Summary

“And I know that the next few months are going to be hard for you but don't let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.”

Harry Potter understood what loss was before he knew the word existed. In the space of a few hours, he loses two of the people he loves most in the world, and the word loss suddenly has a new meaning.

Notes

I just want to explain a few things before the fic starts;

1. In this, Harry is a twin. He has one sister - Lydia.
2. James is also alive.
3. There will be Drarry in this, so don't read if you don't like it.
4. When I say slow burn, I mean slow burn. Don't get excited.
5. This is kind of an AU of an AU. I've written a different version of this called 'The Children who Lived,' if you care enough, read it. If not, don't. You can do what you want.

6. Please enjoy.

-E.
“Harry? Lydia?” Mr Weasley popped his head into the room, "Professor Dumbledore is here to see you,"

“Professor Dumbledore is what?” Lydia asked distractedly as she tried to work through her Arithmancy homework.

“He’s here to see you,” Mr Weasley repeated.

"He's taking away your prefect badge already," Fred said.

"Probably," Lydia said, standing up, "I'd take it away too,"

Lydia expected to follow Mr Weasley into the kitchen but instead he lead them to one of the living rooms in Grimmauld Place. She thought that he was acting strange, though that could have just been because he was very tired. One things that Lydia always noticed about the members of the Order of the Phoenix was that they never looked as though they had had a full nights sleep.

Professor Dumbledore was stood outside the door of the living room with his hands clasped in front of him. He looked unusually serious though the usual twinkle was still there. He smiled pleasantly at them both and Lydia had to remind herself to smile back for a sense of foreboding settled over her. Harry was tugging at the bottom of his t-shirt in the way that he did when he was nervous.

"Now, what you are going to see behind this door might upset you, it might even scare you," He said grimly, "But please understand me when I say this - there is no dark magic at play here and even if you want to attack, please do not,"

Lydia and Harry glanced at each other and automatically moved closer together, expecting the worse. Dumbledore waved his hand and the door opened on its own accord. Together, Harry and Lydia leaned forward slightly. At first, Lydia was very, very confused for Harry was stood both next to her and in the room between Sirius and Lupin. Then she looked a little closer and realised that this person could not be Harry because his eyes were hazel, he looked a little bit older and there was no scar on his head.

Harry cocked his head to the side, his eyebrows furrowed. He opened his mouth as though he was going to say something but then closed it again. He turned and looked at Lydia as though he was expecting her to say something. She looked at Remus and Sirius both of whom looked like they were torn between laughing and crying. Finally, she turned to look at Dumbledore who was looking very solemn.

"I don't get it," Lydia said loudly.

Professor Dumbledore cleared his throat.

"This is James Potter, your father,"

"No he's not," Lydia said, "Our dad is dead. There was a whole thing about it," She gestured to the scar on her head.

"That is true," Dumbledore said, nodding his head, "However, certain magic has come into play,"
"I thought there was no spell to bring back the dead," Harry interrupted, "That's what you said to us last year,"

Lydia turned and looked at the man who was claiming to be her father. She couldn't help but distrust him. It was a cruel thing to do, really, pretend to be orphaned children's father. Especially after everything that they had been through the previous summer. He smiled at her but she didn't return the smile and quickly looked away.

"There is no spell to bring back the dead, Harry, you are correct," Dumbledore said, "However, there is old, ancient magic that has not been brought into play for hundreds of thousands of years," He glanced around, "Perhaps we should sit down whilst I have this conversation. It is very confusing,"

Lydia thought that if even Dumbledore found it confusing, there was probably no point in him even trying to explain it to the rest of them. Dumbledore lead the way into the living room and Lydia and Harry sat on the couch furthest away from 'James' who was now looking very uncomfortable.

"Last summer, when Lord Voldemort returned from the dead, he murdered Cedric Diggory. When you two duelled Lord Voldemort, you were faced with the echoes of those he killed. Cedric Diggory being one of those people and, from what you have told me, he asked you to bring his body back to his parents and that is what you did-" Harry opened his mouth to interrupt but Dumbledore waved him down, "-in doing so, you did a good deed. A deed that others might have ignored given the circumstances, and so you were rewarded. A male soul, for a male soul,"

"That makes no sense!" Lydia protested, "That means that he should have come back after Quirrel died!"

"No, no," Dumbledore said gently, "You misunderstand me. Both your father and Cedric were innocent. Professor Quirrell was not. You could not save Cedric Diggory - no one in that situation could have done - but you avenged his death in the best way that you could and so you were rewarded. Do you understand?"

"A little bit," Lydia said.

"That is enough," Dumbledore said.

"So," Harry said, speaking for the first time, "That man there...that's our dad?"

"Yes," Dumbledore said, "I shall leave you to bond. I need to go to the Ministry and explain this,"

Once Dumbledore left the room, silence fell. 'James' was staring intently at Lydia and Harry whilst Remus and Sirius were determinedly looking away from each other. Harry jumped up and walked to the window, looking out of it. Lydia stared at her hands, trying to think of something to say. She had always imagined having parents, but now that she had one, she didn't actually know what to do with herself.

"Are you two okay?" Remus asked, "I know this is a lot for you to take in-"

"Understatement," Lydia muttered.

"-but it's best if we just talk about it,"

"I know it's a lot for you two," James said quietly, "But it's a lot for me, too. The last time I saw you both you were babies and now you're teenagers,"
Before she knew it, Lydia burst into tears. Harry raced back over to her and sat on the couch next to her and put his arm around her. That only reminded her of the fact that they had missed out on so much together. Lydia could think of a million different times in her life when all she needed was a parents advice. The sorting ceremony, for example, would have been a nice time to have gotten advice of someone who had already been through it. It would have also been nice to have someone telling her that being sorted into Slytherin wasn't the worst thing in the entire world.

"It's alright," Harry whispered, "We'll get through this together. We always do,"

Lydia nodded and wiped her eyes. She tried to pull herself back together and faced James again. There were tears rolling down his own face. Remus was leaning over the back of the couch, his hands interlocked. Sirius was leaning back against the wall, his arms folded. Harry was jigging his knee up and down.

"I'm sorry..." James whispered, "I'm sorry that I was never there for you. I didn't want to die. I didn't want to leave you to fend for yourself and not have any idea of what the Wizarding world was like...I didn't want your lives to be like this,"

"I know," Harry said, "We both know. We didn't want you to die and...and-" His voice wavered and then he burst into tears, which only made Lydia cry even harder. Remus placed his hand on Lydia's shoulder and squeezed it in a way that was strangely comforting.

"You've both been through a lot," Remus said, "I know this. Sirius knows this. James...will come to know this," He cleared his throat, "But this is a good thing in your lives. For the first time, I think you've both found something good,"

"You're right," Lydia whispered, "This is something good," Lydia looked up at James and smiled at him. She saw him physically relax at this

"This is definitely one of the better things that has ever happened to us," Harry said thickly through tears.

James tentatively walked towards them and before they knew what was happening, the three of them were sobbing in each other's arms. Behind them, Lydia heard Sirius and Remus let out sighs of relief.

"So," James said, finally pulling away, "Lydia, your name - it doesn't start with a 'G'"

Lydia looked down at her t-shirt. She was wearing one of George's jumpers with his initial on it in the hope that it would help the others tell the twins apart.

"It does, actually," Lydia said, "I changed my name to Gydia,"

"That's me told," He muttered.

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It had been a good start for such a bad ending, really.

Lydia sat in a stony silence as Harry ranted at Professor Dumbledore, walking around his office and smashing things. James sat next to her with his arm around her. He hadn't really shown any emotion since they had watched Sirius fall backwards through the veil, though that could have been more to do with shock than anything else. He didn't even try and control his son as he swore at the Headmaster. The portraits that hung around the office were the only ones who seemed to be reacting to anything.
Now that she actually sat and thought about it, Lydia felt as though she should have just expected everything to implode the way it had. She had been incredibly naive to believe that all of the good that had happened at the start of the year - their dad being alive, becoming a Prefect, Harry not being expelled from school - would come with some sort of a price. And it had done - Sirius. Good times didn't last for people like her, and Lydia was finally getting used to it.

Harry finally fell silent and Lydia saw this as her chance to get everything across to Dumbledore. "I want out," she said, "I don't want to do this anymore. I don't care about Voldemort. I want to be a normal kid,"

"Lydia-" Dumbledore began.

"No. I don't care. I really do not give a shit. Don't tell me about the power of love or some other bullshit because that's gotten me nowhere!" she napped, "I just want to be normal. I want to go to class and watch Quidditch games and not have to worry about anything else. I don't care about Voldemort anymore."

"Lyds...come on."

"No, dad, no! You have no idea what it's been like for us! Between getting sorted into Slytherin, killing a Basilisk and thinking there was a mass murderer after us for a whole year, I'm done! I don't want special treatment! I don't want to be part of the Prophecy! I don't care about my fucking 'destiny'! I'll change my destiny! I'll off myself if I have to! I just don't want to be part of this anymore! I don't want to have meetings with you, I don't want to be a part of the Order! I don't want any of this! I just want to graduate Hogwarts and start again! I'll never cast another spell in my life if I have to! I'm not doing this bullshit anymore. I'm done,"

Dumbledore regarded her for a moment and Lydia geared herself up for another argument but in the end he just nodded.

"If that is your wish..."

"It is," she said bluntly.

"Then I should like to speak to you alone,"

When they were alone, Dumbledore gestured for her sit down and she dropped into the seat in front of his desk, folding her arms. She had no idea what more Dumbledore could possibly have to say to her and she found that she did not really care.

"I need to tell you a vitally important piece of information," Dumbledore said, "something that is integral to the defeat of Lord Voldemort,"

"I've already told you," she said through gritted teeth, "I don't give a-"

"Lydia, please,"

There was something about the way he said those two words that made her shut up. She looked up at him and was shocked to see that there were tears trickling down into his beard.

"Lord Voldemort has created objects known as Horcruxes. Each of these objects contain a piece of his soul. The only way we can truly kill Voldemort is if we destroy every single Horcrux," he said, "and we have already destroyed one," Slowly, he reached into his desk drawer and pulled out an object that Lydia had not given much thought to for years - Tom Riddle's diary.
“How many are there? What are they?” Lydia asked, “Why aren’t you telling Harry this?”

“There are eight Horcruxes in total but with the destruction of the diary, there are seven left,” Dumbledore told her, “I only know what one other is for certain,”

“What?” Lydia asked, wishing that she cared more.

“Have you ever wondered why you can talk to snakes, Lydia?”

She stared at him for a few moments and had no idea what he was going on about. Then all the puzzle pieces slotted together in her mind. She felt her heart deflate but the more she thought about it, the more she realised it actually made sense.

“There's a Horcrux inside of me,” it wasn't a question.

“Unfortunately, yes. You were the one he never intended to make,”

“That means I have to die,” Lydia said, her voice strangely calm for a fifteen year old girl who had just been told she was going to have to die, “‘Neither can live whilst the other survives’. That makes more sense now,” she looked up at Dumbledore. He was still crying, “I guess you're going to kill me now?”

Dumbledore shook his head, “No, I am too much of a coward for that,”

“So, what? Am I just meant to wait for Voldemort to come and do me in?” Lydia asked, “because I’m not going to give him that satisfaction. I already told you that I’d off myself if I have to! You might be a coward, Professor Dumbledore, but I am not,”

“Lydia-”

“Don't try and talk me out of it,” she snapped, “You've been raising me like a pig for slaughter! At least give me the dignity of ending it on my own terms! Just-” her voice softened, “make sure Harry, Ron, Hermione or my dad don't find me,”

She did not wait for him to answer and swept from the room, going straight to the common room. There were a couple of things she wanted to do before she went.

With it being so early in the morning, Lydia crept around the dormitory, gathering as much parchment as she could. Then she sat in the common room and began to write letters; the first letter she wrote was to Harry. She apologised for what she was going to do, but assured him that in some sick, twisted logic, it was for the best. She told him everything that Dumbledore had told her and made sure that he was aware how much she loved him.

Then she wrote to James, Ron and Hermione. And then to George and to the other Weasleys. She wrote to Mad-Eye, to Kingsley and to Tonks, asking them to promise to make sure Harry never did anything stupid. She wrote to Dobby and thanked him for everything, and told him how happy she was that he had found his freedom. She then wrote to every member of the DA - even to Zacharias Smith - and thanked them for standing by her. She wrote to Remus, Professors McGonagall, Babbling, Sprout, Sinastra, Flitwick and then to Hagrid. She thanked them for everything and, once again, asked that they looked after Harry. She even wrote to Mrs Figg, because she had done a lot for them over the years.

Finally, she was done. She rolled up each piece of parchment and piled them up neatly, leaving a note for the other Slytherins to give them to those they were addressed to. She hoped they would be
Still feeling supremely calm, Lydia rose from her seat in the common and left without looking back. She did not take much notice of anything as she walked out into the grounds. If she started taking notice of the castle around her, she would never do it. And she had to do it so that the world could be one day free of Lord Voldemort.

“Miss Potter, you are up early!” Professor Sprout called to her as she passed the Greenhouses. Evidently, Sprout had not heard the news about Sirius and Lydia was not going to be the one to tell her.

Lydia forced a smile onto her face, “I'm just going on a walk to clear my head, Professor!”

Without looking to see if the curtains were open, Lydia snuck past Hagrid's hut and into the shade of the trees of the Forbidden Forest, checking to see she was not visible from the castle. She hoped that Hagrid was not the one to find her. When she thought about it though, she didn't actually know who she wanted to find her.

Lydia took a deep breath and exhaled slowly as tears began to cascade down her cheeks. She had always assumed that her life would end earlier than most, she just never thought that it would be on her own terms. And really, she was glad it was going to end like that. She was quite happy that she was able to take control of the narrative and would do be able to do the one thing that Voldemort had always dreamed of doing, but never could. It felt like one last act of rebellion.

“Fuck you, Tom Riddle,” she whispered to herself.

With one last fleeting thought of those she loved, and a desperate prayer to a God that she didn't believe in that this would be over quickly, she turned her wand on herself and whispered the two words she had been running from her entire life.
Harry and James sat in complete silence in an unused classroom on the second floor. Harry did not feel like going back to the Gryffindor common room or the Hospital Wing, and James did not want to go back to Grimmauld Place and be confronted with a house devoid of Sirius.

All Harry wanted to do was find Lydia. He assumed that Professor Dumbledore was trying to convince her to fight Voldemort, but he knew that the Headmaster was fighting a losing battle. It was clear to Harry that Lydia had made up her mind and she was far too stubborn to listen to a word of whatever Dumbledore could possibly be saying to her now.

Harry glanced sideways at James’ watch and sighed. It was almost seven in the morning, and Lydia was still not back. She must have been with Dumbledore for almost four hours now, which meant that she was definitely putting up a fight. He was surprised that they couldn't hear her voice ringing throughout the castle.

Quite suddenly, his scar began to burn. It was almost as though someone had pressed a hot piece of metal to his skin. He squeezes his eyes shut and furiously rubbed his forehead, but nothing was helping to distract from the pain.

“Hey, hey, Harry, son,” James said quietly, pulling his hand away from his face, “That isn't going to help you. What's wrong it? Is it your scar?”

He nodded, tears stinging his eyes.

“It's just the aftermath of...everything,” he looked up at his dad, “I just want it to stop. I want the pain to stop. Everything hurts, dad, I don't - I don't know how much longer I can do this for,”

“Let's get you up to the hospital wing, yeah? Madam Pomfrey can give you something for shock,”

Harry nodded, but only because he didn't know what else to do. An almost paralysing sense of sadness had washed over him for a second and he didn't really know where it had come from. For some reason, and he wasn't exactly sure why, but for some reason, he did not think that the sadness was for Sirius.

James half dragged - half carried Harry up to the hospital wing. Somewhere in the back of his mind, a rational voice was telling Harry that James was hurting more than he was and that he ought to try and make all this easier for his dad, but the unreasonable voice was the loudest, and Harry did not try and check that his dad was okay.

Up in the hospital wing, Ron, Ginny, Neville and Luna were all sat around Hermione’s bed. She seemed to have already made a full recovery for she was sat upright in bed, though she did look rather pale. McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey were stood in the shadowy corner of the room, having a whispered conversation.

Harry dropped into the seat next to Ron and stared blankly down at his knees. He could not bare to look at any of his friends, not after what he had put them from, not after what he made them witness...an image of Sirius falling through the veil flashed through his mind again and he squeezed his eyes shut again, trying to block it all out.
“Where’s Lydia, Harry?” Hermione asked in a small voice.

“I don’t know.” Harry replied, sounding hoarse, “Dumbledore wanted to speak to her. She’s probably still with him,”

Hermione nodded and they lapsed into silence again. Harry kept on glancing at Ron’s watch to check the time. Almost 45 minutes had passed and there was still no sign of Lydia. Harry impatiently jiggled his knee up and down, occasionally stealing glanced at the door. He wished that she and Dumbledore would hurry up talking about whatever it was they were talking about.

A lifetime passed, and the doors behind them opened. Harry did not turn around straight away. It was only when Ginny gasped and almost fell off her chair that he did. Hagrid and Ernie Macmillan were carrying a stretcher into the the room, a white sheet was covering the person lay on it. At first, Harry thought nothing of it but then he noticed their tear stained faces and jumped up.

“Harry,” Ernie exclaimed, clearly seeing him for the first time as they carefully placed the stretcher on the nearest bed, “I didn’t - I didn’t think you’d - I didn’t think you’d be here,”

“What’s going on, Ernie?” Harry asked, fear gnawing away at his heart.

A hand flopped over to the side of the stretcher and out of curiosity, Harry looked down at it. He stared at it for a moment, frowning for suddenly, nothing was making sense. Etched upon the hand was the sentence, “I must not tell lies,” in handwriting tha he recognised. He hurried towards the bed but Ernie shoved him backwards, shaking his head.

“Please, don’t,” he said, “for your own sake,"

“No, I- I don't get it - I'm confused - why is she - what happened?” Harry stammered, “I don't understand, what happened to her? Is she - is she dead?”

“Harry, please,” Ernie pleaded, still shoving him back, “Please, please, please, don't look...you shouldn't...you should remember her as she was-”

“No!” Harry yelled, “NO! NO! NO! It can't be! She isn't - she's not - no! NO!”

Behind them, James let out an awful yell and collapsed to the floor, sobbing loudly. Hermione was quietly sobbing into Ron's shoulder and Ginny very quickly left the room, her face in her hands. Luna was starting at the place where Lydia was underneath a sheet, her bright blue eyes swimming with tears and Neville was stood with his back to them, his head bowed.

Madam Pomfrey bustled passed Harry, shooed Hagrid and Ernie away and hastened to shut the curtains around the bed. But the curtains were not sound proof and Harry could still hear Madam Pomfrey crying.

“This - this is not happening,” Harry said, “This is some shitty nightmare! This is something that Voldemort has put in my head to get to me! This isn't - this isn't actually happening!”

“Harry,” Hagrid said through great heaving sobs, “I’m s-s-sorry, but I found her being me h-h-hut. C-Cold as a block of ice,”

“NO,” Harry bellowed, sick of them all, “MY SISTER IS NOT DEAD!”

The doors opened again and Harry’s head snapped up, he was half-expecting it to be Lydia, but it wasn’t. It was Dumbledore looking unusually grave and Harry’s heart deflated like a balloon. Maybe Hagrid was telling the truth. Maybe she really was gone.
“I need to speak to Harry, James, Mr Weasley and Miss Granger, privately,”

The others did not need telling twice and quickly let the room. When Professor McGonagall passed him, she lightly squeezed Harry’s arm and it was strangely comforting. Before she left, Madam Pomfrey helped James up off the floor and gently sat him on a seat. The moment she let go of him, he slumped forwards in his chair, his head in his hands.

“Harry, please take a seat,” Dumbledore said.

“No. I want to see Lydia,” Harry snapped, going to move towards the bed but Dumbledore held up a hand.

“Please, Harry, I need to speak to you first. I want to explain,”

Sending a furious glare Dumbledore’s way, Harry threw himself into the seat that Neville had occupied and tried to fight the tears that were already streaming down his face. Hermione had still not looked up from Ron’s shoulder and Harry was not sure that she would ever would. He wasn't sure that he would blame her if she never did.

Dumbledore then launched into a long winded explaining about something that Harry did not understand. Nor did he even try to understand. Something about objects called Horcruxes and how Lydia had been one all along, and that that was why she had to die. This was around the time that Harry switched off. He didn't like hearing about her in past tense.

“So, let me get this straight,” James said, his voice shaking, “You told a fifteen year old girl who's had the shittiest year of her life and who just watched her Godfather get murdered that if she dies, they win the war? And you have the nerve to cry about it? To cry about her?”

“She had to know,” Dumbledore said quietly.

“Did she?” James thundered, “Or did she need it fixed? You're meant to be the most powerful wizard alive! How could you not fix this?” he jumped up out of his chair and walked towards Dumbledore, “Are my kids just pawns in a game of chess, to you? Is that what they are? Do you just look at them both and think that they're disposable? Because they're not! My little girl is dead because of you, Dumbledore,”

“Once a Horcrux is created, there is very little chance of going back,”

Harry suddenly perked up, “it's not over! Dad - Dad came back! If Dad came back, why can't Lydia? We just - we just have to do a good deed!” He looked around the room as if the perfect charitable act would just present itself to him.

“That would not work, Harry, for you have an ulterior motive,”

“Wanting my sister to not be dead isn't the worst ulterior motive in the world though, is it?” Harry snapped.

“How did it happen?” Ron asked, his voice hollow, “How did she do it?”

“The Killing Curse,”

Hermione began to sob loudly now and Harry couldn't bare it. Reality seemed to hit all at once. Lydia was dead. He would never see her again. He stared at the curtains behind which her body lay and the room began spinning. He did not want to believe that she was gone and yet the only evidence he needed to prove it really happened was lay on that bed. The only evidence he had
needed had been shown on Ernie's tear streaked face and the fact that Harry had found her.

“At least she wouldn't have suffered,” James said, speaking very quietly, “The Killing Curse - it's over - it's over very fast,”

That was the first time that James had ever mentioned being killed and thinking about that was too much for Harry. Thinking about everything that had happened that night was more painful than ever.

“Forget it, then,” Harry said finally, “Forget everything. Voldemort's already won. You might as well let the Ministry know, Professor,”

“What are you on about, Harry?” Ron asked.

“Do I need to make it clearer? Voldemort has won! He's won the fucking war and I could not give less of a shit!” Harry yelled, “He killed Lydia! He won! He got what he always wanted!”

“You're still alive-”

“No, I'm not! I wish I wasn't!” Harry screamed, but then he voice broke, “He killed her, he killed me...I need - I need to be alone,”

“Son-”

“No! Dad, please, I just...I need this. I need to wrap my head around it. Or at least try to,”

Without waiting for an answer, Harry shoved past Dumbledore and let his legs carry him all the way into the grounds. He didn't stop until he was at the edge of the lake and the muscles in his legs were burning. Freezing water washed over his trainers but he didn't care, it made him feel less numb.

All Harry had ever known was loss, but he had always known it with Lydia by his side. The loss always felt less heavy when there was always someone to share that with. And he had lost that someone, and he would never get her back again.

Anger burned through him as the tears streamed thick and fast down his face, and all the anger was directed towards Dumbledore. Harry laughed a bitter laugh, unable to believe that he could look up to a person like Dumbledore. If Dumbledore had ever cared about either of them, he wouldn't have kept them in the dark when it came to the Order, he wouldn't have let Umbridge torture them and he certainly wouldn't have let Lydia kill herself on the school grounds.

Then he thought about his dad, and how he might never be able to get over the death of his daughter. He thought about Professor McGonagall and how she had always had a soft spot for Lydia because she had always been the underdog, and how she might find teaching difficult knowing that Lydia would never sit in one of her classes again. He thought about Ron and Hermione, and how they had lost their best friend, how George had lost his girlfriend and how he had lost someone he loved more than anyone else in the entire world.

“Potter,” said a voice that belonged to someone who Harry did not want to speak to.

“Fuck off, Greengrass,”

He heard Daphne Greengrass sigh and this actually made Harry turn around for she sounded quite sad.

“I'm sorry about Lydia,”
“You heard?” Harry asked, wiping his eyes. He did not want to cry in front of Greengrass of all people.

“Snape told us at breakfast,” Greengrass said and she sounded like he was choosing his words carefully, “It's - it's pretty shitty,”

“You made her life a living hell,” Harry snapped suddenly, “You were fucking awful to her throughout the five years she was here and now you're telling me that you're sorry that she's dead?”

Greengrass backed away from him, her eyes wide, “We never got on, Potter, but I never wanted her dead. I don't want - I don't want either of you dead,”

“Yeah, alright,” Harry scoffed, “and I guess you don't support Voldemort, either?”

“No!” Greengrass exclaimed, and she actually sounded quite offended, “No. I don't. I don't support him at all! Lydia and I were never friends and I always hated the fact that I couldn't find the courage to tell Parkinson to go fuck herself and befriend Lydia but I - you can imagine how much I regret that now,”

“I had no idea,” Harry said quietly.

“No one did,” Greengrass said bluntly and then she held a roll of parchment up, “this is for you. I think Lydia wrote it before she - they were left on a table in the common room. She wrote loads,”

“Thank-you, Greengrass,” Harry muttered, taking it off her.

“Yeah, well, it's the least I can do,” she smiled sadly at him, “I really am sorry for your loss. I'll see you around, Potter,”

Harry watched her go for a while and then looked down at the parchment in his shaking hands. He hadn't even thought that she would leave anything behind for him, and he felt as though opening it would make her death seem too real. And yet he couldn't help but open, because he needed to know what she had to say.

‘Dear Harry,

I'm sorry. I am so, so, so, sorry. I didn't want this. Especially now that Sirius has gone, but it had to be done. It's the only way we can ever get rid of Voldemort. I hope you understand, or come to understand one day.

Dumbledore told me about these things called Horcruxes. Objects with pieces of Voldemort's soul in them. If we get rid of them, we get rid of Voldemort. The diary was one and so was I. With me and the diary gone, there's six others left. I don't. Know what they are but, Harry, you have to find them. And you have to destroy them. The Wizarding World won't survive Voldemort a second time. Protect the world we love, please.

Make sure dad is okay, make sure Ron and Hermione don't bicker each other to death but, more important, look after yourself. Don't stop living because I have to stop living. Carry on because I have to stop living. For gods sake Harry, don't do something stupid. Don't try and come after me, because I know what you're like. If you carry on living, then Voldemort can never win. You still being alive despite everything is the biggest 'fuck you,' to Voldemort.

Somehow, this is for the best, however sick and twisted the logic is. This is going to make the world a better place one day. And I guess this is like what mum did, isn't it? Mum sacrificed herself for us, so I'll do it the same. Look at it like repayment if it makes you feel better.
I love you, Harry. Thank-you for being the best brother I could ask for. We were brought up with
nothing, but with you as my brother, I felt as though I had everything.

And I know that the next few months are going to be hard for you but don't let it destroy you. Let it
destroy Voldemort.

I love you. I'm sorry and I'll see you on the other side,

Love,

Lydia,”

Harry finished reading the letter and looked out across the lake. The sun had fully risen and was
reflecting off the usually murky water, making it look as though it was sparkling. The sight calmed
him and he closed his eyes against the sunlight, letting tears roll down his cheeks. Losing Lydia and
Sirius was hard, and it was going to be hard from here on out, but he wouldn't let it destroy him.
Lydia was right, he couldn't let it destroy him.

“Don't let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort,” Harry said out loud, “let it destroy Voldemort,”

He rolled the parchment up, placed it carefully in his pocket and began to walk back up to the castle.
His heart was the heaviest that it had ever been, and he could not stop crying, but it wouldn't last
forever.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading.

-on a completely unrelated note, this fic is doing wonders for beating writers block-

-E.
Harry did not want to leave Hogwarts because leaving Hogwarts meant facing a world where Lydia was dead. He very rarely left the Gryffindor common room, instead just sitting and staring into the fire, wondering how a person could be as unlucky as he was. Ron and Hermione did not leave his side; partly out of support, and partly out of their own grief. James had gone back to the flat he owned, and Harry felt terrible about the fact that he had left him, but he did not know what to say to him.

All classes had been cancelled and the school seemed to have gone into a state of stock. Despite the bright sun shining and the fact that their exams had finally come to an end, Gryffindor Tower was eerily quiet. Although Lydia had never been in Gryffindor, they felt as though they had lost one of their own. Harry often thought about the Slytherins and how they must have been dealing with it all. He wondered if the other Slytherin girls could not bare to look at the bed that Lydia had once occupied and wondered if the likes of Draco Malfoy was truly sorry for her death, or if he was just happy that she was finally out of the way. It was probably the latter, Harry thought, no one was stupid enough to truly believe that Draco Malfoy was on their side. His loyalties lay with Voldemort, and they all know it.

The portrait hole swung open and Professor McGonagall walked in. It was the first time that Harry had seen her in a few days and he was shocked to see how terrible she looked. Her skin lacked all colour and where he hair was usually pulled back in a tight bun, tendrils of hair fell around her face and she looked older than he had ever seen her. No one spoke as McGonagall slowly made her way over to where Harry, Ron and Hermione were sat.

“You three may s-see Lydia, if that is what you want,” McGonagall said, her voice unusually shakey, “before the burial tomorrow,”

Harry nodded mutely and Hermione did not look up from the floor. Ron seemed to be the only one who managed to find his voice.

“Yes, we’ll go,”

The three of them rose from the their seats and followed Professor McGonagall out into the deserted corridors. It was like a completely different Hogwarts, and Harry hated it. The corridor leading up to the Hospital Wing was a little more crowded than usual. Bill, Kingsley and Tonks stood by the doors, quietly talking to Professor Sprout who was dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Professor Dumbledore was in deep conversation with, and Harry felt a stab of annoyance when his eyes fell on him, Professor Snape who had the audacity to look somber. James was stood on the other side of the corridor with Fred, George and Remus, who was gripping onto James, apparently to stop him from launching at Snape. Various members of the DA were hovering awkwardly in a very tight group, and did not seem to know where to look. Upon seeing him, Mr and Mrs Weasley threw their arms around Ron and within seconds, they were all crying.

Harry looked over at George and regretted it almost immediately. Their were deep bags under his bloodshot eyes and Fred seemed to be holding him up. They locked eyes for a minute and then Harry looked away. George Weasley was the last person that Harry wanted to speak to at the moment.
Professor Dumbledore cleared his throat and they all looked over at him. Harry looked over at him and felt a wave of anger overtake him. He still could not help but put all the blame on Dumbledore, and he did not think that he would ever not blame him for what he had done. Only a monster would have told an emotionally drained fifteen year old girl that she would have to die in order to defeat the Wizard who had destroyed her life in the first place.

“Before Lydia is put to rest tomorrow, I wanted to give those who knew her best one last chance to say goodbye. Family,” he looked over at Harry and James, “will go first. Followed by the others. Before we begin to say our farewell, I must bring up the subject of eulogies.”

“I'm doing one,” James said quickly.

Dumbledore nodded and looked over at Harry who looked away almost immediately.

“As her head of house-” Snape began.

“As her head of house, you will sit in silence,” James snapped, taking everyone by surprise, “If any teacher is speaking, it's Minerva,”

McGonagall looked shocked but nodded anyway, “it would be an honour,”

Professor Dumbledore nodded again and then looked over at Harry and James and gestured for them to walk into the Hospital Wing. Hermione took a step back from Harry but he whirled around and grabbed her hand, shaking his head.

“He said family-”

“Don't be ridiculous, Hermione,” Harry said, “You are family. You too, Ron,”

“And you, George,” James said quietly, putting his arm around his shoulders, “You are George, aren't you?”

“No,” Fred sighed, extracting himself from James' grip and pushing George forward, “he is,”

Even Harry managed to smile at that as they walked into the Hospital Wing, but the smile soon melted off his face. Madam Pomfrey had pulled all the curtains closed and the oil lamps were not burning at the full brightness.

“She's in a separate room,” Madam Pomfrey whispered, opening a door that Harry had never noticed before.

Ron, Hermione and George hung back slightly, allowing Harry and James to go first. James lead the way and Harry very slowly followed, trying to think of the best way to get out of having to see her. His mind did not work quickly enough and before he could even try and get away, he was at the foot of her bed. At first, he just stared down at the white sheet that covered her up to her stomach. His eyes slowly travelled upwards, stopping before he could look at her face. Madam Pomfrey had dressed her in one of the jumpers that Mrs Weasley had knitted her. It was her favourite one and the first that Mrs Weasley had ever made; it was Gryffindor red and had a silver snake on it. Lydia had learned how to charm it so that it would always fit her, no matter how much she grew.

Harry finally looked at her face, shocked to see that she looked so peaceful. Although, he wasn't really sure what he had been expecting. Whenever he thought of the Killing Curse, he never thought about peace. He thought about his dad shouting for his mother to run, and then his mum screaming for mercy. He thought about that old muggle man who had been needlessly murdered by Voldemort, and he thought about Cedric lying spread eagle on the floor in the graveyard, his eyes staring blankly
at the sky and a look of terror etched up his face forever.

And yet Lydia looked as though she was asleep. Her hair was pooled neatly around her head and her hands were crossed over her stomach. Harry did not know if he was seeing things or not, but she might have even been smiling slightly. Hermione whimpered slightly and looked at the floor, gripping onto Harry's hand so tight that it hurt. George took one look at her, shook his head and then hurried out of the room. If it weren't for the fact that he was doing his best to be there for his dad, Harry probably would have followed him.

“This is the neatest her hair has ever looked,” James said finally, breaking the silence.

Harry couldn't help it and he started laughing. Even Ron and Hermione managed to join in.

“It is a definite improvement,” Harry said quietly.

“If we keep on going on about her hair she's going to come and haunt us,” Ron muttered.

“Would that be a bad thing?” Hermione asked.

Hermione was the first to leave, and the others hastened to follow. When they got back out into the corridor, James muttered something about how the rest of them could go and see her if they wanted to. Mr and Mrs Weasley nodded and disappeared into the Hospital Wing, followed by Professor McGonagall and Professor Sprout. Not knowing what else to do with themselves, Harry, Ron, Hermione and James stayed outside the Hospital Wing and watched as people walked in to pay tribute to Lydia.

Professor McGonagall came out just two minutes after she had been in, looking quite shell shocked. Mrs Weasley came out moments later, sobbing and being supported by Mr Weasley who was also crying. Harry had to look away from the two of them, seeing them both cry hurt him in more ways than he could have imagined. He just hoped that they both knew how much both he and Lydia appreciated them. George went in again, though this time he went with Fred and Bill and seemed to be handle it better with two of his brothers.

Harry soon could not handle being around everyone crying and announced that he was going back to Gryffindor Tower. As he walked back to the common room, he tried not to think about the fact that he would be burning his sister the next day.

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The funeral was to be held at Godric's Hollow. They could not think of a better place to bury Lydia, though Harry could tell that James was dreading going back to Godric's Hollow. He had not been back since 1981 and never seemed o be in any rush to do so. Harry had never lived there long enough to even remember what it was like and he had always wanted to go to see where the place his parents had been killed out of a strange morbid curiosity. Though he would have preferred to go when Lydia was with him.

“Ready?” James asked, popping his head around Ron's bedroom door, “Great Merlin, this room is orange,”

They were at The Burrow and would Apparate there with the Weasleys. Ron was stood at his mirror, fiddling with his robes and scowled at James as he looked around the room, his eyes wide.

“I like the colour orange,”

“Clearly,” James muttered. He glanced back over at Harry who sat cross legged on Ron's beds, “it's
“gonna be OK, son,”

“No, it isn't,” Harry said, “it's going to be the worst day of my life,”

James nodded, “I know, but it's going to be the worst day of everyone's lives. We'll get through it together,”

Together, they walked back down into the kitchen where all the Weasleys were stood. George was sat with his head in his hands, staring down at a piece of parchment on the table. At first, Harry thought that maybe he had asked to do a eulogy, but then he realised that everyone else had a piece of parchment in their hands as well.

“What's going on?” Ron asked.

“She wrote loads of letters,” Hermione whispered, clutching onto her own, “school have only just managed to send them all out. I thought - I thought she only wrote to Harry and James,” she walked over to Ron and handed him a rolled up piece of parchment, “this one's addressed to you,”

Ron took the scroll in his hands and looked down at it as though he couldn't quite believe that it was in his hands, and then he opened it. He was silent for a few moment and then he scoffed loudly.

“She's insulted me three times in the first paragraph!” he exclaimed. Then, out of nowhere, he burst into tears, “I miss her,”

Bill sighed and put his arm around him, “We all do, Ron, we all-” he glanced down at the letter and then sniggered, “she is right though, you are an overly-freckled knobhead,”

“If it makes you feel better, she said that I was the less attractive twin,” Fred said, “but I'm just assuming that she got me and George mixed up. It makes more sense,”

George hit Fred around the head without even looking up from his own letter and then shoved it in the inside of his robes and looked up, “she wrote a whole paragraph about how bitter she is- she was because I had better hair than her,”

There was a few seconds of silence and then the whole kitchen was full of laughter. Even Harry managed to find it in himself to laugh. For as long as he could remember, Lydia had been very bitter about the fact that she had inherited their dads hair because no matter how hard she tried, she could not control it.

“All the Weasley's have great hair,” Lydia said out of nowhere. It was the summer holidays before their fifth year and they were sat in the shade of some trees in Privet Drive, desperate to escape both the Dursleys and the sun.

“Come again?” Harry said.

“All the Weasley’s have great hair,” Lydia repeated, “Have you ever noticed?”

“Um, no,” Harry said, frowning at her, “I have never noticed that,”

“You've lived with Ron for four years and you've never noticed that no matter what, his hair is always perfect,” Lydia exclaimed, “and do you know what Ginny does to her hair in the morning?”

Harry sighed, “what does Ginny do with her hair in the morning?”

“She brushes it, and then that's it for the day!” Lydia said, “Do you know what I do with my hair in
the morning? I have a fight with it! The only person who can ever make my hair look relatively nice is Hermione who is god knows where!"

“I feel like we have bigger things to worry about,” Harry muttered.

“Yeah, like how every time I stand next to George my hair looks worse than usual,” Lydia exclaimed, “those bloody Weasleys and their perfect bloody hair…”

“Come on,” James said quietly, “it’s time to go,”

Harry tried not to take much notice of Godric’s Hollow, but it was quite difficult not to. It was a very quaint village and one that he would have very much liked to grow up in. As they silently walked to the cemetery, Harry couldn’t help but wonder if one of these cottages had belonged to James and Lily. They passed a pub and Harry thought that before they had had children, James and Lily probably went for a drink in there with Remus and Sirius. And maybe after they had had children they had started going in for some lunch. These thoughts carried him all the way to the cemetery.

Lydia’s coffin was already there, sat at the edge of a freshly dug cage. Harry looked closer at the headstone and felt his knees give way. Ron very quickly grabbed his arm and gently guided him to a chair.

Lily Potter

January 30th 1960 - October 31st 1981

Lydia Potter

July 31st 1980 - June 19th 1996

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death

“You know, I don’t know whether I can do this,” Ron said, looking around, “Is there somewhere I can go and-”

“I can’t do this either but we’re doing it together,” Harry said, “attending my sisters funeral wasn’t exactly high on the list of things I wanted to do today,”

The first part of the funeral went so quickly that Harry barely registered what was going on. A wizard with tufty hair stood besides the coffin and said a few words about how brave Lydia was. Harry felt as though this was a stupid thing to say. Everyone already knew how brave she was. When Dumbledore got up to make his speech, Harry looked at the ground and refused to listen, blocking out everything that he saying. He couldn't care less what Dumbledore had to say anymore. It was his fault that Lydia was dead in the first place and Harry felt as though he had a lot of nerve to stand in front of them all and say how sorry he was that she was dead.

“And now, a word from another of Lydia’s teachers, Professor McGonagall,” Dumbledore said, standing to the side.

“The first time I met Lydia, was a week after she and her brother were born,” Harry's head snapped up. He had never heard this story before, “and the next time I saw her, was after the fateful Halloween night, and I knew that the next time I saw them, they would not at all be the children that Lily and James would have brought them up to be, but they were OK. I knew that they would be safe at Hogwarts. Or..I thought they would be.
“Although Lydia was never in Gryffindor, she did become an honorary Gryffindor. So much so that sometimes I forgot she was not in my house and often gave house points to Gryffindor when I should have given them to Slytherin. She only started correcting me in her third year. Though, sometimes, I'm sure she let me take house points off Gryffindor instead of Slytherin,”

Harry smiled inwardly. He knew that Lydia used to let teachers take house points off Gryffindor when they got her house mixed up. He wondered why no one had ever called her out on it, though.

“Anyone who knew Lydia knew that she was not your average girl. Even from a young age she harboured a defiance that that I had only ever seen before in her mother. In fact, one of my clearest memories of the two of them are almost the same memory. I remember an eleven year old Lily Evans turning up to a Quidditch match with Slytherin colours painted on her cheeks, and Lydia turning up to one with Gryffindor colours painted on her cheeks.”

“Oh, why’d you have to mention Lily...” James muttered, putting his head in his hands. Next to James, Remus sighed and put his arm around him.

Some people laughed; perhaps they remembered the Quidditch match and the genuine controversy it caused, or perhaps the thought of an eleven year old going against the Hogwarts status quo was something ridiculous. The more Harry thought about it, the more he realised how ridiculous it really was. He felt as though that maybe he had never appreciated his sister for the amazing person she actually was.

“If we were all a little more like Lydia Potter, then maybe the world wouldn't be so bad,” she glanced at Lydia's coffin and a tear escaped her eye, “Rest easy, Miss Potter,”

“Finally, Lydia’s father, James, would like to say a few words,”

“Oh, fucking hell,” James muttered, standing up, “this is where I start crying for four hours and never stop,”

“You’ll be fine,” Remus whispered.

James cleared his throat and looked over the congregation and paled slightly, “Oh, wow, there's a lot of people here...” he cleared his throat again, “I would like to start by thanking everyone for coming today. She would have probably hate having all this attention on her, so it’s probably best that she has no idea what's going on right now. If she did, I can almost guarantee that she would be sat with Harry, Ron and Hermione complaining about everything and glaring at everyone who walked passed her,”

Harry snorted. He could see it now: she would probably be sat right besides him with her arms folded and slumped down in her chair, moaning about everything loudly. He sniggered at the memory of her actually making a second year cry because he had accidentally looked at her when she was glaring so fiercely at the wall.

“Um, I haven’t had the privilege of spending much time with either of my children as I would have liked to and, you know, now I’m not going to be able to spend any time with Lydia which isn’t how I thought - when I came back after - well, the first thing I thought of was Harry and Lydia. I had to know where they were if they were okay and they...they weren’t as okay as they should have been but they were my kids and that - that was enough.

“The thing with Lydia is that she never really ended up being the daughter that I imagined her to be, but I still wouldn’t have wanted her to be anything other from who she is - who she was. I never actually thought that I would end up with a child who both in Slytherin and a prefect but, I came
back from the dead so weirder things have happened...

“You know, I always imagined that I would be one of those dads who would always protect his daughter whenever she needed me but I very quickly realised that she didn’t need me to do that. I remember going to watch Harry in a Quidditch match and someone turned around to her and said, “it must be hard being the family disappointment,” and before I could say anything and without even looking over at them, Lydia just said, “Yeah, defeating Voldemort all those times...so disappointing,” it was at that moment that George turned around to her and they high fived that I realised that Potters just like redheads and Lydia was more than capable of standing up for herself. It was almost as though she didn’t need me,”

Harry chanced a glance over at George and regretted it almost immediately. Mr Weasley had his arm around his shoulder whilst he sobbed into his hands. Harry felt another rush of anger towards Dumbledore because all of this was his fault. It was his fault that James was having to make a eulogy at his daughters funeral, his fault that Hermione had not stopped sobbing for almost a week and his fault that Harry had lost more than any fifteen year old boy should have done.

“Anyway, I just wish...I wish I had more time wish her, but that doesn’t make me any less grateful for the time that I did get to end time with her,” James’ voice broke and he looked at the ground for a few seconds before looking back up and gently touching the coffin, “See you later, sweetheart.”

Finally, the funeral ended. Harry could not watch as they lowered the coffin into the ground and only looked back up as people began to rise from their seats and walk away. Hermione gently took his hand and turned to him, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“I don’t want to upset you but your Aunt, Uncle and cousin are here,” she said quietly.

Before Harry could say anything, James jumped up, “Where?”

“James, I don’t think you should speak to them,” Remus said quickly, “I don’t think-”

“I don’t think that Lydia would be very pleased if she knew that Vernon Dursley left her funeral without being punched,” James snarled, walking towards the gates of the cemetery where the Dursleys were stood, looking as though they weren’t really sure what to do with themselves.

Harry, Ron and Hermione glanced at each other and then very quickly followed him. Remus sighed again and followed them, muttering about how punching muggles was very illegal, but Harry did not think that James was very bothered about the law right now.

“What are you doing here?” James demanded, “no one wants you to be here!”

“I should ask you the same question!” Vernon snapped, “aren’t you meant to be dead?”

“Aren’t you meant to be bullying kids, or whatever it is you do?” James asked, “Harry and Lydia both told me what it was like growing up with you! And you ,” he rounded on Petunia who was trembling, “how could you do this to Lily? Do you think that if we had to take in Dudley we would treat him the way you treated our kids? Do you think we’d lock him in the cupboard under the stairs and treat him like an animal?”

“James, leave it,” Remus said, tugging on his arm, “Come on, we don’t have to worry about them anymore-”

“And we’re very happy to not have to worry about Lydia anymore,” Vernon exclaimed.

“Oh, no...” Hermione whispered, her eyes widening.
James stared at him for a few seconds as though he could not quite believe what had been said. Harry could not quite believe what had been said. Then, James drew his fist back and punched Vernon in the face.

“Knobhead,” James said.

“We won’t be taking him in again!” Petunia said shrilly, pointing at Harry.

“I don’t need you to be taking him in again, because he’s got his dad!” James yelled, “and I’m not going anywhere!”

Professor McGonagall very quickly swooped in and ushered them away from three very shell-shocked Dursley’s. Harry did not look back at them again. He would be more than happy to never see them again. Ron looked torn between crying and laughing whilst Hermione was shaking her head at James. Harry knew that punching Vernon probably wasn’t the best idea, but he couldn’t deny that it had made him ridiculously happy. His happiness very quickly evaporated when Dumbledore walked over to them.

“Now, Harry, I think it would be best that you go back to the Dursleys-”

“No,” Harry said, “No. I’m not doing that,”

“He can move in with me,” James said stiffly, “I have an apartment,”

Dumbledore regarded them for a moment and then nodded, “Of course. It is for the best,”

“Everyone is going for a drink in that pub over there,” Hermione said, “but I know neither of you are going to come,”

Harry smiled at her, “how is it that you know everything?”

Hermione shrugged, “I pay attention to everything unlike you and Ron,” she kissed him on the cheek, “See you soon, Harry,”

“See you, mate,” Ron said, hugging him, “write if you need anything,”

Harry nodded but did not say anything. What he really needed was his sister back, but he wasn’t sure that that was anything that anyone could achieve.

James turned to him, “Home?”

“Home,”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!
I promise that this isn't going to be depressing forever, it just seems like that at the moment.
I hope you're all still enjoying this!
-E.
Harry felt incredibly stupid for ever thinking that things might have been better at James’ apartment, because things were not better. Things might have even been worse, if such a thing was possible. Whenever there was a knock on the front door, Harry always expected it to be one of three people; Voldemort, Lydia or Sirius. It was always stressed members of the Order of the Phoenix who came in relaying urgent information to either James or Remus. There was a time when Harry would have gone out of his way to listen to what they were saying, but he had lost any and all interest in the Order and would just slope off to his bedroom whenever one of them arrived.

Really, Harry spent a lot of his days hoping for the Order to spill into the house because that meant that he could sit in his room and feel sorry for himself. He felt safe within the four walls of his bedroom to cry and to throw things at the walls in a desperate attempt to vent all the anger that was slowly but surely building up inside him like rust to metal. James had stuck pictures on the walls of Harry with Ron and Hermione, Harry with Lydia, Ron and Hermione, Harry with just Lydia but he had taken them down during the first week of the summer holidays. They reminded him of happy times that he would probably never experience again, and it was much easier to pretend that they had never happened in the first place. James had noticed the absence of pictures but had not said anything, probably because he was too depressed himself.

Remus also lived with them, though Harry rarely saw him for he was working to recruit other Werewolves before Voldemort did. Harry could tell that it was taking a toll on him, he came home every other night looking more tired than usual and with more grey hair than he left with. Without speaking, he would take whatever food that Mrs Weasley had sent over from The Burrow out of the fridge and then retreat into his bedroom.

The world seemed a lot darker without Lydia and Sirius. It was as though the sun had gone behind a dark storm cloud and was refusing to come back out. Sometimes Harry felt like going behind a cloud and refusing to come back out. He could not sufficiently put into words how he really felt, and he was worried that he would never be able to. Losing Sirius was hard enough on its own, but losing Lydia was like someone had punched him in the stomach and he could not quite catch his breath. He had only ever known a world where she was by his side, and he was certain that he didn’t like the world where she wasn’t by his side.

But Harry tried not to dwell on it, if not for the sake of his dad. Since the summer, all the light seemed to have drained from James’ eyes and where he usually filled the room with laughter, there was now only uncomfortable silences. Harry didn't even know what he was meant to say to him anymore.

He wasn't sure what he was meant to say to anyone. Both Ron and Hermione had wrote to him on multiple occasions, but he could not even bring himself to open the letters, never mind actually reading them and then writing back. Others from school had also written to them, but Harry had just shoved them all into a drawer in his desk. He knew that they were all writing to him out of the good of their hearts, but he wished that they wouldn’t. He needed to be alone for a while.

“Harry, Professor Dumbledore is here to see you,” James said, knocking on his bedroom door.

“I don’t want to see him,” Harry replied, watching a Golden Snitch buzz around the room.
“Come on, mate,” James said gently, “You can’t avoid him forever,”

Harry groaned but got up anyway and followed James out of his bedroom and into the living room where Professor Dumbledore was sat with Remus. Harry did not return Dumbledore’s smile and sat down on the couch farthest away from him. If Dumbledore picked up on this behaviour, he did not let on. James awkwardly cleared his throat and sat on the arm of the chair that Remus was sat on.

“Professor, what happened to your hand—” James said suddenly.

Harry looked over at Dumbledore and frowned for his hand was blackened and shrivelled. Dumbledore smiled pleasantly and shook his head.

“A story for another time,” Dumbledore said, “Now, Sirius’ will was discovered two days ago and he left everything to you three. Including Grimmauld Place,”

“Oh. Right,” James said. Remus put his head in his hands and Harry had a suspicion that he was crying.

“Can’t you just keep on using it as Headquarters?” Harry asked, wondering what the point of this conversation was, “That’s what you’ve been doing, isn’t it?”

“Not quite,” Dumbledore replied, “Black family tradition creed that the house was handed down the direct line, to the next male with the name of Black. Sirius was the very last of the line. While his will made it perfectly clear that he wanted you three to have the house, it is nevertheless possible that some spell or enchantment has been set upon the place to ensure that it cannot be owned by anyone other than a pure-blood,”

Remus looked up from his hands and nodded, his eyes bloodshot. “If Mrs Black was aware that a Werewolf, a blood traitor and a half-blood owned the house, I don’t think she would take it very well,”

“Quite,” said Dumbledore, “if such an enchantment distance, then the true owner of the house is Bellatrix Lestrange,”

“No,” James said quickly, “No. She isn’t owning the house,”

“Obviously, we would prefer that she didn’t get the house, but we do not truly know who owns the house and since Bellatrix could arrive on the doorstep at any point, we have had to move to The Burrow,”

Harry smiled slightly at the thought Mrs Weasley trying to stop Ron, Hermione and Ginny from listening in on Order of the Phoenix meetings.

“How are you going to find out if we’re allowed to own it?” Remus asked.

“A simple test,” Dumbledore replied, flicking his wand. There was a loud crack and House-Elf appeared. It took Harry a few moments to realise that it was Kreacher, a House-Elf that he had completely forgotten about.

“Kreacher won’t, Kreacher won’t, Kreacher won’t!” the House-Elf croaked, “Kreacher belongs to the Black Family! To Miss Bellatrix!”

“As you can see, Kreacher is showing a certain reluctance to pass into your ownership,”

“I don’t want to own a house-elf,” Harry said, thinking, for the first time in his life, about S.P.E.W.
“Neither do I,” James said, “Remus is great at cleaning,”

Remus retaliated by throwing a cushion at his head.

“I think that our best bet would be to have James give him an order,” Dumbledore continued, ignoring Kreacher’s constant shouting, “If he has passed into you ownership, he will have to obey. If not, then we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress,”

James looked shocked for a moment and then looked over at Kreacher who was lay face down on the floor, screaming and banging his fists of the carpet. He looked back over at Remus who just shrugged.

“Kreacher, shut up!”

At once, the house-elf fell silent and Dumbledore smiled, “That simplifies matters. You are the rightful owner of Grimmauld Place,”

“Everyone's favourite house,” Remus muttered, getting up and leaving the room.

“I’m not keeping him with me;” James said, “Can I send him to Hogwarts?”

“Now,” Dumbledore said, standing up after Kreacher had disappeared with another crack, “Another, ah, delicate issue - Lydia’s things are still at Hogwarts. Would you like to have them or-”

“We want them,” James said quickly.

Dumbledore nodded solemnly and then flicked his wand. Lydia’s trunk and a pile of boxes appeared on the floor in front of them.

“I shall leave you to it,”

Once Dumbledore left, they did not immediately start looking through Lydia’s things and acted as though they weren’t there. There was a part of Harry that didn’t even want to go through her belongings because it very much felt like an invasion of her privacy. He had to keep on reminding himself that since she was dead, they had very little choice but to sort through all her things and decide what they would do with them.

After a couple of days, it soon became clear that they could no longer act as though her belongings were not in the middle of the living room. Early one morning, whilst Remus was out, Harry and James sat on the floor to begin what Harry could only begin to imagine would be a very long and very painful process. He realised that Lydia’s entire life was stuffed into her trunk and some boxes and suddenly felt as though looking through it all would only send him even more insane than he already felt.

“There's no point in just staring at them,” James said, pulling the trunk closer to him and flicking it open.

“It feels like an invasion of her privacy,” Harry said.

“I know,” James said gently, “but we have to do it,”

As Harry could have predicted, it was not enjoyable. Harry carefully took out of her school uniform and folded it with shaking hands, thinking about how she would never wear it again. He un-pinned her Prefect badge from one of her jumpers and looked down at it, tears springing to his eyes. He remembered how she had not acted as though it was a big deal to not make him upset about the fact
that he was the only one who had not been made Prefect. As he stared down at the small green badge, he realised that he had never properly congratulated her for being made Prefect and felt a wave of guilt wash over him.

Putting the badge to the side, he took out all the jumpers that Mrs Weasley had ever knit her and carefully folded them up alongside her school uniform. The fact that she had kept them all, even the ones that didn’t really fit her, just proved what kind of person she was. James sat with the Marauders Map in his hands, staring down at it. He sighed loudly and then placed to the map to the side before taking out all her books and sorting through them.

Harry picked up her Potions book and flicked through it. She had written notes throughout the entire thing in a desperate attempt to help her understand it better, though she often said to him that no matter how many notes she made, she still couldn’t understand Potions. She would often go as far as saying that she was worse at Potions as Neville was, though Harry thought that she might have said that just to make Neville feel better about his own dismal Potions skills.

Whenever Harry picked up one of the books, he would automatically turn to the inside cover just so he could read, ‘Lydia Potter,’ in her handwriting. It made her feel less like a figment of his imagination. Sometimes he thought that she might have been a figment of his imagination that he had thought up to combat the loneliness that he felt at Privet Drive. But these books were proof that at some point in time, Lydia Potter had really lived.

“I’ve never seen this before,” James said, holding up a photo album.

Harry smiled, “Yeah, Hagrid made it for us in first year. Lydia took it because she didn’t trust me to not lose it,”

James laughed and began to flick through it, “I think she added to it,” he said, sliding the album across the floor to him and pointing at a picture that was taken by Colin Creevey in their second year, “You look older there,”

“Yeah...” Harry whispered, “Yeah, she must have done...”

He looked through the entire album, amazed at how many pictures had been taken of him over the years without him knowing; there was one of the two of them after Gryffindor won the Quidditch Cup in third year, another showed Harry and Ron playing a game of chess whilst Lydia and Hermione looked on, both rolling their eyes. There was another of them having a fierce snowball fight with Fred and George before the Yule Ball and one of the entire DA on their very first meeting, and Harry’s personal favourite; one of him, Lydia, Ron and Hermione taken in the sunshine right after the final Quidditch match of the year.

It ended rather abruptly and Harry couldn’t help but see the irony in the album ending as abruptly as Lydia’s life.

“Have you seen what she wrote on the very last page?” James asked, flipping to the back.

Harry bent closer to the page to read what Lydia had written;

“To Harry,

Happy seventeenth!

I’ve been planning this since we were eleven so you better have come up with the greatest present for me! I am your only sister, after all.
Love,
Lydia,”

He dropped the book as though it had stung him and pushed it back towards his dad, squeezing his eyes shut as tears threatened to spill over his cheeks. This had only reminded him that she had never planned to die and that she had not wanted to do that. She had wanted to live. She had wanted to live so much, that she had began planning his seventeen birthday six years in advance. And this only reminded Harry that in just a week, he would have to face his birthday alone for the first time ever.

“I’m going to be on my own on my birthday,” Harry said, looking up on his birthday, “I’ve never been on my own on my birthday,”

“You won’t be on your own, son,” James promised.

“Yes, I will be!” Harry exclaimed, jerking away from him when he tried to put his arm around him, “Lydia's dead, dad!”

“Harry,” James said gently, “I know it’s going to be-”

“I don’t want to do anything,” Harry said, “on my birthday. I don’t want to do anything. I’d rather act as though it's not happening,”

James regarded him for a moment and then nodded, “Of course, H, whatever you need,”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“You just did,”

Harry glared at James and he held up his hands, “Sorry, trying to catch up on all the dad jokes. You were saying?”

“How do you - how do you deal with not having mum around?” Harry asked.

James smiled at him sadly, “You’ve just got to keep on going, son. There’s not much you can do. Both your mum and Lydia would want you to keep on going. They can't go on but we can, for them,”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry this is shorter than usual, but it is only a bit of a filler chapter!

Anyway, thank-you for reading!

-E.
The Unhappiest of Birthdays

Chapter Notes

Since living with a Werewolf, Harry had started the quite annoying habit of constantly checking the lunar cycle. Not because he was terrified that Remus was going to suddenly transform and kill him, but because he wanted to make sure that he wasn't doing anything that would make Remus feel even more ill than he already did. In the week leading up to the full moon, Remus spent most of his days lay on the couch with the fire roaring in front of him despite the fact that it was mid July. When Harry asked James why the fire was on, he just explained how Remus always got strangely cold before he transformed and had to go out of his way to stay warm.

Harry had never felt more sorry for Remus than he did when he watched him move around the flat. He moved as though every bone in his body was breaking and he often complained about having a headache. The worst thing about it all was the fact that they could do nothing to help him. James actually had to sit Harry down and explain that sometimes the best thing to do with Remus before he transformed was to just leave him alone, because there really was very little that they could do to help him.

Worrying about Remus was still not a good enough distraction from grieving for Lydia and Sirius. It seemed like there was nothing to distract him from what was going on in his head. Whenever he closed his eyes, he would see Sirius falling through the veil or Lydia disappearing in a flash of green light, and this only got worse when he tried to sleep. In his sleep, it was like he was back in the Department of Mysteries, watching Bellatrix kill Sirius. And then he would see Lydia calmly walk through the veil, and there was never anything Harry could do stop her from going in. He would shout her name and even try to run after her, but she would ignore him and just as he reached his arm out to grab her hand, she would be gone.

So he tried not to sleep. Instead, he sat on the window ledge and stared out over London, wondering what lay ahead of him. Sometimes he would get distracted by the almost full moon, or he would convince himself that there was a Dark Mark glowing brightly against the dark night sky, or he would drive himself insane thinking about what Voldemort was doing at that exact moment. He thought about Voldemort more than he wanted to, but it as quite difficult to not constantly think about the man who was hellbent on killing you.

