius shrugged and gestured with his Firewhiskey to Danny.

“You're a Ninja, and you can do wandless magic too?”

“It’s called Chaste Magic. It’s a lost art only taught by the Magical Monks of Kun Lun.” Danny said. Harry was sure Danny’s explanation went right over Sirius’s head, but Hermione and Remus lapped up every word.

“And you’re the Slytherin that saw the light,” Sirius said finally, looking at Jessica, who was staring at the Firewhiskey bottle in his hand, clearly trying to figure out how to get some for herself.

“Pot meet kettle, Black. Your whole family has been dark and in Slytherin for generations.”

“Not true! I have a cousin who married a Muggleborn!” Sirius proclaimed, shaking his bottle at her.

Jessica just rolled her eyes, but her smile didn’t leave her face.

“What I don’t understand is how you were able to kick that door in,” Jessica said, putting her arms on the bench and staring at Luke, who had suddenly found the floor very interesting. “That door
went flying into the room and shattered into a bunch of pieces. Not only that, but there were powerful locking charms on that door, you should not have been able to simply ‘kick it.’"

Luke took a deep breath and looked up. Somehow, he looked like he had aged years in the few seconds he had broken eye contact. Harry thought he looked a lot like Remus did the day after the Full Moon every month actually.

“I’ve got Giants blood. Not as much as Hagrid mind you, but it’s there. I’ve got the impenetrable skin and the strength, but not the height, which isn’t that bad, all things considered.” He looked around the faces in the room. Ginny and Ron looked quite shocked, Danny wasn’t fazed, Matt was watching Luna, who was snoring softly on the table, Hermione was staring, and her hand was twitching, almost as if she were trying to write with an invisible quill, Lupin shrugged non-pulsed and Sirius seemed to be about to head the same way as Luna, given the glazed eyes and the swaying. Harry inwardly smirked, he’d get Hermione to give him a lecture on everything the people said with some help from the Pisces Rune as payback for spiking Remus’ drink. Actually, come to think of it, the Pisces Rune should have worn off by now. He must have done it better than he thought. He’d have to ask her later.

“Luke, Lupin is a werewolf, Matt’s a blind ninja, Black is a wanted criminal, I’m a blood-traitor and Potter here makes friends with literally everyone. Did you honestly think we’d care that you had giants blood? I definitely do not want to the know how the mechanics of something like that are even possible, but it doesn’t mean we’re going to look at you any differently.” Jessica said softly, staring at her hands. Harry wondered if that was the first time she had really understood just what she had gotten herself involved in. She was as much a blood-traitor as the Weasleys were now.

“She’s got a point, Luke, I do have a habit of making friends with strange and unique people. What’s another one on the list?” Harry said, easing the tension in the room.

“If you need any help with it Luke you can always come to me, my door is always open to you,”
Lupin said, gripping the boy’s shoulder.

“Thanks, professor.”

Luke hoisted Harry aloft, and the crowd surged around him. He was riding on a sea of outstretched arms as Gryffindor slowly made their way down to the pitch, where Madam Hooch was standing next to Dumbledore, the gleaming Quidditch cup between them. Once they were on the field, Hagrid grabbed Harry out of the crowd and plopped him on his shoulders.

“GO! GO! GRYFFINDOR!!” Hagrid bellowed, and Harry raised his hands to his ears. There was definitely a wet sticky substance coming out of them. Harry turned to the stage. Oliver and the rest of the team, which had somehow made it not only to the ground but to the front of the wave of people while Harry wasn’t looking, were stepping up to take the Trophy from Dumbledore. Angelina was sobbing into George’s shirt, and Harry laughed at George, who was smirking at Fred, who had a look of fury seemingly constrained only by the sheer joy of the occasion. Oliver shook hands with Dumbledore and McGonagall and hoisted the cup in the air. The screaming erupted again, and Hagrid finally relented, dropping Harry down onto the stage with his team. The seven of them bunched together in a circle and started jumping up and down.

“GO! GO! GRYFFINDOR!! GO! GO! GRYFFINDOR!! GO! GO! GRYFFINDOR!!”
Harry couldn’t get the chant out of his ears for a week and, although it was not overly helpful for his studying, he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Harry and Ginny sat down side by side on the seat next to the window in the last compartment of the Hogwarts Express. The term was over, and for the first time in living memory, Harry was looking forward to the Summer Break.

The Gemini Rune purred happily on Harry’s neck. Ginny had placed her hand on his leg. The sun glowing in through the open window was illuminating her hair and making her eyes sparkle. She had undoubtedly grown the past nine months. She was still a head shorter than he was it was true, but she had grown in other areas. She was definitely curvier, and she had lost some of the baby fat from her face.

“Harry, you’re staring,” Ginny said, her mouth twitching into a slight smile, her voice the same tone that Fred and George adopted when they were scheming.

Harry blushed Weasley red and mumbled an apology, before turning back to the window. Ginny snuggled up to him, and he had to admit he quite enjoyed the feel of her against him. Harry’s eyes widened, and he risked a glance down at the girl leaning against him. Enjoyed! What was that supposed to mean?!

Harry took a deep breath and ran a hand through her hair, feeling the smoothness of it beneath his fingers. He would deal with… with whatever was going on with Ginny later. Right now, he had another question to ask her before the others arrived.

“Gin, do you have any idea why the Dragon and Phoenix Rune keeps vanishing, but the Gemini Rune doesn’t?” he asked softly.

Ginny looked up at him.

“I was thinking about that myself actually. I reread through the first chapter of *Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations* again but couldn’t find any reference to it. I checked the other books in the library while you were in exams and couldn’t find anything in there either.” Ginny shuddered slightly, and Harry subconsciously moved the hand running through her hair to sit across her shoulders.

“I did think though. What if… what if Dumbledore made it turn invisible somehow?” Harry looked down at her and found himself staring into those sparkling chocolate orbs again. They were like a whirlpool Harry thought, desperately trying to pull him in. He fought back another blush and turned back to the window.

“Maybe… I guess it would make sense. It always shows up when danger’s nearby. It burned brighter than I’d ever seen it before when we went back in time, and I fought the Dementors again. And when we were in the city… It was like it was calling to me. I don’t know what it is, but I intend to find out. And if Dumbledore has put some sort of charm on it to hide it from me…” Harry balled his hand into a fist.

“I think we need to get back inside the city,” Ginny said at length. Harry frowned.

“The only time we’ve been there was when Dumbledore visited you on the holidays, or when we were near the Dementors. Somehow I don’t think doing either of those things are a good idea.”
“No, no. Not like that. I think we need to get inside of our own free will. It’s inside our heads, right? Now that your inside, we should be able to get in there without having to fall unconscious.” Harry pursed his lips.

“I don’t know,” he admitted, “I’ll ask Remus about it, see if he knows something about getting inside our own minds.” Ginny nodded and placed her head on his shoulder.

A few minutes later, a familiar set of arguing voices came down the corridor.

“Honestly Ronald, would it kill you to learn some manners?” Hermione asked.

“What’re manurs?” Ron asked through a mouth of food. The duo moved into the compartment, Luna and Matt behind them. Foggy was apparently busy trying to get Parvati Patil to go out on a date with him and declined to join them.

“My point exactly,” Hermione huffed, sitting down next to Ginny. Ron shrugged and sat down opposite Harry. Ron looked at Harry and Ginny, who was still curled up into his side, and frowned. Harry’s hand moved toward his wand, expecting a confrontation, but Ron just looked down at the open chocolate frog box in his hand and pulled out the card.

“Hey, I got Ptolemy!” He exclaimed.

Harry frowned, and saw Matt slide his wand back into the holster on his leg out of the corner of his eye. Harry looked over at Luna, who was staring at him dreamily and mouthed, ‘tell Matt thank you’. Luna smiled and whispered in Matt’s ear. Matt then turned in Harry’s direction and nodded.

“Ptolemy was a wizard?!” Hermione asked, her mouth falling open.

“Yep,” Jessica said, stepping into the compartment with red-hair and Gryffindor robes, “He was an Arithmancer and an expert at Ancient Runes, particularly runes based on constellations. His theories are incredibly advanced, it’s no wonder you haven’t heard of him yet. He’s only taught in NEWT level classes.” Jessica sat down between Matt and Ron, before smirking at Harry and Ginny, leaning back, lifting her legs and placing them on Harry’s knee. Ginny scowled at her and Harry and Hermione laughed.

“Then why do you know about him?” Hermione asked.

Jessica’s smile vanished in an instant, “I just do.” Hermione frowned and appeared to be about to begin an interrogation when Luke and Danny stepped in, sliding the compartment door behind them.

“Your right Hermione, the compartments definitely expand,” Danny said, taking a seat next to Luna. He was wearing a green t-shirt that said Sweet Christmas.

“Of course, she’s right. Hermione’s read Hogwarts: a History so many times she could recite it off the top of her head even without the Pisces Rune,” Ron exclaimed. Hermione blushed but said nothing.

The train jolted, and slowly began to move down the track. Harry sighed as the tall towers of Hogwarts castle slowly receded and vanished.

“Cheer up Harry. You’ll be closer to it than any of us,” Matt pointed out.

“I don’t know if being in a different dimension counts as being closer,” Harry admitted, “but at least I never have to go back to the Dursley’s. Not that I think they’d take me anyway, considering what I did to Aunt Marge.”
“I wonder if someone ever got around to puncturing her and returning her to normal?” Ginny giggled.

“I hope the Snorkacks didn’t get her. She can’t be very healthy. All that negativity rots the soul you know,” Luna said, her tone deadly serious.

“It certainly does,” Harry said.

The compartment lapsed into a comfortable silence for a few minutes before Hermione perked up.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you all. I dropped Muggle Studies this morning. That means I’ll have a normal schedule next year,” she said.

“So, no more time turning?” Danny asked.

“Well, I don’t know about that,” she said sneakily. She glanced towards the door, then lifted the time-turner on its golden chain out of her pocket.


“How’d you manage that!?” Ginny asked, instantly sitting up and touching the necklace in reverence.

“Well, you know how I locked myself up in the Home after we got the exam results two days ago,” Hermione began, and Harry, Ron and Ginny all nodded.

“Yeah. We assumed it was because Harry beat you in the Ancient Runes and Defence Against the Dark Arts exams,” Ron said, and Harry blushed bright red. He had beat Hermione and topped Ancient Runes by a single mark. Hermione and Daphne, who had drawn second, were understandably annoyed with him over it, but Professor Babbling had been absolutely ecstatic. She actually wouldn’t let him leave until he told her how he had read about the translation for the Scutum Rune. He had been sheepishly forced to admit to her that he had read about it in Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations, rather than remembering it from her brief mention in class, but rather than being disappointed with him, she had actually congratulated him on his choice of additional reading materials. His DADA score hadn’t overly surprised him though, considering not only his getting through Professor Lupin’s obstacle course the fastest without triggering a single trap, but his Patronus had gotten him extra credit, which firmly put him in the lead. Hermione had naturally topped every other subject in the school (except for Divination). He was incredibly glad that for the first time he would have a Defence Against the Dark Arts Teacher two years in a row.

The biggest surprise had been Ginny. She and Matt had battled it out for top spots in Defence, Charms, Potions and Transfiguration, with Ginny taking Defence and Charms and Matt just sneaking past her in Transfiguration and Potions. Ginny claimed he had used his powers to cheat. Matt just said he was using all options available to him.

“Well, I was actually using the Pisces Rune to help me create a replica of it. It’s virtually identical to the original, except it doesn’t actually turn time. I handed that to McGonagall.”

“Hermione Granger, you cheeky little minx. I didn’t know you had it in you,” Jessica exclaimed.

“We will not be using it for fun and games. It will be held in reserve by me just in case we need it. I mean, what are the odds that we’ll be on some other adventure next year? It could come in handy again,” Hermione stated, sliding it back into her robes.

“Well, well, well. Look who it is, Potter and his posse. Hanging out with second years now? Does it
make you feel smart?” Harry forced himself to look away from the window, to stare up at Draco, who was standing at the compartment door with Crabbe, Goyle, Blaze Zabini and Pansy Parkinson. Apparently, he had expected Harry would be with more people and had come prepared. Malfoy scanned the compartment, scowling at each member individually as he looked them over and apparently found them wanting. Then he stopped at Jessica.

“Wow, Potter, you must really like the redheads. You’ve already got two of them fawning over you.” Draco frowned and Harry locked eyes with Jessica, who seemed to be in a state of well-controlled panic. Jessica’s position, with her feet up on Harry’s knee, meant her head was turned away from the compartment door, and her face was hidden by her hair. Harry didn’t think Draco was smart enough to recognise her with her disguise, as she looked nothing like what she usually did. In fact, Harry suddenly realised, she practically changed her entire demeanour when she was posing as a Gryffindor. She was a brilliant actress. But even so, Harry wouldn’t risk Malfoy seeing her face.

“Who even is this chick Potter?” Malfoy asked, seemingly confused. Harry said the first thing that came to mind.

“This is my cousin, Lily Evans. She’s been at Hogwarts the last two years Malfoy. And you didn’t even notice, did you? Wow. You really are thick. No wonder Hermione and I beat you in every class. I heard I even beat you in Potions, despite you and Snape trying to cause each potion I make to explode.” Harry grinned as Malfoy’s confused face was replaced by rage. Malfoy pulled his wand from his pocket, pointing it at Harry. Harry, feeling uncharacteristically bold after seeing his gambit with Jessica working, decided to up the anti.

“I wouldn’t do that Malfoy. You see, I’m due to check in with my Godfather this weekend. You know? Sirius Black, escaped convict and mass-murderer? Surely Daddy dearest told you that he wasn’t a part of Voldemort’s little club. But he definitely killed all those people after Mum and Dad died. He has a bit of a temper you know. So, what do you think will happen when I tell him that you, the son of Lucius Bootlicker Malfoy, hexed my friends and me?” Harry asked him, his eyes twinkling in a remarkably accurate impression of Dumbledore. All the blood drained from Malfoy’s face and the coward dropped his wand and backed out into the hallway.

“Oh, and Malfoy!” Ginny called, “Tell Snape the Marauders say hello!” Malfoy and his band scurried away, tails between their legs, and Harry’s compartment started laughing. It was only now that Harry noticed that all eight of them had their wands discreetly in their hands, ready if Malfoy hadn’t retreated. Luke slid the door closed and turned around, a massive smile on his face.

“Nice bluff Harry,” he said.

“Yeh Harry, that was really clever,” Hermione stated, clearly proud of him.

“Harry,” Jessica whispered, dropping her legs to the floor and sitting up straight, “thank you.”

“What are friends for cousin Lily,” Harry smirked. Jessica slapped him lightly on the knee but laughed alongside the others.

“You know what we need?” Ron said suddenly, “We need our own team name. The Marauders have one, why don’t we?”

“That’s actually a good idea,” Ginny stated, staring at her brother in bewilderment.

“Always the tone of surprise,” Ron said, putting another chocolate frog in his mouth.

“Any ideas?”
“I think we should name ourselves after the Fallywiggle. They’ve gotten a bad reputation since one accidentally killed Marylin Monroe,” Luna said dreamily.

“How about the Canis Mienior? That’s the Greek rune for Friends,” Hermione suggested.

“I always thought the Fellowship was a cool name,” Danny said.

Hermione blanched, “You stole that right from Tolkien! No! I won’t accept such blatant plagiarism.”

“Okay, how about the Friends of Hogwarts? Or is that too much of a Narnia rip off?” Matt said, raising an eyebrow. Hermione just scowled at him.

“Hey, why don’t we take a leaf out of Malfoy’s book? He seems to think we should call ourselves Harry’s Posse. I personally prefer Harry’s Posse of Wenches, but maybe that can be a group within the group for Ginny and me? Although, I suppose it’s a bit weird now that I’m Harry’s cousin and all. But that doesn’t stop the other purebloods does it, so I don’t mind if you don’t Harry.”

Ginny blushed scarlet and started stammering at Jessica’s Cheshire smile, but Harry wasn’t paying attention. He was looking out the window, thinking harder than he did on his Herbology exam (which wasn’t entirely hard if he was honest). If they were going to have a name, it needed to mean something. The Marauders were a symbol. No one could catch them in their pranks. They were like a family, as evidenced by the Home, until they were betrayed from within. He glanced back at his friends. They were all laughing at a bright red Ginny, Harry guessed it was something Jessica said. They were just like the Marauders. They had been on adventures together, admittedly of different kinds but still. They all trusted each other, but, then again, so had the Marauders and they had cracked from within. He may not consider Matt, Jessica, Danny, Luke and Luna in the same sphere as Hermione, Ron and Ginny, but they had all stepped up to save Sirius’s life without even asking or knowing any of the facts. If that didn’t make them good people, Harry didn’t know what did. But could he trust them? Suddenly, something Dumbledore said echoed through his mind. “It is our choices Harry, that show us what we are, far more than our abilities.” His friends all had various abilities: Hermione her intellect, Danny his Chaste magic, Matt’s sensing powers, Luke’s strength, Luna’s hearing, Ron’s tactical mind, Jessica’s cunning and he suspected more she had yet to tell them, and Ginny’s raw power and leadership. But the choice had to be his. Dumbledore had said after he rescued the Philosophers Stone that Voldemort would one day return, and despite all the lies Dumbledore had told the past year, Harry was inclined to believe him if his last two years were anything to go by. What Harry really needed was a way to defend people from his parents’ fate when that happened. And a group of people like the ones sitting around him now… that was a good start. And, as if struck by divine intervention, Harry knew exactly what their team should be called.

“How about the Defenders?” Harry said. The laughter died down, and everyone turned towards Harry.

“The Defenders?” Danny asked as if pondering it.

“Well we did defend Sirius from the Dementors Kiss,” Luke said.

“And we defended Buckbeak by stopping him from being unjustly executed,” Hermione said, a smile slowly creasing her lips.

“And you defended me, and the rest of the school from the Basilisk,” Ginny said.

“And we defended the Philosophers Stone first year,” Ron added.

“Defenders… hmmm, sounds like a comic book I read once.” Luna said thoughtfully.
“I like it. It’s a good statement,” Matt said.

All eyes turned to Jessica. The Slytherin, who quite clearly thought the idea of naming themselves was utterly ridiculous, sighed and looked Harry in the eye.

“I told you once, and I’ll tell you again. I’ll follow you into this Harry Potter. If that means being one of your Defenders, so be it. At least it’s a cool name.”

Harry grinned, “Defenders it is then.”

“Does that mean we get code-names then?” Luna asked. Jessica groaned and smacked her head on the compartment wall.

“Not yet. We have to earn our code-names, just like the Marauders did.” Harry turned to Jessica. “Right, Lily?”

Jessica scrunched her eyes closed as the compartment broke into laughter. “I will not kill Harry Potter, I will not kill Harry Potter, I will not kill Harry Potter, I will not kill Harry Potter…” She began muttering like a mantra, which only served to create more laughter.

The Hogwarts Express pulled up to Platform Nine and Three Quarters and the newly christened Defenders – minus Jessica, who had retreated to transform back into her Slytherin persona – slowly made their way towards the barrier. On the other side, the duo said goodbye to Danny and Luke, who walked over to a man in a black suit holding a sign that said ‘Rand’. Luke, whose family had been from Harlem in New York City, had been forced to move to England to live with his older cousin, who was deeply involved in gangs both in New York and London. As a result, he spent most of his time with Danny’s family: The Rands of Rand Enterprises – one of the wealthiest companies in the world. Matt, his cane taping away as he walked, made his way over to his father, legendary Auror Jack Murdock, while Luna skipped over to her father, who dressed as strange as Luna talked. Finally, Hermione, Ginny, Ron and Harry walked over to Mrs Weasley, who seemed to already be berating Fred and George for something.

“I cannot believe I received an owl about you two stealing toilet seats from the bathrooms. You should both be ashamed of yourselves, and the less said about your grades, the better!”

“Oh! Ron, Ginny!” Mrs Weasley exclaimed as she saw them, rushing over to pull her youngest into a suffocating hug Harry was glad he was not a part of.

“Ah, Harry sweetheart, I haven’t seen your Uncle anywhere. Admittedly that isn’t entirely a bad thing as last year he kept looking at me funny, but how are you going to get home?”

“Don’t worry Mrs Weasley, I know they aren’t coming. Uncle Vernon said he had more important things to do. I’m taking the bus.” Mrs Weasley frowned, completely missing George pull a shrunken toilet seat out of his pocket for Ginny, who had to shove her fist in her mouth to stop herself from laughing.

“Well, I’m not sure I like you being on your own, but it’s not really up to me I suppose. Arthur’s trying to get tickets to the World Cup this summer for the both of you so you can come with us.” She said, gesturing to Harry and Hermione, who looked to each other with barely contained glee.
“We’ll send an owl if we can get the tickets.”

“Thank you, Mrs Weasley.” Harry and Hermione said.

“Bye Ron. Bye Gin.” Ginny looked back to him, and a look of confusion passed across her face, then she seemed to steel herself, before walking over and placing a kiss on his cheek. The Gemini Rune blazed with warmth, and Harry’s face turned the colour of a ripe tomato.

“Bye Harry,” Ginny said, ignoring the look of shock on Mrs Weasley’s face as she skipped away.

Hermione turned to Harry and elbowed him the ribs.

“You are going to ask her out next year, aren’t you?”

Harry scratched at his hair.

“I… I don’t know. I’m not very good at this sort of thing, Hermione.” Hermione gave him a sympathetic smile.

“Nobody is at first. If you want my advice, just be yourself. That’s who she’s head over heels for, so why do anything different?” With that, Hermione winked, turned her cart around and walked off to find her parents car.

Harry shook his head and pulled his necklace out from under his shirt. The two pendants were still shining away: Ginny’s Zodiac, and his Mum’s Amulet. He smiled at the thought of Ginny, took the amulet in his hand and whispered the magic word.

“Home.”

Kings Cross blurred away in a haze of rainbow colours, and Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, vanished from planet Earth.

So Ends Act I…

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the authors, contributors and editors of…

- Pottermore: [https://www.pottermore.com/](https://www.pottermore.com/)
- The Harry Potter Wiki: [http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)
- Archive of Our Own author ‘smallbrownfrog’ for their complete sourced index of characters, in *The Hogwarts Years: Classmates, Birthdays, and Ages* [https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin](https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin)


- Mutant Storm by Bobmin356 [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm)


Finally, we’d like to once again thank Joanne Rowling for creating the incredible world that is Harry Potter and allowing us to play in it. I don’t know what the world would be like if we knew nothing about Harry or his world.

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**Post Credits Teaser:**

**Next season on *Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse***:  

**Act II: The Goblet of Fire**

*Hogwarts* is participating in *The Triwizard Tournament*, a competition between three of the eleven magical schools of the world held every five years. *Harry Potter*, finally pleased that he won’t be at the centre of some grand mystery, decides to sit back and relax. Let somebody else have the fame and glory. But *Harry’s* plans for a peaceful year get destroyed when the *Goblet of Fire* chooses him as the *Hogwarts Commander*. Now, *Harry* must participate in three deadly challenges against the champions of the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the Alcheringa Academy of the Magical Arts, all while learning more about the *Gemini Curse* placed upon him in the Chamber of Secrets. *Harry* and his friends will need all their unique skills to navigate *Harry’s Fourth Year* at *Hogwarts School*, but danger lurks around every corner, and the newly christened_Defenders_ will lose one of their own forever!

*The next adventure premieres Australia Day, January 26th, 2019 on Fanfiction.net and the Archive of Our Own.*
Act II, Chapter 1: The Fabric of Reality

Chapter Summary

Act II: The Goblet of Fire
Hogwarts is participating in The Triwizard Tournament, a competition between three of the eleven magical schools of the world held every five years. Harry Potter, finally pleased that he won’t be at the centre of some grand mystery, decides to sit back and relax. Let somebody else have the fame and glory. But Harry’s plans for a peaceful year get destroyed when, the magical Goblet of Fire chooses him as the Hogwarts Champion. Now, Harry must participate in three deadly challenges against the champions of the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the Alcheringa Academy of the Magical Arts, all the while learning more about the Gemini Curse placed upon him in the Chamber of Secrets. Harry and his friends will need all their unique skills to navigate Harry’s Fourth Year at Hogwarts School, but danger lurks around every corner, and the newly christened Defenders will lose one of their own forever!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

Act II: The Goblet of Fire

Act II, Chapter 1: The Fabric of Reality

“This is bad. This is very bad,” Anneliese said as she paced back and forth in front of a large transparent window with several holographic screens floating across it. One showed a man in rags walking down a street in Paris carrying an unconscious man slumped over his shoulder. Another showed two teenagers walking through a darkened pub. But the one that she kept glancing to depicted a black haired man with round glasses, falling to the ground, dead.
“The story changed,” Riker said simply from his seat behind her, watching with a touch of amusement in his eyes.

“No shit the story changed! We interfered! This! This is why the Multiversity Accords exist! Article 1, Section 1: Ascended beings must not use abilities gained through Ascension to interfere with the Lower Plains. We broke that law!”

“You’re conveniently forgetting Article 1, Section 1, Sub-Section A which states, “Unless the very fabric of reality is at stake.” It was, so we fixed it.”

“Yes. We fixed it. But now you’ve gone and stopped Potter from trusting Dumbledore. Now he won’t get the Elder Wand, won’t know about the Horcruxes, and Voldemort will kill him! How’s that keeping the timeline intact?”

Riker frowned. “Good point.”

“You know damn well it is! The Multiversity is pissed! They know we broke the rules big time! And now there’s a shard of Dragon Force in play!” She fumed, smacking the taller man across the head.

“Anneliese, don’t you think you’re blowing this a bit out of proportion?” Jason’s voice said from behind her. Anneliese snapped around to see Jason Celestial, Riker’s best friend, lounging on a couch in the corner of the room. In his hand was a tankard of Nidavellirian Ale.

“Ooo, I have a Phoenix in this one!” Riker exclaimed, and Anneliese rolled her eyes, turning back to Riker and his screens. One of them now had two people standing on a sandy beach, one of which had a majestic white and gold feathered Phoenix perched on his shoulder. “Oh. And it looks like you’re a fish sis.” Anneliese raised her hand and blasted her brother with a bolt of white energy, which sent him hurtling into the wall.

“I hate you.”

“I have an idea if any of you want to hear it?” Clara said, revealing her presence sitting in a corner on the floor, a bottle of whiskey beside her and a notebook on her lap.

“What?”

“We’re bound by the Multiversity Accords. But the Travellers aren’t. This is my mess, and I’m going to fix it.” Suddenly, Clara stood up, grabbed her whiskey, and vanished.

“Why do I get the feeling I’m going to like this solution even worse than the last one?” Anneliese asked no one in particular.

Marline Alarie, the assistant to the French Minister of Magic, Jean-Pierre Vasseur, was about to leave the Ministry for the afternoon when the most shocking thing she had seen in her entire career walked into the large open plan glass dome that was the atrium of the Ministère des Affaires Magiques de la France. He was tall, with long black hair that was matted in several places. His beard was patchy and had clearly not been shaved in several weeks. His clothes also screamed either homelessness or a very recent battle, as they were ripped to shreds and covered in mud and grime. But the most spectacular thing was, he had another equally filthy man slung over his shoulder.
“Pardon mon français, mais je n'avais nulle part où aller,” he said in a thick British accent. His voice was hoarse, as if he wasn’t used to using it, and his eyes carried a look of gaunt hopelessness.

“Je m'appelle Sirius Black et voici l'homme que j'ai été accusé d'avoir assassiné.”

The man, who Marline had just realised was the spitting image of his wanted posters, dropped the body on the ground.

"Do you speak English? Please tell me you speak English, because, after twelve years in prison, my French is really rusty.” He asked. Marline nodded slightly, desperately wondering how she was going to get help without the mass-murderer noticing.

"I wish to submit myself and my very much alive supposed victim over to Auror custody, on the condition I get a fair trial, something I can't get from the British."

Marline, her mind threatening to completely shut down, slowly pulled her wand and raised it high in the air.

“Pericculum.” Red sparks shot forth from her wand, bursting like fireworks in the air.

“Merci,” Black said, giving her a tired smile. He pulled a wand from his robes, and she had to resist the urge to squeal in fright. He reversed his grip and handed her the shaft of black wood, point facing him. She took it with a shaking hand, and Black raised his arms over his head as a group of five Aurors raced over, all pointing their wands at the two men.

"Sirius Black!” One of the Aurors exclaimed. Another Auror bent down and rolled the body on the floor over so his face was turned up and gasped.

"Impossible! C'est Peter Pettigrew! Regardez! Il lui manque même un doigt!"

“Attention, il est illégal… um… Animagus… I don’t know the French word…” Black stuttered.

Marline couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She didn’t know what Pettigrew supposedly looked like, but the Auror said it was him, and he was clearly missing a finger. And he was an Animagus… Marline’s eyes widened as she stared at Black. Was he innocent?

The senior Auror seemed to come to the same conclusion she did, as he lowered his wand, though he didn’t put it away, and stepped in front of Black.

“Your first language is English is it not?” the Auror asked Black in heavily accented English.

Black breathed a sigh of relief, “Yes, it is. Does this mean I get a trial?” He asked hopefully, a pleading look crossing his face.

“You better believe it.”

The Auror turned to Marline and spoke in French.

“Miss Alarie, could you please inform the Minister that we may have an international incident on our hands while I take these two men into custody?”

Marline nodded her head enthusiastically, “Right away, sir.” She turned on her heel and raced towards the Minister's office. She wasn’t going to get home any time soon.
Meanwhile, as Sirius Black, infamous mass murderer, was turning himself into the French Ministry of Magic, two figures in deep red cloaks made their way down the magical street of Diagon Alley. The duo, who seemed to be slightly shorter than most, strolled up to the white marble building that was Gringotts, The Wizarding Bank.

The few wizards inside the building turned to look at the mysterious newcomers but frowned when they realised their cloaks completely obscured their faces from view. It was almost as if their eyes kept sliding past their faces, unable to focus on them. The Goblins, however, acted indifferently to the pair’s arrival. In fact, they barely registered them at all. Except one. As soon as they walked in, one Goblin stood back from his teller and strode over to a wall on the far side of the room, which immediately morphed into a large wrought iron door. The two figures walked straight through the bank, ignoring the odd looks they received from the wizards, and pushed open the door, vanishing into the corridor beyond. The Goblin snapped his bony fingers, the door disappeared, and he returned to his teller.

“Excellent perception filter Mr Potter. Might I assume it is Miss Weasley standing beside you?” Griphook asked as the two red cloaked figures stepped through the door and into the hallway, dropping their hoods in the process.

“My Mum created them. Apparently, she got the idea from a muggle television show.” Harry explained. With Sirius and Remus’s help, he had finally gathered the courage to enter his parent’s room in the Home. The robes were some of the only clothes left in the wardrobe and resized to fit the wearer. Ginny suggested they try and patent the design, and Lupin had agreed, doing so with the Goblins immediately. Dobby the house elf had been ecstatic when Harry had asked him to make eleven copies of the cloaks. The charm work was highly complicated, but Dobby was slowly getting the job done. In a single week, he had managed to create three more cloaks.

Ginny thought she was doing very well so far, considering she had never actually spoken to a Goblin before… or been into Diagon Alley without her mother.

“It’s an honour to finally meet you Mr Griphook. Harry’s told me all about you.”

“The honour is all mine, Miss Weasley. To meet not one but two marked by the Gemini Rune is a rare moment.” Griphook flashed the two teens a toothy grin before beckoning them down the hallway to Ragnok’s office.

“The Director was quite amused by your letter. I take it your planned misdirection succeeded?”

“Yep. Sirius is turning himself into the French as we speak. By tomorrow morning the story will be on every paper this side of the Atlantic,” Harry said confidently. He, Sirius and Remus had planned this to the letter.

“Perfect, Director Ragnok will see you now.” Griphook pushed the door at the end of the hall open, and Ginny and Harry stepped into Ragnok’s rather spacious office. Ginny could quite comfortably say there was more value in Ragnok’s chair than in the entirety of the Burrow. She had never seen so much gold in one place before! Harry, no doubt seeing the look of awe on her face, pulled her over
to the Goblin’s desk, and sat her down in one of the chairs opposite it.

“Mr Potter, Miss Weasley. So glad you could finally join us,” Ragnok stated. Ginny thought he was the ugliest thing she had ever seen, but then again that was probably a perk for a Goblin.

“Thank you Director Ragnok. May you bask in the blood of your enemies and your vaults always overflow with gold.” Harry said. Ragnok sat back in shock, his jaw dropping open slightly.

“Did I say it right? I wasn’t sure. I couldn’t find a lot of information about proper Goblin greetings, but that seemed to be the most common one.” Harry said hesitantly, scratching the back of his head and looking at Ragnok’s expression wearily.

“He’s been practising that all week,” Ginny told the Goblin, and Harry elbowed her in the ribs.

“Forgive my surprise, Mr Potter. I have not heard a wizard use a proper Goblin greeting in almost thirty years. I thank you for your effort. It is much appreciated.”

Harry blushed slightly at the praise but said nothing.

“Now. Onto the business at hand. You will be happy to know that Gringotts has successfully routed the corruption within its walls. A grand total of fifty-two Goblins were beheaded for their betrayal, and all their possessions have been transmitted into vault number 1733, a new vault placed in yours and Miss Weasley’s name. At current capacity, the Vault contains 16,142 Galleons, as well as a number of their heirlooms.” Ginny had to try very hard not to let her jaw drop open at that.

“Um… did these Goblins have families or anything?” Harry asked, visibly shocked.

“A few yes. Why?”

“Can you have their family heirlooms returned to them? I won’t blame an entire family for the crimes of one member. If that’s acceptable in your culture of course,” Harry quickly said, keeping his eyes locked on the Goblin.

“Miss Weasley?” Ragnok asked, turning to her, “What is your stance?”

“Oh… I’m… I agree with Harry. They belong to their families.” She said, keeping her voice as steady as possible.

The Goblin smiled and nodded at her.

“Very well.”

Then Ginny had an idea.

“Director Ragnok, there must be other goblin made relics and objects that were seized as well, right?”

Ragnok frowned. “That’s correct.”

“Well, you’ve been such a great help to us in figuring this whole thing out. It’s only fair you get something out of it as well. The Goblin artefacts belong to the Goblins. Its only right they are distributed amongst the Goblins who uncovered and helped put a stop to the whole corruption business in the first place.” She said. Ragnok’s beady eyes went very wide indeed. He seemed at a complete loss for words. Harry, on the other hand, beamed at her, and it was all Ginny could do not to melt under the gaze of those bright green eyes.
“I think that’s a brilliant idea.” He said.

Ragnok grabbed a piece of parchment and rapidly scribbled down a lengthy paragraph, before sliding the paper into what looked like a mail slot in the side of his desk.

“I must say, you two make quite the pair. Your request will be processed immediately.”

Ragnok grabbed a small golden orb from the corner of his desk and rubbed it three times. He then looked up and stared them in the eyes.

“As a token of thanks from the Goblin Nation and as an apology for our gross incompetence in handling your finances, I am removing all age restrictions from the Potter Family Vault. Mr Potter, you and your rune-mate may now enter the Vault whenever you please and remove or add anything you wish. I will also have your Trust and Reparations vault reabsorbed into the main vault.”

Harry and Ginny sat gobsmacked. She didn’t know merely suggesting the Goblins have what was rightfully theirs would lead to this!

“Thank you, Director,” Harry managed to stutter out.

“There is no need to thank me. It is the least I can do. Now, onto the issue of the corruption itself. The conspiracy we uncovered was far deeper than I imagined. It would appear your guess was correct. It was Albus Dumbledore who was having your mail screened. However, it was not just Gringotts mail that was intercepted. Letters numbering in the tens of thousands from well-wishers in the aftermath of Voldemort’s defeat were discovered in a previously thought abandoned vault. Various gifts and packages were enclosed, including some highly expensive items like a high-quality Pensieve. You also received 1152 guardianship requests from families ranging from close friends of your mother and father to known Death Eaters; close to one hundred betrothal requests; invitations from every Magical School in the world; and documents from around fifty people who, with their families wiped out during the war, named you as the beneficiaries of their Wills, including the highly wealthy McKinnon family, whose daughter was your mothers best friend.”

“In the past two weeks alone, there were several messages from a number of Quidditch Scouts who were highly impressed by your flying abilities demonstrated at Hogwarts this year, as well as from renowned Defensive Magic Institutions who were impressed by your examination scores for Defence Against the Dark Arts, Ancient Runes, Charms and Potions.”

Harry’s jaw went slack, and his eyes clouded over. Ginny was seriously worried he would faint, as all the muscles in his body seemed to tense up simultaneously. Ginny realised that she needed to say something, less Harry go into a complete mental shut down.

“Did they reply to the mail?” She asked.

“They did not. All the mail, including the gifts, was catalogued and then stored in the vault.” Ragnok stated.

Harry seemed to regain some of his mental cohesion… or at least enough to form speech.

“So all those people think I just ignored them?”

“Unfortunately, yes. While the messages received when you were a child may be understandable, the absence of replies to official documents, not to mention the guardianship requests is highly irregular. Also, all the Wills in which you are the beneficiary have remained outstanding. If you do not open them within fifteen years from the recipient’s death, the Ministry of Magic will repossess any items or funds contained within.”
That definitely got Harry’s attention. He clenched his jaw, and his hands curled into fists.

“Ragnok. It seems I once again need to ask your assistance. Could I please get any official documents brought to me, so I can look them over? Particularly the Wills, the Quidditch Scouts and the Defence schools. The gifts you can move to the Potter Vault, and destroy the Betrothal requests.”

Harry sighed and looked at the goblin with tired eyes. “And I’d like to send letters to all the well-wishers who never received replies. I want to thank them for taking the time to mail and let them know that the only reason I haven’t replied earlier is because of a problem with my mail.”

“That is a lot of replies,” Ragnok said. “I assume you wish for an automated reply to be sent?”

Harry nodded. “To anyone who just said a basic thank you an automated reply will do. But if there are any particularly interesting ones, I’d like to read them. I’ll pay whatever you’d like for your services and discretion of course.”

Ragnok grinned. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a Wizard quite like you Mr Potter. Very well, I will see to the arrangements personally, and withdraw whatever fee is incurred from your vault.”

“Before we go down to the vault, however, there is one more thing.”

Harry groaned, “Please don’t be worse.”

“As I said. Every document you received was catalogued, and all the letters in the vault matched up to the log. All except two. The first was your parents Will. The document has quite literally vanished. There is no record of it at the Ministry or in Gringotts. I have my best agents sweeping for it as we speak, but the document is most likely in the one place my people cannot enter.”

“The Headmasters Office in Hogwarts,” Ginny said quietly.

“Correct Miss Weasley.”

Harry sighed again. She couldn’t blame him. This was so much worse than they had thought.

“And the second?”

“The second missing item was a portkey in the form of a letter addressed to yourself and Miss Weasley from an organisation calling itself the Council of Fire. I have never heard of this organisation before, but the fact that the Headmaster has most likely removed the message is proof of its authenticity. The letter was received the day of your marking with the Gemini Rune, so it most likely relates to that event, but how and why I do not know.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair, “The Council of Fire?”

“Maybe they’re the ones that marked us?” Ginny said, mulling it over in her mind.

“Maybe…” Harry muttered.

Harry and Ginny sat in silence for a long time, simply trying to process everything.

Eventually, Ragnok stood up and walked to the edge of the room, where another door appeared.

“Follow me.”

The two teens stood up and followed Ragnok into another corridor, which brought them out next to a cart at the end of a spiralling track.
Ginny, who had never been down to the vaults before, found herself greatly enjoying the exhilarating cart ride down the vaults for two reasons. One, she was moving so fast her entire body was pushed into the back of the cart chair. The rail flipped them upside down, did loop the loops and sent them hurtling down drops so steep her stomach rose up into her throat. Two, she got to snuggle into Harry the entire ride, his arm around her shoulders to keep her steady. She didn’t think there was possibly a better feeling, and the Gemini Rune agreed as it glowed with warmth on her neck.

The Potter Family Vault had mountains of gold taller than the Burrow and was probably larger than their entire block of land. It was quite the sight for little Ginny Weasley, who had grown up with second-hand clothes her whole life. But what awed her the most was when Harry grabbed a blue velvet money bag that was lying on the floor and began to shovel entire stacks of galleons inside it. After putting what Ginny estimated had to be almost a thousand galleons inside. He tied the bag off and shoved it into Ginny’s hand.

“What! Harry no way! I can’t take this! It’s yours!”

“It’s ours. You have every right to this stuff that I do Gin.” Damn it. That was the second time he had called her Gin. He didn’t seem to realise he was doing it, which was good because every time he did she had to fight the urge to jump him. Or maybe he did know because he had seemingly used her distraction to investigate the area behind one of the larger stacks of coins. She had just started walking over to find him when he emerged, a massive smile on his face and a green money bag in his hand.

“I think that’s all we need. And now that we can come in here without repercussions, we can use the Home Anchor to access it at any time. The bookcase is just there.” He said, pointing to the far wall, which was lined with dozens of bookshelves carrying old tomes.

Ignoring Ginny’s continued attempts to say she didn’t need the money, despite the fact she was actually deeply flattered he trusted her with it, Harry grabbed her hand and led them back to the carts.

When they exited Gringotts, still hand in hand, Harry grinned at her.

“I have to take you to a theme park.” He said as they walked down Diagon Alley, which looked even more gorgeous in the light of the sunset.

“What’s a theme park and why do you have to take me there?”

“Because looking at your face on the carts. You loved it. If you liked that I’m betting you’d love a roller-coaster.” Ginny was now very confused.

“Harry. Nothing you’re saying is making sense.”

Harry frowned before a wave of recognition swept across his face.

“A theme park is a Muggle invention. It’s a place where there are lots of different types of rides that you can go on and competitions you can enter. Rollercoasters are a type of ride where you get in a type of cart, which then shoots you around a track at incredibly high speeds while doing flips and turns and stuff. There are also haunted houses – where they stick all kinds of fake monsters in a
creepy old house to try and scare you – waterslides where they pump water into a large pipe, they put you into an inflatable tube and then shoot you down the pipe at high speed – bumper cars – where you deliberately drive around in cars and smash into each other – and lots of others. I’ve never actually been to one because the one time the Dursley’s went they locked me in the cupboard the entire day, but I’ve seen the advertisements, and they look really cool. Maybe one day we can go to Disneyland, that’s the most famous theme park in the world. They say it’s the happiest place on Earth.” Harry continued to ramble on about theme parks as they walked back to Diagon Alley. Ginny honestly didn’t mind. She loved seeing him so happy. And it did sound like these Theme Parks were a cool place to visit. Maybe she could convince her Dad to take them if she appealed to his Muggle sensibilities.

She stopped as they walked past Ollivanders.

“Ginny?”

“I just realised. With this money I can buy my own wand,” she whispered.

“You don’t have your own wand?” Harry asked, seemingly scandalised. She blushed and dropped her head.

“That won’t do at all. Mr Ollivander says the wand chooses the wizard. You’ll never get the best results if you’re using someone else’s wand. Come on.” Harry pulled her into the shop, oblivious to the flash of bright light that shot out behind them for a split second. They had forgotten to raise their hoods when exiting the bank.

Mr Ollivander was standing at the front desk as they walked in.

“Mr Potter, a pleasure to see you again. 11 inches, Holy and Phoenix feather core. Still working well for you?”

“Very much so Mr Ollivander,” Harry replied.

Ollivander looked thoughtfully at Ginny, “Who’s your friend, I don’t think I recognise her.”

“My names Ginny Weasley. Nice to meet you, Mr Ollivander.”

“Ah, Miss Weasley. I had thought to meet you three years ago.”

Ginny looked at her shoes again.

“Ginny’s here to get herself a wand, Mr Ollivander,” Harry said, cutting off anymore embarrassment on Ginny’s part.

Ollivander’s face lit up as if someone flicked a switch.

“Right then. Let’s have a look see.” Ollivander scurried off into the back of his shop before returning with a short birch wand. Ginny gave it a wave, and the overhead light exploded.

Ollivander snatched the wand from her hand and rapidly ran away. He returned several minutes later with a long reed wand that actually had a hole in it that Harry thought couldn’t be very safe. Apparently, Ginny agreed, as she set Ollivanders desk on fire with it.

They were in the shop for over half-an-hour according to Harry’s watch, and Ginny was clearly getting very scared. Ollivander, on the other hand, seemed over the moon. He was crawling into every nook and cranny of the shop, each wand box getting dustier and dustier each time, until he
disappeared for a good five minutes, returning with an old grey box that Harry though probably predated the first world war.

“Try this one Miss Weasley.” He said a strange look on his face. Ginny picked up the wand, which was black and seemed to be very fragile, delicately in her hand and gave it a flick with her wrist. A bright golden light burst forth from the tip, before morphing into Ginny’s horse Patronus and cantering around the room. The stallion stopped in front of Harry and nuzzled him before fading away.

“Fantastic,” Ollivander exclaimed in awe, “I never thought I would see the day that wand would sell. Yew, 12 inches with a phoenix feather core. A powerful and strong-willed combination. That, Miss Weasley, is the first wand that I ever made. I was fifteen years old, and it took me almost the entire year to get it right. And its sat on that shelf all these years. Until you. Use it well.” The old man actually bowed to Ginny as she placed the seven galleons on the bench. Together, the teens pulled up their hoods and walked out, Ginny still waving her brand-new wand in awe.

The duo slipped through the Leaky Cauldron and out into London, where Ginny was forced to put her wand in her pocket, much to her displeasure. They strolled through the city in companionable silence, just enjoying each other’s company, eventually ending up at an old stone archway in Hyde Park as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Harry placed his hand over the hidden Home Rune and whispered the password, before stepping through the portal into the entrance hall of the Home and silently closing the door behind them.

Ginny shrugged off her cloak and handed it and her money bag over to Harry.

“I can’t risk Mum finding them,” she explained upon seeing his confused look.

“What are you going to tell your parents? They’re bound to know you were missing.”

Ginny shrugged. “I’ll come up with something.”

She pulled Harry’s necklace out from beneath her shirt and held it in her hand. The talisman she had given him the previous year was still there next to Lily Potter’s Amulet.

“I had a great time today, despite everything at Gringotts,” Harry said, pulling her into a hug, which she happily returned, the Gemini Rune humming along as she did so.

“Me too. We should do it again sometime.” She replied, watching his eyes to try and get a glimpse of something. She was hoping she wasn’t reading all the signs wrong… but she didn’t want to get her hopes up.

“Yeh, we should.” His watch beeped six o’clock.

“I better go.” She said. Harry nodded, his lips squeezed together.

He gave her a tiny wave, and she blew him a kiss, gripping the amulet in her hand.

“Return.” She whispered, before vanishing back to her room in the Burrow to the sound of her mother screeching her name.
We're back! Act II is ready and raring to go. Same as for Act 1, you'll get one chapter each week (unless we forget!). Act III is complete and Act IV is a work in progress. We love to hear all of you're comments and reviews, so keep them coming!
Ginny sat at the wooden table in her Dad’s tent at the World Cup between Hermione and Luna nursing a hot chocolate as she read that morning’s Daily Prophet. Ignoring the raucous verbal play-by-play the boys were crowing, she shared a grin at her two friends as she looked at the paper.

Sirius Black Framed!! By Silvia Hofsman

In a shocking turn of events early this morning, notorious mass-murderer Sirius Black received the trial agreed upon by the Wizengamot in his extradition order from the French Ministry, which Black submitted himself and another man to just one week ago. It was revealed during the trial by Mr Black under questioning from Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore and Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement (DMLE) Madam Amelia Bones that Black didn’t, in fact, receive a trial before being thrown in Azkaban under the orders of Barty Crouch, Madam Bones predecessor.

This has been revealed to be a disastrous decision, as not only was Mr Black innocent of the charges placed against him, but the person who framed him, Peter Pettigrew, was allowed freedom! Believed dead, Pettigrew – as per Mr Black’s and Mr Harry Potter’s testimonies – has been hiding in his illegal Animagus form of a rat the past twelve years.

Mr Black narrated the events of that horrible night on Halloween 1981 when he found the bodies of his friends James and Lily Potter after they were murdered by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. This reporter is not ashamed to admit that she cried as he related the heart-breaking story. He then told the Wizengamot how he confronted Pettigrew, the real betrayer of the Potter’s whereabouts, the next day, and was framed for the deaths of twelve Muggles, who were actually killed by Pettigrew himself.

Mr Harry Potter – the famous Boy-Who-Lived- also testified in Black’s defence. Mr Potter informed the Wizengamot of an event he observed the previous year where Black and Defence Against the Dark Arts Teacher Mr Remus Lupin attempted to apprehend Pettigrew. Mr Potter and his longtime friends Ronald Weasley – son of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Head Mr Arthur Weasley – and Muggleborn Hermione Granger aided Mr Black and Mr Lupin’s capture of the criminal, and were in the process of returning him to Hogwarts Castle to prove Mr Black’s innocence when they were set upon by a large group of Dementors. Mr Potter stated that he used an incredibly difficult spell known as the Patronus Charm to force the Dementors away. Many members of the Wizengamot refused to believe Mr Potter’s testimony at this point, but after demonstrating his mastery of the beyond N.E.W.T. Level spell to the court, all questions to Mr Potter’s authenticity were effectively silenced. Is it any surprise that the boy who defeated You-Know-Who as an infant could perform such a complicated spell?
In the ensuing chaos, Pettigrew escaped capture. According to Mr Potter, Minister Fudge – who was on Hogwarts premises at the time for the execution of a dangerous creature, refused to even consider the protests of Mr Potter, Miss Granger or Chief Warlock Professor Dumbledore as to Black’s innocence, instead ordering him executed immediately, in gross violation of Wizarding Law. The Chief Warlock confirmed Mr Potter’s testimony during his own statement.

Mr Black, fortunately, escaped Hogwarts before the Dementors reached him. He says he caught Pettigrew attempting to flee across the Channel into France and brought him straight to the French Ministry upon capturing him.

Pettigrew, who initially denied the accusations despite the damning and conflicting testimonies of Mr Black and Mr Potter, was forced under Veritaserum as a hostile witness. He confessed to the crimes, confirming Mr Black’s story.

Now, Mr Black is a free man and Pettigrew, labelled a dangerous and difficult to contain prisoner, has been sentenced to the Dementor’s Kiss by the Wizengamot. Black refused to relate how he escaped Azkaban to the public on the grounds that he, “Didn’t want to give anyone any ideas.” He did, however, state after his release from Auror custody that he informed Madam Bones of the method he used, and she is ensuring, “That no one can use a similar method to escape justice in the future.”

What happens now to Minister Fudge and Mr Crouch remains to be seen. Mr Black has yet to leave the Ministry as of the issuing of this edition. Some speculate that he is seeking custody of his Godson, Mr Harry Potter, and the return of his wand.

“Brilliant,” Hermione whispered.

“Good to know our hard work didn’t go to waste,” Luna said. The blonde girl had been offered Harry’s ticket to the World Cup after Harry had been unable to attend because of the trial, which she had gratefully accepted.

“I’m just glad he can officially get away from the Dursley’s now,” Ginny said. All three of them knew full well that Harry hadn’t set foot inside the Dursley residence since the events of the previous summer, where Harry had run away from the house after inflating his aunt. But Dumbledore and Ginny’s parents didn’t know that. Nor did they need to.

“I’m not so sure about that,” Hermione frowned, “It just says that he’s trying to get custody, not that he will. With what you told us about the Potter’s Will. Dumbledore might have hidden it for that very reason so that Harry does have to go back to the Dursley’s. If Sirius doesn’t have proof of claim, Dumbledore might be able to keep Harry there, at least until term starts.” Hermione’s faith in the Headmaster, once unbreakable, had been shattered when Ginny informed her, Ron and Luna exactly what they found out at Gringotts. Hermione was outraged at just what he had hidden from Harry; Ron – seemingly controlling his jealousy over the whole situation – had fumed to the point Ginny had had to splash a bucket of water over his head to calm him down, and Luna had accused the Professor of being infected by Wrackspurts. Harry had sent them a letter when the trial was announced informing the Weasley’s that he would be unable to attend the World Cup, much to Ron’s disappointment, but hidden within the letter, thanks to Moony and Padfoot, was a secret message confirming that their plan was going well. He had also informed Matt, Danny and Luke of the Gringotts-Dumbledore situation. Jessica, unfortunately, would have to wait till they returned to school to be told about what the situation was, as it was too risky to be caught sending letters to her by her parents, who were firm supporters of Lucius Malfoy. Danny had also apparently replied asking if he could inform his parents, who had access to very high calibre lawyers. Harry had asked Ginny, Hermione and Ron what they thought he should do about it, not being sure enough to answer
himself. The trio, who had yet to reply, hadn’t decided. Hermione believed the more allies, the better – particularly those with deep pockets; Ron wasn’t sure what value telling a muggle could be; and Ginny was on the fence over keeping the whole thing a secret, though she was tipping towards supporting Hermione’s argument. They would be sending their reply as soon as they returned to the Burrow.

“No offence Hermione, but in this case, I hope you are very wrong.” She told her bushy-haired friend.

“Girls, you might want to look at this,” Luna said, gesturing back to the paper. On the next page was a picture of Harry standing beside his stag Patronus in the courtroom, with another article below.

The Boy-Who-Lived: Look at him now. By Rita Skeeter

Harry Potter, the legendary Boy-Who-Lived, spoke out today in his first visit to the Ministry of Magic. The teenager, who looked incredibly handsome with his messy black hair and vibrant green eyes, was a striking and confident figure in the Wizengamot courtroom. He appeared every inch the dashing hero, standing proud as he defended previously thought mass-murderer Serious Black.

Harry dazzled the entire court with his display of the powerful and challenging Patronus Charm, a spell well beyond the Ordinary Wizarding Level, showing all the politicians and prestigious family members that he can back up any claim he makes with style.

This incident of amazing magic led me to investigate Mr Potter’s career at Hogwarts so far. According to the students I talked to, Harry is somewhat famous for his adventures around the school. Rumour has it, Harry and his friends are responsible for the disappearance of Muggle Studies teacher Professor Quiddle. He is also hailed as the person who defeated the monster within the horrible Chamber of Secrets, which, according to what Mr Potter himself announced before the entirety of the Gryffindor Common Room in September last year, was a 100ft Basilisk.

But while Harry may be a hero figure, apparently his personality leaves much to be desired. Draco Malfoy, son of Ministry official Lucius Malfoy, says, “Potter has a large ego that makes him arrogant and self-centred. He acts like none of the school rules apply to him, and Dumbledore lets him get away with everything.” Another student by the name of Pansy Parkinson says, “Potter surrounds himself with people who make himself look better. The Weasleys are poor unimpressive suck-ups, Granger is an ugly book-worm, and he also hangs around with a blind kid and a lunatic.” Harry is also reported by several students of spending large amounts of time with a girl by the name of Jenny Wesley, a plain looking girl from a poor family. Harry, however, seems to be quite smitten with the red-head, the same girl he rescued from the Chamber of Secrets to the point where he and Jenny even have matching tattoos on the back of their necks (as seen in the photo below). After extensive research, this reporter is proud to say that the marking is not actually a tattoo at all, but the mark of a powerful curse, known as the Gemini Curse, which binds people to one another. So, the question is, is young Harry being forced to like this girl with nothing to her name? Or is there something else going on? Rest assured I will continue to investigate.

What can’t be denied, is Harry’s magnificent, magical power. His Patronus aside, Mr Potter is top of his class in Ancient Runes and Defence Against the Dark Arts, with high marks in Charms and Potions as well according to last year’s results which this reporter acquired from a source who wished to remain anonymous. He’s also a renowned Quidditch Player, and the only known living Parselmouth, an ability common in Dark Arts users.

So, who is Harry Potter? Is there more to this story that we don’t know? Or is he what he appears, a famous, powerful, good looking young man with an attitude and a penchant for danger? Time will tell.
Beneath the photo was a shot of Harry and Ginny in their red cloaks outside Ollivanders in Diagon Alley, runes clearly visible on their necks.

“I am going to kill this Skeeter bitch,” Ginny growled, crumpling the edges of the paper.

“Harry’s going to be in a right mood when he sees this,” Hermione stated.

“I wonder who the lunatic is? And whose Jenny? Does Harry have another friend with a rune that I don’t know?” Luna asked with a mischievous glint in her eye.

Ginny winked at her friend, “Maybe he does, and his arrogant ways are making him keep her from us.”

“Or maybe she’s keeping herself hidden, so we don’t realise she’s enslaving him. We’ll have to be on the lookout for this mysterious Jenny.” Hermione agreed. The three girls looked to each other, before bursting out laughing.

BOOOOOOM!!!!

A massive explosion rocked the tent, followed by another, and another somewhere in the distance. Then the screaming started.

“What’s going on?” Ron called to their dad as he raced out of the tent. He stuck his head out of the flaps, before turning back.

“Everyone get your jackets on. We need to leave. NOW!” Galvanised into action, the Weasleys, Hermione and Luna all grabbed their coats and ran out of the tent. The campsite was a horror show. Tents were on fire, people were running in all directions, and standing a few rows away, were a group of ten people in black cloaks and white masks, levitating a group of muggles above their heads.

“Death Eaters,” her father whispered. Then he turned to Bill, Charlie and Percy.

“Go. Stall them till the ministry arrives!” He shouted. The three eldest brothers whipped out their wands and raced forward, joined by another wizard with short blond hair wearing pyjamas.

“Fred, George, get the kids to the forest. I’m going to help.” Her Dad pulled his own wand and raced after the boys.

“Come on,” Fred said, his usual humorous countenance gone as he grabbed Ginny’s arm and pulled her in the opposite direction, Ron, Hermione, Luna and George, trailing behind.

They raced through the tents, jumping over smouldering stalls, ducking beneath flaming tents, and dodging other panicking witches and wizards. They were just passing the last row of tents when a loud CRACK split the air, revealing a tall man in a dark cloak, wand extended towards them.

“Crucio!” Everyone dived away from the blast of red light, and Ginny lost Fred’s grip on her arm.

“ARGGH! Reducto!” Another explosion ripped through the air to Ginny’s right and clouds of dirt rocketed into the air. She rolled to the left, her vision blurry, trying to move away from the cloaked person. She pulled herself to her feet and sprinted down the line of tents, ducking behind one that was, as of yet, not alight. She couldn’t see any of her brothers or friends. They must have all scattered in the opposite direction. She edged out from behind the tent, and locked eyes with the Death Eater. He was standing a few tents away, shooting spells, detonating each one. Ginny couldn’t see his face beneath the mask, but she could imagine him smirking at the thought of an easy victim.
Ignoring the sickening feeling that she was going to vomit, she ducked back around the tent wall, eased her wand from her pocket and raced down the row.

“Crucio!” the Death Eater cried, and Ginny jumped to the side as the red light flew past her.

“Expelliarmus!” She yelled, firing the spell behind her as she ran.

“Protego!”

She ducked into another row of tents, narrowly missing another jet of red light. Whatever that spell was, she did not want to get hit by it.

She continued running, the black-cloaked figure chasing after her. She turned another corner… and found herself staring at the edge of the forest. She spun back around as the Death Eater ran the corner. She raised her wand, her favourite curse on her lips, but the man in black was faster.

“Cruci…”

The Death Eater was blasted off his feet and into the air, somersaulting and crashing into a tent. Standing behind where the man had been, was Danny, his hand glowing with golden light.

“Ginny! Are you ok?” He asked, dropping his hand and moving towards her as another man ran out behind him.

“Crucio!” Danny screamed in pain as the curse hit him. He fell to his knees, writhing in agony, and Ginny fired her Bat-Bogey Hex over his head.

The man, who was dressed in a long leather trench coat with short shaggy hair and deep blue eyes, deflected the hex with a shield, dropping the pain spell he was using on Danny, who lay seemingly unconscious on the ground.

“Stupefy!” She yelled, firing another spell.

“You’ve got spirit,” the man said, advancing towards her, his shield easily absorbing the spell. Ginny started backing up. Her heart was pounding, her hands shaking. Her wand was sliding in her grip as she sent spell after spell in the man’s direction. He deflected, absorbed or dodged them all.

“Expelliarmus,” he said casually, as if bored, and Ginny’s wand flew out of her hand. She continued moving backwards. The new wand that Harry gave her was still in her pocket. If she could get to it, she might be able to surprise him.

The man pointed his wand at the sky and whispered, “Morsmordre.” A blast of green light shot into the air, and a glowing green skull with a snake for a tongue formed in the night. She didn’t know what it was, but she knew it was bad, and she knew it would haunt her next round of nightmares.

“What’s on your neck pretty?” The man asked. Involuntarily, she raised her hand up to the Gemini Rune, which was dead cold against her skin. Until she touched it. The moment her fingers taped the black ink, a warm pulse swept through her, calming her nerves and slowing her heart.

She took a deep breath, her right hand easing her other wand from her pocket… and another crack split the air. Harry was standing between her and the man, the Dragon and Phoenix Rune glowing with golden light.

“Depulso!” He yelled before his feet even touched the ground. A blast of energy sent the man flying backwards almost fifty metres into the darkness. Ginny, revelling in the buzzing warmth surging
through her veins and Harry’s appearance, followed him as he raced after the man.

“Stupefy!” Harry yelled as they neared him, but a small pop echoed through the area, and the man vanished before the spell reached him.

For the first time, Harry seemed to realise that the entire campsite was on fire. He spun around, a look of horror on his face and pulled Ginny into a hug. Of all the things he could have possibly done at that moment, that was by far the best option as far as she was concerned. His silent support helped keep her confidence up and prevent her panic and exhaustion from settling in.

“What happened here?” He asked.

“There was an attack after the match. People in black cloaks, Death Eaters, Dad called them, we’re setting the tents on fire. Then that guy sent that giant skull thing into the air.” She muttered. Then she remembered.

“Danny.” She slipped out of Harry’s grip and raced over to the curly haired boy who was trying, unsuccessfully, to get up off the ground.

“Ginny… are you… alright?” he stuttered as Ginny and Harry knelt down beside him.

“Yeah, Danny. You saved my life,” She told him.

“Sweet. Go me.” Then his eyes glazed over, and he drifted into unconsciousness.

“Help me get him up,” Harry said, placing Danny’s left arm around his shoulders. Ginny did the same with his right, and together they lifted him to his feet.

Then a series of popping noises erupted all around them, and a dozen wizards materialised out of thin air.

“Put your hands in the air now!” One of the men shouted before he was shoved aside by a balding red-haired figure she would recognise anywhere.

“Dad!”

“Ginny! Harry! What happened here?!”

“Which of you conjured it?” the first man exclaimed, pointing his wand at Harry.

“Hey! Get that out of his face!” Ginny snapped as her Dad took Danny’s weight from her shoulder.

“Crouch! You’re not seriously thinking that Harry Potter conjured the Dark Mark, are you?” her Dad said, staring at the first man in astonishment.

“You mean the skull thing?” Harry asked, gesturing with his wand hand at the spectre in the sky.

“It was summoned by a man with dark spiky hair and blue eyes,” Ginny stated, glaring at the man named Crouch.

“I confronted and defeated him,” Harry stated sharply, glaring at Crouch, “But he disapparated before I could restrain him.”

Crouch sighed and brushed a beetle from his cloak.

“My apologies Mr Potter, it’s been a long day.” Crouch stalked off with his entourage in a rage. Her
Dad pulled Danny’s unconscious body into his arms.

“What happened to him? And how did you get here Harry?” he asked, his face softening.

“He was hit by a red spell, Crucio the man said. He saved my life,” Ginny said.

“The Cruciatus Curse?! Oh no. I’ll take him to St Mungo’s.” He spun on his heel and disapparated without even waiting for an answer to his question.

“How did you get here Harry?”

“I don’t know exactly. I was in the Home, Sirius and I just got back from the Ministry. Then I felt the Gemini Rune, and the Phoenix and Dragon rune heat up, and I knew you were in trouble. So, I focused on the heat and thought about you, and then I was here.”

“Do you think you can do it again?”

“Maybe…” Ginny looked around at the burning tents.

“Can you get us to the Burrow? I have no idea where our tent is. And Dad’s too busy to deal with us right now. Mum’s going to be going spare.”

“I can try.” Harry pulled Ginny into a hug, and she rested her head on his chest.

“Ok. Think of the Burrow. Picturing it in my mind, focus on the heat and…” There was a loud Crack, and Harry and Ginny vanished from the field.

Ginny felt as though she was being squeezed tightly through a tube or a tunnel of some kind. A very warm tunnel that seemed to thrum with the same heat the Gemini Rune emitted. Then it was gone, and she and Harry were standing in the same position they were before. Only now they were in the living room of the Burrow, and her rather shocked mother was sitting on the couch in front of them, a cup of tea spilt all over an issue of Witch Weekly.

“Ok. Cool. I can apparate. That took a lot more out of me then I thought it would.” Harry’s eyes rolled into the back of his head, and Ginny grabbed his body before it fell to the floor, gently guiding it onto the couch next to her mother, before slumping down to the floor with a relieved sigh. It was at that moment that Ginny’s mother regained her ability to speak.

“WHAT IN MERLIN’S NAME IS GOING ON!!!”

Harry knew exactly where he was when he woke up. The white glare, the smell of detergent in the air, and the sound of soft conversation. The Hospital Wing. Harry groaned and sat up on the pillows, reaching out for his glasses. He slid them onto his face, and the room slipped into stark relief.

“I told you already Professor. Harry appeared out of no-where, defeated the Death Eater and took me
back to the Burrow before passing out. He apparated at fourteen for Merlin’s sake. You should be proud of him!” Ginny yelled. They hadn’t realised he was awake yet. He glanced to the Hospital Wing door, where Professor Dumbledore, Ginny, Sirius and Mrs Weasley were debating.

“There must be something else Miss Weasley. How did he know where you were, or how to get there? No one taught him to apparate after all.”

“It was just accidental magic Albus. Maybe to do with the runes on their necks?” Sirius said, crossing his arms and glaring up at the white-bearded man.

“I for one and very glad that he did. Who knows what might have happened to my little girl if Harry hadn’t been there,” Mrs Weasley stated.

“Be that as it may. I will need to question Harry before Sirius returns him to the Dursleys.”

“Surely there’s something you can do Headmaster?” Mrs Weasley asked, “Those people are the worst sort of Muggles.”

“I’m afraid that without the Potter’s Will, the process of guardianship cannot be sped up. Requests like this take months to process. Even I cannot defeat the power of red-tape. The Blood-Wards I erected around Privet Drive are the most powerful words in the known world. Nothing can break them. Not even Voldemort himself. Harry must return there, especially with the number of Death Eaters who escaped the World Cup.” Dumbledore said. The Headmaster then looked Ginny in the eye, and Harry’s world fell away. The white stone walls of the Hospital Wing were replaced by silver towers and a clear blue sky.

He was standing in a park near the edge of the Silver City.

Suddenly, the lamp posts doting the roads began flashing red, and a voice flooded out into the street.

“Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert! Unauthorised Incursion Confirmed!”

A loud ‘boom!!’ rocked the city, coming from the direction of the tall tower that stood in its heart. A pale blue light was shining out from behind the windows near the top floor. Ignoring the strangeness of the whole situation, or the fact that, for the first time, he was in the City while awake, Harry narrowed his eyes and raced towards the tower.

The city was bigger than he ever imagined. There were mysteriously designed cars parked along the roads, and dozens of magical beasts including Dragons, Phoenixes and Giant Eagles soaring between the spires. The buildings themselves were nothing like anything Harry had ever seen. They had no resemblance to the glass skyscrapers of London; instead, they seemed to be constructed mostly from a grey-silver metal, with both stained glass and completely transparent windows spaced in irregular intervals. The trees were also odd. They were not the birches or pines he recognised. Instead, there were towering oaks, flanked by elms and beeches. And those were the ones he knew. There were dozens he did not. One with leaves that seemed trapped in the fall yet holding onto the branches with no hint of falling. Others had large spherical nuts hanging from them, or tiny white and pink flowers. And there were no people in the entire city. Not a soul. But the gardens were all perfectly maintained, the houses he could see inside were fully furnished, and there was no dust anywhere.

Harry was still running when the Gemini Rune flared on his neck, and the city vanished from view. He was back in the hospital wing. Suddenly feeling very sick, he pitched his head over the side of the bed and hurled all over the floor. The four heads on the other side of the room snapped in Harry’s direction in time to see Madam Pomfrey run out of her office, wand in hand.
“Seriously Mr Potter. You can’t stay away from me even when you’re not at school!” She muttered, vanishing the sick and waving her wand over Harry’s head.

“Nice to see you too, Madam Pomfrey,” Harry said dryly as he drank a glass of water on the bedside table. As he swallowed the water, a figure with red hair launched herself at him.

“Harry! Are you ok?! I’m so sorry I asked you to do that. I should have known it was a bad…” Ginny rambled into his chest as the Gemini Rune thrummed with warmth.

“Harry dear, thank you so much for saving Ginny again. If you ever need anything from us. Anything at all, you ask right away, you understand?”

“Thank you, Mrs Weasley,” Harry stuttered, blushing to the roots of his hair.

“You alright Harry? You gave me quite the scare, vanishing from dinner like that. Lucky the waitress wasn’t next to the table. That would have been bloody difficult to explain!” Sirius exclaimed, a smirk on his face. The message in his speech was clear though. This is the story.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t really try to do it. It just happened.”

“Perhaps you could tell us what happened, from your point of view?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling behind his half-moon spectacles.

So, Harry told the headmaster a story. About how he and Sirius were at dinner (definitely not at the Home) before his return to the Dursleys, how he had felt a strange tingling warmth flood through his veins, then the feeling of being squeezed through a hot tube. Then he was in the air between Ginny and a man he didn’t recognise, and he used the first spell that came to mind. The Banishing Charm he had been writing his Charms essay on the previous day.

“I see,” Dumbledore said softly, stroking his beard in thought.

“A warm tunnel did you say?” Mrs Weasley asked, a frown on her face. Sirius remained silent, standing behind Dumbledore with a smirk of pride on his face.

“Yeah. Isn’t that what apparating is supposed to feel like?”

“No. Apparating is meant to be highly uncomfortable and cold,” Dumbledore said.

“I think Sirius is right. It must be to do with the runes.” Ginny stated giving Harry a look that said, ‘just go with it.’

“Have you noticed any other strange sensations you might associate with the runes?” The Headmaster asked.

“Well, there was the whole thing with the Dementors. Plus, this odd dream we’ve had a couple of times,” Ginny told him without taking her eyes off Harry.

“Anything else?”

“Not that I can think off,” Harry said, shrugging towards Dumbledore. He looked into the professor's eyes and realised his mistake instantly, as the Hospital Wing fell away once again. But this time, instead of being miles away, he was standing at the top of a staircase inside a grand room.

It was clearly meant to impress. Harry was standing on a raised platform elevated two steps above the main floor. In front of him was a tall stained-glass window depicting a witch and wizard. The
window reached all the way to roof, which was easily four stories above. The walls were a turquoise colour with fluorescent white lights embedded within them, and the floor had a coppery red tinge to it.

Harry turned around, the sight of the magnificent room taking his breath away. Directly opposite the window was a grand staircase with a number of strange symbols composed of boxes and lines engraved into each individual step. The stairs themselves led up to another window, this one transparent and looking out over the ocean. On either side of the landing was a room situated on a balcony. The room on the right contained a number of desks, tapestries and screens – like televisions, only much thinner than any Harry had ever seen. The left room was empty, save for a single hulking grey metal chair with dull blue components.

But by far the most incredible part of the room was the object dominating the lower floor. It was a grey metal ring partially embedded within the floor, with a circumference large enough to fit an entire bus inside it. Situated at even intervals around the ring were seven triangular shaped chevrons. The ring itself was covered in glowing blue runes, some of which Harry recognised as the Zodiac Runes. And he was standing in the middle of it.

“Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert! Incursion Detected!”

The alarm echoed all around him, and dozens of flashing red lights illuminated the room with the desks. Harry ran up the staircase, but before he could reach the room, seven of the runes on the ring began glowing even brighter than the others, and the entire room began to shake.

The seven chevrons lit up a brilliant white that filled the room, and an explosion of rainbow coloured light erupted in the centre of the circle, followed by a giant BOOM!

“Holy shit.” Harry breathed, as he stared in awe at the shimmering portal that had formed within the ring. Then, without warning, Professor Dumbledore stepped out of the vortex and into the room, a look of confusion and astonishment on his face.

“Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert! Unauthorised Incursion confirmed!”

Dumbledore began ascending the staircase, and Harry suddenly felt very cold. Like someone had walked over his grave. He desperately started looking around. There had to be some way to get the Headmaster out. Seeing nothing but the fancy looking desks and consoles in the room to his right, and the chair to his left, he pulled his wand and pointed it at Dumbledore’s advancing form.

“Expelliarmus!”

Dumbledore was blasted backwards as the beam of light hit him, somersaulting in the air and crashing down on the floor below. Harry charged after him. If the portal was how Dumbledore got in, maybe he could leave the same way.

Dumbledore pulled himself to his feet, seemingly unaware that Harry had attacked him.

“Depulso!” The wizened old man flew back through the portal, vanishing into the light. The city walls evaporated, and Harry was once again staring at the Headmaster, whose look of bewilderment gave him an odd sense of pleasure.

“Very well. Sirius, if you could escort Harry back to the Dursleys. Molly, I imagine Arthur and the boys have returned home by now. It’s probably best if you head off the search parties.”

“Oh dear. Yes, I’ll have to do that right away.” Molly grabbed Ginny’s arm and pulled her towards Madam Pomfrey’s Floo.
“I’ll see you at school Harry!” Ginny called. Then there was a whoosh of flame, and the Weasley’s were gone.

“Come on Harry. Back to prison we go.” Harry sighed for effect and jumped off the bed.

“I'll see you on September 1st Harry,” Dumbledore said, waving as Harry and Sirius left the wing. After walking a few corridors to make sure Dumbledore wasn’t following them, Sirius pulled a blank piece of parchment from his pocket and tapped it with his wand.

“I solemnly swear I am up to no good.” The duo whispered with identical grins.

Using the map to ensure they weren’t spotted; Harry and Sirius made their way up to the Sixth-floor corridor and slipped into the Home.

“There you are!” Lupin exclaimed, running down the corridor, a woman with bright pink hair Harry had become very well acquainted with the past few days walking behind him.

“Moony, Tonks. How’s it been?” Sirius said, brushing off Remus’s concern and waltzing down the corridor. “I need some Firewhiskey, keeping old man Dumbles from reading your mind gives you one hell of a headache.”

“He read your mind?” Tonks asked in shock.

“Yep. Just a surface scan, but I’ve never been particularly good at Occlumency.”

Lupin sighed. “At least I know he didn’t read me. Well, unless he figured out how to stop the werewolf trapped in my head from ripping him to pieces that is.”

“Occlumency comes part and parcel with Auror training, so I should be fine,” Tonks said, pulling a bottle from the Firewhiskey cabinet as they sat down at the kitchen bench. The pink haired wizard, who happened to be both a Metamorphmagus and Sirius’s cousin, had believed their story of Sirius’s innocence as soon as they told her a week into the summer, when Harry, Remus and Sirius (all wearing Defenders Cloaks) had cornered her at her apartment. Sirius had been rolling on the floor laughing by the end of it. By having Tonks on their side, they knew that there were at least two people in the Ministry they could trust – the other being Alastor “Mad-eye” Moody. Tonks, Padfoot and Moony had convinced Harry that if anyone would give Sirius the benefit of the doubt, it was the man who trained him. Tonks had also been apprised of the Gringotts-Dumbledore situation and was helping Harry sought through the many letters and documents he was receiving on a steady basis as the Goblins combed through his redirected mail.

“Yeah. We've just got the kids to worry about now. No pressure.” Sirius said, lounging back in his seat and taking a long pull of the bottle.

“I don’t think you’ll have to worry about me and Ginny,” Harry told them as he declined Tonks offered glass.

“Why?”

“He tried it on both of us back in the Hospital Wing. We got sent straight into the city. The one we keep dreaming about. I kind of banished him through a portal. If I can figure out what those machines are… we should be able to keep him out permanently.”

Moony and Padfoot stared at him in a look of complete astonishment.

“Someone care to fill me in?” Tonks asked, looking between the three of them in total confusion.
Authors Notes:
Greetings to our brilliant readers! We have a question for you all! Imagine if you will…
You walk into your dining room, only to discover that it’s much larger than you remember, and all the furniture is gone. Instead, one large circular wooden table dominates the room. On a raised platform at the table’s head are three podiums. Four individuals are already seated around the table. Dumbledore, Gandalf, Yoda, and Aslan. Who are the other seats for? And who are the hosts standing at the podiums?
We want your answers! Just throw us a few names, and your picks could appear in a particularly epic Disclaimer we have planned. And if you have any ideas for any conversations they might have, be sure to include them in your answer!
See you next week!
Ghost and Miracle
Updated Disclaimer:

Lucy Pevensie, Queen of Narnia, was standing outside the gates of Cair Paravel staring at the three people before her in confusion.

The first was a man with dark brown hair and eyes, and a ridged jawline. He wore a black suit with a deep red tie on a white shirt with black trousers. The woman next to him was wearing a red cocktail dress that contrasted gorgeously with the red coloured highlights of her otherwise blonde hair. The final woman had pale-blonde hair and was shorter than the other two. She wore a sleeveless bottle green mermaid gown that tapered out at her ankles.

They all were of similar age to Lucy, and all carried an aura of strength about them. And they were quite clearly not from Narnia.

“Who are you and where are you from?”

“It is an honour to meet you, Queen Lucy. The tales of your beauty and grace do not do you justice.” The man began, and the woman next to him elbowed him in the ribs as the other woman giggled something along the lines of, “Someone’s sleeping on the couch tonight.”

“My name is Ghost; this lovely lady is Miracle, and the other one is my sister Crystal,” The man stated, bowing his head.

“As for where we’re from, why we’re from the beautiful land of the Sunshine Coast.”

Lucy furrowed her brows. Something wasn’t right about these three.

“Why have you come to Narnia?”

“To tell you we don’t own Harry Potter, the Wizarding World or the Marvel Universe of course,” Crystal said cheerfully.

“But Alcheringa and its magical community are our own invention,” Miracle added, shining a smile at the queen. Lucy rolled her eyes. If they weren’t going to talk, then Peter could deal with them when he got back from the Lone Islands.

“Take them to the cells.”
Harry was sitting with Ginny, Hermione, Ron, Luke, Fred and George, finishing a rather delicious slice of roast beef when Dumbledore stood up and dinged his spoon against his glass.

“Now that we’re all settled in, I have a few important announcements to make. First, Mr Filch has asked me to once again remind you that the Forbidden Forest continues to be forbidden.”

Dumbledore stared at Harry at this point, a fact that Fred and George found highly amusing. “And that his list of banned items has increased by 26 items, bringing the total to four hundred, and thirty-seven I believe.”

“It is also my unfortunate task to inform you that the inter-house Quidditch competition will not be taking place this year.

“What!!” Came the simultaneous cry of horror from all the Quidditch players in the school.

“In more exciting news, it is my great pleasure to inform you that, for the first time in twenty-five years, Hogwarts will participate in the Triwizard Tournament, where we will be competing against the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the United States, and the Alcheringa Academy of the Magical Arts in Australia.”

And, in a single moment an outsider would believe was completely rehearsed, half the school began whistling and applauding, while the other half sat in complete confusion.

“What’s a Triwizard Tournament?” Luke asked.

“I honestly don’t know,” Hermione admitted, and Ron spat out his pumpkin juice.

“That’s a first!”

“For those of you who do not know, the Triwizard Tournament was established some 500 years ago, when the only major magical schools were Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, and brings together three of the 11 magical schools from across the world once every five years. The Tournament consists of six magical tasks; three individual tasks undertaken by a school champion and three matches of Quidditch where each school will field a team. One task and one match is held at each of the three schools. Hogwarts will hold the First Task and the First Match.

“Trials for the Hogwarts Quidditch team will occur in the first week of October, and a full complement of fourteen students will form the team. All other students third year and above will be invited to enter a ballot which will determine who will form the Hogwarts delegation, which will travel to the other two schools to support the Hogwarts Champion. Only those who enter the ballot will be eligible to be selected for Champion. The Champion will be chosen by an impartial judge the day after the Halloween Feast. More information as to the selection process will be provided closer to the date. The delegations from the other two schools will also arrive on Halloween, and will occupy our hallowed halls until New Year’s, where they, and the Hogwarts Delegation, will travel to Alcheringa for the Second Task and the Second Match, and then onto Ilvermorny for the Third Match and the Final Task.

“The reward for winning the Tournament is 1000 Galleons for the winning champion, and 100 galleons for completing all three tasks. The winning team will receive 250 galleons for each player.”

A rush of whispers moved through the hall,

“A thousand galleons!”

“With 500 galleons we could get the shop off to a start…”
“We wouldn’t be able to get the shop in Diagon Alley, but we could get set up in Hogsmeade like we were thinking last year…”

“I could buy all new robes…”

“I could finally get my hands on the collector’s edition of Game of Thrones I’ve been looking at…”

The Headmaster raised his hands again, and the hall fell silent.

“While the competition and the rivalry it creates is certainly entertaining, and the reward significantly enticing, it is its ability to forge ties between young witches and wizards of different nationalities and foster friendships that will last lifetimes that are its greatest strength. I myself met my good friend and long-time colleague Nicholas Flamel at a Triwizard Tournament. And it was also where I met Gellert Grindelwald for the first time, long before he had any designs on taking over the world.”


“Infamous mass-murderer from before Tom’s time. Dumbledore defeated him on the steps of his fortress in Germany days before the end of World War Two. It’s a story even more famous than yours,” Ginny replied.

“I know that you will extend every courtesy to our foreign guests while they are with us,” Dumbledore continued, “and you will give your whole-hearted support to the Hogwarts Champion and the Hogwarts Quidditch Team once they are selected. Now, I do believe dessert is ready, and I dare say the house-elves are getting quite annoyed with me for delaying it.” Dumbledore clapped his hands and an assortment of chocolates, ice-creams, and pudding appeared on the four tables. Whatever people were talking about before, it was promptly forgotten in favour of debating Hogwarts chance in the tournament. Only one person wasn’t indulging.

“House Elves! Here at Hogwarts! Oh no!” Hermione exclaimed, dropping her utensils and staring at Dumbledore in complete disgust.

Harry and Ginny completely ignored Hermione’s tirade about House Elf Rights – which was apparently inspired by her, Ron and Luna witnessing Barty Crouch reduce his House Elf Winky to tears after giving her clothes for some slight after Harry and Ginny had apparated out of the Quidditch World Cup.

“Are you going to try out for the team?” Harry whispered to her.

“Do you think I could?” She asked, biting her lip.

“Definitely! You’re a brilliant Chaser Gin. You flattened Padfoot, Moony, Tonks and I every time you popped over to the Home during the Summer break.”

“There’s no way I’ll make the starting line-up. Angelina, Alicia and Katie are like a well-oiled machine!” Ginny stated, shaking her head.

“But you could make the reserves. And if you do, it’ll put you in a great place for next year, and you’ll get to be a part of the Hogwarts Delegation.” Harry countered.

“That’s true. You’ll get in for sure, and I don’t want a random ballot determining whether or not you get to vanish on me for half the year,” she blanched.

“Me! What makes you think I’m going to be in it?” Harry asked.
“Harry you were the youngest Seeker in a century. You’ve got half a dozen pro-league clubs trying to swoop you up, and you’re only in fourth year. You’re by far the best flyer in the school. No one isn’t going to pick you.”

Harry blushed scarlet under her praise.

“Cedric beat me last year…”

“That was only because of those fucking Dementors, and you know it.” Ginny cut him off.

“I suppose…”

“Suppose nothing Harry. You’re the best we’ve got.” If there was one thing that made her want to kill the Dursleys more than anything else, it was Harry’s almost negligible sense of self-worth they had instilled within him. He honestly thought he wasn’t worth the attention he received, and while it protected him from being arrogant, it made him incredibly vulnerable in Ginny’s opinion. It was something she was trying to stamp out of him, but it was taking some time.

“Just promise me something Harry,” She said, staring into his emerald eyes, her hands gripping his under the table.

“What?”

“Don’t try and become Champion. Leave it to someone else,” she pleaded.

Harry smiled and pressed his lips to her forehead in a quick kiss that sent shivers down her spine and made the Gemini Rune hum with warmth.

“I promise. I wasn’t going to do it anyway. Let someone else be the centre of attention for a change.” Ginny breathed a sigh of relief and leaned her head against his chest, her dessert forgotten.

“Thank you.”

The Tournament was all anyone could talk about. The Twins had started a betting ring on who would be chosen as Champion and who would make the Quidditch team. Harry had been shocked when George told him he was the firm favourite for Seeker. The candidates for Champion so far were Cedric Diggory from Hufflepuff, Angelina Johnson from Gryffindor and Amanda Robbins from Ravenclaw.

Professor Lupin had apparently filled Sirius in on the Tournament, as he, like Ginny, had made Harry swear not to enter as a Champion. According to him, the tasks were a lot more dangerous than Dumbledore had made them out to be, and he didn’t want Harry anywhere near them. Harry told him not to worry as he had no intention of entering.

A few days after the tournament was announced, Hermione rushed into the Gryffindor Common Room after dinner, Lily Potter’s copy of *Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations* clutched in her hands.

“I found it! I found it!” She yelled, jumping up on the coffee table in front of the fire, drawing the
attention of everyone in the room. Concerned she was about to go on another spiel about House Elf Rights, Harry bent over his desk and continued working on his potions essay in the hopes she wouldn’t see him.

“Whot?” Ron asked through a mouthful of chocolate frog, apparently not as observant.

“Alcheringa Academy of the Magical Arts!” That got everyone’s attention. Harry spun around, his essay forgotten, to stare up at Hermione. She flipped open the book and began to read.

Chapter 4: The Druids and the Mer

The Druids and the Mer are two different peoples who exist harmoniously as one culture and civilisation. To be honest, they should really be the envy of most nations in the Multiverse. Instead, they are looked down upon as lesser by people like the Pure-blooded European Magical Folk – and even by the International Confederation of Wizards to some extent – as insignificant and a waste of resources.

The Druids of the modern age owe their history to the Celtic peoples of Ireland and the British Isles. Believing their power was a source of divine favouritism, the Druids were appointed as leaders within Celtic society, organising worship and sacrifices, divination, and judicial procedure. When mortals were discovered to hold Druidic power, they were taken away into the forests, where they were not seen for many years, only returning once they had mastered the art of magic.

The coming of the Romans to Britain changed that. The Druids were no match for the Roman Empire’s wizarding forces, as they had never before used their powers for aggression, instead focussing on bettering the environment and the lives of mortals. By the time the Roman’s withdrew, only a handful of Druids were left, but the Wizarding Population was growing strong, paving the way for Merlin’s time. The Druids retreated to the far coast of Ireland in an effort to preserve their ways. It was here legend tells, that the Druids encountered the Mer for the first time.

The Mer are a race of half-human, half-aquatic creature indigenous to the southern hemisphere. They are only distantly related to the Selkies of the North Sea, and their Siren cousins of the Mediterranean. Myth tells that the Mer were originally humans who lived-in South-East Asia and the Pacific Islands, but were cursed by a long forgotten water deity to transform into aquatic creatures upon coming into contact with water. Whether this is true is hotly debated, even amongst the Mer themselves. The more common belief is that the transformation was the result of an accident involving the full-moon. This hypothesis is far more likely, due to the known magical powers of the moon itself (see Werewolves) and a recent study that proves the moon can be used to take away a Mer’s powers permanently, rendering them human.

The Mer, who were attending the bicentennial council of underwater beings on the maintenance of Earth’s oceans, encountered the persecuted Druids and offered them a means of escape to a new home free of other magical people in exchange for the Druids instructing them in the art of magic. The Druids accepted this offer and travelled to the coast of the continent now known as Australia. The Druids remained for many years on a large island situated in the southern reaches of the Great Barrier Reef a short distance from the Merrish Fortress City of Altica, due mostly to the large populations of dangerous magical animals on the Australian mainland. Dragons, Basilisks, Phoenixes, Thylacine and other creatures dominated the bushland and deserts, while the incredibly large populations of Leviathan, Kraken and Kaiju present in the open oceans discouraged Mer exploration out into the deeper areas of the Pacific. Eventually, the increasing population of Druids spread out, establishing colonies in New Zealand and on the Australian Coast, before expanding across the Pacific Islands, eventually reaching as far north as Hawaii. And as they grew, they continued the deal set up with the Mer. They taught the native magical peoples of the Pacific how to
harness magic to aid in their environment and lessen the effects of natural disasters that frequent the area.

When the International Statute of Secrecy came into effect in 1692, the Druids were the last faction of Magic users to ratify it, and did so only under threat of war from the other Magical Realms. The Druids are often hostile to the ICW in debates concerning mortal (or ‘muggle’) affairs and refused to vote on any decision until the Mer gained equal representation as magic users – as they were initially classified as beasts.

In the modern era, the ancient partnership between the Druids and the Mer still thrives. The city of Alcheringa – built on the island of their arrival and named for the local Aboriginal tribal word ‘dream’ – is a massive metropolis spanning both land and sea and is modelled on a rare painting of Atlantis – the City of the Ancients – discovered by the Mer on the bottom of the ocean. It is also home of the Academy – the only magical school that teaches Druidic Magic.

It is one of only five on land cities in the region – the others being located in the Rainforests of Cape Tribulation; near Auckland on New Zealand’s North Island; on the Tahitian coast; and on a hidden island near Honolulu, Hawaii. All five serve as capital cities for their respective land-based kingdoms, and – combined with the ten underwater kingdoms – make up the fifteen kingdoms (or states) of the Federated Kingdoms of the Druid and Mer – the magical government of the Pacific Islands.

A Druid’s magic is different to a regular Wizard and Witches Magic. A Witch or Wizard uses internal magic, drawn from their own soul – more commonly referred to as the ‘magical core’ – to affect reality. Druids, on the other hand, use magic as an external force – using energy that exists within the environment around us to affect reality. This has several interesting implications. Druids cannot cast charms, jinxes or curses like Wingardium Leviosa, the Impediment Jinx, or the Cruciatus Curse. Instead, they rely on the manipulation of elements within nature to achieve the same effect. A Druid can manipulate gravity to levitate something, use the earth to trap someone’s feet to impede their progress or summon lightning to electrocute someone to produce the effects of the Cruciatus Curse. This leaves them particularly vulnerable to spells that cannot be recreated, like the Finite Incantatem spell, or the Imperious and Killing Curses.

However, due to their understanding of the natural environment, Druids, on average, are far more powerful than the average Witch or Wizard, and their spells more efficient. A simple combustion spell can create an explosion twice as strong as the most potent Detonator Curse. They can use gravity to fly, reconfigure their atomic structure to appear younger, and their magic does not impact negatively on electrical equipment. They are the most advanced learners of Transfiguration in the world, possessing the ability to manipulate particles at the quantum level. They also have an affinity for Wandless Magic, though more powerful spells still require the use of Wands.

The Druids are also considered the experts on Magical Creature handling. This is unsurprising, as it is a necessity for survival in the harsh Australian Outback.

Hermione closed the book and looked up at her enthralled audience.

“So, the people from Alcheringa are half fish?” Fred asked.

“No. Only some. And only some of the time. They’re human when they’re on dry land. But when they come into contact with water, they grow tails, fins and gills. Only the Mer can do it though. The Druids are still 100% human like us,” Hermione explained.

“Wicked,” Alicia Spinnet whispered.
“It is pretty cool,” Katie agreed.

“And they can do wandless magic?” the sixth-year prefect, whose name Harry could never remember, asked.

“Yes. Because they use a different type of magic than we do,” Hermione confirmed.

“In other words. Don’t think just cause they don’t have a wand in their hand, doesn’t mean they aren’t dangerous,” Luke said, rubbing a hand over his bald head.

“I should learn me some of that,” Harry said, louder than he had planned.

“Why?”

“Maybe I can get the jump on Voldemort next time he tries to kill me.”

Lee, Fred and George laughed, most of the room flinched, Hermione looked like she wanted to scold him, and Ginny, who had walked in halfway through Hermione’s speech, looked outright furious.

“Well Harry, first things first. We need you in top form for the Quidditch Team. There’s no doubt you’re going to be Seeker…” Angelina Johnson said, pushing her way through the crowd.

“Speak for yourself. Cedric’s probably gonna out catch me. He’s done it before.” Harry interjected.

Ever since the tournament was announced and Ginny’s pep talk, Harry had been having dreams of being the Seeker for the Hogwarts team. He didn’t care about being the Champion, that could go to someone far more experienced than him. But if he could make Seeker… he could prove to the school… to the entire world… that he was more than just the lightning bolt scar on his head. In his dream he was holding the Triwizard Cup for Hogwarts, his teammates and friends all around him, screaming his name. Then Ginny would run up to him and kiss him hard on the lips…

“That sounds a bit off doesn’t it?” Ron said, breaking Harry out of his daydream.

“How so?” Jessica said, folding her arms from her seat in the armchair next to Hermione. Jessica – both in and out of her disguise – was such a recurring figure around the Gryffindor Common Room now that nobody questioned her presence. She was a welcome addition, as she often provided information on Slytherin Pranks, or gave targets to the Twins, who made excellent use of it. Even Ron, with his seemingly universal hatred of all things Slytherin, had accepted that Jessica was more “lion than snake,” in his words, “although she might think like them, she still acts more like one of us.”

“Well they don’t need wands, they’re constantly around dangerous creatures, and they invite half-humans into their schools. I wasn’t the only one here who was taught the dangerous of half-humans like werewolves and vampires. I just think we should keep an eye on them while they’re here you know.”

Ron’s views on the subject had not been overly popular within Gryffindor House, but thanks to the Hogwarts Rumour Mill, whispers about the dangerous people who attended Alcheringa had circulated through the other three houses within the next day, and many of the Slytherins were being highly vocal about how they refused to allow dark creatures into their school, and would not be associating themselves with anyone from the, to quote Draco Malfoy, “bottom feeders of the world.”
Harry thought he was trying way too hard to be clever with that one.

The Defenders met up as a group on Saturday Morning, where Jessica was finally brought up to date on everything that had happened over the summer. Then she gave them all some news of her own.

“Lucius Malfoy was behind the stunt at the Quidditch World Cup,” She said solemnly, “Draco’s been bragging about it to anyone who’ll listen. Parkinson, Nott, Flint, Crabbe and Goyle’s parents were all involved too.”

No one was particularly surprised by this news.

“But it seems to have caused more problems than it was worth.”

Sirius frowned, “What do you mean?”

“Nobody knows who sent the Dark Mark up into the sky. When they saw it, everyone panicked and disapparated, just missing the Aurors.”

“But why would they panic? It’s their sign isn’t it?” Danny asked, confused.

“The prevailing theory is that it was a loyalist who just happened to be there, that sent the mark into the air. The Death Eaters,” she placed air-quotes around the words Death Eaters, “seemingly weren’t acting on anyone’s orders. They were just having a bit of fun. And it’s got the Dark Lord loyalists, like my mum, really mad. Mum, Avery and a few others have been looking for Him since his fall. Fortunately, most of them are in Azkaban now like Bellatrix, Dolohov, Rookwood and my Dad. Most of the Death Eaters who escaped going to Azkaban are despised by the loyalists for ‘betraying their master.’ Mum goes on about it all the time.

“So now the loyalists are even more pissed at Malfoy and his cronies. This thing has split the Slytherin community down the middle. And as horrible as the circumstances are, that’s only good news for us.”

The group was silent for a several minutes before Hermione hesitantly raised her hand.

“Hermione, we’re not in class,” Ron said, rolling his eyes. Hermione huffed in annoyance but put her hand down.

“Not to change topics or anything, but I do have a bit of a problem.” She pulled up the sleeve of her robes and pulled aside the armband that Ginny’ had made for her. The Pisces Rune was still visible on the inside of her arm, as clear as the day Harry had drawn it.

“You reapplied it?” Harry asked.

“No. It hasn’t come off. I must have read that chapter in the book a dozen times, and nothings working. Its only supposed to last for a few months at max, but it’s been eight now, and its showed no signs of fading.”

Harry’s stomach started doing butterflies in his chest. Had he done something wrong? No. He had done it perfect. If he had screwed it up, it should have worn off faster, not slower. It had to be something else.

“What if… what if it’s Harry’s natural increased power?” Jessica asked, moving to get a good look at the rune inked into Hermione’s arm.

“What do you mean?” Sirius asked.
“There’s no use denying it. Harry’s easily twice as powerful as everyone else here. Probably everyone in the school besides Dumbledore. We all know what he can do. What if, because of that, he accidentally made the rune permanent?”

“It’s not a bad hypothesis. I’m not reading any strange aurae from the rune itself. Lu?” Matt said, before turning towards Luna. The blonde closed her eyes for a few seconds, then opened them and shook her head.

“Sorry, there’s nothing weird in the songs. The Blibbering Humdingers are all acting normal,” she said apologetically.

“It’s not causing you any pain, or anything is it?” Ron asked.

“No. Nothing like that at all. It’s such a big help in everything. It’s just… I’m a bit worried about my O.W. L’s. What if they say it’s cheating or something?”

The rest of the group rolled their eyes and burst out laughing.

“This is important guys,” she said, folding her arms over her chest.

The fourth years only stopped talking about the Tournament after their first Defence Against the Dark Arts Class of the year.

When they entered the classroom, Professor Lupin was sitting on his desk, his legs dangling out just above the floor. When they had all sat down, he looked up with tired eyes and smiled softly at them.

“Welcome to your fourth year of Defence Against the Dark Arts. Last year we learned all about Dark Creatures and what to do if you come into contact with them. This year we’re going to move onto Curses and their counters.” A number of people began whispering throughout the classroom.

“Next year we move onto proper Duelling, combining everything you’ve learned over the past few years. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. First things first. Can anyone tell me, what makes a curse different from your jinxes and hexes?”

To no one’s surprise, Hermione’s hand soared straight into the air.

“Hermione?”

“Curses, unlike jinxes and hexes, are designed to bring intentional, permanent harm to the recipient. Jinxes and Hexes, while they can be mildly painful, are temporary, and can be easily dispelled.”

“Exactly,” Lupin stated as Malfoy coughed a phrase that sounded eerily similar to “know-it-all,” from his spot at the back of the room.

“Curses come in all shapes and sizes. They can remove peoples limbs, bewitch their minds, or even, in the most horrifying of circumstances, kill their target.” Lupin stood up and ran a hand through his hair. The Full Moon was two weeks ago, so Harry wasn’t sure why he looked so tired. But the ever-present lines on his face were even more obvious today, and Harry couldn’t help but feel a bit worried for his teacher and friend.
According to Ministry guidelines, I shouldn’t be showing you any actual curses until you reach sixth year. But Professor Dumbledore says, and I agree, that you all need to know what you’re up against. The attack at the World Cup just proves that there are still terrorists and radicals out there and keeping you in the dark about the world doesn’t help you at all. Curse knowledge is also a major component of your O.W.L exams coming up next year, so make sure you pay attention.”

Lupin sighed and turned to the blackboard.

“That being said. There are three curses that I will not be demonstrating. Anyone care to take a guess which ones they are?”

Then, to the astonishment of the entire class, Neville raised his hand.

“The Unforgivable Curses,” he said shakily.

“Indeed. The Unforgivable Curses, so named because the use of any one of them will earn you a one-way ticket to Azkaban,” Lupin said, and suddenly, Harry realised what the expression on the werewolf’s face was. It wasn’t tiredness, it was dread.

“So, who can tell me the first one?”

A number of students raised their hands, and Lupin pointed at Ron.

“Um… My Dad did tell me about one… the Imperius Curse.”

“Correct. The Imperius Curse is the power to control someone’s mind. And, as you can probably guess, it can cause quite a few problems. There is no way to conclusively prove anyone is under the control of the Imperius Curse. If I placed one of you under its effects right now, you would think that anything I told you to do would be perfectly normal. I could tell you to jump out the window, and you wouldn’t even bat an eye. Or I could make you murder your best friend or the person you love, and there’s no way for you to prove that you didn’t do it out of your own free-will.”

Then Lupin, for the first time that day, smiled.

“But it can be fought. And if you make it to sixth year, I will be teaching you how to do exactly that. It takes incredible will power, and it’s not something everyone can do. But even the ability to resist slightly can give you a massive advantage. Still, best avoid being hit if you can.”

Then his smile vanished as if it was never there.

“Next?”

Malfoy rolled his eyes at Lupin and raised his hand in the air, a cocky smile on his face that did not bode well in Harry’s opinion. Ron elbowed Harry, and he looked at his best friends face. He had clearly seen it too.

“Malfoy,” Lupin said, gesturing to the pale-haired Slytherin.

“The Cruciatus Curse.”

“Yes. The Torture Curse.” Harry felt a thick surge of bile attempt to climb into his throat. That was the spell he had saved Ginny from. That was the spell Danny had been placed under…

“The Cruciatus Curse targets the body’s Nervous System, the tiny cells in your body responsible for you being able to move, and attacks them with a force like a bolt of lightning. Every part of your
body in complete and total pain. The more powerful the caster, the more intense the pain.” Lupin
said softly, looking down at the floor. Harry, however, was looking at Neville, who looked like he
was going to throw up. Hermione, who was sitting next to him, was rubbing circles into his back.

“But how are we supposed to know what it’s like if you can’t show us?” Malfoy asked, “Are you
too much of a coward?”

Lupin looked up at Malfoy, all the kindness gone from his eyes.

“Well, Mr Malfoy, if you think you can provide an accurate demonstration, be my guest.” Lupin
threw his arms out as if making himself a target. Harry had the urge to jump up and pull him to the
ground, but restrained himself, trusting the professor.

Malfoy stood up, a malicious grin on his face, and pulled his wand at Lupin.

“Cruc…”

“Stupefy!” A snarling voice yelled from the door, and a bolt of white light struck Malfoy in the back,
sending him careening forward flat on his face unconscious. Harry, who always enjoyed any
unfortunate circumstances that fell upon Draco Malfoy, had to try very hard to contain his laughter.
A series of dull clunks echoed through the classroom as a man in a black cloak hobbled inside, wand
in one hand, walking stick in the other. A large diagonal scar ran across his face, and a large chunk
of his nose was missing. But it was the man’s eyes that made him look frightening. One of them was
small, dark and beady. The other was large and a vivid electric blue. The blue eye was constantly
moving, rolling about in its socket without blinking, completely independent of the other eye.

“Head Auror Moody,” Remus said, not at all surprised to see the man.

“I have to say Lupin, when I agreed to take Unforgiveable Lesson Monitoring shift on short notice,
this was not what I was expecting,” Moody said, standing over Malfoy and pointing his wand at the
prone boy.

“Rennervate.”

Malfoy jerked awake and squeaked when he saw the man's face. The class was too stunned to laugh.

Moody leaned over and grabbed him by the arm, jerking him to his feet.

“I’ll inform Dumbledore this one’s being suspended for attempting to perform an Unforgivable. If
I’m lucky, he’ll be expelled by the end of the day. Old Lucius will loooove this!” Moody grabbed
Malfoy by his collar and walked him to the edge of the classroom.

“Seeing as how I’m the only one in the country who can legally do this.” Moody reached into his
pocket and pulled out a giant spider, which he then dropped on an empty desk. Ron let out a tiny
whimper. He hated spiders.

“Found this little beauty outside just now,” he said.

He pointed his wand at the spider and, suddenly realising what was about to happen, Harry tore his
eyes away.

“Avada Kedavra!”

He wasn’t fast enough.
A flash of green light emanated through the classroom, and the spider lay on the desk, unmoving.

“The Killing Curse, the last of the Unforgivable Curses. It will penetrate any shield, and there’s no counter.” Lupin said, glaring daggers at Moody, whose blue eye had suddenly slid into the back of his head. Harry, on the other hand, was merely staring at his desk. He knew the spell that killed his parents. Had seen Voldemort cast it in his mind when the Dementors came near. But seeing it in real life was something else entirely.

“Only one person is known to have survived it. And he’s sitting in this room.” Harry looked up and saw that Moody was staring at him, both eyes fixed upon the scar on his forehead.

“Now. I don’t want to be hearing any of you being as stupid as this one. Cause if you try anything, I’ll know. CONSTANT VIGILANCE!” Then, as the entire class jumped back in fright, Moody dragged Malfoy, who was whining about how his father, ‘wouldn’t tolerate this,’ from the room.

“Class dismissed.”
Ghost stood on a sandy beach, staring out at the sunset as the waves washed at his toes.

“What are you thinking about?” Sora asked him, stepping up beside the Traveller and placing a hand on his shoulder.

Ghost hesitated for a few seconds, before finally grinning like an idiot. “We’ve reached 100 followers. I can barely believe it.”

“That’s great!” Sora exclaimed, slapping his friend on the back. “Then what are you doing on the Destiny Islands moping? You should be partying it up!!”

Ghost bit his lip.

“How do you do it, man?” he asked suddenly.

“Do what?”

Ghost hesitated for a few more seconds before answering. “How do you handle knowing your reach is so much further than you can possibly understand?”

Now it was Sora’s turn to hesitate.

“There powers work differently to mine,” Sora said at length, “You build worlds. I can’t do that. So, I’m not sure I’m the best person to ask.”

Ghost shook his head. “Actually, I think you’d understand better than most. You travel between worlds. You’ve seen first-hand how messing with reality can affect people. By building a world from the ground up, I control the fates of everyone in it. If I sentence someone to fail… if I sentence someone to die, just for my plot, doesn’t that make me even worse than people like Voldemort? You’ve met people from countless worlds, witnessed their struggles, felt their pain. You have a better understanding of the heart than I ever will. So, tell me, am I a villain, for condemning people to death, or even worse, to the darkness itself?”

Sora stood silently, the only sound the washing of the waves on the shore, and the birds singing in the wind.

“I think, the fact that you’re even asking yourself the question is proof enough. You’re right, I’ve seen more than my fair share of worlds. And you know what each and every one of them have in common? They all have stories to tell. And without someone to tell those stories, they’ll never be heard. I know my story is fiction on your world. Just like your story is fiction on some other world. If we don’t have our stories, what do we have?”

“You still didn’t answer the question,” Ghost pointed out.

“No, I didn’t. Because you already have your answer.” Sora paused and placed his hands into the bulging pockets of his baggy pants, “Remember when we first met?”

Ghost laughed. “How could I forget? It’s not every day a mad man from the future tries to kill you.”
“But do you remember what I told you later, about being a part of something bigger than yourself?”

Ghost raised an eyebrow, a lost expression on his face. “In my defence, there was a lot of shit going down…”

“I told you that there was an infinite number of different worlds, and that light and darkness had been at war over them all since the beginning of time, and will continue on until the end of days.”

“I fail to see why that’s relevant…”

“I told you that the thing that protects your heart from the darkness is hope, belief in a brighter tomorrow, the people we meet, and the friendships make. Thanks to your story, people that might never have existed now have that same chance. Light and darkness oppose one another on every world, so we have to make sure that enough people are willing to stand up for what’s right to keep the Darkness at bay. Even if that means some people won’t make it to the end of the line. That is your job as a Traveller, and you’ve been doing a bang-up job of it so far. Just do me a favour?”

“What?”

“Make it a happy ending, alright.”

Ghost’s smile returned to his face, and he turned away from the smouldering sunset. At the top of the beach, Miracle and Kairi were waiting for them.

“So, about that party…”

“I’m shouting. All four of us are going to Disney Castle. I’m an honoured guest of the King you know.”

“Yeah, I suppose that happens when you save the Multiverse a couple of times.” Ghost and Sora both broke into laughter as they walked up the beach and re-joined their friends. Just as they were leaving, Ghost cast one final look back at the last rays of sunset, his heart just a little lighter than it had been before.

“The Harry Potter Universe belongs to JK Rowling, Characters and Locations taken from Marvel Comics belong to their respective owners, and Alcheringa and it’s magical community belong to us. A huge shout out and thanks to Karencha.tello.g.33 our 100th follower, and to TinyFox2, Gin110881, DiegoARL38, Triggbc, Son of Whitebread and Dianaanne for taking the time to consistently review almost every chapter of the story so far! This chapter is celebratory for reaching number 100. We hope you all enjoy it.”

Kingdom Hearts 3 is available now on PlayStation and X-Box.

Act II, Chapter 4: The Trials
Malfoy’s Suspension lasted three weeks. Three long weeks of pure Malfoy free school, before Lucius had his son’s attempted crime expunged and he swaggered back into the school, only to be laughed out of the Great Hall by the entirety of Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor and even a portion of Slytherin. And the best part about it was that he missed the opportunity to put his name in the ballot for the Hogwarts Delegation. So, if Harry got the Seeker position, Malfoy would be stuck at Hogwarts all year with no Harry to torment, and no chance to play Quidditch. Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Luna and Matt had all entered the ballot, while Luke, Danny and Jessica had not, as their parents had all expressly forbade it. Jessica didn’t mind as it gave her more time to learn about what happened at the World Cup, and Luke and Danny agreed to watch her back.

This year was looking to be quite possibly the best year of Harry’s Hogwarts career. Actually, it was definitely looking to be the best year of his entire life.

Five years later he would be found wishing very, very hard that he could take that statement back.

Harry, Fred, George, Ginny and Ron walked out onto the Quidditch Pitch carrying their brooms. Harry had made a bet with them before the trials. If any of them made the team, he would buy them a Firebolt, and that was final. He didn’t admit that he was planning on buying one for each of them anyway, but it stopped Ron from complaining about “unwanted charity.”

The entire school had turned out to watch the trials, filling the stadium to the brim with people screaming their names. Harry was quite stunned to see several scouts sitting in the top box next to Dumbledore, Cornelius Fudge, Barty Crouch and Ludo Bagman – Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports.

A very nervous Angelina was standing in the centre of the pitch, wringing her hands together and looking like she was going to be sick. There were already two dozen hopefuls standing around her from all four houses. Angelina had just taken the Captaincy for the team after Cedric Diggory, the other hopeful, had pulled out, expressing his desire to be Hogwarts Champion instead. As Harry and the Weasley’s arrived, Angelina nodded at them, and Harry gave her a thumbs up. She tried a slight smile, but it didn’t reach her eyes in the slightest. Taking several deep breaths, she pulled out her wand and cast the Sonorous Charm on herself.

“Allright! Welcome to the Hogwarts Quidditch Trials for the Triwizard Tournament.” The talking of the students around the stadium dropped to a whisper and Angelina released the spell.

“Ok. Listen up. Today there are no houses. No rivalries. And no favouritism. I am going to be choosing people based on their abilities, attitude, and teamwork. Nothing more. Nothing less. I don’t care if you’re a Slytherin First Year or a Gryffindor Seventh Year. Do I make myself clear?” Ignoring the ball of apprehension that rose up in his throat, Harry nodded his head viciously along with the rest of the hopefuls.
“Alright. We’ll start with Chasers and Beaters. Can I have Chasers and Beaters over here, Keepers over there please.”

“Good luck guys,” Harry said, patting Ginny and Ron on the back. Ginny took her School Cleansweep 6 and walked over to stand by the Chasers, while a very anxious Ron hefted his own school broom and moved over to the Keepers section.

Harry honestly wasn’t sure who would get the Keeper spot, as the only really good Keeper in the school had been Oliver Wood, who left the previous year. Five students were trying out for the role: Ron, the previous year’s Slytherin Keeper Miles Bletchley who Harry knew was abysmal, a Hufflepuff in Ginny’s year called Eloise, Cormac McLaggen and Ginny’s Ravenclaw friend Foggy Nelson.

The Chasers were by far the largest group. This was tougher to guess, as Harry had worked with Angelina, Alica and Katie for the past three years, and the trio worked like a well-oiled machine. They would be very tough to beat. But Roger Davies, the Ravenclaw Captain, was also an excellent Chaser, so was Zacharias Smith from Hufflepuff and Adrian Pucey from Slytherin. Ginny had also been working hard with her friend Demelza Robins, with her other friend Foggy acting as Keeper. Harry had seen them practising tactics almost every morning for the past month, and they weren’t half bad. He also knew, although no one else did, that Ginny was also going to enter the race for Seeker. Harry had been working with her in the Home for a while now, and he had to admit she was quite good. She wasn’t as daring as he was. But he was reasonably confident she could destroy Malfoy and probably outfly Cho, which she had confided was her real aim for trying out, as she had caught Chang bullying Luna and wanted revenge.

As the various teams lifted into the air, Angelina called Cedric, Harry, Malfoy and Cho together.

“You guys are all Seekers, so Beaters and Chasers don’t really affect you. I’ve seen you all play and you’re all good, I could use a hand picking the teams. Having all of you give input will also prevent me from being accidentally bias.”

Malfoy snorted and rolled his eyes, but everyone ignored him.

“Not a problem Angelina. Good call on recognising your own faults and countering,” Cedric told her, patting her shoulder. Angelina blushed and muttered a thank you that made Harry roll his eyes. Suddenly he knew why Fred and George didn’t like the Hufflepuff Seventh Year.

The four Seekers followed Angelina into the air, hovering over the middle of the pitch.

The Chasers had unsurprisingly split into four teams on house lines. Angelina, sighing in frustration, set the Ravenclaws against the Gryffindors first.

As Harry suspected, Alicia, Katie and Roger were by far the best, and Cedric was quick to point this out. Angelina was quite impressed by Ginny and Demelza, who were working together almost as well as Alicia and Katie were, although Cho disagreed, and Malfoy laughed, resulting in Cedric having to stop Harry from punching the blonde-haired git.

When she called in the Beaters, there was no doubt amongst the judges (with the exception of Malfoy, who grumbled about blood-traitors) that the Weasley Twins had a chemistry between them that far outstripped the Ravenclaws.

When the Slytherins and the Hufflepuffs took the pitch, there were no particular standouts. Malfoy kept going on about how the Slytherin chasers were by far the best until Angelina pointed out that they had yet to complete a move without cheating. She then sent a red-faced Malfoy back to the
Harry pointed out that Zacharias was easily as good as Roger, but Cedric and Angelina explained to him that he wasn’t very good at working with others, instead just taking shots himself with no passing, which in a real game was suicide. Neither the Slytherin Beaters or the Hufflepuff Beaters came close to the Twins performances, with both Cho and Cedric stating quite clearly that they were by far the best.

Harry tried very hard not to say too much for fear of being biased, but when Angelina caught this and asked him why, he admitted that he had supervised Ginny and Demelza training hard each morning for the spot, and though they weren’t as good as Katie or Alicia yet, they could be good reserves. Cedric had admired the girls' determination, while Cho had scowled, though Harry couldn’t figure out why.

Angelina scribbled something down on the muggle notepad she had brought just for the occasion, thanked the trio, and descended to the ground.

“OK, everyone! Gather round!”

All the Chasers and Beaters lined up in front of Angelina with nervous looks on their faces.

“Ok. I’ve made my picks. The starting line-up for Chasers will be Alicia Spinnet, Roger Davies and myself. The reserves will be Katie Bell, Ginny Weasley and Demelza Robins. The starting line-up Beaters will be Fred and George Weasley and the reserves Derrick and Bole. Well done to those of you who made it in, and sorry to the people who didn’t. Keepers, your turn. I want the first two in the air.”

Ginny and Demelza squealed and hugged each other so tight Harry thought one of them might burst. Fred and George were pumping their fists in the air and clanging their bats against each other. Angelina moved to stand beside Katie, who looked very disappointed. Harry made his way over to the squealing girls, who quickly pulled him into their hug when they saw him. Harry’s cheeks went bright red, and he looked to the twins for help, only to find them wreathing on the floor in laughter at his predicament.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, Harry!!!”

“Hey, you two did all the work. I just gave you some pointers and made sure you didn’t crash. And it paid off. You made it.” This comment only made the girls tighten their hold, and Harry could feel the blood in his body begin moving in a direction he was not comfortable with. Fortunately, Hermione and Luna picked that moment to run over and celebrate, successfully pulling Ginny and Demelza, who had started sobbing, away from him before his robes became too wet. Only Ron noticed the scowl that crossed Cho Chang’s face at all the attention Harry was getting.

“Look at you ickle Gin-Gin!” Fred and George exclaimed.

“Chaser for the Hogwarts Team…”

“How’d you get so good?” They finished.

Ginny smirked at her twin brothers, “I’ve been stealing your brooms and riding them in the middle of the night since I was six. Plus, Harry’s been helping me, Demelza and Foggy in the mornings the last couple of weeks.”

Fred and George grinned and hoisted Ginny onto their shoulders.

“Brilliant...”
“Trick Ginny.”

“Don’t worry…”

“We won’t tell…”

“A soul!”

The twins laughed, before dropping Ginny to the ground and racing off to find Lee Jordan. Harry slid to the ground, the others following suit as Angelina, Alicia and Roger started taking shots at the Keepers. Each Chaser took three shots on the Keeper for a total of nine. Eloise was first. She saved seven of the nine shots, falling for a bluff on one and just missing the last one. Ron saved five shots, but his nerves clearly got the better of him, as he missed the other four by a country mile. He did much better than Bletchley, who only caught two. McLaggen was good, saving eight shots, but he was arrogant and kept taunting the Chasers until Alicia threw the Quaffle right at his face, almost knocking him off his broom. Foggy caught seven shots, with a last-second catch on Davies final throw that looked more like luck than anything else. When Angelina declared Eloise the victor and Foggy the reserve, McLaggen had thrown a fit and stormed off the field, to the amusement of everyone else.

Finally, it was the Seeker trials. Harry took a deep breath and gripped his Firebolt. This is no different to a regular match Harry. All you have to do is catch a ball. A tiny ball with wings, but still, a ball. You’re the youngest Seeker in a century. You’ve only ever missed one catch and only because you were attacked by Dementors. And you’ve got a Firebolt, the fastest Broom in the world. You’ve got this.

Ginny brushed up beside him, her own broom in hand. She looked the complete opposite of how Harry felt. She had determination in her eyes, and her jaw was tightly clenched.

“Ginny, this is ridiculous. You don’t have to do this,” Luna exclaimed, tugging on Ginny’s sleeve.

“Yes, I do. That bitch isn’t going to get away with stealing your stuff ever again. I’m going to beat that girl to the Snitch if it’s the last thing I do.”

“Seekers, over here please,” Angelina called. Giving Ginny’s a hand a quick squeeze before letting go, the pair walked over to Angelina. Harry stood beside Cedric, who had a look of confusion on his face as Ginny stormed over to face Cho. Malfoy looked ready to break out laughing.

“Here’s the deal Chang. I’m going to beat you to the Snitch, and when I do, you’re going to apologise to Luna, and you’re not going to bully her ever again.” Cho looked outraged for a few seconds as her brain took in Ginny’s declaration, before contorting into a sneer worthy of Snape.

“And when I beat you?”

Ginny scoffed, “Not gonna happen.”

“Oh, it’s definitely going to happen small-stack. What do I get?” Everyone on the field had edged closer at the two girls voices rose higher and higher.

“If you win, I kiss your robes in front of the entire school and let you curse, hex or jinx me whenever you want with no retribution.”

Harry frowned. That wasn’t part of the plan.

“Ginny, I don’t think…” Angelina started.
“Oh, I want something more than that. If I win, you stop pursuing Harry.” Several girls, Hermione included, Harry noticed, gasped in shock. Ginny’s look of fierce determination cracked slightly, a sliver of doubt making its way into her mind.

Harry made to push forward, but Katie and Alicia held him back.

“Don’t. This is between them. You can’t interfere,” Katie said.

“But they’re fighting over me?!”

“Doesn’t matter. If they don’t settle it here and now, it’ll just get worse. Ginny called her out. It’s her decision to risk it now,” Alicia told him, and Harry reluctantly stopped struggling. Ginny turned towards him.

‘I trust you,’ he mouthed, and the Gemini Rune vibrated with warmth. Ginny obviously felt it too, as she reached a hand up to her mark and rubbed it slightly. Then she turned back to Cho, all fear replaced by a blazing look that made Cho step back a step involuntarily.

“Deal.”

Angelina groaned and blew her whistle, while Malfoy and the Slytherins cackled. The five Seekers lined up in the centre of the pitch, and Harry doubted he ended up with Malfoy next to him by accident.

“Well Potter, that was certainly the spectacle. It’s almost boosted my respect for you. Almost. If I were you, I know which one I would be picking, although, who says you can’t pick both? I’ve never tried it myself, but my father says the more, the merrier.” Harry, who’s jaw dropped open in shock at Malfoy’s statement, never got the chance to answer.

“Okay. Here are the rules. First, I am going to release this professional level Snitch. Then I will release the standard level Snitch. I don’t expect anyone to actually catch the professional level one, as it’s a good twice as fast as the normal level ones used for House Cups and the Tournament. If someone does manage to catch it, they’ll instantly make the team. The person who catches the standard one will make reserve. If no one catches the professional Snitch, the person who caught the standard first will be bumped into the line-up, and I’ll rerelease it to decide the reserve. Any questions?”

Harry and Ginny shared a glance. Harry had an advantage here. The Home had a professional grade Snitch that the duo had been practising with over the holidays. Harry had caught it over a dozen times. Ginny had only managed about half a dozen, and only when using Harry’s Firebolt. The Firebolt and the practice would provide him with a massive advantage over the others. The only broom that could keep up with his was Malfoy’s Nimbus 2001.

“Everyone mount your brooms.” Malfoy shot Harry a cocky grin, which he ignored. Cho was staring at Ginny in rage, while Ginny and Cedric were simply staring at the Snitches in Angelina’s hands.

Angelina took a deep breath and released the balls. The two specs of golden light shot up into the sky and vanished.

“Three. Two. One. Mark!” Harry kicked off the ground and soared into the sky, using the Firebolts speed to shoot high above the others as quickly as possible. He reached level with the tallest hoop and began a slow circle of the pitch. Malfoy was following close behind him, Cedric was on the opposite side of the field, and Ginny and Cho were closer to the ground.
With no Quaffle in the air, the pitch was eerily quiet. Harry wasn’t sure whether or not this was a good thing or not. On the one hand, there were fewer distractions, and he could hear the incoming Bludgers, but on the other, the silence set his teeth on edge and did nothing for his nerves. Ignoring Malfoy’s constant taunts was also more difficult when there was no Lee Jordan to tune him out.

It was ten minutes into the play when the first sighting was recorded. Cho saw one of the Snitches and dived, Ginny hot on her tail. The two brooms were evenly matched for speed, but Cho had experience on her side. The two girls hurtled towards the grass, neck and neck, arms outstretched. Both girls were trying to push the other out of the way, neither succeeding. Harry couldn’t help his stomach lurching as they pulled up meters from the ground, soaring back up into the air.

Harry and Draco had been so focused on the girls, they completely missed Cedric soaring towards them from behind. Until he rushed straight past their ears that is. Malfoy screeched and almost fell front over his broom, but Harry cursed and reversed his position, focussing on Cedric, who was now speeding towards the nearby goal post, where Harry could just see a flash of gold. Pushing down on the handle, Harry shot after Cedric’s canary yellow robes, pushing the acceleration on the broom to the absolute maximum and leaving Malfoy in the dust. Cedric’s Nimbus 2000, while an excellent Broom, was not as good at accelerating as the Firebolt was, but the older boy had a substantial lead. The Snitch, as if sensing their approach, fluttered behind the goal post, prompting Cedric to spin 90 degrees, halving his speed as he whipped around. Harry only had to angle through the post. Fifteen metres… He stretched out his arm at the same time as Cedric. Ten metres… He pushed the Firebolt as hard as it could, the wind threatening to pull hair from his scalp. Five… Cedric’s finger closed around the ball, and Harry rolled into a downward arc, narrowly avoiding crashing into him.

Angelina blew the whistle, and Harry cursed his inattention. He could only hope the Snitch Cedric had caught was not the professional Snitch.

Harry levelled off and scanned the field. Ginny and Cho had apparently lost their Snitch and were now back to circling the grounds in opposite directions. Malfoy was on the ground whinging to Angelina, most likely about him. Cedric floated down to Harry and clapped him on the back.

“You almost had me there,” He said breathlessly.

“You got it fair and square. I got distracted,” Harry admitted.

“As both fun and unnerving as having girls fight over you is, don’t let it mess with you. Trust me, I’ve got experience in that arena.” Cedric smiled before dropping down to Angelina. Malfoy huffed and rose back up into the sky. Harry, intent to stay away from Malfoy, resumed his own circling, one eye on the pitch, the other on Angelina to see if she’d rerelease the Snitch. She shook Cedric’s hand and took the ball from him. She looked at it and grinned. Then she threw it back into the air and Harry dropped his head in a sigh of relief. Then he smiled. Directly below him, not far from where Angelina was standing, was the Snitch. He glanced back to see Malfoy tailing Cho, who was herself heading in Harry’s direction. Realising he needed to start moving, Harry began to circle away from the spotted Snitch, angling slightly downward as he did so. He caught eyes with Ginny, who was closer to the ground, and realised she had seen it too. She nodded her head imperceptibly and Harry, feeling Cho start to come up behind him, lifted his knees and drove himself straight down. Leaning low over the handle, he aimed directly for the grass. If he timed it right, he could pull out just high enough to snag the Snitch on his upward arc. Pushing the broom just fast enough to lose Cho, but not sufficient to lose Malfoy, he angled towards the turf to several screams in the stands. Then he heard a soft gasp from Cho. Not falling for the same trick twice, he continued down further, then pulled sharp on his broom handle, using the speed of the downward run to slingshot himself back into the air at an angle 45 degrees from the ground. He heard a grunt and a growl that sounded suspiciously like Malfoy and raised his own arm. His eyes locked on the Snitch, and he raced
towards it.

“Stupid Wronski…” Malfoy muttered from somewhere behind him, and Harry had another idea. He steered slightly above where the Snitch was fluttering a few metres from Angelina’s head, and slowed down, throwing a sarcastic smirk over his shoulder. Face contorted in rage, Malfoy spurned his broom higher so as to return to the sky, completely missing the ball of gold. At the last moment, entirely missing the look of satisfaction on Angelina’s face, he rolled on his broom so he was facing the ground with his back, and plucked the Snitch from the air. Angelina, a massive smirk on her face, blew her whistle twice as Harry rolled back over and landed with a skid on the grass. Only now did he allow himself to look up. Malfoy was hovering over the field, a look of shock and horror on his face as the inevitable crashed down upon him, and Ginny was streaking towards Angelina, a fluttering golden sphere held tight in her outstretched hand as Cho, looking about ready to murder someone, drifted in behind her.

Ginny landed on the ground beside Harry, a massive grin on her face as she handed Angelina her Snitch. Harry beamed at her as he handed his own in. Cedric congratulated Ginny on an excellent catch as Malfoy stormed away from the pitch. Cho landed as the remaining crowd ran out from the stands to meet them. Angelina gave a loud cough, and silence fell over the pitch.

“Cedric Diggory and Ginny Weasley both caught the standard Snitch, but as Cedric caught it first, and Ginny is already in as reserve Chaser, Cedric gets the reserve spot.” Several of Cedric friends patted him on the back as he shook a beat red Ginny’s hand.

“Harry Potter, by virtue of a brilliant roués and excellent flying, caught the professional Snitch, and will play in the starting line-up.”

“Yes!!!!” Hermione and Ginny screamed, followed by the rest of Gryffindor. Ginny jumped into his arms, and Harry spun her around.

“I knew you could do it,” She whispered in his ears as Fred and George made cat-calls behind them.

Angelina cleared her throat again as Hermione scolded the twins.

“Now, before we adjourn, a wager was made on the Seeker’s trial, and as Ginny caught the Snitch before Cho…” Angelina trailed off, staring at the black-haired Ravenclaw.

Cho looked absolutely furious at having been outflown by Ginny of all people. Harry chanced a quick glance at Cedric, who was rolling his eyes at Cho as Ginny, who still had her legs around Harry’s waist, spun around to stare at her rival.

“Well?”

Cho sneered at the red-head in Harry’s arms.

“Fine. I’ll leave Loony alone.” Then she threw her broom over her shoulder and stormed off, her cliché following obediently behind her.

“You bet you will, or the Defenders will be coming for you!” Ginny yelled, and Harry couldn’t help but agree.

No one noticed that Ron had seemingly vanished.
Act II, Chapter 5: Let the Games Begin

Chapter Notes

"Happy Valentines Day Everyone!"

Updated Disclaimer:

“How’s Madelyn doing?” Ghost asked as he walked down the staircase into the basement of the beach house.

“Better than I expected, but considering the poor kid just watched her entire civilisation be eviscerated in a Nuclear firestorm, that’s not saying much. If we hadn’t taken her straight to 2099… I don’t want to think about what might have happened.” Miracle shivered and placed a hand on the boring, plain, old wooden door without a handle. The keyhole glowed a faint blue light, and the door swung open. The duo stepped through, and out into a lush green forest. The door, which was embedded within the trunk of an ancient oak tree, closed softly behind them. They continued on in silence for a few minutes, just listening to the sound of the birds chirping to each other and rustling of branches in the wind. In the distance, the smell of salt water wafted over to them, and it was towards this smell they turned. After several minutes of walking, they arrived at the coast of a small inlet, surrounded by beautiful trees of all shapes and sizes, covered in gold and red leaves. Across the bay, a majestic medieval castle covered the skyline, a small town surrounding its walls. But here, on this side of the inlet, there was only one house, right up on the waterside. Its foundations were made from stone, but the walls were wood, and the roof made from thatch. A chimney, with soft curls of wood smoke billowing out into the breeze, indicated there were people home.

The couple, not bothering to resist the smiles that crossed their faces, stepped inside. The floor was carpeted, and the furniture mostly Jarrah wood. In the lounge room, a large entertainment system covered one wall, and the fireplace the other, a brown leather couch in the centre. The kitchen and dining rooms were cordoned off by a wall. Ghost and Miracle ignored the first rooms, instead turning into another corridor. This one was not wood, but rather made from marble, the floor too. At the end of the hall was a vast amphitheatre, leading down not to a stage, but a pool of water. Sitting at the edge of the pool were Crystal and Pirate – Miracle’s little Highland Terrier puppy – as well as someone else they had not expected to see. The man next to Ghost’s sister was tall, had a long white beard and a grey pointy hat. A wooden staff was leaning against the wall in the corner.

“Mithrandir,” Miracle said, bowing.

“Miracle, Ghost. Forgive me for intruding in your sacred space, but when Crystal informed me of what happened, I thought it best to come see if I could help. However, it seems you have everything well in hand.” Ghost and Miracle’s eyes turned to the pool as a splash indicated their young charge popping back above the water. She had long pink hair, brilliant amber coloured eyes, a mischievous smile that made your heart melt, and a tail of sapphire blue. As soon as the two-year-old poked her head above water, Pirate bounced from the stairs into the pool and began paddling towards her. Madelyn giggled and led the little puppy in circles around the pool.

“I hope you know just what you’ve done here? You’ve done more than save this young lady’s life.
You’ve given her a chance to live life, grow up, fall in love. How many lives will be touched by her, because of your kind hearts?” His voice carried a certain wisdom with it. As if every word was sincere, kind and wise beyond measure.

“How long do you plan to stay in the Realm of the Travellers, Mithrandir?” Miracle asked the old wizard.

“For a while yet I think. I shall endeavour to visit as often as I am able, but I’m afraid I must make haste to the Isle of the Forgotten. I must consult the wisdom of the Ascended before I the Great Council is convened.”

“If it’s the Ascended you’re after, I’ll warn you, they won’t answer your questions. Doesn’t matter who you talk to. The Accords hold, even here,” Ghost told him.

“It is not only questions that have answers, young Traveller.” Mithrandir stood up, dusting off his worn grey robes. Madelyn turned towards him and waved.

“Bubye, Mr Grey Hat!”

“Farewell, Miss Madelyn.” With that, the old man retrieved his staff and walked back down the corridor. As he neared the exit, he whispered to himself.

“All recognisable franchises belong to their respective owners. Alcheringa and its associated characters belong to Miracle, Crystal and Ghost. The Realm of the Travellers, I dare say, belongs only to those who can find it.”

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**Act II, Chapter 5: Let the Games Begin**

“Look!” A sixth-year girl exclaimed. Harry, with Ginny sitting on his shoulders, spun towards her, trying to see where she was looking.

“Where?” Cedric shouted.

“Up in the sky!” She replied, pointing up at the cloud-dotted sky. Harry glanced at Hermione, a massive grin on his face.

“Is it a bird?!” He called. Hermione threw back her head and laughed, much to the confusion of Ron, Ginny, Jessica (in her ‘Lily Evans’ disguise), Neville, Luna, Fred and George, who were standing around them.
“Is it a plane?!” She yelled through her giggles.

“NO!” Colin and Dennis Creevey beamed.

Then all the Muggle-borns and muggle raised half-bloods called out together, “ITS SUPERMAN!!!!” Before promptly dissolving into fits of laughter as the purebloods stared at them as if they’d all grown second heads.

It was Halloween afternoon, and Harry, the Defenders, and the rest of Hogwarts were all lined up in the Entrance Courtyard anxiously awaiting the other schools participating in the Triwizard Tournament.

A thundering crack wrenched the air, pulling Harry from his thoughts just in time to receive the biggest shock of his life. Falling from the sky, a few meters from the small figures that were getting larger and larger by the moment, was the silhouette of a man.

“Oh my gosh!” Hermione exclaimed as the figure hurtled closer and closer.

Several people, boys and girls both, screamed in horror as the person smashed into the ground, leaving an impact crater that left a crack running from the viaduct to the massive wooden doors.

“Urghhhh.” Everyone, student and teacher alike, stared at the crater in complete astonishment, as a man wearing dragonhide boots and a basilisk skin cloak cracked his neck and waltzed out of the impact crater, his entire body still smoking from the speed of his entry, and strolled over to Dumbledore, who was standing in the middle of the courtyard a few meters from the indent, a bemused smile on his face.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” The man said in a rough voice with a heavy accent. He had spikey black hair and a short scruffy beard on his chin. He held himself as if he was the most powerful person in the room and knew it, his shoulders pulled back, his head high, and his legs squared. And he had a sort of smirk on his face that made Harry think instantly that his entrance was by no means an accident.

“My sister, charming lady that she is, decided pushing me off my ride was a good idea for a joke. While I’m always up for new thrills and adventures, falling from the stratosphere with no containment spell or cushioning charm was not my idea of a first impression.” He was young, incredibly young next to Dumbledore. He couldn’t be older than 30! But the most amazing part was that, despite looking as though he was a Greek statue come to life, he was a good head shorter than the Headmaster! In fact, Harry thought most of the seventh-year students would be his equal in height, or perhaps even taller.

Dumbledore took the man’s hand, giving it a firm shake.

“It’s an honour to finally meet you, Mr O’Neill. I take it Headmaster Andrews is still too ill to attend?” Dumbledore asked.

“Unfortunately, yes. Taniwha poison is beyond even the most skilled healer's abilities to heal. It’ll either run its course, leaving only slight scale tissue around the bite, which just so happens to be on the Headmaster’s ass, or his internal organs will all shrink to the size of an ant and… well… the less said about that, the better.”

The entire courtyard sat stunned as they tried to process exactly what Mr O’Neill said.

“I’ll be representing the school as acting headmaster while we’re abroad in your gloomy country. Headmaster Andrews will, assuming he’s in better health and not dead as a doornail, take over my judging responsibilities when we get back home. I’ve got work to do for the Council myself.”
O’Neill shivered slightly. “It’s not this bloody freezing all year round it is? I mean, I’ve heard stories about this island of yours not seeing the sun all year. Please tell me they aren’t actually true?”

“Harry… Harry look at his arm!” Ginny whispered into his ear. Frowning, Harry looked at the man’s right arm, which was now hanging at his side. Harry then shoved his hand in his mouth to stop himself from coughing in shock. Curled around his forearm was a red and black tattoo of a dragon breathing a phoenix wreathed in flames.

“I’m afraid it does. We do get a fair bit of rain this far north.”

“Crap. I’ll have to take that into account…”

“The Council… he must be a member of the Council of Fire, the one that mailed me.” Harry replied quietly. Evidently not quietly enough, as O’Neill jerked his head straight at Harry and Ginny the instant the words left his lips.

An ear-shattering roar echoed across the air, and the entire school spun as one to the other side of the courtyard. In the drama of Mr O’Neill’s arrival, a dozen giant creatures with reptilian heads, two massive hind legs, and arms that looked more like seaweed than birds’ wings landed on the ground. Each beast had different coloured scales, with every colour of the rainbow represented. Only their horns, which were all a bright violet colour, were the same between them. Each beast was carrying between five and ten passengers.

“Ah! Bout time you lot showed up! Students and Staff of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry it is my honour to present the Delegation from the Alcheringa Academy of the Magical Arts!” O’Neill announced, flinging his arms out.

The students of Alcheringa, many of whom openly rolled their eyes much to Hermione’s horror, jumped down from their steeds, which promptly took off without even a hint of instruction.

They were an odd assortment Harry thought. There were just as many people with dark skin as those with light skin, and many of them had scarring along their necks that looked suspiciously like gills. Their uniforms were also strange. They didn’t wear robes of any sort; instead, they wore dark blue trench coats with light blue piping along the sleeves. Their shirts were white, and their pants were the same pattern as their coats. They wore ties in the same striped double blue, but with a crest that looked like a breaking wave with a tree positioned in front of it.

A girl with long blonde hair and done in an elegant plat stalked away from the students and up to O’Neill, before punching him so hard in the chest, he actually stumbled back a few steps.

“Nice dive, show off.” She said, eyes narrowed dangerously. O’Neill furrowed his brows in annoyance.

“Dive! You pushed me!”

“How dare you insinuate such a thing! You did it cause you’re a showboat and you know it!” the girl yelled with a smirk to match the man’s.

“Because you did push me! I heard you laughing as I plummeted to my death!”

“Oh please! It was funny! I knew you’d survive, you always do! It’s like you do it just to spite me!”

“As entertaining as sibling rivalry is, Mr O’Neill, would you and your students care to enter the Great Hall, or would you rather wait for the Ilvermorny Delegation?”
O’Neill glanced back to his students, the last of whom, an older girl with red highlights in her dirty-blondish hair, was petting one of the giant Sea-Dragons. Harry caught one of the creatures dive head-first into the Black Lake. Hopefully, it wouldn’t eat the Giant Squid…

“It’s been a long trip, I think we’ll take you up on that offer. I don’t suppose your pals can whip up a coffee, do you? I need something to keep myself awake tonight.” O’Neill turned on his heel and strode into the castle, the wooden doors swinging open with barely a whisper. The Alcheringa students followed him, with the only other adult, an auburn-haired woman wearing a white singlet and jeans, who’s figure attracted many eyes from the Hogwarts students, bringing up the rear.

“Well they were certainly strange,” Matt said.

“What were you expecting?” Hermione snapped, “they are from a different country after all.”

“Do you think they’re all human?” Ron asked, a strange edge to his voice Harry couldn’t remember hearing before. All the surrounding Gryffindors and Defenders turned towards him. There was no way to deny that everyone was thinking about the conversation from earlier in the year.

“No Ronald. I imagine not all of them are. Do you have a problem with that?” Hermione asked the redhead standing next to her, her voice dangerously venomous.

“Uh…. No. Of course not. I was just wondering.”

BANG!!

All attention in the courtyard turned to the centre of the square, where a shining golden portal was spiralling into existence. A tall man with black hair that was greying on the sides stepped out wearing blue robes and a red cloak. Dangling over his neck was an ornate golden necklace shaped like a closed eye.

“Wow! That’s the Eye of Agamotto, one of the most powerful magical artefacts on Earth. Nobody knows exactly what it is, only that it has the power to dispel any illusion and see into anything, be it a great distance, someone’s mind or even into time itself!” Hermione gushed.

“And it can only be wielded by the Sorcerer Supreme,” Luna added, seemingly in awe of the man. Harry frowned.

“Sorcerer Supreme?”

“The Sorcerer Supreme is the most powerful practitioner of magic in the world! It’s a mantle passed from sorcerer to sorcerer,” Hermione said, focussing on the man as intently as Luna.

“Agamotto, Merlin, Issac Newton and Grindelwald are some of the most famous,” Jessica whispered.

“Doctor Strange, welcome to Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said, shaking the man’s hand as students began filing out of the spiralling portal in two lines. Their robes, like the Doctor’s, were blue and a deep crimson and were similar to Hogwarts robes in style. The School crest, a red flower containing the four animals of the four houses of Ilvermorny, adorned the right chest of their robes.

“Pleasure to be here Headmaster Dumbledore,” the Doctor said, waving his hand behind him.

“So, who is he?” Matt asked.

“That is Stephen Strange, current Sorcerer Supreme and the first recorded Muggle-born to ever hold
“He’s famous across the wizarding-world for defeating the conqueror-demon Dormammu by trapping him in an infinite time-loop!”’ Ron exclaimed.

“Impressive,” Danny said as Harry looked on at the man, suddenly gaining respect for the mysterious stranger.

“So, if he’s uber-powerful, how come he didn’t help with You-Know-Who?” Matt asked.

“Wizarding America was just as messed up as we were in the seventies. They replaced their entire government structure after an internal civil war. The ICW was all over it. It’s a long story, but it’s pretty well documented if you want to look into it,” Hermione explained. Harry wasn’t entirely sure what to say to that, so he just nodded his head as the Ilvermorny Students followed Dumbledore and Strange inside, the Hogwarts crowd filing in whispering behind them.

As they stepped into the Great Hall, everyone gasped. The Hall had almost doubled in size, six long tables instead of four stretching from the doors to the staff table on the raised platform beneath the stained-glass window on the far side. The usual Halloween decorations hung around the room, with the floating candles replaced by pumpkins. The Alcheringa students were already seated at the table between the usual Gryffindor table and the centre of the hall. Mr O’Neill was sitting on the floor leaning up against a tall golden box, stationed on a raised pedestal in the centre of the room, sipping a cup of coffee.

“Stephen Strange as I live and breathe!” O’Neill exclaimed, bracing himself against the box and pushing himself to his feet.

“Will O’Neill. Why am I not surprised to find you here leaning against the Goblet of Fire like it was a tree in your backyard?” Strange replied, rolling his eyes at the younger man. The Ilvermorny students filed into the table opposite the Alcheringa students, while the Hogwarts Students sat down in their usual seats.

“Because you’re not an idiot?” O’Neill asked, adopting an air of confusion.

“Thank you for that ringing endorsement, I wasn’t sure if the Vishanti were having me on or not,” Strange said, his lips twitching in amusement.

“The Vishanti? Nutjobs the lot of them. I wouldn’t trust any of them with a barge pole if you ask me.” The entire Ilvermorny delegation gasped in horror, while Harry just raised an eyebrow, completely lost. He really hated not growing up in the Wizarding World sometimes.

“Eesh. Tough crowd. Chill Yanks, it was just a joke,” O’Neill said, grimacing at the American students. The two men embraced quickly like old friends, before following a smiling Dumbledore up to the staff table.

“To our foreign students, I would like to extend you a warm welcome to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please enjoy our incredible feast!” Dumbledore announced before plates full of food appeared before them.

The feast itself was the strangest Harry had ever experienced. Aside from all the usual Halloween themed treats and platters, there were dozens of dishes that Harry assumed were from America and Australia, as they certainly weren’t British. Assortments of pies, leafy salads, pizzas, plates of pasta, dried meats and seafood covered the tables in addition to the usual dishes. Harry was just about to grab a wing of what he was very sure was not chicken when someone coughed beside him.
“Guys look.” Luke was pointing up at the staff table. Hagrid was having an animated discussion with Will O’Neill – probably about some dangerous Australian creature, Harry thought – while Dumbledore, Flitwick and Doctor Strange were laughing at something. But the real sight was that three people had just sat down at the table. The first was Mr Crouch in his black hat. The second was Ludo Bagman, wearing lime green robes that looked very out of place. And the third was Mad-Eye-Moody with his magical eye.

Dumbledore glanced down the table and seeing that his guests had arrived, stood up and walked around the front, the noise in the hall gradually died down to a whisper as he did so.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” he said, his voice seemingly deeper than usual, “the time has come. The Triwizard Tournament is about to begin. We have with us tonight, Mr Barty Crouch, Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation; Mr Ludo Bagman, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports; and Mr Alastor Moody, Head of Security for this year’s Tournament. These three men have worked tirelessly in putting together the tasks and organising the matches. As such, they, along with Doctor Strange, Mr O’Neill and myself, will form the judges' panel for the three tasks.” Dumbledore stepped down from the staff table and strode through the hall, before stepping up to the tall golden box.

“The rules for the Champions’ selection are simple. Anyone who has been selected as a part of their school delegation may come forward to place their name and their school upon a piece of parchment and throw it into the Goblet of Fire within the next twenty-four hours.” Dumbledore waved his wand, and the golden box melted away, leaving behind a large stone chalice filled with flickering blue flames.

“Tomorrow night, the Goblet will return the names of the three people it judges the most likely to succeed in winning the competition. They will become our three champions.”

Then Dumbledore sighed, suddenly appearing every year of his old age.

“Finally, I must press upon you the seriousness of the journey you are about to embark on. Entering your name is not to be done lightly. These tasks are incredibly dangerous, and it is not uncommon for grievous injury, or even death to befall those who fail. If selected by the Goblet, there is no turning back.”

With those depressing words, he bade everyone goodnight, and all the Hogwarts students returned to their dormitories, while the Alcheringa and Ilvermorny Delegations were led by Hagrid and Professor Flitwick respectively to other sections of the castle, where Harry assumed accommodations had been set up for them. Harry turned to Ginny and whispered in her ear.

“I do believe that constitutes a little bit of adventuring under my Dad’s old cloak, don’t you?” Ginny’s face lit up in a smirk that would have made the Twins proud.

“I think you're onto something Mr Potter.”

Harry went to sleep that night unable to resist the dream of him winning the Tournament, with Ginny kissing him as he held the cup aloft, from creeping back into his mind.
The next morning at breakfast, Harry, Ginny, Ron and Hermione walked down to the Great Hall to find a crowd of students surrounding a large noticeboard on a stand outside the doors. A large piece of parchment was hanging from it, the words Hogwarts Delegation in large font across the top.

“Ooo! Did we make it?” Ron asked, pushing his way through the crowd.

*The Hogwarts Delegation*

**Quidditch Team:**

*Chasers:*
- Angelina Johnson (Captain)
- Alicia Spinnet
- Roger Davies
- Katie Bell (Reserve)
- Ginevra Weasley (Reserve)
- Demelza Robbins (Reserve)

*Beaters:*
- Fred Weasley
- George Weasley
- Peregrine Derrick (Reserve)
- Lucian Bole (Reserve)

*Keepers:*
- Eloise Midgen
- Foggy Nelson (Reserve)

*Seekers:*
- Harry Potter
- Cedric Diggory (Reserve)

**Delegation Members:**

Hannah Abbott
Terry Boot
Ernie Macmillan
Victoria Frobisher
Hermione Granger
“Yes! I got in! Oh, it’s going to be so exciting to see how they do Magic in these other countries!” Hermione beamed.

Colin Creevey
Seamus Finnigan
Geoffrey Hooper
Cormac McLaggen
Natalie McDonald
Eddie Carmichael
Cho Chang
Lance Hunter
Marietta Edgecombe
Mandy Brocklehurst
Anthony Goldstein
Padma Patil
Luna Lovegood

“Oh, thank Merlin, Luna made it in,” Ginny breathed.

Stewart Ackerley
Susan Bones
Owen Cauldwell
Justin Finch-Fletchley
Megan Jones
Kevin Whitby
Terence Higgs
Cindy Moon
Daphne Greengrass…….

“Damn it!” Ron exclaimed, smacking the notice board.

“What is it?” Harry asked, trying to peer over Ron’s head.
“I didn’t make it in!” he growled. Then, without even looking at Harry, he stormed off into the Great Hall, leaving a bewildered Harry, Ginny and Hermione behind.

“What’s up with him?” Ginny asked.

“He didn’t get in,” Harry told her with a shrug, before following Ron inside.

“Matt didn’t make it either,” Hermione said, taking a final look at the sheet.

“Come on,” Ginny said, pulling Hermione after the others.

They were enjoying the new breakfast options in the Great Hall when a voice cut through the noise. The leader of the Alcheringa delegation, Will O’Neill’s sister, who had called him out the previous day, stood up on the bench and the people around her quieted.

“Alcheringa Contenders, with me!” She shouted confidently for everyone to hear. A dozen or so members of the Alcheringa Delegation jumped to their feet and surrounded the Goblet. None had put their name in yet, as if they were waiting for something.

“Come on boys and girls, you know how it goes!! Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!” the same girl shouted once more. Then the rest of Alcheringa replied.

“Oi! Oi! Oi!”

“Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!”

