Summary

Harriet Potter has made it through her first year at Hogwarts. After a summer of no contact from her friends Harriet receives a cryptic warning about terrible things to happen at her school. She then learns that a war has broken out in America and that refugees are coming to Hogwarts. Did the warning have to do with the new students, or is something even more sinister afoot?
“While all war is tragic, the loss of life is always more brutal when a nation finds its only resort is to start killing its own. And no matter which side wins, the whole of the people and their culture will always lose.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Blasted thing,” the farmer muttered as the tractor spluttered to a stop. He needed a new one, he knew, but this had been his father’s tractor, and this was his father's land. He just couldn’t get rid of it that easily. He looked at his barn, a whole mile away across his field. He grumbled and swung his leg off the seat, hopping down to the ground. At least it was only six in the morning, barely sunrise, and he was just a mile away instead of at the far end of his farm a whole five miles away.

He grunted as he put his hands on the small of his back, bent backwards wincing at the rolling wave of crackles that ran up his spine.

“Oof, gettin’ too old fer this,” he muttered, though he still chuckled at himself. He was only forty-nine, not all that old really, but he had been farming his whole life, and it was taking its toll. Though as he looked around at his land, he had to admit there was nothing else he would be doing instead.

He finally started to walk towards his barn, taking care to step over the rows of green that were beginning to pop from the ground as he went. He yawned as he started getting closer to the barn. After he did, he gave a sideways glare to the south. He'd been kept up all night by the sound of explosions coming from the US side of the border. It was the Fourth of July yesterday, the American celebration of their independence. He’d expected the fireworks, but something had been different about this year. The explosions and the flashes of light had started around two in the afternoon, and continued for the next twelve hours.

“Crazy Yanks,” he muttered again.

Thinking back on his school history, it wasn’t even a unique Fourth of July for them to be celebrating. Would it only be their two hundred sixteenth birthday? There was nothing spectacular about that number was there? Nothing significant enough to warrant twelve whole hours of fireworks, anyway. Then he thought perhaps it was something unique to the three or four little towns over there. Maybe it was a significant anniversary year for one of them, so they’d gone a little overboard?

As he neared the barn, something odd made him stop. It was his youngest son running headlong towards him looking frantic.

“Dad! Dad!” he could hear his son calling as he ran.

“What is it, son?” he called back.

He started jogging forward towards his son closing the gap rapidly. His son didn’t answer until he finally reached him, pausing to pant heavily with his hands on his knees.
“Well, what’s the matter?” the farmer asked.

His son was only sixteen and ran track and field for his school. He must have been running as hard as he could to be this winded after just a quarter mile.

“Th-there’s... in the barn, people,” his son finally managed to splutter.

“People?” the farmer asked. “How many? What kind of people?”

“I-I don’t know!” his son spluttered. “There’s a whole bunch of them, the whole barn’s full!”

The farmer looked to the barn, then his house, which was almost the same distance away. The whole barn was full? His son had to be exaggerating. He could fit up to one-hundred people in his barn comfortably, he knew. There had been that many in there before when he and all his neighbours had celebrated the finishing of building it two summers ago. But from the look on his son’s face, he knew that there had to be at least someone in there.

“Son, go get the shotgun and bring it out to me quick but quiet-like, you got me?”

“Okay, Dad.”

The farmer watched his son run off to the house then looked back at the barn. He thought he had a good idea of what was going on. It was probably partying American kids who’d got stuck on this side of the border and were waiting for nightfall to sneak back into the States. Kids often came here to celebrate because the drinking age on this side of the border was lower than in the States. He’d just show up with a shotgun and order them all out, plain and simple.

His son came back out a few minutes later with the shotgun. He took it in his arms, checked it was loaded, and started creeping towards the barn.

Now that it came time for it, he was starting to feel nervous. Darker thoughts were beginning to run through his head now. What if it was drug smugglers? He stopped and looked back at his son.

“Run back inside and call the constable just to be safe.”

His son nodded and started running back towards the house. He took a deep breath and started creeping towards the barn.

Now that it came time for it, he was starting to feel nervous. Darker thoughts were beginning to run through his head now. What if it was drug smugglers? He stopped and looked back at his son.

“Who’s in there?” he finally called. “I warn yeh, I’m armed. Come out nice and slow.”

“Who’s out there? Is... is this... is this Canada? Are we out of the US? Did we make it? Are we safe?”

The farmer jumped at the sound of the voice. It was another man’s voice, middle-aged sounding. He was caught off-guard about the by the palpable fear in it. Whoever was hiding in his barn was terrified, but he didn’t think it was from him.

“Yes, yes this is Canada, now come out nice and—”

He didn’t get the chance to finish. His barn door was flung open and before he knew what was happening someone was hugging him in a tight embrace. As he looked into the barn through the now open door, his eyes went even wider. His son had been right; there were a lot of people in their barn. There had to be nearly two hundred people crammed inside.
The man who was hugging him finally let go, but immediately collapsed back onto the ground and started laughing hysterically. His expression was one of pure, unbridled joy and relief.

“We made it! We’re safe! We made it! Everyone, we’re free!” the man shouted back to the rest.

There were cheers from the rest of the group and the next moment the entire crowd was hugging him. They were varied in age, from the very young to the very old, but for the most part, they seemed younger, mostly women and children. In fact, the only males he could see were the man who had first hugged him, a boy who looked all of thirteen, another young boy who seemed to be about eleven that the farmer had at initially taken for a girl, and two infants.

“Whe-where did you all come from?” he asked incredulously.

No one responded right away, they all seemed too happy to be out of the US to have even heard him.

“We’re from the three towns just across the border; some of us are from St James, some of us from Rollen and some from Belview. They attacked us; they came without warning,” a woman finally said in answer to his question.

She seemed the most composed, though she was still very tightly hugging a young girl who didn’t look any older than twelve. As he took them all in, he noted how many of them had burns and black marks on their skin, and more than a couple had what looked like dried blood on their very ragged looking clothes.

“Wh-who did?”

“The secessionists...” another woman said. There was widespread muttering of agreement around the room.

“Secessionists...? I don’t under—”

“Of course you don’t,” muttered the man. “You’re a Muggle... this is a wizarding fight...”

“W-wizard?”

“Sorry, I know this is all new to you, but we need to speak to an authority figure... I’m sorry I was so unseemly earlier when you came to the door, but,” he waved a hand vaguely at the rest of the group, “if you could only have seen the brutality we encountered you would understand my fear. My name is Arnold Hoffman. I’m the wizarding mayor of Rollen, and what you see here is... well... all that’s left.”

“L-left?” the farmer spluttered.

“Yes, all that’s left of our three towns,” said the first woman who had spoken. The man nodded to her and walked over, holding her hand and the hand of the young girl she was hugging tightly. The farmer guessed the two were the man’s wife and daughter.

“You mean everyone else is—”

“Dead,” muttered another woman, rocking a baby in her arms, “or captured... they rounded up all the men in the town they could get their hands on.”

“Even the boys...” moaned another woman. “My boy, they took my boy!” she wailed and dissolved into sobs on another woman’s shoulder.
“Shhhh, it’s okay Emily, I’m sure he’s fin—”

“HE’S ONLY EIGHT!” the woman screamed, “What good to them is he?!”

The woman collapsed to the ground. The others around her lifted her up and tried to comfort her further. The farmer’s eyes drifted to the man, Hoffman, the two boys in their early teens and the two infants.

“Then... how did you all escape?”

Hoffman sighed. “It was the hardest choice...” he started to say.

As he did, the farmer couldn’t help but notice he was starting to get his wits back about him and seemed a bit more leader-like.

“I had the choice... keep fighting and be captured or killed or...” he looked over his shoulder at the rest of the group, “or do my best to make sure some of us escaped to be able to tell what happened.”

The farmer blinked in astonishment. Hoffman looked back up at the farmer and sighed.

“I know, it’s easy to judge from where you’re standing. But put yourself in my shoes. Could you say you would have stayed?”

The farmer pondered these words and found he didn’t have an answer. “But, why attack you like this? Why try and kill everyone?” The farmer asked.

“We were the one area that held out. They wanted to silence us,” said the woman, who the farmer took to be the mayor’s wife. “They wanted to kill or take all of us... they didn’t want the story to get out.”

“Our towns refused to join the secessionists. We refused to force some of our citizens to be second class, or worse,” said the mayor.

The farmer shook his head. This was all too much, he had no idea what was going on, but this was just becoming too much. All he knew, as he looked at these people, was they had all been through hell.

There was a soft popping noise behind him, and he turned. It was Constable Kirkwood, the local Mounted Police constable standing behind him in the doorway, wearing a grey Mounted Police uniform. His face was stricken as he looked around at the people in the barn.

“Oh Constable, you got here fast, er, these people here—”

But before he could say another word, Constable Kirkwood stuck his hand in his pocket and drew out what looked like a long, straight stick. He pointed it right in the farmer’s face and shouted: “Obliviate!”

* * * *

With heavy hands, Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic of Britain, set down the report. It was too much to bear to read it all. Over three thousand people were dead or missing, both wizards and Muggles. Three thousand four hundred eighty-eight men, women and children. So much hatred, so much destruction. Three whole towns wiped off the face of the map. It was with a certain bitterness that he forced down the small bit of relief sneaking into the back of his thoughts at how glad he was
it had not happened here in Britain.

He tried to imagine it. Three whole towns turned to cinders and rubble; an entire wizarding army descending on them and levelling their homes. It was simply unconscionable.

“My god...” he muttered to himself as he rubbed his temples. “Not even You-Know-Who nor Black could have wrought such destruction!”

A civil war had just broken out in America. States all across the country had decided to break away from the standing Wizarding government there. From what Fudge understood, there was a distinct parallel between this current civil war of the Wizarding World in the United States, and a massive Muggle civil war in that same country a little over a hundred years ago.

Apparently, the newest president and his party had managed to push through legislation that gave equal rights and citizenship to the magical aboriginal population, something they’d been denied since the wizarding government in the States had been formed. While most in the magical world, including Fudge and much of the International Confederation of Wizards, had been very supportive of this law, it became evident very quickly that the place this law was least popular was in the States themselves.

According to the report, in one of the states that had seceded in response to the law, a few cities had held out where support was still active for the Wizarding government. Most of the population had capitulated, yet this little cluster of towns held out. When they finally ignored all orders to surrender, the secessionists attacked. In twelve hours, the secessionists had managed to level the towns utterly. Some were already calling it genocide. It was apparent the attacking forces had tried to kill or imprison everyone.

The report also stated that the severity of the attack was most likely to keep the story from getting out. Fortunately, the only way the alarm had been raised was when the mayor of one of the towns had managed to escape with a small group of survivors into nearby Canada, which was fortunately only five miles away. A Canadian Ministry wizard working undercover in a Muggle law-enforcement entity called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was the first on the scene. He gathered the information about what had happened. The information had been relayed to the Canadian Ministry immediately, who sent out a warning to other major wizarding governments at once.

Fudge jumped as both the clock on the wall chimed, and his little messenger portrait cleared his throat. “Minister, Albus Dumbledore and one guest shall be arriving in five minutes time. They wish to discuss the events in America with you.”

Fudge looked at the portrait. He had only just received word of the attack himself. How did Dumbledore already know? Who was this guest he was bringing?

“Eh, who is the guest?” Fudge asked warily.

“Aurora Sinistra, the Professor of Astronomy at Hogwarts,” said the little man in the portrait.

Fudge felt a small feeling of resentment well up inside him. This was just like Dumbledore to barge in here uninvited just expecting to be seen. And, why, in the name of Merlin, was he bringing the astronomy professor?

Fudge heaved a sigh and nodded. “Very well, I shall receive them.”

He flicked his wand, arranging three chairs in front of his fireplace and striding over to the crackling flames. He stared at them blankly as he tried to process all that had happened that evening.
Three towns had been destroyed, and only eight hours after its happening Dumbledore was calling a meeting with him. Surely if Dumbledore had information concerning the attack, he should be going to the International Confederation of Wizards, not the Minister himself. Dumbledore was the Supreme Mugwump after all.

There was a knock at the door behind him, and Fudge turned around. “Come in,” Fudge said in his bravest attempt at a casual tone.

Dumbledore entered. His glasses flashed white opaque from the lamplight as his eyes found Fudge. “Ah, good evening, Cornelius,” said Dumbledore in maddeningly familiar terms.

I’m the Minister of Magic, Fudge thought bitterly, the least you can do is address me as such.

“Good evening, Albus, what brings you here on such a tragic day?”

Dumbledore quietly sighed and stepped aside. A woman Fudge had never seen before strode in behind him in black robes. Fudge was caught off-guard by the woman’s stark beauty, but not nearly as much as the apparent sadness emanating from her.

“This, Cornelius, is Professor Aurora Sinistra, one of our newest members of staff.”

Fudge nodded and bowed to her and extended a hand. “Good evening to you too young lady, what can I do for you?”

The young woman took his hand and shook, but still looked as if an entire world of misery weighed upon her shoulders. Finally, she spoke, and Fudge found himself slightly taken aback. She was American by her accent, and her voice cracked a little as if she was holding back tears. “Thank you, Minister, as... as Professor Dumbledore said, I’m Professor Sinistra, and I... I’m from the state where this... this... where it happened...” She trailed off again, apparently unable to finish the sentence, and Fudge nodded understandingly.

“Oh, my dear lady, I’m so sorry about what happened...” he said in a quiet voice, trying to sound understanding. “I shall promise whatever support the Ministry can give,” He went on, though even he felt the hollowness of his words. This was taking him right back to his days working as Junior Minister of the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, having to manufacture his empathy for people he’d never met.

“As it so happens, Cornelius, we do have a request we would like to make for some support,” Dumbledore said quietly.

Fudge looked at him curiously before guiding the young teacher to the most comfortable of the three chairs and gesturing for Dumbledore to take a seat of his choosing before sitting himself.

“Well, anything the Ministry can provide in these troubled times we will do our best to do so. Now, what is your request, my dear lady?” Fudge asked.

Professor Sinistra looked up at him and took a deep breath. “Minister... sir... There was a magical school in the area of those towns,” she choked a little trying to force the words out. “Many of the students who went there are now homeless or...” she trailed off again, apparently unable to finish the sentence, and Fudge nodded understandingly.

The young woman looked at Dumbledore, who nodded and leaned forward, his piercing blue eyes fixed on Fudge’s. “Upon hearing of the attack, Professor Sinistra came to me at once. As you are aware Cornelius, Hogwarts is a very large school, even with our large wizarding population,” Dumbledore said solemnly, and Fudge raised an eyebrow.
“Are, are you suggesting we take on these students here Dumbledore? At Hogwarts? How many students are we talking about?” Fudge asked in shock.

Aurora merely shook her head. “Fifty-four. That’s all that’s left of the students in that school... The rest were captured by the secessionists or... or...” The young witch said, and Fudge saw her lower lip tremble slightly as she was unable to finish the sentence.

The words seemed to wash over Fudge as nothing else had. Out of a population of nearly four thousand people, only fifty-four of the magical children were still alive? He fell back in his chair and stared at the fire in thought.

“These children are guilty of no crime, Cornelius. They are mere bystanders in an unprecedented act of hatred and violence. We cannot turn them away in such a time of need like this. We need to bring them to Hogwart’s. Here they will be safe, and whole and their magical educations can continue unhindered,” Dumbledore went on, his voice still solemn, but with a certain element of command to it.

Fudge fought off a grimace. On the one hand, he was growing to resent this sort of behaviour from Dumbledore; on the other hand, Dumbledore was right.

There was no way he could turn away these children now, although, “Is there no wizarding school there in America that could take them? Or Canada?” He asked trying to keep the edge of a plea out of his voice.

Necessary or not, it would cause many issues in logistics getting them here, and, humanitarian mission or not, Fudge couldn’t help but feel bringing fifty new students into Hogwart’s from outside the country would not be an overly popular situation with the some in British Wizarding society. Some would say Fudge was playing with fire and risking pulling Britain into the war.

“There are no battle lines in this war going on there Cornelius, as you are fully aware. Everywhere is the front line. Nowhere in the States is safe for these students anymore. Professor Sinistra and I have been constantly updated on the situation since the details of the attack became known. There are still numerous entities that wish to harm these children. They cannot remain there while this war is going on. They are currently in asylum in Canada. We cannot stand by and do nothing about this Cornelius,” Dumbledore said with a noticeable edge to his voice.

He had not shouted, but Fudge felt a chill run down his back that made it feel more like Dumbledore had stood and raged at him. “I... well... yes, you are right of course. We shall begin making arrangements at once, my dear,” Fudge said.

He returned his attention to the young woman sitting between them. Aurora’s face registered shock at Dumbledore’s display of indignation at Fudge’s hesitancy, and she turned disappointed eyes on Fudge.

Against his will, Fudge felt the slightest flicker of shame.

“Many of the arrangements have already been made, Cornelius. With but a word the students and what’s left of their families will be on their way here immediately. Time is of the essence here, Cornelius. We cannot hesitate or risk losing more innocent lives.”

“A-arrangements? Already? But how, Dumbledore? The attack only ended eight hours ago!”

“Professor Howe, Headmaster of Rathlin, has been keeping a close eye on the situation. I will remind you that I have attempted on several occasions to warn you of this possibility. Professor
Howe has numerous students who come from the United States, and had long ago set up a network to get the families of students out of the US and into Ireland should something like this happen. We can easily use this very same network to bring these children to Hogwarts. They can remain at Hogwarts for the remainder of the summer, where we will be delighted to have them.”

Fudge stared at Dumbledore incredulously. He hadn’t known Dumbledore to be this pressing on an issue since the last time You-Know-Who was powerful. Fudge kept staring back at Dumbledore, then nodded. “Very well Dumbledore, send word. I shall have a task force of Aurors ready to receive them.”

Professor Sinistra fitted Fudge with glowing, watery eyes and began crying in earnest. “Oh thank you, Minister, oh thank you so much!” She exclaimed taking his hand in heartfelt gratitude.

Fudge found himself somehow feeling a little lighter in his chair as she held his hand so sincerely.

Dumbledore smiled softly and put his hand on the young woman’s shoulder. “Aurora, dear, please go and send Fawkes to them. He is waiting for you just outside,” Dumbledore said, and she nodded, rising walking swiftly to the door, though pausing in the doorway to thank Fudge once more before departing.

Fudge turned his gaze back to Dumbledore, who once more had a severe look on his face. “I want to thank you, Cornelius. This is the right decision. It will have its opponents, but you cannot but win in this situation. You are showing great mercy to those who are in desperate need.”

Fudge blinked slightly looking at the older wizard. Dumbledore had never thanked Fudge for anything before, and to hear those humble words from Dumbledore’s lips was shocking. He nodded. “Of course, Dumbledore, what else could I do?” Fudge said still a little taken aback. “No one with a heart could turn away those children... it was simply shocking at first... this has been a lot to process in a very short amount of time.”

“Yet when the time came to make a decision, you picked the correct one. People will not forget this; whatever may happen in the future.”

Fudge furrowed his brow a little at those words. What had Dumbledore meant by that? However, he was distracted from asking when Professor Sinistra re-entered the room and Dumbledore and Fudge both quickly got to their feet.

The woman’s eyes were still full of tears, but she looked much happier now, and hopeful. The sight filled Fudge with such a feeling of self-satisfaction he had to give his head a little shake to bring himself back to the present.

“Fawkes is on his way, Headmaster,” Professor Sinistra said beaming around at them. Dumbledore bowed deeply to her and Fudge bowed as well before he turned to Albus.

“Keep me constantly updated on the progress of getting them here, Dumbledore,” Fudge said in a rather serious tone, trying to sound more commanding.

Dumbledore nodded, “They will be here as rapidly as we can manage, Cornelius. And now, I must escort Miss Sinistra back to school where she must get some much-needed rest, and I must prepare Hogwarts for a wash of bright new faces being offered a second chance at peace and happiness.”

Fudge walked Dumbledore to the door bowing him out and shaking Aurora’s hand again before the pair departed. Fudge sat back in his chair, looking at the report again and sighing. Things had been so quiet for so long, and now this. He groaned as he called out, “Dolores?”
Dolores Umbridge, his squat, very pink, senior under-secretary entered, carrying her ever-present clipboard and smiled in a simpering way.

“Yes, Minister?” she asked in her sweet, girlish voice.

“I need you to take down some letters, but first please send for Rufus, and two Aurors of his choosing, though I highly suggest Kingsley Shacklebolt to be at least one. I have a mission for them.”

“Very well, Minister,” Dolores said, scribbling the notes down rapidly on her clipboard.

“Oh, and send for Amelia and Barty as well. I’d call for Albus I suppose, but he already knows,” Fudge was hard put not to add a slightly bitter laugh to that final statement.

“At once, Minister,” Dolores said scribbling more. “Anything else?”

“No, that is it for now. Tell them all I want them here as soon as possible. There’s very little time to delay. I shall have to pay a visit to the Minister of Muggles as well to inform him of this crisis.”

Dolores nodded and shuffled from the room rapidly. Fudge sat back in his chair and found himself smiling. Dumbledore was right. This was the right thing to do.

Chapter End Notes

Concept idea by night-miner(dA): and littlebityamelie(dA):

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A Strange Summer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Family is a hell of a thing!”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Right, now before tomorrow night there’s a few things I need to get straight with you, girl.”

Harriet Potter set down her fork and sighed. She knew what was coming, because her uncle, Vernon Dursley, had talked about nothing else for an entire week. He was going to talk to her about the stupid dinner party they were having tomorrow night.

Uncle Vernon had invited over a wealthy builder and his wife, and he was hoping he would be able to convince the builder to take out a large order of drills from his company, Grunnings.

Harriet didn’t know why Uncle Vernon thought he had to reiterate the plan. She had known since the first day Uncle Vernon announced the party that she was going to be spending the whole time in her room sitting quietly and pretending she didn’t exist.

“Don’t you give me that look, girl, there’s been an important change we need to discuss.”

Harriet blinked and looked up at Uncle Vernon. “What’s that?” she asked. Her curiosity overwhelmed her disgruntled feelings.

“Unfortunately, it turns out that Mrs Mason has a soft spot for girls,” Uncle Vernon growled. He sounded resentful he even had to say such a horrid thing.

Harriet felt her eyes go wide. Was Uncle Vernon about to say what she thought he was going to say?

“For girls?” Aunt Petunia asked. She clearly thought this was the most unbelievable thing she had ever heard as she put a hand on Dudley’s shoulder.

Harriet raised her eyebrows. What was so ridiculous about that? Wasn’t Aunt Petunia herself a girl?

“This morning, Mr Mason let it slip on the phone when I was telling them about Dudley that he and Mrs Mason always wanted a daughter…” Uncle Vernon explained though he trailed off as if preparing himself to say something he found deeply unpleasant before he turned and glared at Harriet as though it was she who had put such thoughts in the Masons’ heads. “So, instead of staying in your room, unfortunately, you’re going to have to attend.”

Aunt Petunia gasped. “Vernon! Do, do you think that’s wise? How are you going to explain her to the Masons if you’ve never mentioned her before?”

“We’ll just have to say she’s a distant relative who’s staying with us for the summer, that’s all,” Uncle Vernon explained. “I’m not taking any chances in losing this deal. If having the girl there—even to just sit silently and not say a single word unless asked a question directly by Mister or Mrs Mason—will help make the sale, then it’s what must be done. I’ve already expressed an interest to the realtor about that holiday home in Majorca,” Uncle Vernon growled still glaring at Harriet.
Harriet scowled a little to herself. She knew she should be used to such remarks from her Aunt and Uncle, but that didn’t stop them stinging. They always talked about her like she wasn’t in the room even when she was, never wanted to call her by name, or assumed she was going to do something horrible at every turn. Harriet did know how to behave herself in public, whatever the Dursleys said.

Not that any of the truths about Harriet had ever mattered to the Dursleys. Well, one truth did, and unfortunately, it was the one truth that dictated everything the Dursleys did regarding Harriet. That one truth was that Harriet Potter was not an ordinary girl.

Harriet Potter was a witch.

Not the nasty, green, and warty kind that cooked little children for supper. But Harriet could do magic (quite well for her age she thought) and she could fly a broomstick. In fact, she was one of the best in her school at flying a broomstick and had even made her house Quidditch team in only her first year. She was the youngest student to do so in a century. What’s more, she played Seeker which was arguably the most difficult and important position on any Quidditch team. She also got decent grades from all of her professors, including Professor Snape who seemed resolute in pretending that Harriet did not exist even though he had saved her life during her first Quidditch match the previous fall.

Such things were perfectly normal at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It was the finest school of magic in the world according to most people and was run by the greatest wizard of the age, Albus Dumbledore. Harriet had met Professor Dumbledore three times during her first year at Hogwarts. Every time he managed to give Harriet excellent advice, and he had even saved Harriet’s life when she had once again come face to face with the most feared Dark Wizard of all time, Lord Voldemort.

The first time Harriet had “met” Lord Voldemort she was only a year old. Voldemort had apparently come to kill her, and her parents had died while trying to stop him. In doing so, Harriet’s mother had put a magical protection on Harriet so powerful that when Voldemort finally turned his wand on Harriet, instead of killing her, the curse had rebounded upon Voldemort, stripping him of his powers and even his own body.

Harriet still didn’t know why Voldemort had tried to kill her when she was only a baby. Professor Dumbledore had refused to tell her when she asked him after the second encounter. He had said he would tell her when she was older, however, and Harriet would just have to wait.

After his first attempt on her life, Voldemort had fled into hiding until last year when he had successfully infiltrated Hogwarts by sharing a body with Professor Quirrell. He was trying to use Quirrell to steal a powerful magical object called the Philosopher’s Stone that gave long life. Voldemort had hoped to use the Stone to return to his body and power. He’d very nearly succeeded until Harriet, with help from her best-friends got to him and Quirrell in time. Harriet had almost died again in the attempt, but her mother’s protection had lingered, and Voldemort had once again been forced to flee into hiding, killing Quirrell in the process.

Most people would have found such feats to be something to admire greatly. Unfortunately, the Dursleys, who were not magical at all, thought that having Harriet in the family was a matter of the deepest shame. It was for that reason that the Dursleys had spent the entirety of Harriet’s life trying to make her as miserable as possible, thinking it would “squash the magic out of her.” To their dismay they had utterly failed, and not only had Harriet kept her magic; she was now a whole year closer to being a fully qualified witch.

Not that it did much good for Harriet here on Privet Drive. As an under-aged witch, Harriet wasn’t allowed to do magic outside of Hogwarts. This was a fact she had conveniently neglected to mention.
to the Dursleys. She knew they feared she would turn them all into toads or worse if they were too mean to her now.

Her usual target was Dudley, who in his last encounter with a wizard had come away with a pig’s tail that the Dursleys had to pay a private doctor to remove. Harriet had lots of fun tormenting Dudley by muttering nonsense words and pretending they were magical spells. Harriet would laugh as she watched Dudley waddle away in terror, although the trouble she got in with Aunt Petunia or Uncle Vernon after blunted much of the fun.

Unfortunately, Uncle Vernon at least seemed to not have the same fear of Harriet and her “abnormality,” as the Dursleys called it. Immediately upon returning from picking Harriet up at King’s Cross Station for the summer, Uncle Vernon had locked Harriet’s owl, Hedwig, in her cage. While Uncle Vernon had done so to prevent Harriet from sending letters to any of her friends, it also had the effect of making Harriet even more miserable seeing Hedwig locked up all the time. Harriet worked hard to make sure the Dursleys didn’t know that, as she didn’t want to give them any more incentive to be meaner to Hedwig than they already were.

Uncle Vernon had also locked Harriet’s school trunk with all of her school books, as well as her Nimbus 2000 racing broom, in the cupboard under the stairs that had once been her bedroom. In short, any real connection Harriet had to the wizarding world was locked away. More than a few times Harriet had contemplated trying to free both her trunk and Hedwig’s cage with magic. However, Harriet couldn’t willingly do magic without her wand, which was also locked in her trunk. And again as she couldn’t do magic outside of school, freeing her school stuff with magic just to get in trouble was silly.

However, this new possibility of attending the party to win points for the Dursleys with the Masons was a much-unexpected opportunity. Maybe, just maybe, if she played her part well enough, she would be allowed to let her owl, Hedwig, out of her cage, even if it was just to stretch her wings. Or perhaps she could get into her trunk again to get her school books and do the homework she had been desperately wanting to get done to keep from falling behind in her grades when she returned to Hogwarts in the fall.

There were only two things Harriet had to remind her that the last year had happened, that she was, in fact, a witch and she had gone to Hogwarts. The first was Hedwig, who was a good sign since Harriet didn’t know anyone else who had a pet owl. The other was two books that Harriet only had because she had been lucky enough to have them in her jacket pockets when she returned to Privet Drive: The Bungalow Mystery, and The Mystery at Lilac Inn, the third and fourth in the series of Nancy Drew books.

One of her best-friends had given Harriet the books at Hogwarts, Hermione Granger. Hermione had given Harriet the books as a get-well present while Harriet had been in the hospital wing just before the end of term following her encounter with Lord Voldemort. Hermione had in fact given a whole long series of the books, but the rest were locked away in her trunk with everything else. Harriet still felt a little bit of pride whenever she looked at them, as Hermione had told Harriet that she reminded Hermione a lot of the main character. Harriet didn’t feel it herself, but she was certainly flattered.

Harriet’s biggest hope was getting to let Hedwig out. Not just for Hedwig’s sake, but for Harriet’s. She was dying to send her friends letters. However, Harriet knew that the very first messages she would send would be asking all of her friends why they had not sent her any letters this summer, either. Maybe Harriet couldn’t send letters, but she could certainly receive them.

And yet, she hadn’t received word from any of them all summer long. She supposed some of them might have just been busy, maybe taking vacations with their own families, and she knew Hermione
at least didn’t have an owl. Hermione did have Harriet’s address though, so she could have sent a non-magical letter if she’d wanted. And Ronnie had promised to invite Harriet to stay with her and her family that summer, and the summer was already half over.

However, Harriet had a good feeling about tomorrow night. It was her birthday tomorrow; her friends couldn’t ignore that. Could they?

“So, tomorrow,” Uncle Vernon continued snapping Harriet out of her thoughts, “we’re going into town. You and Petunia will find a passable outfit for you to wear to a dinner party—which will be returned the moment the party is over so don’t you dare spill anything on it—while Dudley and I will pick up our dinner jackets. Is that understood?”

Harriet nodded, not wanting to say anything that might jeopardise her chances of getting in the Dursleys’ good graces. Not only was she going to get to attend the dinner, but now the Dursleys were going to buy her new clothes. Maybe she wouldn’t get to keep them, but they had never bought her brand new clothes before.

The only new clothes Harriet had ever worn in her life had been her Hogwarts uniforms. On top of that, she might finally get to send a letter or get access to her school books. And finally, just maybe, for her birthday she might get some word from her friends. With all of this in mind, Harriet was quite sure that tonight she was going to fall asleep with a smile on her face for the first time all summer.

* * * *

It was five minutes before the Masons’ arrival. Harriet couldn’t believe her luck. She was waiting to meet the Masons wearing her brand new outfit that Aunt Petunia had even let Harriet pick out herself. It was a white cardigan with a grey camisole style top underneath, a grey pleated skirt, and white knee-high socks with white Mary-Jane style heels. She’d picked it because she thought it looked fashionable enough for the party without revealing the other reason she had liked it, which was how much it reminded her of her uniform from Hogwarts.

Aunt Petunia had even taken Harriet to get her hair done. The stylist had given her hair a lovely trim cutting it down to shoulder length and then giving it some layers before giving her two mini ponytails on the sides of her head. Aunt Petunia had then bought her a matching scarf to use as a hair-band to “cover that horrible scar.”

As she’d looked at herself in the mirror afterwards, even though she knew every bit of it had been done to impress the Masons, Harriet couldn’t help but feel like a princess. Brand new clothes and her hair done by a real stylist, Harriet felt better than she had felt the entire summer. It was the closest thing to an actual birthday present the Dursleys had ever given her.

Right on time, there came the sound of a car pulling into the drive. The Dursleys all took their proscribed places dictated by Uncle Vernon. They had rehearsed the meal over and over again that day after they had returned from their shopping. Uncle Vernon and Dudley would greet the Masons at the door when they arrived. Harriet and Aunt Petunia meanwhile would be waiting in the lounge. Harriet was still under express orders not to say anything to the Masons unless they spoke to her first.

At eight-fifteen they would start dinner. Harriet was to sit next to Mrs Mason during the meal and not say anything unless spoken to first. After dinner was over, Harriet and Dudley were to retire to their rooms while Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon took the Masons back to the lounge for coffee and to finally bring up the subject of drills.
The doorbell rang, and Dudley opened the door.

“May I take your coats, Mr and Mrs Mason?” Harriet heard Dudley ask.

“It’s a pleasure to have you in our home,” Uncle Vernon said boisterously. “I trust traffic was fine on the way?”

“Oh quite fine, thank you, Vernon,” said another man who could only be Mr Mason.

“Oh yes, Vernon. My goodness, you have a fabulous home. So tidy! Now, where is this niece of yours? I’ve been dying to meet her ever since you told James about her yesterday.”

“Oh, yes,” Uncle Vernon said, and even in the lounge, Harriet could hear Uncle Vernon straining to hide his disapproval at anyone being excited to see Harriet for any reason. “She’s in the lounge with Petunia, right this way.”

Uncle Vernon, Dudley and the Masons entered the lounge. The Masons seemed like the kind of people the Dursleys would like. They looked older, late middle-age, and wore very tidy, neat clothing.

Harriet did her best to put on her most winning smile as their guests walked in. However, upon seeing Harriet, Mrs Mason let out a gasp and swiftly walked over to her. Harriet was so surprised she froze as Mrs Mason squeezed both of Harriet’s cheeks.

“Oh goodness, aren’t you just precious!? Such beautiful green eyes and what a sweet smile!” Mrs Mason declared. Harriet managed to catch the Dursleys’ utterly bemused expressions and somehow felt herself become even more emboldened.

“Oh, why thank you so much, Mrs Mason,” Harriet said doing her best to sound as sweet and innocent as possible, “it’s ever so nice to meet you both, Uncle Vernon has told us all about you both, too.”

Harriet turned to Mr Mason, “So your name is James, Mr Mason? So was my father’s,” she said.

Mrs Mason put a hand on her heart with a simpering smile, and Mr Mason chuckled. “Oh is that so, dear? Well, what a small world it is,” Mr Mason said shaking her hand.

The Dursleys were now looking livid behind the Masons’ backs but quickly switched their expressions back to jovial welcome as the Masons finally turned back to face them.

“Oh, and you must be Petunia? I must say I love what you have done with your home,” Mrs Mason said and graciously shook Aunt Petunia’s hand.

Aunt Petunia laughed in an overly enthusiastic way. “Oh thank you so much, Mrs Mason, it’s nothing really,” Aunt Petunia fluttered waving a dismissive hand.

“Oh goodness, Petunia dear, we don’t need to be so formal! It’s just James and Lilith, I insist,” Mrs Mason said.

What happened next was an odd moment. The Mason had almost the same names as Harriet’s parents, and the realisation struck Harriet, Aunt Petunia, and Uncle Vernon at the very same time. Dudley, of course, looked to be utterly oblivious. Harriet was about to open her mouth to say something about it when Uncle Vernon blustered loudly over her.

“Well, let’s all have a seat, shall we?”
“Yes, indeed,” Aunt Petunia said with relief at the changing subject. “Now, Vernon tells me you’re a wonderful golfer, Mr Mason?”

The rest of the evening passed amicably enough. Much to her surprise, Harriet found she was having a reasonably good time. Mr and Mrs Mason treated her like she was just an ordinary part of the family, and a slightly malicious part of Harriet was more than pleased to see how much this was secretly upsetting the Dursleys. The more the Masons smiled, the more Harriet saw the pound signs swelling in Uncle Vernon’s eyes, and so she kept it up.

Finally, it came time for dessert. Aunt Petunia asked Harriet to bring it in, which Harriet obediently agreed to do. She had just entered the kitchen when Harriet’s whole world and hopes came crashing down at once. The pudding that Aunt Petunia had worked so hard to make that afternoon that had been sitting safely on top of the fridge was instead floating in mid-air right over the middle of the floor. Harriet just stared for a few moments trying to make sense of what she was seeing. How was it floating like that? It could only have been magic, but how? Who could be doing it?

Not wanting to waste another second in looking around for the culprit, Harriet ran for the pudding. She’d never run in heels before and nearly tripped just as she had stretched out her hands and managed to catch the rim, but it was too late. The pudding suddenly dropped straight down, and Harriet didn’t have near enough of a grip on it. The pudding hit the floor with an ear-splitting crash. Only a second later Harriet jumped again at an equally ear-splitting crack that seemed to have come from the top of the refrigerator.

Harriet finally opened her eyes, blinking. She could barely see. Her glasses, as well as her brand new clothes, were covered in the pudding. It had managed to spray over much of the kitchen as well.

The Dursleys and Mr and Mrs Mason burst into the room. Harriet turned to face them and began to splutter. “I-I-I don’t know; I just got hold of it and-and—”

Uncle Vernon looked livid. Harriet felt tears in her eyes. Everything had been going so well. Now her new clothes were ruined, and she had ruined the dinner party. The Dursleys were never going to let her let Hedwig out now.

“What the devil have you done?!” Uncle Vernon snarled.

Aunt Petunia looked horrified. “My pudding… and your clothes… brand new… all that money and work…”

“No, now, Vernon, Petunia, it’s unfortunate, but it was an accident,” Mr Mason said looking disapproving at the Dursleys’ reactions.

Mrs Mason crossed to Harriet and took a dish-rag from the sink, using it to help wipe some of the pudding from Harriet’s face. “There, there dear, these things happen,” Mrs Mason said soothingly.

Harriet nodded. She fought back sniffles and the temptation to ask the Masons if they would adopt her. Instead, in her shame, Harriet asked to stay out and clean up the kitchen herself. She didn’t want to be seen by any of them again. However, if Harriet thought her troubles that night were over, she was sorely mistaken.

No sooner had the Dursleys and the Masons sat back down in the lounge for coffee and ice-cream than an owl flew through one of the open windows and dropped a letter on Mrs Mason’s head. Mrs Mason emitted a hair-raising shriek and fled from the house. Mr Mason paused only to yell at the Dursleys about how Mrs Mason had a dreadful fear of birds, and that if that was their idea of a joke, then it had been in poor taste. Mr Mason turned to Harriet, who had come running out of the kitchen
when she heard the shriek, to tell her how regrettable it was that she had such people as relatives and stormed from the house himself, slamming the front door behind him.

Harriet watched with trembling hands as Uncle Vernon picked up the letter, tore it open, and read. Then, Uncle Vernon slowly turned on Harriet, his expression somehow torn between eternal glee and unending rage. “Read it, girl…” Uncle Vernon snarled and handed her the letter.

Harriet reached out, her hand still trembling as she took the letter and read.

_Dear Ms Potter,_

_We have received intelligence that a Hover Charm was used at your place of residence this evening at twelve minutes past nine._

_As you know, under-age wizards and witches are not permitted to perform spells outside school, and further spell-work on your part may lead to expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Under-age Sorcery, 1875, Paragraph C)._  

_We would also ask you to remember that any magical activity that risks notice by members of the non-magical community (Muggles) is a serious offence under Section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks’ Statute of Secrecy._

_Enjoy your holidays!_

_Yours sincerely,_

_Mafalda Hopkirk,_

_IMITPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE_

_Ministry of Magic_

Harriet slowly looked back up at Uncle Vernon.

“I don’t recall you mentioning that little technicality,” Uncle Vernon said his voice borderline manic. “Well we’ll see about that now, won’t we? You’ll never have to worry about forgetting things like that again, girl… because you’re never going back to that school!”

Uncle Vernon grabbed Harriet’s arm and hauled her from the kitchen. Harriet didn’t resist. She was still too overwhelmed by everything that had happened that night. Uncle Vernon pulled her up the stairs and down the hall to her bedroom, where he forced her inside.

“You’re to stay locked in here until the end of the summer. And don’t even think about trying to escape, girl, because you’ll have to use magic to do it, and if you do, you’ll be expelled anyway!”

Uncle Vernon laughed maniacally and slammed her door shut, locking it. Harriet’s whole world was reeling. In just under ten minutes she had gone from possibly getting more freedom than she had ever had at Privet Drive to being a prisoner in her room for a whole month. She was never going to be able to go back to Hogwarts now. She couldn’t write anyone to tell them about it because Hedwig was still locked in her cage.

Hedwig hooted softly as if she could somehow read Harriet’s mind and knew what she was thinking.
Harriet wiped her cheek as the tears finally started to flow. On top of everything else, her brand new outfit, the only new clothes she had ever had was ruined now too as she peeled it off and changed into her pyjamas.

It happened as Harriet turned from her wardrobe to go back to her bed. There were two little pinpricks of light right outside her window, looking just like a pair of eyes. At first, Harriet thought they were just street-lights when she realised that the street-lights weren’t green. She squinted and just about the moment she became sure that they were in fact eyes, they were gone. Harriet ran to the window and threw it open and looked around outside. There was nothing to be seen that could have been the cause. For a moment she had hoped that it had been an owl bringing her some news from her friends. But no, she was alone.

Harriet gave another little sob as she closed the window. She turned off her light and slowly climbed into bed. She curled up tightly, hugging her legs up to her chest and sobbing harder and harder. No friends, no freedom, nothing. Harriet cried facing the wall until she finally cried herself to sleep.

However, unbeknownst to Harriet, the moment her back had been turned, the green eyes had returned to her window to watch her intently. After she finally fell asleep, the window opened slowly and silently. Hedwig ruffled her feathers and gave a nervous hoot as a small, dark figure sat on the window sill and set something down on the desk beneath the window. The figure turned its large, tennis-ball sized eyes on Harriet’s sleeping form and gave a quiet but high-pitched sigh before it turned and left, closing the window behind it.

* * * *

Harriet was awoken the following morning by a loud, screeching, grinding noise. She sat bolt upright and looked to see a man on a ladder attaching bars to the outside of Harriet’s window. Harriet felt her heart sink even faster at the finality of her entrapment. However, as Harriet looked, she realised there was something else on the desk in front of her window that had not been there the night before. It was a bundled up stack of envelopes. Harriet got out of bed and crossed to the window ignoring the workman who was still installing the bars.

Harriet picked up the stack of envelopes and gasped in shock. They were letters from all of her friends. There were three to four letters each from Hagrid, Dora, Marcus, Kieran, Scott, and Hermione. There were even individual ones from Dean, Seamus, Neville, Lavender and Parvati that Harriet assumed were birthday letters. The bulk, however, twelve of them in fact, were from Ronnie. Harriet heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs and thinking fast she pulled open the drawer to her desk and stuck the letters inside, shutting it quickly.

There was the sound of a key in the lock and Uncle Vernon opened the door. “Alright girl, here’s your first bathroom break of the day. Do your business then come right back here; you got me?”

Harriet nodded and walked past him down the hall to the bathroom. She showered and combed her hair doing her best to take her time. Any time out of her room now was a great blessing.

When Harriet stepped back out into the hallway, she saw that Uncle Vernon was already halfway through installing a cat-flap on the door to her room. Harriet walked past him without a word and sat on her bed. When he finished, Uncle Vernon got up and rubbed his hands together victoriously.

“There, you’ll get your food through here,” Uncle Vernon said gesturing to the flap. Harriet didn’t respond just kept staring blankly at it.

“You’ll get two bathroom breaks a day, once in the morning and once at night. Enjoy your stay,”
Uncle Vernon taunted, gave another maniacal laugh and shut the door behind him locking it again.

The workman had finished with the window it seemed, and now Harriet was quite alone except for Hedwig. Harriet quickly crossed the room again to her desk and pulled out the stack of letters.

As Harriet looked at them, she couldn’t help but start to wonder. There was something very fishy about this. Shouldn’t the letters have been delivered individually? Why did they come all at once? Maybe one of the letters held the answer.

As quietly as she could, Harriet opened the first letter from Hagrid. She felt her smile grow more and more as she read Hagrid’s letters until she got to the final message where Hagrid became concerned that Harriet wasn’t writing him back. Dora’s were the same way, as were Marcus’, as were Hermione’s, then Scott’s, then Kieran’s, and then especially Ronnie’s. Every one of Ronnie’s letters had asked her to come and visit.

Harriet shook her head. She was now torn between two emotions, sadness at having made her friends think she’d been ignoring them all summer and curiosity at how the letters had all shown up at once. And of course, with Hedwig still locked in her cage, Harriet had absolutely no way of letting her friends know what had been happening. More sadness hit her as the rest of the realisation set in. She was never going to see them again, and it was all going to end with her friends thinking Harriet had given up on them all, after everything that had happened last year.

Harriet flopped down on her bed and curled up. There weren’t any tears this time. She was too angry now. Everything this summer had gone from bad to worse. She hated not knowing what to do. Things were so much easier at Hogwarts when she had her wand and her friends. Sure, they didn’t do everything, it was she after all who stopped Quirrell and Voldemort, but everything seemed more manageable with them around like she could do anything with them at her side.

Harriet tried to imagine what her friends would do were they all here. Ronnie and Marcus would probably be trying to break the door down (or possibly burn it down in Marcus’ case), Harriet thought with a soft laugh. Kieran and Dora would probably be trying something clever like taking the hinges off the door. Hermione and Scott meanwhile would likely come up with some dazzlingly brilliant plan finding something the rest of them had completely overlooked.

Harriet lazily lifted her head as she heard the sound of feet coming down the hall. By the sound of it they belonged to Uncle Vernon, and sure enough, it was his gruff voice that called out after knocking annoyingly loudly on Harriet’s door.

“**You in there! Girl! Petunia, Dudley and I are going out. We’re keeping you locked in; we will be back in the afternoon.**”

Harriet didn’t respond, and Uncle Vernon didn’t seem to care for an answer. She heard him ambling back down the hall to the stairs. Harriet sighed and rolled onto her back, staring at the ceiling. What was she going to do? She supposed Stonewall wouldn’t be so bad if Dudley weren’t there. No, there had to be some way out of this.

Harriet heard the sound of the Dursleys leaving. Somehow just having them out of the house made her head feel more clear. She looked at the lock on the door. She remembered in one of the books Hermione had given her that Nancy talked about picking locks. She also recalled cartoons she’d watched when she was younger of characters picking them with things like hairpins. Harriet sat up. She had some extra hairpins from the night before; she could give it a try. But what would it accomplish? Where would she go if she could escape?

Harriet flopped back on her bed. Thinking about it over and over again wasn’t going to help
anything. Harriet looked back at her desk and immediately screamed. Something small and grey-skinned, with bat-like ears and large tennis-ball sized green eyes was squeezing its way uncomfortably through the bars over her window.

“No, please Miss!” The little creature exclaimed holding up its little hands as it finally managed to squeeze his way through and flopped down on her desk, “Do not scream, Harriet Potter! Dobby means no harm Miss; Dobby is trying to help Harriet Potter!”

“D-Dobby?” Harriet asked panting heavily from her shock, a hand on her heart.

“That’s right, Miss. Dobby, Dobby the house-elf,’ the little creature said, standing up and brushing himself off.

Harriet felt her courage and senses returning. She recognised the green eyes as the same green eyes she had seen outside her window the night before. As she looked at the so-called house-elf more, she realised he wasn’t wearing clothes. He was wearing a pillowcase with holes cut in it for his arms and head.

The creature called Dobby hopped off of her desk and bowed deeply to her. “It is ever such an honour to meet you finally, Harriet Potter. Dobby has wanted so long to meet you.”

“To meet me?” Harriet asked keeping her back to the wall, eyeing both her door and the window before reminding herself she could escape out of neither of them.

“Oh yes, Harriet Potter, oh yes. You are well known, Miss, even amongst the likes of us lowly house-elves such as Dobby,” the elf explained.

As Harriet looked at him, she couldn’t help but realise he was looking up at her with near reverence. “Oh, well, um, th-thanks?” Harriet said uncertainly, though she finally did move to the edge of her bed.

Dobby continued to stare at her in a worshipful way, and Harriet looked around uncomfortably. “Ummm, I hope you don’t think it rude of me to ask, but why are you here?”

Dobby’s expression fell. “Oh Harriet Potter, how to explain? Dobby is here to help Harriet Potter, to keep her safe.”

“Safe?” Harriet asked her nervousness rising again.

“Oh yes, Harriet Potter,” Dobby said wringing his hands and looking unaccountably afraid. “Dobby isn’t sure where to begin, so much to explain….”

Somehow as she watched him, Harriet found she wasn’t afraid of the little elf. He didn’t seem dangerous. Indeed, right now, he looked even more fearful than Harriet felt.

“Well, um, please sit down if you’d like?” Harriet said, gesturing to the desk chair next to him.

“S-sit down?!” Dobby exclaimed loudly making Harriet feel very glad that the Dursleys had left. “Never! Never, never, ever!”

“I’m sorry!” Harriet exclaimed, and without knowing what she was doing, she got off the bed and put a hand on the little elf’s shoulder. “I didn’t mean to offend you, I just—”

“No, no, Harriet Potter, you do not offend Dobby, oh no! It is just no witch or wizard has ever asked Dobby to sit down before, like an equal…” Dobby said his look returning to growing adoration.
Harriet let out a subtle laugh. “You can’t have met many good witches and wizards then have you?” Harriet asked.

Dobby slowly shook his head when to Harriet’s horror Dobby leapt up on the chair and started banging his forehead hard on the top of the desk. “BAD DOBBY! BAD DOBBY!” he shrieked with each knock of his head.

“Oh Dobby, don’t!” Harriet exclaimed and pulled the elf away from the desk.

Dobby stumbled around, clearly dizzy, his eyes. “D-Dobby had to punish himself, Miss, Dobby almost spoke ill of his family!” Dobby explained still slightly cross-eyed.

“Your family?”

“Yes, Harriet Potter. The wizard family that Dobby serves. As Dobby said, Miss, Dobby is a house-elf. Dobby will serve the family forever.”

“Did they send you to me?” Harriet asked.

“Oh no Miss, oh no! Dobby will have to punish himself most severely for coming to see you, Miss, shutting his ears in the oven at the very least!”

Harriet furrowed her brow. “But, wouldn’t that make them suspicious, shutting your ears in the oven for no reason?”

“Dobby doubts it, Miss. Dobby is always making a mistake of some kind or another and needing to punish himself, Miss. They let Dobby get on with punishing himself. They often remind Dobby to do extra punishments, just to make sure he didn’t forget any,” Dobby said morosely.

Harriet gasped in disgust. “Why don’t you run away then? Or quit? Why do you have to stay there forever?”

“A house-elf must be set free, Miss! It is part of the deep magic of a house-elf’s enslavement. But the family will never set Dobby free, so Dobby will have to serve them until he dies, Miss…”

Harriet shook her head in disbelief. “You poor thing,” Harriet said, and she stroked Dobby’s head. “Almost makes the Dursleys sound sweet and kind… isn’t there anyone who could help? Could I?”

At once Dobby burst into loud, wailing sobs. “Oh Harriet Potter, you ask if you can help Dobby? Your greatness Dobby has long known Miss, but your goodness, your kindness, Dobby never, ever knew!”

Harriet felt herself blushing. “Heh, I don’t know what you’ve heard about my ‘greatness.’ I’m just a decent student, okay at best…”

“Harriet Potter is so humble, Miss, so humble! Harriet Potter does not speak of her triumph over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Miss! And Dobby heard that Harriet Potter triumphed over him yet again in June, Miss!”

Harriet felt her blush grow. “I, well, I guess I did…” Harriet said sheepishly.

“Oh Miss, Harriet Potter is so valiant and bold! She is a beacon of hope to us all, and has faced so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to warn Harriet Potter, to protect her, even if he does have to shut his ears in the oven…” Dobby turned to look up at Harriet again with such intensity it made Harriet lean back a little.
“Er, protect me from what?” She asked nervously.

“From a plot Harriet Potter. A terrible plot to make awful things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry! That is why Dobby smashed the pudding last night. Harriet Potter must not go back to Hogwarts!”

Harriet blinked. “What? I-I have to go back, I—wait a minute?! You smashed the pudding?!” Harriet asked. Her feelings of pity towards Dobby were rapidly replaced with anger. “It’s your fault I’m stuck in here for another month?!”

Dobby seemed to shrink. “Harriet Potter must not be angry with Dobby; Dobby did it for the best, Miss. Dobby has to keep Harriet Potter safe above all else.”

“But why? What plans? Who’s doing it, Dobby?” Harriet asked. “I have friends at Hogwarts, Dobby, good friends, even… even if they think I don’t care about them anymore…” Harriet said, sitting back on the floor.

Dobby’s ears drooped even further, and suddenly Harriet felt a light click in her brain. “Wait a minute; it was you! You left their letters on my desk last night, you… were you taking their letters?!” Harriet demanded angrily.

Dobby broke down into wailing sobs. “Dobby is sorry, Harriet Potter, Dobby is so very sorry! Dobby thought that if Harriet Potter thought she didn’t have any friends, she would not want to go back to Hogwarts. But then Dobby saw how sad Harriet Potter was last night and he… he… he couldn’t keep them, Miss. So Dobby gave them to you,” Dobby said shrinking back even more.

Harriet’s anger was reaching the breaking point. So none of it had been her fault? Someone was actively trying to keep her from getting to Hogwarts. And here was the culprit right in front of her. He had stopped all the letters from her friends, he had gotten her in trouble with the Ministry of Magic, and he had cost her the chance to go back to Hogwarts, the one place she felt at home.

Harriet took two deep breaths to calm down from the impulse to throttle the little elf and demand answers instead. “Alright, then what is this plan? What terrible things are going to happen at Hogwarts, Dobby?”

Dobby opened his mouth to answer when he suddenly made a sharp choking noise and ran headlong into Harriet’s wall.

“Alright! I get it, you can’t say!” Harriet said as Dobby began to walk in dizzy little circles back towards her. “But why are you warning just me? Why aren’t you warning anyone else? Like Professor Dumbledore? You do know who he is, don’t you?” Harriet asked.

Dobby bowed his head looking just as reverent as he had when he looked at Harriet. “Albus Dumbledore is the greatest Headmaster Hogwarts has ever seen, Miss. Even Dobby knows it, Miss. But Dobby’s family has forbidden him to tell anyone at Hogwarts, Harriet Potter, so Dobby had to choose Miss, to let it all happen, or to protect the one person who is the most in danger! The one who means the most to us who have been and are the most downtrodden! But if Harriet Potter returns to Hogwarts, she will be in so much danger! This is a peril you must not face, Miss!”

Harriet blinked. She wasn’t sure what Dobby was driving at, but whatever it was, it wasn’t good.

“Oh Harriet Potter, for months Dobby has known about this threat. Dobby has thought and thought about what to do, Miss! Dobby must save you, Harriet Potter, whatever it takes!”

“But why me specifically?” Harriet demanded, crossing her arms. “There are lots of other good
people there who need—wait…” a sudden horrible thought came to Harriet’s mind. “This doesn’t have anything to do with Voldemort does it?”

Predictably, Dobby reeled at the name, covering his ears and groaning. “Oh say not the name Miss, say not the—”

“I don’t care!” Harriet declared, her temper flaring again. “I’m not afraid to say his name, and frankly I think it’s stupid to be. It’s just a name. Now, does this have anything to do with him?”

Dobby looked at once mollified and if possible even more reverent of Harriet than ever. “H-Harriet Potter is not afraid to say You-Know-Who’s name…? Harriet Potter is so brave—”

“Answer the question, Dobby!” Harriet demanded again.

“N-not—not You-Know-Who, miss…” Dobby replied finally. His eyes were at their fullest yet, and Harriet couldn’t fight off the suspicion that Dobby was trying to say something without saying it. Which, given his habit of causing bodily injury to himself whenever he was about to let something slip, Harriet didn’t blame him.

“Not You-Know-Who? But who could it be then? Unless that wasn’t a double negative, was it?” she asked.

Dobby didn’t reply, just kept looking at her wide-eyed, almost as though he was trying to put the answer in her head telepathically.

Harriet sighed and leaned back against her bed. Harriet was starting to feel overwhelmed again. She had no idea what to do. Something horrible was going to happen at Hogwarts. Dobby was trying (and Harriet had to admit it looked like he’d succeeded) to stop her from going to Hogwarts because of it. It seemed that if Dobby knew this much about it, but Dobby couldn’t say anything about it, or speak ill of his “family,” Harriet had to admit it seemed that whoever’s family he worked for was behind it.

“Dobby… Dobby has to leave, Harriet Potter.”

“What?” Harriet asked coming out of her thoughts.

“Dobby’s family needs him, Miss, he must go. Dobby will bring food tonight Miss.”

And without another word Dobby disappeared with a loud crack that left Harriet’s ears ringing and sent Hedwig into shrieks of fright, flapping her wings angrily in her cage.

Harriet got up to calm Hedwig and was just able to get her fingers between the bars enough to stroke Hedwig’s head. Hedwig hooted softly and gave Harriet’s finger a gentle nibble with her beak.

“I’m sorry Hedwig, I am… we’re just… stuck…”

* * * *

Two days later, it seemed both Dobby and the Dursleys were as good as their word. Harriet was still locked in her room, fed mere scraps of meals by Aunt Petunia, and only allowed to leave her room twice a day at morning and night. Dobby, on the other hand, did bring her food that first night, which she greatly appreciated. He returned the next night as well.

Admittedly, Harriet still felt resentment towards the little elf, but she was too hungry to turn down the
meals, especially since they were so delicious. Apparently, despite his servitude, Dobby was a fantastic cook. Today’s lunch had been nothing more than a cold broth with some vegetables in it, and in spite of herself, Harriet found she was very much looking forward to whatever Dobby had planned to bring her tonight.

Even better, he had also brought her some owl-treats for Hedwig. Despite her resentment, Harriet had to admit that it did keep her spirits up, especially the rebellious part of her that wanted to imagine the look on the Dursleys’ faces if they knew the kinds of meals Harriet was getting every night in secret, despite their apparent attempts to starve her.

Unfortunately, Dobby was still quite resolute in not giving Harriet any more information. Harriet didn’t know how he managed to climb all the way to the second floor of the house on his own carrying all that food. He would open up her window at midnight every night to set the food on her desk. Sometime later, between dusk and dawn, he would return and take any evidence that the food had ever been there. Harriet had tried to stay awake long enough to catch him at it last night, but she was unsuccessful.

*Might as well get used to it,* Harriet thought to herself as she lay on her bed that afternoon. It was at this moment that a certain dark humour came over her as she looked at the two Nancy Drew books on the desk. Nancy had been in similar situations in both of the books she had, trapped in a room against her will with no apparent means of escape. *I guess Hermione was right; I am a lot like her,* she thought.

Harriet looked down at her wrists. *At least I’m not tied up though,* she thought to herself. She sighed looking around the tiny bedroom.

“Though I might as well be…” she muttered softly under her breath.

She remembered her encounter with Quirrell and Voldemort. Quirrell had cast a jinx on her that had wrapped her almost literally head to foot in rope. Harriet couldn’t get out of it then, and neither could Nancy in the books, though in the books all Nancy ever got was her wrists and ankles tied.

Also unlike Nancy, Harriet didn’t have someone coming to rescue her in just the nick of time. Who would? All of her friends thought she was ignoring them, and even then, did any of them have the right to take her from the Dursleys? The Dursleys would never let her leave. Especially not with anyone that would allow her to return to Hogwarts.

Harriet heard the sound of Aunt Petunia coming down the hall to pick up the dishes Harriet had set out in the hallway through the cat-flap. Harriet sighed still trying to think of a plan but felt more dispirited than ever. Her arms and stomach still hurt from the sit-ups and push-ups she’d done earlier that morning, not wanting to get totally out of shape for the Quidditch season.

Again, Harriet didn’t know why she was bothering, but somehow there was still that little part of her mind that just wouldn’t let her give up hope. Not completely. She couldn’t entirely give up. There was a month left; a lot could happen in a month. Harriet lazily reached over and grabbed up the fourth *Nancy Drew* book. The more she was in the room, locked away like this, somehow the easier Harriet found it to get lost in the books. Absent-mindedly Harriet flipped to the eighteenth chapter and started reading again.

Harriet’s imagination wandered as she reread the chapter. Nancy had been caught by the villains, two men Harriet couldn’t help but imagine looking a lot like Malfoy and either Crabbe or Goyle, and two women that Harriet immediately substituted with her other arch-enemies at Hogwarts, Pansy Parkinson and Pixie Fanfarró. They were hauling her into a miniature submarine, gloating over her as she tried to free her hands, muffled by a gag, only able to glare at them and ponder her fate.
Harriet sighed tossing the book back on the desk and rolling over and facing the wall again, frustrated. On the one hand, the books were the one way she felt connected to both her friends from Hogwarts and her predicament did feel more and more like Nancy’s in the books. On the other, reading about it drove the reality of her situation even deeper into her mind.

Was her situation really that different though? She could talk, but she had no one to talk to really. She could walk around, but the room was tiny and seemed to be getting smaller with each passing day. Now and then she would just lie on her bed and stare at the ceiling until the room started to spin. In frustration, Harriet sighed, rolled over and tried to sleep.

Twelve hours later, however, Harriet had failed miserably. It was two-o-clock in the morning. Dobby had already come and gone for the first time, and the Dursleys were sound asleep. Harriet could hear Uncle Vernon snoring loudly through the thin walls on the one side of her room, and Dudley snoring loudly on the other.

Harriet just couldn’t sleep; curiosity and sheer boredom had finally got the better of her. She was sneaking playfully around her room, wearing her outfit from the party despite the stains, pretending to be snooping for clues in a supposedly haunted house. Despite herself, Harriet felt she was having fun. It occurred to her that in all her life, she’d never actually played like this. She’d never had friends to play with during holidays, and they were always too busy at Hogwarts, so it just had never crossed her mind before. She was careful to be quiet, only walking on her rug and avoiding the area by the loose floorboard under her bed that always squeaked loudly when stepped on.

Harriet giggled as she pretended to toss herself down on her bed as the “bad guys” caught her. She glared up at pretend villains and pretended to struggle. She kicked out her feet at them before flopping back down on the bed breathing heavily. Somehow it still just didn’t quite feel right.

She felt the scarf hair-band and pulled it off, looking at it. It might help the illusion a little bit. Harriet untied the knot and had just put it to her lips when a rapping sound came at her window. Harriet jumped and squeaked in surprise before she clamped her hand over her mouth, listening hard to Uncle Vernon who snorted but resumed snoring almost immediately.

Was it Dobby? Harriet got up and looked out the window, where instead of a bat-eared, tennis-ball eyed house-elf, she found herself face to face with a pretty, red-haired, freckle-faced girl who was beaming at Harriet with glee. Harriet recognised the girl. She had seen her only a month ago on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters with her large family of equally red-haired and freckled witches and wizards; the younger sister of Harriet’s best-friend.

“Gi-Ginny? Ginny Weasley?!”

Chapter End Notes

Concept idea by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)
Proof reading/editing by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“Now and then, even the strongest of us must humbly accept we need a bit of a rescue.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Of course!” Ginny said.

Harriet blinked and was about to open the window when Ginny was pushed to the side, and Harriet’s best-friend Ronnie Weasley slid into sight beside Ginny smiling just as wide.

Harriet finally opened the window trying to make sense of what she was seeing.

“Ronnie! Ginny! Wha-what are you doing here?” Harriet asked in a low, hissing voice. “A-and how are you doing it?”

Harriet looked down and gaped in shock. Ronnie and Ginny were in the back seat of a car. But it obviously wasn’t any ordinary car because it was hovering in mid-air right outside Harriet’s second-floor bedroom window. Harriet looked to the front of the car and saw both Fred and George grinning back at her apparently quite pleased with themselves.

“In need of rescue, m’lady?” Fred asked smirking roguishly.

George winked, “No need to worry mademoiselle, your two standard knights in shining armour on our noble steed—”

“Also known as a Ford Anglia,” said Fred cutting George off.

“Oy!” Ronnie grumbled at them. “What are Ginny and I then?”

“Baggage,” George quipped back without hesitation. “Now, Harriet, get your stuff, you’re coming with us.”

Harriet shook her head in both disbelief and disappointment. “I-I can’t, I’m kinda locked in,” Harriet said pointing at the bars. “And none of us can use magic.”

“Heh, says you,” Ginny said with an admiring smirk.

“What?” Harriet asked.

“Using magic outside school, honestly,” Ronnie said, shaking her head, divided between amusement and disapproval.

“It wasn’t me!” Harriet declared in frustration, “And how do you all know about it?”

“Dad,” said Ginny simply. “He works for the Ministry.”

“Oh, well… that would explain it,” Harriet said, nodding. “But, aren’t you all doing magic too?” Harriet went on looking at the car.
“Nah, we’re just driving it,” Fred said and patted the steering wheel. “It was Dad who made it fly.”

“Oh, well that explains that then too. But you all can’t get me out of here either without magic, can you?”

Ronnie smirked holding up some rope. “You think we came with Fred and George and weren’t prepared for all eventualities?” Ronnie said and handed Harriet one end of the rope. “Tie that off to the bars.”

Harriet did so and looked nervously at the wall that divided her room from her aunt and uncle’s.

“Okay, he-here goes…” Harriet said stepping back. “Better keep your fingers crossed, because if the Dursleys get woken up, I’m finished!”

The engine revved, and Fred flew the car straight up in the air, easily but loudly ripping the bars off the window. Harriet cringed and listened carefully. The snoring continued unabated from both Uncle Vernon and Dudley. Harriet exhaled deeply in relief.

Harriet quickly went back to the window and watched Ronnie pulling the rope with the bars back up into the car as Fred manoeuvred it back to the window.

“Alright, get in,” Ginny said, beckoning.

Harriet shook her head. “I can’t yet. All my stuff’s been locked up,”

“Where?” George asked.

“Locked in the cupboard under the stairs, and the door to my room is locked too.”

George grinned, “No problem, come on Fred.”

Fred and George nimbly climbed out of the car and in through Harriet’s window. “Hairpin,” George said quietly, holding a hand out to Harriet.

“Wh-what?” Harriet spluttered.

“A hairpin,” Fred reiterated, “please.”

“How did you know I had hairpins?” Harriet asked.

“A, you’re a girl, and B, we saw them on the desk as we climbed in,” said George.

Harriet glowered a little at him but still took one of her hairpins from the desk and put it in George’s outstretched hand. “You’re seriously going to try to pick the lock with a hairpin?” she asked.

George merely smirked and crouched at the door handle starting to pick the lock. “Most wizards think these sorts of tricks are a waste of time, but they’re skills worth learning,” said Fred.

“Too right, Fred,” muttered George, deep in concentration as he worked at the lock. “After all, how else are we under-age wizards going to cause trouble during the holidays?”

Harriet shook her head. “Or, you know, escape from a room if you get locked inside it without your wand, and you’re in danger?” Harriet said.

“Well, yeah that too,” said Fred.
“There!” George said as the door finally opened.

“Okay, we’ll go get your trunk. Grab anything else in here you need and get it in the car,” Fred told Harriet sounding a little more serious now.

“Got it—watch out for that bottom step too on the stairs, it’s squeaky,” Harriet said. Fred and George gave quick nods of understanding and disappeared into the hallway. Harriet gathered up the couple of books she had, some of her poor-fitting other clothes and finally Hedwig. Finally, Fred and George came panting into the room, carrying Harriet’s trunk.

“This is getting to be something of a habit, isn’t it?” George grunted as they hoisted Harriet’s trunk up onto the desk.

Fred climbed up and back into the car and pulled the trunk as George pushed it until finally, it went in. Fred jumped into the driver’s seat again, George followed the trunk, with Harriet right behind him. However, as Fred moved into the front, he put his elbow on the car horn, which blared. There was a cry of shock from Uncle Vernon and a scream from Aunt Petunia. Harriet, whose head was out the window, saw the window to the Dursleys’ bedroom fly open and Uncle Vernon’s head appear outside it.

“What the?!” Uncle Vernon exclaimed taking in the flying car before he turned and saw Harriet who was now halfway out of the window, her hands on the car and her knees on the windowsill.

“NOOOO!” Uncle Vernon cried, and his head disappeared.

Harriet began to scramble, Ronnie, Ginny and George grabbing hold of her arms and shoulders pulling her into the car. Harriet was almost entirely in when she came to a sudden stop. Looking back, she saw Uncle Vernon had managed to run around fast enough to grab hold of her ankle.

“No! Let go!” Harriet yelled, tugging on her leg, trying to wrench it from Uncle Vernon’s grip.

Uncle Vernon was hanging out the window after her his face livid with rage. Ronnie, Ginny, George and Harriet all gave one final tug with all their might, and Harriet felt Uncle Vernon’s grasp break, and she fell into the car. Harriet looked over her shoulder and saw Uncle Vernon dangling perilously, trying to pull himself back into the house.

“Step on it, Fred!” George called, and with a roar, the car shot straight up in the air again, away from Privet Drive.

“Victory! We’ve freed the fair maiden from the horrid troll!” Fred called.

Harriet glowered. “Would you please stop calling me stuff like that?”

“Well, you are fair,” George said.

“And you are a maiden,” said Fred.

“And your uncle is something of a troll,” said Ginny while Ronnie laughed.

“Oh come on Harriet, you can’t be the heroine all the time,” Ronnie said playfully nudging Harriet’s side with her elbow.

Harriet was beside herself with happiness. She was free, she was free from the Dursleys, and now not only was she going to spend the rest of the summer with her best friend and her family but she was also definitely going back to Hogwarts.
“So, Harriet, what has been happening?” Ronnie asked, holding Hedwig in her cage in her lap. “I was gonna ask why you didn’t write, but, guess this answers that,” she said flicking the padlock.

“Here, let me see,” George said turning in his seat with the hairpin.

“Well, yeah, pretty much, but that’s not all. I never got any of your letters either, not until three nights ago on my birthday,” Harriet started explaining.

“Not until your birthday?” Ginny asked in surprise. “Ronnie’s been sending letters all summer, and Errol always came back without them.”

“Errol?” Harriet asked.

“Family owl,” George said as the lock finally fell open, and Hedwig spread her wings and flew out into the night sky without a moment’s hesitation and fell into formation with the car.

“Yeah, he’s ancient the poor thing, but I didn’t have any other options because Percy won’t let anyone else use his owl, Hermes,” Ronnie explained further.