The mantra, “Don't let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort,” chased itself around Harry's head, and he had quickly grown to hate it. He knew that Lydia had the best intentions when she wrote that, but it was much easier said than done. It was also much easier to believe it in when you wrote it just before you died. It was hard to not let everything destroy him. Sinking into the darkness that was slowly but surely clouding his mind seemed much easier than trying to kill the darkest wizard that there had ever been.

As guilty as it made him feel, Harry didn't even know if he wanted to kill Voldemort anymore. When he had seen Neville’s parents in St Mungo’s, he had wanted to kill Voldemort because it was him that had ripped all those families apart. When he had watched Sirius fall through the veil, he had wanted to kill Voldemort because it was because of him that Harry no longer had a godfather. But when he sat through his sisters funeral and tortured himself when thinking about what it must have been like for her to turn her wand on herself, he didn't care anymore. As far as he was aware, Voldemort had won and it was much easier to sit back and let the Ministry do whatever it was that they wanted to do. Going after Voldemort would just make it easier for him to kill Harry, and he
wasn't in the business of looking to make things easier for the man who had destroyed his family. Of course, he hadn't said this to anyone. He didn't want people to think that he was giving up because then they would just worry about him even more, but he would not be embarrassed to admit that he had given up.

“Sorry, Lyds,” he whispered, flicking through the photo album and stopping on a picture of them both sat by the lake on a bright sunny day, “I think I'm going to let it destroy me,”

---

“You're going to The Burow tonight, is that OK?” James asked Harry over breakfast, “and then we’ll stay for the rest of the summer,”

Harry felt his heart sink and looked up at his dad, “Do I have to?”

“Yes,” James said firmly, “You can't avoid people forever, Harry. It's the full moon tomorrow as well and Remus doesn't want you to be around for it. I don't want you to be around for it,”

“I've already been around him when he's transformed so-”

“No,” James said, cutting across him, “It's going to be his first transformation since everything that's happened and it's not going to be a fun one,”

“Have they ever been fun?” Remus grumbled, limping past them with a blanket wrapped around him.

“You know what I mean, Moony,” James sighed. He turned back to Harry, “Go and pack your things before you forget.”

Harry groaned and dragged himself to his bedroom. He didn't begin packing straight away, he just flopped down face first onto his bed and began his daily routine of feeling generally sorry for himself. It was only when James walked past his bedroom door and dragged his trunk into the middle of the room that Harry got up and actually began to drop his things into the trunk.

The Burrow was the last place on earth that Harry wanted to be, which was a strange turn of events considering there was once a time in his life where it was the only place he wanted to be outside of Hogwarts. Now, however, it just served of a remnant of a time when Lydia was still alive and his life wasn't as big of a disaster as it was now. He knew that going to The Burrow meant that Mrs Weasley would fuss over him, Ron would do nothing but give him sad looks and Hermione would try and give him daily counselling lessons, which was the last thing that he needed. The only upside to the whole thing was that he would be able to gorge himself on Mrs Weasley's cooking.

Around lunchtime, James knocked on Harry's bedroom door.

“You can Floo over now,” he said, picking up his trunk and dragging it out of the room for him.

Resigned to the fact that there was no way he was going to get out of going, Harry sighed and followed his dad over to the fireplace and tried not to think about how terrible the rest of his summer was going to be.

“I'll see you later, OK?” James said, hugging him, “I’ll be there early tomorrow morning.”

Harry nodded but didn't say anything. Tears had suddenly sprang to his eyes and he was angry at himself for crying, again. Instead, he just turned away from his dad and stepped into the fireplace,
barely taking any notice of what he was doing until he thudded into the living room of The Burrow. Hedwig hooted angrily from her cage.

“Harry!”

He looked up just as Hermione flung her arms around his neck and he staggered backwards, almost falling into the fire.

“Jesus, Hermione,” Harry muttered, “I can't breathe,”

“Sorry!” she exclaimed, jumping back, “Are you OK? Ron and the others are in the garden playing Quidditch, I'll go and-”

“Harry, is that you dear?” came Mrs Weasley's voice. The moment she came into the living room and saw him, her eyes filled with tears and she hurried over to him, hugging him. “Are you alright? Have you eaten? Would you like something to eat?”

“I’m fine, Mrs Weasley,” he said, “I’ve just eaten,”

“And you don't need anything-”

“I don't need anything else,” he said, “I'm fine, honestly,”

He was well aware that neither Hermione or Mrs Weasley believed what he was saying, but they dropped the subject. Whilst Mrs Weasley hurried back into the kitchen, Hermione linked his arm and they walked out into the back garden where the other Weasleys were playing Quidditch. Harry looked up at them and felt his heart sink, he had not thought about how difficult it would be for him to be surrounded by so many siblings.

“Ron!” Hermione shouted, “Ron! Harry's here!”

Very quickly, Ron, Charlie and Ginny landed on the ground and hurried over to them. He forced a smile onto his face and assured them all that he was doing fine, and that if they should be worried about anyone, it should be poor Remus.

“Want a game, Harry?” Charlie asked, throwing a Quaffle up and down in the air.

“Uh..”

“I think it'll be good for you,” Ginny said, “You’ve got your stuff, haven't you?”

“I don't really feel like it,” Harry said, “I’m a bit tired,”

He was saved from having an awkward conversation about why he suddenly didn't want to play his favourite game in the world by the unexpected arrival of Fleur Delacour. Admittedly, Harry had not given her much thought since the TriWizard Tournament and could not work out what she was doing at The Burrow of all places.

“‘Arry!” she exclaimed, hugging him, “eet iz so good to see you again!”

“Um, you too, Fleur,” Harry replied, trying to mask his confusion.

“I am so sorry about Lydia,” she said solemnly, taking his hands in hers, “eef there is anything you need, please tell me,” she smiled at him and then turned to Ginny, “Your mother wants you, Ginny,”

“I would do anything to hex her,” Ginny grumbled.
“Don’t be awful, Gin,” Charlie sighed, “she’s only being nice,”

Ginny glared at him, “You only like her because she’s the only person in the family who’s not fed up of you going on about Dragons all day,” she snapped before stomping back over to the house.

“Why’s she here?” Harry asked, frowning.

“She’s engaged to Bill,” Hermione told him, “and no one is particularly happy about it,”

“Oh,” Harry said, “I didn’t even know she’d moved to England,”

The rest of the day was not particularly fun. Everyone seemed to be tiptoeing around the subject of Lydia and Sirius which just made Harry feel even worse. The Burrow felt strangely empty without Lydia and when Hermione asked him when James was coming, he almost said that he was coming with Remus and Sirius the next day, but quickly stopped himself.

That evening, Harry, Ron and Hermione sat around a fire in the back garden. The sun had not fully set yet and was casting a warm glow across the garden. Harry lay flat on his back with his arms crossed over his stomach and feeling the most peaceful that he had done in weeks. Ron sat and stared into the fire whilst Hermione leaned back against a tree, reading a book. If it weren’t for the fact that Lydia was missing, Harry might have said that it was a perfect evening.

“Do you want to do anything your birthday tomorrow, Harry?” Ron asked suddenly, “mum wants to know,”

“No,”

He heard Hermione sigh and then close her book, “Nothing at all?”

“No,” Harry repeated. He propped himself up on his elbows and then looked over at Ron and Hermione, “I’m not in the mood. It feels wrong to celebrate without her,”

“I understand,” Hermione said quietly, wiping her eyes.

He lay back down and didn’t say anything for a while.

“You know, she got me a seventeenth birthday present,”

“What?” Ron asked.

“Remember that photo album Hagrid got us? She started adding to it and was going to give it to me on my seventeenth. Me and my dad found it in her trunk,” Harry said, “I’ll show it to you tomorrow,”

“It’s strange, isn’t it?” Hermione said, “her not being here,”

“I keep on going to ask where she is,” Ron admitted, “and then I remember...”

“It’ll stop being strange one day though, won’t it?” Harry asked.

Neither of them answered, and Harry didn’t blame them.

---

“Happy Birthday, son,”
“I told you, I don't want to do anything,” Harry mumbled, not looking up from his cup of tea.

James and Remus, both looking quite dishevelled after the full moon, had arrived that morning. Mrs Weasley had immediately descended on Remus and put a massive plate of breakfast in front of him and began to tend to his wounds, despite his many protestations. His protests fell on deaf ears, of course, because Harry was not sure that there had ever been a time in her life when Mrs Weasley had turned her back on someone when they needed helped.

“I'm not ignoring your birthday,” James said firmly, “we don't have to make a deal out of it, but I still want to acknowledge it. I'm not Vernon Dursley,”

“I don't think you'd suit the moustache,” Ron said, looking closely at James, “You don't have the face for it,”

“Thanks, Ron,” James sighed, looking ever so slightly offended.

“Arthur and Bill should be home early today,” Mrs Weasley told him, “Fred and George said that they would love to come, but they're very busy with the shop. We’ll see them when we go to Diagon Alley, though,”

Harry nodded at this but didn't say anything. They all knew that Fred and George would have been able to get away from the shop for one evening, but George won't have wanted to face everyone of Harry and Lydia's birthday. Harry didn't even want to face anyone on his and Lydia's birthday.

“I have an announcement!” James said loudly, making Harry jump.

“What?” Hermione asked.

“I'm working at Hogwarts next year,” He said, grinning.

Harry choked on his cereal and looked up at his grinning dad, fear suddenly clouding his brain.

“You're not - you're not the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, are you?”

“Oh, Merlin, no. No, definitely not, don't worry,” James said quickly, “No. I’m replacing Madam Hooch,”

“With you as referee, Gryffindor will definitely win the Quidditch cup!” Ron said cheerily, “there's no way you won't be biased!”

“You're going to get sacked,” Remus muttered.

Despite the fact that he was having the unhappiest of birthdays, even Harry momentarily forget about his grief as the day wore on. Everyone in the house seemed to have reached an unspoken agreement to still celebrate his birthday without openly celebrating it. There were no banners, no cards, no cakes or singing of Happy Birthday and Harry felt much better for it. Mrs Weasley still cooked a magnificent feast and Harry somehow managed to eat his way through five courses, plus second helpings and not get full. It was the maybe the best day he had had in a long time and the thought of it eventually coming to an end made him want to curl up in a ball and cry.

There was a stark change in the atmosphere, however, when Bill casually mentioned how the O.W.L results would come the next morning and Hermione went into a sudden state of panic. Ron pointing out that there was nothing for her to worry about because she would pass everything anyway did not help matter for she just started talking about all the questions she was sure that she had gotten wrong.
Harry had not thought about his O.W.L results once over the summer holidays. After everything that happened, they seemed quite inconsequential. He wasn't expecting much, anyway. All he knew, and really cared about, was the fact that he was quite sure he had gotten an O in Defence Against the Dark Arts. Anything else was just a bonus. He wasn't expecting much from History of Magic considering he collapsed half way through, and he never gave much thought to Potions, he was just happy about the fact that he would not have to take it again that year.

“I can already guarantee that I failed Divination,” Ron said.

“You never know, Ron,” Mr Weasley said, “I thought I'd failed my Potions O.W.L but I didn't.”

“Yeah, and Fred and George thought they weren't going to get any but they still managed to pull off getting three,” Bill said, chuckling.

“If Moony can pass Potions, anything is possible,” James said, “I’ll never forget the look on Sirius’ face when -” he faltered, “it doesn't matter. Whatever,”

An uncomfortable silence followed this and Harry looked at the floor. He had managed to go the whole day without crying and he would have preferred to have kept it that way.

“Who wants desert?” Mrs Weasley asked, breaking the silence.

Through a mixture of grief and anxiety at what the next day would bring, Harry did not sleep well that night. He lay wide awake in Fred and George’s old room, staring up at the ceiling. He could not help but wonder how Lydia would have felt about her O.W.L results. She had never done very well under pressure and he would never forget her getting so stressed about their upcoming exams that she flung a Potions book with such force that it broke one of the windows in Gryffindor tower.

“Fucking hell, Lyds!” Ron bellowed, “you need to chill out!”

“See, this is why I don't do work in the Slytherin common room,” she mumbled, “if I'd have thrown that into the window down there, the entire lake would be in the common room,”

“That's an easy way to get all of Slytherin house to hate you,” Harry sighed, flicking through his Transfiguration book but not getting a lot done.

“You say that as though they don't all hate me already,”

Harry felt as though he had barely closed his eyes when Hermione burst into his room, waving letters above her head.

“They're here, they're here!” she yelled. She stuck her head back out of the bedroom door, “Hurry up, Ron!”

“Yeah, yeah...” came Ron's disgruntled voice, “I'm coming...I'm coming...”

Harry shoved his glasses onto his face and looked down at the letters that she had dropped onto the bed and frowned.

“There's four of them,”

“I know,” Hermione said gently, “they sent Lydia's as well. They must have still marked them,”

“We should open them downstairs,” Ron said, hastily changing the subject, “or my mum might kill me,”
Downstairs, Mrs Weasley, James and Remus were already sat around the kitchen table. Immediately, the three of them all jumped to give them all advice that didn't really happen. Hermione was pacing up and down the kitchen, throwing her envelope from one hand to the other, Ron had dropped his down onto the table and didn't look as though he was going to open it anytime soon, whilst Harry could do nothing but stare down at the letter that was addressed to Lydia.

“Come on, you lot, you're going to have to open them eventually,” James said finally.

Harry dropped Lydia's letter onto the table and opened his own, well aware of the fact that he could not give less of a shit of what was written on the parchment inside.

\[\text{Astronomy - A}\\ 
\text{Care - E}\\ 
\text{Charms - E}\\ 
\text{Defence Against the Dark Arts - O}\\ 
\text{Divination - P}\\ 
\text{Herbology - E}\\ 
\text{History of Magic - D}\\ 
\text{Potions - E}\\ 
\text{Transfiguration - E}\\ \]

“Oh,” Harry said softly, “I did OK,”

James bounded over to him and grabbed the results out of his hands before laughing loudly.

“You did better than \text{OK}, Harry!” he exclaimed, hugging him, “You did really well!”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “I guess I did,”

Once Hermione had finished crying and Ron had stopped going on about how he really thought he was going to fail everything, all eyes fell on Lydia's results. No one seemed to want to open them, Harry least of all.

“Moony, open them,” James said, sliding the letter down the table.

“Why me?” Remus asked, inching away from the letter as though it would attack him.

“You're the least likely to cry,” James said.

“Not my place,” Remus replied, sliding them back down the table, “You should do it.”

After a few minutes of grumbling, James picked the letter up and opened it. Harry watched as his eyes slid down the results and slowly filled with tears. He dropped into the chair at the end of the table, his head in his hands. Harry snatched the results back off the table and had the same reaction as James. He collapsed into the chair next to his dad and furiously wiped his eyes, feeling yet another wave of anger towards Dumbledore. She should have been alive to look at her O.W.L results and be proud of how well she had done.

“Let me see,” Hermione said quietly, gently taking them out of Harry's hands and reading them out loud.

\[\text{Ancient Runes - O}\\ 
\text{Arithmancy - E}\\ 
\text{Astronomy - E}\\ 
\text{Care of Magical Creatures - E}\\ \]
“She passed Potions,” Hermione said, “she actually passed Potions,”

“Well, I don't know how she passed that,” Ron said, “I don't think I ever saw her brew a Potion correctly,”

Harry could not have joined in on the conversation even if he had really wanted to. He seemed to have been attacked by another stronger wave of grief and was unable to move from where he was sat. Lydia had done all that work for nothing. Had Dumbledore been aware of this? Had he known that Lydia had been working to pass her O.W.L’s for nothing? Had he ever felt a slight pinch of guilt when he saw her pouring over a Transfiguration book during breakfast knowing that it would all be for nothing? Or had he simply saw her working hard and felt no guilt or sorrow at all? He was probably to engrossed in making sure that she could die at the exact right time to bother about what else she might have been done.

“Um, Harry?” James said, his voice sounding strange, “there's something else in your Hogwarts letter,”

“What?” Harry asked, his voice heavy.

“You're captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team,”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry I was a bit slow to upload, but I really struggled with this chapter for some reason.

Anyway, I hope you're still enjoying this!

-E
The once bright and lively Diagon Alley had been replaced with a drab and lifeless place that Harry did not recognise. Where people used to stop and talk to their fellow shoppers, they now hurried past, their eyes trained on the ground and clinging tightly onto their wands. Posters of wanted Dark Witches and Wizards covered every shop front, and Harry was forced to stare at the picture of Bellatrix Lestrange sneering down at him. Her cackle are she had killed Sirius echoed through her mind and he had to pretend to tie his shoelace to stop himself from having a panic attack. He crouched on the ground and took deep breaths, trying to remind himself that Bellatrix Lestrange was nowhere near him and that they were as safe as they could possibly be.

Weasleys Wizards Wheezes was unlike any shop that Harry had ever seen. It stood out against its depressing neighbours and was the only shop that wasn't covered in posters of Dark Witches and Wizards. James let out a low whistle as they neared the front door and Ron swore, earning a glare off Mrs Weasley who was looking up at the shop with a mixture of both pride and fear. Although, Harry was quite sure that the fear came from the fact that there was a poster on the window with the words, “You-Know-Poo,” printed across it in bright letters.

“They’re going to be murdered in their beds!” Mrs Weasley whimpered.

“Let's go in,” Mr Weasley said quietly, casting an uneasy look at the sign.

The inside of the shop was just as amazing as the outside; it was full to the brim and Remus got swept away into the crowd almost immediately. The same person kept on stepping on Harry’s foot and James managed to trip over both Ron and Hermione at the same time. The walls were lined with every product that Harry had watched Fred and George test the previous years from Skiving Snackboxes, to fireworks, to joke wands and the Headless Hats that Lydia found both amusing and terrifying. Harry picked up one of the Headless Hats and turned to Lydia, intending to terrify her, but then he remembered that she was dead and dropped it back into the basket, feeling rather deflated.

He seemed to be the only one who suddenly wasn’t very happy to be there. Hermione, Ginny and Mrs Weasley were giggling near some Love Potions, Ron and Remus were in fits of laughter at the sight of Mr Weasley being amazed at some muggle magic tricks that no one else would have found interesting. James’ eyes were alight in a way that told Harry he would probably have to be careful around him in school, especially with the way that he was looking at the Portable Swamps.

Harry slowly walked around the shop, trying to find everything as funny as the others did, but he could not bring himself to. It seemed that every thing that he laid his eyes on somehow reminded him of Lydia, and all he really wanted to do was go back to The Burrow and not leave until it was time to go back to school. He stood near a cage of Pygmy Puffs and watched as a girl wearing a Slytherin jumper laughed hysterically as her friend got attacked by a Joke Scarf (the joke being that whoever put one on was immediately strangled back the scarf. Harry had never found them particularly funny).

“Hi, Harry,”

He turned around to find a rather forlorn looking George wearing brightly coloured robes that clearly didn’t reflect how he was looking. His skin was paler than usual and there were deep bags under his eyes. Harry liked to think that he looked so tired because of the shop, but as he looked over at Fred
and saw that he looked much better than his twin, he realised that George’s appearance probably had something to do with Lydia.

“Alright, George?”

“Yeah, you?”

“Yeah,” he replied, “shops, great, by the way,“

“Oh, yeah, cheers,”

They fell into an awkward silence and Harry looked around, trying to find something to talk about. It was George who finally broke the silence.

“How did you do in your O.W.L’s?”

“Oh, yeah, quite well, actually,” Harry said, “They, uh, they sent Lydia’s as well,”

George’s eyes flickered to the floor for a moment and then he looked back up at Harry, “how’d she do?”

“Great,” Harry said, “Yeah...O’s in Ancient Runes and Defence...E’s in basically everything else...” He snorted, “and she passed Potions,”

“You’re joking?”

“No,” Harry laughed, “she actually passed Potions,”

George laughed quietly, “There's first time for everything, I guess,” he glanced around the shop, “anyway, I should get back to work. See you around, Harry,”

Harry stayed where he was for a while, tears burning his eyes. The fact that she wasn’t here to see any of this was so unfair. It had been Lydia's idea in the first place to give Fred and George the money for the joke shop and now she would never get to see what their money had gone on to create.

“Harry, this money...we don’t need it,” Lydia said quietly, staring down at the bag in her hands.

Since they had come back at the same time, the winnings had been split, though Harry did not feel particularly victorious.

“I know,” Harry said, “but what else are we going to do with it?”

She bit her lip and looked up at him, “Don’t think I’ve gone crazy but...why don’t we give it to Fred and George?”

“Why would we give it to Fred and George?”

“Well, the rest of the Weasley’s aren't going to take it, are they? And there's no one else who deserves it more than them...” Lydia said, speaking very slowly, “And Fred and George want to open that bloody joke shop, don't they? And their stuff is actually pretty good and Merlin knows we’re going to need all the laughs we can get from now on,”

An image of Lord Voldemort’s face flashed to the front of Harry’s mind and he nodded.

“You’re right,”
Lydia grinned at him, “Of course I am. I’m always right,”

He was brought sharply back down to earth by Ron putting his hand on his shoulder and asking if he was OK. His voice sounded distant but Harry nodded anyway, muttering something about how creepy Headless Hats were. Ron laughed and nodded his agreement, pointing out all the products in the shop that could be used to cause some real damage at Hogwarts. Hermione tutted and shook her head, pointing out that as a Prefect, he would have to be the one to make sure that none of these products could cause any real damage. Harry almost pointed out that Lydia probably wouldn’t confiscate any Weasley products but quickly stopped himself, realising that they probably wouldn’t know what she would actually do.

They wandered over to the front of the shop so that Hermione could look at the Pygmy Puffs that she had become quite obsessed with. Ron rolled his eyes at the back of her head and muttered something about Crookshanks. Harry, not wanting to listen to them bicker, looked out of the window to see Draco Malfoy hurrying down the street on his own, glancing over his shoulder. Harry frowned and watched him more closely until he disappeared out of sight down-Knockturn Alley!’’ Harry exclaimed.

“What?” Hermione asked.

“Malfoy just went down Knockturn Alley!’’

“And?’” Ron asked, stifling a yawn, “he fits the clientele,’’

“Quick, get under here,’’ Harry said, pulling out his Invisibility Cloak.

“Seriously? We’re stalking Malfoy now?’” Ron asked.

“What if someone sees us go under the cloak?’” Hermione asked anxiously, looking around, “Mrs Weasley would-’’

Harry didn’t listen to what she was saying and threw the cloak over the three of them. With Ron now being so tall, it was difficult for them to walk quickly without their feet being seen, but Harry was sure that no one would be paying them too much attention.

“Look where he is!’ Hermione said as they slid down Knockturn Alley.

They arrived outside Borgin and Burkes. Harry glanced inside and grimaced, it looked no different to the way that it had done the last time he had been in there; full of ancient artefacts that Harry was convinced were all contaminated with a Dark Curse or two. Malfoy stood in the middle of the room with his back to the window, seemingly talking animatedly an moving his hands around a lot. Harry frowned, thinking that this behaviour was quite strange for he had never seen Malfoy talk so passionately about anything in his life. Harry turned to ask Lydia if he was ever like this in the Slytherin common room and mentally kicked his brain for not letting him fully process Lydia’s death.

“Who’s he talking to?’” Hermione whispered.

“That’s Borgin,’’ Harry whispered back. He was facing Malfoy and looked quite fearful.

“Here,’’ Ron said, taking out three Extendable Ears and passing them out.

“...you know how to fix it?’” Malfoy asked.

The hairs on the back of Harry’s stood up for it as though Malfoy was standing right next to them.
“Possible,” replied Borgin in a way that sounded like he wasn’t too pleased to be having this conversation, “I’ll have to see it, though. Why can’t you bring it into the shop?”

“It has to stay put,” Malfoy said firmly, “you just need to tell me how to do it,”

“Borgin shook his head, “I can’t do it without seeing it,”

“No?” Malfoy asked sneeringly, “would this make you more confident?” He moved towards Borgin and was blocked from view by a cabinet. All Harry could see was that Borgin looked very frightened.

“Tell anyone, and there will be retribution. Do you know Fenrir Greyback? He’s going to be checking in to make sure you’re giving the problem your full attention,”

“There will be no need for-”

“I’ll decide that,” Malfoy snapped, “I’d better be off. Keep that one safe. I’ll need it,”

“Why don’t you take it now?”

“How would I look carrying that down the street?”

“Move, move,” Hermione hissed, “he’s coming!”

They reached Diagon Alley and whipped the cloak off themselves just as Malfoy got to the top of Knockturn Alley. He looked to the left and right as though crossing the street and his face melted into an ugly sneer when he laid eyes on the tree of them. Though that wasn't what Harry noticed about him. He couldn’t quite believe how terrible Malfoy looked. His hair was not immaculate like it normally was and his skin was grey and lifeless. Even his robes looked rather tattered and worn, as though he had just pulled the first ones on that he had saw that morning.

“Is there a reason you’re staring, Potter?” Malfoy asked, sounding quite bored.

“Fuck off, Malfoy,” Ron snapped.

Draco smiled slightly at Ron and his eyes flickered over to Fred and George’s shop, “I wonder how long that's going to last? Times are changing...”

“Let’s go,” Hermione said quietly, shoving Harry and Ron forward, “he's just trying to start a fight,”

“You know what ‘times are changing’ means, don't you?” Ron asked furiously as they walked away from him, “he’s talking about blood supremacy and-”

“Drop it, Ronald,” Hermione said sharply, “he’s always been like that,”

“He’s not always been a death eater though, has he?” Harry said.

Both Ron and Hermione stopped in their tracks to turn to Harry, their eyes wide.

“Harry, Malfoy isn’t a-”

“He mentioned Fenrir Greyback who's in with Voldemort! His dad was there the night Voldemort came back and now that Malfoy Senior is in prison, he needed someone to fill in for him, and who’s better to fill in for him than his son?”

“They aren’t going to let a sixteen year old join the death eaters, Harry!” Hermione said impatiently
as they slipped back into the shop unnoticed.

“He has the Dark Mark! That's what he showed-”

“Who has the Dark Mark?” James asked, walking over to them with his arms full of products. When he saw Ron frowning at them he grinned, “I've only got these so I know what I'm up against when term starts!”

“No one has the Dark Mark,” Hermione said, “we were talking about those weird edible Dark Marks that Fred and George are selling,”

“All things considered, they actually taste quite nice,” James said.

“You're like a child,” Remus sighed.

“You just bought some fireworks!”

“For bonfire night!” Remus snapped.

“Which isn't for months,” James muttered to Harry, Ron and Hermione.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is shorter than usual, but hopefully the chapters will get longer from now on!

Thank-you for all the Kudos, though! It's much appreciated!

-E.
Harry was in a dimly lit room that might have been familiar to him, but he couldn’t quite work out
where he had seen it before. Something shone brightly in the middle of the room and he moved
towards, curious as to what it was before becoming rooted the spot and being unable to move as
people suddenly appeared around him; to his right, his mother stood. She smiled sadly at him before
walking to the shining object in the middle of the room and disappearing through it. It took him a
moment to realise that it the Veil and he tried to run forward as Cedric Diggory walked forward and
disappeared through it.

“N-No!” Harry yelled, “N-No, stop it!”

His protests fell on deaf ears as Sirius walked passed him. Without so much as looking back at
Harry, he walked through the Veil and was gone. Before Harry could even begin to protest what he
had just seen, someone brushed passed his shoulder and he turned around as quickly as he could to
see Lydia, determinedly walking towards the Veil.

Finally, Harry could move and he launched himself towards her, his hand closing around her arm.
Hope blossoming in his heart, Harry yanked her back and away from the Veil. They crashed into
each other and fell to the floor, rolling away from each other. Cursing, Lydia jumped up again and
started to walk back to the Veil but Harry jumped up again and grabbed Lydia around the middle,
wrenching her backwards.

“Harry!” She yelled, wrestling free from his grip, “Stop it!”

“You’re not going through the Veil,” he said desperately, “You can’t!”

“Okay, then,” she said softly, “I won’t go through,”

“Really?” Harry asked.

She nodded and then, before Harry could actually register what she was doing, she whipped out her
wand and turned it on herself. The entire room room was consumed with green light and through it
all, Harry could just make out her crumpled body on the floor.

“NO! NO! NO!”

Harry’s bedroom light flicked on and James burst into the room, his wand raised. He glanced around
the room as though looking for death eaters but when he saw that it was only Harry sobbing in bed,
he quickly bounded across the room. Harry could not bring himself to look at his dad and drew his
knees closer to his chest and rested his forehead on his knees.

“Harry,” James said softly, putting his hand on his shoulder, “Harry, look at me,”
Harry shook his head, unable to speak. He could not get the image of Lydia’s face right before she killed herself out of his head.

“There’s nothing wrong with having nightmares,” James continued, still speaking softly, “in fact, it would be stranger if you didn’t have nightmares. You’re allowed to have moments like this,”

“My entire summer has been moments like this,” Harry said thickly through his tears and still not looking up at his dad, “and I’m sick of it,”

James sighed and put his arm around him, “You don’t have to brave and strong all the time, you know. You’re sixteen years old, Harry, you are allowed to cry and have moments where you feel like everything is a bit shit. Because everything is a bit shit at the moment,”

“I know,” Harry said quietly.

James kissed his head and then stood up again, “Ready for your first day back?”

“Ready for my...” Harry trailed off, he had somehow forgotten that it was September 1st and had just come to the realisation that he would have to go to Hogwarts without Lydia, “I can’t go without her,”

“What?” James asked.

Harry’s heart rate began to increase and his mouth suddenly became very dry as he tried to catch his breath. Feeling as though he was about to be sick, Harry screwed his eyes shut and gripped onto his dad’s arm. He could hear James talking to him but his voice sounded very far off, as though he was on the other side of a very long tunnel.

“Harry,” James said, “Harry, look at me. Look at me,”

Somehow, Harry managed to raise his head to look at his dad.

“You’re okay, we’re okay,” he was speaking very slowly, “You’re going to be okay. Just breathe through it, breathe through it.”

Ten minutes later, Harry was sat downstairs at the kitchen, with a cup of tea and a lot of breakfast in front of him, but he didn’t really feel like eating. Ron and Hermione were sat on the other side of the table, staring at him intently and James was sat next to him, looking rather anxious. Harry, on the other head, just felt embarrassed. He was not a first year, and yet he was still crying about the thought of having to go to Hogwarts. He also wasn’t looking forward to Hermione spending the next year panicking about him more than she usually did.

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Harry said finally, “I don’t want to talk about it,”

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” James said, “you’re not the first person in the world to ever have a panic attack,”

Harry felt himself go red and looked down at his breakfast, “It wasn’t - I’m not-”

“It’s okay, Harry,” Hermione said, reaching across the table and putting her hand on top of his, “no one expects you to be perfect,”

“Yeah, we have seen you worse, mate,” Ron said.

Harry laughed, “Yeah, I know,”
James did not want to Harry to take the Hogwarts Express to school in case that it was too much for him, and would much prefer to if he went later on. Harry agreed and was glad that it was James who had suggested that, and not Harry. The thought of getting on the Hogwarts Express without Lydia made him feel as though he was about to have another panic attack. He hadn’t particularly enjoyed being on the train without her when she had to go to the Prefects Carriage the previous year, but at least he knew that she was going to come back then. He had never ridden the Hogwarts express without her, and he wasn’t looking to do so any time soon.

“I need to go back home and pack anyway,” James said, “and maybe start some lesson plans...”

“You haven’t started lesson planning yet?” Hermione asked.

“You’re not going to be taking flying lessons, Hermione, you don’t need to worry about it,” James reassured her.

Hermione did not at all look reassured and Harry was quite sure that if it wasn’t for the fact that she was terrible at flying, she would probably try and take over for him.

As Ron, Hermione and Ginny frantically ran around the house trying to get everything ready for school, Harry found himself even more thankful for the fact that he would not have to get the train to school. He was not sure that he would be able to handle the pressure of trying to get so much done in such a short amount of time. Ron clearly wasn’t doing well in getting everything done because when Harry walked into his bedroom to get Hedwig’s cage, he was lay flat on his back in bed, reading a comic. It was only when Mrs Weasley stuck her head round the door and shouted at him to get a move on that he actually got up and started to pack his trunk properly.

“Are you, uh, are you sure you’re going to be alright mate?” Ron asked, pausing on his way to the door.

Harry gently placed Hedwig in her cage and nodded, “Yeah. Yeah. I just can’t face the train, you know?”

Ron stared at him for a minute and then nodded, “I get it. We met on the train, didn’t we?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, laughing quietly. He looked up at Ron who suddenly looked quite teary, “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Course I’m alright, I’m always alright,” Ron said, sniffing loudly, “Everything’s just a bit weird, isn’t it?”

“Just a bit,”

“See you later, Harry,”

“Yeah. See you, Ron,”

After Hermione and Ginny had shouted their goodbyes up the stairs, Harry sat on the edge of Ron’s bed with Hedwig at his feet and realised that for the first time in his life, he was alone. There was no denying the fact that the way Harry and Lydia were brought up was terrible, but despite everything, it had never been lonely. Even when Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia shoved them in the cupboard under the stairs or when Dudley tormented them so much that they were forced to leave the house, they had never been lonely because they had had each other. When everyone thought that Lydia was the heir of Slytherin in their second year, she had not felt lonely because she had had him. When neither of them could go to Hogwarts in third year, it had not been the end of the world because they at least had each other. Even when Lord Voldemort came back, Harry had not been overcome with
the full force of his terror because he knew that through everything, he would have Lydia by his side.

Or, he thought he would have Lydia by his side.

He still refused to believe that there was no way around her death. Dumbledore must have been able to come up with a way to remove the Horcrux that did not result in Lydia dying. Harry stood up from Ron’s bed and walked over to the window just in time to see Ron and Hermione clambering into a car. He felt his heart break a little, watching them go. He had never not travelled to Hogwarts without Ron and it had not been a tradition that he was looking to break. And as he watched the car pull away from The Burrow, he wondered if his friendship with Ron and Hermione would survive this.

“Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort,”

Harry heard the words so clearly in Lydia’s voice that he looked around the room, just to make sure she had not miraculously returned. He hung his head and furiously wiped his eyes on the back of his hand for being so melodramatic. He would do anything to speak to Sirius at that exact moment; as much as Harry loved his dad and would always turn to him when anything went even slightly wrong in his life, Sirius always managed to give the best advice.

Before Harry knew it, it was time to go back to school and he could not even begin to stress how much he really, really didn’t want to go back. James was more than aware that Harry did not want to go back to Hogwarts, and seemed to be approaching this fact by not talking about it at all. In fact, as Harry watched him walk around his apartment and pack away his things, they acted as though they were not going back to school. It was strange to think that in the previous year, he had been terrified at the prospect of him possibly not being able to return to school, and now it was the last place on earth that he wanted to be.

Soon, however, it became the clear that they could not avoid it any longer. James walked back into the living room and cleared his throat.

“Ready?”

Not trusting himself to speak, Harry just nodded and picked up his trunk and Hedwig. James awkwardly smiled at him and grabbed some floo powder off the mantlepiece before handing it over to Harry.

“You’re going to McGonagall’s office, she wants to see you before the Feast,”

“Great,” Harry muttered, stepping into the fire and only just remembering how much he hated travelling by floo powder, “McGonagall’s office!”

Hedwig squaked angrily as they tumbled out of the fireplace and into Professor McGonagall’s office. Harry jumped up and quickly grabbed Hedwig before she rolled too far away from her.

“Good evening, Potter,” McGonagall said, looking over her glasses at him from where she was behind her desk.

“Hello, Professor,” Harry said, sitting down when she indicated to do.

“How are you feeling?”

“Fine,”

“Ready for a new school year?”
Harry shrugged, “Yeah,”

McGonagall regarded him for a moment and then put a tin of biscuits on her desk.

“Have a biscuit, Potter,”

Knowing better than to try and tell her that he didn’t want to, Harry reached into the tin and took a biscuit.

“I don’t see the point in me wasting your time and telling you that you have a difficult year ahead, because you’re not so stupid to think that you don’t,” she said gentle, “but if you ever feel like everything is getting a bit too much, you know where I am, Potter,”

Harry smiled at her and nodded, “I know, Professor. Thank-you,”

“Now get to the feast,” she said, “Merlin knows you look like you haven’t eaten enough this summer, even with Molly Weasley’s cooking. And leave your things here,” she added, when he reached down to pick Hedwig up again, “I’ll get someone to take them to Gryffindor tower,”

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said, hurrying out of her office and down to the Entrance Hall just as people began to spill in.

He stood at the top of the marble staircases for a while, watching as people walked in, talking happily with their friends and he was struck with a bizarre feeling of anger; how could anyone be that happy after what had happened on the grounds last year? How could anyone be happy knowing that Voldemort was still out there, getting ready to strike at the exact right moment?

“Hello, Harry,”

Harry jumped and looked at the bottom of the stairs where Luna Lovegood was stood, looking as serene as ever.

“Oh, hello, Luna,” Harry said, walking down the steps to meet her, “good summer?”

“Not really,” she replied as brutally honest as ever, “I’ve been feeling very sad because of Lydia. She was always very nice to me, you know,”

Harry nodded, “I know,”

“I’m sorry that you lost Lydia. It can’t be easy,” she continued, “but my mum always said things we lose have a way of coming back to us in the end. If not always in the way we expect,”

Harry frowned at her for a moment before he realised that that actually made him feel better.

“Thanks, Luna,”

She smiled at him, “See you, Harry!”

He stayed where he was until he saw Ron and Hermione. They were some of the first people he had seen who looked suitably depressed for everything that had happened, though he was sure that this wasn’t a very good thing. When Hermione saw him, she let out a tiny sigh or relief and flung her arms around her neck, confirming Harry’s theory that she had been panicking about for the entire train journey over.

“Christ, Hermione..” he muttered, “it’s only been a few hours,”
“I know,” she said, brushing the hair out of her face, “I know,”

“Did I miss out on anything exciting?” Harry asked.


“The what?”

Hermione rolled her eyes, “it’s nothing, just something Neville was invited to. It’s some tea thing that the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher has. There was a invitation for you, too but you obviously weren’t there to go...”

“I’m sorry I missed it,”

When they walked into the Great Hall, Harry turned to the Slytherin table out of habit. Lydia never used to sit with her fellow Slytherins, but they always liked to look over to see how many of them would stick their middle finger up at her. As his eyes fell on the green ties that hung around their necks, he felt his heart rate begin to pick up again and his vision become blurry. As casually as possible, he reached out and grabbed Ron’s arm, allowing him to steer him over to the Gryffindor table.

“Maybe we should go and see Madam Pomfrey,” Hermione whispered.

Harry shook his head, “No. I don’t want people to give me any attention,”

He said this as though most of the hall were not all staring at him and whispering behind their hands. It was a great relief when the first years came in and all attention turned to the Sorting Hat. He did not pay attention to anything that was happening until the feast was over and Dumbledore stood up to make his speech.

“Very best of evenings to you all. First off, let me introduce the two newest member of our staff. Horace Slughorn. Professor Slughorn, I'm happy to say, has agreed to resume his old post...as Potions Master,”

“Potions Master?” Harry hissed at Hermione, “You said he was...so who’s going to be teaching Defence?”

“Meanwhile, the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts will be taken by Professor Snape,”

There was a loud gasp and very little applause. The only people applauding were the Slytherin table. Harry glanced over at the staff table to see James sat with his arms folded, glaring at Snape.

“And after Madam Hooch retired at the end of last year, the position of flying instructor and Quidditch referee will be taken over by James Potter,”

James got a much bigger applause than Snape, and looked quite pleased about it as he glanced sideways at him. Once the applause died down, Dumbledore continued.

“As you know, each and everyone of you were searched upon your arrival here tonight. And you have the right to know why. Once, there was a young man. Like you, sat in this very hall. Walked this castle's corridors. Slept under its roof. You see, to all the world, a student like any other. His name: Tom Riddle. Today of course, is known all over the world by another name. Which is why as I stand, looking out upon you all tonight, I'm reminded of a sobering fact. Every day, every hour, this very minute, perhaps...dark forces attempt to penetrate this castle's walls. But in the end, that greatest weapon...is you. Just something to think about,”
“This is cheerful,” Ron muttered.

“Finally, another matter I must address...”

Harry looked down at the table, knowing exactly what was coming.

“At the end of last year, we suffered a great and, unexpected, loss,”

Harry scoffed, “Unexpected to everyone but him, more like,”

“And it is a loss that will be felt, I am sure, throughout the entire school,” he continued as an air of uneasiness settled itself over the Hall, “which is why it is important that we still talk about Lydia Potter and remember who she was; a fierce friend, a talented Witch, ambitious, driven and brave until her final moments. It is important that we remember who she was, so that we might one day destroy those who fought so hard to kill her,”

Harry glanced up at his dad again. He was staring straight ahead, tears streaming down his face. Ginny had her head resting on Neville’s shoulder as silent tears rolled down his cheeks. Ron was staring determinedly at the ceiling and Hermione was trying to comfort Colin Creevey whilst she wiped tears from her own eyes. Out of curiosity, Harry glanced behind him at the Slytherin table, not sure what to expect but was shocked to find that they all looked quite solemn. Daphne Greengrass was actually dabbing at her eyes with a tissue.

“Now,” Dumbledore said, “Off to bed. You have classes tomorrow,”

“Can we all agree that this is going to be a shit year and not try and make it a good one?” Harry asked, standing up.

“Yeah,” Ron said, “it’s going to be shit,”

Hermione nodded, still wiping her eyes, “The shittiest,”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!

-E.
“Does anyone actually know why she did it?”

“Probably went mad at the end. I always thought she was a couple of players short of a full Quidditch team, if you know what I mean,”

“Yeah, but to do it on the school grounds? Bit much, don't you think?”

“She probably wasn't thinking straight. She never struck me as the kind of person to think straight,”

“She never struck me as the kind of person to think.”

Harry clenched his jaw and stormed passed the group of gossiping Hufflepuffs, fighting the urge to whirl around and shout about how she did for them. Doing that would probably make him look as mad as they thought that Lydia had been, and if Voldemort somehow found out that they knew about the Horcruxes...Harry quickly brushed that thought from his mind thinking that perhaps it wouldn't be so bad if he found out. At least then there would be even less of a reason to have to fight.

“I could just tell them to fuck-” Ron began but Hermione hit him in the arm with one of her books.

“No,” she said firmly, “We're not causing a scene. We can’t stop people from talking, they’re always going to talk,”

“How much are we betting that Hermione is the first one to snap?” Ron asked Harry quietly.

Harry forced a laugh and sat down at the very end of the Gryffindor table, trying to ignore all the stares he was getting. Whilst Ron and Hermione began to bicker about something as usual, Harry glanced over at the staff table and waved at his dad when James grinned at him. He then glanced over the top of Hermione’s head at the Slytherin table and, out of shock, his elbow slipped off the table.

“What's wrong, Harry?” Hermione asked anxiously, “What is it?”

“Why is Parkinson wearing a Prefect badge?” He asked, his voice shaking.

Ron and Hermione exchanged a look but did not say anything.

“What?” he persisted.

“Well...Slytherin are one prefect down, aren’t they?” Ron said quietly, “and they have twice as many prefects patrolling the corridors these days so...so...well, Dumbledore had to appoint someone,”

“So he chose her?” Harry asked, “Why not - why not Greengrass? She's not nearly as bad!”

“It doesn't matter, Harry,” Hermione said, “who's prefect and who isn’t is not important,”

“Yeah, no, of course not...I'm just being stupid,” Harry said, pulling a bowl of cereal closer to him and beginning to eat.
Hermione gave him a worried look but soon got distracted by Professor McGonagall’s arrival who was giving out their new timetables. Harry barely any notice of what she was saying to Hermione and didn’t even notice her hurry out of the Great Hall, looking intently at her timetable.

“Well, Potter, you did more than okay in all your exams,” Professor McGonagall said, looking over her list, “You did very, very well in Transfiguration and I’m more than happy to take you for NEWT classes. You will also do well in Defence Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Charms and Potions,”

“Potions?” Harry asked weakly, “I thought I had to get an O-”

“Professor Snape only takes on students who achieved an O in their OWL examinations, but Professor Slughorn is more than happy to take on those students who achieved an E or above,” Professor McGonagall, “besides, I thought it was your wish to become an Auror?”

Harry shrugged, “it was. I just...I don’t know...I don’t know if I still want that,”

Professor McGonagall gave him a piercing look and then tapped his timetable with her wand, “I think you should take the class, Potter, or you might regret it,” she handed him his timetable with a smile, “and there a several hopefuls for the Quidditch team, you need to get around to organising tryouts before it’s too late. I have grown quite accustomed to seeing the trophy in my study,”

“Right,” Harry said, “Yeah, I’ll, um, I’ll sort it out,”

He stared down at the timetable in his hands and pretended to read it, when in reality he was suddenly plagued with anxiety thinking about Quidditch. The thought of somehow managing a Quidditch team made him feel as though he was going to throw up. Unconsciously, he looked up the Gryffindor table and wondered how many of these people wanted to play Quidditch, and how many people were banking on him to take Gryffindor to another victory. Next to him, Ron was babbling on about something but Harry could not bring himself to listen for he felt as though the Great Hall was spinning at an alarmingly fast rate.

Ever since finding out that he was going to be captain of the Quidditch team, he had not really given it much thought. In fact, he had not thought about it all. He had celebrated with his dad who had cried about it for two hours after, but once Harry had gotten over the initial shock of it, it just seemed to slip from his mind. Quidditch did not at all seem important in the grand scheme of things anymore. Nothing felt important in the grand scheme of things anymore.

“...anyway, at least we have a free period now,”

Harry came sharply back to earth and turned to Ron, nodded, “Yeah. Free period. Should be good,”

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked, frowning at him.

“Fine,” Harry lied, “just tired, that's all,”

Ron nodded, “You could go for a nap now, before class,”

“Yes,” Harry said, jumping at the opportunity to be alone for a while, “Yeah, I'll go and do that, now. See you in a bit,”

Before Ron could shout for him to wait, Harry jumped up from the bench and hurried out of the Great Hall. He was well aware of people staring at him as he pushed passed them, but he ignored them and didn’t stop walking until he was back in his dormitory and could collapse onto his bed. He had no plans to sleep, but wrenched the curtains shut around his bed anyway.
He yanked his chest of drawers opened and got out the photo album that Lydia had planned to give him for his birthday and began to look through it. It did not make him feel better, it actually made him feel worse, but he could not look away from it. He stopped on a picture of the two of them at the Yule Ball, and Harry was quite sure that the only time he had smiled that night was for that picture.

“**H!**”

Harry turned around to find Lydia stood behind him, grinning.

“Oh, hey, Lyds, where's George?”

“Either arguing with Kenneth Towler or getting drinks,” she said, “Or both,” she looked around, “where's Parvati?”

“I don’t know,” he said, “with Padma, probably. And Ron and Hermione are arguing,”

Lydia frowned at him, “What's wrong?”

“With Ron and Hermione? A multitude of things. Ron really should have just-”

He looked away from her and over at the dance floor where he could see Cho and Cedric dancing. Just beyond them, Draco Malfoy was twirling Pansy Parkinson and Harry was very, very, confused. Harry could admit that Cho looked beautiful, he could even find it in himself to admit that Parkinson looked nice. But that wasn’t his issue. No, his issue was that he found both Cedric and Malfoy attractive and he thought that he wouldn’t mind dancing with either one of them.

“What is it?” Lydia persisted.

“Nothing,” Harry replied, deciding that he wouldn't ruin her night by burdening her with his weird problems, “nothing. I'm just tired,”

She narrowed her eyes at him and then nodded.

“Come on, I want a picture,” she said, tugging on his arm.

“Why?” He asked.

“So I can look back on it when I'm old and grey!” Lydia said brightly, “Come on! We barely have any pictures of us because the Dursleys don't give enough of a shit about us!”

He rolled his eyes but stood up when someone descended on them with a camera, forcing a smile onto his face just because he knew that she would try and curse him if she saw the picture ad found that he wasn’t actually smiling.

“Do you think Aunt Petunia would be pissed off if I snuck this into a frame at Privet Drive when we go back for summer?” Lydia asked, looking down at the picture.

“She’d be more than pissed off, she'd try to kill you!” Harry said.

“She can get in line behind a dragon and a really evil Grindylow that's tried to murder me already this year,”

Harry shut the photo album with a snap and pushed it away from him, bringing his knees up to his chest. There was something unnecessarily cruel about the fact that Dumbledore had let Lydia really
believe that she would live long enough to be old and grey, only to suddenly pull the rug out from under her feet. He often found himself wondering what that last conversation between Lydia and Dumbledore must have been like. He wondered if either of them had cried, or if Lydia had just taken it on the chin like she used to with everything else or if she finally allowed herself to show a tiny bit of weakness in front of someone.

He quickly shoved that thought from his mind and picked the photo album up and put it back into the drawer, but before he shut the drawer, he noticed Lydia’s prefect badge. He had not even realised that he had shoved it in there the night before and carefully picked it up, looking down at it. It was a lot more scratched than Ron and Hermione’s, but Harry knew that that was because she never treated it with as much care as the two of them. Harry had lost count of the amount of times that she would turn up to breakfast and announce that she had lost the badge, only to find it a week later under her bed or shoved down the side of the armchair in the common room, completely unaware of how it could have ended up there.

At first, he was not sure what to do with it. He considered handing it into Professor Snape, but that felt like it would just be an awkward conversation that he did not want to be apart of. He spent a good ten minutes twirling it around his fingers before deciding that giving it back to school felt like she would have been even further away from him than she already would, so he carefully pinned it to the front of his robes, just underneath his Quidditch badge.

And then another wave of sadness, and maybe even regret, washed over him for there had been a secret that had been eating him up for so long, and he had never gotten the chance to tell her something that he knew he should have done when he had the chance.

“Harry? Are you in here?”

He quickly wiped his eyes and opened the curtains of his bed, yawning quite convincingly.

“Is it time for Defence?”

“Yeah,” Ron sighed, “and to think we actually thought that we were getting away from Snape this--” he paused, “what's that badge?”

“Its my captains badge,”

“No,” Ron said, “the one underneath it,”

“Oh,” Harry said, feeling his cheeks begin to burn, “it's Lydia's old prefect badge. I wanted to wear it,”

Ron stared at him for a moment and then nodded, “Are you coming, then? I don’t feel like being late, Snape loves any excuse to put us in detention, doesn't he?”

Hermione was already waiting outside Defence Against the Dark Arts when Harry and Ron arrived there, her arms already laden with books from Ancient Runes. Her eyes paused on the green badge on Harry’s robes, but she did not say anything. They did not speak at all once they got in the classroom for Snape was already stood at the front of the class, looking as malicious as ever. They chose seats at the very back of the dimly lit classroom, as far away from Snape as possible though Harry never felt like this made much of a difference; he would always find a way to target Harry by the end of the lesson, no matter how far away he was sat from the front.

Once Snape began to drone on about what he expected of them over the next year, Harry lost focus and found himself unconsciously staring at the back of Malfoys head. A slit of sunlight had managed
to spill through a tiny crack in one of the curtains covering the windows, and the way it bounced off Malfoy’s head had quite a nice effect. It made the silver of his hair brighter and healthier. It actually looked quite soft, Harry thought, now that he had stopped putting so much product in it.

“Are you going to try and jinx me or what?” Ron asked, nudging him.

Harry very quickly glanced at the board and read what Snape had written there. His heart sank slightly at the thought of trying to do non-verbal spells after not listening to Snape's lecture, but knew better than to actually try and ask Snape for help. He was actively trying to avoid detention that year, for his own sanity.

After twenty minutes of trying, neither of them were getting anywhere and Harry felt quite stupid, pointing his wand at Ron and not doing anything. Hermione had already managed to repel Neville’s stunning spell, but Snape, as always, had turned a blind eye towards her and instead put his time into criticising Harry.

“Move, Weasley,” Snape snapped. He looked over at Harry who did not miss his eyes widening slightly at the Prefect badge on his robes, though any feeling of sympathy he might have felt towards Harry did not last long, “Maybe you would do better at protecting yourself, Potter. Here - let me show you-”

Harry knew exactly what was coming and did not want to spend another year being bullied by Snape for the amusement of the Slytherins. As soon as Snape turned his wand on him, Harry did the same thing and yelled, “Protego!” His shield charm was so strong that Snape was actually knocked off his feet and fell against the desk behind him. Hermione groaned slightly when Snape stood up again, looking particularly evil.

“Do you remember me telling you we were practicing non-verbal spells, Potter?”

“Yes,” Harry said stiffly.

“Yes, sir,”

“There's no need to call me sir, Professor,” Harry said, before he could stop himself.

Ron snorted loudly and Dean and Seamus both dissolved into a fit of giggles behind Snape's back. Even the Slytherins giggled slightly. The only person who didn't seem to find this particularly funny was Hermione, who had her head in her hands.

“Detention, Potter, my office, Saturday,”

The bell rang and Harry wasted no time in getting out of the classroom as fast as he could. Ron was howling with laughter and Hermione was lecturing him on how he should at least try to stay out of trouble, but Harry could not really care less about what she was saying. Snape had spent the last five years of his life making Harry's life a living hell, and he was more than fed up of it. And everything that had happened with Umbridge the year before, Harry had long gotten over treating any Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers with respect.

“Look on the bright side, Snape’ll be gone by the end of year,” Ron said as they walked out into the courtyard for their morning break, “Defence teachers never last more than a year, do they?”

“I’m hoping for another death...” Harry muttered darkly.

“Harry!” Hermione exclaimed, “You can’t say that!”
“Pretty sure I just did,”
Hermione sighed but did not push the situation any further, “Let's just forget about Snape, OK? We have Potions now,”

“Everyone's favourite lesson,” Ron sighed.

“You might like it now that Snape isn't teaching!” Hermione said, “Slughorn doesn't seem so bad...”

“Quirrel didn't seem so bad at first, and then he had Voldemort sticking out the back of his head,” Harry pointed out.

The bell rang quicker than Harry would have liked it to, and they slowly began to make their way towards the dungeons. Ron seemed to notice the issue about this before both Harry and Hermione because he stopped in his tracks, staring at the dungeon door with widened eyes.

“What is it, Ron?” Hermione asked, a note of impatience in her voice, “if we don't hurry up we’re going to be late,”

“Sorry,” he muttered, looking sheepish, “it's just that - well, you know...Lydia and...never mind, it's stupid,”

Harry did not at all think that he was being stupid and was quick to tell him this. They did not walk down straight away, and stood outside for a while as Hermione tried to convince Ron that putting off going places that reminded him of Lydia was unhealthy for him and it was best that they just tackled the things that made them sad head on. By the time Ron had had calmed down, they had missed the first five minutes of class but even Hermione did not seem bothered about this.

“Sorry we’re late, Professor Slughorn,” Hermione said when they finally walked into the classroom, “We got held up,”

Slughorn looked over at them and Harry could not help but notice how his smile widened when the Professor’s eyes landed on Harry.

“Nothing to worry about Miss-?”

“Granger. Hermione Granger,” she said, “and this is Ron Weasley and-”

“Harry Potter,” Slughorn said, his eyes twinkling slightly as they travelled to the scar on his face, “yes, I taught your mother, you know. Lily Evans was a fantastic Potions Maker in her time...yes, such a shame what happened and, of course, your sister...” His eyes landed on the badge on Harry's robes and he nodded solemnly, “my deepest condolences, my dear boy, I know it must be difficult,”

“Um, yes, thank-you, Professor,” Harry said, annoyed at how much his voice was shaking. He cleared his throat, “um, me and Ron didn’t know that we were going to be taking Potions this year so we don't have a book-”

“No worries, no worries...get one from the back cupboard,” Slughorn said airily, waving his hand. He looked around the room, “Miss Granger if you would take a seat next to Miss Abbott, Mr Weasley can sit next to Mr MacMillan and Harry if you could take a seat next to...ah, take a seat next to Mr Malfoy,”

“My life is a fucking disaster,” Harry muttered to Ron as they walked towards the book cupboard, “an entire hour next to Malfoy! I’d rather spend it with Hagrid’s Blast-Ended Skrewts!”
Ron sniggered as he opened the cupboard, revealing two books. One of which were very tattered. Ron was quicker than Harry and snatched the one that was in much better condition, confirming to Harry that he was just destined to have bad luck for the rest of his life.

“Have I not been through enough?” Harry asked.

“Don't guilt trip me into giving you this book,” Ron said, “Have fun with Malfoy!”

Resisting the urge to stick his finger up at him because Slughorn was watching, Harry buried his pride and stomped over to where Malfoy was sat with Daphne Greengrass, Theodore Nott and Blaise Zabini. Harry dropped into the chair next to him, trying to convey how much he didn't want to be there through the glare on his face. Malfoy just rolled his eyes at him and began to take notes of whatever Slughorn had written on the board. It was then that Harry realised that despite how much of a dick Malfoy was, he probably cared about his schoolwork as much Hermione did, who was also already taking notes on the other side of the room. Ron, on the other hand, was already staring into space and that made Harry feel much better about his lack of eagerness towards Potions.

“I’m glad you kept her badge, Potter,” Daphne Greengrass whispered to him from across the table, “it’s better than Parkinson having it,”

Harry looked up at her, slightly shocked. He had always known that she wasn't as awful as the other Slytherins, but he had not thought that she would have been so open about her obvious disdain for them in front of Malfoy and Zabini.

“Thanks, Greengrass,” Harry said quietly.

Malfoy glanced over at the badge and, for a moment, Harry thought that he was going to say something but then Slughorn asked for the classes attention and he looked away.

“I’ve prepared a few Potions that might interest you,” he said, indicating four cauldrons that he had set out before them.

The one closest to where Harry was sat somehow smelled of a broomstick handle, treacle tart and something he might have smelled in that very classroom, though he couldn't quite put his finger on it. He turned to Lydia to ask what she could smell, but stopped himself before he spoke out loud and embarrassed himself.

“and, it's a small test to see how much you know...now, does anyone know what this one is?” Slughorn continued as he pointed at one that looked like plain boiling water.

As anyone in the class could have predicted, Hermione's hand was in the air long before anyone else's.

“Yes, Miss Granger?”

“That's Veritaserum. It forces the drinker to tell the truth!”

Once again, Harry turned to Lydia, about to ask if she remembered when Snape threatened them both with Veritaserum and only just managed to quickly stop himself. Feeling himself go red, he looked at the ground and hoped that no one had noticed.

“Very good!” Slughorn said cheerily, “Now, what about this one? It's been mentioned an awful lot recently, what with everything that's happening outside...” He pointed at a bubbling potion that Harry automatically recognised to be Polyjuice Potion. He was suddenly overcome with the urge to laugh for Malfoy still had no idea that her and Ron had pretended to be Crabbe and Goyle in their
second year.

“That's Polyjuice Potion, sir,” Hermione said.

“Excellent, Miss Granger! And this one is - well, yes, my dear?” Slughorn asked, looking slightly amused as Hermione thrust her hand into the air again.

“That's Armontentia. The most powerful love Potion in the world. It's easily recognised by the mother-of-pearl sheen and the steaming rising in spirals. It smells differently to each of us, according to what attracts us the most. For example, I can smell freshly mown grass, new parchment and-” she did not finish her sentence and went slightly pink.

“Granger, you said your name was, dear?” Slughorn asked, “You couldn't possibly be related to Hector Dagworth-Granger who founded the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers, could you?”

“No, I don't think so, sir. I'm Muggle-born,”

“Filthy Mudblood…” Nott muttered to Zabini, “she's as ugly as her filthy muggle parents,”

Before Harry could snap at him, Daphne had flung a screwed up ball of parchment at Nott.

“No one thinks you’re funny, Nott,” she hissed, “and she's too pretty to ever even look in your direction,”

“Fuck you, Greengrass,”

“You bloody wish,” she snapped.

Harry was quite taken aback by this and did not know what to say so looked back towards Professor Slughorn instead, who was still singing Hermione's praises. Slughorn was only interrupted by Terry Boot pointing out that he had not told the class what the last potion was. Harry had a suspicion that Professor Slughorn had not at all forgotten what that potion was and had been hoping to be asked for dramatic effect.

“Ah, yes, that one is a most curious potion called Felix Felicis. And, Miss Granger, I take that you know what that is?”

