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Memoriae

by kdblaylock93

Summary

Holding the diary, Harri could feel the magic coming off of it. Magic that felt achingly familiar. She had felt it in the forest and while facing down Quirrel. But surely that wasn't possible.

Surely this didn't have something to do with Vol.....

What? What had she been thinking? Harri couldn't remember. She looked down at the diary, T.M Riddle stamped across the front.

Who was that?
Welcome to chapter 1. This is part 2 in a series. If you haven’t read part 1 you have three options.

1. Go read part 1, Invisus. It is a 70,000 word Hogwarts Year 1 AU
2. Go read part 1.5, Compendio (Invisus Redux). It is a 2,000 word abridged version of Invisus that has all the relevant bits for understanding Memoriae.
3. Read on and hope for the best.

Whichever you choose, I hope you enjoy this fic. Let me know what you think!

Not for the first time, an argument had broken out between Harri and Professor Snape over breakfast. They were in Africa still. They were not moving as quickly as Snape wanted them to.

“I don’t see why you want to stop in every village we pass through,” he sneered unhappily as Harri pointed to her map that updated magically as they traveled. She had purchased it at a travel shop in London while waiting for their international portkey.

“It’s not a village! It’s a natural formation. The Domes de Fabedougou are runic centers of magic.” This explanation was stolen from the guidebook she had also purchased.

Snape gave a long-suffering sigh. It had been like this for nearly six weeks. He had hoped to be out of Africa and into central Asia within a month. So far his quest to collect a plethora of rare potions ingredients had gone belly up.

They had managed well enough in the DRC. The Erumpents he had been searching for had been easy enough to find after two weeks of travel around Salong National Park. Erumpents looked rather like rhinoceros at a distance.

Snape had informed Harri about its thick hide which repelled most charms and curses, so it took a gentle hand to collect horn, tails, and the exploding fluid that was contained in the horn. Harri at first thought it was horribly barbaric that Snape wanted to cut an animal apart. It sounded like Muggle poachers.

“They’re magical animals, Harriet. A witch or wizard can discuss it with them, offer something in trade, and promise magical restoration. It just takes getting the beast in a good mood.”

When they had found the Erumpents, Harri had watched in amazement as Snape made a careful call that was similar to the grunts the animals let out. They looked at him appraisingly as he approached them, crouched low and arms spread wide as if to show he meant no ill towards them.

The herd snorted and pawed the ground several times, before the large male who seemed to the main bull, lowered his snout towards the ground while making eye contact with Snape. The herd calmed, and Snape slowly approached.
He spoke in a low voice that Harri couldn’t hear from several meters back. He presented the peace offering he had made for the Erumpents, caps for their horns that would prevent them from exploding each other during mating season. The Erumpent bull gave out a mighty bellow, and the rest of the herd followed suit. Then to Harri’s amazement, their tails literally began to fall off of their own accord.

What followed was several hours of carefully collecting the fluid from the horns. After each extraction, Snape would take a few shavings from the horn. The animals didn’t seem to mind at all.

Harri had to stay back through of all of this, but it was fascinating to watch. She had been duly impressed with Snape that night and asked all sorts of questions about the properties of the animals, where he had learned to approach them, and which animal they would be looking for next.

“I am a Master Naturalist, Harriet,” he had stated. “It is necessary for a potions master to be adept in Herbology and Zoology.”

“Did you do your apprenticeship with New Scamander?” Harri asked with unabashed excitement.

“With Newt? No,” Snape had replied in what could almost be called a laugh. “He was long retired by the time I was doing my apprenticeship. He did sit on my board for mastery approval.”

Their next stop was to search for a Fwooper. The shells of their eggs were apparently useful in stimulating brain cell regeneration. The Fwooper itself was quite dangerous because its song could drive the listener insane. Harri was personally hoping for a few feathers to give as gifts since Snape had mentioned they made rare and valuable quills.

“Fwooper’s aren’t allowed to be bred in the UK,” Snape explained as they made their way through Nigeria on a Magic Carpet. “They can only be sold once sterilized. Eggs can only be found in this region.”

But Harri’s attention was quickly stolen away from their quest when she saw the beautiful blue of the Nigerian coastline. She had never been swimming in warm water. She had never run on a pristine sandy beach. Seeing the frank longing in her face, Snape agreed to take a day to explore the inlets and tide pools fifty miles outside of Lagos. One never knew what kind of creatures might be lurking in the tides, he had reasoned.

Snape’s plan for one day turned into two weeks. She browned in the heat, spending most of her days in a swimsuit and sandals, her auburn hair streaked with blond from salt and sun. While it was hard to picture Snape outside of his flowing black robes, he had fully converted to khaki’s and a linen button up (though he resolutely did not tan).

Harri wanted to visit every coastal town in Nigeria. Lagos had a large magical community that practiced a lovely runic magic that was almost like a light show to watch. They weaved magic into their clothing, baskets, and shoes. Harri had begged Snape to let her borrow his runic dictionary so that she could begin to study what they all meant. Sadly, she usually could only understand basic ruins such as ‘protection’ or ‘fortification’. Much of the magic was lost on her.

Snape kept trying to leave and go further inland, where he knew Fwooper nests often were. Harri would just find some new reason each day that they should stay near the coast.

She had never been fishing.

She had never seen a Summer Solstice ritual.
Wouldn’t it be nice to go on a plain Muggle tour of the country to see the muggle animals? Ones not in a zoo?

He was surprisingly easy to distract, and with minimal convincing, Harri was experiencing a summer like she never had before.

After two weeks of ‘lollygagging’, Snape pulled Harri away from Nigeria and north into Benin and then into Burkina Faso. They found several Fwooper nests as they went, and Snape even let Harri help collect the egg shells (wearing earplugs of course).

The bright plumage of the Fwooper was enchanting to look at, and Harri found the bright pink ones the prettiest. She was able to snag several lovely plumes out of a nest along with the broken egg shells. She knew that Lavender and Parvati would love them, and hoped that Hermione might too.

Now, deep in the Dida Forest of Burkina Faso, Snape saw little reason to accommodate Harri’s fancies. They needed to get moving, as they only had two weeks of good collecting time left before he needed to be back in England.

“Pllllleeaassee,” Harri pestered. “We can do it on the way. We need to buy our portkey at Bobo-Dioulasso anyways, and the formation is basically on the way.”

“Fine,” Snape said sharply. “You will have an hour. No more. This is it, Harriet, I mean it. No more stops.” This was the fifth time he had told Harri that.

Two hours of carpet flying later, and Harri found herself at the top of a spectacular rock formation. “Apparently they’re 1.8 billion years old, and have been used as runic centers as early as 200,000 thousand years ago,” Harri told Snape, quoting her guidebook again.

“Yes, I can see why they would appeal to our ancient ancestors. You can see the formation has a pattern; a swirl to it,” he gestured at the natural pattern of the Domes. “Magic likes flow, and this area, while primitive, does have the benefit of being a conduit.”

“And you can see all the old runic markings,” Harri exclaimed. “Look, they even have the Runespoor rune here. I didn’t think that developed until much later.”

“The Runespoor is originally from this county,” he explained. “They aren’t very accommodating to wizards though. Research is quite limited on how their venom or scales might be used in potions.”

“Why don’t you just ask them for a sample?” Harri asked absentmindedly, watching the shadows on the rocks and how they seemed to move like snakes.

“Yes of course,” Snape grimaced, “I’ll just talk to the snake like a ruddy Parslemouth.”

“Well, yeah,” Harri said, looking up at him. “Can’t everyone talk to snakes?”

Snape squinted at her, “Very few wizards can talk to snakes.”

“Huh,” said Harri feeling much quieter.

“Would you like to share, Harriet?” Snape asked, looking at her intently.

“I sent a Boa Constrictor I met once to Brazil. He was very chatty. I just assumed that wizards could talk to snakes once I learned about magic.”

Snape sat down on top of the rock formation, clearly surprised.
“It’s not normal?” Harri asked, feeling flustered.

“It is rare, Harriet. There are of course Parslemouths wherever there are snakes. The skill is more common in South America, and even here in Africa compared to Europe. But it is still extremely rare. I have only met one Parslemouth before.”

He said the last part so slowly. Like he didn’t want to say it at all. She felt uneasy. Like snakes were in her stomach.

“Just… just the one? Was it here in Africa?”

Snape shook his head, looking grim. “It is a Slytherin train, Salazar Slytherin was known for it.”

“Oh, another student then?” Harri asked hopefully, well aware that she was grasping. She could tell where this was going.

“Harriet… the Dark Lord was a well known Parlemouth. A trait passed down from Salazar Slytherin.”

“Oh…”

“We’re going to find a Runespoor,” Snape declared when they were safely on the ground again.

“We are?” Harri asked.

“It’s not every day that I have such a useful collecting tool,” Snape said with what could almost be construed as glee.

“You want me to talk to snakes?” Harri squeaked.

“You told me that you did it easily enough before. To think we could have such an expansion in brewing,” he seemed starry-eyed. “The paper I’d be able to write! The first Grand-Master of the guild before fifty if this works out.”

“You just… want me to ask for a sample?” Harri asked, unsure.

“No, Harriet. I want you to ask one if it will come back to England with us and work with us. You’ll be assisting in this project. A fitting punishment for galavanting after the Stone.”

Harri sighed. She had known a real punishment was somewhere around the corner. Talking to a snake to help Snape with his brewing wasn’t too horrible. On the continuum of horrible things Snape was likely to do, this was pretty low.

“If I help you,” she began with hesitancy. “Are you going to tell anyone about me being a Parseltongue?”

Snape fixed her with his heavy stare. “I was planning to tell the Headmaster of this most recent development,” he answered.

“I wish you wouldn’t,” Harri told him sullenly. “You tell him things about me so quickly. I…. I don’t want everyone to know things about me. You ran off about the Dursleys, you told him about my mark, and now you want to tell him about this. Why does he need to know?”

“The Headmaster is the most powerful wizard I know,” Snape told her firmly. “If you are in a fight against the Dark Lord you need Dumbledore on your side, with as much information as possible.
He can protect you, Harriet.”

“What does Parsletounge have to do with Voldemort,” Harri groused.

“It has everything to do with the Dark Lord,” Snape snapped. “It is a hereditary trait, Harriet. The Potter’s are not related to Slytherin. Lily was not a parseltongue. Where do you think this power came from?”

“You think Voldemort gave me the power to talk to snakes when he tried to kill me?” Harri gasped.

“I do not know,” Snape said without meeting her eyes. “But I do know that Dumbledore will need to know this. Anything that connects you and the Dark Lord-”

“I’m not connected to HIM,” Harri nearly shouted.

“He needs to know Harri. If you would like to tell himself you are welcome. But Dumbledore needs to be informed. For your safety.”

“Fine,” she groused, changing the subject. “Where are we going then.”

“The forests where the Runespoor is protected are unplottable. They won’t be on that map of yours. But there is one about an hour from here by carpet. We’ll be there by late afternoon.” Snape looked too satisfied, like the cat that had gotten the canary.

Snape was right about the flight not taking very long. They were flying over a lush green forest that was so thick with leaves, moss, and vines that Harri was hard pressed to see the forest floor.

Snape waved his wand and murmured a spell, and a small glowing light emitted from his wand. Harri knew this was a tracking spell, and he had used it several times to find Fwooper nests. It hadn’t been useful when hunting the Erumpents since they were spell resistant.

The light got brighter as they made their descent, and they landed in a clearing. Harri was glad they hadn’t needed to blast their way into the canopy.

Snape turned to her, “Now Harri, be very careful when talking to this creature. I know it’s said that a serpent won’t strike a speaker, but that could all be folklore. Runespoor are very venomous. If it looks like it’s going to strike, get away from it.”

Harri nodded, but she couldn’t bring herself to be frightened. She had stopped being afraid of things like snakes and spiders when she was young. Hours in Aunt Petunia’s garden, pretending that the snakes were her friends, had taken that fear away. It was a strange realization that the snakes really had been talking to her all those summers. It hadn’t just been the imaginings of a very lonely young girl.

Snape directed her East, and they began a careful trek through the forest. Harri could hear hissing. As they walked it began to become clear.

“Humans! What are humans doing here? They must be wizards,”

“I never much cared for wizards, always poking their noses in where they don’t belong.”

“Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live near a Wizard? Where a fresh wind could slide over the scales, and magic flows freely. To just taste it on the tongue”
“No.”

“Perhaps,”

“We should get rid of them, they're getting closer. Come on, get closer so we can do something. You two are always just lazing about.”

“Stop being critical. If we stay still they won’t see us, and they'll be on their way.”

“Actually,” Harri hissed, “I was wondering if I could speak with you three.” The Runespoor stopped its conversation with itself. It was very quiet. Snape was looking at her with a strange kind of awe.

“If you don’t mind that is, I’m sure you have lots of snake things to do. But I’ve heard many tales of the magnificent Runespoor, the three-headed king of serpents.”

“Speaker,” hissed one of the heads longingly.

“Don’t go near,” hissed another. “I’ve told you a thousand times that wizards are no good. Don’t be foolish going near her,”

“It’s a speaker,” said the third. “We are no serpent at all if we do not meet with a speaker who has called to us.”

The Runespoor came slithering out from the brush. It wasn’t as big as Harri knew they could grow. This one was probably four feet long. It had orange and black stripes and bright green eyes. Harri figured that having three heads also indicated that it wasn’t a full-grown Runespoor yet. Usually, the right head got bitten off because it was overly critical.

“Greetings, speaker,” said the head on the left.

“Hello, speaker!” the middle head hissed. Its tongue flicked out. “Ohhhh, the magic on you and your companion,” it hissed longingly.

“Speaker,” the head on the right greeted shortly.

“Hello, Runespoor. My name is Harri.” Her name didn’t translate well. It came across as fur or animal hide.

“What a strange name,” hissed the right head in a mocking tone.

“Please ignore my brother, Furry,” the middle head implored. “What do you wish of this humble serpent.”

“My companion is a master of potions. He seeks to know more about the mighty Runespoor and how your venom or scales might affect magic. Being such a strong serpent, and knowing that your eggs are so powerful, we would like your help to discover what magic you make.”

“And have you wizards come in and hunt us down if you find out that we are worth something to you,” the right head hissed sharply.

“It is known that wizards cannot come near a Runespoor that does not wish it,” Harri replied. “There a reason no Runespoor has ever been a companion to a wizard without its consent.”

“Where are you from Furry?” the middle head asked.
“A place called England, very far from here. It can get very cold there, but the place you would live would have many mice and rats. And magic in the air so thick you would be able to scent it at all times.”

The head on the left had remained very silent through all this, considering. Finally, it hissed, “My brother makes a fair point that it is dangerous for humans to know more of the Runespooor. You already hunt our eggs, what will we do when you hunt our young?”

Harri turned to Snape, “They’re concerned that if they help you it will lead to wizards poaching them for potions ingredients.”

Snape nodded thoughtfully, “A valid concern. So offer them something. What does each head want? You need the planner most of all, but if you can get the critic or the dreamer as well…. Offer the critic a cone to protect it from being bitten off.”

Harri turned back to the snake. “We cannot guarantee that the hunters will not come. We will attempt to use any knowledge we gain with your consent. There are protections that can be placed in these forests that none many enter with ill intent towards the Runespooor. To each of you, we are willing to offer a gift of your choice. I cannot say what you, planner and dreamer would like. However, to you critic, I can offer a cone to protect you from your brothers’.”

The other two heads hissed angrily at this, but the third head looked rather pleased. “A worthy offer,” he hissed back.

Really Harri knew that it came down to what the planner wanted. It was the one that controlled the body and decided how it moved. All three heads needed to be at least amiable to the plan, or the right one could strike out against the other two and bite Harri or Snape.

“Very well,” hissed the left head. “But if we seek to return to our forest, you will bring us. That is the deal. To help a Speaker is the calling of a serpent, magic demands that we help you. However, you will not bind us with magic to this deal. We will be free to return.”

Harri turned to Snape and told him the Runespooor’s answer. He looked pleased and nodded his consent to the snake’s request.
Harriet was sulking.

Severus found it strange to watch because he had never seen the girl sulk before. He had seen her full of anger, full of magic, and full of tears. He had seen her frustrated, amazed, enraptured, and winsome. He had not seen her sulk.

There she was though, sulking on a stool in his potions lab as he had her translate a conversation with the Runespoor.

He found himself reminded of Draco Malfoy whenever he visited Malfoy Manor. Granted, the last time he had visited had been when the boy was eight years old and told he couldn’t fly before supper. Severus was startled to realize that he hadn’t visited Malfoy manor in nearly four years.

Not that he wanted to spend much time at the manor. Lucious and Narcissa were still perfectly pleasant in polite company, but they had cooled towards Severus considerably over the years. With the Dark Lord gone, and Severus’ use as a spy eliminated, the Malfoy family no longer had the obligation to bother with Snape. Their patronage had been quite useful in the early days after the war, but now Snape didn’t need their money or their name to open doors. He could open his own doors.

He was a master of Potions, Zoology, Dueling, and the Dark Arts. He was a journeyman of Herbology and Healing. He was the guardian of the Girl-Who-Lived, the Head of Slytherin House, and in possession of cooperative Runespoor. Severus would wager that he was the most accomplished wizard on his age. Not yet thirty-five, and well on his way to being Headmaster after Dumbledore or Minerva, to being the Grand-Master of the Potions Guild, and perhaps even being a father to Lily’s daughter. All realities that had seemed impossible a decade ago. So no, he didn’t need the Malfoys anymore.

What he did need was a cooperative Harriet, which didn’t seem very likely at the moment.

“I don’t know why you want to talk to the stupid snake,” she muttered. “It just argues with itself all the time. He isn’t interesting. He’s annoying. I can see why they start biting off heads.”

“The Runespoor may know more about itself than we think. It would be foolish to start experimenting before gathering all the data we can about how it lives, breeds, eats, and hunts.”

Harriet rolled her eyes. Actually rolled her eyes at him. If school had been in session he would have knocked off at least ten points.

Severus repressed a sneer. “Why are you acting like this?” he demanded.


“Like… like…” he was grasping for the right word. “Like a teenaged girl!”

She went very pale and he could feel her erratic magic making an appearance. Over the last year, Harriet had made leaps and bounds at controlling her overly expanded magical core. Severus couldn’t remember how long it had taken him to achieve similar results. He had had the benefit of
a magical mother who had coached him through meditation. Of Lily’s listening ear for a year before Hogwarts. He had not faced the Dark Lord Voldemort or unwittingly killed someone at the age of eleven. It was impressive how much control she had grasped and clawed onto. But it still flared, still made its presence known when she was stressed or upset.

“I’ll have you know that I’m not a teenage girl,” she said through gritted teeth. “I am a twelve-year-old girl, as of today actually. And no one…” she swallowed… “no one has written or said anything about it.”

It was her birthday. Of course, it was. Born as the seventh-month dies was practically ingrained in his head.

“Ah…” was all he could manage. Because Severus did not know how to deal with young girls whose birthday he should have remembered. What did one do for a twelve-year-old on her birthday? Probably not make her talk to a snake that she had grown to dislike for over three hours.

“Exactly,” she exclaimed, throwing her hands up. “No one had written all summer actually. I thought I wasn’t getting mail because we were abroad, but we’ve been back for two weeks! And not one stinking letter. I’ve written all three of them, and it’s radio silence.”

“That is… strange,” Severus offered.

There was that James Potter glare again. “Strange?” she said, her voice reaching a pitch that made him flinch. “I get that no one probably cares about my birthday. I mean, we did for Ron. And I set Neville a gift for his. It was yesterday. But maybe… maybe they don’t like me anymore because we aren’t together all the time. Maybe they’ve realized that I almost got them killed, and I’m too dangerous to be around.” She looked glassy-eyed and every bit the insecure teenaged girl she claimed she wasn’t.

“Friends are overrated…”

“Not helpful.”

“… but I’m sure yours have not forgotten you. Mistakes in owl post are rare, but they do happen. We have been abroad, Cokeworth, and at Hogwarts. All unusual places for a young witch during the summer.”

“That’s because you wizards go around with ridiculous owl mail. Owls! For mail!”

“I suppose you prefer the muggle way of having a wasted job for some poor wizard hand delivering it? And dealing with all the wards around all the houses and places in England and on the continent?”

“What do you mean?”

“There are wards around private residences that prevent someone from just walking up to the front door. A mailman would have a yeoman's work getting keyed into all the different homes in Britain. Some are unplottable and aren’t even registered properly. It is easier by far to simply key owls into the wards and not allow them through if they are caring anything harmful to the recipient.”

“Oh,” Harriet said, Her face looked just like Lily’s when she had understood something new about the wizarding world. The expression was eerily similar.

“Why did no one explain it?” she asked frustrated. “I’ve been asking about it for over a year and all anyone does is shrug.”
“I believe most of the magical community takes it for granted that common magic is known magic,” he replied. “You saw Spinner’s End,” he continued. “My father’s old house didn’t use magic. I didn’t grow up with it coming out of every corner of my life. As a result, I didn’t understand small things for several years. But they come, you figure them out,” he tried to say with a reassuring smile.

She gave him an odd look. “You need to practice that. It looks like you’re in pain.”

His face turned to a glower.

“Thank you though,” Harriet continued. “You’re right that I will catch up... eventually. Or maybe I’ll always be a little muggle,” she shrugged. “It’s not like all these magic raised wizards can blend into the Muggle World. You should have seen Hagrid in London last summer.”

“That is indeed an issue that the Ministry often deals with. The number of muggles we oblivate is staggering.”

“Wait,” Harri exclaimed. “We just oblivate people? We just mess with their minds without their consent?”

“It is either that or let our entire world be known. It won’t go well Harriet. You know as well as I do that Muggles have guns. They have bombs. They have the ability to wipe us out. It is better to stay hidden.”

“You sound like a blood-purist!” she accused. There was Lily again, the outrage, the turn of her lips. She was all her mother for a moment.

“It’s not about blood Harriet. It is about safety. There is… there is something you should know about me.” He didn’t want to bring this up, but Servus could tell there was an opening. Harriet would no longer trust him he kept it hidden, didn’t explain himself, and she found out some other way. It was best to explain on his own terms, or all that fragile trust he had built would disappear.

“You’re a half-blood, you can’t be a blood-purist,” Harriet said slowly. “It would be like hating yourself and your own heritage.”

“I do not hate muggles,” Severus told her firmly. “There was a time though, in my misguided youth, when I made a mistake Harriet. A grave mistake. The worst mistake I have ever made in my life. I don’t expect you to understand or forgive me for it, but you have the right to know.”

Severus closed his eyes. He didn’t want to look at her as he told this story. But he had to. He owned Lily, and even Potter that much.

“Your mother and I were great friends for several years. The best of friends. She was my world. I loved her more than the sun. Yet… at the same time… I hated everything. I hated that her soulmate was your father. He tormented me for years. He… He was cruel to me. Looking back that was probably because he was jealous. Jealous of the relationship I shared with his soulmate. But I was too young to understand that at the time.”

“Well... the worst day, the day that changed everything. It was after exams and your father and his friends started cursing me. And your mother came to my rescue. It was mortifying to need saving in front of the entire school. I lashed out. I was so angry, Harriet. Angry at her for not being able to return my affections. Angry at myself. Angry at the world. So I lashed out at your mother and I called her a Mudblood.”

"She wouldn’t speak to me all that summer, or really any of the next school year either. I tried to
apologize but she… rightly so really… she didn’t want anything to do with me. So I made new friends. The wrong friends.”

"I was… I am... powerful Harriet. Much like you. Our cores, once we can control them, they make us stronger than other witches and wizards in this day and age. It was common two hundred years ago. Society has mostly seen the truth, we understand now that abusing children is wrong. That it isn’t worth it. So there I was, sixteen and drunk on my own power. Isolated from the woman I loved because of my own foolishness. And I found… him. The Dark Lord.”

“Voldemort. You… you joined Voldemort?” Horror was clear on Harriet’s face.

Severus nodded solemnly. “Please let me fully explain Harriet. It wasn’t… he wasn’t the man you described to me down in that chamber. He was so… powerful. His magic was addictive. He was Lucifer in human form. Charming, handsome, and his magic was everywhere. It was addictive to be around. He made you believe that his way was right. And some of his ideas, they weren’t as insane as today’s Ministry would have you believe.”

She opened her mouth in anger, clearly about to protest. “Please let me explain Harriet. Please. I know it sounds mad. I know you think I’m wrong.”

She closed her mouth. “There were ideas about blood purity of course. But he argued for integration too. Of researching Muggle-borns and figuring out if they were descendants of squibs. Research into where magic came from. Why there were squibs in pureblood families. He was asking questions that the Ministry has never dared to ask. Questions that honestly need to be addressed. I agree with you, Harriet, that we don’t need to obliterate muggles. We shouldn’t allow wizards near them unless they can passably move in their society without being noticed.”

"But… there were horrible ideas too. Murder. Raids. Cursing everyone we needed to. Bribing Ministry officials. Intimidating witches and wizards into doing our bidding. No trust in the wizarding community. Everything was falling apart. I just wanted order, Harriet. A safe place to research. A way to move on from your mother.”

"But then… I overheard something. I’m not a liberty to say exactly what. I’ve sworn on my magic to Dumbledore I won’t tell you the details. But the reason Voldemort came after your family was me. I overheard something and reported it back to him. He was… enraged. We were all set to find a child. A child born at the end of July. There were only two options.”

“Me…. and Neville,” Harriet whispered.

“Yes. And when I knew it was you… when I knew it was your mother… I begged him to spare her. I begged him to leave her family alone. To not go near you all. I couldn’t stand to think of Lily unhappy. Of her world torn apart. Of her… dead.”

“He laughed at me,” Severus concluded. “He laughed because he knew who your mother was to me. Said he’d spare her for me…. his face contorted into disgust.

Severus looked up at Harriet’s face. She was crying. Wet tears streaming down her cheeks. It was very silent though. He couldn’t feel her magic moving at all. It was tense like a bow string.

“My parents died because you told Voldemort some information… information that made him want to kill me?” Harriet asked finally.

“It is the biggest regret of my life Harriet. If I had known it would lead him to Lily I never would have…”
“But it would have led to some other child! And THAT was FINE?”

“Of course it wasn’t,” he hissed quietly.

Her magic was building around the room in that same taut way. It was not wavering and moving. No jerks or lashing out. It was like the whole room was filling evenly with her magic. It reminded him of over a decade ago. Of a meeting that he had just described to Harriet.

She was enraged.

Severus grasped his wand. The magic was going to do something. It was going to explode or implode. It could only mean disaster.

Only… it wasn’t.

Suddenly, Harriet Potter was not in his potions lab. She disappeared with a pop.

She hadn’t become invisible, she was quite literally gone. Her magic, all of it, had vanished without a trace. It was like all the air had been sucked out of the room.

He quickly cast a spell to identify where she was on the Hogwarts grounds and grimaced when it showed that she wasn’t on the grounds at all.

Impossibly, which shouldn’t surprise Severus because Harriet Potter was a walking impossibility, Harriet had used accidental apparition at Hogwarts.

Bugger

Harri wasn’t sure what had just happened.

One moment she had been standing in Snape’s lab, the next she was in the woods somewhere. It was a thickly wooded glen, she could hear birds chirping in the distance and squirrels running up and down trees. It didn’t feel like the forbidden forest, it felt like a normal non-magical wooded area.

How had she gotten here?

One moment she had been so full of anger. She hadn’t felt it in months. It hadn’t just been her eyes that had itched. It had been her entire body. Like her entire body had fallen asleep and was buzzing numbly. The rage had been… consuming.

It was because of Snape that her parents were dead.

He had given Voldemort information that had ultimately sent him to her. And Snape regretted it. He regretted it because it had led to the death of her mother. Not because it would have ended in the death of a child under any other circumstances.

She… she had trusted Snape. Maybe trust was a strong word. She had accepted that Snape cared. She had trusted that Snape loved her mother. She had trusted that he would feel obligated to Harri’s safety because of the love he had felt for Lily.

She had felt so exposed suddenly. Like a wound rubbed raw. Another adult she had to get away from. And as her body had buzzed with barely suppressed rage Harri had thought of the only adult she knew who might be worth trusting. Not because she had any particular belief in the adult himself, but because she trusted the love he carried for her father.
Remus Lupin.

Then she had appeared in this wood.

Harri looked around desperately, looking for some kind of clue as to where she was. Could this be where Remus Lupin lived? Or had magic dropped her somewhere random. She needed to figure out where to go and what to do.

She felt… absolutely exhausted. Her magic felt depleated, but not as badly as when she turned invisible. Harri didn’t feel the need to throw up, her body wasn’t shaking. That was something at least.

It was a July summer evening, probably getting near six o’clock. It wouldn’t be full dark for another hour or so, but she needed to figure out where she was. Harri looked around a little more desperately and could make out a light a little bit ahead.

Harri began to walk towards it. The branches were very thick, and the underbrush thicker. It was a struggle to hike even a few meters towards the light. Harri certainly wasn’t dressed for the woods, wearing gym shorts and an undershirt. But after a few minutes of struggling, Harri got close enough to the light to see that it was a little cabin. There were no roads around the little house. No obvious way that someone could get to it except through magical means.

As Harri entered into the clearing the cabin was situated on, she noticed something else. There were large claw marks on the trees all around the cabin. Slashes low and high, and as Harri examined a few more trees, she saw that the marks extended all around the clearing. As if marking a territory.

Harri had learned enough from Quirrel and her zoology books to know that she wasn’t at just any cabin. A werewolf lived in this cabin. And with a shudder, Harri realized that darkness was falling fast.

Chapter End Notes

Some quick notes- no Harri didn't break through the full powered wards of Hogwarts. That will be explained next chapter. I'm not trying to set up a Super!Harri fic, just a Powerful!Harri who lacks a lot of control. I'm also starting to change a few things in relation to Voldemort himself. I think the ideals that he espoused could use a lot of editing and expanding. I don't want to go full 'dead dove' here (because eugenics are bad kids) but there will probably be views explored and expanded on that I don't personally agree with that the characters of this work will advocate for. Please keep in mind that this is a work of fiction and is not an attempt at real-world commentary.
This was a conundrum, to say the least.

Harri desperately tried to remember which phase the moon was in, to no avail. Was it a full moon? She didn’t think so. Much of potion making involved harvesting ingredients by the light of a full moon. But… it still might be a full moon. She wasn’t willing to bet her life that it wasn’t.

All the same, it wasn’t full night yet. It was the beginnings of dusk. If it was a full moon, would the werewolf inside be able to spirit her away to safety before the hour struck? Werewolves were men first, after all. Potentially a very kind and helpful person was inside that cabin. Potentially, they were a monster no matter what phase of the moon.

Harri was so tired. Her magic, which under normal circumstances would be rioting around madly, was depleted and dormant. She wasn’t going to magic herself somewhere new. She had no idea where she was. No idea where the nearest town was located. There was only the cabin ahead and a ticking clock.

With much trepidation, Harri knocked on the door.

And waited.

She could hear someone inside moving around. Could hear them coming closer to the door. Then… nothing. They didn’t open the door.

Harri swallowed her fear and spoke. “I’m so sorry to disturb. But I’m lost and I don’t know where I am.”

The door opened almost at once.

A very confused man stood before Harri. He wore a very shabby robe, had light brown hair flecked with gray, and he looked very tired. Despite the gray in his hair, he couldn’t be older than his mid-thirties. His face, while clearly aged from the picture she had of him, was recognizable at once.

“Remus Lupin,” Harri said with relief.

He still looked very confused. But recognition filtered slowly across his face, and then he looked as if he were seeing a ghost. “Harriet Potter,” he said at last.

“Yes, oh good it’s you! I don’t know how I got here, but somehow I am. I was having an argument with Snape and I just ended up here. Oh thank goodness, I thought it would be a bad werewolf!” Relief was flooding through her, her adrenalin plummeted. It was safe after all.

He frowned.

“There is no such thing as a good werewolf, Harriet.”

“Oh course there is!” Harri exclaimed, feeling desperately tired and almost manic. “You’re practically my family. Of course you’re a good werewolf. Now, if it isn’t the full moon, would it be possible for me to lie down?” Her eyes felt like cement blocks, she was struggling to keep them open or even to form sentences.

Harri couldn’t remember what his answer was, but before she knew what was happening she was
laying down on something soft and closed her eyes.

What had she been worried about? She really couldn’t remember.

Remus Lupin stared down at the young girl currently sleeping in his bed.

Her deep auburn hair was the exact shade that had been Lily’s. Her eyes were mirrors of James. Her voice even was reminiscent of her father, a different pitch, but similar tone.

He had heard the knock on the door and had assumed it was the Ministry. He was a known werewolf in certain circles, but he had managed to stay off the Registry. Remus had been staying in Yorkshire longer than he rightly should. Someone had noticed, he thought with resigned grim.

He had stood by the door, relishing what would probably be his last moment of anonymity, when he had heard the voice of a very young girl.

What was a girl doing at his cabin?

He had thrown open the door to see a bedraggled looking youth wearing clothing more appropriate for a night inside than one in the middle of the wilderness.

Then she had said his name with relief. Remus would have sworn that there wasn’t a soul who could show up at his doorstep with anything short of horror. But he looked closer, and he had known her.

Now Harriet was here, and he didn’t know what to do. The moon was thankfully not the problem. It was a new moon, and the wolf inside him was blessedly silent. He doubted that the wolf would want to hurt Harriet in any case. She was pack, the only part of his pack that was left. The werewolf side of him that existed even in the light of day would relish being near her.

No, the issue was that he didn’t know who to get in contact with. He was aware that Severus Snape was her guardian. Harriet had written that Lily had named Severus in her will. While he had never liked Snape, he knew all about his post wartime record which had led to the capture of many Death Eaters. The spy that had helped finish the war.

He should contact Severus Snape that his ward was here. Something Harriet had said made him pause. He hadn’t understood much of what Harriet had communicated. Sleep had muffled her voice and slurred her words, but he was certain that she had described arguing with Severus.

Remus Lupin was a journeyman of two trades. Zoology under his father and Defensive Magic under Alastor Moody. He had dreamed of following in his father’s footsteps, hunting down boggarts and malevolent spirits. But that wasn’t to be. Between war and his own biology, Remus Lupin was a knowledgable wizard full of potential who would never reach that potential. So he knew magical exhaustion when he saw it.

There weren’t many ways that Harriet Potter could have appeared at his doorstep. Just outside his ward line if he were to guess. Accidental apparition did happen, but it was very rare. Harriet had told him about her magical core, had explained without really explaining, that she had experienced a horrible childhood. An overly expanded magical core would explain apparition, but what had triggered the outburst?

He would need more information to be sure, but he could guess Snape. Arguing with Snape had put Harriet in enough distress that she had accidentally apparated without a destination in mind. Remus assumed that she had thought of a person, the more complex version of Destination. Thinking of
people led to splinching more often than not, and was not encouraged by any sane witch or wizard.

He found himself wishing for Lily and James. It was an old longing painted new colors now that Harriet was before him. Lily, James, and Harriet had been a sun in the darkness. His pack and the tie that bound the Mauraders together after school. Lily would know what to do about her daughter. James would have defended his daughter from any harm that would befall her. They were the protection that Harriet deserved.

They were dead. Their protection all used up by a madman and their closest friend betraying them.

The broken remnants that had been left behind; an abused young girl, a broken werewolf, and Peter’s little finger. Where was the bright life that had seemed so promising when they had danced at Lily and Jame’s wedding? All gone to the darkness.

He waved his wand to activate the floo. He needed to contact Severus. He was probably worried about where Harriet had gotten off to.

Severus had nearly sprinted up to Dumbledore’s office. Blast and Blast again. Bugger, bugger, fucking hell.

How in God’s bloody green earth had Harriet apparated at Hogwarts? It wasn’t possible. Those wards had been strengthened over generations of headmasters and headmistresses. Severus had even added to the wards himself. They were a complicated web with so many layers that it was simply impossible to break through them at this point. Expanded magical core or not, it was not possible.

He came to the gargoyle, shouted an infernal sweet at it, and was heading up the stairs at a breakneck pace.

Dumbledore was sitting at his desk looking benign.

“How in God’s bloody green earth had Harriet apparated at Hogwarts? It wasn’t possible. Those wards had been strengthened over generations of headmasters and headmistresses. Severus had even added to the wards himself. They were a complicated web with so many layers that it was simply impossible to break through them at this point. Expanded magical core or not, it was not possible.”

He was panting, and gasped out, “Harriet has apparated. I don’t know where.”

“Hmmm….” the Headmaster said through pursed lips. “Well, I suppose if it was any day it would be today.”

“What would be today,” Severus growled, feeling frustrated that he had apparently chosen the exact wrong moment to bare his soul to Harriet.

“It is the 212th day of the year,” answered Dumbledore as if it explained everything. Which it bloody well didn’t.

“And?” Snape barked.

“Do you know the strongest and weakest day of the wards at Hogwarts?” Dumbledore asked instead.

“It shouldn’t matter which days are the strongest or weakest. Harriet has disappeared and we are at bloody Hogwarts. It isn’t possible!”

“It isn’t on a normal day. But today is the 212th. And as such the wards are at their weakest. While your average wizard would not be able to apparate even now, I imagine if a witch with a
sufficiently expanded magical core were under enough distress she might be able to manage it.”

Snape slumped down in a chair. “Bloody arithmancy.”

“Luckily, Miss. Potter would not be able to get too far without my knowing.” Dumbledore told him with a reassuring smile. “The wards do have a tracking spell on anyone who does manage to apparate. It alerts the Headmaster where the individual has gotten off to. Like a string one can follow.”

“So you know where she has gone?” Snape asked feeling frustrated that Dumbledore hadn’t given him that information to begin with.

“Mmm… I did a small spell to see where she got off to. Yorkshire as it turns out.”

“And what is in Yorkshire?” Severus could feel a migraine coming on.

Dumbledore answered his question with a question. “What were you discussing with Harriet that caused her to run away?”

Severus felt cold and hot all at once. “There was a natural opening to discuss my involvement in her parent’s death. She had a right to know.”

Dumbledore looked grim. “It would have been easier if you had never told her Severus. Trust can be so easily fractured.”

“It would break completely if I didn’t discuss it with her. One day she will know all of it, she needed to know my involvement before then.”

“Perhaps not the strategy I would have suggested,” Dumbledore said. His eyes did not hold a twinkle.

“It isn’t about strategy. It’s about Harriet Potter deserving to know the truth about her life.”

“She is twelve years old, Severus, and she is not her mother.”

“I know she isn’t Lily. She is her own bloody person. You can’t seem to grasp that her very life might be threatened by her not knowing things. Leaving her ignorant like a lamb to the slaughter.”

The energy around Dumbledore took on a decidedly different tone, heavy and frustrated. “No Severus, I have had enough of lambs to slaughter. Harriet is no sacrifice. She is so young. Forgive an old man his sentiments. His… desire for a child to live in ignorant innocence as long as possible.”

“It is a mistake.”

“So was telling Harriet about your involvement. She may never trust you again. She may demand a new guardian. And what then, Severus? Who can we trust with the safety of Harriet Potter? What if she refuses to come back here with you?”

“She may not have a choice, Headmaster. Whether she likes it or not, she is my charge.”

Dumbledore didn’t look so sure. “We will see, Severus. As for where Harriet is, it is my belief that she is with Remus Lupin.”

Severus mentally did the lunar calculation and was relieved that it was not a full moon. He didn’t want Harriet to experience the horror of confronting a werewolf.
“Oh, and look. Here is Remus now no doubt,” Dumbledore said as his grate turned green.

“Headmaster, sorry to intrude but I’m looking for...” Remus Lupin's head began in greeting to Dumbledore. “Oh good, and Severus. I was looking for you.”

“Have you,” Severus said feeling his lips curl into a snarl.

“Yes. Harriet is here. She’s absolutely knackered. I tried to floo in at your home, but you weren’t there.”

“I have not been to Cokeworth for several weeks.”

Lupin looked confused. “Harriet didn’t apparate from Cokeworth?”

“Oh no,” Dumbledore said cheerfully. “I’m afraid that a combination of lay lines, arithmetic chance, and a rather heated conversation with Severus here let Harri apparate out of Hogwarts.”

“Oh yes, the 212th day of the year,” Lupin muttered. No bloody way. How did the mutt know that? “Lily got a kick out of it you know,” he said with a sad smile. “Said the date had to do with why labor was so draining.”

Lily had known. Of course she had. While Severus had taken Care of Magical Creatures, Lily had taken up Arithmancy. She would have known the significance of her daughter’s birthday.

“In any case, Harriet is sleeping now. I’d wager from the degree of magical exhaustion she’ll be out for the rest of the night. She seemed… distressed, Severus.”

“Yes, she would be. I doubt that Harriet will want to return to Hogwarts in the morning.” Snape said briskly like it didn’t bother him. Of course it did, but maybe what Harriet needed was a cooling off period. What had she been saying before all of this devolved? That she wanted to spend time with her friends?

“I will attempt to make arrangements with the Weasleys,” he said with more surety than he felt.

“Oh, Fabian and Gideon's sister?” Lupin asked with a grin. “How is Molly Prewett these days?”

“Molly Weasley is quite well,” Dumbledore said with happy ease. “Seven children you know. Very auspicious. The last one is starting Hogwarts this year.”

“Seven children? Good Lord. I suppose I knew that she had five. Fabian and Gideon loved to joke about her twins.”

“All well and good,” Severus snapped. What a hellish evening it had been. “I will be in contact in the morning. I will see if Molly and Arthur Weasley don’t mind another running around with their brood.”

“Yes… well.” Lupin didn’t know where to go from there clearly. While Severus knew intellectually that Remus Lupin had never attempted to kill him, that had never stopped the deep seeded dislike that he felt for the man. A werewolf was dangerous.

“Good day, Lupin,” Severus said firmly.

Lupin glanced at Dumbledore as if to see if the other man was done with him as well. A slight nod from the headmaster and the infernal werewolf was gone.

“You are running away, Severus,” Dumbledore told him firmly.
“A strategic pause,” Snape rebutted, and he walked out of the office.

“May 1st,” Dumbledore called after him. “If you’re curious about the day the wards are strongest.”

He hadn’t been.

Harri woke from a deep sleep. She came back to reality slowly, in the soft gentle way that occurs when you have no where particular to be and nothing that needs to be immediately done. The bed she slept on was soft and comfortable. The blankets were thin, and in a colder season, Harri might have felt chilled. But for the height of summer, it was near perfect.

She opened her eyes and groped around for her glasses. She found them on a side table and put them on while sitting up to look around. It was not a richly furnished home. There was only one large room in the cabin, with two doors. Harri assumed that one door led to a bathroom. There was the area she had slept in, with the bed, night table, and chest of drawers. A very worn trunk was at the bottom of the bed. In the back corner adjacent to the bed was a small sitting area. That was where Remus Lupin currently slept. He was sprawled on a couch that had several patches in it and was a faded green. There was an armchair that looked slightly newer that was next to the fire. He also had a bookcase, which was the only area of the cabin that did not look spendthrift. Books on books filled it. For a personal collection, it was very impressive.

In the front of the cabin was a small table and chairs and a kitchen that held an ice chest, stovetop, and a second fireplace. A large cast iron pot was hanging in the grate.

Harri tried to remember what had been said last night. Had she explained Snape to Lupin? She didn’t think she had. With a twisting feeling in her gut, Harri couldn’t help but wonder if she was supposed to keep Snape’s revelation to herself? It didn’t feel like something she could keep quiet about. She wanted to shout, scream, and decompress. But… she also felt a certain loyalty to Snape. Which felt wrong. She didn’t want to feel anything for him at the moment. He had sold her parents out, and he didn’t even have the grace to feel shame about selling out a family to Voldemort. It was about her mother. It was always about her mother.

It would be all about her father with Remus Lupin too, probably. Though the two had written several letters, Harri couldn’t let herself pretend that an adult was interested in anything more than Harri as she related to her parents. It didn’t feel like anyone wanted Harri the person. Not even her friends who hadn’t bothered to write her all summer.

Harri eventually got out of the bed and wandered over to the ice chest to see about some breakfast. If anything had ever put the Dursley’s in a good mood it was breakfast. When Remus Lupin woke shortly, it was to the sight of eggs and bacon being set on the table. He rubbed his tired eyes.

“You cooked,” he stated.

Harri shrugged, sitting down at her place. “It’s not hard.”

“No, but it is rather muggle of you. My mother used to make breakfast.” There was a touch of nostalgia in his voice.

“Wizards don’t cook?” Harri asked, feeling the now familiar furrow of otherness.

Lupin shook his head. “Not really. Many have House-elves like at Hogwarts. And others use magic to speed things along.”

“House Elf? There are elves at Hogwarts?”
“They’re a magical creature that is bound to a home. Or school, in Hogwarts’ case. Hogwarts has the largest number of house elves in England. Over a hundred, I think. We used to sneak into the kitchens at school and they were always happy to spoil students.”

The two ate breakfast with the mild chatter that fills silence that is avoiding an awkward conversation. It was Lupin who broke first.

“Harri… I spoke with Severus last night. He seems fairly certain that you will not wish to return to Hogwarts for the summer.”

“Not particularly,” Harri replied with pursed lips.

“We are just waiting for word then. He said he would be in contact with Molly Weasley about you visiting for the rest of summer.”

“I don’t know if Ron would even want me to visit,” Harri told him glumly. “I haven’t heard from my friends all summer.”

“I don’t know if you should rely on teenaged boys to write. They’re notoriously bad at it.”

That cheered her more than Snape’s commentary on the matter. Lupin was probably right about that… but Hermione. “My friend Hermione hasn’t written either.”

“Hermione Granger, your muggle-born friend? Does she have an owl?”

Harri felt shamefaced. “No.”

“A simple misunderstanding then,” Lupin said. “Nothing to worry about. I’ve found that most conflict between friends and family is simply a misunderstanding.”

He paused, waiting to see if she would fill in the conversation. “I don’t… I don’t think I’m supposed to talk about it. There are secrets about me… and…” she couldn’t keep speaking. There was a lump in her throat.

“I know a thing or two about secrets, Harriet,” Lupin told her with a grim smile. “For years I hid my nature from my friends at Hogwarts. I said my mother was sick. That I had to go home and visit her. Eventually, they caught on. Do you know what they did?”

Harri shook her head.

“They became animagus. Your father literally mastered complex transfiguration as a fifth year so he could spend the full moons with me. Harriet, it was the happiest time of my life. To have my friends while I was transformed and to know that they would stop me from hurting anyone. I can remember those times more clearly than any other transformation. They were my pack. You don’t need to tell me your secret. It is none of my business. But I urge you, share with your friends. Don’t make the same mistakes I did and wait for years. Your friends will surprise you.”

Harri opened her mouth, ready to let it all spill out. Everything about Voldemort as her soulmate, Snape selling her parents out, and the revelation that there was a secret bit of information that had motivated Voldemort to go after her family.

But before she could say a word the fire in the grate turned green, and Snape’s head appeared.

Her mouth closed with an audible click.
Harri couldn’t bring herself to look at Professor Snape’s head in the fireplace. She ran out of the cabin before he could say a word. Let Lupin work it out. She couldn’t handle him. She felt her magic, still depleted as it was, start to hum in agitation.

Meditate.

Meditate Harri. Clear your mind. Gain control. She had no success. She couldn’t clear her mind and she was not in control. Her magic was too weak to do anything much though, so she sat down on the grass and let it whirl around her. She kept trying to settle her mind, but it wouldn’t settle. Her heart was beating in her ears, and she felt like she was seeing white.

But really those were the tears that were filling her eyes and blurring her vision.

She felt so weak. Here she was, crying over Professor Snape. Hadn’t he been the one to betray her trust? Hadn’t he been the one in the wrong here? So why was she crying like she had lost someone? Like he mattered to her.

Because he did.

The realization hit her like a truck. Somehow, over the last year, between potions lessons, memory sharing, and a joyful summer in Africa, Severus Snape had become family to Harri. In a way that was different than her friends or any other adult she knew.

Harri realized that she hadn’t just trusted Snape because of her mother. She had started to trust Snape for his own sake. All of this revelation was like the rug had been ripped out from under her.

Some minutes later Remus Lupin joined her outside. It was a warm summer day even in the early morning.

“Severus has arranged for you to go the Weasleys on the 4th. He thought you might like a few days here. He sent along a few of your things and said he’d get the rest to the Weasley’s by the afternoon you get there.”

Harri nodded, staring at the grass.

“Would you like to tell me what happened Harriet?” Lupin asked.

Harri shook her head but told him anyway. “He told Voldemort about my parents. Or… he told Voldemort something that made him want to attack my parents.”

Remus sat beside her in the sun. “Yes, I’d heard something like that from Dumbledore. Years ago.” Harri looked up at Remus.

“Do you know about it too? Whatever it is that made Voldemort want to kill me?” Harri asked.

“No, not specifically. Your parents knew, and they went into hiding. They used something called the Fidelius Charm to hide from Voldemort. Sirius Black, your godfather, was the Secret Keeper. The secret was your parent’s location. Only the Secret Keeper could divulge the secret. So even though I knew where they were, I couldn’t tell anyone. In the end Harriet, it was Voldemort who killed them and Sirius who betrayed them. Snape didn’t know it was your mother he was betraying.”
“I’m not upset because it was my parents,” she told Remus softly. “I mean, of course, I feel upset... but that isn’t all of it. He explained to me that he didn’t know it would be my mum. He only regretted it because it WAS her. Not because some other family would have been killed.”

