Shadows Over Paris

by Wakefan

Summary

Post-Hogwarts Harry is a young Mage who is dedicated to finding and stopping Dark forces before they emerge. Along the way he deals with being a Young Adult. Relationship issues, Fame, Responsibilities, Family Drama, Wizarding Politics, Dangerous Enemies, and Being the Master of Death. Basically, a coming of age story.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Harry Deals with his breakup as he sets off on a new adventure.

Two days after his breakup with Ginny

Rolling with the Punches

Harry lay in bed, trying not to think. Or in this case, over-think. Ginny broke off their engagement and he was still stunned. After that painful discussion, they had to attend, together, the party he threw for her. Awkward barely covers it. At least their breakup was out there and he doesn't have to deal with telling anyone.

She actually made a lot of sense, but it still hurt. Maybe twenty, and twenty one in his case, is too young for marriage. But, after all they had been through, he didn't want to waste any more time. Unfortunately, she was not ready. Too soon or too fast or too much... whatever.

She sent him a note, but he hadn't read it yet. It was a thick note. the kind you write when you have a lot to say. a lot that Harry really did not want to hear. Or in this case, read. Was he being mature? Not really. He'd deal with it later.

Today, he woke up and vowed to just stay in bed. Exactly like he had yesterday.

His runespoor familiar was coiled around his arm and had her heads on the pillow beside him. He was so very thankful to have 'the girls' in his life. They were very comforting and loving. He knew they did not like Ginny, but now they absolutely hated her. He thought Selene was going to bite her at the party. That would have been horrible.

Kreacher popped in right as he rolled onto his side to snuggle up to his runespoor familiar.

"Master has visitors waiting" Kreacher croaked out. After a moment Kreacher added, "Shall Kreacher tell them Master will be down soon?"

Groaning, Harry sat up, "Who is it Kreacher? It's too early..."

"It is Masters curse breaker friend and his wife. Would master like lunch?"
Offering lunch was Kreacher's way of telling Harry that it was NOT too early. Harry had things he needed to do. "Wait a minute, what day is it?"

"Today is Monday", Kreacher croaked. "Master has important things to do. Master's friends are waiting downstairs."

Normally Kreacher would call them 'Blood traitors' or 'Paupers' or some other insulting name. The fact that he was being civil, showed Harry that he was worried about him. Ok, time to get up, Harry realized.

"Kreacher, can you serve them tea and offer them lunch? I'll be down in a few minutes, after I shower. Would you mind making that grilled ham and cheese you do so well? You know how much I love your... what do you call it again?"

"Very well, Kreacher will make Monte Christo sandwiches. And Chips."

Harry kissed each of the 'girls' and went to take his shower. Fifteen minutes later, he was showered and shaved. His mirror told him how handsome he looked. Someone must have told the mirror about Ginny, because it's parting words were, "She's a fool, one look at you and she will hate herself!" Talking mirrors were just a part of the magical world. They all seemed to like him.

Stepping out of the bathroom, he saw that Kreacher had laid out tan dress pants and a white dress shirt. The emerald green tie featured the Black family crest. The shoes were burgundy wing tips that matched the belt. A sporty black robe was hanging with the shirt. He thought about just throwing on his faded jeans and a tee shirt, but he had a busy day ahead, and Kreacher HAD made Monte Christos... why rock the boat. Sometimes he wondered if he was really the master of the house. He quickly dressed, then looked over at his beloved familiar.

Hecate and Selene were pressing Artemis to get her lazy tail out of bed. Artemis was always a sleepy head in the morning, no change there. He lifted them up, draped them around his neck like a scarf, and went down stairs to face his friends.

Seeing Fleur and Bill, he flinched a bit at the awkwardness of having just broken off his engagement with Bill's sister. Not his fault, but still weird. "Hey guys. Sorry to make you wait. I slept in a bit later than planned."

Fleur came over and hugged him. With a light French accent, she launched right into the trip. "I have taken care of everything. You leave in three days for a fun filled trip to Paris." Pulling a very nice leather itinerary folder out of her bag, she handed it to him with a smile. "Let's discuss over lunch."

Bill put his arm around Harry and with one of his easy grins, said "You'll have a blast Harry. Trust me, Fleur knows how to plan a vacation. Let's go eat."

The covered the itinerary and Fleur shared her insight on the Paris night life. She had arranged for him to have a few guides and companions who knew the city well. He was actually beginning to look forward to the trip.

Fleur excused herself to freshen up and Bill took advantage of the private time to ask Harry how he was doing. "How are you Harry? Really."

"Honesty, I'm still stunned. Sad, embarrassed, hurt even? But not angry". Taking a minute to think, he added, "I just never saw it coming, you know. I still love her and I don't want to trap her. She wants her freedom..."
"Yeah, none of us expected it, but it is clear she still loves you. Just give it time. You both are still very young." Taking a sip of water, he adds, "I hope you are still planning to come over and stay at shell cottage before you leave. We have your room made up."

"Thanks, Bill. I need to take care of a few things today, can I come over tomorrow afternoon?"

"Sounds like a plan." Looking back at him one more time Bill added, "I am here if you want to talk. About, you know, how you are doing…"

At this point, Harry was tired of talking about how he was doing. Done. So, he shifted the conversation and they talked about Malta. What could be under the earth and did they really want to disturb it? What defenses were they likely to encounter? What supplies would be needed? Support team? Given that this site was older than the pyramids, they really needed to be prepared if they even decided to go forward.

Once Bill's debt to Gringotts was paid up, he and Harry went into business for themselves. As freelance curse breakers and explorers, they had had their share of success. Plenty of danger too. Malta looked to be the biggest score and the highest risk yet. Part of Harry's fear was that someone like Tom Riddle would manage to find a way in and come out as another Lord Voldemort. Twisted and corrupt. They had to at least find the entrance before they decide whether or not to break the seals and enter the Kaer.

Fleur eventually came back into the dining room, and they made plans for dinner tomorrow. The 'girls' came in with her and had apparently been showing Fleur a pair of boots Selene thought would look amazing on her. Considering Fleur was not a parselmouth, it is amazing how well they communicate. Likely a lot or pointing and tail gestures. Maybe fashion is its own language.

Kissing Harry on both cheeks, Fleur said her good byes, "See you tomorrow, Harry! We are looking forward to having you." She smelled amazing. Bill was a lucky man. She then looked over at Harry's familiar, "I'll see you too, girls. Perhaps we can update my wardrobe and get you ladies some chic new hats."

Selene practically did a dance at that. Even Artemis and Hecate seemed interested. Harry knew Artemis and Hecate were a little jealous of the attention Selene, and her hat, got at the party last night. They really liked Fleur. Harry wished they liked Ginny half as much.

As Bill and Fleur left, Harry found himself thinking about Ginny and the breakup again. He had to stay busy and avoid thinking about that. He went into his office and got his briefcase. He then went to the apparition point for his appointment with Aunt Andromeda, his Proxy for the house of Black. He was early, but he did not want to be alone right now.

Andromeda Tonk's House

Harry arrived at the front door almost an hour early. Andromeda was a strong personality and he hoped she would not be upset with an unexpected arrival. Checking his appearance, he was suddenly glad he put on the clothes Kreachers chose for him.

'That should be his new style name – 'Kreacher's Choice' – nice ring to it'. He thought. Never hurt to smile a little.

He knocked gently on the door and heard Teddy running toward it. That boy could raise the dead with his volume. Uncle Harrrryyyy! The door slowly opened and Harry saw Teddy and two women standing behind him. The taller dark haired woman was Andromeda, the woman who practically adopted him. Beside her was a familiar face. Platinum blonde and beautiful. After a moment, he
recognized her "Hello Ms. Greengrass. It's been a while."

Andromeda looked at him and noticed his eyes – definitely not sleeping well. He seemed 'off'. Thanks to Kreacher, she knew Ginny had broken things off Saturday. "Harry, please come in. I'm glad you remember Ms. Greengrass." As Harry stepped in, he had a moment of discomfort.

Harry knew he was supposed to kiss her hand, but all he could see was the beautiful witch, laughing at him, while wearing one of those damn tri-wizard buttons. Weird that he had forgiven Draco for making them, but not most of the people that wore the damn things. Fortunately, Artemis created a distraction by stretching out toward Teddy. Selena whispered something in his ear, and Hecate just stared at Andromeda and Daphne. 'Nothing is as good at creating a distraction as a Runespoor playing with a Toddler,' Harry observed.

Harry lifted his familiar off his shoulders and gently set her down. Selene hissed something at him and moved her head toward Daphne – waiting. "Selene wants me to say she likes your shoes. She saw it in the Witch Weekly Fall Style catalogue, but did not know they came in periwinkle." He hissed something back at Selene, who just gave an angry look, he shrugged and continued "handbag too. You must have changed out the fittings to a brushed nickel. She prefers that over the brass." more hissing back and forth, "who did you take it to for the hardware?" apologetically he added, "Sorry."

Raising an eyebrow, Daphne responded with "It is good to see you again Mr. Potter. Or is it Lord Black. Or Lord Peverell? I find that I am not sure how to address you."

"Just 'Harry' is fine". It seemed easier, but it was more casual than he wanted it to be. Maybe he should have just gone with Potter…

"Then please, call me Daphne. And I get my fittings done at a boutique in France called Bridgette's Bridal. They do all kinds of fittings and adjustments. Your familiar has a good eye. I believe Harry called you Selene, it's nice to meet you. What are your sister's names?"

The 'girls' noted that she talked directly to them instead of thru Harry. They approved. Artemis was still playing with Teddy, but Hecate hissed something to Daphne.

"The one playing with Teddy is Artemis and Hecate is the one who just spoke to you. she thanks you for your good manners" Harry replied. Weirdest conversation of the day. "Hold on", he slowly lowered the girls so they could play with Teddy. Play was mock striking and attacking. A little hard to watch, if you didn't know how much they loved Teddy. They took off up to Teddy's room.

"I'm sorry Aunt Andromeda, I know I'm early, I just didn't want to wait…"

"Nonsense. You are always welcome. Kreacher said you would likely be early. He made a treakle tart and Earl Grey is brewing." Kreacher had told Andromeda that he expected Harry to come by as soon as William left. He also mentioned that Harry was hurting. Or in his words "Master is sad that ill-bred pauper is no longer his betrothed. Kreacher thinks Master can find better for the house of Black."

"Harry, I wanted you to meet Miss Greengrass. I have selected her to manage your image and work to re-establish the influence of the three houses you are now head." She saw Harry stiffen up. Maybe the timing is bad, but she really needed Daphne to step in and help. Harry has been riding on the positive results of the last war for two years now and he needed to capitalize on it before it ended. The wizarding world is fickle. "I realize this is a shock, but trust me, it is needed. Badly."
Harry straightened up, this was unexpected. "Daphne, I am sure you are very good at what you do, but I'm not sure this is a good fit. I am not comfortable in the settings you and Andromeda revolve in." There. He said it, and said it politely.

She had laughed at him when Draco threw his insults. She had laughed when the Dementors affected him. She wore that damn tri-wizard button. Why did that button still bother him so much?

Daphne just smiled politely, "Harry, I can assure you that I am needed. Did you know that the Daily Prophet has already printed two articles this week alone that undermine your position subtly? Do you know how many social gatherings have occurred where you could have made an impact last month? Nine. You have a very unique opportunity to market your name, your brand." Seeing that Harry was sitting quietly, watching her, she continued, "Your godson, Theodore, is the son of two war heroes. The godson of Harry Potter, and the future Lord Black. I will be establishing and setting up social protections for him as well."

Harry still had not said anything. This was getting awkward. Maybe a slight demonstration will help, she thought. "Tell me about what you do and I'll demonstrate how I can spin it for establishing your image."

"What do I do…" Harry paused and thought about what he would say. He could stick with the whole 'Traveler and Explorer' descriptive. Andromeda knew he traveled and collected ancient artefacts, but she had no idea what he really did. Maybe this would be a good time to tell her. He was a bit pissed that she sprung Daphne on him. Was he pissed enough to be fully honest? Hell, yes. And if it scared off Greengrass, then so be it.

"I am a hunter of Dark wizards and cursed artefacts. I go to the most dangerous areas on the planet, and fight the most horrific beings imaginable, to prevent another Voldemort. I find evil before it has a chance to set up, and I KILL it. My ex-fiancé was so horrified, the one time I told her about a 'rough day at work', that she had nightmares for a week." The temperature started to drop and he could now see his own breath while he talked. "I am the person that you call when something evil goes "bump" in the night. When mutilated bodies are found in ritualistic murders. I walk alone thru the shadow of death, because I am more comfortable in that environment than anyone else. I am the wizard that the creatures who cause pain and fear are terrified of. I am the master of the elements and the unseen. I am the Master of Death."

Silence.

He had lost control of his emotions. This was Hogwarts Harry, coming back out with all that angst. It felt good in the moment, but now he was starting to get embarrassed. He may have exaggerated a little, but not much. Lack of sleep and the emotional trauma of Ginny leaving had finally caused a minor emotional meltdown. He knew his eyes were probably glowing right thru his glasses. The windows had iced over in the corners and he knew his hair was probably shifting around.

Damn.

He saw his familiar come down the stairs to check on him. Hecate could always sense when he started to lose it. Andromeda was staring at him. Daphne actually took a step backward. Running his hand thru his hair, he asked himself a question he had asked many times before, 'Why can't I just keep my big mouth shut?'

"I'm sorry. It's been a rough few days. I should leave. Again, I'm sorry."

Snapping out of her stare, Daphne dove right in. "Let's see, you are a young lord who is dedicated to the recovery of lost knowledge and items of historical significance. You support charitable
causes and are sworn to defend magical Britain if you are called to do so. You are recently single and using your free time to assist families in need and help raise your godson – the future Lord Black.” Shivering in her summer robes, she added "I don't suppose I could get a cup of warm tea?"

Harry just stared at her. He knew she had felt the magic rolling off him. His Nethermancer side slipped out and impacted the first floor of the house. The temperature drop, the windows fogging up, the shadows seemed deeper, pictures moved and the wizard paintings all stared. She seemed to take it in stride. Was that good or bad?

Andromeda now stepped in. "Harry, you mentioned your 'EX' fiancé. I assume you meant Ginevra. I am very sorry to hear about that and I hope you know I am here for you if you need family. Maybe today is not the best day."

"Ms. Greengrass, can you give me a moment alone with Harry?"

"Certainly, I'll go start a pot of tea. Harry, I do hope we can work together. I know we did not run in the same social circles at school, but I'd like to get to know you better now. I'm sorry about your engagement." And with that Daphne excused herself to the kitchen.

"Harry, what the hell was that?" For Andromeda to curse, she must be quite shaken. "Is that really what you do? Chase dark wizards? Battle demons and monsters? You need balance, Harry. Badly." She would not admit it, but she was actually frightened. She felt as much or more power rolling off him than any wizard she had ever met. Right up there with old Dumbledore. "I thought the glasses prevented the glowing eyes…"

"They usually do, but let it get away from me. It would have looked a lot worse without the glasses. I'm a mess Andromeda. I didn't see it coming at all. Then, after she broke off the engagement, I had to take her to the surprise party I had planned." continuing after a short pause, "I stayed in bed the whole day yesterday. I only got up today because Bill and Fleur came to check on me. I am going to France alone in three days. On a trip I had planned to surprise Ginny with, for her birthday. Fleur re-worked the itinerary, took out all the romantic stops, but it is still going to hurt."

"I know, Harry. I know about pain and loss…" she came over to him and held his face. He looked so much like his father. With those magical eyes of his mother. "You helped me thru losing Ted and my daughter. I'll always be here for you. Stay the night. We'll have a nice casual dinner and you can show Theodore how to catch a snitch. Then, we can conclude our business with Ms. Greengrass over breakfast."

She could tell Harry liked the idea. He could not resist time with his godson. She had come to see both Harry and Edward (Teddy) as 'her boys'. Having them together would be nice. She also needed to press the Greengrass discussion. Not only would she be excellent for his image, but it could result in a good alliance. With Harry now single, maybe even more. Eventually. But not now, he is hurting too much.

"Aunt Andromeda, do you really think we need Daphne? She was not nice to me in school. None of the Slytherins were. I still have anxiety about those years."

"Harry, no one was nice to you. And you know why. You can't blame her for those years any more than you can the others. Give her a chance, she is perfect for this role. Trust me on this, you need her." Moving in for the score, she added "You need her and so does Teddy."

She took him into her arms and held him a moment. Andromeda did not regret helping Ginny find the courage to break things off. She is sure it was going to happen, and the break will be best in the
long run. Temporary or Permanent, they both need to stretch their wings a bit. But, she hates seeing how much he is hurting. Onward and Upward.

Andromeda's Kitchen

Daphne was in the kitchen, checking on the pot of tea that had been prepared. She could have gotten Kreacher to do it, but she needed to get out of that room. The shivering went beyond just being cold. So much for being the ‘ice queen’. Pansy would have wet herself if she had been there. When did he get so powerful? And did she really want to be around a Wizard that prone to emotional outbursts? Strike that, a MAGE that powerful and emotional. The room temperature dropped to near freezing! She had heard the rumors, but she assumed it was just propaganda around the boy who lived. She was wrong.

She needs this job. Her family needs her to have this job. Her sister needs her to have this job. She needs to see this thru. Andromeda was just the warm up, Harry was the tougher hurdle. She saw a picture of him, in his first year, in Andromeda's office. He was a sad little fellow. Dressed in rags. Always looked so lonely, even in a crowd. If she is honest with herself, she still feels guilt over how she and her friends treated Harry at Hogwarts. Children can be cruel. He was obviously an abused or neglected child, and they all just ground him down at every opportunity. House rivalry seems so unimportant now…

Her older brother, Michael, had been a vocal supporter of the changes the Dark lord brought. She knew he did it to shield the family, Michael was in no way a bigot. But the damage was done. On top of that, her Uncle had published anti-muggle and muggle-born propaganda for the ministry. Yes, it was under duress, but he still did it. And was promoted for it. Unlike her brother, Her uncle was a bit of a pureblood bigot. Daphne, like her father and sister, had stayed as neutral as possible. Her Father, Lord Greengrass, had a poor voting record in the Wizengamot. He was known to avoid voting on controversial issues and show support of only non-divisive proposals. Basically, he wimped out.

Her brother is now enjoying low level 'accommodation' in Azkaban. He was not marked as a death eater, so his stay is not permanent, but the stain on the family is. Add in her uncles publications, and no one wanted to deal with them. No alliances would accept them. The Greengrass house was noble, but not ancient. certainly not ancient and most noble like the Black or Longbottom family. While the Greengrass family was very affluent, their wealth would not last multiple generations without income. The Greengrass house was two short hops away from being like the Weasley family was before the war. Respected pure bloods with no influence or control. In a few generations, if they could not turn things around, house Greengrass would start selling off their assets.

The Greengrass family had been a cadet line for the Selwyn family, but was now looking to align with a less 'tainted' ancient family. She was hoping for Black or possibly Potter. The same person was at the head of both. To do this, she needed to show support and alignment. She needed this job. Her sister's need was even more pressing. She was not sure if it could even be helped, but that would rely on Harry directly.

Andromeda's Dining Room

When Daphne came out, she saw Andromeda sitting with Harry. They looked comfortable together. There was real trust there. Reflecting on Harry, and what she knew about him, this is a deeply scarred young man. She also knew her friends had caused many of the scars. Harry Potter may be one of the most powerful mages in Europe. Definitely one of the top 10 mages in the world. But he is just as fragile as the rest of them. And he just got dumped by the girl who chased
Andromeda was on top of it. "That would be fine Daphne. Why don't we meet again at 9AM over a light breakfast?"

Andromeda walked Daphne out and Harry could tell they were already getting close. He knew Daphne's mother had passed away due to some genetic condition. He wondered if Andromeda was 'adopting' her the way she did Harry. That would be awkward. Andromeda was always very polite to Ginny, but there never seemed to be any… closeness? She seemed closer to Daphne after what had to have been just a few days. Odd.

Harry noted that they were still talking. Maybe Andromeda needs a daughter figure. Like Harry needed Teddy and Andromeda. He'd give her a chance. For his family. His shrinking family.

The night went nicely. They played with Teddy. Harry had purchased Teddy a toy snitch that never rose above 3 feet and moved at a pace a toddler could manage. It gave him something to do instead of chasing Andromeda's cat. He taught Teddy how to spot and catch the snitch. The use of strategies to sneak up and corner it, and just have a fun time. Harry's familiar decided to curl up and nap a bit. She liked Andromeda's house.

-Grimmauld Place-

9PM

After dinner, and a little relaxing with Teddy and Andromeda, Harry went to Grimmauld place to begin prepping his travel gear. He wanted his passport, driver's license, apparition license, spare wands, his cloak, various healing potions, 2 bezoars, a Sig P226, a more portable P239, a Benelli M4 shorty, Kurkuri knife, ilkwa short spear, his Gringotts banishing box, a curse breaker (swiss army type) knife, miscellaneous travel 'essentials', and a tin of herrods no42 earl grey. Never forget the earl grey! Plus a few other odds and ends. Always the boy scout... He carefully placed these items in his more civilized travel trunk.

While prepping his assorted toys, he felt the wards flex ever so slightly. This was a way of knocking when wizards or witches were showing up uninvited. Given the fidelius, it had to be someone he knew well enough to have shared the location with, but had not trusted enough to be keyed into the wards. Someone in the ministry, perhaps?

Harry went to the front door and looked outside. Ah, one of the patil twins. It must be padma, the smarter sister, who works in the DogM. Padma had always been nice to harry. Even in the 4th year, she never directly antagonized him or wore one of those buttons. Those damn buttons. Likely, it was from distance and lack of interest, but it was still something.

Opening the door and the wards, harry turned on the charm and greeted her as a long lost friend. "Well, Padma Patil, as I live and breathe. What brings you to my little home?"

Padma lit up with a radiant smile "Harry James Potter, the Master of Death and Lord of Peverell. It has been a very long time. May I come in?"
"Enter freely and of your own will." Harry and Padma had a friendly banter that went back to Hogwarts. His familiar liked to Patil twins. Hecate preferred Padma, Selene preferred Parvati, Artemis thought they were both OK, but Hermione was the better fighter. Barely.

"Are you wondering if I am a vampire now Harry?" She smirked as she walked in. "I could go for a vodka-tonic, with a twist of lime." She said as she walked right past Harry and proceeded to the sitting room. She had been at Grimmauld place a few times in the past. Always on business. She was Harry's contact at the DoM. The DoM had tried to monitor him two years ago, and it blew up in their faces. Harry had found the attempts almost immediately, and it almost destroyed any chance of a good relationship.

That was when he said he would only work with the DoM if Padma was his primary contact. It had really helped her career. Within the DoM, she was known as death's handler. Her code name: 'Charon'. She liked the nickname, it was one of the best. Harry was informally referred to as the 'Reaper'. She knew not to risk his trust, her wagon was hitched to him. And she cared about him as a person, not just an asset.

Sitting in the corner chair, she waited while Harry had Kreacher mix her drink. As Harry came in to join her she put on her business face. "So, I understand you are heading to Paris in a few days. We may need a bit of your expertise while you are there."

Harry was waiting for that shoe to drop. "Padma, I am on vacation. Honestly, I need it badly. Not really running at one hundred percent. Can this wait? Is anyone else available?" Without the banter and bravado that they both seemed to enjoy as old friends, she could see the circles under his eyes and noticed that he was a bit 'off balance'.

"What happened, Harry?"

With a deep sigh, Harry filled her in on the Break up. Padma knew Ginny well and respected her as a person and as a combatant. Honestly, she couldn't believe Ginny would break off the engagement after pursuing Harry for years. On a personal level, Harry was a friend and she wanted the best for him. On a professional level, this could be good or bad. The premier Mage of Britain is suddenly single.

The DoM would have to tighten up his 'social defense'. They couldn't have him suddenly moving to Spain or the United States just to be with someone he had met. Or worse, letting another government get their hooks in him.

She had always liked Harry, but he was such a magnet for trouble. Then the terrible fourth year… She never participated in the attacks on him or wore that damn button, but she did not stand up for him either. She had always regretted being so weak. Her sister had been worse, though. Being in closer proximity to the Horcrux while it was flaring definitely impacted Parvati. Padma could see the changes and it was terrifying. Thank god she made her sister promise not to wear Malfoy's button.

"Harry, we have a situation in Paris and a possible beginning of a bridge. Possible level three or three point five threat. We just need you to look into it and deal with any 'complications' that may be present." She paused at that. They both knew what 'complications' stood for. Continuing, "The French Ministry has requested you as the person they most trust to look into it. Perhaps I can arrange for someone to meet you there and watch your back."

"No, if this is a 'Scout and Scythe' mission, I work best alone or with people I trust. No strangers."

Seeing her pensive face, Harry added "What? You look like you have concerns?"
"Only for you Harry." He was off his game and she could see it. "Are you up to this?"

"Death does not get a vacation." Then with a smirk, "I think I might pack a few extra essentials."

"Alright Harry. Let me get a copy of your itinerary and I’ll arrange for your mission packet to be delivered. Do you need any potions or devices?" He just gave her a knowing look and raised one eyebrow. She already knew the answer. He was almost as paranoid as Mad Eye Moody was. No one would make a potion for him unless he knew them VERY well. She'd make sure he had good support.

"Actually, Padma, there is something you guys can do for me. Andromeda is hiring a social and image manager or something. Not sure about the title, can you check her out? We are likely signing the forms tomorrow."

"We can do that. Tomorrow is a fast turn-around… I wish you had given us more notice. What is her name?" And it begins. Padma suspected the DoM would need to add a new department of "Harry Watchers" to keep him safe and firmly in Britain.

"Daphne Greengrass." Seeing Padma do a double-take, he added, "Yep, one in the same. Andromeda likely vetted her, but I’d like a second opinion. We have an appointment at Gringotts tomorrow at 11 for the document signing. Can you help me out?"

"Sure thing Harry… I need to run and get the ball moving on this. Don't sign anything until I get back to you." Rising, they walked to the door. She gave him a kiss on the cheek and told him to be careful. Then walked off into the night. Harry didn't remember her ever doing that before.

Maybe they really were friends. She did seem genuinely concerned for him. He could always use a few friends. Was this how Luna used to feel when he was nice to her?

Chapter End Notes

I originally posted this story at another site and I am bringing it over. Once they are in synch, the updates will slow to every two weeks or so.
Onward and Upward

Chapter Summary

This is a long chapter. I was going to split it in half, but I really wanted to move past the Breakup section of the story. It was getting a little tough to write. Onward and Upward is the chapter where Harry accepts that he is single and gets on with his life. I have no plans to pair him up anytime soon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

JK Rowling owns Harry Potter and the amazing world he lives in.
FASA owns Earthdawn

Onward and Upward

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The next morning at Andromeda's house

Harry checked his Banishing Box and saw a message from Padma. Daphne passed the background and security checks the DoM had made. That said, Padma insisted on being at Gringotts and reviewing the documents before anything was signed. She would also be bringing her superior, Unspeakable Croaker. Harry did not like that one bit. He helped the DoM, they did not own him. They did not employ him. Moving on…

At around 8:45, Daphne came by and they had a surprisingly pleasant breakfast. No talk about Harry's outburst yesterday. Kreacher made Teddy chocolate chip pancakes. The rest had fruit and omelets. Harry was wearing a slightly more traditional version of 'Kreacher's choice' again, but that is expected at Andromeda's.

Harry was pleased to find that Daphne actually knew a bit about quidditch. Definitely NOT a Chudley Cannons fan. All in all, it was a nice breakfast. They all seemed to get along well. At some point, Andromeda started calling Daphne by her first name, but she was still Lady Black.

Retiring to the sitting room, Daphne discussed opportunities for Harry. He gave her a copy of his itinerary and she said she would find any social opportunities in Paris if it fit in with his schedule. Andromeda perked up at that and the two began discussing Harry's 'opportunities' while in France. Harry wondered if Fleur would get mad at the idea of someone else interfering with his vacation. Too late for that. Last night's meeting with Padma took care of that. Still, he needed to keep as much of the vacation for himself as possible.

"Most of my itinerary was set by Fleur Weasley. You may remember her from the tri-wizard
tournament as the Beaubaton champion. If you need to make any significant changes, we should probably talk to her. She put a lot of time into it." Harry informed the two witches at the table. That would take care of anyone 'bogarting' his vacation. Fleur was not easily walked over.

Daphne's new role would technically start when Harry got back from Paris's, but she would be working all next week in preparation. Any social advice she would give for the trip was just the warm up. Harry had to admit, she was sharp. Now he had the pleasure of informing his frightening aunt and future employee that the Gringotts signing would involve the DoM.

"One small thing I need to mention. I do the occasional 'odd job' for the Department of Mysteries in addition to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Due to the sensitive nature of my work, they want to have representatives at the signing." Harry waited quietly while that sunk in.

Andromeda stared at him for a minute. "You tell me this now? How long have you known about this, Harry?" Oh boy, she was slightly annoyed.

"I just found out this morning. I didn't think it was a big enough deal to ruin breakfast. And you always say, 'no unpleasant business at the dinner table'." Harry held his breath, but he knew he was not out of the woods yet.

Not letting up, Andromeda asked the question he dreaded, "How did they even know about the signing, Harry?"

Yep, Andromeda was not happy. She valued loyalty and now she wanted to know what happened. Daphne looked like her ice queen persona. No emotion. Definitely Occlumency involved here.

Harry decided to just tell the truth, it's easier this way. "I was approached last night for a simple 'Scout and Scythe' mission while in France. I took the liberty of asking for a simple background check on Daphne as I really don't know anything about her. Sorry, Daphne. Believe me, given my line of work, they would have done it anyway. This way, we get it all out in the open. Nothing nefarious, Aunt Andromeda, just staying ahead of the game."

Daphne seemed to consider and accept. It was a Slytherin move. The kind of move she would be doing for Harry in the future.

Andromeda looked intensely at Harry. "Harry, you know I had Ms. Greengrass checked out already. By the Black family lawyers." Harry knew that they were a scary bunch of old men. "Still, I'm proud of you for thinking ahead. I guess you have been paying attention." She actually smiled at this. Then, frowning, she asked, "What is a 'Scout and Scythe' mission?"

Damn. "Sorry Aunt Andromeda, that's classified." He knew, she knew, they both knew, but it would be best to pretend. Harry started to say 'Danger is my middle name', but thought better of it. Why antagonize the bear? Or in this case, the Lady Black. Much scarier than a bear.

Andromeda actually laughed at that. "Very well my young Lord Peverell, let's proceed to Gringotts."

—

Gringotts, Diagon Alley.

11:05AM

Harry, the two witches, Teddy and Harry's familiar made their way down Diagon Alley. Harry was in typical battle mode. Scanning the streets, holly and phoenix wand ready at the flick of a wrist.
He had his Familiar watching all directions as well. He knew he looked a bit like a nutter, but he had been attacked too many times not to be a little paranoid. Teddy was holding both Daphne and Andromeda's hands. Harry did note that Andromeda kept her wand hand free at all times. Good.

Aside from a little begging from Teddy as they passed Florean Fontescue's Ice Cream Parlour, there were no issues. Entering Gingotts, they proceeded to the VIP line. They were quickly received and taken back into the bank. Going into the signing room, they found two wizards and a witch waiting for them as well as a goblin notary. Harry recognized Saul Croaker and Padma, but not the other, much larger, Wizard.

Harry spoke up, "Padma Patil, you remember Daphne Greengrass, I'm sure. This is my godson Edward and my Aunt, the Lady Black." Looking over at the very large middle aged man beside her and the smaller older wizard, he added "You must be Padma's co-workers. Unspeakable Croaker, it has been a while." Harry shook his hand. Then, looking at the very large wizard beside Croaker, he added "I don't believe we have met." Extending a hand, "...Harry Potter". The unspeakable just looked at him. Social etiquette had the most influential or powerful wizard extending a hand first. It was only a momentary pause, but Harry caught it. If he wanted to play that way... Harry quickly added, "Lord Peverell, Black, and Potter." Pure power play. The large man took his hand.

"Gareth Greengrass, Senior Unspeakable. It is good to finally meet you, Lord Peverell. Your activities are becoming the talk of the department. I see you are about to employ my niece." He flatly added, "You have impeccable taste."

Everything seemed nice on the outside, but Harry got the opinion that he did not approve. Something about the name... where had he seen it before? Realization slowly dawned on him and he was glad he packed a few extra essentials. Thinking to himself, 'Got it. File it away, I might need it.'

Pleasantries were exchanged all around.

Director Ragnok joined the party as Harry was a key and premier customer. Since Sirius' will reading, Ragnok always found a way to attend Harry's business. Harry supposed he found him entertaining. Wands were collected and placed in a locked box. Harry had only brought his Holly and Phoenix feather wand, he expected this. They also collected his assorted daggers as well as his Sig P239. The weapons had surprised all, but not the goblins. They seemed to appreciate the knives especially.

Andromeda set Teddy down to play with Harry's Familiar. "So, all the documents are in order, along with a privacy agreement and compensation expectations. Both the Greengrass lawyers and the Black Lawyers have approved them, so this is really more of a formality."

Unspeakable Greengrass chimed in, "With respect, we'll be the judge of that, Lady Black." He then began reviewing the documents. Unspeakable Croaker and Padma also began looking them over. Harry expected this. They wanted to make sure there would be no leaks about Harry's jobs in the future.

Unspeakable Greengrass recommended a few changes that did not concern the DoM, to which Harry firmly said "No." It was not the changes that bothered Harry, it was the audacity of the man.

He appeared to be here more as a Greengrass and less as an Unspeakable. "Daphne chimed in with "Father and our lawyers reviewed all these documents, Uncle Gareth, and revisions have been made." She seemed a little embarrassed. The large man just stared at Harry. Not threatening, but not blinking either.
Unspeakable Croaker chimed in at this point, "Gareth, let's focus on what we are here for. We utilize Lord Peverell on occasion and it is important that all parties be protected."

In a move that seemed to surprise his coworkers as much as everyone else, Gareth pulled out a set of new documents. "Here are non-disclosure and acceptable behavior documents drawn up by the Department of Mysteries. We will require all of you to sign these before proceeding."

Harry thought Daphne might get some kind of a non-disclosure agreement, but not him. And certainly not Andromeda. Acceptable behavior? Oh, hell no. He had heard that catchy phrase two years before. If they wanted to talk about acceptable behavior, he would nail them to the wall. "Well, this is a surprise. Whose idea was it to give me this?" While he held it, he concentrated slightly and it burst into flames. He wandlessly summoned Andromeda's and repeated the process. "Really, who had this brilliant idea?"

Gareth spoke up, making it now clear that he was the instigator, "Lord Peverell, if you wish to continue with any future operations with us, you will sign."

"Fuck you, Gareth, I'm not signing anything. And, if you want to act this way, I'll tell you where you can stick your future operations."

Undeterred, Gareth calmly asked, "And where, precisely, would that be?"

Unspeakable Croaker then spoke up "Harry, Gareth, let's not get carried away…” Harry actually knew Saul pretty well. He stepped in the last time the DoM pissed him off. Saul knew exactly where this was heading.

Ignoring Saul, Harry smiled and said, "Bend over, Gareth, and I'll show you." dropping his smile, Harry added, "You should be used to that. I seem to remember a few DoM books about two and a half years ago, documenting how Muggles steal magic. Weren't you the author of those books?"

Whenever Harry dealt with the DoM, he came prepared. Harry carried around shrunken copies of the DoM published and approved books from the Voldemort period. He pulled out one, resized it wandlessly, and threw it on the table. The author was printed across the bottom of the book. Sr. Unspeakable, Gareth Greengrass.

The Goblins were loving this. They still talked about Sirius Black's will reading. Harry is, in many ways, an even bigger celebrity among the goblins than he is in the wizarding world. They, apparently, appreciate a hell raiser. Director Ragnok just grinned. He was hoping for entertainment. A few guards showed up as well, not so much to guard, they just wanted to watch.

At this, the Unspeakable lost his calm. He knew those books would always follow him. "You little shite! You WILL sign those documents!" Gareth Green Grass rose up and walked toward Harry. He must have been easily over six and a half feet tall and very solid for a man of about 45-50.

They were both now standing, but Gareth towered over Harry by almost a foot. Harry started him in the eye, never blinking.

Gareth Greengrass then hissed out "Lord Peverell, your wand is in the box, along with your other... muggle toys. Maybe we should see what you are capable of man to man. Or is it, man to boy."

Harry's skin slowly shifted to a glossy black. His hair became a glossy silver, and his eyes were now glowing a bright green. The lightning bolt scar he is so famous for looked like it was burning with a silver flame. Each tooth was now flat white and had a small rune on it. **

His Familiar quickly slithered around his torso, up his back, and over his head. She now had the
inverse of his new coloring. Silver skin with glossy black patterns. And glowing green eyes. All
three heads rose up until Selene was a half a head over Gareth. Artemis and Hecate were each at his
eye level, but a foot on either side. Stiletto sharp Fangs displayed, they also had a tiny rune on each
tooth. They let out a slow, but menacing, Hissss.

The temperature began dropping *** and Harry's breath came out in icy clouds as he calmly said,
"Get the hell out of this room, Unspeakable Greengrass. This discussion no longer concerns you."
Pausing for effect, he added, "Please inform your superiors, Harry Potter is no longer available to
do their dirty work." Harry's magic was rolling off him in waves. Dumbledore's magic felt warm
and comforting. Voldemort's was blistering hot and vile – putrid like a rotting carcass. Harry's
magic seemed more cool and clean – like a piney forest in winter. Hermione used to call it 'Winter
Fresh'. Everyone could feel it. There was a hint of oak and roses.

No one said a word. Selene suddenly shot forward and hissed, snapping her mouth as if to strike.
Gareth Greengrass jumped back so fast he tumbled onto his back. Harry and his familiar slowly
reverted to his normal look, but their eyes continued to glow. Harry calmly said, "I won't ask again.
Leave. Now." Harry was considering his response when he realized that it likely did not meet
'acceptable behavior'. This brought a terse smile to his otherwise stoic face.

As Unspeakable Greengrass left the room, Harry's eyes slowly dimmed until they eventually
returned to normal. It was all over in about 90 seconds.

Teddy came running up and leapt into his arms. "Uncle Harry, Do your face! Do it again…" Well,
at least Harry knew Teddy would not be traumatized.

"Maybe later. That was pretty cool, wasn't it?" Harry responded with a grin.

"Yeah! But too cold. Don't do that again." Teddy innocently responded.

"Yes Harry, please do not do that again." Andromeda quietly added. Daphne just sat in her chair.

Ragnok then stepped forward, grinning ear to ear, "Mr. Potter, you make the mundane so much
more enjoyable. Please make sure I am available for your future business and legal needs." The
head of Gringotts, London was practically bursting with excitement. Straightening his tie, he added,
"Perhaps we can take a thirty minute recess for hot coffee or tea. It seems to have become rather
chill in here." With mirth he added, "And to return Unspeakable Greengrass' wand."

Unspeakable Croaker took his co-worker his wand, escorted by two goblin guards. He was gone
for at least fifteen minutes. In that time, Padma approached Harry.

"Harry, we had no idea he would do that. Those contracts were completely unapproved." Padma
was clearly shaken. Like most people, she had never seen Harry put on his 'game face'.

"Padma, was that the same contract the DoM tried to get me to sign two years ago? Maybe even
the same that was presented to Dumbledore decades ago? Hard to tell, as mine turned to ash, but it
seemed similar at a glance. I'm sorry, but I am going to have to re-consider our working
relationship."

The threat was clear. Quite frankly, the DoM is made up of a bunch of researchers. While some are
able to hold their own, most could not fight their way out of a wet paper bag. Their strength lay in
research and rituals. They needed him far more than he needed them. Especially with the Auror
department so badly depleted.

Padma knew magical Britain was at a critical point. Harry Potter is a national hero and is
enormously respected across Europe. Internationally respected, and feared. As weak as magical Britain is right now, Harry's presence is enough to keep the scavengers and opportunists in the ICW away. To alienate him now…

Damn that Gareth, he was a tag along. He used Daphne as leverage to attend, for 'Family' reasons. Those publications he put out were indirectly responsible for so much pain. How that man kept his job, let alone his title, was beyond Padma. He must have dirt on someone. Saul was likely handing him his balls right now. "Give me 24 hours Harry. I'll make it right." Reaching out and taking his hand, she added, "Please, Harry."

Harry was still a soft touch for anyone he considered a friend. Taking his hand made this more than professional. "Twenty four hours. I will be at Bill and Fleur Weasley's house."

He tended to weaken with physical contact. Likely because he had so little of it most of his life.

Did Padma know this? Harry gently squeezed her hand and released it to speak with Andromeda and Daphne.

"Sorry about that, but I know from years of personal experience that you can't back down from a bully." Looking at Daphne, Harry added, "Daphne, I am sorry it was your uncle." Pausing and considering, "Did you ask him to be here?"

Daphne responded first, "Don't be sorry, Harry. I'm not happy this happened." Sighing, Daphne continued, "I did not know he would be here. Uncle Gareth had no right to involve himself like this." Pausing, she held up her documents, the only ones Harry didn't burn. "These new contracts are pretty restrictive. I honestly think he is trying to 'gremlin' the deal. I don't think I can sign these new documents."

Asserting control of the interaction, Andromeda added, "Let's see what we can work out." Harry had expected Andromeda to be unhappy with his display, but if anything, she seemed impressed. Proud even. You can take the woman out of the Black household, but you can't take House Black out of the woman.

By this point, Saul Croaker had re-entered the room and was conversing with Padma. Harry, Andromeda, and Daphne approached them as they were wrapping up their discussion.

Saul Croaker took a deep breath and started talking before anyone else could get a word in. "OK. The confidentiality agreements your aunt had drawn up cover any business dealings you do with the ministry. Specifically, it calls out the DMLE. That includes the Auror department, but not the DoM. I would like to add The Department of Mysteries and any ICW interactions. Plus any foreign government work." Padma had suggested the changes and Croaker had agreed. "If you decide you are no longer going to work with us, then there will be nothing for to be concerned about. It is basically the same document with extra departments called out.

Harry considered. He looked at Hecate, and she shook her head. In Parseltongue, she added, "SSS The addition of the DoM makes good sense, but not the rest. No foreign governments or ICW activities should be covered. Too many differences in law and it would require them to work around the British DoM and DMLE. Sets up too much potential for problems. SSS"

Harry relayed the message and looked to Andromeda and Daphne. They apparently agreed. Adding the DoM was a tiny change. Harry considered adding a little extra money to the contract, but Andromeda had assured him the contract was already very generous.

Saul and Padma considered it, then agreed, with Saul Croaker adding one stipulation, "We want you to keep us informed if a foreign government agency reaches out to you. You are, after all, a
British citizen.

Andromeda saw Harry ready to agree, so she hastily added, "If Harry continues working with you, fine. But it will not be in the contract. He is still a private British citizen. You will need to advise the ICW and foreign governments that they will have to work thru your department." Seeing the professional agreement, she added, "OK, let's see about getting the contract amended."

Selene and Artemis were watching Daphne and noted her nervousness. She had seen Harry flex his magical muscles and it had shaken her a bit. Artemis had whispered something to Selene like 'How can we fix this?'

In Parseltongue, Selene called out,"SSS Harry, she may look controlled and confident, but our little display frightened Daphne. Why not throw in a clothing allowance. Plus time off during Fashion week in Paris. SSS"

Harry knew Selene was an expert on reading girls like Daphne. And Artemis, ever the strategist, must have caught something as well. Andromeda went to fashion week each year, maybe having a travel companion would be good. With a sideways glance, he added "Let's add a clothing allowance and a trip to Paris with Lady Black for fashion week. I'll let Lady Black determine the amount and travel arrangements."

Everyone liked that idea. Daphne even gave Selene a small grin.

Two hours later, documents were signed. Wands were returned. Apologies were offered, with a promise by Parma to synch up in 24 hours to discuss making things right. Daphne left to prepare for her new job. Harry, Andromeda, Teddy and Harry's familiar went back to Andromeda's house to pack.

After a brief stop at Florean Fontescue's.

—-

Andromeda's house.

4pm

Harry closed the latches on his trunk. Teddy was playing with his familiar downstairs and Andromeda was with him. "Well, I'm all packed. I'll spend tonight and tomorrow at Bill's, then, off to Paris! I still can't believe I'm going. Now the DoM wants me to look into something. Something dark and evil no doubt."

"You need this vacation. And Daphne is pulling together a few social opportunities for you in Paris. Make it work for you." Pausing, she asked "Why don't you quit doing the DoM's dirty work, Harry. After what happened today, I thought you were done."

Sitting on the bed, Harry turned to her. "I need them to be my eyes and ears. But, if they pull any more crap like that, I will find another way to get reliable intel." Running his hand thru his hair, he added, "I can't let another dark lord rise. I owe it to all those who lost their life in the last war. I owe it you and your family. To Teddy. Sirius and Remus. And my parents."

"You owe yourself a little 'Happiness' too, Harry." Pausing, she added, "Promise me you will enjoy all Paris has to offer. Don't mope around and let this opportunity pass you by. Be young and influential and single… what is the new term I hear?"

At that, Harry grimaced "You mean a 'YUMMI'? Young Upwardly Mobile Magical Individual."
Laughing, he added, "I hate that term. I swear someone thought of the acronym before the name." Then, becoming more serious, "Also, Ginny uses it for herself and her friends. I don't think it is a very masculine description."

"I see. Well, do try to have fun. Take Pipsey with you. She misses her little Harry!"

Pipsey was the Potter elf. She stayed at Potter properties while Kreacher looked after the Black Properties. She was very mothering, but had no high end fashion sense. She favored plaids and flannel comfort clothes. Fortunately, Kreacher had already arranged most of the clothes in his trunk.

"Pipsey", Harry stated with authority. A 'pop' was heard as Pipsey appeared in the room.

"Pipsey is here, Master Harry! What can I be doing for you?" The only way to describe the look she gave Harry was pure love and adoration. So much so it made him a little uncomfortable. Harry was certain he was a toddler in her eyes.

"Would you like to go to Paris with me?" Seeing her nodding frantically, he added, "Excellent. Meet me at shell Cottage tomorrow evening. I am already mostly packed up, but I may have you do a little extra prep work, if that's OK."

"Pipsey will take excellent care of young Master Potter!" at that, she disapparited.

"Time to say goodbye to Teddy. I'll make sure to bring a souvenir."

—-

Shell Cottage.

5PM

Harry arrived at shell cottage just as Victoire was being put down for a nap. She was a gorgeous baby. Of course, considering the parents, that was a given.

Hi guys, thanks for having me. I am so looking forward to this trip.

Fleur hugged him and ruffled his messy hair. "We are glad you are here. One of Bill's old co-workers told us about the fun you had at Gringotts." She was looking at him with a half-smile.

"Will you ever stop looking for trouble, Harry?"

At that, Bill and Harry both just laughed.

"Never back down from a Bully, Fleur! It gives them too much satisfaction." Harry knew this so very well.

"Tonight, we are having Beef Wellington. For dessert, we will have crème brûlée and ice cream. You will love it, Harry. I guarantee it!" Fleur loved cooking fancy dishes. Harry loved eating them. Molly often got jealous…

"Nice!" Was all Harry could say. The look on his face said the rest – pure bliss. "Tomorrow I cook for YOU guys, though." Bill grinned at Harry. He seemed to be doing well. This would be a fun couple of days.

Dinner was amazing. Harry helped with Victoire and listened to Fleur share the joys of Paris. Around 8:30, two owls arrived within 15 minutes of each other. One was a gorgeous Barn Owl, the
other was obviously a ministry owl. The ministry owl's message was addressed to Harry, the other owl had two letters, one to Harry and one to Fleur.

Harry read his ministry message first. It was from Padma, she was requesting to come over around 11 the next day. It was not very detailed, but Harry knew it was the 'fix-it' discussion he was promised. Likely, it would involve the 'dirty job' the DoM needed him for as well.

Fleur had just finished her message. It was from Daphne, requesting time with Fleur to insert a few events into Harry's itinerary. It must have been very smooth, he never would have expected Fleur to take it so well. Harry's letter from Daphne essentially said the same, she wanted to keep him in the loop. The requested time was 2pm. Selene was reading over his shoulder. Looking over at Fleur's letter, it was in French. Harry mentally congratulated Daphne on her diplomacy.

"Hmmm. Well, Harry, it seems you have a new image and social director looking to send you to a few society activities. This should be fun. We may have to find you a date for a few of these…” with a disturbing twinkle in her eye, she closed with "that should be easy enough."

"The DoM also wants a little of my time. Maybe we can combine the itinerary reviews. I really don't want to ruin this trip, so I need you to help me keep any additions in line, Fleur."

Before Fleur could respond, Bill jumped in, "Harry, if you are charging into combat, that's not much of a holiday. I want in on the discussion." considering that his wife needed to get out of the house, he added, "Maybe Fleur and I can even double up with you at a few social events."

That got Fleur interested. She loved a good party and her parents could keep Victoire... It had been a long time since they had gone out dancing.

Bill was also worried that Harry might be too distracted for a mission. Harry kind of liked the idea of doubling up with Bill and Fleur. It could be fun!

Harry sent the Ministry owl back with a revised time of 2:30pm. That would give Daphne the first slot and prevent her from being surprised.

As Harry went to bed, he had the nagging feeling that he had forgotten something. Then he remembered Ginny's thick letter. He would read it in the morning. All would be well. For the first time in three days, he went to sleep looking forward to the next day. What could go wrong?

Shell Cottage, The Next Morning

Harry woke happy. He tucked his familiar in and kissed each head gently. Artemis hissed at him a little, but that was normal in the morning. Going down stairs, he cast a silencing charm over the kitchen so as not to wake anyone up. He then proceeded to prepare for breakfast. Victoire was too young for solid food, so he focused on the adults.

He had just finished preparing his quiche when he heard Victoire cry – the best alarm clock on earth. As soon as he heard Bill and Fleur moving around, he put the quiche in the oven. He proceeded to make a little bacon and washed up enough strawberries and blueberries for three. Knowing Bill liked Coffee and Fleur likely did too, he proceeded to start a pot. He set the table and placed the bacon in a plate with a heating charm. Bacon is always best warm. The fruit was placed in a bowl with a light cooling charm. Coffee cups set, cream on the table. The quiche would be ready in a few minutes... He really wanted to do it up for them.

At this point, the post came. He picked up the post to move it to Bill's place at the table. That's when he saw the latest copy of Witch Weekly. He moved that to Fleur's spot... and saw the cover.
The Spitfire!

Rookie of the Year!

Most Eligible Witch in Britain!

And there was her photo. With that smirk he loved. So beautiful! And according to the title, very much a single witch.

When Bill and Fleur came down, he was still staring at the magazine. Bill looked at the table and exclaimed, "Something smells great! Harry, you really didn't have to do this." Harry just looked up and smiled. The smile did not reach his eyes, though.

Fluer immediately picked up on the fact that something was wrong. Watching him set the magazine down and get the quiche from the oven, Bill also picked up on the mood. While Harry was prepping the quiche, Fleur picked up the magazine and cursed, "Zat Damn Beetch! Look at zees, Bill! Now tell me again how zees is no one's fault!" Her accent always gets horrible when she is angry. Victoire was just staring at her mum. Eyes wide.

Bill read the title and said "What the hell?"

Harry jumped in and said, "Don't. This is fine. We are no longer an item and she is… well, this is OK. I'm happy for her. Really. She wrote me a note. A big fat one. In all the confusion and turmoil of the last few days, I forgot about it. I guess this is what she was trying to warn me about." Pausing and looking up, he saw that look he hated. Pity. "Look, let's just have a good breakfast. Everything is better on a full stomach."

Harry volunteered to feed Victoire while Bill and Fleur ate. Fleur warmed the bottle and handed it to Harry so he could feed the baby. They both knew how much Harry loved babies. The breakfast was good, but the mood was tense. Fleur was trying to be her normal charming self, but her anger was coming out.

When all were finished, Harry kissed Victoire on the top of the head and handed her to Bill so he could clear the table. He insisted on finishing the job, as his gift. Dinner tonight would be his gift as well. Harry loves to cook for people he cares about, and by god he was going to cook for the two people that he considered his brother and sister.

Once done, Harry went upstairs. He wanted to read Ginny's note. The one he should have read two days ago. With a flick of his wand, Harry summoned Ginny's letter from his trunk.

Dear Harry,

I hope you are well. Please know that I am thinking about you constantly and hoping we are still very close friends. I know that is such a cliché thing to say, but it is true. I still love you deeply and will always feel that way. I am hoping our time apart will allow us to grow and become even better versions of the people we are now.

Breaking off our engagement was the hardest thing I have ever had to do, but we really are too young to commit to a lifetime of marriage and family. I spent all of my youth dreaming about what might be and you spent all of yours preparing to battle 'V'. This gives us time to live in the present and follow the paths that are before us. I do believe that our paths will come back together one day – our story is not yet written, Harry.

I know how hard this has been for both of us and I really don't want to cause you any more pain. Unfortunately, I have news that is not what I would like to share. I was just informed by the editor
of Witch Weekly that my article is going to print weeks ahead of schedule. I don't know why they are doing this and I begged them not to. But it has already gone to press. I am told they worked around the clock to make the changes.

The article not only goes into my success in quidditch and how I want to be a role model for young witches across Europe, but it also describes me as newly single. They are calling me 'the most eligible witch in Britain. I think I now know how you have felt all these years.

Please believe me, I only told the interviewer this after our split and to prevent them from listing me as "Harry's Girl", something that would have been painful for us both at this point. I hope you can look past this and know that I did not want this. We both need time to recover from out split. I would never have done this on purpose.

Please floo call me so we can talk,

Love Always,

Ginny

Harry started to really feel it now. His thoughts went from bad to worse. 'Well, there it is. Done and out there, where everyone can read all about it. Now all the 'Poor Harry' talk can begin. Everywhere I go, people will look at me and say, 'It's all right, you'll be ok Harry'. Behind closed doors, they'll say 'Well, can you blame her? She is a gorgeous witch and he is just a skinny little dude. Maybe I should give her a call.' Whatever.

He felt the bed shift slightly and realized Selene was reading the note he had set down. "OI! Don't read that!"

He startled himself with the desperation in his voice. Selene just looked up at him. The other girls were awake now. Selene said one word. "SSS Bitch SSS". Harry had never heard such malevolence in anything Selene had ever said before. Artemis and Hecate had both said Selene was the most frightening sister, but until now, Harry had never believed it.

"I need a hug" was all Harry could say. They coiled around him and held him tight. Harry subconsciously knew they could flex and break most of his ribs. But to him, this was like being held by his mum. Warm and safe. Protected and loved. When he needs it most. "I'm sorry I yelled Selene. I love you. I love all of you guys".