“It's liquid luck!” Hermione said excitedly, “it makes you lucky,”

The whole class seems to sit up a little straighter. Even Ron was looking at Professor in interest, and Harry was quite sure that this was the first time that Ron had ever showed any interest in a Potions class. Harry soon lost interest again and did not look back up at Professor Slughorn again until he was telling them that if they brewed an adequate Draught of Living Death, they would win a tiny bottle of Felix Felicis.

There was a great rush as fires under cauldrons were lit and books opened to the correct pages. Feeling as though luck was not a thing he would be blessed with, with or without the help of Felix Felicis, Harry pulled his rather tattered book towards I'm and flicked through, rather annoyed that the previous owner had taken to writing notes in the margins, making it quite difficult for him to read.

As he read through the instructions, however, he started to realise that the previous owners notes made a lot more sense than the ones that had actually been published in the book. By the time they got to the end of the lesson, Harry realised that he had actually brewed a potion correctly for the first time in his life.
“How did you do that?” Malfoy asked, taking Harry by surprise.

“I don’t - I don’t know,” Harry said, “why do you care?”

Professor Slughorn was slowly making his way around the dungeon, looking into everyone’s cauldrons. When he got to Harry’s, he let out a hearty laugh and clapped his hands together.

“A clear winner!” He announced, “excellent, Harry, absolutely excellent! You’ve clearly inherited your mothers skill at potion making and, dare I say it, your late sister did as well?”

“Actually, she was-” Harry stopped himself mid sentence, feeling as though Lydia would have found it much more funny if Harry lied and said she had been amazing at Potions, “she was better than me, sir,” he chanced a glance over at Ron and Hermione who were both repressing laughter, “she was very good,”

“Such a shame, such a shame...” He sighed, “Well, as promised, here is one bottle of Felix Felicis!”

Harry took it and felt himself begin to grin. He deserved this, at least.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!!!

I'm really proud of this chapter for some reason, and I hope you like it as much as I do!!

<3

-E.
She was at peace. She was comfortable. She was finished.

A broken voice belonging to someone who didn't deserve to be as broken as he sounded echoed through her brain. She could not do anything about it, and yet she knew that she needed to do something.
The rest of the week passed slowly. Harry spent most of his days thinking about how much he would very much like to hex Snape within an inch of his life whilst reeling at the fact that Potions had, inexplicably, become his best lesson. Hermione was furious about this and Ron found it hilarious. Whenever Harry earned Gryffindor more house points, Hermione would turn to glare at him, as though he was doing well to purposely annoy her.

“What’s up with you, ‘Mione?” Ron asked when they left the final Potions lesson of the week, “upset because Harry’s better at you than something?”

Hermione glared at Ron, “I’m not upset about that, Ronald, I’m upset about the fact that he’s cheating. He’s not doing his own work! I want to know who owned that book before you,”

Harry rolled his eyes as they sat down by the lake. It was not a particularly warm day, but it was the only place that they could sit to get away from the constant stares from other students. It was amazing that Harry had not yet cursed someone, but they were only a week into the new year and there was still more than enough time for him to curse at least half of the castle.

“Look at what the Giant Squid is doing!” Hermione said suddenly, pointing over to the lake.

Harry looked over at the lake and frowned for the Squid was nowhere to be seen. He looked back over at Hermione to point this out to her but then realised that she had just said that so she could snatch his Potions book out of his bag. Grinning, Hermione leapt up and jumped away from him before Harry could grab the book back.

“Hermione!” Harry yelled, “give me my book!”

“‘This book is property of the half-blood prince,’” Hermione read out loud, “The half-blood prince? Who’s the half-blood?” she paused and looked up at him, “please don’t tell me you’ve started calling yourself the half-blood prince,”

“Obviously not, Hermione,” Harry snapped, snatching the book out of her hands and dropping it back into his bag, “I’m not like my dad and giving myself weird nicknames,”

Ron snorted, “Would you like us to start calling you the half-blood prince?”

“No,” Harry said, “I would rather spend an evening with Umbridge than start getting called the half-blood prince,”

Hermione rolled her eyes at him, “you shouldn't be taking instructions from a book Harry,”

“What’s this?” a voice asked from behind them, “You’re taking instructions from a book?”

Harry turned around to find Ginny looking anxious. At first, he couldn’t understand why Ginny cared so much and then it hit him like a tonne of bricks.

“Oh, no, Ginny, it’s nothing like Riddle’s diary,” Harry said quickly, “the previous owner just wrote some extra potions notes in the margins. It’s nothing,”
Ginny narrowed her eyes at him, “the diary was nothing at first,”

Harry resisted the urge to roll his eyes because he knew how adept Ginny was at the Bat-Bogey Hex and was in no rush to get on the wrong side of her.

“If it was something dangerous then it wouldn’t be in the school. Dumbledore would have found-”

“Dumbledore would have found it like he found the Chamber of Secrets?” Ginny asked.

Harry clenched his jaw, “It’s just a book, Ginny!”

“Whatever, Harry, I only came here to tell you that Snape wants you at his office at half past seven tomorrow night for your detention,”

“Right. Okay,”

Ginny glared at him for a bit longer and then smiled at Ron and Hermione, “See you later,”

By the time the seven o’clock rolled around the next evening, Harry decided that he wasn’t going to go to detention. Hermione did not need to know this and Professor Snape certainly did not. He told Ron this information when they were walking out of the Great Hall after dinner and he just shrugged and said, “do whatever you want, mate,”. He was just banking on the fact that Hermione would leave the common room before he was meant to so he didn’t have to try and explain why he wasn’t going to detention to a very angry Hermione.

As Harry could have predicted, luck was not on his side and Hermione stayed seated by the fire, flicking through the Daily Prophet.

“It’s twenty past seven, Harry,” she said, not looking up from the paper.

“Is it really? The days gone fast, hasn’t it?” he said casually.

“Hopefully that means your detention with Snape will go fast,” she looked up at him and raised her eyebrows, “Off you go, then.”

“I’m not going,” he said.

Hermione put the paper down and sighed, “Harry, you’re not starting this,”

“Not starting what?”

“Going off the rails,” she said, “if you start skipping detentions and classes then you’ll just ruin everything for yourself,”

“Because everything isn’t ruined already, is it?” he said, “my sister and my godfather died within hours of each other, Lord fucking Voldemort is out to get me and you really think that my biggest worry right now is what Snape will do when I don’t go to detention?”

He had not realised how loud that he had been speaking because the entire common room had fallen silent and were looking over at them, all with a mixture of amusement and sympathy on their faces. Harry tried his best to completely ignore them and turned back to Hermione who had tears in her eyes. Ron looked as though he wasn’t sure where to look.

“I know that it’s been hard but-’
“Don’t tell me that it’s all going to be okay in the end or that Lydia or Sirius wouldn’t want me to skip detention and fuck up everything, because we actually don’t know what they would want, because they’re dead!”

“Harry, Hermione’s right,” Ron said quietly, “You’re just going to get in even more trouble,”

“I really couldn’t care less,” Harry snapped. He jumped up and snatched his bag off the floor, “I’m going for a walk,”

“To Professor Snape’s office?” Ron asked hesitantly.

“You're not funny,” Harry snapped, storming out of the portrait hole and being more than aware that the moment the Fat Lady swung shot behind him, he would be the topic of conversation until he got back.

He shoved his hands into his pockets to stop them from shaking and walked as far away from the dungeons as was humanly possible without actually leaving the castle grounds, though that did seem like the best option for him at that moment. He walked until he came across a secret passageway hidden behind a tapestry. Assuming that most people would not know of its existence without the help of the Marauders Map, Harry ducked behind it and slid down the cool, stone wall, letting his tears flow freely.

In reality, he was more than aware of the fact that he was probably in the most trouble that he had ever been in with Snape. Out of all the times that he had given him detention, and it had been a lot, Harry had never been so stupid to actually skip detention just because he didn’t feel like going. But he also couldn’t bring himself to care. He had much, much bigger things to worry about than serving detention with his least favourite teacher.

Once again, Harry found himself overcome with sadness at the fact that he couldn't turn to Lydia or Sirius anymore. Both of them were always on his side, no matter what, and now he didn't even have them to turn to. There was always James, of course, but Harry felt as though he would be secretly angry at the fact that his son was skipping attention and Harry wasn't looking to disappoint everyone in his life, even if that was the route he seemed to suddenly be going down.

Harry was not sure how long he stayed where he was, and did not even remember going to bed but he must have done because he awoke in the dormitories with both Ron and Hermione standing over him. He could not make out their faces for he was not wearing his glasses, but he didn't think that they were very happy with him.

“Snape is furious with you,” said Hermione’s blurry figure, “He found us at breakfast and said that if you don't get down to the dungeons as soon as possible, he’ll see that you're expelled,”

“I missed breakfast?” Harry asked groggily, pushing his glasses onto his face.

“That's not what you're meant to be worrying about, Harry!” Hermione snapped, “we told you not to skip detention and now-”

“And now I'm in more trouble, yeah, I'm aware of that,” Harry muttered, throwing his covers off him and realising that he was still wearing the clothes that he had been the previous day, “I’ll go and see him now,”

“Your dad wants to see you, too,” Ron told him, “after you've been to see Snape,”

“See you later,” Harry muttered, leaving the dormitory and probably not feeling as anxious as he should be.
Snape shouted at Harry for almost half an hour, but Harry could not pay attention to a thing that he was saying. He just sat motionless in the chair in front of his desk, listening to him go on with himself, spit flying from his mouth. He couldn’t have focused on what Snape was saying even if he had really wanted to, and he really didn’t want to.

“You will serve detention with me tonight and tomorrow night, understood, Potter?”

“Yes, Professor Snape,” Harry said, his voice completely devoid of emotion.

“Get out of my sight,”

Harry did not need telling twice. He jumped up at once, only for Snape to shout him back just before he opened the door.

“Any grievances in your life are not excuses for bad behaviour,”

Harry almost snapped and told him that he should take his own advice but stopped himself in time. He muttered, “yes, sir,” underneath his breath and then left quickly. He was not looking where he was going and barrelled straight into someone who yelped as they fell to the floor.

“Watch where you're going, Potter,”

Harry looked at the ground and saw Malfoy struggling back to his feet, looking quite pissed off.

“I'm not in the mood, Malfoy,” Harry mumbled, “just fuck off,”

“Are you - are you okay?”

“Why do you care?” Harry snarled.

Malfoy stared at him for a minute and then his face melded into the ugly sneer that Harry recognised, “Whatever, Potty,”

Somehow in an even worse mood than he had been in when he woke up, Harry stomped up the stairs and to James’ office on the second floor. He knocked on the door and it opened almost immediately, revealing a quite stressed looking James.

“Come in,” he said, stepping to the side.

Harry did not say anything and walked in, looking around the room, impressed. James seemed to have turned his office into a mini Gryffindor common room; there was an unlit fire surrounded by big plump couches and a Gryffindor flag hanging on the wall behind his desk which was already a complete mess. There were three pictures on it: one of him and Lily, another of him, Sirius, Remus and Peter, and one of him with Harry and Lydia from the previous Christmas at Grimmauld Place. It took Harry a few moments to tear his eyes away from the picture and he purposely chose to sit on the couch that had its back to the desk.

“So, Sniv - Severus told me about your detention last night,”

“Okay,” Harry said.

James sighed and ran a hand through his hair, messing it up even more.

“Look, Harry, I’m not very good at being one of those dads who lecture you on every single thing you do because I haven't had the chance but, you can't just stop going to detention because you don't feel like going,” James said, and Harry could tell that he was choosing his words carefully.
“I know,” Harry said.

“So why didn't you go?”

Harry shrugged, “I don't know. It just doesn't seem important with everything else that's going on,”

“Merlin, Harry, when are you going to get it into your head that you’re just a kid?” James exclaimed, “you act as though you have to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders but you don't. There's Aurors for that, the Order of the Phoenix is for that. You need to learn to be a normal kid,”

“I'm not a normal kid though, am I?” Harry asked furiously, “I've never been a normal kid! I wasn’t a normal kid before I went to Hogwarts, and I wasn't even a normal kid when I got here! Now I'm just poor Harry who lost his sister and has gone insane!”

“There's nothing that I can do to change any of that, son,” James said, “as much as it pains me to say it, you're always going to be the Boy who Lived or whatever bullshit name they've given you, but that doesn't mean that you have to act how they expect you to act,”

“I just miss them, dad,” Harry said tearfully, “I really, really miss them,”

“I know,” James replied quietly, “I know. I do, too. You just need to get on with it, though. There’s nothing you can do but keep on going,”

“Yeah...” Harry said quietly, “yeah, you’re right.”

*Don't let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.*

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Once Harry had completed both detentions with Snape, he had hoped that everyone would lay off him a bit, but that was before he received a note off Professor McGonagall asking him to go and see her. Expecting to get a very long lecture, Harry dragged his feet as he walked to her office and wondered if he could block out her lecture by eating as many biscuits as he could possibly hold.

“Potter, take a seat,” McGonagall said, gesturing to the seat in front of her desk.

Repressing a groan, Harry sat in the seat and tried to look as though he wasn’t on the verge of tears. Something that he had noticed about himself was the fact that he always seemed to be one bad moment away from dissolving into floods of tears, and it was doing his head in.

“You haven't organised any tryouts for the Gryffindor Quidditch team,”

“I haven't?” Harry asked.

“Gryffindor remains the only house to not have organised something,” McGonagall continued, “and it is very important that you do so,”

“Right...” Harry said. For perhaps the first time since being at Hogwarts, Harry had not once thought about Quidditch. “Yeah, Professor, I don’t think I want to play Quidditch anymore,”

“Excuse me?”

“I don't want to play Quidditch anymore,” Harry repeated.

“Potter, you’re a fantastic player, and I really think you could play for England,” McGonagall said, shaking the biscuit tin at him, “and I'm not just saying that,”
Harry took a biscuit, “I don’t want to play Quidditch anymore, Professor. Honestly,” he unpinned the captain’s badge from his robes and put it down on the desk.

“You’ve just been made Captain-”

“I know,” Harry said, “I know. It would have been great last year but I don't want it anymore. Katie Bell would be a great captain, though,” he added.

“There's no convincing you otherwise, is there”

“No,”

Professor McGonagall nodded and picked up the badge, placing it in her drawer.

“Well, you were a fantastic addition to the team, Potter,” she said. She glanced down at the Slytherin prefect badge on his robes and smiled sadly, “I’m sure Lydia would support your decision. I’ll see you in class, Mr Potter,”

“Yeah,” Harry said, standing up, “yeah, see you, Professor,”

When he got back to the common room, the first thing that Hermione noticed was that his Captain badge was missing. Immediately, she began to panic and asked if McGonagall had taken it off him for missing detention.

“No, Hermione, I gave it up,” he said blankly, “I'm not playing Quidditch this year,”

Ron’s head snapped up, “You’re - you’re not playing Quidditch?”

“No,” Harry said, “and I don't want to talk about it. I'm going for a nap,”

Both Ron and Hermione shouted for him to come back, but he completely ignored them and dragged himself up to his dormitory. Without letting onto Neville who was sat in bed reading a book, Harry climbed into bed, pulled the curtains shut around him and pressed his face into his pillow, allowing himself to cry.

James was right. He was just a kid. He shouldn't feel as bad as he did, but he didn't know what happy was.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!!

I'm really enjoying this fic at the moment and I hope you are too!!

-E.
The fact that Harry Potter had inexplicably quit the Quidditch team after being made captain was a point of great interest for all of Hogwarts. Gryffindor house were reeling at the thought of losing their best player, Slytherin house had probably never been happier and even the teachers were worried about Harry quitting the team. None of the Gryffindor Quidditch team had appreciated Harry throwing the team into disarray and Ginny and Katie Bell had managed to hunt him down when he was avoiding Professor Slughorn who was still trying to invite him to the Slug Club. Harry had not particularly enjoyed listening to them complain at him for an entire hour and actually thought that he might have much preferred spending his evening in the Slug Club then listen to what they were saying.

Ron was not particularly thrilled about the fact Harry would not be playing Quidditch that year but he only ever brought it up once before dropping the subject. Hermione was not at all keen to drop the subject and tried to bring it up at every opportunity. Over the years, however, Harry seemed to have developed a skill for blocking out Hermione and her lectures and somehow got through his days without having to argue with her, which was a win for everyone in the vicinity.

“Harry, are you even listening to me?” Hermione snapped over dinner.

“Am I - what?” He asked, coming out of his reverie and looking up at her, “yeah, no, I agree. We should do that,”

Hermione pursed her lips, “What did you just agree to?”

“Um..”

“I was saying that I think you should go and see Madam Pomfrey,” Hermione said.

“Why? There's nothing wrong with me,”

“Physically, no. Mentally, on the other hand, I think you need help,”

Harry stared at her, unsure of whether she was joking or not. He looked over at Ron who had suddenly become very interested in whatever Neville, Dean and Seamus were talking about.

“Seriously?” He scoffed, “I'm not going to Madam Pomfrey for - you're being - no!”

Hermione sighed, “Look, Harry, you’ve been through a lot, and you're clearly struggling. It's nothing to be embarrassed about!”

“I’m not wasting Madam Pomfrey's time by-”

“It wouldn’t be wasting her time,” Hermione said calmly, “it's important,”

Harry just shook his head and turned back to his dinner. Hermione was being ridiculous. Hospitals were only for physical ailments, everyone knew that. Uncle Vernon often complained about a young man who worked for him at Grunnings because he once had to take time off because he was ‘depressed’ and had spent the majority of the evening complaining about how he was obviously just lazy and did not want to do any work. A week after the employee had come back to work, Uncle
Vernon had fired him.

“I’m not depressed, anyway,” Harry said quickly, “I also don’t want to talk about this anymore,”

Hermione opened her mouth again but Ron turned back around to them and shook his head, “Just drop it, Hermione. He obviously doesn’t want to talk about it.”

“I do, though,” a voice said brightly behind Harry.

Harry turned around to find James stood there, smiling pleasantly.

“Come on, son,” James said, nodding his head towards the door.

Sighing, Harry stood up and followed him out of the Great Hall, trying to ignore all the stares that they were getting. James stopped at the bottom of the marble staircase in the Entrance Hall.

“You're not playing Quidditch this year?”

“No,” Harry said, knowing that this was what James would have wanted to talk to him about.

“Why?”

“Why does it matter?” Harry countered, “I don't know why people are making it a bigger deal than it actually is,”

“It's a relatively big deal, Harry,” James said, “you love playing Quidditch, and you're very good at it! I don't understand why you would just throw it all out the window,”

“I just don't want to play this year,” Harry said stiffly, “it's my choice!”

“I know, I know,” James said quickly, “I heard what Hermione was saying. Maybe she's right. Maybe you are depressed-”

“I'm not bloody depressed!” Harry yelled so loudly that two third year Gryffindors turned around in alarm, “I'm just grieving-”

“That’s still a good enough excuse to go and see Madam Pomfrey, I see her to-”

“I don't want to go and see Madam Pomfrey just because I'm a bit sad!” Harry snapped, “and I don't want to play Quidditch either! Can't you and Hermione just get over that?”

“Lydia wouldn't want you to stop playing Quidditch,”

“I wouldn't know what Lydia wants because she's fucking dead!”

Without so much as a second glance at James, Harry turned on his heel and stomped up the stairs to the common room, wishing that people would just leave him alone for once in his life.

---

Harry woke up on Monday morning determined to make that week better than the ones he had been suffering through since coming back to Hogwarts. He got dressed quicker than he had done in a while and was even in the common room before Hermione, who was looking at him as though he was plotting something. He wasn't sure if he actually wanted to try and improve how he was feeling, or if he was just convincing Hermione that he didn't need to go and see Madam Pomfrey, but he was thankful for the sudden burst of optimism. He had forgotten what it was actually like to be optimistic.
Amazingly, his morning did not go too badly: Potions, which had somehow become his best lesson, did not make him want to rip his hair out for Daphne’s constant snapping at Nott to stop being mean to Hermione seemed to have finally gotten through to him, and he stayed silent for most of the lesson and Malfoy actually managed to get through the lesson without insulting Harry. Even Slughorn left Harry alone for the hour, though he was sure that had something to do with the fact that all of his teachers seemed to suddenly think that he was somewhat unstable and had started to lay off him a little. Even Snape left Harry alone for the entirety of their Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson, though he was sure that this was because McGonagall or James had told him to do so.

In fact, when he, Ron and Hermione were walking outside for their morning break, Harry felt as though he actually something to smile about and Hermione had stopped treating him like a bomb that was about to go off. Ron seemed the most cheerful because Harry’s sudden change in mood meant that he didn't have to choose a side in whatever argument that Hermione would pick with Harry.

The only thing that was bothering Harry was the fact that he had not spoken to his dad since their slight argument the previous Friday, but he knew that when the time was right, he would apologise to James and they would go on as though it never happened.

“Harry Potter? I have a message for you,” a timid Slytherin second year said, hesitantly walking up to him.

“Me?” Harry asked, “who off?”

“Professor Dumbledore. He says that he would like you to go to his office tonight at eight o’clock and that, um, and that he likes acid pops,”

Harry inwardly groaned and felt his heart deflate in his chest. He had been hoping that he would be able to avoid Dumbledore as much as possible and was about to answer angrily, until he quickly reminded himself that this second year had done nothing wrong.

“Right. Thanks, mate,” Harry said quietly.

The second year smiled in a relieved sort of way and then pointed at Lydia’s badge before hurrying away, “I like your badge,”

“The younger Slytherins are so much nicer than the older ones,” Ron sighed, watching him go.

“Greengrass isn't so bad,” Harry said, “and neither's Zabini. Well, he doesn't really speak enough to be annoying,” when he saw the looks on Ron and Hermione’s faces, he rolled his eyes, “don't worry. I'm not replacing you with Greengrass and Zabini,”

Hermione laughed and shook her head, “What do you think Dumbledore wants?”

Harry shrugged, “I don’t know, but I can guess that it’ll be something about either Lydia, Sirius, Quidditch or all of the above,”

“You know, Katie is holding the Quidditch tryouts this Saturday,” Ron said lightly, “are you going to come and watch?”

“Probably no-” Hermione stood on his foot and Harry quickly changed his tune, realising that Ron was going to tryout again, “actually, yeah. I want to know who's replacing me,”

He tried to keep his tone light, but in reality, the thought of sitting through the tryouts was about as endearing as spending the evening with Professor Umbridge. He had not said this out loud to anyone yet, but he wasn't even sure that he wanted to watch any of the upcoming Quidditch matches.
“Well it’ll be good to get out of the castle for a while, won’t it?” Hermione said bracingly.

“Yeah,” Ron agreed, “Yeah. It’s something to do other than sit in the common all day, isn’t it?”

Harry knew that they were probably only just saying this because they were worried that he would stay in on his own all day, but did not try and start an argument. He just leant back against the wall and nodded along whilst becoming quite distracted by Draco Malfoy on the other side of the courtyard. He was walking alone with his hands deep in the pockets of his robes and with his eyes trained on the round, not at all like he usually looked. It was very rare to see Malfoy without Crabbe and Goyle by his side, and even rarer to see him clearly trying to avoid any attention. Harry had noticed a very sudden and very strange change in Malfoy over the past few weeks; he often looked quite ill and as though he never slept.

As Malfoy neared them, he looked up from the ground and before Harry could even think about looking away, they had locked eyes. Bracing himself for an argument, Harry went to tell him to fuck off, but Malfoy just looked away from him and carried on walking. Leaving Harry feeling quite confused as to why Malfoy seemed incapable of insulting him like he had spent the last five years of his life doing.

“What's Malfoy doing?” Ron asked, noticing Harry staring.

“Nothing,”

“Then why are you staring at him?”

“Because he's doing nothing,”

Mercifully, the bell rang and Harry was saved from having to explain to Ron why he had suddenly become infatuated with Draco Malfoy. As they made their way back inside to Transfiguration, Harry felt his good mood evaporate as he thought about having to go to Dumbledore’s office that night. He could already predict what Dumbledore was going to speak to him and so he felt like going would be a waste of everyone's time. He almost turned around to say this to Ron and Hermione but quickly stopped himself knowing that Hermione would probably take it too literally and then start lecturing him.

The day suddenly sped up and before Harry knew it, he was dragging himself up to Dumbledore's office whilst desperately trying to think of the best excuse to get out of going. Annoyingly, he could not think of a good enough excuse and soon found himself sat in front of Dumbledore’s desk and decided that he would spend the next hour or so feeling sorry for himself.

“Thank-you for coming to see me, Harry,” Dumbledore said, “how are you settling into the new school year?”

“Fine,” Harry said.

“Enjoying your lessons?”

“Yeah,” he said, deciding that one syllable answers might be the best way to speed the conversation up.

“I heard you’ve quit the Gryffindor Quidditch team, is this true?”

“Yeah,”

Dumbledore sighed, seemingly aware that the last thing that Harry wanted to be doing was having
this conversation.

“I know the loss of Sirius and Lydia has hit you hard, but that does not mean that you should give everything up,” Dumbledore said slowly, “which is why I wanted to ask you a question, Harry,”

“What?”

“You remember the Horcruxes and how in order to defeat Voldemort once and for all, we have to destroy them?” Dumbledore asked, “I want to work together to find these Horcruxes. I can't do it without your help,”

“No,”

Dumbledore frowned at Harry ever so slightly, and Harry was quite proud of the fact that he had confused him.

“It is so important that you-”

“No,” Harry repeated, “I don't want to,”

“Not even to avenge your mother's death? Or Lydia and Sirius?”

“No,” Harry said again, feeling suddenly angry, “No. You're the reason that Sirius and Lydia are dead! You ignored me all last year which lead to me going to the Department of Mysteries and Sirius dying! Then you let Lydia kill herself! You didn't even try and help her!”

Dumbledore sighed again.

“I deeply regret Lydia's death, Harry. I wish that it could have been different, but there was nothing that I could do. It was the only way,” Dumbledore said, “it's the only way we can defeat Voldemort,”

“Can I ask you a question, Professor?”

“Of course, Harry,”

“Did you ever care about her?” Harry asked furiously, “or did you only care about when she would die?”

“Of course I cared about her, Harry.” Dumbledore said, tears sparkling in his eyes and this only infuriated Harry further, “this is the last thing that I wanted to happen,”

“Then why did you let it happen?” Harry asked desperately, “why didn't you try and stop it? You're meant to be the most Wizard alive! Surely you could have done something!”

“There was nothing I could do,”

Harry just wished that he had it in him to believe him.

“Can you at least - can you at least tell me what it was like? The last conversation you had with her? Was she s-scared?”

Dumbledore looked thoughtful for a moment and Harry looked away from his, wiping his eyes on the back of his hands. He did not look back over at Dumbledore until he spoke again.

“As intelligent as ever, Lydia came to the conclusion that she would have to die herself. I did not
explicitly tell her what her fate was,” Dumbledore began, “she did not look at all scared, did not even cry. In fact, when I looked at her, I might have seen the ghost of a smile. I do not think that this was because she was happy about the fact that she would have to die, I think it was because she finally understood everything. You, more than anyone, knew that she was always the outcast, even more than yourself. When you both came to Hogwarts, you were welcomed with open arms, whereas Lydia was not,”

Harry nodded. He was more than aware of all of this. At first, she had been shunned by all houses, including her own. Initially, even Ron had not been thrilled about the fact that he had to spend so much time with a Slytherin. Harry was quite sure that had Lydia not been his twin, Ron never would have given her the time of the day.

“Then what happened?” Harry asked, his voice hollow.

“She left my office,” Dumbledore said simply, “but not before she accused me of raising her like a pig for slaughtered and asking that I give her the dignity of ending her own life,” he smiled slightly, “one of the first things I ever noticed about Lydia was how, ah, headstrong, she was,”

Harry laughed quietly, quite pleased that Lydia had had the last word, at least. He did not like the thought of dying without at least telling Dumbledore how she really felt about him.

“Thank-you for telling me this, Professor,” Harry said quietly, and he really meant it.

“Has this at all changed your mind on fighting Voldemort?” Dumbledore asked, a note of hesitancy in his voice.

“No,” Harry said, “No. It hasn't,”

Dumbledore nodded solemnly, “Very well then, Harry. If there is ever anything you need, you know where my office,”

“Thank-you, Professor,” Harry said, “Good-night,”

“Good-night, Harry,”

Harry quickly left the office and could not help but think about how he was walking the same way that Lydia probably had done before she did what she did. He was not looking where he was going and banged into someone, who fell into one of the suits of armour.

“Will you stop banging into me, Potter!” Malfoy yelled.

“Sorry,” Harry muttered, “wasn't watching where I was going...”

Not wanting to start an argument with the banging headache that he had, Harry went to move on but Malfoy held out his arm, stopping me.

“Do you - do you want to come to the Slytherin common room?”

“Do I - what?” Harry asked, flabbergasted.

“I know it's weird but...it might...it might make you feel closer to her,” Malfoy said, not looking him in the eye.

“I don't think anyone would appreciate me being down there,”
“No one would mind,” Malfoy said, “we appreciate family in Slytherin...and losing a twin it must be...it must be tough,”

“Is this some sort of sick plan to get me down to the common room so you can attack me?”

“No,” Malfoy said quickly, “No. It was...it was actually Daphne’s idea,”

Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry obliged and followed Malfoy down to the dungeons. As much as he begrudgingly trusted Greengrass, Harry still held onto his wand tightly when he walked into the common room but very quickly lost grip of it when he caught sight of what was actually inside.

Lydia often spoke about how her favourite chair in the Slytherin common room was in the far corner, besides a large window that looked into the Black Lake. She said that it had unofficially become her seat and that when she was stressed, she liked to stare into the Black Lake because it calmed her down, and she liked seeing the occasional mermaid or the Giant Squid. The rest of Slytherin house seemed to be aware of this because they had turned that section of the common into a sort of memorial for her: the chair itself was surrounded by lilies and a picture of Lydia had been attached to wall, under which a plaque sat. Harry moved closer to the plaque so that he could read what it said.

_ Lydia Lily Potter _
_ 1981 - 1995 _
_ “Death lies on her like an untimely frost _
_ Upon the sweetest flower of all the field,” _

“Who chose that quote?” Harry asked, his voice shaking.

“I did,” a small voice said behind Harry, “I'm Astoria Greengrass, by the way,”

“It's amazing,” Harry said.

She smiled at him, “Daphne did all the flowers. The lilies aren’t too obvious, are they?”

“No,” Harry said, “No. It's perfect,”

Daphne walked over to them, “That quotes from one of Shakespeare's plays. Astoria thought that Lydia would appreciate having a muggle quote. You know, just so she could cause a bit of controversy,”

“Yeah. No. It's great. Thank-you, both of you,” Harry said, “I didn't think anyone would do anything for her,”

Daphne shrugged, “A Slytherin is a Slytherin, no matter who they are,”

Harry thanked them both again and went to leave, but before he did, Malfoy called over to him.

“Come whenever you want, Potter,”

“Thanks, Malfoy,”

“Least I can do,”

“You're still a dick,”

“So are you, Scarhead,”
Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!

(Don't be like Harry and look after your mental health and get help when you need it!)

-E.
Harry sat and stared at the portrait of Lydia. Somehow, it being a muggle portrait made it even more poignant. The way she never moved just served as a reminder of the fact that she never would again. He sighed and sat back in the chair, glancing around the Slytherin common room. The only other time that he had been in there was when he and Ron had transformed into Crabbe and Goyle. He remembered glancing behind him as they ran and seeing Lydia half concealed in the shadows, her shoulders shaking with laughter.

Admittedly, he found it quite strange how accommodating the Slytherins were. They never gave him much attention, barely even sat near him, but there was a bizarre sort of mutual respect between them. No one was particularly happy about the circumstances in which they found themselves in, and perhaps that was why the Slytherins had gone almost two weeks without insulting him. Even Pansy Parkinson did not snap at him whenever he passed her like usual.

As he looked around the room, he understood why Lydia had always had a begrudging appreciation of it. Whilst she would always try and spend as much time in Gryffindor tower, she would admit that the Gryffindor common room had nothing on the Slytherin one. And even Harry had to admit that the Slytherin common room was much nicer. It was not nearly as cosy, but there was something therapeutic about staring into the Black Lake and the green light that filled the room from some unknown source made Harry feel as comfortable as he did when sat in front of the fire in his own common room.

He was also quite shocked at the lack of...dickheads. Harry had always imagined that the Slytherins spent their free time sat around and saying awful things about muggleborns and blood traitors or announcing their support for Voldemort and yet Harry saw no such thing. There was a sixth year consoling a sobbing third year, two girls painting each other's nails and giggling and two lads throwing a Quaffle between themselves, testing each other on poison antidotes. It was no different to anything that Harry would see in the Gryffindor common room and he was starting to think that the Slytherins being so mean was nothing more than a defence mechanism. As this thought entered his head, he could almost hear Lydia saying, “Obviously that's why they're so mean, idiot,” and rolling her eyes at him.

Harry's eyes fell on Malfoy. Who, as always, was sat on his own. This is something that Harry found most peculiar; Lydia always used to say that Malfoy was always surrounded by a crowd of ‘simpering admirers’ in the common room, but Harry had yet to see this. Most days, Malfoy sat away from any large crowds with his nose stuck in a book. At first, Harry almost felt sorry for him, thinking that he had been such a prat over the years that people had finally got rid of him, but then he realised that this was not the case.

Because Malfoy was a death eater and was pushing people away from him so they would not work out his secret.

Deep down, Harry knew that this was a bit extreme but that didn't mean that it made no sense. Malfoy had replaced his dad as death eater and was so terrified of being thrown in Azkaban that he had pushed people away. Whenever Harry checked the Marauders Map, Malfoy was always on his own or nowhere to be seen. As if all this alone wasn't enough to convince Harry that Malfoy was a death eater, Harry realised that he never showed his arms. Whilst most other Slytherins took their robes and jumpers off and rolled their sleeves up once the school day was open, Malfoy always sat
with his arms covered. And it was plainly obvious to Harry that he was doing this so he could hide the dark mark. Harry just couldn't understand why no one else had realised this. Unless he wasn't the only new death eater. Harry glanced over at Crabbe and Goyle but quickly dismissed those thoughts from his mind; Voldemort would not be stupid enough to make them death eaters.

Someone cleared their throat behind Harry's chair and he turned around to find someone who he probably should know the name of. He was in the name above and Harry was quite sure he had a weird last name.

“Oh, hi, uh...um....”

“Urquhart,”

“Yes! Urquhart,” Harry said, “you alright?”

“Yeah,” he said, “I'm only here because Slug wants to see you,”

Harry groaned, “Do you know why?”

Urquhart shrugged, “it'll be something to do with Slug Club,” he sighed, “it's honestly not that bad. You just have to tune what he's saying out,”

“You go?” Harry asked, shocked.

“Yeah,” Urquhart sighed, looking slightly embarrassed by it, “he heard me shouting at some third year for being generally offensive. And, you know, my family are...generally offensive, if you know what I mean. All for, you know...blood supremacy,”

“Right,” Harry said slowly. He had never actually had a conversation with Urquhart before but he had always assumed that he was a terrible person, and was starting to think that he himself might have been part of a much bigger problem, “Well, I guess I'll go and see Slughorn now,”

“Oh, by the way, Potter?”

“Yeah?”

“I'm sorry about Sirius and Lydia,” he said, and he sounded genuine, “I never really had a conversation with Lydia and she once cursed me but...it was a pretty good curse so credit where credits due,”

“Yeah,” Harry said, really quite confused as to how nice people were being, “yeah. Cheers mate,”

Urquhart smiled at him and then sloped off to sit with his friends. Harry stayed where he was for a minute and then remembered that Slughorn wanted to see him. He grabbed his bag off the floor and hurried from the common room. As nice as people were when he was in there, Harry couldn't help but wonder if that all changed once he left and they all started talking about how much they hated him. As he knocked on the door of Slughorn's office door, he found that he didn't really care.

“Come in!”

Bracing himself for a conversation that would probably make him want to punch something, Harry pushed the door open and forced a smile onto his face.

“Good afternoon, Professor,”

“Harry, M'boy! Take a seat, take a seat,” Slughorn said, “can I get you a drink? Tea? Pumpkin
“Uh, tea is fine, thanks,” Harry said, sitting down.

“I hear you’re spending a lot of time in the Slytherin common room?” Slughorn asked, flicking his wand so that the teapot poured tea into the cup in front of Harry.

“Oh, um, I know it’s not technically allowed but—”

Slughorn waved his hand airily, cutting Harry off.

“No, no, my dear boy, you’re not in trouble! In fact, I would encourage this sort of thing! And Professor McGonagall has told me that your sister never gave much thought to that rule,” Slughorn chuckled.

“Honestly, professor, she never get much thought to any rule,” Harry said.

Slughorn chuckled again and Harry was quite sure that he had never met someone who laughed as much as this man.

“I would have loved to meet her. Everyone I’ve spoken to about her have said she was such a delight,”

Harry raised his eyebrows and wondered who on earth he had been speaking too. He loved his sister, dearly, but he could think of several hundred occasions where she had been anything but a delight. Instead of saying this out loud, he just nodded and smiled.

“If you ask Professor Snape about her, he would probably spend a lot of time talking about how she wasn’t a delight,”

“Well, each to their own...each to their own...” He fell silent and unsure of whether or not he was meant to be carrying on the conversation, Harry took a sip of his tea and tried to look mildly interested.

“Anyway, Harry, m’boy, I wanted to talk to you about Slug Club, as the students like to call it,” Slughorn said, coming out of his reverie. Harry had the sneaking suspicion that the students did not at all like to call his Slug Club, and that Slughorn had christened it that himself, “I don't know if my invitations have been getting lost but I would love you to come! Your friend, Hermione Granger, comes every week!”

“Yeah, I know,” Harry said, “she's mentioned it a couple of times...”

“Then do come, my dear boy! Do come!” Slughorn said jovially, “i’m sure you’ll enjoy it!”

“Yeah,” Harry said, realising that there was no way out of it this time, “yeah. When's the next one?”

“Saturday evening,” Slughorn beamed, “at eight o’clock! I’ll see you then, will I, Harry?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “see you then, Professor,”

---

By the time Saturday rolled around, Slug Club was the last place that Harry wanted to be. In fact, Harry couldn’t really think of place that he actually wanted to be. He stood in the Entrance Hall and waited for Hermione, tapping his foot impatiently. She was five minutes late and if she did not turn up in the next five minutes, he would just go back to Gryffindor tower.
Unfortunately, she made an appearance four minutes later and hurried over to him, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

“Sorry,” she said, “prefect meeting overran,” she smiled at him, “ready?”

“No,” Harry muttered, “I really don't want to go,”

Hermione sighed, “it’s honestly not too bad, Harry. Besides, it'll probably do you good! You need to socialise in somewhere that isn't the Slytherin common room,”

Harry bit his tongue as he followed Hermione into Slughorn's office. The fact that he had been spending a lot of time in the Slytherin common room had become a point of contention because him, Ron and Hermione who both thought that he was being stupid for spending all his free time there. They were also not appreciative of the fact that whenever they weren't arguing, they had to listen to Harry go on and on about how he was sure that Malfoy was a death eater. Neither of them believed him, but Harry had never been so sure about something in his life. Harry, on the other hand, felt as though talking about all of this was much better than talking about Sirius and Lydia, which is all Ron and Hermione seemed to want to talk about.

He understood that they were grieving for Lydia just as much as he was, but he really didn't want to hear about it. Knowing how upset his two best friends were made Harry feel even worse, and the last thing that he needed was to feel worse than he already did.

“Harry! Hermione! Welcome! Welcome! Take a seat, take a seat!” Slughorn cried when they walked into the office which Harry was sure had been made bigger for Slughorn had somehow fit an entire table in the middle of it.

Hermione shoved Harry forward and he quickly dropped into the seat next to Urquhart who nodded at him. Harry glanced around the table; Ginny sat on Hermione's other side and looked quite pissed off about the fat that she was sat next to Cormac McLaggen. On Urquharts other side was the two Greengrass sisters and facing Harry was a very bored Blaise Zabini who was sat next to a first year Hufflepuff who Harry was sure was called Melinda Bobbin. He didn't recognise anyone else, annoyingly though, he was sure that they all recognised him.

“Well, have we all had a good week?” Slughorn asked as food was placed in front of them by houseelves. Harry glanced at Hermione who did not at all look pleased about this and wondered if she would begin to lecture them about house elf rights, “Astoria, tell us about your week?”

“Fine. Yeah. It was fine. Didn't do much, really,” Astoria said, shrugging, “Just a lot of Quidditch practice, really,”

“Hopefully that means a Slytherin victory this year!” Slughorn said cheerfully, “No offence, of course, no offence!” he added cheerfully to the the other houses, none of whom looked as though they really cared, “Anyone else? Hermione, dear?”

“Um, it's been OK,” she said, “I've been doing a lot of work and a lot of prefect duties. So, the usual...”

Slughorn beamed as though she had just told a very riveting story, “You know, I remember when I was your age in school! Of course, this was many, many years ago now...I doubt even your parents were alive!” He chuckled, “Potions was the only thing that I was ever any good at...I wasn't like you Miss Granger, good at everything!”

“Well, she isn't good at everything,” Ginny smirked, “has anyone ever seen her on a broomstick?”
Hermione laughed and rolled her eyes whilst Harry wished that he could come up with a good enough excuse to get out of there. It was in moments like this when he really needed Lydia to be around. She was always able to think of great excuses to get out of situations that they didn't want to be in, however bizarre the excuses would be.

“Sorry, Uncle Vernon, I know you want to carry on insulting us, but we have a very angry owl upstairs and we need to let her fly around or she'll start eating us,”

“Ernie, I would love to stay and chat, but I have the strangest feeling that Fred and George are about to blow up the school and if me and Harry don't go and stop them, then we're all going to die,”

“Honestly Ron, there's nothing more that I want to do right now than play chess with you again, but my dad transformed into Prongs and he's got one of his antlers stuck in a wall, so we should go and help him,”

This pointless chatter carried on for almost an hour and Harry had never been so bored in his life. When Slughorn asked him about his week, Harry muttered something about having a lot of work and threw something in about Potions to keep Slughorn happy. He then proceeded to spend a good fifteen minutes talking about Harry had clearly inherited his mother's Potion making skills whilst Hermione glared at him furiously. Another common argument between the two of them was the fact that, in Hermione's eyes, Harry was 'cheating' in Potions. Though, even Ron was on Harry's side in this argument.

Finally, the night came to and end and Harry had never stood up so quickly in his life. Outside in the hall, Hermione was holding them up by having a very long conversation with Melinda Bobbin who seemed to look up to Hermione. Ginny had already left and Harry did not feel like betting his chances of not getting in trouble off Snape or Filch if they found him walking around after curfew. There was a better chance of him not getting in trouble if he was with a prefect.

“See you later, Potter!” Daphne called to him, waving.

He smiled at her and waved, “Bye,”

Hermione tugged on the sleeve of his robe, “Ready?”

“I've been waiting for you for the past half an hour!”

“If anyone should be annoyed at anyone, I should be annoyed at you!” Hermione snapped suddenly. Harry frowned at her, “what's that meant to mean?”

“Where were you today?”

“What?”

“Where were you today?” She repeated, looking furious.

“I was in the Slytherin common - shit,” Harry groaned, “it was the Quidditch tryouts today, wasn't it?”

“Yes! And you missed them!” Hermione exclaimed, “you know how important this is to Ron! He's always, always been there for you and you didn't turn up to this one thing for him? He was really cut up about it, as well.”

Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair, “I just completely forgot,”
Hermione shook her head, “I know there's a lot going on right now, Harry, but you can't just push Ron and I away.”

“If this is about me going to the Slytherin common room-”

“Of course it is!” Hermione shouted, making Harry jump.

“If you're just pissed off about the fact that I'm friendly with Slytherins-”

“I'm not pissed off about that!” Hermione interrupted, “or do I have to remind you that I was best friends with someone who happened to be in Slytherin for five years?” when Harry didn't say anything, she ploughed on, “I just don't think that spending so much time in the Slytherin common room is such a good idea because you're pushing everyone else away,”

“It makes me feel closer to her,” Harry said quietly, looking away from her.

“I know,” Hermione said, practically whispering. She took his hand and looked up at him with tears sparkling in her eyes, “I miss her too, Harry, and so does Ron, and the fact that you aren't spending as much time with him is not helping with his grief. You know how bad he is at dealing with his emotions. We just need to...we just need to try and make it as easy as possible for each other,”

Harry nodded, “I feel like nothing is never going to be easy again,”

“It will be,”

“How do you know?”

“I'm the smartest person you know, Harry. Don't question it,” she smiled sadly at him, “just promise to be around more? Please?”

“I promise, ‘Mione,”

---

Harry stretched and stood up from his seat in the Slytherin common room. Sticking to his promise to Hermione, he was planning on spending the rest of his Sunday in Gryffindor tower. He was even going to sit in on the Gryffindor Quidditch teams training session, which he really wasn't looking forward to. But as always, Hermione was right, he should have been spending time with both of them.

When Harry walked out of the common room, however, he came across his dad who didn't look very happy to be there.

“Hi, dad,” Harry said casually.

“I didn't know you were in Slytherin, son,” James said.

Harry sighed, “if you're here to lecture me on being in there, then you're a bit late. Hermione beat you to it,”

“I don't want to lecture you on it,” James said, “but it doesn't seem like a healthy coping mechanism,”

“I’m not coping,” Harry said bluntly.

“Which is why you should go to Madam-”
“I’m not going to Madam Pomfrey!” Harry snapped.

“Well spending time in the most depressing room in the castle isn’t helping you, is it?” James said impatiently, “even Lydia didn’t spend that much time there, and she was actually sorted into Slytherin!”

“I’m aware of how Lydia spent her time, dad!” Harry yelled, “when I’m ready, I’ll have the deep, heartfelt conversation that everyone obviously wants to have with me, alright?”

“Son, it’s not about that! It’s about the fact that you’re not helping yourself! I spend all my time worrying about you these days!”

“You really don’t have to do that, dad,” Harry said, “I’m just gonna deal with everything in my own way, alright?”

“Harry-”

“I promised Ron that I would watch Gryffindor train, I’ll see you later,”

As Harry stomped away from his dad, wiping tears from his eyes, he could not understand why he was pushing someone away after he had spent most of his life wishing was by his side.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank-you for reading!

-E.
“Are you coming to Hogsmeade, Harry?”

“No,” Harry said, struggling to keep the frostiness out of his voice.

All week, Ron and Hermione had been asking him that question over and over again, but his answer was always the same. He knew it was because they felt like him staying cooped up in the castle was not great for him, but he felt like nothing was great for him anymore so there was no point in even trying. The fact that it was Halloween was not helping his mood, either.

“Alright. See you later,”

Harry heard the door shut and the dormitory fell into silence again. With very little plans for what he was going to do for the rest of the day, Harry shut the curtains around his bed and burrowed deeper into the covers and closed his eyes. Just as he was driving off to sleep, the door banged open again and he heard raised voices.

“He isn’t staying in all day on his own!”

“If that's what he wants-”

“Harry!” Came Hermione's loud voice, “Harry! Come on! We’re going to Hogsmeade today!”

Feeling as though the best way to get this over and done with as quickly as possible, Harry stayed as still and silent as possible, hoping that Hermione would eventually bored and give up.

“I know you're pretending to be asleep!” Hermione snapped before wrenching open his curtains.

Harry groaned and snatched his glasses off his chest of drawers and shoved them on his face, looking up at Ron and Hermione. Ron was perched on the end of Neville's bed, looking slightly awkward and Hermione was stood at the foot of the bed with her arms folded and looking furious.

“Last week, you told me that you'd be around more,” Hermione said, “and so far, you haven’t done very well!”

“Mione, maybe we should just leave-”

“No!” Hermione snapped at Ron. She marched across the room to Harry's wardrobe and threw a pair of jeans and a t-shirt at him, “Get dressed, Harry!”

“Fuckin' hell, Hermione, you're not my mum!” Harry yelled.

“T’m more than aware of that but you act like a child so much that I often feel like I am!” She exclaimed, turning towards the door and gesturing for Ron to follow her, “We’ll meet you in the common room in five minutes,”

“No, you won’t,” Harry said bluntly.

Hermione whirled around to face him again, “Don’t let it destroy you!”
Harry froze, suddenly taken aback, “W-what? Have you - have you read my letter?”

“No,” she said, her voice suddenly much softer, “she wrote it in mine. And in Ron's. I think she wrote in everyone's. So don't let it destroy you, Harry. She didn't die for you to mope around all day!”

He glared at Hermione for a moment, but only because he was so angry about the fact that everything that she had said was right.

“Fine,” he muttered, “Fine. I’ll be down in a few minutes,”

“Good!” Hermione said triumphantly, “and you're not going to the Slytherin common room after we get back. We’re skipping the feast and eating with your dad. Remus is coming up to the castle as well,”

It took Harry longer than five minutes to actually put his clothes on and even longer to get himself from the dormitories to the common room, but Hermione didn't snap at him for it so he must have made it out of her bad books. Part of him had been hoping that the trip to Hogsmeade would be such a disaster he would get out of all the other ones for the rest of the year, but just walking up to the village put him in a better mood and he was strangely bitter about it.

When they reached the Three Broomsticks, Ron immediately turned in the direction of the bar and Harry and Hermione battled their way through the crowd to find an empty table, and they finally found one in the very corner of the pub that was as out of the way as possible in a packed pub.

“You know, Ginny isn't completely thrilled about playing Seeker-”

“No,” Harry said, “No. I don’t want to play Quidditch this year, Hermione,”

Hermione sighed and then nodded, “Alright, alright...just making sure,”

“Can I ask you a question?” Harry asked suddenly.

“Sure,” Hermione said, though she sounded quite apprehensive.

“I know the letter is - I mean, it's all your business, but, I was just-”

“You can read it, Harry,” Hermione said gently, reaching into her pocket and handing it over to him.

“You keep it on you?”

“Don't act like you don't carry around yours,” Hermione scoffed.

“Dear Hermione,

I would apologise, but I feel like somehow, you knew that it would end up like this. If I knew that it would end up like this, then there's very little chance that you wouldn't. I am sorry though. I don’t particularly want to go out like this, but I guess I don't really have a chance.

I explained this in both Harry, Ron and my dad's letter, but I'm not entirely sure that any of them will take any of this in fully with all this going on in their heads: Voldemort has created objects called Horcruxes, which contain a piece of his soul. The only way to kill Voldemort once and for all is to destroy all of these objects. Riddles diary was one and so was I. There's six left, and I have no idea what they are of where they are, but I’m sure that you’ll work it out. You have to work it out. You have to kill him.
As weird as this sounds, this is for the best and I know that you’ll come to understand it before any of the others, so please look out for them. And remember to look after yourself. You're good at everything but looking after yourself, so make sure you do that.

I feel like I never got to tell you how much I love you and how much I appreciated you being my friend. You were the bestest friend I could have asked for, Hermione, and one that I always wanted before I came to Hogwarts. So thank-you for being that friend to me. It was more than I deserved.

I am ever so slightly pissed off that I’ll never see you become Minister for Magic, but I know that when it does happen, you’ll be the greatest Minister to ever hold office. Don't let this be something that stops you from achieving that. Don't let this ruin you. Just see this as a little blip in your life that you’ll get over in a couple of months. Just don't let it destroy you. Let is destroy Voldemort.

I’ll see you again one day, but hopefully not soon,

Love,

Lydia,

Harry dropped the letter to the table and pushed it back towards Hermione who stowed it back into her pocket, looking tearful. They sat in silence until Ron appeared, carrying three butterbeers. He set them down on the table and looked between the two of them.

“Why are we crying?”

“I showed Harry my letter,” Hermione sniffles..

Ron nodded knowingly and sat in the seat next to her, patting his coat pocket, “Got mine here. And you’re not reading it,” he added, when Harry opened his mouth, “because it won't make you feel better,”

“I know,” Harry said quietly, “who'd have thought that you'd be the voice of reason?”

“Stranger things have happened,” Ron said. He rested his head on hand, “I just ordered four butterbeers then, out of habit. It was only when Rosmerta asked if I was sure that I wanted four that I realised,”

“It’s stupid things like that you forget, isn't it?” Hermione said, “I saved her a seat in the prefect meeting last week and then remembered....”

“It's good to talk about it though,” Ron said, “that's what my mum says, anyway,”

“How's George?” Harry asked, suddenly realising that he had barely thought of him over the last few weeks.

“Oh, you know, he's...George,” Ron said slowly, “mum wrote to me the other day and said that's he's almost like himself again. He just has moments where he doesn't really know what to do with himself,”

“We’re all like that, though,” Hermione said, wiping her eyes, “We just need to learn to deal with it,”

“Yeah, and according to Dumbledore the best way to do that is to go after Voldemort,” Harry muttered.

“What?” Ron asked.
Harry sighed and then began to explain what Dumbledore had said to him when he was in his office. Neither of them spoke until he was finished and it was Ron who broke the silence.

“He said you could help find the Horcruxes and you said no?” He asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said heavily.

“Harry, that was really really stupid,” Hermione said, “how else are you going to-”

“I'm not going to do anything,” Harry cut across, “I'm not going after him! Why would I go after someone who's spent the last fifteen years trying to kill me? I'm not putting my dad through that! Do you really think he could survive losing my mum, Sirius and Lydia?”

Hermione paused and then shook her head, “No. Of course not,”

“And Lydia already fulfilled the prophecy, didn't she? Neither can live whilst the other survives,” Harry said, “obviously that was about her and Voldemort,”

“Do you not want revenge, though?” Ron asked quietly.

Harry shook his head, “In the letter, she said. She said that the biggest “fuck you” to Voldemort was that if I carry on living, and the quickest way for me to die would be to go after him, wouldn't it?”

“You're right,” Hermione said, “but can we at least talk about something more cheerful? I'm fed up of crying all the time!”

The fact that between the three of them, they couldn't think of something cheerful became a strange source of amusement. Harry laughed much more than he had done in months, and for once, it was real, genuine laughter and it was with quite a heavy heart that they left the warmth of the Three Broomsticks and began to make their way back to the castle.

What Harry really wanted to do, was freeze this moment in time and stay in it forever. He wanted to remember what it was like to laugh with Ron and Hermione like the past year had never happened, and pretend that the only reason that Lydia was not sat with them in the Three Broomsticks was because she had gone to meet George and there was nothing sinister to her absence. He wanted to pretend that when he saw his dad later, it would not be stooped in awkwardness because the last two conversations they had had were arguments.

He just wanted to pretend that that everything was as it should be.

“Oh god, what are those two arguing about?” Hermione muttered, pointing ahead at Katie Bell and her friend Leanne.

“Let's not get involved,” Ron sighed, just as they were met with a rather disturbing scene: Katie Bell had risen six feet in the air, her arms held out and her face disturbingly blank.

“Never mind,” Ron muttered weakly as Harry ran forward.

“Go and get someone!” Hermione screamed at Ron as Katie fell to the floor.

Ron returned moments later followed by Hagrid who took one look at Katie and dropped to the floor, picking her up.

“Don’t touch that necklace!” Hagrid ordered, pointing at a necklace on the floor. Harry bent closer to look at it. There was something strangely familiar about it but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.
“What happened?” Harry demanded, rounding on Leanne who was sobbing.

“I-I don’t know!” She sobbed, “she went to the bathroom in The Three Broomstics and came back with that necklace! She said that she had to give it to Professor Dumbledore, no matter what!”

Harry frowned at her, “Did she say who gave it to her?” though he already had a good idea who it was.

“No,”

Hermione put her arm around her, “it's okay, Leanne. We’ll go up to school now. I'm sure Madam Pomfrey will be able to put her right,”

They hurried back up to the school and came face to face with Professor McGonagall and Snape, who flicked his wand so that the necklace floated out of Harry’s hands and into the air.

“What happened?” McGonagall asked Leanne, who somehow managed to recount the story through her sobs.

“Go up to Madam Pomfrey and ask for something for shock,” McGonagall said kindly. When Leanne had disappeared up the marble staircase, McGonagall turned to Harry, Ron and Hermione with a much sterner look on her face, “What happened? What did you see?”

“Nothing, really,” Hermione said anxiously, “We saw that they were arguing and then Katie was suddenly in the air! I think it was the necklace but she didn't say who gave it-”

“It was Draco Malfoy,” Harry said, not seeing the point of tiptoeing around the point.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him and Ron looked in the opposite direction. Professor Snape fixed with him with a cold glare and McGonagall’s mouth went very thin, her brows knitted tightly together.

“That's a very serious accusation, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said finally.

“I know,” Harry said, “I know. But I really think that it was him,”

“Very well,” McGonagall said, looking at Harry suspiciously, “you four better get going now,”

No one needed telling twice. They quickly hurried away and began in the direction of James’ office in complete silence. Harry knew that Ron would not want to talk about the possibility of Malfoy being a death eater but he knew that Hermione was already mentally shouting at him for saying it in front of McGonagall and Snape, of all people.

“He is a death eater,” Harry said, breaking the silence.

“Harry-”

“It makes sense!” He snapped, “he went to Borgin and Burkes to buy that necklace in the summer! And he showed Borgin the Dark Mark! That's why he was so scared!”

“Don't be ridiculous,” Hermione said, “besides, he said it was a pair-”

“Necklaces can come in a pair!”

“He said one of them was broke-”
“Necklaces can break!”

“Yeah, but necklaces can be fixed easily, can't they?” Ron said hesitantly, “whatever Malfoy was talking about was obviously more complicated or he wouldn't need help,”

“He's a Death Eater. I'm sure of it.” Harry said bluntly.

Hermione sighed and stopped in the middle of the corridor and turning around to face him, “This new obsession with Draco Malfoy is a weird coping mechanism of yours that you need to nip in the bud!”

“I'm not obsessed-”

“Yes, you are,” Ron said, “Mate, I'm sorry, but on the rare occasion that you actually spend time with us, he's all you talk about. Do you know how often I catch you staring at him from across the room? You're obsessed,”

Harry felt his cheeks begin to burn and his defences rise. They were getting closer and closer to a subject that he had been doing his best to avoid since their fourth year and he wasn't going to be forced to talk about it there and then. Hermione seemed to notice that they had hit a nerve because her face softened and she opened her mouth but a voice that Harry could have done without hearing reached their ears.

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Shove off, Malfoy,” Ron snapped, “this isn't any of your business,”

“You are shouting like its the entire castles business,” he drawled, “who is that you're obsessed with, Potty?”

Before he knew what he was doing, Harry had shoved passed both Ron and Hermione and grabbed Malfoy by the front of his robes, pushing him back against the wall. Hermione screamed whilst Ron tried to pull Harry back but he shoved him off.

“Call me that again, pretty boy, I dare you,”

Malfoy raised his eyebrows at Harry, smirking slightly. Even Ron and Hermione had fallen silent, and Harry couldn't work out why.

“Harry? What are you doing, son?”

Harry turned his head to the side to see James stood with Remus, both holding massive platters of food. He turned back to Malfoy and let go of his robes, taking a step backwards from him.

“And you wonder why people call you Potty,” Malfoy muttered, “See you Granger, Weasley...Mr Potter...Loopy,”

“Five points from Slytherin!” James shouted at Malfoys retreating back, “for being a dick,” he added under his breath.

“I don't think you can call a sixteen year old a dick,” Remus said.

“Probably not, but I can call my sixteen year old son a dick,” James said, turning to face Harry, “I don't know what's gotten into you, but you need to snap out of it!”

“He called me Potty!” Harry protested.
“He called you Potty all last year, as well,” James said firmly, “so you just move on and ignore it, okay?”

“Could you ignore it?” Harry snapped.

“Yes,” James said, handing Ron the platter of food so that he could put his arm around Harry, “let's just go to my office and eat a lot of food, yeah?”

“Good idea,” Remus said brightly, “come on. I'm starving,”

“Harry called Malfoy pretty,” Ron whispered to Hermione, thinking that Harry could not hear.

“I know,” Hermione whispered back.

“Should we talk to him about it?”

“Not tonight,” Hermione whispered, “or...or ever...”

Harry was more than happy to just pretend that everything that had happened after leaving Hogsmeade had never happened.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry that updates have been few and far between, but I've had looooodsoads of exams because my college hates me or something.

Anyway, hopefully I'm going to be back in the swing of things now.

Thanks for reading!