“They were dark times, Harriet. Truly dark. No one knew who to trust. I was approached several times by the Dark to join. The werewolf who bit me, Fenrir Greyback, he was always trying to call my wolf to their side. There was a pull,” he told Harri seriously.

“I loved your parents. I was grateful to Dumbledore for letting me attend Hogwarts. I don’t believe in Pureblood supremacy because my mother was a muggle. Yet even I was pulled and attracted to the Dark. The darkness inside of me wanted to go and join that pack.”

“Are you trying to excuse Snape?” Harri asked, shying away from Lupin.

“No. It was wrong. He was wrong. What I am saying… oh I don’t know if I’m even saying it right. Just that things were complicated. It was like a spell of darkness was being woven around the whole country... like a net. And we were all just fish, drowning in it, being pulled along without a say in the matter.”

“But you did have a say. You stayed true to the light,” Harri said with conviction.

“I stayed true to my friends,” Lupin corrected. “I am a werewolf Harriet, my magic is not light and never will be.”

“I don’t… I don’t think I understand.”

“No. And I hope you never do. I’m not saying this well,” Lupin rubbed his face. “The dark called to us. Those of us with darker magical cores were more susceptible. I suppose that’s why Sirius fell in the end. Severus Snape… he is a Dark Wizard, Harriet. A very powerful one. I don’t know how much agency he had.”

“I don’t want to talk about this,” Harri said firmly. “Let’s talk about something else, please.”

Lupin didn’t say more about it. He turned the subject to brighter topics. Of her father as a schoolboy and tales of tricks from childhood. It was lighthearted. Harri listened to that, and tried to forget about the dark times that would ruin the lives of the four boys called ‘The Marauders’.

Ron’s house looked as though it had once been a large stone pigpen, but extra rooms had bee added here and there until it was several stories high and so crooked it looked as though it was held up by magic (which, Harri reminded herself, it probably was). Four or five chimneys were perched on top of the red roof. A lopsided sign stuck in the ground near the entrance read, THE BURROW. Around the front door lay a jumble or rubber boots and a very rusty cauldron. Several fat brown chickens were pecking their way around the yard.

It looked like a home. Not the neat prim lawns of Privet Drive or the depressing gloom of Spinner’s End. This looked like a place where there was mess, clutter, and happiness.

“It’s wonderful,” Harri breathed. Lupin looked at her with a lopsided grin.

“You’re just like your father,” he said with a chuckle. “He always liked places like this too.”

“But he had parents... a home.”

“Yes,” Lupin agreed. “But the Potters… well, he and Sirius both shared a very strict upbringing.
All houselfs and distant parenting.”

“Was your house like this then?” Harri asked.

“A bit. My father hunted ghouls and magical creatures. My mother was a muggle, but she let him get away with all sorts of magical modifications. For a time it was a very charmed childhood.”

“But then…” and she couldn’t bring herself to say anything about his lycanthropy.

“But then I was bitten, and things changed. My home was still very magical. But my mother never understood what had happened to her son. My father felt nothing but guilt. I liked having my friends for the summer because my parents were much more like themselves before all that.”

They were approaching the front door when Lupin turned to her and said seriously, “I’m sure it goes without saying Harri but I’d appreciate-”

“If I didn’t tell anyone. I won’t. It’s not my secret. I know about those, remember.”

Lupin looked as if he wanted to keep talking, and like he wanted to give Harri time to confess her secrets to him. It had been three days of carefully dancing around each other, pretending that they weren’t wounded animals. Instead of asking he shook his head as if to clear his mind and took the final few paces to the door to knock.

A short, plump, kind-faced woman answered the door. Ron’s mother looked the way a mother should, Harri thought. She was covered in flour, her hair was pulled away from her face in a messy sort of bun, and she wore a worn frock and a flowered apron. Her wand was sticking out of the pocket.

“I’m very pleased to see you, Harri dear,” she started. “Come in and have some breakfast. Would you like to join too, Remus?”

“No, no. I’ve got work shortly.”

“Well do let me at least send you off with something. I’ve got some toast just finished. I’ll make something to go.”

Remus clearly knew that he would be rude to refuse, so he joined Harri as they made their way inside.

“That’s really kind of you, Molly,” he said.

The kitchen was small and rather cramped. There was a scrubbed wooden table and chairs in the middle, and Harri sat down on the edge of her seat, looking around. She had never been in a fully magical house before.

The clock on the wall opposite her had only one hand and no numbers at all. Written around the edge were things like Time to make tea, Time to feed the chickens, and You’re late. Books were stacked three deep on the mantlepiece, books with titles like Charm Your Own Cheese, Enchantments in Baking, and One Minute Feasts- It’s Magic! And unless Harri’s ears were deceiving her, the old radio next to the sink had just announced that coming up was “Witching Hour, with the popular singer sorceress, Celestina Warbeck.”

Mrs. Weasley was clattering around, making Lupin a breakfast to go.

“Now I didn’t tell Ron you were coming, Harri dear. I thought it would be a nice surprise. I sent
the boys out to degnome the garden, so they should be in any minute.”

Harri’s heart sank a little. Ron didn’t know she was here. What if all her fears were confirmed and he didn’t want her? What if he had decided that she was more trouble than she was worth? He hadn’t written all summer…

Mrs. Weasley flicked her wand casually at the dishes in the sink, which began to clean themselves, clinking in the background. She wrapped up the toast, bacon, and sausage for Remus and handed it to him.

“Thank you so much for bringing Harri along,” she said with a smile. “Ron was so worried when he hadn’t heard from her all summer, but I’m glad she got to visit an old family friend.”

Ron hadn’t heard from her all summer? That wasn’t right.

“Oh yes,” Remus said. “Well… It was good for her to visit. But vacation over for me.” He turned to leave. “I’ll be seeing you Harri, and do figure out what’s going on with your post. I didn’t receive any letters from you either this summer.”

He waved a merry goodbye and left out the kitchen door. Mrs. Weasley turned to Harri. “Now dear, you do eat up. I know you’ve been at Hogwarts and with Professor Snape, but you’re still too thin. I’m sure, being a man engrossed in his research, Professor Snape didn’t always remember to stop for food.” She looked pointedly out the kitchen window towards a shed.

“Does Mr. Weasley get engrossed in a project?” she asked.

“Oh indeed. You should see the things he gets up to. He has a car that… well, he really shouldn’t you know, but being the head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Department it’s for purely research purposes, but he has figured out all sorts of things to do to our Ford Anglia.”

“I had a dream once about flying in a motorcycle,” Harri commented. “Hagrid said that he got me to the Dursley’s that way, so it’s more of memory I think. Is it that sort of enchantment?”

“Yes, a bit like that,” Mrs. Weasley said with a put upon smile. “It isn’t of much interest to me, if I do say so. But Arthur likes it, and a man should have a hobby. They get a bit underfoot without one.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Harri answered, unsure of how to discuss things like men.

“Of course not, you’re much too young for things like that,” she said glancing down at Harri’s wrist covering. Silver and unmatched.

“Do you have any questions about that sort of thing,” she asked abruptly. “I can imagine it isn’t the sort of thing you want to discuss with a male professor.”

“Ron and Neville have done their best to fill me and Hermione in,” Harri told her.

Mrs. Weasley didn’t look at all uncomfortable, which was new for Harri. Usually, Ron was bright pink. “Oh Ron,” she said with a smile. “He hates talking about those sorts of things. I’ve no idea why. Probably his brothers. And it is in poor taste to discuss it glibly. But for educational reasons, there is nothing to be ashamed of.” Harri’s own cheeks were a bit pink, and she glanced at Mrs. Weasley’s golden cover.

“Let me show you,” she said. She unlatched the cover, and showed her wrist to Harri. “You’re the twin’s sister?” was there in a messy scrawl.
“Arthur and I met before Hogwarts. We’re both from old families. Has Ron mentioned the quill?” she asked Harri. Harri nodded. “Well, Arthur is two years older than I am. He and my brothers were in the same year at Hogwarts. I ran into him while shopping the year before I started school. Oh, he makes fun of me, but my answer was just ‘Yes.’ His parents had stopped his quill recording, and he had no idea it was me for years. And then, when I got my wand and checked I saw that it was Arthur Weasley. I didn’t tell him right off, I just assumed he knew!”

“But he was nice about it, when you did tell him?”

“Arthur doesn’t have a mean bone in his body,” she replied with a pleasant smile. “By my third year, I was spitting mad at him. I thought he was ignoring me on purpose. I marched right up to him and told him that it was his duty to take me to Hogsmeade and I wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Harri laughed. It felt good to laugh about someone’s soulmark for once.

Mrs. Weasley put her cover back on. “Usually it’s straight forward,” she affirmed to Harri. “Usually you know right away. But you didn’t have a recorder quill. Are you… do you need any help with it all? Any questions? You don’t really need to worry about it, being so young. But it must have been a shock to find out about.”

“Well… maybe.” Harri said. Ron’s mother was very warm and clearly wanted Harri to be comfortable. “It seems like everyone meets their soulmate at school. Is that typical?”

“Yes and no. There is a book,” Mrs. Weasley tapped her chin with her wand as she thought. “I’ll have to look for it when we go shopping for school supplies. But it goes into some of the research. A soulmate is not necessarily the only person you could be happy with. It’s about magical compatibility. Usually, it is someone around your own age and not too far off geographically. Your magic searches out the best fit, and bonds with that.”

“Are there exceptions though?”

“There are always exceptions,” Mrs. Weasley said. “Why my friend Abigale must have been fifteen years younger than Sturgis. It’s a great mystery in a way. Because she wouldn’t have been born for his magic to find, and the words were there just the same when he was eleven. Magic works in mysterious ways. But we know it can transcend time, there are Time-turners. But there is no reason to think you’d be an exception Harri. It’s very rare to have an age gap over five years.”

“Yes, well…” Harri trailed off. Lost, she was always lost when it came to human interaction. Mrs. Weasley was enjoyable to talk to. It was relieving to speak to an adult who wasn’t shying away from a taboo topic. Still… she didn’t really know Mrs. Weasley. Warm and motherly as she was.

Harri was saved the necessity of continuing on though when Ron, Fred, George, and Percy all came into the kitchen.

“They’ll just come back.” Ron was grousing as they entered the kitchen. “They love it here… Dad’s too soft with them!” All four boys immediately grabbed plates.

The boys didn’t notice Harri sitting at the table. They had a sister, so seeing their mother speak to a redhead girl at the table wasn’t worth much attention as they were filling their plates high with food.

It wasn’t until Fred turned to her to say, “Pass the salt Gi- Harri?” that the boys looked up to notice that it wasn’t Ginny Weasley sitting with them.
“Harri!” Ron exclaimed, bouncing up from his seat! “Blimey, when did you get here?”

“About fifteen minutes ago,” Harri said with a smile.

“So that’s why she made us go degnome!” George accused, glaring at his mother.

“She usually FEEDS US first,” Fred added pointedly.

Mrs. Weasley ignored them, putting away plates with her back turned to the group.

Just then, the front door slammed.

“He’s back!” said George. “Dad’s home!”

Mr. Weasley came into the kitchen and slumped onto a kitchen chair. He took his glasses off and closed his eyes. He was a thin man, going bald, but the little hair he had was as red as any of his children’s. He was wearing long green robes, which were dusty and travel-worn.

“What a night,” he mumbled, groping for the teapot. “Nine raids. Nine! And old Mundungus Fletcher tried to put a hex on me when I had my back turned…”

Mr. Weasley took a long gulp of tea and sighed.

“Find anything, Dad?” Fred asked eagerly.

“All I got were a few shrinking door keys and a biting kettle,” yawned Mr. Weasley. “There was some pretty nasty stuff that wasn’t my department, though. Mortlake was taken away for questioning about some extremely odd ferrets, but that’s the Committee on Experimental Charms, thank goodness…”

The committee on what? It sounded like the Magical Ministry was just as bureaucratic as the muggle one. Endless department and committees.

“Why would anyone bother making door keys shrink?” asked George.

“Just Muggle-baiting,” sighed Mr. Weasley. “Sell them a key that keeps shrinking to nothing so they can never find it when they need it… Of course, it’s very hard to convict anyone because no Muggle would admit their key keeps shrinking- they’ll insist they just keep losing it. Bless them, they’ll go to any lengths to ignore magic, even if it’s staring them in the face… but the things our lot have taken to enchanting, you wouldn’t believe-”

Muggle baiting? People still did that? Harri had known from Draco Malfoy’s attitude towards Hermione that lots of wizards didn’t approve of Muggles, even a decade after the fall of Voldemort. Did they really go out of their way to mildly frustrate muggles? For what purpose? It just seemed mean spirited instead of true evil. In a way that was worse. Who would go out of their way to mildly inconvenience muggles? It seemed like far more energy than it was worth, even with blood prejudice involved.

“Enough of that dear,” said Mrs. Weasley putting a plate of food in front of her husband. “We have a guest,”

Mr. Weasley blearily looked around at the table of redheads. He rubbed his eyes and put his glasses back on to discover Harri sitting in their midst.

“Oh, hello!” he said rather more cheerfully than he had looked a moment ago. “One of the boy’s
friends from school?”

“Yes sir,” Harri replied. “Harri.”

“Good lord, is it Harriet Potter? Very pleased to meet you, Ron’s told us so much about you.”

“Not all bad I hope,” Harri replied trying to ignore Mr. Weasley’s glance at her forehead. She had talked to Lavender and Parvati about getting bangs last year, but they insisted that it wouldn’t be flattering with her face shape.

“Well there was that business with the Philosopher’s Stone,” Mrs. Weasley said not unkindly. “We rather wish you four hadn’t been put into a position like that.”

“Ron’s explained why you all went down there. I quite see his point. But perhaps next time find an adult who will listen.”

Harri felt her cheeks flame. Of course Ron’s parents wouldn’t be happy that she had dragged Ron into danger.

“Mum, Dad! I’ve told you a million times that there wasn’t an adult who wouldn’t listen. Harri didn’t put us up to it either. She told us four times that she would go alone.”

“And we’ve told you, Ron,” said Mrs. Weasley with a very serious face, “That we are proud of you for standing by your friends. It was very brave and it would have made your uncles proud. But rushing into danger as an untrained wizard can be very dangerous. We read the medical report. You could have been very seriously hurt when that chess piece hit you.”

“But I wasn’t!” Ron insisted.

“We can be done with that conversation,” Mr. Weasley said, rubbing his eyes again and finishing his breakfast. “I’m off to bed. Where is Ginny? I’d like to say hello before I go to sleep.”

“I’ll fetch her,” said Mrs. Weasley, heading into the next room and (as Harri could hear) up the stairs.

“I really am sorry,” Harri said in a hushed voice to Mr. Weasley. “I asked them to go back. But I wouldn’t have made it if it weren’t for Ron. I’m rubbish at chess.”

Ron’s ears went pink at the praise.

“We don’t blame you, Harriet,” Mr. Weasley said, turning to her. “Of course we don’t. We lived through those times. And the fact that you… with You-Know-Who. It’s almost beyond belief.”

“Well you know Wood really was beyond belief, Harri,” Goerge began.

“He kept badgering to have the final postponed,” continued Fred.

“Surely having our seeker in the hospital because the Defense teacher turned evil...” carried on George.

“Was reason enough to wait for the match!” they finished in unison.

Harri laughed, “I’ve apologized to Wood thirty times!” she insisted.

“Well now we will hear all about how we should have won,” Fred told her solemnly. “It’s all your fault. He’ll be fanatical all year.”
"Say hello to your father," Mrs. Weasley said frog marching Ginny into the room. She had the same shade of hair as her brothers, but it was very pretty and long. She had bright brown eyes and a rather terrified expression on her face.

"Hello Dad," she said before trying to turn and run.

Mrs. Weasley stopped her. "And this is Harri. She’s in the year ahead of you at school."

"Hi Ginny," Harri said, meeting her frightened eyes. "I’ve heard a lot about you from Ron." She hadn’t really, but it seemed like the right thing to say.

Ginny squeaked and escaped her mother, running back up the stairs.

"Weird," Ron said looking at the spot where Ginny had disappeared. "She’s never this shy. She never shuts up normally -"

"Ron," his mother said sharply.

"Sorry," he said in an automatic reply.

"You’ll be in Ginny’s room, Harri." Mrs. Weasly told her.

"Mum! Why can’t Harri stay with me?" Ron asked in frustration.

"Because she’s a girl, Ron," Mrs. Weasley snapped back.

"Now Molly dear, surely that isn’t-" her glare stopped Mr. Weasley’s words.

"That’s all right," Harri said with a smile. "I’m sure we’ll get along fine. Professor Snape said he’d send along my things this afternoon."

"Good, good," said Mr. Weasley getting up. "I’m off to bed," he said kissing his wife on the cheek. He left the room, and Harri stood to help clear the table.

"None of that Harri, you’re our guest! Ron why don’t you show her around?" and the two were pushed out of the kitchen. Harri could hear Mrs. Weasley bossing Fred and George into helping her clean.

"I should have you around more often," Ron told her beaming. "I never get out of chores."

Harri laughed as Ron led her up the stairs to his room. They climbed five flights of stairs before they reached a door with peeling paint and a small plaque on it saying, RONALD’S ROOM.

Harri stepped in, her head almost touching the sloping ceiling and blinked. It was like walking into a furnace. Nearly everything in Ron’s room seemed to be a violent shade of orange: the bedspread, the walls, even the ceiling. Then Harri realized that Ron had covered nearly every inch of the shabby wallpaper with posters of the same seven witches and wizards, all wearing bright orange robes, carrying broomsticks, and waving energetically.

"Your Quidditch team?" asked Harri.

"The Chudley Cannons," said Ron, pointing at the orange bedspread, which was emblazoned with two giant black C’s and a speeding cannonball. "Ninth in the league."

Ron’s school spellbooks were stacked untidily in a corner, next to a pile of comics that all seemed to feature The Adventures of Martin Miggs, the Mad Muggle. Ron’s magic wand was lying on top
of a fish tank full of frog spawn on the windowsill, next to his fat gray rat, Scabbers, who was snoozing in a patch of sun.

Harri stepped over a pack of self-shuffling playing cards on the floor and looked out the tiny window. In the field far below she could see a gang of creatures sneaking one by one through the Weasley’s head.

“Are those gnomes?” she asked Ron.

He looked out the window too. “Yup, they never stay away for long.”

She turned to look at Ron who as watching her almost nervously, as though waiting for her opinion. “It’s a bit small,” said Ron quickly. “Not like what you have at Hogwarts. And I’m right underneath the ghoul in the attic; he’s always banging on the pipes and groaning…”

“Ron I lived in a cupboard for ten years of my life. Everything about your family home is miles better than that. It’s the best house I’ve ever been in”

Ron’s ear went pink.

“I’m glad you’re here!” Ron said at last to Harri. “I was getting worried that Snape had killed you after all when you didn’t answer any of my letters. I thought it was Errol’s fault at first-”

“You didn’t get any of my letters?”

“No,” Ron said with a confused look. “Neville, Hermione, and I all thought that you were too busy in Africa at first. But then there was that article in the Prophet about Snape bringing back a Runespoor for research, and we figured you’d start answering. But you didn’t.”

Harri furrowed her brows. “I wrote all of you letters. All summer.”

“Blimey, that’s weird. What could stop your mail like that?”

Harri just shrugged, knowing less about owl post than Ron did.

“I thought it was Errol. He’s awful. I tried to get Hermes-”

“Who?”

“The owl Mum and Dad bought Percy when he was made perfect.”

“But he didn’t lend him to you?” Harri asked.

“No. He’s been acting strange all summer. Fred and George keep trying to break into his room to find out what he’s doing. But anyway, yeah. We hadn’t heard from you, and we were all worried.”

“I thought that maybe you didn’t want to talk to me anymore,” Harri told Ron not meeting his eyes. “That after all the stuff with Voldemort-” Ron flinched.

“Nah, mate,” Ron told her firmly. “It takes more than a Dark Lord to scare me off. Spiders though, if it had been spiders there would have been a question.”

It was Harri’s turn to blush.
Ginny Weasley was odd.

She skittered around Harri like a fearful animal. Every time Harri entered a room, Ginny rushed to exit. When Harri went to Ginny’s room to sleep the room was already dark and Ginny was completely covered in blankets. The pallet that Harri slept on by Ginny’s bed was comfortable, and Harri didn’t mind sleeping there at all, but she missed the easy conversation of her dorm.

Lavender and Parvati would usually stay up talking late, their giggles and soft whispers a lullaby to Harri. On her other side, Hermione would usually be reading with a soft light glowing in the crack between curtains. After a particularly bad day or harsh dream, Hermione might even crawl into bed with Harri. Only a little older, but taller and more filled out, Hermione was soft where Harri was boney and sharp-angled.

That said, life at the Burrow was as different as possible from life on Privet Drive, Hogwarts, Spinner’s End, or Lupin’s cabin. The Weasley’s house was fit to burst with the strange and unexpected, filled with magic and laughter. It was the first homey home Harri had ever seen. Everyone at the Burrow seemed to like her, not just tolerate her presence. Even nervous Ginny seemed more in awe of Harri than opposed to her very existence.

Mrs. Weasley fusses over the state of Harri’s socks and tried to force her to eat third helpings at every meal. Mr. Weasley liked Harri to sit next to him at the dinner table so that he could bombard her with questions about life in the Muggle World, asking her to explain how things like plugs and the postal service worked. Harri was more than happy to discuss the post, and Mr. Weasley agreed that owls were largely a ridiculous method for transporting mail.

“Sadly, it’s the only thing that works with all the wards. You should see the trouble the Ministry has going to old guard’s homes to perform raids. They’ve been stockpiling highly illegal items for generations, and getting inside for an inspection takes more time than the inspection itself!”

Harri was also happy to show Mr. Weasley her guitar. The magical world had musical instruments, but they usually came enchanted to be self-playing, or at the very least helped your fingers move along the strings. It was like a cheat code in a video game. Mr. Weasley couldn’t believe how well Harri played (even if she missed several fingerings and had difficulty keeping to the tune of the song).

The ghoul in the attic howled and dropped pipes whenever he felt things were getting too quiet, and small explosions from Fred and George’s bedroom were considered perfectly normal. Like other wizarding homes, there wasn’t really a restriction for using magic outside of school. The magical trace that was placed on students could only detect magic in muggle areas. Hermione had ranted about it when they had received the note, and Neville had taken the time to explain that it didn’t actually affect anyone but Muggleborns and a few half-bloods.

Ginny started to calm down about a week after Harri arrived, and Harri was slowly coaxing whole sentences from the monosyllabic girl. The two ate breakfast one sunny morning, and Ginny only dropped her spoon twice while maintaining a conversation with Harri. Harri pretended to not notice any clumsiness that Ginny displayed.

Ron had explained on the second day, “She used to pretend to be you. The Girl-Who-Lived was her favorite bedtime story growing up, and she’d spend hours play acting. Don’t tell her I told you, she’d probably faint.”
“So it isn’t that she can’t stand me?” Harri had sighed with relief.

“Nah, mate. She worships the ground you walk on, more like.”

Harri made a face, “I’m sure I won’t live up.”

Ron just laughed, “Harri, you do realize that you took her big brother on an adventure to face down Voldemort all of three months ago.”

Harri stuck her tongue out at Ron, before throwing several cushions at him.

It was shortly after Mrs. Weasley served up a fresh round of bacon, that Mr. Weasley came to breakfast with the post.

“Letters from school,” said Mr. Weasley, passing Harri, Ron, Fred, George, and Ginny identical envelopes of yellowish parchment, addressed in green ink.

For a few minutes, there was a silence as they all read their letters. Harri’s told her to floo back to Hogwarts on August 31st. So much for riding the train with her friends, she thought with a grimace.

There was also a list of the new books she’d need for the coming year.

Second-Year Students Will Require

*The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2* by Miranda Goshawk

*Break with a Banshee* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Gadding with Ghouls* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Holidays with Hags* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Travels with Trolls* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Voyages with Vampires* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Wanderings with Werewolves* by Gilderoy Lockheart

*Year with the Yeti* by Gilderoy Lockheart

Fred, who had finished his own list, peered over at Harri’s.

“You’ve been told to get all Lockheart’s books too!” he said. “The new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher must be a fan- bet it’s a witch.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Harri said with a glare. Hermione was a fan of Lockheart, but Harri wasn’t. His too smiling picture on the back cover of Hermione’s copy of *Travels with Trolls* seemed very fake. He reminded her of a handsome version of Dudley, certain that he could get his way with just charm. Harri had read his Witch Weekly interviews with Lavender and Parvati with equal appall.
Mrs. Weasley was also glaring at Fred for his remark, and he quickly busied himself with the marmalade.

“That lot won’t come cheap,” said George, with a quick look at his parents. “Lockheart’s books are really expensive…”

“Well, we’ll manage,” said Mrs. Weasley, but she looked worried. “I expect we’ll be able to pick up a lot of Ginny’s things secondhand.”

Harri, who knew a thing or two about second-hand items, could see why Ginny was blushing from the roots of her flaming hair. Money, it was always money. Harri wondered if the Weasleys would accept money from her trust vault. Some kind of donation? Or could she race to the bookshop and buy all the Weasleys copies of Lockhart’s books before Mrs. Weasley could say no?

That plan seemed the easiest to instigate. And it prevented refusal. Would it be the right thing though? Harri knew that Ron was very prideful, and that money was the surest way to make him uncomfortable. Would a gift like that be embarrassing to the Weasleys? How could she frame it? As a thank you? As an apology for almost getting Ron killed?

There was no good way.

Maybe she could offer Ginny some of her clothes that didn’t fit anymore? Ginny was thin and short, so Harri’s old clothes would fit her. They weren’t even very worn. Harri, having grown up with so little, took obsessive care with her clothing. Harri had amazingly grown over the last year and would need to supplement her wardrobe, so really Ginny could take the things that didn’t fit. They would be nicer than what she would find at a second-hand store.

Harri was cut from her musings by Percy walking into the kitchen. He was already dressed, his Hogwarts’ prefect badge pinned to his summer vest.

“Morning all,” said Percy briskly.

He sat down in the only remaining chair but lept up again almost immediately, pulling from underneath him a molting, gray feather duster. At least, that was what Harri thought it was until she saw that it was breathing.

“Errol” said Ron, taking the limp owl from Percy’s hand and extracting a letter from under its wing. “Finally- he’s got Hermione’s answer. I wrote to her saying you had come to visit.”

Ron carried Errol to a perch just inside the back door and tried to stand him on it, but Errol flopped straight off again as Ron lay him on the braining board, muttering, “Pathetic.” Then he ripped open Hermione's letter and read it out loud.

_Dear Ron and Harri,_

_I hope everything went all right this summer for you Harri, Ron mentioned that you haven’t been receiving our letters and that really is such a shame. Have you figured out what is wrong with your post? I’ve been really worried about your Harri, it’s so unlike you. But then I wondered if you were feeling guilty about the end of the school year, and you really shouldn’t. I explained it all to my parents, and they quite agree that a world surrounded in bigatory is no place to live. I may have left out some of the more life-threatening parts._

_I’m very busy with schoolwork of course- “ How can she be?” Ron said in horror. “We’re on vacation!- and we’re going to London next Wednesday to buy my new books. Why don’t we meet in Diagon Alley? Send your reply soon, but it might be better if you used a different owl, because I_
think another delivery might finish your one off.

Let me know what’s happening as soon as you can. Love from Hermione.

“Well that fits in nicely, we can go and get all your things then, too,” said Mrs. Weasley, starting to clear the table. “What’re you all up to today?”

Harri, Ron, Fred, and George were planning to go up the hill to a small paddock the Weasleys owned. It was surrounded by trees that blocked it from view of the village below, meaning that they could practice Quidditch there, as long as they didn’t fly too high.

They couldn't use real Quidditch balls, which would have been hard to explain if they had escaped and flown away over the village, instead they threw apples for one another to catch. Harri’s Nimbus was the best broom whereas Ron’s old Shooting Star was often outstripped by passing butterflies. So they all switched to give everyone time with the better broom. Harri didn’t mind sharing at all, considering that she had never had anything of value to share before her speedy broom.

“Would you like to come Ginny?” Harri asked.

“Ginny can’t fly,” Ron said with a derisive snort.

“Yes, I can!” Ginny exclaimed. It was her first decisive statement in front of Harri.

This was apparently news to everyone in the room because Fred and George started to laugh. Ginny turned red.

“I’m sure she can!” Harri insisted.

“Ginny has never flown with us,” Ron said.

“I’ve flown on my own,” Ginny said quietly.

“Well it won’t be even numbers,” Ron muttered.

“That doesn’t matter. We can all take turns,” Harri said with real determination. If Ginny said that she could fly, well Harri believed her. It seemed like her brothers were mocking her because she was their little sister.

Five minutes later they were marching up the hill, broomsticks over their shoulders. They had asked Percy if he wanted to join them, but he had said he was busy. Harri had only seen Percy at mealtimes so far; he stayed shut in his room the rest of the time.

“Wish I knew what he was up to,” said Fred, frowning. “He’s not himself. His exam results came the day before you did; twelve O.W.L.s and he hardly gloated at all.”

George gave Harri a sidelong look, “Bill got twelve, too. If we’re not careful, we’ll have another Head Boy in the family. I don’t think I could stand the shame.”

Bill was the oldest Weasley brother. He and the next brother, Charlie, had already left Hogwarts. Harri had never met either of them but knew that Charlie was in Romania studying dragons and Bill in Egypt working for the wizard’s bank, Gringotts.

“Dunno how Mum and Dad are going to afford all our school stuff this year,” said George after a while. “Five sets of Lockhart books! Any Ginny needs robes and a wand and everything…”
“I was thinking about that,” Harri commented. The Weasleys all stopped in their tracks. “Well, I have some clothes that don’t fit anymore. I must have grown four inches last school year. Ginny could have my old robes. If you want.”

Ginny was so pale you could see every freckle on her face. “I don’t… We don’t… charity…” she squawked.

“It really isn’t!” Harri insisted. “I wore hand-me-downs my entire life! And my cousin was a right whale. None of it fit. And I promise I took good care of them. They shouldn’t look used at all, I promise.”

The boys didn’t say anything, but eventually, everyone kept walking. Harri knew better to keep commenting on money. When she had lived with the Dursleys she hadn’t wanted anyone to notice her. Notice her lack of fitting clothes, her broken glasses, or her scruffy appearance. She had looked like a boy half the time, with wild stringy hair. Money had changed everything. Suddenly, Harri had gotten to feel comfortable in her own skin. In clothes that fit, glasses that weren’t broken, and hair that was neatly braided back. She looked like a girl. She looked like a person that deserved common decency, not like a street urchin that everyone could turn their noses up at.

So no, Harri wouldn’t talk about money. She knew the value of it, and the pain of not having any. The Weasleys were the kindest people Harri had ever met, and if she had her way she would give every galleon, sickle, and knut that was in her trust vault so that they wouldn’t have to worry anymore. Kind people shouldn’t have to worry, Harri thought.

Flying soon brought an end to her contemplation of coin.

Harri laughed and whooped with joy to see Ginny Weasley fly in magnificent circles on the Nimbus.

Ginny flew as well as any of them, much to her brothers’ shock.

Mrs. Weasley woke them all early the following Wednesday. After a quick half a dozen bacon sandwiches each, they pulled on their coats and Mrs. Weasley brought out the floo powder.

“We’re running low, Arthur,” she sighed. “We’ll have to buy some more today… Ah well, guests first! After you, Harri dear!”

She took a pinch of the glittering powder and threw it into the flames. With a roar, the fire turned green and rose higher than Harri. She stepped right into it, and shouted “Diagon Alley!"

Harri did not like floo powder. It made her want to cough from the ash, but she managed to clearly say her destination. She was glad that Mrs. Weasley would let her go first because Harri wanted to rush to Flourish and Blotts to buy the Lockhart books before the Weasleys got there.

As always, it felt as though she was being sucked down a giant drain. She seemed to be spinning very fast- the roaring in her ears was deafening- she tried to keep her eyes open but the swirl of green flames made her feel sick- something hard knocked her elbow and she tucked it in tightly, still spinning and spinning- now it felt as though cold hands were slapping her face- squinting through her glasses she saw a blurred stream of fireplaces and snatched glimpses of rooms beyond- her bacon sandwiches were churning inside her- she closed her eyes again wishing it would stop, and then-

She fell, face forward, onto cold stone and felt the bridge of her glasses snap.
Drat.

Harri stood, brushing off the soot and moved out of the way. It was poor form to use magic outside of Hogwarts in public, but she did it anyway.

“Reparo,” she hissed as she made her way out of the Leaky Cauldron as quickly as possible.

She could hear the Weasleys start to arrive on her heels. She was still dizzy and tad bit bruised. Harri knew that she had enough money to buy most anything in Diagon Alley, her current plan was to purchase the books while the Weasley’s went to Gringotts, present them, and then go down to her own vault to replenish her coffers.

Harri headed for Flourish and Blotts once she was in the Alley. As she approached she was a large banner stretched across the upper windows:

Gilderoy Lockhart
Will be signing copies of his autobiography
MAGICAL ME
Today 12:30 P.M to 4:30 P.M

Harri sighed with relief that it was still half an hour before the signing, so the bookshop wasn’t bursting yet. Grabbing a bag that held up to a hundred books at no added weight at the front, Harri quickly found the Hogwart’s school book section. She placed her own required copy of The Standard Book of Spells Grade 2 in the bag and then added six box sets of the Lockheart books.

Harri went to the counter to buy the books and went pale when she saw the amount required. After her purchase, Harri was only left with two silver sickles and six knuts.

“Come back later if you want these signed,” the wizard manning the counter said kindly. “It’s expected to be a bit of an event. The Prophet is coming by for his big announcement at one.”

Harri gave her best smile, though she was sure that it looked fake. Harri didn’t give two figs about what Gilderoy Lockhart was announcing.

She came out into the sunlight with her bag of books, and was able to spot the Weasleys talking to Hermione, and couple that could only be her parents.

“But you’re Muggles,” Mr. Weasley said with delight as Harri came up even with them. “We must have a drink! What are you wanted to do, exchange your money? Well, let’s all head to Gringotts!”

“Harri dear,” Mrs. Weasley said pulling large clothes brush out of her bag and began sweeping off the soot. “Fred said he saw you running off. Where on Earth did you go in such a hurry.”

Harri gulped, feeling very awkward. How to not offend? “Well, you see…” she started. “I went ahead to buy the Lockhart books. For everyone.”

Mrs. Weasley looked horrified.

“Harri, no-”

Harri cut her off. “I wanted to say thank you. For opening your home to me. And the fudge, from last Christmas. I… it was very kind of you. You didn’t know me at all. But you were kind anyway. So… thank you.”
Harri pushed the bag into Mrs. Weasley’s arms.

“Harri, that is truly very sweet of you…” said Mr. Weasley, obviously trying to refuse.

“I want you to have them,” Harri insisted. Her voice started to raise an octave. She was starting to feel distressed by her own choices. Harri knew perfectly well that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley weren’t the types to accept such a gift.

They looked at each other, communicating silently. Harri could see Hermione and her parents pointedly looking in the other direction. The Weasly children all had looks of slight horror on their faces.

“Just.. please…” Harri finished.

“Well… if it means so much to you, then thank you,” Mr. Weasley said.

“Yes, I suppose so… well… on to the bank, all,” said Mrs. Weasley. If Harri wasn’t mistaken she had watery eyes.

Harri fell in step with Hermione and Ron. Hermione had invited Neville along, but he couldn’t make it. He and his grandmother were visiting St. Mungo’s that day.

They all headed towards the bank, and while the Granger’s exchanged money Harri went with the Weasly’s down to the vaults. Harri felt justified, and more than a little sick, when she saw the inside of the Weasley’s vault. There was a small pile of silver Sickles inside and just one gold Galleon. Mrs. Weasley swept about half into her bag and gave Harri sidelong look that was tinged in relief. It would have taken every bit of that silver to buy the Lockhart books.

Harri felt nervous when they reached her vault, but didn’t block the view of gold and silver from the Weasleys. She wanted Mrs. Weasley to know that it hadn’t been a hardship of any kind for her to buy the books for them. While Harri felt shame at her own unearned fortune, she was glad that she had been able to use some of the ‘blood money’ to help her friends.

Back outside on the marble steps, they all separated. Percy muttered vaguely about needing a new quill. Fred and George had spotted their friend from Hogwarts, Lee Jordan. Mrs. Weasley and Ginny were going to get some of Ginny’s supplies and wand.

“It’s the big moment,” Mrs. Weasley said looking at her youngest with glowing pride.

Mr. Weasley was insisting on taking the Grangers off to the Leaky Cauldron for a drink.

“We’ll all meet at Flourish and Blotts in an hour to buy the rest of the books,” said Mrs. Weasley, setting off with Ginny. “And not one step down Knockturn Alley!” she shouted at the twin’s retreating backs.

“What’s Knockturn Alley?” Harri asked Ron.

“I haven’t heard of that,” Hermione added.

“It’s a dark wizard place,” said Ron with a shrug. “The twins have been trying to sneak in for ages.”

“There is a dark wizard Alley?” Hermione said with disgust.

“Well sure,” said Ron. “That’s how dark magic works.”
Both Harri and Hermione looked confused. “It draws people in. You can’t just get rid of it.”

“Remus Lupin talked about that,” Harri said.

“He did?” Ron asked with relief.

“Yeah, he kind of explained that Dark Lord isn’t just a self-given title. That Voldemort was literally the Dark Lord. That he was the center of Dark magic and it called to all the dark magic users.”

“It’s not self-given?” Hermione asked at the same time that Ron replied, “You didn’t know that?”

“Uuughghgh,” Hermione growled from the back of her throat. “You wizards never explain ANYTHING!”

Ron just shrugged, once again unaware of all the knowledge he had just from growing up in the wizarding world.

“Will we ever catch up?” Harri asked Hermione.

“I intend to,” said the bushy-haired girl grimly.

The three strolled off along the winding cobbled street. The bag of gold, silver, and bronze jangling cheerfully in Harri’s pocket was clamoring to be spent, so she bought three large strawberry-and-peanut-butter ice creams, which they slurped happily as they wandered up the alley, examining the fascinating shop windows. Ron gazed longingly at a full set of Chudley Cannon robes in the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies until Hermione dragged them off to buy ink and parchment next door. In Gambol and Japes Wizarding Joke Shop, they met Fred, George, and Lee Jordan, who were stocking up on Dr. Filibuster’s Fabulous Wet-Start, No-Heat Fireworks, and in a tiny junk shop full of broken wands, lopsided brass scales, and old cloaks covered in potion stains they found Percy, deeply immersed in a small and deeply boring book called Prefects Who Gained Power.

“A Study of Hogwarts prefects and their later careers,” Ron read aloud off the back cover. “That sounds Fascinating…”

“Go away,” Percy snapped.

“Course, he’s very ambitious, Percy, he’s got it all planned out… He wants to be Minister of Magic…” Ron told Harri and Hermione in an undertone as they left Percy to it.

An hour later, they headed for Flourish and Blotts. There was a large crowd gathered around, and Harri groaned at the thought of Lockhart. He was making his big announcement, wasn’t he?

“We can actually meet him!” Hermione squealed. “I mean, he’s written almost the whole booklist!”

The crowd seemed to be made up mostly of witches around Mrs. Weasley’s age. Harri just rolled her eyes. He was very fit. She would be blind not to see it. But something about his blond hair and overly straight teeth set Harri’s nerves on edge.

The three squeezed inside. A long line wound right to the back of the shop, where Gilderoy Lockhart was signing his books. Harri was filled with relief that she had already bought all hers, and waiting with Ron and Hermione who grabbed their copies of The Standard Book of Spells,
They sneaked up the line to where the rest of the Weasleys were standing with Mr. and Mrs. Granger.

“Oh, there you are, good,” said Mrs. Weasley. She sounded breathless and kept patting her hair. It was a lightly frizzled bun, and Harri noticed that her cheeks were slightly flushed. “We’ll be able to see him in a minute.”

Gilderoy Lockhart came slowly into view, seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his own face. It looked horribly ridiculous to Harri. They were all winking and flashing their dazzling white teeth. Harri poked Hermione in the ribs and whispered, “don’t go weak-kneed. You’ll be as bad as Parvati.” Hermione just glared and clutched at her own copy of *Magic Me*, ready for it to be signed.

A short irritable-looking man was dancing around taking photographs with a large black camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash.

“Oh of the way, there,” he snarled at Ron, moving back to get a better shot. “This is for the Daily Prophet-”

“Big deal,” said Ron, rubbing his foot where the photographer had stepped on it.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him. He looked up. He saw Ron- and then he saw Harri. He stared. Then he lep to his feet and positively shouted. “It can’t be Harriet Potter?”

Harri felt every eye of the bookshop on her. She tensed. No. Not here. Not in front of all these people. Her face was burning. Her magic was rushing in her ears. She didn’t like the eyes. She didn’t want to be noticed. Lockhart had dived forward and seized Harri’s arm. The whole bookshop started to applaud.

Why? What was happening? Nothing of importance had occurred that merited applause!

“Nice big smile, Harriet,” said Lockhart, through his own gleaming teeth. “Together, you and I are worth the front page.”

Oh. That was what Lockhart was after. Harri suddenly knew exactly the type of person that Lockhart was. A fame hound.

When he finally let go of Harri’s hand, Harri could hardly feel her fingers. She tried to sidle back over to the Weasleys, but Lockhart threw an arm around her shoulders and clamped her tightly to his side.

“Ladies and gentleman,” he said loudly; waving for quiet. “What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I’ve been sitting on for some time!”

“When young Harriet here stepped into Flourish and Blotts today, she only wanted to buy my autobiography- which I shall be happy to present her now, free of charge-” The crowd applauded again. “She had no idea,” Lockhart continued, giving Harri a little shake that made her glasses slip to the end of her nose, “that she would shortly be getting much, much, much more than my book, *Magical Me*. She and her schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentleman, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!”

Harri had to stop herself from groaning. Oh, this was horrible. She and Snape had had their tiff. She had promised to help him research that stupid snake. And now Lockhart. Second year was
looking to be not very promising.

The crowd cheered and clapped and Harri found herself being presented with the entire works of Gilderoy Lockhart. Staggering slightly under the weight, she managed to make her way out of the limelight to the edge of the room, where Hermione had moved to stand with Ginny.

“You have these,” Harri said, pressing the books into Hermione’s arms. “I’ve already bought mine.”

“Bet you loved that, didn’t you Potter?” said a voice Harri had no trouble recognizing. She straightened up and found herself face-to-face with Hermione’s horrible soulmate, Draco Malfoy.

“*Famous* Harriet Potter,” said Malfoy. “Can’t even go into a bookshop without making the front page.”

“Leave her alone, she didn’t want all that!” said Ginny. It was a fierce defense, and Harri nearly glowed with how much of a backbone Ginny had. Her shyness had been melting away over the last week, and the spitfire Ron had described was making her appearance.

“Another member of the dream team I see,” Malfoy said with a sneer, though it faltered as his eyes passed over Hermione. She was tanned from the summer and had filled out a bit. Harri noticed Malfoy’s eyes linger over Hermione’s figure.

“Go away,” Hermione told him firmly.

“Oh, it’s you,” said Ron, who had fought his way over with signed copies of the books Harri had bought. “Bet you’re surprised to see Harri here, eh?”

“Not as surprised as I am to see you in a shop, Weasley,” retorted Malfoy. “I suppose your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for all those.”

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand,” Harri snapped. Ron had gone red at Malfoy’s remark.

Ron dumped his books into Ginny’s cauldron and looked ready to throw a punch when they heard his father.

“*Ron!*” said Mr. Weasly, struggling over with Fred and George. “What are you doing? It’s too crowded in here, let’s go outside.”

“Well, well, well- Arthur Weasley?”

It was Mr. Malfoy. He stood with his hand on Draco’s shoulder, sneering in just the same way.

“*Lucious,*” said Mr. Weasly, nodding coldly.

“Busy time at the Ministry, I hear,” said Mr. Malfoy. “All those raids…. I hope they’re paying you overtime?”

His eyes swept over the lot and paused on Hermione.

“Ah,” he said giving her a look like she was mud on his shoe. “And this is… the girl is it Draco?” he asked his son.

Draco looked paler than usual. He didn’t meet anyone’s eyes as he said, “Yes.”
“Hmm…” said Mr. Malfoy as he snagged a book from Hermione’s arms to look. She looked horribly offended as he flipped through an advanced transfiguration text.

“You’re right, one of those types that spends more times with books than learning social grace.”

Harri was surprised to see Mr. Weasley step forward. “You’ll find that this young woman is a boon to magic kind. You would do well to treat her as such.”

“Dear me, a disgrace to wizards aren’t you?” Malfy sneered.

Mr. Weasley flushed darker than Harri had ever seen Ron, “We have a different idea of what disgraces the name of wizard, Malfoy,” he said.

“Clearly,” said Mr. Malfoy, his pale eyes straying to Mr. and Mrs. Granger, who were watching apprehensively. “This lot, they don’t belong here. This girl, she never will.”

There was a thud of metal as Ginny’s cauldron went flying; Mr. Weasley had thrown himself at Mr. Malfoy, knocking him backward into a bookshelf. Dozens of heavy spellbooks came thundering down on all their heads; there was a yell of “Get him, Dad!” from Fred and George; Mrs. Weasley was shrieking, “No, Arthur, no”; the crowd stampeded backward, knocking more shelves over; “Gentleman, please- please!” cried the assistant, and then louder than all-

“Break it up, there, gents, break it up-” Hagrid had appeared.

Through it all, Harri had looked at Draco Malfoy. As his father spoke, Draco had looked at Hermione. Not with the cold hate that had always painted his face. But with fear. And frustration. And shame.

Hagrid broke up the fight, and Malfoy flung Hermione’s book back to her. “Here, girl- take your book- maybe you’ll become some semblance of a witch from it.” Pulling himself out of Hagrid’s grip he beckoned to Draco and swept from the shop.

Harri turned toward Hermione who had started to cry. “Excuse me, Mr. and Mrs. Granger. Do you mind if we go outside?” Harri asked her parents. The two muggles looked shaken but nodded their consent.

Harri grabbed Hermione’s arm and pulled her from the shop. She rushed her into the side alley by the bookshop and hugged the girl tightly as thick sobs wracked Hermione’s body.

“And I thought Draco was bad,” she said between sobbing breaths.

“He’s horrid. They’re all horrid. Every Malfoy,” Harri said, rubbing Hermione’s back.

“I can’t- I don’t… why?”

“You’re amazing Hermione.” Harri whispered into her hair, “The best witch in our year.”

They two stood for some time. Finally, Hermione stopped crying and stepped back from Harri. She looked down at the Transfiguration book still clutched in her arms. Then she did a very unHermione like thing and flung it to the ground.

A small thin book slid out. It had a shabby black cover.

Both girls stared at it in surprise.

“That wasn’t there before,” Hermione told Harri. Harri leaned down to pick it up.
Holding the diary, Harri could feel the magic coming off of it. Magic that felt achingly familiar. She had felt it in the forest and while facing down Quirrel. But surely that wasn't possible.

Surely this didn't have something to do with Vol.....

What? What had she been thinking? Harri couldn't remember. She looked down at the diary, T.M Riddle stamped across the front.

Who was that?
The book felt heavy in Harri’s pocket.

Unconsciously, she had slid it out of sight as the rest of the Weasleys filed out of Flourish and Blotts. Hermione, distracted by her parents, had turned away from Harri and the book. For some reason Harri couldn’t explain she didn’t want Hermione to see the diary again. Not until Harri had looked inside. Something felt… special about it.

Maybe it was alright for something to just be for Harri. Just this once.

The trip back to the Burrow was full of chatter about Mr. Weasley’s brawl with Mr. Malfoy. Harri cheered with the rest of the boys, all agreeing that Mr. Malfoy had had it coming. Mrs. Weasley just sighed and argued that Arthur needing to control himself in public.

Harri went to bed before anyone else at the Burrow that night. While watching Fred and George recreate the altercation between Malfoy and Mr. Weasley was amusing, after the fifth time Harri was done. Also… also, Harri wanted to examine Riddle’s book. She didn’t want anyone to see it. She wanted it to be…. just Hers.

Harri sat on the pallet in Ginny’s room and flicked through the blank pages, not one of which had a trace of ink on it. Then she turned it over. The back cover showed that it was from a variety store on Vauxhall Road, London.

“Why would a muggle diary be inside of a Transfiguration book?” Harri asked herself. She thought back on Hermione’s altercation with Mr. Malfoy. He had held onto that book, hadn’t he? Did he slip the diary into Hermione’s textbook?

There was no mystery as to why he was taunting Hermione. He certainly hated her. Harri could still see Draco’s face in her mind’s eye. He had looked very uncomfortable. Had Draco Malfoy not wanted his father to talk to Hermione? Or had he not wanted Hermione to receive… this?

Harri turned the diary over again and looked at the front. T.M Riddle. Who was that? The diary felt very warm in her hand, and she could definitely feel magic on it. It felt… alive almost. It was very strange.