Maybe he would visit his mum and dad's incarnation tonight. It had been a while. Harry spent about thirty minutes in his room. Just re-connecting with the 'girls' and talking about France. Afterward, he changed into workout gear and took his Iklwa and a pair of short swords to run thru a few Katas on the beach.

He would never dream of charging into a magical battle with a sword or a spear, but it is great exercise, and he had been lounging about for a week. He needed to be is decent form if he was going to do any 'moonlighting' in Paris. It would also do him well to take out his frustrations.

Shell Cottage

Down Stairs after Harry went upstairs

Fleur read the article intently, then handed it to Bill. He read the article, and it was actually pretty good. The only down side was the few paragraphs about the breakup. Even that was actually pretty nice – still very close friends..., ...pursuing different dreams..., ...love and respect..., ...lucky to have had each other..., ...Best first love a witch could have..., etc. and so on.
She said all the right things, but the timing was horrible! Just too soon.

Fleur was so angry, she knew she had to get out. She put Victoire down for a nap, kissed her husband goodbye, and left to Diagon Alley with an apparition crack. She had a contact at Witch Weekly, and she wanted to know why they had pushed the article thru so fast.

After Harry went out to exercise, Bill had called Ginny thru the Floo. He really was not sure what to say. This was her big article and he didn't want to take that away from her. But he had to somehow get her to touch base with Harry, or the damage would fester. He still thought they might end up together, but this needed to be fixed.

"Hi, Ginny. Do you have a minute?"

"Sure Bill, what's up?" It was obvious she had just woken up.

"We saw the Article this morning. It was really good." Now that he had her on the floo, Bill really wasn't sure how to proceed.

"Thanks! Can you save me a copy? I saw the pre-release version, but I want as many copies as I can get of the final print." Pausing and softening she added, "Have you heard from Harry? Do you think he's seen it?"

"Well, yeah. He saw it. He took it well" Why the hell did he say that? Bill knew he was sugar coating it, Harry did not take it well. But, this was still his little sister. She deserved her moment in the sun.

"You are a terrible liar, Bill." Now there was an awkward silence.

Ginny broke the silence with, "I never would have done this to him. The magazine moved the date WAY up for some god awful reason. I begged them to give it a couple of weeks, but they were already at the printer. I wrote to warn Harry. He never floo'd me or responded to my note." Pausing briefly "I bet he didn't even read it. He put it off the way he and Ron used to put off Potions home work. Do you know where he is now?"

"Yeah, he is staying with us until tomorrow. Right now he is out exercising." Seeing his sister so down he added quickly, "The timing was bad Gin, but the article is good. I liked what you said about being a role model and everything. You should be proud. Don't let the timing take that away." Full on big brother now.

"Yeah – you're right. Still, I need to fix things. Can I come by later? Is Phle…Fleur going to be there?" Ginny caught herself before saying Phlegm. This would be a bad time to alienate Bill.

"Yes and Yes. Give us a few hours and come by in the afternoon." Suddenly, he heard his daughter start to stir. "Look, Victoire is crying, I gotta go – But I love you and I am proud of you! Please don't let this get you down." As he heard Victoire crank up the volume, Bill wondered why Fleur had been gone so long.

"Thanks, Bill. I'll try not to. Keep that copy for me." Then, after the connection ended she let out a very heartfelt "Shite! Shite, Shite, Shite!" Why in the hell did Witch Weekly pull this shite?

A few minutes later.

Fleur returned and immediately went to find Victoire and Bill. Bill was holding Victoire and Fleur held out her arms. While Bill handed the child over she said, "How's my little angel? Hmmm."
Looking at her husband, she added, "They rushed the article to print. Actually had to stop the press and toss a few hundred copies of this week's original planned issue."

Bill did a quick double take and asked the obvious question, "Why would they do that? What aren't you telling me?"

Fleur took a deep breath and spilled the beans. "They apparently are planning a most eligible Wizard of the century edition. You know, since it is the year 2001. Full issue dedicated to the most desirable and eligible Wizard of the century. Originally, it was going to be a composite of the top 50 Wizards from 1900 to 2000, but they decided to go another way now that our Harry is suddenly single. Three guesses who the lucky wizard will be…"

"Why the rush? Why move so fast?" Bill just could not believe Harry's luck. He hates the spotlight! This is going to drive him absolutely mental!

"Apparently, they are afraid he won't stay single very long. They even have a betting pool going. Look, we can get him in and out of Paris before all the hoopla. He can still have a good time." Pausing, she added, "You can't tell anyone! My contact would be fired if this leaks out."

Bill looked at her incredulously, "Shouldn't we warn Harry and Ginny?"

Fleur just shook her head, "No, Bill. It would ruin Harry's holiday and spoil your sister's big day. She was on the cover of Witch Weekly with a very nice article written about her." Pausing to shift Victoire, she continued with "We can warn them both after he gets back from his holiday. Honestly, the magazine would have already reached out to him if they weren't afraid he would engage legal options. They know how print shy he is."

Bill nodded and agreed. "A whole issue. What on earth can they use to fill it up? He only just turned 21 years old and his first 11 years are not well known…"

Fleur raised an eyebrow at that. "You could fill it up with the war activities alone. Then there are the Hogwarts years. The Tri-Wizard tournament, youngest seeker in a century, killed a basilisk with a sword when he was 12… He is the head of three families, he is extremely wealthy and donates large sums of money to multiple charities… And don't count out the whole rebellious behavior. You and I know he is a sweetheart, but his temper has been well documented. Yet somehow, he always looks innocent afterward. Remember when he told off Fudge publicly, then was caught eating ice cream not fifteen minute later. It was all over his face, but it looked so cute." They both laughed at that. Molly had a framed picture of it somewhere. "Then there is the tragic side. Orphaned and raised away from the magical world. Dressed in rags – with the pictures to prove it. Mistreated by his classmates, loads of guilt ridden articles about that. But he still came back and saved the day. On, and on, and on… there have been so many articles about him already, that there will be no shortage of testimonials and images. Don't forget what Ginny said about him. Best first love ever…"

"Yeah, I guess there is enough material…" Bill knew how Harry would take it, but he suspected it would not go well with Ginny either. "Oh, hey – Ginny is coming over this afternoon to, you know, fix things. With Harry."

"Why would you let that happen? You know we also have one of the Patil twins and his new image manager coming over also." Judging by the look on his face, he did not remember. Fleur just looked at her lovable husband. "Well, this should be fun. Make sure she is gone before dinner. Harry only bought enough for three."

Harry came in soon after – he had worked up a sweat. "Hey guys. What say I grab a quick shower
and pop out for a little Chinese to go for lunch? I am craving sweet and sour pork!” A good workout really perked him up. He cleaned up his swords and shrank his six foot spear back to its original Iklwa length of a little over three feet. "What do you say?"

Bill chimed in, "I'll get the food, and you take a shower. Lunch is on me!"

Thirty minutes later, they were all eating Chinese take-out! It was spontaneous and fun. It felt like family. Harry was getting past his earlier funk. Bill took the minute to tell him about Ginny. "Hey, listen Harry. I hope you don't mind, but Ginny is going to come by later and just say hello." Harry just looked at Bill, quietly. Bill looked at Fleur, then proceeded, "She feels bad about the article. And wants to just… I don't know. See how you are doing?"

"Great. What time? Before or after Daphne and Padma get here?" Harry wasn't mad, just annoyed. Maybe getting a channel between them would be good.

"She didn't say. Just sometime this afternoon. It'll be fine." Considering his next words, he carefully added, "Remember, she didn't want the article to go to print so fast. And this is a big deal for her. Something she may never get again." At this point, Fleur was just starring wide eyed at her husband. "Just keep in mind that she is hurting too and don't make her feel bad." He quickly added, "I know, it sucks."

"That it does, Bill. I just want a break." After an awkward pause, Harry added with a sheepish grin, "Good thing I am going to Paris tomorrow, right?" No sense being a depressed GIT! He would have fun if it killed him.

Ginny's Flat

Ginny had just tried on her 10th outfit. "Katie, what do you think of this? I want to look good, but not too good. You know what I mean?"

This had been going on for over an hour. Katie had even gotten her a calming potion. "Ginny, Harry won't care what you are wearing. He will appreciate that you came by to check on him." Katie said it, but she was less than sure about that. She actually thought Ginny should just wait a day or two.

"I know. Still. You saw him at the party, I can't bear the thought of hurting him or leading him on. I need to look like I am solidly in the friend zone. But still really good. Because, you know…" Ginny said it, but even she did not know what she really meant. So confusing.

"No, Ginny, I don't know. If you still have feelings, why did you break up? Do you really want to be single that bad?" There, she said it. She thought Ginny royally screwed up. But Harry partially caused it with all that marriage and family talk. Why couldn't he just be the cool boyfriend? Ginny was just staring at her.

Katie could see the tears forming. "Isn't there some middle ground you can take? Stay together, but call off the engagement? I really just want you guys to be happy."

"No, Katie. Keeping him hanging on while I live the carefree and fun life would not be fair. I don't want to date around, but I don't want to be tied down either. Listening to Harry talk about more Dark Lords rising and cursed artifacts. We'll try again in a few years." Ginny said the last part more to herself than to Katie.

'If he is still around,' Katie thought. 'Or if Ginny doesn't meet someone on tour…'

Putting on the 'best friend face', Katie chimed in, "OK Spitfire, make him drool, but not too much."
Your distressed jeans, that red t-shirt, and your MVP jacket. On second thought, skip the jacket. Keep it casual.

Well, the red t-shirt is dirty, so are the jeans. I have time to wash a small load. Then a quick dry charm. I should be ready by three.

Back at Shell Cottage

2PM

Harry jumped when the knock on the door sounded. It was not Ginny. He brought Daphne into the living room. She looked amazing in a custom tailored outfit. Where did these witches get all these clothes?

"Daphne Greengrass, I'd like you to meet Bill and Fleur Weasley." Looking at the baby lying in her bassinet, "And this is Victoire."

"I'm very pleased to meet you both. The itinerary was very well done." Sitting and getting to business, "I have a few social events that can be attended, if we can make space."

Fleur appreciated the compliment and seemed to take a liking to Daphne. "So, would there be any events that we could attend with Harry? My family, the Delacours, are fairly well connected in Paris.

"Hmm", Daphne considered the options. The Delacour family was very well connected. Getting invitations would be no issue. "Well, there is a Formal event at Beauxbaton Gardens, a celebration of the rising seventh year witches of note with social sponsors. Harry and you could both sponsor a student…"

"Oui! Yes – Gabrielle is going to be there. Papa is looking for a sponsor with enough influence! There will be dining and dancing and the most fun a young witch could possibly have! Harry, you must go to this! I can't believe I did not think of it. Say yes!" Harry nodded and Fleur hugged him. "I will let father know. He was considering a foreign diplomat, you will be a much better fit."

"We also have a charity auction. You would auction yourself off to the highest bidding witch for a date." Harry actually stopped breathing for this one. Shock and horror. "It is for a good cause… ok... no."

There is a grand re-opening of L'Savoureux. It will have lots of coverage. The cover charge is going to support the restoration of magical sculptures. It is considered a very posh opening. On the down side, it is tomorrow night. I don't know if we can get you a date this quickly.

"That might be fun. I could take the girls." Harry loves good food.

Daphne shook her head "Well, I don't think the girls would fit in here. There is a no familiar or animal rule, not fair, but it is what it is."

Fleur chimed in again, "I know just the girl for this. Dominique Aris. You met her during the tri-wizard tournament. If you need a date, she could go with you. She loves to dress up. You can even give her career advice. She loves ancient magic, and you are an expert on it."

Harry had no idea who she was. All good, It should be fun. As much as his familiar likes going out, she hates restaurants. Watching other people eat food she can't.

"I guess that would work. I think I have dress robes for both events." Harry thought about it for a
"hold on" He summoned his trunk. Opening the trunk, it folded up into a large armoire and set of drawers.

Daphne inspected the clothes and agreed that Harry was covered. She recommended a second white tie – just in case. Opening a side cabinet, she had a bit of a start. This is the weapons cabinet. She closed it quickly.

"Finally, there is a play you can attend. It is the day after the Beauxbaton event."

"Maybe I can sit that out and watch Victoire for Bill and Fleur. It would be fun for me." Harry got bored at plays, but never with babies.

At this point there was another knock on the door. "Not Ginny" Bill stated. He was attuned to the wards and would know. Harry went to let Padma in. She was in a very attractive set of semi-formal dress robes. Definitely tailored to present her in as beautiful a way as possible.

Harry next brought Padma into the event planning. "Padma Patil, this is Bill and Fleur Weasley, Victoire Weasley, and you remember Daphne Greengrass from yesterday morning."

"I think I know most of you already. Daphne, good to see you again. Bill and Fleur, it has been a few years, but always a pleasure. And your baby is beautiful!"

"Harry, can I borrow you for a minute?" Padma obviously did not want an audience.

Stepping out of the room, Harry just waited for her to say her piece.

"So, Gareth Greengrass was reprimanded and put on probation for his unprofessional behaviour and his unapproved submission of legal documents. He is no longer a Senior Unspeakable. Honestly, he was only promoted because he authored those publications, so this is well deserved. His publications really caused embarrassment for the department. His demotion was just a matter of time."

Harry listened, then asked Padma, "Do you think that is enough? Is he another Rookwood? I really don't want to have to watch my back when dealing with the DoM."

"It is enough. He is not a Rookwood, but he is a bit of a bigot. You, a halfblood, employing his pureblood niece set him off. On the plus side, Croaker has shared his memory of the event and now he is a bit of a laughing stock. He always believed you were just lucky in the war and the power levels reported were just hype. Now he knows it is real. Truthfully, he probably fears you. Hell, Harry, I kind of fear you. That was impressive."

Harry just chuckled awkwardly at that. He didn't want Padma to fear him.

"So, can we keep working together?" Padma asked.

"Yeah – but no more surprises. Let's go review my itinerary and see where the moonlighting can fit in."

Returning to the room, Harry saw a few adjustments to the trip, but nothing major.

"We would like Harry to take part in an event that will free him up to go on a scouting mission with an operative. There is a charity auction he can participate in as a celebrity wizard. The winner will be a pre-determined French Auror and she will provide you with intel and a cover alibi."

At that, the room started laughing. It was the same charity auction Harry had shot down earlier.
During the laughter, Ginny walked into the room.

Ginny looked at the Two witches walking Harry thru different paperwork piles. She knew both of them. Padma Patil and The ice queen, Daphne Greengrass. Behind them was Harry's travel trunk still open and in armoire shape. It was filled with some of his nicer clothes. Definitely planning something. Not too broken up it seems.

"Hello, Harry." And the laughter stopped.

"Ginny. You remember Daphne and Padma. Daphne is my new social and image manager and, well, you know what Padma does." Looking at Daphne he adds, "Did I get the title right?" Daphne just nodded. He actually got it wrong, but close enough.

"Social and Image manager? What? Harry, when did you start caring about that crap?" Ginny was way off balance. In less than a week he had a social and image manager? And he chose Daphne 'the ice queen' Greengrass? What the hell?

'Andromeda actually hired Daphne. She is a huge help in my managing the duties and responsibilities of three families." Not that it was Ginny's business anyway. Changing the subject, "I saw your article. I guess congratulations are in order. It was a great picture of you."

Padma added, "Loved the article Ginny! The part about being a role model for young witches, perfect. I know you will really help a lot of witches out there. Oh, and congratulations on the Rookie of the year award! Well deserved." She could tell Harry was off guard and hurting a bit. She took the pressure off him. "Parvati is so jealous!"


Ginny smiled her trademark smirky smile. "Thanks, Padma. The interviewer did an excellent job. It really was an honor." Shifting her focus to her Ex, "Harry, can I see you for a minute? In the kitchen?"

Stepping out they looked at each other silently for a moment.

Harry Started, "The article was really good. You should be proud." Then flinching a little, "I'm guessing Bill told you I got a bit down over the 'Most Eligible Witch' title. Right?"

"No, he actually said you took it well. But I knew better and wanted to check on you. Harry, I promise you I would not have agreed to that. Or the early release."

"I know Gin, but it was still tough to read. Still, great article. I need to get Pipsey to get me a few so you can autograph one. Seriously Gin, be proud. Don't let anything rain on this achievement." Getting an unfocused look for a minute, he added, "look at all the crap they used to print about me! They may have a line or two that is about selling copies, but the article is what matters. And you killed it!"

Harry always knew how to make her smile. "So what's with all the travel and planning? Going somewhere?"

"Paris. Kind of an image and social trip along with a little DoM moonlighting. Hopefully a false alarm." Harry did not mention that it was originally supposed to be her birthday gift.

"Harry, have you ever had a false alarm?" Ginny started to remember why she needed a little space.
Pausing and concentrating, "Yep. About a year ago. Someone thought there were demons walking the streets. Turned out to be a really good muggle costume. Some teenager was going to a Halloween party." They both laughed at that one. Being used to Halloween disasters, Harry almost attacked the teenager on sight.

"Be safe Harry. Don't take any crazy chances." She moved in and kissed his cheek, then gave him a hug. She held him tight while saying, "I can't stand the idea of living in a world that does not have Harry Potter in it. Love you." She then let him go and stepped back. "Send me a postcard of the Eiffel Tower?"

"Absolutely." He noted that she still smelled like cinnamon.

"Well, I gotta go Harry, say goodbye to Bill and Fleur." He voice was starting to crack and her eyes were wet. She took out her wand to Appirate.

"Goodbye Ginny. And Happy early birthday, if I don't see you anytime soon." As she disapparated, Harry touched the cheek she kissed. He slowly turned and went back to the main room to review the travel plans. That was rough.

Gloomily he thought, 'Onward and Upward.'

Time to move on. Look out Paris, here I come.

Chapter End Notes

Authors Notes

There were a few scenes that reference abilities in the Earthdawn role playing game. For these, I inserted asterisks (*):

** This is called an 'Astral Face' in Earthdawn. It greatly strengthen a Nethermancer’s magical abilities. I slightly modified it to give Harry the features of a Black and White negative. Something of a reverse image in high contrast monochrome. Still, it is close to the Earthdawn description.

*** The temperature drops because a powerful Nethermancer can draw power from the astral plane. In Earthdawn it is referred to as the 'Nethersoul' Talent. I am making that part of the reflex Harry has when he gets angry. It also counteracts any fear based influence.

A Nethermancer is a magician that has followed a path that involves spirits, otherworldly powers, and the Astral plane. They are quite dangerous. Earthdawn is an amazing game system. I thought it went well with being the Master of Death.

A Iklwa is a very short spear – Zulu's used them. They are about half a normal spear length. The blade that makes up the tip is very long and can be used for piercing or slashing. Harry can use his as a short spear, or he can extend the shaft (magically) to be a regular spear length. Why a spear? Spears are cool. Also, they are imo the most common weapon in ancient times. Don't expect too much from this, he still prefers his wand.
Note on Harry's future travel plans: He will get out and about. Searching for ancient evil and places of power. You will see Malta listed frequently – it is a site with Ancient ruins that fit into the 'ancient artifacts' and 'ancient evil waiting to be let loose' themes. If interested, Google 'ruins of Malta' and be amazed. If you like this, check out the ruins of Santorini/Thera, Donana, Sardinia and the underwater pyramid in the Azores. Then you have Petra, Anasazi, Derinkuyu, Toltec, Chimú, Olmec, Huastec, Chavin, Mayan, Aztec, and Inca civilizations. No doubt plenty more – If you have any favorites I should add to the list, please share.

Lots of places for Harry to explore. If you are into creepy places that are not thousands of years old, there are some catacombs under Paris with the remains of over 6 million people. I hear our hero is heading that way soon and something sinister is going on in Paris. Dark and troubling…

Final note on Ginny: She is 19 years old and about to turn 20. She does not want to be married and starting a family. At least not yet. She was enjoying a life she really did not expect to have. She sees Harry as a great guy and, yes, a hero. She knows he hunts emerging dark lords and she needs a break from that. It is hard to break up a young couple where there is no one at fault, but I tried. But hey, if anyone had to be a little selfish/at fault, it is not going to be the hero. I need Harry to be single so he can go out and live an adventurous life that I can write about. Soon it will be all Single Harry. As I said at the beginning of the note, I have no plans to pair him anytime soon, either. And certainly not with anyone still in school, that would be pathetic.

On another note, writing his familiar is challenging. I originally read about the Runespoor and thought that sounds like Harry, Ron and Hermione. The Dreamer (Selene/Harry), the Strategist (Artemis/Ron), and the Pragmatic Realist/Critic (Hecate/Hermione). Hedwig was more of a mother figure. His runespoor is more of a teenage daughter or niece. Different relationship at a different point in his life. I see familiars as becoming what the witch or wizard they bond to needs them to be. 11 year old Harry needed a Mothering Familiar. Older Harry needed a familiar he could look after and take care of. It seemed fun to write about them bickering and getting into crazy antics while just being a part of Harry's life. Part of me now wishes I had written her with just one head. Exhausting. And make no mistake, Selene may seem harmless with her fashion tips, but she is absolutely ruthless. I patterned her somewhat on the character Amanda Plummer played in Pulp Fiction (Hunny Bunny) when she and her boyfriend robbed a diner. Watch it on you tube – 'pulp fiction opening scene' if you want to see my inspiration for Selene.

Well, thanks to all of you who are reading and enjoying this work.

Coming Soon: Harry goes to France, Bill has a man to man discussion with Harry about Veelas, Hermione makes plans, Gareth Greengrass is dressed down, Draco Malfoy makes an appearance, and something rotten is happening in the catacombs under the city of lights.

Till next time
Chapter Summary

Harry wraps up personal issues in England and heads to Paris. Let the adventure officially begin.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter

FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations while in France are in French unless otherwise specified. I may start with Bonjour or Oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of possibly the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Midnight in Paris

Shell Cottage
The Next Morning

Harry was enjoying a nice breakfast, then settled down on the sofa with Victoire. Bill and Fleur were going about preparing for their trip to France. Victoire was just looking up at Harry with huge blue eyes. Pipsey took a quick break from helping Bill and Fleur so she could get in some Victoire time. Harry was just talking away to the baby, discussing all kinds of esoteric theory. In a very soothing voice.

"Pipsey, can you prepare a bottle, I think she is hungry." Harry asked, but never took his eyes off of Victoire. "Someone should warn Fleur that this baby definitely has an allure!" Harry thought all babies had an allure…

Pipsey just shook her head. "Master Harry has important work to do, Pipsey will hold tiny baby." Holding out her hands eagerly.

Harry was no fool. Pipsey loved babies. Victoire seemed to like Pipsey. Hard to tell with an infant, but she definitely cried less when Pipsey held her. "Ok, Pipsey. You win." Harry said with an amused grin. "You know you don't have to call me Master, right?"

"Pipsey is sooo proud of her little Harry. He is Master and Lord Potter." No point arguing. Like Aunt Andromeda says, 'just go with it.'

Handing over little Victoire, Harry went back to check his gear. He was ready for just about anything Paris could throw at him. As long as it did not involve romance or relationships, he would
be just fine. Fleur had arranged for private tours and Daphne had made sure he would have opportunities for personal time as well as political time. He was really looking forward to the food.

He had a fully restored Leica iii, loaded with magical film to capture a little life in his pictures. Collin had given this to him for his twentieth birthday and he thought it looked easy. It was fully mechanical, no electronics – so it should work fine. The aperture and shutter speed dials were enchanted to optimize the images, he just had to point and focus. The dual eye-holes seemed a little odd, but he could manage. This would be fun.

He was taking his phoenix and holly wand as well as the blackthorn wand. These were his primary combo wands when he did not need the raw power of the elder wand. Both were very powerful and more than covered nearly any possible confrontation he could envision. That took care of his ranged attacks.

For non-magical solutions, he had his sig P226 and P239 pistols ready, but these were really just for when he was in non-magical areas of Paris. He also decided to bring his Benelli M4 Shorty. With pistol grip and enchantments to allow for one handed firing. He called it ‘the big gun’. Just in case. Most magical districts had wards that fouled out the black powder and prevented the bullets from firing. Harry had found a few ways around this for short periods, but in time, all bullets would stop working under the standard ministry designed wards. And magic really was more dangerous. Still, he frequently went out of the magical districts and any little advantage would help.

Checking his ammo, he preferred 149 grain JHP with runic casings to resist transfiguration spells and wards. He would get about 7-8 minutes before the runes broke down and the black powder was fouled. Most similar protections he had seen, lasted about 30-45 seconds. Of course, most protections don't use 4000 year old runic formulas. Similarly, he preferred to alternate 12 gauge slugs with 00 Buck Shot is his M4 shorty. Similar runic patterns, but due to the size of the shell, he could squeeze more on. He got about 10-12 minutes out of that runic sequence under standard wards. All VERY illegal.

In close, he had two daggers and his kurkuri knife. The kukuri was really more of a jungle machete, so he doubted he would take it out of the trunk. Then there was his Iklwa and short swords. Good for exercise, but limited in normal applications. The likelihood of close combat was small, but you never know.

Reviewing his small arsenal, Harry couldn't help but laugh. Thank goodness for astral pockets, these would really look odd strapped to him while he walks around Paris. People would run for cover.

When did he turn into a combat mage? Was he a combat mage? His Grandfather was. His parents were (His mum was equally a research mage, but that's quibbling). He wasn't so sure about himself. He didn't fight clean… He ignored local laws and worked best when alone or in a very small group. He was what was needed to protect innocents, like Teddy and Victoire. He was a night stalker, a hunter of horrors. A killer. An assassin. When he had to be.

'No wonder Ginny needed a break,' He thought calmly, shaking his head. 'That sounds melodramatic even to me!' At that, he began laughing and started putting away his 'tools of the trade'. His swiss army knife he kept out though. No putting that away!

Downstairs, he heard Teddy calling out his name. 'Looks like the send-off committee has arrived', he thought happily. He loved his family! Levitating his trunk down stairs he went to see them all off before heading to the international portkey departure site.

The send-off was nice. He promised Teddy that he would pick up souvenirs while away.
Andromeda seemed to be in a very good mood. He suspected that she enjoyed watching Harry scare the DoM employees more than she would admit. She was, after all, a Black at heart. Knowing Andromeda, she had played that scene over and over in her head and the Black family pensieve. Likely, she learned something about everyone in that room.

Handling a sealed folder to Harry, Andromeda made a request, "Harry, when you have a moment, I want you to go to this address. It is a Potter property in France you should look at. It has been in stasis for over two decades, so it may be a bit gloomy. As the last Potter, you are the only one the wards will recognize."

This got everyone's attention. Harry took the envelope and noted the Gringotts seal. "When did this come thru, Aunt Andromeda?" Harry forgot he would gain access to the Potter properties on his 21st birthday. He had limited access to his parent's house in Godric's Hollow, but that was kind of depressing. And he wasn't allowed to take up residence until he turned 21. There were probably a few others that were out there besides the one in France.

"This came thru while you were out exploring Malta. As your Proxy, I was alerted on your actual birthday. In the confusion of the last few days, I neglected to give it to you. Apologies, my dear." She was very happy about this. Harry wondered about this property, it must be nice if Andromeda was this excited about it. "There are a few more, but they can wait for now."

"Well, OK. I think I will have time on Sunday to sneak out. Maybe there will be wizard paintings and a library I can crack into." Hearing himself say this, he realized how much he sounded like Hermione.

Fleur chimed in at this point, "Where is it, Harry? I may know the area."

"Some place called…", pausing to read the name again, "…Yvoire. It's on lake Geneva." Harry noted that Fleur lit up at this. "Have you heard of this place?"

Fleur had that dreamy look she sometimes gets, "Oh, Harry. I know it well. I will definitely be adjusting your itinerary. Small, beautiful, and very restful. You will love it."

"Excellent. It should be fun." With that, he stood up, gathered his things, kissed the kids goodbye and nodded to Pipsey.

Pipsey apparated with the trunk and then Harry left right after. His apparition was barely audible.

After he left, Fleur smiled and looked at her husband. She really wanted Harry to have fun. With a little luck, he may even come to love France as much as she did. Finding out he had property in France was amazing! And the location, incredible.

Fleur knew if she could get a few of Bills 'inner circle' to France, Beauxbatons could easily become Victoire's school. At the very least, they would spend more time in France, near her family. Nothing against Britain, but she missed her native culture.

-CS-

International Portkey launch Site
London

Arriving at the international portkey site, Harry had to show his ID and deal with the fans. He took it in stride and had his photo taken with a dozen or so workers. When his scheduled portkey time was about to be missed, he excused himself and went to the processing point.
"The DMLE customs officer was a friendly little man, Looking up from Harry's paperwork and Passport he smiled and shook Harry's Hand. "Mr. Potter, it is a pleasure to meet you. The highlight of my day in fact. Now, I see your paperwork is in order. You have a DoM and DMLE waiver for inspections." Considering this, he added, "You do know this will not apply in France, right? They still retain the right for inspection."

"Yes, sir. I have an understanding with the French."

The kindly man just looked at him. Not knowing what to say, Harry offered, "You can look if you like, but I would have to inform you that looking will result in your accepting a DoM and DMLE confidentiality agreement." He then added with a conspiratorial smirk, "Can't let the dark wizards know I'm coming for them…"

That got a little chuckle and he was waved thru.

The launch site was a platform approximately ten feet by ten feet. Harry and Pipsey stepped up with the trunk between them.

5…4…3…2…1… Whooooosh.

International Portkey Landing Site

Paris

The Pipsey and the trunk landed perfectly. Harry rolled 5 feet off the mat. Dumbledore always said magic liked him and that's why portkeys and floos seemed to propel him with extra force. Like a firm handshake or a pat on the back. Harry wished they liked him less. "I will never get used to this."

The arrival point had a few wizards and witches busily going about their travel preparations. Harry kicked up a glamour before anyone recognized him. Brown hair, brown eyes and a goatee. Yep – glamoured facial hair. When you don't 'got it, just 'glam it'! That was good for a chuckle!

He and Pipsey went thru the customs line. There were random inspections, but Harry had placed a very subtle entropy charm on his trunk to greatly reduce the chance of an inspection. He knew he had waivers, but the shielded bullets would likely cause issues. Especially in France. For once, nothing went wrong.

Harry led Pipsey out the side door to the lobby. "OK, Pipsey, we have about four hours before dinner. Let's go find our apartment."

Approaching a professionally dressed lady at the front desk, Harry inquired on how to get around. His French was rusty, but serviceable. He really needed the practice. "Bonjour, Can you tell me how to get to my apartment? This is my first time here."

The lady just smiled politely and responded, "Oui, simply step out in the cobblestone pathway and hold out your wand. A carriage will pick you up. If you need faster service, simply hold out your wand on the paved pathway, and a bus will collect you." Pausing she added with a smile, "I recommend the carriage. Your first time in Paris should be memorable."

The carriage was pleasant and the sights were nice. He took a few photos with his camera, but mostly he just sat back and enjoyed the ride. The driver further instructed him on how to summon the carriages, apparently there were numerous cobblestone areas where he could summon one. His apartment building had one such area he could use right out front, under a covered roof.
The driver pulled up to the rented apartment. It was on the third floor in the 7th Arrondissemement with a fantastic view of the Eiffel Tower. He paid the driver and added a very generous tip. Never hurts…

Making their way up to the third floor, Harry entered the apartment. He immediately began scanning and looking for anything out of the ordinary. It was clean. He opened his trunk and set up a few portable ward stones. Without a ley line, he would have to power them up each day. He would summon an ally spirit to watch over the property at night and an air elemental for the day time.

It was a single level historic apartment that looked like it was from a bygone age. In other words, pretty normal for a wizard's apartment. It had a large bedroom with a huge window looking straight at the Eiffel tower. The bathroom was gorgeous and featured a huge tub, big enough for two. The kitchen was small and lacked any electronics. Obviously. The sitting area was cozy and charming with a gorgeous fire place. A quick check confirmed that it was not in the French floo network. Good.

He opened his trunk and went thru his primary belongings. Some he would carry in an astral pocket, others would have to be kept in the trunk until needed. He charmed the windows to be opaque and put a sticking charm on them as well.

He and Pipsey checked the dishes, glasses, and pots for any poisons or harmful coatings. The water and pipes were checked as well. A simple spirit was summoned to check out the adjoining apartments. Harry did not feel any wards or auras, but it was worth checking. It all came back negative. An hour well spent in Harry's opinion. Pipsey felt otherwise.

"Hey Pipsey, can you go and get a bouquet of flowers for my date? Oh, I also need 4 living rose bushes. They don't need flowers, but they need to be healthy and very thorny." Pipsey grinned and with a 'pop' was out collecting flowers. Where house elves get their goods, he had no idea. Harry wanted to make a good impression. Kreacher knew clothes and Pipsey knew flowers. The date was certainly a friendly date and primarily for show, but there were social expectations and protocols to follow.

While Pipsey was out, Harry pulled back the area rug of the sitting area and drew a summoning triangle inside a circle. He gathered his summoning bowl and a bag of treated soil. Soaking the small amount of soil in his ritual bowl, he summoned a minor wood elemental. Exerting a bit of will force, he had it watch the apartment for possible intruders. The rose bushes would give it form. It would be his first line of defense and also serve as an alarm. He also used it to keep the air fresh and clean. So, security and air freshening. Wood elementals were excellent for this all year long.

After this was done, Harry went into the bathroom, closed the door and created a runic summoning circle. After he blocked out all light, he meditated for a few minutes and called out to Fashad, an ally spirit. Fashad knew security as he claimed to have been an assassin or thief in life. He varied his telling enough that Harry was not sure which, but his knowledge was good enough to have been either. Likely, he was both. Maybe neither. Fashad agreed to watch the apartment at night. In exchange, Harry would have to steal something from a vendor each day for the next 3 days and leave it for Fashad each night.

Harry really didn't like stealing, but he could always go back and leave generous tips to cover the loss. One theft per night, for three nights, that was a steeper than normal price. Fashad must either like Paris, or hate it. Maybe both, spirits were impossible to completely understand.

OK – Security set. Coming out of the bathroom, Harry noted there were now plenty of fresh
flowers. The rose bushes were gorgeous and quite 'thorny'. Maybe he should have summoned a
two wood elementals. "Pipsey, how was shopping?" Harry noted Pipsey was scrubbing the kitchen
down magically.

"Pipsey LOVES Paris Master Harry! We have so many flower choices. Pipsey picked out a
bouquet and a corsage for Master Harry's lucky lady. Pipsey also makes master a matching
boutonniere." then added, "Does Master Harry like the rose plants?

"The roses are amazing. You know how much I like Damask Roses. They smell so nice." Harry
places the plants around the apartment. Well, that was that. "Thanks again Pipsey, the flowers for
my date also look Amazing."

Washing his hands he looked at his little friend. "I'm going to take a quick walk around the area. I
need to pick something up for Fashad" Pipsey shivered a little at that. Unlike Kreacher, she really
did not like Fashad.

Harry put on his favorite jeans and a simple oxford cloth shirt. A simple spell camouflaged his
familiar to look like a scarf. Thinking twice, he grabbed a light jacket and enchanted an astral
pocket. Now he was ready to steal some poor guys stuff.

The 'girls' loved the sights and sounds. Being under a scarf illusion, they had to stay tight around
Harry's neck. They had comments about everything. Paris seemed to agree with them. Harry used
up an entire roll of film just walking around and seeing the sights. It was fun! Then, he had to get
down to business.

It took him a while before he found the right place. It was a small souvenir kiosk with mini Eiffel
towers. He used a simple disillusionment on himself and a glamour of a crazy Chihuahua as a
distraction. He took a tower replica. The illusionist in him was thrilled. He hated himself for
enjoying it. Breaking the rules was always something he just could not resist. He would come back
tomorrow and buy a few towers and post cards.

Returning to the apartment, he set the tower in the pre-determined spot for Fashad. The spirit
would most likely claim it while he was on his 'date'. Time to get ready. First, he dropped the
Glamour. Time to show his own face. He showered and shaved the little bit of fuzz on his chin and
His upper lip. Deodorant applied, teeth brushed, and he was good to go.

Looking in the mirror, Harry realized that he may be 21, but he still looked like a teen ager. This
Mirror did not fawn all over him, what with it being non-magical. Maybe seventeen or a young
eighteen. He had filled out a bit since Hogwarts, but was still slender, he just had more wirey
muscle. Barely an ounce of fat. Quite a few scars on the torso… but that goes with the territory. He
could pass for a seventh year. Maybe. The eyes look older. They had seen too much suffering. He
wished he was six feet tall, but five foot nine inches would have to do. His dragon hide boots of
choice added nearly an inch, but that really didn't count. At least he was taller than most girls now.
Back in his Hogwarts days, that used to bug him.

For this gathering, it would be in the magical sector of Paris. He would wear dress robes. No hat!
A light Basilisk skin vest under the robes (he was thin enough to pull it off. Dragon hide boots. A
dagger in right boot and his Blackthorne wand on the outside of the left boot. It needed a larger
sheath due to the thorns. Not expecting trouble, he left the other 'goodies' in his trunk.

The runespoor settled down on a heated mat Harry always brought for them. The girls were still a
little sluggish from the piglet they had before the trip started. Harry had Pipsey style his hair.
Apparently, she used to style his dad's hair – she called it the 'broom struck' look. Something about
replicating the look of riding his broom. Stupid name, but it looked good.
So, Pipsey knows flowers, cleaning, comfort cooking, babies, and hair. Fun in a comfortable way. Kreacher knows fashion, gourmet cooking, Etiquette, maintaining weapons, and how to deeply insult people. Fun in a different way.

Harry double checked the wards, pumped them up slightly, then he headed out. He hailed a carriage and set off for Ms. Domonique Aris' apartment.

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Dominique's Apartment
6th Arrondissement

It was in the 6th Arrondissement, aka Saint-Germain-des-Pres. Her apartment was stylish and well groomed. Judging from the power lines and the electromagnetic 'humming', Harry could feel, there were lots of electronics in the building. Harry couldn't stay too long or they would start to fail. Good escape strategy if he needed it. 'I'd love to stay, but all your electronics might start failing…' That would be a funny line. He kept reminding himself to call her Dominique, not Monique. He kept getting that confused. Was he… Nervous? This wasn't a real date… deep breaths. Occlumency.

Calming himself, he knocked on the door. While he waited, Harry opened up his astral sight and senses. No real wards on the building or apartment. Just a feeble locking ward on the door. Probably windows too. He could sense a generic apparition ward, but any powerful practitioner could punch through it. Well, maybe not anyone. He could, with ease. No thought or concern for danger… was France really this safe? Maybe he should be asking, was Great Britain really so dangerous?

A very pretty young lady, a few years older than Harry, opened the door. She did look vaguely familiar. "Bonjour, Dominique? You may not remember me, I'm Harry Potter." She had brown hair and warm hazel eyes. Her smile was sincere and it went all the way up to her eyes. She was about five foot five inches, a little shorter than him when in heels. He called her Dominique, not Ms. Aris. It was a date after all. Sort of.

He took her hand and did the "kiss on the knuckles" that etiquette demanded. Being muggle raised, it felt weird, but it was expected. He always checked his ring to make sure there was no poison – it warmed when toxins were close. Paranoid much? He knew for a fact that one of his ghost instructors had coated her hand with a slow acting contact poison to remove political rivals. Madame Pompadour was one of his best instructors. The resurrection stone had really been educational.

"Of course I remember you, Harry. Please come in. I am almost ready, I'll only be a moment. Can I get you anything?" She had on a gorgeous outfit. Selene would have pestered him to ask her questions, he just appreciated it for what it was – beautiful.

"No thanks, I'm good." Harry decided not to bring up her lack of security. Still, it bothered him. Damn, the flowers were in his astral pocket. Pulling them out along with the corsage, he fluffed them slightly. Pipsey had very good taste.

"Are those for me? Where did they come from? Conjured?" She asked with an arched eye brow. Conjuring flowers was kind of a cheap thing to do, not horrible, but not great either. He could tell she was teasing him, but he still squirmed a little.

"No, I just forgot to take them out of their pocket. My pocket, I mean. They are fresh." Handing her the flowers, he fumbled around and held up the corsage. It was very elegant and it complimented
his boutonniere, just as Pipsey said it would. "This is for you as well." He said holding the corsage out.

Dominique just smiled, she had been told that he was rather inexperienced, having only dated one person. And Fleur was very clear that Ginny was not into social graces. Something of an athletic girl. What was the term? Tom-Boy? Still, watching him fumble around was cute. "Thank you, Harry. Here, hold my flowers while I pin the corsage on." She had noted his boutonniere. Looking Harry in the eye and smiling, she then said, "Now we match!"

Putting the flowers in a vase, they headed out. Harry held the doors for her and helped her into the carriage. This would be fun!

Harry found Dominique very easy to talk to. She was working on her mastery in history of magic. Her specialty was rituals and hieroglyphs. As Fleur had said, Dominique loved ancient magic of all kinds, so the mastery was not really a shock. She seemed to come alive when discussing the differences between Egyptian, Sumerian, and Hittite runic formulas. Harry was very knowledgeable in this area and she hung on his every word. She had some unique insight into the Canaanite methods and rituals. She was smart and stylish. This seemed to be the Beauxbaton way. He decided again not to bring up her lack of decent wards. How could you know so much and have so little protection? Maybe later.

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L’Savoureux Restaurant
Paris

Getting to the restaurant, Harry escorted her in and noted a few flashbulbs. He was, after all, there on business. What did Daphne call it? Ah, yes – 'Building the Brand'. He saw Colin was there taking pictures. Oh, boy.

"Harry! Harry, over here!" Colin was waving frantically. Dominique just looked on. This was all new to her, he'd apologize later.

Harry waved back to Collin, "Hi Collin, good to see you. Hey, any chance we can get copies?" Harry let Collin take pictures as he knew Collin would never make him look bad. And Collin always shared.

"Sure thing Harry! Turn just a little to the right. That's good. Look up slightly Miss…” Click/Flash. "Perfect."

"Thanks Collin. Hey, if you are in town, send me a note. Maybe we can synch up." Harry always felt protective of Collin. He would have to talk to Daphne about using Collins photography.

Looking at Domonique, he asked, "Do you want a few copies? Collin is really good." She just smiled and nodded her head. Thankfully, she seemed amused. "We went to school together, you know. You might remember him, small guy with a lot of blond hair and a huge camera." Harry realized that was still a good description of Collin. She just shrugged and smiled.

Harry led Dominique into the restaurant. There were a lot of affluent people there. Harry had gotten to know exactly how to behave in these scenarios, but he still clenched up a little. The owner mad a direct path as soon as he saw them enter.

"Mr. Potter, I'm so glad you could attend my little opening. My name is Jean Chopin. I am the proprietor and happy host for the party tonight."
"Please, call me 'Harry' Mr. Chopin. And this is my lovely date, Dominique Aris." Soon, they were all on a first name basis.

And the night went on like this. Harry made a point of promoting his date at every opportunity. A mastery in ancient magical history would take her far in academia. These were good people for her to know. They openly discussed more of the ancient cultures when they were not pulled into other conversations. A few people overheard and asked if Dominique was a researcher.

Harry had a glass of champagne. He always checked both his and Dominique's glass before drinking anything. Better to be safe, than sorry. He stopped at one drink, she had three over the course of the night. The food was magnificent and the dessert was to die for. There was no doubt, this was an amazing event. He actually gave out Daphne's contact information to a few people that wanted to discuss business with him. He had a good feeling about this.

As the night began winding down, Harry made a point to thank the owner. Harry asked if he could have Collin come in and take a few personal photos. Jean Chopin allowed it, as long as it was personal only and permission was requested before every shot. Harry had Collin take a few more of him with Dominique, then with Jean. A few other couples did the same. Jean took Collin's card at the end and Collin joined the press outside.

As Harry began to relax, he had a sudden feeling of being watched. Intently. Not a dangerous feeling, just a feeling of being monitored. Looking around subtly, he could not tell who it might be. Harry wandlessly created an orbiting spy to watch for any dangerous individuals. Doing it with a wand was faster and easier, but it wasn't like he was in combat. He hid the creation behind a simple glamour of sparkling lights that spelled out 'L'Savoureux' before they fizzed up and away. That got a small applause.

Jean Chopin was loving the impact of having Harry Potter in his restaurant. The glamour the young man created was perfect. Did he even use his wand? He had heard that Harry was sullen and reclusive, a bit of a shadow-dwelling introvert. But this Harry was a showman. Now, if he could just bring him back in on a regular basis… Tomorrow he would reach out to Ms. Greengrass and see what could be done.

Harry summoned back the spy and it told him that he was being watched astrally by a woman in the far right corner. That had to be it. Rising to leave, Harry shook Jean's hand and led Dominique out. Right at the door, he turned and looked in the far right corner. She was beautiful. Insanely beautiful. He felt like he had seen her before, but could not place it. Looking astrally, he saw that she was also powerful. Certainly playing in the major league, a mage level power. Her eyes were slightly glowing and... she had an orbital spy of her own. Watching him. Now he was on high alert.

He helped Dominique into the carriage and had it proceed down a busy street. The witches orbital spy was still following them. He tried to converse with Dominique, but was too distracted. Did he want to destroy the spy? He couldn't risk Dominique's safety.

Seeing a coffee shop that looked open, he saw his chance. "Dominique, would you like a cup of coffee?" She nodded, so he had the carriage pull over. He paid and took Dominique's hand. As the carriage pulled away, He silently apparated them both back to her apartment. Dominique looked stunned and just stared at him.

"I'm sorry Dominique, but we were being watched. Astrally. By someone who was powerful enough to have an orbiting spirit. Trust me on, that was not normal. She was a powerful witch, mage Level." She was still just staring at him. "Will you say something?"

"I don't know what to say. Are we… safe?" She seemed to be in a state of shock. Harry knew he
should have told her in the carriage, but he did not know if anyone was listening. Damn, a silencing charm would have worked! Simple and easy. He had been working solo too long.

"Yes, yes. I got us out unnoticed. I really am sorry. Sometimes I attract attention that I don't want. In hindsight, I should have put up a silencing charm and explained in the carriage. Sorry. You know I am a curse breaker and a bit of an explorer. I know a lot of unusual arcane lore. Sometimes I encounter people that want my services, whether I want to give them or not." Minimize the danger and maybe the night can be salvaged. Should he minimize it?

"Harry, you just apparated straight into my living room. I thought I had wards to prevent that…" At a loss for words, but no longer afraid of him, she just asked, "How?"

"Well, your wards are pretty basic. I can upgrade them. Free of charge. You are actually close enough to a ley line for it to be self-supporting." Trying to re-kindle a little bit of the connection they had earlier, he added, "We could use one of the Sumerian runic designs as the base. Like we talked about in the carriage. Your electronics might be impacted, but your security would be greatly increased."

"I'll think about it." She said, the silence was awkward. She then added, "Well, I should probably call it a night…". 

Harry now knew the date was officially over. "Oh, right." Trying to salvage a little dignity and pride, he implored, "Please, try to focus on the fun we had, not the way I screwed it up at the end. You know my background, sometimes I get a little…" More awkwardness. He didn't want to say paranoid. Really, he didn't. Sadly accepting his mistake, he decided to just get this night over with. Very quietly, he wrapped up with, "Well, have a good night Dominique. I definitely had a lovely evening." Harry stepped backward and was getting ready to turn around.

Her shock at being suddenly apparated into her apartment had mostly passed. Part of the shock was the ease with which he did it. She could feel his power, and she realized how vulnerable she was. Alone, suddenly – in her apartment. With a powerful young mage that she barely knew.

Now that the shock had mostly worn off, she saw him as the kind young man she had spent the evening with. He actually looked a bit crushed. Taking pity on him, she stepped forward and kissed his cheek, "Thank you, Harry. It was a wonderful evening, with an... unusual ending. But still, a great night. I had fun and I am sure I will never forget it." And she smiled sincerely while she said it.

Harry was so relieved. He gave her a quick hug and left. Not a total disaster. Once outside her apartment, he apparated to his own place. He quickly pulled on his combat gear. Full basilisk armor, the heavier one. Heavy, but still lighter than dragon hide. He grabbed his Iklwa, sheathed it, and strapped it to his back. He took his invisibility cloak and apparated to an dark alleyway across from the restaurant. He settled in, outside, across the street and under his invisibility cloak.

Summoning his orbital spy, he had it run recon for the woman that had been watching him. She was nowhere to be found. Tomorrow, he would pay Jean Chopin a visit and get the guest list. He would find out who his mystery admirer was.

Harry realized it was now about midnight. Standing alone, in the shadows, looking for trouble. A magnet for danger.

Sarcastically, he thought to himself, 'Midnight in Paris, no romance in sight.'

He felt... oddly at home.
Chapter End Notes

Authors Notes:

And now we launch into the Paris adventure.

A nice and friendly date ruined. This is why Mad Eye Moody never dates.

A mysterious witch with impressive levels of power. One who is interested in Harry.

And we still don't know what the French ministry wants him to look into.

Read and review, constructive feedback appreciated.

Till next time.
A Walk Through a Museum

Chapter Summary

Harry’s adventures in Paris continue.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Walk thru a Museum

Harry's Rented Apartment
Same Night
Paris

Harry returned to his apartment around 1AM. He noted the 'tower offering' to Fashad had been taken. His Familiar was asleep, but Pipsey greeted him. "Did Master Harry catch dark wizard?"

Looking into Pipsey's huge and trusting eyes, Harry just smiled and shook his head. "Not a Wizard this time Pipsey, it was a Witch. She may not be evil, but she sure was powerful! Anyway, I lost her. Spoiled my date, too."

Harry began removing his weapons and putting them away. Trying not to wake the 'girls'. Athena was kind of mean when it came to sleep. "So, I need to make up for the crappy ending of my date. Maybe tomorrow you can give me a few ideas on how to fix it."

"Uh-oh, what did Master do…" Shaking her head and 'tisking' away, Pipsey looked a bit comical. Sweet, but comical. Harry realized she had looked after his dad, too. That probably explained a lot. Harry knew his dad was a bit of a scoundrel.

Nothing too bad Pipsey. When I saw that we were being watched, I apparated her to her apartment. In my haste to protect her, I neglected to tell her what I was doing." There, nice and rehearsed. "It kind of scared her, or something." He said all this while removing his basilisk hide armor. It fits tight and peels off with great effort. Being an August night kind of makes it a lot worse. Maybe he should put baby powder or something on under it next time.

Not hearing anything, Harry turned and looked down at Pipsey. She was covering up her mouth in shocked surprise. After a moment, she dropped her hand and exclaimed, "Young Wizards do NOT
go into a young witches home UNINVITED! Pipsey has failed to train tiny Harry better." She started crying at this.

'Tiny Harry?' He wondered what that was about. 'I'm way bigger than Pipsey', Harry just shuffled around. Harry suspected she was intentionally overreacting. Guilt Trip? Is this what she used to do with his dad?

He recalled that Pipsey was his nursemaid. Just as she was his dad's nursemaid. "I just got scared, Pipsey. Dominique said she had fun, until the mistake." She did not look convinced. "I did apologize and she said it was OK… but I need to fix things. Will you think about what I should do and tell me in the morning?"

"Pipsey will fix things." Continuing with a deep sigh, "Master Harry said sorry and his new witch forgave him. Pipsey will help fix" Then smiling and shaking her head, "Pipsey helped fix lots of James' mistakes." Stopping and thinking back, she just said, "Poor miss Lily."

Harry didn't ask. He took a shower, got a glass of water and went bed. As he drifted off he wondered, 'Did Pipsey say MY new witch? I hope she doesn't do anything crazy.'

The next morning, Harry woke up saw his familiar coiled around his left arm. He was so used to this, it was comforting. She was really getting too big and there was a lot of thick snake body left over. Her heads were on the pillow beside him. He just grinned.

He slowly pulled his arm thru her coils so as not to wake her and went to get a cup of Earl Grey. Pipsey knew the drill. Earl Grey, Sunny side up eggs, bacon or sausage, and toast. Sometimes she made hash browns and kidney beans.

Walking into the kitchen, he saw a small quiche and bacon with a croissant. Looks like Pipsey is enjoying a little French cooking! "Good morning Pipsey!" Harry kissed her on the top of the head. "This looks amazing! I love you Pipsey." He knew how badly Pipsey needed to be appreciated. She never really recovered from losing Harry's parents and grandparents.

Pipsey was beaming with happiness. "Pipsey is glad master Harry loves her breakfast. Here is earl grey with lemon." She took a minute, then added, "Pipsey fixed Master Harry's problem. Miss Aris will be most glad to see you now."

Oh, no. no. no. no. no. Time suddenly stood still. "Pipsey… what did you do?"

"Pipsey sent a dozen, dozen and invitation to Master Harry's walkabout at the dusty place." She was beaming with happiness.

"Walkabout? What? And what is a dozen, dozen?" Harry had to talk very quietly to keep Pipsey from overreacting, but he was crawling out of his skin right now.

"A dozen dozen assorted Flowers. Pipsey chose Daisies. And Tulips, and peach roses, and …"

"Pipsey, are you saying you ordered her 144 fresh flowers?" omg. Omg. omG. OMG. "And, what is this 'walkabout' you invited her to?"

"YES, Pipsey fixed it with Flowers!" She clapped her hands now. "The walkabout is the tour Miss Fleur gave you. Musee Carnavalet." Pipsey was so excited. Harry had to wonder if she ever got involved with his mum and dad. Hey, at least she didn't go and clean Dominique's apartment while she slept… Sometimes, you have to look on the bright side.

Harry just nodded and smiled. And had more Earl Grey. Harrods no 42. Finishing breakfast, he
opened his Banishing Box to go thru his mail. Pretty basic stuff. He had intended to go by the restaurant from last night and check the guest list. Now that he had an afternoon date planned with Dominique, he would have to get Daphne to do the scouting for him. Was it another date? Would Dominique just laugh in his face? Which, given the 144 flowers, she just might.

OK – Harry pulled out a pen and wrote a note to Dominique. He like to write while he enjoyed his second cup of tea...

Dear Dominique,

Thank you for last night, I had fun. Sorry again for the unusual excitement at the end. I hope you like flowers. LOL. Funny story - I'll fill you in this afternoon, if you are interested in a friendly tour. The Musee Carnavalet is giving me a private 'back room tour' of their Egyptian objects from 'The Old Kingdom of Egypt'. Magical and mundane historical items; you might like it. The artifacts are not available to the public. I am going to help them translate a tricky message combining hieroglyphs and a bit of 'Wadi el-Hol'. I am one of the very few who can speak and read Wadi el-Hol, so they are rewarding me with the tour of their unusual artifacts. I plan to go there at 3PM and stay a couple of hours. Should be fun, hope you can make it.