-E.
The first Quidditch match of the year was looming ever closer and Harry was quite pissed off about it for it seemed to be the only thing that anyone spoke about. There was a strange amount of secrecy surrounding the new Slytherin lineup and it was causing such a big deal that Katie Bell actually asked Harry if he had heard anything in the Slytherin common room. When he told her that he hadn't, he felt as though she didn't actually believe him but found that he couldn't care less about what people thought. Besides, he was telling the truth; when he was in the Slytherin common room, he barely spoke to anyone. And if he did speak to someone, it was the Greengrass sisters or, very rarely, Urquhart. And even though Urquhart was the Slytherin captain, Harry had taken it upon himself to not talk about Quidditch because people were still pissed off about that fact that he wasn't playing.

Even the Slytherins seemed pissed off that he wasn't playing that year, though Harry thought that that might be because it meant he spent more time in their common room. Of course, whenever Harry went to see his dad and Ron came with him, it was all they spoke about. Harry had the strangest feeling that the only reason they constantly spoke about Quidditch was to try and remind Harry how much he loved the game and maybe even get him to try out for the team again, but they were fighting a losing battle.

Although, even he couldn't hide from the fact that he really did miss playing Quidditch. He missed the feeling of the wind blowing through his hair as he took a sharp dive to catch the Snitch. He missed being part of a team and listening to the Captains pep talk moments before stepping out onto the pitch. He even missed waking up the morning after a game and feeling as though every bone in his body was aching but not really minding because it was just a reminder that he could achieve great things.

Whenever these thoughts crossed his mind, he would sit and think about possibly playing Quidditch again but would always end up coming back to the same conclusion of not trying out. The thing with playing Quidditch was that it always brought unwanted attention, and the last thing that Harry wanted was to be the centre of attention. He was fed up of the sad looks that people gave him when he passed them in a corridor, or the patronising whispers that followed him wherever he went.

“Oh, I feel so sorry for him! To lost your sister and your godfather on the same day? I don't know how he deals with it,”

“Poor thing has even stopped playing Quidditch,”

“Have you noticed he’s started wearing her Prefect badge? Maybe it's the only thing he has to remember her by. They never had much, did they?”

Someone who was struggling even more with the unwanted attention that Quidditch brings, was Ron. No one had ever been kind to Ron when he played Quidditch, and they didn't seem like they were going to stop anytime soon. Hermione spent a lot of her time telling Ron to ignore all the taunts that were being thrown his way, but Harry felt as though this was much easier said than done. Although, he was quite sure that everything would be fine as long as no one remembered the lyrics to Weasley Is our King.

Ginny had also taken it upon herself to keep Harry updated on everything that was happening with
“It’s not that he’s a bad player because he’s really not,” Ginny whispered to him one evening in Slug Club so no one else would hear, “he’s just really bad under pressure!”

“Well, we all knew that from last year, didn't we?” Harry said, wishing that she would talk to him about something that wasn't Quidditch, “we still won the cup though,”

“Yeah, when you were on the team,”

Harry shook his head, “I missed the last few matches, or have you forgotten about Umbridge’s ban?”

“I think you're forgetting that you aren't banned anymore!” Ginny hissed, “I don’t know why you don’t just come back! You know Katie would let you back on the team in a heartbeat!”

“I don't want to play anymore, Ginny, I've already told what feels like the whole damn castle!” Harry snapped.

“Fine.” she snapped back, “but make sure that you actually come to the game, alright? Ron would hate it if you weren't there to see it!” she paused for a moment and then looked him straight in the eye, “and you shouldn’t be on your own, Harry, not at the moment,”

“Jesus Christ, Ginny, has Hermione appointed you to make sure I'm not going to off myself or something?”

“See, that's your problem!” Ginny exclaimed, “you have it in your head that no one gives a shit about you when people actually do! Ron cares about you, Hermione cares about you, your dad cares about you, I care about you!”

“Yeah, I’m aware of that,” Harry said through gritted teeth, “I know what's going on in my own head,”

“So, you’ll be there?”

“Yes,”

“Good,”

On the morning of the Quidditch match, however, Harry realised that it was the last place on earth that he wanted to be. When he woke up to tell Ron this, he realised that it perhaps was not the best time for him to say anything of the sort because Ron was sat upright in his bed, his eyes wide open. Somehow, he seemed more nervous than before he first ever Quidditch match the previous year.

“You alright, Ron?” Dean asked, who was one of the chasers.

“Yeah,” Ron replied hollowly, “yeah. Yeah. I’m fine,”

“Want to get some breakfast, Ron?” Harry asked, forcing a cheery tone into his voice.

Ron turned to Harry and looked as though he had only just realised that he was there.

“Breakfast,” he repeated, as though such a thing was shocking, “Breakfast. Yes. Breakfast,”

Down in the Great Hall, they found Hermione sat on the end of the Gryffindor table with Neville and Luna, who was wearing a ridiculous lion hat. Ron seemed to be quite fixated on Luna’s hat and only looked away because Hermione pushed a big plate of breakfast in front of him with the stern
order to start eating.

“I must be mental for doing this again,” Ron whispered hoarsely, “mental. I was shit last year, too!”

“That’s not true, Ron,” Neville said, “we won the cup last year, didn’t we?”

“Only just,” Ron pointed out, rubbing his eyes, “D’you think it’s too late to pull out?”

“I’m not expert on Quidditch, Ronald, but even I know that it’s too late,” Hermione said gently, “but you’ll be fine! Katie wouldn’t let you on the team if she thought that you couldn’t play properly!”

Harry nodded and poured Ron a goblet of Pumpkin Juice, an idea brewing in his head. It was perhaps one of his more stupid ideas, but, as always, desperate times call for desperate measures. Forcing a look of innocence onto his face, Harry grinned at Ron and pushed the drink towards him.

“Drink up, mate,” he said.

“Don’t drink that Ron!” Hermione exclaimed, hitting him on the arm.

“What?” Ron asked, rubbing his arm, “It’s only Pumpkin Juice!”

“No, it isn’t!” Hermione whispered, “Harry just poured some Liquid Luck into it!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, ‘Mione,” Harry said casually, tucking the tiny bottle back into his robes, “you should probably get going now though, you don’t want to be late, do you?”

Ron glanced at Hermione for a second and then drank the pumpkin juice in one massive gulp. Hermione tutted and sighed loudly but did not say anything as Ron stood up and hurried out of the Great Hall, waving at them as he went.

“You shouldn’t have done that, Harry,” she said seriously, “you could get expelled for that!”

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, smiling at her and standing up, “I’m going to see Hagrid, are you coming?”

“You’re going to see - but the match!”

Harry shrugged, “I don’t feel like going,”

“But Ron-”

“Won’t know if I’m there or not,” Harry said, “you coming?”

“No,” Hermione said, shaking her head, “No. I promised him I’d go and watch,”

“See you later, then,”

Really, Harry knew that he should have been supporting Ron. After all, there had only ever been one moment in their whole friendship when Ron hadn’t been supportive of Harry and everything that he had done. And yet, Harry did not feel even slightly guilty as he turned his back on the Quidditch pitch and walked in the direction of Hagrid’s hut.

“Harry!” Hagrid exclaimed when he opened the door, “I thought yeh’d be at the match?”

“Didn’t feel like watching,” Harry shrugged, “you weren’t planning on going, were you?”
Hagrid shook his head, “No, not me. I’ve never warmed ter Quidditch like the rest of yers. Want a cup o’ tea?”

“Please,” Harry said, sitting at the table and resting his head on his hand.

“How’ve you been since - since...yeh know...,” Hagrid said quietly, placing a cup of tea in front of him.

Harry did not reply straight away, he just stared down at his tea and tried to think of the best way to describe how he felt without sounding like someone who had completely lost their mind. Though, he wasn’t sure that he hadn’t completely lost his mind.

“I don’t know,” Harry admitted, “I actually don’t know. There’s days when I feel like I’m alright, and then there’s days when I just don’t want to get out of bed, you know? And like, there was this weird part of me that thought I’d be able to deal with losing them. I thought that because I grew up without a mum and dad, I’d be able to carry on without them but...” he trailed off, shaking his head.

“It’s completely different because yeh had memories with Lydia and Sirius. Yeh know what it’s like teh have a sister and a godfather. Yeh didn’t know what it was like teh have parents,” Hagrid said.

“Yeah!” Harry exclaimed, “yeah...that’s exactly it...”

Hagrid smiled at him sadly, “Yeh know, all I’ve ever wanted is fer yeh and yeh sister to get a break from all this rubbish...”

“Lydia did get a break,” Harry pointed out, “she’s not having to deal with any of this anymore, is she?”

“It’s not the answer though, Harry,” Hagrid said, sounding a lot more serious than he usually did, “yeh’ve got an entire life ahead of yeh...there’s so much more to life than what yeh’re seein’ now;”

“Mhmm...” Harry said, taking a sip of his tea, “I know. I do. I just...”

“Don’ let it destroy yeh, let it destroy you-know-who?”

Harry’s head snapped up so much that he hurt his neck, but he didn’t care. He looked up at Hagrid, his eyes wide and his mouth hanging open, “Did she - did she write it in your letter, too?”

“Ay,” Hagrid said, “and I’m guessin’ it’s causin’ yeh some issues?”

“You could say that...” Harry muttered.

The more he read Lydia’s letter, and the more he began to miss her and Sirius, he wondered if Dumbledore was right. He wondered if he really should have been devoting his life to finding Voldemort. After all, destroying Voldemort was probably the best way to stop himself from being destroyed. And that is what Lydia had asked him to do, she had asked him to destroy Voldemort.

“Yeh know, I don’ think she meant it literally,” Hagrid said wisely, “I don’ think she was expectin’ yeh to go after him. I really think she just wanted yeh to live, Harry,”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “I just...sometimes I feel like all I’m good for is going after Voldemort, you know? And maybe I should. Maybe that’s what I’m meant to do. Maybe we were both meant to die,”

“Don’ say that!” Hagrid yelled, making Fang whimper and Harry jump, “don’ say that! Nah, yeh are meant to live! You don’ need to be fighting an adults war, Harry! Yeh leave the defeating You-
“Believe me, I don’t want to fight, but...he is the reason I’ve lost so much—”

“-and he’d be the reason yeh lost even more if yeh went after him,” Hagrid interrupted, “yeh don’ really want to put yeh dad through even more loss, d’yeh? Yeh don’ want to put Ron and Hermione through that, d’yeh?”

“Obviously not,” Harry said, “No. I don’t ever want anyone to feel how I feel right now,”

“Then yeh keep on goin’, because it’s the only thing yeh can do, kid,” Hagrid said, “yeh jus’ keep on goin’ and yeh don’ stop until all o’ this is behind yeh! And that day’ll come, I know it will,”

“That day feels quite far away, actually,” Harry sighed.

“Did yeh ever think yeh were gonna leave the Dursleys on yeh eleventh birthday?” Hagrid asking, his eyes twinkling, “did yeh think that was the day yeh was gonna get away from them?”

Harry laughed, “No. I didn’t,”

“If yeh waited ten years for that, I’m sure yeh can wait another ten years for somet even better,”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t completely on my own for those ten years. I had Lydia,” Harry said, “and ten years seems like a long time right about now;”

“Yeh not on yer own, Harry,” Hagrid said gently, “yeh’ve got yeh dad, yeh’ve got Hermione and Ron and the rest of the Weasleys. And yeh’ve got me. And Lydia was very stern about the fact that I’ve got ter look after yeh, no matter what. In fact-” he stood up from his chair and walked over to a chest of drawers and pulled something out of it, “-read this. It might put yeh mind at rest,”

Harry took the parchment from Hagrid, and, already knowing what it was, tears sprang to his eyes. It was the letter that Lydia had wrote him before she had done it. He stared down at it for a moment, not taking in what she had actually written but looking at her handwriting. The letters were big and spikey and not at all as neat as usual, giving off the impression that this had been one of the last letters that she had written for there was something frantic about the smudged words and the holes where she had accidentally pierced the parchment. If anything, it looked like an essay she had rushed ten minutes before the bell rang.

“Dear Hagrid,

I have this awful feeling that you’re going to be the first to find me, and if you were the person to find me, then I am so sorry. I really didn’t want it to be you, but someone had to. So, again, I am so, so, so, sorry.

First of all, I need to thank you for everything that you’ve done for me and Harry over the years. The day you came and rescued us from the Dursleys was the greatest day of my life, and it’s something that I’m never going to stop being thankful for, and I don’t think that I could ever be able to describe the feeling I had when we left the Dursleys in that weird hut, and I have you to thank for that.

And even though I know that you would do this even if I didn’t ask you, I need to ask to put my own mind at rest. Please, look after Harry. I know he’s his own person and all that, but just the thought of losing him makes my head explode, so I can’t even imagine what it’d be like to actually lose him. And I can’t even imagine what it’ll be like for him to lose me. We were all each other ever had, and I don’t want him to get it into his head that once I’m gone, he’ll be on his own. Just make sure he’s
OK. Please, Hagrid, it’s all I ask. And as difficult as this might be, try and stop him from doing something that is ridiculously stupid. Stupid is fine. Ridiculously stupid is not. There is a fine line and he never seems to be able to see the line.

Don’t let this destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort. Please.

I know I’ve already written this but thank-you, Hagrid, for everything. You’ve been so supportive of me and Harry even when we probably didn’t deserve your support. So, thank-you. Seriously.

Love,

Lydia,”

Harry dropped the letter to the table and looked up at Hagrid, whose eyes were sparkling with tears. One thing that had struck Harry about the letter was how often she had written please, further confirming Harry’s theory that this had been one of the last letters she had written. There was something desperate about it, and that just made him feel even worse. He pictured her sat in her usual seat in the common room, hunched over piles and piles of parchment, her hand moving in a blur as she tried to sum up exactly what she was feeling moments before her death. He wondered if she had shed a tear whilst writing these letters or if she had just written them as quickly as possible, wanting nothing more than to just get on with the task ahead.

“Thanks for letting me read that, Hagrid,” Harry said, finally breaking the silence.

“Don’t mention it,” Hagrid said gruffly, taking the letter back and rolling it up, “I thought yeh would like teh see it,”

“Sometimes I forget that she actually lived,” Harry said, “It’s not even been a year since she died but she just seems so far away...Sirius too...”

“That’s what I felt with me dad,” Hagrid said, “but they haven’ gone too far. Nah, I don’ think the dead ever really leave us. Their all around us,”

Harry shook his head, “I don’t’ feel like that,”

“Yeh not lookin’ properly!” Hagrid said, “When I go into Hogsmeade, I see me dad in the men who are always sittin’ at the bar and laughin’ and talkin’ loudly. Me dad was always laughin’, yeh see, he was a funny man...and I see Sirius in all the kids who I ’ave to chase away from the Forest...yehself included in that, mind you. And I see Lydia in every person who ever stands up for what they believe in. I saw two kids yesterday - a Slytherin and a Gryffindor - walkin’ back from my class together and they weren’ even arguin’! An’ it was like watchin’ Lydia Hermione...her spirit lives on, Harry! She’s never gonna be far away. Same with yeh mum and Sirius and me dad...they’re all around us, always,”

By the time Harry got back to the Gryffindor common room, it was jam packed, telling him that it had been a Gryffindor victory. Grinning despite himself, Harry scanned the room for Ron and Hermione but could only find Hermione, sat on her own. Pushing through the crowd, he finally made it over to her and perched on the arm of the chair that she was sat on.

“Was it a good game?” he asked.

She shrugged, “it was ok, I guess. Ron did ridiculously well...no surprises there, though,”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Harry sighed.
“For god's sake, Harry!” Hermione snapped, “I saw you put-”

Harry just shook his head and reached into his pockets, pulling out the tiny bottle and showing it to Hermione: it was still full to the top and the wax seal surrounding the cork had yet to be broken.

“You didn’t put it in…” Hermione said faintly.

“Nope,” Harry said brightly, stowing it away in his pocket, “he just needed a little push. Where is he, anyway?”

“If you look straight ahead, you might just be able to make him out between Lavender Brown's arm,” a disgusted voice, belonging to Ginny, said behind them.

Frowning, Harry looked up and saw Ron and Lavender kissing. He raised his eyebrows but did not say anything. He would not have ever put them two together in his mind and was quite upset that Lydia was not around to see and make fun of this entire situation.

“He doesn’t look like he’s very good at it, does he?” Ginny sighed.

“I’m going for a walk,” Hermione said quietly, jumping up from her seat and walking towards the portrait hole, her head bowed.

Ginny nudged him in the back, “Go after her, you idiot,”

“This feels more like a girl problem,” Harry said, nodding his head towards the portrait hole.

“Not when my brothers involved,” Ginny said, shaking her head and pushing him forward, “she’s your best friend,”

Sighing, Harry gloomily waved goodbye to her and left the common room, hurrying down the corridor after Hermione. He found her sat in an unused classroom, sat cross legged on a desk with tears streaming down her face. She looked up when he walked into the room and hastily began to wipe her eyes.

“I'm not c-c-crying,”

“No,” Harry said, “I think this counts as sobbing,”

“Don’t be a dick,” she muttered.

Harry smiled slightly and slid onto the desk next to her. Immediately, she rested her head on his shoulder.

“I know there's bigger things to be worrying about than who Ron’s snogging,” Hermione sniffled, “and I know I’m being stupid,”

“You’re not,” Harry said, “and, to be fair, we should all worry about who he’s snogging because Ginny’s right, he looks like he’s terrible at it. So maybe it’s good that it’s not you he’s snogging,”

Hermione laughed and hit him on the leg, “who said that I want to snog Ron, anyway?”

Harry smiled inwardly, “No one, obviously,”

“I’m sorry I’ve been so hard on you lately, Harry,” she whispered, “but this whole thing with Lydia has really gotten to me…I can’t bare to lose anyone else,”
“I get it,” Harry said quietly, “I can’t, either,”

They did not speak after this. They just sat and enjoyed each other's company and, reveled in the fact that, maybe for one of the last times, they were experiencing normal teenager problems. Harry didn't even get overly angry when Filch found them and shouted at them for being out of bounds.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, happy (late) St. Patricks Day to anyone who celebrated!

Secondly, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I planned a few more chapters today and I am SO SO excited about where this is going, and I hope you are too!!!!

Thank-you for reading!!!! <3

-E.
Harry had come to the stark and quite horrific realisation that Ron and Hermione might never be able to repair their friendship. Hermione, who had been under the impression that she and Ron would be going to Slughorn’s Christmas party together, felt betrayed by Ron’s sudden and quite bizarre relationship with Lavender Brown and Ron felt as though Hermione was being stupid about the whole thing. Harry thought that they were both being stupid about the whole thing and was fed up of the fact that he had split his time between the two of them, and the only thing either of them spoke about was the other. What Harry really wanted to do was tell them to both get a grip, but he kept his mouth shut and tried to spend as much time as was humanly possible in the Slytherin common room. At least there, no one ranted and raved about their relationship problems and, if they did, they kept it very quiet.

His time away from Ron and Hermione just meant that he could devote more time to obsessing over Draco Malfoy and whatever it was that he was up too. After finding out that Malfoy was no longer playing Quidditch, he had become even more convinced that Malfoy had definitely joined the death eaters, he just didn’t know how to prove it to anyone.

Now, more than ever, he really needed Lydia. He glanced over at the portrait of her and sighed, running a hand through his hair. She would have been able to sort Ron and Hermione out and would probably have sided with Harry and believed that Malfoy was a death eater. But he found that there was really very little point in crying about something that he would never be able to change, but that didn’t stop him from begging her to come back to life in his head, even for just a moment so that he could just have one last conversation with her.

“Uh, you alright, Potter?” Daphne Greengrass asked, dropping into the seat across from him, “it’s just that you’ve been pulling at your hair for the last five minute,”

“I’ve been - oh,” Harry said, letting go of his hair and rubbing his head, “Didn’t even realise what I was doing,”

Daphne nodded, “Alright. Just making sure that you weren’t going to shed your hair everywhere. I don’t think it’d be very appreciated,” she grinned at him, “So, you got a date to Slughorn’s Christmas party?”

“I haven’t even thought about it.” Harry admitted, “I’ve been more worried about-”

“Lord Voldemort?”

“Yeah,”

“I get it,” she said, nodding, “just go stag. That’s what I’m doing,”

“Is that a joke about my Patronus?”

She snorted, “It wasn’t, but I kind of wish it was though.”

They fell into silence again and Harry’s eyes were, as always, drawn to the portrait of Lydia on the wall. He read the quote over and over again in his mind, and he wasn’t really sure why. It didn’t make him feel better, it just reminded him of how she shouldn’t have been dead and how he
shouldn’t have had to be spending his time in the Slytherin common room in a desperate attempt to feel closer to her again.

*Death lies on her like an untimely frost, upon the sweetest flower of all the field.*

*Death lies on her like an untimely frost, upon the sweetest flower of all the field.*

*Death lies on her like an untimely frost, upon the sweetest flower of all the field.*

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Daphne asked hesitantly.

“Yeah, no, it’s just...that quote,”

“Is it too much?” she asked hurriedly, “We can - we can take it down if you want. Astoria had loads of other ideas, anyway-”

“No,” Harry said quickly, “No. I like it. But, out of, out of interest, what were the other ideas?”

Daphne smirked, “Well, Astoria, for some weird, inexpiable reason, has gotten really into muggle literature recently,”

“No weird,” Astoria said, appearing behind her sister, “Sorry, I wasn’t listening to your conversation, I just came back from Quidditch practice and then started listening to your conversation,” she grinned sheepishly at them, “and muggle literature is so much better than all the crap that Wizards write! Have either of you ever read *The Catcher in the Rye*?”

“Never even heard of it,” Daphne said.

Harry just shrugged, “The Dursley’s weren’t really the type to take me and Lydia to the library every week,” to cover the awkward silence, he kept on talking, “so, um, these quotes? What others - what others were there?”

Astoria looked thoughtful for a moment, “The first one I thought of was, “though she be but little she is fierce,” which is from a Shakespeare play. Then there was also, “Even Death has a heart,” but don’t ask me what book that comes from, because I cannot remember. And then there was also, “Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal, which is from-”

“Tori,” Daphne said, her voice sounding strange, “I think he’s heard enough,”

Harry sat with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands as awful sobs wracked his body. He balled his hands into his fists and tugged on his hair, wanting all the pain to stop. He wanted everything to stop and to go back to how it used to be. He wanted to have Lydia by his side. He wanted to know that Sirius was only a letter away from him. He wanted to know that his dad wasn’t grieving the loss of his daughter as well as the loss of his wife. He wanted to know that Ron and Hermione were still friends, and that one stupid thing had not ruined their entire friendship. He wanted everything to be OK, but everything was far from OK.

“Oh, Harry, I’m really s-sorry,” Astoria said, “but you said - you said wanted to hear-”

“No,” Harry said, somehow managing to speak through his tears, “No. It’s fine. I’m glad I heard the rest of them,”

He forced himself to look up at them both and tried to ignore the fact that the entire common room was staring at him. Malfoy was stood by Zabini and Parkinson, his eyebrows raised. Harry could not tell if this was out of amusement, sympathy or a mixture of both, but he found that he didn’t really
“Are you sure you’re ok, Potter?” Daphne asked, “I haven’t seen anyone cry like-”

“Fine,” Harry repeated, standing up and furiously wiping his eyes, “I’m going to, um, I’m going to see my dad,”

Without looking back, Harry hurried out of the common room and ran up the marble staircase to James’ office, taking the stairs two at a time. He kept his eyes firmly trained on the ground as he passed people, not wanting to draw attention to the fact that he had just cried a ridiculous amount in front of people he most certainly did not want to cry in front of.

Harry had barely knocked on the door before James flung it open, his facial expression changing comically from glee when he realised that Harry had come to see him, to horror upon the realisation that he had clearly been crying.

“Son!” he exclaimed, “what’s the - what’s the matter? Is everything OK?”

“No,” he sobbed, “no! Nothing is OK! I’m so fucking fed up of everything!”

“Alright, alright, alright...” he said soothingly, putting his arm around him and guiding him into his office and directing him to sit on the couch, “you’re just freaking out a bit, but you’ll be alright in a few minutes. Sit down,”

Harry dropped onto couch and slumped slightly, feeling suddenly exhausted. Almost as if he had just ran a marathon. He felt dizzy and he couldn’t quite catch his breath. He let his eyes flicker shut as James walked around the office, presumably getting snacks. Harry did not open his eyes until he felt James sit next to him and heard the sound of a tray being placed onto the table in front of them.

“So, do you want to tell me what’s going on?” James asked.

“I’d love to,” Harry muttered, “but I don’t even know what’s going on. There’s days when I feel completely fine and like nothing is bothering me but then there’s days like...” he trailed off.

“Then there’s days like today?” James asked quietly.

“Yeah,”

James nodded, “I get it, Harry, I really do. There’s days when I don’t feel like getting out of bed, because I don’t see the point,”

“Not helpful,” Harry muttered.

“It is helpful, actually,” James said patiently, “because just because you don’t see the point doesn’t mean it’s not there. The point of getting out of bed is because I have a job, I have a life and a son who I spend the majority of my day worrying about because he spends his time in the Slytherin common room and doesn’t come and see me nearly as much as he should,”

“He sounds like a nightmare,”

“He isn’t,”

Harry smiled, “I just feel like...I’m in this really weird place and I don’t know how to feel. One minute I’m worrying about normal teenager things like the fact that Ron and Hermione aren’t speaking because Ron has a girlfriend, but then I’m worrying about Lord Voldemort and how my
sister is dead,

James laughed quietly.

“That's just what it's like being a teenager when there's a war going on out there somewhere,” James said, “I was exactly the same when I was in school - one minute I was worrying because your mum still wouldn’t go out with me and then I was worried because there were reports of death eaters being sighted in Hogsmeade. And neither of those things were nice feelings, but we still had to carry on, even if it felt pointless,”

“And what was the point to carrying on through all that?” Harry asked, half joking, half serious.

“Well,” James grinned, “First of all, I knew your mum would marry me one day, anyway. And second of all, death eaters were scary, but so was running out of dungbombs,”

Harry frowned at him and couldn't work out if he was joking or not, “Seriously?”

“Oh, yeah,” James said, nodding his head, “there were a few months in our sixth year where we were banned from going to Hogsmeade because of these death eaters and the mail order list from Zonko’s was really long, so we took matters into our hands. You’ve just got to remember that no matter what happens, you’re a teenager before you’re the Boy who Lived,”

“Are you encouraging me to sneak into Hogsmeade even if there's death eaters lurking?”

“Merlin, no, they’re much more likely to kill you than they were to kill me,” James said quickly, “and if I did encourage you to do that, then your mother would come and haunt me for the rest of my days,”

“Would that be so bad?”

James looked thoughtful for a moment and then shuddered, “You never saw her when she was in one of her bad moods,”

Harry would have happily stayed with his dad for the rest of the night, but time caught up with them too quickly and he was, as always, close to breaking curfew. James did write him a note to give him a pass for being up late, but Harry didn’t think that it would save him from the likes of Snape or Filch, and the Invisibility Cloak was upstairs in Gryffindor tower with the Map. Harry did not know why he has suddenly stopped walking around the castle with the Cloak and the Map, but it was a habit that he was looking to break out of. There was a time when he would not have left his dormitory without at least one of those things on hand, just in case.

Just before he got to the stairs leading up to Gryffindor Tower, Harry heard footsteps and the sound of Mrs Norris hissing. The note that James had written to him suddenly felt very feeble and would definitely not keep him from getting in trouble. Especially after James had spent a large majority of the evening telling Harry about the many times that Filch had put him and Sirius in detention.

He hurried away from Gryffindor Tower and hurried down the corridor, ducking behind the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. For what felt like the thousandth time that day, tears sprang to his eyes when he remembered how funny Lydia used to find Barnaby the Barby. Whenever they used to get to the Room of Requirement before a Dumbledore’s Army meeting, she would always start to giggle upon the sight of the Trolls ballet dancing. Harry sighed and wiped his eyes, once again struck with unmanageable grief and wished that there was a way to see her again one day.

Once Harry heard Filch and Mrs Norris pass by, he jumped out from behind the tapestry and went to walk back to Gryffindor Tower, but something caught his eye; a door to the Room of Requirement
Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry walked towards and, glancing up and down the corridor, pushed it open and slipped inside.

The door snapped shut behind him and the room was bathed in silence, except for one source of light at the very end of the room. Trusting that the Room would not put him in any danger, Harry slowly walked towards the source of light and felt his heart sink in disappointment when he realised that it was just a mirror, and nothing more interesting. He almost turned and left the room until a memory of a Christmas night that he had almost forgotten about forced itself to the front of his brain.

Heart beating out of control, Harry whipped around to face the mirror again and his eyes shot to the top of the mirror, “Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi,”. He kept his eyes trained on these words, scared of what he might find when he looked down into the mirror. When he was eleven, he longed for his parents, but a lot had happened since then. The first time he had stared into this mirror, he had only met Lord Voldemort once and could not even remember what he looked like; he had not seen a classmate die before his eyes and not lost a sister and a godfather in the space of a few hours. He had not known loss as intimately as he did at the age of sixteen, and longed to remember what that was like.

Taking a deep breath, Harry looked down into the mirror and took a step forward. At first, he stared at his own reflection, wondering why nothing had changed, but then he noticed that there was no scar on his forehead and, as he held his fist up to the mirror, realised that the words, “I must not tell lies,” were not etched there. He looked up from his hand and his breath caught in his throat for, like it had done when he was eleven, his family had materialised; Lydia was stood next to him, grinning, and there were no scars on her face or hand, either. James was smiling in a way that Harry had perhaps never seen him smile, and Lily had her arms around both of her children, looking completely and utterly as though she was at peace. Behind them, stood Sirius and Remus. Both of whom looked happy and healthy, which was not at all how Harry was used to seeing either of them; Sirius looked as though he was no longer haunted by his years in Azkaban and Remus’ face was not lined and his hair not grey. As he looked closer, he realised that Ron and Hermione were there too, and they were stood side by side, smiling and, for the first time in a long time, not arguing with each other. And they were surrounded by all the other family members that Harry had never been lucky enough to meet.

As much as Harry wanted to stay in the Room for as long as possible, he knew that it was dangerous. Dumbledore’s words echoed through his mind and as much as Harry disliked the Headmaster, he knew that the last thing he needed was to torture himself by staring at a life that he would never be able to have. After all, Harry thought to himself, “It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that,”

With one last glance at the mirror, Harry hurried away from it and hastily wiped the tears out of his eyes, hoping to get back to the common room without anything else making him cry. With a vow to never go looking for the mirror again, Harry closed the door of the Room of Requirement and stepped back to watch it disappear from sight.

“Is there are reason you’re looking at a wall, Potter?” a voice drawled behind him.

He turned around to see Malfoy stood by the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy, an amused look on his face.

“Is there are reason you’re here, Malfoy?” Harry snapped.

“Some of us,” Malfoy said, leaning back against the wall, “were made Prefect,”

“Some of us, also aren’t massive dickheads,”
Malfoy smirked at him, “You should run along now, Potty, it is after curfew,”

“I’m not going to let you boss me around, Malfoy,”

“If you don’t hurry up, I’ll have to take points off you,” Malfoy said. He pointed at Lydia’s badge, “that doesn’t actually give you any power, you know,”

“You are the worst fucking person in the world, you know that?” Harry exclaimed, plunging his hand into his robes to get his wand, just as Malfoy did the same thing, “Stup-”

“Harry!” Hermione yelled, walking down the corridor towards him, “What are you doing?”

“Dueling Malfoy, why?”

With a face like thunder, Hermione stormed down the corridor towards him and forced his wand down, standing in the middle of them both, her hands on her hips. Harry wanted to point out that standing in the middle of the two of them achieved nothing because Malfoy would be more than happy to curse them both, but decided not to, based on the fact that Hermione looked like she wasn’t opposed to killing both of them with her bare hands.

“Get lost, Malfoy,” Hermione snapped.

“I’m on Prefect duty, Granger,”

“And you’ve never cared about it until now,” Hermione said, “piss off,”

“Whatsoever, Granger,” he hissed, “See you, pretty boy,” he added to Harry as he stalked away.

“I’m going to curse him,” Harry said, holding up his wand and aiming it at Malfoy’s back.

“No, you’re not,” Hermione said, yanking his wand out of his hand, “You need to stop letting him get to you! He only wants to get a reaction of you!”

“He’s really, really hard to ignore,” Harry said, and he felt like this for more reasons than one. Though he wasn’t quite prepared to go into all the reasons with Hermione..

“I mean, do you...do you...” Hermione went red suddenly, “Do you want to talk about the whole Pretty Boy thing or-”

“Never,” Harry said firmly, feeling his own cheeks go red.

He was quite sure that Hermione let out a sigh of relief at this.

“OK,” she said, looking away from him for a moment, “Then we have more important things to talk about - Slughorn’s Christmas Party. Who are you taking?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said shrugging as they set off for Gryffindor tower, “Greengrass suggested I should go stag,” he did not miss Hermione’s eye roll at the mention of Daphne so ploughed on ahead, “why don’t we go together? Instead of torturing ourselves in trying to find someone?”

Hermione groaned, “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Who’re you going with?” Harry asked.

“It’s a...it’s a surprise,” she said faintly, “but you need to be careful about who you bring,”
“Careful?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Hermione said, “careful. I heard some girls talking about smuggling you a Love Potion in the bathroom the other day and-”

“What?” Harry exclaimed, stopping just short of the Fat Lady who was most definitely listening in on their conversation, “Why didn’t you take it off them? You spent all of last year complaining about Fred and George selling their products!”

“I know!” Hermione said, “but I couldn’t take it off them because they were just talking about giving you a Love Potion. So you need to find someone, and soon,”

When Harry climbed into bed that night and thought about who he really wanted to take the party, he only became more and more confused about what was happening inside his head. The only thing that he knew for sure that if he did bring the person he was thinking of, it was the exact opposite of being careful.

Chapter End Notes

The Mirror of Erised scene in the book is so underrated, and I'm mad about it.

Anyway, thank-you for reading!!

-E.
Harry was not sure how he had ended up asking Luna Lovegood to go to Slughorn’s ridiculous Christmas Party with him, but the news had quickly spread around the room and people seemed to find it hilarious; Ron most of all. He had heard about it off Lavender and had wasted no time in hurrying over to him in Gryffindor Tower, howling with laughter.

“You’re taking Luna Lovegood?”

“We’re going as friends, Ron!” Harry exclaimed, realising that this sort of conversation was the act reason that he never spent time in Gryffindor Tower. The Slytherins probably couldn’t care less who Harry was taking to some christmas party.

Ron snorted, “Still...you could have any girl in Hogwarts, and you’re taking Luna Lovegood!”

“Yes, I’m aware of who I’m taking, Ron!” Harry snapped.

“I think it’s good that you’re taking her, Harry,” Ginny said, “she’s really excited about it, you know,”

For some reason, this comment made Harry’s heart swell but he did not have time to even think about what that meant before Ron carried on talking.

“I know, I know!” Ron said hurriedly, “there’s nothing wrong with Luna! I think she’s ace! She’s really grown on me but-”

“At least she got invited,” Hermione said angrily, “are you going to be going, Ronald?”

“Piss off,” Ron mumbled, before slouching back over to where Lavender was and sitting with a stony expression on his face for the rest of the night.

“One day, they’re going to stop bickering...” Ginny muttered to Harry.

“No, they aren’t,” Harry sighed, rubbing his forehead where a headache was threatening to come to the surface, “they’re going to be bickering with each other for the rest of the lives,”

“Lucky us...” she sighed and looked at her watch, “Quidditch practice. See you later, Harry,”

Harry watched with some amusement as she somehow managed to pry Ron out of Lavender’s fierce grip and shove him out of the portrait hole. He heard raised voices just before the Fat Lady swung shut behind them and Harry found himself to be quite thankful for the fact that he didn’t have to listen to them argue all the way down to the Quidditch pitch.

“Thinking about Ginny?” Hermione smirked, looking over at him.

“Am I thinking about - what?”

“Nothing,” Hermione said lightly, “You were just staring after Ginny for a while, is all,”

“I was staring after...” Harry trailed off and felt his cheeks go red, “No, I wasn’t. I’m going for a walk.”
“Do you mean you’re going for a walk to the Slytherin common room?”

Harry rolled his eyes at her and stood up, hurrying out of the room before someone called him back. The truth was, was that he hadn’t even been thinking about Ginny for he had been too busy thinking about the Room of Requirement. Without even realising it, Harry turned in the direction of the Room and found himself stood by the tapestry of Barnabus the Barmy, grappling over whether or not to go back in or not.

On one hand, the thought of being able to spend time with the family that he had always wished he had was the best way to spend an otherwise boring Saturday morning, but he was also more than aware of how dangerous it could be. He could waste away hours and hours sat in front of that mirror, or it could push him over the edge. Harry often felt like the only thing that was stopping him from going to join Lydia, Sirius and his mum was the fact that he knew that his dad would never be able to deal with it, Ron and Hermione would perhaps be broken by it and Hagrid would maybe never recover, and he didn’t want to put anyone through anymore pain.

The fact that the faces of Lydia and Sirius haunted his dreams did not help, either. It had been a week since Harry had looked into the Mirror, and he had not had one full night of sleep because he was always awoken by their faces. They would never speak, though. They would just stand and stare at him with blank smiles and glossy eyes, serving as a horribly cruel reminder that all he had left of them was images of their faces, but he felt like even they were fading fast. With each day that passed, their features got more blurred and he was forgetting small details; he could not remember if Sirius’ eyes were blue or grey anymore, and he had forgotten which of Lydia’s hands had, “I must not tell lies,” scratched onto.

The sound of footsteps coming down the corridor pulled Harry back down to earth and he dove behind the tapestry again. There was nothing in the school rules stating that Harry could not be wandering the corridors on a Saturday, but he didn’t feel like explaining to Professor Snape or Mr Filch why he was lurking near the Room of Requirement when he probably had better places to be. His heart stopped in his chest as he heard the footsteps stop and he flattened himself against the wall, as though this would stop someone from noticing him hiding.

When the footsteps didn’t start up again, Harry chanced a glance around the tapestry and became even more confused. Draco Malfoy glanced up and down the corridor surreptitiously before slipping through the door to the Room of Requirement. Gasping out loud, Harry burst out from behind the tapestry and launched himself at the door, but the door handle disappeared before Harry could get a proper grip on it.

Swearing loudly, he lashed out and kicked the wall. This did not make him feel any better and instead just made his foot hurt. Swearing under his breath, Harry stomped away from the Room of Requirement and down to the dungeons, deciding that he would instead wait and see how long it took for Malfoy to reappear again. When Harry got to the Slytherin common room and settled himself into his usual seat, it occurred to him how strange he was being and wondered if Ron and Hermione were right and that Malfoy wasn’t a death eater, but there was something strangely comforting about being able to focus on something that wasn’t his dead sister and godfather.

“Alright, Potter, Greengrass Senior told me that you’re good at Defence Against the Dark Arts. I need help,” Urquhart dropped into the seat next to him and clapped him on the shoulder, “Patronus Charms. I just do not understand them,”

“Fucking hell, Urquhart!” Daphne exclaimed, “You’re an absolute - I told you that to leave me alone, not to bother Potter as well!”

Urquhart looked mildly offended, “Look Senior, I-”
“Please stop calling me that,”

“But how else are you supposed to know that I’m talking to you and not Junior?” he asked, pointing to Astoria who was sat with her friends on the other side of the room.

“Whatever, dipshit,”

Urquhart sighed and turned back to Harry, “As I was saying, Potter, I’m not very good at Defence Against the Dark Arts, I’m meant to be doing my NEWTs this year and Professor Snape will not let me sleep in class,” he said this as though it was the worst thing that a teacher could do.

“Right...” Harry said, “Um, I’m not...I’m not that-”

“For the love of Merlin, Potter, don’t say you’re bad at it,” Daphne sighed, “I sit behind you in class, you’re better than Granger,” she paused, “Don’t tell her I said that. I’m slightly scared of her.”

“Aren’t we all,” Urquhart muttered, shivering. He glanced over at Harry and smiled sheepishly, “but you know...sure she’s a great friend,”

Harry laughed and nodded, “Yeah. Yeah, she’s great...” he cleared his throat, “so, um, Defence Against the Dark Arts?”

“Oh, yeah,” Urquhart said, “so...this happy memory thing? I just...don’t get it? What sort of memory is a happy memory? Is it like, I don’t know, that time I woke up thinking it was Friday but realising it was Saturday so that I could stay in bed? Or is it like, I don’t know, something else? Snape isn’t the best person to talk to about happiness, has anyone ever seen him smile?”

“Once, when he put Lydia in detention for a week,” Harry said. He shrugged, “Maybe that's what he thinks about when he casts a Patronus,”

“Still doesn’t answer my question,” Urquhart muttered.

“What do you think about, Potter?” Daphne asked quietly.

Harry opened his mouth to answer but then closed it again, realising that he hadn’t even tried to cast a Patronus charm since everything that had happened. He looked at his hands and tried to think about a memory that was powerful enough to cast a Patronus, but he wasn’t sure that he had one anymore.

“Never mind,” Daphne said quickly, “It's a personal question. You don’t have to answer,”

“It changes every time,” Harry said, “and they’re always weird ones that really don’t make sense. They aren’t always normal memories. I know that Lydia's was, um, Lydia’s was when we were in the Hospital Wing after Voldemort came back,”

Urquhart frowned at him, “that makes...no sense,”

“Yeah, no, I know,” Harry said, “it was more because...she always said that it was because it made her realise that she wasn’t on her own, even though everything had uh...you know, gone to shit,” he turned around and looked at the portrait of her on the wall, “although, I don’t know how true that it is, because she did tell Ron that she thought about the time he fell from the top of the marble stairs to the bottom during one of our DA lessons,”

“Did her and Weasley even like each other?” Daphne asked, “whenever I saw them together, they were always insulting each other,”
“It came from a place of love,” Harry shrugged.

“It is weird that I miss seeing her moping around down here?” Urquhart asked, looking around the room.

“No,” Daphne said, “we all miss her,”

“And this conversation is not helping me cast a Patronus because this is just making me want to curl up and cry,”

“Oh, wow, you do have a heart, who’d have thought?” Daphne said.

Urquhart stuck his middle finger up at Daphne and turned to Harry, “So, the advice is...think of something depressing?”

“No,” Harry said, “think of something unconventional,"

“Well,” Urquhart said, jumping up and clapping his hands together, “I have a practical test on Monday and if I fail, I’m going to punch both of you,”

“He’s joking,” Daphne said hurriedly as he walked away, “but I do hope that his Patronus is something shit. Like a slug. Or a Flobberworm,”

“Do you know what your is?” Harry asked.

“Yes, I do. It’s a fox,” Daphne said, “I got bored when I was here last Christmas so I thought I’d teach myself. I took me months, though,”

“When you’re bored you...learn advanced spells?”

Daphne shrugged.

“You and Hermione would probably get on,” Harry grinned, “that’s the sort of thing that she’d do,”

“She’s still scary,” Daphne muttered.

“Yeah...” Harry said.

“Anyway, I’ve got to go the library,” Daphne sighed, standing up, “I forgot to hand that potions essay into Slughorn yesterday, and I told him that I’d hand it in on Monday. He was surprisingly OK with it. Slug Club privileges though, isn’t it. See you later, Potter,”

“See you,”

Harry flopped down into his seat and ran a hand through his hair, his mind racing, suddenly struck with the quite horrible thought that he didn’t know what he would think of should he ever had to cast a Patronus again. He turned to stare at the portrait of Lydia and felt like all memories of her, no matter how happy, would be forever tainted with indescribable happiness. One that he was used to turn to was the feeling that he got when Sirius had hesitantly suggested that he and Lydia go and live with him once he was a free man, but that was more feeble than any of the others that he could think of. He closed his eyes and let his mind wander.

“I was...I was the snake that attacked Mr Weasley,”

His words hung in the air as he stared at Lydia and Sirius whose face did not change once whilst Harry told her the story of the nightmare. They were stood outside the kitchen in Grimmauld place,
giving the Weasley’s some space.

“You just saw it happen, Harry-”

“No! No, Sirius, I didn’t!” Harry snapped, “I was the snake,”

He looked over at Lydia who was looking at the ground.

“Did you tell Dumbledore this?” Sirius asked.

Harry nodded.

“Did you see this, Lydia?” Sirius asked.

“Why does that matter?” Harry snapped, “it’s not like he’d tell me anything, anyway!”

“You just need sleep, Harry,” Sirius said firmly, “once you sleep, you’ll be fine,” he smiled at them both and then left them in the dark corridor of Grimmauld Place.

Groaning in frustration, Harry turned to Lydia, “You believe me, right?”

Lydia sighed and then nodded, “Yes. Of course I do,”

“You don’t think that I’m...you don’t think that I’m evi-”

“Shut up, Harry,”

“You’re not evil!” she giggled, “Merlin, you can be so dramatic sometimes! You didn’t actually attack Mr Weasley. Some big arse snake did! You just happened to witness, and it’s a bloody good job you did or Mr Weasley might never have been found! It’s not as though you’re an animagus, is it?”

“I might be-”

“Harry, for fucks sake, you can’t be an animagus without realising it!” she exclaimed, “look, when dad gets back from wherever he is, ask him about being an animagus, alright?”

Harry nodded and smiled at her, “You’re right,”

“Usually am,” she grinned, “Look, H, whatever happens, I’ll be there for you, OK? Even if you are some weird half snake half human hybrid, I’ll be by your side. Even though I hate snakes,”

“But you’re in Slytherin,”

“Yeah, but if you were locked in a room with a lion you wouldn’t be happy about it, would you? Gryffindor or not,”

There was something unnecessarily cruel about the fact that when Harry needed her most, she was not there. His mind wandered to the Mirror of Erised again but he pushed that thought out of his mind. It would just drive him even more insane, and that was the last thing that any of them needed. Besides, there wasn’t a lot of advice that a reflection could give him.

When Harry opened his eyes again, Malfoy was back and staring at him intently from the other side of the room.
Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!

-E.
“So he was offering to help him?” Ron asked.

“If you ask that question one more time, I'm going to stick this sprout-”

“I'm only checking!” Ron exclaimed, casting a wary look at the sprout that Harry was holding.

They were stood in the kitchen at The Burrow, slowly chopping up a mountain of sprouts that Mrs Weasley definitely could have chopped up much quicker with just a flick of her wand, but Harry knew she had only set them this task in attempt to distract Harry from the fact that he was going to be spending his first Christmas without Lydia. Though, he did not need the sprouts to distract him for Draco Malfoy was serving as a great distraction after the peculiar conversation that Harry had overhead him having with Professor Snape after Slughorn’s disaster of a Christmas Party.

“He said that'd he promised Malfoy’s mum to protect him and that he'd made an Unbreakable Vow,” Harry said.

“An Unbreakable Vow?” Ron asked, “really?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “Why?”

“Well...you can’t break an Unbreakable Vow,”

“Funnily enough I’d worked that one out for myself,” Harry said through gritted teeth, “but what happens if you do?”

“You die,” Ron said bluntly, “Fred and George tried to get me to make one once when I was five. I nearly did, too, but then Dad found us and he went mental. Fred reckons his left buttock has never been the same since,”

“Yeah, well, passing over Fred's left buttock...”

“I beg your pardon?” Said Fred's voice as the twins entered the kitchen. “Aaah, George, look at this. They're using knives and everything,”

Harry winced slightly at the sight of George; he looked quite ill and as though he had not slept in year. He grinned at Harry as he sat down at the table, but it looked forced and did not quite meet his eyes.

“I'll be seventeen in two and a bit months time!” Said Ron, “And then I'll be able to do it by magic!”

“I'm sure Ron will dazzle us all with unsuspected magical skills,” Fred said, clapping his brother on the back.

“And speaking of unsuspected skills, Ronald,” said George. “I have heard that you and a certain lady of the name of Lavender Brown are quite close,”

“Mind your business,” Ron snapped.

“What a snappy retort,” said Fred, “I really don't know how you think of them. No, what we wanted
to know was...how did it happen?”

“What d’you mean?”

“Did she have an accident or something?”

“What?”

“Well, how did she sustain such extensive brain damage? Careful, now!”

Mrs Weasley entered the room just in time to see Ron throw a knife at Fred. He turned it into a paper aeroplane with one lazy flick of his wand. George sniggered as a furious Mrs Weasley rounded on him.

“Ron! Don’t ever let me see you throwing knives again!” She said. “Fred, George, I’m sorry, dears, but Remus is arriving tonight, so Bill we have to squeeze in with you two,” said Mrs Weasley, “And James can stay with him,”

“No problem,” said George.

“Charlie won’t be home so Harry and Ron are in the attic, and Fleur can stay with Ginny,” Mrs Weasley said, “Everyone should be comfortable,”

“Percy not showing his ugly face, then?” Fred asked.

Mrs Weasley turned away. “No, he’s busy, I expect,”

“Yeah, being the world’s biggest prat,” Fred muttered as Mrs Weasley left the room. He stretched and good up, “Well, I'm off. There’s a very pretty girl who works in the paper shop who thinks my card tricks are something marvellous...almost like real magic...”

“You not going, George?” Ron asked, somewhat hesitantly.

“Nah,” George said, shaking his head, “don’t feel like it;”

An awkward silence fell between them and Harry turned back to the sprouts, glad to have an excuse to not have to look at George anymore. Harry had not expected him to be his usual cheery self, but he had also not expected him to look so...depressed. Before the end of term, Harry had confessed to Hermione that he was not at all looking forward to seeing George on account of the fact that he felt as though he no longer knew what to say to him.

“He probably feels the exact same, Harry,” Hermione had said thoughtfully, “I also imagine that he feels like he doesn’t really know how to grieve; he wasn’t officially family so he won’t want to grieve like you and your dad, but he felt like he was family. I imagine that because he’s always so loud and happy he feels like he has a duty to carry on being like that, even though it’s probably not at all what he feels like doing.”

None of what Hermione had said actually made Harry feel better, but he was at least thankful for the insight. Part of Harry wished that he would speak to George about Lydia, but he didn’t even know how to bring her up. He also wasn’t sure what he would do if George started to cry...he had never been very good at being around people whilst they cried. All he could ever offer was sad looks and awkward pats on the shoulder that he knew didn’t help because they never helped him.

There was a sudden great deal of noise and the door burst open, revealing a rather disgruntled James who was, for some reason, almost entirely covered in snow. Harry stared at him with raised
eyebrows as he took his wand out of his back pocket and angrily waved it so that the all the snow siphoned off him.

“Bad morning, James?” George asked lightly.

“Your twin - and I have no idea which one you are - but your twin, somehow managed to dump more snow than I have ever seen in my life on my head,” James said.

“I’m Fred,” George lied, “I’m wearing red, he’s wearing blue. Remember that when you prank him back,”

“I shall remember that,” James said happily, sitting next to him, “are you two still chopping sprouts,”

“No, we’re just stood here for the fun of it,” Ron said angrily.

James shrugged, “that’s one way to spend your time,”

“Can you not just do this by magic?” Ron asked him, “it’d be over quicker!”

James looked thoughtful for a moment before shaking his head.

“No, keep on going, it’s character building,”

Harry’s assumption that he would be able to get through the christmas period without thinking about Lydia may have been wishful thinking. As the day dragged on, he became more and more aware of her absence, and it was strange how even the smallest of things managed to remind him of her. For the first time, Harry noticed that she had the same mannerisms as James: they walked in the same way, drank their tea in the same way and used their hands too much when they spoke. Even Mrs Weasley sitting in the corner of the living room and knitting the jumpers reminded Harry of Lydia because she had treasured those jumpers more than she had treasured anything else that she owned.

Groaning quietly, Harry covered his eyes with his hand and tried not to look as though he was close to having another meltdown. The last thing he wanted to do was ruin christmas by sobbing uncontrollably, but he could feel one creeping up on him. Lydia had loved christmas, even when they were at the Dursleys.

“Why are you in a good mood?” Harry asked.

“Because it’s christmas!” Lydia said loudly, quickly lowering her voice when Aunt Petunia sent a withering glare their way.

School had just finished for the Christmas holidays and Harry and Lydia were trailing behind Aunt Petunia and Dudley as they walked home. Harry shivered slightly as the bitter wind blew around them, the coat that Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon had given him was riddled with holes and was not doing a very good job at keeping him warm. Lydia did not seem to care too much about the wind for she was grinning, as though she would experience the same Christmas that every other ten year old in the country was going to in a weeks time.

“Christmas is never fun for us,” Harry said quietly.

“I know,” Lydia said, “but I think of it like... when we get this one out of the way, we’re just one more Christmas closer to a good one!”

“Is there such thing as a good Christmas?” Harry asked, thinking about the previous Christmas where they had only been able to eat two pieces of turkey and a potato.
Lydia shrugged, “you never know, next Christmas might be good,“

Harry stared at her, “you’re really weird."

“Yeah...”

Harry opened his eyes and rubbed them, trying to get rid of any tears and wishing that his brain would stop springing memories on him unannounced. Especially memories that he had otherwise forgotten about; the last Christmas that they had had at Privet Drive perhaps been the worst one. Aunt Marge had made Lydia cry within the first half an hour of her arriving at Privet Drive. That had been the first time that Harry had ever seen his sister cry, and he had decided that he was in no rush to see her do so again.

When he realised that the entire living room was staring at him, Harry quickly stood up and excused himself, saying that he was tired.

“It’s only half past six, son,” James said, somewhat anxiously.

“I know,” Harry replied, “but I woke up early this morning,” this wasn’t even a complete lie, and this seemed to satisfy James and the rest of the Weasley’s, so Harry bid them good night and slowly made his way up to the attic room.

He collapsed onto the camp bed that sat at the end of Ron’s bed and put his face in his hands, feeling a possible panic attack coming on. When he wasn’t thinking about Lydia and Sirius and wasn’t thinking about the possibility that there was a death eater living at Hogwarts, his mind would wander back to the Yule Ball. Where Lydia and Hermione had often spoke about the Yule Ball fondly, Harry and Ron remembered it as being quite possibly one of the worst nights of their lives. He wasn’t thinking about it to remember happy memories fondly, but because he was trying to come to terms with something he had realised years before, but had never really wanted to face.

There were many things that Harry had come to regret since Lydia and Sirius died. He regretted never picking up that damn mirror and speaking to Sirius through it and he regretted not going to meet him in Hogsmeade when he had asked. He regretted all the times that he told Lydia he couldn’t spend time with her because of Quidditch practice but, most of all, he regretted never telling her the one thing he had thought about telling her whenever they were alone.

Someone softly knocked on the door and, expecting Ron, Harry wandered over to the door and opened it, only to reveal James.

“You alright, dad?"

“Are you alright, Harry?” James asked.

“Um, yeah, I’m just-”

“Please don’t tell me that you’re just tired,” James cut across him, “You’ve had two naps, today. What’s on your mind?”

Harry sighed and stepped back so that James could walk into the room. He looked around and snorted, shaking his head.

“ So much orange,”

“I know,” Harry said, “you get used to it,”
“What is it?”

“I, uh, I need to...um, I need to tell....I need to tell you something,” Harry said, suddenly unable to look him in the eye.

“What is it?” James asked earnestly, “son, is...is everything alright?”

“Yes,” Harry said, “Yeah, no, I think...yeah, it’s fine...I mean, it should be...” he sat down on Ron’s bed and stared down at his feet, trying to think of the best way to say this, “I don’t actually know how you feel about - I mean, I guess if you can deal with a werewolf, but I think - I don’t know...you can’t really control being a werewolf but you also can’t control...I mean, I’ve tried and - well-”

“Harry, son, if this is you coming out to me, then take your time,” James said serenely.

“If this is me coming - how did you know?” Harry asked, jerking away from him.

James smiled at him, “I’m your dad, kid, I know these things,”

Harry took a deep breath and nodded, “Right, well, bisexual,”

“I’m glad that you felt like you could tell me,”

“Me too,”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!

-E.
Harry was awoken on Christmas morning in the same way that he had been woken up on every Christmas morning since he was eleven: Ron shouting happily about presents and then getting a cushion in the face to wake up. Only, this Christmas morning would not be like the others because the door would not burst open and Lydia would not shriek “Merry Christmas!” in their faces whilst happily distributing presents and speculating about how good the Christmas dinner would definitely be that year. And even though he knew that none of this would happen, he still glanced hopefully towards the door. Just in case.

“Merry Christmas, Harry!” Ron said cheerfully.

“Yeah,” Harry said, “Merry Christmas, mate,”

Ron seemed to have realised that he wasn’t in the best of moods because he put down James’ present and turned to Harry.

“You don’t have to pretend to love today, you know,”

“I know,” Harry said, “I’ve never spent Christmas without her. I actually on ever liked Christmas because she liked it so much and I felt forced into enjoying myself,”

Ron laughed, “Yeah. She really did love Christmas, didn’t she?”

The door opened and Fred and George walked in, both looking rather somber. At first, Harry thought that it was about Lydia.

“I wouldn’t go downstairs,” Fred told them, “Percy sent his jumper back again and mums crying about it,”

“Why’d she send one again if he sent it back last time?” Ron asked, frowning.

George shrugged, “I don’t know, it’s mum, isn’t it? She’d probably send a jumper to Bellatrix Lestrange if she thought it would keep her warm,”

Harry shuddered at the mention of Bellatrix but no one noticed for Fred had suddenly burst into laughter at the sight of a bright pink present sitting on top of his piles of presents. Harry could have worked out who it was from without the help of Fred who had taken it upon himself to read the label outside, tears streaming down his face.

“To my darling, Won-Won. Lots of love, your Lav,”

“Give that back!” Ron yelled, snatching it out of Fred’s hands and shoving it under one of his jumpers.

“Are you not going to open it, Ron?” George asked casually.

“No,” Ron snapped.

“How rude,” Fred said, shaking his head, “Your Lav has gone out of her way for her darling Won-Won and now you’re not even opening the present!”
Ron seemed to come to the conclusion that there would be no hiding the present from anyone and was very slow in the way that he opened it. Despite his mood, even Harry couldn’t help but laugh loudly as Ron pulled out a rather interesting necklace; it was a thick gold chain with the words, “My Sweetheart,”. Fred actually toppled off the bed from laughing so much and George suddenly seemed unable to breathe and was steadily turning purple.

The door opened again and James walked in, looking quite confused.

“What’s so - bloody hell! What’s that?”

“A present off Ron’s girlfriend!” Fred gasped out before bursting into laughter again.

“It’s a joke, isn’t it?” James asked, “that’s not real, is it?”

“It’s real,” Ron said miserably.

“Have you ever mentioned to her that you wanted a necklace for Christmas?” Harry asked.

“Obviously not, Harry!” Ron exclaimed, shoving the necklace out of sight, “I’m not wearing it,”

“It’d be rude not to,” Fred said.

“Do you have a minute, Harry?” James asked, still sniggering about Ron.

Knowing that the next conversation they would have would be nothing short of depressing, Harry nodded and followed James out of the bedroom. They walked into the bedroom that he was sharing with Remus, who Harry presumed was responsible for the loud snoring that was coming from underneath the blankets on the other bed.

“Ignore him,” James said, gesturing vaguely in the direction of Remus, “he’s never snored like a normal person. I think it’s the Werewolf in him,” he paused for a moment and then gasped, “Merry Christmas, by the way!”

“Oh, yeah...Merry Christmas,” Harry said, “I said no presents so-”

“-so I didn’t get you a present,” James said quickly, “No, I know. I was just wondering - I just wanted to make sure that you’re okay,”

“I mean, I’m a little hungry but-”

“Harry,” James said, “You know what I mean,”

“I’m fine,” Harry said, shrugging, “I’m just - you know, I’m just...you know,”

“I know,” James said. He sighed and sat down on the bed, “I didn’t think that today would be so hard. I only spent one Christmas with you both, well, only one Christmas that you can remember and even though it was the best Christmas that I could have asked for all things considered, I thought that because I only had one, I’d be able to deal with her not being here,”

“It’s only because she liked Christmas so much,” Harry said, “if it wasn’t her favourite day of the year, I don’t think that it’d be that difficult. I’m pretty sure the first Christmas we spent at Hogwarts was the best day of her life,”

“What was Christmas at the Dursleys like?” James asked hesitantly.

Harry shook his head, “If I tell you, you’ll get annoyed,”
“I’ve already taken all my anger out on Vernon Dursley, I think I can deal with it,”

Harry shrugged.

“I don’t really know what it was like. It was just like any other day, really. They didn’t treat us any different on Christmas day,” Harry said, “Dudley opened his presents, we sat and watched. Then they had Christmas dinner and we ate the scraps that they didn’t and then we went to bed.”