“So anyway, how did you get all the letters at once?” Fred asked.

“A house-elf named Dobby was stopping my mail,” Harriet explained.

“A house-elf?” Fred asked bemusedly. “What was a house-elf doing stopping your letters?”

Harriet glowered, “He wanted me to think I didn’t have any friends so I wouldn’t want to go back to Hogwarts.”

“What?!” the Weasleys asked in unison, Hedwig hooting outside the car in indignation as Fred jerked the wheel a little almost turning the car into her.

“Yeah, he said terrible things were going to be happening this year at Hogwarts, and he had to keep me away from Hogwarts so I’d be safe. It was he who smashed the pudding too so I’d get in trouble,” Harriet went on, glad to finally have someone to tell this story to who would believe her.

“Hmm, well that’s certainly dodgy,” George said.

“Why’s that?” Harriet asked.

“Well, the thing about house-elves is they are magically powerful, but they usually can’t use it unless given an order by their family,” Fred said.

“Right, so, I’d say it’s a lot more likely someone ordered him to stop you,” George added thoughtfully.

“Anyone you know like that?” asked Fred.

Ronnie and Harriet both glowered and nodded. “Draco Malfoy,” they said in unison.

“Draco Malfoy?” George asked. “That little, pointy-headed Slytherin git? Isn’t he Lucius Malfoy’s son?”

Harriet shrugged. “No idea, but I guess it’s possible, not a very common name.”

“Well that’d figure though, the Malfoys are a very old, and very wealthy family,” George went on.
“Yeah, and have really strong connections to the dark arts,” Fred added. “Dad still grumbles about it every time he runs into Lucius Malfoy at the Ministry. Malfoy was a big supporter of You-Know-Who back in the day.”

“Though after You-Know-Who fell, thanks for that by the way, Lucius Malfoy came back and tried to say he’d been enchanted into following You-Know-Who,” said George.

“Codswallop,” growled Fred. “Dad reckons he was one of You-Know-Who’s closest followers, maybe second only to Sirius Black.”

“Sirius Black?”

“Yeah, You-Know-Who’s second-in-command. He killed thirteen people with a single curse right after You-Know-Who fell. He was caught though. He’s in Azkaban where he belongs,” George explained.

Harriet shuddered at that thought. Thirteen people with a single curse? “Well, I don’t know Malfoy well enough to know if he has an elf…” said Harriet.

“The Malfoys are wealthy enough to, trust me,” Fred replied.

“Well, I don’t know, any time he got close to telling me anything about either his family or what was going on he’d hurt himself, it was… kinda horrible to be honest,” Harriet said.

“He’d hurt himself?” Ginny asked.

“Yeah, first he banged his head on the desk until he got a bruise when he sort of accidentally implied his family weren’t good wizards… then he ran headlong into the wall when I asked him what sort of horrible things were going to happen at Hogwarts this year and he tried to tell me. He also said he’d have to shut his ears in the oven for coming to see me.”

Fred and George looked at each other, clearly thinking hard. Ronnie was gaping, and Ginny had her hands over her mouth her eyes wide.

“Well, not sure what to make of that then, it does sound like he was there to warn you against something, but I wonder what it could be?” Fred muttered.

“Yeah,” said George, “but I can’t see anything horrible happening, not with Dumbledore there. Oh, you’re going too far west, Fred,” George added tapping the little compass on the dash.

Harriet felt reassured that Fred and George at least didn’t think there was much to worry about. Granted Fred and George were usually pretty care-free, but they had listened to her and what she had to say.

“Well anyway I’m glad we got you still,” Ronnie said smiling and hugging Harriet around her shoulders. “I was getting so worried when you weren’t writing back.”

“Thanks, I was getting worried too that I didn’t hear from any of you lot either, then when I finally got all the letters I was going nuts over not being able to let you all know what had happened, then when I found out that Dobby had been behind it all…” Harriet muttered. Despite the horrified look on Ginny’s face, Harriet’s feelings towards the elf who had made her summer so miserable so far had not altered in the slightest.

“Well don’t worry about it, you’re safe with us now,” Ginny said beaming proudly. “Adorable outfit by the way,” she added looking it over.
“Oh, thanks, Ginny,” Harriet said feeling her cheeks get warm. “It was my outfit for the party; it’s kinda ruined now though, all stained…” Harriet went on.

“Nahhh don’t worry about it,” Ronnie said reassuringly. “Mom’ll have them out faster than you can say ‘four-four-two’.”

“Four-four-two?” Harriet asked.

From the front seat, Fred and George groaned.

“What?” Ronnie asked.

“You’ve made a monster, Harriet, we’re warning you now,” George said.

“She’s talked nothing but football all summer long,” Fred muttered before leaning out the window, looking for landmarks.

“Even joined a local Muggle league for the summer down in the village by our house,” Ginny said looking up at her older sister with pride. Ronnie blushed but smiled despite Fred and George’s jabs.

“That’s great!” Harriet declared. It was just light enough Harriet could see Ronnie blushing even brighter, now getting too bashful to talk, so Harriet changed the subject.

“So, what else has been going on in the wider wizarding world while I’ve been locked away?” she asked curiously.

To her surprise, all four of the Weasleys’ faces fell.


“There’s a war going on in the U.S.,” said Fred. The other Weasley kids all nodded in agreement.

“What?” Harriet asked in shock. “I didn’t hear anything about that!”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t have, living with the Muggles,” said George. “It’s a wizard’s war.”

“Well you probably did hear about it, you just heard the Muggle spin on it,” said Fred.

“What was that?”

“They obviously can’t tell the Muggles that wizards do exist and all that, so they’ve had to come up with cover stories. There was one really awful attack at the beginning of the summer, killed thousands of people, destroyed three whole towns. Though the Muggle news called it a series of horrible tornadoes,” George went on shaking his head.

Harriet shook hers in disbelief too. She had heard about the tornadoes, but it was really a war?

“Only two hundred or so people escaped,” said Ronnie in a quiet voice.

“But, it’ll be kind of cool,” said Ginny somehow sounding more cheerful. “Dad told us how the Minister has had the survivors brought here as refugees to keep them safe, and the kids that made it are going to be coming to Hogwarts with us too! I can’t wait to meet them!” Ginny went on excitedly.

Harriet couldn’t help but smile a little.
“Oh yeah, you’re going to be starting with us this year too, huh?” Harriet asked.

Ginny smiled so brightly Harriet could have sworn her head was glowing.

“It will be pretty interesting having some new students around, though, yes,” said Fred with his trademark mischievous grin.

“Especially female ones,” George said with his identical grin.

“Naïve country-girl female ones,” Fred added.

Ronnie rolled her eyes and swatted Fred up the back of his head.

“Oy! Watch it!” Fred yelped and glared over his shoulder at her.

“Come on Fred, their entire towns were destroyed, and I’m sure all of them had friends who were killed, I’m doubtful any of them are going to be all that interested in relationships,” Ronnie said, showing slightly uncharacteristic insight in Harriet’s opinion, but she had to agree. As little as she disliked Privet Drive if she were in their situation and Privet Drive had been destroyed and she got sent halfway across the world she doubted priority one on her list would be looking for a boyfriend. Granted, Harriet had to admit that those things hadn’t happened to her and she wasn’t all that interested in a boyfriend anyway.

“The glory is in the challenge, little sis,” George said sagely though both he and Fred ruined the effect by breaking out laughing. Ginny, Ronnie and Harriet started laughing now too, and suddenly Fred called out and pointed down.

“There’s the village,” he said pointing out a little patch of light, “be there about ten minutes, which is good because it’s getting light.”

In the east, the tiniest crack of pink was starting to come over the horizon. Fred began taking the car down, skirting the edge of the town that Ronnie said was named Ottery St. Catchpole. Fred manoeuvred the car down towards some fields skimming the treetops before finally setting down with a little bump on the ground. Fred pulled the car up to a run-down looking garage, and Harriet leaned out the window for her very first look at the Weasley house.

The house looked as though it had initially been a stone pig-pen on the bottom. It had been branched out both sideways and upwards with extra rooms until it was four stories tall and was so crooked it could only have been held up by magic. It was topped with a red roof with five chimneys, and in front was stuck a sign that had fallen at an angle that read: The Burrow.

“Well, here we are,” Ronnie said sounding nervous. “Nothing flash really but, it’s home. Not like that nice, neat place you usually live—”

“It’s amazing!” Harriet said cutting Ronnie off. Harriet quickly got out of the car, wanting to get a better view and scaring some chickens that had been pecking around nearby in the process.

“Okay, here’s the plan,” said Fred looking around shiftyly. Somehow as he said it, Harriet started to get that uneasy feeling that trouble was probably headed in their direction.

“We sneak back in, and upstairs to our rooms. Then we wait for Mum to call us for breakfast. Ronnie, you come running down all excited that Harriet turned up unexpectedly in the night, and she’ll be all excited to see her, and no one will ever need to know we took the car,” Fred went on sounding quite pleased with a plan he obviously thought fool-proof.
“Wait,” Harriet said catching that last bit. “You mean you weren’t supposed to be flying the car?”

“No they weren’t!” said the angriest voice Harriet had ever heard in her life, which was saying something considering she lived with Uncle Vernon.

All five of them spun on the spot to find themselves face to face with none other than Mrs Weasley. “How dare you? How dare all of you!?” Mrs Weasley growled in a low, threatening voice. Even though Mrs Weasley had managed to make Harriet feel like part of the family already in the past year, helping Harriet onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters and giving Harriet a lovely jumper for Christmas, Harriet found herself suddenly wishing she was anywhere else at the moment as Mrs Weasley stared them all down.

“Do any of you have any idea how worried I have been!?” Mrs Weasley carried on, and Harriet and the others started leaning back a little as Mrs Weasley loomed down on them. “All of your beds empty, the car gone! Oh, you all just wait until your father gets home! I was going out of my mind with worry! We never had this trouble with your other brothers! What if you’d crashed!? You could have been killed! You could have been seen and cost your father his job! And taking not just Ronnie but Ginny with you too?! What on earth were you thinking?! No, of course, you weren’t thinking! Your father and I told you all that he and I were going to go get Harriet ourselves if Ronnie had not heard back by Friday, there was no need!”

Mrs Weasley’s voice was starting to crack from harsh use by the time she finally stopped shouting. She turned her eyes to Harriet who flinched, but Mrs Weasley smiled.

“I’m thrilled to see you, Harriet, I’ll make you some breakfast, come on dear,” she said plainly only talking to Harriet as she turned and headed back towards the house.

Harriet looked over at the other four. Fred and George were looking especially resentful at Ronnie and Ginny behind Mrs Weasley’s back, both of which were giving the twins apologetic looks that told Harriet only too plainly that the entire rescue operation had been the two girls’ idea.

Ronnie gave Harriet a sad little nod after Mrs Weasley, and they all fell into step behind her. Mrs Weasley led them up the front steps which were lined with Wellington boots and into a cramped little kitchen with a table that somehow fit even though it was big enough to fit a dozen people. Harriet’s eyes flashed around excitedly as she sat down having never been in a proper magic house before.

There were two clocks, one that had only one hand and around the edges were listed such points as “Feed the chickens,” “Tea time,” and “You’re late!” The other clock had nine hands, each labelled with the name of a member of the immediate Weasley family and as the first clock instead of numbers it had little titles such as “Travelling,” “At Work,” or “At School,” and most ominously of all, “Mortal Peril.”

Cookbooks covered the mantelpiece. All of them had magical spins to their titles such as the one that made Harriet almost giggle a little, Charm Your Own Cheese. The little radio by the sink was giving a news broadcast, though instead of the usual morning traffic reports and either pop songs or oldies, it was announcing the upcoming “Witching Hour” featuring some singer named Celestina Warbeck.

Meanwhile, Mrs Weasley was muttering to herself, loudly banging pans down on the stove as she made breakfast. She kept shooting angry glances at Fred, George, Ronnie and Ginny as she started frying some sausages and eggs.

“Oh don’t look like I’m going to eat you, dear,” Mrs Weasley said to Harriet as she put three eggs and eight sausages onto her plate. “You didn’t ask them to fly that horrible car, but honestly you four, flying an illegal car halfway across the country, what if you’d been seen?”
“Oh come on Mum, it was cloudy,” Fred said through a mouthful of sausages.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full!” Mrs Weasley barked.

“And they were starving her, Mum!” Ginny piped up now, coming to her brother’s defence.

“Not another word out of you, young lady,” Mrs Weasley snapped, and Ginny hung her head over her plate.

“Setting a horrible example for your younger sisters,” Mrs Weasley said as she started cutting up bread for them. Harriet accepted and buttered a slice, though she felt fuller than she had ever been in her life.

It took very little time for all five of the plates to be cleaned. Fred and George yawned and got up from the table.

“And where do you think you two are going?” Mrs Weasley snapped. “You lot are all to go out and de-gnome the garden. They’re running amok, and with four of you on it we may finally get rid of the little pests.”

“I’ll help!” Harriet said excitedly. Even though she hadn’t slept at all, she felt incredibly excited. She wanted to know everything there was to know about living in wizard homes.

“Well, a-alright dear,” Mrs Weasley said, torn between wanting to treat Harriet like a guest and seeming to be amused at Harriet’s eagerness to help. “But I suggest you get some more appropriate clothes on first, I’ll grab you some of Ginny’s clothes, Ronnie’s are a bit long for you, and I’ll get your outfit nice and cleaned up for you.”

“Oh thank you so much, Mrs Weasley, that would be wonderful,” Harriet beamed as she got up from the table too. She followed Mrs Weasley into an old-fashioned laundry room that seemed to be running itself, clothes leaping out of laundry baskets, dunking themselves in a tub of soapy water, scrubbing themselves on a scrubber before ringing themselves out and flying out the window to hang themselves on the clotheslines in the garden.

Harriet gaped in wonder. Even though she’d spent a whole year at Hogwarts, where incredible magical things happened several times a day, Harriet couldn’t help but feel glee any time she saw magic at work. She supposed it was even more impressive now that she was watching it working in a practical way, the way ordinary witches and wizards lived.

Mrs Weasley pulled out a t-shirt and a pair of jeans from one of the baskets and handed them to Harriet. “Here you are dear, these should fit fine, you can change through there in the restroom, dear,” Mrs Weasley said smiling.

Harriet thanked Mrs Weasley again and quickly got changed giving Mrs Weasley her stained party outfit and practically ran out of the house to join Fred, George, Ronnie, and Ginny in the de-gnoming. Harriet heard the sound of laughing to her left as she stepped out the front door and walked over, though she jumped back as she walked around the corner and saw something brown with flailing limbs go sailing past her head, spiralling over the top of the fence into the field next to the house.

“Whoa, sorry about that, Harriet,” George said, laughing.

“Okay… what was that?” Harriet asked.

“Gnome,” Ronnie said and held up a small, human-shaped creature with leathery skin and a head
shaped like a potato. Ronnie was holding it up by its foot as the little gnome flailed its hands and free foot, muttering curses at her.

“That… that’s a…?”

“Yep, a real gnome,” Ronnie said, and she started to swing her arm in a big circle over her head, somewhat like a lasso. Harriet gaped in shock as Ronnie let go at just the right moment, flinging the gnome over the wall and into the neighbouring field that the other had been tossed.

“Not bad, little sis,” Fred said. “Here, let’s see if I can get mine past the stump.”

“Doesn’t it, doesn’t it hurt them?” Harriet asked.

“Nah,” Ronnie said. “Gnomes are tough; you just gotta get them dizzy and far enough away they can’t find their way back to their holes.”

Harriet nodded, biting her lip anxiously as she started looking through the bushes with the others. Harriet had a hard time catching one at first, mostly because she was too nervous, even though there did seem to be quite a lot of them as Mrs Weasley had said. The very first one Harriet caught bit her on the hand, which surprised her so much she ended up flinging the little gnome at least fifty feet according to George’s measurements.

After that, Harriet felt less sympathetic to the gnomes and was soon snatching and flinging them just as well as the rest of the Weasleys. Harriet found that imagining the gnomes to all have Dobby’s face did help a little too.

“You see, gnomes aren’t the brightest creatures,” said George. “They hear the commotion and come running to see what’s going on.”

“They keep coming back here though because of Dad,” Ginny said. “He likes them.”

At that moment, the front door slammed.

“There’s Dad!” George said, and without a moment’s hesitation, they all headed back to the house to see him.

Mr Weasley turned out to be a tall, thin man who was as red-haired as the rest of the family, though he was balding on top. He wore glasses which were in his hands as he rubbed his eyes wearily, and he was wearing long green robes.

“Nine raids in one night,” Mr Weasley muttered as the rest of the family sat down around him. “That scruffy rat Mundungus Fletcher tried to hex me too when my back was turned…”

“Any good catches, Dad?” Fred asked with a grin.

“Oh, nothing particularly exciting. Just some shrinking door keys and another biting kettle. I did happen across a wizard with some rather odd ferrets, but fortunately, that’s not my department.”

“Why would someone make a door key that shrinks? That sounds kind of useless,” said George.

“Muggle-baiting,” said Mr Weasley in a dark tone. “Unevolved, low-life wizards who think it’s amusing selling keys to Muggles that shrink too small to see then back again, so Muggles have a hard time finding them when they need them. Unfortunately, Muggles are so set in pretending that magic doesn’t exist, it makes prosecutions very difficult, they all insist they lose them. It’s not all malicious like that though, fortunately, but the things we wizards have taken to enchanting the
LIKE CARS FOR INSTANCE?” came the angry voice of Mrs Weasley from the door. Mr Weasley jerked fully awake and spun around to look guiltily up at his wife.

“C-cars, dear?”

“Yes, Arthur, CARS! That would be an interesting scenario for your department to investigate, wouldn’t it? A wizard lying to his wife about a car he told her he was only going to tinker with to see how it worked and then actually enchanting it so it could fly!”

Mr Weasley looked as guilty as the Weasley children had when Mrs Weasley had confronted them in the yard. “Ah, w-well now Molly dear, you see when you look at the law you can see how even if he-eh-would have been much better served by telling his wife, he would be in his right to do so, as long as he didn’t intend to fly the car—”

“Oh, Arthur don’t give me that! You intentionally put that loophole in when you wrote that law so you could keep tinkering and enchanting all those Muggle gizmos you’ve got stored away in your shed! And just so you know, Harriet here arrived this morning in that very same car that you never intended to fly!”

“H-Harriet?”

Mr Weasley looked around the table until he spotted Harriet and gasped. “Goodness! Harriet Potter! Oh, it is a pleasure to meet you finally after all the wonderful thing’s Ronnie here has said—”

“Arthur! Your four youngest children flew your car to Harriet’s house and back last night! What do you have to say about that?!?”

“Really?” Mr Weasley asked, though his tone was less shocked outrage as Mrs Weasley had been hoping for and more excited curiosity. “How did it do? Did you try the-er-that-that was very wrong, a-all of you, very, eh- very wrong!”

Ronnie nudged Harriet’s arm and gave a side-nod towards the door. Harriet nodded and she, Ronnie and Ginny slipped as quietly as possible from the room. They went down a narrow passageway that led to a zig-zagging staircase.

“So, what does your dad do?” Harriet asked.

Ronnie rolled her eyes. “Misuse of Muggle Artefacts. You pretty much heard what he does; he finds Muggle things that witches and wizards have bewitched that are illegal to charm, in case they wind up back in Muggle hands.”

“Ah, okay, I can see why your mum was less than thrilled about it all then,” Harriet said.

“Yeah, it drives her nuts,” Ginny said. “He’d have to arrest himself if he ever got reported.”

On the third floor landing, they stopped, and Ginny excitedly showed Harriet into her bedroom. The whole room was dark green and gold, with a large poster on the wall featuring seven witches on broomsticks wearing Quidditch robes, zooming around a giant team shield emblazoned with the name “Holyhead Harpies.”

“The only all-girl Quidditch team in Britain,” Ginny explained, looking at it with pride.

“A fat lot of good worshipping them will do us though,” said Ronnie sounding bitter. “Since Fred
and George won’t let us practice with them.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Ginny. Harriet furrowed her brow a little, noting how Ginny had seemed to give an odd little smirk to herself and gave Harriet a wink. Somehow, Harriet now had the suspicion that Fred and George’s “no girls allowed” Quidditch rules hadn’t been as air-tight as they’d hoped.

“Oh Harriet, come on I’ll show you my room!” Ronnie said excitedly, noticing none of Ginny’s hints to Harriet. Harriet nodded and followed, climbing the last flight of stairs to the very top. Harriet grinned as she stepped into the room. Unlike Ginny’s room, Ronnie’s was themed bright red and white, and instead, she had regular Muggle posters on the wall of the Nottingham Forest football club.

Ronnie’s belongings were scattered everywhere on the floor and the shelves. Scabbers, Ronnie’s pet rat, was asleep in the sun on her windowsill. Harriet peered out Ronnie’s window and smiled to see a little group of gnomes sneaking back into the garden from under the fence.

“Yes, it’s… it’s a little small,” Harriet heard Ronnie say from behind her. “And the ghoul in the attic is right above us, so I have to put up with him banging on pipes and stuff when he gets bored but…”

Harriet turned and looked at her best friend who was avoiding Harriet’s eyes, apparently nervous about what Harriet thought of her home. Harriet knew Ronnie was probably a little jealous of the nice house the Dursleys had, even knowing what horrible people the Dursleys were. Harriet walked up to Ronnie and hugged her tight.

“Ronnie, your place is fantastic,” Harriet beamed. “This is hands down the best house I have ever been in. And I mean it.”

Ronnie blushed and finally smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Original concept idea by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editing by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA), and h-a-cooke(dA)
“I dislike the notion of the phrase “you cannot choose your family.” That simply depends on one’s definition of family. Often in my own life, I have found the bonds with the family I have chosen to be much stronger than my bonds with the family I was given.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Oi, breakfast!”

Something hard bonked Harriet on the top of her head, and she shouted out, sitting upright and clutching her head. “Ow! Hey!” Harriet said. She laughed as she looked up at Ronnie’s grinning face.

“Sorry, just excited you’re here,” Ronnie replied.

Harriet smiled rubbing her head and stretching. Despite the sore spot on her head, Harriet was happier than she could have ever thought she could be. It hadn’t been a dream. She really had been rescued from the Dursleys by her best friend.

Harriet slid out of bed, stretched again and yawned. Between the excitement of the rescue the night before the ghoul in the attic right above them Harriet had barely slept in the last two nights. She knew she should be exhausted, but she didn’t care. She was still too excited.

Harriet and Ronnie cleaned up as quickly as possible and went down to breakfast. The smell of frying bacon and eggs hit their nostrils all the way up on the third-floor landing. Harriet felt her stomach rumble with hunger as they finally walked into the kitchen. Fred, George and Ginny were already there, as were Mr Weasley and Mrs Weasley. Mrs Weasley was fussing about the stove cooking up what looked like enough breakfast for a small army.

Harriet and Ronnie approached the table to take their seats. Mr Weasley eagerly gestured to Harriet to sit next to him. The moment she sat, Mr Weasley launched into a series of questions all about life with Muggles. Harriet knew that Mr Weasley was genuinely interested in Muggle life, as Ronnie had told her last year. But she was quite surprised by how little Mr Weasley seemed to know.

For instance, even though he apparently had a collection of plugs, Mr Weasley didn’t know how they worked. As Harriet thought about it, she didn’t know exactly how they worked either. She knew that the power company ran power to all the houses that paid to use it, and all you had to do was to stick the plug into the socket in the wall and it ran power to whatever it was you had plugged in. Fortunately, this seemed to satisfy Mr Weasley, and he promptly moved on to other topics. As he and Harriet talked, Harriet could see the other Weasleys rolling their eyes but still smiling. In the end, Mr Weasley was almost late for work.

“Isn’t Percy coming down?” Ginny asked the room at large as Mr Weasley hurried out the front door.

Harriet looked around and realised Ginny was right, Percy was the only member of the family in the house who wasn’t there. As she thought about it, Harriet hadn’t seen Percy since she’d arrived.
“Oh, he must be having another lie in,” Mrs Weasley said simply as she flicked her wand sending all of their plates to the sink. As she did, Harriet couldn’t help but notice an odd little smile on Mrs Weasley’s face.

“Yeah, Percy’s been a little odder than usual this summer. Usually, he never misses a breakfast,” Fred said suspiciously.

“Yeah, and he got his OWL results too, didn’t even gloat once,” muttered George with similar scepticism as he looked up at the ceiling.

Harriet felt curious now too, was Percy ill? “Do you think he’s sick?” Harriet asked concerned.

“Oh, I doubt it dear, don’t worry about Percy,” Mrs Weasley said, still smiling her little smile.

From her left Ronnie suddenly spoke up. “Hey, Harriet, I’ve got a, uh, a match this Saturday and, well, I was wondering—”

“Oh! Oh, sure!” Harriet said immediately. Ronnie blushed and shifted a little in her chair. “Oh, thanks,” Ronnie said, going as red in the face as her hair, “I was wondering if you wanted to go help me practice in a bit.”

“I’ll join in too!” Ginny said. The three girls looked at Fred and George who both raised their eyebrows.

“What? You think we have nothing better to do than help some little girls kick balls around?” Fred said sounding affronted.

“No thanks,” George said with a little smirk. “No kicking our balls, thank you very—ow!”

George yelped as Mrs Weasley rapped him on the top of the head with a long-handled wooden spoon. “That’s enough you two, I won’t have those kinds of jokes in my house, thank you very much,” Mrs Weasley said.

George rubbed the spot on the top of his head, and both he and Fred opened their mouths to retort, but the burning glare from Mrs Weasley silenced them both immediately.

Harriet grinned as she, Ronnie, and Ginny got up and made their way upstairs to their rooms. Harriet still had to borrow clothes from Ginny, as almost nothing she had from the Dursleys fit her, either being too large or too small. The only clothing she had with her that did fit was her party outfit, and that was less than appropriate for practising football.

Harriet and Ginny changed into track shorts and tee-shirts, while Ronnie changed into her actual uniform. As they headed down the stairs, Harriet was a little worried that her old, ratty trainers wouldn’t stand up to much football. The toe on the left one was split along the seam which made Harriet glad that enough of the morning had gone by that the dew was gone on the grass when they stepped out into the morning sunlight.

As it turned out, it was Harriet and Ginny that did most of running. Ronnie played goalkeeper for her team, so most of what Ginny and Harriet had to do was kick the football at her as she stood between two trees in the garden, trying to get the ball past her. Ronnie was pretty good, Harriet thought. She had a focus that Harriet hadn’t seen Ronnie have any time before as she watched each ball come in. It made her very excited for Saturday to see her friend in action.
There was considerable delay in play when the ball rolled into the little patch of bushes that lined the house, and they were forced to do some impromptu de-gnoming. Some of the gnomes who had snuck back into the garden the day before got hold of the football and wouldn’t give it back.

The practice came to a complete end a little before lunchtime with an angry shout from one of the second-floor windows. It seemed they had finally awoken Percy, who was yelling angrily down at them all, his glasses askew. Ronnie merely responded with an eye roll and a well-aimed punt of her football that sent it up, hitting the side of the house right over Percy’s window, making him jump and duck out of sight, muttering in a disgruntled way.

“Not my fault he was up all night,” Ronnie grumbled as Ginny laughed at Percy’s expense.

As Harriet watched them, she was glad to see how well the two sisters did get along. Ronnie was right, with so many brothers she and Ginny did have to stick together.

They went back inside to wash up. Ronnie was dirty from how many times she had dived to block kicks and Harriet and Ginny had both worked up good sweats. After that, Harriet pulled out some of her parchment to finally write letters to all of her closest friends to let them know what had happened, as well as thank you notes to her other friends who had written her birthday cards. She wrote mostly matching letters as far as the story of her summer went, though she made sure to thank them all individually for the birthday cards, to apologise for not being able to write them back sooner and to tell them how much she was looking forward to seeing them as soon as possible.

Harriet felt a little embarrassed as she attached the sizeable stack of letters to Hedwig’s leg. “Is that too much?” she asked the snowy owl.

Hedwig hooted in a dignified way, though she seemed very excited as she puffed out her snow-white chest. Harriet smiled and rubbed the back of Hedwig’s head warmly between her thumb and forefinger. Hedwig clicked her beak with pleasure before Harriet leaned in to give Hedwig the gentlest hug she could.

“Thank you, Hedwig. I couldn’t have made it through all this past summer without you. I’ll never let anyone lock you away in a cage again, I promise.”

Hedwig hooted softly and gave Harriet’s earlobe a soft nibble. Harriet sat back, and Hedwig turned, spreading her silent wings and sweeping out of the window. Harriet leaned forward again to watch the owl fly off over the trees, disappearing quickly.

Harriet got up and stretched. She was getting even more tired, but she heard Ronnie yell up at her from a couple of floors down that lunch was ready. Not at all reluctant to have more of Mrs Weasley’s excellent cooking, Harriet quickly got up and ran back down the stairs. Harriet thought Mrs Weasley’s cooking was easily on par with Dobby’s, and Harriet thought Dobby cooked just as well as the cooks at Hogwarts.

On the way back down the stairs, Harriet almost ran into Percy who was finally coming out of his bedroom, though still in a white tank-top and plaid pyjama pants. Harriet barely suppressed a giggle at the realisation that even here at home Percy still pinned his Prefect’s badge to his shirt.

“Oh, hello Potter,” Percy said in a distracted voice as he saw her.

Harriet smiled. “Hi Percy, how’re you today?”

“Fine, fine, and you, Potter?”

“I’m alright, been having a good summer?” Harriet asked politely.
Percy merely shrugged. “It’s had its ups and—wait a minute, P-Potter? What are you doing here?!” Percy asked in total surprise.

Harriet beamed up at him. “I got here yesterday morning! Fred, George, Ronnie and Ginny flew your dad’s car to rescue me!” Harriet said and continued down the stairs, leaving Percy in dumbstruck silence behind her.

Lunch proved to be just as delicious and filling as ever. Harriet was pretty sure even Ginny’s clothes wouldn’t fit before long. They managed to eat much more quickly now that Mr Weasley wasn’t bombarding Harriet with questions, and soon they were all back outside. This time, however, it was Harriet who had an idea for a game. Now that she had friends around she had the chance to play for the first time in her life.

“We’re going to play Nancy Drew?” Ronnie asked. “How do we do that?”

Harriet launched into her explanation. She, Ronnie and Ginny would play the sleuths, trying to find the stolen treasure which had been taken by thieves played by Fred and George. The entire plan hinged on Fred and George wanting to join in, which Harriet doubted would happen after their refusal to participate in football, but to her surprise, Fred and George both agreed to the plan point blank.

They set things up as quickly as they could. They swiped the family clock from the kitchen that had all the Weasley family’s names on it, pretending it was a rare, expensive clock with secret instructions on how to get to a buried treasure hidden inside it. The three girls gave Fred and George a half an hour to hide the clock and all the clues in the large garden and then hide.

Finally, Harriet, Ronnie and Ginny headed out. Harriet wasn’t sure precisely what clues they had to look for. The garden was reasonably large and cluttered. However, she had a strong suspicion that if anything were going to be hidden anywhere, it would be in either the garage, Mr Weasley’s shed, or the broom shed. The closest was Mr Weasley’s shed, so they headed there to investigate first. The three girls crouched low and tip-toed as quietly as they could to the shed. They peeked cautiously through the windows, in case Fred and George were hiding inside to ambush them.

Seeing no one inside, Harriet opened the door. They searched a good ten minutes before spotting a conspicuously new looking piece of parchment sticking halfway out from under a shelf. She picked it up and read aloud.

There’s a clue upon this paper,
That may help you halt our caper
Try and solve it if you may,
Or else the villains win the day!

Ronnie and Harriet crowded around Ginny, reading too. On the back of the paper was drawn a map, but nothing on it was labelled.

“Typical,” muttered Ronnie in frustration.

“Well, we’ve just got to figure out the orientation,” Harriet said, trying to sound cheerful.
There was a point on the map with a dotted line that led to another location, which had another
dotted line leading to yet another site. Harriet took the note and walked out of the shed looking
around. She had an inkling, and she had to see if it was right. She looked from the shed to the garage
and turned the map. Sure enough, if she held it at the right angle, the line went right from the shed to
the garage, and then the final line led straight to the broom shed on the front lawn.

“Okay, I’m guessing our next clue will be hidden in the garage,” Harriet said, pointing this out to
Ronnie and Ginny.

“Good thinking,” Ginny said.

Harriet shrugged. “Just trying to think logically, I mean, not exactly like there’s a lot of places for
them to hide clues, is there?” Harriet said though she blushed.

They headed off towards the garage, again sneaking as they went, trying to be discrete.
Unfortunately, the garage didn’t have any windows to peek through as the shed had. If there were
anywhere that Fred and George would be waiting to ambush them, it would be here. Harriet looked
at Ronnie and Ginny, who both finally nodded reassuringly and Harriet pushed open the door.

It was almost pitch black inside the garage with no light from windows. The car took up most of the
room, and Harriet kept clear of the doors on it, in case that was where Fred and George were hiding.
On the other hand, it might also be where they had stashed the second clue.

Harriet closed her eyes, waiting to adjust them to the low light of the garage before she turned to
Ronnie and Ginny. “Okay, Ginny, you check under things. Ronnie, you try checking on top of
things, I’ll look in the car and on the shelves,” Harriet instructed.

Ronnie and Ginny agreed, and they set to work. Ginny peered under everything she could, while
Ronnie walked around using her height to look on top of everything, even though she did have to go
on tip-toe occasionally. Harriet looked on all the shelves and also braved peering into the car. After
determining Fred and George were not, in fact, hiding in it, she opened the doors and climbed inside
to look on and under the seats and in the glove-box. Finally, after twenty minutes of searching in the
cramped garage, Harriet had to conclude that they must have missed something with the first clue.

“There’s nothing here…” Harriet grumbled, crossing her arms in frustration.

“What can we have missed?” Ginny asked.

“You never looked up,” said a voice from above them. It sounded as though it was brimming with
barely suppressed laughter.

As one, Harriet, Ginny, and Ronnie all looked up. Fred and George were sitting in the rafters right
above them.

“Surprise!” George yelled, and the twins dropped down on them.

Ginny, the shortest, managed to duck under Fred’s grabbing arms which caught Harriet instead.
George grabbed hold of Ronnie who yelled and struggled.

“Gotcha you little snoops!” Fred said as he pinned Harriet’s arms down to her sides.

“No! Get off!” Harriet yelled though she was trying not to laugh.

“The little one escaped, Fred,” said George as he tried to keep a hold of Ronnie and Ginny darted
out the door.
“No matter my comrade in crime, we’ll get her in due course!” Fred said, apparently taking his role to heart.

“You’ll never get away with this!” Ronnie declared, looking like she was getting more into the game too.

“But of course we will!” declared George with a laugh, “What do you think this is, a game!?”

All four of them laughed at this though Harriet squeaked as Fred spun her around and lifted her like a potato sack over his shoulder.

“Ack! No Fred! Put me down!” she declared as she almost fell over face first when Fred stood back up too quickly and nearly lost his balance.

“Oy! I’m not Fred! I’m Prongs Padfoot, criminal mastermind!”

“Oh, what?! You’re going to leave me with something like Mooney Wormtail!” George said, breaking character in his indignation.

Fred rolled his eyes as he tried to keep Harriet balanced on his shoulder while she was still struggling. “You can be—ow, hey watch it, or I’m gonna drop you! You can be Paws Mooney if you want?” Fred said.

George nodded.

“What the devil are you two talking about?” Ronnie asked, struggling harder.

“Never you mind!” George declared and seemed to realise he wouldn’t be able to carry Ronnie over his shoulder as easily since she was the same height as him.

He started to force march her towards the door. Fred carried Harriet after them, and they started off towards the shed. From over Fred’s shoulder, Harriet could see Ginny sneaking along after them, moving quite catlike amongst the bushes as she trailed them.

However, it was at that moment the game came to an end. They rounded the corner of the house, where it became apparent that Fred and George were taking them both to the broom shed. Ronnie took one look at it and immediately began to struggle frantically. At first, it seemed like she was still playing. That was until she finally yelled “NO!” and spun to kick George in the shin before running off.

“Ronnie!” Harriet yelled after her friend as Fred set her down, looking very confused.

“What was that about?” Fred asked, scratching his head.

Ginny stomped over to them, her arms crossed. As she did, Harriet couldn’t help but recognise how much Ginny looked like a younger, thinner version of Mrs Weasley the morning Harriet had arrived at the Burrow. She walloped Fred on the shoulder and glared.

“You know she’s afraid of spiders, you ass!” Ginny said and ran off after Ronnie.

“Oh, oh damn,” Fred said, rubbing his shoulder before turning to look at the shed.

“Oh, yeah… that was kinda our fault, wasn’t it?” George muttered sounding guilty as he rubbed his shin where Ronnie had kicked him.

Harriet didn’t bother to wait for further explanation. She ran off after Ginny. She caught up with
Ginny and together they started looking for Ronnie. They finally found her in her room, hugging her football tight to her chest and rocking a little. Ronnie looked away ashamed as Harriet and Ginny entered.

“Sorry I ruined your game, Harriet,” Ronnie muttered. She gave a loud sniff, and Harriet sighed as she and Ginny sat on the bed next to her.

“It’s okay, Ronnie, honest, just, what happened?” Harriet asked, hugging Ronnie tight around the shoulders.

Ronnie took a deep breath. “When I was three, Fred and George locked me in that shed for a joke… and it’s crawling with spiders… I couldn’t see them at first but they started crawling all over me and made me start to panic; and I got bit a couple of times, had to go to St Mungo’s to make sure none of them were poisonous.”

Harriet grimaced at the thought. She didn’t mind spiders much; she’d gotten used to them from living in the cupboard under the stairs. But she had no problem imagining how traumatic that would have been to a three-year-old.

“Oh Ronnie, I’m sorry,” Harriet said. Ginny sat on the other side of Ronnie putting an arm around her shoulder the other way.

Ronnie sniffed again. As she did, Harriet suddenly had a suspicion about Ronnie having never shown much real interest in flying or Quidditch, or sneaking out to fly as Ginny had alluded to doing. It wasn’t so much Fred and George not letting her join in; it was Ronnie’s fear of spiders. She didn’t want to go near the broom shed, ever.

* * * *

The rest of the week went much the same. Despite the awkward ending to the first game, Ronnie was okay with playing further adventures, although on the condition that the broom shed was not be used. They also expanded the games to the little paddock on the hill behind the Weasley house where usually Fred, George, their older brother Charlie, and now Harriet would practice Quidditch.

Harriet and Ginny continued to help Ronnie with her football practice too. Harriet was pleased to find she was improving as they played that week too, and she managed to score on Ronnie once. However, this made Harriet nervous, as Ronnie seemed to be very hard on herself for having let the goal in and had a harder time blocking them after that.

During breakfast Friday morning Hedwig flew in through the kitchen window, carrying six letters and looking immensely pleased with herself.

“Hedwig! She’s got everyone’s replies!” Harriet said and stroked Hedwig’s back gently in thanks before taking the letters from her. Hedwig then flew up to the perch that the Weasley family owl, Errol, was sleeping on. Hedwig landed as softly as possible so as not to wake the old owl before she puffed up her feathers and stuck her head under her wing, clearly tired from her nearly week-long mission.

Harriet smiled at Hedwig and looked back at the letters, pondering who’s to open first. She decided on Hermione’s. Harriet found the letter fairly predictable. Hermione seemed torn between being glad that Harriet had been rescued from the Dursleys, and being more than a little disapproving that Fred, George, Ronnie and Ginny had flown an illegal car to do it. She also said how she and Marcus were going to both be in Diagon Alley the upcoming Wednesday, and hoped Harriet and the Weasleys
could meet up there too.

Scott’s letter was in the same vein as Hermione’s, even saying how he and Kieran were planning on going to Diagon Alley on Wednesday to meet up with Hermione and Marcus as well.

“Well that would work out nicely,” Mrs Weasley said overhearing Harriet telling Ronnie about this. “I’ll see if Arthur can get the day off that day and we can all go as a family. You all should be getting your letters any day now with your book lists.”

Harriet smiled even more. She was going to get to see all of her friends before school started.

Marcus’ letter deviated considerably from Hermione and Scott’s. In his, he expressed anger (which Harriet had predicted) at the Dursleys as well a bit of envy at having taken a ride in a flying car. However, whereas Harriet had imagined Marcus would have burned down the door to Harriet’s bedroom, Marcus’ actual desire seemed to be to set the Dursley’s whole house on fire. Harriet shook her head but smiled affectionately and moved on to Hagrid’s letter.

In his letter, Hagrid had much the same anger as Marcus, saying how if he had known what was going on he would have turned up and finished the job he’d started on Harriet’s eleventh birthday with Dudley’s pigtail. This time, however, he said he would make sure he turned the rest of the family in the pigs they were too. Even though Harriet appreciated Hagrid’s indignation on her part, she had to admit she was glad now that Hagrid had not gotten such word.

Kieran’s, predictably, was the mildest of the letters. He merely expressed his relief that Harriet was safe and that nothing terrible had happened to her, how he’d been worried after not hearing from her for so long, and he hoped she could go to Diagon Alley too. Something in Kieran’s letter made her smile even more compared to the others. He was such a nice guy, just happy that Harriet was safe, and that was all that had mattered to him. Not revenge, just happy that she was okay.

Finally, Harriet opened Dora’s letter. Harriet was the most nervous about opening Dora’s letter considering that a little over a month ago Dora had helped Harriet stop Voldemort from stealing the Philosopher’s Stone. As a result, Dora’s still living ancestor and creator of the Stone, Nicolas Flamel, had the Stone destroyed. This meant that without the Stone’s Elixir of Life, Nicolas and Perenelle would finally die.

Even though Dora had said that she and Harriet were now friends, and had cheered Gryffindor House winning the House Cup despite being a Slytherin (which meant they were supposed to hate each other on principle), Harriet was still nervous that the death of her relatives would make Dora resentful. However, whatever Harriet had expected to read in Dora’s letter, she was wrong.

Dear Harriet,

My Muggle uncle runs a pest control company. It would be awful if some Formosan termites found their way into your aunt and uncle’s home, wouldn’t it?

Lots of love,

Dora

Harriet laughed at first but then stopped. Dora was only kidding, wasn’t she? Harriet handed the letter to Ronnie, and her face immediately broke into a dark grin.
“You don’t think she’s serious, do you?” Harriet asked under her breath.

Ronnie just shrugged and handed Harriet back the letter. Harriet bit her lip in thought when six more owls fluttered into the window one after the other, each dropping a letter into a little pile on the table. Harriet picked hers up. It was indeed their Hogwarts letters.

“Ah there they are, I told you they would be coming,” Mrs Weasley beamed.

Harriet tore hers open. The letter was full of the usual information: the train leaving from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, robe requirements, et cetera. However, the book list made her blink in astonishment.

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 by Miranda Goshawk

Break with a Banshee by Gilderoy Lockhart

Gadding with Ghouls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Holiday with Hags by Gilderoy Lockhart

Travels with Trolls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart

Wanderings with Werewolves by Gilderoy Lockhart

Year with the Yeti by Gilderoy Lockhart

“Gilderoy Lockhart?” Harriet asked trying to remember where she’d heard the name before.

“What’s that dear?” Mrs Weasley asked, and Ronnie groaned.

“Our book lists, Mum, we’ve all been set to get seven of Lockhart’s books this year,” Ronnie said miserably, and Ginny bit her lip looking up at her mother anxiously. “Each.”

Mrs Weasley turned and looked at them curiously. “Really?”

Ronnie held up her list, and Mrs Weasley took it, her face seeming to fall with every line she read.

“Who’s Gilderoy Lockhart?” Harriet asked Ginny under her breath. Ginny nodded towards the kitchen counter, where a book was propped up against the wall. There was a very handsome wizard on the cover, who had wavy blond hair and bright blue eyes, with flashing, pure white teeth that shone brightly. As with all other pictures in the Wizarding world, the man was moving and winking roguishly up at them all. Above his head was the title: Gilderoy Lockhart’s Guide to Fantastic and Fabulous Feasts.

“He’s a cook?” Harriet asked curiously.

“Oh no dear!” Mrs Weasley said looking flustered. “He’s wonderful! One of the brightest wizards of the day! He’s done and seen and written books on everything!”

“Mum fancies him,” Ginny muttered.
“Don’t be silly, Ginny,” Mrs Weasley snapped, having overheard.

Ronnie snorted into her porridge and Ginny rolled her eyes at Harriet who returned a surreptitious smile before she looked back at her list. The professor who had set all these books must have been a fan as well, Harriet thought and looked up as Fred and George finally came down.

“Morning all,” Fred said as they took their seats and Mrs Weasley started serving them breakfast too.

“Ah, book lists in eh?” George said, snatching up his letter and tearing it open. George read and his eyebrows climbed higher and higher up his forehead as his eyes moved down the booklist. George whistled.

“Blimey, all of Lockhart’s dark arts books? That’s gonna cost a knut and a half…” George muttered.

“Really?” Fred asked tearing his letter open too. Fred whistled too and looked up at Harriet, Ginny and Ronnie. “Did you three have to get all his books too?”

Harriet nodded. Fred sighed. “Six copies of seven Lockhart books for five of us…”

“We-we’ll manage dears,” Mrs Weasley said gently, taking their letters.

Harriet felt her heart sinking into the pit of her stomach. In her vault at Gringotts in Diagon Alley was a large pile of gold that Harriet had inherited from her parents. The Weasleys were not so lucky. Harriet tried to look oblivious as she, Ronnie and Ginny got to their feet. Fred and George looked up at Harriet.

“Oh, Harriet, had a question, since Ronnie’s got team practice this afternoon, did you wanna practice Quidditch with us this afternoon?” Fred asked.

Harriet looked at Ronnie who rolled her eyes. “Of course, Harriet, you’ve gotta practice Quidditch too! Gotta keep being the best Seeker Hogwarts ever had somehow.”

Harriet blushed.

* * * *

Saturday afternoon came, and all of the Weasleys (minus Percy) headed down to the village. Harriet smiled with excitement. She had never seen a proper football match before, and going to watch her best friend play made it even better.

As they walked, Harriet couldn’t help but notice that Ronnie’s face already had the same look of determination on it that Ronnie always had when they practised. Harriet hooked her arm in Ronnie’s and gave it a little squeeze. Ronnie gave Harriet a nervous little smile and squeezed back as they kept walking. Harriet tried not to seem worried about her friend. She knew Ronnie’s confidence issues and wanted her friend to do well.

Harriet was glad that Fred and George were coming as well. Given the animosity that seemed to still be just below the surface between them, Harriet thought it was a nice gesture on their part to come out and support her. Ginny kept saying words of encouragement to her older sister, and Mr Weasley put his arm around her shoulder.

“Just remember honey, no matter what happens, know you did your best, and we’ll always love you, and have fun, that’s what counts,” Mr Weasley said, smiling down at her warmly.
“Thanks, Daddy,” Ronnie said back.

Harriet had to smile to herself. No matter how independent and tough Ronnie pretended to be at Hogwarts or elsewhere, Harriet had learned very quickly this week that Ronnie was “Daddy’s little girl” through and through. Harriet supposed that the mess-up over Ronnie’s name had something to do with it, but she found it adorable anyway.

Finally, they arrived at the pitch. By the looks of things, most of the town had turned out to watch the two teams. As she looked around, Harriet had to wonder how many of the other families there were also witches and wizards. Though Harriet then had to remind herself that football wasn’t very popular in the Wizarding world. The only others she’d heard talk about it had been Dean and Marcus, who had grown up in Muggle homes like her. In fact, they were the ones who had given Ronnie her love of football in the first place.

However, Harriet was proven wrong when Mr Weasley greeted another man who Harriet thought could only be a wizard given his odd style of dress. He had long blonde hair that came down past his shoulders and was wearing a strange sort of ankle-length, patchwork overcoat that looked like it was made from pieces of old brown and white carpets, a gaudy red and blue knitted shirt, dirty white pyjama pants and brown slippers.

There was also a girl with him that looked to be about Ginny’s age, who could only be his daughter. She had long blonde hair as well and was wearing a bright yellow sun-dress over blue Capri-style pants and red high-top trainers. At the sight of them, Ginny beamed. She and Harriet wished Ronnie good luck as Ronnie went to join her team before she led Harriet over to the little family.

“Hi, Mr Lovegood! Hi Luna!” Ginny said in greeting.

“Ahhh hello youngest Miss Weasley,” said the man named Mr Lovegood. If odd, he seemed like a warm, genial man to Harriet as he smiled down at them both.

“Hello Ginny, it is nice to see you here,” the girl named Luna said before she turned her large, grey eyes on Harriet. “And it’s nice to meet you, Harriet Potter.”

Harriet felt her eyes widen at the declaration. Unlike everyone else Harriet had met in the magical world Luna hadn’t looked for Harriet’s scar (which she was covering with her bangs) before recognising her. The girl’s voice was sort of dreamy, though oddly matter-of-fact.

Mr Lovegood turned at the mention of Harriet’s name and gave her a scrutinising look. “By Jove! So it is! Harriet Potter, it is an honour to meet you!” Mr Lovegood said, shaking Harriet’s hand eagerly.

“Shhhhhhh,” hissed Mr Weasley, looking around at the rest of the families filling up the seats and the sidelines. “Don’t go shouting that about too much, Xeno,” Mr Weasley said.

“Sorry Arthur, sorry you just, well you obviously know what an honour it is for any of us to finally meet the girl who lived, eh?” Mr Lovegood said beaming.

“Th-thanks, Mr Lovegood,” Harriet said feeling unaccountably nervous, “it’s very nice to meet you too.”

Mr Lovegood continued to beam while the girl, Luna, merely played absent-mindedly with her hair and watched Ronnie’s team stretching and practising.

“Ronnie is quite good you know? She puts her all into playing, but I think she tries too hard sometimes, she wants to prove herself too much,” Luna said.
“Er, yeah, I, I guess,” Harriet said uncomfortably. Luna didn’t seem to notice, just kept watching the players lazily.

From the middle of the field, the head referee finally gave a whistle to signal that the game was about to start. The fans and families all started heading towards the make-shift wooden stands sitting and waving excitedly to their kids on the field. The teams were co-ed, and it made Harriet rather impressed at her friend that she had managed to make goalkeeper when there looked to be others much taller on the team that Harriet thought would be better suited at first sight as they had longer reaches.

However, by the end of the match, Harriet found she had been proven dead wrong. Whatever worries Harriet had that Ronnie would start to lose focus if she let in a goal had been baseless it seemed, as Ronnie didn’t let in a single goal. However, the day turned out to be bitter-sweet, as two-thirds of the way into the match Ronnie was getting tired and so her coach pulled her and sent in their reserve goalie. The new goalie ended up letting in two goals, which resulted in a tie at the end of the match and it was called a draw.

Harriet felt a little bitter that the coach had pulled Ronnie like that, but Mr Weasley shook his head and to Harriet’s surprise, was smiling.

“No, no, Harriet, the coach did Ronnie a favour. He thinks Ronnie has a lot of potential, so he pulled her when she was getting tired before she let in a goal to keep her stats up. Ronnie hasn’t let a goal in all summer; he wants her to get noticed,” Mr Weasley explained.

Harriet nodded looking back at Ronnie who was walking toward them. It may have helped Ronnie individually, but it certainly didn’t seem to have improved her morale. She looked miserable as Harriet ran up and hugged her.

“You were great, Ronnie!” Harriet declared as Ginny walked up beaming.

“Thanks,” was all Ronnie muttered as Ginny reached up to tussle Ronnie’s already messy hair.

“You really were, sis, you didn’t let in a single goal,” Ginny said soothingly.

“We would have won if I hadn’t worn myself out so fast,” Ronnie retorted miserably.

“You were, you know?” drifted the dreamy sounding voice of Luna Lovegood. “Why is it your fault the backup goalkeeper didn’t play as well as you did even when you did get tired? That’s something to be proud of.”

Without another word, Luna walked off to rejoin her father, and they both started heading off down the road in the opposite direction from the Burrow. Ronnie blinked after her and muttered “Barking,” under her breath as Ginny giggled.

“There’s my girl!” Mr Weasley said making his way over and lifting Ronnie up off the ground as he gave her a giant bear-hug.

Ronnie groaned at the tightness of the embrace. “Daddy! Put me down!” Ronnie demanded though Harriet couldn’t help but notice she was smiling now too.

Ronnie’s coach came over, and he and Mr Weasley shook hands, both talking animatedly about Ronnie and her prospects. Harriet wanted to listen in to this conversation, but she felt a tug on her arm and saw Ronnie pulling her nervously away.

“What is it?” Harriet asked in confusion.
“Just come on,” Ronnie said, and Harriet shrugged and followed with Ginny. They ducked through the little crowd, one after the other before finally breaking out the other side and running towards a thicket of trees. Harriet and Ginny were panting once they finally got there and they both looked up at Ronnie curiously.

“What was that about?” Ginny asked.

Ronnie didn’t respond right away, merely picked up a stick and threw it in a long helicoptering arc towards another tree, which it hit dead on and spiralled off into the underbrush.

“Boys,” Ronnie muttered. “They try and talk to me after every game.”

“So?” Ginny asked, bemused. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

Again Ronnie didn’t answer right away. She merely shrugged.

“Doesn’t matter, anyway, thanks for coming you two,” Ronnie said, changing the subject.

Harriet smiled. “Oh come on, Ronnie, you’re my best friend, of course, I’m going to come watch you play.”

Ronnie nodded and looked up at Harriet before she finally smiled.

Chapter End Notes

original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

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"While we all know people who have met either greatness or ruin when they have chosen to step off the so-called beaten path, the simple fact is that often the most significant events in our lives, for good or for ill, happen when we step off that path by complete accident."

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet nearly leapt out of bed Wednesday morning. Mrs Weasley had said she would be waking them up early for the trip into Diagon Alley, but Harriet was too excited to stay in bed any longer. She had woken up nearly every other hour that night, looking at the clock eagerly before sighing in disappointment and going back to sleep. She couldn't help it. She was too eager to see all of her friends again.

She still didn't know if Dora was also going. Dora was the only one who hadn't said if she would be at Diagon Alley too in her letter. All Dora had said was that it would be 'awful' if someone released termites in the Dursleys' house. Harriet had sent Hedwig with a letter to Dora to see if Dora was coming too. Apparently, Dora lived far enough away that Hedwig had not returned yet with a reply. Harriet hoped she could see her. Even if she had only become friends with Dora on their last night at Hogwarts before the summer holiday, there was some understanding there between them Harriet didn't think she quite had with the others.

Harriet cleaned up quickly and got dressed. She had tried to wake Ronnie too but was greeted by Ronnie's usual 'wake up' grumble that sounded akin to an angry bear. So instead Harriet quietly headed down the stairs by herself, making sure to move extra quietly past Percy's room.

She did pause briefly to ponder his door. Percy had shut himself away in his room quite a bit. Mrs Weasley still wouldn't say what he was up to, but Harriet was sure something was going on. Harriet was sure Mrs Weasley knew more than she was saying. Harriet tried to remind herself that whatever was going on with Percy was none of her business; the part of her mind that loved adventure and mystery just couldn't let it go.

Harriet shook her head trying to put it from her mind and continued down the stairs. She entered the little walkway to the kitchen but paused when she heard voices. Mr and Mrs Weasley were already awake and talking.

"Will Percy be joining us?" Mr Weasley asked.

"Well, he said to wake him," Mrs Weasley replied. Harriet could hear the sound of pans being moved about on the stove-top.

Mr Weasley gave a short laugh. "This'll be the earliest I've seen him awake all summer."

"Well, you remember what it was like at his age, Arthur, I'm sure," Mrs Weasley said sounding a little coy.

Mr Weasley laughed earnestly. "How could I forget? I don't think a single day went by that summer we didn't send each other at least two letters."
Harriet blushed in spite of herself and put her hands to her mouth fighting back a giggle.

"It was quite lucky for you my father liked your father, you know?" Mrs Weasley replied. "He threatened my last two boyfriends with the Cruciatus Curse if they ever crossed him."

Mr Weasley laughed again, but somehow Harriet couldn't help but notice that the laughter seemed much more nervous than before. She didn't know what the Cruciatus Curse was, but it sounded quite nasty.

Out in the hallway, Harriet was still doing her best not to giggle. Mr and Mrs Weasley made such a cute couple in her eyes. Even though she was a little jealous, she was glad her friends Ronnie, Ginny, Fred and George had such a loving home.

However, Harriet did have to look back upstairs and think. Did this mean Percy had a girlfriend? Given his stiff demeanour Harriet found that hard to believe, but after what she had overheard it was the only conclusion she could make. But if he did why was he keeping it a secret? Shouldn't that be something to be happy about? Then the image of Fred and George's taunting faces flashed into her head, and Harriet knew immediately why Percy would never, ever want them to know that information.

Harriet suddenly became nervous not wanting the Weasleys to know she had overheard. Harriet waited another moment before she finally walked a little louder than she usually would have towards the door pushing it open and beaming at Mr and Mrs Weasley.

"Good morning!" Harriet chirped, trying to sound nonchalant and eager.

"Good morning, dear," Mrs Weasley said smiling over at Harriet from the counter where she was preparing bread, eggs and bacon. Mr Weasley beamed back and pulled the chair out beside him.

Harriet sat as Mrs Weasley started frying the eggs and bacon and Mr Weasley spoke up. "So, Harriet, I hope you don't mind my asking, but Molly and I were wondering for next summer—"

Harriet felt her heart soar. Was Mr Weasley about to ask her what she hoped he was going to ask?

"—if you could explain exactly how Muggle post works? Seeing as how this summer we had difficulty in getting letters to you the normal way."

Harriet's heart sank. That wasn't what she'd hoped he was going to ask at all. "Oh, well, it, uh, it works pretty simply, really," Harriet said, trying not to sound disappointed. "You write your letter, you put it in an envelope, and then you put a stamp on the envelope in the upper right corner, you put your address in the upper left corner, and then you put the address of the person you're mailing it to in the middle."

"So like normal post except for the stamp?" Mr Weasley asked.

"Yeah, exactly, and then all you have to do is drop it in a letterbox or at a post office, and they mail it for you."

"I see, I see," said Mr Weasley, his eyes gleaming with fascination. "And how do they—" Mr Weasley started to ask but stopped at a look from Mrs Weasley.

Harriet smiled again. Despite her disappointment that the Weasleys weren't going to ask her to stay next summer Mr Weasley's manic desire to learn anything he could about Muggle life always cheered her up.
"Well, the other question is about the use of a telephone. Eh, maybe not so much the function," Mr Weasley went on with a cautious eye towards Mrs Weasley. "but regarding etiquette…"

"Oh, well that's easy enough," Harriet said smiling. "There's a part you talk into and a part you listen through, all you have to do is pick the phone up off the base part, dial the number you want to call, some have dials, and some have buttons, and wait for whoever you're calling to answer."

"Fascinating… and all you do is talk, and the other person can hear you just fine?" Mr Weasley asked.

Harriet nodded. "Well, some connections are better than others but yeah all you have to do is talk."

"Astounding," Mr Weasley said his eyes still gleaming in his thirst for more information. "Eh, as for calling someone, how long do you typically wait? I mean, if the person you're calling is not at home for instance?"

"Uh, oh, I'm not sure, to be honest, I've never really had that many people to call, but I think my aunt once said ten rings," Harriet said as she thought. "Oh, but some people's phones do have answering machines, which record a message for whoever you're calling so they'll know to call you back."

"Ingenious!" Mr Weasley declared. "How we wizards can continue to think we are more advanced than Muggles I have no idea, it's inspired! Simply inspired! So much simpler than owls—er, no offence Errol old boy—but to be able just to pick up the device, place a call and reach them almost immediately or at least leave a message right there for them to get back to you, simply brilliant!"

Out of the corner of her eye, Harriet saw Mrs Weasley roll her eyes. Mr Weasley broke off his revelry about Muggle ingenuity when Ginny walked into the kitchen.

"Morning everyone," Ginny said.

"Morning," Harriet said smiling as Ginny sat in the seat opposite her and Mr Weasley. Ginny looked wide awake and just as excited as Harriet felt. However, it looked as though she’d put very little thought into her morning routine as her hair was a complete mess.

"Morning Ginny dear, oh goodness you're a mess," Mrs Weasley fussed, producing a comb from nowhere and setting to work on Ginny's hair. Ginny didn't put up a fuss, though whether it was from being used to this treatment or being distracted by her excitement over going to Diagon Alley to shop for her school books, robes, and other magical equipment for the very first time Harriet wasn't sure.

"So, what's it like getting your very first wand?" Ginny asked Harriet. Her eyes were gleaming much like Mr Weasley's did when he was asking questions about Muggles.

Harriet smiled. "It's a great feeling even if Mr Ollivander is a little odd," Harriet said.

"I wouldn't be too harsh on Ollivander now," Mr Weasley said waggling a finger in a good-natured way. "The oddest people are often the most ingenious, and no wand-maker anywhere comes close to Ollivander. After all, Dumbledore is a complete genius, but he is certainly not without his quirks."

"I suppose," Harriet replied.

It was true Professor Dumbledore was odd, but Harriet didn't get quite the same feeling from Ollivander that she had from Dumbledore. She didn't think she could forget the way Ollivander had looked at her and how he had seemed much too excited that Harriet should be meant for a wand that "shared a core" with Lord Voldemort's.
"I hope I get a good one," Ginny said a little wistfully.

Mr Weasley smiled encouragingly. "The wand chooses the witch or wizard, dear, as Mr Ollivander will undoubtedly tell you. So instead you need to be glad that whatever wand chooses you it won't be so much you getting a good wand as it will be your wand picking an excellent witch."

Ginny blushed, and Harriet smiled to herself. Leave it to Mr Weasley to say something genuinely encouraging like that, she thought.

Harriet turned and looked at the door as she heard the sound of shuffling feet coming down the hall. It was Ronnie still in her pyjamas, looking half asleep, her eyes barely open, and her hair even messier than Ginny's had been.

"Oh Ronnie dear, you're not even dressed!" Mrs Weasley declared.

Ronnie grumbled sitting in her chair and staring blankly at her plate as if trying with her mind to will it to produce food like the meal trays did at Hogwarts. Mrs Weasley set to work on Ronnie's hair as well while Mr Weasley got up to work on finishing the cooking for her.

Soon they were all being served bacon and egg sandwiches. Fred and George soon came down as well looking no more awake than Ronnie. Neither did Percy who came down five minutes later. After what felt like a half a dozen egg and bacon sandwiches each, the rest of the Weasley children went up to get dressed. Harriet excitedly went to the door, waiting for them all to come out to head off when Harriet heard someone calling her name.

Ronnie walked into the entryway and looked at Harriet confused. "What are you doing out here? We're waiting for you by the fireplace."

"F-fireplace?" Harriet asked.

What were the Weasleys doing by the fireplace if they were leaving? Maybe they wanted a family photo for Ginny's first trip to Diagon Alley for her school supplies.

"Ohhhh right, you don't know about travelling by Floo Powder, come on, I'll show you!" Ronnie said and grabbed Harriet's hand pulling her back through the kitchen into the living room.

Mr Weasley smiled as she came in. "Ah, there you are, well let's get going, eh?"

"Uh, Harriet's never travelled by Floo Powder," Ronnie said to her parents.

"Never?" Mr Weasley asked. "Then how did you get to Diagon Alley last year?"

"I went on the Underground and through the Leaky Cauldron."

"Really?!" Mr Weasley asked, his eyes glowing eagerly again. "D-did they have, oh what are they called, escapators? No… escal—"

"Not now, Arthur," Mrs Weasley warned before smiling at Harriet. "Nothing to worry about, dear. Floo Powder is much quicker than those Muggle methods, but I suppose it can be a little tricky your first time."

"Here Harriet, watch!" said Fred.

He grinned and took a pinch of glittering powder from a little flowerpot that Mrs Weasley was holding and walked up to the fireplace. He gave her a confident grin over his shoulder as he threw
the powder into the fire, which immediately turned a brilliant green and rose up at least six feet.

"Diagon Alley!" Fred said annunciating clearly before he stepped into the flames. Harriet gaped as Fred, and the green flames vanished at once.

"You must say your destination very clearly, dear, to be sure you get out at the right grate," Mrs Weasley explained as George took some Floo Powder.

"The right grate?" Harriet asked. She was distracted by the fire blazing green again before it whipped George out of sight too.

"There are a lot of wizarding fireplaces to choose from, dear. As long as you speak clearly you should be just fine," Mrs Weasley said.

"Oh don't fuss, Molly dear," said Mr Weasley as he helped himself to Floo Powder as well.

"But dear, what if she got lost and wound up in the wrong home? There are dangerous people out there you know?" Mrs Weasley asked. Harriet wished she hadn't said that she was starting to get worried now too.

"Well, I could take her with me separately via side-along apparition I suppose," Mr Weasley said.

"W-well…" Harriet started to say, not sure what 'side-along apparition' was. "I-I mean I'll have to learn how to do it sometime, right?" she suggested.

Despite her worries about Floo Powder, Harriet knew the one thing she didn't want to deal with was Fred and George teasing her about being too afraid to try it.

"Well, very well, dear, you can go after Arthur," Mrs Weasley.

"All you do, just like you saw Arthur, Fred and George do, dear, is step up to the fire, throw the powder into the fire, say where you want to go clearly, keep your arms tucked in and your eyes shut, step into the flames," Mrs Weasley advised. "And most importantly, don't panic!"

Harriet nodded, took a pinch of the powder, and stepped up to the fireplace. Well, it's now, or never, she thought and threw the powder into the flames. The flames roared green, and Harriet closed her eyes, before stepping into the fireplace. Harriet knew what she'd done wrong immediately. She'd forgotten to say where she was going first. Harriet quickly opened her mouth to say "Diagon Alley," but at once she inhaled a mouthful of ash. Instead, it came out "Diagurn all-heh-ee!" as she coughed hard.

Harriet felt a rush of wind and her whole body spinning. Her stomach lurched at the sensation, and she finally opened her eyes. She was whipping past what looked like a stream of windows. A second later Harriet realised she was looking at fireplaces from the other side. Harriet wanted the sensations to stop when with a loud thud she landed on a hard, stone floor.

Her nose was throbbing where it had hit the stone, but it didn't feel broken, and it wasn't bleeding. Harriet groaned as she pushed herself up into a sitting position and realised her glasses had snapped at the bridge. Harriet looked around, holding her glasses on so she could see.

It looked like the inside of a little shop, and Harriet was aware of two things right away. First, that this was a wizarding shop, and second, that this was a shop she should not be in. The shelves and glass cases did not hold wands or spell books or cauldrons. Instead, they held a withered hand on a cushion, wicked-looking masks and what looked horribly like medieval torture devices she had seen only in books or on television. There was even a glass eye in the cabinet closest to her that followed
her as she got to her feet and walked towards the door.

As she neared the door, Harriet's heart sank even further. The street outside the shop was definitely not Diagon Alley. Everything looked dirty and dark. Nearly everyone walking by outside the store had the hoods of their cloaks pulled up over their heads and moved in furtive, nervous jerks.

As she stopped at the door, trying to look outside through her broken glasses, Harriet didn't know which worried her more, staying in the creepy, frightening shop, or going out into the equally creepy, frightening street. However, just as she was about to reach for the handle, someone stepped up to the door that made her decide staying in the shop was the right way to go.

Draco Malfoy was standing right on the other side of the door trying to look in through the dirty glass. The last thing Harriet wanted was to be discovered in a shop like this, alone, by Draco Malfoy. She spotted a large cabinet, big enough for her to hide in and immediately hurried over to it and climbed inside. She closed the doors behind her, leaving just enough of a crack to peer out as the door-bell chimed.

Through the crack Harriet watched Malfoy enter with a tall, blonde haired man who could only be his father. They had the same face and the same cold, grey-blue eyes. Mr Malfoy wore a long, flowing, jet-black cloak and Harriet noted how he walked with a cane although he clearly did not need one.

"Touch nothing, Draco," Mr Malfoy said as they strolled over to the counter. Draco looked around at the items on display with wonder.

"I'm not a child, father, I won't break anything," Draco retorted.

"That was a warning, Draco, not a reprimand," Mr Malfoy said and pointed with his cane at an opal necklace. "That necklace there is pretty to look at, but even the slightest touch of it will kill you where you stand. Understood?"

Draco muttered an agreement under his breath.

"Don't mumble, Draco," Mr Malfoy said as he rang the bell on the counter. "Your mother and I didn't hire you the best speech tutors in magical Britain for you to mumble."

"Yes father," Draco said more clearly, though still with the slight lilt of bitterness. Mr Malfoy either didn't notice or pretended not to as he rang the bell again. "But I thought you were going to buy me a present?"

"I said I would buy you a racing broom now that you are old enough to have one at Hogwarts," Mr Malfoy said in a bored voice as he drummed his fingers impatiently.

"What's the point if I'm not on my house team? Harriet Potter was given a Nimbus 2000 last year with special permission from Dumbledore even though she was only a first-year."

"I'm growing tired of your complaining about this issue, Draco," Mr Malfoy said with more than a hint of warning in his voice. "And I will again remind you that it is not prudent to seem less than fond of Harriet Potter in this present political climate. Indeed, I believe I tried hard to impress upon you before you started at school last summer how advantageous it could be to appear overly fond of Harriet Potter."

Harriet was hard pressed not to gasp in disgust. Was Mr Malfoy suggesting what Harriet thought he was suggesting? Harriet remembered the first trip on the Hogwarts Express after Draco had learned who she was, the odd way he had acted and looked at her. She also recalled how he kept popping
out at her in the corridors, always trying to catch her alone. Then there was their detention in the Forbidden Forest. Her suspicions about what Malfoy had been about to say to her there were suddenly taking a turn she didn't like. Had Draco been trying, poorly, to get close to Harriet on his father's orders?

Harriet expected, or maybe hoped, Draco would give some retort to this, some little sign of having the same disgust she felt. However, Draco merely scowled and muttered under his breath more, but too quietly for his father to hear as he walked away, looking around the shop.

"Ah, Mr Borgin," Mr Malfoy said. Harriet shifted enough in the cupboard to see a new man walk into view from the back of the shop. He had a stooped posture and was bald except for greasy looking grey hair growing around the fringes that he had combed over into what looked to Harriet like a nest on top of his head.