Sincerely,
Harry

—-CS—-

Authors Notes:

** Old Egypt is refers to what was called the "Old Kingdom" from about 2700-2200 BCE.

*** Wadi el-Hol is the name of the 'Gulch of Terror' where a very old writing style was discovered in 1999. It is not fully translated, very little is known about it. It may have been the first/earliest known phonetic alphabet. Most people just refer to the script by the location it was found. I have decided to hijack it and make it Parsel Script. Even if translated, it would only be a bunch of hisses and snake sounds…

—-CS—-

Ok, that should do it. Placing it in the banishing box for a moment, he knew it went out. Hopefully, Gringotts, Paris branch was as efficient as the London branch. Now, a quick letter to Daphne, and he will be ready to go out and steal something for Fashad. Hopefully Daphne was 'wily' enough to get the guest list.

Sending Daphne a quick letter, he got ready to go out. Picking up the 'girls' from the bed he draped them over his shoulders. He had to apply the 'scarf galmour' but that was no big deal. But, if she gets any bigger, he will need a feather lite charm. Do all familiars grow this fast? It seemed like just yesterday she could fit in his lapel pocket!

An hour later, Harry had a pilfered snow globe for Fashad. He also purchased from yesterday’s 'mark' 6 Eiffel towers and a dozen post cards. He had mentioned to Hecate that Dominique was a researcher, which might have been a mistake. He had to disillusion himself and cast notice me not charms to keep people from staring at the strange Brit hissing to his fluttering scarf. Hecate could really talk fast when she wanted to.

Hecate was eager to see the artifacts and Artemis seemed to be more interested in the mysterious witch from last night. The one watching him. Yep, his girls were a fun bunch. It was at this point
that he realized he would have to surprise Dominique with his gals. Assuming she was even willing
to be seen with him.

Checking his banishing box, he had a letter from Dominique. That was fast, what was it, an hour or
so? Too fast? We'll see. Opening the letter, he smiled. She would meet him at the B.D.J. cafe at
1PM. She offered to buy lunch. Nice, and meeting him takes the pressure off. Pulling out his map,
it is an easy walk to the museum. Fun.

His next letter was from Colin. He's covering the Beauxbaton garden even freelance. 'Maybe I can
help him out,' thought Harry. Writing him back, Harry asked Colin to come and visit Eiffel tower
with him on Tuesday. He liked Colin. Tons of energy. Always positive. Made Harry feel tall! LOL.
He needed some fun time.

Last letter was from Daphne. She said she was on it. Apparently Jean had already reached out to
her. She was taking the 'business contact' approach to get the invitee list. Harry thought he chances
were 50-50. On a whim, he invited her to his Yvoire home on Monday. Added that he was going to
invite Andromeda as well. Harry really didn't want to give her the wrong idea. Hopefully it would
be clean enough.

He next sent Teddy a post card and a snow globe he had personally enchanted to have the snow
spell out a 'yes', 'no', 'maybe', or 'ask later' at random after being shaken. Harry remembered Dudley
spending hours with his magic 8 ball. Until he broke it anyway. It should make Teddy happy.

Sent a postcard and a letter to Andromeda. Invited her to his home in Yvoire on Monday with
Daphne. He filled her in on his trip and how well everything was going. He left out the strange
witch that he encountered last night. No sense making waves in a still lake. Hopefully she could
make it.

He sent a post card to Ginny, too. A quick note about seeing the sights and thinking of her. Said he
saw Colin. Nothing too personal. He signed it with, take care. He also sent a mini Eiffel Tower.

Last, he sent a note to Bill offering to keep Victoire on Thursday night with the Delacours. He
offered up his home in Yvoire with the condition that if it was a mess, he would give them his
apartment. Bill and Fleur were like his brother and sister, this is the least he could do.

OK – mail is done. Time to secure the apartment again.

Sitting in his summoning triangle in the main room, he watered the roses and performed a soil
cleansing and enriching ritual to appease the wood elemental. He didn't have to do it, but it kept the
 elemental happy. He then charged up the wards. Next time he travels, he would have to get a ley
line map. Charging up the wards was time consuming. Considering his itinerary, he would have to
see about scaling it back. It may be a little full, and he liked just walking around.

Wards fully empowered. Elemental appeased. Fashad's gift out of the way… Time to get ready. He
wanted a little time to explore with the girls, so he planned to leave early and kill a little time. It
would also allow him to scout out the area around the museum and the café. No one would
recognize him under the glamour he had cast. After last night, he would have his orbiting spy
circulating and watching. Just in case…

Showered and changed, he transfigured his Iklwa into a small umbrella. Seeing how it is overcast,
no one would look twice. Black jeans, a simple green crew neck tee shirt, and a royal blue light
weight linen sport coat, he was out the door. He felt a little overdressed. The sport coat did let him
keep his pistol in a hidden astral pocket easily enough.
Harry had to wonder, 'Why did Kreacher always put him in a sport coat of some kind? And why the green? Kreacher always said it matched his eyes, but sometimes it seems like Kreacher is trying to convert me to Slytherin.'

Other than the Ilkwa, The sig P226, a simple dagger and his primary wand, he was pretty light from a combat point of view. No armor. No second wand. No Benelli M4 Shorty. He felt like a civilian! Considering what he just thought, he had to laugh a little.

B.D.J. Café
5 rue de Jarente
Paris

The carriage actually got him there a little early. Walking around, he got a nice feel for the area. His orbiting spy made the rounds and all was clean. He decided to go in and get a seat. He as 10 minutes early. Dropping his glamour, he walked in.

Approaching the hostess, Harry smiled and asked for a table, "Bonjour, I'd like to get a table for two please."

She smiled back, "Bonjour, do you have a reservation?"

Harry suddenly remembered that he was not in the magical district. He had no pull here… "No… sorry. How long is the wait?" Looking around, the café was full and there were people waiting. Maybe Dominique set up a reservation? Before the hostess could reply, he quickly asked, "Or is there a reservation under Dominique Aris?"

"Ah, Oui. She has already been seated." Harry followed her to the back of the restaurant. To his shock, Dominique was already seated and Harry would have to have his back to the entire restaurant. In parsle tongue he whispered, "watch my back, girls. He silently cast a 'sound muffler' around the table. It would not silence everything, but it would distort and muffle sound enough that no one could make out what they were saying. He'd have to expand it when the waiter came by.

"Hi Dominique. Thank you for meeting with me again! Oh, they're charmed to look like a scarf, but this is my familiar, Hecate, Selene, and Artemis. I named them after three moon goddesses."

Dominique looked intrigued and simply said, "Good to see you Harry. And pleased to meet you... three."

The scarf fluttered around a bit. Prompting Harry to add, "Yes, I have a glamour and a mild 'confundus' up to prevent anyone from noticing. Although you could ask, 'why is that crazy Brit wearing a scarf in August?'" To that they both laughed. Harry gently placed his 'scarf' on the chair beside him.

Harry jumped in first, "Hey, thanks again. Sorry about last night. I am officially off the clock now. No sudden apparitions."

Smiling she just said with a playful smirk, "I'll hold you to that, Harry." Thinking a bit, "You have three familiars?"

"Yes, but it's complicated. The girls are a runespoor." At this, Dominique jumped a little and did a double take at the scarf. "It's OK, she is my constant friend and confidant. Artemis is my strategist, Selene is my fashion and social advisor, and Hecate keeps me from doing anything too stupid." Harry said all that with a grin.
"Well, I look forward to meeting them outside of a glamour."

"Hecate has been eager to meet you as well. I may have mentioned our conversation last night around ancient rituals."

The topic turned to old magic. With Hecate sending questions to Dominique thru Harry. Then it slowly morphed to school. Harry did not talk as much as listen. His school experience was exceptionally horrible. The tri-wizard tournament was never brought up. At one point they were served and the food was excellent. Harry especially liked the lamb.

"I have a very eager house elf who loves flowers. I mentioned that I," Struggling for the right words… "Acted rashly last night and asked her for advice. I had no idea she would flower bomb you." Perfect. Acted rashly. Fortunately, Dominique seemed to think it was funny.

Finally, the conversation turned to relationships.

Harry started, "I only really dated one person. We were together for a few years, but we broke up last week. I guess I wanted a family too much. Too fast. Too young. Throw in that there was always something dangerous around every other corner and… she needed a 'Break' from 'Us'. She's doing great and we are still friends. I guess. Who knows, maybe we'll find our way back to each other. Maybe we won't. But we both intend to do amazing things in the meantime. I'm taking a break from romance for a while, so I can figure out what I really want." There. Now it is done. He could relax.

Dominique already knew about Ginny. The French version of Witch Weekly circulates about two days after the English version. She could see that the scars were still healing and he was OK. She did as one crazy question, "Do you still love her?"

He answered immediately, "Yes." Then considering, "But I also know she needed time apart. Maybe I did, too. To stretch our wings, so to speak." Harry was shocked to realize that he actually meant it. Taking a deep breath, Harry took the plunge and asked about her status, "What about you? A beautiful witch like you must have wizards knocking on her door…"

"Similar to you, my last relationship ended about a month ago. Phillippe was more serious than I was. He wanted to settle down, but I am not ready to give up my career. Our split was NOT as nice as yours. He took it poorly." Looking into the distance, she added, "I still care about him. I don't know if I love him or not, but I did once. We were good together. He wanted me to give up my dreams and follow his. He is an up and comer in the French ministry. Being married to a 'Ministry Man' does not leave a spouse time for a career."

Shrugging her shoulders, "We are not so much on a 'Break' as we are on a permanent hiatus. I am, like you, taking stock in my life and avoiding romance."

Appreciating her honesty, Harry reached out and squeezed her hand. He always appreciated it when Fleur did it to him. Comforting. Next, he held up his glass and said, "To New Friends and Avoiding Romance."

"Cheers" she said as she touched his glass with her own. Harry realized he may have made a friend.

-CS—

Musee Carnavalet

16 Rue des Francs Bourgeois
Paris

Arriving a little late, Harry and Dominique met the Magical Curator, Madame Bellamy. She was a strong looking woman who appeared to be in her early fifties. In the magical world, appearances and age could be deceiving. Powerful Wizards and Witches frequently enjoyed an extended youth and overall lifespan.

Madame Bellamy introduced herself and held out her hand to Harry. He kissed her hand, as Andromeda trained him, and introduced Dominique and himself. Harry still found the kiss on the hand awkward.

"Well, Mister Potter, It is nice to meet you. I did not expect you to bring a friend, but as far as dates go, you will find the Musee Carnavalet to be a very amazing place to bring one." This is a witch who obviously loves and takes pride in her museum.

As they walked thru the private and undocumented part of the library, she pointed out the most interesting pieces. Harry was fully immersed in the history of the place; and so, it appeared, was Dominique. Finally, they were led to an ancient stone obelisk.

"We found this on a dig in Egypt. Most of the hieroglyphs are clear, and easily translated, but the Wadi el-Hol script is a mystery. We feel certain that it is meant to give further descriptions to the hieroglyphs, but we have no way to prove this."

"OK, lets take a look. Please tell me before I begin, what is it you think the hieroglyphs say?" Harry wanted to start on the same foot.

The curator looked at him intensely for a moment then said, "It speaks of a hidden place of power and reverence. A place of life and safety."

Harry considered this. "Close. The sequence of these symbols means it is a place you go to hide and preserve life. This is dating back to at least 4500 BCE. Maybe older. The 'power' hieroglyph is missing the lower third. I suspect it actually looked… like… this… Harry focused and created an unrealistically-vivid glamour over the obelisk. Muggles would refer to this as an over saturated and sharpened image. The many centuries just dropped away and the details of the obelisk really 'popped'. Harry even provided highly saturated colors he thought would add contrast. It was Harry's version of what the ancient scribe spirit did in Malta. Not able to recover completely lost markings, as the spirit had done, it definitely brought back the barely visible carvings and colorings.

The curator and her staff were enthralled.

"See here, if I am correct, the bottom of that symbol on the obelisk is jagged, like a crocodile's mouth. That implies not just power, but dangerous power. The stone carver is noting that they went into hiding. Great fear. Great power. This is a work of desperation. But there is reverence for life here as well. And of sacrifice."

"Now, the rest of the script. The Wadi el-Hol portion. Hold up a moment." Harry then lifted his scarf. To the curator and her staff, it seemed too stiff and heavy. "This is my familiar. Please don't panic." And he removed the glamour.

Hecate took a bit of pleasure in watching people jump. Artemis was figuring out who reacted fastest. Selene was evaluating their outfits. She believed you could tell a lot about people by how they dress.
"OK," Harry said, "Now that we have gotten that out of the way…” He began hissing and speaking in parsel tongue to his familiar, mostly Hecate. They focused on the carvings, noting that many of the Wadi el-Hol symbols were worn almost smooth. As Harry touched them, he extended the glamour to make them more visible, as he had done with the hieroglyphs.

"OK. They are cursing the Therans for taking so many of their children, but rejoicing in what the sacrifice brought them". More hissing and agreement. "This is the obelisk of Kaer… Cresus. Maybe. Names translate poorly in parsel script. It marks the time spent inside a… citadel? Or a kaer. Hard to tell the difference between a kaer and a citadel as many parts of the script are worn completely away."

Walking around the obelisk, he went to a flat side covered in hundreds of symmetrical small lines. They were slightly grouped in collections of 10 lines. Perfectly sized and spaced. Harry addressed the curator, "What do you make of these, Madame Bellamy?

The curator stepped forward, "They appear to be markings of some kind. Perhaps a place where they were counting. The round carvings contradict that theory, though." The curator really was not sure what they were. But she knew they were not a script or language.

"This is the notation of years. That were spent inside the kaer or citadel. See the circle inside a circle? The inner circle is the sun. The outer circle is the earth's orbit. Usually there is a marking for the earth, but this is pretty smooth… wait. Here it is. Almost missed it. Together, the two circles represent solar cycles. Years." Pointing to where the small lines change into round figures, "These markings are when the wards or defenses began to fail." At this Harry touched the roundish marks. Using his glamour, he makes them stand out clearly. They are stylistic skulls. Crude. "Terror. Death. I don't know where you found this obelisk, but it is not a safe site."

Harry and Hecate locked eyes and nodded. Artemis then hissed something. "Oh, I missed this. Artemis noticed the changes in the markings. See how clean and precise the lines are. All the way until you get here… Something happened to the carver or the tools used to carve. These markings are less precise. Amateurish. Crude." Noting the slight darkening at one of the lower edges of the obelisk, Harry reached out and faked a little off. Rubbing it between his fingers, he knew exactly what this was.

Looking at the curator very closely he added, "Check the markings for microscopic bone fragments. In the end, they were carved with organic tools. But you knew that already, didn't you Madame Bellamy? I'm going to ask you a question that you may not want to answer…” The temperature was slowly dropping. It smelled suddenly like winter in a forest. Winter fresh. Clean. A faint hint of Oak and Roses.

"Where did you really find this obelisk, Madame Bellamy and why have you been lying to me?" Harry's eyes were now faintly glowing .The electric lights in the room were flickering. His wand slid slowly into his palm.

His familiar curled around him. Her eyes scanned the room in all directions.

Her eyes were glowing just like Harry's.

All six of them.

To be continued...
Notes:

What's up with the Obelisk?
Who is Mme. Bellamy?
What’s going on in Paris?

Read and review - thanks
Actions and Consequences

Chapter Summary

Some of the people who have treated Harry poorly realize that there are consequences to their actions.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am changing up slightly and starting anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script"
Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Actions and Consequences

Musee Carnavalet
Département des Mystères des Arcanes
Director Bellamy's Office
Paris

Madame Bellamy poured herself a tall glass of wine, finishing the bottle. How did everything turn to 'merde' so fast? Reflecting on this afternoon's meeting with Mr. Potter, she realized she needed more bottles of wine. Especially if she was going to be working with young Mr. Potter in any capacity in the near future.

The plan had been so simple. First, validate that Mr. Potter is what everyone in Britain seems to think he is. Then, determine if he is just a combat wizard, or if he actually knows what he is talking about. Life would be a lot easier if he had just been a combat wizard, that's for sure. Point him at a target and fire. Croaker warned her against playing games with the young man, now she understood why.

When she first met the young mage, she had her doubts. This young man was supposed to be one of the top mages in Europe? By the time a rare wizard actually achieves that level, they are so old they need help walking across a room. Yet, here was a young man who looked like a student, moved like a gymnast, dressed like a YUMMI, and even brought a date to a museum.

The minute he walked in, the wards noticed him. It was similar to how they acted when Dumbledore would visit. Like they were compelled to just stand up at attention. All the magical artifacts reacted ever so slightly when he made his tour about the museum. She could tell he
recognized a few of the artefacts. But How? Some of those were so ancient that even her department were struggling with identifying them. Overall, the tour was simple and basic. He seemed to enjoy just looking and taking it all in. Until the final stop, that is. Then he got down to business. He pulled out all stops while interpreting the obelisk.

He found elements and details on the obelisk that no one should be able to find. That trick he did to 'pull out the details', was pure brilliance. Using magic to clearly show known details was not difficult and was commonly used. However, she had never seen anyone do that in a way that exposed new information. His knowledge is unnatural… How could anyone have so much knowledge about pre-recorded history? Someone had trained him intensely. Someone who possessed an obscene amount of knowledge on ancient history. The entire staff had been in awe within 5 minutes. Then it almost went to hell.

At some point, he noticed the dried blood around the bottom, and as the yanks say, 'the gig was up'. There had to have been other clues, but he wasn't talking at that point. Threatening, maybe. Talking, nope.

Once the drama passed, the meeting had been terse, but passable. Unfortunately, Miss Aris' cover was blown, but that was more a testament to his familiar. Madame Bellamy made a note to research runespoors to see if they were all this intelligent. Likely, his magic was enhancing the mental acuity – but something had to have been there already. To his credit, he did not lose his temper and start throwing a tantrum. To hear the stories from his school days, he used to be quite the 'hot head'.

Mr. Potter had agreed to scout out the possibility of an emerging Dark Lord and take actions as appropriate. The French 'Département des Mystéres des Arcanes', aka the DMA, would give him the full briefing and case file Tuesday evening. The fact that Dominique Aris would be his primary contact did not seem to be well received, his acceptance of the rising agent had been icy. He had been firm that she would have to work with his British DOM contact – a Ms. Padma Patil as they had first option on his time.

In return for his services, the DMA would cover his care and expenses while on assignment. They would also protect his interests and privacy while in France. It was apparently very important for him to have complete privacy while in Paris and at his home in Yvoire. It was news to her that he owned property in Yvoire. It has been very simple to confirm after the meeting. She also found that his parents had planned to move there twenty years ago and his mother had applied for dual citizenship. The application was valid and covered her son as well. Perhaps they could be 'approved' posthumously...

She would have to take steps to make his stay pleasant enough that Yvoire would become a regular nesting place. His services would likely be in demand on a regular basis now that she knew how unusual his knowledge was. It would also annoy Saul Croaker to no end, and that definitely amused her. Something else to research. Perhaps she could call Perenelle to assist, she lives in Yvoire.

At this point in her mental review, she took another large gulp of wine. They say you can tell a lot about a Mage from the 'feel' of their magic. When his magic flared, Mr. Potter's magic felt icy clean. It seemed like a wintry forest. Oak and fir were prominent, but there was slight scent of… roses? Maybe a little analysis is in order. After all, research and analysis is what Madame Bellamy knows best. Settling into her comfort zone, she pulled out a piece of paper and began making notes.

OK. The chill and iciness was indicative of a loner. Someone who is closed off and guarded.
Certainly not someone who trusts or confides easily. Possibly a bit of personal trauma or abuse. Given his past, that made sense. No corruption, hence, the unbelievably clean and fresh feel of his magic. The forest flavor was odd, but he was rumored to be trained in the elements. She had heard that some old masters of magical theory consider wood and nature to be a part of the elemental structure. But that is a very old interpretation that has fallen out of favor. An ancient arboreal forest could be a quiet and somewhat lonely place. Could it be that simple? Oak and fir were there. But the faint scent of roses was really odd. It might play back to the icy nature of his magic – what with the thorns and all. Hard to get close to a thorny rose bush. She wondered if anyone in Britain ever got him therapy after dealing with their Dark lord.

Breaking out her venn diagrams and psychological profiling books, Madame Bellamy had a new project. Who is Harry Potter and how can we keep you around?

—CS—-

Musee Carnavalet
Département des Mystères des Arcanes
Dominique Aris' Office
Paris

Dominique is one of the most promising and successful young members of the DMA, but right now, she did not feel like a success. She somehow tipped off the familiar that she was involved in the DMA duplicity. She really hadn't intended to lie to Harry, she just wanted to get to know him. He was a gifted mage and she enjoyed his company. They could talk for hours on end… If Madame Bellamy had been more honest and forthcoming, this never would have turned sour.

Her report to the DMA had been a confirmation of Harry's power level and the fact that his knowledge was vast. She also reported a heightened level of paranoia consistent with people who had been thru trauma. She had urged a gentle introduction in a calming environment. Dominique had also requested to be allowed to share her affiliation. Both requests were ignored.

Madame Bellamy was the Director of the DMA and her boss, once removed. The Director had struggled with the belief that Harry Potter was more than a gifted combat wizard who had enjoyed a large measure of luck against the Dark Lord Voldemort. Mme Bellamy wanted to test his knowledge and ability before employing his skills at the DMA. Given his reflexes, she may have been right in his abilities with combat, but he is so much more. The old lady really bungled things up with her 'test'.

At this point, Dominique just sat back and shut her eyes. Now everyone knows Harry Potter is potentially a vast source of knowledge and 'problem prevention', but he no longer trusts them. He no longer trusts HER. And she had liked him. Not romantically, that was never on the table. For either of them. But as a potential friend, she really wanted that. Speaking of friends, what would she tell Fleur? 'Hi Fleur, yes I manipulated you into sending your 'petit frère' into the DMA offices with my recommendation of a museum for him to tour – Musee Carnavalet. I also neglected to tell either of you that I am a member of the DMA, but we're still friends – right?'

With a sad grimace, Dominique decided she would have to make time to practice her flame resistance charms. This could get ugly. Maybe she could fix things… a little crow in a humble pie?

—CS—-

Greengrass Manner
The Same Day
England
Cyrus Greengrass was not a happy man. His younger brother, Gareth, had gone too far and would be put in his place. The scene he made at Gringotts was inexcusable. It was the last in a long string of bad decisions. His blood purity ideas had gone far enough! Looking about his study, he made sure all fragile materials were moved. This might get a bit messy. Sitting back and taking a deep breath, he summoned his house elf, "Tolly!"

Tolly popped in directly, "Yes Master Greengrass? You called?"

"Yes, Tolly. Has Lady Greengrass left yet?" He really didn't want Roxanne stumbling into this conversation.

"Yes, Master. Tolly helped her prepare and saw her off with Miss Daphne and Miss Astoria."

"Good. Will you tell Gareth that I would like to see him immediately? We have much to discuss."

Tolly has known Cyrus Greengrass his entire life. He was always an extremely focused wizard. He rarely became angry, but when he was – it was frightening. Tolly did not envy Lord Greenrass' brother. "Yes My Lord."

With a slight smile, Cyrus thanked Tolly. He always cared for the small creature. Tolly had helped with him as a child as well as his children. He would always take care of the silly little fellow. His brother, Gareth, on the other hand constantly irritated him. He was finally going to let him have it. It was time for Gareth to understand how little he really mattered. It was time for an attitude adjustment and a re-defining of their relationship.

Thirty minutes and two tumblers of fire whiskey later, Gareth Greengrass shows up.

Gareth was irritated at the summoning. He had better things to do on a Saturday afternoon than meet with his brother. Gareth was a large man, very broad and very strong. He was also very used to getting his way. He always looked at Cyrus as an indecisive and overly cautious man.

Truthfully, not worthy to be the Lord of such a prestigious house as Greengrass. One of the sacred 28 families. Oh, he was affable enough, and a strong business mind… but not strong in the ways that matter. More of a social climber and cunning business man. To make matters worse, he married Roxanne Greengrass née Fawley. The same witch Gareth had his eye on. Well, time to get this over with, "Cyrus, how can I be of service?"

"Gareth, do come in. We have much to discuss. Help yourself to some fire whiskey." He watched his younger brother with a calm face that gave away none of his anger. The ice king. Obviously, Gareth did not want to be here. He took a generous glass of Cyrus' best whiskey.

Walking to the family tree mural that all the sacred 28 had, Cyrus beckoned his brother over. "Come over here, Gareth. Let's take a look at our tree. We need to discuss where our family is going."

Gareth was now interested. His brother was FINALLY coming to him for advice. Now it was time to turn the ship. "Cyrus, I am glad you're coming to me for family advice. It is long overdue if I do say so myself."

Cyrus politely smiled, "Yes, yes, Gareth. Look here. Look at how few of us are left. Over half of our family were lost when Grindewald rose up. On both sides, I may add. Then Voldemort rose up and so many of our cousins perished. Most on his side, unfortunately. Against fathers express instructions to remain neutral. Dad paid for that instruction with his life. When the dust settled, only the core family was left. Michael, Daphne, Astoria, You, Me and Roxanne. By marriage."
"Cyrus, this is common knowledge... " Gareth stopped when his brother held up his hand. Gareth realized that Cyrus was invoking 'Paterfamilias Auctoritatis' to ensure he had full control. What was he playing at?

Cyrus smiled calmly. "We'll come back to this. Now, let's review the sacred twenty eight." He walked to another tapestry. One Gareth had not seen in the study before. "You are a genealogy expert, fill in the blanks for me. Let's start with the Abbott family." Seeing his brother begin to stare off, he added, "Gareth, stay focused please – let's start at the top. The Abbotts. Who are they, how many are there, have they grown or shrunk, and what are their financial position?"

"The Abbotts are a predominantly light family. There are currently about forty five Abbotts in magical Britain. About half were killed in You-Know-Who's first rise. The family is wealthy, but the next generation is small. Only about twelve Abbotts are of an age where they can continue the line. Including cousins."

Cyrus then pointed to the next family on the tapestry.

Gareth hesitantly gave his review. "The Avery family was nearly wiped out in the last two wars. There are perhaps a dozen left with only a half dozen or so cousins able to carry on the line. Some are half-bloods" He added this last piece with no disguise for his contempt. "Their fortunes are gone, consumed in the war and they are without wealth."

Gareth continued to the next family on the tapestry, "The Black family was all but wiped out. The main line is made up of half-bloods, and very few of them. Of the pure Blacks, only Andromeda Tonks is left, and she is not having any more children. Her sister is a Malfoy and part of that line. Andromeda's grandchild is the heir. He is a half-blood and werewolf mix." More contempt. "Their Fortune is extremely high and they are currently the wealthiest family in Magical Britain. Politically, their head of house is extremely influential."

Gareth started to move on, but Cyrus stopped him. "Tell me what you know about Lord Black."

Now Cyrus had another clue where this was going. "Harry Potter is the defeater of You-Know-Who. He is the heir of the Black, Potter, and Peverell families. Peverell is actually not a Sacred 28 family as it pre-dates magical Britain. It is the progenitor family of Potter, Gryffindor, Gaunt, and possibly more. He is also a half-blood and ill trained for his position."

Cyrus just looked at him and added, "You forgot Slytherin. He is the heir of Slytherin. Thru his mother. She is a Gaunt decedent and he is, to the best of our knowledge, the last heir of Slytherin."

Gareth had heard enough, "She was an uppity Mudblood whore who...SMACK!" His brother had backhanded him full force. Since Cyrus had enacted 'Paterfamilias Auctoritatis', he had to just take it. If he resisted or retaliated, the wards would kick in and he would be a memory.

Cyrus calmly added, "She is a national hero and the mother of the wizard known as 'the savior of magical Britain'. A hero we, house Greengrass, are trying to align ourselves with. Now, let's continue."

They walked the families one by one. Most were in dire straits. A few were either extinct or near extinct. The wars had decimated the families of Britain, especially the sacred 28 families. They still held a great deal of power, but it was fading fast. When they were finished, Cyrus had him repeat the process, but with the analysis focused on Squibs. It was horrific how many squibs there were in the sacred 28. It seemed to get worse in each generation. Cyrus next made him count the children that 'disappear' around eleven. The ones who, perhaps, never got a Hogwarts letter. It was depressing. The truth was sinking in. Purebloods were becoming sterile or interbred to the point of
becoming squibs.

Birthrates, Gareth, tell me about them.

"Birthrates and fertility have been dropping among the pure bloods. Too many branches have been eliminated. Too many deaths." Gareth knew what was coming, but it still hurt.

"Gareth, forgive me, but why don't you have children?"

"I'm infertile and you damn well know it!" Cyrus let the disrespect go. This time. Making Gareth say it out loud was enough of a blow. Cyrus knew Gareth treated Daphne and Astoria as his own children.

"Now Gareth, let's talk magic affinity levels. We'll use the Merlin scale. A ten is a mythical number that we suspect Merlin may have been. I already know the DOM randomly monitors magic affinity, but I'm really only interested in a few numbers. Specifically, the average wizard, the average muggleborn, the average half blood, and the average pureblood. Add to that, the level of Grindlewald, Voldemort, Dumbledore, and Harry Potter."

Gareth had no choice but to proceed. "The average pure blood witch or wizard is between 3.5 and 4.2 on the Merlin scale. The average half blood is between 3.8 and 4.3 on the scale. The average muggleborn is between 3.2 and 4.1. There are plenty of exceptions, but these are the ranges within two standard deviations. We classify anything over 8.0 as a true mage. Magic works differently for them. It's subtle, but different. We do not know the level of Grindlewald, but Dumbledore was higher and had approximately 9.1. You-know-who had 9.3." Taking a deep breath, he added what he knew Cyrus really wanted, "Harry Potter is not really known. His level is guessed to be at 9.8, but anything over 9.5 is too high to accurately measure so we just call him a 10."

"I see. So there is not much difference 'magically' between wizards of different blood statuses. If the DOM is saying Mr. Potter is a '10', the mythical 10 is no longer mythical. What do they call it?"

"They call it the Peverell point. You obviously know that Cyrus, why…BAMM!" That was a fist. Gareth's nose was now bleeding. Gareth was beginning to see his brother in a new light.

"So, tell me, Gareth, what is the reason you went out of your way to antagonize the most powerful wizard in Britain? The head of the wealthiest magical family? And a very influential man at that. Why were you trying to sabotage a plan to align our families and strengthen the Greengrass family's financial and political position?"

"What the Hell Cyrus, that little shite got exa…CRACK!" Gareth's eye would likely swell shut over that comment. More blood, now from his eyebrow. Calmly and with a hint of tremor in his voice, "I did not want Daphne to serve an inferior family." He flinched, but no blow came.

Cyrus was still outwardly very calm. Gareth was seeing something that terrified him. His brother could be vicious while maintaining a calm facade. "Daphne, is not SERVING the house of Black. Read the contract… right here." He passed a copy of the document to Gareth. The area Cyrus wanted read was underlined. "Read it, please."

And Gareth read, "As a show of friendship and alliance, Daphne Greengrass, of house Greengrass, will assist the houses of Black, Potter, and Peverell in assimilating into wizarding society." He had not noticed that sentence in his first reading. It set the tone for the relationship.

Doubling down, he implored his brother, "Cyrus, we don't need them! We have been affiliated with
"Gareth, you just read the fortunes of the Selwyn family. Were you even listening to yourself? They are struggling to maintain their status and are near bankrupt. Voldemort drained them dry to fund his little war. Like so many of his supporters. And after the war, the reparations finished the job. So, who will they turn to when they move to shore up their resources?" Cyrus could see the lumos coming on. "Don't be shy Gareth, answer the question."

"They will draw from their cadet lines." Gareth said as the picture was growing clearer.

Cyrus calmly responded, "And which of their cadet lines is not yet in a dire financial position?"

"Greengrass." Pausing to think of how to frame the words and avoid being struck, "Can we not afford to assist them? I'm not challenging Cyrus, just asking…"

Cyrus calmly nodded, recognizing that Gareth was beginning to understand their relationship. "No. Not without selling off assets." Pausing and considering a moment, Cyrus adds, "You see Gareth, our competitors are holding up your publications as a definition of our family. Most of our customers are half-bloods to some degree or at least related to half-bloods and muggleborns. Hard to read those publications about a relation or loved one. The impact to our bottom line has been brutal. Politically, no one will ally with us. We are losing our footing and our fortune. Slowly."

"I did it to protect the family, Cyrus. Your voting record was in question with the new regime. They were talking about marrying off Daphne and Astoria!"

No punishment for this, even if it was self-serving. "I know Gareth. But you have said so many things over the last few decades… No one would believe it if you claimed it was under duress. And you did it without informing me." Pausing and pouring another whiskey. One for him, and a refill for Gareth, Cyrus continued. "Did you know I was feigning terminal illness to buy Michael time? He was playing the same game you were, only better."

"Michael is in Azkaban, Cyrus. WHOOSH!" The blow came right to his stomach. Gareth fell to his knees gasping for air. His Whiskey all over the carpet. Mixing with his blood.

"Michael is where he needs to be to stay safe. Once the last pureblood holdouts are rounded up, he will be released as an undercover sympathizer who helped half-bloods and muggleborns escape to the continent. For now, he has to stay under guard to ensure his own safety."

"And why would anyone believe that?" Gareth croaked out while lying on the floor. "CRACK!" Gareth felt a few ribs break.

"Because it is true. He assisted many of his half-blood and muggleborn friends and their families. Plus a few others. Enough to show he was no blood purist. And no one who knows him can say he has always been a bigot. No, they'll say he played the game, toed the line, and saved lives at his own risk."

Considering his words, Cyrus added, "They will believe it, because it will come from Harry Potter. Harry Potter, who already knows Michael saved lives and provided information on snatchers and death eater cells. As does Ronald Weasley, the most aggressive and relentless Auror on the force."

Cyrus was a little worried at this point. Gareth's re-education was taking longer than he expected. His hand was aching. It might be broken. He'd have to use his left hand and the steel toe shoes he bought specifically for this conversation. The girls would be devastated if anything happened to Uncle Gareth, but Cyrus was sorely tempted to just arrange for an accident. Hopefully it would not
come to that.

"Now, Gareth, let's talk about Astoria…"

—CS—

Harry's Rented Apartment

Same Night

Paris

Harry came in and sat his stolen 'tour guide magazine' down in the designated spot for Fashad. This completes the three nights of stolen materials. No thrill this time, he was too annoyed. Dominique had lied to him. And after he had declared them friends! Add in that she took advantage of his 'grande soeur' and he was in no mood to play. He really hated being deceived, and the fact that Dominique did this triggered all his trust issues.

Oh well, one less 'so-called-friend' to keep up with. Say what you will about the DOM, Padma had never pulled this crap with him. At least, not in a way his 'girls' ever picked up on.

Artemis knew immediately that she was feeling guilty about something. The girls had originally decided it was because Harry is such a handsome man and she was having scandalous thoughts about him so soon after her breakup. Harry did his best not to roll his eyes at that. Sometimes the girls sounded like either a romance novel or a soap opera.

In the ministry, while Harry and Hecate were working on the obelisk, Artemis and Selene both picked up on her being very familiar with everyone present and the return of the guilty behavior. One knowing look was shared between Dominique and Mme Bellamy, and the truth was out. Selene had offered to bite her, but Hecate told her not to. Something about seeing everything play out.

Harry heard all this while he was examining the not-so-ancient dried blood and the lack of sand residue. He had already formed an excellent idea of who he was dealing with, but sending in Dominique brought the whole scenario down a few levels in respectability. If they wanted to play like this, he decided to put them in the hot seat. If he wasn't a bit hurt and offended, he would have enjoyed watching them scramble around. To Mme Bellamy's credit, she did not call security. That would have worked out horrifically for all involved parties.

The tour had been nice up until that point. Harry had noted that there were quite a few ancient artefacts in the DMA area of the museum, but they did not seem to know what to do with them. One was quite impressive and begged to be used. Instead it was on display in a glass case. Sad really. He may have to 'liberate' it at some point. No less than they deserved.

Sitting down and relaxing, Harry checked his banishing box for correspondence. It was not empty… Well, time to dig in. "Pipsey, can you help me out?"

Pipsey appeared suddenly with a 'pop', "How was Master Harry's date? Did master's witch like the flowers?" Pipsey was so excited. The girls just looked at each other embarrassed. This would be an awkward conversation.

"Well, yes, she liked the flowers very much. Unfortunately, we decided not to continue seeing each other. We just don't have enough in common." Like honesty and integrity, he glumly thought. At that, Pipsey just patted his hand sadly. "Hey, you know what would make this all better? Some of your famous grilled cheese and tomato soup for dinner?" At that, Pipsey beamed with pride and
started in the kitchen. Pipsey really does make the best comfort food on earth. Her grilled cheese and tomato soup is amazing. Sitting back, he started on the letters. Thinnest ones first!

Ah, this is from Colin! I can always count on a fun letter from my little buddy! Harry wrote up a brief response. They would be getting together Tuesday. He had a tour scheduled at the Eiffel tower and they could just hang out. Harry had a midnight tour of the catacombs tonight – maybe Collin could come along to that as well! He'd send a different message for that.

Focusing his thoughts, he conjured a midnight black owl, whispered the invite – and away it went. Harry knew Collin would go crazy over that! It's a combination spell he came up with that combines an ancient spell called Dark Messenger with a simple conjuring of an owl. It only worked at night, but it was after nine so…

Next thinnest letter, oh. Ginny. He shuffled that to the bottom. Maybe tomorrow. Nextrrxt…

Padma Patil. Padma wrote him a nice note describing a few of her experiments. She was always very bright… In most ways, just as smart as Hermione, but not as inclined to 'over-do-it' to the point that people become frustrated. She was working on some kind of dark magic detector. He'd have to work with her on that. Very promising. Doing a double take, he exclaimed, "What the hell?" Harry got the part where Padma asked how he liked the DMA. She must have seen the itinerary and assumed he knew… Damn. He filled in the girls and just shook his head. The he started to quietly laugh. "More in common with Hermione than he expected apparently!" Smart girls tend to assume everyone knows as much as they do. How on earth would he know the Département des Mystéres des Arcanes was in the Musee Carnavalet?

In the spirit of not procrastinating, he pulled out a piece of paper and began a letter, just then, his soup and sandwiches arrived. OK – that first. "Thanks, Pipsey!"

Hecate was reviewing the letter. She had a few thoughts on the experiment too. Harry would convey both of their ideas the next time they met up. He enjoyed reading to the girls, it was one of their morning rituals. Usually they had little to say, but liked being included. No way was he reading Ginny's letter to them!

Once Harry finished inhaling his meal, he thanked Pipsey again and went back to writing. He filled Padme in on the whole DMA fiasco and that his 'Date' over the last two days would be his contact for the DMA. He wasn't too happy about that, but at least he had a good read on Dominique. Padma would work out the way they would interact. On a whim, he thanked her for never pulling that kind of crap with him.

Next letter… Neville Longbottom!

Æ "Hmmm. Apparently his classes are expanding and Pamona is stepping back. He is moving into his own place with Hannah during winter break. Apparently his Gran is scandalized that he has been living over a pub. I don't now girls, I think his Gran is right. Neville needs to have less alcohol in his life. We've been invited to his holiday house warming party. We'll send a gift." Æ It was obvious to the girls that Harry had no intention of going.

Selene picked up on his mood change as soon as the letter mentioned Hannah. Æ "Harry, why don't you like Hannah? She seems nice enough. Kind of quiet, but nice. Neville seems to like her, but you don't." Æ

Æ "Well, it all goes back to that fourth year. You guys weren't around back then, but I REALLY needed you." These were painful memories and Harry didn't want to dwell on them too long. "She was one of the people I remember most vividly antagonizing me. She felt I was stealing the
Selene continued to look at him, waiting for more information. Artemis and Hecate were also listening, but trying not to be obvious.

Harry decided to just wrap it up. “Well, one day I was trying to get out of the castle and she blocked me. Holding up that damn pin she used to wear. She was taller than me back then, or maybe she was just standing on a step higher. I don't know. She and Ernie blocked me and I had to squeeze thru. Ten steps later, someone hexed me from behind. Right in the middle of the back. It was a nasty Hex and I had to just lay there until I was recovered enough to get up.” Harry took a sip of tea at this point. Then, finishing the story. “People were laughing at me as I lay there, struggling to get up. Some people even threw garbage at me. Ernie looked a little embarrassed, but Hannah looked… proud. Happy even… Just laughing away. I never knew who cast that hex, but she seemed to take delight in my pain. For some reason, that stuck with me. There were plenty of other hexes and ambushes that year, but that one was one of the ones that I can't shake. She was also a distributor for those damn buttons throughout Hufflepuff.” He then quietly added, “Even Susan had one.” At one point, in his third year, he and Susan were friends. He'd forgotten how much that hurt. “Did you know Hannah is in training to be the new Medical Matron at Hogwarts once Mme Pomfrey retires?” That seemed to really get to him. How could she be a healer when she took delight in his pain?

Artemis looked ready to kill, Selene looked sad, and Hecate just looked confused. Artemis was in combat mode, so she started, “Harry, how could anyone get the drop on you? You always sense attacks. It's impossible to catch you like that.”

“Back then, the Horcrux was really blocking me on most things. Learning anything new was more difficult, my magic was being siphoned off by both the Horcrux and the protections against it. Developing my 'danger sense' and magical 'awareness' came later. Probably because of that horrible year. I was ambushed and hexed more times than I can remember. I was beaten down so low at that point…”

Selene timidly added in a very soft and caring voice, “Do you want us to kill her for you, Harry?” Harry was touched. And more than a little horrified. It reminded him of Hedwig. And Andromeda. Crazy Protective. Loving. Predator. Frightening. The other girls were not correcting or contradicting Selene. The offer was serious.

“No. Thank you, but no. The Horcrux affected everyone. Badly. I can't hold her responsible. In all honesty, she was a victim too. If I decided to hold people responsible for the fourth year, I'd be holding it against the ENTIRE school. This is just something I need to deal with. I don't even know if she was the one who cast the curse. It was a bad one, so it probably wasn't her. I never want to re-live that year, not even in conversation. But for what it is worth, Ginny never turned on me.” He let that sink in.

Hecate gently asked, “You see Hannah often enough, has she ever apologized? Have you ever asked about it? I know you like Neville, but you avoid him when he is with Hannah – which is most of the time. Have you ever thought about talking to Hannah about this?” The other girls were nodding along. Great. Harry's emotions must be showing on his face. How could he be such a strong occlumens and have no poker face?

Ignoring them, he picks up the next letter. Time to move on. “The next letter is from
McGonagall. She wants me to teach a NEWT level course on one of a few select topics. Let's see, Elemental Magic, Illusion Magic, Combat, or Ancient Magical History." Æ Harry just shook his head. He had no intention of returning to Hogwarts as a teacher. Hell, he'd go to Beauxbaton's first. Æ "I think I'll let Daphne field this one. Seriously, 'Combat Magic'? Is that how they get around the DADA curse? By just renaming the course?" Æ Harry shrugged his shoulders. He'd have Daphne offer a pro-bono curse breaking to the school. He would meet with McGonagall while on campus. Maybe discuss a potential apprentice or two.

Æ "Up Next. Gringotts! Well, it seems I have a few documents to sign now that I am 21. More properties and all. The Potter inheritance kicked in and this also completes the legal requirement for the Peverell inheritance. All in person." Æ Pausing and thinking, Harry decides he wants to do this sooner, rather than later. Æ "What do you say we go to Gringotts Paris next week? Maybe Tuesday morning. Before I hang with Collin. I'll arrange with Daphne and Director Ragnok." Æ Harry wrote three brief letters, To Daphne, Andromeda, and Director Ragnok. Hopefully Tuesday at the Paris branch of Gringotts would work. He held off on sealing Andromeda and Daphne's letters until he had a chance to read the letters they had written him.

The letter from Daphne was up next. Æ "Ok, Daphne… She wants to know when we can get together and discuss plans and events. She apparently has been busy scouting the social events of the fall up thru New Year's Eve. Hmmm. Thinking about a Black holiday party that does not interfere with any other big events. And… Apparently, Narcissa has invited us to the Malfoy Christmas party. The Longbottom New Year's Eve event is once again planned. What's this? The Greengrass Equinox party on Sept 22nd. Looking for direction around Samhain. Wanting to know if that would be a good time to kick off a charity in my parent's name. No pressure…" Æ Feels like Andromeda may have given gentle direction in this. Æ "We'll talk in person. Maybe she can come to Yvoire on Monday with Andromeda to review." Æ God how he hated Halloween. Samhain. Whatever.

The girls looked a bit bored, Selene perked up a bit at the mention of a party, but then they just settled into whispering to each other. Harry suspected they were whispering about him.

Æ "OK – last letter. (Beside Ginny's) This one is from Andromeda. Teddy loves the snow globe, but he is driving Andromeda a little nutty with it. Using it to answer all sorts of questions. Hmm, maybe I can spell it in a way that matches what Andromea wants him to do. I don't know girls, I guess I am still a marauder at heart! Good prank and I can score a few points with the Lady Black… She has been meeting with Daphne and seems to really like her. She is urging me to not be hasty in dismissing Samhain's day. Yeah. I don't see her out celebrating on the fall of Voldemort day." Æ Silently, he cursed himself for that. Losing Tonks and Remus was nothing to make light of. Æ "Oh, look here, Teddy sent us some pictures." Æ They all enjoyed the pictures and it broke the tension. The girls kept a picture that featured them.

Glad he held out on sending Andromeda and Daphne's letters. He invited them both down Monday. With Teddy of course. They could talk business plans and social calendars. He had to be back in London on Tuesday to meet up with Bill and Fleur, but they could stay in Yvoire the week. Assuming it's not a dump. Or a mess. He was checking it out tomorrow. Hopefully it was not too bad.

Now, the best for last. He excused himself and went to sitting room to read Ginny's letter.

Dear Harry,

I hope you are well. I miss talking to you and hope things will be normal for us soon. The team break ends a week from Wednesday and I am expecting the practices to be especially grueling. The
following Saturday will be a good game. We are playing the Appleby Arrows. I am sending you a few tickets to the next few games. It should be enough for you to bring Andromeda and Teddy. I hope Paris is treating you well. Don't let the socialite life keep you from being who you are, take time to enjoy yourself. Maybe we can synch up soon and talk. I'd like that.

Katie says hi. So do Mum and Dad.

Sincerely,

Ginny

Well, that was… polite. Four tickets to the next game. That might be fun. Harry wasn't up to a response and didn't really know what to say. He was not sure if the letter made him feel better or worse. Ginny's Birthday is a week away, he needs to send something. Fleur could help, he'd talk about shopping on Tuesday night after spending the day with Collin.

Speaking of which, he was meeting Collin at 11:30 - in an hour and a half, for the midnight catacomb tour. Should be fun. He would take the elder wand and his original holly and phoenix wand. But that's all. Hey, I'm on vacation, time to act like it. No armor, pistols, potions, flights of paranoia… He'd relax and just be a tourist.

Seriously, it's not Halloween. What could possibly go wrong?

Thanks

Chapter End Notes

Notes:

What could go wrong? We'll see next time.
I'm ready to write a little action to be certain.

So, do you readers think I was too hard on Gareth?

Please read and review if you have any constructive feedback.

Trying to decide if I need to focus solely on Harry or keep a little side story for Ginny and some of the others.
The Catacombs

Chapter Summary

Harry meets up with an old friend and tours the catacombs. U Dee Paris, he discovers something dark.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter

FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am changing up slightly and starting anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Catacombs

The Home of Dan and Emma Granger

Emma Granger looked over at her daughter and realized how special she was. She was brilliant, caring, generous, and had turned into a beautiful young lady. The only area she just never figured out was how to deal with boys. Now that she was as beautiful on the outside as she has always been on the inside, that made things complicated.

Emma looked back at the TV in time to catch the famous line:

"…Louis, I think this is the start of a beautiful friendship…"

Hermione loved ‘Casablanca’. She could watch it every day and still love it. She knew all the lines and all the players. Hearing "As time goes by…" is frequently enough to make her tear up. Being home with her mum made this a very special week. She told Ron she needed to go over banking and accounting and all the muggle things that made him glaze over. she knew he was no longer listening thirty seconds in. As planned. She just wanted to get away for a week.

She needed to be near her mother this week. To talk things out. Her mother always helped her sort out her emotions. First, Ron hinted that he was going to propose. Then, Harry and Ginny split up. Hermione hated being confused, but when it came to matters of the heart, she could only turn to her mum.
Emma turned off the TV. "That was fun, dear. I have really missed spending time with you. More popcorn?"

Smiling, Hermione realized she had eaten two bowls of already. "I'd rather have another glass of wine. Care for a refill Mum?" Hermione picked out a new bottle. Popping the top, she was now committed to staying up and talking.

"Absolutely dear." She caught herself staring at her daughter. "You are SO beautiful. I have 'Gone with the Wind' if you want to make this a double feature."

"No, I think I'd rather talk. We've talked about my career, you and dad, selling the practice, becoming volunteers for dental services in third world countries, but not Harry." Taking a sip of wine for courage, "I just don't know what to do here. Things with Ron are good, but we are so different. We have so very little in common."

"Hermione, you have been with him a while now. What made you care about him in the first place, and does it still hold true?" Ron was Hermione's first real boyfriend. Emma knew her daughter had carried a torch for Harry for years, but it never seemed to happen. It just seemed odd that Hermione ended up with Ron, who was a bit of a slacker.

"He makes me laugh. When we are just joking around, I feel care free. Like I don't have a problem in the world. But that only lasts until it's time to be serious. He hates reading, he procrastinates everything, he's a bit of a slob, and his Mum drives me crazy. She's sweet, but so loud and overbearing."

"Well, care free is not something I would expect from you, Hermie. That kind of sounds nice. I can tell you really care for him." Considering her daughter, she decided to go the introvert/extrovert route, "After you are together, do you feel charged up or run down? And how does Harry make you feel?"

"Harry makes me feel like the smartest person in the room. Like I am important and respected. Like he needs me more than anyone else alive. He makes a lot of people feel that way. I truly love him. But I love Ron, too." Another sip or wine, "I feel energized after being with Ron. Often quite Annoyed, but energized. And before you ask, I felt the same after being with Harry. But with Harry it is different."

"How so?"

"Harry's problems are HUGE. They tend to eclipse the world with their enormity. It's never something small, like finding your keys. Ron's problems involve reading an Auror manual without falling asleep. With Harry, it's always huge, like 'How do I save hundreds of lives in Spain from some horrible dark wizard on the rampage?' kind of a different perspective."

At this, Emma stared at her daughter in shock. "Good Lord! Are you telling me there is another Voldemort?" This scared Emma beyond what Hermione expected. Emma was now more favorably inclined toward Ron, that for was certain.

"Deep breaths Mum… It's ok. No, Voldemort was one of the worst. But yes, there are other evil wizards like him. Witches too, ever heard of Baba Yaga?" Once her mum calmed down, Hermione continued, "They rise up and people like Harry put them down. Usually the local law enforcement is enough, but in times of upheaval, these dark lords and ladies rise up and try to take over. Sometimes they even succeed. Especially in third world countries."

"So, Harry is part of some kind of magical international police force?" settling back on the sofa,
"Would you really want to be married to someone who does that?" Seeing her daughter grit her teeth, "NO, do NOT look at me like that! I know it is important work, but my god… no wonder Ginny broke things off. Hermione, that was hell for you when it was here in Britain. Could you really be with someone who does that ALL the time?"

"I honestly don't know Mum. And you are right, Ginny struggled with it. Night and day. Worrying. Wondering how he got some new scar. Always having to struggle with the BIG picture."

Wrinkling her brow, she made a connection. "Maybe that's the difference between Harry and Ron, scope. Harry is a big picture guy and Ron is a day to day guy." To keep things in line, Hermione added, "But keep in mind, Ron is doing the same thing as an Auror, just on a local level. Smaller scope."

"There is nothing wrong with day to day Hermione. Beats the hell out of chasing monsters for a living. And do you see Ron chasing Dark Lords, or just wizarding criminals. If I remember what you told me correctly, the Aurors did not know how to deal with Voldemort because they so rarely had anything like that."

Taking a different path, Emma added, "Ron laughs all the time. I'm sure he can be serious…. But when I see him with you, it's all laughs and fun. And Chess!" That got a chuckle. Ron LOVED chess. "I don't remember you ever being like that with Harry. At least, not the few times we saw you guys together."

"No, we have fun too, Mum. Harry can be a lot of fun, he just needs someone to remind him from time to time." Her mother had a point. Ron kept her in a fun mood, but she would have to do the same with Harry. It came naturally with Ginny, but Hermione had to make the effort.

"Hermione, are you attracted to Harry? I mean, I know you are mentally. He is brilliant in many ways. But what about Physically? That matters too."

"Arrrrggg. Not something I want to talk to my mum about." Pausing a moment. "Yeah. He is thin, but really fit. Like a track and field athlete. He works out all the time. I've had a few thoughts about him. Maybe more than a few…" She looks at her mum and laughs. "And he smells amazing. It's part of his magic. I call it 'winter fresh'. But there is also oak and juniper." Thinking about it a bit, "And a very subtle note of roses. I think it goes back to the accident he had years ago. That was horrible. But it sure smells good on him now."

Shaking her head, Hermione added, "Harry is like a male icon, women chase after him. Except the ones that like 'big hulky men'. But even they think he's adorable. The fact that he is rich, famous, and titled doesn't hurt. Add in that he has no idea…" Thinking about the fact that dating Harry meant dealing with 'groupies' Hermione added, "Ginny actually used to get into fights over him. She could be scary when she wanted to be."

"How would she take it knowing you were pining after her ex?" Emma teased her, but she was only half teasing.

"Well, Mum, I'm not a Gryffindor because I back down easy. And he did love me first."

"When was this Hermione? I'm sorry, but I always thought it was unrequited on his side…"

"No, he was just shy. He came clean in his fourth year, said he had loved me since our first year together. But I got cold feet. I was scared, so I turned him down. It was awful. Boys don't know what we go thru when we crush someone we care about. And I regretted it so much… but Ginny moved in before I could fix things." Pausing for more wine, "Now, she is voluntarily out of the picture and I don't know what to do. It has been almost seven years, he may not even feel the same
"Seven years? All that time with Ginny? That's a long time to be together. Harry doesn't seem like the rebound kind of guy. At least, not from what you have told me. If you do go after him, give him a little time. He needs to come to terms with it all. Seven years... That's kind of a cliché, you know. The 'Seven Year itch' and all. Sounds like Ginny wants to be a little wild and independent. I hope she knows what she's doing..."

"Mum – worry about me, not Ginny. She made her bed, she can lie in it. Damn fool." Hermione suspected Ginny would regret her decision, but not before causing her true best friend anguish. And yes, she realized, Harry is her absolute true best friend. Always. "I guess I'm 'Rick' and I have to decide if Harry is 'Ilsa' or 'Louis'. See Mum, it all goes back to Casablanca!" At that they toasted their classes and had a hearty laugh.