“Oi! Oi! Oi!”

“Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!”

“Oi! Oi! Oi!”

After this yell, they all proceeded to take parchment out of their coats, and as one, throw them into the flames. All the Alcheringa students who had not put their name in proceeded to start cheering, soon joined by those who had put their names in and, shockingly, even the professors started clapping. The rest of the Great Hall, Harry included, just stared at them as if they were in some kind of crazy cult.

Harry spent most of the day relaxing under a tree by the lake with Ginny, watching the Sea Dragon’s leap out of the water every once and a while. Hermione had gone to the Library to research more into Ilvermorny, and Ron has seemingly vanished after his outburst earlier that morning.

A few Hogwarts students, including the twins, had entered their names throughout the day, but nothing as impressive as the Alcheringa Students entry happened until dinner of the same night. The Ilvermorny students all started whispering in hushed voices, becoming silent when a bulky boy with blond hair walked up to the Goblet, tossing his name in almost carelessly. After he sat down, another Ilvermorny girl with short cropped blond hair, with the tips died pink, stood and walked up to the Goblet, levitating the parchment in with her wand. Once she sat down, another Ilvermorny girl walked up, and the pattern repeated. Whenever someone sat down another would stand, each putting their name in a different way than the last. As the final student to enter his name, a skinny brown haired boy with glasses, walked up to the Goblet, the blonde-haired boy stuck out his leg and tripped him over. The brown-haired boy’s face went bright red, but he continued walking to the Goblet. When he reached the bottom of the raised platform, he stopped, set something on the floor and gave the parchment with his name to it. When it climbed the Goblet, it became clear to everyone that it was a spider, and the revelation caused many gasps – and even a screech from Ron, who had
reappeared in time for dinner. The spider dropped the name in and scampered up his leg and onto his shoulder. He proceeded to sit down once more.

Once dinner was over, the entire hall sat staring at the Goblet in total silence, waiting for something to happen.

Dumbledore rose from his seat and slowly made his way down the centre of the hall, waving his wand as he did so. All the candles and fireplaces went out as one, plunging the hall into darkness. The only light now was the Goblet of Fire. The second he stepped up onto the raised platform, the flames in the goblet turned green and gold, and Harry’s stomach hitched in his chest. A tiny piece of parchment flew out, which Dumbledore caught deftly.

“The Alcheringa Champion is Claire O’Neill!” The Alcheringa delegation jumped to their feet, screaming as the blonde-haired girl who led the chant ran up to Dumbledore and shook his hand.

“Miss O’Neill if you’ll wait in the antechamber behind the hall…” Dumbledore said, gesturing to a door behind the staff table. Claire nodded her head several times and took the offered piece of paper, before skipping out of the hall.

“Somehow I don’t think anyone is overly surprised by that one,” Ginny said, clapping alongside Harry.

The flames turned blue and red, and another parchment shot into the air.

“The champion of Ilvermorny is Peter Parker!”

All the mouths at the Ilvermorny table fell open in shock as the brown-haired boy with the spider stood up shakily, a look of fierce determination on his face. He walked up the middle of the hall, pausing once to smirk at the blonde boy who tripped him earlier, before stepping up to Dumbledore, taking his paper, and following Claire. Harry glanced at Doctor Strange and saw that, of all the people in the Ilvermorny Delegation, he was the only one not shocked by the Goblet’s decision.

Then the Goblet’s flames turned red and gold, and the final parchment shot high into the air, showering sparks all over the floor.

“The Hogwarts Champion is...” And as he read from that tiny piece of paper, Harry would swear to his dying day that he saw Dumbledore grin slightly. “Harry Potter.”
All the Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws erupted in cheers. Fred and George slapped him on the back, and all his housemates were calling out their congratulations. And through it all, Harry Potter sat, staring at Albus Dumbledore with a look of total shock, mixed with horror etched across his face.

Forcing his eyes away from the Headmaster, he looked at Ginny. She was not cheering. Her face was like a mask. Mouth set in a thin line and no colour in her cheeks at all. But her eyes… her eyes screamed hurt and betrayal. He had promised not to enter, and he hadn’t. But there his name was, on the parchment in Dumbledore’s hand.

“It wasn’t me,” He told her over the screams, “I was with you the whole day. I made you a promise.” He tried to project a feeling of comfort and security, but Harry thought he failed quite spectacularly, as he himself felt neither of those things. Ginny’s face remained an impassive mask, and the Gemini Rune was ice cold.

“Please believe me,” he begged, reaching out and grabbing her hands in his. Ginny looked into his eyes, and in an instant, the Gemini Rune blazed with warmth, and her façade shattered. She launched herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck and burying her face in his shoulder.

“Harry!” Hermione hissed.

“Mr Potter if you could come up the front please?” Dumbledore said. Ginny pulled herself away, her face bright red. Though whether that was from embarrassment or the Gemini Rune, Harry wasn’t sure.

Standing on shaking limbs, he made his way to the centre of the Great Hall as the school continued to cheer. Well, everyone except the Slytherins of course. Jessica was smirking so hard she actually had dimples in her cheeks; Draco Malfoy was so red Harry thought his head might explode, and Snape looked like he would have Harry in permanent detention if he could manage it.

He stepped up to Dumbledore and accepted the offered parchment. He looked down at it and saw, plain as day, the words ‘Harry Potter – Hogwarts’. Only it was quite clearly not his handwriting. The writing was incredibly elegant. In fact, judging by the looping on the ‘r’s’, it looked more like a calligrapher’s handwriting than his own. Harry frowned. Now that he thought about it, the writing seemed vaguely familiar, but he couldn’t quite remember where he’d seen it before.

Harry followed Dumbledore’s gestured hand to the side door, avoiding the stunned expression on Professor Lupin’s face, and the proud one on Hagrid’s. Behind him, Dumbledore was addressing the crowd once more.

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“Excellent! We now have our three champions! But in the end, only one of them can go down in history. And only one school will hold the Triwizard Cup!”

Harry walked down a set of stairs and found himself in the Trophy Room. Claire and Peter were standing next to a large fireplace, talking to a portrait of the four Founders.
“I learned Druidic magic myself you know,” Rowena was saying.

Then, as one, the four noticed Harry’s entrance. Helga immediately rushed out of the frame, Godric pumped his fist in the air and started berating Salazar, who winked slyly at him, while Rowena just gave him a sad smile.

“Oooo. Harry Potter! The Boy-Who-Lived! This game just got a whole lot more interesting!” Claire exclaimed, cracking her fingers. “No offence Parker.”

Peter didn’t seem to care too much, he was staring at a silver award in one of the cabinets. Harry had been in this room before, on Detention for Filch, and that trophy bore the name of Tom Marvolo Riddle, for special services to the school.

“Voldemort,” Harry said, gesturing to the award. Peter looked up, seemingly noticing his presence for the first time.

“Why do you have an award to him?” He asked. Claire snapped her head towards the cabinet and frowned.

“Am I missing something?”

Harry pulled out his wand and drew the words Tom Marvolo Riddle in the air. Then he flicked his wand, and the letters rearranged themselves to form I am Lord Voldemort. Claire’s mouth formed into a silent O.

“As to why it’s still there, no idea,” Harry replied.

The door at the top of the stairs banged open, and Dumbledore, Strange, O’Neill, Bagman, Crouch and Moody walked inside.

“Three champions!” Bagman gushed, “Excellent. Now, Barty, the rules.” Crouch, who looked suitably chastised at being told what to do, cleared his throat and read from a piece of parchment in his hand. “The First Task will be held on the 24th of November, and the First Match will be between Ilvermorny and Alcheringa and will take place on the 4th of December. You will not be told what the objective of the task is until the day of, but nobody is going to stop you from attempting to discover it yourself. You are not allowed to seek help from the staff pertaining to the Tasks of the Tournament itself, but any other means of protecting yourself or enhancing your skills are open to you. The only spells outlawed are the Unforgivable Curses, and you must not cast any spell with the intention of killing your opponent. You may, however, stun, incapacitate or injure, and you must complete each task to proceed to the next.”

Crouch placed his paper back into his pocket, turned on his heel, and left the room, Bagman trailing behind.

Dumbledore clapped his hands, “Well, the three of you should head back to your common rooms. I’m sure your friends are already preparing suitable parties for your triumphant return. Good luck to you all.” Dumbledore turned and walked back towards the Great Hall, Moody on his heels.

Giving the others a hasty goodbye, Harry raced after them. He may not trust Dumbledore, but he – and Moody if he was supposed to be in charge of security – needed to know Harry hadn’t put his name in.

“Professor Dumbledore!” Harry called, pushing open the door and racing out into the hall. The two men stopped and turned towards him.
“Yes, Harry?”

“You need to know. I didn’t put my name into the Goblet,” He said, catching his breath. Moody’s face, which seemed to hold a permanent scowl, became even more tense than usual. His magical eye was spinning around in its socket.

“What do you mean?” Dumbledore asked the twinkle in his eyes vanishing as a look of concern flitted across his face.

“I didn’t put my name in. I didn’t care about being Champion. This parchment isn’t my handwriting.” He held the paper to Dumbledore, who took it in hand and scrutinised the curly writing. Moody’s magical eye latched onto the paper, while his normal one stared at Harry.

“While I don’t claim to be an expert, you’re right, this isn’t your handwriting. Nor the handwriting of any student I recognise.” Moody broke contact with Harry and stared at Dumbledore. The scarring made it impossible to get a read on what the man was thinking.

“But who would want to enter me into the Tournament?”

Dumbledore frowned and continued to stare at the paper.

“I’m not sure.”

“I can think of a few people,” Moody growled, snatching the paper from Dumbledore.

“There are a lot of folks out there who want you dead, Potter. Death Eaters, Dark supporters, Pure-blood fanatics. You name it. People die in this Tournament, maybe they’re hoping some of the beasts lined up will do it for them.”

Dumbledore reached out and placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder, “Don’t worry yourself about it, Harry. Auror Moody and I will look into it, but if you keep up your studies and your exceptional learning so far, I don’t see you having much of a problem. After all, you’ve already killed a Basilisk and driven back an army of Dementors, not to mention of three encounters with Lord Voldemort, you have come out on top in all of them. Now, I dare say Gryffindor House is waiting anxiously for your return, you’d best get up there.” Harry, knowing a dismissal when he saw one, slowly made his way out of the hall.

“Potter!” Moody shouted as Harry reached the doors, “Constant Vigilance! If someone is trying to snuff you, you don’t want to let them know you’re onto them!” Harry nodded to the grizzled Auror, before turning and racing up to Gryffindor tower, ignoring all the portraits that congratulated him on the way.

The moment the portrait swung open, Ginny’s voice came booming out into the corridor.

“… CAN’T BELIEVE YOU’D BE SO SELFISH!!!”

Sensing incoming trouble, Harry dashed quickly inside. Fred and George each held one of Ginny’s arms, seemingly to stop her from charging at someone on the other side of the room. Hermione held Ginny’s wand tightly behind her back, while the entire rest of Gryffindor House stood around them in a circle yelling the words, “Fight! Fight! Fight!” Over and over again.

“YOU’D TURN ON YOUR BEST FRIEND!? FOR WHAT! A BIT OF MONEY? YOU ARE THE MOST SELFISH, JEALOUS PERSON I HAVE EVER SET MY EYES ON RONALD WEASLEY!!!”
Harry pushed his way through the crowd and jumped between Ginny and Ron, who was standing, fists clenched, staring at his brothers and sister in rage.

“What the hell is going on here?” Harry yelled, desperate to stop the impending disaster. He didn’t notice Lavender Brown slide Ron’s wand from his pocket and hand it to Hermione.

“This NO-GOOD PIECE OF FILTH!”

“Ginny! Calm down! Now, what is the problem?”

“You!” Ron yelled so loud that everyone’s hands went to their ears.

“Me?”

“That’s right. All my life I’ve been the last person on the pile. Bill – Hogwarts Head-boy and Curse-breaker. Charlie the Dragon Tamer. Percy the Ministry Man. Fred and George – Pranksters Extraordinaire. Ginny – the only girl and best in her year. Oh, and Ron. Harry Potter’s best friend. For years I’ve been standing in your shadow. Harry Potter – the youngest Seeker in a Century! Harry Potter saved the Philosophers Stone! You wouldn’t have gotten near it if I didn’t help you across that chess-board. Harry Potter kills a Basilisk and saves Ginny! Harry Potter summoned a Patronus and saved Sirius Black! Harry Potter apparatuses at age fourteen and saves Ginny again! Harry Potter, Seeker for Hogwarts. Now, Harry Potter Triwizard Champion. You know what? I’m done being second best. I’m done hanging around your attention seeking, egotistical ass! Go find yourself a new best friend. I’m done with you. I’m done with your Defenders. And stay the hell away from my sister!”

Harry stood in a state of shock ten-times worse than when his name came out of the Goblet. In fact, the entire room seemed to be as petrified as he was. Everyone except Ginny. She broke free of Fred and George and lunged at Ron. The pair crashed into a bookcase, completely destroying it and scattering books and shelves falling all across the floor. Ginny, who landed on top, then proceeded to punch Ron in the nose, and the ‘snap!’ that followed caused everyone to cringe. Harry and Hermione broke from their frozen state first and rushed over to the pair. Ron lashed out, pushing Ginny back.

“GET OFF!”

She fell back, and struck her forehead on the broken bookcase, before collapsing and smacking the back of her head on the stone floor.

“Ginny!” Harry yelled, the Gemini Rune flaring in pain against his skin, his heart jumping into his chest. Harry and Hermione dropped to their knees next to Ginny and rolled her over. She was unconscious. A large gash, full of splinters, had opened above her eyebrow, and blood was pooling at the back of her head. Ignoring the feeling of absolute fury building up within him, Harry focussed on the pain stemming from the Gemini Rune, using it to focus on the girl in front of him.

“We have to get her to the Hospital Wing!” Harry exclaimed, frantically looking to Hermione. She appeared as terrified as Harry felt, but nodded quickly and pulled out her wand.

“Mobilliarbus.” Ginny’s body floated into the air and straightened as if held by a Muggle spinal board, and Harry and Hermione rushed out of the portrait hole.

“I’ve alerted Madam Pomfrey, she’s waiting for you!” The Fat Lady called in anguish. They rushed through the corridors faster than Harry ever had before, trying desperately to ignore the darkening of Ginny’s red hair or the wide-open cut over her eye. As soon as they arrived at the Hospital Wing,
Madam Pomfrey congratulated Hermione on her quick spell casting and took over, levitating Ginny to a bed and immediately setting to work using her wand to knit her eye back together.

“Hermione, go wake Professor McGonagall. Tell her what happened,” Harry said, not taking his eyes off Ginny. Hermione rushed out from the room, and Harry sat down on the bed opposite Ginny, focussing on the pain coursing through the Gemini Rune. He closed his eyes for a second and opened them again.

He was standing in the City, in the centre of the portal room he had been in the last time he was here. Quickly, he stepped down from the platform and looked around. The moon was shining through the gorgeous stained-glass window. Suddenly, a scream of pain ripped through the building, and the entire City trembled before it. To Harry’s right, a door slid open on the bottom floor and without thinking, he ran through it into a long hallway lit by shimmering golden spheres of light attached to the ceiling. At the end of the hall were two doors that looked very out of place. One was a deep mahogany wooden door trimmed in Gryffindor colours – identical to his door in the Home – the other was a soft oak that Harry had also seen before. He rushed to the oak door and pulled it open to reveal an exact replica of Ginny’s room at the Burrow. The walls were painted a bright green, with Holyhead Harpies posters plastered over them. There was a bookcase with dozens of books in the corner. And lying on the bed beneath the window, which had a magnificent view of the City outside, was Ginny, in the same clothes as the outside world, trembling and screaming in pain as she wreathed on the sheets.

Harry dropped to his knees beside the bed and took her hand in his.

“Ginny, wake up. Come on, come in here with me,” he whispered, threading his fingers with hers. Ginny went very still for a few moments, before opening her eyes and locking onto Harry.

“Harry?” She muttered.

“It’s me.”

“My head is killing me,” she groaned, rubbing her hand along her eye, where a scar had formed across her eyebrow.

“Don’t worry about it right now,” he told her softly.

“Where are we?”

“We’re in the City. I think I’m in your head right now,” he admitted, looking around the room. Ginny blushed and followed suit.

“Potter!”

Harry and Ginny both jumped as the voice echoed through the room. The door swung open, and the sound grew stronger.

“Potter, can you hear me?”

“I think someone’s trying to get my attention,” Harry said, turning back to Ginny. He smiled when he realised, she had fallen back to sleep. Only this time she was resting peacefully. He tucked her beneath the covers and closed his eyes again.

When he opened them, he was lying on a Hospital Wing bed, Professor McGonagall hovering over
“Hi Professor,” Harry said slowly, refocussing on the world around him. Hermione and Professor Dumbledore were standing with Madam Pomfrey next to Ginny. Fred and George stood with Ron in the corner of the room.

“Are you alright?” McGonagall asked softly.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I was helping Ginny,” he said, not really thinking about anything besides Ginny, who was still lying unconscious as Madam Pomfrey fed a potion down her throat.

“How were you helping her exactly?” the Professor asked, a look of confusion etched across her face.

“I was in the City. She was in pain. I had to help her.” Dumbledore snapped up at that and looked over at him.

“You were communicating with Miss Weasley?” he asked, walking over and sitting down on the end of the bed.

“Yeah. It’s the first time I’ve done it while awake. It usually happens when we’re dreaming,” Harry said, realising his mistake. “It’s to do with the Gemini Runes I think.”

McGonagall still looked confused, but Dumbledore nodded in understanding.

“Now. Perhaps someone could tell us what exactly happened?” The Headmaster asked.

Fred and George launched into the tale, telling the two professors about what happened in the tower in excruciating detail. Harry and Hermione ignored them, instead focussing on Ginny. Madam Pomfrey had fixed the head wounds and given her a potion to combat the concussion, Hermione explained, but she would still be disorientated when she woke.

After the Twins finished, a furious McGonagall took them, and a shamefaced Ron, back up to Gryffindor Tower to dissolve any remaining party goers. Harry and Hermione, who refused to leave Ginny’s side, remained in the Hospital Wing, while Dumbledore went to inform Mr and Mrs Weasley of what had occurred.

Harry missed most of the events of the next morning to stay with the still sleeping Ginny in the Hospital Wing. And to miss the blatant cheering and staring that would inevitably come from the entire school. Hermione, who had gone to down to grab breakfast for both her and Harry, witnessed the whole thing.
Hermione completely ignored Ron when she walked into the Great Hall. She couldn’t believe he could be so incredibly stupid and jealous of Harry to say those things. Harry was famous for one reason. Because his parents were dead! He’d trade it all for the opportunity to grow up like Ron had, with a family that actually cared for him. Why couldn’t he understand that?

When Harry had been so thrilled to get away from the Dursleys the previous year, she had known instantly there was more than he was telling. So, she had snuck out of the house one day over the summer while her parents were at work and made her way to Number 4 Privet Drive. She had peered through the window and had actually gagged at the people she saw. The giant walrus of a man was obviously ‘Uncle Vernon,’ and the boy her age was clearly Dudley. She honestly couldn’t believe someone could be so fat! Then she had caught a glimpse of the cupboard under the stairs. The one with the lock on the outside. Harry was not nearly as careful as he thought he was, she had known there was something about a cupboard that haunted him.

She had ranted and raged at her parents when she got home that night. Not that anything had been their fault, but they were the only ones she could talk to. She had raved about Dumbledore abandoning Harry to never once check up on him and about the Dursleys for being wastes of space. She had inadvertently let slip some of her more colourful adventures at Hogwarts during her rant, as her Mum and Dad had sat her down and forced her to admit to exactly how she had met the mass-murderer Sirius Black, and about the giant snake that had almost killed her, both things she had deliberately not told her parents about. She had also sheepishly revealed some of the preliminary plans she had drawn up for Harry’s Defenders. She had even created a manifesto.

But Ron’s actions to Harry, while horrible, could be explained, and weren’t the reason she completely refused to even look at him. It was because of what he had done to Ginny. She didn’t care how angry he was, or what Ginny might have been doing to him. He had deliberately shoved her at full strength, and she was in the Hospital Wing because of it. He gave his own sister a fractured skull for heaven’s sake! If they had been at a Muggle Hospital, Hermione wasn’t sure Ginny would have escaped without brain damage. Even with Magical Medicine, Ginny would have a thin scar over her eye for a very long time. It might have been an accident, but she was not ready to forgive that any time soon. And to think she had actually started to get a crush on him! Well, screw that! Not until he matured a great deal at least.

Just as she had started to pile some toast and bacon onto a napkin, two owls flew in, apparently late. One delivered Hermione’s copy of the Daily Prophet, the owl clearly irritated at her late arrival. The other was Errol, the Weasley family Owl - and it dropped a Howler right in the middle of Ron’s plate. Stuffing the newspaper in her pocket, Hermione forced herself to look at Ron. His nose had apparently been fixed while she wasn’t looking, and he was shovelling food in his face like he did every other meal. But you could tell from his swallow and pale face that he hadn’t slept a wink. And there were precisely three empty spots around him.

Suddenly glad she came down to breakfast, Hermione noticed an empty spot at the Ravenclaw table next to Luna and Matt and plonked down onto it as Ron started to panic at the sight of the as yet unopened Howler.

“Defenders meeting later today. Get up to the Home as soon as you can. Tell the others,” She whispered to the blonde girl. Despite her oddities, Hermione quite liked Luna. Her interesting way of looking at the world kept Hermione on her toes and constantly pushed her to research new and exciting things. Plus, her ability to hear Magic was incredibly fascinating and Hermione was just itching to start studying it.

“Where’s Harry and Ginny?” Luna asked as Matt nodded.
“Harry didn’t put his name into the Goblet. Someone else did, but that’s not the worst thing,” she told her. Then she pointed to Ron, who had given in and opened his letter. The red envelope flew up into the air, but instead of Mrs Weasley’s screeching, a cold male voice came out.

“Ronald Weasley. Do you know how completely and utterly furious I am right now? I don’t suppose you do. And you should be very thankful that I had to stun your mother so she couldn’t do this herself. I am a very forgiving person. All of your siblings know that. But this? This I will not tolerate. I want you to try and imagine what went through my mind when I received a letter via Phoenix from Professor Dumbledore, in the middle of the night. Now I want you to picture my face when I read that not only did you get into a fight with your best friend where you called him, I believe the quote was, “an attention seeking, egotistical ass,” but you actually sent your sister to the Hospital Wing. Picture my face. Do you want to know what happened when your mother read the message? She set the Burrow on fire. I spent an hour putting out the flames in our bedroom.

“Now I don’t want to hear any excuses. Not a single one. I imagine a letter is already on its way from Fred and George, but I won’t need it. Your mother and I will be at the school after Breakfast this morning. You will be in the Hospital Wing caring for your sister, who is there because of you when we arrive, or there will be total hell to pay. And if I find out you were in the Great Hall stuffing your face when you received this… you will deserve every single stare and snigger that you receive a hundred-fold.

“This is not over.”

The Letter promptly burst into flames, disintegrating into Ron’s bacon and eggs. Then Luna jumped to her feet, a look of righteous fury on her face that Hermione had never seen before, and stalked over to Ron. The red-head only noticed she was there when she grabbed him by the ear and, showing more strength than Hermione thought possible for someone so petite, hurled him from his seat and dragged him out of the Hall. Fred and George, who had apparently arrived part-way through the Howler’s speech, took the thrashing Ron from the small blonde and dragged him by his arms towards the Hospital Wing, Hermione and Luna following behind, while Matt gathered the others.

When they arrived, Mr and Mrs Weasley were already talking to Harry, who was still sitting by their daughters’ side.

“Well. For what it’s worth. Congratulations on getting picked as Champion, Harry. I’m sure you’ll do excellent,” Mr Weasley said. He looked much older than when Hermione last saw him. His hair seemed to have thinned, and he had dark shadows under his eyes. As soon as he saw Fred and George dragging Ron, his expression went ice cold. The twins dropped their brother on the floor and went back to sitting next to Ginny, on either side of Harry. Neither one had made a single joke since it happened. Arthur stared at Ron with barely contained fury. Molly’s rage was nowhere near as measured.

“RONALD WEASLEY!!!!” Mrs Weasley screeched, “I HONESTLY CANNOT BELIEVE YOU ARE THE SON I RAISED RIGHT NOW!!! I DON’T CARE HOW ANGRY YOU ARE, YOU DO NOT HIT YOUR SISTER! YOU DO NOT HIT ANYONE!! EVER!!!!!!!”

“It was an accident…” Ron muttered, his face a bright shade of crimson. Madam Pomfrey was seemingly in full agreement with Mrs Weasley, as she didn’t even make a move to quieten the raging Weasley matriarch. Luna kicked Ron in the shin for good measure, before walking over to sit on the bed next to her best friend. Hermione followed, not wanting to be in Ron’s presence for another moment.
“AN ACCIDENT!!! YOU CALL A FRACTURED SKULL AN ACCIDENT!!”

“How is she?” Luna asked Harry, a tear sliding down her cheek as she looked down at Ginny’s sleeping face.

“Madam Pomfrey fixed most of the damage last night. She’s resting now, but she’ll still have a concussion when she wakes up, and the scar over her eye will take a while to fade,” Harry told her softly. Hermione grabbed Luna’s free hand and squeezed, trying to push some comfort across to the distraught girl.

“But she broke my nose!”

“THAT DOES NOT GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO HIT BACK!!”

Mrs Weasley’s rant went on for another fifteen minutes until she was interrupted by a soft and shaky voice.

“Mum…” But Mrs Weasley didn’t hear her and continued to yell at her son.

“Ginny? Can you hear us?” Harry asked, tightening his grip on Ginny’s hand.

“Tell Mum… stop…”

“Mrs Weasley!” Hermione yelled, and Molly stopped mid-rant, seeing Ginny’s eyes slowly squeeze open.

“Ginny!” She exclaimed, rushing with Arthur to the bedside, which was becoming rather crowded.

“Heya Gin-Gin. You gave us quite a scare,” George said.

“Was my fault…” Ginny wheezed, “I attacked him. Was an accident.”

“That doesn’t change that he still did it, sweetheart,” Mr Weasley said.

“Don’t blame… please…” Then Ginny pulled Harry’s arm up to her chest, rolled onto her side and snuggled into it, falling back to sleep. Harry, seemingly oblivious to the crowd, placed his head down on the bed beside her and kissed her head, before using his free hand to place a loose strand of hair behind her ear. Hermione noticed that Mr and Mrs Weasley seemed rather shocked by this, and realised Ginny mustn’t have told them about the developments between her and Harry. She resolved to pull them aside before they went home and warn them.

Mr Weasley, snapping out of his daze, turned back to Ron, who was still lying on the floor.

“Ron. You’re grounded for the rest of the year, and you’re on probation for the rest of the term at Hogwarts. You will be coming home over the Christmas break where you will be cleaning the entire house from top to bottom without magic and by yourself, on top of every other chore your Mother sets you. Come summer, you will be waiting on your sister hand and foot, as I’m sure she will not wish to come home over Christmas. You will not be allowed to play any Quidditch, and you will not be a part of the Hogwarts Delegation.”

“I didn’t get selected anyway…” Ron muttered darkly.

“Well I’m sorry about that, but the punishment stands. Now I want you to go up to your dormitory, where you are going to write me a fifteen-foot essay on exactly what happened the past twenty-four hours, why it happened, and how you are going to learn from it. This essay will be turned in to
Professor McGonagall by Monday Morning. Do you understand?” Mr Weasley said, pulling Ron to his feet. Ron looked to Ginny and Harry, and Hermione caught a look of rage pass over his face before he turned back to his father and said, “Yes Dad.”

“Good. You have a lot to think about.”

Ron turned and fled the room. Mr Weasley conjured a large plush couch and pulled Mrs Weasley, who had started sobbing, down onto it with him.

Hermione turned to Harry.

“Harry. I’ve called a Defenders meeting. The others should be gathering as we speak. Do you want to come?”

Harry looked Hermione in the eye, and shook his head, before turning back to Ginny.

“I’ll come,” Luna said, standing up.

Together, the duo bade their goodbyes to Mr and Mrs Weasley, before vanishing up to the Sixth-Floor Corridor.

When they reached the Home, everyone, Sirius and Tonks included, was already there.

“I can’t believe Ron did that,” Jessica lamented.


“Yeah, and he’s lucky I can’t walk down there and punch him myself,” Sirius growled.

“Look, guys, as bad as Ron’s actions were, I’ve brought you all up here for a different reason.” Then she told them everything Harry had explained to her last night. About not entering his name in the Tournament, the mysterious handwriting, and Moody’s belief that a Death Eater might be responsible.

“So, what do we do about it?” Danny asked.

“I’m going to talk to Moony, then I’m going to start cleaning this place out and dusting off the cobwebs. The Home was designed as a safe-house for a reason. It’s about time we got it back in shape,” Sirius exclaimed. Then he stood up and transformed into a shaggy black dog, before running out into Hogwarts.

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?” Matt asked.

They didn’t find out the answer until Ginny woke up again three days later.
Authors Note:

While we were expecting it, we were rather put out by the flames the last chapter received, so we decided to put a little note at the beginning of this chapter. Not so much for those of you who accused us of being sexist. Thanks for that. Really made us feel good about ourselves. This is more for those of you we like – which is most of you! Ron is a kid. He might be more mature than average, but he’s still a kid. And kids get jealous. If you think you don’t or didn’t, you’re lying to yourself. Both Ginny and Ron were in the wrong, there is no doubt about that. But it was Ginny who ended up in the hospital, not Ron. Molly and Arthur’s reactions were vetted by my own mother before the chapter was posted, and she agreed wholeheartedly with them. In case you’re wondering, Ron will not be turning evil. He made a mistake, and it’ll take a bit of time for him to come to terms with that, and the repercussions.

So, we really don’t care if you didn’t like what happened because you thought we were trying to be sexist or indulging in excessive violence. We’d care if it was lazy writing, or if the characters were perhaps a little too far out of character. We received neither of these comments.

Finally, a huge shout out to all the positive reviews we got! And to the haters, don’t like it? Don’t read it.

Act II, Chapter 7: Aftershocks

“Guys, will you relax?” Ginny exclaimed as Harry and Luna tried to help her out of the Hospital Wing bed. She slapped their arms away and gingerly dropped to the floor.

“Give us a break Gin, you have been asleep for three days,” Harry said, rolling his eyes at her.

“You know he hasn’t left your side,” Hermione said, winking from behind Harry. “He’s even been sleeping in here.”

Harry blushed scarlet, and Ginny couldn’t help the butterflies that rose up in her stomach.

“Really?” She asked softly.

“I didn’t want you to wake up alone,” he told her. Ginny beamed and blushed a scarlet of her own
before pulling him into a tight hug.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Don’t mention it.”

“Well, as lovely as this is, we have orders to bring you up to Sirius and Remus as soon as you were good enough to walk,” Luke said, tossing Ginny a set of jeans and a t-shirt. She mouthed a thank you and ducked behind a curtain to change out of the highly unflattering hospital gown. When she finished, she bade goodbye to Madam Pomfrey and followed Harry, Hermione, Luna and Luke up to the Sixth Floor.

When they arrived, Danny was waiting for them in the bedroom hallway, and they all gasped as he showed them just what Padfoot and Moony had been up too. Wormtail’s room was gone. Replaced by a spiral staircase. Danny led the way upstairs to a new common room set on the landing, with couches, a new tv and three desks. Two hallways pointed out of the landing, each with six new doors all hanging wide open with silver plaques on the front. But none of the plaques had names on them. Sirius was lounging on one of the couches, reading the Daily Prophet.

“You’ve been busy,” Ginny remarked.

“Ah! Welcome back Miss Firefly!” Sirius exclaimed, jumping to his feet and discarding the paper.

“Firefly?”

“Yep. Firefly. I’ve been thinking about it for four days now. Considering what you did to Ron, I think it’s appropriate. You’re a passionate and powerful little personality trapped in a tiny package, you love flying, and your hair is bright red. It’s perfect!” Sirius said. Then he pulled out his wand, moved to the first open door and tapped the silver plaque. The plaque changed to gold with the name Firefly etched into it. Ginny narrowed her eyes at the Marauder. Tiny package? Jack-ass.

“I like it,” Harry said, nodding his head absently. Well… if Harry liked it, who was she to argue?

“Cool. I accept.”

Sirius barked, “Accept!? You don’t get a choice, dearie. That’s how it works. Now, just let me know how you want your room decorated. It’s yours now. Jessica, Matt and Danny here have already picked theirs. I think Jess asked for hers in Slytherin colours just to piss me off.”

Danny rolled his eyes and pointed down the right hallway, “Matt and I are down there, first and second on the right. Jessica is the last door down the left-hand corridor.”

Sirius then ran over, grabbed Harry and Ginny by their wrists, dragged them back downstairs, down the hallway, and into one of the doors off the Study Room.

It was a large circular room with runes etched across the floor. The walls were covered in cushions, and pillows were scattered on the floor. A raised platform with leather couches covered the back of the room, and a skylight served as the primary source of light. Matt and Jessica were arguing in the middle of the floor.

“But it’s perfect!” Matt beamed, bouncing up and down like a kid on a sugar high.

“I don’t care if it’s perfect! You are not calling me that!” Jessica snapped, her hand hovering over her wand.
“Woah, Woah, Woah. Who’s not calling who what?” Sirius asked as they walked inside.

Matt smirked, and Jessica snarled at him.

“I have discovered the perfect codename for our slippery friend here,” he said cheerfully. Harry wasn’t sure whether Matt’s senses couldn’t pick up Jessica’s hand, or if he was just ignoring her.

“Don’t you dare say it…” She warned, pulling her wand free and pointing it at him.

“Jessica’s Defenders name should be Alias!” A beam of dark purple light shot out of Jessica’s wand and hit Matt in the chest. He flew back across the room, his head inflating like a balloon. He floated up, and his head started bouncing along the skylight as Jessica scowled at him and put her wand away. Sirius fell to the floor laughing as the others stared at the ballooned Matt in shock.

“Alias it is,” Harry stated.

“Do you want to be on the ceiling too, Potter?” Jessica threatened.

“Would you prefer we came up with something worse?” Ginny asked innocently.

Jessica’s scowl deepened, and she stormed over to the platform and dropped into a chair, arms folded across her chest. Hermione pulled her wand and deflated Matt with a well-placed “Finite,” while Luke yanked Sirius to his feet. Moony took that moment to walk up behind them.

“What did I miss?” he asked, staring at Matt, who had just landed face first on one of the pillows, and Jessica, who was still scowling at the entire world.

“Ginny is now Firefly, and Jessica is Alias,” Luna chirped. Then she skipped over to the platform and sat down next to Jessica, pulling a chocolate frog from her pocket. Jessica snatched it from her hand and bit its head off, causing Ginny to break out laughing.

“So… What’s the point of all this?”

Sirius, who had finally composed himself, stepped into the middle of the room and the runes on the floor began to glow several different colours.

“This is a Duelling Room. It’s warded to the nth degree and contains more safety charms than a baby’s bedroom. Basically, it’s a room where you can shoot people with whatever you like; however many times you like, without fear of causing permanent damage.” Jessica’s scowl miraculously vanished at those words.

“Padfoot and I agree with Moody. He trained both Sirius and your Dad at the Auror Academy Harry, and he’s got a good head on his shoulders,” Moony said. “This Triwizard Tournament is a big deal, it’s dangerous, and we’re going to make sure that if it is a Death Eater that’s got it out for you, they’re going to be mighty disappointed when it’s all over.”

“And who knows Harry,” Luke said, slapping Harry on the back, “you might just be able to win.”

Harry’s life at Hogwarts took a drastic shift after he became Triwizard Champion. Hufflepuff,
Ravenclaw and Gryffindor were treating him and his friends like royalty. He was escorted by a pack of students to every class, and he had dozens of people offering to do the detentions Snape gave him in rage every time a wave of people dropped him off at the Dungeons. No matter how many times he told them they didn’t need to, they kept doing it anyway. Fred and George had taken his protection as a matter of personal pride, and with Ginny and Jessica, had decided to start a Pranking War against Slytherin House, the only part of the school that wasn’t supportive of Harry as Champion. Well, them and Ron.

Since the events of the Champion Selection Night and the subsequent Howler that had told the entire school precisely what had happened, no one wanted anything to do with Ron. Hermione wouldn’t look at him; Luna went out of her way to trip him over in every hallway she met him; and Harry and the other Defenders wouldn’t let him within ten feet of Ginny. The thin, white scar above her left eye served as a constant reminder. Ginny herself was the only one not particularly mad at him. But every time she tried to approach him in the common room, his face would glow bright red, and he’d storm off before she could even get a word in. If Harry got within ten feet of him, he’d leave the room instantly, fuming the whole time. Hermione believed Ron was blaming Ginny and Harry for the school’s segregation of him when in truth he only had himself to blame. He had also yet to apologise, even though on the one time Ginny had managed to corner her brother, it was the first thing she did.

Harry and Hermione had taken to sitting with Neville during class to cover Ron’s absence, and, after giving him a chance, decided they didn’t really mind the usually quiet boy. Working with the school Champion and the ‘brightest-witch-of-her-age’ did wonders for his confidence. In fact, they actually owed Hermione’s Defenders nickname to Neville.

It was during Potions and Snape, who was being even more antagonistic towards Harry in an attempt to make up for all the positivity the school was showing him, was lingering over Harry, Hermione and Neville’s Cauldron. They were attempting to brew a ‘Universal Antidote’, and for once Harry was trying exceptionally hard to make sure he got it right, as Snape had threatened to poison them as a means of testing their potions. And Harry knew that the first-person Snape would murder would be him.

Dice the Graphorn liver into strips and add to mixture when turquoise blue. “Add when mixture is Royal Blue – creates better texture.”

Harry was now using his mother’s fourth-year Potions Textbook, which had also been stored in the Marauders Library. Like her third-year book, it had many helpful hints in the margins. Using the book, which Snape rarely did, brought to light that Snape, whenever he put instructions on the board, did it purposely wrong so as to make everyone, except Malfoy – who also used his book – fail. Hermione had been highly scandalised at this.

The potion passed turquoise and settled at royal blue. Harry added the liver and watched in satisfaction as his potion began bubbling and releasing a distinctly flowery scent.

“Potter. What do you call this pathetic concoction?” Snape drawled from behind them. Neville jumped sky high and dropped his Armadillo bile on the floor. He swore under his breath and began to scrape it off the stone.

“Ten points for an untidy workspace Longbottom. Well, Potter, I’m waiting.”

“It’s the Universal Antidote, Professor.” Harry said, being careful to keep his tone neutral. Hermione placed her ladle into the cauldron and began to stir anti-clockwise, as per Lily Potter’s notes.

“Granger, it clearly states on the board that you must stir clockwise.” Hermione blushed to the root of her hair, and Harry clenched his fist. Snape knew damn well that the potion was supposed to be
turned anti-clockwise.

“Twenty points for thinking you’re smarter than the teacher, Granger.”

“Well, at least she’s got the brains to figure out how to do it right…” Neville muttered.

“What was that Longbottom? Speak up if you have something to say,” Snape snapped. Neville went white, and Harry had suddenly had a brilliant idea.

“Actually, Professor, it says right here in the book that it should be turned anti-clockwise,” Harry said, picking up the potions book and showing it to Snape, desperately trying to keep a smirk off his face. But Snape’s response was not what Harry expected. He snatched the book from Harry’s hand and stared at it in disbelief.

“Where did you get this?” He whispered dangerously.

“It’s my mum's copy of the textbook. She was quite good at potions you know. She got the Governor’s Award for Highest N.E.W.T score in Potions,” Harry said smugly. Snape, a look of righteous fury on his face, snapped the book closed and started walking to his office.

“Hey! Give that back!”

“This book has been tampered with. I’m afraid you’ll have to make do with the instructions on the board,” Snape sneered. The Dragon and Phoenix Rune traced its way onto Harry’s arm, glowing an ominous red, and Harry thrust his hand towards Snape’s retreating form.

“Accio Lily Potter’s book!” He yelled. The book flew from Snape, straight into Harry’s outstretched hand, and the Rune let out a low hum, before vanishing once more. Snape slowly turned back to Harry and pulled his wand. Harry dropped the book into his bag and drew his own wand, ready to cast the shield spell Moony and Padfoot had been teaching them in the Duelling Room of the Home.

Then the bell rang, and the entire class began filing out of the room as fast as possible. Harry slowly backed outside, wand still pointed at Snape, until the door slammed closed. He let out a deep breath in relief.

“That was incredible Harry!” Hermione gushed, “You did wandless magic!”

“I’m never going to forget Snape’s face when you called him out. That was brilliant Harry,” Neville said, looking oddly dreamy.

Hermione frowned, “What did you say under your breath Neville when Snape told you to speak up?”

Neville blushed.

“I said, “At least she’s got the brains to figure out how to do it right.”

Hermione blushed the same shade as Neville and muttered a thank you. Then Harry broke into a grin and placed an arm around Neville and Hermione’s shoulders.

“Done. That’s it. Thank you very much, Neville.”

“What’s done?” Hermione asked, confused.

“Your name. I hereby dub your Defenders name to be Brains.” Harry exclaimed. Then he raced off to the Great Hall to avoid being hexed.
The thing Ginny hated the most about Harry being Champion was the posse of girls following him around. It seemed, to Harry’s eternal embarrassment, that every time he would try to acknowledge them, they would all blush, start giggling and scatter. Then, a few minutes later, they would be back, and the cycle would continue. The only thing good about Harry’s fame, in Ginny’s mind, was that it stopped Cho from bullying Luna, as she was widely recognised as one of Harry’s friends and any move against her was seen as a move against the Hogwarts Champion. Harry liked it because Ginny would rarely let him out of her sight, and that meant they could spend even more time together than they usually did. With Ron out of the picture, Ginny had easily taken his place as Harry’s best friend.

The Creevey brothers had also started taking surprise photographs of him all across the school. He suspected Fred and George were selling them as autograph material.

The other exciting part of Harry’s weeks were Ilvermorny and Alcheringa. The Ilvermorny Witches and Wizards could often be found sharing classes with the Hogwarts students. Harry and Hermione had Defence Against the Dark Arts, Transfiguration and Charms with the fourth-year Ilvermorny students while Ginny, Luke, Luna and Matt had History and Charms with the third-years, and Jessica and Danny had Potions, DADA, and Arithmancy with them. The Alcheringa students, on the other hand, didn’t attend regular classes, but they were highly visible, particularly in the Transfiguration Courtyard and around the Forbidden Forest. The only Hogwarts classes Harry ever saw them participate in were Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes. The twelve Alcheringa students in Harry’s class seemed to have fallen in love with Hagrid’s Blast-Ended Skrewts. Literally, as they had taken over almost every aspect of caring for them from the Hogwarts students. And, instead of screaming when they blasted off like Lavender and Parvati did, they actually laughed at their unfortunate classmate who either had all their hair burned off or a gaping hole in one of their limbs. Hagrid was on cloud nine. Harry and Hermione had both been forced to step up their game in Ancient Runes as well. Only half the Alcheringa class took this subject, but everyone who did was exceptionally good at it. So good in fact that Harry and Hermione had slipped to third and fourth place on the score tally, which Professor Babbling kept on the blackboard as a form of motivation – and shame.

So, between ordinary classes, avoiding Ron, the extra work for Ancient Runes, Professor Moony and Padfoot’s lessons on the basics of Duelling (during which Jessica took great pleasure in knocking everyone on their asses repeatedly), early morning Quidditch practices with Angelina and the Hogwarts Team, pranking the Slytherins, dealing with Harry’s new-found popularity, and Harry and Ginny’s late-night excursions to find the Ilvermorny and Alcheringa Common Rooms (which so far had yielded no success) all the Defenders were going to sleep very tired each night.

The day of the first Hogsmeade visit of the year, two days before the First Task, an owl delivered Hermione’s copy of the Daily Prophet in the Great Hall as it usually did.

“Oh no,” she whispered.
“What is it?” Neville asked, trying to look over Hermione’s shoulder.

“She’s done it again.” Harry’s mood, which had been excellent when he woke up that morning, as he and Ginny believed they might have found where the Ilvermorny Common Room was the previous night (it totally had nothing to do with them having to hide from Filch in a broom cupboard and the resulting dream), vanished.

“Give it here then. Let’s see what Skeeter has to say.” Hermione reluctantly handed the paper over the table to Harry, who opened it large enough for Ginny to see from her seat next to him.

Harry Potter: Champion of Hogwarts

By Rita Skeeter

Just when Harry Potter’s life-story couldn’t get any more thrilling, the Goblet of Fire declares him the Triwizard Champion of Hogwarts School.

In just three days, the dashing hero who defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will come face to face with the dangerous and daring First Task. Nobody knows what he will face in the arena, but is there anything young Harry can’t defeat? The Slayer of Basilisks and Defeater of Dementors should have little trouble completing the task. In fact, I would go so far as to say he could win it.

That’s not to say he doesn’t have competition. Oh no. The two contenders: Cleo O’Neill of Alcheringa Academy and Peter Packer of Ilvermorny School will not go down easy. Miss O’Neill is the younger sister of world-renowned Druid William ‘Will’ O’Neill – famous for single-handedly stopping a Meteor Strike and resulting Volcanic Eruption that would have destroyed the Island of Hawaii three years ago. If Miss O’Neill is half as powerful, or half as good-looking, as her brother, she will be a tough competitor to beat. Mr Packer, on the other hand, is relatively unknown. A Muggleborn from a poor family, Mr Packer is, according to his long-time best friend Gwen Stacy, “a noble soul,” and an “expert at Transfiguration and Arithmancy.” Is Mr Packer a wildcard contender? Or is he getting in over his head as fellow Ilvermorny student Flash Thompson says? “Peter is a nerd who can’t play Quidditch to save his life. He’s a coward, and he’ll probably come last in every task.”

Despite the anxieties the upcoming task must be causing, Harry seems to be coping well enough. The students are hailing him as a hero. Susan Bones, daughter of DMLE head Amelia Bones says, “If anyone can win the Tournament it’s Harry.” Harry has taken to seeking comfort in his friends, Hermione Granger and Jenny Wesley, and, if rumours are to be believed, his new girlfriend, Cho Chang.

However, not all is easy in Harry Potter’s world, as a recent falling out with his best friend Don Weasley, has several people across the Castle talking. Draco Malfoy says, “Weasley has always been jealous of Potter’s fame. Seems like it finally got to him.” The rumours I’ve heard are that, in a midnight fight in Gryffindor Tower, Jenny was seriously injured, and the two boys have not spoken a word to each other since.

Another rumour I have discovered through my investigations is that Harry has begun forming a group of like-minded allies within the student body. Though what the point of this group is and its current membership remains unknown, it does have a name: The Defenders. Is Harry training a number of students in his knowledge of advanced magic? We already know he has mastered the Patronus, and this reporter can exclusively reveal that he possesses the ability to Apparate – despite being underage! We shall have to wait and see…

Good luck on the First Task, Harry!
“So, Brains, Firefly. What do you think? Do you want to be part of my secret group?” Harry asked, trying desperately to keep the smirk off his face.

“I’ll have to check my schedule,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes, “I’m getting ready to launch my House Elf Liberation Campaign you know.” Ginny just laughed.

“I want to know when you’ve been seeing this new girlfriend of yours Harry.” She said slyly. Harry groaned and slammed his head on the table.

“Should I confess my undying love before or after I gag at the thought of going out with Cho Chang of all people?” Hermione, Ginny and Luke all burst out laughing, drawing the attention of many of the people who had apparently been reading Skeeter’s article.

“Why does she keep praising me though?” Harry asked, flicking back through the article, “You’d think I’m the next Sorcerer Supreme the way she writes.”

“Hey don’t knock it. You could be. What with your, “Basilisk Slaying and Dementor Defeating”” Ginny chided.

“She’s doing it to create a hero figure. The only thing people love more than a hero is to watch a hero fall. The first mistake you make, she is going to eat you for breakfast,” Hermione said casually as she continued to eat her omelette.

“Gee thanks, Brains. That makes me feel loads better.”

Harry was practically escorted down to Hogsmeade by the school, much to Harry’s total embarrassment, and Ginny and Hermione’s amusement. As this was the first Hogsmeade weekend all year, Ginny was the only third year who had ever been to the village before. As a result, she was forced to look around at everything as if she was seeing it for the first time, which had Hermione in stitches. Harry was focussing on trying not to seem too rude to the dozens of Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw third, fourth and fifth years trying to talk to him at once. Jessica, in her Lily Evans disguise, didn’t think much of the village itself it seemed, as she had much more fun stealing Colin Creevey’s camera and taking several choice shots of a very disgruntled Harry, which she planned to give to Ginny for Christmas. Luke and Danny spent almost an hour in Honeydukes arguing over which type of chocolate was the best, while Ginny dragged Jessica, Matt and Luna into Zonko’s to stock up on prank items. Matt’s powers came in particularly handy at this point, as he could detect faulty items and had several suggestions on the devices that could be combined for more interesting effects, which had Ginny holding back an evil cackle at the thought of a naked Malfoy hanging upside down from the roof of the Great Hall. Luna wasn’t much help, as she was more interested in a nest of Wrackspurts she insisted could be found in the Honeydukes cellar. Ginny had to pull her away when she realised her friend had inadvertently discovered the secret tunnel.

When Harry finally managed to get away from all his admirers and well-wishers, with the inadvertent help of Cedric and Angelina, who had been caught snogging on the other side of the village, he snuck into the Three-Broomsticks and ordered a round of Butterbeers as the others slowly made their way inside.

“Did you see Cedric and Angelina!” Ginny exclaimed as she rushed over with Luna and sat down beside Harry. She grabbed his Butterbeer and took a long sip, before sighing as the warm liquid slid down her throat. “Merlin, I missed this stuff over the summer,” she muttered as Harry rolled his eyes and bought another drink.
“You better believe we did!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Fred and George are going to be sooooo pissed,” Ginny said, a massive smirk on her face, “I am going to lord this over them forever!!”

“Have fun with that,” Harry said.

“Oh, you bet I will.”

“Hey guys,” Jessica said, sitting down with her own Butterbeer.

“Jess, I’ve been thinking about this Rita Skeeter problem,” Hermione said, playing with her red wrist band.

“What about her?”

“Well, I think it would a good thing to have something we can hold over her, you know, for when she decides to turn on us.”

Jessica frowned, “You might be onto something there.”

“Onto what, Alias?” Matt said, taking the seat opposite her as Luke and Danny sat down.

“Don’t worry about it,” Hermione said, staring into her Butterbeer.

“What do you…” Danny began.

“Quiet!” Ginny snapped, following Jessica’s eyes. Rita Skeeter herself had just entered the pub and was clearly scanning the booths for something; or someone. Ginny pursed her lips and did the first thing she could think off. She jumped into Harry’s lap and flicked her head, so her hair was fanned out behind her, obscuring Harry’s face from view. Harry, who had also seen Skeeter, blushed redder than he ever had in his entire life and started taking deep breaths. Ginny was blushing herself, butterflies swirling in her stomach once more. A blush that got even worse when she realised just what her close proximity was doing to him.

“Hey, love birds. She’s gone. You can stop trying to get into each other’s pants now,” Jessica said, not at all trying to hide the amusement in her voice. Ginny, slightly reluctantly, slid down from Harry and resumed drinking her Butterbeer in an attempt to protect her incredibly flushed face. Harry, who was just now recovering the ability to breathe, muttered a strangled thank you, and the rest of the table burst out laughing.

A welcome distraction came in the form of Hagrid, who sat himself down next to Ginny and Harry quite suddenly, resulting in the two accidentally sliding into each other, renewing both their blushes and the laughter at the table.

“Sorry, Hagrid.”

“Not to worry. Now, Harry, meet me at midnight tonight outside me cabin. Bring your cloak,” he said quietly. Then he stood up, dusted off his jacket and walked away.

“Well that was odd,” Danny said at length.

“I wonder what he needs to meet you for,” Matt said, frowning and tapping his cane on the ground a few times.

“Ooooh! Maybe he’s found some Crumple-Horned Snorkacks and wants to show you!” Luna
exclaimed, looking very excited.

“Don’t know. But the last time I went into the Forbidden Forest on Hagrid’s advice, I almost got
eaten by Acromantula, so forgive me if I’m cautious.”

At a quarter to twelve, Hermione, Ginny and Luke bade farewell to an invisible Harry, who made
his way down to Hagrid’s Cabin through the dark and deserted castle. Raising his hand, he knocked
on Hagrid’s door. It opened promptly, and Hagrid’s giant form stepped out.

“You there, Harry?”

“Yeah I’m here,” Harry said, lowering the hood so Hagrid could see his head, “what’s going on.”

“Come on,” Hagrid said, stepping outside the hut and walking purposefully into the forest. Harry
sighed. He loved Hagrid, he really did. He had already decided to name one of his kids after him one
day. But the man did love dangerous creatures, and the visitors from Alcheringa, who seemed to
agree with his opinion that they were, “simply misunderstood,” had only made it worse.

He flipped the hood back up and followed Hagrid deep within the forest. They walked in silence,
Harry tripping over several tree branches, for over fifteen minutes when he started to smell smoke
and ash on the air.

Hagrid made his way forward and pushed a rather large bush out of the way, in time for an ear-
shattering roar to echo through the woods. Three massive metal cages were sitting in a large clearing,
each of them carrying a creature with four legs, giant wings, a snake-like tail and a scaly head with
spines running along its back. Dragons. That was the First Task. Harry’s stomach retreated so deep
within his gut he didn’t think anyone would ever find it.

“Magnificent aren’t they,” a voice said to Hagrid’s right. Harry and Hagrid both turned to see Will
O’Neill sitting cross-legged, floating in mid-air, drinking a beer with the word Bundaberg on the
side, staring at the beasts in the same awe as they were.

“That they are,” Hagrid whispered.

One of the Dragon’s, jet black with giant fangs and spines, reared on its legs and shot a funnel of
flame into the air.

“That Horntail looks one nasty piece of work,” Hagrid said. Harry gulped.

“All right there, Hagrid? O’Neill?” A wizard was walking towards them from the Dragon cages. A
wizard wearing smoking robes with bright red hair.


“Good to see yeh again Charlie. Been ‘ow many years now?” Hagrid asked, shaking the man’s
hand. And Harry realised who it was: it was Charlie Weasley. Ginny and Ron’s older brother who
worked in Romania. With Dragons.

“I’m not sure. It’d have to be a few.”
“That Antipodal Opaleye,” O’Neill said, pointing to a rainbow coloured Dragon that appeared to be sleeping, “that ones for my sister isn’t it?”

“Apparently it’s a random draw. One Dragon for each Champion. But I would imagine that was the intention,” Charlie said.

O’Neill actually looked worried, an expression Harry couldn’t believe he was seeing on the face of a man who could fall out of the sky without even a bruise.

“Well shit,” he said darkly.


“I don’t think so. They wanted nesting mothers, so I’d wager they have to get past them,” Charlie said, running a hand through his hair.

“If Claire gets the Opaleye, there’s no way she gets past without injuring it, you know that, don’t you Charlie?” Will said solemnly.

Charlie dropped his eyes to the ground, “You’re telling me. My boss practically had kittens when Crouch and Bagman came knocking.”

“What’s so bad about Claire getting the Opaleye?” Hagrid asked, “I would’ve thought the Horntail or the Hebridean Black would be worse?”

“Normally you’d be right. But the thing is. Claire is Half-Mer, and Opaleyes absolutely hate the Mer. If she got the Horntail, she’d take it down in ten seconds flat, twenty if she gets chatty,” Will said with a sigh. Harry bit his lip and started walking back into the forest. Once he was far enough away from the adults and the smell of ash, he dropped to his knees, pulled the hood of his cloak down and took a long gasp of fresh air.

“Scare’s ya shitless, hey?” a voice said from above him. Harry looked up to see Claire O’Neill, wearing a red singlet and boxers, sitting on the tree-branch above him. She dropped down to the ground and sat on a log. In the moonlight, Harry could see that her face, usually rather dark in complexion, was ashen white.

“They certainly do,” Harry admitted.

“Almost makes you regret entering. Almost.” Suddenly, from behind a tree a few meters away, Peter Parker stepped out, looking much the same way Claire looked, and Harry felt.

“Believe it or not, I didn’t actually enter,” Harry said, pulling the cloak off and sitting down on the grassy earth.

“You didn’t?”

“Nope. Someone’s trying to kill me.” Harry laughed, “Isn’t the first time. Won’t be the last.” Then he looked at Claire.

“Did you hear what your brother said? About the Opaleye?” If possible, Claire grew even paler.

“Yeah. I really don’t want to hurt it. It’s not its fault some wizard tied it up and decided it would be fun to use as sport,” Claire said. She waved her hand, and a clump of dirt rose up into the air, before forming itself into a tiny replica of the Dragon in the enclosure behind him.
Peter sighed.

“Look, guys. You both seem to be decent people. I like to think I’m a decent person as well. But this competition… it has the potential to turn us all into bitter enemies. Why don’t we, for each other’s sake, agree not to deliberately harm the others. I know it’s a contest and everything. But shouldn’t we be able to get to the end without having to put holes in the others? I’d rather be friends than enemies.” Harry looked at Peter, then to Claire. Then, surprising even himself, he stood up, brushed the dirt off his jeans, walked over to Peter and extended his hand.

“Deal.” Peter nodded and shook his hand.

“Agreed. We get nowhere by fighting each other,” Claire said, giving them both a slight smile.

The sound of someone clearing their throat behind them caused all three champions to turn around, wands pointed at the origin of the sound. Which happened to be Stephen Strange, standing next to Will O’Neill.

“An admirable pact, and a solemn vow. You have proved your worth as Champions more tonight in these words, then you will as warriors in the arena in the coming trial. In my opinion at least. Remember that the right words hold just as much power as great deeds, sometimes even more,” Strange said, bowing his head to the trio. Then he disapparated with a soft pop. O’Neill rolled his eyes.

“Get to bed you lot. I imagine you’ll have a lot to think about in the morning.” He winked at them and burst into golden dust, which then scattered on the wind.

“He’s right. Goodnight Harry. Goodnight Peter.” Claire turned on the spot and vanished into golden dust just like her brother.

“Show offs,” Peter muttered. Then he and Harry made their way back to the castle in silence.
“Brains! Murdock! Wait up!” Harry yelled, running down the stairs into the Transfiguration Courtyard. Hermione and Matt turned around as Harry reached them.

“How’d your midnight meeting go?” Matt asked, shouldering his book bag and tapping his cane on the ground.

“Dragons. That’s the first task. I have to get passed a Dragon.” All the colour drained from Hermione and Matt’s faces.

“Okay. Let’s… let’s think about this logically,” Hermione stuttered as they continued walking.

“You don’t exactly have time to learn methods of Dragon taming, that take months to master, in two days, so we have to use skills that you already have…”

“The Shield Charm Moony and Padfoot taught us will be good against any flames it decides to send your way,” Matt said, whacking a first-year girl standing in the corridor out of the way with his cane.

“What about actual spells though? Somehow, I don’t think a Stupefy will take down a giant dragon,” Harry exclaimed as they walked out into the grassy courtyard.

“Dragonhide is highly resistant to Magic, Harry. That’s why we use it for clothing. Casting spells at it most likely won’t do anything,” Hermione said.

“What about one of my spells though? You know they’re loads more powerful than average,” Harry pointed out.

“It might work, but it’s not safe to rely on it. You need an alternate method of taking it down, something that plays to your strengths, instead of relying on your enemies weaknesses,” Matt said.

“But what strengths are going to get me past a giant nesting mother dragon?!” Harry moaned.

“Well, well, well. Looks like Potter has suddenly realised his days are numbered, fellas.” Harry, Hermione and Matt turned around to see Malfoy leaning against a large tree, Pansy, Blaise and half a dozen other Slytherins standing behind him.

“How did you miss him?” Hermione whispered to Matt, who had a baffled expression on his face.

“I don’t know, Brains. I can’t sense him. It’s like there’s a blank space where his voice is coming from. He wasn’t like that yesterday, it’s something recent,” he whispered, straining his ears.

“And why’s that Malfoy?” Harry snapped, his voice betraying his anxiety.
“My father and I have a bet you see. I don’t think you’re going to last ten minutes in this tournament. He disagrees, he thinks you won’t last five. And after you’re dead, just like your parents, I’ll take the place that you stole from me on the Quidditch Team.”

Harry scoffed, “Have you ever actually caught a single Snitch, Malfoy?” Malfoy locked his jaw together in an attempt to hold his smirk, a tint of red crawling its way into his cheeks. Ignoring a slight gasp from Hermione behind him, Harry stepped forward slightly, so that he was eye-to-eye with Malfoy.

“Maybe your right. Maybe I won’t last ten minutes. But I’d last ten minutes longer than you. If you were in my shoes, Hogwarts wouldn’t even have a Champion, seeing how you were suspended for trying to put the Crucius Curse on a teacher. And I’ve been thinking about that actually. Professor Lupin says that it takes real intent to cast a proper Unforgivable Curse. It takes practice. So, I wonder, would Professor Lupin have even felt anything? Or have you been practising illegal curses with your Death Eater daddy?” Seeing Malfoy turn even redder, Harry rolled his eyes and turned, hiding his hand, which was sliding his wand free from its pocket.

“Furnunculus!” Malfoy snarled.

“Protego!” Harry whipped around, a transparent shield forming between Harry, his friends and Malfoy. The hex bounced off the barrier and flew straight into Goyle’s face. Dozens of boils began to sprout across his nose, and he dropped to the ground, whimpering.

“Oculus Dollarum!”

“Orbis!”

“Petrificus Totalus!”

“Densaugeo!”

“Calvario!”

“Flipendo!”

“Protego Maximus Ventus!!”

Jets of light flew across the courtyard in both directions, until a massive shimmering barrier formed between both sides, blasting everyone off their feet and onto their backsides. Harry quickly jumped back to his feet, surveying the damage. Pansy’s hair was falling out of her head at a rapid rate, Blaise was buried neck deep in the dirt, and Malfoy was lying on the ground in a full body-bind. Matt had apparently avoided the tripping jinx sent his way by Pansy, and Harry had deflected Malfoy’s Conjunctivitis Curse into Crabbe, who was now frantically rubbing his eyes. Hermione hadn’t been so lucky. Her two front teeth were growing down past her chin, and she was trying to hold a hand over her face. Standing between the two sides, was Claire O’Neill. Waving her hand in Malfoy’s direction, she turned toward Hermione and, with Harry and Matt’s help, lifted her off the ground.

“Come on, Hospital Wing,” Harry said, grabbing her arm.

“I don’t know how to fix this. I’m sorry, I saw it coming, but I didn’t get over here fast enough. Is he always that much of a dick?” Claire rambled, leading Hermione away.

“Yes, he most definitely is,” Matt confirmed, searching the ground for his dropped cane.

“Diffindo!” Malfoy screamed. Matt launched himself at Harry, Claire and Hermione, colliding with
them and knocking all three of them to the ground. A red spell whizzed over their heads, and Hermione screamed in pain. Claire and Matt whipped out their wands and turned them on Malfoy.

“Fulgur Expulso!”

“Reducto!”

A blast of white-hot lightning shot forward from Claire’s wand as a bolt of convulsing red light blasted from Matt’s. But neither spell was the first to reach him. For Auror Moody was standing on the other side of the courtyard, wand in the air.

“That’ll teach you to curse someone when their back is turned!!” He snarled, hobbling over, his right leg making an odd clunking sound with each step. Sitting on the ground where Malfoy had been moments before, was a giant white ferret, two spells speeding towards it. The Reductor Curse hit the ground, blasting chunks of dirt, and the ferret, high into the air, where the Lightning Curse collided with it point blank. The Ferret shivered and squealed, its hair blackening and standing on end, as Moody caught it with a levitation charm.

“Cowardly little shit!” He growled. Then, in what was quite possibly the best moment of Harry’s life, he began bouncing the still twitching rodent up and down in the air.

“Auror Moody what in Merlin’s name do you think you’re doing!!” McGonagall screeched, running out from her classroom, Ginny, Luke, Jessica and the rest of the third-year Gryffindors and Slytherins behind her.

“Teaching a lesson!” Moody barked, sending the ferret even higher.

McGonagall’s eyes went even wider, and her jaw went slack.

“Is that… is that a student!”

“Technically it’s a ferret!”

McGonagall pulled her wand and with a loud ‘snap!’ Malfoy reappeared, twitching on the grass. His hair was standing on end, blackened and smouldering in a perfect rendition of Albert Einstein. Firefly and Alias burst out in cackling laughter, followed by Harry, Matt, Claire and almost the entire courtyard. Moody seemed highly pleased by this. McGonagall not so much.

“Mr Potter, Miss O’Neill, please escort Miss Granger to the Hospital Wing. Mr Murdock, I do believe this is yours.” Matt’s white cane flew into her hand, and she handed it to Matt. Harry found it slightly hilarious that Matt’s glasses were cracked down the lens, and he hadn’t even noticed.

“The rest of you! Back to class, now!” The student body quickly scattered while McGonagall began to scold Moody.

“Harry!” Hermione wheezed.

“What? Are you ok?”

“Duh!”

“Sorry.”

“Shut up and pay attention. Play to your strengths! Your Firebolt!”

And, with that thought in mind, they made their way to the Hospital Wing, Harry feeling much more
optimistic about his chances of survival than the previous night.

Harry got up on the morning of the Task and dressed so inattentively that it was a while before he realised he was trying to pull his hat onto his foot instead of his sock.

Ginny, Hermione, Luke and Jessica – as Lily Evans – were waiting for him in the Common Room, all of them looking suitably anxious.

“Is Matt…”

“He’s waiting atop the Astronomy Tower with the Firebolt. Luna and Foggy should be bringing breakfast up to him already.” Hermione confirmed, biting her lip as they made their way down to the Great Hall. Madam Pomfrey had restored Hermione’s front teeth to standard size, though Hermione had let her shrink them to an extent the matron considered normal, rather than to the ‘normal’ size of her somewhat notorious buck-teeth.

“Fantastic,” Harry said, walking into the hall.

“Don’t worry, Harry. I’m sure you’ll do brilliantly. You’re the youngest Seeker in a century. If anyone can outfly a Dragon, you can,” Ginny said. As soon as they stepped inside, the entire Hogwarts population – minus the Slytherins – jumped to their feet and started cheering. Harry went beet red and sat down at the last seat on the table with Ginny force-feeding some toast down his throat.

Much sooner than Harry would have liked, Professor McGonagall announced that the schools were to make their way down to a large Stadium that had seemingly appeared on the edge of the Forbidden Forest overnight.

The stadium was the largest Harry had ever seen. It was twice the size of the Quidditch Pitch, the stands towering over one hundred feet high. Six flags were flying from various towers. Harry recognised the Hogwarts Crest, The Ministry of Magic flag, the Alcheringa Crest and the Ilvermorny sigil, but the other two were a mystery. Harry assumed they belonged to the Federation and the United States Department of Magical Affairs but didn’t care enough to ask. As they approached the stands, Ludo Bagman walked outside of a large tent protruding from one of the walls and, upon seeing Harry, beckoned him over. Harry glanced quickly up at the Astronomy Tower, but couldn’t see Matt from this distance. Ginny grabbed his head and turned it back towards her.

“Listen here. You’re going to go in there, you’re going to stick to the plan, and you’re going to get out. Nothing more, nothing less. You understand me?”

Harry, who thought his voice might fail him if he tried to speak, nodded quickly. Ginny pressed a quick kiss to his forehead and whispered, “Good luck.” Then she turned, and Jessica and Hermione pulled her up into the stands, the others following behind.

Harry made his way over to Bagman, who quickly pulled him inside the tent. Claire and Peter were already there. Peter was apparently meditating on a couch, while Claire was pacing. In mid-air.

“Now that everyone is here let’s get on with the show.” He grabbed a purple velvet bag from a
coffee table and held it out in front of him. “Now, each of you will be selecting a small model from this bag. The model you select will indicate which creature you will face! Exciting isn’t it?” Harry was very sure he didn’t agree with Bagman’s assessment, so wisely remained silent.

“The objective of your task is simple. Collect the Golden Egg that has been placed in the arena.”

“Okay, Mr Potter, since you’re the youngest, you’ll go first.” Bagman held out the velvet bag, and Harry tried desperately to keep his hand from shaking. He dipped his hand into the bag, and hissed when something very hot snapped at his finger. He grabbed hold and pulled the first creature out. Harry’s nerves, which had already been sky-high, went soaring into outer space. Sitting in his palm, with a tiny number one dangling around its neck, was a tiny Hungarian Horntail.

“Ok then. Harry looks like you’re going first. If you’d step into that curtained off area, you’ll find a set of robes inside. Could you put them on please?” Mechanically, Harry ducked behind the curtain and pulled on the red and gold robes, that were not dissimilar to his Quidditch Robes. He stepped back outside and saw that Claire, who had returned to the ground, was holding a tiny Antipodal Opaleye that was attempting to bite her fingers off. Peter was staring at his miniature Hebridean Black in thought.

“Well, off you go.”

BOOM!!

Harry forced himself forward and pushed past the tent flap.

“That’s right folks! Witches and Wizards, I present to you, our first Champion: Harry Potter of Hogwarts!”

Harry was standing on a cliff edge, looking down over a massive crater of jagged rocks and boulders. Surrounding him were the sprawling stands, all of them filled to the brim with people. There was a sea of red-heads in one of the corners, and Harry hoped that meant the Weasleys had come to support him. He knew Sirius and Remus were out there somewhere.

Sitting in the centre of the arena, curled up around a large nest, was the giant black skinned Dragon from the previous night. The Hungarian Horntail. And it was staring straight at him. Taking a long shaky breath, Harry pointed his wand skyward.

“Accio Firebolt!”

“What was that spell? I didn’t hear it.” The announcer bellowed, and several people in the crowd started laughing. Then he heard it. A whooshing of air. Harry glanced back to the castle and couldn’t help the grin that crossed his face as his broom soared over the rim of the stands. Narrowing his eyes, Harry started running towards the cliff edge, and the dragon. He reached the edge and pointing his wand at the ground.

“Ascendio!” Harry shot up into the air as the Dragon reared its head and spewed fire where he had
been moments before. The Firebolt flew beneath him, and he landed on the handle. Pushing his body low, he shot forward, just avoiding another burst of flame.

“Look at that dodge!! That is one talented flier down there!!”

Harry soared around the dragon in circles, forcing the beast to pull itself to its feet so it could keep track of him. He could see into the Dragon’s nest from here, and there was quite clearly a large golden egg that stood out from the rest. Now he just needed to get the Dragon away from the nest so he could swoop in and get the egg. He couldn’t do that with it hovering like it was.

Thinking on the spot, Harry pushed the Firebolt into a climb, he flew right up above its body, just in range of its snapping fangs. The Dragon snarled and rose up on its hind legs, wings extending out as it attempted to close its jaw around him. But Harry dived out of its way at the last moment, flying down its exposed neck.

“Oooh. That was close. Not many people could have pulled that off!”

He wiped around its exposed legs, ducking the thrashing tail that flew right past his head and pulling around behind the giant creature. An ear-shattering roar shook the air, and Harry forced himself to ignore the sticky substance flowing from his ears. Using the Dragon’s bulk against it, Harry soared down between its legs and snatched the Golden Egg from amongst the jet-black ones. Pulling it tight to his body, he jerked the broom handle down.

“That’s it! Harry Potter has retrieved the Golden Egg!!!!! INCREDIBLE!!”

The crowd broke into hysterical screaming and applause and cheers of “Potter!” and “Hogwarts!” filled Harry’s ears as he dropped down into the gorge. Then, as he was just about to pull up, the rune on his arm burned violently, and Harry ducked.

He wasn’t fast enough.

The Dragon’s massive tail lashed out, and one of the spines racked across Harry’s back, shredding his robes. Maintaining his hold on the egg and ignoring the searing pain coming from his back, Harry angled for the tent entrance, where several people were already waiting for him.

“Owch!! Looks like the Dragon nicked Potter on the exit… And here come the handlers!!”

Harry pulled short and placed his feet on solid ground. Holding tightly to the egg, his brain feeling exceptionally fuzzy, Harry let himself be led inside and forced onto a bed.

“Dragons! My word!! Who on Earth thought this was a good idea!!” Madam Pomfrey exclaimed. Harry wasn’t entirely sure where she was, as he couldn’t see straight. Everything was blurry, but he was sure he still had his glasses on. A cold pressure weighed on his back, and a bottle was held to his lips. He downed the sweet tasting liquid, and everything came back into focus.

Madam Pomfrey was hovering over him, Hagrid and Professor McGonagall standing behind her.

“Alright now Harry?” Hagrid asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Blinking several times as the reality of what he’s just done set in, he looked up at Hagrid, who had tears in his eyes.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m alright. Not something I’d want to do again though.”

“I should hope so, Mr Potter. I do not want to see you again do you hear me! No more giant
monsters, assassination attempts or mysterious tattoos!” Madam Pomfrey grumbled. McGonagall patted him on the shoulder.

“You did good Potter, now come and get your scores,” She said, before ushering him outside with Hagrid. He grabbed his Firebolt from where it was floating, looking a bit worse for wear, and watched as the Horntail was dragged away and the eggs replaced. He had done it. He had survived.

Looking out, Harry could see Dumbledore, O’Neill, Strange, Crouch, Bagman and Moody all seated in golden chairs in the tallest stand. Then, one by one, they held their wands up in the air.

Doctor Strange gave him a seven. Mr O’Neill gave him a nine. Dumbledore a nine as well… Bagman gave him a ten, and the crowd, which roared in approval, seemed to agree. Crouch gave him a six, and finally, Moody gave him a Nine.

“That’s 50 points out of a total of 60 for the first task!! Though Mr Potter did retrieve his Egg in spectacular fashion, he was injured, and points were deducted as a result. Ok, everybody take your seats. The Alcheringa Champion will be entering the arena in five minutes!!”

“Well done Harry. Mighty well done that!!” Hagrid beamed. Then he and McGonagall led him out of the tent and into the stands, where the Weasleys, the Defenders, Remus, Tonks and Sirius were waiting for him.

Ginny was out of her seat before he even reached them. She barrelled through George, knocking him into the people below and sprung at him. If Hagrid hadn’t had been behind him, they would have most definitely fallen backwards.

“Don’t you ever, ever, ever do that ever again! Do you know how terrified I was?!”

“No offence Firefly, but I was probably just a tiny bit more terrified than you.” She slapped him across the face and huffed.

“Wrong thing to say, Mister. Now you don’t get a “Congratulations you’re not dead kiss.” She said, pulling herself off him, and ignoring Hagrid’s booming laughter.

“Pity. I was looking forward to that,” Harry told her. Ginny’s scowl vanished, replaced with a very red blush.

“Harry!” Mrs Weasley shoved past her daughter and pulled Harry into her own hug.

“Can’t… breathe….”

She released him and patted him on the head.

“Oh, sorry dear,” she muttered.

“Are you alright, Harry? We saw it get you at the end,” Hermione said, pushing through and running a hand down the tear in his robes.

“All fine, Brains. Madam Pomfrey fixed me up good as new,” Harry told her.

“Nice one Harry! That was wicked!!” the Twins exclaimed, pulling him into a seat between them.

“You out flew a Dragon!!”

“They’re going to be…”
“…talking about this…”

“…for years!!”

“So, Harry, what’s next on the bucket list?” Sirius asked him, a giant smirk painted across his face, “Slay a Basilisk to save a fair maiden – done. Defeat an army of Dementors – in your sleep. Free a convicted felon and prove their innocence – Easy. Outfly a Dragon – accomplished. Time Travel – been there, done that. Save the world from a Dark Lord – every other Tuesday. I honestly don’t know what your gonna do next. You’ll have to start doubling up soon.”

“How about I start a revolution?” Harry joked.

“Only if I get to be the girl on those posters saying, “We can do it!” while flexing her muscles,” Tonks said, flexing her arm.

“Emperor Harry. I could live with that,” Remus said thoughtfully.

“Ooo! Does that mean he gets concubines! Sign me up!” Jessica exclaimed.

“Over my dead body!” Ginny said, glaring at a smirking Jessica.

“That could be arranged,” Jessica said, winking at Ginny.

“Nobody is talking about murdering my daughter while I’m sitting right here,” Mrs Weasley moaned.

“Sorry, Mrs W,” Jessica said, though she didn’t look remorseful in the slightest.

Harry laughed and gestured back to the arena, where the second Dragon, the rainbow scaled Antipodal Opaleye, was being led in by Charlie and his team.

“Next into the arena is Alcheringa Champion Claire O’Neill!!”

Charlie and the other Dragon Keepers vanished into the gorge, and Claire stepped out wearing robes of Green and Gold. She walked out to the edge of the cliff, drawing the attention of the Dragon, which belched a torrent of flame in response.

“This isn’t going to end well,” Harry whispered.

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“Antipodal Opaleye’s hate the Mer. And take a guess what Claire is…”

Claire slashed her hand down, and the flames reflected up into the open air.

“And some impressive use of wandless magic by the Second Champion!”

Claire floated up in the air slightly, opened her mouth… and started speaking to the Dragon.

“I do not wish to fight you!” She called out, and almost the entire stadium gasped in horror. Harry frowned.

“What’s the big deal?”

“She just spoke Parseltongue, Harry!” Ginny exclaimed.
“Oh. Sorry, I heard it as English.”

“You are Mer! The ancient enemy of my people. You come to take my children! You will burn!!!!”

The Dragon lunged forward and leapt across the ravine at the floating Claire.

“Whatsoever she said has pissed it off!!!” The announcer cried. Claire dropped back to the ground, narrowly missing the Dragon’s teeth, and thrust her hand up in the air.

“Immobulus!!”

The Dragon froze, suspended in mid-air. It tried to breathe more fire, but the flames soared straight up into the sky instead of down to roast the Mer as it intended.

“Would you look at that! Miss O’Neill has literally reversed the flow of Gravity around her Dragon!! Amazing!!”

Claire jumped from her ledge up to the Dragon’s nest and removed the Golden Egg. Then she floated up into the air and drifted back to the tent.

“The Second Champion has retrieved the Golden Egg!! And look at that Dragon! Still suspended!! That’s some powerful magic there!”

The Alcheringa side of the Stadium broke into cheers and applause. Claire looked up at the dragon, winked at it, and watched it fall back down into the gorge, several ledges and shards of rocks collapsing around it.

“I’m sorry…” She whispered as the Dragon howled in pain, before turning and running back inside the tent.

“Wow. So, there’s another Parselmouth out there Harry,” Luke said, placing a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“Wish I’d have thought to do that…” he grumbled. Ginny laughed and placed her head on his shoulder.

“Wish I’d have thought to do that…” he grumbled. Ginny laughed and placed her head on his shoulder.

After Charlie and the tamers removed the Dragon from the arena, Claire stepped back outside, flanked by the auburn-haired woman Harry had seen on Halloween.

Harry looked to the judges' panel and watched with bated breath.

Doctor Strange gave her a nine. O’Neill gave her a nine. Dumbledore a nine… Bagman only gave a five! The Alcheringa Delegation and all the other people sitting in their section of the stands looked outraged. Then Crouch gave her a four, and the entire stadium leapt to their feet and started jeering.

“That’s not fair!! How can you give her a four!! She was twice as good as me!!” Harry yelled, a good number of other people echoing his statement.

“We’ll agree to disagree on that,” Ginny said. Finally, Moody gave her a full ten.

“That’s 46 points out of a total of 60 for the First Task!! Mr Crouch and Mr Bagman would like me to point out that Parseltongue is considered a Dark Art, and the Alcheringa Champion’s use of it affected her scores.”

Harry scoffed and rolled his eyes. Several members of the Alcheringa Delegation, all of whom were
still standing, turned towards the judges' panel and hissed a series of swear words Harry refused to repeat. Bagman and Crouch looked very uncomfortable, while Moody doubled over laughing.

“Dark Art my arse,” Harry grumbled.

“Of course!” Hermione exclaimed, “It makes sense that they’d know it if you think about it. Basilisks are a massive problem in Australia because of the introduction of Cane Toads. You know, hatching a chicken egg under a toad gives you a Basilisk. That plus the dozens of other Reptiles down there like Crocodiles and Dirawong, not to mention all the ordinary snakes. It makes all the sense in the world that there would be Parseltongues down there. I guess Dragons qualify.”

Harry turned to Hermione with a raised eyebrow, “And you’re just mentioning this now?”

Hermione glared at him.

“Well, I only just figured it out. You might have given me super memory powers Harry Potter, but you still have to wait for my brain to make the connections!”

Harry threw his hands up in surrender.

“All right, all right! Chill Brains, chill.” The entire Weasley clan laughed, and Hermione went bright red.

“Now! Our third and final Champion!! Peter Parker of Ilvermorny!!”

Harry turned back to the arena, where Peter was walking out of the tent, a determined grin on his face. The American glanced up at the Ilvermorny side of the stands, and the blonde-haired girl with the pink highlights gave him a thumbs up. Peter turned and looked at his Dragon. The Hebridean Black seemed entirely different from the others Harry thought. Though it had had black scales like the Horntail, it was significantly smaller. Its wings were more batlike, and its tail was shaped like an arrow instead of a snake. It had short, sharp ridges on its back instead of spines and lacked horns on its head.

Peter walked to the edge of the cliff, the Dragon eyeing him warily. He pulled his wand, pointed it at the Dragon’s nest and said, “Accio Golden Egg.”

Harry’s jaw dropped open as the Golden Egg flew out of the nest, despite the dragon’s attempts to catch it in its mouth, and right into Peter’s outstretched hand.

“I don’t believe it. The Ilvermorny Champion has retrieved his Egg in less than a minute. And with a simple summoning charm. Ingenious!!”

The Ilvermorny stand jumped to their feet and cheered, led by the blonde girl, who raced down a set of stairs as soon as the announcer spoke.

Peter walked back into the tent as the Dragon handlers hurried out to subdue the final Dragon.

“Harry. I feel the need to point out that your method of getting the Egg was by far the most entertaining, if not the simplest or easiest approach.” Sirius stated, trying desperately to keep a straight face.

“I can see it now,” Danny said, waving his hands in the air. “Parker’s the smart one, O’Neill’s the powerful one, and Harry’s the dramatic, awesome one.”

Sirius and Remus laughed.
Peter walked back out into the arena, accompanied by his blonde-haired friend, whom Harry assumed, if Skeeter’s article was right, must be Gwen Stacy.

Strange held up his wand and gave him a ten, as did Dumbledore. O’Neill and Moody both gave him a seven while Crouch and Bagman gave sixes.

“That’s a total of 46 points for the First Task. The judges would like to congratulate the Ilvermorny Champion on cool use of intellect, but remind him that the Task was meant to demonstrate magical ability, as well as intelligence.”

“That brings us to the end of the First Task. As of right now, the tally stands: Alcheringa and Ilvermorny tied for Second on 46 points, and Hogwarts in First Place with 50 points!”

Harry and the rest of the Hogwarts supporters started screaming and dancing around in the stands.

“Party in the Common Room tonight Harry! This is gonna be wicked!!!” Fred and George exclaimed, hoisting Harry onto their shoulders.

“These scores are tight, and anything can happen between now and the final task in June. The next event, where Alcheringa will face off against Ilvermorny on the Quidditch Field, will be held here at Hogwarts in two weeks time! So until then, congratulations Champions and good luck to the Quidditch Teams!”
Updated Disclaimer:

Ghost, Miracle and Crystal on their couch, staring at the god-like being in front of them in awe and reverence.

“You want us to do what?” Miracle asked, still trying to process what was happening.

“I want you to fix the plot hole in your story. You can do it. You’re more powerful than I am in a way. I’m all seeing and all knowing, but you guys, you can create anything you want. Not even I can do that.” Clara Hunter said, running a hand through her hair.

“Wait a second. Are you telling me, that the plot hole these guys accidentally created when they wrote the first chapter of Gemini Curse, was your fault? I just thought Ghost was rushing through it instead of studying for his exams?” Crystal asked. Miracle’s mouth fell open.

“See what an Ascended Being can do if they don’t consider the repercussions of their actions?” Clara said.

Ghost, Miracle and Crystal nodded.

“Why us?” Ghost asked.

“It’s your story. You know how to fix it better than I do.”

With that, Clara winked at them and vanished in a flash of white light. Ghost glanced at the door to the basement.

“I’m going to need a blue box, a piece of parchment, and a redhead…” he muttered to himself, before jumping up from the chair and bounding down the stairs to the basement. There was a flash of gold light, then nothing.

“We don’t own Harry Potter, or Doctor Who,” Miracle exclaimed excitedly, before following him. Another flash later, and Crystal was left alone in the house.

“Well, guess that leaves me to get the groceries. Which cheese does Miracle like again?”
Harry sat on a log staring out over the Black Lake as the sun began to set, colouring the sky a brilliant gold. In the distance, he could hear the Alcheringa students laughing as they played with and got squashed by the Whomping Willow. Apparently, they were native to New Zealand or something, Harry wasn’t sure.

But this wasn’t why Harry Potter was sitting out on the grass alone. What had him sitting on his own, was Professor McGonagall’s announcement of the Yule Ball today.

Harry knew exactly who he’d like to invite. In fact, there’d be no one other than her he’d even consider asking. They’d been seemingly locked in a phase of both of them showing blatant displays of affection to the other, but neither of them doing anything about it. If he asked her to the Ball, would he ruin that? What if she was just being flirtatious for the fun of it? Or because that’s just who she was? What if, by asking her, he lost his best friend in the process? But, if he did nothing, would she stop being interested?

If he was honest with himself, Harry wasn’t even entirely sure how he felt at all. She was his best friend. Every time she came into a room, he couldn’t help but smile and feel that little bit better about the day. When she laughed, he couldn’t help the butterflies that rose up in his stomach; and that blazing look she got when she was planning her next prank, or preparing to step into the Duelling Ring, he could see it in his mind’s eye all the time. And he couldn’t deny she was incredibly beautiful. The way her hair fell down her back like flickering flames, or the sparkle that would shine in her eyes when she had an idea. Then there was the Gemini Rune. Every time they touched it would warm up, practically humming whenever they were together. It responded to shared fears and triumphs, and it was creating the dreams of the city. At least he thought it was. If asked a year and a half ago if he could be rid of it, he would have done it in a heartbeat. Now, he couldn’t imagine a life without it. Or her.

But what did it mean?

It was times like this he really wished he could talk to someone. There wasn’t really a female adult presence in his life to even try and talk about these things. He couldn’t exactly go to Mrs Weasley and say, “Hi, I think I have feelings for your daughter, but I’m a total idiot and don’t know what to do.”

Harry sighed and continued his vigil, no closer to an answer. He thought he heard a soft wheezing, groaning sound somewhere behind him, but dismissed it in favour of thinking about a girl with long red hair and brown eyes.

“Harry Potter?” Harry spun around to see a tall man with dark brown hair wearing a leather jacket and jeans. His hands were tucked in his pockets, and he was biting his lip.

“My name is Ghost. I’m a Traveller – not that that means anything to you. However, I think I have someone here who you’ll be rather interested in meeting,” the man said in an accent not dissimilar to Will O’Neill’s. Harry rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, and who’s that?”

“Harry?” a woman’s voice called. A voice Harry would recognise in a heartbeat. A voice he heard in his nightmares, and whenever a Dementor came near. He lifted his eyes and saw two women standing beside a tall blue wooden box marked police. One was short and had bright red hair with blonde highlights. She wore a singlet top with the hippie peace logo on the front. The other had thick red hair and vivid green eyes and wore denim jeans and a loose fitting white long-sleeved top. She
was identical to the image he’d seen in the Mirror of Erised.

“Mum?” Harry stuttered, his voice cracking.

“We’ll give you some time,” Ghost said. Then he turned and stepped inside the box, the reddish blonde following behind him.

Harry stood quicker than he ever had before and ran at Lily Potter so fast he actually leapt the last few metres. He crashed into her and wrapped his arms as tight around her as possible.

“This is a dream. It has to be,” he whispered.

“No dream sweetheart, I promise,” Lily said, holding her son close, tears sliding down her cheeks.

“How is this even possible? Time-turners can only turn a couple of hours.”

Lily patted the side of the blue box, “I’m not completely sure, to be honest. This box is a type of time machine. It brought me here after I received an unexpected visitor in my kitchen.”

“Voldemort?”

“No. Not yet at least. No. The person I met was you. An older you. A you from the future. I don’t know exactly when, or how. But it was you. And he said that right here, right now, you needed to talk to me. He wouldn’t tell me anything, but I can fill in the gaps well enough. You’re going to grow up without me, aren’t you?” Lily choked, placing a hand under Harry’s chin and lifting it up to her face. Tear stains were running down his cheeks.

Harry took a shaky breath. This wasn’t happening. This was impossible. But it was happening. His mum, a person he thought he’d never meet, was standing right in front of him. Unable to form a coherent sentence, he nodded his head and buried his head back in his mum’s chest. She had a very distinct vanilla-like scent that Harry made sure to commit to memory.

“I’m so sorry…” Lily whispered softly.

“It’s not your fault. It’s Voldemort’s. No one else’s. Well, one other person,” Harry snarled.

“Don’t. You can’t tell me anything. You can’t change the timeline, as much as you might like to.” That simple statement seemed to hurt her to say just as much as it pained him to hear. Taking his hand, Lily guided Harry back to the knoll he was sitting on a few minutes before and sat down on the grass beside him.

“So, what’s happening? Why are you out here all alone?” She said at length as the sun continued its arc to the horizon below.

“The Yule Ball is coming up in a few weeks… and there’s this girl, Ginny. She’s amazing and beautiful and kind and funny. And she’s my best friend. I couldn’t imagine my life without her…” Harry trailed off, reaching up and rubbing a hand over the Gemini Rune on his neck. He saw his mum’s eyes fixed on the Rune and her mouth hanging open in shock.

He laughed, “long story involving twelve-year-old me, a 50ft basilisk, a cursed diary and a sword.”

Lily went very pale and pulled Harry into another hug. It was strange, Harry thought. It was different from any other hug he’d had. Not that he’d had many. Mrs Weasley’s hugs were smothering and all-encompassing, Hermione’s were like she was trying to squeeze the life out of him, and Ginny’s made his blood run hot. But his Mum’s hugs were loose yet comforting, and the aching in his heart
created by the entire situation seemed to double.

“I’m not even going to ask. It seems like you really like her, this Ginny.”

Harry sighed, staring at the golden sun, “I do. I really do, I think. I’ve got no experience with this, with love. I don’t know. If it is… I think this is what it would feel like. At least I hope it is. Cause if it’s not, then I’ve got no idea.” He took a deep breath and ran a hand through his hair.

“What do I do, Mum?” He asked, turning towards her. Lily smiled and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Ask her to the Ball. You clearly want to.”

“But what if she says no? What if it ruins everything?”

“It won’t,” she assured, “My guess, from what you’ve said, is that she feels the exact same way. She’s probably sitting somewhere agonising over whether you’re going to ask her.” Harry frowned. How could she know without even meeting her?

“Listen Harry. Girls are complicated and hard. But when you find the right one, you just know. So, don’t be scared to go out and get her before someone else does.” A flood of bile rose up in his throat. Someone else ask her! He hadn’t thought of that. He honestly didn’t think he’d be able to stomach having to watch her go with someone else.

He took a deep breath, “You’re right. Can’t be any harder than fighting a Dragon.”

Lily grinned at him, “There’s that Gryffindor courage. I assume you’re a Gryffindor… wait did you say fighting a Dragon?!”

Harry blushed, “Just last week actually. Outflew it on the Firebolt Sirius got me, and yes, Gryffindor through and through.”


“If you really want to know how she feels, show her how much you care about her. Then watch her reactions, and you’ll know.” The creaking of a wooden door caused Harry and Lily to turn around. The man was standing outside the box once more.

“I guess my time is up,” Lily whispered. Harry pulled his mum into another hug. She kissed him on the top of the head and stood up hesitantly. Together, they walked back to the blue box.

“Wait a second. Is that the Tardis?!?” Harry exclaimed. Ghost, who was now leaning against the door, winked at him.

“Borrowed it from a friend,” Ghost said sheepishly.

“Goodbye sweetheart. Know that whatever happens, I’ll always love you. And…” Lily wiped her face with her sleeve, “… this Ginny of yours is one lucky girl.” She pulled away, tears streaking down her cheeks, and walked inside the box, which Harry could see really was a great deal larger on the inside than the outside.

“You’ll see me one more time, Harry Potter. After it’s all over.” Ghost placed his hand in his pocket, pulling out a white piece of paper and handed it to him.
“This is from your future self. He says you’ll know how to use it. And do yourself a favour, remember to give it to me in the first place, or this timeline is completely screwed.”

“Good luck, Harry,” the reddish-blonde girl called from inside the time-machine, waving shyly to him.

“Seriously, Miracle!” The man complained, before turning and stepping back inside the box. Harry caught one final glimpse of his Mum, smiling at him before the door swung closed and the box started groaning. It faded away as if it were never there, and Harry was left standing on the Hogwarts Grounds, a letter in hand, tears rolling down his face as the sun slipped below the horizon behind him.

Harry stepped into the Gryffindor Common Room, and the Gemini Rune instantly heated beneath his skin, drawing his eyes to a desk beneath the window, where Ginny sat scribbling on a piece of parchment. Only moments ago, by virtue of a man called Ghost and the Tardis, which Harry was about 90% sure he stole, he had met his mother for the first and most likely only time. If she believed Ginny would say yes, then she would. He couldn’t allow himself to think otherwise, or all the courage she had given him would most likely vanish.

The Dragon and Phoenix rune tingled, and he slid his gaze to the couches by the fire. Neville was sitting tensely, and he kept looking over at Ginny and Hermione. Harry’s stomach rose up in his throat. Not good.

Steeling himself, Harry walked over to the table where Ginny and Hermione were working on their Ancient Runes Essays.

“Firefly? Can I talk to you?” He asked. Ginny dropped her quill and looked up at him with a dazzling smile that made his stomach do flips in his chest.

“Sure.” She stood up, and he led them over to an empty corner of the room.

“Gin, I… I just wanted to say that, I don’t know where I’d be without you. I’m really glad I saved you from the Chamber, because if not, I’d have never gotten to know you. I’d have never met my best friend.” Ginny blushed as red as her hair, and she bit her lip, eyes sparkling in the firelight.

“This thing with the Runes on our necks… I’d like to think that we’d still be best friends, even without them linking us together. But they do give us this strange connection and, if I’m honest, I wouldn’t give it up for the world. I need you in my life, Gin. But lately, there’s been this… this unspoken thing getting stronger between us. And I like it, I really do. So, I think it’s about time we brought it into the open.” Harry took a deep breath and grabbed her hands in his.

“Ginny Weasley, I would be honoured if you would go to the ball with me.” The smile that lit up Ginny’s face made Harry’s ramblings completely worth it.

“Really?” she whispered.

“Yeah? Is that a problem? If you don’t want to its fine. I understand not wanting to go with me… I mean I certainly wouldn’t. Lots of better choices…” Ginny smacked him across the back of the head and pulled him into a hug that made Harry’s legs weak. The Gemini Rune was blazing forth with vibrant heat on his neck.
“Of course, I’ll go with you, silly!” She exclaimed. Harry scratched his head and blushed.

“Great. Excellent. Really excellent…” Harry trailed off, and a lop-sided smile graced his lips. He was going to the Ball with Ginny Weasley. He closed his eyes and said a silent prayer to Ghost. Whoever you are… thank you. You've given me the best gift anyone could ever receive.

“Um… you should, probably get back to your essay,” Harry stuttered. Ginny, who had been staring at him absently with a goofy smile of her own, was seemingly shocked back to reality. She turned to Hermione, who was grinning at them from her seat.

“Yeah. I probably should…”

“I’m going to go and get in the shower…” Then he turned on his heel and raced up the staircase to his bed before his legs gave out on him.

It was hours later, in the middle of the night, when Harry realised he had fallen asleep, on top of his bed, in his clothes. His stomach let out a loud grumble in the dark night. And he missed Dinner. Slipping quietly out of his room, Harry made his way down to the Common Room. It was completely empty, with only the fire flickering in the fireplace making any noise. He sat down in an armchair and whispered to the night, “Dobby?” The little elf appeared with a crack, wearing a Gryffindor scarf around his body like a towel.

“Harry Potter has called for Dobby!” he said, bouncing on his toes.

“Hi, Dobby. Could you get some food from the kitchens for me? I kind of missed dinner.”

“Right away Harry Potter sir!” he exclaimed, before vanishing. Harry laughed at the elf’s antics. It had been Sirius’s idea to recruit the elf to help keep the Home in good condition when Harry explained the events of his second year in vivid detail. Harry insisted on paying him two galleons a week, which Dobby, who thought “the Great Harry Potter was too kind,” much to Sirius and Remus’s amusement, had begrudgingly accepted. Since then, he had responded to Harry’s every beg and call. He had yet to tell Hermione this, as he did not want to listen to the House Elf Liberation Speech that would no doubt accompany the revelation.

The elf reappeared with Roast Beef, Mashed Potatoes and Yorkshire Puddings, which Harry thanked him for. Then, instead of leaving, Dobby began walking around the room, gathering several socks and hats, all of which, now that Harry thought about it, were poorly sewn and hidden under pieces of rubbish.

“Dobby? What are you doing?”

Dobby looked up at Harry, a sock dangling from his ear.

“Mr Harry Potter’s Grangey is been leaving clothes for the elves to find, Harry Potter. Thesy is not liking it. So, Dobby comes and removes them, so the elves will still clean the House Room.” Harry sighed.

“Damn it, Hermione. I’m going to have to talk to her, aren’t I?”
“Dobby would most appreciate it,” he admitted, before resuming his search. Harry quickly ate the food and was about to go back to bed when Hedwig flew in through an open window and landed on Harry’s shoulder, and he was reminded rather forcefully of the letter sitting in his pocket.

He pulled it out and opened it. It was on muggle paper and had several bars of music, along with several verses of typed words printed across the page. It was a song.

Scrawled at the bottom of the page in his own handwriting, were six words.

Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake.

Harry stared at the words in confusion. Diary… who’s Diary? Of all the things to send back in time? What important Diaries did he know of…

All the colour drained from his face, and he dropped the paper as if burned. Tom Riddle’s Diary. That was the only thing it could possibly be. Did that mean there were five other objects like the Diary? Did they work the same way? Where were they? The Diary contained the memory of a sixteen-year-old Voldemort… what could the other objects contain? Was it more memories of Voldemort, or something worse?

Hedwig, perhaps sensing her master's distress, nibbled Harry’s ear, and he ran a hand through her feathers.

“Is you alright Mr Harry Potter sir?” Dobby asked, tugging on Harry’s sleeve. Harry blinked a couple of times and realised Dobby was looking very frightened. He could only imagine what his own face looked like.

“I don’t know Dobby. I received a message today… a message from the future… does this make any sense to you?” he handed the sheet to Dobby and pointed to the scribbled writing. Dobby let out a soft whimper before looking up at Harry in complete fear.

“Is there… is there more bad things like the bad master’s book out there, Harry Potter?” Dobby asked, trembling something fierce. Harry bent down, being careful not to dislodge Hedwig, and wrapped his arms around his tiny friend.

“I don’t know Dobby. But I promise you, I’m going to find out, and I’m going to stop them.”

Authors Note – MUST READ!!!

This one is serious guys. First, you get this chapter early because I’ve got Uni stuff to do tomorrow. Second, thank you to those of you who gave us your support after the flames we received on Act II, Chapter 6. They really mean a lot.

Now, onto the meat of this chapter. When I (being Ghost here) started this story, I didn’t really have any idea where I was going with it plot-wise. I just wanted to test myself in a romance type genre.
and chose one of my favourite pairings to do it. But as you can see, we’ve grown far beyond that. And as Crystal pointed out to Miracle and myself, if we’re going to see this to the end, we need to deal with the Horcruxes. We spent weeks trying to figure out how to deal with them, but there was no way to incorporate them into the narrative without it seeming cheap. We seriously considered just not doing Horcruxes at all, to be honest with you.

It was Miracle who came up with the idea of using ourselves + plus a bit of Time-Travel to get around the error in our narrative in a fun and interesting way. We won’t tell you everything about what this chapter means. That would ruin the surprise. But we will say that there are more hints in this chapter than you’ll catch on your first read through. Any time travel experts will recognise we have invoked the Bootstrap Paradox here, so don’t worry the circle will be completed.

As a final message, if we hit 100 reviews, or 100 favourites before next week’s deadline, we will post Act II, Chapter 10 – our favourite chapter in the entire story – early.

Until next time True Believers!!!
**Updated Disclaimer:**

As promised, enjoy the final chapter of Act II! Don’t murder me for the cliff-hanger. Murder Ghost, it was his idea. – Miracle.

“100 favourites! Wow! That was a lot faster than we expected… MUM!! Get away from that!!” Crystal yelled, walking into the house with the groceries in one hand and her phone in the other. Crystal’s mother was leaned over the Typewriter of Infinite Power, typing rapidly on the keys. Crystal panicked and rushed over, then, seeing what her mother had done, tried to wrench her arms away from the device.

“No! What did I tell you! No dating till you’ve finished your Masters in Medicine. I’m very disappointed in you!” She said, pointing an accusatory finger at Crystal, who looked horrified as she read through the text and realised the woman had changed the entire narrative.

“Do you realise what you’ve done!” Crystal screeched, “Miracle!! Ghost!!”

“Seriously,” Crystal’s mum exclaimed, “why do you insist on using those stupid names?”

Miracle and Ghost came running downstairs from the bedroom, both flushed and in stages of undress.

“What is going on here!?” Ghost yelled.

“Mum’s trying to rewrite the Yule Ball!”

Ghost panicked and helped Crystal pull their mother away from the Cosmic Typewriter while Miracle rushed over and began assessing the damage.

“Looks like I can fix the foreshadowing and the disclaimer, have to let them know that the song ‘Enchanted’, featured within this chapter is by Taylor Swift. Hmm… the sentence structure looks corrupted… have to start again…” she muttered as the siblings tried to console their mother, who was raging about underage dating, despite the fact that her son had quite obviously just been having sex one floor above her. Thankfully, she hadn’t noticed that Miracle had forgotten to put on pants, or that the hastily thrown on shirt she wore was not her own.

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**Act II, Chapter 10: Enchanted**

Ginny sat down next to Hermione and Luna for breakfast, trying desperately to tune out her friends latest rant about House Elf enslavement. Last night, Hermione had dragged Harry, Ginny and the rest of the Defenders down to the kitchens to meet the House Elf population of Hogwarts. It had not
gone well. After Hermione had inadvertently insulted the entire elfish community, Jessica had sat her down and explained, with Dobby’s help, that for a House Elf, being given clothes was the greatest insult possible. Dobby himself had said that he was a unique case, as his masters had been highly abusive. The House Elves enjoyed working and most considered it a great affront to be paid anything. Luna had then suggested that instead of campaigning for the House Elves, she should campaign with them. Hermione had been highly affronted by this and accused the elves of being brain-washed into their enslavement. Suffice to say, Brains and Alias were currently not talking, which made Duelling Lessons with Sirius, Remus and now Tonks – who had graduated from the Auror Academy in the last week of November – very tense. On the bright side, only Jessica still struggled to form a Patronus.

“Hey guys,” Harry said, sitting down opposite them. Ginny looked up at his dazzling green eyes and resisted the urge to sigh. It had been two days now since he had asked her to the Yule Ball, and Ginny was still on a high over the whole deal. They had decided to keep it very secret so Rita Skeeter, who seemed to be able to get interviews with everyone, didn’t find out about it. Matt had reported detecting her presence on the Hogwarts grounds very frequently, but none of the others had seen her. Alias, on her continued investigation into Skeeter, had found this highly interesting but refused to say anything.

But while Ginny had been happier than she had ever been before, Harry seemed deeply troubled by something. Something he wasn’t sharing. She had found him this morning sitting on the couch in the Common Room, bags under his eyes, a small strip of parchment clutched in his hand, an empty coffee cup on the floor.

Ginny’s line of thought was broken when a tawny owl dropped a large box wrapped in white paper next to her plate.

“Who sent that?” Hermione asked, her speech dying on her lips. Ginny frowned.

“No idea.”

There was no card. Shrugging, she opened the box revealing a gold and white fabric obscured by a piece of parchment with elegant handwriting.

There I was again tonight
Forcing laughter, faking smiles
Same old tired lonely place.

Walls of insincerity,
Shifting eyes and vacancy
Vanished when I saw your face.

All I can say is it was enchanting to meet you.
Your eyes whispered, "Have we met?"

Across the room your silhouette

Starts to make its way to me

The playful conversation starts

Counter all your quick remarks

Like passing notes in secrecy

And it was enchanting to meet you

All I can say is I was enchanted to meet you.

“Wow…” Hermione whispered, her eyes flickering up to Harry, who was keeping his gaze firmly on his bacon. Ginny’s heart was beating as fast as it had been during the first task. She was drawing a crowd of onlookers as well.

She gently lifted the piece of paper out of the box and handed it to Luna. Digging into the box once more, she stood up and drew out a gorgeous white and gold dress, that somehow looked like it would fit her perfectly. She resisted the urge to glance at Harry. He had not named the package, so clearly wanted to keep it a surprise.

“Merlin, Ginny!” Demelza Robins exclaimed, gingerly stroking the exquisite fabric.

“Who sent you those?” Katie Bell asked. It was at this point that Ginny realised almost all the girls in Gryffindor were standing around her, staring in awe at the beautiful dress.

“My… my date to the Yule Ball,” she stuttered.

“Wow. Must be some date. Who is it?” Lavender Brown exclaimed.

“He asked me not to say,” she choked out, still staring at the dress.

“Ooo, surprise date is it Gin Gin?” Fred asked. Hermione swatted him over the head.

“I don’t recognise this song,” Luna said, handing the parchment to Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot, both of whom had come over to see what the fuss was about.

“It’s not a wizarding song. It’s really good,” Hannah said, before passing the paper to Alicia Spinnet.

“It’s not a Muggle song that I recognise either. Did he write it himself?”

“It’s only the first verse though, where’s the rest of it?” Hermione asked.

The answer came two days later.
Ginny and Jessica – in her Lily Evans disguise – had only just sat down at the Gryffindor table when another owl, this time a small screech, flew down to her carrying another box covered in white wrapping. Ginny glanced up and saw that both Harry and Hermione were not in the hall. Actually, now that she thought about it, she hadn’t seen much of Brains since the Alcheringa/Ilvermorny Match. The Australian team had just edged out the Americans 360 – 330, with the Alcheringa Seeker, an eighteen-year-old girl by the name of Clarissa Mayfair, catching the Snitch to take the win. The game won 36 points for Alcheringa and 33 for Ilvermorny, pushing Alcheringa into the first position on the ladder with 82, Ilvermorny in second with 79 and Hogwarts in third with 50. She assumed it was some new S.P.E.W research, as Hermione said she was spending most of her time in the Library.

Ginny opened the much smaller box as the girls crowded around her, eager to see what was inside this time. The first layer held another piece of parchment.

“Read it out!” Jessica said, nudging her shoulder.

>This night is sparkling, don't you let it go

>I'm wonderstruck, blushing all the way home

>I'll spend forever wondering if you knew

>I was enchanted to meet you.

Alicia leaned over Ginny and moved the tissue paper aside, revealing a golden necklace with a butterfly-shaped ruby at its peak, four gleaming diamonds set on either side.

Nobody dared touch it. It was just that beautiful.

“Ginny, this is old. Really old. Look at the date stamp on the clasp,” Jessica said. There, printed on the tiny clasp, was the number 1712.

“My god. This is a priceless family heirloom. Your boy must be loaded,” Parvati exclaimed. Ginny couldn’t help tearing up. This necklace had belonged to Harry’s parents. Probably his mum. And he gave it to her.

Angelina took the parchment and placed a preserving charm on it.

“Trust me. You’re going to want to keep this.”

Harry vanished for two days. He wasn’t at any meals, he didn’t sleep in his bed, and no one saw him in the castle. The only thing that prevented Ginny from breaking down Dumbledore’s Gargoyle was the fact that the Home was locked. Clearly, Harry was inside doing something. She just didn’t know what. Whatever it was, Hermione told her, it was going to be good.
So, when he showed up at breakfast incredibly bright and cheerful, Ginny immediately started attacking him.

“What have you been up to Harry?”

“Sirius and Tonks were helping me with some stuff. Popped into Diagon Alley for a bit. Don’t worry I’m fine.”

“That’s not an answer, and you know it, Mister. Now spill.” Harry was incredibly closed-lipped, and Hermione was no help, as she kept on staring at something over at the Ilvermorny table.

“Ginny, would you just drop it please,” Harry begged, “Look another gift from your admirer.”

Another owl, a snowy, delivered another white box to Ginny. Immediately she was swarmed by giggling girls while many of the boys were looking at her darkly. Whoever Ginny Weasley’s mysterious date was, he was making them all look bad by comparison.

Opening the box, Ginny and the girls were assaulted by the sweet aroma of flowers. Ginny lifted the flowers free from the box, revealing a bouquet of vibrant red Tulips. A note was attached to one of the stems that red: Red Tulips – A Declaration of Love.

“Merlin’s beard Ginny, you must have this man of yours tied around your finger,” Harry exclaimed reaching into the box and pulling out another sheet of parchment.

“So, it’s not you?” Katie asked, opening her mouth in shock.

Harry raised an eyebrow, “I don’t think I could write a song if I tried. I haven’t played an instrument in my life.”

Ginny noticed that Harry didn’t actually lie once during that sentence.

Harry cleared his throat and read the next verse.

The lingering question kept me up
2 AM, who do you love?
I wonder ’til I’m wide awake
And now I’m pacing back and forth
Wishing you were at my door
I’d open up and you would say, "Hey,
It was enchanting to meet you,
All I know is I was enchanted to meet you.”

His singing voice was horrible.

“Sorry girls, but I don’t think I’m the singing type,” Harry admitted. Everyone quickly agreed.
“Well Miss Weasley, I do hope you’re thanking this date of yours for all these gifts. He’s quite clearly spent a lot of time preparing them.” The entire table looked up to see Professor McGonagall standing behind them, a soft smile on her face. She waved her wand and conjured a vase full of water, then floated the flowers from Ginny’s hands into the glass.

“Don’t worry Professor. I keep telling him he doesn’t have to do this, but he keeps sending them anyway.” Though it came out as words, they weren’t very heartfelt. She had cornered Harry in the Home after he sent the dress, chastising him for spending money on her. But he refused to hear a bar of it.

“I highly doubt your words had any effect. You have quite the thoughtful admirer.” She handed the vase back to Ginny and walked towards the exit to the hall. Harry gave the parchment to Angelina.

“I’ve got to speak with McGonagall about the Transfiguration Homework. I’ll see you guys later.” Then he got up and rushed out the hall after her.

“You better be treating this boy of yours right Ginny,” Demelza said, “or I’m going to snatch him up faster than you can say Quidditch.”

Two days before the Ball and the Great Hall was in full Christmas mode. Tinsel covered the fireplaces, a giant wreath hung suspended in the air, and Hagrid and Professor Flitwick’s highly decorated ten-meter-tall tree was in pride of place behind the staff table. The weather had also, finally, turned, bringing in a massive snowstorm overnight. The only people seemingly bothered by this were the Alcheringa Students, many of whom seriously disliked the frigid temperatures. Though they continued to wear their customary singlets, t-shirts and shorts (of varying lengths depending mostly on gender). Ginny assumed they utilised Warming Charms, or whatever the Druid version of Warming Charms was.

This morning however did not go off without a hitch like the others. Professor Snape just happened to be walking behind Ginny when an Eagle Owl delivered another white box to her. Before she even had the chance to open it, Snape snatched the box from the table and tore the packaging, drawing the attention of every person in the hall.

“What is this muggle rubbish?” Snape said dryly, discarding the lyric parchment on the flagstones and pulling out a small pale blue box wrapped by a white satin ribbon.

Every girl and several guys in the hall gasped. Even the Purebloods knew the significance of a Tiffany Blue Box. Snape either did not know what it was, or didn’t care, as he broke the lid, and the ribbon, and threw it on the floor.

Ginny, seeing red, pulled her wand and pointed it at him. Harry, Hermione, Luna, Matt, Luke, Danny, Foggy, Fred, George, Neville and Demelza were seconds behind her.

“Put. My gift. Down. Now.” Ginny said, her voice as cold as ice. Snape looked at her with such hatred that she physically recoiled. What had she ever done to the man?

Then, a massive ‘bang!!’ echoed through the hall, shattering every window in the room and bringing several people’s hands to their ears.

The Tiffany Box had been restored to its original state and was resting, with the lyric parchment, on
the table in front of her. Snape was floating in the middle of the hall, surrounded by crackling golden energy, limbs spread eagle as his clothes seemed to be squeezing him to the point where he was struggling to breathe. Standing at the doors was Will O’Neill, hand outstretched, fist slowly clenching. Columns of golden energy were sparking off him in all directions, his hair literally on fire, basilisk skin coat billowing in the non-existent wind, and his eyes were solid gold. Ginny and everyone else in the hall couldn’t help but shrink back at the terrifying sight.

“Severus Snape!” He boomed. His voice carried so much power you couldn’t help but listen, raptured to every word he said. He began walking forward, and each step he took cracked the flagstones beneath his boots.

“What in the name of all the Seven Circles of Hell gives you the right to deface a student’s property?!" He released his hand, and Snape fell to the floor, where he slowly and hesitantly began to stand. Professor’s McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout and Lupin were standing a quarter of the way down the corridor from the Staff Table, wands at their sides. They must have started moving when the commotion started, Ginny thought. Dumbledore remained seated.

O’Neill was standing right opposite her now.

“Are you all right miss?” He asked gently, his tone suddenly so at odds to his demeanour that it was practically laughable. She nodded several times, not even realising that her wand was no longer in her hand. In fact, none of the students realised their wands had returned to their pockets.

O’Neill turned back to Snape, who was drawing his own wand, and his deep booming voice returned.

“I have tolerated your attitude towards both my students and your own, since my arrival. For the sake of international cooperation. But this is the last straw. If you lay a hand on a single student, from any school. If I even hear you denigrate a student based on blood one more time, I will bury your body so deep not even a volcanologist will find it. One of my Mer students came to me in tears because you covered them in painful boils in a potions class, then refused to permit them access to the Hospital Wing on the grounds that you didn’t consider them human!”

Snape looked more furious than Ginny had ever seen him, and that was saying something.

“You dare threaten me?” he sneered.

“Oh, I dare. What I find hilarious, is that you think you even stand a chance against me.” Then a grin, so like the twins it was uncanny, manifested on his face. He snapped his fingers, and both he and Snape floated up into the air above the tables. A transparent Duelling Runway materialised out of thin air beneath them, and O’Neill dropped Snape at the other end.

“Very well. Let’s see how you do against the infinite power of the Dragon Force. Apollo!” A flash of bright golden light erupted from near the doors to the Great Hall, and a magnificent gold and white phoenix soared into the room. Ginny watched in awe as it flew up and hovered between the Wizard and the Druid.

“On his flame, use any curse you see fit. You can even cast your Unforgiveables if you so wish.” For the first time in living memory, Snape smiled. It was a grotesque and vile image that made her want to hurl.

The Phoenix burst into flame and vanished, and Snape fired the first spell.

“Sectumsempra!!” He snarled, and suddenly, all the golden light surrounding O’Neill vanished, and
he fell to his knees on the platform. Dozens of wounds were crossing his body as if he were attacked by a storm of swords. A victorious light passed through Snape’s eyes as he advanced slowly.

“Interesting spell. I’ll have to remember that one,” O’Neill wheezed. Blood was dripping all over the platform, even drizzling off it in some places. Ginny cast a glance at Claire, who was smirking so massively that Ginny could barely believe it. She looked back to O’Neill, and realised in that, with his head bent to the ground, Snape could not see his face. But she could, and O’Neill was grinning like a madman through the gashes crossing his face. Then she thought further. If O’Neill really was as wounded as he appeared… why was the platform still in one piece?

“The first spell you use is Dark Magic. I think my suspicions are confirmed.” Then, as though flipping a switch, O’Neill stood up, and every wound on his body began glowing with golden energy as they knitted themselves closed in less than five seconds. Snape’s victory glare vanished, and Ginny couldn’t help a smirk of her own blooming across her face.

O’Neill grabbed Snape’s outstretched wand arm and stepped inside the man’s guard so fast it was as if he teleported. He jerked Snape’s arm up, knocking his wand clear out of the arena, where Harry caught it with practised ease. O’Neill then judo-flipped Snape over his head, where he landed with a crash on the platform.

“Now. Let’s give little Death Eaters what they deserve shall we…” O’Neill rose up in the air, the golden energy swirling around his body in full force once more and drew a gleaming white sword from the aether.

“Any final words, Severus Snape?”

Snape sneered at O’Neill, but the look of fear that crossed his face was unmistakable.

“Very well then.” And he slammed the sword point down towards Snape’s chest.

“Enough!!!!” Dumbledore roared, finally standing from his seat, wand in hand. The sword point stopped millimetres from Snape’s heart. The Headmaster flicked his wand, and all the shattered glass restored itself, and the cracked flagstones sealed as if no damage were ever there.


And at that moment, Ginny realised just what the significance of this moment was. Dumbledore was standing in front of the Staff Table, wand aloft, his aura of power filling the room. It was palpable to be sure, and it wasn’t hard to see why this was the only wizard Voldemort ever feared. But compared to O’Neill… She wasn’t sure what it was, but O’Neill’s aura was different. Very different. It wasn’t a feeling like Dumbledore’s was. It was like a physical force, forcing the hairs on the back of her neck to rise. If she was honest, she wasn’t sure who was more powerful. But she did know that, if a fight broke out, it would most assuredly be Will O’Neill who walked out the victor.

“Looks like you live to sneer another day, Snape.” The Duelling Platform vanished, and Snape fell face first to the ground. Unfortunately, Dumbledore caught him before he hit. O’Neill, the golden energy slowly fading away, floated down to the ground next to Harry and held out his hand.

“Nice catch, Potter.” Harry, a massive grin on his face, handed Snape’s wand over. O’Neill examined it for a second, before snapping it in half in one smooth motion. If it was even possible, Harry’s grin grew even wider.

“Here you go, Sevy. I trust your boss can use his favourite toy to fix this for you.” O’Neill threw the wand fragments on the floor next to Snape’s head and turned to Ginny.
“Sorry for the disturbance Miss Weasley. I understand the Tiffany Blue Box is an incredible gift to be treasured at all costs. I could not, in good conscience, allow this waste of space to ruin that for you. I wish you a good day on the Yule Ball.” Then he turned to Dumbledore, all of the energy gone, though his eyes were still gold in hue.

“I expect something done Albus. Or your pet will learn quite painfully why showing respect to those you perceive to be beneath you is a good trait to learn. You do not want an enemy of the Dragon Force, Headmaster.” Suddenly, as if a waterfall were parting slightly, a large scar running along O’Neill’s face materialised from hairline to chin, and he took on the complexion of someone far younger than he usually appeared. Then it was gone, and he turned on his heel, stalking from the Hall. The Alcheringa Students rose as one, Claire in the lead, and followed him solemnly, each of them making sure to leer and hiss at Snape before exiting.

Slowly, but inevitably, the chatter returned to normal levels, though everyone was now talking about the spectacle they had just witnessed. Ginny placed the box and the parchment in her pocket, grabbed Harry and Hermione’s wrists, and dragged them from the hall.

Retreating to the safety of the Home, Harry told Sirius about O’Neill kicking Snape’s ass in the most colourful way possible. Remus came in halfway through and confirmed that Harry wasn’t bullshitting him. Ginny and Hermione ignored them all in favour of the blue box. Carefully untying the ribbon, she lifted an elegant rose-gold infinity bracelet from within. She turned to Harry and whispered, worried her voice would break as tears slid down her face.

“Why?”

Harry smiled softly.

“Because you’re worth it.”

_This night is sparkling, don't you let it go_

_I'm wonderstruck, blushing all the way home_

_I'll spend forever wondering if you knew…_

_This night is flawless, don't you let it go_

_I'm wonderstruck, dancing around all alone_

_I'll spend forever wondering if you knew_

_I was enchanted to meet you._

The day of the Yule Ball dawned and Ginny, like every other girl in all three schools that would be attending, couldn’t help smiling wistfully at the ceiling of her four-poster bed as she woke up.

She made her way down to breakfast with Hermione, Harry, Luke and Neville, and sat at the
Ravenclaw table with Matt, Luna and Foggy. This was not all that uncommon for them to do, so nobody really questioned it. Danny also joined them, although Jessica remained in Slytherin.

This turned out not to be an overly good idea because as soon as they sat down, Cho Chang and her posse of giggling girls slid into position next to them.

“So, Harry, have you invited anyone to the Ball yet?” Cho asked, batting her eyelashes. Harry, according to the Hogwarts Rumour Mill, had not accepted any of the invites put forward to him by any of the dozens of people that had asked him, so many people were trying to figure out just who he was going with. This it seemed, included Cho.

“Yes,” he said, focussing on his food and giving the black-haired girl the cold shoulder.

“Oh. Who’s the lucky girl?”

“Not you,” Harry said blandly, and the Defenders all snickered into their plates.

Cho scowled and moved to speak, but with perfect timing, another owl, this time a simple Brown, flew down and dropped a final box in Ginny’s lap. All the girls, except Cho, crowded around her as she removed the wrapping, and pulled out another bouquet of flowers. Only this time they were gorgeous blood-red roses, and the attached note read: Red Roses – I Love You.

The girls cooed and stroked the velvety petals of the flowers.

“Come on Ginny! Read the song!” Someone, a first- or second-year Gryffindor she didn’t recognise, exclaimed.

She lifted the parchment from the page and read aloud.

This is me praying that
This was the very first page
Not where the storyline ends
My thoughts will echo your name
Until I see you again
These are the words I held back
As I was leaving too soon
I was enchanted to meet you…

“Wow…” Hermione breathed, “this really is amazing.”

Ginny sighed, “I know…”

“You still won’t tell me who it is you’re going with?” Harry asked her, a slight smirk twitching his lips.

“You’ll see tonight…”
Ginny and Hermione stood just beyond the stairs down into the Entrance Hall. Together with Demelza, Lavender, Padma and Mandy Brocklehurst, they had spent three hours trying to tame Hermione’s hair into the elegant knot it currently sat in. It had not been easy. Then they had all paired up to help with make-up. Lavender had insisted on doing Ginny’s, revealing that she had actually gone out and bought golden mascara and eye-liner to match her dress just for the occasion. The Greek goddess-worthy dress Harry had bought her had white tank straps, embellished with swirling gold details that gave the illusion that they were actually rippling across the fabric. The lower part of the dress was the same creamy white, with more gold patterns done in swirls. Lavender’s make up had ensured that her eyes mirrored the details on the dress perfectly, and her hair, which had been curled at the ends, drooped over her shoulders. She wore Harry’s mum’s necklace around her neck, and the infinity bracelet, which she had yet to take off since she got it, around her wrist.

“Are you ready to do this?” Ginny asked her friend. Hermione was wearing an A-line magenta dress with a ruffled skirt and minimal make-up, though she had a pink eye-shadow that matched her dress. She had steadfastly refused to wear heels.

Hermione bit her lip, “Probably not. But let’s do it anyway.” Then she took a deep breath and walked downstairs, Ginny following behind. They stepped into the Entrance Hall, drawing the eyes of every person still standing there. Harry was busy talking to Claire and a tall dark skinned boy the same age as her who Ginny assumed was Claire’s date. Claire’s date was wearing black robes over a white shirt and a deep sapphire tie. The tie matched Claire’s date perfectly. The Mer was wearing a royal blue lace dress with spaghetti straps that crossed over at the back. The dress just skimmed the floor, revealing a set of silver strappy sandals adorning her feet. Her long hair was beautifully curled and swept to the side and was pinned by a sapphire brocade.

Harry himself looked quite handsome in a set of dark green-almost black robes with an emerald green lining that matched his eyes, beneath which he wore a white shirt. As soon as he saw her, his jaw fell open and a spark lit within his eyes.

She stepped down towards him, and he held out his hand. She took it and squeezed.

“You look absolutely gorgeous,” He said.

“You don’t look too bad yourself,” She said with a smile.

“Thank you again for the dress. The one Mum sent… well, let’s just say it’s better off they stay buried at the bottom of my trunk.”

“Gin, this is Tim Tuhora from Alcheringa. Tim this is Ginny Weasley.”

“Nice to meet you,” Tim said in an accent even thicker than Claire’s.

“You too. If you don’t mind me asking, where about in the Federation are you from, I can’t place your accent.”

“I’m from Maatau Taone in New Zealand,” he said.
“Yep. Kiwi-born and bred. Ask him to say ‘Fish and Chips,’ it’s hilarious!” Claire stated cheerfully. Tim frowned and rolled his eyes.

“Yes, yes. Make your jokes.”

But Ginny was no longer listening. Instead, she was focusing on Hermione, who was standing behind them. On the arm of Peter Parker.

“Merlin!” Ginny exclaimed, “So this is why you wouldn’t tell me who you were going with!” The nerdy boy looked quite impressive in a muggle three-piece suit and tie and had clearly slicked back his hair for the occasion.

“Hi Harry, Claire. Good to see you,” Peter said, clearly trying not to laugh.

“Of course, I didn’t! You would have all made fun of me!” Hermione huffed.

“No, we wouldn’t!” Ginny exclaimed.

“Well, maybe a little,” Harry admitted, and Ginny swatted him across the back of the head.

“Ah!” McGonagall exclaimed, rushing over to the champions and their dates.

“Everyone is ready inside the hall. Now, line up in pairs. Miss O’Neill in front, Mr Parker in second, Mr Potter in third. Oh, and Mr Potter, that matter we discussed has been resolved.”

Harry beamed, “Excellent.”

“Matter?” Ginny asked.

“You didn’t honestly think I was talking to her about homework did you?”

Then the doors swung open, and the Champions walked into the Great Hall.

It was like a giant winter wonderland. Snow covered the ground, and ice-sculptures adorned every table. Stalagmites of ice hung from the ceiling, interspersed with mistletoe. The House tables had been replaced by dozens of small round tables, each with six chairs. All except the Staff Table, which had doubled in size and was covered by an elegant table cloth and glass cutlery that Ginny thought was quite ridiculous.

And everyone was staring at them.

Ginny gripped Harry’s hand tightly and grinned at Angelina, who had a knowing grin on her face as she sat next to Cedric Diggory. Demelza and Lavender sat together, jaws on the floor. Susan Bones had actually fainted. And Fred and George had identical looks of idiotic shock etched into their faces.

They reached the Staff table and sat down between Will O’Neill and Mad-Eye Moody.

The food was the most delicious she had ever eaten. O’Neill was lecturing Harry over the benefits of steak, while Ginny dug into her seabass. Midway through the meal, Moody leaned back and took a swig of the tankard at his hip, that smelled suspiciously like Firewhiskey.

“That was mighty fine flying at the First Task, Potter,” Moody exclaimed, “You thinken about going professional?”
Harry frowned. “I’m not sure. I’ve had requests from scouts, but I’m not sure if that’s what I’d want to spend my whole time doing. I’ve thought a bit about curse-breaking because I’m quite good at Ancient Runes…”

“Better than good the way I heard it,” O’Neill said dryly, “Madison Sheppard, who’s one of mine in your year, said she’s never met someone who can keep up with her in Runes, and then she comes here and meets you and Miss Granger over there. She said that Granger seems to know everything before she reads it, and you… well, she had quite a few interesting things to say about you, and that shiny Gemini Rune on your neck.”

Harry blushed, and Ginny chanced a quick glance at Dumbledore. The Headmaster was quietly eating his food, but Ginny could tell he was listening intently to the conversation. Moody’s magical eye followed her glance, and he nodded ever so slightly as if to say, good girl for noticing, be careful what you say.

“Have you considered being an Auror?” Moody asked him, and Harry choked on his steak. Here was legendary Auror Alastor Moody asking him if he wanted to do one of the hardest jobs in the Magical World? Ginny would be shocked too.

“Not… not really.”

“Think about it. I’ve watched your DADA classes. There’s a reason you get top marks, Potter. If you ever want to learn anything a bit more flashy, or you want to bring the fight to the types of wankers that killed your folks, let me know.”

“Curse-breaking isn’t a bad option either you know,” O’Neill added, “Opens a lot of avenues. And even if you decide against that, Ancient Runes are incredibly powerful and useful to know. You get an O.W.L in runes, and most jobs will take you in a heartbeat. Get a N.E.W.T in Runes, and you’re set for life. I’ll warn you though, whether Curse-Breaking or Auror, both will see you facing a lot of danger.”

“No offence Mr O’Neill, but I’m always in danger. I’m only in this Tournament because someone’s not gutsy enough to say the two words themselves. It would be nice to have a better chance of stopping them though… I’ll give your suggestion some serious thought Auror Moody.”

Moody nodded. While Sirius, Remus and Tonks were teaching them, so far, they had been focusing on blocking, dodging and maintaining their defences, including both the Patronus Charm and Occlumency, the art of shielding the mind, for the not Harry and Ginny of the group. Hermione was quite good at Occlumency, as was Jessica. Luke and Danny were working hard and were slowly moving forward with success. But Matt and Luna were absolutely terrible at protecting their minds. The sheer amount of input their brains took in because of their strange powers made Occlumency practically impossible for them. On the bright side, it also gave a Legilimens an instant headache.

“There is something I’ve wanted to ask you, Mr O’Neill,” Harry said.

“Ask away,” he replied, placing another portion of steak in his mouth.

“That Rune on your arm, I don’t recognise it from any books, and I have quite the collection. It’s not even in Riker O’Neill’s Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations.”

Ginny looked to O’Neill’s arm and watched as the Dragon and Phoenix Rune seemed to ripple slightly.

“No, it wouldn’t be in there. Riker O’Neill, genius that my crazy Uncle was before he disappeared,
never knew this Rune existed. Few do. It’s called a Firebrand, and it cannot be drawn. Only bestowed.”

“And how does it connect to the Council of Fire?” Harry asked. Ginny, surprised by Harry’s boldness, glanced at Dumbledore, who had noticeably stopped eating, spoon raised midway between his mouth and his plate. Ginny grabbed Harry’s hand, prompting him to turn towards her, and by extension Moody, both of whom were wide-eyed and shaking their heads slightly. Harry frowned, clearly confused.

“The Council is a much longer conversation. One best held where there aren’t as many ears,” O’Neill said softly.

Then, as though waking from a trance, Dumbledore stood up. The rest of the hall followed, and the Headmaster clapped his hands. The tables zoomed to the edge of the room, and the flagstones in the centre of the hall transfigured into a dance floor with dozens of grid squares illuminating different colours. He conjured a large stage along the right-hand wall complete with musical instruments by the score. The Weird Sisters emerged from the door to the Trophy Room to raucous applause and stepped up onto the stage. Ginny, still holding Harry’s hand, followed O’Neill and his date, a woman the same height as he was with dirty blonde hair accented by red highlights, wearing a gorgeous red strapless evening gown, down to the dance floor. Harry, an anxious grin on his face, placed one hand on Ginny’s back and gripped her hand with the other. And suddenly, as if an obvious fact were suddenly becoming clear, she gasped.

“The two days you vanished… you were getting Tonks to teach you how to dance!” She exclaimed.

“Busted,” He admitted slyly.

She blushed at all the effort he went to and placed her free hand on his. The music kicked in, and they slowly began gliding around the floor. Harry was no brilliant dancer, but then again, neither was she. But she wouldn’t change anything for it. This was easily one of the best nights of her life.

They danced through so many songs Ginny lost count. The Gemini Rune was tingling with warmth the entire time, to the point where Ginny thought it might actually be giving them energy, because she didn’t feel tired in the slightest.

Dozens of people swung by them to compliment her robes or tell Harry what a good boyfriend he was. Those comments had a tendency to make Ginny’s ears burn. They had not discussed in any detail at all just what they were to each other. They were best friends, of that there was no doubt, but were they, boyfriend and girlfriend? It was all very confusing.

Moody’s comment on Harry’s socks threw her, until Harry explained they were a gift from Dobby, to which she had laughed merrily, and used the distraction to change the position of her arms to around his neck. He slid his arms down to hold her waist close to him, and the Gemini Rune warmed even further if that was even possible.

Ginny’s attention was then pulled to Claire, Tim and Roger Davies. Roger apparently thought he was a better choice of date for Claire, and quite brazenly attempted to cut into them.

“Uh, excuse me?” Claire said, knocking Roger away from her.

“I was just going to ask for a dance,” Roger replied curtly.

A number of other girls and boys had surrounded them at this point, apparently intending to capitalise on either Claire or Tim being up for stealing.
“Well then you could have asked, instead of just cutting in, and maybe I would have said yes!” Claire snapped.

“Gees. Sorry, I didn’t know that wasn’t a thing where you come from,” Roger said, scratching the back of his head. Ginny almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

“Where I come from? Where I come from!” Claire scoffed and turned away from Roger and the assemblage of boys. Then, spotting Harry and Ginny and Hermione and Peter, rushed over and resumed dancing, using the two other pairs as a human shield.

“Urgh! I hate humans!!” She exclaimed, “They’re all so infuriating!” Ginny had to resist the urge to laugh at this point, as Claire continued to moan about how annoying humans, particularly British humans, were.

Shortly after; Harry, Ginny, Claire, Tim, Hermione and Peter all decided to take a break around one of the tables scattered around the hall.

“So, what should we know about Alcheringa before we leave in a few days?” Harry asked.

“Well, since you’re cool, I’ll let you in on a little prank we’ve been preparing,” Claire said, eyes darting around the hall to make sure none of her friends were near.

“Because it’s in the south, it’s the middle of Summer down there right now. Which means you delicate fair skinned pommies are going to be scorched to buggery if you head home without protection. You need Sun-Screen, and high-powered stuff at that. I suppose a sun reflection charm would probably work, but I wouldn’t know where to find one.”

Harry and Ginny, who was even fairer skinned than Harry, nodded furiously. “Where do we get it?” Ginny asked.

“Any old pharmacy will do,” she said quietly. Ginny didn’t know what a farm A.C was, but Harry nodded, so she decided she’d leave it to him.

“I’m so going to take you down to The Rocks in Sydney though. That’s our version of Diagon Alley. It’s this massive underground town hidden right under the Harbour Bridge. It’s a miracle the Mortals don’t notice it really, but hey, that’s how it is with most magical settlements. Will is working on this new type of ward that will fool satellites at the Academy. Should keep us hidden for another few decades yet.”

Her rant about the Rocks, which Ginny decided she very much wanted to see, was cut off by the sound of a loud buzzing chiming noise that rang out through the hall. Everyone started looking around, trying to find the source, when O’Neill, who was still dancing with his gorgeous partner, reached into his jacket and withdrew a small rectangular object that he flipped open.

“My god!” Hermione breathed, “his phone works at Hogwarts!”

“I thought you said that was impossible,” Harry whispered.

“It is. According to Hogwarts: A History at least. I think I need to send a letter to Bathilda Bagshot, she seems to be getting a lot of things wrong,” Hermione said solemnly.

O’Neill raised his phone to his ear, which disabled the ringing sound. He spoke softly for a few minutes, before snapping the phone shut and looking to Doctor Strange, who remained seated at the Staff table talking with Professor Babbling. Strange nodded once, then O’Neill kissed his date rather passionately on the lips and started walking towards their table. Claire stood up and gave him a quick
hug. He whispered something in her ear, and she nodded back. Then he walked towards the front
doors, and his suit started melting away, replaced with his basilisk skin cloak and a strange armour
made from a material Ginny didn’t recognise. Golden energy began sparking around his body, and
as he strode out into the night, a crack rent the air, and he burst into a cloud of golden dust.

“Well that’s something you don’t see every day,” Peter said, sipping his Butterbeer. Ginny, unable to
resist, glanced at Hermione.

“I thought you couldn’t disapparate inside Hogwarts, Brains. Maybe we should start rethinking your
codename.”

“Shut it Firefly,” Hermione chided, still staring at the spot where O’Neill had disappeared.

“It’s called Quantum Entanglement,” Claire said, sitting back down, “He’s not apparating, that’s how
he gets through the Wards around the Castle.”

“But you can do it too. I saw you do it when we were in the Forest before the First Task,” Harry
pointed out.

“Well yes. We’re taught to do it when we’re seven, in our first year at Alcheringa. It’s a fast and easy
method of escaping danger. Plus, it doesn’t tear a hole in the fabric of the universe like Apparation
does. We simply exchange our molecules from one place to another. I can teach you if you’d like.
When we get to the Academy. It’s not too hard,” Claire offered.

“Oh yes please!” Hermione gushed.

“Sure, I’m always up for learning new stuff, even if it is unorthodox,” Peter said.

Harry frowned and turned to Peter.

“I’ve been meaning to ask, and I don’t want to be rude, but your friend Gwen, the one with the
blonde hair and the pink tips, I thought you’d go to the Ball with her?” Harry said, and Ginny had to
resist the urge to smack him across the back of the head. She looked at Hermione, who looked
shocked he had actually asked that, and mouthed, ‘boys.’ Hermione shrugged and rolled her eyes.

“Oh, Gwen. Yeah, she wouldn’t have gone with me even if I asked.”

“Why?”

“She… um… well, let’s just say she bats for the home team and leave it at that.”

Ginny’s eyes went wide, and Hermione giggled. Ginny scowled at her. Harry just looked confused,
clearly not understanding.

It was Claire who took pity on him, “She’s lesbian, Harry.”

“Oh. Sorry.”
recognise. Harry grinned and stood up, offering his hand to her.

“May I have a final dance?” He asked her. She blushed and accepted. Harry led her onto the dance floor just in time for the first verse to begin.

There I was again tonight
Forcing laughter, faking smiles
Same old tired lonely place

Walls of insincerity,
Shifting eyes and vacancy
Vanished when I saw your face

All I can say is it was enchanting to meet you.

“Fits perfectly doesn’t it,” He said, humming along to the guitar as it strummed through the chords. “Forcing laughter, faking smiles. Seems to be me all the time these days. Especially with this tournament. Until you walk into the room, and I can just be myself.”

Your eyes whispered, "Have we met?"
Across the room your silhouette
Starts to make its way to me.
The playful conversation starts
Counter all your quick remarks
Like passing notes in secrecy

And it was enchanting to meet you
All I can say is I was enchanted to meet you

“The necklace was my mothers. Passed down from mother to daughter or daughter-in-law for generations.” Ginny’s heart leapt into her throat.

“How did you come up with all this?” She asked as he spun her around. He smiled softly, his gaze a
million miles away.

“I had a visit from someone I never thought I’d meet. It was a blessing. She told me that I should show you just how much I care about you. So here we are.”

This night is sparkling, don’t you let it go
I’m wonderstruck, blushing all the way home
I’ll spend forever wondering if you knew
I was enchanted to meet you

“Who was it?” She asked, resting her head on his chest. The Gemini Rune was blazing with such intense heat that she was starting to get dizzy.

The lingering question kept me up
2 AM, who do you love?
I wonder ’til I’m wide awake
And now I’m pacing back and forth
Wishing you were at my door
I’d open up and you would say, "Hey,
It was enchanting to meet you,
All I know is I was enchanted to meet you."

“A man called Ghost. He had a message for me. And a gift.”

“Harry, you’re not making any sense,” she said.

This night is sparkling, don't you let it go
I'm wonderstruck, blushing all the way home
I'll spend forever wondering if you knew…
This night is flawless, don't you let it go
I'm wonderstruck, dancing around all alone
I'll spend forever wondering if you knew
“Ghost is a Traveller. He brought me a letter from my future self. A letter containing the musical notes and lyrics for the song you’re listening to right now. And the Gift… he brought my Mum, from before she died.”

Ginny gasped, “you… you spoke to your Mum?”

A tear ran down Harry’s cheek.

“Just for a moment. But it was enough. And it was at the perfect time too. My future self knew what he was doing.”

Then Harry started singing along, in a voice far better than the one he used the other day.

I was enchanted to meet you

This is me praying that
This was the very first page
Not where the storyline ends
My thoughts will echo your name
Until I see you again
These are the words I held back
As I was leaving too soon
I was enchanted to meet you

“This night is sparkling, don’t you let it go
I’m wonderstruck, blushing all the way home
I’ll spend forever wondering if you knew…”

I was enchanted to meet you
Heart pounding, head spinning, tears sliding down her face as the Gemini Rune reached boiling point, Ginny looked up into Harry’s emerald green eyes and saw nothing, but honest love reflected within them. The chorus played one final time, and both Harry and Ginny sang to the words.

This night is sparkling, don't you let it go

I'm wonderstruck, blushing all the way home

I'll spend forever wondering if you knew…

This night is flawless, don't you let it go

I'm wonderstruck, dancing around all alone

I'll spend forever wondering if you knew

I was enchanted to meet you.

Then, as the Weird Sisters played the final chord of the song sent from the future, Ginny, barely keeping her body from shaking in total exhilaration, reached up and kissed him, hard and passionate, on the lips.

The Gemini Rune flared with brilliant golden light across both of their necks, blocking out every other source of light in the room. A blast of magical energy swept the hall, and everyone except Professor Dumbledore, Doctor Strange and Will O’Neill’s mysterious date were knocked from their feet, blinded, starbursts dancing across their eyes.

When it cleared, all the snow in the room had melted away, yet all the water had solidified into crystal, shards of the glowing golden light trapped within.

In the middle of the room, lying entwined together on the floor, were the unconscious forms of Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley, soft smiles creasing their faces.

And in a dark room, deep within the British Ministry of Magic, an obscure white covered book adorned with a golden symbol of two vertical lines bisected by two curved horizontal lines flipped open to a new page for the first time in nearly a century. The quill sitting on the stand beside it rose up in the air and scratched a single sentence down on the white paper.

The completion of the Soul Bond-by-Gemini Rune of Harry James and Ginevra Molly Potter was completed at five minutes to midnight on December the 25th, 1994.

So Ends Act II…

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- Pottermore: [https://www.pottermore.com/](https://www.pottermore.com/)
- The Harry Potter Wiki: [http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)
- Archive of Our Own author ‘smallbrownfrog’ for their complete sourced index of characters in the Harry Potter world collected in, *The Hogwarts Years: Classmates, Birthdays, and Ages* [https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin](https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin)
- The Order of the Phoenix by Ruskbyte [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/826742/1/The-Order-of-the-Phoenix](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/826742/1/The-Order-of-the-Phoenix) and its sequel: *The Well of Shadows*.
- Mutant Storm by Bobmin356 [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm)
- A Man of Iron by Mr Chaos [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10156413/1/A-Man-of-Iron](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10156413/1/A-Man-of-Iron)
- Taylor Swift and the song 'Enchanted' from the album 'Speak Now'.
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Finally, we’d like to once again thank Joanne Rowling for creating the incredible world that is Harry Potter and allowing us to play in it. I don’t know what the world would be like if we knew nothing about Harry or his world.

**Post Credits Teaser:**

Next season on *Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse*:

Act III: The Council of Fire

The Gemini Curse has been lifted! But Harry and Ginny remain trapped inside the City with terrible foes of their own making. When they finally escape, they return to a world very different to the one they left. But while Harry and his friends embark on their World Tour for the Triwizard Tournament, dark forces are stirring in Britain. Who put Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire? What is Draco Malfoy hiding? Who is William O’Neill? What will the Second and Third Tasks entail? And what is the Council of Fire?

The Next Adventure Begins April 17th, 2019 on Fanfiction.net and the Archive of Our Own.
Act III, Chapter 1: All's Fair in Love and War

Chapter Summary

Act III: The Council of Fire
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Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

Act III: The Council of Fire

Updated Disclaimer:

Note: So, there’s been some confusion on our end as to when we were supposed to be coming back. Crystal said in the Post Credit that it was the 17th, but Ghost and I kept telling people in the comments and reviews that we came back on the 14th. So, we’ve compromised, and are bringing it out now instead.

Ghost and Miracle rushed into the gallery weighed down by heavy steel and leather plate armour. Emblazoned across both their chests was the image of a wolf with snarling jaws. Miracle’s hair, usually hanging loose and full of volume, was caked in dirt and tied back with a piece of leather cord. Hanging from both their belts were simple and rather dull looking metal swords. Ghost also had an axe strapped to his back and a helmet under his arm.

“Excuse me, sorry, pardon me, coming through,” they whispered as they noisily moved through the row of chairs, ignoring the huffs and grumbles from the people seated within. When they finally reached their seats towards the left-hand side of the third row, they sunk down into the leather armchairs with relieved sighs.

“Your late,” Oracle said with a raised eyebrow from the seat next to them. She was a short girl, about fifteen, with braided blood red hair hanging off her shoulder. She wore a pair of faded blue jeans and a green tank top with a picture of Orlando Bloom as Legolas and the words “He’s my Elf on the Shelf,” on the front.

“Well excuse us. You’re just lucky we got here at all. Only got the message about five minutes ago,” Miracle grumbled, crossing her arms and pouting.

“Where have you guy’s even been anyway?” Brawn – a heavy set dark-skinned man in his late
thirties wearing simple surf-brand clothes – asked from the row in front of them.

“Westeros Duty,” Ghost said, whipping the sweat from his brow with a gauntlet covered hand.

“Owch,” a tall blonde called Cygnet said, wincing in sympathy, “I had Westeros Duty two years ago. I died twice before the bosses pulled me out.”

“Only twice?” Oracle asked, a mischievous sparkle in her eye. Cygnet punched her in the shoulder.

“What? You shat yourself when Lazuli and Spectre tricked us into visiting the ‘Shining’. At least I didn’t squeal like a girl when I got decapitated,” Oracle pointed out, clearly savouring her friends fury.

“At least I survived the ‘Shining,’” Cygnet grumbled.

“Didn’t survive Game of Thrones though,” Oracle said cheerfully.

“It’s not my fault I didn’t know not to trust Queen Cersei. I’ve never seen Game of Thrones!”

“Um, for those of us who are new here, what’s Westeros Duty?” Garnet asked, leaning over from behind them as he brushed his dark brown fringe behind pointed ears.

“We keep an eye on Westeros, both show and book continuum, to make sure no one gets any ideas and goes changing the official story after it’s finished. Yoda and Annabeth set it up after the whole Harry Potter debacle,” Miracle supplied as the rest of the group shuddered. The Potter issue was not something anyone enjoyed having brought up.

“Shut up you lot, it’s starting!” Lazuli hissed from the front row. Everyone quickly obliged, staring down into the large chamber below them.

The chamber itself was circular in design, with a mosaic mural depicting thousands of heroic characters tracing the entire wall. Directly across from them was an image of the Avengers battling the mad Titan Thanos, with depictions of Luke Skywalker holding a lightsabre aloft and George Washington crossing the Delaware on the left, and Frodo throwing the One Ring into Mount Doom on the right. Eight statues stood at intervals around the room: a majestic dragon caught mid-flight; a woman wreathed in flames that depicted a phoenix; a pack of large wolves surrounding a flowering tree; a panther prowling across a field; a floating eye; a hammer trapped in stone; a bolt of lightning falling from the sky; a man and woman, swords in one hand, wands in the other, standing back to back on a rocky field; and a shield with a single star emblazoned across the front. On the floor of the room were several seats of similar designs, all looking inwards towards a slightly raised circular platform in the rooms centre. The great hall was illuminated by dozens of tiny balls of light, that despite their brightness were not uncomfortable to look at in the slightest. The roof was a transparent window that looked out onto the night sky, a full moon shining it’s rays down on them from above.

Only a quarter of the seats were actually occupied today. The rest were filled by holograms, people reporting in from across the Orrery of Worlds who couldn’t make it to the Realm of the Travellers in time for the summit. Miracle could see Master Yoda and the Doctor having a whispered discussion with Magneto and Marco Polo, while Tyrion Lannister chatted amicably with Nick Fury and Tom Clancy.

Once the room was silent, a man who was too far away from them to see clearly, stood up and stepped onto the raised platform in the centre.

“Welcome ladies and gentlemen, I’m your host for the 631’st Summit of the Travellers Council, Stephen Colbert.” Dozens of people broke out into applause, Ghost and Miracle included.
“I love it when Colbert hosts. The guy is hilarious,” Oracle whispered.

“I don’t like him,” Brawn said, though whether it was to disagree with Oracle or because he actually disliked the comedian was up for debate.

“The Travellers own none of the recognisable franchises seen in their works, but the Alcheringan Characters are our own creations.”

“Wow, a lot of stuff happened since our last gathering a few months ago, so we certainly have a lot to talk about. But let’s not beat around the bush. We’re all really here for one reason, and it’s not to hear me speak. We’re here to determine what side the Travellers are going to take in the Trial of Clara Hunter.”