She opened it again, and taking out her wand, Harri cast ‘Revelio’. Nothing happened.

Was it written in invisible ink?

“Aparecium ”

Again, nothing.

Had Riddle gotten this diary and never bothered to fill it out? That didn’t make sense. Why did the diary feel magical if it was from a muggle shop? It wasn’t possible unless Riddle had done something to it.

Why had Mr. Malfoy given it to Hermione?
It didn’t feel dangerous at all. The magic felt so familiar, almost like Harri’s magic. Like a friend. She reached out tentatively, visualizing a tendril of magic, and touched the diary with it. The diary reacted at once. A matching tendril of magic reached out to greet her and latched on, almost like a handshake.

It felt… very nice. Like a warm caress.

“How do you work?” Harri asked herself, feeling a pleasant buzz from the magic mixing with her own.

She stared down at the blank first page of the diary in contemplation. Even if Riddle didn’t use this diary, he had certainly enchanted it. Harri couldn’t quite remember why she had felt hesitant about handling it before. It was certainly harmless.

With those thoughts in mind, Harri went to bed. The diary carefully clutched against her chest, their magic dancing together like two old friends.

By August 31st Harri had come no closer to figuring out the secrets of the little book. Every spell she tried did nothing. Not a thing appeared. What had developed was that Harri was loath to let the diary out of her grasp. She carefully hid it in her pockets or in the waistband of her shorts, unwilling to let it be seen but unable to leave it somewhere. The comforting magic was like a balm to her soul, constantly caressing and mixing with her own magic. She felt like she was flying all the time, it was a constant and exhilarating rush.

What wasn’t a rush was the fact that Harri would be returning to Hogwarts a day before everyone else to the tender care of Severus Snape.

She had thought of Snape often over the last two weeks. She was still frustrated and angry at him. Almost unbearably so. Yet… her mother had wanted Snape to care for her. It had been in her will. Wouldn’t her mother have known that Snape was a Dark Wizard?

Harri wished that there was someone else she could talk to. Another friend of her mothers. There wasn’t anyone else though. Remus had mentioned that her mother had only really been friends with Alice Longbottom.

“They doubt she’ll ever be well,” Remus had explained sadly. “I’m glad you’re friends with their boy. Frank and Alice were the best of people. Just like your parents.”

Harri only had Snape for information about her mother’s intentions. She wasn’t sure how much she could trust the man and wasn’t sure if her mother had misplaced her trust completely.

“There is still Dumbledore,” Harri thought. She wasn’t sure if she trusted Dumbledore either. The man who knew so much, but didn’t want to tell her any of it.

“Sometimes it feels like the entire world if moving too fast, and I am standing still in it,” Harri thought.

She nearly screamed when she heard a soft voice answer in her head, “I know what you mean.”

“What?” Harri exclaimed out loud. She was alone in Ginny’s room, packing her trunk before returning to Hogwarts.

There was no one else in the room.
Even softer than before, the same voice, “The book… write….”

Harri could feel the magic of the diary pulsing from her jean pocket. The tendril of magic that seemed to constantly be playing with her own was much weaker than usual as if it had used a great deal of energy.

Energy to talk in her mind? That shouldn’t be possible, but she was willing to put that aside because an answer on what the book was for seemed to be presenting itself.

The book… the book wanted her to write in it?

“Yes,” she heard, like a whispering caress.

Harri jumped at a knock on the door, Mrs. Weasley bustled in with clean laundry.

“Later,” she thought, pushing magic towards the little book. It hummed in approval.

Harri flooed back to the Headmaster’s office. Waiting for her were Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore looking serene, Snape had a scowl.

“Ah, Harri” Dumbledore began with a smile. “Right on time. Your guardian and I were just discussing your disappearance.”

“Remus explained it, sir, I know that normally I would have been splinched or just destroyed the potions lab.” Already Harri felt on edge. She had left with Burrow with no small amount of trepidation, but she was amazed at how quickly conflict was looming. There was still soot on her cloak.

“Ah… yes,” Dumbledore said, looking over at Snape who only looked annoyed.

“We’ve discussed controlling your magic, Harriet,” he told her firmly. No apology, no explanation. Just right to her magical control.

She wanted to feel rage, but couldn’t bring herself to it. Her magic didn’t feel as active as it usually did when Snape made comments like that. Maybe she was gaining control after all? Funny, she hadn’t practiced her Occlumency at all at the Weasley’s.

“I’ll work on it,” she told him flippantly.

“You could have been seriously injured,” Snape continued. “You could hurt someone if you lose control like that in class.”

“I highly doubt I’ll lose control like that again,” she told him with a glare. “It’s not every day that you’re given new information about your parent’s death.”

Her magic made a weak swirl around the room but faded away quickly.

Dumbledore coughed, “Yes, well. Enough of that I think.”

Harri turned her glare on the old Headmaster.

“You have every right to be angry, Harri,” he told her meeting her glare with his clear blue eyes.

She didn’t want understanding from either of them. She didn’t want Snape’s anger and worry. She didn’t want Dumbledore’s concern and understanding smile. She just wanted to be upset, to be
right, to be away.

She wanted to break everything.

But nothing broke. Instead, she felt the diary reach out for her with a calming tendril of magic, and soothe away all the rough edges of her misery. Everything was okay, everything was fine. She would move past it.

Harri looked down at the floor, not wanting to meet either of their eyes anymore. “I don’t want to talk. I just want to go to my room. In Gryffindor tower.”

Dumbledore began to protest, but Snape cut in. “I thought as much. One night alone in the tower won’t do you harm. Go. But I expect you down in the Dungeons on Friday evening. You’re grounded.”

“What?” Her head snapped up, anger filling her once again. “I didn’t do anything wrong and you know it!”

“Until you learn to control your magic, there will be consequences. This time didn’t have any obvious physical ones, but next time there will be. You will spend the foreseeable Fridays helping me with the Runespoor.”

“You were going to make me do that anyway,” Harri said.

“Yes, originally as a good potionineering exercise. That you complained endlessly about. Clearly, it works just as well as a punishment.”

"Fine," Harri bit out, and stomped over to the door to the staircase, dragging her heavy trunk behind her.

“Oh just leave it,” Snape snapped. “I’ll have a house-elf bring it to the tower. No need to martyr yourself.”

She wasn’t martyring herself. She wasn’t. Why did he have to insult her at every turn? He was so horrible. Hadn’t the summer started off so well? Then he’d had to go and ruin it.

“Harri,” Dumbledore began, seeing the look of hurt that flashed across her face. But Harri didn’t stop, she slammed the door and began down the staircase. How was it that the day had started so well with Ron and his family? They didn’t make her churlish. They all seemed to like her. But one moment with Snape and it was like she couldn’t stop fighting.

The diary’s magic caressed her gently, and she felt her rage simmer away. It was alright, she’d be alone in Gryffindor tower. She didn’t need to talk to Snape again tonight. It would just be Harri and the little black book in her pocket.

Harri knew with a certainty that she couldn’t explain that if she wrote in the diary it would write her back.

Harri sat on her four-poster bed in the empty Gryffindor tower. She pulled a bottle of ink out of her trunk, dipped her quill into it, and dropped a blot onto the first page of the diary.

The ink shone brightly on the paper for a second and then as though it was being sucked into the page, vanished. Excited, Harri loaded her quill a second-time and wrote, “My name is Harriet Potter.” handwriting
The words shone momentarily on the page and they, too, sank without trace. The magic around her buzzed.

Oozing back out of the page, in her own ink, came words Harri had never written. It was a pristine hand, clinical and male. It was some of the best handwriting Harri had ever seen.

“Hello, Harriet Potter. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you come by my diary?”

These words, too, faded away, but not before Harri had started to scribble back.

“You were in my friend’s transfiguration book. I think her soulmate’s father put you there.”

“That’s very strange. Who is her soulmate’s father?”

“I don’t know his first name,” Harri wrote back. “He’s a Malfoy though.”

“Ahh, well I know someone from that family.”

“You do?”

“Yes, though from when I was in school. This diary was meant to be a record of my time at Hogwarts.”

“I’m at Hogwarts now. Term starts tomorrow.”

“Does it? Why are you there already? What year is it, if you don’t mind my asking.”

“1992, and I’m an orphan. My guardian is one of the professors.”

“I am an orphan as well.”

It was a very direct statement. Though looking at her own fading words, Harri realized that she had been very direct about it as well. She paused in her writing, and the diary began again before she did.

“It is good for you though, to be at the school instead. I had to return to an orphanage each summer. It was… unpleasant.”

“They take it more seriously now, I think,” Harri confided. “My relatives weren’t the good sort. My entire childhood was unpleasant.”

“I can relate,” the diary replied.

“When were you at the school?” Harri asked.

“1938 was when I started. My memories extend till 1943.”

“Why not until 1945?” Harri asked, doing the math.

“A terrible thing occurred in my fifth year. I wanted the truth preserved.”

“So you’re like a pensieve?”

“Yes, a bit like that.”

“You must have been very good a magic then, to make something like this in your fifth year.”
“I was always top of my year, yes.”

“My friend Hermione, the one whose Transfiguration book you were in, she’s like that.”

“I must ask, Harriet, why would her soulmate’s father try to give me to her?”

“I don’t know,” Harri replied, thinking hard. Her suspicions of the diary seemed far removed now. It wasn’t harmful. “He doesn’t like her. She’s muggle born.”

“That does explain a few things, the Malfoy I knew was not very friendly to muggleborns or half-bloods.”

“Yes, well after the war I think most of that has died down.”

“There was a war?”

“It ended about ten years ago.”

“Not Grindelwald still?”

“Oh no, that ended in 1945. Same as the big muggle war.”

“So a new Dark Lord?” Tom asked. Harri could feel the diary’s magic buzzing in excitement. It was… odd.

“Yes. His name was Voldemort.” Magic practically leapt around the diary.

“Please, Harriet. Tell me everything.”

“There isn’t much to tell anymore,” Harri lied. She hated to talk about Voldemort.

“A little history, please? I’ve been alone for so long. I’ve been left in the dark on all the happenings of the Wizarding World.”


“It goes like this, back in 1970 there was a wizard gaining power. He was the new Dark Lord, the first one since Grindelwald. He had followers called Death Eaters and all sorts of Dark Wizards and Witches following him. They used blackmail and all sorts of curses to gain a foothold at the Ministry. But there was a group of Light Witches and Wizards to fight back. I know Dumbledore was the leader.”

“Dumbledore was the one to defeat Grindelwald, wasn’t he?” the diary asked. “He was a Professor in my day.”

“Yes he was, and he’s considered the leader of the Light I think. But he… and my parents and several others they fought against the rising dark.”

“So you are a child of light, Harriet Potter? That is interesting. Your magic feels very similar to my own. I wouldn’t have thought… but you are a war orphan then?”

Harri almost felt uneasy, but something stopped her from worrying too much. He was just asked questions, nothing to worry about. It was fine and normal, there was no reason to worry. Tom was just wondering what happened while he was in the diary. A lot of history missed. So much time had passed. Nothing to worry about.
“Yes. My parents were killed by Lord Voldemort.”

“How do you know why?”

She wanted to stop writing, but she felt the quill start scratching anyway. “It had something to do with me.”

She wasn’t imagining, she could feel magic pouring off the diary. Tom… was he, it, excited? Tom seemed excited.

“You?” was all he asked.

“Yes. For some reason, and I don’t really know why, when I was a baby he decided he needed to kill me.”

“You survived a Dark Lord?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“I don’t know. But for whatever reason, his power broke. He disappeared, and no one heard from him for a decade.”

“But he’s been heard from since. He’s not dead.” Tom seemed very sure about this.

“No. I heard from him.”

“You again, Harriet Potter. Do you know why now?”

“Well, he was looking for a Stone, the Philosopher’s Stone.”

“For immortal life.”

“I think he needed a body. But before he could get it, I stopped him.”

“HOW?”

She really wanted to stop now. Her quill kept moving. He didn’t need to know any of this. Why was she telling him? But it was not something to worry about. He was just curious. Whoever heard of a young girl stopping a Dark Lord. Anyone would be curious, there was no reason to worry.

“I don’t know. Dumbledore says it has to do with my mother’s sacrifice. But…” she forced her quill to a stop. She wouldn’t tell him this. She couldn’t tell him this. But it was alright. Tom could be trusted with her secrets. He was just a diary, just a memory. It wouldn’t hurt to tell him.

“But?”

“But he’s my soulmate. So I think it has something to do with that.”

There was a roaring in her ears like the wind rushing all around her.

“Tell me, Harriet Potter,” Tom wrote. “Did you call the Dark Lord Voldemort a liar?”

Harriet froze. She felt icy all over. He couldn’t know that. The trance that she had been in broke. Voldemort. The magic felt like Voldemort. This was Voldemort. Somehow she was talking to a
She couldn’t think. Harri felt like she was floating. Magic all around her, and like she was safe. No need for anger or worry. Everything would be alright. She looked back down at the diary in her lap. There were words being written on the page. How nice.

“Harriet, I’m afraid that my plans will have to wait with you. Our time together has been very illuminating, but I just can’t risk hurting you, my dear.”

That was very kind of Tom, she should tell him so.

“Thank you, but what do you mean, hurt me?”

“In time I’ll explain it to you. You see, I need a little help. But it’s very dangerous. And I just can’t risk you, Harriet. Not when you can help me so much more later on.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” Harri wrote back.

“Yes. So what you need to do Harriet is go down to the first year dorm. I want you to leave me in the nightstand of one of those girls. Then I want you to forget all about this diary and go to sleep. I’ll help you remember me later.”

“Okay, that sounds like a good plan Tom. But wouldn’t a first year get hurt too?”

“Oh no, nothing like that. You don’t need to worry Harriet.”

She didn’t, did she?

Harri stood on shaky legs. She needed to go down to the first year dorm. Someone had asked her to. Harri felt herself shakily climbing down the staircase a level until she found the door. She groped blindly in the dark for the handle.

Several beds were perched in the room, but she chose one to the far left. The little book slid easily into the drawer of the nightstand, and then still stumbling, Harri returned to her own dorm room.

She was so tired. It was late, and she really needed to go to bed. Snape would probably want to talk again in the morning. Not to mention she would be seeing Ron, Neville, and Hermione tomorrow. It would be an excellent day, wouldn’t it?

Goodness, she hadn’t been this tired in ages.

Harri pulled back her covers and climbed into bed. She was quickly asleep, all thoughts of Tom Riddle blissfully pushed into the depths of her mind.

Chapter End Notes

So in this fic, I’m going with Tom Riddle is a Dark Lord. And the title of Dark Lord has far-reaching power and meaning. Harri is... well that would be a spoiler. That said, 15-year-old Dark Lords are more powerful than 12-year-olds. I thought it was crazy that Harry wasn’t more affected in the book. I tried to bill this as Harri was mingling her magic for two weeks before she even had her first conversation, so she was very affected by the Horcrux. So we say goodbye for a bit to Tom Riddle... but don't worry.
He'll be back.

In the meantime, I'm excited to get back to some Mentor! Severus Snape who does not know how to be a good parent. The theme of this book is Memory. Tom Riddle is the clear example, but I'm hoping to help Snape and Remus deal with some of their 'memory' based baggage. Here's to hoping that this goes alright. And is that another chapter increase? It sure is (holds head in hands because I was supposed to be better than this)(You want the smut! I want to write it! It's still four to five books away).
Harri woke up to two bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls staring at her. She managed not to shout, but it was a close thing. Instead, she pushed herself back against the headboard and brandished her wand. Gulliver, her cat who had somehow managed to realize she was back at the castle, was purring quietly at the foot of the bed. Harri figured that the creature was probably alright if Gulliver wasn’t bothered.

“Who- why- hello?” Harri stammered, realizing that she was looking at a house-elf. They usually made a point of not being seen by students.

The elf bowed so low that the end of its long, thin, nose touched the carpet. Harri noticed that it was wearing what looked like an old pillowcase, with rips for arm-and-leg holes.

“Harriet Potter!” said the elf in a high-pitched voice. “So long has Dobby wanted to meet you, madame… Such an honor it is…”

“Th-thank you,” said Harri, edging out of bed and pulling on her bathrobe. “Er- if you don’t mind my asking- do you need something? I thought the elves avoided students.”

The elf lowered its ears, “Dobby is not an elf of this most esteemed school, Harriet Potter ma’am.”

“Then why are you here, Dobby?” Harri had never heard of an elf randomly appearing like this.

“Dobby has come to tell you… it is difficult… Dobby wonders where to begin…”

“Sit down,” said Harri politely, pointing at her unmade bed.

To her horror, the elf burst into tears.

“S-sit down!” he wailed. “Never… never ever…”

Gulliver hopped off the bed and made a hasty retreat under the bed, annoyed at the noisy elf disturbing his morning sleep.

“I’m sorry,” Harri tried, “I didn’t mean to offend you or anything-”

“Offend Dobby!” chocked the elf. “Dobby has never been asked to sit down by a witch-like an equal-”

Harri, trying to look comforting to the strange creature was struck by the statement. “But Dobby, you’re clearly an intelligent being. Of course you’re equal.” She was ushering Dobby onto the bed where he sat hiccoughing looking like a large and very ugly doll. At last, he managed to control himself and sat with his great eyes fixed on Harri in an expression of watery adoration.

“I’m sure you just haven’t met many decent witches,” said Harri, trying to make a poor joke of the awkward situation. Why was this elf here exactly?

Dobby shook his head. Then, without warning, he leapt up and started banging his head furiously on the stone wall, shouting, “Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!”
“Don’t- what are you doing?” Harri exclaimed, trying to pull the elf away from the wall. Gulliver let out a low hiss from under the bed.

“Dobby had to punish himself, ma’am,” said the elf, who had gone slightly cross-eyed. “Dobby almost spoke ill of his family, ma’am…”

“The family that you serve?”

“Yes. I’ll be bound to that family forever,” said the elf very sadly.

“Do they know you’re here?” asked Harri curiously.

Dobby shuddered.

“Oh, no, ma’am, no… Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to see you, ma’am. Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven door for this. If they ever knew, ma’am-”

“But won’t they notice if you shut your years in the oven door? And really Dobby, please don’t. You shouldn’t have to… to MUTILATE yourself!”

“They won’t notice. Dobby is always having to punish himself for something. They let Dobby get on with it, ma’am. Sometimes they remind me to do extra punishments.”

“Dobby that’s horrible. Isn’t there somebody you could appeal to? This sounds abusive. Wrong. Clearly a violation of your rights.”

Dobby’s eyes welled with tears. “House-elves do not have rights.”

“Young!”

“A house-elf must be set free, ma’am. Or sold. And the family will never set Dobby free… Dobby will serve the family until he dies.”

Harris stared.

“And I thought I had it bad staying with my relatives. No wonder Snape said they treated me like a house-elf. Who is your family Dobby, I have money, maybe I could buy you from them?”

Dobby sprung up again and began to weep uncontrollably in a heap on the floor. “Surely not. They would not…”

“Oh, please calm down! I’m sorry if I’m saying the wrong things! I just wanted to help you. Can I?”

“Harriet Potter asks if she can help Dobby… Dobby has heard of your greatness, but of your goodness, Dobby never knew!”

Harri, who was feeling distinctly hot in the face, said, “Whatever you’ve heard about my greatness is a load of rubbish. I’m not even top of my year. That’s Hermione.”

“Harriet Potter is humble and modest,” said Dobby reverently, his orb-like eyes aglow. “Harriet Potter speaks not of her triumph over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.”

“Voldemort?” asked Harri.

Voldemort. Why did something feel wrong? Harri felt like she had missed a step walking down a
staircase. It was like an itch she couldn’t scratch.

Dobby clapped his hands over his bat ears and moaned, “Ah, speak not the name, ma’am. Speak not the name.”

“Sorry,” said Harri quickly. “I know lots of people don’t like it. My friends Ron and Neville hate when I use the name.”

“Dobby heard tell,” he said hoarsely, “that Harriet Potter met the Dark Lord for a second time, just months ago… that Harriet Potter escaped yet again.”

“Something like that,” Harri muttered.

“Ah,” gasped Dobby, dabbing his face with a corner of the grubby pillowcase he was wearing. “Harriet Potter is valiant and bold! She has braved so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to protect Harriet Potter, to warn her, even if he does have to shut his ears in the oven door later… Harriet Potter must leave Hogwarts. This place is not safe for you.”


“No, no, no,” squeaked Dobby, shaking his head so hard his ears flapped. “Harriet Potter must go where she is safe. She is too great, too good, to lose. If Harriet Potter stays at Hogwarts, she will be in mortal danger.”

Danger… hadn’t someone else said something about danger? Getting hurt?

“Why?” asked Harri, feeling as if she had forgotten something very important.

“There is a plot, Harriet Potter. A plot to make most terrible things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this year,” whispered Dobby, suddenly trembling all over. “Dobby has known for months, and Dobby knows that it has already started!”

“Then come with me to see the Headmaster,” Harri insisted earnestly. “If something horrible is going to happen then help me tell him. We can stop it.”

Dobby made a funny choking noise and then banged his head frantically against the floor again.

“No, please, stop Dobby! Don’t hurt yourself. Why are you hurting yourself?”

“It is the magic that binds me, Harriet Potter.”

“That’s barbaric.”

Dobby blinked salty tears into the stone. “It cannot be helped. Dobby knows that his pain is worth saving Harriet Potter.”

“Can you tell me any more about the plot?” Harri asked gently, placing a hand on the elf’s shoulder.

Dobby shook his head.

“Has this got to do with Vol- sorry- with You-Know-Who? Just shake or nod.” Dobby’s head tilted worryingly close to the wall again.

“Not- not He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, ma’am,” but Dobby’s eyes were wide and he seemed to be trying to give Harri a hint. Harri, still feeling like she was missing something, was completely
Not Voldemort. Then who? For some reason, the Malfoy family came to mind. Lucious Malfoy… and trying to hurt Hermione?

“Could you come with me so I could tell Dumbledore these things? You do know who Dumbledore is, don’t you?”

“Albus Dumbledore is the greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had. Dobby knows it, ma’am. Dobby has heard Dumbledore’s powers as the Light Lord rival those of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at the height of his strength. But-” Dobby’s voice dropped to an urgent whisper- “there are powers Dumbledore doesn’t… powers no decent wizard…”

And before Harri could stop him, Dobby bounded off the bed to the bedside table. He stuck his hand into the drawer and slammed it hard. There was a crunching sound. Harri let out a little scream, but the elf only let out a little yelp.

“Please, you need to stop hurting yourself. I promise Hogwarts is the only place I can go. I have friends here… my guardian is here.”

“Friends who don’t even write to Harriet Potter?” said Dobby slyly.

“Yes, something has gone wrong with my post- wait a minute,” said Harri, frowning. “How do you know my friends haven’t been writing to me?”

Dobby shuffled his feet.

“Harriet Potter mustn’t be angry with Dobby. Dobby did it for the best-”

Harri sighed in frustration. “You’ve been stoping my post. Do you have my letters? I would like them back.”

“Harriet Potter mustn’t be angry… Dobby hoped… if Harriet Potter thought her friends had forgotten her… Harriet Potter might not want to go back to school…”

“Magic is the best thing I’ve ever experienced,” Harri told Dobby. “Learning how to use it has been the first real joy in my life. I would never leave Hogwarts, Dobby.”

Dobby’s ears lowered. “You are in such danger,” the elf said sadly.

“I will always be in danger, Dobby. I can’t tell you why… but the Dark Lord will always be after me. He won’t ever stop. I have to learn. If I don’t… I think very bad things could happen in this world. If you can just give me what information you have, I will be in your debt. But I won’t leave Hogwarts.”

“Dobby has said all that he can,” said the elf sadly. “Dobby supposes that it is Harriet Potter’s choice. But Dobby will try to help if he can. For Harriet Potter is too good.”

“Thank you for the warnings Dobby. Can you stay for breakfast?”

The elf shook his head. “Dobby will be missed soon. Dobby will need to punish himself for being late with mistress’s tea. Be safe Harriet Potter.”

And with a small pop, the elf disappeared, a pile of letters left behind where he had stood.

Gulliver eventually came out from under the bed, and Harri scratched the cat’s head while she read
through her belated post.

She should probably be telling Snape about this encounter, but Harri didn’t feel like she could face the curmudgeon yet. She really just wanted to crawl back into bed. In the excitement of the morning Harri hadn’t noticed her headache, but now that Dobby was gone and her adrenalin was down, Harri felt sick and achy.

She couldn’t remember the last time she had caught a cold. It wasn’t even cold season yet. Maybe she’d go back to bed for a little while, and then go find Snape.

Yes, that seemed like a good plan.

With a cat on her stomach, Harri fell asleep again and didn’t wake until noon.

Harri made her way down to her rooms with Snape after she had woken up again. She still felt exhausted but figured a pepper up potion and a good meal might solve that. The Great Hall was empty, which left Snape as the ideal location for food.

She didn’t knock when she entered, attempting for a blase attitude. Snape was at his desk, pouring over a lesson plan. The Runepoor was lazing on the heated stone that had been enchanted for it, and looked up when Harri entered.

“Furry!” exclaimed the middle head.

“Hello,” Harri hissed back to the snake. “Sorry to have been away for so long. How have you been?”

“Horrible,” hissed the critical head that was now carefully protected with a cone.

“You look like you’ve grown, so it can’t be too bad.” And indeed the snake looked like it had grown another foot.

“There wasn’t anyone to talk to,” hissed the snake grumpily.

“He likes to be interviewed I think,” said the planning head.

“I will be with you every Friday, apparently.”

“What is Friday?” asked the middle head.

“It’s a way to mark time. Like the sun,” Harri tried to explain.

“Did it tell you anything new?” Snape asked, interrupting the conversation.

“I think it’s just bored,” Harri replied.

“Well, you should come around more and talk to it. Or ask it if it would like a friend, if it needs company,” Snape said, looking at the snake thoughtfully. The Runespoor looked like it was going to fall asleep again soon.

“It would probably just eat another snake,” Harri told him. “And believe it or not, snakes aren’t very interesting to talk to all the time.”

Snape rolled his eyes. “You’ve been blessed by a gift that most potion masters would kill for. And all you can say is that snakes don’t have interesting things to say.” He motioned to the table where
lunch was laid out. He had already eaten, but the elves had brought food for Harri too. She tuck
in.

"Did Voldemort say that snakes were interesting conversationalists?"

Snape glared at her. “Of course not. He had his snakes eat people he didn’t like.” Harri blanched. The mental image made her stomach roll with nausea. Or maybe that was her new illness. She pushed the plate away, mostly untouched.

“Well speaking of evil people,” she began, “a house-elf came to see me today. He told me there is a terrible plot at Hogwarts that puts me in mortal peril.”

Snape looked surprised and then scowled.

“Of course you're in mortal peril, aren’t you always?”

“Yes, well the house-elf was nice enough to warn me this time.”

“What did it say exactly?”

“Just that it wasn’t Voldemort and that he was certain I would be hurt this year. He couldn’t say more without punishing himself.”

“That means that the elf’s family must be involved somehow. Sending the elf might have been a trick. Or a prank… but we shouldn’t treat it that way. We should take any threat on your life as serious.”

“I don’t think it was a trick. He… well, he was constantly hurting himself. He seemed abused. I wish I knew who his family was, I’d offer to help him.”

“There isn’t anything you can do Harriet. A family will never sell a house elf. It’s considered a sign that they don’t have money. Old families will kill their elves before letting them be sold.”

Harri stared at Snape with a look of pure horror. “And everyone is just okay with this? They’re clearly… well, I don’t know if I have the right word… Sentient? Human-ish? Intelligent. Why isn’t there legislation protecting them?”

“For the same reason there isn’t legislation protecting werewolves, centaurs, or merepeople. It isn’t convenient, and the Ministry has more to gain by not passing any legislation.”

“Isn’t the whole point of government to protect and serve its people?”

“Harriet, I don’t think now is the moment to get into a debate about civic duties. Come, up to the Headmaster. Let’s see if we can figure out anything about this threat. I imagine there will be a pensieve involved.”

There was. One memory extraction later and Harri was watching her visit with Dobby alongside Snape and Dumbledore. Furrows of concern were etched on both their brows.

“You should have come right away Harriet, why did you go back to bed?” Snape asked.

“I don’t know,” Harri confessed. “I was really tired. I can’t explain it. I just feel… empty.”

The Headmaster gave her a serious look, and Harri felt a soft brush of his magic reaching out for her. The sensation was familiar, even though she couldn’t remember ever mixing magic like this.
Harri mustered a weak response and, for lack of a better description, shook magical hands with Dumbledore. His magic was very separate from hers. It felt light and airy, yet also charged with exponential energy.

“You are magically drained, Harri,” Dumbledore told her. “That is why you were exhausted. Do you have a headache? Or were you sick after eating today?”

“How could she be magically drained?” Snape asked.

“Yes,” Harri replied, feeling like she was missing something. She felt foggy, like her mind wouldn’t focus. “Something is… wrong I think. With my head.”

“Would you mind, Harri, if Severus looked to see your last couple days of memory?”

Harri felt herself react violently, pivoting away from Dumbledore and Snape while a guttural “NO” escaped her.

She blinked owlishly. What? Why would she care about that? Snape had looked into her head several times. She looked between the two men feeling very confused, and then was violently sick on the Headmaster’s rug.

Harri felt cold and clammy. “I don’t know what’s wrong,” she confessed. Her vision had trouble focusing, but she felt a soothing hand on her brow and made out concerned black eyes before everything went black.

Apparently just forgetting wasn't enough

What? Everything was dark. Her eyes felt so heavy. She felt her magic like a comforting blanket around her.

Silly girl said a voice with a strange hint of fondness. Running off to Dumbledore.

Had she? She didn't think she had. It was supposed to be about Dobby. Dobby and his warning.

Don't worry Harri-dear, I'll hide myself. You don't need to worry about them finding me in your mind.

Worry about them finding who? This voice... it sounded so familiar but she couldn't place it. What a strange dream.

Our magic really is so similar, you know. It's like the same note on a different octave. If anyone goes to look, all of me is cloaked in your magic. Hidden away in the back of the cupboard if you will.

You like music? It was all that she could grasp. That's nice. Wizards never know anything about music. But... now that she thought on it this voice was probably just her own imagination in a dream.

That's one way to think of me I suppose.

I wish I stopped blacking out. It's embarrassing.

You should stop overtaxing your magical core. I took too much last night I think.

Don't take any more then.
Harri woke in the Hospital Wing. Snape was sitting in the chair by her bedside reading a manuscript. He glanced over at her when she let out a little moan, and set the aged parchment down.

“You have severe magical depletion,” he told her bluntly. Harri sat up as best she could in the bed. She felt very weak.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Harri said hoarsely. “I didn’t do anything that could cause it.”

“You’re right, it doesn’t. We saw your encounter with the house-elf. I would normally accuse it of doing something to you… but I took the memory myself. It was not a tampered memory.”

“Then what?”

“Harriet, I need you to focus on last night in Gryffindor Tower and look me in the eye.” Her first instinct was to pull away, but she fought it. She tried, but remembering was like water on glass. Harri couldn’t remember anything. At any wisp of memory, it seemed to float away before she could grab at it.

“You’re shaking,” Snape observed, taking her hand. She pulled it away and watched it tremble with a detached sort of frustration.

“I can’t remember. I don’t know what’s wrong.”

“I think a calming draught and more sleep will do you good.”

“What’s wrong with my memory? With my magic?” Snape pushed a vial into her hand. She was shaking so violently, that she couldn’t manage the stopper. She tried to breathe, but it came out in choking gasps.

Gentle hands on her own, a voiced charm, and Harri was breathing on a distinct pattern. Snape’s forehead was against her own. He counted out her breaths, matching her with each one.

They stayed like that longer than the last time Snape had done this to her. Eventually, her trembling subsided. Snape uncorked the vial and handed it to her. With only a hint of a tremble, Harri took the potion. It wasn’t immediate, but she felt some measure of calm return to her.

“Will I be able to go to the feast tonight?”

“No. Madame Pomfrey wants you to stay here for the night. I agree with her, Harriet. You need to rest and get your energy stores back up. We’ve no idea why you’re like this, but you shouldn’t cast any spells until your core has stabilized.”

“That’s so unfair. I’ll miss the sorting. I’ll miss Hermione, Ron, and Neville! They’ll worry about
“me.” Even as she said it Harri began to lay back down. She did feel too tired to go anywhere.

He grimaced. “If it makes you feel better, I will let them know that you are ill.”

“That does. Thanks.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, Harri blinking longer and more slowly. She was close to sleep when Snape said, “I apologize. About your birthday. Not just that, for everything, Harriet. You should have known about it all before I let you chose me as your guardian.”

“You should have,” Harri agreed sleepily. “But… It’s not like there is anyone else.”

“There will always be others who would take you in, Harriet. You can choose someone else if you’d like.”

“No…” and she was drifting away again. In her mind, she thought, ‘No, you’re who mum wanted’, ‘No, you know what to do when I can’t control my magic’, and ‘No, you’re the closest thing to family I have.”

Maybe Snape understood because he didn’t let go of her hand. Its steady grasp felt like an anchor as she drifted in and out of consciousness. A line from a children’s book resurfaced from years ago, “Outside the sea enfolds the sand, inside I hold my father’s hand.” Her breathing evened, and eventually she fell into true sleep.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is out when I wanted it to be *high fives self*. And next weeks chapter is already written, just needs some judicious editing. *self fives again*. Hope you are enjoying the story, and see you next week!
The next day, Harri could barely keep her eyes open. She was released from the Hospital Wing under strict orders to not cast any spells. As she stumbled into the Great Hall for breakfast, she was greeted with a cheer from the second year Gryffindors.

Hermione sprinted over to Harri and greeted her with a tight hug. “Oh, I’m glad you’re out of the Hospital Wing. Professor Snape said you were ill, and not a thing more! He looked sour at the feast last night and wouldn’t stop scowling,” she explained. “We were so worried! Ron was convinced that he had started to poison you.”

The two girls sat down at the table across from Ron and Neville.

“I don’t think he’s that mad at me about my apparition act,” Harri told Ron.

Hermione rolled her eyes, “Honestly, I still can’t believe that you did something like that. It’s supposed to be impossible you know. I read all about the apparition wards in-”

“Hogwarts a History,” finished Ron, Neville, and Harri in a chorus.

"Which you should all read!"

"Why bother when we have you?” asked Ron.

Hermione scowled and the two began to bicker about responsibility.

"How are you feeling, Harri?” Neville asked.

"I’m alright, just a bit tired," Harri replied. "How was your summer, Neville?”

"It was really good. I got to spend a lot of time with Mum and Dad. We picked right back up."

"That's really great!"

“Mail’s due any minute- I think Gran’s sending a few things I forgot,” Neville continued cheerfully.

“Any idea what you forgot?” Harri asked her accident-prone friend.

“So far I’ve just noticed my quills and three of Lockhart’s books.”

“You’ll need two owls to carry all that,” Ron told him, turning away from Hermione. “Those things are bricks. Have you read them? Complete tosh.”

“I think he’s rather brilliant,” Hermione said with slightly flushed cheeks.

“Not to mention he’s so handsome to look at,” Lavender added from next to Hermione. Lavender Brown as a pretty girl who had gotten more full-figured over the summer. Harri noticed that both Ron and Nevill had snuck looks at her chest.

“I did my hair especially nice,” added Parvati Patil. “I wonder if he’ll notice?”
“You shouldn’t want him to notice. He’s old,” Harri told her three roommates.

“No he’s not!” exclaimed Parvati. “He’s so handsome and brave. Can you imagine doing all those things that he’s written about?”

“Well I’m sure Harri can,” said Lavender. “But for the rest of us, he’s a hero come to life.”

Harri shook her head and started on her porridge. The owls streamed in, and sure enough, Neville received a large lumpy package containing quills, three books, and his potions scale.

“Didn’t even notice I had forgotten it,” said Neville cheerfully.

Hermione, who had started reading *Voyages with Vampires*, disapprovingly at Neville. “You should start to make lists of everything and run through a checklist before you leave home.”

“Hermione, it’s fine really. Gran always finds what I need,” Neville said with a shrug.

“One day you may forget something important!”

“Well sure, I might,” said Neville. “But life will go on. There are more important things to remember you know. Like asking Harri how she feels after a night in the Hospital Wing,” he turned to look at Harri.

Ron and Hermione both flushed, realizing they had forgotten to ask her how she was feeling. “Just run down I think. Magical depletion for some reason. OH. And tonight I do have something to tell you three.”

“New mystery already?” Ron asked rubbing his hands together. “Excellent. I figured it would take you at least a month to find trouble.”

“You know that it’s trouble that finds me,” Harri joked.

The four friends left the castle together, crossed the vegetable patch, and made for the greenhouses, where the magical plants were kept. As they neared the greenhouses they saw the rest of the class standing outside, waiting for Professor Sprout. Harri, Ron, Hermione, and Neville had only just joined them when she came striding into view across the lawn, accompanied by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Professor Sprout was a squat little witch who wore a patched hat over her flyaway hair; there was usually a large amount of earth on her clothes and her fingernails would have made Aunt Petunia faint. Gilderoy Lockhart, however, was immaculate in sweeping robes of turquoise, his golden hair shining under a perfectly positioned turquoise hat with gold trimming.

Lavender and Parvati both sighed in admiration.

“Do you think he looks like that while fighting the forces of darkness,” Harri whispered to Hermione.

“Shush,” Hermione hissed, not taking the bait of Harri’s mockery.

“Oh hello there!” Lockhart called, beaming around at the assembled students. “I was just telling Professor Sprout the proper way to handle Mandrakes. She mentioned you would be handling them today. But I don’t want you running away with the idea that I’m better at Herbology than she is! I just happen to have used these exotic plants on my travels…”

Neville glared at the man who would dare to imply that he knew more than Sprout, his personal
“Greenhouse three today, chaps!” Professor Sprout called. She looked disgruntled, not at all her usual cheerful self.

There was a murmur of interest. They had only ever worked in greenhouse one before- greenhouse three housed far more interesting and dangerous plants. Mandrakes? Harri had read about them and felt a little sick at the idea of handling them. They were a strange mix of plant and animal.

Harri caught a whiff of damp earth and fertilizer as she made to enter the greenhouse, but Lockhart’s hand shot out.

“Harriet! I’ve been wanting a word- you don’t mind if she’s a couple of minutes late, do you, Professor Sprout?”

Judging by Professor Sprout’s scowl, she did mind, but even Harri’s pleading eyes were no match for Lockhart who said, “That’s the ticket,” and closed the greenhouse door in her face.

“Harriet, Harriet, Harriet,” said Lockhart, his large white teeth gleaming in the sunlight as he shook his head.

Far too tired to deal with this, Harri said “What?”

“Don’t know when I’ve been more shocked. Purposely avoiding the feast, pretending to be ill, oh Harriet.”

“I wasn’t-”

“When I heard- well, of course, it was all my fault. Could have kicked myself.”

What?

Harri had no idea what he was talking about. She was about to say that she was still a bit ill when Lockhart went on, “Well, of course, I knew at once why you were playing sick, Harriet. Stood out a mile.”

“I really was sick, sir,” Harri told him.

“Now playing ill is one way to get publicity, but never the right way. You don’t want people thinking you’re sickly, Harriet!”

“What?”

“Gave you a taste of publicity, didn’t I,” said Lockhart. “Gave you the bug,” and here he winked. “Now I know you didn’t want to compete with me for the spotlight. Completely understand. But you can’t spend the year playing ill.”

“Sir, really. You can ask Snape and the Headmaster. I fainted.”

“We’ve all ‘fainted’,” he said with a grin. “Just calm down, all right? Plenty of time for all that when you’re older. Yes, yes, I know what you’re thinking! ‘It’s all right for him, he’s an internationally famous wizard already!’ But when I was twelve, I was just as much of a nobody as you are now. In fact, I’d say I was even more of a nobody! I mean, a few people have heard of you, haven’t they? All the business with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named!” Harri was shocked. Was this man actually implying that he was more famous than Harri was? It was laughable.
It wasn’t like Harri wanted fame, but she knew that she had it. She couldn’t go anywhere without whispers. Without being recognized. Everyone thanked her for ending the ghastly war.

He continued on, “I know that it isn’t as good as winning Witch Weekly’s Most-Charming-Smile Award five times in a row, as I have- but it’s a start, Harriet, it’s a start.”

He gave Harri a hearty wink and strode off. Harri stood stunned for a few seconds, then remembering she was supposed to be in the greenhouse, she opened the door and slid inside.

Professor Sprout was standing behind a trestle bench in the center of the greenhouse. About twenty pairs of different-colored earmuffs were lying on the bench. When Harri had taken her place between Hermione and Neville, she said, “We’ll be repoting Mandrakes today. Now, who can tell me the properties of the Mandrake?”

To nobody’s surprise, Harri, Hermione, and Neville all shot hands into the air.

“Show-offs,” whispered Ron.

Sprout chose Neville, “Mandragora is a powerful restorative,” he said. “They are used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed to their original state.”

“Excellent. Ten points to Gryffindor,” said Professor Sprout. “The Mandrake forms an essential part of most antidotes. It is also, however, dangerous. Who can tell me why?”

Hermione’s hand beat Harri’s up.

“The cry of the Mandrake is fatal to anyone who hears it,” she said promptly

“Precisely. Take ten points,” said Professor Sprout. “Now, the Mandrakes we have here are still very young.”

She pointed to a row of deep trays as she spoke, and everyone shuffled forward for a better look. A hundred or so tufty little plants, purplish green in color, were growing there in rows. They looked quite unremarkable to Harri, but she knew that a strange baby-ish looking plant/animal hybrid lurked below.

“Everyone take a pair of earmuffs,” said Professor Sprout.

There was a scramble as everyone but Lavender tried to seize a pair that wasn’t pink and fluffy.

“When I tell you to put them on, make sure your ears are completely covered,” said Professor Sprout. “When it is safe to remove them, I will give you the thumbs-up. Right- earmuffs on.”

Harri snapped the muffs over her years. They shut out sound completely. Definitely charmed, she thought, thinking of the muggle equivalent.

Professor Sprout put on a pink fluffy pair over her own ears, rolled up the sleeves of her robes, grasped one of the tufty plants firmly, and pulled hard. There it was, the small, muddy, and extremely ugly baby. It had pale green, mottled skin, and was clearly bawling at the top of its lungs.

Professor Sprout took a large plant pot from under the table and plunged the Mandrake into it, burying him in dark, damp, compost until only the tufted leaves were visible. Professor Sprout dusted off her hands, gave them all the thumbs-up, and removed her own earmuffs.
“As our Mandrakes are only seedlings, their cries won’t kill yet,” she said calmly. “However, they will knock you out for several hours, and as I’m sure none of you want to miss your first day back, make sure your earmuffs are securely in place while you work. I will attract your attention when it is time to pack up.”

“Four to a try- there is a large supply of pots here-compost in the sacks over there- and be careful of the Venomous Tentacula, it’s teething”

She gave a sharp slap to a spiky, dark red plant as she spoke, making it draw in the long feelers that he been inching sneakily over her shoulder.

Harri, Ron, and Hermione were not joined by Neville. He opted to work with his soulmate, Hannah Abbot, and two other Hufflepuffs. Instead, they were joined by a Hufflepuff boy Harri knew by sight but had never spoken to.

“Justin Finch-Fletchley,” he said brightly, shaking Harri by the hand. “Know who you are, of course, the famous Harriet Potter… and you’re Hermione Granger- always top of everything” (Hermione beamed as she had her hand shaken too) “- and Ron Weasley. Was that your sister sorted last night?”

“Yes, Gryffindor again!” said Ron with a smile. Harri felt ashamed, she hadn’t asked after Ginny at all.

“That Lockhart’s something, isn’t he?” said Justin happily as they began filling their plant pots with dragon dung compost. “Awfully brave chap. Have you read his books? I’d have died for fear if I’d been cornered in a telephone booth by a werewolf, but he stayed cool and -zap- just fantastic.”

“He was wrong to kill that werewolf!” Harri said sharply. “They’re only a wolf three nights a month. The rest of the time they’re just people. It’s positively horrendous. And then when Lockhart found out it was a muggle who had never had any idea they were a werewolf. That was why he was in that town, not because he meant to hurt people.”

“Well, but Lockhart is right that he didn’t have any choice!” Justin insisted. “I mean, even people who aren’t werewolves during the rest of the month. They’ve still got the wolf inside them, corrupting them.”

“I know that’s not true,” Harri replied. Justin looked very awkward and opted to change the subject.

“My name was down for Eton. I can’t tell you how glad I am I came here instead. Of course, Mother was slightly disappointed, but since I made her read Lockhart’s books I think she’s begun to see how useful it’ll be to have a fully trained wizard in the family…”

After that, they didn’t have much chance to talk. Their earmuffs were back on and they needed to concentrate on the Mandrakes. Professor Sprout had made it look extremely easy, but it wasn’t. The Mandrakes didn’t like coming out of the earth, but didn’t seem to want to go back into it either. They squirmed, kicked, flailed their sharp little fists, and gnashed their teeth; Harri spent ten whole minutes trying to squash a particularly fat one into a pot.

The after effect of the class was that Harri was more exhausted than she probably should be. She felt a bit faint and wondered if she should beg off to the Hospital Wing instead of going to Transfiguration. Hermione glared when she vaguely mentioned it, and Harri drug herself to class instead.
Professor McGonagall’s classes were always hard work, but today was review and involved wand waving, which Harri had been strictly ordered to avoid. McGonagall already knew this and set Harri to writing an essay while the rest of the class was turning beetles into buttons.

Harri was relieved to hear the lunch bell. Her stomach had been rumbling angrily for the last half hour, and she was certain she should have eaten more than just oatmeal for breakfast. They went down to lunch, where Ron and Neville glowered at Hermione for showing them her perfect buttons.

“What’ve we got this afternoon?” asked Harri, hastily changing the subject.

“Defense Against the Dark Arts,” said Hermione at once.

“Ugg,” Harri groaned, “I really should just go back to the Hospital Wing.”

“Why,” demanded Ron, seizing Hermione’s schedule, “have you outlined all Lockhart’s lessons in little hearts?”

“Oh Hermione, no!” laughed Neville.

Hermione snatched the schedule back, blushing furiously.

“But you have to admit,” she said through her embarrassment, “that he looked very fetching in those robes. And didn’t you notice, his wrist covering is still silver.”

“I didn’t notice,” said Harri. Ron and Neville just shook their heads.

“Probably because his soulmate is the reflection,” joked Ron.

They finished lunch and went outside into the overcast courtyard. Hermione sat down on a stone step and buried her nose in the well-read Voyages with Vampires again. Harri, Ron, and Neville stood talking about Quidditch for several minutes before Harri became aware that she was being closely watched. Looking up, she saw a very small mousey-haired boy staring at her as though transfixed. He was clutching what looked like an ordinary Muggle camera, and the moment Harri looked at him, he went bright red.

“All right, Harriet? I’m- I’m Colin Creevey,” he said breathlessly, taking another step forward. “I’m in Gryffindor, too. D’you thing- would it be all right if- can I have a picture?” he said, raising the camera hopefully.

Harri opened her mouth, but so sound came out. She felt very uncomfortable. A picture? Goodness no. “Er- why?” Harri asked. She couldn’t miss the look of disappointment that flashed across Colin’s face.

“So I can prove I’ve met you,” said Colin Creevey eagerly, edging further forward. “I’m in Gryffindor, too. D’you thing- would it be all right if- can I have a picture?” he said, raising the camera hopefully.

Harri opened her mouth, but so sound came out. She felt very uncomfortable. A picture? Goodness no. "Er- why?" Harri asked. She couldn’t miss the look of disappointment that flashed across Colin’s face.

“So I can prove I’ve met you,” said Colin Creevey eagerly, edging further forward. Harri took a step back, nearly bumping into Ron. “I know all about you. Everyone’s told me. About how you survived when You-Know-Who tried to kill you and how he disappeared and everything and how you’ve still got a lightning scar on your forehead” (his eyes went to the scar, and once again Harri vowed that she would cut fringe) “and a boy in my dormitory said if I develop the film in the right potion, the pictures will move.” Colin drew a great shuddering breath of excitement and said, “It’s amazing here, isn’t it? I never knew all the odd stuff I could do was magic till I got the letter from Hogwarts. My dad’s a milkman, he couldn’t believe it either. So I’m taking loads of pictures to send home to him. And it’d be really good if I had one of you”— he looked imploringly at Harri—“maybe your friend could take it and I could stand next to you? And then, could you sign it?”
“Signed photos? You’re giving out signed photos, Potter?”

Loud and scathing, Draco Malfoy’s voice echoed around the courtyard. He had stopped right behind Colin, flanked, as he always was at Hogwarts, by his large and thuggish cronies, Crabbe and Goyle.

“Everyone line up!” Malfoy roared to the crowd. “Harriet Potter’s giving out signed photos!”

“No, I’m not,” said Harri, her face full red. “Shut up, Malfoy.”

“You’re just jealous,” piped up Colin, whose entire body was about as thick as Crabbe’s neck.

“Jealous?” said Malfoy, who didn’t need to shout anymore: half the courtyard was listening in. Not Hermione though. She was still reading. Harri noticed Malfoy glance over in her direction. “Of what? I don’t want a foul scar right across my head, thanks. I don’t think getting your head cut open makes you that special, myself.”