Emma sighed. Only her daughter would see THAT parallel. She decided not to point out that Ilsa got on a plane with someone else. Her daughter would make the right choice. Emma felt guilty for hoping she would choose the safer boy. But she couldn't help but note how Harry loved her when she was awkward, Ron waited until she blossomed. Time would tell.

"I meant what I said, Hermie. Don't be the rebound girl. Give him time."

"I have to decide what to do about Ron, I think he wants to take the next step. I'm just not ready."

"Tell him before he takes that step. You are smart enough to let him know. If you are not ready... Well, Ginny had the same decision and did what she thought was right." Letting that sink in, she added, "At least she did not leave him hanging on."

-CS-

Blue Sky Pub

11:25 PM

Paris

Harry met up with Colin at the Blue Sky pub. It was basically a British themed pub in Paris. A little taste of home. The girls had no interest in exploring an underground cemetery, so Harry let them roam about in a nearby park. Hopefully no one would be missing their dogs or cats in the morning. He had charmed them to look like a water hose when they sat still, but he knew she would be hunting.

Colin perked up when he came in, "Harry! Over here!" True to Colin, he was waving both hands. Harry told him how he would be dressed, but he used a glamour to change his hair to light brown and his features ever so slightly. Apparently, a little too slightly. Colin recognized him immediately.

"Hey Colin, can I buy you a drink?" Harry pulled up a chair to the table and asked Colin to switch with him. He wanted his back to the wall and his eye on the door. Colin cheerfully switched seats. Harry liked this place. A bit 'touristy', but still nice. And he was a tourist...

"How about a whiskey sour?" Colin was growing up. Harry ordered a Whiskey sour for Colin and he had a double Glenlivet 18. He instinctively checked the drinks for potions or toxins. It was scary how good he was at being paranoid. Mad Eye was always so obvious with it, Harry had it down to an art. He had Mme. Pompadour to thank for that. He also put up a sound distorter so they could talk privately.
"So, Harry. I still can't believe we ran into each other in Paris. The hair threw me for a minute, but I knew it was you. You always scan the room with your eyes. You remind me of what those American gun fighters must have been like. What is new with you?" Colin still lit up like a Christmas tree whenever he was around friends. After the war, his enthusiasm dimmed slightly, but it appears that most had returned.

"I am out 'building my brand', Mr. Creevey. Love has been unkind, so I am out living the single life." At that they both laughed. "Hey, life hands you lemons, make lemonade. Paris is pretty cool and I needed to get away. What abut you?"

"I'm here on assignment. The editor at the Daily Prophet said I needed to bring back better pictures if I want a full time gig. I thought the opening of that restaurant would be nice. I hoped to get a press pass to a Beauxbaton event, but that fell thru. I hear there is a charity auction as well, but no idea how to get a pass. So, I am capturing France. Maybe a nice wizarding tour guide." Colin still talks a mile a minute. Always smiling.

"Not the Beauxbaton Garden event? I can help with that. The auction too. I think."

"Harry, are you actually attending those? It's pretty exclusive… What am I saying, you're Harry Potter! I would love to attend, but I don't want to abuse our friendship. I'd pay you, but I'm a bit behind on my rent… How about I also act as your personal photographer. You choose the photos you want me to submit of course, and keep any you like."

Always about the photography, Harry really missed Colin. After being photographed in unflattering or biased ways, he appreciated a photographer who only wanted people to look their best. Rare.

"Colin, we're old friends. I'd love the pictures. Maybe you can also take a few of the Delacour's. Actually, I'd love to pay you for some Baby pictures of Victoire and Teddy. Andromeda, Bill and Fleur, too. You can never have too many pictures of family. Sorry about the whole engagement thing."

"It's all right, Harry. If you do get engaged again, I'd love to do the engagement pictures. Not your fault it… Well, I guess… you know. Sorry about that." Harry had asked Colin to take engagement photos and had to cancel due to the breakup. Colin was apparently a little tight on cash these days, but Harry knew these photos at Beauxbaton Gardens would help tremendously. As would the private photos.

Looking over at his friend he was reminded a bit of Remus Lupin. Colin needed a new set of clothes. Harry suspected his appearance had something to do with not getting a press pass. His French was poor too.

"Hey, if you are going to be my private photographer, why not contact my social manager. She can set you up. Do you remember Daphne Greengrass?"

"Harry, she was in Slytherin house." Colin was visibly shocked now. "Are you really hanging out with snakes? She was scary. Did you know her nickname was 'the ice queen'?"

"She's OK. Her family was neutral, so I imagine it was hard to be a neutral Slytherin. Relax, she'll be in town next week and we can work it all out. Are you staying in Paris?"

"I'm at a muggle motel. Nothing fancy." Harry caught the little eye shift. Colin was likely in a cheap dive.
"Hey, if you don't mind my snake familiar, you can crash on my sofa. The place is pretty posh. You'll need clothes for the events and my house elf can help. She's amazing." Another eye shift, he has no money. "I'll gladly forward you the cash for the pictures. I really want them before the kids get any older."

"Deal, Harry." Collin reached out and shook Harry's hand. "You really are the best."

Harry looked at his watch, "Let's get going or we'll miss the tour."

They arrived with two minutes to spare.

-CS—

Catacombs Tour

11:58 PM

Paris

The tour group was small. Only seven people total. Two wizards, two witches, Colin and Harry plus a tour guide. There was some confusion about Colin, apparently the party was set at six people. Harry agreed to pay for Colin, but he had to drop his glamour and use his celebrity status to convince the others. Once they knew who he was, they could not be nicer.

The two couples were recent Beauxbaton graduates and they remembered hearing about him from the tournament. He had to go thru all the normal questions. "Did you really kill a dragon at 14?" "Why did they make you compete?" "Did you know the Delacours when you saved their youngest daughter?" "They say you fought a sphinx" and so on. Nothing about the grave yard, thank goodness.

They settled down and walked thru the tour. Apparently, the tours end at 8PM for muggles. There is too much latent magic in the catacombs. There are over 200 miles of catacombs and over six million human remains. Apparently, underground Paris is like swiss cheese with all the caverns and the catacombs are just one part of that. The largest part. Most of the catacombs have been hidden away from muggles, but this tour is magic only. They went past the touristy spots, but continued on until they were in areas muggles were repelled from.

In one large antechamber there was a sacrificial stone. Around the walls were skulls and bones all neatly arranged and stacked. Harry could sense the corruption of the room. Thankfully, it was old and faded. According to the guide, centuries ago, the nobility would apparently perform death magic to keep their power.

Harry immediately picked up on three things about this room.

There were spirits present. Angry spirits that were in no way friendly. They were bound to this room and had no way of leaving. Some were children. All were healthy when they were killed.

The Sacrificial stone was stained in the blood of the dead. It also was the tether that held them to this location. He could make out a few runic symbols, but nothing amazing. The Aristocrats that used this room were amateurs. Weak men pretending to be more than they were.

The dead were powering 'something' even in death. Corruption. Maybe not all were amateurs…

Harry shifted his vision and saw a multitude of spirits. All with gaping holes where their hearts should be. He summoned his Orbiting spy to warn him of any potential attacks. These were the
spirits of victims, but they were angry. What was feeding off them? He made a mental note of the location and followed the rest of the tour.

There were a few other sights in the catacombs that seemed impressive, but Harry was still focused on the sacrifice room. He'd come back after the tour and take care of that. Two hours after the initial descent, they were back up in the land of the living. They all said their good byes and departed. Apparently, there was another tour in an hour. That did not give Harry much time.

"Hey Colin, I need you to do me a big favor. Can you go back to the Blue Sky Pub and wait for me? If anyone asks, I ran back to my room. Here's enough money to order us both fish and chips. I should be there in 30 minutes."

"Yeah, sure Harry. Everything OK?"

"No, but it will be. I just have a quick job to do. Remember, mums the word." And Harry pulled out his wand and disillusioned himself. Retracing his steps, he was back in the chamber.

Once there, he examined the stone carefully. It was about three by five feet and it looked like there were once anchors on the floor near the corners. Likely to tie people down. Brutal. He could sense the tether of the rock. There was a very powerful malignant spirit attached to it, but nothing he couldn't handle. The old spirits of the victims had come out to watch him. Harry drew up a circle and reached out mentally. He knew he would have to be fast.

"My name is Peverell, I want to release you from your prison so you can all move on." Harry waited for a response. Eventually, a small girl walked forward. she wore a simple dress. Pretty. Harry always struggled with ages. Ten, maybe? A gruesome hole where her heart should be.

"Why are we here? Why can't we move on? Did you do this to us?"

"I don't know why you are here or who did this, but I want to help." Then looking around he asked, "Can any of you tell me the specifics around the way you died?" He hated asking, but he needed to know.

A scene was played in his head. It was dark and the room was lit by lanterns. There were a number of men and women all in noble regalia. All wearing masks. Hmmm, common theme for wannabe dark wizards. A terrified woman was dragged out and strapped to the stone. The leader came over, he removed his mask and began slowly carving out her heart. Over the woman's screams, the other masked nobles were chanting 'Usurpateur'.

That is a name Harry thought he recognized, Usurper. Likely 'Bone Crown the Usurper'. Last seen in the French Aristocracy. One of the defining elements of the French Revolution was ending his atrocities. Of course, the atrocities that followed were even greater. Harry knew enough about the Reign of Terror to suspect it was diabolically inspired. Well, time to get down to business. First Harry cast a silencing sphere around the room. No noise would escape the antechamber but sound inside the room would still be audible, allowing him to hear enough to avoid being surprised. Harry then shifted his vision to more owl-like so he could see better in near darkness. It also helped him process what he was seeing faster. Useful in a fight. Very useful.

Raising the elder wand, Harry first raised a shield around himself, then he formed an Astral Spear pumping it up with as much power as he could summon. An astral spear is an ancient spell that was perfect for these situations. It would affect both the physical and the Astral. It could be cast quickly, or it could be charged up if given enough time. Spell casting is like weaving, some spells required more power, so you would weave more astral threads to it. Wands made it fast and easy. He would normally need only one thread to power it. For this, he would go much more slowly and
really charge it up. He tied nearly a dozen threads to the spear before completing the spell. He then used the Elder wand like an atlatl and hurled the glowing bolt at the sacrifice stone. What he launched from the elder wand was more like a ballista bolt than a spear. It impacted like a missile. The stone split open in the center both physically and astrally. The spirit tethers were released, freeing the victims from the stone and allowing them to move on.

Harry's shield deflected the shrapnel from the stone. He immediately began forming another overpowered 'Astral Spear'. He figured he could connect about five or six 'threads' before the guardian spirit showed up. Not quite as powerful as the one he destroyed the stone with, but two to three times more powerful than a standard 'quick cast' astral spear.

The spirits in the room began cheering and circling the room. Some were even chanting Harry's name 'Pe-ve-rell, Pe-ve-rell, Pe-ve-rell…' Then a dark form began to rise from the broken stone.

This is what Harry was waiting for. Just as the form gained physical form, Harry hit it with the charged up astral spear, followed by a steady stream of spirit darts. They were similar to piercing charms and the elder wand seemed very attuned to them. The spirit began to waver, but still finished forming. It looked like a nobleman, but the eyes were hollow and black. It vaguely resembled the leader in the sacrificial death ceremony images the other spirits had shared with Harry. When it opened its mouth, a long black tongue shot out toward Harry. It was barbed and wicked looking. It was headed straight for Harry's heart.

Harry quickly pivoted his left shoulder backward and leaned to the right, causing the tongue to narrowly miss. That was FAST. As his left shoulder went back, his right pivoted forward and instincts kicked in. a flick of the right hand and the elder wand sent a 'Diffindo' cutting charm at the tongue near the mouth, severing it completely. As the tongue fell, it dissolved into blackened mist. Undeterred, the creature charged forward, only to collide with Harry's hastily raised shield. Harry noted that it collided with the force of a small car, causing the shield to 'wobble', but it held. Harry's shields were pretty tough. Bouncing backward off of the shield, the monstrosity was slightly off balance just long enough for Harry to fire off a 'Bombarda' with the elder wand. It struck the foul creature at center mass and the spirit exploded into a foul mist.

They regretted using the 'Diffindo' and 'Bombarda', in case any scans were made of the room. For unsanctioned missions, Harry preferring spells that were harder to identify due to their age. Made it more difficult to track the spells to him. Unfortunately, the guardian spirit needed to be brought down fast. Modern spells were often quicker and very good at reflexive wand work. The element of surprise helped, but Harry suspected the spirit had not awakened in over a hundred years. It was sluggish when it formed and had allowed Harry to hit it with that overpowered astral spear. That was half the battle right there. If only it was always so easy.

Quickly checking the area, Harry confirmed that it was gone. Permanently. Using his phoenix wand, Harry repaired the stone physically, but not magically. It was now just a simple rock, but it would appear the same to the tours. His first spear made a real mess of the room. He had to repair lots of little damage points. The victim spirits were now free and circling. They were cheering for him. The little girl that approached him earlier stopped and smiled at him. She no longer had a hole in her chest. She whispered her name to him, 'Catherine', and disappeared. A half dozen or so followed her example and shared their names as well. Harry bowed his head to each and wished them happiness in their next life.

Harry then dropped the silencing ward and waited. He did not have time to leave and avoid the next tour, so he would just hide and wait them out. Soon he heard footsteps approaching. He found the darkest corner and cast a 'shadow meld' spell followed by a 'disillusionment' charm for good measure. He waited for the tour to pass. As they walked thru, they all remarked on the chill. Not
wishing to be cold, they hurried thru.

Still disillusioned, Harry made his way back and to the Blue Sky Pub. He had his Orbiting spy circling to make sure he was not being followed. As much as he hated it, he would have to contact the DMA. But first, another round with Colin. Hopefully his fish and chips were still warm.

—CS—

Harry's Rented Apartment

Paris

3:30 AM

The Pub did not sell fish and chips, so they had a fancy salad. Harry noted that Colin looked ravenously hungry. First, they collected Harry's familiar. The girls seemed a bit annoyed with Colin's bubbling personality, but they politely ignored him. They had eaten and wanted to sleep. Harry didn't ask what they ate, but judging the lump in her torso, it was bigger than a rabbit. Checking the wards, Harry carefully entered with his familiar. A few quick spells and a check of the roses confirmed that all was safe.

"Pipsey? Are you awake?" Harry knew House Elves only sleep for a very few hours a week, but he thought it polite to ask.

Pipsey appeared and looked at Colin. "Master Harry brought a friend?"

"Yes, Pipsey. Colin is an old friend from school and needed a place to stay. I didn't want him to stay in an unsafe place, so I offered to let him stay here. I think the couch folds out. Would it be too much trouble…?"

"Poor little Colin. Pipsey will make up the sofa for you. Master Harry is the kindest wizard in Britain. Always looking out for his friends." And Pipsey went to work.

Harry imagined what Kreacher would have said. HA!

Before Harry went to bed, he sent a letter via his banishing box to Dominique. She could have brunch with them at noon while Harry was de-briefed. He provided the apartment information (he was sure she already knew it) and a very brief overview. Ideally she could help identify the spirit that he destroyed. It might have been the original Noble leading the ceremony. That would be about right for a Horror. Lock your willing servant up for all eternity just so you can feed on their pain.

One last thing Harry thought after he lay down, "Hey Colin, don't be alarmed, but I have a ghost in the apartment. He kind of runs security for me at night." No answer, well, not everyone is as light a sleeper as Harry.

—CS—

Harry's Rented Apartment

11:30AM

Paris

Colin ate early, then went to pick out new clothes with Harry's advance. Harry warned him not to
cut corners, the venues he would be shooting at had discerning dress expectations. Colin nodded, thanked Harry, and went to the magical sector in Paris.

Dominique Aris arrived right on time. Along with her was Mme. Bellamy. They both seemed to be uncomfortable, but after their last meeting, that was understandable.

Harry invited them in, but did not kiss any hands. "Mme. Bellamy, Ms. Aris. 'Two for one' I see."

Harry noted with some satisfaction that Dominique flinched a bit when he referred to her as 'Ms. Aris'. Leading them to the dining table, Harry introduced Pipsey and noted that his familiar was climbing into the chair beside him. He pulled the chairs out for both of his guests, then sat down.

Whether they deserve it or not, manners matter.

"We have eggs or omelets any way you like them, bacon, toast, and fruit. We also have my favorite blend of Earl Grey or coffee if you prefer. If you would like something heavier, Pipsey will gladly accommodate." To this Pipsey eagerly nodded her head.

The Mme. Bellamy had toast and coffee. Dominique had Fruit and Earl Grey. Harry had a loaded omelet with a side of bacon, toast and fruit with his tea. Pipsey told Dominique she was too thin and scolded her for not eating enough. Still annoyed about yesterday, Harry let her scold the young woman without deflection.

Mme. Bellamy started, "I understand you had a busy night. I appreciate you taking time out of your weekend to brief us." Harry noted that she was making a very real effort. Likely she was annoyed Harry went on an unsanctioned mission.

"Yes. How to begin…" And he told the story. He left out no detail. He used his glamour in lieu of a pensieve, but the overall story was very complete. He did this frequently with Padma and Saul.

"What I am most interested in, is this man." And Harry showed the image of the leader in the rituals as well as the spirit he fought. Continuing his observations, "He was an aristocratic looking man. Clean shaven and powerful in appearance. Arrogant. Sadistic. The spirit I fought was a twisted mockery of life, warped and corrupt beyond what could be considered human. But, when you put the two side by side, the resemblance was undeniable." Looking with fresh eyes, it had to be the same individual. "The way the spirits had cheered was so enthusiastic… Vengeance. No, not that. Well, not entirely. More like, Justice. It must be the same person."

Mme. Bellamy considered the image. "He looks very similar to a Dark Wizard we had in France back in the 18th century. His excesses and extravagance was very well known. If he is who I believe him to be, he was one of the Dukes of the French Magical Aristocracy. If you think Britain is biased and prejudiced, let me tell you, France was many times worse. The wizards and witches not born of aristocratic families were very poorly treated."

Continuing, she added, "The French aristocracy and the Magical Aristocracy lived in parallel. The French Magical Aristocracy had slowly gained control over the French Muggle Aristocracy. They treated France like a playground. When stirrings of a revolution began, the Magical Aristocracy became quite nervous. They did not want the party to end. The aristocratic wizarding families made up about five to seven percent of the Wizarding population of France. They were greatly outnumbered. So, they took steps to keep power. Those steps involved Ritualistic Murder. Death Magic."

"This man you are showing is similar in appearance to be one of the five wizards charged with solidifying the Aristocracy's power. Both Magical and Mundane. He likely contacted nether beings to reinforce the rule of the day. This, Usurper, was almost certainly one of those beings. But they all have a price. And it was all for naught." Mme. Bellamy paused for a moment and took a bit of
Continuing the education lesson, "Robespierre led the commoners in the revolutions that overran the aristocracy, magical and mundane. Then, it was discovered that he was also a Dark Wizard. These dark wizards and witches were having their little power struggles and the citizens of France were caught in the middle. The Nether-beings, whatever they are, were gaining power from the conflict. The bloodshed was unbelievable. Horrific."

"Then our own 'Champions of the Light' rose up and ended Robespierre and the followers of the Horrors that were feeding off of the conflict. You probably know the leaders’ of the light by their names, Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel."

Harry did a double take. He knew his parents were friends with the Flamels. He also remembered the fiasco with their stone in his first year. Recovering, he nodded for Mme Bellamy to continue.

We believe there is more going on in the catacombs once more. We want you to scout out three regions and see what is happening. Possibly more, given what you found last night."

Harry had been listening intently, but had to ask, "Why me? Why do you think you need me to do this?"

Dominique spoke up for the first time, "Harry, you sensed something in a part of the catacombs that has been traveled thru hundreds of times. Something no one else picked up on. You have a gift for sniffing out corruption. Quite frankly, we need you and you may be the only person able to do this. Even the Flamels don't have the same grasp of death magic that you do. We fear there may be a new Grindewald or Robespierre or Voldemort rising, but we don't know how to prevent it."

Harry respected the directness. "What tipped you off? How do you know something is happening?"

"We found a number of decapitated bodies. All from wizarding families that have some political sway. Entire families murdered with none spared. Nicholas seemed to think it resembled the early part of the Reign of Terror in 1793. He suggested we call you."

Bracing herself for the next part, Saul Croaker had warned her that Harry hated prophesies. "Also, his wife is a bit of a seer and had a vision." At this Harry just put his head in his hand. Not Again! Mme Bellamy actually looked concerned for him. She continued. "We only know a part of it, she will have to tell you the rest. 'The Master of Death will End the killings' that's the part she shared. There is more to it, of course. Perenelle must have considered it too personal to share. She is good that way. She was very close to your mother. Your colleagues at the British Department of Mysteries clued us in that you are the actual Master of Death."

"I see. I want to hear the whole prophesy before I go scouting around. I'll write Mrs. Flamel today." Pausing and thinking a bit, Harry shared one concern, "There are over two hundred miles of catacombs, and this could take a while. We can start with the areas you have already identified, but Dark lords are very mobile. Handled poorly, this will become a game of cat and mouse until we catch the source. The longer it takes, the stronger the mouse will become." Harry noted that he could see his breath. Theirs too.

Pipsey came and refilled their cups with hot tea and coffee. She knew the drill when Harry's magic flared up. "Thank you, Pipsey. Here, let me help you…" Harry put a warming charm on Pipsey.

After considering all said, Harry asked on more thing, "Will I have immunity to do what must be done? Official Immunity, not a wish and a promise?" Dominique and Mme Bellamy looked at each
other. Harry took that as an undecided answer, so he clarified, "This is where you say 'YES' if you want me to do more than take a look around. Dumbledore played footsie with Voldemort when he should have stomped him out. When he COULD have stomped him out. Look where it got him."

Mme. Bellamy shook her head, "But what if a person of importance is involved? How would we explain this? You are asking us to authorize you to kill without jurisdiction or oversight of any kind."

"I don't just go around killing people Mme. Bellamy. Would you like me to tell you why Dumbledore didn't put down Voldemort when he had the chance? Because the families of the death eaters were respected. He was afraid it would draw sympathy for the cause. That it would create political rivals." Sitting back and finishing his tea, Harry added, "Once a Horror marks a person, they are forever changed. If accepted willingly, they are lost. Forever. There really is only one release you can give them. It is a MERCY." Harry didn't mention that if you kill the Horror, the mark disappears. But the willing bearers all change.

Mme. Bellamy flinched at that. She understood what he was saying, but it was obvious she did not have the authority. "We will consider what you have said. I feel certain I can get you limited immunity, but not carte blanche to do as you see fit."

"Well, make up your mind fast. I'll be here another two weeks or so, then I leave." Staring at them both for a minute, he had a sudden thought, "Why haven't I read about this in any of your papers? The killings? Have you been hiding this?" The looks on their faces spoke volumes.

Shaking his head Harry could only say, "Do the right thing ladies. Your problems are just beginning. If you were able to bury and hide mass murders, you have likely been infiltrated. For every body you find, there are a dozen or more you will never find. Hell, they still find new grave sites in Britain from Voldemort's first rise. You likely are not stopping a Dark Lord before he rises, France very well may ALREADY HAVE ONE."

On that note, Harry noted they seemed to pale a bit, "Every day, he or she will grow in power. Both political and in followers. He will target your law enforcement and DMA. Look for newer recruits. Less than five years in. Ms. Aris may even know a few. Ones that seem too ingratiating. Too… odd. Funny hours. Unusual looks. A loss of artistic ability is quite common. Start spying on your own people. And for the love of GOD – get some decent wards on your homes. Gringotts is good. If you want, you can hire my firm. Bill Weasley is the best in the business. At least in Europe. Don't wait until your friends start disappearing."

That got their attention. "Now, I have property to see in Yvoire. Send an owl when you make up your mind. Be VERY careful who you trust." Harry opened all his perception and looked them both over. They were clean. As far as he could tell, anyway.

"Mr. Potter, did you know your eyes were glowing?" Clearly Mme Bellamy was disturbed at being scanned. Too bad.

"Well, as near as I can tell, neither of you have been marked. But that just means you are not in an inner circle." For the first time, Harry thought he understood why Albus formed the 'Order of the Phoenix'. You never know who you can trust.

Mme Bellamy ended the meeting with, "Give us till Thursday. We'll have an answer for you by then. We'll bring the mission file."

Harry saw them out. He took a minute to check for any magical or mundane listening devices, but found nothing. No duplicity here. He needed to get in fighting form fast. He'd find room at his new
Sitting down at his desk, he wrote a short note to Padma – France may be 'compromised'. All signs point toward a Hidden Power. Next he wrote a letter to the Flamels asking if they could meet. He placed the letters in his Banishing Box and started to pack up for his trip.

He was ready to start reviewing the data from Malta, but it looks like that will have to wait. This holiday was not really what he expected. At least he was staying busy.

Until Next time.

Chapter End Notes

Next stop, Yvoire.

Then Gringotts, Where Harry finds out something shocking

The Goblins love watching Harry get pissed, they are so rarely disappointed.

I originally planned for Robespierre to be a Horror stalker, fighting the dark forces. Rooting out the evil wizards of the French Aristocracy. Then I read about the Reign of Terror. There is no way that was the act of a good person. Horrific. I almost wish I could un-read about it.
Hello, Yvoire!

Chapter Summary

Harry Settles into his inherited home.
Andromeda covers Wizarding World economics and Black family business.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am designating anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hello, Yvoire!

Potter House
Yvoire, France

After his meeting with Mme. Bellamy and Dominique, Harry finished packing for his trip to Yvoire. He told Colin that he could use the apartment for a few days while he was out. Harry absolutely did not want Colin going back to a crappy hotel when this apartment was empty. If the surrounding area of Yvoire was as pretty as he had heard, he would bring Colin in for pictures.

Once ready, Harry put his familiar in his back pack and apparated to the designated apparition point in Yvoire. After he got to the house, he'd summon Pipsey to bring his trunk. The area was picturesque. Lots of beautiful flowers and lovely small shops. The largest building was a medieval chateau overlooking lake Geneva. Harry just took it all in. Just a gorgeous place to relax and unwind. He should have been here on day one.

After walking around for an hour or so, the girls started to get restless. They could only take so much confinement in the back pack. Their heads were out, charmed to look like ear pods, but they were still cramped up. And complaining. His familiar was a bit heavy and Harry was starting to get tired of carrying them around. Gone were the days where his familiar could fit unnoticed inside a loose shirt. Where once they ate crickets and small mice, they now ate piglets. And probably other things.

Harry's home was in a wooded area off Route de Terroz. He could feel the 'notice me not' charms and 'muggle repelling' wards as he began walking thru the woods. He knew his house would be
moderately warded, that was standard for homes put in 'stasis' by Gringotts. Fortunately, he had a 'key' to get in. Once fixed up, he and Bill could upgrade the wards to his normal 'insane' level of security.

The house was a French farm house design. Very attractive from the outside. A small water wheel would provide a bit of 'power' for fans and moving equipment. Once it was engaged, of course. The stone walls looked weathered and showed a bit of distressed staining, but it was nice looking. It looked like a three story house, but there was definitely only one room above the second level. The external stairs went up to the second level for entry. Overall, it looked really nice in a rustic and charming way. It also appeared, thank goodness, to be in good condition. The roof was very tall and somewhat peaked. Looking from the front, the top floor had a small round window, the second level had two windows and the lower level had three. Harry didn't see any damage to the roof, he supposed the wards would have prevented that. The windows looked to be in good shape. Likely, also thanks to the stasis and wards.

Walking up to the stone stairs, he noted that they were in good shape, but could use a little scrubbing. The entry door on the second level was solid looking and he could feel the wards on it. Touching the key to the door caused the goblin wards to immediately relax. Applying a drop of his blood to the door knocker made him acceptable to the Potter Wards. He then opened the door and got his first look inside.

The second level was made up of a family room and a small but functional kitchen. Very rustic, but charming and comfortable looking. 'So, this is 'French Farm House' decor', thought Harry. The family room had wide slat wood floors. They looked to be in good condition. It had two windows looking out at the front of the house toward Yvoire. On one side, there was a small half bath. On the other side, it had a bricked in fireplace. It was very large, it had to have been designed for a wizarding home. The room had not been furnished, but there was a sturdy table separating it from the kitchen. Harry suspected that this is where he would spend the majority of his time.

The kitchen was definitely not modern, but it was 'cozy'. Not large or small, but just big enough, and it had a very usable island for food prep. The counter tops were actually made of extremely thick wood planks. Heavily treated. The sink was large and deep. There were two windows looking out behind the house. They were slightly smaller than the ones in front, but generous with the light. Harry suspected that he would need magical appliances and he doubted there were any gas or electric lines leading to the house. He could imagine his mum and dad hanging around the kitchen with Remus and Sirius.

He knew his parents stayed here when they were studying with the Famels. This would have been perfect for them. No furniture, though. Harry wondered about that. When Pipsey arrived, he'd ask her where the furniture ended up. Harry wondered if the Flammels had received his letter asking to meet.

There was a small winding staircase going up, and a narrow traditional set of stairs going down. Harry elected to go up. Before doing so, he extended his senses and made sure the house was safe. A few charms later, he was satisfied. The winding stair case looked like it could be enchanted easily to automatically rise up, but he was good to walk it. No wobble, it was solid. Upstairs was what he supposed was a master bedroom. It was not overly large, but it was nice. Same plank floors as downstairs, but the ceiling was gorgeous with mahogany beams. Two large windows to the back yard and a round one over where the headboard of a bed would go. Harry thought a queen size bed would fit perfectly. No closet, he would have to put in an armoire.

The bathroom in the corner was small. Basically, a sink, a toilet, and a large claw foot tub. The floors were heavily treated thank goodness. Wood floors in a bathroom made him a bit nervous. A
small window was over the tub. The tub was gorgeous and absolutely enchanted. Checking it, he deduced that the enchantments were safe and focused on water temperature and distribution within the tub. The wall had some kind of an enchanted cabinet which slid open to reveal an expanded space for more 'stuff'. Likely put in by his mum wanting more space. The mirror was an antique shaving design with shelves for razors and soaps, and whatever else. Harry knew that would be all too easy to clutter up. It was also enchanted, but had not yet activated. Harry liked magic mirrors, they were usually fun. A small spark of power, and it came to life.

A pleasant sounding and masculine voice said, "Bonjour. How may I assist you, Monsieur?"

Harry smiled, he sounded like the candlestick from Cinderella. "I am just checking out my new home. My name is Harry. You can help me in the future by telling me if I miss a spot shaving. Also, I tend to have a lot of girl problems. I hope you don't mind."

"Ah, a gentleman with ladies chasing him. I look forward to the challenge, young Harry."

Harry returned to the family room on the second level and once more admired the look and feel of it. Proceeding to the narrow staircase to the first floor, he went down stairs. There was a small hallway on the first floor with a door to the back yard and door to a covered patio on the side of the house. The patio had an outdoor fireplace and flagstone floor. It seemed… nice.

Going back inside, he opened the three other doors. Two moderate sized bedrooms and a full bathroom. The bedrooms each had a window looking out the front. This bathroom was larger than the on the third floor with two sinks and a shower/bath combo. Harry imagined it would do for guests or children. Children… He really was looking forward to that. Of course, he had Teddy. And he sort of had Victoire, too. Hopefully they could come over when he was in France.

Harry had been a little nervous that the house would be like Grimmauld Place after it sat empty for a decade. Especially given how he had invited a few people to visit tomorrow. But, unlike Grimmauld place, this house had been put in 'stasis'. It actually looked pretty nice. A little dusty, but between Pipsey and Kreacher, it could be ready for visitors the next day. As planned.

Walking out into the back yard, he could see that it once was a very well planned area. It started with cobblestone patio that was about twelve feet by twenty feet. Then it had a small grassy area – in need of a cutting. A winding stone walkway blended in and went thru the back yard beyond the grassy area. There was what looked like an overgrown garden in the back yard. Obviously in need of cultivation, it had an amazing area in the middle of it for quiet contemplation.

The elementalist in him was thrilled at what he could do with the rather large back yard. It looked like the garden had once been very nice, but not quite finished. Adding a large tree near the middle would be perfect. The rose bushes were horribly overgrown, but could be corrected. He imagined his Mum must have planted these years ago as they appeared to be the same strain as the house at Godric's Hollow.

He could feel the ley lines. Two prominent lines intersected right under the property. Old families like the Potters and the Blacks had picked up most of the properties on ley lines. It almost seemed unfair. Hermione would say it absolutely was unfair. Early Bird and the Worm…

Thinking back, Harry was still irritated at how the Ministry had tried to keep his parent's home at Godric's Hollow as a monument. He and Sirius had to fight them and threaten to go public to get it back. Dumbledore sold it to the ministry for a galleon, allowing the ministry access to the ley line juncture it was over. The old man had no right. He wasn't even in the will. Manipulative bastard. They were absolutely tapping into the energy without any thought of compensation or propriety. Well, that's been taken care of. And now that Harry was 21, he could legally take physical
possession and pull it out of the stasis Andromeda had it put under.

Thankfully, the French Ministry never tried to move in on this property. He could see why his mother loved Yvoire. Great view, beautiful gardens, privacy, charming, you name it. The wards were good, but he and Bill could pump them up a few degrees. A few wood elementals could be summoned as well. First things first. Furnish the house. Ensure minor mendings get done. Then, once the house had been fully restored, he'd focus on the wards. Once that was in place, he could make it a nice little project. New paint, area rugs, restore the garden, etc.

After looking over the property for about an hour, he called Pipsey. She showed up immediately with a 'POP' and brought his chest. "Pipsey loves it!" she exclaimed.

"Me too, Pipsey. Do you think we can get it ready for guests before tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes Master Harry! Wees can do that." She was so excited.

"Pipsey, do you know where the furniture is?"

Thinking for a moment, Pipsey nodded slowly, "Master James sold most of it. Some of it is in storage. Pipsey knows where bed frames, kitchen hutch, Baking rack, and Ms. Lily's Armoire are."

"Pipsey, do we need Kreacher to help us?"

"NO, Master Harry! Not Kreacher. This is Pipsey's home!"

Harry had forgotten how territorial house elves were. Pipsey would allow Kreacher to visit a Potter property, but not 'help'. "Sorry, Pipsey. Well. I guess we need the furniture. Let's get started!"

They worked until midnight. Harry ended the night by attuning the wards to himself. They were from the time before Voldemort's first big rise to power. Which means, they could be improved. Still, not bad. The ley intersection had provided plenty of power. Harry knew he could get it to near Grimmauld levels. One more Ley line and he could match the old house… but two would do for nearly any threat.

Before turning in for the night, Harry decided to get an aerial view. He assumed his animagus form and took to the skies. The 'greater' sooty owl was not indigenous to France, but it was near invisible at night. It was very dark. Clouds obscured most of the star light. The moon was thin crescent, but it was also obscured. There was a surprising amount of life in this small patch of woods. Including a mated pair of eagle owls. He'd deal with them later. Feeling like he knew his property much better, Harry returned to his home.

No furniture meant Harry slept on the floor. Tomorrow he would work on getting beds and cutting the grass in the back yard. Making the house look lived in.

While he was sleeping, Pipsey was active. She brought in a large Hutch that was a perfect match for the kitchen along with a cast iron baker's rack. Chairs for the table. Two full sized bed frames for the lower bedrooms and a queen four poster canopy bed for the master bedroom. Harry awake to the sounds of moving furniture, but rolled over and dozed a bit longer.

The smell of bacon, eggs, earl grey got him up. Pipsey had located and brought in a great deal of furniture. And a magic stove/oven. She got food from who-knows-where and started breakfast. They still needed an icebox.

Harry insisted Pipsey have breakfast with him. "Nice work Pipsey! Just what I needed."
Harry looked around and noted that one of the small nooks now had a desk in it. "Pipsey, where did you find that desk?"

"That is Master James' old desk. Master Charlus' before him. It was in a corner of the Potter vault at Gringotts. Collecting Dust. It folds up into a suitcase for taking with you. All Potter men have used it. It's very old Master Harry."

Harry inspected the desk. It was a roll top design with a number of compartments and drawers. The drawers were all larger on the inside. Harry had hoped to find old pictures or documents, but there were none. Still, it was a gorgeous oak desk. With a bit of experimenting, he could fold it down into roughly the size and shape of a slightly above average size attaché.

Nice.

Harry apparated to Paris and found three nice mattress sets – One queen and two full sized. He also bought three simple luggage racks. One for each bedroom. Until he had more furniture, these would come in handy. Sheets and mattress protectors for all in a very high percale Egyptian cotton. All White. He also purchased for each bed a simple quilt to lay on top until Harry could decide on how he wanted to decorate things.

He had to slightly modify a few memories to get the mattress sets home without a delivery, but easy enough for a wizard.

He knew he was calling it close as Andromeda was bringing Teddy and Daphne by at 2PM. He elected to make dinner reservations at a local restaurant in Yvoire for dinner. Then he could set them up for the night and talk business.

Once back at the house, Pipsey had a sandwich waiting for him. Harry unpacked his trunk of all his clothes and put them in the Armoire Pipsey has brought in. He left his weapons in the trunk. It was more secure. On a whim, he went to the bottom of the stairs and pricked his finger. He placed a drop of blood on the stairs and twisted the knob. The staircase rose up and exposed a set of stairs leading down to a door. Just like at Godric's Hollow. He didn't have time to further explore, so he just closed up the passage way and prepared for his guests.

At Two o'clock, Harry was in Yvoire at the apparition point when Andromeda, Teddy, and Daphne arrive. Harry greeted them all and picked up Teddy. Pipsey collected their bags and took them on to the house.

Harry started with "I'm so glad you could make it. I hope the portkey wasn't too bumpy…"

Harry had arranged for a carriage to pick them up. They all enjoyed the carriage ride with Teddy pointing and squealing at all kinds of sights. The Yvoire gardens looked gorgeous and Harry knew he would make time to visit them.

Andromeda just smiled. She knew harry struggled with portkey and floo travel. "Not at all, Harry. Once you get used to travel via portkey, it's really not that bad. How are you settling in?"

"Well, I love the house and it is in great shape, all things considered. It needs a bit of finishing." Seeing Andromeda's questioning look, "You know, furniture, rugs, paintings, etc. I have beds, a few pieces of furniture, but nothing making it feel like a 'home', if that makes sense."

"It does Harry. Well, let's take a look, and if it's not ready, Teddy and I can stay in town. I hear they have wonderful hotels in Yvoire."

Suddenly registering what she said, Harry added, "It should be good. New beds, clean sheets, just
enough furniture. But I'll let you decide." Harry then looked at Daphne and asked, "Daphne? Where would you stay? I thought you would all stay over."

Andromeda gave him an odd look. Daphne just smiled and politely said, "Harry, I am a single witch in your employ. If I stayed over, it would give the wrong impression." Based on the way she said it, and the way Andromeda looked at him, Harry realized he still had much to learn about wizarding etiquette.

He must have looked embarrassed, because Andromeda made a point to jokingly add, "Daphne, you have your work cut out for you." And they all laughed. Even Teddy, who had no idea what was going on, he just loved to laugh. It turns out Daphne's sister, Astoria, is spending the summer in the neighboring area of Nernier. It was only a few miles away from Yvoire. Daphne was planning to stay with her.

Harry had the carriage let them off on the edge of his property. Helping the ladies out he waited for the carriage to move out of sight, then took them to what looked like a large growth of poison ivy and briars.

Harry led them thru an elaborate illusion he had created to reveal the walkway he had cleared that morning. They did not have to go far before the house was right in front of them.

Daphne was the first to comment. "Harry, it is so charming!" Obviously Andromeda agreed.

"Thanks. Come on up and get settled. Pipsey will have tea ready. Then I'll give you a tour of the house. After that, we have reservations in town for dinner.

Harry offered Andromeda the third floor master suite, but she declined. She liked the idea of being on the ground floor near the patio. Harry suspected she preferred the larger bathroom and wanted to be near Teddy.

Pipsey had been busy. She tracked down an ice box and all the necessary magical appliances for the kitchen. She also stocked it with pots and pans and plates and utensils and… everything that a kitchen needs. At least that was now fully functional. She also found bedside tables that worked well enough with the downstairs beds.

After the house tour, tea was served with biscuits and fruit. The large table seemed like such a natural place to just relax and unwind. Harry couldn't wait until he had pictures and paintings on the walls.

Remembering Colin, Harry shared his plans for the next day, "Aunt Andromeda, I invited a photographer to come by tomorrow and take pictures of you and Teddy in the Yvoire gardens. Do you mind? We can do it after breakfast, just before Gringotts. He was going to scout out the best photo locations yesterday. Bill and Fleur were also going to also come by with for photos in the afternoon." Looking over at Daphne, he added, "You should bring your sister and take a few also."

The idea was well received. The group wrapped up tea and set out to dinner in Yvoire. The food was excellent and so was the wine. Harry really like Yvoire, this could easily be a second home. Once finished, the group returned to the house and began discussions at the kitchen table.

Daphne started out, "Harry, before I forget, here are the guests from the restaurant opening. Mr. Chopin has asked if you intend to return soon. You apparently made a very good impression." Harry took the list. He like the restaurant and he liked Jean Chopin. He'd have to return at some point.
Andromeda then took him thru what to expect tomorrow at Gringotts. They would go to the bank at 11AM. It should take no more than two hours, after which they would grab lunch and head back for pictures. Originally, Harry was going to hang out with Colin in Paris, but photo opportunities took priority. He had to help his little buddy out.

Next, they discussed a few Black family properties that were owned. Most were in Great Britain, but not all. There was a home in the swiss alps and a small island near Tortola. The British properties were extensive and were currently rented out. Of note were two spaces in Diagon Alley and three spaces in Knockturn Alley. One of the Diagon Alley spaces was currently being leased. Two of the Knockturn Alley spaces was also in use. This meant an open location in both Diagon and Knockturn Alleys. Harry would have to look into this. It was time he and Bill took out an office and started working a bit more professionally.

In reviewing the family expenses, Harry was surprised to learn that the Black family was making payments to a number of family members. Most were extended family in Australia or the United States. The amount was not high, but it surprised him. He had never heard of these individuals. They reviewed one payout that shocked him. Apparently, Ginny had been paid a monthly stipend of 200 galleons a week as the future Lady Black.

"Wait a minute, you mean we've been paying Ginny for being my fiancé? Remind me, what is the conversion of pounds to galleons? Is it five pounds to the galleon? That would be 1000 pounds per week. Right?" Harry was clearly getting flustered. He never really dealt with his break up. Now he was getting angry.

Before anyone could say anything, Harry continued, "Ginny never did anything as the 'Future Lady Black'. She hated the formal attire and the fancy balls. She never 'dressed for tea' or changed her public demeanor. She got to just be herself. And collected 1000 pounds a week for it." Shaking his head, Harry continued, "I used to have to beg her to go to those stuffy events I was obligated to attend. My god, I gave her a nice sum after that whole basilisk fiasco. Now THIS?"

Andromeda started to talk, "Harry, this is a standard…"

Harry rudely cut her off. He was really getting worked up. "No Mum, it's not OK! She broke up with ME! I didn't do ANYTHING wrong. She kicked me to the curb and walked away. I was always good to her. She wanted 'out of my shadow'. What the hell does that mean? My SHADOW? Well, good for her. She can make all the shadows she wants. With her own money. A thousand pounds a week…"

Andromeda gave Daphne a pained look. Daphne went to check on Teddy, who was down stairs playing with Harry's familiar. Andromeda recognized three things.

Harry was coming to terms with the breakup and was finally showing emotions other than sadness. This was good. Andromeda did not think Genevra was a 'suitable' Lady Black, but that was Harry's choice. He is now recognizing that she shirked her duties to the position. Also good. It would help him choose her replacement.

Harry had no idea how wealthy he was. The conversion rate was between 30-40 pounds to the Galleon. No wonder he was always so careful with money. Likely that would never change, but it would be one less worry for the young man.

Harry called her Mum. She had seen him as a son for a long time, but this was the first time he called her that. Knowing his hardships growing up, this meant a lot.

"Harry, you are not incorrect. She failed to perform her responsibilities as expected. It was
embarrassing at times. I never stepped in because I knew you loved her and she loved you. She just wasn't ready. Honestly, you also have not stepped fully in the role, which is why Daphne is here. But at least you made the effort. Now, it's time to move on. You will meet someone else. When you are ready. We could pursue a return of the compensation, since she broke off the engagement, but that would be... chintzy. And petty. I also suspect you would regret that later."

Harry knew she was right. He was suddenly so angry! The temperature was dropping and he knew it was his fault. Why is it, the hotter he gets, the colder he makes it. You'd think it would be the opposite. Casting a quick warming charm, he continued.

"You're right. I just did NOT see it coming. She didn't even try to talk about it with me, she just cut me loose so she could have fun. Let me tell you, it is a lot easier to relax and enjoy life when you are in a shadow than it is when you are casting a shadow. To cast a shadow, you need to be in the spotlight. I know Ginny. A year from now, she will be hating the spotlight. It's only fun when it's new. Not all photographers are as nice as Colin, and don't even get me started on the reporters."

"I know, Harry. She came to me for advice. I told her to follow her heart, but not to lead you on. I knew she was looking for permission." Thinking a bit, she added, "I'm sorry she hurt you, but I can honestly say I doubt she realizes how badly she screwed up. As much as it hurts now, she did the right thing in not leading you on or drawing this out."

Harry knew Ginny had talked to her. Andromeda had discussed it with him while he stayed over, before coming to France. It bothered him that Ginny never had that talk with HIM. Ginny made her bed, now she had to lie in it.

Calming a bit, he added, "I think I called you 'mum'. I hope you don't mind. I just did it without thinking. You have been like a mum to me for years now, I guess I just see you that way. I'll stop if you like. I'm not trying to, you know, replace Tonks or anything..."

Placing her hand on his, Andromeda smiled and said, "I'm flattered, Harry. I have seen you as my son since before Teddy was born. You can call me that anytime." Andromeda actually teared up. To know that Harry felt the same way was touching. She added, "It's nice to be called 'mum' again."

Taking a minute and pouring more tea, they both seemed more relaxed. Happy even. This house had some very good 'Juju' to it. It was not big, but it was definitely a 'family' house. Andromeda knew Ted would have loved it.

"Harry, there is something I need to correct you on. Please remain calm. The pounds to galleons conversion fluctuates, but it is actually between 30 and 40 pounds to the galleon."

Harry just looked at her stunned. That means he is not just wealthy, he is SUPER wealthy. And Ginny was getting something like 7000 pounds per week! For NOTHING. Breathe... Breathe... Breathe... Control... ok. "I see. Wow. This changes my perspective a bit." Doing a little math, Harry also had a realization. "Hold up, that means everything in Diagon Alley is crazy expensive."

"Harry, I am going to have Daphne discuss this with you further. You definitely need an education on Wizarding economics. The economy of Magical Britain is different than the Muggle economy. In many ways, this is the root of the schism between pure bloods and muggle born wizards and witches. Half-bloods can go either way. As the head of three families, four if you count Slytherin, and you should, it is necessary that you fall in the pure blood group." Seeing Harry begin to protest, "NO, not the pureblood bigotry group, but the pureblood economic group. I'll let Daphne explain it in more detail. It will take time."
Seeing Harry still staring and calculating, she added, "Without getting side tracked, everything in
the wizarding world is custom made. When you buy your goods in diagon alley, you are supporting
magical Britain. When you buy them in muggle London, you are paying far less for cheap and
mass produced goods. The funds leave magical Britain and the economy is impacted. If everyone
did this, it would lead to a terrible 'death spiral' for our economy. Your friend Hermione buys most
of her clothing in London. At muggle stores. Have you noticed how she is not given as much 'care'
when in diagon alley? It's not because she's muggle born, but in truth, most muggle born witches
and wizards do exactly as she does. It matters and it is noticed. You should ONLY shop in
wizarding districts." Taking a breath, she ended with, "You are a very wealth wizard and you have
a responsibility to the wizarding economy."

"OK. Well, I guess I need to sleep on this." Pausing a moment, Harry added, "Why didn't anyone
tell me this earlier?"

"I suspect Sirius just didn't like talking about it. And, honestly, talking about money is considered
very poor etiquette. I do recall discussing finance with you once, but that was when Voldemort was
active, so I imagine it just didn't 'stick' with you."

That made sense. Harry had a very narrow tunnel vision in those days. He tended to forget the
many distractions from his goal – staying alive. It drove Hermione crazy. "Well, I'm not going to
let it change me. Still, that's a lot of money. I WILL support the magical economy. Wow, I have a
lot to learn"

"That is why Daphne is now part of your staff. Enough for today, Harry. Let's call it a night."

Harry walked Daphne to the outside porch where she apparated to her sister's place. He'd look over
the guest list she had provided in more detail tomorrow morning. At a quick glance, he did not see
anyone of note on the list. Certainly no single witches. Later in the week, he'd delve back into the
Malta documentation. He was thinking about that quite a bit lately.

Teddy and Andromeda settled in down stairs. Harry brought in his rose bushes from the apartment.
He performed the rite to transfer the wood elemental to this house. His ally spirit, Fashad, could
watch the rental apartment. For now. Eventually, Harry planned to really beef up the elemental
presence at this location. So much potential! Over twelve acres of woodland to work with. One
acre cleared for a garden... Right at the ley line intersection. At some point he would investigate
the hidden area under the stairs.

Harry inspected his weapons and wands. he sharpened the blade on his Ilkwa and two swords. He
then broke down his pistols and inspected the ammunition runes. All intact. Harry performed a bit
of calisthenics before bed. Pushups, sit-ups, lunges and stretching. He wanted to sleep well tonight.

It had been a while, but Harry needed to go into his mindscape and speak with the 'incarnations' of
his parents. He needed to know more about this house, the Flammels, France, and wizarding
economics. He would delve in tonight while performing his occlumency exercises before drifting
off to sleep.

That night, Harry focused on his mindscape. His center were four massive oak trees that were
unnaturally large. There was a wooden mansion built into the trees, fully integrated where the tree
was living in harmony with the dwelling. In fact, the dwelling appeared to be a natural part of the
tree. The steps were naturally formed of tree limbs rising up between the trees and slowly winding
around the massive trunks. Descending down to the ground took a good three to five minutes.
Harry loved his mindscape, he had built it with the aid of an ancient Wood Elemental and it felt
exactly like home to him. It was pure and clean and living. He needed to visit his mindscape more
often. This was the first time since his break up with Ginny.
Once on the ground, Harry proceeded along a path through the forest to his childhood home in Godric's Hollow. Sitting peacefully, surrounded by a picket fence and a beautiful garden that his mum had planted. Walking thru the fence and up to the front door, Harry felt a sense of calm come over him. It really had been too long. He knocked on the door and waited only a moment before it opened. His dad looked straight at him, broke a smile and pulled him into a hug. He could see his mum come out from the kitchen. Tonight, he would spend time with his parents. They would always be there for him. In the morning, he would be rested and happy.

-CS-

The original write up was crazy long and it needed a lot more fine tuning. I cut what I had in half and focused on Harry just moving in.

Harry's mindscape is loosely based on elven architecture in the Earthdawn game book 'Bloodwood'. Seeing his parents is based on my other story 'the Dance of Death'. it is the prequel to Casting Shadows.

if you have been reading my other story, the prequel for Casting Shadows, 'Harry Potter and the Dance of Death', you know Harry has an owl animagus form which is why he is far sighted. More to come on that.

I see the relationship with Andromeda as very important to Both Harry and Andromeda. They need each other. Both have lost so much, but together they are stronger than apart. Throw in Teddy and you have a family. Something they both lost.

My vision for Harry's house is a french farm house and french country design. Lily and James Potter in my story were not into massive homes and estates, so I kept it simple. like a more organized version of the burrow. three well designed levels, slightly taller than it is wide. French farmhouse seems very 'Lily', and the woods give me a bit of flexibility.

The note about wizarding economics is important. Think of magical Britain as a small town. Shop outside of the small town, and the shops close. Muggleborns frequently shop in muggle stores where goods are cheaper, then wonder why they are not treated as well in magical districts. To most pure bloods, they are only partial citizens. Quick to take, slow to give back. But, this also makes it a self fulfilling prophesy. Before being too critical of muggleborns, imagine paying 500% for most things. Of course, most custom made goods are of a high quality and lasts a very long time... This is why the Weasleys and so many others buy second hand in Diagon Alley. The quality of custom goods is high enough that second hand is still very good and it is still part of the wizarding economy.

Read and Review, thanks.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have Harry at Gringotts and an appearance from our favorite blonde wizard, Draco Malfoy.
Harry Visits Gringotts and learns more about his titles and legacy.

Chapter Notes

- JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
- FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am starting anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-Titles and Vaults-

Potter House
Yvoire, France
The Next Morning

Harry woke up early. It was about 4:30AM and he wanted to get a workout in. The girls wanted to hunt, so he took them outside with him. They had no interest in banking, so they were on their own until that was wrapped up. He expanded his Ikluwa short spear to full spear size and went through an intense set of exercises at least a dozen times. These exercises were practiced in an ancient civilization called Landis. An allied warrior spirit taught them to him. The exercises were named after the four main elements. The Earth Defense, the Water Defense, the Air Attack, and the Fire Attack*. The emphasis was on low stances and explosive jumps, so his legs were burning when he was done. Then, he switched to short swords, and gave his shoulders and arms an intense work out.

Finally, he pulled his two primary wands – Holly and Elder, and fired water hexes at various trees and plants while simulating intense combat maneuvers. Harry combined the 4 different exercises all into what he called the Wood Kata. He replicated many of the moves with his wands and key spells. After the first six runs, he switched out the Elder wand for the Blackthorn wand. Six more exhausting runs and he was finished, he went upstairs to the third floor for a shower.

Harry realized, as he entered his bathroom, that he did not have a shower on the third floor, so he just relaxed in the bath. While enjoying the warm water, he thought about last night. He had spent his time asleep inside his mindscape talking to the incarnations of his parents**. They filled him in on France and the Flamels. Basically, the house was purchased while they were studying under Nicolas and Perenelle. They had planned to move back, but Voldemort found them first. The vault
under the house might have a few books in it, but it is mostly empty. The only exception was an
enchanted sculpture that Lily had acquired. It was enchanted to defend the grounds if under attack.
Some kind of stone golem. She confessed to wishing she had brought it with her to Godric's
Hollow. It might have bought them time…

They also talked about Ginny. Harry came to realize he was too young to start a family. The travel
he has with his job and his work preventing future dark lords makes family near impossible until
things settle down or he gets an apprentice or two. His mum was quick to point out, "Ginny should
have talked to you about it before breaking up the way she did." Lily continued with, "She'll regret
it. Mark my words." James nodded along before adding, "Don't wait for her to come around. You
have options. Live your life to the fullest and give your heart a chance to heal. Don't be afraid to
find someone new. Your soul mate is out there. Trust me." Harry felt there was a story there, but
that would be another night.