Stay tuned to the Disclaimer for more of the Trial of Clara Hunter.

Game of Thrones Season 8 premieres tonight on HBO.

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Act III, Chapter 1: All’s Fair in Love and War

The Rocks, Sydney – May 31st, 1993

Two simultaneous ‘CRACKS!!’ rent the air on the sidewalk of George Street in the dead of night.

George Street was a very well-to-do street in the town of Sydney, Australia. It ran right through the centre of the historical district of the city, The Rocks, which lay in the shadow of the world-famous Sydney Harbour Bridge, directly opposite the Opera House. The community was quite famous for its old pubs and rather expensive restaurants and hotels. It also roped in a large number of Tourists, thanks to the open-air markets held there most weekends, so odd visitors were not entirely uncommon. And a good thing too, as the residents of the Rocks will tell you, because it was not uncommon to see very odd-looking people among the old Victorian style buildings.

Keeping to the shadows of the old colonial brick buildings, two cloaked figures stepped into a small cobbledstone alley off the side of the usually busy thoroughfare. Ignoring the entrance to the outdoor pedestrian shopping mall, the duo followed the lane to a sheer rock-cliff face. At the top of the cliff, numerous cars could be heard as they drove onto and off the Harbour Bridge. The dead-end alley was rather noticeable, as the cliff face was covered in greenery. Moss clung from the greyish red stone, and potted plants lined the sidewalk. The only light in the small alleyway came from two tall black lamp posts positioned at the end of the road, right in front of the cliff.

The duo walked down the cobbledstone street and stepped between the two lamp posts.

And then, as if by magic, a stone archway formed within the cliff face, the rock within the arch seemingly replaced by what could only be described as a shimmering transparent barrier. The archway itself was etched with odd writing. The first set of writing was in a series of symbols so worn by time none could tell what they said. The second set was clearly Latin, though anyone who attempted to translate the writing would find that it matched the third inscription, which read in
The two figures, paying no heed to the inscription, stepped through the arch, and into a giant underground cavern that seemed far larger on the inside than on the outside. The road the pair found themselves on was not dissimilar to the alleyway outside. It was lined with shops, though these shops had odd names like Eldritch Wand-Makers or Adeneurs Wizardwear Superstore. The buildings all seemed to be old fashioned, though in some cases they, like the cavern itself, looked to be larger on the inside than the outside. This road as well was seemingly deserted, due to the late time of night.

At the end of the street, however, the similarities ended. In the middle of a large circle, where Hallows Street crossed with another, larger road, was a great bonfire that cast flickering shadows through the entire cavern. Above it, floating unassisted was a large rotating banner flashing headlines that made absolutely no sense. “Basilisk Slain at Hogwarts by twelve-year-old Harry Potter after Dumbledore removed from school!” “ICW Launching Inquiry into Statute of Secrecy breach in Brazil!” and “Dwarven Miners hit motherloade in Grampians,” being just some of the strange messages.

The pair walked down the cobbled street, their boots making no sound on the stone as they approached a sprawling three-story wooden building with a sign out the front that depicted a blue insect with wings on its head. Beneath it was scrawled the words, ‘The Floating Billywig.’

They stepped inside and pulled down their hoods. The taller of the two was a boy of about sixteen-seventeen years of age with black spiky hair, brown eyes and a scar that looked quite fresh cutting across his face. The other was a girl, perhaps a year younger than her companion, with long golden hair accented by red highlights.

Despite their ages, they walked towards a table near the back of the bar, where a man wearing blue robes and a red cloak was sitting, nursing a tankard of Dwarven Ale.

The man put down his ale and stared at the new-comers. A small pop ran through the relatively quiet pub, and a little creature with wide eyes and long floppy ears appeared before them.

“Welcome to the Floating Billywig Bar and Inn. How can Mirty be of service to yous?”

“Can we get two tankards of Butterbeer please?” the girl asked. The House Elf nodded and vanished. Two pops later, and two tankards of golden liquid were now sitting on the table in front of them.

“You already know the topic,” Miss Mayfair said, sipping at her drink, “Harry Potter.”

“Ah yes. I heard from Albus this morning. The Gemini Rune, perfectly formed, upon both Potter and the girl he saved. Albus was completely stumped as to how it came to be. He fears some retribution of Voldemort’s.”

“Bull shit,” Mr O’Neill muttered, rolling his eyes, “Voldemort’s dead, killed by his own backfiring curse years ago. Everyone knows that. We might not’ve been overly affected down here, but any excuse to celebrate you know.”

Doctor Strange sighed, “I’m afraid that’s not entirely true.”
The couple exchanged a worried glance.

“How? How could he survive the Killing Curse?” Miss Mayfair asked, “the same way Potter did?”

The Doctor shook his head, “No. Albus has been investigating it since the day he was defeated but could not turn up any leads. Until today.” He reached into his pocket and withdrew a green covered muggle-book with a large hole in the centre as if it had been burnt, or eaten away by acid. He dropped it on the table and slid it across to the teens. O’Neill ran a hand over the book, and a golden aura manifested itself around his hand, then the book began glowing a filthy black colour, and he jerked his hand back. The auras died away, leaving only a simple book, and the looks of disgust and fear on Mr O’Neill and Miss Mayfair’s faces.

“That has to be the darkest object I have ever seen,” O’Neill whispered, grabbing Mayfair’s hand beneath the table, “Where did you find it?”

“I didn’t. Albus did. In the possession of the very girl whose life Harry Potter saved. It was she who was opening the Chamber of Secrets, under the influence of this Diary, which seemingly contained the memory of a sixteen-year-old Voldemort.”

Miss Mayfair gulped, “That poor girl.”

“Albus did an examination, and although the damage from the Basilisk Fang leaves considerable doubt as to whether we are actually correct in our evaluations, he believes, and I agree, that the Diary was most likely a Horcrux.”

The teens’ faces went white, and Miss Mayfair bit her lip, while Mr O’Neill ran a hand over the tattoo of a black dragon breathing a red phoenix wreathed in flame on his arm.

“Well, that’s just wonderful.”

Strange placed the book back in his pocket, “we don’t know how many there are out there. Albus is already planning to visit Horace Slughorn, Riddle’s old teacher, to see if he knows anything as to what the objects could be or how many there are. Until they’re destroyed, Voldemort’s spirit will remain intact. We’ve had some debate as to whether Voldemort needs to be in an actual body before he’s killed, but more research needs to be done before any plans are made. My spies say he remains deep in the forests of Albania.”

“But this is not the reason for your calling me here, what do you need?”

O’Neill took a deep breath, temporarily banishing the thought of Horcruxes from his mind, and began his tale.

“I was summoned to the Library of Worlds this afternoon. There’s been a new bestowal.”

Strange’s mouth fell open slightly. “Two in as many years! Incredible! Who is it?”

“Harry Potter,” Miss Mayfair said. If it was possible, Strange’s jaw dropped even further.

“Albus didn’t say anything…”

O’Neill shrugged, “and Potter didn’t show up to the Library from the summoning portkey that the Council sent. So, either he hasn’t received it…”

“Or Dumbledore has kept it from him somehow,” Mayfair finished. Strange regained his composure and ran a hand through his beard.
“If he’s hidden the letter from him, and not divulged anything to me, he plans to keep it secret for a good long while,” he said at length.

“It won’t work. The Rune responds to threats, no matter what Albus does. Plus, it boosts the bearer beyond peak human condition. His strength, reaction time and magical power will all noticeably increase. He obviously won’t be anywhere near us, he doesn’t hold the Dragon Force after all, but it will still be noticeable.”

“I’ll ask Albus what he intends to do. I still disagree with his decision not to tell the boy the Prophecy, but I promised to respect his wishes on the matter. But this…” Strange trailed off.

“We’ll keep an eye out for anything that might help you with your Horcrux hunt,” O’Neill said, standing up, “and let us know what Dumbledore intends to do about the Council of Fire. If he doesn’t tell him, I will.”

The couple made to leave, then Miss Mayfair stopped suddenly, her hand reaching for her neck, where the faint refraction of light showed a Glamour Charm, “He’s not telling them about the Gemini Rune, is he?”

The Doctor smiled, “No. I made sure to tell him not to interfere. They must discover its true-purpose themselves.”

“Good.” The two teens left the bar, and two simultaneous ‘CRACKS!!’ echoed from outside. Doctor Strange leaned back on the bench and took another sip of his Ale. A smirk crossed his face when he realised, they had left him to pay for the drinks.

“Teenagers,” he grumbled, before reaching into his pocket for the pen-turned-portkey that would take him back to the United States. Then he felt it. A faint vibration coming from the Eye-of Agamotto hidden beneath his shirt. He took a deep breath and slipped his wand from within his robes.

“I know you are there. You have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide.” The very air seemed to give a depressed sigh, and a woman with red hair, dressed in white and gold robes, materialised leaning on the table in front of him.

“Nothing much gets past the Sorcerer Supreme does it?” the woman whispered, twirling a silver wand in her hand.

“You would know, Clara Hunter.”

The woman gave a tired smile, “that I would.”

“Why the Potter boy? I may not know the Ascended Rule Book as well as some, but I know enough. You broke the Accords to bestow that power upon him. No interference. Those are the rules.”

“Shhh! Do you want the others to hear you?” She snapped, looking around wildly, despite the pub being empty. Then she sighed.

“I know, Strange. Trust me I know. I’m only allowed to bestow the Firebrand upon one worthy soul every hundred years. The Multiversity is going to be on my ass when they find out. But screw them… I couldn’t just let Harry Potter die.”

Strange frowned, “How bad is it out there?”
“The Story-Machine was damaged badly this time. The Conflict Force is leaking out into the Orrery, and residue from the Dark Multiverse has been scattered across the cosmos. I’m not sure we can fix it. I fear what the next catastrophe will bring.” Then she stood up and brushed off her robes.

“You will not see me again, Stephen.” Strange bowed to her, and the deity vanished as if she were never there.

Harry woke up in an unfamiliar bed. However, this was not a particularly bad thing, as a very familiar body was lying curled up against him, breathing softly into his chest. Harry would have been perfectly happy to stay like this for a good long while. Unfortunately, there were three problems with this. One, there was a rather annoying alarm ringing out from somewhere beyond Harry’s closed eyes. Two, he really needed to pee. Three, he was, most assuredly, naked.

Cracking his eyes slightly, he realised he did actually know where he was. The walls were a cool green colour, and a large window looked out over a series of sprawling silver towers.

Smiling down at the gorgeous redhead still nestled against his side, Harry threw back the covers and slipped out of the sheets. Ginny pouted in her sleep at the loss of contact and pulled the blankets back up over her equally naked form. Harry tried not to look. He really did. But she was lying right in front of him, and he could quite clearly see her budding breasts.

Gulping hard, he turned around so he couldn’t see her, and took a deep breath. He grabbed his wand, which was somehow on the bedside table, and cast a silencing charm to shut off that annoying alarm. Then he looked around and took inventory of the room. It was the same yet different to the last time he was in here. The bedroom was a great deal larger, and the bed, which before had been a small single with a single pillow that looked slightly worse for wear, was now easily queen sized with a mahogany headboard depicting a man with short messy hair and a girl with long hair chasing a Snitch on a broomstick. It was not exactly hard to figure out who they were. The walls were the same green, but there were fewer posters. Instead, several photo frames hung on the walls. Some with pictures of Harry and Ginny together, others on their own, some with their friends and family, and even a photo of his parents. Harry’s Firebolt was leaning against a chest of drawers that looked suspiciously like the one opposite his bed in Gryffindor Tower.

Dismissing this for now, he crossed the room to a silver door that opened into a large, immaculate bathroom as he approached. Relieving himself, he stepped back into the bedroom and crossed to the dresser, where he quickly pulled some muggle clothes on. Then, thinking that he really should do something about that alarm, he moved over to the bed and knelt next to Ginny’s sleeping form.

“Gin,” Harry whispered.

“Five more minutes,” She moaned, pulling her pillow closer. The sheets fell away slightly, but Harry, with no small degree of effort, forced himself to keep his attention on her face.

“Ginny, It’s Harry. You need to wake up…” Ginny cracked an eye.

“Why?” she whispered sleepily.

“Because of this.” He flicked his wand, and the alarm began ringing through the room again.

“Alert! Alert! Breach in the Detention Level! Alert! Alert!”
Ginny sighed. “Yeah, that does seem like a reason.” She yawned, and Harry had to admit he loved the dimples that creased her cheeks for a few brief moments. “Not a good reason. But still, a reason.”

Then she frowned and pulled a hand from beneath the sheets to wipe her eyes.

“Harry?”

“Yeah?”

“Am I naked?”

Harry blushed beet red, “You are yes.”

She bit her lip and stared up at him.

“And you woke up next to me?”

Harry was started to panic slightly at this point.

“Yes, I did.”

Ginny, in her drowsy state, seemed to ponder this for a moment.

“And you were naked too?”

“That’s right.” Harry, deciding it might be best to step away, moved over to the dresser and pulled out a shirt and jeans for Ginny. His blush got even worse when he pulled out her bra and knickers. He placed them on the bed, still trying desperately to avoid both her eyes and her breasts, which were still highly visible.

“You do realise if you were anyone else, you’d have Bat-Bogies flying out of your nose by now don’t you?” Harry just nodded his head very fast. This was not a very good idea, as it meant his gaze latched onto her… assets… again. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to think of anything but the beautiful witch lying right next to him. Snape in a dress… She wasn’t actually helping here, as she had made no move to even cover herself.

“Relax Harry. I don’t bite. Well… only if you want me to.” Harry’s eyes shot open, and his eyebrows went in search of his hairline. Ginny was staring at him with a shit-eating grin.

“You are not helping. At all,” He told her pointedly.

“I know,” she purred. Then she threw back the covers and Harry’s squeezed his eyes shut once more, but not before he got a rather good look at something he shouldn’t have that made his blood run even hotter than it already was. A part of his brain wondered why the Gemini Rune didn’t seem bothered by this at all, the rest of it was trying not to focus on the rather good image of Ginny’s nether regions he had just received to care.

“You can open your eyes now.” Harry opened his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief.

“I am going to need a very cold shower.”

Ginny just laughed at him.

“Just so you know… you’re one great kisser.”

Harry dissolved into repeated stuttering, his cheeks reaching a shade of Weasley red that even Ron
The duo stepped out of the bedroom, and the wooden door closed behind them. They were standing in a hallway with dark blue walls. The left side was a large transparent window that looked out over the City. It was sunset, and the glow of the last rays of light had turned the ocean a deep pink colour.

“It’s beautiful,” Ginny whispered.

“Yeah, it is,” Harry said, taking her hand. How it had got there, he wasn’t sure, but the infinity bracelet was still on her wrist.

“Come on. We need to figure out what’s going on.” Ginny followed Harry down the hallway, where they emerged inside the large control room. The portal stood on its ramp in the centre of the room, silent and unassuming, but the alarm continued to ring. The pair rushed up the stairs and stepped cautiously into the adjacent room, the one with the machines.

There were three desks. One was a circular table with the same Runes visible on the ring etched onto large transparent triangular shaped buttons surrounding a large blue half-sphere. The second was short and rectangular. It had a keyboard with writing neither of them could understand, and a large synthetic screen that floated unassisted above it. The final desk was long and curved around a slightly elevated platform behind the other two. This one had several dozen buttons and levers of various shapes and sizes, but the thing they did understand was a screen within the desk itself. A screen that displayed a map of the city.

The city itself was shaped like a snowflake, with dozens of roads, parks and towers spread across the six piers, although they weren’t laid out in the same way. Some of the buildings, presumably the important ones, had labels next to them, but the writing was in the same dialect as the keyboard, and they had no idea what they said. The language itself seemed to be a collection of characters, each containing a number of lines and boxes. A second map showed the interior of the tower and its 100 levels. It was here they had some luck.

“Hey Gin, take a look at this,” Harry said, pointing to the writing along the second map. Next to each level was a series of one or two characters.

“Numbers…” She said, “Look here. They’re clearly going in ascending order.”

She was right. With every increase in floor going up the tower, an extra box was added to the character opposite. When the character reached nine boxes and no lines, a second was added, and the first went back to one box.

“Well at least we figured that out,” Harry said.

The 14th level, near the base of the tower, was flashing red.

“That must be the Detention Level,” Ginny reasoned.

“The question is, how do we get down there?” Harry asked dryly.
“Well don’t look at me? At least you grew up in a Muggle House.”

“Yes, watching Dudley from afar was a great way to learn about… whatever the hell these are,” Harry snapped.

Ginny stared at him.

“Sorry.”

Suddenly, a brilliant blue and bronze phoenix flew into the room, filling the tower with song. They watched as the Phoenix flew to a red metal door behind them and perched on the railing overlooking the portal room below. It gestured with its head towards the door, which slid open as if on command, a series of buttons lit up as the door opened, and another screen with a map of the city glowed on the wall.

Harry stepped forward warily and grinned.

“It’s an elevator!” He exclaimed. He ran his hands over the buttons, searching for the number fourteen.

“I’ve found the Detention Level…” then he paused, “which level is this again?” Ginny turned back the map.

“Ninety-Five.” She said, before following him inside. The phoenix burst into flames and vanished, its job done. The door slid closed, and Harry pressed the button. A white light filled the room, before vanishing. The doors slid open again, and a narrow, pitch-black hallway greeted them.

“Ok. Detention Level.”

Harry and Ginny pulled out their wands and cast a Lumos charm, filling the corridor with light, and ambled down the hall. The walls were the same blue as at the top of the tower; however, the air was musty, as if it were ancient and stale, and the very space seemed to vibrate with a sense of ominous dread.

“Alert! Alert! Breach in the Detention Level! Alert! Alert!”

“What does it mean by Breach?” Harry whispered. He wasn’t entirely sure why he whispered, it just felt right not to disturb the unnatural silence of the dark hall.

“Detention Level. It could mean some sort of dungeon. Maybe something got out?” She replied, also whispering.

“But this is all in our heads? What could have possibly gotten out?”

Harry stopped dead, answering his own question. There was one thing he had locked up in his head he never wanted to get out.

They had reached the end of the corridor. Confused at why Harry had stopped, Ginny continued, shinning her wand light into the space. The hallway opened onto a large room shrouded in darkness. Directly in front of them was a cell. A cell with a broken door. She edged closer, ignoring the heightening sense of fear and dread emanating from within, and peeked inside. Floating in the centre of the cell was a pitch-black cloud, like the foulest smoke from a Muggle factory.

“Ginny be careful!” Harry called, moving forward as well, though much more hesitantly than Ginny had. The smoke was coming from something in the cell.
“Evanesco,” she said. The black smoke vanished, and Harry seemed to breathe a great sigh of relief. Ignoring him for the moment, she continued forward. A large crack was visible in the floor now. That was where the darkness was coming from. Already it was beginning to leak back into the room. But there was no denying what it was. The crack was clearly in the shape of a lightning bolt. Identical to Harry’s scar.

“I think I know what this is,” Ginny said, crouching down to investigate a white object lying next to the crack on the ground. She pointed her wand closer to get a look and recoiled in shock. Harry was beside her in a second.

“What?”

“This is your scar. It’s your connection to Voldemort. You were keeping it locked up in your head. Deep in the recesses of your mind. But the door was broken, and it was leaking out. That’s why the hallway is so dark. It’s poisoning your mind, Harry.” Harry fell down on his backside with a yelp.

“I wonder how far it goes?” she whispered. She stood up and flicked her wand.

“Lumos Maxima!”

The room lit up in a bright flash of light, and several other cages became visible. Each cell containing one of Harry and Ginny’s biggest nightmares. Right next door was the pale figure of Voldemort himself, then one over was the teenage Tom Riddle, fuming and berating himself over something. Another block contained the Basilisk, another Harry’s Mum and Dad, blaming him for their murders, and one even had Hermione, Ginny, Sirius, Ron, Luna, Matt, Remus, Jessica, Luke, Danny, Tonks and all of Ginny’s family dead on the floor. Fortunately, the memories and fears seemingly couldn’t see them.

“I think this is our head, Gin. You’re in here too, and I’m pretty sure that one’s yours.” Harry was pointing to a cell opposite the one broken one. Harry was lying dead on the floor, a sobbing Ginny kneeling beside him.

“Please… I’m not worth it… he’s so much better than me… I’m just a stupid girl who trusted someone she shouldn’t, please bring him back…”

“This is where we hide our nightmares,” she admitted, “and that is undoubtedly my worst one.”

Harry stood and pulled her into his arms.

“You know the Diary wasn’t your fault Ginny. And you’re a better person than I could ever hope to be. Without you, I’d probably be brooding and moping around all the time. If I had a choice, I would have gladly given up my life for yours in the Chamber. Now? I’d do it without a seconds hesitation.”

Ginny honestly couldn’t come up with a response to that, and flatly ignored the cell containing a scrawny Harry covered in bruises sitting in a cupboard telling himself he was a worthless freak that nobody wanted. It was one of the closest to the scar.

“This is revolting,” Harry said finally.

“Not as revolting as this.” Ginny broke away and leaned back down into the smoke, which had almost covered the entire cell once more. She grabbed hold of the white object and lifted it out for Harry to see.

It was a skull, with gleaming emerald eyes. A snake was slithering within its mouth.
“You’ve got me there,” Harry said flatly.

“This must be what’s attracting the smoke. Look how it’s rising up towards it.” She was right. Now that she had lifted the skull off the floor, the black smoke was gathering around her legs, trying to creep up to the rather disgusting thing.

“What is it do you think?”

Ginny bit her lip, “I’m not sure. Didn’t Dumbledore say he transferred some of his powers to you when he tried to kill you?”

“Yeah. It’s why I can speak Parseltongue and can sense when Voldemort’s nearby.”

“And it causes pain right?”

Harry shrugged. “I guess so. I don’t really notice it, except when he’s really close by. The last time it hurt badly was when I fought Quirrell for the Philosophers Stone.”

“What if… and I’m going out on a limb here… but what if this is a bit of him? And that’s why your scar keeps hurting. That’s why this scar, why all this blackness, is here.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair, thinking it over.

“I don’t know. It’s the only hypothesis we’ve got, and it makes sense, I guess. I mean, if I were Voldemort, I’d want those powers back. And if it is causing the scar pain, creating a link between him and me, maybe…” Harry trailed off and grabbed the skull from Ginny’s hand. Then he knelt down by the scar. Ginny followed suit and whispered the Vanishing Spell again. The smoke vanished once more, revealing the sickly gash in the floor.

“Maybe we can get rid of it? Forcibly eject it from my mind. Cut the connection at the source.”

Harry dipped a hand into the scar and yelped, jerking it back rapidly and shaking it wildly in the air.

“Whatever’s down there isn’t nice.” He said, sucking on his fingers as if burned.

“Are you alright?”

“Fine. I’d wager my vault that on the other side of that scar is Voldemort’s mind. That’s what the smoke is. It’s his negative emotions. His black thoughts. And they’re fuelling our nightmares.”

Harry’s face broke into a determined grin, and he grabbed the snake, yanking it out of the skull’s mouth. The snake hissed but didn’t attempt to attack him.

“What are you doing?”

“Voldemort can have his skull back, but I’m keeping Parseltongue. Who knows when that could come in handy again.” Then he stood up and dropped the skull straight through the crack in the ground. A blast of green light shot out of the crack, followed by a piercing scream that could only be Voldemort himself. Harry and Ginny covered their ears and watched in awe as the black smoke receded back into the scar tissue. The feeling of dread permeating the room instantly lifted and all the lights flicked on at once, bathing the entire space in warm light. The alarms shut off, and all the nightmares seemed to start wreathing in pain. The cell bars on each cage started glowing with blue light, and many of the occupants leaning against them were shocked, forcing them into the middle of the tiny square.

“Looks like Tom won’t be feeding our fears anymore,” Harry announced proudly, grabbing Ginny and pulling her close to him, eliciting more butterflies in her stomach – and in other places, thinking
back to this morning. The scar on the floor, once large and painful to look at, had sealed, leaving a thin white line in the shape of a lightning bolt carved into the floor.

“One more addition,” Ginny whispered. Then she pointed her wand at the cell, and said, “Reparo.”

The crack vanished, and the cell door restored itself, the blue lights flashing on to show it was active once more.

Harry spun her in his arms, so his arms were around her waist. She snaked hers around his neck and smiled.

“I love you,” he whispered, placing his forehead against hers, “I’m free. Free of him at last. Thanks to you.”

“We’re free,” She said, “never underestimate the power of true love’s kiss hey?”

“Oh yeah. Ready to go back and face the music?”

“You bet.” Then she pulled his head down to hers, and kissed him, as passionate as he did the night before. Tingles ran through every nerve in Ginny’s body, and fireworks lit in her brain. Golden light filled the hall, and the city evaporated before their eyes.

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**Harry Potter: Married??!!**

*By Rita Skeeter*

No, my avid readers. You did not read that headline incorrectly. Harry Potter – the Boy-Who-Lived – has gotten himself hitched before even coming of age!

On the night of Christmas, a grand Yule Ball was held at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to celebrate the Triwizard Tournament, and as a send-off to the three delegations, which depart for Alcheringa Academy in the Federation on January 2nd. But in the weeks prior to the Ball itself, this reporter has uncovered a mystery among the student populous. It started when Harry Potter refused to tell anyone who his date to the Ball was. Shrouded in mystery, many of the students attempted to discover who the lucky girl was, to no avail.

Then a series of mysterious packages began arriving for Ginny Weasley. (Previous issues printed her name wrong through no fault of mine. My editor has been fired.) Each package, according to Ginny’s friends Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot and Lavender Brown contained, “a present and a song lyric nobody recognised.” This sparked another mystery in Hogwarts, who was sending Ginny, a plain looking, and poor girl, such expensive gifts?

The reveal on the night shocked many. Harry and Ginny were attending the Ball together, and it was Harry who was sending the gifts. As many of my loyal readers will recognise, Ginny and Harry are long-time friends and even carry the mark of the Gemini Curse between them. I, of course, speculated that Ginny was perhaps using the curse to bind herself to Harry. Whether this is true remains in doubt, but it is obvious that Harry is clearly smitten with the girl. He even wrote a song and had the Weird Sisters themselves play it at the Ball for her.

It was at the end of this song, called “Enchanted,” (The Weird Sisters refused to provide me with the
actual lyrics, as they were “not their property.”) that the young couple kissed in the middle of the hall. The witnesses I spoke to described, “a bright golden light that made you feel giddy inside just looking at it,” enveloped the couple. The light appears to be highly magical in nature, and a power of the Gemini Curse. This light, whatever it was, has bonded the two individuals together in the most divine of ways. A soul-bond! You heard me correctly ladies. A real soul-bond, as seen in the fairy tales we grew up with as children. The Department of Mysteries in the Ministry of Magic, which seemingly has the ability to track the formation of Soul-Bonds, confirmed this the morning after the event occurred in a statement.

“Mr Harry Potter and Mrs Ginny Potter did bond through the powers of a Soul-Bond. This leaves them married and tied together for all eternity. The Department of Mysteries would like to wish the Potters congratulations on the completion of this rare ritual, and, should they wish to have the process studied, we would be more than happy to conduct experimentation.”

Whether this was the pair’s intention or not, the fact remains, they are married. A friend of both the Potters, Miss Hermione Granger told me that, “Harry and Ginny truly love each other, so you should back off and leave them alone.” Other Hogwarts students close to the group confirmed that the couple were exceptionally close long before the magical marriage and were often seen together in various locations across the school.

Sorry ladies. It looks like Harry Potter is off the market for now. I just hope that Harry hasn’t been coerced into this. Though the evidence seems to say their love is true, who knows what the reality is.

Harry and Ginny Potter remain in St Mungo’s unconscious for unexplainable reasons, most likely due to the Soul Bond. For more on the new Mrs Potter, see page 2. For what little information exists on Soul-Bonds, see page 4.

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Kraken almost Destroys Hong Kong – Mass Obliviations in progress – Will O’Neill Missing!

By Davis McAllister

In the early hours of the morning British time, a giant Kraken was sighted off the coast of Hong Kong. The Chinese Muggle Government seemed to have detected the creature using a technology called ‘radar’ and were sending their mechanical warships to investigate. The Chinese Department of Magic were unaware of the situation and unable to intervene before the disaster struck. The Muggles attacked the Kraken, which then proceeded to destroy the muggle ship. Aggravated and wounded, the Kraken went on the offensive, causing significant damage to districts of the island near the ocean.

Fortunately, Will O’Neill, the legendary Druid responsible for preventing a meteor from crashing into the Mt Kilauea two years ago, saving millions of Muggle and Magical lives in the Hawaiian Islands in the process, arrived at the scene and battled the Kraken to a standstill, preventing mass damage and breach of the Statute of Secrecy.

The Chinese Department of Magic is working tirelessly to Obliviate any Muggles who witnessed the event, and the ICW is overseeing to prevent another disaster like the Kaiju Incident in Japan in 1952, where several Muggle’s were not obliviated, sparking several Muggle Movies about the
As of right now, the location of Will O’Neill is unknown. He has not been seen since his duel with the sea monster. Sorcerer Supreme Stephen Strange is on sight to help in the search. Hopefully, Mr O’Neill’s actions have not cost him his life today.
“Harry!” he breathed, “You’re awake! What are you doing out of bed!”

“I just woke up. I feel fine. Spectacular actually. Is Ginny in there?”

Bill’s mouth opened and closed several times. Harry rolled his eyes and walked into the room.

“Harry! I wouldn’t go…”

It was exactly the same as his room, only Ginny and her mother were standing in this one. And there was a great deal of screaming going on.

“MY DAUGHTER! A SCARLET WOMAN! I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU’D GO AND DO THIS!!!”

“SCARLET WOMAN!! SCARLET WOMAN!! DON’T YOU OF ALL PEOPLE CALL ME A FUCKING SCARLET WOMAN!!”

“DON’T YOU DARE USE THAT LANGUAGE INFRONT OF ME YOUNG LADY!!”

“I’LL USE WHATEVER LANGUAGE I BLOODY LIKE UNTIL YOU CALM THE FUCK DOWN AND TELL ME WHAT EXACTLY YOU’RE HAVING A SPAZ ATTACK ABOUT IN THE FIRST PLACE!!!”

“YOU DISRESPECTFUL LITTLE GIRL!!! WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DAUGHTER I RAISED WHO RESPECTED HER ELDERS AND KNEW NOT TO GO SLEEPING WITH AND MARRYING BOYS BEFORE YOU WERE FIFTY!!!”

By this point, Harry decided his ears were ringing so badly it didn’t matter what he did to stop the screeching. He just needed to end it.

“EVERYBODY SHUT UP!!!!” He yelled. Molly and Ginny spun around to face him, and Ginny’s face lit up at the sight of him. The sizzling rage emanating from the rune vanished, replaced by a giddy, dizzying aura – like getting into a bed with freshly washed sheets. He felt a rush of happiness course through his mind, and this time he was sure it came from the rune.

“Let’s everyone take some deep breathes. We’ve been unconscious for who knows how long. We don’t know what’s going on. Maybe if someone can tell us, we could offer an explanation.”

Mrs Weasley looked like she had blown a gasket, and smoke issuing from her ears would not have been entirely surprising.

“Harry, Ginny, you’ve been unconscious since the Yule Ball two days ago. We’re in St Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, you were transferred here yesterday morning,” Bill said, stepping into the room awkwardly.

“What happened?” Ginny asked.

“No one’s really sure. You kissed at the Yule Ball, there was an explosion of bright light, and you two passed out.”

Bill reached up and scratched his hair, which was still tied in its customary ponytail.

“Look, guys… there’s no easy way to tell you this… but I’ve been lying to you. Ever since Ginny visited me in Egypt.” Harry frowned, confused. Ginny and Molly both seemed similarly
“A day before you arrived, Charlie and I received a visitor. She told us exactly what your situation was, and what the most likely end result would be. She also warned us that under no circumstances could we tell you what it meant. You had to discover it yourselves; otherwise, the process would be corrupted. She knew that I would figure it out, being a curse breaker and everything. I turned you onto the right track, by telling you that Dumbledore lied but... I couldn’t say anything else.”

Harry clenched his fist behind his back.

“What most likely end result?”

Bill opened his mouth to reply, but it was not him that spoke.

“The Firebrand of the Council of Fire is bestowed upon one individual every century. It is gifted only to a worthy soul with a greater destiny, willing to sacrifice their life for someone else’s. But on its own, the Firebrand contains too much-unbridled energy. It would burn the soul to cinders. That’s where the Gemini Rune comes in. By sharing the brand between two souls, the power is balanced. All the benefits, none of the side-effects. But the sheer amount of power, of magic, moving between the two souls forces them together. That is the burning sensation you felt upon getting closer. It was the feeling of your two souls trying to come together to create, in the words of my late-uncle-in-law, a Soulbond.”

It was a girl with golden hair, accented by red highlights running through it to give the appearance of flickering flames. It was almost the opposite of Ginny’s hair if he was honest. She had sparkling green eyes, not unlike his own, and wore faded jeans and a Bon-Jovi t-shirt that hung off one shoulder. If he had to guess, he’d say she was eighteen or so.

He recognised her instantly of course. It was the Alcheringa Seeker, Clarissa… something. He couldn’t recall her last name. But she was good. Really good. Easily as good as he was, probably better. He remembered feeling very anxious when he saw her fly. There was no guarantee of a win by Seeker in that match.

“And who are you?” Molly asked, seemingly controlling her rage now that someone else was in the room.

“My name is Clarissa Mayfair. Or it was. Before this…” The girl waved her hand over her neck, and the skin shimmered slightly, before a rune of solid gold, two horizontal lines on two curved vertical lines, materialised in the exact same spot Harry and Ginny’s were. “Now, my name is Clarissa O’Neill, though no one actually knows that yet, except Claire, and now you.”

Ginny gasped, seemingly making some connection that was still beyond Harry.

“Did you do this to us?” Harry asked, his voice low and venomous.

“No. The Herald did,” she stated simply as if this was obvious.

“The Herald?”

“Yes. The Herald of the Council of Fire. She who chooses upon who the Firebrand is bestowed.”

Clarissa snapped her fingers, and suddenly the Dragon and Phoenix icon became visible on his arm for the first time without any accompanying pain or threatening situation.

“I’m sorry. You should have already known what the Firebrand was. You should have been bamboozled.
summoned to the Library as soon as you received it.”

“The Library? Herald? Summoned? Who are you?”

“She’s Will O’Neill’s wife, Harry,” Ginny explained, jumping off her bed and ignoring her mother’s protests as she moved to stand beside him.

“Wife? But you’re still in school. And he’s like ten years older than you.”

“No he isn’t,” Ginny said, her eyes sparkling, “He’s been altering his appearance. Remember what Hermione said at the beginning of term? About what the Druids can do?”

Harry did remember.

“However, due to their understanding of the natural environment, Druids are far more powerful than the average Witch or Wizard, and their spells more efficient. A simple combustion spell can create an explosion twice as strong as the most powerful Detonator Curse. They can use gravity to fly, reconfigure their atomic structure to appear younger, and their magic does not impact negatively on electrical equipment.”

“So, he’s what, eighteen?” Harry asked, very confused.

“Nineteen actually. He graduated from the Academy in October of this year. He’s been masquerading as a thirty-something-year-old since we got here. None of you lot would have taken him seriously if he didn’t. Most of you still don’t, like Snape. Guess stopping a volcano from killing millions wasn’t enough, hey. Heavens forbid you to know that I actually helped him.”

“Enough!” Mrs Weasley shouted, her entire body trembling, “Stop whatever charade is going on right now! Will O’Neill is a legend! You’re a school girl! If you have answers as to how my daughter has been turned into a whore, then tell them or…” Harry’s wand was on her the second the word slipped from her mouth. A quick reductor blasted her back into the wall, where she ended up sitting rather shocked on the floor.

“Never, call Ginny that word ever again.” Then he spun back to Clarissa and Bill, who looked rather impressed by Harry’s reaction time.

“What is up with her anyway. She didn’t actually tell me what I did during her whole rant,” Ginny asked, showing no remorse for her dazed mother.

“The completion of the Soulbond-by-Gemini Rune created a magical marriage between the two of you. And the entire Wizarding World knows. Dad says Mum’s been reading those Rita Skeeter articles like they’re gospel, and she’s been in a right tizzy about it. Although, if this lovely lady hadn’t warned me, I’d probably be a bit confused as well,” Bill said. Harry turned to Ginny, who was staring at him with an expression of total shock on her face.

Married? They were married!? Harry gulped. No wonder Mrs Weasley was mad.

“Harry… are you… ok with this?” Ginny asked hesitantly. He could feel her distress, her fear that he would panic and hate her. He didn’t know how he knew, but he did. The Gemini Rune was ice cold.

He didn’t even hesitate, “Of course! Remember what I told you last night, err two nights ago? Of course, I’m ok with it! Sure, it’s a bit sooner than I’d like, or I’m sure you’d like, but it’s not as if we weren’t headed that way anyway.”

Ginny’s anxious expression faded into one of amazement.
He was really going to ask me to marry him…

Harry’s jaw dropped open. She hadn’t moved her lips. But he had heard her voice.

Ginny? He tried attempting to push the thought to the same place he could sense her feelings coming from, to the Gemini Rune. The rune blazed with fiery passion, and Ginny’s eyes flew wide open, her jaw going slack.

Harry? Can you hear me?

Yeah.

What’s happening to us?

“Oh good. You’re already experiencing the side effects,” Clarissa said happily. Then she turned her wrist and looked at her watch. The watch itself was gorgeous, a Tag Heuer, but that wasn’t what Harry’s eyes were fixed on. Hidden beneath the watch face, only visible if you knew what to look for, was a black ink marking. An isosceles triangle, with two horizontal arms extending away from two of the triangles points parallel to each other. The bottom arm then went up towards the upper arm at a 45-degree angle, before bending again and running parallel for another centimetre.

Libra… Ginny’s voice said in Harry’s mind.

“Telepathy is one of the powers you’ll develop, not to mention the whole sharing feelings thing. Good luck with PMS, Harry. Now, I would love to stay and chat away, but Will is still somewhere inside the gullet of a Kraken, and I’m going to have to go and help Stephen fish him out it seems. Also, Dumbledore is ten seconds from the door. See you at the Library, Potters!” Clarissa gave the two baffled teens a dazzling smile, then burst into a cloud of golden dust.

“These Druids are going to kill me…” Harry muttered, as Bill just stood in a state of shock.

Dumbledore, Mr Weasley and Sirius rounded the corner and stared into the room. Arthur’s eyes instantly went to Molly, who was seemingly still trying to stand up on the other side of the room. Sirius looked to Harry, concern written all over his face. Harry gave him a nod so as to say, “all okay,” and the Animagus breathed a sigh of relief closing his eyes in what might have been a silent prayer. Dumbledore looked like he had aged quite significantly.

“Well, I did want to be here when you woke up to stave off Molly’s… well, Mollyness. I did leave Bill to guard the fort,” Arthur said apologetically, before crossing the room to his wife.

“Fat lot of good you were,” Ginny said, staring at her brother.

“You’re the one that got married before you finished puberty, Squirt,” Bill said as if it wasn’t his problem.

“Well,” Dumbledore said brightly, “may I be the first to congratulate you on your recent nuptials, Mr and Mrs Potter.”

And it was that moment that Mrs Weasley decided to start shouting again. Harry was going to need a hang-over potion before this was over.
Harry and Ginny dropped down onto the couch in the Home incredibly worse for wear. They hadn’t had a chance to sleep in almost 24 hours. First, Mrs Weasley had ranted at them for a good solid hour before Sirius finally got pissed enough to stun her. Then he’d merely stated that he’d known this was going to happen. Ginny had smacked him at that point, and Padfoot had just laughed something about Potters and redheads. Mr Weasley had apologised for his wife’s behaviour, but it did nothing for Ginny, who was incredibly mad at her. Then they’d had to take a trip to Gringotts, all the while avoiding the press, who were practically trying to molest them into submission. Harry was never more famous than he was now, and the worst thing was that Ginny was much more inclined to hex the paparazzi than he was. Griphook had congratulated them and informed them of Ginny’s upgraded status, but thanks to the Gemini Rune, she had already been added to his accounts, so no new wards needed to be constructed. He then gave Harry the next batch of interesting fan-mail and sent them on their way.

“You two have had a busy week, haven’t you?” Sirius said, pulling a bottle of Butterbeer and handing it to the two exhausted teens.

“You don’t even know the half of it. We just came from Dumbledore’s office. He wanted to apologise…”

Earlier…

“Harry. Ginny. I want to say I am greatly sorry for lying to you about the Gemini Rune…” Dumbledore began, stroking Fawkes’ feathers.

“It’s ok Professor, Clarissa told us after we woke up. We understand why you couldn’t tell us. It would have been like pushing us into something we weren’t ready for. I don’t want to think about what might have happened,” Harry said. In truth, he was ok with the Headmaster lying about the Gemini Rune. He had a valid reason. What he wanted to know was why he had lied about the Firebrand. Or had he honestly not known?

“What we wanted to know, was why this was under a glamour charm?” Harry raised his arm and showing the Dragon and Phoenix tattoo. Dumbledore gasped upon seeing it, but Harry wasn’t fooled for a second. The Headmaster was a brilliant actor.

“There was a glamour charm?” He asked incredulously.

“Yeah. Clarissa removed it.” Ginny said, trying very hard to keep her voice neutral.
Remember, keep calm, stay focussed. You can do this. He told her mentally.

They were still getting used to this whole telepathic communication thing, but it was beneficial in situations like this. Ginny was not good at hiding her emotions, as Jessica frequently reminded her. At the thought of Jessica, Harry’s hand itched towards the magically protected piece of parchment now resting in his pocket.

Harry…

I’m fine. I just wish I’d never found out about the fan mail.

No, you don’t.

No. I don’t.

“Incredible. How could I have not noticed it?” He looked genuinely amazed, but Harry wasn’t going to let him off the hook.

Let’s throw him a bone.

“Clarissa said the charm was really powerful, and she wouldn’t have noticed it if she hadn’t known to look for it,” Ginny said.

Dumbledore frowned, “Hmm. I suppose that could explain it… but I still should have noticed it…”

“Whoever this Herald is must be an incredibly powerful person,” Harry supplied.

“Indeed. The Herald of the Council is a figure cloaked in mystery none have ever seen in the flesh. We have no way of knowing how powerful he or she, or even it, really is… I’ll have to ask Will and Clarissa more when they return…”

“So, Will isn’t dead then?” Harry asked. Dumbledore did know about the Council. He had confiscated their letter. But why?

“Oh yes,” Dumbledore said offhandedly, still stroking his beard in thought, “his Soulbond with Clarissa protects him from Death far more effectively than any means known to Wizardkind. My old friend Nicholas Flamel did significant research into the process. Neither half of a Soulbond can die while the other still lives. It’s almost like a Horcrux in that regard…” Dumbledore trailed off. No matter Harry’s prejudices against the man, he could tell the Headmaster was deep in his own mind, trying to connect something he alone knew.

Harry, we can’t die. Ginny said, an amazed tone to her mental voice. But Harry wasn’t focussing on that right now.

Do you know what a Horcrux is?

No. Why?

I think it’s important. I’ve heard the word before. In Ancient Runes and Lost Civilisations, I think. But I’d need to check again.

But why is it important?

Cause it’s got Dumbledore stumped. And that doesn’t bode well for us.

Horcrux. He was sure he’d read it, in the section on the Gemini Rune. It was one of the possible uses
of the rune on objects. And if Dumbledore was right, it had something to do with preserving life from death. Could it have to do with how Voldemort survived? Could he have used the Gemini Rune to make a Horcrux, whatever it was, to save himself from Death? He needed to ask Sirius and Remus. They’d know. If they didn’t, it would give Hermione a challenge.

Ginny was clearly more interested in the not dying part.

“Wait. We’re immortal?!”

Dumbledore broke out of his thoughts and frowned.

“Clarissa didn’t get that far?”

“Nope!”

Dumbledore smiled, the twinkle returning to his eyes.

“All matter and energy in the universe vibrates at its own natural frequency. Everything is in a constant state of motion. Even if you can’t see it with the naked eye. The Soulbond you now share because of the Gemini Rune, basically allows your souls to act in perfect vibrational harmony. You will be capable of conversing without speaking, feel the other’s emotions, translocate to one another, are magically married to one another, and, should one of you fall in battle, recall your other half from the jaws of death itself – so long as you’re both not killed at the same time of course. In essence, you share both your souls and the power that comes from that bond.”

Harry nodded along, but Ginny didn’t seem to understand at all.

“She doesn’t get it, sir. She doesn’t do Arithmancy, and she certainly didn’t do muggle science,” Harry said. Ginny gave him an appreciative glance.

“I see. Forgive me. I shall endeavour to explain it better.” Dumbledore pulled out his wand and conjured ten different coloured vibrating rubber balls floating in the air.

“Imagine, if you will, that each of these balls represents the soul of a person. Each is moving at its own speed, and each is a slightly different shape or colour to the others.” He flicked his wand, and a green ball and a red ball began to draw closer. Then the image of the Gemini Rune glowed on both balls.

“These two souls are the two of you. The Gemini Rune was acting as a force drawing you together, making you both acutely aware of your feelings for each other over time, much faster than if you had been left to your own devices. And now that the two souls have united…” the two balls touched, and changed colours to gleaming gold, and shifted to be precisely the same size and move at the same speed.

“… the two souls have become synchronised. This is what a Soulbond is. You are, for all intents and purposes, Soulmates.” Ginny nodded, but Harry could tell through their connection that she felt bad for having Dumbledore dumb it down for her.

The Headmaster vanished the balls and sat back in his seat.

“Now. Your marriage does present other issues. For one, you are entitled to use the private suites if you choose…”

“I think we’ll stay in Gryffindor Tower, for now, Professor. We’re… we’re not ready for that yet,”
Ginny said, blushing a brilliant shade of red.

“Of course. Know that, if you should wish it later on, you are welcome to begin using them at any time. Just ask Professor McGonagall.”

“You are also,” Dumbledore continued, “technically emancipated under magical law. This means that you no longer, legally have to live at your parents and guardian’s homes…”

“I don’t have to go back to the Dursleys?!” Harry exclaimed, beaming. He had to keep up the pretence that he was still staying at the Dursley’s over the summer. He had a feeling he knew where this was going.

“Legally speaking? No. But, the Blood Wards around the House will remain until you turn seventeen years of age. They are the most powerful protection known to magic…”

*Except hiding in another dimension. But you don’t need to know that.*

Ginny snickered in his mind.

“… and require you to stay within the house for a minimum period of four weeks a year to recharge. I would not send you back there unless there were any other choices, but the protection offered by the blood wards is too strong to pass up. Even Voldemort couldn’t break those wards.”

*Bet Will O’Neill could.*

*It’s a moot point anyway. I certainly didn’t go back there for four weeks this summer. The Wards should already be destroyed, and he hasn’t even thought to check. They could have been destroyed years ago.*

“Ok Professor. I understand. I don’t like it, but I understand.”

“Thank you, Harry. Now I understand you leave for Alcheringa in four days, I suggest you return to your dormitories to reunite with your friends and start packing,” Dumbledore said. Harry and Ginny had the headmaster farewell and left his office.

“So yeah. I have to go back to the Dursley’s,” Harry said with an exaggerated sigh.

“We should start a betting pool on how long it takes before he realises the wards are already gone,” Danny said, rolling his eyes.


“Sixth,” Jessica said, sliding her own galleon in.

“I’m going for seventh,” Danny said.

“Summer after Fourth year,” Luna said, adding her galleon.

“Why?”

“Just a feeling…”
“Either way,” Harry said, pulling the conversation back on track, “I want to know what a Horcrux is. If it is what snake-face used to keep himself from dying, we need to know, that way he can’t use it again.”

“I don’t know the word, but I’ll look into it while you lot are Down-Under. Gives me something to do at least. There might be some information in Black Manor. That thing is full of Dark Magic artefacts and knowledge,” Sirius said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Hermione’s eyes lit up at the thought of previously undiscovered knowledge.

Harry bit his lip and dug a hand into his pocket. He really didn’t want to do this. But he couldn’t keep it a secret any longer. Plus, they might have an idea of what they could mean. Ginny had clearly felt his anxiety because the Gemini Rune began to hum with warmth as she pushed comforting feelings to him, which he greatly appreciated.

“Okay. There’s something I need to tell you all. Something I’ve been sitting on for a couple of weeks now.”

He stood up and walked over to the corner of the room, where a discarded blackboard was sitting. He rolled it over and grabbed a piece of chalk from the tray.

“What’s this, Prongslet? You pulling a McGonagall on us?” Sirius asked.

Harry shook his head.

“At the beginning of December, when the Yule Ball was announced, I received a visitor. He called himself Ghost and said he was a Traveller. I have no idea what that means, but he showed up in the Tardis.” The looks of blunt amusement on everyone’s faces showed they didn’t believe him.

“Yeah right, and I’m Superman,” Luke said, rolling his eyes.

“It wasn’t the Doctor in the Tardis?” Hermione asked, her eyebrows arching towards her hairline.

“Ghost, if that’s even his real name, said he, “borrowed it from a friend.” I assume he meant the Doctor, or it could be another one of these Travellers.”

Hermione didn’t look very convinced.

“Ghost gave me a letter, from my future self. The letter contained the musical notes and lyrics from a song, and an afternote scribbled at the end.”

“Enchanted,” Luna guessed, sitting forward in intrigue.

“Exactly. But the afternote is the important part.”

Harry put the chalk to the board and scribbled six words at regular intervals across the top.

“Diary. Ring. Locket. Cup. Diadem. Snake,” Remus said aloud for Matt’s benefit. Seeing Jessica’s continued look of disbelief, he pulled out the letter and handed it to her. Luke and Danny crowded around her to get a better look. Hermione jumped to her feet and walked over to the blackboard beside Harry, her analytical mind no doubt putting together what Harry’s had in half the time.

“What have you got so far, Harry?” She asked.

Harry turned back to the board and drew an arrow beneath the word Diary, before writing a few more words.
Hermione gasped, and Ginny went white as a sheet. The Gemini Rune froze on his neck and a wave of pure uncontained fear flooding Harry’s mind. He stood back and sat down next to her, pulling her into a hug.

“The word Diary represents Tom Riddle’s Diary. Of that, I have no doubt. I think it’s safe to assume that the other five words are also objects of incredible power, all undoubtedly connected to Voldemort. Whether they contain memories of him at earlier points in his timeline, who knows. I don’t think so. But I think they’re all important, and just as dangerous. The problem is, we don’t know what they are, or where they are. The way I see it, finding these objects is priority number one. If even one of them can do as much damage as the Diary…”

“It could be catastrophic,” Hermione finished.

“Exactly.” Harry glanced around the room, analysing everyone’s faces. Everyone seemed to believe him at this point, and they were all staring at the board with expressions of deep thought or dread. All except Jessica. She looked like she had seen a ghost.

“Jessica?” Harry asked hesitantly, worried he’d step on a nerve.

“I… I heard my mum talking once about… about an object of her masters… of You-Know-Who’s… that she had. I was eavesdropping on her and Malfoy late one night when I was ten. She said that You-Know-Who had given it to my Dad as a token of faith and that she had protected it when Dad was carted off to Azkaban. Malfoy was asking her about using some sort of token that he had in his possession, a book. Mum said that the Cup would remain hidden until the Dark Lord came to reclaim it and refused to speak more about it. I thought Malfoy was talking about some Dark Arts book that he had, but if he meant the Diary, and giving it to Firefly was what he meant by using it, then Mum must have this Cup, whatever it is, stashed away. I don’t think I’ve ever seen it, but if it’s as unassuming as the Diary…”

“Who knows whether or not you’ve ever encountered it,” Luke said solemnly. The room was silent, but Hermione was furiously writing on the blackboard. Beneath the word cup was now a blank space, followed by the phrase, ‘Jones Manor.’ Beneath that were the words ‘The Jones’. She had also written, ‘Malfroy Manor’ and ‘The Malfoys’ beneath Tom Riddle’s Diary.

“He gave the Diary to Malfoy, this Cup to your dad. Odds are he gave the others to other prominent Death Eater Families to protect. The Lestranges, the Blacks – no offence Sirius,” Hermione said, tapping her chin with the chalk.

“None taken. Another reason to give Black Manor a thorough sweep,” Sirius said, dismissing the insult.

“I’ll talk to my mum. Together, we should be able to help you,” Tonks said, placing a hand on Sirius’s shoulder.

“Thanks, I’ll need it. Andi is probably the only other person alive who knows her way around the house, sept perhaps Bellatrix… and Cissy.”

“If I had to guess, assuming it’s a real snake, the Snake was probably with You-Know-Who himself when he was in power, as he’s the only known Parseltongue in Britain apart from Harry. Who knows where the snake could be now?” Hermione continued.

Harry grinned. They were getting somewhere finally. He knew these things, whatever they really were, were important. He just didn’t know why. And that thought terrified him. But if he was glad for anything, it was for his friends. They wouldn’t let him do this on his own, and that was exactly
what he needed.

He gripped Ginny tighter and rested his head on hers. He was still getting used to this whole married thing, not to mention the emotions and the telepathy, but he was getting there, and there was no one he’d rather been bonded to.

Harry and Ginny were creeping under the Invisibility Cloak as they moved silently down the corridor opposite the Transfiguration Courtyard.

*This mental talking is coming in super handy.*

*Oh yeah.*

Harry smiled beneath the Cloak as they walked, and he knew Ginny could feel his happiness travelling across the link between them. Knew the rune on her neck was heating up right now.

They rounded a corner and found themselves face to face with a marble statue of a mermaid holding a trident.

*This is it.*

Why they’d decided to come out to try and find the Alcheringa Common Room tonight was not exactly honest. Harry had proposed the idea to get Ginny out of the Common Room in Gryffindor Tower. He knew the only way he’d have the guts to say what he had to say would be with no one else around, so telling her they should try to finally find the Common Room of the Federation Students was a good enough excuse. That, and he’d give anything to get away from the staring. It was driving him nuts.

*Definitely. Now the question is…*

*How do we get in?*

They’d quickly learned that their mental communication was not an automatic thing. They had to be consciously thinking about the Gemini Rune – about the other person – to send thoughts across. They had less control over emotions, and strong ones could get through no matter what, but they could also deliberately send their feelings across when they wanted. It made for some intriguing developments when one of them was in the shower, that was for sure.

“Come seek us where our voices sound,” Claire O’Neill’s voice echoed down the corridor.

“That’s what it said?” another voice, one Harry vaguely recognised, replied.

“Yep.” Two figures rounded the corner, Claire and her date from the Yule Ball, Tim something, Harry couldn’t remember his last name.

“But doesn’t that seem a bit easy?” Tim asked as they stepped up to the statue. Harry and Ginny inched as far back as they dared, taking as soft breaths as possible.

“I don’t know. I feel like Bagman and Crouch would be stupid enough to not even consider a Mer
being chosen by the Goblet,” Claire said, shrugging.

“Maui is a boss,” Claire said to the statue, which winked at her before it, and the floor in a semi-circle around it began to rotate into the wall. Claire and Tim stepped onto the rotating floor and vanished inside the hidden room. Harry and Ginny rushed to stand on the rotating floor and grinned at each other as it spun around again so the statue of the mermaid could guard the entrance once more.

The hall they found themselves in was very Greek, Harry thought. Marble columns were lining the walls and small ponds and fountains in intervals in the centre of the floor. Hanging from the roof was the Academy banner from the First Task and the Quidditch Match. Numerous doors dotted the walls, and in the centre of the room was a large open firepit, surrounded by couches. All in all, Harry thought it was a rather lovely place, though clearly it had been picked for a reason. And a not so subtle one at that.

“I mean seriously,” Claire continued, “Having the message in the Egg in the language of the Mer? Do they really think so low of us?” Harry glanced to Ginny, a look of shock equal to his crossing her face.

The Egg is Mer language.

She’d have cracked the egg’s clue in a second!

They followed Claire and Tim a few doors down until they stopped outside one.

“Don’t complain. At least you knew to open the Egg under water. The others won’t,” Tim pointed out.

“True,” Claire sighed, “I just feel like it’s cheating a bit.”

Tim laughed, “It’s not cheating. It’s winning!” Claire didn’t seem as thrilled by that as Tim was, so she bade goodbye and slipped into the door, which Harry realised must go to her rooms. But as she closed the door, her eyes flicked across them, and Harry accidentally stepped on Ginny’s foot. She bit her lip, but not before letting out the tiniest of squeaks. Claire fixed on them for a moment, before huffing and closing the door. Tim turned away from the door and strolled away, probably to his own rooms. Harry and Ginny, on the other hand, bolted all the way back to Gryffindor Tower, adrenaline flooding pushing them to the limit.

When they arrived, they slammed the Fat Lady’s portrait closed and slumped down in front of the fire. The room was completely empty.

“That was… do you think she saw us?” Ginny asked breathlessly.

“I don’t know. Maybe?” Harry and Ginny stared at each other for a few moments, before bursting into laughter, the Gemini Rune thrumming with harmonic heat on their necks.

“I’ll go get the Egg,” Ginny said eventually, moving to head up to his dorms, “there’s a bathroom on the fifth floor that Bill told me about. The Password is Pine Fresh. They haven’t changed it in years…” Harry, suddenly realising that now was the best possible time he could have to say what he needed to say, grabbed her hand to stop her from going anywhere.

“Wait… there’s something I need to say first.” Ginny frowned but sat back down beside him, so their legs touched. She took both his hands in hers and looked him in the eye.

“What is it?”
Harry swallowed hard. He was sure his fear was flitting through the Gemini Rune.

“I… I wanted to ask you what you thought about all this. The whole married thing. I… I’m really sorry. If I hadn’t have kissed you, then this all wouldn’t be happening, and I just wanted you to know that if you want we can find a way to reverse it and…” Harry didn’t get the chance to finish, as Ginny lunged at him, grabbing his face in her hands, and crashing his lips to hers. He could taste her chapstick, that sweet aroma of strawberries that was all her. Her hands felt like fire on his face, her scent intoxicating, sending him higher than any drug or potion could hope to achieve. And the Gemini Rune. The Rune exploded with heat like a rocket trying to launch from inside his head. She pulled away slightly, but didn’t let his face out of her hands, and instead rested her forehead against his.

“I’m not going anywhere okay. I’m staying right here. Like Dumbledore said. Even death can’t keep us apart. I dare it to even try,” she said fiercely, giving him that blazing look he loved so much.

“Gin…” he whispered, but Ginny interrupted him.

“I’m going to get the egg. Then you and I are going to the Prefects Bathroom so we can listen to the clue underwater, and then, if you’re a good boy, maybe we’ll do some other things.” Then she was on her feet and skipping away, leaving Harry to sit on the sofa in a state of petrification as his brain tried to catch up to his blood flow.

‘I’ll do it right one day, I promise,’ he thought to himself, ‘I’ll get down on one knee, and I’ll make damn well sure you get the Wedding you deserve.’
Act III, Chapter 3: The Federated Kingdoms of the Druids and Mer

Updated Disclaimer:

Ghost and Miracle, having finally had the chance to change out of their medieval armour, sat back down freshly showered.

“Oh, thank the High Divines. You guys smelled really funky,” Oracle said, a playful smirk crossing her face.

“Don’t remind me,” Miracle grumbled as she resumed her seat.

“So, I guess the question is if it comes to a vote, which side do we support? The debate is now open.” Colbert stepped down from the centre of the stage, making his way to a seat at the back of the room.

“Broke the law, Clara did, but for a just purpose,” Master Yoda said, leaning forward against his walking stick.

“The Multiversity Accords are a big set of laws to break,” Annabeth Chase pointed out.

“It’s for this reason the Accords were established in the first place. To prevent tampering with timelines and continuities by Ascended Beings. Not that it stops Riker Celestial and his ilk,” Julius Caesar exclaimed, clenching his fist on the arm of his chair.

“We don’t need a history lesson, Julius,” Tyrion Lannister stated, glaring at the Roman Emperor in his toga.

“Hunter isn’t the first to break the Accords. The Ori, Darkseid and Lucifer’s fiends break them all the time. Why are we making such a big deal about this anyway?” Joseph Stalin proclaimed, looking utterly disinterested as he slouched in his chair.

“Would you like to take a waltz down to Hell and tell Lucifer that he needs to start following the rules yourself? Or should someone else do it?” Eleanor Roosevelt snapped.

Stalin huffed but didn’t answer.

“That’s what I thought,” Eleanor hissed.

“Bickering gets us no-where!” Gandalf proclaimed, slamming his staff on the ground and rising to his feet.

“But it’s so funny,” Oracle whispered, before being quickly silenced by her fellow Travellers.

“We are all capable of civilised conversation. Let us act like it,” Charles Xavier agreed. Then Aslan, who usually remained silent at these meetings, rose from his position lounging between Gandalf and Yoda and stepped forward.

“Clara Hunter’s actions were against the Accords. None deny that. But she did what she did to safeguard the people of that Universe. The Darkness may be defeated, but it is not destroyed, and
worlds may still fall into the grip of the Great Destroyer. The more worlds upon which he feasts, the quicker he launches his next attack upon the Orrery of Worlds.”

“And we’re still fixing the wreckage from the last attack,” Nick Fury grumbled.

“If the Angels and the League of Heroes don’t uphold the Accords, and fix the damage done by entities that don’t, what’s the point of having a set of laws anyway?” Steve Jobs asked.

“Hunter was on a mission for the League to repair the damage done by the Destroyers attack when she committed the act!” Tom Clancy pointed out.

“The League gave her clearance to fix the damage, not alter the story. By all reports, the Universe in question should have proceeded almost identically to most of the other Harry Potter continuities. With the exception of a Dragon Force Shard being in play,” Tyrion said, flicking through his notes.

“So, we punish people for trying to protect others now?” Gandhi questioned, and the room fell eerily silent. There was a rustle of movement, and Ghost leaned over the railing to see a young black man approach a member directly beneath him and whisper in his ear. A few seconds later, the member got to his feet.

“Let’s take a recess. Take the time to assess our options. We’ll reconvene tomorrow,” President Josiah Bartlet said, before turning and following his aid out of the room without waiting for a response. A collection of murmuring flitted through the room before many of the others stood up to leave as well, or their holograms fritzed out of existence.

“Wonder what that was about?” Cygnet asked, following Ghost’s gaze to Bartlet as he left the hall through the large oak doors.

“Alcheringa and the Federation were created by Miracle, Ghost and Crystal. Any recognisable characters belong to their respective owners,” Ghost said offhandedly, watching as Master Yoda walked out with Tyrion.

“What?”

“Never mind.”

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**Act III, Chapter 3: The Federated Kingdoms of the Druids and Mer**

Hermione stood, her backpack slung over her shoulder, watching parents waving, hugging and kissing their children goodbye as they stepped onto the Hogwarts Express at the Hogsmeade Station. Most of the Delegation were saying their final farewells. For Harry, Hermione, Ginny and Luna, the experience was far different.

Ginny’s mother was still refusing to believe she even existed. Her favourite children at the moment seemed to be the Twins of all people, which the two redheads were plotting to be rid of as soon as
possible. Hermione was also very sure Mr Weasley was on the verge of losing his job over the whole scandal. Thanks to the Pisces Rune, she could read between the lines better than anyone, think and process information ten times faster than even Professor Dumbledore. He hadn’t told any of the children, but Hermione could pick up the vague trail-offs in his speech patterns while they were at St Mungo’s, and there were certain subjects he refused to address. Harry’s parents were dead, so they weren’t exactly going to show up to see him off, and Hermione’s parents were Muggles who wouldn’t be able to walk into Hogsmeade if they tried. Luna’s father was apparently convinced that Harry and Ginny’s Soulbound was the work of Fairy Sprites that had journeyed south from Greenland in search of tragic couples to torment, and insisted on working on the story for the Quibbler. Hermione wasn’t entirely sure why Luna said she believed her father, because she was positive the dreamy girl didn’t actually believe it. Was it merely her way of describing her powers of hearing magical energy? Or was it something else. Hermione was about seventy per cent certain her petite blonde friend had a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but she was too tactful to actually say such a thing out loud. She also knew that Jessica was more panicked over Harry’s message from the future than she let on, and Matt was still on edge over his inability to detect Malfoy using his powers.

Pulling Harry and Ginny onto the train, Hermione led them down a few carriages and into their favourite compartment at the back of the train. Taking the initiative from their friends, who were still acting more or less on autopilot, she and Luna grabbed their bags and threw them up onto the luggage racks, before sitting down opposite Harry and Ginny.

Hermione couldn’t imagine what they were going through at the moment. They were married! She was still trying to get her head around it. She knew that Harry and Ginny cared for each other, a lot. But to be married… It had to be a lot of unnecessary weight on their shoulders. And that was on top of everything else going on in their lives at the moment. Harry really couldn’t catch a break.

She sat watching their faces for a while. They were talking significantly less frequently since it happened, but they didn’t seem like they were arguing or annoyed. They just weren’t talking. Hermione had a feeling something was going on there that she didn’t know about. Their faces often made expressions randomly as she watched; blushing without provocation or smiling and frowning at odd times. Luna was Luna. She was staring at the window humming ‘Enchanted’ to herself.

A series of soft taps rapped on the door, and the quartet turned to see Peter and Gwen standing outside with their own packs. The backpacks were mass produced, with an undetectable extension charm and a featherlight charm on them. Each member of the three delegations had one, as lugging Trunks around was just impractical.

“Mind if we join you?” Peter asked.

“Sure,” Harry said, beckoning them inside. Peter sat down beside her, and Gwen next to Harry. Hermione smiled at him, before pulling a book on time-travel she had taken from the Home Library out of her bag. She had met both Peter and Gwen in the Hogwarts Library sometime after the First Task, and the pair’s thirst for knowledge had pulled her in.

“I’m sorry, but I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of the Magical Creature section? I’d ask your librarian, but she looks like she’d rather bite our heads off.”

Hermione looked up from her Arithmancy Essay and found herself looking up at the Ilvermorny Champion, Peter Parker, and a blonde short-haired girl with fluorescent pink tips.

“Fair enough, Madam Pince scares everyone,” Hermione said, sitting up and walking down the aisles, the two Americans following her.

“Arithmancy and Mathematics are in this section, Herbology in the next two rows,” she said,
pointing to each area in turn, “And here we are. Magical Creatures. Aquatic on the left, land-based on the right and aerial at the back. If you want any of the more Humanities type subjects like Runes and Charms, they’re on the next level up.”

“Thanks,” Peter said, giving her a quick grin, before dragging Gwen towards the Aquatic section.

“Oh! My name’s Gwen, and by the way, the second set of equations on your essay were off by a factor of 3.” She gave a quick wave before pulling a book on merpeople. Hermione frowned and raced back to her essay. Sure enough, her equations were off by a factor of 3.

They had started studying together a little after that, with Hermione quizzing Gwen on her Arithmancy knowledge. The duo were two of the smartest kids at Ilvermorny, Hermione discovered. Easily on par with her. But instead of threatening her, it thrilled her. She could hold conversations with them that the other Defenders, as talented as they were, just couldn’t follow. Two weeks before the Yule Ball, she and Peter had gotten into a rather passionate debate concerning the theory of magical energy transference, Gwen running fact checks and interference.

“No way. Kelmscott’s Theory of Extranormal Equivalents clearly states that Magical Energy is generated by the Magical Core aka the soul!” Peter exclaimed, pointing to the diagram in the book on Gwen’s lap.

“Yes! I know that!” Hermione snapped, “but I’m telling you, Kelmscott was wrong!”

“How could you possibly know that!”

“Because Kelmscott was a Pureblood! He hasn’t taken into account the Laws of Thermodynamics!” Hermione told him. She grabbed the book and pointed at the illustration.

“Kelscott clearly states that magical energy, or what we define as magical energy, is generated by the Magical Core. That contradicts the first law! Therefore, it has to be false.” Peter’s jaw fell open at that point, while Gwen just looked confused.

“Um. For the Pureblood at the table, the Laws of Thermodynamics are?”

“The Laws of Thermodynamics are a series of No-Maj scientific laws concerning the behaviour of fundamental physical quantities like temperature, energy and entropy,” Peter quickly explained.

“And the First Law, more commonly known as the Law of Conservation of Energy, states that…” Hermione continued.

“Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it merely transforms into different forms,” they finished together.

“How could I be such an idiot,” Peter muttered, scribbling away at his notebook.

“Wait a second. Hold the Owl. Did you just disprove Kelmscott’s Theory, the key component in most Arithmetic equations concerning higher magical power?” Gwen asked, rubbing her thumbs on her temples.

“Yep. She did. She just completely destroyed one of the most important laws of Magical Theory. With Science. And simple science at that,” Peter gushed. Hermione sat back in her seat smugly.

“Wicked. The only problem, of course, is that no self-respecting Pureblood will ever believe it. You need to come up with a Magical Equivalent of your Thermodynamics. Only then will you be offered every single job in the Magical World,” Gwen said. Hermione deflated at this point. Peter glanced
up at her, a look of incredible respect and awe in his eyes.

“Say, Hermione. Do you want to come to the Yule Ball with me?” Hermione’s eyes went wide, and Gwen sniggered into her palm.

“I think you broke her Pete.”

Suffice to say, the Yule Ball had been one of the best nights of her life.

“Ooo. Look at that. Gotta love International Cooperation. Dumbles would be proud.” Claire was leaning against the compartment door, a smug expression on her face.

“Hey, Claire. How’s life treating you?” Harry asked, rolling his eyes.

“Lot more shit than yours let me tell you. You just got yourselves married. I’ve got everyone offering me their sympathies over my not-dead brother. You do not want to know how many seafood jokes I’ve been the butt of the last week, it’s quite offensive considering I basically am seafood.”

The whole carriage laughed at that.

“So, you don’t think he’s dead?” Gwen asked.

“Nah,” Claire said, sitting down beside Peter, “takes more than a Kraken to destroy the Dragon-Force.”

“What is the Dragon-Force exactly?” Hermione asked, leaning forward so she could look the Aussie girl in the eye.

“It’s kind of like this extradimensional energy parasite that latches onto a host. In exchange for its near limitless power, the force gets to keep plodding on, because it can’t survive long without a host. You’d have to ask Will about it if you want to know more.”

Hermione and Peter nodded several times, digesting how fascinating the concept of extradimensional energy was.

“You two are weirdly adorable,” Ginny said with a smirk, gesturing with her finger between Hermione and Peter, “what with your constant search for knowledge and stuff. It’s cute.”

Hermione scowled, and Peter blushed, while Gwen, Claire, Luna, Ginny and Harry laughed.

“Hey, you can’t say anything, little miss I got married by kissing a celebrity. People will be telling that story at bedtime for years!” Claire said, turning her laughter at Ginny and Harry.

“So,” Luna said once the laughter had died down, “Have you figured out your Eggs yet?” Harry facepalmed, and Claire, Peter and Gwen looked on in complete shock. Hermione just sighed. No one but Luna would actually ask such a pointed question.

“I’m not so sure we should be talking about that Luna,” Hermione said, trying to diffuse the sudden tension in the compartment.

“No, it’s alright. We’re all friends here, aren’t we?” Peter asked carefully.

“Well I know you two are at least halfway there, seeing as how you spied on me last night,” Claire said, staring pointedly at Harry and Ginny, who both went as red as Ginny’s hair. Hermione’s mouth dropped open, and her brain stalled.
“What! Why would you do that!?”

“It was an accident. Honestly. We were just trying to get into your Common Room in the castle. We didn’t mean to overhear you,” Harry gushed, his eyes staring firmly at his feet. Ginny swatted him across the back of the head.

“We talked about this, Harry. More assertive, remember?” Harry gulped and nodded. Hermione sighed. Harry still had a ways to go yet. At least he had Ginny, herself, and the rest of the Defenders, not to mention Sirius, Remus and Tonks to help him.

Peter sighed, and began to speak,

“Come seek us where our voices sound,”

Claire rolled her eyes and continued.

“We cannot sing above the ground,”

Somberly, Gwen sang next.

“And while you’re searching, ponder this:
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,’

Ginny scowled but kept going.

“An hour long you’ll have to look,
And to recover what we took,”

Then Harry sang the final verse.

“But past an hour – the prospect’s black
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back.”

Hermione’s mind was running at a million Pisces enhanced miles an hour. “Come seek us where our voices sound,” Ok. On its own not very helpful.

“We cannot sing above the ground,” Combined with the first line, it could mean, ‘find a species that cannot speak above ground.’

“And while you’re searching, ponder this:

We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,” The creatures have taken something the champions will “sorely miss.” But what?

“An hour long you’ll have to look,” Easy, the length of time to complete the task.

“And to recover what we took,” So that was the actual task. To retrieve whatever was stolen from the champions by the creatures in one hour.

“But past an hour – the prospect’s black

Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back.” That was the kicker. If Harry didn’t retrieve whatever object was stolen from him, he wouldn’t get it back. What would Harry sorely miss? He didn’t really have
that much in the way of sentimental… No. They wouldn’t!? No. They would. They most definitely would. But what species could the message be referring to? Why wouldn’t something be able to speak above ground? Unless above ground wasn’t literal. It was metaphorical. Peter had been researching merpeople. Harry and Ginny had overheard Claire speaking… the Mer couldn’t speak above water when transformed. Oh brother…

It took her less than three seconds to figure it out.

“The Second Task is Merpeople. You’re going to have to retrieve a hostage from the bottom of the ocean,” she deduced.

“Damn your fast!” Gwen exclaimed, “It took us a week to figure it out!” Hermione grinned sheepishly but said nothing. Harry and Ginny looked at her knowingly, and Claire winked at her, expertly whipping the smile off her face. Did she know?

“Yeah that’s what we figured as well,” Harry said. Hermione glanced at Luna, who, though it was hard to see through her dreamy expression, had a tiny glint of victory in her eye.

It took twenty hours to reach Alcheringa on the Hogwarts Express. Harry and Ginny spent most of the ride asleep on each other’s shoulders, which, while adorably sweet, was quite annoying as Hermione couldn’t talk to them about anything and Luna and Claire talked about Luna’s more ‘strange’ theories about magical animals for longer than she thought humanly possible. That left Hermione, Peter and Gwen to brainstorm. Harry had told her about his noticing one of the Zodiac Runes on Clarissa Mayfair’s wrist in the Hospital Wing and had asked for her to look into it. She had readily agreed, as it most likely had something to do with her Soul-Bond to Will O’Neill, who was still missing. As she was incredibly bored and had already finished all her course work for this year and the next, and had no exams to study for, she had thrown herself into the project and recruited Peter and Gwen’s help.

Chapter 33: The Libra Rune

The Libra Rune dates back to the Sorcerers of the Roman Republic, who sought a way to overcome the Second Law of Magic: That the use of Magic is irreversible – i.e., if you cast a spell, you can’t un-cast the same spell. Those of you who study Physics will recognise this as the Law of Entropy. This was (amazingly) not a very good idea, as the Roman’s soon discovered when they accidentally caused the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in the year 79 CE. However, they did develop something before their untimely demise, the Libra Rune.

The constellation of Libra represents a set of scales in infinite balance. Mortals take this to be associated with law and justice, and they aren’t specifically wrong in this assumption. However, to the Romans, the concept of ‘balance’ that Libra represents, refers more specifically to the ‘balance of power in nature’.

The Libra Rune, or the Balance Rune, allows the safe sharing of energy between two points in space and time without inciting the law of Entropy. Energy, be it magical, electrical or even Zero Point Energy, flows through a self-contained region of Subspace connecting two runes. The connection serves as a constant feedback loop, existing in infinite continuity without risk of decay. Because no ‘live’ spell is cast, the connection is reversible. This is achieved by the erasure of both runes. So long as one rune is active, the region of subspace will remain open.

While conceivably a brilliant innovation, the Libra Rune has one major drawback. It works both ways. Subspace is not a one-way corridor, rather energy travels – as it usually does – in a circuit
within the folded space. Therefore, it is impractical as a method of one-way transportation. On the other hand, it’s value in the study of trans-dimensional magic is unparalleled. It is also a major component in the creation of Time-Turners.

Possible Uses of the Libra Rune…

- Energy Containment and Redistribution
- Subspace Manipulation
- Temporal Manipulation
- Hyperdrive Construction
- Wormhole Creation
- Dimensional Refraction
- Dimensional Reintegration

The Libra Rune’s effects on people are bizarre and unpredictable, as such, it is highly recommended that you NEVER DRAW IT UPON A LIVING PERSON!! Experimenters have observed complete neurological breakdowns, temporal schisms, and even life-force drainage on individuals who have tried this process. As of the creation of this manuscript, there have been no recorded uses of the Libra Rune on a person that have not resulted in eventual death.

Suffice to say, how Clarissa was still alive was a highly debated topic, as was what the Rune could be possibly doing for, or to, her body. But try as they might, even with their combined intellect, Hermione, Gwen and Peter couldn’t figure out what the purpose of the rune on the Australian’s wrist could be.

Suddenly, the train screeched to a halt, and Harry jerked awake.

“We’re here!” Luna announced, suddenly looking very excited. She grabbed her bag and bounded out of the compartment, stepping on Hermione’s foot without a care in the world, causing the bushy-haired girl to wince in pain.

“Come on you lot,” Claire exclaimed, following Luna out the door.

Harry?? Are we there yet?

Yep. Come on, Firefly, time to go.

Harry reached into his bag and pulled out the bottle of sunscreen he had bought before leaving Britain. Ginny stood up and stretched her hands over her head, yawning as she pulled her own bag down. Harry squirted some of the cream onto his hands and dabbed it onto Ginny’s face, ignoring the cute spluttering noise she made when she tried to lick some of it off her lips.

Gross!!!!!!

Then why’d you lick it?

It looked like ice-cream!
Harry laughed and grabbed their bags, before guiding a still whining Ginny out of the compartment, and out of the train.

Harry was instantly grateful for Claire’s warning of what to expect because it was seriously hot outside the train. The air was damp and heavy, and the sun beamed down through a large skylight that reduced none of its heat. They were standing on a concrete platform in a train terminal, not unlike the Muggle side of Kings Cross. There were half a dozen other platforms with silver cylindrical trains like those Harry had seen on the underground, though they looked much cleaner. But instead of going through tunnels, they seemed to accelerate through strange circular gateways filled with purple light, before vanishing. Finding himself sweating more than he had in any Quidditch Match he could remember, and wishing for Scottish weather, Harry and an equally flustered Ginny followed Hermione, Peter and Gwen – who seemed to be doing far better than they were – onto an escalator in the middle of the platform.

Leaving the Hogwarts Express behind, they ascended through another concrete floor and up into a large glass atrium, and it was even hotter than the platform below. Floating in the middle of the atrium was a massive billboard with news headlines, train times and advertisements flashing intermittently. A loud chiming sound rang out through the atrium, and an announcer’s voice called out, “The next service to Aotearoa departs in five minutes from ‘Quokka Gate’.” The overhead sky was bright blue, without a cloud to be seen. The sun was beaming down through the glass ceiling, fighting with the air-conditioners to control the temperature of the room. The people looked just as odd as ordinary Witches and Wizards in Britain did. Greens, yellows, blues and whites were all prevalent in their clothing, but there were no robes to be seen. Instead, singlets, crop tops, board shorts and a large and diverse assortment of odd-looking hats seemed to be the prevalent form of dress, which made sense given how hot it was. There really was no way to tell who was Mer and who wasn’t. There were some with faint scars on their necks, but they could be from anything.

Harry took the lead and, really wishing he had cooler clothing than the jeans he was wearing, led Ginny, Hermione, Peter and Gwen out of the terminal to where Luna and Claire were waiting. The rest of the Hogwarts, Alcheringa and Ilvermorny Delegations trailed behind. They stepped out of the large revolving doors and Harry couldn’t help but gasp.

Standing before them was the City of Alcheringa in all its glory. Suburban houses lined large muggle bitumen roads, but the homes couldn’t be any less like Privet Drive if they tried. One was painted entirely purple, another had a giant tree sticking out through the roof, and yet another had a sand dune pilled in the back yard, and a chimney large enough for Santa Clause. In the distance, dozens of muggle style skyscrapers stood proud around a winding river that ran out into the ocean in the far distance. But the towers seemed to all be crooked or bent out of shape. They curved at bizarre angles, or in some cases formed giant letters like ‘T’, ‘V’ or ‘X’. To the south, a single snow-capped mountain soared into the air hundreds of feet higher than any of the towers. Hovering over the mountain was a massive thunder cloud, and if he squinted hard enough, he could see snow falling on several ski runs cut into the mountainside. In the north, a large port with dozens of ships – cruise ships, large tankers and wooden galleys alike – bordered a vast expanse of red dirt and scattered scrub land, interspersed with several large pits dug in the earth. And behind them, Harry could just see the tops of a rainforest covering the slope of an enormous and very active volcano.

But the part of the skyline that drew Harry’s eye was the tower standing proudly on a small island in the middle of the broadest section of the river. Unlike the other buildings, this one was made from a greyish blue metal, instead of glass and steel, and was cylindrical rather than rectangular. The body of the tower was quite thin, but a section near the peak of the spire widened slightly to form three protruding sections along the main structure, before thinning out again at the very top. Despite its incredibly unique nature, Harry would recognise it anywhere. As did Ginny.
It’s identical to the central tower of the City. The one from our dreams.

Claire beamed at them, clearly mistaking the reason for their awe.

“Welcome to Alcheringa.”

The blonde-haired woman of the Alcheringa Staff – whose name Harry finally learned was Katelyn – led the students onboard a series of trams that moved much faster than Harry assumed ordinary trams could move. Although he had never been on one before, so he honestly didn’t know. As the trams zoomed across the island, Claire, who Hermione had cast the Sonorous Charm on, regaled the foreigners about the Island of Alcheringa. The Island was divided into regions, each with different topography and climate based on one of the regions of the Federated Kingdoms of the Druids and Mer. The northern region was based on the ‘Outback’ terrain of the Western reaches of the Kingdom Mari Cath in Northern Australia, bordering the Dwarf Realms. The pits Harry could see were mines extracting Malleeniam – a highly valuable and rare metal that was only found within the Federation – from deep within the ground. The snowy region to the south came from New Zealand, or ‘Aotearoa’ in the language of the indigenous peoples the Mauri, and – aside from the Ski Resort – was host to, according to Claire, “the best magical theme-park in the world.” Ginny, remembering Harry’s previous promise to take her to a theme-park, had perked up considerably at that. The suburban district hailed from the various hidden Druid settlements dotted across the Alcheringa Kingdom, which dominated the eastern coast of Australia from Melbourne to Townsville, not that Harry knew where either of those places were. The Hawaiian Kingdom donated the Volcano, and the surrounding rainforests, which Katelyn explained were great for “bushwalking,” – which Harry assumed meant hiking – and was completely contained to prevent the risk of eruptions, which happened regularly and were used to power the city. On the other side of the Island, beyond the main city, were the palm tree covered beaches and crystal blue reefs of the ‘Paradise Coast’, a surfing and social centre based on the Island of Motu Maohi, the capital city of the Tahitian Kingdom. Claire also told them that the Island was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Surrounding them were dozens of kilometres of Mer settlements, done in the same design, with districts representing regions of the underwater kingdoms of the Federation. And, if you went deep enough, you would find the ruins of the ancient Merrish fortress city of Altica.

Hermione lapped up every word, while Luna was more interested in trying to get stung by a Billywig that was buzzing around her head. Harry and Ginny meanwhile, were much more interested in the Tower.

“Why does that tower, the one in the river, look so different from the others?” Harry asked.

“It’s based on an old painting found in a shipwreck at the southern tip of the Mauri Kingdom. The painting is believed to be of the lost city of Atlantis, home of the Ancients. That tower is a perfect replica of the central tower depicted in the painting. On the exterior at least. The interior is all Druid, as the painting showed nothing of the inside of the building. I think the painting is somewhere in Britain now,” Katelyn explained. Harry and Ginny had a feeling they knew exactly where it was.

“And who exactly were these Ancients?” Ginny continued.

It was Luna who answered.
“The Ancients were the very first race of Magical people to inhabit this planet. Legend tells they came from beyond the stars, and built the Argentum Atlantis Urbem, in Sacramentum de Campion lay corde Terra! They vanished from the Earth a long time ago, but not before they taught what they knew of the Magical Arts to those humans they deemed fit to teach: the first Witches and Wizards.” Never had Harry seen Luna so excited over something. She had abandoned her Billywig and was now staring at Harry and Ginny with an intensity so strong Harry took an involuntary step backwards. She was bobbing up and down on her tiptoes, a broad grin stretching as close to her eyes as physically possible.

Katelyn snapped towards Luna.

“You speak Ancient!”

Hermione looked similarly flabbergasted, “was that Latin?”

“Of course I speak Ancient! Who doesn’t?” Luna said dreamily, ignoring Hermione.

“Ah, everyone! There are like twenty people, max, in the entire Federation who speak Ancient!”

Luna just shrugged.

*Harry, what if Luna can read the writing in the City? If the City in our dreams is Atlantis…* … then it stands to reason the writing is in Ancient. But we have no way to show her the symbols. It’s not like she can come into our mindscape with us.

**Damn it.**

“Ancient is a NEWT subject you can take at Hogwarts. I always thought it was some History thing. Are you telling me it’s actually a language, a derivative of Latin?”

“No. Latin is a derivative of Ancient,” Luna said softly. Her eyes were flitting around again, most likely looking for her Billywig. Hermione looked like someone had just killed a puppy in front of her.

“So, what happened to them?” Harry asked, trying to re-rail the conversation.

“No one knows for sure. Some say they were attacked. Some say they died out because of a plague,” Katelyn said.

“I think they went back to the stars!” Luna exclaimed chirpily. She jumped up and grabbed the Billywig, which stung her.

“Yay!” She started floating up into the air as the tiny blue insect whirled away, and one of the nearby Alcheringa students grabbed her by the ankle. Clearly, they were used to it.

“Maybe. Either way, their city was lost to time, and not even the most legendary of explorers have ever been able to find it. No one even knows where the Plains of Mystery, or as your friend correctly called them, the Sacramentum de Campion, are. The ‘corde terra’ or Heart of Earth, is most likely Africa, because it’s at the Equator, aka the centre of the Earth. Merlin was the last known Ancient to dwell on Earth, but obviously he died in the Battle of Camelot,” Katelyn finished.

“Well Mystery, you’ve been holding out on us,” Hermione smirked, elbowing Luna, who frowned.

“Mystery?”
“Yep, that’s your Defenders name. Sealed and done.”

Harry and Ginny were unable to ask the fountain of questions they still had because at that moment, they arrived at their destination. It was an island in the river mouth, just off the coast of the Paradise Coast district. Sitting on the cliffside was a sprawling campus of white sea stone buildings with roofs of pale blue, gleaming gold, and shimmering silver easily the size of Hogwarts. Dozens of tiny rivulets of water snaked their way through the complex and out into the ocean. There were soaring towers and elaborate halls, floating classrooms and rock pools descending into the deep below. Dozens of fountains and waterfalls covered the island, and Harry counted a total of five Quidditch Pitches. That wasn’t to mention the seven other sports fields, the basketball courts, or the fifteen pools of different sizes, shapes and purposes. But the most magnificent part of the scene was the 200-metre-high diving platform in the middle of the school. Floating suspended beneath it, were five large bubbles of water. Harry watched in shock and awe as a person dived from the top of the tower, front flipped, grew a tail, and landed in the first bubble, before swimming down and falling through the bottom, doing another flip he didn’t even know how to describe, then landing in another bubble. The Mer repeated the process, doing more daring stunts the closer he got to the ground, before falling from the final bubble and landing in a pool down on the ground with barely a splash.

“That is Quin-Sphere, a sport we play down here in the Federation. I’ve never been one for dramatics myself, that’s more Will’s field, but I guess this calls for it.” Katelyn hung off the tram so everyone could see her, and threw her free hand in the air.

“Welcome to the Alcheringa Academy for the Magical Arts.”

Dozens of fireworks shot up into the sky, crackling in the air and exploding with very audible pops.

“What? Too much?
Jessica hugged the corner of the Viaduct Courtyard, listening carefully as Draco Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott regaled the green coated figure of Rita Skeeter with their opinions on Harry and Ginny’s Soul-bond.

“Honestly, I think it’s about time Potter started honouring the old pureblood traditions, though he could have chosen a better bride,” Malfoy said, as Skeeter’s Quick Notes Quill scribbled away.

Jessica turned to Danny, who was fake-reading a textbook on the other side of the courtyard and raised her hand.

“Is that so? Why’s that do you think?” Skeeter asked sweetly.

Jessica pulled her hand down, and Danny punched a support pylon with his glowing fist. The pylon cracked, and the Hufflepuff dived out of the way as the stone roof came down all around him.

Heads all around the courtyard turned towards the destruction as Luke helped Danny to his feet and made an effort to make sure his friend hadn’t broken anything.

“Get out of here, Dumbledore will be on his way!” Malfoy exclaimed. Skeeter grabbed her quill and shoved it in her purse, before shrinking down and vanishing. Malfoy and his friends then quickly raced down into the Dungeons.

Professor Babbling came running out of the Ancient Runes Corridor and began talking to the boys as a crowd gathered around them. Dumbledore and McGonagall, fulfilling Malfoy’s prediction, arrived shortly later and began repairing the damage. But Jessica didn’t notice, because she was racing out of the courtyard as soon as Malfoy was gone, wand in one hand, glass jar in the other. She stepped out onto the Viaduct bridge and swung her wand in a wide arc.

“Accio Rita Skeeter!”

A tiny green beetle flew into the jar, and Jessica pulled a lid from her pocket, which she quickly screwed on. She held the jar up to eye level and smirked.

She had confirmed her theory that Skeeter was an illegal Animagus a few weeks ago, just before the Yule Ball, but with everything going on, it had, understandably, slipped her mind. She had used the Captis Picturae spell from the top branches of a tree in the Transfiguration Courtyard to take several pictures of Skeeter meeting with Malfoy, then shrinking into a beetle and vanishing. Now she had her trapped.

Skeeter attempted to transform, but the unbreakable charm on the jar did its job, and the beetle was forced to sit in the jar and stare at Jessica. She imagined it was full of confusion, and a little bit of fear, but she couldn’t tell, as the beetle did not have that much depth of facial features.

Jessica pocketed the jar, making sure that Skeeter couldn’t see out of it, and made her way back into the castle and up to the Home. Matt and Sirius were waiting inside the Duelling Arena, where Sirius...
(she refused to call him Padfoot, even in her head) was showing Matt how to cast the Blasting Curse. They spun towards her as she entered, and she placed the jar in the middle of the room.

A few minutes later, Danny and Luke came in.

“I hope your plan worked Alias because I’ve got detention now,” Danny moaned. Merlin, she hated that name.

“Worked to perfection Stupid Fist,” she snapped, rolling her eyes at him.

“It’s Iron Fist. Thank you very much.”

“Sounds like you’re trying too hard.” Sirius snorted and shoved his fist in his mouth.

“Did you get the package, Jessica?” Luke asked, rubbing his forehead. She gestured to the jar in the middle of the room.

“Fantastic,” Danny exclaimed, rubbing his hands together.

“Easy Sparkles,” Sirius said. Danny pouted and poked his tongue at Sirius. Jessica rolled her eyes again. Why did she agree to join Potter and Weasley’s stupid little club again? Oh, that’s right. To save the world. Merlin, she hated her life.

“Well then, shall we crack this beauty open and see what she has to say then?”

“Finally, something I get to do!” Matt exclaimed, jumping to his feet. He pulled his wand and cast a finite on the jar. Beetle-Skeeter immediately transformed, shattering the glass, and pointed her wand at Jessica.

“You kidnapped me!” She exclaimed, although whether it was outrage that she was kidnapped by a kid, or simply that she was kidnapped was anyone’s guess. “I’ll see you all destroyed for this!”

“Expelliarmus,” Sirius said casually, and Skeeter’s wand flew out of her hand. Skeeter swung around towards Black, who was now twirling her wand in his hand.

“Sirius Black! I knew you were guilty! I don’t know how you convinced the Wizengamot of your innocence, but I’ll see your reputation is mud by the time I’m done with you.”

“Have fun with that, seeing as how we can get you fired with a single Owl to the DMLE. I’m sure they’d love an illegal Animagus to play with.” Rita’s mouth clamped shut.

“Now. The way I see it, you’ve got two choices, Ms Skeeter,” Matt said, he was drumming his fingers on a thick cylindrical red baton he kept strapped to his leg at all times. Most people assumed it had something to do with his blindness. In Jessica’s opinion, most people were idiots.

“One, you tell us what we want to know, then we’ll let you go, on a few conditions of course, but still, we’ll let you go.” Skeeter turned to Matt, and a look of recognition crossed her face.

“You’re Murdock’s kid, the one in that Muggle car accident. The messed up one.” Jessica’s fist crashed into the arrogant woman’s face, and she flew across the room, bouncing off the ward cage Sirius had activated earlier, and landing on the floor. The burn on Jessica’s neck twinged, but she had gotten very used to ignoring it by now.

“Or two. You refuse to tell us, and we lock you up in here for a few days, with periodic visits from Alias over here.”
“Jessica Jones. How angry would your mummy and daddy be if they could see you now, I wonder?” Skeeter said, nursing a large bruise on her jaw as she stared at Jessica, a murderous look in her eye.

“Better a disappointment to your parents than a traitor to your friends.”

“So, Ms Skeeter. Which one will it be?” Matt asked softly. Skeeter turned her glare on him but said nothing.

“I should warn you, if it’s option two, you’re currently trapped in a parallel dimension, so good luck getting out,” Sirius said gleefully. The old dog had been quite pleased with Skeeter’s articles praising Harry, but when Hermione and Jessica had explained to him what she was trying to do – build him up as a hero so she could tear him down – he had agreed with Jessica’s investigation and resulting plan of capture and intimidation.

Skeeter still said nothing.

“Iron Fist?” Matt asked. Danny walked towards Rita and slammed his golden energy fist into the ground, cracking the floor down the middle and sending blasts of gold light towards Skeeter, who shrieked.

“Ok! OK! OKAY! I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you!!!” the woman exclaimed, hyperventilating. What a loser.

Jessica reached into her pocket and pulled out her Christmas present from Harry – a journalist’s notebook; complete with plastic tabs, calendar with important muggle and wizarding dates, and a pencil charmed to be ever sharp. It was the best gift she’d ever gotten, not that she’d ever tell him that. If Ginny weren’t permanently attached to the little bugger, she’d probably find it endearing.

She flipped open to her page on questions for Skeeter and began to read.

“How long have you been an illegal Animagus?”

“Five years,” Skeeter said, clearly realising she was trapped.

“Why are you praising Harry Potter in the Daily Prophet?”

Skeeter hesitated, then said, “Because he’s the Boy-Who-Lived, a Legendary Hero. People love the brat. Do you know how much fan-mail he gets?”

“I do actually, the most recent batch is sitting in the living room,” Jessica said, a smirk crossing her face as Skeeter’s scowl deepened. “Keep going.”

Skeeter sighed, “So when he finally makes a mistake, I can write the best article ever written. It’ll be Eldgan’s Award worthy, just you wait.”

Jessica looked to Sirius, who looked dejected and resigned. He clearly hadn’t wanted to believe her.

Suddenly, Skeeter plucked up, scanning them all.

“Oooo. I know what this is! You’re Potter’s, Defenders. Aren’t you? This is good.”

“I’ll ask the questions here,” Jessica said, “Now. Why are you getting cosy with Draco Malfoy?”

“Jessica Jones, Matthew Murdock, Sirius Black, the mysterious Iron Fist – who I don’t know, and Mr strong and silent type in the background. Doing Potter’s dirty work while he’s out of the country. Clever, very clever. But not clever enough. I would have covered my face if I was…”
“Iron Fist!” Jessica exclaimed.

Danny swung his fist at Skeeter’s face, stopping inches from her nose. She instantly silenced.

“Answer my question.”

“His father’s the primary monetary backer of the Minister?” She said as if this were obvious, still eyeing Danny’s glowing fist.

“She’s lying.” It wasn’t angry. Or violent. In fact, the statement Matt made was so monotone it actually sent shivers down the spine of everyone in the room. Even Jessica.

“I won’t ask again,” Jessica said, trying to emulate Matt’s tone.

Skeeter looked from Matt to Jessica, to Danny’s fist, and gulped.

“He’s got something running. Lucius that is. I don’t know what it is, but it’s big. And his kid knows about it, cause he’s wearing an emergency portkey.”

Now that was news.

“What is it? This portkey?”

“A necklace with the Aquarius symbol on it that he wears around his neck.” Jessica looked to Matt, who had the same expression on his face as hers. Aquarius. If it was the Zodiac Rune…

“Is that important?”

“Here’s what’s going to happen Rita. I’m going to Owl your boss and tell her what a marvellous job you’re doing at the Daily Prophet and even recommend you get a raise. In exchange, I’m going to hold onto the little tidbit that you’re an illegal Animagus, and you’re going to send me a copy of every article you write before you print it. If I don’t like it, you’ll be in Azkaban before you can say Hogwarts. Do we have an accord?” Sirius explained, taking command of the conversation.

Skeeter nodded enthusiastically.

“Brilliant.”

Jessica stood in the Marauders Library, staring at the shelf marked ‘Ancient Runes’ in Hermione’s elegant handwriting. Sitting in pride of place, was the book she hated more than any other: Ancient Runes of Forgotten Civilisations by Riker O’Neill. She knew what she needed was inside those pages, but bringing herself to open that cover was not easy. Jessica had always prided herself on not being as stupid or rash as a Gryffindor. Before she did anything, she gathered facts, investigated every possible angle, then only when she knew every conceivable outcome and weighed the benefits and costs would she act. But right now, she wished she had a bit more of that famous Gryffindor courage.

“It’s alright you know.” Jessica had a stunning spell fired from her wand before the voice even finished speaking. It was only Matt’s enhanced reflexes that saved him unconsciousness.
“Sorry, Murdock.”

Matt smiled at her from behind his red spectacles.

“Don’t worry about it. I shouldn’t have snuck up on you.”

Jessica returned the smile softly and turned back to the book. She reached out her hand but froze centimetres from the cover. Her hand was shaking. Wow, Jessica. Shaking hands? Really? How pathetic.

“It’s alright to feel fear. Everybody does. The trick is to not let it control your actions, and use it as a fire to fuel them instead.” Jessica’s stomach plummeted. Merlin, she must look like a fool for even Matt to notice. He couldn’t even see for fuck’s sake!

“A great Slytherin I make.”

“Don’t worry. I’m the only one who can tell. Me and Luna really, but she’s not here. I can see it in your colours. Right now, your aura is a vivid yellow colour with an apricot tinge around the edges. Fear and disgust. I can only guess it has something to do with Ancient Runes, particularly one in that book there, and the disgust is at yourself for being weak. You’re not weak Jessica. We all have our trauma’s to deal with. Some are just more visible than others. Take us for instance. I have to walk around trying not to bump into things, while simultaneously hearing everything within about a kilometre radius. You, on the other hand, have your own internal demons to worry about. Don’t think I haven’t noticed how you’ve been struggling with the Patronus, despite Lupin’s best efforts.”

“So, I’m just an open book to you, am I? A sob story?” She asked sharply. Matt frowned and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“No. I think you just need some actual self-confidence, instead of just faking it all the time.” He gestured towards the shelf. Jessica turned back to the book. Maybe the blind idiot was right. She had been conquering her fear of her parents, of what they did to her, since she was six. No reason to let them win now. She grabbed the book and walked out to the Study Room. Taking a deep breath, Jessica opened the book that had almost killed her…

Chapter 1: Ancient Runes – What the Fuck are They and How do I Draw Them.

Ancient Runes are (in my professional opinion) the most exciting and technical aspect of magic. Runes, unlike spells, can stack upon one another for more potent or powerful effects. Their uses are wide-reaching and far-ranging, and their side-effects in some cases deadlier than the Avada Kedavra curse. And, most importantly, they can be used to equal effect by mortals and magical folk alike. Which is precisely why I went and found all the coolest and most dangerous ones and stuck them in a single book. I know, I’m a genius. You’re welcome.

Ancient Runes – for those of you without brains in your heads – are different forms of written word dating back thousands of years. They are the true definition of the phrase, “Words are power.” Words have the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble. And they do it far more effectively than any sword, gun, missile or wand. So, when we combine the power of words with the power of magic, we find ourselves with one of the most dangerous and limitless sources of destructive and creative force in the Multiverse.

You listening yet?

Ancient Runes is the study of languages of lost civilisations, and how their words carry the ability to
But, to truly master the power of Ancient Runes, you have to draw them.

The potency of a rune depends on how well it's drawn. A rune drawn haphazardly with a permanent marker is not going to be anywhere near as powerful as a perfect rune drawn by wand. So, before you start drawing, make sure you have the pattern memorised!

Drawing runes is not taught in Wizarding Schools until after students have passed their Ordinary Wizarding Level Examinations. This is done not so much out of difficulty, but rather to prevent over-eager students from experimenting – with disastrous results. Ten galleons say that last sentence just got this book banned in America. I say let them experiment. Making sure they know how to remove the runes they draw, and how to make them safely, is a much smarter way of instructing children instead of just ignoring it in my opinion. Sorry, I'm getting distracted by my libertarian views.

To use your wand for runic drawing, the incantation is ‘Scribo.’ There is no wand movement. Once activated, your wand can be used to draw runes on any surface, whether they hold depends on the substance and the quality of the drawing. Runes – with the exception of highly dangerous permanent runes, like the Gemini Rune – can be removed using the ‘Eradicus’ spell over the affected area.

I hope you enjoy reading this book and learn much from the intriguing knowledge within – I know I did! Good luck with your runes. Don’t cause too much mayhem! (And by that I mean anything short of world domination that’s not for an altruistic purpose. Can I do a winkie face in a textbook?)

Rolling her eyes, Jessica flipped through the book to the page she needed. She wondered if Riker O’Neill had known what people would use this book for, would he still have written it? She had a feeling the answer would be yes.

**Chapter 25: The Aquarius Rune**

The Aquarius Rune is one of the most fascinating runes ever invented. In my opinion at least. Bestowing the power to ‘cloak’ a person or object, carrying an object bearing the rune, or bearing it oneself, will ‘hide’ them or it (if an object) from any means of tracking or identity recognition. Owls will be unable to find you, the trace will be unable to detect you, even Mortal security cameras and scanners will be unable to see you. However, you are still visible to the naked eye, and as such can interact with the world around you easily.

Using the rune on an object will cloak the object from any and all manner of detection, but it can still be seen with the naked eye, and if someone sees the rune on the object, they will most likely become suspicious. Using the rune on a person will cause even the person’s identity to be hidden from bystanders, though they can still interact with them, they just won’t be recognised. If you do it in your mum and dad’s house, have fun explaining who the fuck you are and what you’re doing there!

The Aquarius Rune is permanent but can easily be removed using the ‘Eradicus’ Spell, so it is not incredibly dangerous. Once the spell is used, however, the cloak will be cancelled from that moment onwards.

**Possible Uses of the Aquarius Rune:**

- Hiding from both Magical and Muggle Law Enforcement detection
- Running away from anything really
- Voiding the Trace
- Thievery and Robbery
- Departure from Society
- Hiding from a potential enemy or hunter

As you can imagine, the ability to hide from the government or law enforcement is very appealing – for both decent and dodgy reasons, of course, no need to discriminate. But, as with the other Zodiac Runes, there are a series of side-effects one must be on the lookout for, and the sheer number of them concerning this rune, plus its difficulty to draw, generally discourages would be students attempting to void the trace.

Possible Side-effects of the Aquarius Rune:

- Jail – usage of the Aquarius Rune is illegal in most countries (you probably should have figured that one out by yourself)
- Insanity due to no one ever recognising you
- Never getting any mail
- Fingerprint scanners won’t work (have fun getting through American Airports!)
- Magical registries will not update to reflect status changes
- Good luck going to the bank
- Or proving your credit cards actually belong to you (the rune doesn’t stop people calling the cops on you)

“Makes sense. Something like that would definitely screw with my powers,” Matt said, scratching his head.

“I don’t like this. What does Malfoy possibly have to hide that’s that important?” Jessica pondered.

“You’re right. I say we take away Malfoy’s new toy, up for it Alias?”

Jessica closed the book and grinned.
Happy May the 4th everyone! Just gushing here, but how awesome were the Billboard Awards Ceremony! Taylor Swift and Brendon Urie, the Jonas Brothers and Ariana Grande all in one show! I literally almost died. Hope you love this fluffy respite. Love, Miracle.

Updated Disclaimer:

Ghost and Miracle closed the door to their cottage across the inlet from the great fortress city of the Travellers and were immediately assaulted by a tiny person with pink hair.

“Momma! Dadda!” Madelyn exclaimed, jumping up into Ghost’s arms.

“Hello, gorgeous! Have you been a good girl for Aunty Crystal?”

“Yes! Guess what! Guess what!”

“I could never hope to guess!” Miracle exclaimed, grabbing Madelyn from Ghost and twirling her around. “You’ll just have to tell me!”

“I met a Drogon!” Ghost and Miracle’s jaws fell open, and their brains threatened to go into a meltdown.

“You met a what now?” Ghost asked, and Madelyn wiggled in Miracle’s arms to face him.

“A Drogon!”

“Sweety, do you mean a Dragon?” Miracle asked.

“Yes! Dr…a… gone.” Madelyn pronounced each syllable, stumbling over the letter A.

“A’s ‘re mean,” She huffed.

“Maddie, where’s Aunty Crystal?”

“With Mister Yoda!” She said eagerly, nodding her little head so fast Ghost worried it might fall off.

“Master Yoda is here?!” Miracle exclaimed, looking to Ghost in panic. However, Ghost was too busy imagining different painful ways to murder his sister to truly comprehend what Madelyn had said.

“Yes!” She stopped now, whispering to herself a few times before pronouncing each word very slowly, “He is here with Mist-er Tiweeon.” She looked to Ghost and Miracle with an anxious grin.

“Well done!” Miracle proclaimed, and Madelyn disengaged her hands to clap, which resulted in her slipping slightly until Miracle caught her giggling form. She turned to Ghost, who was still fuming
slightly.

“Go see what the bosses want. I’ll get this little one some dinner,” Miracle said.

“Can we swim?” Madelyn asked as Miracle left the room.

Ghost took several deep breathes, before walking into the sitting room. Yoda, Tyrion and Gandalf were seated on the couches in front of the fireplace, Crystal leaning against the window opposite them.

“Master Yoda, Mithrandir, Lord Tyrion. What brings you to our humble abode?”

“Lovely, your home is,” Yoda said, nodding slightly.

“We have come to brood on today’s events,” Tyrion said, staring into his empty wine glass.

“Fantastic. Crys, why was Madelyn saying she saw a Dragon?” Crystal gestured towards the fireplace, and Ghost sucked in a breath when he realised there was, in fact, a tiny white and gold scaled Dragon sleeping amongst the logs.

“That would be my fault. I brought this little guy to win a bet with Magneto, now he’s sort of hanging out until I take him back to Daenerys tomorrow,” Tyrion said, grabbing a bottle of wine and pouring himself a generous serving of red. Ghost stepped over and confiscated the bottle, one he’d salvaged from a 400-year-old shipwreck on Earth 271.

“How was Westeros Duty?” Crystal asked, and Tyrion flinched. When Tyrion Lannister had joined the Travellers, shortly after its creation, and discovered a group of people with the power to change stories, the first thing he’d done was punch the Doctor, one of the Travellers founders, in the face. He’d lost friends and family on his world, something the Travellers could have easily fixed. As had been explained to Ghost many times over, for every story you fix, hundreds more broken ones are spawned in their place. Leaving one partially darkened world to spawn millions of possible lighter ones was the risk you had to take. Now, Tyrion was one of the Travellers most important leaders, but he still held the guilt that something could have been done for his friends.

“Good enough. I died twice. Thrown off the Wall the first time and roasted by an Undead Dragon the second. Miracle only died once, though her body got turned into a Wight, so who fared worse is up for debate. And we still don’t own Harry Potter, the Stargate Franchise, AC/DC, or Marvel Comics!”

“Wish I could have seen it,” Crystal remarked wistfully.

“No. You don’t,” Tyrion whispered.

“So, what’s the plan for tomorrow then?” Ghost asked, desperately trying to steer the conversation into less depressing grounds.

“The Council is a tremendous form of debate. That is its purpose after all. But the Accords have always been a contested topic.”

“Bound by the Multiversality Accords, we are not. Power we have to change and create stories, not reality,” the Jedi Master said, eyes closed as he raised his three-fingered hands over the fire.

“Enlightenment of the degree the Ascended have reached comes with a cost. They hold the power to destroy entire universes at will, the Accords are a necessary evil to stop that from happening,” Mithrandir stated, head resting on his hand, propped up at the elbow by the arm of the chair.
“But sometimes the Accords cause more harm than Good,” Tyrion pointed out.

“True that is. Caused the Accords did, the return of the Great Destroyer.” Everyone flinched as Yoda mentioned the name. The Great Destroyer was a being whose true name none of the Travellers knew, a terrifying creature imbued with a single purpose: the destruction of worlds. Anybody who isn’t terrified of it should be.

“What do we do about Clara then?” Ghost asked, slumping down in the chair and sighed.

“I think I have a plan,” Crystal said, staring out the window.

“Let’s hear it then.”

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**Act III, Chapter 5: Waves**

Ginny jolted as the train, that did not look or feel remotely like a regular train, came to a hard stop. The only reason she didn’t lose her footing and fall flat on her face, was because Hermione did it after their first stop, and Ginny was now holding onto the yellow poll that stretched from floor to ceiling in the middle of the large compartment like her life depended on it.

“This station is The Rocks. Please alight here for access to Sydney. The next station is the Australian National University.”

Ginny could honestly say that if she ever met the owner of that Morgana damned voice, she would AK her on the spot. Every time the silver bullet from hell jumped into what Hermione called “Subspace,” which from Ginny’s perspective just looked like a tunnel of violet and blue light, the lady would announce their next destination, all the while warning them to, “Brace for Subspace Window Turbulence.” Then, when they decelerated, which felt like being sucker punched in the chest, she would again announce their new location, and the cycle would repeat. Again. And again. And again. So far they had been to Rockhampton, Australia Zoo – Magical Division, Moreton Stadium, Surfers Paradise, Byron Bay and now The Rocks. Those names would be burned into the back of her brain for eternity, she was sure of it. And every single time she thought the contents of her stomach would come back up to visit her, the train would jolt forward again. But the worst thing. The worst thing was that Harry was riding the train like a pro. He barely swayed as they jumped between platforms. It was annoying, it was frustrating, and it was slightly infuriating.

*You know you love me.*

*Oh, shut up.*

*This is a piece of cake compared to the Knight Bus. That thing is a nightmare.*

“Come on folks, this is us,” Claire announced, jumping off the train without even a stumble. The Mer had invited Harry, Ginny, Hermione, Luna, Peter and Gwen on a trip to The Rocks, the magical district of Sydney, the largest city in the Federation, with a couple of her friends. With Will, who was
supposed to be overseeing the Alcheringa Delegation, still missing, and Headmaster Andrews on the verge of death via Taniwha poison, which according to Hagrid was incredibly painful, the Academy was in the middle of a power vacuum. So, sneaking out was effortless. Well, almost effortless.

Hagrid followed Claire onto the platform with an expression more fitting for a kid in a candy shop than a half-giant in a train station. Why exactly Hagrid had been chosen of all the teachers to chaperone the Hogwarts Delegation Ginny wasn’t sure. But he was a million times better than Snape, and much less strict than McGonagall, so she tried not to think about it. The Care of Magical Creatures Professor had encountered them at the train station on his return trip from the Magical Division of the Australia Zoo, where he had had, “the abs’lute privilege it was,” to talk to a Druid called the Crocodile Hunter (who Ginny thought must have been a rather intimidating figure) about both the spike in Dragon numbers in the Outback and the Basilisk infestation in a place called Cape York. If asked, Ginny could have told anyone a great deal about Basilisk’s in the tropics and Dragon population growth, as Hagrid had replayed his entire conversation with the famed Steve Irwin to the cohort when he insisted on coming to the Rocks with them so he could go to a pub called the Floating Billywig. Hagrid’s enthusiasm was fuelled even further by Claire and her friend Emilie, both of whom were Mer and apparently knew a great deal about Crocodiles, which Ginny now knew were large reptilian creatures with tough hides, large teeth, and tails longer than she was tall that lived in northern Australia and had a tendency to eat people.

You know, I’m starting to see why everyone is constantly going on about Australia being full of dangerous animals. Harry admitted.

Wait, you knew about all these Crocodiles and Basilisks and wild Dragons before we came here!

I didn’t know about Basilisks and Dragons, but whenever muggles mention Australia, they’re always talking about how it’s full of spiders and snakes that can kill you with one bite. And of course, the Crocodiles. Oh, and Emus. Apparently, they’re enormous, have big sharp beaks and stalk people.

Why did nobody think telling me this was a good idea?

Harry and Ginny were the last people off the train, and Ginny took a deep breath of relief at being back in the open air. Claire had not been lying about how hot it was in Australia, or about the effects of the sun. Half the Hogwarts Delegation visited the Hospital Wing in Alcheringa that first night for bright red blotchy burns on their skin. Claire and the other Alcheringa students had apparently been waiting for the procession of sun-roasted kids, as they had set up beanbags and a score-board in the courtyard outside the hospital. Every time a Hogwarts kid would come up, they would mark a new entry under the word, “Pomegranates,” on the board, which made all the Druids and Mer laugh, and left all the Wizards very confused. Thankfully, the sun-screen Harry had acquired meant he, Ginny and Luna could sleep without peeling skin. Hermione apparently didn’t burn, she just instantly tanned into the same olive coloured shade that Claire and most of the white-skinned Alcheringa students supported. Ginny was incredibly jealous of her friend on that account.

The Rocks air-conditioning was undoubtedly better than Alcheringa’s, as a soft cool breeze caressed her cheeks as they followed Hagrid’s bulky form through the crowd. He had seemingly moved on to Leviathan now.

“So ‘at’s why you folks are always staying away from the deeper parts of the Pacific. I always wondered why you stuck to the reefs and islands.”

“Yeah, those things can sniff out a Mer fifty kilometres away, staying where they can’t get us is
better for everyone. It’s been better since we tricked them into stirring up the Kraken Nest up near Guam. Got into a mighty bit of trouble with MACUSA for that, but then the whole revolution happened, and the Americans were a bit busy to complain about us. It was sooo worth it,” Emilie replied.

“Wait a second, you guys did that on purpose?!” Gwen exclaimed.

“Well they were eating us, what did you expect?” Claire asked.

Gwen laughed and put an arm around Claire’s shoulder.

“Oh no. I’m laughing my head off. Flash Thompson, the egotistical jerk who thought he was gonna be Champion for Ilvermorny, his Dad is in the Kaiju Baiting industry. You know the illegal one? Yeah, well apparently Daddy Thompson thought I would be the perfect catch for his son, cause he’s an idiot and he needs someone vaguely intelligent to continue the esteemed Pureblood Thompson line. Imagine his face when I told him I like girls, so he could take his betrothal contract and fuck off? That my new friends is not an exclamation of shock. Oh no. It’s an exclamation of pure and utter sweet revenge.” Everyone just looked at her confused.

“There are only three things in nature that can kill a Kaiju. Leviathan, Kraken and Dragons. Sea Dragons patrol Hawaiian waters, so Daddy Thompson has to go beyond Federation territories, up closer to Japan, if he wants any bites. The only problem, with the Leviathan closing in on Kraken territory beneath the waves, Krakens are starting to move north, and they’re picking off the Kaiju one by one. That pushes them closer to Federation territory…”

“…and into the waiting jaws of the FPA. That’s the Federal Protection Authority by the way. They’re responsible for law enforcement, dark magic monitoring and creature handling, anything dangerous really,” Claire finished.

“Exactly,” Gwen continued, her smile growing larger with every sentence, “So, not only do the Thompsons have to risk coming into closer contact with Japanese Ships to avoid the Federation, but the Kaiju are more skittish, less likely to be baited. The Thompsons are losing heaps of revenue because of it. They tried to get the new Secretary of Magic to sue the Federation, but Federation President Matson…”

“Pulled the finger at him. We know, it was broadcast live across the Kingdoms. I want to fucking marry that guy,” Emilie sighed. Ginny couldn’t believe a national leader would actually be that rude, but the circumstances did warrant it. She thought she would at least be a bit politer about it.

“He’s seriously dishy, no doubt about that,” Claire admitted. Ginny decided she needed to see a picture of this President Matson.

Should I be jealous?
Shut up you prat!

Hagrid and Claire led the group out of the gunmetal grey building and out onto the street. The Rocks it seemed, were housed entirely within a large stone dome. Shop stalls like those in Diagon Alley lined the roadside, and muggle automobiles were parked on the cobblestone roads. A few blocks away was a large intersection with a majestic fountain, floating above the fountain was a large glowing news board like the one in the train station, only this one was ten times larger. Lit torches and street lamps ran along the sidewalks, but most of the light came in through a skylight at the apex of the dome. Ginny assumed the dome was larger on the inside than the outside, as there was no way they could hide a community this large from Muggles if this were its actual size.
“The Rocks is a cool place to visit. It’s not particularly old, but it does have a lot of shops, and it caters to tourists better than the Alcheringa CBD does. There’s a department store, Adeneurs Wizardwear Superstore, that has a lot of cooler clothing if you guys want to get any. Sunscreen you can get at the Apothecary on Hallows Street, oh and of course Gringotts is just there.” Indeed, the slanted white marble building of Gringotts stood on the corner of the intersection, identical to the one in Diagon Alley. Suddenly, the doors banged open and a figure with a long black beard wearing a white singlet that said, ‘Keep Calm and love a Dwarf,’ and khaki cargo pants, stormed out of the building muttering about Goblins, ICW treaties and how he missed having Elves to murder.

The Dwarf strode up the street, a deep scowl on his face. He nodded to Claire, eyed Hagrid warily, and walked into the train station, where Ginny saw him board a train for Uluru. Wherever that was.

“He seemed very jolly,” Luna exclaimed.

“Not really. His names Gárlin, he’s a good friend of my brother. Not the sort of person you invite to a Christmas party though. But he loves his job, and that means dealing with the Goblins, who everyone knows are universally hated by the Dwarves. Of course, the Goblins hate the Dwarves even more, so who’s fault is who’s you’ll just have to guess,” Claire explained, before pointing out the Floating Billywig to Hagrid while Emile and Jimmy – another of Claire’s friends – led the foreigners into Adeneurs.

If Harry thought Adeneurs would be a short visit, he was very, very wrong. The shop, though looking only three stories from outside, was actually fifteen stories high on the inside. It was like Harrods. Harry and Peter would have been content to sit in the rooftop café with what the Australian’s called a ‘Sausage Sizzle,’ while the girls shopped. But they all wanted their opinions, which ruined that dream. So, they were dragged from change room to change room around the store and forced to watch with the other boys as the girls put on outfit show after outfit show. Harry thought Ginny looked particularly lovely in a set of denim short shorts.

After shrinking their packages, (Hermione was understandably thrilled when she learned there was no underage magic law in the Federation – something about protecting yourself from Mimi Spirits) Claire led the group out into Muggle Sydney through a passageway in the side of the rock dome in which the magical community resided.

The passage opened out into an old overgrown alleyway in the Sydney district of The Rocks, which it turned out was a historical and tourist district. Hermione had started an impromptu lecture on why a historical area made the most sense to hide a magical community, but Gwen silenced her when they came into view of the Sydney Opera House.


They spent the rest of the afternoon ogling the sites of Sydney, eventually ending up on Bondi Beach eating Fish and Chips. For Harry, it was the first time he had ever been to the beach. He decided very quickly that he liked the feeling of the sand between his toes. Ginny and Hermione took him down into the waves and gave him an impromptu lesson on swimming. Claire declined to join them, as she thought, “growing a tail live on Bondi Rescue, while good for ratings, was probably not the best way of maintaining the Statute of Secrecy.” They stayed at Bondi until Sunset. Then, just as the group were planning to head back, Emile pulled a dozen tickets to an AC/DC concert on that night out of her pocket with a Cheshire grin and the statement, “Fun ain’t over yet guys.”

Harry thought AC/DC’s music was thunderous and jarring, and Hermione and Peter agreed fervently with him. Gwen and Ginny however, absolutely loved it. Gwen knew practically every word of every song (Peter confided in them that Gwen had a secret love of Rock and Roll Music that her parents didn’t approve of) and belted them out as loud as she possibly could. Ginny didn’t know any
of the songs but had a blast trying to guess the words or just jiving along to the beat. No matter how much he personally didn’t like it, he enjoyed the entire concert regardless, as just watching Ginny’s face beam in the strobe lighting and listening to the broken and disjointed thoughts she accidentally sent across their connection made his night, and Ginny wouldn’t stop talking about it for a week afterwards.

Harry was sure she was cheating. There was no other explanation. How was she just so damn good! Harry dived after Clarissa Mayfair as the duo soared towards the red dirt floor of the Alcheringa Academy Quidditch Arena. And what an arena it was. It was easily twice the size of the Hogwarts pitch, with a gilded metal roof Hermione thought was Dwarf made. The stands were filled to the brim, and, much to Luna’s pleasure, padded. But after over four hours of gameplay, Alcheringa and Hogwarts were both neck and neck, and every time Harry saw the Snitch, Clarissa was on him, and it took all his considerable skill to keep her from snatching the tiny golden ball from right under his nose. She was easily the best Seeker he had ever played against, but some of the moves she pulled off… it was like she could predict where the Snitch would be or how it would move. It was barely noticeable, but Harry was watching very carefully. The Alcheringa Seeker moved just before the Snitch did, not just after it like she should have been. It became so clear after the first five times she had intercepted him that Harry had started watching her almost as much as he watched the Snitch. The result was he and the girl with the hair like flickering golden flames had spent most of the match locked in aerial chase after aerial chase, performing more and more dangerous maneuvers to shake their opponent.

_The Snitch is near the Hogwarts posts!! Go, Harry!!_

Ok. So maybe he was cheating a bit as well, but she definitely started it. Harry took a subtle glance behind him, and locked eyes with Clarissa. She grinned evilly at him, following him closer and closer to the turf. He had to do something to lose her before he could go after the Snitch, and he had to do it fast, or it would vanish before he could reach it.

_Can you Wronski Feint?_

_No. She’s watching for it. I already tried it this match, and she’s clearly done her research. I have to try something else._

_Something original maybe?_

_Could work, but what?_

_… remember that Motorcycle Derby we watched in the Home that one time?_

_… That might actually work!_

Harry pulled up inches from the ground and steered away from the posts at top speed.

_Better make it look good, or she’ll never buy it. She’s a fricken phoenix!_

Harry reached his arm out and twisted upwards towards the middle of the field, causing Angelina to duck around him with the Quaffle. A bludger soared past his head, only to be intercepted by Fred.
Or was it George? Clarissa started pulling up alongside him... and Harry kicked back on his broom, letting his feet fly clear while keeping an iron-clad grip with his hands. He threw himself backwards, allowing gravity to pull his weight back to the ground, and using the brooms forwards momentum to increase his acceleration even further as his body pulled it in a complete 180-degree turn. The look of shock on Clarissa’s face was so worth it. Harry fell remounted his broom in the middle of the decent, twisting and flinging himself faster than he had ever flown before in the direction of the Hogwarts posts.

\[text{That was wicked!!! It’s still there! Go, go, go!!!}\]

Harry could see the Snitch now, and by the sound of the slipstream behind him, Clarissa had seen it too. He rocketed forward, arm outstretched as he aimed for the post.

\[text{Duck!}\]

Harry dipped his head, and the Quaffle soared centimetres above his hair. He ignored the announcer declaring the throw a foul by the Alcheringa Chaser but didn’t process it. If he stopped now, Hogwarts lost. Period. The Snitch, as if sensing the peril it was in, began fluttering around one of the posts, climbing closer and closer to the hoops. The wings were just out of reach... Clarissa was cursing behind him... a whining sound was coming from above him...

\[text{Bludger!!!!}\]

Harry jerked himself down, just in time to avoid a Bludger careening right for his face. The metal ball flew through the space he occupied a second before, smashing into Clarissa’s shoulder on the follow through. Harry tried to course correct, to angle back towards the Snitch, but it was too late. Clarissa, ignoring the bone peeking out of her shoulder blade, latched onto the Snitch. A siren sounded, and Harry felt rather than saw, like a pressure in his skull, Clarissa’s free hand slip from her broom handle. He reached out and grabbed her arm as she slipped clean from her broom, and held her up as her head lolled to the side in unconsciousness.

\[text{“Clarissa Mayfair has caught the Snitch for Alcheringa!! But a Bludger shot by teammate Jackson Pearce meant for Seeker Harry Potter seems to have struck her instead. Potter is lowering her to the ground, but the result is clear. Alcheringa wins 500 – 340! That puts Alcheringa firmly in the lead on 132 points, Hogwarts sits in second place on 84, and Ilvermorny in third place with 79 points. The Second Task will take place in two weeks! Be sure to join us at the yet to be disclosed secret location!!”}\]

Harry didn’t process anything the announcer said, as he was too busy lowering Clarissa to the ground. One of the Alcheringa Chasers caught her broom, while Eloise – the Hogwarts Keeper – flew down and placed herself in position to catch the girl if Harry dropped her.

\[text{Hold on, Claire is on her way with a medical team.}\]

They reached the dirt and Harry lay her down on the ground. Claire was the first person to reach them, before even the medi-witches. She stared at the wound and made a face, ignoring the fact that Harry was still gripping her hand. Harry finally got a good look at the injury himself. It didn’t look nearly as bad as he’d initially thought it was. The bone was already starting to slide back into her shoulder...

\[text{Okay. That is just plain weird.}\]

Harry had to agree with Ginny on that one. Bones did not just restore themselves like that on their own.
“Shit,” Claire muttered. She slapped Harry’s hand away from Clarissa’s, bent down, picked the girl up in her arms, and vanished in a cloud of golden dust.

I don’t think she was supposed to do that.

“What does that girl think she’s doing!? Where did she go!? Did she tell you!?” One of the nurses snapped at Harry and Eloise as she arrived with a stretcher, the rest of the Alcheringa and Hogwarts teams landing around them. Both of them shook their heads.

“Well I hope she’s had enough common sense to go to a hospital…” the witch grumbled before stalking off. Harry just stared at the spot where Claire and Clarissa had vanished. Fred and George incorrectly diagnosed his confusion.

“Don’t you worry mate. We’ll beat Ilvermorny, no doubt about that. And you’ll win the next Challenge as well!” Fred and George looped arms around Angelina and Alicia’s shoulders and walked them, the Firebolts Harry had bought them as per his bet earlier in the year clutched in their hands.

Ginny, Hermione and Luna finally pushed their way through the crowd to him.

“Where’d they go?” Hermione exclaimed.

“Entangled away,” Ginny said, sounding as confused as Harry felt.

Why would she take her away without seeing the nurses?

I think she was trying to stop them from seeing her healing. No ordinary person heals that fast.

Why?

I don’t know. Could be a power from the Soul Bond maybe?

I don’t think so. That doesn’t sound much like a Soul Bond does it? Sounds more like the Dragon Force.

Yeah but she doesn’t have that. Does she?

Maybe they share it?

How?

Who knows? I mean, what do we really know about the Dragon Force anyway? All we do know is it's uber powerful. Kicked Snape’s ass.

Good times.

“Hello! Potters! Are you even listening?” At the sound of Hermione calling them ‘Potters’ Harry and Ginny realised they had been completely ignoring their friend. Blushing to their roots at the reminder of their… newly married… status, they mumbled their apologies.

“Honestly. I was asking how you could possibly know that Ginny. Harry hadn’t even spoken yet, and you certainly didn’t see it,” Hermione said, clearly exasperated.

“They were talking about it as we walked down silly,” Luna said off handily, flitting her eyes between Harry and Ginny and swaying her head as if singing along to a song only she could hear. Which was of course, precisely what she was doing, Harry realised.
How could she know? We agreed not to tell anyone.

I stopped trying to figure Luna out a long time ago.

“Talking? What do you mean? How could they be talking?” Hermione asked, rounding on Luna.

“They’re doing it again now,” Luna said cheerily.

Hermione snapped back to the duo, studying their facial expressions carefully.

“Luna. They aren’t saying anything.”

That’s what you think.

Harry had to bite his lip to hold back his laughter. Ginny he could feel was trying just as hard, though she made it look easy. Growing up with Fred and George probably gave her an edge.

“Yes, they are. The Fairies are flying between them very fast, carrying secret messages!! It’s very nice. Like the tingling of wind chimes.”

Hermione looked from Harry and Ginny to Luna, then back to Harry and Ginny.

“Is she telling the truth?”

Realising their charade was well and truly blown, Harry and Ginny nodded sheepishly.

Hermione turned back to Ginny, “never let me underestimate you ever again, Mystery.”

“That’s alright Brains. Blame the Wrackspurts. I do!”

Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment, before grinning and slinging an arm around the petite blonde.

“Say, Luna, how would you like to use your music to help Gwen, Peter and I prove Kelmscott’s Law is false?”

Luna looked dreamily at Hermione, “That sounds like fun. Orders of Merlin here we come!”

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Clarissa and Claire were at dinner that night in the Academy Mess Hall, acting as if nothing had happened, and for all anyone except Harry and his friends knew, nothing had happened. The Hall was located on the ground floor of what the Druids and Mer called the “Boarding House,” the large white building the Hogwarts and Ilvermorny Delegations stayed in. Apparently, Alcheringa had equal populations of boarding students and day students, unlike Hogwarts and Ilvermorny, which only boarded. The building itself was large and spacious, designed like a large Greek temple, with the floors and column supports for the roof both made from marble. The tables, on the other hand, were plain wooden affairs that seated eight, and had tiny labels on them that said, “IKEA.” Unlike at Hogwarts, the students were free to sit wherever they liked. Even with all three delegations present, the hall felt very empty. The Alcheringa Students were on their version of Summer Holidays, and as such, the Academy was virtually deserted. The Second Task, which took place in the second week
of February, would be opening the new school year. To quote Sirius, “No pressure.”

But as much as Harry wanted to spend his entire time contemplating the mystery that was Clarissa Mayfair, aka Clarissa O’Neill – one half of the only other Soul-bonded pair alive and a member of the Council of Fire – he had to focus on the Second Task. Which was why he and Ginny were sitting with Fred, George, Angelina, Alicia and Katie tonight, leaving Hermione, Peter and Gwen to fill Luna in on their Arithmancy Project.

“So, guys,” Harry said, finishing another piece of Angus Beef Sirloin – Will O’Neill had converted him to the delicious cut of meat – “I was wondering if I could get some help from you. It’s about the Second Task.”

All the sixth years suddenly looked very interested.

“Sure thing Harry…”

“…you know we’ll help…”

“…any way…”

“…we can,” the twins exclaimed, each taking a bite of a Yorkshire pudding while the other spoke.

“The thing is, I’ve figured out the clue,” Ginny smacked him across the back of the head. “We’ve figured out the clue. Looks like the judges are going to take a hostage dear to me and place them at the bottom of the Ocean somewhere.”

It took Katie all of a second to figure out what he implied.

“Oh my gosh! That’s messed up!”

“Yeah. Odds are, the hostage is going to be me,” Ginny said, sipping an Apple Cider as a silent and pointless protest against her mother, who never would have allowed such a thing.

“I’m not so sure I’m comfortable with that Gin-Gin,” Fred said, all joking cast aside.

“Me neither. But we don’t get a say,” Harry told them. Neither looked happy.

“The only good thing about it is,” Harry dropped his voice now, “thanks to the Soul Bond, I can sense where Ginny is at all times. All I have to do is follow it and get back to the surface.” Fred and George were noticeably relieved by this, the girls, however, latched onto the mention of the Soul Bond.

“Come on you two, you’ve got to tell us something. What’s it like? Being married and all,” Alicia asked.

“It’s… weird,” Ginny supplied.

*I hate talking about it.*

*I know, but it’s only Angelina, Alicia and Katie, they won’t tell a soul.*

*Fred and George will.*

“We might be legally married, but we’re taking it slow,” Harry said.

“We’re close, no doubt about that. Best Friends certainly. Boyfriend and Girlfriend? We haven’t
really decided. We’ve kissed a couple of times, nothing more. Slow and steady, we’ll get to all that when we’re ready,” Ginny explained softly, blushing the entire time.

“You two are so sweet. And that song Harry! That was just beautiful,” Katie gushed. Thankfully, Angelina was seemingly still focussed on Harry’s initial dilemma.

“You need to be able to breathe underwater for an hour,” she realised.

Harry nodded.

“Any ideas?”

“The Bubblehead Charm,” the twins said excitedly, “we use it all the time when we’re testing our products. Filters out any toxins in the air. Including water.”

“That would definitely work,” Angelina said, “assuming you can swim. You can swim, can’t you?”

Harry looked to the floor. Ginny, sensing his self-loathing, grabbed his hand and squeezed.

“The Dursleys refused to teach him, but Hermione’s a good swimmer and Luna and I are pretty decent. We’ve been using one of the pools to practice every non-Quidditch morning,” Ginny told them. Harry was by no means an excellent swimmer. But he could do Freestyle and Breaststroke well enough to get him from point A to point B. He didn’t tire while doing it, which had Hermione very confused, but after Luna attributed it to the Glowing Migglybites that quote, “made his abs glisten,” she had dropped the issue very quickly, much to Harry’s comfort. It had been quite the eye-opening actually. Spending so much time without a shirt on (covered in sunscreen) had forced him to realise that he was in quite good shape thanks to both Quidditch and Padfoot and Moony’s Magical Bootcamp™. Ginny, who had enjoyed sitting in the sun attempting to tan herself before the sun became powerful enough to fry her pale skin even through SPF 100+, was highly appreciative of the view. She was not so grateful when Luna kept pointing out that whenever she stared at him, with his knowledge or without, the Fairy chimes in the air increased in pitch.

“Hermione found me some spells that should help with propulsion, ascent and descent, so I should be fine,” Harry told them.

“Bubblehead Charm. Got it. Thank you,” Ginny said.

George made to say something, probably another joke, but stopped short when a sonic boom shook the entire hall. A rocket of golden energy flew down from the sky, before skidding to a halt in the middle of the room, leaving a smoking trail scorched into the marble floor. Will O’Neill stood, surrounded in golden energy, panning his gaze around the room. He went straight passed Harry’s table, before locking onto Clarissa, who was sitting with her friends a few rows back. His face split into a grin and the golden energy faded away, revealing a figure just shy of six feet, wearing a basilisk skin cloak that looked like it had seen better days. The most shocking thing though, was that his left arm was missing from the elbow. An old scar ran from his hairline, above his right ear, down to his chin, ending below his mouth. His facial hair was significantly thinner as well, though his frame was the same muscular form it usually held. His posture was slightly different too. He wasn’t standing to his full height, and by standing with his feet slightly further apart, he appeared an inch or so shorter.

“That must be what he really looks like…

“Honey, I’m home,” Will announced, in a voice slightly higher than the one Harry was used to. In a fraction of a second, Clarissa was up from her seat, and the two raced towards each other. They
jumped into each other’s arms and began to snog each other senseless.

The Hogwarts and Ilvermorny students sat in complete shock, but the Alcheringa kids laughed, and wolf whistled as if that happened all the time. Then he realised, it probably did. They already knew that Will was really nineteen instead of the late 20’s he pretended to be, most of them had gone to school with him!

Look at Hermione!

Harry glanced at his friend. Her jaw was literally sitting on the table. Ginny elbowed Fred, who was sitting next to her, before standing up on her seat and clapping. Fred followed suit, then Harry, then George, then the Chaser trio, then the rest of the Hall.

When the Soul Bonded pair parted, big goofy grins on their faces, they took a bow. Then a phoenix trilled in the distance, before flying into the hall, landing on Will’s shoulder, and vanishing, with the O’Neill’s in toe, in a flash of fire.
Act III, Chapter 6: The Library

Chapter Notes

No disclaimer this week as Ghost and Miracle are currently passed out. On the bright-side, I now have a high definition video of a smashed Ghost and Miracle singing a duet of Taylor Swift's 'Me!' Oh sweet, sweet black mail. Might not get a new chapter next week, because Ghost's computer is going in for repairs. So sorry if any of the formatting is off this week, cause i'm posting this from my iPad.

Act III, Chapter 6: The Library

Harry felt incredibly hollow. He was tired and cold. Every cell in his body felt like it was being drained of energy. He had a splitting headache, his stomach felt the need to vomit every few seconds, and his legs and arms were like jelly. And the Gemini Rune had no energy in it. It wasn't hot or cold, even the constant thrum it usually held was gone. It was like one of his senses had been ripped away. But the worst thing, the worst thing was how empty everything was. All the colours around him had lost their shine, and every time someone talked, he had to strain to hear them through the high-pitched ringing that clogged his ears. He could barely feel the rain dotting his skin as he stood on the dock at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, a gunmetal sphere with an eye trapped within it floating over his shoulder.

He had woken the morning of the Second Task in a pool of his own sweat, Dobby staring at him fearfully. His vision, which had been slowly improving since he received the Firebrand, was the worst it had ever been, the Gemini Rune – that constant companion and anchor – was dead, and Harry was sure he had lost at least five kilos of muscle weight. The elf had been sent for him by Luna, as he was late for breakfast.

He knew why he was feeling so terrible. Why his strength and senses had left him. He knew it like he knew how to breathe. Ginny was down there, somewhere at the bottom of the ocean, trapped in suspended animation. All her bodily processes frozen. Until that moment, Harry had never truly realised just how much his body had grown to rely on his connection through the Gemini Rune to Ginny. Now, with her constant presence negated, Harry had been practically stripped of his power. Clarissa said the Firebrand only worked when shared between two souls. With Ginny frozen, she couldn't do her part to contain the power that came with being a member of the Council of Fire. Now he was slowly wasting away. The very power he had come to rely on had deserted him. He was as weak now as he was when he first came to Hogwarts. The only power that remained to him it seemed, was his innate knowledge of her location. It was like a beacon of light in his otherwise cloudy vision. A gold and white glow that only he could see. And it was coming from deep below.

"Welcome ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, to the Second Task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament! Today, the three school champions will be diving head first into the depths of the Pacific Ocean to recover a hostage taken last night. Each champion has their own hostage to collect and must return to the surface within one hour, lest they fail the challenge. The first champion back with their hostage will be the winner!"

Harry stood beside Claire and Peter on the dock, Dumbledore, O'Neill and Strange standing behind them.
"We should have thought of this. Of course, this would happen. How could I've been so infinitesimally stupid!" Will exclaimed. He had an orb of Plutonium in his hand he was using as a stress ball.

"There's no way we could have known. No one has ever put half of a soul bond into an enchanted sleep before," Strange told him.

"Harry," Dumbledore said, placing a hand on Harry's shoulder, "the task can be delayed, we can retrieve Mrs Potter and find another hostage."

"No. Ginny's down there right now. And odds are, it would take time to get back to full health even if she was woken right now. Besides, I could probably get down, find her, and get back before any of you. You're just lucky I can't apparate straight to her like this, or this task would've been very short."

O'Neill blanched, "I definitely should have thought of that."

"Like you should have thought about the possibility of a Mer taking part in this challenge?" Claire ribbed, raising an eyebrow at her brother, who had resumed his aged appearance. His arm had also apparently grown back. The Mer looked as if she didn't give a care in the world. She wore a set of short jeans and a white blouse that said, "Ask me about my Feminist Agenda." Her hair flowed freely down her back.

"That was Bagman, Crouch and Moody's job. Not my fault. And why are you complaining?"

"Don't want it to be too one-sided for these two. I mean, and no offence, but Potter looks dead on his feet. I can swim at almost 200km an hour. What chance do these two have?"

She wasn't wrong. Harry felt very much like roadkill right now.

"Don't count me out just yet," Peter said. He couldn't have looked less like Claire if he tried. He wore a mesh wetsuit with an 'Oscorp' logo across the shoulder. Mounted to his belt was a small oxygen canister attached to a mouthpiece currently hanging around his neck. A pair of scuba goggles were sitting on his head, and he wore a pair of flippers on his feet. Harry also wore a wetsuit. His original plan had been to simply go in a pair of boardshorts he'd bought at the Rocks that Ginny had charmed to show the Hogwarts crest. Thank Merlin Hermione had insisted on buying a wetsuit as well, just in case. The suit, though a bit uncomfortable in the humid February heat, effectively hid the heavy breathes he was taking and stopped him from slouching his shoulders.

"Ready Champions!"

"Good luck guys." Peter pulled his goggles down onto his eyes and fixed his clear plastic mask over his face. Claire pulled off her blouse, revealing a thin spaghetti strap bikini, and several wolf whistles echoed from the stands. She tossed her shirt at Will, who rolled his eyes as he caught it. Harry pulled out his wand and cast the Bubblehead Charm he had been practising the last few days. A thin bubble of air materialised over his mouth, nose and eyes, and he breathed a sigh of relief. The charm would allow him to breathe and see clearly while he searched the reef, but wouldn't obscure any sounds he might hear. The only problem, of course, was making sure he didn't vomit.

"Potter, I don't give a shit about school pride. You think you're going to pass out, you pull out. You understand me? Don't make me come down there and save your ass," O'Neill told him.

"I'll be fine." O'Neill, Strange and Dumbledore didn't look like they believed him very much.
"3! 2! 1!"

A horn blast blew across the stands erected along Paradise Coast, and Harry, Claire and Peter dived into the ocean, their cameras following them. As soon as they were beneath the water, both Harry and Peter couldn't help but stare at Claire.

The bubbles of water surrounding her cleared and the Claire they knew had vanished. In her place was a figure with a sky blue and silver blended tail. She had two sets of four fins, one at her hips, one at the end of her tail. Blue and silver scales dotted her skin in certain places. Her jeans were gone, though her bikini top remained. Her hair, usually a dirty blonde colour, was now the same shade as her scales, and her eyes were a vibrant crystal blue. On each side of her neck were three scars. Gills.

"See you boys," she said, winking at them. Then she flared her tail and shot forward into the ocean, leaving nothing but a trail of bubbles behind her. Harry sighed and turned towards the gold and white light. It was hovering deep beneath them, so Harry deemed following the seafloor was the best course of action. He glanced at Peter, who was fiddling with a metal device in his hand. Shrugging, Harry pointed his wand behind him and cast the propulsion charm he had learnt specifically for this occasion. He shot forward, angling down towards the sand.

The sea floor was mostly white sand, dotted intermittently with red and grey rocks, where clumps of green moss and seaweed waved in the ocean currents. At least at first. The further he followed the bank, the more he came to appreciate the Mer as a people. After only a few minutes, he was forced to cancel the charm, not from lack of energy, but from the fact that a small town now blotted his vision. Harry thought back to what Claire had said when they first arrived at Alcheringa.

"Beneath the island are ten individual Mer settlements, done in the same design as the regions above."

Harry, naturally, had no idea what area of the deep this region attempted to emulate, but he could feel that the water here was hotter than when he first entered. Geysers dotted the ocean floor spewing bubbles up to the surface. The houses were made from a glassy black rock and were very geometric in shape. Dozens of Mer, all with tails and hair of different hues, watched and applauded him as he swam through. One Mer girl with violet hair and an indigo tail with three fins along her back like a shark, who looked about the same age as him, told him he was headed in the right direction and pointed towards the white gold light Harry was following. He thanked her and, though he couldn't be sure as he was underwater, he swore he saw her blush.

Leaving the volcanic village behind, the sand started to become more sparse, replaced with more of the reddish-grey rocks. For the first time in his life, he actually thanked Uncle Vernon, because he knew that the stones were Iron Ore. The terrain radically changed with the next village. This one had its buildings constructed from shards of massive coral, with roofs made from seaweed. He also couldn't help but notice that the Mer who lived here had significantly more colourful and vibrant tails and hair. He guessed they must be more reef based. Beyond the village was a veritable forest of coral and marine plants. It was like staring into a rainbow, and thousands of fish of different patterns and colours flitted in and out from between the giant structures.

By now it was so dark that Harry couldn't even see the sun. Hermione had told him that the Mer could see in the dark, thanks to their different biology, but Harry hadn't really understood why that was important until now. Harry had to use a Lumos charm to even see where he was going!

Keeping Professor Lupin's lessons on underwater creatures in mind, Harry wisely went over the forest, though it took him longer than he thought it would. Eventually, he winded up in a village that rested on the very edge of a massive drop-off. This village was built from grey stone and looked the
most like a village you would see on land. The Mer here seemed to have more fins, and their hair and scales were more transparent. Maybe they spent more time at deeper levels?

Either way, the white and gold light was coming from beyond the cliff.

Harry floated at the edge of the drop-off, gazing down into the trench below.

"Your time's half gone, so tarry not. Lest what you seek stays here to rot." Harry wasn't sure where the eerie voice came from, but it filled him with dread all the same.

He took a deep breath and prepared to jump, but felt a hand on his shoulder. He spun around, raising his wand, but the hand merely belonged to an elderly Mer with a long white beard.

"What you seek lies below. Be careful, the ruins are sacred and unguarded. There may be many creatures hiding in the darkness." With that he swam away, leaving Harry to continue to fight the urge to hurl on his own.

The swim had taken a lot out of his already depleted reserves. His headache, whether it was from the lack of surrounding noise or an increase in intensity, was definitely stronger. If he didn't find her soon… Harry didn't think it would be the monsters that killed him.

Muttering a thank you, not that anyone heard it, Harry propelled himself down into the abyss. He swam for a few more minutes until he encountered a ledge. He swam over to the moss-covered rock and peered over. Lying on the ocean floor were the ruins of an ancient fortress built from stone. Harry wasn't sure whether it belonged on the History channel, or in a horror movie. The walls, covered in moss, were in substantial decay. Sharks circled the statues, ducking in and out of their hiding places. Several stingrays were coalescing around what looked like the main entrance. No one had been here in a very long time. But Ginny's light was glowing from within.

A bang echoed from within the ruins, scattering most of the creatures, and seconds later two figures emerged from the roof, trapped within a giant bubble that was ascending rapidly to the surface. Harry assumed it was Claire and her hostage, whoever that was. Using the noise as a distraction, Harry dived down the last few meters and through a crack on the stone wall.

The inside of the ruined fortress was even more decayed than the outside. Entire wings had collapsed to the floor, and the surviving rooms it seemed had been taken as nests for various creatures Harry couldn't even begin to describe. He stayed away from them. Fortunately, the light from his wand kept them in the shadows for the most part. Harry assumed it was because they didn't get to the surface very often. He turned a corner into a large open courtyard, and his body broke into shivers. Ginny was floating, eyes closed and red hair billowing out in the darkness. A rope attached to a large metal weight was hooked around her ankle. A shell of energy surrounded her, keeping the animals away.

Pushing down the vomit once more, Harry swam over to her. She looked so peaceful, yet so vulnerable at the same time. It was a new kind of horror, and Harry was sure it would feature prominently in his nightmares for the next few months. Pointing his wand at the rope, Harry cast a Cutting Curse. The line snapped, and another loud boom erupted all around him. The water surrounding him vanished to nothing, and Harry fell a few feet, before crashing against a soft shape like a mattress. Then the equivalent of a volcanic eruption exploded in Harry's head. It was like a dozen needles being stabbed into his brain. Like sculling an entire bottle of vodka in a single gulp. It was singular, agonising, all-encompassing. And it was coming from the Rune on his neck, which had blazed back to life in a single second.

Harry pushed himself up and realised he was trapped in his own bubble that was rapidly ascending.
away from the ocean floor. On the other side of the sphere, was a very wet Ginny. Her body, contorted into a tight ball, was violently shaking, her face scrunched so tight it looked like it might burst, and her eyes were screwed shut.

**HARRY!**

Suddenly, as if flicking a switch, their mental connection slid back into place. The tiredness was still there, but the emptiness that accompanied it was gone. Harry pulled her close and buried her head in his shoulder.

*It's all right. I've got you.*

*It hurts! Make it stop! Make it STOP!*  

Ginny screamed aloud, and Harry pulled her even closer.

*What happened?! Why does everything hurt so much?!

Withdrawal. It sucks.*

*Withdrawal? From what?*

**Us. At least you won't get reverted back to a dweeb like I did.**

Slowly, but surely, the pain started to lose its edge as their powers flowed back. Harry's vision became clear again, and ringing in his ears ebbed away. Ginny, instead of screaming in pain, started sobbing quietly into his chest. Then suddenly, they breached the surface, dumping them into the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean. Harry pulled Ginny's head above water, and together they swam towards the beach. The crowd might have been cheering, but Harry didn't notice. All he could think about was helping Ginny to the sand. Every step felt like lead. Every muscle was screaming out in pain. It was all he could do to stay on his feet.