"Mr Malfoy! It is a *pleasure* to serve you again, ah and young Master Malfoy too, delightful to see you both," Mr Borgin said as he stepped up behind the counter. "Terribly sorry to have kept you waiting, but we just got in some marvellous new items, and well, I'm not as young as I once was, eh would you like to see—"

"No, I'm sorry Borgin, but I am selling today," Mr Malfoy said still sounding bored.

"Selling?" Mr Borgin asked his expression falling a little.

"Yes, selling. I'm sure you have heard the rumours that the Ministry has been conducting more raids," said Mr Malfoy as he pulled some parchment from his pocket and laid it out on the counter. "And as you can see, some of the items on this list are ones I would rather not have discovered in my home should the Ministry come to call."

Mr Borgin furrowed his brow in a look Harriet thought was very disingenuous concern as he put a pair of pince-nez glasses on his nose and started to read the list. "Oh but surely sir, the Ministry would never trouble you?" Mr Borgin said as he read.

Mr Malfoy put on a forced smile. "They have not visited yet. The name Malfoy still commands considerable respect within the right circles. However, with new laws being rumoured about like the so-called Muggle Protection Act, it is perhaps only a matter of time. Especially if that no-account blood traitor Arthur Weasley is behind it…"

Harriet clenched her fists tightly threatening to break her glasses further as she peered out through the crack. However, her attention was pulled away almost at once. Somehow, Harriet could have sworn she had heard the sound of voices behind her. She looked over her shoulder, but all she could see was the black back of the cabinet. She knew she had heard voices, and it couldn't have been from any of the other three in the shop because they had been girl voices.

"Can I have that?" said Draco's voice from far closer than Harriet had expected. She nearly jumped and moved around to see Draco was only a few feet away pointing at the withered hand Harriet had seen when she first arrived in the shop.

"Ah!" Mr Borgin said setting down Mr Malfoy's list and walking over to Draco. "Yes, yes the Hand of Glory. Simply put a lit candle in the hand, and it will give light only to the person who holds it. Your son has fine taste, Mr Malfoy!" Mr Borgin went on, looking pleased.

Mr Malfoy looked less impressed. "It sounds like a tool for a thief, to me. I do hope you are not suggesting my son would ever become such a thing?" he asked, coldly.
Mr Borgin spluttered. "Oh no, no offence meant sir, not at all!" Mr Borgin said looking nervous. Mr Malfoy's steely eyes drifted to Draco.

"Although, if his grades do not begin to improve this year that may be all he will become."

Draco turned away, fighting hard not to mutter more as Mr Borgin tried to look casual as he returned to the counter and picked up Mr Malfoy's list again. This time, however, Harriet kept her eyes on Draco as Mr Malfoy and Mr Borgin began to haggle. Even though she was watching to make sure Draco didn't get too close and discover her, something about Draco seemed to catch her eye. It was a side of him she had never expected to see. He looked slightly wounded and miserable. He now started walking closer to Harriet's cabinet, though he didn't seem to be paying any attention to where he was going.

Then, to Harriet's horror, Draco paused and looked at the cabinet. Harriet couldn't help but feel that Draco's blue-grey eyes were looking right into her green ones as he looked at the cabinet. He started walking towards her his expression one of great curiosity. Harriet didn't know what about the plain-looking cabinet could have been so fascinating, but it didn't matter. If Draco found her in here...

"Done!" said Mr Malfoy, and Draco stopped, looking back at his father. "Good day Mr Borgin, please stop by the manor tomorrow to pick up the goods."

"Oh yes indeed sir, of course," said Mr Borgin bowing so that his piled up hair fell off his shiny, oily scalp.

"Come, Draco," Mr Malfoy said and started towards the door. Draco paused only long enough to look back at the cabinet, studying it as if ordered to memorise it, then he turned and followed his father out of the shop.

The moment he'd left, Mr Borgin dropped all his pretences of courtesy. "Good day to you too Mr Malfoy… If even half of what he's hiding in his manor is on this list, I'll grow back my hair!"

Mr Borgin continued to mutter darkly while he gathered up some other parchments from his counter when again Harriet heard voices from behind her. Harriet listened hard determined to hear them. She couldn't entirely make them out, but certain words did seem to jump out at her. She could have sworn she heard the name "Dumbledore" at least once, and even "Filch," and "Great Hall."

Harriet turned to look over her shoulder. It occurred to Harriet that the back of the cupboard seemed darker than it should even with the doors almost shut. She turned more trying to look closer. It almost seemed like the back of the cupboard wasn't there, like she was looking into a cave or a tunnel. Harriet slowly started reaching out her hand, trying to touch the back of the cupboard.

A door slammed shut in the shop behind Harriet which caused her to jump, hitting her head on the top of the cabinet. Harriet yelped in pain, clutching the top of her head. She was in for it now; there was no way Mr Borgin couldn't have heard her.

However, Harriet didn't hear anyone walking towards the cupboard, and she nervously peeked out again. She didn't see Mr Borgin anywhere. Harriet slowly pushed the doors open and saw that the entrance to the back room of the shop was now shut, and Mr Borgin had put the closed sign up in the front door.

Harriet now stepped out of the cupboard looking around more just to be sure she was alone again before she looked back at the cupboard. With the doors wide open Harriet could see the back of the cupboard. Harriet put a hand on it, feeling it was hardwood, and definitely there. What could she have been hearing? She leaned inside, placing her ear to the wood now too, but she couldn't hear
anything anymore.

Harriet shook her head before she decided she couldn't push her luck anymore and tip-toed to the door. She slowly turned the lock and held the little bell, so it didn't chime as she pushed the door open before she finally stepped out into the street.

Once she was there, Harriet again wondered if she would be better off in the shop. Every shop on the street looked to be run by the very worst of wizards. *Borgin and Burke's*, the shop he had just left, looked to be the biggest of them all. Some seemed full of dark creatures, like one two doors down that had a large cage in the front crawling with giant, black spiders the size of house cats. Others had more items like the ones she'd seen in *Borgin and Burke's*; one seemed to specialise in shrunken heads, and some seemed to advertise selling banned goods openly. Harriet finally saw a large sign hanging down the street that read Knockturn Alley.

Harriet had never heard of Knockturn Alley before, and she swallowed, still holding her glasses on and trying to move with the flow of the crowd, keeping low and trying to be as inconspicuous as possible.

"Lost, dearie?" asked a raspy voice in Harriet's ear that made her jump.

Harriet spun on the spot and took a couple of quick steps backwards from the wicked looking crone in front of her who was holding a tray of what Harriet thought could only be human finger-nails. Harriet took another step back as the witch took a step towards her. Harriet spluttered a little, worried when—

"Harriet? HARRIET! What the *blazes* are yeh doin' down here?!!" asked a booming voice Harriet had no trouble recognising. The voice of Hogwarts' gamekeeper, Rubeus Hagrid, filled Harriet with the first bit of relief she'd had since the Weasleys had tried to explain travelling by Floo Powder.

However, before Harriet could even turn to look at Hagrid, she felt his strong fingers grab her by the back of her shirt and lift her up into the air and set her on his massive, broad shoulder.

The witch that had approached Harriet was cursing up at Hagrid who had apparently knocked over her tray of fingernails. Hagrid gave her no notice as he started walking quickly through the crowd out of the creepy street.

"Oh Hagrid, thank you!" Harriet said hugging the top of Hagrid's head, which was nearly as tall as her torso. "I was going to Diagon Alley with the Weasleys by Floo Powder, and I came out at the wrong fireplace I think."

"I'll say yeh did, windin' up in Knockturn Alley," Hagrid said as they started up a cobbled street and into the sunlight. "Yer in a right state," Hagrid went on, taking in Harriet's soot-covered clothes and broken glasses.

"I'll say I am," Harriet said beaming.

There was no one in the whole world Harriet felt safer around than Rubeus Hagrid, with the possible exception of Professor Dumbledore. Hagrid was the first wizard Harriet had ever met, and the kindest person she had ever known. He could see the good in anyone or anything, which unfortunately Harriet and her friends discovered last year also included things like a giant, three-headed dog and baby dragons.

"There we are," Hagrid said with a chuckle, "That look more like where yeh were tryin' ter get?" he asked and pointed down the alley. Harriet looked up and sighed in relief to finally see the tall, white
marble building that was Gringotts Wizarding Bank.

"Yeah, yeah that's a lot better," Harriet beamed and nodded.

"Yeh weren't down that place too long were yeh? Did someone do that to yer glasses?" Hagrid asked solicitously.

Harriet shook her head. "No, they broke when I fell out of the fireplace. And I, well I hid in a shop for a little bit but—wait, if that street's so bad what were you doing down there?"

"Was lookin' fer a better slug-repellent than what I've been usin'. The stuff yeh can get in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade's just not cuttin' it an' they're ruinin' all my cabbages," Hagrid explained.

"How's stayin' with the Weasleys been? I was right relieved to finally get yer letter, was worried sick when I hadn't heard from yeh."

"Wonderful," Harriet said smiling more but now feeling a little nervous again. She hoped they'd be able to find the Weasleys soon.

"Those lousy Muggles yeh live with," Hagrid growled. "I'm gonna report them ter Dumbledore fer that. Lockin' ya up and deprivin' yeh of food."

"Harriet! Hagrid!"

"Over here!"

Harriet looked over to see the beaming faces of two of her best-friends at Hogwarts, Hermione Granger and Marcus Van Der Lakk. They were standing on the top of the steps leading up to Gringotts Bank waving excitedly. Hagrid chuckled and started walking towards them. Harriet smiled over at them (sitting atop Hagrid's high shoulder put her almost eye level with Hermione and Marcus when they reached the foot of the steps up to Gringotts) and patted Hagrid's shoulder for him to put her down. Hagrid obliged, and Harriet ran up the steps meeting her friends halfway and giving them both tight hugs in greeting.

"I'm so happy to see you two finally!" Harriet said brightly.

"We're happy to see you too!" Hermione said.

"What happened to your glasses?" Marcus asked.

"Oh," Harriet said looking down at them in her hands. "Yeah, I had a bit of an accident getting here," She said, too happy to be that upset about them.

"Hello, Hagrid!" Hermione said as Hagrid awkwardly made his way up the stairs.

He had difficulty with them given how large his feet were compared to ordinary people's, which made steps more like a slope to him.

"'Ello 'Ermione, Marcus," Hagrid said reaching down and giving Marcus a pat on the shoulder that nearly toppled him off the steps. "Oh, sorry 'bout that."

"Eh, n-no harm done," Marcus said obviously too happy to see them both to be that upset at nearly being flattened. Marcus returned his attention to Harriet. "So are you coming to Gringotts?"

"Well, I do have to; but first I really should find the Weasleys…" Harriet said anxiously looking out at the crowded street.
"Well, won't 'ave long ter look," Hagrid chuckled and pointed to a conspicuous redheaded family making their way towards them through the crowd.

Ronnie reached them first after sprinting over at the sight of Hagrid. "Oh Harriet!" she said looking relieved. "We've been going spare! No idea where you woulda turned up, but guess you only went a fireplace too far, huh? Hi Hermione, hi Marcus!"

Ronnie gave Hermione and Marcus hugs when Ginny, Mr Weasley, Fred, George, and Percy caught up as well.

"Oh what a relief," Mr Weasley said pulling out a handkerchief to dab his shiny bald spot. "Molly's going frantic."

"Where did you wind up?" Fred asked, also breathing heavily.

"Found her down Knockturn Alley," Hagrid said darkly.

"Wicked!" Fred and George said in unison.

"We've never been allowed to go there," said Fred his voice full of envy.

"And never will," Mr Weasley said in an uncharacteristically stern voice before he turned his attention to Harriet. "I'm so glad we found you, Harriet, well, glad Hagrid found you at any rate."

Finally, Mrs Weasley caught up as well crying with relief as she hugged Harriet tightly. Mrs Weasley then took out her wand and waved it up and down Harriet like a brush, the wand sucking all the soot off of Harriet that she hadn't even noticed in all the excitement of winding up in Borgin and Burke's. Mr Weasley meanwhile took Harriet's glasses and repaired them with the same spell Oliver Wood had used last year on Ronnie's football.

"Well I'll be off you lot," Hagrid said smiling. "I'll see you all at Hogwarts."

Harriet watched Hagrid striding away and smiled to herself before she turned to the others. "So you'll never believe who I almost ran into at Borgin and Burke's."

"You were in Borgin and Burke's?" Mr Weasley asked, suddenly looking very curious, but also very serious.

"Well, yeah, I came out in the fireplace there."

"Who did you see?" Hermione asked.

"Draco Malfoy and his dad," Harriet answered.

"Malfoy? Lucius Malfoy?" Mr Weasley asked.

"I-I think so? Tall, blonde hair, has a cane?" Harriet asked.

"That's him," Mr Weasley said darkly. "Was he buying anything?"

"Er, no, he was selling."

Mr Weasley grinned in a self-satisfied way. "So he's worried… oh, I would love the chance to catch Lucius Malfoy for something… you didn't overhear any of the items he was selling by any chance?"

"Arthur, be careful," Mrs Weasley said anxiously as they passed through the large golden doors to
the bank. "The Malfoys are trouble, and if you're not careful—"

"You don't think I can stand up to a lout like Lucius Mal—" Mr Weasley started to retort, but he stopped dead in his tracks. He had spotted Hermione's parents and another man who could only be Marcus' father.

"Muggles!" Mr Weasley declared with delight as he shook all their hands eagerly. "Arthur Weasley, oh it is a pleasure to meet you all! Simply delighted!"

Hermione's parents both blushed slightly at Mr Weasley's excitement. Marcus' father merely laughed.

"Much obliged," he said. As she looked at them, Harriet had to suppress a giggle at the similarities between Marcus and his father. Mr Van Der Lakk was almost as tall as Mr Weasley but had a more rounded face than Marcus.

"So you are all exchanging Muggle money?" Mr Weasley asked, eyeing the notes in their hands with great interest.

Hermione giggled into her hand at Mr Weasley's boyish excitement, and both Ronnie and Ginny rolled their eyes. Ronnie introduced Ginny to Marcus before a goblin came over to lead the Weasley's and Harriet to their vaults.

"Wait up for us!" Ronnie called back to Hermione and Marcus who waved in acknowledgement.

Twenty minutes later, they were back in the lobby. Harriet was trying hard not to show how sick to her stomach she felt. However, it wasn't the roller-coaster ride on the special carts that took people to their vaults in the caverns below Gringotts that caused it; it was the sight of the Weasleys now empty vault. Harriet wished she hadn't seen it, and tried her hardest when they finally got to her vault to hide the giant pile of golden galleons inside from the Weasleys.

Fortunately, those thoughts were driven from her mind upon the sight of Kieran and Scott entering the lobby. Harriet, Ronnie, Hermione and Marcus all ran over to them, the three girls hugging the boys eagerly while the boys all shook hands with one another in greeting instead. For some reason, as she hugged him, Harriet couldn't help but want to let the hug linger a little with Kieran. She had been touched by his concern in his letter and wanted it to show.

Harriet couldn't help but smile her brightest. Despite the problems with the Dursleys and the fiasco with Dobby, everything that had happened since her rescue was just getting better and better. Now she was with almost all of her best friends from Hogwarts in the most interesting street she had ever seen.

They waited for Scott and Kieran to get their money from their vaults, and then everyone split up. Ginny looked a little disappointed as she was led away by Mrs Weasley to a second-hand robes shop. Mr Weasley was taking the Grangers and Mr Van Der Lakk back to the Leaky Cauldron for a drink. Percy muttered something under his breath as he headed off alone, and no one seemed that bothered to find out what he had said, while Fred and George ran off after their best friend, Lee Jordan.

"Well, we have one hour before they want us all to meet up at Flourish and Blotts," Scott said, looking at his watch. "Where to first?"

"Fortescue's!" Ronnie said eagerly, and everyone else agreed enthusiastically.

"So, has anyone else heard if Dora could make it?" Harriet asked as they made their way towards Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour.
"Not that I've heard," Kieran said giving Harriet a sympathetic look, as though he knew what she was thinking. As happy as Harriet was to see the rest of them, Harriet wanted to confirm that Dora was okay after the loss of Nicolas and Perenelle.

"Oh, I think I made it alright," said a familiar voice behind them and they all spun around to see Dora smiling at them all.

"Dora!" Harriet said hugging her. Dora looked taken aback but kept smiling as she returned the hug.

"Hello Dora, good summer so far?" asked Ronnie smiling.

To Harriet's surprise, Dora's smile didn't even flicker. Given the loss in her family, Harriet thought Dora might find the question a little rude.

"Oh, it's been great," Dora said, beaming. "Well Grandma and Grandpa Flamel's funeral was sad but other than that, yeah, it was a good summer."

"So you got our letters then?" Marcus asked, smiling.

"Oh yes, sorry I wasn't able to confirm, we only just got back home yesterday."

And they were off, talking about all the details of their summers apart. After the funeral, Dora and her family had gone on a tour of Southern Europe and Northern Africa. Kieran and Scott had spent most of the summer first at Kieran's place then at Scott's. Hermione had spent her summer doing extra homework and refusing yet again to let her parents give her braces. Marcus meanwhile had spent a quiet summer so far, just him and his dad, training his falcon, Adal, and tending their little farm. Ronnie went into great detail about her football exploits and gave a somewhat more colourful version of the rescue than had happened.

Almost everyone expressed the same indignation in person that they had in their letters at how Harriet had spent her summer at the Dursleys. Everyone looked at Kieran, who was the only one who hadn't said something angry about the Dursleys. He simply shrugged.

"Hey, getting angry about it's not fixing anything. Harriet's safe, and that's what matters, right?" Kieran asked.

There were general murmurs of agreement on this, and everyone resumed looking happy and excited once more. Harriet blushed and gave Kieran's arm a hug of thanks. However, Harriet couldn't help but notice that Dora didn't seem quite to share the new good cheer.

However, Harriet didn't get time to think about it as the topic immediately shifted to the war going on in the United States. Scott had brought the subject up when they walked past a stand of Daily Prophets that seemed to be in two minds, one half of the front page was an article about possible peace talks, while the other half was an article about there being no end in sight to the conflict. Even more confusing was the fact that upon closer examination, both articles had been written by the same writer, some woman named Rita Skeeter.

"I think it's awful, naturally," Hermione said. "I mean, fighting a war because they don't want to accept Native Americans as full citizens…"

"Agreed," Marcus said, sounding like his temper was flaring again. "And destroying those towns, it's just… it's just…"

"I know, Mate, there aren't any words..." Kieran said dismally.
"It was good of the Minister though, wasn't it?" Hermione said. "Having the children who survived come over here and the of-age students go to Hogwarts with us."

Dora snorted. "The Minister? Right, my mum works on the same floor as the Minister. She said less than ten minutes after the Minister found out Dumbledore showed up. Right after he left the Minister sent word out that the kids were to come here."

"Well, he, he still agreed to it," Hermione said softly.

Harriet bit her lip anxiously. She felt so out of the loop on everything that had been happening, not having anything to say about any of it. Fortunately, the topic of the war was dropped when they encountered the large crowd outside Flourish and Blotts.

"Blimey, wonder what the occasion is?" Ronnie asked. They got closer and finally saw the sign draped across the upper windows of the shop.

=GILDEROY LOCKHART=  
will be signing copies of his autobiography  
MAGICAL ME  
today 12:30pm to 4:30pm

"He's here?!" Hermione squealed. "He's written almost the whole book list! Such a prolific writer! Omigosh I simply don't believe it!"

The rest of the group all stared at Hermione in disbelief, but she didn't seem to notice as she bounced up and down on the balls of her feet, trying to inch closer through the crowd. Harriet looked at Ronnie who merely shrugged, and they started to follow.

As they slid through the crowd, Harriet couldn't help but notice that much of the crowd was middle-aged witches. Their little group managed to sneak around past the assistants who were trying to reign in the long line of anxious Lockhart fans and into the shop. They made their way to a little table to the side that had stacks of The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 on it, and each grabbed a copy before they found the Weasleys, O'Briens, McIntyres, Grangers, Marcus' father and even the Flamels standing together in line and talking happily.

"Oh good, you found us," Mrs Weasley said, looking breathless as she tried to straighten her hair. "We're almost to him now!"

Harriet found she couldn't much care, not seeing what the fuss was all about. She supposed Lockhart was handsome, but he seemed a little old for her to be worrying about.

Instead, Harriet put her attention to introducing herself to the group. The Grangers were very nice and wasted little time in complimenting Harriet on her very straight teeth, which made Harriet blush, and she found it much harder to smile without showing them. She remembered how Hermione had said her parents were dentists.

The McIntyres and the O'Briens were very nice too.
"Aye, Miss Potter is it, eh," Kieran's father asked in a lyrical Irish lilt.

"Yes, sir, nice to meet you," Harriet said smiling.

"Knew your ma and ma back at Hogwarts, I did," Mr O'Brien said, beaming.

"Really?” Harriet asked, suddenly very interested.

"Indeed," interjected Mr McIntyre overhearing. "They were a few years behind oos, but they made a name for themselves alright, 'specially your father and his little gang."

"Aye, Lupin, Dusk—"

Ominously, Mrs O'Brien, Mrs Weasley, and Mrs McIntyre flashed warning looks at the two men. Mrs O'Brien even elbowed Kieran's father in the ribs.

"Er, I well, ya, he and his little gang. Lots of laughs they were," he finished somewhat lamely. Harriet wanted to press him more on the subject, but the looks on the faces of all the other adults told her she wouldn't get the answers she wanted.

Harriet finally turned her attention to the Flamels. They looked just as happy to see her as they had in the Entrance Hall the night of the end of year feast at Hogwarts. Mr Flamel greeted her warmly, shaking her hand. Despite the large size and evident power of his hand, Harriet was surprised at how gentle he shook. The thing that caught Harriet the most off guard about the Flamels was another girl who was holding Mr Flamel's hand. She looked younger in the face, though she was a half a head taller than Dora. She had the same long blonde hair and blue eyes; though her face looked much more like her father's than her mother's.

"Ah, and this is Emma, our youngest," Mrs Flamel said seeing Harriet looking.

"Oh, hello, I'm Harriet Potter," Harriet said holding out her hand. Harriet was surprised, Dora had never mentioned having a little sister before, but then she supposed she and Dora had only really been friends for less than a day before they had both gone home for the summer holidays.

Emma predictably looked up at Harriet's fringe, spotting her scar before she shook hands.

"'Lo," Emma said, barely audible over the noise.

Harriet kept smiling. "So are you starting at Hogwarts this year too?” Harriet asked politely.

Emma responded only by shaking her head, looking at her feet. Emma was having a hard time maintaining eye contact and seemed much more shy and quiet than Dora was, and she moved a little closer to her father's side and held his hand tighter.

"Non, ma petit Emma still 'as anozer year before she will be starting at 'Ogwarts as well," Mr Flamel said beaming down at Emma. Emma blushed looking even more embarrassed than before.

Harriet smiled and now turned her attention to Ginny, who was eagerly showing the others her new wand and glowing with pride telling them all about how it had chosen her. Harriet tried to keep smiling and look excited with everyone else, but she kept feeling something intruding on her attention. She was unable to notice the considerable attention the boys were all giving to Mrs Flamel, all stealing little furtive glances at her as she laughed and hung on the arm of Mr Flamel. Harriet scowled a little, but of all people, Mrs Weasley put a hand on her shoulder.

"Boys will be boys dear," she said sagely, and Harriet blushed that she'd been so obvious.
As they got closer, Harriet started having to fight back some coughs as well. The ceiling of the shop was almost completely obscured from view by clouds of purple smoke that turned out to be coming from a squat photographer and his camera. The photographer had The Daily Prophet on the back of his robes and was dancing around trying to get as many photos from as many angles as possible of a wizard who could only be Gilderoy Lockhart.

Lockhart was sitting at a table laden with copies of books all titled *Magical Me*, and bearing his picture. Large pictures of Lockhart were hanging all around, all of them winking and laughing silently in a good-natured way at the crowd. Lockhart himself was wearing robes the same shade of blue as his eyes and was signing copies of his books at a surprising pace, his quill flashing and flourishing as he beamed around at everyone.

"Oy! Watch it!" Marcus snarled as the photographer stepped on his foot.

"Watch it yourself!" the photographer snapped back. "I'm here for *The Prophet*!"

"Then *The Prophet* hires some pretty rude, bumbling gits as photographers I'd say," Marcus' father snapped, making the much shorter photographer pale a little.

Lockhart looked up at the commotion, taking them all in before his eyes found Harriet and he stood up. "Could that possibly be Harriet Potter?"

The crowd parted, whispering excitedly as Lockhart stepped around the table, taking Harriet by her arm and hauling her back to where he had been signing. The crowd started applauding loudly, and the photographer's camera began emitting billowing clouds of purple smoke as the photographer began snapping frantically. Harriet looked over at her friends anxiously, trying to plead with her eyes for them to come up with some way of rescuing her as Lockhart began shaking her hand vigorously.

"Smile big now, Harriet, the two of us are worth the front page," Lockhart somehow managed to say to her just loud enough for Harriet to hear, even though he barely moved his lips, holding his broad, toothy smile.

Lockhart finally released her hand, which was hurting a little from his tight, over-enthusiastic grip and threw an arm around her shoulder, pulling her close to his side to stop her from escaping back to her friends and the Weasleys.

"Ladies and Gentleman! Well, this is an extraordinary moment indeed! Miss Potter here has just reminded me of an announcement I have been keeping under wraps for days now! When little Harriet here—" Harriet glowered at him for calling her 'little,' "—came into Flourish and Blotts, it was only to buy a signed copy of my new autobiography, which she will receive right now, free of charge!" Lockhart paused to let the audience applaud more before he continued. "She couldn't possibly have known that she and all of her schoolmates would soon be getting much better than even that! I therefore finally announce that this fall, she and her schoolmates will be getting the real magical me, as I have agreed to take up the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

The crowd burst into even louder cheers, and Harriet was soon staggering under the weight of Gilderoy Lockhart's entire collection of books, including his books on cooking and household pest control. Marcus and Scott rushed forward to help her with the books as they made their way to the side of the shop, away from the fuss of Lockhart.

The others all made their way over too, though most of them were trying not to laugh at how flustered Harriet was.
"Well, Lockhart's… er… interesting," Scott said sounding disapproving.

"Aye, seems to think right highly of himself for being a 'hero' doesn't he? I always thought real 'heroes' were supposed to be humble about what they've done?" Kieran muttered though he smiled at Harriet. "Like you for instance."

Harriet felt her cheeks get even hotter than they had been when Lockhart had hauled her to the front of the room and quickly dropped the books she was left holding into Ginny's cauldron to distract herself, telling Ginny she could have them.

"Goodness Potter, can't you even go into a bookshop without making a spectacle of yourself?"

Harriet knew at once who had said those words, and she would have known even if she hadn't heard him a little over an hour ago. She turned around to find herself looking right into the sneering face of Draco Malfoy.

"Shove off, Malfoy," Marcus growled as he and Scott tried to step in between Harriet and Malfoy.

"Oh dear, bodyguards, Potter? You do think quite highly of yourself don't you?" Malfoy drawled sizing the other two boys up.

"At least she's famous for defeating a dark wizard, not being one, like your dad," said a voice none of them had expected to speak up as Ginny pushed her way past both Scott and Marcus and glared daggers at Malfoy. Malfoy looked utterly taken aback and opened his mouth to retort when Mr Weasley came up behind them with Fred and George in tow.

"Here you all are," Mr Weasley said looking flustered. "It's madness in here; let's go get some fresh air."

"My, my if it isn't Arthur Weasley," said another cold voice that Harriet had no trouble recognising. Lucius Malfoy appeared out of the crowd, putting a hand on Draco's shoulder and giving Mr Weasley much the same sneer that Draco was giving Harriet and the rest.

"Lucius," Mr Weasley said with a curt nod.

"You've been rather busy lately I hear," Mr Malfoy said. "Raid after raid, so many late nights… well, the overtime must be good at least."

Mr Malfoy turned to look at the group of twelve-year-olds. His cold eyes passed over Hermione, Marcus, Kieran, Scott, Dora and Harriet. His eyes lingered on Harriet for a bit longer than the others, when to Harriet's surprise, they moved back to Kieran and something of a smirk passed over Mr Malfoy's face as he looked at Kieran's shillelagh and leg.

"Well, old wounds do die hard it seems," Mr Malfoy said.

Harriet looked back and forth between Kieran and Mr Malfoy, her brow knotted in confusion. What was Mr Malfoy talking about? Did he know something about Kieran's injury? Kieran had never told anyone what had happened to his leg, and the rest of them were too nervous to ask.

Harriet focused on Kieran more. His face was set, and his breathing was measured. To anyone else, Harriet thought Kieran would look convincingly unflustered by Mr Malfoy's ominous words but glancing down, Harriet couldn't help but notice that the knuckles of his hand on the shillelagh handle had gone white.

"Your old friends had a hard time killing babies," Kieran's father said, putting his hand on Kieran's
shoulder and glaring at Mr Malfoy. "Even though they tried."

Mr Malfoy's eyes darted around a little. As Mr Flamel and McIntyre joined the circle and even Marcus' father stepped up, he seemed to realise how badly outnumbered he was. Instead, he casually reached down into Ginny's cauldron and drew out her well-used copy of *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration*.

"Ah, perhaps they don't pay so well for that extra work, after all, Weasley?" he said looking at it with disdain. "Dear, dear, well I suppose being a Muggle-loving oddity doesn't exactly pay the bills, does it?"

Mr Weasley's face went scarlet, and his hands balled into fists.

"'Muggle-loving oddity,' eh?" said Marcus' father. He was standing behind Mr Malfoy and Draco. Mr Malfoy's face tightened a little, and he gripped his cane a little tighter.

"Dear me, is this one of them, Weasley?" Mr Malfoy said, looking at Mr Van Der Lakk as though he were something unpleasant on the sole of his shoe. "And I thought your family could sink no lower?"

Mr Weasley took a step towards Mr Malfoy, but Mr Van Der Lakk held up a hand. "I wouldn't talk so lowly of Muggles if I were you. If you pay attention to their history, Muggles are pretty good at fighting. Especially when we get an enemy to rally against like you… we've had those who think they're better than everyone else… they don't tend to last very long."

Harriet felt her eyes darting back and forth between Mr Malfoy and Marcus' father. Mr Malfoy kept gripping his cane, looking more threatening and enraged until his face suddenly seemed to melt back into his calm sneer. "You know, you're rather uppity for someone whose people were once hunted for sport—"

There was a soft thud, and Mr Malfoy was knocked backwards into a bookshelf and collapsed to the floor. Everyone spun on the spot to see what had happened. Mr Flamel had punched Mr Malfoy right in the nose.

The shop went deathly quiet in an instant, followed by a rolling gasp passing over the crowd. Mr Flamel shook his hand out as Mr Malfoy glared up at him trying to blot the blood pouring from his nose, which was broken. His free hand was scrambling for his cane again, and he had just grabbed it when a massive form moved between the two men.

"What the devil's goin' on here?" asked the booming voice of Hagrid. Mr Malfoy sized up Hagrid and set his cane back down, and just got to his feet instead. Draco was looking much like someone had punched him in the face as well, his jaw slack and his eyes wide moving back and forth between Dora's father and Mr Malfoy. Fred and George were giving Mr Flamel looks of sheer reverence while Ronnie was holding back fits of giggles.

"Zat was for mah wife's brozer, and his wife, and zeir children," Mr Flamel said darkly, glaring at Mr Malfoy.

It was one of those moments where a burst of clarity came to Harriet she had not had before. She knew what it was that connected her and Dora so much now. They had both lost family to supporters of Lord Voldemort. She looked around at the rest of her friends and wondered how many of them had lost too, the Weasleys, O'Briens and McIntyres.

Mr Malfoy didn't respond to Mr Flamel's taunt. He merely glared at Ginny and handed her back her
battered textbook. "Take your worthless book, girl; it's the best your father will ever be able to give you."

Hagrid now started ushering the little group out of the shop. The shopkeeper looked as though he wanted to stop them but after sizing up Hagrid, he decided it would be best to let them be on their way. Behind them, Harriet could hear Gilderoy Lockhart excitedly asking the photographer if he had gotten any pictures and if the fight could be worked into the article as well.

"Well, that wasn't much of a fight, I mean not really," Ronnie said beaming. "But that was hands down the coolest thing I have ever seen."

Dora grinned and gave her hair a flick over her shoulder proudly as she walked side by side with her mother, father and sister. Emma was still holding tight to Mr Flamel's hand, the one he hadn't used to punch Mr Malfoy. Harriet stole a glance at the other one. It was the same hand he had used to shake her hand. He remembered how gentle it had felt, but also the power she felt in it. It was an odd duality moment Harriet was trying to understand. Something so gentle could be so strong and do such harm. Like everything else she had met in the magical world, nothing was ever as it seemed.

Harriet now kept stealing glances at Kieran. It was only now occurring to her how remiss she had been in not asking Kieran more about his leg. It had somehow always just been a part of him in her eyes, since the moment she'd known him. It never occurred to her that he'd been any other way. And what had Mr O'Brien meant by Mr Malfoy's friends having bad luck killing babies? Did that mean Mr Malfoy really had been a supporter of Lord Voldemort?

Harriet looked at Kieran again as they made their way back towards the row of fireplaces that wizarding families used to get in and out of Diagon Alley. She wanted to pull him aside to ask him about it but thought maybe right after being reminded what had happened might not be the best time to bring it up. Harriet sighed, unable to help feeling like a bit of a coward as she said goodbye to them all, put her glasses in her pocket, took some Floo powder, threw it into the fire, clearly stated "The Burrow" and was whipped back to the Weasleys' home.

Chapter End Notes

Marcus Van De Lakk, Kieran O'Brien, Scott McIntyre and respective parents property of night-miner(dA)

Dora Flamel and parents property of me!

original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
"One of the easiest mistakes people make is thinking 'forgetting to live' means forgetting to be brash and adventurous. Sure, doing so will make life more 'interesting,' but it is not living. More often I find 'forgetting to live' is forgetting to find the joy in the simple things of life. Find joy in having your cup of tea, find joy in a simple meal with family. Laugh more, smile more. It is a mistake to get so caught up in trying to live that you forget how great it is just to be alive."

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet had a lot to think about in the next few days. Between a possible revelation about one of her best friends and a more significant revelation about almost all of her friends and their families, Harriet's mind was much fuller than usual. She did her best to smile with the Weasleys for the first couple of days, but the nagging worries and questions wouldn't stop butting in.

Had the followers of Lord Voldemort targeted Kieran like they had targeted Harriet? How could she find out? She was too afraid to ask. She never liked people asking about or looking at her scar, so she was sure Kieran wouldn't like people asking about his leg. Maybe she would ask Scott? But no, that wouldn't work either. While she was confident Scott would know, it was too much of the coward's way out, trying to ask someone else about something so important.

Fortunately, in the end, the fun of living with the Weasleys won out. There was just so much to do: football practice with Ronnie and Ginny, Quidditch practice with Fred and George, playing sleuths in the garden with all the Weasley kids (minus Percy), learning how to cook with Mrs Weasley, and teaching Mr Weasley all about life with Muggles.

Harriet found she enjoyed cooking much more than she thought she would. It reminded her of Potions, which was a class she appreciated apart from the strange Professor Snape. However, while the result of most of the potions Professor Snape had them make were things like boils or shrinking body parts, cooking resulted in food. Delicious food, at that, if it was done right.

Neither Ronnie nor Ginny seemed to share the same interest, but Harriet didn't mind. She felt awkward admitting it, but it was something like fulfilling another fantasy of hers. She remembered overhearing other girls in primary school talking about things they would do with their mothers. She would never admit it, but in the few short weeks she had been here, she was starting to view Mrs Weasley as something of a mother figure, the one she'd never had.

In fact, it was how she was starting to feel about the Weasleys altogether, that they were beginning to become more than just friends. They were growing to be a surrogate family. This made it harder to think that after this year at Hogwarts she would have to go back to the Dursleys. She kept trying to push this to the back of her mind, but it was difficult at best.

The biggest excitement coming, besides going back to Hogwarts, was Ronnie's final football match the last weekend of the summer holidays. Even though it wasn't an official league tournament, Ronnie still went through a wild range of emotions in the build-up to the match. Her moods would quickly go from being on top of the world and ready to conquer anything, to utterly convinced she was going to be a failure.
About the only thing Ronnie would always get up for when she was in her down moments was "The Muggling Hour," a radio show on the Wizarding Wireless that catered almost entirely to Muggle-Borns and covered Muggle news and developments. Ronnie liked it because there was a ten-minute spot where they talked football news. Her favourite was when they spoke about Holly Cambridge, an up and coming American football talent who was also a Muggle-born witch. She had become something of a hero to Ronnie over the past summer, being almost the same age as them.

Apparently given the war going on in America, Cambridge was also something of an inspiration. Harriet supposed she could see why. With hundreds of people dying every month in a secret war, it would be only natural they would want some good news to help cheer people up.

"She should be good enough for the majors," Ronnie said in a tone that was both glum and proud as they listened to the broadcast the day before Ronnie's final match. "But the big teams don't think she's mature enough for the majors yet, or national teams."

Harriet thought about it. She supposed even though she was good at Quidditch, and she had natural talent, she had only been playing for a year. She had only just turned twelve. She didn't suppose she'd be good enough to be noticed by the big leagues, even when she did turn fourteen. However, Harriet couldn't help but see the fire in her best friend's eye whenever the subject of professional play came up.

Even if she thought it was a stretch, Harriet tried to encourage Ronnie in those thoughts, if for no other reason than Harriet hated to see Ronnie depressed. Harriet had to admit that from what she had seen of the last match and their practice sessions Ronnie was pretty good for their age.

Harriet couldn't help but notice she was having something of an impact on the Weasley household in turn. For instance, Fred and George were now allowing Ronnie and Ginny to join in their Quidditch practices. Ronnie was still learning most of the basics of flying so the most advanced practising they would do, when she joined in, was throwing apples to one another in a circle. This kept Ronnie's confidence up as her goalkeeper practice gave her good hand-eye coordination, and she was able to catch most any apple thrown her way. However, either Harriet or Ginny still had to fetch a broom for her, as she always refused to go near the broom shed.

Ginny surprised everyone in these practices. She was quick and nimble on a broomstick, and even Fred and George had to admit that Ginny had talent. Harriet thought Ginny had the makings of a Seeker, but Ginny seemed much more interested in playing either Chaser or even Beater. Fred and George thought the urge to play Beater was their inspiration, but Harriet knew better. It was because of her hero, Gwenog Jones, who was captain and Beater for the Holy-Head Harpies, Ginny's favourite team.

Harriet's nose for mysteries and secrets was continuing to get stronger as well. With the solving of the Percy mystery (which she still was keeping hidden from Fred and George), her next mystery became Fred and George themselves. No one paid much attention to the random bangs and whistles that came from their room, but the more Harriet listened, the more she was starting to detect a pattern. She also couldn't help but notice the occasional furtive ways Fred and George would sneak up to their room before the bangs and explosions would commence. Given the loud noises that followed they couldn't be trying to hide the fact they were in their room. The only conclusion Harriet could come to was: they were taking things into their room they shouldn't.

Unfortunately, Fred and George were proving a little too crafty for her. Harriet supposed the regular Nancy Drew games with them having to be better and better at hiding things was giving them too much practice in being secretive. Once Harriet even flew her broom up to their window, but they had drawn the curtains. This just made Harriet even more suspicious, as Fred and George lived on the
second floor.

Harriet tried voicing her curiosities to Ronnie, but Ronnie dismissed them point blank.

"Fred and George have always been a little secretive and love making noise; it's nothing new," Ronnie said.

Harriet was unconvinced. While she hadn't known Fred and George as long as Ronnie, there was one thing she had learned about the twins. They never did anything without reason. Harriet was sure that, having gotten to know them better, Fred and George couldn't be up to anything wrong.

She decided to focus her energy on keeping Ronnie's spirits up. With her upcoming match, Harriet knew that Ronnie would ignore anything that didn't have to do with Football. It was Harriet's job, as her best friend to keep her spirits up.

* * * *

By the time Friday night came around, Harriet had no voice. She had shouted herself completely hoarse at Ronnie's match, cheering as her best friend played the entire match. Ronnie didn't even let a goal that snuck past her mid-game get to her, and in the end, they had come out for the win scoring two on the other team.

The Lovegoods had turned up for the match again, and Mr and Mrs Weasley even invited them over for the party afterwards. Mr Lovegood graciously accepted. Harriet felt a little sorry for Ronnie, as their team was throwing a party of their own in town. Harriet knew she wanted to go too, but before she could say much Fred and George had scooped Ronnie up on their shoulders and they were off making their way towards the Burrow.

Even if Harriet knew she wanted to be with her team-mates, Harriet had to admit the Muggle party probably had nothing on the one the Weasleys threw. Fred and George shot off half of the Filibuster Fireworks they had bought during the trip into Diagon Alley. The fireworks whizzed and banged and shrieked for hours. Mrs Weasley made a giant feast for them all with a large cake in the shape of a football that had "Congratulations Ronnie!" written in bright red frosting across the top.

Not having anything to talk about, Harriet merely resigned herself to listening in on other people's conversations. Mr Weasley was talking animatedly with Mr Lovegood about the war. Mr Lovegood seemed quite knowledgeable about what was going on, particularly about the history of the natives. Percy, who Harriet felt a little more gracious to for coming to Ronnie's final match, was sitting next to his father listening in with great interest. Harriet knew Percy was ambitious and wanted to work for the Ministry someday, and so she supposed the subject of foreign affairs would be quite interesting to him.

"Well you see, Arthur, it's a very tricky issue," Mr Lovegood was saying in a resigned voice. "Many of the aborigines don't want citizenship; they want to remain their people and be recognised as their semi-independent nations, much as the Muggle aborigines are in the States. But that makes a bigger problem because in their culture they don't hide their magical members, they are a united people, so some are afraid they would not follow the Statute of Secrecy."

"But that's no excuse for treating them as third-class citizens with barely any more rights than slaves!" Mr Weasley retorted slapping his palm on the table.

"I know it isn't, Arthur!" Mr Lovegood replied and raised a hand, "I'm not saying that; of course, they deserve all the same rights as other American magical peoples, but even within their ranks there
is disagreement that makes it difficult for them to start a popular support movement. The message gets confused amongst a population predisposed to discriminate against them."

Harriet felt her attention pulled away by Fred who elbowed her in the side gently.

"Mr Lovegood runs a magazine, The Quibbler. No one takes it that seriously because he does publish some pretty ridiculous stuff, conspiracies and the like, but there are lots of things you can ask him for answers about politics and cultures you can't get other places."

"Like what?" Harriet asked.

"Like how people in other places live," George muttered leaning over to look past Fred. "Mr Lovegood cares about local perspectives in news stories. The Prophet only cares about its own perspectives."

"And profitable perspectives," muttered Fred.

Harriet nodded. She remembered the copy of The Daily Prophet she saw in Diagon Alley with her friends and the contradictory headlines. She supposed it made sense now. Why sell papers to people who want to read about how long the war will last or to people who want to learn about how soon the war will be over when you can sell to both at the same time?

Harriet felt hands on her shoulder and turned to see Ronnie and Ginny smiling down at her with Luna standing beside them, though she looked more like she was only there by accident. Harriet smiled and without a word from any of them she got up to join. They went up to Mr Lovegood to thank him and Luna for coming to Ronnie's match, and to ask if Luna could spend the night. Given his genial nature, Harriet had expected Mr Lovegood to say yes at once. She was surprised when he hesitated a moment before agreeing. Luna didn't look thrilled or upset by it, but did hug her father and thanked him before they all headed into the house and up the winding staircase to Ronnie's bedroom.

"So your father runs a newspaper, Luna?" Harriet asked.

"A magazine, yes," Luna replied in her bored voice. "Daddy loves it. He gets to talk to people from all over about all kinds of things."

Harriet opened her mouth, about to remark on what Fred and George had told her, but stopped herself thinking it was rude to admit she had been talking about Mr Lovegood behind his back.

"Any more news on Snorkacks, Luna?" Ginny asked in a forced casual tone. Harriet couldn't help but notice Ronnie give Ginny a sharp look over Luna's head, but Luna didn't seem to notice. Indeed, for the very first time, Harriet had ever seen her, Luna did not have a passive and bored look on her face. Instead, her eyes had gone almost frightfully full in her excitement.

"Oh yes!" Luna said in a voice brimming with excitement. "Daddy and I have started saving up to go on an expedition to try and find them."

"Uhhhhhh what are—?" Harriet started to ask before Ronnie shot Harriet a look too.

"You've never heard of the Crumple-Horned Snorkack?" Luna asked in a voice brimming with disbelief.

"Uh, n-no, sorry," Harriet muttered. She sat on the edge of Ronnie's bed. Luna sat beside her, her eyes still wide and burning with excitement.
"It's a fantastic magical creature, never been photographed before, incredibly elusive."

"Heh, sounds a little like the Loch Ness Monster," Harriet said before she could stop herself.

"Nah, the Loch Ness Monster's just a kelpie who likes to tease Muggles," Ronnie said in an ever-suffering tone.

Harriet only had a second to digest this revelation about the reality of a legend before Luna launched into a drawn-out explanation about the Snorkack. The whole time, Harriet couldn't help but notice the mischievous twinkle in Ginny's eye as she stole looks back at Harriet. Ginny was finding Harriet's overwhelmed bemusement and Ronnie's exasperation incredibly amusing.

Fortunately, Ginny came to their rescue and diverted Luna's attention with their upcoming trip to Hogwarts. She and Luna wasted little time in comparing their wands, while Harriet and Ronnie talked about the match and what their upcoming classes would be like. Harriet couldn't imagine there would be that many surprises, since most of their classes would be the same as the previous year, just harder.

The two classes Harriet was looking forward to the least were Potions with Professor Snape, who acted as though Harriet didn't exist, and History of Magic with Professor Binns. She supposed History of Magic should be a fascinating class, both because from the parts she did overhear there were lots of wars and developments that had happened in the magical world and because Professor Binns was a ghost. Instead of being exciting, Professor Binns treated History of Magic less like the history of Magic and more like someone reading a phone book. Drowsiness was guaranteed within five minutes of Professor Binns lecturing, and at least ninety-percent unconsciousness amongst the students within fifteen.

The only student Harriet had ever seen who seemed able to fight off the effect of Professor Binns' voice was Hermione. This was an asset to the rest of their little group of friends, however, as Hermione was usually good enough to at least help them study for exams. If they caught Hermione in a good enough mood, she would sometimes even let them copy her notes. Unfortunately, that didn't happen as often as they'd like, given Hermione's often stiff demeanour. But maybe after all they had gone through at the end of the summer, she would lighten up a little. She had undoubtedly seemed much more talkative and light-hearted when they had met up in Diagon Alley.

The conversation did take a slight downturn when Luna rather bluntly stated the reason her father had hesitated to let her stay the night.

"Daddy is quite sad I will be leaving though, but he pretends not to be," Luna said. "It'll just be him all alone in the house with me gone away to Hogwarts."

Harriet looked at the two Weasley girls who were wearing quite sympathetic expressions as Ginny tried to tame Luna's slightly wild hair into a braid. Harriet wanted to ask why, but somehow the look on Ronnie and Ginny's faces told Harriet where Luna's mother was. Harriet looked down at the younger girl and felt that sense of connection that she felt to her other friends, like Dora. Had Luna lost her mother to Voldemort's followers too? As much as Harriet wanted to know, she had no desire to ask a question like that.

It was another moment that made her pause and think. She thought about how the war had touched many of her friends in the same way she had, losing close family and friends, but how many other students at Hogwarts had also lost. Her mind then drifted to Malfoy, the accusation Mr Flamel had stated against his father and wondered how many other students at Hogwarts were related to dark wizards like Malfoy.
She slid under the covers when they were ready for bed. Harriet had to wonder about the new refugee students coming to Hogwarts. Sure, Harriet and her friends had lost much in the last war, but those had all been years ago, so long ago even Harriet could only remember a flash of green light and a sinister laugh. What must the refugees still be dealing with, having only experienced the attack two months ago?

* * * *

The morning of September the First came with indecent speed. The night before had been nearly as fun as Ronnie's celebration dinner. They had spent most of the day packing and getting ready and ended with another big feast. Fred and George shot off nearly the rest of their Filibuster Fireworks, which were a bit more exciting this night as they shot them off in the kitchen rather than in the garden.

That morning, in spite of all their efforts the day before, there was a remarkable amount of packing they still had to do. Harriet nearly fell down the stairs after running into first Fred then Percy. Mr Weasley almost tripped over one of their chickens in the yard while carrying Ginny's trunk out to the car. Mrs Weasley was in a terrible mood running people down to put last minute spare socks in their trunks.

Harriet's biggest worry was space. She remembered riding in the Weasley's car the night Fred, George, Ginny and Ronnie had collected her from Privet Drive. The five of them plus Harriet's trunk and broom had barely fit. However, it appeared Mr Weasley had been busy with the car since she had come to the Burrow. He had magically expanded the interior of the car and the boot. Now everyone's trunks and brooms fit neatly in the boot, and Fred, George, Harriet, Ronnie, and Percy could all sit comfortably in the back seat. Mr Weasley, Mrs Weasley and Ginny were in the front. Despite disapproving of Mr Weasley's using magic to modify Muggle artefacts, it seemed Mrs Weasley was turning a blind eye to this apparent transgression in favour of their getting to King's Cross in time.

Mr Weasley finally started the car, and they were off. Harriet had only just started wondering when she would see the Burrow again when Mr Weasley had to turn the car around to fetch Fred and George's last box of fireworks. Next, they had almost made it to the highway when Ginny began shrieking that she had forgotten her diary. By the time they had fetched it and got back on the road they were running very late, and Mr and Mrs Weasleys' tempers were quite high.

Mr Weasley even tried to suggest using the "invisibility booster" he had installed on the dash to enable them to fly the car to King's Cross instead, but Mrs Weasley wouldn't hear of it.

"Not in broad daylight, Arthur! If anything went wrong—"

They only had fifteen minutes to spare by the time they got to King's Cross station. They got trolleys for their trunks and finally made their way to the secret barrier between Platforms Nine and Ten. Despite Harriet's anxieties that they weren't going to make it in time, Harriet couldn't help but relax a little as they reached the barrier, especially when she heard the soft sound of a violin playing somewhere nearby.

"What are you smiling about?" Ronnie muttered in mixed agitation and confusion when she saw Harriet smiling to herself.

"What? Oh, n-nothing, just excited to get on the train," Harriet said quickly.

"Oh, yeah," Ronnie said and smiled.
They lined up by the barrier, and Percy strode through first. Then Mrs Weasley went through with
Ginny, followed by Fred and George.

"Alright girls, you two next, I'll be right behind you," Mr Weasley said as Ronnie and Harriet lined
up their trolleys with the barrier.

"Ready?" Ronnie asked with a smirk.

"As ever," Harriet grinned and they hurried forward, almost getting to a run. Harriet didn't even
brace herself in her excitement as she expected to pass through the barrier just as easily as she had
last year. Unfortunately, she was dead wrong. Instead of passing through the invisible barrier as she
had last year and almost all of the Weasleys had done before her, Harriet and Ronnie hit the wall
with a loud crash. Hedwig screeched as her cage toppled off Harriet's trunk and Harriet felt the
handle of the trolley catch her in the chest, knocking the wind out of her.

"Girls!" Mr Weasley exclaimed rushing over to them and helping the two to their feet. Ronnie
quickly picked up Hedwig for Harriet, who had to sit down for a moment to get her breath back and
fight off the tears from the pain.

"What the devil happened, I'm sure this is the right spot!" Mr Weasley went on, putting a hand
against the wall, which remained solid. "Stay right here, girls, I'll, I'll be right back," Mr Weasley
said and hurriedly strode away from the platform.

Ronnie meanwhile picked up the shrieking Hedwig and set her back on Harriet's trunk as Harriet
finally felt the pain subsiding and got wearily to her feet.

"What did happen? How come we couldn't get through?" Harriet asked, her voice croaking.

"I don't know," Ronnie said looking up at the big clock. "The train's gone now though, left half a
minute ago… we missed it…"

Harriet felt her heart sink. In spite of all her hopes, it looked like she wasn't getting to Hogwarts after
all. How could they if they weren't on the train?

To Harriet's surprise, Mr Weasley returned a moment later with Mrs Weasley in tow.

"But, how Arthur? How did the barrier seal itself?" Mrs Weasley asked as she looked Harriet over.

"I haven't the foggiest, Molly. The guard on the other side is trying to get it to reopen, but he says
he's never seen it closed before, it's not supposed to close again until everyone's left the platform."

"Then how are we going to get the girls to Hogwarts? Will you take them side-along?" Mrs Weasley
asked looking around anxiously. Harriet looked back and forth between Mr and Mrs Weasley feeling
just as anxious as she tried to calm down Hedwig.

"I could, but it would take several apparitions, well… if we left now and kept to the highways, I
could get them there in the car before the train makes it to Hogwarts," Mr Weasley said thoughtfully.

Ronnie and Harriet looked up quickly. Was Mr Weasley really going to drive them to Hogwarts?

"I-I suppose, Arthur, do you think the car can handle that trip?" Mrs Weasley asked.

"Well maybe one way, I can get a room in the Hog's Head overnight and drive back tomorrow," Mr
Weasley said reassuringly.
"Alright Arthur, I'll head back to the house then," Mrs Weasley said and gave Ronnie and Harriet tight hugs. "Have a good year you two, please write often."

"I will, mum," Ronnie said smiling.

"Me to, Mrs Weasley," Harriet agreed.

"And no flying, Arthur!" Mrs Weasley said in a snippy voice.

"O-of course not, Molly, of course," Mr Weasley said.

Mrs Weasley gave out another round of hugs before they all started heading back to the car. Outside the station, Mrs Weasley stepped off to the side and around a corner. Mr Weasley followed her, and the two hugged and kissed before Mrs Weasley drew her wand and gave a little spin that looked like a pirouette before she vanished from sight with a loud crack. Harriet gaped as Ronnie gave her trademark smirk.

"Apparition," Ronnie said simply. "Mum'll already be home by now."

"Wow…" Harriet muttered, "when do we learn how to do that?"

"Not till sixth year," Ronnie said as Mr Weasley started leading them back to the car. "So, are we gonna fly to school?" Ronnie asked her father eagerly.

"Ah, well…" Mr Weasley said, his ears getting a little red again. "Probably best if we don't, actually, girls. But we can have quite an adventure anyway," Mr Weasley went on with a twinkle in his eye.

Even if they weren't going to be flying, Harriet felt quite excited. The last time she was on a car trip it was the summer before her first year at Hogwarts when the Dursleys had been trying to flee from the letters from Hogwarts that kept following them. She was quite sure already that this was going to be a much more fun trip than that.

Harriet and Ronnie hurriedly put their trunks in the boot and climbed into the front seat with Hedwig beside Mr Weasley. Mr Weasley happily started the car, and they headed off. They did stop by Diagon Alley to exchange some wizard money for Muggle money, and then they were finally off. They stopped just outside London at a petrol station to top off the tank, and Harriet and Ronnie ran inside for snacks. Ronnie seemed more excited than Harriet was at this prospect, having never had Muggle snacks before. She found liquorice ropes and Muggle crisps particularly enjoyable as they drove along.

Mr Weasley even let them turn on the radio, which Harriet was relieved to find could pick up Muggle stations as well as magical ones. She wasn’t a particular fan of wizarding music she had heard so far, which always seemed too quirky and old-fashioned for her. Ronnie seemed to share this opinion, and even Mr Weasley got quite a kick out of the Muggle music.

Ronnie gasped nearly an hour into their trip and quickly reached across Harriet to start spinning the dial. Spotting the time, Harriet knew why. It was time for the "Muggling Hour."

"There we go," Ronnie said taking a swig of her soda and grinning. Harriet knew that Ronnie was especially excited to hear the broadcast today as her idol, Holly Cambridge, had been allowed to play with a professional team, and had played in her first game the previous night.

"Hello, all, and welcome to another edition of The Muggling Hour. I'm your host, Jonathan Jordan."

Soumehow, even before he said anything else, Harriet could tell that something was very wrong.
"As is well known, the war in the United States has been going on for just short of two months. Thus far, the war has managed to keep the American Muggle population away from the conflict, but that appears to have come to an end last night. The perpetrators are as of yet unknown, but during a match last night at Merlin Field in Chicago, Illinois between the Chicago Inferno and the Texas Firebrand, an explosion occurred on the Firebrand side-lines."

Harriet heard Ronnie gasp and turn the radio up louder. Mr Weasley pulled the car over and stopped, listening in.

"The death toll amongst the fans in the stands is as of yet unknown. Several of the Firebrand players were killed, and most are in the hospital for minor to serious injuries."

"Holly, come on, what about Holly?" Ronnie asked sounding close to tears. Harriet took Ronnie's other hand and squeezed it.

"Young Muggle-Born forward, Holly Cambridge—"

Ronnie inhaled sharply and squeezed Harriet's hand so hard it hurt.

"—survived the explosion but is currently in critical condition. Hospital staff announced this morning that Miss Cambridge has been stabilised and is expected to improve."

Ronnie exhaled and slumped over onto Harriet's shoulder. Harriet put an arm around Ronnie's shoulders, hugging her friend close.

"Current reports indicate that the explosion was most likely non-Magical in nature, but authorities are still not ruling out magical involvement. The state of Illinois was one that did not opt for secession when the war began early in July, and thus is considered a likely target for such an attack—"

The radio announcer went silent as Mr Weasley reached over and turned off the radio. Ronnie didn't do or say anything, and the three merely sat in silence for a few minutes. Finally, Mr Weasley broke the silence with a smile.

"You know, we're not quite making the progress I thought we would… maybe you girls would like it if I were to, say, speed things up a bit?" he asked in a strange voice. Harriet and Ronnie both looked at him.

"What do you mean, Dad?" Ronnie asked.

Mr Weasley responded by merely smiling and pushing a button on the dashboard. There was a little popping noise, and suddenly the car went invisible around them. Not just the car, but Harriet looked down and realised she had gone invisible, as had Ronnie and Mr Weasley.

"Whoa," Harriet muttered holding up her hand and trying to see it.

"Wicked," Ronnie said beside her. Even though they were invisible, Harriet could hear the smile in Ronnie's voice.

Harriet could hear Mr Weasley chuckle and start the motor to the car once more. However, the car had only just started forward when with another popping noise they all came back into view.

"Oh dear," Mr Weasley muttered, pushing the button again. Everything went invisible once more but only for a second this time.

Mr Weasley grumbled as he pushed the button a couple more times but nothing happened. Ronnie
sighed and slumped a little in the seat again. Mr Weasley seemed bound and determined. He drew his wand, rolled down his window, and tapped the top of the car. A slight shimmering appeared to spread down across the windshield, and as Harriet leaned forward to watch, the bonnet of the car in front of them vanished.

"Disillusionment charm works even better in the end," Mr Weasley said smiling. "We can see each other inside now and still be invisible on the outside. Now, on to Hogwarts, as the thestral flies," Mr Weasley went on, and the car lifted up into the air.

The exhilaration of flight took over quickly. Mr Weasley made the car climb, and they were off, soaring into the clouds. Harriet had never flown this high on a broomstick before and hadn't flown in an aeroplane either, so the feeling of flying up through the clouds was an incredible one. She watched the water from the moisture vapour of the clouds beading off the windshield.

They finally broke through the cloud layer, and Harriet gasped softly. The clouds stretched on for as far as they could see in any direction and made it look as though the entire world had turned into fluffy piles of wool. Ronnie gave a little whoop, and Mr Weasley laughed and guided the car through a barrel roll. They didn't end up doing that again because their snacks dropped to the ceiling and down again scattering about the vehicle.

Harriet just managed to grab onto Hedwig's cage in time before Hedwig herself went crashing to the roof. Hedwig began screeching indignantly until they righted themselves. This caused much more laughter than anything else, and after putting Hedwig in the back seat Ronnie and Harriet crawled around a bit, picking up everything that had fallen.

Unfortunately, Mr Weasley wasn't able to keep flying that high above the clouds and had to drop back down to follow landmarks and see where they were going. This wasn't much of a problem for Harriet. As much as she liked flying high above the clouds, the sights below them were much more interesting. They flew past mountains and beautiful hills and forests as well as big sprawling cities and quaint little towns. She rather liked the look of the small towns. They seemed happier, quieter places to live. The kind of place she would like to live someday.

As the sun started setting, Harriet found her eyes beginning to get heavy too. Ronnie had already fallen asleep against the window, and Mr Weasley hummed quietly to himself as they flew along. Finally, just as Harriet was about to nod off, Mr Weasley nudged her arm and pointed out the windshield.

"There it is, Hogwarts," he said, beaming.

Harriet blinked herself awake and stretched. Indeed, there next to the lake was the unmistakable sight of Hogwarts castle. Harriet felt her excitement grow as she shook Ronnie awake.

"We'll just set down in the grounds, girls, and from there you can take your trunks up to the school. The train shouldn't arrive for another hour and a half yet," Mr Weasley explained as he started to circle the car around for a landing. For the first time all summer, Harriet felt genuinely overjoyed. She was here; she was back; she was finally back. Hogwarts was real after all. After every hurdle that had been put in her way this summer, she was here.

Mr Weasley flared the car a bit, and it landed on all four wheels with a gentle thump. The vehicle rolled a few yards before finally coming to a gentle stop.

"Well girls, here we are," Mr Weasley said. He rolled down his window and tapped the roof of the car returning to visibility.
Harriet grinned and turned to hug Ronnie when she stopped. Ronnie was gaping and pointing out Mr Weasley's window. Harriet turned and looked before gaping too. She saw the trunk of a tree out Mr Weasley's window. It was a horribly familiar, knotty, gnarled looking trunk. It was the trunk of the Whomping Willow.

Chapter End Notes

original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

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“There comes a time when even the oldest and wisest among us behave the most foolishly. This inevitably happens whenever we return to the places we knew and loved as children.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet let out a cry of shock as she felt the car lurch to the left, knocking her hard to the right into Mr Weasley. She grunted again as Ronnie fell on top of her. The tree had swung down one of its larger limbs, hitting the side of the car with extreme force.

They fell back into their seats as the car flopped down onto its wheels once more. Mr Weasley scrambled as he tried to turn the car back on. The vehicle lurched under another barrage of hits before Mr Weasley got the car started and stamped on the gas. The engine roared, and the car began to move forward. It stopped hard when another giant limb smashed into the grill. The ceiling caved down a little as another branch slammed down onto the roof and the windshield went nearly opaque in a spider-web of splintered glass.

In the back seat, Hedwig was screeching madly. Her cage had toppled onto its side in the barrage. Harriet fought with her seatbelt as she tried to get back to her owl when all at once the engine roared again. Instead of moving forward this time the car shot backwards. Having just undone her seatbelt, Harriet was launched forward. She saw stars after hitting her head hard on the dash. The car bounced and jostled them around as it backed up rapidly and finally clunked to a stop. Harriet tried to keep herself braced for more blows, but none came. Apparently, the car had acted on its own to get them out of reach of the tree.

“A-are you, girls, alright?” Mr Weasley asked. His voice sounded a little slurred, as though his lip was swollen.

Harriet tried looking around but found she couldn’t see. Her glasses must have been knocked off in the attack. She heard Ronnie groan beside her.

“Yeah, yeah I’m okay, Dad... I think,” Ronnie muttered.

“What on earth was that?!” Mr Weasley asked, looking up at the tree.

“The Whomping Willow...; don’t you remember it?” Ronnie asked in reply.

“No, that wasn’t here when I was at Hogwarts,” Mr Weasley said.

Harriet heard Mr Weasley grunt and a thumping noise. By the sound of it, he was hitting his shoulder into his door trying to pop it open. The hit to his door had been so hard it had jammed the door shut.

Harriet groaned and tried to move her legs. She heard a tinkling sound as she put her foot down on the floor and knew at once what it was: her glasses.

“Not again,” she muttered and tried to reach down to find the shattered remains.
“What’d you say, Harriet?” Ronnie asked.

Harriet didn’t get time to respond. Ronnie’s door opened of its own accord, and suddenly Harriet felt herself lurch sideways as the seat tipped and dumped both her and Ronnie out onto the grass. There was an “oof” from nearby that sounded like Mr Weasley and a metal clang followed by more screeching. Another clunk noise followed by two muffled thuds signified that the car had ejected their trunks. Harriet heard a low-rumble, and the car began driving off on its own. Without her glasses, Harriet could just make out the tail lights blaring as the car headed off past Hagrid’s hut and disappeared into the Forbidden Forest.

“Okay... well that was rather unexpected too...” Mr Weasley muttered as he got wearily to his feet. Harriet groaned. She would be almost blind until she got another pair of glasses.

“My glasses,” Harriet muttered.

“What the devil is going on out here?!” asked a loud voice in the distance that Harriet had no trouble recognising. Unlike Hagrid’s voice, which filled her with delight when she heard it, this one filled her with dread. It was the enraged voice of Professor Minerva McGonagall.

There was the sound of oncoming feet and more muttering voices as Harriet felt Ronnie’s hands on her arm, pulling Harriet up to her feet. Her whole body ached, and she looked around frantically trying to locate Hedwig.

“Hedwig,” Harriet said frantically. Mr Weasley had fetched the owl and pressed her cage into Harriet’s hands. Harriet fumbled with the release. The moment the door was open Hedwig fluttered out in what felt to Harriet like an explosion of feathers. She was just able to see a blurry white streak shooting off towards the owlery.

“Well, she didn’t seem hurt,” Mr Weasley said.

“Arthur? Arthur Weasley?!” came Professor McGonagall’s exasperated voice from much closer now.

“Ah, y-yes, Professor,” Mr Weasley said.

Harriet heard something odd in Mr Weasley’s voice as he spoke to Professor McGonagall. It was an even more nervous voice than Harriet had heard him use when talking to Mrs Weasley during one of her tempers. He sounded like Harriet, and her friends so often sounded when caught in wrongdoing by Professor McGonagall.

“What the devil happened, Arthur?! How did you get in the middle of the grounds?!” Professor McGonagall demanded, sounding torn between disbelief and outrage.

“Well, it’s a, er, long story, Minerva, uh but first uh the girls need a bit of tending to...” Mr Weasley said, putting a hand gingerly on Harriet and Ronnie’s shoulders.

“Yes, Potter, Weasley, hospital wing with you both,” Professor McGonagall said.

“My glasses,” Harriet muttered, taking a slightly blind step.

“We’ll take care of that as well, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said.

Harriet felt Ronnie’s arm around her shoulder, and her friend started walking her towards the castle.

“This way, girls,” squeaked the little voice of Professor Flitwick. “We’ll get you all patched up in
time for the Sorting.”

Ronnie guided her as the two made their way behind Professor Flitwick into the castle. Harriet couldn’t help but notice that Ronnie was keeping oddly quiet in spite of what had happened. Harriet opened her mouth to say something. She stopped when she realised Professor Flitwick was right in front of her and decided that keeping silent was probably the better plan.

They finally arrived at the hospital wing, where Madame Pomfrey fussed in her usual way. “In the hospital wing already you two? Term hasn’t even started yet!”

Madame Pomfrey put ointment on their bruises, and Miss Momori checked for broken bones and missing teeth. As usual, neither asked any questions about how the injuries had been sustained. As she was getting over her shock of what had happened, Harriet was starting to get much more worried.

Had anyone seen the car? If they had, and if they told anyone at the Ministry, Mr Weasley would be in deep trouble. Harriet kept squinting, trying to see where Ronnie was.

“Well, that’s you two patched up, I should think,” Madame Pomfrey finally declared, “any more aches and pains anywhere, Potter, Weasley?”

“No, Madame Pomfrey,” Ronnie said to Harriet’s right, speaking for the first time.

“No, I feel a lot better now,” Harriet said, “but still I can’t see.”

“What?!” Madame Pomfrey asked sounding shocked. “Why on earth didn’t you say something before, Potter? How do you not list off blindness as an immediate problem?! You took a good hit on the head there, it could be a concussion which I can cure easily enough but if not then we might have to send you off to St Mungo’s—”

“N-no, no miss!” Harriet said shaking her head as Madame Pomfrey began shining her wand into Harriet’s eyes and inspecting her closely. “I just lost my glasses, that’s all!”

“Oh, oh goodness, that’s a relief,” Madame Pomfrey said sitting back.

“I can take care of that for you, Potter, here,” Miss Momori said and the next thing Harriet knew she fitted some sort of goggles over Harriet’s eyes. “Don’t blink Potter, just stare straight ahead and let the Keratonophoropter do its work.”

“Okay,” Harriet said, doing her best to keep her eyes open and not blink. As she did, the goggles went to work. She felt little puffs of air on her eyes and winced but kept trying not to blink. Then it shined bright lights in her eyes, which moved around distractingly but she kept trying to stare ahead. Next, the lens before her eyes looked like it was starting to mould and melt. Harriet furrowed her brow in confusion when amazingly the entire world became clear, much clearer than Harriet had ever seen before.

“Ah, all done, how does that look, Potter?” Miss Momori asked.

Harriet turned, feeling a little silly still wearing the goggles but smiled.

“It looks great,” Harriet replied.

“Wonderful, now, take a quick look through this little parchment of styles while we tend to Mr Weasley,” Miss Momori said, handing Harriet a roll of parchment with pictures of glasses frames.
She got up and crossed the room to where Mr Weasley was getting the same treatment that Harriet and Ronnie had received, looking quite sheepish as Madame Pomfrey checked him over, and his ears were bright red. Harriet furrowed her brow a little. Mr Weasley didn’t seem to be embarrassed over what had happened; he appeared bashful to be near Madame Pomfrey.

Harriet looked around for Miss Momori again and raised her hand to get her attention. Miss Momori crossed over, and Harriet pointed out a frame she liked. They were a lot like her old ones, but the lenses were smaller and looked like they wouldn’t fall off quite so much.

“Very well, Potter,” Miss Momori said and drew her wand.

Harriet watched with interest as Miss Momori first tapped the picture on the parchment, being careful to touch the frame before she tapped the goggles with her wand as well. The goggles contracted momentarily, and when they released, Harriet felt something new on her face. Miss Momori lifted the goggles off, and to Harriet’s amazement, she was wearing a brand new pair of glasses.