Crabbe and Goyle were sniggering stupidly.

“Eat slugs, Malfoy,” said Ron angrily. Crabbe stopped laughing and started rubbing his knuckles in a menacing way.

“Be careful, Weasley,” sneered Malfoy. “You don’t want my father making trouble for yours at work.”

Ron whipped out his wand, but Hermione shut *Voyages with Vampires* with a snap and whispered, “Look out!”

“What’s all this, what’s all this?” Gilderoy Lockhart was striding toward them, his turquoise robes swirling behind him. “Who’s giving out signed photos?”

Harri started to speak but she was cut short as Lockhart flung an arm around her shoulders and thundered jovially, “Shouldn’t have asked! We meet again, Harriet!”

Pinned to Lockhart’s side and burning with humiliation, Harri saw Malfoy slide smirking back into the crowd.

“Come on then, Mr. Creevey,” said Lockhart, beaming at Colin. “A double portrait, can’t do better than that, and we’ll both sign it for you.”

She was going to die of shame. It was sheer force of will that kept her magic in check. She was filled with a certain knowledge that if she lost control of her magic now she would probably be sick on Lockhart’s pretty robes and would pass out in front of everyone. That was more embarrassing than a picture, wasn’t it? Harri wasn’t really sure, at least with the former she would be blacked out and not a witness to this horror show.

Where was Snape when you needed him?

Colin fumbled for his camera and took the picture as the bell rang behind them, signaling the start of afternoon classes.

“Off you go, move along there,” Lockhart called to the crowd, and he set off back to the castle with Harri, who was wishing she had the magical energy to disappear.

A word to the wise, Harriet,” said Lockhart paternally as they entered the building through a side
door. “I covered up for you back there with young Creevy- if he was photographing me, too, your schoolmates won’t think you’re setting yourself up so much…”

Deaf to Harri’s stammers, Lockhart swept her down a corridor lined with staring students and up a staircase.

“Let me just say that handing out signed pictures at this stage of your career isn’t sensible- looks a tad bigheaded, Harriet, to be frank. There may well come a time when, like me, you’ll need to keep a stack handy wherever you go, but”- he gave a little chortle- “I don’t think you’re quite there yet.”

They had reached Lockhart’s classroom and he let Harri go at last. Harri yanked her robes straight and headed for a seat at the very back of the class, where she busied herself with piling all of Lockhart’s books in front of her, so that she could avoid looking at the real thing.

The rest of the class came clattering in, and Ron and Neville sat down on either side of Harri. Hermione went to the front to sit down with Lavender and Parvati, looking a little sheepish when she glanced back at Harri.

“Sorry,” she mouthed.

“You could’ve fried an egg on your face,” said Ron. “You’d better hope Creevy doesn’t meet Ginny, or they’ll start a Harri Potter fan club.”

“Shut up,” snapped Harri. The last thing she needed was for Lockhart or Malfoy to hear the phrase, “Harri Potter fan club.”

“I’d join,” said Neville. “We could make t-shirts.”

“And a banner,” added Ron.

“Regular meetings with member dues.”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up,” she hissed at them, head between her hands.

When the whole class was seated, Lockhart cleared his throat loudly and silence fell. He reached forward, picked up Hermione’s copy of *Travels with Trolls*, and held it up to show his own, winking portrait on the front.

“Me,” he said, pointing at it and winking as well. “Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third Class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of *Witch Weekly’s* Most-Charming-Smile Award- but I don’t talk about that. I didn’t get rid of the Bandon Banshee by smiling at her!”

Parvati literally gasped.

“I see you’ve all bought a complete set of my books- well done. I thought we’d start today with a little quiz. Nothing to worry about- just to check how well you’ve read them how much you’ve taken in-”

When he handed out the test papers he returned to the front of the class and said, “you have thirty minutes- start- now!”

Harri looked down at her paper and read:

1. What is Gilderoy Lockhart’s favorite color?
2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart’s secret ambition?

3. What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart’s greatest achievement to date?

On and on it went, over three sides of paper, right down to"

54. When is Gilderoy Lockhart’s birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

Harri had to restrain herself from laughing. She needed to keep a copy of this to show Snape. He’d love it. And he called her father big headed. This- this was the zenith of it. She glanced over at Neville who looked like he was fit to burst as well.

“Should we try to be serious?” she asked him.

But before he could answer, Lockhart called, “Now no sharing answers!”

Half an hour later, Lockhart collected the papers and rifled through them in front of the class.

“Tut, tut- hardly any of you remembered that my favorite color is lilac. I say so in Year of the Yeti. And a few of you need to read Wanderings with Werewolves more carefully- I clearly state in chapter twelve that my ideal birthday gift would be harmony between all magic and non-magic people- though I wouldn’t say no to a large bottle of Ogden’s Old Firewhisky!”

He gave them another roguish wink. Ron was now staring at Lockhart with an expression of disbelief on his face; Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas, who were sitting in front, were shaking with silent laughter. Hermione, Lavender, and Parvati on the other hand, were listening to Lockhart with rapt attention and gave a start when he mentioned Hermione’s name.

“... but Miss. Hermione Granger knew my secret ambition is to rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions- good girl! In fact”- he flipped her paper over- “full marks! Where is Miss. Hermione Granger?”

Oh good Lord no. Hermione hadn’t.

She raised a trembling hand.

“Excellent!” beamed Lockhart. “Quite excellent! Take ten points for Gryffindor! And so- to business-”

He bent down behind his desk and lifted a large, covered cage onto it.

“Now- be warned! It is my job to arm you against the foulest creatures known to wizardkind! You may find yourselves facing your worst fears in this room. Know only that no harm can befall you whilst I am here. All I ask is that you remain calm.”

In spite of herself, Harri leaned around her pile of books for a better look at the cage. Lockhart placed a hand on the cover. Dean and Seamus had stopped laughing now. Hermione looked intrigued.

“I must ask you not to scream,” said Lockhart in a low voice. “It might provoke them.”

As the whole class held its breath, Lockhart whipped off the cover.
“Yes,” he said dramatically. “Freshly caught Cornish pixies.”

Seamus Finnigan couldn’t control himself. He let out a snort of laughter that ever Lockhart couldn’t mistake for a scream of terror.

“Yes?” he smiled at Seamus.

“Well, they’re not- they’re not very- dangerous, are they?” Seamus choked.

“Don’t be so sure!” said Lockhart, waggling a finger annoyingly at Seamus. “Devilish tricky little blighters they can be!”

The Pixies were electric blue and about eight inches high, with pointed faces and voices so shrill it was like listening to a lot of budgies arguing. The moment the cover had been removed, they had started jabbering and rocketing around, rattling the bars and making bizarre faces at the people nearest them.

“Right then,” Lockhart said loudly. “Let’s see what you make of them then!” And he opened the cage.

Now Harri knew what a pain these types of creatures were. She had run into a few at Spinner’s End and knew the spell to get them all quite. The pandemonium that was quickly developing caused her to roll up her sleeves, brandish her wand, and call out the Freezing Charm, “Immobulus”

The Pixies all froze. It must have been a strong spell then, she had been sure she would have had to cast it several times to get them all.

That was good. Only... not that she was thinking on it she understood why Madame Pomfrey hadn’t wanted her to do magic. Exhaustion washed over her.

Everything went dark again.

Bugger.

She’d passed out again. She was sure of it. Everything was dark and her eyes felt too heavy to open.

_Oh, Harri. Why do you keep doing this to yourself?_ a voice asked.

I don’t know. I don’t mean to. I was just trying to help everyone.

_You should know better. I’ve already taken so much, you should have let yourself rest. We don’t need to put too much stress on that pretty little core of yours._

Wait? Who are you? What is this?

_Don’t worry about that Harriet. I’m afraid we won’t get to do this much longer. Your magic won’t be what sustains me soon. That will be my new friend._

My magic?

_Shh, forget. Your sweet magic has done its job and I am strong. What more could I have asked of you? Magic truly made you perfect for my needs, didn’t it?_
This made no sense, but it hurt her head to keep thinking of it. She sunk deeper into the safe darkness and gave up trying to concentrate on the hissing voice.

Chapter End Notes

I got some of the nicest replies from y'all. Thanks so much for all the positive comments.
When Harri woke, it was to a dark Hospital Wing. She felt around for her glasses and found them on the bedside table. Out the window, Harri could see the faint pink light of early morning. Late afternoon had been when she had passed out, so she had been asleep for well over twelve hours. She did finally feel better though. The heavy feeling had faded, her head was no longer throbbing, and she felt as if she could manage to go to class without falling over in exhaustion. Madame Pomfrey had been right that staying in the Hospital Wing and missing her first day would have been better for her. Darn the mediwitch, she wouldn’t let Harri escape next time.

A soft snore to her left made Harri jump, and squinting through the dim light she saw a lump on the bed next to her. Was someone else injured? But no, as she squinted she was greeted with the sight of Severus Snape. Had he stayed the whole night? A warm feeling filled Harri’s chest.

“Ah good, you’re awake,” someone said, making Harri jump. It was Madame Pomfrey in her bathrobe. She looked tired but decently alert. Had she been waiting up for Harri all night?

“How did you…”

“A little charm, dear. A healer’s bread and butter to know when a patient wakes up.”

“Oh. That’s a useful trick,” Harri replied.

Snape snorted slightly and woke.

“Is she up, Madame?” he asked sleepily.

“I’m up, Uncle Sev,” Harri said lightly. “And feeling much better,” she told the two adults.

“We’ll see about that,” said Madame Pomfrey, who began to cast diagnostic charms. A soft blue glow enveloped Harri, and Snape let out a satisfied sigh.

“That does look better,” he said softly.

“Yes, I’d say so,” agreed the mediwitch. “Your core has stabilized, Harriet. As I suspected, rest would have done you good yesterday instead of overexerting. Maybe next time you’ll listen,” she said primly.

“Hopefully there won’t be a next time, ma’am,” Harri told her cheekily.

“Unlikely,” the witch said. “Now I have prep to do. You’re free to go, Harri. If you feel suddenly tired do come back. I don’t want yesterday happening again. I’ll send an elf over with breakfast. Something easy on the stomach, I think. Would you like anything, Professor?” she asked Snape.

“Some tea,” answered Snape.

Madame Pomfrey was off in her usual bustling manner. Harri turned to Snape, who looked rumpled and out of place on the hospital bed. His hair, usually pulled back or hanging limply from fume oils, was in disarray.

“Are you mad?” Harri asked him.
“No. You shouldn’t have been put in that position to begin with. Lockhart,” Snape paused with a sneer, “should know better than to release a gang of pixies into a second-year class.”

“Why is it that he got the job instead of you?” Harri asked. It was well known that Snape wanted the defense job.

“It’s a cursed position. If I were to ever take over, it would only be for a year.”

“It’s actually cursed?”

“Yes,” said Snape, his lips curled into an unhappy sneer. “We haven’t been able to keep a steady professor for the twenty odd years I’ve been at Hogwarts.”

“Do you know who cursed it?” Harri asked.

Snape rolled his eyes, “No, but does it matter? The point is that we are cured with incompetence. My least favorite attribute. We must take care to not let that pompous man hurt anyone, especially not you, again.”

Harri shrugged, “It wasn’t really his fault.

The room was lighter now, and Harri could make out Snape’s angry eyes. “It was his fault, Harriet. He is an adult. You are school children.”

“I don’t see how that matters.”

“I hope one day you will.”

Harri received minor jeering from the Slytherin table about her fainting spell. Most of came from Pansy Parkinson and Draco Malfoy, who could be ignored. Hermione was very pleased to have Harri back in the dorms finally, giving her “A break from all this girly silliness.”

“Hermione, I like the girly silliness,” Harri told her with a laugh. She then presented her pink fwooper feather quills to her three roommates. Lavender and Parvati both squealed with delight and wrapped Harri in a tight hug while jumping up in down.

“Careful! I’ll bend them!” Harri told them through her smile. Three people who hugged her, she thought warmly.

She spent a lot of the next few days dodging out of sight whenever she saw Gilderoy Lockhart coming down a corridor. He had cornered her the day after she left the Hospital Wing to give another lecture about playing sick for the sake of fame.

“He’s unbearable,” Harri groused to Hermione that night.

“Oh, he’s just looking out for you,” Hermione tried to brush off.

“What is it about Lockhart, Hermione?” Harri asked in exasperation. “I know he’s good looking, but he’s horrid.”

Hermione gripped the silver mark covering on her wrist. “Harri… I just want to pretend. Please let me. He’s handsome and he’s published such exciting books. I don’t really care if any of it is true. I just want there to be someone else to think about.”

“Oh.”
“Yes, oh. I don’t know if you can understand, Harri. I know you say you’ve met yours, but you don’t have to put up with him day after day being horrid.”

Harri fell quiet. How to explain to Hermione that she had defiantly won the worst soulmate contest. There probably wasn’t a way without saying… and Harri didn’t want to say anything. Nasty thoughts filled her head, thoughts of her friends finding out, thinking she was maybe evil herself, wanting nothing to do with her, Hermione never giving her a hug again.

“I guess you’re right, Hermione,” Harri said, letting the subject of Lockhart and his abject horribleness drop.

They fell into an awkward silence, and then bed.

Harri didn’t bring up Lockhart around Hermione again, but she did start to complain about Colin Creevey. She felt like he was more Colin Creepy. He had clearly memorized Harri’s schedule and had taken to running into her six or seven times a day. Always saying, “Hi, Harriet!” or “All right, Harri.” He would let out a little squeak of excitement every time she would respond, “Hello, Collin,” with more exasperation each time.

With the new stress of being back at school and two annoying figures following her around, Harri was relieved when Friday night came and it was time to serve detention with Snape and the Runespoor.

“Furry,” the middle head hissed happily when it saw Harri.

“Hello again,” Harri told it. “I think we’re doing actual research tonight.”

“It’s certainly taken long enough,” groused the right head.

“Yes, we have been wondering when true research would start,” agreed the left.

“I didn’t mind,” said the middle. “I’ve gotten to spend so much time being awash in the magic.”

“Well they’re ready to get started,” Harri told Snape.

“Excellent,” he said with a manic gleam to his eyes. “We’ll begin our research with the mental regenerative properties of the Runespoor. Which potion uses the eggs, Harriet.”

“The Wit-Sharpening Potion, Algier’s Short Term Memory Enhancer, and The Neuron Regeneration Brew.”

“Good. Now when testing the effects of other components of the Runespoor we will be using other magical aspects of it and testing it in the same potions to see if it enhances their effectiveness, has no effect, or lessens the effect. Which properties would make the most sense to test?”

“Scales, Fang, and Venom?”

“A good start. We could also try with their uric acid.”

“Eww, snake urine?”

“Can be imbued with magic properties.”

“Gross.”

“Yes, that would describe many potion ingredients,” Snape said rolling his eyes.
“In any case, we will start with venom. Please ask the Runespoor’s right head to bite down on this,” Snape said, handing an interesting vial with what looked like stretched skin on top to Harri. “Once we have the venom I’ll be showing you how to convert it to a powder. A powder is a much more stable way to work with the venom. Why?”

“Because the powder is produced using a process that put the venom into a known… amount? The active agent becomes quantifiable and therefore can be accurately measured. The potion can be replicated, and the amount used can be raised or lowered without guesswork.”

“A little messy in the description, but yes,” Snape said with a slight smile. “It is also easier to make anti-venom from powder. That is partially why we are beginning here. If something were to happen, we want the ability to fix it quickly.”

Harri nodded and then turned back to the snake. It had been watching the two humans speak with vague interest. Harri wasn’t certain on the snake’s grasp on English.

“So,” Harri hissed, “If you would be willing to bite down on this so we can collect venom, that would be all we need of you tonight.”

“Our venom?” asked the left head. “Why would you want something that is for killing our prey?”

“Yes, it doesn’t seem like it would help in any research,” said the right head with suspicion. He looked grumpy and a little silly wearing his cone.

“Venom used in non-lethal doses can actually be useful in many medical practices,” Harri said. It didn’t translate well.

The middle head hissed in laughter. “Oh, Furry. You speak, but with such a funny accent.”

She continued to bicker with the snake until it finally relented and bit down on the skin covered jar. Bright orange venom exploded out of its fangs.

“That’s an excellent sample,” Snape said cheerily. It was strange seeing him so happy. Was it an alien wearing Snape’s face?

“Now, to begin the process of powdering…” and they spent the next several hours going over how to powder a venom so that it was at several different toxicities. They created five different solutions, which Snape was quite pleased about.

While Harri was glad the evening was working out so well for him, she was very tired and it was near midnight by the time all the powders were collected and stored. The Runespoor was dozing on its warming rock, leaving Harri feeling envious that the snake got to sleep.

It must be nearly time to leave, Harr thought sleepily.

Then… she heard something. It was a voice, a voice to chill the bone marrow, a voice of breathtaking, ice-cold venom.

“Come… come to me… Let me rip you… Let me tear you… Let me kill you…”

Harri gave a huge jump and nearly fell off her stool. Snape looked startled, removed his goggles, and looking over at Harri with annoyance.

“If you’re falling asleep on your feet you can go to bed, Harriet,” he said sharply.
“What? No.”

Snape looked at her dubiously.

“NO, the voice!”

“What voice?” asked Snape, looking around like he expected a Weasley twin to appear in his storeroom.

“It was…. It was threatening to kill someone.”

“You heard a voice threatening to kill someone? I didn’t hear anything Harriet. Were you dreaming?” It was patronizing.

“NO. I wouldn’t dream something like that. It was… I’ve never heard anything like it!”

“We heard it too, Furry,” interjected the Runespoor.

Harri turned to the snake. “You did?” she asked it. “Was it a snake then?”

A snake roaming the corridors looking to kill could very well be a Slytherin student’s pet looking for mice.

“It was Mother,” said the critic with a reverent hiss.

“Your mother is here?” Harri asked. Had they kidnapped a hatchling whose mother had hunted them from Africa? That seemed very unlikely.

“Not our mother,” explained the left head. “The Mother. Of all Serpents.”

Harri looked at Snape who looked frustrated from being pulled from his sharp focus. “They say it was a snake. But I’m not sure this is translating right. Do you know who the Mother of Serpents is?”

Snape shook his head. “I’ve no idea. But if there is an illegal snake slithering around Hogwarts, we’ll find it. Grab a bezoar before heading back to your tower. I’ll write you a note for being out past curfew.”

“You’re sending me back when there is a murderous snake around here?”

“You’re a parslemouth, Harriet. If anyone can be wandering around, it’s you. Talk to the bloody thing if you run into it.”

That didn’t feel acceptable to Harri, but she had her invisibility cloak and would just tread lightly as she went. Hopefully, she didn’t meet a nasty surprise on her way to the common room. At least they don’t like stairs, she thought and was glad when she reached the staircase off of the Great Hall.

It was so late that the Gryffindor common room was almost empty. Harri went straight to the dormitory. Lavender and Parvati were asleep, but Hermione was up still reading in bed. She gave a small wave in greeting, before going back to her book.

How someone could look so interested in Goblin Wars, Harri would never know.

She climbed onto Hermione’s bed and shut the curtains. Keeping her voice low so that the other two wouldn’t wake, Harri told her about her evening with Snape.
“And they said it was the Mother of Serpents?” Hermione asked. “Snape just let you walk back,” she added with an angry furrow between her eyes.

“Well, he had a point. Snakes aren’t supposed to attack Parslemouths. It’s a type of magical binding. At least, that’s how the Runespoor describes it.”

“We’ll have to research this,” Hermione said. “I don’t like the idea of a mad snake slithering around the castle,” she said with a shiver.

Harri didn’t mind that she and Hermione stayed up talking till one in the morning on the grounds that she could sleep in on Saturday morning. The four friends were planning to go see Hagrid around ten, but that still left plenty of time for rest. Harri, however, was shaken awake several hours earlier by Angelina Johnson.

Angelina didn’t look happy about it. “Up, Potter. Wood wants us to practice.” Harri squinted out the window. There was a thin mist hanging across the pink-and-gold sky. Now that she was awake, she couldn’t understand how she had slept through the racket that the birds and her cat were making.

Gulliver was standing at the window letting out strange eeks and chirps, his tail swishing.

“Angelina, has Wood gone mad? It’s the crack of dawn.”

“You’re telling me,” the chaser groused. “On the field in fifteen.”

Harri climbed out of bed and tried to find her Quidditch robes. When she found her scarlet team robes and pulled on her cloak for warmth, she scribbled a note to Hermione explaining where she’d gone. She went down the spiral staircase to the common room, her Nimbus Two Thousand on her shoulder. She had just reached the portrait hole when there was a clatter behind her and Colin Creevey came dashing down the boy’s stair, his camera swinging madly around his neck and something clutched in his hand.

“I heard someone saying your name on the stairs, Harriet! Look what I’ve got here! I’ve had it developed, I wanted to show you—”

Harri looked bemusedly at the photograph Colin was brandishing under her nose. A moving black-and-white Lockhart was tugging hard on an arm Harri recognized as her own. She was pleased to see that her photographic self was putting up a good fight and refusing to be dragged into view. As Harri watched, Lockhart gave up and slumped, panting, against the white edge of the picture.

“Will you sign it?” said Colin eagerly.

It was time to be straight with him. “No. Colin look, I’m sure you mean well, but you’re making me uncomfortable. I’m not a real celebrity. I’m a girl whose parents got murdered. I need you to stop following me around. If you want to actually talk, that’s great. But I’m not someone you can follow around and take pictures of.”

He looked crestfallen. “No… I’m sorry Harriet. I’m sure you don’t want some first year following you around.”

“It’s not even that, Colin. I’m happy to get to know you. But you have to treat me like a normal person. One you’re just getting to know.”

The small boy nodded. “Alright.” He looked glum. “I’ll leave you alone for now, Harriet. I didn’t mean to be rude or anything. I just… I’ve heard how You-Know-Who was. That people like me…”
people who are muggle-born with milkmen for fathers, they weren’t treated very well. I feel really
grateful,” he looked up at her with shining eyes. “I don’t like to think that there is a version of life
where I don’t get to come here and be magical. And it’s all because of you that I do!”

Harri understand. She did. It was a much less creepy version of his adoration than she had feared.
“It wasn’t really me, though. It was me, but I have no idea why it happened. So just be glad that it
did. I think I’m rather circumstantial to it.”

Colin nodded and turned to head back to the dorms. “Bye, Colin. I’ll see you around,” she said.
He perked up a little and gave Harri a small wave.

The rest of the Gryffindor team were already in the changing room. Wood was the only person
who looked truly awake. Fred and George were sitting, puffy-eyed and tousle-haired, next to Alicia
Spinnet, who seemed to be nodding off against the wall behind her. Her fellow Chasers, Katie Bell
and Angelina Johnson, were yawning side by side opposite them.

“There you are, Harri, what kept you?” said Wood briskly. “Now I wanted a quick talk with you all
before we actually get onto the field…”

What followed were diagrams that fell on deaf ears. Several boards of diagrams were pushed
forward, each taking nearly half an hour to explain. When they finally were done, several
motivational speeches later, the sun was up completely.

As Harri walked onto the field she saw Ron, Hermione, and Neville sitting in the stands.

“Aren’t you finished yet?” called Ron incredulously.

“Haven’t even started,” said Harri, looking jealously at the toast and marmalade they had brought
out of the Great Hall. “Wood’s been teaching us new moved.”

She mounted her broomstick and kicked at the ground, soaring up into the air. The cool morning
air whipped her hair, waking her up far more effectively than Wood’s long talk. It felt wonderful to
fly and feel her hair streaming behind her. Parvati would be aghast at the knots.

They were getting into formation to try Wood’s first diagram when Wood stopped midsentence. “I
don’t believe it!” he hissed in outrage. “I booked the field for today!”

Several people in green robes were walking on the field, broomsticks in their hands. Wood shot
toward the ground, landing rather harder than he meant to in his anger, staggering slightly as he
dismounted. Harri, Fred, and George followed.

“Flint!” Wood bellowed at the Slytherin Captain. “This is our practice time! We got up specially.
You can clear off now!”

Marcus Flint was even larger than Wood. He had a look of troll-ish cunning on his face as he
replied, “Plenty of room for all us, Wood.”

Angelina, Alicia, and Katie had come over too. There were no girls on the Slytherin team, who
stood shoulder to shoulder, facing the Gryffindors, leering to a man. Their two beaters were leering
specifically at Angelina, who was the most full-figured of the female Gryffindor players.

“But I booked the field!” said Wood, positively spitting with rage. “I booked it!”

“Ah,” said Flint. “But I’ve got a specially signed note here from Professor Snape. ‘I Profesor S.
Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today on the Quidditch field owing to the
need to train their new Seeker.”

Harri wanted to march up to the castle and yell at Snape. He knew that times were assigned through Hooch. Professors weren’t supposed to do things like that. He was just angry that the Gryffindor team had only lost the Quidditch cup last year because she had been unconscious in the Hospital Wing.


And from behind the six large figures before them came a seventh, smaller boy, smirking all over his pale, pointed face. It was Draco Malfoy.

“Aren’t you Lucius Malfoy’s son?” said Fred, looking at Malfoy with dislike and no doubt remembering the altercation in Flourish and Blotts.

“Funny you should mention Draco’s father,” said Flint as the whole Slytherin team siled still more broadly. “Let me show you the generous gift he’s made to the Slytherin team.”

All seven of them held out their broomsticks. Seven highly polished, brand-new handles and seven sets of fine gold lettering spelling the words *Nimbus Two Thousand and One* gleamed under the Gryffindors’ nose in the early morning sun.

“Very latest model. Only came out last month,” said Flint carelessly, flicking a speck of dust from the end of his own. “I believe it outstrips the old Two Thousand series by a considerable amount. As for the old Cleansweeps”- he smiled nastily at Fred and George, who were both clutching Cleansweep Fives- “sweeps the board with them.”

None of the Gryffindor team could think of anything to say for a moment. Malfoy was smirking so broadly his cold eyes were reduced to slits.

“Oh, look,” said Flint. “A field invasion.”

Harri didn’t need to turn around to see that it was Ron, Neville, and Hermione coming towards them. She could see in Malfoy’s face. He wasn’t smirking anymore. He looked grim, with a hard set to his jaw like he was clenching his teeth.

“What’s happening?” Ron asked Harri. “Why aren’t you playing? And what’s he doing here?”

He was looking at Malfoy, taking in his Slytherin Quidditch robes.

“He’s on the team now,” Neville surmised. “Those are new brooms too.”

“That’s right,” Malfoy drawled. “I’m the new Seeker. Everyone’s just been admiring the brooms my father’s bought our team.”

Ron gaped, openmouthed at the seven superb broomsticks. Harri was a bit shocked too. The amount of money it would cost! She would have to empty her trust vault.

“Good, aren’t they?” said Malfoy smoothly. “But perhaps the Gryffindor team will be able to raise some gold and get new brooms, too. You could raffle off those Cleansweep Fives; I expect a museum would bid for them.”

The Slytherin team howled with laughter.

“At least no one of the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in,” said Hermione sharply. “They got
in on pure talent.”

The smug look on Malfoy’s face fell completely.

“No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,” he spat. It was far from the first time Mafoy had called Hermione that slur. Harri had comforted a crying Hermione several times last year. Neville had gotten jinxed over defending her. It was vile talk, and Harri wanted to punch the git.

Not every one of the Gryffindor team was used to Malfoy’s crude way of speaking to Hermione. Fred and George attempted to jump on Malfoy. Alicia shrieked, “How dare you!”

It was Ron though, who actually did something about Malfoy this time. He plunged his hand into his robes, pulled out his wad, and yelled: “You’ll pay for that one, Malfoy!” and pointed it furiously under Flint’s arm at Malfoy’s face.

A loud bang echoed around the stadium and a jet of green light shot out of Ron’s wand, hitting Malfoy square in the face.

Malfoy fell flat on his back, and Flint worked to help him to his feet. “You’ll pay for that Weasley!” he spat.

Malfoy opened his mouth to speak, no doubt something nasty was going to come out, when something literally nasty escaped. He gave an almighty belch and several slugs dribbled out of his mouth onto the grass.

The Gryffindor team worked very hard to subdue their laughter, and Ron was so white that his freckles stood out in sharp contrast.

“Not saying I don’t agree with you Mate,” Neville whispered, “but I’m not sure that was such a good idea.”

Malfoy managed a few pitiful “My father… will… hear” as he was hauled off to the Hospital Wing by Flint. All semblance of practice had fallen apart.

“I think you should go see McGonagall,” Wood told Ron frankly. “Get your feet under the situation.”

Ron, still very pale, nodded. Hermione looked visibly upset, though if it was Ron or Malfoy causing her distress, Harri wasn’t sure.

McGonagall’s office was not a common sight for Harri, Ron, or Neville. Hermione, on the other hand spent at least an hour a week badgering McGonagall for extra reading and updated journals. The four filed in, and McGonagall was already thin-lipped with anger. She knew.

“Well,” she began angrily, “there is never an excusable reason for hexing another student, Weasly. But go on, let’s hear it.”

She looked at Ron sternly through her square spectacles. Ron straightened his back, and firmly answered, “Malfoy called Hermione a… well you know. I don’t want to repeat it.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know, Mr. Weasley.”

“He called me a filthy little mudblood,” Hermione said, saving Ron the embarrassment of repeating the slur. “It isn’t the first time.”
McGonagall looked taken aback. “Language like that at this school is prohibited, Miss. Granger. If Mr. Malfoy speaks that way to you again, you will find a teacher at once.”

Hermione nodded, as McGonagall turned back to Ron. “As for you Mr. Weasley, as it’s the start of the term there aren’t many points to deduct. Hexing another student is usually worth one hundred points and detention. As it is, I’ll settle for the next four Saturdays. Be grateful it isn’t more.” Ron didn’t protest, just nodded.

“I understand, ma’am.”

Her face softened somewhat. “I know what you were trying to do, Mr. Weasley. It is an admirable thing to want to defend your friends. But be aware that choices like this have far-reaching consequences. You should owl your parents so they know what happened.”

Ron flinched and did look a bit shamefaced. "You're excused," said Professor McGonagall.

The four left.

“Why does McGonagall want you to write your dad?” Harri asked.

“Probably about work,” Ron muttered. The girls looked confused.

“Ron’s father works for the Ministry, right?” Neville asked. “Well, Malfoy’s father is the head of an Ancient House. That’s basically a Lordship. He pours a lot of gold into that place. Mr. Weasley could face some trouble at work over this.”

“All over me?” Hermione squeaked.

“It’s worth it, Hermione,” Ron told her. “They can’t get away with that. It’s nonsense. There isn’t a spell that you’ve met that you can’t do. It’s a disgusting thing to call someone. And hypocritical. Wizards have married into Muggles. We have to have, or we’d’ve died out.”

“You’re a pureblood, Ron!” Hermione exclaimed in frustration.

“Well sure, my grandparents are all magical. That’s all it means. Some families like to boast about no Muggle blood for generations, but no one really knows. It’s all tosh. My parents think so. And I know....” and here Ron took a very deep breath. “I know that my Dad won’t stand for you being called vile things. He won’t like that I cursed Malfoy. But he always told me to stand up for my friends. I’ll go write to them now,” and Ron headed off.

Hermione’s cheeks were pink. “When did Ron grow up from that rude boy a year ago?” she asked Harri.

“I don’t know,” Harri agreed. “But next time I’ll hex Malfoy. No one will lose a job over me.”

“I’ll write Gran,” interjected Neville. “Maybe she can do something to head Mr. Malfoy off. We’ve got some money investiture at the Ministry, too.”

Hermione and Harri were left in the corridor outside of McGonagall’s office, both a little shocked. “Are you okay, Hermione?” Harri asked her.

“I am... it’s just... do you think Ron has maybe... gotten a little more attractive?”

“No.”

“I really think...”
“It’s possible you just like seeing him curse Malfoy.” Hermione glared.

“No, I just...it’s nice. Having friends. Having someone stand up for me. He's very brave, that Ron Weasley.”

“No intergroup dating!” Harri said, glaring at Hermione. “You’ll break us up. You know I’ll choose you, and Neville will choose Ron. It just won’t work Hermione. I forbid it!”

“Harri, I’m just thirteen.”

“Almost thirteen! Speaking of, what do you want for your birthday? A snog from Ron?”

“Harriet Dorea Potter!”

Chapter End Notes

So I'm throwing in some Ron/Hermione but it's not an endgame pairing and it isn't planned as more than a little crush. So I'm not tagging it because I don't want people who actually want to read Ron/Hermione to get mad at me. Some of Ron's lines on blood purity are ripped directly from the book. If he wasn't belching slugs while saying them, I bet Hermione would feel pretty touched.

Thank you to the kind comments I've received. I really appreciate them! I'm pretty aware that I should go back and do some judicious editing (not to mention re-read for small plot details), so thanks for reading even with my many typos.
October arrived, spreading a damp chill over the grounds and into the castle. Madame Pomfrey was kept busy by a sudden spat of colds among the staff and students. The Pepperup Potion worked instantly, though it meant that Harri and Professor Snape spent less time researching and more time brewing for the Hospital Wing. Ginny Weasley, who had been looking pale, was bullied into taking some by Percy. The steam pouring from under her vivid hair gave the impression that her whole head was on fire.

Harri tried multiple times to speak with Ginny that month. Despite her best efforts though, Ginny had returned to her pre-summer state. She could barely manage a word around Harri and would rush away as soon as Harri sat down near her.

It was the week before Halloween when Harri received a summons to the Headmaster’s office. Handed off by Percy Weasley at breakfast it read,

“I would appreciate your presence this evening at five o’clock.

My favorite sweet is Pumpkin Pasties.

Professor Dumbledore”

“Did you do something to get in trouble?” Neville asked, reading over her shoulder.

“No at all,” Harri replied. She couldn’t think of a single toe she had stepped out of line. Ever since Ron had hexed Malfoy the four Gryffindors had done their best to stay out of trouble. Mrs. Weasley’s reply had not been a howler, as Ron feared, but a fairly cordial letter.

“While your father and I cannot say that we are pleased with your most recent actions, we also cannot say that we are surprised. After the way Draco Malfoy’s father spoke to Hermione’s parents, we assumed he would continue with his father’s poor manners.

At the moment there is no inquiry at your father’s office, but it wouldn’t surprise us if one happened in the next month. Your father will be sure every i is dotted and every t crossed. In the meantime, keep your grades up, look out for your sister, and don’t go near Draco Malfoy.

With love,

Mum”

With the Malfoy incident some time behind them now, Harri couldn’t think why the Headmaster wanted to see her. It was with great trepidation that she road the steps up to his office. Harri came to the gleaming oak door, with the brass knocker in the shape of a griffin, and paused, What could Dumbledore want?

She rapped at the door.
“Enter,” called Dumbledore.

Harri stepped into the large circular room. It was always very pleasant in this office and by far the most interesting office of any Professor. Snape’s was all darkness with strange jars and bad smells. Dumbledore’s office was very bright, covered in portraits, and strange silver instruments that sat whirring and emitting little puffs of smoke.

“You wanted to see me, Professor?” Harri asked, closing the door behind her.

“Oh yes,” said Dumbledore peering at her over his half-moon glasses. He was seated at his desk looking over paperwork. “I was wondering, Harri, if you would be interested in joining me for a Samhain ritual.”

“A what?” Harri asked uncertainly. Draco Malfoy had mentioned a Yule ritual, but Harri hadn’t heard any mention of Samhain.

“It’s a ritual that I perform every year on Halloween. I think it would be of great value for you to participate this year. Twelve years old, it’s a very important age for a young witch.”

Harri, who had not taken Arithmancy, had read up on the subject after her apparition act on her birthday. Day 212. It had mattered for the weakening of the wards. Why would being twelve years old matter though? It was not a strong number. It had several factors: two, three, four, and six. Four was more factors than many numbers, especially ages, had.

Higher factors meant to break down, to make weak. Having few factors, or being a prime number, meant to build up. Because a prime number could not be divided, it was a strong number to build magic off of.

Thus when a witch or wizard turned seventeen, an age without factors, something happened to the core that caused expansion. At eleven years old, school started because magic was finally easily accessible to a child. At thirteen, when more complex magic would begin to be taught, the core had a small puberty.

Why would a magically weak age, such as twelve, be one that had any value? By the arithmic standard of school ages, twelve was the magically weakest. It had the least magical expansion and the most reason for dedicated study and building on foundations.

“What would you need me to help you do, sir? Would anyone else be involved?” Was he inviting her because Snape would be there?

“Oh, no. It would just be us, Harri. And I’d show you as we went. It’s not complicated, but it is important.”

“That doesn’t make sense.” And it didn’t. Why would Dumbledore, the literal Lord of Light, want a twelve-year-old to tag along on a Samhain ritual? One that he deemed important. There was not a clear added value.

“It will, give it time. It’s magic you should know. It’s an old tradition, not often practiced anymore. None of the old light families publicly do. Families with magic inclined towards the dark have a different ritual entirely. What I would show you is something that would be very similar to the ritual the Potter family has historically performed.”

“You’re… trying to teach me magic that my family practiced?”

“In a way. You won’t have the opportunity to enact the specifics until you come of age. That
would be in your family grimoire, which should be in your family vault. Yet, you may find that what I show you is of greater utility than even that."

“I don’t understand.”

Dumbledore gave her a small smile, clearly amused at her blunt answer. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t. In time, Harri, in time.”

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Raindrops the size of bullets thundered on the castle windows for days on end; the lake rose, the flower beds turned into muddy streams, and Hagrid’s pumpkins swelled to the size of garden sheds. Oliver Wood’s enthusiasm for regular training sessions, however, was not dampened, which was why Harri was to be found, late on a stormy Saturday afternoon, a few days before Halloween, returning to Gryffindor Tower, drenched to the skin and splattered with mud.

As Harri squelched along the deserted corridor she came across somebody who looked just as preoccupied as she was. Nearly Headless Nick, the ghost of Gryffindor Tower, was staring morosely out of a window, muttering under his breath, “… don’t fulfill the requirements… half an inch, if that…”

“Hello, Nick,” said Harri.

“Hello, hello,” said Nearly Headless Nick, starting and looking around. He wore a dashing, plumed hat on his long curly hair, and a tunic with a ruff, which concealed the fact that his neck was almost completely severed. He was pale as smoke, and Harri could see right through him to the dark sky and torrential rain outside.

“You look troubled, young Potter,” said Nick, folding a transparent letter as he spoke and tucking it inside his doublet.

“So do you,” said Harri.

“Ah,” Nearly Headless Nick waved an elegant hand, “a matter of no importance… It’s not as though I really wanted to join… Thought I’d apply, but apparently I ‘don’t fulfill requirements’-”

In spite of his airy tone, there was a look of great bitterness on his face.

“But you would think, wouldn’t you,” he erupted suddenly, pulling the letter back out of his pocket, “that getting hit forty-five times in the beck with a blunt az would qualify you to join the Headless Hunt?”

“Oh- yes,” said Harri, who was obviously supposed to agree.

“I mean, nobody wishes more than I do that it had all been quick and clean, and my head had come off properly, I mean it would have saved me a great deal of pain and ridicule. However-” Nearly Headless Nick shook his letter open and read furiously:

“We can only accept huntsmen whose heads have parted completely with their bodies. You will appreciate that it would be impossible otherwise for members to participate in hunt activities such as Horseback Head-Juggling and Head Polo. It is with the greatest regret, therefore, that I must inform you that you do not fulfill our requirements. With best wishes, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore.”

Fuming, Nearly Headless Nick stuffed the letter away. “Half an inch of skin and sinew holding my new on, Harriet! Most people would think that’s good and beheaded, but oh, no, it’s not enough for
Sir. Properly Decapitated-Podmore.”

Nearly Headless Nick took several deep breaths and then said in a far calmer tone, “So- what’s bothering you? Anything I can do?”

“No,” said Harri. “Not unless you know anything about participating in a Samhain ritual. I’ve been invited by—”

The rest of Harri’s sentence was drowned out by a high-pitched mewing from somewhere near her ankles. She looked down, almost expecting to see Gulliver, but instead saw a pair of lamp-like yellow eyes. It was Mrs. Norris, the skeletal gray cat who was used by the caretaker, Argus Filch, as a sort of deputy in his endless battle against the students.

“You’d better get out of here, Harriet,” said Nick quickly. “Filch isn’t in a good mood- he’s got the flu and some third years accidentally plastered frog brains all over the ceiling in dungeon five. He’s been cleaning all morning, and if he sees you dripping mud all over the place—”

“Oh,” said Harri. “Right, Scourgify,” she said, pointing her wand down at the puddle that had formed. It quickly evaporated. She was about to cast on the tracks that she had made, when Argus Filch burst suddenly through a tapestry to Harri’s right, wheezing and looking wildly about for the rule-breaker. There was a thick tartan scarf bound around his head, and his nose was unusually purple.

“No spellcasting in the corridors! And look at that filth you’ve tracked in. Follow me, Potter!”

“Sir, I’m really happy to clean this up. I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking.”


So Harri waved a gloomy good-bye to Nearly Headless Nick and followed Filch back downstairs, doubling the number of muddy footprints of the floor. Filch’s sharp glare at her wand made her hesitate to finish scouring her robes.

Harri had never been inside Filch’s office before; it was a place most students avoided. The room was dingy and windowless, lit by a single oil lamp dangling from the low ceiling. A faint smell of fried fish lingered about the place. Wooden filing cabinets stood around the walls; from their labels, Harri could see that they contained details of every pupil Filch had ever punished. Fred and George Weasley had an entire drawer to themselves. And there in the bottom drawer was “Black, Sirius, Lupin, Remus, Pettigrew, Peter, and Potter, James.”

A highly polished collection of chains and manacles hung on the wall behind Filch’s desk. It was common knowledge that he was always begging Dumbledore to let him suspend students by their ankles from the ceiling.

Filch grabbed a quill from a pot on his desk and began shuffling around looking for parchment. He sneezed loudly.

“Mr. Filch, Professor Snape and I just brewed a fresh batch of Pepper-Up Potion last night. Have you been to the Hospital Wing for one?”

“You brew with Professor Snape?” the weasley looking man asked. He looked very suspicious.

“Well, yes. He’s my guardian. So he gets me to help out with a lot of the extra brewing.”

“Hmm…”
“I’d even be happy to go and get you one if you like. I really am sorry about tracking mud. I just don’t understand why a quick spell couldn’t clean it up, it’s just mud.”

Filch now looked very angry. He went back to looking for parchment. “Dung,” he muttered furiously, “great sizzling dragon bogies… frog brains… rat intestines… I’ve had enough of it… make an example… where’s that form… yes.”

He retrieved a large roll of parchment from his desk drawer and stretched it out in front of him, dipping his long black quill into the ink pot.

“Name … Harriet Potter. Crime … befouling the castle… suggested sentence …”

Dabbing at his streaming nose, Filch squinted unpleasantly at Harri, who waited with bated breath for her sentence to fall.

But as Filch lowered his quill, there was a great BANG! On the ceiling of the office, which made the oil lamp rattle.

“PEEVES!” Filch roared, flinging down his quill in a transport of rage. “I’ll have you this time, I’ll have you!”

And without a backward glance at Harri, Filch ran flat-footed from the office, Mrs. Norris streaking alongside him.

Peeves was the school poltergeist, a grinning, airborne menace who lived to cause havoc and distress. Harri didn’t much like Peeves, but couldn't help feeling grateful for his timing. Hopefully, whatever Peeves had done (and it sounded as though he’d wrecked something very big this time) would distract Filch from Harri.

Thinking that she should probably wait for Filch to come back, Harri sank into the moth-eaten chair next to the desk. There was only one thing apart from her half-completed form: a large glossy purple enveloped with silver lettering on the front. Harri picked it up, and almost opened it. But that felt rude, so she set it back down.

Harri turned instead to the filing cabinet. There was her father’s name, written alongside his friends. Harri thought of the picture she had from her parent’s wedding, and of the four men who looked so happy. At school, it appeared that they had been real trouble makers. She wondered what they had gotten up to. Harri wanted to slide open the drawer and rifle through the papers. Would Filch let her if she asked? Probably not. He wasn’t known for doing a kindness to a student.

What if she peaked in now?

Before she could do anything, she heard shuffling footsteps outside. Filch was returning. When he opened the door, he looked triumphant.

“That Vanishing Cabinet was extremely valuable!” he was saying gleefully to Mrs. Norris. “We’ll have Peeves out this time, my sweet-”

His eyes fell on Harri and then darted to the purple envelope, which Harri realized too late, was lying two feet away from where it had started.

Filch’s pasty face went brick red. Filch hobbled across to his desk, snatched up the envelope, and threw it into a drawer.

“Have you- did you read-?” he sputtered.
“No,” Harri told him firmly. “I wouldn’t. I’m sorry, I picked it up because I thought the purple envelope was a nice brand of stationery,” she fibbed.

Filch’s knobbly hands were twisting together.

“If I thought you’d read my private- not that it’s mine- for a friend- be that as it may- however-”

Harri was staring at him, alarmed; Filch had never looked crazier. His eyes were popping, a tic was going in one of his pouchy cheeks, and the tartan scarf didn’t help.

“Very well- go- and don’t breathe a word- not that- however, if you didn’t read- go, now, I have to write up Peeves’ report- go-”

Amazed at her luck, Harri sped out of the office, up the corridor, and back upstairs. To escape from Filch’s office without punishment was probably some kind of school record.

“Harriet! Harriet! Did it work?”

Nearly Headless Nick came gliding out of a classroom. Behind him, Harri could see the wreckage of a large black and gold cabinet that appeared to have been dropped from a great height.

“I persuaded Peeves to crash it right over Filch’s office,” said Nick eagerly. “Thought it might distract him-”

“Was that you?” said Harri gratefully. “Yeah, it worked, I didn’t even get detention. Thanks, Nick!”

They set off up the corridor together. Nearly Headless Nick, Harri noticed, was still holding Sir Patrick’s rejection letter.

“I wish there was something I could do for you about the Headless Hunt,” Harri said.

Nearly Headless Nick stopped in his tracks and Harri walked right through him. She wished she hadn’t- it was like stepping through an icy shower.

“But there is something you could do for me,” said Nick excitedly. “Harriet- would I be asking too much- but no, you said you were doing something on Samhain.”

“Oh… well yes, I am. I’m meeting the Headmaster at four.”

Nick’s face fell. “Well, this Halloween will be my five hundredth death day. I’m having a party down in one of the roomier dungeons. Friends will be coming from all over the country. It would have been such an honor if you could have attended.”

“What time does it start?”

“Oh… at seven,” said Nick, looking very disappointed.

“Well… I could ask my friends if they would be interested?”

This seemed to perk up Nick. “Yes, I suppose that Mr. Weasley and Mr. Longbottom are from very well known families… perhaps. And word of their bravery along with Miss. Granger has spread about the community. What with that nasty business at the end of last year.”

“I’ll ask them. I’m sure they’d rather attend a deathday party instead of the feast.” Harri mentally hoped this was true because in reality Ron might be annoyed and not want to go at all. Ron did
love a good feast.

“Do you think you could get them to mention to Sir Patrick how very frightening and impressive you all find me?”

“Of course,” said Harri.

Nearly Headless Nick beamed at her.

“A deathday party?” said Hermione keenly when Harri had changed at last and joined her, Ron, and Neville in the common room. “I bet there aren’t many living people who can say they’ve been to one of those- it’ll be fascinating!”

“Why would anyone want to celebrate the day they died?” asked Neville, looking a bit pale at the idea of being around so many ghosts.

Surprisingly, Ron also looked interested in attending. “Luna might like going to that,” he said. “She’s a strange bird. That’s the kind of thing she’d write about for her dad’s magazine.”

Harri noticed the slight look of hurt on Hermione’s face. But it passed quickly. “You should invite her, Ron.”

“Yeah, I think I will. Shame about missing the fest. Do you think they have any good food at these types of things.”

“Last I checked, the dead don’t eat,” said Neville. “We should pack food.” He gave Harri a mocking glare, “How are you getting out of this again?”

“I told you, I have to meet with Dumbledore. He wants me to do something with him for Samhain.”

“That’s right strange,” said Neville. “I haven’t heard of any Light Families celebrating Samhain before. Gran only cares about Yule and Summer Solstice.”

“But a Deathday Party will be nearly as good,” said Hermione with conviction. “And Harri will tell us everything about Samhain.”

“As much as I can,” said Harri, certain that she had the better event to attend.

By the time Halloween arrived, Harri had a permanent nauseated feeling in her stomach at the thought of joining the Headmaster for the Samhain ritual. Everyone around her was very cheerful and didn’t understand her dampened demeanor.

The Great Hall had been decorated with the usual live bats, Hagrid’s vast pumpkins had been carved into lanterns large enough for three men to sit in, and there were rumors that Dumbledore had booked a troupe of dancing skeletons for the entertainment.

It was with heavy feet, that Harri made her way to the Headmaster’s office just before four. Dumbledore had instructed her to wear the most simple light-colored clothing that she owned. Homespun if she had it. Harri didn’t own anything as basic as that, but she did own a thick linen robe in cream and a woolen cloak in grey.