“Do you think I have time to punch him again?” James asked, tears sparkling in his eyes.

“No,” Harry said quickly, “I knew I shouldn’t haven’t told you. It’s nothing. It was fine. We have - we had each other,”

Without any warning, Harry burst into tears and seemed unable to stop. At once, James leapt up and grabbed Harry’s arm, sitting him down on the bed next to him. Once they had gotten to the other side of Halloween, Christmas Day had been playing on his mind but he had been doing his best to ignore it, knowing that it would be a difficult day not only for him, but for everyone else; Mrs Weasley had not enjoyed Christmas ever since Percy had turned his back on the family, and now she had to deal with another empty seat. Hermione was probably at her parents house feeling lonelier than ever knowing that Harry was spending time with Ron, who she still wasn’t speaking to and James was clearly trying to control his grief for Lily, Sirius and Lydia all whilst trying to make sure that neither Harry nor Remus was going to do something stupid. Ron was, as always, being Ron and burying all his emotions. And although George had been laughing this morning, Harry was quite sure that he wasn’t nearly as happy as he was letting on.

“Maybe I should have just stayed at Hogwarts this year,” Harry muttered.

“You couldn’t have spent Christmas on your own, mate,” James said quietly, “no one should spend Christmas on their own,”

“She is,”

“Nah, she isn’t,” James said quietly, “She’s somewhere with your mum and Sirius,”


James looked uncomfortable for a moment and then Harry sighed.

“Sorry,” he said quickly, “I shouldn’t have asked. It was a stupid question, anyway,"

“Wasn’t a stupid question,” James said, “I, um, I don’t know. The last thing I remember is Voldemort and then I woke up again. I have a vague memory of my parents though, somewhere in between,”

“So they’re together?”

James nodded, “They’re together. Somewhere,”

The rest of the day improved somewhat after that. Harry somehow managed to get through the entire day without crying, and so did everyone else. Harry graciously accepted a Christmas jumper off Mrs Weasley, despite his no present rule, but was much happier to accept the mountain of food that she had placed on the table. None of this stopped the pangs of guilt he kept on feeling whenever he realised that he was having a good time without Lydia. He felt as though he wasn’t allowed to be happy without her around, even though even he could admit that he was being ridiculous.
“Arthur!” Mrs Weasley said suddenly, “Arthur! It's Percy!”

Mr Weasley looked round. Everybody very quickly turned to look out the window. Mrs Weasley was right - Percy Weasley was walking across the snowy yard. Even stranger, he was not alone for the Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, was walking next to him.

“Arthur! He's with the Minister!” Though no one needed telling.

There was a painful silence as the back door opened and Percy stood in the doorway. No one looked at each other. Them, rather stiffly, Percy said, “Merry Christmas, Mother,” Mrs Weasley burst into tears and threw herself into his arms.

“Apologies for the intrusion,” Rufus Scrimgeour said, pausing in the doorway, “But Percy and I were in the vicinity and he was quite insistent that we dropped in on you all,”

Harry glanced at Percy and couldn't help but think that this couldn't be further from the truth. He was stood very straight, as though he wasn't in his own home, and there was a muscle twitching in his jaw. Mrs Weasley beamed at him but Fred, George and Mr Weasley maintained a stony face as they looked at him.

“We won't be here long, Molly,” Scrimgeour said, “I’ll have a stroll around the yard whilst ou catch up...well, if anyone would like to show me round your charming garden...ah, what about him? He seems to have finished,” He pointed at Harry who raised his eyebrows. No one bought this for he still had some food left on her plate and George, Ginny and Ron had also finished their plates of food.

“It's fine,” Harry said to Remus and James who had stood up. “Fine,” he added to Mr Weasley who had moved towards the door.

No one was fooled. There was no way that Percy had actually wanted to come and see his family. Scrimgeour was just using him as a cover so that he could speak to Harry alone. They walked across the yard towards the Weasley’s garden.

“I’ve been wanting to talk to you for a very long time,” Scrimgeour said after a while, “Did you know that?”

“No,” said Harry.

“Dumbledore has been very protective of you. Natural, of course, after what you've been through...especially at the Ministry...and your dear sister...,”

Harry didn't say anything, so he carried on. “I have been hoping for an occasion to speak you ever since I gained office, but Dumbledore has prevented this,”

Still, Harry did not say anything.

“The rumours have flown around!” Scrimgeour said, “Well, of course, we both know how these stories get distorted...all these whispers of a prophecy...of you being the “Chosen One”...”

Harry stifled a yawn, knowing that Scrimgeour was getting closer and closer to what Scrimgeour wanted to speak to him about,”

“...I assume you have discussed with Dumbledore?”

“Maybe,” Harry said, “We’ve discussed...some things,”
“Have you, have you...” Scrimgeour said, “And what has Dumbledore told you?”

“Sorry, but that's between us,”

“Of course, it is a question of confidence...but, does it really matter whether you are the Chosen Ones or not?”

“I don't really know what you mean, Minister,” Harry said.

“Well, of course, you two it will matter enormously. But to the wizarding community at large, it's all perception, isn't it? It's what people believe that's important,”

Harry still didn’t say anything. He just wanted to go back inside and finish his food.

“People do believe that you are the Chosen One. They think you a hero - and there's no denying that you are, of course. How many time have you faced He Who Must Not Be Named and survived? It's a good morale booster, you see. And I can't help but feel that, once you realise this, you might want to publicly stand alongside the Ministry,”

“So basically, you'd like to give the impression that we’re working for the Ministry?” Harry asked.

“It would give everyone a lift to see that you were more involved,”

“I think we’ve been involved more than enough, actually,” Harry said coldly.

“It would give everyone a lift,” Scrimgeour persisted.

“But if we keep on running in and out of the Ministry, it will look like we agree with what you're doing,” Harry said.

“Well, that is what we would like-”

“But we don't agree with what you're doing,” Harry interrupted.

Harry realised that he was saying, ‘We,’ as though Lydia was still alive and quickly stopped, looking away from the Minister. The last thing he wanted was for the Minister to think that he was somehow unhinged.

“You’re only sixteen, I wouldn't expect you to understand-”

“Dumbledore's a lot older than sixteen and doesn't agree with anything you're doing,” Harry said.

“I see,” Scrimgeour said, all warmth disappearing for his voice, “So, like your hero Dumbledore, you would like to distance yourself from the Ministry?”

“Can you blame me?” Harry asked scathingly, “After everything that happened last year?”

Harry held his fist up to him, the words ‘I must not tell lies,’ shined white in the sun. Scrimgeour fixed him a cold, hard stare.

“Where were you last year when then Ministry were going out of there way to discredit us? Where were you when Dolores Umbridge forced us to carve these words into our own flesh? What were you doing, Minister?” Harry asked furiously.

“Some would say it is your duty to stand by the Ministry,” Scrimgeour said.
“My duty to be used?” Harry said, “That's what you'd love, isn't it? Just to have the Chosen One working for you! You don't really care about anything else! My sister killed herself at the end of the year, because of people like you! And now you want me to work for you?”

“What is Dumbledore up to, when he’s absent from Hogwarts?” Scrimgeour asked suddenly.

“No idea,” Harry said, “I didn’t even know he was leaving school. But I wouldn't try and find out. Fudge tried to interfere at Hogwarts and you’ll notice that Fudge isn't Minister anymore, but Dumbledore is still Headmaster. I'd leave him alone, if I were you,”

There was a long pause.

“You’re Dumbledore’s man through and through aren’t you, Potter?”

“No,” Harry said firmly, “I’m just trying to live, for my sister. Merry Christmas, Minister,”

And turning his back on the Minister for Magic, Harry strode back over to The Burrow, hands deep in his pockets.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!

-E.
"How is it that time of year, already?"

"Time doesn't really exist here,"

"That doesn't make sense. How can time not exist?"

"Oh, I don't know, love. It just doesn't."

"They all seem so sad..."

"There's nothing you can do about it,"

The only thing she could do was listen to their sobs and their arguments, and she thought that it might have been sending her insane. If people could even go insane where she was.
On the Sunday morning before term started up again, Harry sat in the Great Hall eating his breakfast and tried to think of the best way to avoid Lavender Brown. He had always liked and got on with Lavender, but just not when she was Ron’s girlfriend. Even Parvati seemed to have gotten fed up of her, because she was sat facing Harry, clearly trying to to avoid looking at them. Harry scanned the table, looking for Hermione, but she was nowhere to be seen. He had not even seen her on the train.

“How have you seen Hermione, Parvati?” Harry asked, almost sat with his back fully to Ron and Lavender.

“She’d left the dormitory before I’d woken up,” Parvati replied, clearly quite happy to have an excuse to not look at Ron and Lavender, “she spends as little time as possible in there because...well, you know...”

“Yeah,” Harry sighed, “I know,”

“Hey, Harry. Parvati,”

Harry quickly turned around to see Hermione stood behind him; there were deep bags under her eyes and she did not at all look refreshed for someone who had just had two weeks off school.

“When was the last time you slept?” Harry asked, pushing some coffee towards her.

“Last night, obviously,” she said with the air of someone who definitely had not gotten enough sleep the previous night, “can we go for a walk?”

“Yeah,” Harry said frowning at her, “Yeah, course,”

They walked out into the grounds in silence. Harry kept on glancing sideways at Hermione, feeling quite worried about her. She was walking with her eyes trained on the ground and her hands shoved deep into her pockets.

“What’s going on, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Nothing,” she said.

“How was your Christmas?”

“It was...” she trailed off and then, out of nowhere, burst into tears.

“‘Mione-”

“Sorry, sorry!” she said miserably, wiping her eyes, “it wasn’t much fun...I finally told my parents about Lydia-”

“You never told them?” Harry asked, gobsmacked.

“They’re muggles, Harry! They don’t understand my life here!” she exclaimed, “They barely knew anything about her! They don’t really know anything about you and Ron! They just choose to believe that I go to a prestigious but normal boarding school! They still call Potions Chemistry!”
“That’s quite Dursleyish of them,”

Hermione shook her head, “No, they’re nothing like your Aunt and Uncle. I think they’re proud of me, but I think they’re also aware that Hogwarts is a bit more dangerous than the local comprehensive I was meant to be going to,”

“I don’t know, the muggle school I nearly went to wasn’t the nicest place in the world,” Harry said. He still shuddered at the thought of actually having to attend Stonewall High.

Hermione managed a laugh, “my dad had a drink or two over Christmas and let slip than him and my mum are terrified that they’re going to lose me to the Wizarding World. They think that one day they’re going to put me on the Hogwarts Express and they’ll never see me again,”

“Is that going to happen?” Harry asked.

“I can’t go back to the Muggle world, Harry,” Hermione said, “not after everything that I’ve seen here! Could you do it? Could you turn your back on all this to go and work in an office somewhere in London?”

“Well, no...” Harry said, “but it’s different for me. I don’t have anyone in the muggle world,”

“I don’t want to stop seeing them but...I might have to,”

“Why would you have to-”

“If this war carries on in the way that it is, I might have to go into hiding. My parents might have to go into hiding,” she said, “there might come a time when me just being around them puts them in danger,”

They stopped under a tree that looked over the lake and slowly sat down. Hermione sighed and rested her head on his shoulder.

“We’ll protect them, Hermione,” Harry promised, “I don’t know how, but we will.”

“Yeah,” Hermione said, “We, um, we visited her grave,”

“You did?” Harry asked.

James had gone to Godric’s Hollow after Scrimgeour had left, but Harry could not bare to do it.

“We put some flowers down,” she continued, “and then we went to light a candle for her and your mum in that Church, even though I don’t believe in any of that and I’m quite sure Lydia didn’t, either,”

“Thanks for doing that, ‘Mione,” Harry said quietly, wiping his eyes.

“So, how was Christmas at The Burrow?”

“Quiet,”

“Anything exciting happen?”

He shrugged his shoulders lightly, “Percy came home with the Minister,”

“What?” Hermione exclaimed, sitting up straighter and whirling around to face him, “What do you mean Percy came home with the Minister? Did he speak to you?”
“Yeah,”

“Why wasn’t that the first thing you told me?”

“You were crying,”

“You still should have mentioned something! What did he say?”

“...so then I walked back into The Burrow,”

Hermione scoffed and shook her head, her eyes sparkling with tears again.

“The audacity...after everything that the Ministry have put you through! First with trying to expel you and then Umbridge and not believing anything that you said last year!” she exclaimed, “did Scrimgeour apologise for any of that?”

“Of course he didn’t!” Harry said, “he doesn’t actually give a shit about me. He’s too busy worrying about all this ‘Chosen One’ crap!”

Hermione shook her head, “Do you think that Dumbledore knows?”

“Honestly, Hermione, I couldn’t care less what Dumbledore thinks. When has he ever really cared about me?”

“At least Scrimgeour won’t try to speak to you again,” she said.

Harry turned to her and frowned. He could tell that something was still bothering her because she wouldn’t quite meet his eye.

“What is it?”

“Nothing,”

“There’s something else bothering you,”

“It’s nothing,” she said, “it’s just that...I went to the library early this morning to add something to my Herbology essay, and I got up to go and grab another book and when I came back...”

“What?” Harry urged.

“When I came back someone had scribbled Mudblood all over my essay in red ink,”

“Hermione...”

“Forget it, Harry,” she said, standing up, “it’s not the first time it’s happened-”

“It isn’t?” Harry asked furiously, “Well...that’s not...that’s not right! You should do something! Tell McGonagall!”

Hermione smiled at him.

“Ask any muggleborn in the castle and they’ll have a story like that to tell,” she said, too flippantly for Harry’s liking, “It’s just...I don’t know, I always like to think that no one in Hogwarts really thinks that way, but that’s just wishful thinking,” she glanced over at him and rolled her eyes, “don’t worry about it, Harry. We have bigger things to worry about,”
“Yeah,” Harry agreed, “bigger things to worry about,”

That did not change the fact that Harry wanted to track down whoever had done that and either curse them or beat them up. Possibly both.

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Hermione’s wondering as to whether or not Dumbledore was aware that Scrimgeour had spoken to Harry on Christmas day came to an end halfway through Potions on Monday morning. A note came for Harry asking him to go and speak to the headmaster, and Slughorn seemed quite sad to see the back of his favourite student. Harry, on the other hand, couldn’t wait to get out of the dungeons, even if it meant having to go and speak to Dumbledore.

“In trouble already, Potter?” Daphne asked, “that must be a record even for you,”

“Yeah, well, I aim to better myself,” he replied, hurrying out of the dungeon and choosing to take his time to walk up to Dumbledore’s office.

“Come in,” came Dumbledore’s voice when Harry knocked on the door.

“Hello, Profess - dad?”

Harry faltered when he saw his dad sat at Dumbledore’s desk and he began to worry that he was actually in trouble. Perhaps Dumbledore had decided that him spending so much time in the Slytherin common room was against the rules, or he had been caught doing something else that was wrong. Though as he racked his brains, he could not think of one thing that he done recently that would warrant getting in trouble.

“You’re not in trouble,” James said.

“Oh,” Harry said, relaxing, “I thought I was,”

“Guilty conscious, Harry?” Dumbledore asked, smiling and gesturing for him to sit down.

“Always,” Harry muttered, dropping into the seat next to his dad, “So, um, what’s...what’s going on?”

“Your father informed me that Rufus Scrimgeour paid you a visit,” Dumbledore said, “can I ask what it is you spoke about?”

“Not a lot, really,” Harry said, “he wanted to recruit me to work with the Ministry. Be a poster boy for them,”

“What did you say?”

“No,” Harry said, wondering if Dumbledore really thought that his answer could have been anything but that.

“Right,” Dumbledore said nodding, “This is not the only thing that I wanted to talk to you about, Harry. I wanted to ask, and forgive me if your answer is still the same, I wanted to ask if you have changed your mind on the Horcruxes,”

“I’m not going after those Horcruxes, Professor,” Harry said, with as much politeness as he could muster.

“I told you that’s what he would say, Professor,” James snapped, “and with all due respect, you
couldn’t protect Lydia from what happened to her, and I don’t think you’ll be able to protect Harry from the same thing happening to him. I’ve lost enough. We’ve all lost enough,

“This would be the downfall of Lord Voldemort,”

Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.

“But would it be the downfall of my son?” James asked, and Harry knew that the same words that had just echoed through his mind had echoed through his dads, “I’m all for Voldemort dying, Professor, but not if Harry dies as well. I’d rather live in a world where both the Dark Lord and my son are alive, than a world where they’re both dead,”

“I need you both to understand the severity of the-

“Don’t say that I don’t understand the severity of the situation, Dumbledore,” James snarled, “I understood the severity of the situation when you told me and Lily that he was coming after us. I understood the severity of the situation when he killed me. I understood the severity of the situation when I watched Sirius fall through that veil and I certainly understood it when I saw my fifteen year old daughter dead in the Hospital Wing!”

“James-”

“Call me foolish, call me arrogant, I don’t care,” James said, his voice rising, “but I’m not letting you kill another one of my children,”

“Is there no part of either of you that wish to avenge their deaths in some way?” Dumbledore asked, somewhat curiously.

“When I was speaking to Scrimgeour on Christmas Day, he asked me if I was your man through and through,” Harry said.

“And what did you say?”

“I told him that I wasn’t,” Harry said, “I told him that I’m just trying to live for Lydia, and that is what I’m doing. I just want to live,”

Dumbledore regarded him for a few moments and then nodded.

“Very well,” he said, a note of sadness in his voice, “I just wanted to know where you both stand,”

Outside of Dumbledore’s office, James turned to Harry.

“One day, I might have to fight,” he said, and Harry could tell that he was choosing his words carefully, “and if that day ever comes, I want you to understand that I won’t be fighting for Dumbledore, I’ll be fighting for your mum and Sirius and Lydia...and you,”

“I understand,” Harry said.

James smiled and clapped him on the shoulder, “Go on. Get back to class, or we’ll both get in trouble for being late,”

“See you later, dad,”

“See you, son,”

As Harry walked away, he tried not to think about the fact that he didn’t really plan on surviving the
war.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank-you for reading!

-E.
Harry was quite sure that there was nothing in life quite as trying to teach Urquhart how to cast the Patronus charm. Urquhart had, unfortunately, failed the test that Snape had set and would have to retake it again. He was actually very apologetic about the fact that he had failed when he asked Harry to tutor him.

“I know that you might be busy-”

“It’s fine,” Harry had said, “I don’t have Quidditch to worry about anymore,”

And so Harry spent the majority of the time he spent in the Slytherin common room trying his best to explain the best way to cast a Patronus. Snape was living up to his usual standard of being horribly cruel by asking for a corporeal Patronus, where most teachers would be happy with one that did not take shape. Sometimes, the other Slytherins would stand around and watch, sometimes they would just ignore them. Often, it was not entirely unlike teaching the DA. The only problem was that it made him miss Lydia even more. He had gotten so used to always having her by his side when he was teaching that it suddenly felt quite lonely.

Urquhart groaned in frustration and threw his wand to the side, “I can’t do it! I don’t understand you were able to do it when you were thirteen!”

“If it makes you feel any better, I can’t do it anymore,” Harry admitted, “I was trying last night, and I don’t have it in me anymore. All of my happy memories involve people who are dead, so it kind of ruins it,”

“That doesn’t not make me feel better, Potter,”

Harry snorted and shook his head, deciding to change gears a bit.

“What are you thinking about?” Harry asked, “You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to. It’s a personal question, I know,”

“No, it’s fine,” Urquhart said, “me and my family don’t really get along. We don’t see eye to eye on...anything. If they knew we were talking without trying to fight each other...they would be furious. So I think about the last conversation I had with them during the summer before they suggested I join the death eaters,”

Harry raised his eyebrows but did not say anything. He had always assumed that there would be people in the Slytherin common room who hated him for the same reason the death eaters hated him but he had never actually heard anyone say it out loud. It was strange for Harry to realise that everyone around him was just as caught up in the war as he was, even if was for completely different reasons.

“I don’t think like that, don’t worry,” Urquhart said hastily.

“So this isn’t your way of telling me you want to kill me?” Harry asked lightly.

“No,”
“Great!” Harry said, clapping his hands together, “now...that memory. Did you always know that your parents were sympathetic to Voldemort, or did you find out when they suggested your jon the death eaters?”

Urquhart looked thoughtful for a moment.

“I always knew that they were, you know, dickheads, but I just used to ignore it,” he said, “The thought that people who brought me up being so horrible is not something that I liked to think about, so I tried not to,” he paused for a moment and then added, “I got really drunk over the summer and cried about it, though,”

“So then your happy memory is the moment they openly showed you who they really are,” Harry said, suddenly having a newfound respect for Urquhart.

“What?”

“Remember when I said that sometimes the memories are unconventional? Like how Lydia’s was from after Voldemort came back?” Harry said, “this is yours! Look, when you weren’t sure if they were dicks or not, you were stressed! And it was probably weighing down on your mind,”

“Well, yeah,” Urquhart replied, somewhat uncertainly, “and I think that when they asked me to join the death eaters, it felt as though this massive weight was lifted off my shoulders. And I’m glad I know who they really are now because it just makes me work even harder so that I can move out! I lied and told them that I would after school ends, so I need to get out whilst- oh ,”

“There’s your happy memory - the feeling of doing the right thing despite the fact that everyone is pushing you to do the opposite!” Harry exclaimed, smirking, “try again,”

“Expecto Patronum!”

A black bear bust out of the end of his wand and he let out a low whistle.

“Merlin’s beard, Potter. You’re not half bad as this. You remind me a bit of that Lupin,”

“Thanks,” Harry said, genuinely touched, “but you did most of the work, mate. Well done,”

“You should teach Defence Against the Dark Arts, Potter. Or should I say, Professor ,” Daphne grinned, walking over to them.

“I wouldn’t go that far, Greengrass,” Harry said.

“You’re great!” she said, “it’s no wonder all of the DA did so well in their OWLs,”

“If they didn’t put the work in-”

“Just take the compliment, Potter,”

“Right,” Harry said, “Anyway, I should probably get going before curfew,”

“That you should,” she said, still smiling, “see you later, Harry,”

Harry did not know why the use of his first name made him so happy, but he was not going to question it.

“Bye, Daphne. Urquhart,”
Before he left the common room, Harry took out the Marauders Map and quickly scanned it, making sure that his path back to Gryffindor Tower was clear. And it would have been, if not for the fact that Draco Malfoy was, once again, lurking near the Room of Requirement. Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry hurried from the dungeons and up to the Room of Requirement. It was only when he got there that he realised that he was being stupid because there was every chance that Malfoy was just doing his prefect duty. He would have just carried onto the Gryffindor Tower if Malfoy didn’t call his name.

“What do you want, Malfoy?” Harry snapped, “I’m just trying to get to bed,”

“You’re the one who’s been following me around all year, Potter! Don’t think I haven’t noticed!” Malfoy hissed, marching towards him, “You don’t have to walk past here to get to your common room, but you did, because you saw me on that ridiculous map of yours!”

“The map is not ridiculous!” Harry yelled, realising that this was a very strange thing to get offended by, “and you’re one to talk, you stare at me all the time! In Potions, in Defence, in the Slytherin common room! You’re up to something!”

Malfoy scoffed and rolled his eyes.

“I thought you wouldn’t mind me staring, if I recall correctly, you find me pretty,”

Before Harry knew what he was doing, he had grabbed Malfoy by the front of his robes and shoved him against the wall. But instead of punching him like he had planned to, he was kissing him. And then Malfoy was kissing him back. And neither of them stopped despite the fact that anyone could have walked down the corridor and seen them.

Eventually, Malfoy prodded Harry in the chest and they jerked away from each other, as though they had just realised what they were doing. At first, Harry felt nothing but elation, but this was very quickly replaced with embarrassment because he had just kissed Draco Malfoy. Draco. Bloody. Malfoy.

“Well, you’re a lot better at kissing than dueling,” Malfoy said casually.

“That’s not - I’m good at dueling - better than you - that’s not the -” Harry sputtered. Then he shut up and looked at Malfoy with narrowed eyes, “Why aren’t you hexing me and running to tell the entire school that I just kissed you?”

“Because in the words of my loving father I am a poof,” Malfoy shrugged.

“Oh,” Harry said, “well, now I feel like I should mention I’m bisexual,”

“Oh, I know,”

“Huh?”

“I saw the way you always looked at Diggory in fourth year, and Chang. Anyone could have worked it out,” he said flippantly. He glanced up at Harry and then rolled his eyes, “Get over yourself. No one else cared enough to notice,”

“But you did,”

“That’s not what I - shut up, Potter,”

Harry awkwardly shuffled his feet, “Can we at least talk about-”
“The fact that we just kissed?”

“Yeah.”

Malfoy smirked and, for the first time in his life, it did not make Harry want to punch him.

“Yes,” he said, “but only because I’m curious as to how this—” he gestured vaguely between the two of them, “ever happened.”

“But you’re glad it did?” Harry asked, trying not to sound too hopeful.

“Well I kissed you back, didn’t I?”

Chapter End Notes

I have been dying to get to this part of the fic since I started it, so I hope you enjoyed it!!

And I know that this chapter is slightly shorter than the others, but I didn't want to drag it out because I didn't want to take away from what actually happened in it, if you know what I mean?

Thank-you for reading!!! <3
George

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

George Weasley was numb. Completely numb. Numb to everything but unbearable grief and guilt. It was a strange thing, to work in a joke shop was when telling jokes was often the last thing that he wanted to do. But he still went out of his way to make people laugh, because the world was already too dark and too depressing on its own for its inhabitants to be acting the same way.

And Weasleys Wizard Wheezes customers never saw through George’s act. He had lost count of the amount of time that customers had come up to him just to praise him for being so brave in the face of everything that had happened to him.

“You’re an inspiration, Mr Weasley! The way you can just carry on is incredible!”

“Such a brave, brave young man,”

“I’m sure she would have been so proud of you,”

He often wondered how many of these people had believed the Ministry when they said that the Potter Twins were crazy. He wondered how many of these people had decided that because she was in Slytherin, she was evil. He wondered how many of these people were the reason that she truly believed that she had to do what she had ended up doing. Sometimes, he would consider asking them this, but he never would. He would just thank smile and thank them for their business, instead. Occasionally, he would overcharge them. Not for personal gain, but out of spite. And he would always donate the money to people who needed it more than he did.

“You know, there's a building for sale in Hogsmeade,” Fred said to him one evening, “Near the Three Broomsticks, actually,”

“Really?” George replied, flicking through the Daily Prophet but not really reading it, “do you want to go and look at it?”

“Might as well,” Fred said, shrugging, “we have the means to expand and we’d get loads of business from Hogwarts students,”

George nodded, “We can go when we meet Ron on his birthday,”

“Are you, uh, are you sure that you’re ready for that?” Fred asked anxiously.

“Am I ready for Ron’s birthday? Yeah, I told you, I went and got his present the other-”

“You know what I mean, Georgie,” Fred sighed, “I mean are you ready to go to Hogsmeade without-”

“I can’t stop living my life because of my dead girlfriend, Freddie,”

When Ron’s birthday did eventually roll around, George realised that he was not even close to being ready to go to Hogsmeade. When they were in the Three Broomsticks and talking to the owner of the building they wanted, George found that he could not pay attention to anything that was being said. All he could think about was how the last time they had gone to Hogsmeade together was on Valentines Day, the same day that Lydia and Harry had given the interview to Rita Skeeter.
“Are you sure that this is interview is a good idea?” George asked quietly, casting a furtive look around to make sure that no one was listening.

“Oh, Merlin, no,” Lydia replied, “but Hermione thinks it is,”

“Hermione also thought that it would be a good idea for you to take Arithmancy,” George pointed out.

“Good point,” Lydia said, and then she changed; she sat up a little straighter and she looked determined, “but people need to know the truth about what happened that night. They need to know how Cedric died, who re-joined the death eaters and they need to know that Voldemort is back!”

“How do you think Umbridge will react?”

“In a way that only someone as cruel as Cruella de Vil would,” Lydia muttered darkly.

“Cruella de Vil? Is she a death eater?” George asked, frowning.

Suddenly, Lydia burst into laughter and George couldn’t quite work out why. He had thought that it was quite a sensible question.

“Sometimes I forget that you know nothing about muggles,” she giggled, wiping her eyes, “No. Cruella de Vil is a movie villain-”

“Movie?”

“Moving pictures,” she explained, “like a radio but you can watch it as well as listen to it. Your dad would know what I’m on about,”

“So who is she?”

“It’s a kids film. She skin dogs to make coats out of their fur,” she said.

George recoiled, “and it’s a kids film?”

“A really good one!” Lydia exclaimed, “me and Harry used to sit by the door at the Dursleys and listen to it! I think I had a crush on Roger...”

“Roger?” George asked, “Who’s Roger?”

Lydia smirked and rolled her eyes, “Not a real person. Calm down. He did sing a great song about her though,”

“Someone wrote a song about her? Why?” George asked, genuinely horrified.

“Jesus Christ, Georgie, it isn’t real!” Lydia laughed before breaking out into song.

“Listen, Umbridge will react in an awful way, I’m sure, but it probably won’t be as bad as how Voldemort will react,” Lyda said, once she had finished the singing the creepiest song that he had ever heard.

“That does not make me feel better,” he said, “do you think that people will believe you?”

Lydia scoffed and shook her head, “They will when it’s too late. When Voldemort has killed another innocent person, they’ll know,”
“Do you think we’re the only couple who talk about something like this on Valentines Day?”

“What, you think we’re the only couple who are talking about a genocidal maniac coming back from the dead to kill one of them?” Lydia asked.

“We might be the only couple who are actually talking to each other,” George muttered, glancing around the pub, “Lisa Oswald and Frankie Grey haven’t actually come up for air yet,”

“Stop watching people kiss, it’s weird,”

“They’re in my eye line!” he exclaimed, “every time I try to look at you, I can just see those two eating each others faces,”

“Don’t look at me then!”

“Can we not just swap places?”

“I don’t want to look at them!” Lydia said, “just come and sit next to me,”

“My biggest pet peeve in life is couples sitting on the same side of the table when they’re alone,” George grumbled, standing up and sitting next to her.

“That’s funny because my biggest pet peeve is you,”

“Oh, aren’t you hilarious,”

“Yes,” Lydia said, “it’s part of my charm!”

“I don’t think you can claim to have charm when half the country is against you and thinks you’re crazy,”

“At least I’m not ginger,”

“George? George!” Fred exclaimed, hitting him in the arm.

“Huh? What?” he looked up and realised that the owner was holding out his hand, “Oh, sorry,” he hastily shook the man’s hand and decided that it would be best for Fred to finish the meeting.

“Were you paying attention to anything that was said then?” Fred asked once the man had left.

“No,” George admitted, deciding that there was no point in even pretending that he was, “I started thinking about Lydia and that last date we had,”

“If you want to go home-”

“No,” George said firmly, standing up, “No, I want to go and meet Ron. He’s probably missing her just as much today,”

Fred regarded him for a moment and then nodded, “Let’s get going, then,”

George realised that standing at the end of the path that led up to Hogwarts was a bad idea when it was too late. When the first lot of Hogwarts students began to spill into Hogsmeade and saw him and Fred, he could not help but notice how differently he was being treated. Dean Thomas greeted Fred with the kind of enthusiasm that you would upon being reunited with someone you have not seen for decades, before turning to George and speaking to him as though they were at a funeral parlour. A number of people felt it prudent to tell George how very sorry they were for his loss before asking if
they could get Skiving Snackboxes for a lower price.

“These lot really don’t like spending money do they,” Fred muttered.

“War makes people frugal or something,” George said absentmindedly. He glanced down at his watch and sighed, “What’s taking Ron so long?”

“No idea, but Nevilles in a rush,” Fred said, nodding at Neville who was rushing up the path, “Oh, no, wait...he’s coming to us,”

“Fred! George!” he gasped, coming to a stop in front of them and almost keeling over.

“Have you missed us that much, Neville?” Fred asked, smirking.

“It’s Ron,” he said anxiously, “he’s in the Hospital Wing. He’s been poisoned! I just saw Hermione - she told me,”

“Poisoned?” George exclaimed, “what do you mean poisoned? By who?”

“I don’t know! She didn’t say!” Neville said, “You just need to go and see him,”

“Is he - is he in a bad shape?” George asked.

“He’s been bloody poisoned, George, what do you think?” Fred said, “Thanks for telling us Neville,”

By the time they got into the castle, George was quite sure that he was on the verge of a panic attack. One million horrible thoughts about Ron raced through his mind; was he going to die? Was he dying? Was he already dead? What would happen if he died? The only thing that George knew for certain was that he could not bare to lose someone else that he loved, especially not one of his siblings.

Ginny, Harry, James and Hermione were already sat around Ron's bed when they got into the Hospital Wing. Hermione's eyes were red and puffy and she did not say anything when they walked in.

“What happened?” Fred asked.

George tried not to pay too much attention to his surroundings. Somehow, everything in the Hospital Wing reminded him of Lydia and the day that she had died, which was one of the last things that he wanted to be thinking about at that moment.

“We were in Slughorn's office, and he offered us some wine,” Harry explained, “but it had poison in it,”

“And you didn’t drink yours?” James asked sharply.

“Dad, if I drank mine I think I’d be in a bed too,” Harry said impatiently, “Madam Pomfrey says he’ll be alright though. He just has to keep on drinking Essence of Rue,”

“Blimey, it’s lucky you thought of a Bezoar,” George said in a low voice, trying not to think about what would have happened if he had not.

“I was lucky there was one in the room,” Harry said, shuddering slightly.

“Do Mum and Dad know?” Fred asked Ginny.
“They've already seen him, they were here like an hour ago. They're with Dumbledore now, I think.”

There was a pause while they all watched as Ron mumbled a little bit in his sleep.

“So the poison was in the drink?” said Fred quietly.

“Yes,” said Harry at once, “Slughorn poured it out—”

“Do you think there was a chance Slughorn could have slipped something in the drink?”

“Probably,” said Harry, “but why would Slughorn want to poison Ron?”

“No idea,” said Fred, frowning, “You don’t think he could have mixed up the glasses by mistake? Meaning to get you?”

“Why would Slughorn want to poison Harry?” asked Ginny.

“I dunno,” said Fred, “but there must be loads of people who want to poison Lydia and - loads of people who want to poison Harry,”

“So you think Slughorn is a Death Eater?” asked Ginny, clearly trying to skate over the awkwardness of the mention of Lydia.

“Any things possible,” Fred said darkly.

“He could be under the Imperius Curse...” George said.

“Or he could be innocent,” James said, “The poison could have been for him,”

“Who'd want to kill Slughorn?” George asked.

“Dumbledore reckons Voldemort wanted Slughorn on his side,” said Harry, “He was in hiding last year. Maybe Voldemort wants him out of the way because he could be valuable to Dumbledore,”

“But you said Slughorn had been planning to give that bottle to Dumbledore for Christmas,” Ginny reminded him, “So the poisoner could have been after Dumbledore,”

“Well, the poisoner obviously didn't know Slughorn very well,” said Hermione, speaking for the first time in hours and sounding as though she had a bad head-cold, “Anyone who knew Slughorn would have known there was a good chance he'd have kept something that tasty for himself,”

“All that matters is that he’s alive,” James said, “and that he’s going to recover,”

“Er-my-nee,” croaked Ron, taking them all by surprise.

“Did he just say...” Fred whispered.

“Hermione?” George whispered back, “quite sure,”

It was a great relief for George to get home that night. Ever since going to the Hospital Wing, he had been feeling shaky and as though he was going to collapse at any moment.

“Why don’t you take tomorrow off?,” Fred suggested.

“I thought we were interviewing that girl for a job tomorrow,” George said, “Maisy,”
“Daisy,” Fred corrected, “It’s fine. I can do it on my own. She’ll probably get the job, anyway. Everyone else who applied was terrible,”

“Alright,” George said, secretly happy that he would be able to have a lie in the next day, “I’m going to bed,”

Instead of going to bed, however, George sat down at his desk and pulled open the top drawer, rummaging through it until he found what he was looking for. Carefully, he unrolled the letter and began to read it, even though he had read it so much that he could recite it word for word.

“Dear George,

Believe me, I am more than aware of how shitting this is and I cannot even begin to describe how sorry I am about what I’m probably going to put you through. Especially now that you’ve finally got the shop up and running. I’m really sorry that I’m not going to be able to see it, but I know that it’s going to be amazing.

I have to do this. I know this won’t make any sense to you right now, but one day it will. As much as I hate this and as much as I don’t want to leave you or anyone else behind, I have to do this. I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.

But you don’t have to do this. You don’t have to do something stupid. Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort. Move on with your life. Make people laugh. God knows you’re all going to need a laugh going forward.

Also, look after your hair. Try not to go bald. You have great hair. I am quite bitter about the fact that your hair is much better than mine, so the least you could do is make sure you have it forever.

Thank-you for everything, George, seriously. You made me so happy.

Good luck with the shop. I love you.

Lydia.”

Nine months. It had been nine months, and a lot had changed. George often wondered what Lydia would think if she were still alive. He wondered how she would have reacted to seeing the shop for the first time, he wondered if she would have fallen in love with the Pygmy Puffs like he thought she would have done. He had been planning on giving her a Pygmy Puff for her birthday, and now couldn’t look at the cage of them in the shop without wanting to burst into tears.

Sighing, he dropped the letter back into his drawer and saw another discarded birthday present. Just before the end of the school year, he had ventured into muggle London to buy the DVD (a concept he could not wrap his head around) of 101 Dalmatians for her. He took one look at it and then quickly slammed the drawer shut, staggering away from it as though it had stung him.

Losing Lydia had shattered George’s world in more ways than one; he missed her every single day and still had no idea how to deal with it. When he wasn’t feeling guilty about the fact that his girlfriend had been feeling suicidal and he had no idea about it, he found himself angry at her. Angry for leaving him behind, angry for leaving everyone behind. Perhaps she had no realised that her death would affect as many people as it did. He saw the effects of grief in Ginny, who could not bare to talk about her, in Ron who would get very quiet and refuse to look at anyone whenever someone brought it up and even his own mother, who he had found crying quietly over a Christmas jumper that she had not needed to knit.

Most of all, he saw it in himself.
“Why’d you do it, Lyds?” he whispered tearfully, knowing that no one would ever reply.

Chapter End Notes

Slightly longer chapter to make up for how short the last one was!

Thank-you for reading!
“Hermione, do you feel like Harry is hiding something?”

“Hermione, do you feel like Ron should shut up?”

They were sat in the Hospital Wing late one evening and Ron, being so bored of being holed up there, had come up with the crazy conspiracy theory that Harry was hiding something. Of course, Harry was hiding something, but neither Ron nor Hermione needed to know about Malfoy.

Hermione rolled her eyes at the two of them, “I think you both need to grow up,”

In a very strange way, Ron being poisoned had been a blessing in disguise for it had brought him and Hermione back together again. Something that Harry was very happy about it because it meant that things had a chance going back to normal, if normal was even a thing that they could strive for anymore. Ron’s relationship with Lavender had also become quite strained, something that Harry was secretly happy about and Hermione was openly happy about. Ron did not seem bothered either way and Harry could not understand why he didn’t just break up with her and get it over and done with.

“He’s acting shifty!” Ron exclaimed, pointing at Harry.

“Has this poison had some lasting effect on your brain?” Harry asked, “do you think that we should go and get Madam Pomfrey?”

“You are being weird,” Ron said confidently, “and I will find out why,”

“Calm down Sherlock Holmes,”

“Who’s Sherlock Holmes?” Ron asked.

“Muggle detective,” Hermione said without looking up from the book that she was reading, “he isn’t real, he’s a book character.”

Ron rolled his eyes at Hermione, “and I’m sure that you’ve read all of the books,”

“I have, actually!” Hermione said, “and they’re very good,”

“You say all books are good, Hermione,” Harry sighed.

“Because they are!”

Harry snorted and stood up, “Well, I’m off-”

“Where are you going?” Ron asked suspiciously.

Harry stared at him.

“For a shower,” he replied, “something that you should consider, because you stink,”

Having to carry the secret of his strange relationship with Malfoy was rather like having to carry the
He was quite sure that they would both be more than OK with the prospect of Harry being in a
relationship with another bloke, but he didn’t think that this tolerance would stretch as far as Malfoy.
Whenever Harry left them to go and meet Malfoy somewhere, he couldn’t help but feel guilty.
Malfoy had always made fun of Ron and his family for not having a lot of money, and he had never
shied away from insulting Hermione in any way that he could.

But all of this was usually forgotten within five minutes of meeting him, and Harry was not sure if
that made him a terrible person or not.

And yet, there was something rebellious about it all. There was something almost amusing about the
fact that Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy spent all their time together, even though they were two
sides of the same coin and were never meant to work together. Somehow, Harry felt as though what
they were doing was more impactful than finding and destroying all the Horcruxes. It made him feel
powerful for the first time in a long time, and he never wanted to stop feeling that way.

“Harry?”

He jumped and turned around, coming face to face with the one person that he didn’t really want to -
his dad.

“Oh, hi, dad,”

“Where are you going?” James asked, frowning.

“For a...shower,” Harry said, realising that lying to his dad was much harder than lying to Ron and
Hermione.

“Are you walking the long way round or something?”

“Yes,” Harry said, “that is exactly what I’m doing,”

James frowned at him again and then sighed.

“I know you’re probably doing something you shouldn’t, but I’m going to turn a blind eye on
account of the fact that I’d probably be more disappointed if I found out that you weren’t doing
something that you shouldn’t,” he said, ruffling his hair, “Night, son,”

“Good night,”

There was a moment in which Harry seriously considered telling his dad about Malfoy, but he
quickly brushed the thought from his mind. It would be an extremely awkward conversation that
James would probably want to have even less than Harry did.

“You’re late, Potter,” Malfoy said when Harry finally got their chosen broom cupboard of the night.

“Not my fault,” Harry said, “I ran into my dad,”
“Ah, and what incredible lie did you tell Potter Senior?” he asked.

“I told him I was going for a shower,”

Malfoy rolled his eyes, “you’ve been for about fifteen showers this week. People are going to think that you have a problem,”

“He won’t question me,” Harry said confidently, “he got up to much worse when he was in school,”

Malfoy opened his mouth as though he was going to argue back but then closed it again and nodded.

“You’re probably right,”

---

“Is Weasley alright?” Malfoy asked suddenly, when they were sat in the boys dormitories.

Harry turned and looked at him in surprise, “Since when have you cared about Ron?”

“I won’t ask in future,”

“No!” Harry said hastily, “No, it’s just...a surprise that you asked, that all. He’s fine. He’s just a bit pissed off because he can’t play Quidditch this weekend,”

Malfoy smirked.

“Bad news for the Gryffindor Quidditch team,”

Harry shrugged, “I really wouldn’t know. I haven’t been to a single Quidditch match this year,”

“You say that likes it my fault,”

“Well, I was going to go the Ravenclaw and Slytherin match but I got distracted,”

“You didn’t seem to mind getting distracted,” Malfoy said, leaning closer to him.

Harry still found Malfoy’s face being so close to his own quite strange, but found that he didn’t really have much to complain about when their lips met. Malfoy dropped his lips to his neck and Harry allowed himself to relax into his grip, until the door suddenly opened.

“Draco, have you seen Har - AGHHH,”

Before Harry could even realise what was happening or who was in the room, Malfoy shoved Harry in the chest and he toppled backwards off the bed, landing quite painfully on his arm.

“We were fighting,” Malfoy said.

Groaning in pain, Harry pushed himself off the floor and flushed red when he saw Daphne stood in the doorway, looking slightly confused.

“You were...fighting,” Daphne said.

“Yes. Fighting,”

She nodded, “Really weird way of fighting, Draco. You ever heard of this thing called duelling?”
Malfy glared at her, “Yes, you’re really quite hilarious, Daph. What do you want?”

“Potter,” she said, turning to Harry and smiling slightly, “Ginny Weasley wants to speak to you,”

“Why?”

“Oh, Merlin, I don’t know. Something about Quidditch, I think,”

“But I’m not on the team,”

Daphne stared at him, “Harry, do you really think I give a shit about whatever the Gryffindor Quidditch team get up to? I barely care about whatever it is the Slytherin team are doing. Go and speak to her yourself,”

“Ugh, yeah, um...” he hurried past Daphne and glanced back in the room at Malfoy, “I’ll see you...ugh, well, not necessarily later but, you know, I will see you at some point, we do live in the same place but - I’m just gonna go,”

“It’s about bloody time, don’t you think?” Daphne said to Malfoy before the door swung shut behind him.

As Harry walked through the Slytherin common room, he tried his best to smooth his robes and hair, although he was quite sure that most of the Slytherins might have worked out what he had been doing in the boys dormitories. Urquhart definitely had, because he high fived Harry when they passed each other and Harry really didn’t know what to take from that.

“Hermione really wasn’t lying when she said you spend all your time in here, was she?” Ginny said when Harry found her pacing up and down the corridor.

“It makes me feel closer to Lydia,” Harry said.

She sighed and then shook her head, “I know, and I think that Hermione should get off your back about it. Especially if it makes you feel better,”

“It does,”

“Well, I’m not here to give you a counselling session,” she said, clapping her hands together, “Katie is in a bit of a panic because we’re a chaser down and a Keeper down,”

“So?” Harry asked, “what’s that go to do with me?”

“I need to fill in as Chaser,”

“Ok...”

“So we need a Seeker,”

It took Harry a minute to realise what she meant and quickly shook his head.

“No.”

Ginny groaned, “Harry, please, we’re close to winning the cup again!”

“Ginny, I told you, I’m not playing-”

“Look,” she said furiously, “I get it, alright? I get that miss you Sirius and Lydia! I get that you’re
going through a lot and everything is a bit shit right now. I really, really get it, Harry, but them being gone doesn’t mean that you have to stop living your life! Do you really think that Lydia would want you stop playing-”

“I’ve already had this conversation with my dad, Ginny,” Harry snapped, “and, like I said to him, I don’t know what Lydia would want, because she is dead,”

“Harry, please, it’s just one game! One game and then you never even have to look at a broomstick again if you don’t want to!”

“Fine. Fine,” Harry said, “but when I say one game, I mean one game.”

Ginny grinned at him, “That’s all I ask. One game. Practice is tomorrow night. You still have your robes, don’t you?”

“I’ll dig them out of my trunk,”

“Great!” she said brightly, “by the way, who’ve you been snogging?”

“Who’ve I - what?”

“You have a funny little mark on your neck and I highly doubt it’s a birthmark,”

Harry felt himself go bright red and he clapped his hand to his neck.

“No one!”

“Sure,” she said, winking at him, “Daphne Greengrass is very pretty though. Nothing to be ashamed of,”

Harry opened his mouth and then closed it again, realising that he had no comeback to what she had just said.

“See you on the Pitch, Harry!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!
The news that Harry Potter was dating Daphne Greengrass was a shock to everyone. Harry Potter and Daphne Greengrass most of all. Harry had been enjoying what he had hoped to be a very relaxing Friday morning in the Gryffindor common room after Herbology had been cancelled when Hermione grabbed him by the back of his robes and yanked him up, shoving him towards the portrait hole.

“Hermione!” Harry exclaimed, “Have you - have you lost your mind? What are you doing?”

“I know why you’re spending so much time in the Slytherin common room, Harry!” she said, smirking, “and it’s nothing to do with Lydia!”

“You do?” Harry asked, his heart dropping to his stomach, “This isn’t how - this isn’t how I wanted you to find out! I was going to tell you but it’s just an awkward conversation to have and-”

“Daphne Greengrass!” she giggled, “I knew there was a reason you were so friendly with her!”

“Daphne Greengrass?” Harry repeated, his speech about how he was still the same Harry despite being bisexual and dating Draco Malfoy on the tip of his tongue.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him, “Don’t even try and hide it! Ginny told me!”

Everything seemed to slide into place at once in Harry’s mind and he quickly nodded.

“Yep,” he said, “Daphne Greengrass...my girlfriend...Daphne Greengrass,”

Hermione laughed again and linked her arm with his as they walked down to the Great Hall for breakfast. When he spotted Daphne walking out of the dungeons with Malfoy and Parkinson, he suddenly realised that there would be very little chance for him to explain that Hermione thought they were dating, and just hoped they would both be quick on the uptake.

“So...how long?” Hermione asked excitedly.

“Um, not - not long,” Harry said, purposely sitting so that Hermione’s back was to the Slytherin table, “it kind of just happened, you know?”

Hermione beamed at him.

“Well, I’m happy you’re happy, Harry!” she said, “and it’ll probably be great for inter-house relationships, as well,”

“There's always a bigger picture with you, isn’t there?” Harry asked, smiling despite himself.

Hermione shrugged, “just thinking ahead - hi, Daphne!”

“Hi, Hermione!”

Harry turned around and felt his heart sink to see Daphne stood behind him. She winked at him and slid onto the bench next to him, grabbing ahold of his arm and kissing him on the cheek.
“Don’t worry,” she whispered in his ear, “Astoria just told me what’s going on,”

“Ron is going to have a heart attack when he finds out about this,” Hermione said cheerfully.

“You should definitely be the one to tell him,” Harry said hurriedly, thinking that he would do anything to avoid having that conversation with Ron.

Daphne shrugged, “At least he’s already in the Hospital Wing if he does have a heart attack,”

Harry forced a laugh and then grabbed Daphne by the hand, “Come on, uh, dear, we should, uh, go...”

They bid goodbye to Hermione and then hurried out of the Great Hall to many wolf whistles. Once they were out of earshot, Daphne burst into laughter and slumped against the wall, clinging onto her sides. When Harry had managed to get his head around everything, even he couldn’t help but laugh.

“If we need to stage a fake break up-” Harry began.

“We don’t,” she said, “Listen, this-” she gestured between the two of them, “-would never happen. No offence,” she added.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked furiously, before realising that it was a strange thing to be annoyed by, “Sorry. It’s a good point. Carry on,”

“But, if you’re constantly in and out of the Slytherin common room and you and Draco carry on eye fucking across classrooms-”

“We do not-”

“You really do,” Daphne interrupted, “sometimes it’s worse than when I did actually walk in on you both,”

Harry felt himself go red but gestured for her to carry on talking.

“If you carry on eye fucking across classrooms, people are going to talk and then rumours are going to start which is the last thing that either of you need, right?” Daphne said, “so we just carry on this fake relationship. No one will ever know. I’m quite the actress,”

“Are you?” Harry asked.

She shrugged, “I have no idea, but I probably am. I’m usually really good at everything I do,”

“Well, I guess it’s the best way to throw people off the scent of me and Malfoy,” Harry said.

Daphne grinned and clapped her hands together.

“Maybe just don’t call me ‘dear’. We’re sixteen, not eighty six,”

“What am I meant to call you then?” Harry exclaimed.

“Daph-Daph?” she suggested.

“I’d rather be outed to the entire school,”

“So does this mean that I can’t call you Har-Har?”
“Outing myself would be less painful,”

---

The problem with being in a fake relationship was that trying to keep track of everything was quite difficult. Whenever someone asked him how long he and Daphne had been together, Harry was quite sure he kept on telling people different than what Daphne was telling people. It was also quite difficult to remember to act like he was actually her boyfriend whenever he was around her.

Thankfully, Daphne did actually prove to be quite a good actress and was carrying the entire thing solely on her shoulders. She was also a lot more committed than Harry was. When he had to start Quidditch practice again (something he wasn’t particularly thrilled about), she sat in the stands the entire time and shouted encouragements at him that, strangely enough, made him feel better.

Ron had reacted in the way that Harry had predicted him to by overreacting to the point where Madam Pomfrey snapped at him for over exerting himself. At first he was quite disgusted at the thought of Harry being in a relationship with a Slytherin but after Hermione pointed out that his own brother had been in a relationship with a Slytherin, he very quickly changed his tune and found the whole thing quite amusing. This almost gave Harry hope that Ron and Hermione would one day be OK with Harry and Malfoy, but he had to quickly remind himself that with Malfoy being, well, Malfoy, there was very little chance of that.

“You’re not annoyed by this whole thing with me and Daphne, are you?” Harry asked anxiously when he and Malfoy finally got time alone.

“No,” Malfoy replied, “it’s actually very funny. She’s selling it, you are not.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “it’s a weird thing to do!”

“I know,” Malfoy said, “I don’t think I could do it,”

“Do you think that we could ever be...open?”

Malfoy looked away from him and shook his head.

“No,” he said, “Merlin, use your brain, Harry! You’re the Boy who Lived and I’m a Malfoy! Us doing this in secret is probably a bad idea! The wrong person is bound to find out at some point!”

Harry knew that this would have been the perfect time to ask him if he was a death eater or not, but he got slightly distracted by something else.

“You just called me by my first name,” he said, “You never do that,”

Malfoy’s cheeks turned pink, “well, it felt...it felt slightly silly still calling you by your second name now that we’re a bit more...familiar,”

“I wasn’t complaining about it, Draco,” Harry said, leaning towards him, “but I wouldn’t mind if you shut up for a while now,”

That evening, Harry walked back to Gryffindor Tower with a spring in his step. For the first time in a long time, Harry felt like everything was OK. Of course he still missed Lydia and Sirius, but he suddenly didn’t feel like the world was crumbling around him. He didn’t feel like everyone was out to get him. More importantly, he didn’t feel like Draco was a death eater anymore. He had given it a lot of thought and had come to the conclusion that Ron and Hermione had probably been right; Voldemort wouldn’t just let anyone join him. Especially not someone who hadn’t even left school.
yet. Draco had just been unlucky enough to be born into a family like the Malfoys. As far as Harry was aware, Draco was like Urquhart and was rebelling against everything that his family stood for.

“Harry, son, can I speak to you?”

Harry was brought sharply back down to earth by his dad's voice and turned to him, grinning. He had not even realised that he had been walking past his office.

“You look...happy,” James said, “come in for a minute?”

“Sure,” Harry said brightly, following him in, “what is it?”

“Professor Slughorn told me about Daphne Greengrass,”

Harry felt himself go bright red. He had not even thought about the fact that his dad would have heard about his and Daphne’s ‘relationship’.

“Yeah...I was going to tell you I just got-

“Distracted?”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “Yeah. I just distracted,”

James nodded and then grinned, “Listen, son, I’m not here to have a go at you about it. You’re young! This is actually how you should be spending your teenage years!”

Harry nodded but did not say anything. He felt like there was a ‘but’ coming.

“But, I need to know if you’re being safe,”

“You need to know if we’re being - ew!” Harry exclaimed, “Jesus Christ! No, dad, we aren’t...we aren’t...you know...no! We’re not even...you know,”

James let out a sigh of relief, “Oh, thank Merlin for that,”

“Yeah. No. We aren’t,”

“But if you were-”

“Yes,” Harry said quickly, “yes, we would be safe,”

James smiled at him, “I’m just looking out for you, mate,”

“I know,” Harry said.

And deep down, beneath all the embarrassment, he was secretly happy about it. Harry was not sure that the Dursley’s ever cared about him or Lydia to have that sort of conversation, so it was nice to know that there was someone who finally cared.

“I heard you’re playing Quidditch again, though?” James said.

“One match,” Harry said firmly, “one match tomorrow and then I’m finished,”

“I know,” James grinned, “I know. I’m just...I’m just excited to see you play again,”

When Harry was lay in bed that night, he wondered what Lydia would think about the whole situation. He knew that no matter what he thought her reaction would be, he would have to tell her
about him and Draco, and tell her that he and Daphne weren’t really dating. He imagined that there would be a lot of laughter, but also a lot of support.

*Don’t let it destroy you. Let is destroy Voldemort.*

For the first time, Harry felt like maybe he wouldn’t let it destroy him.

Chapter End Notes

I know that fake relationships are an overdone trope, but I feel like this in a fake relationship with a twist?

I'm just really excited about where this is going to take this fic and I can't wait! I hope you're enjoying it!

<3
The wind whipped through Harry’s hair as he took a sharp dive towards the fluttering Snitch, just meters ahead of him. The Hufflepuff Seeker was somewhere behind him, but he didn’t worry about him. The roar of the crowd egged him on as he bent closer to his Firebolt, his arm outstretched for the Snitch and-

“YES!” Harry yelled, his hand closing around the Snitch.

The Gryffindor side erupted into deafening cheers as Harry flew back down to the ground. He had barely gotten of his broom by the time his dad had landed next to him and thrown his arms around him, sobbing loudly. Even Cormac McLaggen managed to crack a smile as the crowd poured onto the pitch.

“You’re welcome,” Ginny muttered in his ear, grinning.

“What?” Harry said.

“You’re welcome for getting you back on the pitch,” she said, “Great catch,”

“Cheers,” he said, grinning despite himself.

For a few moments, Harry felt as though everything was as it should have been, because everything was as it always had been: he was celebrating winning a Quidditch match, James was crying and telling him how amazing he was and Hermione was doing her best to look like she cared about Quidditch. And Harry found himself looking around for Lydia, who was undoubtedly pissing off the entirety of Slytherin House by wearing Gryffindor colours and being far too happy for the victory of the opposing team.

But she was nowhere to be found.

Tears sprang to his eyes and he looked at the floor, hoping that everyone would mistake his tears for happy ones. And they seemed to, because Seamus threw his arm around Harry’s shoulders and shouted, “Party in the Gryffindor common room, lads!” to louder cheers than when the Snitch had actually been caught.

Before Harry could even get the words, “I don’t feel like a party,” out of his mouth, he was swept away into the crowd and carried up to Gryffindor Tower. His saving grace was Daphne, who caught him at the exact right moment and grabbed his hand, yanking him back and away from common room to more wolf whistles than was probably socially acceptable.

“Thank-you,” Harry said gratefully as they walked down to the dungeons.

“No problem,” she said, “I could tell you didn’t really feel like going to the party. Perks of having a fake girlfriend, I guess,"

“Fake girlfriend?”

Harry spun around and could have screamed for Ron, fresh out of the Hospital Wing, was stood there.
“Uh-” Harry said.

“Did you just say fake girlfriend, Greengrass?” he asked.

“No,” Daphne said, “No. I - of course I didn’t - we’re not...” she trailed off and then turned to look at Harry, “This is a conversation for you. He’s your best friend,”

“Yeah,” Ron said furiously, “I am! So I’d love for you tell me what the hell is going on,”

“Ron, I -” Harry groaned and put his head in his hands, “I can’t.”

“You can’t?” Ron repeated, “you can’t tell me, your best mate, what’s going on? First you don’t even tell me that you’re together in the first place, and now I’m finding out that you aren’t actually together? No offence, mate, but this is shittiest joke,”

Daphne shifted awkwardly next to Harry and then cleared his throat, “You know, I don’t think that this is a conversation that I need to be part of,” she glanced at Harry and then over to Ron, “I’ll, um, I’ll see you later,”

They did not speak again until Daphne had disappeared into the dungeons.

“Well?” Ron demanded, rounding on him, “what is it? What’s going on?”

“Can we at least sit down and have this conversation?” Harry asked miserably, resigned to the fact that there was no way out of this.

Ron frowned at him but nodded.

“Whatever,”

Heart in his mouth, Harry lead the way into an empty classroom off the Entrance Hall and sat down. Ron, still looking furious, threw himself into the chair in front of Harry, looking at him expectantly.

“I just - after everything that we’ve been through, you...you trust me, don’t you?” Harry asked.

“What?” Ron asked.

“You trust me, don’t you?”

Ron frowned at him and then nodded, suddenly looking worried.

“OK, and...what I’m about to say. I don’t want - I don’t want that to change anything between the two of us, yeah? I don’t want you to think I’m weird or -”

“Harry, are you gay?” Ron asked, his eyes wide.

“No,” Harry said quickly, “No. I’m - I’m bisexual,”

His words hung in the air for a moment and Harry closed his eyes, accepting the fact that this would be the day that he’d lose his best friend.

“I don’t know if I’m being stupid or not, but I have no idea what's that got to do with Daphne Greengrass,” Ron said finally.

“Are you not weirded out?” Harry asked hopefully.
Ron rolled his eyes, “You’re my best mate, Harry,”

“For now,”

“Huh?”

“Daphne isn’t actually my girlfriend,” Harry said, “it all started when Ginny asked me who I was snogging in the Slytherin common room. I didn’t say who I was actually snogging but she thought that it was Daphne and then ran with it. She is...she is covering for me so people don’t find out who it actually is,”

“It’s not - it’s not Parkinson, is it?”

Harry rolled his eyes at him, “No, Ron, if it was Parkinson I wouldn’t have told you I’m bisexual!”