"Harry! Ginny!"

Hermione, Luna and Clarissa bounded over to them, towels in hand. Harry was immensely grateful when Clarissa took Ginny's weight away from him. His legs were shaking, despite the heat. That was when everything started spinning. He felt something draped over his shoulders, but he was too far gone to comprehend that it was a towel.

Gin…

Harry…

Harry's legs gave out, and the last thing he remembered was the vomit in his stomach finally reaching his throat.

Clarissa grabbed Ginny in both hands as she slipped into unconsciousness. This was all their fault! They should have thought of this! A quick glance to Harry confirmed that he had passed out as well. The two girls, whose names she couldn't remember, were holding him between them. She looked up the beach and breathed a sigh of relief as Albus, and the nurses ran towards them.

**Will; Harry and Ginny are unconscious.**

**Claire's still not back. Where the hell is she? She should've finished first.**
Go look for her.

Can't, there's still five minutes left... Wait... here she comes. Oh, thank the Valar.

Clarissa rolled her eyes before lowering Harry onto a stretcher. She glanced to Albus and nodded her head.

The medi-witches immediately began running diagnostic charms over the pair, frowning when the results came up.

"I don't understand," one of them said as they reached the healers' tent, "it's like they're going through withdrawal."

"They are," Albus told them, "from the effects of the Soul-Bond. We can only surmise it is because of the enchanted sleep. This has never happened before." The old wizard removed his hat and scratched his beard, concern visible in his face. Clarissa didn't buy it for a second. He was probably far more interested in the fact that the enchanted sleep could be used against them in the future, should they need to be contained. And against her and Will.

What the actual fuck!

Speak of the devil.

They put the hostages in Altica!

Clarissa's eyes went wide, and she all but raced out of the tent. She ran to the dock, before forcing herself to stop short near Parker and his hostage, a blonde girl with pink highlights. The Ilvermorny kids had come out first, much to all the Alcheringa Delegation's surprise and Will's concern.

That explains why she's out last.

It does that. No way she'd go down to such a religious site. Its sacrilege to even step foot down there. Bloody Brits.

Oh yeah.

Clarissa watched, a toothy grin on her face as Claire shot out of the water, transforming back into her human form in mid-air, and landing, completely dry on the dock, inches away from Ludo's face.

"You insensitive, mother-fucking piece of crocodile shit!" The Mer raged. Clarissa couldn't help but notice Ludo's eyes drop to Claire's bikini covered chest for a moment.

"Ah, what's going on?" Parker asked.

"The fortress they put the hostages in is sacred ground. No Mer would ever dare enter it of their own free-will. It's like holding a Cricket game in Westminster Abbey. Or drawing a dick on the Declaration of Independence."

Parker's hostage gasped. "How could they do that!"

"They didn't care. Most likely Moody looked at a map of the sea surrounding the island, picked the scariest thing he could find, and stuck them in there."

"That's just messed up. I haven't committed any crimes, have I?" Parker asked.

"No. You haven't. It's not an actual law. Just heavily frowned upon."
Will, who was fuming as much as Claire, but tactful enough to hold it in, was using the vibrations in the air to amplify the Mer's rant to the entire crowd.

"You dare use one of our most sacred locations for sport! How would you like it if I took a shit on one of your cultural icons!"

_She's going to be at this for quite a while._

"She's going to be at this for quite a while," Parker said, echoing Will's silent statement.

"Oh, you can bet your ass. Might even be an ICW issue. Will'll be over the moon. He loves a good international law case." Clarissa frowned and turned back to Parker, remembering something she had wanted to ask before.

"Where'd you get that stuff anyway? I didn't think Muggle technology was that efficient yet. The last dive suit I saw was large and clunky."

Parker chuckled to himself. "It's not really. At least the commercial stuff isn't. But I went to school with Harry Osborn, Norman Osborn's kid, before I transferred to Ilvermorny."

"The CEO of Oscorp?"

"That's the one. I still hang with him and my old friends when I'm in New York. We go to summer camp together. So, I called him up, told him I was taking part in an underwater challenge and asked him for some gear. He sent me this top of the line Oscorp Marine Mission gear. Twelve hours of oxygen, pressure resistant suit, and a waterproof GPS tracker. I tagged both Gwen and Hermione last night. I assumed it would be Gwen they picked, but I wanted to make sure." Parker's hostage, Gwen, slapped him across the back of the head.

"You could have told me you prat."

"I could have yes, but where's the fun in that?"

Gwen rolled her eyes and poked her tongue out at him, which looked incredibly immature on someone who was the same age as Clarissa, but she dismissed it as an American thing. Americans confused her.

"How could you not have checked first!" Claire continued. Hundreds of people in the stands were now roaring loudly in agreement. Everyone had seemingly forgotten Claire's hostage; a short, brown-haired woman walking up the beach who looked just as mad as Claire did. Finally, Bagman politely excused himself from the raging girl to confer with Crouch. Crouch made a note on his page, then handed a sheet of paper to the Announcer, who also stood on the dock.

"Well. What an incredible way to start the year for the Alcheringa Academy students! And a fascinating finale to the second task. Mr Peter Parker of Ilvermory and his hostage Miss Gwendolyn Stacy were the first to return and did so uninjured. As such, Mr Parker receives a full 60 points from the judges!"

The Ilvermory students all jumped to their feet, cheering on their champion. Gwen grabbed Peter's arm and hoisted it in the air, making the Americans cheer even louder.

"In second place, is Mr Harry Potter and his hostage Ginevra Potter. They finished the task just a few minutes after Mr Parker and Miss Stacy but returned injured. As such, the judges have awarded him 40 points!"
More cheering, combined with a great deal of booing.

"That's not fair," Parker said, folding his arms, "Potter would have easily won. He had a massive disadvantage."

"Maybe…" Clarissa said. Gwen, wisely, stayed silent.

"Finally, Miss Claire O'Neill and her hostage, Mrs Mallory O'Neill, returned last, uninjured. But… do I have to read this? Fine. For the record, I don't like it."

Clarissa frowned.

This can't be good.

Oh, it won't be.

"But, as Miss O'Neill decided to question the judges, she receives only 30 points…"

Suddenly, a massive tidal wave erupted from the ocean surface, soaring towards the dock the Announcer, the judges, and a Claire who was so shocked she stood utterly frozen, were standing. Who was controlling it, Clarissa wasn't sure, but she began to slide her wand from her pocket, latching onto the Dragon Force through the Libra rune on her wrist. But Will beat her to it. He held his hand up, and the wall of water exploded in a cloud of steam.

"Um… Alcheringa is in the lead with 162, Ilvermorny in second with 139, and Hogwarts in third with 124. See you in America folks."

The Announcer dropped the amplifier and all but ran from the dock. Peter nudged her and gestured to the beach, where Claire's hostage, who just so happened to be Claire's mother and Will's step-mother, had her arms raised, a scowl etched across her face.

"I think Will is going to be sleeping with me tonight."

Ginny woke up four days later. As soon as she opened her eyes, she breathed a long sigh of relief. The headache, the wretched feeling in her stomach, and the burning in her body were gone. Everything was clear and pristine again, and the Gemini Rune was thrumming with heat once more.

Oh, thank god.

Ginny turned to her left, following the magnetic pull of the Rune, and saw that Harry was sitting up in his bed, looking around the room the same way she had.

That was a rather horrible eye-opener wasn't it.

You have no idea. I had to swim to the bottom of an ocean feeling that bad.

Harry looked down at himself and sighed in relief.

My body's back to normal. Phew. I had not realised just how much this thing was affecting me.

Harry grinned and held up the arm with the Firebrand upon it. The Rune was rippling softly in the morning light.

Ginny looked around the room. They were obviously still in the Academy, judging by the ocean outside the window, but it seemed some principles of design, like hospitals, were universal. Beds
lined the walls, which were painted white. Some were curtained off, others weren't. And the smell of antiseptic was thick in the air.

"What now?" Harry asked, jumping up from his bed. He flexed his toes and grinned. Ginny pointed to a pile of clothes at the foot of his bed.

"Right." He grabbed the clothes and ducked behind the curtains, while she giggled and moved to do the same. When she came back out, Harry was sitting on his bed, a blank look on his face as he stared at an envelope in his hands.

"What is it?"

He held it out to her, and she sat down beside him. Written on the front was a series of words in an unfamiliar font.

Harry and Ginevra Potter.

Beneath the writing was a symbol of a black dragon breathing a red phoenix wreathed in flame.

"This is the letter we should have got years ago. It's from the Council," Harry said, confirming her thoughts.

"Question is…"

"… do we open it?"

*We'll finally get some answers.*

*Do we want those answers though?*

Ginny wasn't sure what to say to that, so she remained quiet. As far as they knew, she didn't get any powers from the Firebrand, so it was his decision. Finally, after a few minutes, Harry took a deep breath and opened the letter. The second his fingers broke the seal, Ginny felt a tug around her navel, and she was pulled forward through a funnel of swirling colours and howling wind. Then, as soon as it had begun, she was on her feet, Harry beside her, standing on a mountainside, snow falling all around her as an icy wind bit at her skin.

"Shit it's cold," Ginny said, folding her arms around her chest. Then she laughed, "I've been spending too much time around Jessica."

"I'd offer you a jacket, but I literally don't have one to offer," Harry said slyly. They were high. Very high. The rest of the world was obscured by clouds; they were so high up. Only the ledge they stood on – which was covered in snow and ice – the sheer cliff below, the thick wall of rock directly in front of them, and the pinnacle of the mountain about fifty metres above them were actually in her field of vision.

"Ah!" Harry clutched at his right arm.

"What is it?!" She shouted over the wind.

Harry didn't answer. Instead, he held the Firebrand up in the air. The marking was glowing a bright ethereal light. As soon as the light washed over the wall, an immaculate archway appeared, a wooden interior visible beyond it. Ginny grabbed Harry by the waist and pulled him forwards. As soon as they crossed the threshold, the wind and the cold vanished, replaced by the crackling of logs in a fireplace.
Ginny let go of Harry, and together they made their way down the hallway. The hall wasn't long. Only a couple of metres. It opened into a perfectly circular room with bookshelves covering every wall save the door they entered, a fireplace, and another door on the far side. Hanging above each bookcase was a portrait. The odd thing? Ginny recognised most of them.

"Moses, Odysseus, Confucius, Jesus of Nazareth, King Arthur, Salazar Slytherin, Charlemagne, Leif Ericson, Joan of Arc, George Washington, and Queen Victoria," She listed as she made her way around the room. Before Moses were several portraits of people she didn't know, and after Victoria was two empty frames. The intriguing thing though, was that most of them had two people in them. Salazar's also had Helga, Arthur's had Guinevere and so on.

"Holy crap. Ginny check this out." Harry was holding a book with a red leather cover on it. On the bottom of the front cover were the initials BB.

"This is the Red Book of Westmarch. It's real…"

Ginny didn't know what the Red Book of Westmarch was, so she started scanning the shelves herself. There were hundreds of books she had never seen before, but each looked important, and made tingles rush up her spine as she ran a hand over the cover. The Song of Ice and Fire; the Star Wars; The Great Gatsby; the Chronicles of Narnia; Crisis on Infinite Earths; The Odyssey; The Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table; In Search of Lost Time; War and Peace; The Elder Scrolls; 1984; The Aeneid; Watchmen; The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn; Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; Jurassic Park; Pride and Prejudice; The Iliad; Great Expectations; The Wind in the Willows; The Dark Phoenix Saga; The Northern Lights; Ender's Game; Les Misérables; The Percy Jackson Chronicles; The Hunger Games; A Clockwork Orange; The Handmaid's Tale; The Wheel of Time; and the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy were all titles that adorned those shelves. Then there were entire collections from dozens of authors: Shakespeare; Harper Lee; Hemingway; Terry Brooks; Roald Dahl; Ray Bradbury; Charles Dickens; Stan Lee; Arthur Conan Doyle and many, many more.

In Ginny's opinion, the most fantastic thing was the books themselves. Each appeared to have been literally plucked out of time. Some were so old they used actual animal skin, some were on ordinary parchment, and others were on white paper, with a flat and consistent type of writing that Harry called 'typing'. Then there were the books seemingly written inside a screen, contained on the library shelves in thin glass rectangles of different shapes and sizes.

But two volumes specifically drew both Harry and Ginny's eyes. The first was on a shelf with a golden plaque that read: 'The Amazing Spider-Man (Various Authors)'. One of the books on the shelf was titled, The Night Gwen Stacy Died. With shaking hands, Ginny pulled the text from the shelf. It was thin and weak, like a newspaper. But it was in colour and contained divided squares of artwork.

"It's a comic…" Harry whispered, looking over her shoulder as she flipped through the pages. A man in a red and blue suit with a spider-motif, who they realised was actually Peter Parker, was attempting to save someone who looked vaguely like the Gwen Stacy they knew after she was thrown off a bridge by a Green Goblin. Peter, who apparently went by the name 'Spider-Man', tried to save her with some type of grapple line, but she died anyway.

"They don't even look alike," Ginny said, trying to sort out the whole thing out in her head, "Peter has nothing to do with Spiders. And he certainly doesn't have these web-line, things."

"I don't know. Most of the books on the shelves are supposed to be fictional… but some of them aren't. Who knows how many are actually true…” Harry stopped short, his eyes had fixed on another shelf across the room. A shelf containing seven books of differing lengths, all written by the
same author: J.K Rowling.

Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone; Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets; Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban; Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire; Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix; Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince; and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.

"What the hell?" Harry muttered as he hesitantly walked over to it. Ginny put the comic back and followed him. He reached up to pull the Philosophers Stone from the shelf, and his hand slid straight through as if the book wasn't even there. He tried again with the other titles, but his hand phased through each one.

"I wouldn't bother with that mate. Believe me, we've all tried." The pair spun around, but no one was there.

"Who's there?"

"Us of course." Harry and Ginny looked up and found themselves staring into the eyes of King Arthur, who had a broad grin on his face from within his portrait.

"Your story. It's the one thing the Library won't let you look at. You have to live it for yourself."

Harry turned back to the seven books labelled with his name.

"What is this place?"

"This is the Library of Worlds, Harry Potter. The Headquarters of the Council of Fire. Welcome to the pinnacle of Mt Everest," Queen Victoria said grandly, gesturing at the room around them.

Ginny gasped, "You're the Council of Fire!"

"Indeed we are Mrs Potter," George Washington confirmed, nodding his head to them.

"So, you all carried the Firebrand then?" Harry asked.

"This one is intuitive isn't he," Slytherin said, winking at them.

"So maybe you can tell us what the hell is going on?" Harry finished, ignoring Salazar's comment.

"Well, you've been bestowed the power of the Firebrand by the Herald of the Council, who chooses one worthy soul every hundred years or so. Well at least, she did. Until now. Never have two bearers been alive at the same time before. This is exciting," Leif Ericson proclaimed, rubbing his hands together.

"So, you're the Council then? A bunch of dead people?"

Ginny smacked him across the back of the head.

"Hey! What was that for?"

"For being a prat." Harry rolled his eyes but didn't retort.

"Is there anything you can tell us?" Ginny asked the portraits.

"Well, we all had to deal with some sort of possible world ending or potential genocide, so expect something similar," Joan of Arc provided.
"Yep got one. His name's Voldemort. He's a dick," Harry explained, rubbing the back of his head.

"We know, we've read your story," Slytherin said, before sighing, "How our dream of a better world has fallen." He turned to Helga and placed his head on her shoulder.

_Is it just me? Or is that really creepy?_

_It's really creepy._

"Can you tell us about the Herald?" Harry asked.

"That would be me," a voice called from above the fireplace. It depicted a woman in a white and gold robes, with flowing red hair braided and hanging over her shoulder. Hers' was the first painting in the circuit.

"Fantastic. Who are you?"

"My name is Clara. Clara Hunter. And I lived roughly ten-thousand of your Earth years ago, so don't feel bad about not knowing me."

"You're an Ancient?" Ginny asked in awe.

"What you call Ancients yes. We called ourselves the Anquietas, which I guess translates roughly to Ancient."

"Brilliant. Then you know where Atlantis is then," Harry said hopefully.

Clara frowned. "Why would you need to know that?"

"Because we've been dreaming about it. Is that not normal?" The portraits all looked at them in confusion, and the Gemini Rune twinged with cold.

"Can you tell us where it is?" Ginny tried.

"I don't know where the City is. I ascended long before our civilisation was wiped out. I've given directions to where it was, but no one has ever found it. I think the later generations must have taken the City and left."

"Left? How can you just take a city and leave?" Harry asked, an edge to his voice betraying his frustration.

"It flies." Harry and Ginny's jaws dropped open.

"It flies?"

"Well yeah. It's an interstellar vessel. Of course, it flies," Clara said, staring at them in confusion. Ginny was incredibly relieved when all the other portraits started yelling at Clara.

"Why didn't you tell anyone?!"

"What do you mean it's an interstellar vessel?"

"What is an 'interstellar vessel'?"

"Hold the wormhole!" Clara yelled, and the room quieted. "Seriously? None of you knows that Atlantis was just one of a bunch of spaceships the Anquietas built as we traversed the stars?"
Holy shit. Luna was right! The Ancients are from space!

Like I said, never, ever, doubt the genius that is Luna Lovegood. It may just be the last thing you ever do.

"I can't believe that got lost to history!" Clara fumed, "Hey, Ascended self, this is your younger self patronising you from beyond the metaphorical grave!"

There was a bright flash of light, and then, standing in the middle of the room, was a figure dressed in the same robes the Clara in the portrait wore. Same face, same hair, same figure. The only difference? This one glowed with awe-inspiring white light, and her cloak seemed to billow in a non-existent wind.

"Oh, don't you start!" the woman exclaimed, folding her arms over her breasts. Ginny wasn't sure if her brain had literally stopped working.

"I've been running around, trying to find loopholes in the Accords ever since I Ascended! The law clearly states that all beings of the lower planes must possess free-will. That means no interference from yours truly, or anyone else for that matter. I'm already in the dog house with the Multiversity for giving these two the Firebrand after I already gave it to someone this century. Do you know how much of a lecture I'm in for? I'm just lucky I'm dating one of the Celestials, or I might have been forcibly descended. Do you know just how excruciatingly painful and humiliating that is? Of course, you don't. You haven't ascended. Ascension, for those of you members of my esteemed Council that are idiots, is the process by which one achieves eternal enlightenment. Oh, hi, Jesus,"

"Hi, Clara. How's Heaven?" Jesus asked.

"Smashing. I'm going to a garden party with Raziel in a few minutes, we've got to discuss the latest development on Earth 185 involving the Shadowhunters. That's if I don't get arrested."

"Excellent. Give my love to Dad."

Clara paused for a second.

"He says thanks."

What is going on?

I have no earthly idea.

"Oh, shut it you two," Clara said, waving a hand at them. If it was possible, their jaws fell open even further.

"To answer your question, portrait me. The reason they don't know where Atlantis is because a plague wiped out our entire civilisation, and the city shield was left active when they died. All the Ancients in the Milky Way, save those who Ascended like me, bit the bullet. As a result, all our secrets died with us. Except this of course." Clara waved her hand and stepped closer to the fireplace. Suddenly, the ground in the middle of the room folded in on itself and a large hexagonal glass platform rose up to fill its place. In the middle of the platform was a blue and white metal and glass chair.

"Have fun kiddies. I'm off. Going to go punch Thanos in the face a couple of times. Doesn't really do much, but it makes me feel better about myself. Then I have a party to get too. Toodles!" Clara vanished as if she were never there, leaving a dozen shocked portraits and a completely stunned Harry and Ginny in her wake.
Eventually, Moses coughed and gestured to the chair.

"Please tell me you at least know what this is?" Harry asked, not really hoping for much at this point.

"We do actually. Every member of the Council has sat in that chair. It's a type of test," Moses explained.

"What kind of test?"

Moses shrugged, "it just is."

Harry – who, judging from his emotions seeping into her brain, was about an inch shy of blowing the portrait of Clara off the wall – walked up to the chair and unceremoniously sat down.

Nothing happened.

Harry looked around and slapped the armrests for good measure, then he jumped to his feet and shrugged.

"Oh well. Guess I'm not so special. Thank Merlin there's not another thing that makes me different!" Ginny rolled her eyes at him, before ascending to the chair herself. It was incredibly strange. The body of the chair was the white metal, but the back of the seat was made of glass, with a blue light trapped within it. Gingerly, she lowered herself down onto the seat. Instantly, the back of the chair leaned back, and the glass platform began to glow a faint blue light.

"Woah!" Harry exclaimed.

Suddenly, Ginny could see everything in the Library. The magic that made the portraits work. Each book title, date of publication and date of acquisition. Their exact geographical position – they were really within Mt Everest. Her and Harry's biosignature. She could even detect the energy residue left by Clara's arrival and departure. It was like being in her body, but out of it at the same time. The chair, as if providing the information straight into her brain, was an interface that allowed the conscious mind to connect to the technology present within the Library's structure. Everything was under her control. A blip at the edge of her vision got her attention. Will and Clarissa were standing outside, seeking entrance. She opened the door for them and ordered the chair to spin around, so it faced the hallway. The pair walked into the room without noticing her, as they were too busy arguing with each other.

"I know you don't have the best relationship with your parents," Clarissa was saying, "but you can't sleep in my dorm room at the Academy. School has started again. I don't care how powerful we are, or that you can fool the wards, if someone, teacher or student, catches us, they can suspend me. I am not having a suspension on my record."

"But Clarieeeee…" Will moaned. He had reverted to his nineteen-year-old form.

"You need to get an apartment. Who knows, if you do get one, maybe I can come and live with you, instead of in the boarding house." Will perked up considerably at that. Finally, they seemed to notice Ginny sitting in the Control Chair.

"Ah! Lovely! So, younglings, any more questions these old fogies couldn't answer?" Will asked. Ginny ordered the chair to deactivate, and she quickly stood up. Only now did she notice that Harry was sitting on the floor with his head leaning against the bookshelves. He was fast asleep. Hm. She must have been in the chair longer than she thought. Ginny, deciding to let him sleep, turned to the other Soul-Bonded pair.
"Boy do I have a story to tell you."
Sirius stood on Grimmauld Place, staring at the ominous darkness of Number 12, hand gripping his wand tightly from within the pocket of his leather jacket. It felt oddly unlike his wand now that he thought about it. It was too thick, too smooth. Frowning, Sirius lifted his hand from the pocket, revealing a bottle of Firewhiskey clasped in his hand. Well, that explained that at least. He lowered the bottle back into his pocket and found his wand in his left pocket instead.

“Sirius?” Andromeda Tonks, formerly Andromeda Black, placed her hand on her cousin's shoulder. “Are you okay?”

“Never better. Let’s get this over with.” Plastering as real as smile as he could muster of his face, and ensuring his sunglasses securely covered his eyes, Sirius advanced with a spring in his step – it was a very fake spring, but a spring nonetheless – towards the door. Sirius stepped up the small set of stairs and placed his hand on the door. Remus, Andromeda and Dora stood behind him, anxiously glancing down the street.

“I, Sirius Orion of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, and Head of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, do seek entrance to the family home.” He said, trying very hard to keep his voice steady. The door creaked slightly, and a tiny shock of magic passed from the house into Sirius’ hand. The door unlocked, swinging open of its own accord, and a rush of stale air blew out, causing his hair to whip across his face.

“She’s blasted away,” Tonks asked, her voice betraying her disbelief.

“Believe it or not,” Sirius confirmed, “doesn’t look like much has changed though, hey Andi.”

“No. Not even a single picture is out of place. I wonder if she blasted us off the family tree?”

“I would be shocked if she didn’t,” Sirius told her. He reached out for a door handle, and slowly edged it open, trying to keep it from creaking too much. The others followed him inside. The room was dominated by a large tapestry that hung the length of the wall. The cloth looked immensely old, it was faded and looked as though Doxys had gnawed it in places. Nevertheless, the golden threads with which it was embroidered still glinted bright enough to reveal the sprawling family tree that dated back to the days of King Arthur. Andi knelt down and rubbed too blackened scorched marks with her hands.

“Yep, blasted away,” she confirmed.

“Your mother was a cow, Sirius,” Remus said solemnly.
“No need to tell me…” Sirius was cut off by a crack, followed by a scream.

“NO! NO! NO! NO! Kreacher won’t! He won’t serve the Blood Traitor master!!” A house elf sat in the middle of the floor, wearing the filthiest rags Sirius had ever seen. It took him a moment to realise the elf was Kreacher, the same one that had inhabited the house as a child. Suddenly, the realisation hit him.

“Oh, but you don’t have a choice, do you? You have to follow my orders because I’m the head of the Black family now. All my mother’s hatred, fear and disgust of all things not-pureblood, where did it get her? Dead in a ditch. She’s dead; Regulus is dead; My lovely father is dead; Bella is in Azkaban, and I’ve been giving serious thought to kicking Cissy out of the family altogether. What do you think, Andi?”

Andromeda grinned, “I think it’s a fabulous idea. Rebuild the Black family as a force for good. Of course, that’ll mean cleaning out the old place, making sure there aren’t any nasties hidden in the closet, so to speak.”

Tonks laughed and stepped on a loose piece of floor. Her foot went straight through, and she eeked when a dozen doxies flew out, scattering around the room.

“Speaking of nasties hidden in the closet, my first order as your new master Kreacher, is to tell me if there are any lockets, diadems, or rings full of dark magic that were hidden here on Voldemort’s behalf?”

Kreacher let out a long groan, pulled on his ears and banged his head on the floor. The others stood there, waiting him out. Finally, Kreacher began to croak.

“There are many artefacts full of powers in the house, the house that Kreacher keeps for his mistress. Oh, what she would do if she saw the filth that Master lets into her house…” Sirius made to smack the old elf, but Andromeda and Remus grabbed his arm.

“Don’t! He won’t help us if you hurt him, Sirius. It’s not worth it,” Remus exclaimed.

“Kreacher will not help foul Werewolf scum…”

“GET OUT!!” Sirius snapped. Kreacher vanished with a crack, and a horrible screeching filled the house.

“Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks, begone from this place! How dare you befoul the home of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black!!” Sirius’ blood went cold. It was a voice he and Andi would recognise anywhere. Even from beyond the grave, they couldn’t be rid of her.

“Well, looks like this is going to take a while…”

May…

Jessica did not like Lupin delaying her plan until after exams. In her opinion, investigation was far more important than exams. But Lupin had insisted on it, and Jessica reluctantly agreed, though not for the reasons he thought. Malfoy would be much easier to ambush after exams than before, because, with his classes and study over, he was more liable to become overconfident and let his guard down. So now, a day after her Defence Against the Dark Arts exam – which she was aiming
to get a higher score on than Granger did the previous year – Jessica stood under Potter’s invisibility cloak wearing one of Lily Potter’s perception filter cloaks, following Malfoy and his bodyguards as they stomped down the fifth-floor corridor. Murdock was walking beside her, using the tap, tap of his white cane to mask any sound she might make. Luke and Danny were waiting in an adjoining corridor ahead of them.

“Urgh, Murdock you blind idiot, stop tapping, or I’ll show you why they shouldn’t let people like you into this school,” Malfoy snapped, turning around and staring at Matt with loathing.

Matt continued forward a few more steps and stopped, deliberately tapping his cane in a pre-prepared signal. Long tap, long tap, long tap, little tap, little tap, little tap, long tap, long tap, long tap. Crabbe and Goyle, dumb asses that they were, turned to stare at Matt, trying desperately to put intimidating looks on their faces. They failed. Miserably. Instead, their expression was more akin to something Jessica would expect to see on a pair of constipated walruses. Merlin, she was spending too much time around Ginny.

“Sorry, Draco. I didn’t know it was you there, I can’t see, remember? I’m not good enough with voices yet,” Matt apologised, before hurriedly spinning around and sweeping his cane out, tapping back the way he came. Jessica didn’t follow him. She stepped forward, wand in hand, and pointed it at Malfoy’s back the second he turned around.

“Stupefy,” she whispered, and Malfoy crumpled to the floor, to the gasps of Crabbe and Goyle. Then, two figures, cloaked in red, faces obscured by hoods, stepped into the corridor, wands drawn. Crabbe and Goyle, brave and loyal individuals that they were, crapped their pants and ran back down the hall after Matt. As soon as they were gone, Matt dropped down from the ceiling wearing his own cloak. Jessica pocketed the Invisibility Cloak, drawing the red garb around her (which was quite comfortable, despite the fact that she refused to call it a ‘Defenders Cloak’). She reached down and rolled Malfoy over. Dangling from his neck, the same place it had been since they had known to look for it, was the amulet with the Aquarius Rune. She unclasped it and tucked it into the pocket with the cloak.

“Bingo,” Danny whispered. Jessica ignored him, instead helping Luke drag Malfoy into a broom closet. She removed his wand, cast a full body bind on him, and placed a locking charm and a silencing charm on the door. Then she threw the wand down the corridor, where it clattered several times, before rattling its way down a set of stairs.

“Let’s go,” Matt said. He reached into the cloak, twisted the portkey hidden within the seam, and vanished. Luke, Danny and Jessica followed, arriving in the lobby of the Home with only a slight stumble. Jessica glanced at the clock hanging on the wall. Moony was in the school, probably marking papers. Padfoot was pointed to ‘Hell on Earth’ which Jessica thought probably wasn’t that much of an exaggeration considering what her family home was like. Prongs and Jewel were still pointed at ‘Lost Forever’, and Wormtail’s hand had been snapped off.

“Sirius must be at Grimmauld Place again,” Luke said, voicing her thoughts.

“Should we wait for him?” Danny asked, flexing his fingers.

“No,” Jessica said, retrieving the amulet from her pocket, “I want to know what this thing is, and I want to know it now. So, any of you planning on coming with me when I open the clasp here, better grab on now.” Matt, who had abandoned his cane, grabbed Jessica’s shoulder and gave it a soft squeeze. It was unnoticeable to the others, but Jessica couldn’t help the butterflies that popped into her stomach. She inwardly berated herself. Stop thinking about that, it doesn’t help anyone, least of all him. ‘Besides, he’s not going to want anything to do with you when he finds out what you really are. A freak,’ the tiny voice that sounded suspiciously like her mother added. Jessica forced the
thoughts, and the butterflies, back into the depths of her mind far enough to realise Luke and Danny were now holding onto her as well.

“Ready?”

“Ready,” they confirmed. She flipped open the golden locket, her feet were pulled out from under her, and she flew through a tunnel of flashing lights, only to stop a few seconds later. The others let go, and she took stock of the situation. They were standing in the middle of a large parlour, a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling. Dozens of portraits hung on the walls, and five doors of various sizes led away to different rooms. Jessica recognised it instantly.

“It’s Malfoy Manor,” she hissed.

“Two… maybe three people coming this way, centre corridor, the one with the double doors,” Matt said, gesturing to the large wooden doors at the far side of the room, which were carved with the symbol of Slytherin House.

“What do you mean, maybe?” Danny asked.

“There are three voices, but only two heartbeats and two sets of footsteps. I’m not sure.” Matt was straining his right ear towards the door, his head twitching ever so slightly from within the hood of the cloak.

“Move,” Jessica whispered, before leading the way up a flight of stairs to a balcony level above them. They ducked down behind a banister just in time, as a few seconds later, the doors opened, and two figures walked out. One was unmistakably Lucius Malfoy, his platinum blonde hair being recognisable almost anywhere. In his hand was a thick, black covered book. The other man was a mystery. He was dressed in a long leather trench coat and had short shaggy hair and deep blue eyes, and carried a bundle of cloth. Danny gasped.

“I know that guy. He tortured me at the World Cup. Harry attacked him, and he was forced to flee before he could get to Ginny. Who the hell is he?”

“And what’s he doing here?” Luke said, his voice making an attempt at the deepest whisper Jessica thought she’d ever heard. Jessica was going to reply when another person walked into the room by way of another door. Dressed in deep flowing black robes, she was tall, with hair as black as midnight. Her eyes, though they weren’t visible from where Jessica hid, were a vivid piercing blue, as Jessica knew only too well. The scars on her neck flared in pain, and Jessica grabbed hold of the balcony railing, crushing it with her bare hand.

Allisandra Jones walked over to Lucius and the mystery man.

“It is ready?” she asked.

“It is. McNair should be entering the maze as we speak. He will ensure Potter wins the competition, or suffer the consequences of his failure,” Lucius said, handing the book to Allisandra.

“And the book, Barty?” Jones asked, directing her question to the other man.

Barty grinned feverishly.

“The book has given us what we need Lady Jones. The cauldron simmers as we speak.”

“Good. You are lucky you had the Dark Lord with you when you came to see me, Crouch. There is no other way I would have given you access to my families most prized possession otherwise…”
“Silence!” a cold high voice whispered. Suddenly, a giant green snake slithered out from the same door Malfoy and Crouch had exited earlier. A hissing sound followed coming from the snake, then another, in the same cold high voice as before. Then it spoke in English, “Nagini says we must leave now if the ritual is to succeed!”

Jessica’s body froze, her eyes fixed on the green snake as it slithered up her mother’s leg. Then she disapparated with a crack. Crouch and Malfoy followed, and silence descended on the building once more.

“There’s no one else here,” Matt said, in a normal voice that sounded eerily loud in the silence of the house.


“But it didn’t look like Crouch,” Danny pointed out.

“He must be under Polyjuice then,” Luke said.

“Why would he be under Polyjuice here?”

“Jones called him Crouch, why would she call him anything else?” Danny clearly didn’t have an answer for this, so fell silent.

“Jessica?” Matt’s said, kneeling down beside her. She was still staring at the place her mother had been seconds ago.

“She’s going to do it again,” she muttered to herself. Matt, by virtue of being Matt, heard it though.

“What’s she going to do again?” he asked softly. He grabbed one of her hands in his and closed his fingers around hers. She wasn’t sure why, but she felt a tiny bit better for it.

“She’s going to try and use Harry to do the same thing she did to me. Only this time, it’ll most likely work…” She trailed off, images of a pentagram, a golden cup and a book with a black cover dancing through her mind. The constant reminder that she carried itched, but she resisted the urge to scratch it. She had long ago learned that scratching only made it worse.

“What’s going to happen Jess?” Her eyes snapped up to his, but she couldn’t see them, not from within the hood. It wouldn’t have mattered anyway, she realised. They would have been as unfocused as they always were. It was the first time anyone had ever called her Jess. And at that moment, everything fell into place.

“The Triwizard Tournament was a trap the whole time. My mum must have entered Harry into the contest and used the book to bewitch the cup. There’d certainly be something inside that could do it. Who knows what will happen when Harry takes the cup in the maze? When’s the final task?”


“Fuck,” she exclaimed, the tiny surge of hope dying in her chest.

“No way an Owl gets to Harry or Dumbledore before it starts,” Danny said.

“We have to warn them somehow!” Luke exclaimed.

“How are we going to get from Britain to America in a matter of minutes?” Danny snapped.

“There’s something else as well,” Matt pointed out.
“What?”

“The Snake.” Everyone went silent.


“At least we know where it is,” Danny tried.

“That’s true,” Luke confirmed, placing a hand on Danny’s shoulder.

Jessica’s eyes went wide, and she pulled herself to her feet. Then she jumped clean over the railing, landing on the ground without even a stumble. She shoved the double doors open and ran down the hallway, torches coming to life on either side. She had been to Malfoy Manor before. And odds were, it was the exact same as her house. She exited the corridor and found herself in a large drawing room. She ran over to the dining room table, a massive slab of fine wood, and lifted the entire thing with a single hand. She kicked the carpet out from under it and dropped the table back to the ground, where it clunked loudly. She threw the rug aside, revealing a trap door embedded in the ground.

“Got ya.”

“Jessica, what are you doing?!” Luke called out, rushing into the room with Danny and Matt on his heels. She ignored them, wrenching the locked door open without so much as tensing.

“Whoa,” Danny muttered, “did you know she could do that?”


“Lumos Maxima!” A dazzling white light filled the dungeon space. The basement was almost identical to the one in her own house. On one side were dozens of bookcases, on the other were potion cabinets. On the far side of the room were cages containing dozens of animals, both muggle and magical. And nestled on the bookshelf was an elaborate box carved with the Malfoy family crest. She grabbed the box and opened the lid. Revealing a dozen rings, each in individual spots with tiny brass nameplates beneath them. The others followed them down into the cellar.

“What is this place, Jessica?”

“It’s the Malfoy sub-basement, where they keep all their dark magic artefacts and illicit activities hidden from the DMLE. We’ve got one just like it,” She told them, pulling a ring from a spot marked, ‘Ilvermorny’.

“And this is an emergency international Portkey. Very illegal, but all of the old Pureblood families have them. Just in case. Most of them go to Europe or America naturally, so it was a good bet there was one to get us to Ilvermorny.”

“Brilliant,” Matt exclaimed. Even though she couldn’t see his face, she could tell he was smiling at her.

“Okay, let me close this and fix the carpet, that way, Malfoy doesn’t know we were here,” Luke said, climbing back up the step ladder that Jessica had ignored. A few seconds later, he pulled the door shut, and the only light came from Jessica’s spell, which was slowly fading. She held out the ring, and they each placed a finger on the golden band.

“Activate!” She said. Her finger suddenly became stuck to the metal, and a hook latched at her navel, pulling her, Matt, Danny and Luke into a spiralling tunnel of rainbow light.
“Order! Order! I have something to say!!” Tyrion shouted, standing up and waddling into the centre of the room, climbing up onto the raised dais. Miracle bit her lip and stared out over the assembled leaders. This was ‘make or break.’ She glanced at the two empty seats next to her. Ghost and Oracle were in Westeros with Yoda and Magneto, called in to prevent an emergency situation. The number of time travellers and dimension hoppers arriving on Planetos 2 – the canon universe of the Game of Thrones TV Show – had increased by over 6000% in the span of a few hours. The only reason the canon hadn’t been destroyed already was thanks to the Travellers efforts, and even then, the threat gauge still sat in the red zone. Miracle, Crystal, Tyrion and Mithrandir would be joining them as soon as this meeting was over.

“This arguing gets us nowhere!” Tyrion shouted, and the room slowly quieted down.

“Thank you. Now I know none of us has any great love for the Multiversity Accords. My own opinion of them is well known. But they are there for a reason, to protect reality. Without them, we’re all lost.” Stalin and Caesar reluctantly grumbled in agreement.

“The only other thing I think we would all agree on is how much of a pain in the ass the Ascended are in general. They sit on their pedestal in the Circle of the Gods. In Asgard, in Olympus. In Valinor, Heaven, Asmere and New Genesis. And they look down on those beneath them. People like us!” He shouted, and the room erupted in a chorus of “Ayes!”

“Here now, we have a choice before us. Support Clara Hunter, an Ancient and former Sorcerer Supreme of Earth 125. Or we can agree with the sentence the other Ascended beings serve at the Court of the Multiversity. But to those decisions, I say this. When have we agreed with what the ascended have to say?!!”

“Aye!!”

“They’ve been sitting in the heights for too long. They’ve forgotten the struggles people face down here in the Orrery. Down in the boom docks of reality! And when one of them tries to get dirty? Tries to do the right thing. She’s condemned for it! I say that’s wrong!”

“It’s wrong!!” Miracle found herself shouting, jumping to her feet with the rest of the gallery. Tyrion was usually a calmly spoken individual, careful yet witty and incredibly sarcastic. But he knew how to work a crowd. Politics was what he was best at. Charisma was the greatest weapon of all. And here? Where difference meant little and power over story was valued more than the strength of one’s sword arm, he was in his element.

“Clara Hunter broke the rules of the Multiverse, placing reality at risk. But she did it to save countless lives, as anyone here would have done!”

“Aye!!”

“So, I say fuck the Ascended. We’re going to go to that trial, and force them to take a good hard look at what their rules of non-interference have come to!!”

“AYE!!!”
Act III, Chapter 8: Mt Greylock

Brooklyn, New York City – 1977

“Richard… are you sure we have to do this?”

Richard turned to his wife of two years, Mary, who was standing on the other side of their apartment, looking out the window towards Manhattan.

“You’re not seriously thinking of backing out now, are you?” he asked her. Mary sighed.

“It’s just… what about Peter?” Richard stepped over to her and pulled her into his arms.

“I know. I don’t want to leave him either, but we’ve dedicated the last five years of our lives to this cause. And we’re finally seeing results. We’ve got almost 50 per cent approval ratings now, and the movement is growing. The time to act is now! MACUSA is too busy worrying about right-wing radicals like that wacko Voldemort over in Britain to look too closely to us. If we don’t do anything, everything we’ve done. All the protests, all the shelters, all the appeals, all the speeches. It will all be for nothing.”

“But if we do this,” Mary countered, “we’ll be breaking the Statute of Secrecy. We’ll be executed at best, fed to the Dementors at worst. We’ll never get to see our boy again.” Mary broke down, crying into Richards’ chest.

“If we don’t, what type of world will Peter grow up in? A world of isolation, of fear, of hatred. MACUSA is powerless to stop it. Look at what happened to Ben! Forced to fight in a No-Maj war that even the No-Maj’s didn’t want. We were there at Harvard, protesting just as hard as everyone else, and then what, dumped on the street with no support and treated like a werewolf the moment he came home? The plan will work, and Ben will look after Peter. Besides, the kid will be better off without us anyway.” Richard’s shoulders slumped, and he couldn’t help the tears that slid down his face. It was for the best. They were on the verge of losing their rental, their car was already gone. He refused to admit it to his brother Ben, but the money he had given him to get therapy and treatment for his leg after coming home from Vietnam was all he had in savings. When he and Mary joined the Interventionalist Movement to bring the plights of people thrown under the bus after the war to light, his Dad had disowned him. All he wanted to do was show the Wizarding World that ignoring problems it didn’t want to deal with was wrong, to demonstrate just how advanced the No-Maj’s had become while the old and out of touch members of MACUSA sat in their pampered offices pretending to care about people beyond how many galleons were in their pockets. Richard and Mary’s generation weren’t stupid, they knew exactly who their ‘congress’ really was. Potion Company CEO’s, Real-Estate Developers, Floo-Powder Barons and Media Conglomerate Chairs. It needed to end. They needed a new system, one that wasn’t as corrupt, and one that actually cared about the people. The repeal of Rappaport’s Law in 1965, which the President only did after a mass
riot outside the Woolworth Building that needed the Obliviators, was the first step, but it wasn’t far enough. But Richard’s father, whose seat on the Congress was passed down from his father, who passed it down from his father, wouldn’t hear a bar of it. Now they were on the verge of being forced out onto the streets… But if they did this, they’d be able to do something really good before they died. Who knows, maybe the names Richard and Mary Parker would be remembered for something.

Mary released him and looked up into his eyes.

“I’m ready. Let’s just get this over with.” She glanced to a photo of her, Richard and Peter, smiling and waving at the camera.

“I love you, honey.” She steeled her face and disapparated.

“You’ll do great things, Peter Parker. I just know it.” Then he too disapparated from their tiny apartment for the last time.

Now...

BANG! BANG! BANG! Hermione continued to pound on Peter’s dorm room door at the Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The Hogwarts/Ilvermorny Quidditch Match, the last match of the Tournament, was about to begin, and her two friends were late. Again.

“Peter! Gwen! Come on! We’re going to be late!!”

There was a bang and a large number of swearing, then the smell of smoke began wafting through the keyhole. Hermione narrowed her eyes and, just like she’d seen in a James Bond movie once, kicked at the door handle, channelling her knowledge of probabilities to estimate the best place and degree of force to use. The latch broke, and the door swung open, revealing Gwen shooting Peter’s desk with what looked like a fire-extinguishing spell.

“Shit, Shit, Shit!” She muttered. Peter was busy trying to Aguamenti a burn mark on his right wrist. Behind him, a red-headed woman the same age as Peter and Gwen was opening a window and banishing the smoke out of it.

“What the hell?!” Hermione exclaimed. Peter looked up and desperately tried to hide his wrist. But he forgot to turn his wand off and ended up drenching his bed sheets.

“Damn it!” He exclaimed, trying, and failing, to cast a drying charm with his left hand. Gwen, seemingly ignoring Hermione’s entrance, cancelled her charm and began banishing the foamy substance from the desk. The red-head turned and waved at her.

“Hi! You must be Hermione Granger, Pete and Gwen told me all about you in their letters. I’m Mary Jane Watson. No-Maj born and bred.” Mary Jane smiled warmly at her, before continuing her work of siphoning the smoke out the window. Hermione looked back to Peter, who had finally dried his bed.

“Oh! You…” Peter trailed off, his mouth opening and closing rapidly, but with no words coming out.
“Yes, and Harry’s going to reveal that his Animagus form is an albino chicken, I’m going to win a beauty pageant, and Ginny is going to declare that she’s never going to have sex with Harry! This is the exact opposite of easily explainable!” She fumed, stamping her foot on the ground. But instead of thumping on the stone floor, it crunched on something small. She glanced down and picked up a little red contraption, not unlike a watch, with white fluid leaking out in multiple places.

“What’s this?”

“Those are my… um… those are our… those are batteries, it’s a No-Maj technology I’ve been fiddling with. Nothing special,” Peter stuttered.

“Nice try Parker. I’m not some snooty pureblood who’d buy that in a second. I’ve seen enough batteries, and you damn well know it. Now, I’m going to ask you one more time, what is this? And why is your room on fire?” Peter glanced around his room and groaned. His laundry basket was indeed, on fire.

“Oh, in the name of the Vishanti! Stop trying to fricken hide, you idiot. She can probably help us solve the containment issue anyway!” Gwen snapped, pocketing her wand and snatching the device from Hermione’s hand.

“This is a prototype device we designed. It uses this fluid that Peter invented to release a high tensile strength cable. I designed the shooters,” Gwen started rambling as Peter tried to salvage his laundry. Mary Jane finally finished with her task, jumped down to the floor. “We think we can use this stuff to carry heavy loads, repair or at least contain injuries and even snatch wands from people’s hands before they can cast spells,” she beamed, “They’re the inventors, I’m the marketer. I’m head of the school newspaper.”

“We hope to make some serious money out of this,” Gwen admitted. “Well, Pete’s got nothing, his parents are long dead; Dad’s practically disowned me – at least he can’t actually have me kicked out of the family until he remarries and has another kid, not that I think that’s gonna happen – and MJ’s parents are No-Maj’s without a galleon to their name.”

Hermione dropped her head. She couldn’t believe how much she didn’t know about her friends. And suddenly she realised she had never asked. They had asked about her parents, and she had told them all about them. But she had never once asked about theirs… God, they must think she was an idiot, going on about her perfect family.

“I’m sorry, I should’ve offered to help. My family has money… Harry has boat loads, we can help…”

“No, Hermione,” Peter said, forestalling her, “we don’t want charity. If it was money we wanted, I’d call up Harry Osborn. We want to be able to build something on our own. Something we can call ours. It’s… it’s a metaphorical thing you know. Besides, your observations about Kelmscott’s Law could lead us all to Orders of Merlin, you’ve done more than enough for us as is.” Hermione looked back up at the three seventeen-year-olds.

“You’ve got your own little Golden Trio here, haven’t you?” she said cheekily. All three of them looked at her blankly.

“Never mind, inside joke. So, what’s this containment problem?”

“Well,” Gwen said, handing back the shooter, “we’ve got the fluid ready, one pass through this transmutation coil, and as soon as it comes into contact with air it solidifies into an extremely tough, flexible fibre like cable with extraordinary adhesive properties and a tensile strength of 120 pounds
per square millimetre of cross section. The device uses a 300 p.s.i. pressure level in each cartridge of fluid which, when sent through the spinnerets, can force a stream of the cable up to an estimated 60 feet, longer if it’s in a parabolic path. The triggers are these disconnectable palm mounted switches so the line fires on command.”

“Our problem is the changeover, every time we try and insert a new cartridge, manually or automatically, the fluid jams, and well…” she gestured to the still smouldering laundry and desk.

Hermione bit her lip. She could see the ingenious design and its potential… but what could she do about the containment issue? Hermione closed her eyes and dived deep into the memory centres of her brain. Using the power of the Pisces Rune, which still hadn’t worn off, she started shifting through everything she knew about Transfiguration, Chemistry, Physics and Mechanics…

“What’s she doing?” Mary Jane whispered.

“Sorting through her brain I guess,” Peter replied.

“The adhesion. That’s your problem,” Hermione said, opening her eyes. Her memory bank had come through for her.

“Yeah…” Peter trailed off as Hermione sat down at the desk and began to examine the cartridge change mechanism.

“The fluid solidifies when it comes into contact with air, right? As a result, when oxygen particles from the environment get into the machine during the changeover, it solidifies and clogs the transmutation coil.” She pulled out her wand and conjured a set of protective goggles over her eyes. Then she grabbed a cartridge of fluid and grinned.

“The answer then is to limit the fluids adhesiveness while in its solid form. If you reconfigure the formula, so the cable is just a little bit less adhesive in its solid form, the cable won’t stick as much to the coil, and you’ll be able to change the cartridges with ease. If you give it, I don’t know, a total rate of decay of about an hour, then the cable will still maintain its strength and cohesion. The larger the shooter and the larger the cartridge, the longer you can increase the time till it dissolves.”

Peter and Gwen conjured their own chairs and goggles and sat down beside her, grabbing vials and parchment for formula’s, the Quidditch match long forgotten.


No, you’re not. You’re going to do brilliantly.

You don’t know that! This in front of thousands of people! I’m going to make such a fool of myself! You won’t. Trust me. You’ll see what I mean once you’re in the air.

“Okay team, listen up,” Angelina said, calling the Hogwarts Quidditch team together from their positions around the change room.

“I know our line-ups a bit different, but we’ve trained for this. Extensively. We know what we’re
doing. We can win this thing. We will win this thing. We have to win this thing. We win this, and we eliminate Alcheringa’s lead going into the final task. Then it’s just up to Potter…”

“No, pressure, Harry!” Fred and George exclaimed, slapping Harry on the back.

*Katie should be here…*

*There’s a reason Katie isn’t here.*

He was right, of course. Two days before, in the Ilvermorny Great Hall, which Ginny thought was much more comforting and homelier than either Hogwarts or Alcheringa’s Halls, Roger Davies, the third starting line Chaser for Hogwarts, had accused Katie of only getting onto the team because she was Angelina’s friend. Katie had, understandably, not appreciated his comments. So, she punched him in the face. Roger had then cursed Katie, and the duel began. It lasted for about thirty seconds before Harry had walked into the hall and disarmed both of them in one wand movement. Angelina, who had come in with Harry and Ginny, had furiously benched both Katie and Roger and elevated Ginny to take Roger’s place. Ginny had wondered why they had three Chaser reserves at all, surely one would do? Now she didn’t.

“Cheers, guys. Don’t worry about me, I’ve got it all under control. The Maze should be a piece of cake,” Harry told them.

*Liar!*

*What was I supposed to say? I’m totally shitting myself and am sure I’m going to die?*

*If you die in that infernal Maze, I am going to resurrect you, just so I can kill you again myself!*

*Love you too.*

“Good. This is our game! So let’s show them what we’ve got!!” Angelina exclaimed.

*“HOGWARTS!!!!”*

*“Welcome, everyone, to the third and final Quidditch Match of the Triwizard Tournament!!!”*

Cheering lit up the arena beyond the change room doors.

Harry gave Ginny’s hand one final squeeze and let go. Ginny clenched her Firebolt and, with a deep breath, took her place beside Angelina and Alicia.

*“Today, Hogwarts plays Ilvermorny in a race to close the lead set by Alcheringa in the previous challenges. Remember everyone, the school with the most points accumulated before the Third Task, will have their Champion enter the Maze five minutes before the others! As of right now, Miss Claire O’Neill, the Champion of Alcheringa, is in the lead, but if Ilvermorny or Hogwarts beat Alcheringa’s score of 162 points here today, Mr Peter Parker of Ilvermorny, or Mr Harry Potter of Hogwarts, could take that incredibly crucial advantage away from Miss O’Neill. Now, I present to you all, the Ilvermorny Quidditch Team!!! Chasers: Khan, Pryde and Morales; Beaters: Cho and Alexander; Keeper: Lorna Maximoff; and Team Captain and Seeker, Flash Thompson!!”*

“Good luck everyone,” Eloise said nervously. Ginny looked to the Keeper and tried to smile, but she didn’t think it looked very authentic, considering how many flips her stomach was doing right now.
“And the Hogwarts Quidditch Team!!”

Ginny, Harry and the others mounted their brooms and shot forward as the doors swung open.

“Chasers: Captain Angelina Johnson, Spinet and Potter; Beaters: Weasley and Weasley; Keeper: Midgen; And Seeker and School Champion, Harry Potter!!!”

Ginny soared through the doors and out into the arena, keeping in formation on Angelina’s left and George’s right as they flew in a circuit around the pitch. Dozens of people were screaming and cheering. Ginny knew that her parents didn’t have the money for an International Portkey, but she couldn’t help looking for them.

Ginny, Angelina, Alicia, Fred and George lined up over the centre of the pitch opposite their counterparts, while Eloise flew to the hoops and Harry hovered opposite Flash a few metres above them. Ginny was against a girl her age with shoulder-length brown hair and a Middle-Eastern complexion. Kamala Khan. From what Ginny had seen of her at the Alcheringa/Ilvermorny game, she was equally as good as Ginny herself was, probably better. If she remembered correctly, she favoured her right arm and, because of her small stature, was good at weaving between the larger players. Fortunately, Ginny was very good at that particular skill too.

The referee stepped out onto the pitch below them and stepped on a metal plate embedded within the grassy pitch. A section of the turf flipped over, and the bludgers and Snitch flew up into the air.

“The Bludgers are up! Followed by the Golden Snitch.”

The Quaffle was launched into the sky, and all of Ginny’s fears and reservations vanished as all her attention fixated on the large red ball. She propelled forward, dodging beneath Khan and spinning around behind Miles Morales, the lead chaser as he reached for the Quaffle. Angelina, whose arm was longer, snatched the ball first and passed it over Morales’ head. Ginny snagged it and shot towards the goal posts, Khan and Katherine Pryde – who was also brown-haired but had a complexion closer to Ginny’s own – racing behind her. She rolled under Pryde and flicked the ball to Alicia, who had come up beneath her, then pulled up and over, dodging a Bludger sent her way by Ilvermorny Beater Sam Alexander. Morales intercepted Alicia, and Ginny was forced to swerve around Khan, who pulled up on her inside. She ducked and threw her body backwards, cutting her acceleration and clearing her of Kamala’s mark. Then threw herself back forward, thanking Harry and his stupid bet with the twins for the extra speed the Firebolt offered.

“Oooh! That’s some nice Bludger work from one of the Weasleys. Sorry fellas, but I literally can’t tell you apart… Okay, Professor Dumbledore just told me that nobody can tell them apart, and the twin beaters of Hogwarts are famous of assuming the role of their opposite, so I’m not even going to try!”

The crowd began laughing, but Ginny ignored it, she was busy. Alicia tried passing to Angelina but was intercepted by Pryde. Pryde, who was now very close to the situation Alicia had been in seconds before, passed to Morales, but Ginny sped between them, catching the red sphere as it arced through the air.

“Excellent intercept by Potter there! For those of you who don’t know, Mrs Ginevra Potter, playing Chaser for Hogwarts, is part of a real-life Soul-Bond with Mr Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, hence their shared last name. This is Mrs Potter’s first game of match level Quidditch, having played reserve for Hogwarts’ match against Alcheringa earlier in the year. And it seems as though she’s pulling her weight!”
Ginny rocketed towards the goals, she glanced to Angelina, but Morales was keeping the Hogwarts Captain blocked, Ginny was on her own. Khan and Pryde bore down on her from behind, and Ginny reached up, angling towards the left hoop. The Keeper moved… and she threw for the centre. The Quaffle soared clean through the ring, and Ginny banked off to the sound of raucous applause.

*I told you so.*

*Shut up and find your Snitch, Boy-Who-Lived.*

“**Incredible shot from Potter. The first points of the game go to Hogwarts!!**”

Ginny circled around and marked Kamala as Lorna Maximoff, a girl with shocking green hair, passed the Quaffle to Morales, who then advanced down the field. Miles Morales was the one Angelina had drilled into her to not underestimate. According to her, he was the best non-professional Chaser she had ever seen, better even than some of the League Chasers, and that was saying something.

She hadn’t really understood what Angelina had meant, until that moment. Morales spun in a complete loop around Angelina. Angelina, anticipating a move, passed to Alicia on her right, but Morales had seemingly goaded her into precisely that, as he reached out, grabbed the Quaffle as soon as it left her hand, and dropped into a Harry like dive. Ginny tried to follow him, but Kamala chose that moment to pull into a hard ascent, and Ginny, anticipating a pass to her from Morales, followed. Miles couldn’t shoot from where he was right now, he was too low, which meant he had to shake Alicia’s tail, or pass to Kamala or Pryde, but then he did the seemingly impossible, he turned 90 degrees then 90 degrees again, effectively cornering around Alicia, and whipped his arm towards the bottom left goal. Eloise dived, and Ginny smirked, there was no way the ball would go in. Eloise passed through the ring and went for the ball, but it went far closer to the hoop than it looked, and Eloise was actually an inch or so below it. The Quaffle glided over her head, and bounced off the top of the ring, straight through the goal.

“**Brilliant manoeuvring from Miles Morales!! Ten points to Ilvermorny!!**”

“Damn,” Ginny muttered.

“I know, right?” Kamala whispered, “He’s so dreamy when he does that…” She zoomed off, and a very flustered Ginny reversed after her.

The game continued in a similar sort of pattern for the next fifteen minutes, with both teams racking up points against the other. The Ilvermorny team’s cohesion was excellent, but Khan and Pryde were both in Ginny’s year, and as a result, less experienced than Angelina and Alicia, who made an incredibly formidable pair. Morales was a one-man army, but he didn’t fall into the trap Ginny saw so many other good Quidditch players fall into. He never let his show-boating or ego stop him from passing when he needed to or bailing when he knew he’d miss. But, fortunately for Angelina, Alicia and Ginny, he was only one guy, and he couldn’t be everywhere at once.

Harry, on the other hand, was thrilled to be versing someone without the Dragon Force to back them up. Flash, while better than Malfoy, was nowhere near Clarissa inability. Which made him feel much better about himself.

“**Look at him go! Seeker Potter expertly leads Captain Thompson straight into the path of a Bludger sent by his own teammate! No wonder teams are lining up to sign him, and he’s only in fourth year!!**”

It didn’t hurt that the new announcer was clearly crushing on Harry, despite the fact he was
technically married. Ginny had wondered whether she should be worried, to which Harry had sent across their connection a very lurid dream that made her miss a shot.

But, as Ilvermorny and Hogwarts were locked in an aerial battle, the scoreboard slowly edged upwards in count. Hogwarts would take a goal, then Ilvermorny would neutralise, then Ilvermorny would score again, and Hogwarts would bring the score back to a draw.

“Owch!! Hogwarts Keeper Eloise Midgen has taken a Bludger to the shoulder. It just came out of nowhere… And the referee has called time out.”

Ginny landed next to Harry on the ground as Eloise was rolled away on a stretcher.

“She should be fine,” Harry said, having reached the ground first, “She’ll need some Skele-Gro, but it didn’t look too bad.”

“That’s not good. Eloise really stepped up today. Morales is hard to defend against, I don’t know if Foggy will be up to it. Harry, you have to catch the Snitch, fast,” Angelina said as Foggy rushed out, an anxious look on his face. The team wished him luck, and they returned to the air.

“Hogwarts substitute Keeper Franklin Nelson has assumed his position at the Goals... and the Quaffle is back in the air.”

Ginny shot forward, but Morales reached the Quaffle and rolled over both her and Angelina. Alicia attempted an intercept, but he passed to Pryde at just the right moment, who took the shot. Foggy knocked the Quaffle away, but Kamala caught it from below and lobbed it into a different hoop.

“Shit,” Angelina mumbled.

“And we’re back ladies and gentlemen. Ilvermorny has a tight lead of just ten points, sitting pretty on 230 points. Can Hogwarts tie the gap once more? Wait... Looks like Seeker Potter has seen the Snitch!”

Time to end this...

Angelina, ignoring the announcer, grabbed the Quaffle and advanced, Ginny and Alicia beside her, down the field, in the opposite direction to where Harry and Flash were chasing each other across the field. Two Bludgers shot towards them, and Ginny rolled beneath one. Alicia wasn’t so lucky. The Bludger just nicked her leg, and she faltered slightly, bumping into Angelina, which was all Morales needed to dive in, grab the Quaffle and slip out. Ginny dove after him and the duo ended up locked in a Seeker like race along the grass. Suddenly, Ginny bit her lip. Pryde was leading Angelina up into the air, and Khan was boxing Alicia, who still appeared a little shaken from her near miss. He was making the same move, and there was no way Foggy could stop it. She doubted any Keeper could stop it. And if Angelina left Pryde for an instant, Morales would pass to her, and she’d point blank into the right hoop.

Ginny glanced to Fred, who was deflecting a Bludger back at Amadeus Cho, the other Ilvermorny Beater. He would be of no help. She had to break Morales’ run... She glanced to Harry, then to George, who was shadowing him.

Harry, drive the Snitch in front of the goals.

Got it.

George was angling a Bludger towards Pryde in an attempt to free Angelina. He swung his bat, and
the violent little ball careened towards them. Harry, with Flash trailing behind, was careening down towards the goal posts. She could just see the Snitch, inches from his hand.

Morales reared up and Foggy dove to cover the free hoop. The Quaffle flew from his hand, careening in the same arc as earlier, and she could tell it was going to go in. Then Harry zipped straight in front of the ball and swung out his free arm. Ginny pulled up sharp and edged to the left. George’s Bludger forced Pryde to duck down, and Angelina broke free. Harry, guiding his broom using only his legs, deflected the Quaffle straight into Ginny’s waiting hand.

“I don’t believe it!! Seeker Potter just perfectly intercepted the Quaffle in flight, sending it straight into the waiting arms of Chaser Potter, without ever deviating from his chase of the Snitch!!!”

On five.

The crowd went wild, and Ginny pulled a 180-degree turn and barrelled down the field, pushing the Firebolt as fast as it could go. Morales tried to race her, but the Nimbus 2001 was just that little bit slower. Ginny arced downwards, relying on her Seeker reflexes and the speed of her broom to keep her shy of Morales. Maximoff realised what she was doing and gasped, diving for the lowest hoop. Ginny angled up and started counting.

5…

The Quaffle soared free of her hand.

4…

Harry kicked out with his left leg, catching Flash in the side and knocking him into the wooden wall of the stands.

3…

The Quaffle slipped an inch over Maximoff’s head and collided with the top rim of the post.

2…

The ball rebounded through the hoop.

1…

Harry’s hand clasped the Snitch.

Boom.

The crowd started screaming at the top of their lungs, the wooden stands creaking under the weight of so many people jumping up and down.

“I don’t believe it!!!! Harry Potter has caught the Snitch at the exact same moment Ginny Potter has used Ilvermorny Chaser Miles Morales’ own technique against him to restore the tie!!!!! Hogwarts wins 380 – 230!!!!!!”

“Okay, that was some seriously good flying,” Morales exclaimed, pulling up alongside Ginny.

“I’ve never met anyone who could pull that off, and I’ve tried teaching people before.” Ginny turned towards the African-American boy.
“Well, now you have,” She said, winking at him, “But Merlin it was hard. I’m going to need like five showers just to get the sweat out of my hair.” Miles chuckled.

“Every time. Every time.”

“The judges… the judges… Okay, EVERYONE SHUT UP A SECOND!!”

The crowd paused their incessant celebrations.

“Thank you. The Judges have just informed me that, with the points tallied up, Alcheringa, Ilvermorny and Hogwarts are all sitting on 162 points, putting all three schools in first place going into the Third Task for the first time in Tri-Wizard History. That means that the Champion who emerges from the Maze victorious will win the Tri-Wizard Cup for their school. The stakes have never been higher folks. This is going to be EPIC!!! Claire O’Neill, Harry Potter and Peter Parker go head to head in two weeks. See you all there for what’s looking to be a thrilling grand finale to the 1994 Tri-Wizard Tournament!!!”

“You know Kamala has the hots for you,” Ginny told Miles as the crowd started roaring once more.

Miles bit his lip, and his eyes dilated, “Really?”

“Yep,” then she laughed and held her hand out to him, “until next time, Miles Morales.”

“Until next time, Ginny Potter.”

“...If someone asked him to describe Alcheringa, Harry would have told them it was a tropical paradise. The sun was hot, the wind fresh, the ocean warm, the people friendly (if a bit aggressive in some cases) and the food delicious. It was very much the image of a society created by a peace-loving and carefree people, who cared little for division or social barriers. The Druids and Mer, two races living in harmony, lived all over the Federation, and while each individual Kingdom had its own identity, they all felt unified under the Federation banner in a way Harry had never experienced before. It was very refreshing.

If asked the same question of Hogwarts, his mind would pull up the image of his trip across the lake, the first time he looked up at the place he considered home. It was a large, beautiful and majestic structure with thousands of years of history. But it was built behind thick walls and isolated far away from the Muggle world. Students were divided into Houses the moment they stepped through the door, and they didn’t get to choose where they went, an authority figure did it for them (Harry himself being a unique case). It was a metaphor for the British Wizarding World as a whole. It looked beautiful and majestic on the outside and carried years of knowledge and history that Alcheringa just couldn’t match. But it was divided and isolated, with barriers based on blood far more ingrained than any animosity between the Alcheringan Kingdoms. That, in Harry’s opinion at least, was why Dark Wizards clearly had an easier time of gaining support in Britain, and to a lesser extent the Magical nations of Europe, than they did in the Federation.

Ilvermorny seemed to be aiming for the best of both worlds. The school was located high upon Mt Greylock, concealed from ‘No-Maj’ eyes by a thick permanent cloud of fog, highlighting its isolation
from the outside world. The castle itself looked almost like a ‘new and improved’ version of Hogwarts. It contained fewer floors and towers but was more spread out and integrated better with the forested surroundings. It carried the same sense of awe that Hogwarts had, and it had the same deep history, with a compelling origin story that Alchingen just couldn’t replicate. The students were also sorted into houses, something taken from Hogwarts by Ilvermorny’s founder, according to Hermione. However, like most British influences on America, Ilvermorny’s sorting carried its own twist. Students had the option to choose their houses should they be offered more than one.

That instinctual difference, that element of choice, epitomised the American Wizarding Community. At least in Harry’s opinion. Each person strived to live up to the image of their house, instead of just being a part of it like Hogwarts students did. At Hogwarts, if you were a Gryffindor people, like Snape and Malfoy could always be counted to look down on you as rash and prone to violence and rule breaking. By the same token, Harry begrudgingly admitted, Gryffindor’s painted the Slytherins in a similar light as evil, lying and malicious. Jessica was proof that those images that were drilled into them were false. Jessica was proud and ambitious, yes, but she was also courageous and didn’t care about what someone was born. At Ilvermorny, you had the chance to grow beyond social confines based on where you came from. Instead of being sorted based on personality, you were offered the choice to go where you felt you could grow, to live amongst people with similar beliefs and passions as yours, rather than merely all being brave, loyal, cunning, or knowledgeable. Harry thought Jessica would have loved it here.

But the thing that set Ilvermorny closer to Alchingen than Hogwarts the most was its attitude towards being different. One of the founders of Ilvermorny had been a muggle. Not Muggleborn, but a fully-fledged Muggle. As a result, anyone trying to publicly sprout how Pureblood Magicals were better than Muggles within the Castle walls was generally laughed at, and often cases, the Pukwudgies who guarded the castle shot them with arrows if they were overheard. Harry had no doubts the same rhetoric happened behind closed doors, but it was refreshing not to have to listen to people like Hermione be belittled by people like Malfoy. There was still plenty of bullying, and if Harry had been a student of Ilvermorny, he would have had no shortage of injustices to correct.

It was this observation, which Harry made to Ginny, Hermione, Luna, Gwen, Peter and Mary Jane while they were having a collective sleepover in one of Ilvermorny’s numerous ‘retreats’ which were scattered across the castle, that led them to where they were now. Harry thought the retreats were an ingenious idea. Each room had a large television (shielded to work around magic) a fireplace, a carpeted floor, and several couches and armchairs – all of which were very comfortable. They had been watching a favourite of Peter’s: ‘Back to the Future’, and Harry had remarked about the power of choice – in reference to Marty’s actions within the film – and how the Ilvermorny system was intrinsically better than the Hogwarts one. Gwen had then proudly stated that she believed Harry would be in Thunderbird House, her house. Peter then laid claim to Hermione for his and Mary Jane’s house – the Horned Serpent. Then MJ, as she insisted they call her, had asked why they didn’t they just let fate decide?

So, now they were standing in the entrance hall of Ilvermorny, a circular room topped by a glass cupola lit by torches, in the dead of night, in front of the four giant carved statues representing the four Ilvermorny houses.

“How does this work?” Hermione asked, staring at the wooden carvings, the ghost of a smile on her face.

“Well, you step up and stand on the Gordian Knot here, then wait and see which house wants you. If more than one offers, it’s your choice,” MJ said, bouncing up and down on her heels.

“Has anyone been picked by all four?” Harry asked.
“Every generation or so. Doctor Strange was the last one that I know off, and he chose the Horned Serpent,” Gwen told them.

“They say Horned Serpent is the house of the mind or the house of Scholars, but I think that’s horse shit. It’s the house of people who enjoy learning new things and applying them. I guess you could say it’s like half Ravenclaw, half Slytherin,” Peter provided, shrugging his shoulders in the firelight.

“Well, in that case, Thunderbird is the house of the curious. We explore new possibilities or create new ones. Don’t tell us we can’t do something, cause we’ll set out to prove you wrong,” Gwen said smugly.

“By that logic then Wampus would be for people who prefer action over words I guess,” MJ said thoughtfully, “that’s not to say they’re dumb, far from it, Miles is in Wampus, and he’s a fricken genius. But it’s a place for people who define themselves by what they do, rather than what they say.”

“What about the last one, Pukwudgie?” Ginny asked.

“Pukwudgie is the weird one I guess. They say it’s the place for healers or people of the heart. Not entirely sure what that’s supposed to mean, to be honest,” Peter said.

“I’d say it’s for the dedicated, the unwavering optimists, the people with the kind hearts who are determined to make the biggest difference in the world,” Gwen said. Peter pursed his lips and nodded his head.

“So, who’s first?” MJ asked, raising her torch above the knot on the floor.

“I’ll do it,” Hermione said, before rushing forward. She stepped onto the knot, and Luna, who had been silent since she stepped into the room, gasped.

“Mystery? You alright?” Ginny asked, her and Harry rushing to the blonde girl.

“Um… yeah. I… I think so… It’s just really loud,” She said, covering her ears with her hands. For the first time since her mother died, Ginny saw the dreamy, cloudy expression that seemed a permanent fixture of Luna’s face vanish entirely. Her eyes, erratic and fluttering, were fastened on Hermione.

Harry and Ginny turned back just in time to see the jewel in the Horned Serpent’s forehead light up, followed by the Pukwudgie lifting it’s arrow above its head.

“I got a choice! This is so cool!!” Hermione looked between the two carvings. “Sorry, Mr Pukwudgie…” Then she walked to stand by the Serpent carving, beside Peter. Luna let out a sigh of relief.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Ginny asked her.

“Yeah. It just takes a bit of getting used to. Too many creatures in here at once while they’re choosing, too much music to sort through."

“Come on, Harry! Let’s see!” Gwen called from where she was sitting at the Thunderbirds feet. Harry, letting go of Luna, stepped up to MJ and stood on the knot. A tiny rush flowed through him for a split second, then it was gone.

You feel that?
I felt it through you. Must be how the carvings scan you or something.

The Thunderbird beat its wings and Gwen jumped to her feet and whooped.

“Told you so!” She exclaimed, sticking her tongue out at MJ, who pulled a Galleon out of her pocket and tossed it to Gwen. Harry moved to stand beside Gwen, who became the fifth person in his life to hug him behind Hermione, Mrs Weasley, Ginny and Sirius. Gwen’s hugs were similar to Hermione’s he decided. Quick, excitable and all-encompassing.

“You’re up Firefly,” Hermione called.

I wonder if anyone’s just not been picked?

...

You’re a real comfort, aren’t you?!

What!

I rest my case.

Ginny stepped up to the centre, and Harry felt another rush, but it came from Ginny’s side of their connection, like a leaky tap. The roar of the Wampus filled the hall, as well as the beating of the Thunderbirds wings.

“Ooh. Another choice. What shall it be, sister of hair but not blood?” MJ teased. Ginny scowled at her and glanced between the two carvings.

What do you think?

I think you should choose yourself.

“Hey! No mental conferring!” Hermione scolded. Ginny went bright red, and Harry just rolled his eyes. She looked between the two once more, before making her way over to stand beside Harry and Gwen.

“Boom! Team Bad Ass over here!!!” Gwen exclaimed, giving Ginny a hi-five.

What made you decide?

Not you if that’s what you’re thinking.

That’s it we’re getting a divorce.

Harry….

I was joking!

If you really want to know, it’s something you said before. About choices, and being who you want to be, instead of who people in power tell you to be. Maybe I should be a Wampus. I’m rash, I get angry, and I tend to hex first ask questions later. But… I want to know more about the City. I want to find the secrets of the Ancients. There are so many things I want to do, things beyond just being a ‘warrior’. I used to think I’d finish school, find a husband – preferably you – and become a housewife. That’s what mum always told me I’d be doing. That was my purpose, according to her. And I accepted that because I didn’t know any better. Maybe, if I was lucky, I’d get to play some Quidditch first, but a housewife was my future. But now I see Hermione and the genius that she is,
pushing every sort of intellectual boundary she can. Claire is a badass who’s probably going to
conquer the world. And Gwen and MJ, they’re going to start a business. It’s been an eye-opener for
me. I don’t have to follow my mums out of date rules anymore. I can be who I want to be, and that,
for me, means choosing the Thunderbird, the path of curiosity and adventure. You being here is just
a bonus.

Harry pulled Ginny into a hug.

You can be whatever the hell you want to be. Don’t let me stop you.

I won’t. Though, FYI, you already snagged me as a husband, even if we’re trying not to think about
it like that.

Ginny giggled. Another roar interrupted them, and the pair turned back to the carvings. All four were
moving, and standing in the middle, was Luna, her hands over her ears.

“Holy shit,” Peter exclaimed.

“That’s… that’s amazing!!” MJ exclaimed.

Luna didn’t even hesitate. She walked over to the Thunderbird statue and sat down cross-legged,
humming a lullaby to herself.

MJ raised her hand. “Quick question, is it okay if I reserve full rights to write your biography one
day?”

Luna just kept humming. No one noticed the tiny flecks of blood in her ears, or the drops from her
nose she had wiped away with her hand.
Harry stood, Claire to his right and Peter to his left, staring at the entrance to the Maze. The hedges were dark and foreboding, and every once and a while, a roaring sound could be heard from deep within. Harry had done a flyby of the maze when they arrived at Ilvermorny, and it was easily five kilometres squared.

“Welcome, Witches, Wizards, Druids, Hags, Mages and Merfolk, to the third and final task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament. This a momentous occasion, as, for the first time in Triwizard History, all three schools are on equal points. As a result, the Champion who comes out victorious here today will claim the Tri-Wizard Cup for their school, as well as the monetary reward for themselves and their team-mates. The rules of this challenge are simple, enter the maze, don’t get eaten, and reach the Cup, which has been hidden somewhere inside. Good luck, Champions!!!!”

Dumbledore strode out and glanced towards Harry. He pursed his lips in a hard line and turned towards the judges' box.

What was that about?

Don’t know. But I have a feeling it’s not good for me in the slightest.

Harry, suddenly more nervous than he was before, glanced at Peter. The brown-haired boy was fiddling with something red on his wrists, muttering about making shooters more comfortable. Claire was spinning her wand between her thumb and index finger like a pen while biting her lip so hard blood was starting to trickle out. It made him feel a little bit better to know they were as nervous as he was.

We’re waving at you.

Harry turned to the stands and spotted Hermione, Ginny and Luna sitting in a box to the right of the judges. It looked very empty, having been meant for a whole family. In fact, most of the boxes were empty. Peter’s had MJ, Gwen and a woman he assumed was Gwen’s mother based on their similar appearances, and Claire’s box had two people that must be her parents. O’Neill, Dumbledore, Strange, Moody, Crouch, Bagman, the British Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, the Alcheringan President James Matson and both the American Secretary of Magical Affairs Mr Caleb McAdams and the U.S President Bill Clinton were all seated in a box floating above the rest of the stands. The announcer was standing in front of a dozen crystal balls on a raised platform in the centre of the arena.

“Champions! On the sound of the cannon, you are each to enter the arena through a separate entrance…”

Three gateways opened up in the exterior of the maze. Harry stood in front of the centre one, with Claire on his left and Peter on his right.
“Good luck, and remember whoever comes out first wins eternal glory, so no pressure!!”

Three silver grey balls flew down and hovered over their shoulders, the eyes trapped within the metal blinking a few times. Three large magical screens appeared above the maze, each showing a live camera feed.

BANG!!!

The cannon blasted off, and Harry stepped through the entrance, which promptly sealed behind him.

_Ginny, you still there?_ 

_Not here. Claire and Peter are in the same boat as you._

_Good to know._

Harry took a deep breath, drew his wand, and advanced down the dark hedge lined corridor. A quick Lumos illuminated the darkness but failed to take away the dull and foreboding atmosphere.

“Well, that didn’t work.”

_What were you expecting? Someway to the cup right at the entrance for you?_ 

“Oh shut up,” Harry mumbled, before continuing forward.

_FYI, the announcer thinks you’re talking to yourself._

_Fuck you._

_Love you too, honey._

Harry continued plodding along for a few minutes, before finally reaching a fork in the path. Both passages looked the same, so Harry decided to take the leftmost way. This path was colder than the last one, significantly colder.

Harry, Claire’s stumbled on a Dementor nest. She entangled out and got herself stuck in a hedge. The announcer recons you’re heading the same way.

_Dementors we can handle._

_Should be fun._

Harry moved forward into the cold darkness, and sure enough, a few minutes later, two Dementors floated out of the fog. The Firebrand ignited on Harry’s arm, and the Gemini Rune began to sizzle on his neck. Focusing on the feeling of Ginny’s lips on his, Harry stood his ground and held his wand in front of him.

“_Expecto Patronum!!_” Prongs exploded forth into the maze in silver glory and preceded to charge down the pathway, clearing five more of the soul-sucking creatures hidden in the mist. The Gemini Rune cooled down to its usual thrum, Harry pocketed his wand and followed the ethereal stag with a smug look on his face.

_Show off. The announcer is swooning Harry._

_I can’t help it if my magical abilities are so awesome._
Our magical abilities.

...Sorry.

Mmhmm.

Harry continued his trek deeper into the maze, ignoring Ginny, who continued to narrate the adventures of the other champions in his head. Apparently, Peter had taken out a Griffon with a single well placed Petrificus Totalus while Harry was busy duelling with one of Hagrid’s Blast-Ended Skrewts.

“Fuck these things a huge! What does Hagrid feed them?!”

Hehe, they bleeped you.

Ten feet long, it looked more like a giant scorpion than anything. It had a long sting curled over its back, and its armour glinted in the light from Harry’s wand.

“Stupefy!”

The spell rebounded of its shell.

“Fantastic,” Harry said dryly, sidestepping his own spell with ease.

Hermione says to attack where the shell isn’t.

Got it.

“Depulso!” The Skrewt flew backwards, exposing its fleshy undercarriage. Harry fired off a Reducto into its stomach, turning away before he could see the result. The Firebrand singed against his skin, and he dove into a forward roll, the Skrewt’s guts flying over his head.

Show off.

The Gemini Rune twinged with warmth, and Harry rolled his eyes, before turning left at a T-junction, the floating eye trailing behind him. He kept walking for what could have been hours for all he knew until a soft humming noise started to fill his ears.

“That noise is the Triwizard Cup everyone! Potter’s getting close!!”

“Shit!” Harry exclaimed as the announcer’s voice rippled out of the part of Harry’s mind that belonged to Ginny.

Harry! Did you get that?! You just swore on camera again.

Yeah, I heard it! How’d you do that??

I just concentrated on the announcer’s voice and tried to push it towards you.

Wicked.

Suddenly, a scream echoed through the maze. A girl’s scream. Harry glanced around, but no one was in the corridor with him.

It’s Claire. Her camera’s gone dark.
“Crucio!!!!” a shrill voice yelled from in front of him, and Harry bolted down the corridor. The humming grew louder, as did Claire’s screams. Harry turned a corner and found himself staring at a dead end.


*What’s happening?*

*Someone must be in the maze with you because Peter’s camera is working fine. Hermione says Druids are more vulnerable to the Unforgiveables. Moody and an Auror team are heading inside, but you’re in the very centre of the maze, it’ll take them time to get to her.*

Harry ran back to the bend in the path.

“Come on, Firebrand, don’t fail me now.” Harry clenched his jaw and bolted forward, running full tilt at the hedge wall. He pushed off the ground and soared over the wall. Harry crashed into another hedge wall and landed on the dirt one corridor over, metres away from a tall man in a dark cloak, wand pointed at Claire’s writhing form.

“Stupefy!” Red light shot forth from Harry’s wand, striking the man in the back of the head. He collapsed as if his strings were cut, and Harry dropped to his knees beside Claire.

“It’s alright, it’s Harry,” he exclaimed, grabbing her shoulders.

Claire hesitantly opened her eyes.

“Harry?”

“Don’t worry, I took care of that guy,” he said, pointing his wand aimlessly at the unconscious man. Claire pulled a strand of hair from her face, and Harry pulled her to her feet.

“What happened?”

“He got me from behind,” Claire said, stepping on the man’s hand for good measure, breaking his fingers in the process, “fuck that spell hurts.”

“That’s kind of why it’s unforgivable,” Harry told her.

*She’s okay.*

*Oh, thank Merlin. Moody’s still on his way.*

Harry, relieved that Claire was fine, looked up to examine his new surroundings. The hedges looked just the same as every other one he had seen so far, but in the distance was a pale silvery light. The humming was much stronger here.

“Is that?”

“Yep,” Claire confirmed. She pulled back the man’s hood.

“Recognise him?”

Harry looked at the face and realised he did know him.

“His name is McNair, he’s a Death Eater who avoided Azkaban thanks to Lucius Malfoy’s money after the war.”
Lol, Fudge just got really uncomfortable.

“Bloody corrupt British government officials. You annoy the shit out of me, I want you to know that” Claire grumbled.

“Don’t blame me, the government’s screwed me over more than it has you,” Harry retorted.

“I wasn’t talking to you, I was talking to your camera,” Claire said, pointing at the floating eye, which Harry had forgotten was even there.

“Where’s yours?” Claire pointed to a smashed orb lying several metres away.

“Ah.” Harry glanced back to the cup, shining away in the distance.

“Go ahead,” Harry said, gesturing down the corridor, “you were here first, it’s only fair.”

“You saved my ass,” Claire intoned, “you’ve earned it fair and square.” The argument was stilled by an ear-shattering roar that echoed from ahead. Then, to make matters worse, the sound of scurrying legs came from behind them. Harry and Claire spun around to see a dozen Acromantula hurrying up out of the darkness. Claire pulled Harry behind her and chanted some words he didn’t understand. The earth rose up, creating a solid stone wall in the middle of the path.

“That won’t hold them for long,” Claire said.

“Then, let’s get out of here.” They spun around and ran towards the cup, Harry ignoring the sickening feeling in his stomach as the roars grew louder and louder.

Harry and Claire ducked around a corner, and there, sitting on a pedestal in the middle of a wide clearing, was the Triwizard Cup. On the other side of the open space, was Peter, with four huge black haired and yellow-eyed cats circling around him as if he were dinner. Harry didn’t even hesitate, and neither did Claire. They circled the pedestal, completely disregarding the cup, and came up behind the creatures. The cats, whatever they were, smelt them, and two of them spun around to stare at them.

All of a sudden, Harry felt a pressure in his mind, and his surroundings vanished, replaced by the central tower of the City.

What the hell!

Ginny materialised beside him as he stood at the top of the stairs. The swirling rainbow portal was active.

“How can a cat have telepathic powers!?” Harry exclaimed, looking frantically around the room for any sign of the beast, but there was none.

“Maybe it’s not trying to get in, just connect somehow…” Ginny trailed off. Harry followed her gaze and realised she was staring into the room on the other side of the stairs, the one they hadn’t been inside before. Suddenly, the red-head grinned and raced inside, pushing open the frosted glass door. Harry followed behind her and gasped. In the middle of the room, sitting on a hexagonal platform identical to the one in the Library, was a silver and blue chair.

“Get back out there, I’ve got this,” She said, before shoving his shoulders.

Harry stumbled backwards as his world morphed back to that of the Maze. Both Claire and Peter remained still locked in the eyes of the giant cats. Harry raised his wand at the closest one and fired a
stunning spell. The cat whimpered and collapsed, drawing the attention of the other three, which all promptly pounced on him. Harry banished them back into the hedge hall and fired three more stunners. He got one, but the other two missed. Harry cursed and dived into a forward roll, barely missing one of the cats' claws, who jumped to his feet and spun back to face them.

“Immobulus!” One of the cats froze in its tracks and began to float up into the air. The other crashed straight into Harry’s chest. He fell backwards, losing the grip on his wand. The cat’s maws hovered over Harry’s face, and the Firebrand blazed to life. The Gemini Rune prickled on his neck, and a force repulsed the cat away from him, sending it flying up into the air.

Yes!!! I did it!

Harry figured he’d wait to ask what exactly Ginny had done until later. The creature landed on its back but jumped to its feet in an instant. Thankfully, Claire and Peter had seemingly come out of their rigid states, and both fired stunning spells at the black cat. It collapsed, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief.

“What the fuck were those?”

“Wampus cats,” Peter said, rubbing his temples. Harry placed his hand on the hedge wall to heave himself up and felt a furry hand clasp around his mouth.

Harry!

The Firebrand flared, late though it was, as something strong pulled him to his feet. He thrashed around, and a claw swiped at his left leg, causing massive amounts of pain to burn through his calf.

No, no, no, no. Come on, damage report… repair damaged areas… yes.

Ginny continued to mutter away in Harry’s mind as he was slowly pulled backwards by the creature. Harry, trying his best to ignore the pain in his leg, heard Peter swear, and saw a red light fly past his ear. The arm around Harry’s mouth went limp, and he was dropped to the ground, right onto his bleeding leg.

“Argh!!!!” He yelled, collapsing to the ground. Peter and Claire were on him in a second.

Shit, fractured knee, severed tendons… quarantine those areas, try to prevent infection.

Peter pulled Harry to his feet, draping his right arm around his shoulder while Claire retrieved his wand.

“Hidebehind,” Peter exclaimed, looking over Harry's leg, “nasty buggers.” Peter helped Harry limp over to the cup. Claire was now standing, wands pointed back towards the entrance she and Harry had come out from before. The Acromantulas had arrived.

“Someone take the fucking trophy!” She yelled, using Harry’s wand as a flame thrower while pointing her own towards the clouds.

“By the power of the Mighty Thor!!!!” She yelled. A bolt of lightning arced out of the air, connecting with her wand, which she then turned on the spiders. The smell of ash that flooded Harry’s senses was enough to make him want to heave.

“One of you should take it, without you I wouldn’t even be standing here, those cats would have killed me,” Peter exclaimed.
“Fine, Potter, take the damn Cup already!” Claire shouted, continuing her lightning and flame assault. Two rows of hedges were now on fire.

In a split second, Harry’s dream from the start of the year came rushing back into his mind. He was holding the Triwizard Cup for Hogwarts, his teammates and friends all around him, screaming his name. Ginny kissing him for all he was worth. He could prove to the school… to the entire world… that he was more than just the lightning bolt scar on his head. The money he won would be his own, not from his dead parents. He’d finally deserve everything that came with the mantle of Harry Potter. He glanced at the floating camera ball on Peter’s shoulder. This was his chance…

Then he remembered Dumbledore’s words at the beginning of term, “While the competition and the rivalry it creates is certainly entertaining, and the reward significantly enticing, it is its ability to forge ties between young witches and wizards of different nationalities and foster friendships that will last lifetimes that are its greatest strength.”

And the conversation in the Forbidden Forest,

“Look, guys,” Peter said softly, “You both seem to be decent people. I like to think I’m a decent person as well. But this competition… it has the potential to turn us all into bitter enemies. Why don’t we, for each other’s sake, agree not to deliberately harm the others. I know it’s a contest and everything. But shouldn’t we be able to get to the end without having to put holes in the others? I’d rather be friends than enemies.” Harry looked at Peter, then to Claire. Then, surprising even himself, he stood up, brushed the dirt off his jeans, walked over to Peter and extended his hand.

“Deal.” Peter nodded and shook his hand.

“Agreed. We get nowhere by fighting each other,” Claire said, giving them both a slight smile.

He remembered the laughter as they sat around a table at the Yule Ball, sitting in the cabin on the Hogwarts Express, sneaking out into the Rocks and watching AC/DC, standing in front of the ancient carvings at Ilvermorny…

“Together,” Harry yelled. He let go of Peter and stood awkwardly by one of the cups three handles.

“On three,” he said. Peter’s hand hovered over a handle, and Claire started to back up towards them.

“One!”

“Two!”

“Three!” Harry, Peter and Claire all grabbed hold of the smooth glass handle of the Trophy, and instantly they all felt a tug behind their navels. The ground pulled away from them, replaced by a vortex of swirling lights and colours. The last thing he heard before he slipped into darkness was Ginny’s voice from within the City.

Translocation field activated! What the hell!? Raise defences! Shields offline?! What do you mean offline! System failure?! OH, FUCK!!”
Jessica, after what felt like hours, landed on her back in the middle of a stone courtyard. Three more thuds indicated the arrival of Matt, Luke and Danny. She rolled over and groaned. That was the last time she took an International Portkey anywhere. She pushed up of the ground and found herself staring down the shaft of an arrow, held in the hands of a small elf-like creature.

“Don’t shoot! We mean you no harm!” Matt exclaimed. A quick glance showed an arrow in his face as well.

“Why can we not focus on you?” the creature asked in a deep barrelled voice.

“It’s the cloak, let us pull back the hoods and show you,” Matt pleaded. The creature nodded, and Jessica, following Matt, pulled back her hood, revealing the blood red hair of her ‘Lily Potter’ persona. Damn Harry. The others followed suit, and the creatures lowered their weapons.

“Who are you? How did you come here?”

“We’ve discovered a plot to sabotage the final task of the Triwizard Tournament. We need to speak to Professor Dumbledore immediately!” The creatures whispered in their own language, before stepping back and allowing the foursome to stand up.

“We will escort you to the Judge's box. The task has already started.” With that, the creatures surrounded Jessica, Matt, Danny and Luke in a loose circle, and escorted them inside the sweeping stone building that was Ilvermorny castle. The creatures, which Luke called Pukwudgies, led them through the ground floor of the castle and out the other side. In the distance, a stadium backed onto the edge of a forest. The Pukwudgies walked them into the stadium through a tunnel under the stands, and as they exited the other side, Jessica got her first glimpse of the Maze. The hedges were two metres high and stretched on for miles. Thousands of spectators were cheering and screaming in the stands, all of them fixated on three giant screens floating in the air. Or, more accurately, two monitors, as the third was blank.

“O’Neill is holding back the swarming Acromantulas, but neither Potter nor Parker seem to be taking the cup, what is going on? Let's see if I can’t turn up the volume a little. Everyone quiet down so we can hear,” An announcer bellowed into a loudspeaker. The crowd quietened slightly, but not by much. The Pukwudgie nudged Matt and Jessica, who were in the lead, up a set of stairs, but they were too focussed on the screens to really pay attention to where they were walking.


“One!”

Suddenly, Jessica and Matt realised what was about to happen, and raced ahead of the Pukwudgies.

“Two!”

“Professor Dumbledore, it’s a trap!” they yelled. All the judges turned towards them, and all the colour vanished from Dumbledore’s face. He rose to his feet, Strange and O’Neill milliseconds later, but it was too late.

“Three!”

Harry, Claire and Peter grabbed the trophy at the same time; and vanished into thin air.

Jessica’s heart and stomach plummeted. Matt, pale as a sheet, placed his hand over his mouth.
“Oh, God.”
Harry! Wake up! Trust me, love, you really want to wake up!!!

“Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken,” someone muttered. The Gemini Rune and the Firebrand were both burning hotter than they ever had before, so Harry, delirious though he was, forced his eyes open, ignoring the pounding in his head. A woman with long black hair stood over a bubbling cauldron holding a gleaming silver knife dripping with blood. “You will resurrect your foe.” She flicked the blade, and drops of blood fell into the water. And at the same moment, Harry’s blood began to boil in his veins as the acrid smell of the Gemini Rune burning the skin of his neck filled the air.

Harry! Are you there?

Ginny! What’s going on!? Where are you?

I’m still in the city. The chair’s letting me help control the flow of power between us. I’m diverting everything I’ve got to you. My body is basically in a magical coma right now. The knife wound was easy, but the leg is taking time to heal.

Harry, suddenly incredibly clear of mind, frantically looked around. His left arm had a large gash running down it, and the Firebrand burned on his right, hidden beneath his shirt. He was trapped against something behind him, and a stone beam was pressing into his chest, stopping him from moving. The space around him looked like something out of a horror movie. Dozens of stone statues, each with grave markers beside or beneath them, stood in a circle around a massive black cauldron bubbling bright red. Standing around it were three figures. The woman with the knife, a shaggy-haired man Harry recognised as the one who tried to attack Ginny at the World Cup, and Lucius Malfoy. The mystery man held a thick black covered book in his hand. Trapped against statues the same as Harry was, were Claire and Peter. On the grass were three wands. His and Claire’s on one side, Peter’s on the other.

What do you mean you’re in a coma?

That is the last thing you should be worried about.

Harry begrudgingly admitted she was probably right as the light blazing forth from the cauldron reached a crescendo, and exploded outwards, blinding him. When the specs of white cleared from his iris’ there was a fourth figure standing in the clearing. In an instant, the Gemini Rune went from scolding hot to bitter cold, sending a migraine shattering through his skull. At that moment, all of
Harry’s greatest fears came back to him, and he remembered with perfect clarity the face that haunted him. The man, if it could be called that, turned towards Harry and held out his arms.

“Robe me,” came a high, cold, empty voice. Lucius walked out of the darkness and draped a black robe over the figure’s shoulders. Harry could have cared less. He was staring into red eyes, set within a face whiter than a skull. His nose, like a snake’s, was flat, with slits for nostrils. Curling around his feet was a giant green snake. A piece of paper flashed through Harry’s mind. A paper with six words. *Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake.*

*Ocular telemetry restored… Oh, God.*

Lord Voldemort had been reborn.

“My lord, welcome back,” the tall woman said, falling to her knees before him. Voldemort observed his three followers. The man with the book held it out to him with both hands. Lucius seemed to be cradling the stump of his left hand.

“Thank you, dear Allisandra.” Allisandra pulled from within her robes a wand of thin white wood, she reversed her grip and held it out to him. He took it with hands as pale as his face and held it up to his eyes.

“How nice it is to have it in my hands once more,” he said. He stepped over to Lucius, who muttered, still clutching his left arm, “My lord.”

“Well, well, Lucius. You who said it could not be done, and yet here I am.”

“I am sorry to have doubted you, my Lord.”

“Indeed. But you have served yourself well these past few months, so I commend you for that. Let it not be said that Lord Voldemort is not without mercy.” He waved his wand, and a silver hand materialised where the stump had been before.

“Thank you, my lord.” Lucius breathed.

Voldemort ignored him, moving on to the final man.

“Barty, my most loyal servant, arise.” The mystery man stood to his feet, still holding the book out to him.

“The Darkhold, my lord.” Voldemort took the book in his spiny hands and flipped it open.

“The compendium of Dark Magic itself. Tell me, Allisandra, why did you never tell me that the Jones’ had this in their possession all these years?” Harry held back a gasp. The woman was Jessica’s mother!

“The Jones’ have protected the Darkhold for 400 years, my lord. We are sworn upon being told of it never to reveal its existence to anyone. Even you. But when I used it in my first attempt to procure you a new body, I must have broken the enchantment, because when you and Barty came to me, I was able to reveal it all I wished,” The woman stated darkly.

“Very well.” Voldemort conceded, before throwing the book back to Barty. He then advanced toward Allisandra.

“Hold out your arm.” She did so without hesitation, brandishing her left arm for Voldemort’s examination. Sitting upon it was a tattoo. A black tattoo of a skull with a snake curling out of his
mouth. Voldemort placed his wand tip against it, and the mark began to pulse. The Firebrand seared even harder, and Harry let out a soft hiss.

“Ah, Harry Potter. How do you like your accommodations? You stand upon the bones of my muggle father, you know. A foolish man, which is, of course why I killed him. That and revenge, for abandoning my mother. But let’s not get into family history. There are other things we must attend to.” Voldemort stepped into the centre of the clearing, where the cauldron had once been, and suddenly the clearing was filled the audible cracks. Dozens of people in dark robes materialised out of the darkness, some enveloped in smoke, others not.

“Welcome my friends, thirteen years it’s been, and now, here you all stand before me as if it were only yesterday. I confess myself… disappointed…” Voldemort began to glide around the circle of Death Eaters, berating them for not helping him sooner, but Harry didn’t pay much attention to him. The pain had mostly vanished, though his leg still throbbed terribly. The Firebrand was still searing against his arm. As if he didn’t know he was in trouble!

*What am I going to do?*

*I don’t know.*

*First things first, we have to get out of these restraints.*

*Where’s your wand?*

*On the ground, Claire had it went we went through the Portkey.*

*Are they still alive?*

*I think so, why would they be trapped if they were dead?*

*Good point.*

*Can you use your strength?*

*It’s solid rock, I’m not Luke, Ginny.*

*I was just asking.*

*… but I might be able to break them if I could slam something into it.*

*Like what?*

*How about Tom’s skull?*

*… that would do it.*

“Now, who might these young people be?” Voldemort asked, stepping up to look at Claire’s unconscious form.

“Stay away from them!” Harry yelled. The entire group of Death Eaters, Voldemort included, turned towards him as if suddenly remembering he was there.

*What are you doing?!*

*Just go with it.*
“Ah! Harry, I’d almost forgot you were here.” Voldemort turned back to the Death Eaters, throwing out his arms as if he were presenting an award.

“May I present, the Boy-Who-Lived!” Then, faster than Harry thought possible, he spun back around, placing his face inches from Harry’s own.

“How lies have fed your legend, Harry. You see, you did nothing to me that night fourteen years ago. It was your mother. You see when sweet dear Lily Potter gave her life to protect her only son, she provided the ultimate magical protection. I could not touch you.” Voldemort inched closer and closer. His head was now hovering right over the stone beam keeping Harry in place. Harry slid his hands further apart, just slightly.

“It was old magic, something I should have foreseen. But no matter, things have changed. I can touch you now!” Voldemort reached a bony hand up and pressed his finger against Harry’s scar. The Firebrand blazed hotter than he could imagine, but Ginny was there, pushing as much love and comfort into him as possible, lighting the Gemini Rune up with a blazing warmth that filled his entire body, shielding any pain he might have felt. Instead of screaming out in terror, he smiled.

“What’s the matter, Tom? Not what you expected?” Then Harry grabbed Voldemort’s head and forced it down into the stone beam. It shattered to pieces, and Voldemort stumbled backwards. Harry dropped to the ground, his leg mostly healed, though it still twinged terribly, and forward rolled away from the statue. He thrust out his hand towards where his wand lay metres away and yelled, “Accio!”

The Holly and Phoenix Feather wand flew straight into Harry’s outstretched hand, and he cast the shield spell that Sirius, Tonks and Remus had hammered into him.

“Protego!” He was just in time too, as four stunners smashed against it not a second after he’s raised it.

Yes! You can do this! Get enough space to Apparate!

Then something he was not expecting happened. The smell of ozone filled the air, and the statue Claire was tied to crumbled to dust. In its place stood the Alcheringa Champion, lightning dancing around her fingertips. Then there was a sharp ‘thwip’ noise, and a thin cable shot out from Peter’s wrists, connecting with the face of the Death Eater nearest to him. Peter’s eyes shot open, and his face solidified into a vindictive smirk. He jerked the line back, and the black-robed wizard went with it, crashing into the statue, knocking it to the ground. Peter rolled out from the debris and shot another cable from his right wrist, which connected with the next Death Eater’s wand. He flicked his hand upwards, and the wand sailed into Peter’s hand.

“Stupefy!” The Death Eater crumbled to the dirt, and Peter used a cable shot from his left hand to latch onto his own wand, still lying in the grass, and pull it towards him, exchanging it for the Death Eater wand in his right hand. Claire held out her hands and screamed, and suddenly, five of the Death Eaters surrounding her flew up into the air, suspended the same way she defeated the Dragon at the first task. Then five rock fists broke free from the Earth and punched each floating figure in the face.

Harry dove forward again, dodging another stunning spell.

“Confringo!” He yelled, pointing his wand at a statue behind two more Death Eaters. The statue exploded, raining stone down on them, sending both to the floor. Harry jumped to his feet and whipped his wand across his body.
“Diffindo!” A beam of red light arced from Harry’s wand, and three more black cloaked figures dove out of the way. The fourth wasn’t so lucky. He fell to the ground, a large gash over his chest.

“Relashio!” Peter’s voice exclaimed. The Firebrand seared against his arm, and Harry leapt up into the air, dodging a convulsing red curse that was undoubtedly the Cruciatus. He dropped to the ground and backhanded a spell towards the Death Eater.

“Expelliarmus!” The Death Eater flew backwards into another stone statue. Harry turned and put his back against Claire, who was duelling with Jessica’s mother. He summoned Claire’s wand and put a shield up to protect her back.

“Think you might need this,” he shouted, slipping Claire’s wand in her pocket.

“Cheers. So, these are the wankers that have been trying to kill you since you were born?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m always up for putting terrorists in their place. You?”

“I definitely am,” Peter shouted, stunning another masked Death Eater, before firing a cable at Allisandra’s face. The white fluid, whatever it was, covered her face like a spider-web, and she stumbled backwards. Claire pulled her wand from the pocket Harry placed it in and thrust it forward.

“Sectumsempra!” Dozens of wounds like sword cuts materialised over the woman’s body, and she collapsed to the ground breathing heavily. Peter placed his back to theirs, wand extended, and they formed a triangle.

“Snape’s curse?” Harry said grinning.

“Yes. What are those web things?” Claire replied.

“Something I’ve been working on,” Peter answered.

Then a clapping sound filled the graveyard.

“Impressive. Most impressive. You have come far, Harry Potter, and chose your friends wisely. Your parents would be proud.” Voldemort said softly, yet his voice held a malice that Harry couldn’t even begin to describe.

“But enough games. Now, I will finish what I started all those years ago. What do you think you and your friends can do against me?”

Hermione was having a hard time keeping everything straight in her head. And considering she had the fastest mind on the planet, that was saying something. First, Harry is fighting four Wampus cats; then Ginny turns to her and says, “don’t panic, I’m going to fall unconscious now;” then she does precisely that, and her and Luna are trying to both watch the screen while waking Ginny up. Then Harry was grabbed by a Hidebehind; Jessica, Danny, Luke and Matt showed up dressed in the Defenders robes Harry’s mum invented and started racing towards Professor Dumbledore yelling that it’s a trap; and then, Harry, Claire and Peter grabbed the cup together and vanished. She wasn’t
entirely sure she wasn’t having a mental break down.

“I’ll stay with Ginny, you find out what’s going on!” Luna exclaimed, grabbing Hermione’s shoulders and shaking her out of her reverie. Hermione nodded, then turned and raced out of the Hogwarts champions box and up to the judge's box.

President Clinton was surrounded by his Secret Service detail, their hands hovering over their weapons. President Matson was trying to push his way closer, and Fudge, Crouch and Bagman, were sitting very still, looking deathly white.

“… we snuck into Malfoy Manor and overheard them talking about a ritual intended to bring Voldemort back to life!” Jessica was saying, “And they planned to use the Tournament to abduct Harry in order to do it.” Hermione’s stomach expressed a desire to vacate the popcorn she had just eaten, and Jessica was cut off by the sight of a silver bear Patronus soaring out of the maze and up to Dumbledore.

“It’s Walden Macnair,” the bear said in Moody’s voice, “but the Spiders got to him. He’s dead. Looking for Potter and the others, but no sign.” The Patronus winked away, and Dumbledore took several deep breaths.

“Um… judges. Was that supposed to happen?” the announcer asked anxiously. The crowd were all whispering to themselves. The screens were showing an empty field, with no trophies or champions. Will O’Neill, seemingly ignoring the announcer, turned to Dumbledore.

“I’m going after them. The Dragon Force should be able to track a portkey signature,” then he jumped off the stage and landed on the ground ten metres below, leaving a crater in the Earth. Then he raced forward at an impossible speed, deep into the maze.

“Miss Jones, Mr Murdock, Mr Cage, Mr Rand. Thank you for alerting us and making all haste. Thanks to you, we may yet be able to save Harry, Claire and Peter.” Gone was the Headmasters usual demeanour. Replaced by something harder. This, Hermione realised, was not Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts. This was Albus Dumbledore, defeater of Grindelwald.

“Miss Granger, I trust you to keep everything together while we attempt to find Harry and the others,” Dumbledore said, the twinkle long departed from his eyes. Hermione nodded and Dumbledore and Strange both disapparated. Hermione glanced up at the screens. Will was already there, and Dumbledore and Strange apparated in behind him, wands at the ready.

Then a second later, Hermione was pushed aside by a man in a black suit wearing sunglasses. He had a pistol at his hip and a wand on his belt. This must be the Secret Service captain.

“What’s going on here?” the man asked.

“Mione!” Gwen yelled, coming up the stairs, MJ and Claire’s mother not far behind her. Hermione took a deep breath and counted to five. Then taking charge, and using all the confidence she didn’t have, she stood up on top of Dumbledore’s vacant chair.

“Someone has tampered with the Triwizard Cup, turning it into a Portkey, and the Champions have been abducted. Professor Dumbledore, Doctor Strange, and Mr O’Neill are trying to track them as we speak. Miss Jones and her friends discovered intelligence of the plot back in Britain and tried to warn us, but they arrived seconds too late.” Jessica placed a hand on Hermione’s shoulder and nodded to her. Alias looked incredibly tired and very scared.

“I’ve got it!” Will’s voice carried over the speakers from the centre of the maze, where the two
cameras were still floating. A loud crack erupted from within the Maze and suddenly, a vortex of rainbow light materialised where the Triwizard Cup had been seconds before.

“Yippee Ki-yay Motherfuckers!!” He yelled, before diving head first into the vortex, Doctor Strange, Dumbledore and Auror Moody following behind.

Albus apparated into the centre of the maze inwardly berating himself. Why did he not think to check the Cup before the contest began?! He knew placing Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire had been a risk, but for Voldemort to come back so soon! It was a nightmare scenario. He didn’t even know how many Horcruxes there were yet!

Albus had hoped that Harry would be picked by the Goblet, though he hadn’t charmed the Goblet to forcibly select him. If he were chosen, it would be a defining moment of his journey to greatness. Albus knew that Harry had the potential to be a legendary wizard. His defeats of Voldemort and the Firebrand being obvious giveaways. But Albus believed that Harry had the potential to be the next Sorcerer Supreme, and if that was the case, the boy needed allies. Not just his Defenders, though it was an excellent start, but in the foreign schools as well. And Harry had exceeded that expectation in leaps and bounds. He was incredibly proud of the boy. He was now fast friends with both champions and their respective friendship groups. He had the Dragon Force on his side, and Albus had flamed the development of Harry’s skills as an investigator and adventurer by hiding the Firebrand from him and letting him discover it and its importance on his own. Sure, it may have cost him some standing with young William, but as powerful as he was, William’s heart was in the right place, Clarissa would ensure that.

Stephen, while slightly annoyed at him at first, had agreed that Albus’ plan was the right one. Though they still disagreed on when to tell Harry the prophecy. That wouldn’t matter now anyway, as he planned to tell Harry at the end of the year. Then, next year, he would build on Harry’s training by introducing him to the subjects that Hogwarts didn’t teach. Like Alchemy, Ancient Language, Advanced Conjuration and even Evocation. Perhaps he’d invite Miss Granger, Mrs Potter, Miss Jones and Mr Murdock as well. It would be nice to be able to teach gifted students once more.

But if Harry had been taken to return Voldemort to power as Miss Jones claimed, those plans were for naught… focus Albus, this is not your fault. There’s no way you could have known this would happen. All that mattered was getting to Harry before the ritual was complete.

William was standing, the Dragon Force’s unbridled energy circulating around him, holding his hands over the pedestal where the Trophy had been placed.

“Do you have anything?” He asked, anxiously. He drew the Elder Wand from within his robes, and the comforting feeling holding in his hands helped calm his erratic nerves.

“Yes. But it’s far away. I’m trying to narrow it down. Once I can pinpoint the location, I can mimic the resonance frequency of the wormhole the Portkey generated. Then all I need to do is use the limitless power of the Dragon Force to force the wormhole back open from this side. Give me two minutes.”

“We may not have two minutes,” Stephen exclaimed. Albus looked to him and knew that the Doctor
was just as frightened of the possible ramifications as he was.

The sound of boots on earth came from behind them, and Albus and Stephen had their wands on them in an instant. Alastor rounded the corner with his squad of Aurors.

“What’s happened? Where is Potter, and the others?”

“Aabducted, in an attempt to return Voldemort to his physical form. William is working on finding them.”

Alastor growled and told his squad to watch the perimeter. Then he stepped closer to Albus.

“Is this it?”

Albus swallowed hard, “I think so old friend, I think so.”

“I’ve got it!” William roared triumphantly. He gathered all the energy around him into a single sphere of light between his hands and clapped. A sonic boom ripped through the clearing, and a spiralling vortex of swirling rainbow light opened above the pedestal. William turned back towards them and transfigured his formal attire into his Basilisk skin cloak and uniform.

“Yippee Ki-yay Motherfuckers!!!” He yelled, before jumping head first into the vortex. Stephen followed after him, and Albus stepped up with him. It looked exactly like the vortex a Portkey made.

“Fascinating,” he whispered before he too jumped into the tunnel.

“But enough games. Now, I will finish what I started all those years ago. What do you think you and your friends can do against me?” Voldemort grinned.

“Imperio,” he said softly. The Unforgivable Curse had no light. No colour to it. All that happened was that Harry instantly found himself standing in the City. The swirling portal active once again. Voldemort stepped inside with a wicked grin on his face. “There is nothing I can do to stop you,” he said. Harry was completely confused. This was the famous Imperious curse that controlled your mind? It didn’t feel particularly powerful. Then Ginny came barging out of the Chair Room, a rocket launcher Harry recognised from ‘Mission: Impossible’ sitting on her shoulder. She stopped at the top of the stairs, aimed at Voldemort, and with a vindictive grin, announced, “See ya next time, Tommy boy!”

She fired the gun, and a rocket careened straight into Voldemort’s body. He exploded in a shower of confetti. Ginny turned to him, winked, and blew him a kiss. Harry blinked, and he was back outside, Voldemort sitting on his ass on the ground as the Gemini Rune beamed.

_Boom! Mental Defence systems at full force! You get that son of a bitch, sweetie!!_

“Sorry, Tom, a bit nasty in there is it?”

Voldemort made to say something else, probably some insult or another, but the Triwizard Cup, sitting on the floor behind a headstone a short distance away, suddenly exploded, drawing the attention of Voldemort, the Champions, and the remaining Death Eaters.
“Lucius! Take the book and go!” Malfoy grabbed the book from where it lay on the ground and disapparated. Another loud bang erupted through the Graveyard, and the grass beneath where the cup had been opened in on itself, revealing a swirling vortex of rainbow light. A blast of energy shot out into the air, then out of the portal came Will O’Neill, his entire body engulfed in golden power.

“You’re all screwed now!!” Claire yelled, laughing her head off.

“Wrathium Aldetus Corday!!!” He yelled. A massive shockwave of white-gold energy washed over the Graveyard, and all the Death Eaters still standing panicked and attempted to disapparate. This ultimately turned out to be the worst decision they ever made, as their attempts to create a stable Apparation tunnel backfired spectacularly. Each person attempting to Apparate instantly exploded, scattering guts everywhere. Then Doctor Strange jumped forth from the portal.

“By the Crimson Bands of Cytorak!” He chanted, and thick red chains materialised around all the unconscious or injured Death Eaters still lying on the ground where Harry, Claire and Peter had put them down earlier. Similar chains attempted to seal around Voldemort, but he transformed into black smoke and passed through them. He resolidified and looked to Harry, a look of righteous indignation etched across his face. Harry knew what was coming before Voldemort even raised his wand.

“Avada Kedavra!!”

“Expelliarmus!!” Why Harry picked that spell he wasn’t sure, maybe because it was the first spell to pop into his head, perhaps one of Luna’s Nargles had come to save the day. He’d never know. But he sure as hell thanked whatever the reason was until his dying day. Red spell collided against the green, and a shockwave blasted forth, knocking everyone, even Will O’Neill, backwards. The two spells had collided, but instead of cancelling each other out like Harry remembered Professor Lupin’s lessons said they should, they had merged into a single beam of golden light with a golden bead in the centre. Harry’s wand was vibrating in his hand, but he couldn’t have let go even if he wanted to. Harry glanced at Voldemort. He was staring in confusion at his own wand, which was jerking just as hard as Harry’s. Then, as Harry caught a glance of Professor Dumbledore and Auror Moody emerging from the rainbow portal, the golden thread splintered. Dozens of smaller threads danced around them, forming a cage of golden energy around the two of them.

“Harry!!

Ginny!! You still there?

It’s going nuts in here! What’s happening?

Our wands are connected!

That’s not possible.

Harry focussed on his connection to Ginny, pulling all he could from the Gemini Rune that sealed them together, of the Soul Bond that now held him closer to Ginny than ever before. He focussed on that, the feeling of her. An image flashed across his mind of her, sitting in the Chair, eyes closed as it
spun around on its platform. The lights had turned from blue to a faint violet colour.

*Come on, Harry. If anyone can win this, it’s you.*

*I love you; you know that.*

*I love you too. And I’ll never let you go.*

Harry narrowed his eyes and concentrated on the beam of light. Focussing all his willpower, and Ginny’s for that matter, into the bead. Instantly, Harry’s wand stabilised in his hand, and the bead began rushing down the beam towards Voldemort. And as it got closer and closer, flashes of light started shooting out of it. Yellow, white, grey, orange, red accompanied by screams, then green. Then, a ghost-like figure seemed to jump out of Voldemort’s wand, creating the form of a ghostly person, an old man.

“I don’t rightly know what this is fella, but he killed me he did, so you fight him!” the old man exclaimed, though his voice was distant as if echoing from far away.

Another shadow burst forth, solidifying into a young woman, no older than twenty-one. She looked the same as when Harry had met her past self, a gift from the mysterious Ghost.

“Hold on, Harry! Your father’s coming… just hold on,” Lily whispered into his ear.

Then, as if summoned by his mum's voice, another person emerged from Voldemort’s wand as the bead slid ever closer to the tip. In an instant, James Potter stood beside him and wrapped an arm around his shoulder.

“You’re doing great son, you’re doing brilliantly. We’re so proud of you. We’ll try and distract him… give Dumbledore a chance to catch him, but I don’t have much hope.”

“Let go,” Lilly said, “sweetheart, you’re ready. Let go!”

*Let go, Harry!*

Harry jerked his wand up, and the beam snapped apart. The cage fell away, and Harry dived to the side, where Peter and Claire caught him – wands at the ready. The disembodied spirits shot forward, obscuring Voldemort’s vision. Voldemort, in a rage, fired a barrage of spells in his general direction. But Dumbledore was there. He deflected every blast of magic, and O’Neill was on him a second later. Voldemort was enveloped in golden fire, and a fist collided with his face.

“Tranquilus Environmenta!!” Strange shouted. For a split second, defeat entered Voldemort’s eyes, then he disapparated as Strange’s spell took effect, freezing everything around him. But Voldemort was gone.

“Oh, no, you don’t! You don’t take my sister and run away!!” O’Neill snarled, then rotated his wand in a clockwise circle where Voldemort stood a second before. His wand tip glowed gold, and he disapparated with the loudest crack Harry had ever heard.

“Harry, are you alright?” Dumbledore asked, placing a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“Yeah. Yeah, we’re fine,” Harry said, rubbing his temples. In his mind’s eye, Ginny was finally sitting up from the chair, her forehead covered in sweat. The chair returned to its natural colour, and Ginny slumped to the floor.

*I think I’m going to go to sleep now…*
“We’re?”

“Ginny and I, Professor. She’s sleeping now,” Harry told him. He was quite tired himself, he realised, now that Ginny’s energy was no longer coursing through his veins as well as his own. The heat of the Gemini Rune began to subside, and the Firebrand finally stopped searing against his arm.

“That was amazing!” Claire exclaimed giddily.

“What was that?” Peter asked.

“Priori Incantatem, the reverse spell effect. Harry and Voldemort’s wand share cores. Ollivander wrote to me the minute you left his shop four years ago. I had a feeling it would come in handy at some point,” Dumbledore said, scratching at his head thoughtfully.

“We have secured the criminals, Albus,” Doctor Strange said, walking over to them with Moody.

“Aye,” the grizzled Auror said roughly, “they’re all British. I’d wager we’re in Britain too.”

“Call the Aurors,” Strange said. Then he held out his hand and rotated his fingers. A shimmering golden portal spiralled into existence. On the other side, Harry could just see the stadium they had begun in.

“What about Voldemort?” Harry asked.

“If William catches him, and he might just if he’s lucky, this will all be over. But if he doesn’t… I shall have to inform Fudge. Have him put the Aurors on alert. It will not take long for Tom to regain his lost strength, and although many of his greatest followers are behind bars, many others are not.” Harry glanced back to Allisandra as Dumbledore said that, only to realise that she had somehow vanished in the chaos. He wasn’t overly surprised.

“Professor, Jessica’s mum. She said she used a book called the Darkhold to bring Voldemort back, and that it had been passed through the Jones family for generations.” Dumbledore looked confused, but Strange gasped in horror.

“The Darkhold? Are you sure?”

“Yeah, that was definitely what she called it,” Peter confirmed, “what is it?”

“The Book of Sin. Supposedly written by Lucifer himself as a compendium of every and all forms of Dark Magic ever known, as the Book of the Vishanti, which is in my possession, contains every Light Magic spell known to wizardkind. If Voldemort has it…” Strange trailed off, clearly absorbed it his own mind. They stepped through the portal, and the crowd broke into raucous applause. People were whistling and screaming, jumping up and down.

“They look like a bunch of headless chickens,” Claire remarked under her breath.

“SILENCE!!” Dumbledore boomed. The crowd fell instantly silent, and Strange sealed the gateway behind him.

“Albus, I have to return to the Sanctum Sanctorum to consult with the Vishanti immediately. If Voldemort has the Darkhold…”

“Go. I’ll handle things here,” Dumbledore told him.

“Tell the President and the Secretary I’ll give them a detailed explanation tomorrow morning. Just
give me till tomorrow.”

“Until next time old friend,” Dumbledore replied, smiling softly at him. Strange bowed and disappeared.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” Dumbledore called out to the entire stadium.

“Unfortunately, it is my duty tonight to inform you that tonight, as our three champions attempted to claim the Triwizard Trophy as a trio, drawing the Triwizard Tournament for the first time in living memory, they were kidnapped by use of Portkey, and taken into the hands of Lord Voldemort. As a result, Voldemort has regained his physical body.” The crowd broke out into a flood of whispers.

“William O’Neill is chasing Voldemort across Britain as we speak in an attempt to find him before he has a chance to attack, but should he fail, the Magical World must be on alert. Voldemort will not limit his conquests to just Britain. Once he has finished with us, he will come for the rest of the world too. We have dealt him a setback tonight, which should hopefully delay him, but we cannot trust to hope. I will do whatever I can to ensure the safety of the people of Magical Britain in the wake of Voldemort’s return. But the Federation and the United States are both beyond my jurisdiction, so I leave it to the Presidents of your respective nations to do what they feel is necessary. Now, I think we have all had a long night, our champions most of all, so let us all retire, and reconvene in the morning.” Dumbledore then led Claire, Peter and Harry through the tunnel under the stands, and up to Ilvermorny Castle, where Harry promptly followed Ginny into the land of dreams.

Harry woke up in the hospital wing, in the bed next to Ginny’s long after breakfast the next morning. Dumbledore was standing in the corner, talking animatedly with Sirius and Hagrid.

“If Fudge is not going to believe us, then we must mobilise on our own. Sirius, I need you to return to Britain immediately. Get the old crowd back together. Any old members of the Order you can find, and any new ones you think might be a good fit.”

“Gotcha boss man. And what do you know, I’ve suddenly discovered the desire to re-join the Auror corps,” Sirius said.

“Thank you, Sirius, and I’m sorry about Harry, I really am…”

“It’s alright, I get it. As much as both he and I hate it, not getting Harry murdered in his sleep needs to be the priority.” Sirius turned on his heel and left the hall.

“Hagrid, I hate to ask but…”

“I understand sir, don’t you worry.” Hagrid turned and caught sight of Harry sitting up in his bed.

“Yeh, be good now, Harry. Don’t yeh worry, we’ll ‘ave yeh out of there in no time,” Hagrid said, then he followed after Sirius. Dumbledore walked over to Harry and sat down on the edge of the bed.

“What’s happened?” Harry asked him.
“Fudge refuses to believe that Voldemort has returned. He claims that I have invented this story to usurp his authority. He’s already moved to have my tenure as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot revoked. He’ll have a harder time kicking me out of the ICW, but if he tries hard enough, he’ll manage. Fortunately, you were all asleep by the time he arrived to interrogate you last night, so he cannot implicate any of you in my conspiracy. Still, he will most likely try.”

“What about Will and Doctor Strange?”

“William lost Voldemort near Helsinki when Voldemort tricked him into apparating into a Cold Drake nest. William was most annoyed; apparently, the muggle researchers are trying to determine why a previously undiscovered lake appeared miraculously overnight.” Harry couldn’t help but laugh at that.

“As for Stephen, he sent an owl this morning. The Vishanti warned him to retrieve the book as soon as possible. Stephen intends to attack Malfoy Manor in the next few days to see if he can find it. Miss Jones and Mr Murdock have travelled at his request to the Sanctum Sanctorum to give him the full details of their incursion into the building. I doubt Voldemort will be foolish enough to leave it out like that, but we can hope. Mr Cage and Mr Rand have returned to Britain with letters from me for the staff. As for us, we will depart as scheduled on the Hogwarts Express tomorrow morning. A one-way trip to Kings Cross.” Dumbledore paused and looked Harry in the eyes. His twinkle had vanished.

“I’m sorry, Harry, but I must ask you to…”

“Go back to the Dursley’s. I know.”

“I truly am sorry. I shall try to get you out of there as soon as I have a safe house prepared. Sirius has already offered us the use of his old family home, which already has powerful wards on it. Once I am done with it, it should serve as a location we can move you to. Do me a favour, Harry and be prepared to leave at a moment’s notice. We do not know what may happen.”

“Don’t worry Professor, I’ll stay at Home. I promise.”
Dumbledore smiled and stood up.

“Well, Harry. For what it’s worth, congratulations on winning the Triwizard Tournament. It might interest you to know that even I cannot boast such a feat.” Harry’s jaw dropped open.

“You lost the Triwizard Tournament?”
Dumbledore laughed, “Indeed I did. In 1895. One hundred years ago today, in fact, I lost the Triwizard Tournament to Gellert Grindelwald, who ended up becoming my best friend. I want you to know Harry, that I am very proud of how much you have grown this year. You truly have made the best of the opportunities sent your way. You’ve made friendships that will last a lifetime, formed a stronger connection with your existing friends, and even found yourself, true love, if not in the way any of us expected.”

Harry smiled softly at him, “Thanks, sir.”

Harry, Ginny, Luna and Hermione stood on the platform outside the Hogwarts Express with Gwen,
Mary Jane, Peter, and Claire.

“I’m going to miss you guys so much!” Hermione was saying, pulling each of them into a hug individually.

“Don’t worry about us, we’ll be fine. You’re the ones going back to a country with a magical terrorist on the loose,” Gwen pointed out.

“So, what’s next for you, guys?” Harry asked.

“Well, we take our make-up NEWTS in October next year, so we’ll be back here the same time as everyone else, though we’ll only be doing private study. But for the summer, Pete and I are going to try and get internships at Oscorp,” Gwen said cheerily.

“Yeah. Should be fun,” Peter confirmed, though his mind seemed a million miles away.

“We’re going to use the Triwizard money to buy an apartment in New York,” MJ said.

Another reason it seemed that Fudge was pissed at Dumbledore and Harry, was that the British Ministry, who were supplying the prize money to the competitors, had to fork out three times as much money as they planned because they had tied. As a result, every Quidditch player from every team got 250 galleons each, and all three champions got 1100 Galleons.

“What about you, Claire?” Ginny asked.

“Back to school for me, I’m afraid. School runs February through November in the Federation. I get two weeks off in July though. Might go over to New Zealand for some therapy skiing. You know, for my near-death experience.”

“Which one?” Harry asked pointedly.

Claire laughed, “Good point.”

“Keep an eye out for the Big Nosed Wagglediggle. They’re only found in New Zealand,” Luna said, giving Claire a hug of her own.

“Will do,” Claire told her. A roar erupted in the courtyard, and Claire said her farewells before walking over to the parked Sea Dragons. She and the rest of the Alcheringa Delegation not taking international Portkey’s home would be flying the Sea Dragon’s back across the Pacific to Hawaii, the North-Eastern border of the Federation.

Harry glanced around and spotted Fred and George talking in hushed voices as they walked towards the train.

“Pete, Gwen, MJ. It’s been an honour getting to know you. I really hope all your plans go well,” he told them.

“Harry, if you need us, we’re just an Owl away. Don’t hesitate,” Peter said. Harry pulled the older boy into a hug and slapped him on the back, which was followed by Gwen and MJ hugging him as well. He slipped away as Hermione engulfed them in another series of hugs.

Where are you off to?

There’s something I’ve got to do.

“Guys,” Harry said, waving to the twins. They stepped over to him and patted him on the shoulder.
“What’s up, Harry? Sorry, you have to go back to the Dursley’s,” they said.

“Oh, I wouldn’t bother worrying about that. I think my holidays are going to be excellent.” Harry winked at them, and, before they had a chance to recover, pulled the bag with his Triwizard winnings out of his pocket.

“I want you to have this,” he said, placing it in Fred’s hand.

“What!”

“No, seriously. It’s for your joke shop. The one your mum doesn’t want you starting. I’ve given it a lot of thought. I’m loaded, I don’t need any more money. But I’ve got a feeling the world’s going to need some laughs real soon, and this is your dream. I don’t want a lack of funds to get in the way of that.”

Fred and George looked utterly flummoxed. Then Harry turned on his heel and left them standing there, gaping at him like a pair of fish. The Express blew its horn, signalling the imminent departure. Harry stopped and stared up at Ilvermorny castle. It certainly looked gorgeous in the sunrise. A pair of arms snaked around his waist, and Ginny’s head came to rest on his shoulder.

“What are you thinking?” She asked.

“The world’s changing. But it doesn’t matter what the world throws at us. Because we’ll keep fighting to protect it, and the people in it, no matter what. What will come will come, and we’ll meet it when it does.”

So Ends Act III…

Imagine that video of Ghost and Miracle singing “Me!” by Taylor Swift featuring Brendon Urie from ‘Panic! At the Disco’ playing through the credits.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the authors, contributors and editors of…

- Pottermore: https://www.pottermore.com/
- The Superpower Wiki: http://powerlisting.wikia.com/wiki/Superpower_Wiki
- The Harry Potter Wiki: http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page
- The Marvel Wiki: http://marvel.wikia.com/wiki/Marvel_Database
- Archive of Our Own author ‘smallbrownfrog’ for their complete sourced index of characters in the Harry Potter world collected in, The Hogwarts Years: Classmates, Birthdays, and Ages https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin
- The Cast and Crew behind the Marvel Netflix shows, Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Iron Fist and the Defenders. The characters in this fanfiction are inspired by those portrayed in
these works, and the older versions of the characters are designed to match their older portrayals as shown on these shows.

- The Cast and Crew of the Spider-Man PS4 game, on which the characters of Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson are based off.
- Mutant Storm by Bobmin356 [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm)
- A Man of Iron by Mr Chaos [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10156413/1/A-Man-of-Iron](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10156413/1/A-Man-of-Iron)
- Harry Potter: Lost by Bear12 [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/5366780/1/Harry-Potter-Lost](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/5366780/1/Harry-Potter-Lost)
- The Thorny Rose by Brennus [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9631998/1/The-Thorny-Rose](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9631998/1/The-Thorny-Rose)
- Unintended Consequences by sbmcneil [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6365342/1/Unintended-Consequences](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6365342/1/Unintended-Consequences)
- Harry Potter and Fate’s Debt by Intromit [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/2479927/1/Harry-Potter-and-Fate-s-Debt](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/2479927/1/Harry-Potter-and-Fate-s-Debt)
- The Search for Victory by Morena Evensong [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10740334/1/The-Search-for-Victory](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10740334/1/The-Search-for-Victory)
- and, Avengers of the Ring by Dr Matthattan [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8774682/1/Avengers-of-the-Ring](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8774682/1/Avengers-of-the-Ring)

Finally, we’d like to once again thank Joanne Rowling for creating the incredible world that is Harry Potter and allowing us to play in it. I don’t know what the world would be like if we knew nothing about Harry or his world.

And we’d also like to say thanks to Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Kevin Feige and the all the other fabulous people at Marvel Comics and Marvel Studios for creating all the Marvel comic-book characters we know and love to this day. Excelsior Stan.

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**Post Credits Teaser:**

**Next season on Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse:**

**Act IV: The Defenders Army**

_Lord Voldemort has returned, but the Wizarding World won’t believe it. Minister Fudge will stop at nothing to deny Voldemort’s resurrection, even going so far as to assign the wicked Madame Umbridge to watch Harry, the Defenders and Dumbledore at Hogwarts. But Umbridge’s reign of terror may be just what Harry needs to bring the disparate houses of Hogwarts School together. The Defenders are becoming more powerful by the day, but to stand against Voldemort, and rid the school of Umbridge, they’ll need allies. They’ll need an Army._

_The Next Adventure Begins June 15th, 2019 on Fanfiction.net and the Archive of Our Own._
Chapter Summary

Act IV: The Defenders Army
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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

Act IV: The Defenders Army

Updated Disclaimer:

The Odyssey, a space-craft bigger than a moon, shaped like a giant replica USS Enterprise, shot through the Bleed, leaving a trail of golden lightning in its wake.

“Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Shooting for the stars when I couldn't make a killing

Didn't have a dime but I always had a vision

Always had high, high hopes!!!

Had to have high, high hopes for a living,
Didn't know how but I always had a feeling

I was gonna be that one in a million,

Always had high, high hopes!!”

Ghost and Miracle stood at the foot of a stage in the depths of the ship, jumping up and down, fists in the air, as Panic! At the Disco played High Hopes to the crowd of Travellers making their way to the Multiversity for the Trial of Clara Hunter.

“Mama said
Fulfil the prophecy
Be something greater
Go make a legacy
Manifest destiny
Back in the days
We wanted everything, wanted everything

Mama said
Burn your biographies
Rewrite your history
Light up your wildest dreams
Museum victories, everyday
We wanted everything, wanted everything

Mama said don't give up, it's a little complicated
All tied up, no more love and I'd hate to see you waiting.”

Phoenix, Ghost and Miracle’s clone daughter from Earth 90123 – long story, don’t ask cause we’re not telling you – beamed in beside the dancing duo in a flash of white light. She instantly threw her hands to her ears, wincing in pain as she adjusted to the loud noise.

“Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Shooting for the stars when I couldn't make a killing

Didn't have a dime but I always had a vision
Always had high, high hopes!!

Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Didn't know how but I always had a feeling

I was gonna be that one in a million

Always had high, high hopes!!”

“What the fuck is going on here!!!” Phoenix exclaimed, staring in shock at the assembled crowd. Dumbledore and Maui were having a breakdancing contest a few metres away from her, and Tyrion was standing on Churchill’s shoulders beside Thor – all three of them nursing infinitely refilling tankards of beer.

“It’s a concert!!” Ghost exclaimed, looping an arm around her shoulders. Phoenix looked nothing like her father, but there’s no denying the relationship between mother and daughter. Both women had thick red hair, though Phoenix wore her's knee length and Miracle’s cut at the shoulders. Both had vivid green eyes, but while Miracle went to great pains to cover up her freckles with magic, Phoenix wore them proudly. She was also taller than both her mother and father (though only by a few inches), something she was rather proud of. The big difference between them, of course, was the golden ink tattoo of angel wings across her back. That was another long story, definitely involves Raziel, Michael and Anneliese Celestial. That one might be worth telling actually…

“Mama said

It's uphill for oddities

The stranger crusaders

Ain't ever wannabes

The weird and the novelties

Don't ever change

We wanted everything, wanted everything

Stay up on that rise

Stay up on that rise and never come down

Stay up on that rise

Stay up on that rise and never come down.”

“No, shit! What are they doing here? They aren’t Travellers! Are they?!”

“No!” Miracle screamed, “We abducted them from Earth 212 when we passed it a few Chronos back!”
"You what?!!"

"Mama said don't give up, it's a little complicated
All tied up, no more love and I'd hate to see you waiting
They say it's all been done, but they haven't seen the best of me
So I got one more run, and it's gonna be a sight to see.

Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Shooting for the stars when I couldn't make a killing

Didn't have a dime but I always had a vision

Always had high, high hopes!!"

"We were bored, we wanted some fun!!" Oracle beamed, pushing her way past Percy Jackson.

"You could have played some chess?! But instead, you abducted a rock band? And aren't you supposed to be on Planetos 2?" Phoenix asked, directing the statement at Oracle, who, if she was being honest, looked absolutely stunning in the green crop top and mini skirt she was wearing.

"I left Stalin and Magneto in charge, they'll be fine," Oracle dismissed, before belting out the next line.

"Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Didn't know how but I always had a feeling

I was gonna be that one in a million

Always had high, high hopes!!"

"You what?!!" Ghost exclaimed, spinning around and staring at Oracle in terror. Oracle ignored him, instead focussing on Phoenix.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to tell everyone we don't own Harry Potter, Marvel Comics or the Discworld novels by Terry Pratchett!" She snapped.

"Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Shooting for the stars when I couldn't make a killing
Didn't have a dime but I always had a vision

Always had high, high hopes

Had to have high, high hopes for a living

Didn't know how but I always had a feeling

I was gonna be that one in a million

Always had high, high hopes!!!"

“You’re lucky I like this song,” Phoenix grumbled.

Act IV, Chapter 1: Home Invasion

Mr and Mrs Potter – who lived in the parallel pocket dimension of the ‘Home,’ – liked to think they were perfectly normal thank you very much. Whether they actually were normal or not was irrelevant in their opinions. What mattered was that they thought themselves quite ordinary and liked to partake in normal endeavours whenever they had the time.

Which was why Mr and Mrs Potter were currently sitting on the couch in their home in front of the television.

“Good evening and welcome to BBC Nightly News. Our lead story tonight is our continued coverage of the story that’s gripping the world. The Spiders of New York City.”

“Oh, look, Harry, you made the cover of Witch Weekly,” Mrs Potter said, holding up a magazine for her husband to see. He was indeed on the cover of the magazine, holding up the Triwizard Cup aloft. Beneath the depiction of the handsome black-haired, green-eyed, bespectacled youth was the headline, ‘HARRY POTTER: A HERO AMONG WIZARDS’

“Well, isn’t that nice of them,” Mr Potter remarked casually, continuing to watch the BBC newscaster.

“For those of you living under a rock the last few days, on Monday, Times Square in New York City became a battleground between a group of people who seem to possess genuine real-life superpowers.”

“How long will Sirius’ exam take?” She asked him.

“Most of the day. There’s a midnight stealth test, I think. It’s tough, but he should make it back into the Auror Corp. Good thing too, because with Voldemort back, they’re gonna need him,” He replied.

Suddenly, a gorgeous snowy owl flew into the room via an open window and landed on Mr Potter’s
shoulder. Attached to the owl’s leg was a letter. Now, I know what you’re thinking. ‘Owl’s sending messages? That doesn’t seem very normal.’ Well, you’d be entirely wrong in that assumption, as sending letters by owl was exceptionally ordinary. For the Potters at least.

“Who’s it from?” Ginny asked as she flipped through the Witch Weekly article.

“It’s from Gwen,” Harry said, rolling his eyes at her as Hedwig the owl took flight once more.

“The battle took place between a man dubbed ‘Electro’ – who seemingly possessed a suit that allowed him to harness electricity – and two unknown individuals, both dressed in Spider themed costumes who demonstrated incredible agility and the ability to ‘swing’ around using a type of synthetic cable. Whether the cable is from a device or from their bodies is unknown. The two Spider-People fought Electro, who was holding several civilians hostage, to a standstill after all attempted police intervention failed. They then used a hose from a fire truck to subdue the villain. Electro’s suit was removed, and he was remanded into police custody.”

“What does she say? If it’s anywhere near as flattering as this article I think I might need to be worried,” Ginny said, a playful grin crossing her features as she began narrating, “Mr Potter’s daring heroics saved his fellow champions and aided them in escaping capture from a terrorist cell attempting to emulate He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, the dark lord Mr Potter defeated at the age of one.”

“Spider-Man and Spider-Woman – whose names were coined by witness and fledgling reporter Mary Jane Watson who works for Daily Bugle Communications – fled the scene using their webbing to swing between New York City’s iconic skyscrapers.”

Harry ignored Ginny’s poor attempt at the Queen’s English and opened the letter from their American friends.

Harry and Ginny

By now I’m going to assume you’ve seen the news and correctly deduced that Spider-Man and Spider-Woman are Peter and I. If you hadn’t… spoilers, I guess?

“You guessed right,” Harry told her, showing her the first paragraph of Gwen Stacy’s neat writing.

“Wasn’t that hard. You saw Peter use the web shooter’s in the graveyard,” Ginny pointed out, then her face darkened, “and what we saw in the Library of Worlds…” She trailed off, staring at the TV.

The full story is long, complicated and I can’t trust it in a letter, even an Owl message, which obviously can’t be intercepted as easily as No-Maj messaging can. The short version is: MJ got a tip about Oscorp, we snuck inside, got busted, hid in a lab, found them experimenting on Acromantulas, got bitten by radioactive spiders, got powers, saved the day. Is this what it’s like for you all the time? I don’t know how you do it.

“Harry’s desire to save even those he doesn’t know is enough to make any girl wet between the legs and weak between the knees,” Ginny continued reading the Witch Weekly article.

“Ginny? This letter is serious, I’m trying to read about our friend’s efforts at clandestine vigilantism.”

“Harry!” Ginny scolded, “are you not taking the lovely, honest and hardworking reporters at Witch Weekly seriously?”

“If there were any lovely, honest and hardworking reporters at Witch Weekly I would take them
“seriously,” Harry told her sharply.

“Tut, tut Harry. You should be showing more respect for the media community. What would your dear Aunt Petunia say?”

“I think if Aunt Petunia saw the photo on page two of that magazine, she’d have a heart attack.”

“I loved the photo on page two of the magazine,” Ginny said slyly, holding up a spread of Harry with his shirt off taken when they visited Bondi Beach in January. Harry rolled his eyes and turned back to the letter.

*It’s been a seriously crazy couple of weeks. Peter’s handling it even worse, seeing how his Uncle Ben just died. He’s blaming himself, something you are somewhat familiar with, according to Hermione (I’ve also sent a letter to her, so it’s safe to talk to her about us).*

*I’m going crazy. Not like, Voldemort level crazy, but like still psychotic crazy. If that’s even a thing. I’m sensing everything around me. It’s like my senses have been dialled up to eleven. It’s not fight or flight as much as it’s like a precognitive trigger. And everything sets it off. Fly gets to close, zap to the brain. Someone closes a door, zap. I know if someone’s going to say something before they even say it. It’s frying my brain. Peter’s no better. We’re using the Scorpius Rune to mediate the effects the best we can, but it’s not working very well. And that’s not even going into the sticking. We’re sticking to literally everything!! The web-shooters, which Pete says you saw in action in the Graveyard, are getting a serious workout. Our muscles and bone structures are now literally strong enough that we can jump off buildings and use the cables to swing between them without even feeling it! I’ve broken a sink, the toilet and a window so far. Pete’s destroyed the door to our apartment twice.*

*MJ’s covering for us as best she can, but she’s struggling, and frankly, I can’t blame her. Especially Pete. He blames his own in-action for his Uncle’s death. We have no one else we can talk to about this. Given your own gifts and the responsibilities you have to carry as a result, you’re the only ones who can understand. Luna has the powers, but not the burden; and Hermione is brilliant, but she just doesn’t understand. Not like you do.*

*We need to talk in person as soon as we can. I need your help. We need your help.*

*Love, Gwen.*

“Well… I didn’t expect that” Harry admitted, handing the letter to Ginny.

“Well, so they’ve got actual powers? Damn. We really do need a conversation. That’s a story I want to hear,” she exclaimed, finishing the message.

*“The identity of Electro has been revealed as Max Dillion, an employee of Oscorp Industries. Mr Norman Osborn has issued a statement claiming innocence from any wrongdoing on behalf of his company, but the question is, how did Dillion get his hands on such levels of advanced technology? And if it wasn’t from Oscorp as Mr Osborn claims, where did he get it? And did Spider-Man and Spider-Woman gain their powers in a similar way? Any attempt to ascertain the identities of Spider-Man and Spider-Woman has so far proved impossible, but the two vigilantes have been sighted aiding civilians against muggings, rescuing people from car crashes, and even stopping a high-speed chase. NYPD Officer Jaime Reagan, who was involved in the chase, thanked the Spiders for assisting in the criminal's arrest, rescuing a young girl who was trapped in the stolen car…”*
Whatever the newscaster said next Harry and Ginny would never know, as, at that moment, the disembodied voice of Lily Potter echoed through the house.

“WARNING! WARNING! EXTERNAL DEFENCES UNDER ATTACK! LOCATION, HOGWARTS ANCHOR.”

“Crap!!” Harry exclaimed, falling off the couch and planting face first into the floor. Ginny was little better. She had jerked up so violently that both Gwen’s letter and the copy of Witch Weekly went flying into the air as she toppled backwards, taking the couch with her.

“What was that?!?” Harry yelled over the continuing alarm.

“Did you know it could do that?!?” Ginny asked, peeking her head above the overturned piece of furniture.

“No.” That was not the answer Ginny was looking for.

“WARNING! WARNING! EXTERNAL DEFENCES UNDER ATTACK! LOCATION, HOGWARTS ANCHOR. SHIELD FAILURE IMMINENT. COMMENCE EVACUATION PROCEDURES!!”

That announcement snapped them back into the moment, and their shock at hearing Lily Potter’s voice from beyond the grave was pushed to the back of their minds.

“Voldemort! He’s found us!” Harry exclaimed. He grabbed his wand from the coffee table and obliterated Gwen’s letter.

But how... Ginny wondered, grabbing her backpack from where it lay on the floor. She’d yet to unpack the supplies she’d stolen from Grimmauld Place before she used Lily Potter’s Amulet to transport into the Home just a few hours ago, and letting them fall into Voldemort’s hands was not a good idea.

We can’t think about that right now. We’ve got to evacuate. Harry replied sharply through their mental bridge.

“Right.” They jumped to their feet and followed the emergency procedures drilled into them by Sirius Black and Remus Lupin for just this type of scenario. They bolted out of the living room, giving no thought to the dozens of expensive possessions scattered within. The most important thing was that they protect the library at all cost. They skidded to a halt at the lobby and stared down the hallway towards the four multi-coloured doors opening back out into the real world. The blue door that opened out into Hogwarts was vibrating something fierce. Harry swallowed hard. He knew what he had to do. He spun towards the wall and faced the family clock that hung there, displaying the names Padfoot, Moony, Harry and Ginny. Harry pulled aside the clock, revealing a console of spinning silver gears and levers, each with labels on them. In the top right-hand corner was a black knob like what one might find on a safe. He spun the dial to the number 3, then counter clockwise to the number 1, then a full revolution back to the 1 again, then one spot to the right to hit 0, then a clockwise rotation to the 8, and finally counter clockwise back to the 1. The nob changed from black to red and began flashing.

Harry and Ginny glanced back to the door. There was a large crack in it now, and the sound of muffled explosions could be heard coming from beyond.

Harry, forcing back the bile that rose up at the thought of destroying all that remained of his parents legacy, pressed the big red button.
“SELF DESTRUCT SEQUENCE ACTIVATED. ANCHOR TERMINATION PROTOCOL IN EFFECT. COUNTDOWN COMMENCING. 30, 29…”

Harry knew his mum was a science fiction nerd. He’d watched all her tapes of Classic Who and Star Trek episodes. But he didn’t think she’d be that much of a nerd. Rolling his eyes, he grabbed Ginny’s hand and pulled her with him down the residential corridor of the home. They ran full tilt through the Study Room and into the Marauders Library, by far the biggest room in the house.

“25, 24…”

An explosion made the entire house vibrate, and Harry and Ginny slammed the door shut.

“INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!” Lily Potter’s voice exclaimed. Harry pulled aside a picture frame of the four Marauders plus Lily that hung on the wall and spun a silver gear towards the door. The lights within the library turned from natural white to vivid red, and a set of blast doors sealed themselves over the wooden door.

“20, 19…” Another bang shook the house.

Harry spun the gear again, and a magical hologram of the world materialised in front of him.

*Where are we going?*

“The Library of Worlds. It’s the only place Voldemort won’t be able to find us,” Harry said, eyes narrowed as he zoomed the globe in on Mt Everest. Ginny facepalmed. Perfect!

“15, 14…”

“Harry! Ginny! Come out, I know you’re here!” Albus Dumbledore’s voice boomed through the corridors. Harry and Ginny went white.

Okay, so not Voldemort.

*Guess Luna won the bet after all.***

*How’d he find us? And why now?***

*Good questions, for another time.*

Harry spun the gear one more time.

“COMMENCING SEPARATION. PREPARE FOR HYPERSPACE LAUNCH. 10, 9…”

The wooden floor folded in on itself and five chairs rose up out of the ground.

“Merlin, I love your Mum,” Ginny whispered as she and Harry sat down. Seat belts appeared from thin air, wrapping themselves around the two teenagers. They held hands and braced themselves.

“7, 6…”

“Harry, stop this!” Dumbledore pleaded.

There was a loud groan, and the library began to shake violently. Harry and Ginny stared out the window on the far side of the room.

“5, 4…”
Suddenly, everything in the library hazed out of focus, as if light were struggling to keep up with them for a moment. A second later it was gone, and the Quidditch pitch was replaced by a tunnel of blue light. Lily Potter’s voice, too, was gone.

“That was close,” Harry breathed.

“We’re not out of trouble yet,” Ginny reminded him.

Harry bit his lip. “How’d he find us? Actually, how’d he even know you were gone, or even where to find us once he did realise you were missing from prison at Grimmauld Place?”

Ginny shook her head and took some deep breathes. “No idea. Mum thinks I’ve got the flu, thanks to the Twins. It’s got me get out of almost all the housework. Andromeda, Remus, Sirius and Tonks did a fantastic job of inventorying the place, but Mum’s a stickler for that stuff. I’m just glad they managed to hide away most of the really dangerous stuff at Andromeda’s apartment before Mum got her greedy little hands on it. She’s turfing anything even remotely dangerous. The only reason she didn’t burn the Black Library to the ground the minute she stepped inside was because Mad-Eye wouldn’t let her. Said it had ‘strategic value,’” she fumed. Harry knew all this of course. He’d had regular updates about the activities of Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix from Sirius, Remus and Tonks, who passed the information onto Sirius’s cousin Andromeda – who wasn’t actually in the Order – who in turn passed it to him. He then gave the info to Ginny, so she could inform the Defenders members trapped within Sirius’ family home. Ginny, who had taken charge in his forced exile, had elevated Fred and George to full-time members. The twins had been overjoyed, and Hermione had declared that their names should be “Thing 1” and “Thing 2” from the Cat in the Hat. Neither of them had understood the reference, but had taken the nicknames to heart, now refusing to be addressed by anything else. Harry couldn’t wait until he could get back to see them. They’d briefly considered communicating with Hermione and the Twins using the mind link but had decided to keep it as a secret for now. Only Dumbledore, Brains and Mystery knew about the link, and Harry and Firefly preferred it stayed that way. Ginny was using her illness to maximum potential. While her mother thought she was in bed, Ginny was actually sneaking as many of the Black Family books into the Home to save them from Mrs Weasley’s hatred of all things mildly dark in nature. When Moody (who’d become the sort of defacto second in command for the Order) had caught her doing it, he’d praised her efforts as excellent forward planning – and then tried to recruit her to the Aurors, just like he’d tried with Harry the previous year. Harry had enjoyed making fun of the scarlet blush that Ginny got at the compliment.