Walking only gave Harri time to think. She felt as if she was missing something. She just couldn’t puzzle out why Dumbledore would want her to join him this evening. The only answer that she
could think of was ridiculous. It was a crazy thought, and one that she hoped was very wrong.

Dumbledore was waiting for her in front of his Gargoyle. Its ugly grin was as sickening as her own nervous thoughts.

“Ah, good. Harri. Right on time. We need to get to the grounds before sunset. It will be a long night for us, I’m afraid. It’s good you dressed warmly.”

Dumbledore was wearing a thick woolen white cloak. His usual flamboyant robes were eschewed in favor of homespun undyed robes. He looked rather modest, except for the belt around his waist which was a rope of unicorn hair.

Here then was the Lord of Light.

It was usually so easy to forget that Dumbledore was not just a typical wizard. Sure, the students all knew the titles. They all knew that he had defeated Grindelwald, that he was the Supreme Mugwump and Chief Warlock. Most of the time he seemed like a doddering old man who was a little mad.

Tonight, he was radiating a slight aura. Harri could feel his power bumping against her. Her eyes began to prickle, her nose began to itch, and her magic felt like it was pushing out from under her skin.

Something about the rush of power eased her nerves. She managed a nod at the Professor, and let her mind get lost in the swirling push and pull of magic as they walked towards the Great Hall. It was a familiar and yet alien sensation all at once.

When they stepped out into the brisk evening it was nearly sunset. The orange and pink of the sky felt somehow heightened. Like her prickling eyes could see more clearly than they ever had before. She didn’t have long to meditate on this though, Dumbledore’s pace was quick and she had to move fast to keep up.

Dumbledore led the way down to the village, and once they were past the gates of Hogwarts reached for her hand.

“We will be apparating tonight. It’s all prepared at the site, so we will begin at once. As soon as the sun fully sets, we will begin.” That couldn’t be more than five minutes from now. “I should warn you, Harri, there is no metal allowed in the ritual circle. Take off your wrist covering before entering. I’ll explain the rest as we go.”

The sick feeling in her stomach grew. She had made a personal vow to never look at those words again.

With a slight squeeze of the hand, Dumbledore apparated. It felt like being squeezed through a very small straw. Her ears popped, and they appeared on a narrow land bridge. On both sides there was sea, and in front of them, a henge.

A large circular henge. There were about 30 large stones, all several meters from each other. It was a little lighter here, Harri assumed that they had come further south. Sunset was probably ten minutes away.

“Welcome to the Ring of Brodgar,” Dumbledore told her. He began to make his way into the circle.

Harri gripped her wrist and pulled off the silver covering. Bracing herself, she looked down. She
never took off the covering on her wrist, even to shower. In the fading light, she could just make out the words Lord Voldemort had left on her.

She looked around for a place to leave her covering and found a large flat stone not too far from the henge. It would have to do. Otherwise, she wore no jewelry.

Unadorned, she followed Dumbledore into the ritual circle.

He was in the center and was building up a fire. There was a large pile of firewood beside him, as well as a basket, several candles, and several pillows. The light from the flames grew as Dumbledore built the fire by hand, and darkness finally fell.

“We come to pay tribute to the dead. We come to pay homage to those who are lost in the night. We come to bring light. Spirits, find our circle and find your way through the veil,” Dumbledore said in a calm voice.

He took a bone knife from a pocket in his cloak and sliced across his hand. He allowed blood to fall into the fire.

It sparked and turned blindly white. There was a rush of wind, a howl that seemed to echo around the entire henge.

“Let the offering of the living help to stir the dead,” Dumbledore said. The fire faded back to its usual color, but it was still very bright. He then passed the bone knife to Harri.

“No need for much blood,” he told her. “Yours is far more precious than mine. A small nick will be plenty,” he explained.

Normally the idea of blood sacrifice would be daunting, but it felt very natural to take the knife and let it graze against her palm. It was very sharp and did not hurt more than a slight sting. Blood welled easily to the surface of her split skin. Harri lifted her hand over the fire and let her blood flow into it.

Once again it sparked and turned hot white. The words came out of their own accord, “Let magic move you, come and find the veil, find your peace.”

“Oh very good,” Dumbledore told her with a smile. He seemed jubilant. Harri herself could feel a slight giddiness bubbling up inside her. She felt the desire to dance around the fire. It was too tempting to resist. She felt herself leap and bound around the bonfire. She felt like a gleeful doe. Dumbledore let out a carefree chuckle and clapped for her when she stopped, out of breath.

“Sir, what’s going on?” Harri asked between gasps for air.

“One of my duties is to help the dead move from this realm to the next,” he told her. “On Samhain, the veil between our world and the next becomes the thinnest.”

“So the fire is to help light the way?”

“Yes, and the blood is to give spirits grounding.”

“And the magic…. Why is my magic like this, sir?”

“Hmmmm,” Dumbledore hummed. “I’m afraid that has something to do with it reacting to mine. The magic acts as a beacon. The spirits of the dead can be pulled toward the convalescence. I’m sure you heard me referred to as the ‘Light Lord’ a time or two.”
“Yes, sir. Remus Lupin explained it to me over the summer.”

“Well, there is some truth to the title. It isn’t to say that I am somehow a fully light wizard. My magic is just as capable of darkness as anyone else. However, my magic has a natural pull on magic users. It can act as an expander of an individual's light magic.”

“So… my magic is acting this way because your magic is having acting as a magnet?”

“A bit.”

“And because you’re the Light Lord you have to come out here and do this ritual? Ron and Neville told me that you weren’t at the Halloween feast last year.”

“No, but hold on for a moment Harri. Our fire is dying down. We must keep it built up. The next part of the ritual won’t take place until after midnight. Until then we are stewards of the fire.”

Harri helped Dumbledore put more logs on the fire. The bonfire was built up into a pleasant roar. Dumbledore moved towards one of the pillows and sat. It was nice and warm near the fire, and Harri was glad to sit as well. Dumbledore pulled open the basket.

“I had the house elves prepare a little something for us. It’s usually a night for feasting. How do you feel about meat pie?”

Pie sounded very good to Harri, who happily accepted a slice from the aged Professor.

“Now, to answer your questions, Harri. Yes, I do this ritual every year. It is of utmost importance that I am at this henge at Samhain. Everything should come second to that. There are other henges though, for other magical moments. For Samhain, Yule, Beltane, and Litha.”

“The four magical holidays. I’ve heard some of the other students talk about Yule and Beltane.”

“Yes. Some families have their own rituals. The one that I perform, and the one that the Dark Lord preforms, are the ones that have the most, if any, importance.”

“So the Dark Lord should be here too?”

“Yes. As far as I know, Voldemort is the current Dark Lord. Despite his wraith-like state. He should be performing his own ritual in tandem with ours. Another fire burning in the night.”

“What happens if he doesn’t perform the ritual?”

Dumbledore looked very grave. “Balance is an important thing in magic. Peace between light and dark needs to be achieved. Without light and dark functioning in tandem, the pull of my magic is diminished for those who are called to the light. You only have to look at our Ministry to see that things are not in balance.”

Harri was stunned to hear Dumbledore describe it like that. “You need to work with Voldemort?”

Dumbledore grimaced. “No. Not I. When I was young there was another Dark Lord of another time. We were two sides of the same coin.”

“Grindelwald.”

“Yes. We tried to work together the way magic called us to. Or maybe it doesn't truly call for working together. It felt as if magic was ripping us apart as well. Either way, it wasn’t possible. We both made mistakes that ripped us apart. I believe you know the rest.”
“You bound his magic.”

“Thus the next Dark Lord was called.”

“Why wouldn’t you need to work with Voldemort? If you’re the Lord of Light and he’s the Dark Lord.”

“It wasn’t my tasking. My job was to keep the dark at bay until the time of my successor.” He fixed Harri with that piercing blue gaze of his.

Harri felt the sinking feeling in her gut. It was almost an answer to her question. She couldn’t bring herself to ask it though. She asked a different question then, one that suddenly occurred to her.

“I thought Voldemort attacked my family on Halloween. Why would he do that if he was supposed to be here?”

It was not the question Dumbledore had been expecting. “Oh Harri, how to explain Lord Voldemort to you. He was not always mad you know. Once he was the most promising student to ever walk through the doors of Hogwarts. He came into his power soon after I bound Grindelwald’s. I had suspected that he might be Gellert’s successor. I was quickly proven correct. He always had a natural affinity for the Dark, and many of his school mates felt pulled to him. He was young, handsome, and full of promise.”

"Then after graduation, instead of pursuing his position in magic, he took a job at a shop. He began to travel. He did not return to our territory to perform the rituals as he should have.”

“Wait,” Harri interrupted, “your territory?”

“Surely you didn’t think that Voldemort and I are the only magical beings called to represent balance? Europe has its hinges and magical mythology. But we would not be able to touch the magic of Africa, Asia, or the Americas. It’s very different. A different belief went into building it. Layers upon layers of faith and history twist together on those soils. It would have nothing of me.”

“This hinge then, it represents a corner of your territory?”

“Indeed. There are three others. I will be showing them to you this year.”

There was the opening again. The moment where she should be asking the question he obviously wanted her to. She couldn’t. Instead, Harri got up and threw a few more logs on the bonfire.

“You were saying that Voldemort didn’t attend to the rituals?”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, continuing. “He would come some of the time, but he had little issue with missing. He was quite firm with me that it wasn’t important as long as it was me representing the light.”

"Then he heard something that chilled him to the bone. Do you know what Voldemort translates to in French, Harriet?”

“No, I didn’t realize that it meant anything.”

“It means, ‘Flight from Death’. Voldemort has never been interested in dying. I’ve never been sure of the exact means he has used to prevent his death, but as we can see, he was successful in preventing it.”
“In June of 1980, Voldemort heard something that frightened him. A rumor of a child that would bring about his downfall. On Samhain the next year, the night he should have been here, he took the opportunity to find and attack you.”

Harri rubbed her wrist. She thought of the question that might answer what Dumbledore was baiting her to ask. Soulmates were the center of all this, weren’t they? She and Voldemort were tied together somehow. What if Dumbledore had once been tied together with someone just as tightly. Just as horribly.

“Was Gellert Grindelwald your soulmate?”

He didn’t look surprised by Harri’s question. Or annoyed. He just mildly replied, “You should ask the real question, Harri. It does you no good to bait for the truth.”

“Am I your successor to the Light?”

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

As a writer, I view myself as just along for the ride. I know where the train is going, but I don't have much idea how we're going to get there. So two things happened this week. I now know exactly how the Graveyard scene is going to play out about 150,000 words form now. And a conversation I wasn't expecting Harri to have until next book came spilling out here. I hope you enjoyed the world building and cannon divergence.

Also, I was worried I was going to have retcon Dumbledore being at the Halloween feast last year. But guess what? Harri didn't go that feast and I never wrote that Dumbledore was there. Retcon avoided.

But yeah, this chapter has made it more apparent than ever that I need to go back and reread what I've already written. I was control f'ing my way through this chapter to be sure that I wasn't messing up my own timeline. Apparently, once you get over 100,000 words in a series things can muddle together. I have a whole new respect for George R. R. Martin. No wonder the Winds of Winter is taking so long! Please call me out if you see areas where I messed up. I want this to be a neat and tidy as possible!

Thank you as always for the very kind comments. They are always an encouragement and really do help keep the writing process going.
The Writing on the Wall

Harri was asleep.

The young girl had usurped three pillows and was laying with her cloak clutched tightly around her. The air was brisk, but Dumbledore made sure to keep the fire warm. She had drifted off at around three in the morning. She had performed the candle ceremony with him just after midnight. They had let the embers of the fire go low, just the faint light illuminating the clearing. Then taking the candles, they had lit them with their magic. He had shown her how to build the flame higher and higher until their two candle flames met in an arch. They had walked back, expanding their archway until it stretched from one end of the Ring to the other.

He had been impressed by her control. He had only needed to nudge at her magic to keep it focused on the flame. Despite the sweat that broke out on her forehead, she had kept her side of the flame well maintained.

He had called on the spirits to cross over the veil. At halfway between sunset and sunrise, the veil was the thinnest and easiest to cross. Dumbledore had directed their arch of flame to go convex, shooting into the bonfire. The tower of flame would need very little keeping for the rest of the night.

Harri was dazed after that, magically exhausted and too young for what he was showing her. It had been an agonizing debate. Dumbledore had been planning to wait. Would fifteen have been better? Or even seventeen, when she was no longer a child and at her age of majority.

He had decided not, so it was twelve. Not a good age from outside appearances. Yet, on a deeper level, it was perfect. Agora's Numeric Principal held that the sum of numbers also held power. Harri, twelve, was a three. Albus, at one hundred and eleven, was also a three. Three was a strong number, the first prime number of multitudes. Three was a number of good fortune, of teamwork, of life cycles. Past, Present, Future; Birth, Life, Death; Beginning, Middle, End.

Wand, Stone, Cloak.

Albus had been fifteen when the magic had called him. There had not been a teacher. Magenta Tripe-Black had been a sick and bedridden witch by the end. When she had died in the summer of 1896 no one had any idea who would follow her as the Lady of Light. Only, it hadn’t been a Lady. Several generations had passed since a Lord of Light, but no one was overly surprised that it was Dumbledore who had felt the call to visit the four sacred sites. He had followed magic’s call and smeared his blood on the ritual stones. He had given his body to the Earth and had returned to his sixth year of school more powerful than he could have dreamed.

Having no mentor had not been the best thing for him. He had believed himself the paragon of good, a man who would know best for other people. Albus Dumbledore was going to take the world by storm and lead the Wizarding World into a new era of light.

That hadn’t been what awaited his graduation.

Instead, his mother had died. Ariana, his poor, sweet, obscurial sister, had needed him. Aberforth was still too young to take on the burden, he was in school. It had fallen to Albus, who felt he should have been out exploring the world and coming into his own. He had resented everything and everyone. There were no prizes in looking after your half-mad sister.
Then, Gellert had appeared.

Beautiful, blonde, and blue-eyed Gellert Grindelwald. He had been in Godric’s Hollow to ‘visit’
his aunt, but really he had been there to discover what he could about the Deathly Hallows. When
the brilliant boy had come knocking he had been sixteen and bright as the sun.

“Excuse me, are you Herr Dumbledore?”

Albus’s world changed.

Albus had met Gellert before he came into his power as the Dark Lord. The young man had no
idea of his future. It was to his own great elation that Albus could share the news with the boy.
Two men united for the betterment of the world. Surely this would be the strongest union between
Light and Dark that had ever occurred. Stronger than silly Magenta Tripe and Licorus Black.
Stronger than Godric Gryffidnor and Salazar Slytherin. Stronger than Merlin and Morgana Le’Fay.

It had been foolish arrogance.

How could he have believed so fully in the ‘greater good’? The notion that all of his ends would
justify the means. The idea that he, Albus Dumbledore, had power- and therefore had the right to
remake the Wizarding World in his image. How could he have ignored what Gellert Grindelwald
was? He had closed his eyes and dreamed of making all their fantasies come to fruition.

He ignored Ariana and Abeforth in favor of discussing the united Deathly Hallows, muggle
suppression, and a future ruled by the invincible and united Lords of Magic.

Admirable Abeforth had stepped in and tried to clear Albus’ head. The result; his brother tortured
and his sister dead. Gellert had fled, and the two Dumbledore brothers had never been able to
repair their relationship in the wake of pain and loss.

The responsibility of his sister was gone, but the guilt would last a lifetime.

He saw Gellert again on Samhain 1898. Gellert had come into his power, performed the rites
magic required, and given his body to the Fire. Gellert was the newly anointed Dark Lord who
Albus could not forgive, but could not bring himself to raise a wand against. Albus refused to speak
to the man, and they spent four nights a year at odds with one another. If they had spoken, if Albus
could have performed the duty that magic was asking of him, could that Great War have been
prevented? He would never know.

When the war started in 1940, Dumbledore stayed hidden at Hogwarts. It was the job as the Lord
of Light to balance the Dark. By shirking his duties and letting Gellert run wild the balance was
permanently in tatters. There was no recovery for the two men, and magic would need to wait for
its next victims to repair itself. They were Twin Flames of magic, and the only way to stop Gellert
was to bind his magic or kill him. Gellert Grindelwald was hauled off to Numengard cursing
Dumbledore’s name. The only man he ever loved, his soulmate, would hate him for the rest of his
life.

Dumbledore looked across the fire at the sleeping girl before him. What mistakes could he save her
from?

Already she had been wiser than he had. True, no pretty face had tempted her, but she had stood up
to Voldemort and refused to join him. She had stood more bravely at eleven years old than
Dumbledore had at fifty. Could the small girl before him mend the rift in magic that he and Gellert
had caused?
No. Almost certainly not. Not with the way that Lord Voldemort acted. There was dark magic afoot. Voldemort had only ever wanted to live forever. With Harri, that possibility was horribly real. There were perversions of the soulmate bond that could be enacted. Ways of hiding a soul from death that bound one permanently to the Earth. It was strictly banned, the evilest sort of crime.

Would Lord Voldemort attempt to rip Harriet Potter’s soul away from her body? Would he try to hide his own inside of her?

Voldemort would certainly attempt the creation of two living Horcruxes who could never die. The Lord and Lady of Magic would be eternal and terrible. The meaning of the prophecy that Sybil Trawlaney had given him years ago was layered with depth that made Dumbledore’s hands clench in frustration.

He could only prepare her. Give her what information he could, tell her of his mistakes, and hope that Love would be the magic that saved Magical Europe. Dumbledore mentally debated about when he would tell her what Voldemort wanted with her soul. Would there ever be a good time? Was anyone ever ready for such news?

Dumbledore knew that twelve was too young. How many years did Harri Potter have left though? When would Voldemort’s next plan begin? Even now the Dark Lord could be gathering his power. Dumbledore just needed to stay alive as long as he could, teach the girl what magic expected of her, and pray to the Green Mother that Voldemort would not succeed.

Too much weight rested on the sleeping girl before him.

It was a tragedy.

When Harri and Dumbledore returned to the castle they were met with a grim-faced Professor McGonagall.

“Albus, there has been trouble,” she told him. Bitterly cold and stiff to the bone, Harri wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed after a hot shower. A well-rested Harri would want to linger and listen in to what the adults were saying, but she was too tired to hear what nonsense the students had gotten up to last night.

When they came to the second floor of the marble staircase, Dumbledore and McGonagall, speaking quietly, turned down the corridor. Harri continued the long climb up to the seventh floor and Gryffindor Tower.

No one was awake, the common room was empty in the glower of early morning light. The fire had long died out, the hearth was cold.

Harri climbed the steps to the girl dormitory and found her roommates all asleep. Harri changed quickly and was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

She dreamed of fire.

Of a man, dark and handsome, hissing words that she did not understand.

He looked at her, and his eyes were red as the fire that seemed to be consuming her.

He opened his mouth, and it was her name that came out.
Harri woke with a gasp and was blinded by the light of late morning sun. Hermione was standing over her, looking annoyed.

“I’ve been trying to wake you up for ages! You’ll never believe what’s happened!”

“Have I missed breakfast?” Harri asked sleepily.

“Never mind breakfast,” said Hermione. “Someone attacked Mrs. Norris!”

“Why would someone attack a cat?” asked Harri, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

“That’s not all, it’s... well, it’s a bit gruesome. Ron, Neville, and I went by after breakfast to see. The whole school has gone to see it I think.”

“The cat attack is gruesome?” Harri asked making a face. “Why would you want to go see that?”

“NO! It must have happened last night. But someone saw it on the second floor this morning. And then it got around that Mrs. Norris is in the Hospital Wing. Apparently, she was found at the scene. It’s... well it’s written in blood apparently.”

“Hermione, what is written in blood?” It had taken Harri a while to catch on, but it must have been something really strange to make Hermione this inarticulate.

“It’s the Chamber of Secrets! Someone has written on the wall of the second-floor corridor ‘The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir, Beware’.”

“No.” The Chamber of Secrets was a myth. Harri couldn’t remember the specifics, but she knew that she had read about it and that the school had been checked multiple times.

“YES! Do you have your copy of Hogwarts a History? I left mine at home, and all the library’s copies have been checked out.”

Harri did, but it wasn’t very helpful.

“Long has the rumor of the Chamber of Secrets clung to Hogwarts. The myth that Slytherin built a secret chamber at the school is highly unlikely. The school has gone through several major renovations (such as the introduction of plumbing, the conversion to a modern kitchen, and building the West Wing), but no chamber has ever been found. While very powerful, the Dark Lord Slytherin could not have successfully hidden such a project from Lord of Light, Gryffindor.”

“That’s useless,” Hermione groused.

Harri shrugged, “Are we sure it isn’t just a prank? It was Halloween.”

“It was no prank. Harri, Mrs. Norris wasn’t just attacked. She was petrified!”

“Petrified? You mean someone turned her to stone?”

“I don’t know if it was true stone or just a stone-like state. I heard Percy Weasley while he was talking to Penelope Clearwater that Mrs. Norris was petrified. They’re both prefects.”

“I can only think of a few ways that someone could be petrified. A medusa for one.”

“You think a medusa is running around the school?”

“HARRI”
“Or…” but something stopped Harri from finishing her thought. There was a creature that was able to petrify. She was sure of it, but it was like her mind went foggy and she couldn’t quite remember what it was.

“Or?”

“I don’t know,” said Harri slowly. “I think… I’ve forgotten it. We’ll have to research I suppose.”

“I’ll meet you in the library and we’ll get started. Neville and Ron say it’s just a prank, that it isn’t anything to worry about.” Hermione began to bite her lower lip. “I’m scared, Harri.”

“It really may turn out to be nothing,” Harri tried to assure.

“Harri, I’m muggle-born. I don’t know if you can understand this since your family is all magical. You’re the Girl-Who-Live. Dumbledore takes you to special rituals. Professor Snape loops you into secret projects. No one questions your right to be here. People hate me for no reason at all. And now some monster might be on the loose with the express purpose of getting rid of muggleborns. I know that’s the myth of the Chamber, I can remember that much.”

“I won’t let anything happen to you. The teachers won’t either.”

“How can you know that Hari?”

“Because it’s what’s right and decent!”

“If there is one thing that I’ve learned from Draco Malfoy and his Slytherin friends, it’s that right and decent don’t mean a thing in the Wizarding World.”

Harri wouldn’t be available to meet her in the library until after lunch. She had promised Professor Snape that she would check in with him after Samhain.

Hermione made a mental note to ask Harri more about the ritual when she had the chance. The Chamber of Secrets had taken up all of Hermione’s headspace, and she hadn’t left room for Harri’s Samhain Sojourn.

Rather than go straight to the library like she usually would, Hermione decided that she would go back to the second-floor corridor to look at the scene of the crime. As much information as possible would help narrow down their search.

Hermione had a scientific brain. She knew she couldn’t begin to form a proper hypothesis about all this without gathering data. The facts needed to be established for any kind of reliable theory to be formed.

She was amazed to find the corridor empty when she made it down the five flights of stairs. After breakfast, the corridor had been full of students hoping to get a look. Filch had been angrily scrubbing at the words, but it appeared he had been unsuccessful because he was no longer there.

“The Chamber of Secrets Has Been Opened.”

Hermione dropped her bag and got to her hands and knees so that she could crawl along, and search for clues.

“Scorch marks,” she whispered.

What could leave marks on the stone? They were impervious to most magic. A student would be
hard pressed to do something like this.

“We’ll have to see if Dumbledore can cure Mrs. Norris,” she mused to herself. “If he can’t, whatever attacked her might not be human.”

Hermione dug around in her bag and pulled out some spare parchment to write her observations down on.

November 1, 1992

Notes of ‘Chamber of Secrets’ 1st Petrification Site

1. Scorch marks around the base of the wall
2. Words are written in a substance that cannot be removed by Filch (magically stuck to the wall? Filch always cleans using muggle methods)

Hermione looked around again.

“Oh, that’s strange,”

Hermione got up and crossed to the window next to the message on the wall. On the topmost pane, there were around twenty spiders scuttling, apparently fighting to get through a small crack. A long silvery thread was dangling like a rope, as though they had all climbed it in their hurry to get outside.

3. Spiders acting strangely. Trying to escape?

Hermione didn’t see anything else in the corridor. What else was there to do? Was there a witness to question? Her eyes landed on the bathroom door marked “Out of Order.”

Myrtle.

Hermione had been at the Death Day Party last night and couldn’t recall seeing Moaning Myrtle. Had she been here, just outside the crime scene?

Hermione entered the bathroom. It was very gloomy. Under a large, cracked, and spotted mirror were a row of shipped sinks. The floor was damp and reflected the dull light given off by the stubs of a few candles, burning low in their holders; the wooden doors to the stalls were flaking and scratched and one of them wad angling off its hinges.

No one used this bathroom unless that had to. Hermione usually avoided it, but at times it couldn’t be helped. On the way from Potions to Charms, this was the most convenient restroom. There was never any wait.

Hermione set off toward the end stall. “Hello, Myrtle, how are you?” she asked. Moaning Myrtle was floating above the tank on the toilet, picking a spot on her chin.

“What are you doing here?” Myrtle asked, looking surprised to see her.

“Well, I was just looking at the corridor outside the restroom. I was wondering if you saw anything last night?”

“No,” said Myrtle dramatically. “I wasn’t paying attention. Peeves upset me so much I came in here and tried to kill myself. Then, of course, I remembered that I’m- that I’m-”

Hermione had played this game before, and tried to say very gently, “I’m so sorry that Peeves hurt
“Your feelings, Myrtle.”

“My life was nothing but misery at this place, and now no matter what happens people come along ruining my death,” the ghost began to cry with thick translucent tears flowing down her cheeks.

Myrtle gave a tragic sob, rose up in the air, turned over, and dived into the toilet, splashing water all over her and vanished from sight, although from the direction of her muffled sobs, she had come to rest somewhere in the U-bend.

“That was almost cheerful for her,” Hermione groused, stepping out of the stall. With a wave of her wand, Hermione cast a drying charm. Should she go change into new robes? No, a cleaning charm would stop anything from smelling.

Hermione glanced into the spotted mirror at her hair as she passed. It was frizzier than usual from the water. There wasn’t a spell that could help with that. Magic and her hair just didn’t mix. Lavender Brown had suggested a hair care charm at the end of first year. Hermione had tried it in private, but her hair had just absorbed the magic, becoming even bushier than usual.

She exited the bathroom and made her way back towards the end of the corridor. She would head down to the library and start looking into creatures that cause petrification. Myrtle had been a dead end, but if she got a few options ready hopefully it would be clear what did this when the next attack happened.

Hermione had no doubt that another attack was coming.

So certain, in fact, that when someone pulled her into a broom closet as she passed by Hermione was certain that she was about to be a victim.

She reached for her wand on reflex but wasn’t fast enough. Both her wrists were held tight.

“What do you think you’re doing,” she said with indignation, trying to make out who had pulled her into the closet.

Her eyes adjusted to the gloom, and she had out a pointed face and silvery blond hair.

“Get off me, Malfoy,” Hermione said sharply.

“Shush, Granger,” he hissed. “You’ll get us found out.”

“Found out?” she said, not shushing in the slightest. “Are you worried your little Slytherin friends will find you alone with me?”

“Yes,” he said nastily. “And I need to talk to you, so shut it.”

“I will not. Give me one good reason to not leave right now.”

“The Chamber of Secrets.”

Hermione held back her reply. Malfoy wanted to talk about the Chamber? Fine then, he could talk.

“That’s better,” he said. “Now, where is that book my father gave you?”

“What book? What does that have to do with the Chamber of Secrets?” Hermione realized that Malfoy was still holding her wrists and she wrenched them away from him.

“Don’t be daft,” he said. “In Flourish and Blotts. My father slipped you a book.”
“No, he didn’t.”

“I saw him do it!” Malfoy hissed.

“Why would your father give me a book?” Hermione asked, feeling a sinking feeling.

“Gee Granger, I don’t know. Maybe it has something to do with us being soulmates. He’s not exactly pleased.” Malfoy rarely referred to their connection. He spent most of his time belittling Hermione for her heritage.

“So you think he gave me something that has to do with the Chamber of Secrets?”

“No, I KNOW he gave you something. He went on about it all summer. How he’d get rid of you. You’re quite the uppstart Mudblood you know. Know-it-all top of the class. Friends with the Girl-Who-Wouldn’t-Die. A Malfoy for a Soulmate. You’re a real status chaser by any appearance.”

Hermione turned to leave. Malfoy grabbed her wrist again.

“Will you stay put!”

“No if you’re going to insult me, Malfoy. I am NOT a status chaser. Just because you have sour grapes that I beat you in class…”

“And could you not? You wouldn’t believe how much I heard about that this summer. ‘If your grades don’t pick up, Draco, you won’t be a fit Malfoy heir.’ Second in the class and that’s what he has to say to me!”

“Ha,” Hermione let out with a smirk.

“Yes, Ha. Well now he wants you dead, so maybe don’t laugh about it. Now, where is the book?”

“I don’t have any strange…” but Hermione remembered suddenly. She had thrown her new Advanced Transfiguration book outside of Flourish and Blotts. Harri had picked up the small book that had slid out. Harri had hidden it away when everyone came outside. Harri hadn’t mentioned it again.

“Remember now, do you?”

“Malfoy what does that book have to do with the Chamber of Secrets?” Hermione couldn’t keep the slight hint of fear out of her voice.

“I’m not sure,” he said. “Look, Granger, all I know is that my father said that he was going to give you something that would set all of Slytherin’s wrath against you. He said it would take care of the family mudblood problem. Now that,” he waved his hand indicating the writing on the wall, “has shown up. It has to be connected.”

“It does,” Hermione agreed. “But I don’t have that book anymore. I never touched it.”

“Who has it then?”

“Harri.”

“Bloody Potter has gone and opened the Chamber of Secrets. Of course,” Malfoy said with a groan.

“No, she hasn’t.”
“How do you know? None of you were at the feast last night.”

“I was at a Death Day Party and Harri was with Dumbledore.”

“Dumbledore took Potter to Samhain?” Malfoy asked, looking very surprised.

“Yes,” Hermione said.

Malfoy let out a low whistle. “That is news.”

“Don’t tell anyone. It’s private.”

He looked conflicted for a moment, but resolve took over. “Not like there is anyone I’d want to tell.”

“Not even your father?” Hermione jeered.

“Obviously not, I’m talking to you, aren’t I?”

“In a broom closet, where no one can see. Can’t have anyone know you associate with a Muggleborn, can you?”

“Just stop harping on that for a moment, will you Granger? I don’t want you dead, okay? You’re MY soulmate, and that isn’t any of my father’s business. I don’t like you, but you don’t need to DIE. We need to do something. Potter has the book. Potter must have done this last night.”

“Harri isn’t the Heir of Slytherin. They’re the only ones with the power to open the Chamber.”

“Look, Granger. I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know about heirs of Slytherin, or monsters in secret chambers. All I know is my father said that what he gave you could bring down Slytherin’s wrath. There’s blood on the wall. You’ll be next if you aren’t careful.”

Hermione met Malfoy’s cold grey eyes and felt a chill of fear run down her spine.

“What should we do?”
The soul fragment of Tom Riddle Jr. was not truly sentient.

He was alive, but things like time and isolation did not reach him. His main purpose was to lie in wait until the larger soul had need of him. He could wait for fifty years or fifty thousand, it would make no difference to him. Eventually, he would be used or destroyed, and then he would meld back into the larger soul. Any knowledge or insight he had gained while separated would belong to the main soul. He had no real desire to escape the confines of the diary, for an aspect of the Horcrux's magic was to want to be separate until the purpose of preventing death was achieved. No, the fragment’s only purpose was to be of use to the main soul. From what the Horcrux understood, the main soul was in need of him. So he needed to get strong, become corporeal, and find Lord Voldemort.

Most of all, he needed to present Lord Voldemort with Harriet Potter.

Oh, Harriet.

How many times had he lain awake at night wondering who ‘Liar’ was? It had been so exciting to think that his future witch would be able to see through him so quickly. Tom Riddle had presented the perfect picture, the ideal young wizard. He had longed for ‘Liar’ to appear just so that his true face would be known to one person. Someone he could terrorize and posses completely.

He already did possess her. He had reached deep into Harriet’s brain and magic. Had explored every nook and cranny. Had found himself in her deepest parts. It had sent a shiver up his spine. She was all marked up from him already. From the lightning bolt on her forehead, his words hidden on her wrist, to the deepest reaches of her soul.

He wanted to look at her, to add more marks to the girl and show her that she was so fully possessed by Lord Voldemort that it didn’t matter what else she was. First and foremost, she was his.

It wouldn’t be very long. Soon, he would present Harriet Potter to Lord Voldemort. She would be used for the purpose of glorifying the dark- as it should be. The future beacon of Light would be used to flood Europe with darkness. He just had to get strong…

It was tedious work. The initial burst of magic that he had gotten from Harriet had been intoxicating. Oh, what he wouldn’t give to still be leaching off her magic. It had been so close to his own, truly like mother’s milk. He would be corporeal by now if he had been able to keep on with her.

But he couldn’t hurt her. If he were to keep draining her magic it would kill her, and he couldn’t have that. No, Lord Voldemort would have great need of his little soulmate. With Harriet Potter, the main soul would have no difficulty returning to its all-powerful state. The Horcrux might need to be absorbed in the process, or perhaps there would be enough power for the Horcrux to be returned to the Diary. Either way was perfectly fine, so long as the overarching plans of Lord Voldemort were achieved.

He would have to placate himself with weaker magic for now. He could take from Ginny Weasley, but not as much as he would like. The girl still had to function in class. She couldn’t be noticeably different, or Dumbledore might start to suspect that she was being manipulated. The bulk of Ginny’s magic would have to be the final push to corporeal form, but it wouldn’t be enough to
completely achieve it. If she were a witch past her age of majority… well, then she wouldn’t be nearly so easy to control. A witch under the age of thirteen was much more biddable.

Thus, the Chamber had to be opened. The Basilisk’s deadly gaze could be used to drain Hogwarts students. Petrified or dead, it didn’t matter. Either way, there would be a shock of magic as the child met the gaze of the Basilisk, and Tom could use that magical outburst to strengthen himself.

The cat was a good start, to be sure that the magic worked the way that he had hypothesized all those years ago. The mangy kneazle had enough magic for Tom to test his theories without escalating too fast. Dumbledore was gone. Harriet was gone. It was a perfect night to let the Basilisk out. Then with his message, to stir up a little fear that always made the magic taste sweeter, he retreated to the shadows once more. Let them wonder if it was true, let them stew. The next attack would bring him such sweet magic. It would be glorifying to use those little light users. To let them give up their magic in service to the Dark, the way they should. It was the Dark’s right to take from the Light.

He would take and take and take.

Then he would present Harriet to Lord Voldemort and be gratified in knowing he had succeeded in his one true purpose.

To deliver the Light into the hands of Darkness.

Harri was feeling more than a little lost.

The Samhain revelations had escalated the feelings of anxiety that had been coursing through her since the beginning of term. Lady of Light. It was the most ridiculous thing that she had ever heard. She wished that Dumbledore was wrong. Harri didn’t want to be Lady of Light. She didn’t want to have power over other light users, keep up magical traditions, or have yet another tie to the Dark Lord.

What had Harri done to deserve this?

All she had ever wanted was a safe place. Friends, family, people who didn’t hate the sight of her. Harri had never wanted power, had never wanted strangers to look at her, had never wanted to be known.

This whole thing would make more sense if it were someone else. A brilliant witch, a powerful witch, a witch who could control her magic.

A witch that wasn’t Harriet Potter.

Harri had passed out twice due to unexplained magical exhaustion in the last two months. Harri was still just as liable to cause an explosion in class as get a spell correct. Harri still flinched at a sudden touch. She was not in any position to lead a faction of the magical community.

The days had ticked by slowly, and Harri felt like she was in a haze. Hermione kept talking about the Chamber of Secrets, and Harri was trying to help, truly. Her mind just couldn’t concentrate. It was a hoax, it had to be. All that had happened was a cat got attacked, Hermione was just working herself up over nothing.

All Harri could think about was Samhain. Next would be Yule, then Beltane, and then Midsummer. It would be a ritualistic cycle. She was trapped. What if the Dark Lord returned? Eventually, Dumbledore would die and Harri would take his place. She would have to confront the
Dark Lord four times a year. It was unconscionable.

Harri spent most of the first week of November avoiding her friends. She didn’t want to talk about any of this. It would mean revealing her soulmate to Neville, Ron, and Hermione, an impossibility. She didn’t even want to talk to Snape about this.

After Samhain, she had checked in with her guardian only to find him busy planning out ingredient procurement for the Mandrake potion. It had been easy to slide into potioneering mode instead of talking about her future. Snape, blissfully involved in several projects, took Harri’s renewed dedication as a sign of maturity instead of something being wrong.

She would just keep to herself, keep her head down, and get through the next few months. Gloomily, Harri wondered if she should start avoiding her friends all together. Wouldn’t they be safer away from her? The more alone Harri seemed the less likely someone would get hurt because of her.

Harri woke early on Saturday morning and lay for a while thinking about the coming Quidditch match. She was nervous, mainly at the thought of what Wood would say if Gryffindor lost, but also at the idea of being on public display. Her desire to be invisible had skyrocketed. After half an hour of lying there with her insides churning, she got up, dressed, and went down to breakfast early, where she found the rest of the Gryffindor team huddled at the long, empty table, all looking uptight and not speaking much.

As eleven o’clock approached, the whole school started to make its way down to the Quidditch stadium. It was a muggy sort of day with a hint of thunder in the air. Ron and Neville came hurrying over to wish Harri good luck as she entered the locker rooms. Hermione was planning to miss the game in favor of staying in the library.

The team pulled on their scarlet Gryffindor robes, then sat down to listen to Wood’s usual pre-match pep talk.

“Slytherin has better brooms than us,” he began. “No point denying it. But we’ve got better people on our brooms. We’ve trained harder than they have, we’ve been flying in all weather—” (“Too true,” muttered George Weasley. “I haven’t been properly dry since August”) “—and we’re going to make them rue the day they let that little bit of slime, Malfoy, buy his way onto their team.”

Chest heaving with emotion, Wood turned to Harri.

“It’ll be down to you, Harri, to show them that a Seeker has to have something more than a rich father. Get to that Snitch before Malfoy or die trying, Harri, because we’ve got to win today, we’ve got to.”

“So no pressure, Harri,” said Fred, winking at her.

As they walked out onto the pitch, a roar of noise greeted them; mainly cheers, because Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were anxious to see Slytherin beaten, but the Slytherins in the crowd made their boos and hisses heard, too. Madam Hooch, the Quidditch teacher, asked Flint and Wood to shake hands, which they did, giving each other threatening stares and gripping rather harder than was necessary.

“On my whistle,” said Madam Hooch. “Three… two… one…”
With a roar from the crowd to speed them upward, the fourteen players rose toward the leaden sky. Harri flew higher than any of them, squinting around for the Snitch.

It started to rain, but otherwise, it was a very quiet game. The stands were muted in the gray clouds. Harri lost herself in the feel of her broom, in the way flying made her feel as she sped from one side of the pitch to the other looking for that glint of gold.

Even Malfoy shouting the occasional jab didn’t bother her.

She needed to concentrate and just find the Snitch. Slytherin’s superior brooms were clearly doing the trick, as they currently were in the lead by sixty points.

The rain began to fall more heavily. She slowed down considerably so that she could see through the dark sheets of water.

“Broom break down, Potter? It’s to be expected,” yelled Malfoy as Harri came to a standstill trying to see through the thick rainfall. She glared over at Malfoy in annoyance, when she saw it- the Golden Snitch. It was hovering inches above Malfoy’s left ear- and Malfoy- busy laughing at Harri, hadn’t seen it.

For an agonizing moment, Harri hung in midair, not daring to speed toward Malfoy in case he looked up and saw the Snitch.

But this wasn’t a time for indecision. She dived for the sneering face below her and saw its eyes wider with fear. Malfoy thought Harri was attacking him.

“What the-” he gasped, careening out of Harri’s way.

Harri took her hand off the broom and made a snatch; she felt her fingers close on the cold Snitch.

When Harri exited the locker room about an hour later, Snape was waiting for her looking very grim.

“Harriet, you need to come with me,” he said.

“What? Is something wrong?” Harri asked, surprised. “Is it about the Runespoor potion? Because it shouldn’t need me to stir it till tonight.”

“It’s not about the potion,” said Snape looking paler than usual. “Just… just wait. I’ll tell you before we go into the Hospital Wing.”

“We’re going to the Hospital Wing?”

“Harriet! Just follow me.”

She felt a bolt of worry jolt down her back. She followed Snape back to the school and up the marble staircase. As they approached the Hospital Wing, Snape found his voice. “This will be a shock,” he said. “There has been an attack.”

Snape pushed the door open and she entered.

Madam Pomfrey was bending over a bed where a bushy haired girl was laying. In her stiff hands was one of Harri’s silver combs.

"Hermione!” Harri gasped. Hermione lay utterly still, her eyes open and glassy.
“She was found in the dungeons,” Snape told her. “My wards were activated and I went to investigate. I found her just a little down the corridor. After bringing her here, I realized that she used your hair to get through the wards. Your drawers were very clearly disturbed.”

“I don’t… what?” Harri asked, confusing filling her.

“Now I am well aware that there isn’t a thing in your possession that could cause this,” said Snape indicating her friend. “What I want to know, Harriet is why your friend felt the need to go snooping in your private things.”

“I- I-... I don’t know!” Harri said, trying not to cry. “She’s been acting odd over the last few days, but I didn’t pay attention! I was… I was in my own world. I have no idea why Hermione would break into your office.”

“Who knew that Miss. Granger would not be attending the match?” Snape asked.

“I don’t know. Everyone. She was talking about it at breakfast. She said that she wanted to do more research on the Chamber!”

Snape’s brows furrowed.

“She said this in the Great Hall?”

“Yes, anyone could have heard her! Do you think a student did this?”

“I’m quite certain that this was not caused by any student, Harri,” came Dumbledore’s soft voice.

Harri jumped.

Snape gave the Headmaster a severe look. “You should go back to Gryffindor tower, Harriet,” Snape told her, pushing her out the door.

“Wait, I want to see Hermione!”

“You can come back tomorrow. There are things I need to discuss with the Headmaster for now. We will talk,” said Snape, giving her a meaningful look.

“Headmaster-,” Snape began, but Harri couldn’t hear as the Hospital Wing door swung shut. Well, that wouldn’t do. Hermione was in there, what on Earth was going on? She pushed slightly on the door so that it opened a crack.

“- the Chamber of Secrets is indeed open again,” Harri heard Dumbledore say.

Madam Pomfrey let out a little gasp.

“But Albus… surely… Who?”

“The question is not who,” said Dumbledore, “The question is, how…”

Harri let the door close softly. How? The Chamber was real? Hermione had been right all along? Of course she had. Hermione was always right. Harri has been so wrapped up in her own fears and worries that she had completely neglected Hermione.

Harri made her way back towards Gryffindor tower.

Why had Hermione been going through her things? If Hermione had been fixated on the Chamber,
why would she want to go through Harri’s stuff? Harri didn’t have anything to do with this.

But…

Hermione must think that Harri did. Why else would she break into Snape’s private rooms? He would know if something else had been touched, but had only mentioned Harri’s drawers. And someone… someone had known that Hermione was looking into the Chamber.

When she was down in the Dungeons, that someone had attacked her.

Was there an alternative explanation?

The shock began to wear off and Harri felt wet tears make their way down her cheeks. How was she going to tell Ron and Neville about this? How was she going to make it through the rest of the school year without Hermione?

The anxiety that seemed to haunt Harri like a ghost escalated. Her entire body began to shake. She slid down against the wall of the corridor.

She had been an abominable friend. Hermione had been scared, and Harri had ignored her. Now she was laying petrified in the Hospital Wing; her glassy unblinking eyes were fixed in Harri’s mind.

Harri was going to be sick.

Why was this happening?

Draco Malfoy was met with the news that Hermione Granger had been attacked the day after he had lost his first Quidditch Match.

It was fitting.

Draco did not like Hermione Granger. She was bossy, a know-it-all, and shrill. She wasn’t very pretty or refined. In fact, her bushy hair and buck teeth brought to mind a beaver. She was a mudblood, and about the last person in the world Draco wanted to be tied to forever.

She was still his Soulmate.

Despite what his father thought, Draco still couldn’t shake the feeling that magic must be onto something if it was her words on his wrist. He had stared at her neat handwriting every day for over a year.

It wasn’t random. It had to mean something.

It had been a long summer of hearing how he was a disgrace to the Malfoy name. Second place in school. Tied to a Mudblood. Letters home from Snape about poor comportment.

It had been such a long summer that Draco had gotten rather angry with his father. He had snuck into his father’s study to switch his favorite whiskey with one of much lower quality- that would show him- when he had heard footsteps.

Quickly, Draco had hidden under a desk. His parents had entered, speaking in hushed voices.

“Lucius, I really don’t know about this. We should wait and see.”
“There is no waiting. She needs to be gotten rid of.”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit extreme? It’s not a guarantee.”

“And do you want to risk one around the house?”

“Of course I don’t!” his mother had exclaimed. “But Draco knows better. He would never-”

“Just like your sister would never?”

His mother was very quiet after that.

“And what exactly are you planning to do?” she finally asked.

“I’m going to give her this,” said his father. Draco couldn’t see what it was, but it must have been something truly nasty because his mother gasped.

“Lucius, if word ever gets back to him …”

“You worry too much, my dear. He said that its purpose was to bring down the wrath of Slytherin on Hogwarts. I think that it’s high time this uppity Mudblood sees what that wrath looks like.”

Draco stood over Hermione’s prone body. He was so angry. He had never been so angry in his life. How dare his father take this choice away from him. Magic had declared that Hermione Granger was his. Whether or not anything came of that was his choice. But like every other choice that should have been Draco’s, from getting on the Quidditch team on talent or picking out his own ruddy owl, it had been taken away from him.

There were never choices for Malfoys. Just tradition.

“OYE, Malfoy! You get away from her.” It was Weasley and Longbottom.

“Oh? And what will you do about it Weasel?” he drawled.

“I’ll curse you again is what I’ll do!” said the ginger boy, drawing his wand.

“Ron,” said Longbottom, looking exasperated. “Just let it be. He’s not going to do anything to her in the Hospital Wing.”

Weasley lowered his wand and glared.

“What are you doing here Malfoy?” he asked, voice full of anger.

“The same thing as you, I imagine,” Draco said. “Came to see what a Mudblood looks like turned to stone.”

Longbottom hit him.

Malfoy landed on the ground hard. He looked up, surprised that the pudgy boy would dare. “She deserves better than you, Malfoy.”

Did Hermione Granger deserve better than Draco Malfoy? No, that was laughable. But if this… whatever it was… wasn’t stopped there may not be any hope for Granger when she woke up. The potion would be ready before the end of the school year, but what then? Last time… this thing had killed. What if Granger died? Was Draco going to let his father take away the girl that Magic declared his soulmate? Just roll over and let it happen?
Malfoys didn’t have choices, but looking up at Weasley and Longbottom, Draco made one anyways.

“You’re going to help me stop whatever did this to her,” he told them firmly.

The both gaped.
“Please stay behind, Miss. Potter,” Snape called as Thursday’s double potions concluded.

It had been a dreadful week. Harri had spent it avoiding everyone. Ron and Neville had cornered her on more than one occasion, but Harri just raced off. She felt so guilty and sick to her stomach. Hermione was petrified, and Harri couldn’t help but blame herself. She had been so wrapped up in her own life, in her own problems, and had ignored Hermione’s fear.

“Harriet, I said we’d talk,” Snape said with the attempt of a smile. “How are you?”

“Fine,” Harri said.

Snape’s eye twitched. “Fine…” he hissed letting the word trail off. “Of all the teen slang that has gained popularity, that is perhaps the worse. Fine? Harriet, you have barely been eating. You’ve been skipping meals, and when you do show up at the Great Hall it is just to sit alone and push your food around.”

“I’ve been eating,” Harri tried weakly.

“No. You have not. Now I can understand that you would feel distressed about Miss. Granger’s state, but let me assure you…”

“Distressed? Of course, I’m *distressed,*” Harri spat. “My best friend is lying practically dead in the Hospital Wing.”

“LET me assure you, that Miss. Granger will make a full recovery.”

“It won’t matter! What if it happens again? What if Hogwarts isn’t safe anymore!”

“Hogwarts is the safest place on Earth.”

“Clearly not!” Harri nearly yelled. “You professors always say that, but bad things happen anyway.”

“Sit,” Snape said, gesturing to a desk.

Harri glared but sat. Not a short conversation then.

“This is confidential, Harriet. But I will tell you for fear you will do something very foolish if left unchecked. The adults around you are doing there best to resolve the attacks. Professor Dumbledore has some idea about is causing all this,” Snape told her. “It happened before, fifty years ago.”

“What stopped it then?” Harri asked.

“The alleged perpetrator was caught.”

“Alleged?”

“Professor Dumbledore has reason to believe that it was a setup. The student caught was Rubeus
Hagrid.

“Hagrid would never attack students!”

“Professor Dumbledore is inclined to agree with you. However, after Hagrid was expelled, the attacks stopped.”

“But Hagrid never left Hogwarts. If he was causing the attacks wouldn’t they have continued on?”

“Obviously,” Snape agreed.