“What do you think, Potter?” Miss Momori asked as she held out a hand-mirror for Harriet.

Harriet’s hand shook as she took the mirror, looking at herself from as many angles as she could. The glasses fit on her face like they were a part of her. She could only really feel them on her face if she focused on them.

“Wow, they’re wonderful, Miss Momori, thank you!” Harriet said, grinning ear to ear.

“You’re very welcome, Potter,” Miss Momori said.

“Well that’s you two taken care of,” Madame Pomfrey said walking back over to the girls. “You’re all free to go.”

“Not so fast, you three,” spoke Professor McGonagall. “There are still some questions that need to be answered...”

Harriet looked over at her head of house curiously. Professor McGonagall did not sound quite so upset anymore, in fact, unless Harriet’s ears were deceiving her, she almost seemed amused.

“A flying car, Arthur? Honestly,” Professor McGonagall said shaking her head.

Harriet, Ronnie, and Mr Weasley all froze. How had she known that? The car was invisible when they had landed and had driven off before she had come out of the castle. Unless someone else had seen what happened and told her.

“It may be nearly dark, you three, but tire tracks that miraculously appear in the middle of a lawn Muggles aren’t supposed to know about is an excellent clue,” Professor McGonagall said with a knowing smile. “After all these years Arthur you are still quite the trouble-maker, aren’t you?”

Mr Weasley’s ears went, if possible, even redder and he muttered a little.

“W-well Minerva, th-there was extenuating circumstances, I can explain everything—”

“Oh I’m sure you can, Arthur, but now the girls need to get down to the Great Hall. The train will be arriving in ten minutes,” Professor McGonagall said.

“So we’re not in trouble?” Ronnie said, breaking her silence once more.

“No, Weasley, not today,” Professor McGonagall said. “But I will ask you as seriously as possible to
not tell a single soul about the car, your father’s career might depend on it.”

Professor McGonagall ended on a much more serious note, and Harriet felt a little chill run down her spine.

“We won’t, Professor,” Ronnie and Harriet said together.

“Alright, now get along to the Great Hall straight away you two. Arthur and I will talk,” Professor McGonagall said, gesturing to the door.

“Have a good term, girls,” Mr Weasley said, his ears still red. Ronnie gave him a tight hug, and Harriet could have sworn she’d heard her whisper “thanks, Daddy.” before she turned back to Harriet. Harriet said goodbye to Mr Weasley before she and Ronnie made their way out of the Hospital Wing and down the corridors to the Great Hall.

“I thought we were goners,” Ronnie muttered as they strode along.

“Me too,” Harriet replied. It occurred to her now that the refugee students were supposed to be here at Hogwarts already, yet she couldn’t hear or see any sign of them. Perhaps they were waiting somewhere for the Sorting and the feast to begin.

“That was a great trip though,” Ronnie finally admitted with a hint of a smile on her face.

“Yeah,” Harriet agreed.

They finally reached the Great Hall and stepped inside. Harriet had forgotten the enchanted ceiling of the Great Hall, which was bewitched to look just like the real sky. The four long house tables were arrayed in their usual spots, but unless Harriet’s new glasses were playing tricks on her, there was something a little different about them. They seemed a little longer than before, which Harriet reminded herself with the new students coming in was necessary.

Harriet and Ronnie took their usual seats and started waiting. However, it was only another five minutes before a roar of voices filled the Entrance Hall, and the long line of returning Hogwarts students began filing into the Great Hall. As she looked around for her friends, Harriet was disappointed to have the first people she recognised in the swarm be two of her least favourite people in the school, Pansy Parkinson and Pixie Fanfarró. She was pleased to see her fellow Quidditch team-mates, however, and gave passing hugs to Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet as they filed past to say hello before taking their seats.

Finally, the rest of Harriet’s best friends: Hermione, Kieran, Marcus, Scott, and Dora came into view. The little group all hustled over and immediately began questioning the pair.

“Where were you two? We searched the whole train top to bottom trying to find you,” Marcus said.

“Aye, even Fred and George said they didn’t know, they were just as confused as—”

“There you two are! Where the devil were you two on the train!?” Barked the angry voice of Percy as he muscled past.

“W-we’re not allowed to tell,” Ronnie said sheepishly, “Professor McGonagall told us not to.”


“Oh lighten up Percy, they’re here aren’t they?” Marcus said sounding very annoyed.
“Yeah, if they’d done anything wrong I doubt they’d be here waiting for us,” Dora said crossing her arms.

“Get back to your table, Flamel. You too McIntyre,” Percy snapped, pointing at his prefect’s badge. “The feast is about to start.”

Dora grumbled angrily, and Scott sighed. Harriet and Ronnie gave them both hugs before the two headed off to their respective house tables.

Despite his offensive tone, Percy was right. At that moment the door at the far end of the Great Hall opened, and the staff all began filing in. Professor McGonagall and Hagrid were absent, most likely still welcoming the new first-years. Harriet smiled to herself as she remembered her first night, how scared she had been.

Now the ghosts glided in through the walls, heading towards their tables. Harriet, Ronnie and Marcus eagerly moved aside to let Nearly-Headless Nick sit next to them.

“Hello, Nick!” Kieran said in a cheerful tone as the ghost sat.

“Good evening young masters and misses!” Nick said in an equally cheerful tone. “Such a historical Sorting for the school this year, eh? Almost fifty new students on top of our usual first-years.”

“Will they be sorted in the usual way?” Hermione asked, curiously.

“I’m not sure, to be honest,” Nick admitted with a shrug that threatened to topple his partially decapitated head off his shoulders. “We weren’t consulted, we merely had to busy ourselves once more with making sure Peeves did not make a mess of things as usual.”

However, Nick quickly put a finger to his lips and shushed as the side door opened and the new first-year students slowly shuffled in. They all looked as scared as Harriet had remembered feeling, except one boy who was trembling just as much as the rest, but his face was lit with the biggest grin Harriet had ever seen. Harriet also saw Ginny, and she and Ronnie both waved eagerly at her. Ginny blushed and waved back nervously, but smiled all the same.

Harriet did turn and finally see Hagrid sidle into the room through a side door, making his way to his seat. Harriet rose halfway out of her seat to wave at him vigorously, as did the rest of the group. Hagrid spotted them and smiled waving back, his beetle-black eyes twinkling in greeting.

Harriet scanned the rest of the new students. She was curious to see who all would end up where, and again wondered if those that would end up in Slytherin knew just what sort of a reputation the house had. There did appear to be others that had older siblings already attending or recognised other new students. Two pretty girls in the little group were waving eagerly at the Hufflepuff table and saw another girl Harriet only knew by name so far, Isabella Martinez, was waving back.

She spotted Luna in the crowd too, who again looked as though she had wound up where she was by accident and itched the side of her nose as she stood beside Ginny. Difficult to miss was a boy who stood a head and a half taller than the other students with bright red hair who looked very awkward with limbs that seemed far too long for his body, but he was smiling a little in a good-natured way.

However, as she looked over the new students, Harriet furrowed her brow. The little crowd didn’t seem any larger than it had for her sorting. Where were the new refugee students? From the murmuring going on around her, Harriet could tell that everyone else was wondering the same thing.

Their curiosities were answered immediately when the door to the Great Hall opened once more and
another group of students filed in. They looked to be of varying ages, some older than her but some younger. The next thing that struck Harriet was the fact that of all of the fifty or so students in the new group, there was only one boy.

“Blimey, they’re all girls...” Muttered Ronnie next to her.

“My father said the secessionists killed or took most of the man and boys prisoner,” Kieran muttered sympathetically.

“Why would they do that?” Hermione asked.

Kieran shrugged.

“It is a tragic thing,” Nearly-Headless Nick said in a very low voice.

They all turned to look at him interested.

“Well I can only really speculate, but having once been a warrior I can guess,” Nearly-Headless Nick went on and turned a sad eye to them all. “Fathers will fight hard for their families, and young men will grow up to avenge lost fathers.”

A little collective shudder moved around the group. Harriet bit her lip and looked up at the group of new students. Despite the stand-offish nature of some of the refugees, she couldn’t help but feel a bit of pity starting to well up inside her.

The room hushed as Professor McGonagall strode to the front of the room, carrying the little stool and gently placing the ancient, but intelligent talking Sorting Hat upon it. It was the Sorting Hat that read your mind and determined which house you belonged in. Harriet remembered all too well her fears of the previous year, first worrying that it wouldn’t place her in any house, and then her worry that it was going to place her in Slytherin. That was, of course, before she’d come to know Dora and seen how not all Slytherin students were what they seemed.

Harriet held her breath with the rest of the students as they waited for the Sorting Hat to begin its song. Finally, the rip near the brim opened, and the hat began its song.

“It was so very long ago,

When Hogwarts was erected.

A place for learning and great magic,

To be nurtured and protected.

’Twas a time of kings and brutal wars,

When fear ruled o’er the land.

So our four founders came together,

And sought to make a stand.
The four were strong and learned folk,
With names of great distinction.
Dedicated all to teaching magic,
As well as its protection.

And so wise Ravenclaw, the Kind,
Took her students underwing.
A steady mind and razor wit,
To her was just the thing.

Kind Hufflepuff, the Wise,
Chose students of great caring.
Their golden hearts and patient minds,
Meant quite as much as daring.

Cunning Slytherin, the Brave,
Honoured magic above all.
Purest breeding and ambition,
Would receive his eager call.

Brave Gryffindor, the Cunning,
Knew just what he wanted:
Students brave and full of daring,
Who always stood undaunted.

They built this castle, tall and strong,
With magic at its heart.
They brought students from near and far,
And thus began their art.
Through Viking raids and countless wars,
Has this castle been defended.
Now those who’ve fled another war,
Have come with lives upended.

So keep heart you weary few,
Who’ve come so far from home.
You can rest easy here as anywhere,
That you have ever known.

But now the time has come again,
When I must split you house by house.
Whether you be boastful lion,
Or humble as a mouse.

So have a seat and try me on,
Come on now, don’t be shy!
I am the Hogwarts Sorting Hat,
And I can never lie!”

The Great Hall burst into applause. However, this time it seemed a little different. There seemed to be unease, and the song had been a little darker now that it had the previous year. There had also been the odd description of the founders.

“Bit longer than usual,” said Oliver Wood from nearby.

“Yeah, and what’s all that ‘Slytherin the Brave’ rubbish?” asked a burly third-year boy Harriet had seen but never spoken to before.

“And ‘Gryffindor the Cunning’? Was it trying to suggest we’re anything like Slytherins?” asked another third-year boy by the first, who sounded equally disgruntled.

“Well obviously the four founders weren’t exclusively their stereotypes,” Hermione grumbled as they took their seats. “I mean to think Hufflepuff couldn’t be wise or Slytherin couldn’t be...”
Hermione trailed off as Professor McGonagall gave the room her imperious glare and the Hall fell silent once more. Professor McGonagall unrolled a long parchment with the student names on it and cleared her throat before she read the first name.

“Aarons, Wendy.”

A sallow-skinned and dreary looking girl strode forward to the stool where Professor McGonagall put the ancient hat on her head. Somehow just by looking at the girl, Harriet knew before she even heard the Sorting Hat call:

“Slytherin!”

Wendy Aarons took off the hat and made her way to the cheering Slytherin table. Harriet felt a certain amount of disgust as Draco Malfoy made Crabbe push Dora’s friend Sae aside to give Wendy a seat.

“Archer, Ben,” Professor McGonagall called.

A skinny blonde boy walked forward and was quickly sent off to Ravenclaw. In fact, Ravenclaw seemed on a streak at that point, as a pair of black twins, Liam and Riley Argall, were all sorted into Ravenclaw.

“Coghlan, Ardghal,” Professor McGonagall called. The lanky, tall boy strode forward.

“Slytherin!” the Sorting Hat called, and the boy took off the hat and made his way to the table.

“Rough year for Gryffindor and Hufflepuff,” George muttered. “Not a single one yet.”

He was immediately proved wrong when the little, trembling, mousy boy Harriet had noticed, named Colin Creevey, became the first Gryffindor. Harriet cheered him with the rest of Gryffindor House as he took a seat next to Neville. He was so little that his chin just barely came over the edge of the table.

Lola Flor de Agua, one of the girls who had waved to Isabella Martinez, became a Slytherin. Finally, Luna was called forward. Professor McGonagall had to call her name twice, as Luna was distracted and apparently trying to count the floating candlesticks that hung in the air above them.

“Ravenclaw!” The Sorting Hat called, and Harriet sighed a little to herself as Luna made her way to the Ravenclaw table. True she was a bit odd, but Harriet had taken a shine to Luna over the summer. She was someone who had a huge heart and who Harriet felt she shared a connection with through the loss of a parent.

A Japanese girl, Minako Minagawa, became the second Gryffindor. She gave a sad little wave to Tomomi and Atsuko at the Ravenclaw table as well as Sae at the Slytherin table, but the loud cheers of the Gryffindors welcoming her soon had her smiling as happily as everyone else.

Next Alexandra Munoz, who was one of the other girls who had waved to Isabella, was sent to Slytherin as well, though she stopped on her way to the Slytherin table to hug Isabella before sitting next to Lola.

“Needle, James,” Professor McGonagall called.

“Gryffindor!” called the hat and Harriet again broke into applause as the spiky-haired boy took a seat, though unfortunately for him (in Harriet’s opinion) he had chosen to sit next to Percy.
Next, Minami Takamiya became a Gryffindor. Minami eagerly sat next to Minako, and the two began introducing themselves around to the other Gryffindors excitedly.

Finally, Ginny was called forward. Harriet and Ronnie held each other’s hand and closed their eyes, crossing their fingers on their free hands and hoping hard.

“Gryffindor!” called the Sorting Hat and Harriet whooped loudly with the rest of the table as Ginny made her way over. Harriet and Ronnie moved aside to let Ginny sit between them, each hugging her tightly.

“Welcome to the family!” Ronnie said. Ginny laughed and rolled her eyes.

After Ginny, a handsome, black-haired boy named Cian Whelan was sent to Slytherin, as was William Wisp. The final boy, Ryan Yukisaki, made his way calmly to the stool and was quickly declared a Gryffindor. He smiled brightly as he made his way to the table, sitting next to Kieran.

“Hi, I’m Ryan,” he said in introduction.

The rest of the group began introducing themselves but fell silent as Professor Dumbledore got to his feet. Harriet felt a little confused; shouldn’t they be sorting the refugees now?

“Welcome all of you, and thank you, dear Sorting Hat, for another wonderful Sorting,” Professor Dumbledore said and bowed to the hat which bowed back.

“Now, I know tradition dictates that from here we move on to our much-anticipated feast, but in the present climate, I must take this time to inform you of some other changes. To those of you who have been anywhere near a *Daily Prophet* or a Wizarding wireless over this past summer, you will have heard news of a terrible wizarding war going on at this moment.

“It is imperative in times of conflict that we must all stand together, united. For only together, as one, are we strong. It is heart-breaking then that such a tragedy is unfolding on such a scale within our times. The people of the Americas are wrapped in bitter warfare, countless lives have been lost, and the American wizarding government is strained to the breaking point in trying to both keep the conflict contained and keep it from the Muggles. Just yesterday, another tragedy occurred in this conflict that finally has begun to affect the Muggles in earnest.”

“What’s begun to affect the Muggles?” asked Lavender in a hushed voice.

Harriet glared a little, as did several other students. It was always considered ‘bad taste’ at Hogwarts to talk while Professor Dumbledore was speaking.

“He’s talking about the bombing,” Ronnie answered in a growl. “Some nutters blew up a football stadium over there... a whole... a whole bunch of people were killed...”

Lavender swallowed and didn’t speak again, returning her attention to Professor Dumbledore who was still speaking.

“Our ministry has opted not to get involved in the conflict thus far. However, the bitter sentiments of separatism and violence within that nation have threatened to spread into neighbouring lands, and there is no guarantee that we will be able to ignore this for long.

“While the violence and bloodshed of the conflict may not have reached our peaceful shores, we shall feel the effects here nonetheless. However, these are not all unpleasant effects. From one of the most ravaged of the war-torn American states, I have seen fit to open the doors of our great school to a small group of refugee students. This small group of just over fifty students have lost their entire
hometowns, their lives, and for some their families.”

Dumbledore paused. Harriet squinted a little in the candle-light but, unless she was much mistaken, Dumbledore looked for once as though emotion had got the better of him. Harriet didn’t know why, but the sight moved her deeply as she watched the headmaster, and felt her affection and admiration for Dumbledore rising.

“The war has destroyed all they knew, and so they come to us for a new life. While I’m sure there are those among them with feelings on either side of the conflict, my hope in allowing them a home here at Hogwarts is not just a home, but a path to unity. And not just amongst themselves, but amongst all of us as we all learn to live with and accept one another. So please, join me in welcoming our newest members as they continue their wizarding education here and to take their turn to participate in the grand tradition of the Sorting.”

There was much applause at this speech and Harriet couldn’t help but feel her heart lift. However, the most significant reaction came from the refugee students. While Harriet greatly admired Dumbledore and indeed felt indebted to him, the looks on the refugees’ faces as they looked at the headmaster was borderline reverence. Harriet supposed as Dumbledore had been the one to rescue them and give them a new home that was only natural.

Professor McGonagall pulled out another piece of parchment and unrolled it. Harriet held her breath now as she waited for the first name.

Chapter End Notes

ah heck I'm just gonna come right out and say if there's any name you don't recognize from canon they came from night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA), and me

Selene Maan and Penelope Rose belong to Hasbro

original concept by night-miner(dA): and littlebityamelie(dA):

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
The Refugees

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“One of the most dangerous things in the world is assumptions.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Brewer, Sasha.”

An olive-skinned girl strode forward. While Harriet had never seen a Native American before, she thought Sasha looked much like the ones she had seen in books. Though with the last name Brewer...

“Ravenclaw!” shouted the Sorting Hat.

“Damn,” Fred cursed receiving a dirty look from Hermione.

Sasha joined the cheering Ravenclaw table. As Harriet watched her, she couldn’t help but notice that Sasha seemed nervous around the other students as they introduced themselves to her. The whole time, she stole hopeful little glances back at the other refugees.

After Sasha, Lauren Buford became a Slytherin. Lauren seemed to be one of the older students of the group and was eagerly accepted by the other Slytherins. Then a younger girl, Haley Burns, became a Hufflepuff.

A tall, pretty girl named Christina Clark also became a Ravenclaw. Harriet could see the other girl, Sasha, looked relieved as she hugged Christina.

Tory Clooney was called forward and became the first Gryffindor. The Gryffindors all exploded with cheers as Tory made her way over. She blushed brightly but smiled at the warm reception.

Nearby, Harriet could hear Fred and George grumbling.

“Why don’t they sort them by age instead of name? So hard to tell who’s what year!” Fred said as Tory walked over.

“Yeah, first and second years all look too alike,” George agreed.

Harriet furrowed her brow and looked around at the other first years like Colin Creevey and Ryan. She didn’t look as young as that anymore.

“Well you know, you could just try asking them?” snapped Katie Bell, who looked a little ruffled, as did Alicia Spinnet.

It was Angelina that made room for Tory and grinned in welcome. Harriet remembered the moment last year when Angelina had chased Harriet down to give her advice about boys. She smiled at Angelina’s big-sister nature before returning her attention to the Sorting.

Next came a trio of Slytherins: Emily Couch, Megan Eastman, and Natasha Fraser. A very pretty blonde girl named Lindsey Gallifrey became a Ravenclaw, much to Fred and George’s dismay, and
she looked to be about their age. Two girls named Angela Gilberts and Cassidy Godfrey became Gryffindors. However, unlike the other groups that had been sorted the two didn’t seem to be friends, although both looked to be first years. Cassidy sat with Tory while Angela came and sat down next to Hermione.

Twins, Kimberly and Leslie Grace, became Slytherins, while Nicole Green became a Ravenclaw. At the Ravenclaw table, Christina and Sasha both leapt to their feet and shrieked with excitement as Nicole made her way over. Professor McGonagall had to clear her throat twice to get them to calm down.

“Hoffman, Tori,” Professor McGonagall said.

A tall, thickly built but pale girl with long blonde hair made her way to the stool. She had a very set face, doing her best to look dignified.

Sure enough, Harriet wasn’t surprised when the Sorting Hat called “Gryffindor!”

Tori sat down next to Parvati and Lavender who immediately began trying to talk to her about her hair when “Hollins, Sarah” also became a Gryffindor. Sarah beamed at them all as she sat next to Angela and seemed no bigger than the boy named Colin Creevey.

Adele Jackson also became a Gryffindor, as did the only boy in the group, Benjamin Jackson. As Benjamin was sorted, Harriet heard groans from the other tables, but they came from girls this time, rather than boys. The two Jacksons looked reasonably similar, and Harriet was quite sure they were brother and sister. They had the same noses and jawlines and long, straight blonde hair.

As the boy walked past her, Harriet couldn’t help but feel her heart skip a beat. He looked well built for his age and seemed like a fourth or fifth year at least. His shoulders were broad, and he was very tan. Angela and Sarah groaned as he sat little ways down the table next to Wood, who shook his hand in a firm greeting. Harriet thought she knew why. Wood was both the Captain and the Keeper for the Gryffindor House Quidditch team. He was also a sixth-year, meaning he only had this year and another at Hogwarts. Given Benjamin’s size, if he were a fourth-year, in particular, he had the build for a Keeper, meaning Wood already had his eyes set on a replacement.

Harriet shook her head realising she had been staring. She turned to look at the refugees again but stopped. Across from her, Kieran had his head tilted slightly one eyebrow raised and a knowing smile on his face.

“Oh shut up,” Harriet muttered.

Kieran chuckled in his good-natured way.

However, Harriet found she had been wrong about Benjamin being the only boy, as the next name called was: “Jameson, Nathan.”

Harriet blinked in surprise when a figure she had taken as another girl walked forward. He had shoulder-length hair and a round face. He still resembled a girl, but the more Harriet looked, the more she was sure he was, in fact, a boy.

“Hufflepuff!” called the Sorting Hat and Nathan made his way over. Harriet couldn’t help but watch, as did a lot of other students. For the most part, the other students, mainly the other refugees, greeted him eagerly, but there was more than a few that were looking at him with distinct unease.

“Kane, Rachel,” called Professor McGonagall.
Harriet looked to see a short but pretty girl take a seat on the stool. She was quickly declared a Gryffindor. She sat next to Marcus, whose face went a little pink as she thanked him for making room.

Next a long streak of Hufflepuffs: Michelle Masters, more twins named Avery and Ellery McGee, Meredith McQueen and Taylor Middleton. After Taylor, Toni Middleton was sorted into Ravenclaw.

“Lots of siblings,” Kieran noted thoughtfully.

“It makes sense though,” Hermione said in agreement. “Most of us come from all over Britain, but they’re all coming from three little towns. A lot of them are bound to be at least cousins if not siblings.”

“Miller, Ari,” took Harriet’s breath away. She was beautiful and looked two or three years older than Harriet. Harriet could hear Fred and George muttering wishes under their breath and rolled her eyes. However, the Sorting Hat didn’t call out right away. Not in the first minute, nor in the second.

“Wow, another Hatstall,” said Dean Thomas under his breath as he looked on. As he did, Harriet couldn’t help but notice he had his fingers crossed too.

After four whole minutes, the Sorting Hat finally called “Hufflepuff!”

There was a collective groan from the boys at the three other house tables as Ari took off the hat and made her way to the Hufflepuff table. The Hufflepuffs were all cheering eagerly as Ari crossed over to them and sat down with the other refugee Hufflepuffs.

Heidi Morrison and Sandra Overton became Ravenclaws while Rochelle Poole became another Hufflepuff and Rayne Prismere became a Gryffindor.

“Quoy, Erica.”

Another very pretty older girl walked towards the stool and once more Fred and George held their breath, which caused much eye-rolling by most of the girls in the area. However, it wasn’t her looks that caught Harriet’s attention. It was the way she had beamed at Hagrid as she walked to the front of the Great Hall and the way Hagrid held up crossed fingers for her and smiled back. Somewhere deep down, Harriet felt something rise inside her she couldn’t quite place.

“Oh come on, just give us this one!” George muttered a bit more loudly than he’d probably intended.

Widespread sniggering broke out amongst the tables. Erica didn’t seem the slightest bit phased. In fact, she even smiled at him as she sat on the stool and Professor McGonagall placed the hat on her head.

Unlike Ari, the Sorting Hat was in no doubt this time, “Gryffindor!”

Fred jumped to his feet, cheering. Harriet was surprised to see George keep his seat, his mouth gaping in shock. In fact, his ears were going a little red. Harriet could barely believe it; it was the first time in her life she had ever seen either of the Weasley twins look even the slightest bit embarrassed.

Harriet stole a glance at Hagrid and saw him on his feet applauding as Erica joined the Gryffindor table. Once more that odd knotted feeling she didn’t like rose in her chest. She was feeling jealous. Why was she feeling jealous?
However, Erica didn’t sit with the twins. She sat with Rachel and smiled at Marcus. Marcus blushed even brighter.

A willowy, curly-haired girl named Alexis Richardson also became a Gryffindor, which caused another scene as Angela and Sarah both greeted her with great enthusiasm. A stoic, severe-looking girl named Peyton Riseman was made a Ravenclaw, as was Maddie Roman and a tiny girl named Ashley Roth.

Courtney Thomas became a Slytherin, while Jennifer Thomas became another Hufflepuff. Despite the same last name, Harriet didn’t think they were related, as neither looked anything like the other, and they didn’t give each other a single look as they were sorted.

“Are they sisters too?” Harriet asked the little group of refugee students across from her. To her surprise, they laughed.

“Jenny and Courtney? Are you kidding?” asked the girl named Sarah in a twinkling, pixie-ish voice.

Harriet blushed, and Ronnie stepped in. “Well, fair enough question, they have the same last name, and there are lots of sisters.”

“Doesn’t mean we’re all related though,” said Angela with an eye roll. “We come from little towns, but we’re not all that close!”

“Yeah that would be kinda weird and gross wouldn’t i—” started the girl named Alexis but she stopped talking as soon as she noticed everyone was looking at her and turned to look back up at the Sorting.

Harriet looked back at the refugees too. It was then that it occurred to her how few of them seemed to have become Slytherins. She wondered if it was because of the different lives the refugees had lead back home. Maybe things like blood purity didn’t matter as much to them as it mattered here.

Kaitlyn Tyler became another Gryffindor, which caused Alexis, Sarah and Angela to leap up to greet her. Kenley Tyler became a Slytherin, while a curly-haired girl named Savannah Walters joined them at the Gryffindor table. Danielle Waterman became another Slytherin, while a pretty girl named Kelly Werner was sent to Ravenclaw with another outburst of cheers from Christina, Sasha and Nicole.

They were down to the final two. Noelle Winston became a Hufflepuff, while the last girl, a short, redhead with a mouth full of braces, named Rebecca Wright became a Gryffindor.

There was a minute or so of excited talking before Professor Dumbledore once more rose to his feet, and reverent silence fell over the Great Hall.

“And so ends a most unconventional Sorting by Hogwarts standards. I hope during the feast you will all get to know each other a little better. And as you have all been waiting so patiently, tuck in!”

At once, the tables groaned under the weight of the food that appeared. After all the excitement of the car trip, being pummelled by the Whomping Willow and the Sorting, Harriet hadn’t realised how starving she was. She was about to reach for food when pandemonium began. The usual tradition at Hogwarts was to sit and eat at your house table. However, the moment Dumbledore had sat down, nearly all of the refugee students got up from their tables.

The heads of houses were also on their feet, trying to shepherd the students back to their proper tables. The prefects (Percy in particular) were also trying to herd them back to their tables. As she looked around, Harriet couldn’t help but notice the staff table. Professors Snape and McGonagall had
come down to try and herd students around, while Professor Flitwick was standing on his chair, wagging his finger. Professors Sinistra and Sprout were merely looking around at what was transpiring with kind-hearted smiles, shaking their heads at the spectacle.

Harriet looked at Professor Dumbledore. He was acting as if nothing whatsoever was happening out of the ordinary. He merely threw his beard over his shoulder, tucked a large napkin in the collar of his robe and started eating. Even through the thick white beard, Harriet was sure she could see the corners of his mouth twitching in suppressed laughter.

“Hi, I’m Kenley,” said the Slytherin girl who had been sorted after Kaitlyn.

She was standing with her hand on Kaitlyn’s shoulder. Harriet guessed they were either sisters or cousins. She assumed the latter, as she didn’t think they looked alike.

“Hello Kenley, it’s ever so nice to meet you,” Hermione said smiling. “I’m Hermione Gran—.”

“Alright, back to your table this instant,” Percy growled having just come over.

Kenley glowered at him. “Says who? Why can’t I talk to my sister and her new friends?” she asked indignantly.

Harriet sighed, having once again been proven wrong about one of her assumptions.

“Says me, a Prefect. You can talk to your sister tomorrow, back to your table,” Percy growled.

“Oh come on, Perce,” Marcus said. “Leave them alone; aren’t we supposed to focus on inter-house unity after all?”

“Not during the feast, Van Der Lakk, it’s tradition. Now eat your food and you back to your table!” Percy growled.

Kenley merely glowered at him, as did Kaitlyn and her friends. Kenley sighed and bent over hugging her sister.

“I’ll talk to you soon, ‘kay sis?” Kenley said.

“Definitely,” Kaitlyn said and glared at Percy again as Kenley went back to the Slytherin table.

“You mean we have to just sit here? We can’t go to other tables ever?” the first year Ryan asked, looking disappointed. “That’s lame...”

“I agree,” muttered Ginny darkly.

Nearly-Headless Nick sighed. “Well, there isn’t a rule that says that... it’s just tradition,” he grumbled looking disapprovingly at Percy as Percy sat back down.

“Who is that?” Kaitlyn asked glaring after Percy.

They all looked at Ronnie. “Percy... my brother... sorry about him he’s... a prat,” Ronnie said sounding disgusted. “Anyway, I’m Ronnie, Ronnie Weasley. What year are you all?”

“We’re first years,” Angela said. “Most of us are.”

“Really!?” Ginny piped up sounding excited. “We’re gonna be in the same dorm! My name’s Ginny Weasley!”
The other first-year girls grinned.

“I’m Annie.”

“And I’m Kaitlyn, but call me Katy.”

“Sarah!” said the short girl excitedly.

They all looked at the fourth girl, Alexis. She swallowed and finally introduced herself quietly.

“I-I’m Alex,” she muttered not meeting anyone’s gaze.

“And I’m Rachel!” said the other short girl who was sitting next to Marcus. “I’m a second year, and this is my unofficial big sister, Erica, she’s a fourth year!”

Erica just smiled and gave a short nod in greeting before returning her attention to another older girl Harriet had never spoken to before.

Harriet smiled. “Nice to meet you all.”

“Yes, we’re all second years too,” Hermione said. “I’m Hermione Granger.”

“And I’m Marcus Van Der Lakk,” Marcus said sounding a little more relaxed.

“Kieran O’Brien.”

“Ryan Yukisaki!” piped up the new first-year boy looking on eagerly.

“And I’m Harriet Potter,” Harriet said.

Harriet didn’t know why what happened surprised her so much. She was used to getting reactions from people over her name, but somehow when all of the new students around her stopped and stared at her in shock, she just looked around blankly.

“Wh-what?” Harriet asked.


“Well, yeah...” Harriet said.

She had never been comfortable being famous, but realising that even these people who grew up thousands of miles away from her knew her name too was a bit too much. She merely started filling her plate with food, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

Sarah opened her mouth to ask another question when Alex elbowed her in the side, apparently noticing how Harriet didn’t want to talk about it. Harriet thanked Alex with a small nod. Alex saw but didn’t nod back. Instead, she merely looked down at her food and let her wavy hair hide most of her face from view.

In the meantime, Kieran had launched into an explanation about life at Hogwarts to Ryan as Hermione and Marcus explained how lessons would go to the other new students. Harriet looked around the table curiously. She caught sight of a first-year boy, James Needle, trying to ignore Percy who was trying to talk to him. Apparently, James hadn’t been that impressed by Percy’s treatment of the refugee students either.

Down the other end of the table, Neville was talking to the short, mousy boy named Colin Creevey.
To her horror, Harriet saw Neville point at her. The boy turned to look at her with wide-eyed excitement, and of all things, he drew an old-fashioned camera from the front of his robes and aimed it at her. Harriet quickly sat up so that Ronnie blocked her from the boy’s view, groaning under her breath.

Elsewhere along the table Parvati and Lavender were talking animatedly with Tori and Adele. To Harriet’s amusement, both of the new girls were looking at Parvati and Lavender with dumbfounded looks, as if Parvati and Lavender were speaking to them in gibberish. Somehow looking at both girls Harriet didn’t get the impression either were all that interested in things like fashion and glamour like Parvati and Lavender were.

“Wait a moment,” Hermione said so suddenly, and in such a shocked voice it made Harriet jump. “Where’s Professor Lockhart?”

Harriet looked back up at the staff table. Sure enough, Professor Lockhart wasn’t there. Harriet had utterly forgotten that Gilderoy Lockhart was going to be starting as the new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor.

“Maybe he decided not to take the job after all?” Marcus suggested. Harriet couldn’t help but notice the amount of hope Marcus had in his voice.

“Who’s Gilderoy Lock—” Kaitlyn started to ask.

Her question was answered before she could finish. The doors to the Great Hall were swung open wide, and Gilderoy Lockhart himself strode in. He was wearing the same robes he’d worn at the book signing in Diagon Alley. As usual, his robes and hair were immaculate.

“Sorry I’m late, Headmaster!” Lockhart called in a jovial voice. “I decided to come via the Forest, get the measure of the creatures in there myself before term started.”

Dumbledore had risen to his feet to give a very slight bow and gestured to the one empty seat at the staff table. Widespread murmuring was going on throughout the Great Hall as he took his place. Across from her, Hermione was halfway out of her seat to get a better look at him.

“He took a stroll through the forest my ass,” muttered Erica, looking at Lockhart with burning eyes. “Wanted to make an entrance if you ask me. I’ve been in that forest a hundred times this summer with Hagrid; you can’t walk ten feet into it without something catching your hair or robes.”

“He... he could have got changed before he came in...?” Hermione suggested, sounding as hopeful as Marcus had sounded while suggesting Lockhart had quit.

Erica only responded by giving Hermione a sceptically raised eyebrow before taking a sip of her pumpkin juice and turning away to talk to the older girls on her other side. Harriet caught a glimpse of Fred and George. Fred was leaning over to speak to the group of fourth-year girls Erica was talking to, but George was still looking a little sheepish, only listening in and laughing at most anything Erica said.

After all the plates were empty, Professor Dumbledore once more got to his feet. The dishes cleaned themselves and vanished, and Professor Dumbledore spread his arms wide in welcome.

“Well, now we’re all full bellied, let us turn to the essential announcements. Firstly, as you all noticed during his most malapropos entrance, we welcome Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, who has stepped in to fill the Defence Against the Dark Arts post.”

Something about the way the other staff sniggered but Professor Lockhart beamed at the word
“malapropos” told Harriet only too plainly that the word did not mean what Lockhart apparently thought it meant. Harriet didn’t know what it meant either, but she was sure it wasn’t flattering.

Elsewhere throughout the Great Hall, the reaction to the proclamation was a varied one. Lockhart got to his feet again, waving around at all the students and beaming with his mouth full of brilliant white teeth. Harriet only gave two or three claps, as did Ronnie and Kieran. Marcus didn’t clap at all. Hermione was on her feet, as were quite a few other girls around the room, though Harriet noticed most of the other girls were older.

The staff, on the other hand, showed everything but open contempt. Lockhart gave a roguish wink to Professor Sinistra, who looked as though she wanted to respond by hitting him over the head with her plate.

“And now, for the ‘four hundred ninety-second time,’ a list of items not allowed in the corridors can be found on Argus Filch’s office door, and for the ‘five hundred sixth time,’ he reminds me that magic is not allowed in the corridors between lessons.”

Predictably, Fred and George sniggered at this feeble pronouncement on Filch’s behalf. What Harriet hadn’t expected was the number of sniggers that had also come from the refugees as well.

Professor Dumbledore smiled around at them all and cleared his throat to continue. “Returning students will be pleased to know that the restorations have been completed on the third-floor corridor on the right, and so is no longer off limits, and those entering it will no longer ‘suffer a most gruesome and violent death’.”

In spite of herself, Harriet grinned around at her friends who had entered that same corridor with her the year before and faced the trials to stop Lord Voldemort from stealing the Philosopher’s Stone.

“Quidditch try-outs will be next week; captains, please sign up with Madame Hooch for their team try-outs.

“First-year students please take note that the Forbidden Forest is, as its name suggests, forbidden. Given the large amounts of dangerous creatures that our gamekeeper Hagrid has kindly filled the forest with for us, I’m sure all of you will understand.”

Harriet couldn’t help but smile and roll her eyes at this statement. Hagrid merely chuckled in his good-natured way, and Dumbledore smiled and gave Hagrid a short bow before turning his attention back to the students.

“And now, as we are all tired and full and ready for a nice full day of classes tomorrow, I bid you all goodnight and shall see you all bright and early at breakfast!”

Once again, pandemonium broke out. Harriet laughed out loud now as once more the refugee students scattered about the Great Hall. There was no harm in it she thought; most of them were introducing themselves to ordinary students from other houses. Percy was still quite beside himself trying to herd all the first years together, which was complicated given the number of refugee first-years that were running about trying to touch base with friends.

Marcus was grumbling, and Rachel shook her head.

“Seriously, where does he think we’ve been living?” Rachel asked in disbelief. “We’ve been living here for the last two months with pretty much nothing to do but look around and figure out where everything is. We know where the common rooms are.”

“All the common rooms?” Marcus asked, interested.
“Oh yeah, they showed us where they all are, let us sleep in whatever ones we wanted. It was pretty great, I like the Gryffindor Room but I think we had the most fun with the Ravenclaw Common Room, we made it a game all summer long trying to figure out all the riddles the door would ask us,” Rachel said. She smiled brightly, but it was stifled immediately as an unspoken thought seemed to hit her, and she hung her head and sped up to walk with Erica.

Marcus looked concerned and was about to say something but Scott put a hand on his shoulder.

“Eh, I’d leave her be for now... no sense forcing them to remember all that’s happened...”

“Yeah, good point,” Marcus muttered, though he still kept stealing glances at Rachel as they walked along. Scott stayed with them until they hit the stairway that split off between the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw towers.

“Alright everyone,” called another of the Gryffindor prefects, “the new password is ‘wattlebird,’ everyone got that?”

From a little ways behind her, Harriet could hear Neville groan. Poor Neville always had a horrible time remembering the passwords. The prefect opened the portrait hole, and they all climbed inside one by one after her.

As Harriet looked around the Common Room, a strong feeling of ‘home’ swept over her. While the Burrow had felt very much like home to her this past summer, it was still nowhere near as home to her as Hogwarts.

“D-do you need a hand?” asked a concerned voice from behind her that Harriet didn’t recognise. She turned to see one of the new refugee girls, Tori Hoffman, looking at Kieran who was awkwardly making his way through the portrait hole with his shillelagh.

“What? Oh, no thanks, honestly, I’m right as rain,” Kieran said back, smiling in a good-natured way. The new girl continued to look sympathetic as Kieran got inside the common room and stretched, walking over to join Harriet and the rest. Harriet kept looking at the girl, her brow tight. Once more, jealousy rose up inside Harriet.

Harriet shook her head and turned to look at the rest of the common room. She couldn’t help but smile when she saw crowds of people around their refugees. It made her feel good to see them getting such a warm reception. It also touched a part of her that was glad the focus was off of her for a change. The portrait hole opened once more as Percy and the first years entered. Harriet had hoped that maybe he would have cooled off in leading the first-years around, but she was wrong. Instead, Percy gritted his teeth.

“Alright, new refugee students of all age levels over here,” Percy barked.

None of them moved. They all merely glared at him indignantly.

“I am a Prefect! I can give you all detentions for this,” Percy said, and finally, the students all started making their way over.

Out of the corner of her eye, Harriet caught sight of Marcus. His eyes were boring holes in Percy, and his hands were clenched into fists.

“Alright, now, we need to get some things straight,” Percy started looking around at the refugees. “First of all, there is great tradition and protocol here at Hogwarts School. We are an ancient and
prestigious school, and we behave ourselves with dignity here.”

“Oh shut up, Perce,” Fred called from the chairs by the fireplace where he and Wood had been talking.

Percy ignored Fred and continued. “So during meals, we eat at our tables. I’m sure the other prefects are giving this same speech to their houses.”

“Yeah right,” muttered Marcus.

Harriet put a hand on his shoulder, but he shrugged it off and boldly walked up to Percy.

“Look, Prefect or not, Percy, get off their backs,” Marcus said.

Marcus didn’t raise his voice, merely scowled as he spoke. Harriet saw his hands were still clenched into tight fists.

“Watch your step, Van Der Lakk,” Percy growled.

“No, listen, leave them alone! They’ve been through hell and have only had each other for two months. They’ve all been under way too much already to deal with you pushing them around on your little power-trip—”

“That’s out of order, Van Der Lakk!” Percy shouted. “That’s detention, and I’ll report it to Professor McGonagall.”

Marcus glowered and turned, storming off towards his dormitory. Kieran sighed and bid the group goodnight before he went off after Marcus. Harriet bit her lip, wanting to follow but with Percy watching and her uncertainty over what to say she stayed standing where she was.

She nervously looked around the room as well. As she did, she couldn’t help but notice that most everyone seemed to be agreeing with Marcus. Ronnie, in particular, was looking livid with Percy and turned to storm towards their dormitory. Harriet didn’t hesitate to follow. Hermione followed as well, and they made their way up the staircase after Ronnie.

Ronnie was halfway changed into her pyjamas when they entered.

“I’m so sick of Percy,” Ronnie said without any preamble.

“We know, Ronnie,” Harriet said hugging her friend around the shoulders. Ronnie sighed as the door to the dormitory opened again. Harriet had expected it to be Parvati and Lavender but was surprised to see instead Adele, Rachel and Tori enter.

Harriet was about to ask them what was up when she realised there were three extra beds in their dorm that had not been there the year before. It then occurred to her it was silly to assume they would put them in different rooms, though she had to stop and ponder just what the magic of Hogwarts was that the room had expanded to accommodate the exact number of new beds needed.

“Hey, well guess we’re all roomies now,” the stoic blonde Tori said as she went to one of the new unclaimed beds. Rachel sat on another and Adele yet another.

Harriet couldn’t help but continue to steal glances at the girl named Tori. The way she had tried to help Kieran kept intruding on her mind. Why had it bugged her so much? Why was it still bothering her? Kieran was a big kid; he could handle himself, even with his leg.
She then remembered the sound of Kieran’s voice last summer when they had gone after the Philosopher’s Stone, the hurt in his voice that he hadn’t been able to go with them. She also remembered the look on his face during the End of Year Feast when Professor Dumbledore had been giving out the new points. She decided that must have been what the feeling was, she didn’t like people making Kieran feel conscious about his leg, and he could do it on his own.

“Don’t think we got introduced yet,” Adele said, smiling. “I’m Adele,” she muttered displaying a great distaste for the name, “but everyone calls me AJ.”

“And I’m Tori.”

“And we’ve met of course,” Rachel said smiling.

Harriet smiled. Now she had sorted out her feelings in her head she was feeling much more favourably disposed to the new girls.

“I’m Harriet, and this is Ronnie and Hermione,” Harriet said.

“Pleasure to meet-cha,” AJ said, and Tori nodded.

“It’s Hoffman, right...?” Hermione asked in a thoughtful if quiet voice.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Tori said.

“So is your father...”

“Arnold Hoffman, yeah,” Tori said, actually sounding quite proud.

“Arnold Hoffman... I know that name...” Ronnie said thinking.

“He was the mayor of one of the towns, Rollen wasn’t it?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Tori confirmed.

“He was the one who saved two hundred people from the attack, leading them out of the country,” Hermione explained, looking at Tori and smiling.

Tori smiled back, and her chest seemed to swell with pride.

Harriet smiled too. Having heard that she felt she understood Tori even better and why she had been so solicitous to Kieran before. Obviously, Tori had seen her father helping all those people and probably wanted to live up to his legacy.

Harriet stretched and started getting ready for bed. As she did, she brushed her hair back absent-mindedly and jumped as both Tori and AJ gasped.

“You’re Harriet Potter?!” They both asked in unison.

Harriet sighed. They had seen her scar.

“Er, yeah,” Harriet said brushing her hair back down over her scar.

“Someone said you were in this house,” Tori said looking amazed.

“Yeah, Potter’s something alright,” said a teasing voice from the doorway.
Harriet looked to see Parvati and Lavender enter and move to their beds.

“Hey Parvati, hey Lavs,” Harriet said. Despite the jab, she was happy to see them. “Good summers?”

“Pretty good, yes,” Parvati said sitting on her bed.

Lavender nodded too. “Oh yeah, but I couldn’t wait to get back,” Lavender said and sighed looking around. “I missed this place.”

Harriet nodded in agreement but turned and saw Rachel looking at her.

“Um, Harriet, I just, I guess I wanna ask you to thank your friend Marcus for standing up for us like that to Percy,” Rachel said smiling warmly. “It was a tough time, and...” she looked around at the other two girls. “We are all we have...”

AJ and Tori both agreed earnestly.

Harriet smiled. “Well you know, he’s in our house, you can thank him yourself tomorrow,” Harriet said.

Rachel smiled and nodded before turning to introduce herself to Parvati and Lavender.

“Hi, I’m Rachel, omigosh I love your necklace!” Rachel said to Lavender who beamed.

Harriet smiled yet again. Apparently, the new refugees were going to fit in pretty well at all levels. She finished getting into her pyjamas and climbed beneath the covers of her warm, soft four-poster bed, drew her curtains shut and laid her head down on her pillow. Sure, the year had started out a little rough, but she was sure that from here on, things would go back to normal.

Chapter End Notes

One more... all characters that don't exist in Harry Potter canon are property of night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA) or myself with the exception of Benjamin Jackson, Adele Jackson, and Rayne Prismere who are property of Hasbro.

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“The deepest wounds and the most terrifying threats are the ones we cannot see. It is the mind, you see, where we are all most vulnerable. What we perceive by its very nature can do a tremendous amount more harm than what is tangible.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet’s first day as a Second-Year Hogwarts student got off on what could only be described as a rocky start. At two in the morning, Rachel woke everyone in the room when she sat bolt upright and screamed at the top of her lungs.

There was loud shuffling as Harriet got the curtains to her four-poster pulled back and saw Tori and AJ doing their best to calm Rachel down. Rachel was struggling hard in Tori’s arms and seemed to be trying to flee. To Harriet’s horror, she was flailing so hard; she even swatted AJ in the face so hard that AJ got a bloody nose. Tori kept holding Rachel tight from behind, finally managing to pin Rachel’s arms down and whispering in her ear while AJ got some tissues to stifle her bleeding nose.

“They—they’re coming… They’re going to get me… THEY’RE COMING!” Rachel shrieked.

“Shhhhhh,” Tori whispered. She gently rocked Rachel back and forth despite her continued efforts to flee.

“No one’s gonna getcha, sugar,” AJ said. Her voice was garbled a little as she kept her nose pinched, and head tilted back.

“The ground… it’s shaking… and burning… everything’s burning!”

Harriet bit her lip. Elsewhere in the girl dormitories, Harriet heard other screams. There was only two more that she could hear, but the sound was equally chilling. She imagined it was going on in other house dormitories too.

After fifteen minutes, Rachel finally closed her eyes and collapsed back in Tori’s arms. Tori gently laid the smaller girl back down on the bed and tucked her in. AJ groaned checking her nose in the mirror. It seemed it had finally stopped bleeding.

“She just… fell right back to sleep? After all that?” Parvati asked in a tiny voice.

Tori shrugged. “Don’t think she was ever awake. The crazier part is she won’t even remember it tomorrow, she never does.”

“But, her eyes were open, she looked terrified,” Lavender said.

Tori looked around at the other girls. She had an imploring look on her face. “Please don’t say anything about it to her,” she said anxiously. “She knows she has them. She’s been seeing Miss Momori for treatment for them, but she’s ashamed of it.”

“What was that then?” Ronnie asked bluntly.
Harriet turned to look at her. Despite the blunt nature of the question, Ronnie’s face was full of concern.

“It was a night terror,” Hermione said.

Harriet swallowed. She remembered last year, the strange nightmares she’d had. Ronnie gave her a look that told her all too plainly that Ronnie remembered them as well. Harriet wanted to say something about it, but somehow she didn’t feel it was appropriate. Harriet had just had some nightmares about things that happened when she was only a year old. What she had watched right now with Rachel just seemed so much worse.

“Is your nose okay?” Lavender asked AJ, getting out of bed to take a closer look at AJ’s nose.

“Yeah, she got my lip good once this summer already, you kin’a expect it once she gets flailin’,” AJ said, her voice back to normal.

“How often does this happen?” Parvati asked.

“Eh, only once ‘r twice a week,” AJ said sitting on her bed.

No one said anything for a long time after that. One by one, everyone climbed back into bed. Tori was the last to do so. She stayed sitting beside Rachel, just stroking her hair. As she did, Harriet couldn’t help but watch her through the crack in her curtains. Tori had the same look on her face she’d had when Kieran had been coming through the portrait hole.

It was this that finally quelled Harriet’s feelings towards Tori. She did seem to want to look out for everybody. She really must have gotten a lot of her father’s influence from that, Harriet thought. She even gave a little laugh at the realisation that Tori was perhaps something like a female Kieran, just wanting to make sure everyone is okay and cared for. However, it only took another minute of letting that realisation sink in for Harriet to feel that knot come creeping back.

It took another hour for everyone to calm down enough to go back to sleep. Harriet only felt like she had just closed her eyes when she heard Ronnie shouting out in anger.

“Oh no, oh you have got to be kidding me!”

“What’s wrong?” Harriet heard a voice ask.

“My wand! I hadn’t noticed it last night; it’s ruined!”

Harriet blinked becoming fully awake now and pulled back the curtain of her four-poster bed. Ronnie was sitting on her trunk at the foot of her bed half-dressed and staring at her wand. Harriet looked at it and gave a sympathetic groan. The wand had been snapped nearly in half. The only thing holding it together was some splinters and the core which was exposed in the break.

“Oh Ronnie, I’m so sorry!” Harriet said, quickly getting out of bed and crossing to sit beside Ronnie, putting a consoling arm around her shoulder.

“Well, m-maybe we can ask one of the teachers to fix it? Maybe Professor Flitwick?” Hermione suggested in a hopeful voice as she sat down next to Ronnie opposite of Harriet to inspect the wand.

Ronnie sighed looking miserable.

“How did it happen?” Lavender asked walking over too.
Ronnie didn’t look at her or respond, and Harriet knew why. Admitting to how the wand got broken would mean admitting her father had flown an illegal car to Hogwarts.

“Well, couldn’t you write home for a new one?” Parvati asked sounding distracted as she checked her hair in her mirror.

Again Ronnie didn’t answer but kept staring miserably at the wand. Harriet knew why that prospect was an unwelcome one for Ronnie. Given how poor Ronnie’s family was and the fact they had just lost their car, that Mr Weasley had probably spent quite a bit of money on, was too much to handle. Harriet was sure that Ronnie had no desire to add to her family’s financial burden. On top of that was the fact that Ollivander wands were quite expensive, seven galleons at least. Harriet felt sick as she remembered how the Weasleys’ vault had only contained a single galleon and some sickles and knuts before their school shopping had emptied it. However, Harriet didn’t see how Ronnie could get through the year without a working wand.

“Well, maybe you could write to that one wandmaker, Sugar? What was ‘er name again? She was real good; she made wands for lots of us when we got here since most of us lost ‘em in the attack,” said another voice Harriet didn’t recognise.

Harriet turned and blinked a bit at the three new girls looking over from their beds. It was then that Harriet finally started remembering all that had happened the previous night and the new refugee students. She furrowed her brow trying to remember their names. One was very tall for their age and put Harriet in mind of Viking women she had seen in books. Tori was her name. The other was about Harriet’s height with waist length blonde hair she had just put up in a long ponytail with another hair-tie near the end. That was AJ. The third was petite but athletic looking with bright eyes. She remembered her name was Rachel.

“Wand-maker? You mean Ollivander?” Ronnie asked looking grim. “Sure he’d probably do something like that for you guys after what you went through, but for just a normal student like me…”

All three of the new girls’ faces darkened a little at this, and again Harriet thought she knew why. If she were in their place, she had to admit she would probably be resentful of being called a charity case too.

AJ crossed her arms. “Ollivander who? I wasn’t talkin’ about no Ollivander. And she sure weren’t no ‘he’ neither. This one’s name was McIntyre.”

Harriet blinked, and her mouth fell open. McIntyre? Of course! Scott had said the very first time they’d met that his family made wands. Why hadn’t she thought of that?

“Ronnie, that’s it! Scott’s family could make you a wand!” Harriet declared.

Ronnie’s reaction to this was a divided one. She looked as though she thought it was a good idea, but much like the refugees, Harriet was sure Ronnie didn’t want anyone’s charity.

“Oh Ronnie, don’t be so stubborn,” Hermione said. “You can’t take classes with a broken wand.”

Ronnie sighed and seemed to give in. “I just… this was my wand… I mean, I know it was Charlie’s but…” Ronnie sighed again looking at it sadly. “It became mine… I even knocked out that troll with it last year in the bathroom, remember?” Ronnie asked looking back and forth between Hermione and Harriet.

Harriet’s eye twitched uncomfortably. Of course, she remembered; being nearly flattened by a troll
with a giant club was not something someone forgot in a hurry.

“Yeah, the McIntyre’s made a lot of us wands, for nothing at all,” the tallest new girl said. “A lot of us older kids lost ours in the attack, but the younger ones who’re first years now; they never had wands in the first place.”

Harriet couldn’t help but smile at the thought of Scott and his family. However, another feeling hit her as she took in the three new girls, but especially Ronnie. For as sympathetic as she had initially been to Ronnie for her broken wand, she found she was having a hard time feeling quite so sorry for her when she thought about them. Especially little Rachel, having seen her attack she’d had the night before.

Rachel was acting as though nothing at all out of the ordinary had happened, merely doing her hair up in a ponytail and picking up her uniform. As she did, Harriet felt herself smile again. There was a twinkling smile on Rachel’s face as she looked at the uniform that Harriet knew only too well. It was the same look she’d had on her face when she’d first seen her uniform last year.

Rachel caught sight of Harriet watching and blushed.

“Sorry, just, never had nice clothes like this before,” Rachel said.

“Me neither,” AJ said though she seemed much less excited about the prospect of the uniform. “Don’t they make pants or somethin’?” she asked holding up the skirt in disgust.

“It’s the uniform,” Hermione said in an unhelpful tone, though the corners of her mouth were twitching. “We all have to wear them, see?” She said stepping around from behind her bed to show her full uniform that she had already changed into.

AJ merely grumbled and started getting dressed. She muttered more in frustration trying to fasten the skirt, prompting Parvati and Lavender to come to her rescue.

Harriet saw Tori smiling affectionately. Tori nonchalantly made her way over to Harriet and smiled pretending to be looking for something. She whispered. “AJ’s family’s from Texas… her family moved up to manage a farm her father bought.”

“Then why did she come here? Why didn’t she go back to Texas?” Ronnie asked, overhearing.

Tori sighed. “Texas seceded too. Anyway, she’s not exactly the ‘girly’ type you can see.” Tori smiled over her shoulder at AJ who was still grumbling as Lavender attempted to show her how to tie her tie. “Don’t think she’s ever worn anything but jeans in her life.”

Harriet gave a little-forced laugh as she finished getting dressed. Despite thinking she’d resolved her feelings last night, she still felt unaccountably uncomfortable around Tori. Maybe the fact Tori stood a whole head taller than her had something to do with it? Or perhaps it was her guilt over having thought so poorly of her already? Harriet figured it was probably the latter.

Finally, they were all ready and headed down the stairs to the Common Room as a group. A lot of the students it seemed had already gone down to breakfast, but sure enough, Marcus, Kieran, Neville, Dean and Seamus were waiting for them. As the boys rose from the seats by the fireplace, Harriet blinked to see another boy in the group. It was the boy named Colin Creevey, and he was still carrying his camera. The other boys looked at her a little apologetically.

“E-excuse me please, H-Harriet Potter, b-but; I was just… I was wondering… could I… have a picture?”
Harriet blinked. “Oh, uh, okay, with my friends.”

“Oh no meant just you,” Colin said. He had apparently thought Harriet had been asking rather than stating.

“No, I mean I’ll take a picture with my friends,” she said again, much more firmly this time.

“Oh, alright,” Colin said.

Harriet turned to look at her other friends who were all giving her sceptical looks. Ronnie was looking at Colin with disbelief while Hermione, Dean, Seamus, Parvati and Lavender all seemed on the verge of laughter. Marcus was giving Colin a most disapproving look, while Kieran had an eyebrow cocked so high it was almost disappearing into his hairline. Neville was looking at Harriet with a very apologetic expression as he scuffed a foot on the carpet.

“Uhh, well we’ll let ya’ll get ta that picture thing,” AJ said heading for the door. “I ain’t lettin’ no one get a picture of me in this,” she said pushing the portrait hole open. Tori and Rachel looked at each other and Tori shrugged and headed off after AJ.

“I’ll see you all down there,” Tori said back, and Rachel waved after her before turning back to the group.

“Well, I’d be in it, if you don’t mind?” Rachel asked.

Harriet nodded, and they all lined up in front of the fireplace. In the back row, Neville, Ronnie, Marcus, Dean, Seamus, and Kieran all lined up. Rachel, Parvati, Lavender, Harriet, and Hermione all stood in the front. Colin beamed looking beside himself with excitement as he held up the camera.

“Smile everyone!” Colin said.

Harriet did her best to smile despite how uncomfortable she felt. She kept being taken back to the incident at Flourish and Blotts, being forced into the spotlight and having pictures taken of her. However, it was relatively painless in the end. Colin snapped a picture and beamed at them all. “Thanks you guys! Not just Harriet Potter but all her friends too! Wow!”

Harriet looked to see Rachel who was suddenly looking uncomfortable take a step away from the group. She turned to look at her other side as Kieran smiled spoke up.

“Hey, you know what, Colin? How about another picture? One for you and one for all of us?”

“Oh, sure!” Colin said gleefully as he wound his camera.

“W-well I’ll let you guys have that,” Rachel said, taking another step further away.

“Oh come on,” Ronnie said. “It’s just a picture.”

Rachel blushed but retook her place in the group. Colin snapped another picture, and the group finally broke up.

“Hey, you know what?” Hermione said.

“What?” Harriet asked.

“We should go find Scott and have a picture together with him. It isn’t fair to cut him out just because he’s in Ravenclaw.”
“Hey, good point,” Ronnie said. “And Dora!”

Harriet followed along in the group as they discussed pictures on their way to the Great Hall. Along the way, Colin bombarded Harriet and the others with questions.

“So is it true you’re the youngest player in a century at Quidditch, Harriet?”

“Why do you need that walking stick?”

“Is it true you all fought off a troll?”

“So all your family have been in Gryffindor?”

“Is that other pretty girl at the Ravenclaw table your twin?”

On and on he went as they made their way down. Harriet was finally getting the hang of ignoring him when he finally asked: “So did anyone else hear all that screaming last night? What was that all about?”

At once, Rachel froze. The awkward way the group stopped walking too, and all the girls looked around at her seemed to confirm her suspicion.

“I… well… I’m gonna… go find AJ and Tori,” Rachel said and rushed past them all, all but running as she went.

“Huh, what’s wrong with her?” Colin asked.

“Gee, do you think maybe she was one of the ones who was screaming?” Marcus asked, his voice a low growl.

“Oh, she was? What for?” Colin asked more persistently.

Harriet closed her eyes. Deep down she knew Colin just didn’t know any better, but at the same time…

“It doesn’t matter, let’s get breakfast, we need our new timetables too,” Parvati said, sounding as though she was trying to disarm the situation.

The rest of the group all nodded in agreement and made their way down to the Great Hall in silence. Even Colin stopped asking questions, apparently finally realising he’d done something wrong.

When they got to the Great Hall, Harriet quickly looked around for Rachel. She saw her sitting with Erica, who had an arm around Rachel’s shoulder in a comforting way. Harriet felt her heart sink more as they found a spot further down the table with Tori and AJ.

She noticed there didn’t seem to be quite the same effort to move to different tables amongst the students. However, given the disgruntled looks on some faces, Percy and the refugees, in particular, Harriet did wonder if they had tried to move around before she and her friends had arrived. Harriet did stop to wave to Dora and her other friend Sae, who by the looks of it had taken at least a couple of the new Slytherin refugees under their wing.

Colin seemed to have gotten the hint the others were slightly upset with him and made his way down to sit with the other new first years instead. Harriet could see him talking to them miserably, and Ginny turn to give her a little sympathetic smile before returning her attention to Colin.

Harriet started feeling guilty. He wasn’t that bad she thought. He was just easily excited and didn’t
have the greatest people skills. Harriet remembered only too well the awkward moments she had
gone through with her roommates during their first few weeks at Hogwarts.

“So I’m guessing it was Pipsqueak who said somethin’?” AJ asked with a nod towards Rachel.

“Yeah…” Kieran said. “He didn’t mean to but, anyway, Kieran. Kieran O’Brien.” Kieran said and
held out a hand to Tori and AJ.

Both girls smiled and shook. Marcus, Dean, Seamus and Neville all introduced themselves to the
new girls too.

The introductions were interrupted when the Owl Post finally arrived. Harriet sighed not seeing
Hedwig amongst the swirling mass of owls. She doubted that Hedwig would be bringing any letters,
but she usually would stop in to say good morning at least. Harriet supposed she was still upset about
what had happened the day before.

Ronne was still quiet, apparently still upset over her broken wand. Harriet smiled as Professor
McGonagall finally came around handing out their timetables.

“Double Herbology with the Hufflepuffs, that’ll be fun,” Marcus said.

Harriet smiled. She hadn’t gotten to know any Hufflepuffs the previous year, but they seemed like a
pleasant group to be around. They quickly finished eating and caught up with Rachel to make their
way down to the greenhouses together.

“Hey, our first class together,” came a voice from behind them.

Harriet turned to see the other group of Hufflepuff second-years right behind them as they left the
castle. The Gryffindors all stopped to wait for them.

“Jeremy, Jeremy Owens,” said the tall boy who had spoken first. Harriet noted there were only two
refugees in their group, the blond McGee twins who gave Rachel eager hugs of greeting.

They all made hasty introductions, not wanting to be late and figuring they’d have time to talk once
the practical part of the class started. Harriet had been right, the Hufflepuffs were a very cheerful lot,
and they all seemed to smile and laugh very easily, except a stout, serious-looking boy named Ernie
Macmillan who reminded Harriet rather forcefully of a young Percy.

Harriet felt her mouth contort a little bit with the eagerness at which the other Gryffindor boys
introduced themselves to Isabella. However, she felt a bit guilty about it a few minutes later when
Parvati pointed out how “friendly” the Hufflepuff boys had been with her, particularly a curly-haired
boy named Justin Finch-Fletchley.

As they made it to the greenhouses, Harriet noticed that Professor Sprout was not there. They looked
around a bit before Jeremy spotted her coming from the grounds, looking agitated with an arm full of
bandages and Professor Lockhart in tow. He was in his turquoise robes and hat once more, both with
bright gold trim. He contrasted greatly with Professor Sprout who wore a very patchy hat and whose
robes were always covered with dirt.

“Good morning!” Professor Lockhart said as he and Professor Sprout caught up with them all. “I
was just showing Professor Sprout the right way to doctor an injured Whomping Willow.”

Harriet looked past them to see the tree that had assaulted them the night before with many of its
numerous branches in slings. After the way it had nearly killed her, Ronnie, Mr Weasley and
Hedwig last night, Harriet had to admit she didn’t feel that sorry for it.
Lockhart beamed and went on. “Now I don’t want you all coming away thinking I know more about Herbology than Professor Sprout! I’ve just managed to run across a few of these remarkable trees in my travels and offered what advice I could.”

Marcus snorted a little in disgust. Lockhart turned his eyes on Marcus but never broke his cheerful look.

“Oh dear, a bit of an allergy there? Maybe Herbology wouldn’t be a good choice for you to continue after this year,” Lockhart said.

“Greenhouse Three, class,” Professor Sprout said. She didn’t look or sound as cheerful as she usually was, and kept stealing disgruntled glances at Professor Lockhart.

There was much murmuring of excitement at the pronouncement of Greenhouse Three. Greenhouse Three held much more exciting plants than they had dealt with the previous year. Harriet took an excited step towards the greenhouse with the rest of the class when to her horror Lockhart spotted her.

“Ah! Harriet! There you are, wanted a bit of a word with you. Do you mind terribly if I borrow her for a few minutes?” Lockhart asked Professor Sprout.

Professor Sprout looked as though she minded a great deal but Professor Lockhart seemed not to notice.

“That’s the ticket!” he said and quickly steered Harriet away from the group.

Harriet sighed a little as Lockhart started to talk.

“Harriet, Harriet, Harriet… I heard all about your little exploits last night in the flying car—”

“Oh, no Professor, it wasn’t me, I was just giv—”

“I mean I understand completely,” Lockhart went on as though Harriet hadn’t spoken at all.

“Y-you do?” Harriet asked, sincerely doubting it.

“Of course! I mean it’s all my fault after all!”

“Sir?”

“Gave you the bug, didn’t I? The taste for publicity! Only natural to want more after the taste you got!”

Harriet blinked. Lockhart couldn’t seriously be saying what she thought he was saying.

“But, sir!”

“I’ll just say you’re only lucky you got here early so McGonagall could bring you round to your senses, eh? Get you to keep quiet about it all. Keep you from really getting yourself going. Now I know, I know, it’s all a lot for me to talk, I’m famous already. But you’ll get there, Harriet, you’ll get there. I know it’s not quite as easy for girls to make it in the fame department, but you’ve already got a good start with all that ‘You-Know-Who’ business. Maybe just work a little bit on the hair and the make-up, and you’ll be a shoe-in!”

Harriet felt her jaw drop. Had Lockhart just said what she’d thought he’d said?
“Now, think I’ve delayed your Herbology class quite long enough. You run along now and remember what I said.”

And without another word, Lockhart turned and started striding back up towards the school. Harriet didn’t waste any time. She spun on her heel and almost ran into greenhouse three.

“Ahh, Potter, he finally let you go, did he?” Professor Sprout said in an oddly sympathetic voice as Harriet entered.

“Y-yes Professor,” Harriet replied.

Something of Harriet’s dismay must have shown on her face.

“Everything alright, Potter?” Professor Sprout asked.

“Y-yes, fine, Professor,” Harriet replied and made her way over to her friends.

“Well, now certain egos have allowed us to begin our class, let us turn to today’s lesson. We’ll be repotting Mandrakes, and gradually learning to care for them throughout the year. Can anyone tell me the significance of the Mandrake and why they are so important?”

Several hands shot in the air, but Hermione’s was easily the first. “Mandrakes, or Mandragora, are a human-like plant that can be made into a very powerful restorative draught that is often used to return those who have been transfigured or cursed back to their original states.”

“Precisely, Miss Granger, ten points to Gryffindor! As you can imagine from that description, Mandrakes form a critical component of most antidotes. However, extreme precautions must be taken when handling them. Who can tell me why?”

Once again Hermione was first. “When threatened, Mandrakes emit a cry that is fatal to anyone who hears it.”

“Exactly. Take another ten points. The Mandrakes we will be working with today are only seedlings, so their cry won’t cause death, but it will render you unconscious for several hours. Now everyone take a pair of earmuffs.”

The class all stepped up to Professor Sprout and took a pair of earmuffs. As they got to the trays, Harriet leaned to the side to look past Professor Sprout. Behind her were trays and trays of little purple-green plants. They didn’t seem dangerous, and they didn’t look “human-like,” but Harriet reminded herself that this was the magical world after all, and nothing here was ever what it seemed.

As the group picked through the earmuffs, Rachel and Neville both looked put out. They were both the last to the tray and thus had to take a pair of the hideous fluffy pink ones. To Harriet’s surprise and amusement, Jeremy and Isabella both eagerly swapped them for the black ones they had managed to get and promptly put the pink ones on, doubling over in fits of laughter at each other.

“When I tell you all to put them on, make sure they are on tightly. I will move around amongst you after they are on to make sure everyone has theirs on correctly. When it is safe to take them off again, I shall signal you all with a thumbs up. Right, earmuffs on!”

Harriet put on her earmuffs. Instantly all sounds were drowned out. Harriet couldn’t even hear her heartbeat and felt a little disoriented until she got more used to the sensation of deafness.

Professor Sprout moved amongst them, checking to make sure their earmuffs were all correctly fitted. Once satisfied, she put on her earmuffs, took one of the pots with a plant in it and a much larger pot
and put them on her tray for them all to watch. She then took hold of the stalks of the tufty plant and pulled hard.

Harriet silently gasped. At the end of the stalks, where there should have been roots was what looked like a very dirty, tiny, and ugly baby. Its skin was the same colour as the stalks and fronds, which were growing out of its head. Its little legs were flailing wildly, and its mouth was wide open in what to Harriet was a silent scream. Professor Sprout then pulled over the large pot and with surprising force and speed stuffed the Mandrake down into the soft compost until only the tufts were visible once more.

Professor Sprout took off her earmuffs and gave them all a thumbs-up.

“Did everyone see how I did that?” Professor Sprout asked. There were many murmurs of assent, and Professor Sprout smiled.

“Right then, four to a tray everyone. Everyone take a Mandrake pot and an empty pot and some compost—”

Professor Sprout stopped to swat at a pair of spiky red vines that were inching over her shoulders.

“—and look out for the Venomous Tentacula, poor thing’s teething.”

They all split up a bit as they gathered pots. Harriet wound up at a table with Ronnie, Jeremy and Isabella who were still slightly giggle.

“Sorry,” Isabella said trying to stop laughing. “I know we’ve introduced ourselves already so—so what did Lockhart want with you? You were white as a sheet when you came back in?”

Harriet twisted her mouth a little, not wanting to remember that unsettling time. “N-not important,” Harriet said.