“Oh,” Ron said, “so it’s a bloke?”

“Yeah,”

“In Slytherin?”

“Yeah,”

Ron made a face, “It’s not Zabini, is it?”

“What?” Harry asked, taken aback, “No! I don’t even think he’s gay!”

Ron nodded knowingly, “makes sense. I don’t think that he talks enough to uphold any sort of conversation  Is it Crabbe or Goyle?”

“No!” Harry exclaimed, “Jesus Christ, Ron, I have standards!”

Ron held his hands up, “I don’t know!” then he started laughing, “it’s definitely not Malfoy,”

Harry did not say anything and looked at his hands. Ron’s laughter stopped rather abruptly.

“Harry,” Ron said slowly, “you’re joking, right? It isn’t - it isn’t Malfoy, is it?”

“Yes,”

“Him ?” Ron raged, suddenly sounding angry again, “Draco fucking Malfoy? Harry! Are you - are you serious? You were convinced he was a death eater five minutes ago!”

“I know!” Harry exclaimed, “I know I was but...but he isn’t. I swear to god, he isn’t! He just has a shitty excuse for a dad!”

“That’s all well and good, but have you forgotten everything that he’s said about Hermione? About me? About my family?” Ron snapped.

“I know, I know, I know,” Harry said quickly, “believe me, I do. But, well, he’s apologised for that! He’s said he’s sorry and-”

“He’s said he’s sorry to you ,” Ron snapped, “or did you forget about that fucking song he wrote about me? According to your new boyfriend, I was born in a bin!”

“I know,” Harry repeated, “Really, Ron, I do, but he isn’t as bad as you’d think. If you gave him a
“Why would I do that?” Ron asked moodily.

“Because you’re my best friend!” Harry yelled, “You were the first friend I ever had outside of Lydia! I actually give a shit about what you think about my life!”

Ron’s facial expression softened and he nodded, “Fine. Fine. I’ll give him a chance. I’ll speak to him, but you need to tell Hermione. She deserves to know after everything that he’s ever said to her,”

Harry nodded.

“Yes. Fine. I’ll tell her. And then we can...I don’t know...spend some time together. Almost like a double date,” he added with a grin.

Ron narrowed his eyes at him, “Don’t push it, dickhead.”

Harry had expected Hermione to take the news that Draco Malfoy was his boyfriend slightly better than Ron did, but he had never been so wrong about something in their life. The day after the Quidditch game, the three of them walked out into the grounds in an attempt to get away from people listening in on conversations that they shouldn’t be listening in on.

“So, what is it that you wanted to tell me, Harry?” Hermione asked, throwing some toast into the lake for the Giant Squid.

They watched as one of its tentacles lazily rose out of the water and dragged the toast underneath.

“Me and Daphne aren’t together,” he said, refusing to look at either her or Ron.

“Oh,” Hermione said, sounding sympathetic, “When did you break up?”

“We, uh, we were never together,” Harry replied, “it was...it was a stupid lie to cover for the fact that I have a...” he sighed and turned to look at her, “It was a stupid lie to cover for the fact that I’m bisexual and have a boyfriend,”

She raised her eyebrows at him and then nodded.

“Well, Harry, you know that I’ll support you through anything,” she said, “And I’m guessing you don’t want the rest of the school to know who this boyfriend is,”

“Not particularly,” Harry said, grateful that she understood this, at least, “Not even my dad,”

“Do you not want to know who the boyfriend is?” Ron asked, somewhat bitterly.

Hermione frowned, “Why are you saying it like that?”

“Because you won’t like it,” Ron muttered.

“It’s Malfoy,” Harry said resignedly.

Hermione did not reply straight away. Her face locked in a vicious glare that actually made Harry take a step back from her and hold his hands up. He was not sure that he had ever seen her look so angry.
“Draco Malfoy?” Hermione asked, her voice shaking.

“Yeah,” Harry said.

“I cannot believe you, Harry Potter!” she exclaimed, “Draco Malfoy? After everything that he’s ever done to us? How many times has he made fun of you? How many times has he made fun of Ron? How many times has he called be a Mudblood?”

“Hermione-”

“No, Harry, do not interrupt me!” she snapped, “Do you know what it’s like to walk through Hogwarts and have people hiss that word at you? Or tell you that you don’t belong? And then you have the nerve to go and spend your free time snogging one of them? What happened to-” she put on an annoyingly accurate impression of his voice, “-Malfoy is a death eater and he’s going to kill us all!”?

“He isn’t a death eater,” Harry said firmly, “and he’s apologised for everything that he said. And he wants to apologise to you two, in person! So just speak to him, please,”

Hermione glared at him for a little while longer and then nodded.

“Fine,”

Harry managed a smile, “Thanks, Hermione. It genuinely means a lot,”

Trying to get Ron and Hermione into the Slytherin common room without causing a stir was a lot more difficult than Harry had expected it to be. In his mind, they would just throw the Invisibility Cloak over themselves and sneak into the boys dormitories, but Ron had grown so much that it was quite difficult to hide his feet. All of this lead to them being ten minutes late and finding a very stressed Draco Malfoy pacing up and down the dormitories whilst Daphne, who had been chosen to mediate what would be an awkward meeting, tried to calm him down.

“You’re late,” Daphne said, looking at her watch.

“It’s because Ron is ridiculously tall,” Hermione snapped, whipping the cloak off them and glaring up at him.

“Really weird thing to get angry about,” he muttered. He looked over at Draco and awkwardly waved, “Hi,”

“Weasley, Granger,” Draco replied, nodding curtly at them.

“Hi Hermione, Hi Ron,” Daphne said, smiling widely at them, “the Draco Malfoy I know and the Draco Malfoy you know are two very different people,”

“Oh, so is the blood supremacy thing just for show, then?” Hermione asked coldly.

Harry glanced over at Draco who had gone slightly red and looked at the floor. Maybe asking them to meet on civil grounds had been a terrible idea.

“Yes,” Draco said, and he sounded ashamed, “the Malfoy’s have a reputation to uphold and as only heir-”

“You have all the more reason to mess with the status quo,” Hermione interrupted, “I haven’t forgotten all the times you’ve called me a mudblood, Malfoy,”
“And I don’t expect you to,” he said quickly, “and I don’t expect Weasley to forget all things that I’ve said about him and his family,”

Ron narrowed his eyes at Draco but stayed silent, which felt like a great indicator of how well things weren’t going.

“So, I just want to apologise. And maybe even get the chance to, um, to start afresh?” Draco asked hopefully, holding out his hand.

Hermione looked at him for a few seconds and then nodded, shaking his hand.

“Fine. We can start afresh,” she said, “but I swear to god if you hurt Harry, I will punch you again,”

“Sorry,” Daphne said, “Sorry, I know that wasn’t the point, but you said...you said again? You’ve punched him before?”

“Third year,” Hermione replied.

Daphne’s entire face lit up, “You’re my new favourite person!”

“Ron?” Harry said quietly, quite happy about the fact that Hermione and Daphne seemed to be bonding, “are you - are you alright with this?”

“I guess so,” Ron said, also shaking his hand, “but I will find out how to turn you into a ferret. Just in case,”

“Message received,” Draco muttered.

Harry felt himself begin to smile, but he couldn’t help but feel extremely sad about the fact that Lydia was not around to see the sort of house unity that she had always wanted.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!

As always, feedback/kudos is appreciated!!!

<3
“I can’t believe how bloody obsessed you are with that book, Harry,” Ron said, shooting him a disgusted look over dinner one evening.

Harry rolled his eyes as he flicked through his Potions book.

“You only don’t like it because of that spell,” Harry said, “if it weren’t for this book, you’d have died of poison,”

“What spell?” Hermione asked sharply.

Despite his complaining, Ron sniggered.

“This spell that hangs you upside down,” he said, “Harry used it on me the other day,”

Hermione rounded on him, her eyes wide.

“You used a spell on him even though you didn’t know what it did?” she asked, “he could have died, Harry,”

“But he didn’t,” Harry pointed out, “he’s still alive and kicking, isn’t he?”

Ron then proved his point by kicking his leg out and accidentally knocking over an unsuspecting first year who walked by at the exact wrong time.

Hermione shook her head, “That book is dangerous, Harry. I don’t know why on earth you’re taking the previous owners advice. We don’t even know who the Half Blood Prince is!”

“Whoever it is helped me save Ron’s life, so I’m not going to start complaining about it,” Harry said, putting the book back into his bag and standing up, “I’m going to see Daphne,”

There was a slight awkwardness in the way that they said goodbye to each other, but Harry did not read too much into it. Ron and Hermione had adapted to the fact that he and Draco were together quite well, they just didn’t talk about it. And Harry was more than happy to never have to talk about it with them ever again. He understood that it was a difficult situation for them to be in, and that it would have been much easier had he spent his evenings snogging Neville, rather than Draco.

Harry had barely stepped foot in the Slytherin common room before Daphne hurried over to him, holding up a piece of parchment.

“Uh - what’s this?” Harry asked.

“A note,” she said, “from Professor Dumbledore. He wants to see you,”

Harry groaned, “Now?”

“Unfortunately,”

“For fucks sake,” he muttered, “Right. Will you tell Dra-”
"Two steps ahead of you, mate," she brightly, "as always,"

"As always," he agreed, turning on his heel and walking back out of the common room.

Out of spite against Dumbledore, Harry took the long way up to the headmasters office whilst walking as slow as was humanly possible. He even let himself get held up by Peeves for a good ten minutes before he finally got to the stone Gargoyle and halfheartedly muttered the password (Pygmy Puff).

"Ah, Harry, do sit down," Professor Dumbledore said, gesturing to the seat with his blackened and withered hand.

"Professor, what actually happened to your-" Harry began, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Dumbledore simply shook his head and shook his arm so that the his sleeve hid his hand.

"A story for another time,"

"Right," Harry said, wondering if there would ever be a time in his life when Dumbledore wouldn’t be so vague.

"Now, Harry, I need to discuss a matter that is, ah, rather sensitive,"

Harry suddenly felt his cheeks go red as he became convinced that somehow, Dumbledore had found out about him and Draco. As he prepared himself for what he expected to be an awfully awkward conversation, Harry felt as though he would rather have this sort of conversation with Uncle Vernon.

"It is about Lydia,"

"Oh," Harry said, also coming to the realisation that he didn’t want to have that sort of the conversation with the headmaster, either.

Slowly, Dumbledore reached into a drawer in his desk and pulled out a Golden Snitch. Harry looked down at the Snitch and then back up a the headmaster, quite confused.

"Sorry, Professor, but what does a Snitch have to do with Lydia?" he asked, "she never played Quidditch,"

Dumbledore shook his head, "That is the Snitch that you caught in your first ever match at Hogwarts;"

"OK..." Harry said slowly, wondering if old age had finally caught up to Dumbledore.

"Do you know how a Snitch is made, Harry?"

"Um," Harry said, "No,"

"The first person who ever touches a new Snitch is the first Seeker to catch it. Before that, it is never touched by bare skin," Dumbledore explained, "it will only respond to your touch,"

Curiosity getting the better of him for the second time that day, Harry reached out for the Snitch and picked it up. It did nothing but lazily sprout wings.

"Do you remember how you caught the Snitch, Harry?"
“Um, I, uh...” Harry tried to cast his mind back, but it really did feel like a whole lifetime ago.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, suddenly remembering, “I nearly swallowed it, didn’t I?”

Dumbledore smiled and nodded.

“It was a very impressive catch for an eleven year old,” Dumbledore said.

“So, am I...are you asking me to swallow it?” Harry asked.

“No,” Dumbledore said, still smiling, “a simple touch will do,”

Feeling rather foolish, Harry brought the Snitch up to his lips and felt his heart sink when nothing happened still. As he looked up at Dumbledore to tell him that nothing was happening, he noticed something written on it in familiar writing. Harry peered closer at it, trying to make out what it said.

“I open at the close,”

“‘I open at the close’” Harry read out loud, “I don’t get it. What does that mean?”

“I never intended for Lydia to die as early as she did,” Dumbledore said heavily.

“You had a time frame?” Harry asked, flabbergasted, “like a - like a class timetable?”

Dumbledore did not quite meet his eyes, “I was always more than aware that Lydia would have to die - Neither can live whilst the other survives, but I had thought that she would be alive to see her seventeenth birthday,”

Harry shook his head, suddenly angry.

“And then what?” Harry asked, “were you gonna tell her to off herself after our birthday party or something?”

“I had hoped that the two of you would help in the hunt for Horcruxes,” Dumbledore continued, “and when we had found them all...Lydia would have understood them better. You both would have understood better.

“You see...Neither can live whilst the other survives refers to Lydia and the piece of Lord Voldemort’s soul living inside of her. If she had...if she had spent the rest of her life living with it inside of her, she would have eventually succumbed to it,”

Harry closed his eyes and tried to gather his thoughts.

“So, you were going to - you were going to use her and then kill her?” Harry asked, tears springing to his eyes, “You were going to get us to do your dirty work and then kill her?”

“There was never going to be a good option, Harry,” Dumbledore said, tears trickling into his beard.

“That’s somehow worse than what actually happened,” Harry snapped. He looked down at the Snitch, “and what’s this got to do with anything?”

“I knew that your hunt looking for Horcruxes would not be an easy one, and I knew that by the end of it you would have lost even more and needed each other more than ever,” Dumbledore said, and Harry was furious to see that he was still crying, “inside, you will find something that will people back from the dead. Not truly, but enough for you to have a conversation with those you have lost,”
Harry dropped the Snitch as though it had burned him and jumped up from his seat.

“Why should I trust you, after everything that has happened? After everything that you just told me?” Harry asked, his voice shaking, “Why would I - you told me not to - the Mirror of Erised! When I found the Mirror of Erised you told me to not dwell on dreams and forget to live! I don’t know what’s in there, but I don’t want it!”

Dumbledore regarded Harry for a moment and then nodded, “Of course, Harry. But if you ever change your mind, you know where it is,”

Harry fled from the office without so much as a goodbye. He began to walk in the direction of James’ office but quickly stopped; he did not want to burden his dad with what he had just found. If what Dumbledore had really worked, that meant that James would probably have the chance to speak to Lily again, and that was not a choice that Harry wanted his dad to make.

Instead, he walked back down to the Slytherin common room and burst into the boys dormitories without even knocking. It was empty apart from Draco and Zabini, both having a quiet conversation.

“Harry!” Draco exclaimed, “you’re - you’re crying,”

“I need to speak to you,” Harry said, surprisingly unembarrassed about the fact that he was crying in front of two people that he usually would not want to cry in front of.

“OK,” Draco said, looking rather worried. He glanced at Zabini, “Uh, Blaise, do you want to...do you want to...”

“Leave?” Zabini said, standing up, “more than anything,”

The door snapped shut behind Zabini and Harry practically collapsed onto the nearest bed, sobbing in a way that he never had done in front of someone before.

“Harry? What - what is it?” Draco asked, gently placing his hand on Harry’s back, “what’s happened? Harry, speak to me,”

“He could have stopped her!” Harry sobbed, “he didn’t have to let her kill herself! He should have done something! He’s the most powerful wizard in the world! He should have been able to do something!”

Draco sighed and didn’t say anything for a few minutes.

“Is this - is this about Lydia?”

“I miss her,” Harry said, forcing himself to sit up and face Draco, “I miss her every day. And it just gets harder and harder and harder. I don’t know what I’m meant to do without her!”

Slowly, and slightly awkwardly, Draco pulled Harry closer to him.

“I’m an only child. I don’t know how you feel. I can’t even begin to imagine how you feel but...you’ll get through this, Harry,”

“I feel so alone,”

“You’re not,”

Chapter End Notes
Thank-you for reading!

Feedback appreciated as always

<3
Draco Malfoy could not remember the last time that he had had a full night's sleep. And the majority of Hogwarts was probably aware of this fact, too, because Merlin, did he look terrible. His skin had become grey, dull and lifeless, and he had come to the quite horrifying realisation that his hair had begun to fall out. Blaise had been the first to point out how terrible he looked, and Draco was sure that there was nothing worse than having one of the most attractive people he knew pointing out how terrible he looked.

He was living a double life and he was sure that it was going to be the death of him.

Strangely enough, the one thing that would most definitely be the death of him was the one thing that was probably keeping him sane.

His blood went cold whenever he thought about what would happen if the wrong people found out about their relationship. It would not end well for either of them. Although, he was quite sure that nothing would ever end well for either of them.

The hardest thing about him and Harry being together, though, was the fact that they still had to pretend that they hated each other. There had been a time in Draco’s life when hating Harry Potter was second nature. Now, he had to stop himself from laughing at his jokes in class and had to often remind himself that he was meant to be glaring at him, not smiling at him. Indeed, if it weren’t for the fact that Daphne paid attention to things that were happening around her, he definitely would have outed them by then.

It was a relief to be in a class like Defence Against the Dark Arts where everyone was too scared of Snape to look around at each other. He and Harry could have been snogging at the back of the class and no one would ever know.

“Your essay is due in on Thursday... no excuses,” Professor Snape said, his black eyes sweeping over the classroom.

“Thursday?” Weasley hissed to Harry, “For fucks sake, he’s only giving us one day!”

“Why don’t you ask him for a few extra days then?” Harry asked, “I’m sure he won’t give you detention for asking,”

Draco smirked into his bag as he began to shove everything back inside of it, but the smirk was very quickly wiped off his face when Snape asked him to stay behind after the bell had rang. Knowing that it would not be about anything good, Draco dropped his bag back onto the floor and waited for the classroom to empty.

“How much progress have you made on the-”

“It’s none of your business!” Draco snapped, attempting to close off his mind from Snape, “I don’t know why you keep on asking me-”

“I made an Unbreakable Vow to protect you, Mr Malfoy, or have you conveniently forgotten?” Snape said in his most dangerous voice.
Draco narrowed his eyes at him.

“I didn’t make you make that Vow, did I?” he said, “and I’m not doing this for you!”

“If you need help-

“I don’t need your help! I don’t need anyone’s help!” Draco hissed, “He chose me, for this. Out of everyone, He chose me! So I’m going to be the one to do it,”

“Are you aware of the consequences?”

“Of course I am,” Draco replied as casually as he could, “I know what’s at stake and I don’t need you to remind me. I don’t need anyone to remind me.”

Without waiting to be dismissed, Draco turned on his heel and stormed out of the classroom, trying to act as though he wasn’t moments away from a panic attack. He shoved passed people without giving them so much as a second glance and practically fell into the boys bathroom, stumbling towards the sinks and steadying himself on them. He looked up into the mirror and almost cringed at how skeletal he looked. His cheeks were ridiculously hollow and the bags under his eyes were getting deeper and deeper every day.

“Draco, is that you?”

He looked up to see Moaning Myrtle floating behind him. It was a sign of how bad things were that the only person he felt as though he could confide in was dead.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“He’s going to kill me,” Draco said, tears threatening to spill, “He’s going to kill me and my family if I don’t do it. And I can’t do it. I just - I just can’t,”

“Don’t cry,” she said softly, “Don’t...don’t...tell me what’s wrong, and I can help you,”

“No one can help me,” Draco sobbed, wondering why it had taken him so long to come to this conclusion, “There’s no one...he’ll kill me...I need to do it soon but I just...I’ll never be able to...I don’t want-”

He looked up into the mirror again and gasped - Harry was stood behind him, his mouth hanging open slightly. And as Draco looked at him, he realised how stupid they had been. How stupid he had been, to think that this would ever work. To think that they could have ever been a normal couple.

“Draco-”

“Leave me alone, Potter,”

He saw the hurt flash across Harry’s face and immediately felt terrible. But it was for the best.

“Wha-”

“I said, leave me alone, Potter!” Draco yelled, whipping out his wand without a second thought, “Depulso!”

Harry yelped and dived out of the way, falling into one of the cubicles. Draco stood where he was for a few seconds and almost put his wand down to apologise, but Harry jumped out again, his own wand outstretched.
“Expelliarmus!”

Really, Draco did not know why he was even trying to duel him. Even though he would never admit it out loud, he knew that Harry was much better at duelling than he would ever be.

“Protego!”

A shield burst between the two of them and Harry ducked under his reverberated spell, looking furious.

“What are you doing?” he yelled, “I thought we were…”

“YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME, POTTER!” Draco screamed, “YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT’S GOING ON!”

“Because you don’t tell me anything!” Harry snapped furiously, “Merlin, we never talk about you!”

“BECAUSE I’M SCARED!” He yelled, and then faltered, “Harry, I… I’m so scared. So, so, scared,”

He burst into tears again and before he could even try and stop him, Harry was in front of him, his hands on his waist.

“Look, Draco, I don’t - I don’t know what’s going on but whatever it is… whatever it is, I can help you. Or, Hermione can or my dad or, even McGonagall, someone can help,” Harry said softly, “You just need to tell me,”

Draco looked up at Harry, feeling as though he was in some sort of daze that had convinced him that he would be able to tell Harry everything.

“He - He…. if I don’t - he’ll - but I don’t know how -”

“Tell me,” Harry urged him.

As though it was for the first time, Draco noticed the scar on Harry’s head and suddenly remembered what it was and what it stood for. And he remembered who the people he had mentioned - James Potter, Hermione Granger, Professor McGonagall - were people he was meant to hate, people he was meant to stand against. Gripped with the panic that someone might know what was happening between them, Draco shoved Harry in the chest squirmed away from him, holding his wand up again.

“Fuck off, Potter!” Malfoy yelled, “Why do you think that just because you have that ugly scar on your head you can save everyone?”

Hurt flashed across Harry’s face again but Draco found that he didn’t really care, because it would be much better for them both in the end.

“Draco, I-”

“Depulso!”

The jinx caught Harry in the chest and he fell to the floor with a dull thud, groaning slightly. It took everything in him to not run over to him and make sure that he was OK. Moaning Myrtle was swooping around above them, wailing loudly.

“Sectumsempra!” Harry bellowed, waving his wand wildly.
Blood suddenly spurted from his chest and arms, as though an invisible sword was slicing into him. Consumed by pain and terror, Draco fell to his knees and tried to stay upright, but the pain soon clouded his senses and he fell onto his back, trying his best to focus on his breathing and stay conscious.

“No, no, no!” Harry exclaimed, scrambling over to him and dropping to his knees beside him, “No, Draco, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to - I didn’t want to - I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I just wanted to - I only wanted to help. I was only trying to help you. I wanted to help, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

Draco was vaguely aware of Myrtle shouting something about murder, Harry sobbing over him and then Snape turning up and shoving Harry out of the way.

The one thing that he was definitely sure of, was that he and Harry had fucked up, and that might have hurt more than the deep cuts on his chest.

Chapter End Notes

I'm pretty sure that I've only ever written from Draco's point of view once, so this was fun! Even though the actual chapter was quite depressing.

And just a PSA, I'm going to be starting a new job on Friday (woop!) but it's longer hours than my last one, which means that I won't be able to updated as regularly here. So if you think I haven't updated in ages, it isn't because I've forgotten about this fic, I'm probably just sleeping/working/writing/doing all of that at once. I'm also in college and writing another fic on top of other things I'm writing outside of fanfiction, so I can't promise it's going to be multiple times a week, however, it will be at least once a week.

Sorry for the slight ramble, I just wanted you to be aware.

<3
Suddenly

For the first time in his life, Harry had disappointed his dad, and it was not a nice feeling. He, Ron and Hermione sat in James’ office in silence. James was stood in front of his desk, his arms folded and not quite looking at Harry. Professor Snape had taken a lot of pride in telling James exactly what Harry had done to Draco, and seemed nothing short of gleeful in informing James that Harry would be in detention for the rest of the school year.

“Why were you duelling him in the first place, son?” James asked finally.

Harry looked up at him and shrugged.

“I don’t know,” he said, and he genuinely didn’t. “I walked into the bathroom and he was crying and I asked what was wrong and he just started going mad,”

James sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“That spell...how did you even know it existed? I haven’t seen that spell used since...well, since the last war,”

“You know the spell?” Hermione asked, “what - what book did you find it in?”

James frowned at her.

“I don’t know. I can’t remember. I don’t think that I ever saw it written in a book, but it was used a lot when I was in school. Just not by the kind of people who you’d want to be associated with,”

“Death Eaters?” Harry asked miserably.

“Yeah,” James said, and he sounded angry. “So I want to know where you found that spell! I’ve never seen it written in any book in the school library!”

Harry opened his mouth and the closed it again. The last thing he wanted to do was tell his dad about his potions book, but he really felt as though he had been backed into a corner that he wouldn’t be able to worm his way out of.

“What aren’t you telling me, Harry?” James asked.

Harry sighed and slumped down in his seat slightly.

“It was written in my Potions book,”

“It was - what?”

“I had an old copy of Advanced Potions Making, didn’t I? And it had stuff scribbled in the margins, including that spell,” Harry said, “it said “for enemies” beside it so I thought I would try - I know it was stupid!” he exclaimed when he saw the look on James’ face, “I know it was stupid and I shouldn’t have done it, but I panicked and just said the first spell that came to mind!”

“The first spell that came to your mind was dark magic, Harry!” James yelled, taking him by surprise.
“I know!” Harry cried, “and I’m not proud of it! I thought I’d killed him!”

James’ facial expression softened and he nodded.

“I know you’re not proud of it,” he said gently, “it’s no better than anything that I would have done to Snape when I was your age. Just promise that you’ll go to your detentions and get rid of that book, yeah?”

“I’ve already gotten rid of it,” Harry said.

He had shoved it into the Room of Requirement at the first chance he had, and wasn’t really sure if he would ever go back for it.

James smiled at him, “Good. Things are only gonna get better from here, son. You know that, yeah?”

“Yes,” Harry lied, “Yeah. Things are only gonna get better,”

Harry had always resented how fast news spread in Hogwarts. Especially when it was news concerning him. And he supposed that there was nothing more interesting than the fact that Harry Potter, of all people, had used Dark Magic which only begged the question of whether he was mentally stable or not.

Whispers followed him as he made his way through the corridors, and it took every bit of willpower he possessed to not start hexing people left, right and center.

“He’s obviously cracked,”

“And I thought that Lydia was meant to be the one into Dark Magic! We must have gotten it wrong all this time...”

“He needs help. I wonder if they’re going to ship him off to St. Mungo’s?”

Even worse, the entire school seemed to be angry at him. Whilst he had been expecting the Slytherins to want to kill him, he had been hoping that Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff would cut him some slack, but he had no such luck; Gryffindor was angry at him for losing them the points he had won them in the one Quidditch match he had played all year, and Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff just seemed angry about the fact that he had used Dark Magic.

If it weren’t for the fact that James, Ron and Hermione seemed so determined to stand by his side, Harry might have asked to drop out of school. There was still a chance that he was going to drop out of school.

Since the Bathroom Incident, as it was now being referred to as, they had not had a Potions lesson and Harry had not braved the Slytherin common room, so had not bumped into Daphne. And part of him was hoping that he would never see her again, because he didn’t think that she would be thrilled to see him.

On the Saturday morning after everything that had happened, Harry escaped from Gryffindor Tower and went for a walk. It was strange how such an open space could make him feel like he was suffocating. He walked slowly and with his eyes trained on the ground, not wanting to make eye contact with anyone that might have passed him.
“Hey,”

Harry stopped in his tracks and turned around to find Daphne stood behind him, her arms folded. He couldn’t quite read her facial expression, but he wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not.

“Hi,” he said.

“What were you thinking?” she asked, suddenly angry, “what were you thinking when you duelled him?”

“Daphne, I-”

“No,” she snapped, “No, there is no excuse! I have no idea what stupid shit you were arguing about, but using Dark Magic wasn’t the answer!”

“Don’t you think I know that?” he asked furiously.

“No, actually. I don’t think you do,” she said, “this is your problem, Harry! You think the entire world is against you when it isn’t!”

Harry raised his eyebrows at her, “Sorry, have you heard of this man called Lord Voldem-”

“Sorry, have you ever thought about the fact that he just doesn’t affect you?” she said, “have you ever thought about the fact that Draco has been suffering because of all this shit his dad did? Have you ever thought about the fact that Urquhart is going to be homeless? Have you ever thought about the fact that He’s going to go after people like your best friend?” she scoffed, “You’re the most protected person out of us all! Do you know how many people support you? How many people would be willing to put their life on the line for you? For fucks sake, I would have put my life on the line if Lord Voldemort himself walked through the front doors!”

“I don’t need reminding about the fact that people have died for me!” Harry yelled, “Don’t you think I feel guilty about what happened to my mum and Cedric? And Lydia? Don’t you think I feel guilty about what I did to Draco?”

“He asked you for help,” Daphne said, her eyes sparkling with tears, “He asked you for help and you cursed him,”

“He attacked me-”

“Yeah, probably with Depulso, which is a very, very scary spell. I don’t know how on earth you survived!” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

Harry groaned.

“I’m aware that I fucked up, Daphne, and the last thing I need right now is you reminding me that I did!” he said, “I know I should have just helped him, but I panicked! You didn’t see what he was like! He was sobbing and-”

Daphne rolled her eyes, “He was sobbing, so you cursed him? For the love of Merlin, Harry! After everything that happened to you, I would have thought you were slightly more empathetic,”

“How many more times do you want me to say, ‘I know’?” Harry asked, “how many more times do you want me to apologise?”

She sighed and shook her head at him.
“Just...don’t ever think about showing your face in the common room again,”

“Daphne-”

“Fuck off, Potter,” she hissed before turning on her heel and storming away from him.

He had never quite realised how painful the use of his second name could have been up until that moment.

—

Suddenly, it was May and the last Quidditch match of the year. Suddenly, Harry was stood in a broom cupboard kissing Ginny Weasley.

He wasn’t exactly sure how or why this had happened, but he couldn’t quite find it himself to complain. Somehow, everything felt right. Or maybe nothing was right and he was just convincing himself that it was. Either way, he decided not to think about it and just carried on kissing Ginny, because that was what he was meant to be doing.

This was perhaps one of the only times when Harry was glad news travelled fast in Hogwarts, because now whenever people spoke about him, it had very little to do with Dark Magic.

“Him and Ginny Weasley! Can you believe it?”

“He moves on quickly, don’t you think?”

“Poor Daphne Greengrass. I wonder how she feels about it. I heard her crying in the bathroom with her sister this morning,”

As angry as Harry was at Greengrass for the way she had reacted to everything, her words had stuck in Harry’s mind.

“Do you know how many people support you? How many people would be willing to put their life on the line for you? For fucks sake, I would have put my life on the line if Lord Voldemort himself walked through the front doors!”

He had started to think that not getting involved in hunting Horcruxes was nothing but wishful thinking and had just been a coping mechanism to get him through what might have been the worst school year of his life.

Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.

The first part almost seemed silly now, and as though Lydia had just written that for her own peace of mind. The saying chased itself around his brain over and over again, stopping his from paying attention in class and from falling asleep at night, no matter how tired he was.

Let it destroy Voldemort.

Let it destroy Voldemort.

Let it destroy Voldemort.

Let it destroy Voldemort.

Let it destroy Voldemort.
Let it destroy Voldemort.

Let it destroy Voldemort.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!
<3
It had been a year.

Harry was trying to work out exactly it had been a year, because he could still remember it like it was yesterday. He could still remember exactly what Sirius looked like the moment he fell through the Veil, the sound of Lydia screaming and the sounds of Bellatrix cackling at murder of her cousin. He could still remember the sight of Lydia’s limp hand flopping over the side of the stretcher, the look on his dad’s face when he realised that his daughter was dead and what he had felt the first time he had ever read the letter that she had written him.

He sat alone in the Gryffindor common room; it was too early for anyone else to be awake and he was thankful for that. He needed time to think. With shaking hands, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the letter, his heart skipping a beat in his chest when he saw that it was slightly crumpled. The last thing that he wanted was for it to get somehow ruined.

“Dear Harry,

I’m sorry. I’m so, so, so, sorry. I didn’t want this. Especially now that Sirius has gone, but it had to be done. It’s the only way that we can ever get rid of Voldemort. I hope you understand, or come to understand one day.

Dumbledore told me about these things called Horcruxes. Objects with pieces of Voldemort’s soul in them. If we get rid of them, we get rid of Voldemort. The diary was one and so was I. With me and the diary gone, there’s six others left. I don’t know what they are but, Harry, you have to find them. And you have to destroy them. The Wizarding World won’t survive Voldemort a second time. Protect the world we love, please.

Make sure day is okay, make sure Ron and Hermione don’t bicker each other to death but, more important, look after yourself. Don’t stop living because I have to stop living. Carry on because I have to stop living. For gods sake Harry, don’t do something stupid. Don’t try and come after me, because I know what you’re like. If you carry on living, then Voldemort can never win. You still being alive despite everything is the biggest ‘fuck you’ to Voldemort.

Somehow this is for the best, however sick and twisted the logic is. This is going to make the world a better place one day. And I guess this is like what mum did, isn’t it? Mum sacrificed herself for you, so I’ll do the same. Look at it like repayment if it makes you feel better.

I love you, Harry. Thank-you for being the best brother I could ask for. We were brought up with nothing, but with you as my brother, I felt as though I had everything.

And I know the next few months are going to be hard for you but don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.

Love,

Lydia,”

By the time the sun had risen, Harry had read and re-read the letter more times than he could count. And all he could think about was how he longed to go back to the time just before everything went wrong. He wanted to go back to that last spring day he had spent with Lydia, Ron and Hermione after the final Quidditch match of the year. He could barely remember what they had been talking about, but he knew that there had been a lot of laughter and that Lydia and Sirius had been alive.
And that alone was enough.

“Harry?”

He turned around to see Ginny stood behind the couch, looking concerned.

“Are you OK?” she asked.

“Fine,” he said, “just thinking,”

“What about?”

He shrugged.

“I don’t know. Lydia. Sirius. Voldemort,”

“You’re going to go after him, aren’t you?” she said, “even though you said that you wouldn’t,”

“I think so,” Harry said, without looking at her.

*Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.*

—

Hours later, Harry was stood in Dumbledore’s office instead of going to see his dad.

“I think I want to go after him,”

Dumbledore did not say anything straight away, and Harry thought that he might have said the wrong thing.

“Are you quite sure about this, Harry?” Dumbledore asked finally, “once you begin on this journey, you must see it through to its end, no matter what,”

“Yes,” Harry said determinedly, “I have to do it. For my mum, for Sirius, for Lydia...I have to destroy him,”

“Well, Harry, I must say that this is quite fantastic timing for I have located a Horcrux,”
In his strange and erratic life, James Potter had learned many things. When he was eleven, he learned how to properly cast *Wingardium Leviosa*, when he was fifteen, he learned how to turn into a Stag and when he was seventeen, he learned that the best way to get Lily Evans to go out with him was to stop being a dickhead. And although he was no longer sure how old he was (no one ever discussed the finer parts of coming back from the dead - was he twenty one or was he thirty six?), James was still learning.

He had to learn how to deal with the fact that he never saw his children grow into the teenagers that he had first met all those months ago at Grimmauld Place, and then he had to learn how to deal with the fact that he would only see one of them grow older. He had to learn how to deal with the fact that his one of his best friends was dead and another had betrayed him.

He had also had to learn how to not think about the things that would only hurt him. When he woke up in the morning, he did not think about the fact that there was a time when his arm would be stretched out over Lily. When he walked through the halls of Hogwarts, he did not let himself think about how he and Sirius would go out of their way to cause havoc, even for just a few seconds.

And he tried not to think too much about Lydia, only this never quite worked in his favour. Every time he saw Harry, he thought about her. He thought about how scared she must have been in those final moments, and how much she probably didn’t want to do it. He thought about how she should have lived to see how well she had done in her OWLs, and how she should have had the chance to take her NEWTs, because she probably would have done amazing in them, too.

James woke up on the one year anniversary of her death feeling worse than usual. His bed was empty of Lily Potter and he knew that Lydia was not waking up somewhere in the dungeons. It took him even longer than it usually did to get out of bed, but he still did, because he had to. For Harry.

The moment he stepped out of his office, James noticed the difference in the way that people spoke to him. In the morning staff meeting, Professor McGonagall looked at him with too much of a sympathetic look and Madam Pomfrey hugged him and asked if he needed anything. Even Snape did not mutter something sarcastic under his breath.

When Dumbledore began to speak about Lydia, James left the room. The headmaster was the last person that James needed to hear talk about her.

Instead of going to the Great Hall for something to eat, James walked back up to his office and slowly sat behind his desk, staring down at the pictures in front of him. The first was of him, Sirius, Remus and Peter in school and the other of him and Lily on their wedding day. The one closest to him was of him, Harry and Lydia at Christmas in Grimmauld Place. Tears sprang to his eyes as he looked down at it; he had never seen Lydia smile so as widely as she was in that picture and tried not to think about the fact that he never would again.

Dumbledore had been kind enough to give James the day off work. It wasn’t nearly enough compensation for what he had done, but even the greatest Wizard in the world would not be able to bring his daughter back. Although, James wasn’t even sure that he truly believed that Dumbledore was the greatest Wizard in the world anymore.
The day passed slowly. He did not leave his office and just drifted in and out sleep, waiting for seven o’clock when Harry had promised he would come and see him with Ron and Hermione. Secretly, James was dreading it. Harry had changed so much over the school year, and he often felt like he had no idea how to speak to his own son. He had never needed Lily more; she would have known exactly what to say to Harry to make him feel better.

To pass the time, James read and reread the letter that Lydia had written him. It did not make him feel any better, but he could not help it. After reading it around ten times, James realised that Lydia wrote her the letter ‘s’ and ‘t’ in the same way that he did, and had to have a lie down to calm himself down.

“Dear Dad,

I’m sorry. I’m really, really sorry. I didn’t want it to be like this. All my life I’ve wanted a parent and now that I have one, I have to go. But this year has been the best year of my life thanks to you. You really are the best dad that I could have ever asked for, and I’m sorry that we don’t get more time together. It seems stupid now, but I wanted you to walk me down the aisle one day and meet your grandchildren and all that crap, but I guess you’re still going to be able to do all that with Harry.

And I know that you will, but make sure that Harry is OK. Make sure he doesn’t do something stupid. But also don’t do something stupid yourself. You’ve just got a second chance at life, don’t ruin it just because of me. Don’t let it destroy you, let it destroy Voldemort.

Dumbledore told me about these things called Horcruxes. Objects with pieces of Voldemort’s soul in them. You have to find them and destroy them. I was one of them, which is why I had to do what I’m going to do.

I’m so sorry, dad, I really am. I love you. I’ll say hi to mum and Sirius for you.

Love,

Lydia,”

Frantic knocking on his office door brought James back down to earth and he glanced at the clock, frowning. Harry was late. When the banging on his door increased, James’ heart dropped to his stomach - something awful had happened to Harry.

“Come in!” he called, trying to keep his voice steady.

The door banged open and Ron and Hermione burst in.

“James!” Hermione exclaimed, “Harry’s gone!”

“Gone? Gone where?” he asked anxiously, “he’s no been hurt-”

“No,” Ron said quickly, “No. He’s with Dumbledore. They’ve gone looking for Horcruxes,”

“He’s gone where?” James thundered, jumping up from his seat, “on all the days that he could have gone...did he say anything else?”

“One other thing,” Hermione said, “he thinks that there’s going to be an attack on the castle tonight. Something about Draco Malfoy,”

James groaned in frustration and kicked his chair which didn’t help anything.
“Right. OK. Don’t panic. I’ll let the Order know,” he said, whilst panicking a lot, “is there anything else you need to tell me?”

“Harry left us this,” Ron said, holding up a golden bottle, “it’s Liquid Luck. He said that we should all take some but - why are you shaking your head?”

“You two have it and give it to anyone else who might need it. I’ll be fine,” he looked down at his watch and wondered how much time they had left if there was indeed going to be an attack on the castle, “I need you two to go back Gryffindor Tower and do not leave under any circumstance, OK?”

They both nodded their heads but James was not so stupid to think that they would go back to Gryffindor Tower and stay there for the rest of the night. If he and Sirius had thought that there was going to be an attack on the castle, they most certainly would not have sat in Gryffindor Tower and did as they were told.

As James hurried to find McGonagall, he found himself hoping that Voldemort would be a part of the attack on the castle. James would have liked nothing more than to finally go up against Voldemort in a fair fight. For Lily, for Sirius, for Lydia, for Harry...

Don’t let it destroy you. Let it destroy Voldemort.

It felt like the world was ending.

James leapt forward and grabbed the back of Neville Longbottom's robes and yanked him backwards just as a curse exploded right where he stood. Alice would have killed him if she knew that he had just stood there and let her son get cursed.

“Thanks, Mr Potter,” Neville gasped.

“Don’t worry about it, kid,” James said, clapping him on the back, “watch where you’re going,”

All James wanted to do was find Harry and make sure that he was safe. But he had no idea where he had gone with Dumbledore or if we was ever going to come back. The thought of losing both of his children was too much for him, and he had to dive behind a tapestry to forge his thoughts into something coherent.

“Harry is going to be fine,” he muttered to himself, “he’s going to be fine. You’ll find him soon, but you just have to keep on moving, keep on fighting,”

He took a deep breath and nodded his head to no one in particular.

“Come on, Prongsy. Keep on moving, keep on fighting,”

The moment he stepped foot outside of the tapestry, he came face to face with a death eater. Even worse, it was someone who he had gone to school with. Someone he had once bonded with other their mutual hatred of Arithmancy.

“Farsley?” James said, “Seriously? I thought you were decent,”

Farsley, however, did not seem to be in the mood for a conversation.

“Sectumsempra!”
James ducked under the curse and launched himself forward, rugby tackling Farsley to the floor. He leapt up again and whirled around, just as Farsley had struggled to his feet, his wand outstretched.

“I was always better at Defence Against the Dark Arts than you were,” James said, “do you really want to do this?”

“And I’m better at the Dark Arts. Do you really want to do this?” Farsley asked, “shouldn’t you be reserving your energy to make sure your son doesn’t go the same way as your daughter?”

Within minutes, Farsley was in a crumpled heap on the floor.

“Knobhead,” James muttered, taking care to kick him in the side as he hurried away.

What seemed like hours later, James finally saw Harry. He was hurtling down through the courtyard after Snape and some death eaters. Knowing that he was almost certainly running do his death, James sped up, hellbent on getting to his son before the worst happened.

“HARRY!” James roared, “HARRY POTTER! SON, DON’T GO-”

A pain unlike any other that he had ever felt suddenly consumed his entire body, and the floor gave way between his feet. And James was quite sure that the world was actually ending.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!!
<3
Too much had happened too soon.

Harry felt as though his entire world view had been shattered with the muttering of just two words. He had never for one minute thought that Snape was a good person, but he had also never believed that he was really a death eater. And he most definitely had not thought that Severus Snape could have been the Half Blood Prince. He didn't even have the energy or the time to think about the fact Dumbledore was dead.

But that didn't bother him nearly as much as the fact that he had wasted his time with Draco, that none of it was ever real. Draco had just used him so that he could give Voldemort information. And the more he thought about it, the more he realised that Daphne had probably been in on it, as well as the rest of Slytherin House. It would explain why they all acted so terribly to Harry cursing Draco. Voldemort would not have taken that news well, he would have probably gone after them or their families. Though Harry found that he couldn't bring himself to care about any of that.

He sat in a numb silence next to an unconscious James in the Hospital Wing. He had been hit by some unknown curse, but Madam Pomfrey had promised Harry that he would make a full recovery in no time. Bill Weasley, on the other hand, would probably have a much harder time recovering. Harry watched as Fleur tearfully dabbed potion onto his cuts and wondered how many people in the room blamed Harry for everything that had happened. Not that he would blame them if they did, of course, he blamed himself for everything.

Maybe if he had gone after the Horcruxes sooner, they wouldn't be in this mess. If he hadn't have spent a good few weeks snogging Draco Malfoy at every opportunity, he might not have been manipulated into believing that he was a good person and would have been able to convince Dumbledore or McGonagall that he actually was a death eater.

It was ridiculous really; one attractive person showed the slightest bit of interest in Harry and all of his morals went out of the window.

And yet, there was still an incredibly stupid part of Harry that believed that Malfoy wasn't at all a death eater.

There was no denying that he had the Dark Mark and had let all those death eaters into the castle, but he had sounded so scared. He had cried the entire time. And Harry was sure that there had been a moment where he had lowered his wand before Bellatrix had arrived.

"Harry," Professor McGonagall said quietly, "Could I speak to you, please?"

"Sure," Harry said, thankful for something to do, "Yeah,"

They walked up to the Headmasters office, a move Harry found quite strange until he realised that now that Dumbledore was dead, McGonagall was headmistress.

“Can I ask where you went with Professor Dumbledore tonight, Harry?” McGonagall asked.

“I can’t, Professor, I’m sorry,” Harry replied, the locket lying heavy in his pocket.
“Harry, it is of the utmost important that you-”

“I’m sorry, I can’t,” Harry said again.

Part of him felt as though the reason that he was keeping what had happened a secret was not because he wanted to honour Dumbledore’s memory, but because he didn’t want to accept the direction that his life was going in.

“Potter,” McGonagall said sternly, “I understand that you looked up to Dumbledore-”

“I didn’t, Professor,” Harry said bluntly, “I’m sorry, I know that he’s only been dead about two hours but...I didn’t look up to him. Not after...” he trailed off and Professor McGonagall nodded knowingly.

“Alright, Potter,” she said, “If you don’t wish to talk, then I will not push you to do so,”

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said, “Can I...can I have a few moments alone here?”

McGonagall smiled at him in a way that was a little too sympathetic and nodded, grasping his shoulder tightly.

“Take as long as you need, Mr Potter,”

Harry did not really know why he wanted to stay in Dumbledore’s office. The place did not hold particularly happy memories. It was here that he had stood by Lydia after she had been accused of petrifying Mrs Norris and Colin Creevey, here that Umbridge had tried to get them expelled after she had discovered Dumbledore’s Army and here that he had seen Lydia for the last time...

Harry fell silent. Finally feeling as though he had said everything that he had wanted to say to Dumbledore, a man he was suddenly regarding with the sort of contempt that Harry had thought was only reserved for the likes of Voldemort.

"I want out," Lydia said suddenly.

Harry turned around to face her, his eyebrows raised.

"I don't want to do this anymore. I don't care about Voldemort. I want to be a normal kid,"

"Lydia-" Dumbledore began.

"No. I don't care. I really do not give a shit. Don't tell me about the power of love or some other bullshit because that's gotten me nowhere!" she napped. "I just want to be normal. I want to go to class and watch Quidditch games and not have to worry about anything else. I don't care about Voldemort anymore."

"Lyds...come on.." James said quietly.

"No, dad, no! You have no idea what it's been like for us! Between getting sorted into Slytherin, killing a Basilisk and thinking there was a mass murderer after us for a whole year, I'm done! I don't want special treatment! I don't want to be part of the Prophecy! I don't care about my fucking 'destiny'! I'll change my destiny! I'll off myself if I have to! I just don't want to be part of this anymore! I don't want to have meetings with you, I don't want to be a part of the Order! I don't want any of this! I just want to graduate Hogwarts and start again! I'll never cast another spell in my life if I have to! I'm not doing this bullshit anymore. I'm done,"
Dumbledore stared at Lydia for a moment and Harry could tell that she was getting ready for a fight. He almost wanted to sit back and watch it happen. But Dumbledore just nodded his head.

“If that is your wish…”

“It is,”

“Then I should like to speak to you alone,”

Lydia turned to Harry and gave him a half-hearted shrug.

“I’ll see you later,”

“See you later…” Harry said to himself, “Yeah...course I will,”

Sighing, he dropped into the Headmaster's chair and looked down at Dumbledore’s desk. For the first time, Harry realised how much of a mess it was. It made Dumbledore seem more human in a strange sort of way. As though he was trying to preserve everything, Harry slowly sifted through the parchment on his desk. None of it made any sense to him, until he saw something that caught his eyes.

The Golden Snitch.

With shaking hands, Harry picked it up and looked down at it. “I open at the close,” was still written on it in handwriting that Harry finally realised what Dumbledore’s. Glancing up at the portraits to make sure that none of the previous Headmasters were watching, he awkwardly cleared his throat.

“Um..Lydia is...Lydia is dead,”

At first, nothing happened and Harry went to put the Snitch back on the desk, feeling rather foolish, but then a compartment that he had never noticed before slid open, revealing a tiny black stone.

In his sudden panic, Harry threw it up and down in the air a few times, trying to work out what to do with it. The chance to make a choice, however, was ripped from his hands as a bright light filled the room and four people walked towards him. Lily Potter looked how Harry had always thought she had looked, but somehow more beautiful. Cedric Diggory looked exactly as Harry remembered him to look, only calmer. Sirius was as handsome as ever, but looked as though he had never once stepped foot in Azkaban.

But Harry’s eyes were drawn to Lydia, looking like she always did: hair in a bun on the top of her head with her wand sticking out of it, and her robes not nearly as neat as they probably could have been.

“Hey, H,” Lydia said, “You look like you’ve seen a ghost,”

Harry stared at her, his mouth hanging open slightly. He could not quite believe that they were standing in front of him.

“I never wanted this,” he whispered, “I never wanted any of you to die for me. Cedric, you never should have been there in the first place,”

“It’s not your fault, Harry,” Cedric said, “You brought my body home, and that’s more than I could have ever asked for,”

“Dad really misses you, mum,” Harry said, turning to face her, “and you, Lyds. We both - we both
Lily smiled at him and held out her hand. Harry hurried towards her, his hand outstretched, but their hands never met.

“We never left,” Lily said, tears sparkling in her eyes that were so like his own.

“We’re here, you see,” Sirius said, pointing to Harry’s heart.

“I’m sorry,” Lydia said, tears streaming down her face, “I didn’t - I never wanted to...I had to do it,"

“I know,” Harry said, “I know you did. Wish you didn’t though. I need you, more than ever. Dumbledore’s dead. How are we meant to win a war if Dumbledore is dead? The only man Voldemort ever feared is dead. I might as well start writing my will now!”

“Don’t let it destroy you,” she whispered, “Let it destroy Voldemort.”

Harry wasn’t sure how long he stayed with them for. All he knew was that by the end of the war, he himself would be the only man Lord Voldemort feared.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!! I know I say this all the time, but I’m genuinely very excited for where I’m going to take this fic and I can't wait for you to read it!

Feedback/comments appreciated!

<3
“Shouldn’t you be at Dumbledore’s funeral, son?” James asked Harry quietly.

They were sat in the Hospital Wing where James was still recovering from whatever curse he had been hit with. Harry had been spending the majority of his time in the Hospital Wing; Madam Pomfrey still could not work out what spell he had been hit with, but it had stripped him of most of his energy and he could not do much but lie in bed.

Harry shook his head, “Can’t face it. I can’t face anything. I don’t want to...” he trailed off, “I just feel like I’ve been betrayed,”

“Betrayed? By who?”

Harry felt himself go red but resigned himself to the fact that James would have to know about Draco, eventually.

“I, um, I...” he cleared his throat, “I’ve been really stupid this year, dad,”

“No, you haven’t. It’s been a tough year and-”

“No,” Harry said quickly, “No, I have been really quite thick. Draco Malfoy and I...Draco Malfoy and I were together,”

His words hung in the air for a moment as James stared at him with his eyebrows raised.

“This...this feels like an issue for your mum,” he said in a strained voice, “but...um...you know, I mean...fucking hell, I mean...wait, you and Daphne Greengrass-”

“Were never together,” Harry sighed, “Ginny got confused and thought that the reason I was spending so much time in the Slytherin Common Room was because of Daphne, even though it was because of Draco,”

“Right...” James said quietly, “but are you and Ginny actually together? Or is she covering for, I don’t know...Neville? Or - Or Seamus! I’ve always liked Seamus, you know, he reminds me of-”

“She isn’t covering for anyone,” Harry said.

James nodded and was silent for a few moments.

“I mean, all the Malfoy’s are quite attractive. I never liked Lucius in school but even I wouldn’t have said that he was ug-”

“Dad,” Harry said, “That’s not helping. I was in a relationship with a death eater ,”

“You didn’t know. How could you have known?” James said, “Don’t beat yourself up about it. The Malfoy’s and death eaters in general are master manipulators...it’s probably a Slytherin thing,”

Harry laughed and shook his head, “Not all Slytherins...did I ever tell you about the tribute they have to Lydia in the common room?”
“Show it me,” James said, starting to get up, “whilst Madam Pomfrey isn’t watching me like a hawk,”

It took them a while to actually get James out of bed, and an even longer time for him to get used to using the walking stick that Madam Pomfrey had given him. The curse had completely wiped him of all energy and Harry was quite sure that James would need a nap once they got to the common room.

“I don’t know the password,” Harry said.

“Don’t worry,” James said, taking out his wand, “all teachers can get in to any common room without knowing the password,”

“That feels like an invasion of privacy,”

James shrugged, “You’re at a boarding school. When was the last time you had any privacy?”

Harry helped his dad into the common room and lead him over to where the tiny memorial was. James stood and looked at it for a while before slowly sitting down on the couch behind him and put his head in his hands.

“Death lies on her like an untimely frost, upon the sweetest flower of all the field,” he read out loud, “where did that come from?”

“It’s Shakespeare,” Harry said, “Astoria Greengrass chose it. She likes muggle literature, apparently,”

‘Likes’ is an understatement,” a voice said behind him.

Harry turned around and found Daphne Greengrass stood there, her arms folded.

“Are you alright, Mr Potter?” she asked.

“Oh, look, it’s my not daughter-in-law,” James muttered, standing up, “Right, well, I’m going to leave you two to...argue, or whatever,”

“You told him?” Daphne asked after James had left.

“Yeah,” Harry said, “I wouldn’t have been able to hide it from him,”

Daphne nodded and looked awkward, “Well, I guess Malfoy wasn’t even worthy of whatever curse you hit him with,”

“Did you know?” Harry asked, “Did you know that he was a death eater?”

“No. I told you, Potter, my family isn’t like that. We’d never be like that,”

“What are you doing here then? Shouldn’t you be paying your respects to Dumbledore?” Harry asked.

“Shouldn’t you?”

“I just...I just wanted to say goodbye. To Lydia,”

She smiled at him and nodded, “You’re not coming back here next you, are you?”
“Somehow, I don’t think I’ll be very welcome,” he shrugged, “and I, uh, I have other stuff to do,”

Daphne looked at him for a moment and then took him by surprise by throwing her arms around his
neck and hugging him.

“Be careful,” she said, “I can’t be doing with doing another memorial,”

Despite himself, Harry laughed.

“Right, I’ll survive the war so that it doesn’t inconvenience you,”

She pulled away from him and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“See you on the other side, Potter,”

“Bye, Greengrass,”

Harry spent the rest of his day alone, sat on the Astronomy Tower. It looked so different to the way it
did on the night Dumbledore died. It was almost hard to believe that a place that showed such
beautiful views of the Hogwarts grounds could be the location of something so awful.

“Hey, Harry,” Hermione said, walking up behind him with Ron, “funeral ended about half an hour
ago,”

“How was it?” Harry asked.

Ron shrugged, “It was just...it was just a funeral, really. Scrimgeour was there, wanted to know
where you were,”

“What did you say?”

“We pretended you didn’t exist,” Hermione said, “told him you were a figment of his imagination
until he walked away. So did you get the Horcrux,”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “it was a complete waste of time,”

He had done his best to not think about the locket that was sitting in his pocket and had made the
decision to not tell Ron or Hermione about it. After all, going after it had been a complete waste of
time, and had resulted in the the pointless death of Dumbledore.

“What is it?” Ron asked.

Harry sighed and handed him the locket, “Open it,”

Ron looked slightly worried for a moment but read the note outside.

“To the Dark Lord,

I know I will be dead long before you read this but I want you to know that it was I who discovered
your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and intend to destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in
the hope that when you meet your match, you will be mortal once more

R.A.B ,”

Hermione frowned, “R.A.B, who’s R.A.B?”
Harry shrugged, “No idea,”

“I’ll find out,” she said determinedly, “I’ll go to the library,”

“Of course you will,” Ron said lightly, “we’re in the middle of the war, but there’s still time for the bloody library!”

“What are you two doing next year, then?” Harry asked.

“Whatever it is you’re doing,” Ron said as though it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Where I’m going...you can’t come with me,”

Hermione rolled her eyes at him.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Harry. You’re not in this on your own. You’ve never been in this on your own.”

“Yeah,” Ron said, “Yeah. We’re here for you through everything. Always,”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!

<3
Harry felt the air rush out of his lungs as his knees hit the ground outside The Burrow. For a brief moment, he revelled in the fact that, somehow, he had survived. And so had Hagrid. They had flown half down the country from James’ apartment, but Voldemort had not managed to kill him. He might have laughed if not for the fact that he had lost Hedwig, a loss that he had not thought would hit him as it had done.

Groaning slightly, Harry fell to the side and rolled onto his back, staring up at the starry night sky as he tried to catch his breath. He could hear Hagrid breathing next to him, but that did not stop all the other fears that were chasing themselves around his head; had Voldemort caught up to any of the others? Had anyone been seriously hurt? How many more funerals would he have to attend?

And despite the genuine fear he felt for the others, he couldn’t help but wonder if Draco had been there tonight...

“Is that Harry?” an unfamiliar voice asked.

Suddenly gripped with the fear that a death eater had somehow managed to get through the wards, Harry leapt to his feet and spun around, wand outstretched and pointing at a girl with light blonde hair who he had never seen before.

“Who’s tha’?” Hagrid asked loudly.

“Woah, woah, woah!” she exclaimed, holding up her hands, “Woah, not here to kill you! Not here to kill you!”

“Harry!” Ginny yelled, rushing out of The Burrow, “Don’t curse her! It’s only Daisy!”

“Oh,” Harry said, slowly lowering his wand and feeling quite embarrassed, “Oh, sorry. Are you - are you a cousin?”

“A cousin?” she repeated, looking confused, “Oh, no, I’m not. I’m George’s girlfriend,”

“Georges girlfriend?” Harry asked, feeling as confused as Daisy looked, “George as in George Weasley?”

“Who else would she be talking about, Harry?” Ginny asked him, looking quite anxious, “We don’t know any other George’s,”

“No,” Harry said, “No. Of course we don’t. Sorry. It’s, um, it’s nice to meet you, Daisy. I’m Harry,”

“Yeah,” she said, awkwardly gesturing at his scar, “I kind of guessed...”

Harry was not sure why meeting Daisy and hearing her introduce herself as George’s girlfriend was so strange to him. Perhaps he had just gotten too used to hearing Lydia referring to herself as George’s girlfriend and felt the need to get angry on her behalf. He had to remind himself that it wasn’t as though he was cheating on her. He was by no means an expert on relationships, but he was quite sure that it was impossible to cheat on the dead.
“Is anyone else back?” Harry asked, trying to cover the awkwardness. Though, he was quite sure that trying not act awkward around your ex-girlfriend and your dead sister's boyfriend’s new girlfriend was an impossible task.

“Not yet,” Ginny said, “Hermione and your dad should - here they are!”

Harry spun around just as Hermione and James slid off a Thestral and hurried over to him.

“You’re alright!” James exclaimed, “Oh, Merlin, I saw Voldemort go after you and-”

“It was fine,” Harry said, even though it was quite the opposite, “I managed to hold him off. He can-”

“-fly,” Hermione said anxiously, “I know. A flying Dark Lord. That’s the last thing we need,”

And even though the situation was quite dire, the three of them actually burst into laughter.

“Don’t worry, Daisy,” Ginny sighed, “you get used to this,”

“Who’s that?” James whispered to Harry.

“Oh, uh...Daisy. She is...she is George’s girlfriend,”

“Lydia wanted him to move on,” Hermione said firmly, “and we should - we should be happy that he did,”

“Obviously,” James said quickly, “Obviously...still weird,”

They were saved from having to carry on what Harry was almost certain would be a painfully awkward conversation by the sounds of Remus and George arriving. Mrs Weasley’s cries of relief were quickly replaced with cries of anguish when George’s features were illuminated by the moon: the left side of his face was covered in thick blood, all spewing from a large hole where his ear should have been.

“Fuck me,” James yelped, rushing over to help carry George into The Burrow.

Harry wasted no time in going to help, but before he could get so much as a finger on George, Remus had grabbed him by the back of his t-shirt and shoved him backwards. For one wild moment, Harry thought that he might have been about to transform due to the sheer strength he possessed.

“Oi! What’re yeh doin’?” Hagrid yelled as he struggled to get through the kitchen door.