“Could it have been Moody?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe…” Ginny trailed off as the Library began to vibrate once more. The tunnel out the window vanished, replaced by black clouds and swirling snows. More alarms rang out inside the library, and Harry and Ginny were never more grateful for the seatbelts. The building crashed into the side of the mountain, sending books flying off the shelves in all directions. They continued to roll for a few more metres before the room came to a stop. The only problem, they were upside down, heads dangling from the roof.

Harry shook his head to clear it and stared out into the room. Hundreds of volumes lay on the floor, and there was smoke coming from somewhere.

_We have to get down. Dumbledore will have a way of tracking us._

“GYROSCOPIC STABILISERS ENGAGING.”

“What’s a… whoah!!!!!!” The room spun around at terrifying speed, and Harry and Ginny jolted as the chairs locked into the ground, the right side up.
“Awesome!!” Ginny exclaimed. Harry just rolled his eyes and unclipped the seatbelt.

I’m so taking you to a theme park.

What’s taking you so long then?

Harry ran over to the door and disengaged the blast doors. Ginny pulled the wooden door open and, biting back a curse at the frigid temperatures, jumped out into the snow. Harry followed, closing the door behind him. It wasn’t a pretty sight. The Marauders Library was embedded within the cliffside, and a storm was raging around them, wiping at their clothes and sending Ginny’s hair flying in all directions.

“Quickly!” Harry shouted, but Ginny was already ahead of him. She reached up and pulled a wooden plank free from the wall, revealing a lever. She pushed it into the opposite position, and the building shrank to the size of a peanut in seconds. Ginny caught the miniaturised structure, once again muttering under her breath about Lily Potter and her love of Sci-Fi.

Harry ground his teeth and grabbed his right arm. The Firebrand was stinging along his skin.

“He’s coming!” He yelled, before grabbing Ginny and holding his arm towards the cliff-face. The door to the Library of Worlds materialised, and they rushed inside, Harry slamming the door behind them. Ginny bolted down the corridor and into the atrium, casting her backpack of books aside and ignoring the greetings shouted out to her by the portraits containing the likeness of the former members of the Council of Fire. She sat down in the glowing silver and blue chair dominating the room, and the chair instantly slid back into a reclined position. Ginny felt the tether slip into place, and suddenly she could sense everything about the Library. Its defences. Where each book fit on each shelf. Each person in every portrait. She knew that the power source for the Library was at 73% capacity. And she knew that there were five incoming Apparation signals.

“Shields to maximum, engaging cloaking generator,” Ginny whispered as she pictured a shimmering energy shield solidifying around the walls and hiding them from all detection.

Five blips appeared on her sensors, and she magnified the external cameras.

“Display,” she said. She opened her eyes and saw Harry standing beside her, looking into the magical hologram now floating above their heads. Dumbledore, Moody, Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt and Ginny’s mother were standing outside in the high-altitude storm.

“Where are we, Albus?” Shacklebolt asked, pointing his wand at where the Marauders Library had crash landed.

“Everest if ever I saw it,” Moody growled.

“It’s so cold!” Tonks exclaimed, hugging her robes around her.

“EVEREST!” Molly exclaimed in a voice higher than Harry had ever heard it.

“It would appear so,” Dumbledore confirmed. The Headmaster waved his wand in a number of intricate patterns.

“My baby girl married before she even graduated. Now she’s running off for clandestine meetings with troubled teenagers. My daughter, a scarlet woman. Morgana only knows what she’s given to that boy by now,” Molly moaned. Ginny’s amused expression darkened in an instant. Harry looked about ready to walk out the door and curse her. The only comfort was that Tonks seemed to be restraining herself as well.
“Scarlet Woman! Who’s she calling a Scarlet Woman. I can look at a calendar, Mum! I know when Bill’s birthday was!” Ginny fumed. The chair picked up on her rage and began to hum.

“Deploying offensive measures…”

“NO!” Ginny and Harry yelled, and the chair stopped humming, though Ginny could tell it was disappointed.

“The children are obviously not here,” Shacklebolt said, pocketing his wand.

“I believe you’re right. And we can’t even be sure it was Harry and Ginny in the Home. Or that the two are even together at all, though it is the most likely scenario,” Dumbledore agreed.

“I think the kids are fucking geniuses. They’re embodying Constant Vigilance!! They’d destroy a sentimental stronghold without hesitation rather than be captured and let it fall into the hands of the enemy. That takes balls. Now they’ve led us on a wild hippogriff chase to the fucking Himalayas, while they make their escape! It’s brilliant I tell you. Brilliant!!!” Mad-Eye beamed, looking very pleased.

“These are people I can work with Albus,” He said proudly.

“No! You will not be working with my daughter and her kidnapper! I won’t allow it. They’re kids! And Ginny is going to locked up in her room until she’s fifty!”

“Didn’t stop her once, won’t stop her next time,” Moody said haughtily. Molly went a bright shade of red.

“That’s my cue to leave,” Tonks said. Then she turned on her heel and disapparated.

“Come, Kingsley, to Privet Drive,” Dumbledore said solemnly. Ginny and Harry looked at one another.

“The Dursleys!”

“Maybe we can still salvage this,” Ginny said, the workings of a plan running through her head. Harry kissed her on the cheek and disapparated.

“Care to tell us what’s going on, please?” Queen Victoria asked.

Harry apparated straight into the living room of Number 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, which was probably not the best idea he’d ever had. Or maybe it was. Harry landed firmly on Aunt Petunia’s rug, right in front of the television. Vernon, Petunia and Dudley were all sitting on the couch, eyes bugging out of their heads at him.

“Hi, loving relatives. I’m back!” Harry said cheerfully. The TV exploded behind him. Oops?

Ignoring the Dursleys sitting like stunned mullets. Harry made his way to the window and peered outside. He couldn’t see Dumbledore; he must have made it back before him. He pulled the curtain closed and spun back around. The second he did so, the Firebrand signalled a warning, and he
leaned wide, just missing a frying pan swinging clear through the space his head had been not a moment before.

“Well that wasn’t very nice,” Harry said as Vernon staggered forward, unbalanced from the swing. Dudley was next. He charged towards Harry, meaty fists raised above his head. Harry rolled his eyes and faster than Dudley could even comprehend, he’d pulled his wand and cast a jelly legs jinx on the boy, sending him collapsing to the floor. This was going to be fun. Thanks to the Firebrand, Harry knew that Vernon was coming around for another swing, but he didn’t bother dodging. Instead, he cast an impervious charm on himself, and the kitchen utensil bent in half as it collided with his head. Hmm. That wasn’t an item he’d used before.

“Aunt Petunia, did you buy new kitchen stuff?” He asked, turning to his Aunt while Vernon stared at his bent weapon. Dudley was crawling away into the kitchen. But Petunia was nowhere to be seen.

“Aunty? Where’d you go?” Harry brought his wand around in an arc.

“Revelio Petunia Dursley.” Petunia’s form glowed from where she was cowering behind the couch.

“Oh please,” Harry rolled his eyes. Dudley had crawled over to a kitchen drawer and had pulled out a shotgun, which he then threw to Vernon. Harry sighed. As much as he wanted to keep enjoying this, he really needed to put to rights before the Headmaster showed up if he was going to get this to work. The constant hum of the Gemini Rune amplified against his neck.

*Harry. Dumbledore, Mum, Shacklebolt and Moody have all left. Odds are they’re coming to you.*

*Thanks, Gin.*

*Bat-Bogey my mum if you get the chance!*

*Love you too.*

Harry pushed the link into the background and focussed on Vernon’s gun, which he was cocking back.

“Now come on everyone, there’s no reason we can’t be civil about this.” Twirling his wand in his fingers, Harry drew the Zemeckis Rune in the middle of the air. The rune flashed red, and Vernon, Dudley and Petunia started reversing their movements until they were all back on the couch.

“What the… YOU!” Vernon bellowed, realising his weapon was no longer in his hands. The Zemeckis Rune was a handy one he had found within his favourite book of all time, *Ancient Runes and Forgotten Civilisations*. It reversed the flow of time around the user for thirty seconds. But it only affected living entities, and anyone affected would remember their original actions when time resumed. It also gave them one hell of a headache. There was a reason Harry was top of Ancient Runes after all.

Harry resisted the urge to laugh and placed all three of them into body binds.

“Okay. Here’s what’s going to happen now. When the rest of the Magical folk show up here in a couple of minutes…” Harry couldn’t help but notice the unrestrained fear in each of their eyes at that comment, “… you are going to pretend that I have been here at this lovely dwelling of yours for the past two summers. You will not mention that I ran away, and you will tell them that I have been a model house guest. Is that understood?” Harry, realising the Dursley’s couldn’t actually answer him while frozen, dispelled the charm. Dudley immediately launched himself at Harry, who just sighed and stunned him. He dropped to the floor like a dead whale, and Petunia screamed.
“Listen here, you little freak! We won’t be doing anything you want. Now get out of this house at once!” Vernon screamed, the vein running along his forehead becoming so inflamed Harry worried it might actually explode.

Harry sighed, “I didn’t want to do this, but you haven’t given me any choice.” Harry flicked his wand, and watched, a sense of satisfaction on his face, as Dudley’s prone form was replaced with that of a pig. Thank you, Hagrid and McGonagall. Petunia screamed even louder.

“We’ll do it! We’ll do it! Just change him back!”

“Sure… after you’ve told Dumbledore that I’ve been coming back here for Summer break the last two years.” Harry was actually surprised Vernon didn’t blow a gasket at that point.

Then the doorbell rang. Petunia’s face lost all colour, and Vernon went a fascinating shade of green.

*This is priceless!*

Harry quickly cast a Reparo on the television and a disorientation charm Ginny told him on Dudley, to ensure the newly porcine creature wouldn’t interrupt.

Harry pocketed his wand, before walking up to the door, a fake smile on his face, and opening it. Dumbledore, Moody, Shacklebolt and Mrs Weasley were all standing outside. Dumbledore looked incredibly disappointed, Moody looked like a kid in a candy store, Shacklebolt was unreadable (Harry figured he probably just didn’t care), and Mrs Weasley looked as mad as Uncle Vernon had five seconds earlier.

“Ah, Harry. Good to see you. Having a pleasant evening?” Dumbledore asked. His eyes weren’t twinkling, which gave Harry goosebumps. He knew he could cast a pretty powerful wandless banishing charm, that should give him time to disapparate. It was whether or not he could get the draw on the Headmaster. He might have the added power of the Firebrand, but he wasn’t sure if that would be enough.

*Play along.*

“Spectacular Professor. Auror Moody, Mrs Weasley, good to see you both. It’s just Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and our pet pig Waddles. Dudley’s out bullying ten-year-olds. Um… if you don’t mind me asking, why are you here? Is it Voldemort? And who’s that guy,” Harry asked, pointing to Shacklebolt. He figured deniability was the best idea. Mrs Weasley was the only one who flinched. That was interesting.

“This is my good friend Kingsley Shacklebolt, Harry. He’s an Auror,” Dumbledore said simply. Harry couldn’t help but notice that he didn’t answer his first question.

“Well, nice to meet you then Mr Shacklebolt.” Harry nodded his head at the tall, dark-skinned bald man, but didn’t offer his hand. Moody’s smirk twitched slightly. The grizzled old Auror was loving this.

Harry turned back to the Headmaster, “I don’t suppose you’re here to get me out of here, are you? I haven’t had any letter’s from any of my friends. It’s driving me barmy.”

Dumbledore smiled softly.

*Maybe he’s buying it?*

“I am quite sorry about that, Harry. It was under my direction that your friends not send any
information to you. It was too risky, with Voldemort having returned from the dead.” Petunia made an odd squeaking noise at that point, which distracted all of them.

“He’s… he’s back?” She whimpered.

“You didn’t tell them?” Dumbledore asked incredulously.

“Well, no. They refuse to let me even say the M-Word in the house.” Harry placed air-quotes around the ‘M-Word’.

“Wait a second. This Voldy person, he’s the one that…” Vernon started, clenching and unclenching his fist. Harry was impressed he hadn’t gone for the shotgun again yet.

“… killed my parents and hundreds of other people, wizards and muggle alike. Yes. Yes, he is,” Harry concluded, a smug smile on his face.

“But… but he’s dead. You killed him with your… your…” Petunia muttered. Harry actually turned to look at her. She was holding the newly christened Waddles the pig in her arms.

“Come on. Spit it out. It won’t kill you.” Moody actually laughed at that. On the other hand, Mrs Weasley’s anger seemed to reach a crescendo at his disrespect to his elders. She pushed past Dumbledore and actually slapped Harry across the face. The only problem, the impervious charm was still in effect, and all the bones in the Weasley matriarch’s hand broke upon contact with his cheek.

“WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY DAUGHTER!!!” She shrieked, seemingly not realising her fingers were now hanging limply from her wrist, and that there was no mark on Harry at all.

“Molly!” Dumbledore admonished, but Mrs Weasley ignored him. She grabbed Harry by the collar and made him stare into her eyes.

“I KNOW YOU HAVE HER!”

Hey honey, guess what?

What?

The chair can project our mental connection. The Council of Fire and I are having the time of our lives here. There was even some popcorn in my bag! Oh, also Clara and Will are here. They say hi.

Gin, kinda in the middle of something here.

Oh. Sorry, get back to humiliating my mother. We’ll just sit here and enjoy it.

Harry, having had quite enough of his eardrums being screeched into, lifted his hand palm up and banished her back into the hallway. Shacklebolt caught her.

“Harry!” Dumbledore exclaimed.

“What? I think my ears are bleeding,” Harry said, rubbing his ears and checking for signs of blood.

“You can’t do magic outside of school, the Ministry will have been alerted by now.”

Vernon gave what might have been a victorious whoop, but Harry ignored him, instead counting on his fingers
“Not really. 1) I didn’t use a wand, and the Trace is placed on wands, so it doesn’t affect wandless magic. 2) I’ve been shielded from the Trace since I got the Firebrand, thanks for not telling me that by the way. 3) I’m married, which means I’m emancipated under wizarding law, which means the Trace broke on Christmas anyway. So, zoik, but that shit ain’t gonna work. Try again.”

“Married…” Petunia whispered in anguish.

“Be that as it may, you still shouldn’t be using magic, Harry,” Dumbledore said sternly, “And you need to show respect to your elders.”

“Maybe when my elders show me some respect, I’ll give that a try,” Harry said candidly. He had to resist the urge to fold his arms because that would cost him precious seconds when a fight broke out, and Harry was sure that one would.

“With that said Professor, I’d be awful grateful if you could tell me why Mrs Weasley thinks I’ve stolen her daughter, who just so happens to be my wife via Soulbond, so I couldn’t steal her if I tried.”

“I think Harry…” Harry’s eye followed Dumbledore’s hand inside his robes. The Firebrand was starting to prickle against his skin. Ginny had stopped her giggling in the back of his mind, letting him focus on the task at hand. Petunia and Vernon were looking between Harry, Dumbledore, Mrs Weasley, and pig Dudley, merely trying to follow the conversation. Harry almost felt sorry for them. Almost.

“… that you know exactly what Mrs Weasley is talking about.” Moody was still laughing his pants off behind them and had made no move to go for his wand. Shacklebolt seemed incredibly confused but still had a hand on his wand. Harry wasn’t worried about it. Harry knew that Dumbledore would have him disarmed, bound, and doing a tap-dance before the Auror could blink. What mattered was if the Firebrand had enhanced Harry enough to beat the Headmaster in a quick draw.

“I don’t understand…”

“You see Harry. We’ve had quite a long night, you see. Been led on quite a merry chase if I do say so myself. And it all started here on Privet Drive…”

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Ten Minutes earlier…

“We’ve got a problem!!!” Tonks yelled, running at full tilt into the kitchen of Grimmauld Place, where Remus Lupin, Molly Weasley, Arthur Weasley, Emmeline Vance, Hestia Jones, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Alastor Moody and Albus Dumbledore were having a meeting of the Order of the Phoenix.

Albus was immediately on edge, Tonks was supposed to be watching Harry right now.

“What’s happened?”

“Dementors! In Little Whinging. Dung’s been kissed. Looks like he was drinking, didn’t stand a chance.”

“What about Harry,” Albus asked in alarm, he was already on his feet, as was the rest of the group.

“No change. He’s still inside Number 4. He hasn’t come out. Should be safe. But I don’t know how many of the things there are, and I can’t take them down by myself.”
Albus, quickly forging a plan in his mind, turned back to the others. “Arthur, Hestia, Emmeline, head to Little Whinging immediately. Find the Dementors before they encounter anyone else. The rest of you with me, Mrs Potter should be able to tell us whether Harry is alright.” Molly flinched at the words ‘Mrs Potter’ but said nothing as she followed him upstairs. He stopped at the youngest Weasley’s room and knocked loudly.

“Mrs Potter. We must speak with you. It’s urgent,” he intoned. No response. He knocked again.

“Ginny’s been ill. She might be asleep,” Molly said tensely.

Albus tried the door. Locked. He pulled his wand and quickly unlocked it, before stepping inside. The room was crystal clean. No dust. No clothes on the floor. Nothing. The bed hadn’t even been slept in. Albus, fighting down a mild sense of panic, turned back to Molly, who looked just as confused.

“It appears Mrs Potter hasn’t been here in some time,” he said softly.

“She could have gone to Hermione’s room…” Molly tried, looking around frantically.

“This room hasn’t been slept in or even used. So, the question is, where has the young Mrs Potter been sleeping?” Kingsley asked. Dumbledore noticed a look pass between Remus and Nymphadora.

“Anything you’d care to add?”

Remus bit his lip, “We might know where she’s been sleeping.”

Present Day

“Imagine my surprise to learn that you haven’t been staying here at all, Harry. After you ensured me you understood the dangers.” Dumbledore took a step forward, and Harry stepped back. He lowered his right hand towards his wand, but his left hand was subtly drawing the Aquilla rune. If he timed it right, he’d create just enough pandemonium to escape back to the Library of Worlds.

“Well shit,” Harry muttered, realising there was no point in his charade at all. He should have stayed in the Library.

“Do not insult my intelligence, Harry. Smarter men have tried. I am seriously disappointed with you and your actions. I thought you were maturing. Evidently, I was wrong. You haven’t stepped foot in this house for almost three years now. The Blood Wards have failed completely. There’s no hope of resurrecting them. Why Harry? Why would you do this?”

Harry snapped. He completely forgot his plan, and the Gemini Rune went from humming in the background to blazing in fury. “Why would I do this!? Are you that fucking naïve?!” Harry turned on his heel and strode over to the Cupboard Under the Stairs. Knowing full well that it hadn’t been touched, he wrenched the door open as the acrid smell that usually accompanied his skin melting from the Gemini Rune began to fill his nose.

“This was my bed for ten years! I was thrown in here, treated like garbage by my own family. Do you want to know how many times I tried to commit suicide between the age of five and eleven? Six times! Six fucking times! The first person to ever hug me was Hermione for crying out loud. I didn’t know my own name until I started primary school. I didn’t know my parents’ names, let alone what they looked like, until Hagrid showed up on my doorstep. Come take a peek. I doubt they’ve cleaned it, so there’s probably still urine in there from one of the times I was locked up for days on end. You want to know why I left? It was to escape the jail that you sentenced me too after I saved all of your
fucking lives.” The Firebrand was burning with power, glowing brightly as it shone out from beneath his skin. Harry’s wand was in hand.

“And if this is the last time I’m going to be here in this forsaken place, I’m going to send it to hell.” Harry, knowing he wasn’t getting out of here conscious now, spun around and poured all his hate and rage at the Dursley’s into a single spell. The heat of the rune reached a crescendo, and he screamed, “Confringo!!”

The bolt of red energy soared up the stairs, where it collided with the door to the master bedroom. The wooden door. The blasting curse detonated, and the entire top story was alight in seconds.

Harry, using Dumbledore’s shock against him, turned back to Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and Waddles (aka porcine Dudley), and pulled his middle finger at them.

“That’s for my Mum, you little shits.” Harry was hit with a spell, and everything went dark.

Chapter End Notes

Authors Note: It should be noted that the events depicted in the Captain Marvel (2019) movie take place at some point during the year 1995 and are canon within the events of the story, despite us not actually mentioning them.
Ginny, Will, Clarissa and the rest of the Council of Fire stood in the Library of Worlds in stunned silence as the live feed from Harry’s side of the mind link clicked off. Ginny sat deadly still as the Gemini Rune, which had been smoking a second ago, instantly lost its power. She sighed and sat up, running a hand over the now inflamed skin on her neck.

“What are we going to do?”

“I say we take the fight to this Dumbles of yours. He is not a foe your combined might cannot defeat!” Arthur proclaimed, brandishing his sword… and almost beheading Guinevere in the process.

“I think you should go and get my Basilisk, then set it upon him and drink some Champaign,” Salazar said smugly.

“Your Basilisk is dead, remember,” Ginny pointed out.

“Details, details,” Salazar shrugged.

“I propose you storm this Grimmauld Place and rescue young Harry,” Ulysses said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, “can you get passed the Fidelius Charm?”

Ginny turned to Will and Clarissa, whom she guessed were having a mental conversation of their own. “Can you do it? The Dragon Force is supposed to be infinite power, right?”

Will grimaced, “It’s not that simple.”

“Why? Surely with enough juice, you can get passed any ward. That’s what Bill told me.”

“Oh, sure. We could break down the Fidelius Charm, no problem. We could do it without a scratch,” Will said, scratching his head.

“Then what’s not simple about it?”

“We’d come out without a scratch sure,” Clarissa explained, though she was staring at the locked door on the far side of the room and not at Ginny herself, “But you, Harry, everyone in the House, and everything within a… what do you think? Bout 3?”

“Yeah about 3 would do it,” Will said, staring the same way Clarissa was.

“and everything within a 300-kilometre radius would go up in a mushroom cloud.”

“We have access to infinite power sure, but funneling that into the real world is a whole lot more difficult,” Will finished.

Ginny gulped, “OK. So not that then. Any other ideas? I can’t apparate you in if you don’t know the secret, and your Phoenix friend won’t be able to get through Dumbledore’s wards.” Will and
Clarissa were staring at the door in silence, no doubt talking in their minds. Suddenly, she realised how Hermione must feel all the time. Then she frowned. She’d never gone through that door before, and it didn’t show up when she sat in the Chair.

“What is that?”

“That is the door to the Orrery,” Washington said, sipping a glass of wine.

“What’s the Orrery?” She asked exasperated.

“The Orrery of Worlds. It’s a fancy name for the local Multiverse. At last count, there were fifteen hundred thousand Earth’s in the local group. I think. It could have changed, I suppose,” Clara Hunter said from her portrait.

“The Multiverse? That’s real?!”

“Of course, it’s real. What made you think it wasn’t?” Odysseus exclaimed.

Ginny couldn’t really come up with an answer to that, so she just kept her mouth shut. Luckily, she was saved from further embarrassment when Will and Clarissa’s conversation broke into speech.

“We’d need a world high on the Merlin Scale,” Will whispered to himself, “That way we could use Narrative Causality to get in there.”

“But which one?” Clarissa asked him.

“I can only think of one where we’d be certain of success.”

Clarissa gasped and started shaking her head very fast.

“Nope. No way am I going there! We could get wiped out of existence!” Ginny got the feeling there was something she was missing.

“It’s perfect though,” Will said. Clarissa closed her eyes and looked at the ceiling.

“Please, god. Please just make Will a little less stupid. He doesn’t need to be smart, just vaguely intelligent will do.”

Will gasped in mock outrage.

“Will someone please tell me what the fuck you’re talking about please?!” Ginny yelled, stamping her foot on the floor. They didn’t have time for this, they needed to get to Harry.

The two turned towards her with shocked looks on their faces, as if they’d forgot she was there.

“We’re going to take a quick trip across the Orrery. That, if we’re lucky, should be able to get us inside the Fidelius without invoking the spell,” Will said eagerly.

Ginny raised an eyebrow, “I think I preferred the mushroom cloud…” Will grabbed both Ginny and Clarissa by the arm and pulled them towards the door which, as if sensing them, swung open, revealing a lush green forest that looked too perfect to be real.

“Hold your breath,” Clarissa said. Ginny did so, and then she was pulled through the doorway. It was like stepping through a wall of water. Cold, heavy, and loud. And it lasted no longer than a second. One moment she was in the Library, the next she was in the enchanted forest. The second her foot touched the ground, she felt incredibly light headed. Everything seemed to float slightly, and
all Ginny’s cares and worries washed away. Everything was just so wonderful. Like living a dream. The trees were the most brilliant green. The blue jays sang songs as if telling full-length stories, and she could understand every chirp. The wind on her neck was like the blessing of some long-forgotten deity. And the Magic! Oh, the Magic! It was everywhere! In absolutely everything. The trees, the sky, the ground, the wind, the animals. It was incredible. And she could feel it radiating out from her like waves. It was ecstasy!

“We can’t stay here!!!” Clarissa yelled. It seemed very far away, and Ginny found herself not really caring too much. Why should she care after all? This place was just so… magical.

“If we don’t get out we’ll be trapped forever! Hurry!!"

“I’m trying!” Will’s voice was far away too. That was funny. Will. It was a special name. A nice name. A royal name. A hero’s name. William. Like William the Conqueror. Now that was a story! She’d love to see the Battle of Hastings. She could hear the rumbling of cavalry even now.

“Will! It’s… fuck! It’s William the fucking Conqueror!”

“Stop Ginny from thinking so hard!”

William would be like a hero, she knew. Sitting astride a tall horse, banners unfurled behind him. Maybe she could be…

A set of hands grabbed her shoulders.

“NO! Stop thinking Ginny!” Clarissa’s face pulled into view right in front of her. Ginny frowned. Her hair looked different. Like it couldn’t decide what colour it wanted to be. It was fiery red like hers, then a deep rose red, then a golden blonde, and a chocolate brown. Her eyes stayed the same, though. Ginny didn’t understand that.

“Focus on Harry. Focus on Grimmauld Place, that’s what you want, right? You want to be in Grimmauld Place with Harry. So, we can help him.”

Harry. She knew him. That was a good name. Harry. A good story. She loved him in that story she was sure. She could almost feel it even now. Harry was drowsy. Not really awake, but not really asleep either. There were people whose voices he recognised. An old and wise wizard named Dumbledoors… no that wasn’t right. Dumbledore! That was it. Then there was the devilishly handsome man who acted like a loveable rogue. Han Solo! No that was wrong too. It was Black. Something to do with Black. Black stars? Sirius! Sirius Black yes, and his best friend Remus the werewolf. That was a cool story. There was someone else she thought. A mother of many who loved her family more than anything. And Harry was trying to take that away from her. But she had to learn to let go. People grew up. You can’t be a child forever…

“Got it!” Will exclaimed. Clarissa grabbed her around her waist and threw her over her shoulder. Ginny didn’t mind. This was the next stage in her story. She was going to rescue Harry. Take that damsel in distress! Another wall of water passed over her, and Ginny fell to the floor.

In a split second, everything came back to her. She looked up and saw Clarissa retching on the floor. Will was little better. He had his head stuck in a bucket of conjured water. Ginny’s stomach turned, and she joined Clarissa in her heaving. The entire contents of her stomach landed on the floor, which was only followed by the biggest migraine she’d ever had, times ten. She barely managed to miss the sick she’d created as she dropped face first to the floorboards, heavy breathing. She rolled over and looked back towards the shimmering blue portal floating in the main hallway of Grimmauld Place.
“What the hell was that place?” She whispered, pushing herself up on her elbows. Clarissa finally having regained her faculties, vanished the sick with a wave of her hand.

“That was the Disk. There’s so much magic in the atmosphere Physics doesn’t mean shit. All you have to do is believe something, and it can come true. That’s why we almost got killed by William the Conqueror and his army of Normans just now.”

Ginny fought back the urge to vomit again.

“How’d you stand that. I felt like I was being lifted out of my own head. Living dozens of stories at once…”

“You were. That’s the danger of the Discworld for someone like us. There’s so much Background Magic there that us, as Magicals ourselves, can barely operate. You could have destroyed the entire Disc if you thought the wrong thing. You could easily wish away your whole life by accident. Picture yourself as Dracula’s sex toy, and blamo, you’ve got a vampire as your slave master, with no memory of what or who you were before,” Will said, pouring the bucket over his head and drenching himself in water.

“We’ve got the Dragon Force on our side though. So, we could at least keep our sense of awareness on the other side. I still can’t believe their entire planet is actually a disk being held up by four elephants that ride on a cosmic turtle.” Clarissa concluded.

Ginny just shook her head. She didn’t want to know if she was lying. She really hoped she was. Will snapped his fingers, and the portal vanished.

“I’m never doing that again,” Clarissa proclaimed. Ginny found herself furiously agreeing with her.

“Me neither,” Will agreed. Throwing his now empty bucket down the hall. That’s when the screaming started.

“Vermin! Blood Traitors! Uncouth abominations of magic! In my house! Scum! Get out you monstrosities, get out!” Ginny cringed. Sirius’ mum really didn’t like Druids it seemed.

Clarissa, looking incredibly tired, merely pointed her hand at the portrait of the Black matriarch and a beam of energy consumed the entire image in the space of a single second. She didn’t even look up; instead, she was humming a song to herself that Ginny thought she recognised from the Breakfast Club.

Then a plethora of clapping broke into Ginny’s consciousness. Ginny, Clarissa and Will all turned towards the stairs, where Fred, George, Hermione, Bill, Charlie, Ron, Hagrid, Professor Mcgonagall, Professor Flitwick and Snape were all staring at them in complete bewilderment. Fred and George were the ones clapping. Ginny had to hide her glee at Snape’s face. His jaw was hanging open like a bad hinge. Flitwick had fallen unconscious, and McGonagall didn’t look very far behind. Then the Gemini Rune lit up once more, and Harry’s thoughts and emotions re-awoke in her mind.

_Gin?_

_Harry! You’re back online!_

_Yep. Massive headache, though._

_Yeah, I think that’s my fault. I may have travelled to another universe. Sorry?_
All good. Bout time you got an adventure of your own.

Where are you?

The kitchen. Dumbles is pretty pissed.

Oooh! It’s my turn!

“Brains, Thing 1, Thing 2. Harry’s in the kitchen with Dumbledore. Back Out Protocol is in effect. He needs some backup. What say we give the Headmaster a lesson on why you don’t mess with the Defenders?” Ginny said, winking at her friends. They instantly moved to follow her, Will and Clarissa as they walked towards the basement kitchen. McGonagall, Snape and Hagrid (carrying Flitwick), trailed behind, all seemingly trapped in states of disbelief.

Ginny pulled out her wand and, for dramatic effect, blasted the door open. She led the group inside and stood, hips squared, shoulders back, wand pointed right at the Headmasters head.

“Give me one good reason. I dare you,” She whispered menacingly.

“Ah. There’s the cavalry. Forget about the mind-link did we, Headmaster?” Harry said cheerfully. He was reclining in a rather comfortable looking armchair, legs up on the table. Sirius and Remus stood on either side of him, their hands on their own wands. Dozens of other Order members, including Mad-Eye and Tonks, were scattered around the room. Including…

“Ginny!!” Molly exclaimed rushing forward to grab Ginny. She didn’t move her wand an inch, trusting the others to handle it. Molly instantly found herself trapped inside a bubble of golden energy, courtesy of Will, who was fiddling with a strand of magic in his palm.

“I’d stay there, dearie. Mrs Potter has asked a very valid question, and I intend to see it through,” Will said casually.

“And who are you supposed to be!” Molly yelled, her temper, still high from minutes ago, returning to full force. Her hand was bandaged up.

“William. Clarissa. Nice to see you,” Dumbledore said softly, not moving his head.

“Cut the crap.” Clarissa said. Hagrid had just squeezed himself into the room. Ginny wondered if Hermione had cast a resizing charm on the door. Hagrid placed the now conscious Flitwick on the table.

“How did you bypass the Fidelius Charm?” Moody growled, stepping forward on his peg leg. His Magical eye was locked on Ginny. Good, she thought. Stay locked on me.

“Quick trip to the Discworld. No form of Magic can cut across Universe boundaries, not even a Fidelius Secret. So, we skipped over to the Disc, tried not to throw up. Used a bit of Narrative Causality. Might have accidentally launched a Norman invasion of Ankh-Morpork. Popped up in the hallway outside. Definitely threw up. You might want to use some detergent on that,” Will said casually as if he were asking for some toast in the morning.

“You can travel to other universes!!” Flitwick squeaked.

“We’re the Dragon. What did you expect?” Clarissa said, answering for both of them. The charms professor seemingly didn’t have an answer to that, so his mouth closed very abruptly.

“Stephen will be very disappointed in you. You know how he feels about crossing between worlds,”
Dumbledore said, “The Discworld especially.”

“Watch it, Albus. I think Ginny’s still waiting for you to fess up. I feel a Mexican stand-off coming up, and you know whichever side we’re on will win. Your best bet is to convince us to stay out of it at this point, cause we certainly won’t be helping you,” Will told him pointedly.

“Very well. Would you care to explain why you have a wand pointed at my head, Mrs Potter?” Molly flinched again.

“Ginny! Listen to me right now! You’re going to give me that wand. You’re grounded. Big time! Threatening the Headmaster! Running off with a boy! I thought I taught you better…” Molly tried to walk through the golden shield but screamed when it seemingly electrocuted her.

“That’s a Speed-Force Cocoon Molly. I wouldn’t try to push through it. You’d need to be a Flash to come close. And trust me, you’re not one,” Clarissa said, rolling her eyes. Ginny caught Fred drop something onto the floor out of the corner of her eye.

“I’d like to see you take it away, Mum. This is my wand, bought at Ollivanders over a year ago now. It’s not Charlie’s leftovers. No offence, Charlie.”

“None taken,” Charlie said helpfully. He was standing beside Tonks, trying desperately to hide a grin. George dropped another packet on her right. She couldn’t see Hermione. Seeing the look of seething on her mother’s face, Ginny turned her attention back to Dumbledore.

“I want to know, Headmaster, why exactly you thought you had the right to break into a secure facility without considering contacting the inhabitants. I want to know why you thought yourself justified in destroying the Marauders legacy. I want to know why you attacked us. And I want to know what helped you sleep at night after you had the balls to leave Harry with those abusive pieces of shit for ten years? That is what I want to know. Feel like sharing?” Ginny pressed her wand into Dumbledore’s neck.

“I left Harry at the Dursley’s because they were his only blood relatives. The blood wards were invaluable. And there was nowhere else…”

“Try again,” Harry said sharply, “I got exactly 1152 guardianship requests after my parents died. True, about 400 were from Death Eaters, but the others certainly weren’t.”

Dumbledore looked very confused, before his face sagged slightly, clearly coming to the realisation of just how Harry had come across that information.

“I see you’ve spoken with Ragnok.”

“Fifty-two beheaded Goblins. I hope you’re feeling good about yourself,” Harry said triumphantly, leaning back further in his chair.

“Goblins? Ragnok? What are you talking about Harry?” Bill asked. Ginny couldn’t help a grin spreading across her face. Bill worked for Gringotts, he’d know exactly what the punishment for Dumbledore’s transgressions would be.

“Oh, nothing much. Just that the Headmaster has been bribing the Goblins to screen Harry’s mail since he was born. All his mail. Hell, if we hadn’t found out about it, 50 outstanding Wills naming Harry as their beneficiary would have been transferred over to Ministry custody this year,” Ginny told the room. Bill suddenly went very pale. He turned to Dumbledore incredulously, mouth agape.

“Albus… is this the truth?” McGonagall whispered.
“I did it to prevent Harry from getting a big head from all the praise heaped upon him. The fan mail alone…”

“Yes, let’s talk about that shall we,” Harry said, sitting up and looking Dumbledore straight in the eyes, practically begging him to use Legilimency on him. The fan mail was a particularly sensitive topic for him.

“I’ve been reading through it, you see. And sure, some of it is pretty basic thank yous, or offering help and assistance should I need it, which, let me tell you, those days in the Cupboard, I totally needed it. But there was actually quite several cries for help. Kids, pleading for someone to come. Writing to the hero they’d heard stories about to come and save them. And they were never heard. Not one. You want to know what I’ve been spending my summer doing, while you’ve been sitting here in Grimmauld Place? I’ve been using them to investigate each one of those stories. I’ve found three dead kids so far. Reported five more to the Aurors, and seven to Muggle authorities. Then there’s the one letter I carry around with me, because it reminds me of what I need to fight for.” Harry reached into his pocket and withdrew a folded piece of paper.

“Dear Harry,” he read aloud,

“I heard what you did too You Know Who. You must be a great hero. I was wondering, if it isn’t too much trouble, if you could save me too? My mum… she’s making me do something I don’t want to. It hurts. It hurts lots. I… I think I won’t make it out alive. Please help me.

From Jessica Jones!”

Harry virtually spat out the last line. Ginny didn’t think there was a dry eye in the room. Well, except Moody’s. That’s when she saw Hermione. She was sitting in the corner, a tape recorder in one hand, and her wand in the other. She was twirling the glowing tip around in circles. Moody’s eye remained fixed on Ginny. Hagrid was balling his eyes out.

Nice job, Brains.

Let’s hit home, shall we?

“The problem? I was one of them too, thanks to you! You and your blood wards. Which brings us back to the original questions, doesn’t it Ginny?”

“I think so, Harry. So, let’s continue, shall we? Why exactly you thought you had the right to break into a secure facility without considering contacting the inhabitants, destroying the Marauders legacy in the process. That one’s pretty easy, I think. Let’s go with that.”

“The Home, which might I say is a marvellous and ingenious piece of magical achievement, has not been destroyed. The Marauders legacy, as you call it, remains intact. Though the library seems to be missing. So perhaps we can move to the next set of allegations?” Dumbledore said though he betrayed no hint of emotion in his voice.

“He’s telling the truth. I disabled the Self-Destruct with two seconds to spare. The Home is intact,” Lupin said, a smile of relief crossing his face. Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Oh, thank God.

“Thanks, Moony. Always knew we could count on you at least.”

Ooh. He didn’t like that!
What do you mean?

There was something in his eye for a second there. Not very sparkly. Keep going!

Good. The angrier Dumbledore gets, the better it is for us.

“How about this one then. Why did you attack us?” Harry said shirily.

“I didn’t attack you. I was trying to discover Mrs Potter’s whereabouts. She had vanished, and there was danger at Little Whinging. We came searching for her, seeing as how she is the best type of communication we have with you.” Several people were looking very confused at this point. Ginny wanted it to stay that way. She could tell Snape was lapping up every word of all their speeches. She also had the feeling he had his wand ready and aimed at Will. Not that the greasy git had a chance, but it was mildly amusing to imagine him try.

“Then, what do we find, but that you’ve run off with a boy to his secret hideout that nobody knew about!!” Molly yelled.

“That’s the point of a secret hideout you idiot,” Harry muttered. Ginny, the twins, Sirius and Remus all started snickering.

“YOU! Don’t even get me started with…” Molly was suddenly silenced. Professor McGonagall had her wand out and pointed at the Weasley matriarch in her golden bubble.

“Please continue Mr Potter, Mrs Potter.”

“Seven Hells, I thought she’d never shut up,” Will whispered in Ginny’s ear.

“Get ready for me to grab you,” she whispered back.

“So, breaking down the door and jeopardising the security of the most important asset we have against Voldemort was a good idea, was it? God, I thought you were supposed to be good with plans and stuff. Mine are fucking better than yours, and I’m a teenager!” Harry exclaimed.

“You get em, boss!” George (or was it Fred?) yelled. Hagrid placed a hand on the twin’s shoulder and shook his head softly.

“If you’d have knocked, we’d have let you in. You do realise that?” Harry said, rolling his eyes.

“He apparated straight to the Sixth-Floor Corridor after we told him, Harry. We had to try and Flu to catch up. If you’d have waited, we’d have told you the password,” Remus’ said pointedly, glaring at the Headmaster. Ginny glanced at Sirius, who raised an eyebrow at her. ‘What’s the plan’.

‘Back Out’ she mouthed back to him. Seemingly satisfied with that answer, Padfoot turned his attention back to the Headmaster.

“Is that all?” Dumbledore asked.

“You still haven’t answered my last question,” Ginny said softly, “I want to know what helped you sleep at night after you had the balls to leave Harry with those abusive pieces of shit for ten years?” Molly started raging again behind her silent barrier.

“What would you like me to say, Mrs Potter? I didn’t mean for Harry’s childhood to be as bad as it was. I incorrectly assumed that Petunia would care for the child of her lost sister. I would have. Anyone here would have.”
“I told you, Albus. I told you they were the worst sort of Muggles, but you didn’t listen,” McGonagall retorted.

“Oh, you bet your ass. Everyone who knew Lily knew what Petunia did to her. Cutting her out. It broke her. Lily loved her sister. I’m in my right mind, now that I’m an official Auror again, to go and turn them in for child abuse right now,” Sirius bit back.

As entertaining as that would be…

“We’re the best of humanity Professor. Well, except Snape. That’s the point, though. You can’t hold everyone to the same standard. Most people aren’t like us. The number of people willing to become a torchbearer for any side of a war is tiny compared to the number of people who’ll follow the torchbearer into it. There is no good or evil. There is only power, and what you intend to do with it once you’ve got it. Most people will only help themselves, their family and friends. A few will use it to force others to their knees. Fewer still will use it to protect people they don’t even know. Not everyone fits in the same category. Not everyone deserves a second chance. A shot at redemption,” Harry said sadly. Then he kicked back his chair and stood up straight-backed. His jaw was clenched tightly, and there was a glint of determination, of heroism, of leadership, in his eye that made Ginny bite back a moan.

You are in for such a snogging later.

Looking forward to it.

“And until you do understand that, I can’t work for you. I can’t fight for your Order of the Phoenix, not if we aren’t on the same page. Not to mention that I think Mrs Weasley will probably kill me the moment Will releases that shield. See you at school, Headmaster.”

Harry thrust out his hand, and his wand soared out of Dumbledore’s robes. At the same time, five tiny ‘BANGS!’ erupted from different points within the room, and fireworks shot through the open kitchen. The Order Members started freaking out, casting protection charms and trying to contain the harmless crackers, giving the Defenders all the time they needed. Ginny reached out with both hands and grabbed hold of Will and Clarissa. Then, picturing a large, bland, empty hall firmly in her mind, twisted on the spot. She felt herself twist through a tube of vibrant heat for a second, before her feet hit the ground, revealing the same hall she’d envisioned in her mind’s eye.

“Out of the way,” Ginny said, pulling her two passengers to the end of the corridor.

“Where…”

Fred arrived with Hermione next, the duo materialising in the middle of the corridor, before quickly joining Ginny, Will and Clarissa.

“Yes!” Fred exclaimed, “That worked perfectly!”

“I’m just glad that spell worked for Moody’s eye,” Hermione breathed. Ginny pulled the bushy-haired girl into her arms.

“Nice job Brains,” She whispered.

“Thanks,” she replied.

George stumbled in next with Hagrid, whose hand was still on his shoulder. George’s leg was contorted severely, and Hagrid appeared to be missing an ear.
“Shit!” Will and Clarissa immediately moved to help them, pulling them out of the landing zone. Clarissa began weaving a series of bandages from thin air while Will was actually regenerating Hagrid’s ear. If Ginny’s heart weren’t still beating out of her chest, she would have been impressed.

“I can’t stay,” Hermione said, eyes locked on George and Hagrid.

“What?”

“Half an hour ago, I got a visit from my future self. She told me to pack everyone’s stuff from our rooms in Grimmauld Place and to come back five minutes after we disappeared, which should be about now so…” Ginny immediately caught on. She nodded and released her friend. Hermione winked, before pulling a golden chain from within her pocket and throwing it around Fred’s neck.

“Hermione, what are…” Fred tried to grab Hermione’s hand, but she slapped it away, twisting the hourglass a single turn. The pair vanished, just in time for Remus and Harry to apparate straight in carrying a bleeding Sirius between them.

“Dumbledore wasn’t fooled for a second. Sent a petrification hex straight at me. I dodged it, but Snape sent a hex as well, not sure what it did but Sirius shielded me. We got him out…” Harry trailed off as the door behind them swung open, revealing a woman with long brown hair and grey eyes. She was tall and bore a striking resemblance to Sirius.

“Get inside quickly!” She yelled, pulling the door open and beckoning them forward. Will grabbed Hagrid and vanished in a flash of golden dust, and Clarissa did the same with George. Harry and Remus pulled Sirius inside, and Ginny moved to follow but stopped when a door on the opposite side of the hallway creaked open, exposing an elderly woman with a walking cane.

Brains and Thing 1 chose that moment to apparate into the hallway at a run carrying two backpacks and three handbags between them.

“Now that was exhilarating!” Fred exclaimed, running inside with Hermione, who was rolling her eyes, in tow. Their host waved her hand at the woman across the hall.

“Afternoon Miss Pevensie,” she said.

“Afternoon Mrs Tonks. Seems you’re having quite a day.”

“Doesn’t it.” Ginny breathed a sigh of relief; the woman must be magical. Ginny gave a quick wave of her own before following the rest of the Defenders into the house.

The Tonks’ London Apartment had been magically altered to be larger on the inside, which was incredibly lucky, as Hagrid wouldn’t have fit inside if it hadn’t. Sirius and George were both lying on couches in the main living room with people hovering over them. A man Ginny assumed was Ted Tonks, Andromeda’s husband, was standing over Sirius, while Clarissa continued to weave magic into George’s leg. Harry was standing next to her with a bottle of what Ginny assumed was Dittany. Remus was pillaging through the fridge, probably looking for chocolate. Will, who was floating off the ground to reach Hagrid’s head, was almost finished with the half-giants ear.

Ginny and Andromeda rushed over to Sirius.

“What have you got Ted?”

“I’m not sure. Harry says it was a curse from Snape, so it was probably Dark. I’ve got him stabilised I think…” Andromeda pulled her own wand and hovered over him. She breathed a sigh of relief and patted her husband on the back.
“Good work,” she breathed.

“What about George?” Ginny asked.

“Not as good,” Clarissa said, “He didn’t account for Hagrid when he apparated. He’s been splinched pretty bad.”

Ginny took a deep breath and leaned against the wall.

“Well, that could have gone a whole lot worse.”

“Well, that could have gone a whole lot worse,” Ginny said casually. Clarissa’s head shot up. There it was again! That infernal screeching. Her ears had been full of it since they entered the house, and it was driving her mad! She knew she’d heard it before but couldn’t place where. Letting go of the Weasley twin’s splinched leg, she angled her head towards a staircase on the far side of the lounge room.

You hear it too?

Yep. Any idea what it is?

I’ve got a vague idea. Remember what Doctor Strange showed us in the Floating Billywig?

Clarissa gasped. That’s why the sound was so familiar!

“Oh, you just had to jinx it, didn’t you?” Clarissa moaned. Everyone turned towards her, but she ignored them, instead standing up and making her way to the stairs. She called the Dragon Force into her cells, resistant though it was after Will’s stint on the Discworld, and pushed it into her eyes and hands. The Dragon Force was infinite power, but they could only channel so much of it without burning themselves to a crisp. In an instant, the room became more vivid. Bright hues of dozens of different colours filling her vision. The ambient magic billowing off the people in the room, the residual power within the building itself, the wards surrounding them. But there was one trail that definitely didn’t belong. It was black, dirty, and filthy. Like dirty oil. It was faint but incredibly clear to her enhanced vision. Pooling the Dragon Force into her hands, lest something attack, she stepped onto the second-floor landing.

“Clarissa, what are you doing?” Ginny asked. Clarissa ignored her, focusing on the trail instead. It was stronger up here… down the corridor. She advanced, using the light in her hand to illuminate the darkness until she arrived at the very end of the hallway, where the trail veered upwards into the roof. She could practically taste it on the air. Like a rotten fruit, or liquid tar. Intense scrutiny revealed a hatch leading up to an attic. She reached out with the Dragon Force and pulled the hatch down, before launching herself up into the enclosed roof space.

Bending her back and forcing herself not to gag, she brightened the tiny space. There were half a dozen cardboard boxes labelled ‘Lockets’, ‘Cups’, ‘Rings’ or ‘Diadems/Crowns?’ Whatever it was she was searching for was in here, but there was so much of the darkness that she couldn’t pierce it.

It’s in here, but I can’t trace it. Now what?

I don’t…
“Clarissa, what are you doing?” Ginny called again.

“There’s something in here. Something dark,” she replied. She moved to the closest box and pulled it open. There were dozens of cups and mugs sitting inside.

“Dark? What kind of dark? Can you tell?” Harry yelled. There was something in his voice, an edginess perhaps, that made her stop.

“I’m not sure.”

“Is it a container? Like for memories or something similar?” Clarissa’s eyes went wide. He knew? Of course, he knew. He killed the first one, after all.

“It should be…”

“Check for lockets or rings first. If it is one of them, then those will be the most dangerous.” Clarissa did as instructed, abandoning the box of cups and moving to one full of rings. They were all gold, wedding rings probably. Some had large jewels adorning them, and most had a foul taint to them, but nothing like what she was searching for.

“How do you know?” Will was asking below.

“We received a message from my future self containing a list of six objects. Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem and Snake. We think the diary refers to Tom Riddle’s Diary, an artefact that I destroyed in my second year. It stored the memories of a sixteen-year-old Voldemort. So, either the other five are the same, or objects of similarly destructive power. Bad enough to send a message back in time to warn us at any rate. The Diary possessed Ginny for an entire year, and almost killed a half dozen others. If the other five are half as bad, we all need to be careful. We’ve been trying to hunt the others down. We think our friend Jessica’s mother has the Cup, and the Snake is with Voldemort – I saw it in the Graveyard. Where the others are is up for debate, but seeing as the Diary and Cup were with prominent Death Eater families…”

“The other’s might be too,” Will concluded, “Good sleuthing.

Clarissa abandoned the ring box and moved to the next one, ‘Lockets’. She opened the box and immediately recoiled.

“Got it!” Sitting in the box was a silver locket with a green S engraved into the front. Summoning a shield of Dragon Force around the necklace, she reached in and pulled it free. Holding her other hand over her mouth, she moved to the hatch and dropped it through, where it clanked on the floor. She jumped back down a second later.

“So, this is it?” Andromeda asked, picking the locket up from the ground and running her hand over it.

“I didn’t think I recognised it when we inventoried Grimmauld,” She whispered.

“Lucky we did. Who knows what might have happened if Molly had thrown it out?” Remus replied.

“That’s it. I can feel it,” Ginny said. She looked incredibly pale, and her eyes were glassy. Harry had an arm around her shoulders, stroking her hair.

_She’s one tough kid._

_Oh yeah._
Will snatched the locket from Andromeda and grimaced as it touched his hand. He quickly encased it within a sphere of energy.

“Definitely a Horcrux,” he said slowly.

Harry and Ginny went even paler.

“What’s a Horcrux?” Remus asked.

“It’s a piece of him. A piece of his Soul,” Harry said, his voice cold and stiff.

“I was possessed by a piece of Voldemort’s soul. That’s even worse…” Ginny exclaimed, “I’m going to be sick…” Then she turned and raced into the bathroom.

“Take it downstairs, Will. I want everyone to see it die,” Harry said, a tint of anger cracking the calm façade. Will nodded and brought it down into the main room where Hermione, Fred, George, Hagrid, Ted Tonks and a now awake Sirius were still standing.

“What’s… That the WMD is it?” Sirius said, coming straight to the right conclusion.

“Yep. It’s a Horcrux,” Harry said simply, standing in the middle of the room with his arms folded.

Sirius and Hermione grimaced, but the others just looked confused.

“What’s a Horcrux?” Hagrid asked, his head bumping against the ceiling.

Hermione gulped “The vilest type of magic known to Wizardkind. A Horcrux is a vessel within which someone can hide their soul. That’s all I could find in the Hogwarts Library, someone removed all the references to it.”

“That’s basically it,” Will confirmed, “You split your soul in half, and then hide part of it within an object – a Horcrux.”

“What does it mean?” Fred asked.

“It means that so long as these things are still out there, Voldemort can’t die,” Harry said bluntly. This time everyone went white. Hagrid literally fell onto his ass with a loud thud.

“Merlin’s beard…” Hagrid whispered.

“My god, I actually touched a piece of You-Know-Who’s soul and I couldn’t even bloody tell! It felt normal,” Andromeda exclaimed, staring at her hand in horror.

“That’s why he didn’t die when the Killing Curse rebounded on him thanks to Mum’s sacrifice. If we’re going to kill him, we have to get rid of these things first,” Harry said, a hint of steel returning to his voice.

“How?”

“We have an advantage. Voldemort doesn’t know we’re onto him. Even better, we know what the objects are and how many there are. The Diary’s already gone, the Snake is with Voldemort himself, the Locket’s here, and the Cup is in Jones Manor. That leaves the Ring and the Diadem. All we have to do is find them.”

“The Diary…” George whispered.
“Merlin, Ginny…” Fred muttered.

“And destroy them,” came Ginny’s voice from the staircase. “We have to destroy them too.” She advanced down the stairs, looking much better than a few minutes previously, and leaned against Hagrid’s shoulder.

“How do you even destroy a piece of someone’s soul?” Andromeda asked.

“None of the books in the Hogwarts library could tell. I only found three references in the entire room, and only abstract one-liners in the Restricted Section,” Hermione admitted.

“Basilisk Venom can do it,” Ginny pointed out, “we could take a trip down to the Chamber. I don’t think the Basilisk was ever actually moved.”

“It’s an idea, but I don’t think carrying Basilisk Venom around with us is a good idea. One spilt drop and you’re dead,” Ted countered.

“If there’s one substance that can do it, there has to be more,” George said.

“There’s plenty of things in nature just as destructive as a Basilisk’s venom,” Hagrid said, nodding his head up and down, “Kaiju saliva, Manticore sting, Phoenix tears, Dragon Fire…”

“How about an unhealthy dose of Dragon Force?” Clarissa asked, a grin worming its way onto her face. Everyone turned towards her and Will.

“Could it work?” Harry asked.

“Infinite Power, I don’t see why it wouldn’t work.” Will shrugged and lowered the protective barrier. He levitated it into the centre of the room.

“Everyone back,” Harry said as he and Clarissa walked forward. The young black-haired boy with the lightning bolt scar fingered the floating locket, before tilting his head.

“It’s speaking Parseltongue. When I tell it to open, attack it as soon as you can. The Riddle in the Diary tried to kill me. Somehow, I don’t think this will be much better.” Clarissa nodded to him, she knew what she was doing.

Harry started hissing at the locket, and the ‘S’ on the front seemed to slither slightly. Then the clasp flew open, revealing a single red eye. A shockwave knocked them back, but Clarissa summoned all the Dragon Force she could to brace herself. The golden energy flared around her, filling her veins and materialising as coursing energy bleeding from her entire body. Her hair was wiping in the artificial wind, and her hands blazed with power.

“**I have seen your heart Clarissa O’Neill, and it is mine!!**”

Inky black energy leached from inside the locket, billowing out into the air, conjuring images of Will lying dead beside a volcano sprang into her mind, and flashes of her, standing atop the Central Tower of Alcheringa, lightning dancing across the island as a mad look filled her eyes.

“**And I have seen your fears!**”

“Bye beautiful,” came the whisper of Will’s voice as he lay broken in a crater and the light faded from his eyes.

The Gemini Rune on her neck flared with all of Will’s love and devotion and Clarissa reached out,
clasping the locket in her hand.

“Not today.” And, pushing all of her power into her fist, she clamped her hand closed. The locket was crushed into oblivion, and all the darkness vanished, replaced by a single piercing scream of agony, then nothing, leaving only Harry, her, and the rest of the Defenders, standing in the Tonks’ living room.

“Two down…” Ginny began.

“Four to go,” Harry finished.
“That’s what I don’t understand!” Hermione exclaimed, sitting on a barstool at the Tonks’ kitchen bench. Clarissa had given up on her attempt to get the oven to work and had instead resorted to cooking pies on her open palm, each one taking about ten seconds to go from frozen to well done. “How can you even have infinite power? There’s no such thing. Everything is finite, there’s a limit on everything. Even light can only move so fast!”

Brains was having a hard time coming to grips with Harry’s simple explanation of, “The Dragon Force gives them infinite power, what else is there to know?” when she questioned him on the blatant power that the O’Neill’s possessed.

“Why not?” Clarissa said with a grin, before sticking a fork into her pie, pulling it out and nodding to herself when steam curled off it. She placed the pie down on a plate, conjured a bottle of BBQ sauce, drizzled it on, and slid the plate to Hermione. Harry, Ginny, Fred and George were sitting on stools behind her while Hagrid lounged on a bean-bag watching them with rapt interest.

“Because it’s not possible! The whole idea of Infinite Power violates Special Relativity!”

“Not if the power is only infinite because it’s constantly replenishing,” Clarissa pointed out, a grin on her face as Hermione’s brain worked a mile a minute.

“But then how do you contain it! That much energy would destroy matter at an atomic level,” She said, taking a bite of her pie.

“True but we’re not using all of it at once, are we? We just channel some of it when we need it,” Will said, stepping out of the bathroom and grabbing a pie of his own.

“But what is it exactly? Is it like some undiscovered magical power or something else?”

Both Clarissa and Will frowned. “We don’t know.” They said in unison. Hermione’s jaw dropped open.

“How could you just not know?!”

Will sighed and scratched at his beard.

“The Dragon Force is one of the seven Enigma Forces. The Fundamental Forces of the Cosmos. Their existence is a closely guarded secret known only to a select few. Doctor Strange, Dumbledore, the King of Wakanda, they’re pretty much the only people who even know what they are. At least on this Earth.”

“An Enigma Force?”

“It’s an energy reservoir. A feedback loop of cosmic energy if you will, and those who access them can tap their power for their own purposes. Not all forces are the same, though, each one operates by different rules. At least that’s what we understand.”
“There’s the Dragon Force, the manifestation of Cosmic Balance. It’s responsible for stopping worlds from bleeding into each other and bestows its power through the use of ‘Shards’ – basically, tiny fragments that bond to an avatar. Will is the chosen avatar of his Shard, I’m just sharing it with him thanks to the Libra Rune,” Clarissa said.

“So, there could be other shards and avatars out there?” Harry asked, suddenly paying attention.

“Yeah, though we’ve never met one. Odds are there are hundreds scattered across the Orrery of Worlds. It’s highly doubtful there’d be more than one per universe,” Will said. Harry seemed quite relieved by that.

“What about the other six?” Hermione asked, eagerly.

“Well, there’s the Phoenix Force. That one’s probably the most violent of the lot. As its name suggests, its power comes from rebirth. It is the Phoenix Force that creates universes through the Big Bang, and ultimately ends them,” Will said.

“We met a woman once, in another Universe, who was taken over by the Phoenix Force. She destroyed an entire Solar System without even flinching. Scary stuff,” Clarissa shuddered.

“Could you do that?” Fred asked, “destroy a Solar System?”

“Probably,” Will admitted, “Though it would take considerable effort. We can only channel so much of the Dragon Force without killing ourselves or burning out the Shard. Yes, we could crack the planet in half, wiping out the whole population, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Fred gulped.

“We’ve got better odds though. Possession of the Phoenix Force is like a battle of wills. Host vs Phoenix. The Dragon Force doesn’t really have a will of its own. Though sometimes we hear voices,” Will shrugged, summoning a Coke from the fridge.

“Then there’s the Speed Force. That one’s the most interesting, in my opinion,” Clarissa said, veering the conversation away.

“Why?”

“The Speed Force’s job is to keep time moving forward. Without it, the Fourth Dimension would collapse into ours, and all of time would start happening at once. It generates its power through Kinetic Motion and bestows its power on people through lightning. Flashes, as they’re called, are responsible for protecting the Speed Force from the other Forces, as well as other beings intending it harm. Quite the job description.”

“So, what can these Flashes do?” Hagrid asked.

“Move at superspeed, time travel, generate lightning from their bodies to use in different ways, and their reflexes are seriously fast,” Will told him. “We can channel minute amounts of Speed-Force energy through the Dragon Force, but nothing like what a Flash can do.”

“The others are a bit vaguer. The Conflict Force is super-secret and is hidden by the Travellers somewhere. No one knows where it is or what it does.” Harry choked on his pie.

“Did you say, Travellers?”

“Yeah. Why?”
“I met one of them. Called himself Ghost. He’s the one that delivered the message from my future self,” Harry said.

Clarissa raised an eyebrow.

“Well, you know more than we do then. We’ve never met one. They’re big-time secretive, and rumour has it they control stories, though how that works, I have no idea,” she said, taking the drink Will offered her.

“The Aether Force,” Will continued, “is a benevolent force that separates the Multiverse from the plains of existence where the Ascended hang out, and it must be bestowed by the Vishanti. Only the Sorcerer Supreme may use it, and they keep its knowledge very tight to the chest. The Dark Force is exactly that, Dark. It’s not Dark Magic or evil as such. Rather it comes from the place below even Hell. The Dark Multiverse. Don’t ask me what that is cause I’m not going to tell you. Then there’s the Nether Force. That one is definitely evil, though it’s kind of ironic when you think about it. It’s what gives Demons their powers, but it also serves as a barrier that protects us all from the Dark Multiverse and the Great Destroyer who lies trapped inside.” Both Will and Clarissa shivered when Will mentioned ‘the Great Destroyer’, “as to how you get your hands on it, no idea.” Everyone sat in silence for a while.

“That answer your question?” Will asked.

Hermione opened her mouth to say something, but whatever it might have been was lost, as at that moment, Sirius and Andromeda, who’d been getting groceries, walked back into the house, Sirius carrying a newspaper in his hand. He tossed it to Harry, who caught it deftly and realised it was the Daily Prophet. Groaning, he read out the Headline article.

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Harry Potter: Missing!!

*Harry Potter, Triwizard Champion and the Boy-Who-Lived, is missing! According to Auror services, Mr Potter’s residence, Number 4 Privet Drive in Surrey, was destroyed in a fire created by magical causes. Mr Potter’s muggle family thankfully survived the attack, though one of them was transfigured into a pig. The Magical Reversal Squad has rectified the damage, but Mr Potter’s whereabouts remain unknown.*

This fact is cause for serious concern, as Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, has been trying to raise awareness of the return of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, despite no evidence proving him correct. Could this be You-Know-Who’s first move? Or something else?

Either way, the Wizarding World waits with bated breath for its hero’s return. Minister Fudge says, “Mr Potter is highly resourceful, and I’m sure he will return in time. In the meantime, the Auror Squad are looking into the event and searching for Mr Potter.”

We here at the Daily Prophet ask that Mr Potter, if he can escape, or has already done so and is laying low, come into the Ministry to set the record straight. What happened? And do we need to be worried? Our best hopes are with you, Harry.

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“Well, at least there are people actually worried about me,” Harry laughed.

“Amelia says I’m not allowed to take on the case. I’m too close, and I’m not due to start duty until Monday. But she did ask me to check any possible hideouts. I told her I’d already done it, and that
you were nowhere to be found. Should buy us a little bit of time,” Sirius said.

“What are you going to do?” Andromeda asked him.

Harry bit his lip, “Brains? What’s your take?”

Hermione furrowed her brows for a second and scratched at her arm band, before letting out a breath. “You need to go into the Ministry, that’s a no brainer, but what happens when you get there is up for debate. We could go in and come out pro-Dumbledore. Tell them the attack was from You-Know-Who and you barely made it out alive. The only problem being of course that Fudge would probably throw you in the same pile as the Headmaster. As much as Fudge is an idiot, he’s still a powerful enemy to make. Then there’s the reverse, go in and say it wasn’t him. Would it be the truth? Yes. Would it be monumentally stupid? Also, yes. You-Know-Who is back and telling people he isn’t will only get them killed when he does come out into the open. Then there’s the third option. We could go in there, say that you don’t know who attacked the house and allude to a possible threat. If Fudge accuses you of siding with Dumbledore, simply remind him that you were abducted at the end of the Triwizard Tournament and fought you’re way out from a terrorist organisation. All you have to do is not explicitly mention Voldemort either way. If you do, that’s when we’ll run into problems.

Harry nodded, “Okay. I like option three. Let’s go with that.”

“There’s also the issue of Skeeter,” Sirius pointed out, “She’s on our side now, but we should throw her a bone if we’re going to keep her there. If she decides the fine is worth it, she’ll go with her story, blackmail or not.” Sirius went to say more, but another ‘Crack!’ echoed from outside. Then came two knocks on the door. Will vaulted over the kitchen bench and moved to the door. He stared at it intensely for a second, then turned back to the others.

“It’s Tonks and Moody. Are they supposed to be outside?”

“Tonks and Moody?” Ginny asked, biting her lip. "Tonks is still undercover, but why would she bring Moody here?

Maybe he sniffed her out but doesn’t plan on telling Dumbledore. Remember he did catch you stealing books earlier in the summer.

True. And he was loving the dress down you gave Dumbledore....

“Let them in, but Clarissa, I want you to hide from Moody’s Magical Eye if you can,” Harry said. Clarissa winked at him before vanishing into golden dust. Harry nodded to Will, and he opened the door.

“Aurors. What brings you here on this fine summer evening?” Harry asked as the duo stepped inside. He held his hand near his wand and was relieved to see the others doing the same. Sirius flat out had his pointed at the ex-teacher.

“I love it, Potter! I just love it! Finally! Someone takes constant vigilance seriously. Back up plans hidden within back up plans. Secret weapons in plain sight. Deep cover agents. Safe houses in parallel dimensions. It’s brilliant! You’re the type of man I put my cards on Potter. And even now! Still not trusting me! I can only see one-half of your Dragon palls! The other one is surely in a position to strike me down the instant I touch my wand. I’m impressed, Potter. Impressed. We’ll make a Sorcerer Supreme out of you yet!” The first thing that went through Harry’s brain was that Moody must be high on something.
Well, he is called Mad-Eye.

Moody’s face split into a massive grin, his magical eye spinning around like a pinball, and he was actually clapping his hands emphatically.

“Drop your wands everyone. Auror Moody is a friend of the Defenders,” Harry said, winking at the man, whose smile grew even wider.

“Defenders. I like it. Short, sharp, to the point. Not like the Order of the Flaming Chickens that’s for sure. What’s your modus operandi?”

“Firefly?” Harry prompted, elbowing Ginny in the ribs.

Prat.

“We’re here to protect people, simple as that. Our families, our friends, and the people who can’t protect themselves. And we don’t care who gets in our way,” Ginny said flatly.

“Also, we’re in the business of killing Death Eaters…”

“… and hunting Horcruxes,” the twins added cheerfully.

“Where do I sign up?” Moody asked excitedly. Harry rolled his eyes.

“What happened after we left?” Remus asked them.

Tonks sighed and ran a hand through her hair, “It wasn’t pretty let me tell you. Molly went on quite the rampage. She screamed at Dumbledore for a good hour before the old codger declared he needed to return to Hogwarts. Minnie and Filius disapparated not a few minutes after you guys did looking quite distressed. So did Bill Weasley you’ll be interested to know.” Ginny perked up considerably at that, as did the twins.

“Charlie and Ron?”

“Charlie certainly didn’t look happy, but he didn’t have anywhere to go. He’s staying the night at Grimmauld before returning to Romania tomorrow. Ron was rather put out, and he certainly looked agitated. He retreated to his room, although whether that was to hide from his mum or not is up for debate. Your Dad… well, as soon as he got back, he was molested by Molly. The whole house heard the argument. Basically, Molly’s convinced Ginny, Fred and George have betrayed the side of the light, that Harry raped Ginny, and that the world is officially ending. Arthur, the brave soul, just sat on a couch drinking a cup of the blackest tea I’ve ever seen as she ranted on. When she got to the rape bit, he actually yelled at her to shut up and think about just what she was doing. Then he walked to the Floo and went to the Burrow. He hasn’t been back to Headquarters since.” The Twins suddenly began whispering amongst themselves. Ginny breathed a sigh of relief and turned to Harry.

Better than I’d hoped for. Bill could be a serious asset to get onboard. We know he’s cool with the Soul Bond.

Agreed. It’s nice to know your Dad isn’t accusing me of rape too.

I can’t believe her. Did she just ignore the entire conversation in the kitchen? Or does she honestly think Dumbledore can’t do a thing wrong?

Ginny rested her head on Harry’s shoulder, and Harry ran a hand through her hair. Ginny purred into his neck, and Harry couldn’t help the flow of blood in his body, heading rapidly south.
“The other members of the Order are still firmly in Dumbledore’s pocket, no doubt about that. Snape was quite chuffed actually. I don’t like him. I think he’s working for the enemy, but Albus says we can trust him, so everyone believes him,” Moody said gruffly.

Harry sighed, “Dumbledore thinks everyone deserves a second chance, even convicted criminals. That’s why you can’t trust him. He’s too trusting.”

“Odds are, Snivellus is playing both sides,” Sirius fumed, “Giving just enough information to us and them to be of use, then he’ll say that he was serving the winning faction the whole time.” Everyone murmured their agreement.

Light or dark.

Harry raised an eyebrow and turned to Ginny as the others continued to talk.

What’s that got to do with anything?

It has everything to do with it. Everyone’s acting like there are only two sides, Light and Dark. Like a chess match between black and white, or in this case, Voldemort and Dumbledore. But that’s not true, is it? There’s the Death Eaters and Dumbledore’s Order sure, but there’s also the Ministry, and then there’s us. Where do we fit into this whole thing?

Harry frowned and ceased his stroking of Ginny’s hair. She was right. Where did they fit? They were fighting Voldemort sure, but they also weren’t part of Dumbledore’s club. Harry wouldn’t tow the Professor’s line. From the reports he’d seen, the only thing Dumbledore was actually doing was guarding a doorway in the Ministry of Magic that he wouldn’t tell anyone what was behind. He didn’t even have anyone trying to gather intelligence on Voldemort’s plans except Snape!

It’s like you said. We’re fighting to defend people.

Then I think we need to come out and say that. No more hiding in the shadows. Voldemort’s skipped his move, Dumbledore’s ignoring his, the Ministry’s already come out against everyone. Our first move put a schism in the Order’s framework. Hell, we might even be able to recruit some of Dumbledore’s own guys!

You’ve got an idea I take it?

Yep. We’re going to pull the rug out from underneath all three sides and put ourselves on the world stage. Let’s use all that good press you’ve got to our advantage and put our team in the lead.

Alright, Firefly. Let’s see what you’ve got.

Ginny jumped to her feet and let out a piercing whistle.

“Brains, I need you to write to the others. We need the full Defenders line-up on hand by tomorrow morning. Even Alias. I don’t care about your House Elf thing right now, use Dobby if you need to.” Hermione struggled to bite back a retort, but she did, and Harry inwardly commended her for it. She nodded her head quickly before grabbing a notepad and quill from the corner of the bench.

“Padfoot, Moony, how many cloaks do we have ready?”

The ghost of a smile started to worm its way onto Sirius’ face, “I like where this is going, Firefly. We’ve got twenty-five cloaks ready for use. They’re in the Home. Dumbledore probably has wards all over the place by now, but Dobby can get in and out without triggering them.”
Ginny beamed, “Excellent.”

“Firefly, I’m going to go to Bill’s apartment and talk to him,” George said, “if we can get him onside…”

“And I’m going to the Burrow. I want to let Dad know we’re all safe. I won’t tell him where we are or anything, I just think he has a right to know,” Fred interrupted.

“Good ideas. Both of you. Get it done but be back here by 8am at the latest. I’ll need you here for the big show.”

“No problems. You know we’d never miss out on the chance to prank anyone,” they exclaimed.

“Tonks, you’ll have to sit this one out I’m afraid,” Ginny said apologetically.

“No probs, Firefly. I’ll keep the codger busy,” Tonks said with a mischievous smile.

This is going to be fun.

“What about the rest of us?” Remus asked.

“Suit up.”

The second Harry landed in the Ministry Atrium at 8:30am in a burst of golden light, every eye fell on him, and all movement froze stiff. He was dressed in a white dress shirt with a pair of non-descript denim jeans. Over the top he wore his Defenders robe with the hood down. He had his hair spiked up specifically by Ginny so his lightning bolt scar was on full display. He stood tall and advanced down the corridor with long strides (Sirius had made him practice the walk). He was also, unequivocally, terrified.

Don’t worry. Everything is going to go perfectly. Just be yourself and follow my lead if you get tongue-tied. Remember Harry, these people worship you, own it!

I’m not worth this Gin…

That’s the Dursleys talking. You beat them, Harry. You put them in their place, turned Dudley into a pig and blew up their house. You won. They lost. You’re more worth it than anyone could ever know.

Gin…

I love you, Harry. I really do. You can do this. I believe in you. We all believe in you. Thousands of people look up to you to be their hero. Now’s the time to prove it.

Alright, alright, alright. You had me last night when you promised the snog session.

Good. You think you’ve got problems. I’m going to have to stand trying really hard not to rub my thighs together the whole bloody time! Authoritative you is super sexy.
Harry, basking in the warmth of the Gemini Rune, continued his walk, smiling and greeting the gaping people as he passed. Then more bursts of golden dust and Apparation cracks filled the hall. Figure after figure, all cloaked in red with their hoods drawn over their faces appeared in the Atrium and followed in step with Harry. By the time Harry had stepped up to the security desk at the end of the hall in front of the Fountain of Magical Brethren, fourteen cloaked figures stood beside him, seven on one side, seven on the other. Each was staggered, so they looked like a rather large V shape. Ginny was directly to his left, followed by Sirius, then Jessica, Matt, Luke, Fred, and Will. On his right were Hermione, Remus, Luna, Andromeda, Danny, George and Clarissa. Hagrid would be returning to Grimmauld Place at the same time with help from Tonks, who would modify the giant’s memory, so he didn’t remember where they were hiding. He fully supported them, but the entire group agreed that his mission from Dumbledore to ensure the neutrality of the Giants was more important than supporting Dumbledore or Harry, as much as the poor man wanted to do both.

“Harry Potter. I’m here to report my continued existence to the Minister.” Harry said in the best commanding voice he could muster. Hermione told him to try channelling Superman and Clark Kent. Keep the normal Harry as Clark, and then adopt a more stern and authoritative voice as the Boy-Who-Lived. While a bit crude, Harry found that pretending he was playing a role was infinitesimally easier than merely trying to act ‘tough’. Jessica had arrived in the middle of what Sirius had called Harry’s “Weak Knees Tutorial” and had burst out laughing. It didn’t instil him with a lot of confidence.

If it’s any consolation, I think you’re doing pretty well.

And what makes you think that?

Well everyone’s staring at you like you’re Jesus, and I kind of want to jump you right now.

Harry had to try very hard not to let the heat of the Gemini Rune show up in his cheeks.

“W…” the security wizard swallowed hard, his gaze stuck on Harry’s forehead, “Wand please.”

“Of course. Here you go, sir.” Harry pulled out his wand, a smile on his face that was totally authentic, and placed it on the man’s bronze scales.

“Eleven inches, Phoenix Feather Core. Been in use five years?” the guard asked hesitantly.

“That’s right. Thanks for your assistance, sir.” Harry nodded to the man and repocketed his wand. Then he advanced forward, the Defenders following behind him. Brains and Moony (as the smartest of the group) insisted that if they walked straight into the building with Harry that no one would contradict them. Harry had seriously doubted whether that plan would work, but apparently, he was wrong, as no one, not even the Aurors with their feathered caps, attempted to stop them as they walked over to the elevators.

All good so far.

Remember the plan, are Padfoot and Moony ready?

They’re ready. So are the Dragons.

Harry continued his walk, flanked by the Defenders, towards the closest elevator. Everyone inside quickly scurried out of his way, and Harry couldn’t help but feel a little bit guilty. He stepped into the elevator, the others filing in behind him, and the door swung closed.

“Level 2, and the Minister’s Office please,” Harry said flatly. The doorman, shaking rather noticeably, pressed two buttons, and the elevator slowly began to rise up through the floors.
“Level Two: Department of Magical Law Enforcement.”

Sirius and Remus stepped out of the elevator hurriedly and walked out of view. The door slid shut once more, and they ascended another level.

“Level One: Department of the Minister for Magic.”

Harry and the others stepped out, walking down a well-lit corridor with several windows and photo-frames displaying newspaper articles. At the end of the hall was a plush waiting room.

*Will and Clarissa have entangled out. They should be able to find out what Dumbledore’s guarding. Let’s hope so.*

Harry came to a halt in front of a desk where a buxom young woman with curly blonde hair sat, staring at Harry’s scar in awe.

*I still hate the bloody scar.*

*At least it doesn’t hurt anymore?*

*True.*

“Morning, Miss. I’m afraid I don’t have an appointment, but I read in the paper that Mr Fudge sent out the Aurors to assist me, and I thought I’d thank him for his hospitality,” He said cheerfully.

The woman’s face twisted into a seductive smile and Ginny groaned in his head.

*Does everyone forget you’re married?*

*Jealous, are we?*

*Grrrrr.*

“Of course, Mr Potter, if your friends could wait here, I’m sure Minister Fudge can see you right away.” The woman stood up, deliberately leaning forward in the process. Harry kept his eyes locked on the woman’s, even going so far as to flash her a smile. The secretary seemed slightly startled by the fact that Harry didn’t take a peek, then her smile got even wider.

*Merlin! No wonder Lily Potter couldn’t escape your Dad. If James Potter was anything like you, he must’ve had every girl in Hogwarts trying to marry him!*  

*It’s the hair. It’s a chick magnet.*  

*And the eyes. My god those green eyes.*  

*Ginny, focus.*  

*It’s hard!*

The secretary knocked on the office door before opening it softly.

“Pardon the interruption Minister, but Harry Potter is out here.”

“Potter! Send him in!” The secretary opened the door wide and beckoned Harry forward. Harry nodded to her, still smiling, and walked inside, the rest of the Defenders remaining outside, still as
Cornelius Fudge was sitting at a rather expensive looking mahogany desk, sitting in the chairs opposite him were the platinum blonde hair of Lucius Malfoy and a woman in a pink cardigan whose face resembled a toad’s rather than a human’s.

“Minister. Good to see you’re well,” Harry said, walking over to the man’s desk. Fudge, taking in Harry’s uninjured and healthy appearance, not to mention his robes, stood up and offered his hand.

“Harry! Thank Merlin you’re alright. You gave us quite a scare my boy.”

“Oh, don’t worry about me, Minister. Takes a bit more than a couple of terrorists to keep me down,” Harry said cheerfully, before winking at Lucius. The Death Eater scowled at him, unconsciously fiddling with the black glove over his new silver hand. The toadlike woman seemed affronted by Harry’s very presence.

“Oh, that was priceless!”

Fudge frowned, “Terrible business Harry, terrible business. The Aurors said your home was blown up! What on earth happened?”

Harry kept his features schooled, forcing himself not to show any hint of the smile that wanted to break out on his face as he thought of the Dursley’s faces as he blew up their house.

“I’m not entirely sure if I’m honest, Minister. One minute we were sitting down to dinner, the next the upstairs floor exploded. I managed to contain the blast and get my family outside. I duelled with the attacker, and one of our spells rebounded on my cousin, turning him into a pig! You can understand my outrage.”

“Indeed,” Fudge said, lapping up every word.

“Unfortunately, my anger got the better of me, and I didn’t see the second attacker. He stunned me just as I finished off the first. I woke up in a prison cell a few minutes later. Not that I was very worried. I simply used my Patronus to call forth a team of my Defenders to aid me. The battle finished shortly after that. We’ve disposed of the terrorists, but I’m afraid there are more of them out there. I’ve got my best agents on it, and I’ve prepared a packet of all the information we’ve gained for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. What I do know, is that the leader of this group, whoever they are, is still at large, and the public must be warned.”

Fudge suddenly looked very concerned, though whether he was acting or not Harry wasn’t sure.

“Hem, hem.” Harry wasn’t sure what the noise the witch made was supposed to be precisely, something between a cough and a high-pitched sneeze maybe?

“Forgive me, Mr Potter, but you can’t seriously be saying the You-Know-Who is back are you?” she asked in the most girlish voice he had ever heard. It was so high pitch he actually shook his head to make sure he was hearing her right.

Don’t fall for it, Harry. Remember the plan.

“I’m afraid I don’t know you Ms…”

“Dolores Umbridge Mr Potter, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister,” she replied sweetly.

Harry’s face darkened, “So you’re the woman who forced one of my best friends onto the street.
Good to know.”

Harry! Not now!

*She’s the one that passed the Anti-Werewolf Act! Remus can’t even walk down Diagon Alley because of her!*

The plan, Harry! We’ll deal with her later!

“I never said anything about Voldemort ma’am. All I said was that the leader of the group that attacked me in my home, the same group that kidnapped me earlier this year, is still out there. And, speaking from experience, he’s most likely planning another try. I will not allow the public to be put in danger, and I like to think you wouldn’t either. However, considering what I know about you Madam Umbridge, I suppose that would be incorrect.” Harry never thought he’d thank Severus Snape for anything in his life, but right now, he thanked the man for showing him what the perfect sneer looked like, and he used it to full effect on the toadlike woman.

“Now, now, Mr Potter. There’s no need to be antagonistic,” Lucius said, mirth hidden in his grey eyes.

*Inbred filth.*

*And the Muggles think Cersei Lannister is bad.*

“Of course, not Mr Malfoy. I just don’t have much time for people who act like they’re better than everyone else. Especially those who can’t back it up.”

Repeat after me…

“For example, I could probably kick all of your asses in a duel, but I’m here deferring to our Minister, and giving him the respect he deserves as the leader of our society. I am entitled to my opinions, and you are entitled to yours.”

*Can I wash my mouth out now?*

*In a minute, sweetie.*

“Well, Harry. I’m glad you’re back with us. But if I might ask, who are these Defenders you mentioned?” Fudge asked.

Harry grinned. A quick glance at Lucius and Umbridge revealed they instantly realised a trap when they saw one.

“A group of like-minded warriors of high esteem. A number of them are standing outside as we speak. Would you like to meet them?” Harry didn’t wait for a response. He stood back and held the office door open. Fudge, who was either dumber than Harry thought or smarter than anyone gave him credit for, followed with a gallant stride in his step. As soon as he saw the red-cloaked figures, he stopped short.

“Don’t be worried, Minister. They have to keep their identities a secret to protect their families you see, but I assure you they all have the highest degree of training. I’ve placed a note on how to contact us should you need assistance in the packet my man has given to the DMLE.” Fudge gulped hard. Umbridge and Malfoy followed him out, also stopping still at the sight of the twelve Defenders.

Wait… 12?
Clarissa and Will just got back. The door Dumbledore is guarding is in the Department of Mysteries, on the very bottom floor of the building. The only problem, they can’t step inside.

What!

We’ll brief you later.

Ginny, though Fudge didn’t know it was her, stepped forward and offered her hand to the Minister.

“Minister Fudge. It’s an honour, sir.” Her voice was muffled, but it was clearly female. Each cloak was exactly alike. To an outsider. Only a Defender knew that two strands the width of a finger on the cuffs of each robe were a different colour. Harry’s were emerald green, Ginny’s gold, Jessica’s silver and so on.

“Lovely to meet you, Miss. I’d like to express our thanks to you and your… friends for rescuing Mr Potter,” Fudge stammered.

“No problem, Minister. Just doing our jobs,” Ginny said warmly, though it was lost thanks to the cloak.

“I can’t focus my eyes on your faces. Why?” Lucius asked angrily.

Harry smirked, “It’s something my mother invented before she died, Mr Malfoy. I own the patent on it.”

Lucius scowled at him.

“Minister, you can’t seriously be planning on letting Potter have his own… own… private army!” Umbridge exclaimed. Harry ignored her, instead patting the Minister on the back.

“Perhaps you could walk us out, Minister. I imagine the reporters will be waiting for me, and I’d love the chance to thank you for your efforts at finding me where the public can hear.”

And we’re off to the races!

Fudge beamed, “Of course Harry. A swell idea.” Harry smiled, and Ginny snickered in his mind as Lucius and Umbridge both looked about ready to murder him. Harry and Fudge walked towards the elevator, the Defenders trailing behind. They rode the elevator in silence down to the Atrium, and the second they stepped out, Harry and Fudge were swamped by reporters, Rita Skeeter in pride and place at the front.

“Harry! What happened at your home!?”

“Are you alright!?”

“How did you escape!?

“Who attacked you!?”

“Who are the red-cloaked figures!?”

“Everyone quiet down, quiet down!” Fudge exclaimed, placing a hand on Harry’s shoulder. The reporters trailed off, leaving only the flashing of cameras and the whispering of people behind them. The entire Atrium was packed with people trying to get a glimpse of Harry and his colleagues. Harry kept his chin high and waved a hand at the cameras, who were all too ready to get shots of him and Fudge standing beside each other.
"Young Harry has had quite an ordeal the past few days and has kindly agreed to share some of it with you. Just give him a bit of room now…" Fudge said, gesturing with his arms for the group to backpedal.

"Thank you, Minister," Harry nodded to Fudge and waved his hand at the ground. The tiling lifted up, putting Harry a good head and shoulders above the crowd so everyone could see him.

Got to love Druid sleight of hand.

Harry could just imagine Will snickering behind him as the crowd gasped.

You got the palm cards?

Yep. Hidden in my robes right now. Here we go…

Harry took a deep breath and listened to Ginny’s voice, acting as a prompter in his head before repeating her words out loud. “Good Morning, everyone. I just wanted to say thank you for all your help and support the past few days. As most of you are already aware, my home was attacked a few days ago. The perpetrators were the same people that abducted Peter Parker, Claire O’Neill and I at the end of the Triwizard Tournament. Thankfully, I was able to escape my captors with the aid of the good men and women you see behind me. These people are but a small number of an organisation we like to call the Defenders. It’s a group of like-minded warriors dedicated to fighting for the good of all magical beings. We’re not fighting a war, we are here to protect and defend the people. All of you who get caught in the middle, when some dark wizard decides he doesn’t care about your safety or your life. My fellow witches and wizards, we are under threat. A terrorist organisation has kidnapped me not once, but twice. As much as I might want to live my life as an ordinary wizard like all of you, this scar on my head makes me a target. If they can get rid of me, they boost their credibility. That has been their goal. By now they’ve learned that I’m not so easy to take down, which means I fear they will turn against the public next. And that is something me, the Defenders, and the Ministry of Magic will not, and cannot, tolerate. My team will be working with the Auror department to hunt down this new threat to our security and safety and rest assured we will not stop until it has been expunged, and it’s leaders brought to justice. Any questions?"

Oh, you are so getting snogged senseless.

I did alright?

That was awesome!

Harry breathed a sigh of relief and glanced around the crowd of people, all of whom were jumping up and down, whistling and cheering his name.

“Mr Potter! Mr Potter!”

“Miss Skeeter!” Harry proclaimed, pointing at the primed blonde-haired woman wearing her trademark green jacket.

Sirius is here.

Harry glanced over Ginny’s head and saw Sirius walking with Amelia Bones, Kingsley Shacklebolt, half a dozen Aurors, and a still cloaked Remus.

“I speculated about the existence of your Defenders some time ago. Can you say that its members are all adults? Or are some of them, like yourself, still children?” Numerous whispers circled through the crowd.
We prepped for this. Redirect, and note on your childhood.

“I’m afraid I can neither confirm nor deny that Miss Skeeter. The Defenders identities remain anonymous to protect their loved ones from retribution. And I’m afraid I’m not the best example to use. I may not be an adult, but I’m most certainly not a child any longer. I think seven near death experiences, not to mention a loveless childhood without family or friends that cared for me, have destroyed any childhood innocence I had left.” Harry didn’t notice many of the surrounding people tear up, as his eyes were drawn to the sight of Albus Dumbledore stepping out of the Floo at the far end of the Atrium.

Looks like time is up.

What do you… Oh shit, Dumbledore.

Yep.

“Mr Potter! How can we be sure you’re Defenders aren’t the beginning of another group like the Death Eaters if you won’t show your faces?!”

We don’t have a card for that, um….

“That’s an excellent question, sir. I’m afraid in the post-war world, there will always be a fear originating from the previous terror of groups like the Death Eaters, but throughout history, there have been organisations that have fought for good with just as much renown. We keep our other lives a secret not to deceive you, but to protect the people that we love, and I ask that you at least try to respect that.”

Harry swallowed hard as he finished, his eyes still locked on Dumbledore, who was pushing his way through the crowd. Harry glanced imploringly at Sirius and gestured towards Dumbledore. Sirius frowned, turned his head, bit his lip, then turned back to face Harry.

“Let’s hear it for Harry Potter – The Boy-Who-Lived!!” He yelled. He began rapidly clapping his hands, and the rest of the crowd followed. Cheers and whistles filled the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic, and chants of “Potter!!” and “Defenders!!” echoed throw the air. The podium Harry stood on sunk back into the ground, and he pulled up his cowl, shielding his face beneath the perception filter the cloak provided. Ginny grabbed into his arm and pulled him inside the circle of red-cloaked figures. Another hand grabbed the back of his neck, and Harry’s world turned on its head. The smell of ozone filled the air, the sounds of the crowd rose to an ear-shattering whistle, and the ground beneath his feet fell away. His entire body was pulled thin, then a split second of nothing, and everything came back into stark relief.

He was standing in Andromeda Tonks lounge room. He looked down at his hands and watched as his fingers reformed from golden dust in the air.

Ginny pitched and threw up on the floor.

“Sorry. I kind of rushed that jump. Usually, it’s much smoother, but entangling with another person isn’t easy, and I had to bend us around the Anti-Apparation Ward. Not easy with passengers,” Will O’Neill said, pulling back his hood and slumping onto the couch.

“You don’t say,” Harry breathed, taking several deep breaths.

That sucked.

Better than being splinched.
Harry sighed and pulled his wand, banishing the remains of Ginny’s sick from the floor. Then he pulled her into his arms and slumped onto the couch next to Will.

“What happened in the Department of Mysteries?” Harry groaned, rubbing his temples in a weak attempt to be rid of his newfound headache.

“Was pretty fucking easy actually. No guards or anything. A couple of alarm-based wards, but even an idiot could have disarmed those,” Will said, before conjuring an ice-pack and placing it on his forehead. A few seconds later, Jessica, Luna and Matt both appeared in a flash of golden sparks.

“Fuck that’s weird,” Jessica breathed. Then she turned on her heel and walked over to the kitchen, pulling a bottle of Firewhiskey from the cupboard and taking a long hard pull.

“I love it! It makes the Mallywaddles around us get all excited!” Luna exclaimed cheerfully as she bounced up and down on her toes.

Harry ignored them, instead focussing on Will, “Then what happened?”

“We couldn’t get past the front door,” he said.

“But you just said…”

“There’s something down there. I don’t know what it is, but it’s really messed up. As soon as we opened the door, the Dragon Force went haywire. Whatever it is, it was draining our powers. Feeding off it. Do yourself a favour and stay very far away from the Department of Mysteries.” Harry swallowed hard and laid his head on Ginny’s shoulder.

“You realise that’s really bad for you, right?” Matt was saying to Jessica as he pulled off his cloak and threw it on top of the still bouncing Luna. Luke and Danny re-materialised a moment later. Luke stumbled backwards into a wall, leaving a six-foot indent in the brick. Danny was little better. He tripped on his own feet and face planted into the wooden floor.

“Watch me not care,” Jessica replied dryly. Ted Tonks opened the front door and stopped, jaw hanging open. Jessica raised the bottle up to him before taking another pull.

Fred and George entangled in and walked into each other, banging foreheads, before falling unceremoniously to the ground unconscious. Will groaned, before standing up and pulling his cloak back on. He vanished in a discharge of dust, and Andromeda and Remus appeared a second later. Andromeda immediately rushed to the bathroom, and Remus took Will’s seat on the couch with a dazed look on his face. Finally, Hermione and Will reappeared with a slumping Clarissa held between them.

“I’m just going to go to sleep now…” Will muttered, before both he and Clarissa collapsed to the ground. Hermione, by virtue of still having Clarissa’s arm over her shoulder, went with them, colliding with the pair and making a loud “Eeep!” noise as she did.

“Behold the Mighty Defenders!” Jessica proclaimed, “the world is so screwed.”
Act IV, Chapter 4: Fire and Blood

Chapter Notes

Authors Note: For those of you asking where Crystal has been, the answer is blowing off exam study to re-read the Percy Jackson series. Which inspired her recent trip to Earth 36742.

Disclaimer:

“Shit,” Crystal whispered, dodging a falling lump of scrap metal. Well, it might have been scrap metal, she wasn’t quite sure, it could have been an MRI machine or an automaton. You could never be sure here.

She heard an even louder crash and lunged for cover. Sure, she’d come back to life if she died, but dying wasn’t fun, and getting a new body involved so much paperwork it wasn’t funny. Ghost and Miracle would never let her hear the end of it. The tell-tale scream of someone in agonising pain tore through the junkyard, reminding Crystal of the whole reason she was here.

She had to time this perfectly if she wanted to both live and get the person she’d come for before they drifted off. Hades was always protective of what he considered his, but in this time immediately after death, was when Travellers did their best work. Well, in Crystal’s opinion anyway. It was when some of their best agents had been recruited.

Crystal waited an extra breath, just to be sure that everyone had left the junkyard, and then began sprinting. The giant robot, not fifty feet away, didn’t detect her, of course, it didn’t. When she’d rewritten herself into this exact moment, she’d made very sure it was too preoccupied to notice her. The automation exploded, and Crystal slid into action. She dove beneath the rain of falling scrap metal and caught the hand of a transparent young girl before she hurtled to the ground.

“Annabeth?” the dark-haired girl of no more than twelve whispered, staring in shock as Crystal hurled her away from the exploding robot.

“No, not Annabeth. Just a resemblance,” Crystal said with a smirk, shoving her charge’s discorporated spirit beneath a car. A few metres away, an almost perfect replica of the spirit girl now beside her crashed into the earth. Only that body was heavily burned and was most assuredly dead.

“Who…” the girl caught sight of her body lying amongst the wreckage and swallowed hard. “How are you alive? How am I alive?”

“I’m Crystal. I don’t die like most people do. And sorry, but you are dead. Can’t stop that. But you don’t have to stay dead if you take my offer.” Crystal said with a blinding grin, patting a fire out of her hair.

“Offer?!” The girl had begun hyperventilating.

“I’m here to tell you that we don’t own Harry Potter, Marvel Comics, or anything else recognisable for that matter! But Will and Clarissa O’Neill, the Dragon Force and the Federated Kingdoms of the
Druids and Mer, and all its inhabitants are solely the creation of Ghost, Miracle and I. And my offer? Bianca Di Angelo, I'm here to recruit you as a Traveller.”

“A what? Now I know you’re crazy,” The girl, Bianca, stated, beginning to tug her hand away.

“You’d be surprised how often I get that. Come with me,” Crystal said with a sigh, and she disapparated, pulling Bianca in tow.

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**Act IV, Chapter 4: Fire and Blood**

*Behold the Mighty Defenders! By Rita Skeeter*

*Harry Potter – the Boy-Who-Lived and Triwizard Champion – strode into the Ministry of Magic with an aura of power and fierceness I’ve never seen before. His face was no longer that of a boy. This was the image of a man destined to change the world. A real hero. He walked, clad in an elegant red cloak, scar shining proudly on his forehead, into the seat of our government to allay the fears abounding after the attack on his home. And flanking him were fourteen others wearing the same cloaks, but each with their hoods drawn so that none could see their faces.*

*Nobody knew what was happening. Nobody knew what was going on. Only that Mr Potter seemed completely unharmed, and in as good health as ever.*

*After Harry and his comrades vanished into the depths of the Ministry, this reporter and numerous others, as well as over five-hundred civilian Witches and Wizards all stood inside the Atrium waiting for his reappearance. And what a reappearance it was! Harry strode out with the Minister of Magic himself and, demonstrating incredible control of wandless magic, elevated himself above the crowd. His voice was powerful and full of passion, and it reached every corner of the atrium without even using a Sonorous Charm.*

*Harry, a cocky grin on his face that had even this strong-willed reporter infatuated with him, thanked us all for our concern over his disappearance and related what really happened.*

“My home was attacked a few days ago. The perpetrators were the same people that abducted Peter Parker, Claire O’Neill and I at the end of the Triwizard Tournament. Thankfully, I was able to escape my captors with the aid of the good men and women you see behind me.” Harry’s saviours were an organisation he founded sometime over the summer of 1993 if my sources are correct. In fact, I even speculated about the existence of such a group after the start of the Triwizard Tournament. The group, named the ‘Defenders’ are, according to Mr Potter’s statement, “like-minded warriors dedicated to fighting for the good of all magical beings…” Throughout his speech, Harry seemed genuinely concerned for the safety and well-being of the ordinary witch and wizard, something often lacking from statements from the people in power. If his organisation is based on those same principles, I’ll feel much safer at night.

*The Defenders are keeping their identities a closely guarded secret to protect their loved ones, an admirable goal. Instead, they have adopted code-names for use in the field. Those I have heard so*
far are, “Firefly, Iron Fist and Alias.” But who are they? If Harry is the leader of the Defenders, it’s a fair assumption that his Wife via Soul-Bond Ginny Potter is also a member, but who else could be under those crimson cloaks? Harry was reportedly good friends with the other Triwizard Champions, are they members? We’ll just have to wait and see.

Say what you will about the idea of the Defenders or the possibility that some of its members may be underage, they’ve demonstrated their prowess in rescuing Harry himself from the hands of the mysterious new threat that has abducted him twice now. Harry stated that the Defenders will be working with the Auror Office to investigate and take down this “terrorist organisation,” before they begin to “turn against the public.” It’s nice to know the Defenders will be working within the law, and not beyond it.

My fellow Witches and Wizards, there is a new threat out there, and we must all be prepared to face it, but with Harry Potter and his Defenders protecting us, I have faith we’ll make it through to the other side.

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**The Defenders: The Danger they Pose, By Corban Yaxley**

Harry Potter’s Defenders. An organisation supposedly intended to “protect and defend the people.” An organisation founded by a schoolboy with a penchant for arrogance and danger. Forgive me if I’m a little sceptic.

There’s no denying that Harry Potter is a talented wizard, but do we really think putting our safety in his hands and his hands alone is a good idea? We know nothing about his Defenders. They keep their identities hidden, cowering behind anonymity instead of coming out in full support of Potter.

I’m not the only one who lived through the last Wizarding War. When wizards with hidden faces and black cloaks attacked us across the country on behalf of a powerful and dangerous leader. I can’t help but think that the situation we find ourselves in now is eerily similar.

Harry Potter is using his fame to begin amassing power. His Defenders are just the start. He has the Minister in his pocket and the public behind him. What happens if Potter decides that the Werewolves and other threats to Wizarding society should be befriended and treated as equals?

If we don’t stop Harry Potter now, we could be creating a new evil the likes of which we haven’t seen since Grindelwald. I hope Headmaster Dumbledore takes the necessary steps to reign Potter in once the school term resumes. If he doesn’t, those of us immune to Harry Potter’s charismatic charm will do what we can to spread the word that he cannot be trusted.

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**Harry Potter: The-Boy-We-Failed, By Pete Wisdom**
When Harry Potter unveiled his Defenders for the first time in the Ministry of Magic this week, I couldn’t help but notice something he said when answering a reporter’s question. Despite all of us being told that Harry was in the loving care of his relatives after his parents’ deaths, it seems this was far from the truth, as Harry himself indicated that his childhood was “Loveless” and “without family or friends that cared for me.” This comment, while heartbreaking to hear in the moment, sparked a trail of thought I was loath to find myself travelling. “What could have happened to Harry Potter in his childhood that would cause such a response? Why was his childhood, “Loveless?”

Harry is a national hero, and the idea that he might have grown up unloved is a disturbing one. So, I made a trip to Harry’s home address, Number Four Privet Drive, to discover just what his comments meant. The neighbourhood I arrived in was anything but what I expected. It was an entirely Muggle suburb, without a degree of magical energy that I could detect. I’m no Curse Breaker, but I can perform a decent magical detection charm. Imagine my surprise when I arrived at the property in question (which has been rebuilt since the events of Harry’s abduction) and discovered not even the most basic Anti-Apparation ward! Assuming I had to be incorrect in my assessment, I called in some friends of mine. Brian Braddock – Deputy Chief Auror – and his sister Head Gringotts Curse Breaker Elizabeth “Betsy” Braddock.

Together we revisited the property, and Brian and Betsy confirmed my original discovery. There were no wards surrounding the home at all. There was some evidence of Blood Wards, but they had been inactive since mid-1993! 1993! According to Betsy, the only thing that could have broken the Ward would have been the occupants of the House actually kicking Harry out, or Harry himself declaring that the location was “no longer his home.” With this revelation, I attempted to interview the occupants of the House, Mr Vernon Dursley and his wife Petunia – sister to Lily Potter. Mr Dursley, a very overweight and ugly looking man, called me a “Freak” and told me to “get out of (his) home.” Then he threatened to fire upon me with a muggle weapon known as a “Firearm.”

After this reaction, you can imagine Brian, Betsy and my horror. So, we headed into Gringotts for some clarification. Thanks to Betsy, I was able to gain a meeting with Ragnok, head of the British branch of Gringotts. Ragnok had little to say, as Gringotts maintains its privacy very seriously, but what little he did say praised Harry and his wife via Soul-Bond Ginny. He said both were “highly courteous” and showed “incredible respect to the Goblin Nation, particularly after our blunders concerning the Potter clients.” When I asked him what blunder he referred too, the old Goblin merely grinned at me and had me led from the room. But the most important thing I learned was that Mr Potter’s first visit to the bank occurred in 1991. After he turned eleven. Is it possible Harry Potter didn’t know he was a wizard before receiving his Hogwarts letter? The very thought makes one sick.

Brian, as Deputy Chief Auror, went to the Head of the DMLE Amelia Bones to report our findings. Madame Bones was quite concerned by our observations and immediately requested a warrant to investigate Number 4 Privet Drive. A request that was denied by Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore himself, the same person who told us that Harry was with his loving relatives in the first place.

Not to be dissuaded, Madame Bones went directly to Minister Fudge, who granted the warrant immediately.

Betsy and I accompanied Madame Bones and an Auror team consisting of Brian, Rufus Scrimgeour, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and newly reinstated Auror Sirius Black – Harry Potter’s Godfather – back to Privet Drive, and this time we didn’t knock. After setting up Muggle-Repelling Wards, we entered the property, and Mr Dursley and his son Dudley attacked us. They were quickly subdued. We investigated the house and, if I wasn’t disgusted already, I was feeling the need to vomit by the time we left. Harry’s room was covered in broken toys, his bed was thinner than something a House Elf might sleep on, and there were metal bars on his window. His bedroom door and the door to the
cupboard under the stairs had exterior locks.

The extent of Harry’s unloving home life was much worse than we feared.

The only problem? There was nothing to prove Harry had ever been in the home in the first place. There were no pictures or photographs of him, or of his parents. There were no clothes or belongings of Harry’s anywhere in the house. The cupboard under the stairs was perfectly clean, except for the old camp bed, threadbare pillow and the spiders on the ceiling. Someone had cleaned out every scrap of evidence in the House, leaving the Aurors with nothing to incriminate the Dursleys. And it was clear that it was a Wizard who did it, as even the Dursley’s themselves had only vague recollections of their nephew’s existence. It didn’t take Betsy long to determine that they’d been Obliviated.

Auror Black was despondent during the whole investigation. When Madame Bones asked him why he hadn’t brought Harry’s home life to her attention sooner, he could only respond with, “I didn’t know. He never talks about it. I knew they didn’t like him… I never realised it was this bad. God, what would James and Lily say?”

And what would James and Lily Potter say if they were here to see just how their son was raised? No one bothered to check up on Harry after the events of that tragic night. He vanished from the Wizarding World. Nobody, myself included, thought that his lack of response to any attempts to communicate with him was confusing? No one thought to see how he was doing at all. And I will take that guilt with me to my grave.

Mr Black and I took a trip around the suburb of Little Whinging interviewing people about the boy known as Harry Potter, and almost everyone came to us with a similar response. “Harry Potter? I remember him. Dodgy he was. Always wearing baggy clothes like a hooligan. Constantly covered in bruises and cuts. Mixed up in fights, I reckon.” That response was from Harry’s fifth-grade teacher.

The Dursley’s are immune to prosecution thanks to the tampering of wizard or wizards unknown. I have my theories, but I can’t prove them, so they will remain unsaid in this piece. Rest assured I will continue researching. Harry, if you happen to read this, I know it doesn’t mean much, but on behalf of the Wizarding World, I’m sorry we forgot about you when you needed us most.

Jessica rolled her eyes as she sat on the Hogwarts Express, staring out the window at platform nine and three quarters, a copy of the Daily Prophet in hand. The last few weeks had been seriously hectic. She wished she’d been able to visit the mass protest on Privet Drive before the Aurors had dismantled it, but her mother was keeping an annoyingly close eye on her this summer. The first month had been magnificent. She’d had the entire house to herself! She’d Flooed over to the Greengrass’s every few nights to grab some food, and the rest of the day was spent searching through Jones Manor for that infernal Cup. But nothing! The Cup was nowhere to be found. It had completely vanished. None of the old hiding places were still in use, even the cloakroom was empty.

The entire place had been cleaned out, and she had no idea why. She’d finally given up in early July and instead had focussed on learning to Apparate. It wasn’t easy. At all. She’d splinched herself thirteen times. At least she could take it better than anyone else could, thanks to her abilities. Was it a good idea? No. But she’d had Dittany and her strength. They’d compensate for it. And she’d come out victorious in the end. She could now comfortably Apparate on her own to anywhere she needed. That would be a significant advantage in the future she knew.
Her gaze flitted to the portal as the unmistakable jet-black hair, and round glasses of Harry Potter stepped through, trolley in hand. Beside him was Susan Bones. Jessica suppressed a smirk. The girl was standing closer than was strictly necessary, and Harry seemed as oblivious as ever. He really was adorable like that. Sirius Black and Amelia Bones stepped through after them, and seconds later the press was all over the four.

The door to Jessica’s compartment slid open of its own accord, and a voice she’d recognise anywhere let out a very unladylike groan. Jessica reached over and pulled the hood of Harry’s invisibility cloak off Ginny Potter’s head and elbowed her in the ribs.

“Hi to you too Alias. Good to see you’re still as grumpy as ever,” Ginny quipped.

“Very funny Firefly. I thought you’d be with Mr Handsome and Famous out there. Miss Bones looks to be quite comfortable.” Ginny scowled and grumbled something about ‘Hufflepuff flirts’ under her breath.

“Bitch,” Ginny muttered darkly.

“Suck up,” Jessica retorted. The two girls glared at each other for a few seconds, before both burst out laughing. If Jessica had told her younger self that her best friend would be a Blood Traitor Weasley, she honestly didn’t know what she might have done. Pitch herself from the third floor, maybe? But now she couldn’t imagine herself without Ginny Potter as her best friend. The red-head was the exact opposite of her. Fiery and passionate where she was cold and calculating. Ginny was bold and beautiful. Jessica was sly and plain. Maybe that was why they were best friends, she wondered. Opposites attract. Either way, Jessica was just glad she’d reached out when she did. She still held her guilt over not helping Ginny with her possession in her first year. She had known full well the signs and had ignored them because she was afraid that the same thing might happen to her. Again.

“If you’re going to sit in here and spy on us, you might want to get onto the luggage rack before anyone comes in,” Jessica said. Ginny poked her tongue at her, before pulling the cloak back around her and jumping up onto the rack with much less effort than she should have needed. Jessica sighed and went back to the Daily Prophet.

It didn’t take long for the Greengrass sisters to sit down beside her. While Jessica wouldn’t particularly call them friends, they had helped her in the past, and Jessica herself was one of the few who knew the family was not as Pureblood orientated as they tried to appear. Though that was more through her skills at not being an idiot like the rest of the Wizarding World rather than them entrusting her with any specific secret.

Astoria sat down beside her and glanced at the Daily Prophet in her lap, still held open to the story about Harry’s home life. Harry had not been pleased when Sirius had asked him to come in to speak to his boss without even warning him first.

“Reading about Potter, hey Jones? Didn’t pick you for a fangirl,” Astoria said, elbowing Jessica in the ribs. Jessica, as usual, didn’t feel a thing, but she was very good at faking pain.

“Say what you will, it’s certainly an eye-opener. The champion of the light grew up in an abusive household, probably because of Dumbledore. Maybe he isn’t as squeaky clean as the Gryffindors like to think he is?”

Astoria shrugged, “I don’t know. To be honest, I hadn’t really thought about it like that. Are we sure it’s even true?”
“It’s true,” Daphne said, “I read the article, this guy, Pete Wisdom, he’s legit. He went through all the right hoops, did all the right research. Potter of all people was abused by Muggles, and he still defends them.”

“Hey, not all muggles are shit heads.” The trio turned their heads to the compartment door to see Lance Hunter, a Slytherin Half-Blood in Daphne’s year, swagger inside and drop down into the seat next to the blonde haired, blue eyed girl.

“Just most of them,” Jessica amended, rolling her eyes. Astoria opened her mouth to say more, but before she could, Tracey Davis all but barrelled into the compartment and slammed the door shut. She cast a locking charm on the door, pulled the shades down, and cast a silencing charm. Jessica leaned forward; this just got a whole lot more interesting.

“Tracey?! What are you doing?!” Daphne exclaimed, grabbing her friends jacket sleeve.

“Umbridge. Dolores Umbridge. She’s been appointed by Minister Fudge as ‘High Inquisitor’ at Hogwarts. It’s not out yet, but I doubt it’ll be much of a secret by the evening feast.”

Jessica’s heart froze stiff in her chest for a few valuable seconds.

“What the hell does that mean?” Lance asked a look of confusion etched across his face.

“It means Fudge is upping his war against Dumbledore. He’s going to have Umbridge monitor the school, and him, for anything he sees as a threat. You’ve all read the articles in the Prophet; Fudge is convinced that Dumbledore is after his job. This is his chance to undermine the codger in his own seat of power,” Daphne fumed, leaning back and slamming her head into the wall.

“It’s worse,” Jessica said softly, glancing towards where Ginny lay hidden underneath the Invisibility Cloak. Harry and the rest of the Defenders (she’d finally relented and started using the name) should be talking about the same thing at that very moment, “Lupin.”

Tracey and Daphne both shuddered.

“I don’t understand…” Astoria began.

“Professor Lupin is a werewolf. That’s why he always looks ill. And Umbridge has access to the national werewolf registry, so she’ll know exactly what he is. If Lupin gets kicked out of school…”

“Kiss our O.W.L’s goodbye,” Lance concluded. His head fell into his hands.

“Exactly,” Daphne groaned.

“Yeah. That’s… I can see why that’s bad,” Astoria lamented, “But if he’s a werewolf why was he allowed into the school anyway? He could attack someone.”

“He’s a brilliant teacher, and it’s not as if he’s going around mauling people. So long as he takes the necessary precautions, I don’t see why he shouldn’t be allowed to teach,” Tracey said with a shrug. She dropped down on Jessica’s other side and snatched the paper away from her. Tracey, Jessica knew, was very gossipy. She may not be as good as Jessica herself was at deductive reasoning… or simple common sense, but she certainly had a way to get information. Jessica suspected the buxom brunette wasn’t above using her figure to draw the juicy news out of the unsuspecting.

“So, what happens now?” Astoria asked.

“Depends, I guess. Umbridge will need motive to get rid of Lupin. With as positive results as he’s
had the past two years, not to mention his popularity with the other houses, simply outing him as a werewolf probably won’t cut it. The Board of Governors don’t have Lucius Malfoy to act as a spine anymore, but most of the members are still Sacred Twenty-Eight. If she has a sufficient reason, they’ll back the call, especially if Fudge manages to get complete control of the Daily Prophet. From what I’ve heard, both the light and dark families are pumping the paper full of galleons to counter Fudge’s budget cuts. The only plus side is it’s relatively equal at the moment, so both light, dark and Fudge are getting their opinions heard. That’s bad for the Dark and Dumbledore, and great for Harry Potter and his Defenders. It’s almost Slytherin of him,” Tracey observed.

“Potter is an enigma I’m telling you,” Lance exclaimed. When he was met with a bunch of frowns, he elaborated. “Think about it. Really sit back and think about it. He’s a Gryffindor, rushes into everything, average brain, decent bloke, mopes a bit, breaks so many rules it makes even me impressed and saves the day. Only how much of that is actually true? Yes, he’s a Gryff, but he doesn’t really act like you’d expect a Gryff too. Spells first ask questions later sort of thing. If you’ve noticed, he only resorts to violence when twats like Malfoy piss him off. Unlike the little spitfire he got himself hitched too, and I’ll get back to her later. He’s not stupid, he’s near the top of the class in almost every subject…” Daphne scowled at that. She was still sore over Potter beating her at Ancient Runes. “…sure he might have Granger to help him, but all of it can’t be cheating, can it? Then there’s the rule breaking. Potter became so legendary for rule-breaking first and second year that now everyone just assumes he’s breaking the rules all the time, but since then how many rules has he actually been caught breaking?”

Everyone frowned again, and Jessica had to try very hard to suppress her smirk. Ever since she’d started hanging around Harry and Ginny, Jessica had become a bit more open-minded about everything, and she had tried to make some of her friends think along the same lines. Clearly, it had worked.

“He hasn’t really. Is there something I’m missing?” Daphne asked, scratching the back of her head.

“What are you saying, Hunter?” Tracey prodded, eyes narrowed.

“I’m saying he’s getting smarter. He’s not getting caught. And not to mention he’s seriously famous after whole Tournament thing. What did that get him?”

“Power, resources, recognition and attention,” Daphne breathed. Jessica couldn’t help noticing that Ginny fidgeted slightly on the luggage rack.

“Exactly. Then there’s the Defenders. We all heard the rumours last year. Ginny yelled the name out for everyone to hear the day of the trials when she put Chang in her place. Lavender Brown was going on about Ron Weasley mentioning the name after he knocked the littlest Weasley into a bookcase. And then Skeeter, even she’d heard about it. But then it disappeared. Poof. Gone. You didn’t hear any more about it. Until this month of course, when fourteen people in red cloaks strolled into the Ministry of Magic. Why all the silence?”

Jessica was impressed. She’d always thought Hunter was more brawn than brain, she’d have to be more careful around him in the future.

“Potter was at Alcheringa and Ilvermorny for the rest of the year…” Astoria muttered.

“Exactly, and I’ll wager he didn’t waste that time. He was recruiting. He was pretty chummy with the other Champions if you remember, and Will O’Neill loved the guy. They were chatting it up during the Yule Ball…”

“And don’t forget that O’Neill is a lot younger than he wants everyone to believe.” Daphne pointed
out. Astoria suddenly looked very confused, and Jessica quickly adopted a similar face. This was fun!

“What?!?” Tracey exclaimed.

“That’s right, we never told you. Hunter and I were in the Hogwarts Delegation, and when we were at Alcheringa, O’Neill flew – yep flew – into the dining hall one day, missing half his arm, and looking no older than eighteen. He had a massive scar over his face as well. It was just after he got eaten by that Kraken if you remember, and he just right landed in the middle of the room. Then he ran up to one of the girls at Alcheringa, a seventh year I think, and snogged her in the middle of the room! The whole thing had me super intrigued, so I went to the Library at the Academy and went through old newspaper issues. There, plain as day, was the article about sixteen-year-old Will O’Neill stopping a meteor from colliding with Mt Kīlauea, in 1992. 1992. Which means the older version we were all dealing with was a façade meant to protect his credibility. Think about it, if I told you that a sixteen-year-old stopped a meteor, you’d have laughed your head off. But the Will O’Neill we all saw. You’d have no problem believing that he stopped a meteor. Especially after what he did to Professor Snape.”

“That’s kind of awesome actually,” Jessica admitted. Astoria was looking at her sister in total disbelief. Hmm. Maybe Alias was a good name after all? She’d have to thank Matt… Those annoying butterflies reappeared in her stomach, and her mind flashed to the memory of the two of them on the couch in the Home… MURDOCK! His name is Murdock! Not Matt. Just Murdock. And nothing else. Keep yourself together, Jones!

“Back to my point,” Hunter said, drawing the attention back to him, “Also notice how not all his friends went with the delegation. Rand, Murdock and Cage. They all stayed here, who knows what they were doing.”

“But why them?” Tracey asked suddenly, “They’re nothing special. Granger, I get, but why the others? Wouldn’t Bones or some of the other big heirs be smarter?”

Lance smirked.

“Let’s think about it. Granger, as you said, is a no brainer. She’s a fricken genius, and everyone knows it. But what about the others. I’ll admit, he does seem to genuinely be in love with the Weasley girl – sorry, Potter girl now. And I bet her Mum’s probably pissed, but notice how he hasn’t looked at any of the dozens of girls trying to cosy up to him? Either Potter’s child bride is really good under the sheets…” Ginny shifted on the luggage rack again. “Or he’s seriously loyal. Either way, by not looking at the other chicks, it gets the brothers on side. Bill Weasley is a Curse-Breaker, a seriously good type of person to have on hand should you need them. Charlie is a Dragon Tamer. Not entirely helpful, but he has international contacts. The Twins can be crazy smart when they put their minds to it.”

“And Ginny’s really powerful,” Astoria added. Everyone turned towards her, and she blushed a bright red, “We have Defence together, and she’s top of the class. Easily. Her spells are super powerful too.”

Jessica sighed, “She’s right. The girl is not someone you mess with. I saw her cast a perfect Bat-Bogey Hex on someone once. Looked fucking painful let me tell you.”

“I’ll keep it in mind,” Hunter agreed, “So you can see, smart choice of allies. As for the others. Cage is a tank. The guy could easily take out Crabbe and Goyle, and he also has a brain in his head, so twice as deadly. Murdock’s dad is an Auror, and a good one too. That gives Potter two Aurors he can call on, Sirius Black and Jack Murdock, both of whom are good at their jobs. Also, let’s not
forget he has the Black family fortune behind him too. Lovegood. She’s an oddball I’ll admit, but her Dad runs the Quibbler. If Potter does lose control of the Daily Prophet, he has a fall-back media advantage. Plus, both Murdock and Loony are Ravenclaws, and they can give him info on what’s going on in their tower.

“What about Rand? He’s not exactly very useful,” Daphne pointed out.

“That’s where you’re wrong. I’m Half-Blood, which means I know a fair bit about the Muggle World. Would it interest you to know that Rand Enterprises, a company run by Danny Rand’s parents, is a seriously wealthy business with lots of connections in the Muggle world?”

“That is interesting,” Tracey admitted, “Plus it gives him an in with Hufflepuff.”

Astoria bit her lip, “But he doesn’t have anyone in Slytherin.” Jessica suddenly felt very self-conscious. She made extra sure to keep her features schooled. This was the dangerous part of her game, and she knew it.

“Who’s to say he doesn’t?” Hunter said.

“You think Potter has a spy in Slytherin?” Daphne asked.

“I’d put money on it. Let’s him keep an eye on Malfoy and the other Death Eater families. Kid probably knows Dumbledore’s claims about You-Know-Who being back are hogwash thanks to said spy. That’s why he’s distancing himself from him.” Suddenly, Jessica had an idea. Whether it was a good one or a bad one, she wasn’t sure yet, but it was an idea. Let’s see where it went.

“He’s not lying,” Jessica muttered, her head dropping down into her lap, hair obscuring her face.

“What was that, Jones?” Astoria asked, placing a hand on Jessica’s back. She looked up, adopting a frightened demeanour.

“Jones… what do you know that we don’t?” Tracey asked hesitantly. Jessica swallowed hard for effect.

“Dumbledore. He isn’t lying. V… You-Know-Who is back.”

Lance opened the car window and spewed outside. Daphne, Astoria and Tracey were all much paler than usual.

“You know how I kept coming over every couple of days?” She began, and Astoria and Daphne nodded their heads, “Well. That’s because my mother was gone for the entire first month of the holidays. Not only that, but every dark object in the house had vanished. Even… Even the Darkhold.” There. It was done. She couldn’t back out now.

“Darkhold?”

“The Book of Sin. The antithesis to the Book of Vishanti. Your Mum had that!?” Hunter exclaimed.

“It’s a Jones family secret. We’ve had it hidden for generations. Mum must have given it to someone, and given how insane she is, there’s only one person she’d give it to. That’s why I’ve been checking the papers. Potter never mentioned that He isn’t back. Just that there’s a new group out there, and that he’s dedicated to fighting it. I think the Dark Lord did come back at the end of the Triwizard, and he did attack Potter’s house…”

“He’s just not stupid enough to turn the whole world against him. No one wants to believe the Dark
Lord’s back. If Potter says that he is, then he gets painted with the same brush that Dumbledore is,” Daphne muttered, slumping back in her seat.

The rest of the train ride was spent in silence as each member handled the realisation that Voldemort had returned their own way.

When they finally reached the station, Jessica ignored the Thestrals and climbed into a cart bound for the Castle. The welcoming feast was as elaborate as usual. She kept a subtle eye on Harry at the Gryffindor table, which turned out to be an excellent idea, as she saw the entire spectacle that resulted when Lavender Brown tried to sit in his lap. Unfortunately for her, Firefly chose that moment to enter the hall, and a Bat-Bogey Hex was in the air before anyone even saw her move. Actually, come to think of it, maybe Ginny had sent the spell with her eyes. That would be cool. Either way, poor Lavender ended up on the cobblestone floor with overgrown bats pouring forth from her nose. Harry then began profusely apologising as a giggling Hermione lifted the spell. Ginny simply swaggered into the Hall, all eyes on her, and sat down in Harry’s now vacated lap. A not so subtle reminder of their married status in Jessica’s opinion.

Aside from that, she noticed a few other things in her observations. Ron spent the entire time looking at Harry’s group, which consisted of Hermione, Ginny, Luke, Colin Creevey, Neville Longbottom and Demelza Robbins, with longing. She made sure to file that away for later. Fred and George were demonstrating their prank products to Alicia and Katie (Angelina having graduated the previous year), Cho Chang spent the entire night staring at Harry, or more accurately, his ass, and Malfoy was whispering amongst his little gang of followers. The big point of note, however, was the Staff Table. Hagrid was absent on his mission, and his seat was taken by Professor Grubbly-Plank. But next to her was a short, dumpy woman with short curly brown hair that had way too much product in it wearing a fluffy pink cardigan. Her face resembled that of a toad. She knew instantly who it was, Harry had described the foul woman in great detail. It looked like Tracey was right. Fudge was trying to take over the school. This was bad for a dozen different reasons.

The Sorting Hat’s song was also interesting. That was a sentence she never thought she’d say.

The hat’s warning to unite was something unexpected, and very powerful if you paid any attention, as most didn’t. It wasn’t wrong either. She wondered if Dumbledore had a hand in it.

“Now that we have all finished our magnificent feast,” Dumbledore announced, “I have a few start of term notices I must impart before you all depart. First years ought to know that the forest in the grounds is out-of-bounds to all students – and a few of our older students ought to know by now too. The caretaker Mr Filch has asked me to remind you that magic is not permitted in the corridor between classes. Finally, we have two changes in staff this year. We are very pleased to welcome back Professor Grubbly-Plank, who will be taking Care of Magical Creatures until Professor Hagrid returns from personal leave; and Madame Umbridge, who will be filling a newly created post of High Inquisitor and Curriculum Overseer. Now I’m sure you’d all like to go to sleep…” Dumbledore trailed off and gazed behind him.

Jessica frowned. Why had he… Oh. This couldn’t be good. Professor Umbridge had cleared her throat and was now getting to her feet. She was going to say a speech. Dumbledore stepped aside, though the look on his face was one of well-controlled panic. Jessica glanced at Harry and realised he was looking right at her, a look of fear matching Dumbledore’s own on his face. He mouthed the words, ‘Fire and Blood,’ then turned back to Umbridge. She bit her lip and did the same. Fire and Blood. That was not something she wanted to hear. It was one of the emergency codes Hermione had come up with. She had based them on a fantasy book series she liked, so no one would ever guess what they meant. Jessica had to admit it was a smart idea. Fire and Blood was code for “we’ve got a big ass problem, and we need to meet up asap.” And that meant she and the other Defenders
would be making a trip to the Home that night. Hopefully, Sirius and Ginny’s brother Bill had anti-Dumbledore the place by now. If not, Matt would know, thanks to his powers.

“Thank you, Headmaster,” Umbridge said as she stepped up to the lectern, “for those kind words of welcome. It’s lovely to be back here at Hogwarts, and also to see such happy faces looking up at me.” Jessica couldn’t help snickering into her plate, and almost all the other Slytherins were doing the same. The other houses seemed to be in states of shock and horror.

“The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured by careful instruction. The treasure trove of magical knowledge amassed by our ancestors must be guarded, replenished and polished by those who have been called to the noble profession of teaching.” Professor’s Snape and Flitwick glanced at each other with bewildered looks, looks Jessica found herself sharing. What?

“Every headmaster and headmistress of Hogwarts has brought something new to the weighty task of governing this historic school, and that is as it should be, for, without progress, there will be stagnation and decay. Then again, progress for progress’s sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering. Old habits must be retained, and rightly so, whereas others, both old and new, must be abandoned. Let us move forward then into a new era of openness, effectiveness, and accountability, intent on preserving what must be preserved, perfecting what can be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.”

Suddenly everything made sense. As if a veil had been lifted. A quick look along the Slytherin table revealed a sharp divide. Some, like her, had realised the implications of the toad woman’s speech and were now holding back their panicked expressions. The others, like Malfoy, were grinning like idiots and applauding, just like their parents told them to no doubt.

“This is so not good,” Daphne moaned into her pudding.

Jessica made sure she was in the middle of the crowd moving down to the Dungeons. That way, she was safely hidden once they reached the common room, and Draco Malfoy stood up on a coffee table in the room to hold court.

“Listen up, everyone,” he said. Everyone ignored him, instead talking in their own hushed voices.

“Everyone listen!” Malfoy tried again. This time he might have got everyone’s attention, but his voice broke, resulting in numerous sniggering.

“This is the chance we’ve been looking for!” Draco proclaimed, “Finally the Ministry has sent someone in here to clean up Dumbledore’s mess and purge the Mudblood filth from the school. That means we are going to help Madam Umbridge in her crusade to get rid of Dumbledore. We are going to make damn sure she knows just which teachers are filth, like the werewolf Lupin, the fraud Trelawney, and the half-breed scum like Flitwick and that stupid oaf Hagrid. And we are going to make damn sure that she knows who are helping her in her mission. Do I make myself clear?” There were a few mumbled yes’s, and the group started breaking up.

“I said, do I make myself clear?!” Draco shouted. This time everyone ignored him and began trudging down the dormitory corridors.

“My father will hear about this!”
Jessica followed Daphne, Lance and a couple of other people from the upper years into the sixth-year boy's dormitory and stood still in the shadow of the door.

“Well. We’re screwed,” Cassius Warrington, a seventh-year prefect said, slumping on the fireplace.

“No kidding,” Maria Hill, another seventh year admitted.

“Who’s willing to bet we get all new curriculums for at least Defence and Transfiguration tomorrow?” Emilie Brindle – a sixth year – asked.

“You bet your ass,” Cassius said with a sigh, “Care of Magical Creatures and Charms too probably.”

“I liked Hagrid. The guy was super eccentric and slightly mad, but he knew his stuff, a lot better than Grubbly-Plank does. She’s scared of fricken everything. I got an Outstanding on my O.W.L thanks to Hagrid, I wonder where he is?” Emilie moaned.

“No offence, but I’m more worried about Lupin and Flitwick. Without them, I won’t even pass my O.W.L’s. You know if Umbridge gets them fired it’ll be Ministry toadies that replace them,” Daphne said.

“True.”

“I’m going to have to do so much extra study for my N.E.W.T’s it isn’t funny. They won’t be compensated if Hogwarts won’t teach us what we need to know. I want to be a Warder. If I can’t pass my exams…” Cassius trailed off, looking very defeated.

“I’ve got a really bad feeling about this.”

Jessica was late to the Home. By the time she reached the Duelling Chamber, Sirius was already attacking a training dummy, and Remus was eating what she guessed was not his first chocolate bar that night. The other Defenders were scattered around the room, watching as Harry paced in the centre of the room, a scowl on his face.

“What have I missed?” She asked, plonking down next to Ginny and the twins.

“Well, Gin-Gin filled us in on everything she overheard in your train compartment, then Harry was ‘invited’ up to the Headmaster’s office after the feast, and Mrs Firefly gave us a play by play of the boss’ meeting with our esteemed headmaster,” Fred supplied.

“How’d that go?”

“Better than I expected,” Harry admitted. “He told me that this was the only time he’d be able to meet with me during the year. I told him I was more than fine with that, then he told me in no uncertain terms that I needed to, “put my differences behind me.” Love how he still thinks I do what he says. Anyway, then he explained that Umbridge was watching him like a hawk and that he’d have to distance himself from me to protect me from her interference. I said I agreed that it was a good idea, which it is. Then he said that we shouldn’t use the Home, because if Umbridge finds it, the results could be catastrophic.”

“He’s not wrong. As much as I hate to admit it,” Jessica said.
Harry sighed, “I know. That’s what makes this all the more annoying. Sirius will lock the door when we leave tonight, the password will be changed, and he’ll be staying at Andromeda’s. Just in case. We’ll keep this place secret for use in High as Honour codes only.”

“Anything else Dumbledore mentioned?” Danny asked.

“Not really. He started to say something, but the Sorting Hat berated him. Not sure what that was about. He did try a bit of Legilimency when I entered the room…”

“I love my mental bazooka,” Ginny said wistfully.

“…but it didn’t do anything, thanks to miss trigger happy over here.”

“What? My bazooka protects our collective brain, you’re whining?”

“Of course not, dear,” Harry amended, throwing his hands above his head in defeat.

“What about the Defenders?” Hermione cut in. “Umbridge is bound to be onto us, and you specifically after your grand entrance into the Ministry. If she finds anything to pin on you, she will, and all the goodwill you have with the Minister will be evaporated,” Hermione said, chewing a piece of hair in her mouth. Harry’s scowl returned in full force now.

“We have to curtail our public meetings. Jess, I’m sorry, but you’ll have to limit your contact with us. If Umbridge or worse Voldemort catches wind of you…”

“I’m dead. I know the risks. Fortunately, I think Slytherin is where I can do the most good right now. Malfoy might think he has the House under his control, but there are plenty of people from multiple years that care about passing their exams and getting solid careers after school a lot more. If Umbridge puts that in jeopardy and I play my cards right, I might just be able to stake the fires of a Slytherin revolution. Or at least get them to the stage where they’d be willing to cut a deal with you to get rid of her. And if we can do that…”

“We make some friends in a place we don’t have very many,” Ginny concluded. “Just don’t put your neck on the chopping block, Jess. You’re one of us, if you need help, you shout. You understand?”

Ginny turned her blazing look on her, and Jessica had to use her considerable willpower not to flinch. Damn that girl was good.

“I will. Promise.” Jessica couldn’t help noticing the smile that creased Matt’s lips at that statement. The butterflies started gnawing at her stomach lining again…

“What about us?” Luna asked, gesturing to her, Matt and Danny. It was Matt himself who answered.

“We don’t have to completely stop communication. That would look even more bizarre. But we have to be careful.”


“He’s right. Malfoy was going on about how the Slytherin’s need to do anything they can to get rid of Mudbloods and Half-Breeds. No offence guys.

Hermione waved her off, “None taken.”

“I’m fine. I can handle myself,” Lupin said, an air of finality to his words that brokered no argument.

Harry smiled at him, “I know Moony, I know. But you also have an escape plan if things go sour. If
Umbridge comes after you, you get your ass up here. Understand?"

“Giving me orders now, Harry?” Lupin said, a smirk creasing his lips.

“Well, Mum’s not around to do it, so someone has to keep the last Marauders safe,” Harry said, winking at Sirius, who promptly burst out laughing.

“Well played. Well played,” Remus said, shaking his head as he held in his own laughter.

“I was thinking more about Flitwick,” Luke amended.

“He’s on Malfoy’s target list. Along with Hagrid when he gets back. They need an evac plan too.” Harry ran a hand through his hair and looked to Ginny for a few seconds, before nodding his head.

“Brains, Mystery, Murdock. Flitwick is your job,” Ginny said, standing up and walking to stand beside Harry, “Bring him up here sometime in the next week or so, let him know that if he gets in trouble, he can come here. If he’s still undecided, the chance to research this place should swing him over.”

“Cage, Iron Fist. You need to keep an eye on McGonagall. If she does get in trouble, she won’t back down without a fight, so you’ll need to be ready to extract her if she gets caught up in a fight she can’t win. Harry and I will watch over Hagrid when he gets back,” Ginny said.

“That sum everything up?” Harry asked.

Hermione raised her hand again, “Um, I’ve got one more thing.”

“What is it?”

“Well, if we can’t use this place, we’re going to need to look for a new hideout to use.”

Harry pursed his lips, “Good point. Everyone keep an eye out.” They all nodded before scattering back to their respective common rooms. Just as she was about to leave, Harry pulled her aside and pushed something into her palm. She frowned at him before looking down at her palm. It was his amulet, the one with the Home Rune on it.

“That Amulet will bring you back here in case of an emergency. It’s not a portkey, so it’ll work through any ward, including the school wards. Say ‘Home’ while holding it to come here, and say ‘Return’ while you’re in here to go back to the last place you used it. Okay?” Jessica swallowed her pride and nodded, silently thankful that he’d give something so important to her for the off chance she’d need it.

With the benefit of Hindsight, Jessica was sort of glad that she missed most of the things that happened to the rest of the gang the first month of school. Hindsight, however, is, as they say, 20/20, and at the time, she was incredibly annoyed that she missed most of the action.

The first thing she missed was Hermione’s blow up at Fred and George in the Gryffindor Common Room. According to the detailed re-enactment she got from Ginny and the twins a few weeks later, Hermione had begun lecturing the duo on how they weren’t allowed to advertise for test subjects for their products on the Gryffindor Noticeboard, despite the fact they were offering fair pay for willing
participants. Luke had only been able to diffuse the situation by asking her if she preferred they test on unwilling subjects instead, which hastily silenced Hermione’s arguments. The second thing she very much would have liked to see was Professor Flitwick’s visit to the Home. Matt had cornered the Charms professor after class a few days after their meeting and asked to show him something odd he’d discovered on the Sixth Floor. Hermione had been waiting for them and opened the portrait into the Home conspicuously to allow them in. Hermione said the look on Flitwick’s face was priceless. He had absolutely gushed over the promise of being able to research Lily Potter’s construction of an entire parallel pocket dimension. He even revealed that Lily had come to him with help on the subject of Transcendental Charms in her Seventh Year and proclaimed she was one of the best students he ever had the honour of teaching. As for Harry’s offer, the diminutive teacher with Goblin ancestry agreed to their escape plan but refused point blank to join anything Defenders related for the same reason he wouldn’t join Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix. His obligation was to his students, nothing more, nothing less. Jessica had to admire that.

The third thing she had wanted to see was Harry, Hermione and Ron’s first Defence Against the Dark Arts Class. With Professor Lupin – and Umbridge. It quickly became the stuff of legend across the entire school. Jessica had been sitting in Transfiguration, focussing on transfiguring a school provided gerbil into a pocket watch when all of a sudden, Ginny – who was on the other side of the room with the Gryffindors – had sat bolt upright, cursed in the middle of class, and rushed out the door, wand in hand, books and gerbil discarded. McGonagall had called after her, but Ginny was already gone. McGonagall quickly rushed after her, leaving the entire class in disarray. Everyone knew what had happened by the end of the day. But Jessica wasn’t sure what was the truth, and what was an exaggeration. With Harry, you could never tell.

She was finally pulled out of her funk when Luna had skipped into Potions in the last week of September and started handing out free copies of the Quibbler to everyone in the room, Ravenclaws and Slytherins alike. Most binned them – or set them on fire when Lovegood wasn’t watching. But she slid hers into her bag, only retrieving it late that night in the safety of her curtained off four poster bed in the Slytherin Fourth Year Girls Dorm. The article was the usual insane drabble one expected from the Quibbler, but one of the pieces was titled: The Defenders – Mischief and Marauders. She rolled her eyes and pointed her wand at the page.

“I solemnly swear I’m up to no good,” she whispered, and the words rearranged themselves into a brief note.

Alias,

Sorry for the lack of communication, but as you’ve probably figured out, Umbridge is watching my every move. The situation is far worse than we feared. Bring as many Slytherins as you can trust to the Hogs Head Inn at Noon on the first Hogsmeade visit next week. We have a plan.

Stay safe,

Harry.
The moment Harry sat down in his first Defence Against the Dark Arts Class of the year, he knew he was in trouble. Lupin, who was only three days past the Full Moon, was sitting on his desk, book in hand, looking incredibly frail. Sitting in the corner on a fluorescent pink plush armchair, was Umbridge, sipping a cup of tea. Harry sat next to Hermione in the middle of the room, and carefully extracted his textbook – Curses and their Counters: The Art of Magical Duelling – out of his bookbag. He glanced at Brains, who was looking equally as anxious. Once the rest of the class had sat down, Malfoy in the very front row – which was incredibly unlike him – Lupin stood up, dusted off his robes, and placed his book down on the desk.

“Welcome back for your fifth year. I take it you’ve already been dumped with mountains of homework by your other classes today?” A murmur of agreement passed through the class, and Lupin smiled softly at them all.

“Well, you’ll be pleased to know that you won’t be getting any extra work from me.” The entire room let out a collective sigh of relief. “But this is your O.W.L year, so don’t expect me to go easy on you forever. Now, you’ll be delighted to hear that last year we finished all our new content for this course. And that means, this year we bring everything you’ve learnt together, and we prepare you for exactly what a Magical Duel, be it with a fellow wizard, or a beast, may entail.”

‘Hem, Hem.’ Umbridge cleared her throat and pulled out a clipboard.

“Yes, Madame Umbridge?” Lupin asked politely as Malfoy sniggered in his seat.

“I apologise for interrupting, Mr Lupin, but I couldn’t help but notice that you plan to teach these young people how to duel?” Lupin frowned.

“Yes, that is what’s set out in my lesson plan. The one I submitted before term started, as every teacher does every year,” he said, seemingly confused.

“Oh no,” Hermione whispered in Harry’s ear, “This is a lot worse than we feared.” Harry didn’t have a chance to answer, as Umbridge spoke again in her high-pitched girly voice.

“Yes, I’ve been looking over your plan, and I must say, it is far from the Ministry-approved course outlined for this subject.”

Lupin raised an eyebrow at the woman. “The Ministry-approved course is highly insufficient to pass an O.W.L exam Madame Umbridge. My lesson plan is drawn from the ICW Defence Against the Dark Arts Syllabus for the Ordinary Wizarding Level. If you have a problem with it, I suggest you take it up with the ICW Department of Education and Magical Testing,” he said flatly, before returning his attention to the class. Harry breathed a sigh of relief.

See, don’t worry. Hermione was freaking about nothing. Ginny told him through their connection. She was rather board in Transfiguration, having already succeeded in transfiguring her gerbil.

“First things first, let’s see if you remember what I taught you last year. The most important spell
when facing any opponent is what?”

Hermione’s hand shot into the air, “The Shield Charm, Professor.”

“Correct Miss Granger, take two points for Gryffindor.”

“And just why is it the most important? Someone else?”

“Because it can be used, depending on the focus and will of the caster, to defend against any spell,” Daphne Greengrass recited.

“Exactly, two points to Slytherin. And what are the exceptions to that rule?”

“The Unforgivable Curses,” the class replied. Umbridge’s face contorted into a scowl.

“Excellent.” Lupin exclaimed, “Now if you’ll all stand up. Let’s see if your memory extends beyond theory, shall we?” Lupin pulled out his wand and, once everyone was on their feet, sent all the desks to the side of the room. He spun his wand over his head and three targets dropped from the roof.

“Wands out everyone. We’ll start with Expelliarmus, then make our way up. Every week from now until O.W.L.’s we’ll be having a little competition. The person who gets the most spells in the target by the end of the period will receive a two-week homework exemption.” That got everyone moving fast to line up behind a target. Harry led the right-hand line, Malfoy the left, and Ron ended up in the lead of the middle line.

Lupin stepped to the side of the room and flicked his wand to his record player, which he kept in the back corner.

“Disarming Charms on three! One, two thr…”

“Enough!” Umbridge cried, stepping straight between the students and the targets. Her face was bright red, and her hands were visibly shaking. Harry had forgotten she was even in the room. She banished the targets and silenced the record player. Every student, even Malfoy, had their jaw drop open. Lupin’s expression had grown quite dark.

“I’m sorry? I wasn’t aware you had the right to disrupt my class Madame Umbridge. I must have missed that in the fifty-page memo you Owled us.” Hermione, who was behind Harry, gripped his shoulder.

Okay… this is bad.

A bitter cold began to creep out from the Gemini Rune.

“You were going to have school children casting deadly spells! I cannot allow such a thing. I should have expected it from… from… something like you,” Umbridge fumed. She was trembling something fierce. Harry’s jaw dropped open.

“Something like me?” Lupin said, taking a step forward, “to what exactly are you referring to Madame?”

“I held my tongue over the goblin half breed, and you mark my words that games keeper will be gone before he’s even back from whatever leave he’s on. But you teaching students how to attack each other; I will not have!”

“Pardon me, Professor Lupin, but Madame Umbridge, I’m afraid you’re mistaken,” Hermione said,
stepping between Harry and Ron, “The disarming charm is not lethal. In fact, it’s potential for
damage is quite minimal, as evidenced by the fact that it is a charm and not…”

“Silence! You don’t know what you’re saying. This… thing… has been corrupting your mind.”

“Actually,” Ron said hesitantly, “it’s right here in the textbook.” He opened his book and pointed to
a page with the Disarming Charm written in bold ink at the top. Harry couldn’t help the smirk that
hinted at the edge of his mouth.

Is Ron defending Hermione? Ginny’s voice echoed.

 Yep.

 Hm. The flame’s still burning, I guess.

What?

You never noticed? Ron likes Hermione. Has since the second year. That’s why they’re always
fighting. Or were.

Harry’s smile definitely came out that time.

You’re so cute when you’re oblivious.

“The Ministry will not allow you to teach these dangerous spells to school children,” Umbridge
stated firmly, as if her words would make the fact reality.

“As Miss Granger, who is an exemplary student, stated. The Disarming Charm is not lethal as you
seem to believe. You can borrow one of the textbooks and check if you’d like?” Remus said, a smug
smirk on his face.

Umbridge looked about five seconds away from blowing steam out her ears she was so red.

“It is the view of the Ministry of Magic that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to
get students through their examinations. The ICW course is unacceptable and out of date for modern
peaceful times.”

“Um, Madame Umbridge,” Parvati stuttered, “There’s a practical element to our defence exam. If we
don’t practice, how will we pass?”

“As long as you have studied the theory hard enough, there is no reason you should not be able to
perform the spells under carefully controlled examination conditions,” Umbridge said, clearly
regaining her stride.

“I’m afraid that’s highly inaccurate Madame. Numerous studies prove…”

“Silence! I will not be contradicted by the likes of you! As long as the children have studied the
theory hard enough…”

“And how’s theory supposed to prepare us for what’s out in the real world?” Harry yelled, and most
of the class murmured their agreement. Umbridge turned her gaze on him, and Harry was actually
put back at how much hatred he saw there.

What did you ever do to her?

She must really not have liked me calling her out in front of Fudge.
This is more than that.

“This is a school, not the real world.”

“School is meant to prepare you for the real world, that is what school is all about, Madame Umbridge. Now I suggest you sit down and allow me to continue with my class,” Lupin said firmly, trying to diffuse the growing tension. But Harry was having none of it.

“So, we’re not supposed to be prepared for what’s waiting for us out there? Is that your view? You want us all to be killed or worse?!”

“There is nothing waiting out there, Mr Potter. Who do you imagine wants to attack children like yourself?” Umbridge said, a sudden gleam appearing in her eye.

It’s bait! Don’t fall for it!

“Have you not been paying attention the last months? People have started disappearing across the country! I’ve been abducted not once, but twice by the same people. I’d wager they’d like to attack and rape children, like myself,” Harry raged.

“And who exactly is this group you keep mentioning. You haven’t even given us a name. I am inclined to think you have made the whole thing up in your quest for more attention!” Harry’s jaw fell clean open, Ron gasped in shock, Neville fell over, Lavender Brown let out a tiny squeal, and Lance Hunter short whistled in shock.

Okay. I’ve had it with this hag.

You and me both love.

“Now, all of you, let us make things quite plain. You have been frightened into believing that you are at risk of attack by dark forces. This is a lie. The only thing you need to fear is the half-breed standing in front of me…”

The Gemini Rune blazed forth in fury, and Harry snapped.

“Watch your language, Toad-face. Or I’ll have to watch it for you.” Everyone turned to face Harry, but he didn’t care. He stepped forward, wand still in his hand – though it was by his side in a non-threatening manner – and glared at Umbridge, who suddenly looked very frightened.

“I do not tolerate slurs against good people. Especially slurs based on the pathetic belief that you are better than anyone else. Is that clear?”

I’m on my way. McGonagall’s chasing after me. Keep her distracted for a few seconds...

“Are you threatening me, Mr Potter,” Umbridge asked coldly.


“I guess I am,” Harry said. The Firebrand was searing against his arm. He knew that he wasn’t doing an excellent job of keeping his anger, or his power, in check, but he didn’t care. This woman, no matter her position, would not be calling anyone a half breed in front of him. Especially not Remus.

“Then I’ll see you expelled,” Umbridge said sweetly.

“Good luck with that,” Ginny exclaimed, blasting the classroom door off its hinges and waltzing into the room as if she owned it, “You can’t do shit to him. Your boss wouldn’t dare. Not with a
potentially dangerous element out there. Not to mention, you couldn’t expel him anyway, he’s emancipated you, idiot. You can’t touch him. So, get off your high horse and calm the fuck down, bitch.”

“Now,” Harry said, restoring the room’s attention to him, “You are going to apologise to Professor Lupin, then I am going to write a letter to the Minister for Magic, your boss, asking him to curtail your behaviour or have you removed.”

“Mr Potter, Mrs Potter! What is going on here!?” McGonagall yelled, entering the room with heavy breathing.

“Madame Umbridge called Professor Lupin an inappropriate racial slur in front of the class, Professor McGonagall. I was requesting she apologise for her offensive comment,” Harry said, turning and nodding to his Head of House respectfully.

McGonagall’s face softened, and she nodded to Harry and Ginny.

“Professor Lupin, is Mr Potter correct?” Remus, who now had his hand on Harry’s shoulder, turned to McGonagall.

“I’m afraid so. I had intended to ignore it, but Mr Potter was highly offended,” He said simply.

“Well, Dolores? Anything to say?”

“Mr Potter threatened me and should be expelled from the school immediately, and so should Miss Weasley!”

“Mrs Potter. Get it right, hag,” Ginny growled, fire alight in her eyes.

Damn your hot when you’re mad.

Thanks. I have a feeling I’m going to be like this a lot with this toad around.

“Mr Potter and Mrs Potter cannot be expelled from the school Dolores. You know that, as you tried it before they even reached the castle and were told the same thing. They are not considered minors in the eyes of the law and attend the school of their own free will. They are not subjugated to the board’s Duty of Care policy.”

Umbridge’s face made a remarkable impression of Uncle Vernon’s, and she stormed towards the door. Harry narrowed his eyes and watched her go.

“Potters, you need to be careful. You’re smart. You know why Madame Umbridge is here, she’s going to report you to the Minister now.”

Harry shrugged, “what’s he going to do?”

“Send you to Azkaban if you aren’t careful.”

Ginny scoffed, “I’d like to see him try.”
Umbridge’s next inspection was a Charms class with the fourth-year Gryffindors and Ravenclaws. Thankfully it ran a lot smoother than Harry’s Defence Against the Dark Arts class. Umbridge attempted to goad both Flitwick and Ginny into a confrontation, but neither of them rose to the bait. In fact, Flitwick had designed his lesson so that they didn’t actually use any practical charm work that might have set the woman off. Instead, he set it for homework. Umbridge had still found ways to attack the diminutive teacher however, highly offending the Ravenclaws in the process.