His parent's incarnations seemed angrier than he was about the breakup, but that's to be expected.
He hasn't written Ginny off and they may reconnect, but he took what his dad said to heart. Live
life to the fullest, follow your heart, and take time to heal.

He talked about calling Andromeda 'mum'. He had felt guilty about it. Lilly's incarnation said she
was happy he had a mother figure and was proud of him for having the courage to talk about it.
She knew she would always be in Harry's heart and was glad he was open to someone like
Andromeda, whom she deeply respected.

They talked about other residential Potter properties. To James' recollection, the only one still
habitable, besides Yvoire, was Godric's Hollow. The manor had been destroyed with fiend fire, but
the estate grounds were still there. The basement vault was likely still there, but getting to it would
be a challenge. And the wards were lethal to non family members. Most of the valuables were
transported to the Gringotts vault by the elves before they were slaughtered. Of the four Potter
elves, only Pipsey survived.

It was worth a visit. The grounds were beautiful and rebuilding on them made a lot of sense. But
that would be expensive. James once had a bachelor's pad on Diagon Alley, but he sold it when he
got married. James did not know anything about the Peverell properties as Harry was the first to
assume the title. He suggested summoning Charlus or looking in the vault for a portrait, if anyone
would know...

The rest of their time together was spent playing scrabble, enjoying old stories and just relaxing.
Harry vowed to enter his mindscape at least weekly. This was very therapeutic. Getting out of the
tub, he felt better than he had in days. He toweled off, put on a nice set of Kreacher approved
clothes, and headed down for breakfast. He had not heard from the DMA, but he knew it was just a
matter of time. They said Thursday, two days from today, he would hold them to it. Hopefully they
would not wait too long. Lives were at stake. The auction was three days away now.

Coming down to the second floor, Harry was overwhelmed with the heavenly scent of a hearty
breakfast. Pipsey was preparing breakfast for the family. Harry knew better than to try and help,
she would be offended. The girls were back and waiting for him. Clearly they had eaten. Hopefully
just a rabbit. Harry settled in and decided to just talk to his little family while going thru his mail
from the banishing box. Since Pipsey was there, he would stick to English. No, strike that, French.
He needed to sharpen that skill a bit now that he had a home here.

"Gareth Greengrass sent a letter of apology. That was unexpected. Apparently, he deeply regrets
his behavior at Gringotts and hopes to make it up to me when I am back in London. He Says he has
always been close to his nieces and let his protectiveness override his good nature and
professionalism. He hopes I do not take it out on Daphne. Seriously? Like I'd do that. What do you
guys make of this? I figured him for an arrogant and vindictive ass."

Pipsey chimed in with, "Maybe he was just having a bad day. Most people are good at heart,
Master Harry." Pipsey always made him smile. She was a sweetheart. Harry felt like he needed
Kreacher's input on this one. That would be amusing.

Artemis had a different opinion. Æ "He is a sycophant. No doubt he is wanting to hitch his wagon
to the biggest game in town. Watch your back with him. He'll switch on a dime." Æ The other girls
were nodding along.

Opening the next letter, "Hermione asked if she could visit. She wants to check on me and make
sure I am OK. Oh god. Something about my 'id' and 'Super Ego'. She really reads too many books.
You have GOT to love Hermione." Harry read the letter again. No doubt about it, she is his best
friend.

"She is a good friend Master Harry!" Pipsey nodded along so much her ears were shaking.

Harry took another sip of tea and pontificated, "If she were an elemental, it would be Air all the
way. She needs a little 'fire' mixed in. I guess that's why she's with Ron. Only way I can make
sense of that crazy pairing."

Selene tilted her head mischievously. Æ "We all like Hermione, Harry. The question is, do YOU
like her, love her, lust after her, or want her to bear your progeny?" Æ The other girls were hissing
in laughter. Hecate seemed to think it was less funny and appeared to be waiting on an answer. She
had always liked Hermione best and deeply despised Ron. Selene just liked to keep Harry on edge.
Silly flirt.

Harry laughed and smiled. He was not answering that question. He did care for her. He just wished
she would get out from behind her books more. Harry wrote her a quick note including his Yvoire
address. He asked her to come by next week before he left. Too much "interesting work" to do
before then. 'Interesting work' was code for DOM work and Hermione would understand it. If she
decided to come by before next week, it would mean she was helping. He doubted that would
happen. She had had enough of that life. Yet, she is dating an Auror… Maybe there was a little fire
there too.

Next letter, "Colin's press passes came thru. Daphne must have pushed it to get this fast a turn
around." He'd hand-deliver them when they meet up. One for the Beauxbaton Garden event and
one for the Auction. He could use a friendly face there.

Last letter was from Arthur Weasley. "Arthur wrote us. He invites us over for Boxing Day with
Teddy and Andromeda. He and Molly are not happy that Ginny and I split, but they want to make
sure I know I am always welcome. Oh, boy. There is blame here, but not directed at me."
Laughing, Harry looked at Pipsey and the girls and said, "I bet Molly had a heifer! How much you
wanna bet Ginny got a howler over it all!" The girls 'hiss' away in delightful laughter. This laughter
had a slightly malicious tone to it.

Harry put down the letter. "Arthur has always been there for me. So calm. That man is the calmest
person I have ever met." He pulled out some paper and began writing a response. Thanking them
both for their kindness and saying he respects Ginny's need to walk her own path. He added, they
were still very close friends. Harry inquired about the ministry and how Molly was enjoying the
beginning of autumn. He knew that was her favorite season. He'd wrap up the letter and send it
when he spoke with Andromeda about Boxing Day.
Andromeda and Teddy came up as Harry was setting the passes aside. Pipsey had made chocolate chip pancakes for Teddy. Plenty of whipped cream. Andromeda preferred toast and black coffee. Harry enjoyed a loaded omelet and a second cup of Earl Grey. Teddy talked about everything he had seen in Yvoire and the back yard. He seemed to love the house. But he loved everything. His face was delightfully smeared with chocolate and whipped cream. Where is a camera when you need one?

Harry paused after finishing breakfast and asked Andromeda if he could call her mum when in private. He would still refer to her as Andromeda or Lady Black in social and Professional settings. She enthusiastically agreed. She was very much interested in attending Boxing Day with the Weasley family. She did occasionally enjoy a casual atmosphere. She asked if Harry would be OK around Ginny. After considering it, he said he would as long as she didn't bring a date. Harry completed the Weasley letter, accepting the invitation, and sent it thru his banishing box. They then wrapped up breakfast so they could meet Colin at 7:30 in front of the Yvoire Five-Senses Garden. More and more, this was feeling like home.

-CS-

The Five Senses Gardens

Yvoire, France

The Tour and the Gardens

Harry accompanied Andromeda and Teddy to the photoshoot. Colin was so excited! He captured a number of photos in the gardens. Teddy alone, with Andromeda, with Harry, and all three together. Harry even got a sit with Colin while Andromeda took the picture. As they were wrapping up, a very poised gentleman approached them.

The man was tall and had very symmetric features. "Hello, I hope you are enjoying the gardens. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Nicolas Flamel and these are my gardens. Well, my wife's gardens, actually." He then extended his hand.

Harry enthusiastically took his hand, "Mr. Flamel, it is a pleasure to meet you. I'm Harry Potter and I have been hoping to have a word with you. This is Andromeda Tonks, the Lady Black, my God son Edward Tonks, the heir to the Black family, and my long-time friend Colin Creevey."

"My name is Teddy!" The young boy exclaimed while shaking the hand of Mr. Flamel. His hair shifted to the same shade as Nicolas, much to his surprise. They all chuckled at the introduction to Teddy. Hands were kissed and social peasantries were exchanged.

Once the fancy talk was complete, Nicolas Flamel opened up with his desire to discuss the events that brought Harry to the DMA. "Firstly, I would like to welcome you to Yvoire. Your parents loved that charming house and Perenelle and I are both overjoyed that you have decided to keep it. We did discuss your letter and would like to invite you and your lovely family over for dinner to discuss the issues at hand. Perhaps next Friday, Mr. Potter?"

Harry winced at the date, "Please, call me Harry. Unfortunately, I have a social event that day. A Bachelor Wizard auction, if you can believe it. For a good cause, of course. Can we possibly meet soon after?"

"That would be fine, Harry. I will discuss with my wife and arrange a more suitable date. And please, call me Nicolas." Staring at Harry for a moment longer than expected, he added, "Your father was my apprentice and he was brilliant. You very much resemble him. Except, as I am sure
you have heard, the eyes. I look forward to sharing stories with you."

Nicolas thanked them and departed, promising to arrange a dinner in the near future. They had just met the most influential mage in France.

Daphne and Astoria showed up at that point. Harry thought he recognized Astoria, but was having trouble remembering where. She was petite and pretty. Outwardly, she seemed very much like her sister. But she had a warmth to her similar to Andromeda. Her eyes seemed less guarded. Harry was introduced and kissed her hand. He felt something. Something… tainted. A curse maybe? He just stared at her.

Suddenly, voice from the past drawled out, "Don't even think it, Potter! Astoria is my fiancé, you can't have everyone." Standing to the side, was his old nemesis, Draco Malfoy.

"Well, Malfoy. You seem to be batting above your weight class." Colin chuckled. He was the only one that got it.

Draco, like the other pure bloods, looked confused. "Is that a muggle phrase? Really, Harry. I expected better. Why not insult me in Russian or Swahili?"

Harry just laughed. "It means you did well, Draco. Ms. Greengrass is a lovely young witch." Turning to Astoria added, "Sorry I stared, I felt… well. Probably nothing. Draco, do you remember Colin? I assume you are here for a photo?" Colin looked meek. He had been on the receiving end of Draco's vicious insults before and did not seem comfortable.

Nodding stiffly to Colin, Draco simply stated, "Mr. Creevey. No, Harry, I am only here to see the sights and to take Astoria shopping."

Colin took the sisters along and began the photo session. Andromeda excused herself and took Teddy to a nearby shop. Clearly, Draco had a question for Harry. Harry took Draco to a local bistro and ordered coffee and croissants.

Draco started talking before the coffee arrived. "Harry, I need to ask, why were you staring at Astoria? That was not a normal look."

Annoyed at the lack of security, Harry cast a sound disruption charm to prevent eavesdropping. He silently summoned an orbital spy and, once satisfied, began, "She has a curse on her. A very old one. But you know that, don't you." Looking up at Draco, he focused is gaze. "Did you come here just to see my reaction?"

Wincing, Draco responded, "Yes, Harry. The Greengrass women have a longstanding blood malediction. It skips a few generations here or there, but it resurfaces. I wondered if you could sense it." Harry could see how pained Draco was.

"It's old Draco. Very old, actually. I suspect it was once far more potent. Time waters curses down. I only just sensed it, but it's there. Currently buried. I suspect she suffers a bit now, but the full effects have yet to be triggered. Maybe." Harry knew Draco had suffered over the years. Between his Deatheater father and the Horcrux exposure in Harry's scar. It had particularly loved affecting Draco.

"We are here for treatment. The best healers in Europe can't seem to make any headway, they just treat the symptoms. Unfortunately, it's not a sickness or a normal curse. They don't know what to do with it and I don't know where to turn. I can't lose her, Harry. I just can't."

The coffee arrived and they quietly ate and sipped. After Harry checked it for toxins and potions.
Draco watched him with amusement. Their friendship took years to build, but it was solid. They still loved the verbal sparring, it now just stayed witty and fun, rather than malicious.

"Have you talked to Andromeda? She is an excellent healer AND she knows her curses. She is the Lady Black, you know." Harry had seen her in action, both treating and delivering curses. She could be as frightening as Bellatrix. In her own way.

"Yes, Harry. She recommended I talk to you." Draco just waited. Harry could see the man looked tired. As he thought about the situation, he realized that he really was one of the leading authorities on ancient curses. And this one screamed Nethermantic curse.

"I only got a brief look at it. Come by the house tonight, and I'll take a closer look. Bill is coming by with his family, he is good with curses, too. Especially anything from Egypt." Finishing his coffee, Harry added, "In the meantime, just relax and enjoy Yvoire. The curse is mostly dormant and the area is lovely. I'll have Pipsey make something for dinner. Let's keep it casual, though. Nothing fancy." Harry didn't want Draco to dress up. "We will likely be spending time outside the house. Dress appropriately. And expect it to get very cold. Don't wear anything enchanted that can't be removed. Given how faint the signal is, it might throw me off."

"Thanks Harry. Really." Pausing a moment, Draco added, "I am sorry to hear about your split with Ginevra. If I can help, let me know." Harry knew that he meant it. All of it. He just smiled and nodded.

They were soon joined by the rest of the family. 'The family'. Harry realized that they were all either related or would be once Draco married Astoria. So different than a decade ago. Removing the privacy charms and releasing his orbital spy, he stood and offered Astoria his seat. They made plans for dinner at Harry's house, and Harry's party broke off.

The ladies apparated back to Harry's house and prepared for the trip to Gringotts. Harry opted to walk with Colin and talk. He handed Colin the press passes and advised him to always buy from Wizarding stores. He gave Colin the basic run down that he had received from Andromeda. He could tell Colin had no idea how his purchases had affected his treatment. Harry really needed to get the word out.

Finally, he advised Colin to consider Draco a potential client. Seeing Colin's inner 'Griffindor' start to come out, Harry hastily added that Draco had grown up and changed for the better. Harry invited his friend up for tea and a little down time, but Colin had to develop his photos and finish buying his clothes for the events.

Entering his house, Daphne and Andromeda looked like they were waiting on him. He knew they had an idea about the discussion with Draco. "I assume you both knew about Astoria's curse?"

Both women nodded. Andromeda asked the key question, "Can you help?"

Harry took a deep breath, "Maybe. I'll take a look tonight. Whatever the curse is, it's an old malediction. Daphne, can you pull together your thoughts on your family history. Think in terms of a millennia or more in the past. Whenever the first time the curse was mentioned in your family. If it only affects Greengrass women, it may have come thru other family lines by marriage. The more we know, the better."

Realizing he was suddenly having a dinner party, Harry looked around. Slightly panicked, he exclaimed, "Oh, Merlin. We need furniture. I can't just sit them at the table all night. Mum, Daphne, do either of you know anyone who could get us a few pieces for the main room? Something in the right style for the house? Comfy and kid friendly? Kind of fast?" Harry suddenly
looked insecure. "I didn't think this thru. Maybe there's a shop in Yvoire…"

Daphne came over and hugged him. She never hugged. She was like Harry, not one for displays of affection. "Thank you, Harry. Don't worry about the furniture. I can't tell you what this means to us all." Then the waterworks started.

Harry awkwardly patted her on the back. "Hey, we're going to be family soon." He suddenly remembered Astoria. She was a Slytherin that never fit the stereotype. When Hannah or one of her friends had cursed him, Astoria and two others eventually came over and helped him up. He didn't know any of them, but they were wearing Slytherin colors. Astoria showed him more kindness than all of Gryffindor and Hufflepuff combined. With a few exceptions, of course. No way would he turn his back on her.

Bill and Fleur came over with Victoire. They would stay with Teddy while Harry and his crew went to Gringotts. His Familiar showed up and played with the kids. His familiar loved the kids and Fleur. Harry briefed Bill on Astoria and the need to get a better look at the curse. It would be a long night, but so worth it.

Gringotts

Paris Branch

11AM

Harry, Andromeda, and Daphne arrive at Gringotts a few minutes early. The Paris branch is a little different than the London Branch. It was somewhat brighter and had more crystal chandeliers. They were met by Director Argus, Head of the Paris branch, as well as Director Ragnok, from the London Branch. Pleasantries were exchanged and they were led back into one of the conference rooms.

As they walked thru the bank, the goblins stopped what they were doing and stared at them. Harry began to notice that they were all whispering. This was odd. He'd never seen goblins act like this before. Were French goblins different in behavior than British goblins?

Noticing all the stares and whispers, Harry asked the obvious question, "Director Argus, why are so many of your employees watching me? Is there something about today's meeting that I don't know?"

"There is nothing out of the ordinary, but you are well known to the Goblin Nation. They are excited to see their favorite wizard. You are quite the celebrity, Lord Potter. Or is it Lord Peverell?"

Harry knew his track record at Gringotts. He also knew they cut him a tremendous amount of slack. Most wizards would be horrifically punished for his outbursts. "Potter is fine, sir. I am afraid your employees are going to be very disappointed, this is just a simple visit."

"There is nothing out of the ordinary, but you are well known to the Goblin Nation. They are excited to see their favorite wizard. You are quite the celebrity, Lord Potter. Or is it Lord Peverell?"

Director Argus was so excited, he was practically jumping up and down. Harry wondered if he would be signing battle axes or something. He had every intention of disappointing them. No drama today.

This would be simple. In and out. No trouble. Where had he heard that before?
Entering the conference room, they were greeted by one of the Black family lawyers, a Mister Brun. A few notaries were present as well as a small number of guards. All waiting to see something fun. Harry was determined to disappoint them.

Mr. Brun approached and gave a small head bow. Harry extended his hand. "Mr. Brun, thank you for attending on short notice. I'm sure you remember Lady Black. I'd also like to present Ms. Greengrass." The lawyer kissed her hand and turned to Daphne. Repeating the process.

"I am glad to be of service. Now, on to business." Those Black family lawyers don't mince words. Vicious bastards. Harry frequently missed Ted.

Once they were all seated, the business review took place. Harry heard a repeat of all that Andromeda had walked him through. The changes Harry had discussed were reviewed and implemented. Then it got interesting.

Director Ragnok then got to family stipends. "Ms. Weasley has asked for a cessation of her stipend and has petitioned to return the unused portion of what has already been paid out. Lord Black, how would you like us to proceed?"

That surprised him. He was still considering how and when to end the stipend. Andromeda had convinced him to give Ginny notice and a period of time to adjust before ending it completely. He was still angry, so he decided not to do anything. When did his grief turn to anger?

"Director, how much of the payout is she returning?" Harry really wanted to know.

"Approximately 89% of the payout to date. She has not drawn from it significantly over the last year." He looked like he was waiting for Harry to blow up or wail in grief. Nope. Not today, at least – not here.

"Very well. Put it into a separate account. Maybe we can donate it to the Harpies or get her to endorse some of our businesses. Or something. Season tickets? I don't know." Harry looked over at Andromeda. She had an unusual look on her face. Surprise maybe. "Lady Black will let you know what we want to do with the funds."

Next, Director Ragnok discussed legal issues. Last time Harry was a part of these discussions, it involved suing the Ministry for the Godric's Hollow ownership. Now that he had defeated Voldemort once again and personally saved MANY lives, there would be no moderation. This should be interesting.

Apparently, there were a few lawsuits against the Black family. Many by Dark families that claimed the Black family turned on them without just cause. Basically, they claim the Black family led them to Voldemort, pressed them into service, and then switched sides. Harry was too stunned to be angry. Could it be true? He always thought the Malfoy family, Abraxas Malfoy specifically, had been the one recruiting and applying pressure. Maybe the LeStrange family, too.

Andromeda took control. "Director Ragnok, it appears we were not informed of this in advance of our meeting. Mr. Brun is our attorney and he can review the documentation and begin counter actions. Let's proceed with the inheritance that came with Harry's twenty first birthday. Mr. Brun, I trust you have this in hand?" Mr. Brun looked over and simply nodded.

Looking like someone had stolen his favorite battle axe, Ragnok proceeded with the Potter holdings and condition of the primary vault. The vault held a number of family artefacts and magical tomes. It also held nearly two hundred orichalcum coins and a dozen orichalcum bars. Dumbledore admitted to using a few dozen of the coins to learn more about horcruxes in his
attempt to help Harry. Harry just let it go. About three quarters of the original quantity was left. The tomes were primarily large discs written in Theran, aka, Linear A **. Few could interpret them, as Dumbledore learned. Harry, was one of those few, Albus was not.

The galleons were nowhere near as high as Harry had expected. It was actually less than what was left of his trust vault. Harry knew his liquid assets in the Black family were enormous and he had no need to ever fear being out of galleons, but he wanted to shore up the Potter funds too. He still saw the Black fortune as belonging more to Andromeda and Teddy. In the near future, he planned to partition the funds between the branches and it would not do for the Potter funds to be dry.

The Potter estate is still wealthy on paper. They were massively invested in various wizarding businesses across Great Britain and in Europe as a whole. There were also plenty of investments outside of Europe. The account strategy was focused on rebuilding the wizarding economy with prodigious investments. Apparently, Dumbledore expanded on what the Potters originally invested in and diversified into South America, parts of Africa, Australia, Canada and the US. He moved most of the liquid assets to this 'investment only' strategy after getting control of the vaults when Harry was placed with the Dursley's. The Potter vault now had much less liquid funds than it did twenty years ago, but far more assets and influence.

Obviously, Dumbledore used his connections in the ICW to invest strategically, and it had paid off. The return was high. Unfortunately, the vault was nowhere near as liquid as it should be due to the re-investing strategies left in place. However, the influence Harry now had thru the Potter name and holdings was almost like the Malfoy family once was. Technically, The Potter estate was at its wealthiest in family history, but had the least amount of galleons in the vault.

Of course, the Black accounts would and had always dwarfed the Potters by a factor of at least fifty. But, while the Potters very affluent, the Black family was filthy rich. Now that Dumbledore and the investments he made had compounded over twenty years, the Potter estate was indeed a small fortune. Just not liquid. Based on what Ragnok was showing him, overall value had increased in value by a factor of eight or nine.

Harry's feelings were mixed because Dumbledore had no right to do this. Harry wondered if it was even legal given Dumbledore's position in the ICW. Wizarding law was different than Muggle law. Hermione would shake her head and cry foul. But Harry knew enough about the Wizarding world to know it was probably just part of the 'Old Wizards Club'. He would privately confirm this. Andromeda had taken back control with Ted's help, but with the war turmoil, minimal changes were made.

Harry put the Weasley Wizarding Wheezes investment into the Potter holdings. He also transferred half of the funds it had paid to the Potter vault with the other half earmarked for re-investing. Ideally in a Paris location. Director Argus agreed to have his team look for a suitable location. Ragnok would inform George of the re-investment and potential opportunity in Paris.

Harry also moved his trust vault back to the main family vault along with his funds from the Basilisk and Hungarian Horntail harvesting. Knowing the actual exchange rate, Harry realized how significant this actually was. He changed the investment strategy from the '100% re-investment' strategy that Dumbledore set up to a more reasonable, but still very aggressive 50%. That would help build up the funds while continuing to expand the assets.

The list of businesses owned and partially owned by the Potter family was too large for review today. Harry would get an independent solicitor to review the accounts and holdings. Andromeda said she could help him. Basically, he needed a new Ted. One holding did catch his eye, apparently Dumbledore purchased 40% of the Puddlemere United quidditch team. Knowing the old man was
an avid fan, Harry saw this as a selfish indulgence. 'Hey, maybe I can get box seats. Time to stop
only following the Harpies,' he thought somewhat sadly.

He decided to continue donating 100% of the profits from his likeness to various orphan funds and
charities. It was a very tidy sum and it built a great deal of good will for the Potter name. He asked
Mr. Brun to have his team review the accounts to make sure the Charities were well managed and
passing on the bulk of the funds to the proper families.

Daphne put forth a new trademarked design. It was a simple lightning bolt. It would be used for
any product Harry developed and personally approved for his 'brand'. She had ideas she was going
to cover with Harry when he was back in London. It would separate the 'independently licensed' products from the 'HP Owned' products. Harry had liked the idea and was looking forward to her
thoughts. He had a few Ideas as well.

Ragnok took the application for the design and agreed to submit it within twenty four hours.
Director Argus did raise a concern that it may be too generic for international approval. Daphne
presented a few stylized versions that would be less generic. They could be submitted if the
application failed to be approved.

Ragnok cleared his throat and moved to the next topic. "Now, onto the Potter residential
properties." This is why Harry was here.

"The Potter family owns the home at Godric's Hollow. Fully restored and placed in stasis per
instructions from Lady Black. It currently sits on a conjunction of two ley lines. Magical collection
stones around the perimeter of the property have been disabled and returned to the ministry as of
your twenty first birthday. With their removal, the wards were fully charged within three days. As
of today, the Potter wards are now fully charged and the Gringotts wards have been removed. Of
note is a very lethal ward on the staircase. We avoided it per your instructions, so the staircase has
not been re-finished. Fortunately, it was in excellent condition. The furniture in the house was
similarly restored. The only pieces that could not be restored were in the nursery and were
destroyed when Voldemort was killed. The first time he was killed."

Not easy to listen to, but that was done now.

"The next property is the 118 acre primary estate. It is located in Oxfordshire on the edge of the
ancient forest of Wychwood. The manor house is completely destroyed. A few of the other
buildings were put in stasis and are still in functional condition. They include a dowager house, a
groundskeeper house, and various maintenance and storage buildings. The ministry had been
collecting mana as it has three ley lines that join on the property, but this ceased on your twenty
first birthday."

Harry interrupted, "What the hell?" Harry had no idea the ministry was siphoning off his estates
mana supply. The Godric's Hollow house he knew about as it was part of the settlement. The
manor property he did not agree to. Bastards. And Dumbledore let them do it! Apparently, his
reaction held a bit of 'flair'. The temperature dropped and he saw his hands were starting to clench
into fists. Director Ragnok stopped talking and watched jubilantly.

Then, Ragnok began again, "The gates contained a few bars of orichalcum and were removed
when the ministry fell. They were not returned, but we should be able to track them down as long
as they were not melted down and divided."

Now Harry was getting pissed. His family property had been raided. "Track them down Director
Ragnok! Those were family artifacts. They dated back to before the Bronze Age and I will have
them returned. Mark my words, there will be a reckoning! I will not rest until the looters are found
and punished!" A bright electrical spark leapt involuntarily from Harry's left fist to the center piece on the table, destroying it utterly and leaving a smoldering burn mark. Waving his hand, Harry extinguished the flame. Director Argus was just beside himself with joy. Despite himself, Harry was putting on a show.

Continuing, Ragnok smiled viciously, "And so they shall, Lord Potter! So they shall. Now. The grounds have a low stone fence that has center posts every one hundred feet or so with various protection enchantments and wards. One post was destroyed, likely in the initial attack. Another post was in the process of being moved, but, once Voldemort fell, deconstruction ended. It can be re-built along with the destroyed post for a moderate sum."

Harry nodded. "Proceed with the reconstruction of the stone fence and posts." He would inspect the condition and make his own evaluations. Building wards was something he and Bill could do, but they could layer on top of Gringotts wards easily enough.

Harry quickly added, "Mr. Brun, I'd like you to take steps for re-compensation for the stolen Mana. No discounts. I don't care if it was started while Voldemort was in power, they never returned the mana. The perpetrators may have even done it after the first war. Likely, they took the orichalcum as well. If it is the ministry, track it to the department and the individuals that signed for it."

Staring directly at Mr. Brun, Harry added, "I want blood Mr. Brun. Do you understand me?" The lawyer simply smiled and nodded. Harry's eyes were glowing.

Andromeda noted that Harry may need new glasses, these no longer do enough to contain his glowing eyes. Her eyes were showing pure pride. Harry was so much like Dorea. So much like Arcturus. He is a perfect Lord Black. Well, he will be. With a little coaching.

Ragnok grinned and continued "There appears to have been mining activity to find the basement vault, but the efforts were unsuccessful and abandoned upon your victory. Overall condition of the estate is very good." Harry just smiled. He knew what happened. No doubt the body count was too high to continue. Charlus was one skilled Warder. Without an inside man, likely Pettigrew, Voldemort's forces never would have breached those wards. His wards were ahead of their time.

The director took a sip of water and proceeded. "You have already taken possession of the Yvoire home. Nothing to add to what has already been communicated. Of note is the ley line intersection on the property, which is probably why the Potters purchased it to begin with."

Harry simply nodded, signaling Ragnok to continue.

"As for rental property, you own 3 properties in Diagon alley. All of which are rented out. One has a tenant that fell behind in the payments and is to be evicted at the end of the month. You own one property in Horizont alley, currently leased, and one property in Carkitt Market, currently open."

"Director Ragnok, which shop in Diagon alley is about to be closed?" Harry was curious about this. His knowledge of the Potter properties was minimal. Obviously, much of this came from Albus' investments.

"Florian Fontescue's shop fell behind during the war and never was able to recover solvency."

"I'm not going to close Florean Fontescue's. Please reach out to the Fontescue family and let them know we will work this out. The man gave me free ice cream when I was down on my luck, there is no way I'm shutting his doors. Who else is leasing from me?"

"In Diagon alley, there is space rented to 'Bells' and 'Sugar Plums'. Horizont alley has space rented to 'Flimflam's Lanterns'. Finally, Carkitt market has property beside 'Cogg and Bell Clockmakers'."
This is a good upscale property and we expect it to fill soon."

Harry nodded along to this. He would have to check out these properties soon. "Thank you, Director." He had a soft spot for Bell's. Not only was it Katie's family that ran it, but it had the best Shepherd's pie. "Daphne, if you have any ideas for the open property, please let me know." Harry noted that she had already been taking notes.

"The Potter estate also has three Hogsmeade properties. One is currently empty retail space. The other property is leased out by the 'Wizarding Wireless Network'. Finally, you own a modest sized wooden house nick-named 'the shrieking shack'. Of note is the ley line that runs thru the property toward Hogwarts and the reputation for being haunted."

"I own the Shrieking Shack. Wow. That has a good amount of property, right?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter. Five and a half acres to be specific."

Harry wondered if he could build there. A small Tudor cottage, maybe? The land was nice… When he had kids, it would be good to be close to school. Good hills for sledding. Assuming they don't go to Beauxbaton's or Ilvermorny.

"Finally, you own wizarding business properties in the United States, France, Peru, Brazil, and Uganda. I can review the details with you now or I can make this information available to your solicitors. The list is extensive and we have a lot of ground to cover."

"Let's review the French properties in detail and the rest to be delivered to my solicitors." Harry's head was beginning to spin a little.

"Very well, you own three properties here on the 'Place Cachée', here in Magical Paris. All of which you can see from the second floor of this branch. Two locations that are leased and one location that is currently empty. It is in the shopping district, but it is rather narrow. It's narrowness makes it a challenge to rent. The establishments are all together, making it easy to find them. The two rented properties are 'Belle Ècriture' fine writing store and 'Beaux Briefases', briefcases for the discerning professional wizard."

After the properties, Ragnok reviewed the charities and outstanding debts owed to the Potter estate. It lasted over an hour. Harry deferred the non-property businesses investments held to his solicitors. They would be here all day at this rate. He'd rather review in London.

Once completed they took a brief recess. Harry sent Colin a note – he did not see any possible way he could meet him today in Paris. They would just synch up in Yvoire for the afternoon photos with Bill and Fleur.

When they were all seated, Director Ragnok started with a surprising question. "Now, would you like us to begin with the Peverell, Slytherin, or Dumbledore accounts?" You could hear a pin drop.

"Dumbledore accounts? What Dumbledore accounts?" Harry had mended fences with Dumbledore before he died, but the man had left everything to the school and his brother. "Oh good lord. Let's start with Slytherin. That should be short and easy."

"The Slytherin vault is bare, the Gaunt family spent the entirety of the holdings. The only assets that come with the Slytherin title is a founding seat on the Wizengamot and a seat on the board of directors for Hogwarts." At this, Harry just laughed and shook his head. Two groups he had no interest in.

To activate the seat on the Wizengamot comes at the standard price of 10,000 Galleons. The seat
on the Hogwarts board can be activated after teaching a class at Hogwarts for one school year. During this time, you will live on the school grounds and be the head of the Slytherin house."

Andromeda was staring at him. Daphne was looking at him as well. The message was clear, 'Please don't reject this out of hand.' Harry just started to laugh. He tried to hold it back, really he did. The harder he tried, the redder he became. After about ten seconds, he just let it all out. "Directors, maybe we can get something a little stronger down here. Do we have any fire whiskey?" Time to 'let loose' my 'inner Potter', the goblins were going to get a show.

Andromeda had her most disapproving face on. Tonks had told him about that look. But what really stopped him from cutting loose was the look on Daphne's face. She looked crushed. Harry put back on his game face. "There may be some benefit to this. I'll take it under advisement. Let's skip the whiskey. Is that all for the Slytherin account?"

Andromeda noted the change in tone. She also noted the way he looked at Daphne right before he regained control of his temper. Was he just being polite? Could there be more?

Ragnok shook his head, "Unfortunately, Lord Potter, there is more. The Slytherin account comes with a debt of approximately Two hundred and ninety six thousand galleons that need to be paid to the British ministry before any of the benefits can be realized. Most of this is from the Gaunt family debts and they have been growing with interest and late fees."

Harry did the math in his head, "That's over ten MILLION pounds!" Harry could not even think in terms of that much money. Shaking his head he was about to tell Ragnok and company where the ministry could go to get the late fees…

Andromeda quickly inserted herself before Harry could utter a word. "WE'LL PAY IT! Out of the Black accounts. Along with the Wizengamot seat." Looking sharply at Harry, who was stunned beyond measure. "Think of your God Son." That shut him down.

Harry was lost. There was much discussion at this point. Mr. Brun was talking to Andromeda, Daphne was almost in tears she was so happy, Harry slowly rose up, walked to a waste basket in the corner, and threw up his entire breakfast. He just paid over ten million pounds to become Lord Slytherin. He shifted his hearing a bit and heard Andromeda say something about childhood trauma and needing time. A word about delaying this session… Harry coughed out a simple "No. Hell NO!"

A quick 'scourgify' on his shirt and a rinse of water and he was ready to go. "Let's proceed. I'd like to wrap this painful visit up." Andromeda and Daphne looked concerned. Looking at the table, it seemed a bit green. He realized he had overwhelmed his glasses and his eyes were glowing full beam.

"Ignoring His companions, Ragnok began again. "You have inherited the Dumbledore vault and the Hogs Head establishment in Hogsmeade. Aberforth Dumbledore asks that you view his memory before claiming the contents of the vault or the establishment. The vault content consists of eighteen hundred and twelve galleons, numerous books from the now extinct Dumbledore line, and various family heirlooms. The inn is currently in stasis awaiting your review and visitation. Additionally, there is one house elf that is associated with the Dumbledore family and comes with the estate."

"I see. Well, I guess it can't hurt to take a look. I'll view the memory in private when I return to Britain." Pausing a moment, Harry added, "I barely ever even spoke to the man. I can't say I liked or disliked him. This is really odd. When did he pass away?"
Ragnok simply shrugged and said, "He was found in his pub last week. He had acute liver failure and had been on an all week drinking binge. No one knew he was dead for three days. It was only a complaint about the smell that resulted in his being found."

Harry found that truly heart breaking.

Harry had a sudden thought, "Lady Black, Ms. Greengrass, do you remember if Hogsmeade has any other inns? I really don't remember any." Both women considered the question, then shook their heads.

"Director, can you look into what it would take to purchase the surrounding properties? It's near the main strip, but if I'm going to own an inn, I'd like it to be a nice inn on a nice street. Please do this before anyone knows I am the new owner, I'd like to buy for less. We could have our own shopping district if we do this right." Pausing a moment, Harry added, "Also, see if we can get the property around the 'shrieking shack' for as low a price as possible. I bet that is near worthless due to the reputation of the property."

Andromeda and Daphne looked suddenly very interested.

Ragnok nodded and began once more. "Now, the Peverell estate. Apparently, a Potter married into the Peverell line. His wife, a Peverell by birth, was your many times great grandmother. She felt uneasy about many of the artifacts his wife inherited and was compelled to place them in a separate vault for when there is an uncontested heir. The other Peverell women who joined other families did the same. They kept the gold, but placed the 'unusual' objects in the Peverell vault until an uncontested heir claimed it."

Ragnok took a sip of water before continuing. "You see, Lord Potter, the Peverell line was split across multiple families. Namely, the Potters, the Gaunts, and the Blacks. You are now the head of all three families, with Slytherin absorbing Gaunt, making you the undisputed head of the Peverell family. Those artifacts put in storage by your ancestors are in one of the deepest vaults in Gringotts. We do not know what is there. All we know is that it is not gold. It is opened by a drop of blood and your ring."

Ragnok looked over his clients and shifted topics. "Now, family alliances. Shall we proceed?"

Andromeda stepped in quickly, "No, Director. We need to delay that discussion until I have time to educate and advise Lord Black. Before we break for the day, can you confirm that there are no open marriage contracts?" That got Harry's attention.

"No, Lady Black. There are none." Harry slowly began breathing again.

As they wrapped up the meeting, Harry was led out and to a nearby restaurant for a snack. He was mentally exhausted and perplexed. All that, and he was ten million pounds poorer. Well, the Black accounts were.

Someone had been stealing from his property. At least Ginny did the right thing. That made him feel happy. He was now Lord Slytherin. Unbelievable. "Please, please tell me why you did that? Why the Slytherin name?"

"You can't pass that up Harry. A 'Founders' seat is worth five votes at the Wizengamot. 'Even Ancient and Most Noble' families only get three. 'Ancient and Noble' families get two votes and 'Noble' families get one. Order of Merlin first class recipients also get one." Andromeda was really seeing the deficiencies in Harry's education. Dumbledore should be dug up and killed again. It wasn't just negligent to fail in training a future family head, it was actually criminal.
"You now have five votes as Lord Slytherin, three Votes as Lord Black, one vote as Lord Potter, and one vote as an order of Merlin first class recipient. That is ten votes. Now add in the firmly allied families: Longbottom has three votes, Weasley has one vote, and Greengrass has one vote. Then there is an extra vote from the Malfoys. Yes, Harry. We count them. They owe you. Also, their old allegiances are no longer in place."

Pausing for effect, Andromeda made eye contact and continued, "All in all, you can influence at least sixteen votes. That is unheard of. You essentially control a sizable voting block without even trying. It is doubtful that anyone has come to realize this. When they do, you need to be prepared. The only other 'Founding' seat is with the Smith family from Hufflepuff, but they only have those five as Smith is not a noble house, unlike the Potter family."

Continuing she added, "There may be more allies, Harry. I don't pretend to know if the old Potter alliances are still intact, but I suspect they are. As a rule, Multi-generational alliances usually need to be formally ended. I suspect Bones, Abbott, maybe Prewitt, thru the Weasley family. There are possibly a few more. The Bones are worth three votes and Abbot is worth two. Prewitt is worth one, but they tend to be a bit... unusual in their voting. They are a light family that is also a supporter of blood purity." Saying that, Andromeda raised one eyebrow. Her eyebrows speak volumes. Harry often wondered if she practiced using her eyebrows in the mirror when she was younger. Narcissa could do it too. Bellatrix, on the other hand, had only possessed one look – crazy.

Harry let these numbers sink in. "But can I represent multiple families? Would I have to delegate off any of the seats? I don't remember paying for any of these seats. I need to think about this." Suddenly realizing the count, he looked at Daphne. "So, our families are officially aligned? I thought it was just friendship and something or other."

Daphne paused, considering how much she had to teach him. It was almost sad how little he still understood. She was grateful that he was helping her family. Grateful that he was helping her sister. Beyond the benefits of aligning with him, she really had grown to like him. "Yes, Harry. Our families are aligned. It is an alliance we can both benefit from and do wonderful things for our world."

Daphne took a deep breath, now or never. "Harry, I have regretted for years the way my friends and I behaved at Hogwarts. I can't believe the way I acted and I hope you can forgive me. I want to help shape Magical Britain into a better place for years to come. Ideally, we can work together to make that kind of bigotry and behavior a thing of the past... Can you forgive me, Harry?" She looked to be in pain and near tears. The ice queen had left the building.

"I'd like that Daphne. And you are forgiven. I'm very glad to be allied with the house of Greengrass." Pausing a moment, he added. "There is too much to look forward to for us to continue looking back." Daphne just smiled and nodded. Harry knew it sounded good, but he was just being nice. Harry would always be haunted by the hell he went thru at Hogwarts.

He had received this kind of confession and apology before. The horcrux in his scar had caused so much pain. Ron was so broken up with guilt, he sometimes had trouble relaxing in the same room with him. As did so many others. Draco, McGonagall, Chang. Add in most of the prefects at the school while he attended and pretty much all of Gryffindor and Hufflepuff. He knew Daphne was sincere. He couldn't tell her about the horcrux, but he could help mend the wounds.

Andromeda was just looking on with a concerned face. Harry knew she had no idea what he went through. If she had, she never would have hired Daphne. Andromeda may have even refused to support Hogwarts. Given that the Black family is a top donor, cessation of donation would have
been terrible for the school.

The tension ended and Harry began to see Daphne as a person he could count on. She struggled with the apology, not because she didn't mean it. She struggled because she meant it so much. Dudley had the same discussion with him after the horcrux was removed. He was now a youth minister, counseling kids with violent behavior. They keep in touch and are as close as siblings. Harry knows Dudley will never completely forgive himself. Nor will Petunia or Vernon. Maybe he will have more success with Daphne. It's not like she behaved too badly. To the best of his knowledge, she just laughed along with the crowd. Her sister was one of the few who ever came to his aid. Water under the bridge.

They went to a few shops and Harry bought a one of a kind bracelet for Gabrielle. It was really nice. Rather expensive, but she was practically family. And he now knew he could afford to be generous once in a while. Andromeda helped him pick it out. The bracelet itself was platinum with sapphires inset. He hoped Gabrielle liked sapphires. If he had time tonight, he'd put a few protection charms on it.

He also purchased a singing Birthday card and a gold Eiffel tower 'charm' for Ginny. She had a charm bracelet she put charms on when she traveled with the Harpies. She would like this. When you held it, you would smell baked bread and red wine. 'A charmed charm'… or would it be a 'charming charmed charm'? That thought made Harry chuckle. Happy Birthday Ginny. It was comparable to the boots she had given him for his birthday. He'd send it off when he got home. The banishing box is a life saver.

It was nearly four o'clock and Colin would be at the house soon to take photos of Bill and Fleur with Victoire. Time to go.

Till next time

Chapter End Notes

Authors Notes

Next, Harry and Bill deal with the curse on the Greengrass family. Plans are made. Teddy meets one of Harry's admirers. Harry considers his options.

Earlier in the story, I thought Teddy's real name was Theodore, but I was wrong. Apparently, it is Edward. I am adjusting this in the earlier chapters. Normally I'd just go with the mistake and live with it, but changing a name is too big to ignore. Sorry. Hopefully I catch them all.

* The Exercises Harry walks thru in the morning are straight from the ‘Warrior’ Discipline in the Earthdawn World setting by FASA. He uses them to keep in shape and improve his dueling skills.

** An incarnation is like a spirit guide that is bequeathed to a recipient. The 'Lightbearer' organization uses that to pass on their ancient lore and skills. Covered extensively in the Dance of Death Prequel. It is how Harry got so good at using his abilities by the age of 21.

*** Linear A is an ancient script that has never been translated. First found in 1893,
and later found on the island of Crete. Predates ancient Greek. Used by the Minoans between 1800 and 1400 BCE

****I never really saw the Potter family as being filthy rich. I prefer to think of them as very affluent to moderately wealthy. Nice investments, royalties on inventions (sleeky's), Low birth rates, and modest living can result in a nice accumulation of wealth. By the time Harry turned 21, the principal had not been touched and proceeds were re-invested for twenty years. Increasing the overall wealth of the estate by a factor of 8 or 9 is an aggressive, but realistic return. Consider: If a good portfolio doubles in value every 7 years, Dumbledore was able to use his 'old boys network' to double the funds every five years or so. A very well managed fund, aggressively invested, can do that in the real world. Especially with a little 'insider knowledge' helping out. Wizarding laws seem to favor the rich and pure blooded groups, so I don't see it as a stretch to say old Albus would not have seen anything wrong with helping Harry out and rebuilding the wizarding economy at the same time. The man was over a hundred years old in a culture that is, in many ways, even older. Yadda, yadda, greater good.
Chapter Summary

Harry hosts an informal dinner party and the French ministry finds the remains of another dinner party.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter

FASA Owns the Earthdawn Game

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am designating anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Tale of Two Dinner Parties

Potter House
Yvoire, France
The House and the Gardens

3:45 PM

Harry and Andromeda returned to the house from Gringotts. Daphne went to see her sister. Entering the house was like opening a bottle of fun. Teddy was doing metamorph tricks for Victoire and she was laughing hysterically. Harry was almost brought to tears by the sight. Tonks used to do that to cheer him up when he was down.

Harry felt blessed to have these people in his life. "Hey guys, looks like you had fun!" Teddy ran over and leapt into his arms.

"Daddy! Victoire is funny! She laughs all the time!" Everyone was quiet. Well, Victoire was still laughing. Teddy had called him 'Daddy'.

Harry got a little choked up. "I know buddy! And so are you!" Harry then proceeded to spin the little guy around. Soon they were all laughing hysterically. He'd talk to Andromeda about this. She would help find the best solution. He did consider Teddy to be his son, but he was Andromeda's son too. And neither wanted to have Remus and Tonks forgotten.

Then Teddy walked over to Victoire and said "Bonjour, Mademoiselle." He made his hair flop about and change colors while he said it. The reaction was hysterical laughter from Victoire.
Harry looked over at Fleur and said, "Teaching the language I see."

Fleur responded with a confused look, "Non, Harry. I thought you were teaching him. He has been trying new words all afternoon." Harry looked at Andromeda and she shook her head.

Harry realized Teddy must be a natural if he was picking up French so quickly. "Teddy, where did you learn French?"

"Catherine! She says you're a hero." Teddy was so proud of him. Harry looked over at Bill and Fleur questioningly. They just shrugged.

"Where did you see Catherine?" Harry was a little concerned now. He didn't know anyone named Catherine.

"She is in the mirror."

AH, an enchanted mirror obviously. Welcome to the world of outrageous flattery. Odd that the mirror downstairs knew about Harry. He hadn't even spoken to it. Maybe it had been talking to the one upstairs? Were they like paintings? Moving around the house? Still. Always cautious, Harry extended his perception and felt something. Something light, fun. Slightly familiar. He quickly focused on this presence, intensifying his astral reconnaissance tremendously. He suddenly froze.

He felt an ever so slight 'tug' on his astral presence. There she was. He could easily sense her now. Walking to the window, he began scanning the back yard. Catherine, the spirit girl from the catacombs was just visible through the trees. She was dancing in the clearing near the ley line intersect. She looked so beautiful. The Ley Lines were helping her get her 'glow' back. She was no threat, but it was a little disturbing that she could find him. The wards on this property were nowhere near as high as Harry normally liked them, 'could she have squeezed thru?' Harry wondered. She stopped dancing for a moment and looked up. Harry just numbly smiled and waved to her.

Bill looked at Harry oddly. "Harry, who are you waving to?"

"A ghost child from the catacombs. She must have followed me back after I destroyed that foul guardian spirit. Her death was pretty gruesome and I avenged her." That seemed to get everyone's attention.

Harry motioned for Bill to come over. Once Bill was there, "Shift your focus Bill. To the 'lower' astral plane. Look deep into it, past the glow of the living. Everything is much more subdued. Quieter as a general rule. Do you see her? Right… there." Harry pointed to where Catherine was spinning about.

Bill slowly focused as Harry had taught him. Then he froze up. It's never easy finding yourself, unexpectedly, in the presence of the dead. Well, not easy for most people. "Harry… is she safe?" That reminded Harry of the questions he used to ask Bill while they were disarming ancient wards in Egypt during the summer before his third year. That was the best summer of his young life.*

Harry took the moment and made it educational. Bill did this with him in the field when looking at modern wards. It works. "Absolutely. Look at her closely... First, look at the edge of her aura. Can you see the dark 'blobs'?" Bill slowly nodded. "Those are the last remnants of the darkness that bound her in the catacombs. She is literally spinning them out of her aura. The ley line juncture is helping. It's like taking a deep and hot shower. Now look at her 'inner' aura. Notice there are no black streaks or malicious 'notes' close to her. No red streaks showing anger or aggressiveness. She is here because she wants to be." Bill was taking all this in. He was a natural. "Finally, look at the
pulsing patterns around her head. The gold and silver sparks. A few blue notes as well. That is a bit of her personality. Brave, noble, mischievous… maybe other stuff too. She is kind of far away."

The entire room was watching Harry teach Bill about the supernatural. They were all engrossed. They could feel Harry's magic as well as Bill's. While Harry's was a cold and clean Alpine forest with oak and subtle hints of roses, Bill's was something else altogether. Not as strong as Harry's, but still present.

Bill's magic had a Sandalwood flavor to it. This was accompanied by a hint of Papyrus. He had the 'feel' of a warm breeze in a desert oasis. Extremely dependable. Like a rock. Egypt must have impacted him tremendously. He was hard to read with Harry in the room, but Fleur always picked it up.

Harry did note that Catherine seemed tied to HIM rather than to the house or the catacombs. That's probably why he did not immediately feel her, she was personally attached. Probably happened while he was in combat. Harry noted that he needed to be more careful and observant, he couldn't let himself miss this kind of thing in the future. He briefly considered cutting the threads that tied them together, but decided not to. She was not pulling any measurable amount of mana from him, it was more like a frightened child holding his hand. When she was ready, he would help her move on. Until then, he would care for her. His desire for a family and kids probably made it easier for her to attach herself. Intent… Harry still had a lot to learn. It pained him to admit it, but Dumbledore really did know a lot. Things you can't learn in a book.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door and half the room jumped out of their skin. Harry just smiled. He had already felt Colin coming thru the wards. Catherine and continued dancing off in the distance.

Colin came in and had the obligatory house tour, then the Weasley's went out for their photos. Teddy went down for a nap and Harry took the time to begin enchanting a few charms into Gabby's bracelet. He could do a lot in a few hours. The bracelet was primed to receive simple enchantments by the jeweler. Harry's enchantments were anything BUT simple.

Harry went out to the ley line intersect point to give this a little more oomph, and to save time. He enchanted each of the seven sapphires. He added a disillusionment charm, toxin detection, potion detection, a summoning charm, shielding charm, and finally, a healing charm. The detection enchantments were constant and the charms were good for one use before needing to be recharged.

-CS-

Potter House
Yvoire, France

While Colin is Taking Pictures Outside

Finishing up the enchantments, Harry came upstairs and saw Bill at the table reading over the Malta notes. Colin was likely doing a few photographs with just Fleur and Victoire. Andromeda was out with Teddy.

"Hey, Bill. How was the photo shoot?"

Bill looked up from the notes and smiled. "Very nice, Harry. Thanks for doing this. Mum is always after me to take pictures No doubt we will be financing Colin's next camera!" They both laughed at that. Colin had invested much of the Basilisk funds Harry had given him into wizarding
photography training and equipment. He was good, but a bit poor. The young guys just couldn't say no to a new camera.

Harry glanced at the table before asking, "Looking over the Malta notes?"

"Yeah. I've made a bit of headway. Still plenty to decipher. But that's not why I came back early."

Looking at the door to make sure Fleur was not near, Bill quietly warned Harry, "Harry, I thought I would give you a gentle heads up. I think Fleur is laying the groundwork to set you up with her sister. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but I don't want you to be blindsided. Gabrielle thinks the world of you, and this is not her doing. So, don't screw that up if things get weird."

Harry was a bit stunned. "Oh, ok. Thanks for the heads up. Isn't she kind of young? Like, 13 or 14? I just turned 21 last month." Harry started trying to do the math in his head...

"No, Harry." Thinking about it, Bill continues, "You do know she was a first year during the tournament, right? Had the little blue uniform and everything. She's about 3 years younger than you. About two years younger than Ginny. She turns 18 in September. Everyone used to think she was younger for some reason. In a way, she is kind of like you. Looks younger than she is. Well, she used to. Then she hit 16 and that ended." At this Bill just raised his eye brows and shook his head.

Narrowing his eyes a bit and evaluating Harry's blank look, "Harry, we talked about this before you left for France. Don't you remember? She's a rising seventh year? Needed an escort? Fleur got so excited she floo called her father? Does this ring any bells? You do know you are going to the event, right? With Gabby."

Thinking back, Harry responded with a little shock, "I know I'm going with her, I'm just fuzzy on the details. I remember having just dealt with that article from Witch Weekly. I do recall Fleur saying I could take Gabby. And there would be dancing… I even got her a gift. I just did not remember it was a seventh year only event." Pausing and thinking back a moment, he added, "Don't forget my anxiety of sitting around and waiting for Ginny to show up. Then the Wizard Auction came up… I still can't believe I'm actually doing THAT."

Thinking about how the conversation started, Harry added, "Bill, you know I am still dealing with my break from Ginny, right? I'm really not wanting to start dating anytime soon. Definitely not anyone still in school. That would be…inappropriate. I never really saw Gabby as anything other than a sweet little girl. Kind of like Luna - like having a little sister. Are you sure she's almost 18?"

Shaking his head, Bill just grinned. "Harry, if you have to ask that, then you must have been crazy in love with Ginny. Gabby is an inch taller than Fleur and has an Allure that is just as strong."

Sitting back and being Serious, "Fleur and I both know you need a break from dating, just know that she may be laying the foundation for more in the future." In his mind, Bill wondered if Harry would still think it 'inappropriate' when he saw her clearly. He'd have to suggest they all go swimming and watch Harry's reaction to seeing her in a bikini. Inappropriate! Ha! Harry is more innocent than most third year students.

"I'll make a deal with you Harry, you don't tell Fleur I warned you and I don't tell her you forgot Gabby was a rising seventh year."

"Deal!" Harry loved hanging out with Bill. The guy was just so cool. He did wonder why Fleur would even think about setting him up in the future with her sister. Harry never felt half as cool as Bill.
"Why me, Bill? It's not like I'm cool or anything. I mean, we both know I am not the kid from those crazy children's books. That kid was tall and perfect, I'm only a shade over 5'9" and far from perfection. And this scar..." Harry points to his head, "It will never completely fade. For crying out loud, it's right in the middle of my forehead!"

"Harry, are you serious? You are an attractive guy, I know because Witch Weekly keeps featuring you and your 'dazzling emerald eyes'. Seriously, it's an adjective now! 'Potter Eyes', I kid you NOT." They both laughed at that descriptive.

"And no, you are not 'cool', but you are sincere. That beats 'cool' every time." Smirking, he added, "And you do give off a rebellious vibe. Seriously, you are the bad boy of Hogwarts that called Snape a 'Fucking Deatheater' to his face in front of witnesses. Right after you killed a Basilisk with a sword! No, Harry, cool's got nothing on you, little brother." Harry loved it when Bill called him that.

Getting back to the topic, Bill dropped a bombshell, "When Fleur first met you, she thought you weren't into girls." At that Harry just stared at Bill.

Harry started to chuckle when Bill held up his hand and continued, "Don't laugh. You were fourteen years old and full of hormones, but you were not affected by the allure. At least, not much. You seemed a little affected at the world games. I have a high tolerance, but yours was even higher. Then, she saw you DID like girls and she was 'taken aback'. That means, at fourteen years old, you were stronger than ninety five percent of the adult wizards. After you rescued Gabby, she was ready to adopt you."