“Someone betrayed us tonight!” Remus said, not taking his eyes off Harry.

“It’s not gonna be me, is it?” Harry snapped, gesturing to his scar.

“You could have easily taken Polyjuice Potion!” Remus said sharply, “What creature sat in my office the first time Harry Potter visited it at Hogwarts?”

“Are you mad, Moony?” James snapped.

“What creature?”

“I don’t know!” Harry yelled, “it was nearly four years ago! A Grindylow, wasn’t it?”

Remus regarded him for a moment and then lowered his wand, stowing it back into his robes, “I’m
sorry, but I had to check. Someone-"

“Ly...Ly...di...Ly ;”

Harry frowned and looked over Remus’ shoulder; George was lay on the couch with Mrs Weasley, Ginny and Daisy stood over him. He looked deathly pale, and the left side of his face and neck were almost completely covered in blood.

“Where - where - get her - mum, please - find her;”

“Who do you want me to get, Georgie?” Mrs Weasley asked tearfully.

“Ly...di...Lyd...Ly...”

Harry was quite sure that he knew who George was asking for, but he did not want to be the one to say it. He look over at Hermione who was staring down at George with her eyes wide, and Harry had the feeling that she also knew who he was asking for.

“Who, Georgie, who?” Mrs Weasley asked, stroking his hair, “Tell me, dear,”

“Lydia,” he muttered, tears making tracks in the blood on his face, “Lydia. Where - where is she? Can you get her for me, mum? I need her - Lyds...Lydia,”

James could not seem to handle being in the room for much longer and quickly made his exit. Harry chanced a glance over at Daisy - if she was hurt or offended by George asking for Lydia, she did not let it show on her face.

“Oh, Georgie, I’m sorry, darling! I’m sorry!” Mrs Weasley cried, “she’s gone! She’s gone! You know she has! I’m sorry!”

“Want her to come back,” George whispered tearfully, “I miss her,”

It soon got too much for Harry and he hurried out of the kitchen and back out into the garden. James was sat alone on a bench, and Harry felt that it would be best to leave him alone for a while. It had been a long and strange day for them all.

“Hey,” Ginny said quietly, coming up behind him, “Sorry that I never told you about Daisy...I never knew how. They got together around May time, I think,”

Harry shook his head, “No, it’s fine. It’s not really got anything to do with me, anyway. It’d only be a problem if Lydia was still alive,”

Ginny laughed, “Yeah, that would be a problem,”

“I’m sorry I had to end things the way I did,” Harry said, turning to look at her.

He had broken up with her on the last day of term after resigning himself to the fact that Voldemort would go through anyone to get to him.

“I knew it was coming,” Ginny admitted, “Sometimes I think you consider it a day wasted if you don’t do at least one thing for some noble reason.”

Harry snorted and shook his head.

“If I’m going to go after Voldemort-”
“I know,” Ginny interrupted, “I know,”

“I don’t even want to do it,” he said, unsure of why he was suddenly confessing this to Ginny, “I’m only doing it because it's what Lydia asked,”

They sat in silence for a while, their eyes trained on the night sky and willing everyone else to come back in one piece. As Harry listened to Daisy fussing over George in the kitchen, he could not help but wonder how Lydia would have reacted to seeing him with one ear. Perhaps it was better that she wasn't around to see it, because he wasn't sure that they would have been able to stop her from tracking down the death eater that did it in the first place.

And Harry felt a sudden rush of anger towards Voldemort for ruining their lives, for being the reason that George Weasley could have been bleeding to death if not for Mrs Weasley's healing skills.

He woud destroy him, for her.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! This is a bit of a filler chapter, but I promise that everything that comes after this is going to be really fun, and I cannot wait to write it!

Just a heads up - I am going to skip over a lot of the Deathly Hallows stuff - breaking into the Ministry, being on the run etc, etc, etc just because I feel like there's not much that I couldd to make it more interesting. But where I am going from in this chapter will be intersting, I PROMISE.

It'll make a lot more sense when you actually read it.

(hopefully)

<3
What's in a Name?

Draco slowly walked up to the drawing room and flopped into one of the armchairs by the fireplace. He stared down at the ring on his finger that bore the Malfoy family crest and wondered whether the wealth was worth it all. He could not deny that the money was nice, but morally speaking he was probably as poor as the beggars that now sat in Diagon Alley. Sighing, he twisted the ring round so that he could no longer see it. Being a Malfoy was all fun and games until the Dark Lord came back, now he was no better than any Snatchers.

There was a scuffle and someone swore very loudly. Draco sat up in his chair slightly, there was something oddly familiar about that voice but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. There was a bang and a voice that Draco might have recognised from school. The doors burst open and Draco leapt up, his wand drawn but it was only some Death Eaters. Wishing that he wasn't so paranoid all the time, he shoved his wand back into his robes and went to sit back down, but then his father walked into the room followed by a cackling Aunt Bella.

“Have you seen who they’ve brought in?” Lucius asked, chuckling slightly.

Draco looked back over again and just about stopped himself from gasping. Two Death Eaters had a very firm grip of a very pissed off Daphne Greengrass. She had a black eye and blood was pouring out of her nose.

“W-Why?” Draco asked, “She’s on - she’s on our side? Isn’t she?”

Lucius scoffed, “She never was. Apparently, she was carrying on Dumbledore’s Army at Hogwarts;”

“We’re still recruiting. Do you want to join?” she piped up.

As quick as anything, Aunt Bella whirled around and slapped her around the house. Draco flinched and looked away as the Death Eaters dragged her down to the basement.

“What’s wrong with you, boy?” Lucius asked.

“She’s my friend,” Draco mumbled stupidly.

“Was your friend, nephew dear,” Aunt Bella corrected, “If you carry on the way that you are, you’ll be keeping your friend company;”

A braver man that he was would have said that he’d rather do that than support Lord Voldemort. But Draco Malfoy was not brave; he was cowardly and too busy trying to protect himself.

—

Since the end of his sixth year at Hogwarts, Draco had lost count of the amount of people who had been held captive at Malfoy Manor. Some were sent straight onto Azkaban, some were left to starve to death and some were killed by his aunt when she got bored. Draco usually pretended that they didn’t exist and it was easier to stay out in the grounds when someone was being tortured, but there was something nagging him about Daphne Greengrass being down there.

He had started to have reservations about the whole thing when he watched Luna Lovegood being dragged up the driveway because she, of all people, did not deserve to be held there. And though he was well aware of the fact that Lord Voldemort was somewhere within the depths of the house,
Draco opened his bedroom door and began to walk to the drawing room.

Quite shocked that there was no one guarding the basement, Draco flicked his wand at the lock and slowly walked down the stairs. He could hear a whispered conversation but that quickly stopped when he got to the bottom of the stairs.

Mr Ollivander was huddled in the corner of the room looking as weak as ever, and Luna was knelt next to him, tipping water into his mouth. Daphne was stood in the middle of the room and glaring at him so fiercely that Draco actually backed away from her.

“You absolute fucker,” she hissed, “I defended you to my parents when they told me that you were no good! I defended you against Harry when he nearly killed you! And this is how you repay me?”

“Language, Greengrass,” Draco said, trying to sound as much like his old self as he could.

“Language?” Daphne exclaimed, “You’ve locked us in a fucking basement nad you have the nerve to have a go at me about my language?”

“I’m sorry,” Draco said quickly, realising that he was going about this the complete wrong wrong.

“Come again,” Daphne said, frowning a him, “You’re sorry?”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, “I’m really, really sorry. I never wanted any of this. I never wanted to be a death eater. I never wanted to...I don’t believe in anything my family does. Please, you have to believe me,”

“I believe you,” a soft voice said from behind Daphne.

Daphne sighed, “Luna, come on, it’s Malfoy!”

Luna looked over at Draco and then nodded.

“I know, but I believe him. What is he gaining if he comes down here and helps us? If anyone was to find out, he’d be killed,”

“But he could be here on someone else’s orders,” Daphne pointed out.

“Well, if he was, then Harry would just come for him, wouldn’t he?” Luna said serenely, “the death eaters aren’t as stupid as we think. They’re all scared of him, aren’t they? Even You-Know-Who is scared of him,”

“I’ll get you out of here, Daphne, I promise,”

“Just because I don’t have a wand doesn’t mean I can’t kill you,”

“I know,”

—

“Draco! Draco!”

He rolled his eyes and opened his bedroom door to find his father stood outside, looking quite frantic.

“What?”
“The Potter boy! They've found him!”

Draco’s heart dropped to his stomach and then the room began spin slightly. They couldn't have him. Not Harry. They’d kill him. There was no way that even he would be able to get out of this one. Before he could even begin to fathom the thought of him being killed, Lucius began marching down the hall and Draco was already forming a plan in his head.

“I'll be there in a minute,”

When he was sure that his father was as far away from him as possible, he ran to his father's study and broke the lock. Without even caring about how much noise he was making, Draco ransacked the room until he found Daphne’s wand. Luna's was nowhere to be seen but an extra wand was better than none.

The drawing room was empty when he got there, and his heart was beating out of control. He sat down in one of the armchairs, his heart beating out of control. It had been months since he had saw Harry and he did not trust himself to react to seeing him again normally.

The doors of the room banged open and Draco closed his eyes. He felt his mother brush her hand against the top of his head and wondered how much she knew about he and Harry. He had never told her about their relationship, of course, but he was not stupid enough to think that his own mother wasn't at least vaguely aware that he was gay.


“He looks strange,” Narcissa said, “As though he's been hit by a stinging hex,”

“Not a stinging hex,” someone said, and Draco immediately knew that it was Harry, “it was something in the forest. I fell over,”

“Draco went to school with them! He'll know!” Lucius exclaimed.

Before Draco could fight back, a hand closed around his arm and dragged him to the middle of the room. Harry was sat on the floor, tied with Weasley, Granger, Dean Thomas and a Goblin. And though his face was swollen, there was no doubt that it was in fact Harry.


But Draco was not listening to a thing that his father was saying. All he could do was stare at Harry. They had not been this close since they were both at school, and it took every ounce of willpower that he owned to not lean in for a kiss. That would probably be the quickest way to get them both killed.


“I can't - I can't be sure,” Draco stammered.

“Look closer!”

“I don’t think it’s him,” Draco said, fighting to keep his wand calm, “I would know,”

He might have heard Weasley snort at this comment, but he couldn’t be sure.

“Did you find anything that might suggest it is in fact the Potter boy?” Narcissa asked, barely looking at the Snatchers who had brought them in.
“I found this,” one of them said proudly, holding up a sword with a ruby encrusted hilt, “I think I’m gonna keep this after-”

There was a whip like crack as Aunt Bellatrix suddenly sliced her wand through the air and the Snatcher fell to the floor.

“That is not yours!” she shrieked, “That was in my vault at Gringotts! They must have broken in!”

“Impossible,” Lucius said dismissively, “How could a group of teenagers break into Gringotts and survive?”

Had their lives not been on the line, Draco might have pointed out that if any group of teenagers could break into Gringotts and survive, it would be Harry, Granger and Weasley.

Still looking furious, Aunt Bella turned and looked at the three of them on the floor, and Draco knew that whatever was coming would not be enjoyable. If his mother was not staring so intently at him, he might have tried to break them out at that exact moment.

“I want a little girl time with the mudblood here...” Aunt Bella said, smiling down at Granger as she dragged her away from Harry and Weasley, “take the boys down to the basement, Draco,”

“No!” Weasley yelled, “No! Take me instead! Take me instead! No!”

“Don’t worry, Weasley, I will!” Aunt Bella cackled, “If she dies under my questioning, I will!”

Trying to remain as calm as possible, Draco strode forward and grabbed Harry, Weasley and Thomas. Dragging them down to the basement was a lot more difficult than it needed to be thanks to Weasley’s constant struggling. Draco had never realised quite how strong he was and was suddenly grateful that he had never gotten on the wrong side of him on the Quidditch pitch.

Granger's screams began to echo through the house just as Draco slammed the door shut behind them.

“Is that Harry fucking Potter?”

“Daphne?” Harry asked, trying his best to turn around, “what are you doing here?”

"Nows a really bad time to join Dumbledore's Army, apparantley."

"You joined the DA? How did you even-"

“We haven't got much time,” Draco said gruffly, quickly untying the three of them, “If I stay down here too long, they’ll get suspicious. Now, I have your wand, Daphne, but I don’t have-”

Before he could carry on his conversation, Harry had dragged himself to his feet and punched Draco square in the face.

“You’re an absolute arsehole, Draco Malfoy!” Harry yelled over the sounds of Weasley sobbing.

“Yes, I am more than aware of that,” Draco said, rubbing his jaw, “but I am trying to help. Please, believe me. I am going to get you of here, alive,”

“How do you expect me to trust you?” Harry asked, tears in his eyes, “after everything? How do you expect me to trust you when you tried to kill Dumbledore and your crazy as fuck Auntie is torturing my best friend?”
“Because I trust him, Harry,” Luna said, grabbing his hand, “he’s been helping us these past few weeks. We would probably be dead if he hadn’t been sneaking us food and water,”

“I trust him as well, for what it’s worth,” Daphne said, “please, Harry. He’s our only choice,”

Granger let out an awful scream and Harry slumped against the wall, as though Aunt Bella was physically hurting him too.

“Fine,” Harry said, his voice barely above a whisper, “Fine. But if we don’t get Hermione out of here, I’m holding you responsible, Malfoy,”

“Of course,” Draco said quietly, “I wouldn’t expect anything less,”
“Sweetheart, you’re going to have to go back,”

“I thought I was done,”

“There’s still life inside you. Are you ready?”

“I...I think so,”

Lydia Potter took a deep, gulping breath and her eyes shot open.
Air suddenly rushed back into Lydia Potter's lungs and her eyes shot open.

There were a few minutes in which she was not quite sure what was going on. She was vaguely aware of the fact that for some unknown reason, she was lay on her back in some dirt and her entire body was aching in a way that it had never ached before. She was also vaguely aware of the fact that Harry was in dire need of help somewhere. She just wasn’t sure where he was. She wasn’t even sure where she was.

Feeling as though the best way to work out where she was to start moving, Lydia pushed herself off the ground and came to the quite horrifying realisation that she was in a cemetery. Shuddering at thought that she was quite possibly lay on someone’s grave, Lydia leapt to her rather unsteady feet, trying to look for something that might tell her where she was. Or maybe something that would tell her where Harry was.

Out of curiosity, Lydia’s eyes flickered down to the marble headstone before her.

Lily Potter

January 30th 1960 - October 31st 1981

Lydia Potter

July 31st 1980 - June 19th 1996

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,”

It all came rushing back to her at once and she dropped to her knees, suddenly unable to catch her breath. Tears sprang to her eyes and before she could even try and grab a hold of her emotions, the tears had come thick and fast.

And she wasn’t even sure why she was crying: some tears were for her mother, of course, but she couldn’t quite describe the feelings of being faced with her own grave. Perhaps part of her grieved for the fact that Harry and James had had to deal with so much loss, or perhaps she was crying because, more than anything, she wanted to be back under the ground with her mother.

Still gasping for breath, Lydia squeezed her eyes shut and tried to think back to the last thing she could remember doing...they had just finished a History of Magic exam that Harry had collapsed in. He had claimed that Voldemort had had Sirius...there was a gap in her memory and she couldn’t quite remember what had happened between leaving the exam and going into the Ministry of Magic. But what had even happened in the Ministry of Magic?

The laughter of Bellatrix Lestrange suddenly echoes around her mind paired with that evil, evil gloating.

“I killed Sirius Black! I killed Sirius Black!”
So Sirius was dead, too. Although, Lydia thought through her tears, perhaps that made sense, because she had a memory of Harry shouting about something.

“I DON’T CARE! I’VE HAD ENOUGH, I’VE SEEN ENOUGH, I WANT OUT, I DON’T CARE ANYMORE!”

The memory of her brother being so in pain brought fresh tears to her eyes and Lydia wasn’t sure how much more of it she could handle. And yet, she still did not understand how she had ended up dead. Who had killed her? Had it been Bellatrix? Or perhaps even Voldemort himself?

Lydia opened her eyes again and forced herself to stare at the headstone, as though confronting her own mortality would make her brain move quicker. She remember speaking up when Harry had finished ranting and though she could not remember what it was that she said, it had lead Professor Dumbledore to want to speak to her alone.

“There’s a horcrux inside of me,” Lydia had said, her voice unusually calm.

“Unfortunately, yes. You were the one he never intended to make,” Dumbledore replied.

Finally, all the puzzle pieces slotted back into place and Lydia remembered everything.

“Miss? Are you OK?”

Lydia whirled around and came face to face with a kind-faced muggle woman. Her brows were knitted together in confusing and her warm eyes bore into Lydia’s.

“Y-Yes,” Lydia replied, wiping her eyes and getting off the floor, “Yes. I’m fine,”

The woman peered behind Lydia and smiled sadly.

“Lily and Lydia Potter,” she said, “did you know them?”

“Yes,” Lydia said, “yes, they were family. My, uh, my cousins. I couldn’t make it to Lydia’s funeral,”

“You must feel guilty,”

“Something like that, yeah,”

The woman smiled at her, “Where are you staying?”

“I’m not,”

The woman gasped, “Oh, you poor thing! If you need somewhere to stay for the night, I have a spare bedroom.”

Lydia did not reply straight away, her mind working in overdrive. If Mad-Eye was with her, he’d probably be angry at her for being so relaxed around a complete stranger. There was no saying that this woman was a death eater, but Lydia didn’t even know if the death eaters were still around. She had no idea how long had passed since her fifth year at Hogwarts.

“That’d be great, thank-you,” Lydia said, trusting this woman for some strange reason.

“I’m Vera, by the way,”

“Hermione,”
“What a lovely name,” Vera smiled sadly at her again, “I’ll let you have a bit more time with them. I live at number 34, facing the war memorial in the town square. Do you know it?”

“I’ll find it,”

Vera smiled again and left the cemetery. Lydia watched her go and then turned back to face the headstone. Her headstone. She stayed for a further fifteen minutes, staring at her name forever etched in marble. Maybe it would be better if she was still under there.

The thought had barely entered her mind before Lydia shut it down. She had to find Harry. He deserved to know that somehow, she was still alive. She did not allow herself to think about Ron, Hermione or even George; that would be enough to send her over the edge.

“Alright, Potter,” she muttered to herself, “time to start moving. Come on, now. Let’s get - my wand!” she gasped, “where’s - where’s my wand?”

 Automatically, her hand went to her hair and she felt her heart begin to so slow down as it closed around the familiar handle.

“I knew putting it in my hair wasn’t stupid,” she muttered to no one in particular. “Right. Potter. Get going. Come on. Places to be. A Dark Lord to kill,”

Still quite unsteady on her feet, Lydia staggered out of the cemetery and then realised that she had no idea where she was going. Following sign posts was a lot harder than she thought it would be and ended up walking in a circle for ten minutes before she plucked up the courage to ask someone for directions.

The relief of seeing the war memorial was very quickly replaced with anguish at truly seeing the war memorial; from a distance, it looked like a regular cenotaph, but when she got closer to see it, she realised that it was a memorial for a different kind of war. Lydia’s parents, immortalised as statues, smiled down at her, holding a baby Lydia and Harry in their arms.

“Please, please still be alive...” she whispered, looking up at Harry and James, terrified of what she would do if they were not.

Lydia tore her eyes away from the statue and hurried over to number 34, glancing over her shoulder to make sure that no one was following her. Walking around in the open was probably the stupidest thing that she could have been doing, but it was not as though she had the time (or the skill) to brew a Polyjuice Potion.

She had barely knocked on the door before Vera opened it and ushered her inside.

“I know who you are,” she said.

“What?” Lydia asked.

“I know who you are,” Vera repeated, “Lydia Potter,”

Before Lydia even knew what she was doing, she had drawn her wand and there was a curse on the end of her tongue.

“Wait!” Vera said quickly, holding something gold up to her, “Look! I’m on your side!”

“Is that - is that a DA coin?” Lydia asked, frowning, “How do you have one of them?”
“My daughter, Daphne,” Vera said quickly, “Daphne Greengrass. You know her,”

Despite herself, Lydia burst into laughter.

“Daphne was never part of Dumbledore’s Army! You’re one of them! You’re a death eater!”

Vera shook her head, “Lydia, so much has happened since you...since you died. Dumbledore is dead and your brother is on the run, with Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger and my Daphne...” tears sprang to her eyes, “my Daphne was taken from school...she was part of some underground rebellion that started at the school, and with Snape Headmaster...well, nothing is quite the same and—”

“Stop talking,” Lydia said quickly, a headache creeping up on her, “Dumbledore is...no, he can’t be!”

“Snape did it,” Vera said, her voice barely above a whisper, “and now he’s headmaster. Hogwarts isn’t what it used to be. My husband and other daughter, Astoria, I think - I think you know her...they’re abroad, in hiding. We’re one of the only Pureblood families who’ve rebelled against what You-Know-Who expects of us...”

Lydia narrowed her eyes at Vera, quite distrustful of her.

“If you’re so scared of what he’ll do to you, how come you aren’t abroad with your husband and Astoria?”

“But Daphne is still in the country. I can’t go without her,” she said tearfully. She held the coin up again, “this is how we were communicating when she was in Hogwarts, but then all communication stopped and I found out that they had taken her...I just...I don’t know where,”

“And...and Harry...is he...where is he?” Lydia asked.

“Alive,” Vera said confidently, “You-Know-Who would waste no time in telling the entire world that Harry was dead if he had killed him,”

“And my dad?”

“I haven’t heard anything,”

“I need to get them,” Lydia said, turning on her heel and walking straight towards the door.

“No!” Vera shouted, grabbing her arm and pulling her back, “No, wait, Lydia. You need to rest. You need to know everything that’s happened. You can’t stumble through this blind. You need to be smart about it,”

Annoyingly, Lydia knew that she was right and allowed herself to be lead into the kitchen so that Vera could fill her in on everything that had happened. And, it was a lot: Severus Snape had murdered Albus Dumbledore on Voldemort’s orders almost a year after Lydia herself had died. With Dumbledore gone, Voldemort had full control of Hogwarts and had declared Severus Snape headmaster of Hogwarts.

“Rumour has it that Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger broke in and out of the Ministry of Magic to steal something. The only problem was that no one knew what they had stole or if they had even gotten it,” Vera said, placing a mug of tea in front of Lydia, “And then...they disappeared off the face of the earth. No one has heard from them for months. That was back in September...”
“What month are we in now?” Lydia asked, somewhat hesitantly.

“March,“

“And..the year?”

“Nineteen Ninety Eight,”

“I’ve been dead...I’ve been dead nearly two years?”

“I’m sorry,”

“I need to find Harry,” Lydia said, “Do you have any idea?”

“No. I’m...I’m sorry,”

Lydia groaned and put her head in her hands, trying to get her brain to think up an amazing plan, but it seemed unable to do that. She thought about all the people that she could ask for help, but she had no idea how to get to them; if Hogwarts was under Voldemort’s control, then there was no way she could contact any teachers. The first person who popped into her mind was her dad, but he was most likely in hiding...or worse.

“Dobby,” Lydia said suddenly, “Of course!”

“What was that, dear?”

“Dobby!” Lydia shouted, looking around the room, “Dobby!”

There was a loud crack and a creature with bat-like ears and large green eyes appeared in the middle of the kitchen. For a moment, he looked around, apparently confused, but when his eyes fell on Lydia, they filled with tears and he threw his arms around her legs.

“M-Miss P-P-Potter! You’re a-a-live! Dobby is s-so happy to s-s-see you!” he cried.

Even Lydia’s eyes welled up with tears. Somehow, Dobby still being around filled her with hope that Harry would be, too.

“Dobby, I need your help,” Lydia said, kneeling down in front of him, “I need to find Harry. I don’t know where he is, but I need to-”

“Dobby can help, miss!” he exclaimed, grabbing her hand, “I can show you how to find him!”

Lydia turned to Vera.

“Thank-you for the help, and thank-you for...well, thanks for not being a death eater,”

Vera cracked a smile, “Not being a death eater has been my absolute pleasure,”

“I’ll find Daphne. I promise,”

Dobby clicked his fingers and the Greengrass house was gone, only to be replaced by a bar that might have been vaguely familiar. Dobby pushed Lydia through a door and slammed the door shut behind him, putting a finger to his lips before running up some stairs and gesturing for her to follow him.

As thankful as Lydia was to see Dobby, she was all too familiar with his plans and how they often
did not work out in the way that he expected. Keeping a firm grip on her wand, Lydia hesitantly followed him up the steps only to run into-

“Dumbledore? I thought you were dead,”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to be shocked about dead people being alive,” the man said gruffly, “I’m not the Dumbledore you’re thinking about. I’m Aberforth, his brother,”

“Oh,” Lydia said, feeling her cheeks go red, “Sorry. You just - you look like him and...sorry. I didn’t know he had a brother,”

“How is that you’re alive, then?” Aberforth asked, “I thought you killed yourself,”

“I don’t know,” Lydia admitted, “I thought I killed myself,”

Aberforth tutted and looked down at Dobby, “You trust too easily, Elf. There’s no way that’s actually the Potter girl. Probably one of You-Know-Who’s lackeys,”

Lydia clenched her jaw.

“I am not!” she snapped, “Just because I don’t know how I’m alive doesn’t mean that I’m not actually me!”

Aberforth narrowed his eyes at her.

“What was the last conversation you had with Albus Dumbledore?”

“Excuse me?” Lydia asked, taken aback.

“The day you died, my brother came into my bar and we spoke about you. And you asked him something. What was his reply?”

Lydia frowned at him, “I asked if he was going to kill me himself,”

“And his reply was?”

“He told me he was too much of a coward to actually do it,”

Aberforth regarded her for a moment and then nodded.

“Welcome back to life, Miss Potter. This is not the best time to be alive,”

Lydia, however, was not listening. She had become distracted by a mirror hanging on the wall, for she could see Harry’s panicked reflection in it.

“Help me! We’re in the basement of Malfoy Manor! Help!”

“He’s alive,” Lydia whispered, “He’s alive. He’s alive!” she turned to Dobby and held her hand out, “Take me to Malfoy Manor. Now,”

“Hold on!” Aberforth shouted, “You can’t just go running into Malfoy Manor on your own! You’ll get killed!”

“That’s my brother!” Lydia yelled back, “He’d do the same for me!”

“And what if you get killed?” Aberforth shouted.
“Then I die,” Lydia shrugged, “Already done it once. Not nearly as bad as you’d think,"

“Kids like you are the reason why I could never be a teacher. You’re annoyingly headstrong.”

“Thank-you,”

“I said annoyingly,”

"Before we go...did you hear anything about my dad?"

For the first time, Aberforth looked sympathetic and the eyes that were so much like his brothers looked away from her.

"I haven't. I'm sorry,"

“Come on, Dobby,” Lydia said, holding out her hand and pushing that thought to the back of her mind, “Time to give my brother a heart attack.”

When they arrived outside Malfoy Manor, Lydia was taken aback by how big it was. She had always been vaguely aware of the fact that the Malfoy’s were rich, but she had not been expecting the kind of rich that could afford to live in a mansion. Dobby tugged on her hand, bringing her out of her reverie, and hid behind a tree.

“Are those Peacocks?” Lydia muttered, glancing around the tree.

“Miss Potter! Your brother!”

“Oh, yeah,” Lydia said, turning back to look at Dobby, “Right, well...do you know where the basement is?”

"Off the drawing room!” he said, “but Dobby is sure that Master Malfoy will have death eaters on guard, just in case. So I can Apparate you directly into the-”

Lydia shook her head, “No, apparate me outside of the drawing room, and you go straight down into the basement,”

“But...why?” Dobby asked, his ears drooping slightly, “Lydia Potter will put herself in even more danger if she does that! The death eaters-”

“Don’t know I’m alive, so they’ll be distracted and you’ll have more time to help Harry,”

Dobby did not want to go through with what really was quite a terrible plan, but he did not argue back. They Apparated to directly outside of the doors that lead into the drawing room and, despite her situation, Lydia was rather calm and collected. Until she heard screaming.

“No! No! We didn’t break in! We didn’t break in! I swear! I swear!”

“Don’t lie to me Mudblood! Crucio!”

“No! No! We didn’t break in! We didn’t break in! I swear! I swear!”

“Don’t lie to me Mudblood! Crucio!”

“NO! NO! PLEASE!”

Rage suddenly coursed through Lydia like fire and she kicked the door open, completely forgetting who she was. As the doors burst open, faces turned towards her, all wearing similar faces of shock; Draco Malfoy looked like he was about to collapse, and Narcissa Malfoy actually took several steps away from her, dragging her husband and son with her.
But Lydia could not care less about the Malfoys or the death eaters staring at her, she was too concerned with the fact that Bellatrix Lestrange was stood over Hermione, her wand aimed at her chest.

“Lydia?” Hermione whispered, “is that...is that really you?”

“Stupefy!” Lydia yelled.

The spell caught Bellatrix in the chest and she was thrown off her feet. She hit the back wall and slid down it, falling to a crumpled mess on the floor. Lydia launched herself across the room and grabbed Hermione, pulling her to her feet.

“Right,” Lydia said, brushing her hair out of her face, “Has anyone seen my brother?”

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading! We're going to be back in Harry's P.O.V next chapter!

-E.
A Free Elf

Harry could not believe that everything could have gone as spectacularly wrong as it had done. He had not began the search for Horcruxes thinking that it would be anything like a holiday, he had barely believed that he would survive it, but he did not think that they would be so stupid to end up in *Malfoy Manor* of all places. He paced up and down the basement, wringing his hands together and trying his best to ignore Hermione’s cries of pain. Ron was still throwing himself against the basement door, but it would not budge and Harry could not bring himself to tell him to stop.

Luna was crouched down next to Mr Ollivander, trying to keep him conscious whilst Dean was sat with his head in his hands, humming quietly under his breath. Griphook the Goblin was completely ignoring them and skulking in the shadows. For all Harry cared, he could stay there for the rest of his life.

They had to get out somehow. Harry would not be so stupid to blindly trust Draco Malfoy again, and the fact that both Luna and Daphne did was beyond him. It was as though they had both forgotten that he had tried to kill Dumbledore.

The solution to their problem came so quickly to him that he almost laughed at how stupid he had been: The Mirror. For weeks, Harry had been convinced that he had been seeing Dumbledore’s eye in the Two-Way Mirror. The Headmaster being alive was a longshot, but they weren’t really in the position to be coming up with sensible plans.

“Help me! We’re in the basement of Malfoy Manor! Help!”

Behind Harry, Daphne tutted.

“I thought you were trusting Draco to get us out of here?” she asked as Harry shoved the mirror into his pocket.

“Do you really trust him?” Harry snapped.

“I trust him a damn sight more than a mirror,” she said, “what’s that meant to do, exactly?”

“Fuck off, Greengrass!” Harry shouted, “Hermione is being tortured! I need to do something to keep me sane!”

“Fuck me, Potter! What do you think they’ve been doing to me whilst I’ve been here?” she snapped, “and forgive me, but I really struggle to believe that speaking into a mirror is going to help us get out of here!”

“It’s a Two-Way mirror! Someone’s on the other side!”

“Who?” Daphne asked, “because unless it’s the entire Order of the fucking Phoenix, I could not give less of a shit!”

“Arguing isn’t helping!” Dean snapped.

“Neither are you!” Daphne shot back, “We’re actually all going to die here, aren’t we? I’m sure Draco will fuck everything up somehow and we’ll all get killed!”

“Also not helping,” Dean muttered.
“She’s done it,” Ron whispered, tears streaming down his face, “she’s killed her. She’s killed Hermione.”

Harry opened his mouth to say that Hermione was definitely still alive but then closed it again, realising that they could no longer hear her. Tears sprang to Harry’s eyes and he felt his knees give way beneath him. Daphne ran forward and grabbed him before he fell to the floor.

“Harry, I’m so sorry,” she whispered, “I’m really, really sorry, I don’t know what to say,”

He could not speak, could barely breathe. Hermione was gone. Harry staggered forwards towards Ron, who had fallen to his knees and was sobbing into his hands. Harry wanted to say that they would be OK, that they would get through this, because they always go through shit like this. There had never been a time when they hadn’t gotten through shit like this, but he couldn’t bring himself to say it, because he wasn’t sure that they would get through it. Hermione had been the glue that held them together after Lydia died, and now she was gone too.

There was a loud crack and Harry jumped and whirled around to see Dobby.

“D-Dobby?” Harry said, wiping his eyes, “What are - what are you doing here?”

“Dobby has come to save Harry Potter and his friends!” he said, looking around, “Come! Come quick!”

“It’s too late, Dobby,” Ron said hoarsely, “Hermione’s g-gone!”

“No, she isn’t!” Dobby said, “she has her! She has her!”

“Who has her, Dobby?” Harry asked frowning, “have they taken her away somewhere?”

“No! She has her!” Dobby said, somewhat gleefully.

Unable to muster enough energy to work out what was going on, Harry just gestured at Luna, Dean, Daphne and Mr Ollivander.

“Take them - take them...um...take them....” Harry faltered, realising that they didn’t have a safe house to go to.

“Shell Cottage,” Ron said, “take them to Shell Cottage. It’s where Bill and Fleur live,”

“I’m staying here,” Daphne said.

Harry sighed, “No, you’re not-”

“You’re not my dad, Harry,” she snapped, “I’m staying here to fight some death eaters,“


“Thank-you. I - someone’s coming down the stairs! Dobby! Quick!”

There was another loud crack as Dobby disappeared. Harry grabbed Ron and yanked him away from the door just as it opened and Wormtail stumbled through the door.

“She’s back,” he muttered, “I - I don’t know how, but she’s back.”

Wormtail looked at Harry as though he was seeing him for the first time and suddenly shoved him against the wall with surprising strength. He enclosed his silver hand around Harry’s throat and began to squeeze.

“Get off him!” Ron yelled, lurching forward.

“Are you really gonna kill me?” Harry choked, “even though I spared your life?”

Harry felt the pressure on his throat release slightly as Wormtail hesitated. Ron grabbed Wormtail and pulled him away from Harry, shoving him to the floor, but there was no need for the silver hand had turned on its owner and was strangling him to death.

“Sirius was right about you,” Harry muttered as he snatched his wand out of his robes, “worthless,”

“Wormtail?” a voice from upstairs called, “have you got the boy?”

“Coming!” Ron yelled back in a passable imitation of Wormtail's voice.

“Stick behind me, you lot,” Harry said, “and I’ll get us some wands,”

Praying that somehow, Hermione would still be alive, Harry lead the way up the stairs and to the door that separated them from the drawing room. He took a deep breath and then burst through it, ready to curse whoever was on the other side but before the the scene before him made him falter.

Ron swore at the top of his voice and Daphne gasped for Lydia Potter was stood in the middle of the room, holding a frail Hermione up and pointing her wand at a rather terrified looking Lucius Malfoy. Bellatrix was stood by the wall, looking murderous and with blood pouring down her face.

“Harry! You’re alive!” ‘Lydia’ exclaimed.


He looked around the room, suddenly angry.

“Is this some sick joke?” he shouted, “is this what you lot think is funny? Pretending my sister is back from the dead? Did you do this on purpose? Is this all part of your sick plan to fuck me up before you kill me or something? Make me listen to your torturing my best friend and then act as though my sister is alive?”

“Harry, it’s me-”

“DON’T!” He roared, “DON’T STAND THERE AND PRETEND TO BE HER! YOU’RE NOT LYDIA POTTER! LYDIA POTTER IS DEAD !”

“Potter,” Malfoy said, walking forward, “Potter. It is her. There is no way that it isn’t-”

But Harry had heard enough.

“Expelliarmus!”

Malfoy’s wand flew through the air and Harry caught it. He threw Wormtail’s wand back to Ron and ducked under the curse that Lucius Malfoy aimed his way. He jumped back up and quickly Stupified him. Daphne ran forward and snatched Lucius’ wand out of his hand and, Harry noticed, took care to tread on his fingers as she ran over to Hermione and took her out of ‘Lydia’s’ grip.

There was a scuffle, and Harry lost sight of every one. He was too busy trying to stay alive and not
get distracted by the person claiming to be his sister. Perhaps he had been stupid to think that the death eaters would not sink as low as pretending to be his dead sister, and he was quite surprised that they had not thought to do it sooner.

“STOP!” Bellatrix shrieked.

Harry whirled around. Bellatrix was stood holding ‘Lydia’, her wand aimed at her throat.

“Wands down, or I kill her,”

“That isn’t her!” Harry yelled, “Go on! Do it! See if I care!”

“No!” Hermione shouted, “No! Harry! Don’t! That is her! It is Lydia!”

“Harry....Harry, please...please...I promise, I promise it’s me,” ‘Lydia whispered’, tears in her eyes, “Please, put your wand down. It’s me. I swear it’s me,”

“Draco,” Bellatrix said, “Collect their wands, please. We haven’t got all day,”

Harry barely reacted to Draco yanking the wand out of Harry’s hand. He could not take his eyes off Lydia. No, Harry quickly reminded himself, that isn’t Lydia. That’s just someone pretending to be Lydia.

“Now,” Bellatrix said, “We’ll call the Dark Lord-”

A peculiar squeaking sound cut Bellatrix off. Harry looked around, trying to find the source of the sound and wondered if maybe he was hearing things.

“Dobby,” Malfoy said, looking up at the ceiling where he was sat on the chandelier and determinedly trying to unscrew it, “You might want to try turning it the other way,”

“Draco, you little-”

Whatever insult Bellatrix was going to throw Malfoy’s way they never found out. Harry watched in amazement as ‘Lydia’ threw her head back, punched Bellatrix in the face and grabbed the wands out of her hand, jumping out of the way just as the Chandelier fell to the floor with an almighty left.

Malfoy grabbed Lydia and pushed her towards Dobby, dragging Daphne and Hermione with them. Harry grabbed a hold of Ron and ran over to where Dobby was and joined hands.

Bellatrix pulled herself out of the wreckage of the Chandelier and rounded on Dobby.

“ELF! YOU COULD HAVE KILLED ME! WE ARE YOUR MASTER-”

“Dobby has no master! Dobby is a free elf!”

A knife flew through the air towards them as Dobby Apparated away and Harry squeezed his eyes shut. The smell of the sea forced his eyes open and he looked around as the wind whipped his hair. They were on a beach somewhere, but where didn’t really matter to Harry. They were away from Malfoy Manor and that’s all that mattered.

“Harry...Potter...”

Dobby staggered towards Harry, blood spreading in a steady stain over his clothes. Heart in his mouth, Harry dropped to his knees and Dobby fell into his arms.
“Dobby, hold on - just, we’ll be fine - just...we got away, you’re OK. You’re OK,” he sobbed, “You’re going to be OK. Hold on, hold on,”

“Such a beautiful place to be with friends...D-Dobby is glad that you have your sister back, Harry Potter...”

“Just hold on, Dobby, please, you’re going to be OK. We can heal you,”

“Such a beautiful place to be with friends...D-Dobby is glad he is friends with Harry and Lydia Potter...”

The House Elf took one last shuddering breath, and became still.
Harry looked down at the still Elf in his arms, silently begging him to open his eyes again. There was something unnecessarily cruel about Dobby being dead. A creature, so innocent, should not have gotten mixed up in a war.

“Here, Harry, let me take him,” Luna said softly.

Harry nodded and handed him over.

“I want to - I want to bury him,”

“Of course, Harry. I’m sure Bill will have a shovel,”

Slowly, Harry stood up and looked around. He had never seen such a mismatched group in his life; Malfoy and Daphne were stood so close together they might have been joined at the hip, both staring at the ground. Hermione, still looking frail, was clinging onto Ron who’s eyes were bloodshot from all the crying. Dean was stood beside Mr Ollivander, holding him up whilst the old man stared at Griphook the Goblin with what might have been suspicion.

And yet Harry only had eyes for one person.

The person claiming to be Lydia was stood in the middle of the circle that they had accidentally formed. Harry could not believe how good of an impersonation she was carrying out - her mannerisms were identical to that of Lydia’s and, to top it all off, she even had her wand stuck in her hair. She was even wearing the clothes that they had buried Lydia in.

“You did this,” Harry said quietly, and raising a shaking finger to point at Dobby, “this is your fault,”

“I didn’t - I didn’t want him to be killed, I j-just needed help to get to you!”

Harry snorted, “Yeah. To get to me and kill me?”

“No! It’s me, H, I-“

“Don’t call me that,” he snapped, “only she calls me that,”

“Because it is actually me!” She exclaimed, “for fucks sake, I don’t know what you want me to-“

“Depulso!”

She yelped slightly as she was thrown off her feet and hit the sand with a thud. And as though he was trying to infuriate Harry further, Malfoy hurried forward and helped her to her feet. Further confirming to Harry that she was not who she said she was.

“Ha!” He yelled, “you’re working together! The two of you-“

“He just saved our lives,” Daphne said, “remember? He turned his back on his family for us?”

“N-No, he didn’t!” Harry said, “he just did that to throw us of the scent that he’s a death eater!”
“Malfoy’s a death eater?” ‘Lydia’ piped up, “Christ, what else have I missed?”

Harry rolled his eyes, “Don’t act as though you don’t know!”

Bill and Fleur had joined them by now, both wearing similar looks of shock on their.

“Lydia!” Bill exclaimed, “You’re...alive?”

Harry groaned and swore loudly.

“No! She isn’t! That isn’t Lydia!”

“Who eez it then, ‘Arry?” Fleur asked, frowning.

“I don’t know!” Harry shouted, furious that no one would listen to him, “some death eater that he brought!” and he pointed at Malfoy.

“I was forced into-“ Malfoy began quietly but Harry shushed him.

“Don’t you think if she was a death eater, she would have called You-Know-Who by now?” Ron asked.

“Don’t tell me you actually believe her!” Harry snapped.

Ron shrugged, “Your dad came back, didn’t he?”

“Yeah, but - but - I...” Harry trailed off, “Last year, I was convinced that Malfoy was a death eater and you didn’t believe me! And look what happened! You have got to believe me!”

“Tell him something only you two would know,” Dean suggested, "something that the death eaters wouldn’t even know,"

A silence followed this, and Harry was secretly pleased that he was right, all whilst being heart broken that he hadn't got his sister back.

“When we lived at Privet Drive, we would name the spiders that lived under the stairs with us,” she said, her eyes swimming with tears, “because it was the only way that I wouldn’t be scared of them. And there were always four: Sid, Gregg, Olivia and Freya,”

Harry stared at her for a few moments with narrowed eyes as his brain worked quicker than it ever had done in his life. There really was no way that anyone but the two of them could know about those spiders. He was positive that they had never told anyone that story. Harry himself barely remembered it.

And then it hit him.

She was alive.

Suddenly overcome with emotion, Harry launched himself at Lydia and threw his arms around her. Sobbing uncontrollably, they fell to their knees in the sand just as Ron and Hermione fell besides them.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” Lydia wailed, “I never wanted this to happen. I didn’t want to do it. I’m sorry, I’m sorry,”

“It doesn’t matter,” Harry sobbed, “You’re alive. You’re alive,”
Lydia being back was perhaps the best thing that had ever happened to Harry, but that didn’t change the fact that they were in a war. They had all agreed to tell no one that Lydia was still alive, even those that were on their side. By now, Voldemort was probably aware of what had happened at Malfoy Manor, but Bill was convinced that the more people that knew, the easier it was to track them down.

“I’ll let James know, though,” Bill said, “but only because he’ll kill me if I didn’t,”

Harry could not help but notice how different his sister was. After they had gone up to Shell Cottage to bury Dobby, she barely spoke and there was a sort of haunted look in her eyes that Harry was not used to seeing. When Daphne feebly asked what she had been doing before Malfoy Manor, she managed to mutter something about Daphne’s mother before falling silent for the rest of the night.

In a way, Harry was quite glad that she had not asked too many questions. He did not want to be the one to explain to her that George had a girlfriend. Though he wasn’t exactly sure that she would care. She didn’t seem to care about many things. She barely flinched when Hermione explained everything that they had done whilst on the run.

There was still so much that Harry needed to tell her, but he would wait. The last thing he wanted to do was overwhelm her with information, and she already looked rather overwhelmed.

“I think - I think I’m going to go to bed,” Lydia said finally.

“Of course,” Fleur said, standing up, “I’ll show you to your room,”

And she left without saying goodnight.

“She’s going to be fine, Harry,” Bill said, noticing the look on his face.

“My dad wasn’t like that when he came back. What if she’s like that forever?” Harry asked fearfully.

“He was,” Bill muttered darkly, “You didn’t see him. He was worse, actually. Just give her time,”

“She might be alright once she sees George,” Malfoy piped up. When he saw the look on everyone’s faces, he blushed. “S-Sorry. Did I say the wrong thing?”

“No,” Hermione said kindly, and Harry scowled at how nice she was being to him, “it’s just that...George has a girlfriend. Who isn’t Lydia,”

“Oh,” Draco said, “Oh. I, uh, I didn’t know,”

“Let’s hope she doesn’t mention him, then,” Dean muttered.

“Listen, she can mention him all she wants, I’m just not being the one to tell her,” Ron said, “that’s a Harry job,”

“It is not.” Harry said quickly, “No, it’s a girl thing. It’s a Hermione thing.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, “Obviously. Neither of you two have the tact to tell her anything to do with George,”

Once everyone had gone to bed, Harry crept out of the living room where he was sleeping and into the back garden. The smell of the sea calmed him as a soft breeze blew through his hair. He closed his eyes and leant back against the wall, taking in a moment of tranquility.

“Harr - Potter, can we...can we talk,”
Harry opened his eyes to see Malfoy and nodded, resigning himself to the fact that he would not have been able to avoid him forever, no matter how much he would have liked to.

“I do, um, in all seriousness want to say thanks. For - for what you did back there...” Harry muttered, not quite looking at him, “turning your back on your family it’s a big deal. And I'm sorry that I called you a death eater. I never actually thought that you were one...even after Dumbledore..."

Malfoy shrugged.

“I should have done it when my father was arrested, but I was too much of a coward,”

“You’re many things, Malfoy, but I don’t think you’re a coward,”

“I’m happy you got Lydia back,” he said, “You deserve it. You, your dad, Weasley, Granger...”

“I just hope she goes back to the way she was,”

“Do you really think she’ll be able to?” Malfoy asked, “do you really think that any of us are going to be able to go back to the way we were after this?”

Harry couldn’t help it and laughed.

“You’re right. We’re never coming back from this,”

They lapsed into silence after this, and Harry found it quite hard to focus on anything but the fact that their knees were just about touching. And without even realising that he was doing it, Harry slowly reached out his hands towards Malfoy’s, lightly brushing over his knuckles.

“I really like you, Draco,” Harry whispered, finally turning to look at him, “even though I’m not sure I should,”

“You probably shouldn’t,” he whispered back, “but I really like you,”

And even though he knew that he shouldn’t, Harry leant towards Draco and was quite pleased when he leaned forward, too.

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Chapter End Notes

Loooorrrddd, I've missed writing Drarry.

Anyway, thanks for reading!

<3
It was strange how two years apart could change a relationship with someone. Even when that someone was family. Harry felt as though he no longer knew how to speak to his own sister, a stark contrast from the time in their lives when she was the only person that he ever spoke to. He hovered awkwardly in the kitchen and looked out into the garden where Lydia was sat alone, her head bowed. He wondered what eight year old Harry would think if he knew that seventeen year old Harry was too scared to speak to her.

After a few more minutes of awkwardly standing in the kitchen and realising how stupid he was being, Harry walked out into the garden and slowly sat down next to her. Immediately feeling terrible when she jumped so violently that she almost spilled her cup of tea all over herself.

“Sorry,” he said hurriedly, “Sorry, I should have - I should have made a noise or something.”

“It’s fine,” she said quietly, “It’s not your fault,”

He smiled at her, “You alright?”

Lydia shrugged.

“I don’t know. I don’t really feel alive. Do you know what I mean?”

Harry wanted to say that he knew exactly what she meant, but he really didn’t. She must have realised this because she sighed and shook her head.

“Never mind. I didn’t think you would. I barely know what I mean,”

“I’m glad you’re back, though,” Harry said, trying to keep his tone light, “I missed you,”

“I’d say I missed you but...it feels like yesterday,” she sighed again, “who - who found me?”

“Hagrid,”

Lydia closed her eyes as a tear rolled down her cheek.

“Merlin, I should have just gone as deep into the Forest as possible, shouldn’t I?”

“No, because then no one would have found - hey, this doesn’t even matter,” he said, “You’re here and you’re OK. That’s the only thing that matters right now,”

They fell into silence and Harry wondered if talking to her was only making things worse.

“Did I miss anything fun?” Lydia asked, breaking the silence, “because the only stories that people have been telling me aren’t fun,”

Harry turned to look at her and was about to tell her about him and Draco but quickly stopped himself. For the entirety of his sixth year at Hogwarts, he had beat himself up about the fact that he had never told her that he was bisexual, and lamented the fact that she would never know about him and Draco. Now that he had the chance, something was stopping him. Perhaps it was the fear that she would not accept it, or maybe he was terrified that she would begin to treat him differently.
“What?” she asked, “what is it?”

“I...I...” he had imagined this moment countless times, but now that it was here, he had no idea how to put it into words, “I have something to tell you,”

“Yeah, I gathered that,” Lydia said, almost sounding like her old self.

“And no matter what, I’m still your brother, right?”

Lydia frowned at him, “Harry, what are you on about?”

“I’m bisexual,”

“Oh,”

“And I spent the better half of last year snogging Draco Malfoy,”

Lydia stared at him for a few moments and his heart dropped to his stomach. He could not quite work out what the expression on her face was and began to prepare himself for the worst.

“I sort of knew,” she said, “Well, not about Malfoy, obviously but...I don’t know. You being bisexual kind of...makes sense,” she paused before adding, “you spent far too much time staring at Cedric Diggory to be straight,”

“So, you aren’t pissed off about it?” Harry asked, deciding to ignore the Cedric Diggory comment.

“No,” Lydia said quickly, “No, of course I’m not. The only thing I’m pissed off about is the fact that you cursed me the other day,”

“Yeah...I’m sorry about that,” Harry sighed, “but, seriously, you’re OK with it? All of it?”

She nodded, “I’m happy for you, H, I really am,”

Harry could feel them getting closer and closer to the subject that he really didn’t want to talk about. For a moment, he considered changing the subject completely before deciding that if they were going to talk about it, he’d start the conversation. At least then Lydia wouldn’t be able to throw the question at him out of nowhere and catch him off guard.

“You, um, you haven’t asked about George,”

She smiled at him and looked down at the cup of tea in her hands.

“When no one mentioned him to me, I just assumed that it was because he has a girlfriend and no one wanted to be the one to tell me,”

“I mean...yeah, that is...yeah. No one wanted to tell you,” Harry admitted, “Hermione was going to do it, but she kept on saying that it wasn’t ‘the right time,’ or something,”

Lydia snorted and took a sip of her tea, “I’m just glad that I didn’t have to have this conversation with Ron,”

“Are you - are you OK?”

“I didn’t expect the entire world to stop for me, H. I knew that once I was gone, the world would move on...and I’m glad it did. I’m glad you moved on, I’m glad that Ron and Hermione did, I’m glad that George did...”
“I don’t know if we ever moved on...”

“You moved forward, then,” she said, “So, is she nice. George’s girlfriend? And don’t lie and say
that she’s a bitch, because I know she won’t be,”

Harry laughed quietly, “I’ve only met her once but she’s nice, yeah.”

“I’m glad,”

As much as he wanted to, Harry did not tell her that when George lost a ear, he had asked for her.

“What else is new, then?” Lydia asked, “Why have you three been talking to Griphook?”

Harry quickly filled her in on everything with Griphook and the Mr Ollivander, explaining the
situation with the wands and the fact that they were convinced there was another Horcrux in
Bellatrix’s vault.

“We just need to get in somehow,” Harry said, “Which means that we have to be break into Gring-”

“I don’t want to know,” Lydia interrupted, “I’ll join the fight when I have to but right now...I need to
sort my head out. I need to get used to the world again,”

“You don’t need to fight again, Lyds. You’ve done more than enough for us,”

Harry had assumed that that was the only conversation that he would get out of Lydia for the rest of
the day, but he did not complain about it. Her being alive was more than enough and he was not
going to start complaining about the fact that she wasn’t speaking as much as she used to. That night,
however, it was Lydia would found him, Ron and Hermione upstairs discussing the plans for
breaking into Gringotts and announced that they were going to build a bonfire, and there was no
excuse for any of them to join. No one argued, of course, and the three of them hastened to join her
around the fire. The other inhabitants of Shell Cottage seemed to understand that this was what the
four of them needed more than anything, and gave them their space.

“Do you think we could just live out the rest of the war here?” Ron asked, stretched out in the grass
with his hands folded across his stomach.

“I wish,” Harry said, “but I think we might be needed to help finish it,”

“We aren’t far off now,” Hermione said.

“And you know that, how?” Ron asked.

Hermione shrugged, “I don’t know. I just...I feel like we’re getting closer and closer to the end,”

Beside him, Harry heard sniffling and turned to look at Lydia who was quietly crying.

“Lyds!” Hermione exclaimed, jumping as though she had been stung, “What’s - what’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, wiping her eyes, “I’m sorry. It’s just that...everyone has changed so much and I
- I feel like I barely know anyone, anymore! And this war is still happening and I just want everyone
to be safe! I thought what I did was going to make everyone safe, but it hasn’t! It’s like...I did it for
nothing! God, I was better off death because then at least I didn’t know how terrible everything-”

“Don’t let it destroy you,” Ron said quietly.

Lydia froze, “What?”
“Don’t let it destroy you,” Ron said, louder this time. He was still lay on his back, “in those letters you wrote us, that’s what you wrote. Maybe you should take your own advice,”

“How pretentious of me,” Lydia muttered, “I can barely remember writing them,”

“Well, if it makes you feel better, you referred to me as a ‘overly-freckled knobhead,”

“I wasn’t wrong,” Lydia said, “You are an overly-freckled knobhead,”

“Piss off, Potter,” he snapped.

“You wish, Weasley,”

Hermione smiled and looked over at Harry.

“Oh, just like old times,”

“Oh, just like old times,” he agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!
Lydia felt as though she had forgotten how to be a person. It was a strange thing to think, but an even stranger thing to feel. Whenever someone spoke to her, even if it was just a simple, ‘good morning’, she would not know how to reply. She felt awkwardly out of place in every room she was in, and became paralysed with fear every time she would have to do something in front of two or more people in case they thought she was being strange. She had held an apple core in her hand for an hour because she had been too scared to stand up and put it in the bin. It was only when Bill stood up to put something in the bin that Lydia did.

And on top of all this, she was reeling from how much time had passed and how much had changed. She was still trying to work out how on earth two years could have passed when they had only been at the Ministry hours ago. And she was trying to work out how so much had happened in those two years: Dumbledore was dead, Voldemort was out in the open, the Ministry had fallen under his control and, perhaps strangest of all, Harry and Draco Malfoy were in a relationship.

Lydia glanced over at them and frowned. They were sat at a table in the garden with Luna and Dean, all talking as if they had been friends forever. But it did not weird Lydia out in the way that she had expected it do; she found it strange, but it sort of made sense in her mind. As she thought about it more though, she realised that she had never really thought of Harry as straight. Of course, she had never given that much thought to her brothers sexuality on account of the fact that it was none of her business, but after years of watching him stare at the likes of Cedric Diggory, Blaise Zabini and, of course, Draco Malfoy, she had always just assumed that he would talk when he was ready.

And she sort of wished that Harry being bisexual was a bigger deal than it actually was, because at least then she wouldn’t still be reeling from the fact that he had cursed her. It wasn’t the first time that he had ever cursed her; training for the third Triwizard Tournament task and teaching the DA had lead to him Stupefying her on numerous occasions, but it never came from a place of ill will. But that day on the beach...

Tears sprang to her eyes whenever she thought about it. The way that he had looked at her and shouted at her was completely alien to her. No one had ever looked at her with such contempt as Harry had done, even after years of living with Uncle Vernon and meeting the Dark Lord himself. And although she had been hit with Depulso more times than she had had hot dinners, it somehow hurt more coming from Harry. She would rather have Bellatrix Lestrange torture her for the rest of her life than go through Harry thinking that she was a death eater again.

And, of course, there was George. George who had no idea she was alive and George who had moved on without her...she found that she wasn’t angry at him for moving on. She wasn’t even upset. She was just...disappointed. There had been stupid, naive part of her that was convinced that he would be waiting for her somewhere.

“Hey,”

Lydia turned around to see Daphne. She looked at her with raised eyebrows but moved to the side slightly, inviting her to sit down.

“Your mum is really nice, by the way,” Lydia said, deciding that she would be the one to initiate the conversation for once.
“I know,” Daphne sighed, “If I become even half the person she is, I can die happy,” she blushed, “Sorry, I shouldn’t have mentioned di-”

“It’s fine,” Lydia said hurriedly, “I’m not going to have a nervous breakdown,”

Daphne laughed, “You must be sick of everyone walking on eggshells around you,”

Lydia shrugged.

“I feel like I’m the one who’s walking around on eggshells. It’s like I’ve forgotten how to react around people! So much has changed!”

She wasn’t entirely sure why she was felt comfortable enough to talk about these things in front of Daphne. Despite living together for five years, they barely knew one another, but Lydia was struck by how much it was like talking to Hermione.

“Tell me about it,” Daphne muttered, “I was suddenly best friends with Neville Longbottom and a part of the DA,”

“I’m genuinely amazed by that,” Lydia told her, “joining the DA, I mean. Your mum mentioned what’s going on at Hogwarts,”

“Someone had to be the rebellious Slytherin,”

“I think I was more annoying than rebellious,”

“Is there a difference?”

“Speaking of rebellious Slytherins...” Lydia said as Draco walked by with Luna.

Daphne laughed loudly at this.

“Harry told you, then? Did he tell you about our fake relationship?”

Lydia stared at her.

“Your what?”

Daphne clapped a hand over her mouth as she giggled.

“To hide the fact that he and Draco were together, we pretended to be together,” she laughed, “It lasted for about a month. It was hilarious though,”

Lydia laughed and shook her head, “I can think of many different ways to hide the fact that they were together...”

“Yeah, so can I now that I look back at it but...everything sort of fell apart when you weren’t there,” Daphne said, frowning.

“Which is strange, because I’m usually the one to fuck things up,”

“That’s not true!”

“It’s slightly true...”

Daphne paused for a while and then nodded.
“Yeah, you are right, actually. Weren’t you the cause of all arguments in the Slytherin common room?”

“It’s a talent,”

That evening, Lydia tried to include herself in the conversation when they were having dinner, but it was extremely difficult. They were all talking about things that she had never been part of - the opening of Fred and George’s shop, Slughorn’s Christmas Party, Bill and Fleur’s wedding...it took Lydia the length of three anecdotes to realise that Slughorn was a person and not a place.

When Hermione was halfway through complaining about Cormac McLaggen whilst Ron turned more and more red, there was a series of frantic knocks on the door. At once, Lydia’s blood ran cold and she was sure that He had found them. Griphook slipped out of sight underneath the table and Draco looked like he was close to joining them.

“Who is it?” Bill called, standing up with his wand drawn.

Deciding that if she was going to die again, she would do so fighting, Lydia stood up and drew her own wand.

“It is I, Remus John Lupin, a werewolf married to Nymphadora Tonks and-”

“Oh, fuck off, moony!” exclaimed a familiar voice that made Lydia’s heart leap in her chest, “Bill! Just let us in!”

“You know I can’t just-” Bill began, but the voice cut him off.

“It’s me, James Potter, a man who just wants to see his kids - both his kids - and will happily break down the door as my animagus form, a stag, if you don’t fucking open it!”

“I think eet ees ’im, Bill,” Fleur said casually.

“Yeah, I realise that now,” Bill muttered, striding over to the door and opening it, “Honestly, James, you don’t have to-”

But whatever James didn’t need to do they never found out. He all but leapt across the threshold and shoved Bill into the wall, his eyes sweeping the room, followed by a very apologetic Remus.

“Lyds,” James whispered, launching himself at her and pulling her into a bone crushing hug, “Oh, sweetheart, you’re alive, you’re alive. Are you OK?” he pulled away and wiped the tears from her eyes, kissing her forehead, “You’re going to be alright. It’s going to be alright. We’re alright,”

Lydia could not find the right words to say and just clung onto her dad like he was her lifeline. It was strange how one simple hug and a few comforting words from the right person would make everything seem right again.