“So, get along well with your new students?” Jeremy asked, seeing the need to change the subject.

“Oh yeah,” Ronnie chimed in. “They’re pretty great so far,” she went on giving a wave to AJ and Tori who were at another tray with Ernie and another boy named Justin Finch-Fletchley. Despite her awkward feelings towards Tori, Harriet did feel amused at the slightly intimidated looks both boys had on their faces as they looked up at her.

“Yeah, our two are a lot of laughs too,” Isabella said smiling at the McGee twins who had paired up with Parvati and Lavender and were chattering as though they were old friends.

“So I hear you went to Rathlin?” Ronnie asked Isabella, looking interested. “My dad talks about it all the time, what a great school it is and how progressive and all that.”

Isabella beamed. “Oh yes, only for primary though.”

Harriet listened in. She had only heard of Rathlin in passing a few times, but never anything that in depth.

“What’s it like?” Ronnie asked.

Isabella shrugged. “It’s not terribly different from here. We didn’t live in a castle though. And we had students from all over the world, so I’ve already met a few Americans. Ours here are a lot nicer than the usual ones we’d have at Rathlin. Most of them there came from really wealthy families, so they were usually pretty stuck-up. Well,” she shot a glance at the McGee twins. “Avery and Ellery
kind of are, but they’re still a lot of fun compared to the others. And the older and younger ones than
us we’ve met are nice and cool. It’s really competitive at Rathlin though.”

“Competitive how?” Harriet asked.

“Well it’s an art school,” Isabella replied. “It focuses on music and dance and stuff.”

“But, magical people go there?” Harriet asked.

“Oh yeah, it’s an art school first though, so I went to school with Muggles and Squibs too.”

“Squibs?” asked Harriet.

“Oh people born into magical families that don’t have any magical powers,” Jeremy answered.

“Yeah, think Muggle-Borns in reverse,” Ronnie said.

“Ohhhh, okay,” Harriet nodded. “S-so if we’re supposed to be secret, how can you go to school with
non-magical students?” Harriet asked changing the subject.

Isabella shrugged. “Not that hard really, I was too young to have a wand and do magic, and only
students who go to the primary are allowed to go to the academy, so the non-magic kids go through
primary with magic kids. And I mean really, who’d believe the lone kid who goes: ‘Omigosh! There
are witches and wizards at my school!’”

Harriet, Ronnie and Jeremy all laughed. Harried and Ronnie looked at Jeremy now who laughed
uncomfortably.

“Heh, hey, nothing spectacular about me,” he shrugged. “Just your plain, ordinary secondary-year
pure-blood student.”

Harriet wanted to say something more, but Professor Sprout finally recalled their attention. She asked
them all to put on their earmuffs, once more checked to make sure everyone had theirs on right and
set them to work. Harriet looked down at her little pot, grabbed the tufts, took a sigh, and pulled.

* * * *

Harriet groaned as she finally made her way up to the common room that night. The rest of the day
had not improved. The Mandrakes had turned out to be a nightmare. They kicked and flailed and bit
when they were being pulled out of the pots, and once again when they were being put into the new
ones. In the end, they were all left muddy, scratched, bitten, and sweaty.

After Herbology they had Transfiguration. The good part was, Ronnie was finally convinced that
she should ask Scott if he could write to his aunt about crafting her a new wand. They had been
tasked with turning a beetle into a button. Instead, Ronnie’s wand just gave out a blast of grey smoke
that stank of rotten eggs. During one of these blasts, Ronnie ended up being blinded, and she
accidentally squashed her beetle with her elbow.

Harriet hadn’t fared much better. She felt like she had forgotten everything during the summer.
Instead, she merely kept chasing her beetle around the desk with her wand. As was typical, by the
end of class only Hermione had been successful. Kieran had come close to making his beetle almost
entirely a button, save for the legs and wings that enabled it to fly away through the open window.

The last straw of the day had come when Harriet had run into Colin Creevey on her way to Defence
Against the Dark Arts with Ronnie and Hermione. Harriet was already less than thrilled about spending an hour in the company of Professor Lockhart, and so was hard pressed not to sound annoyed when Colin piped up.

“Eh, h-hello Harriet, so—sorry about earlier.”

“Oh, that’s alright, Colin,” Harriet replied trying to sound less irritable than she felt.

“I-I was wondering, c-could I have another picture? Just you? I want to send it back to my dad to prove I met you.”

“Oh, uh, th-that’s nice, I guess,” Harriet said. She felt uncomfortable as Colin looked up at her with wide, hopeful eyes.

“I-it’s just that my family are Muggles, so they don’t know a lot about this world, so sending them a picture of the most famous witch in the world would be really impressive,” Colin went on.

Harriet felt her frustrations melt as she looked down at Colin’s innocent face. She felt she understood him a little better now. He was different than the rest of his family, and he wanted to impress them, to show them the new world he lived in. Harriet knew how that felt. She’d wished the Dursleys could understand about that about her as well.

“W-well, alright, I guess a picture couldn’t hurt,” Harriet replied, trying not to sound sceptical. She was also trying to ignore Ronnie’s amused sniggering.

“Wow, thanks! And, and do you think you could sign it?”

“Signed photos?” Harriet felt as though a bucket of ice water had been dumped down her spine at the sound of Draco Malfoy’s voice.

“Hey! Everyone, get this! Potter is handing out signed photos!” Draco called around the courtyard, stopping nearly everyone in sight.

“I am not, Malfoy,” Harriet growled while Malfoy’s ever-present cronies, Crabbe and Goyle, guffawed.

To Harriet’s surprise, little Colin turned and swelled up his chest standing between Harriet and Malfoy. “L-leave her alone, you’re just jealous,” Colin barked, though his voice cracked and sounded more like a squeak. Despite both Crabbe and Goyle each having arms that looked as long and thick as Colin’s whole body, Colin didn’t back down.

“Jealous?” Malfoy asked with amused disbelief. “Of Potter? Of having a stupid scar on her forehead? Not sure that makes anyone that special, to be honest.”

“Not sure being a git with a rich dad and a face pointier than a ferret’s makes you that special either,” Ronnie cut in.

Malfoy glowered while Crabbe and Goyle cracked their knuckles. “You know, Potter, maybe you should give out some signed photos. You could give one to Weasley anyway; I’m sure it’d be worth more than their whole house.”

Ronnie took a step towards Malfoy when one of the last voices Harriet wanted to hear spoke up behind her.

“What’s all this then?” came the overly cheery voice of Gilderoy Lockhart. “What’s this I heard
about signed photos? Ah! Shouldn’t have asked!”

Harriet’s cheeks felt like they were on fire as Lockhart threw an arm over her shoulder. Malfoy gave Harriet a dark grin and slid into the crowd with Crabbe and Goyle in tow.

“Tell you what, Mr Creevey, how about a double picture, Lockhart and Potter! You know I like the sound of that,” Lockhart said. He muttered the last part to himself. “And we’ll do it one better for you; we’ll both sign it for you when it’s developed, would that be alright?”

The crowd finally began to disburse as Colin snapped the picture. Harriet shot a disgruntled look at Ronnie who still looked as though she couldn’t stop laughing. She tried to shrug Lockhart off, but he kept her clamped tight to his side. She was starting to get uncomfortable, but Lockhart took no notice as he started walking her towards the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. Harriet couldn’t help but wish she could disapparate like Mrs Weasley had back at Kings Cross or cast that spell Mr Weasley had used on the car.

“Now, Potter, I covered up for you back there in the courtyard, but this attention seeking of yours is going a little too far, don’t you think? Signed photos at your age? No, no, much too early. Setting yourself up for an early fall, we might say. But if people see you taking a photo with me, well that’s something else entirely.”

Harriet didn’t say a word. Her hands were clenched into fists at the thought that Colin and Malfoy had gotten her in this situation, as well as Lockhart for making it worse.

“I mean, that’s not to say you won’t come across a day when you need to carry around a handy stack of signed photos wherever you go, as I do. You have quite a ways to go before you get there. But you’re on your way, Harriet! You’re on your way! I could help you with that you know?”

“Uh, P-Professor, we’re here,” Harriet said gratefully as they reached the classroom.

Lockhart blinked. “Good lord you’re right Harriet! Well then, let’s get this first lesson started; have an extra special lesson planned for our first day!”

Harriet quickly stepped past Lockhart into the classroom. She found her way to the open seat next to Ronnie and stacked as many of Lockhart’s books in front of her as she could, hoping they would block Lockhart from view.

Ronnie opened her mouth, still wearing that little smirk of hers but stopped at the look on Harriet’s face. “You alright?” Ronnie asked.

Hermione, Kieran and Marcus all turned to look at her, wearing similar concerned expressions. Harriet was spared having to answer by Lockhart who cleared his throat. He strode around in front of his desk, picked up Neville’s copy of Travels with Trolls, and held it up to show the class his smiling face on the cover.

“Me: Gilderoy Lockhart. I’ve travelled the world, facing the darkest of arts and the darkest of creatures. In my time I have been awarded the Order of Merlin: Third class, been made an Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defence League, and of course, the five-time winner of Witch Weekly’s Most-Charming-Smile Award!”

There was only sporadic applause at this proclamation. In fact, only Hermione clapped with any enthusiasm. Lockhart laughed.

“But that’s not important. I didn’t banish the Bandon Banshee by smiling at her, or tame the Wagga Wagga Werewolf with a wink!”
Once more the reaction was lukewarm at best. Hermione laughed, but Marcus furrowed his brow and grumbled to himself quietly.

“Well, good to see you’ve all got the full sets of my books. I’m going to start us all with a little quiz just to see how well you’ve all read them.”

Most of the class looked around anxiously. It was clear not one of them, except Hermione, had read any of Lockhart’s books.

“Well, we have a little under an hour of class left, so how about a half hour to complete the quiz?” Lockhart said as he handed out the sheets.

He walked back up to the front of the room and beamed around at them all. “And start… now!”

Harriet looked down at her sheet and felt her eyebrows disappear very quickly into her fringe.

1. What is Gilderoy Lockhart’s favourite colour?
2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart’s secret ambition?
3. What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart’s greatest achievement to date?

Harriet couldn’t help but steal a glance around the room. Predictably, Hermione’s quill was flashing over her parchment. Ronnie had her mouth open reading over the questions with an increasingly dumbstruck expression that Harriet saw was mirrored on Parvati, Lavender, Dean, Seamus, Neville, and even Tori, AJ and Rachel’s faces. Marcus had a look of disgust on his face, while Kieran’s face was unreadable.

Harriet returned her attention to the test. It was three pages long, and the final question made Harriet give out a snort of laughter.

54. When is Gilderoy Lockhart’s birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

His birthday and his “ideal gift?” Harriet thought to herself, is he serious?

“Yes, Miss Potter?” Lockhart asked.

Harriet cleared her throat a bit looking around and catching Marcus’ eye. “Uh, h-hay fever, sir, just a snuffle,” she lied quickly.

Marcus smiled and gave her a discrete wink before turning to look back at Lockhart.

“Ah, goodness, two of you eh? I think there are some tissues in the cupboard,” Lockhart said in what he thought was a helpful tone. “But do hurry, time is ticking away.”

Harriet quickly got up and went to the cupboard and pretended to blow her nose. It was official; Lockhart was the most self-absorbed person Harriet had ever met. Harriet had thought it was Malfoy, but at least Malfoy had the proper sense to know when he was being laughed at or insulted. At first, she had found Lockhart’s clinginess uncomfortable, but now she had a better idea of him.
Harriet finally went back over to her desk and sat, still trying hard not to laugh as she set to work on
the test. After the test was over, Lockhart collected and casually leafed through them all. As he did,
his expression fell and he tutted them all disappointedly.

“Oh dear, oh dear… it seems we all need to be a little more thorough in our readings, don’t we? It is
in Year with the Yeti that I state quite plainly that my favourite colour is lilac. And it was right at the
very beginning of chapter twelve of Wanderings with Werewolves that my ideal birthday gift would
be ‘peace and harmony between all magical and non-magical people around the world’.”

Lockhart gave them all a roguish wink.

“Though I wouldn’t say no to a nice aged bottle of Ogden’s Old Firewhisky!”

Ronnie gave Lockhart the same bemused expression she had worn looking at the test. Dean and
Seamus were doing their best not to laugh while Hermione seemed to have eyes and ears for no one
but Lockhart.

“Miss Hermione Granger, however—”

Hermione jumped so hard she nearly toppled her books off her desk.

“—got full marks! Not a single missed question! And who is Miss Hermione Granger?”

Hermione nervously swallowed and raised her hand. Lockhart beamed.

“Well done Miss Granger! Take ten points for Gryffindor! Now, how about we have a real treat and
get to our first practical lesson.”

In spite of herself, Harriet felt her sense of excitement growing. They hadn’t had any practical
lessons the previous year under Quirrell, and Harriet was anxious for the chance to learn how to use
her wand to defend herself. She was in the process of pulling her wand out when Lockhart reached
under his desk and drew out a large cage covered with a sheet. As he set the cage down it began to
rattle, and clatter and a sound akin to chattering budgies filled the room. Harriet leaned around her
books for a better view, and even Dean and Seamus had stopped their sniggering.

“It is my solemn duty as your Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher to teach you how to defend
yourself against the darkest and foulest creatures and beings to ever walk this earth. The very things
of nightmares may pass through this room this year. However, I swear no harm can befall any of you
while I’m here. As long as you all remain calm.”

Lockhart put his hand back on the top of the cage and prepared to pull off the cover. “Now, we don’t
want to provoke them, so I must ask all the ladies of the room, do… not… scream.”

In spite her anxiousness over what was under the sheet, Harriet felt her cheeks burn at the slight. She
 glanced over at a little popping sound and realised it was AJ cracking her knuckles and looking livid.

“Behold, freshly caught—”

Lockhart whipped off the cover dramatically.

“—Cornish Pixies!”

Once more, the response wasn’t quite what Lockhart probably had in mind. Seamus laughed out
loud.
“A doubter, eh?” Lockhart said wagging a finger at Seamus. “Size is never an indication of power! Pixies are a perfect representation of great power in small packages.”

“Well so’s Rachel but I ain’ afraid of her,” AJ said, probably louder than she’d intended, but it drew considerable laughter all the same.

Rachel blushed and stuck her tongue out at AJ over her shoulder. As everyone laughed, Harriet finally got a good look at the pixies. They certainly did look unpleasant she thought. They looked to be only eight inches tall and were a bright, shimmering blue. They had clawed hands and beetle-like eyes and glittering teeth. They did not look happy to be caged up like they were.

“Well then, if you’re all so sure of yourselves,” Lockhart said, and before anyone else could do or say anything, he opened the cage.

Lockhart might as well have set off a box of Filibuster Fireworks. The pixies wasted no time in turning the entire room upside down. Anything that wasn’t nailed down was upended, including the rug underneath half of the desks, dumping all of their books and desks and even the students themselves onto the floor. Neville cried out in pain as several of the pixies began lifting him up off the floor by his ears to hang him from the chandelier. Ink flew everywhere, and Harriet ducked out of the way as the pixies smashed the windows, showering the room with shattered glass.

“Not much to laugh at are they?!” Lockhart called over the on-going calamity. He pulled out his wand and rolled up his sleeves. He pointed his wand at the rampaging pixies and cried out, “Peskipiski Pesternomi!”

The only thing that happened was a pixie snatching Lockhart’s wand from his hand and tossing it out the window. Lockhart swallowed before being crumpled to the floor as Neville fell on top of him when half of the chandelier gave way.

The bell rang, and Parvati, Lavender, Dean and Seamus sprinted for the door. Harriet was inclined to follow, but Lockhart finally got Neville off of him and caught sight of Harriet and her friends.

“Ah, well, if you lot wouldn’t mind getting the rest back into the cage, I’ll get uh, I’ll get Longbottom here to the Hospital Wing.”

Lockhart pulled a half-conscious Neville after him as he swept from the room, opening and shutting it tightly behind him before any pixies could get out.

“That… great… oaf!” Marcus said, pausing between swipes at pixies that kept dancing just out of reach of his hands and pulling taunting faces at him.

“Well, i-it’s good experience,” Hermione said in a quiet voice, though she did skilfully freeze two pixies at once with the Petrificus Totalus charm she had used on Neville at the end of last year.

“Oh yeah, I just love cleaning up after other people’s stupidity,” Harriet heard Tori growl fighting off some pixies that had got hold of the hem of her robes.

“He’s not stupid!” Hermione snapped angrily.

“Hermione,” Kieran said, stooping to pick up a quartet of pixies he had managed to trick into running into a hastily summoned shield charm, “he had no idea what he was doing, his spell did nothing… you saw it yourself.”

“Rubbish, the pixie just snatched his wand away before he could cast his charm, that’s all.”
“Oh yeah, a great wizard that is, lettin’ a pixie take his wand right from his hand,” AJ growled.

“You’ve all read his books; he’s done so many amazing things!” Hermione carried on as she caught another pixie.

There was a flash of flame, and they all turned to look at Marcus who was attempting to crowd the pixies into a corner with his flame charms.

“Things he’s done according to whom?” Marcus asked in a very dark tone.

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O’Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, Jeremy Owens and Isabella Martinez are property of night-miner(dA)

Tori Hoffman, Rachel Kane, and Avery and Ellery McGee are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

AJ property of Hasbro

All others property of J.K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
In the days that followed, Harriet found herself trying to figure out if life had gone back to normal. On the one hand, Rachel had not had any more night terrors yet, and Harriet didn’t find herself having any problems with their refugees. Neither did anyone else in Gryffindor House that Harriet could see, with the obvious exception of Percy, who despite no real problems seemed to be unable to bring himself to trust the new students. To Harriet, they seemed like ordinary Gryffindor students, except their accents.

However, Harriet couldn’t help but notice that this was not entirely the case elsewhere in the school. At the Slytherin table, in particular, Harriet noted that only two of the Slytherin refugees, Lauren and Danielle seemed to get along with the rest of the house. Others, like Kenley, looked to be mainly outcasts within their house, and usually sat by themselves. Harriet was pleased to see that at least Dora and Sae would sit with them, as would the other two first-year girls, Lexi and Lola, and two of the new first-year boys, Cian and Ardghal.

Harriet was surprised to note that it was almost the opposite amongst the Ravenclaws. According to Scott, in their house, it was the refugees who were putting up the walls to the other students, primarily lead by the austere Peyton. Though, as with Slytherin’s refugees, that wasn’t the universal case. Lindsey Gallifrey, by contrast, seemed to be on a mission to make herself the life of the house by trying to get to know everybody. Even more amusing was the fact that she was quite good at Transfiguration, to the extent that by the third day she was becoming something of an annoying shadow to Professor McGonagall, asking her questions and giving off the distinct air of hero worship.

Not all of the changes pertained to the refugees, however. The event that got everyone talking the second day of classes was the rumour of the heated argument Draco Malfoy had got into with the new first year, Cian Whelan. The stories were greatly varied as was typical at Hogwarts. Some said it was just an argument, while others insisted that it was a full-on duel.

Even what they had argued about seemed to vary from telling to telling. According to most, it was about bloodlines, but some insisted it was over the new refugees. Even though all stories said it took place in the Slytherin common room, somehow almost no one seemed to have witnessed what happened. Even Dora said she hadn’t seen what happened. In the end, the only thing Harriet did know for sure was whenever she saw the two over at the Slytherin table in the Great Hall, Draco and Cian did not like each other.

Harriet was finally starting to warm to Colin Creevey as well. The second day at lunch Harriet and her friends finally got their group picture together, with Scott and Dora, in front of the giant hourglasses that recorded house points. Colin looked beside himself with excitement at actually being asked to take pictures for them.

Harriet found it amusing to see how quickly things at Hogwarts could snowball. It took very little
time for other groups of students to start asking Colin to take pictures for them. The equally amusing part was how quickly Fred and George capitalised on the situation by setting up a makeshift photo booth and charging for photographs. This almost came to an end when Percy tried to intervene, but finding there was no rule against it, he did make the two swear to give Colin one-third of the profits by threatening to write to their mother.

Even the staff got in the spirit and organised so quickly that by the end of the second day it was announced that the following Monday the students would all be gathered for the very first school photographs and yearbooks in Hogwarts history. This seemed to go over reasonably well with all but four people. The most benign was AJ, who mostly grumbled about finally having to be photographed wearing her uniform. Next was Percy, who seemed to have galvanised himself against any further changes to Hogwarts’ culture. And last were Professor Snape and Filch, the gruff, irritable caretaker of Hogwarts. Filch and Professor Snape, however, didn’t seem to like anything so Harriet was hardly surprised that they wouldn’t be too cheerful.

Outside of that, there didn’t seem to be too much different that Harriet could see. They got up, they went to classes, they talked and laughed with their friends between lessons, they studied and did homework at night, and they went to bed. By their third morning, Harriet found she was starting to take it for granted that the refugees were there.

“You know, I have a really good feeling about this year,” Ronnie said as the group made its way down to their first History of Magic lesson.

“My too,” Harriet said.

However, as she said it, Harriet felt a small nagging doubt trickle into the back of her mind that she couldn’t quite place. She felt like she was forgetting something significant but just couldn’t think of what it was. Like a warning of some kind.

“Maybe you should borrow Neville’s Remembrall?” Ronnie teased as Harriet confided it to her.

Harriet laughed too and shrugged it off as the willowy, aged and transparent figure of Professor Binns, the only ghost professor at Hogwarts, came through the blackboard to take his place behind the desk, drawing out his ghostly notes to set to work in boring the entire class for an hour.

“Today we are going to discuss——” Harriet felt her eyelids get heavy at once “—the war.”

Harriet’s elbow slipped off her desk, and she snapped awake. So did everyone else in the room.

“Yes, I was going to discuss the circumstances regarding the Giant wars and their exile from the country, but the Headmaster requested most insistently that we have a guest speaker today instead.”

Around her, everyone began to mutter to each other in excitement. This might be the first interesting History of Magic Harriet had ever had. There was the sound of light footsteps coming down the hall, and everyone turned in anticipation to see who it was. The door opened, and a woman Harriet didn’t recognise strode in. Despite that, Harriet was left in no doubt as to who she was when Tori gave an uncharacteristic shriek of excitement and ran up to the woman. Even Rachel and AJ got to their feet and ran up to greet her.

“Mom!” Tori cried out as she and the woman embraced tightly.

“Hello, Tori dear. And Rachel and AJ my dears! Enjoying your classes so far?”

“Oh yeah,” Tori replied. “These are all my friends!” Tori went on and gestured about the room to everyone.
Harriet blushed in spite of herself at being called one of Tori’s friends. The woman looked at Harriet and saw the apparent flicker of recognition in her eyes, but she didn’t say anything about it and took in the rest of the class as well.

“A good morning to you all, I am Mrs Clemence Hoffman,” she said in introduction.

“Good morning, Mrs Hoffman,” the class replied almost automatically.

Mrs Hoffman smiled at Professor Binns. “Thank you for agreeing to let me speak today, Professor Binns.”

“Not at all, my dear lady,” Professor Binns said and gave a very deep bow, so deep he bowed straight through his desk.

Tori, AJ, and Rachel retook their seats, and Mrs Hoffman walked up to the front of the room, standing in front of Professor Binns’ desk and smiling around at them all.

“Well, as I’m sure Professor Binns told you, I’m here to explain the war to you all, what has happened and why my daughter and the rest are all here,” Mrs Hoffman said.

Harriet listened with rapt attention as Mrs Hoffman went on.

“Well, magical education is very similar in America, but it’s also different to what you know here,” Mrs Hoffman explained. “The subject matters are much the same: Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, History of Magic of course.” Mrs Hoffman went on giving a bow of her head to Professor Binns who bowed back graciously. “Where it is different is here in Great Britain you tend to teach magic in the nation as a whole. Back in America, it is a bit more complicated.”

“How so, Miss?” Kieran asked as he leaned forward on his desk, his brow furrowed.

“Well, North America is a vast continent. There is Canada which works a little like here, though it has two major schools that function as boarding schools like Hogwarts. In America, instead of regional schools, magical education is run by the states themselves. Our state was North Dakota, and in our state, we ran education much more locally. I was the principle of the little magical school that catered to our three towns: Belview, Rollen, and St James.”

“How many students?” Lavender asked.

Mrs Hoffman smiled. As she did, Harriet couldn’t help but notice it seemed a little more forced than before.

“Three hundred seven,” Mrs Hoffman replied.

The number hit Harriet like a kick in the stomach. There had been that many students, and only this many left? A collective shiver went around the class as Harriet realised the rest of them were thinking the same thing. Harriet gave a sideways glance towards Rachel, Tori and AJ, who were all looking at their desks quietly.

“My husband, Arnold, was the mayor of Rollen. Well, the magical mayor of Rollen,” she corrected. “It was he who organised the escape of as many survivors as he could find from the three towns towards the Canadian border. Yes, dear?”

Harriet turned to see Hermione raising a nervous hand into the air.

“W-well, Miss, I was just wondering, why… why did they attack like they did?” Hermione asked.
“The stories of what happened are all just so… awful…”

Mrs Hoffman put on her sad, forced smile once more. “Well, that is more or less why I am here, to give some of the history and explain why things happened the way they did. To understand the nature of the war, we’re going to have to go back nearly five hundred years to the first European magical settlements on the American continent.”

As she spoke, there was a sudden ruffle of parchment and clink of ink bottles as students set up their desks for note taking, a task usually reserved for Hermione alone.

“The first settlers began coming to America with the Spanish shortly after Columbus landed in fourteen ninety-two. Contrary to most legends, Columbus did not discover the Americas, and magical records indicate Viking wizards arriving hundreds of years before he did, but it was Columbus who ushered in the era of colonisation of the continent.”

Mrs Hoffman pulled out her wand and drew a map of the United States in mid-air.

“That won’t discuss the Spanish very much. They were there first and colonised the vast majority of the continent at one point or another, but their impact was much more cultural than political.”

“How do you mean, Miss?” Marcus asked.

“Well, the Spanish settled large areas but mostly created missions, outposts, forts, and little towns. It was here in what we call ‘New England’—” Mrs Hoffman drew a circle around the northeast coast of the country “—that the biggest impacts on what is happening today started. Particularly English settlers, and to a small extent the French, but mostly it was the English.”

Her proclamation was met with mixed results. Some like Harriet leaned forward, eager to hear more. Others muttered quietly to each other, but all eyes were still focused on Mrs Hoffman.

“The English made full settlements and continued to spread out from them. As you can imagine, this didn’t go over so well with the Native populations of the areas already living there.”

“But I heard that the Natives didn’t believe in things like property?” Dean asked.

“A bit simplistic a stereotype,” Mrs Hoffman said. “Many tribes were very communal within their tribe. But they understood things such as hunting territory and farming territory as well. Indeed tribes were often at odds with each other over those boundaries.”

Dean nodded digesting the information.

“That started the general resentment between Natives and Europeans. The French were a little better about getting along with the Natives than the English. The French were more interested in furs, and magical plants and animals for trade than they were about settling, and they were not above adopting Native customs and living by Native rules. It was very common for French traders to take Native wives as well. That was quite unheard of amongst the English.”

“But if the French got closer to the Natives, how did England take over the continent?” Hermione asked without raising her hand.

“Well, the English did ally themselves with one Native tribe, rather a consortium of them. The most powerful in that region: the Iroquois. Through that alliance, the English came to hold a lot of power over the area and eventually won a war with the French for control of the continent. Even though this was after the Statute of Secrecy, and so most of these conflicts were Muggle affairs.”
“Then how did this war start?” Ronnie asked in a frustrated tone. “If the magical people withdrew and left everyone else alone?”

“But they didn’t,” Mrs Hoffman said simply and waved her wand, vanishing the map. “We withdrew from Muggle affairs, but we did not stop moving west with the colonists and settlers. Along the way, we continued to rub shoulders rather forcibly with the Natives. Native culture is very different than European and European-American magical culture.

“While we hid, the Natives maintained harmony between their magical and non-magical peoples. Magical people were revered by the Natives, who understood their use as healers and shamans and hunters. Their magical members did not wish to go into hiding. This upset European-American magical people, who saw it as a serious threat to magical secrecy. On top of that, the Natives were becoming very angry with the expansion and the fact European-American magical people were consuming all of the continent’s magical resources that they relied upon for their potions and other magical goods.”

Mrs Hoffman took a breath and went on.

“The question began to rise: what to do about the Natives? To the Americans of the time, the Natives seemed backwards, lesser, and were a hindrance to progress. In the end, it was decided it was “us or them” and war broke out in earnest to subjugate the natives completely. These wars lasted nearly fifty years and spread across the continent from Atlantic to Pacific, starting in the early eighteen-twenties and ending by and large by the eighteen-eighties. In the end, the population was put down and forced into reservations and isolated areas. They were forced to keep their magical members secret and were not afforded any rights of their own until they agreed to abide by the laws of the magical government. Hardly any agreed.”

Harriet bit her lip, starting to feel a little hollow inside.

“The magical population was… much harder on the Natives than the Muggle population. The Muggle population gave the Natives their reservations and semi-autonomy. Non-magical Natives can pass their laws, so long as it doesn’t interfere too strongly with Muggle American laws. Slowly, magical sentiments did begin to change. People started to feel sorry for the Natives—”

“They ruddy well should have!” Marcus growled.

Mrs Hoffman gave him a sympathetic look. “You’re right, dear, you’re right.”

“Well, it’s not like it was all one-sided!”

Harriet spun around to look at AJ who was looking a little indignant. “They killed lotsa us too!”

Harriet was surprised. AJ was a little rough around the edges, but Harriet was stunned to hear her talk like that.

Mrs Hoffman gave AJ a rather pitying expression. “Yes, you’re right, dear, there were terrible losses on both sides, and trying to allocate blame won’t solve anything. You’re right,” Mrs Hoffman said in a soft, soothing voice. “But perhaps put yourself in their situation, reverse the perspectives. Say you had been driven from your home and forced into near servitude? Yes, the settlers moving in needed a place to live, but without any deference to the people who were already living there?”

Harriet bit her lip again looking at AJ. AJ didn’t seem entirely convinced, but she looked as though Mrs Hoffman had given her a lot to think about. Mrs Hoffman smiled and went on.

“A compromise was later reached giving states the individual right to decide how many rights the
natives could have. This wasn’t the best compromise, as naturally, the states that had experienced the harshest fighting between the Natives and the settlers were the most punitive. Texas, for instance, Arizona, New Mexico, North and South Dakota,” Mrs Hoffman said.

At the mention of Texas, AJ glowered again and muttered.

“In North Dakota we changed the law even further over time, allowing individual cities or towns to decide the matter amongst themselves. Our three towns afforded considerable rights to our native populations, and they became fairly well integrated. We think that is the real reason our towns were attacked so brutally. We held the seat of one of the major bands of the Chippewa tribe.”

Mrs Hoffman paused looking around the room. Even AJ was starting to look more troubled.

“So they carried out that whole attack, killing everyone, just because they hate the Natives?” Harriet found herself asking before she even realised she was speaking.

Mrs Hoffman’s mouth twitched. “Partly… my dear. It was strategic too. Our towns were the centre of power to almost the entire native population in the state. They wanted to cut the head off the Native chain of command so to speak, so they could carry out their genocide essentially unopposed with no one on the outside aware of what was going on. They wanted to knock out the area with a swift stroke so no one would see what was coming.”

Harriet swallowed. It was becoming more and more horrible the more Mrs Hoffman spoke, and the more Harriet thought about it. Before Mrs Hoffman could continue, AJ got up and stormed from the room, nearly running as she slammed the door shut behind her.

“AJ!” Rachel exclaimed and got to her feet.

“I’d… just let her go, dear…” Mrs Hoffman said in a sad voice.

Rachel frowned and sat back down, though she didn’t take her eyes off the door.

Mrs Hoffman looked at her feet, thinking hard as if trying to find the best words for how to continue. “I’m sorry if I’ve made this sound like it’s too black and white an issue. It isn’t,” Mrs Hoffman went on looking back up at the class. “I knew it was going to be a tough issue to explain to anyone at any level in only an hour meeting…”

“No please, Miss,” Hermione said, “Go on, I want to know.”

There was a wave of agreement at this. Mrs Hoffman smiled looking reassured.

“Very well then, well, this system continued until about twenty years ago. At that time Muggles were pushing very strongly for equal rights amongst all members of the American Muggle community, regardless of skin colour or creed.”

“Skin colour?” Dean asked again with raised eyebrows.

Mrs Hoffman sighed once more. “Yes, dear, I’m afraid while discrimination here has fallen largely along bloodlines, in America, it has been more, visual discrimination… people tend to discriminate by what they see.”

Dean gave a little laugh of disgust. “Well I’m in trouble no matter where I go then I guess,” he muttered.

Mrs Hoffman gave a little laugh. “Okay, that probably wasn’t the best impression to give, no. It’s just
what’s so hard to get across, how very, very large America is. It’s… well… how to explain? There are very progressive areas, which support efforts like equality, and very regressive areas, that want to take things back but most of them are in between. It’s something of… how many of you have ever heard of a kaleidoscope?”

Most of the class raised their hands.

“Good, good, well, America is something like a kaleidoscope. You can look at the entire U.S. and identify distinct areas where people are more regressive, or more progressive, or more independent.”

Mrs Hoffman re-conjured her map of the United States in the air.

“These are just examples to illustrate my point but say, here is more progressive,” she circled a place on the map, “and here is a more regressive area, and here a more independent area. Now, let us narrow this down a bit.”

Mrs Hoffman tapped an area on the map. The rest of the map vanished, and the area she had touched grew large enough to be seen clearly. In spite of herself, Harriet barely suppressed a smile as she noted the way the area looked like a pair of mittens.

“Now, if we take this state here, we can say that there are progressive, regressive, and independent areas as well. Then narrow it down…”

She tapped an area in the lower right corner of the map, and it grew to block out the mitten.

“And here in a city, we can again identify progressive, regressive and independent areas. Sorry, this is getting a little off topic but, do you understand?” Mrs Hoffman asked solicitously.

Dean nodded, and Parvati piped up.

“Yes, Miss, it is a little like here. We have areas that hold more to old ways than others.”

Mrs Hoffman smiled. “Good, dear, yes, the point is you cannot always judge a nation and their people by the very worst they’ve done because there is always good there too. Yes, a terrible war has happened, and so many have died… but there is good too. There are families near the borders working with Canada and Mexico, helping sneak Natives from the country to safety, at great personal risk to their lives. All those states have rallied to the cause of equality. Just as with the Muggles a hundred and thirty years ago when they fought the war in America that abolished slavery amongst the Muggles, and just as the Muggles did a little over twenty years ago when they finally gave full nationwide rights to their peoples. It is good and bad everywhere and for everyone. You just have to know where to look to find it.”

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Everyone was good about giving AJ some space over the next few days. She didn’t seem to be upset or angry about what had happened. It was more like she was deep in thought the whole time. She even stopped complaining about the uniform. Mrs Hoffman had advised them all to give AJ some space until she was ready to talk about it. Harriet however, whose curiosity was always bubbling just under the surface, was finding it harder and harder to put it from her mind. She finally decided Friday night to ask AJ about it the following morning. On a Saturday with the day off classes, she thought perhaps there would be time to find her alone.

Unfortunately, that didn’t go as planned. The subject of AJ was first driven out of Harriet’s mind by Rachel having yet another night-terror. Harriet got out of bed to help this time, Tori once more
holding Rachel from behind while AJ and Harriet held Rachel’s arms and whispered soothingly to her. Fortunately, Rachel calmed down much quicker this time and fell back to sleep after just under ten minutes.

“Thanks, Harriet, that went much better,” Tori whispered to Harriet and smiled appreciatively.

“Yeah, not getting’ slapped in the face is a nice change,” AJ whispered with a chuckle as she climbed back into bed.

Harriet smiled and lay back down to sleep. However, once more Harriet only felt like she had just closed her eyes when there was a hand on her shoulder, shaking her awake.

“Sorry Potter gotta get up, Wood’s orders.”

“Wuh?” Harriet managed to ask as she fumbled around for her glasses.

She managed to get them on and see Angelina Johnson leaning over her, looking just as tired as Harriet felt.

“What is it?” Harriet asked again, having not registered what Angelina had first said.

“Gotta get up, Potter, Quidditch practice.”

“Quidditch practice? But it’s—” Harriet picked up her clock off her bedside table. “—it’s six in the morning!”

Angelina sighed. “I know, Potter, not that thrilled either, but… you know Wood.”

“Yeah, I know Wood,” Harriet grumbled.

Angelina smiled and patted Harriet’s shoulder. “Good on you, Potter, see you in the Common Room in five.”

Harriet groaned as she wearily got dressed. Fortunately, by the sound of it, they hadn’t woken any of the other girls. Harriet grumbled to herself as she finally made her way down the stairs. Sure enough, Angelina was there waiting for her.

“You alive?” Angelina asked, rolling her eyes.

“Yeah,” Harriet replied, hoisting her *Nimbus 2000* racing broom up over her shoulder. “Where’s everyone else?”

“Already headed down. Fred and George are just thrilled of course,” Angelina said with a laugh.

Harriet smiled though she stifled a yawn as she and Angelina made their way

“Short night eh?” Angelina asked.

“Yeah, but not as bad as the first night,” Harriet replied.

Angelina sighed. “Those poor kids,” she said miserably. “I just can’t imagine what they went through to have attacks like that.”

“Me either,” Harriet muttered.

“Glad to see how well they fit in with us though; Gryffindor I mean, doesn’t look like they are so
well in other houses,” Angelina said.

“The Hufflepuffs seem okay with theirs,” Harriet said, remembering the McGee twins from her Herbology classes.

Angelina laughed. “Well yeah, they’re Hufflepuffs, they love everybody,” she said brushing her long dreadlocked hair back. “At least we got the hot boy, yowzers…” Angelina muttered.

Harriet laughed. “Yeah, he’s… something alright,” Harriet said trying her best to sound casual.

Angelina fitted Harriet with a knowing look and grinned. “Told you boys weren’t all that bad.”

“Oh shut up, Johnson,” Harriet laughed though she yelped as Angelina playfully punched her shoulder.

Fred, George, Katie and Alicia were all changed into their Quidditch robes as Harriet and Angelina arrived. Harriet couldn’t help but notice how even though they all usually got on well, Alicia and Katie were sitting on the opposite side of the changing room from Fred and George. Both pairs looked as though they were only half awake, in fact, Fred had his head tilted back against the lockers, and it sounded as though he was beginning to snore. Harriet and Angelina got to changing as Wood came out of his office.

“All here, finally? Good,” Wood said, his typical manic glee in his eye. “I want to talk tactics with you all before we start. I’ve spent all summer devising new manoeuvres and want to run them past you all before we head out and try them out on the pitch.”

Harriet finally finished changing and stepped out to join the rest of the group with Angelina. Wood had crossed over to the chalkboard where he was drawing an oblong circle for a Quidditch pitch. He started chalking outlines and arrows and crosses with varying colours of chalk. Wood tapped the board with his wand, and the little lines and arrows and crosses began to zoom about the board.

Even after having walked all the way down and changing, Harriet was having a tough time staying awake through the briefing. Everyone else seemed to be having a hard time fighting off sleep as well. Fred had started snoring in earnest while George’s head had slid down onto Fred’s shoulder. Alicia, Angelina and Katie were all resting on each other with their eyes closed. It didn’t help that Wood took over an hour to finally explain all of his new tactics and manoeuvres. About the only thing Harriet was sure of was how hungry she was getting, and the fact that the hunger was probably the only thing keeping her awake at the moment.

Finally, Wood was finished, and after a brief spat with Fred and George who were still disgruntled over practice being so early in the morning, the team all made their way out on to the pitch. The sun had risen now, and Harriet jumped as she heard cheers from the stands. Harriet blinked in the sunlight looking in the stands. By the looks of it, half of Gryffindor House was in the stands, cheering them all on as if they had just come out for a game. Harriet smiled spotting Dora, Sae and Scott amongst them, along with Kenley who was sitting with her younger sister, Katy. Meanwhile, Fred and George made the typical spectacle of themselves, strutting about like gladiators in an arena as the little crowd whooped and cheered.

“Harriet, this way!” Colin called before starting to snap more pictures with his camera. Harriet could only give a forced smile and wave as she finally climbed onto her broom and kicked off. Harriet felt the exhilaration of flight snap her wide awake. Her hair whipped wildly behind her as she rocketed around the pitch.

They were just about to form up to when Wood shouted pointing down.
“Oy! What are the Slytherins doing here? This is our practice!”

Harriet glared, assuming Wood had spotted Dora, Sae and Kenley but she was wrong. The Slytherin Quidditch team was striding out onto the pitch.

“Get out of here, Flint, we’ve got the pitch this morning!” Wood called as he flew down to confront the Slytherins. Harriet and the rest of the team flew down, while numerous other Gryffindors started climbing down into the pitch.

“Room for all I should think, Wood,” Marcus Flint, the captain of the Slytherin Quidditch team called.

“Not the point, Flint, and you know it,” Wood growled.

Flint, who was even bigger than Wood, didn’t look the least bit intimidated. He looked over the oncoming Gryffindors before returning his attention to Wood.

“Sorry to disappoint, Wood, but I happen to have a signed note here from Professor Snape, giving our team permission to use the pitch today.”

Flint held out the note to Wood who nearly tore it as he snatched it from Flint. Wood read the letter thoroughly several times, his hands shaking with rage.

“Well isn’t that a happy coincidence he gave you the pitch the same day I had booked it for?” Wood muttered thrusting the note back into Flint’s chest.

“What? We’re not seriously letting them get away with it?” Fred asked appalled.

“Of course you are, Heads of Houses trump the flying instructor, don’t they, Wood?” Flint said grinning ear to ear. “Besides, your team and its, er, equipment,” Flint said giving disgusted looks at the Gryffindors’ brooms, “doesn’t look much changed from last year. On the other hand, we need to break in not just our new brooms, but our new Seeker as well.”


“New brooms?” George asked.

The Slytherins all smirked, and Flint stepped aside. As he did, Draco Malfoy stepped forward from behind him, and the Slytherins all held up brand new brooms. On the handle of each broom was gold inlay spelling the words *Nimbus 2001*.

“Brand new, not even a month old yet,” Flint said, his grin somehow getting wider.

“Yes, my father donated them,” Malfoy said, casually studying his broom. “Quite good, aren’t they? They certainly make a mess of the old *Nimbus 2000* and well… I won’t even dignify those *Cleansweep Fives* with actually sweeping a floor.”

“Well gee, it’s so nice seeing our team requires buy-ins to play!”

Harriet spun around. It had been a girl who’d spoken, and as Harriet looked at the crowd, she saw Dora step forward, looking livid.

“You were second best, Flamel, drop it,” Flint growled dangerously.

“I wasn’t during the tryouts! I caught the Snitch faster than anyone! He didn’t even try out!” Dora yelled pointing a finger at Malfoy.
“I said drop it, Flamel, my word is final. Now, all of you clear off, or I’ll report this to Professor Snape who I’m sure would love a reason to give detentions and take considerable points from everyone here,” Flint said.

There was much muttering from the crowd as the Gryffindors debated his threat.

“Alright, fine… but I’m taking this to McGonagall too, Flint… you will not get away with this twice,” Wood said.

Flint merely continued to smirk as Wood turned and strode away towards the changing rooms.

Harriet and the rest of the team reluctantly followed. The rest of Gryffindor House fell in behind them. Surprisingly, Dora, Sae and Kenley were allowed to join the Gryffindors as they made their way up to the school. Harriet tried to slow down to talk to Dora. She wanted to ask Dora about her accusations. To Harriet’s surprise, the moment Dora realised what Harriet was trying to do she broke off from the group and headed off in the opposite direction, Sae following after her, bemused. Harriet didn’t know what the issue was; she had seen how well Dora could fly, it would have been really fun if they were both Seekers, even if they were playing against each other.

“You’re not seriously going to let them use the pitch, Wood?” Harriet heard Fred ask Wood, distracting her from Dora.

“I’m not going to start a fight I know Flint wants. The whole Gryffindor Quidditch team and half of Gryffindor House against just their Quidditch team? We’d win the fight, but we’d lose the war on that one. We’ll need a more subtle approach,” Wood replied, his hands still clenched.

To Harriet’s surprise, Fred grinned.

“Gryffindor, the Cunning, eh?” Fred asked.

Wood smirked. “Gryffindor, the Cunning.”

* * * *

After lunch, Harriet and her friends went down to Hagrid’s. They invited Dora along, as well as Scott, AJ, Rachel and Tori. AJ seemed to be in much better spirits now and agreed. As they reached the grounds, both Harriet and Dora grumbled at the sight of the Slytherins still swooping about over the Quidditch pitch.

Harriet still hadn’t asked AJ about what had upset her so much during the guest lecture. Adding to that she now had Dora on her mind. She’d hoped that after a year of having friends she would be better at figuring people out. However, she was sure; at least, that as a group heading down, talking and laughing, to Hagrid’s was not the moment to bring that up.

They had almost reached Hagrid’s hut when the door opened. But instead of Hagrid, it was Professor Lockhart who stepped out. Harriet squeaked in surprise and immediately ducked behind Kieran. Marcus and Scott got the hint and stood shoulder to shoulder with Kieran, blocking her from Lockhart’s view.

“Well hello there!” Lockhart called boisterously at the sight of them. “Enjoying the first day of your first weekend? Marvellous! I was just giving good old Hagrid here a little guidance in getting kelpies out of a well. Well, I’ll be off, enjoy the rest of your weekend!”

Professor Lockhart started to take a step when he stopped and looked at Kieran.
“Goodness, O’Brien, sprained ankle?” Lockhart asked bluntly indicating Kieran’s shillelagh. “Bit excessive for something as little as that isn’t it? You could just go up to the Hospital Wing; Madame Pomfrey would have it fixed in seconds.”

“Y-yeah, guess it is, Professor, I’ll, uh, do that…” Kieran said. His voice sounded calm and casual as ever, yet as she clung to the back of his robes, Harriet could feel Kieran’s body go rigid.

Before any of them could say anything more, Lockhart laughed and strode off towards the castle. Harriet breathed a sigh of relief though she blushed when she saw the look Kieran was giving her over his shoulder.

“Sorry,” she muttered, but Kieran just laughed and shrugged it off.

“Happy to be of service, love, even if it’s just as a handy wall.”

The rest of the group laughed but to everyone’s surprise, Hermione looked troubled.

“What’s up?” Ronnie asked.

“Nothing,” Hermione replied, too quickly to be entirely convincing.

“He… seriously hasn’t noticed you need that…?” Scott asked.

Kieran simply shrugged when Hagrid, who had apparently heard them, stepped out of his hut.

“There y’all are!” He said in his loud, cheerful voice. “Bin wonderin’ when yeh were gonna come see me finally. Come in! Come in!”

They finally filed in each getting their customary near-back breaking pat on the back by Hagrid as they entered.

The hut was very crowded with Hagrid, Harriet, Hermione, Ronnie, Kieran, Scott, Marcus, Dora, Tori, AJ and Rachel piled into it.

“Hey Hagrid,” Harriet said politely, nodding to AJ, Tori and Rachel. These are our new refugees, Rachel—”

Hagrid laughed cutting her off. “Oh I know them well enough alright, ‘specially you there, Rachel, followin’ yer friend Erica around.”

“Er, oh, right,” Harriet said, feeling foolish. She reminded herself that even if they were new to her, the refugees had in fact spent almost the entire summer here at Hogwarts.

“Well you and I haven’t met formally, however,” Dora said. She stood up and held out a hand.

Hagrid smiled and shook by way of holding out a finger for her to shake, given his sheer size.

“Definitely don’t need no one ter tell me yer name though Miss Flamel, right little hero you made of yourself with the others last Spring,” Hagrid said beaming.

Dora blushed uncharacteristically. “Oh, thank you very much, Hagrid.”

“So, how’ve you been, Hagrid? Good summer?” Scott asked.

Hagrid nodded. “Well it was a more ’nerestin’ summer than usual with you lot runnin’ about causin’ trouble,” Hagrid said giving a wink to AJ, Tori and Rachel.
The three girls all smiled giving each other conspiratorial grins.

“Well, we all just wanted to know what there was to see everywhere,” Rachel said cheekily.

Hagrid suddenly looked stern. “Now you lot, as I told yeh b’fore this summer, it’s downright dang’rous in them woods. I’m safe enough in ‘ere, I mean, look at me, but you lot, there’s plenty in there that’d fancy a nibble on summat little like yeh.”

“Oh, like what?” AJ asked, sounding far more curious than concerned.

“Well, last Spring Lord Voldemort was hiding there,” Harriet said.

Predictably, most of Harriet’s friends shivered at the mention of Voldemort’s name. Even Hagrid jumped and dropped the jug of pumpkin juice he was using to pour them drinks. However, while the refugees had shown excitement at learning Harriet was “famous Harriet Potter,” they showed almost no reaction to the name Voldemort. The biggest response was Tori, who glowered darkly.

The others looked at the refugees with amazement.

“What?” AJ asked.

“Y-you’re not afraid to hear You-Know-Who’s name…?” Ronnie asked.

Rachel, AJ and Tori shrugged.

“Voldemort—”again a shiver moved around the cabin “never really got that involved in America. We only ever just heard about him in History of Magic classes,” Rachel explained.

Ronnie continued to gawk.

“Then, why were you all so excited to hear who Harriet was?” Hermione asked.

AJ snorted. “She’s Harriet Potter! She survived the Killing Curse! That’s amazing!”

Harriet felt her cheeks getting very hot.

“Uh, th-thanks,” Harriet said muttering.

Hagrid was about to say something when there was the unmistakable sound of an explosion. The group all rushed to the door, pushing outside and looking towards the Quidditch pitch as more bangs and whistles filled the air. Tiny figures on broomsticks were speeding away from the pitch, chased by rockets and streamers, as what was unmistakably Fred and George’s remaining supply of Filibuster Fireworks erupted right in the middle of the Slytherin Quidditch practice.

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O'Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, and Scott McIntyre are property of nightminer(dA)

Mrs Hoffman, Tori Hoffman, and Rachel Kane are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!
“The state of our lives is always in flux. So knowing this, never assume that the bad times that happen will be how your life will remain. However, my word of caution is also to never take the good times in your life for granted for the very same reason. Thus you should treasure them always when they come.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“Come on, Dora, of course, I wasn’t going to hate you for joining your house’s Quidditch team.”

“I know, I know, not my most brilliant moment…” Dora muttered and rolled her eyes.

Harriet laughed. “Well, maybe if Malfoy stinks enough they’ll kick him off the team?” she suggested hopefully.

Secretly, she did hope this was true. Not because she was worried about flying against Malfoy, but because she didn’t want to taint her love of Quidditch with Malfoy’s snide face every time she played the Slytherin team.

“Oh maybe he’ll fall off his broom or run into a goal post and break every bone in his body?” Dora said with a dark grin.

Harriet and Dora both laughed, though Harriet felt a little uncomfortable. She was still never quite sure when Dora was kidding. As much as she disliked Malfoy, she wasn’t sure she was the kind of person to wish physical injury on him. Not much physical injury, anyway.

Harriet blinked as they stepped out of the Entrance Hall and put her hand up to peer into the sunlit grounds. It was early Monday evening, just after dinner, and Harriet and her friends were all heading out to the grounds to unwind before having to take the first official school photographs. Somehow it made Harriet feel good to be a part of Hogwarts history, even if it seemed trivial in the long history of events at Hogwarts.

Harriet smiled wider when she saw the Quidditch pitch. She still felt a hint of glee every time she imagined the sight of the Slytherin Quidditch team fleeing from a cascade of fireworks. The story was that Peeves had stolen the fireworks from Fred and George’s dorm and set them off in the middle of the pitch. At least that was Fred and George’s story.

Harriet highly doubted this, but neither she nor anybody else could spot a single hole in their alibi. Not even the outraged Professor Snape was able to prove Fred and George’s guilt. Harriet supposed his anger was all the more fierce because Professor Snape himself was the twins’ alibi. Fred and George were both serving detention with Professor Snape at the time the fireworks went off. Unable to prove they’d been involved, the worst Professor Snape could do, in the end, was take twenty points each from Fred and George for “failing to store fireworks in a Peeves proof location.”

If Harriet doubted Fred and George’s story, she doubted even more that Professor Snape was going to be satisfied until he had truly had his vengeance. However, what she questioned the most was that any location in Hogwarts could truly be “Peeves proof.”
“So, have you always wanted to play Seeker?” Harriet asked returning the conversation to Dora’s try out.

Dora shrugged. “Not necessarily Seeker, but I have always wanted to play at least. I know Flint’s a pig, but I figured if I could show I was good enough to play Seeker maybe I could at least get a position as a Chaser.”

Harriet sighed sympathetically and hooked her arm in Dora’s to comfort her. Dora looked down at Harriet’s arm, a little taken aback, but it only took her a moment to get used to it, and they resumed walking towards the lake.

“Hey, you two!” Ronnie called and waved to them from their usual spot under the shady tree near the shore.

Harriet sat down between Hermione and Ronnie while Dora moved over to sit by Scott and Kieran. Ronnie groaned and stretched. “Ugh, I’m not looking forward to Astronomy tonight,” she said as she yawned.

“You’re not looking forward to waking up for Charms after being up until one in the morning you mean,” Hermione corrected, drawing an eye-roll from Ronnie.

Kieran laughed and changed the subject. “Well, at least Lockhart’s stopped bringing live things to class,” he said.

Fortunately, Kieran was right, after the disastrous first day Lockhart had not repeated the catastrophic fiasco with the pixies. As had become her habit over the weekend, Hermione feigned deafness and became overly interested in whatever book she was holding when anyone made a negative comment about Lockhart. Today it was Wanderings with Werewolves.

“I know, right?” Harriet replied, still too annoyed with Lockhart to care about sparing Hermione’s feelings.

“Well I don’t know about the pixies, but I can’t believe he thought you were just using that for a sore ankle,” Dora said nodding to Kieran.

“Aye, and I still can’t believe he told you it’s harder for women to be famous than men. I mean not even just how offensive it was but that he said that to you of all people,” Scott said, shaking his head.

Harriet tried to laugh but failed. She didn’t think she’d ever get comfortable with being famous, and frankly wasn’t all that sure she ever wanted to be. She also found her eyes drawn to Kieran’s leg. Somehow everyone seemed to just take it for granted, but Harriet just couldn’t keep her curiosity at bay.

“I can believe all of it,” muttered a grumpy sounding voice from behind Harriet. She turned to see Marcus had come up quietly behind them, his forehead so furrowed in his frustration his eyebrows had almost become a continuous line. He was also rubbing his writing hand looking a little pained.

“There you are,” Ronnie said smiling. “Hand okay?”

“I had to have addressed a thousand stupid letters… and all the while that lying blowhard just talk—”

“He is not a lying blowhard!” Hermione declared, slamming her book shut.

Marcus glowered, and his eyes fell on the Lockhart book Hermione was holding. “Mark my words, Hermione, I don’t trust him. Only he says he’s done these things. He doesn’t even think when he
talks about his ‘adventures.’ I mean it’s not even like he’s remembering having done them, more like he’s memorised a story,” Marcus said, trying hard to be reasonable despite his obviously growing temper.

Seeking to defuse the situation quickly, Ronnie took hold of Marcus’ hand. “Here,” she said splaying his hand out. “Coach taught me some good massages over the summer to keep my hands loose for goalkeeping.”

Marcus blushed as she started to knead his hand. Hermione was still fuming but was biting her tongue as she opened her book forcibly and began reading once more.

“Ugh, I’m just about ready to disown Percy,” Ronnie muttered. “Picking on not just a refugee but a first-year refugee just because she gets night terrors.”

Hermione closed her book; finally looking distracted enough from the subject of Lockhart. “I know, and giving you two detentions for it!”

“Well, I say good on you all the same, mate,” Scott said patting Marcus’ shoulder. “Not many brave enough to stand up to a prefect like that, especially not twice.”

Marcus tried not to blush and smiled. “Thanks, guys,” he said sounding a bit more cheered up.

“I know, I’m so proud of you,” Ronnie said warmly.

Marcus failed utterly at not blushing, and his face went bright red, though Ronnie didn’t notice as she kept massaging his hand.

Harriet sighed, remembering the exchange Sunday morning. One of the Gryffindor first-year refugees, Becky, had screamed in her sleep which caused a domino effect of people waking up. Percy had started telling her off for scaring everyone, saying that they were safe at Hogwarts and shouldn’t be having such childish nightmares. At which point several students intervened, but Marcus was easily the most outspoken and paid the price with another detention.

However, now that Harriet thought about it, it did seem that some of the first years were a bit on edge. Ginny, in particular, seemed rather shaken. She appeared pale and quiet lately, not at all like Harriet remembered her being over the summer when she had been much of the life of the Weasley family. Harriet was finding it strange that Ginny was so affected since Ginny had seemed quite fearless during the summer and had grown up around both Fred and George and the ghoul in the Weasleys’ attic. She asked Ginny about it, but Ginny just insisted it was nerves from living away from home for the first time.

“Oh, thanks, Ronnie, that feels so much better,” Marcus said.

Ronnie smiled. “You’re welcome, I’ll think of some way for you to repay me later.”

Marcus laughed but suddenly looked nervous that Ronnie may not have been kidding as Ronnie started eagerly digging through her bag.

Harriet smiled. She knew what Ronnie was looking for: her brand new wand that she had just received that morning. Scott’s cousin had travelled to Hogwarts with a host of wands for Ronnie to try. The one that had finally chosen her was a twelve-inch ash wand with a unicorn tail hair core.

“An interesting match, this wand,” Scott’s cousin, Jessica, had said. “Ash is loyal something fierce, and unicorn hair be also. I guarantee if yeh use the wand right ye’ll never have to worry about another stealing this wand’s allegiance from yeh.”
Professor McGonagall, in particular, had been very appreciative of Ronnie finally getting a new wand. A class without Ronnie filling the Transfiguration classroom with sulphur smelling smoke was a very welcome change for everyone. Harriet was sure that Professor Flitwick would be equally happy to learn Ronnie had a new wand too. In their last class, Ronnie’s broken wand had shot from her hand and hit Professor Flitwick right in the middle of his forehead, where it left an enormous, green welt.

Ronnie eagerly showed the wand to Dora. Harriet was glad to see that Ronnie had toned down her strong anti-Slytherin sentiments, at least as far as Dora was concerned. Dora, in turn, seemed to have gained considerable respect for Ronnie after Ronnie utilised Dora and then sacrificed herself to help win the giant Wizard’s Chess match while trying to get the Philosopher’s Stone. Even Harriet had to admit it was one of the most selfless acts she had ever seen, knowing how easily the white side’s stone queen could have killed her as it knocked Ronnie down and dragged her from the board.

Harriet smiled as Marcus’ falcon, Adal, fluttered down and landed on Marcus’ upper arm.

“Hey you,” Marcus said stroking Adal’s back. Adal twittered happily and quickly gobbled down an owl treat Marcus pulled from his pocket. Marcus smiled as Ronnie cooed and began gently petting the little falcon.

Harriet jumped as a voice shrieked nearby.

“LEXI GIVE IT BACK!”

“NEVER! Finder’s keepers!”

“Get her!”

“Thief!”

The group turned to see a group of Slytherin first years, Lexi Munoz, Lola Flor de Agua, and the refugee Grace twins, Kimberly and Leslie, go tearing past. By the looks of it, Lexi had managed to steal the other girls’ wands.

“Lexi, come on give it back,” called a girl’s voice Harriet recognised as belonging to Isabella Martinez from Hufflepuff.

“Oh, hey you lot.”

Harriet turned again to see Isabella, Jeremy, the McGee twins, and Justin Finch-Fletchley making their way over. The group waved to them and made room for them to join the circle.

“Salutations,” Jeremy said smiling around.

“Are those four always so rambunctious?” Hermione asked watching the four younger girls who had run past and were now wrestling for the wands.

Isabella laughed. “Well Lexi and Lola pretty much are, and the twins seem to fit in with them well enough.”

“Are Lexi and Lola related?” Harriet asked. “Well, related to you I mean?”

Isabella shrugged. “Kind of. To me they are, but most people probably wouldn’t say so. Our family is just huge and really close.”
“You’re not Muggle-born are you?” Ronnie asked.

“No, Half-Blood,” Isabella replied.

Ronnie nodded. “Well makes sense then, a lot of wizard families are interrelated. I mean, I hate to admit it but overhearing Dad one time we’re even related to Sirius Black.”

Most of the group nodded sympathetically. The McGee twins blinked. “Sirius Black? He’s that guy who was right up there with You-Know-Who, wasn’t he?” Avery asked.

At least Harriet thought it was Avery. The embroidering on her jumper said “Avery Anne McGee,” but Harriet quickly learned that didn’t necessarily mean much. The two were so identical she had just about as hard a time telling them apart as she had telling Fred and George apart when she’d first met them.

“Yeah,” said Ronnie. “Though, how come you called him ‘You-Know-Who?’ The other girls in our year call him by his name.”

Ellery shrugged. “We don’t have a problem saying it really; it just gets kinda annoying having everyone flinch around you all the time when you say it.”

Harriet gave a short laugh in spite of herself. She remembered having that same feeling all too well last year, of trying to say “You-Know-Who” instead of “Voldemort” to spare the feelings of those around her.

“Well yeh know, if I were you I’d just keep sayin’ it,” said Scott, sounding thoughtful. “Harriet’s not afraid to say it either.”

“So how do you all know about Black then?” Marcus asked. “I’d think if you all didn’t learn much about You-Know-Who you wouldn’t know much about Black, sure he was bad, but he was still second-fiddle.”

“They told us about him during our orientations this summer,” Avery explained. “We didn’t just goof off all summer long; we had a lot of lessons about how classes and customs and things are at Hogwarts.”

“And just about life here in Britain in general,” Ellery added.

Marcus laughed. “So did they teach you about the stupid ‘sit at your own tables’ rule then or did you lot just choose to ignore it?”

Ellery and Avery both gave overly dramatic gasps.

“Us? Ignore a rule?!?” Avery asked in a deeply sarcastic tone.

“Never!” Ellery declared.

The group fell about laughing. Harriet smiled looking up at the clouds in the sky. Yeah, she thought to herself as she laughed, this year’s going to be just fine.

* * * *

Many hours later, Harriet groaned and yawned as they made their way back down the long spiralling staircase of the Astronomy Tower. She liked Astronomy, even if she wasn’t quite as good at it as Hermione or Scott. But then she reminded herself that she wasn’t nearly as good as either of them on
any subject, so that didn’t matter much.

Ronnie sounded as though she was on the verge of snoring and her eyes were nearly closed. Marcus rolled his eyes and prodded her in the back, making her start before glaring and punching his shoulder, much to everyone in the class’s amusement.

“That was a good first astronomy lesson I should say,” Hermione said, barely keeping down a yawn herself. “So interesting now that we’re moving beyond our solar system, isn’t it?”

“Aye,” Kieran said.

“I love having Professor Sinistra as a teacher,” Rachel said, sounding much more awake than the rest of them felt. “She’s just so great! You know she was the one who talked to the Minister of Magic with Dumbledore, right? To get us to come here? She’s from our state apparently, and she’s just been so nice to us all summer long like she’d take us into Hogsmeade on field trips with Professor Sprout and McGonagall and we’d see all the shops. And we got to meet her daughters who’re so cute, they’re twins, and they’re a couple of years younger than us, but they go to Rathlin on a special scholarship. But what was really cute, is they took us with some spending money to Dusk til Dawn’s to get some new clothes and stuff and the guy who runs the place, Mr Dusk, is super hot. He wears his hair in a ponytail, and he’s got gold earrings and everything. Super cool. Anyway, I think he really likes Professor Sinistra, and I think she really likes him too because they were doing that silly thing couples do in movies where they try to talk, but they’re too shy to say anything really—”

“Rachel, honey, breathe,” Parvati said.

“Oh, yeah,” Rachel said, catching her breath.

The Gryffindors all laughed as they made their way toward Gryffindor tower. Harriet smiled sleepily, imagining how warm and soft her bed would be when she got there.

“Wait, Hogsmeade? How come you all got to go to Hogsmeade when we can’t go until next year?” Ronnie asked disgruntled.

Tori rolled her eyes. “We were all getting stir crazy in the castle with so little to do. We had orientations, but outside of that we didn’t have much to do.”

“Some of us started some sports leagues and the like but it was nice to get outta the castle and the grounds fer a change,” AJ said.

“And a lot of us still have family who’re staying in Hogsmeade now, like my mom,” Tori added.

“Well, okay that makes sense,” Ronnie said.

“Kill…”

“What?” Harriet asked looking around the group. She stopped dead. The voice she’d heard had been so cold and hateful it raised the hair on the back of her neck.

“What’s that?” Hermione asked, stopping. The rest of the class stopped too.

“Didn’t, didn’t anyone hear that?” Harriet asked, now feeling a little worried.

“So hungry… so hungry… for so long… give me blood, look into my eyes and let me devour youuu… Mudbloods…”
Harriet trembled. She couldn’t move; the voice filled her with such terror she had never felt in her life.

“Must find them… must obey the heir… must obey the one with the voice… must kill…”

Harriet felt her trembling grow stronger. No one around her was speaking; everyone was just staring at her with concern. It wasn’t anyone of them. Harriet shivered. She didn’t think even Peeves could have made such a horrible, terrifying voice.

“Harriet, are you alright? You look like you’re about to faint?” Kieran asked. His shillelagh clicked as he took a step towards her as if preparing to catch her.

Harriet shook her head. She was not alright; she was not alright at all.

“Didn’t… didn’t anyone else hear that?” Harriet asked, unable to keep the plea out of her voice.

“Hear what?” Ronnie asked.

“That… voice… it was… it was evil…” Harriet whispered.

Kieran’s eyebrows furrowed in thought while everyone else’s raised in surprise.

“I didn’t hear anything,” Lavender said, looking around.

“Me neither,” said Seamus, “just us and the water pipes but yah hear that stuff all the time, ‘specially the talkin’ part when Lavender’s around.”

Seamus winked at Lavender who glared and stuck her tongue out at him.

“Maybe you just had a bit of a waking nightmare?” Hermione suggested as she put an arm through one of Harriet’s. “You do look exhausted.”

“Aye, we all are, c’mon love, let’s get back to the dorms,” Kieran said, taking her other arm.

“Y-yeah, you’re right,” Harriet said in a quiet voice.

She kept listening as they made their way back to the Common Room. Every little sound made her start a little and look around. But she never heard the voice again, or anything associated with it. Not even water from the pipes like Seamus had pointed out.

Finally, they made it back to the Common Room. Once inside, Harriet finally felt safe again and let go of Kieran and Hermione’s arms.

“Well at least our first lesson’s not till tomarrah afternoon,” AJ said, yawning deeply and stripping off her jumper. “I’m bushed…”

Ronnie started to say something when she paused, looking towards the fireplace. “Ginny?”

Harriet turned. Ginny was in fact in one of the chairs by the fireplace. She was sound asleep, but she was very pale. She was wearing her night-gown and was clutching her diary close to her chest, and her ink bottle and quill had fallen to the floor. Fortunately, the cap had still been on the ink.

“Ginny,” Ronnie said again, shaking Ginny awake.

“Wuh… oh… Ronnie… where… what time is it? What happened?” Ginny asked.
“Why didn’t you go to bed?” Ronnie asked shaking her head.

“I don’t… know…” Ginny said, looking very confused to be in the Common Room. “I thought I had…”

“Well let’s get you back,” Ronnie said helping Ginny to her feet and putting an arm around her shoulder.

Ginny nodded, and the girls and boys all bid each other goodnight before heading for their respective dorms. Ronnie stopped at the first-year girl dorms to take Ginny back to bed while Harriet and the others continued up to their room.

“Sounds like a rough night for a lot of us,” Parvati said as she flopped down on her bed before she began changing out of her uniform into her night-dress.

“Yeah…” Harriet muttered as she started to change as well.

Ronnie finally came in as Harriet climbed into bed. Harriet didn’t say anything else to anyone. She merely closed her bed curtains and rolled over, tossing and turning, trying to make sense of what she had heard. The voice had been so clear to her. She had heard every word as though whoever had said it had spoken the words right in her ear. No, it hadn’t been that close, more like whoever it was had been moving right under her feet. It had moved relatively slowly too, like something stalking or creeping along, hunting for its prey.

Then there was the way it had explicitly said it was looking for “Mudbloods.” She remembered how Malfoy had called Harriet’s mother one last year, and what an offensive word it was. But it couldn’t have been Malfoy; they would have seen him. And Harriet was sure Malfoy couldn’t turn invisible, or speak in a way only Harriet could hear.

Harriet started to feel more worried. This wasn’t the first time she’d heard sounds no one else could hear. She thought of the music she could hear back at Kings Cross Station that no one else seemed to be able to hear. But she was sure she knew what that was. She remembered too well the mysterious violinist who had been there with the magic violin her very first trip to Hogwarts.

And she still could swear she remembered someone telling her to listen for that music and she would know she’s safe if she could hear it, or something like that. But that was nothing like what she had heard tonight. And if the music meant she was safe, Harriet wished she could hear it again at that moment.

It was then, just as Harriet was about to close her eyes that she remembered something else, something much more recent and clear in her memory. Something she had been told just this past summer on her birthday by the tiny creature named Dobby the house-elf, who had smashed a pudding to keep her from going back to Hogwarts. She hadn’t thought about the little elf since almost her very first full day at the Weasleys’ house. “…a plot, Harriet Potter. A terrible plot to make awful things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!”

* * * *

Whatever Harriet had heard that night, she didn’t hear it again. September passed into October with minimal disturbances. They had by and large gotten used to the night terrors, and unless Harriet was much mistaken, their frequency was becoming less and less as time went by. Harriet supposed living a much more settled life now in Hogwarts and making friends, along with treatments by Miss Momori, was helping to ease the new students’ minds and move on from the horrors they saw.
Even Ginny seemed to go back to normal, though lately, she had taken to looking a little ill again as a wave of colds hit the school. The result was Ginny having to take the potion that Madame Pomfrey was giving out to everyone else. The Pepperup Potion was very effective, but it also made the drinker spout steam from their ears for a few hours. Harriet was pleased to see that even if it didn’t look as though she was feeling very well, even Ginny laughed at the way the steam made her red hair look as though it was actual flames.