Unfortunately for Umbridge, Professor Flitwick was hands down the most well-liked teacher at the school, so even the Slytherin’s were loath to say anything bad about him. Well except Malfoy, but it seemed even his own house was turning against him in their hatred of Umbridge. Many of them might hate half breeds as much as she did, but they cared more about getting good grades in their classes than getting rid of the best teachers in the school.

Harry sent off a rather annoyed letter to Fudge via Hedwig written with help from Hermione that he hoped might diffuse the situation slightly. Harry didn’t like using such underhanded tactics, but Hermione and Matt had assured him they were necessary. Both of them being much smarter than he was, he deferred to their judgement. He just wished that Jessica could put her opinion in too, she was the best at these things.

Moony was forced to dull down his Defence classes. His planned ‘no homework competitions’ got scrapped, and they weren’t allowed to do spells in class. But he still had them practising wand movements, and they were learning about dodging and quick shielding. These were both things Lupin and Sirius had drilled into the Defenders the previous year in their first term lessons in the Home, so Harry and Hermione were quite good at it. As was Lance Hunter from Slytherin. Harry didn’t really know much about him, other than that he was a Half-Blood and hadn’t called Hermione a Mudblood before, so he couldn’t be all bad. What he did know was that he was a fair hand at duelling, – or at least the parts they could do without angering Umbridge – so much so that he was the only one beside Hermione and Lupin himself that kept up with him. Was having the Firebrand cheating? Hermione insisted it was, but Harry preferred Matt’s view of using all abilities available.

Harry had not heard from Sirius at all since he returned to school, and he wasn’t sure exactly how he felt about that. On the one hand, he was still slightly mad at him for tricking him into visiting his boss Amelia Bones about his treatment at the Dursley’s, which he had researched behind Harry’s back. On the other, the silence was killing him.

Snape was also a victim of Umbridge. Harry almost felt sorry for him… actually, that would be a lie. He had thoroughly enjoyed his humiliation.

Harry was sitting in his customary seat with Hermione at the very back of the room, using Lily Potter’s copy of the Potions Textbook rather than Snape’s instructions on the board to prepare a Strengthening Solution when the pink toad let herself into the Dungeon classroom without so much as a knock. Snape looked absolutely furious for a few moments, before schooling his features and continuing to prowl around people’s Cauldrons.

Snape seemed to be intent on taking out all the rage he’d missed out on imparting on Harry while he and Hermione had been off, to quote Snape himself, “gallivanting in other countries,” the previous year. As such, he and Hermione worked diligently every period they had with the greasy git to make sure their potion was perfect. If it was anything less than, Snape would vanish the potion and fail them, as even he couldn’t fail them if they created a perfect brew.

Initially, Umbridge sat at a corner desk making notes. Then, about halfway through the lesson, she started interrogating Snape as he prowled, specifically as he reached Harry and Hermione’s table.

“Well, the class does seem quite advanced for their level,” Umbridge said in her annoying voice,
which had quickly risen to above even Voldemort’s high-pitched cackle to achieve first place on
Harry’s list of most hated noises. Snape stopped from his rigorous examination of Harry’s potion to
stare at Umbridge with his usual sneer.

“How long have you been teaching at Hogwarts?”

“Fourteen years.” Snape told her. Harry, trying desperately hard not to laugh as Snape’s sneer
became even more fixed on his face, accidentally dropped his Salamander blood into his potion
much too early. Hermione hissed at him and began fiddling with his potion to fix it, but Harry was
too fixated on Snape to care.

“You applied first for the Defence Against the Dark Arts post is that correct?” Umbridge asked.

“Yes,” Snape said quietly.

“But you were unsuccessful?”

Snape’s eyes went wide, and Harry choked on his tongue.

“Obviously.” He couldn’t help it. Harry, Neville, Dean, Seamus and Ron all burst out laughing in
unison.

“And you have regularly applied for the Defence Post since you first joined the school, I believe?”

“Yes,” Snape said quietly. Harry spotted his hand hovering dangerously close to his wand, and
quickly turned back to his potion, only to realise it was now the exact opposite of the colour it was
meant to be. And his cauldron was starting to melt. Hermione was hiding under her desk, Lily
Potter’s textbook clutched in her robes, a shield charm brandished in front of her.

*Honey, please duck.*

Harry dove to the ground and thrust his hand out behind him, “Protego!” A shimmering shield
appeared around him, drawing the attention of everyone in the room. A second later, Harry’s
cauldron detonated, and a mushroom cloud filled the air. Harry dropped his shield and risked an
upward glance. His desk had been evaporated, as had the first layer of stone flooring. Snape was
sitting on the floor, robes on fire and supporting a distinct lack of hair on his head. Also, it looked
like his nose was broken, though Harry couldn’t be sure, as it had always been long, pointy and
crooked at an odd angle.

“Potter. Detention for the rest of the month. How many times must I tell you not to add Salamander
Blood to anything if not handling the mixture properly?” Snape asked coldly.

Umbridge, who was somehow completely unaffected, scribbled on her clipboard, cleared her throat
yet again and left the room.

The final straw that turned the entire school against Umbridge was when she ‘inspected’
McGonagall’s Transfiguration class in the second week of term. Neither Harry nor Ginny had been
in the class, but the first-year students who were had regaled any who would listen of McGonagall’s
virtual dressing down of the most hated person in Hogwarts.

Professor Flitwick may have been the most well-liked of the Hogwarts staff, but Professor
McGonagall was undoubtedly the most respected. You did not interrupt or insult Professor
McGonagall. Especially not to her face.

But Harry and the Defenders couldn’t figure out what to do about her. Harry’s letter to Fudge had
gone unanswered, and by the end of the third week of September, Hedwig had yet to return, which was increasing Harry’s insecurity. The only stabilising element was Ginny. She was always there in the back of his mind whenever Harry and Umbridge were in the same room, and her constant reminders to keep his cool had spared him numerous Detentions. Ginny herself was leaning heavily on Harry for the same reason: it wasn’t as if her being the more trigger happy of the two was unknown after all. Malfoy took exceptional joy in needling the two of them. Ginny was itching to Bat Bogey him, but Umbridge seemed to always be just around the corner whenever Malfoy baited them. As a result, they kept as close to Matt as possible when they were outside of class. His senses always gave them forewarning before Umbridge could sneak up on them, and they’d managed to avoid detentions with her so far.

On the Friday of the third week, Harry was beginning to go stir crazy, and he couldn’t help ranting to Hermione and Susan Bones as they stepped into Ancient Runes.

“I have a theory. No, no, no, hear me out. This one’s good. So, what if she’s actually the offspring of a toad and a Dementor? Wouldn’t that make sense?” Harry exclaimed as they took seats in the front row. Harry had taken significant joy in watching people slowly trickle out of this class. They had started with about twenty students in third year, but now they only had nine. Himself, Hermione, Susan Bones, Daphne Greengrass, Anthony Goldstein, Padma Patil, Leopold Fitz and Jemma Simmons. Fitz and Simmons, a pair of inseparable Ravenclaws Harry quite liked, sat down beside them as Harry made his piece.

“I can see it,” Jemma agreed, pulling out her book. But Fitz was shaking his head rapidly and gesturing behind them. Harry, a look of mortification sliding onto his face, turned around to see Umbridge sitting elegantly in the back row, clipboard out. Harry glanced to Hermione, a look of horror on his face. They’d thought at least Professor Babbling and Professor Vector – both Purebloods – would be safe from Umbridge. They were wrong.

Professor Babbling stepped out of her office and into the classroom proper fiddling with a large astrolabe as she did so.

“Good Morning, Class!” She exclaimed in her usual exuberant manner. “I’ve got a real treat for us today! I’ve borrowed this wonderful piece of technology from a friend of mine who works in the Department of… Mysteries…” Babbling had just noticed Umbridge sitting in the corner.

“Oh, don’t halt your lesson on my account, Professor. Please continue,” she beckoned in a honeyed voice Harry just knew meant they should all pack up and reschedule the lesson. Babbling, most of the colour vanished from her face, nodded a few times, before drawing her wand and raising a pedestal from the floor.

“Gather around everyone,” she said, her cheeriness a thing of the past. Everyone stood and surrounded the Astrolabe. It was a thing of beauty, Harry thought. A dozen rings all orbiting a single sphere in the heart. Each ring had a series of images depicted on them… many of them Harry recognised from Astronomy.

“Are those constellations, Professor?” Susan asked, voicing Harry’s thoughts.

“Indeed, they are Miss Bones! Well spotted, indeed. Each ring of the Astrolabe as you see it here is etched with one of the 39 runic symbols based upon the constellations we see in the night sky. Even the Zodiac Runes.” Babbling glanced to Harry at this point. “The Astrolabe, a tool of the ancient Witches and Wizards, allows us to use the stars as guidance across the world. It has naturally few uses in the modern world, but it’s use in Ancient Runes remains.” Babbling levitated the Astrolabe over the pedestal and pointed her wand at the core with two hands.
“Activation of the Astrolabe requires a direct connection to the Magical Core or the Soul.” Babbling closed her eyes, and her wand began to glow with an ethereal white light. A beam of energy light up the room, before colliding with the Astrolabe core. Babbling stumbled back and was caught by Fitz and Simmons. Harry and Hermione both stood transfixed by the Astrolabe. The rings were slowly beginning to spin around the core, and all the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck were standing at full attention.

“Now, let’s dim these lights shall we,” Babbling said, and with another flick of her wand, all the lights in the room went out. Except for the Astrolabe. Now the pulsing glow of the core was even stronger, and all the runes on the orbiting rings were glowing as they rotated. Then, in a burst of light, each rune began emitting rays of their own, and the entire room was filled with images. All 39 symbols flying across the walls. Even Umbridge looked impressed, which was saying something.

“You can see why these patterns were invaluable to old-world travellers – muggle and magical alike. But for us Runic Masters, which all of you are well on your way to being, they carry an even greater meaning. It is this knowledge that led us to the invention of Apparation!” The entire class awed, and Babbling’s smile fully returned to her face. ”If we have enough power, we can create a wormhole, a tear in the fabric of space-time, which enables us to travel between locations instantaneously, move between parallel dimensions or, theoretically, even travel through time!” Harry’s head snapped towards the astrolabe. Could this be the secret of the Home’s existence? Had his mum been sitting in a similar class thinking the same thing Harry was right now? It was enough to make his head spin.

“For example. We can use six runes to mark a three-dimensional location within space, then add a seventh to represent the point of origin. This will open a wormhole between the point of origin and the target destination. The only problem is that opening such a bridge, and then maintaining the connection long enough to be of any use requires massive amounts of power. In the past, Runic Masters have used energy channelled directly from the sun, or from an active volcano to power such a bridge, and even further back still, there is evidence to suggest that the Ancients drew on a type of unknown power to achieve sustained connections for almost half an hour! Incredible, isn’t it?!” Harry certainly agreed. This was incredible. He couldn’t help but stare in awe at the symbols rotating around the room. But there was something that didn’t quite make sense. He was sure he’d seen these patterns before somewhere. But for the life of him, he couldn’t think of where. It was on the tip of his tongue, but he just couldn’t place it.

“A few of my colleagues have requested access to the new Muggle invention known as Nuclear Reactors, as they believe that such power would be sufficient…”

“Enough of this!” Umbridge yelled, and the entire class – Babbling included – groaned. Harry turned towards the toad woman, who was hurrying down the stairs, wand in hand. Harry moved to stand in front of the Astrolabe, and Professor Babbling, having guessed as well as he had what was about to happen, quickly disabled the device before Umbridge could damage it and possibly kill them all.

“I will not have you filling these children’s heads with fanciful notions of Ancients and Wormholes and Muggle Power. The Ancients are a lie spread by other nations to make themselves sound better than us, the original decedents of Merlin!”

“The Founders predated Merlin – he was a Slytherin for starters, and Merlin himself was an Ancient,” Hermione muttered under her breath.

“These wormholes do not exist and cannot exist!”

“Then how do we apparate or use portkeys?” Susan whispered into Harry’s ear, and he couldn’t help smirking.
“And the Muggles are still living in squaller like the inferior filth they are!”

“Then why are we hiding from them?” Daphne Greengrass of all people whispered, arms folded across her chest.

“This… device will be confiscated into Ministry custody at once!”

Babbling snorted, her smile gone once more as she returned light to the room.

“Sure. It’s Ministry property you idiot. I have to have it back to Croaker within half an hour. It’s an annual contract we have the DoM. So have fun dealing with the Unspeakables when they come asking for it.” With that, Babbling turned on her heel and walked out the door. Harry and the other eight kids quickly gathered their books and followed her out.

“We have to do something about her,” Susan moaned as they made their way towards the Great Hall.

“Like what?” Fitz asked, “She controls the entire school.”

“I don’t know. At the very least we need to be actually practising defence, and I could use help with the charms too. Not having Flitwick helping us with them in class anymore is making things a lot harder,” Susan sighed, “Harry being attacked twice now just proves that everything she says about no threat out there is hogwash.”

“Not to mention all the ordinary thieves and magical beasts we might encounter,” Anthony Goldstein added.

“We need a teacher,” Hermione perked up, “someone Umbridge can’t do anything about. All the Hogwarts staff, except maybe McGonagall, are in Umbridge’s firing line. Professor Lupin will be gone by Christmas, Professor Flitwick not long after, and I doubt Professor Babbling will be safe either after that.”

“But who then?” Jemma asked.

“It would have to be some teacher,” Padma said as they reached the Hall.

“Yeah. Let me know if you find one. I might be a Slytherin, but I want to pass my O.W.L’s as much as you guys,” Daphne stated. Then she turned on her heel and walked over to the Slytherin table.

“Guys, I’ll catch up to you… I… I’ve had an idea,” Hermione stuttered, eyes fixed on Harry. Then she fled up the Grand Staircase in the direction of Gryffindor Tower.

Hermione missed History of Magic. For anyone else, this wouldn’t have been very notable. Harry himself skipped History of Magic all the time. But Hermione had never missed a lesson in her life. Not only was Hermione missing, but Ron and Parvati were gone as well. So as soon as class finished, Harry bolted to the Gryffindor Common Room. He arrived at the same time as Ginny and Luna, who’d been in Herbology together. When they stepped inside, they found Hermione, Ron, Parvati, Fred, George and Katie Bell, all yelling at each other in front of the fire.

“We can’t do much by ourselves,” Ron was saying in a defeated voice, “I mean, all right, we can go and look jinxes up in the library and try and practice them, I suppose.”

“Ron’s right. It would be like shooting in the dark…” Fred pointed out.

“… and we can’t go to Madam Pomfrey if we get ourselves injured,” George added.
“No, I agree, we’ve gone past the stage where we can just learn things out of books,” Hermione admitted.

“We need a teacher,” Parvati concluded, mirroring Hermione’s statement earlier that morning.

“But who?” Katie asked.

“What are you guys up to?” Harry asked, walking over to them with a raised eyebrow. Everyone looked at him, and based on Hermione’s evil grin, he had the feeling he had just walked into a trap.

“We need someone that can teach us DADA, Charms and even Runes that Umbridge won’t let us learn. Someone that knows what’s out there, and can correct us if we’re doing anything wrong,” Hermione said, an odd sparkle to her eye that Harry wasn’t sure he liked directed at him.

“I can’t get Sirius in here. Or Tonks. I don’t know who you’d get,” Harry admitted, slumping his shoulders.

“No. Padfoot and Tonks aren’t who I have in mind.”

“Who then?” Harry asked.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Luna said dreamily, “She’s talking about you, Harry.” Harry looked from Luna to Hermione, to Ginny, waiting for one of them to admit to pulling his leg. But on the contrary, Ginny was giving him that blazing look that he both loved and feared.

“Excellent,” She beamed, cracking her fingers.

Oh yeah. Definitely a trap.

The Hogs Head was not an establishment Harry would ever willingly step into. He decided this very quickly after walking in with Hermione and Ginny. He wasn’t sure whether it was the thick smell of goats, the shady looking customers, the ragged old bartender, or just the overall atmosphere that gave credence to the notion that more than one person had been murdered inside it. But despite this, he entered the dingy pub anyway, and Hermione led him to a back room, where almost thirty people were waiting for them.

Wow. I never expected so many…

Harry’s jaw actually dropped open slightly. When Hermione had unveiled her plan to create a secret study group to practice the DADA and offensive Charms that had now been banned, he had laughed it off. But after some serious thought, he’d finally decided that it wasn’t a bad idea. Plus, as Matt had pointed out, more allies was never a bad thing, especially with Voldemort on the rise. They had still heard nothing from Sirius, Hedwig was missing, Fudge certainly wasn’t helping them as they’d initially hoped he would, and the Dragons had vanished. There had been a massive explosion near the Wakandan Border, but no evidence any of the Defenders could actually connect to them. Harry had even used Matt’s owl Stick to send a letter to Doctor Strange. The Doctor’s assistant, Wong, had sent back a short two-sentence reply, “Doctor Strange is currently occupied in the Dark Dimension. He will address your inquiry upon his return.” Not very helpful. So, it was just Harry and the seven of them, and now Harry stood, nerves the highest since his confrontation with the Ministry.
Danny stood with fellow Hufflepuffs Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Ernie MacMillan, Eloise Midgen, Zacharias Smith, Megan Jones and Justin Finch-Fletchley. The Ravenclaws (Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, Michael Corner, Padma, Cho, Marietta Edgecombe, Foggy, Matt and Luna) were gathered around Fitz and Simmons, who were regaling them with how incredible the Astrolabe had been. And occupying the chairs in the centre of the room were the Gryffindors – Fred and George, Lee Jordan, Alicia, Katie, Lavender, Parvati, Dean, Seamus, Neville, Colin and Dennis Creevey, Demelza, Vicky Frobisher, Luke and Ron.

It was far more than he’d expected. But there were no Slytherins. None at all. Maybe Jessica hadn’t gotten his message? He had thought at least Daphne might have come… The door swung open one final time, and Daphne Greengrass, her sister Astoria, Lance Hunter, Cassius Warrington, a seventh year with short black hair he didn’t know, a girl with stringy brown hair who Harry thought was called Emilie, and finally, Jessica herself entered the room. Half the Gryffindors jumped to their feet and pulled their wands. Harry and Ginny instantly stepped between the two groups.

“Whoah, whoah, whoah. Wands down people. We’re all friends here,” Harry said calmly.

“What are they doing here?” Lee asked, angrily.

*I don’t think they’re catching onto the friends part of your statement Harry.*

*What gave you that impression?*

“We’re here to listen to what Potter has to say. Just like you, Jordan,” Warrington snapped, eyes narrowed and arms folded.

“I invited them, Lee,” Harry told the Gryffindors, “they have just as much right to learn as the rest of us.”

Lee huffed something about Slytherins and evil gits, before sitting back down in his seat. Ginny frowned.

*Ron didn’t get up.*

*What?*

But she was right. Ron hadn’t gotten up at all. Instead, his gaze was fixed on Jessica, who was doing her best to hide behind her hair at the back of the group.

Harry shrugged and called everyone together. All four houses took their seats, although the Slytherins were slightly apart from the other three, and nervous glances kept sliding their way.

Harry cleared his throat, and the chatter in the room slowly died away. Everyone was looking up at him now. It was ten times worse than at the Ministry. There he didn’t know anyone, here he knew all of them.

*You’ll do fine.*

*I wish I had your confidence.*

Suddenly the Gemini Rune bristled with a bright warmth that made Harry stumble slightly. He glared at Ginny, who winked sweetly at him, before taking a deep breath and standing up.

“Okay… um… well, we all know why we’re here. Umbridge is taking over Hogwarts on behalf of the Ministry. Why? Well, we’re not exactly sure,” Harry began nervously.
“And that means that Professor Lupin and Professor Flitwick’s days are numbered. Umbridge has already taken control of the school curriculum. It won’t be long before she controls the staff too,” Hermione said stiffly.

“Which means we need a teacher who can show us what we need to do. We need to be able to protect ourselves against what’s out there, and if Umbridge doesn’t let us learn how, we have to take matters into our own hands,” Ginny proclaimed.

Then, surprising the hell out of both Harry and Ginny, Susan Bones stood up from her seat and stared straight at Harry.

“I know… I know why Umbridge is doing what she’s doing,” she said hesitantly. Everyone in the room turned towards her.

“You do?” Hermione asked, incredulously.

“My Aunt Amelia figured it out. It was something Fudge mentioned to her. He thinks that Dumbledore is going to use us to take over the Ministry. To train us up like some wizard army. That’s why he’s making such a big deal about the Headmaster’s claims that You-Know-Who is back. Says it’s all a game to take the Minister’s position.”

“What a load of rubbish,” Ron snorted.

“As much as I hate to agree with my brother on anything, that does seem a bit out there,” Fred said, scratching his head.

“That’s what my Aunt thinks, and she’s the head of the DMLE, so I wouldn’t dismiss it out of hand,” Susan said grumpily.

“All I’m saying is…”

“No think about it. It makes sense.” The voice belonged to Jessica, who quickly became the centre of attention. She blushed scarlet, which clashed terribly with her raven coloured hair, but ploughed forward.

“Fudge is terrified that Dumbledore’s right and the Dark Lord might actually be back. The evidence is everywhere. People disappearing. Harry being kidnapped twice. So, he’s doing the only thing he can, try and place the public onto someone else’s radar. He’s painted Dumbledore as the enemy and used that to strip him of as much power as he can. He’s been kicked off the Wizengamot, he’s lost his position in the ICW, and now the school is under threat. The more Fudge targets Dumbledore…”

“The easier it is to silence him, and make himself look better in the progress,” Lance finished. Harry grinned.

“This is why I love Slytherins.

Certainly, make it easy to figure things out, don’t they?

“So, what’s the last thing he has on his side?” Daphne Greengrass said simply.

“Us,” Matt said. Harry was pleased to note that many of the others, even some of the Gryffindors, were taking in what the Slytherins had to say.

“So Umbridge’s goal is to get Dumbledore kicked out of the school, why go after Lupin and Flitwick then?” Ernie Macmillan asked. Daphne moved to say something, but then stopped,
frowning to herself. It was Luna who eventually answered.

“Threats,” she stated simply, and all the Ravenclaws nodded, though the other three houses looked confused.

“It’s her paradigm,” Anthony elaborated.

“Still not getting it,” Dean said, looking highly bamboozled.

“Umbridge looks at the world through, forgive the pun, pink-tinged glasses. Only things in her world view – that of a pureblood with a hatred of all things not like her – can ever fit into it,” Fitz began, though his explanation involved a great deal of hand waving.

“As a result, the people she hates the most – her so-called ‘half-breeds’ – are the biggest threat. She sees them as the people Dumbledore – aka the enemy – will go to first, so she gets rid of them. Whether it’s the truth or not is irrelevant. That’s what she sees; therefore, it must be the truth,” Simmons finished.

“That’s also why she’s baiting Harry,” Padma added, “He’s the one we all look up to. He’s powerful, respected and famous. The perfect target leader figure for Dumbledore’s supposed student army. If she gets him expelled, the odds of us doing anything fall dramatically.” Harry’s jaw fell open, and he glanced to Hermione, who was in a similar state of shock. He hadn’t thought about that before. Umbridge was baiting him so he couldn’t unite the students?

“And that is why Ravenclaws and Slytherins should never be left alone in the same room,” Danny stated, clapping softly.

Wow…

But Harry was now beaming.

“Exactly. Umbridge doesn’t want us uniting, because if the houses stay at odds with one another, we’ll never get anywhere. Remember the Sorting Hat’s song? “We must unite inside her, or we’ll crumble from within.” Just look at what we’ve accomplished already. A couple of Slytherins and Ravenclaws working together solved a riddle I’ve been trying to solve on my own for weeks. Imagine what we could do together? I’m a Gryffindor, proud and true. I may not be a genius, but I’m not stupid; I’m a good fighter, and, as Ginny keeps telling me though I’m not sure I believe it myself, a fair leader.” Several people, Ron and Hermione included, laughed at this point. “But that doesn’t mean I’m any better than the rest of you. I’m a Gryffindor because I play the hero card, I value everyone else above myself. Hermione calls it my saving people thing, but that’s what makes me me. Ravenclaws are the most creative and knowledgeable people you’ll meet. They can solve problems and puzzles I’d never be able too.” Most of the Ravens were blushing hard by now. “Hufflepuffs come in all shapes and sizes, but there’s one thing you can always count on them for. You guys are loyal bastards, and if the rest of us lose track of where we’re going, we can always count on you guys to pull our heads in.” Finally, Harry turned to the Slytherins. “And without Slytherin, understanding people’s actions, uncovering secrets and seeing the big picture would be nigh impossible. Not to mention you guys are very good at coming up with plans that won’t get the rest of us screwed.”

Nice job.

Everyone in the room, even the Slytherins Harry was happy to note, were smiling now.

“This is just the first step. We need to learn to fight the battles Umbridge doesn’t want us too, we
need to pass our O.W.L’s, and N.E.W.T’s, and we need to fight back against Umbridge herself. We aren’t going to let her just take over our school, so I say we get rid of her. Together.”

The room broke out in cheers, and Harry couldn’t help the heat that rose to his cheeks.

*Nice going, Harry.*

Ginny grabbed his hand and squeezed, pushing as much love as she could through the rune.

Eventually, the cheering died down, and Hermione stood up, her voice suddenly very high pitched, “Well. Now that we have that settled, we need to decide on a place to meet, how often, how to keep it a…”

“Wait a moment,” Cassius stated, standing up from his seat, “what makes him the leader of this group?”

Almost everyone, Slytherins included, turned to look at the seventh year as if he had just sprouted a second head. Oddly enough, this filled Harry with a giddy sort of confidence, and he couldn’t help but step up to the burly older boy, shoulders pulled back, eyes narrowed. Ginny let his hand go, and Harry was now standing face to face with Warrington. Well, he would have been face to face if he was taller… or Warrington shorter. Either one would have worked.

“You reckon you can do it better?” He asked. Warrington merely raised an eyebrow at him, not intimidated in the slightest. Ginny was simply shaking her head.

“I’m seventh year for starters. I’ve got loads more experience than you. I could take you down easy. If anyone should be leading this club, it’s me or at the very least a seventh year who actually knows a thing or two. What are you going to teach us, Potter? A third-year spell?”

Ron cracked up laughing, and Fred, George, Ginny, Lee Jordan, Matt, Luna, Luke, Danny, Susan and Hermione all quickly followed suit. The rest of the group were all holding back their sniggers. Well, all except Cassius’s brown-haired friend.

*Kick his ass.*

Harry made to say something, but Hermione beat him to it.

“Can you summon a fully corporeal Patronus powerful enough to force back an army of Dementors at once?” Hermione wheezed through her laughter.

“Or defeat a 50ft Basilisk at twelve years old?” Ginny stated, pointedly.

“Did you outfly a Dragon?” Lavender asked, an intense sparkle in her eye.

“Fight your way through a gauntlet of terrorists?” Susan posed, more people joining the laughter by the second.

“Out duel a serial killer?” Danny queried.

“Apparate at fourteen without splinching?” Luna provided. Harry’s face was burning quite spectacularly now.

“Or win the Triwizard Tournament?” Fitz and Simmons finished in unison. Then, as the laughter reached a crescendo, the Firebrand burned white-hot against Harry’s arm, and he dropped to the floor, swinging out with his left leg in the process. Warrington had pulled his wand from beneath his
robes, face scarlet and tense, and fired off a stunning spell in seconds. His draw was fast, but Harry was faster. He swept Warrington off his feet, and he landed on the floor of the pub with a thud. Harry stabilised himself, drawing his own wand and pointing it at Warrington. He wasn’t the only one. Ginny, Hermione, Matt and Ron were all there, wands at the ready. The rest of the room was in shocked silence.

“Anyone else?” Harry asked, looking around. Nobody stood up. Harry pocketed his wand and held his hand out to Warrington. Cassius took it hesitantly, wary for any sort of trap.

“I don’t do that,” Harry stated firmly, and he pulled the older boy back to his feet. Then a round of clapping broke out in the room. Harry spun around and saw Sirius standing at the entrance to the private room, Hedwig resting on his shoulder.

“Now that was neat!” He exclaimed. He was wearing his Auror robes Harry noticed, with a silver pendant on his collar.

“Hedwig!” Harry beamed. The Snowy Owl flew from Sirius to Harry, landing on his shoulder and nipping his ear.

“Where have you been?!” He asked. Though it was more to Hedwig than Sirius, it was the old dog who answered, rather than the Owl.

“Busy. Got promoted. Thanks for noticing by the way,” Sirius said, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, good job. What about Hedwig?” Harry said hurriedly, not really paying attention to anything Sirius said as he inspected his friend for anything amiss. One of her feathers was misaligned, and she was favouring one leg.

“She was attacked,” Sirius said.

“What?!”

_Harry calm down._

“Not sure, but it happened up here somewhere. Must have known it wasn’t safe because she winged it all the way to me instead. Slept for three days.” Harry was currently sliding from panicked to mortified as he stroked Hedwig’s feathers.

“Attacked by what?” Ginny asked.

“It wasn’t an animal. Odds are it was a person,” Sirius explained, a grim look on his face that matched his Animagus form.

“Umbridge,” Hermione whispered.

“My thoughts exactly.”

“Can she do that? Read our mail?” Susan asked, and several others mirrored the statement.

“Legally? No,” Anthony said, “But somehow I doubt that would stop her.”

“Kid’s right,” Sirius admitted, scratching his beard, “I’d be careful what you say in messages if I was you.” Several hushed whispers broke out, and Sirius beckoned Harry into a corner of the room.

“So, what’s the news?” Harry asked quickly.
“Not much, I’m afraid. The Dragons are missing, but I’d wager you already figured that out. The Order is still watching something in the Department of Mysteries. We, the Auror Corp that is, caught Sturgis Podmore on his way out. Confiscated his invisibility cloak, so at least we have that now. Moody and Tonks are giving us regular updates, but the Order seems to be still sitting on the fence, not willing to get their toes wet if you get what I mean. I’m just glad I’m a free man, Dumbledore probably would’ve had me locked in Grimmauld Place if I wasn’t.”

Harry cringed. “You would’ve gone nuts.”

“Big-time,” Sirius confirmed, then he folded his arms and smirked, “So, illegal defence group hmm?”

“Wasn’t my idea,” Harry told him sharply.

“Had a feeling it wasn’t. You’ve got too much of your mother in you. I kind of wish James and I were still in school, though. We would’ve loved it. A smashing idea if ever I’ve heard one,” he exclaimed. Harry grinned. Knowing that his godfather approved made him feel a lot better about it.

“I’ve also got a message to pass on for Amelia’s niece,” he said, looking up. Harry followed his gaze to Susan, who was currently signing a piece of paper Hermione had placed on a desk. Actually, everyone was lining up to sign the document. That wasn’t part of the plan…

I don’t know. She just pulled it out and asked everyone to sign, so she had a record of who to contact once we’ve got a place to practice.

Okay, Brain’s knows what she’s doing.

“Susan!” Harry called as the strawberry blonde handed the quill to Hannah Abbot. Susan smiled sweetly and rushed over to them.

Dirty, rotten, no good…

Harry pushed Ginny’s commentary on Susan to the back of his mind and focussed on the Hufflepuff.

“Yeah?”

“I have a message from your Aunt,” Sirius said, taking the girls attention, “She says not to send her any more letters and to stay close to Harry. Fudge is trying to cut funding to the DMLE, but he needs Cabinet approval to do it, and the Department heads not in his pocket are holding out. She’s worried Umbridge might…”

“Do something to get to me. Got it. Stay close to Harry,” Susan confirmed, “Thanks Senior Auror Black.” She smiled to the pair of them, before meeting back up with Hannah and departing the room with the rest of the students.

As the last student – Ron – left the room, leaving Harry, Hermione and Ginny alone with Sirius, a crack rent the air, and a tiny House Elf with the longest set of ears Harry had ever seen appeared, causing all of them to jump.

“Apologies good sirs and mams. Wicken is to be delivering a message from Doctor Strange to Mr Harry Potter,” the elf said.

“Praise Morgana!” Ginny exclaimed.

Harry blinked rapidly and accepted the offered letter, and the elf vanished.
“Doctor Strange uses House Elves?” Hermione exclaimed, clearly scandalised, “I would’ve thought he of all people would understand their plight! I’ll have to…” But Harry wasn’t listening, he was fixated on the letter, which brought only more bad news.

_Harry,_

_Time is of the essence, so I must reply to your message with haste. Voldemort remains elusive, and the Dragons have indeed vanished. I have no knowledge as to where they might be, but I received a similar request for aid from Claire O’Neill, so we must assume the situation is dire. Unfortunately, I am in no position to help them. Voldemort has made use of the Darkhold to undo the traps I put in place to fend off Dormammu and his horde. It is taking all my efforts to restore them once more, but the Lord of Chaos is a cunning adversary, and he thwarts me at every turn._

_Based on your letter, Albus is no doubt similarly disabled. The Dragons will have to help themselves I’m afraid._

_Kind Regards, Stephen Strange._

Harry scowled and handed the letter to Hermione.

_Not good._

_Not good at all._

The next day, Harry, Hermione, Dean, Neville, Ginny and Demelza were walking into breakfast in the Great Hall when they encountered a crowd milling about the notice board. The last time Harry had seen a crowd that large around the notice board was when the Hogwarts Delegation was announced.

As soon as the people, many of whom had been at the Hogs Head the previous day, spotted them, they parted, leaving Harry and his companions a straight line to the board.

_By order of the Hogwarts High Inquisitor, all student organisations are henceforth disbanded. Any student caught engaging in illicit activities will be expelled._

“Fuck,” Harry said flatly.

“What about Quidditch?” Alicia whispered to Katie, who just shrugged her shoulders.

“Or charms club?” Simmons exclaimed. More hurried muttering rushed through the crowd about the fates of several clubs or study groups.

“This isn’t a coincidence Harry, Umbridge knows,” Jessica hissed in his ear. Harry turned towards her, but she was already gone, melted into the crowd as if she was never there.

“This is bad,” Neville muttered.

“What are we going to do?” Ron asked. Several other people echoed his statement.
Harry moulded his face into a confident grin reminiscent of Sirius and turned to the crowd.

“This doesn’t change anything. We go on as planned. It’s not as if she wasn’t going to try and stop us,” He said. Several people sighed in relief, others looked anxious, and those who hadn’t been to the meeting just stared at him, confused.

“What if someone ratted us out?” Ginny whispered to Hermione.

“If they did, we'd know it,” Hermione murmured back so quietly Harry only heard it thanks to his link with Ginny.

“How?”

“I put a spell on the parchment everyone signed. Trust me, we’ll know.”

“Well Potty, what’s going on here? Meeting up with your fan club?” Malfoy drawled as he stepped up from the dungeons with his entourage.

Harry just sighed, “I don’t have time for you today, Malfoy.” Malfoy at least had the intelligence to realise Harry was deeply troubled by something, though it seemed that his newfound mental capacity didn’t extend far enough to cover the English language.

“What?” he asked dumbly. Harry gestured to the board, absorbed in his own thoughts and not really caring. Where were they going to practice? It had to be somewhere Umbridge wouldn’t find them. Now more than ever. But where could they go? The Forest was a no go. Ginny had suggested the Shrieking Shack, but it was too small and getting everyone out there would’ve been too hard. An abandoned classroom had been his original plan, but they couldn’t trust the paintings not to spy on them.

“Quidditch is banned?” Malfoy exclaimed.

“Yep,” Harry said, again not really paying attention.

*Harry, focus, please.*

What?

“Potter. You got every student organisation banned?!” Malfoy yelled. Harry finally looked towards Malfoy. The pale-haired boy was redder than any Weasley he’d ever seen. His hands were shaking, and his gaze was practically murderous. Harry raised an eyebrow at him.

“No, Umbridge banned student organisations. Yes, that includes Quidditch.” He said it slowly and patronisingly, the same way one would speak to a child. Several people sniggered, but most remained quiet, watching the confrontation simmer. It was Malfoy who cracked.

In a rage, he pulled out his wand and screamed, “Crucio!!” Harry was so stunned his long-time rival had actually used an Unforgivable Curse on him, in the middle of a crowd of students, in the heart of the school, that he froze in shock. He must have looked quite the sight. It was only the Firebrand that saved him. Using years of honing his reflexes to his advantage, as soon as the Firebrand began to sting against his arm, Harry leapt up into the air. He somersaulted over the spell, and using a trick he’d learned from Claire O’Neill, flicked his wand towards the crowd.

“Protego Maximus Ventus!!”

A shield materialised around the surrounding students, and a gust of wind pushed all of them, even
the Defenders, to the stonework floor.

*Hey!!*

Harry landed in front of Malfoy, fist raised towards his face.

“You colossal idiot!!!” He screamed, and Malfoy flinched away from him.

“You cast an Unforgiveable Curse into a crowd of people! Are you insane!!!????” Malfoy’s mouth opened and closed like a fish.

Harry was so mad both he and Ginny missed the Firebrand heating up against Harry’s skin once more. And they missed Pansy Parkinson’s retaliation, much to their internal shame.

A spell hit Harry in the back, and his throat instantly constricted on itself. Harry tried to breathe, but no air made it to his lungs. He choked on the lack of air and spun around, the Firebrand searing painfully against his arm. He raised his hands to his throat, desperately trying to force air inside.

*Harry!!!*

Ginny’s voice was distant, and the freezing fear that flooded the rune on his neck was vague and confusing. Harry tried to wretch, but no matter what he tried no air made it to his lungs. He tried to point his wand at Parkinson, who had somehow gotten around the shield spell blocking the rest of the people away, but his arm wouldn’t obey him. He lost his grip on the shaft of wood and tripped to the floor. Then a fist hit the back of his head, and he lurched forward.

“Expelliarmus!!” Harry couldn’t tell who the voice belonged too precisely. Everything was swimming, people and objects blurring in and out of sight even with his glasses. The Gemini Rune has gone quiet.

Then suddenly, the constriction vanished. Harry gasped and air flooded into his lungs. He vomited blood on the floor and took as many deep breathes as he could. The Gemini Rune snapped back into place, a mixture of fire and ice. His vision came back into focus, and on shaking legs, he grabbed his wand and pulled himself to his feet. Arms grabbed him from behind, steadying him, but he couldn’t tell who it was. What he could see, was Ron Weasley standing over Pansy Parkinson, wand at her throat. Ginny was throwing spell after spell at Malfoy, who was desperately trying to maintain a shield of his own. And Susan Bones and Neville Longbottom of all people had Blaise Zabini at wand point. Hermione ran out of the crowd in slow motion and waved her hands about.

“Everybody stop this!!” She cried.

“I quite agree.” Harry snapped back into clear-headedness and stared in horror as Umbridge descended the Grand Staircase with a clipboard.

The people behind him, who Harry realised were the Patil Twins, helped him upright and Harry whispered his thanks, before catching Ginny’s eye.

*Harry! Harry, are you okay!!*

*I think so, what the hell was that spell?*

*A choking spell! That vile bitch! If Ron hadn’t have gotten to her first, I would have…*

“Fighting on school grounds. Unacceptable. I thought the students of Hogwarts would have more appreciation for their fellow students. Clearly, I was mistaken,” Umbridge said in a cheerful
demeanour that set Harry’s teeth on edge. There was a sharp gleam in her eye as she looked from Harry to Ginny, to Susan.

“Mr Potter, Miss Weasley, Mr Weasley, Miss Bones, Mr Longbottom. Detentions. All of you. Mr Crabbe, Mr Goyle, please help Mr Malfoy, Miss Parkinson and Mr Zabini to the Hospital Wing.” With that, Umbridge turned and entered the Great Hall with a spring in her step that wasn’t there before.
The solution of where they were to practice was solved by Dobby of all people. The hyperactive elf had heard from the Hogwarts elves of a room that only showed itself when a person had real need of it. Harry and Ginny had checked out the place for themselves and been absolutely shocked when, after following Dobby’s instructions, a large oaken door materialised in the wall of the seventh-floor corridor opposite the tapestry of Barnabus the Barmy and his dancing trolls.

“I’ve been in here before,” Ginny had whispered when they stepped inside the vast open hall lit by torches and a large skylight – a room not unlike the duelling room in the Home, though ten times larger, “When Jessica, Luke, Danny, Luna and I freed Sirius, we hid from Snape in here.” Another good thing was it was a short run away from the portrait of the silver city that guarded the entrance to the Home. So, if Umbridge did find them, they had an escape plan nearby they could utilise. With the where solved, Harry called the first meeting of the as-yet-unnamed organisation he was now the leader of.

It was 7:00 pm on a Wednesday evening in October, when Harry Potter found himself standing in the middle of the Room of Requirement, beside Hermione Granger, Luke Cage and an old Wardrobe that kept making gurgling noises as the students walked through the oaken doors staring at the room in awe. Group by group they arrived, usually in Houses, before taking up positions somewhere in front of him. Harry made sure to smile and wave at everyone as they entered, more to settle down his nerves than the anxious faces he saw in the ever-increasing crowd. Finally, at almost ten minutes past their start time, a group of Slytherins – including Jessica – slipped into the room and stood at the back ignoring the looks of contempt thrown their way by some of the Gryffindors. Not that they didn’t indulge in their own sneers or make rude gestures of their own in reply. Once Harry was satisfied everyone had arrived, he gestured to Luke, who moved to the door and locked it.

“Okay, everyone. Welcome to the first meeting of Dumbledore’s Army. Thanks for still showing up despite Umbridge’s latest Educational Decree banning us from doing pretty much everything.” Several scowls and muttered curses were thrown Umbridge’s way at that statement. “For our first meeting, I thought I’d bring out an old favourite, and use it as a sort of teeth kicker, and a trust exercise.” Harry kicked the wardrobe, which began to groan again, before turning back to the crowd to catch the looks of realisation crossing the faces of the Patil twins and some others. He locked eyes with Ginny, who has a slight scowl on her face. He had argued fervently that she couldn’t be beside him when he did this. It had to be him on his own. Not just for everyone else, but for himself as well. He’d even gone so far as to block off their mental link as best he could, though the Gemini Rune still hummed away – if a bit softer than usual. Ginny had not liked the idea and argued against it, but he’d held his ground until eventually she’d declared she didn’t care and went to bed, but even Crabbe or Goyle would have known she was lying.

“I’ll admit, I am no saint. I’ve broken almost every school rule Hogwarts has had – and that was by the second year alone.” Most of the Gryffindors laughed, the Hufflepuffs did not. “But after everything I’ve seen, everything I’ve done – good and bad – I think it’s safe to say that the hardest obstacle to overcome is fear.” That did not earn any laughs. Instead, most of the crowd, even the Weasley Twins, looked at him as if he’d suddenly grown a second head.
“You out flew a dragon! How could fear be the greatest thing you’ve faced?” Colin exclaimed, his brother Dennis, Neville Longbottom and Lavender Brown all nodding in agreement. Harry smiled softly, “And I was absolutely terrified the entire time. I had no idea if I’d even make it out of that arena, let-alone get past the Dragon. My plan was sketchy at best, and I had no back-ups.” The looks on Hannah Abbott and Susan Bone’s faces made it very clear they didn’t believe him. “But instead of letting that fear control me, or disillusion me from even trying, I turned it into a fuel, a resource to use. Fear is not evil; fear means you human. It’s conquering fear that’s the mark of a true hero. And that is what we are going to do today. Conquer our greatest fear.” Harry spun around and stood in front of the wardrobe, before nodding to Hermione, who bit her lip, clearly repressing the urge to tell him that she agreed with Ginny about how much of a bad idea this was. But she tapped the wardrobe with her wand, and the doors slowly swung open.

Harry was not surprised that the Boggart didn’t take the form of a Dementor as it had in Professor Lupin’s office two years ago. He was not afraid of Dementors anymore, he knew how to fight them. What he feared was something far worse now. A figure stepped out of the wardrobe wearing robes of the darkest black. He was tall, thin, but muscular in all the right places. In each hand, he held a wand. A brown wooden wand with a black handle, and a wand of pure white. His hair was black and messed like a bird’s nest, flying in all directions, and his eyes were solid red. It was warped and twisted, a being of hatred and cruelty.

“Hello, Harry. Having a good day?” Harry stood in front of the Boggart, which had morphed itself into an image of himself, however, it excluded an aura of rage and scorn, powerful enough to fill the entire room. And as the people behind him stepped back, many of them shrieking in terror, it seemed to grow taller. More malevolent, if that was even possible.

Harry took a deep breath and locked eyes with his counterpart. The Gemini Rune was thrumming with vibrant heat. Throbbing in a very recognisable pattern. A heartbeat. His doppelgänger did not have a rune.

“Tell us what you are,” he commanded, steeling his voice as best he could as the Boggart grew taller and stronger.

The torches flickered, and the other Harry laughed -a booming laugh that made him want to shit himself. But he stood his ground and did not take his eyes from the red irises of his other. The red eyes of Voldemort looking down on him from his own face.

“I am you, Harry! Surely you must know it? I am you as you could be in all true glory! If you would just give in to the darkness of your heart. The horrors of your past, present and future. The cupboard under the stairs! The endless threats and beatings from Uncle Vernon and Dudley! Harry Hunting! Lord Voldemort! Your mother’s death, your only memory of her! Your friends turning their backs on you! The Basilisk! The Graveyard! Everyone who’s died for you! I am what you are, on the inside. All you have to do is let me out! All you have to do is embrace me!” The Boggart cackled as its head brushed the roof, dark smoke falling from its robes like ash blowing in the wind. But Harry never let go of its gaze.

“The day I let myself become you, is the day I let the horrors of my past define me, control me. And hell will freeze over before I let that happen.”

“Not even for her?” An image of Ginny’s lifeless body flitted through his mind, and he knew she’d seen it, as the rune on his neck began to burn almost as hard it had the night of the Yule Ball.

This night is sparkling, don’t you let it go

I’m wonderstruck, blushing all the way home
I’ll spend forever wondering if you knew…

The song burst clear into his mind, and Harry slipped his wand from his pocket, and with the slightest flick of the hand, whispered the word, “Riddikulus.”

This night is flawless, don’t you let it go

I’m wonderstruck, dancing around all alone

I’ll spend forever wondering if you knew

I was enchanted to meet you.

The Boggart collapsed in on itself, transfiguring into a woman in a gold and white dress with red hair and a man with messy black hair in black robes with green trim, dancing around in a circle as their song filled the air.

Harry turned around and glanced to Ginny, who had a tear sliding down her cheek, then to the rest of the students as they stared in terrified awe, wands held limply in their hands.

“Conquering your fear is the first step. But it’s not something you have to do alone. Now everyone form a line. One by one, you’re going to approach this Boggart, and it will shapeshift into the thing you fear the most. Once it does, your job is to stand tall, aim your wand, and cast the spell ‘Riddikulus’ while thinking about something you find funny, or personally important, something that the Boggart cannot make you fear.” Harry took a deep breath, ignoring the dancing figures behind him.

“The point, as I’m sure many of you are wondering, is to confront your fear. But you won’t be facing it alone. Here, you are surrounded by your friends and colleagues. What better place to face your greatest weakness than amongst friends? And by extension, by doing this here, in front of everyone, no one has anything to hide. We all have something we want to hide from the rest of the world. A Darkness we try to deny. I’ve trusted you all with mine, now it’s time to trust us with yours.”

Harry stepped aside, and the students hesitantly formed into a line. Hermione came to stand beside him, placing a hand on his shoulder, “Well done, Harry. That… that couldn’t have been easy.”

Harry shuddered, “I’m asking them to do it. If I didn’t, what does that make me?” Hermione didn’t say anything, merely squeezing his shoulder as Ginny stepped up to the two dancers, wand at the ready. The Boggart transformed with a snap, revealing two young people lying on the ground. An eleven-year-old girl with red hair kneeling over a twelve-year-old boy with black hair.

“No! You can’t die! I won’t let you… you saved me… I… You can’t die, please…” the girl – a young Ginny covered in muck and grime from the Chamber of Secrets – whimpered, lifting the young Harry’s head. Harry closed his eyes, pushing all the love he could through their connection, feeling the Gemini Rune become an inferno beneath his skin just as she had done for him minutes before. The older Ginny glanced to him for a brief moment, then turned back to her younger self and proclaimed, “Riddikulus!” The two figures vanished, and the line of people gasped as the young Harry stabbed a sword through the roof the giant Basilisk’s mouth.

Ginny stepped out of the line, and Harry pulled her into a hug.

“Well done,” he whispered, rubbing her back.

“Thanks. I… I’m sorry I was mad at you. I didn’t understand. But, now I think I do. You’re right.
It’s easier when you have other people with you, but it’s something you have to have the courage to do yourself,” she said softly. A whip-crack echoed through the room, and Harry, Hermione and Ginny all stared at the Boggart standing opposite Luna Lovegood. It was a tall man with shoulder-length stringy blonde hair mixing potions at a desk.

“Come on, Luna, what’s the worst that could happen?” He poured a red liquid into a green, and the entire workspace exploded. When the smoke cleared, the man was lying on the floor, burns covering his still and lifeless body.

“Riddikulus!” Luna exclaimed, and the scene vanished, warping into an image of Voldemort – in all his pale-skinned and absent nosed glory – in a tutu, doing a pirouette. The line broke into applause, and Luna slipped away, stepping over to Harry, Ginny and Hermione.

“It’s nice,” she said as if the image hadn’t even affected her, but Harry could see that her eyes, usually hazed and dreamy, were hollow and devoid life, “having friends.” Ginny pulled her friend into a hug, and Harry grinned at them both, before the next person, Ernie Macmillan, stepped up for his turn at the Boggart.

So, it continued, each person stood up to face their fear, and each person defeated it, to the applause and cheers of the rest. And when they stepped away, Harry made sure to let them know that they weren’t alone, as friends consoled friends.

Harry couldn’t help but compare the class to the last time they’d encountered a Boggart. In their third year, most of the fears people had faced had been creatures, monsters or in some cases, people. Now, they faced death, corruption, failure and loss. It was a sad thing to realise. To see just how friends – all of them still students – like him, had lost their innocence. Now they had genuine fears, like the death of loved ones, failure at a career, or even terrorism to face. A cruel reminder of a harsher world. However, as each person walked away from their fears and into the comfort of their friends, he couldn’t help but feel proud of each and every one of them.

The last person to face the Boggart was Jessica.

With a sharp crack, Jessica found herself standing face to face with a tall woman with raven black hair. Harry recognised her instantly – it was Allisandra Jones, Jessica’s mother. In one hand was a thick black covered book, in the other was a golden cup – like a chalice, but with a badger symbol engraved into it. The woman made to say something, but Jessica’s eyes flashed with rage, and she pointed her wand at the Boggart and screamed, “Riddikulus!!” The Boggart cracked, and Hermione caught it with her own wand, forcing the creature back inside the wardrobe. Ginny started to run towards her, but Luke grabbed her arm, slowly shaking his head. Ginny bit her lip and watched in barely contained anguish as Jessica turned on her heel and hid amongst the Slytherins once more.

Finally, Harry stepped into the middle of the crowd once more.

“You should all give yourselves one hell of a pat on the back. What you’ve done here today is one of the hardest things you’ll ever have to do in your entire life. But here is proof that you can face your fears and win. From now on, every time that fear creeps up on you at night, or in your thoughts when you’re feeling low, you’re going to think back to this moment, you’re going to remember what it felt like to stand here, and you’re going to remember that you have friends you can go to for help, and you’re going to know that no matter what it is you’re struggling to face, they’re facing a struggle of their own. You’ve seen it with your own eyes. Everyone has fear, and today you’ve trusted yours with everyone here, just as they’ve trusted theirs with you. So, don’t be scared to ask for help. No one is going to judge you for it here. You’ve all done a fantastic job, well done!” The people all broke into raucous applause, and Harry’s cheeks tinged red.
“We’ll meet again on Monday evening next week. For now, class dismissed.”

The students filed out of the room, the large oaken doors closing on Susan and Hannah last. The second they did, Jessica slipped out of the shadows, and Ginny bolted for her, enveloping the girl in as tight a hug as possible. Harry and Hermione stood trying not to snuffle, as both girls cried in each other’s arms. It was the only time Harry would ever see Jessica cry.

Half an hour later, Ginny stood outside the door to Umbridge’s Office and softly knocked on the door.

“Come in,” came the woman’s unnaturally girly voice, and Ginny gritted her teeth, and stepped inside.

_Oh my gosh. That’s just sick._

She couldn’t help but agree. Umbridge’s Office on the Fifth Floor of Hogwarts was like the Pink Panther’s worst nightmare. The stone walls had been painted fluorescent pink, and hundreds of ceramic plates full of cat pictures hung on the walls. The room was circular, dominated by a large wooden desk covered by a white tea cloth. And sitting in the high-backed pink velvet chair behind the table was Madame Umbridge herself, in all her toad faced glory.

“How many times?” she asked.

“Hmm. Let’s say, enough times for the message, to sink in.” Ginny, resisting the urge to sigh in frustration, put pen to parchment and began to write.

_Line after line she scribbled. She deliberately made her handwriting as illegible as possible, just to_
spite the woman. Harry was working on a potions essay, so he was no help. And there was a dull
aching in her hand that was mildly annoying, but she ignored it.

Almost an hour after she started, Umbridge moved from her seat to walk over to the mantle of the
room’s fireplace. She took a kettle and poured some tea into two cups. She came back to her seat and
took a sip from her cup before offering the second to Ginny.

“Tea?” Ginny, suddenly realising how thirsty she was, graciously took the offered cup, ignoring the
continuing ache in her right hand. She took a sip from the tea, which wasn’t that bad really, muttered
a thanks, and continued writing. Another few minutes, and a few more sips of tea later, Ginny put
down her quill and ran her left hand over the back of her right, where the pain in her hand seemed to
be coming from. The skin was oddly red, as if something was heating her hand from the inside, but
there was no mark of any type, so she shrugged it off. Five minutes after that, Umbridge put down
her own tea and stared at her.

“Miss Weasley. I have been thinking, and perhaps we can help each other out.” Ginny looked up at
Umbridge as if she were mad.

“Can you tell me how Mr Potter managed to ensnare you as a child bride. Maybe I can help you, or
at least protect other purebloods like Miss Bones from a similar fate.”

Did she just… did she actually just say that? Harry’s potions essay was quickly forgotten.

“He didn’t ensnare me. The Gemini Rune was placed upon us by an ascended being called the
Orac….” Ginny’s hand flew from the quill to her mouth, where she bit down hard to stop her mouth
from running. Blood trickled down her fingers and palm from the broken skin, and the Gemini Rune
froze. Ginny lowered her now bloody hand and stared in horror as the words I will not disobey my
betters, which were traced into her hand, sunk into her skin, leaving her hand even redder.

The tea!!

Ginny’s gaze flew to the teacup, then to Umbridge’s, which was still completely full.

How didn’t I notice!?

Who cares? You have to get out of there!!

If I leave, she can complain to the Headmaster and insist on more detentions.

Who gives a fuck!!

“If that’s the case, tell me what you know about the Defenders. Who are they? Where do they
meet?” Umbridge asked sweetly. Ginny’s mouth moved of its own accord.

“Harry, me, Brains, Alias, Iron Fist, Mystery, Ma…” Ginny’s shoved her hand back into her mouth.
Biting down hard.

“It’s pointless to resist, Miss Weasley. You can’t leave. The second you sat down in that chair, a
permanent sticking charm took effect. You can’t fight the Veritaserum. It was made for me by
Professor Snape, and you can’t stop answering my questions. Only I can release you. So, you are
going to remove your hand from your mouth like a good little girl and tell me the real names of your
gang of conspirators. Then you’re going to tell me the names of everyone in the little club you think
you were so clever in starting.” Umbridge sat back in her chair, a smug smile on her face, and Ginny
stared in horror as her hand dropped down from her mouth without her even doing anything, falling
gently to the pink parchment, where her left hand was still sitting. In a panic, she tried to stand up,
but true to Umbridge’s word she couldn’t lift off the chair. And the chair was as equally stuck to the stone as she was.

_Screw this! I’m coming down!! Luke and Hermione are with me._

_No! It’s what she wants!_

_She’s poisoned you and locked you up! I don’t care if it’s what she wants! I’m coming after you!!_

Ginny looked frantically around the room, heart beating so hard she thought it might burst out of her chest, and her eyes latched onto the quill, sitting on the table where she’d dropped it. And she had an idea.

“Tell me their real names,” Umbridge asked again, an evil glint in her eye as she watched Ginny struggling.

_Sagittarius!_

_What about it?_

_Would it work through a permanent sticking charm?_

_Of course! It works through any form of matter. But you don’t have your wand?_

_I don’t need a wand._

_Gin… what… NO! DONT’!_

Ginny, focussing her whole mind on the icy aura of the Gemini Rune to ignore Umbridge’s command, grabbed the magical quill and began to draw on the parchment.

She started with two short diagonal lines that intersected at the point, then a diagonal line to the bottom right, then a straight vertical downwards, then a diagonal to the bottom left so it looked like a crude curve.

_Ginny! Sagittarius is super complicated! If you mess up at all…_ She ignored him. Next came a short diagonal line towards the top right, then a long line down to the bottom left. Finally, she drew a vertical line upwards and three horizontal and diagonal lines.

Then she dropped the quill and stared Umbridge in the eye as the symbol began to trace itself into the skin of her hand.

“See you soon, asshole,” Ginny exclaimed venomously. Then she pulled the finger with her left hand and clenched her right into a fist as the rune finished carving itself into her skin. She felt a tingle run from her hand out through her entire body, all feeling from the Gemini Rune vanished, and she fell straight through the chair, and the stone floor beneath it.

She dropped from the roof of the corridor above and fell straight through Peeves, who was chasing a tiny grey cat down the hall with a Beaters Bat. A second before she landed on the ground, a few inches away from the kitten, she released her fist and felt the magic coursing through her body instantly dissipate as the welcome glow of the Gemini Rune returned. She hit the ground with a thud and groaned into the pavement.

“Ow.”

Peeves screeched, dropped his bat and dove into the nearest wall.
Ginny! Ginny! Can you hear me?? Do you still have all your body parts? You went silent on me! Gin!

I’m fine. All of me is still here. I think.

You think?!

Ginny sat up and rubbed her head, some of the blood dripping from the wounds on her hand falling into her hair. The kitten beside her mewed softly, before jumping onto her leg, latching its claws tightly to her jeans.

Ginny sighed in relief as the adrenaline began to flood out of her system and patted herself down.

Nope, still got all the essential bits.

That was reckless.

Pot meet kettle.

…Fair enough.

“Well, well, well. Look who it is, Potter’s little bitch.”

Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me.

This day just keeps getting worse, and worse, doesn’t it?

Tell me about it.

Grabbing the kitten in her hand, Ginny stood up and turned around to see Malfoy and Parkinson standing in the hallway, prefect badges pinned to their robes.

“Care to tell us what you’re doing out here so late?” Malfoy asked innocently. Ginny opened her mouth to give him a piece of her mind, but at that moment, Umbridge decided to come rushing around the corner, panting as if she’d just run the Boston Marathon.

“Ah… Mr…. Malfoy. Miss Weasley… just ran away from Detention. As a prefect with an outstanding record, I ask you to assist me in escorting her back to my office.”

Malfoy’s grin turned practically savage, and he advanced towards her, hand reaching into his robes for his wand.

Gin, you can’t attack Umbridge. She’ll have Fudge arrest us, and you don’t have a wand. You have to run!

Ginny clenched her fist once more, and the tingling rush flooded her body again. Malfoy reached for her arm, and his hand passed straight through her body as if she was a ghost.

“Aww. What’s wrong Malfoy? Your catch not playing nice?” She laughed maniacally. Then she walked straight through him, kitten still in hand, before phasing through a door and into the next corridor, before unclenching her fist again.

…really annoying the crap… Gin! What are you doing?!

I’m using the Sagittarius Rune. It must cut our connection.
Malfoy kicked open a door and ran into the corridor, wand at the ready, Umbridge and Parkinson behind him.

“Expelliarmus!” He cried, and Ginny ducked away from the jet of red light that followed.

Room of Requirement?

Okay. I’m with Luke, Hermione, Danny and Susan of all people – she was doing her prefect rounds – on the Sixth Floor. We’ll meet you ther...

Ginny clenched her fist once more, and a body bind spell shot through her.

“Bye, bye!” She called, waving her hand in the air.

“Stop right now!!!” Umbridge screamed, but Ginny wasn’t listening. She was running now, running for the edge of the corridor, where the Grand Staircase was wide open. The staircase opposite her was gone, leaving nothing but air between her and the stairs to the next level, hovering over the chasm below. She ran, two more jets of light passing through her. She tucked the kitten, whose claws were now digging into her hand, into her pocket, and released her fist.

“Ascendio!” She cried, pointing her hand at the ground. She shot up into the air and slammed her fist shut as a staircase sailed through the gap, passing straight through her. Some small part of her noted that she really should be freaked out by a staircase passing through her, but she was too high on adrenaline to care. The stairs passed, and she released her hand, just in time to land on the staircase above.

That was awesome!!!!

... 

Ginny rushed up the stairs to the Sixth-Floor corridor, stopping once to wink at Umbridge, who was staring in shock at her from the passage below. She ducked into the hallway, and slipped her hand into her pocket, stroking the cat’s hair softly as she ran past the portrait of the Silver City – Atlantis – hanging on the wall.

We’re here and waiting for you.

Thanks.

She slipped up the stairs and past the tapestry of the dancing trolls. She glanced at the wall, but the door to the room wasn’t there. Not bothering to wait for the door to appear, she closed her fist, waited that split second for that rush to pass through her, and dove through the wall... into a horrific storm of pain, bolts of agony striking out all over her body all at once.
Updated Disclaimer:

Ghost, Miracle, Oracle and Phoenix stood on the command deck of the Enterprise, staring out the main view window into the infinite red sea of the Bleed. Directly in front of them, however, was a giant wall of rainbow light. Every time a blob of red bleed residue collided with the wall, a bolt of golden lightning would lance out into the sea, eviscerating it instantly.

“The Speed Force,” Ghost said simply, staring at it in awe.

“Have you ever been past it before?” Oracle asked hesitantly.

“To the lands beyond time? Only once. Us non-God folk aren’t really welcome,” Ghost said.

“Anneliese Celestial and Raziel brought us in there to free Phoenix here from the effects of the Phoenix Force,” Miracle said, placing her hand on Phoenix’s shoulder.

“But we didn’t come in this way. We used the Pearly Gates,” Ghost said anxiously.

“Well we don’t have any Angels with us, and the Olympians didn’t let us use the Elevator, so we’re going to have to get to the Circle of the Gods the old-fashioned way,” Annabeth Chase, Captain of the Enterprise, stated from her command chair in the middle of the bridge.

“Toretto, you think you can get us through that?”

Sitting forward and to the left of Annabeth was a man with an uncanny resemblance to Vin Diesel. His seat was like something one would see in a very high-quality car and had quite clearly been customised.

“Hear that, Hobbs?” he called, and a tall Samoan man who looked like he could bench press a truck without breaking a sweat, who stood at a raised console behind Annabeth answered.

“Almost sounds like she’s doubting you.”

“It does doesn’t it.”

Annabeth rolled her eyes. “Make your jokes, but that…” she pointed to the wall of lightning, “…is a fuck tonne bigger than anything either of you has tried before. So, I’m asking, with no disrespect, are you ready for this?”

Toretto smirked, “I was born ready.” His hand dropped to the gearbox, and his feet hit the floor. The Enterprise shot forward, and Ghost, Miracle, Oracle and Crystal all flew off their feet.

“We don’t own any recognisable franchises!!!” Oracle screamed.

“Warning! Angst ahead!!!!”

And with that, the Enterprise ploughed through the barrier of rainbow light and was swallowed by the Speed Force: The Enigma Force responsible for the flow of time, the border between the Orrery of Worlds, and the Circle of the Gods.
Act IV, Chapter 7: Sagittarius

Chapter 35: The Sagittarius Rune

Sagittarius is quite possibly the Zodiac Rune we know the least about. What it does is simple. It allows the bearer to pass through any form of solid matter. Spells have no effect, you can run through walls or slide through floors. How it does this is a lot more difficult to explain. From what my research has been able to gather, when using the Sagittarius Rune, the object or person in question is transported into another dimension. A mirror dimension if you will. One just out of sync with our own, but not close enough to affect it.

In most cases, you or whatever object enchanted can still be seen in the real world, but will be unable to physically interact with it besides standing on the floor – if the person does not want to pass through it. Some people have found that when applying the rune, they have been completely invisible and intangible in the real world. How this is possible is unclear, though some speculate it could be that the person has accidentally gone further away from their original dimension than intended. As such, this rune is highly dangerous, though not without its uses if used correctly and carefully.

Firstly, ensure that the rune is well-drawn, with no errors or blemishes to interfere with the pattern. Mishaps or rush jobs will cause irregularities when ‘phasing’ into the mirror dimension or back and are not recommended. Second, don’t get sleepy. The rune draws significant amounts of power from the host in order to phase, so when applying to an object, make sure it has enough power in the form of electricity or magic to make the trip. The same is true of people. The rune draws directly from the magical core – this is the cause of the noticeable ‘rush’ of power that passes through you when the rune is active – to make the shift. If you’ve used a significant number of spells recently, or are naturally weak in magic, don’t let yourself get trapped on the other side. Finally, keep an eye on the time. Due to the amount of power required to travel between dimensions, the Sagittarius rune burns out fast. As a result, extended usage will cause the rune to fade away. Based on my calculations and observations, approximately 10 jumps can be made before the rune will completely fade off for a witch/wizard of ordinary magical strength. Adjust this depending on your relative ability, the same is true if using objects.

Possible functions include:

- Phasing through solid matter.
- Avoiding Spell fire
- Dimensional Jumping
- Dimensional Warping
- Stealth operations
- Preventing potential attackers
- Scaring the shit out of people.

It is important to note, however, that if you do get stuck on the other side, you are not without hope. Simply use your wand to replicate the rune. If you’re lucky, you’ll be able to trace over the remnants of your existing rune to ensure another workable glyph. If you don’t have your wand on you, you’re an idiot and deserve to be stranded for all eternity. Have fun!
One month, seven days, thirteen minutes. That’s how long it had been since Ginny vanished. Hermione looked up, forcing her heavy skull out of the book she had to have read at least twenty times since it happened. She knew Harry had read it at least twice that, searching for something they’d somehow missed.

Harry had just entered the portrait hole, the bags under his eyes, and the gaunt look to his face clear for all to see. It had been at least an hour since the DA meeting had ended, and she knew full well what he’d been doing. Every night since Ginny had disappeared, Harry drew the Sagittarius Rune on his forearm and wandered the halls of Hogwarts under the Invisibility Cloak, searching for any sign of her. But nothing. Harry said the Gemini Rune couldn’t even give him a hint of where she was. It was empty and lifeless, much like Harry himself.

The only thing keeping him sane was the Defenders Army.

It had been Luna who suggested it.

“We need a name,” Susan said during their third meeting, “I mean think about it? We’re supposed to be this united force going against the law to protect ourselves from enemies the government refuses to acknowledge exist, and we don’t even have a name.”

“She has a point,” Neville pointed out, and the rest of the group murmured their agreement. Harry, his eyes already dead, but the bags under his eyes not yet fully formed, nodded his head.

“It’s a good idea. Gives us something to rally behind. Anyone have any ideas?”

Several people opened their mouths, but Luna beat them all, shouting, “Defenders Army!” at the top of her lungs. Everyone was silent for a few seconds, clearly deciding if they could come up with anything better. Then Matt stepped forward.

“Defenders Army.”


“Defenders Army.”

“Defenders Army!”

“Defenders Army!!!!”

Hermione kept watching him as he trudged, unseeing, up the stairs to his dormitory, and her eyes couldn’t help lingering on the Gemini Rune carved into his neck. It was no longer the shimmering gold that it had been since the Yule Ball. Instead, it was faded, washed out like a watermark on a company document. And she had no idea what to do about it. They were no closer to finding Ginny. She had literally vanished off the face of the Earth. The only clues they had were that she had the Sagittarius Rune carved into her hand with a blood quill and she was near the Room of Requirement. Hermione had spent days upon days in the school library with Matt and Foggy searching tome after tome for references to the Sagittarius Rune, and runes drawn with a blood quill. The former had come up annoying short, the latter had no shortage of entries. In medieval times, a Warlock Cult was discovered using Blood Quills to draw runes on unsuspecting muggle children, particularly young girls. Which runes were used was unknown, but all of the children were mutilated and transformed.
into abominations and monsters. They were eventually captured, but the process could not be reversed, and many opted to pass through a device in the Ministry known as the Veil of Death to relieve themselves of the constant pain they were in. Since then, Blood Quills had been outlawed in every nation, save a few small Middle Eastern settlements.

Hermione sighed and snapped the book closed before ambling to the window. She’d been doing this a lot lately, just staring out over the grounds in thought. She wasn’t sure why. It didn’t help at all. It just made her think of all the things she couldn’t solve. She couldn’t figure out what happened to Ginny. Couldn’t get her back from wherever she was. She couldn’t find the Dragons, who were still lost somewhere. And she couldn’t figure out what to do concerning Umbridge. She had the most powerful brain in the world! Why couldn’t she do anything?!!!!

“Still nothing?” Hermione turned her head to face Ron, who was standing a little way behind her, hands in the pockets of his jeans, maroon Weasley jumper displayed proudly. Hermione shrugged. “Nothing,” She admitted, before turning back to the window. Ron came up beside her and just stood there, looking out the window himself. Hermione was so lost in her thoughts; she had no idea how long it had been before Ron’s voice once again cut through her concentration.

“Look! At Hagrid’s Hut!” he exclaimed. Hermione’s eyes snapped to Hagrid’s Hut, where a soft curl of smoke was coming from the chimney.

“He’s back!” She beamed, her sour mood vanishing. She grabbed Ron’s hand somewhat subconsciously, and together they raced out the portrait hole and down into the darkness of the castle, running through corridors and staircases until finally, they arrived at Hagrid’s front door. The lights in the hut were already on, and the person who opened the door was not Hagrid but Luna, who quickly ushered them inside. Hagrid was lying on his bed, scratching Fang’s head.

“Hagrid!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Ello ‘Ermione!” Hagrid wheezed. He looked incredibly worse for wear, holding a cold cut up to his face with his free hand. Matt stepped over with a cup of tea, which Hagrid gladly took.

“What happened to you?” Ron asked.

“Well, you see. It’s just a wee bit of a scratch is all. But Matt was tellen me ’bout Ginny. Is it true?”

Hermione’s brightened mood vanished back into the aether.

“No…” Hagrid whispered, tears rolling down his face.

“How’s ‘Arry taken it?”

“Bad. Really bad. He doesn’t sleep. He barely eats. His aura is like a person with a terminal disease, slowly rotting away from within,” Matt said solemnly.

“The Fairies are gone,” Luna agreed.

Hermione gulped hard and tried desperately to redirect the conversation. “That’s no scratch, Hagrid,” she said pointedly, “what happened?”

Hagrid sighed, taking a long sip of his tea.

“The Giants weren’t too pleased to see us, that’s for sure,” Hagrid started, “Me an’ Olympe Maxine from Beauxbatons went deep into the mountains we did. Slept in caves and worse places. But we found em. Talked to em, but we ah… we didn’t give em the message Dumbledore wanted to.”
Hermione blanched, Ron choked on-air, and Matt almost dropped the tea. Luna, on the other hand, just started massaging Hagrid’s giant toes.

“Olympe she…” Hagrid actually blushed! “She had an idea that was a bit better than Dumbledore’s if I’m right honest. Maybe before all of that business with Harry came out, I would’ve refused to listen, but I listened to her, and we came to the Giants with a proposition. We said, “You-Know-Who is gonna be sending people to offer you big rewards to come and help him fight the Wizards. So, we offered em a way out. Said if they sided with us, we’d give em just as good. But here’s the difference. Olympe, she’d been around more giants than me, she says that the Giants are lazy, and based on what I saw she was right, they’d much rather do nothing than something, and they don’t really care about wizards except when they limit their territory. So, we said, in exchange for doing nothing, we’d organise transportation to the Ural Mountains up near Siberia – a much bigger area than they’ve got now let me tell ya – for any of ’em that wanted more territory. Giants love the cold you see, and there are so few people up there it’s perfect. Olympe says that she’d been working with the new Russian magical government since the whole Soviet Union fell apart to get a new Giant reserve up there.”

“That’s great!” Matt exclaimed, “what did they say?”

“What’s the Soviet Union?” Ron whispered to Hermione, who quickly explained it to him.

“Well, we were right. Death Eaters turned up the day after us, offered less than we expected actually. Reckon You-Know-Who won’t keep em around once he’s done with em. So, the Gurg, that’s their leader, stepped on the Death Eaters! Saw the whole thing we did. Bloody scary!!”

“So, they’re staying neutral?!” Ron beamed.

“Thanks to Olympe.”

“Well done, Hagrid!” Hermione said, patting Hagrid on the leg.

Hagrid made to speak up again, but then there was another knock on the door.


Hermione opened the door, revealing a heavy breathing Luke.

“Great Hall! Now! Professor Lupin…” Hermione was up from her seat before he even finished. She bolted from Hagrid’s Hut, the others – Hagrid included – racing behind her. They reached the Great Hall in record time, pushing through the crowd of students, half of whom had seemingly run from their common rooms in their pyjamas. Thanks to Hagrid’s bulk, Hermione managed to make it to the middle of the hall. Kingsley Shacklebolt – an expression on his face that would kill a cat – John Dawlish, Mad-Eye, Sirius, Tonks, Matt’s father Jack Murdock, and three other Aurors that she didn’t know were standing in a loose formation. Dumbledore and the rest of the teachers were sitting at the staff table, seemingly conducting a staff meeting. Standing in the middle of the room was Umbridge, pointing a stubby finger at Lupin, who looked resigned.

“Madame Umbridge, you called for an Auror squad because… what exactly?” Kingsley asked incredulously.

“To arrest this… this thing!” She snapped as if it were obvious.

“Are you referring to Mr Lupin as a thing?” Shacklebolt asked again.

“What else would you call him!?” She screeched.
“His name maybe?” Sirius queried.

“And we’re arresting him because...” Shacklebolt tried.

“Because he is no longer a teacher at Hogwarts school!!” Umbridge exclaimed, an unnatural excitement oozing out from her. The crowd of students broke out into cries of anguish.

“NO!”

“You can do that!”

“He’s an awesome teacher!”

“Hag!!”

“You can’t fire him!”

“I won’t pass my O.W.L’s without him!”

“What about NEWTS!”

“It’s not right!!”

“SILENCE!!” Umbridge screamed, though it only succeeded in making the cries of support for Lupin louder.

“What’s happening?!” Hagrid whispered to Hermione very loudly.

“She’s a Ministry hag. She’s taken over the school and attacking everyone. Hogwarts has changed Hagrid.”

“How could Dumbledore let this happen?” Dumbledore was sitting with a proud expression on his face as he observed the students chanting. Umbridge, on the other hand, looked murderous. Snape was clearly trying to hide his glee at Lupin’s firing, but he was failing miserably.

“He doesn’t have a choice. He’s lost all his power in the Ministry. Umbridge is doing everything she can think of to get him kicked out of the school completely. He can’t risk it.”

Finally, Professor Lupin stepped up and waved his hands.

“Thank you, everyone, really. It means a lot,” he winked victoriously at Umbridge with a shit-eating grin, “But as much as I’ve loved my time here, it looks like the DADA curse has finally caught up with me.” The older students broke out into laughs, the younger years, who’d had Lupin for close on three years now, just looked confused.

“But Madame Umbridge is right. My position at the school has been terminated…”

“You’re welcome to stay in the castle as long as you’d like Remus,” Dumbledore tried, though Snape sneered something fierce at that statement.

“He is not!” Umbridge snapped.

“You have the authority to dismiss my teachers, but you do not have the right to banish them from the grounds!” Dumbledore snapped, anger tinting his voice.

“I really am sorry my friend,” he said softly, though in the quiet of the room it was easy for everyone
to hear.

“It’s alright.” Then Lupin turned back to the crowd, “Remember everyone, keep up with your studies. Keep reading your books and practising your spells. You never know when you’ll need them.” Then he stepped down into the hall and started to walk to the exit. Hermione, Matt, Ron and Luna broke out into applause, rapidly followed by everyone – student and staff alike. An honour guard formed as the Professor walked out the doors. As he passed Sirius, Hermione heard him whisper, “See you at Andi’s.”

Remus stepped out into the night with a sigh and began the walk down to the castle gates.

“You called us here, an entire Auror squad, for that?” Shacklebolt asked in shock. Then, without waiting for an answer, he trudged after Lupin, the Aurors following behind.

Finally, Umbridge seemed to regain herself, and she turned on the student body.

“GO TO YOUR BEDS!!!!!”
Ginny followed her mother and brothers down the halls of St Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies, Lightning the kitten gripped tightly in her hands. The steps she took made no sound, the voices she heard were muffled and far away, and the constant pain in her hand served as the permanent reminder that it was her own foolishness that had caused this. She’d known the dangers of using the Sagittarius Rune, but she’d screwed with fate and paid the price. Now she was forced to watch in sorrow, unable to even speak or touch anything, as her whole family gathered around the hospital bed of Arthur Weasley, who was barely clinging onto life. Worst. Christmas. Ever.

Her father looked horrible. Shallow in the face, his skin paler than snow. He had dozens of monitors attached to him, but Ginny knew, just like everyone else in the room, that they were all mostly for show. Her father was dying. And she couldn’t even say goodbye.

“Arthur… it’s Molly. Can you hear me?” her mother asked, tears streaming down her face as she sat in a chair next to the bed. Dad shifted slightly, muttering something that sounded like “Mollywobbles,” and Mum burst out in wailing tears. Bill, tears streaking down his own cheeks, stepped over to the nurse. Ginny, unable to watch her Mum, followed him.

“How long does he have?” Bill asked as Charlie and Ginny followed him into a corner.

“If we draw it out? A week, maybe two? But it’ll be painful.” The medi-witch admitted solemnly.

Charlie jaw twitched, before running a hand over his forehead, “First Percy, then Ginny, now Dad. Merlin, what’s happening to our family Bill?”

‘I’m here. I’m okay. I’m just trapped,’ Ginny exclaimed, unable to hold in her tears any longer. She ran her uninjured hand through Lightning’s fur and sobbed.

“I don’t know, Charlie. I just don’t know.” Bill sighed before looking the Medi-witch in the eye. “Let him go. I don’t want him in any more pain,” He whispered.

“But your mother…”

“Doesn’t need to know. Understood?” Bill said, a sternness appearing in his voice that Ginny had never heard before.

“Of course, Mr Weasley,” the woman said, before slipping out of the room. Bill and Charlie looked back to Dad’s sleeping form, where the twins were trying to console their mother, who was attempting to squeeze Dad’s hand back to life all on her own. Ron was standing at the end of the bed, eyes staring vacantly at his father’s swallow face.

“What do we do now?” Charlie asked quietly.

“I’m… I’ve given my notice of resignation to Gringotts. After we’re done here, I’m going straight to the Burrow, look over all the papers, mortgage, loans, bills, the lot. Everything. Then I’ll have to start looking for a job here in Britain. I’ve got savings backed up, money Dad wouldn’t let me send back that I kept in a vault. Gringotts pays well, so we should be fine for a while at least. If worst comes to worst, I can ask Fleur, a… friend from Gringotts for help. We won’t have to pull the others from
Hogwarts,” Bill said, fiddling with his fang earring.

“Sounds like a good enough start. I’ve got two weeks leave for Christmas break, and I’m using up all my leftover leave for the rest of the year to make another, so I’ll be here to help you with anything you need for a month at the least.”

Bill slapped his brother on the back, “Thanks, mate.”

“Don’t mention it,” he replied. Then the door crashed open, and Percy all but barrelled into the room, wide-eyed as his gaze latched onto Dad, lying on death’s door in the hospital bed.

“Merlin, Dad.” Percy, suddenly realising the rest of his family was in the room, looked to Bill and Charlie.

“I came as soon as I heard…” He choked on his words, taking several deep breaths before speaking again. “An Auror told me. I came straight away… what happened?” Bill stepped over to Percy and pulled his younger brother into a fierce hug.

“I’m sorry… I… I shouldn’t have said what I said. I was just so angry and…” Mum looked up from the bed and locked eyes with Percy. She jumped to her feet and almost tripped on her nightgown she ran to them so fast. She pulled both boys into her arms, and Ginny couldn’t take it anymore. Cat in hand, she ran through the hospital wall and out into the corridor beyond. She bolted down the hallway and down the stairs until she found herself in a waiting room. She dropped to her knees, and sobbed in anguish, oblivious to the dozens of people that stepped through her intangible and invisible form as she wept.

Whatever dimension she was stranded in had no concept of time Ginny had learned. She could close her eyes for one second, and what appeared to be days passed all around her. Or, on the flip side, she’d be forced to watch everything, unable to sleep or eat to reprieve herself. She didn’t get hungry, and she wasn’t tired. But it was cold. Merlin was it cold. Not like a winter cold, but an empty, lonely cold. Ginny’s skin had gone numb, and her sense of touch and temperature was all but gone. And that wasn’t even the worst part. The worst part was the Gemini Rune. It was lifeless, all its power vanished. But she could still feel it, like a faint buzzing on the edge of her consciousness. Just enough to let her know that Harry was still there, she was just too far away for anything but the patchiest of signals to get through. It was just her and the kitten, whom she named Lightning. And she refused to even let go of the cat. Lest the tiny furball leave her too.

The only time she had any reprieve was when she was in the Home. Maybe it was because the Home was in another dimension as well, Ginny didn’t know. But when she was in the Home, she could touch things like walls or furniture. Food and drink were beyond her still, but she could sit on a bed without falling through it – even if she couldn’t use the sheets. It was also somewhere she could be sure no one would walk through her, as the Home had been left to gather dust thanks to Dumbledore and Umbridge.

“I’m here to see Arthur Weasley.”

Ginny’s gaze snapped upright, fixating on Harry, who was standing at the front desk, Defenders cloak draped around his shoulders. Two Defenders stood behind him, their cuffs marking them as Hermione and Matt, though they kept their hoods up. Ginny glanced to a clock on the wall and realised it had been several hours since she’d abandoned the ward.

“I’m sorry, Mr Potter, but Mr Weasley passed away less than fifteen minutes…”

“Harry!” Bill’s voice exclaimed. Ginny, the only thing stopping her from being sick on the carpet
being the fact that she hadn’t eaten in months, spun to the stairs. Bill and Ron were walking down
the stairs, their clothes a mess, and their eyes puffy and red. Harry followed Bill’s voice, and as
Ginny’s eyes locked onto his face, tears began trickling down her cheeks again. Harry was a shadow
of himself. His usually vivid green eyes, the ones that used to light up the second he realised she was
in a room, were cold and dull. His hair was no longer any sort of maintained, growing out to the
point where it had become a shaggy mop rather than the spikey birds’ nest she loved. He had even
started growing facial hair, but it was patchy and of intermittent lengths, and Ginny knew he hadn’t
even considered shaving – he didn’t even know how. The only thing about him that was clean was
his clothes, obviously done not by him, but by Dobby. To say he looked like death warmed up
would be an understatement. And all she wanted to do was run to him. To wrap her arms around him
and feel the warmth of the Gemini Rune again.

“Bill. I came as soon as I heard. Nobody would tell me anything, I had to weed it out of
McGonagall, then I may have blown up the Gryffindor Tower Floo with the amount of powder I
used and…” Harry was rambling, all of his pent-up emotions spilling over in a single instant. His
eyes were watery, and his left-hand kept twitching.

“It’s alright,” Bill said tiredly, waving him off. Hermione pulled back her hood, her own tear-stained
eyes coming into view, and she launched herself at Ron. The second they pulled each other into
hugs, they both broke down into tears.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said. Bill grabbed Harry’s shoulder and sat them down in a chair on the other side
of the room. Harry then turned his gaze onto the receptionist, and the three other people in the room,
all of whom were staring at Harry.

“Give us the room,” Harry said, a tone of command to his voice that warned all not to test him.
Everyone quickly scurried away. Once everyone was gone, Bill made to start talking, but Harry held
up his hand, eyes fixed on Matt.

“Anything?” Bill looked incredibly confused, but Matt simply pulled his hood back.

“All clear. There’s no one else on this level, and no listening or monitoring spells that I can detect.”
Both Harry and Ginny let out a breath of relief.

“How can he…” Bill began.

“Matt was in an accident when he was a kid. He might be blind, but he can hear better than anyone
else on the planet and see the auras people give off. We’re still working on his codename though.”
Harry tried to laugh, but it came out more like a cough.

“Bill, what happened?”

Bill lost all his composure. His shoulders slumped, and his head fell into his hands.

“The doctor says he was found by an Unspeakable this morning, somewhere in the Department of
Mysteries. He’d been bitten by an animal of some kind, in dozens of places. The bites were bad, but
it was the venom that killed him. Snake venom.” Bill sighed, “What was he even doing down
there?”

Harry’s face contorted in rage. “Damn you Dumbledore. What’s so important behind that fucking
door?!” he growled.

“What door? What does Dumbledore have to do with this?!” Bill exclaimed, looking up at Harry in
shock.
“Dumbledore’s had members of the Order on duty monitoring a door in the Department of Mysteries since Voldemort’s return to power. But he won’t tell anyone what’s behind it. I sent the Dragons in there to try and find out when I went into the Ministry earlier this year, but they couldn’t get past the front door. There’s something down there that interferes with their powers.” Harry slammed his head against the wall. “I’m sorry I have to be the asshole that says this, but I can’t stop thinking about it. If your Dad was on duty guarding Dumbledore’s door…”

“Did You-Know-Who get someone… or something… past Dad and into the DoM?” Bill breathed. He hit his eyes and rubbed his temples.

“This just keeps getting worse,” he whispered.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said.

“Not your fault. Do your friends have any idea what You-Know-Who…” Bill swallowed hard, “Do you know what Voldemort wants?” Ginny gasped and looked to Bill. His face, a few seconds before so broken, was now hard, his eyes fixed on the wall ahead. She knew that look. That was the same look he got when he told Mum he was going to Egypt, despite her refusing to let him.

“No. And nothing I’ve tried gets me any closer. I’m running out of allies Bill. The Dragons are gone. Vanished after an explosion in Wakanda. No one, not even Will’s sister, knows where they are. Doctor Strange is battling Dormammu in the Dark Dimension. Umbridge has taken over Hogwarts, which means I’m being watched like a hawk and can’t do shit. Fudge – who I thought I had on my side – is ignoring me at every turn. And Gin…” Harry cracked. His head sagged down over his lap, and his body was racked in sobs. Ginny knelt beside him, her heart splintering as she watched him sink into despair. She tried to grab his hands, but she just slipped through. It was the most terrifying thing she’d ever seen.

‘I’m here! Hear me! Come on! COME ON!!!!’ She screamed. But no one could hear her, and the only result was that the scar on her hand hurt even worse than before.

Bill shifted in his seat slightly and placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“I miss her too. I…” But whatever Bill was going to say was cut off by Matt, who’d spun around, ear strained towards the door.

“Malfoy. He’s coming this way. Allisandra’s with him… and the Minister.” Harry’s head shot up.

“Fuck!” He exclaimed.

“What could they want?” Bill exclaimed as both of them jumped to their feet.

“Brains! Get out of here!!” Harry yelled, and Ginny spun around. She’d completely forgotten Ron and Hermione were even there. The duo leapt to their feet, and Ron took charge, pulling Hermione’s hood over her head and yanking her up the stairs out of sight.

Bill pulled out his wand and drew a rune in the air in front of Harry’s face. It wasn’t a pattern she recognised immediately, but the results were obvious. The tear stains and untidiness of Harry’s face vanished in an instant. He gained a few inches in height, and his body filled out slightly. His eyes regained their sparkle, and his hair reverted to its traditional look. Virgo: the rune of illusion.

“Thanks,” Harry said quickly, ensuring his wand was within easy reach.

“Sirius is on his way up with Betsy and Brian Braddock and two Goblins… wait they’ve been stopped by Fudge’s personal guard at reception. Shacklebolt’s here too, so the Headmaster can’t be
too far behind,” Matt said quickly, before pulling his own hood back into place.

“Something’s happened,” Bill said.

“But what?”

Ginny held her breath as the door’s swung open, revealing Minister Fudge standing between Lucius Malfoy and Allisandra Jones, flanked by his personal guard of Kingsley Shacklebolt and John Dawlish.

“Minister, a pleasure to see you. Are you here to answer my letters by any chance?” Harry said evenly. The Virgo Rune did wonders to hide his emotions and appearance, but no obscuration could fool Ginny. He was angry, and she wished with all her heart that she was there with him.

“Indeed, indeed. Good to see you too, Harry. Mr Weasley. Dreadful news,” Fudge said, shaking his head softly, “Has there been any news of your friend, the one who ran away?”

Ginny winced. “She didn’t run away. She vanished after a detention with your High Inquisitor. The one I have sent several notifications to you about inappropriate conduct, not to mention using methods of torture on school children.” He didn’t yell, but his voice was dripping with such venom even an idiot could tell he was pissed.

“I don’t know about that. Dolores assures me everything is well in hand and that you’re moving back to the proper curriculums…”

“If by proper curriculums you mean, sacking the only competent teachers in the school and replacing them with deadbeats, then sure, she’s done a fantastic job,” Harry bit back, rolling his eyes.

“Now, now, Mr Potter. That’s no way to speak to the Minister for Magic,” Malfoy drawled, a smug smile on his face.

“Oh, shut up, Lucius. The day I care to hear your opinion will be the day Han Solo sells me the Millennium Falcon for free.” Lucius’ smug grin faded into a look of pure confusion, and Ginny burst out into laughter, not that anyone could hear her. No one except Lightning at least, who purred in her pocket at hearing her voice, rare thing that it was these days.

“What do you want?” Bill asked flatly, folding his arms.

“Ah, yes. Dreadful business, you see. It seems that, as much as we’d like to, the Ministry will be unable to pay compensation for your loss, Mr Weasley,” Fudge said. Ginny’s jaw dropped open.

“What?” Bill exclaimed, “He died in the Ministry of Magic! The Law states that at the very least, the Ministry should be paying for his funeral!”

“We’re afraid those laws only apply to people who die on Ministry premises. And as your father tragically died here in St Mungo’s, our hands are tied. We truly are sorry for any inconvenience this has caused,” Allisandra said sweetly. Harry balled his hands into fists at his sides. Bill looked ready to draw his wand and murder all of them in one fell swoop. With Harry’s help, he could probably do it too.

“And to make matters worse, it seems as though your father had substantial debts to pay on both his children’s – your sibling’s – school fees and his property. Both of these charges now fall to you to repay, but, because I am generous and always willing to help people in need, I have agreed to purchase all your outstanding debt, on a few conditions of course.” Malfoy’s grin as he said those words made him look more monster than human. Alessandra seemed equally pleased, while Fudge
looked indifferent. Maybe he was under the Imperious Curse? Surely no one could be that stupid?

“You son of a b…” Bill, Harry and Matt all went for their wands, but at that exact moment, Sirius ran into the room, flanked by a witch and wizard she didn’t recognise. The man wore robes like Sirius marking him as a member of the Auror Corps. The woman wore business robes beneath a purple sash with the Gringotts Crest on it.

“Mr Weasley remain silent!” the woman exclaimed, rushing to Bill’s side. Harry’s hand dropped from his wand as he looked to Sirius, who mouthed “just go with it.”

“Who are you and what are you doing here?!” Malfoy snapped.

“My name is Elizabeth Braddock, Chief Cursebreaker for Gringotts International – British Division. I am here to inform Mr Weasley, who is an esteemed employee of Gringotts International, that he is not to say anything to you, or any parties interested in the purchase and acquisition of the Weasley Family Property in Ottery St Catchpole until a lawyer provided to him by Gringotts International is present. I am also here to inform Mr Lucius Malfoy that his accounts with Gringotts International have been temporarily frozen on the account that the seizure of mortgage owed on the Weasley Family Property in Ottery St Catchpole without notification or agreement to by all parties concerned was against bank policy. Please visit the nearest Gringotts International branch at your earliest convenience to settle this matter. Now, on behalf of Gringotts International, I will escort Mr William Weasley – Gringotts Employee – and Mr Harry Potter to Gringotts immediately for consultation.”

Ms Braddock gave the Minister – who seemed incredibly confused – Malfoy, – who looked like someone just stole his favourite toy – and Allisandra – who seemed amused by the whole thing – a slight curtsey and smile, before ushering a very shocked looking Harry and Bill out of the room, Matt, Sirius and the other man trailing behind.

Eventually, the room was empty save for Fudge, Malfoy and Allisandra. And Ginny.

“What in the name of Merlin just happened?!” Fudge exclaimed, turning to Malfoy.

“The Goblins have seen fit to step above their station. They will need to be dealt with, lest they gain even more ideas. It seems Harry Potter’s radicalism has taken root with them. It’s as I’ve been telling you, Minister. Potter is trying to gain as much power as he can. My son is trying to determine what he’s up to at Hogwarts, but he has over half the student population on his side. Them, his red-cloaked cronies, and now the Goblins. Who’s next? He already stole my House Elf. And I don’t believe for a second that his little friend ran away of her own accord. She’s on a mission for Potter. I’m sure of it,” Malfoy explained, staring at the door by which Harry had vanished.

“I’ll have to tell Delores to step up her campaign. Potter’s influence must be curbed. If things keeps going on like this, he’ll put the entire Wizarding World at risk,” Fudge huffed, apparently chugging Malfoy’s bullshit like it was the best Butterbeer he’d ever tasted.

“An excellent idea, Minister,” Allisandra said, lowering her head slightly in deference.

“Well, best be back to the Ministry for me. I’ll see the pair of you soon I expect.” With that, Fudge straightened his bowler hat and walked out the door. The second he left, Allisandra gaged and turned on Lucius.

“Laying it on a bit thick, weren’t you?” She said sharply, glaring at the blonde-haired man. Malfoy rolled his eyes.

“Fudge only understands the most basic of explanations. You can’t let him come to his own
conclusions, because he simply won’t be able to. Why do you think Amelia Bones and Albus Dumbledore were the real powers in the Ministry?”

Allisandra shrugged, “Good point.” Then she turned serious. “Did you speak to…”

“Yes. He was most annoyed. Killed one of the young ones. I can’t remember his name.”

Allisandra shuddered, “Did the mission fail, then?”

Lucius grinned evilly, “Oh no. The Dark Lord found the prophecy concerning him and Potter, but the shelves are spelled in such a way that only he or Potter themselves can remove them. I believe he intends to lay a trap for Potter somehow that way he can retrieve the prophecy and kill Potter at the same time. Without Potter, the alliance he’s built will crumble.” Allisandra breathed a sigh of relief.

“Good. Let’s go see what these fucking Goblins have up their sleeves then.” Together the pair stalked from the room, leaving an invisible and intangible Ginny Potter shaking like a leaf behind them.

When Harry stepped out of the Gryffindor Tower Floo, he wasn’t surprised to see Umbridge waiting for him.

“Mr Potter, how lovely of you to return to us.” Harry, Bill’s Virgo Rune still in place, merely pulled the finger at her before trudging up the stairs to the boy’s dormitory. He barely even noticed that Umbridge was following him. When he reached his dormitory and stepped inside, all he could do was sigh. Neville, Lavender and Dean were refolding his clothes into his trunk, most of which remained strewn across the dorm. His letters had been pilfered through, and the parchment holding the secret of the Marauders Map was torn on one side. The photo frame that held the picture of his parents was cracked across the front, and one of the hangings had been torn from his four-poster bed. The Invisibility Cloak was gone.

“Mr Potter, I’m afraid, due to numerous infractions against school policies, the least of which being leaving the school without a guardian or informing the faculty, I, as High Inquisitor, have been forced to conduct a search of your dormitory for any illicit objects. To ensure the safety of the students, of course,” Umbridge chirped. Harry, all the fight having long since vanished from him. Merely muttered, “Of course, Madame Umbridge.”

“Good boy.” Harry rolled his eyes but said nothing. Lavender looked at him apologetically, and Neville was biting his lip, casting glances at his own trunk as if he feared Umbridge would ransack it too.

“You’ll also be serving detention with…”

“Professor McGonagall. Yep.” Harry muttered, before walking over to his bed and whispering a thanks to his friends as he picked up a shirt and began to refold it. Umbridge let out a long breath. Harry didn’t care if she was angry that he’d been the one to find a way for everyone to get out of her Detentions or not. Hogwarts Duty of Care stated that students could request that detentions be served with their Heads of House if they felt in an unsafe environment. He just didn’t have the energy to fight with anyone today. Not after… not after Mr Weasley, or Malfoy’s attempted ruining of the entire Weasley family.
While Miss Braddock and her brother had taken Harry and Bill to Gringotts, Sirius had quickly filled them in on what he could. He and Brian Braddock – who were now partners – had been assigned Mr Weasley’s Case, and had found out about Malfoy’s attempted move on the Weasley’s a few moments before Fudge set off for the hospital. They’d contacted Brian’s sister Betsy, who worked for Gringotts, who’d immediately gone to a Gringotts Legal Team. It was a miracle Bill had made millions of galleons for Gringotts over the years, or the Weasley’s might have ended up on the street, and Bill forced into Voldemort’s ranks. Say what you would about Goblins, but they protected their own, and Bill was part of that. Ragnok had even offered Bill a job in the British Division of Gringotts, so he wouldn’t be out of work anytime soon. The Director had also assured Harry that, given the current climate, his Vault security status had been upgraded to ‘Severe’ and its contents moved deeper into the caverns. He also had several Goblins (members of the Clan he and Ginny had returned the seized heirlooms to the previous year) on 24/7 guard duty at the door. Also, there were now two Dragons on patrol. At least he wouldn’t be cashless any time soon, so that was a problem he didn’t have to worry about.

Umbridge, on the other hand…

“If you step one more toe out of line, Mr Potter, I will be forced to take drastic actions against you. And if I find even one of your red cloaks in this school, I’ll have them expelled in an instant.” She was a problem that just wouldn’t go away.

The toad woman turned on her heel and stalked from the room.

Neville raced to the door and stuck his head out, seemingly watching her leave. Harry sat down on his now messy bed and picked up his picture frame. He drew his wand and repaired the glass, before placing it back on his bedside table, watching as young and carefree Lily and James Potter danced around in circles. Not for the first time, he found himself angry at his future self. He’d had one chance to see his mother again, thanks to Ghost. And his older self-had sent her to deal with relationship advice ahead of the Yule Ball? Now, with everything crumbling around him, was when he needed her advice. To hear her voice telling him everything would turn out okay. Not before some stupid dance!

“We’re so sorry about your stuff, Harry. She just stormed in here with Malfoy and his shmucks. We made sure they didn’t steal anything,” Dean said, patting him on the back.

“Cheers, Dean.”

“There is one thing though,” Lavender began, but Neville spoke up before she finished.

“Umbridge is gone.” He said, his voice shaky. Lavender and Dean breathed a sigh of relief.

“Dean and I were… well, we were already in here when Neville burst in yelling about Umbridge. We went for your trunk and grabbed the most important thing we could find.” Lavender, who now that Harry thought about it was wearing her clothes quite dishevelled, and her hair – usually platted or braided – was down, with no sign of her usual scrunchy, opened Neville’s trunk, and withdrew a shiny silver fabric he knew only too well.

Harry let out a sigh of relief, “Thanks, guys. I owe you all. Big time. It’s one of the only things I have of my Dad’s.” Lavender and Neville sat down on the bed beside him, and Lavender offered him the cloak, but Harry shook his head.

“Keep it. It’ll be safer with you. Umbridge won’t think to look with your stuff. I’m too much of a target.”
Lavender gasped, looking from the fabric to Harry, then back to the fabric.

“Are you sure?” She asked in disbelief, “It was your Dad’s. It’s invaluable!” Harry nodded softly, locking eyes with her.

“I trust you. Tell no one you have it, even Hermione, and it should be safe. Maybe if I survive this, I’ll be able to come back for it one day.” Then Harry saw something he’d never seen before. Lavender’s eyes filled with determination, she squared her jaw and nodded her head sharply.

“I won’t let you down, Harry. I promise.” Harry smiled softly at her, and Lavender blushed red as a tomato.

“Don’t you worry, Harry,” Dean said, putting on a brave face, “you’ll survive this easy. Dolores Umbridge won’t be what takes you down. You’re brilliant. You’re the only one who’s teaching us what we need to know. You’re the only one actually trying to protect our families. Fuck knows what the Ministry is doing, and Dumbledore’s sitting on his ass while Umbridge takes over the school. You’re the best bloke I know, and the only one who’s getting shit done. This is bigger than just sticking it to the toad, I understand that now. It’s what you said that first meeting, and at the Hog’s Head. It’s about our friends, and it’s about our school. You can count on us to have your back. If we’re the Defenders Army, then you’re our General. We’ll back your plays, and if you go down, well, I like to think I’d be damn proud to go down with you.” Harry turned his gaze towards Dean and saw the same fire reflected in his eyes as he saw in Lavender’s. It made his heart swell with pride. The idea that two people he wasn’t even particularly close with could trust him enough to put their lives on the line. But…

“Thanks, Dean. I mean it. But… but it’s bigger than even that. I… I lied to you all. I’ve lied to the whole god damn country.” He said solemnly, and he couldn’t bring himself to look at Lavender or Dean’s eyes. He didn’t want to see the failure and disbelief that he knew would be there.

“About what Harry?” Neville asked softly as Harry kept his gaze firmly centred in his lap.

“The terrorist group that attacked me. I said I didn’t know who their leader was. I lied. It’s…”

“You-Know-Who,” Lavender finished. Harry looked up at her in confusion.

“How’d you…”

“It wasn’t that hard to figure out,” Neville admitted, folding his arms, “Given what Dumbledore has been saying.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry said, dropping his gaze once more, “I didn’t want to lie. It was just that Fudge was going after anyone who even mentioned Voldemort was back. I had to find a middle ground. Get people to start preparing, but not make myself a target. Fat lot a good it did though. Umbridge is trying to crucify me on Fudge’s orders, and all it achieved was lying to my friends. I don’t deserve your trust. I’m not ready to be a leader.”

Lavender grabbed Harry’s hand and squeezed.

“The fact that you think lying to us makes you unfit to lead is all the evidence we need to know we picked the best man for the job.”

“Lav’s right, Harry. Like I said, we’re behind you, because you’re the only one who actually cares what happens to us at the end of the line. The only one who thinks we’re more than just pieces on some grand chessboard between You-Know-Who and Dumbledore,” Dean said firmly, grabbing Harry’s shoulder as he spoke.
“You’re the leader we need Harry. Like Dean said, the General of the Army. So, lead. Tell us what we need to do, and we’ll do it,” Neville proclaimed. Harry finally looked up, sitting straight up and looking between the three Gryffindors. And what he saw was three people who believed in him. Three people who believed he could make a difference, no matter the obstacles that stood in his way. Then Harry’s eyes caught on a letterhead lying discarded on the floor, and he had an idea. For the first time since Ginny vanished and the Gemini Rune lost its warmth, Harry smiled.

“Well, then. I think it’s time we kicked our Army into shape, don’t you?”

“Alright!” Dean exclaimed, high fiving Neville. Harry squeezed Lavender’s hand back before letting go. Then he stood on his feet and walked to the door, Lavender, Neville and Dean following behind.

Hermione slipped into the Room of Requirement and screamed. It wasn’t a terrified scream, but one of those screams that just escapes you when you’re so excited your throat constricts. Like when the new book in your favourite series comes out. Because standing in the centre of the Room of Requirement, with a smiling Harry (which in and of itself begged a lot of questions), were Peter, Gwen and MJ.

“Mione!!” Gwen exclaimed. Then as a unit, they raced towards each other. Gwen and Hermione slammed into each other and squeezed for all they were worth.

“Girls confuse the shit out of me,” Harry said to Peter, louder than was strictly necessary.

“Don’t ask me, pal,” Peter replied.

Hermione pulled back from Gwen, and then MJ was hugging her instead. Finally, they separated, and Hermione glared at Peter, who was still standing with Harry, an amused smile on his face.

“Oh, shut up you,” Hermione huffed, before opening her arms. Peter relented, and let Hermione jump into his arms.

“I should have brought a video camera,” Harry said, “I could watch that on repeat for hours.”

Hermione pulled away from Peter and suddenly focussed her attention on Harry. He’d shaved, as bad a job as it was, and apparently cut his hair. His clothes were neat and tidy, and the bags under his eyes had vanished. His eyes still weren’t what they used to be, but there was a hint of the old spark back within them.

“What the hell happened to you? You aren’t moping about like the Voldemort’s already taken over the world anymore.” She said dumbly, trying – and failing it seemed – to comprehend the almost complete 180 in Harry’s appearance and character.

“Some people reminded me that I’ve got a job to do, and a lot of people counting on me to do it,” Harry said, an air of finality to his statement that brokered no further argument.

“Yeah man, we heard about Ginny. How are you doing?” Peter asked, putting a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

Harry’s façade shattered for but a moment, returning just as fast, replaced by a smile she knew was fake.
“She’s out there. I just don’t know how to find her. But I’ll find her. If it’s the last thing I do, I’ll find her.” The room was eerily silent for a few seconds before Hermione just couldn’t wait for a second longer.

“Tell us about what happened at Oscorp!!”

“It’s a long story. I promise I’ll tell you all soon though. On the bright side, we’ve got our powers figured out now. And the shooters you helped us build are working brilliantly.” MJ exclaimed chirpily.

“What are your powers?!” Hermione asked, eyes flitting between Peter and Gwen. They looked the same as they always did. Maybe they were built a bit better, but underneath their jackets, she couldn’t tell. They looked healthy, though, so she supposed that was good.

“Enhanced Strength, perfect balance and adhesive fingers are the main ones, but it’s the precognitive sense that the kicker,” Gwen said.

“I call it ‘Spidey-Sense,’” Peter said, grinning slyly at MJ, who rolled her eyes.

“The rest of us don’t.”

Peter and Gwen’s heads snapped towards the door, and a few seconds later it swung open, revealing Susan, Hannah, Danny and Ernie.

“We’ll talk later,” Harry said. Giving MJ and Gwen hugs of his own before stepping into the middle of the room as more and more whispering students filed inside.

“Okay, everyone. As you can see, I’ve managed to wrangle us some extra special guest teachers today, so let’s give a big welcome to Mary Jane Watson, Gwen Stacy and Peter Parker!” The entire room broke out into applause and whistles, and the Ilvermorny trio all waved their hands as they blushed.

“All three of them have just completed their NEWTS at Ilvermorny school. Mary Jane received the top mark in the United States for Applied Charmwork and is working as a reporter for the Daily Bugle – she coined Spider-Man and Spider-Woman’s names for those of you up to speed on the New York vigilantes. Peter received the President’s Award for Arithmancy and is now heading his own sub-department at Oscorp Industries. And Gwen won the President’s Award for Transfiguration and graduated Dux of Ilvermorny School. So, these guys are top of the line when it comes to Magical Studies. So, for today’s lesson – where we’ll finally be learning Patronus’s – I thought it only fitting I enlist some help.” The room broke into more raucous applause, and Harry couldn’t help the grin that spread across his face. He locked eyes with Neville, who gave him a quick thumbs up.

“So, let’s do this, everyone pick a spot around the room.” The assembled students all broke up into groups, scattering around the room while Harry, Peter, Gwen and MJ stood in the centre.

“The Patronus is all about you. Before you can cast it, you need to think of a happy memory. The happiest memory you can. The best moment of your life. Allow it to fill you up. Then, you’re going to turn your wand in a spiral, while pointing it where you want your Patronus to appear. Like so.”

Harry, MJ, Peter and Gwen stood back to back and pointed their wands at the roof.

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

Four silvery shapes burst forth, illuminating the room and bringing gasps from the assembled crowd. Harry’s Stag galloped around the rafters; a Griffon conjured from MJ’s wand racing behind it. Peter’s Patronus was, fittingly, a Spider that scurried around above them. Gwen’s was a falcon, and
it flew between the students, spreading silvery vapour through the air.

“A full-body Patronus is the most difficult to produce, but shield forms are equally useful against a variety of opponents. Wands out everyone. And let’s give it a shot!” Harry exclaimed, beckoning to the crowd as the Stag dissipated. Everyone drew out their wands, and some – mostly the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs – started chanting the incantation immediately. The Slytherins and Ravenclaws just stood there, many with their eyes closed, trying to pick memories Harry guessed.

“Nice job, man,” Peter said, elbowing him.

“You’ve got quite the thing going here,” Gwen agreed.

“Thanks for taking the time to help us out,” Harry said, his gaze drifting past them to settle on the Patil Twins, both of whom were starting to get a silver mist.

“Gwen, you can tackle the Ravenclaws,” Harry said, pointing to the twins. Gwen nodded and skipped over to Jemma Simmons, who was staring furiously at her wand as if it had betrayed her.

A flash lit up his vision, and Harry turned to the Gryffindors in time to see Lavender Brown conjure a fully formed Direwolf of all things, though no one seemed more shocked than Lavender herself, who dropped her wand to the floor in fright.

“Fantastic Lavender! Brilliant!” Lavender turned towards Harry, cheeks flaming red, and he nodded to her. Lavender’s direwolf winked out of existence, and her smile faltered.

“Just remember, your Patronus can only protect you as long as you stay focused,” Peter said, and several people nodded enthusiastically as they returned to waving their wands. Harry, MJ and Peter continued their walk around the classroom, though Peter soon ducked away to help a struggling Neville. Harry and MJ ended up helping Susan and Hannah with their wrist movements. Susan eventually managed to summon a jaguar, and Hannah achieved a Chimpanzee.

“You really are good at this,” MJ said as they moved towards the Slytherin group.

“Thanks. It’s about the only thing that’s kept me going since Ginny…” he trailed off, biting his lip.

“Ginny’s the toughest there is. If anyone could get herself back on her own, it’d be her.” Harry smiled at that, the image of Ginny suddenly reappearing in the middle of the room, her hair smoking and clothes smouldering, light illumining her like a goddess flashing through his mind. But the Gemini Rune remained lifeless and dull, and the image failed as soon as it appeared.

“You’re right about that,” Harry said, trying his best to laugh convincingly.

The Slytherins were having the hardest time of the Patronus. Jessica, who’d been trying to create a corporeal Patronus with Professor Lupin since they started lessons with him in the Home a year and a half ago, was still nowhere closer to a solid form. The only Slytherin who’d managed anything was Astoria, who’d forged – incredibly – a bald-headed eagle that had MJ in stitches. But Harry thought he might know what the Slytherin’s problems were.

“Working hard is important. But there’s something that matters even more. Believing in yourself. That’s the key component of a Patronus. Just think, every great wizard in history has started out exactly as we are now. Students. If they can do it, why not us?” Harry exclaimed, then he walked over to Jessica, and held her wand hand, pointing it at the roof.

“I believe in you, Jess. You can do this,” He whispered in her ear. Jessica closed her eyes for a few seconds, then, without opening them, allowed Harry to guide her hand.
“Expecto Patronum,” she whispered. Her wand tip glowed a brilliant white, and a Lioness leapt into the air. It slammed into Cassius, knocking him flat on his ass, before standing over him with snarling teeth. Jessica’s eyes jerked open, and a brilliant smile lit up her face in awe.

“I did it,” she exclaimed softly, then, seemingly accepting it properly. She jumped up in the air and yelled, “I DID IT!!” She hit the ground and pulled Harry into a hug, not even caring who saw.

“YES!!!” Harry pulled back and rubbed his ears.

“Sorry,” Jessica admitted sheepishly.

“Don’t be. Well done.” Harry laughed, but then an ear-shattering crack filled the room, followed by uncontrollable sobbing and moans of “Harry Potter!” Harry bolted to the centre of the room where he’d been standing at the beginning of the lesson, and came face to face with Dobby, who was staring up at him from beneath his tower of eight woolly hats, all of which were standing on top of one another. There must be some sort of magic keeping those things on, Harry couldn’t help but think to himself.

The entire room fell quiet, and the few Patronus’s in the into the aether.

“Harry Potter, sir! Dobby has come to warn you, he has. The bad toad lady Umbridge warned the House Elves not to tell, but Dobby is a free elf! So, he has come to tell Harry Potter and his friends, even if the other Hogwarts Elves don’t like…”

“Dobby, focus! What’s happened!?”

“Bad toad lady Umbridge has found Harry Potter and his friends!” Dobby exclaimed, before bursting into tears and howling on the floor.
Hi guys, Miracle here! We’ve gotten numerous questions concerning Malfoy’s actions in Act IV, Chapter 5. Specifically, his use of an Unforgivable Curse against Harry being both out of character and implausible. We feel the need to point out to the Draco fans out there, that this is not a good Draco story. There is no redemption for him here. Here, he is the spoiled brat child who thinks everything is owed to him and is verbatim regurgitating his father’s views. There is a place for good Malfoy stories, but this one isn’t it. Draco using an unforgivable in a rage about his favourite game being taken away is in character for this Malfoy. As for the Aurors showing up, Umbridge has gridlock control over what gets in and out of the school, and you think she’d honestly care that Malfoy tried to curse Harry? She tries herself to use the Cruciatius on him in the books and the movies.

Hopefully, that clears things up.

In much better news, you get this chapter early for two reasons. One, Ghost and I are going skiing this weekend, so no new chapter until next week. Two, its San Diego COMIC-CON this weekend!!!! Have fun everybody!!!!!

Updated Disclaimer:

“Hold on!!!!” Hobbs yelled as the Enterprise ploughed through another wall of rainbow light. Ghost slammed his eyes shut from his position on the floor as glare flooded the Bridge. Then it was gone, and Ghost opened his eyes.

Beyond the main viewer was quite possibly the most incredible thing he’d ever seen.

The Enterprise was hovering above a sea of rainbow-coloured water, rippling under the engines. It stretched as far as the eye could see, with what should have been the ocean surrounding it replaced by the rainbow light of the Speed Force. In the heart of the continent was a giant ash tree. And when he said giant, he meant GIANT. It towered up into the sky, stretching farther than any mountain, and nestled in its great branches were entire kingdoms. Ghost could see a storm covered planet surrounded by rings of pure white energy, a mountain covered in marble buildings, a city of golden towers, forests of the greenest he had ever seen, mountain ranges that looked cold and unforgiving and pits of darkness that swallowed all light. If he looked directly up and squinted high enough, he could see clouds flitting through the uppermost branches, and the shimmering white aura of the Aether Force, beyond which he knew lied the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ghost helped Miracle to her feet, and Oracle fell from the roof, landing with a thud on the floor. Phoenix gracefully lowered herself back to the floor. Ghost couldn’t help but notice she was standing closer to Hobbs than was strictly necessary.
“Told you I could do it,” Toretto said smugly. Annabeth, who had banged her head quite hard on her chair, glared at their driver.

“Shut up and dock us with the Multiversity. I don’t want to be too close to the Fair Lands for long.”

“No problem,” he winked at Annabeth and started angling the ship up into the sky, away from the forested continent where the roots of the World Tree lay.

“What’s wrong with the Fair Lands?” Phoenix asked softly as Miracle rubbed her head and Ghost checked on Oracle, who was groaning softly on the floor.

“The Faeries of the Seelie and Unseelie Courts aren’t the most hospitable of peoples. They don’t like it when outsiders get too close to their shores, especially outsiders who have can’t touch the True Source. In other words, us,” Miracle explained softly.

“True Source?”

“We’ll explain later.”

The Enterprise rose up through the air, soaring past the golden city of Asgard, and the megalopolis of the Ascended Ancients. The ship glided through the towering branches of the tree. They passed the Enchanted Forest and the Dragon’s Nest, and Ghost got a good view of Mount Olympus through the brush. Eventually, they pulled up sharply to avoid the trunk of the tree, which appeared through the leaves out of nowhere, and they spotted a cavernous hollow, right in the centre, with dozens of vessels from pirate ships to spacecraft docked against smaller branches extending out.

“Take us in, Toretto,” Annabeth said coolly.

“Aye, aye, captain.”

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**Act IV, Chapter 9: The Gathering of the Clouds**

Harry spun around, bringing himself to full height in an instant. Fear was rippling through the entire group, and the Slytherins were already eyeing the exits.

“Everybody don’t panic!” Harry yelled. Matt pushed his way through the crowd and grabbed Dobby by the shoulders, ignoring the looks of shock on Danny and the rest of the Ravenclaws faces as he moved without his cane.

“Dobby! How much time do we have! Does she know we’re here right now?!” Matt asked, shaking the tiny elf. But Dobby was incoherent, balling into his tea cosy.

“We need to get out of here!” Someone yelled. That was all it took for the entire group to begin bolting for the doors. Harry made to speak, but MJ beat him too it.

“Everybody stand exactly where you are!!” She screamed, and everybody stopped still, turning to face her.
“If we run out that door like a bunch of headless chickens Umbridge will catch us for sure! We need a plan! And fast!” Hermione exclaimed.

“As High as Honour!” Danny yelled, pushing through the crowd with Luke, Fred and George, “If ever there was ever a time to do it, now’s it.” Harry nodded, “Agreed. Defenders! High as Honour is in effect!” As one, all the Defenders reached into their robes and pulled the hem within their sleeves. Their school robes all transfigured themselves automatically into the hooded red-cloaks of the Defenders, and several people gasped as they realised just who the people behind the hoods were. But almost every eye in the room fell to Jessica as the crowd parted to let her, decked out in red just like the rest of them, reach the centre.

“Harry! The Home! It’s the only way! It’s close enough we should be able to get everyone there if we hurry!”

Harry hesitated for a second, debating whether exposing the Home’s secret to the entire Army was a good idea, then disregarded it. They trusted him, so it was about time he started trusting them.

“Agreed. Defenders, ten to a group! We’ll stagger the run ten seconds apart. That way if one group gets caught, the rest will be safe. Brains, take Dobby. Cage, ten Gryffindors first. GO!” Luke quickly gathered up ten of the Gryffindors around him, including Demelza, Colin, Dennis, Lavender, Dean, Neville and Seamus and made a run for the door. Harry took off at a run as well, stopping at the door and watching Luke and his party vanish down the stairs to the sixth-floor corridor. Peter, Gwen and MJ followed him.

“I’m going to look out, watch for anyone who shouldn’t be there,” Peter said. He pulled back the sleeves of his jumper, and ‘thwipped’ a web to the roof. Then he jumped off the ground and swung up into the rafters.

“Clear!”

“Okay, Iron Fist next group!” Danny, with his group of Hannah, Susan, Ernie, Eloise, Megan and Justin, raced to the door and ducked out into the corridor.

“Filch is coming!” Matt hissed, sliding to a stop next to Harry.

“Where!”

“Fifth floor. He’s coming from the other direction. Malfoy, Parkinson and Blaise Zabini are on their way too! Via the Grand Staircase.

“We need to speed this up. Alias! You’re next!” Jessica ran up to him with Daphne, Tracey, Lance, Emilie and Astoria.

“Cassius and Maria have vanished!” Jessica exclaimed.

“They went out the other way! They’re headed straight for Filch,” Matt said, twisting his head.

“Crap,” Tracey muttered.

“Fuck them. Let’s get to this safe house now!” Lance intoned. Harry nodded to Jessica, and Alias led her Slytherins towards the stairs.

“Mystery!” Harry called, now very scared about the time.

“I’m here!” Luna exclaimed, running full tilt with most of Ravenclaw House behind her.
“Someone’s coming up the stairs!” Peter hissed. Harry slammed the door before Fitz could exit and wished it away.

“It’s… I don’t know… I can’t…” Matt was stuttering, placing his ear against the wall. Then he gasped in frustration. “It’s the bloody cat!” Harry shoved the door open in time to see Peter wrap Mrs Norris up in a cocoon of spider-webs and affix her to the roof.

“Go!” Harry yelled, and Luna all but pulled Jemma out into the hall, bolting with her charges.

“Malfoy’s at the Sixth-Floor corridor!” Matt yelled, then he swore and ducked out into the hall on his own.

“Matt!” Harry yelled.


“Brains!” Hermione rushed towards him, still cradling a sobbing Dobby, accompanied by Fred, George, Alicia, Katie, the last Gryffindors, as well as Padma and Anthony from Ravenclaw.

“Go now!” He begged. Hermione and her group charged into the breach, the last group – save him and MJ.

“Come on!” Harry yelled, jumping out into the hallway with MJ. He slammed the doors closed, and the Room of Requirement vanished as if it were never there. Peter dropped down from the ceiling, landing without a stumble behind them. They raced down the stairs, and Peter gasped. He pushed them to the ground just in time for a spell to fly over their heads. They looked up, and watched in awe as Matt flipped over a curse before cracking one of the red sticks he kept attached to his leg at all times on Malfoy’s head. Gwen flung a web line at Blaze, jerking him forward straight into her waiting fist. Then with her wand, she slammed Pansy Parkinson – whom she had suspended with Wingardium Leviosa – into a wall.

“Come on!” Susan yelled. She was standing next to the open portrait with Ron, beckoning them with her hand. They raced towards the picture, and Ron ducked inside. Just as they were about to reach it, Matt cursed.

“Umbridge!” Susan, a look of horror on her face, slammed the portrait closed before they could reach it. Peter jumped over Harry and MJ’s heads, slinging a web to the ceiling. He flung across the gap and latched a web onto Malfoy’s unconscious body before hoisting him to the roof and sticking him there, while Gwen did the same thing with Blaze and Pansy. They disappeared out of sight the second Filch and Umbridge came running down the stairs, Cassius Warrington and Maria Hill floating suspended behind them.

“Potter and Bones!! I’ll have you expelled for this!!” Umbridge pointed her wand at Harry, MJ, Matt and Susan, but Matt was faster on the draw. He pointed his wand skyward and yelled.

“Obliviate!” A bright flash filled Harry’s vision, accompanied by Umbridge screaming, “NO!”

When it cleared, Harry found himself stumbling into a wall in the Sixth-Floor corridor. He looked around, confused. Mary Jane Watson was sitting on the ground wearing a parka and winter pants, and Matt and Susan were leaning against the wall on the other side of the hall much the same way he was. What was MJ doing here? She wasn’t supposed to show up for the DA lesson for a few hours at least. Harry glanced at his watch and blanched at seeing the time of 9:30 pm. How had it gotten so late!? He was supposed to be at the DA meeting!
“What?!" Umbridge’s high pitched whine filled the hall. Harry groaned and turned towards the
stairs, where Umbridge was standing with Filch. Cassius Warrington and Maria Hill stood up on
shaky legs behind them. Then, seeing Umbridge’s attention fixed on Harry, they bolted in the
opposite direction.

“You!” Umbridge screeched, seemingly coming to some conclusion that eluded Harry. The
Firebrand burned on Harry’s arm, and he leapt into action, slinging his wand out and summoning a
shield charm between his friends and Umbridge before she’d even finished casting her stunning
spell. The spell ricocheted off the shield and hit the roof. Harry followed its impact and had to force
himself not to gasp at the sight of Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy sticking to the underside of the roof,
three bodies wrapped in Spider silk stuck next to them, all of them unmoving. He dropped his eyes
back to Umbridge, and lazily defended against her weak stunners.

“Harry behind us!” Matt yelled. The Firebrand twinged again, and Harry spun around, raising his
free hand.

“Protego!” Cornelius Fudge, Kingsley Shacklebolt and John Dawlish were standing on the other
side of the corridor, wands drawn. Susan, MJ, and Matt drew their own wands, pointing them at the
newcomers.

“Potter, drop the shield now!” Fudge commanded, but Harry wasn’t paying him any attention. His
gaze was fixed on his sleeve. His red sleeve. He was wearing his Defenders Cloak. A quick glance
to Matt confirmed he was wearing his cloak as well. And at that moment, he realised that something
must have happened. Something he couldn’t remember, for there was no other reason for him to be
in the Sixth-Floor corridor in Defenders garb. He chanced a look at the portrait of the silver city. It
was firmly closed, and he needed to keep it that way.

“Yeah, I don’t think so,” Harry said, pushing more of his strength into his two shields.

“Fine. If you’re going to be like that. Shacklebolt, Dawlish, teach this boy a lesson about respecting
his superiors!” Fudge snapped, his anger evident for all to see. Shacklebolt and Dawlish rolled their
eyes and sent off quick stunners. Both seemed quite shocked when they shot back at them faster than
they impacted, and both had to duck to avoid being hit.

“I’m not so easy to take on Minister. Perhaps you should have thought about that before you decided
to disregard my help to take more of Lucius Malfoy’s bribes,” Harry snarled, the image of the
Malfoy’s smug face as he tried to seize the Weasley property flashing into his mind.

“You, disrespectful…”

“Enough!!” Everyone turned towards Umbridge’s side of the hall, including Umbridge herself. For
standing at the top of the stairs was Albus Dumbledore, wand in hand.

“I quite agree!” Professor McGonagall exclaimed, running down the hallway on Fudge’s side.

“Dumbledore! Good of you to come. Care to explain to me how it is that Potter has been building an
army from amongst your students! Are you that incompetent that you didn’t notice? Or were you a
willing co-conspirator in Potter’s plans to overthrow the Ministry?!” Fudge proclaimed.

“Everything Harry did was under my direct instruction,” Dumbledore said matter of factly, “This
army that Harry has built was my idea and conceptualised entirely so that I could overthrow the
Ministry.” Fudge started spluttering stupidly, and Harry rolled his eyes. He really was a moron.

“You… you admit it!” Fudge exclaimed.
“Indeed,” Dumbledore said cheerfully. Harry had to admit, seeing in an instant Dumbledore’s plan for what it was, that it was a good idea. But he couldn’t help wondering why he was doing it. Harry hadn’t said a word to the Headmaster since their meeting at the beginning of term, and Dumbledore hadn’t attempted to speak to him either. Not even after Ginny had disappeared. So, Harry let Dumbledore take the fall, and he didn’t feel in the least remorseful about it.

But Fudge was now grinning like a kid in a candy store as if realising something incredibly important. “Well, well, well – I came here tonight expecting to finally have Potter expelled, but instead…”

“You get to arrest me. It’s like losing a Knut and finding a Galleon isn’t it?”

Fudge spun around to face Kingsley and Dawlish. “You two, arrest Dumbledore and escort him to Azkaban to await trial for treason and sedition.”

“But what about Potter!” Umbridge exclaimed.

“What about him?” Fudge snapped.

“You said he’d be expelled!”

“Oh, not now, this is far more important!”

Fudge, practically giddy with excitement turned to Dumbledore, “Come now, Dumbledore.” Kingsley and Dawlish started to move around Harry’s shield, but Dumbledore held up a hand.

“Ah. It seems we’ve hit a bit of a snag,” he said thoughtfully, stroking his beard.

“A snag?” Fudge repeated dumbly.

“Yes. You see, you seem to be under the impression I’m going to, what was the phrase? Come quietly. Well, I can tell you this, I have no intention of going to Azkaban.” It happened in a split second, Dumbledore whipped out his wand and sent a shockwave through the hall. Dawlish, Kingsley, Fudge and Umbridge all collapsed like puppets with their strings cut, leaving Harry, Susan, MJ, Matt and McGonagall to stare in awe at the Headmaster as he descended the stairs. Harry let the shields drop, and took a deep breath.

“Excellent shield work Harry,” Dumbledore said, deliberately stepping on Umbridge as he approached them. Peter and Gwen dropped down from the ceiling, scaring the crap out of Professor McGonagall.

“Ah, Mr Parker, Miss Stacy, Miss Watson. Good to see you’re well,” Dumbledore said, taking two people lowering themselves from the ceiling with spider cables as the most natural thing in the world. Malfoy’s cocoon fell from the roof, which Peter caught one-handed, before unceremoniously letting him fall the last metre with a thud.

“Hi, Prof Dumbledore. Lovely school you’ve got here. Just, quick question. I have literally no memory of how I got here,” MJ said, raising her hand in the air awkwardly.

“Matt cast an Obliviation when Umbridge came down the stairs. Pete and I were just outside it’s affects,” Gwen said as Peter lowered Pansy and Blaze down as well.

“So that’s what I did. Thought it might be something like that,” Matt admitted, scratching his head.

“Thank Merlin, I thought I’d gone mad for a second there,” Susan said, breathing a sigh of relief.
“An excellent idea, Mr Murdock. Now, allow me.” Dumbledore swished his wand in an arc, and half an hours’ worth of memory suddenly flooded back to him. The Patronus lesson, Dobby, as High as Honour.

“Everyone made it into the Home except us,” Harry breathed.

“Albus, what’s going on?” McGonagall begged.

Dumbledore sighed, “I’m afraid I’ll have to leave the school in your capable hands, Minerva.”

“Where will you go?” McGonagall asked, “Grimmauld Place?”

Dumbledore shook his head, “No. In fact, this could not have come at a more fortuitous time.”

Dumbledore turned towards Harry.

“I believe I’ve managed to uncover what happened to the Dragons at last.” Harry breathed a sigh of relief. “It seems Voldemort lured them into a trap on the Wakandan Border and transported them into Hell, literally, not figuratively. Not a place one goes for a holiday. Hopefully, I’ll be able to rescue them in time, and that Satan has not had the chance to get his claws into William and Clarissa, or worse, the Dragon Force itself.”

Harry swallowed hard. Hell? Apparently, that was a real place. Who knew? Pushing the thought out of his mind for now, he stepped over to the portrait, brushed his fingers over the Home Rune and whispered, “As High as Honour.” The picture swung open, revealing Ron, Danny, Luke and Jessica, wands pointed straight at them.

“Oh, thank Merlin it’s you,” Danny exclaimed, dropping his wand in relief.

“We thought for sure Umbridge got you,” Luke admitted.

“Not yet,” Harry said.

“Harry, mate there’s someone you need to see,” Ron said, scratching his head.

Harry frowned, “In a second. But everyone’s okay?”

“Yeah. Everyone made it.” Jessica confirmed.

Harry turned back to the teachers.

“So, what should we do?” Harry asked, directing the question at Dumbledore.

“Well, I suggest you all be gone by the time Madame Umbridge and the Minister wake up, which should be any minute now. They’ll have no recollection of what has occurred here. I’d also say your clandestine meetings may need to take a break, but aside from that, I have no advice for you. I’ll attempt to contact both of you when I’ve located the Dragons.” Dumbledore nodded to McGonagall and Harry before whistling. Fawkes flew from across the hall and landed on Dumbledore’s shoulders. The Headmaster vanished in a tongue of flame, and McGonagall retreated down the hall she came after giving Harry a curt nod. Peter, Gwen, MJ, Susan and Matt followed Harry inside, and they shut the portal.

Jessica elbowed Matt in the arm as they proceeded down the corridor. “Don’t do that again!” She snapped, “You gave me a heart attack, running off like that!”

“Sorry, I needed to buy us some time,” Matt said unapologetically.
“No need to be such a daredevil about it,” Jessica huffed. Luke laughed and slapped Matt on the back, forcing him to stumble forward a few paces.

“That’s it. Daredevil. Done deal.”

“What! No way, that’s a terrible name,” Matt huffed.

“So’s Alias, Daredevil. Deal with it,” Jessica beamed. They rounded the corner, and Harry stopped short. His throat constricted, and his heart-rate, which had been finally returning to normal after the nights’ events, went through the roof.

The kitchen and living rooms were crowded with people nervously chatting away, and in the centre of them was a fire-haired figure with a gaunt face, pale and shallow. She was thin as a rake and looked like she’d lost inches from her height, but it was her. He’d know her anywhere. Ginny.

He didn’t think. He just bolted. Step after step. Ginny spun around, and her face lit up like Christmas morning. She rushed towards him too, and he made to take her into his arms and twirl her around in the air. But they phased straight through each other, and instead, Harry crashed into the couch. He went arse over tip, smashing into the coffee table. But he didn’t care. He jerked upright and vaulted back over the couch. Ginny was standing there, tears streaming down her face. No. No, no, no, NO!!!! He was so close. She was right there. He reached out to her, but his hand slipped through hers as if she wasn’t even there, and he saw the scars mangled into her hand. The words, ‘I will not disobey my betters’, but cut over that was the bloody image of the Sagittarius rune. Tucked in the pocket of her robes was a grey-furred kitten with a pink nose, looking up at him with suspicion in its eyes.

“Gin…”

“Harry, I’m so sorry.” Her voice was far away, as if coming to him from the other side of a telephone, and Harry wasn’t sure how long he’d be able to stop himself from collapsing from a mixture of relief and dread. He couldn’t stop himself. He reached up and ran a hand over the Gemini Rune. Hers was as faded and washed out as his was. And, even with her right there, it remained lifeless. No more than a bad tattoo.

“Don’t you dare, apologise!” Harry exclaimed, tears of his own threatening to leak from his eyes, “You did what you needed to do to get away from that hag.”

“And now I’m stuck like this,” Ginny retorted.

“We can get your wand, I can use the Sagittarius to bring you back. Now that we know where you are, we can…”

“No, Harry. It won’t work. It’s not about reapplying it, this scar on my hand won’t let me get back. Trust me, I tried to reapply it.” She bared her arm, where dozens of scratch marks featuring the Sagittarius Rune were clearly visible, many of them covered in dry blood. Harry shook his head, “But you didn’t have a wand. If you did…”

“What happens to me doesn’t matter right now!” She growled, “There are bigger problems. I know what Voldemort’s after! The thing in the Department of Mysteries that Dumbledore’s guarding. The thing that got Dad killed. It’s a fucking prophecy. And it can only be removed by you or Voldemort himself!” Harry’s mouth clamped shut, and everyone started whispering frantically. Harry fell flat on his ass, leaning his head against the couch. Ginny flopped down next to him.

“Come on, everyone, park it would you,” Fred said, sitting down opposite Harry and Ginny with
George, Ron and Hermione. Everyone slowly started sitting down, some on the bar stools and couches, the rest on the floor.

“What happened outside Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Umbridge caught us, but Dumbledore took the fall,” MJ said, shaking her head, “He’s fled the school to find out what happened to the Dragons. Let’s hope he finds them.”

“Then whose Headmaster? McGonagall?” Fitz asked, though Harry couldn’t pin-point where his voice came from within the crowd.

“Umbridge will take it. With her as Headmaster, no one will be safe. Flitwick will be packing his bags by morning. McGonagall not long after. Harry, I wouldn’t wait for her to kick you off school grounds, I’d get the hell out of dodge before then,” Jessica said, taking a seat within the inner circle. Several people cast her odd glances – Gryffindor’s included, as though realising it was the red-hair she used to wear as ‘Lily Potter’ that was the disguise, rather than the other way around.

“She’s got a point, Harry. She might not be able to expel you, but she can sure as hell kick you out of the grounds. No one will be safe from her Detentions either. It’s hopeless,” Hermione said bitterly, swirling a coffee cup in her hands.

“Then there’s this prophecy,” Ginny said, “I overheard Malfoy and Alissandra talking about it that day at the hospital. Voldemort wants it badly. It has something to do with you, and he’s laying a trap of some kind to trick you into getting it. I’ve given it a lot of thought, and I wouldn’t be surprised if some of the Death Eater students like Malfoy are tasked with grabbing someone important as a hostage, to force you to retrieve the prophecy for him. I say he’d use me, but, well…” Ginny gestured to her gaunt self, and Harry had to swallow down the bile that threatened to revisit him.

Everyone was silent for several minutes.

“Is there anything we can do?” Susan asked, eventually.

Ron took a deep, harrowing breath, “We have to stop You-Know-Who from getting this prophecy. If he wants it so bad, we need to make damn sure he doesn’t get it.”

“Wait a second, hold the phone. You mean Dumbledore’s been right the whole time? He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is actually back?!” Zacharias Smith said, adopting a face somewhere between horror and disbelief.

“He was resurrected at the end of last year. I saw it with my own eyes,” Peter said, staring angrily at Zacharias.

“It’s the truth,” Jessica said, turning to look at the crowd, “My Mum helped him do it. Her and Lucius Malfoy.”

“They’re right,” Emilie Brindle said from her position cross-legged behind Jessica, “my parents were Death Eaters that got off last time, and they’ve been acting super strange.”

“Every piece of evidence points towards it. The disappearances, all the strange things happening. It’s what you’ve been training us for from the beginning, isn’t it Potter?” Lance Hunter said, giving Harry a firm nod.

Harry took a deep breath. “It is. I’m sorry for lying to you. All of you. But given what the Minister did to Dumbledore, can you blame me? If I had come out and said it was Voldemort that abducted us,” he waved to include Peter, “would you all have believed me? We, that is the Defenders and I,
needed a way to make sure people realised there was a threat, and this was the only way. I’m sorry. I truly am. I never wanted to lie, and I hated every second of it. But if I had to do it again, I would. Because it allowed me to see all of you, sitting here in front of me, and know that Voldemort and his sycophants won’t find it easy to murder you. I’m so proud of all the work you’ve done.” Everyone was silent again until Neville stood up from towards the back of the room.

“We’re with you, General. Defenders Army remember?”

“Defenders Army,” Harry agreed with a smile. Then Susan rose from her stool and looked him the eye.

“I knew from the beginning what we were training for. I’ll admit it. My Aunt’s the smartest person I know, cept perhaps Granger here, and she says to stay close to Harry. But I don’t need her to tell me that, cause I’m Defenders Army, all the way.”

Then Jemma stood up from the other side of the couch, and Harry had to twist his head around to see her.

“I’ll admit. I don’t like being lied too,” she said, “But I’m glad you did it. Because if you hadn’t, I think I would have never joined the Defenders Army. I wouldn’t have believed. But now I’m prepared for what’s out there, all thanks to you Harry. So, thank you for being willing to make the hard choice, to protect the rest of us. I’m a member of the Defenders Army, and you can count on me.”

And Lance Hunter.

“Look, Potter, I wasn’t originally on board with this. I figured you were gearing up for something, but I didn’t see how you’d be able to do anything about it. Even guessed you had a mole in Slytherin.” He turned to glare at Jessica, who winked slyly at him. “But this thing you’ve put together is something else. It’s something I can get behind, and when it comes down to you, old man Dumbles, or He-Who-Must-Be-Hyphenated, my money’s on you. So, it looks like I’m in for the long haul. Defenders Army,” He said with a resigned air, though Harry could tell it was fake. That was all it took. Everyone launched to their feet chanting at the top of their lungs, “DEFENDERS ARMY!! DEFENDERS ARMY!! DEFENDERS ARMY!!”

It was possibly the proudest moment of his life. He looked to Ginny, who was staring in awe at the crowd. She smiled and nodded at him, and Harry pulled himself to his feet, standing tall and proud as his friends all pledged their support.

“OKAY!!” Matt yelled at the top of his lungs, bringing the cheering back under control.

“The way I see it, we’ve got three problems. One, we have to get the prophecy before You-Know-Who can. Two, we have to not get caught in the trap that he probably has waiting for us. Three, we have to get rid of Umbridge. So, we need a plan, anyone have any ideas?”

Fred and George looked to each other, communicating softly using a number of hand gestures. Finally, it seemed Fred won whatever argument they had because he turned back to the group and said, “We’ve been preparing something since Umbridge started going psycho at the beginning of term. It’s almost ready…” “And by almost he means could possibly malfunction terribly,” George interjected while Fred continued, “We could use it. It’ll cause a lot of mayhem, we’ll definitely get expelled, but it could be the match that lights the fuse of whatever we use to get rid of her once and for all.”

Several people murmured softly between themselves.
“I like it, but that won’t be enough to get her the sack,” Harry said.

“What if we use it as a distraction?” Luna asked, jumping up and down so everyone could see her at the back. Harry gestured with his hands, and she slipped to the front through the parted crowd. “Use the twins’ project as a mass distraction. That way, while Umbridge is dealing with it, a group can sneak out undetected using the anchors and get the prophecy!”

“How about we use the Twins’ project as a mass distraction?” Someone asked, Harry thought it might have been Fitz.

“There are portals in this place that can take you to Hogsmeade, London, or Gringotts. The London Anchor will get us within eye-shot of the guest entrance to the Ministry!” Hermione beamed, “Brilliant Luna!”

“But what about all the people in the Ministry? There’s no way a group of students or Defenders would make it down to the Department of Mysteries without getting caught,” Susan pointed out. Hermione and Luna deflated.

“Then we need a second distraction, divide and conquer. One group gets Fudge’s attention while another sneaks down to the DoM,” Lance said, nodding his head.

“What about a protest?” Neville asked. More nervous chattering broke through the crowd.

“A protest?” Matt repeated, confused.

“Exactly. It’s not illegal to protest on Ministry premises. And think about it, what started the American Magical Revolution?!” Peter gulped hard.

“A protest! Of course!! It’s the perfect way to bring heaps of people into the Ministry. Clog the arrival hall with Anti-Umbridge and Fudge protestors during the morning rush hour, and people will get seriously mad. They’ll be crowded, jostled, less likely to notice who’s in an elevator compartment with them!” Jessica exclaimed.

“Do we have enough people?” Anthony Goldstein asked.

“Not on our own, but the younger years could help!” Lavender exclaimed, catching on to the idea and running with it, “They hate Umbridge as much as we do, the more bodies, the better!”

Harry beamed. This was why having a team around you was the best anyone could ask for. First among equals. One person had an idea, and then another person built upon it, until they had a fully comprehensive plan structure for how to spread the word to the first, second and third years, where to place Fred and Georges packages for maximum damage, how they’d get to making signs and posters to make the student protest authentic and many, many more. It was only when Jessica stepped up to Harry and intangible-Ginny that they realised there was a major flaw.

“If we get into the Department of Mysteries, how are we going to make sure we don’t fall into the very trap we’re trying to avoid?” Harry was stumped at that, but Ginny apparently wasn’t.

“I’ve been thinking about that,” she said, “what if we only make it look like we’ve fallen into Tom’s trap? I know him better than anyone else, and if there’s one thing Tom will never consider, it’s that we saw through him. If you spring the trap, he’ll assume you fell for it hook, line and sinker. Then we set a trap of our own. An ambush, as it were. Once we know what Tom has planned, we send in the back-up, and in the confusion, you get the prophecy out of there. Then you make like a bat out of hell back to the populated areas of the Ministry. The Death Eaters either expose themselves to the
“It’s a good plan. We’ll help anyway we can,” Peter said, stepping forward with MJ and Gwen, and drawing Harry, Jessica and Ginny’s attention.

“Thanks, guys.”

“Anything to give that piece of shit a piece of my mind.”

Then Harry felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see Ron standing there looking very uncomfortable.

“I’m going with you,” he said firmly.

“Ron…” Harry began.

“No. I need to do this, Harry. I… I’ve had a long time to come to terms with how much of an asshole I was last year. Especially what happened that night. I have no excuse for what I did. It was wrong, but I was just so mad and so jealous of you, and you Ginny,” he said, directing part of the statement to Ginny’s ghost-like form, “I’ve spent the last nine or so months, knowing that I destroyed the best thing I ever had: my friendship with you. And knowing that it’s something I can never get back, all because of my mistakes, eats me up inside. But let me do this. Let me do something to make up for all the stupid shit I’ve done. Let me stand beside you again.” Harry, head-spinning a thousand miles an hour, held out his hand.

“Just like old times,” Harry said, a smile creeping across his face. Ron’s face lit up, and he gladly took Harry’s offered hand.

“I’m going with you too,” Hermione said, slipping in to stand next to them. “If we’re going to walk headfirst into something we know is a trap to save the world from Voldemort, we may as well do it properly.” She grabbed their clasped hands, and Harry, grinning like an idiot, held his other hand over hers. Ron did the same, then Hermione again.

“The Golden Trio lives again,” Harry said.

Ron laughed, before gesturing to the cloaks Harry and Hermione still wore. “I don’t suppose you’ve got any spare cloaks lying about, do you?”
Act IV, Chapter 10: The Clouds Burst

Directions:

Here we are, everybody! The big kahuna!!! This is going to be one epically awesome chapter, but to do it justice we needed to introduce a new mechanic. Keep an eye out for P.O.V shift points through the narrative as we jump from location to location and group to group. As a result of the format, each person’s timeline – particularly at the beginning – won’t be chronologically sound. We’ve tried to keep it as close as we can, but for the sake of coherency, we’ve opted for this route. Now, on with the show – and the review flame war that is sure to accompany the finale.

Act IV – X: Susan I

It took them three days to get everything ready. Susan’s job was to organise the Faction responsible for the Ministry of Magic Protest. She’d teamed up with Neville Longbottom from Gryffindor and Foggy Nelson from Ravenclaw to talk to the various cliques of first, second and third years. She was proud to say no one took much convincing. All any of them had to say was, “Listen, we’re helping Harry Potter get Umbridge kicked out of the school, you in?” and you had a dozen recruits surrounding you five seconds later. From the three houses, they’d amassed a group of forty students from first, second, third and fourth year, all of whom knew their plan to a tee. On Friday morning, they were to wake up early, dress in their school robes, and make their way to the painting of the Silver City in the Sixth Floor Corridor, where Demelza Robbins would be waiting to open the portal into Harry’s secret pocket dimension base that the Ravenclaws were all geeking out over.

The hardest thing, in Susan’s opinion, had been making it look like they weren’t doing anything. Fortunately, Umbridge had been gone from the school almost the entire first day, so it’d given the Weasley Twins and their team the chance to move some of the larger elements of their grand spectacle in place. But they’d paid for their freedom at Dinner when Umbridge had announced that Dumbledore had been arrested and thrown in Azkaban (something the DA members made sure everyone else knew was a lie), that she had been appointed the new Headmistress, and that Harry Potter had been banned from Hogwarts Grounds. Of course, Harry hadn’t actually been stupid enough to go to dinner that night. He was simply ate in the Home (which was much more comfortable to eat in than the Great Hall anyway).

After her speech, which sent sixty-two people to sleep (Susan counted), Umbridge and her new staff took great care to monitor the students as closely as possible. Not that they didn’t make it difficult for them. All the passwords to the Common Rooms were changed to stop ‘undesirables’ from entering, and the secret passageways that Umbridge and her crew knew next to nothing about got quite the workout. The House Elves, led by Dobby, also weren’t happy with the new arrangements. Dumbledore had given most of them homes and watching him get ousted was a bitter pill for many of them to swallow. So, they’d agreed to make sure that any poisons like Veritaserum were removed from student’s food before meals (mostly Harry’s friends, though no one was particularly surprised
by this).

Not that Umbridge’s new position did her much good. Dumbledore’s office remained sealed, barring passage to anyone who tried to access it. Umbridge had also made a fatal error. She’d dismissed almost all the teaching staff. Most of them were now hiding out in the Home. Professors Vector, Fliitwick and Babbling, were working with Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy to find a way of bringing Ginny back into the real world without putting her or anyone else at risk, while Professor Sprout was helping Susan’s team marshal the younger years. When the Aurors came to arrest Hagrid, McGonagall, aided by two red-cloaked Defenders Susan knew were Luke and Danny, had helped him escape into the Forbidden Forest. Umbridge had then cursed McGonagall from behind, resulting in her current unconscious state under the care of Madam Pomfrey in Lily and James Potter’s old room. The only teachers to keep their jobs were Snape and Binns, though why nobody was really sure. Professor Trelawney – the Divination Teacher – had disappeared.

With no respected teachers left in the school, Umbridge was finding it very difficult to control any of the students. Her new replacements were unable to lead classes, many of which were simply empty. Students simply didn’t bother going to Detentions. Especially after the DA started spreading the truth of what really happened to Ginny, which caught on like wildfire. As a result, the number of house points in the hourglasses in the Great Hall just kept rapidly shrinking. The only person who seemed to be enjoying the state of affairs was Malfoy, who was walking around like the bee’s knees giving detentions and taking points from everyone he pleased. Him and a number of his friends – all of them from Death Eater families – had been commissioned into a group called the ‘Inquisitorial Squad’. It was basically a gang that thought they really ran the school. It was hilarious really, the fact that Malfoy truly believed he had any control over the situation. No, the person with the real power was the General.

The General was Harry’s new name, courtesy of Neville and Dean. Everyone in the Defenders Army was calling him it now. Both as a sign of respect and for a laugh, as it seemed to embarrass the hell out of him. The First and Second years were practically worshiping him. When he stopped to talk to them? Susan had seen one of the first-year Hufflepuffs, a girl named Brigette, faint. And that was to say nothing of the number of girls (and guys for that matter) literally besotted with him. Susan herself couldn’t help watching him when he wasn’t looking. Since the Triwizard Tournament, he’d commanded this sort of presence. When Harry Potter entered a room, everyone noticed – for better or worse. But he’d always acted as if it didn’t get to him, as if none of the fame or attention even phased him, and that sort of brought him down to a human level. Helped him hide to a degree. But since Umbridge had discovered the DA, and they’d all stood up and proclaimed him their leader that night in the home? It was like that shield had been stripped away like pulling back the hood of one of the Defenders Cloaks. He stood taller, carried himself just that little bit higher. His voice was just that bit more powerful, it was barely recognisable, but everyone noticed. And he’d gotten rid of his glasses. She didn’t know why, but he had. And it made all the difference. Now his bright green eyes shone unrestricted into the world, and the intensity and passion of them was enough to make Susan’s breath short and stomach clench whenever he turned them to her. He’d always had a presence, but now it had been turned up to eleven. Instead of everyone knowing he was in the room, now everyone had to acknowledge it, even defer to it in a way. At sixteen he carried the same aura about him that Dumbledore, Doctor Strange or Will O’Neill did. It truly was awe-inspiring. He’d taken the ‘General’ persona and made it his own.