“Harry, come here,” James said, holding out his hand, “Are you alright, son? Is everything alright?”

“It is now,” Harry said.

“Can I ask a question?” Lydia asked, extracting herself from James’ arms, “Is Remus married to...is Remus married to Tonks?”

“We also, um, we also have a baby,”

Behind her, Hermione shrieked.
“You had the baby?”

“Yes!” Remus exclaimed, looking the happiest that Lydia had ever seen him, “He’s called Teddy! After Dora’s father! And he’s a Metamorphmagus! His hair was blue the last time I left, but Merlin knows what colour his hair is now!” he beamed as he took out pictures and showed them to everyone, “and I made James godfather!”

“I officially have three children now!” James beamed happily, “Well...five, really, if you count Ron and Hermione,”

Lydia glanced over at Ron and Hermione who looked both shocked and touched at James counting them as family. Lydia wondered if they had ever really thought that they weren’t family.

It was at this moment that Lydia realised that it didn’t matter that she was confused about the life that she had been thrust back into; it barely mattered that there was a genocidal maniac after them, because she had the strongest, most loving family in the world. And that was more than enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!
The plan to break into Gringotts had been decided, and Harry had never heard of such a terrible idea in his life. The more he sat and thought about it, the more holes he could see in the plan, but there was no point in dwelling on it; they could not think of a better idea and they needed to find the cup.

“So, is the plan ready?” Lydia asked, sitting next to him.

“Yeah,” Harry said, “Yeah, Hermione’s just sorting out the finer details with Griphook,”

“I’ll come with you if you want me to butt-”

“I don’t want you to come with us,” Harry said firmly, “Go and stay with dad. You don’t need to do anything else,”

Saying goodbye to her was a lot difficult than Harry had thought it was going to be. There was an underlying tension in the way that they hugged each other goodbye, and Harry knew that it was because they were both thinking the same thing - what if they never saw each other again? He could not think of anything crueler than one of them dying after being reunited again.

“I can’t believe you’re breaking into Gringotts without me,” she muttered.

“I don’t think it’s going to be fun, Lyds,” Hermione said, frowning at her.

“Come on, ‘Mione! You’re breaking into Gringotts, what isn’t fun about that?” Lydia exclaimed.

Even though Harry could have listed a great number of things that weren’t fun about breaking into Gringotts, he did not. She sounded like her old self, and he didn’t want to be the one to ruin that.

“If you see a dragon I’m going to be pissed off,” Lydia said.

“If we see a dragon I’m going to be pissed off,” Ron said, “I don’t want to come face to face with a dragon!”

The next morning, Harry, Ron and Hermione woke up much earlier than the rest of Shell Cottage. Ron had told Bill and Fleur that they would be leaving, but there was no need to see them off. They had both been extremely suspicious but had not pushed him to say anything further.

The day started off badly: Harry stood in the kitchen with Hermione, trying to convince her to take Draco with them, but she was having none of it. Draco was stood next to him and eating a bowl of cereal, very much looking like he wanted the ground to swallow him.

“He would help, Hermione!” Harry said earnestly.

“He would bring unwanted attention,”

“I bring unwanted attention! Namely the attention of the Dark Lord!”

Hermione rolled her eyes and turned to look at Ron.

“What do you think? Should we bring him?”
“Harry? Definitely not, he’s annoying,”

“Ronald...”

Ron sighed and shrugged, “We all bring unwanted attention at this point, don’t we? We’re all in pretty deep shit,” he paused and then added, “he’s also sick at duelling, which might help,”

“Did you - did you just compliment me, Weasley?” Draco asked hesitantly.

“Don’t get excited. It was a once in a lifetime sort of thing,”

“We can disguise him,” Harry said, “Like we are with Ron. It’ll be fine,”

Hermione groaned, “Fine, but on your head be it!”

They left the house very quickly after this, careful not to wake Dean and Luna up. Hermione was already wearing Bellatrix’s robes and looked very odd in them. She beckoned Ron over to her and began to mutter spells under her breath, slowly moving her wand over his face. Harry watched in amazement as his nose grew larger and his eyebrows bushier, almost hiding his face. His freckles dissolved into nothingness and were replaced with three long scars. Harry thought he looked more like Bill than usual until Hermione waved her wand again and his hair turned from it’s usual red to black.

“How do I look?” Ron asked, turning to Harry.

“Not my type, but you’ll do,” Harry said.

He looked mildly offended.

“What do you mean I’m not your type?”

Harry stared at him, “Seriously? You’re getting annoyed by that right now?”

Ron turned to Draco, “Do I look like your type?”

Draco was saved from having to answer by Hermione beginning to disguise him. By the time she was finished, Harry could barely recognise him. His hair was light brown and fell to his shoulders. His skin had some colour to it and his face was fuller than usual.

“If you say he’s your time, I’m never going to speak to you again,”

“And looking rather perplexed, Hermione took a swig of the Polyjuice Potion. Harry couldn't help but look on in disgust as she transformed into Bellatrix Lestrange. It was quite disconcerting, actually, watching your best friend turn into someone he hated. Draco looked the most uncomfortable out of them all and it suddenly occurred to Harry that Bellatrix was his Auntie. It would have been like Hermione turning into Aunt Petunia, which would be enough to send anyone running in the opposite direction.

"How do I look?" Hermione asked in Bellatrix's voice.

"Terrible," Ron said, "but in the best way,"

Griphook walked over to them.
"Let's get this over and done with, shall we?"

Harry bent down and allowed Griphook to climb onto his back. Draco threw the Invisibility Cloak over them and after a lot of time making sure that his feet could not be seen, they joined hands and Apparated to outside of the Leaky Cauldron. Inside, the pub was almost deserted, a stark contrast to how Harry was used to finding the pub. The only customers sat at the bar took one look at Hermione and slunk away into the shadows. It was almost impressive, the effect that Bellatrix had on people.

"Madam Lestrange," murmured Tom, bowing his head as Hermione walked past.

"Good morning," said Hermione.

Next to Harry, Draco tutted.

"You're being too nice. She'd never say that," he hissed in her ear.

"OK, OK!"

Out in the tiny backyard, Hermione took out Bellatrix's wand and tapped a brick on the wall. At once, it began to spin and whirl, opening an entrance into Diagon Alley - but not a Diagon Alley that Harry recognised. The shops were not due to open for hours and there was barely anyone around. Anyone who was around hurried past them, their heads bent low. Most shops had been boarded up, but the ones that remained were now dedicated to the Dark Arts. Harry glanced over at Weasley's Wizard Wheezes and saw, with a pang, that the windows had been smashed in. He wondered if Fred or George knew what had come of their shop but quickly pushed this thought from his mind; he needed to be worrying about Gringotts, not a joke shop.

They hurried down the street and Harry's eyes were always drawn to the posters of his face that covered the shop walls, occasionally joined by a picture of Ron or Hermione. Harry suddenly banged into Draco, who had stopped dead in his tracks.

"Ouch!" Harry hissed, "Draco, what are you-"

"Look," he whispered, pointing at a poster hanging in a doorway where a group of beggars were huddled.

At first, Harry had no idea what was so upsetting about this poster, but then he peered closer at it and felt his heart drop to his stomach. It was a picture of Draco that beared the words, "TRAITOR TO THE DARK LORD - TO BE KILLED.", Bringing Draco along suddenly felt like the worst idea in the world. If they were caught, and it was highly likely that they would be, then Draco would be killed. Tears sprang to Harry's eyes almost immediately and he had never been more thankful for the Invisibility Cloak in his life. He would be able to add Draco to the list of people that he was responsible for being dead, joining Cedric, Sirius and, no doubt, Ron and Hermione.

"Let's just keep moving," Hermione whispered, "it's more dangerous if we just-"

"MY CHILDREN!" a man suddenly bellowed, launching himself at Hermione, "WHERE ARE THEY? YOU KNOW! YOU KNOW!"

"I - I-" Hermione stammered.

His hands were almost around her throat but there was a bang and a burst of red light and he fell back to the floor. Harry turned to see Draco stood there, his wand outstretched with a look of shock on his face.
"Thank-you," Hermione said timidly, massaging her neck.

"Let's just keep going," Ron said, casting a wary look at the man on the ground.

Their entrance into Diagon Alley could not have been more conspicuous if they tried. Harry wanted to suggest that they should leave and come back another day, but before he could, someone called out from behind them.

“Why, Madam Lestrange!”

Harry turned around. A tall, thin wizard was striding towards them.


Harry leant forward and whispered his name in Hermione’s ear.

“Travers,” Hermione said, her voice shaking slightly, “how are you?”

“Well, I confess that I am surprised to see you out and about, Bellatrix,”

“Really? Why?”

“Well...” Travers trailed off and looked slightly awkward, “I did hear that the inhabitants of Malfoy Manor were confined to the house after the escape of the Potter’s and your nephews betrayal,”

“The Dark Lord forgives those who have served him most faithfully in the past. Perhaps your credit is not as good with him as mine is, Travers,” Hermione replied in a way that was very reminiscent of Bellatrix.

“Is it true then?” he asked, “is she back? The Potter Girl?”

Harry’s breath hitched in his throat.

“No,” Bellatrix replied, “I don’t know who you’re sources are, Travers, but they aren’t very reliable,”

Though the Death Eater looked slightly offended, he did look less suspicious of them and Harry felt himself calm down. He glanced over at Ron and Draco, frowning slightly.

“Forgive me, but I do not recognise your two friends...”

“This is Dragomir Despard,” Hermione said, indicating Ron, “And Alexandre Clermont-”

“Bonjour,” Draco said in a French accent that was so good, Harry couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows at him.

“So, what brings you and your, ah, sympathetic friends to Diagon Alley this morning?”

“Gringotts,” Hermione replied.

“Why, me too!” Travers exclaimed and Hermione had no choice but to fall into step with him.

Harry, Draco and Ron followed behind. They slowly walked up the steps of Gringotts Bank. Two wizards stood on either side of the door, holding what Harry recognised to be Probity Probes.

“Confundo,” Harry whispered at the two wizards.
Unnoticed by Travers, he carried on into Gringotts and Hermione followed. She was almost through the doors when one of the Wizards stopped her.

“One moment, Madam!” he said, walking towards her and raising his Probe.

“You’ve just done that!” Hermione said indignantly.

“You have checked them all, Marius…” the other one said, looking ever so slightly dazed.

Hermione swept past them with Ron and Draco, and Harry very quickly followed. Griphook was getting heavier on Harry’s back and it felt as though the Goblin was beginning to strangle him. And Harry felt like it might have been on purpose.

Hermione allowed Travers to step in front of her under the pretext of explaining the features of the hall to Ron and Draco. And then, she stepped forward to a goblin and cleared her throat.

“M-Madam Lestrange!” He said, obviously startled, “Dear me! How may I help you today?”

“I wish to enter my vault,” said Hermione.

The goblin seemed to recoil a little. Harry glanced around the vast hall and seemed that most goblins had stopped working to look at them.

“You have...identification?” The goblin asked.

“Identification? I have never been asked for identification before!” Hermione said.

“Your wand, will do,” the goblin said.

They knew. Voldemort must have informed the Gringotts goblins that an imposter might try and break into Gringotts and that Bellatrix no longer had her wand. If Hermione handed her wand over now, it would be game over for them...and Harry could do nothing but watch as Hermione, hand shaking slightly, handed the wand over.

“Imperio him, imperio him!” Griphook hissed in his ear.

Without having time to think about what this really meant, Harry lurched forward and very quickly whispered _Imperio._

“Ah,” the Goblin said, “yes, I see you have had a new wand made!”

“A new wand?” Travers asked, striding over to them, “But how could you have done? Which wand maker did you use?”

“And him!” Griphook whispered.

_“Imperio,”_ Harry whispered, pointing his wand at Travers and feeling very strange for casting a spell that he thought that he never would.

“Yes, I see,” he said, looking down at the wand, “yes, very handsome. And is it working well? I always think wands require a little breaking in, don't you?”

Hermione looked shocked but managed to go along with it, and Harry was more thankful than ever that Hermione was so quick thinking.

Amazingly, everything went to plan and the goblin slid smartly off his chair and lead them into the
rough stone passageways that lead to the vaults. When the door closed with a bang behind them, Harry whipped off the Invisibility Cloak. Neither the goblin nor Travers seemed surprised to see Harry Potter suddenly in their midst, and he was pleasantly surprised at how good his Imperius curse was.

“They’re imperiused,” Harry quickly explained to Ron and Draco who looked confused, “We’re in trouble though, they suspect something’s going on,”

“What do we do?” Ron asked, ‘get out whilst we can and think of a better plan?’

“We’ve gotten this far,” Harry said, “I reckon we might as well get going. Also, we have no idea what’s happening out there,” he nodded towards the rest of the bank.

“He’s right,” Draco said quietly, “There’s no point in giving up now,”

“Good!” said Griphook, making Harry jump. He had not even realised that he had jumped off his back, “We need Bogrod to control the cart. I no longer have the authority to do so...but there will be no room for the wizard,”

Harry pointed his wand at Travers, “Imperio!” He turned and set off along the dark track at a fast pace.

“What’d you make him do?” Ron asked.

“Hide,” said Harry. He pointed his wand at Bogrod. The goblin whistled and a little cart came trundling along the tracks towards them.

They piled in quickly. Harry was sure that he could hear shouting behind them in the rest of the bank but it did not matter as the cart took off at once and Harry could no longer hear anything over the sounds of the cart rattling on the track. The more he thought about the plan, the more stupid it seemed. They could have just pretended to go to another vault and then had the goblin take them to Bellatrix’s...

It was too late to go back now, though as they were deeper into Gringotts than Harry had ever been. He heard the sounds of rushing water just ahead of them and looked up to see a waterfall pounding over the tracks.

“NO!” Griphook shouted, but it was too late.

As the water poured over them, Harry felt the cart lurch forward and his body suddenly became weightless as he was thrown the air, vaguely aware of the others flying besides him. Closing his eyes before the impact, Harry heard Hermione shriek something and suddenly, he felt himself fall slowly to the ground and landed painlessly on the floor.

“C-Cushioning Charm,” Hermione spluttered, “I remembered Dumbledore using it on Harry after that Quidditch Match in third year...”

Draco helped Harry to his feet.

"Oh, fuck!" Harry yelled, catching sight of Draco's face.

"Hey!" Draco exclaimed, "I know I don't look like myself but there's no need to-"

"No, you look like yourself! That's the problem!"
“The Thief's Downfall!” Griphook said, clambering to his feet, “it washes away all enchantments and magical concealments. They know something is happening and have set all defences against us,”

Harry turned round to Bogrod and quickly pointed his wand at him, “Imperio!”

“This was a terrible plan. Can I say that?” Draco asked, looking around at them all.

“Yes, well, we’re here now,” Harry muttered. He looked up suddenly as he heard the sound of running footsteps.

Before anyone could do anything, Draco had stepped forward and pointed his wand upwards, “Protego!” He turned around and looked at their shocked faces, “They won’t be able to get to us,”

“Good thinking,” Hermione said, looking genuinely shocked, “How far now, Griphook?”

“Not far now, not far now...” Griphook said, “this way,”

They turned a corner and saw something that Harry knew would be there, but was still not prepared. The dragon lay curled up on the ground, protecting four or five of the deepest and oldest vaults in the bank. It's scales had turned pale from the lack of sunlight and its eyes were milky and pink. It was chained to the ground by its rear legs, both of which were bleeding a raw. Harry’s immediate reaction was to draw his wand on it, but the closer he looked at it, the more depressing it became. Great beasts like this weren't meant to be held up underground.

“It's partially blind,” said Griphook, “but even more savage for that. We have learned how to control it though,” he pointed at a bag close to Ron, “hand them out. They’re called Clankers. The dragon is trained to expect pain when he hears them,”

“That’s awful,” Hermione said, but Griphook either did not hear or did not care about the dragon enough to answer. He began to shake the Clanker and the Dragon immediately began to cower under his wings.

“Quick,” Griphook said, pointing at one of the vaults, “Get Bogrod to put his hand on the door of the vault, that will open it,”

Harry turned his wand on Bogrod and they hurried forward. The Lestrange vault was bigger than any that Harry had ever been in before. It was stacked high with gold and silver that glinted in the light of the lanterns that hung from the ceiling. He suddenly felt very overwhelmed looking at it all and wondered if destroying everything in sight was their best bet.

“Remember, it's the Cup we need to find. It has Hufflepuffs symbol on it,” Harry said quickly, looking around, “it’s here...it must be...,”

The more Harry looked, the more everything seemed to blend together. After a few minutes, it was just like one giant ball of gold and silver.

“There!” Draco cried, pointing into the top corner of the vault.

Harry turned around too quickly and accidentally touched a goblet next to him.

“Ouch!”

His hand began to burn and from the goblet, more identical copies of it appeared, “what’s going on?”

“Don’t touch anything!” Hermione said quickly, but just as she said it, Ron touched a silver plate and
that too multiplied.

“Shit!” He exclaimed, staring down at his hand, “ah, Merlin!”

“How are we going to get it without touching anything?” Harry asked, desperately looking around.

“The - ouch! - the sword!” Hermione yelled.

There was a rush of silver plates that caused Draco to fall into an entire shelf of gold and they all came crashing down onto him.

“Harry, hurry!” Draco yelled.

“Levicorpus!” Hermione said, pointing to Harry.

Hoisted into the air by his ankle, Harry took the sword of Hermione and put it through the handle of the cup, picking it up. Thankfully, it did not multiply.

“Liberacorpus!” Harry said, and he fell back to the floor again, the sword dropping out of his hand. He jumped to his feet in complete pain and spun around, “the sword! Where is it? It has the cup on it!”

Griphook saw it before they did and lunged towards it. Evidently, he had not trusted them to give the sword to him when they had gotten out of here. He grabbed it, and as he did so, the cup was flung through the air. Harry dived forward and caught it in his hand, screaming as it multiplied and began to burn her skin.

Ron’s hand closed around his arm and pulled him up. Griphook was already out of the vault and, clutching the sword to his chest, he ran through the chamber outside screaming, “Thieves! Thieves! Help! Help!”

“Come on!” Draco called to them, “they’re going to be here soon!”

Now waist deep in burning hot treasure, they fought through it, desperate to get to the door. Harry held the cup over his head, terrified of losing it in the vault. Finally, with one final push, Harry fell out of the vault and onto the hard, cold floor outside. But his relief at feeling something cold was temporary as a horde of goblins made their way over to them.

Draco was the first out of them all to get back up, “Stupefy!”

As quickly as possible, Harry, Ron and Hermione joined in, sending stunning spells into the crowd of goblins. Wizard guards seemed to appear out of nowhere and sent stunning spells straight back and Harry could see no way out of this. He glanced to the side of him and watched as Draco sent stunning spell after stunning spell at the crowd advancing on them.

“DOWN!” Ron yelled, kicking them to the ground as the dragon let out an almighty roar and bellowed fire over their heads.

“We don't have to die!” Draco yelled suddenly.

“What?” Ron asked, “have you gone mad?”

“We don't have to die!” he repeated, “come on! Follow me!”

“He’s gone mad!” Ron yelled at Harry as though it was his fault.
Draco grabbed Hermione and pushed her up off the ground, beckoning for the Ron and Harry to follow them. Harry was quite sure that he agreed with Ron that Draco was indeed going mad as he seemed to be walking *towards* the dragon and not away from it.

“*Relashio!*” The cuffs broke with a loud bang and Harry suddenly realised what Draco was doing.

“Brilliant!” Harry yelled at Draco, “absolutely brilliant!”

“Wait, what are you-?” Hermione called.

“Get up! Come on!” Harry yelled, shoving Hermione and Ron towards the dragon, “ON! NOW!”

They clambered onto the dragon quickly and seconds later, it realised that it was untethered. It gave a great roar and then reared, stretching it's great wings and taking flight. It clawed away at the ceiling, but it wasn't getting very far. Already, the remaining guards and goblins on the first were pulling themselves back together and shooting spells at them.

“*Defodio!*” Hermione yelled, “come on! It's a gouging spell! Quick!”

The others quickly joined in and within minutes, they had carved a passageway big enough for the dragon. It gave another great roar and flew upwards, perhaps able to smell the freedom it had so longed for. And, at last, by the force of the dragons strength and their combined spells, they had made it into the marble hallway, scattering the goblins and wizards that were still there.

Harry clung onto Draco as the dragon forced itself out of the metal doors and into the sky above Diagon Alley. Behind them, he could hear Hermione quietly sobbing and he suddenly remembered that Hermione had a massive fear of flying. In front, Ron was swearing over and over again and there might have been a few times when he threatened to kill Draco for making them do this.

Finally, after what felt like hours, the dragon dipped suddenly and Harry looked over the edge of it. They were flying over water and Harry suddenly had a terribly stupid idea.

“JUMP!” Harry yelled.

“What?” Hermione yelled back but he had already gone over the sid of the dragon and splashed into the water below.

Knowing Hermione would rather stay on the dragon for the rest of her life than jump from such a height, Harry grabbed her around the middle and ignoring her cries of protest, he dragged her off the dragon with him and they splashed into the water. His robes weighing him down for a moment, Harry thrashed around and kicked his legs, breaking the surface and looking around for the others. He did a quick headcount and was thankful to see that everyone was still with them.

They swam to the edge of the water and staggered out of the water, coughing and spluttering. Ron took one look at them and burst into laughter. It took a moment, but then they were suddenly all laughing, tears streaming down their faces.

"Oh, Merlin, Lydia's going to *kill* us!” Hermione exclaimed, "We broke out of Gringotts on a dragon *without* her,"

“We just broke out of Gringotts,” Ron gasped, clutching his side, “on a dragon!” He turned to Malfoy and clapped him on the back, “we might not be best mates, but you just helped us a lot so...thanks,”

Draco looked shocked but was spared from answering from Harry crying out in pain. He grabbed
onto Ron’s shoulder to stop him from collapsing to the ground. He had a sudden image of Voldemort in Gringotts, surrounded by corpses.

_The boy knows about the Horcruxes... has he been destroying them? No, surely he would know if parts of his soul were being destroyed. And if the girl was alive as they were claiming... he needed to make sure that the others were safe... then he would have to go to Hogwarts, and take Nagini would have to come with him, they could not be parted, not now._

“What is it? Harry, what's going on?” Ron asked, “Harry!”

“He knows,” he said, “he knows we’re looking for the Horcruxes. Ones the snake and the other is at Hogwarts,”

“I'm guessing we’re going back to school then,” Draco said.

Chapter End Notes

This is ridiculously long, I know, I'm sorry.

Anyway, thank-you for reading!
“We can’t just stroll into Hogwarts!” Hermione exclaimed, “We need to plan! Every single one us is a wanted criminal!”

“Hermione, none of our plans have ever worked,” Harry said, “Every single time we plan something, it goes wrong! We just need to find a way back in!”

“Do you even hear yourself, Harry?” Hermione asked, “This isn’t the same a sneaking back to the common room after curfew! Hogwarts isn’t the same as it used to be! We’ll get worse than detention if we’re caught!”

“I know, Hermione, but we have to try,” Harry said, “I just want this over,”

Hermione sighed and nodded, “You’re right,”

“We’ll just have to play it by ear. I’m sure we’ll be fine,” Ron said brightly, “If we can break out of Gringotts we can break into Hogwarts,”

“Don’t let your head get too big, Weasley. We don’t have a Dragon this time,”

“Shove off, Malfoy,”

Harry insisted that they wear the Invisibility Cloak. He, Lydia, Ron and Hermione could barely fit under it properly when they were eleven, and now that they were much taller and Draco (who was almost as tall as Ron) had joined them, it was practically impossible. Hermione pointed out that their shins were on show, but Harry was adamant that they wear it.

“No one is going to see our feet!”

“No, they’re going to see our legs,” Draco muttered.

Even Ron laughed at this but Harry ignored him. He knew that seeing four pairs of bodiless legs was probably more conspicuous than seeing four of the most wanted people in the country, but the Cloak always made him feel better.

They turned on the spot and apparated to Hogsmeade. Harry barely had time to collect his thoughts before a shrieking noise broke the silence.

“Caterwauling Charm,” Draco whispered, dragging them down a tiny alley, “they knew we were coming.”

“He must have told them...” Harry muttered, his heart beating like a hammer against his chance. Perhaps Hermione had been right, they should have waited to plan...

“Let’s go now,” Hermione hissed, “and come back another-”

The sound of footsteps running cut her off. Ron groaned quietly as a death eater came into sight; he was stood at the top of the alley, looking around.

“Potter! We know you’re here!” he yelled.
Another one joined him.

“The cloak! He’ll be under that stupid cloak!”

“Accio Cloak!”

Immediately, Harry grabbed the bottom of the cloak, but it did not move.

“Not under your wrapper then? We could always call the Dementors!”

“The Dark Lord wants him alive-”

“And a Dementor won’t kill ‘im! They’ll make ‘im easier to kill if anything!”

Their argument died away as the hurried off, presumably to find the Dementors. Harry rounded on the others, his heart beating out of control. There was no way of hiding Dementors; they could see through Invisibility Cloaks and if Harry cast a Patronus, he would give them away even quicker than if he showed his face. Ron and Hermione’s were probably too well known at this point and so, out of desperation, he turned to Draco.

“You’re going to have to cast a Patronus for us,” he said quickly.

“I can’t,”

“They won’t know it’s us! Your Patronus isn’t as obvious as-”

“No, it’s not that. I can’t do the spell,”

“Just think of a happy memory!” Harry urged.

“No, Harry, I can’t. I don’t have a memory that’s happy enough,” Draco said, his cheeks tinged with pink.

An awkward silence followed this and Harry didn’t know what to say. It took Hermione saying, “let’s go now!” to break it, but it did not matter. A chill like no other fell over Harry and he knew that there was no getting away now. Echoes of his mother's dying words rang around his brain, mingled with the sounds of his dads sobs when they had found Lydia dead.

“Fuck it!” Harry exclaimed, “I’m not getting kissed by a bleeding Dementor!”

A stag burst from the end of his war, spurred on by the memory of Harry realising that Lydia was alive again. It cantered down the alley and the death eaters yelled in triumph as it passed them, illuminating their gleeful features.

“Well, this was fun whilst it lasted,” Draco said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice as he drew his wand and stood up from the floor, “No offence, Weasley, but I don’t fancy dying huddled besides you,”

“I’ll kill you before-”

Suddenly, a door besides Harry burst open. He whirled around, his wand pointing at the face of Albus Dumbledore. Harry faltered, there was no way that it could have been Dumbledore; his hair and beard weren’t as long and his eyes were dull, absent of the twinkle that Dumbledore used to have.

“Get in, all of you!” he snapped, “go upstairs. Don’t make any noise,”
Ron grabbed Harry and shoved him upstairs. Curious to know what was going on, Harry crouched in the darkness at the top of the stairs, peering back at the door. The man was still stood there, staring at one of the death eaters.

“The Potter boy is in there!” the death eater yelled, “I saw his Patronus!”

“You did not see Harry Potter’s Patronus, you idiot!” the man yelled back, “that was my Patronus! A goat! Expecto Patronum!”

A goat burst from the end of his wand and ran down the street.

“Well someone set the Caterwauling Charm off!”

“And you automatically assume it’s Harry bloody Potter? It was me! I let my cat out! I do hope you didn’t call the Dark Lord on my cat!” and he slammed the door shut.

Before he saw him, Harry retreated to join the others, all of whom were ashen faced. The man stared at them for a moment before muttering “food” and walking back out again.

“You know who that is, don’t you?” Hermione asked quietly.

“Someone who looks like Dumbledore?” Ron said.

“Dumbledore’s brother. Aberforth,”

Harry gaped at Hermione, “He’s who helped Lydia?”

“You don’t have to sound so surprised, Potter,”

Harry jumped and whirled around. Aberforth had silently walked back into the room.

“Sorry, I-”

But Aberforth waved him down.

“How is your sister, anyway? She was bloody annoying when she came here, you know. Going on about how she had to save you,”

“She’s fine,” Harry said, quite touched, “she’s with our dad,”

Aberforth nodded.

“So she is capable of making decisions that don’t involve the possibility of her dying,” Aberforth said, “you should take a leaf out of her book and go with her. Get out of the country whilst you can. All of you,”

Harry shook his head, “We can’t. We have a job to do. Something your brother told us about-”

“Oh, he did, did he? And it is a fun task?” Aberforth asked scathingly, “I already told you, leave,”

“No,” Harry said, “that’s not an option,”

“You’re seventeen. Go and live the rest of your life whilst you can,”

“We can’t live whilst You-Know-Who does! We have to kill him! We need to get into Hogwarts. Tonight,”
Aberforth laughed quietly and Harry suddenly wanted to punch him.

“Killing the Dark lord isn’t a job for you. It isn’t a job for anyone,”

“It’s a job for us,” Harry snapped.

“Anyone with half a brain knows that there’s not way out of this,” Aberforth snapped back, “he’s won,”

“He hasn’t won!” Draco said defiantly, “With Harry and Lydia still alive, he’s not won the war,”

“I thought you were a death eater, boy,”

“And I thought you were as brave as your brother,” Draco shrugged.

These words seemed to have done something to Aberforth. At first, Harry thought that Aberforth was going to try and curse Draco. Instead, he turned to face the fireplace. He looked as though he was talking to himself but then Harry noticed that he was talking to the portrait of a young girl on the wall.

“You know what to do,”

Instead of sliding sideways out of the frame like most subjects of magical paintings, the girl nodded and walked away from them. Her figure getting smaller and smaller until she could no longer been seen.

“That was your sister, wasn’t it?” Hermione asked quietly, “Ariana?”

“Have you been reading Rita Skeeter?” Aberforth asked.

“Dumbledore told us about her,” Harry said quickly.

“Yeah, but he never gave a damn about her. He never gave a damn about anyone but himself,”

Hermione gasped and hit Harry in the arm, pointing at the portrait. Ariana Dumbledore was walking back to them, but she was not alone; another figure was walking besides her, though they seemed to be limping slightly. Harry moved closer to the portrait, there was something familiar about the other figure. Before he could get a better look, the portrait swung open revealing-

“Neville!” Harry exclaimed.

“Alright?” he asked, grinning, “You all look terrible,”

“Have you seen your face recently?” Ron asked, looking at him with wide eyes.

His right eye was puffy and gave off the impression of a black eye that had been unable to heal. Blood poured from a cut in his lip and his nose seemed to be broken. His hair was overgrown and his robes were ripped and yet he still looked the happiest that Harry had ever seen him.

“I heard you’d come to the other side” he grinned at Draco.

“You’ve missed out on a lot,” Ron said, “but he’s alright. He's not a Death Eater anymore,”

“He saved my life, Neville,” Harry said quietly, “all of our lives, actually. He turned his back on his family for us,”
Neville grinned, “the more the merrier!”

He turned to Aberforth, “by the way, there’s a few more people coming in,”

“A few more people?” Aberforth asked furiously, “there's a bloody Caterwauling Charm-”

“I know, that's why they’ll be apparating directly into the bar,” Neville said as though it was the most obvious thing in the world, “When they get here, send them down the passageway, will you?”

Harry looked around, confused. They were a passageway with smooth stone steps that looked as though they had been there years and their path was lit by brass lamps that glowed brightly.

“Potter,” Aberforth called to him before the portrait swung shut behind them, “take this other mirror. You might need it,”

Harry took it, “Thank-you. You've saved our lives twice, I don't know how to-”

“Look after ‘em. I might not be around to save them a third time,”

“How long has this been here then?” Ron asked, “it's not on the Marauders Map, is it?”

“No, and all the others got sealed up,” Neville said, “There's no chance of getting out of them now, there's always loads of Dementors and Death Eaters at the other end,”

“What's happening with Hogwarts, Nev?” Hermione asked quickly, “We haven't heard anything...”

The smile faded from his face, “It's not really Hogwarts anymore. You wouldn't recognise the place. Do you know about the Carrows?”

“They do more than teach,” said Neville darkly, “they're in charge of all the discipline. They make Umbridge look tame. The other teachers are supposed to refer us to the Carrows if we do anything wrong. They don't if they can avoid it,”

“What are the lessons like?” Hermione asked.

“They aren't really lessons. Amycus, the bloke, he teaches what used to be Defence Against the Dark Arts, though really it's more about learning the Dark Arts, now. We're supposed to use the Cruciatius Curse on people who've earned detentions,”

“Merlin!” Ron exclaimed.

“Yeah,” Neville said, “Alecto, his sister, teaches Muggle Studies which is now compulsory. We’ve got to listen to her explain how Muggles are like animals, stupid and dirty, that sort of thing,” he shook his head and sighed, “I got this,” he indicated a slash on his face, “for asking how much Muggle blood she and her brother have got,”

“Blimey, Neville. There’s a time and a place for getting a smart mouth,” Ron said, though Harry thought that he sounded quite proud.

“You didn't heard her,” said Neville, “None of you would have stood for it either. Thing is though, it's good when we stand up, because it gives other people hope. I used to notice that when Lydia and Harry did, especially in fifth year,”

“Yeah, but Umbridge didn't use us as a knife sharpener, did she?” Harry said.
Neville shrugged, “Doesn’t really matter, does it? It’s like Lydia said in fifth year, sometimes you’ve gotta do what you gotta do,“

“I think she said that in reference to cursing Zacharias Smith for the fun of it…” Hermione muttered.

“Is it true then? Is she alive? Is Lydia alive?”

Harry nodded, “Alive,“

Neville burst into laughter and whooped, “What is it with Potters and coming back to life?”

They turned a corner and there ahead of them was the end of the passageway. Neville pushed the door open, grinning broadly and jumped down. Harry followed, eager to see what was hidden behind the door.

“Oi, you lot! Look who it is!”

There were several yells as Harry appeared:

“It’s Harry!”

“Ron!”

“Hermione!”

Harry had a brief glimpse of colourful hangings and many faces before he and the others were engulfed by hugs. He felt as though he was being congratulated for winning the Quidditch Cup. Eventually, Neville began to calm everyone down and managed to move everyone back from them. Draco stood behind them slightly, not quite meeting anyone’s eye.

Finally, Harry was able to take in his surroundings. They were not in any room that he recognised. Hammocks hung from the ceilings, surrounded by the tapestries of the four houses. Students sat under their houses respective tapestry.

“Is this the Room of Requirement?” Hermione asked, sounding awestruck.

“Yep! Really outdone itself, hasn’t it?” Neville said proudly.

There was a sound behind them and Harry spun around. The door opened again and more people arrived; Daphne, Luna and Dean came first, beaming and holding up their DA Galleons. At the sight of Dean, Seamus gave out a roar of delight and threw his arms around his neck, kissing him full on the mouth. Harry snorted and shook his head, thinking that it was probably about time. Then came Cho Chang who waved at him and went to sit next to Michael Corner. Next, came Ginny, Fred, George and Daisy. Ginny beamed at Harry who awkwardly smiled back. He glanced at Draco, who looked as though someone had just said something terribly offensive.

“So much for being inconspicuous…” Ron muttered.

“Nothing about you lot is inconspicuous,” Neville shrugged.

Harry’s scar suddenly burned white hot. Voldemort had realised that they had destroyed another Horcrux and was on the move again. He forced his eyes open despite the fact that he felt like someone was dripping acid onto his forehead, he looked around the room and realised that they could use these people to their advantage.

“Right,” Harry said, clapping his hands together and turning to the Ravenclaws, “We need to find
something. Do any of you lot know anything about an object that was important to Ravenclaw? Maybe something with her eagle on or something?”

“There's always the lost diadem,” Luna said.

Michael Corner rolled his eyes, “but the point of the lost diadem, is that it's lost, Luna,”

“When was it lost?” Harry asked.

“Centuries ago,” Cho said, “Flitwick says that the diadem vanished with Ravenclaw herself,”

“I don’t even know what a diadem is,” Ron whispeered.

Cho jumped up from her seat, “If you want to see what it looks like, there’s a statue in our common room. I can take you-“

“Luna can go,” Ginny said quickly.

Cho looked slightly crestfallen but did not say anything.

“Alright, Luna. Let’s get going. The sooner we get out of here, the better,”

As Harry threw the cloak over the two of them, he couldn’t help but wonder if walking out of the Room of Requirement was him simply walking to his death.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!
Lydia, James and Remus apparated directly into the Hogs Head Inn and, as Lydia could have predicted, Aberforth did not seem all too pleased to see her. In all honesty, Lydia was not all too happy to see him. The last thing she wanted to do was fight Voldemort that night, but she could not bring herself to sit back whilst Harry Ron, Hermione and countless others were putting their lives on the line.

“Are you actively trying to get yourself killed?” Aberforth grumbled at her, opening a portrait of a young girl and gesturing for them climb through, “I thought you were staying out of this? That's what your brother said,“

“So did I,” James muttered.

“I can’t sit back and let people fight a war in my name,”

Aberforth rolled his eyes.

“If you keep on walking down that tunnel, you’ll get to Hogwarts,”

“What part of Hogwarts?” Remus asked.

“I don’t bloody know! I’ve never been down it!”

“How do we know we’re not just walking into the middle of the Great Hall?”

“You don’t,”

“Wands out, I think,” James said as he helped Lydia clamber onto the mantelpiece and through the portrait, “When’s the next moon, Moony?”

“Two weeks,”

James sighed.

“shame it isn’t tonight. I think we could do with a werewolf,”

“I’m more than happy for him to not turn into a werewolf,” Lydia said, shuddering at the memory of him doing so. “No offence, Remus,” she added, wondering if that was a rude thing to say.

“None taken,” Remus muttered darkly, “I’m more than happy to not turn into a Werewolf tonight,”

They walked through the passageway in silence, listening out for anything that might suggest that death eaters were coming for there. Twice, Lydia thought that she could hear someone walking behind them only to realise that it was Remus’ footsteps echoing.

“Is that a door?” James said, pointing ahead.
“Why don’t you open it and find out?” Remus asked, a hint of impatience in his voice.

“Alright, don’t get your wand in a - ooh, it is a door!”

Lydia peered over James’ shoulder and gasped at the sight before her. If they were indeed at Hogwarts, it was a room that she had not seen before. It was massive, and looked almost like an inter-house common room with the four house banners hanging in corners of the room. Lydia glanced over at the Slytherin common room and felt her heart swell when she saw that there were a few people sat there. Before she could figure out who it was though, someone had noticed her and screams quickly rose up around them.

“Is that Lydia?”

“It can’t be!”

“Fuck me, she’s alive!”

“How is she alive?”

Before Lydia could even begin to explain herself, there were hands grabbing her and the screams quickly turned into cheers. People were crying and hugging her, shouting about how glad they were to find her alive.

“Lydia! Oh, come here, dear, oh! Arthur! Arthur! Look who it is! Oh, Lydia!” Mrs Weasley sobbed, fighting through the crowd to get to her.

Lydia took one look at Mrs Weasley and burst into tears. She had not realised how much she had missed her.

“Oh, it’s lovely to have you back, dear. But how - how are you back?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted, “I have no idea,”

Mrs Weasley sighed and wiped Lydia’s eyes, “No matter, dear. All that matters is that you’re back,” Lydia glanced around and frowned, “Where’s Harry, I thought he was-“

“Lyds?”

She felt her heart do a somersault in her chest when she heard that voice call her name. Ron and Hermione had just gotten to her when she turned around and saw George stood hand in hand with someone else.

“Hey, George,” Lydia said, fighting to keep her voice level. “You, uh, you have one ear,”

His hand went to the side of his head and he laughed awkwardly.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do. I, um, I...it was Snape,” he glanced over at who Lydia assumed was Daisy and then back up at her, “you’ve missed out on a lot,”

Lydia nodded, “that tends to happen when you’re dead,”
“I would love for the ground to swallow me up round about now,” James whispered to Remus.

“Oh, Merlin, me too…” Remus whispered back.

“I’m Daisy, by the way. George’s uh...George’s...um, I’m George’s…”

“Girlfriend?” Lydia suggested.

“Yeah,” she said blushing, “Yeah. Girlfriend.”

“Nice to meet you, Daisy,” Lydia smiled before turning her back on them and looking up at Ron and Hermione.

“Sorry,” Ron said quickly, “we probably should have told George that you were coming so-“

“It doesn’t matter, Ron,” Lydia said firmly, “I just want this war to end tonight so we can go home, alright?”

Lydia could not settle down until Harry came back. She wandered up and down the Room of Requirement, occasionally stopping to hug people who all seemed ridiculously happy about the fact that she was alive. In the end, she gravitated towards the Slytherin corner of the room. Draco, Urquhart and Daphne seemed to be the only people who weren’t mollycoddling her.

The four of them sat in silence, staring at their hands. It was strangely comforting to be surrounded by people who had had to carry the burden of Slytherins legacy on their shoulders, and it made Lydia wonder why she never spent time in the Slytherin common room when she was at school. She might have enjoyed it a bit more if she was surrounded by people like her.

“I think it’s going to end here tonight,” Urquhart said, breaking the silence.

Daphne nodded, “Yeah. I think it might,”

“And who would have thought that this is where we’d end up?” Draco muttered, glancing around the room, “I think the majority of people in this room hate me,”

“That doesn’t matter now,” Lydia said, “you’re here fighting for us. That’s all that matters,”

“Whatever happens tonight, can we - can we stick together?” Daphne asked, “if I’m gonna be murdered by the Dark Lord, I’m not going down on my own,”

“We stay together,” Urquhart agreed, “Potter? What do you say?”

Lydia glanced over at the Gryffindor corner, seeing the people she had grown up with; the Patil twins, Neville, Dean, Seamus, Lavender. There had been a time where she would have rather gouged her own eyes out than sit with the Slytherins and not the Gryffindor, but times had changed. She had changed.

“We stick together,” Lydia agreed.

As far as Lydia was aware, the world was ending.
Urquhart grabbed her by the shoulders and dragged her to the floor just as a curse exploded above her head. Daphne whirled around and shot a Stunning Spell at the death eater who was getting closer and closer to them. Word that Lydia Potter was alive and fighting had spread, but no one had on the other side had managed to confirm it yet, and they were hoping to keep it that way.

“He was a family friend,” Daphne muttered darkly, “was being the key word here,”

“Can we please keep moving? Before I bump into a family friend?” Draco asked, “or, even worse, a family member? Namely my Aunt Bellatrix,”

“This isn’t a bloody competition of who has the worst family,” Lydia explained, shoving the three of them behind her as a death eater advanced on them, “Stupefy!”

The curse caught the death eater in the chest and he fell backwards, tumbling down the stairs and out of sight.

“LYDS! LYDIA!”

Harry ran towards her, inexplicably covered in soot but smiling all the same.

“We did it! We destroyed the diadem! We only need to get the-"

A powerful force knocked them both off their feet and Lydia suddenly became weightless. She was not entirely sure what was going on until she hit the floor. Groaning, Lydia dragged herself up off the floor and placed a tentative hand to the side of her face. Her hand came away covered in blood and she almost threw up.

“Harry!” she called out, “Harry? Are you - are you ok? Where are you? Harry!”

“Here!” he shouted, holding up Draco who looked as though he had broken his leg.

Hermione, Daphne and Urquhart had managed to pull themselves out of the wreckage but Ron was nowhere to be seen. Lydia whirled around, expecting the worst but was quickly flooded with relief when she saw him with Percy. But that relief was quickly replaced with anguish when she realised what had happened.

“Fred! No! No! No!”

Bile rose in Lydia’s throat and tears sprang to her eyes as she looked at the body of Fred Weasley, still smiling. Hermione let out a small sob and gripped onto Lydia’s arm.

“George,” Lydia muttered, looking up at Hermione, “I need to find George. He can’t - he can’t find out from the wrong person!” and before anyone could shout her back, she was gone.

It took Lydia almost an hour to find George through the mess of the Battle. She saw sights that she would never be able to forget and heard cries of pain that she would never be able to unhear.

“GEORGE!” she yelled, finally spotting him just outside of the Great Hall, “GEORGE!”

But he never heard her for Lord Voldemort’s voice filled the hall, so clear that Lydia had to glance around to make sure that he had not entered the battle himself.

“You have fought valiantly. Lord Voldemort knows how to value bravery. Yet you have sustained heavy losses. Lord Voldemort is merciful. I command my forces to retreat, immediately. You have one hour. Dispose of your dead with dignity. Treat your injured.
“I speak now, Harry Potter, directly to you. You have permitted your friends to die for you rather than face me yourself. I shall wait for one hour in the Forbidden Forest. If, at the end of that hour, you have not come to me, have not given yourself up, the battle commences,”

Lydia squeezed her eyes shut, unable to believe what she was hearing - Voldemort had no idea that she was alive.

“This time, I shall enter the fray myself, and I shall find you, and I shall punish every last man, woman and child who has tried to conceal you from me. One hour,”

Suddenly, all Lydia wanted to do was protect Harry. Her mind began working in overdrive; if Voldemort did not know that she was alive and wanted to kill Harry, surely she was the best person to kill him? If she could somehow sneak up on him and take him by surprise...

Without her realising, Lydia’s legs had carried her into the Great Hall. Automatically, she looked around for George and quickly found him. He was sat on the floor with Daisy, sobbing into her shoulder. She almost walked over to him but quickly stopped herself when she realised that it wasn’t her place to do that. She wasn’t even sure what her place was, anymore.

After all, all she had been useful for in the war was dying, and she had managed to fuck even that up.

She tore her eyes from George and looked around the room; James was knelt besides Remus’ body, sobbing as Professor McGonagall crouched next to him. Tonks lay beside her husband, looking quite peaceful and all Lydia could think about was little Teddy Lupin who was suddenly an orphan. Colin Creevey was lay next to Lavender Brown, who must have sustained such terrible injuries for only her face was on show.

Lydia stood and stared at Lavender and Colin for a while, two people who she had grown up with. Two people who she had shared many laughs with in the Gryffindor Common Room and had stepped up to the plate when Dumbledore’s Army started, both gone.

Soon, Lydia could not take it any longer and she quickly exited the Hall, not noticed by anyone. She was not entirely sure where she was going. Part of her was seriously considering walking into the Forbidden Forest and letting Voldemort kill her.

“Don’t let it destroy you,” she whispered to herself, “Let it destroy Voldemort,”

But those words seemed so feeble.

Instead, Lydia walked up to Dumbledore’s office. The stone Gargoyle, slightly wrecked from the fight, let her up without the password. Once she got there, however, she realised that being there was pointless. What would it achieve apart from bringing back terrible memories of just before she died?

Sighing, Lydia dropped into the Headmaster’s chair and looked around the office. It had not at all changed, something that struck Lydia as quite odd - she had assumed that Snape would have turned it into a haven for Dark Magic the moment that he could.

In an attempt to distract herself from everything, Lydia began to open the drawers at random, shuffling through them. When she was looking through the last drawer, something caught her eye - a small black pebble. Frowning, Lydia picked it up and looked at it, wondering why on earth Snape would keep a random stone in his office.

As Lydia let her mind wander to places that it probably shouldn’t have been wandering too, she flipped the stone over in her hand and a bright light filled the room. She yelped and almost toppled
off the chair, somehow convincing herself that Voldemort had something to do with this light.

“D-Dumbledore?” Lydia gasped, her eyes adjusting to the light.

The Headmaster was stood before her, looking exactly as he had done the last time that she had seen him.

“Lydia,” he said, “You brave, brave woman,”

“What? I - I thought you were dead!”

“I am,” Dumbledore said, “what you are holding is the Resurrection Stone. It brings people back from the dead. Not truly, of course. I believe that Harry used it to speak to you,”

Lydia frowned.

“I don’t remember-”

“You wouldn’t,”

“Oh,” she said, growing more confused, “I know you’re not the real Dumbledore but do you - do you know why I’m alive?”

“The prophecy,” Dumbledore said, “You understand it, yes?”

“Neither can lives whilst the other survives,” Lydia recited, “About the Horcrux, right?”

“Quite,” Dumbledore replied, “the Killing Curse did not kill you, but the piece of Voldemort’s soul that was inside of you,”

“So why didn’t I come back straight away?”

“I believe that you were biding your time,”

“Did you know this all along?”

“I had my suspicions,”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

Dumbledore suddenly looked ashamed, “I was more than foolish in my lifetime,”

Lydia nodded and they fell into silence until she asked the question that she didn’t really want to know the answer to.

“Do you think that we’re going to win this war, Professor?”

He looked thoughtful for a moment.

“You understand that Harry has to be the one to kill Voldemort, yes?”

“No,” Lydia admitted.

“Harry and Voldemort are connected in a way that we can never understand. When Voldemort returned from the dead, it was Harry’s blood that was used. Their wands share the Phoenix feather core from the same Phoenix. Fawkes, to be exact,”
Lydia nodded. It was starting to make more sense.

“Voldemort has the Elder Wand, though,”

“He might own it, but it does not answer to him,”

“Snape?” Lydia asked.

“No,” Dumbledore said, “it belongs to Harry,”

“Harry?” Lydia exclaimed, “How?”

“Whilst Severus killed me, it was Draco Malfoy who disarmed me on the Astronomy Tower. And just a few weeks ago, Harry disarmed Draco Malfoy and thus became the owner of the Elder Wand. Though, I am not sure he is entirely aware of the fact,” Dumbledore said.

“Oh, my god!” Lydia yelled, jumping up, “I need to tell Harry!”

Dumbledore smiled at her, “Good luck, Lydia,”

She dropped the Resurrection Stone and tore from the room. Feeling, for the first time, that they could actually win.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!

Sorry for the lack of updates, but it was my birthday this weekend and I had to work extra shifts at work so that I could actually have the weekend off lmao. From now on, I should be updating as usual!
Harry felt sick. It seemed as though everything that could have gone wrong, had gone wrong. Fred was dead and Ron seemed inconsolable, some bastard had killed Colin Creevey and Teddy Lupin was an orphan. James was knelt next to Remus, sobbing, and Voldemort was coming and they still hadn’t killed the snake.

They had lost.

He sank to his knees besides James and closed his eyes. It was strange, because he did not feel how he had been expecting to upon realising that the war had not gone in their favour. If anything, he felt relieved, because at least it was over.

“What are we gonna do, dad?” Harry asked quietly.

“I don’t know, son,” James replied, his voice thick with tears, “I don’t know,”

Someone put their hand on his shoulder and Harry turned around to see Draco, looking exhausted. Harry felt his heart deflate a bit thinking about how he and Draco would probably never have a chance to try again.

“I’m sorry, Harry,”

Harry stood up in silence.

“Did you ever really think we were going to win?” Harry asked.

Draco sighed and hung his head.

“Whatever way this ends tonight, I don’t think...I don’t think anyone wins,”

Harry’s eyes travelled over to the Weasleys and he nodded.

“Yeah. No one wins,”

They stood in silence for a while. Harry watched as Kingsley ran around the Hall, trying to put everyone in some sort of order for when Voldemort came, but there was no point. They would never be able to kill the snake, and they would never be able to kill him.

There was a part of Harry that wanted to explain this to Kingsley, but he just let him be. He did not think that Kingsley Shacklebolt was the kind of man to not fight back. Harry did not think that he was the kind of man to not fight back, but he was too tired to try anymore. He just wanted it to be over.

“Harry!”

He looked up and saw Lydia running over to him, her eyes wide.

“We don’t have to lose this!” she exclaimed, grabbing his arm and dragging him out into the Entrance Hall, “We can win this! We’re going to win this!”
“No, we aren’t,” Harry said dully, “I don’t have it in me to pretend anymore,”

“The Elder Wand. It’s yours,”

“Huh?”

“You disarmed Draco, didn’t you? And who did he disarm?”

“What? I don’t know, probably loads of - oh my god, he disarmed Dumbledore!” Harry yelled, “Which means that—”

“You’re the only one who’s going to be able to kill Voldemort!” Lydia exclaimed, jumping up and down, “and when I died, I gave you the same protection that mum gave us when she died!”

Harry grinned but then reality hit him and he shook his head. Lydia’s smile faltered and she frowned at him.

“What? What is it?”

“The snake. We haven’t killed the snake,”

“When he comes, I’ll distract him and then you get to it!”

“He’ll kill you—”

“He’ll kill us all if we don’t kill Nagini! One life compared to hundreds? Thousands? Come on, H! We need to end this!”

Harry shook his head, wishing that she could understand.

“It won’t work, Lyds. You haven’t been around...you don’t what it’s been like—”

“Harry, I died so that we could end this!” she yelled, “Don’t act as though we can’t win this! You can do it, I know—”

“No, I can’t! I can’t do this!” he snapped, “it’s over, alright? We’ve lost! I can’t - I can’t face him again!”

Tears sprang to Lydia’s eyes and Harry just about stopped himself from rolling his eyes at her. She had not been with him when Dumbledore died, she had not spent months on the run, she had no idea what it had been like.

“You have to!”

“I don’t have to do anything!”

“What happened to not letting it destroy you? What happened to ending this tonight?” she yelled.

“YOU HAVE NO IDEA!” he roared, “YOU’VE BEEN SAFELY OUT OF THE WAY FOR TWO YEARS! YOU HAVE NO FUCKING CLUE WHAT IT’S BEEN LIKE, LYDIA!”

“Yes, I’ve been safely out of the way because I killed myself, Harry! It’s not like I took a nice little holiday for two years, is it?”

“No, I know. I’m sorry, Lydia, I didn’t mean to—”
“Do you think I wanted to do it?” she continued, tears streaming down her face, “Do you think I wanted it to end like that? But I did it because I had to, H. I just want this to be over, alright? And if you don’t want to kill him, fine. I’ll do it. I’m meant to be dead anyway,”

"No, you're not meant to be de-

“Um, sorry, I don’t want to - I don’t want to interrupt but...he’s here,” Neville said, appearing behind them, “Near Hagrid’s hut,”

Harry reached out and grabbed Lydia’s arm just as she ran to follow the crowd of people spilling outside.

“Harry, we really don’t have the time to carry on with this argument,”

“Which is why we’re not carrying on with this argument,” Harry said, reaching into his coat and pulling out the Invisibility Cloak, “Put this on. He doesn’t know you’re alive, we should probably keep it that way,”

“If you don’t want to do it-”

Harry shook his head.

“You’re right. Don’t let it destroy you, let it destroy Voldemort,”

Lydia grinned at him before disappearing under the cloak.

Harry took a deep breath before running to join the crowd, pushing through to get to the front where James, Ron and Hermione were. Voldemort was stood only metres away, flanked by his death eaters and a bound Hagrid.

“Harry Potter, your saving grace, has been too much of a coward to fight for you. He is more than prepared to leave you all to perish,” Voldemort spoke in a clear, loud voice and Harry wondered why he hadn’t tried to kill him yet, “Beofre I kill the boy, I’m giving you the chance to join my ranks. Or die,”

No one moved, all Harry could do was stare at Nagini who was slithering around at Voldemort’s feet. Even if Harry could get to it without being murdered, he had no idea the best way to kill it. He glanced sideways at Hermione and tried his best to ask her for Basilisk fangs without it being too obvious.

“Come, Draco,”

Harry’s head snapped up and he saw Narcissa Malfoy holding her hand out to her son.

“No,” Draco said.

“Draco,” Lucius Malofy hissed, “Come on!”

“No,” he said again, this time louder, “I told you. No,”

As inconspicuous as possible, Harry reached out and grabbed Draco’s hand, squeezing slightly. Thankfully, no one noticed for Neville walked forward.

“And who is this?” Voldemort asked.

“It is Neville Longbottom, my lord! The son of the Aurors!” Bellatrix cackled.
“Ah, yes, I remember,” said Voldemort, looking Neville up and down, “You are Pure-Blood, are you not? I am sure you will make a valuable death eater,”

“I’ll join you when hell freezes over!” Neville spat, “because it’s not over! We can still fight! We can still win!”

“You stupid boy!” Voldemort laughed, “Perhaps you can be an example of what happens when you don’t stand by me - crucio!” Neville screamed and became rigid, but he did not fall to the ground. It was like he was determined to stay upright, “You have lost. Rather like her brother, Lydia Potter was too much a coward to face me and -”

“CONFRINGO!”

Fire curled around Nagini but the snake did not seem to be injured. Harry glanced around, trying to work out where the spell had come from, but he could not see anyone.

“ACCIO SORTING HAT!”

Out of one of the smashed windows of the castle, the Sorting Hat soared through the air and landed in Lydia’s hand. She was stood on a pile of debris, Invisibility Cloak in one hand and Sorting Hat in the other. There was a gasp from the death eaters and Voldemort faltered.

"You died," he said, looking at her with narrowed eyes, "they said you killed yourself,"

"I did," she replied.

"How are you alive?"

Lydia shrugged, "I guess it’s a Potter thing. We die and then come back to life,"

"Not for long though - Avada Kedavra!"

Lydia yelped and ducked under the spell, sliding of the debris and over to Neville, shoving the Sorting Hat into his hands. Harry watched in astonishment as Neville stooped down and pulled something out of it - something long and silver. In one swift motion, Neville brought the sword down through the air and onto Nagini who had made a beeline towards him. The snake’s head spun through the air and then landed on the ground, dead.

Lord Voldemort was a mortal man.

“GREAT HALL!” Harry roared, grabbing Neville and dragging him with.

The Great Hall was soon buzzing with activity. Lord Voldemort was stood in the centre, duelling both Kinglsey and McGonagall. Ron and Hermione were expertly taking on four death eaters at once whilst a stag, who Harry could only presume was his dad, had speared two death eaters on his antlers.

“Harry!” Lydia yelled, running over to him.

“How did you - how did you know that the sword would present itself to Neville?” he asked, amazed at her genius.

“I didn’t!” she said, “I was kind of counting on it to present itself to me but it didn’t and then I just saw Neville and - GINNY! LOOK OUT!”

Harry whirled around just as Bellatrix advanced on her, about to deliver the fatal blow. Harry roared
and ran forward but Mrs Weasley beat him to it. She pushed Ginny out of the way and advanced on Bellatrix, looking the most terrifying than Harry had ever seen her.

“NOT MY DAUGHTER, YOU BITCH!”

Within a minute, Bellatrix was on the floor, dead.

“It all ends here, Tom,” said Harry, walking forward as Voldemort did, presumably to kill Mrs Weasley, “it’s between you and me,”

“You dare call me that name?” Voldemort hissed.

“Yes, because that is who you are and who you will die as,”

“I will never die,” Voldemort snapped.

“You will,” Harry continued calmly, “We got the Horcruxes, Tom. We worked it out. Lydia was the Horcrux you never meant to make. That's why she killed herself. She didn’t do it because she was scared of you, she did it so that she could destroy you. You’re as mortal as any of us now,”

“That is not true,” Voldemort said, a look of evil satisfaction spreading across his face, “because I have the Elder Wand. When I took the wand from Dumbledore’s tomb and killed Snape, I became its true master,”

“Not quite,” Harry said, “that’s actually my wand you’re holding, Tom. See, before Dumbledore was killed, Draco Malfoy disarmed him, and he became the true owner of the wand. Weeks ago, at Malfoy Manor, I disarmed Draco...I’m the true master of the wand, not you,”

Voldemort narrowed his eyes at him, “but none of that matters now, I can deal with Draco Malfoy later, because you still cannot win,”

“I can, actually,” Harry said, “because I have something on my side that you never have and never will,”

“And what is that?”

“Love. You’ve never felt love, Tom, and I feel sorry for you. So why not try for a little remorse now? Have you ever felt remorse, for anything you’ve ever done?”

Voldemort laughed that high, cold, cruel laugh.

“Love?” he sneered, “you still believe in everything that old fool told you?”

“Our mother sacrificed herself for us,” Lydia said, “And I did the same thing. You can’t hurt us anymore, Tom. We have love on our side. We always have,”

And then there were two cries:

“Avada Kedavra!”

“Expelliarmus!”

An eternity passed by the time Tom Riddle’s wand flew into the air. His curse ricocheted off the wall and hit him in the chest. There was a look of shock on his face for a moment before he hit the floor with a dull thump, but Harry did not believe it. How did he know that Riddle would not get back up the moment he turned his back on him?
“Harry,” a soft voice said behind him.

He turned around to face Lydia, still unable to believe that it had happened, that it was over.

“You did it, son,” James said, walking over to them, “We can go home,”

A few seconds of silence passed and then Lydia burst into tears and threw her arms around him. Around them, the entire Hall burst into applause and people were grabbing them, trying to shake their hand and clap them on the back. For they were, once again, the Children who Lived.

Chapter End Notes

Thank-you for reading!!

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