Aside from colds, the start of October also brought rain. Hardly a single day passed between the end of September and Halloween without a shower. Not that the rain mattered to Wood. Harriet was sure that a full-on hurricane could hit and Wood would still have them go out for practice.

This was how Harriet found herself soaked head to toe three days before Halloween, returning to the castle after lightning nearly struck Katie Bell. Wood finally agreed to call off practice while the rest of the team took a shaken Katie to the Hospital Wing to help calm her down from her panic attack.

“My goodness, Harriet, what the devil happened to you?” a voice asked from behind her.


“Goodness, in this weather?” Nick asked, actually sticking his almost decapitated head through the wall to look outside.

“Yeah,” Harriet grumbled as another crackle of thunder sounded.

“Dear, dear, well good thing you’re inside now, then, Potter,” Nick said.

As Harriet looked at him, she couldn’t help but notice that Nick seemed distracted and a little upset.

“Are you alright, Nick?” she asked solicitously.

“Oh? Oh, yes, I’m fine, Potter, nothing to concern yourself about.”

“Oh come on, Nick, you’re always here for us if we need someone, the least I can do is return the favour,” Harriet said.

In spite of himself, Nick smiled. “Oh alright, Potter, it’s… well, it’s something you wouldn’t understand, but, well, I just got my reply from the Headless Hunt, denied…”

“Oh, I’m so sorry Nick,” Harriet said trying to sound as sincere as she could as she didn’t understand what the Headless Hunt was.

“Half an inch, Harriet, only half an inch… it’s not my fault the executioner was using a blunt axe, was it?”

“N-no, it certainly wasn’t—”

“MUCK!” Harriet spun and felt her heart sink. It was Argus Filch, and he had spotted the trail of mud she had left after trudging in from the muddy grounds in her Wellington boots. Filch looked as though he was sick with a cold as so many others had been. He had a ludicrous scarf tied around his head like a little old Russian lady, and snot was dripping from the tip of his nose.

“FILTH!” Filch cried out again. “Follow me, Potter,” Filch muttered. Filch’s cat, Mrs Norris, snaked her way between Harriet’s ankles and scampered off after Filch in a way Harriet could only describe as triumphant. Harriet sighed, waved to Nick and followed.
She resigned herself to her fate as she followed the horrible caretaker and his cat to his office. As they walked, Filch kept muttering complaints about students and the punishments he wished he could unleash on those who broke the rules. Harriet would have been more upset about this if she hadn’t dealt with Filch’s behaviour the previous year just before her detention in the Forbidden Forest where she had first seen Lord Voldemort. After having faced Voldemort twice in a year and escaped him each time, Harriet had to admit that Filch wasn’t all that frightening anymore.

However, that was before Harriet finally entered Filch’s office. Most thought it was only idle threats, but sure enough, Filch did, in fact, have a well-polished collection of chains and other torture implements on the walls. It didn’t necessarily make her more afraid of Filch, knowing Dumbledore would never let Filch use them. But they were quite unsettling to look at.

Harriet could also see rows of filing cabinets along the walls. There were names on all the drawers, and Harriet could only assume it was the records of every detention Filch had ever given. Harriet felt even more certain of that when she realised there was an entire cabinet titled “Weasley, Fred and George.”

“Name, Harriet Potter. Crime, befouling the castle.”

Harriet rolled her eyes. It was so like Filch to blow every little thing out of proportion to exact bigger punishments on students. “Sentence…”

At that moment, a loud crash shook the ceiling.

“PEEVES!” Filch cried out shaking his fist at the ceiling. Filch tore from the office, shuffling off with Mrs Norris at his heels.

Harriet battled with herself as she looked at the open door. On the one hand, she was sure Filch would forget all about her detention if she did leave now that he had his sights set on his mortal enemy, Peeves. On the other hand, how much worse would her punishment be if she left and Filch did remember?

Harriet had just made up her mind to go when something on Filch’s desk caught her eye. It was an envelope entitled *Kwikspell: A Correspondence Course in Beginners’ Magic*.

Harriet picked it up, intrigued. It looked like the “get rich quick” junk-letters that the Dursleys occasionally got in the mail. Without thinking, Harriet flipped the envelope open and started to read. As she did, she felt more and more curious. By the sounds of it, *Kwikspell* was for people who weren’t fully-qualified witches and wizards. There was a testimonial in it from a warlock who had apparently turned his wife into a yak after a month of using *Kwikspell*.

Suddenly, the gears in Harriet’s head started turning rapidly. Harriet had only been at Hogwarts for just over one school year, but now she thought of it, she had never seen Filch perform any magic. In fact, she had never seen him with a wand. Could this mean that Filch wasn’t a wizard? If he wasn’t, he could only be a Squib, because Muggles weren’t supposed to know about the magical world.

Harriet jumped as she thought she heard the sound of feet. She quickly stuffed the letter back into the envelope and set it back on the desk. She peered out the door and heard Filch approaching. Harriet promptly slipped off her muddy boots and hurriedly tip-toed in her socks across the hall and into an empty classroom. She could hear Filch muttering excitedly about finally having caught Peeves destroying something valuable enough to kick him out of the school. By the sound of it, Peeves had dropped something called a Vanishing Cabinet. Harriet was just about to sneak out of the room and down the hall when Filch suddenly went silent. Harriet held her breath. Did Filch realise his letter had been tampered with?
“Potter!” Filch cried out.

Harriet heard him shuffle out of his office, grumbling. “Going through my mail, mark my words, I’ll get her for this… no… no, my sweet… can’t risk it, can I?” Filch asked, apparently talking to Mrs Norris. “She’s a crafty one… Potter… we’ll keep an eye on her my sweet, won’t we…?”

Harriet shivered as she heard Filch start shuffling off down the hall. She was waiting to be entirely sure they were gone when she gave a start of fright as Nearly-Headless Nick’s head stuck in through the door in front of her.

“Harriet! It worked, didn’t it? I’d hoped it would!” Nick said looking proud of himself.

“What?” Harriet asked, bemused.

“I persuaded Peeves to drop the Vanishing Cabinet on top of Filch’s office as a distraction.”

“That was you!?” Harriet exclaimed laughing. “Yeah, it worked, I managed to get away.”

Harriet considered saying something about Filch’s possibly being a Squib, but her judgement told her that was information she needed to keep close to her chest for a while.

“Thanks, Nick, I owe you one,” Harriet said instead as she opened the door and followed Nick into the corridor heading the opposite direction from where Filch had gone.

Nick proudly led Harriet to the room above Filch’s office where Peeves had dropped the cabinet. It was very severely damaged, and yet, Harriet couldn’t help but feel there was something very familiar about the cabinet. She was sure she had seen it before the previous year, but that wasn’t where her mind was picturing it, yet she still just couldn’t quite place it. Did the Weasleys have one like it? She doubted it; the cabinet looked very expensive.

“Well thanks again, Nick, you ever need a favour, just ask,” Harriet said appreciatively to Nick as they exited the room again.

“W-well… it… I’m loathe to ask because I’m sure you wouldn’t want to but…”

“But what?”

“Well, I don’t know if you know this Harriet, but this upcoming Halloween will be my five-hundredth deathday party.”

“Deathday party?” Harriet asked.

“The, er, anniversary… of my death,” Nick explained.

“Ohhhhh got it,” Harriet said. “Sure I’ll come.”

“Of course I didn’t think you’d—what?” Nick asked.

“I’ll come,” Harriet replied simply.

Nearly-Headless Nick looked overcome with emotion. “Really? Oh, oh Harriet, thank you, you have no idea what that means to me. We ghosts never get the living at our deathday parties, not that I blame them I suppose, they’re not that fit for humans…”

Harriet was sincerely starting to wish Nick had simply left it at “thank you.”
By the time Halloween arrived, Harriet was starting to regret promising to go to the deathday party. The decorations were already in place for the Halloween feast that night, one of the biggest events of the year. Live bats were fluttering about the ceiling, and the whole school was full of the smell of fresh pumpkin pie coming from the kitchens. There were also giant carved pumpkins lining the walls that had been grown in Hagrid’s garden. Harriet was sure Hagrid had secretly used magic to increase the size of the pumpkins, but Harriet got the impression everyone was too excited to care.

Harriet had missed the Halloween Feast the previous year. She had been sulking in the first-floor girl’s toilets when a troll that Professor Quirrell had secretly let into the castle found its way into the room and nearly crushed Harriet with its club before her friends showed up and Ronnie knocked the troll out with its club. While Harriet was sure nothing like that would happen this year, she still wasn’t entirely sure she wanted to pass on the feast again so eagerly.

At least most of her other friends had said they would come too. Harriet was surprised actually with the readiness that Dora had agreed to come. But sure enough, just before seven-o-clock, Harriet, Hermione, Ronnie, Marcus, Scott, Kieran, and Dora were all making their way down to the deathday party in the dungeons. The path was lit with ominous black candles that burned a pale blue, making everything look grim and pale. The concentration of ghosts was also making the temperature grow colder and colder until they could all see their breaths and Harriet felt began to shiver as she hugged her robes tighter.

There was a strange noise ahead, which sounded to Harriet like someone dragging their fingernails down a blackboard.

“Ugh, what is that supposed to be?” Ronnie asked, covering her ears.

“I don’t know, but it’s certainly a bit rough on the ears, isn’t it?” Dora agreed, following suit and covering her ears as well.

They rounded another corner where they finally saw Nick, who was greeting another pair of ghosts who had just arrived. Nick beamed as he finally saw them.

“Ah, my good friends—my goodness so many of you too!” Nick said smiling around at them all before doffing his wide, plumed hat to them and bowing them into the dance hall.

If the air outside the room was cold, the air inside was almost frozen. Harriet began shivering outright the moment she walked into the room. There were hundreds of ghosts scattered around, talking and mingling and laughing. The room was lit with the same black and blue candles in the hallway, making all the ghosts translucent and milky in colour. The sound they had heard turned out to be a witch ghost who was indeed scrapping her fingernails down a ghostly chalkboard as an apparent accompanist to an orchestra of musical saws.

While Harriet did recognise a lot of the ghosts from the school, she did note the majority of them were entirely new to her, such as a knight with an arrow in the middle of his forehead who was talking to the Fat Friar, the Hufflepuff ghost.

“So many ghosts,” Harriet said looking around in amazement.

Marcus nodded. “Makes you wonder, if ghosts are like this, what is it that Muggles see?”

“Oh, they see ghosts,” Scott said knowledgeably. “But only magical people can become ghosts. They’re sort of like a magical imprint of themselves on the world. Muggles killed a lot of witches and
wizards before the Statute of Secrecy, and a lot of the ghosts that got left behind didn’t forget what Muggles did, so they haunt them, getting their revenge.”

“Okay, fascinating though this is… I’m voting for just taking a quick look around then heading back up to the feast,” Hermione said. Her voice was quivering as she was shivering so badly.

“Here,” Scott said giving her his robe for extra warmth.

“Oh, th-th-thank you very much, Scott,” Hermione said and eagerly tucked it tighter around her.

Marcus and Kieran looked at each other before nodding and taking their robes off too. Marcus draped his around Ronnie’s shoulders while Kieran had Dora stand next to Harriet and put his on both their shoulders.

“Th-thanks, Kieran… and I’ll second that vote,” Dora muttered. “I’m starving, and I think I see food over there but if I know anything about ghosts, I’d wager we don’t want to get anywhere near it.”

“Why not?” Harriet asked, curiously.

“Ghosts can’t taste,” Scott said, “so they just let the food rot so it might get a stronger flavour.”

“I’d also take a guess that given the temperature in here, it’s probably frozen anyway,” Kieran added.

They all took a step back as Peeves shot past, chasing Moaning Myrtle, the bespectacled, spotty young witch ghost that haunted the first floor girls’ toilets where Harriet had nearly been killed by a troll exactly a year before. In fact, as Harriet recalled, Myrtle had told her that very night how she had died in that toilet. The thought sent another shiver down Harriet’s spine that had nothing to do with the cold.

“Oy!” Marcus grumbled as one of the peanuts that Peeves was throwing at Myrtle hit the side of his head and landed on his shoulder.

“Eww,” Ronnie said brushing it off for him. “It was all mouldy!”

They moved about a bit more to keep warm, but Harriet paused when she noticed Kieran wince. He blushed a little seeing she’d noticed, and he put a little more weight on his shillelagh.

“The cold…” he muttered. “Hurts sometimes.”

Harriet steeled her courage. She had to ask; she couldn’t keep not knowing when Kieran was one of her best friends. However, at just that moment, Nearly-Headless Nick found them.

“Ahh there you all are, wonderful turnout, isn’t it?” Nearly-Headless Nick asked and waved about the room. “I’ve had some come from as far away as Kent, you know?”

Nick beamed around at the crowd in a self-satisfied way. “So are you all enjoying yourselves?”

They all lied that they were and Nick smiled brighter before making his way to the podium. He signalled for the orchestra to cut the music and cleared his throat. Silence fell, but the moment Nick opened his mouth to speak, the sound of a trumpet filled the hall.

“Oh no, not this again,” Nick said.

They turned and saw at least a dozen horses and riders come in straight through one of the walls, galloping around in a circle. It was only as they stopped that Harriet noted with horror that all of the riders were headless, carrying their heads under their arms.
The group finally clattered to a halt, and the rider at the head of the group climbed down off his saddle and held his head up in the air over the crowd, causing much laughter, until he spotted Nick and started making his way over.

“Nick, old boy!” the man said with a hearty laugh and clapped Nick hard on the shoulder, causing his head to fall off and dangle by the bit of ghostly flesh that still held it on. “Oh dear, head’s still hanging in there I see.”

The crowd laughed again as Nick reset his head. “Hilarious, Sir Patrick,” Nick muttered.

“Goodness!” the ghost named Patrick said and gave a false start that made his head fall off and once more laughter broke out in the crowd.

“The living at a deathday party?!” Patrick’s head said from the floor. Harriet glowered a little. This was Nick’s deathday party, what was this guy doing blundering in and stealing the show?


“Oh come along now, Nick, not still sore about the Headless Hunt, are you?” Patrick asked before his body turned to face the group of students and held out a hand. “Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore, leader of the world famous Headless Hunt. Don’t mind old stick in the mud Nick; he’s just upset because we can’t let him join the Headless Hunt.”

Harriet kept glowering, but to her surprise, it was Dora who stepped forward. “That’s discrimination!” Dora said pointing at Nick. “Okay maybe he can’t quite play games the rest of you can, but it’s not his fault.”

Sir Patrick looked greatly taken aback, and the crowd had once more fallen silent.

“Y-yeah,” Harriet said and took a step forward too. “I mean, you couldn’t at least make him a… what’s the word… an honorary member? For his five-hundredth deathday?”

Sir Patrick looked disinclined to agree, but after he caught sight of the crowd as his body finally picked up his head from the floor and the hopeful looks on their ghostly faces, he changed his mind.

“Well, you know, young ladies, that is a splendid idea!” Sir Patrick said, getting his blustery tone back. “Sir Nicholas De Mimsy-Porpington, on this occasion of your five-hundredth deathday party, I hereby declare you an honorary member of the Headless Hunt, able to take part in Hunt activities as conditions permit.”

The crowd exploded in cheers, and ghostly hats and heads were thrown into the air. Nearly-Headless Nick was beaming, and his face had almost turned opaque as he blushed.

Five minutes later, Harriet and the rest were quite happily out of the party and on their way back to the warmth of the upper levels of the castle and the Hogwarts Halloween feast.

“You look proud of yourself,” Hermione muttered, smiling at Dora incredulously.

Dora grinned brighter. “Oh, I am.”

Harriet and the rest laughed. Harriet was just about to say something when it happened once more.

“So hungry… sooo hungrryyyyy… bite… kill… eat…”

Harriet froze on the spot. The voice was back, the horrifying voice she had heard during their second
Ronnie looked back at her. “Harriet, are you all—”

“SHH!” Harriet hissed, waving a hand at them all to be quiet as she listened.

“Want to kill… want to eat… must kill…”

As Harriet listened, she became aware of the fact that the voice seemed to be rising, heading up from under them towards the first floor. Harriet furrowed her brow. How could it possibly be doing that?

“Follow me!” Harriet called and ran down the corridor towards the first staircase she could find.

They made it to the Entrance Hall, past the Great Hall and into the first-floor corridor directly above the dungeon corridor they had been in a few minutes previous. At the end of the hall, they saw a great wash of water flooding the floor. They slowly made their way towards it, and realising that there was a reflection of something hanging from one of the torch brackets, looked up to see... Mrs Norris, Filch’s cat.

“Look!” Marcus said as they got even closer, pointing at the wall above Mrs Norris. Harriet looked and saw something written on the walls in large red paint that looked like blood in the dim light.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED ONCE MORE.

ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O’Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, Scott McIntyre, Alyssa Munro, Lexi Munoz, Lola Flor de Agua, Isabella Martinez, and Jeremy Owens are property of night-miner(dA)

Tori Hoffman, Rachel Kane, Kimberly Grace, Leslie Grace, Avery McGee, and Ellery McGee are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

Tabitha Dusk, Charity Delacour, and AJ are property of Hasbro

All others property of J.K. Rowling

(holy cow a lot of them popped up in this chapter, didn't they?!) 

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“History must always be remembered in the context of the times in which it happened. That is not to say one cannot judge the past. It is only by reflection on the past and understanding the faults of our forbearers that we can hope to move forward. But one can only understand why events happened the way they did by understanding the times they occurred with a more accepting eye.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“I uh… I think we need to get out of here… now…” Ronnie muttered and started pulling on Harriet’s arm.

Harriet couldn’t move. Over and over again the words kept playing in her head; "A terrible plot to make awful things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

Harriet finally got control of her feet back and took a step towards the cat, but Ronnie tugged her arm harder. "Come on, Harriet, we shouldn’t be found here like this, this is bad, this is really—"

Ronnie's words were cut off by a roar of sound from down the hall. The feast was over. Within seconds, the door was thrown open, and students began pouring into the hall. They all stopped in their tracks at the sight of the little group, the flooded floor, the hanging cat, and the ominous blood-red words. Harriet and her friends just stared back at the crowd of students, almost as frozen as Mrs Norris in their uncertainty over what to do.

A scuffling sound broke the silence, and Draco Malfoy pushed his way to the front of the crowd. His face was bright red, and he was breathing hard and grinning at the words and the hanging cat.

“’Enemies of the Heir, beware!’” Draco read, his voice cracking in his excitement. His eyes quickly found Hermione and Marcus. “You’ll be next, Mudbloods!”

Marcus quickly went red and took a step towards Malfoy when another shout turned everyone’s heads.

“The devil’s goin’ on here? Get a move on you lot, what are you all doin’ standin’ about?”

The crowd parted and let Argus Filch move up to the front. Filch’s eyes did not follow the same progression as the other students’ had. Instead, they moved straight to Mrs Norris.

Harriet had seen Filch’s face on many occasions. She had seen him show every emotion from rage at a dirty floor to outright glee at the thought of giving punishment to the perpetrator of the dirty floor. But Harriet had never seen the look of abject horror that passed over his face.

“No!” Filch cried.

He dropped to his knees, clutching his face and gaping.

“Mrs Norris! What happened?! Why is she—”

Harriet felt her heart sink as Filch’s eyes found her.
“YOU!” Filch cried and scrambled to his feet. “It was you! You’ve killed my cat! You killed Mrs Norris! I’ll kill you too—”

“That is enough, Argus!”

Filch froze, though his hands were disconcertingly close to Harriet’s throat before he did.

Harriet looked past Filch to see Professor Dumbledore had arrived. Behind him stood Professors McGonagall, Snape, Lockhart, Sinistra and Sprout, as well as Hagrid. Professor Dumbledore strode forward and without another word to anyone he took Mrs Norris from the wall and began inspecting her. Professor McGonagall moved up right behind him, looking over his shoulder. Professors Sprout and Sinistra meanwhile had taken Filch by the arms, gently guiding him aside while Lockhart simply beamed around as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening at all.

It was the reactions of Professor Snape and Hagrid that gave Harriet the most pause. Professor Snape’s eyes were moving back and forth between Mrs Norris and Harriet. He looked like he was thinking hard, and Harriet didn’t like it. Even though he had saved her life the previous year, Professor Snape’s usual policy was pretending Harriet didn’t exist. If he was acknowledging her existence, she was sure it couldn’t mean anything good.

Hagrid also caught Harriet’s attention. Harriet had remembered fondly how Hagrid had told them last year of his dislike for Filch and his desire to set his boar-hound, Fang, on Mrs Norris. However, Hagrid wasn’t looking at the distraught Filch or the lifeless Mrs Norris. Instead, his eyes were locked on the writing on the wall, darting back and forth reading and rereading the ominous red letters.

“Argus, Misses Potter, Weasley, Granger, Flamel, and Mistres O’Brien, McIntyre, and Van De Lakk, if you would all follow me, please?” Dumbledore said.

Lockhart cleared his throat importantly. “My office is the closest, Headmaster, right above us.”

“Thank you kindly, Gilderoy,” Dumbledore said and started down the hall, carrying Mrs Norris gently in his arms.

Lockhart was now the one following right behind Dumbledore, bouncing a little as they walked like an excited puppy being taken for a walk. Professors McGonagall and Snape followed, with Professors Sprout and Sinistra helping Filch along. Hagrid remained frozen where he was, staring at the writing.

Harriet and her friends all looked at each other before they followed too. No one said a word as they headed down the hall, climbed the stairs and made their way down the next corridor to Lockhart’s office.

Harriet had never been in Lockhart’s office before. As she stepped across the threshold, she saw, to her horror, that the walls were almost entirely covered with portraits and framed photographs of Lockhart himself. Not only that, but Lockhart had also signed every single one of them. There was even another stack of already signed photographs on his desk next to a waiting stack of envelopes. Harriet heard Marcus groan at the sight of them.

Professor Lockhart lit the candles on his desk and stepped aside for Professor Dumbledore. Dumbledore sat at Lockhart’s desk and laid Mrs Norris on the table. He bent low over Mrs Norris, inspecting her inch by inch, his fingers prodding and examining. Professor McGonagall was right beside him, while Sprout and Sinistra were once more trying to comfort a sobbing Filch. Professor Lockhart was fluttering about the room importantly, making suggestions about what could have killed Mrs Norris while Professor Snape continued to look from Mrs Norris to Harriet with dark,
fathomless eyes.

“If I know my curses, I would say it was the Transmogrifian Torture that killed her, no doubt about it! The way she’s been transformed into such a hideous excuse for a cat, it could only be transmogrification,” Lockhart was saying to no one in particular, and serving no more purpose than to make Filch wail louder.

As Harriet looked at Filch, despite all the animosity that she felt for him and Mrs Norris, she couldn’t help but feel a tinge of sympathy. He clearly was distraught. But Harriet was worried even more about herself. What was going to happen to her and her friends if Dumbledore believed Filch and thought they were the ones who had killed Mrs Norris?

Dumbledore now began examining Mrs Norris with his wand, casting little charms on her body here and there, but all had no effect. Everyone was ignoring Lockhart, who was now carrying on about some attacks he’d stopped somewhere called Ouagadougou.* Tired, still very rattled, and very hungry, Harriet was starting to wish he would shut up.

Finally, Dumbledore sat back and sighed. “Well, Argus, I can tell you with the greatest certainty and satisfaction that Mrs Norris is in fact still alive.”

Filch blinked and finally lifted his head out of his hands. “Still alive? Then… then why’s she all stiff like that…?”

“She has been Petrified—”

“Of course! I was sure of it!” Lockhart said. Everyone continued to ignore him.

“—but how, I have no idea,” Dumbledore went on as if Lockhart had not spoken.

“It was her!” Filch declared, jabbing a bony finger in Harriet’s direction.

“This level of dark magic could not have been performed by a second-year, Argus,” Dumbledore’s replied very gravely.

Filch’s eyes moved around to take in the rest of Harriet’s friends. Dumbledore’s eyes flicked over Harriet and her friends too.

“Nor could it have been done by a group of them. In fact, there is not a single student within the walls of this school who could have performed such a spell.”

“I know it was her!” Filch carried on. “She knows I’m a Squib! Snooping in my office!”

“I’ve never touched Mrs Norris,” Harriet declared, angry at the injustice of the accusations. “And I didn’t even know what a Squib was until the beginning of the year and two of my best friends are Muggle-borns. Why would I—”

Harriet was cut off by Professor Snape clearing his throat. “If you don’t mind, Headmaster, I do have a few questions for this little group,” Professor Snape said. “While the Headmaster has rightly said that you all are not capable of performing spells necessary for Petrification… what, exactly, were you all doing down that corridor and why were you not at the feast?”

All of Harriet’s friends gave her awkward, sideways glances.

It was Dora who spoke up first. “We were at Nearly Headless Nick’s deathday party, Professor.”
“Yeah, Nick’ll back us up,” Ronnie chimed in.

“But why did you go to that corridor afterwards, instead of to the feast?” Professor Snape asked.

There was another awkward pause, and again everyone glanced at Harriet. She thought she could feel herself getting pale as the blood drained from her face. How could she explain that she heard a voice no one else seemed to be able to hear?

“W-well,” said Scott, looking the most uncomfortable to be in such trouble. “We were but, the feast was almost over anyway, wasn’t it? I mean, we only happened on the scene a minute before everyone left the feast and entered our corridor.”

Professor Snape furrowed his brow. “You still could have gotten some food, could you not? As I recall, ghosts do not serve food fit for humans at their parties, and by the rumbling of Weasley’s stomach I would highly doubt none of you were hungry.”

Ronnie glared crossing her arms.

“And if you were all heading back to your dormitories, shouldn’t you, Miss Flamel, have been heading down the stairs to your dormitory, rather than up?”

Dora grumbled looking at her feet.

“I heard something,” Harriet said quickly.

Everyone paused and looked at Harriet intently.

“ Heard something?” Professor McGonagall asked, her eyebrows almost touching.

Professor Dumbledore leaned forward, his eyes boring into Harriet as they had never done before.

“Yes…” Harriet went on, swallowing. Her throat had gone parched. “I… we came out of the room, and we were talking and… I just… heard something… above us…” Harriet went on, trying to choose her words carefully. She didn’t want any of them to get in trouble, but she certainly didn’t think telling Dumbledore about the voice would help their case.

“So we ran upstairs to see what it was and that was when we found… well…” she nodded at Mrs Norris.

“And what was this sound you heard, Potter?” Professor Snape asked. His tone had changed, and he didn’t sound quite as sceptical now as he had before.

“I… I can’t describe it, sir… but it… it gave me chills…” Harriet went on haltingly.

“And did any of the rest of you hear this sound?” Professor Snape asked the rest of them.

The rest of the group all looked around at each other.

“No, Harriet did look as though she had heard something,” Kieran said defensively.

Professor Snape didn’t look convinced. ”It seems to me, Headmaster, that none of these students are being truthful with us,” Professor Snape said, barely containing a grin. “I suggest we deprive them of certain privileges until they decide to be honest with us about this most unfortunate event.”

Harriet couldn’t help but glare. Glancing around her group, Harriet knew the only one of them who could be affected by such a punishment was her, being a member of the Gryffindor Quidditch team.
“Honestly, Severus!” Professor McGonagall barked.

Professor Snape did not quail, but his jaw did tighten, and his barely concealed sneer did falter a little as Professor McGonagall confronted him. Harriet remembered now that Professor McGonagall was the Deputy-Headmistress, which surely meant she outranked Professor Snape.

“I see no reason to punish any of these students as there is not a shred of evidence that they have done anything wrong. This cat was not attacked with broomsticks, footballs, shillelaghs, or books!” Professor McGonagall went on.

Harriet was vaguely impressed that Professor McGonagall seemed to know them all well enough to rattle off so many of their favourite hobbies by memory. She looked at Professor Dumbledore, who was looking right back at her with his X-ray like blue eyes.

“Innocent until proven guilty, Severus. It is the main tenant of our judicial system, and it applies to everyone within this school,” Dumbledore once more turned his gaze on Harriet, giving her a deep, significant look.

Harriet blinked. What had that meant? Dumbledore was apparently trying to tell her something, but what? It had seemed like Dumbledore was merely saying it to Professor Snape, but Harriet was sure that Dumbledore was speaking to her.

Filch was far from satisfied. “My cat is Petrified! I won’t stand for there not being a punishment for this! Someone has to pay!”

Professors Sprout and Sinistra recoiled a little from Filch, looking quite taken aback as his rage burst forth once more.

“Calm yourself, Argus,” Dumbledore said, and Harriet was surprised to hear a note of warning in Dumbledore’s voice. “As upset as you are, I will not punish the innocent. Furthermore, we will be able to cure Mrs Norris.”

“We, we will?” Filch asked. He suddenly looked far less threatening as his eyes widened with hope.

“Yes. Professor Sprout has a ready supply of mandrakes that she uses for teaching her second-year Herbology classes,” Dumbledore said giving a nod to Professor Sprout.

Professor Sprout nodded back and patted Filch’s arm once more. “Of course my good chap. Brand new and in perfect condition.”

Filch slumped back in his seat, burying his relieved face in his hands.

Professor Lockhart finally chimed in again. “And tell you what, Mr Filch, I will whip up that Mandrake Restorative Draught for you, I could do it in my sleep——”

Lockhart was cut off by Professor Snape who menacingly cleared his throat. “I beg your pardon, but I believe that I am the Potions master here, I will make the draught if it is to be done correctly…”

Professor Lockhart’s smile didn’t falter, but Harriet was sure that she saw him swallow and some sweat appeared on his brow.

“You all may go,” Professor Dumbledore said to Harriet and her friends.

They didn’t hesitate. They got all the way to the end of the hall before turning into an empty classroom and closing the door behind them.
“Okay, well how none of us got expelled is entirely beyond me,” Hermione muttered darkly.

“Well, there was no case against us other than we were the first on the scene, fortunately,” Scott muttered.

“Do you think… Should I have told them more? Like about the voice, I mean?” Harriet asked looking around.

“Voice?” Dora asked, perplexed.

“What voice?” Scott asked too.

“Oh, is that what you heard?” Ronnie asked.

“Well, yeah,” Harriet muttered.

“Oh, okay, you never said… you just went white as a sheet, shushed us all and went tearing off towards the stairs!” Ronnie explained. “So you heard it again?”

Harriet nodded.

“Well, I… I hate to admit it Harriet but, I didn’t hear a voice,” Scott said, sounding apprehensive.

Everyone else murmured agreements.

“You… you all do believe me, don’t you?” Harriet asked nervously.

“Of course we do,” Kieran said with little hesitation.

Marcus nodded enthusiastically while everyone else muttered that they did.

Harriet swallowed and changed the subject. “So… what do you think that message on the wall meant? The Chamber of Secrets has been opened once more…?”

“I haven’t the foggiest…” Dora muttered.

“You know… I think I remember Bill mentioning a secret chamber or something once…” Ronnie said. She was squinting her eyes hard, trying to remember. “But the way Bill made it sound… it was a secret place that only students knew about… but nothing dangerous happened like pets getting Petrified…”

“I just can’t believe Filch is a Squib…” Dora said, barely concealing a laugh. “Doesn’t that explain everything?” she asked the room at large.

Ronnie snorted laughter. “Oh completely… bitter old fossil…”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“Meaning that’s why he’s so mean to students,” Marcus grumbled. “He’s jealous that we’re magical and he’s not.”

“But who would want to attack him for it?” Harriet asked.

“I couldn’t say,” Kieran said. “But somehow… even though Dumbledore was trying to act calm… something’s not right. And I don’t think this is gonna be the last we’ll hear about this chamber.”
As November started, the weather seemed to change to reflect the gloomy mood inside the castle. Tights quickly replaced knee-high socks amongst the girls as the wind grew chillier and the days got shorter and shorter. Harriet was sure the hushed whispers and edgy nature of all the students had very little to do with the weather and everything to do with the attack on Mrs Norris.

Kieran was mostly right. The topic of the attack on Mrs Norris certainly did not die soon. The rumours continued to fly around for several days afterwards, with many people assuming (or more likely hoping) that Mrs Norris had been killed. Filch kept the subject of the attack going by the way he continued patrolling the corridor where the attack had taken place.

Harriet wasn’t sure what the point was, as she doubted the attacker was going to return to that area so soon. Harriet doubted the fact he’d been unable to remove the paint from the wall helped his determination at all. To make matters worse, Filch was now meaner to the students than ever, telling them off and trying to give them detentions for every little dreamed up infraction he could come up with.

The worst part, from Harriet’s point of view, was the way that everywhere she went people seemed to be much more cold towards the refugee students. Regular students seemed less inclined to sit by them at the house tables during meals and mostly ignored them in the common room. Harriet supposed they were suspicious of the new students, though Harriet found the idea ridiculous. How were new students, not even from this country, supposed to know where some “Chamber of Secrets” or something was hidden in the school? Sure they had spent the summer here with ample time to explore, but Harriet had never heard of this chamber before. If anyone would have heard of a chamber like that, it was Ronnie. And Ronnie still insisted the rumours she had heard couldn’t be the chamber that the writing on the wall had been referring to.

Harriet couldn’t find a motive the refugees could have either. Sure, they all hated Mrs Norris as much as any regular Hogwarts student, but that was the point. Every student in the school had the motive to exact some revenge on Filch or Mrs Norris. The only explanation that Harriet could think of for people being suspicious of the refugees now was merely that they were new and different. Being somewhat ‘different’ herself, Harriet felt her sympathies go to the refugees.

Though as Harriet thought about it, even she had to admit that some students had been giving her the cold shoulder since the attack as well. That Monday in Herbology, Ernie MacMillan and Justin Finch-Fletchley had not said hello to her like they usually did and then spent the rest of the class muttering to each other and stealing glances at her. They would quickly look away every time she looked at them, and Harriet was pleased, though no less perplexed when Jeremy cuffed Ernie up the back of his head when Professor Sprout wasn’t looking.

Hermione and Scott were also quite affected by the attack. While the two of them were usually reading, now it seemed they spent every waking moment in the library. It wasn’t until Wednesday that Harriet finally found out what they were after. Harriet and Ronnie were in the library, finishing their essays for Professor Binns when Hermione and Scott both flopped into chairs net to them looking defeated.

“Every copy of *Hogwarts: A History* has been checked out, and there’s a two-week waiting list!” Hermione declared angrily without preamble.

“Don’t you have a copy?” Harriet asked, remembering having seen Hermione reading it regularly the year before.
“I do, but I had to leave it at home because of all the stup—uh, because of all the Lockhart books,” Hermione said, recovering quickly.

Harriet gave Hermione a raised eyebrow as Hermione quickly busied herself with digging into her bag. Harriet was starting to grow more than a little sceptical of Hermione’s constant and forced defences of Professor Lockhart.

“We haven’t been able to find a mention of it in any of the other books in the library either,” Scott said, looking amazed that the library had failed to turn up information.

“Mention of what?” Ronnie asked irritably.

“Oh, uh, the Chamber of Secrets,” Scott said.

“Ohhhhh,” Harriet said and nodded.

“Right, I know I’ve read about it in Hogwarts: A History before but I can’t remember exactly what it was,” Hermione said sounding disappointed.

Ronnie sniggered. “Wow, Hermione couldn’t remember some—”

“Oh shut up,” Hermione snapped. “Of course I can’t remember everything, why do you think I take so many notes and study so hard!”

Ronnie opened her mouth to retort, but Harriet cleared her throat and cut in.

“Well, anyway,” she said as she finally started to roll up her just finished essay. “We gotta get going, Binns’ class in ten minutes.”

Ronnie groaned looking at her nearly finished essay before she gave Harriet a questioning look. Harriet smiled and slid her essay across to Ronnie, despite the looks of disapproval from both Hermione and Scott.

Fifteen minutes later, Harriet was feeling her head starting to droop towards her desk. Today Professor Binns was lecturing on the International Warlock Convention of 1289. Without fail, half of the class was getting drowsy, and Neville had already fallen asleep. However, it was right at that moment that Harriet found herself being stirred awake by something that had never happened in History of Magic before. Hermione had raised her hand.

Despite his usual dogged determination to continue lecturing full stop, the raised hand was a distraction Professor Binns could not ignore. First, because every student in the class was now paying more attention to Hermione and her raised hand than to his lecture, and second because Hermione cleared her throat. Professor Binns looked around in confusion and jumped as he took in the class, looking just as surprised to see the students, let alone Hermione’s raised hand.

“Miss, er, Grint?” Professor Binns asked.

“Granger, Professor, and I wanted to ask if you could please tell us about the Chamber of Secrets?”

Harriet had never really appreciated how noisy the History of Magic classroom was. Between Professor Binns’ voice, students shifting in their chairs as they tried to stay awake, and the constant scribbling of Hermione’s quill, there was a lot of noise in the room. Every sound stopped except for the ticking of the clock on the wall after Hermione asked the question and looked up at Professor Binns intently.
“The Chamber of Secrets, Miss Granger? This class is History of Magic, history, not fantasy. Now if we can continue—"

“But sir, if you don’t mind my saying so, don’t myths and legends always have at least some basis in fact?”

Professor Binns stared at Hermione long and hard. “Well, yes one could make that argument, certainly, but the fact is there is no historical evidence whatsoever of this supposed Chamber—"

“Well, sir,” Kieran cut in. “Even if it is a legend, everyone’s talking about it after this weekend. Maybe if you explained the story a little, it would help people see how silly it is?”

Harriet shot an impressed look at Kieran, who winked back.

“Well… I… alright… I suppose that is a good argument,” Professor Binns said clearing his throat.

Harriet leaned forward intently, as did most of the class, except Neville who was still asleep. Seamus elbowed him awake.

“Well, I’m sure most of you who were there will remember the song the Sorting Hat sang at the start of this year, which I must applaud for so succinctly putting the history of our school. There were the four founders of Hogwarts; Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin, who were the greatest witches and wizards of magical Britain at the time, and perhaps ever. The time that they lived in, over one thousand years ago, was a time of great unrest within the nation.”

Professor Binns cleared his throat again and went on. “The island was under attack from external forces, primarily the Vikings, as well as facing deep troubles within the nation as well. Trust in anything that was different was very low in the population, and so to help save the magical world of Britain the four founders came together and built Hogwarts castle here, far out in the wilderness.

“For perhaps the first decade or so, things at Hogwarts were fairly stable, until a rift began to grow between Slytherin and the rest of the founders. This rift was particularly strong between Slytherin and Gryffindor in particular.”

“You’re kidding,” Ronnie muttered ironically under her breath, drawing a snigger from Dean and Seamus.

“The crux of the argument,” Professor Binns went on, ignoring Ronnie, “concerned magical students from non-magical families. Given the persecution that magical peoples had undergone at the time, Slytherin was deeply mistrusting of non-magical people and those who came from non-magical families. He felt that they should not be allowed into the school for fear they would give away Hogwarts’ location and threaten the school’s safety. Eventually, there was a fight, and Slytherin left the school forever.”

Professor Binns suddenly looked a little cross, as though he felt he was continuing against his better judgement. “That much we can verify from any number of historical documents and accounts. However, it has also lead to the fanciful legend of the so-called, Chamber of Secrets. This was a supposed hidden chamber that Salazar Slytherin had constructed within the castle unbeknownst to the others.

“He supposedly sealed this chamber when he left, in such a way as none could find it, or open it except his true ‘heir.’ This supposed heir would be the only person who could open the chamber and unleash the beast within to drive those who Slytherin considered undeserving of attending Hogwarts.
from the school.”

Harriet could almost hear her heartbeat in her ears with how silent the room had become. Even Neville was wide awake, though he was looking far more terrified than interested.

“That’s why the heir went after Filch’s cat…” Seamus muttered, drawing a nod from Dean, Parvati and Lavender.

“There is no heir, Flaversham! The whole thing is utter nonsense. Almost since the founding of the school, the most learned minds of the magical world have attempted to find this supposed chamber and none have done so. Not even Merlin, who was, in fact, a student of Salazar Slytherin’s, was able to find this chamber.”

Harriet blinked. She had never heard that about Merlin before. The wizard that so many looked up to and called the “Greatest Wizard of All-Time,” the wizard that so many compared Dumbledore to, was a Slytherin?

“But sir…?” Hermione asked, putting her hand back in the air. “What did you mean by ‘the beast within’…?”

“The legend states that there is some monster hidden within the Chamber, and the only the Heir him or herself can control it.”

“Sir, just thinking, but you said no one had found it, what if none of those people was Slytherin’s true heir? Because if they weren’t then they couldn’t have opened it, could they?”

Harriet twisted in her seat to see who had asked the question. It was Tori, who was sitting in the back with Rachel and AJ. Harriet was taken aback a little as she took the three girls in. They looked almost as stricken as Neville, but different somehow. She just couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Miss Hoffbrau… a long line of headmasters and headmistresses have searched for the Chamber, including Dumbledore, and found nothing.”

Lavender raised her hand now. “But sir, what if they have to use Dark Magic to open—”

Professor Binns finally lost his temper. “Miss Brown! First of all, just because a witch or wizard chooses not to use Dark Magic does not mean they cannot use it!” he thundered and would have slammed his fist on the desk if his ghostly hand hadn’t passed straight through it.

“Second of all, you are the product of your time’s prejudices on the past! To assume that Salazar Slytherin was a dark wizard is incredibly short-sighted. Salazar Slytherin himself was a product of his times! It was a time when witches and wizards were rounded up and burned alive if caught performing magic! That was what led to the Statute of Secrecy! Muggles even killed millions of fellow Muggles in their fears of magic! That is far from a black and white, good versus evil issue!”

They classroom went very quiet again. Professor Binns was breathing heavily and glaring around the room, almost as if daring another student to speak up. No one did.

“Now then… with all the foolishness about this fantasy behind us… please let us return to actual history…” Professor Binns said darkly.

Harriet sighed, and after another five minutes, she had once more drifted back into her usual half-conscious staring as Professor Binns resumed his usual droning.
Half an hour later, everyone was filing from the room. Tori, AJ and Rachel had gathered their books and parchment up rather more quickly than the rest of the drowsy class and left at top speed. Harriet furrowed her brow in curiosity as she watched them go, muttering amongst themselves.

“I wonder what those three are up to?” Harriet asked no one in particular.

“Hmm?” Kieran asked, distracted, voice as he checked his pockets to make sure he hadn’t forgotten anything.

“Oh, nothing,” Harriet said, and they started down the hall to drop off their book bags in their dorms before dinner.

“I just can’t believe it went all the way back to Slytherin, all the Muggle and Muggle-born hating,” Ronnie said. “No wonder they’re all like that… jumped up pure-bloods—”

“Well they’re not all like that,” Hermione interjected quickly. “There’s Dora…”

“Oh, so there’s an exception,” Ronnie conceded. “Still, I wouldn’t be a Slytherin anymore; you couldn’t even pay me.”

Harriet didn’t say anything. She had never told any of her friends, but she remembered only too well her sorting. The Sorting Hat had told her she could achieve ‘much greatness’ in Slytherin and had seemed reluctant to put her in Gryffindor, and she’d had to insist fairly hard to get the hat to comply. Then she remembered overhearing Pixie and Pansy on Halloween the previous year, how even Draco Malfoy had apparently thought Harriet should be in Slytherin house.

A little smile came to her lips though at how glad she was that she wasn’t in Slytherin. She probably wouldn’t have become a seeker, for instance. Not even just because of the Slytherin team’s habit of only recruiting boys, but also because if Harriet had been a Slytherin rather than a Gryffindor, she probably would have been given a detention or worse when Professor McGonagall caught her flying against Madame Hooch’s orders.

“Harriet! Hey, Harriet!”

“Oh, hello Colin,” Harriet said as the diminutive Colin Creevey caught up with her in the crowded hallway.

“Harriet, I have to talk to you, something important you have to know!” Colin said, actually grabbing hold of Harriet’s backpack to keep up with her. Harriet paused though everyone else kept going, not seeing she’d stopped.

“What is it?” Harriet asked.

Colin was looking stricken, and Harriet was starting to get worried. Did Colin know something about the attack?

Colin looked around and spotted an empty classroom and started pulling Harriet towards it. Harriet blinked and followed uneasily through the swarms of students. Finally, they were inside the room, and Colin caught his breath.

“You… you gotta know… everyone’s talking…”


“S-sort of…?” Colin said uncertainly.
“Sort of how?”

“It’s… well… everyone, well, not everyone but a lot of kids have been saying that you’re, well…”

Harriet’s heart sank. She knew what Colin was going to say before he even said it.

“Slytherin’s heir…” She groaned and slumped into a chair.

“Yeah… but not just you,” Colin went on. “A lot more people think it’s one of the refugees…”

Harriet blinked in confusion. “One of the refugees?”

“Yeah, because it didn’t happen until they got here, you see?”

Harriet sighed. That explained everything. The way that people were acting around the refugees, and the way the refugees were starting to pull in too. It also revealed why AJ, Tori and Rachel had looked so stricken in class, finally learning why all the other students were starting to give them the cold shoulder. That must have been why they left class in such a hurry too. They wanted to explain to the others what was going on.

And now Harriet thought about it, she felt sure that was what Justin and Ernie had been muttering about in Herbology too, and her appreciation of Jeremy for getting them to shut up rose dramatically.

“Thanks for telling me, Colin,” Harriet said appreciatively.

“Don’t mention it!” Colin said, looking proud of himself. “I had to make sure you knew. I know you won’t rest until you’ve figured out who it is for real!”

Colin beamed and left the room. Harriet sat for a moment more contemplating before she finally headed out to catch up with her friends who had probably noticed her missing by now.

* * * *

“People think you are the Heir of Slytherin?” Ronnie asked, a little louder than Harriet would have liked.

“Shhhh,” Harriet shushed looking around, but no one seemed to be paying attention.

“Sorry,” Ronnie said in a quieter voice.

“People here are pretty gullible then,” Marcus muttered. “I mean, how does that make any sense?”

“Aye, you’re doing that secret Slytherin bloodline proud by making friends with two Muggleborns, aren’t you?” Kieran teased.

Harriet stuck her tongue out at him. “Whatever’s going on, I want to check out the place where the attack happened again…” Harriet said. Her curiosity was starting to boil over. She wanted to know who it was and stop them before they did it again, as well as clear her name and the refugees.

Ronnie looked pensive. “I don’t know…” she muttered glancing down the table, looking for Percy. “Wait… where is Percy…?”

“Who cares?” Marcus muttered getting to his feet. “I agree, let’s check it out!”

Harriet grinned.
Only a minute later, Harriet, Ronnie, Hermione, Kieran, Marcus, Scott, and Dora were all heading back down the corridor.

“Do you think there is a Chamber?” Ronnie asked.

By the tone of her voice, Harriet could tell Ronnie was trying to sound braver than she felt as they neared the spot.

“I don’t know,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “Professor Dumbledore couldn’t fix Mrs Norris, which could very well mean that whatever attacked her isn’t…”

“Human,” Scott finished for her.

“Right,” Hermione said.

They finally reached the spot. The words were glinting just as bright as they were that first night. The water on the floor had been mopped up, and something about the floor jumped out to Harriet at once.

“Hey, look at these…” she said and got down on her hands and knees for a closer look. There were two scorch-marks, about a foot apart on the floor where the puddle had been.

“Dunno what to make of that,” Scott muttered, scrutinising them.

“Hey… come look at this,” Hermione said.

Harriet got to her feet and moved down the hall to Hermione who had stopped at a window sill. There Harriet saw a little horde of spiders trying to push their way through the tiny gap between the window panes.

“That’s odd…” Kieran muttered.

“Yeah, never seen spiders do that before,” Marcus agreed.

Out of the corner of her eye, Harriet noticed Ronnie staying well back. Given Ronnie’s fear of spiders, Harriet didn’t press her to look.

“What the devil are you all doing here?!”

The group whirled around to see Percy striding down the corridor towards them, looking furious.

“How should it look?” he pointed at the chair nearby that Filch had set up to keep his vigil over the place where Mrs Norris had been attacked.

“How should it look?” Ronnie retorted, stepping up to Percy. “We’re just looking for clues, trying to help find out what happened.”

“‘You lot were the ones who were found at the scene of the attack, anyone else who sees this is going to think you’re returning to the scene of the crime!’”

“We walk down this hall at least twice a day!” Ronnie spat back, “And we never touched that stupid cat! Even Dumbledore said so!”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell Ginny!” Percy snarled. “But she’s still convinced all of you are going to be expelled or worse! She’s been an absolute wreck these last couple of days! You’re her sister; you’re in the same dorm, you two are best friends, how you can’t have noticed how she’s feeling is beyond me!”
Ronnie opened her mouth to retort but slowly closed it. Harriet could tell Percy had struck her a heavy blow with that one. Harriet felt it herself; she hadn’t seen Ginny as much as she’d have liked during this school year.

Unexpectedly, Percy’s face softened a great deal. “Okay Ronnie, I know you like to help, you’re a Weasley, but come on… you’ve got to think about family and yourself sometimes too…”

Percy hitched his sterner look back on his face as he took in the rest of them and pointed down the hallway back towards the Great Hall. “Now I don’t want to hear any more about you lot playing detectives… this is far too serious a matter for games.”

The little group all nodded slowly and started heading back down the hall. Marcus put an arm around Ronnie’s shoulder, glaring back at Percy.

“We have to find out who was behind it, who’s opened the chamber,” Marcus said in a bolstering tone. “Percy or not.”

Ronnie finally smiled again. “Thanks, Marcus, but you know… Perce’s right… I… I think I’m gonna see what Ginny’s up to… I’ll catch up with you guys later, okay?”

They all waved Ronnie off, smiling. As soon as Ronnie was gone, Marcus punched a fist into his hand.

“Oh, I so wanna ring Percy’s neck, and punch Malfoy in his ferrety face while I’m at it!” Marcus declared.

“You and me both,” Dora said. “But why do you wanna punch Malfoy?”

Marcus glowered. “You heard what he said that night… ‘you’ll be next, Mudbloods.’”

“Well, he did, but he’s said that bef—oh don’t tell me you’re going to duel him again!” Harriet said exasperatedly.

Everyone laughed.

“No-no,” Marcus said, still laughing. “No, I just… well… you think it’s him?”

“Malfoy? The Heir of Slytherin?” Hermione asked sceptically.

“Yeah… he’s an arse, but I can’t see it being him,” Dora said.

“Well he does know something about it,” Scott said wisely. “I could tell that much… that look on his face, it was more like he’d been anticipating it than he’d done it.”

“That’s a good point,” Kieran said nodding.

Harriet didn’t say anything. She thought Marcus had a point. Malfoy did often brag about how far back his family went in Slytherin House. And he certainly was one of the more outspoken against Muggleborns and anyone he thought didn’t belong at Hogwarts.

“Well, there might be a way to investigate Malfoy… and anyone else around this school for that matter…”

“How’s that?” Dora asked.

“Polyjuice Potion.”
“Polyjuice Potion?” Harriet and Marcus asked.

“Brilliant…” Dora muttered, her eyes bright with a mischievous twinkle.

“That… could go seriously wrong,” Scott said. “I’ve heard about Polyjuice Potion…”

Hermione gave him a quelling look.

“But, I guess it’s the best we’ve got to go on…” Scott said apprehensively.

“What we’ll need is the book *Moste Potente Potions*… Professor Snape’s mentioned it, but it’s in the restricted section,” Hermione explained.

“We’d need a teacher or an older student to get it for us then…” Harriet said dismally.

“Well… I know a teacher who just might be thick enough…” Kieran said with a slight grin.

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O'Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, and Scott McIntyre are property of night-miner(dA)

Tori Hoffman, and Rachel Kane are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

AJ is property of Hasbro

All others property of J.K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“It is true the best-laid plans often do go wrong. Just remember that means they will often go wrong for your opponents as well.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

If Scott felt apprehensive about using Polyjuice Potion, it was nothing compared to how Ronnie felt about it when Harriet and Hermione told her the plan in full.

“No way,” Ronnie declared. “There is no way I’m taking some mental potion that turns me into a Slytherin. Notta chance!”

“You won’t be a Slytherin,” Hermione retorted. “You’ll just look like one; you’ll still be you.”

“Oh yeah, that’s just a million times better, isn’t it?”

“Well, what other plan do we have?” Harriet tried to reason.

“We have Dora!” Ronnie retorted. “Why can’t she snoop around?”

“Yes, because Dora and the rest of the Slytherins are all such pals, aren’t they?” Hermione grumbled.

“But what if one of us gets stuck looking like some ugly Slytherin git for the rest of their lives!?” Ronnie asked, showing just how strong her opposition to using the potion was.

“If brewed right, the potion wears off after exactly one hour,” Hermione explained.

Ronnie rolled her eyes. “Yeah, if.”

Hermione glowered. “We’ll have me, Scott, Kieran, Harriet, and Dora working on it and we’re tops in the year in Potions. If the five of us can’t work out how to make the potion—”

“Alright, alright,” Ronnie said throwing up her hands.

“And besides, I don’t think we’ll all have to take the potion, it would probably be too obvious if we all tried to do it,” Harriet said. “Maybe only three or four of us at the most.”

Ronnie started to look a little less opposed now. “Well, alright, how are we going to get the book with the instructions? You said it was in the restricted section…”

“Tomorrow we’re going to trick Lockhart into signing the permission form for us to check the book out,” Harriet explained.

“Oh, well that’ll be easy enough,” Ronnie said simply.

Harriet almost laughed at how readily Ronnie accepted the idea that they could trick Lockhart. Hermione merely pursed her lips and didn’t say anything.
They stopped talking and looked up as the door to the room opened, and AJ stepped in. She paused at the sight of them, looking uncertain.

“Oh, sorry, not interruptin’ am I?” she asked taking a step backwards to leave.

“Oh no, of course not,” Harriet said doing her best to look warm and welcoming. “It’s your room too!”

AJ blushed but gave a rare smile and walked over to her bed. Harriet watched her in thought and finally made up her mind.

“Hey, AJ, I just… I wanted to—”

“Oh, not you all too!” AJ said spinning around and glaring. “We’ve all been done near blown up, burned up, cursed, fled in the middle of the night, shipped thousands of miles over here just to get blamed for—”

“NO! No, no!” Harriet said putting up her hands, cutting AJ off. “I just wanted to say I’m sorry this has happened, and people are turning on you all like this, it’s unfair…”

AJ’s face fell from a glare of anger to shame. “I… sorry Harriet… Yer right, we’re all just a little on edge and…”

“We know,” Ronnie said and got up and crossed the room to hug AJ.

AJ returned it but looked as though she felt she didn’t deserve it.

“Thank you guys; it’s just so hard on all of us. We don’t know no one here, and just as we’re getting’ started to fit in this all happens,” she said in a quiet voice.

Hermione and Harriet got up too and headed over.

“It’s alright, dear,” Hermione said in an oddly motherly tone. “But, I did want to ask you something, not related to the Chamber and all that rubbish.”

Harriet, AJ and Ronnie all looked at Hermione.

“Well, I just, ever since that History of Magic lesson with Tori’s mother, I’ve wanted to know what got you so upset? I mean… if it’s something you still don’t want to talk about, that’s okay…”

Harriet couldn’t read AJ’s expression as she looked at Hermione. It might have been resentment, or anger, or sadness, or all of them at once.

“I guess,” AJ started, sounding like she was thinking hard to find the right words. “I just always grew up hearin’ stories about how hard it was tryin’ to get settled and making homes back in the settlin’ days.”

“What stories?” Ronnie asked

“Indian attacks, attackin’ homesteads and stuff, guess I just… never really heard another side of the story and it was… well… a lot to take in at once,” AJ explained.

“Yeah, I could see that,” Harriet said. Harriet had experienced enough mind-blowing revelations in the past two years alone to last a lifetime.

“I still don’ really know how tah feel about it,” AJ went on and sighed. “I mean, didn’t my family
have a right to live somewhere too? I can’t believe we was all just out to kill Indians…”

None of the other three responded. Harriet, Hermione and Ronnie all simply looked at each other. Harriet certainly couldn’t think of a response to that.

AJ sighed again but smiled. “Thanks, fer listenin’ though you guys if there’s anythin’ I can do for ya too?” she asked, finally looking more cheerful.

“Well, just keep being strong and don’t let people get to you like that,” Harriet said, smiling. “Professor Dumbledore told me that last year. It’s not your fault; you didn’t do anything to deserve it.”

At the mention of Dumbledore’s name, AJ smiled fully. “Yeah, he would say somethin’ like that; he sure is somethin’, isn’t he?”

“Sure is,” Ronnie agreed squeezing AJ around the shoulders.

“And one favour you could do us is let Tori and Rachel know we don’t think any of you opened the Chamber either or attacked Mrs Norris,” Hermione said with a warm smile.

AJ smiled more. “Alright, yeah, I’ll do that. Good to know you three are on our side anyway. We kinda got the other impression from Lavender and Parvati.”

Again Harriet felt a little uncomfortable. She’d never quite got on as well with Lavender and Parvati as with Hermione and Ronnie, but she didn’t think they would believe fellow Gryffindors would open the Chamber of Secrets and try to expel all Muggleborns from the school, even if they did come from far away.

“Well, anyway, I’d just come in here to get a book to take down and study with Tori and Rachel,” AJ said getting up.

She picked up her Potions book and was just heading to the door when Harriet had another brainwave.

“Oh, AJ?” Harriet asked stopping her.

“Yeah?”

“Why don’t you have Tori and Rachel come up too? We can all study together?”

AJ smiled and nodded. “Yeah, yeah I’ll do that Harriet, that’d be great.” AJ’s smile brightened even more, and she finally left the room.

“Those poor kids,” Ronnie said after AJ left, chewing her lip.

“They’re not a bad lot, really,” Harriet agreed.

“Definitely,” Hermione said looking purposeful. “You know, we should try and get closer to them… ones from other houses too… We could probably learn a lot about this situation if we do…”

Harriet blinked. “You don’t seriously think any of them are behind it—”

“Oh of course not!” Hermione said in a sharp, slightly wounded voice. “You heard Professor Binns; the most learned minds in the magical world have looked for the Chamber for years and failed. Not even Dumbledore found it, and he’s been here at Hogwarts for over fifty years. I doubt even the Heir, whoever it is, would be able to find it in only a few months, or even a few years. It’s either an
older student who’s had a lot more time to search for it or a student who comes from a family that
knows the location.”

“Oh, sorry. Yeah, that makes sense,” Harriet agreed.

“Meaning it’s probably a family with a long lineage of being in Slytherin House…” Ronnie said.
“You know who that probably means?”

“Okay,” Hermione said. “Yes, I’ll admit the chances are high Malfoy is at least involved. But Malfoy
is far from the only student here with a long Slytherin lineage, and it could be a girl just as well as a
boy,” Hermione went on.

“That’s a good point,” Harriet said. “Maybe we should do two groups, a guy or two to question
Malfoy and a couple of us to investigate Slytherin girls?”

“That’s a good idea,” Hermione agreed.

Harriet thought more. “But… going back a bit, how could the refugees help?” Harriet asked.

“Spies,” Hermione said simply. “They might be able to hear things around here others can’t.”

“How do you figure?” Ronnie asked.

“Because they do seem to know a lot more about the secret passages of the castle than most other
students,” Hermione explained. “They get to classes faster than anyone, if they only knew we
thought they were innocent…”

“We’ll have to get the word out somehow,” Harriet said. “But we’ll have to be secretive about it…”

“Right, if people know we’re trying to have the refugees spy for us it’ll make everyone trust them
even less,” Ronnie agreed.

“We’ll have to think of something, and quick… or the next attack might not be an animal…”
Hermione said ominously.

They all stopped talking once more as the three refugees finally came back through the door with all
their books. Harriet smiled warmly around at them all. It made her feel good to be taking these steps
to welcome the new students when so many others were pushing them away. She pulled out her
Potions book, flipped open to the chapter that Professor Snape had assigned them, and started to
read.

* * * *

The following day, they finally began to put their plan into action. Phase one was getting Moste
Potente Potions. Unfortunately, it involved Harriet and Marcus taking one for the team. After the
fiasco with the pixies, instead of bringing live creatures to class, Lockhart would call up students to
play roles in re-enactments of scenes from his book.

His favourite target was Marcus. Marcus, in his campaign against Lockhart, had taken to grilling the
professor hard on every point in class he tried to make and every story he told. In response, Lockhart
had taken to using Marcus in his re-enactments, often making him take on the roles of monsters who
couldn’t speak. Harriet on the other hand usually had to play varying roles of “damsels” during
Lockhart’s re-enactments.
Today was no different. Marcus was playing the role of the Wagga Wagga Werewolf and Harriet was the young witch Lockhart supposedly saved from the beast. Harriet found these characters all the more pointless because she never actually did anything but pretend to be in peril as Lockhart “saved the day.” Indeed, the only thing she had done today was cower and give off an unenthusiastic shriek as Marcus the werewolf bore down on her.

However much she resented the role, Harriet knew this was even harder on Marcus than usual, having grown up in Australia not too far from the town of Wagga Wagga. Marcus said he was sure he had read about the Wagga Wagga Werewolf shortly after learning he was a wizard back in Australia. However, he insisted quite confidently that during his readings, he had never heard Lockhart’s name once in the report.

“How give us a howl, Marcus, nice and loud there! Now, he sprang at me, and I slammed the doors of the phone booth shut just in time, and he bounced right over onto his back!”

Marcus pretended to howl and grunt before falling onto his back, glaring at the ceiling.

“And then, rather than flee, I knew what had to be done. I leapt upon the stunned beast, grabbing him hard by the throat—”

Marcus grunted as Lockhart pushed him back down and stuck his wand into Marcus’ throat.

“I then pointed my wand and using every last bit of my strength and mental capacity I performed the complex and difficult Homorphus Charm, which immediately began to reverse the transformation. He let out a loud, pitiful moan—”

Marcus fought off a glare and gave out a satisfactory ‘pitiful moan.’

“—and then, charm successfully performed, the fur, teeth, and even his body began to shrink. And just like that, he turned back into a human, and the offender finally identified, the town of Wagga Wagga will forever remember me as the man who saved them from the monthly terror of werewolf attacks.”

Mercifully, the bell finally rang, and Lockhart sprang to his feet.

“Your homework!” He called over the clamour of students putting away their books. “I want you all to compose a poem detailing my defeat of the Wagga Wagga Werewolf. A signed copy of Magical Me will be given to the composer of the very best poem!”

Harriet looked with some jealousy at the other students who were leaving. Despite being part of their plan, Marcus didn’t stay behind with them, and instead, he threw his bag up over his shoulder and stormed from the room. Harriet didn’t blame him. Ronnie bit her lip watching him go.

“Hey,” she said in an undertone to Harriet, Hermione and Kieran, “think I’m gonna… you know.” She went on nodding after Marcus.

“Good idea,” Harriet said, and Ronnie headed off after Marcus.

The remaining three all gave each other bolstering looks before they looked up towards Lockhart’s desk. It was now or never. They made their way slowly up to Lockhart. Hermione led the way, Harriet and Kieran hanging back a little bit. This was both over their mutual distaste for Lockhart, and the fact that as thick as Lockhart was they didn’t want to seem suspicious by seeming too interested in the book.

“Excuse me, Professor Lockhart, sir,” Hermione said a little breathless. While Harriet was sure
Hermione’s faith in Lockhart’s greatness was slipping, she had not lost all the vestiges of hero-worship yet.

“Oh yes, Miss Granger, how may I be of service?” Lockhart said giving Hermione a wink and toothy grin that made Hermione flush and Harriet gag.

“Well, I… I was wondering… I wanted to get a book from the library, but it’s in the Restricted Section, and so I need a teacher to sign for it… I… I wanted it for some background reading. I’m interested in slow-acting venoms after reading *Gadding with Ghousl*—”

“*Gadding with Ghousl*, eh?” Lockhart asked excitedly. “Possibly my favourite out of all my works! How did you enjoy it?”

“Oh, I did, Professor!” Hermione replied. “It was so clever of you to use a tea-strainer to trap that last one!”

Professor Lockhart beamed toothily and drew out a three-foot-long peacock feather quill from his desk and took Hermione’s piece of paper.

“I don’t think anyone will hold it against me, giving the very best student in the year a little extra leg-up, eh?” Lockhart said and quickly signed the paper with a flourish.

Hermione smiled taking it back, and they were just about to leave when Lockhart stopped them again.

“Oh, Harriet, first Quidditch match this weekend eh?”

Harriet gritted her teeth and forced a smile on her face.

“Oh, yes Professor,” she replied.

“Yes, Professor,” Harriet replied, trying to keep her answers short as she did not want to remain much longer.

“Good on you; heard good things about your playing from the rest of the staff. I was a Seeker too back in my day. In fact, they asked me to play for the National Squad, but I knew my calling was helping defeat the Dark Arts in the world.”

“Mm,” Harriet replied not caring to sound interested.

“Come on, Harriet, we’re gonna be late for lunch,” Kieran said quickly.

“Oh yes, off with you lot now,” Lockhart said in a cheery tone.

Harriet and the rest didn’t hesitate. They hurried from the room but instead of down the stairs towards the Great Hall; they went up towards the Library.

“Thanks,” Harriet muttered to Kieran as they headed up the hall.

Kieran laughed. “Well you looked like you needed to be saved for once,” he said barely containing a grin and a snigger from Hermione.

Harriet rolled her eyes, and they entered the ominous silence of the Hogwarts library. They nervously made their way to Madame Pince, the librarian, who was severe in both her looks and her
demeanour. She ruled the library with an iron-fist.

“Moste Potente Potions,” Madame Pince asked as she took the note from Hermione.

She cast them a doubting look as she inspected the note, holding it up to the light. Finally satisfied that the note was legitimate, Madame Pince stalked off towards the Restricted Section and returned a few minutes later holding an ancient, mouldy tome. Hermione took it, almost reverently and put it gently into her bag. This tender treatment of the book seemed to satisfy Madame Pince further, and she wished them a good day as they made their way as casually as they could back out of the library into the hall.

“Okay, well that all went easily enough,” Hermione said,

“Let’s get back down to the Great Hall and find the others,” Harriet said feeling relieved.

“We’ll need to think up a place to work on the potion too,” Kieran said thoughtfully as they headed towards the Great Hall.

“Oh I have the perfect place in mind,” Hermione said enigmatically.

To Harriet’s dismay as much as everyone else’s, ten minutes later they found themselves in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Even worse, they were all crammed around the very same stall where Harriet had almost been crushed to death by a troll last year. Hermione had picked this location because of how rarely other students used it because of Moaning Myrtle.

Myrtle herself was in the stall next to them wailing away miserably. The group was ignoring her, and Myrtle herself seemed perfectly happy to ignore them in return. Harriet wasn’t overly fond of ghosts, but she did enjoy Nearly-Headless Nick and the Fat Friar. However, when it came to Myrtle, Harriet was finding her to be another ghost whose presence she could do without.

Hermione gingerly pulled Moste Potente Potions from her bag, and they all leaned over awkwardly to read.

Scott whistled. “Okay, think I see why they restrict this book,” he said.

Harriet thought he had a point. The illustrations that went along with many of the potions were particularly horrible, and the fact the illustrations moved didn’t help. One featured a wizard being turned inside out, and another showed a witch who was sprouting extra arms out of her head.

Hermione looked relieved as they finally reached the page for the Polyjuice Potion.

“Here we are,” she said.

Scott whistled once more. “Okay… that’s the most complex potion I’ve ever seen, full-stop,” he said.

The rest of the group all murmured agreements.

“Well, most of the ingredients should be easy enough to get,” Dora said, running a finger down the list. “Most of these, like lacewings, we can get in the student store cupboard in Potions.”

“Yeah,” Harriet agreed. “Except maybe the bicorn horn, that’s not in our student stores,” she said.

“No, but probably in Snape’s private storage,” Dora said. “Same with the boomslang skins.”

“What?!” Ronnie said jabbing a finger at the bottom of the ingredients list. “A sample of the person you’re transforming into?”
“Yeah,” Scott said knowledgeably. “Nothing bad though, just like a strand of hair, that’s all.”

Ronnie didn’t look entirely relieved. Kieran was also starting to look a little sceptical.

“I don’t know about this you lot,” Kieran said. “I mean not the potion,” he went on under the glare Hermione gave him. “I mean, I know we can make the potion, I just… even if he doesn’t figure out it’s us, isn’t Snape going to notice these ingredients missing?”

“Well, as long as he doesn’t know it’s us we should be fine,” Hermione said, though she was starting to look nervous too. “I don’t want to break all these rules, and it is a lot of risk but…”

“Yeah, the best plan we have,” Scott finished.

Having Scott on board seemed to increase Kieran’s confidence, which in turn seemed to improve everyone else’s.

“The real hard part,” Hermione said, reading to the end of the potion “will be keeping it secret for so long…”

“How long?” Ronnie asked.

“Uh, probably a month,” Hermione said.

“A month?!” Ronnie repeated looking stunned.

“Well, the lacewings have to stew for twenty-one days, and the fluxweed has to be picked at the full moon.”

“But… a month… that’s plenty of time for someone else to get attacked!” Ronnie exclaimed.

“Well if you have a better plan, I’m all ears!” Hermione asked in a doubting tone.

Ronnie looked a little wounded and Hermione quickly backtracked.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean, just, well, I guess being a… you know… Muggle-born I guess it has me a bit more on edge…”

Ronnie grimaced. “You’re right, Hermione, okay, let’s do it.”

Hermione smiled.

***

As always in the week leading up to a Quidditch match, time seemed to speed up indecently. Harriet felt extra nervous that Saturday morning after she woke and breakfasted with the rest of the team. The Slytherin team was also eating breakfast, and seemed particularly pleased to gloat over the Gryffindor team about their superior brooms. Harriet was sure the fireworks incident did not help the animosity the Slytherins were showing the Gryffindors, and the fact Fred and George both got off scot-free.

That wasn’t the only reason Harriet was nervous. It would be her first time flying against Malfoy, and she felt sick to her stomach watching from across the hall as Pansy and Pixie fawned over Malfoy, his Nimbus 2001 propped beside him as though it were a knight’s sword.

“Little git,” Fred muttered as he poured Harriet a glass of milk.
“You’ll show him, Harriet,” George said giving Harriet an encouraging smile.

Harriet returned the smile and felt even better as the rest of her Gryffindor friends grinned at her.