"You also earned a life debt when you protected her in the maze. She is sure Krum was going to kill her while under the imperious curse." Bill added with a smirk.

"So that's all it is, a life debt? You know, half of England owes me a life debt at this point." Harry added with a laugh and shaking his head.

"No, that's not it. Well, not entirely. Fleur really does not have many friends or people she cares about. Veela tolerate each other, but they are also very competitive. Normal witches often behave in a petty and jealous way. You know, even Ginny treats her bad. Her own sister in law. She calls her 'Phlegm' behind her back." This seems to make Bill really pissed. Harry knew he told Ginny to never call her that in his presence again. Harry had said much the same.

Bill continued, "Most boys and men act like love sick idiots around a Veela. Nothing endearing about that. Hell, even my own brothers act all lovey-dovey around her. So, my wife loves her parents, her sister, me, a half dozen or so friends, and, she loves you."

Harry ran his hand thru his hair, "I just assumed she had tons of friends" considering Bill's words carefully, he asked, "What do you mean by 'Veela are competitive'?"

Pausing to collect his thoughts, Bill gave him a funny look. "You are resistant to the allure, right? Well, the vast majority of wizards are not. Most Veela want a family, just like most wizards and witches. However, they don't want a family with a man who can't handle the allure. They also need a wizard powerful enough to protect them should any 'allure driven fools' get any aggressive or possessive ideas. It happens, believe me. I have the scars to prove it."

Bill continued as Harry just listened, "So, unless a Veela can meet a strong enough wizard, they just have to live with other Veela in a commune of sorts for companionship and protection. Usually, the rare wizard strong enough, is at their peak magically. That happens sometime between 45 - 70 years old. Not what an 18 year old beautiful young witch dreams about. And by then, the
'good' wizards are usually married. You, Harry, were strong enough at 14 to resist the allure. You are nice looking and very athletic. Very… symmetrical, I guess. You are kind and caring... You are wealthy. No struggling wizard here. Wealth is far less important to a Veela than to most witches, but security and stability are important to everyone.” At this, Bill shrugs one shoulder and tilts his head. Basic stuff.

Bill wrapped up with, "Now, the competitive side. Your resistance to the allure is not something my wife wants other Veela hearing about! I promise you, she will feel threatened by any Veela that comes within 10 yards of you. Veela can be as aggressive and possessive as an allure crazed wizard. Fleur would never let another Veela 'stake her claim' on you without your consent. She sees you as a little brother and, I suspect, a possible love for her sister. Before we were married, she was very 'protective' of me around her Veela cousins."

Given the events of the last two weeks, Harry was not interested in anything related to romance or of possible love affairs. He needed time without any romance or female attention. So, he steered the conversation to curse breaking. The conversation wound around and eventually turned to Malta. Bill had made some headway on the information, but needed Harry to fill in the blanks.

Harry was the only known individual fluent in Theran runes and script. Bill was learning fast, but Harry was the only 'guide book'. Bill confessed that he was having second thoughts on breaking the seals on the kaer, assuming they could even locate them. There was a risk of freeing whatever was trapped down there. Harry felt much the same way.

-CS-

At Six o'clock, Draco and Astoria arrived with Daphne and… Narcissa Malfoy. "Lady Malfoy, welcome to my home. You know Lord Weasley and Lady Weasley." Harry knew to keep things formal. The Malfoys and the Weasleys are not especially fond of each other. Pleasantries were exchanged and hands were kissed.

Harry gave them a tour of the home and the consensus was that the home was charming. Harry sensed that Narcissa was being polite. As the tour ended, Narcissa pulled a small box from her bag and opened it to reveal five miniature pieces of furniture. "Harry, I have a few pieces of furniture that would work very well in your home." She placed them at different points in the main room and expanded them. They were a perfect fit. Adding a nice area rug completed the picture. So, this is where Andromeda goes for decorating advice.

There was a medium camel back sofa, a pair of very attractive chairs and a center table that was very sturdy looking. Nothing matched and everything went well together. Perfect French country styling. Now he just had to fill the walls and the upper room was done.

"Thank you, Aunt Narcissa. I don't know what to say. I'll have to get your advice when I rebuild my manor house." Harry had said the last piece half joking, but she took it seriously.

"Manor house? Yes, you absolutely will Harry. I look forward to the challenge." Regaining her composure, she added, "Perhaps we can talk further at the Yule celebration?" This would be the first big Malfoy event since the war ended. Having Harry would be a real coup.

"I can't wait. I had planned to RSVP when I returned to London." Narcissa just smiled. "Oh, and I believe we are planning a family celebration as well. We have not picked a date, Daphne and Mum will be setting it up." Oops. He called Andromeda 'Mum', it just slipped out. Narcissa just smiled and looked at her sister. Andromeda looked back with pride.

Harry and Draco expanded the Dining table and seating to accommodate the crowd. The meal was
roasted pheasant and it was excellent. Harry and Bill avoided the wine, they were working later. Draco and Harry fell into their verbal melee thru dinner, but it was all good natured. Mostly quidditch focused. Then the topics turned to Harry's titles.

Narcissa brought it up first. "So, Harry, I understand you are the new Lord Slytherin. What are your plans for enhancing the image?" She looks almost predatory in her eagerness.

"I am still coming to terms with it. I think I want to focus on reinforcing traditions, encouraging those of muggle birth to support the wizarding economy, and stress education." Yes! Focus on education. Andromeda looked like she approved. As did Daphne. Why did Narcissa make him on edge?

Narcissa nodded approvingly. "Will you be teaching at Hogwarts? I understand that is what is needed to be on the board. The school could use your positive influence."

"I am still considering all my options. It is hard to commit to teaching when I could get a call from a number of ministries in need of my… talents." That should do it. Harry is a light wizard who specializes in doing the things other light wizards don't have the stomach for. "The Department of Mysteries needs its Reaper."

Then Teddy got bored and wanted to play. Andromeda politely excused Teddy from dinner. Harry's familiar came down from upstairs and joined in. Narcissa and Draco had not seen the runespoor in over a year and were shocked at her size. She was not small. Astoria just stared. Runespoors tend to put people in shock. Especially when they like to wrestle with three year olds.

Harry hissed out to his familiar, Æ "Good timing 'girls'. Play gently, we have a few new people and don't want to scare them." Æ The 'girls' just laughed. What everyone else heard was hissing. Fleur winked and Selene winked back. They loved the theatrics. Fleur took Victoire in to join the fun. A runespoor, a toddler and a baby. What more could you ask for? Harry waved his wand and the noise level dropped to a fraction of what it had been. Not silent, but manageable.

Draco was laughing and shaking his head. "Harry, you always bring the entertainment with you. At least this time it is not muggle inspired." Thinking for a minute and becoming serious, he added, "I do hope you consider the Hogwarts position. You're terribly needed. Things have gotten… Bad. Having you as head of Slytherin would be a massive step in the right direction. Consider what a positive influence could accomplish."

Daphne added, "I've heard stories about how Slytherin house is scorned. Innocent children being treated like dark wizards. McGonagall has done very little to curtail it."

Harry knew all about McGonagall putting her head in the sand. "Who is the head of Slytherin now?" Last he heard it was Slughorn. Not that he kept up. When he left Hogwarts, he cut all ties. He really wasn't a Gryffindor anymore. No house rivalries as he resented them all at the end.

Astoria chimed in, "No one wants it. Horace retired and now they have a rotation of heads. Apparently, it carries a stigma."

Harry pondered that. Every house needs a head. "I'll think about it, but first I have a dark lord to track down." Seeing the shocked looks on all the faces except Bill, he quickly added. "Why do you think I'm in France?" The Malfoys looked blankly at him.

"At the DoM we call it 'Scout and Scythe'. I find them, and… I deal with them. Everyone was stunned. High time these family members knew he was no cream puff of a wizard. He suspected the Black side was just more surprised he had it in him. "I recommend not hanging around in Paris
until I… wrap things up."

Bill then chimed in, "Speaking of wrapping things up, are we ready to get down to business?"

Harry gathered his Familiar and he led Draco, Bill, Astoria and Daphne out to where the ley lines intersected. He had advised them to all dress warm as it would get very cold. Thankfully, they had listened.

-CS—

Meanwhile, Back at the House.

Fleur went downstairs to feed Victoire and Teddy fell asleep on the sofa. This gave the Black sisters time to talk. Narcissa started with a simple one word question, "Mum?"

"Harry and I have grown close over the years. He was there for me when my husband and daughter were killed. He is quite impressive, Cissy."

"So I hear. I brought a pensieve, I would love to see how the Gringotts visit played out. It sounds like Harry is high drama at Gringotts. Ms. Greengrass says they don't even collect wands when he is around."

Andromeda smiled, "He is a celebrity at Gringotts more so even than in wizarding society. He has no idea how much he gets away with. Ragnok treats him better than the minister."

The Pensieve was placed on the table and Andromeda extracted her memory. "Cissy, absolutely no acting on anything you see, understood?"

Narcissa considered a moment, then agreed.

The sisters dove into the memory. Andromeda 'fast forwarded' past the sensitive details and boring information. She found the 'fun' parts and slowed things down.

After about an hour, the sisters came out of the memory. Fleur had at one point come up and taken Teddy to bed. She was out on the downstairs patio now. She said in her note that sisters should catch up, she would take care of the kids.

"That was impressive Andromeda. His power has grown, as has his business acumen. The idea to expand Hogsmeade has merit. I never knew he could be so blood thirsty as when he heard about his family property."

"That was a bit surprising. If Harry wasn't always checking his food and drink, I would suspect the Goblins are spiking it somehow. I do suspect the wards magnify power somewhat to cause a buildup, Harry never has 'electrical arcs' like that."

Andromeda poured a cup of tea for them both. "His childhood must have been horrible. He is both fanatically loyal to his family and ruthless to anyone who threatens him. Trust me when I say, never get on his bad side. He reminds me so much of Arcturus and Dorea. And he is learning. Daphne will help him get there."

Narcissa considered that for a moment. "I can see that. Now he is Lord Slytherin. Any hints of a Lady Slytherin?"

"No. But he is young. Ginevra was half way out the door when he proposed. She left with dignity, returning the stipend, not drawing it out… Say what you will, the Weasleys are very honorable. I
am sorry it did not work out, but Ginevra was unprepared to lead an ancient and noble house. Had she shown any interest, I would have gladly helped her. I seriously doubt she would want to be Lady Slytherin."

"Two birds with one stone… What about the elder Greengrass daughter? Or the younger Delacour girl?"

"That would be his choice. I think my Harry needs to heal and grow. I'll support him and guide him as he needs and requests. I do like Daphne," Andromeda did not like the two birds and one stone comment. Ginevra left on her own. Changing the topic, "Did you know he loathes spending money from the Black account? He feels like he is robbing from Edward. He is a very trustworthy young man. I hope he takes the Hogwarts position, it would be good for him in the long run."

Narcissa agreed. "The more he grows, the more he will attract followers. I'm glad he and Draco are getting along. The house of Black is on the rise. I like his ideas about Hogsmeade. I suspect he has other ideas as well. The Hogs Head inn could be very nice with the right improvements. A nice upscale place for parents or visiting families."

Andromeda took the moment to ask about her sister's family, "How is the house of Malfoy?"

"Recovering. The health issues of Astoria are distracting Draco. Hopefully, Harry can help with that. Our finances are stable, but we need a formal alliance with the Potter house to begin repairing our reputation. There is a reason Draco has been studying in France."

Andromeda knew the reason. No one wants to be treated or work with a follower of You-Know-Who, and the Malfoy family was the poster child for his followers. Lucius' legacy lives on. "My offer to apprentice him stands. He truly is a gifted healer. He could stay at Grimmauld place and strengthen our allegiances. People need to see how much he has changed since getting away from Lucius' influence. They need to see that he never took 'the mark'."

"I still miss Lucius. The Lucius from my youth. He was a gifted wizard with such a bright future, before that damn mark. So much potential. It destroyed him. His father forced him to take it, I curse that man to hell and back." Looking at her sister, she smiled. "I'm glad we were able to reconnect, Andromeda. It is good to have someone I trust and can talk to. I regret all those years apart." Looking around she added, "I do like this house. It's… charming. Let's make sure Lord Slytherin builds a suitable manor house in Oxfordshire. I remember the original Potter manor. It was impressive. Dorea did a good job with it."

Andromeda listened to her sister. She had missed Narcissa, but that was in the past. Andromeda considered correcting her on Lucius being forced to take the mark. Harry had stressed to her how important it was to be taken freely. Also, the vile acts that had to be performed to qualify for it. No point bringing that up, though.

To Narcissa's credit, she never bought into the Voldemort propaganda. Andromeda knew Narcissa was a snob and believed in pure blood superiority. But where Narcissa was concerned, it was more cultural than biological. She would accept a muggleborn who recognized pure blood traditions easily enough. Unlike Bellatrix. Andromeda had made Bellatrix pay dearly for that.

With a mischievous grin, Andromeda asked, "Would you like to see Harry intimidate Gareth Greengrass?" The Black sisters poured a glass of wine and enjoyed the memories.

-CS—

That Same Night
Potter House in Yvoire

While Narcissa and Andromeda are Enjoying the Penseive.

Harry led Bill, Draco, Astoria, and Daphne to the clearing behind the house, at the Patch of Grass Where the Ley Lines Intersect. Harry had prepared a magic circle in advance for this event. It was approximately ten feet in diameter. Inside the circle he took chalk and made a triangle, cutting his hand and placing a few drops of blood at every corner. Technically, blood magic was illegal, but he wasn't worried. "If anyone is wearing anything enchanted, can you either hand them to Draco or step back about ten feet?"

Harry sat at one of the triangle points and had Astoria sit facing him in the grass. She was at the center of the circle. He put Bill on the left point and Daphne on the right point. He had Draco stand behind him about ten feet, well outside of the circle.

Taking a slow and deep breath, he instructed the participants. "Now, this would be a good time to relax and clear your minds. It might get a little cold." Harry slowly assumed his 'astral face'. His hair slowly turned silver, his skin turned deep black, and his teeth became flat white with small runes on them. His eyes blazed green and his scar lit up with silver fire. His familiar matched him in reverse. The temperature dropped dramatically.

Gazing upon Astoria, he began slowly untangling her pattern. As he proceeded to gently peel apart her pattern, without damaging the 'threads', he saw the curse deep inside near her core. Mostly dormant. He slowly and gently began tracing it back to her center. It was a 'birth curse' that had been inverted. A slow withering triggered by having a child. Originally, it had been a curse on the child. Somehow it shifted. He had heard of a similar curse before, in Scytha, long ago. Before recorded history. But this is a more modern curse. Maybe… a millennia old, possibly two. It was difficult to pinpoint the age because it is a generation skipping curse. Looking over at Daphne's pattern, he gently delved in and saw it there too, but completely dormant. If Daphne had children, it would be passed down. A daughter might cause it to awaken. A son would just carry it.

Turning is perception back to Astoria, he caught images. A jungle. A stone city very high up in the mountains. A great cat cried out in the distance. Not a lion roar, something else. A deep 'sawing' roar. Rain. Ozone. Clouds. STOP! The curse was twitching. He ever so slowly backed out of her pattern. Slowly. Gently. Calmly. He heard Selene whispering to him. Hecate, too. His vision returned to normal. He saw two owls in the trees, watching him. Catherine was there, watching also. Now that he was aware of her, he could sense her with ease. Almost instinctively. Odd. He should have expected that, but he didn't. His appearance slowly shifted back to normal.

Harry was exhausted. He had to strain to be that gentle. And he held it for hours. Careful as he was, the curse almost noticed him. Almost, but not quite. Another minute and it may have become active. He lay back and looked at the stars. Bill came over after seeing to Daphne. Helping him up, he asked, "You OK, Harry?" Looking over, Harry saw Draco and Daphne helping Astoria. Artemis whispered, "You were focused for hours, Harry."

Harry rose up, stretched, and looked at his watch. "Let's go inside and warm up." Astoria and Daphne were both a bit pale. Never easy to have someone poking around in your pattern. He had told them what to expect, and not to resist. Easy to hear, harder to experience. He was very proud of the way they adapted.

Once inside, Pipsey served hot chocolate and tea while Harry brooded. "That was difficult." They were all gathered around the table. Harry offered the sofa to Astoria, but she wanted to know what the saw.
Bill started, "Harry, I saw the curse, but it was very faint. I'm afraid all I got was a general feel for the effect."

Harry nodded. Had this been Egyptian or maybe Babylonian, Bill would have recognized it. Probably. Bill was learning, but Harry was the Master. "I saw a lot. But not enough. I need to speak with the dead."

Draco spoke up. "What did you see? We were out there for hours. You looked like… something else, Harry. What was that?" Draco was a bit shaken up. Daphne and Bill had seen him like that before, but Draco and Astoria had not.

"That was me at using full power. Well, 80-85% full power." Harry sipped his earl grey. "It is much harder to do delicate work than bludgeon around and knock over buildings. I'm knackered. Bill, take the first pass, please."

Bill started, "It's a withering curse. Very deep and tied to your family. Not active, but present."

Harry Nodded. "Agree, the malediction is 'semi-dormant'. It likely stirred at puberty. It is tightly tied to childbirth and causing deep emotional pain. I suspect the original curse was impacting the children, but it was at some point inverted. It is part of your family pattern and will never end until it is neutralized at the source." Looking at the sisters, Harry added, "It is in both of you, but Daphne's is fully dormant and will only pass down to her children."

Looking at Astoria, he added, "I think I can neutralize it right here, but that would make you infertile. From what I saw of your magic, I don't think you will not stand for that. You are a life giver." Astoria nodded.

Harry continued, "We need to go to the source of the curse to destroy it. I sensed mountains, a jungle, clouds, stone structures, rain. Can any of you identify this sound?" Harry replicated the cat he had heard with an audible illusion.

Narcissa spoke up, "Jaguar. Maybe a leopard. In the distance. They roar in a distinctive 'sawing' way. That goes with the jungle theme. South or Central America. Unless it is a leopard. Then it is Africa."

Bill added in with, "Could be either, but I think South America given the mountains. There are mountains in Africa, but the description fits South America better."

Hecate reared up and hissed at Harry. He relayed her thoughts, "Don't rule out India or China. Unlikely, but you have to consider all options."

Harry leaned back and thought about this for a minute. "Hold up. Let's outsource this. Rain, Forest, Mountains, Stone City in the Mountains, a great cat that is either a Jaguar or a Leopard, Clouds." Harry put this on a paper and ended it with 'Where am I? Please respond in 24 hours – If you can!' And added a smiley face. He held the note up to show the others, put the letter in an envelope, addressed it, and put it in his banishing box.

Andromeda seemed inquisitively amused. "Care to explain?"

"Who do we know that will take a simple puzzle and obsess over it until every possible detail is known? The little challenge at the bottom will make this a personal mission to research from every possible library in Britain. Someone who can't pass up an intellectual puzzle or challenge…" Then Harry started laughing.

Draco's eyes went wide and he leaned back and burst into a deep belly laugh.
When the laughter ended, Harry just said "Hermione"."

"Let's check again on Halloween. Or Samhain if you'd rather. I need to consult the dead and that is
the best time. It will take a bit of preparation. Daphne and Astoria – find out anything you can
before then. I need to know which of the dead to summon. Ancestors, explorers… In the meantime,
I need to research a similar curse created over ten thousand years ago. There may be a link."

Daphne took Astoria's hand. "OK, let's convene again at the Greengrass Equinox party. Midnight."
Looking at Astoria she said a very simple phrase. "We have hope."

It was after midnight and the group began to break up. Teddy went to bed hours ago while Harry
was outside. Victoire was sleeping in Fleur's arms. Bill had spread out a make-shift and hand drawn
map of different mountain ranges and was showing the group different possibilities

Harry saw Astoria in the kitchen area getting water and decided to have a word with her. "Astoria, I
remember when you helped me in my fourth year. In the courtyard. I never thanked you for that,
but it meant more than you know. I was beaten down to a point where I almost gave up. Your
kindness made a difference. Thank you."

Astoria just hugged him. "That was horrible, Harry. I never saw anyone go thru that much betrayal
in my life. And now you are returning the favor. And please, call me Tori. That's what family calls
me. I am looking forward to joining your family."

"Me too, Tori. Me too."

Astoria quietly said, "Outside, the air tasted so fresh, like a snowy forest. Switzerland maybe?
Trees, roses, icy cold, but so clean. Was that you Harry? Your magic?"

"You now know me. That's my magical signature. Supposedly it gives insight to the wizard or
witch, and I guess it does. But sometimes, I think we draw what we want from it. Like divination."
Looking at her, he added, "Would you like to know what your magic feels like?" Seeing her
hesitate, he quickly added, "It's all good. Trust me, when I say, that's not always the case."

She just looked at him, considering the choice. Finally, she nodded.

"Your magic has a Rosemary flavor. And a hint of Thyme. Very hearty and strong. Impressive. It is
the magic of a 'family' person. Warm and comforting. That's how I knew you would never go for
'option 1’ that would have left you unable to have children." Noting that she seemed to deeply
consider this, he added, "Draco's magic has a flavor of Sage. It is intense and somewhat embracing.
He is a natural healer. Very empathetic. You two make a good match, magically speaking. And
seeing the two of you together, I'd say non-magically as well." He couldn't help but feel slightly
jealous of the both of them. Happy for them, but wishing he had a partner as well.

Astoria just stared at him, slowly smiling. She had a warm smile. "You are a very surprising
wizard, Harry Potter."

-CS-

Paris Catacombs

Mme. Bellamy took a deep breath. That act had been a mistake, as she nearly vomited her dinner
all over the scene. Charms could be used to block the smell, but a deep enough breath let you 'taste'
the air a bit. This is air that should never be 'tasted'.

The French ministry had rejected Harry Potter's demands for immunity. They actually scoffed
when they heard he thought they already had an emerging Dark Lord on their hands. They believed the previous murders were likely 'one-off' crimes. Horrible, but not coordinated enough to be the work of a Dark Lord. Afraid Harry might spread rumors, the ministry decided to discredit him rather than listen to him.

The French Ministry had been preparing an article focused on Harry as a victim of post-traumatic stress that the British magical community had failed to treat. It outwardly appeared to be a sympathetic call for help to the famous young wizard, but it was actually intended to discredit him. The only reason it did not go to print was one insightful bureaucrat who mentioned that the Black family lawyers and the well-respected Delacour family might not react well to the article. That political nervousness, thankfully, delayed the release.

Deciding Potter was a bit too much of a wildcard, the French Ministry chose to send in their own DMLE Aurors to begin the subterranean reconnaissance. They selected four outlying areas of the catacombs that needed scouting. In total, there were twelve experienced aurors split up into four teams of three. The plan was simple. Teams One and Two would scout their designated areas with teams Three and Four remaining above ground, serving as backup. Once the first two teams returned, teams Three and Four would be deployed and the first two teams would be backup.

The Team One found nothing of note. They finished their job in the first hour and a half. Much of the area they were investigating had collapsed and there was no evidence of any activity.

Team Two hit the jackpot and discovered an area where muggles had been operating an underground cinema. There was a lounge, a small restaurant, a well-supplied bar, electricity, and a movie screen. That was good for a chuckle. The Team Two Auror report read, "We have found the secret lair of Harry Potter's Dark Lords. They are muggle cinema enthusiasts!" Everyone in headquarters had a good laugh at that. The ministry brought in reporters and photographers, deciding to use the opportunity for a little humor.

Mme. Bellamy seriously doubted anyone was laughing now.

The Third and Fourth teams descended into the catacombs, full of jovial enthusiasm. Both teams hoped to find something as entertaining as the muggle movie theater. An hour after descending, Team Three discovered the site that had the DMA called in.

It was the scene of a macabre feast. Four very long tables, each with artistically arranged human heads for a centerpieces. The heads were very real and relatively fresh. The faces were all locked in various states of emotion. Some looked happy. Some appeared to be in the middle of laughter. Some were sad. A few appeared to be terrified. A quick wave of the wand told her the muscles in the face had been frozen like this. Some sadistic maniac's idea of 'artwork'.

The magical community was not very big. Hopefully, they were not people she knew. Steeling her resolve, Mme. Bellamy forced herself to look closer at the faces. That was when she noticed the eyes had been enchanted to occasionally move and blink. She actually did lose her dinner at that point. She was in good company. Thankfully, she did not recognize any of them. Her nightmares would only be horrific, but not personal.

The remains of the meals were piled in an adjoining small alcove. Some of the remains were quite old. Some were not. The bones had been gnawed on to get to the marrow and it was a messy affair. A few organs were half eaten... was that a liver? All the remains appeared to be human. A second adjoining room was a slaughter house and cooking area. There were other bodies hanging upside down. Head and Internal organs removed. Like some kind of horrific butcher shop.

Due to ministry incompetence, the press was now involved. Once the movie theater was
photographed and reported on, the ministry decided to send down a few reporters with teams Three and Four to document that the catacombs were safe. A few ministry officials also went along, thinking it would be fun. Big mistake. When the horrific feast was found, the reporters had taken it all in. Thinking it a prank, they took photos as they approached the scene and enjoyed the inventiveness of muggles. Then, upon entering the main cavern, the smell assaulted them. There had to have been a charm holding it back or the catacombs would have smelled for miles.

The aurors immediately secured the area and evacuated the accompanying civilians. Among those civilians evacuated were the reporters. The aurors failed to confiscate the cameras. Mme. Bellamy was certain the whole scene was now going public in the morning. They might be able to delay the some horrific details, but no guarantees and certainly any information withheld would not be withheld indefinitely.

The Fourth Team had yet to return. Teams One and Two went looking for them. Being underground made communication tricky. A Patronus was sent to locate and summon the Team Four back, but everyone was now on edge. Pulling herself together, Mme. Bellamy pulled out her wand and went to work. There were plenty of arcane symbols and runic sequences. She had already called for DMA support to analyze the scene. Hopefully they would arrive with an empty stomach.

Harry had warned them. He had said, once the dark wizards and witches realize you are on to them, they will be much harder to track down. Mme. Bellamy knew she needed to pull out all stops to get Harry's involvement approved. As soon as the ministry did that, she would have Dominique call in Mr. Potter. She said a silent prayer that they would move quickly.

Things will start heating up from this chapter on. Harry is forming his new 'Circle of Friends'. In the Dance of Death, Harry and Draco will eventually work things out. But they will always enjoy needling each other.

Malta is no longer the only potential site for investigation. Harry has picked up a new ally spirit, it will be interesting to see how that goes. Hey, he is the master of death, stands to reason he would have a few ghostly fans. Hopefully my 'Feast' is within the "T" rating.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Now I need to brush up on key combat spells in preparation of the coming chapters. Fun.

Coming soon:

The Beauxbaton Garden Event, Babysitting Victoire and the Wizard Auction.

Harry has a Heart to Heart with Andromeda about Teddy

Catherine and Harry get to know each other

Padma pays a visit to the DMA.

Ginny has a chat with Katie and Fay.

Draco considers moving back to London.

Chapter End Notes
Authors Notes

* To be covered in Harry Potter and the Dance of Death. I really need to get cracking on that story.

** This underground club was actually found in the catacombs. Look up "Arènes de Chaillot" to read the fun details.

FOR SOME REASONS THIS CHAPTER IS SHOWING NOTES FROM AN EARLIER CHAPTER. I HAVE TRIED DELETING AND RE-LOADING. IT STILL COMES BACK. NOT VISIBLE IN PREVIEW... PLEASE IGNORE THE NOTES BELOW THIS NOTE.
Conversations

Chapter Summary

With the horror from the Catacombs going public, Harry scrambles to prepare. After speaking with Elementals and the original Master of Death, he can only think of one person to advise him. That means a return to Hogwarts.

Fay and Katie have a talk.

Gabrielle Delacour prepares for her coming out event.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter

FASA Owns the Earthdawn Game, Elianar Messias, Sperethiel, Lightbearers, Books of Harrow, etc. a wonderful world setting.

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless otherwise specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am designating anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Conversations

Potter House
Yvoire, France
Before 5AM

Harry slept fitfully. He had planned to visit the incarnation of his parents in his mindscape, but that is not where he ended up. He was in an ancient library, sipping tea with the original Master of Death, Elianar Messias. They were speaking in a language Harry had never really mastered, Sperethiel. The ancient language of Wyrmwood. Harry knew this is one of the skills imparted on the Master of Death, but he never saw the need to embrace it as it is a dead language. Apparently, that was no longer an option.

The ancient spirit spoke first. "Descendant, I see you have grown. How long has it been young Peverell? A century, perhaps?"

"It has been only a year, Ancestor. You asked me to develop myself before I contacted you again."

"You have come far in a year. In truth, I assumed you would settle down and try your hand at a traditional family. I thought you might live a normal life for a while, before contacting me."
"Master Messias, I did not contact you… And my plans for a normal life fell apart. My chosen spouse wanted more than I could give her." Seeing his mentor waiting, Harry knew he was expected to continue. "She wanted me to settle down and have a normal job. To stay in London and stop traveling to defend our world. She also wanted to live on her own and pursue other dreams beyond a home and family."

"I see. She wanted you to support her for a few years but you wished to continue as the Master of Death, Keeper of the Books of Harrow and the Champion of the Lightbearers. In truth, I had wondered if you would take a lifetime off from that, but I am impressed that you did not. It is your dedication that must have called to me. I had expected it to be the death of your wife and children that brought you back."

Now Harry was confused. Was he supposed to be an ancient man before he took up the mantle again? Remembering the tale of the three brothers, he couldn't help but think of his ancestor who, at the end of his life, greeted Death as an old friend and equal. Is this what Messias meant? Is Messias the actual version of 'Death' in the tale?

"People are dying and there are so few that can stand up to the Horrors. I have a responsibility to help prevent the coming of new Dark Lords and Horror Spawn. If I can work out a way to have a family, I will. But not now."

"And yet, you have a child. Perhaps even two? You have a woman you call mother. There is a man you call brother and his wife you call sister. I can see in your heart that you are surrounded by family and opportunity."

Harry just chuckled. "Funny how life can give you a family right when it takes one away."

At that, Elianar Messias' eyes blazed. "You had a woman that you wanted but she wanted something else. MOVE ON descendant! Find your heart and embrace it. You are the last of my line and unless you continue, you will be the last 'Master of Death'! If you don't want to find a spouse, at least find a mate. Being a hermit is not healthy. Now, I am going to unlock a bit of your pattern."

Harry felt a subtle shift deep inside his pattern. A sudden influx... of something.

Elianar Messias continued advising him. "You are already a Master of Nethermancy. My other descendants also were accomplished Enchanters, Weaponsmiths, Warriors and Wizards. You have independently learned much of what they could teach you, but you can expect to learn more. Take a year and absorb what is given. Possibly more. Find a new mate and a new family, you will need their support."

"Master Messias, before you depart, I have a Horror sighting to deal with. I suspect Bonecrown the Usurper may be crossing over. I also have a family friend to help with a blood curse. One very similar to the Scythian curse. Have you any advice?"

"Yes, I do. You had best get busy young Peverell. The Horrors will not contain themselves..."Elianar Messias was grinning mischievously. "We will talk again when you are ready."

Harry woke suddenly. His heart was hammering and his hands were shaking. He saw Catherine at the foot of his bed staring at him. Not creepy at all. His familiar was also looking at him.

Harry sat up and, using occlumency, filed that dream away for future reference and review. He knew from personal experience that he never forgot a dream with Elianar Messias, but it was a good habit to save important dreams before they were forgotten.
Selene spoke up as he finished his occlumency exercises. "Harry, let's go back to sleep."

Harry smiled and stroked Selene's neck. "I think your sisters are already asleep… You should join them, I'll be outside."

He then kissed Selene on the top of her head and cast a mild warming spell on the bed. Harry quietly dressed, noting that Catherine was no longer there. As he walked outside, he noted the guardian statue he had retrieved from the vault last night after his guests left. Andromeda helped place it. It was a seven foot tall woman reaching to the sky. Pretty. Examining its pattern, powerful too.

Walking out, he made for the ley line intersect and sat cross legged. He cleared a bit of soil and vomited in the shallow hole. Out came an acorn. The very acorn he had swallowed years ago when he first contacted Oak Heart. He felt connected to the acorn. Using his bare hands, he covered it up and tilled the soil. He also pumped a bit of magic into the earth to enrich and purify it. He ended the ritual with a sliced palm as he placed blood over the earth he had enriched. Summoning the nested owls, Harry made eye contact and commanded them to guard the acorn and the tree that would emerge. They understood. All night flyers understood the commands of the Master of Death. Especially owls.

Next Harry reached out and commanded the wards to do the same. He was looking forward to beefing these wards up, but they were still moderately impressive. Finally, he reached out and let the statue know the emerging tree was a part of his family and should also be protected. Intent and magic.

While meditating, Harry mentally reached out to the elements. He considered Earth, Air, Water and Fire. He bound them together with a massive oak tree. The roots traveled into the earth. Deriving nutrients, but also providing stability and resistance to erosion. The limbs reached up into the sky, feasting on sunlight and air. Absorbing all that the sky had to offer. The roots absorbed the life giving water that fell from the sky. Then the limbs that fall are sacrificed to the element of fire. Feeding the element that gives warmth. A single name now rings out in his mind and spirit.

"Oak Heart, giver of life and binder of the elements. Bless this acorn that it may sprout and grow."

Slowly, Harry felt the presence of this ancient spirit of wood. The one that aided him when he needed help. The one that bonded to him and rebuilt his pattern while purifying its own of ancient corruption. The Elder Elemental that his bonded rose fed and purified from his very blood. The elemental is pure and strong. Ancient and powerful.

With the sound of deep wood and rustling leaves, Oak Heart spoke to Harry. "My Acorn. I see you are well. Your roots have grown. Your spirit soars. You honor me with this new life."

"Thank you Grandfather Oak Heart. In truth, my magic directed me here. The tree I have been carrying has been ready for planting for a very long time."

"No, Acorn, not so long. You must learn patience. Years are but moments to beings such as us. Spirits of light and life. Embracers of the forest. Binders of the elements."

Harry had always been called 'Acorn' by Oak Heart. Ever since they 'rebuilt' each other. "It is good to be near you again. I have missed you."

At that Oak Heart laughed. It sounded more like a rustling of leaves. Harry could feel the love and affection from the ancient elemental. "Acorn, I have never truly left you. Our roots are intertwined and bound together. I simply slumbered. I have dreamed and thought of you. Heed my advice.
Take on an apprentice, teach the truth to the multitude of young seeds and sprouts. The world is out of balance."

"I have been considering taking on new pupils, I just have not had time."

"Time is not something that you should horde, Acorn. Remember, years are but moments. I sense that you are ready to teach. You have a tremendous life ahead of you. Share what you know. Cherish the children you have taken in. Honor the balance. Ignore not Fire, Earth, Water, and Air. They all must stay in balance even if you have most affinity to Wood. Teach it all."

"My children?" Harry now wondered if this was Catherine. Hopefully Ginny had not failed to use 'the potion'… Didn't Elianar say something like that also?

Answering Harry's question, "Your godson and your spirit child. She is your responsibility until she moves on. She did not force the bond on you, Acorn. It was your magic that invited her to bond with you. Much like the rose that is forever a part of you."

Oak Heart continued, "Be a forest. Let your roots intertwine with and embrace the roots of those around you. Embrace your current family and your ancient family, I sense they are close. They are eager to meet you. Tell them you are my acorn and they are tasked with nurturing you into becoming a seedling worthy of your legacy."

"My ancient family..?" Now Harry was confused. He was the last Potter. He already knew all the Blacks that were left. Could this be the Dursleys? They weren't ancient…

"Good bye young Acorn. Heed what I have shared. I leave with you a gift. You know what to do with it."

Harry slowly emerged from his meditation. In the place of where he planted an acorn, a young sapling now was present. On one skinny branch was a single acorn. Normally, a tree would have to be older before it began producing acorns, but Harry knew who this was from. He took the acorn, removed the cap and rubbed off any sharp points. He then swallowed it whole. He probably should have gotten a glass of water, but he was in the moment. It went down a little rough, but it went down.

He could feel the tree. It was his acorn. It resonated with his magic and Oak Heart's. It was fed from his blood ritual and earth cleansing. It had received a boost from the ley line intersect, Harry's magic, and Oak Hearts blessing. This tree would be magnificent and the center of his property.

Harry considered the conversation. It was the second confusing discussion in the same night. Well, not night anymore. It was nearly eight AM and he had to get Andromeda and Teddy to the international portkey site. So much to consider.

"Catherine, would you like to travel with me?" Harry asked while holding out his hand. She appeared beside him and took his hand while smiling at him. Not being physical, it was more of a tingling feeling where their hands overlapped. He smiled and took in her look of happiness. So unlike how he first saw her in the catacombs.

"Where are we going? Someplace fun I hope?" she asked.

"We are going to Paris to see Andromeda and Teddy off. They are going to London."

"Can I go to London someday? I have never been there before." Her ghostly eyes were alight with wonder and excitement.
Absolutely.

As they came in, Pipsey was feeding Andromeda and Teddy. She was whipping up an omelet for Harry, having heard him coming up the stairs. Harry sat down and saw a steaming cup of Earl Grey waiting for him. Herrod's no.42 blend. Teddy ran over to Catherine and they went into the main room to talk and play. Andromeda watched them carefully for a few minutes.

Andromeda then looked at Harry and noted he had not slept well. "Productive morning, Harry? You look tired."

"I spent the night talking to ancient spirits and elder elementals. I can't say I slept well." Pausing and considering, he added, "I enjoyed last night. It was... natural. By the way, I have a present for you. I was saving it for Christmas, but given Teddy calling me Dad, I think now is better. Honestly, I doubt I could make you wait any longer. Kreacher!"

A brief pause, then Kreacher appeared. Pipsey looked annoyed. "Master calls?"

"Yes Kreacher, can you bring the gifts for Lady Black I had set in the vault? The paintings?"

"Yes, Master. Lady Black will be most pleased." He then disapparated away with a 'pop'.

"Harry, what have you done?" Andromeda raised one eyebrow and looked amused. She knew Harry had spent a lot of time and money about two months ago on something right before leaving for Malta.

Mum, I want you to consider moving into Grimmauld place. You can have the master suite and decorate it to your liking. Just consider it. You are the Lady Black and Grimmauld place is your birth right. If you are willing to relocate, it will be a good fit. I can move into one of the other rooms. Maybe Sirius' room. I just need full access to the ritual room and shared access to the most of the house. Especially the library. The master suite would be all yours. Along with any other room or rooms you may want for yourself.

At that point, Kreacher reappeared with two picture frames. One contained a painting of Ted Tonks, the other had 'Tonks' (aka, Nymphadora) and Remus. Andromeda was just looking at them.

Lost in thought.

Harry rested his hand gently on Andromeda's and said, "I know we can never really replace the ones we loved and lost, but perhaps this will help Teddy know he had parents that loved him. I want to be his dad, but I want him to always know Remus and Tonks."

He then tapped his wand to the first frame and slowly Ted began to move. He settled into a quiet sleep as all new paintings do. He repeated the process with the other painting. He then hung two empty paintings in the main room.

"The first two are yours. They are the 'master' paintings. The second two empty frames are attuned to the first two so they can visit other locations. As long as the master frames are near a ley line, they should be active."

"Harry, how did you do this? It shouldn't be possible. Paintings can't be animated after a witch or wizard passes on..." Andromeda was stunned. She just stared.

"Well, I am the Master of Death. That counts for something. It was tricky, but I was able to pull a bit of who they were from the 'æther' and capture their personalities in the paintings. They should wake in a few days." The resurrection stone was of immense help here.
"Thank you Harry. Edward will know something of his parents and his grandfather. I can't thank you enough." Andromeda pulled him into a hug. She never dreamed this would be possible.

It was then that he heard his banishing Box chime. He had a letter from Hermione and the local paper. Opening the letter first, it read 'Machu Picchu'. Followed by a need for Hermione to meet and discuss what he really wanted. The letter went on to say she did not like being manipulated and he better have a good reason for this. Oh Joy.

The local French newspaper was in Andromeda's hands. She looked pale and horrified. Handing the paper to Harry, He knew something was happening. Something bad. The headlines were stunning. It referenced a horrific scene found in the catacombs. The "Horrible Festin de Monstres". Or in English, The Horrible Feast of Monsters. The victims belonged to old families. Prominent, but not publicly recognized citizens. Relatively unknown members of well-known families.

"My god, Harry. It's happening again…"

"Mum, I want you and Teddy back in London ASAP. Please don't stay in France any longer." Then Harry got angry. He slammed his fist down on the table. "I warned them! Now 'they' know the ministry is on to them – they'll be near impossible to track down. Why did the French Aurors go down there without me? How could they be so stupid as to bring the press?"

Harry was mentioned as well. A separate editorial article went on to say Harry Potter tried to warn the ministry and they laughed at him. A few of the reporters overheard conversations amongst the Aurors where Harry was mocked and made fun of. The article draws parallels with the way Britain mocked him after Voldemort returned.

Harry pulled a note out of his desk and wrote a letter to Mme. Bellamy. It opened with "How could you be so stupid?" He continued along that path ending with – "are you ready to talk yet?" He also wrote a note to the Flamels – he needed to know the full prophesy. He requested to meet tomorrow morning.

Damn! Putting both letters in the Banishing Box, he decided he would be taking a trip as well. He raised the wards and 'upped' them to lethal levels. He decided to let the girls pour over the article and give their feedback while he was getting ready. He donned his Basilisk hide armor, two pistols in astral pockets. His Iklwa short spear on his back, Elder and Phoenix wands in wrist sheaths with his blackthorn wand in his boot. On his hip was his Gringotts issued kukri knife. He loaded the girls in his dragon hide backpack layered over his Iklwa and escorted Andromeda and Teddy out. Catherine was with them as well, but out of sight. They would meet Daphne at the international portkey departure point.

Harry needed advice. Was the French ministry compromised? How could this leak out? Who could he trust? He only knew one person to go to… that meant returning to Hogwarts.

-CS-

International Portkey Departure and Arrival Sites

Paris and London

Harry and Daphne

9:00 AM

Arriving in Paris, Harry attracted a bit of attention. He was not on the departure list, but he was able to push thru as Andromeda's departure appointment was listed as "The Black Family"
departure. He was the head of the family, so he skated thru. They did not want him to leave. No
doubt, Mme. Bellamy would be spinning in her chair when she heard he had departed. GOOD!

Soon he had said his goodbyes to Andromeda and Teddy. Andromeda had agreed to consider
moving back in to Grimmauld place. The house she was in now was not the same one she had lived
in with Ted and Nymphadora… That one was destroyed in the war. Harry guessed she was just
nervous about uprooting Teddy. The paintings would help. He knew magical paintings needed to
be near ley lines and there were none in her current home. He'd respect her wishes, but he hoped
she would move into the family home. He knew Kreacher felt the same way.

Looking at Daphne, Harry said, "I need to get a little Intel at Hogwarts. Can we follow up on any
of the details of the last week after you meet with your family? I have to move quick if I am going
to be on time tonight. I really don't want to go to the Beauxbaton event with everything
happening. I'd skip it, but Gabby wouldn't have an escort. I can't do that to her."

Seeing him looking tense, she realized he was nervous about something. "Harry, do you want me
to go with you to Hogwarts?"

She immediately noted the relief in his eyes. Harry smiled and said, "YES. I struggle with going
back to that place. We can apparate in and get it done. Talk on the way."

As Daphne watched him, It all clicked into place. The bullying, the ridicule, the betrayals… It's all
tied to Hogwarts. Daphne's memories were good and bad, but she suspected Harry's were mostly
bad. Horrible in fact. She remembered the Yule Ball and what had happened. No wonder he
refused to back out on Gabrielle.

"Let me freshen up, then we'll see about a portkey to Hogsmeade. It's a bit far to apparate. At least,
for me it is." From what she had seen of Harry in recent weeks, she suspected he could cover the
distance with ease.

"Thank you, Daphne." He really didn't want to do this alone.

-CS-

Ginny, Katie, and Fay's Flat

10AM

Fay Dunbar looked at the paper. My god, here she was worried about playing quidditch and people
are being killed. Why had she given up on her plans to be an Auror? Maybe the whole thing with
Voldemort put her off base for a while. She had been accepted to the Auror academy, but had
defered it. Technically, she could still get in as the deferment was for two years. The next class
began September twelfth…

Katie and Ginny joined her. They were all in shock. The write up on what had been found in the
catacombs was horrific. Even Voldemort never engaged in cannibalism. At least, they didn't think
he did.

Katie started the conversation. "Knut for your thoughts Fay."

"I'm thinking that I should be doing something."

Ginny looked at her and winced. "You are just rattled. It'll be fine in the morning. Harry will take
care of this. I know he will. He suspected there was something happening, that's why he's there.
This is what he does best." She couldn't hide the slight tremble in her voice though.
Katie spoke up, "I sure hope so, Ginny. I pray he's able to." Thinking a minute, she adds, "So, we sit in a comfortable flat, eating and drinking and having fun. Harry is out there fighting and protecting us. Again. At least this time we didn't shat all over him first."

Fay nodded, "Tell me about it. I should be helping. It's not like I'm really all that great at quidditch. I should be out there."

Ginny just looked at her hands. 'Please be safe Harry. Please don't die.' She looked up and with a shaky voice said, "I need to get some air. I need to see my parents. I'll be back soon." Ginny stepped out and apparated away.

Fay spoke up "just the two of us. Good. Katie, I need to ask you something… Am I really good enough to play professional quidditch?"

Katie had been waiting for this. Dreading it. "Honestly, no. You could be, but you aren't quite there. You are so close, but you seem to be holding back. You have not really committed." Seeing Fay deflate, she adds, "Hey, I was the same way. I loved quidditch, but my calling was healing. Now I get to be a part of both… The question is, do you really want this? Is it your calling?"

"No, Katie. I don't think it is. I think I'm called to be an Auror. Maybe I just got a little side tracked. I'm considering exercising my option on the Auror deferment I was given. If I do, I'll join the Sept 15 class. I hope Gwenog understands."

"If that is your calling, who cares if she understands." Katie added with a smirk. "We are Gryffindors, right?"

Fay laughed and noes at that.

"Katie, can I ask you a question? A personal one?"

"You can ask, but I may not answer."

"How do you feel knowing Harry is out there? Fighting the good fight. Risking his life… I remember how you used to light up when he was around. Why did you never go for it with him?"

"Oh boy." Katie settled back, with a tender smile she shared her thoughts, "I remember him in first year. So tiny and vulnerable. I took him under my wing and he was like a little brother. I think I let him in my heart even back then. So brave and vulnerable. Little fella."

Katie's smile faded as she continued. "Then in his second year… that Heir of Slytherin crap. I had my chance to stand up for him when Alicia hexed him, but I didn't. I was afraid of going against Alicia and Angelina. When McGonagall asked about it, Angelina and Alicia lied. I just stayed quiet. So did the rest of the team. Alicia actually got points awarded for it. I think Harry even got detention for getting HEXED."

Fay nodded as she recalled what happened. "Right! That's when she hexed him with boils on his… ouch. Hey, didn't he put them both in the hospital after that. Some kind of weird spear that wrapped them in thorns… That was wicked. Messed up the common room."

"Yeah. But I was a coward. He quit the team and basically told us all to catch our own snitch. It cost us the house cup I'm sure. Well, it would have if the last game wasn't cancelled."

Katie kept moving forward. "Third year was good. We became friends again, but Hermione and Ginny were always in the way of anything more. And that Damn Ron hated anyone getting close to him. Such a possessive bastard. After the previous year, I just didn't have the courage to force
myself in. I decided we're just team mates... that's enough. He's younger than me and I thought I needed an older boy... what a crock of crap."

Fay looked up when Ron was mentioned. "Hey, Ron may have been a lazy GIT at times, but he is an amazing Auror. Relentless."

Katie ignored that comment. "Do we even need to discuss his fourth year? The tournament? I didn't do anything directly, but I also never stood up for him." Now Katie was looking really down.

Fay shook her head. "You were one of the few people who DID stand up for him. You argued in his favor against his being censored. You beat the snot out of Cho Chang after the Yule Ball. You were one of the very few on his side. Hell, look at what Abbott did. She really put it to him! Seriously, she should have gone to Azkaban. Using that spell on the heir to an ancient and most noble house!"

"Yeah, Fay, I remember that. No one ever came forward and snitched or confessed. The staff must have covered it up. Susan may have talked her aunt into looking the other way. Who knows? And he wasn't the heir of the Black family yet. Potter house is Noble, but not Ancient. Still, she got away with it. How do you think that made him feel?" Pausing a moment, Katie added, "You do know Hannah did not intend for that to happen – right? It was a malicious and nasty attack, but not intended to be so dangerous. Rumor had it she was horrified once she knew what her spell did."

"Yeah. Well, now she is in line to be the primary healer at Hogwarts. How about those apples? Just seems wrong." Thinking a moment, Fay added, "Did anyone ever get Harry a mind healer? I sure hope so. He probably has tons of trust issues."

Katie shrugged her shoulders and shook her head, "Doubtful." Continuing the overview, "Fifth year came and we all thought he was a broken wizard. A near squib according to the Daily Prophet. I had hoped he would come back and take the 'wandless studies' program Dumbledore had offered, but he just walked away. He hated us all. Can you blame him?"

Fay nodded and smirked, "Wasn't that the year his god father was killed? The goblins and Aurors still talk about his encounter with Malfoy at Sirius' will reading. Malfoy Senior went to St. Mungo's and Junior had his ass handed to him. Don't forget what he did to Umbridge! Totally bad ass. How do you go from having your core shredded to being able to do that?"

"You know, Fay, I saw him the day he went to Gringotts. For the will reading. He was with Professor Lupin, his hulking cousin, and his aunt. He looked good. But he was still so angry. He at least tried to be nice to me, but I knew he didn't want to see anyone from school. Then he came to take his OWLs, covered in those thorns. It was shocking to see him like that. We never did find out what caused them."

Fay shared her theory. "Best guess was Lucius Malfoy cursed him. Constant pain. And he became so bitter. I know, we had it coming, but the angst was hard to be around. The more people tried to apologize, the angrier he became."

Katie nodded to that. "McGonagall advised us to steer clear until he was no longer suffering and in pain from the thorns. I wish I had ignored her and reached out... Only Ginny really made the effort. Hermione too, I suppose."

Then his sixth year came. You-Know-Who was out killing people. Harry was so emotionally withdrawn. When the thorns healed up, he seemed closer to normal. Still, he refused to re-join Gryffindor." Katie then had a laugh, "The things he did to Snape... I almost felt sorry for the greasy GIT."
Fay held up a finger and smiled. "Never proven. Snape never proved any of that was Harry's doing. But we all knew. Being in his year, I had a front row seat. Glorious. He had lawyers too, so no one could touch him without the risk of lawsuits. And as the next Lord Black… even the staff had to be careful." Growing serious again, Fay added, "That's when we started to notice he had glowing eyes. I think most of us were kind of afraid of him. The eyes didn't help. The people who weren't afraid of him, were afraid of his lawyers."

At that, Katie shrugged. "He was dating Ginny by that point. His sixth year was my last year. I graduated and got into a training program at St. Mungo's. I heard he was engaged to Ginny after the war and that was that. So, nothing ever happened."

Fay looked at her friend. "Katie, he's not dating Ginny now."

"Ginny's not the issue, Fay. Not completely. I mean, there is a girlfriend code... But this goes beyond that. I don't know if I could be with a guy who hunts Dark Wizards."

-Hogsmeade-

Harry and Daphne Arrive at Apparition Point

9:20 AM

A quick portkey later and Harry and Daphne were in Hogsmeade, familiar in tow. In Hogsmeade, Harry purchased an eight by twelve foot carpet. It was thick and durable, nothing too fancy. Afterward, Harry walked by the Hog's Head Inn and saw it was in stasis. It looked like hell, but it was serviceable. On a whim, he led Daphne around to the back of the property, away from prying eyes, and called out "Frankie!"

A small and scared little elf appeared. "Is yous Frankie's new master?"

"Yes, Frankie. My name is Harry. I wanted to meet you and assure you that everything would be OK."

Looking at the sad little fellow, Harry wanted to take more time to assure him, but time was not something he could afford. "I'd like to remain anonymous for a while, so please don't tell anyone. Pipsey!"

Pipsey appeared. "Master Harry is... meeting new elf?"

"Yes, Pipsey. This is Frankie, he was the elf of a good friend and a great wizard. He will be my new Hogsmeade elf. Can you help him get settled and tell him a bit about me? Also, I don't want anyone to know about me yet. Big secret for now. It'll be a surprise."

Reading the scene well, Pipsey smiled. "Pipsey will be a good friend to Frankie. Come now, let's get you settled." And they disappeared with a double 'pop'. "Harry knew Frankie needed someone to comfort him and Pipsey was a sweetheart.

They then proceeded to walk up to Hogwarts. Harry was very quiet. His familiar had her heads out of the backpack and was looking around. It was a very pretty day. Daphne was touched at how Harry had comforted his new elf. Not many wizards would even make the effort to soothe a house elf. The more she came to know Harry, the more she respected him. Hmmm. She was wearing heels. This was going to be a rough walk.
A Short Walk Later

Mr. Filch slid open a small opening after Harry knocked very loudly for about five minutes. He appeared to be both surprised to see them and more than a little scared of Harry. Daphne noted that Harry had zero warmth when it came to Filch. He was all business. Filch had said to wait at the door while he fetched the headmaster, but Harry calmly said, "You will escort us to the headmaster or I'll rip this door off its hinges and make my own way." His eyes were glowing bright green.

As they opened the doors, Hagrid was the first to see him. He stood up and waved. "HARRY!" He boomed out. Harry could only smile and awkwardly wave back. He missed that lovable giant.

Approaching the staff, Filch apologized to McGonagall and said Harry had insisted. He appeared to be scared to death. It's not like Harry had threatened him. Had he? Harry realized three things.

There were students in the great hall. Not expected, it's only August eighth. And there were only a small number of students there. All of them older.

Harry was suddenly the center of attention. He had apparently interrupted some kind of student orientation. The students were too old for this to be a muggle-born orientation. Some kind of Prefect orientation maybe? He vaguely recognized a few of the students that were much younger than him while he was in school. The ones he remembered were all go-getters.

Minerva did not look happy. She never liked being surprised or interrupted. Harry then realized he was armed to the tooth and had a runespoor head on each side of his face with Selene casually scanning the entire room from about a foot over his head. He began to realize that maybe he was partially to blame for always being in the spotlight.

His familiar immediately picked up on the scene and quickly gave advice.

Hecate started with "Don't answer any questions that make you look bad. Just ignore them. Act like she never even asked the question. If she pushes, declare the conversation a waste of precious time. Declare it without venom. You may need these people."