“So… who does Dumbledore think it was?”

“The Heir of Slytherin is the fabled wizard or witch able to open the Chamber. The marker of such an individual would be the ability to speak with snakes,” Snape told her carefully. “It is the only trait singular to Salazar Slytherin.”

Harri felt her insides grow cold. “I can speak with snakes.”

“And did you set a creature on your friend?” Snape asked her with no small amount of sarcasm.

“No,” Harri replied with a glare.

“Have you told anyone about your ability, Harriet?” Snape asked with a grave face. “The school would blame you for the attacks if they knew.”

“No. I didn’t want to mention anything that connected me to… him!”

“Have you caught on then?”

“Voldemort? Dumbledore thinks that this is because of Voldemort?”

“There hasn’t been another known parsletounge for some fifty years. The Dark Lord was a student during the last set of attacks.” Harri couldn’t picture Voldemort as a student. All that came to mind was the gruesome face on the back of Quirrell’s head dressed up in school robes.

“How could Voldemort be here?” Harri asked, feeling fear trickle down her spine.

“We don’t know.”

“Do we know anything at all?” Harri asked fearfully.

“Just that if there is a creature, it is probably one controlled by a parsletounge. There a few options, but we haven’t yet figured out how they could be in the school. Someone would notice a large snake slithering around.”

“But there was a snake!” Harri explained feeling vindicated. “Do you remember the voice I heard at the start of term? The Runespoor called it the Mother!”

Snape looked contemplative. “Even if the snake were to just move around at night, someone would have noticed. And where would it go during the day?”

“The Chamber of Secrets, obviously.”

“We have checked every conceivable spot for the Chamber,” said Snape with annoyance. “There isn’t one. Between Minerva, Flitwick, Dumbledore, and me looking, one of us would have found
something in this infernal castle.”

“None of you are speakers,” Harri said. “You aren’t meant to find it.”

Snape fixed her with a stern look, “You aren’t to go looking, Harriet. I know that face. If you hear that snake or think you’ve found the chamber you will find me. We won’t have a repeat of last year.”

“I did alright last year!” Harri protested.

“You nearly died, Harriet,” Snape stated. “Your safety means a great deal to a great many people. Don’t throw away your life.”

“But… but it’s my fault that Hermione is nearly dead,” Harri said, blinking away tears. “I didn’t listen to her so she decided to go looking for clues on her own. If I had bothered to listen to her maybe she would have gone to the game instead of staying at the castle.”

“That is a very foolish way to look at it,” Snape told her. “You cannot blame yourself for the actions of others.”

“I’m not… blaming myself. I’m being honest with myself. I wasn’t being a good friend. I got caught up in what happened on Samhain and I didn’t pay attention to Hermione.”

“You never mentioned that something happened on Samhain,” Snape said coolly. “I’ve tried to give you several opportunities. Yet you remain silent on the matter. If something were the matter, you should have said so.”

“What opportunity? You’ve been basically mute the last few brewing sessions!”

“Yes, I was giving you an opportunity to speak up.” Harri wanted to pull her hair out.

“This isn’t how you parent! You aren’t supposed to just wait around for me to start talking about things. You’re supposed to ask me what happened and ask me about my feelings and not just expect me to come out with it!”

“Is this about to turn into another teenaged mood swing?”

“AHHG!” She stood up and wanted to walk out of the room.

“Harriet,” Snape said before she could. She turned around to see a more natural smile on his face like she had amused him.

“You are correct. I am the adult and it was I who should have taken initiative. Please forgive my lapse in judgment.”

Feeling slightly, only slightly, mollified, Harri sat back down. “What do you already know?” Harri asked him.

“I’ve known since you showed me your soulmark that you are our future Lady of Light,” Snape informed her. “You once asked me why I rushed off to tell Dumbledore right away. That was why. Dumbledore can offer you far more guidance than I ever could.”

“So you’ve known all along and didn’t tell me?”

“It wasn’t for me to tell, Harriet. Some things are magically sacred.”
“I hate it,” Harri confessed. “I don’t want to be a Lady of Light. I don’t want to be singled out like this. I don’t think I’m more powerful than anyone else.”

“You really aren’t,” Snape told her bluntly. “It isn’t a matter of power. It is more… magnetism. Magical magnetism. What do you know about a compass?”

“It points north because of magnets,” Harri said, following his train of thought.

“The purpose of a Lord or Lady of magic is to pull at the innate magic in witches and wizards around them. It allows for balance. Magic can go haywire without balance and anchor points. Just like a potion, we must always be sure that our base is brewed properly first before we add components. Add too many acids or bases, or components that don’t react well together, and the potion will go wrong.”

“So you think the purpose isn’t power at all? Then why is Dumbledore so powerful? Why is Voldemort?”

“They have studied and trained very hard to be powerful. Like any muscle. The more stress you put on it, the stronger it becomes.”

“My core. It’s strangely expanded because of duress. That’s how you described it from the beginning. My core had a strain on it!”

“Yes, and you’ve learned to control your strength quite well. If you were to never try particularly hard over the next twenty or so years, you would be no more powerful than an average witch or wizard. Your advantage of strength would disappear. But if you were to train now, and not stop for twenty years, you would be as powerful as I.”

“Because you’ve done that,” Harri stated. “You’ve been training nonstop for twenty years.”

“It has been to my benefit to be powerful. It has allowed me to toe the line between dark and light. It has given me opportunities that no other thirty-year-old wizard has had.”

“I’ll never catch up then. If Voldemort returns he’s what, seventy years old? When Dumbledore dies I won’t be any kind of match for him.”

“Don’t be so sure, Harriet. The purpose of the Lady of Light isn’t to defeat the Dark Lord in battle. Nor is it to be submissive to him. It is to bring balance between light and dark magic. Magic would not have chosen you if the balance could not be achieved through you.”

“That is a highly subjective statement. We don’t know why magic does anything!”

“I know this to my bones, Harriet Potter. You were chosen to bring balance and temper the dark. You are no lamb to slaughter. I’ll be damned before I let you be.”

“Are you saying… that you’re going to help me?”

“Yes. We are all going to help you. So don’t go chasing snakes, Harriet. Work with me, and the other professors at Hogwarts. You’re young now, but you won’t be forever. Live to fight another day, become strong, so when the day comes you’ll be a match for Lord Voldemort.”

“Harri Potter we are not going to sit in this common room and mope all evening,” Lavender Brown told Harri.
“We aren’t?” Harri asked from her place by the fire. Ron and Neville were not in the common room. Harri had spent the last fifteen minutes looking speculatively into the fire. Where were they? She had been avoiding them all week, but were they now avoiding her?

“I know you’re sad about Hermione,” Lavender said, “and I’m very upset too. So we should be sad together somewhere else.”

“We should?” Harri felt like a broken record.

“Yes,” said Parvati, coming down the stairs with a bag slung over the shoulder. “I’ve got our stuff, Lav. Let’s go.”

“GO?” Harri asked, feeling alarmed as Lavender grabbed her by the arm with surprising strength and began to pull her toward the portrait hole. “Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise,” Lavender said with a mischief-filled smile that made her look more like the Weasley twins then she had a right to.

The two girls pulled Harri out of the common room and practically frog-marched her through the castle. It was still several hours till curfew, but Harri got the feeling that she wouldn’t be coming back to Gryffindor tower that night.

The went down two flights of stairs to the fifth floor and then began to work their way to the east wing of the castle.

“This way,” said Parvati, pulling them toward a spiral staircase.

They climbed in tight, dizzying circles; Harri had never been up here before. At last, they reached a door. There was no handle and no keyhole: nothing but a plain expanse of aged wood, and a bronze knocker in the shape of an eagle.

Parvati reached out a hand and knocked once. Harri expected someone to answer the door, but instead, the beak of the eagle opened, and a soft musical voice said, “What asks, but never answers?”

“Any idea, girls?” Parvati asked.

“Wait… is this the Ravenclaw common room?” Harri asked.

“Yes,” said Lavender cheerfully. “I do love a good riddle. Hmm…”

“And they don’t have a password?” Harri asked Parvati.

“It couldn’t just a riddle itself? Or the knocker,” Lavender murmured to herself with a laugh. “I bet you don’t give a lot of answers, do you?” Lavender said to the bird.

“No, they have to answer riddles. Isn’t it dreadful? I always feel so bad for Padme. Can you imagine? What if you had forgotten something and needed to hurry?” Parvati said to Harri.

“A QUESTION!” Lavender exclaimed happily.

“Yes, exactly,” said the bird.

The Ravenclaw common room was a wide circular room, airier than any Harri had seen at Hogwarts. Graceful arched windows punctuated the walls, which were hung with blue-and-bronze silks: By day, the Ravenclaws would have a spectacular view of the surrounding mountains. The
ceiling was domed and painted with stars, which were echoed in the midnight-blue carpet. There were tables, chairs, and bookcases, and in a niche opposite the door stood a tall statue of white marble.

The statue stood beside a door that led, she guessed, to dormitories above. She walked carefully into the domed room. It was very pretty here. It had a real feminine touch that Gryffidnor Tower lacked.

“Oh good, you’re here,” said Padme Patil from one of the desks. She was sitting with Mandy Broklehurst and Lisa Turnip.

“They knew we were coming?” Harri asked, turning to Lavender and Parvati.

“Of course we knew,” said Lisa cheerfully. “Lavender suggested that we have an inter-house sleepover and I thought it was a lovely idea.”

“A… sleepover?” She was a broken record. Harri had never had a sleepover before. She had slept in Ginny’s room but never done anything remotely girly. Hermione would never do anything like this, Harri thought.

“Well, you’ve just seemed so sad Harri,” Parvati explained.

“We’ve all noticed. Hermione being attacked must be really hard for you,” interjected Mandy.

“So we thought it might be nice to spend a night here with us. You stare at Hermione’s bed every night for hours,” Lavender added.

“That’s… so nice of you,” Harri said, looking at the five girls who she didn’t know all that well. “Why are you being so nice?”

Padme laughed softly. “That’s what we owe each other, Harri. Have you ever heard of Professor T. M. Scanlon?”

“No,” Harri said, thinking that Hermione probably would have heard of him.

“He’s an American muggle philosopher. He has a theory of morality called Contractualism. Have you heard of that?”

“No, and I have a very limited understanding of philosophy. I’m sure that Hermione would like… or she will like to hear about it. In a few months.”

“Well… yes… I suppose you wouldn’t really want to listen to a treatise on philosophy?”

“Please, no!” exclaimed Parvati. “Save it for Hermione in a few months. We’ll have all of you over to celebrate!”

“Yes, I think that’s best,” added Lisa. “I don’t think I could listen to another talk tonight Padme.”

“The matter at hand,” said Mandy, “Is cheering up Harri. We should start that process with chocolate.”

“Here Here!” cheered Lavender loudly.

“Shhh,” said a fifth year Ravenclaw boy at the desk next to Padme, Lisa, and Mandy.

“Upstairs then,” said Padme with a smile. The three Ravenclaw girls gathered up their books and
led Harri, Lavender, and Parvati up the stairs to their dormitory.

It turned out that sleepovers involved painting nails, gossiping, face masks, more gossip, and a good deal of discussion about soulmarks. They lit candles that smelled like flowers. They ate chocolate bars, drank hot chocolate, and devoured chocolate biscuits. They experimented with makeup and hairstyles. Harri learned that purple shades of eyeshadow would bring out the green in her hazel eyes, that applying lotion to her neck would prevent a makeup line, and that lining her bottom lid with white eyeliner would make her eyes seem larger.

Harri hadn’t laughed all week, but she couldn’t stop all night. As they left the Ravenclaw common room the next morning, Harri shyly hugged her three new friends.

“Thank you,” she said. “You didn’t have to spend last night with me. It was nice to sleep somewhere else… and to laugh.”

“It was our pleasure,” said Lisa. “We should do it again. Not next weekend, because we have that monster essay for potions that will take forever.”

“Do you need help with that?” Harri asked. “I already finished.”

“Did you really?” Padme asked, looking interested. “I’d forgotten that you’re top in our year for potions.”

“You’d never think with Hermione running around,” Harri said with a laugh. “Snape would turn me out if I wasn’t though. Plus, most Friday’s he has me brewing as punishment for last year.”

“We should meet in the library then,” said Lisa. “It’s due next Monday so I’d like to get my preliminary research out of the way first. Friday then?”

Things turned around after that. Harri spent the next month with Lisa, Mandy, Padme, Lavender, and Parvati. They didn’t flinch when she brought up Hermione, which was often. They let Harri talk about her feelings, which was new, but more than that they ASKED Harri about her feelings. That had never been a part of her life before.

It wasn’t perfect. Like any sisters, Padme and Parvati argued often. Lisa and Mandy had a long-standing feud over Transfiguration theories that would stop them from speaking every other day. And Lavender would get annoyed if Harri got too mopey. All said it was a close-knit group of girls that began to develop.

Harri tried to catch Neville and Ron in a conversation too, but they seemed to be avoiding her. It was frustrating, and she felt like they blamed her Hermione’s attack.

In the second week of December, Professor McGonagall came around, as usual, collecting names of those who would be staying at school for Christmas. Snape had told Harri that she would be staying and helping in finalizing their initial findings on the Runespoor tests. Two weeks of uninterrupted brewing time was a godsend to Snape.

All five of Harri’s friends would be going home for the holidays, as would Ron and Neville. Strangely, Draco Malfoy was planning to stay. Harri found this very odd since he was always talking about his family Yule traditions.

It was that thought that turned Harri’s mind to Yule. Dumbledore had said that he would be taking Harri to each of the four rituals this year. Yule was next, followed by Beltane, and then Litha. Harri had looked up what she could about Yule, Beltane, and the Summer Solstice, Litha as she
had found out. Yule would start on the 21st, exactly two weeks from now, and would conclude on January 2, the day before everyone arrived back from Christmas Break.

From what her research said, Yule was more Germanic in origins and would probably involve some sort of hunt. Harri didn’t think he would be spending twelve nights in the wilds of Germany with Professor Dumbledore, but who knew what would happen. He hadn’t let on about any of it. Though Harri was very certain that he had been at Hogwarts during Christmas the previous year. He hadn’t been gone for twelve days straight.

Why was Malfoy staying? Harri couldn’t puzzle it out. Her suspicions were stoked that something odd was happening when she found Malfoy speaking quietly to Ron and Neville in the library on Thursday before double potions. They weren’t fighting, they were speaking almost like they were friends. Harri had hidden behind a shelf trying to make out what they were saying, but she couldn’t make anything out. The three parted ways and arrived at potions separately.

What in the world was going on?

The Monday before winter break, Harri, Lavender, and Parvati were walking across the entrance hall when they saw a small knot of people gathering around the notice board, reading a piece of parchment that had just been pinned up. Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas beckoned them over, looking excited.

“They’re starting a Dueling Club!” said Seamus. “First meeting tonight! I wouldn't mind dueling lessons; they might come in handy one of these days…”

“What, you reckon Slytherin’s monster can duel?” asked Lavender, but she too, read the sign with interest.

“Do you want to go?” Parvati asked Lavender as they walked into dinner. Harri was all for it, but her roommates deferred.

“I’ve got miles of homework to get done,” Parvati explained.

“And I just don’t want to,” said Lavender bluntly. “We’re second years and the whole school will be there. We won’t be able to keep up.”

Harri walked down with Seamus and Dean, who she had caught on their way. “I wonder who’ll be teaching us?” Harri asked as they edged into the chattering crowd. “Flitwick was a dueling champion when he was young- maybe it’ll be him.”

“As long as it’s not that dolt- oh no…” Seamus began but ended on a groan. Gilderoy Lockhart was walking onto the stage, resplendent in robes of deep plum and accompanied by none other than Snape, wearing his usual black.

“That bat,” Harri hissed. “He didn’t tell me.”

Lockhart waved an arm for silence and called, “Gather round, gather round! Can everyone see me? Can you all hear me? Excellent!”

“Now Professor Dumbledore has granted me permission to start this little dueling club, to train you all in case you ever need to defend yourselves as I myself have done on countless occasions- for full details, see my published works.”

Dean began to cough, hiding his laughter. Lockhart’s book had become a joke in the Gryffindor common room.
“Let me introduce my assistant, Professor Snape,” said Lockhart, flashing a wide smile. “He tells me he knows a tiny little bit about dueling himself and has sportingly agreed to help me with a short demonstration before we begin. Now I don’t want any of you youngsters, to worry- you’ll still have your Potions master when I’m through with him, never fear.”

Now it was Harri’s turn to cough to hide laughter. Snape was an excellent dueler. He met Harri’s eyes across the hall and gave her a sly smile that only made her cough harder.

Lockhart and Snape turned to face each other and bowed; at least Lockhart did, with much twirling on his hands, whereas Snape jerked his head irritably. Then they raised their wands like swords in front of them.

“As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position,” Lockhart told the silent crowd. “On the count of three, we will cast our first spell. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course.”

“That’s not allowed in dueling anyways,” Seamus hissed to Harri.

“One-two-three-”

Both of them swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent; Snape cried out “ Expelliarmus!” There was a dazzling flash of scarlet light and Lockhart was blasted off his feet: He flew backward off the stage, smashed into the wall, and slid down to sprawl on the floor.

Malfroy and some of the Slytherins cheered.

Lockhart was getting unsteadily to his feet. His hat had fallen off and his wavy hair was standing on end.

“Well, there you have it!” he said tottering back onto the platform. “That was a Disarming Charm- as you can see, I’ve lot my wand- ah thank you, Miss. Patil.” Padme had handed Lockhart back his wand. Much like Hermione, she had an unseemly crush on the bafoonish man.

“An excellent idea to show them that, Professor Snape, but if you don’t mind my saying so, it was very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you it would have been only too easy- however, I felt it would be instructive to let them see…”

Harri snorted.

Snape looked annoyed. Possibly Lockhart had noticed, because he said, “Enough demonstrating! I’m going to come amongst you now and put you all into pairs. Professor Snape, if you’d like to help me-”

They moved through the crowd, matching up partners. Lockhart teamed Neville up with Justin Finch-Fletchly, and Snape reached Harri first.

“Time to split up you two,” he said to Dean and Seamus. “Harriet, you can take Finnigan. Thomas, over here with Miss. Bulstrode.”

He then paired Ron with Malfroy, who strutted over, smirking.

“Face your partners!” called Lockhart, back on the platform. “And bow!”

Harri and Seamus bowed dramatically, using all the same hand flourishes that Lockhart had used.
“Wands at the ready!” shouted Lockhart. “When I count to three, cast your charms to Disarm your opponents- only to disarm them- we don’t want any accidents- one.. two... Three-”

Harri swung her wand high, and she and Seamus took turns trading silly charms like Tarantallegra which caused one to tap dance.

Others weren’t so lucky, with Ron and Malfoy trading rather painful Rictasempras.

“Stop! Stop!” screamed Lockhart, but Snape took charge.

“Finite Incantatem!” he shouted; Harri’s feet stopped dancing and Seamus stopped laughing from her tickling charm.

A haze of greenish smoke was hovering over the scene. Both Neville and Justin were lying on the floor panting; Ron was doubled over, and Millicent Bulstrode had Dean in a headlock.

“Dear, dear,” said Lockhart, skittering through the crowd, looking at the aftermath of the duels. “Up you go, Macmillian… Careful there Miss. Fawcett… Pinch it hard, it’ll stop bleeding in a second Boot-.”

“I think I’d better teach you how to block unfriendly spells,” said Lockhart, standing flustered in the midst of the hall. He glanced at Snape, whose black eyes glinted, and looking quickly away. “Let’s have a volunteer pair- Longbottom and Finch-Fletchley, how about you-”

“A bad idea, Professor Lockhart,” said Snape, gliding over like a large bat. “Longbottom causes devastation with the simplest of spells. I think a fair pairing would be…” he glanced around.

“Harriet, you and Draco I think.”

Harri felt annoyed, but Snape was probably right. She and Malfoy both had high grades and would probably be able to get the shield charm right on the first couple tries.

She didn’t like the look on Malfoy’s face. She saw him make eye contact with Ron, who gave a slight nod.

“Excellent idea!” said Lockhart, gesturing Harri and Malfoy into the middle of the hall as the crowd backed away to give them room.

“Now, Harri,” said Lockhart. “When Draco points his wand at you, do this.”

He raised his own wand, attempted a complicated sort of wiggling action, and dropped it. Snape smirked as Lockhart quickly picked it up saying, “Whoops- my wand is a little overexcited-”

“A simple protego should do, Harriet,” Snape said calmly. “Draco, just perform the disarming spell, if you will.”

Harri and Malfoy faced each other. Lockhart counted down, “Three- two- one- go!” he shouted.

Malfoy raised his wand quickly and bellowed, “Serpensortial!”

The end of his wand exploded. Harri watched, aghast as a long black snake shot out of it, fell heavily onto the floor between them, and raised itself, ready to strike. There were screams as the crowd backed swiftly away, clearing the floor.

“Come no nearer!” it hissed in anger.

Harri blinked, surprised. “Hello,” she hissed. “I’m sorry, this must be very jarring for you.”
The serpent looked marginally calmer. “A speaker?” it hissed at Harri.

“Yes, and if you'll just come over here onto me, I can take you to get some very nice rats,” Harri told the snake, offering out her arm.

The snake hesitated, but then consented and slithered over to Harri and coiled up her arm onto her shoulder.

There were gasps of shock. Harri looked up and met Snape’s eyes. She realized her mistake. She had spoken to a snake in front of the whole school. Snape was already pinching the bridge of his nose, something he only did when he was very annoyed with her.

Harri slowly turned her head to look at the assembled crowd and saw open faced shock. Everyone was looking at her. Everyone except Ron and Neville. They were looking towards Malfoy, and as Harri turned back to face her opponent, she saw that Malfoy had a look of pure triumph on his face.

Chapter End Notes

I know this doesn't make Ron and Neville look good. It isn't good. They're twelve. They are not emotionally competent people. They will make mistakes. They won't do things the right way. Forgive the twelve-year-old boys for not doing everything right.
“What in the hell do you think you were playing at?” Harri accused angrily. She had cornered Ron and Neville in their dorm room. They had practically run back to the Gryffindor common room after Dueling Club. All it had taken to keep Dean and Seamus out was a venomous glare from Harri. The black snake still draped around Harri’s shoulders enhanced the effect.

“What were we playing at? What are you playing at!” Ron yelped back. “You’re a bloody parselmouth!”

“So what!” Harri yelled back.

“So what? Harri, don’t you think it’s odd that you can suddenly talk to snakes?” Neville asked, clearly pleading with her to stay calm. His face was white, and Harri suddenly realized that the room was crackling with energy.

Harri took a deep breath and tried to calm down. She felt incredibly betrayed. They had known that Draco Malfoy was going to do something like this. She had seen the nod. Why would they try to expose her secret? Now everyone would think that she was the Heir of Slytherin. They were her friends. How could they do this to her?

Only… they must have exposed her because they thought she was the heir of Slytherin.

“I’ve been able to talk to snakes for a long time,” Harri told them. “When I was ten I sent a Boa Constrictor at a zoo to Brazil. I’m helping Snape brew experimental potions with a Runespoor every Friday. Both Snape and Dumbledore know about my ability.”

“You sent a boa constrictor to Brazil?” Ron repeated faintly.

“There’s a Runespoor in the castle?” Neville asked, face still very pale.

“Yes, but he won’t do anything. He’s very nice!”

“Oh yeah, and what about that snake around your neck?” Ron asked. Said snake was eyeing Scabbers who was asleep on Ron’s bed.

"Is that the rat you meant?” the snake asked with disgust.

“No, it’s not. That rat belongs to someone else.”

“Good,” the snake hissed, “that rat isn’t right.”

“She says that she doesn’t want Scabbers. He might be sick,” Harri told Ron.

Ron scooped the rat up protectively. “He is not!” he exclaimed while looking the rat over.

“Why would you let Malfoy do that?” Harri asked furiously. “It was rotten of you. If you had asked I would have told you that I’m a parselmouth.”

“Well, we didn’t know that!” Neville said. “He said that you wouldn’t answer truthfully.”
“How did Malfoy even know, anyway?” Harri continued on. “It’s not like I advertise it.”

There was a pause, where Ron and Neville looked at each other silently. “Malfoy thinks that you’re possessed,” Ron said finally.

“Possessed? No, I’m not.”

“Would you know if you were?” Neville asked.

“I would know if I’m possessed!” Harri exclaimed. “Isn’t there a spell or something? I’ll prove it.”

Neville shrugged. “I don’t know about a spell. He said that you picked up a book at Diagon Alley that Malfoy’s dad gave Hermione. That it was meant to open the Chamber of Secrets.”

Harri froze. It was like she could almost remember something, but it wasn’t coming to mind. She couldn’t focus on it. There was a fog covering her vision, and she had to lean on Ron’s bed to prevent herself from falling.

Both boys reached out as if to catch her, but Harri waved them off, gaining control of herself again.

“I think… I think there is something,” she said haltingly. “I don’t know what. I can’t… it won’t focus in my head. But it’s been like that since the start of term. Ever since I…”

The boys seemed to realize at the same time that she did. “You were in the hospital wing for magical depletion,” Ron said.

“But you haven’t been there since,” added Neville.

“If there was a book that possessed me,” Harri said, “I don’t think I have it anymore. You can check my things… Hermione!”

Ron jumped, “Hermione what?”

“Hermione was going through all my things. She broke into Snape’s rooms before she got petrified. She was looking for the book?”

“Yeah, she was. Malfoy put her up to it.”

“Malfoy?” Harri asked, shocked. “Why would Malfoy be trying to find the book? How do we know he didn’t set Hermione up?”

“He seems pretty beat up about it,” Neville said. “He… he really wants to stop whatever did this to Hermione I think. He visits her almost every day.”

“Does he really?” Harri asked, feeling guilty that she hadn’t visited Hermione more often.

“Yeah, he does,” said Ron. “He said that a way to test if you had the book since we can’t exactly go up to the girl’s dorms, was to see if you were a parselmouth.”

“It would make sense if Slytherin’s monster was a snake,” added Neville.


“You know what the teachers are thinking about all this?” Neville asked.
“Well… sort of. I think Snape let me know some things about it so that I wouldn’t go looking for
trouble. Apparently, Hagrid got framed for opening the Chamber fifty years ago, but Dumbledore
thinks it wasn’t him. Apparently, Voldemort was a student when the attacks happened last time.”

“Well was a student here?” Ron asked horrified.

“Yeah, I can’t picture it either,” Harri said. “The teachers think that Voldemort is doing it again
somehow.”

“What if… What if You-Know-Who gave the book to Malfoy’s dad?” Neville asked. “What if it’s
a book that takes control of people and makes them open the Chamber of Secrets?”

“How could a book do that? It would have a huge magical signature! We'd all feel it, and if we
couldn't Dumbledore would feel it at the very least.” Harri said.

“I don’t know,” said Ron thinking. “I think we need to talk to Malfoy more about this. We should
all meet, and then, and I can’t believe I’m saying this Harri, then I think we need to tell the teachers
what we know.”

“Ron that sounds a lot like Hermione.”

“Don’t tell her when she wakes up, I’ll never live it down.”

They met the next day in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. No one liked being around Myrtle, which
meant that it was one of the most private places in Hogwarts. The snow that had begun in the night
had turned into a blizzard so thick that the last Herbology lesson of the term was canceled:
Professor Sprout wanted to fit socks and scarves on the Mandrakes, a tricky operation she would
entrust to no one else, now that it was so important for the Mandrakes to grow quickly to revive
Mrs. Norris and Hermione.

“So you’re telling me that you think you were possessed by the book, but you don’t have it
anymore,” said Malfoy, arms crossed and looking at Harri in disbelief.

“That’s right,” Harri told Malfoy.

“And you’re a parslemouth despite the fact, and could talk to snakes before my father gave
Granger that book in August.”

“You’ve got it,” Harri said.

“Which is a fact that can be confirmed by Professor Snape,” Malfoy continued on, eyeing Harri
with suspicion.

“Yes. He’s known about it since June.”

“Which means we have no idea where the book is now or who it’s using to get into the Chamber,”
said Neville.

Malfoy groaned. “Isn’t that bloody fantastic,” he hissed. “Some maniac is on the lose petrifying
people. You know last time someone died.”

“Well, it’s only been two attacks so far. Just Hermione and the cat. Maybe there won’t be
anymore.”

“Doubtful,” said Malfoy. “They’re probably just trying to pick their next victim. Do we know who
is a Mud-" Harri, Neville, and Ron all glared at him, “Oh alright, Muggle-born. Do we know who is muggle-born?”

“I don’t think they keep a list. We could start to make one, I guess?” Ron said with a shrug. “I think we need to tell the teachers though. If the teachers know that there is a book that is possessing people, they’ll be able to search the castle for it.”

Malfoy went even paler. “If we tell the teachers then my father will know that I told you about the book. He’s on the Board of Governors.”

“So what?” Harri asked. Malfoy glared at her.

“So what, Potter? Do you know what my family does to blood-traitors? I’d get disinherited.”

“You’re saying money is more important than people’s lives!” Ron said angrily to him. “Who is to say that Hermione won’t wake up and get attacked again?”

Malfoy didn’t look happy. “I don’t want to go to the teachers or Dumbledore. But...we can tell Snape.”

Ron and Neville weren’t happy about that, but Harri thought it was fair. “I guess that’s as close to neutral territory as we’re going to get,” Harri agreed.

“Snape is NOT neutral!” Ron snapped.

“He’d probably help feed us to the monster,” agreed Neville.

“No he wouldn’t,” Harri told them. “He wants the attacks to stop too, come on.” And Harri led three reluctant boys to Professor Snape’s office.

Snape didn’t take his eyes of Malfoy for the entire meeting but agreed to keep Malfoy’s name officially out of it.

“I will have to let the Headmaster know, Draco,” Snape told him as they stood to leave. “But we will keep your name out of anything official. To search student’s belongings we need to have permission from the Board of Governors.”

Draco visibly gulped. “My father won’t approve something that could lead back to him. Is there a way for you to word it so it isn’t obvious that I told you? To make it sound like you’re looking for something else?” he asked.

“We will find a way. Thank you for coming forward. It was very brave of you. I know how these things are,” Snape laid a hand on Malfoy’s shoulder. He looked very solemn.

“My father won’t be pleased, if he finds out,” Draco said, looking down.

“There isn’t a way for us to prove anything without your direct cooperation,” Snape told Malfoy. “Unless you’re willing to give memories and testify publically, there isn’t much we can do legally.”

Malfoy shook his head, still looking down. “I’m not going to testify against my father,” he said weakly.

“Of course, Draco. Out with you four. I’ll be heading to the Headmaster’s office.”

Snape pushed them out the door of his office, locked it, and strode off- his cloak flowing behind
him like great bat wings— in the direction of Dumbledore's office.

"You sneak," Ron hissed at Malfoy once Snape was out of earshot. "What do you mean you won’t testify against your father! He’s the one who started this mess."

"He’s my father, Weasley. I figured you would at least understand," Malfoy spat. "Would you go around testifying against your family?"

Ron was white with anger. "If my family were a bunch of Death Eaters I would!"

"Ron, Malfoy, shut it!" Neville said, going between them. Both boys were physically stronger than chubby Neville and could push him aside if it came to blows.

"We don’t have proof without Malfoy," Ron said tersely. "If he won’t testify then his dad just gets away with hurting Hermione? That isn’t right."

"Well, we can’t do anything about that. Fighting won’t change his mind, Ron," Harri said. She understood Ron’s frustration perfectly.

"Don’t you dare tell anyone about this," Malfoy said. "It’s not right. We all know it’s not right what my father did to Granger. We’re stopping it. I’m doing my part. So shut your faces. Or next time you get in some sticky trouble, I won’t help you at all."

"Draco, are you saying that you’re planning to help us next time?" Harri asked with an overly sweet voice.

"Shut it, Scarhead," snapped Malfoy, and he stomped off.

Harri decided to get some school work done in the library after Draco had marched away. She had her school bag with her, but Ron and Neville had to return to the common room to get theirs.

Harri wasn’t sure how she felt about Ron and Neville right now. They had ignored her for nearly a month, which had hurt horribly. Not to mention her free time had evaporated and studying had increased exponentially. Between no Hermione, Ron, or Neville, Harri was finding it much harder to master magic. Ron was much more intuitive in magic than she, and was good at helping Harri practically with spells. She always overloaded her spell casting or had nothing happen at all. Neville was a Herbology wiz and could make out differences in plants that Harri would never notice. Harri was good at magical theory, but Hermione was miles better. The only area Harri could claim to be the best at was Potions, and she had the advantage of private lessons with Snape every Friday. She felt subpar. With the help of her new friends Harri had managed to keep her grades up, but it was more of a struggle.

A group of Hufflepuffs who should have been in the canceled Herbology class with the Gryffindors were sitting at the back of the library, but they didn’t seem to be working. Between the long lines of high bookshelves, Harri could see that their heads were close together and they were having what looked like an absorbing conversation. She was walking toward them when something of what they were saying met her ears, and she paused to listen, hidden in the Invisibility section.

“So anyway,” a stout boy was saying, “I told Justin to hide up in our dormitory. I mean to say, if Potter’s going to make him her next victim, it’s best if he keeps a low profile for a while. Of course, Justin’s been waiting for something like this to happen ever since he let slip to Potter he was Muggle-born. Justin actually told her he’d been down for Eton. That’s not the kind of thing you bandy about with Slytherin’s heir on the loose, is it?”
“You definitely think it is Potter, then, Ernie?” asked Neville’s soulmate, Hannah Abbot.

“How?” said the stout boy solemnly, “she’s a Parselmouth. Everyone knows that’s the mark of a Dark Witch. Have you ever heard of a decent one who could talk to snakes? They called Slytherin himself Serpent-tongue.”

Harri felt her stomach sink all the way to the floor. She almost wanted to start crying. Everyone thought that she was the heir of Slytherin now. Everyone was probably whispering about her. Any that she had garnered for herself over the last two years would be gone. She would just be hated Harri Potter again.

“Well I was talking to Padme Patil earlier today,” said Hannah. “She’s been hanging out with Harri some. She says that Harri’s horribly upset about Hermione Granger. Why would she attack her best friend?”

“Well doesn’t that prove it!” said Ernie. “If Potter went and attacked her, she’d have a reason to feel guilty. Maybe that’s why there hasn’t been another attack yet. But we all know about her now. So there isn’t any reason to hide it.”

There were some heavy murmurings at this, and Ernie went on, “Remember what was written on that wall? *Enemies of the Heir, Beware.* Potter had some sort of run-in with Filch. Next thing we know, Filch’s cat’s attacked.”

“She’s really nice though,” argued Hannah. “She’s good friends with Neville too,” Hannah said this as if Neville’s good approval was all that anyone should need. “And, well, she’s the one who made You-Know-Who disappear. She can’t be all bad, can she?”

Ernie lowered his voice mysteriously, the Hufflepuffs bent closer, and Harri edged nearer so that she could catch Ernie’s words.

“No one knows how she survived that attack by You-Know-Who. I mean to say, she was only a baby when it happened. She should have been blasted to smithereens. Only a really powerful Dark Witch could have survived a curse like that.” He dropped his voice until it was barely more than a whisper, and said, “That’s probably why You-Know-Who wanted to kill her in the first place. Didn’t want a new Dark Lord competing with him. I wonder what other powers Potter’s been hiding?”

Harri couldn’t take it anymore. Clearing her throat loudly, she stepped out from behind the bookshelves. If she hadn’t been feeling so angry, she would have found the sight that greeted her funny: Everyone one of the Hufflepuffs looked as though they had been Petrified by the sight of her, and the color was draining out of Ernie’s face.

“Hello,” said Harri. “If you see Justin, please tell him that I don’t have any reason to petrify him. He’s annoying, but not worth a full-on attack. He can come out of his dorm.” She tried to sound sarcastic but judging from the looks of horror on the Hufflepuff’s face, she was pretty sure they thought she was serious. Even Hannah looked dubious.

“You stay away from him,” Ernie told her firmly.

“I just said-”

“We all saw what you could do at Dueling Club!”

“Then you noticed that I stopped the snake from hurting anyone!”
“All I saw was you talking to a snake! Who knows what you were telling it.” The Hufflepuffs around the table began to nod.

“It didn’t touch anyone!”

“Well it could have!” said Ernie. “And in case you’re getting ideas,” he added, “I might tell you that you can trace my family back through nine generations of witches and warlocks and my blood’s as pure as anyone’s so-”

“I don’t care what sort of blood you’ve got!” said Harri fiercely. “Why would I want to attack Muggleborns?”

“I’ve heard you hate those Muggles you used to live with. Why else would you want to live with Snape?”

Harri went pale. The Dursleys. How many people knew about them? What were people saying? Did people know about her childhood? That would be horrible. For everyone to think that she was evil and abused? They’d all say that abuse had made her that way. She could hear the harsh whispers, the unsympathetic comments, people rushing at her, sure that she was up to something, coming to hit…

Harri shook her head slightly to clear her mind.

“It’s not possible to live with the Dursleys and not hate them,” said Harri softly. “I’d like to see you try it.”

She turned on her heel and stormed out of the library, earning herself a reproving glare from Madam Pince, who was polishing the gilded cover of a large spell book.

Harri blundered up the corridor, barely noticing where she was going, she was in such a fury. The result was that she walked into something very large and solid, which knocked her backward onto the floor.

“Oh, hello, Hagrid,” Harri said, looking up.

Hagrid’s face was entirely hidden by a wooly, snow-covered balaclava, but it couldn’t possibly by anyone else, as he filled most of the corridor in his moleskin overcoat. A dead rooster was hanging from one of his massive, gloved hands.

“All righ’, Harri?” he said, pulling up the balaclava so he could speak. “Why aren’t yeh in class?”

“Canceled,” said Harri, getting up. “What’re you doing in here?”

Hagrid held up the limp rooster.

“The second one killed this term,” he explained. “It’s either foxes or a Blood-Suckin’ Bugbear, an’ I need the headmaster’s permission tern put a charm on the hen coop.”

Rooster. A dead rooster. The itch in the back of her head began. She was missing something. Something that she should know. Hagrid peered more closely at Harri from under his tick snow-flecked eyebrows.

“Yeh sure yeh’re all righ’? Yeh look all hot an’ bothered-”

Harri couldn’t bring herself to repeat what Ernie and the rest of the Hufflepuffs had been saying
about her.

“It’s nothing,” she said. “I’d better get going, Hagrid, it’s Transfiguration next.”

She walked off, her mind turning over everything she had learned that day and everything Ernie had said about her.

A book that possessed people. A book that she was pretty sure had possessed her.

A snake. There was a snake that was doing something…. Why hadn’t she heard it again? Were the attacks going to stop? She was missing something so important. That heavy fog that she felt whenever she tried to remember returned.

Harri stamped up the stairs and turned along another corridor, which was particularly dark; the torches had been extinguished by a strong, icy draft that was blowing through a loose windowpane.

A snake… a snake and a rooster… BASILISK.

It was a basilisk that was causing the attacks! She could almost quote the section from Fantastic Beasts.

“Basilisks are uncontrollable except by Parselmouths, they are as dangerous to most Dark Wizards as to anybody else. Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the crowing on the rooster, which is fatal to it.”

Why had it taken her so long to remember this? It was so obvious. A basilisk stare could cause death, but petrification was possible if looking through a reflective surface. Hermione had been looking at Harri’s comb.

Harri was halfway down the passage when she tripped headlong over something lying on the floor. She turned to squint at what she’d fallen over and felt as though her stomach had dissolved.

Justin Finch-Fletchley was lying on the floor, rigid and cold, a look of shock on his face, his eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. And that wasn’t all. Next to him was another figure, the strangest sight Harri had ever seen.

It was Nearly Headless Nick, no longer pearly-white and transparent, but black and smoky, floating immobile and horizontal, six inches off the floor. His head was half off and his face wore an expression of shock identical to Justin’s.

Harri got to her feet, her breathing fast and shallow, her heart doing a kind of drumroll against her ribs. Justin had seen the snake through Nearly-Headless-Nick. That was the reflective surface. Justin wasn’t dead.

She had to get help… oh, but would anyone believe that she hadn’t had anything to do with this?

As she stood there panicking, a door right next to her opened with a bang. Peeves the Poltergeist came shooting out.

“Why, it’s potty wee Potter!” cackled Peeves, knocking Harri’s glasses askew as he bounded past her. “What’s Potter up to? Why’s Potter lurking-”

Peeves stopped, halfway through a midair somersault. Upside down, he spotted Justin and Nearly Headless Nick. He flipped the right way up, filled his lungs and, before Harri could stop him,
screamed, “ATTACK! ATTACK! ANOTHER ATTACK! NO MORTAL OR GHOST IS SAFE! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES ATTAAAACK!”

Crash- crash- crash- door after door flew open along the corridor and people flooded out. For several long minutes, there was a scene of such confusion that Justin was in danger of being squashed and people kept standing in Nearly Headless Nick. Harri found herself pinned against the wall as the teachers shouted for quiet. Professor McGonagall came running, followed by her own class. No sooner had the scene cleared somewhat than Ernie the Hufflepuff arrived, panting, on the scene.

"Caught in the act!” Ernie yelled, his face stark white, pointing his finger dramatically at Harri.

“That will do, Macmillan!” said Professor McGonagall sharply.

“Professor,” said Harri to McGonagall. “I need to see Professor Dumbledore. Right away.”

“Yes,” said McGonagall curtly. “I suppose you do.”

After Justin was carried to the hospital wing by Professor Flitwick and Professor Sinistra, and McGonagall conjured a fan that she gave to Ernie to waft Nick up the stairs, Harri and McGonagall turned down the hall.

They marched in silence around a corner and stopped before the ugly gargoyle.

“Lemon Drop,” said Professor McGonagall.

She and Professor McGonagall stepped onto the stairs, and rose upward in circles, higher and higher. At last, they came to the door, and McGonagall knocked.

The office was empty, and Professor McGonagall told Harri to wait and left her there, alone.

Harri looked around. Standing on the usually empty gold perch behind the door was a decrepit-looking bird that resembled a half-plucked turkey. Harri looked at the gagging bird and it looked balefully back. It had scarlet plumage all around it on the floor, and even a few still sticking up on its head.

Was this…? But it couldn’t be. It didn’t look like one… but Harri knew that Phoenix’s typically burst into flames when their bodies broke down. They would rise from the ashes as chicks.

“Hello,” Harri said to the ugly bird as a couple more feathers fell out of its tail. “Not to be rude, but are you a Phoenix?”

As if in answer, the bird burst into flames.

Harri yelled in shock and backed away into the desk. Well, that answered that. She headed back over to the smoldering pile of ash to see the chick emerge. What an amazing, once in a lifetime, opportunity.

Sure enough, a tiny, wrinkled, newborn bird poked its head out of the ashes. It was very ugly.

The office door opened. Dumbledore came in, looking very somber.

“Professor,” Harri gasped. “Your Phoenix!”

“About time,” he said. “He’s been looking dreadful for days; I’ve been telling him to get a move on.”
Harri gave the bird a suspicious look. “He did it just when I asked him if he was a Pheonix.”

Dumbledore laughed, “That sounds like Fawkes. He wanted to meet you once he was handsome again. He’s very vain. Since he couldn’t get that, I suppose he decided to shock you instead.”

“He wanted to meet me?” Harri asked, looking back to the bird in curiosity.

“He is a creature of fire. The Lord of Light gives their body to the Earth and in return receives a companion of fire. The opposite is true for the Dark Lord. Since Pheonixes are very long-lived, they tend to help multiple generations.”

“So one day…” Harri didn’t finish her statement since it seemed insensitive.

“One day you and Fawkes will be very close,” said Dumbledore with a small smile.

In the shock of Fawkes catching fire, Harri had forgotten what she was here to do, but it all came back to her as Dumbledore settled himself in the high chair behind the desk and fixed Harri with his penetrating, light blue stare.

Before Dumbledore could speak another word, however, the door of the office flew open with an almighty bang and Hagrid burst in, a wild look in his eyes, his balaclava perched on top of his shaggy black head and the dead rooster still swinging from his hand.

“It wasn’t Harri, Professor Dumbledore!” said Hagrid urgently. “I was talkin’ ter her seconds before that kid was found, she never had time, sir-”

Dumbledore tried to say something, but Hagrid went ranting on, waving the rooster around in his agitation, sending feathers everywhere.

“- it can’t’ve bin her, I’ll swear it in front o’ the Ministry o’ Magic if I have to-”

“Hagrid, I-”

“- yeh’ve got the wrong girl, sir, I know Harri never-”

“**Hagrid!**” said Dumbledore loudly. “**I do not** think that Harri attacked those people.”

“Oh,” said Hagrid, the rooster falling limply at his side. “Right. I’ll wait outside then, Headmaster.”

As he stomped out looking embarrassed.

“Professor,” Harri began, “It was actually Hagrid who helped me realize what has been going on. The rooster, sir. It’s dead. A snake that can’t stand the crow of a rooster could only be a Basilisk!”

Dumbledore leaned back slightly in his chair. “Yes,” he said slowly. “I had thought that might be a possibility. It fits the profile very well,” he stroked his beard thoughtfully. “I asked you up here because after Professor Snape informed me of what you and your friends have discovered, I wanted to know what exactly you have heard from this snake.”

“Not much,” Harri said. “Just the once I head that it wanted to kill. And the Runespoor called it the Mother of Serpents.”

“Hmm,” said Dumbledore, lost in thought.

“Sir,” said Harri, “Professor Snape told me that you think it’s Voldemort. And now with Malfoy
telling us that his father gave Hermione and me a book… I’ve had this feeling… like a fog on my brain. It was almost like I couldn’t break through and remember the word Basilisk.”

“That doesn’t surprise me Harri. If this book is what I think it is then there is a very good reason you were heavily affected by it.”

“Are you going to search the school to find it?”

“The ability to search the belongings of our students is one that is not taken lightly. It requires approval from the Board of Governors. At the moment they are heavily influenced by their Chairman, Lucious Malfoy.”

“So you’re saying it won’t be approved?”

“We shall see. They will vote over Winter break. Speaking of, we are less than a week from Yule now. Are you excited?”

“No,” Harri said. “I’ve researched it, but I’ve read so many different traditions that I don’t know which ones we will do. It’s very overwhelming.”

Dumbledore smiled. “Yule is a bit more fun than Samhain, in my opinion. Good food, good drink, and welcoming people. We’ll be traveling to northern Norway. To the Alta Fjord. It's the location of some very interesting ancient runic carvings. Thankfully, we won’t have to be out at night, just during the suns most powerful hours. We will be celebrating rebirth, much like our friend Fawkes here.”

“So no evergreens and staying out from sunset to sunrise to mark the longest night of the year?” Harri asked, surprised.

“That would be the job of the Dark Lord,” Dumbledore said with a smile. “Our longest day will be at the summer solstice, Litha.”

“We celebrate solstices are during the day, so Beltane and Samhain are in the night?” Harri asked.

“No, just Samhain. The Dark Lord would join us in the daylight for Beltane. Properly celebrated it concludes at sunset, but the main focus of the ritual occurs at the sun’s hight.”

“Why?”

“Beltane is for the living, Samhain is for the dead,” answered Dumbledore cryptically.

“It really is about balance?”

“Yes, rituals all focus on the balance between day and night, light and shadow.”

“I wouldn’t have thought,” Harri said. “It seems like a ritual should take place at darkest night.”

Dumbledore chuckled, “Yes one would think. Thankfully, we get more daylight tasks. My old bones wouldn’t enjoy too many long nights.”

Term finally came to a close, and in a blink of an eye, Harri was dragging herself out of bed at six in the morning to meet Professor Dumbledore. She wasn’t sure what he meant about not having nighttime assignments. This was far too early for her without a broom ride to help wake her up.

Dumbledore, however, looked bright-eyed and festive in robes of resplendent green with fur
trimming.

“Ah good, Harri!,” he said with a wide smile as she slumped down the stairs. “A very Merry Yule to you my dear!”

“Mmm,” she said blearily.

“Oh, dear. I think we need to get some tea in you,” he said handing her a thermos.

They made their way into the early morning. The snow was very deep, and their tracks left a clear trail as they made their way down to the Hogwarts gate.

Harri was warm in her green robes and thick cloak. She had on her mittens and even a pair of earmuffs that she was quite fond of. She certainly did not look like a Snow Maiden to match Dumbledore’s Father Christmas, but she thought she looked like a passable apprentice.

“When is sunrise?” Harri asked.

“There isn’t one,” said Dumbledore. “The sky should get slightly pink for an hour around eleven, but that will only last till just after noon.”

“You mean there isn’t even going to be a sunrise or sunset?” Harri asked shocked. She had heard that there were places where the sun didn’t rise during the winter.

“No. You can see then why the Dark Lord might not enjoy this holiday, and I do very much,” said Dumbledore cheekily. “But alas, even in the dark there is a magical responsibility from around 9:20 in the morning till 1:30 in the afternoon.”

“Even without the sun?” Harri asked.

“My dear girl, that is what we go to celebrate. It is the rebirth of the sun! She leaves us during the winter months, but with this night she only grows in power once again. It is our duty to honor her shortest appearance.”

They had reached the gates, and Dumbledore reached out his hand to take Harri’s arm. “I think you will enjoy it,” he told her. “Have no fear, it is all good fun in Alta.”