At eleven, the entire school began filing out into the grounds and on towards the Quidditch pitch. There was a distant roll of thunder and Harriet shivered in the cold, damp air. Her friends walked her as far as the changing rooms, giving her hugs and pats on the back before they moved on to the stadium. Dora received more than a few jeers from a passing group of Slytherins as she wished Harriet good luck. Harriet was quite sure she was going to end up sitting with Hermione, Ronnie, Marcus, Kieran and Scott instead of the other Slytherins.

Harriet quickly changed and sat on the bench with the rest of the team, ready for Wood’s traditional pre-match briefings.

“Okay, now I know there’s no denying it. As equipment goes, Slytherin has the edge in this match,” Wood said sounding as though the admission cost him a great deal. “But we have the edge when it comes to players. We’ve been training harder in all weathers than they have—”

“All weathers?” George asked incredulously. “It’s been raining non-stop since September!” Wood glared. “Well then, we’re going to be perfectly prepared for today if it does rain then won’t we?” he asked.

George looked mollified.

“Honestly, though we seem like the underdog, we have the advantage. The only thing they’re counting on is the speed of their brooms. Just like Harriet showed us against Hufflepuff last year, speed isn’t everything.”

Harriet blushed and gave a little smile.

“Long story short, I think we’re going to win. Remember our training, work together, and show them there’s more to playing Quidditch than a broomstick.”

Wood turned to Harriet now. Harriet felt her smile falter under the hard stare that Wood gave her, the kind of stare that made her insides turn to jelly.

“Harriet, this is going to be true for you. Malfoy will have the speed advantage, but I don’t need to tell you Snitches do more than fly fast. Get to that Snitch before Malfoy, or die trying, you got me? This is the first match of the season, this is the big one,” Wood said in his usual cliché. “This’ll set the pace for the rest of the season.”

Harriet nodded seriously.

“No pressure then,” Fred said patting Harriet’s knee.

The team got up and grabbed their broomsticks before making their way out onto the pitch. They were greeted mostly by cheers, but the Slytherins made their presence known. Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, fortunately, were also cheering Gryffindor, as the entire school was anxious to see Slytherin’s Quidditch Cup streak come to an end.

Madame Hooch had Flint and Wood shake hands. Harriet noted the tradition of Slytherin and Gryffindor captains trying to break each other’s hands had not died as the two shook. Harriet swung her leg over her trusty Nimbus Two-Thousand as Madame Hooch counted down and finally blew the whistle.
Harriet kicked off and accelerated as hard as she could, rocketing up fifty feet in the air before she began circling the pitch, her eyes peeled for the Snitch. The new glasses indeed were an asset. As she had noticed in practices, they gave no sign of wanting to fly off in the wind, and she could see much more clearly than with her old pair.

Harriet just managed to dodge aside as Malfoy clipped past her.

“Out the way there, Potter,” he called over his shoulder as he passed.

Harriet opened her mouth to call a retort after him but couldn’t as the black streak of a Bludger raced towards her. Harriet ducked and felt it tug her ponytail as it rocketed past.

“Watch it there, Harriet,” George called as he chased after it. George hit it hard towards Adrien Pucey, but instead of continuing, it curved in a long arch and shot straight back at Harriet.

Harriet ducked the Bludger again and streaked off as fast as she could. George was still hot on its trail and this time knocked it towards Malfoy. However, before it even got close to Malfoy, the Bludger began to turn once more towards Harriet. Harriet tried to pull away, but it didn’t take long before she could hear the Bludger whistling along as it bore down on her.

Harriet looked over her shoulder at it in confusion. Bludgers didn’t act this way; they were supposed to go after whatever player was closest to them, not lock on and chase a single player all over the pitch.

Harriet saw Fred pull up and wave to her, his bat at the ready. Harriet shot towards him, and he whacked the black ball as hard as he could. The Bludger seemed like it was heading towards another Slytherin player now and Fred pumped his fist victoriously. However, Fred gaped in shock as once more the Bludger turned and shot straight back for Harriet. Harriet ducked it again and raced off in the other direction. She couldn’t watch for the Snitch like this. To make matters worse, it had started to rain.

Harriet had no idea what was going on. Fred and George were now doing their best to fly alongside her, working hard to keep the Bludger off her. Harriet had no idea how the game was going until she heard Lee Jordan announce the score, sixty to zero, Slytherin lead.

Harriet gritted her teeth. No matter what Wood had said, it was apparent that the Slytherin’s faster brooms were doing the trick. Harriet felt her irritation growing at Fred and George as well. Harriet was sure she could out-fly the Bludger, but with Fred and George hounding her trying to keep the Bludger off of her she was too distracted to focus on either the Bludger or the Snitch.

“Have Wood call a time-out,” Harriet said to Fred and George.

George nodded and broke formation enough to signal to Wood who called the time-out. Even after Madame Hooch blew the whistle, the Bludger continued to chase Harriet all the way to the ground.

“Where the hell have you two been?” Wood asked Fred and George angrily. “Angelina would have scored had you stopped that Bludger!”

“We were trying to stop the other Bludger from killing Harriet!” George growled, pointing up at it. The Bludger wasn’t attacking, but it was still circling the Gryffindor team menacingly.

“Someone has to have fixed it,” Fred added, looking equally disgruntled. “It’s only been going after Harriet the entire match! It must have been the Slytherins somehow!”

“Can’t have been,” Wood said. “Madame Hooch keeps the balls locked up in her office, and we
were the last to practice with them before the match!”

Harriet gritted her teeth. She knew what had to be done to win the game.

“Oliver,” Harriet said. “We’re never gonna win with Fred and George just focused on me. You two,” she said turning her attention to the twins. “Go back to the rest of the game so our chasers can score. I’ll deal with this crazy rogue one; I can dodge it better on my own.”

Fred and George looked at Harriet doubting but seemed to soften under the glare she gave them.

“Harriet, with the way that Bludger’s been after you, if it hits you at speed that high off the ground…” Fred said sounding concerned.

“This is your fault,” George thundered at Wood. “Get the Snitch or die trying!”

“Ready to resume?” Madame Hooch asked as she stepped up to the Gryffindor team.

Harriet gave Wood her most determined look. Wood chewed his tongue, thinking hard.

“Alright, you two, let Harriet deal with the mad Bludger. We can have Madame Hooch inspect it after we win.”

Harriet felt her chest swell and more butterflies in her stomach. Despite the deficit in the score, Wood still had that much faith that Harriet was going to win the match for them. Fred and George both looked apprehensive, but Wood had spoken.

Finally, they all mounted their brooms and kicked off as Madame Hooch blew her whistle once more. Almost the moment Harriet was airborne the Bludger dive-bombed her again. Harriet took advantage of the Bludger’s trajectory to shoot off in the opposite direction.

The rain was coming down hard now, and Harriet was having a harder and harder time seeing. She did her best to keep dodging the Bludger as it chased after her. She gritted her teeth, zigging and zagging, climbing and diving, but as ever the Bludger followed her every move.

Fortunately, Harriet was starting to work out a pattern. The Bludger couldn’t turn as fast as she could, and so instead of dancing around dodging it, Harriet would let it build up speed, jink out of the way just in time, and shoot off to the other end of the pitch, looking for the Snitch as the Bludger corrected its course. It was then that the strangest thing Harriet had ever seen happened.

She had just dived to dodge the Bludger once more when Malfoy shot past yet again.

“Should be in the ballet, Potter, it’s where girls like you belong,” Malfoy shouted as he passed.

Harriet glared at Malfoy who was smirking back at her when it happened. The Golden Snitch flew right in between them. Harriet looked at it and glanced at Malfoy, whose eyes had gone wide, almost as if horrified, and he was turning hard. Malfoy had seen it too.

Harriet leaned forward hard and accelerated as fast as her Nimbus 2000 could go towards the Snitch. It was heading towards Malfoy who had finally turned and was heading straight towards Harriet. Harriet gritted her teeth and stretched out her hand towards the Snitch. Malfoy loomed in her vision.
They were about to collide.

Harriet swiped hard at the Snitch and closed her eyes. She felt her hand close on the Snitch and she braced for impact. It never came. Instead, there was a loud _whack_ from close behind her, and a great gasp went up in the crowd below. Harriet looked around, holding up her hand. She was all alone in the air, neither Malfoy nor the Bludger was anywhere to be seen.

Madame Hooch’s whistle blew, and Harriet looked down, and to her horror, she realised what had happened. Malfoy was spiralling towards the ground on his broomstick, clutching his shoulder. The Bludger was careening off, trying to recover. The Bludger had hit Malfoy instead of her. Harriet just stared for a few moments before she had to duck once more as the Bludger shot back towards her again. Harriet dove straight towards the ground, and Fred and George finally flew back into formation with her to ward off the Bludger as it continued to give chase.

Harriet landed and skidded on the muddy ground as Fred and George both caught the Bludger, struggling hard to contain it as they landed.

“That’s got you, you jinxed little—” Fred muttered as he and George did their best to keep their grip on it as they awkwardly dismounted their brooms.

“That’s my girl!” Wood was shouting as he landed next to Harriet and lifted her off the ground in a rib-cracking bear hug.

The crowd was on their feet, the combined might of the Gryffindors, Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs all drowning out the boos and jeers of the Slytherins.

“You did it!” Angelina cheered as she hugged Harriet too.

“That was a fantastic job, Harriet! You beat that Bludger and Malfoy!” Alicia Spinnet cried as she and Katie joined in the group hug.

Over Angelina’s shoulder, Harriet saw two odd sights. One was Fred and George wrestling the rogue Bludger into Madame Hooch’s carrying case. Madame Hooch was standing nearby looking at the Bludger incredulously.

“What on earth is wrong with it?” Madame Hooch was asking and shaking her head. “Why didn’t you all call an inquiry?!”

The other odd sight was Malfoy. He was still clutching his arm, looking as though he was nearly passing out in pain. Flint was standing over him, looking furious as Professor Lockhart inspected Malfoy’s arm. They were just near enough for Harriet to overhear what was going on.

“Dammit all, Malfoy, how did you miss that Snitch!?” Flint was thundering. “It was flying straight at you! Next time you try for a Snitch like that and miss you had better die trying!”

Malfoy wasn’t paying attention to Flint, however. He was arguing with Lockhart.

“Get away from me you great oaf! No! I don’t want you to fix my arm! Get that ruddy camera out of my face you scrawny little mud-blood git!”

There was a flash that Harriet recognised instantly as Colin Creevey’s camera.

“No, you—” Before Malfoy could finish his protest Lockhart’s wand had twirled and jabbed straight
at Malfoy’s arm.

However, instead of mending, it looked as though Malfoy’s arm deflated. Lockhart hadn’t mended Malfoy’s broken bone; he’d removed it, along with all the other bones in Malfoy’s arm.

Malfoy took one look at his arm and fainted. The enraged Slytherin team all picked up Malfoy and shoved Lockhart out of the way, carrying Malfoy off towards the Hospital Wing.

At that moment, Harriet’s friends all made it down to her. All except Marcus.

“You were brilliant!” Ronnie shrieked and hugged Harriet almost as hard as Wood had.

“Spectacular flying!” Kieran said giving her a one-armed hug around the shoulder. “We were all biting our nails the whole time!”

Dora gave Harriet a congratulatory hug too but seemed distracted. She kept watching after Malfoy and the rest of the Slytherins. Her eyebrows were knotted in deep thought. Harriet thought she knew what it was. Dora was probably contemplating her chances of getting on the Slytherin Quidditch team now that Malfoy was injured.

“Party in the Common Room!” Lee Jordan called, having made his way down from the announcer’s booth. The Gryffindors around them all cheered in agreement, and they all started making their way out of the pitch.

“Where’s Marcus?” Harriet asked looking around.

Ronnie rolled her eyes. “Malfoy’s little fan-club of Parkinson, Fanfarró, Crabbe, Goyle and Zabini all sat behind us to taunt us about your flying,” she said grinning proudly. “Then when Malfoy flew into that Bludger like an idiot, Marcus laughed, and it started a fight with him and Crabbe and Goyle. Seamus and Dean jumped in too. Marcus, Seamus and Zabini all had to go to the Hospital Wing.”

Harriet sighed and shook her head. Poor Marcus, between Percy and Lockhart he was having a hard enough year as it was. They told Fred and George they would be along to the party soon and instead diverted, making off for the Hospital Wing and their friends instead.

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By eleven o clock that night the party was still going. Marcus and Seamus had returned by nine-o-clock, and each had earned a detention for fighting. However, Marcus didn’t look so upset about it this time. As it had come from such an uneven fight, he seemed to be wearing it as a badge of honour.

Marcus looked even more proud of himself when two burly third-year boys that Harriet had never spoken to before shook his hand after shaking hers.

“What’s your name, mate?” asked one of the boys, interested.

“M-Marcus… uh Van Der Lakk,” Marcus said as he looked up at the much taller boys.

“Chris Jerome,” said the boy who had asked Marcus his name.

“Cormac McClaggen,” said the other boy.

“Good on you in that fight, Cormac and I here were too far away to get over there in time to lend a hand before it was over, but jumping at those two lunk-heads at the same time all by yourself, that
took some balls, mate,” Chris said.

“Yeah, tell you what, you ever have a problem with those two again, just find us. We’ll take care of ’em but good. We’re sick of those two upstart second years, er, no offence, blundering around like they’re the toughest things in the school.”

“Good match again, Potter,” Chris said and shook Harriet’s hand once more. “Same thing, you ever run into any Slytherin problems, you let us know.”

Harriet nodded reluctantly as the two headed back over to the food table.

“I think you might have found yourself your own Crabbe and Goyle,” Hermione teased poking Harriet in the ribs.

“Or I did… not exactly sure what just happened there,” Marcus said blinking.

Harriet laughed.

The Gryffindors were all in such fervour over besting Slytherin two years in a row that they ran out of food just before midnight. Harriet was pleased to see that even the refugees were once more being accepted by the rest of the house and were sharing in the festivities.

“That…was…awesome!” said the little first-year refugee named Katy Tyler. “I so wish I could fly like you, that was just amazing! I can’t fly anymore after the attack cuz it damaged my inner-ear or something or other and so like now if I try and fly I get dizzy, so Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori won’t let me, but holy cow I so wish I could fly like you!”

“Th-that’s, uh, thanks, Katy,” Harriet said awkwardly “Do you like sports?”

“Do I?!” Rayne asked going wide-eyed. “They’re like the bestest thing ever! I was training to play Quadpot back home, that’s like Quidditch for Americans, but yeah,” she suddenly looked put out. “I can’t anymore…”

“Have you ever thought of football?” Ronnie asked.

Katy blinked. “Like, real football with pads and stuff, or soccer?” she asked.

Ronnie’s eye twitched a little. Harriet put a hand on Ronnie’s arm in a calming way.

“S-soccer,” Ronnie replied, as though saying the name cost her a great deal.

“Ohhhhh, no,” Katy said. “But it looks lotsa fun, do you play it?” she asked sounding very interested, which seemed to disarm Ronnie.

“Yeah, I’d like to learn more about it too!” asked another first-year refugee that Harriet remembered from the start of year feast as being named Tory Clooney.

“Great!” Ronnie said, beaming with pride. “Yeah, I love playing. I play in a local summer league.”

“What position?” Tory asked with wide eyes.

“Keeper,” Ronnie beamed back.

“Wow, hey, do you like Holly Cambridge?”

Ronnie’s face hardened a little. “Y-yeah, yeah I do.”
“You know she visited here this summer,” Katy said, and Tory nodded eagerly.

Ronnie blinked. “No… no, I hadn’t heard that.”

“Yeah, well it was all secret and stuff, but she was here to tour schools in case she got picked to play for a team here in Europe,” Katy added, almost beside herself with excitement. “Anyway, could you teach us some stuff?”

Ronnie beamed again. “Well yeah, I can teach you lot all about it tomorrow!”

“Hey, you’re Ginny’s sister right?” Katy’s friend Annie asked.

“Yeah,” Ronnie replied.

“Have you seen her lately?” asked Annie looking curious.

“Not since the match I don’t think,” Ronnie replied.

“Oh, okay, just hadn’t seen her in a while either, that’s all,” Annie said.

Katy beamed and took hold of Ronnie’s arm. “Hey come on, I wanna introduce you to my other friends!”

Harriet laughed watching Katy and Tory pulling Ronnie off through the crowd. She turned to head back to the food table and paused when she saw Fred and George whispering something to Colin Creevey, who shot Harriet a look. At least Harriet thought the look had been at her. She suddenly realised he was looking past her and turned to see he was looking at a very tall, pretty fifth-year girl with long blonde hair. Harriet looked back just in time to see Fred, George and Colin sneaking out of the portrait hole.

Finally, the prefects all raised their hands and called for quiet. The group quieted down only a moment before a wave of mutinous moans went up as the prefects declared it was time to start winding the party down. Harriet looked towards the portrait hole a little concerned. It was now midnight. Fred, George and Colin had been gone a half an hour. She remembered them slipping off for food last year, and it had never taken them this long. She hoped for Colin’s sake they hadn’t run into Filch.

Harriet helped pitch in with everyone else in cleaning up the remnants of the party. She was starting to worry more about the three boys. She kept stealing glances at the portrait hole, waiting for them to return.

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” Ronnie said as Harriet tried to voice her concern to Ronnie. “They probably went out to do something really big and impressive with Colin for Colin to impress you or something.”

“I don’t know…” Harriet muttered. She wasn’t sure it was her that Colin fancied anymore, but perhaps it had been something for the older girl. Harriet had to admit that whatever they had been up to, it must have been something big indeed if it was going to get a fifth-year like that to notice a first-year like Colin.

Finally, most everyone had drifted off to their dormitories for bed. Harriet and her friends stayed behind under the guise of wanting to do homework. Harriet kept glancing at the clock and biting her lip.

“Relax, Harriet, really,” Ronnie kept saying.
“I can’t,” Harriet said. “I mean… what if they ran into, you know?”

Ronnie was suddenly looking very nervous too.

“Oh goodness!’ Hermione said looking scared now as well. “You don’t think?”

At that very moment, the portrait hole was flung open, and Fred and George both toppled into the room.

“There you are!” Ronnie said running over to them.

However, between the looks of horror on Fred and George’s faces and the fact Colin wasn’t with them, Harriet knew something was very, very wrong.

“Where’s Colin?” She asked immediately as she and the others made their way over to Fred and George.

Fred and George were both trembling, and Fred clutched the front of Harriet’s robes.

“It-it was after us!”

“What was?” Kieran asked.

“Monster, something, we never saw it, but we heard it. Got separated,” George said, his teeth chattering.

“It was horrible… just saw its shadow, and we heard it, this horrible… rasping noise…” Fred added.

“Where’s Colin?” Harriet asked again more adamantly.

“I-I don’t know as I said, he got separated from us,” George said.

Harriet gritted her teeth. She darted up the stairs to her dormitory, wrenched the door open, ran to her trunk, flung it open and hauled out her invisibility cloak.

“Harriet? What are you—"

Harriet didn’t stop to see who it was who had spoken. She ran back out the door, down the steps two at a time and ran for the portrait hole.

“Harriet, what are you doing?” Marcus asked as Harriet threw the cloak around her shoulders, her body below her neck vanishing.

“I’m going to find Colin,” she declared boldly. “Where did you two see him last?” Harriet asked.

“Uh, I’d say, it was way down in the dungeons wasn’t it?” Fred asked George.

“Yeah, right when we first heard it. Right in front of the portrait of the bowl of fruit that leads to the kitchens. We told Colin to follow us, and we thought he was right behind us, but we looked back after we got to the Great Hall and he wasn’t there,” George replied.

“And you didn’t go back to look for him?” Harriet asked, hard-pressed to keep some disappointment out of her voice.

“That thing was still after us!” Fred said defensively. “It followed us up at least three floors before we finally lost it!”
“Okay, okay, well I’m going after him,” Harriet said and finally pulled the hood up over her head, making herself invisible.

Before any of the others could say anything, Harriet had pushed her way out of the portrait hole and was running as best she could down the stairs towards the lower levels. She stopped after hearing the sound of feet behind her. As it sounded nothing like the monster Fred and George had described, she stopped. It was Marcus, looking around furiously.

“Harriet, I know you’re here somewhere, I could hear your feet. You’re not running off out here alone!” Marcus hissed, looking around.

Harriet sighed and lifted up the cloak. “Okay, I’m right here, get under and let’s get moving. We have to find him!”

Marcus nodded and ducked under the cloak with her, and they kept moving down the stairs. They listened hard for any of the rasping sounds the twins said they’d heard, but they couldn’t hear anything other than their own feet and breathing. It wasn’t just a monster they had to look out for either. Filch was sure to be patrolling the halls too. What if Colin hadn’t been caught by the monster, but by Filch instead? Regardless of the trouble he’d be in for being found out of bed, Harriet was hoping that was what had happened.

Finally, they made it to the first floor of the dungeons. It was even eerier in the barely-lit darkness.

“Left or right?” Harriet asked, chewing her lip. Fred and George hadn’t said what direction the portrait was, and Harriet never came down here if she could help it, except for Potions.

Marcus looked back and forth before pointing down the left. “Well, that way leads to Potions, and I’ve never seen a portrait like what Fred and George described down that way.”

“Good point,” Harriet said and looked down the right hallway. “Try that way?”

“Might as well,” Marcus said.

Harriet took another deep breath, and they started off down the corridor. Despite the candle brackets lining the wall, it was very dark this far down and this late at night.

“Should we risk lighting our wands?” Harriet asked.

Marcus nodded. He and Harriet drew their wands, and both muttered “Lumos.” The tips of their wands lit and shone beams of light down the corridor. Almost at once, the beams fell open what looked like a crouched figure in the distance, just out of the wand light. It seemed to turn and look at them before it rose and darted down the corridor away from them.

“Hey, wait!” Harriet called.

“Stop!” Marcus yelled.

They both started off after the figure but stopped after only a few strides as their wand lights fell on something lying on the floor where the figure had been stooping. Even at a distance, Harriet could tell it was a body.

What was worse, after only a few more strides, Harriet could already tell who it was. The figure was lying on its back, and at first, it had looked to be holding its hands in the air, but a glint of shiny black revealed the hands to be holding a camera. Harriet felt her heart sink at the realisation it was Colin.
“Colin,” Harriet said as she whipped the cloak off of herself and knelt at the boy’s side. Marcus pulled it off as well and got down on one knee beside her. Harriet nervously put a hand to his forehead. He was cold to the touch. Did that mean he was dead? Harriet hadn’t felt Mrs Norris, so she didn’t know what all the symptoms of being Petrified were. He certainly did feel solid, which was what Harriet guessed someone petrified would feel like. Harriet couldn’t even get his skin to budge.

“Oh, Colin…” Harriet sniffed, feeling herself becoming overwhelmed a little with emotion.

“We should find a teacher,” Marcus said anxiously. “We have to get help.”

“Yes, that is an excellent idea,” said one of the angriest voices Harriet had ever heard behind her.

She and Marcus jumped to their feet and spun to find themselves almost face to face with the looming form of Professor McGonagall.

“What the devil are you two doing all the way down here at this time of ni—”

Professor McGonagall trailed off, and even in the dim light, Harriet could see her face drain of blood. She had seen Colin.

Professor McGonagall swept past them, kneeling over Colin’s form.

“P-Petrified!” Professor McGonagall gasped, putting a hand over her mouth. “Oh little Colin, how long ago was he missing, Potter?”

Harriet felt quite taken aback by the question. It was not what she was expecting.

“Oh, a half-hour to an hour, I’d say?” Harriet replied nervously.

Professor McGonagall sighed. “Far too long, alright, Van Der Lakk, you take his head. We must get him to the Hospital Wing, and summon the Headmaster.”

Chapter End Notes

Chris Jerome, Kieran O’Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, and Scott McIntyre are property of night-miner(dA)

Katy Tyler, Annie Gilberts, Tori Hoffman, and Rachel Kane are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

AJ and Rayne Prismere are property of Hasbro

All others property of J.K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
The Petrification of Colin Creevey

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“In times of a troubled mind I often find a simple hot tea, jasmine, in particular, is the best cure. However, nothing will speak to a troubled soul more soothingly than the simple power of music.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Professor McGonagall drew her wand and pointed it down the hall. Harriet squinted as a blinding flash of white light filled the corridor. She blinked and just got her vision back in time to see a streak of pearly-white light shoot off down the hall and disappear up the stairs.

“Right, that’s the Headmaster notified, he should meet us at the hospital wing,” Professor McGonagall said as she moved to Colin’s feet.

Marcus solemnly stood at Colin’s head and knelt, taking hold of Colin’s shoulders while Professor McGonagall took Colin’s feet. They lifted as one and Harriet fell in line behind them.

A couple of thoughts occurred to Harriet as they strode along. The first thought was how she didn’t think she had ever been a part of a stranger group. Tall Professor McGonagall leading the way with Marcus following and the mannequin-like form of Colin Creevey stretched out between them.

The second thought was that Harriet didn’t think she and Marcus could be in more trouble than they were right at that moment. While Professor McGonagall had not seemed as though she thought they were guilty, the fact remained Harriet and Marcus had just been found at the scene of an attack with no one else around. And this time it had been a fellow student who had been attacked.

Would Professor McGonagall, and more importantly, Professor Dumbledore, believe that Harriet and Marcus had not been the perpetrators? And what about poor Colin, how long would he be petrified? It looked as though he had tried to take a picture of the monster. Maybe if he got a picture of whatever or whoever it was, that would prove Harriet and Marcus had not done it.

Harriet felt a hollow feeling grow in her stomach as they neared the hospital wing. She shouldn’t be so worried about herself like this when poor had been petrified. She should be worrying about what was going to become of him. What if they couldn’t cure him? What if something went wrong with the potion? What if he wasn’t merely petrified, but was dead?

They finally reached the hospital wing. Harriet swallowed as they stepped inside. Professor Dumbledore was not there yet.

Professor McGonagall led Marcus over to an empty bed oh which they laid Colin.

“Stay right here, both of you; I’m going to fetch Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori,” Professor McGonagall said, sternly as she bustled off to the back of the room.

Harriet and Marcus looked at each other. What was going to become of them now? Professor Dumbledore had insisted there was no way Harriet or any of her friends could have petrified Mrs Norris. Would he still believe that now Colin had been attacked and once more Harriet and one of her friends had been found at the scene?
Harriet was distracted by the sound of a moan from a nearby bed. She looked over to see Draco Malfoy. He looked asleep but restless, his arm was still in a sling, and his forehead was glistening with sweat. There was a large bottle of something titled *Skele-Gro* on the bedside table.

Despite the apparent trouble she was in, Harriet couldn’t help but ponder Malfoy. Something about what had happened in the match just did not sit right. How had Malfoy hit that Bludger? If Malfoy had been heading after the Snitch, he should have collided with Harriet instead. Had Malfoy chickened out and dodged, and that was how he hit the Bludger? Or had he done something else?

Harriet was distracted from thinking about Malfoy further as the doors of the hospital wing swung open once more. Professor Dumbledore had finally arrived. To Harriet’s surprise, he was not alone. Professor Snape was following close behind. Both of their faces were unreadable as they swept past Harriet and Marcus without a word, heading straight for Colin’s bed.

Harriet looked after Professor Snape with much confusion. Why was he here? Colin was a Gryffindor, not a Slytherin.

Professor McGonagall returned from the back of the hospital wing with Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori in tow. They were both wearing their night-gowns and pulling on robes and cardigans as they approached.

Professor Snape was bent low over Colin, scrutinising him with Professor Dumbledore looking over his shoulder. Harriet was beginning to feel more and more overwhelmed. What on earth was going on?


Harriet felt, even more, surprise at Snape’s pronouncement. Not at what he said, but how he said it. It was a widely known fact that Professor Snape and Gryffindor students did not get on, but the tone of Professor Snape’s voice had been relief.

“Just like Mrs Norris and the others before,” Professor Dumbledore said without preamble as the three women approached.

Harriet furrowed her brow. *The others before…?* Did that mean the Chamber had been opened before, as the painted passage on the wall from Mrs Norris’ attack had said?

Professor Dumbledore finally turned his eyes on Harriet and Marcus as the two nurses lit oil lamps to inspect Colin properly. “It was you two who found him, was it not?”

Harriet and Marcus looked at each other before looking back up at Professor Dumbledore and nodding.

“Where did you find him?” Professor Dumbledore asked.

Harriet swallowed. “I-in the first floor of the dungeons, sir, in front of the large portrait of a fruit bowl…”

Professor Dumbledore’s eyes bore into Harriet’s. As they did, Harriet somehow felt as though she was remembering the events that happened as clearly as if she was watching it happen once more.

“He-he had snuck out during our party with some other students, I think they were trying to get more food,” Harriet said, omitting the names of Fred and George. “The others came back without him and said something was after them; they said it made a rasping noise.”
As she explained, Professor Dumbledore didn’t move. Neither did anyone else. Not even Professor Snape, who was merely contemplating Harriet.

“We ran down to find him,” Marcus said. “We… we didn’t hear any monster, but I’m sure we saw someone crouching over Colin when we found him.”

“Did you see who it was?” Professor McGonagall jumped in.

Harriet shook her head. “No, Professor, but whoever it was looked to be about my height… they were wearing a cloak; we couldn’t see their face.”

“We tried to chase after whoever it was when they ran off, but we stopped when we saw Colin,” Marcus added.

Professor Dumbledore’s eyes were still boring into Harriet. She felt as though she were made of glass as she looked back at him. Harriet also felt something else. For the first time that Harriet could remember, Professor Dumbledore looked troubled. His eyebrows were knitted and he looked as though he was thinking very hard.

Professor Dumbledore turned from them and strode back over to Colin. With surprising strength, he wrenched the camera from Colin’s petrified hands.

“You don’t think he got a picture of his attacker, do you, Albus?” Professor McGonagall asked.

Dumbledore didn’t respond, merely opened the camera’s film slot. Harriet jumped as a puff of steam burst from the compartment. Professor McGonagall, Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori all gasped audibly. Professor Snape clutched the edge of the bed, studying the camera carefully.

“Melted? But… it couldn’t be…” Professor Snape said and gave Professor Dumbledore a questioning look.

Professor Dumbledore did not respond or react to Professor Snape. He merely kept looking at the camera with grim satisfaction, as though he was right about something he had hoped he was wrong about.

“My goodness! Albus, what does this mean?” Professor McGonagall asked.

“It means the Chamber of Secrets has indeed been opened once more,” Professor Dumbledore said quietly.

“But… who could it be, Albus?” Professor McGonagall asked.

Harriet and Marcus looked at each other. Did that mean they weren’t suspects?

“Until Miss Potter and Mister Van Der Lakk’s testimonies, the question in my mind had not been who, but how. However, after their testimonies, I am forced to re-evaluate. I’m still quite sure of whom, but it needs to be expanded in scope. They have provided interesting clues, most definitely, but I definitely cannot put the entire puzzle together just yet.”

Professor McGonagall didn’t seem to understand this any better than Harriet did.

Professor Dumbledore turned to Professors Snape and McGonagall. “Severus, I shall require your counsel, and yours, Minerva.”

He then turned his eyes back to Harriet and Marcus. “Minerva, would you kindly escort young
Master Van De Lakk and Miss Potter back to their dormitories? And Severus, please fetch Professor Morrisey. I shall meet you all back at my office. I have already sent for Headmaster Howe; we shall begin our meeting once he arrives.”

Harriet blinked and looked at Marcus. Were they getting off that easily? And who were Professor Morrisey and Headmaster Howe? Her curiosity was starting to overwhelm her sense of dread completely.

“Come Potter, Van Der Lakk, I’ll take you back to Gryffindor Tower,” Professor McGonagall said.

Harriet swallowed and once more fell in behind Professor McGonagall with Marcus. They kept stealing glances at each other, but no one said a word as they walked along. Harriet was still too unsure of what was going to happen to them to talk, and she was sure Marcus felt the same way.

For the first time, Harriet was starting to feel fear. Something had happened at Hogwarts that Professor Dumbledore couldn’t solve. What could have been so horrible that Dumbledore had to write others for help?

Finally, they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. Professor McGonagall turned to look down at them. Harriet swallowed and felt her heart sink. Here it comes, she thought to herself.

“Well, as you two were clearly out of bounds after hours, I’m afraid I will be forced to take the customary fifty points each from both of you,” Professor McGonagall said.

Harriet felt her heart sink even further. They had just lost all the points Harriet had won that day. It was Norbert all over again.

“However, were it not for you two, we may never have found Colin until it was much too late. By the sounds of it his attacker had returned, and you two possibly spared him from further damage. Furthermore, you expressed the true spirit of Gryffindor by going to find him after being told something truly horrible may have happened to him. For this, I shall give you seventy-five points each.”

Harriet felt her jaw drop.

“Close your mouth, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said in a huffy tone and turned to give the Fat Lady the password that permitted them entrance to the Gryffindor common room.

As her back was turned, Harriet stole another look at Marcus. He looked just as stunned as Harriet felt.

“So… so we’re not being… ex—”

“Of course not, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said, turning back to face them. “But I must caution you in the strongest possible terms. There is something terrible going on at Hogwarts at the moment. Tread very cautiously, and go nowhere alone.”

Professor McGonagall’s eyebrows touched as she bent a glare down upon both of them. “And if I ever hear of you sneaking out this late again without coming straight to me to report such an event, I shall be most displeased…”

Harriet nodded, doing her best to look as serious as possible. Professor McGonagall seemed satisfied and stepped aside to allow Harriet and Marcus to climb through the portrait hole past her. She closed the portrait behind them with a sound snap.
“Harriet! Marcus!” Ronnie exclaimed and ran over to them from the fireplace, hugging them both tightly at the same time.

“Oh thank goodness,” Hermione said, flopping back down in her chair, looking relieved.

Harriet caught Kieran’s eye as well. He looked a little more pale than usual but smiled and exhaled deeply.

“We’re alright,” Marcus said, sounding a little awkward as Ronnie let them go.

“What happened? Did you find Colin?” Kieran asked before he grunted and used his shillelagh to get to his feet.

“We… we did…” Harriet said.

Kieran’s face drained of colour once more, and Hermione put her hands over her mouth. Apparently, Harriet’s tone had told them the story.

Ronnie’s eyes were wide. “You mean he…?”

Marcus nodded. “We found him where Fred and George said they’d lost him,” he said, making his way towards the fireplace. “He’s been petrified… just like Mrs Norris…”

“It… it looked like he’d stopped to take a picture of whatever it was…” Harriet added, emotions starting to take her over.

She heard a quiet thunk and felt Kieran’s hand gently take her upper arm, guiding her towards the seats. Harriet looked up at him as he smiled inexplicably.

“Heh, that’s just like him, isn’t it?” Kieran asked. “Had to get a picture of everything he could with that camera.”

Harriet made a noise that was half-way between a laugh and a sob. It was true; it was such a ‘Colin’ thing for him to have done. Snap first, ask questions later.

“Did he get a picture?” Hermione asked, sounding hopeful.

Marcus shrugged. “No idea… when Dumbledore opened the camera to check the film it had all melted…”

“Melted?” Kieran asked, looking confused.

Harriet and Marcus both nodded. Hermione slumped back in her seat in thought. Harriet looked around suddenly confused.

“Where are Fred and George?” she asked, feeling a sense of anger rising in her. It was their fault Colin was out tonight, the least they could have done was stick around to make sure he was okay.

Kieran quietly guided her into one of the chairs and had her sit. As she did, she saw the twins. They were sitting in a corner by themselves, and as she took them in Harriet felt her anger ebb away as quickly as it had come. She had never seen Fred and George afraid before, and the sight of it unsettled her quite as much as everything else had that night.

The twins were sitting facing each other, resting their heads against each other’s, still breathing heavily and trying to calm down. Fred had a hand on George’s head and George a hand on Fred’s shoulder. They looked merely happy to be alive.
“Yeah, I think they feel bad enough,” Ronnie said in an uncharacteristically sympathetic tone.

Ronnie had never really got one well with Fred and George, but she supposed Ronnie realised now how close she had come to losing them.

“Well, I think… maybe… we’re not doing anyone any favours keeping ourselves up so late… maybe… maybe we should try and get some sleep?” Hermione said, without much conviction.

Harriet shrugged, but she supposed Hermione had the right idea all the same. Harriet was very tired. In fact, she was exhausted. She couldn’t remember ever being so tired before in her life.

Almost as one, they all got to their feet. Harriet, Ronnie and Hermione made their way to the girls’ dormitories while Marcus and Kieran headed off for the boys. Fred and George didn’t move. Harriet supposed they still wanted to be alone.

The three girls stepped into the bedroom quietly. The other girls were all asleep, and Harriet slowly moved over to her bed. She was so tired she only took off her jumper and jeans before sliding under her covers. She had just turned down her oil lamp and laid her head down when she heard it. It was the soft sound of a violin.

Harriet sat up in bed looking around. Where was it coming from? At first, she thought maybe it was coming from back down in the common room, but then maybe it was coming from the window? But it couldn’t be coming from the window; they were in one of the tallest towers of the castle.

“Ronnie…?” she asked quietly.

“Mn?” Ronnie muttered.

“Do… do you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Ronnie asked.

Harriet thought hard and other words she had once been told floated up to the front of her memories.

“…listen for music that no one else can hear. You'll know I'm there even if you can't see me. I'll always be there to watch you and make sure you're safe.”

“Nothing,” she answered though by the sound of it Ronnie had already fallen fast asleep.

Harriet smiled to herself and lay back down. The music she heard was soft and sweet. She did feel safe hearing it, like a musical guardian angel of sorts. She closed her eyes, and despite all her worries and fears and everything that had happened that day, Harriet finally fell fast asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Mai Momori, Kieran O'Brien and Marcus Van De Lakk property of night-miner(dA)

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“It is best to approach every situation with an open mind. Especially in times of great uncertainty. Consider all new people you meet as possible friends, as well as possible enemies. I know the typical interpretation of an open mind is a positive mind, but open means consideration of all possibilities and one should always act accordingly.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet was so tired she didn’t wake up until well past noon the next day. At first, she wasn’t entirely sure why she was so tired when the memories of the previous day all came flooding back to her. She hoped it had been a nightmare, but she knew it wasn’t.

Harriet sat up and looked around. She was alone in the dormitory. Harriet swung her legs out of her bed and dressed wearily before making her way down to the common room. Unusually, the common room was crammed full of people who were all talking in subdued voices. Harriet looked around but didn’t see any of her friends.

Everyone in the room looked anxious, especially all the first-years that she could see. Harriet was sure that news of Colin’s attack had spread through the whole school by now. Nothing at Hogwarts stayed secret for very long.


Harriet turned and saw Kieran waving at her from behind a crowd near the portrait hole. She made her way over; ignoring the looks, she was getting from other students. She got to Kieran and discovered he’d been sitting alone.

“Hey, where’s everyone else?” Harriet asked.

“Hermione and Dora are working on the Potion; Scott, Marcus and Ronnie are at lunch,” Kieran answered simply as he beckoned for her to follow him.

“Why aren’t they all working on it?” Harriet asked as they climbed out into the silence of the hall.

“Well, we were going to, but… well… the simplest answer is we can’t all fit in the cubicle to work on it. Then we also figured it might be a little obvious if the whole lot of us are going in and out of there all the time,” Kieran explained.

Harriet nodded thoughtfully. “Good point,” she said impressed.

Kieran smiled.

“So why didn’t anyone wake me up?” Harriet asked. She felt a little snubbed at having not been involved in any of these latest plans and developments.

Kieran laughed. “Ronnie and Hermione said they’d tried, but you were so tired you just growled at them.”
Harriet blushed but laughed. “Yeah, yeah I guess I was pretty tired.”

Kieran chuckled, and a few minutes later they found themselves at the entrance to the Great Hall. The mood in the Great Hall seemed to reflect the mood Harriet had seen in the Gryffindor common room. There was very little laughter, just quiet muttering and whispers. Harriet felt many eyes turn towards her and the sound of muttering grew louder still. The exception was Scott who waved merrily at them from the Ravenclaw table, drawing some raised eyebrows from other Ravenclaws around him.

Harriet felt her face flush, and she and Kieran made their way to the Gryffindor table. Ronnie and Marcus made room for her.

“Rise and shine sleepy,” Ronnie teased passing a plate of sandwiches to Harriet.

Harriet took one and bit into it without really caring what kind it was. She was too hungry and had too much on her mind. As she did, she couldn’t help but notice how many people were still looking at her and muttered.

“So, I take it the news got out that Marcus and I were the ones found with Colin too?” she asked as she chewed.

Ronnie and Marcus’ faces fell.

“Guess so, looks like Malfoy was only pretending to be asleep when we were in the hospital wing,” Marcus explained. He turned to glare over his shoulder at Malfoy, who was smirking as Pansy and Pixie fawned over him once more.

Harriet noted Malfoy’s arm was still in a sling, and though she was sure it was completely healed, and Malfoy was just milking his wound for attention, Harriet sincerely hoped it was still hurting him.

“Yeah,” Ronnie added. “He told everyone in Slytherin house about it today and well… you know Hogwarts,” Ronnie said shrugging.

Harriet sighed. It was just then she noticed something else odd. While attitudes had cooled towards the refugees in the wake of Mrs Norris’ attack, it now appeared that they were being outright rejected. At the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables, the refugees were all huddled together at one end of the table while the regular students were all down at the other. The regular students were all talking amongst themselves, but the refugee students might as well have not existed. The refugees themselves were all looking miserable and silent.

Hufflepuff wasn’t quite as bad as the others. In fact, Hufflepuff looked as though it was divided fifty-fifty among the students who did trust the refugees and those who didn’t. Half of the regular students were sitting with the refugees and talking openly with them, while the rest were clustered together and stealing suspicious glances down their table.

At the Gryffindor table, fortunately, this didn’t seem to be going on at all. Harriet supposed the Gryffindors had more sense than most of the other houses. Or more likely, as Colin was also a Gryffindor, it had prompted unity within the house, refugee or not. Either way, Harriet still had to admit that if she couldn’t hear their distinct accents, you wouldn’t know any of the refugees weren’t ordinary students.

Harriet’s latter assumption was proven right when some of the refugees at the Slytherin table got up and started to leave. A group of older Gryffindor students nearby all huddled together and murmured, watching the Slytherin refugees as they left the Great Hall. Harriet put down her glass of
pumpkin juice, feeling disgusted.

“I’m going to find Hermione and Dora,” she said and all but stormed from the Great Hall.

She didn’t bother looking back at her friends as she left; she didn’t want to see their faces and feel guilty. She just wanted to be angry. She got into the Entrance Hall and suddenly did feel a little better now she was alone. At least she thought she was alone.

“Oh, hey, um, Potter?” asked a nervous voice from behind Harriet.

Harriet turned and saw one of the Slytherin refugees who had left a few minutes before sitting alone on one of the benches. Harriet remembered her as Kenley, the older sister of one of the Gryffindor refugee first-years, Katy, who had talked about football with Ronnie.

“Oh, um, hello. It’s Kenley right?” Harriet asked.

The older girl nodded getting to her feet. “Can we talk, umm… somewhere private…?” Kenley asked.

Harriet suddenly felt unaccountably nervous. As she did, she hoped it was just the lingering animosity between Slytherin and Gryffindor at work.

“Oh, sure,” Harriet replied.

Kenley seemed a little satisfied and started leading Harriet into a corridor. Harriet looked around nervously, and in spite of herself put her hand on her wand in her pocket. Kenley stepped into an empty classroom and Harriet followed apprehensively.

Kenley lit one of the lamps and sat on a desk, looking at Harriet in a very business-like way. “So, my sister says you and your friends are looking for the Heir of Slytherin?”

Harriet was taken aback. Was nothing ever secret at Hogwarts?

“H-how did she?”

Kenley rolled her eyes. “Katy and her friends are nosey as hell. Anyway, I want to help.”

Harriet studied the older girl closely. “Well, if you want to help why are you only asking me about it?” she asked crossing her arms.

Kenley didn’t look abashed. “Because right now you’re in the same boat we are,” she replied quietly.

Harriet let her arms down. That was a fair point.

“Yes, we are, aren’t we?”

Kenley nodded. “And well, I guess, I have a little more to worry about than most,” she went on chewing her lip.

“What do you mean?” Harriet asked, confused.

Kenley sighed. “Well, it’s the Heir of Slytherin right…? Well, I’m in Slytherin, and I’m a Muggle-born.”

Harriet raised her eyebrows. A Muggle-born Slytherin, was that even possible?
“A Muggle-born?”

“Yeah,” Kenley muttered.

“Uh, does anyone else in your house know?”

Kenley laughed. “Well obviously like Court and Emily and the others that came with me know,” Kenley said. “But I don’t think so…”

Harriet nodded, noting how Kenley didn’t refer to herself or the rest as refugees. Harriet made an extra mental note to herself to stop doing so as well.

“Well, how do you think you could help?” Harriet asked.

Kenley shrugged. “Any way you need, I can just… keep my eyes and ears open for you guys? I wanna do something…”

Harriet bit her lip thinking. Hermione had just said the other day that they needed to use the new students from other houses. Here was one ready-made, and from Slytherin no less.

“Yeah, okay,” Harriet said.

Kenley’s face glowed as she smiled. “Oh thank you! Seriously! Anything you guys need let me know! And let Katy know too, seriously.”

Harriet smiled and nodded. She was starting to feel oddly clever. Whoever the heir was, they were probably working alone. Harriet and her friends, on the other hand, were forming a sort of group, more eyes and ears.

Harriet bid Kenley a good afternoon and continued on her way towards Hermione and Dora. She was just starting to get her good mood back when something else Harriet did not expect drove the good feelings from her completely.

The bathroom that they were using to brew the Polyjuice Potion in had just come into sight when Harriet heard it. A little cough from right behind her, the kind of cough someone gave when trying to get another person’s attention. Harriet froze and closed her eyes. She knew the voice that had given that cough. It belonged to a small-creature with bat-like ears, tennis-ball sized green eyes and spoke with a high, squeaky voice.

It was Dobby, the house-elf.

“You!” Harriet declared, and she spun around, pointing at the little elf, rage welling inside her once more.

It would be a long time before she forgave the elf that had tried to keep her from returning to Hogwarts and doom her to a life of misery with the Dursleys, never to see her best friends again. Dobby was peeking out of another classroom door, looking anxious and flinching under Harriet’s glare. Dobby stepped out of the room a little more, and Harriet let her arm fall a little as she noticed Dobby’s right arm was in a sling.

“What… what happened?” Harriet asked automatically.

“D-Dobby… Dobby will tell you inside, Miss…” the house-elf said in a tremulous voice. It looked as though he was in a great deal of pain.
Harriet sighed and stepped in after the elf. Dobby closed the door and looked up at Harriet, wringing the front of pillowcase clothing with his good hand, looking terrified.

“Harriet Potter…” Dobby said in a soft voice. “Why… why did you come back… after Dobby warned, and warned…?”

Harriet crossed her arms. “You know what, Dobby? I don’t care about your stupid warning.”

Dobby flinched again at Harriet’s anger. “I don’t care that there’s something dangerous going on. If you’d kept me locked away in my room while this was going on, I probably would have starved to death. Yeah, you’re doing an outstanding job keeping me safe, aren’t you?”

Dobby’s lip wobbled. “Oh, Harriet Potter… Dobby said he was sorry; Dobby is sorry still, Miss! Dobby thought he could stop Harriet Potter at the train but yet again—”

“THAT WAS YOU!?” Harriet yelled making Dobby jump and cover one of his over-large ears. “You stopped us getting on the train!? We almost got killed by the Whomping Willow thanks to you! That’s twice now you’ve nearly killed me rather than saving my life!”

Tears were beginning to flow down Dobby’s face. “And-and then… not even Dobby’s Bludg—”

“WHAT!?” Harriet thundered, not caring that someone might be walking by outside the room and hear her. “You made the Bludger try and kill me?!”

“N-not kill you, Miss, just… injured enough to go back home—”

“No, you listen here, Dobby!” Harriet went on, too incensed to put up with the elf’s excuses. “That makes three times you’ve tried to ‘save me’ that have ended up nearly costing me my life! Stop trying to save me, Dobby, please! You’re horrible at it! I’d probably be safer if you were trying to kill me!”

Finally, Dobby broke down in sobs. He sank to the floor hunching over and sobbing as best he could with only one usable hand. The sight of it was so pitiful that all her feelings she had built up since last summer melted away. Harriet sighed and sat down on the floor.

“I’m sorry…” Harriet said in a hushed voice. “I… I’ve just… there’s been so much going on… it’s… hard to handle—”

“You’re right, Harriet Potter, you’re right!” Dobby wailed. “Dobby only wanted to keep Harriet Potter safe, but Dobby has failed, Miss! And… and Harriet Potter is right… Dobby hasn’t protected Harriet Potter at all, and done much more harm than good, Miss…”

Harriet bit her lip as she watched the elf. Her eyes drifted down to his arm.

“What happened to your arm, Dobby?”

Dobby looked down at it and looked away. “Dobby… did a bad thing, Harriet Potter, a very bad thing. Dobby did something very bad to his family, Miss, and had to punish himself accordingly.”

“You broke your arm?!” Harriet gasped.

Dobby didn’t say anything. He merely kept staring at the floor.

“Oh, Dobby…” All anger Harriet had felt against the elf evaporated. She wanted to hug him, but she was sure it would hurt his arm even more.
“So… it if is alright with Harriet Potter, Miss… Dobby… Dobby would like to help Harriet Potter… in any way he can, Miss… he… he could watch over Harriet Potter… when he has time…?”

Harriet blinked. “But… won’t your family not like that?”

Dobby gave the tiniest of smiles. “What Dobby’s family doesn’t know, won’t hurt them, Miss. And they never told Dobby he couldn’t, though Dobby supposes that’s because they never suspected Dobby would, Miss…”

In spite of herself, Harriet smiled. She bid Dobby farewell, and the elf vanished in an ear-splitting crack. It was the same crack Dobby had made when he disappeared after smashing the pudding in the Dursleys’ kitchen. Any other time Harriet would have found the memory unpleasant and found herself getting angry again but somehow, as she finally made her way to the door to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom, Harriet laughed.

Harriet slowly pushed open the door and looked around. “Hermione? Dora?”

There was scuffling from the far cubicle, and the door opened a little, Dora’s tell-tale blue eye appearing in the crack.

“Oh, Harriet, it’s you,” Dora said, opening the door wider.

Harriet smiled and squeezed in. They had set the cauldron on the lid of the toilet, and by the sound of it, Marcus had conjured some waterproof flames in the bowl to heat it. Hermione and Dora were tearing up the knotgrass bundles and adding them to the cauldron.

“How’s it coming?” Harriet asked.

Hermione grimaced. “It will be slow. We’re only to the point of adding the first ingredients…”

“Well, we have to start somewhere, right?” Dora asked and shrugged.

“So, I have news…” Harriet said.

“What’s that?” Hermione asked looking up from the cauldron.

“Well, I think our list of allies is growing. I just had Kenley, from Slytherin,” Harriet said giving Dora a nod, “stop me outside the Great Hall and ask if she could help.”

Dora’s eyes went wide with excitement, but Hermione’s narrowed in thought.

“Brilliant!” Dora said. “I like Kenley!”

“But, how did she know?” Hermione asked.

Harriet shrugged. “She said her little sister, Katy, overheard us or something. She said we should talk to Katy too because she’s ‘nosey’ apparently.”

Hermione nodded, still looking like she was thinking hard.

“That’s not all though,” Harriet added. “I just ran into Dobby too.”

“What?!” both girls asked at once, looking stunned.

“Yeah, just down the hall,” Harriet said. “He… it was him who stopped Ronnie and me from getting on the train, so we had to ta—er… get to Hogwarts another way.”
Dora and Hermione both crossed their arms. Harriet knew they still wanted to know how exactly Harriet and Ronnie had got to Hogwarts without taking the train. Harriet had sworn to Professor McGonagall not to say anything, and given how important Professor McGonagall’s favour was to her at the moment, Harriet wasn’t going to betray that promise.

“And that Bludger yesterday was him too,” Harriet added.

“He sent that mad Bludger after you? Are you sure he’s trying to save you?” Dora asked, though her lip was starting to twitch as though she was trying hard not to laugh.

Harriet rolled her eyes. “Well, he apologised and promised he’s not going to try and ‘save me’ that way again… but he has promised to keep an eye out for us, too.”

“Well, he sounds sneaky enough anyway,” Hermione said. She didn’t sound very approving of Dobby yet, and not very inclined to forgive him either.

Harriet shrugged. “I figure every little bit helps.”

Dora nodded. “I agree. Though I’ll give him some extra credit for breaking Malfoy’s arm,” Dora went on; wearing her dark, mischievous grin she always wore when she imagined terrible things happening to people who annoyed her.

Harriet forced another laugh, but this time it wasn’t her discomfort at laughing at other’s misfortune that gave her pause. Instead, she felt like she had just figured something out. Dobby had said he’d done something terrible to a member of his family, and so had to break his arm. It was the same arm that Malfoy had broken when the Bludger ran into him. The very same Bludger that Dobby had sent after Harriet.

Was Dobby the Malfoy’s house-elf? Was Harriet foolish to trust the little elf? Had Malfoy ordered Dobby to send the Bludger against Harriet? If he had, had it been an accident that the Bludger hit Malfoy? Had Dobby done it on purpose?

Harriet gave her head a little shake. All the questions and developments that had occurred over the past twenty-four hours were starting to give Harriet a serious headache. Instead, she simply picked up *Moste Potente Potions* and proceeded to help Dora and Hermione prepare the ingredients for phase one.

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November passed into December in a mundane fashion, given all that had happened. There were no more attacks, and students were starting to warm to the new students once more. Kenley and Katy both insisted daily that they had not heard anything more than rumours from other students, and Harriet had seen neither hide nor tennis-ball eyes of Dobby since the day after Colin’s attack.

The only change Harriet noted was the sort of black-market trade that sprang up throughout the school in the wake of the attack. It was comprised of magical amulets and other items that all promised to protect their owners. As a sign of the hysteria, even pure-bloods such as Neville Longbottom were buying them.

After finding him in possession of a pungent green onion, an amethyst crystal, and a rotted newt tail, Kieran tried to reason with Neville that as a pure-blood he was the least likely to be attacked. However, Neville quietly retorted how the first attack had been Filch’s cat, and Neville himself was almost a squib, and stormed off, clutching his newly bought defences.
Fortunately, the Polyjuice Potion was coming along well. All they needed now was the bicorn horn and the boomslang skin. This was the part of the plan that Harriet was the most nervous about, as it meant they had to break into Professor Snape’s private potions stores. They had initially come up with a plan of creating a diversion during a Potions lesson to enable one of them to sneak into Snape’s stores and steal the ingredients that way.

Fortunately, that part of the plan didn’t happen. The day before they were to carry out the diversion, Scott had a moment of clarity and pointed out that Harriet had an invisibility cloak. This meant all they had to do was wait until Professor Snape was out of the room, sneak back into the classroom and steal what they needed. And so after watching for Professor Snape to leave the room after the next Potions lesson, Harriet simply threw on her invisibility cloak that she’d kept hidden in her bag, waited for Professor Snape to leave, snuck into the room, and took the remaining ingredients they needed.

It was yet another moment in carrying out their plan that made Harriet feel both relieved that nothing had gone wrong, and even more nervous that something was about to go wrong. Harriet took it as a mark of how much faith Professor Snape put in the amount of fear he instilled in all students at Hogwarts that his private stores were not locked.

Hermione was quite pleased. “Well, now that we have these,” She said adding the two ingredients to the potion, “it should be ready in two weeks’ time.”

“About time, too,” Ronnie said. “I still can’t believe Malfoy targeted Colin… what had Colin ever done to him? Well okay, he took pictures of Malfoy after he broke his arm but…”

Harriet shrugged. They’d had this discussion several times before, and it had never produced an answer. Harriet was sure that the fact it was Colin who had been attacked had merely been a coincidence. It could have just as easily been Fred or George that had been petrified instead. How was Draco supposed to know that Colin had snuck into the kitchens that night?

There was also the fact that Draco was in the hospital wing at the time of the attack, but Hermione found that alibi shaky at best. Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori had both been asleep when Professor McGonagall, Marcus, Harriet and Colin arrived in the hospital wing. Malfoy could have easily snuck out to perform an attack and picked Colin after discovering him roaming about. At that, Harriet had to admit she had a point.

As the Christmas holidays neared, a distinct air of excitement began to fill the school. However, it wasn’t the same excitement that had filled the school before Christmas the previous year. Instead, it was an anxious desire to leave.

Almost every single student signed up to take the Hogwarts Express home for the Christmas Holidays. The main exceptions to that, of course, were the new American students. Harriet did overhear some saying that they would be going to stay with their surviving families in Hogsmeade, but by and large, most of them would be remaining at Hogwarts.

Outside of that, the only Gryffindors that would be staying were Harriet, Kieran, Hermione, and all of the Weasleys except Ginny. Marcus was going home because he didn’t want his father to spend Christmas alone, and none of them held that against him.

Ginny, on the other hand, was heading back to the Burrow to go to Egypt with Mr and Mrs Weasley. Percy had written to their parents to tell them how Ginny had been looking so off-colour this year, and that sun and warm weather might do her some good. It was one of the odd moments when whatever issues Harriet and the others had with Percy over his little power-trip earlier in the year; he did seem to be genuinely worried about Ginny.
Aside from the refugees, Scott was to be the only Ravenclaw staying behind. Harriet had been sure Dora would be the only Slytherin, but they were all surprised at their stroke of luck. Not only was Draco staying behind for the Christmas holidays along with his cronies Crabbe and Goyle, but Pansy Parkinson and Pixie Fanfarró were remaining behind as well, as was a first-year, Wendy Aarons. According to Dora, the Aarons were old family friends of the Parkinsons and the Fanfarrós, and Wendy seemed to be in the same mould as both Pansy and Pixie.

With all these factors adding up, Harriet almost couldn’t believe their luck. The holidays would be the most opportune time to carry out the final stage of their plan. They had been only going to use the potion to imitate Crabbe and Goyle, but they had now decided to copy Wendy as well. This way they could also investigate Pansy and Pixie. They didn’t think either Pixie or Pansy was the Heir of Slytherin, but they were undoubtedly nasty enough to support whoever it was, and they very close to Malfoy too.

However, just before the end of the term, something happened that finally distracted Harriet from the subject of Draco, the Heir, and the Polyjuice Potion. It happened as they were passing the bulletin board in the Gryffindor common room.

“Hey look,” Marcus said pointing it out as they made their way down to breakfast. “Duelling lessons.”

“Duelling lessons?” Hermione asked, going on tip-toe to try and read over the heads of the crowd that had gathered.

“Looks like it. The first lesson’s tonight,” Kieran said.

“That’d be fascinating,” Hermione said. “And could be very useful for the future, it might help us get ahead in Defence against the Dark Arts.”

And so, at eight-o-clock, Harriet and her friends waited around in the Entrance Hall while the Great Hall was being set up for the lesson. Finally, the doors opened and the waiting students filed inside. The house tables had all been cleared away, and in their place was a large, golden stage.

“Does anyone know who’s running this?” Dean Thomas asked, looking around with interest.

Harriet shrugged, and Hermione piped up. “Well, I heard that Professor Flitwick was a duelling champion, maybe it’ll be—”

Hermione was cut off when a collective groan swept over the group as Professor Lockhart bounded up onto the stage and spread his arms wide in welcome.

“Hello there! Gather round everyone! Can you all hear me? Can everyone see? Marvelous! Now, given the events that have happened in recent weeks, I’ve obtained permission from Professor Dumbledore to train you all in proper duelling in case you ever need to defend yourselves. I am, after all, Defence Against the Dark Arts professor!”

Professor Lockhart waited for a laugh that never really materialised.

“Now, let me introduce my assistant for tonight, Professor Snape!” Professor Lockhart gave a toothy smile as Professor Snape also stepped onto the stage. “Now, Professor Snape here tells me he knows a little thing or two about duelling, but don’t worry all you Potions lovers, I promise to leave him in one piece.”

Professor Snape was getting the same sneering look he got whenever he was about to give out a particularly nasty punishment. The sort of look that gave Harriet chills. In fact, Harriet was
wondering how Lockhart could look so cheerful. The look Professor Snape was giving him now was the same look a lion would give a wounded gazelle.

“Who do you wanna win? Lockhart or Snape?” Seamus asked.

“Can’t we want them both to lose?” Ronnie asked, triggering widespread sniggering amongst the Gryffindors.

“The first step to any proper duel,” Professor Lockhart went on. “Is to bow to your opponent.”

Lockhart turned and bowed deeply to Professor Snape. Professor Snape didn’t return the bow. Instead, he just gave a curt nod of his head. They then brandished their wands the way Harriet had seen fencers on television prepare to duel.

“And now that we have our wands in the standard position for combat, on the count of three we will cast our spells. Neither of us will be aiming to hurt or kill of course,” Lockhart went on.

Given the look in Professor Snape’s eye, Harriet sincerely doubted that.

Lockhart gave the countdown, but the moment he had even twitched, Professor Snape pointed his wand and cried, “Expelliarmus!”

A jet of bright red light shot from Professor Snape’s wand, hitting Lockhart square in the chest and lobbing him backwards into the wall. Lockhart’s wand flew from his hand and hurtled towards Professor Snape who caught it deftly.

The Slytherins, in particular, cheered though Harriet did notice quite a few Ravenclaws joined in as well. From talking to Scott, Harriet had gathered that most of Ravenclaw house found Lockhart to be a joke, and so she was sure their reaction had a lot less to do with Professor Snape winning than Lockhart losing. Hermione, however, was bouncing on the balls of her feet, her hands over her mouth and looking anxious.

Lockhart finally got to his feet and looked distinctly winded. “Uh-g-good spell to show them, Professor Snape. That was the “Disarming Charm,” useful little spell. As you see, I’ve been properly disarmed—”

He held out a hand to Professor Snape who looked as though he’d rather the wand into Lockhart’s ear than hand it back, but he returned it anyway.

“—though if you don’t mind my saying so, it was the most obvious spell to use and I could have blocked it quite easily. However, I thought the students would appreciate it better if they saw the actual effects.”

Professor Snape’s knuckles went white on his wand, and his face looked as though it had turned to stone. It seemed Professor Lockhart had finally realised the danger he was in because he cleared his throat and declared it was time for the students to pair up and try the Disarming Charm on their own.

Harriet paired up with Ronnie and Marcus with Kieran. Scott and Dora made their way over, and Scott paired up with Hermione while Dora ended up pairing with Dean and looking disappointed for some reason.

“Everyone paired up? Wonderful! Now, everyone face their partners and bow.”

Harriet and Ronnie bowed to each other and tried as best they could to imitate the stance Professor Snape had adopted, as they were sure Lockhart’s had been wrong. Remembering vividly the effect
Professor Snape’s spell had on Lockhart, Harriet admitted to herself that she was a little nervous. She didn’t want to hurt Ronnie if she cast her spell right. She also didn’t want to be hurt in return.

“Now, when I count to three, everyone attempt to disarm your opponent. Only disarm! Now, on the count of three then everyone! One! Two!”

Before Lockhart could say “Three!” there was a flash of light and a shout of pain from nearby that made everyone look around. Harriet gaped as she saw Kieran sprawled out on the floor, clutching his bad leg, a look of agony on his face. Most of the Gryffindors rushed over to him. Marcus and Scott managed to get one of Kieran’s arms over his shoulders and pulled him over to the stage, sitting him up on the steps.

“What happened?” Harriet asked, putting her hands on Kieran’s cheeks, trying to see if he was okay.

“Hit by a—” Kieran started to explain, but he winced and doubled over, grabbing his leg.

Harriet didn’t know what to think. She had never seen Kieran this hurt or rattled before. He would often look serious if something bad were happening, but he never let the pain show like this.

“Sorry O’Brien, guess I got a bit excited and missed,” called a deep, slow voice from the nearby group of Slytherins.

It was Crabbe, who was looking almost triumphant as he smirked at Kieran. Quite a few Slytherins were laughing, and Draco was patting Crabbe on his broad shoulder. Marcus took a step towards Crabbe, reaching for his wand but Kieran grabbed the back of Marcus’ robes, stopping him and shaking his head.

A few feet away, Harriet could hear the third year, Cormac McClaggen, who had offered to deal with Slytherins for Harriet and Marcus after the last Quidditch match growling. “That little… I’ll—”

“Easy mate… we can deal with him in time, but not in front of Snape,” the other boy, Chris Jerome said with a nod to Professor Snape.

Professor Snape was looking down at the crowd. He was almost unmoving, except for his eyes which were darting back and forth between Kieran and Crabbe.

“Hee, that were convenient wadn’t it?” asked an angry, cynical voice from amongst the Slytherins. “Of all the people for yer spell to just happen to hit it was him, eh? And it would just happen to hit that leg?”

The first-year, black-haired Slytherin boy who Harriet recognised as Cian Whelan, stepped from the crowd. Crabbe and Goyle both cracked their knuckles as they usually did when they wanted to look threatening, but Cian didn’t back down as the tall figure of Ardghal Coghlan stepped up behind him. Though he was a bit lanky, his height did seem to give Crabbe and Goyle a little pause.

Professor Snape meanwhile seemed to have decided how to handle the situation. “You want to be more careful with your aim, Crabbe… I’m embarrassed to see a Slytherin miss like that,” was all he said before turning away and striding back to the middle of the stage.

The Gryffindors all glared at Professor Snape. Harriet wanted to throw something at the back of his head. While he mostly ignored her, the way Professor Snape treated her friends was starting to anger her more and more.

“Well, uh, maybe we should try this again, maybe with, er, different partners,” Lockhart suggested. “Professor Snape and I shall move amongst you and split you all up.”
This time, Professor Lockhart paired Harriet up with AJ. Over on the Slytherin end, Professor Snape had paired Crabbe and Goyle up with Cian and Ardghal. Harriet wasn’t sure that was the best idea. All four of the boys looked ready to kill their opponents.

Professor Lockhart climbed back on the stage and once more gave the count to three. What followed next was utter chaos. Spells shot everywhere, and hardly anyone hit their partner. Harriet and AJ ended up laughing as their own disarming charms hit each other at the same time and their wands both leapt from their hands.

Professor Lockhart called for a halt, and Harriet looked around. She laughed to see Goyle looking stricken as his feet did a little jig against his will. Crabbe meanwhile was doubled over on the floor clutching his stomach and looked as though he was having difficulty breathing.

“Finite Incantatem!” Professor Snape cried.

At once, Goyle stopped dancing, and Crabbe slowly got to his feet. Professor Snape was looking furious that he was in a situation where two little upstarts had shown up some of his prized students, but as they were also Slytherins, he apparently didn’t want to punish them.

“Goodness!” Professor Lockhart said as he helped some other students to their feet. “Perhaps the next lesson should be how to block unfriendly spells!”

Professor Lockhart bounded up onto the stage and drew his wand again. However, he took one look at Professor Snape who had regained his bestial, hungry look and cleared his throat.

“Uh maybe with some volunteer pairs?” he suggested looking around. “How about… Ahh! How about Longbottom and Finch-Fletchley here?”

“I would advise against that, Lockhart,” Professor Snape said. “Longbottom is dangerous enough trying to walk, let alone cast a spell.”

Again Harriet’s insides burned. She didn’t know who she should be madder at, Professor Snape, or Crabbe. She looked back at Kieran who was still grimacing in pain and decided on Crabbe. Kieran finally got to his feet with the help of Marcus and Scott, leaning hard on his shillelagh.

“Oh, how about Malfoy and O’Brien? Since O’Brien is already right here?” Professor Snape suggested; his lip still curled.

The Gryffindors once again looked furious, but Kieran just turned and took a deep breath before he made his ways as best he could up the stairs.

“That’s a good sport there, O’Brien, can’t let a little sore leg slow us down, eh?” Lockhart said putting a hand on Kieran’s shoulder.

Kieran merely grunted. Professor Lockhart attempted to demonstrate how to block a spell, but Harriet found it rather silly. Not just because Lockhart dropped his wand, but because Kieran had proved on their very first night at Hogwarts that he already knew how to perform a shield charm.

Professor Snape meanwhile was sneering and whispering something in Draco’s ear. The fact Draco sneered as well did not make Harriet feel any better. She was starting to regret their decision to join in this fiasco.

Finally, Professor Snape and Lockhart stepped back. Kieran and Malfoy both gave little jerking motions that resembled bows and raised their wands.
Lockhart smiled broadly. “One! Two! Three!”

Kieran cast his shield charm, but Draco instead cried, “Serpensortia!”

Harriet gasped as instead of light, a towering, black snake shot from the end of Draco’s wand. It bounced off Kieran’s shield charm and hissed angrily, spitting, its fangs bared. It was at that moment that Harriet felt her mouth fall open even more as she heard a voice over all the other gasps and exclamations going on around her.

“Where am I? What did I hit? What are all these monsters?!”

To Harriet’s horror, she realised it was the snake. She was hearing the snake talking. Only once before, Harriet had heard a snake speak. At least, she thought she had heard it speak. It had been during her cousin Dudley’s eleventh birthday party. She had accidentally released a boa constrictor that had chased her cousin and his best friend, Piers Polkiss. As the snake left, Harriet could have sworn she had heard the snake thank her. But this was more than just a breathy hissing; this was real speech.

“Allow me, O’Brien,” Professor Snape said, raising his wand at the snake.

The snake spun to face Professor Snape, baring its fangs. “Get back,” the snake hissed angrily “Get back, or I’ll bite!”

“No, allow me!” Professor Lockhart said and aimed his wand at the snake as well.

A loud bang noise rang out, and the snake flew straight up in the air and landed hard on the stage.

“Ow!” Harriet heard the snake hiss, and it spun around more, thoroughly enraged. “In danger, under attack, strike, save myself, fight back!”

Harriet shouted out as the snake turned and seemed to focus on Justin Finch-Fletchley. Harriet didn’t know what made her do it. Before she knew what was happening, she had propelled herself forward and shoved Justin hard out of the way. Before the snake could strike Harriet yelled as loud as she could, “STOP!”

The snake stopped. The entire room stopped. Not a single person moved as Harriet looked the snake face to face. Harriet swallowed.

“Don’t hurt anyone here,” she said to the snake. She didn’t know why she was talking to it; snakes weren’t supposed to understand people. And yet…

“They hurt me. So many monsters. I’m scared.”

Harriet stared in wonder. The voice could only be coming from the snake, but its lips weren’t moving. Harriet couldn’t read anything in the snake’s blank, expressionless face.