Artemis kicked up with a bit of strategy. "She'll be fishing for information. Trying to assert authority in front of the staff and the students. Give her none, but take none away. Neutrality is the key here. You are setting a tone for future interactions. Remember, you are the biggest snake in the room. You don't have anything to prove."

Selene wrapped up with a little wry humor. "Would it kill her to polish her shoes and put on a little makeup?" Harry needed that! He almost broke into laughter.

Harry approached the staff table and took a deep breath. "Please excuse my interruption. I was not aware students were attending so early." Looking directly at Minerva McGonagall, he added, "I need to speak with Dumbledore rather urgently."

"Well, Mr. Potter. It is good to see you. You look… ready for action."

Harry realized she was now fishing. Artemis and Hecate had warned him. He just stayed silent.

Annoyed that he did not bite, Minerva pursed her lips and politely said, "Well, had you given us notice I'm sure we could have arranged a meeting. Unfortunately, we are in the middle of prefect
orientation. Come back tomorrow and I'll arrange a meeting."

Filius and Pamona gasped at the dismissal. Hagrid just shook his head. Bless them.

Harry kept his voice low, "Headmaster, I don't have time to spare." Harry then handed her the daily Prophet he picked up in London. It had the same headline as the French paper, just in English. "As you can see, I'm on the clock."

Minerva gave him a solid look. He appeared to have had very little sleep. His gaze was focused, but obviously adrenaline fueled. He looked like a man about to engage in battle. Her pride and confidence wavered as she saw Lily and James' son. The student she had failed so miserably. The student who shared no real warmth with her at all.

"Professor, people are DYING in France. They are being eaten and their heads are put on display. Please don't draw this out."

Daphne noted the stunned silence as McGonagall read the paper and looked at Harry. Well, she was on the clock too. Daphne was wearing stylish shoes that were not suitable for the long walk from Hogsmeade she had undertaken. Her feet were killing her, enough stalling. "Headmaster, Mr. Potter has taken up the title of Lord Slytherin and as a descendant of a founder, is entitled to audience with all headmasters upon request. Past or present. Perhaps a short recess?"

That shocked McGonagall out of her stupor. "Lord Slytherin? Well, I see you have been busy. We will take a two hour recess. Prefects, please return to your common rooms and begin the inspections and preparations."

Daphne's bombshell about Harry's new title shook the room. The students were all whispering amongst themselves. The staff was in shock. Harry's eyes were glowing and he was barely containing his magic amidst the chaos.

"Harry, I'll be in the Slytherin common room. Come find me when you are done." He just nodded. The girls had a bit of an argument, but two out of three voted to go with Daphne. They slithered out of the backpack and followed her along. Harry noted that his familiar was at least eight or nine feet long now. Maybe more. Kind of large for a runespoor. He recently had to add 'feather light' and expanding charms to the backpack he took her around in. Daphne smiled at the girls with only Hecate looking back at Harry. She hissed, "Take notes and tell me everything, Harry!" as she was led away.

Walking beside Minerva was a silent affair. Neither spoke. As they approached her office, she broke the silence.

"Harry, have you had time to reflect on the invitation to teach? I hope you will consider a position here." She seemed sincere in her request. Harry knew how close she was to his parents. He just struggled to get past the way she had failed him so many times. Oak Heart was advising him to share...

"Perhaps after I deal with this issue in France. I have a different 'issue' in South America to deal with in the spring. Can we discuss over the holidays? Also, Bill and I would like to remove the curse on the DADA position. No charge of course. I'm pretty sure we can break it."

"That would be appreciated, Harry. I do hope you will give Hogwarts another chance. I know your first time here was filled with strife," Harry knew what she was really saying. She hoped he would give HER a second chance. He just nodded his head. She gave the password and they began to climb the stairs into her office. Into Albus' old office.
"If you did return, perhaps you could head the Gryffindor house. I have been splitting my focus and doing a poor job as a head of house."

"Professor, if I returned, I would have to be the Slytherin head of house. It's a required part of my title." He knew how pathetic this sounded. But it was honest.

"I see. Well, that is unfortunate. I'm sorry, Harry. Still, I know you can do amazing things here. If you will give us a chance." She said with a gentle smile. She then took her leave and left him alone in the office.

Entering the office Harry had a sudden sense of Déjà Vu. It seemed like an eternity since the last time he had been here. The office as a whole was much more organized than before. It was a reflection of the current headmaster and her desire for order and organization. Harry realized that he preferred the old look it had under Dumbledore. Cluttered and messy. He approached the paintings.

"Well, look who decides to pay us a visit." The voice was loathsome and mocking. Full of condescension and disdain. Snape.

"Silence, fool. You are addressing the current Lord Black and you will show him the proper respect." A little support from Phineas Nigellus Black, a previous headmaster. Harry had talked a few times with the painting at Grimmauld place.

"I will do no such th…" Harry cast a quick 'Silencio' charm on the painting.

"Deatheater, I have heard enough from you to last a lifetime. Thank you Phineas."

Harry sat down and looked at Dumbledore's painting. Albus' eyes were twinkling. "Albus. I have a dark lord problem I hope you can help me with." Harry cast a simple spell that ensured only the two of them could hear each other. When did he get so paranoid?

Over the next hour, Harry shared what he had seen in France. His concern that the French ministry had been compromised. Pain over not knowing who to trust. He talked about finding out the ministry had been stealing his mana – Dumbledore swore he knew nothing of that. Harry also shared his failures. His relationship with Ginny fell apart. He needed help in running the three families and had to enlist Daphne. He shared his horror that he was now officially 'Lord Slytherin'. How he apparently adopted Catherine and wants to do right by her. And on and on. It just came out in a continuous stream. He was still angry at Dumbledore, why was it so easy to confide in him?

Albus listened. He then shared his own failures. There were many. He talked about why he formed the Order of the Phoenix and how much harder it is to fight a war where the enemy is not openly aggressive in the beginning. When it starts out political. How using subtlety is harder than direct force. How much easier it was to fight Grindlewald than Voldemort where he did not know where the enemies really were.

He advised Harry to deal with the issue quickly. To have lawyers on hand with iron clad loyalty contracts. He confessed that his mistake was in trying to play above the game instead of within it. His eccentric persona worked against him when he needed to be taken seriously. His lack of legal leverage allowed the Malfoys, the Notts, the Lestranges, and so many others to out maneuver him. He warned Harry about trusting the French ministry, they would avoid anything that seemed to undermine their authority. The DMA likely was better, but he had trusted the DoM and Rookwood was passing on info. Basically, until Harry knew more, he should be cautious who he trusted. Harry came to understand Albus a little better. The man struggled with Voldemort and had been betrayed repeatedly. Hence the order of the Phoenix. But there was betrayal there, too.
When Harry had heard enough to be overwhelmed, Albus simply said, "Let's pick up here next time. Find Nicolas Flamel, he can advise you on this rising force. It does bear a resemblance to the Jacobin uprising."

"Thank you Albus. This has been... therapeutic." The painting just smiled.

"We'll talk again soon, Harry. Now, go and save France. Save the Greengrass family. Find a witch that doesn't mind a few 'shadows' you may cast. Love both Teddy and Catherine as the children you always wanted. But most of all, find time to be happy, Harry."

As Harry walked down the stairs, he realized that he did feel better. This was a good visit. He expected it be so much worse. Seeing McGonagall, he smiled and thanked her for letting him meet with Albus.

"Harry, I know I have made mistakes, but perhaps we can start over again." Minerva then realized that she had said this very thing the summer before his third year. He accepted it then. She failed him once more in his fourth year. After which, he told her in no uncertain terms where she could stick any other offers to 'start over'. She braced for his response.

"Well, if we might be working together, it would help to start fresh." He said half joking. "Can you tell me about the state of the school? I just found out I'm kind of well off and would like to help. You know I'm related to a founder..."

Minerva actually teared up. Harry hated these awkward and emotional scenes. Dammit, what had he said this time? It's so much easier to be an angry teenager.

"Harry?" Said a voice he recognized.

Harry looked over and saw Neville approaching. Thank goodness. A distraction. Neville was filthy. Obviously he'd been working in the greenhouses.

With a huge grin, Neville exclaimed, "I heard you were here! Why didn't you tell me?" It was then that Neville realized Harry was wearing armor and sporting weapons. At a school. Oh, my.

"Neville! Well, I had a sudden problem in France and needed to do a little research. No real warning. But hey I may be more often. I'd say it'll be like old times, but the old times kind of sucked." Minerva noticed the relaxed mood between the two. "On that note, I need to get Daphne and head back to France. What I wouldn't give for a pint and a good night's sleep..."

"You decided to come here? That's great news. I can't wait to tell Hannah." Harry twitched at that, but recovered quickly. Neville picked up on it. He knew Hannah had done something in Harry's fourth year, but had no idea what. She flat out refused to discuss it, so it must have been bad. Hell, if Harry could forgive Draco Malfoy, he sure as hell can forgive Hannah! Future discussions.

"We'll catch up soon, Nev. Looking forward to the New Year's party!" They shook hands and Neville went to take a much needed shower.

"Well, off to the Slytherin Common room." When Minerva started to give directions, he hastily added, "No worries, I can find it. I snuck in there during my second year. Walk with me?" They both laughed at that. Well, Harry laughed...

"You mostly favor your mother, but sometimes you are all James." Shifting to Harry's earlier question, "The school is having difficulty. Inter-house rivalry is very high. Many students were orphaned in the war. Muggleborn students are still treated poorly. We have our challenges. I considered making Neville the Gryffindor head of house, but he is so mild. He seems to excel in
times of peace and times of outright war. He's like his mother in that way. Very affable."

"Professor, would you consider Bill Weasley? He would be amazing as a head of Gryffindor house. And seeing the two of us interacting would do wonders for inter-house rivalry. Give it a thought. By the way, if I am able to teach, I'll cover my own salary, so maybe we can expand into an introduction to curse breaking for NEWT students. Or a course on economics. The only condition would be we'd occasionally be called away for DoM or ICW business. And the summers are when we look for 'trouble'."

"I believe he earned his Curse Breaking Mastery. He would be an excellent choice… Do you think he would agree?"

"Maybe. We are kind of apprenticing each other. And he does have a small child. Actually, we both do. I have two in fact!" Harry enjoyed the shocked look on Minerva's face. He'd let her wonder. Ha!

As they walked to the Slytherin dorms, they slowly relaxed and discussed next year. Harry discussed teaching options including Ancient Magical History, Principals in Elemental Magic, and possibly taking on an apprentice if anyone stood out. No promises on that though. He discussed the possibility of sponsoring an orphanage for magical children. Something in Hogsmeade. Might be worth putting on the grounds of the shrieking shack. Harry said he would speak to Andromeda about it. Finally, he brought up the need to teach economics in the Wizarding world and the need to buy products from the magical community. Minerva seemed to think it was common knowledge, but Harry insisted that it was NOT.

The conversation eventually turned to quidditch and a discussion around the state of the school brooms. Harry liked the idea of leveling the playing field by having the entire quidditch teams play on the same brooms. This almost happened in Harry's third year, but Lucius Malfoy monkey-wrenched the plan. Harry suggested Clean Sweep 11's for the chasers and a Nimbus 2001 for each team seeker. Harry remembered how Ron's CS11 was fast and nimble. On par with the Nimbus 2000. They also discussed the possibility of a just released Comet 360 for the Keepers. Apparently it is not significantly faster than the C290s, but it has been demonstrated to be insanely responsive and maneuverable. Perfect for a keeper. Minerva brought up the merits of playing under amateur rules where the snitch was only worth 75 points. That made the chasers more important. Professional snitches are harder to catch, so the 150 makes sense given how long those games can last. School games use the amateur snitch, but not amateur scoring. This is due to legacy rules and tradition… Basically, quidditch at Hogwarts pre-dates amateur rules. Harry always thought the seeker getting 150 points seemed a bit ridiculous in school games that only last a few hours. He often wondered if the chasers ever felt overshadowed. Minerva then discussed the possibility of Harry being a flying instructor and quidditch coach, apparently Madame Hooch was ready to retire. In spite of himself, Harry was getting excited.

When they finally arrived at the Slytherin entrance, Minerva gave the password and Harry entered while Minerva went to meet with her staff.

Daphne had apparently been talking about Harry's new title as Lord Slytherin. Harry settled into a chair and fielded questions. He mentioned that he was considering returning as a teacher and head of Slytherin house. That got their full attention. Daphne was beaming at that. A few students raised concerns that he was a Gryffindor.

He reminded them how in his last few years, he was not really a Gryffindor. He was censored in his fourth year and declared himself a Gringotts student, he was home schooled in his fifth, and he refused to be a part of any house in his sixth year. His seventh year was spent wandering around
Britain and in combat. He had to take his NEWTs in France. Harry talked about the need to heal and mend fences. He talked about how the sorting hat had wanted him in Slytherin, but he had met and instantly hated Draco Malfoy, so he asked to go anywhere else. He also mentioned that Draco is now one of his most trusted friends. That got a laugh.

One of the students asked him if he would have an issue representing children from families that supported you-know-who. Harry stressed the need to move forward. He discussed how Tom Riddle was a half-blood who lost his mind dealing with forces that should not be dealt with. That real change comes thru understanding and communicating rather than murder and violence.

He added, "Forget blood purity. The last guy who spouted that crap was the son of a muggle and a near-squib but had everyone convinced he was the purest of the pure. Traditions are what matter. Traditions and a drive to be the best." Most of the kids agreed, a few seemed skeptical. "Look, you know I am a Slytherin descendant. Did you know it is thru my supposedly muggle-born mother? Full family magic, too." At that he spoke a bit of parcel tongue to his familiar.

One of the kids asked why he was in armor and carrying weapons. He responded with the same thing he said to McGonagall, "I'm on the clock. Have any of you read the paper this morning?" They all just looked at him. They'd read it. "Ms. Greengrass and I have to get back to London. I have dinner plans and a Dark Wizard to hunt down. She has an empire to help run."

-CS-

Harry said his goodbyes to the staff. Hagrid put him in a full body hug. Neville agreed to visit him in Yvoire after things settled down. They were all invited if they could make it. Filius and Pamona wished him well. Minerva invited him to the sorting celebration. Assuming he was finished with his business in France. A few other goodbyes and Harry unrolled his carpet. He cracked his knuckles and began weaving astral threads to it.

Filius was beside himself with excitement. Minerva figured out what was happening and looked on in concern. After about a minute, the carpet started to rise. "Don't worry, Professor, this is not a magic carpet, it's a normal carpet with a charm attached. Huge difference. Not QUITE illegal. And it sure beats walking." He helped a hesitant Daphne onto the carpet behind him. She looked relieved not have to make the walk to Hogsmeade. Harry applied a sticking charm to them both, cinched up his backpack to keep the Girls safe. He called out to Catherine and she appeared in front of him. The staff just looked on in amazement. Catherine waved at them.

He slowly took off. Rising about 75 yards in the air, he circled the castle slowly, then they evened out and shot off like a bullet toward Hogsmeade. Daphne grabbed him tight and made a sound that was somewhere between a scream and a laugh. Harry noted that Catherine was screaming and laughing along with Daphne. Harry laughed so hard he couldn't breathe. Then he heard Daphne scream out "Faster! Make it go faster!" Catherine did the same.

About halfway there, he disillusioned the ride so no one would report them. Harry really did not want to deal with Andromeda's disapproval. They deserved to have a little fun. He also decided Daphne and Catherine needed to experience a little more speed. He had woven enough magic onto this carpet that it was almost as fast as a broom. It would last for a few hours. Definitely long enough for them to zip around Hogsmeade a couple of times. If only every day could be this much fun.

And if Daphne had to hold him tighter, so be it. Not really a problem...

-CS-
Delacour Mansion

5:00 PM

Gabrielle was preparing for her 'presentation' at the Beauxbaton Gardens event. It would signal France and Europe that she was ready to be a leader in their society. She knew her father had arranged for an ambassador to escort her and serve as sponsor. He was apparently a respected gentleman who supposedly possessed enough magical ability to resist the allure. He was a friend of the family and she knew he would likely behave appropriately.

She decided to dress down a bit to ensure her escort did not get the wrong impression. She went with a more natural look with minimal makeup. A simple shirt under her robes to ensure against wandering eyes. Having an Allure meant it was her responsibility to set the tone of personal expectations. Her mum had drilled that into her at a young age. That meant dressing down and being a perfect lady.

Her mum had tried to convince her to wear her hair down, but she decided to go with a more conservative look. She wore her hair up and had only a simple and tight necklace to ensure her date kept his eyes on her eyes.

Her sister suddenly came into her room. Fleur told Gabrielle that her date had arrived and was meeting with their Father. Fleur tried to get Gabrielle to let her hair down and add a little make-up, but her sister was adamantly against looking like anything other than a conservative and proper young lady.

Her mother covertly placed a bit of perfume on Gabrielle's wrists and instructed her to straighten her escort's bow tie. Gabrielle just glared. She did not appreciate having perfume applied without her consent and she had no desire to straighten his tie. That would just lead him on! She slapped away the preening hands and began marching down the stairs. Then, she heard a voice she had not heard for some time.

In the mirror at the bottom of the stairs, she saw a reflection of Harry Potter talking to her father. He was in stylish dress robes and holding a corsage! She turned around and shot up the stairs before he saw her. Her mum and Fleur tricked her!

Bill saw her shoot upstairs, he just smiled. Fleur was a mischievous woman.

Thirty minutes later, Harry was greeted by a stunningly gorgeous young lady. Long silvery hair flowing behind her. Stylish dress robes that made him suddenly realize she was, in fact, nearly eighteen and he had to force his eyes to stay up. The fancy necklace she was wearing did not help one bit as it plunged down and led his eyes to her… look up! Eye contact! Respect!

"Hi Gabby. You look AMAZING. Oh, I brought you something…” He handed her the corsage Pipsey had made of white roses. My god she looked great. Makeup was perfect. Everything was… wow.

"Harry! They didn't tell me you would be my escort! You look amazing, too. So handsome!" Harry helped her with her corsage and attempted to make a little small talk. He was a bit tongue tied and it showed. Gabby noted that he was amazed at how she looked, his eyes were too clear for this to be the allure, but his response was exactly what she wanted. For about six years.

She smiled and reached up to adjust his bow tie saying, "Here, let me help you…” as she straightened his tie, Harry picked up the subtle scent of her perfume. Damn, he thought he had his tie on straight. Still, it felt nice to have her fix it. Smelled nice too. How did he never notice how
attractive she was? OK, still a student. Control. Control. She then attached a boutonnière to his lapel. Fleur must have given it to her – a perfect match for the corsage. Pipsey...!

"Thanks, Gabby. You remember Hecate, Selene, and Artemis. They'll be staying with Victoire. Oh, I brought you a gift, I hope you like it." He handed her a slim box containing the bracelet he had enchanted for her. She opened it and was stunned. It was gorgeous. "I thought the blue Sapphires would match your eyes. I put a few enchantments on it, but we can review that later."

At that point, Harry remembered Colin. "I hope you don't mind, but I brought my friend Colin. He has agreed to take a few pictures so we'll always have something to remember tonight by."

Introductions were made. Colin took a few photos of the whole family. Harry was photographed with Gabby. Only three or four times did Harry have to snap Colin out of a staring trance caused by the allure. Three beautiful women with Veela blood... Poor Colin. Even Bill was showing a bit of effort in resisting.

Selene gave compliments to both Fleur and Gabby. Especially Gabby who apparently went all out. Harry had never seen the youngest Delacour where she wasn't dressed conservatively. Wow. Selene was mercilessly teasing Harry, knowing that no one else could understand her. OMG.

Harry was now glad Fleur made him leave the extra weapons at the house. 'Two wands ONLY', Fleur had insisted. 'And no armor! No spears! No Daggers! No Pistols!' He fought her on the kukri knife saying it was ceremonial, bit she pointed out a stubborn little blood stain near the handle. So there he was. In a very stylish set of dress robes with only two wands and no backup weapons. Harry knew he looked good. Did he look good enough to have a Delacour on his arm? Maybe. Probably not.

Ok, time to head out. Sometimes you just gotta leave the armor behind.

What could go wrong?

-CS-

Somewhere in Paris

A Tall man steps up to a podium. He is surrounded by dozens of men and women. The podium is formed from a column of human heads with a human rib cage on top that was transfigured to be flat. The man raised his hands and the crowd became quiet.

His eyes are solid black. They collected the light and reflected nothing. He is covered in faces from his head to his feet. The faces on his flesh are animated. Eyes searching, mouths moving, teeth biting. Hungry for flesh. Many of his followers have faces tattooed on themselves in an effort to match him.

"My faithful followers. No longer will the purebloods, the elites, and the wealthy control our fate. They believe we are less than they purport to be. We shall lead our people with reason and compassion. We shall control our enemies with terror. Our rights will no longer be denied! They call us mudbloods and treat us like we are the dregs of their oppressive and corrupt society. A society of excess and opulence which we have been excluded from. Tonight, the wheels will be set in motion. The sweetest of the herd will be gathered. We will mark them, collect them, then we shall feast on them. The oppressors will be usurped and we will devour their flesh." The cheers and applause were intense.

More to come.
Read and Review if you liked.

-CS-

Coming soon:

The Beauxbaton Garden Event

Harry has a Heart to Heart with Catherine

Padma pays a visit to the DMA.

Babysitting Victoire

The Wizard Charity Auction.

The opening of a massive can of 'Whoop-Ass'

Chapter End Notes

This chapter turned out a bit longer than I expected, so I did not get to the Beauxbaton Garden event. That will be up next. Along with the DMA, DoM, and a few bad guys. Harry is moving past his break up and other opportunities will present themselves at the end of the story. A few votes for a Daphne pair up... maybe. lots of options. He will not be settling down though. No soul bonds or sudden marriage proposals. Too much to do.

The scene where Daphne has sore feet and was tired of waiting was straight from personal observations. When people's feet hurt, they tend to lose patience fast.

I originally planned to put Harry in Beauxbatons, doing a bit of teaching between adventures, but Hogwarts is so much better defined. So, back to Hogwarts. Not in this story, but maybe the next.

The event with Hannah will be touched on in both this story and the prequel. It will be summarized in this story and detailed in the prequel. The movie did a great job of showing Hannah and Ernie bullying Harry during the goblet of fire. The way they blocked him and held the 'Potter Stinks' badges up in his face – good inspiration. I only recently found out that the characters were Hannah and Ernie... More of Harry's history in this AU will be further detailed out in the prequel, 'Harry Potter and the Dance of Death'. He had a rough time at Hogwarts and the Horcrux in his scar made it significantly worse than in Canon.
Moving On

Chapter Summary

This chapter opens with the DoM visiting the DMA. It also has Neville confronting Hannah on what specifically happened between Harry and her in their fourth year.

Finally, Harry goes to the Beauxbaton event which results in a big surprise.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

I am starting anything in parcel tongue with Æ "Italic script" Æ

OK, this chapter wraps up enough loose ends that I can now focus on the main story. The story will take on more action going forward. No more 'Breakup Angst'. He will start showing a bit more of his rebellious and sarcastic side. And a lot more of his 'Master of Death' side.

This chapter also brings my AO3 postings up to date with my postings at another site, so updates will now slow down.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Moving On

Musee Carnavalet
Département des Mystères des Arcanes
aka the DMA
Director Bellamy's Office
Paris

The same day Harry goes to the Beauxbaton Event

2PM

Four individuals sat around a conference table in Director Bellamy's office. Three women and one man. The DMA was being visited by their British counterparts, the DoM. The two Unspeakables form the British Department of Mysteries arrived ten minutes ago and were ushered into the DMA director's office.

Saul Croaker was the first to speak, "So, you really bungled up things here I see. What's being done
to contain the problem?" He placed the copy of the Prophet on the table. Photos of 'The Feast in the Catacombs' on the cover.

Mme. Bellamy had expected this, "The leak was... unfortunate. We are treading carefully until we have a definite plan of action."

The young witch code named 'Charon', aka Padma, spoke next "Waiting for a definite plan of action is the same as doing nothing. You have a monster on your hands and you spurned the only person that has enough power and experience to deal with it." Charon was beyond annoyed. The first letter she received from Harry really ticked her off.

Dominique Aris countered immediately, "Are you implying that you did better against your monster? We are moving forward carefully, but we are not ignoring the problem. Writing articles to discredit the witnesses. Rubbing shoulders with Death Eaters that had enough money to buy their way out of prison..."

Padma was prepared for this. She reached into her briefcase and threw the article the French ministry had written about Harry to the table. It was the discredit piece that never went to print. Key paragraphs and sentences were highlighted. Seeing the shock on the DMA women's faces, she smirked and said, "What, you thought we wouldn't find out? We have our sources. Don't get so high and mighty with us." Looking directly at Agent Aris, she venomously added, "I know about your little 'date' with Mr. Potter. Like he doesn't have enough trust issues."

Mme. Bellamy cut in before Dominique could respond. "Enough. We are all here to deal with the same issue. Obviously, there are personal issues as well," she said with a superior look and tone, glancing at Padma, "But those can wait.

Not one to mince words, Saul Croaker simply said, "We are considering pulling our asset. He is a British citizen and a national hero. We don't feel like he is being treated fairly here. This article found its way to our offices and we were shocked. First you request our aid, then you mock the aid we send."

Mme. Bellamy adopted a wry grin and calmly stated, "No, Saul, you are not pulling your asset. He is as much a French citizen as he is British." She then calmly laid the citizenship paperwork she had pushed thru in front of Saul. It was the application for citizenship Lily Potter had submitted twenty years ago. Retroactively approved. "You will find it is all in order. We look forward to sharing with him that his mother's final wishes have been completed. Besides, Mr. Potter does not seem to be the type to simply run away from a fight."

Padma, looked the documents over quickly after Saul, her boss, handed them to her. "You can't just say that to him. My god, you don't know anything about him. Fine. He has dual citizenship. Throwing his dead mother in his face before a fight is not going to help him. Harry needs to be focused. If he is distracted, he could get hurt."

Both Mme. Bellamy and Dominique Aris noted Padma's use of Harry's first name. They were close. Dominique took the opportunity to get a 'dig' back at Padma directly, "You seem to have a great deal of insight into Mr. Potter. Is he more than an asset to you? Have you lost your objectivity?"

At that, Sr. Unspeakable Saul Croaker let out a deep laugh. "You have no idea! We call him HARRY because he is like family to us. Agent Charon went to school with him and is a true friend. Unlike you, Agent Aris. I have personally stood by that young man multiple times because I see him for what he is. A Hero! He is not an ASSET! Call him that and he will make you regret it. A word of warning, if the temperature suddenly drops and you smell a forest with a hint of Roses,
you are on thin ice. When you start smelling roses OVER the forest, you are FUCKED."

"Language! I would appreciate a bit of professional respect in this office." Mme. Bellamy was not used to being talked to like this in her own office.

Saul just snorted. "Ha – that's why you will never really relate to Harry. You have no heart."

Agent Aris calmly responded, "We have plenty of heart. We are building our relationship with our newest citizen carefully and look forward to years of mutually beneficial interactions." In truth, she was jealous. Padma Patil obviously had a deeper friendship with Harry than she ever would. Saul Croaker too. Her deception and Mme. Bellamy's actions ensured that there would always be suspicion.

Padma chuckled. "Mutually beneficial? What can you possibly give him? Please, invite me to that discussion, I'd love to see his response."

Mme. Bellamy was beginning to feel like she was being backed into a corner. She felt the need to push back and take control. She decided to flex her 'intel' muscles and show how Harry was integrating into French society. "I will discuss the issue with Mr. Potter tonight. He will be an escort for one of the young ladies to the…"

"The Beauxbaon Garden event. Yes, he will be escorting one Gabrielle Delacour. A close and personal friend. The younger sibling of his 'adopted' brother's wife. The same little girl he rescued during the tri-wizard tournament."

That was news to Mme. Bellamy. Harry had an adopted brother? Was he a Weasley? She would have to re-read his file. Gabrielle was not mentioned in it. "I intend to approach him tonight and discuss his offer of immunity."

Padma knew she had rattled the older woman. "Why not just give it to me? I can take it by while he is getting ready. I was planning pay him a visit before the event." Padma knew that was not going to happen, but she wanted the DMA to now Harry was with HER. She suddenly realized how possessive she was being and quieted down a bit.

Mme. Bellamy now realized how well established Harry's friendship was with this young lady. She should have listened to Dominique. Still, from what she had read, Harry had no friends at his school when he graduated, so maybe Dominique could still recover. If not, a different agent could be assigned.

Saul got tired of all the drama, He'd talk to Padma after they left. She was publicly showing too many signs of being overly attached. "If Harry is going to stay, he needs the same basic immunity we gave him. Otherwise, citizen or not, we're taking home in the morning. You can call in the ICW and hope for the best, but I'm not letting that boy rot in one of your prisons because he had the stomach to do what you did not. You agreed to work with us if we arranged for Mr. Potter to visit, so let's see the contract of immunity."

Feeling a migraine begin, Mme. Bellamy dropped the 'contest of wills' and shared her basic offer. "He will have freedom to do what must be done. This is unprecedented, but he has a 90 day immunity from any persecution that involves finding and eliminating this emerging Dark Wizard. She handed them the contract for immunity.

Saul nodded and began reviewing the document, "You have a lot of check-in and control points. Remove them. He won't sign this as it is. Maybe a debriefing after each contact… he's used to that. As I believe you already know. He usually treats for breakfast. Oh, add in immunity for actions..."
against the followers. There are always followers." Seeing Mme. Bellamy tense up, he added, "Bear with me on this. He is going to share it with his lawyers, so make it clear the first time and cover any potential needs. Delays at this point could result in catastrophe." Saul then handed the marked up contract back to his counterpart.

"Now, let's talk about ways to root out any potential followers that might have infiltrated your ranks. Trust me, I've been there." The conversation slowly became much more collaborative. Once they understood how the new dark wizard was recruiting, they could begin looking for potential followers. It's all about motivations. Veritaserum would make a huge difference in getting details out of followers, but have samples and court orders in hand. Otherwise, witnesses would suddenly find themselves obliviated while waiting for permission. Or murdered in their cells. Speed was the key. Dark Wizards operate autocratically and there is no bureaucracy slowing them down. The meeting ended with the offer of three experienced Aurors to assist the French teams. Three of the best.

-CS-

Neville and Hannah's Flat

The Leaky Cauldron

6PM the Same Night

"Hannah, why won't you tell me what happened between you and Harry? You know and Harry knows, why won't you share with me?" Neville was normally the most affable man in the room, but right now, his patience was at its end.

"Nev, please try to understand, I can't share what I know because it involves other people too. I made a promise and I can't just… break it." Hannah had been dreading this day. One of the worst mistakes of her life was now coming back to haunt her. Again.

"A magical promise or a mundane one?" Neville knew the difference. Breaking a magical promise carried painful penalties. He couldn't pressure her if it was magical.

"Mundane. But it is a big one. Please tell me we can just let it go. It has been nearly seven years. Why do we have to rehash it now?"

"Hannah, I plan to ask Harry to be in my wedding as the best man. How on earth can I do that knowing I am marrying someone who did some anonymous and horrible thing to him? Hell, he might even decline." Considering what he just said, "No, he wouldn't decline. He'd just grit his teeth and stand by me. Pretending that everything is OK. I don't want that."

"Can you ask someone else?"

"Absolutely NOT. I'm a Longbottom and he's a Potter. He has to be a part of the wedding. It's tradition. Not only that, but he was really the only bloke in our house that treated me like I mattered. That earns him the top spot."

Getting up, he added, "You think about it. I'm going out for a drink. When I get back, I expect you to tell me what happened." Neville walked out.

Hannah was stunned, she hadn't seen him like this since the war. So focused and strong. Only, now she was the 'enemy' he was standing up to. She would come clean. But not alone. That would not really be fair. She floo called Susan.
Neville had a drink. Then he had another. Then he had a third. Each one a little stronger than the one before. He examined who he was and made a decision. If Hannah did not come clean and make things right, there would not be a wedding. Harry was his true friend and that was that. Looking at his watch he realized that it had been over an hour and times up. He paid his tab and headed upstairs.

Walking in, he immediately saw Susan Bones talking to Hannah. They awkwardly stopped as soon as he walked in. Oh, Boy.

"Hello, Neville. I understand we have something to discuss..." Susan did not look happy at all. Nervous. Maybe even a little scared.

"Susan" Neville walked over to the corner chair and sat down. "OK, let's talk."

After a short period of silence, Hannah started. "Let's go back to our fourth year at Hogwarts. You remember how angry everyone was when Harry's name came out of the cup, right?" Neville just nodded. "Well, at first we were all shocked. Then we became angry. But it was more than just 'HE CHEATED', it was also about house pride. Being in Hufflepuff was great in so many ways. We were all loyal and kind to each other. We worked together and we were really a happy bunch. Loyalty was valued, but so was hard work and friendship. But other houses all looked down on us. Neville, you don't know what it's like to be in the house no one respected."

Neville was following. He knew Hufflepuff had an unfair reputation as a third rate house for wizards and witches that didn't get selected by one of the other houses. The sorting hat gave him a choice. It had said he would do well in Hufflepuff, but he would develop more in Gryffindor. Still, he always wondered if he had made the right choice.

"Cedric was like a big brother to us all. The one we looked up to. This was his moment. Cedric would be the champion and people would realize Hufflepuff was NOT the house of duffers that no one else wanted. Hufflepuff would finally shine. Then, out came Harry's name. It was like, 'Here we go again, no respect for the 'puffs'. You know, that's how the Slytherins felt in our first year with all those ridiculous points at the end. Fifty points to Harry just for playing a good game of Chess? Now, Harry Potter gets special treatment again and we all just have to take it."

Neville remembered that it was actually Ron who got those points, but he decided against correcting Hannah. He wanted to see where this was going.

Susan picked up as Hannah finished, "I actually tried to talk to Harry. I wanted to know what happened. But, the more we talked, the madder I got. I mean, at first I was stunned and hurt. But then I became angry. I was so angry... I hated him. In the space of an hour, I went from liking him and having a mild crush to outright hatred."

Neville had seen it before. It happened in his second year and in his fourth. During those years, he had just felt a crushing inadequacy and fear of failure around Harry. But he never let it drive away one of the only friends he had. "Susan, did he say anything to you? Anything to make you hate him so much?"

"No. It was like all my fears and insecurities came out full force and it was all his fault. The more he claimed to have not entered, the madder I got. Well, all of Hufflepuff was furious." Thinking a moment, she added, "I'm telling you, there had to be some kind of a curse involved. No way that many people can just start hating someone who is so basically nice."

Hannah nodded to that. No doubt the two women had compared notes at some point.
Neville stayed calm, "OK, so Hufflepuff hated him as much or more than anyone else. What happened to make Harry so… different… around Hannah?"

The two women looked at each other, then Susan took the point, "We decided to hex him. Embarrass him. I'm not proud of it, but it's what we did. We took the meaneest hex we were willing to use and modified it. But it was something we never would have used if we knew what the modifications did."

Neville decided to just stay quiet until they were ready to share.

Eventually, Hannah spoke up. "I took a curse that is used to make girls have cramps. You know… female cramps. I thought it would be funny to make Potter go through that. Alicia gave him boils on his bits in his second year, but that seemed a bit excessive. We were Hufflepuffs, not Sytherins, you know? This felt just right. Not so severe he had to go to the infirmary, but something that would give him a rough few hours."

Neville shook his head, "I'm confused. How would that work on a guy? I mean… basic anatomy, right?"

Hannah nodded, "That's where I had to modify it. We wanted to affect his abdominal muscles. Abdominal cramps hurt, but it's pretty minor really. That was an easy modification. Unfortunately, it would affect his intestines too. We didn't want to affect his intestines because that would be gross and extreme." At this point, Hannah stopped and stared quietly at the wall. Susan was looking at her hands.

Neville waited until he just couldn't wait any longer. "OK. So what did the modifications do?"

Susan spoke up when it was clear Hannah couldn't continue. "It affected his heart. Apparently, his magical core was strong enough to resist the spell, but for some reason, it allowed it to affect him initially." Taking a deep breath, she added, "Harry had a heart attack."

"WHAT?" Neville practically yelled. They had used a lethal spell on Harry Potter!

Hannah was jolted out of her stare at Neville's exclamation. "He is so powerful, it shouldn't have affected him at all. Then he overcame it and his heart was fully functional." She was on the verge of tears.

Neville just stared. Clearly they left a lot out. "So WHAT HAPPENED? I want the full story, not a whitewashed version." This was something Neville did NOT expect.

Hannah quietly recounted the event, "He was walking out of the castle, no friends around him. I enlisted Ernie to distract him and we blocked his path. We knew those buttons Malfoy distributed really got to him, so we held those up. While we taunted and bullied him… To her credit, she was ashamed. Neville knew she was a bit of a handful before her mum was murdered. That changed her. Never mean, but certainly more confrontational than most Puffs.

Susan picked up where Hannah trailed off, "While they distracted him, I got in place to hit him with the spell. From the rear, hidden away so he wouldn't know who did it." Seeing Neville's face she added, "I know, it was a cowardly attack, but it was really just meant to be a cramping jinx. Please Neville, you know we'd never try to kill Harry!"

"So, if you cast the spell, why does he think it was Hannah?"

Hannah now had tears running down her face. "He never really knew who cast the spell. But, while he was on the ground, we made eye contact. I laughed at him." At this point she started
sobbing. "I thought he was just being dramatic. You know, writhing around like that, can't handle a couple cramps. Typical boy…"

Susan rested her hand on Hannah's shoulder, comforting her friend. Neville just looked at them in shock and dismay.

Susan wrapped up the story, "Then other students got involved. They… threw trash at him. Poured drinks on him. Kicked his books. You know, petty stuff. After about a minute, we knew something was wrong. Harry still hadn't gotten up. He never faked an injury before. A few Slytherin girls actually came over and helped him. When he struggled to get up, he was shaking and barely able to walk. That's when we knew he was hurt badly."

All Neville could say was, "Oh My God."

Now Susan set herself up straight and pushed thru any tears or anxiety. She was an Auror and she could separate her emotions. She went into 'work mode', "Right. Harry Potter was taken to the infirmary and the DMLE was called in to investigate an attempted homicide. More specifically, my Aunt was called in."

Neville leaned back in the chair. Wanting another drink. "This just keeps getting worse."

"Yep. You see, House Bones and House Potter have been in a 'Tier One' alliance since well before 1066AD. That meant she was honor bound to investigate personally. My Aunt talked to me first. I still remember the slap she gave me when I came clean. It was the only time she ever struck me in my life. She called in Hannah and read us both the riot act. Apparently, no one at the scene was paying close enough attention to have seen me cast the spell. I was in a good ambush spot – not that I'm proud of that. Ernie never left Hannah's side and he vouched that Hannah had not cast it, so she was out of the woods. Thank Merlin we did not include him in our plan. To this day, He does not know who cast the hex."

"A Tier One Alliance… My god, how did your aunt not prosecute you? Her magic would force her…" Neville understood all about alliances. Tier One was the strongest. Even the Longbottoms only had a Tier Two Alliance with Potter and Bones Houses, and those were considered very strong.

"Well, I am the sole heir to the House of Bones. This would make me an Oath-Breaker. My actions reflect on the house as a whole. The Bones family name would never recover. Our reputation would be destroyed. Had Harry actually been killed or permanently harmed, my aunt likely would have forced me to confess and ruined the name of Bones. Instead, she formally ended the alliance."

"Wait, you can't just end a Tier One Alliance. Harry would have to agree…" Thinking back to Harry at that age, he slowly realized what had happened. "Susan, please tell me you didn't trick him." Seeing her face, Neville knew she had. "Oh, god. You did. You took the fact that he knew nothing of alliances and our society and used it against him." Neville was one drink away from ending that sentence with 'you bloody bitch.'

"Yeah. I told Aunt Amelia that Harry would go along with it if she presented it well. Like a Slytherin. She had him sign the document ending the alliance, saying it would be necessary to put a pause on the house alliance to prevent a 'conflict of interest'. He bought it, hook, line, and sinker. Dumbledore was in the loop and helped orchestrate it. He said 'when Harry calmed down, apologies could be made and he could reinstate the alliance as the Chief Warlock', and we took the easy way out."

"So, everyone wins but Harry. Wow. I never would have thought…"
Susan turned tomato red at that. "We didn't 'WIN' Neville! You don't know what it's like to carry this around. Harry could still ruin the Bones family name with a simple proclamation. 'Oath-Breaker'. The Bones family would tumble further than the Selwyn family." Seeing a lack of empathy on Neville's usually kind face, she added a personal note, "And what do you think would have happened to your precious Hannah without the cover up? Hmm? I'll tell you. First, the main line of the Abbots would have cut her off. Then, she would have had her wand snapped and been expelled. She would have been ruined. Would you have wanted that? My aunt sure didn't. She said Harry had been cursed so much that year, he was now looking for someone to go after. He specifically sent her after Hannah."

Neville understood what would have happened if Harry had pressed charges. He also knew how the magical society viewed oath breakers. But to just quietly make it disappear… That is what the Deatheater families did after the first war. No doubt the intention was not nefarious, but the girls took the easy way out. And Dumbledore was in on it!

Susan continued, "So, the alliance was ended with a pen stroke. He eventually realized that he had been played and seemed to think I influenced my Aunt to drop charges against Hannah. Most people already thought she was the one who cursed him. If it had not been for Ernie swearing she was innocent… Anyway. My Aunt never really got over it. Not completely. She loved me. She never brought it up again, but it was there. How had she put it before she covered it all up? 'A thousand years of alliance, ended. All to save a stupid little witch that wanted to jinx a boy she had a schoolgirl crush on'."

"A Crush?"

"Yeah, that's why it hurt so much when I thought he had cheated. Not that he'd look twice at me now." Susan was done at this point.

Neville got up and poured a couple fingers of Ogden's finest. "Did you ever try to talk to him? At least to apologize? Hell, he probably already knows or suspects what happened."

Hannah was finally ready to talk again, "No. But we both wanted to! Dumbledore and Amelia told us to stay away from him until after the tournament, then Dumbledore would step in and help. But after the tournament, Harry was magically crippled and we didn't know where he was. We heard that he was coming back to learn Potions, Runes, Arithmancy, and other 'wandless' studies. But he never came back."

Susan added, "Harry and I wrote a bit to each other the summer between our third and fourth year. We were actually becoming good friends. During the summer after our fourth year, after the tournament, I tried to write him, just to see if he was OK… He sent the letter back unopened." Susan still seemed bothered by that. Neville wondered what she had expected. "I waited and sent him another when he didn't show up at school on September first. I really poured my heart out. Apologizing for not believing him. For wearing the Malfoy button. For laughing at him at the Yule ball. I didn't include the attack, but what I did say was from the heart and I meant it all. That letter came back a few weeks later. It had been opened and used to line what I can only assume was Hedwig's cage."

Her work face was now showing cracks. Neville noted that using her letter as a liner for owl droppings was 100% pure Harry Potter. He was actually proud of him for being so creative with his rejection of her crappy apology.

Hannah now spoke up. She had noted Neville's smirk at Susan's letter story. He had no idea how much that had hurt Susan. "Later, at the end of his fifth year, he came back for his OWLs, he was covered in those thorns. And you have to admit, Neville, he seemed pretty dark. Truthfully, most of
us were afraid of him. No way were we confessing to THAT Harry Potter. He was... Hell, look at what he did to Umbridge! Amelia never pressed charges, but she was sure Harry did it. Somehow. But there was zero evidence. And Harry had those vicious Black family lawyers. When all of the Blood Quill punishments Umbridge forced on students came out, Amelia just dropped the investigation and said Umbridge got what she deserved."

Neville remembered the Umbridge case. "Yeah, I will never know how he did that. I think that was when we started believing Harry might actually be a match for Voldemort. He was definitely vicious enough. I really need to ask him how he pulled that off. Amazing."

Susan came back into the conversation, "Not amazing. Terrifying. You only heard about it. I snooped thru my aunt's desk and saw photos. Let me tell you, Neville, it matched photos from the victims of death eaters. But let's not get side-tracked. We were scared of him when he finally came back. Then, the thorn curse cleared up and he seemed… approachable. Certainly less dark. But, Hannah's mom... was killed. Her dad took her out of school." Susan reached out and took Hannah's hand. "Then My Aunt and Dumbledore were killed..." Now the mood was less about Harry.

"I'm sorry. To both of you. I know you lost so much." Neville had to say that. It was true. "Look, Harry is absolutely NOT a dark wizard, he just had a dark phase. Talk to him."

"My aunt tried to re-establish the alliance, before she was killed. His response must have been extreme, because she never spoke of it again. Given the things he said to Fudge and Lucius Malfoy, I can only imagine what his response was. By then he had those lawyers and must have known she had tricked him."

Neville pointed out the obvious, "Yet, he never declared the Bones family as 'Oath-breakers', he never went public with what either of you did. He fought beside you both at the battle of Hogwarts. He has never said a single negative word to Hannah and he works with you from time to time at the DMLE... I just don't think you have any reason to hold off on clearing the air."

"He is always polite at the DMLE. He mostly just talks to Ron and Minister Shacklebolt. I know for a fact that Ron also feels bad about that year. Hell, we all do. But I'm the one who nearly killed him." Susan stated this with cold logic. "Still..."

"It was my spell, Susan. You had no idea. I'm more to blame, really. I had no business modifying spells as a fourth year. Honestly, I can't keep living with this. I see him frequently enough. Most of the time, we're cordial, but it's always there." Taking a deep breath, "I guess I need to talk to him. Susan, if you aren't on board, I'll leave you out completely. I'll say it was all me. Doesn't really change anything. I would have done it last year, but I promised you and your aunt I would stay quiet. And so much time has gone by..." Wincing a little and adding a bit of truth, "And I'm also more than a bit scared of him... Neville, please tell me he won't curse me."

"Not a chance. Worst he will do is tell you off. You should be ready for that... He can be vicious with his tongue. He'll probably hold back if I'm there. A little, anyway. Timing is everything. You should wait until he wraps up that French problem. Let him blow off some steam in combat. I know you will be happier once you talk to him."

"And if he says 'Go to hell?'" Hannah was building up her resolve.

"Well, at least you can say you tried." Neville really did not know what the outcome would be, but he knew Hannah and he knew she'd feel better after at least attempting to fix things. Looking over at the other woman in the room, "What about you Susan?"

Susan just shook her head. "I don't know if I can take that chance, Neville. He could exact too
much revenge on me and my family name. I can only imagine what Lady Black could dream up. I need time to consider this."

"Well, think about it. But if you don't at least come clean, I'll never really be close to you again. Hannah might, but I'll always see you as a coward." Harsh, but it had to be said. Neville went back down to the bar.

-CS-

Beauxbaton Gardens

That Evening

The Beauxbaton event was an extravagant affair. Harry and Gabby rode up in a gorgeous carriage pulled by a pair of beautiful horses. There were photographers and journalists everywhere. Colin had joined the press pool and was photographing all the honored attendees. They were led down a long golden carpet, stopping frequently for photographs and handshakes. They were directed into the main ball room where Harry presented Gabrielle Delacour as a rising witch to the French magical Society. Each witch was given a beautiful gold and platinum Fleur-de-Lis pin to wear. Apparently, this was a tradition. Seven witches selected each year, high achievers from influential families. The witches and wizards he presented Gabby to were apparently well known and influential French citizens. The witches all had the same pin. Harry had no idea who they were. He was just hoping to get thru the ceremony without embarrassing himself or his date.

After the formal presentation, they were led to the table of honor with the six other witches and their escorts. Harry knew Bill and Fleur were at another table somewhere with Gabby's parents. As much as he longed to just kick back, this was Gabby's night and he was not going to ruin it. He sat up straight, listened to the guest speakers, and politely clapped when everyone else did. He began to notice that he was getting a lot of attention. Everywhere he turned, he was being watched and photographed. It never really ends. France was better than England, but he still had a following.

'Probably from the Chocolate Frog Cards', he thought with a snicker!

Gabrielle looked over at him and smiled. She was having a great time. She looked amazing. She smelled great. She was fun and witty. Was Fleur ever this relaxed? They looked so similar, but Gabby had a playful, almost silly, side that her intense older sister seemed to lack. After the speakers finished up, the first course was served. Andromeda had trained him well and he knew just how to handle the setting. Well, he knew how to NOT behave at least. The other people at the table seemed nervous around him, but they eventually relaxed. The wizards talked politics and quidditch. The witches discussed charities and career choices. They all were having a good time.

After dessert, the witches and their escorts opened the dance to an orchestra. Gabby was an amazing dancer and Harry was pressed to hold his own. He suspected she was keeping it simple for him. Harry once again silently thanked Andromeda for her training and instruction. After the first dance, the rest of the room joined in. He danced with Gabby for three songs, then they politely switched partners. The other witches were very nice, but seemed nervous around him. Eventually, Harry danced with Fleur and noticed she was also wearing a Fleur-de-Lis pin that matched Gabby's. They made small talk and she thanked him for making Gabrielle's night so special. Soon, he switched back to Gabby and they decided to go for a walk in the gardens. Harry noted that Colin had taken quite a few photos of Gabby and him. All good, Colin would give them both copies.

On their way outside, Mme. Bellamy approached him. Harry guessed she had business on her mind. Bad timing. She was actually very genteel and cultured. She knew her way around a party, that's for sure. Before she left, she handed Harry the immunity contract for his perusal and made her exit. Harry placed it in his inside breast pocket of his dress robes and he continued outside with
Gabby.

Walking thru the gardens, they encountered the Mr. and Mrs. Delacour. They talked for a while and then the Delacours excused themselves to go inside. Gabby led Harry to a spot where the Gardens lined up perfectly with the Beauxbaton palace and it was a stunning sight. The lights and the music combined to make for a truly amazing experience. Absolutely gorgeous. Soon, the school bells began chiming – it was almost midnight. He slowly realized he was holding her hand. Looking down at her, he suddenly was overcome with a sense of… closeness. She was SO beautiful. He knew this was the moment he was supposed to kiss her, but he also knew she was a student. Three years younger than him. Still… she smelled so nice. He briefly debated leaning in, but he just didn't feel good about it. Not yet. He suddenly was drawn to her pin. The Fleur-di-Lis. It was starting to build up a magical charge.

Harry's instincts kicked in, he ripped the pin off her dress and tossed it across the garden. He then pulled out his wand and stared at where the pin fell. He was about to raise a dome shield when he noted it was now inert. Looking back at Gabby, she was staring at him. He dress torn across the shoulder and down the front. She was having to pull it back up. There was a lot exposed. He barely saw her hand as it slapped him, knocking his glasses off. She ran back inside in tears. Harry's adrenalin had kicked in, fight or flight and he was not running.

Quickly, Harry reviewed the events leading up to the scene. The night was a beautiful evening right out of a fairy tale. He and Gabby had danced and talked all night. She led him to a romantic spot. At a very vulnerable moment… the Fleur-de-Lis pin began to build up a magical charge. He ripped it off her as fast as he could, tearing her dress and her undergarments in his frantic burst of speed. Why did she put the pin thru so many layers? Anyway, his 'snatch and toss' resulted in exposing far more of her than either of them were comfortable with. Yes, he noticed. Summoning his glasses, he looked over at the pin. Was it his imagination? He'd be in a world of trouble and embarrassment if he was wrong. Shifting his perception into the astral plane, he noted the threads of magic were very heavy. Not only was it enchanted, but it had a trigger. A time based trigger that required it to be worn. Was Midnight the time-based trigger? Probably. He had prevented it from doing 'something'. Gabby would thank him later.

Levitating it up, he began dissecting the pattern. It was a portkey. Underneath the portkey enchantment, it had a built in 'stupify' set to trigger immediately after the portkey. He disconnected both threads, effectively de-activating both enchantments. He began to hear a commotion inside the ball room. Likely the other witches were portkey'd out. He needed to inform Mme. Bellamy. Fast. Summoning his Stag Patronus, he relayed a simple and fast message – "The Fleur-de-Lis pins are Portkeys. I suspect it is a kidnapping trap. Trace them back to the source. Find the guilty party. Time is critical. I'm going to investigate." He sent the Patronus to Mme. Bellamy. There's no way this was part of the event. Especially with the built-in stunning enchantment.

Lives were at stake. Any second now, whoever perpetrated this would realize ONE witch had gotten away and he'd lose his window. First, he shifted to his Black and Silver 'Astral Face' as full on Master of Death. Then he reconnected the 'portkey' thread and completely severed the 'stunning' thread. Holding his phoenix and elder wands and adopting a combat stance, he felt his adrenalin spike up. No, its not easy to just walk into god only know what. No armor, no planning or reconnaissance, no backup, no supplemental weapons. Just raw power, intense training, determination, and two kick ass wands. Time to get busy. Harry pressed his fist against the pin, activated the portkey... and vanished.

-CS-

Authors Notes
Coming up:

The Usurper has made his move. Harry reacts and counters.

Harry talks to the Flamels.

Open combat. Yes, finally some action.

Chapter End Notes

Notes below are based on feedback from the other site I posted this story on:

I had so many messages and reviews about Hannah that I made it a priority to address. The prequel, 'Harry Potter and the Dance of Death', is taking a long time to write – longer than planned. I don't want to force any of you to wait or to read it if you are not interested. So this chapter covers the overview of what happened that day with Hannah and Susan. Basically, the Horcrux in his scar was charged up by Barty Crouch Jr. and it brought out the insecurities and worst traits of everyone near him. It actually used Harry's magic against him and projected its influence onto anyone in his vicinity. Susan was angry that Harry had 'betrayed' her. She had a crush on him and felt rejected and scorned. All the Hufflepuff inferiority issues really came out and were intensified. No, Susan was not being completely logical, but hey, neither was Ron when he abandoned Harry and Hermione in Canon. And he knew the Horcrux was affecting him. Hannah was angry that Hufflepuff was getting shown up again and with the negative influence of the Horcrux, decided to get even along with Susan by creating a vicious hex as a prank. But she screwed up the spell and created something potentially lethal. The Horcrux let the spell initially affect Harry by diverting much of his magical core. Then, it released enough of Harry's magic to neutralized it (all magical cores can resist harmful spells, Harry's is quite powerful when it is not 'blocked'). I don't plan to address this anymore in the current story. At least not until after Paris. The scene will play out in a future release of the prequel, 'Harry Potter and the Dance of Death'. Note that the Horcrux had to have something to work with. Hannah and Susan are not completely blameless.

And yes, Neville has a bit of a drinking problem. I think that was true in Canon as well and it is a flaw I kept.