They disapparated with a pop... and arrived at a party.

There was music being played, a bonfire lit, and what smelled like breakfast being served. A cheer went up from the crowd of witches and wizards when they saw Dumbledore.

They spoke rapidly in Norwegian, which Harri didn’t understand, but Dumbledore spoke back with perfect ease. Add that to the long list of things Harri would need to learn, she thought with a groan. Was there a spell to learn a language? There should be.

“And who is this?” asked one cheerful blond witch in English, referring to Harri.

“This, my dear Inger, is Harriet Potter. Harriet, this is Inger Olsen. She is the Minister of Magic in Norway.”

“Oh, goodness me!” said the woman with a gasp. “But why is she here? Oh, Albus, you don’t mean to tell me-” She covered her mouth with her hand.

Dumbledore only smiled at her, neither confirming or denying. Harri felt her cheeks warm. It was still very dark, there wasn’t any light other than from the fire, so no one could see.
“Well let’s get some food in you!” said Inger brightly. She pulled Harri over to a table that was laden with smoked fish, several cuts of thin meat, bread, jam, and honey. It all looked very good. “Would you like any coffee?” the woman asked. Coffee? What was this, America?

“No thank you,” Harri said holding up her thermos. “I’ve got tea.”

“Oh, you British,” she said teasingly. “Well, let me introduce you to my girls. They’re about your age,” she said referring to the two blond girls sitting at the table. “This is Ida, and this is Cathrine.” The two girls waved shyly at Harri.

Their mother spoke to them in Norwegian, before turning back to Harri. “Would you mind terribly if I cast a translation spell? It will make things a bit simpler, I’m sure.”

“That would be great,” Harri said happily. There was a spell, fantastic! Perhaps she would be able to avoid learning Norwegian.

What followed was a party. Harri was happily eating plate after plate of good food. She even tried some coffee (it was horrid). Ida and Cathrine were very pleasant to speak to. They were schooled locally with three professors who taught them during the day and returned home every night.

“You spend most of the year apart from your family?” asked Ida. “Isn’t that very difficult for family relationships?”

“For some people, I think,” Harri told her. “But my father…” Harri tried again, “my father…” she meant to say guardian, but the spell didn’t translate it correctly. “My father works at the school,” she finished.

“Your father is a Master of an art?” Cathrine, who was almost of age, asked. “That is very impressive. Our Professors are journeymen in one or two subjects. Who is your father? Perhaps we have read his research?”

“Severus Snape,” Harri said. Catherine nearly dropped her coffee.

“You cannot be serious!” the young woman exclaimed. “THE Severus Snape?”

“Yes,” said Harri, a small smile tugging at her lips. “He’s currently letting me assist him in a project,” she bragged.

“That is amazing,” said Cathrine.

“Who is Severus Snape?” asked Ida.

“He wrote the paper on the improvements that could be made to the Wolfsbane Potion,” Cathrine told her sister. “The one that has helped Uncle Sven.”

“Ohhh,” Ida said. “Yes, that is very impressive. You are so lucky. You must learn a lot from him.”

“Yes, I do. I enjoy brewing quite a lot, not to mention zoology. It’s been a rare opportunity. Is your uncle a werewolf?” Harri asked.

The girls looked at each other haltingly. “Yes,” said Cathrine carefully. “But he is a very good man.”

“I’m sure he is,” Harri agreed. “I have an uncle with the same condition. I’ll be seeing him a few days for Christmas, actually.”
Both girls relaxed. “It is good to see family,” said Ida, but neither wanted to talk anymore about werewolves.

Near noon, Inger brought out the Yule Log and presented it to Dumbledore.

“Lord of Light,” Inger said as she held the Log out to him. “We ask your blessing on this log, that the fire that is lit from it may nourish our heaths through the long nights ahead. As we celebrate the sun’s growing strength, let magic keep our houses warm.”

“The fire of yesterday dies,” Dumbledore said, taking the log. “But today a new fire starts. May the warmth of it keep your families safe. May it’s light keep back the shadows. May this blessing bring rain to your fields, sun to your crops, and fish to your nets.” Harri could feel the magic in the words, it was like a pleasant breeze through her hair from the coast. Salty and full of promise.

“And mead to our wives lips!” yelled one man, playfully pinching his wife on the rear. She swatted at him.

“And temperance to our husband’s hands,” said his wife.

“Here, Here!” said Dumbledore. Everyone raised their cups in a rowdy cheer. The music picked up and people began to dance.

Dumbledore made his way over to Harri. “I believe that is all for us,” he told her.

“But we’ve barely been here at all,” Harri said.

“Yes, and our time is done. Without the express invitation from the Dark Lord, it would be rude to overstay. Whether he was planning to come or not.”

Harri glanced at Ida and Cathrine who didn’t seem to understand Dumbledore’s English. She wanted to protest but knew it would come out in Norwegian. She didn’t want the girls to hear them arguing or speaking about Dark Lords. Maybe that was one benefit of learning Norwegian instead of using a translation spell.

“Perhaps I will see you next year?” Harri asked.

The girls agreed. “It was very nice to meet you, Harri Snape,” said Cathrine. “Bring your father next year.”

“I’ll have to see,” Harri said. Dumbledore led her a little aways, before linking his arm with hers.

“Could Snape come next year? I think they appreciate his work here.”

“Norwegians do have a reputation for being a studious bunch,” said Dumbledore. “I’m sure Severus would enjoy pretty women asking him about his work.”

“Gross,” said Harri. “Don’t talk about him that way.”

Dumbledore chuckled, and Harri felt the familiar pull of his magic as the apparated back to Scotland.

Chapter End Notes
Y'all don't even know how excited I am to post the next chapter. It's dark. I loved writing it. I've gotten a lot of writing done the last couple days, so I think I'm going to bump up the posting schedule. I've got three more chapters to write for this story and I think I'll finish in the next week.

Happy reading!
Christmas morning dawned cold and white. Harri sleepily wandered into Ron’s dorm very early carrying her pile of presents so that they could open them together. Gulliver, her wandering tom, walked between her feet as she went.

“I’m going to drop everything you oversized monster,” Harri hissed at the frisky cat.

“Harri- you’re not supposed to be in here-” said Ron, rolling over and trying to go back to sleep.

“We need to go see Hermione before breakfast,” Harri told him. “So come on, get a move on.”

Harri’s Christmas presents were very satisfactory. Hagrid sent her a large tin of treacle toffee, which Harri decided to soften by the fire before eating; Ron had given her a book called *Flying with the Cannons*, a book of interesting facts about his favorite Quidditch team, and Neville had sent along a book called *Herbs and Brewing: What every Potion Master Should Grow* which described the most useful herbs in pioneering and, most importantly to Harri, how to maintain them easily. Lavender had sent Harri a box of chocolate and Parvati a bottle of Sleek-eazy’s. Harri’s last present was a new hand-knitted sweater from Mrs. Weasley and a large plum cake. Snape and Remus had both deferred giving her a present until later that day,

Harri had gotten Parvati an updated subscription to Witch Weekly and Lavender a deck of tarot cards. Harri had sent Ron and Neville the same gift; a gift certificate to Mr. Olivander’s wand shop.

“Harri... “ Ron said looking at the paper Mr. Ollivander had written out. “This is too much.”

“No, it isn’t,” Harri insisted.

“Yes, it is. My mum isn’t going to like this.”

“Well, you should use it anyway. I’ve been thinking about last month when...” Ron had the decency to look ashamed. “Well, I didn’t do so well without you. And it made me realize how much easier magic would be for you if you had a wand that was just yours. You’re so intuitive anyways, and a new wand can only help.”

Harri and Ron went by the Hospital Wing to see Hermione before heading down to the Great Hall. She was frozen in the same position she had been in for months now.

“Lord, she’s going to hate waking up and realizing she missed the whole year,” Ron said.

“I know,” replied Harri. “Can you imagine how upset she’ll be? Snape said that the potion won’t
be ready till May."

“She’s going to go mad. You can tell her what month it is,” Ron said.

“I wonder what the professors will do. Hermione can’t get held back,” Harri said feeling worried for her friend. Hermione would be devastated if she was held back behind her friends. She was smarter than everyone, and to be pushed behind because of Mr. Malfoy being spiteful would be very hard to handle.

“No, they won’t do that,” Ron insisted. “Maybe they’ll do a placement test. Hermione was miles ahead of everyone else. She could probably pass the third year and jump right into fourth if they’d let her.”

Harri wasn’t so sure. Ron took a lot of knowledge for granted. While Hermione might be able to cast spells after some practice and research topics to death, it still wouldn’t fill in the gaps that Ron and Neville took for granted.

The Great Hall looked magnificent when Harri and Ron entered. There were dozens of frost-covered Christmas trees and thick streamers of holly and mistletoe crisscrossing the ceiling. Enchanted snow was falling, warm and dry, from the ceiling. Dumbledore led them in a few of his favorite carols (Snape refused to join in).

Ron and Percy were dragged off by Fred and George after the meal to look for Ginny and to spend ‘family time’ together. Harri strongly suspected that Fred and George were going to torment their siblings with a snowball ambush.

Harri and Snape followed Dumbledore up to his office where they would floo to Remus’ cabin. It was a new moon, no need to worry about Lupin’s furry problem.

It was stilted at first. Snape and Remus didn’t have much to say to each other. But several swigs of fire whiskey later had loosened both men up. They didn’t talk about Sirius Black or Harri’s father, but both were happy to tell stories about Lily Evans. Her mother sounded like a superhero the way that they described her.

Lupin gave her a large box of homemade fudge, “You can never have enough chocolate,” he told her.

Snape didn’t give her a gift. Instead, he presented Lupin with a piece of paper.

"As you may know," he began to Lupin, "I have a strong dislike for werewolves. Ever since that man tried to kill me, I have done everything in my power to ensure that werewolves are not a threat."

Harri knew that Snape had done extensive research into werewolves and the wolfsbane potion, but the reason for that hadn't occurred to her.

“I imagine this will make you happy, Harriet,” said Snape. “As you know, I brew wolfsbane regularly. It is tested on a volunteer group for research purposes to improve the formula. What I have offered Lupin is a place in the study.” Harri’s heart filled with joy. Wolfsbane was incredibly expensive. It took three grants to keep Snape's research funded. Lupin would never be able to afford it on his own, but now he wouldn’t lose his mind every full moon. He would get to be himself instead of losing control to the dark magic inside of him. “Identities are confidential, of course,” Snape told Lupin who was too shocked to speak.
Harri was visiting Hermione a few weeks into the new term. Everyone kept hissing at her or running away whenever she entered a room. It was now easier to do homework in the Hospital Wing sitting next to Hermione’s bed. Harri talked to her friend about the lessons and what they were learning and wondered if Hermione was actually awake and listening, just unable to move.

Harri had just finished the homework Snape had given them, a huge amount that Ron claimed wouldn’t be completed until sixth year, when she heard an angry outburst from the floor above.

“That’s Filch,” Harri said to Hermione, before dashing out of the hospital wing. She left her bag and books scattered around Hermione’s bed.

She hurried up the stairs and paused, out of sight, listening hard. Had someone else been attacked?

“- even more work for me! Mopping all night, like I haven’t got enough to do! No, this is the final straw, I’m going to Dumbledore-

His footsteps receded along the out-of-sight corridor and she heard a distant door slam. Harri poked her head around the corner. Filch had clearly been manning his usual lookout post: she was once again at the spot where Mrs. Norris had been attacked. A great flood of water stretched over half the corridor, and it looked as though it was still seeping from under the door of Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Now that Filch had stopped shouting, Harri could hear Myrtle’s wails echoing off the bathroom walls.

Harri, holding her robes over her ankles, stepped through the great wash of water to the door bearing its OUT OF ORDER sign, ignored it, and entered.

Moaning Myrtle was crying, if possible, louder and harder than Harri had ever seen before. She seemed to be hiding down her usual toilet. It was dark in the bathroom because the candles had been extinguished in the great rush of water that had left both walls and floor soaking wet.

“What’s up, Myrtle?” asked Harri.

“Who’s that?” glugged Myrtle miserably. “Come to throw something else at me?”

Harri waded across to her stall and said, “Why would I throw something at you?”

“Don’t ask me,” Myrtle shouted, emerging with a wave of yet more water, which splashed onto the already sopping floor. “Here I am, minding my own business, and someone thinks it’s funny to throw a book at me…”

“But it can’t hurt you if someone throws something at you,” said Harri, reasonably. “I mean, it’d just go right through you, wouldn’t it?”

She had said the wrong thing. Myrtle puffed herself up and shrieked, “Let’s all throw books at Myrtle because she can’t feel it! Ten points if you can get it through her stomach! Fifty points if it goes through her head! Well, ha, ha, ha! What a lovely game, I don’t think!”

“Who threw it at you anyway?” asked Harri. Usually, no one came into this bathroom.

“I don’t know… I was just sitting in the U-bend, thinking about death, and it fell right through the top of my head,” said Myrtle glaring at her. “It’s over there, it got washing out…”

Harri looked under the sink where Myrtle was pointing. A small, thin book lay there. It had a shabby black cover and was as wet as everything else in the bathroom. Something was stamped across the front in gold lettering.
Harri felt like the fog was rolled back from her mind.

This was it. This was the book. She remembered it now. The book that she had mingled her magic with for weeks at the Burrow. She had finally figured out how to write in it the night before term began… and it had been Voldemort. The magic that had felt so familiar had been Voldemort and she hadn’t been able to do anything to stop it. He had taken her magic, caused her magical depletion, and made her hide the book in the first year girl’s dorm.

A Gryffindor First-Year had been possessed by the book and opened the Chamber of Secrets because Harri had given it to her.

What should she do?

She couldn’t very well touch the diary. She could feel it reaching out toward her. If she touched it, would it have the ability to control her again?

Could she leave it here? What if someone else came by to investigate the water? What if the diary found a new victim and possessed them instead. What if the Gryffindor First Year who had tried to flush the diary away came back for it?

She would levitate it. Harri would levitate it to Dumbledore and he could deal with Voldemort’s enchanted Diary. That would solve it… maybe.

Making up her mind, Harri cast Wingardium Leviosa. She could feel the diary’s magic try to mingle with hers, but she did her best to push it away. She just had to get the book to Dumbledore. She could make it up a flight of stairs and down a corridor.

This would work. This would be okay.

Harri’s plan fell apart halfway down the second-floor corridor when she heard Filch shout out, “Hey! Potter, no magic in the corridors! What do you think you’re doing, give me that!” Filch was right behind her and made a grab for the floating book.

With a seeker’s reflex, Harri grabbed the diary before Filch could touch it. The magic rushed in like a battering ram.

Everything went black.

Harri woke up on her bed.

Her books and bag were neatly placed on her bedside table. How had they gotten here? Where was Filch? How was she in her bed?

Harri sat up. Laying at the foot of her bed was the diary, her fwooper feather quill laying innocuously next to it. It didn’t think she was going to write to it, did it? She was most certainly not. She was going to find Lavender and Parvati in the common room and have them guard the door while she went to get help.

Only…

She felt frozen to the spot.

Harri had the impulse to raise her hand, she fought it and attempted to keep it firmly by her side. She fist her comforter to stop herself from raising it, but almost like watching someone else’s
arm it rose up. Her entire arm was trembling as she tried to force it back down, but it wouldn’t.

Instead, she watched as her hand reached for the quill. Her other arm, without her notice at first, also began to move. It was reaching toward the diary.

Harri tried to flinch back, to move, to do anything, but her body wasn’t cooperating. Instead, she watched like a prisoner in her own mind as her hands opened the book and placed the quill on the first page.

‘Hello,’ she wrote in a hand that was not her own.

The pages of the diary began to blow as though caught in a high wind, stopping on the twenty-fourth day of June. Mouth hanging open, Harri saw that the little square for June twenty-fourth seemed to have turned into a miniscule television screen. Her hands trembling from her resistance, she raised the book to press her eye against the little window, and before she knew what was happening, she was tilting forward; the window was widening, she felt her body leave her bed, and she was pitched headfirst through the opening in the page into a whirl of color and shadow.

It was shadow that was prominent when she landed. It wasn’t night, or at least it didn’t look like night. Just a twilight time. There was a bonfire ahead of her, maybe twenty feet away. There were woods all around, but she was in a perfectly circular clearing. The fire was at the center. She felt like she couldn't breathe properly. There was a great blanket of magic covering her and holding her down. It was suffocating.

June 24th was Litha. Why would Voldemort want to take her to midsummer?

“Come out, come out,” called a voice. It was deep and masculine.

Harri rose shakily to her feet. Whatever this was, she would need to face it if she wanted to escape. Had she been sucked into the diary? How was that possible?

She walked towards the fire.

A young man was standing behind it. She could make out his outline, and as she walked closer to him she had to stop herself from gasping.

This was not Lord Voldemort.

He was very tall and lean. He was wearing robes of deep burgundy that made her think of embers and fire. He had dark brown eyes and wavy black hair. His cheekbones were so sharp Harri wondered if she would get cut if she touched them. He was the most painfully good looking person she had ever seen. Harri had never paid much attention to boys before, but this one would be impossible to not pay attention to. This must be the Voldemort of the past. She could remember now, he had told her his name was Tom Riddle.

“Harriet Potter,” the young man said. “I’ve been waiting to see you.”


He laughed, not the high cruel sound that belonged to his future self, but a warm laugh that made her think of chocolate.

“Well, I can’t say that does anything for my vanity. Tell me, Harriet, what was it like to meet Lord Voldemort in the flesh.”
“I don’t know if I’d call it that,” Harri said stiffly. “You look horrible in the future though. Rotted and disgusting.”

“That’s a shame for you I suppose,” he said. “I’m sure that won’t make Beltane or Litha very fun for you.”

“Why would it affect me at all. I’m not going to have anything to do with you,” Harri told him.

“We shall see,” was all he said.

He walked closer to her, the fire finding new shadows in his face to illuminate. He could go from looking terrifying to handsome in a single flicker of light.

“You aren’t much to look at for now,” he said taking the end of her braid in his hand. “How old are you, thirteen?”

“Twelve,” Harri said trying to pull away. He held fast to her braid, and it hurt to turn her head away.

“Hmm, but maybe there is potential in you. Your hair isn’t bad. You haven’t grown into your face yet. You’re very scrawny, but if you keep up with your Quidditch maybe you’ll fill out a bit.” He was looking at her very flat backside.

“Get off,” Harri said shoving him away feeling uncomfortable. He let go of her braid and let her push him a little back, but he grabbed her wrists before she could pull them back toward herself.

“It’s just an honest assessment, Harriet. Lord Voldemort likes his possessions to be pretty. You wouldn’t want to disappoint.”

“I don’t give a damn what Voldemort thinks about me,” Harri hissed at him, struggling to get her hands back. He held on tightly. She wondered if he would leave a bruise.

“Oh, but you should. You like me pretty, don’t you Harriet? It was plain as day just a few moments ago.”

Harri blushed. Of course he knew he was good looking. People who looked like that always knew it. She looked away. This wasn’t the game she thought Voldemort would want to play with her. It had an undercurrent of something she couldn’t describe. Something she knew she was far too young to experience.

Was it sexuality?

Lavender had given her some of those books to read, and Harri had found them ridiculous. Now she felt like the heroine of one, a helpless witch in the arms of rouge. It felt wrong.

“I’m twelve,” Harri told him, doing her best to meet his eyes. “I’m… I don’t know about this. I don’t want to know.”

She began to pull away again in earnest, and he laughed as he let her go.

“You know I was eighteen on this night,” he said, gesturing to the fire around him. “I was called into my power just a few weeks earlier, and this was my first ritual as the Dark Lord.”

"This night?"

"June 24th, 1945. This is a diary, Harriet. It stores memories of my past."
"You said, before, you said you didn't have any knowledge past 1943."

"Partially true. The diary itself doesn't have specific memories past 1943, but my other half periodically added impression so I'd stay up to date. That ceased around 1970."

“And what, you thought you’d bring me here to reminisce?”

“In a way. Do you know what I found on Litha 1945?”

“Dumbledore, I’m guessing.”

“He was here when I arrived,” Riddle confirmed. "I told him to go as soon as I arrived. He looked so hurt, as if we’d be bosom friends. Hardly,” he laughed and it was much more cruel sounding.

“I could feel what magic wanted, Harriet. It wanted us. But my sweet little soulmate wasn’t here. My twin flame of magic, yet to be discovered. There is no point in any of this you know,” he said gesturing around the circle, “no point at all unless we’re the ones performing the rituals. It’s us that magic wants. It’s done with Dumbledore and Grindelwald.”

“As long as Dumbledore is alive I won’t be called,” Harri told him, backing away. She couldn’t go very far, as her back was against the fire.

“I’ll fix that, don’t worry,” he hissed, stepping forward and leaning close. “It will be us before you know it. You’ll be good, won’t you Harri,” he said winding his hand behind her head and leaning down. Her nickname coming out of his mouth felt mocking and cruel. His lips were very close to hers, “You’ll give the magic what it needs, and be a good little simpering Lady of Light to your Lord.”

She wanted to cry. “Get away,” she said softly, her voice breaking.

He laughed at her again. “Oh Harriet, you’re well on your way already. You won’t be hard to kowtow at all.” He pressed his lips against her forehead and it was like an electric zing of magic went through her.

She gasped, harsh and unbidden. “Can you feel it, Harriet,” he whispered in her ear. “The way the magic wants us to come together. I’ll make it good for you, don’t worry.” He let her go and she stumbled forward, almost falling to her knees, but she refused to give him the satisfaction and righted herself.

“Do you mean to say that Beltane and Litha involve sex magic,” Harri said, doing her best to meet his dark brown eyes and to speak with a steady voice. ‘Sex Magic’ sounded harsh and dirty to her ears. Had she ever said the word sex out loud before?

“Did you not know?” he asked mockingly.

“No,” Harri said. “Dumbledore said that Beltane was for the living and Samhain for the dead.”

“It would be better to call it fertility,” the young Voldemort said.

“Why do you think I would participate in a fertility rite with you?” Harri asked. “I’d leave. You couldn’t make me.”

“On Beltane, you won’t have much of a choice,” he said smoothly. “At the hight of the sun, the Lord and Lady of Magic should be performing their duty. To bring fertility and prosperity to the land. It will be your calling, Harriet, more than mine. My dominion is over the dark and shadows.
Death. Yours is for the light and living."

“It’s not like you ever performed the rite with Dumbledore,” Harri said, trying not to think of the specifics of such a ritual. “He said you skipped rituals more often than not. I'll skip too. As you say, it won’t matter.”

"There wasn’t a point in performing the rituals without you, Harriet, so I didn't. You are my Lady. You are the one whose magic is like mine. Dumbledore may go out four times a year, but he’s paying lip service to old magic that doesn’t want him anymore. But once it's us... it will be a call you won't be able to resist.”

“That isn’t true. I went with him to Samhain and Yule. I felt the magic. It responds to Dumbledore still.”

“The magic doesn't do anything,” Tom Riddle said with certainty. “It might rise for the moment, but it won’t protect any hearths or raise fertility rates for witches and wizards. There is no balance, Harriet. Not until it’s you and me.”

“Well, it won’t be,” Harri snapped.

“It will,” he said smugly. “You’ll do your duty. Dumbledore is setting you up for it, isn’t he? A bunch of rot about how I missed the rituals and let the balance go. He’s already trying to manipulate you from his future grave.”

“SHUT UP!” Harri exclaimed, and she felt her magic finally lash out against the oppressive press of his power.

He laughed again, but it was a different laugh. It was one of real excitement and pleasure. “Oh, Harriet, yes!” he exclaimed. “Look at that magic. You’ll be so fun to break. Study hard, little witch. Get big and strong so I can tear you apart.” He looked feral, his perfect white teeth reminded her of a predator.

“What are you?” she asked, looking around desperately for a way out. “You aren’t just a memory. You talk like you really are him.”

“Because I am,” he said. “Voldemort is my past, present, and future.”

“That doesn’t mean anything!” She began to move around the fire, trying to stay out of reach.

“Let me put it this way then,” he said. She was opposite him now, and he looked like a demon wreathed in flame. “I am part of Voldemort. When I’m strong I will return to him and bring myself back into power.”

“You’re a magical reservoir then?” Harri asked. She’d never heard of that before, but there were lots of things she had never heard of before that the Dark Lord knew.

He smirked. “I’m just the same as you, Harriet. A connection. A way to the Dark Lord’s return to power.”

“I won’t help him,” Harri said. “He’s going to stay dead. I’ll fight my whole life if I have to. But you’ll only ever be a hateful memory. Dumbledore will help me. We’ll destroy you.”

His eyes hardened. “You’ll see, Harriet Potter. Sooner or later I’ll be back with Lord Voldemort. With you or with all the information I’ve gathered here at Hogwarts. Either way, it will hasten my return.”
“And then…” he literally stepped through the fire to grab her, pulling her in with him. She screamed in fear as the flames licked around her, but it didn’t hurt. She looked up at the tall man holding her in the fire. His eyes looked red in the reflected light of the flames.

“...you’ll burn.”
She woke up on her bed. The diary was gone.

How was that possible? Harri tried to remember anything after the fire, but there was a fog on her memory again. He had left the memories of the diary and their encounter, but had hidden something else.

Had he made her hide the Diary? She needed to tell Snape and Dumbledore.

Harri got shakily to her feet and felt like she was going to be sick. She was magically exhausted, Harri realized with resignation. Harri looked around her room as she braced herself on the bed. Where were Lavender and Parvati? Judging by the sun it was almost curfew. Shouldn’t they have come in by now?

Harri shakily hobbled to the door of her dorm room and opened it. Gulliver instantly came in with a loud yowl. Lavender was leaned on steps looking half asleep.

“Harri!” Lavender exclaimed when she saw her. “We knocked for ages. Gulliver kept yowling and we thought something was wrong. What happened?”

“Get a teacher,” Harri said weakly.

“Parvati already went to get McGonagall,” Lavender said getting up and letting Harri lean on her.

“That’s good then,” said Harri weakly and slid down the wall to the ground and let herself fall into a half sleep. She heard McGonagall when the teacher arrived. How much time had passed? It felt like only the blink of an eye.

“She’s been like this since she came out,” Harri heard Lavender say. “I don’t know what’s wrong with her or why we couldn’t open our door.”

“I’ll take Miss. Potter to the infirmary, Miss. Brown,” said McGonagall. She cast a spell and Harri felt like she was floating. Her stomach turned and she threw up. McGonagall let the spell drop, and Harri was back on solid ground.

“On second thought,” said the teacher, “Please ask Mr. Wood to come and help me carry Miss. Potter. It appears magic doesn’t agree with her.”

It was a muffled blur after that. She thought she heard McGonagall tell Ginny to get her a change of clothes and something about a pause on an enchantment to someone else. There were strong arms around her and a soft rocking motion from movement that lulled her to sleep again.

She woke in the morning to a bright Hospital Wing. The bright light hurt her eyes. She groped for her glasses, and someone handed them to her.

She blinked rapidly until her vision focused and saw the unsmiling faces of Dumbledore and Snape.

“Good Morning, Harriet,” Snape said with an unhappy scowl.
“Harri,” greeted Dumbledore. His eyes lacked their usual twinkle.

“It was the diary,” Harri told them. “I can remember it all now. I stopped Filch from grabbing it after I found it, and after that, it was all black. I woke up on my bed with it, and it made me write in it. It sucked me inside…” she trailed off.

Snape looked very angry. “And you didn’t think it was best to get a teacher instead of trying to deal with that book by yourself?”

“I was trying to get a teacher, but I couldn’t just leave it! What if someone else picked it up?”

Snape didn’t have anything to say that. He stood up and walked around the room looking like he wanted to curse something.

Dumbledore leaned in and said softly, “I think we all feel a bit helpless at the moment, Harri. Mr. Filch says that you ran away from him this afternoon after ‘flagrant disregard for rules about magic in the corridors.’”

“I don’t know what happened after I touched the diary. I didn’t hurt anyone, did I?”

“Not as far as we know,” Dumbledore reassured.

“Do you know where it is?”

“We searched your rooms and found no sign of it.”

“How is that possible? Lavender said the door was locked. I didn’t leave the room.”

Dumbledore looked much older and frailer than usual. “I do not know Harri. But perhaps your experience will help us. Now that you can describe what happened to the Board of Governors I believe they will approve a search of the student’s belongings.”

“Yes!” Harri exclaimed. “Anything to help.”

Weeks passed and nothing happened.

“I can’t believe that Malfoy has the Governors so deep in his pocket that they won’t investigate,” said Ron testily.

“I can,” said Neville. “The Malfoy’s are rich beyond all imagining.”

“This isn’t right!” Harri said in frustration, kicking the leg of a table. Her toe began to throb.

It wasn’t all bad news. Everyone thought Harri had been exercised of the ghost of Salazar Slytherin with her most recent visit to the Hospital Wing. It was now nearly four months since Justin and Nearly Headless Nick had been Petrified, and nearly everyone seemed to think it was over. Peeves got bored of singing various diddys about Harri, Ernie Macmillan asked Harri quite politely to pass a bucket of leaping toadstools in Herbology one day, and that very day several of the Mandrakes threw a loud and raucous party in greenhouse three. This made Professor Sprout very happy.

“The moment they start trying to move into each other’s pots, we’ll know they’re fully mature,” she told Harri. “Then we’ll be able to revive those poor people in the hospital wing.”

The second years were given something new to think about during their Easter holidays. The time had come to choose their subjects for third year, a matter that Hermione would have taken very
seriously.

“She’d probably try to sign up for all of them,” said Neville wistfully.

The second years had a choice between Divination, Arithmancy, and Muggle Studies for their first elective and Ancient Runes or Care of Magical Creatures for their second.

Divination seemed to be the big pick among the second year Gryffindors. Ron and Neville both planned to sign up since it would be an easy O or E, as did Parvati and Lavender when Harri consulted them.

“Useless tosh,” Snape told her in reference to Divination that Friday over brewing. “There are true seers and true prophecy, but unless you are gifted with the sight there is no point in studying that drivel.”

“I wish I could take Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures,” Harri groused. “I like both. Why are they at the same time?”

“Your third-year schedules are such that the entire year has the same elective slots. It’s impossible to coordinate it otherwise,” Snape told her.

“I guess I’ll take Arithmancy then,” Harri said. “I don’t need to take Muggle Studies.”

“I should think not,” Snape said with a snort. “Arithmancy is useful in more advanced potioneering. I’m sure it will be a good pick for you.” Snape’s face got a bit wistful. "Your mother was a natural at it. I must confess, I've never used it for anything more than Potions. The more delicate aspects of it are lost on me. Your mother though...” and he trailed off.

Her mother

“Do you really think I’ll be advanced enough in potions to need Arithmancy?” Harri asked hopefully.

“You better be,” said Snape with an evil gleam. “I don’t dedicate such effort to many students.”

“Do you think I should take Ancient Runes or Care of Magical Creatures?” Harri asked Snape gloomily after adding crushed batwing to her brew.

“That is entirely up to you, Harriet.”

“You’re no help at all,” Harri said, stamping her foot.

“It’s your life, Harriet. Both are useful classes. You should do what you like,” he said. “Now stop all this talking. I need you to get another venom sample from the Runespoor.”

In the end, Harri chose Care of Magical Creatures. She loved Zoology, and her last summer with Snape exploring Africa had been the most amazing experience of her life. It was odd, she thought, that she was setting herself up to be a Potions Mistress. When she had first heard about magic potions had been the last subject she would have pictured as witchcraft. Potioneering was not showy or flashy. It was like cooking but required intimate knowledge of ingredients and mathematic formulas.

Snape had told her several times that her mother had been well on her way to becoming a Potions Mistress within the Healer Program at St. Mungos. Maybe Lily Potter had left her more than protection in Harri’s blood.
“I don’t want to go,” Harri told Dumbledore on the morning of May 1st. It was Beltane, and after her conversation with Tom Riddle, Harri didn’t want anything to do with the sex ritual.

“Why ever not?” asked Dumbledore who was wearing his plain homespun robes again. He had sent Harri similar robes the week before, and she had reluctantly put them on before heading to meet Dumbledore in the Great Hall at 9.

“He told me what this ritual is. I don’t want to go.”

Dumbledore tilted his head, “I’d be very curious to know what Lord Voldemort told you of Beltane considering he’s never participated in it properly.”

“He said there was... “ Harri dropped her voice to a whisper, “sex.”

“Yes, for mature adult consenting witches and wizards, that is a part of it.”

“I don’t want to see anything involving that,” Harri said.

“You won’t,” Dumbledore told her. “You and I will be going to Germany to pay homage to a very important tree.”

“A tree? What does that have to do with fertility?”

“You won’t know unless you come,” he said mysteriously and headed toward the door.

He knew she would follow, and Harri ran to catch up.

When they appeared at their destination, it was in the woods. “Welcome,” said Dumbledore, “to the Black Forest. Or the Myrkviðr as it used to be known.”

“Like the fairytales?” Harri asked, looking around at the foggy woods they had appeared in. This forest was very old, and it seemed like the sort of place where witches could terrorize Muggles.

“Just so,” said Dumbledore, as he began to walk towards the east. “We came in about a mile away. It would be rude to apparate right up on her.”

“Her being...?” Harri asked, jogging to keep up with Dumbledore’s long stride.

“Yggdrasil,” as if that described someone Harri should know.

“Who?” Harri asked.

“The tree I mentioned,” said Dumbledore looking somber. “Her name is Yggdrasil.”

“Why does a tree have a name?” Harri asked.

“Why does anyone? Because someone gave her a name. Yggdrasil is a very famous tree. Even the Muggles know about her. She’s quite prominent in Norse Mythology.”

“I don’t know much about Norse mythology,” Harri confessed.

“Where to start then,” said Dumbledore contemplatively. “I suppose it is best to say that Yggdrasil is the root of much of our magic, Harri. Her roots extend deep and far throughout mainland Europe.”
“A tree is responsible for magic? Then why doesn’t it get taught about in school?”

“It is in more advanced magical theory. There are several children’s tales as well. However, British Wizards are under the misapprehension that since Yggdrasíl’s roots do not reach Britain, that her magic is not ours. They are quite incorrect. Her roots reach the outer shores of Britain. Part of the reason why our ancestors built so many henges was to channel the magic from the roots throughout the isles.

“Is that how the territory works?” Harri asked with new understanding. “You’re the Lord of Light for areas that have Yggdrasíl’s roots.”

“Very good, Harri!” Dumbledore said cheerfully.

“Why does our magic work in other places then? Snape’s magic worked fine while we were in Africa.”

“The gift of a magical core comes from Yggdrasíl for British born witches and wizards. No matter what you have magic once you’re born with it. It’s in every part of your body. Professor Snape would have found that if he became magically depleted it would be much harder to recover, but still entirely possible given time. It is hard to say how our magic relates to that of Yggdrasíl once we are born. However, if the tree were destroyed magic would cease to be born in Europe. I do not know if all magic users would suddenly find themselves squibs, but the magic would die out.”

“All of the magic in Europe would be destroyed?” Harri asked, stopping in her tracks.

“Scary, isn’t it?” answered Dumbledore, looking back at her.

“Why doesn’t everyone talk about Yggdrasíl all the time then? She sounds like the most important thing in the magical world.”

“Most Ministers agree that it is best to let the knowledge of the tree be passing. The less the public knows about her, the less likely she is to come under attack.”

“Do you agree?”

“In which capacity? As the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, I am inclined to say that the magical center of every territory must be protected to the greatest extent possible. If the Confederation was voted for secrecy, so be it.”

“And as the Lord of Light?”

“As the European Lord of Light, I am inclined to protect Yggdrasíl against any threat. I do not believe secrecy is how we best achieve that. The more who know of her, the more who will add layers of protection around her.”

“Is she in any danger?” Harri asked, worried.

“Not that I know of. If there is one thing Voldemort and I always agreed upon, it was the protection of this tree. The stronger she is, the more likely magically gifted children will be born.”

“So it is a fertility rite,” Harri said, stopping.

“Not for me,” he said. He looked at with his piercing blue eyes and said in a serious tone, “My time is done, Harri. It has been over since 1945. I have been waiting a long time for my successor. Whether or not you will be called to such an act remains to be seen. Voldemort would need to
corporeal, and unless he is this conversation is irrelevant. But, if Yggdrasil asks it of you, I implore you to remember that the blessings of magic will extend beyond old families. New blood, people like Miss. Granger and your mother will find their way into our fold.”

Harri wanted to gag. “He was right, you’re already trying to talk me into it,” she said backing away.

“Who was right?” Dumbledore asked gently.

“The Diary, Tom. I know I didn’t tell you and Snape that he spoke to me, but I didn’t want to say. It was too much!”

“What did Tom Riddle show you?” Dumbledore asked softly.

“Litha. 1945. He told me that you would try and make me do the fertility rites. That I would never have a choice. That he would make me…” her magic started to lash out painfully and her breathing came out in sharp gasps. Harri had tried to compartmentalize all this, to not think about the fact that she might have to have sex with the monster on the back of Quirrel’s head. She could sometimes still smell the rotting flesh in her dreams.

It wasn’t Dumbledore that did anything to calm her down. Instead, Harri felt a wave of calm magic wrap around her like a hug. Her breathing evened out almost instantly. Her magic was still extended and dancing around her, but it was no longer lashing in fear and anger. Instead, it was blending and breathing with the magic of…

Yggdrasil.

The tree could have been fifty feet tall or could be too tall to see the top of. Her eyes couldn’t focus on the height and girth of the great tree. It had evergreen needles and wide sweeping branches that reached well over Harri’s head and several meters over the path she and Dumbledore had walked.

She was beautiful, the most beautiful thing Harri had ever seen. She could practically see the leaf green magic swirling around the magnificent tree.

“She’s a yew tree,” Dumbledore told her. “Yew wood represents death but it is Yggdrasil that brings magical life. Fitting, isn’t it?”

“She’s amazing,” Harri breathed.

“I’m sure she would like to meet you,” Dumbledore said, pushing Harri forward, causing her to almost trip over a large root.

“How do you meet a tree?” Harri asked Dumbledore, feeling nervous. The tree’s magic brushed against her as if amused.

“Hello,” Harri said, pushing out still more of her magic to dance with the tree’s. It really was like holding hands with your mother, the warmest and most comforting thing Harri had ever felt.

“That’s about right,” Dumbledore said with a chuckle, his own magic free and dancing with the tree. If they hadn’t been with such the enormous power source of Yggdrasil, Harri would have been floored with the amount of power Dumbledore had. She had some inkling from Samhain, but this was on a new level. His power unbounded was awesome.

She would never compare to him, she thought gloomily. If Voldemort returned and she was the one called to hold him in check it wouldn’t go well.
Harri felt like she had been flicked on the nose. Yggdrasil brushed magic over Harri’s ears, and Harri could almost hear the tree say, ‘I would not have chosen you, daughter, if you could not handle him.’

“How can you know?” Harri asked the tree.

’It is who I am,’ she felt the tree answer. ’Give it time, you will grow into who you need to be. You are but a sapling.’

The magic faded somewhat, and Harri could tell the conversation was over. She looked at Dumbledore who was looking up at the tree with adoration.

“What do we need to do for Beltane?” she asked.

“Since there is no fertility rite, some bloodletting will do,” Dumbledore told her. “Over on the altar at her base.”

It wasn’t so different from Samhain. Harri cut her palm and let the blood drip onto the stone altar that was obviously intended for sexual intercourse. Would that be her future? Pinned to a stone altar while the Dark Lord took.

A breeze ruffled Harri’s unbound hair, and it was like Yggdrasil was trying to blow Harri’s worries away on the wind.

It wasn’t for today to worry about that.

Ginny was scared.

She had flushed the diary away, she was certain she had. She had finally been free of Tom, of the memory blackouts and the feelings that the Chamber of Secrets had something to do with her.

Yet, somehow, the diary was back in her possession again.

Harri had been sick, and Ginny had felt pulled. A tug on her magic that she couldn’t refuse. She had already gone into her dorm room when McGonagall told her to get a change of clothes. Then, before she could explain it herself, she had opened Harri’s bedside table and slipped the diary into her robe pocket.

She was out of control. She tried to hide the diary, to tell someone about Tom, or to get rid of it again. But something was wrong with her. She couldn’t seem to let it out of her sight. When she tried to open her mouth it was like her tongue got glued to the roof.

Worst of all, she couldn’t stop writing in it.

She cried wet tears as she confided every fear she had about Tom to Tom. He gave her platitudes, but Ginny could tell that he was just humoring some game he was playing with her.

She felt so tired and weak. Her reflection kept getting paler and paler. Her eyes weren’t even brown anymore, they were a sad faded grey. Would anyone notice that she was just fading away?

The end was coming, and it was a strange thing to know that you were going to get killed by your diary. Then it would over at least. Then she would be dead and no one would get hurt anymore.

That perception changed one morning in early May when Ginny found herself in the owlery. She was writing a letter that was no in her hand.
The final act will begin today. Take discussed actions

She didn’t want to send the letter. She fought her own shaking hands harder than she had in months. She wouldn’t send. She wouldn’t!

Except she did. She could almost hear laughter.

‘Oh silly Ginny,’ whispered Tom in her mind as her world faded into grey nothingness.

Gryffindor’s next Quidditch match was against Hufflepuff. Wood had insisted on team practices every night after dinner for the last two weeks, thus Harry barely had time for anything but Quidditch and homework. However, the training sessions were getting better, or at least drier.

The Saturday of the match they woke up to brilliant sunshine and a light refreshing breeze.

“Perfect Quidditch conditions!” said Wood enthusiastically at the Gryffindor table, loading the team’s plates with scrambled eggs.

Harry had been staring down the packed Gryffindor table at her cheerful house. She had received many cheerful waves that morning. She felt angry at her house. When they had thought she was the heir of Slytherin they had refused to speak to her, but now that she would win them a Quidditch game they acted like Harry was their friend.

‘What would they do if they knew about Voldemort?’ Harry thought, rubbing her silver mark cover self consciously. If having a Dark ability was worth ostracizing her for months, having the Dark Lord as a soulmate would probably be worth never speaking to her again.

As she left the Great Hall with Ron and Neville to go and collect her Quidditch things, another very serious worry was added to Harry’s morose thoughts. She had just set foot on the marble staircase when she heard it yet again.

“Kill this time... let me rip... tear”

She shouted aloud and Ron and Neville both jumped away from her in alarm.

“The voice!” said Harry, looking over her shoulder. “I just heard it again- the snake!”

Ron and Neville looked at her with wide eyes. “What did it say?” Neville asked.

“It wants to kill this time. We have to tell the teachers! People have to get out of the school”

“Well good thing there is a Quidditch match,” said Ron, as people began to emerge from the Great Hall behind them, talking loudly, exiting through the front doors on their way to the Quidditch pitch.

Lavender and Parvati were exiting the great hall and Harry flagged them down. “Could you go with Ron and Neville to get my Quidditch things?” she asked in a rush. “I need to talk to Snape before the match. It’s really important!”

“Yes, of course, Harry,” said a worried look Parvati. “Is something wrong?”
“Yes, I think another attack is going to happen.” Both girls went pale.

“Should we really be going to get Quidditch things then?” asked Lavender.

Harri opened her mouth, but then closed it again. “That’s a very good point,” Harri conceded.

“You should all get out. Tell Wood I’m going to help the teachers. Don’t let anyone come back into the castle.”

All four students looked nervous but agreed.

Harri rushed to the Great Hall, where Snape will still sitting at the head table talking to Professor Vector, the Arithmancy professor.

“Professor Snape!” Harri called as she rushed into the hall. Snape looked up and glared at Harri.

“No running in the halls, Harriet.”

“That doesn’t matter,” she said skidding to a halt in front of Snape. “I heard the snake again. It’s going to attack someone!”

Flitwick, Sprout, and Vector reacted nearly as quickly as Snape did. All had their wands out in an instant.

“Get out of the building, Harriet, now,” Snape said. He cast “Sonorus!”

“ALL STUDENTS ARE TO EXIT THE SCHOOL, NOW!” Snape’s booming voice rang out.

The fifty or so students who were left in the Great Hall reacted in a panic and began rushing to the doors.

Flitwick started out too, “I’ll go and look for stragglers and get them out,” he squeaked.

“I’ll go to the Headmaster,” said Sprout, also hurrying out of the hall.

“Use a reflective surface around corners,” Snape reminded in his booming voice them as they left. He turned back to Harri, and cast “Quietus”

“Out,” he told her.

“You won’t know where the snake is,” Harri told him. “You need me. I’m the only one who can hear it.”

“That isn’t-” Harri cut him off.

“If you want to catch it, you need me to help you find it.”

Snape didn’t look happy. “I’m blindfolding you,” he said.

“What? No.” Harri said. “The diary doesn’t want to kill me,” she said. “I’m probably the safest person in this school.”

But Snape would hear none of it. He made Harri wrap her tie around her eyes and then led her by the hand out of the great hall with Professor Vector.

“Where to?” Vector asked her.
“It sounded like it went left,” said Harri. “Maybe towards the library.”

The professors set out briskly. Harri didn’t know if they were checking corners or not, but she doubted it since they were in such a hurry. As they turned a corner, the hiss came into Harri’s hearing.

“Yessss, I will tear,” it said, clearly pleased.

“NO!” Harri shouted, and was surprised that it came out in Parseltongue.

“Faster!” she managed in English, and Snape began to run, pulling Harri along.

Then they came to a sudden halt. Neither Snape nor Professor Vector said anything for a long moment. Snape let Harri’s hand drop and Professor Vector let out a small choked sob.


“Can I take off the blindfold?” Harri asked, not sure she wanted to know what they had found.

Snape didn’t say anything, but Vector placed a soft hand on Harri’s shoulder. “It would be better if you didn’t see, Miss. Potter.”

She pulled the tie off.

A pretty Ravenclaw girl with curly blonde hair was laying on the floor. She wasn’t rigid the way the other victims of the Basilisk had been. She was limp and splayed out on the floor without a mark on her. Her very fair skin was unnaturally pale.

She was dead.

Chapter End Notes

To head off some worried folks, it's not Luna
Percy Weasely was sitting in a chair behind Lee Jordan and seemed lost in his own world. He would usually try and force the noisy common room into some kind of order, but tonight he let everyone talk loudly.

Fear hung heavily amongst the Gryffindors.

“Percy’s in shock,” George told Harri quietly. “That Ravenclaw girl- Penelope Clearwater- she’s a prefect. I don’t think he thought the monster would dare attack a prefect.”

“You’re wrong,” came the quiet voice of Ginny Weasley. “She was his girlfriend.”

Fred and George looked over at Ginny in shock. “What? Percy wasn’t dating her!”

“He was writing to her all last summer,” said Ginny sadly. “They were meeting all over the school in secret. I walked in on them kissing in an empty classroom one day. He was worried you’d tease him and made me promise not to tell.”

Ginny had fat tears in her eyes as she looked over at Percy. He looked like he was going to cry too. Pompous Percy, more annoying than any other Gryffindor except maybe Colin Creevy, had lost his girlfriend to the monster.

Fred and George were baffled. “Was she his soulmate?” George asked Ginny.

She shook her head, “I don’t think so. They just liked each other.”

“I guess that’s better,” Fred said, looking at George helplessly.

“Nothing about this is better. Or good,” Ginny said, suddenly angry. “It’s horrible. How can this still be happening? When will it just be over?” She stormed off to her dorm.

“We have to stop this,” Harri said softly to Ron and Neville. “We have to find that book.”

“Where would we even look?” asked Neville hopefully.

“Maybe we have to get to know the enemy,” Ron said. “You can’t win at chess unless you know who you’re playing against. Hagrid knew Tom Riddle in school, didn’t he?”

“He framed Hagrid, they must have known each other,” Harri agreed.

“McGonagall said we’ve got to stay in our tower unless we’re in class,” Neville cautioned. “What if it gets us?”

“I don’t think it will,” Harri said. “It said it was going to tear…” Harri stopped as she remembered Penelope Clearwater’s dead body… “I told it to stop and it didn’t touch her body. If we run into it, it will listen to me.”

“Are you sure Harri?” Neville asked her.

“No, but we have to do something. I think it’s time we pulled out my dad’s old cloak.”
Harri had inherited just one thing from her father: a long and silver Invisibility Cloak. It was their only chance of sneaking out of the school to visit Hagrid without anyone knowing about it. They went to bed at the usual time, and waited for their roommates to finally fall asleep, then got dressed again and met in the Common Room.

“This is a bad idea,” Neville moaned as Harri threw the cloak over them.

The journey through the dark and deserted castle corridors wasn’t enjoyable. Harri, who had wandered the castle at night several times before, had never seen it so crowded after sunset. Teachers, prefects, and ghosts were marching the corridors in pairs, staring around for any unusual activity. The Invisibility Cloak didn’t stop them making any noise, and there was a particularly tense moment when Ron stubbed his toe only ten meters from the spot where Snape stood standing guard. Thankfully, Snape sneezed at almost exactly the moment Ron swore. It was with relief that they reached the oak front doors and eased them open.

Don’t do anything foolish, Snape would tell her. Did this count as foolish? Certainly, but Penelope was dead. The time for caution was over.

It was a clear, starry night. They hurried toward the lit windows of Hagrid's house and pulled off the Cloak only when they were right outside his front door.