“Susan!” Demelza’s voice echoed through the Home, snapping her out of her thoughts. She pulled herself up from the couch and rushed to the main hall in time to see the first wave of students – the young Gryffindors – step through the portal, looks of awe and excitement written across their faces.

“Come on everyone, in you come, quickly as you can. We’re going to need lots of room, so keep moving.” She called, and the kids started hurrying inside to meet her. Professor Sprout came rushing
down the stairs, and Susan gave her a quick smile as the kids kept pouring in. A few minutes and sixteen hyperactive Gryffindors later, Neville, Dean, Seamus, Parvati and Lavender brought up the rear.

“All good so far?” Dean asked.

“Brilliant.” The Portrait opened again, and Foggy Nelson and Padma Patil led the Ravenclaws, who looked even more in awe of the Home than the Gryffindors had, inside.

“Come on people keep moving, down the right-hand corridor please!” Susan said, guiding the influx of students towards the study room at the other end of the house, where Harry and the Defenders were preparing.

“Are you ready for this?” Lavender asked, coming to stand beside her.

“I keep telling myself I am, but deep down I’m absolutely terrified,” Susan admitted.

“Well I am too.”

“It’s okay to be scared, you know.” Susan and her friends all spun around to see Ginny Potter standing, arms folded just behind them.

“I was terrified the first time I did anything like this,” she said, gesturing to the moving tide of kids, many of whom were staring wide-eyed at Ginny as they passed. Susan had to admit; she did look quite terrifying. The paleness of her face, thin frame and gaunt appearance made her appear very much like what one might imagine a reanimated corpse might look like.

“Trust me, I saw the Chamber of Secrets at 11. Nothing can prepare you for that. Not to mention the time I was trapped in my own head with all my and Harry’s collective fears. Not fun.”

“Your point?” Dean asked, and Susan couldn’t help but agree. She wasn’t exactly putting anyone at ease.

“The point is that fear isn’t bad. Fear makes sure you know what you’re doing is dangerous. So, use it. Like Harry said at the first DA meeting. It’s fuel, don’t waste it.” Ginny turned on her heel and walked through the wall, and Susan couldn’t help but shiver.

“It’s downright creepy that is,” Hannah said softly. Susan spun back around and realised the Hufflepuffs had arrived while she wasn’t looking. Demelza shut the portrait door and walked up to them.

“Shall we?” she asked eagerly, taking off before waiting for an answer. Susan rolled her eyes but followed with the others behind her anyway.

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**Act IV – X: Harry I**

Harry was really trying to get used to not having his glasses on. He kept looking for them at random times. His mind would just forget that he didn’t need them and he’d frantically go looking for them, only to realise several minutes later that he could see perfectly fine, and that he’d been an idiot. He would miss the old wireframes, that was for sure. But he couldn’t deny the practicality of not having to wear them in a fight. Also, he didn’t have to worry about them bouncing on his nose when he
jumped. That was just really annoying. So, he once again silently thanked Daphne for arranging the incredibly expensive sight-correction potion to be sent from her father (who was a Potioneer) to Ragnok, who had then placed it in Harry’s Vault for him to retrieve.

The DA. Harry had been furious when he walked into the Great Hall the day after the morning after the attack and his subsequent elevation to apparent divinity amongst the student populous. Cho Chang had been sitting at the Ravenclaw table with a ring of empty seats around her. Scared across her face in puss-filled welts and giant pimples was the word, “Sneak.” Clear and plain as day for everyone to see.

“So, it was her,” Hermione had said, staring at Cho with the same look of hatred he was.

“How’d you do it?” He’d asked her.

“I put a powerful spell on that parchment we all signed. It has no counter that I know of. I hope Miss Chang is happy with her new position amongst Umbridge’s favourites, she’s certainly earned it.”

Harry pushed thoughts of Chang out of his head, focussing on the task at hand. He gripped his wand, secure in its holster within the Defenders Cloak, just to make sure it was free (he’d done this about five times already). He was standing in the training room of the Home with the rest of the Defenders, plus some last-minute additions. Harry, Hermione and Ron would be going in first to spring Voldemort’s trap. Then the other Defenders would come in a good deal after in two separate teams. The only problem? They were short-handed. So, Harry had offered positions on his suicidal squad to the best fighters he had available. Peter, Gwen and MJ had all accepted in a heartbeat (MJ had been especially ecstatic when he said the Cloaks were part of the deal).

The two teams were Matt, Jessica, Luke and Danny; and Peter, MJ, Gwen and Luna. Together, they’d attack the Death Eaters from behind, allowing Harry, Hermione and Ron time to escape with the Prophecy. Once they made it out, the other Defenders would retreat if the enemy wasn’t yet dealt with. Harry wasn’t a massive fan of the plan, as it left most of the fighting to others, but he didn’t really have much choice in the matter. The priority was getting the prophecy away from Voldemort’s hands at all costs, and not only was he the best person for the job, but he was also apparently the only one who could remove the thing.

Ginny stepped through the wall, and Harry’s eyes found hers immediately.

“I should be there with you,” She growled. Harry’s stomach plummeted so far he thought miners in China might find it.

“I wish you were with us too,” he replied. God all he wanted was to hug her. To touch her. To feel her. To feel anything from their connection again.

“Has Flitwick found anything?” He asked, trying to change the conversation.

Ginny sighed, looking even more depressed than before.

“No. But he’s only been working for a few days. Professor Babbling says the best possible way to work it to send my wand to me. The only problem is that we still don’t know how far away from the real world I am, so sending anything to me would be quite difficult.” She pulled her kitten, Lightning, out of her pocket and stroked his head a couple of times.

“Harry. Don’t you dare get yourself killed out there,” she said sternly.

“Ginny…”
“No, I mean it. If you die out there, I can’t resurrect you. Not from here. If you die, we’re stuck forever. You’re more important than some prophecy. If it looks like you’re going to lose, send a reductor curse at it and get out of there.” She turned her blazing look on him, but all Harry felt was sadness. It had lost all its shine and rage. Now, all he could see was sorrow in her eyes, attempting to be strong.

“I promise,” he said. Ginny breathed a sigh of relief, then looked over his shoulder. Professor Sprout was peeking her head through the door.

“Everyone’s here,” She said.

Harry nodded, “Good. Let’s get this show on the road then. Everyone, gather up.” Harry stepped into the middle of the room, and his friends gathered in a circle around him, all dressed in their own cloaks.

“I’m not going to bother with a pep talk or anything. We all know our jobs and the consequences if we fail. Everyone stand very still.” They did as instructed, and Harry drew his wand.

“Scribo.”

He began to carve away at the floor, drawing lines into the rough shape of a person, then over the top, he drew a quick swirl. He extinguished his wand and slammed his foot onto the symbol, fixing an image firmly in his mind. The rune on the floor lit up in brilliant white. He stared, a small smile of victory on his face as the magic did its work. Golden dust spiralled up from the floor, surrounding everyone in the room (except for ghost-Ginny). Light burst out from each particle, like thousands of tiny suns. Once the light cleared, Harry opened his eyes.

Standing where they’d been not five seconds before, were his twelve friends. But each of them had been aged at least ten years. Harry had pictured each of them as best he could, imagining what they’d look like in their mid-twenties, and Harry thought he’d hit the mark quite well. Everyone was taller, and their bodies more defined. The boys all had much more visible muscles, their clothes were tighter, and they all had varying degrees of facial hair. Ron’s hair was significantly longer and shaggier, not unlike Bill’s; Matt had a three day growth and a shorter fringe; Peter looked, for the most part, unchanged, though he did have some slight facial growth; Danny had a moustache, accompanied by a similar growth and his hair was even curlier than usual; Luke had a killer goatee – and he was built like Hagrid on steroids. The girls were all more built as well, though it was more discrete than the boys. Their legs were taller, and their chests slightly larger. Hermione’s hair had tamed somewhat from its usual frizz; MJ’s hair, usually up in a ponytail, had changed to look more like Ginny’s long locks; Luna’s had become much less stringy, more filled out in a way; Jessica had shot up like a tree, though she was still incredibly skinny, and her hair just as long; and Gwen’s had gone from blonde with simple pink tips, to bright magenta, though it still hung shoulder length. And no longer was everyone wearing the Defenders Cloaks. Instead, they wore simple black robes, like something one would wear to the Ministry of Magic.

“Holy crap!” Gwen exclaimed, checking her wrists for the web-shooters.

“Nice Rune work, Harry!” Hermione beamed.

“Fuck. I look good. Don’t suppose this is permanent, is it?” Luke asked, hopefully.

“Fraid not,” Harry admitted. He checked his own body and was glad to see that his personal changes had taken effect. He appeared taller, his eyes were an ordinary shade of brown, and his hair was slicked back instead of all over the place.
“Good to know I’m always destined to be skinny as a rake. You could have at least given me bigger tits, Harry,” Jessica fumed, and Harry blushed beet red.

“Um… for the guy that can’t see, what just happened? Your auras went wonky for a moment, but now they’re the same as before,” Matt said, looking around wildly, though his eyes remained as lifeless as ever behind his red-tinted glasses.

“Sorry, Matt. I used the Virgo rune to make everyone look about ten years older. Should get us into the Ministry of Magic without any dramas.”

“Ah. Okay. Do I look any good?” he asked, running his hands over his face, “a beard. That’s cool, I suppose.”

“You look fine, Daredevil,” Danny said candidly. Matt scowled at him but continued to run his hands through his hair.

“You look like you should be the next Bond, Murdock. Chill,” Jessica said.

Harry looked for Ginny, but she had evidently disappeared as he placed the enchantment. Crushing the sadness in his heart, he turned on his heel and made his way out into the hallway to face the music.

Act IV – X: Fitz I

Leopold Fitz was quite possibly having one of the best moments of his life. Hands down. He was sitting at the Ravenclaw table in the Hogwarts Great Hall, Jemma beside him, her hand gripped tightly in his right, and a detonator in his left. Not something one gets to do on a regular basis. Everything was in place. Three days’ worth of hard work was about to pay off. The Weasley Twins really were geniuses. If he were honest, he’d asked himself several times why they weren’t Ravenclaws. The levels they went to for their creations were incredible. He supposed the Weasley blood must have won out in the end, or maybe the impulsiveness. Either way, both he and Simmons, who’d been helping check over the twins’ packets and place them around the school for the grand show, had a great time discussing the whole thing with them. Fred and George were proud of their inventions and having someone they could actually discuss them with had (according to one of them, Fitz honestly couldn’t tell which one was which) made the experience even better. And considering they were about to blow up the school, that was saying something. And to top it all off, thanks to the Twins, Fitz and Simmons had been able to finish a pet project of their own. Which was why Fitz got to press the first detonator of the day. And it was going to be a long day.

The doors of the Great Hall swung open, and Umbridge stalked into the hall in her grotesque pink cardigan. She even had a pink bow in her hair today. She walked a few steps, before stopping still and scanning the room, clearly taking in the distinct lack of students. In fact, the hall was practically empty – except the Slytherin table of course. Umbridge’s gaze passed over the few stragglers at the other three tables, Fitz and Simmons included, before fixing onto the Gryffindors, beady eyes searching for one face in particular. Jemma reached into her bag and withdrew a small grey metal ball. She lobbed it up into the air while Umbridge wasn’t watching, and it floated over to the Gryffindor table. The second Umbridge saw it, she scowled. Fitz thought Snape did it better.

The cameras had been the Greengrass’ idea. They’d used the Home to sneak into Hogsmeade, flued to the Greengrass Manor, stolen four of the grey metal camera balls, and snuck back all without their
parents noticing. And now they reaped the rewards.

“Madame Umbridge!” the ball announced in Harry’s voice, “I regret to inform you that I and a considerable portion of the school populous have elected to take a leave of absence today. But don’t worry, we’ve left you and your magnificent staff members in more than capable hands. We’ll see you, or rather, what’s left of you, at dinner. We hope you enjoy today’s entertainment, brought to you by Weasley Wizard Wheezes! Coming to Diagon Alley this Summer!”

Umbridge screamed, and Fitz pushed the detonator. The device hidden beneath the flagstones in the centre of the floor activated, and a pulse of blue magic shot through the room. For a brief moment, nothing happened. Then Fitz felt the gravity around him reverse directions, and he let out a holler as he was yanked up towards the roof. Keeping Simmons hand in his, the pair of them flipped in the air as they screamed, soaring up towards the ceiling, displaying a gorgeous sunny day outside. They came almost to the top, and another pulse shot through the room. Then they fell, and both Fitz and Simmons screamed again as they plummeted to their deaths. Another blue pulse and the duo were pulled back towards the roof. Fitz and Simmons looked out over the crowd and watched as all their fellow students were caught in the flux field. Bouncing up and down with every pulse. People were screaming and yelling and whooping in hilarity and terror all across the hall. Fred and George were doing backflips! Then Fitz saw Umbridge, and he couldn’t hold back his laughter. She was jerking up and down, her wand floating inches from her hand as she struggled to reach it, screaming like a stuck pig the whole time.

Fitz pressed the detonator again, and an entire flagstone on the floor of the hall flipped over, a metal spout affixed to it.

“Geronimo!!” Fred (or was it George?) exclaimed, and a giant funnel of water shot into the air. The water was caught by the flux field and thrown around the room. Splashing anyone who found themselves caught in its path.

“Weasley Wizard Wheezes Anti-Grav Bouncers and Insta-fountains! Available now from Fred and George Weasley, pranksters extraordinaire! Or coming soon to Diagon Alley! Stay tuned folks, it only gets better from here!!” Fitz idly wondered how the twins convinced Harry to record such messages, but before he could think about it, George whistled sharply, and a chariot made from cardboard boxes shot into the room, pulled by two broomsticks with cardboard horse heads affixed to them. Pulling the reigns of this chariot? Dobby the House Elf wearing a tiny Defenders Cloak, complete with all ten of his fluffy hats and a brand-new pair of Harry’s mismatched socks. That’s who.

“This is so much better than OWL’s!!!!” Jemma screamed. Fitz laughed, watching as Fred and George grabbed onto Dobby’s chariot, which swiftly spun around, and carried them out of the Great Hall.

‘Oh yeah,’ he thought to himself, ‘So much better than OWL’s.’

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**Act IV – X: Susan II**

There was something about walking through the streets of London leading a cohort of over three dozen students under the age of fourteen from a school of Witchcraft and Wizardry, that just couldn’t be believed. Half the students it seemed had lived in London their whole lives, the other half had never seen it before. That, more than crossing very busy six o’clock London roads, caused Susan
more headaches than anything else.

She and Neville were stationed at the front of the train, with the other older years stationed in pairs around the edges, with Lavender and Foggy bringing up the rear.

“Merlin, I hope we don’t lose anyone,” Susan whispered to Neville as they started their short ten-minute walk from the archway in St James Park that served as the Home Anchor. Fortunately, the notice-me-not charms were holding for the most part, as none of the passing Muggles seemed to notice the children appearing from thin air, though they did see the kids themselves. Thankfully, Aunt Amelia’s old saying proved true. “If you act like you belong somewhere, people will generally assume you do.” So, Susan and Neville marshalled the kids, making sure nobody was deliberately swatting their friends with signs or rolled up banners, and then, once Lavender and Foggy had stepped through, she got everyone moving down the well-maintained dirt pathway, and out onto the Mall. A number of the kids had brought cameras and insisted on taking photos of Buckingham Palace when it came into view, but Susan and Neville kept them moving as well as they were able. The front of the train was mostly comprised of Ravenclaws, though the very front was led by Dennis and his brother Colin. Ginny’s friend Demelza was somewhere at the back, keeping an eye on the Gryffindors she thought. That left the middle to be comprised of mostly Hufflepuffs.

Trafalgar Square brought another halt for photos, and Susan caught sight of Dean and Demelza pulling a group of second-year Gryffindors out of a sandwich shop. Their first encounter with a wizard occurred on the corner of Trafalgar Square and Whitehall. The man, upon seeing what must have looked like the entirety of Hogwarts walking down a London street, instantly disapparated, right in the middle of the road. A few seconds later, Susan heard numerous soft pops from various side allies and rooftops. And sure enough, Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour, in all his tawny-haired and big bushy eyebrowed glory, was walking beside her and Neville before they even reached the phone booth that hid the visitor’s entrance to the Ministry.

“How are you?”

“I’m swell Rufus. Just swell. How’s my Aunt?”

“Suitably bamboozled when we received a report just now of an, and I’m quoting here, “army of Hogwarts students carrying signs, posters, and blankets marching through Trafalgar Square,” Scrimgeour said gruffly, eyes darting around at the onlooking muggles. Several Aurors were now surrounding their column, dressed in rapidly transfigured clothing it seemed. But they didn’t try to stop them, and Susan was silently thankful for the security.

“I can imagine, and the day’s only begun too,” Susan said, continuing her walk towards the street corner where the red telephone box waited.

“How did you even get here?”

“It’s quite the tale if I do say so myself. A highly entertaining one as a matter of fact.” Scrimgeour’s scowl deepened.

“Susan…”

“I’m here leading a student protest, as I’m sure you, esteemed Auror that you are, have already deciphered. Why? Because I’m under orders from the General, Rufus. Orders I don’t plan on disobeying any time soon. So, I’d appreciate it if you could tell my Aunt that I’m okay, and not under the Imperious Curse. I’d also advise her to take the day off, but you and I both know she’s never taken a day off in her life, so that’s not going to happen.” Scrimgeour scoffed. Susan looked behind her for a moment and caught sight of one of the Patil Twins whispering to Auror Sirius...
“What, General? Come on, Susan! You have to give me something here,” Scrimgeour begged.

Susan raised an eyebrow at him, “I don’t have to give you anything. I am leading a peaceful student protest and doing nothing that is against the law. So, I would appreciate it if you’d stop bothering me.” Scrimgeour scowled, but by then they’d reached the booth. Susan stepped inside and pressed the correct sequence of numbers.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your business,” a cold female voice announced.

“Susan Bones. Leading a Student Protest.” Susan said clearly.

A badge shot out the hole at the bottom of the receiver that read, ‘Susan Bones. Student Activist.’ She pinned the button to her robes and ignored the voice, instead calling to the others.

“Four at a time!” She called. Dennis, Colin and two Ravenclaws she didn’t know crammed themselves into the box with her. The door closed, and the floor of the telephone shuddered as they began sinking into the ground. She locked eyes with Scrimgeour once more and winked slyly at his scowling face. The box slid into the atrium, and the kids gasped as they began sinking into the ground. She locked eyes with Scrimgeour once more and winked slyly at his scowling face. The box slid into the atrium, and the kids gasped as they got their first glimpse of the Ministry of Magic. It was still early, so it wasn’t jam-packed yet, but the fire-places were already lit, spitting out witch after witch and wizard after wizard. The hall held no allure to Susan, who had seen it countless times already, but she couldn’t help but smile at the looks on the Creevey brothers faces, who were looking at everything with an odd sort of glee.

“Ready everyone?”

“You betcha!” one of the first years, a short blonde girl with her hair done in Jamaican style braids, exclaimed giddily. The phone box touched down on the ground, and Susan led her group out into the Atrium. The telephone booth rose back up into the roof, and Susan walked with a spring in her step towards the wand check-in desk. She stopped a few metres in front of the chokehold and grinned mischievously at the adults all waiting in line, staring at her oddly. She reached into her pocket, and pulled out a tiny model frog, with a string sticking out of its ass.

“Fire in the hole!!” She yelled, and the four students around her covered their ears. Some of the adults, maybe half-bloods and Muggleborns, realised the significance of the phrase and rapidly covered their ears, but most of the people did not. Oh well, their loss. She pulled the string and threw the toad. It hit the floor and skittered several feet. Susan covered her own ears, and not a second later, a bang like a gunshot, followed by a rush of wind, swept through the Atrium, creating dozens of screams, and drawing every single eye. Now, sitting in the middle of the hall – blocking up half the available space at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the Fountain of Magical Brethren, was a 25 foot (7 metres) tall inflatable toad, with Madame Umbridge’s face.

Thank Merlin for Fred and George Weasley.

Susan, basking in the looks of shock and horror displayed on the faces of pretty much everyone in the room, walked around the toad, so she was in front of one of its crossed legs, and climbed up on top of the knee. Then she sat down and beckoned for Colin Creevey to throw her a sign. He tossed one that said, “Down with Fudge! Down with the Toad!” and she brandished it up in the air.

“How’s your parents ever tell you what happens when you oppress the next generation??!!” She yelled, her voice echoing through the room as Neville arrived with the next batch of students.

“I’ll give you a hint! It doesn’t end well for you!!!”
Act IV – X: Harry II

When Harry stepped out of the fireplace, he couldn’t help the massive smile that crossed his face. Because sitting amidst a sea of black Hogwarts Robes, all of them chanting at the top of their lungs, was a giant pink inflatable toad with the face of Dolores Umbridge. Ron stepped out of the fire behind him and choked on his own laughter.

“Say what you will about Fred and George, but you can’t deny, they’ve got style,” Ron said through his laughter. Hermione emerged from the fire and bumped into Ron.

“Who’s got style?” She asked, dusting off her illusionary skirt. Ron and Harry simply pointed at the inflatable frog. Hermione giggled.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll admit it. Your brothers are literal geniuses.”

“High praise indeed coming from the brightest witch of her age,” Harry said. Hermione rolled her eyes and nudged Harry’s shoulder.

“Come on.” Together, the trio made their way into the long and winding line of people that was snaking its way around the crowd of students, all shouting and waving signs. One go lucky first-year Gryffindor was waving their sign a little too enthusiastically and proceeded to whack not only one of his friends but a wizard in line as well.

“Watch it!” the wizard barked. The boy poked his tongue out at the older wizard, but then Ernie appeared, easing the tensions.

“Look at the toad’s knee,” Ron whispered.

Harry turned, looking towards the toads crossed legs, and saw Susan Bones in deep conversation with Neville and Lavender. She caught his eye and nodded her head before returning to her conversation.

“Hiya kiddos,” a very familiar voice exclaimed cheerfully, causing Harry to jump a mile a minute. “Now, as an Auror, it’s my job to inform you that I think this idea of yours is incredibly reckless and dangerous, and it’s my job as a god-father to say that I approve wholeheartedly.” The trio spun around and found themselves face to face with Sirius, minus his usual Auror garb.

“Sirius,” Harry breathed, resisting the urge to hug him the middle of the Ministry.

“Nice disguises, General,” Sirius winked at him, “I can’t help you. I’m too busy watching these youngsters. But that’s why they’re here, so you already knew that.”

Harry, Hermione and Ron nodded sharply.

“Good luck. I’ll keep an eye out for you. Just get in and out as fast as possible.” Sirius disappeared back into the crowd, and Hermione, Harry and Ron approached the wand-booth. The guard looked at him funny, but let them past without any fuss, and they joined the throng of people trying to push their way towards the elevators. It was hard going and took a lot of shoving, but eventually, they pushed their way into one of the compartments. They were crammed to the back and forced to wait as the elevator travelled up to the first floor before they could go all the way back down to the atrium. Only once everyone on the bottom tiers had disembarked could they descend to the Department of
Mysteries.

They stepped out of the elevator, and stared down a dark corridor, every surface covered in black tiles, the only illumination from several flames sitting in brackets on the wall. At the other end of the hall was a black door with a golden doorknob. Harry’s first thought was that it reminded him of the detention level of Atlantis before he and Ginny had repaired the broken cell.

“This isn’t foreboding at all,” Ron whispered.

“I don’t like this, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Me neither, but we have to get the Prophecy before He does.” Harry advanced forward, trying to portray a confidence he didn’t feel as he walked through the darkened hallway. Their footsteps were loud as they crossed the tiled floor, and there was a musty smell to the air.

“Revelio,” Hermione whispered, sending a yellow spell towards the door. A faint white outline appeared around it, and a black aura around the knob, but that was it.

“Like Will said. It’s only lightly defended. The white is probably the Ministry alarm, the black – Voldemort’s,” she hissed.

“Can you trip Voldemort’s alarm but leave the Ministry’s?” Ron asked.

“It’d take a few minutes. But do we want to?”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked her.

“Well, if we only trip one alarm when we really should be tripping two, won’t Voldemort put two and two together?” Harry bit his lip, turning the decision over in his head.

“We trip them both. With any luck, it’ll be Malfoy that sees it, and the Aurors will be too busy upstairs. It is the whole point of the protest anyway.” And with that, Harry turned the doorknob. The trio stepped inside and found themselves standing in a circular room with half a dozen doors affixed to the walls.

“Which one is it?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know.” Harry crossed the room and opened one of the doors, beyond which lay a room full of what looked like fish tanks. But the fish inside them did not look like fish. Hermione peered through the door with him and gagged.

“Are those brains?”

“I don’t think I want to know,” Harry said, shivering. He closed the door, and the room began to shake. The door they’d entered slammed shut, and the walls began to spin around and around and around, creating a whirling noise as the air in the room was forced into an uproar. Hermione ‘eeked’ and grabbed hold of Harry’s arm, but thankfully, the floor wasn’t also moving. Eventually, the walls came to a halt, and Harry shook his head to clear it and stop the room from spinning.

“What the bloody hell was that!” Ron exclaimed.

“Must be part of the Unspeakables’ defences,” Harry muttered, looking around at the doors. Hermione huffed and walked over one of the doors and pulled it open. On the other side was what looked like a giant amphitheatre, with rows of stone benches leading down to a large pit. In the centre of the pit was a large stone arch. The second he looked at it, the hair on the back of his neck
stood on end.

‘Seven powers and one.’ It was like a whisper on the edge of hearing, faint and sinister. It made Voldemort's malicious snarl sound like a kitten mewling in comparison. And it was coming from the arch. Harry, using all his willpower to hold down his breakfast, glanced to Ron and Hermione and saw their faces go deathly pale. ‘Aether, Nether, Dark, Conflict, Dragon, Speed, Phoenix. Seven powers, but all shadows of a greater whole. Free me, Harry Potter… Together universes will tremble before us… forged…shattered…rising…’

Harry slammed the door shut, and Hermione yelled, “Flagrant!”

A spell shot at the door, carving a red flaming X into the wood the second before the walls started spinning once more. Hermione and Ron looked as scared as he felt.

“I think we know what the Dragons were afraid of now,” Hermione said shakily.

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, swallowing hard as the walls came to a stop once more, only this time they at least knew which door not to open, as Hermione’s flaming X remained imbedded in the wood.

Harry hesitantly moved to try another door, but the second he touched the handle a lightning bolt lashed out and struck his hand. Harry’s head jerked back, and the Gemini Rune burst to life against his neck. Fire filled his veins, his heartbeat started bursting in his head, and his eyes glazed as the world around him evaporated.

Harry forced himself to open his eyes amidst the burning pain springing forth from his neck. But the pain, the pain was nothing compared to the silence, a silence shattered by the loudest of choruses. He pulled himself up and stood atop the staircase in the central tower of the City. Alarms were blaring, the skies outside the windows were bright red, lightning dancing in the air, and the portal was active. Filled with rainbow light, the shining gateway, lined by runes blazing forth with white light, was a welcome embrace calling to him. The Gemini Rune was pulling him towards the portal, or rather, what was on the other side.

HARRY!!!!!!! His connection with Ginny snapped back into place, and Ginny stumbled through the portal, with her clothes in tatters and her hair smoking.

“Ginny!!” Harry yelled, running down the stairs towards her.

“Harry!!!” Ginny exclaimed, seeing him coming towards her. She tried to hobble as best she could, but she couldn’t move fast enough. Harry jumped down the last flight of stairs and ran to pull her into his arms, but just as he reached her, he jerked back to the sounds of Ron and Hermione screaming his name.

“Harry!!!”

Harry!!!

Harry was back in the Department of Mysteries, sitting on the floor in the middle of the circular room, Ron and Hermione beside him. Harry’s hand jerked to the Gemini Rune and ran his fingers over it’s burning hot surface. And he laughed. A good, honest to God laugh that echoed through the circular room.

“Harry! Harry, are you okay!” Hermione exclaimed, shaking his shoulders.

“I’m okay Brains. Better than okay. It’s back.” Harry looked up at the door. Electricity was flashing over it, but the image of the Gemini Rune carved into its wooden surface was bright and clear to all.
Ginny!! Ginny, can you hear me!!! Harry called through the mind link.

Har..y! A.. y..u th..r?

Harry rubbed the sizzling rune again.

Ginny, can you hear me?

Y..s! I ……n’t make …. a..l th.. ..ay b….k. B..t I’m c..ose enou…. to t..y!

The connection was there. He could feel a vague sort of panic, mixed with hope, coming from her. But the words were faded and crackly, like a weak radio signal.

“Harry! Come on! The Death Eaters will be here any minute!” Harry, suddenly coming to his senses, refocused on the task at hand, and let Ron pull him to his feet.

“What happened, mate?”

“Ginny. She slid closer to us. I think I can hear her in my head again, but it’s like a dodgy radio.”

“We can deal with it later. Right now, we need to finish the mission!” Hermione snapped, yanking open another door. A blast of cold air washed through the circular room, extinguishing the torches. Harry, Ron and Hermione lit their wands and proceeded into the dark hallway beyond.

The room they found themselves in was massive, stretching on far beyond where the eye could see. The room itself was dark, but it was full of shelves containing thousands of glass orbs, each giving off a pale silver light of its own that served to faintly illuminate the darkness.

“This has got to be it,” Ron said. Hermione used her spell to draw a circle with a check on the door, to ensure the back-up teams didn’t have to waste time searching for the right door like they did, and they ploughed on into the darkness. There was an eerie silence to the place that set Harry’s teeth on edge, and he couldn’t help gripping his wand just a little tighter.

“How do we find it? It could be anywhere!” Hermione muttered into the darkness.

Harry made to reply but hissed in pain instead. He pushed the sleeve of his robe up, revealing the Firebrand on his left arm. It was rippling against his skin, a dull ache searing into his body. The Death Eaters were waiting for them.

“Follow me. I know where it is,” Harry said loudly. Then he took off into the darkness between the shelves, letting the pain of the Firebrand guide him towards the right shelf. The worse the stinging got, the further into the trap he walked, and the closer he got to the orb. Eventually, he found himself standing opposite Row 97, and the searing agony of the Firebrand was so bad he was gripping his forearm.

“Harry. This one’s got your name on it,” Ron said, pointing to an orb on the shelf.

Jackpot.

Wh..t?

Gin?

S....ll fu..zy.

Pushing the poor connection to the back of his mind, Harry stepped up to where Ron and Hermione
stood, staring at an orb marked:

\[ S.P.T \rightarrow A.P.W.B.D \]

Dark Lord and (?) Harry Potter

“This is it,” he said. But as he read the name tag, he realised, with a sense of resignation, that he recognised one of the acronyms. A.P.W.B.D. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Who else could have such a specific acronymic name? Resisting the urge to smash his head into a shelf, Harry released his still burning arm and grabbed the orb with his left hand. He lowered his hand, with the prophecy, to his pocket, and turned to the others.

“Time to go,” he said.

“I quite agree. Very good, Potter. Excellent disguise. But the time for that is passed. Be a good lad and hand over that prophecy, and we can all be on our way.” Harry hid a triumphant grin, before schooling his features into a look of confusion, and turning around. Standing at the end of the row were three figures in billowing black robes, silver masks over their faces. But the one in the lead had long pale blonde hair that fell back over his shoulders, and a superior drawl to his voice that made it clear who it was.

“Lucius Malfoy. Still doing Voldemort’s bidding I see,” Harry said as he, Ron and Hermione stood back to back.

“You dare speak his name!!” a woman hissed from the other side of the row, flanked by two flunkies of her own.

“Hi Allisandra, would you mind stepping into the light for me? I’d love to get a look at all the scars Claire must have left on you the last time we tried this.” Harry lowered the orb in his hand so that it was hovering above his and Hermione’s pockets.

“I dare speak his name!” Ron said frankly, the ghost of a smile on his lips, “Listen, it’s really easy. Tom Marvolo Riddle.” As Ron spoke, Harry did a quick flourish with his hand and whispered, “Gemino.” The orb in his hand duplicated, and he let the original fall into Hermione’s pocket while slipping the copy into his own. Hermione cast him a quick glance, but Harry didn’t have the time to reply.

Allisandra shared blank stares with another Death Eater who stepped out of the darkness beside her.

“Oh, this is rich!” Harry exclaimed, genuinely laughing now, “He hasn’t told you has he? I’ll bet he’s told you all he’s pureblood going back generations! Am I hitting the mark?”

“Well I hate to spoil your fun,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes, thought the effect was lost in the darkness, “But Tom Riddle, Voldemort’s real name, is a half-blood son of a squib…”

“Silence, girl! I’ll have your tongue! The Dark Lord is great and powerful! Far greater than any half-blood could ever be!!” Allisandra sneered.

“Now, now, Allisandra. Let’s not be rude. All we want is the prophecy Potter. Just hand it over, and we’ll let you go,” Malfoy said, an odd glint to his eye Harry found quite disturbing.

“How stupid do you think I am Luci? Really, I’m genuinely curious,” Harry asked. Lucius made to say something, but Harry laughed, cutting him off.

“Oh wait, I’ve just remembered what I told you the last time we met. And it appears Han Solo still
hasn’t sold me the Millennium Falcon, so your opinion still means squat. So, here’s our counter-offer.”

“Leave now,” Ron said viciously.

“Or we won’t ruin your day for you,” Hermione snapped.

The pain from the Firebrand began to lessen, and Harry glanced into the darkness behind Malfoy, where the faint outline of another person was visible.

All the Death Eaters burst out into laughter, and Harry smirked. He snapped his fingers, and the illusions surrounding them all fell away, revealing the Defenders Cloaks and vanishing the aged appearances.

“In the immortal words of Admiral Ackbar…” Harry said.

“IT’S A TRAP!!!” The trio exclaimed, before dropping to the ground.

“STUPEFY!!” Eight spells hurtled out of the darkness behind the Death Eaters, and all hell broke loose.

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**Act IV – X: Fitz II**

When the Anti-grav generator finally stopped working, it powered down slowly, letting everyone sink softly to the ground. It also allowed the water from the fountain to start falling regularly, instantly flooding the floor of the Great Hall. Which was a good thing actually, as it washed away the numerous piles of sick and vomit that also fell from the sky. Umbridge finally retrieved her wand and sent a blasting hex at the camera ball. It promptly exploded, and Umbridge turned the evil eye on everyone still in the room.

“If I find out any of you knew about this…”

Umbridge’s tirade was interrupted before it even started by a loud ‘BANG!’ that echoed from outside. Umbridge spun on her heel in the flooded floor and stalked out the door into the Entrance Hall, and immediately found herself trapped in a swamp. Yes. A real honest to goodness swamp. Full of bogs, mosquitoes, giant lily pads, a rather gnarled looking tree, and three giant inflatable pink toads floating on the swamp water, all stylised so that their faces looked like Umbridge’s. And the water filling the Great Hall had only one place to go. It slowly trickled out the doors to join the new swamp, making it even worse than before. To complete things, three docks were visible, near the three doorways into the Entrance Hall. And a row-boat was docked at one of them.

Fitz turned to Jemma just in time to see another silver camera ball fly out of her hand and whiz out into the hall over the stunned faces of the people left inside. It flew up over the swamp and fixated on Umbridge, who appeared to be sinking in Quicksand.

“Well, Madame Umbridge, it seems you’ve gotten yourself into quite the ‘sticky’ situation if I do say so myself.” A clash of symbols accompanied Harry’s voice, which Fitz was sure was just augmented to sound like Harry, because Harry would never make such a bad joke surely. He turned towards Jemma, and couldn’t hold back his snigger when he saw her speaking softly into a speaker hidden in her palm.
“I hope you enjoy your time in Weasley Wizard Wheeze’s Portable Swamp! Come see us at our new location in Diagon Alley! Have fun Madame Umbridge, it is true what they say, after all, Karma is a bitch.” Jemma slipped her speaker back into her pocket just in time for Umbridge to destroy the camera all the while screaming, “Weasley!!!!”

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**Act IV – X: Jessica I**

Jessica’s spell hit her mother right in the back of the head. As much as she wanted too, she didn’t savour the moment. Instead, as Harry, Hermione and Ron pulled themselves to their feet, drew their hoods over their faces and vanished into the chaos, she advanced on her mother as she lay on the floor. Jessica kicked her hard in the back, and Allisandra rolled over, firing the Cruciatus Curse straight at her. It would have hit anyone else, but Jessica was faster than anyone else. She dodged the spell easily, biting back with a curse of her own.

“Incendio!” Her wand became a flame thrower as she poured flames from the tip. Allisandra summoned a shield to deflect the fire back at her, but Jessica banished them into the shelf of prophecies instead.

Jessica, using both her speed and strength, slammed her foot down on her mother’s ankle, and couldn’t help the intense sense of satisfaction that washed over her as the woman who’d tortured her own daughter howled in pain.

“Expelliarmus!” Jessica snapped, and Allisandra’s wand flew out of her hand while she screamed. Jessica caught it in her free hand and snapped it like a twig.

“I’ll destroy you for that!” Allisandra snarled. She leapt at Jessica, but she dodged, letting her fly through the air. Luke snapped a rope spell around another Death Eater’s neck and yanked him forwards into Danny’s glowing fist. The fist collided with the man’s face, resulting in a loud crack and a very high-pitched scream as he sunk to the ground. Matt disarmed his target, before flinging one of his Eskrima sticks at his head. It crashed into his temple, and Matt followed up by jumping into the air, and side kicking the man into one of the shelves. His head hit metal, and the shelf actually fell over with the force of the impact. Several more shelves went down like dominos, and there was an explosion from the other side of the hallway, but Jessica didn’t care, her eyes were on the figure every single one of her nightmares featured.

“You already did!” Jessica snarled. “It took me years to build myself out of the Hell you built for me. Years of pain and suffering and burning!” Jessica pulled back her hood, revealing her face, contorted in pure anger as she advanced.

“Incarcarus Nerus!!” Jessica snarled, and chains of darkness shot forth from her wand, wrapping around Allisandra as she gasped in recognition, horror and pain.

“Jessica. I should have killed you years ago.”

“It would have been a blessing!”

“You were meant for great things!” Allisandra exclaimed as the chains bit deeper into her skin, “I made you into the perfect weapon. A pure vessel for the Dark Lord’s return!”

“You made me into a monster!” The stinging in the old burns on Jessica’s neck and back forced their way to the front of her conscious mind, escaping the prison she’d confined the pain to in her years of
suffering.

“Strength and speed of the gods! Endurance beyond the greatest mortal! Knowledge of the ages! Power beyond compare! That was all me! You’d be nothing without me, and now you stand there with Potter and his brats?”

“Everything I hate about myself you taught me. Without you, I’m free. The Defenders are the family I choose, you’re the family I spurn.” Jessica felt her friends walk up behind her, and Matt’s hand came to a rest on her shoulder. She raised her wand and pointed it at her mother’s head.

Allisandra spat a wad of blood on the floor, “You won’t kill me. You’re too soft to do what needs to be done.”

“This is for the little girl who lost her soul,” Jessica whispered, a tear sliding down her cheek. She gripped her wand as tight as possible and said the words.

“Avada Kedavra!” A bolt of green light shot out of Jessica’s wand. It collided with Allisandra’s chest, and the light went out behind her eyes as she slumped to the floor, and the chains melted away. Jessica spun around and buried her face in Matt’s chest, letting herself cry. But she didn’t cry for her mother, lying dead on the ground by her own hand. Instead, she cried for a little girl who didn’t have happiness or love when she needed it most.

Act IV – X: Peter I

Peter was disappointed by Lucius Malfoy. He’d heard stories about how the man was utterly ruthless and terrible to behold when he came collecting a debt. But Peter thought the man wasn’t that bright, at least when it came to basic combat physics it seemed. Malfoy spun around, deflecting the stunner sent at him straight into one of his Death Eater friends, sending him straight to the ground in a heap before the spell sent his way by MJ could even reach him. The Death Eater on his other side, was a bit luckier. He seemingly dodged Luna’s stunner by pure luck, turning around at just the right time for the spell to sail over his head and into a nearby shelf. He’d reciprocated by sending a blizzard spell of all things to attack the diminutive blonde. If Peter had learned one thing during his time travelling the world with the friends of Harry Potter, it was that one underestimated Luna Lovegood at their own peril. The Death Eater clearly thought he was smart, sending such an arcane spell at the girl. He was wrong. Luna caught the spell with her own wand, did a pirouette, and shot the spell, which looked far deadlier than it had before, right back at the man so fast he barely had time to register his misfortune before he was turned into an Ice-Sculpture version of himself in a tutu.

That left Peter and Gwen to deal with Malfoy. Peter thought they’d be able to take him down in ten seconds without Spider-Sense. Five seconds with.

They both launched duel conjunctivitis curses, combined with full body-binds at the man, who blocked them, shattering his shield before launching the stock standard Death Eater killing curse towards them. Gwen flipped over the beam of green light while Peter slid under it. Then Gwen shot a web line at Malfoy’s chest. He tried to shield once more, but the web was not a spell, and went straight through the barrier, connecting with his chest. Malfoy looked at it in confusion for a second, before Gwen used the web to pull herself towards him through the air and punch him square in the jaw, sending him crumpling to the ground. Two stunners sent his way by Peter and MJ, and Malfoy senior was down for the count.
“Well, that was fun. I’m feeling in the mood for ice-cream. You guys?” Luna asked cheerfully. She walked up to her ice-sculpture, and conjured a wreath, before draping it over his neck.

“That’ll teach him for being mean,” Luna said, nodding her head at the statue. Peter took the whole thing in stride, summoning ropes to bind Malfoy from head to toe.

“What do we do with them?” MJ asked.

Peter shrugged, and Gwen pulled a sticky note and permanent marker from within the pocket of her cloak. They were comfortable, Peter had to admit. Not very practical for swinging through New York skyscrapers, but it was much warmer than his Spider-Man suit, which he wore underneath his clothes and robes. She signed the note, ‘From your Friendly Neighbourhood Defenders’ and affixed it to Malfoy’s face. They stunned him twice more (once to make sure he stayed sleeping, another for fun) and turned to make their exit. But as they did, Peter Spider-Sense started ringing church-bells through his skull. He turned to Gwen and saw she was looking at him with the same expression he no doubt wore.

Then an explosion rocked the room, causing several shelves to shake precariously. Another blast, and dirt trickled down from the roof.

“Something’s gone wrong,” MJ said. They all looked to each other, fear easily visible in the other’s eyes, before bolting in the direction of the elevators.

Act IV – X: Susan III

Susan was honestly surprised it took her Aunt as long as it did to come to find her. Surely Scrimgeour had gone straight to her, and told her how she wasn’t cooperating? Whatever the case, Susan couldn’t help but smile slightly when Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, came strutting out of the elevators like the very paving stones owed her respect. She eventually, after a cursory glance at Susan’s position atop the knee of a giant inflatable toad brandishing a new sign that said, “Fudge doesn’t care about you! He only cares about his wallet!” accompanied by a rather unflattering image of Fudge himself stroking a galleon with a speech bubble beside him that said, “My precious,” came to stand in front of her, monocle over her eyes and hands on her hips. It was quite intimidating, she was sure. But Susan had tasted Amelia Bones’ cooking. She’d lost her ability to be intimidating after that.

“Susan, how are you?” Aunt Amelia asked her.

Susan smiled, giving her sign another wave as Lavender led the students into another rendition of some muggle-song she didn’t know. Whatever it was, it wasn’t flattering, that was for sure. Dean said they should have brought a ‘stereo’. She didn’t know what a stereo was either so had assumed it was a good idea they just hadn’t thought of.

“I’m magnificent, Aunty. Having the best day here at the Ministry with my friends. How’s work been?”

Amelia raised an eyebrow, “It’s been better. No doubt about that. You got my message about…”

“Staying close to Harry? Yep. I’m here on the General’s orders right now,” she exclaimed. Amelia’s face went through several rapid emotional changes that only Susan, with the in-depth knowledge of her Aunt that came with being raised by her, could read. Confusion, recognition, shock and finally
“So, this is Potter’s work is it? Then, where is he?” she asked sharply. Nothing got past her Aunt’s keen eye. Or her monocle. Susan still didn’t understand why she insisted on wearing it.

“Breaking into the Department of Mysteries,” Susan said, trading her sign with Neville for one that said, ‘Hermione Granger for Minister for Magic!’ with an emoticon of Hermione standing over the British flag – with a book in her hand.

Amelia’s eyebrow went very far into her hairline indeed. Susan had to resist the urge to laugh. Oh, this was fun!

“This is all a diversion?”

“Pretty much. Oh, well, we are having a bit of fun sticking it to old toad face. Foggy realised Umbridge’s humiliation is being broadcast on the Wizarding Wireless, we were all watching the Swamp prank a few minutes ago… hey, where’d he go?” Susan sat up, looking for Foggy. She breathed a sigh of relief when she spotted him chatting up Padma Patil. Well good luck to him she supposed. She pulled a bottle of water out of her robes and took a drink.

“And I’m supposed to believe that?” Amelia asked suspiciously.

This time Susan did laugh. A few seconds later, a messenger in a red Auror hat ran out of the crowd and grabbed Aunt Amelia’s sleeve.

“Madame Bones! Alarms have gone off in the Department of Mysteries.”

“Told you so,” Susan said happily, taking another drink of her water.

“But there’s more. We’ve lost contact with Azkaban.” Susan spat her water out onto a Hufflepuff second year.

“What do you mean ‘lost contact’?” Amelia said, her face contorting into something, Susan could only describe as worry, and fear.

“All the monitoring spells have failed, and we can’t contact any of the guards inside either.”

Amelia was spinning back to Susan before the messenger even finished talking.

“Get these kids back to Hogwarts now!” Susan made to stand up, but an ear-shattering crack filled the hall. An explosion of black smoke filled the Apparation point, before shooting in the direction of the elevators. Within seconds the fireplaces were full of people wearing black robes and silver masks. Screams of terror and panic filled the atrium, and then, loud and clear as the dawn, a cold, high-pitched malicious voice cried out over everyone else, “Avada Kedavra!!!” Susan tried to slip down from her perch and draw her wand at the same time, but she tripped. Then an orange spell flew over her head, striking the toad’s Umbridge head. The inflatable exploded, and Susan was sent flying into the air. She crashed into a table of some kind, her head slammed into the tiled flooring, and she knew no more.

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Act IV – X: Jessica II
The second the roof began shaking, Jessica pulled herself together, pushing away from Matt and donning her hood once more. The next second, she was running to the elevators with Matt, Luke and Danny. They bolted through the door and into the room with the circular wall. But the wall didn’t spin as they entered it. The exit door was already open, and they could hear voices in the long hallway on the other side.

“The Dark Lord says the brats are still down here, and we can do whatever we want with them, so long as they don’t make it out alive. Oh, I’ve missed this! It’s time for some fun, boys!!!” She knew that voice. Recognised it instantly. Fenrir Greyback. The Werewolf Death Eater. The one that deliberately transforms near children so he can bite as many as possible or eat them. Jessica’s stomach plummeted, and she started counting to ten in her head in an attempt to calm her nerves. She glanced to Luke and Danny, leaned against the wall on the opposite side of the doorway. ‘Nine.’

“What do we do?” Danny mouthed.

‘Seven.’

“We fight.” she mouthed back. Danny and Luke nodded, and Jessica turned to Matt, and those familiar butterflies reared their ugly heads.

‘Five.’

Then Jessica came to an epiphany. One she was quite proud of actually. She’d killed her mother. She was free. And she was quite possibly about to die. So, screw it.

‘Three.’

She grabbed Matt by the collar and snogged him. It was quick, split-second, and he barely had enough time to reciprocate before she pulled away, drawing her wand from her pocket.

‘One.’

And she charged into the hallway beyond.

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**Act IV – X: Harry III**

Harry, Hermione and Ron slipped out of the elevator, the operator’s jaw still hanging open at the sight of three cloaked Defenders coming up from the bowels of the Ministry of Magic on their own. Harry kind of felt sorry for him.

“Looks like we’re in the clear,” Ron said as they pushed their way through the crowd and towards the archway back into the courtyard where the Fountain of Magical Brethren stood tall. The inflatable toad was still visible in the Atrium beyond, and they couldn’t help the laughs that slipped out upon seeing it.

As they were about to pass through the archway, a deafening crack echoed through the entire Ministry. Then a giant cloud of black smoke shot through the Atrium, flying straight towards the arch where Harry, Hermione and Ron stood.
The Firebrand burned, and Harry yelled, “Move!” as he realised with horror the only thing the smoke could be. He grabbed Hermione and dived for the ground, pointing his wand towards the ceiling.

“Reducto!” He cried as Voldemort screamed, “Avada Kedavra!!!”

The roof exploded, raining debris down around them. Harry tried to raise a shield, but his wand slipped from his grip when something heavy hit his back. Screams of pain, cracks of shrapnel hitting the walls, wails of terror as people ran for their lives. The smell of death and decay, and dust and marble. All of it assaulted Harry in the few moments before he hit the ground. Something green flashed at the edge of his vision, and he hit the ground. More things hit him from behind, something brushed his head, and everything was consumed by darkness, and an unending tone of ringing.

Harry!!!

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So Ends Act IV…

Acknowledgements:

In case you missed it, the theme for this Act was Choice, Destiny and Prophecy – as exemplified by the chess match. As such, the Credits song is the one we showcased in the Disclaimer for Act IV, Chapter 1: High Hopes, by Panic! At the Disco.

Thank you to the authors, contributors and editors of…

- Pottermore: [https://www.pottermore.com/](https://www.pottermore.com/)
- The Harry Potter Wiki: [http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)
- Archive of Our Own author ‘smallbrownfrog’ for their complete sourced index of characters in the Harry Potter world collected in, *The Hogwarts Years: Classmates, Birthdays, and Ages* [https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin](https://archiveofourown.org/works/1063231/chapters/2132188#workskin)
- The Cast and Crew behind the Marvel Netflix shows, Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Iron Fist and the Defenders. The characters in this fanfiction are inspired by those portrayed in these works, and the older versions of the characters are designed to match their older portrayals as shown on these shows.
- The Cast and Crew of the Spider-Man PS4 game, on which the characters of Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson are based off.
- Mutant Storm by Bobmin356 [https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7404056/1/Mutant-Storm)
We’d like to once again thank Joanne Rowling for creating the incredible world that is Harry Potter and allowing us to play in it. I don’t know what the world would be like if we knew nothing about Harry or his world.

To Terry Pratchett, thank you for proving that no matter how bizarre or outlandish, everyone has a story to tell, and everyone has the right to tell it.

To Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Kevin Feige and the all the other fabulous people at Marvel Comics and Marvel Studios, thank you for creating all the Marvel comic-book characters we know and love to this day, and for making it cool to believe in Superheroes. Excelsior Stan.

Finally, to C.S. Lewis, the man who made me love reading. Thank you for teaching me to never give up on happily ever afters.

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Post Credits Teaser:

**Next season on Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse:**

**Act V: The Lost City**

Voldemort has scored a major victory against his enemies in the Department of Mysteries, and the Defenders have been torn asunder on the brink of victory. However, Voldemort is playing with dark powers in his rise to conquest, powers that threaten to overwhelm any who attempt to harness them, even the Dark Lord. Harry must pull together anything and anyone he has left to begin a desperate last-chance mission to find the fabled Lost City of Atlantis. Only with the secrets contained within can he hope to defeat Voldemort and save the World.

*The Next Adventure Begins August 16th, 2019 on Fanfiction.net and the Archive of Our Own.*
Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

Act V: The Lost City

Authors Notes: We’re back!!!!!! And we’ve finished writing the story!!!!! The whole thing is done. Just the Disclaimers and editing left! It’s also worth noting that we know flying is supposed to be super rare in the Wizarding World. But the battle at the end of the Order of the Phoenix movie is just too cool, and the Dragons can already fly so we don’t really care about the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters being able to do it too.

Previously, on Harry Potter and the Gemini Curse

Harry and the Defenders Army have put together a plan to retrieve the Prophecy and get rid of Madame Umbridge. While Fred and George work with Daphne and Astoria Greengrass, Lance Hunter, Leo Fitz and Jemma Simmons to put on the biggest prank show in Hogwarts history (all live broadcasted on the Wizarding Wireless), Susan Bones and the Defenders Army led a protest against Umbridge in the Ministry Atrium with a large group of younger year students. Using the rally and the pranks as distractions, Harry and the Defenders snuck into the Department of Mysteries to spring Voldemort’s trap and retrieve the Prophecy. Harry, Ron and Hermione successfully completed their objective and escaped the ensuing carnage while the Defenders defeated the Death Eaters. Jessica Jones found herself facing her Death Eater mother, Allisandra Jones, and killed her.

However, just when victory seemed assured, Voldemort arrived, attacking the Atrium. The protesters were scattered, and Harry, Hermione and Ron crushed beneath piles of rubble as Voldemort fired the Killing Curse at them.

Meanwhile, Ginny Potter, who is still trapped in another dimension, may have found a way back to the real-world, Doctor Strange is in the Dark Dimension battling the dread Dormammu, and Professor Albus Dumbledore is attempting to rescue William and Clarissa O’Neill from the depths of Hell, where Voldemort trapped them earlier in the year.

The Defenders Army

Hufflepuffs: Danny Rand, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Ernie MacMillan, Eloise Midgen, Zacharias Smith, Megan Jones and Justin Finch-Fletchley.

Ravenclaws: Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, Michael Corner, Padma Patil, Foggy Nelson, Mathew Murdock, Luna Lovegood, Leopold Fitz and Jemma Simmons.
**Gryffindors:** Fred and George Weasley, Lee Jordan, Alicia Spinnet, Katie Bell, Lavender Brown, Parvati Patil, Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnegan, Neville Longbottom, Colin and Dennis Creevey, Demelza Robbins, Vicky Frobisher, Hermione Granger, Harry Potter, Ginny Potter, Ron Weasley and Luke Cage.

**Slytherins:** Daphne Greengrass, Astoria Greengrass, Lance Hunter, Emilie Brindle and Jessica Jones.

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**Death Eaters**

Voldemort = Horcruxes: Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake.

Non-Azkaban: Barty Crouch Jr, Macnair, Lucius Malfoy, Allisandra Jones, Nott Sr, Jugson, Avery, Yaxley, Crabbe Sr, Goyle Sr.

Azkaban: Dolohov, Rookwood, Greyback, Bellatrix, Rabastan, Rodolphus, Zebadiah ‘Kilgrave’ Jones, Travers, Selwyn, Alecto and Amicus Carrow, Rowle.

Students: Draco Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson, Theodore Nott, Blaze Zabini, Crabbe, Goyle etc.

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**The Enigma Forces:**

*An Enigma Force is a reservoir of cosmic energy. Not all Enigma Forces function on the same rules. Some have sentience, others do not.*

**The Aether Force:** The manifestation of cosmic good. Generated by the existence of Ascended beings. It exists as an energy reservoir that separates Heaven from the Circle of the Gods. It fuels the powers of angelic beings. It can be tapped with the permission of Ascended Deities like God or the Vishanti.

**The Nether Force:** The manifestation of cosmic evil. Generated by the existence of Descended beings. Exists as an energy reservoir that separates the True Multiverse from the Dark Multiverse, keeping the Great Destroyer trapped within. It fuels the powers of demonic beings. Access is achieved through Dark Magic artefacts.

**The Dark Force:** The manifestation of cosmic destruction. Generated by the destruction of Universes. Originally created as an energy reservoir to power the World Forge, now it fuels the powers of the Great Destroyer, and can only be accessed by surrendering one's soul to it.

**The Speed Force:** (Also called ‘Hyperspace’, ‘the Time Vortex’, ‘The Superflow’, and other names.) The manifestation of cosmic motion. The Speed Force maintains the barrier between the three dimensions of space and the fourth of time. Without it, the fourth dimension would collapse into the other three, and all of time would start happening at once. It exists as an energy reservoir that can be found within the ‘space-time’ continuum, and it separates the Multiverse from the Circle of the Gods. It generates its power from kinetic motion. People imbued with its powers are known as ‘Flashes’.

**The Conflict Force:** The manifestation of cosmic conflict. The force that powers the Story Machine. It is generated by any and all forms of conflict in the Multiverse. This force is protected and hidden by the Travellers.
**The Dragon Force:** The manifestation of cosmic balance. It is responsible for keeping Universes from colliding with one another. It can be tapped by 'avatars' imbued with its power through the use of 'Shards'. Shards are often drawn to points of imbalance between 'good' or 'evil', offering a powerful advantage to the weaker side. Some shards hold more power than others, allowing them to actually speak to their bearers, though this is uncommon, while others hold far less power, and many avatars never even know that they are avatars at all. The Shards will often 'leave' through one means, or another once equilibrium has been achieved.

**The Phoenix Force:** The manifestation of cosmic rebirth. This force determines the death and resurrection of the universe, and each universe has its own Phoenix Force. Its power comes from its cycle of rebirth, drawing strength from creation and using it for destruction. It bonds to unsuspecting individuals in attempts to find those capable of harnessing its true power.

**The One Power:** The One Power (unlike the other Enigma Forces, which are self-sustaining) emanates directly from the *Source*. It is a duel conduit of energy made up of two halves: *saidin* and *saidar*. The two halves are direct opposites; yet also complimentary, representing eternal cosmic duality and balance. People who can wield the One Power are called channelers.

**The Source:** *Information Classified*

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**Act V, Chapter 1: Enigma**

**Act V – I: Ginny I**

Ginny snapped back out of the City, landing with a thud in the Duelling Room of the Home.

*Harry!!*

"Mrs Potter!" Professor Flitwick exclaimed, dropping down beside her as she panted, her entire body covered in sweat. Flitwick placed a hand on Ginny's shoulder, before gasping and jerking away. Ginny's own gaze snapped towards Flitwick.

"Did you just…"

"What happened?"

"Harry did something. Touched something. I don't know."

*Gi....y!! Gin.... can y..u ....ar me!!!*

It was like a weak radio connection. Harry's voice was covered in static and corruption, but it was there. And the Gemini Rune was blazing with warmth once more. Ginny reached out and attempted to touch Flitwick, but her hand slid through his arm once more, and she deflated.

*Harry! Are you there?*

Flitwick reached out again and tapped her shoulder. His fingers were rough, and he needed to cut his nails. Ginny locked eyes with Professor Babbling, who was standing over Flitwick's shoulder, a look of utter shock on her face.
"Impossible…" She whispered.

"…y, c..n you hear m..?"

She'd slid back somehow. She must have. Something Harry had done in the Department of Mysteries had jolted her just a tiny bit closer to the real world, or at least the dimension the Home resided in. That's when she realised she could no longer feel the pain in her hand. She glanced down and gasped at the sight of the wound, now just a series of faint clean lines. Lightning peaked his head out of her robe pocket and licked her hand.

Yes! I didn't make it all the way back. But I'm close enough to try!

"My wand!" Ginny exclaimed, jumping to her feet and bolting towards Harry's bedroom.

"Mrs Potter, wait! We don't know what happened! It could be dangerous!!"

Ginny ignored him, yanking the door to Harry's room open and lunging for her wand, sitting on the desk where Harry had left it. Her hand phased through it, but her head slammed into the wood, and she collapsed to the ground. She groaned and cursed, before pulling herself to her feet. But then she stopped. Because under the desk was a compartment she'd never seen before. A compartment with a plaque on it, featuring the same writing as the plaques on the doors. Lily Potter's handwriting; and it said Ginny's name.

"Mrs Potter!" Ginny jumped up - dismissing the draw for the moment.

"I'm so close! We have to try bringing me back!" Ginny begged the two teachers as they entered the room.

"It might not be safe. We could make things worse!" Professor Babbling exclaimed.

"And waiting could let me slip even further!" Ginny snapped.

J..ck..ot.

What?

G..n?

Still fuzzy.

Flitwick and Babbling still looked unconvinced.

"If you won't help me, I'll do it myself."

Flitwick sighed, and together, they walked back to the Duelling Room.

Act V – I: Fitz III

It took Filch the better part of an hour to get Umbridge out of the Swamp. And because no one could leave the Great Hall, they all had to stand around snickering as they watched. Eventually, one of Umbridge’s newly appointed staff Members arrived and levitated her out of the sludge. But that still left what remained of the student population trapped in the Great Hall. So, Filch had been humiliatingly forced to use the rowboat to punt people across the swamp waters. They were supposed to go to classes, but Madame Umbridge declared that everyone was to gather in the
Entrance Courtyard for inspection to determine who was helping the Weasleys and Potter. Fitz and Simmons made sure to stand at the back, and with Umbridge starting at the front of the queue, hopefully, it would take quite a while before she reached them. And by then Fitz hoped to have a plan to not be caught with the other two camera spheres in Simmons bag and posthumously expelled.

Fortunately, Daphne solved the problem for them. The Slytherin students underwent far less extraneous searching than the other houses, and as a result, Daphne had the opportunity to brush up against Jemma, sliding the Ravenclaw's bag onto her shoulder before ducking away, with no one the wiser. Now all they had to do was wait for Lance and Emilie to press their detonator. It was earlier than they'd planned, but with everyone out in the Entrance Courtyard, it was the best turnout anyone could hope for.

And Hunter didn't disappoint. Just as Umbridge was getting to Fitz, beady eyes running over each person in turn like a hound sizing up its next meal, a voice rang out from the other side of the courtyard proclaiming, "Madame Umbridge!" followed by several gasps and whispers of, "It's Potter! It's Harry!"

Umbridge, a victorious smirk on her face, abandoned her search and followed everyone's gazes to the front doors of the castle. Standing in front of them was Harry Potter, Defenders Cloak flapping in the breeze. Fitz glanced to Jemma, and couldn't help the smile that broke onto his face at the sight of her, fist in mouth trying desperately not to break the spell by laughing.

"Potter! As Headmistress of Hogwarts School, I hereby banish you from the grounds effective immediately!" Umbridge declared, advancing on him with wand out.

Harry raised his hands in the air rather rigidly, and said, "Oh well. Game's up." It was Harry's voice, but it had an almost robotic hitch to it. Simmons elbowed Fitz and gestured to the sky, where another ball was floating, the camera fixed on Umbridge.

"Leave now, Potter, before I have you removed with extreme prejudice!"

"Oh well. Game's up." Harry's voice said again. Harry stepped down the stairs and started walking towards Umbridge, the students crowding closer to get a better look. There was something about Harry's gate that was off.

"Don't come any closer Potter!" Umbridge snapped, several of her new staff coming up behind her looking incredibly wary.

"Oh well. Game's up," Harry's voice replied.

"Stop!"

"Oh well. Game's up."

"I mean it!"

"Oh well. Game's up."

"Stupefy!"

Umbridge's hex flew straight at Harry, and the crowd gasped. The spell hit Harry right in the face, but he didn't keel over. In fact, he remained exactly where he was, but his face was smoking something fierce. Fitz frowned, glancing to Lance, who had a similar look of confusion on his face. That wasn't supposed to happen.
The smoke cleared, and the screaming started. Half of Harry's face had burnt away, revealing a metal skull with a magical green eye fixed in the eye socket, skin melting off it like liquid.

"I'll be back," it said before Umbridge's staff started firing hexes at it, reducing the duplicate to scrap.

"Madame Umbridge!" Everyone spun on their heels again to see Harry, defenders cloak blowing in the wind, standing on the side of the courtyard closest to Fitz, Simmons and the Viaduct bridge.

"Oh well. Game's up."

Curses were in the air before the students could even move out of the way, and at least half a dozen from all four houses went down in the firestorm. The students all threw themselves to the ground, and Fitz and Simmons began to rush, hunched over, towards the wounded. The second Harry exploded, raining metal across the cobblestones.

"Madame Umbridge!" Another duplicate announced, entering the Courtyard via the stairs to the Boat House.

Another round of spells, accompanied by Umbridge's screams, soared over the crowd. Fitz and Simmons dropped to the ground next to a first-year Slytherin with thick blonde hair who was cradling her now bleeding knee.

"Ah!!" She screamed as Jemma applied pressure to the wound and Fitz conjured a set of bandages.

The chaos reigned for five minutes before Umbridge seemingly ran out of Harry-duplicates.

"Sorry 'bout that. Kinda rushed those into service for the main event. Life Model Decoys curtesy of Weasley Wizard Wheezes!! We can duplicate and replicate anyone!! Great for alibies and prank clones galore! We're still working out the bugs. Oh, and word of advice Madame Umbridge? Try not to maim any more students in your first week. I imagine you're already going for a record here."

Umbridge screamed and blasted the camera sphere from the sky.

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**Act V – I: Neville I**

Neville pulled himself up from the floor, ignoring the ringing in his ears as he scrambled to full height. He'd lost his wand, and the entire atrium was frozen stiff, staring towards the elevators. The archway into the enclosed space had collapsed, taking the rooms above it with them. Dozens of people lay sprawled across the ground, pieces of rubble scattered all over the place. As the ringing cleared, Neville realised there was an alarm ringing somewhere, but everyone was too frozen to care.

For floating in the air just above the wreckage, surrounded by clouds of darkness, purple electricity crackling around him, was a figure with pure white skin, a bald head and billowing black robes. In his hand was a pale white wand. Identical to the one Boggart Harry had held during the first DA meeting.

The Dark Lord.

You-Know-Who raised his hand, and the largest pile of rubble – right under the archway – flew backwards into the crowd of watchers. Neville and hundreds of others dropped back to the ground as rocks flew over their heads and screams filled the air, breaking the silence that had set over the room. Neville glanced up, and nearly crapped his pants when he saw You-Know-Who lift a body up out of the rubble. A body in a Defenders Cloak. Neville couldn't tell who it was and didn't have time to dwell on it, as a voice called out in pain behind him.
"Neville!" Neville turned around, and locked eyes with Hannah, who was desperately trying to lift a piece of debris off a Hufflepuff firsty with braided hair. Disregarding the fact that the entire world was going to shit around him, Neville raced to Hannah and slid his hands beneath the rock.

"Lift!" he exclaimed. Together they managed to get the slab high enough for another first year to pull the little girl out. Neville and Hannah released the rock and dropped to the girl's side. She was unconscious, probably from the pain, and her pelvic bone looked crushed pretty badly.

"Is Emma going to be alright?" the boy who helped them asked, frightened eyes looking at Neville. He tried to summon as much courage as he could at that moment and told the boy that Emma would be fine. Then a reductor curse flew at them, and the floor exploded. Neville hit the ground on his left arm and could have sworn he heard it snap. But his eyes were locked on the boy, whose head had collided with the very stone Neville had just lifted, spilling blood everywhere. Somewhere, Hannah screamed, and Neville tried to pull himself up. But everything was dizzy, and his movements even more sluggish than usual. He fixed his eyes on the little girl, Emma, lying next to him in a crumpled position. But her chest was still rising and falling. He rolled her over, onto her back, and slowly began to drag her towards the wall on the other side of the atrium. As far away from the carnage as he could.

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**Act V – I: Lavender I**

Lavender was certain she was going to die. There was no doubt about that in her mind at all, and if she was honest with herself, which she always tried to be given nobody else was, that realisation provided a clarity of mind that probably saved her several times. When the explosion went off, Lavender had been on the far side of the atrium, close to the Apparation point. She'd watched in horror as the cloud of smoke flew towards the elevators, and heard when the archway leading to the elevators collapsed, but she hadn't had time to actually process any of it, because at the same time, a bunch of people in absolutely garish black robes and silver masks that looked like they belonged somewhere in the 17th century, emerged from the fireplaces lining the walls. Calling to mind all her training with Professor Lupin and Harry, she'd summoned a shield just in time for three stunners to bounce off it. The spells had crumpled her shield, blowing her back, but it gave Parvati enough time to step in and cast a shield charm of her own. Padma was there a second later, then Dean. And finally, Lavender herself reached her feet and fired Disarming and Stunning Spells through the stalemate and into the waiting Death Eaters. A spell hit its mark, and the first cloaked fanatic dropped to the tiled floor. Which led her to where she was now, duelling with a Death Eater, while Dean took on the other and the Patil twins shielded the second year Gryffindors hiding behind them.

"Stupefy!" Lavender shouted, barely dodging a convulsing yellow spell she definitely didn't recognise from Defence Against the Dark Arts. Although, Lavender had never really paid attention in DADA. Divination was much more interesting in her opinion. But she had never been gladder for Harry's lessons than she was right now.

"Protego!" She cried, blocking another hex she didn't recognise.

"Crucio!" The man snarled, and Lavender immediately summoned a chunk of rock thrown in their direction from something happening elsewhere in the atrium into its path. The rock exploded, and Lavender stumbled backwards. But she recovered, and quickly recast her shield before two purple spells could fly out of the dust and strike her. Her foot caught on a piece of debris, and she had an idea. She needed to play dirty. Literally. She ducked, dropping her shield, and pointed her wand at the ground before flicked it at her assailant.
"Depulso!" She banished all the dirt and dust around them towards the man, and his eyes widened behind his mask. The dust storm engulfed him, and Lavender pressed her advantage.

"Petrificus Totalis!!" The spell struck the man in the chest, and he fell flat on his face, frozen. A scream filled the air, and Lavender spun to Dean, who was wreathing on the ground.

"Ventus!!" A blast of air shot forth from Lavender's wand, and the Death Eater shot off his feet and into the Fireplace behind him. He vanished in green flames, and Lavender let out a ragged breath of relief.

She dropped her hands to her knees and watched as Dean rolled onto his side to face her, groaning. Then his eyes slid past her, and he yelled, "Look out!" Lavender spun around, just in time to see a red spell hit a Death Eater in the side. He stumbled slightly, and Lavender took no time to fire a stunning spell at him. The Death Eater crumpled to the ground, and Lavender's eyes locked onto one of the second years, who had his wand pointed in a shaking hand at the fallen terrorist.

"I… I did it…" He breathed, staring at his wand in amazement.

"Potter! Give me the Prophecy, or I'll kill every last person here!!!!" The voice was high pitched and cold as ice, holding a malice Lavender couldn't even begin to describe. She chanced a look deeper into the atrium. Anthony and Ernie were being suspended by their ankles by a cackling woman with thick curly black hair and a gaunt face. Colin and Dennis were standing between the Ravenclaw first years and a Death Eater with short hair and a maniac look in his eye. Demelza and Foggy were standing by one of the Fireplaces, ushering kids through the flames much faster than the Floo was designed for. There were another half-dozen Death Eaters between the Fountain of Magical Brethren and the remains of the inflatable frog, torturing screaming people Lavender really hoped weren't students. And floating in mid-air, a pale hand gripped around a figure in red's neck, was He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Just like Harry said.

"Stay here, I'm going to help the others!" Lavender called to Dean and the Patils, before bolting towards the cackling woman, wand in hand. She was totally going to die, but she would make sure she took out as many bootlicking terrorists as she could. She only hoped Harry had something up his sleeve, or You-Know-Who would surely kill everyone in the Ministry, and it wouldn't matter who she saved.

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**Act V – I: Harry IV**

"Hermione? Ron?" Harry hissed into the darkness. He couldn't see anything, and dust was heavy in the air, making it very difficult to breathe. He was sure his leg had been crushed by the falling roof, as he couldn't feel anything from the knee down. It didn't even really hurt, though he supposed that was more shock than anything. Fortunately, the collapsed roof hadn't completely crushed him. Instead, it'd been caught by a scaffolding beam.

"Harry?" a soft voice whispered from not far away from him.

"Hermione?"

"Yeah. Are you okay?" Harry tried to move his foot and winced.

"Not okay then," Hermione said, seemingly hearing him, though he still couldn't see where she'd ended up.
"My leg's fucked. How about you?"

"Something's pushing into my back, and I can't feel my legs," she told him shakily, and Harry bit his lip.

"Where's Ron?" Hermione asked.

"I… I think he pushed me down when Voldemort sent the Killing Curse at us. I don't know," Harry admitted, something he couldn't describe gnawing at his stomach. Hermione let out a shaky breath before going silent. There was a slight rustling in the debris above them, and dirt particles rained down into their hair. Harry began to run his hand along the ground, feeling desperately for his wand, and praying that it wasn't damaged. If Voldemort was still up there…

The second the thought entered his head, a 'crack!' split the earth above them, before all the stone and tiling was thrown aside. Light exploded in Harry's vision, and he slammed his eyes shut. Not that it did much considering the backs of his eyelids seemed just as bright as the outside. The stone on his foot was pulled aside, and the numbness dissipated slightly, replaced by throbbing pain that began coursing through his leg. Definitely not good. Then the Firebrand began searing against his arm.

That's when the ground pulled away from him, and Harry realised he was being pulled into the air. That's when the screaming started. He forced his eyes back open and choked in horror at the sight that met him. A dozen Death Eaters were standing around the atrium and the courtyard with the fountain. The inflatable toad was lying deflated on the floor, and dozens of Aurors lay scattered about, unconscious or dead. The damage to the arch was much worse than he intended, the whole level above having collapsed onto the floor, and debris Voldemort had cast aside were now scattered throughout Ministry. Half the black-robed figures were torturing adults in the Courtyard, and the Defenders Army members were desperately trying to hold off the others. The air in Harry's throat constricted, and his head was compelled by some invisible force to face towards a pale figure wreathed in darkness with flaming red eyes. He choked, his hands rising to his throat as he desperately tried to bring much-needed oxygen into his lungs. He drifted closer to Voldemort's outstretched hand, and his pale fingers latched around Harry's throat. The force surrounding him vanished, and Harry took a deep, ragged breath, before Voldemort's hand began to replicate the feeling, though his grip carried a coldness to it that the force he used couldn't replicate.

"Hi Tom," Harry coughed.

"Potter! Give me the Prophecy, or I'll kill every last person here!!!" Voldemort fumed.

"What prophecy," Harry whispered, his brain working far slower than usual. Voldemort squeezed tighter.

"You know… choking me to death… while very satisfying I'm sure… isn't going to get you the answer you're looking for," Harry coughed, gripping Voldemort's hand in an attempt to pry it away from him. His vision was starting to glaze over, and the pain in his leg wasn't bothering him anywhere near as much as it should be. Voldemort loosened his grip slightly, fury burning away in his cold red eyes as they bored into the scar on Harry's forehead, and Harry took as deep a breath as he could manage.

"The prophecy Potter, or they all die," Voldemort snarled.

The Firebrand was burning against his arm, keeping Harry lucid enough to concentrate on Voldemort, and to grasp at the beginnings of a plan. Harry lowered his hand to his pocket and withdrew the smoky glass sphere from within his robes, which, remarkably, hadn't shattered when he
hit the ground.

"What? Too scared to dig around in my head for it yourself. I know what it says, go and get it," Harry teased, before taking a deep breath just in time for Voldemort to begin squeezing again.

"Okay, okay, okay!!" Harry was going to have serious bruising on his neck tomorrow. It'd be a miracle if he could even talk. Keeping his gaze fixed on Voldemort, he lifted the sphere from his pocket and let it slip through his fingers.

"Oops," Harry hissed as black spots started dancing across his vision. He definitely couldn't feel his legs now. Voldemort frowned in confusion before wide-eyed panic filled his gaze. His eyes shot towards Harry's hand, then down to the glass orb, just in time to see it shatter on the ground and release a ghost-like mist.

'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches,' it whispered, before fading away to nothing.

"NOOOOO!!!!!!!" Voldemort screamed. He drew his free hand back, purple lightning crackling off his fingernails and wand, and pointed it at Harry's head.

"Legilimens!!"

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**Act V – I: Sirius I**

Sirius rushed out of a Fireplace near the Fountain of Magical Brethren and into the Ministry. He'd been dispatched to Azkaban with Scrimgeour to find out why everything had gone silent at the prison, but the second they stepped foot on the island, it had become clear what happened. The Dementors had revolted. Almost every guard in the prison had been kissed, and an explosion had ripped apart the side of the black wind-shorn tower that Sirius had called his personal hell for twelve years.

Sirius had summoned every happy thought about Harry, Lily and James he could muster, and sent Patronus after Patronus to repel the hordes, but it was a losing battle, and he and Scrimgeour both knew it. So, they'd called a retreat, battling back to the guard outpost to Floo back to the Ministry and alert the world. But Sirius had a more important task. Warn Harry that Voldemort was most likely already on his way to the Ministry to stop Harry from getting the prophecy, with much greater numbers than his godson could hope to defeat alone.

But they were too late. Voldemort was already here.

Sirius swept the atrium, wand in hand, and forced himself to remain calm in the face of what he saw. To his left, Voldemort had Harry in a choke hold, floating above the ground supported by a cloud of darkness, wand fixed on his head. Directly in front of him, Augustus Rookwood was torturing an assistant Sirius had gone out with just a few weeks ago named Mandy with the Cruciatus, while five other masked Death Eaters submitted others to the same fate. And on the right, his cousin Bellatrix cackled away as she fired spell after spell at a Hogwarts girl with honey blonde hair while the rest either hid behind various pieces of debris, duelled with their own Death Eater, or raced for a Fireplace being held open by two other kids Sirius didn't recognise.

"Fuck," he exclaimed, before summoning his Patronus once more. "Get Remus Lupin, Alastor Moody and Albus Dumbledore here now!" He told it, and the dog raced away. Brian and Scrimgeour came out of the Fireplace behind him.
"Mary have mercy," Brian breathed. Sirius looked to Harry, still held in Voldemort's grip, then back to Bellatrix, who had the same honey blonde girl on her knees screaming in silent terror.

"Ignore Voldemort!" Sirius snapped, quashing the guilt that welled up within his chest, "Save as many people as you can!" Then he bolted towards his cousin. Sirius wasn't an idiot. He knew his limits. And he knew he didn't stand a chance in hell of fighting off Voldemort. Only Harry, the Dragons, and Dumbledore could do that. Not only that, but Voldemort wouldn't kill Harry, not until he knew what the prophecy was according to the girl he spoke to from the protest procession. Bellatrix, on the other hand, wouldn't hesitate to mutilate her current victim. And that he could do something about.

"Stupefy!" He cried, sprinting in Bellatrix's direction. She spun around, deflecting the curse into the roof and releasing the girl, who crumpled to the ground unconscious. Another kid was lying at her feet, and Sirius knew from the look of glee on his cousin's face, combined with the sinking feeling in his gut, that the boy was dead.

"Look who it is! It's Sirius Black!!!" Bellatrix cackled.

"Reducto! Stupefy!" Sirius cried, and Bellatrix deflected them.

"Let's have some fun!!" She exclaimed, before firing a blood-red curse at Sirius. He jumped over the spell, firing a bolt of blue electricity at the vile woman as he landed. She dodged and sent the Killing Curse his way in retaliation. Sirius summoned a block of nearby debris to intercept the spell, before launching a curse of his own.

"Confringo!" The spell shattered Bellatrix's shield, and the explosion went off right in her face. She blew backward, flipping through the air, but before she hit the ground, she cloaked herself in black smoke and flew up towards the roof, still cackling away. A blast of wind shot from behind him, and Sirius spun around, a shield spell on his lips. But it wasn't a spell. It was Tonks, rushing past him and jumping up into the air. White dust began pouring from her body, and she charged into the sky, chasing after her Aunt. Three cracks filled the hall, and Sirius breathed a sigh of relief as Moody, Remus and Kingsley raced forward into the atrium via the apparition point. Moody immediately took over duelling Dolohov from two young Gryffindors, while Remus bolted to the fireplace where the students were fleeing. Kingsley rushed to Sirius, and together they turned towards Voldemort, just in time to see something that Sirius would never forget for the rest of his life.

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**Act V – I: Fitz IV**

By the time everyone calmed down, it was lunchtime at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Fitz and Simmons were sitting back at the Ravenclaw table eating chicken schnitzel when the Twins brought it home.

The entirety of the Great Hall was eating in dead silence. Umbridge was sitting in Dumbledore's chair at the head of the room, sipping a cup of tea as she glowered at the student populous. Half her staff were missing, having been sent out to find Harry and the missing students. And that made it the perfect time for the final phase of the ‘Get Umbridge out of Hogwarts’ plan.

It happened ever so suddenly. There was an odd crackling sound from outside the hall. Umbridge, her body shaking in rage, slowly rose up from her seat and advanced towards the doors. As she neared them, a tiny speck of sparkling red light shot into the hall. It danced in front of Umbridge's face for a moment, before flying up into the air, and exploding with a bang in the middle of the room, transforming into a blast of blue fireworks.
That's when the guitar started.

“Oi, oi, oi

Oi, oi, oi

Oi, oi, oi

Oi, oi, oi

Oi, oi, oi,”

Dobby’s cardboard chariot, with Fred and George standing on the back, soared down from the Grand Staircase and into the Great Hall, the Twins belting out the words to the AC/DC song at the top of their lungs as a muggle stereo blasted out from retrofitted speakers installed in the chariots' sides.

See me ride out of the sunset

On your colour TV screen

Out for all that I can get

If you know what I mean.

Women to the left of me

And women to the right

Ain't got no gun

Ain't got no knife

Don't you start no fight

The Weasley's threw a box of fireworks into the air, and with perfect timing, they exploded as the soothing tones of Heavy Metal ripped through the air.

’Cause I'm T.N.T. I'm dynamite

T.N.T. and I'll win the fight

T.N.T. I'm a power load

T.N.T. watch me explode

Fireworks of every colour, shape and design you could possibly imagine filled the air, splitting the silence with crack after crack after crack.

I'm dirty, mean and mighty unclean

I'm a wanted man

Public enemy number one

Understand
So lock up your daughter
Lock up your wife
Lock up your back door
And run for your life
The man is back in town
Don't you mess me 'round

Specific fireworks seemed targeted at certain people. Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini and Parkinson were all attacked green sparklers that screamed, "POTTER!" in Malfoy's voice. Daphne and Astoria were confronted by vampiric butterflies. Fits and Simmons both collapsed in laughing fits when they were assaulted by a fluorescent pink dementor with Umbridge's face and the long tongue of a toad. Malfoy was up against the wall as a dancing orange Hermione replica floated a pristine white ferret up and down in the air. And Umbridge... Umbridge was saved until last.

T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
I'm dynamite (oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)

George threw the biggest rocket yet up into the air as the crowd jumped up and down, screaming "oi, oi!" into the hall. The missile detonated, transforming into a fiery red Dragon. The Dragon let out an ear-shattering roar, before charging at Umbridge. That's when Fitz saw the person on its back. Riding the dragon was a replica of Ginny made from white sparklers.

And I'll win the fight (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T. (oi, oi, oi)
I'm a power load (oi, oi, oi)
T.N.T.

"Watch me explode!!!" Firework Ginny cried in a very non-Ginny like voice, and Umbridge lost it. She screamed in terror and ran out of the hall as fast as her legs could carry her.

The Dragon's jaws slammed shut around Umbridge, and the entire creature detonated. Red, White and Gold Fireworks blasted out into the Entrance Hall, and George commanded Dobby to fly them towards Umbridge. The House Elf nodded so fast Fitz thought if his head didn't fall off at the very least his hats would. The chariot flew back towards the doors, and Fred grabbed a crispy and mortified Umbridge's leg, and yanked her up from the ground. The student body charged after the chariot out into the Entrance Courtyard and watched in awe as Madame Dolores Umbridge was dragged kicking and screaming upside down from a cardboard chariot, out of Hogwarts. Fred
dropped Umbridge into the Forbidden Forest as they flew past, and George launched one final fireworks into the air. It detonated, forming a giant letter ‘W’ in the air over Hogwarts.

"Weasley Fireworks Extraordinaire!!! Available soon at Weasley Wizard Wheezes in Diagon Alley and now via Mail Order!!! Thank you so much for watching our broadcast today, it's been loads of fun bringing it to you all!!! We hope you enjoyed it! So, for now, I'll bid you a due on behalf of Fred and George Weasley. This is Harry Potter, signing off. See you soon, True Believers!!!"

The final camera ball exclaimed, and the entire crowd broke out into cheers. Fitz and Simmons were standing at the back, near to the doors with Daphne, Astoria and Lance.

"I think that went well don't you?" Simmons said.

"Well? That was fucking brilliant!" Lance beamed.

"I hope the others are having as much luck," Astoria whispered.

Then, as if the youngest Greengrass had jinxed it, screams not of hilarity but terror escaped the Great Hall. They raced back inside, just in time to see Seamus Finnigan charge out of one of the Fireplaces lining the walls.

"Attack! Attack at the Ministry!" He cried, before three first-year Ravenclaws ran out of the Fireplace behind him.

Fitz grabbed Simmons hand, and together with Lance and the Greengrass sisters, they raced to the Floo.

Act V – I: Jessica II

Jessica flung herself out into the hallway, and punched the first Death Eater she encountered so hard he flew backwards through the solid stone wall of the hallway, and into some sort of abyss judging by the screams of terror that slowly faded into the distance. The second Death Eater to go down was Matt's doing. He jumped up in the air, and sideswiped a man in the face with his leg, crushing his jaw and splattering blood against the wall. He landed on the ground and forward rolled beneath the legs of another black cloak, and swept his other leg out, knocking the man's legs out from under him.

Danny was next. He came into the hallway like a storm, right hand ablaze with golden energy, wand in the other crackling with red power. He sent a stunning spell with his wand, hitting his mark – a very surprised Death Eater further back – before punching another with his glowing fist. The number of ribs Jessica heard crack then was a statement unto itself.

A spell hit Jessica's back, but she shrugged it off, advancing down the hall, wand drawn and face dark. She bit off a strangulation hex and full-body bind in a few seconds and narrowly dodged a Cruciatius curse that hit the wall somewhere behind her. She kicked a cloaked figure in the groin and was highly satisfied when she met flesh and heard an agonised whimper before the apparent man collapsed, revealing Greyback standing behind him. Greyback lunged at her, and she braced herself, but Luke charged into the breach, taking Greyback in the chest like a wrestler and throwing him to the ground.

Matt jumped to his feet and kicked off a guy's back, so he could right cross another cloaked Death Eater in the face. He finished his move by firing an impediment jinx at a guy coming up behind him. Then a Death Eater kicked him in the shin, and he tripped, dropping his wand.
Jessica slammed her fist into the wall, and a large chunk of the tiling came loose. She grabbed it, not even fazed by the weight and ignoring the rekindled stinging of her burns and threw it over Luke and Greyback's heads. A Death Eater blew up the slab, but then Danny was there. He vaulted over Luke, and swung out, taking down two Death Eaters in one move. He thrust his fist out in front of him, and a shockwave blasted five Death Eaters back into their comrades.

Matt drew one of the red Eskrima Sticks forever strapped to his legs, and smashed it into the guy who'd tripped him. He stumbled back, giving Matt all the time he needed to punch him in the stomach, knocking him down for the count.

Greyback snarled as Luke punched him in the face, Luke reached back to hit him again, but the werewolf was stronger than he looked, intercepting Luke's hand, though his arm was shaking. Luke looked to his hand, stunned for a second, which gave Greyback enough time to slash through the Defenders Cloak and run his long claw-like fingernails down Luke's arm. Greyback's fingernails shattered against Luke's invulnerable skin. Luke grinned savagely, before punching Greyback in the face once more. The child murderer fell unconscious, his mouth and nose leaking blood all over the floor. Jessica ran into the fray with Matt, shooting two stunning spells, though one missed. She deflected a body-bind with a shield, but a Combustion Curse smashed through it, catching her in the chest.

"Ahhhh!" she screamed as what felt like a gunshot ripped through her chest. Her abdomen exploded in pain, and Jessica lost her grip on her wand, falling to her knees and gasping for breath as flames engulfed her cloak and began to lick at her skin.

"Alias!" Matt cried, running along the wall for a few seconds to get past Luke, and shooting a water spell at her chest. She breathed a sigh of relief as the cold water hit her, putting out the fire, but the burns remained, searing in agony at her stomach. She coughed, and the taste of blood flooded her throat. So not good.

But Matt's inattention cost him. One last Death Eater still standing shot him with a repulsion hex, and he sailed almost ten metres before slamming headfirst into the floor. Danny launched forward, casting spell after spell towards the final Death Eater. The figure deflected them all, long black hair flaring out as the two got closer and closer. Danny lit up his fist, and the woman dropped her wand, instead thrusting her own hands forward and creating a shimmering black shield. Danny's fist crashed into the shield... and bounced back. Danny stumbled, losing power to his fist, and the woman drew two blades from within her robes. They were long and thin, like daggers, but protruding from the hilt were two curved and sharpened prongs.

The woman went toe to toe with Danny, something Jessica didn't think was possible. Not even Matt could go punch for punch with Danny. The guy was trained by mystical martial-arts monks for crying out loud, and when he graduated from Hogwarts fully intended to return to Kun Lun to undertake his final tests as a ninja. As bizarre as it sounded, Jessica had never questioned it. She felt he earned that given the glowing fist. But now she was terrified.

"Alias!" Luke exclaimed, dropping to his knees beside her. He grabbed what remained of her Defenders Cloak and ripped it away, leaving her in a grey singlet and jeans.

"Crap," he whispered, "I'm not good at healing shit!" Jessica, her head feeling much heavier than it had any right to be, looked down to her stomach. Her singlet had a large hole burnt in it, and pieces of the fabric were stuck to her skin, which was red and blotchy with the edges already starting to peel and inflame.

Luke tore away the rest of her singlet as she screamed, exposing the black sports bra she wore beneath it.
"I'm sorry, I'm sorry…" He muttered. He grabbed Jessica's arm and reached into his robes to pull the emergency portkey, forgetting in his panic that it wouldn't work in the Ministry.

"Damn it!"

"Help Danny," Jessica croaked through the haze of pain descending on her. She found it ironic she supposed, that it would be burns that killed her.

"Jessica, I can't…"

"Go!" she exclaimed, taking a deep long breath. Luke glanced to Danny, who was on his back foot deflecting and dodging strike after strike from the cloaked woman, to Matt lying unconscious on the floor.

"Shit," He fumed, before jumping to his feet, and barrelling towards the woman. Jessica breathed a sigh of relief, and let her eyes fall to Matt, crumpled on the ground. She saw the rise and fall of his chest and let herself rest a little easier. Her last thought before her eyes fell closed, was of their kiss.

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**Act V – I: Ginny II**

Ginny screamed, and her hands flew to her head as Voldemort began his assault on Harry's mind. The Duelling Room and Professors Flitwick and Babbling fell away, replaced by the Portal Room of the City. She fell to her knees atop the staircase, Harry falling into place beside her.

"Harry! What's happening?!" She exclaimed, pulling him into a hug that sent the Gemini Rune into tumbles of blissful pulses of heat.

"Voldemort's trying to get the Prophecy," Harry exclaimed, releasing her and rushing into the Control room. Ginny's eyes locked onto the portal at the bottom of the stairs, truly taking it in for the first time. It was a perfect ring shape, though a section at the bottom was embedded within the floor, made from solid grey metal with swirling patterns within it. Separating the outside of the ring from the inside was a track of silver metal, with dozens of glowing blue runes in a single line following the curvature of the ring itself. Each rune was distinguished from the one beside it, sitting in a divided rectangle of the track. Situated at equal distances from each other around the circumference were large triangles that hung over both the outside grey metal and the silver track of glowing symbols.

Then, as she stood there staring at it, the silver track began to move! It was like the sound a car makes when it starts up, and it groaned and whistled as the track began to rotate around the ring. All the symbols stopped glowing.

"Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert! Incursion Detected!"

The alarm echoed through the room, and dozens of flashing red lights illuminated the Control Room. The track stopped moving with a jolt, and the first triangular shape slid apart, before locking back into place like a jaw opening and closing. One of the symbols was now glowing brightly beneath it. Then the track began to move again.

Ginny bolted into the control room beside Harry, who was staring at the buttons and controls on the desk in confusion, running a hand through his hair.

"Come on, come on. One of these has to be a shield," he muttered to himself.

"You know what the Prophecy says?!” She exclaimed.
"No. But Voldy thinks I do, and he's trying to find it. So, keeping him out is kind of a big deal."

Ginny glanced back to the portal and watched as the fourth symbol locked into place.

"Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert! Incursion Detected!" 

Ginny followed Harry's example and began scanning the flashing screens. But they were all in the strange language, Ancient, and she had no idea what any of them said.

"Come on! Why couldn't this be like Star Trek!?" Harry stopped dead. "What if it is like Star Trek?" he whispered to himself. Then he turned towards where Ginny was standing, just in front of the console covered in the same runes as the portal. He rushed over and tapped his fingers on a large red button displayed prominently on the console.

"Please…" He muttered as they both turned back to look at the portal. The last rune locked into place, and all seven chevrons lit up a brilliant white that filled the room. The ring filled with liquid rainbow light, which then exploded out of the ring with a roar like a lion. The energy flared out like a wave of water, before being sucked back into the ring itself, leaving a spiralling whirlpool of rainbow energy sitting within the circle. Then a shimmering transparent shield materialised over the vortex, stopping anything that might attempt to pass through it.

"Gate Shield Engaged!" the voice of the city proclaimed.

"YES!!" They screamed, before embracing once more. There was a loud bang as something collided with the energy shield, and it rippled slightly, but nothing passed through, and the portal shut down. All the symbols illuminated themselves once more, and the lights in the triangular-shaped mechanisms shut off.

Ginny blinked, and found herself sitting on the floor, her two minders – plus Madame Pomfrey – hovering over her, with concerned looks on their faces.

"Mrs Potter, what's going on!? Your eyes rolled into the back of your head, and you collapsed, we feared you were having an attack!" Professor Babbling exclaimed.

"I was in the City. Voldemort's trying to get into Harry's head," she said candidly, eyeing her wand in Flitwick's hand.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Madame Pomfrey asked, brushing her hand over the Gemini Rune, which was bubbling with residual warmth from their time in the City.

"I'm fine. I have to get to Harry. We have to do this now!" She begged, turning all her attention on Flitwick.

The diminutive teacher huffed, biting his lip.

"Okay." Ginny held out her hand, and Professor Flitwick activated her wand, before starting the trace on her hand. She closed her eyes and sent up a prayer to anyone who could hear her.

'Please. Just let me get back to him. Let me help him.'

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**Act V – I: Peter II**

Peter raced with Gwen, MJ and Luna towards the exit of the Hall of Prophecy, which turned out to
be a lot harder than it seemed. The explosions coming from above were causing the shelves around them to rock and shudder, dropping prophecies from above them like rain. It was only thanks to Spider-Sense that they made it out without anyone getting a sphere of glass embedded in their heads. Eventually, they made it to the door, and what they found as they stepped inside, made Peter's stomach heave.

The hallway was littered with bodies, most of them bleeding or seriously injured. Over a dozen Death Eaters lay prone on the floor, all of them either unconscious, pretending to be, or suffering grievous wounds. But it wasn't just Death Eaters on the floor. Two red cloaks were among the fallen, and the battle was far from over.

Iron Fist and Luke Cage were going head to head with a woman who moved like a ninja, and they were losing. The woman wielded the most bizarre blades Peter had ever seen and had even Danny on the ropes. Forcing him further and further backwards, though Danny was smart enough to avoid the woman's attempts to corner him against the walls. But he was clearly tiring. If it weren't for Luke, who was trying unsuccessfully to get his own punches in, which the woman elegantly dodged and countered, Danny most likely would have been defeated already.

Wasting no time, and forcing himself to ignore Luna's scream of, "Matt!!" Peter thwipped two webs to either side of the hallway, before using them to launch forward the second he saw an opening. As Danny ducked down to avoid a kick, Peter flung forward, smashing the woman in the face, and knocking her to the ground. He forward rolled, and spun around, firing a web line at the woman's leg. Adapting far faster than Peter even though possible, she sidestepped the line, and cast a throwing star from within her sleeve straight for him. Peter didn't need his Spider-Sense to tell him to get out of the way of that.

Peter flipped over the throwing star and rushed forward as Luke grabbed at the woman's shoulder. She weaved away but was too slow to avoid Danny's glowing fist, which clipped her in the side, causing her to hiss in pain. Peter joined the fray and managed a punch to the woman's jaw while she was off balance. His spider-sense went ballistic, and he dropped to his knees just in time to avoid a spell shot from the end of her blades. It struck the wall, blasting the tiling away, and Peter had an idea. He webbed one of the fallen black cloaks, silently apologising in his head, and whipped it over his head, straight for the woman. The woman dodged, right into Danny's waiting fist. It crunched through her ribs, and she screamed in pain. She crashed into the wall and fell to the floor heavy breathing. Luke grabbed her by the collar, pulling her mask off with his other hand.

"Elektra?" Peter spun around, and his eyes met Matt Murdock's unseeing ones. He was being held up by Luna and MJ, his hood having fallen down as they hobbled up the hallway. There was blood dripping down his face, and the robes around his ribs and shoulders looked a far deeper red than they were supposed to be.

"Hello, Mathew. Long-time no see," the woman said in an accent marking her as definitely not British or American. It was exotic, maybe from somewhere along the Mediterranean, but Peter wasn't sure. The woman whom Peter deduced was probably around his own age, was quite pretty, with long black hair, a circular face and a tanned complexion. She had a dark, mischievous glint in her eye that he didn't like, and a tattoo in the rough shape of a scorpion on her neck. It had to be the Scorpius Rune. The Awareness Rune.

He glanced to Gwen and watched for a few seconds as she used a combination of web fluid and the Aguamenti Charm to tend to what looked like a nasty burn on Jessica's stomach as she lay unconscious, slouched against the wall.

"How are you still alive?" Matt whispered, tilting his head rapidly from one direction to the other -
like one might do when shaking water out of their ears.

"The same reason you are. Maybe you should have a think about where those chemicals we were exposed to that day actually came from Mathew, I have. And it's something the ICW would be quite terrified about I think." Elektra smirked, and Peter's spider-sense went up the walls.

"Look out!" He exclaimed, diving for cover. Elektra detonated something that released black powder dust into the air.

"Shit! No!" Gwen exclaimed, hastily conjuring a bubblehead charm around Jessica's wounds.

"Elektra!" Matt bellowed, rushing forward only to cry out in pain and slip, Luna and MJ catching him.

"Stop! You need a hospital!" Luna snapped.

"Shit, shit, shit!!" Gwen exclaimed, doing something Peter couldn't see. The tensing in his spider-sense vanished, and the dust slowly fell to the floor.

"It went through the charm!" Gwen shrieked, desperately trying to web up Jessica's stomach. Peter dropped to his knees, ignoring the fact that Elektra had vanished in the chaos, and started helping her, casting an air purifier that he'd learned, though it didn't seem to be doing much.

"Crap…"

"It's going to get infected, she needs a doctor, now!" Gwen exclaimed.

"Jess..." Matt muttered, trying to remove himself from MJ and Luna's grips again, but the girls were ready for him and kept their grips tight.

"No way lover boy. You're in almost as bad shape. You're both going to St Mungo's. Stat!" MJ admonished, her eyes locked on Jessica.

"She's gone," Danny said, walking back to join the group while Luke pulled Jessica into his arms.

"There's a Floo in the DMLE for the Aurors to use, we can get out through there," Matt hissed.

Then, slowly but surely, they made their way towards the elevators, leaving the smell of blood and dust behind them, all of them harbouring guilt and dread at what was to come.

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**Act V – I: Will I**

Will was running, which seemed to be the only thing he'd been doing of late. His basilisk skin cloak, the last thing he owned of his father, had been destroyed three days ago. Almost all his remaining clothes were burnt to a crisp, with just his shorts, threadbare and torn, and a rough cotton shirt he'd salvaged from a corpse protecting his skin from the boiling heat of the Deadlands. Clarissa was little better. She had a sash recovered from what had looked like a Wood Elf tied around her chest to hold her breasts in, and her necklace, a powerful enchanted artefact Will himself had made for her, was holding her long hair – now so caked with ash and blood it had utterly lost its golden shine, and her dyed red highlights had long since faded away – back in a poorly tied ponytail. At least her pants from Earth were still intact.

Will had no idea how long they had been here. Time being as complicated a subject as it was when
dealing with anything related to the domain of demons. Fortunately, the Dragon Force kept them sustained, so they didn't need food or sleep, as much as they might wish to have it. But rest wasn't an option. The Dragon Force might keep them alive, but it was also a beacon to every single creature here. Like a juicy fruit too delicious to turn down, or the ultimate treasure. So, sleep didn't happen, and there was no food to eat in the Deadlands anyway. It was kind of in the name.

Will and Clarissa ran up yet another hill made from old magma flows. The sharp rocks and obsidian slicing their feet open as they ran. The wounds healed themselves as they lifted their feet, before reopening again as they touched the ground. They reached the top of the cleft dry heaving and looked out over a canyon of spitting lava running a few metres below. Beyond the river was a great tower, soaring into the black clouded sky, with spires like a crown of thorns adorning its peak.

"There's no way Mephisto left this one portal open, Will. Why are we bothering?" Clarissa said, slumping to the ground and pulling a shard of obsidian out of her leg.

Will sighed, "Do you have any better ideas?"

Clarissa looked up at him with tired, hopeless eyes. The Gemini Rune throbbed with old pain on their necks, and Will stared at the Firebrand. It was dull and lifeless, like a watermark on a business document. Then he looked back up at the sky. One of the dark storm clouds parted for but a moment, revealing another realm full of snow-capped mountains hovering in the dark void like an island stranded in outer space.

The magic of the Ascended had no power here in Hell, the realm of the Demons, so the Firebrand's abilities were virtually void. Lucifer Morningstar took great joy in stopping all Ascended power from functioning within his domain. His Demonic Legions were such a plague on the Multiverse that their realm had been sealed away, preventing the escape of any of its inhabitants, unless summoned from the outside. The Kingdom of Hell Voldemort had stranded them in was known as the Deadlands, domain of the powerful Dreadlord Mephisto. And Mephisto wanted the Dragon Force, badly. With it, he could easily break through the barriers sealing Hell away from the rest of the Orrery of Worlds and launch a new invasion. But even between them, Will and Clarissa couldn't channel enough power to puncture through the shield without killing themselves, and if they died here, there were no resurrections. It was game over. So, they'd been racing across the plain, trying desperately to find a gateway to any Universe within the Orrery of Worlds; anywhere that wasn't here. But Mephisto had sealed them all as soon as he learned of Will and Clarissa's presence. Their last chance lay in the tower beyond, a portal the Prince of Hell kept in secret that should take them to the island of Morrowind on the planet Nirn – a world Will and Clarissa had been to before. From there they could make their way back to Earth, and a long-awaited bath.

Clarissa winced as her wound knitted itself shut, and let Will pull her back to her feet. An ear curdling roar filled the air, and the pair groaned. They turned to the bottom of the hill and watched as a figure in glowing gold plate armour riding a nightmare black horse halted, at least a thousand monstrous creatures with burning eyes, horns, various different numbers of limbs, and very sharp looking swords behind him.

"Kill them!" the figure screamed, and the army surged forward. Will and Clarissa summoned blades of ethereal energy in their right hands, and spheres of frost magic in their lefts, and waited for the advancing horde.

Then, the most incredible thing happened. There was a soft pop, and a mangy old boot appeared in mid-air directly in front of them. The boot fell to the ground, making a slight thud as it hit the black earth. Clarissa released her summoned spells and knelt down beside it while Will moved to cover her.
"What is it?"

"I don't..." she stopped, letting out a tiny gasp, "It's a portkey!!" She exclaimed, light returning to her eyes for the first time in Will didn't know how long. Will vanished his weapons, and instead held his hands out towards the approaching army.

"Depulsus Maximus Exeilium!!" He cried, and the most powerful banishing spell ever seen blasted forward into the horde. Demons went flying backwards like a wave, wretched screams and wails filling their air. Will turned back to Clarissa who had her hand hovering above the boot, a smile beaming on her face.

"Three."

"Two."

"ONE!!" They cried together, before latching onto the boot. The last thing either of them heard as they were sucked into a vortex of rainbow light, was the sound of a menacing evil voice screaming, "NO!!!!!!"

They landed in a lake. It was cool, it was serene, it was blissful, it was clean. Will burst his head above water and took a deep breath of fresh air as he looked to find Clarissa doing the same thing. He glanced skyward and laughed in relief as he recognised Ursa Major in the stars.

"We're back on Earth," Clarissa whispered.

"Indeed. You are home, my friends." Will and Clarissa turned towards a mossy bank, where Albus Dumbledore stood naked in the centre of a pentagram.

"Brain bleach! Brain bleach!" Will exclaimed, faux retching into the water.

"A simple thank you would have sufficed, William," Albus said stiffly, clearly not appreciating his joke, before summoning a purple bathrobe that did not hide anywhere near as much as Will hoped it would.

Not as wrinkly as I expected.

Clarissa! That's revolting.

I'm not dead. Give me a few minutes to celebrate before I have to reacclimatise.

"Gods. Thank you so much, Albus. I was beginning to think we'd never make it back," Clarissa said as they made their way out of the lake. Will glanced to the Firebrand, and let out a breath he hadn't realised he was holding when he saw its colour rapidly return.

"Much has happened since you were lost. Stephen labours in the Dark Dimension to restore the barriers separating the mortal world from Dormammu. Barriers Voldemort used the Darkhold to tear down. Fudge had me removed from Hogwarts and replaced with a sycophant, Dolores Umbridge. And to top it all off, Ginny Potter has vanished. Trapped in some lost dimension after a mishap with the Sagittarius Rune. Even my attempts to find her failed." Will's jaw fell open slightly, he wasn't ashamed to admit it. Albus shrugged, before making an effort to clear away his pentagram.

"On the bright side, I believe I may have located another of Tom's Horcruxes; I have discovered a solution for Stephen's dilemma, which I have sent to him; a plan to discover just how many Horcruxes Tom created, and I have found you. By no means an easy feat. I scried through seven different Demonic Kingdoms before I succeeded in tracking your magical signature to the
Deadlands. I believe Sheogorath, Asmodeus and Semirhage discovered my intentions, but fortunately, I pulled myself out before they could track me. None of the others got their hands on the Dragon Force I assume?"

Clarissa held up her hand, summoning a sphere of Dragon-Force energy into her palm. Albus let out a breath of relief.

"Excellent. Then I would ask that you aid me in…" Albus trailed off, gaze fixed on something in the night sky above them. A silver shape careening towards them. The shape, which formed into an ethereal dog, stopped in front of Albus and spoke with the voice of Sirius Black.

"Voldemort is at the Ministry. Kids in danger. Need help." The Patronus winked away, and Albus stared at the place where it vanished for a brief moment, before disapparating with barely a sound.

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**Act V – I: Harry V**

Voldemort flinched back as he was repulsed from Harry's mind. Harry, on the other hand, smirked devilishly and focussed on the Gemini Rune, which was getting hotter and hotter against his skin. Fiercer and fiercer it burned, until the acrid smell of skin burning filled the air, and vibrant heat filled his veins.

*Suck on this.*

An ear-shattering crack split the hall, and Ginny materialised in the middle of the air, clothes on fire and a murderous rage in her eye. She fly-kicked Voldemort in the head, and the Dark Lord released his grip on Harry's throat. Harry collapsed to the ground, heavy breathing, but his broken leg crunched even further on impact, and he screamed in agony.

Voldemort didn't fare much better. He crashed headfirst into the Fountain of Magical Brethren, while Ginny landed elegantly on the ground, clothes still on fire, wand pointed at Voldemort's face.

*Die you sick bastard.*

"Confringo!!" The blasting curse leapt from her wand, and Voldemort didn't have time to raise a shield. Instead, he lifted his hand, and the bolt of red light froze in mid-air, inches from his hand.

*That's not possible.*

"Ginevra? Oh, how far you've come!" Voldemort exclaimed, standing up, spell still frozen in front of him.

An explosion ripped through the atrium, and everyone looked up to see Tonks fall from the sky, being chased by Bellatrix Lestrange, cackling away like a mad-woman.

"Harry!" Hermione's voice exclaimed, and Harry turned towards the rubble of the arch. Hermione was lying with her back propped against a boulder staring at him with terror in her eyes. In her lap was a head of red hair Harry would remember till the day he died.

*Oh god. Ron…*

"From the darkness of the Chamber of Secrets to standing here before me now. Look at your power, your rage. I chose well in my host. Join me now. You have incredible gifts, Ginevra. Let me bring you to your full potential."
Harry could barely hear Voldemort's voice anymore. There was a sense of dread permeating everything. He tore his gaze away from Ron, lying still in Hermione's arms, and panned across the courtyard. Harry wasn't sure just how many dead there were, so many people were lying still it was impossible to tell. But he couldn't help his gaze locking onto one body in particular. A body in Hogwarts robes lying beneath what once might have been a table. She had strawberry blonde hair, and her head was lolled to the side, blood-forming a puddle around it. Susan… And in that moment, all of Harry's hope died in his chest. This was where it ended. All this death. He’d promised to protect them. He was supposed to defeat Voldemort. He'd failed.

Everywhere people were screaming in pain, and the stench of death was heavy on the air. Sirius and Kingsley were duelling with the Lestrange brothers, Remus was defending Tonks unconscious body, Brian Braddock and Rufus Scrimgeour were locked in a fight with Dolohov and Rookwood, and Will and Clarissa were cutting through the grunts with flaming swords….

Will and Clarissa!

Harry's gaze snapped onto the Dragons, charging through Death Eater after Death Eater like paper. They looked terrible, dressed in rags and caked in blood and dirt, but they were fighting through it, ploughing through the crowd as Foggy led the last student through a Fireplace.

"This is my potential. This is my place. Standing between you and Harry. I don't fear you. Don't forget, I know more about you than anyone alive. You aren't the master of the chessboard Tom. Because here I stand, a rogue piece, and that's not something the rules of chess allow," Ginny said, standing tall against Voldemort. She still looked gaunt and frail, and her clothes were still smouldering, but the fire in her eyes was undeniable. She was gorgeous.

"Then you'll die where you stand!"

"I don't think so!" Ginny whipped up a shield, absorbing three spells Harry couldn't even describe fired at her from Voldemort's wand before responding with two of her own – a banishing hex and a severing charm.

Voldemort flung Ginny's spells back at her with a wave of his wand, and Ginny pulled up a wall of earth to absorb them. She summoned a blast of lighting and stabbed her wand into the ground, electrocuting the floor directly beneath where Voldemort stood. But he floated up in the air, throwing a bolt of darkness at her instead. Ginny dived out of the way, before firing a bone-crushing curse at Voldemort. He batted the spell into a wall and retaliated with a blast of green light. Ginny summoned a nearby Death Eater into the Killing Curse's path, and the black cloak collapsed with his strings cut. Ginny banished the body at Voldemort, but he transfigured the fresh corpse into a giant snake. Harry snapped his eyes closed and sent a phrase of Parseltongue across their connection.

Ginny repeated the phrase, and the snake turned on a curious Voldemort, who quickly banished it. Harry, who still couldn't get up and had no idea where his wand was, would just slow her down and distract her if he tried to help, but he could direct what remained of his energy into her, just like she did for him in the Graveyard. He focussed all his attention on the Gemini Rune, pushing all his love and will into their bond. The Gemini Rune on Ginny's neck flared with violet light, drawing Voldemort's eye for just a moment, allowing Ginny to point her wand at the sky.

"Pluit Ignus Sanctum!!" She cried. A giant crack split the air above them, and white light beamed down on Voldemort from beyond, then bolts of pure white energy began raining from the sky like knives. Two of the holy magic fires passed through Voldemort's hastily conjured shield, spearing through his arm and shoulder, and he grunted in pain briefly. Then something changed. His red eyes darkened to solid black orbs, and the veins running along his head turned charcoal dark.
Voldemort grinned maniacally and pointed his wand straight at the light.

"Tenebris Consumate!" A lance of darkness shot into the light, snapping it closed as if it had never been, and Ginny stumbled backwards. She launched three rapid-fire disarming spells at Voldemort, but they all ricocheted of a shell of darkness that enveloped his body the second they hit, which vanished a second later.

Get out of there! Harry begged her.

No! If I do, he kills you! I won't let it happen. I won't! I'll die first!

"You are truly impressive, Ginevra. Magnificent even. You would have made a fine disciple. But you cannot best me. I am beyond mortality. Did you really think you could stop me?" Voldemort asked, rising up into the air, purple lightning dancing at his fingertips.

"Do you think the Nether Force can defeat me?" Ginny spun around as Dumbledore stormed forward, wand in hand and anger etched across his face. Will and Clarissa were forcing Bellatrix back towards one of the Fireplaces, Braddock and Scrimgeour had finally subdued Rookwood and Dolohov, binding them in enchanted chains, and Sirius and Kingsley had Rodolphus Lestrange on the ropes, his brother already down for the count.

The Nether Force?

Remember what Clarissa and Will said? About the Enigma Forces.

The Evil One? But how did he...

"The Darkhold has taught you much, Tom. But even with it, you are not infallible. Doctor Strange is on his way with the Aether Force…"

"By which time I shall be gone. And you shall be dead!" Voldemort screamed, firing a Killing Curse at Dumbledore and Ginny. Ginny dived out of the way, but Dumbledore transfigured a piece of rubble into a bullseye, which exploded on contact with the spell.

"You are playing with something you cannot control! It will destroy you!!!" Dumbledore admonished, dodging and shielding from Voldemort's barrage of spells.

"I am the Dark Lord Voldemort. Nothing is beyond my power!! The Nether Force is mine to wield! Only I have the strength!!" Voldemort snarled. Then he gathered a void of darkness around him and blasted it at Dumbledore. The Headmaster disapparated, leaving Will, who had been running up behind Dumbledore, to get blasted back across the courtyard and into the abyss below the balcony. Dumbledore appeared behind Voldemort and hit him with a bludgeoning hex and a banisher. The bludgeon struck Voldemort in the shoulder, but the wound merely sealed itself in coursing black energy. The banisher didn't even make Voldemort flinch. He turned around, a sinister sneer on his face, and pointed his wand at Dumbledore's shocked face.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!!!" Green light tinged with black sped towards Dumbledore, but then Clarissa dropped from above landing between the two titans and summoning a giant shield of coursing golden energy. The Unforgivable Curse – the curse that could not be shielded from – struck the barrier with the sound of a gong, sending a shockwave through the atrium that shattered every glass window that hadn't already been destroyed. But Clarissa remained standing, golden energy flaring around her like a hurricane.
"The Nether Force gives you power Tom Riddle, but it does not give you the strength of mind to use it. Many more powerful than you have tried to tap its energy, all have failed, or fallen into madness trying!" Doctor Strange was standing in the middle of the atrium, bleeding white energy billowing all around him. His blue robes had been transfigured pure white, and a golden halo adorned his head as circles of white made from archaic symbols spiralled around his wrists. Behind him stood Sirius, Amelia Bones and the Aurors, as well as Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbot, Demelza Robbins, Lavender Brown, Dean Thomas and Foggy Nelson. Then Will flew up out of the abyss, entire body wreathed in golden fire, eyes solid gold.

"Give up now, Tom. There are worse things than death. The path you tread leads only to eternal damnation and despair," Dumbledore said, wand pointed at Voldemort. Voldemort looked between Dumbledore, the Dragons, and Doctor Strange, but instead of the defeat Harry expected to see, all he saw was pitch black. Hate, anger and vengeance.

"Nothing is worse than death," Voldemort said. An orange spell flew from the back of the room, colliding with the Fountain of Magical Brethren. The Fountain exploded, revealing the man that had attacked Ginny, who helped bring Voldemort back to life, hidden in the darkness. Barty Crouch Jr. He ducked into a Fireplace and vanished, but by then it was too late.

Voldemort had used the chaos to disappear.
Ginny jumped to her feet, racing over to where Harry lay amongst the rubble.

"Harry!"

"Here," he croaked. Ginny dropped to her knees beside him, the Gemini Rune thrumming away with warmth, and pulled him into the tightest hug she could. Merlin, it felt so good to have her arms around him again.

He looked absolutely terrible. His throat was covered in bruising, his eyes were devoid of warmth, and his right leg looked like it had been crushed like an aluminium can.

"Are you okay?" She asked him.

"Yeah. Now that you're back," he said drowsily. She smiled softly, and helped him up, draping his arm over her shoulder.

"Where's your wand?"

"I don't know. I lost it in the collapse with…" Harry turned around, Ginny following. Her eyes locked onto Hermione, who was lying unconscious next to a boulder. In her lap was Ron, his eyes shut like he was sleeping. But there was no rise and fall to his chest, and he was completely still.

"No… No, No, No. No. NO!!" Ginny screamed, rushing over to them as best she could with Harry draped over her. She lowered Harry to the ground, before grabbing Ron and shaking his shoulders.

"Come on, Ron. Wake up… wake up please… we can't lose you too," she whispered. But Ron didn't stir, and Ginny found she was all out of tears. She closed her eyes and whispered a silent oath, ‘He won't get away with it. Tom will die, and I'll make sure I'm the one who does it.’

"Mr Potter, Mrs Potter?" Ginny turned around to see Dumbledore holding Harry's wand. "I believe this is yours." He handed Harry's wand back to him, before pointing his own wand at Harry's leg and casting a complicated-sounding spell. There was a faint cracking sound, and Harry let out a long-ragged breath.

"Thank you," He breathed, eyes still locked on Ron.

"I have numbed the pain and reset the bone so the wound heals properly. Go to Madam Pomfrey as soon as you get back to Hogwarts and she should be able to heal the wound more effectively."

"Hogwarts?" Harry asked.
"Yes. You both need to be gone before Fudge and the reporters arrive. Unless you want to talk to them, of course?"

Harry made to say something, but Ginny jumped in first.

"What about Hermione? And the students that came for the protest. We don't know if Jessica, Matt, Luna, Luke, Danny, Peter, Gwen and MJ made it out of the Department of Mysteries either."

Dumbledore sighed and ran a hand through his silver hair.

"I will look into the Department of Mysteries myself. From what I can discern, all but five of the students escaped back to Hogwarts via the Floo thanks to Mr Nelson and Miss Robbins' quick thinking. I will send Miss Brown, Mr Longbottom, Mr Thomas, Miss Abbot, Mr Nelson and Miss Robbins back to Hogwarts right after you. Miss Granger will be taken to St Mungo's with the rest of the wounded…", Dumbledore trailed off, looking to the elevators, where Cornelius Fudge had just exited. The Minister took one look at the destruction and fainted.

Ginny gulped but could see no other option.

"Okay," Harry said simply, still staring at Ron. Ginny looked back at her brother, but a glint of light caught her eye. She opened Hermione's closed hand, revealing the time-turner clutched tightly in her grip.

"Oh, Brains," Ginny whispered, taking the time-turner and tucking it into her pocket. She didn't want to know what Hermione had done, if anything.

"He threw himself in front of Voldemort's killing curse," Harry whispered, "He pushed me out of the way. I tried to collapse the roof, to seal the passage… he sacrificed his life to save mine." Harry's voice cracked, and tears slid down his face.

"Ron, Susan, Mr Weasley. Who knows how many people are lying out there, dead right now, because of me." Ginny's heart broke, and she knelt next to Harry, taking his hands in hers.

"It is not your fault. Voldemort is responsible for this. No one else. They all came here for one purpose, Harry. To help you fight this war. So, don't pity them, that's just an insult. Ron didn't die for you to sit here blaming yourself. He died so you could live. Use his sacrifice to take down that pale-faced bastard, instead of wallowing in self-pity. Because that doesn't help anyone."

She pushed as much love and support across their bond as possible, igniting the Gemini Rune once more. He looked up at her with a sad smile, and let his forehead come to rest against hers.

"Harry, if anyone is at fault here tonight, it is me. I tried to control everything. To manoeuvre everyone in a direction that I believed they should go in. And in doing so, I forgot the most important of lessons. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. I let my arrogance and belief that I was cleverer than everyone else, even Voldemort, to cloud my judgement. I ignored the warnings that William, Stephen and Clarissa imparted upon me, and I turned a blind eye to the suffering of the innocent. I was so focussed on playing the long game, that I forgot I wasn't playing a game at all." Dumbledore sighed, and he removed his glasses, giving them a thorough wiping over. "I cannot change the past Harry, but I can endeavour to be more proactive in the future. And all an old man can do is ask forgiveness for his mistakes." Dumbledore held out a hand to Harry, and Harry took it, letting the Headmaster help him to his feet.

Ginny took Harry's arm around her shoulders once more, and Dumbledore whistled softly. Fawkes appeared in a flash of flame, landing on Harry's shoulder.
"Fawkes will return you to Hogwarts. I do not know how long I will be, but when I return to the castle, I promise to tell you my final secret. All of it." Dumbledore nodded to Fawkes, and the Phoenix's claws gripped tightly to Harry's shoulder. They vanished in a tongue of flame, reappearing in Harry's bedroom in the Home.

"Thanks, Fawkes," Harry whispered as Ginny lowered him down onto the bed. The bird trilled, before vanishing once more.

"What are we going to do, Harry?" She asked him softly.

Harry fell back against the covers and Ginny did the same, curling up against his side, the Gemini Rune thrumming with a warmth she'd missed for months.

You saw Voldemort. You fought him. You even had him on the ropes.

Mhmmm. I was pretty badass, wasn't I?

But the second he tapped into the Nether Force, he outclassed everyone. Even Dumbledore couldn't stop him. It was only facing the Dragon Force and the Aether Force at the same time that made him retreat. With that kind of power at his disposal, we can't hope to stop him. There has to be a way of levelling the playing field.

Clarissa and Will said its infinite power. We certainly don't have that. How do we fight infinite power?

Harry was silent for so long Ginny worried he might have fallen asleep, but then he stirred slightly, letting out a deep breath.

We have beat him, though. Together. Multiple times now. All in the same place.

It took Ginny a few moments to realise what he was talking about.

In our minds.

Four times we've repulsed Voldemort from the City. The First time with the Dementors, the second in the Detention Level, the third with the bazooka, and the fourth tonight with the shield.

But that's in our heads. How does that help us in the real world?

Not just in our heads. In the City. Remember what Clara Hunter said in the Library that day? The Ancients were wiped out by a plague, and the City was abandoned with the shield still active. That means Atlantis is still out there somewhere. I think the dreams are a message from Clara. She said she can't help us because of those Accord thingies that she's on trial for breaking. And none of the other members of the Council of Fire had dreams about Atlantis. I think Atlantis is how we defeat Voldemort, or something inside the City maybe, and Clara gave us the dreams so we'd go looking for it.

Suddenly a wind picked up in the room, making the curtains of Harry's four-poster bed sway slightly before it vanished and the curtains returned to normal. Only there was no window in Harry's room, and the air conditioner was not on.

"Well, that answers that I suppose," Ginny said warily, rising up on her elbows and glancing around the room.

"It's like you said. We can't bring back the dead, but we can honour their memory. I don't know what
the prophecy said, and I don't want to. We're going to find Atlantis, and we're going to use it to destroy Voldemort once and for all."

Ginny grinned and stared into Harry's eyes, delighted to see his old fire returned. She leant up and kissed him softly on the lips.

"I think that's a great idea, but what do we tell the others? Where do we start?"

_We can leave a letter for the others, Jessica can take over as leader. She's the best person for it. As for where to go... the one place Voldemort can't follow us. Not yet, at least._

_Doctor Strange..._

_New York City. The Doc might even be able to give us some pointers._

"It's settled then," Ginny said, a determined grin solidifying on her face.

"We have to leave soon. Before anyone can catch us," Harry said.

"Don't worry Harry, we have all the time in the world," Ginny told him, holding up Hermione's time-turner.

"Brilliant." Then Harry pressed his lips to hers, and they fell back against the bed, pouring all their love into the other to obscure the pain of the past, the mourning of the present, and the dread of what their futures might bring. But they'd stand side by side when they faced it, together forever. Always.

Ginny groaned as she sat up on the bed, a wistful smile on her face as she watched a shirtless freshly showered Harry finish throwing clothes into the magical backpack they'd used on their trip to Alcheringa and Ilvermorny. Hearing her, he turned back around, brows knit together.

"You alright?" Harry asked softly.

"Yeah. Just a little sore," she said, pulling back the sheets and padding over to his wardrobe, where she'd been keeping a spare set of clothes since the previous summer. There was a dull ache between her thighs, but it was a good kind of pain. She opened the wardrobe door, and her smile brightened even further as she stared into the mirror, spotting a highly visible love-bite on her neck. She was still on the thin side, but she'd regained all the colour in her skin, and no longer looked like a walking corpse.

She grabbed the jeans and shirt she'd stashed, as well as one of Harry's jackets, and slipped into the bathroom for a long, refreshing shower.

When she returned, Harry had finished packing the bag.

"People have arrived. I can hear their voices," Harry whispered. She nodded and picked up the time-turner, now anxious to be gone lest their friends try to stop them or, knowing them, try to come with them.

She draped the chain around their necks and twisted the hourglass pendant five times, so they'd return shortly after Ginny left for the battle. They waited as time rewound, with no small degree of blushing given the events in the bed opposite them.

When the hourglass stopped moving, Ginny placed the time-turner down on Harry's desk and remembered her trip from earlier that day. Curiosity getting the better of her, she felt beneath the table
for the compartment. Letting her fingers hook on the catch, she pulled back a false panel and felt a
letter fall out into her hand. She pulled back her hand, revealing a muggle envelope with her name
written on it in Lily Potter's handwriting. Gulping hard, she shoved the letter into her pocket and
turned back to Harry, who was looking at her curiously.

"What was that?"

"I don't know yet. I found it by accident before. But we can check it later, right now we need to go."

They opened the bedroom door just in time for Ginny's younger self to disapparate from the Duelling
Room. A few seconds later, Lightning the kitten came running out of the door and down the
hallway. The cat stopped short when he saw Ginny, before bolting for her leg. Ginny bent down and
picked up the cat, nuzzling him against her face.

"Hello!" Harry whispered to him, running a hand through Lightning's fur, "Nice to finally meet you,
little man. Thanks for keeping Ginny company for me." The kitten didn't seem to care much for
Harry, ignoring him in favour of Ginny. Which is how Professors Flitwick, Babbling and Madame
Pomfrey found them when they rushed out chasing the run-away hairball.

"Potters!" Flitwick exclaimed, mouth opening and closing like a dead fish.

Harry turned towards them and smiled softly.

"Afternoon Professors. Madame Pomfrey, could I ask a favour before we leave?"

Hermione woke up in a cordoned-off wing of St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies, and the
first thing she did was wiggle her toes. They flexed, curled and twitched perfectly fine, and she let
out a sharp breath of relief.

"Alright, Brains?" Luke asked from a seat beside her bed. Hermione squeaked, suddenly realising
the tall boy was there. She sat upright and glanced around the white-walled room, eyes finally
coming to rest on two figures lying in beds next to hers. Jessica and Matt.

That's when it all came crashing back to her. The Department of Mysteries. Voldemort. The collapse.
Ron…

"How are they?"

Luke sighed, scratching his bald head as he looked at the screen, monitoring Jessica's vitals.

"Matt should be awake within the hour, no permanent damage done. One hell of a concussion
though."

"And Jessica?"

"Harder to tell. She took a Blasting Curse to the stomach, then got it infected by Peruvian Instant
Darkness Powder. If it weren't for her powers, she'd be dead already. But she's a tough one and
should pull through. The Docs managed to heal the burns, on both her stomach and parts of the old
wounds on her neck that were apparently never treated properly. But they won't know for sure they
got everything till she wakes up, and we have no idea when that'll happen."

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief, "That's great news!"

"What?"

"Initial reports say nineteen people are dead," Danny said, walking into the room with Luna, Sirius and Professor Lupin, expressions as if they'd just left a funeral. Hermione blanched as if struck.

"Who…"

"On the Death Eaters side: Allisandra Jones, Crabbe Senior, Avery and Jugson are all dead. Five ministry workers. And from the students, Susan Bones, Ernie Macmillan, Anthony Goldstein, a Hufflepuff first year, a Ravenclaw third year, two Gryffindor second years, and…"

"Ron," she whispered, eyes watering and lip trembling. She'd... she'd thought about using the Time-Turner. About going back. But she knew it wouldn't work. Time-turning didn't change time, it just allowed you to relive it. A rewind, instead of a do-over. She hadn't been able to bring herself to do it.

Sirius came and sat down on the bed beside her.

"Don't beat yourself up. He sacrificed himself to save you and Harry. If he hadn't that Killing Curse would have hit you both, and that's game over. If Harry dies, we're all lost," Sirius said, pulling her into his side and letting her sob onto his shoulder.

"Harry…” She burst into a fit of hiccups before she could finish, and Danny offered her a tissue to blow her nose.

"He made it out. Ginny apparated into the atrium on fire. Duelled with You-Know-Who for a good five minutes before he got the better of her. I've got to say, she looked like a fucking goddess flipping about firing spells left right and centre to keep Him busy. It was a sight to see," Sirius stated in a tone of pure awe and amazement.

"And? What happened next?"

"Dumbledore, the Dragons and Doctor Strange showed up all at the same time. Scared the bugger off. We managed to re-capture Rookwood, Dolohov and the Lestrange brothers. But Bellatrix, the Carrows, Barty Crouch Jr, Zebadiah Jones, Fenrir Greyback, Lucius Malfoy and You-Know-Who all escaped," Lupin said blandly.

Hermione took several deep breaths and wiped away her tears. Then she sat up and did her best to put on a brave face. She knew the others could see through it, but it was more for her than for them anyway.

"So, what's next? Where's Harry? And Ginny if she's back?" The trio shared a glance.

"What?"

"They're gone."

"What do you mean gone?"

Sirius fished a letter out of his pocket and handed it to her.

*Defenders, I'm sorry. I'm sorry about everything that's happened. If I hadn't have been so intent on getting a one-up on Voldemort, we never would have gone to the DoM, and Ron and Susan and everyone else who's died because of me would still be alive. I don't know what state everyone's in, and*
unfortunately, I don't have the time to wait to find out. And for that, I'm even more sorry.

We can't beat Voldemort. Before we had a chance. I truly believed we could do it. But now? We don't stand a chance. He's used the Darkhold to gain access to the Nether Force, one of the Enigma Forces that the Dragons told us about. Infinite power, in the hands of Tom Riddle. Makes me sick just thinking about it. And we all know he isn't going to show the restraint the Dragons do. To defeat him, we need to find a way to counter it.

That's why Ginny and I are going off the grid. We're going to find the one thing we think is capable of stopping Voldemort once and for all. The Lost City of Atlantis. Ginny and I have been dreaming about it since the Oracle placed the Gemini Curse upon us in the Chamber of Secrets, and now we're sure its a message to go and find the City. So, that's what we're going to do.

I don't know when we'll be back, but I promise that we will be. Until then, we're putting Jessica in charge of the Defenders and giving her complete authority to do whatever she needs to do, including recruiting. We'll stand by whatever you decide Alias, and we know you won't let us down. Go with your gut if something doesn't feel right, listen to Hermione's brain as much as you can, work with Dumbledore (I think he's come round, but always keep an eye open), and never dismiss something Luna might say, no matter how bizarre it might seem at the time.

Also, if you guys can feed the cat, it'd be great.

Love Harry and Ginny.

Hermione closed her eyes and counted to ten.

"How long have they been gone?"

"We don't know. They used your time-turner to go back in time after the battle, where they gave this letter to Professor Flitwick. After that he and Madame Pomfrey rushed out into the school to tend to the wounded students coming back to the castle via Foggy and Demelza's Floo. Who knows how many lives those two saved with their quick thinking? Once Hogwarts was settled, he raced here and delivered the letter. That was about twelve hours ago."

Hermione shivered. She had slept that long?

"It gets worse," Sirius said solemnly, "Fudge is going ballistic. He's trying to blame the damage to the Ministry on Harry. Even demanded he hand over his Vaults to the Ministry to pay for the damage. When Harry didn't show, he barged in here with a very worse for wear Lucius Malfoy demanding the identities of the wounded Defenders and to see Harry."

"We told him to fuck off," Luke said, leaving Jessica and Matt's side to join the others.

"With style," Danny added, igniting his fist. Hermione smiled slightly.

"I doubt he liked that very much," She said.

"Nope," Luna admitted, shaking her head rapidly.

"Stormed out of here very cross."

Three knocks rapped at the door, and Bill Weasley poked his head in. His eyes were blood red, his hair was hanging limply over his shoulders, and he desperately needed to shave.

"You need to see this." Bill stepped inside and closed the door, before handing a newspaper to
Lupin. The werewolf groaned and began to read aloud.

**The Potters: Saviours branded Criminals?**

*By Rita Skeeter.*

"I am going to destroy that woman," Sirius growled.

By now, the whole world will have heard what happened in the Ministry today. You-Know-Who has returned, and it took the combined might of Harry and Ginny Potter as well as Professor Dumbledore to fend him off.

Dozens lost their lives in the attack, but hundreds more – including countless children – were saved by the Potters arrival. But now, as the dust settles and You-Know-Who flees into the shadows to concoct his next plan to attack the Wizarding World, Minister Fudge seeks to blame the damage on the two Potters and has called for both Harry and Ginny to be arrested!

This reporter herself witnessed the moment when Minister Fudge marched on Gringotts to have the Goblins hand over the Potter's vaults to repay the damage caused by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his Death Eaters. The Goblins, in a sign of respect shown to very few, shut the doors to the bank as the Minister walked up the steps. Minister Fudge then angrily told the Goblin guards to open the doors, to which they refused. They then blasted him off the steps and back into the alley!

I never thought I'd be saying this, but I'm actually thankful for the Goblins actions! But they came at a cost. Now, in retaliation for this perceived slight, the Ministers Office has called for the arrests of Harry and Ginny Potter. Madame Amelia Bones – Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and aunt to Susan Bones, a Hogwarts student who fell defending her peers in the Ministry attack – had this to say about the order. "It is not the place of the Minister's Office to order the arrest of individuals or groups. That authority remains in the hands of the Head of the DMLE and the Head of the Auror Corps."

I applaud Madame Bones for keeping a clear head in these difficult times, especially with the passing of her niece. But it seems Madame Bones' prerogative was for naught, as Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour has let the arrest warrant go ahead.

"I must follow the orders of the Ministry of Magic, regardless of my personal opinions. When the Minister tells you to do something, you do it," Mr Scrimgeour said when he announced the news a few short minutes ago.

This is a devastating blow to the Wizarding World. Harry and Ginny have not been seen since the battle, but rumour has it a team of Defenders was seen leaving the Department of Mysteries after the battle. Was You-Know-Who after something in the secretive department, and did the Defenders secret this weapon away while Harry and Ginny duelled with Voldemort? Albus Dumbledore is to address the Wizengamot at an emergency hearing in a few hours so we may learn some answers then. With any luck, the Wizengamot will restore the Professor to his position at Hogwarts, which has seen its own batch of chaos the past day that I don't have time to go into here.

At any rate, Harry and Ginny are now on the run or in hiding, and I urge them to remain safely hidden away until their names are cleared.

The second Lupin's narration reached the spot about the Department of Mysteries, Hermione gasped and began frantically looking around for her robes. She was dressed only in a hospital gown; had they been destroyed?! What about the prophecy?!
"Where are my clothes?" Hermione begged, throwing back the covers.

"In here, Brains, relax..." Hermione raced to the wardrobe on the far side of the room where Luke pointed, not caring if the hospital gown rode up. She wrenched the doors open and immediately dug her hands into the pocket of her Defenders Cloak. Part of the enchantment was a protection spell weaved into the pocket to ensure nothing inside became damaged. Her hand clasped around the glass orb, and she pulled it free.

"Oh thank God," she whispered, before turning around.

"What!"

"How did you get that?!"

"Harry gave it to me before we fled," Hermione said, stepping into the middle of the group.

"What do we do with it?" Danny asked the obvious question.

"The smartest thing would be to destroy it," Luke said, "that way Voldemort can never learn what it says."

"But then we wouldn't know what it says either," Sirius retorted.

"What even is it?" Bill asked.

"That's what this whole thing was about. Voldemort wanted this prophecy about him and Harry, that's what was hidden in the Department of Mysteries," Lupin said softly, scratching his hair.

Bill pointed a finger at the orb, "That is what my father and brother died for?" He asked, angrily.

"Yes." Bill moved faster than Hermione could have imagined. One second he was across the room, the next he'd snatched the orb from Hermione's hand.

"Then I have a right to know what it fucking says!" he snapped, before rubbing the surface. A ghostly image rose up out of the sphere, capturing everyone's attention. Then Professor Trelawney's faint voice filled the room.

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

The voice and the spectre faded away, leaving everyone in a shocking sort of silence. Well, almost everyone.

"What the fuck was that?" Jessica wheezed, and everyone spun around, jumping for kingdom come as they fixed their gazes on Jessica, who was squinting at the prophecy with her jaw hanging open.

"That... was not good. Not good at all," Luna said stoically, eyes wide with what could only be described as fear.
Updated Disclaimer:

The Multiversity was as grand as one could imagine. Literally. The buildings and terraces seemed to transform as one walked past, morphing into what the type of structure the viewer believed was grand or magnificent. Ghost couldn’t speak for the others, but to him, the boulevards were white marble inlaid with patterns of gold, silver and bronze. Trees from hundreds of different worlds lined the terraces. Sunlight – which was an enigma in and of itself given there was no ‘sun’ in the Circle of the Gods – glistened from leaves slightly dampened with dew. Lining the roads were buildings that just couldn’t remain fixed. One moment they were colonial British or Parisian, the next elegant palaces with immaculate gardens and columns. Surrounding the Multiversity on all sides was the trunk of the World Tree, white light shimmered down through the canopy of leaves above them.

To say the Courthouse was just a courtroom would be like calling the Arc de Triumph a door. It was the size of a university at least, and the entire thing looked like it had been pulled out of a book. The exterior of the building was decorated with beautiful Ancient Greek marble columns, green vines with gold leaves embossed across them. The roof appeared to be made from gilded gold, with several interlocking Nordic runes etched across the edge. The steps leading up to the enormous oaken doors were lined with every language ever invented. The hallways were perfectly geometric. Each wall segment was an exact rectangle, alternating gold and silver. The interior was like a giant theatre. Millions of seats lined the three galleries of the house, most of them already filled by the time the Travellers arrived. Tapestries depicting each of the Enigma Forces in action hung at equal intervals around the room, and no matter how far away from a tapestry you were, you could always see it clearly.

Floating in the middle of the chamber were twelve thrones, all of the same design. The people seated, however, were utterly different, representing the various members of the Multiversity Council chosen to sit on the panel for the day’s deliberations.

Ghost, Miracle, Crystal and the 200 strong force of Travellers were relegated to the third tier balcony – the visitors’ gallery. Because none of them were divine or ascended, they weren’t eligible to get any closer to the deliberations. No, they were just a group of hardworking ‘mundanes’ trying to keep the Orrery of Worlds from dissolving into chaos.

After what felt like several hours, one of the people on the thrones – Ghost thought it was the Angel Aziraphale – stood up and called for silence.

“Let it be known,” he called, “that we do not own Harry Potter, Wakanda or any other franchise observed in our works of fanfiction! Alcheringa and it’s magical community, however, belong to Ghost and Miracle. Bring forth the prisoner!”

Act V, Chapter 3: The Burden of Leadership

Maggie Adams was having quite a nice day. She was minding the front desk of the American Embassy in London, a job that was usually fraught with British people harassing her about why they couldn’t get their Visas either faster or more efficiently. Apparently, none of them had the wherewithal to realise she staffed reception, not a seat in Congress. But today was a good day. No
arguments, no insults, no thinly veiled threats, no idiots, and she had a date that evening. Her first since moving from Chicago. So, maybe, just maybe she thought to herself, the universe was giving her a sign of a good day.

That image was well and truly shattered; however, the second two young people walked through the front door. The leader was a woman with long hair like flickering flames. She wore denim jeans, brown leather boots and a matching jacket. Around her neck was a woollen scarf with an indigo tint to it. Her eyes, a deep chocolate brown, were fixed on Maggie. Behind her was a man, taller than she was, with messy black hair and vivid green eyes. He wore jeans like the woman, but with an AC/DC t-shirt, and a leather jacket that was black instead of brown. Unlike the woman, his eyes flitted between every person in the room, scanning, assessing. He mapped out every exit, analysed the security guards like a professional. In reality, nothing really should have distinguished them from the general people she saw. Maggie knew what a socialite and a punk rocker looked like after all. But she'd also been trained to recognise potential threats. It was part of her job, especially with the situation in Afghanistan only getting worse. The bosses were worried about another potential incident, and a foreign embassy was the perfect target. So, Maggie was trained to see-through covers. To recognise specific peoples who might be threats. And these two screamed it. The man was clearly a soldier, and the woman looked far less healthy than a British socialite had any right to be. Her face had a shallowness to it that screamed previous malnourishment, her right hand hovered far too close to her pocket, and the aura of confidence she excluded was undoubtedly fake. Then, to top it all off, Maggie recognised their faces. They'd been on the news just the previous night. Kidnap victims 16-year-old Harry Potter and 15-year-old Ginny Weasley, the BBC had said. Yet here they seemingly were.

Maggie's heart began hammering in her chest, and she pushed the little red button on the bottom of her desk. The woman smiled as she approached Maggie's desk, and she smiled back, eyeing 'Ginny's' brown jacket warily. Could they be wired with suicide bombs? The thought made her want to vomit. She silently apologised to her friends, her family. She really hoped her sister would remember her dog, Mickey. But she kept the smile on her face.

"Afternoon Miss, how can I help you today?"

"Hi, can I speak to the Ambassador please?" The woman asked. Maggie very narrowly stopped herself from hitching her breath. The Ambassador must be the target.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No. But I think the Ambassador will be willing to make time for us," 'Ginny' said sweetly.

"I'm afraid that's not how it works Miss. The Ambassador is a very busy man, he doesn't have the time to accede to demands for his time. If you need to speak to him, you'll have to have an appointment. I can book one for you if you'd like?" The door behind her opened, and two security guards in black tuxedos and dark sunglasses stepped out, hands on the guns at their hips. The two security guards at the door spun towards the two youths, drawing their own weapons. Finally, the doors on either side of the room swung open, and two more guards came out from each.

"Hands in the air, step back from the desk. We don't want to hurt you kids," one of the guards said, gesturing to the pair. The teens shared a glance before stepping back and slowly raising their hands in the air.

"I think there's been a misunderstanding here," the woman said hesitantly. The guard who spoke stepped up to them, and began patting down the man – ‘Harry Potter’. Maggie breathed a sigh of relief when no bomb packets were discovered. It appeared all the man had was a shaft of wood in his pocket, and an odd golden tattoo on his neck. The woman also had a stick, though it was a different
colour, and she had the same golden symbol. Also, a fading bite mark on her neck, and a scar on her hand.

"Who are you?" The head guard asked. By this point, everyone in the room was staring at the two teens.

"Oh, in the name of Merlin's saggy left testicle, my name is Harry Potter. Surely that means something to one of you!?" The man barked. One of the guards and two of the visitors let out gasps of shock.

"There we go. My wife and I are here to request political asylum in the United States of America, and I suggest you hurry this up before the British arrive, as the guy by the front door with the grey cardigan has already reported our whereabouts," he snapped. The guard who'd gasped instantly spun to the entrance, where a man in a grey cardigan was sitting in one of the black leather armchairs - a look of horror etched on his face. The man let out a gasp of fright before vanishing with a loud crack! Maggie and several people in the room chocked in shock. What!? Who were these people?!

The guards instantly surrounded the two teens.

"Take them to the Brass-level! Now!" The guard who'd seemingly recognised Potter said frantically. Brass-level? What Brass-level? There was no Brass-Level?!

That's when the glass revolving door blasted off its hinges.

People screamed, scattering as glass flew through the room, but Maggie was frozen stiff, staring at the entry in utter shock.

Harry and Ginny pushed through the guards and pointed the sticks that had been confiscated from them mere moments before towards the ruined doors, where five people were now walking inside. The leader had long silver hair and wore garish black robes. Beside him were four individuals with even worse fashion sense. They wore similar gaudy clothes, but on their heads were red caps with feathers sticking out from the brims. All in all, they were the most bizarre people she'd ever seen.

"Potter! You are under arrest by order of the Minister for Magic," the man with the silver hair snarled.

"Escape the Department of Mysteries did we Malfoy? I have to say, I'm impressed."

"Come quietly, Potter, you don't want these poor pathetic Muggles caught in harm's way, do you?"

Magic? Department of Mysteries? Muggles? What on earth was going on?

"You and I both know where we'll be going if we come with you. Straight into Voldemort's waiting hand. In case you hadn't noticed, we intend on departing this country, and you certainly won't be stopping us."

Then all hell broke loose. Blasts of red, green and yellow energy filled the air, and Maggie finally had the sense of mind to duck beneath her desk. There was a great deal of snarling, yelling, gunfire, and even an explosion, but eventually everything quieted down.

"Thanks for the assist," the head guard said.

"Likewise," Ginny replied.

"So, can we see the Ambassador now?" Potter asked.
"Take them to the Brass-Level," the other guard directed, "I'll deal with the clean-up."

"Copy." The elevator made a ding, and Maggie heard several footsteps crunch across the glass. The elevator doors closed, and a voice said, "Reparo," followed by "I know you're all probably very confused right now, and you have every reason to be. But if you look here, you'll all be fine. Obliviate." A bright flash illuminated the room above her, but Maggie remained hidden beneath the desk. More footsteps echoed through the room, and, slowly, ordinary levels of conversation returned. She heard the elevator ding again and finally lifted her head above the desk. It was like nothing had happened. The door was fixed, the glass all restored. All the people were uninjured and sitting or standing precisely as they had been before, and there was no sign of Harry, Ginny, the security guards, or the attackers.

"Holy shit."

Five hours after Malfoy's catastrophic attack on the American Embassy, Harry and Ginny found themselves sitting on the Private Jet of the American Ambassador to Britain. The Ambassador was – by convention – a Wizard, so as soon as the Security Guard (whose name was Dave) brought them onto the Wizarding floor of the embassy (which they called the Brass-Level) the Ambassador had instantly known who they were and assured them of their anonymity and security. The Ambassador had sent an Owl to the Secretary of Magic immediately, and within four hours, Harry and Ginny were political refugees in the United States. Now they were on their way to New York City on a plane. It had been deemed too dangerous to take a portkey, as they were easily traceable, and Voldemort might be able to find them. So, a plane it was. At least it was a nice plane, rather than some of the pictures Harry had shown Ginny of Economy Class on the larger passenger jets the Muggles used.

They'd been in the air for over half an hour now, and Ginny was sitting in the bathroom, staring at the letter in her hands. She'd sealed up her bond with Harry as best she could, claiming girl problems – a subject he knew very well to avoid by now. Slowly, hesitantly, she broke the seal, removing the parchment within.

Ginny,

Don't let Harry see this.

And with a horrible sense of foreboding, Ginny read on.

When they landed in New York City, Harry led the way down the stairs into the dark of night and onto the tarmac. Waiting for them was a black sedan and two MIB Agents in black suits. The MIB, or Magical Intelligence Bureau, had been established as an independent government agency when MACUSA fell, and the Wizarding government of the United States was reabsorbed into the greater American government. Now their main job was protecting the border between the mundane and magical worlds. The Agents nodded to Harry and Ginny as they sat down in the back seats of the car.

"The President and the Secretary have expressed their desire to meet with you as soon as possible Mr and Mrs Potter. With your permission, we'll escort you to Washington DC immediately…"

"No. We need to go to 177a Bleecker Street," Harry said firmly. The agent stared at him for a few seconds, as if sizing him up, before nodding quickly and starting the car.

They drove out of the airport and onto the highway, quickly getting caught in the famous New York
traffic. It was almost 10:00pm at night by his watch, and the roads were as clogged as rush hour in London.

Harry couldn't help but stare at Ginny as they drove. She was keeping their mental link completely sealed, no stray thoughts reaching his brain. She was deep in thought, staring out the car window in exactly the same position she'd sat in on the plane. It was disconcerting, and Harry could tell she was struggling with something. It was clearly something she didn't want him to know about, so what could he do? He'd thought about asking if she needed help, but he just knew the answer would be a polite refusal, before turning back to her window. So, Harry remained staring out his own window into the flashing neon lights of New York, watching as car after car moved past them.

Eventually, they drove down a less busy street, coming to a stop outside a colonial manor with a window on the roof that matched the glyph on the Eye of Agamotto.

"We'll wait for you here," The agent said, and Harry and Ginny walked up the stairs. Ginny finally reopened their mental bridge as Harry knocked on the door.