As for Hogwarts, some criticism for Harry being too quick to forgive. Well, maybe. OK, Probably. I think my favorite description was that he seems like a "Forgiveness ATM". Excellent Feedback. I love that image. Well, the ATM is now closed. When Harry returns to Hogwarts, it will be as Lord Slytherin and he will have far more authority than a typical teacher. He will have access to the restricted section. He will have a ritual chamber that exists on top of the highest number of ley lines in Great Britain (Hogwarts and the Chamber of Secrets), and he will be able to help out a few orphans.

It also puts him near his properties in Hogsmeade. Harry is not dwelling on the past, but he has not forgotten. After he spends one year as a teacher, he will be on the Board of Governors. Payback can be a B***h. Think about how Lucius Malfoy used to push
Albus around… McGonagall will be held accountable if she sticks her head in the sand again. Hogwarts is a good 'home base' while Harry wraps up his familial obligations. I barely scratched the surface on that and, quite frankly, managing family business interests is boring to write about. At least for me. But, his teaching at Hogwarts is at least two stories away. He needs to travel to Machu Picchu and take care of a Malediction first. Then maybe Malta.
Chapter Summary

Ronald Weasley is brought into the picture to assemble a team of Aurors for French assistance.
Gabrielle learns about the fate of her classmates.
Harry lands in a tight spot and must deal with being under pressure as he opens up a can of whoop ass.

Chapter Notes

JK Rowling Owns Harry Potter
FASA Owns Earthdawn

Note: All conversations in France are in French unless specified. I may start with Bonjour or oui, but that is the true limit of my knowledge of the most beautiful language on earth. Sorry.

Three sections to this Chapter:

+ The First section of this chapter focuses on Ronald Weasley – Auror. It is about five and a half hours before the end of the last chapter.

+ The Second section focuses on Gabrielle. It picks up five minutes after the last chapter where Harry used the Portkey.

+ The Third section is all about Harry. I HIGHLY recommend you play 'Under Pressure' by David Bowie and Queen. In fact, play it while you read it. Perfect fit. It picks up where the last chapter left off.

Note, spells verbalized will be in "Quotations".
Spells cast silently will be in between 'Apostrophes'.

"Protego!" = Vocalized
'Protego!' = Silent

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Under Pressure

-CS-

Before the Beauxbaton Event
British Ministry of Magic
Auror Offices
London
Ronald Weasley was finishing up his work. Well, his paperwork to be specific. God how he hated paperwork. Unfortunately, it was a part of the job. Being a part of the ministry meant mountains of paperwork and bureaucracy. Bill had joined the Aurors instead of taking his seventh year. Kingsley had make an exception for him. He had proven himself in the field time and time again.

Ron's team had rounded up the last of the Voldemort loyalists. At least, the last ones that were willing to take any sort of action. No lives had been lost, but there had been injuries. Nothing serious, but enough that he had to do the paperwork for the whole team. He suspected a few were intentionally staying home to recuperate. Susan was supposed to help him, but she had a call from Hannah and took off. Leaving him with the shite work. He really could not complain – he had done it to her enough times. In the office Susan frequently called Ron a slacker. Ron knew it was true. But never in the field. No one ever slacked off in the field. That was where Ron had always shined brightest. He had to.

The entire Auror force had been decimated and was now in 'rebuilding' mode. They needed as many good witches and wizards as they could get. The team was never large, but now it was just a very small group of dedicated witches and wizards. Voldemort and his Death eaters had killed most of the original force. The DMLE that formed under Voldemort were a joke. The crimes committed on their watch spoke volumes to their loyalties. They ignored the snatchers and kangaroo courts that sent muggleborns to Azkaban. Or worse. Some of those Aurors, like Albert Runcorn, had even participated. The Aurors and DMLE officers that enthusiastically supported or were recruited during the Voldemort regime are today mostly either in Azkaban or dead. The rest were morally weak opportunists and had been sacked, like John Dawlish.

Then there were the Aurors and DMLE officers who quit or hid out after Voldemort came into power. Like his direct supervisor, Sr. Auror Williamson and Director Gawain Robards, the new Head Auror. Kingsley had said the man knew his stuff, but he was not at the final battle. He was hiding out somewhere with his family, looking for a way to the continent. Of course, like many, he said he did not even know the final battle was taking place. There was some truth in that, Ron grudgingly accepted, but those who fought in the final battle were considered true Heroes. Those who hid out, were not considered Heroes. It was a source of pride for Ron and Susan, who had fought and risked everything for what they knew was right. Both of whom had lost friends and loved ones. Unfortunately, it was a point of objection for those who were not there. Most did not know the battle was taking place and feel unfairly discriminated against for not being there.

As Ron reshuffled the rumpled and coffee-ring stained reports he had been working on, Robards walked over. The man looked tense. "Good evening, Weasley. Nice work again on the raid. I've recommended you and your team for commendations. Honestly, it's getting to be a habit. Say, where are your co-workers? I thought Auror Bones was here earlier."

"Susan had a sudden floo call from Hannah Abbot, a close friend who needed her help. About an hour ago. The rest are either off today or recovering from the raid. All good, it's my turn to file the reports. I guess." Weasley did not look happy about that, Robards noted. Well, that made two of them.

Thinking about the paperwork he would have to review, Robards held back a groan. He hated it when Weasley filed the reports. If he wasn't so effective in the field... "Come into my office when you wrap up. Don't wait too long, I want to see my wife and daughter tonight." Robards walked into his office and began working on his own paperwork. Tomorrow the rest of the Aurors will return. Most probably could have been back today, but he wanted them to rest up. The last raid took a lot of field time. Most had been burning the midnight oil for weeks in preparation of the
final bust. He only hoped Bones had helped with the majority of the paperwork. Hell, they had been at it all day.

About an hour later, Ron Weasley knocked on Robards door, then slid in and sat in front of the desk. "All done sir. What did you want to see me about?"

"We have a situation. On the continent. I'm sure you read the paper this morning." Seeing Weasley nod, he continued, "Our ministry has offered three Aurors to the French DMLE to act as advisors. If this is not contained, it could cross the channel… I am tasking you with choosing two others on the team for this assignment."

Ron had read the horrific story from France. He expected to be pulled into something like this. But he had worked weeks without a break. Living on coffee and pepper-up potions. "When do we need to report in? Honestly, I could use a few days off. The last month has been… brutal."

He had expected this. Weasley was looking pretty ragged. "Unless something happens, you will report in on Monday. Today being Wednesday… I want you here tomorrow. You will pick your team and I'll cover the specifics with the team you choose tomorrow. You and your team can break until Monday. Oh, and Weasley, make sure one of your picks is Bones."

Ron nodded, got up, and left.

He knew if Susan had been here, she would be the one organizing the team. This was his career break. Ron knew Harry was in France and there was no way that was a coincidence. It would be good to see Harry again. No doubt he'd have that snake with him… But that's fine. A pint with his mate. Hanging out and going on stake outs again… He was actually getting a second wind just thinking about it. Maybe he could convince Hermione to take some time off ad vacation in Paris. She had been acting odd for the last few weeks. Ron suspected Harry and Ginny's break up had upset her. She was close to both of them.

Ron was one of the few people that actually understood why his sister had split from Harry. He thought she was a fool for cutting things off completely, they could have just had a temporary break… But he understood her wanting to be her own person. He may be the ONLY one who really understood it. His mum went ballistic over it. She really loved Harry and wanted him in the family. She even tried to make an arm for her clock that was tied to Harry, but without a marriage bond, no success. Ron's brothers just didn't understand. His dad was sad about it, but was supportive. Ron was sorry Ginny felt the need to break off the engagement, but he was glad his sister was being recognized for herself rather than who she was dating.

As much as he sometimes missed Harry, Ron also enjoyed being recognized for his own achievements. He had been awarded multiple commendations over the last two years and had a very impressive arrest record. He was being referred to as 'The Next Mad-Eye Moody'. A few had even taken to calling him "Red-Eye". Partly due to his hair, partly due to the crazy hours he worked. What is it about nick names and the wizarding world? Well, he supposed 'Red Eye' beat 'Sidekick'.

Ron knew Harry would over at the Burrow for Boxing Day and hoped he and Ginny could work things out. They were good together. Ron still felt bad about how he had acted at Hogwarts, especially in the fourth year. But he also is one of the few who knew about the Horcrux's influence. Not that he could tell anyone, oaths of secrecy and all that. Still, he had worked hard to regain Harry's trust. They were solid. Both had crazy schedules, so they rarely synched up. But, when they did, it was always fun. Well, when the snake wasn't hissing at him. One of the heads seemed to really hate him. He missed Hedwig. Now she was a familiar he could love. Not that snake thing. Really, the only good thing he would say about Harry's familiar was that it played...
good chess.

Stretching and changing mental gears, he considered that everyone survived the last big raid. He knew Harry's contributions were partially to credit for that. It was the contributions Harry and Andromeda had made to the emerging Auror force thru the Black family trust. In Tonk's name and remembrance. They contributed to the DMLE as a whole too. In addition to the financial contributions, all Aurors and Hit Wizards had been issued a suit of dragon hide armor. The armor alone must have cost a fortune to provide for the entire department. Had they not all been wearing their armor during the last raid, there may be a few less Aurors on the team. Even Ron had taken a direct hit. He had to have his armor repaired after one of the Voldemort supporters caught him with a cutting curse. Thankfully, the armor absorbed it all and he was fine. Almost everyone now had 'badges of honor' on their designated body armor. A few of them now had badges on their skin…

So. Enough day dreaming. Back to the French mission. Who would he choose? He was the best 'fighter' in the Auror department. Susan was the next best in combat. Honestly, she could probably beat him in a duel half the time… but not a flat out, no holds barred, fight. She was also really smart. Susan was so much like her aunt. She would probably be running the department one day. Who as he going to pick as the third team member. Someone cunning. Smart and reliable, but able to see things he and Susan might miss.

Tracy Davis would be a good fit there. Sly and cunning, she understood dark wizards and their tactics. She had survived the snake pit at Hogwarts as a half-blood. Ron knew she had been treated poorly and only her alliance with the Greengrass family shielded her from the worst… With all the Jr. Deatheaters in Slytherin house during that period, she had to have had it bad regardless of her affiliations. Also, she had participated in the final battle too. On the LIGHT side, of course. She was one of the Slytherins that fought with the defenders and had earned his trust. She had the scars to prove it. Thorfinn Rowle got her good before Harry took care of him. She had made him reevaluate his opinions of Slytherins.

There is usually a little friction between Davis and Bones, but it seemed to be competitive in nature and they actually worked well together. Still, he'd have to listen to the two of them bicker and 'one up' each other. Susan would have chosen someone else. There was already enough talk of bias toward those who fought in the final battle. Toward those who graduated together in the same year. It was actually true. But Ron had learned long ago that when it came to choosing someone to cover your back, political correctness goes right out the window.

Ron would pick only those who he trusted 100% with his life. Only those who could hold their own in a fight or on a crime scene. There were a few who made up for lack of combat training with intelligence and deduction skills, but Susan was as good or better than most of them. So was Tracy. The odds were that most newbies wouldn't last more than a year or two before transferring to a safer department. Their time on the Auror force would help their careers and help the force by seeding the ministry with knowledgeable bureaucrats that wouldn't take them for granted. But he wouldn't choose to have them watching his back!

-CS-

Beauxbaton Gardens
Just after Midnight
12:05 AM

Gabrielle Delacour was heartbroken. Her big night had just been ruined by the one person she never thought would hurt her. As she walked up the hill toward the main ball room, she took a moment to magically repair her dress and dry her eyes. No one would see her cry. Nope, not
tonight.

How could Harry do this to her? The evening had been so magical and wonderful. The moment was perfect. The lights, the music, the garden, everything. Even the bells chiming as midnight approached. One moment she was sure he was about to kiss her, the next, he was ripping her clothes off. He used her pin to actually tear her under clothes as well as her dress – fully exposing the left side of her torso. Then he maliciously threw her pin across the lawn. It just did not make any sense. One moment was pure romance, the next was violence and assault! Even his eyes changed, glowing emerald green in the dim light. Her kind and wonderful Harry was gone, replaced by an aggressive and incredibly intense version of the man she thought he was. It might have been attractive if he had not just attacked her.

Entering the Ball room, she realized that everyone was in panic. The music had ceased and people were frantically running about. What on earth…?

"GABRIELLE! OH, THANK MORGANNA!" Her mother ran up to her and pulled her into a hug. Fleur rushed up and joined. They were both in tears, they were nearly in a full on panic. Where was her father? Had they heard about what Harry had done?

Bill suddenly asked, "Where is Harry? Is he safe?" He had his wand out and looked ready for anything. He had the same intense and aggressive look Harry had, without the glowing eyes.

"Harry attacked me! Of course he is safe! Why wouldn't he be?" As the words came out of her mouth, she began softly crying again. "It was so wonderful, then he just grabbed my pin and ripped it, and my dress, off me…” Full on tears at this point.

Fleur gently placed a hand on either side of her sister's face. "Gabrielle, listen to me. Look at me." Once she had her sister's full attention, "Your classmates have all been kidnapped. All of them disappeared as the midnight chimes ended. They were port-keyed away and we do not know where. Whatever Harry did was to protect you."

Fleur then pulled her sister into a deep hug. She would be safe tonight. In her own bed. Her dear little sister was safe. Gabrielle was slipping into shock. They needed to calm her, keep her warm, and find Harry!

For Gabrielle, Numbness began to set in. Had Harry been protecting her? It had all happened so fast. Replaying the scene in her head, she realized that Harry was intent on throwing her pin. More than on… how exposed she was. Could…

"Miss Delacour!" Gabrielle looked over at the middle aged witch Harry had spoken to while they were leaving. She could not recall her name. "My name is Mme. Bellamy, the Director of the Département des Mystéres des Arcanes. The DMA. We met briefly a few minutes ago when you and Mr. Potter were heading outside. I need you to think about what I am asking and answer to the best of your knowledge. Where is Mr. Potter? Is he with you?" she asked while scanning the nearby crowds. This was a woman with authority.

"No, he is… I left him… in the garden…”

"Your pin, where is it? Quickly now! Where is your pin?" The woman was intense.

"Harry ripped it off me and threw it... Somewhere in the garden…”

"I see.” The DMA woman looked like she had just solved a complex puzzle.

Before the woman could say more, Bill inserted himself into the conversation. "Director Bellamy,
I'm Harry's close friend and business partner Bill Weasley. Can you tell us what is happening?"

Mme. Bellamy looked over at the red haired man. What had the British Unspeakables said? Harry's 'adopted brother'? "Not here. Soon. I assume you are used to the same problems that Harry is? Please, help me contain the crowd. We need order now. Until the Aurors show up."

Seeing Mme. Bellamy begin to turn, Gabrielle reached out and touched her shoulder. "Wait, what about the pin? Why did Harry pull it off me?" There was a desperation in her voice. She had to know. Realization was beginning to dawn on her, but she had to know…

Seeing her desperation, the Mme. Bellamy softened a bit, "Mr. Potter identified the pins as port-keys. Your date may very well have saved your life. He likely used your pin to go after the other young ladies. Do not share this information with anyone." There was a subtle threat there. "We will talk later." Seeing the state Gabrielle was in, she addressed Gabrielle's mother, "Mme. Delacour, your daughter has had a shock. You should take her to a quiet area and gather yourselves. It will most likely be a long night, and I will certainly have more questions for her. Mr. Weasley, please assist me." She then walked off.

Bill hugged his wife, smiled at Gabrielle, "All will be well. This is what Harry does. Fleur, let your dad know Gabrielle is safe, he is outside looking for her. Love you." Bill Weasley then went to join the DMA woman.

"Oh, mum! I slapped him. I slapped him so hard I knocked his glasses off! What if… I may never see him again…" she was on the brink of tears once more. Her mother pulled her into another embrace. Shushing her and gently stroking her back.

Fleur rested her hand on Gabrielle's back. "Harry will be fine. He saves people all the time. This is like eating breakfast to him. He will be back soon and you can take him out to dinner to show your appreciation." Considering her sisters state, she added, "The slap meant nothing to him. I promise. He just wanted you to be safe."

Internally Fleur was worried. As powerful as Harry is, he is still just a mortal man. Did he really just leap off into who knows what kind of place? Surrounded by enemies? Harry is the worst at using the floo and portkeys. No chance he will arrive without being at best off balance. At worst, flat on his back. She had seen the look on Bill's face and knew he was worried too. She silently said a prayer that her petite frère came back safely. Her sister needs her now.

They sat and calmed Gabrielle down. Her father came back and they filled him in. He was normally a very controlled wizard, but his relief was visible. As was his concern for Harry. The entire Delacour family had a soft spot for Harry. He’d earned it after the tri-wizard tournament.

Fleur was extremely impressed with how well her little sister was coping. Proud of her. Gabrielle wanted to go and help calm the families impacted. To help. Fleur just held her and shook her head. She knew it might be a distraction to the other families that one student had evaded capture. And Mme. Bellamy had insisted on no communication. Still, she was proud of her baby sisters desire to help others.

Suddenly, a large glowing white stag appeared and headed to Mme. Bellamy. That was Harry's patronus! It relayed a message, but Fleur was too far away to make it out. Mme. Bellamy immediately sent out a patronus of her own. Something was happening.

-CS-

Somewhere in France
Harry materialized and was tossed sideways. He transferred the momentum into roll and came up firing. Until he knew the scene, he stuck with silent 'Stupefy' spells. There were four wizards and a witch tending to the unconscious young ladies from the event. The whole scene seemed so wrong. He dropped them in less than two seconds. They were completely unprepared. As he rose up from his crouched position, he felt the wards.

NNNN...PRESSURE!

The wards were VERY powerful and once they had sensed him attacking 'friendlies' within the building, they had retaliated. He lost his black and silver 'astral face' as he focused on his internal resistance. It was as if he was having his teeth drilled without Novocain.

UNEARTHLY PRESSURE!

A lesser wizard would be reduced to rolling on the floor. Or been outright killed by these wards. They felt modern and professionally set. These wards had at least two ley lines connected to them. Maybe three.

He'd have to keep his attention focused on resisting the wards. The spells he would cast would be verbal and low powered. No silent casting unless the spell was truly second nature and instinctive. No wandless magic either. To hold the wards power back would mean keeping 90-95% of his focus on resisting them. He'd have to go 'old school'.

First, he held up his Holly and Phoenix feather wand and said "Rennervate" over the unconscious students.

WHITE-HOT-PAIN! PRESSURE!

He'd have to be very slow in his casting to avoid moving his attention from resisting the wards. As the students regained consciousness, he addressed them.

"Please, listen to me, we don't have much time. You have been kidnapped. I am going to get you out of here, but you must follow my instructions." The girls were obviously shocked and scared. Once he had their full attention, he proceeded. "First, do not cast a single spell. I am currently under attack from the local wards. Trust me when I say, you do not want this. Follow behind me, but not too close. Let me go ahead and clear the rooms as we make our escape. There WILL be fighting."

Harry then raised the Elder wand and said "Spiritus Ærmis!", Emerald green translucent armor suddenly formed around him.

PRESSURE! NERVE PAIN!

The spell he cast is called 'Spirit Armor' and it would help him resist the wards and hostile curses. It would last about thirty minutes. Hopefully that would be enough time. His nose was beginning to bleed. This would happen every time he cast a spell.

Turning to the young ladies, Harry asked the group, "What Questions do you Ladies have before we set out?"
The questions came all at once. He could barely focus on them. "Where are we?" "How did we get here?" "You look terrible. Is it the wards?" "How will we defend ourselves?"

"Whoa! OK. We don't have much time." He knew he was twitching. FOCUS! "Answers to your questions: I don't know where we are. Your pins are portkeys, take them off. Yes, the wards are brutalizing me." Defense was important… He then slowly transformed the stunned wizards and witches into spears.

PURE AGONY!

He went too fast. "If you have to, defend yourselves with these." Poetic justice. "Don't even touch your wands until I give you the all clear."

Given time, he would draw a protective circle, gather his strength, and send a heavy pulse of power at the ward stones - shattering them, but time was not something he had. He needed to outsource the problem while making a break for it.

No time to draw a summoning circle. Stick with simple elementals. Earth Elementals. Harry then focused just enough to summon three moderately powerful Earth Elementals.

PAIN! CRAMPING! PRESSURE!

His knees buckled and he almost lost control of them. They were about four feet tall and three feet wide with arms that ended in pic axes. "Destroy the ward stones". Hopefully he would survive long enough. Their response sounded like stones grinding together. It was an affirmation. Then they merged with the stone floor, and were gone.

Just then, a wizard wearing an filthy, splattered apron entered the room and stopped suddenly when he saw Harry. He drew his wand and shot a cutting curse at Harry. Harry deflected it and stunned the wizard with a silent 'Stupefy'.

AAAARRRGGGG! PRESSURE! WHITEHOT!

He reflexively cast the stunner silently. The armor helped, but he needed all his concentration to resist the wards. Very, very slowly, he transfigured the man into yet another spear, he now had armed all six of the ladies.

Next, Harry gently summoned 'Fashad', an allied spirit of a dubious nature. Dubious meaning theft and assassination. PRESSURE! This was easier with Fashad as he was already allied with the spirit and did not need to exert control.

The spirit spoke in a whisper, "Greetings, Master of Death. You are in a VERY dangerous place."

No, Shit! Way to state the obvious. Harry just stared at the spirit for a moment.

"Fashad, I need to know the layout of the building. Number of opponents and the best way out."

At that Fashad bowed and faded from view. Tic-toc, time was wasting. Harry used the time waiting on Fashad to return to focus on resisting the wards and recovery. The students were huddled together, comforting each other. He thought he heard his name spoken a few times amongst themselves.

Fashad returned in less than a minute. That was fast. "The best route out of here is thru the door in front of you, which is a kitchen. Proceed down the hall at the end of the kitchen, then up the stairs to the main level. The occupants of the house are being awoken now and will be setting up an
ambush. Be vigilant, young Master. There are many in the house. From the top of the stairs you should proceed to the front door. The going will be tough, but the back door is too heavily warded. Make haste!"

Good Intel. "Payment for services?" Fashad rarely did anything for free. Even if the charge was minor.

"I only wish to watch and enjoy. Payment enough. The other spirits in the house are hoping you will exert vengeance on their behalf." Fashad faded away, but Harry could sense his lingering presence. Spectator.

Blood thirsty bastard. Harry often wondered why he liked the spirit so much. Vengeful spirits, expecting retribution. Thar explains how Fashad was able to gather the Intel so fast. Harry knew spirits would interact and communicate. Never underestimate an angry spirit. Time to get going.

As he staggered under the wards, Harry realized that he was in no shape for dual casting. Which wand to keep out? He would need his most vicious spells to survive. The Holly wand could handle mage level power, but it was not as good with the ancient 'Nethermantic' spells. Better with 'Elemental' spells, though. The Elder wand could cast any spell with full mage power and it loved those vicious Nethermantic spells. It was a tad long for wrist sheath summoning. At 15 inches, it is an awkward length for a wrist sheath, it required a sheath with a minor astral pocket. It was slower to draw once sheathed. The deciding factor: the Holly wand was one he could effortlessly summon left handed in a split second. It actually seemed to prefer the left hand – closer to his heart, maybe? So, he put his beloved Holly wand in the left wrist sheath and kept the Elder wand out and in his right hand. Ready for action.

Addressing the students, Harry gasped out "Follow me. But not too close." They made their way thru a kitchen. Apparently, the last Wizard to barge in was the cook. He had come to see what was taking so long. Well, he was now a spear… The kitchen had pieces of meat on a cutting board. One of the ladies gasped and Harry realized there was a human hand on the counter. Based on the size, it had either belonged to a small woman or a child. He muttered "Bloody Fucking Cannibals". The girls seemed to be emboldened by his anger. Or maybe it was his lack of fear.

PRESSURE! PAIN!

Harry was distracted just enough by the kitchen 'leftovers' that his knees wobbled from the wards. Can't lose focus.

Proceeding quickly down a short hall and ignoring adjoining doors, they followed Fashad's directions and went straight to the stairs. The pace was as fast as Harry could manage, faster than a walk but less than a jog. Now, ascending up the stairs, he slowed and prepared for the inevitable ambush. He had to stop twice to gather his focus and his balance.

RESIST! PRESSURE!

Lord help him if he had an extended fight in this state. Those flunkeys he had already defeated downstairs did not count. As he rose to see around the corner at the top of the stairs, he had to lurch back to avoid some very brutal spells. Bone-breaker, Cutting, and a Piercing Hex. Maybe more. Swirling his wand, Harry said, "Aut Tenebræ!" He did not have to be silent with this one, it was so old no one would recognize it.

PAIN! PRESSURE! AGONY!

Harry had summoned 'Ethereal Darkness' and directed it to rapidly swirl up and out beyond the
stairwell. He could see thru it, as could anyone trained to perceive the world as a Nethermancer – into the 'lower' astral plane. But there were so very few who could do that now. Something of a lost discipline. They could not see thru it and he could. Perfect cover. The opponents began firing blindly into the inky blackness. Harry motioned the girls to stay put and crawled under the spell fire.

Harry countered with a wide cutting ribbon. Flicking his wand and focusing, "Ferrum Uitta!" It was a very dangerous spell that could affect multiple opponents. He referred to it as his 'scythe'. He hoped to cut their numbers in half. By cutting THEM in half. A powerful spell, he had to divert a bit more attention than he wanted to. Harry knew casting it would open him to the wards, but it was do or die time.

PAIN! PRESSURE! RIPPING AGONY!

He counted eight opponents and under the cover of his darkness he had reduced them to five with that last spell. Better odds. These guys were moving well and somewhat coordinated. Don't get cocky!

PRESSURE!

Working together, two of them had managed to dispel the darkness, leaving Harry moving and dodging for his life. He dodged three curses while batting aside a cutting curse and a piercing hex.

PRESSURE!

The pressure from the wards was unbelievable! He felt his core straining to resist it. Harry's nose was now bleeding in a steady stream now.

He was in full on defensive mode and that was not a good place to be. The wards were really holding him back. A Blasting curse was sent at the ground in front of him, but he saw it and shielded the floor, "Protego!"

AAAARRR! PAIN! PRESSURE!

He had angled the 'protego' to rebound the curse back at the ceiling over two of the combatants. The other three were pressing him with direct spells. His movement was impaireed and his Spirit Armor was wavering under the onslaught. Without his attention, it would not last long. He was not moving anywhere near as well as normal, so his spirit armor was taking a few glancing hits. He lacked the focus to attack as he normally would. He had to improve his odds or they would wear him down.

"Hastam Tonitrua!" Summoning an elemental spear tied to air, he hurtled it from the elder wand the way a primitive hunter would use an Atlatl. He had to put enough force into it to destroy a shield. Harry knew the price he would pay.

HHHSSSSS! BURNING PAIN! AGONY! PESSION!

The spear shattered one of the opponent's shields, piercing the wizard's chest and exploding with a deafening thunder clap. The wizard's chest was opened up and the others were stunned by the thunderous sound and the mini shockwave. This bought him three breaths.

Reinforcing his spirit armor, Harry began hurling astral darts. 'Sægittæ' was very precise and extremely fast to cast. Like having a .45 ACP semi-automatic pistol. Not as destructive as Confrigo, but he couldn't divert his attention enough for a blasting charm. So second nature, he could do them silently and perfect to finishing of the stunned opponents. Harry could snap off
Astral Darts faster than a Royal Marine could fire bullets. Astral Darts are unimpaired by physical armor or defenses, they only became destructive when they found living targets or anything with an astral presence. Meaning, you cannot just hide behind a wall. The same held true with Astral Spears.

MORE PAIN! DAMN THE WARDS! RELENTLESS!

The hastily cast astral darts dropped two opponents leaving only a pair or attackers. Recovering from the thunder clap, they began firing curses back. Harry dodged, but his focus was WAY off. One of the bone breaker curses caught his leg. His armor held off the worst effects, but enough got thru that he was sure there was at least a hairline fracture. He managed to keep moving and numbed his leg. He'd feel that tomorrow. Assuming he saw tomorrow. These opponents were so much better trained than the ones down stairs.

Harry managed to somehow dodge a killing curse, but was clipped with a blood boiling curse. His armor deflected much of it. His core resisted most of it, but he had to perform a fast counter-curse to localize the damage.

PRESSURE!

All out of options. Harry fired a wide area lighting strike, "Fulgur Uitta!"

EXCRUCIATING PAIN! PRESSURE AND STRAIN!

One of the opponents could not shield it enough and fell. The other was strong enough to resist it, but his shield was destroyed and he was off balance.

Harry focused thru the pain. Spinning to the side and using his centrifugal momentum, Harry flung his wand hand forward and yelled "Hastam Æstræ!" He hurtled an astral spear straight at the wizard while continuing his movement and pivoting painfully away from another killing curse. It caught the wizard in the shoulder. Harry followed with an overpowered cutting curse, "Diffindo!" Splitting the wizard cleanly in half. Harry briefly thanked Merlin he did not have to clean up the mess he was leaving behind. Ick.

DAMNATION! PAIN AND PRESSURE!

All in all, the battle had lasted no more than thirty to forty seconds. Eight trained wizards down, but it cost him. He had shifted too much focus from resisting the wards. His ears were now bleeding. His ears ringing. It took Harry a moment to recover from a swirling sense of vertigo the pain from the wards and his injuries caused.

Looking around, Harry realized he was standing in a main foyer. There were hallways and stairs all converging on this area. And a Front Door! There was a staircase leading up to the second level opposite of the stairs he had followed up from the basement. He knew the girls were still on the basement stairs. Hopefully safe. He would not leave without them.

He heard movement on the descending stairs. He moved his wand in a jagged manner, then thrust it forward saying, "Unctæ Devourare Æstræ!"

BURNING PAIN!

Harry nearly collapsed from the pain the wards were inflicting on him.

He had summoned an 'Astral Maw'. It was like a cross between an octopus and a megalodon, but it only exists on the astral plane. Basically, a huge tooth filled mouth surrounded by tentacles. For the
next five minutes or so, it would be on THIS plane. He sent it gliding up the stairs and flicked his wand saying "Glisseo!" transforming the stairs into a slide. The Astral Maw would float up while the opponents on the stairs would slide down into its mouth. He steadied himself and reinforced his armor again while he heard the screams. That beast would take out any wizards or witches that it encountered until it was destroyed or dispelled.

PRESSURE! PAIN!

He heard movement from the two hallways on either side of the front doors. Making a small circle with his wand, he said "Aspera Caliditas!" He placed a cold field in front of one of the hallways.

JOINTS ON FIRE! PRESSURE!

Before he could repeat the cold zone on the second hallway, two disillusioned attackers came running out of the one he had just set up the cold field in front of. He could see their 'distortions'. They hit the cold field and fell screaming. No longer disillusioned he saw two witches in their mid-thirties. Cold that intense is like fire. It sucks the heat from you so fast it causes burns. 'Sægitta! Sægitta! Sægitta! Sægitta!' He silenced them with a pair of silently cast Astral Darts to the head.

NAUSEA! TEETH SCREAMING PAIN!

What was taking those elementals so long?

He once again staggered under the wards and, as his vision came back into focus, he saw four new opponents. He was now squaring up against three wizards and a witch. They all seemed confident in their abilities. These were the leaders. The lieutenants, actually. They had apparently entered from the other side corridor and were between him and the front door.

He straightened up and felt the blood vessels in one of his eyes pop. It would be an ugly bloody mess, but he could still see from it just fine. While he rapidly steeled himself against the ward's influence, the new opponents approached. He still heard screams from the top of the staircase he had sent the monster up. No worries there, which was good, as he had his back to the staircase.

One of the wizards stepped forward. Obviously the top lieutenant. He looked vaguely familiar. "Ah, Harry Potter. Long time no see. Too bad we have to meet again under these conditions. I've followed your career closely." Harry noted the others were fanning out. Using the time to set themselves up in more advantageous positions.

Harry couldn't place him. "You have me at a disadvantage." Who is he? Not French. He sounds English. He seems…

PRESSURE! PAIN! Analytical thought was almost as bad as spell casting.

Don't focus on figuring out who he is! Focus on resisting the wards! Harry staggered slightly.

The 'Top Dog' continued to speak. Harry decided he was 'Monsieur' Dark Lords version of Lucius Malfoy. "I see my wards are taking their toll. How you are still alive is beyond me. But, we can remedy that. Avada Kedavra!"

Harry twisted to avoid. He knew his reflexes were impaired, but he had spent years dodging. His affinity for his Owl animagus form had greatly increased his speed of perception and ability to plan his movements, but his injuries and the wards were greatly impacting him. Using the momentum of the twist, he whipped his wand around and said "Ferrum Uitta!" throwing out his scythe once more. It was aimed at two of the new opponents, but he had no time to see if it had connected.
He was then struck with a Bombarda that shattered his spirit armor and threw him across the room. He felt ribs shift and break. His arm and shoulder instantly went numb. He saw another killing curse miss from a different angle. It slid through the space where he might have finished his dodge. The Bombarda might have saved his life, but it was not a loving kiss. He flew through the air and collided with the wall head and face first. He lay limply on the floor, unconscious.

Harry was floating in space while ice daggers slowly pressed into him from every conceivable angle. He saw Catherine, bleeding from her nose, ears, and eyes. She suddenly yelled, "RÉVEILLEZ-VOUS!" This snapped him back into consciousness. His spirit armor and his core had saved him. But they would not take another hit like that. Not in his current state. Where was his wand? Dropped it somewhere.

PAIN! PRESSURE! UNBELIEVABLE! MUST RESIST!

Two wizards and a witch now approached. Wands up. Apparently his 'Scythe' had taken out one of them. He heard others entering the room as well. Must be 'flunkeys' as they were holding back. Letting their bosses enjoy their fun. Enjoy their kill.

RAZORBLADES! PRESSURE!

The leader, aka 'Lucius Jr.', spoke to him, "And now, we come to the close. Broken bones. Constant assault from my wards. Numerous other injuries. Your right wrist looks to be broken. No wand either." The man said while holding up the elder wand. He must have summoned it when it was dropped. "Look on the bright side, you have been 'pre-tenderized'. I will personally feast on your heart. Any last words?" The others enjoyed his little 'pre-tenderized' joke.

Harry looked up. He made deliberate eye contact and pulled his focus together. One last spell. He'd summon his Holly wand from its sheath and cast left handed. No worries there, he was just as good left handed as he was right. Something powerful. Full force. The wards would kill him, but he'd blow this house apart. If the girls were still below ground level, they should survive… Stall for time. "Yes. Who are you? Why did …"

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...Ooohhhhh... RELIEF!

The ward stones had been destroyed. The elementals he had summoned had done their job. FINALLY! Good Lord, did they think they were getting paid by the hour?!

Harry could see the leader suddenly stagger. He must have been tied to the wards. Apparently, he had felt the wards come down as well, but not in a good way. The others looked over at 'Lucius Jr'. For a split second, Harry realized no one was looking at him! Apparently the cavalry just arrived. And it's ME!

He had maybe a half a second. Summoning his Holly wand from its sheath while he moved, he silently shot a full force 'EXPULSO!' blasting curse directly at the leader. No messing around with stunners! The leader had no time to throw up a shield, but it wouldn't have saved him if he had. The 'Expulso' struck with so much power, it liquefied the man in a massive explosion. Harry used Expulso as he was too close and did not want to risk getting burned. It worked on pure pressure and force rather than heat.

The gore from 'Lucius Jr.' went everywhere. The entire room was showered if blood and bone and entrails, as well as the content of the man stomach. The temperature was quickly getting colder and Harry was now rapidly regaining his power and focus. The force of the Expulso explosion had
thrown everyone standing within ten yards to the ground. The wizard who had blasted him with the Bombarda was the closest to Jr. Lucius and was sent flying through the air. He landed rough. Probably injured by bone fragments. Karma! This bought Harry enough time to get to his feet. Harry shielded the next few curses that came his way from the 'late-comers', methodically batting them aside left handed. His Spirit Armor was fully formed once more. Hopefully he would not need it.

He wasn't moving well at all, but he had plenty of raw power. Massive amounts of adrenaline. Harry pressed forward, his wand a blur a Harry deflected spells from multiple sources while firing off Diffindo, Sægittæ, or Confrigo curses between spell deflections. There were quite a few of these newcomers. No time to count, but at least a dozen. He was slowly whittling the masses down, but he was not mobile enough to avoid multiple unforgivable curses cast in concert... assuming they could cast them. Harry needed a distraction. Mentally, he reconnected with the summoned Astral Maw and instructed it to 'swim' back down the stairs and devour the rank and file late-comers. It was just swimming around upstairs. Lazy fish!

Then, to his side, he heard "Crucio!" His mobility was low, too many broken bones and injuries. With a flick of his wand, Harry ripped the front door off its hinges and put it between himself and the curse. It moved so fast it was just a large wooden blur, but it managed to barely intercept the spell in time. He then banished the door straight at the 'lieutenant' witch who had cast the crucio, knocking her flat. She appeared to be unconscious. He threw his head to the side to avoid a piercing curse and volleyed two cutting curses back to the casters. Some fool shot a jelly-leg jinx at him. Harry just ignored it and let it slide off his spirit armor. Even without armor, it would have had zero effect on him. Now that the wards were no longer impacting him, his core and his power level were just too high for those kinds of spells.

He glanced over at the 'lieutenant' wizard who had caught him with the Bombarda and had been most impacted by the 'Jr. Lucius' explosion. He had raised a shield and was beginning to get up. Harry cast a stabilized Protego between himself and the flunkies, He then cast the 'Umbræ Petulæns!' silently at the wizard. It was a 'Shadow Tether' spell. The man's own shadow would wrestle and hold him down, restraining him from inside his shield. For a while. Long enough to buy Harry some time. He needed to deal with the rank and file.

While his shield was holding, Harry summoned 'Ethereal Darkness' over the side of the room he and the last two lieutenants were on. That would keep the dozen or so flunkies from drawing a bead on him and reduce the incoming spells he had to deal with as his opponents would not know which image was him. Now, something to further distract and reduce the count of the red shirts. Yeah, Harry liked Star Trek...

Avoiding casting any flashy spells that would give away his position, Harry transfigured furniture into wolves and sent them after the new rank and file red shirt opponents that had entered the room. He took a cue from his father's old tactics and conjured illusions of wolves to intermingle with the transfigured ones heading their way. About half of the illusions would get to the opponents first, tricking the victims into think they were all illusions. Then the physical wolves would attack. They would all hit right as the Astral Maw made its way down to them.

Seeing that the 'lieutenant' witch, who had tried to crucio him, was started to rise up from under the front door, he quickly raised his wand and focused, silently casting 'Dolor!' It was an ancient spell that resembled the cruciatus, but not quite as debilitating. It also did not require his full attention to maintain. It was not technically an unforgivable as it is an ancient and unknown spell. Inflicting tortuous pain was a grey area, but hey – she started it with that Crucio. Tit-for-Tat.

This gave Harry time to deal with the remaining 'lieutenant' Wizard from the 'experienced' group.
The one that hit him with the blasting curse and was wrestling with his own shadow. Looking over, Harry noticed the bastard had just managed to overcome the 'Shadow Tethers' but had dropped his shield. Unable to see thru the Ethereal Darkness, he apparently decided to strategically withdraw – Harry saw the astral threads rapidly winding up in an apparition pattern. He was apparating! Hell NO! In half a second he would be gone.

Harry flicked his wand so fast it was barely visible, his 'Sægittæ' caught the fleeing wizard with an astral dart right as he began to 'wink' out of existence. The Astral Dart was very fast to cast and its astral nature allowed it to affect the partially apparated wizard. Striking the wizard center mass, the man lost focus and splinched horribly. Where ever he was headed, only about half of him would show up. Given that half of his head and torso stayed behind, Harry was satisfied that the man had NOT gotten away.

The group of 'red shirt' late arriving flunky wizards were busy fighting the wolves. The Astral Maw was being held back, but it was taking three of them to do it. Harry peering through the darkness and bolstered the number of wolves – both transfigured and illusion. That would keep them busy a little longer. He stayed inside the area of darkness to lessen the chance of any random curses of 'opportunity'.

The lieutenant witch he had cursed was writhing on the ground, in pain. She was trying to do something with her wand. Harry quickly disarmed her with a quick 'expelliarmus'. He tried to stun her, but she had some kind of protection against 'Stupefy'. French Aurors were probably like their British cousins and always led with Stupefy. Whatever charm or enchantment she had on her would have been effective against them. But Harry was not planning on sticking with 'stunners'.

He quickly noted that she was trying to reach into her pocket, he summoned a fire whip and severed her hand at the wrist. She screamed and tried to use her left hand, but he severed that too. The flame whip cauterized the wounds, so she would not bleed out. It had sliced up a good bit of her torso as well, but not fatally. So much for disillusionment.

Harry guessed she had a portkey in her pocket. She was far more experienced than the cannon fodder red shirts that made up most of the opponents fighting the wolves. Harry had killed all the other more experienced fighters. He wanted her alive for questioning. Dispelling the whip, he silently cast a 'Petrificus Totalis', also known as a full body bind. Unlike the stunner, THAT took effect. Maybe he should have started with that instead of 'Stupefy'. No second guessing now.

Turning and peering through his 'Ethereal Darkness', Harry noted the 'late-arrival-red-shirt-flunkies' that had entered the room when he was blasted into near unconsciousness, right before the wards dropped, were about a third their original number. Maybe less. He never really got a good look and no telling how many were devoured by the Astral Maw. But they were ankle deep in blood and body parts.

They likely assumed all the wolves were illusions only to be horrifically surprised. There were four or five wizards in a defensive circle. All but one of the transfigured wolves were destroyed and the illusionary wolves were fading. Someone must have had enough power behind their 'Finite' charm to end his illusions. Maybe it was a combined effort. Same with the Astral Maw. Working together, it could be dispelled. Not bad. Some talent there, apparently.

Flicking his wand, he mentally thought, 'Ignis Pila'. With this, Harry silently hurled a fireball into their defensive circle to break them up before they could recover or apparate away. They probably thought the wards were still up or they would have already left… Two of them saw the fireball and raised their shields, but their protections shattered under the raw force of the explosion. Half of the wizards were blown to pieces, all were burned horribly. The two who managed to raise their
shields might be alive, but they weren't going anywhere.

Suddenly, all Harry could hear was the steady ringing in his ears. It was constant, but there was no other noise. His right arm was killing him. His leg too. Ribs busted up. The Blood Boiling curse had done 'who knows what'. Blood was seeping from so many wounds. Hard to stay focused. He noticed his right shoulder was out of its socket. A quick 'Episkey' put it back. THAT HURT. Best to leave the other injuries to the professionals.

Harry summoned an orbital spy and sent it off to search the house for any hidden opponents or unknown survivors. With a left handed flick of his Holly wand, he summoned his Elder wand and caught it in the same hand holding the Holly wand. It was happily re-united with him. He then checked on the 'lieutenant' witch, he had to make sure she was not able to somehow kill herself or escape. Once satisfied, he reinforced her full body bind. She had already passed out. Hopefully she was not dead. He struggled to put the elder wand in the sheath one handed while holding the Holly wand, but he got it.

He limped over to the descending stairs where the students were hiding. Not wanting to get stabbed by a spear, he croaked out, "Its safe now, ladies. You can come out."

The six young ladies slowly emerged and then recoiled. Harry realized what the scene must look like. Horrific. Severed body parts, blood everywhere, the overpowering smell of burnt flesh… His orbital spy returned and told him there were no other people in the house. Harry assumed that if there had been anyone else, they would have left when the battle turned against them.

"Battles over. The wards are down. Let's get out of here." He staggered out the front door. Taking one step at a time very carefully. Basically dragging one leg behind the other.

He slowly levitated the surviving opponents into the front yard. He collected the spears and transformed them back into the wizards and the witch he had first stunned when he arrived. He re-stunned them all for good measure and put them in body binds.

Looking back at the house they had exited, it was a grand manor. Stately and beautiful. Surely it was a known location. "Ladies, do any of you have any idea where we are?"

One of the witches spoke up, "Yes, I've been here before. It is the home of the Lavoisier family."

Harry summoned a patronus and sent it to Mme. Bellamy to inform her of their location. Hopefully she knew the Lavoisier family, too. If not, she could ask around.

Thinking of what to do with the students. They looked like they were all pretty shaken. An hour ago they were enjoying a party in their honor. "Now, I can create a portkey, but I really don't know where to send you. The Beauxbaton Academy is probably warded up. I don't know any other locations… I guess I can send you to my Paris flat. I still have it for a few more days… No wait. I know a DMA agent who has pitiful wards."

One of the ladies spoke up, "NO! We will not just leave you. You are battered and broken. We'll wait with you. Please, sit." The others were nodding along. Harry now realized that he must look like hell warmed over. Was his appearance the reason they had recoiled when he called them out of hiding? These were brave young ladies.

"I can't sit. Too many injuries. Once I sit, I'm done. I need to stay alert. At least until the DMA gets here." Thinking of what they can do to stay active, "You can use your wands now, please help me guard the prisoners."
One of the ladies refused to leave his side. "At least let me help support you. Here…" She wrapped her arms around him, careful not to touch his obviously broken wrist. Normally, Harry would refuse as it would prevent him from moving effectively, but he wasn't exactly moving well now.

Within about ten minutes, the sound of multiple apparitions was heard. Harry held his Phoenix wand as defensively as he could in his current state. "Keep your guard up ladies. Probably friendlies, but you never know…"

"Harry!" Familiar voice… "It's alright, Harry. We got your message. My god, you look like hell." She slowly came into focus. Harry realized he was fading fast. Internal bleeding likely. That blood boiling curse may have done some real damage. Concussion? Probably.

Harry checked Padma's pattern. No Polyjuice or Imperious.

Harry recognized her. "Ah, thank goodness. Padma Patil, You are a sight for VERY sore eyes." He also noted Mme. Bellamy and a small army of Wizards and Witches. Including one Dominique Aris.

Mme. Bellamy approached, she gently asked, "Mr. Potter, What is the status?" Looking him over, she noted a broken wrist. Shallow breathing in line with broken ribs, heavily favoring one leg, eye glasses gone except for one arm still hanging from his ear, possible concussion. Covered in blood. He needed medical attention badly.

Harry looked her in the eye, "All the students are safe and recovered. I have nine or ten captured dark wizards and witches." Looking at their mangled forms, he added, "A few may have expired."

Continuing, "The one without hands is a lieutenant and should be interrogated ASAP. She probably has a false tooth or vial of poison or some way to kill herself, be careful. She is shielded from stunners and almost certainly has a portkey in her right pocket. Heal her, protect her from assassination, and interrogate her. I'd bet my fortune she will know more than the others combined."

Harry took a deep breath, then coughed up a bit of blood. His whole body trembled. Thankfully, the student holding him added support. This was not good. He noted Padma looking at him very concerned. "The rest are low level. Or at least, they were not as skilled at combat. Inside the house is a battleground. Pretty messy. I have no idea how many I fought thru. The wards finally came down, but I expect there are booby traps and self-destruction curses, which is why we are waiting outside. Don't go in without a very good curse breaker, I expect any evidence is protected. Seriously. This is a one of a kind opportunity. You need a master curse breaker before you step inside. Like Bill." Mme. Bellamy listened and nodded. She hadn't considered that. She mentally noted that Harry had been fighting Dark Wizards most of his life. She wanted him.

Mme. Bellamy seemed to be in a state of disbelief. "I see. And you did all this while under the influence of wards?"

"Yes, POWERFUL ones. Professionally set. Had I been prepared or had time to counter the wards… I would not look like this. Oh, here you go." Harry put his Holly wand in his teeth and handed her the paperwork. Not easy doing everything with his left hand. He had signed it just before she arrived. The contract was a bloody mess, but it was legal. He needed the immunity with all the dead bodies lying around. The details of the contract looked good enough. Taking his wand back, he realized how much he was being supported by the witch beside him.

Padma spoke up, "We should get all of you to a hospital. You should all be checked out."
"Right. So, the students are fine. They are safe. I have a few… captured… wait. We already did this – right?"

Padma was busy healing his minor wounds and scanning him for serious injuries. "Yes, Harry. You covered the status. You have a hairline fracture on your Tibia. You really should not be standing on it. You have the lingering effects of a Blood boiling curse resulting in a damaged lung. Broken ribs. Concussion. Broken wrist. Sprained ankle. Dislocated shoulder, you appear to have roughly fixed that at least… and bruises and lacerations from head to toe. The wards really messed you up too, but nothing permanent. How are you even standing?"

The student with her arm around Harry started crying softly. He had endured this to save them. She was sensitive enough to have felt the wards. She couldn't believe he had actually survived that, let alone during a full on battle. Her adrenalin was dropping and the raw fear and emotion were kicking in.

Padma was tersely holding it together. She hated seeing Harry like this. It reminded her of his fourth year. After the final task. "Let's go now. Director Bellamy, do you have a portkey Harry and the students can use?"

The older woman handed them a rope. "This will take you to the St. Genevieve Hospital."

Harry straightened up. "I want my own doctor. No offense, but I want my personal physician."

Padma tried to reason with him. "Harry, we don't have time. You are not thinking clearly…"

"Yes, I am. I want Andromeda Tonks nee Black or Draco Malfoy. Otherwise, I'll apparate straight to Hogwarts." Harry was gripping his wand dangerously. Padma's eyes widened in fear.

"Harry, you cannot apparate in your current state. And Hogwarts is MUCH too far away. Even for you! Also, the wards would block you." Padma took his hand. "I'll come with you to St. Genevieve. We'll summon your family when we get there. I won't leave you." Padma reflected on his request, Draco Malfoy? Well, according to the DoM intelligence reports, they did mend fences. They are family. Padma came to the realization that HELL, apparently, has frozen over.

Harry softened, but shook his head, "No, you have to stay on the scene. Too much opportunity for data collection. Have I briefed you yet?" His ears were ringing. It was getting louder. Deafening.

"Yes, Harry. You briefed us. Saul can cover for me. Mme. Bellamy is in charge." Padma was calming him down. Mme. Bellamy was impressed. With them both.

"She doesn't know what they're like… Saul? OK. He's good. 'Monsieur' Dark Lord almost certainly left incriminating evidence… Wait! Hermione and Ron! Are they…?" Harry looked confused.

Padma smiled. Harry, always worried about his friends. She gently said, "They're fine. Come on Harry." Padma, The six girls, and Harry held the rope. "Ladies, support Harry. Portkeys tend to throw him around." The other young ladies swarmed around him. Padma noted they seemed eager to move in close to him. Padma noted a bit of confusion when Harry named the Dark Lord. He had started referring to the mysterious French Dark Lord as 'Monsieur Dark Lord' to prevent confusion with Voldemort. Typical 'Harry Humor'.

"Wait!" Harry let go of the rope and touched his wand to one of his many wounds, extracting a little blood. "Sanguis Mundat!" His blood began to sizzle and smoke. The blood on him, that was his, did the same. Much of it was on the witch who had been helping him stand as well. "There, my
blood has been cleansed from the site. Can't be too careful…” Looking over at Padma, he asked, "And you will stay with me? Protect me if I lose consciousness? No unchecked potions or spells?"

"Yes, Harry. I won't leave you!" At that, Harry reached out and took the rope.

Mme. Bellamy said, "Sécurité!" and they were off.

To be continued…

Coming up:

Harry is treated and he treats himself.
More on how this new 'Monsieur' Dark Lord is recruiting.
Harry's relationship with Catherine is strengthened.
Harry talks to the Flamels.
Harry approaches a possible apprentice

Chapter End Notes

Réveillez-vous = French for 'Wake Up'
'Monsieur' Dark Lord = French Dark Lord. As Padma stated, it is 'Harry Humor'.

SO, a lot of combat, and it was a HUGE challenge to write. I think I re-wrote it half a dozen times. Now, if you look at it in detail, it was only maybe about three to five minutes of actual combat. The rest was Harry summoning the Elementals and Creeping thru the house. End to end, the third section lasted between fifteen and twenty minutes. That's why I had his "Come and get us" Patronus arrive in the second section. tied it all together.

The Wards were brutalizing Harry and a lesser wizard would not have survived. Resisting them really cut into his abilities. Imagine having to fight for your life while having your teeth drilled without novocain. I hope I wrote it well enough to convey that Harry really struggled, but still managed to take out a great many opponents. He had a close call with the best of the Wizards and Witches in the house, but it was the wards and his injuries that really wore him down.

Note that the entire event happened at midnight. Most of the wizards and witches in the house Harry portkeyed to were likely asleep or at least in bed. This bought him a little time. The eight that set up the initial ambush were well trained. As were the six that tried to cut off his escape (two dropped immediately due to the cold zone).

The others? Not so well trained. Yet. I alternated calling them 'late comers', 'rank and file', 'cannon fodder', and 'red shirts'. Basically, there are the basic followers and new recruits. Think 'snatchers' and 'sympathizers'. Not used to all out combat, like the others seemed to be. I do love the star trek reference! Any time you hang out with William Shatner, make sure you are not wearing red…

So, who are the Lavoisier family and why were so many Dark Wizards and Witches in their house? Who was the 'Lucius Junior' and how did he know Harry? What will be turned up in the house once properly searched? And most importantly, will Gabrielle ever get her dream date?
Special thanks to everyone who gave detailed reviews. Special call out to KrisB-71854 whose detailed analysis and feedback has helped me consider and define the story from a different perspective.

Constructive feedback is appreciated. Especially around writing combat. I SINCERELY hope I did the scene justice. It was VERY challenging and I have a lot to learn.

New Spells, Many from Earthdawn:
- **Sanguis Mundat** = 'Blood Cleanse'
- **Spiritus Ærmis** = 'Spirit Armor' aka 'Soul Armor'
- **Æut Tenebræ** = 'Ethereal Darkness'
- **Hastam Tonitrúa** = 'Thunder Spear'
- **Hastam Æstræ** = 'Astral Spear'
- **Unctæ Devourare Æstræ** = Astral Maw, Astral Devourer
- **Aspera Caliditas** = 'Drastic Temperature'
- **Ferrum Uitta** = 'Ribbon Blade'
- **Umbræ Petulæns** = 'Shadow Tether'
- **Vide Bellator** = 'Phantom Warrior'
- **Dolor** = 'Pain'
- **Ignis Pila** = 'Fireball'
- **Sagitta** = 'Piercing Curse' (Arrow)
- **Sægittæ** = 'Astral Dart' aka 'Spirit Dart'
- **Fulgur Uitta** = 'Lightning Ribbon'
- **Expulso** = 'Blasting Curse'. Force spell without flame and heat.

End Notes

Authors Notes

Getting closer to Paris, and it looks like there will be a little moonlighting once there. I hope you readers like the term 'Scout and Scythe'. Seemed better than hunt and kill.

This chapter and some of the next will have Harry adjusting to being recently single without a lot of down time to process it. For the short term, he will stay single. Long term, we will see.

Next chapter, Harry loses his temper and goes full on Master of Death. Ginny makes an appearance before Harry goes to France.

The action starts soon, just a little more relationship wrap up work to do…

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