Seconds after they had knocked, Hagrid flung it open. They found themselves face-to-face with him aiming a crossbow at them. Fang the boarhound barked loudly behind him.

“Oh,” he said, lowering the weapon and staring at them. “What’re you three doin’ here?”

“What’s that for?” asked Harri, pointing at the crossbow as they stepped inside.

“Nothin’- nothin’-” Hagrid muttered. “I’ve been expetin’- doesn’t matter- Sit down- I’ll make tea-”

He hardly seemed to know what he was doing. He nearly extinguished the fire, spilling water from the kettle on it, and then smashed the teapot with a nervous jerk of his massive hand.

“Are you okay, Hagrid?” asked Harri. “Did you hear about Penelope?”

“Oh, I heard, all righ’,” said Hagrid, a slight break in his voice. He kept glancing nervously at the windows. He poured them large mugs of boiling water (he had forgotten to add tea bags) and was just putting a slab of fruitcake on a plate when there was a loud knock on the door.

Hagrid dropped the fruitcake. Ron, Harri, and Neville exchanged panic-stricken looks, then threw the Invisibility Cloak back over themselves and retreated into a corner. Hagrid checked that they were hidden, seized his crossbow, and flung open his door once more.

“Good evening, Hagrid.”

It was Dumbledore. He entered, looking deadly serious, and was followed by a second, very odd-looking man.

The stranger had rumpled grey hair and an anxious expression, and was wearing a strange mixture of clothes: a pinstriped suit, scarlet tie, a long black cloak, and pointed purple books. Under his arm, he carried a lime green bowler.

“That’s Dad’s boss!” Ron breathed. “Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic!”

Harri and Neville both elbowed Ron hard to make him shut up.
Hagrid had gone pale and sweaty. He dropped into one of his chairs and looked from Dumbledore to Cornelius Fudge.


“I never,” said Hagrid, looking imploringly at Dumbledore. “You know I never, Professor Dumbledore, sir-”

“I want it understood, Cornelius, that Hagrid has my full confidence,” said Dumbledore, frowning at Fudge. “As I’ve said, we need to search the students’ belongs. As you can see from our report of the different attacks, there is an item-”

“Look, Albus,” said Fudge, uncomfortably. “Hagrid’s record’s against him. The ministry’s got to do something- the school governors have been in touch-”

“Yet again, Cornelius, I tell you that taking Hagrid away will not help in the slightest,” said Dumbledore. His blue eyes were full of fire. The cabin began to fill with Dumbledore’s electric energy. Ron and Neville, who had never felt the Light Lord’s power before, both let out small gasps.

“Stop,” the man squeaked. The energy leveled out. “Look at it from my point of view,” said Fudge, fidgeting with his bowler. “I’m under a lot of pressure. Got to be seen to be doing something. If it turns out it wasn’t Hagrid, he’ll be back and no more said. But I’ve got to take him. Got to. Wouldn’t be doing my duty-”

“Take me?” said Hagrid who was trembling. “Take me where?”

“For a short stretch only,” said Fudge, not meeting Hagrid’s eyes. “Not a punishment, Hagrid, more a precaution. If someone else is caught, you’ll be let out with a full apology-”

“Not Azkaban?” croaked Hagrid.

Harry had to restrain a gasp. No trial? Just straight to Azkaban with no proof? It wasn’t just. She wanted to burst out from under her cloak and tell Fudge she would match whatever Lucius Malfoy had promised, but just don’t take Hagrid away.

Before any such action could happen, there was a loud rap on the door.

Dumbledore answered it. It was Harry’s turn for an elbow in the ribs’ she’d let out an audible gasp.

Mr. Lucius Malfoy strode into Hagrid’s hut, swathed in a long black traveling cloak, smiling a cold and satisfied smile. Fang started to growl.

“Already here, Fudge,” he said approvingly. “Good, good…”

“What’re you don’ here?” said Hagrid furiously. “Get outta my house!”

“My dear man, please, believe me, I have no pleasure at all being inside you- er- d’you call this a house?” said Lucius Malfoy, sneering as he looked around the small cabin. “I simply called at the school and was told that the headmaster was here.”

“And what exactly did you want with me Lucius?” said Dumbledore. He spoke politely, but the fire was still blazing in his blue eyes, and the energy of his magic still pulled at Harry’s skin.
“Dreadful thing, Dumbledore,” said Malfoy lazily, taking out a long roll of parchment, “but the governors feel it’s time for you to step aside. This is an Order of Suspension- you’ll find all twelve signatures on it. I’m afraid we feel you’re losing your touch. How many attacks have there been now? And a girl dead. At this rate, there’ll be no Muggle-borns left at Hogwarts, and we all know what an awful loss that would be to the school.”

“Oh, now, see here Lucius,” said Fudge, looking alarmed, “Dumbledore suspended- no, no- last thing we want just now-”

“The appointment- or suspension- of the headmaster is a matter for the governors, Fudge,” said Mr. Malfoy smoothly. “And as Dumbledore has failed to stop these attacks-”

“See here, Malfoy, if Dumbledore can’t stop them,” said Fudge, whose upper lip was sweating now, “I mean, to say, who can?”

“Aren’t you taking the man responsible now, Fudge?” Malfoy asked, lip curling. “All twelve of us have voted-” he said with a nasty smile.

Hagrid leapt to his feet, his shaggy black head grazing the ceiling.

“An’ how many did yet have ter threaten an’ blackmail before they agreed, Malfoy, eh?” he roared.

“Dear, dear, you know, that temper of yours will lead you into trouble one of these days Hagrid,” said Mr. Malfoy. “I would advise you not to shout at the Azkaban guards like that. They won’t like it all.”

Harri’s hands started to clam up. Dementors. Was Hagrid’s very soul going to be in danger because Malfoy refused to search the school? Because Malfoy planted a book? Her magic started to crackle through the air.

Malfoy looked up and around, meeting Dumbledore’s eyes in confusion.

“Yeh can’ take Dumbledore!” yelled Hagrid, making Fang the boarhound cower and whimper in his basket. “Take him away, an’ the Muggle-borns won’ stand a chance!”

Ron gripped Harri’s arm tightly. “Calm down,” he hissed. Lucius Malfoy was looking around the cabin in earnest now. Did he seem… hopeful?

“Everyone needs to calm down,” said Dumbledore sharply. He looked at Lucius Malfoy, but from the touch of his magic, Harri could tell he meant her. She focused and got her magic under control. She was so furious though. She wanted to blow Mr. Malfoy through the door.

“If the governors want my removal, Lucius, I shall, of course, step aside- “

“But-” stuttered Fudge.

“NO!” growled Hagrid.

Dumbledore had not taken his bright blue eyes off Lucius Malfoy’s cold grey ones.

“However,” said Dumbledore, speaking very slowly and clearly so that none of them could miss a word, “you will find that I will only truly have left this school when none here are loyal to me. You will also find that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.”

Harri met Dumbledore’s eyes which flicked over to the corner where they were hiding.
“Admirable sentiments,” said Malfoy, bowing. “We shall miss your—highly individual way of running things, Albus, and only hope that your successor will manage to prevent any future killings.”

He looked around again, and it struck Harri that he wasn’t looking for her at all. Voldemort had commented multiple times that their magic felt similar. Lucius Malfoy didn’t think it was Harri Potter hiding nearby, he thought it was Voldemort.

With a satisfied smile, he strode to the cabin door, opened it, and bowed Dumbledore out. Fudge, fiddling with his bowler, waited for Hagrid to go ahead of him, but Hagrid stood his ground, took a deep breath, and said carefully, “If anyone wanted to find out some stuff, all they’d have to do would be to follow the spiders. That’d lead ‘em right! That’s all I’m sayin’.”

Fudge stared at him in amazement.

“All right, I’m comin’,” said Hagrid pulling on his moleskin overcoat. But as he was about to follow Fudge through the door, he stopped again and said loudly, “An’ someone’ll need to feed Fang while I’m away.”

The door banged shut and Neville pulled off the Invisibility Cloak.

“We’re in trouble now,” said Ron hoarsely. “No Dumbledore. They might as well close the school tonight. There’ll be an attack a day with him gone.”

Neville turned towards Harri, “Follow the spiders? What could that mean?”

Harri didn’t know. She needed to talk to Snape. It couldn’t wait till morning to let him know that Dumbledore was gone.

She dropped Ron and Neville off at the common room before heading back down to where Snape had been earlier. He wasn’t there. Her next stop was Snape’s room. The man had to sleep sometime, didn’t he?

She slipped in and banged on his ajar bedroom door.

“Are you here?” she asked loudly.

She heard Snape’s muffled curse as he woke, and he appeared his bedroom doorway wand brandished looking very sour.

“No,” he said angrily. “I am dreaming. You are not wandering around Hogwarts at night with a monster on the loose, you stupid girl.”

“I’ll have you know I was wandering around the grounds at night too. Guess who I ran into? Lucius Malfoy. The Governors voted and…”

“And Dumbledore had been dismissed. Yes. Do you think the Headmaster would leave the school without mine and Minerva’s knowledge? In a time like this?”

Harri deflated. “Well… maybe. I don’t know.”

“Now you do,” said the grumpy man who walked over to his office desk and pulled out a bottle of firewhisky and filled a tumbler nearly to the brim.

“Hagrid got taken to Azkaban.”
“I’m not surprised. Who came to get him? Shacklebolt?”

“Fudge,” Harri said.

“Hmm… he must want to seem like he’s really doing something.” Snape mused.

“Hagrid said something strange as he left, to follow the spiders,” Harr told Snape. “It really must be a basilisk. Spiders are their natural enemy.”

“Hagrid was trying to send you into the forest?” Snape said looking furious. “Of all the idiotic…” Snape took a large gulp of whiskey.

“I know the forest is dangerous, but I’ve been there before,” Harri shrugged. “Can you help me follow the spiders? To learn the truth.”

“There is no new truth to learn,” Snape answered firmly. “All those monsters will tell you is that Hagrid did not open the Chamber, which we already know. We know who is opening it. We even know how. We just don’t know who that damned book is using.”

“What do you mean, monsters in the forest?” Harri asked. Hagrid wouldn’t ask her to do something dangerous… what was she saying? It was Hagrid, who had no conception of what was dangerous. The man had adopted a dragon last year.

“Have you heard of Acromantula?”

“They’re a five x creature, a giant spider. Their venom and eggs are useful in paralysis potions.”

“There is a large colony that lives in the Forest,” Snape told her. “Hagrid once heard me complain at the rising prices of their venom and told me he could acquire it easily for me. The fact that he did,” Snape shivered. “Horrid beasts.”

“Why would Hagrid try to send me to talk to an Acromantula?”

“I suspect because it would be able to tell you that it did not come from the Chamber of Secrets or kill Penelope. Then it would proceed to eat you. That fool of a man, sending you to talk to it. It wouldn’t care that you are friends with Hagrid.”

She felt sick to her stomach. “I suppose we know that it wasn’t a giant spider,” Harri said.

“Obviously. There wasn’t a mark on Penelope, and from the report I’ve read of the last girl who died- she was found dead in a bathroom without a thing wrong with her, other than the fact that she was dead. There would be nothing left if an Acromantula got to those girls.”

Snape poured another drink, this one smaller. He swirled around the whiskey in his glass, lost in thought.

“Should we just break the rules and search the students anyway?” Harri asked.

“It may come to that,” Snape said. “It would be a one-way ticket to Azkaban for any teacher who participated. Abuse of authority and endangering minors would be the charge.” He drained the tumbler but decided against pouring another.

“What do we do then?” Harri asked.

“Go to bed, Harriet,” Snape told her with a grimace. “We will figure this out in the daylight. There won’t be a solution tonight.”
“Shall I head back to my dorm?” Harri asked.

“No. Sleep here.”

“Goodnight,” she said, heading to her room. All the energy felt drained out of her. It was all one giant mess. Penelope Clearwater was dead, what if Hogwarts was shut down? The Basilisk had to be stopped- Voldemort had to be stopped.

There had to be another clue, some way to puzzle this all out.

She laid down in bed. She was getting very close to sleep when something Snape said occurred to her.

The girl who had died last time- she was found in a bathroom.

What if she had never left?

“I’m going to talk to Myrtle,” Harri told Neville and Ron the next morning at breakfast.

“Why would you do that?” Ron asked absently as he buttered his toast.

“Snape told me that the girl who died last time was found in a bathroom.”

Ron dropped his toast.

“She’s the ghost of a student,” Neville whispered.

Only it turned out to be a lot harder to sneak off to go see Myrtle than Harri expected. The students were escorted everywhere. From meals to class, then back to their common rooms. Harri tried to sneak out one night, but there was a prefect stationed right outside the portrait hole who would notice if the Fat Lady swung open.

It wasn’t until three days before the first exam that Harri finally found her opportunity.

It started with an announcement at breakfast.

“I have good news,” Professor McGonagall said.

“Dumbledore’s coming back!” several people yelled joyfully.

“You’ve caught the Heir of Slytherin!” squealed a girl at the Ravenclaw table.

“Quidditch matches are back on!” roared Wood, who had been in a dark mood ever since the canceled Hufflepuff match.

When the hubbub had subsided, Professor McGonagall said, “Professor Sprout has informed me that the Mandrakes are ready for cutting at last. Tonight, we will be able to revive those people who have been Petrified. I need hardly remind you all that one of them may well be able to tell us who, or what, attacked them. I am hopeful that this dreadful year will end with our catching the culprit.”

There was an explosion of cheering. Harri looked over at the Slytherin table and met Draco Malfoy’s eye. Hermione would be vulnerable to attack again once she woke up. Unless, by some chance, they knew who had the book, it wouldn’t matter. What if the Basilisk attacked again and Hermione died?
Draco’s look of worry told Harri all she needed to know. She needed to talk to Myrtle before Hermione got woken up. Harri had taken to keeping her invisibility cloak in her bag. She would just need to throw it on in the loo off the Great Hall and then head up to the second floor.

Before Harri could enact her plan, Ginny Weasley came over and sat down next to Ron. She looked tense and nervous, and Harri noticed that her hands were twisting in her lap.

“Spit it out,” said Ron, watching her.

Harri suddenly realized that Ginny’s hands were shaking the same way that her own had when Tom Riddle had taken control. Could Ginny….?

The fog filled her mind again, but Harri fought through it. The fog could only mean she was close to remembering something. Could Ginny have the book? Where had Tom made her take it that night before term started….

It was murky, but Harri could almost remember the first year dorm.

“I’ve got to tell you something,” Ginny mumbled. She said the words like her tongue wouldn’t work right.

“Ginny~” Harri began, but Percy, looking wan and tired, appeared behind them.

“If you’ve finished eating, I’ll take that seat, Ginny.”

Ginny jumped up as though her chair had just been electrified, gave Percy a fleeting, frightened look, and bolted out of the hall.

Harri rushed after her.

Ginny dashed up the marble staircase before Harri could stop her. She pelted up the stairs quick as a whip, but Harri was fast too. They went racing down the second-floor corridor, and Ginny dashed into a bathroom.

Harri wrenched open the door ready to confront the girl and get the diary away from her...

...when she realized her mistake.

‘Stupefy’

“Severus,” Minerva called.

Snape looked past his students to the Deputy Headmistress. She looked grim. Another attack then. It was to be expected with Dumbledore gone. Severus felt angry that Albus had given in so easily. Just left, with a few words about asking for help.

That wouldn’t be enough to fight off the Dark Lord. Help couldn’t come, only more death. The school wouldn’t open again unless the book was found and the Heir of Slytherin caught. Parents wouldn’t send their children back and Severus wouldn’t blame them. A school should be safe, and if Penelope Clearwater was anything to go by, the school wasn’t safe anymore.

“Dismissed,” he snarled at the third years, frustrated that the pretense of normalcy was being maintained; with exams, homework, and regular classes. As soon as the Clearwater girl had been killed the whole school should have been evacuated.
“Who is it now, Minerva?” Snape asked softly. He mentally ran through a list of all the muggle-born students. Colin Creevy, the annoying first year. Kevin Entwhistle in the second year. Sometimes Snape wished he paid attention to these things.

“It’s Harriet,” Minerva said hoarsely.

“What?”

“You should come with me, Severus. Maybe you’ll make something more of it. Miss. Potter and Miss. Weasley haven’t been seen since breakfast. We can’t account for anyone else.”

He followed Minerva numbly through the corridors to the second floor. There, written in blood again right under the first message was a new one.

‘One’s skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever. One’s soul will be used for the glory of the Dark’

“Send out a message to the students,” Snape said. “Get them in their dorms and call a staff meeting.”

She did.

They made their way to the staff room, and Severus pondered what to do. Was there any way to get to Harriet? Was she still in the Chamber? Or had she already been whisked away to Voldemort?

They arrived in the staff room and Severus slumped in a seat. There had to be some way to puzzle this out. Another student couldn’t die. Harriet couldn’t be used to raise the Dark Lord. He had to stop it.

Lily would never forgive him if he let her child suffer like this. Or die. What if Harriet died? Would he ever forgive himself?

Never.

Rage filled him. He should have taken Harriet and left. Run away as soon as he knew that some part of Voldemort haunted the school. Of all the irresponsible foolhardy things. He should have risked Azkaban and rummaged through every student’s things until he found that bloody book.

He hadn’t. He had been a coward and a fool instead.

“It has happened,” Minerva told the silent staffroom. “Two students have been taken by the monster. Right into the Chamber itself.”

Filius let out a squeal. Pomona clapped her hands over her mouth. He gripped the chair.

“The Heir of Slytherin,” said Minerva, “left another message. Right underneath the first one. ‘One’s skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever. One’s soul will be used for the glory of the Dark.’”

Filius burst into tears.

“Who is it?” asked Hooch, who had sunk weak-kneed into a chair. “Which students.”

“Ginny Weasley,” said Minerva. She paused, looking over at Severus.

“And Harriet,” he finished for her.
“We shall have to send all the students home tomorrow,” said Minerva. Too bloody right. “This is the end of Hogwarts. Dumbledore always said…”

The staffroom door banged open again. For one wild moment, Severus was sure it would be Dumbledore, come to save his apprentice from the Dark. But it was Lockhart, and he was beaming.

“So sorry- dozed off- what have I missed?”

He didn’t seem to notice that everyone in the room was looking at him with hatred. Severus liked his coworkers. They were bright and efficient collaborators. Some were quite odd, like Sybill- and granted there was a reason she was here at Hogwarts- but mostly Hogwarts staff lived up to the reputation of the school.

This man- there were few people Severus hated more. From his glossy hair to his large smile, everything about him was fake. He was a liar. A fraud, Snape was certain. A writer of fiction that he passed off as his own. His incompetence may have set all these students back in their education. It would take a truly competent professor next year… only there would be no next year.

He stood. “Just the man,” he said. “The very man. My ward has been snatched by the monster, Lockhart. Taken into the Chamber of Secrets itself. Your moment has come at last.”

Lockhart blanched.

“That’s right, Gilderoy,” chimed in Pomona. “Weren’t you saying just last night that you’ve known all along where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is?”

“I- well, I-” sputtered Lockhart.

“Yes, didn’t you tell me you were sure you knew what was inside it?” piped up Filius (who knew full well it was probably a Basilisk).

“D-did I? I don’t recall-”

“I certainly remember you saying you were sorry you hadn’t had a crack at the monster before Hagrid was arrested,” Severus added. “Didn’t you say that the whole affair had been bungled, and that you should have been given a free rein from the first?”

Lockhart looked around at them all.

“I- I really never- you may have misunderstood-”

“We’ll leave it you, then, Gilderoy,” said Minerva. “Tonight will be an excellent time to do it. We’ll make sure everyone’s out of your way. You’ll be able to tackle the monster all by yourself. A free rein at last.”

Lockhart gazed desperately around him, but nobody came to the rescue. He didn’t look remotely handsome anymore, Snape thought smugly. His lip was trembling, and in the absence of his usually toothy grin, he looked weak-chinned and feeble.

“Very well,” he said. “I’ll- I’ll be in my office, getting- getting ready.”

And he left the room.

“Right,” said Minvera, whose nostrils were flared. “That’s got him out from under our feet. The Heads of House should go and inform their students what has happened…” she paused and looked
at Snape.


“Tell them the Hogwarts Express will take them home first thing tomorrow. Will the rest of you please make sure no students have been left outside their dormitories.”

The teachers rose and left, one by one.

Except for Snape.

Had he ever felt more powerless? Even when he had given up Lily’s location to the Dark Lord he had had hope. Dumbledore had been there, protecting her. Now there was no hope. A student dead.

Harriet… annoying, fearless, foolish Harriet. So brave, bright, and bold.

Gone.

He punched the wardrobe in the corner.

He jumped back in surprise when the wardrobe let out three shrieks. Snape threw open the doors to find none other than Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom, and Draco Malfoy crouched inside.

“And what do you think you’re doing here,” he hissed at them.

The boys scrambled out. The Weasley boy was the first to speak. “My sister and my best mate are down in that Chamber! We have to do something.”

“And what do you propose we do, Weasley?” Severus snarled. “Harriet can’t keep her mouth shut, so I’m sure you three know that we don’t have the book, don’t know where the Chamber is, and don’t have a way to control a bloody Basilisk.”

“Harri,” Longbottom squeaked. “She wanted to ask Moaning Myrtle how she died.”

“Why would Harriet need to…” and Snape realized something he should have put together much sooner. Myrtle Warren had died in 1943 in the second-floor girls' bathroom.

Bugger, Fuck. and all the rest.

He turned on his heel and ran.

“Come on then, Malfoy. Don’t be a coward now.” he heard Weasley say as three sets of footsteps followed him.

When he entered the bathroom he found Moaning Myrtle sitting on the tank on the end toilet.

“Oh,” she said, seeing Snape. “There hasn’t been a teacher in here in ages.”

“Are you Myrtle Warren,” Snape asked breathlessly, winded from the run.

Myrtle looked surprised. “Where did you hear that?” she asked with suspicion.

“Just a guess, Miss. Warren.” Snape said. The three boys finally caught up and entered the bathroom.

“What do you want?” Myrtle asked with ghostly tears in her eyes. “To make fun of me?”
“To ask you how you died,” said Snape.

Myrtle’s whole aspect changed at once. She looked as though she had never been asked such a flattering question.

“Ooooh, it was dreadful,” she said with relish. “It happened right in here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I’d hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked, and I was crying, and then I heard somebody come in. They said something funny. A different language, I think it must have been. Anyway, what really got me was that it was a boy speaking. So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet, and then—” Myrtle swelled importantly, her face shining. “I died.”

“How?” Snape snapped. They didn’t have time for this.

“No idea,” said Myrtle in hushed tones. “I just remember seeing a pair of great, big, yellow eyes. My whole body sort of seized up, and then I was floating away…” She looked dreamily at Snape. “And then I came back again. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby, you see. Oh, she was sorry she’d ever laughed at my glasses.”

“Where did you see the eyes, Miss. Warren,” Snape asked.

“Somewhere there,” said Myrtle, pointing vaguely toward the sink in front of her toilet.

The three boys ran over to the sink. They examined it so closely that Snape couldn’t get in edgewise. He was close to cursing them when Draco called out, “HERE!”

Snape leaned down to look. Scratched on the side of one of the copper taps was a tiny snake.

“That tap’s never worked,” said Myrtle brightly as Draco tried to turn it.

The entrance, plain as day. Except there was no Parselmouth to open the Chamber. No way to get inside and get to Harriet. Could he blast the sink away? He cast a quick spell to reveal any wards. Several, that would take hours to unravel. He would be too late.

A thought occurred, one that probably wouldn’t work but was worth a shot.

“You three are going back to your Common Rooms.”

“But it’s just gotten good,” said Weasley. “We can help you.”

Malfoy and Longbottom looked like they would much rather go back to their Common Rooms then go and face a Basilisk. At least they had some common sense.

“You are children. Ultimately, the most good you can do is to go back to your Common Room and stay out of harm’s way.”

Ron Weasley’s lip trembled. He looked away from Snape and swallowed.

“Are you going to try and save Harri and Ginny?” Longbottom asked.

“Slytherin’s don’t try,” Draco said. “We win.”

If he wasn’t trying to get the students out of the bathroom he would have hit the Malfoy scion over the head.

He was going to die like a Gryffidnor. Lily must be laughing at him from beyond the Veil.
He passed Weasley and Longbottom off to Minverva.

“The entrance is in the second floor girl’s bathroom,” he told her.

“I’m coming,” she said firmly.

“No,” he said. “The students need you. If this should go wrong, who knows what fresh hell will occur. I’ll need your help if my first plan to get in doesn’t work. There are some tricky wards around the entrance.”

He then dropped Draco Malfoy off at the Slytherin common room. “If I should fail,” he told Malfoy, “do the right thing. Don’t let your father get away with murdering four more people.”

The Malfoy heir blanched.

“Granted, if I fail the Dark Lord will return,” he said. “So maybe don’t do the right thing. Avoid your Aunt.”

A quick stop at his office for a hissing three headed snake and he was back in the bathroom. His whole venture had taken an hour, and that was time he couldn’t get back. It was time Harriet didn’t have.

“I’m not sure what you can understand,” he told the snake. “Harriet seems to think you understand more English then you let on.”

He held the Runespoor up to the snake etching. “She’s down there with your Mother of Serpents. We need to get her out.”

The snake fixed all three heads on him, all six eyes staring without blinking.

“Tell it to open,” he commanded. The head with the cone on it- and the fangs- looked annoyed. But the middle head looked at the head on the left, which bobbed in what could only be agreement.

The left head hissed at the tap.

A once the tap glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink, in fact, sank right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, a pipe wide enough for a man to slide down.

Snape wrapped the Runespoor more securely around his wrist. “Well, Snake, let’s go get our girl.”

He lowered himself slowly into the pipe, then let go.

Chapter End Notes

I have cut a chapter. 19 was written, but I realized that the direction I was taking book 3 wasn’t going to work without altering the ending of book 2. I think this new direction will be better, and we’ll be going very off script for the first five chapters of Captivus.

On Friday I am planning to post three things- the last chapter of Memoriae,
Compendio (Memoriae Redux), and chapter 1 of Captivus.

I hope you enjoy and see you on Friday. Happy Reading :)
Harri was cold.

It was the first sensation to make the mirky trip back to consciousness. The second was that she was lying on a hard and wet stone floor. Her head ached like she had hit it on something, and when she tried to blink open her eyes, it throbbed in protest. She let out a groan.

“Ah, the princess awakens,” said a familiar voice.

Harri wanted to bolt upright and get eyes on Tom Riddle at once. That wasn’t an option. She felt sluggish and was certain that if she sat up too quickly she would lose her breakfast.

Instead, Harri stayed quiet and tried to focus on her breathing until she was certain she could sit up without being sick. When she finally managed to open her eyes to look around, Harri wished that she had stayed passed out.

She was in a very long dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long black shadows through the odd greenish gloom that filled the place. She was sitting at a statue's foot, a statue that was as tall as the Chamber itself.

So, this was it. The famed Chamber of Secrets. Harri tried to spot Tom Riddle through the gloom. Why would he bring her to a memory of the Chamber? Only as she looked…

Laying face down under the other foot was a small, black-robed figure with flaming-red hair.

It wasn’t a memory.

“Ginny!” Harri murmured, crawling closer to the girl.

Ginny didn’t move. Harri couldn’t tell if she was breathing. “Ginny- don’t be dead- please don’t be dead-” she pleaded, grabbing Ginny’s shoulders, and turned her over. Her face was white as marble and as cold, yet her eyes were closed, so she wasn’t Petrified. But then she must be-

“Ginny, please wake up,” Harri cried desperately, shaking her. Ginny’s head lolled hopelessly from side to side.

“She won’t wake,” said the soft voice of Tom Riddle.

Harri sprung up and rounded on him, but instantly regretted it. She had to steady herself on the statue of Salazar Slytherin to stop herself from falling.

“You,” Harri hissed. “What did you do to her?”

“Well, that’s an interesting question,” said the young Voldemort pleasantly. “I”m sure you can remember how tired you were after you wrote to me, Harriet dear. I took a little magic, a small price to pay. And you see, poor Ginny has been talking to me all year.”

“You’ve drained her magical core?” Harri asked, shocked.
“You asked if I was a magical reservoir not too long ago, and the truth is much closer to a magical parasite,” he admitted nonchalantly. “Little Ginny will die, and I will live. Then you and I will make our way to Albania to meet an old friend.”

“Take me instead,” Harri insisted. “Use my magic, leave Ginny alone!”

“How noble,” he laughed. “And while admit that if I had used your magic this whole process would have gone much faster, it would have spoiled the game before it has even begun. Surely you know Harriet, I’ve no desire to kill you.”

“It was so boring,” he went on. “Having to listen to the silly little troubles of an eleven-year-old girl. But I was patient. I wrote back. All for you, Harriet.” He laughed a high, cold laugh that didn’t suit his handsome face. It made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

“Why even make her open the Chamber if you were going to kill her in the end?” Harri asked, thinking of poor dead Penelope Clearwater, Hermione petrified, and all the fear that had suffocated the school.

“The magical core of an eleven-year-old girl isn’t enough,” he said. “Between her core and your lovely magic, I got quite strong. But I needed something more to push me all the way out of the book. A couple of sacrifices, if you will.”

Was there a way to stop this and save Ginny? “Is there anything?” Harri asked desperately. “Anything all. Please, Tom. Anything.”

He laughed again, “There you go again Harri, who knew it would be so easy with you? I’ll have to keep this in mind. Threaten a few innocents and you’ll give up anything to save them.”

He finally stepped forward and grabbed her silver covered wrist. “Anything, Harriet? Anything at all?”

She felt like she making a deal with the devil, but she nodded her head in agreement.

“Then kiss me, Harriet, show me that you mean it.”

She didn’t hesitate. Harriet wasn’t a Gryffindor for nothing. She smashed her lips against Tom Riddle’s so hard that it hurt. It was more of a head butt then a kiss and he reeled back, unimpressed.

He rubbed his lips, looking amused even as a trickle of… was that ink?... traveled down his chin.

“Enthusiastic,” he said smoothly. “But let me show you properly.”

He leaned down and Harri could feel his breath. He was so warm. So alive. It was hateful, knowing that the warmth was stolen from Ginny. Gently, he cupped his hand around her cheek and tilted her head up to look directly at him. His eyes were so dark that they looked black in the green chamber light.

He closed the miniscule gap between them and pressed his lips, soft and dry, upon her own. If the kiss on her forehead had caused an electric jolt of magic to beam through her, an actual kiss was like being hit with lightning.

She pulled back gasping. A soft chuckle, and then he pressed in again. It was too much. Far too much. She was drowning in him, and it was like she wouldn’t be able to think straight ever again if she let him keep kissing her.
“You said you’d let Ginny go.”

“No, I said you should prove that you’d do anything. Ginny Weasley’s life is mine, it won’t be long now. Then you and I will be on our way.”

Anger billowed up inside of her, “We’re not just getting out of the castle. Do you think you’ll be able to just walk out the front door?”

“No,” he said blase as could be. “I’m in possession of a rather impressive Basilisk. You’ll find no one would be able to stop us even if they wanted to.”

“I’ll have to disagree, Riddle,” same the most welcome voice in the world. It was Snape, the Runespoor wrapped around his wrist hissing excitedly.

“Furry!” the middle head exclaimed happily.

“Oh ho,” Riddle laughed merrily. “If it isn’t the intrepid guardian. The fear of first years everywhere. Why ever did you come, Severus Snape?”

“I’ve come to collect Harriet and Ginny Weasley. You’ll release them to me now,” said Snape firmly. Looking for all the world like he wasn’t standing in the Chamber of Secrets confronting Lord Voldemort.

“I think not,” Riddle snapped. “Who are you to challenge me? Your charge is coming with me to serve her purpose to the Dark Lord. You were my servant before, Severus Snape. You heed the call of the dark, and you will not stand in my way now.”

“I am no one’s servant,” Snape said, drawing his wand. He looked furious. “I serve no master anymore.”

“I am the greatest sorcerer in the world,” said Tom Riddle, switching his grip on Harriet to hold her like a human shield. “You think you can beat me?” He had drawn a wand, and Harri recognized it has her own.

“You’re not,” Snape said, his quiet voice full of hatred.

“Not what?” snapped Riddle.

“Not the greatest sorcerer in the world,” said Snape, breathing fast. “The greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. The Lord of Light, the man you feared. Even at your full strength, you never tried to take Hogwarts. He frightens you even now, the mean spirit that hides in the forests of Albania.”

Riddle’s grip on Harri tightened.

“Dumbledore’s been driven out of the castle by the mere memory of me!” he hissed.

“He’s not as gone as you might think!” Harri retorted, trying to elbow him and get away.

Riddle seemed about to say something when-

Music was coming from somewhere. Riddle glanced around, still keeping his wand trained on Snape. The music was growing louder. It was eerie, spine-tingling, unearthly; it lifted the hair on Harri’s scalp and made her heart feel as though it was swelling to twice its normal size. Then, as
the music reached such a pitch that Harri felt it vibrating inside her own ribs, flames erupted at the top of the nearest pillar.

A crimson bird the size of a swan had appeared, piping its weird music to the vaulted ceiling. It had a glittering golden tail as long as a peacock’s and gleaming golden talons, which were gripping a ragged bundle.

A second later, the bird was flying straight at Snape. It dropped the ragged thing it was carrying at his feet, then landed heavily on his shoulder. As it folded its great wings, Harri could see it had a long, sharp golden beak and beady black eyes.

The bird stopped singing. It sat still on Snape’s shoulder, gazing steadily at Harri and Riddle.

“That’s a phoenix…” said Riddle, staring shrewdly back at it.


“And that-” said Riddle, now eyeing the ragged thing that Fawkes had dropped, “that’s the old school Sorting Hat.”

So it was. Patched, frayed, and dirty, the hat lay motionless at Snape’s feet. Riddle began to laugh. He laughed so hard that the dark Chamber rang with it, as though ten Riddles were laughing at once. His grip felt like it would bruise her neck, but as he met Snape’s gaze again he sounded eerily calm.

“This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat! Do you feel brave, Severus Snape? Do you feel you can win now?”

Snape didn’t answer. His eyes were hard and his mouth set in a grim line. He couldn’t cast against Riddle until Harri got away. Her struggling got her nothing more than an arm around her throat and the feeling that she couldn’t breathe.

“To business, “ said Riddle, “Since you say you no longer serve the dark, let the dark be done with you. Let’s match the powers of Lord Voldemort, Heir of Salazar Slytherin and Dark Lord, against you- a half-blood fool with the best weapons Dumbledore can give you.”

Harri heard the Runespoor hiss from around Snape’s wrist, “They’re both speakers, we can’t do much of anything.” “We have to help,” “They’re both-” “It’s against nature” “What do you even expect us to do?”

“Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.” Riddle hissed.

“The mother!” Harri heard the Runespoor say. “The mother is coming,”

Harri could hear from behind her that stone was moving. Something was slithering out.

Fawkes took flight once more, and Snape was shakily stepping forward with his wand still in his hand.

“Don’t kill him!” Harri hissed, at Riddle or the snake she did not know.

“A second speaker?” came the hiss of the Basilisk.

“She is the younger,” Riddle hissed coldly. “Kill this man, rip him, tear him!”

The basilisk was moving toward them, and Harri got her first look at it through half-closed eyes. It
was enormous, bright green, and thick as an oak trunk. Harri could see that Snape’s eyes were shut tight. He cast some sort of shield charm, and began to run blindly sideways, his hands outstretched, feeling his way- Riddle was laughing again.

“Did you know,” Riddle whispered in her ears, “That as a speaker you need not fear the gaze of the Basilisk? Keep your eyes open, Harriet. Watch how those who fight Lord Voldemort fall.”

“I won’t forgive you this,” Harri told. “If you kill him and Ginny Weasley, I’ll spend my whole life hating you. I’ll find a way to kill you myself.”

“I’d like to see that,” he sounded smug and pleased, as if the idea of Harri trying to kill him was appealing.

Snape skidded. The serpent was barely feet from him. It reared up, letting out a loud explosive sound as it hissed, and then Fawkes dived and hit Snape out of the way so hard that the man hit the wall of the chamber.

Then Fawkes soared towards the Basilisk, the snake let out a mighty hiss. Would Fawkes die if he made eye contact with the snake? The phoenix soared around the snake’s head, and the basilisk was snapping furiously at him with fangs long and thin as sabers.

Fawkes dived. His long golden beak sank out of sight and a sudden shower of dark blood spattered the floor. The snake’s tail thrashed, narrowly missing Snape, and Fawkes dived again. Another shower of blood.

Harri gasped in surprise as she realized that both the snake’s large bulbous yellow eyes had been punctured by the Phoenix; blood was streaming to the floor, and the snake was spitting in agony.

Riddle gripped Harri so tightly she thought she might choke. “NO!” he screamed out in an explosive hiss. “LEAVE THE BIRD! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE MAN IS BEHIND YOU! YOU CAN STILL SMELL HIM! KILL HIM”

“RUN!” Harri screamed. “He’s telling the snake to get you!”

Snape looked like he didn’t know what to do. He cast a quick spell and red light flashed from his wand, hitting the snake, but didn’t penetrate. The scales were magically resistant. What to do? Could he conjure a roster and make it crow?

The snake’s tail whipped across the floor again. Snape ducked. Something soft hit just above his head. The basilisk had swept the Sorting Hat over to Snape. Snape seized it. What did one do with a hat but wear it?

“Put it on!” Harri called. Maybe the hat knew a way to kill a basilisk?

Snape jammed it on quickly, dodging as the snake’s tail hit over him again. Snape let out a harsh yelp, and Harri feared the worst. Had the snake’s tail hit him?

“KILL THE MAN! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE MAN IS BEHIND YOU! SNIFF! SMELL HIM!” Riddle was so urgent that he wasn’t speaking in a hiss at all but in English.

Snape was on his feet, ready. Something silver... was that a sword? was in his hands. The basilisk’s head was falling, it’s body coiling around, hitting pillars as it twisted to face him. The snake’s mighty maw was stretching wide, wide enough to swallow him whole, and Harri let out a fearful scream as Snape practically disappeared into its mouth.
The basilisk keeled over sideways and fell, twitching, to the floor.

Snape slid down the wall, one of the snake’s fangs in his arm.

“No,” Harri whispered. She pulled against Riddle, and this time he let her go. She rushed past the dead snake to Snape. She gripped the fang that was spreading poison through his body and wrenched it out. But she knew it was too late. His face was in agony.

Everything was growing foggy; she was crying. Snape’s hand was on her face.

“Harri…” he said, his voice weak. “Run… Harri… Live”

“I’m not leaving you,” Harri choked through her tears. “You can’t leave me. You have to stay. Please! You’re all I’ve got!”


“Take her,” Snape told the Pheonix. But Fawkes didn’t move toward Harri. Instead, it laid its beautiful head on the spot where the serpent’s fang had pierced Snape’s arm. The Runespoor, which had miraculously survived all this, slithered to Harri. The right head even hissed sadly.

“You’re dead Severus Snape,” said Riddle’s voice from behind Harri. “Dead. Even Dumbledore’s bird knows it. Do you see what he’s doing? He’s crying.”

Hope bloomed in Harri’s breast. Pheonix tears.

The Runespoor reared back and flung itself at Riddle. Fangs bared in anger, ready to attack.

‘Diffindo’ Riddle snarled, and a jet of yellow light hit the snake. It fell dead to the floor in two bleeding halves.

She gripped the basilisk fang in her hand tightly, seeing red from anger. She turned and swung at Riddle. He caught her wrist, gripping it so hard that her hand opened and she dropped the fang.

"I think not," he snapped. Snape groaned.

"Pheonix Tears," he whispered to himself, looking at Snape in sudden understanding. He lifted his wand.

"Please," Harri pleaded, tears in her eyes. "Please don't hurt him. Let Ginny go. Please!"

He kept his wand raised, and Harri stifled a scream. He didn't cast to kill, it was a simple 'Stupefy'. The spell hit Snape directly in the chest. The nearly dead man was unconscious, but he was alive.

"Please," she said again.

"You must swear on your magic that you won't make a fuss. You'll come with me without complaint. You won't run away. You'll stay with me until I release you. If you do that, I will let Ginny Weasley live."

"I swear it," Harri said quickly. She felt the snap of magic between them of a promise made.

"Go get the diary," he said. "Cut your hand and smear your blood on the pages. That will be enough magic to finish it. Ginny Weasley will live."

"Thank you," Harri breathed. He let her go, and she hurried over to the diary. She had no knife or
means to cut her palm and looked around desperately. There was a flutter of wings, and Fawkes was beside her. He looked up at her with his dark black eyes and she wondered if he was judging her decision.

"Ginny has to live," she told the bird. It looked like Fawkes nodded to her, then he struck forward with his sharp beak and sliced open Harri’s palm. She snatched the diary up and smeared her blood on the front page. She felt like something was pulling at her, a strange sucking sensation that made her ears ring. It was a dizzying sensation. Then it was over. Ginny Weasley let out a small sigh, and her breathing returned to normal.

Tom Riddle sighed from behind her, and she felt a hand on her shoulder. "How strange," he said softly. "It's cold." Had he not felt the temperature before?

"Come, Harriet," he said, pulling her to her feet.

"Where are we going?" she asked. "The Basilisk is dead. We aren't going to be able to just walk out of the school."

He grinned sourly, "It's a good thing that you happen to have that cloak of yours with you, isn't it?"

He woke to the cold Chamber and a voice.

"P-Professor? Professor, please wake-up!" Snape opened his eyes, and at first, he thought it was Harriet kneeling over him. All he could see was a mass of red hair but as his vision cleared he saw that it was not Harriet. It was a sobbing Ginny Weasley. The girl was still alive.

Panic gripped him, and he sat looking wildly around. Harriet and Riddle were gone.

"Oh Professor Snape, thank goodness!" the weeping girl said. "You looked dead. I woke up and that thing over there," she pointed to the Basilisk, "i-is dead. I t-thought it killed you!" she stuttered out.

Snape shakily stood.

"No one was here when you woke up?" he asked the sobbing girl carefully.

"N-no," she said. "He's gone. The Diary," she held it out to him. It was covered in blood. Covered in blood and Ginny Weasley was still alive. Harriet and the Young Dark Lord were gone. It didn't take a ritual specialist to figure out what had happened.

He walked over to the basilisk, and, with a huge tug, retrieved the glittering sword from the roof of the snakes’ mouth. He then picked up the dead Runespoor and looked sadly down at it. Dead. He should be dead too. Somehow he was alive and Harriet was gone. How far had they gotten? How long had he been stunned? The average stunner lasted an hour without an enervate. Did the Dark Lord cast average stunners?

“I-I tried to tell Harri- I tried to tell her at breakfast, but I couldn’t - he wouldn’t let me- R-Riddle made me- he t-took over- and- how-.”

“Miss. Weasley,” Severus asked tersely, “Are you injured anywhere?”

“No-no” she gasped. Snape cast the spell he had often cast on Harri to see the state of her magical core.
“You’re very drained, Miss. Weasley. Almost to the point of no return. We need to get you to the Hospital Wing.”

“I’m going to be expelled!” Ginny wept as Snape awkwardly tried to lead her out of the Chamber. “I’ve looked forward to coming to Hogwarts ever since B-Bill came and n-now I’ll have to leave and - w-what’ll Mum and Dad say?”

“That they have a very brave daughter who fought against You-Know-Who after months and months of him in her head,” said Snape, who took Ginny by the shoulders. “You will not be expelled, Miss. Weasley. You are a child who was taken advantage of by the Dark. Older witches have done far worse knowingly in his name.”

Miss. Weasley’s lip still trembled, but she stopped weeping. Fawkes was waiting from them in the Chamber entrance. Severus urged Ginny Weasley forward; the two stepped over the motionless coils of the dead basilisk, through the echoing gloom, and back into the tunnel. Snape heard the stone doors close behind them with a soft hiss.

Harriet was in the clutches of the young Dark Lord, now fully corporeal.

He had failed.

He delivers the sobbing girl to her scared parents in the Hospital Wing, and like a rage-filled wraith, he Severus goes to the returned Headmaster.

“What is this thing?” he asks Dumbledore, giving him the Diary. He’s certain that he knows, but he wants the Headmaster to confirm it.

“A Horcrux,” Dumbledore replies. A Horcrux. Yes, it was so clear. The Dark Lord who didn’t die. He would be strengthened now. The return of his soul fragment would make him more than a mean ghost in Albania.

“The soul piece…” Snape says slowly, "The Dark Lord had an overexaggerated effect on Harriet. Miss. Weasley was exposed for over half the year and wasn't magical exhausted once. There is something else, isn’t there?"

Dumbledore nods his head, and Snape can feel his stomach all the way down to his feet.

“She’s a Horcrux too, isn’t she?” Severus asks. It’s dread, it’s horror, it’s all the bad feelings in the world. It’s hearing that Lily was dead and that Harriet has been kidnapped all rolled into one.

“Yes,” Dumbledore confirms quietly.

“That explains why her magic is still being so difficult,” Snape mutters. “She hasn’t had the stabilization potion.”

“No, I suppose she hasn’t” Dumbledore mused. “Funny that you would think of that first, instead of how to get rid of it.”

“There isn’t getting rid of a Horcrux from a human host,” Severus snaps. “Not without killing her.”

Dumbledore looks quietly at Snape with resignation. “That was originally my plan,” Albus confesses.

Severus wants to curse the man. “You were going to make her a sheep to the slaughter? Not my
daughter, Albus!"

“Not anymore,” says Dumbledore. “No, not anymore. She’s too valuable as the Lady of Light. My plans were contingent on Harri being free of such a burden.”

“She isn’t a bloody pawn on your chess board. Or a queen, as you would have her now!”

“No,” Dumbledore says, and Snape can feel a sharpness in the air. “She’s no pawn of mine. She’s a pawn of Yggdrasil. I can no more plan for Harri’s future than you can. There is no removing the Horcrux except through her death or Voldemort’s regret. Neither seems likely. I do not know what to do, Severus.”

“We have to find her before the Horcrux uses her."

"Yes, we do." Dumbledore agrees. "I will see if Horace will take over your remaining classes for the year. Minnie can take on my duties."

"You will come?"

"I will. Though I fear... I fear that we will be too late. The Horcrux will be able to find itself easily."

Panic shoots down Snape's spine.

“He’ll go after you, Albus.”

“I’m sure he will,” Dumbledore agrees.

“He’ll want you dead so that she’s the one speaking and negotiating with him. She won’t even be called for a few years yet. He’ll be in a stronger position with you gone.”

“I don’t intend to die, Severus.”

“That’s the thing about death, isn’t it?” Snape said, “It’s not usually intentional.”

A man in a cell gets a copy of the Daily Prophet from Cornelius Fudge.

Fudge is early this year, but apparently there are whispers of the Dark Lord growing stronger. Fudge wants to be sure the prison is secure. They talk loudly and freely, those Ministry witches and wizards. Anyone can hear if they bother to listen. He wonders how many inmates have the ability to listen anymore; each so lost in their own misery.

He sees the giant Rubeus Hagrid come lumbering out of the prison, cold and pale as the rest of the inmates in Azkaban. Why was he here?

He looks down at the paper, thinking of the crossword. The front page gives him pause.

**Hero Professor Rescues Student**

**Heir of Slytherin at Large, Girl-Who-Lived Missing**

This reporter is pleased to report that Professor Severus Snape was able to slay the Basilisk that was terrorizing Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Over the last several months the school has been stalked by the large snake; resulting in one student death (Penelope Clearwater, 16), and two students, one cat, and one ghost being petrified (successfully revived). These attacks
are reminiscent of the last time the Chamber was opened in 1942-43 which also resulted in the death of a student (Myrtle Warren, 13).

Yesterday morning, Hogwarts woke to the chilling news that two students had been taken into the Chamber itself. The first, Ginny Weasley, is the daughter of Arthur Weasley with the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Department. The second, Harriet Potter, the Girl-Who-Lived.

Professor Severus Snape, the guardian of Harriet Potter, found and entered the Chamber. He was able to slay the Basilisk and retrieve Ginny Weasley, but the unknown Heir-of-Slytherin was able to escape with the Girl-Who-Lived. Both are currently at large.

While it is a tragedy that Harriet Potter has been taken, Lord Albus Dumbledore has assured Lucius Malfoy (former Chairmen of the Hogwarts Board of Governors) and Minister Cornelius Fudge that Harriet Potter is still alive. According to Mr. Lucius Malfoy, when he tried to further question Lord Dumbledore, Dumbledore cited Section 4 of the Magical Powers Act that gives Privilege to a Lord or Lady of Magic in regard to dealings between Dark and Light. This clause is only relevant if Lord Dumbledore is acting in his capacity as Lord of Light. If that is the case, the disappearance of Harriet Potter can only mean the involvement of the Dark Lord. Is it He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? Or a new Dark Lord at last.

If you have any information regarding the whereabouts of Harriet Potter please contact the Auror Department at the Ministry.

By the time Fudge walks past Sirius Black's cell again, it's empty.

Chapter End Notes

Click on over to read chapter one of Captivus. Special thanks to those who have left reviews on almost every chapter. Even a single word comment has been very encouraging. Two stories complete! I never would have thought.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!