You okay?

He couldn't help it. He had to ask.

Yeah. Just had some stuff to work out.

Harry knew she was telling the truth because he could feel how confused and anxious she felt through the Gemini Rune.

Anything I can do to help?

No. I'm sorry, Harry. But not this time.

The door to the house swung open, revealing an Asian man in old Wizarding robes squinting at them.

"Come in. Don't blow anything up while you're here." He opened the door wider, beckoning them inside rudely. The house had a sense of grandeur to it Harry couldn't quite place. The room they stepped into was a large one, an entrance hall of sorts. The ceiling was three levels above them, and an immaculate wooden staircase rose up to the next floor. A cauldron sat near the stairs, and luxurious red curtains were drawn over the windows. The same symbol on the window outside covered the floor, embossed in gold.

"Wong, play nice, would you?" Harry and Ginny snapped up to Doctor Strange, who was standing at the top of the stairs in a hastily thrown on outfit of a dressing gown, tracksuit pants and a pyjama shirt.

"If they had come at a decent hour I would have," Wong huffed. He closed the door and left through another door, grumbling about inappropriate visitors.

"Mr and Mrs Potter, welcome to the Sanctum Sanctorum. What can I do for the two of you?" Strange asked, walking down the stairs to their level.

"We need your help," Ginny began.

"We can't beat Voldemort, not on our own. Not with the Nether Force at his disposal, or the entire British government after us," Harry continued.
"But we might have a way. We've been receiving dreams, flashes, of the Ancient City of Atlantis, sent to us from Clara Hunter – the Oracle of the Council. We think there's something in Atlantis that can stop Voldemort once and for all."

Doctor Strange stared at them for a moment, probably assessing whether they were lying or not. Finally, he seemed to decide that they were, in fact, telling the truth.

"Come with me," he said, before walking up the stairs.

Harry and Ginny followed him silently, trying hard not to stare at all the magical artefacts lining the darkened hall. Harry spotted the Wand of Watoomb, the Cloak of Levitation, the Crimson Gem of Cytorak, a branch from a Weirwood tree, the Ring of Barahir... and those were just the ones he recognised! There were at least a dozen more he didn't. A rusted oil lamp, a flower in a jar with golden petals, a clock stuck at nine in the afternoon, a silver steel belt with seven gems affixed in seven silver medallions...

Eventually, the Doctor led them through another door, and they passed through a transparent barrier, not unlike the one you stepped through to get inside the Home.

"We're in another dimension," Harry said aloud.

"Indeed. This is Karma Taj. An ancient citadel built by the Ancients before their demise. The Masters of the Mystic Arts have been using since it was discovered seven thousand years ago," Strange told them.

The room they found themselves in was eerily familiar. It was shaped like a triangle, with a door at each corner, each carved with a different symbol. The walls and floor were the exact same shade of red as the control room in the city. In the middle of the room sat three raised daises. The one furthest from them held a pedestal and resting upon it was the All-Seeing Eye of Agamotto. The next held a sphere roughly the size of one's hands, and on the last was a grey metal and blue glass chair, with blue light trapped within.

Doctor Strange walked over to the platform with the sphere and rested his hands upon it. Instantly, a globe of golden magic materialised in the middle of the room, hovering in the air. The golden light rippled for a second, before solidifying into a three-dimensional image of Earth.

"The Anquietus, or the Ancients as you know them, were a race of space-faring people that arrived on Earth roughly twelve thousand years ago. Earth was still relatively young and new at the time, though still old enough for the first sentient inhabitants of our planet, the Elves, to have been driven to extinction by mankind. Based on what we know for certain, the Ancients came to our planet for one reason, and one reason only. Magic. At least what we call magic in the modern era. The records in this place tell us that the Ancients, when they fled their original home in a galaxy far, far away, were researching a powerful force which they called 'the Source'. We don't know for sure what the Ancients believed the Source was, or if they even had any idea at all beyond its existence. They spent thousands of years trying to find it, but never could. Even sending unmanned starships out into the cosmos to gather data and information as to a possible location. But hindsight, as they say, is 20/20, and using our current understanding of magic, we can deduce that 'the Source' the Ancients sought is the origin of all magic. The force that allows for the existence of life, of which the Enigma Forces are but shadows of its true magnificence."

Doctor Strange moved his hands on the sphere, and four sparks lit up across the globe, with the biggest one right in the centre.

"Atlantis, Karma Taj, Hades and Valyria. Four cities the Ancients had on Earth. Valyria is long
destroyed, Hades fallen into ruin, and Atlantis lost to time. 10,000 years ago, a plague swept through the galaxy, wiping out populations across the stars, and not just the Ancients. Entire civilisations were extinguished. Some Ancients survived by ascending to a higher plane of existence, forsaking their mortal forms, but they were few, and the plague too fast. Almost all of them died, along with much of the human race. Those who did survive eventually evolved into the humanity we see today." Doctor Strange sighed, releasing the sphere.

"Explorers have searched for Atlantis for centuries. None have found it. The City most likely remains hidden by some power of the Ancients we do not understand. I fear your search will be in vain." Ginny growled at him, and Harry had to grab her arm to prevent her from drawing her wand. Red heat flooded the Gemini Rune, and Harry forced himself to ignore Ginny's rage.

"Then how are we going to stop Voldemort?!" Ginny snapped.

"The Aether Force and the Dragon Force together should be able to stop him. If they do not, then the Wheel weaves as the Wheel wills. We are but threads in the Great Pattern of Fate and Destiny, doomed to follow our fated course," The Doctor said as if addressing pre-schoolers.

"You're giving up?" Harry exclaimed. He loosened his grip on Ginny just slightly, but that was all she needed to slip free. She ducked away from Harry and stalked over to the Chair.

"Don't!" Strange exclaimed, reaching for her, but Ginny had already sat down. The Chair lit up, sliding back into place. Ginny's eyes fell closed, and Strange's jaw dropped open in complete shock.

"Impossible…"

"Nothing's impossible if you've got enough nerve," Harry said, staring at Ginny with pride. Then it all went wrong.

The chair made a groaning noise, and the lights started flickering dangerously.

"Gin…"

Ginny's eyes flashed open, and she jumped up out of the chair with a shriek, launching into Harry's arms. The light within the chair spluttered and died, but it didn't reset to its upright position.


"What happened? You imbeciles have been playing with fire, and you got yourself burned." Ginny let go of Harry and stepped up to the chair platform. She dropped her hand to the glass platform and waved her hand over a section near the edge. A piece of the glass vanished, and a cylindrical structure, about the size of Harry's forearm, made from what looked like gold and red stained glass rose up out of the ground. It was smoking. She wrapped her jacket around her hand and pulled it free.

"This is the power source. It's called a ZPM, and it's dead because you've been experimenting on it. I only got time to ask the chair two questions before it died. One: you can't use the chair because you don't have the Ancient Gene, the special genetic characteristic that allows people to use Ancient technology. I do have it, probably because I'm a pureblood. Two: Atlantis is at the Sacramentum de Campion lay corde Terra. I.e. the Plains of Mystery at the Heart of the World. So, unless you can tell us where either of those places are, this whole trip was pointless!"

_Laying it on a bit thick, aren't you?_

_I'm mad._
I know. It's super hot.

This chair was connected to a database, like a giant network of sorts, the chair in the library isn't. I wish I'd known it was here before. I could have learned so much.

Doctor Strange, who was staring at Ginny with something that looked suspiciously like respect, placed his hands back on the sphere. A place near the centre of the Earth, where the Equator met the Prime Meridian, lit up on the floating golden globe.

"The Heart of the World is here. The Plains of Mystery never existed. They are merely part of the legend. If you insist on going to find something that cannot be found, I will not stop you. If you would be willing to stay awhile so my colleagues and I could talk to you about this Ancient Gene and the chair…"

Leave?

Yep. We've got what we came for.

Harry and Ginny turned on their heels, and advanced back through the door they came, marching on a unified front towards the future, leaving Doctor Strange and the past he clung to behind.

Jessica stepped through the St James Park anchor and into the Home, where Luke and Danny were waiting for her.


"Jessica?" Danny asked, disbelievingly.

"Of course, it's me you fuckwits. Now let's get a move on!" She snapped, being sure to keep her usual attitude about her. But secretly she was thrilled at the reaction.

It had been a month since she woke up in St Mungo's Hospital, hearing the prophecy and learning that Harry and Ginny had left her in charge of both the Defenders and the Defenders Army. And it had been a seriously busy month. Fudge had gone and ordered Harry and Ginny's arrest, which basically destroyed all of what remained of his credibility with the public. That's when Jessica, Matt and Hermione had created what Matt liked to call, "The Ultimate Plan of Awesomeness." That had called into serious question why on earth she was ever attracted to him.

They had spent hours and hours while she and Matt were still hospitalised trying to come up with a solution to the Fudge problem, until they realised that instead of treating Fudge like a problem to be defeated, they should treat him as an obstacle. And what was the easiest way to avoid an obstacle? Go around it. So, they'd leaked the prophecy to Rita Skeeter, and all hell broke loose.

They didn't tell her the whole thing. Just that it said Harry was super awesome and the prophesied hero of Wizardkind. Hermione had then started going on about Joseph Campbell, the "Hero's Journey" and a book called "The Hero of a Thousand Faces." Jessica had glazed over at that point.

The stunt worked brilliantly. Kind of hard to run the government if no one is listening to you.
Combined with Dumbledore's speech to the Wizengamot and Umbridge's tour of the Forbidden Forest, which she still hadn't returned from, what remained of Fudge's power-base had crumpled. If Jessica's network of spies within the Ministry (she very much enjoyed the fact she could say she had 'a network of spies' in anywhere) were right, Rufus Scrimgeour would be challenging for the Ministership sometime in the next week. And that was excellent news. With Scrimgeour as Minister, that left the position of Head Auror vacant, and she already knew who his replacement would be: Brian Braddock.

With Braddock at the top of the Auror food chain, Amelia Bones as head of the DMLE, and Percy Weasley as the newly appointed head of the Department of Magical Transportation (the previous head having died in Voldemort's attack), the Defenders had control of three of the most important arms of the Ministry. Scrimgeour would be dancing to her tune.

Perhaps the most incredible thing was that they had made amends with Dumbledore. After his speech to the Wizengamot addressing Voldemort's return, in which he told more lies and half-truths than actual facts (Jessica had counted), he had confronted the Defenders in St Mungo's. As per Harry's letter, they decided to trust him with the information that Harry and Ginny had left to search for a weapon capable of defeating Voldemort, though not about Atlantis. Dumbledore had pondered this for a few seconds, before asking how he could help them. Since then he'd been incredibly helpful. He had given his input on "The Ultimate Plan of Awesomeness," providing some insight, and even pointing out a major flaw that they had missed. Plus, Dumbledore had resources that Jessica did not. Access to potions ingredients and spell books, and knowledge of which members of the Ministry were under Voldemort's thumb and which were under Dumbledore's. Under her direction, Dumbledore had even started sending the members of the Order of the Phoenix out on reconnaissance missions. He seemed to genuinely want to help them. But Jessica didn't trust him. He had his own reasons for helping them, she was sure of it.

Then there was Hogwarts. The Wizengamot had reinstated Dumbledore as Headmaster, and he'd immediately ordered his staff restored to their positions and Aurors be sent to guard the school while protective spells were placed around it. Doctors from St Mungo's had been working at the castle through the night, tending to injuries among the students who escaped the Ministry. Hermione, Flitwick, Luke and Dumbledore made it their job to ensure every parent knew the status of their children, and Dumbledore himself went out to the homes of all the deceased to break the news. The depression on his face that first week had even Jessica pitying him.

Peter, Gwen and MJ had returned to the United States; but insisted that if the Defenders needed their help that they call immediately. Gwen and Peter had also taken with them the plans to install a Home anchor in their apartment building for quick travel to Defenders Headquarters, though it wouldn't be finished for a while.

The Dragons, on the other hand, despite wanting to help, had returned to Alcheringa to recuperate after their stint in Hell. Jessica hadn't actually seen them before they left, but from what the others told her, the pair had looked like Hell had chewed them up and spat them back out. Which, if she thought about it, was precisely what had happened. They'd returned looking no worse for wear a few days ago, and had taken up residence in one of the upstairs rooms in the Home.

They weren't the only new residents, however.

A week after the attack on the Ministry, Voldemort himself attacked Bones Manor, and the only reason Amelia Bones had survived it was because Danny had taken it upon himself to wait for exactly that. He hadn't told any of the other Defenders what he was doing. He simply vanished after they saw the prophecy, reappearing in the Home with Madame Bones after the attack. He only narrowly escaped, thanks to his fist and the portkey hidden in his Defenders robes.
Professor McGonagall also remained in the Home being looked after by Dumbledore and Madame Pomfrey. She was still in a coma, but Professor Dumbledore was confident she would awaken soon. Jessica hoped he was right.

The sheer intensity of the past month had been a gift for Jessica. It had allowed her to devote all her attention to everyone else's problems rather than her own. She didn't want to think about her mother, and how she'd looked as she died. She didn't regret it. Not in the slightest. But it still hurt, and she absolutely hated being weak. Then there was her father. He was already back to his old tricks. Two third-year Slytherin girls had vanished. So had Ernie Macmillan's sister. She knew, knew deep down in her bones that it was him. The man was a complete and total psychopath, and she just knew that she would have to face him at some point. That thought absolutely terrified her, so she stayed very far away from it.

She had to get away from it all. So, she'd decided to take a morning off from trying to save the world, 'borrowed' some of Harry and Ginny's seemingly endless pile of money and gone out to a high-end muggle beauty parlour. She didn't want to be Jessica Jones, daughter of Alessandra and Zebediah. She just wanted to be Jessica, aka Alias – leader of the Defenders.

She'd permanently gotten rid of her long, dead straight black hair. She'd had it trimmed to shoulder length and curled so that it actually had volume instead of hanging limply down her back. And then she'd gone what the hell. She'd asked the person doing her hair what was new and fresh. So now she had gorgeous pink hair, with all trace of her raven locks hidden away. Keeping it that way wouldn't be too hard with some Sleakeasy's Hair-cream. Then she'd gotten her nails done, and even some makeup.

After all that, because Jessica was a ‘lovely’ customer and the Potters had a very large wallet she didn't care about bleeding dry, one of the designers by the name of Sandy (who seemed to think it was her job to tell her entire transgender life story as she was doing Jessica's hair) had gone with her to Oxford Street, where they'd purchased the white tights, light blue mini-skirt, thigh-high boots and the brown leather jacket she was currently wearing. Sandy had impressed on her that wearing greys and blacks was "absolutely not an option" with Jessica's new look, as dark colours clashed horribly with her hair and skin tone. Jessica had then, for reasons beyond her comprehension, agreed to burn all her jeans and return in a few days. She put it down to spending too much time with Ginny. It definitely had nothing to do with the fact that she had enjoyed being the centre of attention for once in her life, and shaking off her parents' influence and embracing muggledom was the ultimate insult to her Pureblood maniac parents and their cultist friends. Merlin, she hoped she never met a psychiatrist.

"Um… you look different," Luke stammered.

"Is everyone here?" She asked him, ignoring their dumbfounded looks.

"Uh…." Rolling her eyes, Jessica stormed down the hallway, chancing a glance at the clock before advancing down the rightward hall. Padfoot and Moony were pointed at 'Home', and The General and Firefly were pointed to 'Abroad'.

She rounded the corner and stalked down to the Study Room. She avoided the newly restored Marauders Library and the Duelling Room and went into the recently added room on the far right. It was very sci-fi. Lily Potter would have been proud. Gunmetal grey walls, electric lighting on the roof, walls and floor, and the centre of the room was dominated by a large holographic table. Standing around the table were Amelia Bones, Sirius Black, Nymphadora Tonks, Bill Weasley, Brian Braddock, Betsy Braddock, Remus Lupin, Jack Murdock, Albus Dumbledore, William and Clarissa O'Neill, Bill Weasley, Fred, George, Hermione, Matt and Luna. All in all, not a bad table to
"Hey Jess," Matt said without looking up his position leaning against the wall. He'd removed his red glasses, but his eyes remained unmoving.

"Hey, everyone." More staring. She supposed she'd have to get used to that. What was it, Ginny always used to tell her? Fake it till you make it. So that's what she did.

"What's the latest?"

"No news from Mad-Eye. He's still trying to hunt down Voldemort's base, but he's had little luck I'm afraid," Bill admitted.

"However, we might have a lead on Greyback," Sirius said, winking slyly at her. Jessica grinned. That was one bottle she wanted corked, especially before the next full moon.

"Investigations turned heads near Yorkshire. He's been gathering up as many werewolves as he can. Trying to convince them to side with You-Know-Who," Remus said, "From what I can tell, he doesn't have a lot of support, but given the Ministry, he doesn't have to drive a hard bargain."

"Then we have to offer them a better one. Will, Clarissa. What's the deal with Werewolves in the Federation?" Will bit his lip, before turning to Clarissa.

"I don't think we have any. Do we?"

"Lycanthropy was introduced into Australia by British convicts in the 1800's when the Ministry of Magic sent over a hundred captured Werewolves on muggle ships to get them out of Britain. The British intended for them to die in the Outback, but the Dwarves of Kata Tjuta brought them into their underground mansions. No moonlight gets in there. Don't think they were altruistic about it though. Werewolves are naturally stronger than average humans, so they used them as slave labour for about a century before the Federation was founded and the Federal Protection Authority put a stop to it. They used Waratah Essence to prevent the transformation as well I think, puts them into a trance-like sleep during it," Clarissa said matter of factly. Everyone just stared at her.

"What? It was my Year 9 assignment for Creature Protection and Manipulation Class," She said with a shrug.

"You got to do Werewolves? Damn, I got stuck with Liar Birds. Mr Archibald was such a dick," Will grumbled.

"You're just sour you didn't get Miss Maxwell," Clarissa told him.

"She was an awesome teacher," Will replied defensively.

"Also had the biggest rack I've ever seen," Clarissa said evenly, raising her hands over her breasts and mimicking a balloon inflating. Will raised his hands in defeat.

"Didn't hurt…"

"If we could get back on topic?" Dumbledore prompted.

Will and Clarissa both looked to their feet.

"I'll ask Gárlin to send some Waratah Essence up here. Can't be too difficult," Will said.

"I'll try it out," Remus said, eying Will, "If it works, we can spread the news there might be an
alternative to Wolfsbane." Tonks, who was cradling Lightning the kitten in her arms as he mewed softly, glared at Lupin. The old wolf firmly ignored her. Matt had told her about a conversation between the two he'd overheard a week previously, where Lupin had rebuffed Tonks attempts to ask him out on a date because of his condition. She had decided she'd leave it to them to figure out, and wouldn't care until they pissed her off.

"At the very least it makes us look better than the Ministry, and presents a viable alternative to Voldemort," Amelia said. Jessica inwardly smirked at Madame Bones. She liked the woman. Despite Susan's death, and the attack on her home, she absolutely refused to back down. She even said Voldemort's name without flinching, and the number of people who could do that could still be counted on Jessica's fingers.

"While we're doing that, we should put together a team to bring in, or bring down, Greyback. If we can get him off the streets, one way or another, I know I'll sleep better at night," Sirius said pointedly.

"Agreed," Jessica said, "Stakeout this gathering. If you see a shot, don't wait for orders, follow your gut."

Sirius beamed and slapped the two Braddock siblings on the back, "You two in?"

"Sounds like fun," Betsy said with a smirk.

"I've got no plans tomorrow night," Brian shrugged.

"I'm coming too," Matt said, standing up and making his way to the table.

"Mathew, are you sure about…" Jack Murdock started.

"My powers will help in the field. I can peg a Werewolf five miles away. I'll be an asset in this," he said firmly, as if daring his father to disagree. The older Murdock threw his hands up in the air, surrendering.

"So long as I can come too," he said. Matt turned towards his dad.

"No way. Maisie needs you at home," he said.

"Maisie needs you more than me, Mathew. She never lets you out of her sight when you're home. If you're going, I'm going."

Maisie was Matt's five-year-old squib sister, though Jessica had never met the girl before.

Matt grumbled something Jessica didn't here, before acquiescing with a nod.

"Count me in as well. Werewolves can't hurt me. I'd be a perfect red-shirt," Luke said, shouldering forward.

"The more, the merrier," Sirius said.

"Good. Brains, Professor, how go the Muggleborn safehouses?" Jessica asked.

"Molly is busy setting up spare beds in the recently vacated rooms belonging to Ginevra, Ronald, Percival and the Twins in the Burrow already," Dumbledore said with a smile.

"Grimmauld Place just has one floor left to clean out, and we'll be completely open for business," Tonks chirped, slapping Bill on the back. She placed Lightning down on the table, and the cat sprinted towards Hermione, who picked him up without thinking and tickled behind his ears.
"The Oxford House is about halfway there. The Goblin Wards are being put in place tomorrow," Hermione said.

The Oxford House was another thing they'd bought with Harry and Ginny's money, though it was a much more essential and thought-out purchase than Jessica's beauty spree. The house was a three-story townhouse in Oxford which had been magically modified by Bill and Betsy to contain three times its actual occupancy. The purpose of the Oxford House, Grimmauld and the Burrow were as waystations for Muggleborns fleeing the country. From there, transport to the Federation, France, or the United States could be organised. Will and Clarissa had already guaranteed support from President Matson of the Federation and brought back two International Portkeys. Professor Dumbledore had contacted Olympe Maxine, the Headmistress of Beauxbatons, who had obtained a portkey from the French Ministry of Magic. They were still working on the Americans. Nothing short of Voldemort arriving with the Nether Force could destroy the Goblin enhanced Fidelius Charm, and even with the Nether Force, he'd have quite the time of it. The Oxford House had been Hermione's pet project. Aside from her OWL's, which she still insisted on sitting despite all the fifth years being offered the opportunity to delay them until next year given everything that happened with Umbridge.

"Fantastic. Anything else?" Jessica asked.

"Yeah," Danny said anxiously, stepping forward, "I received an owl this morning from Kun Lun. I've been granted permission to sit my final examination early. If I pass, I'll be granted the full title of Immortal Weapon and the power that goes with it. I leave tomorrow."

Jessica smiled softly at him. His defeat at the hands of the mysterious 'Elektra' had rattled him more than he let show. He was very conveniently leaving out the fact he'd have to kill a Dragon to pass said exam. The only people in the room who knew the truth were her, Luke and Matt, as Danny had confided in them when he sent the owl to Kun Lun in the first place. Luke gripped his friend's shoulder.

"When can we expect you back?"

"Beginning of next year at the latest." What went unsaid was that if he didn't come back, he would most likely be dead.

"I have one thing I wish to inform you all," Dumbledore said, interrupting the moment. He tapped his wand against the table, and an image of the world shimmered into being.

"A report came across my desk this morning, and I imagine the rest of the world will have the story by the morrow. Harry and Ginny were spotted by paparazzi, leaving the White House. However, despite what the stories might say, I believe the photographs were actually taken about a week ago. So, where the Potters are now, I do not know. But I doubt it is anywhere near Washington."

Jessica nodded softly. Why the hell would they be at the White House?

"Thank you, professor," Jessica said, "If that's all, we'll meet on Monday as planned." Jessica turned on her heel and left the command centre, heading up to her room. Once she reached it, she locked the door and slumped on the bed. Merlin, she was tired.
"Harry, there's nothing here," Ginny said stoically as they stood on the bow of the expensive-looking yacht they had definitely not stolen in Lagos. They were anchored in the middle of the ocean, at the exact point the Equator met the Prime Meridian. And there was nothing for miles except the flat, open sea. There was no wind, no birdsong, nothing but the sound of the motor, which they'd charmed into working eventually (it took four tries, Harry preferred not to think about it). Harry abandoned his scanning of the ocean floor with his wand and turned to face her.

"You think Doctor Strange was lying?"

Ginny sighed, "Maybe. We did kind of piss him off."

"He gave us more than we had, though. Luna said the city was at the Heart of the World as well," Harry pointed out.

"And we know the City wasn't on land. It floated on the Ocean. And the ocean could be a 'plain of mystery'. So, it being here does make sense I suppose," Ginny admitted, continuing to stare out at the flat sea.

"We know the City is still here somewhere. Clara said as much. It wasn't destroyed, it was lost."

"How do you even lose a city?" Ginny retorted, slumping down to the deck and leaning against the railing.

"Let's think about this," he said, beginning to pace "what do we know about Atlantis? It's a city built by an alien race trying to find magic, that was left on Earth when its inhabitants were either killed by a plague or ascended like Clara. We know it was above a body of water, and we know it was here. The myths of Atlantis are all pretty clear that the city sank beneath the ocean. But, no one agrees on why. Some say it was the gods, others a great earthquake or volcanic eruption. If we can figure out the truth, maybe..." Harry trailed off and looked up into the sky. Ginny frowned and followed his gaze but could see nothing.

What is it?

Listen.

Ginny took shallow breaths and realised he was right. There was a faint trembling in the air and a soft smell of heat like a fire. She stood up and eased her wand from her pocket. The second she did so, a large and sleek aircraft made from a grey looking metal with dark tinted windows materialised in mid-air. The sound of the engines picked up, and two cylindrical guns deployed from the bottom of the ship.

Oh fuck.

A voice began echoing out from the ship, but it was in a language neither of them understood. Ginny did catch one word, however.

Wakandans.

Ginny and Harry locked eyes before dropping their wands and raising their hands above their heads.
Harry and Ginny sat very, very still, two Wakandan sentries standing at attention on either side of them as the sleek jet flew over the African jungle. They were moving incredibly fast, faster than Harry thought any plane could realistically move. But it didn't make any sense. Because while one of the guards definitely was a wizard, one of them was definitely not. And if Harry had to guess, the pilot – a rather intimidating woman – wasn't a witch either. So, if the ship wasn't using magic, what the hell was it using?

I thought Wakanda was kind of backwater compared to the rest of the magical world? Ginny sent across their mental bridge.

So did I. Binns says that there isn't a lot of magic in Africa because of the Axis Magicka. Sucks all the magic into it, resulting in a lot fewer magicals than on other continents.

Wait a second. Since when did you pay attention to Bins?!

Harry coughed to obscure his laugh, and the guards looked at him intensely.

"Sorry."

I know, I know. Have your fun. It was in my Dad's textbook. Prongs and Padfoot thought the name was funny, so they paid attention enough to actually right some notes on it. When it came up in class last year, I guess it sort of stuck.

So, for the girl who most definitely fell asleep?

You know how Earth has a magnetic axis, right?

Yeah...

It's sort of like that. It's an axis that runs through the planet with two poles at each end. One positive, one negative. Excess magical energy gets sucked in through the positive pole in Africa and spat out at the negative pole in the North Pacific, near Hawaii, I think.

Cool.

Not for the Africans. According to Bins at least.

Well, Bins isn't the best source of information on anything.

I'm kinda thinking that. We certainly don't have anything as wicked as this ship.

Where is it taking us do you think?

Wakanda, I imagine.

The answer arrived half an hour later, when the ship descended from the sky, flying straight for a mountain covered in a thick canopy of trees.
"Hey, wait a second this is a long way to come for a funeral!" Harry exclaimed, grabbing Ginny's hand and preparing to disapparate despite the anti-apparation wards on the ship. The mountainside hurtled towards them, and Ginny's breath hitched in her throat. Then, like a curtain pulled aside to reveal the morning sun, the rainforest disappeared, replaced by a large city straddling a winding river, nestled within the cradle of the mountains and a lake on the far side. The city was an incredible sight. Towers spiralled into the sky, but they didn't look like the muggle skyscrapers either of them had seen before. Instead, they were modular, with pieces extending at odd angles. And everything was covered in greenery, so unlike London, New York or even Alcheringa, it was breathtaking.

"Wow…" Harry breathed.

"It's an illusion. Wicked!" Ginny exclaimed, staring wide-eyed out the window.

_Not so backwater then._

_Not so much._

The jet levelled off before landing with barely a sound on a large landing bay outside two towers on a raised circular platform in the centre of the city. A ramp lowered down behind them, and the guard said something in Wakandan they didn't understand, before shoving Harry towards the steps.

"Alright, alright. Chill," he grumbled as he stepped carefully down the stairs and into the sun.

The air was hot and sticky, but after Alcheringa, Harry found he wasn't too bothered by it.

_Sea breeze would be nice, though._

_True._

The two guards escorted them to a group of women in red armour with shaved heads.

_Okay. That is super weird._

_Hey, don't knock it till you've tried it._

_If you cut off your hair, I'm filing for divorce._

_Seriously?_

_Seriously. How would you feel if I shaved my hair? Or wore contacts to change my eye colour?_

_Don't you dare._

_Exactly._

…_Fair enough._

The lead woman spoke to the guards in Wakandan, and the wizard handed their wands to her. She looked them over before eying them both.

"Do you speak English? Or at least know a translation spell?" Harry tried.

"Yes. You will be brought before the King. He will decide your fate." While Harry and Ginny stood in stunned silence, the woman slammed her spear on the ground, before turning around. The two women accompanying her surrounded them, and Harry and Ginny followed the Wakandans inside the towers.
Sirius, Brian, Betsy, Jack, Matt and Luke lay in the bushes surrounding Fenrir Greyback's headquarters in Yorkshire using muggle binoculars to get a better look at their set up. Moony's intelligence was good. Greyback was definitely here. He'd set up camp in a natural bowl within the state forest just outside Harrogate. Sirius counted roughly one hundred and fifty werewolves from across Britain, all of them having come to hear Greyback's big speech on why they should support You-Know-Who. Remus was down there right now, getting a feel for the place.

Oh, Remus… Sirius was having a grand time teasing the old dog about Tonks, who was apparently mooning over the poor bugger. He was so easy to tease. He shook his head and brought his attention back to where it belonged.

"What have you got Murdock?" Sirius asked the kid lying beside him, staring through unseeing eyes at the depression below.

"I count one hundred and forty-two potential hostiles. No guards protecting their position or lookouts. He's not expecting company," Sirius still didn't understand how the kid could do what he could, but he didn't question it. The Daredevil had never been wrong.

"We can't fight that many, even if the Full Moon isn't for another week," Brian pointed out from beside them. Sirius sighed; he had a good point.

"Any ideas then Head Auror?" Sirius ribbed. Brian had been promoted to head of the Auror Corp after the Wizengamot had called a snap election and Scrimgeour announced he was stepping aside to run for Minister. Sirius doubted he wouldn't win. The Wizengamot members were all scared shitless after the attack on the Ministry. Having an Auror, a visible strong-man type, in the top job would make them feel safer. The only real threat was Pius Thicknees. Alias' – and Sirius was calling her by the name 100% now, as he just couldn't equate mopey, sarcastic Jessica Jones with the current pink-haired female James Bond who was occupying her body – spy network within the Ministry had confirmed he was on Corban Yaxley's payroll, and Yaxley was most definitely working for You-Know-Who. If he became Minister… Sirius didn't know what they'd do. Presumably, Brains and Alias would put their heads together and think of something.

"We can't let Greyback getaway. As soon as the meeting is over, he'll vanish back to Riddle's side, and we'll lose him."

"So, what's the brilliant plan to get passed the army then?" Jack asked. Sirius liked Jack Murdock. He was a fighter like him, rather than a thinker like Brian. They spoke the same language, point in a direction, and they'd go wands a blazing. Leave the planning to types like Brian.

"I can take Greyback. If the rest of you can keep the pack off me, I see no problem," Betsy said matter of factly, snatching the binoculars from her brother. Brian's sister freaked Sirius out. Big time. He wasn't sure if it was the purple highlights in her hair, her eyes – one vivid lilac, the other pale white – or the rune in black ink on the back of her neck (Granger said it was the Leo Rune, not that Sirius knew what that meant) that reminded him of Harry and Ginny every time he looked at it. Where the hell were they? Doctor Strange had checked in a few days ago saying that Harry and Ginny had visited him in New York but then left. Sirius knew there was something the sorcerer wasn't telling them, he just didn't know what.

"We can't take the whole pack. But, if we can get in as they leave, Greyback's guard will be down, and we might have a chance," Luke concluded.

Sirius groaned and moved a particularly annoying rock from beneath his chest.
"Waiting it is then."

"You stand in the presence of T'Chaka of the Panther Tribe, the King of Wakanda; Queen Ramonda; and Prince T'Challa, the Black Panther," the scary bald woman announced as they were shoved into what was clearly a throne room. It was gorgeous. With glass flooring, intricately carved columns lining the room, a giant window overlooking the city, and a simple yet elegant throne, the place screamed of power, and intimidation. Harry had a feeling that was the point. Unfortunately for them, Harry had stared pure evil in the face. There was nothing, short of a cosmic purple giant that ate planets, that could scare him now.

That was oddly specific.

The Dragons mentioned it, I think.

It would be just our luck if a planet-eating giant showed up.

Might solve some problems though.

...true.

The scary guard lady folded her arms across her chest in an 'x' shape, before standing to the side, giving Harry and Ginny an unimpeded view of the King and his entourage. T'Chaka sat, as would be expected, on the throne, staring at them with curiosity. To his left was clearly his wife, though she looked like she'd rather be anywhere else. On his right was a young man of maybe 20. Harry couldn't be sure. Seated around them on wooden benches were several people in relatively modest clothing compared to some of the robes Harry had seen in Diagon Alley. Reds, purples and blacks seemed to be the prevailing colours, though one person wore a long green gown and a green plate that looked like it must really hurt inserted in his jaw.

"Tell us who you are," the King asked, leaning forward slightly.

Let me handle this.

You're more than welcome to.

"I think you already know who we are, your Highness," Ginny said.

The King smiled softly.

"I do not think there is a wizard alive who does not know who you are, Harry and Ginevra Potter. There is a warrant out for your arrest I should point out. Mister Fudge has guaranteed a handsome reward for turning you over." His voice had a deep baritone echo to it that Harry thought made him seem very regal, and he pronounced each word very carefully as if ensuring he would make no mistake. Harry respected that.

"Then you surely know why we're here," Ginny continued, raising an eyebrow. The King sat back in his chair.

"I must admit I do not. The Heart of the World is not a place one goes for a vacation. You can imagine my surprise when our sensors detected two unauthorised magicals in the area. Perhaps you can enlighten me?"

"We're searching for something that could stop Voldemort," Ginny told him. Harry, though logically it made sense, noted that no one in the room flinched at the sound of the name.
"You search for Atlantis?" one of the councillors admonished, the one in green with the plate, "A fairy tale. You have come a long way for nothing." He was not as well-spoken, though that might have been because of the plate.

"Let them speak," T'Chaka said softly, and the councillor stopped talking immediately.

"Voldemort has the Nether Force at his disposal now. Our only chance to stop him is to find Atlantis before old snake face decides that conquering the world is boring and just cracks the planet in half instead." T'Chaka's face hardened in an instant, but his advisers looked confused.

"What is this, Nether Force?" a tall woman in a red dress asked. T'Chaka, his face now etched with worry, turned to the woman.

"A weapon capable of destroying us all in an instant." He said softly, before turning back to Harry and Ginny.

"What of the Dragon Force. William O'Neill still carries its power, does he not?"

"He does," Harry confirmed. "But he and his wife Clarissa were trapped in Hell for almost a year, and much of their strength was expended there. As far as I know, they're still in Britain working with our agents on the ground. But if Voldemort decides to blow us all to kingdom come, nothing will stop him."

T'Chaka was quiet for several long moments.

"What is it you are searching for in Atlantis? Why are you looking for a place that might never have existed at all?"

Harry shared a glance with Ginny "We know it existed," she said, "because an ascended being told us so. It's still out there, we just have to find it. This place is incredible, surely you must have some idea. It's clearly not at the Heart of the World."

"It is not. Our people have searched for the city for thousands of years. I can assure you that Atlantis is not in Africa," T'Chaka paused, "But the knowledge you possess means it is clear we have not been looking hard enough."

The King turned to his wife, who nodded softly, before looking back at them with what might have been respect in his eyes.

"T'Challa, if you could show our guests to some rooms. I will task our best scientists to look into your task. Perhaps a new set of eyes are what is needed." T'Chaka stood up and crossed his arms over his chest. The rest of the room mirrored his actions, and T'Challa walked over to them. Harry let out a breath he didn't realise he was holding.

*That went well.*

*At least we've got a bed tonight.*

*Don't be so optimistic.*

"Greetings," T'Challa said, offering them another of what Harry was beginning to realise was a sort of half-salute-half-greeting.

"Nice to meet you," Harry replied, nodding his head respectfully. He really hoped he didn't commit some grave act against royal protocol or something.
T'Challa led them out of the room via a different door to the one they came in through. He hesitated for a second, looking back to make sure no one was following before he asked,

"Perhaps while you are here, you could show me how to perform the Wronski Feint?"

"Oh Merlin, not another fanboy," Ginny muttered as Harry laughed and clapped a hand around the older boy's shoulders.

"No problem at all. Show me to the nearest broom."

The rally went for a little over an hour. Greyback gave the standard pitch, "the Dark Lord will reward those who follow him, those who don't will die in pain blah, blah, blah." Sirius tuned out five minutes through. Fortunately, it looked like Greyback wasn't as popular as he used to be. Or maybe Harry kicking his boss' ass close to five times now had made people less interested. Either way, it didn't look like Greyback's sales pitch was very well received, because the crowd was vanishing really quickly. Moony was one of the last to go, casting a not so subtle glance towards where they were hiding before disapparating.

"I count fifteen wolves around Greyback… shit, he's really pissed. They're around the campfire in the centre, packing up the gear. We better be quick though, Greyback says he's reporting back to Moldy-shorts tonight," Murdock hissed.

Brian snapped up, "He can't getaway. Betsy the anti-ap?"

"Ready."

"Then let's go." Luke, Sirius, Brian and Jack drew the hoods of their Defenders Robes up over their faces, and as a team, they peeled up away from their hiding place in the trees. Sirius was on the left with Matt and Betsy – neither of whom were wearing the robes. The Braddock woman refused outright, preferring her purple goblin made curse breaker bodysuit, while Murdock wore an odd all-black get-up consisting of a strange rough material called Kevlar. It was kind of like armour, but it looked far too thin to be effective, at least to Sirius's eye. The kid said he moved better in the suit to the cloak, and Alias said to do what he felt the most comfortable with. Something about being alive was more important than looking cool if he remembered correctly.

They crept down the hill, taking cover behind a large boulder near the entrance to the bowl.

"Betsy…"

"Psylocke," She hissed, and Sirius looked at her like she'd grown a second head.

"What?"

"When in the field, you will address me as Psylocke, or I will teach you what happens to dogs who misbehave.

"We are not doing this here!" Matt snapped. He jerked his head up slightly, before pulling a grey scarf around his eyes, crouching down and vaulting himself up in the air. He somersaulted over the rock and fired two stunners behind him as he landed on the ground. Betsy and Sirius jumped out from behind the boulder and watched the spells knock two approaching men off their feet.

"Come on," he said, before running down the grassy lawn towards the centre of the bowl, Betsy… *Psylocke* chasing after him.
Sirius bolted down behind them and caught sight of Brian's team engaging five poorly dressed people on the other side of the clearing. Grinning as the adrenaline flooded his system, Sirius dove to the side, wand pointed at the campfire below, where Greyback and his remaining men had just realised they were under attack.

"Confringo!" A convulsing red shot fired from his wand as he ducked into a forward roll to absorb the fall. The spell collided with the campfire, creating an explosion that scattered Greyback and his friends and filled the air with the smell of burning ash.

A bunch of people tried to disapparate but cried out in pain as they were repulsed by Psylocke's ward. She wasn't chief Cursebreaker for nothing after all. On the other side of the field, Cage punched one werewolf in the jaw while firing an orange spell from his other hand. Jack and Brian were duelling with three goons between them, but Sirius doubted it would last long. He was proven right when not a second later, Brian had one man hogtied, and Jack had another flying backwards.

Sirius rose to his feet just in time to see Psylocke jump into the fray at the bottom of the bowl. The rune on her neck glowed purple, and a blade of violet energy appeared in her hand. She threw her free hand forward and yanked it back, and a werewolf went sailing through the air towards her, only to be impaled on the sword of energy. Sirius jaw only went a little bit slack. Honest. Murdock followed up, flinging one of the sticks he kept strapped to his leg into one person's face, before jumping up and fly kicking the same guy while he was distracted.

Sirius finally reached the bottom of the bowl and repulsed a woman into the roaring campfire. He then summoned a large chunk of dirt from the ground and banished it at a man in Death Eater robes with the Avada Kedavra curse on his lips. The Earth knocked him from his feet, and a quick stunner ensured he was out of the fight for good. Footsteps echoed to his right, and Sirius threw up a shield just in time to deflect a brown curse he didn't recognise. Then the kid was there, knocking the woman from her feet and placing a full body bind on her. A snarl echoed through the bowl, and Sirius turned towards the sound. Greyback was wandless, standing like a cornered animal within a circle formed by Brian, Betsy, Jack and Luke. Sirius and Matt quickly joined them.

"Give up, Greyback, we have you cornered," Jack was saying. The feral man didn't look very good. His nails were all overgrown, his beard was unkempt, and his hair was scraggily. No wonder his potential recruits didn't want a bar of him. But Sirius recognised the man's eyes. The haunting fear that lurked there. As much as he hated it, he couldn't help but sympathise. Sirius had seen that look in the mirror every day for years.

"You're going away. Properly this time. You aren't going to be hurting anyone else," Cage snarled, wand fixed on the Death Eater.

Then Greyback smiled savagely, "You think I won't be? You think? I dun't think you know anything!!!" Greyback lunged at Cage, and five stunners leapt into the air, but it was Psylocke who reacted first. The rune on her neck blazed to life, and she froze Greyback in mid-air. He swivelled his head towards Psylocke in rage, and before anyone could blink, the Cursebreaker sliced the werewolves head clean off with her energy sword.

"Fuck!" Sirius exclaimed, raising his hand to his mouth as blood started spurting from the corps neck. Psylocke dropped the body to the ground and rolled her eyes at him.

"We are so screwed," Matt said softly. He was staring at the arm of Greyback's severed corps. The Death Eater tattoo was glowing black.

A sickening ‘crack!' split the air in two, and everyone slowly turned around. Standing at the top of the bowl was a figure cloaked in black smoke, with two gleaming red eyes.
"He’s here."
"I DID IT, I DID IT, I DID IT!!!!!!"

"AHHHHHH!!!!!!" Ginny shot awake, as a tiny figure jumped up on the very comfortable bed she and Harry were currently occupying in the Citadel of Wakanda, and Harry let out a not-so-manly scream. The scream didn't seem to discourage their visitor in the slightest, as she just yelled even louder.

"I DID IT, I DID IT!!!!!!"

Their invader was a young girl of about ten or eleven, with braided black hair flying up and down as she bounced, in a nightdress, on the edge of their bed, a smile on her face so large Ginny worried she'd have a heart attack. Actually, now that she thought about it, was she having a heart attack? It would certainly explain a lot.

"Shuri!!!!!!" T'Challa yelled, pushing into the room before immediately turning away and looking back out into the hallway. That's when Ginny's brain, which was trying really hard to function properly at that moment and failing, remembered that she was most definitely not wearing clothes.

"I am so sorry, it's my sister… Shuri! Please leave them alone!" T'Challa begged, though he didn't move an inch from his position staring resolutely out the door and nowhere else.

"I found it!"

That seemed to jog Harry out of his shock at least.

"You found it?" he asked groggily.

"Atlantis!! I found it!! Now hurry up!! I want to show you how absolutely awesome I am!!" With that, Shuri, princess of Wakanda, jumped from the bed and bolted for the door, diving through T'Challa's legs and out into the corridor beyond.

Will dropped out of the atmosphere with a sonic boom, Clarissa not five meters away from him, and together they shot at the same speed a rocket uses when attempting to achieve orbit towards the pit below. It was like something out of a nightmare. Tendrils of darkness lined the Earth for miles. All the plant life was dead, and dark clouds circled the sky. But the Nether Force was crystal clear to Will. It was like a black hole, sucking the magic out of anything near it, drawing power from the very life force of the universe. If they didn't kill Voldemort soon, they wouldn't have to wait for Riddle to crack the world in half, the Nether Force would do it on its own. And then the Phoenix Force would come to absorb the ashes. It was already on its way. The Dragon Force could sense it, like a predator stalking the universe, and that meant Will could sense it too. The only saving grace? It was on the other side of the universe, so Will, Clarissa and everybody else on Earth would be long dead by the time it got here. Hopefully, Stephen's stupid necklace would be blown to shit by the planetary detonation. One less Infinity Stone floating about could only be good news for like, the entirety of reality.

Hey Clarissa, that reminds me, when we're done with this flog we really need to take a look into
what those idiots were doing with the Tesseract while we were stuck in Hell.

Yeah, something to do with an alien invasion?

That's what the folks back home said when I stopped in at the Central Tower in Alcheringa. Apparently, some metahuman chick went and blew them up all on her lonesome before fucking off to the Valar know where.

Could be using her help right now.

Yeah, well, I wouldn't say no to it.

Together, the duo shot out of the sky like twin fireballs trailing a blaze of fire behind them.

Hard and fast.

Sounds like our first night after the meteor.

Really? Now?

Too good to resist. If we don't die painfully, how 'bout a re-enactment?

Count me in babe.

Will hit first. He descended like a wrathful god coming to smite the mortal world and delivered the best motherfucking headshot in the history of the universe to the back of Voldemort's head. The sound of a 25,000 kilometre per hour fist hitting its mark ripped through the entirety of Britain, sending muggle researchers into a frenzy of epic proportions across the globe. Voldemort's body burst like a piñata, and Will crashed into the ground beyond, sinking roughly twenty-seven kilometres beneath the Earth's crust before he decelerated enough to turn around and fly back up out of the pit he'd just made. Clarissa slammed on the breaks a few kilometres above the pit and used the sheer power her decent had generated to blast the bloodstain that had been Tom Riddle with almost 2000 megajoules of raw kinetic energy. Behold another twentyish kilometre deep pit into the Earth.

Will quickly sealed the newly formed cracks in the Earth's crust as he rose back to the surface, lest lava rise up and kill them all. He floated up out of the crevice in gold and white armour, the sigil of a dragon in flight decorating his chest, and landed on the ground, which was now black for a whole different reason. Clarissa, dressed the same way he was, dropped down beside him.

"Holy mother of fuck," the voice of Sirius Black breathed. Will and Clarissa turned around just in time to see the Braddock siblings drop the magical barrier shielding them, Sirius Black, Mathew and Jack Murdock and Luke Cage from the devastation.

"Oh, you guys are still alive. Well done," Will said, giving them a thumbs up.

"Did you just..." Cage gulped hard, pulling his hood back, "did you just kill He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?" he asked in astonishment.

Clarissa laughed, "If only it were that easy." Even as she spoke the words, black vapour began to pour out of the ground, slowly reforming into something that could be considered to vaguely resemble the human body.

"I suggest you get out of here. Really, really fast," Will whispered.

"Leave us." T'Challa's voice carried with it a power that Harry couldn't help but admire. It was
inspiring the way he could control a crowd with barely a word.

You realise that's what happens whenever you speak too, right?

No. I just say what you tell me to.

It's not the words. It's who says them.

Harry wasn't sure about that. He didn't feel anywhere near as powerful as T'Challa, or even Dumbledore or Will or Clarissa. Ginny just snickered in the back of his head.

T'Challa led Harry and Ginny (now suitably dressed in actual clothes) into a vast laboratory deep underneath Wakanda, following the rambunctious and clearly caffeine-high form of Shuri, who was actually ten, not the eleven that Ginny had guessed. The lab was quite incredible. Dominated by a large winding staircase in the middle of the room, desks and high-tech machines lined the walls. At the back of the room was an open glass window overlooking a giant underground abyss. The other scientists quickly vanished into side rooms as they approached. Harry couldn't help but notice the fearful glances sent Shuri's way. Apparently, the girl had a reputation.

"Shuri, if you have brought us down here for nothing, I will personally see to it that a vat of Rhinoceros dung is deposited on your bed," the prince said as his little sister stood in the middle of the room, jumping up in the air as she tried to reach a transparent screen depicting a globe suspended on an arm that was far too high for her.

"And I'll tell Mama that you and Nakia snuck into the broom shed last week and went flying without gear! You're not a wizard T'Challa. You can't cast an Arresto Momentum when you fall off!" Shuri snapped back. Then she stopped jumping, reached out her hand and whispered in Wakandan. The screen lowered itself down to her height, and she gleefully began tapping away.

T'Challa blanched, "How did you know…"

"Glory to Bast you actually did go out with her! I was just guessing! You're too predictable!" Shuri beamed back at the stunned look on T'Challa's face with the look of a cat that had caught a canary. She swivelled her hand on the screen, and a series of beeps rang through the room.

"Behold, my genius!" Shuri proclaimed, bowing dramatically. T'Challa knocked her to the floor with a well-placed backhand as he stepped up to look over the screen.

"Hey!"

Harry and Ginny glanced to each other and rolled their eyes, though they couldn't deny the smiles on their faces.

"You guys would fit in swimmingly with my family."

"Praise be! You actually did do it. Incredible Shuri!" T'Challa exclaimed, turning back to Harry and Ginny as Shuri pulled herself off the floor in a sook.

"Of course, I did it! I'm awesome!"

"Humble too," T'Challa retorted.

"You found Atlantis? Where? How?" Harry asked, cutting to the chase. Shuri elbowed T'Challa in the ribs and reacquired her screen. She tapped it, and an image of the Earth appeared.
"The Earth did not always look the way it does now. Continental drift causes the tectonic plates in the Earth's crust to move around, creating new landmasses and seas. You've been looking in the heart of the world, where the legends say Atlantis was, and you were right to look there. The only problem is you were looking in the wrong time period!" Shuri manipulated the screen and the recognisable continents of Africa, America and Europe rearranged themselves slightly.

"If Atlantis were, in fact, a city floating on the ocean thousands of years ago, then ocean currents and the shifting of the continents would have caused it to drift like this. Especially if no one was still alive to correct it!" She tapped the screen again, and a red dot appeared with the name Atlantis. Then, as a countdown clock of years began to advance, the dot slowly began to drift south, until roughly 4000 years were left on the timer, and the city impacted with the Antarctic ice-shelf.

"Antarctica…" Harry breathed.

"No wonder no one has ever found it," Ginny admitted, mind racing a mile a minute.

"Told you I was a genius."

The puny humans, as Will had taken to affectionately calling all those who couldn't destroy the world without a whole fuck tonne of help, disapparated not a moment too soon. Voldemort's body reformed, and he turned his eyes, now pitch black, on the pair of them.

"Did you really think you could kill me?" he asked, high pitch voice echoing with a resonant horror.

"It was worth a try," Clarissa said softly.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes at them.

"You dare to challenge me? Why? You and I, we are beyond the people of this world. None could challenge us. We can wash the slate clean. Built a better world for our children, free of persecution and fear of discovery! Together we could remake this world with but the snap of our fingers. United, we would be unstoppable." And it was at that moment that a horrible image tore through Will's mind. The image of a woman wreathed in flame, destroying billions of people with nary a thought, and the sickening guilt that came with knowing there was nothing that could be done to stop it.

"You don't have the right to decide who lives and who dies Tom Riddle. You are not a god, however much you try to convince yourself that you are," Will told him.

"Let go. We can help you. The Nether Force is driving you mad. It will destroy everything," Clarissa begged.

Voldemort threw his head back and laughed.

*Time to pull a Superman.*

Will lunged forward, summoning an eldritch sword and jamming it into Voldemort's chest, before repulsing him back out of the bowl. Clarissa, summoning the Speed Force into her veins, raced after him with the crackle of golden lightning. Will launched himself up into the sky and drew all the ambient magic in the air towards him and combining it with raw Dragon Force energy channelled from the Orrery of Worlds itself.

"SHAZAM!!" A lightning bolt arced out of the sky, blasting a new crater within the forest. The glare was massive, but it was gone in seconds, replaced by a shockwave of darkness that disintegrated everything within 100 metres. Clarissa flew backwards, landing in a heap on the
ground while Voldemort stood tall.

Focussing all the energy he’d collected in his palm, Will blasted Voldemort with a beam of extradimensional white fire. Voldemort absorbed the blast with a single hand, before redirecting it straight back at Will. He dove out of the way, and Voldemort banished a hundred construct blades towards him. Will entangled to the ground, and the constructs vanished. He summoned a whip of solar energy and lashed it around Voldemort's neck, using it to pull the pale-skinned man off his feet and into Will's waiting fist. Voldemort shot backward, landing on his feet as he skidded back through the dirt. Will raced forward, an army of summoned Daedra from the Oblivion Dimension rising up from the Earth and dropping from the sky as he charged. He stopped short and blasted a beam of golden power at Voldemort. Voldemort absorbed the bolt with an energy shield, and stamped his foot on the ground, dispersing the Daedra back to Oblivion before they even reached him. Clarissa jumped back into the fray, summoning an Ice Dragon and setting it and a blizzard so powerful it could put the entire world back into the Ice Age on Voldemort. The Dark Lord was enveloped in blue fire, and the ground turned to ice. Will launched himself forward, summoning a cosmic fire into his hand, before smashing it into Voldemort's gut. The Dark Lord stumbled back, slipping on the ice, and Clarissa's Ice Dragon grabbed him in its jowls, ripping Voldemort in half with his teeth. Then the dragon's mouth exploded, and blades of darkness shot forth in all directions. Will tried to dodge, but he took one in the leg and one in the shoulder, sheering through his personal shields like they were made from paper. The wounds began knitting themselves back together, but Voldemort pressed his advantage. Without his legs and flying around like the Genie from Aladdin, Voldemort vanished the eternal winter and tore open the ground to reveal a never-ending pit from which the most disgusting odour Will had ever smelt reared.

The magnetic pull of the hole was incredible, and Will instantly started sliding towards it. He summoned a lightsaber and cleaved it into the ground to keep himself fixed while Clarissa did the same.

*Tartarus!!!*

Will raised his free hand to the sky at the same moment Clarissa did.

"By the power of Zeus and the might of Olympus!!!" Their hands glowed gold, and a lightning bolt fell from the sky. The bolt struck the abyss and sealed it shut once more. The magnetic pull shut off, just in time for Will to hear the words, "AVADA KEDAVRA!!!!". A wave of sick green light washed through the clearing, and Will summoned a cocoon of Dragon Force around himself just in time. His sight was blinded by green, but it cleared soon enough, and both he and Clarissa stood up, spheres of golden power in their hands. Voldemort was floating – his legs having since reattached themselves – a few metres above them, and he was smiling.

"I like you."

The darkness folded in on itself, and Voldemort was gone.

Will took a deep breath and let the energy in his hands fall away. He glanced to his wife, who looked as tired as he did.

"Well, that went about as bad as I expected it too," he said to the silence.

"Me too," she said with a sigh. Will groaned in pain as his collar bone slid back into place and stared up into the darkness as the clouds began to clear.

*You better come up with something fast Potter, or we're all screwed.*
Chapter 34: The Scorpius Rune

The Scorpius Rune was designed by the Pharisee of Ancient Egypt as a means of raising themselves above ordinary people and adding to the image they'd cultivated as gods on Earth. Suffice to say, the ruse worked for a really fucking long time.

The Scorpius Rune, better known as the Rune of Awareness, increases the sensitivity of all seven senses. As a result, the bearer gains incredible reaction time, and the ability to predict incoming threats in the moments before they happen. This lends itself to incredible durability and agility in battle – both magical and muggle. A famous boxer, whose name I can't say for copyright reasons, was caught using this rune in professional MMA and subsequently banned from the sport.

The rune's ability to provide enhanced reactions in combat is unparalleled, but it is not perfect either. The Scorpius Rune provides constant feedback from all senses at once; therefore, the possibility of being overwhelmed by the input for new users is high. For more experienced users, attacking the rune bearer with multiple skilled combatants will usually be enough to succeed in defeating the user, as the human body, unfortunately, does have limits to the amount of information it can process.

Pair this rune with the Pisces Rune for…

Knock, knock.

Hermione jumped to her feet, discarding Lily Potter's copy of Ancient Runes and Forgotten Civilisations, and began walking to the door.

"Coming," she called, stepping out of the living room and heading to the front door of the Granger family home in Watford. It was a small affair, three-bedrooms two bathrooms, a kitchen and a small backyard. But it was home, and as much as she loved the Burrow and the sheer intensity of it, she would always prefer the silence and tranquillity the place she'd grown up in offered her.

She stepped up to the front door and eased it open, suppressing a gasp when she saw the long white beard and half-moon glasses of Professor Dumbledore on the other side.

"Ah, Miss Granger. Lovely to see you."

"Likewise, Professor," Hermione stumbled, her voice returning to her. "Where are my manners. Come in!" She said, opening the door the whole way.

"Mum! Dad! We have a visitor!" She called, leading the Professor into the lounge room. Why the hell was Dumbledore here? This was not good. She hadn't told her parents anything about the current state of the Wizarding World, let alone anything about Voldemort's return. They knew about Harry and her membership in The Defenders, but that was it. She hadn't even told them about her trip abroad, not knowing whether it was breaking some law. She doubted they'd even believe her if she told them about Alcheringa. If Dumbledore said something about the Department of Mysteries…

Hermione's mother, Emma, came down the stairs, and to her credit, she didn't freak out at seeing Dumbledore's bright chartreuse robe and matching hat.

"Mum. This is Headmaster Dumbledore from Hogwarts," she said as her father came down behind her.
"Professor, these are my parents Emma and Dan Granger."

Her mum recovered first.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Headmaster. Hermione has spoken very highly of you," Emma said as they all took seats on the black leather couch.

"Not too highly, I hope. I've met many a parent that's fainted at the sight of me. Quite awkward as I'm sure you can imagine." Dan swallowed hard. Hermione thought it was probably safer to redirect the conversation as fast as possible.

"What's brought you to Watford, Headmaster?" She asked hesitantly.

Dumbledore smiled, "You, in fact, Miss Granger. I came first to congratulate you on your exemplary conduct in both academia and, certain extra-curricular activities at Hogwarts this year." Her parents both looked to her with pride at the compliment, but Hermione was too nervous to really appreciate it. "Secondly, to give you this."

Dumbledore withdrew a letter from within his robes and offered it to her. She took it carefully and broke the ICW issue seal. The paper unfolded, and flew up into the air, narrating as words traced themselves onto the parchment.

"Dear Miss Granger," a male voice said, "Congratulations on an excellent academic year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. My name is Bartleby Widdershins of the Department of Standardised Education at the ICW, and it is my privilege to inform you that, based on your stellar performance in this year's OWL exams, you have been selected as one of the five people from across the ICW community to receive the Joan of Arc Scholarship."


"This scholarship, in case you are unaware, is provided to the top-scoring students in the OWL examinations, and pays for complete tuition, board and supplies for your continued education at your choice of ICW registered institution across the world until you have completed your NEWT studies."

Her father gasped. Dumbledore's eyes were sparkling something fierce.

"Enclosed are your final OWL examination results. Congratulations once again. Hoping to hear from you soon,

Bartleby Widdershins, Department of Standardised Education, International Confederation of Wizards."

The letter drifted down into Hermione's lap, and she just stared at it, entranced.

"Con… congratulations, sweetheart!" Her mother beamed, enveloping Hermione in a hug.

"Indeed. Congratulations Miss Granger. You've truly earned this," Dumbledore said with a smile. Hermione swallowed hard, "What happens now?"

"Should you wish to continue your studies at Hogwarts, you will be offered full tuition, free of charge. You will have no need to pay for any of your books or supplies. If you wish to attend another school, such as the Alcheringa Academy or Ilvermorny, both of which you visited last year, you are more than welcome to with the same offer of free tuition and supplies until you graduate."
Dumbledore hesitated for a second as if deciding if he actually wanted to say the next part.

"I must admit, I would love to see you back at Hogwarts this year. For more reasons than one. I wish to mend bridges with Harry, and knowing that I can count on someone of your skill and intellect, given the climate, would be a great boon. If you accept, I would offer you, Mr Murdock and Miss Jones the opportunity to take private lessons with me this year. I would also appreciate your assistance in a matter concerning a staff member I wish to recruit. He has been… hesitant… to come out of retirement, but with Miss Jones, who has already agreed to help, and yourself, I believe I can entice him to the table." Dumbledore folded his arms across his lap and held Hermione's gaze. She tightened her Occlumency barriers, taught to her by Sirius and Remus. She wasn't by any means an expert, but she could tell when someone was trying to get in her head at least, and the Headmaster wasn't. He was actually leaving the decision to her. As if it was a decision. If Jessica had already agreed, then it was important. And as much as she'd love to go to Alcheringa or Ilvermorny, there was nothing that could keep her from helping Harry and Ginny. She'd been searching and searching for more clues on the Horcruxes, but hadn't been able to come up with anything helpful. Hagrid's advice on substances that could destroy them was useful, though. She now had two vials of Kaiju Saliva stored in a well-sealed and protected case with her books. If they found another Horcrux and the Dragons weren't nearby, she'd be prepared. And after their showdown with Voldemort… They had to destroy the Horcruxes. Only then could the Dragons or Harry get rid of him for good. She'd guessed based on her observations, that Will and Clarissa had a plan, but it wasn't a good one, and it made them very nervous. She'd heard them muttering about the Phoenix Force and something called Galactus. She had a feeling she didn't want to know what a Galactus was.

"Thank you. Thank you so much. I ac…" she started, and hope bloomed in Dumbledore's eyes, but her father cut her off.

"If you wouldn't mind, we'd like to speak with Hermione alone first." Panic flashed through her veins, and she turned to her Dad, who looked very concerned. Her mum looked about as confused as Hermione felt.

"Of course. Miss Granger, why don't you Owl me with your reply?" Dumbledore stood up and bowed slightly.

"I don't have an Owl professor," she said.

"Not to worry. Simply call Fawkes to you, and he will deliver anything you need to me," Dumbledore straightened his hat and smiled.

"Mr and Mrs Granger. Miss Granger."

Then he spun on his heel. Miss Granger.

The second he was gone, her father rounded on her.

"Okay, Hermione. Fess up."

"Dan!!" Emma exclaimed, smacking his arm. Hermione couldn't help but agree.

"What?"

"Certain extra-curricular activities? Current climate? Visiting other schools? You didn't tell us anything about this. Now you're on such good terms with the Headmaster that he's asking your help with recruiting teachers? And who is this Miss Jones you apparently know?"

Hermione took an intense breath.
"You promised you'd told us everything that happened the past two years. You said your friend Harry was in a competition at school. Not that you went with him to other schools to compete! Why did the school really close early this year? I don't think it was because of Wizard Flu. And for the record, I didn't buy that from the start." He folded his arms and stared at her, using his disappointed face.

"Hermione… what haven't you been telling us?" Her mum asked, placing a hand on Dan's knee.

It felt like time slowed down as the Pisces Rune burned against her arm. Everything around her fell still as her neurones flared faster than any ordinary mind.

She ran through possibilities, strategies for getting her out of this mess sliding across her thoughts. She weighed every variable, every factor… and came to a conclusion that shattered her heart. Her parents would not allow anything except full disclosure now, and once they knew, they wouldn't let her leave the house. And with the trace remaining active until her birthday in September, they'd be able to do it too. There were too many people that relied on her. The first Muggleborns were due to arrive at the Oxford House tomorrow. It had to be now, or she'd lose the element of surprise.

"I… I'm sorry, Mum. I'm sorry, Dad." She traced a rune in the air and pushed it forward. A blast of cold air rippled outwards and her parents froze in place. A tear slid down her cheek, and she thrust out her hand, twitching her fingers the way she'd practised. You could use specific runes to lock spells in suspension. That way you could cast a spell in a place where you wouldn't be caught for underage magic, use a rune to anchor it to an object, then use a specific gesture to activate the spell later, without setting off the trace. In this case, it was a simple summoning charm. But it served its purpose. A purple beaded clutch bag flew down the stairs and into Hermione's waiting hand.

It had been Jessica's idea. Who else would have thought about it? But right now, as tears streaked down her face, Hermione was grateful for Alias' paranoia. Her parents' eyes began twitching. The stasis rune was wearing off.

She ducked her hand into her bag and withdrew her Defenders Cloak. Draping it around herself, she took a metal orb out of the bag and placed it on the table. This one was Moody's idea. Aurors used them on Muggles all the time. It was a low-grade Obliviation Bomb. It would instantly wipe any memories of magic from the minds of any muggles within the vicinity of the detonation while leaving wizards unaffected. It was an efficient way of clearing a magical crime scene of non-magical witnesses.

She placed the sphere on the table and clicked it open. A rune on the top began to glow.

Her parent's legs and arms were shaking now, but their faces remained trapped.

"I love you. But my friends need me, and I can't jeopardise that." Hermione reached into her cloak and twisted the portkey thread. Her feet lifted off the ground, and she was pulled into a vortex of rainbow light. The last thing she saw of her parents was her mother breaking free of the runic spell, and a flash of white light.

Her feet landed on a wooden floor, and she found herself staring into Alias's face. Jessica took one look at Hermione's tears, and the bag clutched in her hand, before pulling her into a hug.

"I am so sorry, Miss Granger. I had no intention…"

"I know. I actually don't blame you. It's my fault really," Hermione answered truthfully as she walked down the main street of Budleigh Babberton with Jessica, Matt and Dumbledore. It was a
small village, Jessica thought. You could see the ends of the rows of houses, and the darkness of night beyond. Jessica didn't like it. It was far easier to launch an ambush in a small silent town like this than a city like London, where anonymity was one's ally. She'd mentioned as much to the Headmaster, and he hadn't been worried about a potential attack. When she'd asked why, he'd simply said, "You're with me." Jessica thought that was very egotistical and kept her senses alert anyway. Matt would know if anyone tried to sneak up on them. Anyone except Voldemort, as he'd discovered when Greyback's camp was attacked.

The mission was simple. Recruit Horace Slughorn, a potential informant, to work at Hogwarts to protect him from the Death Eaters (and to fill up a vacant teaching position). If Slughorn resisted? Well, let's just say Jessica, as leader of the Defenders, had greenlit extreme measures, much to Dumbledore's chagrin. He refused to say precisely what Slughorn knew, but it was clearly important, and if Jessica had to guess, it was connected to the Headmaster's hand, which in the previous week had turned ashen and corpse-like. Not that Jessica really cared.

Jessica had initially been going to refuse to participate in the mission until Dumbledore said what information was so vital until he assured her that the only reason he wasn't divulging the truth was because of the danger of being overheard. The Home was a significant thoroughfare these days, anyone could hear what you said. Hogwarts wasn't much better. Aurors and Warders were on the grounds twenty-four-seven putting up defences, the risk of discovery was too high. So, she'd acquiesced on the proviso that he explain everything the day term resumed, or she'd interrogate Slughorn herself.

Jessica had done her research. She knew Slughorn had been a teacher while Tom Riddle had been in school. He'd been head of Slytherin House. Clearly, Dumbledore believed Slughorn knew something important about Voldemort. But what? It was why she'd agreed. This information was big. Big enough to put aside grudges and personal pride.

"No," Dumbledore said, "The fault is mine. I should have realised your parents wouldn't be receptive. I am dreadfully sorry." The conversation lapsed into silence, and they advanced down the street, eventually coming to a darkened cottage at the edge of the lane. The front door had been blown in.

"Looks like they got here before us," Jessica remarked. They had forgone their Defenders Robes for this mission. No sense in broadcasting after all.

"It certainly seems so," Dumbledore agreed.

"No one's moving within the house," Matt noted, staring at the building through his red-shaded glasses, "I can't detect any dark magic either. There's an odd heat signature though."

Dumbledore led the way forward as everyone lit their wands. If there was something in the house, she was more than happy for the Headmaster to die first. The cottage looked like a disaster zone. Blood spatters covered the walls, a grandfather clock had been cleaved in half and thrown across the room. A crystal chandelier had fallen from the roof, shattered into a dozen pieces, and a rather expensive looking dinner table had been blasted to smithereens.

Jessica frowned, her detective's mind going to work in an instant. There was something wrong here; the damage seemed too haphazard. The giant bloodstain made no sense. Either someone had actually exploded to create that impression, or it had been splattered there on purpose. If this was a retrieval mission, why was there so much destruction? Minor damage from misfired disarming charms she would have understood, or discarded ropes from an Incarcerous, but stunners, impediment jinxes and immobilising hexes created no physical damage. This was clearly a battle using reductors, and not well-placed ones either.
"I don't like this. The dispersal of the damage is all wrong. This wasn't a retrieval raid," Jessica said, casting her light across the living room and the remains of an upturned piano.

"The spell traces are all recent, this must-have happened within the hour," Matt said, clearly confused. He alone had no light illuminating his wand. Certainly, wouldn't help him anyway. He was staring at an overturned armchair in the corner of the lounge.

"I think there is more to this situation than meets the eye," Dumbledore said, moving towards the couch. It wasn't very remarkable, a dull blue and grey striped armchair.

"That chair is weird," Matt said hesitantly. "It doesn't have an aura, but it has a heat signature that's a dead ringer for a human's."

"Bingo!" Hermione announced, turning her wand on the chair.

"Finite!" Instantly a yelp came out of the chair, and it transfigured into a portly man with a scraggly beard, wearing a set of pyjamas that matched the upholstery of the former chair.

"That explains that I suppose," Matt said candidly.

"Excellent work," Dumbledore said gleefully, and Jessica realised the old man had been testing them. Asshole.

"Evening Horace. You're looking well," Dumbledore said.

The balding man stood up, dusting off his pyjamas.

"Albus. I must say I'm not pleased to see you. Who are your friends?" the newly revealed Horace Slughorn turned his eyes on them, sliding from Jessica's florescent pink hair to Matt's glasses before stopping at Hermione's frizzed hair, which despite being tied into a ponytail, still looked like it had been out in the rain for far too long.

"Horace, it is my pleasure to introduce you to Jessica Jones, Mathew Murdock and Hermione Granger, otherwise known as the Defenders operatives Alias, Daredevil and Brains." Hermione gave an awkward wave while Matt continued to stare at the man, most likely reading his aura. Jessica stepped over to the window and peered outside. Slughorn's gaze took on a new kind of scrutiny, and a sly smile grew on his lips.

"Ooh," He said, locking onto Jessica as she turned back around, "Well. I must say, excellent deduction skills Miss Jones." He looked to Hermione, "A perfectly executed finite charm Miss Granger, and Mr Murdock, you would be the second person I have encountered with the gift of aura reading. Can I perhaps enquire into how you acquired such a power?" Matt was silent for a moment before saying only, "An accident when I was a kid."

"Interesting. Very interesting. You must tell me the story some time."

"Mr Murdock and Miss Jones will be entering their OWL year when term resumes," Dumbledore advised, "And Miss Granger is entering her NEWT studies with a Joan of Arc Scholarship." Slughorn's eyes went very wide indeed.

"Very impressive, indeed. Why the last Joan of Arc Scholar I had the utter pleasure of teaching would be Lily Evans, the mother of your group's founder. Where is young Harry now that I think about it? Is he well after the battle in the Ministry? Were you there?" Slughorn actually licked his lips at that. Jessica made to say something scathing, but Dumbledore spoke first.
"Quite the elaborate ruse you concocted Horace. You weren't by any chance expecting someone else were you?" Dumbledore asked.

Slughorn's smile vanished in a second, "Someone else? I don't know what you're implying."

Slughorn withdrew his wand and waved it an arc, clearly trying to divert from the conversation. In the span of a few brief seconds, the house had restored itself to pristine condition, with not one item out of place. The lights flickered on, and Slughorn nodded to himself, turning to Dumbledore.

"Don't think I don't know why you're here Albus," he said, pointing his finger at the Headmaster, "the answer is still no. Absolutely and unequivocally no." Jessica had a feeling she understood Dumbledore's game as well. Her eyes were fixed on a cabinet that had hastily reforged itself. Dozens of photo frames were visible across it, each one displaying a picture of Slughorn next to a famous witch or wizard, all of them signed.

"I am simply here to check up on you Horace. I imagine I haven't been the only one. I doubt you'd go to such efforts for little old me."

"What would the Death Eaters possibly want with me?" Slughorn demanded. Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

"I never mentioned the Death Eaters, Horace."

Slughorn sighed, "Alright, alright. Yes fine. The Death Eaters have been hunting me. I haven't been staying anywhere for more than a week, moving from muggle house to muggle house. The people who own this place are in the Canary Islands. It's been delightful, I'll be sorry to leave. It's quite easy once you get the hang of it. Freezing charm on the Burglar Alarm and make sure the neighbours don't see you bringing in the piano."

Jessica would have to remember that one. The Burglar Alarm, not the piano.

"Ingenious," Dumbledore said, "But it does seem like a rather tiring existence. I'm sure you've heard Hogwarts is being given the best of protections this year…"

"Now, now! If you're going to tell me my life would be more peaceful at your pestilential school, you can save your breath, Albus! I might've been in hiding, but I certainly heard what happened to Dolores Umbridge! If that's how you treat teachers these days…"

"Dolores Umbridge," Matt cut in, his voice dripping with anger, "tortured students with blood quills and poisoned them with Veritaserum. If you start defending her, you'll find me turning over your address to Voldemort before you can restore your deterrent spells." Slughorn flinched as Matt spoke the name.

"And trust us when we say you don't want to cross him. Whatever he was in the past, he's infinitely more powerful and horrifying now." Hermione said, a dangerous quiver to her voice. "I've seen him with my own two eyes. I watched as he killed my friends, and I watched him take on Harry, Ginny, the Sorcerer Supreme and Professor Dumbledore all at once without batting an eye."

Slughorn at least had the grace to look suitably chastised. Dumbledore stood up then.

"Are you leaving?" Slughorn asked, hopefully.

"Do you mind if I use the loo?" He asked. Slughorn's hopeful look vanished.

"Second door on the right."
"Lovely." Dumbledore walked down the corridor and disappeared.

Slughorn turned his attention to Hermione. "Don't think I don't know why he's brought you lot here," he said. Hermione blushed slightly. Jessica turned to the cabinet and stepped over to it. Dumbledore clearly had the right idea, as much as she hated to admit it.

"Did you teach everyone here?" She asked him. Slughorn stopped his scrutiny of Hermione to look at Jessica, his smile returned to his face.

"Indeed. Each and every one of them. All mine."


"Harry is always looking for people who knew his parents, especially those who knew his mum. He has Sirius Black to know his Dad, but his mum didn't have as many friends he's found." Slughorn stepped over, looking at the picture in Jessica's hands.

"Ah, yes. I found that as well. Ever the studious one Lily. I helped her with her entrance paper for the Department of Mysteries, you know. It was on Transcendental Runes and Charms, and her experiments with creating pocket dimensions. A truly exceptional young woman. It truly is a shame what happened to her. She would have changed the world." Slughorn's smile faded, and Jessica realised she'd hit the jackpot. Slughorn must have been very close to Lily.

"Brains? I've been meaning to ask, but I keep forgetting with all the missions I've been organising in Harry's absence, how is your research into Kelmscott's Theory going?"

No one ever said Hermione Granger was slow on the uptake.

"Oh! Really well actually. I think I've translated and proved the Laws of Thermodynamics function exactly the same even with the introduction of the magical variable. Mary Jane says I shouldn't bother mentioning Rudolf Clausius at all in my paper because it will make the Purebloods less likely to take me seriously if I mention the idea came from a muggle scientist. I'm waiting to hear from Gwen and Peter about a time we can get together so we can test the next phase, which will involve a concentrated examination of the Magical Core and its reaction to external stimuli. Luna has graciously volunteered to be our, ehh, lab rat so to speak, but I won't do any tests until I have at least one other genius in the room with me to help if anything goes wrong." Hermione's words came out very fast and very exuberantly, but Slughorn held onto each one. Jessica wasn't sure whether he understood what Hermione said or not, but he clearly acted like he did. Either that, or it was the energy with which she spoke that had him raptured.

"Well, Mr Slughorn," Matt said, catching on, "If you did decide to come back to Hogwarts, I'm sure Harry would love to speak with you about his mum's work. He's quite the expert at Ancient Runes, and last year he taught us all Defence Against the Dark Arts in secret after Umbridge banned us from learning spells in class." Slughorn's look turned deeply thoughtful.

'Hook, line and sinker,' Jessica thought to herself.

A flushing sound came from the bathroom, Dumbledore stepped out, holding a magazine, and Jessica placed the photo back on the bench.

"Well, I do believe we best be off," Dumbledore said.
"You're leaving?" Slughorn asked.

"Yes. I think I know a lost cause when I see one. A pity, I would have considered it a great personal triumph if you had consented to return to Hogwarts. Well, our increased security, notwithstanding, you're welcome to visit at any time."

"Lost..." Slughorn whispered to himself in horror.

"Farewell, Horace," Dumbledore said, stepping out the door.

"Goodbye, sir," Hermione said, waving as she followed.

"Evening," Matt said, tilting his head in respect before walking outside. Jessica shook Slughorn's hand as his lip quivered and closed the door behind her. She'd barely reached the street when Slughorn slammed the door open once more, walking out in his pyjamas.

"All right. I'll do it. But I want a raise!"

"Fabulous," Dumbledore announced, he gestured to Jessica, "Miss Jones will be by tomorrow with Head Auror Braddock to bring you to Hogwarts. The Ward securities have been changed you see, so we'll have to readmit you to the clearance list."

Slughorn twisted on his feet, nodded, and turned on his feet to stalk back inside. After the door closed and the quartet had made their way a few houses down, Jessica gagged.

"Gee thanks, Professor. I'm sure I'll love it," She said, rolling her eyes as the others laughed.

"Well done to all three of you," Dumbledore said, nodding to Jessica, Matt and Hermione in turn.

"Clever angle, appealing to his vanity to get him to do what you wanted. Bringing us was a stroke of genius," Hermione said.

"Imagine if you'd showed up with Harry and Ginny," Matt pointed out, "he might have had kittens." They laughed again.

"What did you think of him?" Dumbledore asked as they continued down the road.

"He's clearly an egotist, though not in the traditional sense. He's the type of person who likes to be associated with the rich, powerful and famous, but doesn't really want to be either of those things himself. If I had to guess, I'd say he's like the person who spends their life trying to become the chief of staff rather than the President, the man who works behind the scenes and has connections everywhere," Jessica deduced.

"Correct. Horace, or as we must now call him, Professor Slughorn, has always enjoyed the company of the exceptionally gifted, be it in academia, charisma or magical power. He used to run a club at Hogwarts where he would invite the students he deemed exceptionally talented to forge contacts with others, sometimes current students, sometimes former students who owe their own success to Professor Slughorn."

Dumbledore stopped at a fountain in the centre of the town and pulled a portkey shaped like a pen out of his pocket.

"Thank you all for your help tonight. I promise I'll give you all the answers you want once Hogwarts has been made secure. After the welcome feast, come to my office. There we can have a long-overdue conversation, and I will do as I promised Harry before he departed and tell you all my last
and greatest secret." He placed the portkey in Jessica's hand and stepped back.

"Until then."

Matt and Hermione touched the portkey, and together, the trio were swept into a vortex of rainbow light.
"ORDER! ORDER! I demand order in this court!!!"

The Speaker, a tall gold-skinned man with electric blue hair from a pantheon Miracle didn't recognise, boomed into the amphitheatre. The only problem, of course, was that nobody was listening to him.

The High Inquisitor for today's proceedings, a Noldorin Elf from Tol Eressëa, sat smugly in his wooden chair, carved with vines. Miracle had to admit that his case was a good one. Clara had gone against her mandate from the Multiversity to repair the destruction reaped by the Great Destroyer in his most recent attempt to escape his prison in the Dark Multiverse in giving Harry Potter the Firebrand and the Gemini Curse, and she'd broken the Multiversity Accords to do it – irreparably changing the timeline of that world.

Miracle still wasn't sure what she thought about all of that. On the one hand, Gemini Curse was her story. She'd put painstaking hours into writing and editing it. What right did Clara Hunter have to go in and change everything? But, by the same token, if Clara hadn't done it, would Gemini Curse ever have existed in the first place? It was all terribly confusing.

Riker Celestial sat beside Clara – who was manacled with Soul Steel to a rigid aluminium (the anti-divine metal) chair – on a floating circular platform on the other side of the chamber. Riker – former Asmerian God of Fire and Technology and Clara's boyfriend – was acting as her defence. The Asmerians… well, there was a lot to be said about the Asmerians. A pantheon from a dead universe, who rarely, if ever, talked about their pasts. Rumour had it they were related to the Angels at one point, or at least to one of the Angelic Orders, but no one could confirm it.

He was a charismatic man, and that certainly worked in his favour here. He had worked rings around the Noldorin Inquisitor, but he hadn't had much to work with. His argument had been on moral grounds, not legal ones. Clara's actions had been illegal. What the delegations and the judges were arguing over now, was the punishment.

Ghost slipped back into his seat beside her in the gallery.

"How's it looking?"

"Not as bad as we feared it would be," Ghost said, numerous other Travellers turning to listen.

"The Olympians are being their stubborn selves, so no help's coming from there. The Dwarves are on side, but whether that's just because the Elvish coalition has decided to vote against is up for debate."

"The Asgardians are divided, and will probably abstain. The Vanir will vote with the Elves like always. The Angels will be neutral, but you all could have guessed that."

"The Seelie and Unseelie Courts are both siding with Clara on this, as her intervention brought that world closer to the Source. The Demons will, ironically, vote against just to see Clara removed from the board for the foreseeable future. The Ancients will vote against her as well, they hold to the Accords more vigorously than most, and the Ori will vote against for the sole reason that Clara is an
"The Asmerians will vote for – be kind of hypocritical to do anything else. The Inhumans… it's up to Medusa to decide, and from what I heard she's sitting on the fence. The New Gods are against her, and the Valar will probably abstain."

"So; 4 for formal censure and release, 4 abstentions, and the rest want her forcibly descended. Fabulous. Looks like Miss Hunter can kiss her position amongst the high and mighty goodbye," Oracle noted. The leaders of the Travellers were conferring around Tyrion a few rows away.

"I wonder what they'll do?" Brawn asked.

"I hope it's something clever," Miracle said. Tyrion and Gandalf stood up and hurried out of the gallery.

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**Act V, Chapter 6: The Last Secret**

"So, you wish to go to Antarctica to search for Atlantis," T'Chaka asked, leaning forward on the throne and staring at Harry and Ginny. It was early morning, and the rest of the king's council hadn't arrived yet. It was just T'Chaka, looking at Harry, Ginny, T'Challa and Shuri as they stood awkwardly in front of him.

"Um. Yeah. We'd appreciate it if you could give us a ride in one of your fancy jets, but it's fine if you can't. We can make our way down there on our own," Harry said.

"I wish to accompany them, father. If Voldemort is as powerful as they say, Wakanda is at risk as well. It is the duty of the Black Panther to protect Wakanda. I feel that the best way to do that is to go with Harry and Ginny Potter to see the acquisition of this weapon," T'Challa said, and Harry gave him a sidelong glance. They hadn't discussed that. He was about to voice that when Shuri spoke up first.

"If T'Challa is going then so am I!" She said, stamping her foot on the ground and standing up as tall as a ten-year-old can without falling over.

"Shuri, it will be dangerous…” T'Challa said, turning to his sister. Clearly, they hadn't discussed it either.

"I'm not stupid. I know it'll be dangerous. But if you think you're going to be able to operate that city without me to help understand the technology you're dead wrong. Besides, I'll have you to protect me. I'll be fine," she reasoned. Harry couldn't really fault her logic, and he supposed it would be nice to have T'Challa and Shuri on the trip with them. It would certainly be more humorous.

*That's true.*

T'Chaka sat back on the throne, narrowing his eyes at his children.

"Well, I suppose having such dutiful children is to be commended," he said before sighing, "Bast forgive me when your mother finds out about this, but if this is your choice, I will support it." The king turned to the general of the bald-headed warrior women, the same woman who escorted them
the previous day. T'Challa said they were called the Dora Milaje, Wakanda's elite fighting force.

"Okoye. Prepare a craft to take the Prince, the Princess, the Potters and yourself to the coordinates Shuri discovered. Best ready for a lengthy trip." Okoye performed the Wakandan salute, before leaving the throne room.

"You best get packing. You leave in three days."

Kings Cross Station was packed with Aurors, which resulted not in the increased security the newly elected Minister for Magic Rufus Scrimgeour intended, but instead created more frantic rushing, pushing and shoving than one might find at the Quidditch World Cup. And that was saying something.

Which was why Jessica got to the train station early. That and she was waiting for Malfoy to rear his ugly head. She hadn't been back to Jones Manor once, and that would have raised major flags regardless of her mother being dead. No doubt her father had been waiting for her. So, she fully expected Malfoy to come hunting for her. Not that she was particularly concerned about this notion, more amused really.

So here she sat, in the final carriage of the Hogwarts Express in her Defenders Robes, with her cowl pulled back. Her identity clear for everyone walking by the open window to gawk at. Let them see her. She had no intention of sleeping in the Slytherin Dorms anyway. A knife sticking out of her gut was something she'd rather avoid.

Sure enough, Malfoy found her fifteen minutes before the train was scheduled to leave, his gang of ass-wipes behind him.

"Jones. What in Merlin's name do you think you're playing at?!" he snapped. Clearly, he hadn't wanted to search for her either.

Jessica turned to the boy with bleach-blonde hair. There was something different about him this year. A projection of real arrogance compared with the simple smug look he used to wear. Fascinating.

"What game are you playing at Draco? Fetch? Did Daddy Death Eater tell you to come and find me? Or was it my Dad? If it was, I can't really blame you. If he told you to suck his dick, you'd ask him how deep, that's just how it works with him. No fear or intimidation needed, just a suggestion. I wonder if it works on old snake face? Worth a thought."

"My father…"

"Is a Death Eater, just like my parents. Well, parent. I killed my Mother. And ever since I've found myself quite enjoying life actually. Did you know the muggles have this thing called a cinema? I don't suppose you do. They're lovely places to visit. A quick confundus on the security guard, and you can sit in these very comfortable chairs and watch movies for free! I watched Independence Day a few days ago. I have to say; the Americans do love their alien invasions. Will Smith is so dreamy, don't you think?" Jessica laughed in Malfoy's face as it contorted into several different expressions. Shock, horror, disgust, confusion and even a little bit of rage thrown into the mix.

"You… you killed…"
"My mother? Yes, I did. You should try it sometime; it comes with a euphoria of freedom and peace of mind that I haven't been able to replicate since. I tried cocaine, but it honestly didn't come close." Jessica had actually tried cocaine, as part of her mission to be less brooding. She didn't see what the fuss was about honestly. A good old-fashioned cheering charm worked just as well, and with none of the side-effects.

"You dare suggest…" Draco stuttered. Jessica rolled her eyes. She was getting bored.

"Yes, I dare suggest. Merlin, you're thick Malfoy. Here I sit, with pink hair, wearing a Defenders Robe in broad daylight, and you still haven't put it together, have you? Perhaps this will help you?" She withdrew her wand from her pocket and waved it over her head in the practised flick of her wrist that established her old glamour charm. Her hair shifted from pink to red, and she curtsied.

"Lily Potter, Harry Potter's 'cousin', at your service."

"You… you're…"

"Come on, spit it out. It won't kill you." Then Jessica got a gleam in her eye. "Or maybe it will. Makes my job easier."

Malfoy stepped back into the beachball that was Gregory Goyle, bouncing back to where he was standing a second before. Jessica stepped forward, wand in hand and a sinister smile crossing her face. Her hair returned to its normal shade.

"You're one of Potter's brats!" Pansy Parkinson exclaimed.

"Oh, bravo Pansy. Seems there might just be a brain in there after all. I've been spying on you all for three years now."

"Traitor!" Blaze exclaimed, drawing his own wand. Jessica had him disarmed in less than a second. She took another step forward, and Malfoy's gang continued to back away. She had another snarky reply prepared, but another voice stepped in.

"Alias, still cracking head I see."

Danny was leaning against the wall less than a metre away from Pansy, who was the left most of Malfoy's group of idiots. Only he didn't look like the Danny that left. He had a three-day growth covering his chin, his hair had grown out slightly, becoming even more curly than it had been before, and he'd shot up at least ten inches. His muscles were so well defined they were actually visible under his shirt. And it wasn't a tight shirt either. His eyes had changed colour from blue to vivid emerald green. All in all, he looked like he should be a seventh year, not a fifth year.

"Iron Fist. I see you took the term 'Living Weapon' quite seriously," she said casually, winking slyly at him.

"Rand?" Malfoy breathed.

"Hi, Malfoy. Miss me?"

The tension in the corridor was broken by Professor Slughorn of all people.

"Ah! Miss Jones! I was just looking for you!" The professor exclaimed gleefully, completely missing the antagonistic air. "I must say, your hair looks truly fabulous in the daylight."

"Good Morning to you as well Professor Slughorn," Jessica said, plastering her best smile across her
face and resisting the urge to gag. Jessica returned her wand to the holster within the cloak and stepped past a seething Malfoy to stand next to Danny.

"Professor, let me introduce you to Daniel Rand, son of Wendell Rand – the CEO of Rand Enterprises – the Immortal Iron Fist, Living Weapon of Kun-Lun and member of the Defenders."

Danny looked at her like she'd grown a second head, just outing him like that. Slughorn, on the other hand, almost fell over himself.

"An Immortal Weapon?! Incredible. I've met an Immortal Weapon before you know, during World War II…" Then he stopped, taking in Jessica's robes. "And these must be the Defenders Robes. I'd heard stories."

Jessica twisted her knife. "They were designed by Lily Evans before she died," she explained, using Lily Potter's maiden name as a calculated gambit. Slughorn hadn't used Lily's married name once during their conversation that night at the house, so using Evans instead of Potter was more likely to appeal to him.

That's when she noticed Matt and Luna standing directly behind Slughorn, both of them staring at fixedly at Malfoy. Luna whispered something to Matt, and the pair bolted back down the corridor, not caring about the people they knocked over in their retreat. What?

Slughorn grabbed Jessica's arm and observed the fabric.

"Truly fantastic," he said, before straightening up and smiling at them, "On to why I am actually here. I've come to invite you to have lunch in my compartment at the front of the train, Miss Jones. You're of course welcome to come as well, Mr Rand. An Immortal Weapon is always a good person to know." With that he spun on his heel and led the way back up the corridor, Jessica and Danny abandoning Malfoy and his gang behind them.

Danny whispered into her ear as they walked, "Who's this guy? And why does he now know my life story?"

"He's a mark. He's got information on Voldemort. We're buttering him up so we can extract it. I'll probably just Glock him over the head at some point. Dumbledore's scheming gives me headaches, but in this instance, keeping him close is a good idea. Keeps him away from Voldemort."

"Copy that. Nice dress down, but the way."

"Thanks."

They followed Slughorn down the train corridor as it began to roll forward, and Jessica pulled the thread within her cuff, transforming her Defenders Robes back into the standard Hogwarts ones. The rumour mill would do the rest for her.

When they arrived at Slughorn's lavish apartment, they discovered there were already people inside. Marcus Belby, an an obese seventh year from Ravenclaw. Cormac McLaggen, a seventh year from Gryffindor, who was staring rather rudely at Hermione, her nose in a book. Rounding out the group were Blaise Zabini, Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbot – who was very anxiously watching Blaise out of the corner of her eye – and Leopold Fitz.

"Sit, sit everyone!" Slughorn exclaimed.

"Danny!" Hermione gasped, rising to her feet and enveloping Danny in a hug.

"Hi Brains," Danny said, patting her on the back. Hermione pulled away, blushing slightly.
"Congratulations! You passed your test?" She asked, eagerly. Danny raised his hands and clenched them into fists. Golden energy began to ripple beneath his skin, making his hands radiate heat.

"Wow! Well done!"

"I hear congratulations are in order for you as well. I met Luke earlier, and he said you won a Joan of Arc Scholarship. Nicely done!" Hermione's cheeks coloured even further.

"Oh, it was nothing really. I didn't have to fight a dragon like you," she exclaimed.

"Shou-Lao is just a big teddy really. It was nothing compared to earning eleven OWL's, and after Umbridge, that's even more impressive." Danny had shown Jessica a sketch of Shou-Lao the Undying, keeper of the eternal spirit of the Iron Fist. Calling him a teddy bear was like comparing Voldemort to a barbie doll.

Hermione declined to comment, sitting back down to hide her flushed face. Jessica had to refrain from laughing at her.

Slughorn began interrogating everyone after that. Belby, whose uncle invented the Wolfsbane Potion, didn't impress the old wizard, and he quickly moved onto a rousing discussion with Cormac concerning his Uncle Tiberius over his recent hunting trip with Rufus Scrimgeour.

Jessica had tried to like Scrimgeour, but she felt he was too flat. Too inflexible in his ways. Regardless of what she ever did, for example, she'd be sent through the Veil of Death between Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy without a second thought just because of who her parents were. But Scrimgeour had also put a stop to Malfoy's attempts to purchase the Weasley's mortgage on the Burrow, and rescinded the wanted edict on Harry, so she tried to like him.

It wasn't hard to determine why they were all there. Each of them had a connection to a famous or rich person in the magical community - except Hermione, but her scholarship instantly earned her a seat at the table. It didn't hurt that Slughorn had already met her either. Even Fitz, whose father was an arithmancer in Glasgow. Slughorn clearly hadn't known that Alistair had walked out on Fitz and his mother when he was ten, so that was an awkward ten minutes.

Hannah's father Gifford – who had died five years ago – was a historian and famous archaeologist who'd worked on the restoration of Minas Tirith. Zabini's mother was rich as fuck after marrying and then murdering her seven husbands. Neville's parents needed no explaining.

Finally, when Jessica thought she'd escape unquestioned, Slughorn turned his eyes on her.

"And finally, we have Jessica Jones. Daughter of Allisandra and Zebediah. I heard about your mother, I'm so sorry my dear."

Jessica shrugged.

"I'm not. She was a Death Eater and a murderous hag. I killed her myself. With any luck, I'll be able to take out my brainwashing father before he rapes any more little girls." Slughorn swallowed hard.

"Have you heard from Harry or Ginny?" Hannah asked, directing the question to the Defenders in the room. Jessica refrained from biting her lip. She really didn't want to answer that question. Slughorn suddenly looked very interested.

"Yes. Harry Potter! The Chosen One they're calling him now. Of course, there have been rumours for years. Then there was the Triwizard Tournament, and now, the Battle in the Ministry. Tell me, if you can, does the Prophet tell the truth? Were you in thick of it all? Does this prophecy really exist?"
Hermione gulped.

"Yes. We were all there, Neville and Hannah too. I was leading the group that broke into the Department of Mysteries to retrieve the prophecy about Harry before Voldemort could get it. We escaped with it while Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny held Voldemort back." Hannah, Neville, Belby, McLaggen, Slughorn and Fitz flinched. Hermione cast her gaze into her lap at the mention of Ron, and Jessica instantly felt terrible.

"Does it truly say that Harry is the Chosen One?"

Jessica shrugged, "I haven't heard it. We gave it straight to Harry after the battle. Only he and Ginny know what it says," she lied. In fact, Harry and Ginny were the only Defenders who didn't know what the Prophecy said. "After, he said it confirmed what we feared, that he was the Chosen One, and didn't say anything more. The leak that the Prophet cited was Sir Cardogan, a portrait in Hogwarts that overheard us." Also a lie. Sirius had told Rita Skeeter precisely what to print in the Daily Prophet.

"And where is Harry?" Slughorn queried. Blaise sat up a little straighter in his chair. She couldn't help noticing that Slughorn hadn't mentioned Ginny. Clearly, he had researched her background as a Weasley and found her wanting. A somewhat poor choice Jessica imagined he'd discover.

Jessica sighed dramatically, "I wish I knew Professor. He and Ginny escaped Britain after Fudge called for their arrest, seeking the wisdom and guidance of the Sorcerer Supreme. They said they'd be back before term resumed, but we haven't heard anything."

"But if I know Harry, and trust me, I know him better than anyone, save Ginny," Hermione said with a grin, "There's only two reasons Harry isn't back yet. One, he's gathering the cavalry, or two, he and Ginny just peaced out and are chilling in the Seychelles banging each other on the beach." The Defenders all broke into hysteria, while Slughorn just looked very confused. Poor bloke.

"I know which one I'd choose," Jessica stated between laughs.

"With Harry or Ginny, though?" Danny asked, his hands on his knees as he tried to regain his composure.

"Either or both. I'm not picky." And everyone cracked up laughing again. Even Slughorn couldn't hide his snigger.

Jessica walked up to the castle with the rest of the Gryffindor Defenders, Danny having disappeared to Hufflepuff and Matt and Luna in Ravenclaw. It felt supremely awkward to be riding in a carriage with Luke and Hermione, but no Harry or Ginny. Instead Lavender and Neville were with them, but no Dean.

"Where's Dean?" Hermione asked, clearly thinking along the same lines.

"His parents wouldn't let him come back this year. He's Muggleborn, so they're heading to America. He told me in his last letter. He doesn't know if he'll be coming back or if he'll be able to contact us at all," Lavender said solemnly.
"Are you… are you going to be sitting with Slytherin this year Jessica?" Neville asked. Jessica just sighed.

"I wish I could. I'm still a Slytherin at heart, but I can't risk it. Not after last year. All the Death Eater kids will have orders to kidnap me and take me to the big boss, or even worse, to my Dad."

"How can he be worse than You…" Lavender hesitated before steeling herself, "Is he really worse than Voldemort?" She asked softly. Jessica was so shocked she said the name she didn't answer straight away, but eventually, she regained her voice.

"Voldemort will torture me a bit then kill me. My Dad will brainwash me, then rape me, then send me out to murder a bunch of people most likely, then, if I were to come back alive, he'd do it all again and again and again until I didn't come back. Then he'd turn my body into an inferus, and rape my corpse, just for kicks."

Everyone was silent for the rest of the trip.

Jessica sat down at the Gryffindor table between Luke and Hermione. The rest of the Defenders Army members closed in around her, providing a human shield against the glares coming her way from the Slytherins. She caught Daphne's eye, and the blonde mouthed an apology. Jessica nodded her head slightly to indicate she understood, and Daphne went back to her discussion with Lance, Tracey and Emilie. Astoria was sitting further down the table with a number of her friends. One of them had a bruise on her cheek. No. Slytherin wasn't a lost cause. She was only here to save herself from a knife to the throat. She wouldn't give up on her mission to show everyone that Slytherin wasn't evil. She'd already come so far. She wouldn't stop now.

"Greetings old students and new students alike. Welcome back to another year at Hogwarts. Firstly, Mr Filch, our caretaker, has asked me to inform you all that he has placed a total ban on any and all products from Weasley Wizard Wheezes." Jessica laughed along with the rest of the school. She hadn't had the chance to visit the Weasley's shop herself, but she'd heard reports, and apparently, it was doing gangbusters.

"Not that I imagine many of you will actually follow this rule." More laughter. "Now, we have three changes in staffing this year. I'm pleased to welcome back to Hogwarts Professor Slughorn, who will be resuming his old post as potions master." Jessica's brain slammed on the breaks for a few precious moments "Defence Against the Dark Arts, on the other hand, will be taken up by Professor Snape." Okay. That was not what she expected. She'd known Remus wasn't coming back, owing to the fact he had joined Moody on his hunt for Voldemort's hideout with Bill Weasley and Betsy Braddock – which still hadn't turned up anything useful – but Snape?

"Meanwhile, with Professor McGonagall still in her coma, the first through fourth-year classes will be taken by substitute teacher Professor Gwendolyn Stacy. Professor Stacy will be working with me to instruct the fifth through seventh-year classes." Gasps rang out through the hall, and Jessica's gaze snapped up to the table, scanning for Gwen. But the American girl was absent.

"Professor Stacy will be arriving tomorrow, so anyone with Transfiguration tomorrow can consider it a free period."

Jessica leaned over to Hermione, "Did you…"

"No! She didn't tell me a thing," Hermione huffed, clearly distraught between celebrating for her friend and wanting to slap her across the face.

"Professor Babbling will be temporarily taking up Professor McGonagall's duties as head of
Then Dumbledore's face turned grave, and Jessica tuned him out as he started going on about Voldemort. She knew full well what the dangers of Tom Marvolo Riddle were. She'd seen Matt's face after he got back from the attack on Greyback's lair. Matt, whose face was always hard to read because of his blindness, had looked like someone had stepped on his grave.

A few minutes later, Jessica and Hermione bade farewell to the others and made their way to the griffin statue guarding the entrance to Professor Dumbledore's office. Matt was already there.

"Hey guys," he said, not bothering to look in their direction. The guardian moved aside, and they ascended the escalator like staircase. At the top, they opened the door and let themselves into Dumbledore's office.

It was undoubtedly an impressive sight. Separated into three staggered levels, each looking out over the floor below it, the walls lined with bookcases. A large telescope occupied the third level, and an elegant mahogany desk covered in small silver objects dominated the main floor. They took seats on the couch sitting opposite Dumbledore's desk and waited.

Dumbledore arrived a few minutes later.

"Miss Jones, Miss Granger, Mr Murdock. I appreciate your punctuality. It has been a long day," Dumbledore said, sitting down gingerly in the chair behind his desk. Fawkes the Phoenix flew down, landing on the counter and trilling softly.

"Thank you, my friend," Dumbledore whispered in reply. He cleaned his half-moon glasses with his robe and sighed.

"I believe I promised you three answers."

"Before we start. I need to say something," Matt said, and Dumbledore gestured for him to continue, "Draco Malfoy has a Dark Mark on his arm. Both Luna and I could sense it on the train here."

"That's not good. Not good at all," Jessica hummed.

"We'll have to put a watch on him," Hermione said, shaking her head.

"Danny will do it. He'll have good fun with it I imagine," Jessica said, and Matt nodded.

"I will keep an eye out as well. If Mr Malfoy has been given the Dark Mark, he must have a mission from Voldemort concerning the school," Dumbledore said.

"But can't you just kick him out?" Hermione asked.

"No. It would let Voldemort know we have a means of detecting his agents. If that happens, he'll simply stop marking them, and we'll have no warning," Dumbledore said.

"Okay. Just thought I should bring it up before we get into the heavy stuff," Matt said.

"Very well. I suppose the easiest place to start is the beginning," Dumbledore said, before turning serious. "You know what the Prophecy says, based on your leaking part of it to Rita Skeeter." Everyone nodded.

"Then I must assume you have deduced it's meaning?"

"It means that a child born at the end of July, a child who was marked by the Dark Lord, will have a
power he knows not…” Jessica began.

"And it means that either Harry or Voldemort is going to have to kill the other, in the end," Hermione finished shakily.

"That was my reading of it as well. I was there when it was first spoken, by Professor Trelawney if you can believe it – hence the reason I keep her here at the castle. But I was not the only one who was there. A Death Eater overheard the first few lines and escaped to tell Voldemort. That is why he went hunting for the Potters. He didn't know that marking Harry as an equal through his scar would lead to his eventual downfall."

"You think Harry can win then?" Matt asked.

"I do," Dumbledore confirmed, "But I doubt I will be there to see it." He sat back in his chair.

"I have made many mistakes; it is true. But I am trying to learn from them now, which is why I will tell you everything I know. That, and because someone will need to continue on once I am gone."

Jessica didn't like where this was going. "You sound pretty certain you're going to die," She said. He merely raised his blackened hand.

"Unfortunately, my time upon this world is coming to an end. Severus and Poppy both give me a year if left untreated. Severus has devised a potion that shields from the pain and should extend my life for at least three years before I finally succumb, but he cannot be sure that it will work."

"What happened?" Hermione asked softly.

"That is part of my story. A part I shall get to in time. But I have promised to tell you the whole truth, and so I will. But to do so, we will need to take a trip down memory lane." Dumbledore snapped his fingers, and a stone basin filled with water drifted out of a glass cupboard against the wall. It floated over to the table, before coming to a rest on top of it.

"This is a Pensieve. It allows one to revisit memories of their past, or to view the memories of other people." Dumbledore withdrew a glass potion bottle with white liquid trapped within it from his robes. "This bottle contains the memory of the first time I ever met Tom Riddle, or as he is known today, Lord Voldemort. I would like you to see it." He poured the vile into the water, white and black smoke began to ripple beneath the surface. Dumbledore placed a finger in the water, and Jessica, Matt and Hermione followed suit. Jessica felt as though she was being jerked forward, then she was falling. Falling down through the aether, before she landed without even a stumble, on a washed-out London road. The others all appeared beside her, and a figure who could only be a younger version of Dumbledore, walked past them, heading down the street towards a large building on the corner.

"Whoah. This is weird," Hermione whispered.

"Fuck!" Matt exclaimed. He removed his glasses and his eyes, usually unresponsive and empty, flitted around in shock.

"You can see?!" Jessica exclaimed.

"I can see…” Matt breathed. Old Dumbledore appeared beside them.

"Yes, I had a feeling that might happen. Now, if you would follow me." The trio did so, following the two Dumbledores down the road. The cars looked very old, and there were propaganda posters on the walls of the surrounding buildings encouraging people to sign up for the British Army. Matt
was taking everything in like a kid in a candy store. Hermione looked far more thoughtful.

"When exactly are we?" She asked.

"1938, just before the onset of the Second World War, and the Global Wizarding War. Perhaps, if I had not been so focussed on Grindelwald, I would have seen the signs in Tom Riddle sooner." Dumbledore trailed off into silence as they approached the building. Square shaped, with numerous evenly spaced tiny windows and high railed, spiked gates, it looked more like a prison than a house. Young Dumbledore stepped up to the door and knocked. A young woman in an old-fashioned maid uniformed creaked it open.

"Hello. I have an appointment with Mrs Cole, whom I believe is the matron here."

"I know this place," Matt whispered, "It's the old orphanage in the backwaters of Stratford. We used to drive past it to go to Primary School. It's been in ruins longer than I've been alive."

"Wait a second," Jessica said as they followed young Dumbledore inside, "Voldemort was an orphan?"

"Indeed. His muggle father, Thomas Riddle Sr, abandoned young Merope Gaunt – Voldemort's mother – and she died in childbirth. The child, named Tom after his father, was sent here, where I found him," Dumbledore said. The foyer of the orphanage was nothing special. Old brick walls, an old wooden desk in one corner, a staircase in another, and chairs like those you'd see in a doctor's surgery running the length of the wall adjacent to the desk.

"Gaunt. That's an ancient name. An ancient Slytherin name. So, he isn't actually bull-shiting when he says he's the Heir of Slytherin?" Jessica asked.

"Language Miss Jones. But yes. He is technically the last true Heir of Slytherin, despite only being a half-blood."

"Being a half-blood tends to be a pretty good discriminator for powerful wizards," Hermione noted as they watched Young Dumbledore begin conversing with a frail elderly woman with a very long nose.

"In some cases, yes," Dumbledore agreed, "But many Purebloods and Muggleborns have been just as strong. Take Stephen, for example. He is Muggleborn. And Merlin was a Pureblood."

They followed young Dumbledore and the woman as they mounted the stairs.

"No Tom, nor Marvolo, nor any kind of Riddle ever showed up looking for him, so he's stayed here at the Orphanage." The long-nosed woman stopped for a second.

"There have been… incidents… with the other children. Nasty things. They're afraid of him, and rightly so."

Young Dumbledore frowned, "How so?"

"Well, one time. Tom was arguing with little Billy Stubbs. Then the next day, we find his rabbit hanging dead from the rafters. Tom said he didn't do it, and I don't know how he could have, but there is no one else who would have wanted to. Then, on a trip to the sea-side, Tom went into a cave with Amy Benson and Daniel Bishop. Neither of them were ever the same when they came back out. Never spoke to anyone other than themselves. Left the country and all if I recall."

"I think I understand why they're afraid then," Dumbledore said quietly, biting his lip.
"You'll still be taking him, though?" the woman, Mrs Cole, asked hopefully.

"Yes, of course. A scholarship is a scholarship. Nothing I can say will change that."

"I dare say the children will be glad to see the back of him."

Jessica, Hermione, Matt and Dumbledore followed the long-nosed woman and Dumbledore's past self up the stairs and down a corridor. They stopped outside a door, and Mrs Cole knocked two times before letting herself in.

"Tom, you have a visitor. This is Professor Dumbledore." She vanished, shutting the door on young Dumbledore and the eleven-year-old form of Lord Voldemort.

"So, he was always pasty. Good to know," Jessica said, trying to keep her voice steady. He was pasty, very much so, and it wasn't just the washed-out lighting. His skin was pale against pitch-black hair. He was tall for his age and lanky in the arms and legs. He had deep brown eyes that held no true trace of the evil that would manifest, though they were oddly cold for a boy of mere eleven.

"How do you do, Tom?"

Riddle flinched and looked up to stare at Dumbledore.

"Who are you?" Riddle asked, not getting up from his cross-legged position on his wireframe bed.

"I am Professor Dumbledore. I teach at a prestigious school called Hogwarts."

"Are you a doctor? Are those just nice words for an asylum?" Riddle looked to the door, "She wants me looked at. I've heard her speaking to the other staff about it. She says I'm different."

"Well perhaps she's right," Young Dumbledore said softly, taking a seat on the bed beside Riddle, "But maybe being different doesn't have to be a bad thing." Riddle stared at Dumbledore as if trying to see into his soul.

"Who are you?"

"I'm like you Tom. I'm different."

Riddle's wardrobe burst into flame, and Young Dumbledore told riddle to take a box of stolen possessions out. But Jessica had stopped listening to the conversation. She was staring around the room, taking in something very bizarre. Everything Riddle had was arranged in patterns of seven. Seven rocks on the windowsill, seven items stolen, seven notches on his wardrobe door...

"I can speak to snakes too," Riddle said as Dumbledore made to depart, "is that, normal for people like us?"

Dumbledore stared at Riddle for a moment, "It's not common, but not unusual, either."

The environment of the memory shifted, creating a blank emptiness of swirling white smoke.

"That was eye-opening," Hermione shuddered.

"Yeah. Once a creep-always a creep," Matt said, staring around in fascination at the swirling mists.

"No, seriously. You can already see the habits he picked up later," Hermione explained "Using magic against people he thought lesser than himself, on those that annoyed him, even if he didn't truly understand what he was doing. His independence too. Notice how he was on his own. He
didn't have any friends. In fact, it looks like he deliberately scared them all way."

"Trophies," Jessica added, "He collected trophies as if to prove to himself, or to someone else maybe, of his accomplishments. And the sevens? Why always seven?"

"Excellent deductions," Dumbledore stated, "but there is one that I have found in my numerous returns to this memory, that you haven't mentioned. Tom reacts rather poorly to the sound of his own name. Even back then, I don't think he liked having such a mundane and common name. He wished to stand out, and with a name like Tom, that was something he could not do. Thus, Lord Voldemort was born."

The group fell into silence, and Dumbledore snapped his fingers. The swirling smoke morphed into a room with stone walls, and a window running along the point where the wall met the roof. Jessica instantly recognised it. It was Snape's office in the dungeons. Only it looked much nicer than the few times she'd been in there. The walls had been covered in most places by fancy tapestries and silks, and expensive furniture and handsewn carpets covered the floor. Standing at a bar table, was a much younger version of Professor Slughorn. For starters, he still had hair on his head, and it was blond rather than grey. He was still overweight, though.

Dumbledore drew breath and continued to speak.

"Tom Riddle, when he arrived at Hogwarts, was sorted into Slytherin House the second the Sorting Hat touched his head. How quickly he learned that Salazar Slytherin was also a Parseltongue I do not know, nor do I know whether or not he used his ability to frighten others, but it doesn't seem much of a stretch to assume that the discovery fuelled his own sense of self-importance. However, he showed no hint of aggression or violence towards any of the staff. In fact, his thirst for knowledge and charisma quite endeared himself to them. I had resolved to keep an eye on him, but because of the War, I was often absent from Hogwarts trying to deal with bigger concerns. I regret to say that I mostly forgot about the odd boy that I met. When I did check up on him, he seemed to have made a complete turnaround. It was only in his sixth year, when he opened the Chamber of Secrets and blamed Hagrid for it, that I became suspicious of him once more. It was during Riddle's sixth year that the scene you're about to see takes place."

The room solidified, and Jessica could now see a group of boys surrounding a table as Slughorn walked over and sat back down, now with a shot of Firewhiskey in his hand.

"Sir is it true Professor Merrythought is retiring?" Riddle asked. Slughorn looked shocked for a second before breaking into a grin.

"You know I can't say anything about that, Tom." He ruined the effect by winking slightly. "But if she is, I shall certainly be asking to move into her office. Far nicer than this one, don't you think?"

"I think this place has flare, sir," Riddle said, "Though I'll admit it must be terribly cold to sleep in."

A clock chimed, and Slughorn gasped, "Oh would you look at that! Quickly boys you better be getting to bed, or Headmaster Dibbet will have us all in detention!" The boys laughed and filled out of the room. All except Tom Riddle, who hesitated in leaving. Jessica realised he had timed this perfectly, for Slughorn was quite intoxicated, but not enough so as to be unable to answer questions.

"Professor, I was wondering if I might ask you something that's been on my mind?" Slughorn frowned, looking up from his seat to Riddle.

"Ask away, my boy. Ask away!"
Riddle smiled, "I came across something while I was in the Restricted Section of the Library a few days ago, but I haven't had much luck in finding any clarification, so I thought you, as the most knowledgeable teacher at Hogwarts might know about it."

"Fascinating. And what is this mysterious concept that has stumped you?"

"It's called, and I hope I'm pronouncing it right, a Horcrux."

"Fuck," Jessica whispered, then instantly realised her mistake, as Dumbledore's gaze snapped onto her. She pretended she hadn't noticed, which was easy, as the next second the memory clouded over, and only Slughorn's voice could be heard through the gloom.

"I don't know anything about such things, now get out of here at once, and don't let me ever catch you mentioning it again!" The transition was so jarring that Jessica's head actually went swimming for a moment. Her stomach flipped, and she felt the beginnings of a migraine begin to course through her brain.

"You've encountered Horcruxes before?" He asked. Jessica began frantically pulling together a believable defence, but her mind was moving too fast.

"Horcrux." "Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake." "It's okay Jessica. Don't worry. Everything will be alright. This is all for a good cause..."

She wasn't sure whether the voices were in her head or out loud. It was all she could think about. All-encompassing. The fog began to churn, forming into a dark room, with a low hanging ceiling.

"Mummy. I don't want to..." "Horcrux." "A man named Ghost, he called himself a Traveller, he brought me a message from my future self." "Pieces of his Soul." "Horcruxes."

There was no furniture in the room. No tables. No chairs. No blankets. But there were candles. Five candles sat on the cold, grey stone floor, placed on the five corners of a drawing on the ground. Only this drawing looked like it had been carved into the stone, not drawn. It was a five-pointed star within a circle, painted blood red. Long heavy breaths started wheezing out of Jessica's mouth as she tried to suck in air, tried to will herself to think about anything else.

"What..." Dumbledore's voice whispered.

"You don't know what you want, Jessica. Now, be a good girl and step into the circle." "Objects of incredible power." "Aries and Taurus for the first sequence." "Horcruxes."

Standing in the centre of the room, at the point of the star, was Allisandra Jones. In one hand she held a heavy book, in the other a golden cup with a badger engraved on the front. Jessica's body began to shake uncontrollably as she tried to pull some air into her constricting throat, but she couldn't take her eyes away from the scene.

"That's why he didn't die when the Killing Curse rebounded on him." "DO IT!! It must be NOW!!" "Please Harry Potter. If you can help, I need you now."

Allisandra's face took on a demonic appearance in the firelight, and she held out the cup, which had a foul-smelling red and black substance within it.

Dumbledore, Matt and Hermione all gasped in horror as a dark smoke-like form with red eyes swooped down from the rafters.

"DRINK!!! NOW, GIRL!!!!" The spirit said in Voldemort's unforgettable voice. And then, one more
figure materialised, from within the mist. Standing in the middle of the pentagram, was a little girl of no more than five years old, in no clothing but a thin white cotton night-dress. Her head had been shaved bare. Glowing on the back of her neck were two black tattoos, surrounded by third-degree burns stretching up her head and down her back. The Runic Symbols for Aries – the Ram – and Taurus – the Bull.

"We have to destroy them." "Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake." "Two down. Four to go." "We have to destroy them."

"ENOUGH!!!!" Jessica screamed. The scene shattered, and everyone was blasted backwards, out of the mist and back into Dumbledore's office. Jessica fell to her knees, heaving air down her throat, and expelling it just as hoarsely.

"Jess!" She wasn't sure if it was Hermione or Matt, as she recognised both voices but only the one word. Then someone's hands were rubbing along her back, someone else stroking her hair. A glass of water appeared in front of her, and she snatched it. Guzzling down the clear, cold liquid. She took a deep raspy breath and pulled herself together.

'What would she even say?'

"Miss Jones... Jessica, are you alright?" Dumbledore asked softly. She looked up, and her eyes met the Headmaster's. He was kneeling beside her, his beard just scraping the floor. Jessica swallowed.

"I..." She took another deep breath, "I'm sorry." Hermione was the one rubbing her back. Matt's hands were in her hair. At any other time, she might have enjoyed it, but right now, she just wasn't in the state of mind to appreciate the comfort.

"I've never seen anything like that happen in a Pensieve before. It should only have played the memories I placed within..."

"It's my fault, Professor. It was my memory you all saw, though I imagine you all figured that out."

An awkward silence descended over the room as Jessica pulled herself back onto the couch, and her friends stopped their ministrations.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Matt asked, rubbing a hand over hers.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine, Matt," she replied, before looking back to Dumbledore, who was now sitting on the edge of his desk, staring at everyone curiously. Jessica gulped.

"So, were the voices in my head or..."

"We all heard them," Hermione confirmed, "That was the night you got your powers, wasn't it?"

Jessica nodded softly, her hand subconsciously rising to scratch the burn marks on her neck. They were far better than they used to be, thanks to the St Mungo's doctors who'd looked her over after she was hurt in the Ministry, but she'd carry the scars, and the runes embedded within them, forever.

"What... forgive me, I shouldn't ask." Dumbledore fastened his jaw closed and didn't ask any more questions, to his credit. But she could see in his eyes that his mind was working as fast as Hermione's enhanced brain did, if not faster. He was connecting everything he had heard in her nightmare, everything he had seen in the memory together with what he knew and trying to make sense of it all.

"Ask. It's out there now anyway," Jessica told him shakily, waving her hand as her headache slowly faded away.
Dumbledore pursed his lips. Hermione shook her head.

"Jess…"

"Cats out of the bag, Brains. No sense in denying it." Jessica stared Dumbledore in the eyes.

"After the First Task, Harry was visited by a time traveller who called himself Ghost," she began, "This Ghost person, whoever he was, brought Lily Potter from the past, and Harry was able to speak with her for a few minutes."

"He never told us what she said him, but after the conversation ended, Ghost gave him a letter from Harry's future self," Matt continued. "Contained in the letter were the notes and lyrics to a song…"

"Enchanted…” Dumbledore breathed, "I had wondered how he came up with it."

"And six words, scribbled as an afternote, at the end."

And the trio recited the line that had burned itself into each of their brains, "Diary, Ring, Locket, Cup, Diadem, Snake."

"Merlin…” Dumbledore exclaimed.

"We didn't know what they meant at first," Hermione admitted, "But Harry worked out Tom Riddle's Diary was the first object, so based on that, we guessed they were items of similar dangerous intent."

"We were put onto Horcruxes by you actually," Jessica said, and Dumbledore's face twisted into confusion, before relaxing in recognition.

"I mentioned Horcruxes the day Harry and Ginny spoke to me about their Soul Bond," He realised.

"So, between Harry asking me to research the word, and the Dragons, we realised that the items on the list must be Horcruxes. Then we found item number two," Hermione said.

"The Locket was hidden in Grimmauld Place. Sirius and Andromeda Tonks found it while they were inventorying the place before you set it up as your headquarters and Mrs Weasley began her purge," Matt continued. Dumbledore blanched, his mouth falling open slightly.

Then Jessica took up the story once more. "Will and Clarissa destroyed the Locket. The Cup, as you saw in my… memory… is most likely the object my loving mother used to almost turn me into Voldemort's new host body. Thankfully for all of us, Avery was shit at Ancient Runes and fucked up while drawing them on me. The ritual failed, and Voldemort's spirit vanished back to god knows where. Therefore, it's probably still hidden in Jones Manor, but I couldn't find it when I searched last summer, so Mum must have moved it before she died. Hopefully, that means my father, and by extension, He-Who-Must-Be-Hyphenated, don't know where it is either."

"We also know where the Snake is. With Voldemort himself. Matt and I saw it in Malfoy Manor, and Harry saw it in the Graveyard. That leaves the Ring and the Diadem still in the wind. Two down, four to go."

Dumbledore sat in silence for a moment before he stood up and circled the desk. He reached into a drawer and withdrew two objects from within. A green-covered muggle diary with a gaping hole in the centre, and a gold ring inset with a cracked black stone.

"Three down, three to go."
"Holy no way," Hermione exclaimed, stepping up to the desk and staring at the remains of both the Diary and the Ring.

"This ring belonged to Voldemort's mother. He claimed it from his last living relative, Morfin Gaunt, before he murdered his father and grandparents. Very difficult to find, even more difficult to destroy." He held up his blackened hand again.

"Is there anything that can be done?" Hermione asked.

Dumbledore smiled softly. "You're already doing it. The news you bring today has greatly lightened my mind. Not only do I now know for sure how many Horcruxes there are, but you've also destroyed another on your own and obtained the location of two others."

Then Dumbledore looked back to the Pensieve, "But the mystery of what Professor Slughorn chose to obscure in the memory we witnessed remains. We need to learn what he told Tom Riddle, and we need to learn where the final Horcrux, this Diadem, is. I have two possible locations, but I need more time for research before I have anything concrete."

Dumbledore glanced to a clock on the wall. It was well past midnight.

"We can continue this another time. For now, let us all get some well-deserved sleep."
Hermione didn't go to breakfast the next morning. What was breakfast anyway, but a waste of valuable time? Instead, she barged into Harry's Dorm and went looking for the Marauder's Map, only to remember that it had been torn by Umbridge's goons the previous year, and no longer worked.

Plan B then.

There was a secondary office next to Professor McGonagall's off the Transfiguration Courtyard, not far from the Mermaid statue. She stalked down to the office and tried to open the usually open door. It was locked. Jackpot.

"Gwen Stacy! I swear in the name of the Vishanti if you don't fucking open this door I will tell everyone in the entire school that you write pornographic fanfiction for Lara Croft! Oops, too late! Who knows what else I might say?" The door swung open, and Hermione was jerked inside. Gwen, wearing jeans and a spider-man t-shirt, slammed the door closed.

"What the fuck!??" She exclaimed, "That'll be all over the school before I even teach a single class, Hermione!"

Hermione huffed, folding her arms over her chest. "Good. That'll teach you to not tell me you were going to be teaching here!!!"

Gwen blanched, and Hermione realised that Gwen had let her hair grow out past her shoulders and dyed the pink highlights out of her hair. It made her look at least five years older.

"It was super last minute. Professor Dumbledore owled me last week about it, and I thought it was a good idea. Pete and MJ have started dating, finally, but now they won't stop sucking face literally everywhere we go. That, plus Pete took down another super-villain two weeks ago, this guy in a giant Rhino suit. And he didn't even call me! Since the Department of Mysteries, his ego has grown a mile. For once in his life, he's actually being confident about something, and I'm happy for him. I really am. But I needed a break. So, when Dumbledore offered me a job for a few months while Professor McGonagall gets back on her feet, I decided maybe it would be a good idea. Plus, we can keep working on our project. I've got an idea for refining the ambience sequence I think we can input…"

And just like that, Hermione's anger vanished, replaced by burning curiosity as the two girls debated when they could start with the next phase of their experiments.

Jessica waited a week before she activated the DA coins. If she was honest, she hadn't really expected much turnout.

She'd made plans for every situation. No turnout: they'd play Gobstones. Low turnout: she'd thank everyone and, depending on who specifically showed, she'd focus more on what Harry had been doing the previous year with the duelling lessons. High turnout? She had a speech she'd doubt she'd need. Who'd want to be part of an army with no Harry? The rumour she'd started in Slughorn's cabin had gone around the school as fast as she knew it would. Everyone knew that Harry and Ginny were not going to be there. Not only that, but the whole Department of Mysteries protest was undeniably a
disaster.

However, when Jessica stepped into the Room of Requirement, the entirety of the Defenders Army was there – everyone that had survived Voldemort's arrival in the Ministry at least. Not only that, but all the students that had graduated the previous year who'd been members had returned and were chatting it up with the younger kids. Fred and George had set up a stall in the corner and were actually selling some of their products! Then, as if Jessica's brain wasn't struggling to process everything already, Astoria had brought a group of at least fifteen Slytherin third, fourth and fifth years. To top it all off, the younger students who'd participated in the protests in the Ministry were all present as well. It was a miracle the room changed to suit the users' needs, as, with so many people, the room they'd used the previous year would never have fit everyone. Instead, the place had morphed into an amphitheatre of sorts, with staggered levels leading down to a flat space in the centre, and a raised stage in the centre of that.

Jessica stepped up onto the raised platform where Luke, Danny, Hermione, Gwen, Luna and Matt were waiting for her. She'd gone over her plans with them the previous night in the Home, so she supposed they'd figured it was option high turnout by now. They all smiled softly at her; Luke even gave her a thumbs up. She was so fucked right now.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Matt said, stepping up beside her and brushing his hand against hers. She resisted the urge to shift her feet. She hadn't made a single move since she'd kissed him in the DoM, and if she was honest, she had no idea what to do about any of her feelings. So instead she did what she did best. She focussed on everyone's problems but her own.

"Did we vet the newcomers?" She asked back.

"100%. Hermione made all of them sign another piece of paper. No one got inside without their name on it. And this time the enchantment was much worse."

"What is it?"

"It's an intention curse. If anyone with their name on the parchment has any intent to betray the DA, their mouths will instantly seal up, rendering them unable to speak. That's to stop Veritaserum or the Imperious Curse. To break it you'd need to destroy the parchment, though I suppose Voldemort might be able to personally get around it somehow. Then, depending on the type of intent, like malicious vs they've been captured and in pain, part two of the curse kicks in. A suffocation curse. Stop trying to speak DA secrets, and you'll be able to breathe again, keep going, and I wish them luck. It's fast-acting and rare. Should take Voldemort a few seconds to figure out a counter curse, and by then…"

Jessica nodded. It was extreme, but after what had happened the previous year, they couldn't afford to take chances.

"Okay, everyone!" She called out, but the people towards the back didn't hear her. A microphone appeared in front of her, and Jessica once again thanked the magic of the room.

"Hi everyone," She tried again, and her amplified voice rippled out through the auditorium. Silence fell, and Jessica steeled herself. Time to be the leader Harry and Ginny trusted she could be.

"Thanks so much for all of you showing up. I'll admit, I hadn't expected such incredible turnout after what happened at the end of last year." Jessica took a deep breath.

"What you all did, was incredible, and you all deserve far more than I can give you." Another breath. "But what I can give you is the truth. A truth that most of you have only been able to guess at."
"Our mission to the Department of Mysteries was a success. We retrieved the Prophecy concerning Harry and Voldemort. And it was just as important as we feared. Everyone who died that day... they gave their lives for an incredibly important cause. Not only did we find and destroy the prophecy so Voldemort can never know it, but we also forced him out into the open so the whole world could see that he was back. No more hiding in the shadows."

A cheer swept through the hall as people shouted for Harry and the Defenders, and it was in that moment that Jessica truly understood just what it was she was doing, what Harry had been doing all along. They were flaring the sparks of a revolution, and regardless of if they ultimately succeeded or failed, the world would never be the same.

"But the threat is still out there. Voldemort is intent on creating his idealist world of pureblood supremacy, and to get there, he's going to murder anyone he thinks isn't worthy of living in his grand new world. The old, the young, the sick, the different, the helpless; Voldemort will see them all rounded up and slaughtered. Muggleborns, Half-bloods, Squibs, Druids, Warlocks, Mages, Dwarves, Goblins and non-magical folk alike, he won't discriminate."

Angry yells and curses erupted through the amphitheatre.

"The Ministry is only now pulling the stick out of their ass. They spent the whole of last year denying the signs. People, our families and loved ones, disappearing, and they did nothing!"

"That's right!!!" came the shouts. Jessica felt invincible, she didn't think she could stop now if she wanted too. The adrenaline was making her feel giddy.

"Which means we can't trust them to keep us safe. We have to turn to ourselves! Harry started this group last year to help protect us against not only Umbridge but the threat that Voldemort and his Death Eaters represented. If the Ministry had its way, we wouldn't even know any defensive spells at all!"

"Harry!"

"Defenders Army!!!"

"Thanks to Harry, the students at the Ministry battle, were able to fight off waves of Death Eaters while Ministry officials cowered. Those who died, died protecting their friends, and right now we honour them by not letting their sacrifice go to waste!"

"YES!!!!!"

"So, we're going to take the fight to Voldemort! We're going to say his name! Prove to him and his flunkies like Draco Malfoy that we aren't afraid of him. Even as we speak, Harry and Ginny are gathering allies across the world to come to our aid and seeking out a powerful weapon to destroy the false Dark Lord! We need to do our part for when they return! So, we're going to keep training. We're going to build on what Harry taught us last year, and then we're going to bring the pain to Voldemort and his bootlickers!!!"

"DEFENDERS ARMY!!!!" The crowd screamed, jumping up and down, hollering at the top of their lungs. Jessica beamed, and couldn't help puffing her chest out a little.

"House divides don't matter anymore. Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw united, just as the founders intended! Slytherin students! We are not Voldemort's or Malfoy's bitches!"

"No, we aren't!!" came the cries from the Slytherins.
"We are our own people! And we choose to stand up for ourselves instead of doing what some pale-faced dickwad tells us! We're here for freedom and justice! Just like the rest of you! So I ask the other houses, as someone who would most assuredly be murdered the instant I stepped into the Slytherin Common Room, if a Slytherin comes to you asking for help, to sit with you during lunch, or looking for a place to sleep free from the fear of Voldemort's lackeys, help them. Treat them the way would hope to be treated if it was your parents abusing you, trying to force you to fight a war you want nothing to do with. The old rivalries don't matter anymore. It's just us and them."

Jessica stopped, letting the cries of support die down slightly before continuing.

"So here is the plan that Hermione Granger, Mathew Murdock and I have put together. We've been working through the summer to build up sanctuary locations across the country for people fleeing Voldemort's persecution. If you fear for your families, send them messages tonight. Tell them to travel to 1247, Sidmouth St, Ottery St Catchpole in Devon; 12 Grimmauld Place, Islington in London; 93 Diagon Alley; or 15 Lonsdale Rd in Oxford and ask the person outside to speak to the General. Use those words, and they'll let you in. If you can let a Defender know your family is coming, we'll make sure our people are on the lookout for them."

"From there, you can use one of the International Portkeys we've set up with the United States Department of Magic, the French Ministry of Magic and the Federated Kingdoms of the Druids and Mer to get your asses out of England. Come back when this is all over or build a new life away from persecution."

"We'll hold it against no one who wants to leave, and the offer extends to anyone who wants to take it. If you want to leave and your parents don't, that's fine. The Federation has already agreed to accept minors into their Boarding program at the Alcheringa Academy. If your parents want to leave, but you want to stay? That's no problem either."

"For those who decide to stay and help us fight, we have several missions planned against Voldemort's agents, and we've already got people hunting for his main lair. For anyone who has graduated already, report to Fred and George. They will have assignments and passkeys into the safe houses. We'll need your help to bring at-risk families in and to keep watch across the country.

"Older students will be working with Danny and Luke, Defenders Agents Iron Fist and Cage, our best combat specialists. They'll be teaching you how to survive high stake fights with Death Eaters, and some tricks they'll never see coming. Any student fifth year or above can join Professor Stacy and I for Apparation lessons, which we will start running in a few weeks. Younger students, and those of you who didn't attend last year, Mathew Murdock and Luna Lovegood, Defender Agents Daredevil and Mystery, will be your points of contact. They'll be helping you master the basics of surviving in a fight and kicking ass while you do it."

Jessica took a deep breath as everyone continued to listen in rapt attention.

"Finally, before we break up for the night, there is something I want to do. Dobby!" The tiny House-Elf appeared at Jessica's feet.

"Yesses Agents Alias!" Dobby exclaimed, standing to attention and saluting her. He was now wearing a Defenders Robe he'd made for himself, a pair of Harry's mismatched socks, and Sirius' feathered Auror cap, which he'd given the elf after declaring he would never be caught wearing it in a million years.

"Can you bring the robes I asked you to prepare?" Dobby's eyes lit up, and he vanished with a pop.

"Can the people whose names I'm about to call please come up onto the stage?" She pulled a list out
of her pocket.

"Neville Longbottom, Lavender Brown, Hannah Abbot, Demelza Robins, Foggy Nelson, Padma Patil and Parvati Patil." The people she'd called began filling towards the stage as Dobby returned. He handed a pile of robes to Jessica, who in turn gave them to Matt, who was still standing next to her.

The seven stepped up onto the stage nervously and lined up facing the crowd.

"In recognition for incredible bravery and strength in the face of extreme adversity during the Battle in the Ministry, I, Jessica Jones, as acting leader of the Defenders, elevate you to active agent status. Congratulations all of you."

The crowd launched to their feet and began cheering and clapping their hands as Matt handed each of them the Defenders Robes she'd had commissioned. The purpose was twofold. First, she needed more agents she could trust, and they'd all proved that based on the reports she'd heard and read from witnesses. Second, rewarding them here in front of the crowd did exactly what she expected. The amphitheatre went wild.

Neville, his face completely red, made to retreat back to his seat, but Hermione stopped him.

"You're one of us now," she said, "You get to stand up here. Be proud. You earned it."

The blushing teens all draped the robes across their shoulders, and the cheers soared even higher. This was why they would win, Jessica thought to herself. When had a crowd ever cheered for Tom Riddle like this?

Danny knew that Draco Malfoy was working on orders from Voldemort. How did he know this? Cause Draco Malfoy was an idiot. Every Saturday night, Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle would disappear shortly before dinner. No one would see where they went, most people didn't notice they were gone. But Danny and Luke did. Three weeks into term, on a Saturday, Danny and Luke used the Defenders Army to keep a watch out in all the corridors of the school, scouting where Malfoy was going. That way, no one would be at risk by following him, and he wouldn't realise he was being traced.

The Polyjuice Potion had thrown them at first, but it hadn't taken long for Daphne Greengrass to point out that no girl would willingly step foot near Draco Malfoy these days. Apparently, Voldemort's opinions on gender roles weren't very popular with the young women of Slytherin House. Go figure. It hadn't been hard for Daphne, Tracey and Astoria to convince many of them to side with Harry, even if they weren't willing to come all out in support for the Defenders. Not being broodmares was a highly enticing proposition, after all.

Lance Hunter had then deduced that the assortment of girls watching out for Malfoy was in fact just Crabbe and Goyle, Polyjuiced to look like them. Hunter had admitted to seeing Malfoy steal some from Professor Slughorn's potions classroom.

The spy network had worked wonders, and by the end of September, they'd managed to track Malfoy to the Room of Requirement. It was at that point that Danny called in the big guns.

"Sorry, Danny," Hermione said as they stood in the Seventh-Floor corridor staring at the wall of the Room of Requirement.

"What?" He asked, confused.
"There is no way to know what Malfoy is making the Room show him, so we can't make the room replicate it."

That had thoroughly ruined his day. It didn't stop him and Luke from keeping watch on Malfoy, however. Not that it helped. Malfoy seemed incredibly subdued about everything really. He didn't talk in class. He didn't do much bullying in Slytherin, leaving the job mostly to Blaise Zabini, Theodore Nott and Pansy Parkinson. He didn't even get mad when the DA affiliated Slytherin students stopped sitting at the Slytherin table during meals. Instead, they mingled with the Ravenclaws and the Hufflepuffs. Hufflepuff House had so far taken in twenty-two Slytherins, mostly girls from first to fourth year. They were staying in a separate dormitory off the Hufflepuff Common Room. None of the teachers had said anything about it, Professor Sprout simply treating them as if they'd been Hufflepuffs the whole time. Danny and Hannah Abbot were keeping an eye on all of them, making sure homework got done and that no one turned up with new bruises. A week or so into the new term a second year Slytherin named Britney had stumbled into the common room with Astoria Greengrass and Emma Stokeworth – a Hufflepuff second year who'd been at the Ministry protest – her face bruised beyond recognition. Apparently, Nott had decided he didn't like her face. Danny had cornered him the next day and ensured he'd never have kids, curtesy of a glowing fist to the balls.

Luna, Lavender Brown and Demelza Robbins – with Jessica's help on occasion – were working with all the young girls from all four houses, teaching them what to do if boys thought they could do anything they wanted decided to try anything. Danny's face had paled considerably when he'd learned the spell Demelza was teaching them: The Cock-Blocker Hex. Not something he ever wanted to be on the wrong side of.

Snape's Defence Against the Dark Arts classes were just as bad as one would expect. Danny spent them practising his meditations. Balancing his inner magicks required total concentration, and it just so happened that he could make it appear as though he was paying attention in class while he worked through his mental forms. Luke greatly envied him – he instead resorted to a stress ball provided by Will. He said it was something the Dwarves had taught him while he was in Kata Tjuta. Everyone else resorted to stress relief with the Defenders Army, which met up after dinner every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Room of Requirement and lasted for between one hour and three depending on what you needed help with.

Slughorn's classes turned out to be far better than Snape's. Danny had always been a deft hand with his potions – owing to the numerous concoctions he'd brewed during his stays in Kun Lun – but with Slughorn, he did even better. He actually taught things for starters, instead of just yelling, "do what's on the board" and then going into full Vampire stalk mode like Snape. He was a bit intense, and he kept asking questions about Kun Lun that Danny had to dodge, but otherwise, he quite liked the portly man.

According to the first and second years, Gwen was a very well-liked Transfiguration teacher. The third and fourth years agreed that McGonagall was perhaps a better teacher, but they preferred Gwen's attitude. Transfiguration with Dumbledore was nothing like what Danny expected. The Headmaster was incredibly hands-on in his instruction, guiding hands through wand motions and providing demonstrations whenever necessary. However, he wasn't present for most lessons; only for the first lesson on each new topic while Gwen took the rest.

At the beginning of October, Slughorn announced his first Slug Club party, and Danny found himself the recipient of an invitation. He didn't think the party would be very enjoyable, but at least it would be amusing to watch Jessica continue her mission of sucking up to the teacher, which always promised to entertain.
Hermione sat with Gwen at the bar Professor Slughorn had set up in a large open-air courtyard adjacent to the sixth floor. The place was incredible, and Hermione hadn't known it existed. Clearly, there was some sort of temperature-regulating charm, because it should have been far colder than it felt. The House Elf in charge of the bar had begrudgingly admitted that Hermione was of age and consented to supply her with Firewhiskey. She wasn't sure whether or not she actually liked it yet, as she was still getting over the burning sensation in her throat. She'd also tried to talk to the House Elf about S.P.E.W, but he'd popped away before she could get more than a word in.

"I definitely think we're ready to try the Seeker," Gwen was saying as she sipped her own drink.

"But what if it goes wrong?" Hermione asked, nervously.

"Then I hit the emergency shut off and we work out the problem. Seriously, Hermione, we can't go any further without an actual test. The device you've built is top-notch. I can't find a problem with it. It's simple. All we have to do is activate the Seeker, perform some magic, and follow Luna's music to its source. Then we can extrapolate a potential origin point and hey presto we're awesome."

"I'm just worried is all."

Gwen took another shot of Firewhiskey. "Good. If you weren't worried, I'd be shitting myself."

Jessica chose that moment to plonk down on the seat next to them. She stole Hermione's glass out of her hand and downed it in two seconds. Hermione thought Jessica had gone slightly overboard tonight. Her hair was hanging loosely across her shoulders, and she was wearing a white sleeveless top that hugged her chest and a long black skirt that barely reached her knees. She was even wearing heels! Hermione was just wearing a baby-blue blouse and white slacks - she felt very outdone.

"How goes operation butter-up Slughorn?" Gwen asked.

"Professor Slughorn," Hermione corrected. The girls ignored her.

"As well as can be expected," Jessica said, "I want to get him super drunk first. That at least seems to be working." Professor Slughorn did indeed seem to be highly intoxicated, judging from his current effort to attempt the Charleston going very wrong. Was that Hannah Abbot lying on the floor, unconscious? Well, Fitz and Simmons were taking care of it, so she shouldn't worry.

"Then what?"

Jessica sighed, "I'm still working on that. I might be able to convince him to give up the memory if I appeal to his guilt over Lily Evans. If I do it while he's ass over tip, he won't remember what he did come the morning."

"If that doesn't work?" Gwen asked.

Jessica shrugged, "Bash him upside the head and go digging I suppose. He probably won't remember that either."

The house-elf reappeared to refill Hermione's drink. Once the glass was full again, Jessica snatched and skulled it.

She let out a breath, "That's the stuff."

"You do realise that's incredibly bad for you, right?" Hermione tried.

Jessica raised an eyebrow at her, "Tell me something I don't know."
At that moment, Slughorn reappeared at Jessica's side, a glass of schnapps in his hand that Jessica's eyes immediately fixated on in envy.

"Ah! Miss Granger! Professor Stacy! If it isn't the two brightest minds in Hogwarts. Why, in fact, I was just talking about you two to an old friend of mine. He's a writer you see, and after I told him all about you, your incredible research, and your friendship with Harry, he was just clamouring for the chance to write an autobiography." Jessica was still eyeing Slughorn's schnapps, so she was no help.

"That's fabulous Professor, but I'm afraid Harry has already promised autobiography rights to our friend, Mary Jane Watson. She's a rising star reporter with the Daily Bugle in New York City." Slughorn clapped Hermione on the back, making her feel highly uncomfortable.

"Not to worry, then! I shall look forward to reading it. You must put me in contact with this Mary Jane. Any friend of Harry's is a friend of mine. Speaking of Harry, has there been any word?" Jessica finally regained her marbles and plastered a smile on her face.

"Yes, actually. I meant to tell you. He sent a letter just a few days ago. Did you hear the news from the Federation, Professor?" Jessica asked. They had received a message from Harry a few days ago, via Will's sister and Triwizard champion Claire O'Neill. It was short, sharp, and to the point.

**Defenders,**

*They've found it. Tell my brother and Clarissa to get back to Alcheringa asap.*

**Claire.**

The Dragons had left immediately. It was only the next day that the news from Alcheringa reached Britain.

"I've heard rumours. But each seems more outlandish than the next!" Slughorn exclaimed, taking a seat at the bar and ordering another schnapps. Hermione made sure Jessica didn't steal it before Slughorn could take the glass, to which she received a scathing glare from Jessica and laughter from Gwen.

"Well I don't have all the facts myself, but from what I've been able to put together, Harry showed up in Alcheringa while the Federation Senate was in session, and he managed to convince them to send humanitarian aid north to help us. No news on what help exactly, but hopefully the Federal Protection Authority will be able to lend us a hand. The Americans are being more stubborn. We've got emergency portkeys now thanks to Harry's chat with the Secretary of Magic and President Clinton, and hopefully, he'll support President Matson's decision when it inevitably gets criticised at the upcoming ICW meeting in December."

Jessica frowned and snatched Gwen's drink out of her hand with her superior speed. Gwen's spider-sense clearly went off too late, as Gwen actually jerked back a second after the glass left her hand and went toppling to the floor.

Hermione, Jessica, Slughorn and the people nearby all cracked up laughing, which only doubled when a second later, Filch barged into the courtyard – dragging Draco Malfoy by the ear.

"Professor Slughorn, I found this boy lurking in an upstairs corridor. He claims to have been invited to your party."

Professor Slughorn stumbled, clearly trying to remember if he had in fact invited Malfoy to the party. Malfoy slapped Filch's arm, and the old caretaker let go of him.

"Alright, alright, I was gate crashing," Malfoy snapped, rubbing his now bright red ear as people continued to laugh at him.
Then, to Hermione's shock, Professor Snape appeared from... actually where the hell had he come from? She'd have seen him lurking around the courtyard, wouldn't she?

"It's alright, Mr Filch. I'll deal with Mister Malfoy," Snape said, before grabbing Malfoy's arm in a vice and walking him out of the room. Hermione caught Jessica locking eyes with Danny and gesturing with her head after Snape and Malfoy. Danny nodded before bracing his legs and leaping up onto the roof, vanishing from view.

"Carry on everyone, carry on!" Slughorn exclaimed, reaching for his schnapps, which he must have put down in the commotion. But the glass was nowhere to be seen. Hermione narrowed her eyes and tutted disapprovingly at Jessica, who smirked at her. Jessica's obsession with alcohol was dangerous. She'd need to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on why her apparent alcoholism was terrible for her.

Hermione was unable to deliver her lecture, as at that moment, Hagrid came lumbering up, and Gwen rapidly transfigured a chair for him to sit on. Hagrid's arrival prompted another explanation of Harry's whereabouts, which then launched into a discussion of Harry and Ginny, Alcheringa, and how fabulous Hagrid thought the pair were.

The party was dying down, with most of the guests – including Gwen – having left, when Hagrid provided Jessica with an opening so perfect, you'd think she'd scripted it. The only reason Hermione in her groggy state dismissed the thought, was that Hagrid was so drunk by this point that he wouldn't be able to get back to his hut, let alone remember something Jessica said to him hours beforehand.

"I tell ya, whenever I see em, I see Lily and James again. They're just... they're just so wonderful they are."

"You taught them, didn't you, Professor Slughorn?" Jessica asked as if she didn't already know the answer. In fact, Hermione couldn't help but wonder how Jessica was still sober.

"I did. James was never very gifted with Potions I'm afraid. Transfiguration was more his thing. But Lily! Lily was magnificent at potions! And by far, the kindest student I ever taught for sure. When I heard she'd died..."

Slughorn trailed off, lost in his thoughts.

"Harry... he told me he can remember that night. He remembers his mum standing over him, begging Voldemort to leave her son alone." Jessica's breath hitched. "Riddle offered Lily the chance to step aside, but she refused, and he killed her, creating a powerful magical shield that no one could penetrate. Harry had nothing to do with his survival that night. It was Lily Evans sacrifice to save her only son that caused Riddle's curse to rebound, destroying his body. Only Riddle's soul didn't die that night. And I think you know why."

Slughorn turned to Jessica with tears in his eyes.

"You... you know?" he asked softly. Hagrid started singing a drunken lullaby, and Hermione rather clumsily hit him with a silencing charm to prevent the gentle giant from ruining the moment.

"I need your help, Professor. Harry needs your help. The prophecy says that he can kill Voldemort, but to have a chance, he needs to know what you told him all those years ago."

"I'm not proud..." he whispered hesitantly, "You don't know what he was like, even then. I am ashamed of what... of what that memory shows. I think I may have done great damage that day."
"You'd cancel out anything you might have done by giving me the memory," Jessica told him, taking the man's hand, "Be brave Professor. Be brave like Lily Evans. Be the man who helped save the world."

Then, very slowly, Slughorn put his hand in his pocket and took out his wand. With his other hand, he withdrew a small potion vile. Raising the wand to his temple, he drew out a long silvery thread of memory and dropped it into the bottle, which he then handed to Jessica.

"Don't think too badly of me, when you see it," he said softly. Then he leaned against Hagrid and fell asleep. Hermione, feeling like she would soon be going the same way, placed her head against the bar. The last thing she heard before closing her eyes was Jessica calling for Dobby, and then she was fast asleep.

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Authors Note:

Hey Everyone! Ghost and Miracle here. We’d just like to let you all know that we have just posted the first chapter of our new ongoing story: Harry Potter and Shards of Heaven. It’s a fourth-year AU and will be Harry/Ginny, though we’ve yet to decide on whether any other relationships will be important to the story. If you’ve enjoyed our introduction of new concepts and skills to the HP cannon; if, perhaps, you enjoy stories where Harry comes to Hogwarts late or is just a tad bit more intelligent and world-wise; if manipulative Dumbledore is a loved trope (no redemption this time!); or maybe you just like our writing and would like to see us tackle something new. If any of these is your alley, then this could be a story for you! Here’s the synopsis:

**Harry Potter and the Shards of Heaven**

*Years ago, two gods crashed on Earth after a brutal war in the heavens. Trapped in eternal slumber by Merlin, these gods’ presence on Earth has been shaping the evolution of Wizard kind for generations. What can run-away wizard Harry Potter possibly do against a power that can kill a god?*

We’d love to see you there, and we’d love to hear your thoughts. This story is serving as a trial to see if we can create a fully functional hard magic system, and we’d love to hear your thoughts!

Love you three thousand! Ghost and Miracle.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!