“I… I know you’re scared,” Harriet said. “They didn’t mean to hurt you; they’re scared too.” She went on, trying to calm the snake.

It seemed to be working. The snake dropped its aggressive posture and just curled up, its tongue flicking in and out.

“That’s right,” Harriet said. “You’re safe; I won’t let them hurt—”

But before Harriet could finish, a jet of white light hit the snake. It gave off a scream of agony and
vanished in a puff of black smoke. Harriet gaped and turned to see Professor Snape standing a few feet away; his wand pointed at the spot the snake had been. However, his eyes were locked on Harriet instead.

Suddenly, Harriet felt her rage spill over her.

“What did you do that for!?” She shouted at Professor Snape, not caring that he was a teacher. “He was just scared! He was hurt and alone and afraid! He didn’t want to hurt anybody! He was just scared!”

Professor Snape did not say a word. Nor did anyone else in the room. Someone was tugging on Harriet’s arm. It was Ronnie, and her eyes were wide.

“C-come on…” Ronnie pleaded.

Hermione had taken Harriet’s other arm, and Harriet finally let them pull her from the Great Hall. Marcus and Dora followed while Scott tried to help a still hurting Kieran down from the stage. Cian and Ardghal both hurried over, assisting Kieran down the stairs too. Harriet bit her lip; she shouldn’t be leaving; she should be trying to help Kieran also. However, neither Ronnie nor Hermione lessened their grip on Harriet’s arm as they pulled her towards the entrance hall.

The crowd parted quickly to let them all pass. Half the faces looked awestruck, while the rest were looking at her as though she was diseased. Harriet felt her anger bubbling up again. So much had happened in the last month since Colin’s attack. She was tired, confused, and angry.

Hermione and Ronnie steered Harriet into the first empty classroom they came to. Dora and Marcus slipped inside behind them, and they shut the door. Ronnie and Dora were looking quite stricken, Hermione anxious and Marcus confused.

“What’s going on?” Marcus asked looking around.

“Harriet… why didn’t you tell us?” Ronnie asked, breathing rapidly.

“Tell you what?” Harriet snapped. “What’s wrong with everyone?!”

“Harriet, you’re a Parselmouth!”

Harriet blinked. “I’m a… what’s a Parselmouth?”

“You can talk to snakes,” Dora added. However, unlike Ronnie, Dora’s face was showing more wonder than fear.

“I, well, I guess I can… I think I did it once before, but I’m not sure, it was just a fleeting thing…”

“This is bad… oh, this is so very bad,” Ronnie said, slumping into a chair and running a hand through her hair in thought.

“What’s bad? I stopped the snake from attacking Justin! What’s bad about that!?”

“We know, Harriet!” Hermione said in a calming tone. “Harriet, please relax and just listen.”

Harriet took a deep breath.

“Harriet, you spoke Parseltongue, snake-language, in front of almost the entire school!” Ronnie said, looking more serious than Harriet had ever seen her look before.
“I… what?” Harriet asked. “I spoke another language?”

Everyone nodded.

“And that’s… that’s bad…” Ronnie said.

“Why? What’s bad about talking to snakes?”

“Because talking to snakes is a very rare gift,” Hermione said in a tiny voice. “The only family line ever known to be able to talk to snakes…” Hermione took a deep breath and continued. “Was Salazar Slytherin’s.”

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O'Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, Scott McIntyre, Cian Whelan and Ardghal Coghlan property of night-miner(dA)

Kenley Tyler property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

Pixie Fanfarró and Adele Jackson property of Hasboro

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
The Third Attack

Harriet felt her whole world go reeling. Hermione might as well have pulled the rug out from under her feet. She shivered and sat down in one of the chairs.

“I… I have an ability that only Slytherin’s family had?” she asked, not wanting to believe it.

Dora nodded. “In fact, Salazar Slytherin himself was called ‘Serpent-Tongue;’ that’s why our house animal is a snake.”

Harriet shivered once more. It wasn’t possible; it just wasn’t possible. How could she be a descendant of Salazar Slytherin? She was a Gryffindor, wasn’t she? Professor McGonagall had praised her for showing true Gryffindor spirit in going after Colin, hadn’t she?

“But… I can’t be… I just can’t be…” Harriet muttered.

“That’s going to be hard to prove,” Hermione said matter-of-factly, sitting in the seat beside Harriet and putting an arm around her shoulders.

While Harriet had mostly felt anger over the past month, it was starting to turn into despair. She felt tears welling up, and she sniffed as Dora sat in the seat on the other side of her and awkwardly put an arm around Harriet’s shoulders too. Harriet didn’t know why, but she leaned over and rested her head on Dora’s shoulder, sighing. Dora seemed to tense up but didn’t protest.

Harriet gave a short laugh of disgust. “Well, maybe now that I’ve proven myself to be related to Slytherin everyone will leave the refugees alone.”

Dora and Hermione both squeezed her shoulders tighter. Harriet sniffed again. Something Harriet had never been sure about finally made sense to her. This was why the Sorting Hat had wanted to put her in Slytherin last year. It probably would have done if she hadn’t insisted so hard on Gryffindor. In spite of herself, Harriet gave another little laugh of relief for her stubbornness.

She dabbed her eyes. What if she was the heir? But if she was, then who was opening the Chamber? Harriet knew it couldn’t be her; she was sure she’d remember setting some dirty great monster on Colin and Mrs Norris. And she had been talking with people when both attacks had taken place.

“So, if I am a descendant of Slytherin then who’s opening the Chamber?” she asked not lifting her head.

“I don’t know,” Marcus replied. “But we know there’s no way you could have attacked Colin or Mrs Norris.”

“Plus, after a thousand years it’s pretty unlikely you’d be the only descendant of Salazar Slytherin. Not saying that you are of course,” Hermione reasoned. “I mean if that were the case, Slytherin
could only have had one child, who then would have only had one child… over a thousand years
that’s—”

“Yeah, unlikely. I mean not saying that you are…” Ronnie added. “But it doesn’t automatically
mean you are Slytherin’s heir.”

“Well, you could be one of them,” Dora said matter-of-factly.

“Dora, not helping,” Hermione hissed sharply.

“Right,” Dora said quickly. “Sorry.”

“And besides, you remember what Professor Binns said?” Hermione asked. “Being related to
Slytherin wouldn’t make you some secret dark wizard. It’s just how people twisted his thoughts over
the years. It’s… it’s kind of like the native’s and AJ’s family isn’t it?”

Harriet sat up again. She didn’t know what to feel anymore, aside from the fact she didn’t want to
think about the Heir or the Chamber or Salazar Slytherin or any of it anymore. She just wanted to go
back to the start of the year, when everyone was happy, there was laughter in the halls, and the
biggest worry was what stupid thing Lockhart was going to do next.

“I want to go see Kieran,” Harriet said wiping her eyes and standing up.

“Good idea,” Ronnie said. She crossed over and hooked her arm in Harriet’s and started walking her
towards the door. The rest followed.

Harriet felt like her legs were moving on auto-pilot. Ronnie steered her down the halls and up
stairways until they finally arrived at the hospital wing. Marcus opened the door, and they stepped
inside.

Kieran was already in bed with Scott, Ardghal, and Cian sitting around him. The boys all smiled in
greeting.

“Well there you lot are,” Kieran said beaming.

“Y-yeah, sorry about that…” Harriet said sheepishly.

Harriet blushed but smiled as Cian, Ardghal and Scott all got to their feet. Cian held out his hand in
introduction. Harriet, Marcus, Ronnie and Hermione all introduced themselves to the boys. Harriet
muttered a quiet thank you as Cian offered her his chair. Harriet accepted as Ardghal offered his to
Dora and Scott offered his to Hermione. Marcus hurried over and brought another chair over for
Ronnie.

“Anyway,” Harriet went on, “Sorry, really, we were just… well…”

“Harriet, it’s okay I understand,” Kieran said.

Harriet nodded. “How’s your leg?”

“Oh, fine enough,” Kieran replied. “Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori have done me up a right
treat. I can hardly feel it now, but they’re keeping me under observation for the night just in case,” he
went on.

“Well that’s good,” Hermione said.

Harriet still felt ashamed. “Really, sorry again, we should have stayed to help but—”
“Harriet,” Kieran said cutting her off. “it’s fine.”

“Yeah, pretty understandable you’d want to get out of there after that,” Ardghal said.

“Not every day someone figures out they’re a Parselmouth, after all,” Scott added.

“How do you know I only just figured it out?” Harriet asked, perplexed.

“Well, you’re terrible at keeping secrets for one,” Dora said, trying not to laugh.

“And the look on your face afterwards,” Cian said with a cheeky grin. “You just got done speaking Parseltongue, probably the rarest gift in the magical world and you’re just looking around at everyone like ‘what’?”

Harriet blushed and rolled her eyes. “Oh leave me alone,” she muttered. “I didn’t even know I was speaking another language until you guys told me.”

“Still,” Kieran said. “It’s alright, Harriet, it’s a rare ability but—”

“Kinda cool,” Dora butted in, grinning.

Harriet blushed brighter.

“So, you two are first years, right?” Ronnie asked Cian and Ardghal.

“What?” Ardghal asked. “Oh, yeah, why do you ask?”

“Just wanna know how you knew those jinxes already, the ones you used on Crabbe and Goyle,” Ronnie said shrugging. “I sure didn’t know those jinxes when I was a first-year.”

Cian smiled. “Well, Ardghal’s family goes way back…”

“Aye, and my folks were a bit afraid I’d be picked on, I mean, I stand out a bit… so… they didn’t need to, but they taught me a few spells and jinxes and stuff just in case. I know they were being overprotective, but I figured hey, a chance to get ahead of everyone else, why not?”

Cian laughed. “And well, I’m a Muggle-born, so my folks couldn’t teach me much but I sorta went nuts buying up books in Diagon Alley this summer after I got my letter, and well, couldn’t help but try out as much as I could.”

Harriet blinked. Two things struck her right away about this. First of all was her shock that they had done magic outside of school and not got in trouble like she had when Dobby smashed the pudding. Second of all, Cian was the second Muggle-born Slytherin she had met.

“You mean you did magic outside school?” she asked. Cian hadn’t made much of a deal of himself being a Muggle-born, so Harriet figured she probably shouldn’t either.

Cian’s proud expression faltered. “W-well, it’s not… strictly, uhh…”

“Better not let a teacher hear you talking about that,” Dora said. Her eyes were twinkling and darting back and forth between Cian and Ardghal in an almost predatory fashion.

She focused on Ardghal. “Need special permission to teach children magic at home before they come of age,” she said before looking back at Cian, “and as a Muggleborn you shouldn’t have been doing magic at all.”
Ardghal flushed sheepishly. Cian, however, looked as though he wanted to roll his eyes, but seemed nervous about the prospect of giving Dora sass. Dora seemed to realise what Cian had almost done and judging by the grin on her face she was thoroughly pleased about it.

“So you can learn magic outside school?” Harriet asked.

“Yeah,” Scott said. “But as Dora said, you need Ministry permission to teach your kid at home. Though when it comes to, er, pure-blood families, it’s really hard for the Ministry to monitor under-age magic as they can in Muggle homes.”

“How so? And what about Cian then?” Harriet asked.

“Well, the Trace, the charm under-age witches and wizards have on them that detects magic, can only detect when magic is performed around them, but it can’t detect who it was who did the magic,” Scott explained.

“And the Ministry is a little forgiving of Muggle-borns before they come to Hogwarts,” Hermione said, her cheeks going a little pink. “I mean… that’s how I knew so much before I came to Hogwarts after all.”

“Well that’s nice and fair, isn’t it?” Harriet muttered. “Sorry, I guess that’s just new to me like I thought everyone had to come to Hogwarts.”

“Nah, you can be taught at home or go abroad to another school like Durmstrang or Beauxbatons or Rathlin or Phoenix,” Scott explained. “Well Rathlin’s a bit more selective getting in but you do have a choice is the point.”

Harriet blinked. She’d heard of Rathlin and Beauxbatons before, but not those other schools. She was sure Hermione had said last year that she had a distant cousin who went to Beauxbatons.

“How many magical schools are there in Europe?” She asked.

“Heh, well you just heard them,” Kieran said.

“Yeah, I sort of list all examples like that, bad habit,” Scott said laughing. “you’re just lucky there were only four others. Beauxbatons is just outside Cannes, France; Rathlin is on Rathlin Island just off the coast of Ulster—”

“Oh god, I wanted to go to Rathlin,” Dora interjected.

“How come?” Harriet asked. “I thought you were going to go to Beauxbatons?”

Dora suddenly looked a little cross and confused. Harriet suddenly realised the only reason she knew about Dora being enrolled in Beauxbatons was because Dora’s ancestor, Nicolas Flamel, had told Harriet about it in a letter last year shortly before his death.

“I was, yeah, but one of my friends growing up goes to Rathlin. I haven’t seen her in ages, but she always had such cool stories about Rathlin. In the middle of the sea, right on the coast—”

“I heard the island’s full of banshees,” Cian said interested.

“Well so’s the rest of Ireland,” Dora replied.

Cian did roll his eyes now.

“So where are the other schools, Phoenix and Durmstrang?”
“Well, Phoenix is in Greece, and no one knows where Durmstrang is, it’s a secret,” Kieran explained.

“A secret?” Harriet asked.

“Yeah, but, you wouldn’t wanna go there, based on the reputation,” Cian muttered darkly.

“Reputation?” Harriet asked.

“It’s where Grindelwald came from, the last great Dark Wizard before You-Know-Who, the one Dumbledore defeated,” Hermione said.

Harriet digested the information. As she did, once more her eyes drifted back to Kieran’s leg in the awkward silence. She should ask, she really should finally ask him. She had to know what happened.

“So is that really why the Slytherin animal is a snake?” Ronnie asked. “I always thought that was just because of the name. You know, Slytherin… it just works.”

Everyone turned and looked at Ronnie, bemused. Harriet hadn’t noticed until now, but Ronnie had been very quiet since they arrived at the hospital wing. Had she been mulling that over the entire time? If she had, it was something so “Ronnie” that Harriet couldn’t help but smile.

Dora glowered. “Well you’re a Gryffindor, and your house animal is a lion; Hufflepuff’s is a badger, and how exactly does an eagle represent Ravenclaw?”

“Okay, okay,” Ronnie said. “Sorry.”

Marcus laughed. “You know, we seriously have the most random conversations sometimes.”

Everyone else laughed too, and Madame Pomfrey came bustling over. “Alright, it’s very near curfew you lot, back to your common rooms, this boy needs his sleep.”

Everyone rose and bid Kieran goodnight before shuffling to the door. As they went, Harriet kept looking back over her shoulder, her eyes finding Kieran’s leg once more. Again, she had missed her opportunity. She chewed her lip before sighing. Tomorrow, she would ask tomorrow.

* * * *

Harriet didn’t get her chance to ask Kieran about his leg the next day. Instead a blinding snowstorm blew in during the night, and as a result, their final Herbology lesson was cancelled. This was not only because of the snow, but also because Professor Sprout wanted to fit warm clothes on the Mandrakes, and now that a student had been petrified she was taking no chances in their handling.

Kieran still had not returned from the hospital wing. Harriet was sitting by the fire with Hermione, Ronnie and Marcus playing Wizard’s Chess when James Needle, one of the first years, walked up to her.

“Um, hi, Harriet,” James said. He looked both nervous and confused.

“Oh, hello James,” Harriet said smiling. “What’s up?”

“I, well, I just wanted to say there’s, um, someone waiting for you outside…”

“Someone waiting for me?” Harriet asked.
She shot the others a curious look. They merely shrugged in response.

“Yeah, he’s a Hufflepuff, says his name’s Justin, says you know him?”

Harriet blinked. “Justin… Finch-Fletchley?”

“Yeah, that’s him,” James said. “Said he wanted to talk to you.”

“Oh, well thanks, James, yeah, I’ll go see what he wants,” she said and got to her feet.

The others made to get up too, but Harriet waved them down.

“Nah, it’s alright, it’s only Justin,” she said.

Harriet walked to the portrait hole and pushed it open. Sure enough, Justin Finch-Fletchley was waiting. He glanced up at her before his face went red and he immediately dropped his eyes to the floor.

“Oh, hello Harriet, ummm, hi,” Justin said awkwardly.

“Uh, yeah, hi,” Harriet replied, glancing around. “What’s up?”

“Well,” Justin said, thinking hard. “I just… well… I guess… I know what everyone’s saying…”

Harriet felt her lips draw tight. Yes, she did know what everyone was saying, and she was sure it was everyone saying it after last night.

“Yes,” She said curtly.

“Well, I just wanted to say, um…” Justin paused again.

Harriet crossed her arms. On the one hand, she hated the accusations about her being Slytherin’s Heir, but on the other at least Justin seemed like he was going to do it to her face.

“Thanks.”

Harriet blinked in surprise and her arms slackened.

“Wh-what?” Harriet asked.

“Thanks for, for saving me from that snake…” Justin went on, still looking at the floor.

“You… you know I was trying to save you, even though I’m a—”

“Yeah, I… I do…” Justin said quickly as though he didn’t want her to say the word. “I mean I know Ernie doesn’t think so, but I… I did have a long talk with Jeremy last night about it, and he’s right, you did push me out of the way of the snake and even if you are a… you know… it did stop when you talked to it.”

Harriet felt her heart lift a little. So someone out there was talking sense about her it seemed, that was reassuring.

“Oh, well, you’re welcome,” Harriet said, though she blushed feeling she had sounded a lot lamer than she had hoped it would.

Justin didn’t seem to mind, in fact, he smiled. “Well, yeah, I just wanted to say thank you.”
Harriet smiled brighter in spite of herself. “Well, you’re welcome, and, thanks for not thinking I’m, you know… out to kill everyone.”

Justin gave a little laugh and waved turning to walk away. She smiled even brighter as Kieran came walking around the corner passing Justin. He smiled in greeting to Justin as they passed and grinned at Harriet when he saw her.

“Hey, waiting up for me?” He asked as he made his way up.

Harriet laughed. “Well kinda, um, Justin just wanted to, um, thank me I guess, for last night.”

Kieran smiled. “Well that was nice of him,” he said before saying the password to open the portrait hole. “Nice to see some people around here are half sensible.”

“Heh, not wrong there,” Harriet replied and followed him back inside.

They made their way back over to the others.

“Hey there’s our warrior,” Marcus said chuckling then looking at Harriet. “What’d Justin want?”

“Well, to thank me, I guess,” Harriet said sitting down again.

“To thank you?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, for saving him from the snake,” Harriet explained.

“Oh, well that was very nice of him,” Hermione said, sounding pleased.

Kieran winced as he tried to sit down as well. Harriet did her best to try and not stare at his leg. It was strange. Somehow over the past year and a half, Harriet had just come to accept Kieran’s leg as just being a part of him. But now, it was starting to consume her thoughts just as much as the mystery of the Chamber of Secrets and the Heir of Slytherin.

Hermione quickly cleared her throat. “Hey, I, uh, I have an idea, let’s head to the library.”

Everyone looked at Hermione, and Kieran stopped trying to sit.

“Why?” Ronnie asked. “We’re halfway through a game!”

“Well, I just, it’ll be… quieter there, we can talk easier,” Hermione said quickly. “No one’s going to be in there the day before everyone goes home for the Christmas holidays.”

Harriet wasn’t entirely convinced of this story, but she got up all the same. They made their way back out of the portrait hole and down the hall to the library. It was indeed very quiet as they took seats around a table. Harriet couldn’t hear anyone but Madame Pince who was humming Christmas carols and stamping in books.

“Okay, not going to lie, this is better,” Kieran said shifting in his chair.

“Yes, that’s what I thought,” Hermione agreed, smiling.

Harriet gave a sideways glance at Kieran. Harriet was sure that Hermione had suggested moving because of Kieran’s leg. She furrowed her brow. On the one hand, it was better on his leg to sit at a table, but on the other Harriet didn’t know how she felt about calling attention to his leg like that. But then Kieran was the only person with his condition Harriet had ever met. She’d never had friends before Hogwarts, and she was still learning how to act around different people.
Marcus looked around as casually as he could before he leaned over the table.

“So, how’s the potion coming?” He asked in a whisper. “It’s got to be ready soon?”

“Yes, it’s coming along quite nicely, should be ready around Christmas,” Hermione whispered back, grinning confidently.

“Good, getting nervous,” Marcus said. “At least Malfoy will be here over break, don’t want to have to try making this potion all over again.”

“Well, fortunately, Polyjuice keeps for a while,” Hermione replied. “So that won’t be a worry, but it should be a lot easier with fewer people around.”

“Heh, the only thing I’m not so chuffed about is being Goyle,” Kieran cut in, a look of displeasure on his face.

“Well, at least you don’t have to be Crabbe,” Marcus teased. “Though, again, sorry I won’t be able to help out with that, just, don’t wanna leave my dad.”

“Oh jeez, Marcus, it’s fine,” Ronnie said smiling. “No one should be alone at Christmas.”

Marcus blushed and looked a bit more cheered up.

“Hey, Potter,” said a voice from behind Harriet.

Harriet turned to see Katy Tyler, Kenley’s younger sister.

“Oh, hey Katy. Any news?” Harriet asked, gesturing for Katy to sit and join them.

Katy sat and looked around. “Some news, Kenley says she can get the hairs you guys will need for your potion.”

Harriet blinked. “Huh?”

“The hairs? For your potion, right? Polyjuice you said it was?” Katy asked.

Kieran groaned, and Ronnie’s jaw fell slack.

“But how do you know about the potion?” Hermione asked. “We never told Kenley that’s what we were trying to do.”

“And we never told you about it either,” Marcus said.

“Saw it in that first-floor bathroom stall you’re hiding it in, and overheard you all talking about it,” Katy answered.

“Your sister was right; you are nosy,” Ronnie said.

Harriet couldn’t tell if Ronnie sounded more annoyed or proud. Ronnie had taken a liking for Katy and her friends Rayne, Annie, Sarah and Alex. Ronnie had gone out with all of them every weekend through November, teaching them all football though Katy had also started looking into rugby.

Katy didn’t look abashed. “I like knowing what’s going on; it’s useful,” She said and shrugged.

“Yeah, but we asked you to spy for us, not on us,” Marcus said though as Ronnie he looked equally amused and annoyed.
“Hey, you weren’t telling me everything,” Katy said. She turned and looked at Harriet. “Though Potter, you need to follow me a sec, something’s going on I think you wanna hear.”

Harriet pursed her lips but nodded and rose with Katy. Katy led Harriet through the towering shelves. Finally, she paused at the edge of another group of tables and put a finger to her lips. Harriet nodded and peered through a gap in the books to see a group of Hufflepuffs. She recognised Ernie Macmillan, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Jeremy Owens, Isabella Martinez, and another Hufflepuff boy in their year Harriet knew by name only as Zacharias Smith.

“Ernie, Zacharias, honestly you’re both being ridiculous,” Harriet overheard Jeremy say.

“How are we ridiculous?” Ernie shot back. “Found at the scene of the first attack, found at the scene of Colin’s attack, and a Parselmouth!”

“So were others!” Isabella said, sounding just as disgusted as Jeremy did.

“So she has followers,” Zacharias rebutted. “Big deal, You-Know-Who had plenty.”

“But two of them are Muggle-borns,” Hannah Abbot said. “Why would they help her out if she was attacking other Muggle-borns?”

Ernie shrugged. “Who can say? Maybe they’re just looking out for their necks? Help her out, so they don’t get targeted?”

There was a screech of a chair as Isabella got to her feet.

“I’m going back to the common room,” she said curtly. “I’ll see you there, Jeremy.”

“No worries,” Jeremy said.

“Yeah, we’ll… we’ll join you,” Hannah said.

Hannah and Susan got up with Isabella, ignoring Zacharias and Ernie before they stormed off, their noses in the air. Harriet and Katy pressed tighter against the shelf as the girls left, not wanting to be spotted eavesdropping. The pair relaxed as the other three girls moved off and Harriet realised her hands were clenched and there were dents where her nails had dug into her skin. She was undoubtedly upset with Ernie and Zacharias, but she was feeling quite grateful to the other students, and especially to Jeremy, who was still holding his ground.

“Now you two, seriously, Justin went and spoke to Harriet all by himself, he still looked pretty unpetrified when he came back, didn’t he?” Jeremy said trying to sound more reasonable.

“Oh don’t be thick! Of course, she wouldn’t attack him right outside her common room!” Zacharias snapped back.

“Account for the snake then,” Jeremy said. “Harriet could have just let the snake attack anyone, but she didn’t. And the first person she shoved out of the way of the snake was Justin!” Jeremy said, apparently working hard to keep his temper in check.

“But there it is! A Parselmouth! You know what they called Slytherin!” Ernie said.

“I do, I also know there are a few choice words I’d like to call you two, too,” Jeremy snarled “Also if you’ll notice, it wasn’t Harriet who conjured the snake, it was Malfoy. And what about last Spring, eh? Stopping You-Know-Who from getting the Philosopher’s Stone?”
“Probably didn’t want You-Know-Who coming back to power, someone to compete with,” Zacharias said.

Harriet couldn’t see Smith’s face, but she could almost hear the taunting sneer in his voice. She also couldn’t help but notice that he and Ernie avoided responding to Jeremy’s point about Malfoy conjuring the snake. She glowered and clenched her fists again. She was sure they had dodged that point intentionally.

“That’s probably why You-Know-Who went after her in the first place, didn’t want competition either.”

Jeremy snorted disgust and stood up quickly.

“That’s it! I’ve had it with you two, seriously. You’re both going to be proven wrong about this, and you’re going to be feeling pretty stupid. I’m not talking to either of you until you snap out of this,” Jeremy said.

As he spoke the last sentence, Harriet couldn’t help but notice a growl in his voice. It seemed Ernie and Zacharias noticed it as well as they both drew back from him. Jeremy pushed in his chair hard and headed off the same way that the girls had gone.

Harriet wanted to follow and thank him, but again did not want Jeremy to know she’d been eavesdropping. On top of that, Ernie and Zacharias had started talking again, and Harriet didn’t want to hear any more of what they had to say. She took a step back, and Katy turned to follow as they made their way back to the table where Kieran, Hermione, Marcus and Ronnie were still sitting.

“Thanks, Katy,” Harriet said as they returned.

“For what?” Ronnie asked. “What did you see?”

“Ernie MacMillan and Zacharias Smith from Hufflepuff giving all the reasons they think Harriet’s the Heir of Slytherin,” Katy answered.

Kieran groaned and rolled his eyes and Marcus got to his feet.

“It’s not worth it, Jeremy already chewed them out,” Harriet said, and Marcus sat back down.

“Just wish people could get over it, why does everyone just jump to these conclusions?” Hermione asked sighing wearily.

“It’s because they’re afraid.”

The group jumped and turned. Another girl was sitting a table away, reading a book casually. She was a Ravenclaw Harriet knew by sight but couldn’t think of her name. She was the older Ravenclaw refugee, the one who Scott said was the ringleader in the divide between the Ravenclaw refugees and the regular students.

“Oh, h-hello, Peyton… n-nice day?” Katy asked, in a tone that said she was trying hard not to sound timid.

That was her name, Harriet thought, Peyton. Peyton Riseman. As Harriet looked at her, she couldn’t help but take in her stark features. Her eyes were bright and alert as they moved over the words in her book. She had a long, very straight nose, and a pronounced jawline and high cheek-bones. She put Harriet somewhat in mind of a hawk, and had to admit; she was a little intimidating.
“Of course, they’re afraid, everyone’s afraid,” Hermione said sounding a little indignant.

Peyton girl didn’t look up, merely flipped another page. “Well duh, what I meant is they’re afraid. People feel unsettled when they’re afraid, so they grab for something solid. They find blaming Potter to be ‘solid’ because it’s easy. ‘Ah-hah! I don’t have to be afraid, I know who did it!’ Happens all the time. Doesn’t matter how much evidence there is.”

Peyton looked up at Harriet, unblinking. “They don’t think you’re the Heir, Potter; they don’t even know you’re the Heir.”

Peyton looked back down at her book and flipped a page. “They want you to be the Heir.”

Peyton turned another page and didn’t say anything else. Harriet bit her lip. What Peyton said made perfect sense, but it didn’t help her feel better in the slightest. Peyton hadn’t sounded accusatory when she said they know Harriet is the heir; it was more like a warning; a straightforward, unsettling warning.

She turned to look at the others again. “I’m uh… I’m going to take a walk… I just wanna think for a bit, if that’s okay?”

Her friends looked like they didn’t want to agree, but they all nodded.

“Before you go, Harriet, remember to look around for Kenley to tell her whose hairs you want,” Katy said, grinning.

Harriet waved in acknowledgement and headed out of the library. She wasn’t particularly paying attention to where she was going, just staring at the floor as she tried to think. She felt as though she had a giant wet blanket on her brain, making it almost impossible to imagine. She was so distracted she almost walked headlong into Professor McGonagall who was coming around a corner.

“Do watch where you’re going, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said. “And what are you doing wandering about alone?”

Harriet blushed. “I… well…” she stammered when the sound of hefty feet running filled the corridor.

Harriet and Professor McGonagall turned to see Hagrid coming as fast as he could down the corridor towards them. He was a somewhat alarming sight as he ran. He was wearing a woollen balaclava and his moleskin overcoat. The most worrisome part was the dead rooster that was flopping around violently in his hand as he ran.

“Professor McGonagall! Come quick!”

“What is it, Hagrid?” Professor McGonagall asked, sounding alarmed.

“Another attack, ma’am! D-double attack, I think, yeh’ll have ter see it ter believe it, ma’am!”

Professor McGonagall’s face went white, and she turned to Harriet. “Come with me, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said, and she started off after Hagrid.

Harriet followed as ordered, though more thoughts were running through her mind. Professor McGonagall didn’t think she had anything to do with it this time, did she? Harriet didn’t see how she could; Harriet wasn’t anywhere near where the attack had happened this time. At least she hoped Professor McGonagall would see it that way.
However, when they finally rounded the corner, Harriet felt her heart drop, and her mind went blank. She simply didn’t know how to comprehend what she was seeing. The first thing she saw was the stiff form of a boy lying on the floor. Harriet knew in an instant who he was. He was Justin Finch-Fletchley.

However, it wasn’t just Justin. The most bizarre sight was what was floating right above Justin. The ghostly form of Nearly-Headless Nick. However, Nick wasn’t his translucent pearl colour anymore. He was black and looked as though he was made of very dense smoke. His head was tilted all the way over onto his shoulder, and his arms were spread wide, as though he was trying to shield someone from an attacker.

At that moment, the bell signalling the end of classes rang. The doors along the corridor burst open, and students started flooding the hall though they all stopped at the sight of Justin and Nearly-Headless Nick. There came a few moments of silence before a girl screamed and students started to back away in a panic.

Professor McGonagall drew her wand and gave off a loud bang which silenced the crowd at once. All except for Peeves, who had popped up at the sounds of panic and was dancing about over everyone’s heads, apparently pleased with the fear in the crowd.

“AH-HAH!” a voice shouted from nearby. “I knew it! Once again there’s an attack, and it’s Potter at the scene!”

Harriet turned. It was Zacharias Smith and Ernie Macmillan again.

“Indeed! And look! Justin! Just like we knew it would be!”

“Macmillan, Smith! That is enough! You two may now carry Justin to the hospital wing straightaway,” Professor McGonagall snapped, her eyes dangerously narrow.

The two boys glowered but did as ordered, grunting as they started carrying Justin away. Professor Flitwick drew his wand and waved it as if it was a leaf-blower, air blowing from the tip and wafting Nearly-Headless Nick along as well. Professor McGonagall looked around at the rest of the onlooking students.

“Don’t you all have classes to get to?” she asked in a dangerous voice.

Slowly the crowd started to disperse. After it was gone, Professor McGonagall turned and looked at Harriet.

“Potter, you come with me,” Professor McGonagall said. “I need to take you to see the Headmaster.”

“But, but Professor!”

“No buts, Potter, the Headmaster said if there was another attack I was to bring you to him immediately, follow me.”

Harriet slowly nodded, feeling weak in the knees. This was it; she was done for this time. She followed Professor McGonagall down the hall and around the corner when they came to a large stone gargoyle.

“Lemon drop,” Professor McGonagall said.

Harriet jumped as the gargoyle itself leapt aside, and the wall behind it split into a wide door that led to a sizeable spiralling staircase. The steps of the staircase were moving in a manner that put Harriet
in mind of escalators back in the Muggle world.

“Take the stairs all the way up, Potter, just knock and stay inside and wait there for the Headmaster,” Professor McGonagall ordered.

Harriet could only nod and stepped onto the moving stairs. She slowly wound her way up until she finally came to a polished wooden door with a griffin-shaped brass knocker in the middle. She reached up with a trembling hand and knocked with the knocker. The door swung open, and Harriet stepped inside, looking around. The door shut by itself behind her.

However, Harriet was paying no attention to the door. Her jaw was utterly slack as she looked around the magnificent room. Everywhere she looked she saw something new and wondrous. There were several little spindle-leg tables with delicate looking silver instruments. All of the devices were making little whirring and popping noises and emitting little puffs of smoke. All along the walls were portraits of people Harriet took to be former headmasters and headmistresses of Hogwarts. They all looked to be asleep. Indeed some were even snoring.

She slowly made her way closer to the Headmaster’s desk. There were more magical instruments on it as well, though at the moment it was dominated by a large stone basin. There were intricate runes around the rim, and inside it was what looked like a mist so thick it was nearly a liquid. It was glowing too, swirling and flowing around. Harriet had just leaned over for a closer look when a voice made her jump and spin around.

“Ah, Potter, good, you are here.”

Harriet looked around to see a man standing in the doorway. He was holding a book and looking at Harriet with dark, calculating eyes. His hair was somehow wild in an organised way as if done intentionally, and he had a square jawline with a few days growth of stubble on his chin. He was wearing a white button-up shirt with a grey and silver paisley vest, charcoal tweed trousers and a matching cravat.

He started walking towards Harriet. Despite not knowing this man, Harriet didn’t feel the least bit nervous. In fact, something about his presence was reassuring. He looked sharp and clever, and somehow, very familiar.

“Y-yes, sir,” Harriet said. “Professor McGonagall brought me.”

“Good, just as Dumbledore said she would,” the man said.

He stopped a few paces away from Harriet and bent over, looking Harriet in the eyes thoughtfully from straight on, though they darted to the stone basin and back again.

“I would avoid that basin behind you at all costs, incidentally. The basin in and of itself is not dangerous but what it contains can have a devastating effect on an already emotionally drained mind. Most people’s minds are already quite full enough without adding the worries of another mind to them.”

Harriet had no idea what he meant by that ‘the worries of another mind,’ but she didn’t ask.

“I would like to ask you some questions… but your expression also says you have at least a couple of questions of your own that are probably nagging at you in such a way that will make answering the questions Albus and I have an awkward and uncomfortable experience. So let’s start by putting your mind at ease and deal with your questions first,” the man said.

He stepped past Harriet and turned, leaning back against Professor Dumbledore’s desk and looking
down at her. Harriet was just about to ask her first question when a strange rasping noise came from nearby. Harriet turned and saw a peculiar looking bird sitting on a golden perch near the door. It looked as though it were half-dead.

“Oh goodness, Potter, watch,” the man said pointing at the bird. “You are about to witness one of the most fascinating events in the natural world: the death and rebirth of a phoenix.”

Harriet blinked. “The death and—”

Harriet was cut-off when the bird burst into a ball of flame and gave off an ear-piercing shriek. She jumped but the man’s hand rested on her shoulder, and his eyes were locked on the ball of fire, watching with fascination. The flames consumed the bird, which writhed in a way that Harriet found at once macabre and yet beautiful, almost as if it was dancing. Finally, the bird gave one last cry, and the flames extinguished, leaving behind nothing but a pile of ash in the golden basin beneath the perch.

Harriet blinked a few times before slowly looking up at the man. “Um… what just—?”

“I told you already, Potter. You just witnessed the death and rebirth of a phoenix. Have you never heard of the phoenix?”

“I… I’ve heard the name before but…” Harriet said, thinking of the Greek school that Scott had talked about the night before.

“The phoenix is a truly incredible bird, known in ancient mythologies across the globe. The Egyptians called it the ‘benu,’ in China it was known as the ‘fenghuang,’ the ‘fushicho’ in Japan, ‘kerkes’ in Turkey, and so on,” the man said crossing over to the pile of ash that had collected in the basin under the golden perch.

“Ah, and here he returns, come, look, look!” the man gestured excitedly to Harriet, and she nervously walked over.

Sure enough, Harriet could see the tiny form of a baby bird struggling out of the ashes. Harriet put in a hand to help, but the man stopped her, shaking his head but smiling.

“No, no, phoenixes are amongst the most loyal and faithful pets in the world. They’re nearly impossible to tame. In fact, only two tamed phoenixes exist in the world. One is the mascot for the New Zealand Quidditch team, the Moutohara Macaws, and the other is Fawkes, the very bird you see before you. Fawkes is loyal to Dumbledore and Dumbledore alone, and will only permit Dumbledore to touch him,” he said before turning and walking back towards Professor Dumbledore’s desk.

He leaned against the desk again and smiled down at her. “Now, I know you have questions, and I’m sure the two most pressing questions are ‘where’s Professor Dumbledore,’ and ‘who am I?’ Well, to answer those in order, Professor Dumbledore is checking on the boy, Justin Finch-Fletchley, in the hospital wing. As for myself, I am Professor Sherrod Howe, Headmaster of Rathlin School of the Arts and Magic, Order of Merlin: First Class, and it is a pleasure to meet you, Harriet Potter.”

Professor Howe held out a hand. Harriet blushed and shook.

“I-it’s a pleasure t-to meet you, sir,” Harriet said.

Professor Howe smiled. So far, Harriet had only heard rumours about what Rathlin was like. And now, here she was face to face with the head of the school. He was a lot younger than Harriet imagined a headmaster being. Though she supposed the only headmaster she had ever really known
was Dumbledore. He also seemed a lot less uptight than Harriet imagined the headmaster of a school such as Rathlin would be as well.

“Likewise, my dear,” Professor Howe said.

Harriet smiled when a flash of light made her look past Professor Howe at the stone basin once more. Professor Howe looked back at it too and sighed before he turned and lifted the stone basin off the desk. He carried it over to a cabinet full of bottles and set it inside, closing the door.

“Now then, that little distraction’s gone,” Professor Howe said turning back to Harriet, “and we’ve dealt with your most pressing and immediate questions, I have a few of my own.”

Harriet swallowed. “O-okay, sir.”

Professor Howe smiled. Before he said anymore, he drew his wand. It was unlike any wand Harriet had ever seen before. It was very long, nearly two feet, and had an odd curvature to it. It was a familiar shape somehow, but Harriet couldn’t quite place it. He raised it and gave a little flick. At once, all the sounds ceased. It was as if Harriet was wearing the earmuffs that Professor Sprout had made them wear when handling the mandrakes.

“Ignore the silence,” Professor Howe said and gestured to the portraits hanging on the walls. “I dislike eavesdroppers.”

Harriet looked at the portraits, and to her surprise, although she had first taken them for being asleep, all of them were now looking a little restless. She realised now they were all only pretending to sleep. One was even trying to put an ear-trumpet in his ear to listen discretely.

“First of all, Potter, I want to commend you on very nearly completing Polyjuice Potion at your age.”

Harriet felt her heart jump straight into her throat. How on earth did he know? And did Dumbledore?

“How?”

“My suspicions that someone was brewing Polyjuice potion were first aroused only a couple weeks ago when I was visiting, and Professor Snape reported several ingredients missing from his private stores: boomslang skin and bicorn horn to be specific.”

Harriet swallowed. Had he told Professor Snape?

“Given the timing, I was able to assume whoever had taken the ingredients only had a few weeks to go until the potion was finished. In fact, I would say you’ll be done just about Christmas, if not Christmas Day on the nose,” Professor Howe went on.

Harriet felt even more uncomfortable. While Professor Dumbledore gave her the feeling of being transparent with his eyes, Professor Howe seemed to be able to make her feel that way with words.

“That, of course, didn’t tell me it was you until just now when I could not help but detect the barely noticeable scent of mustard coming from your robes. Fluxweed, a fairly common plant, though a critical ingredient of Polyjuice potion, is a member of the mustard family. The scent doesn’t come across very well for someone just handling the plant but if that person was grinding up the leaves to be used in a potion the scent is much stronger and can linger,” Professor Howe explained as casually as if he was discussing the weather.

Harriet shifted uncomfortably. Would he, or had he told Professor Dumbledore about the potion? How much trouble would she be in if he had?
“No, I’m not going to tell Professors Snape or Dumbledore about this. I wouldn’t have silenced the room if I was going to, I would have just let the portraits tell Dumbledore for me. Fortunately for you, I’m rather a fan of industrious snoops who’ll do almost anything to get the information they need or want. It builds intuition and drive,” Professor Howe said, his eyes twinkling.

Harriet blushed again, though this time it wasn’t quite embarrassment. In spite of herself and what had been happening, Harriet couldn’t help but feel a little proud.

“I… well… I am a fan of—”

“Nancy Drew, I would guess.”

Harriet blinked. “Um, y-yes… how—”

Professor Howe laughed. “Given your history with your aunt and uncle, it’s unlikely you had a television, so film or television detectives are unlikely inspirations. Also, you’re a young girl, just before her teen years. You’re more likely to look for inspirations of your gender and closer to yourself in age which would rule out other literary inspirations such as Poirot, Marple or the Hardy Boys…”

Professor Howe cleared his throat and raised his wand again. “Now that all incriminating discussion is over,” he flicked the wand. “We can let the old headmasters and mistresses in on the conversation.”

Harriet heard the room come back to life around her. The old headmasters and headmistresses in the portraits all jumped at suddenly being able to hear and gave Professor Howe very disgruntled looks.

“So, you have recently learned that you are in fact a Parselmouth, correct?”

Harriet swallowed and only nodded.

“An interesting talent,” Professor Howe said and nodded. “I also take it that you have heard strange noises, noises no one else can hear?”

Harriet was starting to feel hot under the collar.

“Y-yes sir…”

“Are you sure this was just noise?” he asked.

“How do you mean, sir?”

“Are you sure it wasn’t a voice you were hearing…”?

Harriet’s eyes went wide. How could he possibly know that? Harriet opened her mouth to answer when the door to the room opened once more. Harriet turned to see Professor Dumbledore finally enter. He looked distraught.

“Ah, Albus, there you are,” Professor Howe said. “That took longer than I expected, did something else happen?”

Dumbledore sighed gravely. “Oh, I got held up by Hagrid on the way. He gave me his account of finding Justin and Sir Nicholas, and also asked my permission to place a charm on his chicken coop. It seems he’s had another of his roosters killed.”

There was a moment of quiet as the two men looked at each other. Harriet didn’t know what to make
of it, but there seemed to be a conversation going on wordlessly between the two men as they gave each other significant looks.

Dumbledore broke his gaze and turned to bend down and give a soft smile at the sight of the newly reborn Fawkes. He reached in and scooped up the young chick and carried him over to a small padded basket near the fireplace and placed the young bird inside it.

“So you got to witness a phoenix at the most miraculous stage of its lifecycle, Harriet?” Professor Dumbledore asked.

“Yes sir,” Harriet replied. “It was a little… er… alarming at first.”

Professor Dumbledore chuckled. “I can imagine. Remarkable creatures, phoenixes. Quite remarkable. Hopefully, someday you’ll be able to see him in his usual form, beautiful flowing red and golden plumage.”

Professor Dumbledore kept smiling at the little bird. “Their tears also have remarkable healing powers, able to cure any poison and heal any wound. They can lift incredible weights, and can disappear and reappear anywhere when needed. Furthermore, they show great faithfulness to not just their owners, but also to others who show great faithfulness to their owners. What is most remarkable, however, is the fact they are the only creatures in the world to break the cycle of death.”

Harriet tilted her head a little.

“I mean to say when they die they are reborn, instead of staying dead. No one is quite sure how the process works as of yet, but Fawkes is the same bird every time he is reborn,” Professor Dumbledore explained.

The tiny chick gave another little chirp, almost as if in response to Dumbledore’s statement. Professor Dumbledore smiled warmly and gently lowered a long finger, softly stroking the little bird’s head. The baby Fawkes closed its oversized eyes and gave a quiet, dove-like coo.

Professor Dumbledore sighed and walked over to his desk. Professor Howe stopped leaning against the desk as Professor Dumbledore sat.

“Now, Harriet,” Professor Dumbledore said, studying her carefully. “I only have one question for you.”

Harriet furrowed her brow curiously, and Professor Howe looked at Professor Dumbledore a little sceptically, but Professor Dumbledore ignored him.

“I want to ask you if there’s anything you would like to tell me? Any little thing at all?”

Harriet’s head was starting to hurt. She felt like her brain had been run through Mrs Weasley’s laundry ringer back at the Burrow. She thought hard. She thought about the Polyjuice potion she was brewing and how Professor Howe had silenced the room so the portraits couldn’t hear them talking about it. She thought about how so many students were calling her the Heir of Slytherin. She thought about how just as many students were accusing the refugees of also harbouring the Heir of Slytherin in their number. She thought about Malfoy, about the things he’d said after the first attack on Mrs Norris. She also thought about Dobby, and about the voice, she had heard that coincided with Mrs Norris’ attack.

But as Harriet looked into those deep blue eyes, somehow Harriet just couldn’t bring herself to say anything about any of it. She was too worried about what other questions would follow, or what conclusions Professor Dumbledore might make. She slowly shook her head.
“N-no sir, there’s nothing…”

Professor Dumbledore’s expression did not change. He didn’t appear disappointed or upset. He simply nodded.

“Very well, then, Harriet, you may go.”

Harriet looked back and forth between Professor Dumbledore and Professor Howe before nodding. She turned and walked to the door. She had just reached it when Professor Dumbledore cleared his throat.

“Oh, and Harriet?”

Harriet turned and looked back. Professor Dumbledore was wearing a sombre expression.

“Please be careful.”

Chapter End Notes

Marcus Van De Lakk, Kieran O’Brien, Scott McIntyre, Cian Whelan, Ardghal Coghlan, James Needle, Jeremy Owens, and Isabella Martinez property of night-miner(dA)

Katy Tyler, and Sherrod Howe property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editing by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“Sometimes we just have to accept that no matter the circumstances, some of the events of our lives were probably always going to happen, and no matter of variables will change the outcome.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

The days following the attack on Justin and Nearly-Headless Nick were something of a blur. The day after the attack was one of sheer panic amongst the students. Harriet was irritated all that day by the talk going around. Hardly anyone was acknowledging that Justin had been attacked. All anyone was talking about was how Nearly-Headless Nick had been petrified as well. Harriet supposed it was rather unsettling to think of something being so magically powerful it could petrify a ghost, but that didn’t mean that they should ignore one of their fellow students.

Harriet realised just how frightened everyone was that morning when the four heads of house were nearly bowled over at breakfast by panicked students who had not yet booked passage home on the Hogwarts Express for the Christmas Holidays. In fact, from what Harriet could see the only ones who would be staying were now her, Ronnie, Hermione, Kieran, Scott, Dora, Fred, George, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Wendy Aarons, and Isabella Martinez. There would also be a prefect staying from each house, which unfortunately included Percy. That wasn’t including most of the refugee students who were also staying. Some of them, the ones whose families had also escaped the attacks, would be leaving to spend the holidays with those family members. Perhaps, Harriet thought, it was a blessing that so many had requested to go on short notice.

The increased enthusiasm to leave had its positives and negatives. The positive was that the school would be relatively empty for this Christmas holiday. This meant that there would be fewer people to spot them carrying out their plan. The negative was that Pansy and Pixie were now leaving. Harriet did have to laugh darkly at the fact that while she usually wanted nothing more than for Pansy and Pixie to be gone, now that they were going to be leaving, she wished they were staying. However, not having them around complicated their plan to question the two, using Wendy, to see what they knew about the Heir.

Instead, Harriet would masquerade as Wendy and go with Kieran and Scott, disguised as Crabbe and Goyle, to interrogate Malfoy. However, since they couldn’t investigate Pansy and Pixie, Hermione had come up with a backup plan. She would get a hair from one of the older Slytherin refugees and investigate them instead. As with Pixie and Pansy, they didn’t suspect any of them of being the Heir, but the chance they may have heard something was too good to pass up.

The older Slytherin refugee girls had managed to fit in quite well with the regular Slytherin students. However, they couldn’t just have Kenley or Dora question any of them, as neither was very close to the older Slytherin refugees. But using Polyjuice, Hermione would hopefully be able to get close enough to at least ask a few questions.

Even though Kenley was going to be leaving with her sister Katy, she had still managed to come through for them by procuring a hair from another of the Slytherin refugee girls in her year, Danielle Waterman.
Dora secured the services of first-years Lexi and Lola, the two Isabella Martinez of Hufflepuff had called family. After overhearing Isabella sticking up for her in the library, Harriet felt more positively inclined towards her than before and figured even distant cousins of hers could be trusted.

“Right, here you are then, one genuine Wendy Aarons hair,” Lola said the Friday afternoon before most of the students would be leaving for home.

“Wow, that was fast,” Scott admitted, sounding impressed. They had only asked the two girls to get them a hair from Wendy that morning.

Dora smiled. “Never doubt us Slytherins, if there’s something in it for us, we’ll come through every time,” she said with a proud grin at the twins, who beamed back.

Hermione’s eyes narrowed. “‘Something in it for us’? Just what exactly is in it for you?” she asked the first-years.

“And… nine sickles and a dung-bomb final payment,” Lexi replied casually.

An odd silence followed this pronouncement.


Lola crossed her arms. “We have plans; that’s all you need ta know.”

“Fair enough,” Kieran said, raising his hands in a sign of peace. “Thanks for helping out.”

“You’re very welcome,” Lexi said. “For that… we’ll settle for skipping the sickles; we’ll take four dung-bombs instead.”

“Heh, more than fair,” Scott chuckled.

“Here you go,” Dora said, drawing a package of six of them from her book bag.

“Why were you carrying those around?” Hermione asked.

Dora shrugged. “Never know when they’ll come in handy.” She handed the package to the girls. “Keep the change,” she said with a laugh.

“Deal,” they said in unison and ran off down the hall, grins of mischievous glee on their faces.

“I don’t know if that was such a good idea,” Hermione said.

“Nah, those two are good kids,” Dora said closing her book-bag. She didn’t explain precisely why, which left Hermione acting anxious for the rest of the day.

Later that night, they all got together in the Ravenclaw common room to play Exploding Snap, Gobstones, and Wizard Chess. They went to the Ravenclaw common room because Percy was currently in the Gryffindor common room, and while the Ravenclaw prefect who had stayed behind, Penelope Clearwater, was strict, she at least stuck to enforcing actual rules, not “traditions.” So while Percy would have probably kicked Dora and Scott out, Penelope let them all stay. They invited Rachel and AJ along as well, as Tori had gone to stay with her mother in Hogsmeade.

All the while, Harriet couldn’t help but smile. It was the most relaxed she had felt since the attack on Mrs Norris. No one was worrying about being attacked or talking about the attacks. They were all just laughing and playing. She felt like it finally had gone back to the start of the year when everyone was only concerned with issues like making new friends and getting all their homework done.
Things became even more fun when some of the Ravenclaw refugees who were in their year also joined in: Kelly Werner, Christina Clark and Sasha Brewer. Sasha, it turned out was very good at Gobstones, while Kelly proved herself to be an outstanding chess player.

Indeed, excluding the giant game of Wizard Chess, they had played while attempting to get to the Philosopher’s Stone last year, Harriet had to admit the match that went on between Ronnie and Kelly that night was the most riveting she had ever watched. It lasted for hours until finally, Penelope informed them all that it was nearly curfew and they had to return to their respective dorms. They left the board where it was, and both girls vowed to finish the game later.

They bid Scott goodnight before they all headed down to the Slytherin common room with Dora. Harriet had said it was to show the rest of them where the Slytherin common room was, but Harriet secretly had another reason. Even if the Heir of Slytherin had possibly left, and even if Dora was a pureblood, Harriet did not want her walking around the castle alone.

They said goodnight to Dora as well before they all headed back to Gryffindor tower. They made it just in time before curfew, which Percy was obviously displeased about, but he couldn’t very well tell them off for only almost breaking a rule. They then joined Fred and George for more games and listened to Fred and George’s tales of past misdeeds and adventures. Hermione didn’t join in for this part and instead decided to turn in early.

Harriet, however, loved every minute of it. She loved laughing and smiling again. And just as much, she loved seeing Fred and George laughing and smiling again. The two had been much more subdued than usual after the night of the attack on Colin. Having them be back to their usual joking selves was reassuring to her, and perhaps that made her feel even more back to normal than laughing herself.

Little by little, everyone went to bed; first Percy, then Ronnie, then Kieran. When the clock finally chimed midnight, Fred, George and Harriet all agreed to go to bed. However, as Fred and George went off towards their dormitory, Harriet stopped to stretch and yawn. When she finished, she paused just long enough to look down at the dimly glowing ashes in the fireplace. Harriet blinked, and then crouched lower. There was something odd in the ashes, with hard edges. It looked like a box.

Harriet walked over to the fireplace and crouched low, trying to see what it was. She tried to reach in, but the ashes were still too hot. Harriet looked around and spotted a poker nearby. She took it and gingerly moved the object around, pulling it towards her. As the object came closer, some of the ash fell off, and Harriet realized that it was a book. She blinked, and then crouched lower. There was something odd in the ashes, with hard edges. It looked like a box.

Harriet blew on the cover, and the rest of the ash puffed off, making Harriet cough a little as it got in her face. She blinked and inspected it closer. It was a diary. On the cleaned cover she could see the numbers, “1942,” clearly the year the diary had been made. Who would throw out a fifty-year-old diary? Harriet wondered. She flipped it open.

On the first page, Harriet saw a name written. “T.M. Riddle.” Harriet thought hard. She’d never heard that name before. She flipped through the pages, scanning them. There was nothing written on
any of the pages that she could see. Now Harriet was even more confused. Why would someone throw away not just a diary fifty years old, but one that had never been written in? And who was T.M. Riddle?

Despite herself, Harriet gave the tiniest snort of laughter. Here she’d found a riddle involving someone named Riddle. She laughed more at her silly amusement before she stood up again. It did seem fairly harmless. Maybe it had been tossed in the fire earlier in the day by accident? Harriet simply sighed, pocketed the diary, and headed up the stairs to her room to sleep.

** * **

“Merry Christmas!”

Harriet was jolted awake. She sat up, slowly pulling the curtains to her bed open and squinting into the bright sunlight coming through the window. Hermione was standing in the middle of the room, triumphantly grinning at them, her arms full of presents. Harriet blinked.

“Oh, good morning, Hermione,” Harriet said stretching.

Hermione’s eyes twinkled. “Morning,” she said setting all the presents down on her bed.

“What were you doing up so early?” Ronnie asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Well, first of all, it’s Christmas morning, so I was excited about that. Second of all, I was just checking on the potion with Dora.”

Hermione turned back to them all and beamed. “The potion’s ready!”

“Really?!” Ronnie asked, sitting upright in bed.

“No, I just wanted to get you all excited to see the look of disappointment on your face when I told you it wasn’t done yet,” Hermione said in a snippy tone as she sat down on her bed.

Harriet blinked. Something about that seemed off to her. Hermione was often short-tempered with Ronnie, but she was never usually that sarcastic.

“Oh, okay, sheesh.”

“Everything alright, Hermione?” Harriet asked. “You don’t seem yourself.”

Hermione suddenly looked anxious. “Oh yeah, fine, just, well, I guess because Dora and I decided we should use the potion tonight, so, I guess I’m just a little on edge.”

Harriet nodded. That was certainly understandable. As she thought about using the potion tonight, she was starting to feel nervous herself.

Harriet was then distracted by a tapping at the window. Hermione got off the bed and crossed to the window and beamed as she looked outside.

“Well hello, Pretty,” she said opening the window.

In flew Hedwig who went straight for Harriet. Harriet smiled and let Hedwig up onto her shoulder where the owl nibbled and preened Harriet’s ruffled-hair affectionately.

“Hey, Hedwig!” Harriet said eagerly. Hedwig had been giving Harriet the cold-shoulder most of the
year so far after their disastrous trip to Hogwarts. "Talking to me again, huh?"

Hedwig merely responded by puffing up her feathers and cuddling closer to Harriet’s head. Harriet took the envelope Hedwig had been carrying and suddenly wondered if Hedwig’s newly rediscovered affection was her trying to make up for the present she had brought. It was from the Dursleys and consisted of a toothpick and a note merely telling Harriet to see if she could stay for the summer holidays as well.

“Well, that was thoughtful of them wasn’t it?” Hermione asked, barely suppressing laughter.

Ronnie laughed out loud, and Harriet stuck her tongue out at them. As she did, she remembered the pending use of Polyjuice Potion.

“So, how do you know the potion’s done right? I mean… it is a dangerous potion… are we going to test it somehow?” Harriet asked, cautiously.

Hermione grinned in a way that didn’t quite suit her. “Oh, I don’t think we need to worry about testing.”

“Why not?” Ronnie asked.

Hermione’s grin widened. “Because Hermione and I already did.”

Harriet and Ronnie both stared. The door to their dormitory opened once more, and to Harriet’s bewilderment, another Hermione walked in.

“I told you they wouldn’t figure it out!” the Hermione who was already in the room said with a triumphant grin at the new Hermione.

The Hermione who had just walked in rolled her eyes. “Well, Harriet was at least a little suspicious; you weren’t that good an impressionist.”

Harriet blinked, and the reality of what was going on hit her like a train. The Hermione who had just walked in was the real Hermione, and the one who she had been talking to was—

“Dora?” Ronnie asked, apparently having only made the same connection.

The first Hermione beamed the most self-satisfied smile Harriet had ever seen and nodded. In spite of herself, Harriet fell back on her bed, laughing.

“That was perfect! Okay, I noticed something was a little off but that is just perfect!” Harriet declared sitting back up.

Dora-Hermione blushed a little but kept smiling. “Thanks,” she said simply. “Only downside is I’m stuck like this for another half hour until it wears off,” she muttered looking down at herself.

Hermione glared, and Dora rolled her eyes. “Oh relax, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Did you test it on any of the others?” Harriet asked, excited.

Dora nodded. “We did a sort of spur of the moment test on Percy as I was heading up here. Hermione hid while I pretended to be her. He didn’t have a clue, just asked what I was up to, I said I’d taken some presents to some of my friends, and he went on his way.”

Ronnie grinned. “Wicked… you know… this is so going to work…”
Dora put on another mischievous grin that didn’t suit Hermione’s face.

They chatted for another half an hour until the potion finally wore off on Dora. Despite her confidence that the plan would work, the visual of Dora turning back into herself was less than pleasant and did not help her worries over taking the potion. It looked like it was just as painful as the illustrations had made it seem. Dora’s skin bubbled and moulded, her hair shortened and lightened in colour, straightening out into her curtain of shoulder-length blonde hair. Her eyes changed back to blue, and she lay back on Hermione's bed, panting.

“Well, that was fun and all… but yeah I’m not signing up to go through that again…”

“Yeah, doesn’t help me feel bad about not wanting to take the potion either,” Ronnie agreed, looking queamish.

Harriet and Ronnie finally got dressed, and they all headed down with their presents to the common room. Kieran, Fred, and George were already sitting around the fire, waiting for them. As Harriet looked at the fireplace, she suddenly remembered the strange diary she had found in it last night, but the looks of excitement on everyone’s faces combined with everyone’s surprise at how Dora had got in and Hermione and Dora’s less than convincing cover-story forced it from her mind once more.

They gathered up their presents, and all made their way down to breakfast.

Scott was already waiting with his presents, and they sat together, taking it in turns to open the presents. Most of the gifts were universal. For instance, Mrs Weasley had made everyone jumpers this year and given them all the usual piece of home-made fudge.

Marcus had sent everyone home-made Christmas cookies, while Scott had given almost everyone owl treats, except for Hermione and Ronnie who didn’t have owls. Instead, he gave Ronnie some rat treats for Scabbers and Hermione a knitted beanie hat. Hermione seemed particularly interested in the hat, though not in wearing it. Instead, she appeared mesmerised by the pattern of the knits, studying them carefully. She blushed when she noticed everyone watching her and thanked Scott before putting it on.

Harriet received a poster for the Holyhead Harpies Quidditch team, much like the one Ginny had back at the Burrow. In return, Harriet had given Ronnie a book called *The Glory Game*, which followed one of Ronnie’s favourite football teams, the Tottenham Hotspurs. Harriet had never seen Ronnie look so excited for a book before, and it made her feel almost as good as she had felt during Ronnie’s last birthday party.

She gave Kieran a nice bottle of broom-handle polish for him to use on his shillelagh. In return, Kieran gave her a hairband made of a green silk scarf, and unlike Hermione, Harriet wasted no time putting it in her hair.

Her favourite gift, however, was from Dora, who got her a copy of *Quidditch through the Ages*.

“Wow, thanks, Dora!” Harriet said as she flipped through it.

Dora smiled in her usual proud way, though her cheeks did get a little pink. “Don’t mention it, it’s a good read and knew you didn’t have a copy.”

The real big surprise was for Scott. Scott’s barn owl, Alba, landed in front of him with a letter.

“Well there you are, missed you this week,” Scott said as he took the letter. “Had to fly all the way home and back to get my present on your own to show off, didn’t you?”

The owl hooted in a dignified way as Scott opened the letter. The moment he did, a tiny kestrel flew
down and landed in front of him too, twittering excitedly.

“Well hello, where did you come from?” Scott asked.

The little kestrel twittered and hopped onto Scott’s plate before nibbling the edge of the letter. Scott pulled the letter away.

“Hey, that’s mine,” he chuckled.

He opened the letter again and finally read it. As he read, his eyes got wider, until he finally gasped.

“I… I know I’d asked a million times but… I never thought they actually would!”

“What?” Hermione asked leaning over to look closer at the bird.

“I… well… I was always… I mean… don’t tell him… but I was always kinda jealous of Marcus with his falcon, Adal… so… I asked Mum and Dad if I could have one too…” he blushed brightly.

“Awwwwww, that’s so sweet,” Hermione said.

Scott blushed sheepishly but smiled. Hermione smiled more and reached over slowly as if to pet the bird. To her surprise, the little kestrel hopped on her hand and twittered louder.

“Friendly though, isn’t he? What’s his name?” Hermione asked.

Scott looked back down at the letter. “Uhhhh says here his name’s ‘Ayr’.”

“Well, he’s not really a falcon though,” Ronnie said, scrutinising the little raptor.

Hermione glared at her. “That’s not the point,” she retorted before smiling at the bird again. “I bet you feel like a falcon inside, don’t you?”

The kestrel twittered louder and took off, soaring around the ceiling of the Great Hall as if showing off his speed.

Kieran chuckled. “Eager to show off, too.” He said smiling at his friend reassuringly.

Scott smiled brighter.

However, Harriet suddenly felt much of her happiness ebb away when she looked a little ways down the table. AJ, Rachel and Erica were sitting in a little group together, and further, down the first-year refugees who’d stayed, Annie Gilberts, Alexis Richardson, Sarah Hollins, Savannah Walters, and Becky Wright were sitting together too. None of them looked upset, or jealous, but Harriet couldn’t help but notice how almost not a single one of them had any presents at all. Harriet sighed, feeling a little guilty all the same.

* * * *

Despite the guilt, she’d felt that morning at getting presents when the refugees didn’t, and despite her growing anxiety over finally using Polyjuice that night, Harriet couldn’t help but feel more and more excited as dinner-time neared. Christmas dinner at Hogwarts was one of the most enjoyable things to happen the entire school year.

She felt sorry for the many students who did go home for what they missed. Harriet’s favourite part was the crackers. Instead of usual cracks and trinkets, wizarding crackers gave off loud bangs and
puffs of smoke, leaving behind real presents. Last year she got a whole Wizard Chess set from one, even though she hardly ever played it. She was also curious to see if Professor Dumbledore was going to get and wear another flowered bonnet as he had last year.

The meal was different this year than last year. Last year there had been so few people that everyone sat around the same table. This year with the refugees, they were all sitting at their regular house tables. Harriet didn’t mind very much; she wasn’t all that anxious to share a table with Malfoy.

As they arrived, Harriet noticed two new girls sitting at the Gryffindor table she had never seen before. They looked to be around first-year age, and they beamed jumping up from the table as the Gryffindors entered.

“Rachel!” the girls called excitedly and ran towards them.

Rachel beamed back and ran forward hugging them both. “Hey, you two! Didn’t think I’d see you again so soon!”

“Mom brought us!” one of the girls explained.

As Harriet looked on, she noted how the girls were twins, though not quite as identical as Fred and George or the Grace or McGee twins. The one who had spoken had darker hair than the other and was about a half an inch taller. Thinking hard, Harriet thought she knew who the twins must belong to. They must be Professor Sinistra’s daughters, as Rachel had described meeting them over the summer.

Rachel turned and smiled at everyone else.

“Hey everyone, this is Rosie and Nanette Sinistra, Professor Sinistra’s daughters,” Rachel said, confirming Harriet’s theory.

Harriet found their energy infectious as they greeted everyone. They showed the customary gasps of astonishment at meeting Harriet but otherwise seemed very friendly and good-natured. At the staff table, Professor Sinistra smiled warmly at them all, clearly pleased to see her daughters getting on so well with the rest of the students.

To Harriet’s surprise, the Sinistra twins showed equal excitement when Isabella Martinez walked in as they had shown meeting Harriet. The two wasted very little time in rushing over to the Hufflepuff table to talk to her and inviting her over to sit with them at the Gryffindor table instead. Percy looked as though he was about to protest when the sound of a throat clearing came from the Ravenclaw table. The Ravenclaw prefect, Penelope Clearwater, was giving him a disapproving look, and Percy blanched and didn’t say anything more about it. Encouraged by this, Scott and Dora quickly hurried over to join Harriet, Hermione, Ronnie and Kieran.

Fred and George, on the other hand, seemed to have other designs. Rather than sit with the rest of the Gryffindors, they made a bee-line for the Hufflepuff table to sit with some of the older Hufflepuff refugees. Fred also made a show of inviting over Lindsey Gallifrey from Ravenclaw, though she simply turned up her nose as she walked past to sit with AJ’s older brother, Ben, at the Gryffindor table instead. Fred then looked as though he was going to invite over Peyton from Ravenclaw too, though he stopped when Peyton glared at him in a way that Professor McGonagall would have been proud of.

As the dinner passed on, Fred made more than a few attempts to strike up a conversation with Ari Miller, though she seemed thoroughly disinterested, which Harriet found amusing. The reason for her disinterest became apparent the moment the Hufflepuff prefect, Cedric Diggory, walked in. Ari
wasted no time moving to sit with Cedric instead. Reluctantly, Harriet had to admit that she didn’t blame Ari very much as she watched Cedric sit down.

As much as she liked Fred and George, Harriet did think it was probably a good thing for Fred’s head, in particular, to get shrunken a little bit. However, Taylor Middleton did seem interested in Fred, while Michelle Masters seemed to have taken a shine to George.

Fred did manage to get a good bout of giggles out of the girls as he gave a little nod towards Percy. Harriet looked at Percy closely and almost let out a snort of laughter as well. Apparently, Percy had not yet noticed that Fred had transfigured his prefect badge, so it read “Pinhead” instead of “Prefect.”

It was then that Harriet noticed something odd about George. Though he was laughing, he wasn’t talking nearly as much as he usually did, mostly letting Fred run the show. Instead, he kept stealing glances back towards the Gryffindor table, right over at Erica and looking away any time she looked back.

Something about this bothered her, but she just couldn’t quite put her finger on what. She supposed Erica was friendly enough. Rachel looked up to her as a big sister, she knew, but somehow every time Harriet saw George stealing glances at Erica, or Erica waving warmly to Hagrid at meals made Harriet couldn’t help but be overcome with jealousy. Harriet furrowed her brow but was distracted by Hermione nudging her in the ribs.

Harriet looked at her and saw the serious look on Hermione’s face, realised that it was time. She gave a short nod and nudged Ronnie. They gave the others a significant look, and they all rose as one, though trying to look as casual as possible as they did. They bid the other Gryffindors farewell and made their way out into the Entrance Hall. They kept an eye out as they hurried along, making their way to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

“So, you tricked Harriet and Ronnie into thinking you were Hermione?” Scott asked now they were sure they were out of earshot of anyone.

“Yep, worked like a charm,” Dora said, trying not to grin.

Harriet, Ronnie, and Hermione all rolled their eyes before they finally entered the bathroom. Myrtle was crying in her usual way, and they ignored her as they made their way to the stall. The potion was bubbling away, and Hermione grinned around at them all.

“Alright, Kieran, Scott, you take these,” she said handing them two chocolate cakes.

“What are these for?” Kieran asked.

“For Crabbe and Goyle,” Hermione explained. “Set them someplace those two are bound to see them. I’ve made them with a sleeping draught. Crabbe and Goyle won’t be able to resist them, no doubt about that. Once they’re out, take some of their hair and hide them in a broom closet.”

Kieran and Scott both exchanged nervous looks, but neither voiced any apparent doubts about the plan.

“Okay, that handles Crabbe and Goyle then, what about Aarons and Waterman?” Ronnie asked.

Dora grinned. “Lexi and Lola are taking care of them as we speak, I should think,” she said looking at her watch.

Hermione now was the one looking sceptical, but as with Kieran and Scott, Hermione didn’t say anything and turned back to the two boys.
“Okay, you two, go find Crabbe and Goyle. They’re probably still eating in the Great Hall, so you’ll have time to get in position.”

The two boys nodded, and after receiving some good luck wishes left the bathroom. Harriet sighed, the same helpless feeling she always got when important things were happening that she wasn’t involved in bubbled in her stomach.

To everyone’s surprise, Kieran and Scott returned only fifteen minutes later. Both looked equally perplexed at how well it had gone as they handed Crabbe and Goyle’s hairs to Hermione.

“That was fast,” Dora said, impressed.

“Y-yeah… that went… surprisingly well,” Scott said, sounding out of breath.

“Aye, the hardest part was getting them in the closet,” Kieran said. He sounded just as winded as Scott.

Hermione filled four glasses she had smuggled out of the Great Hall with the glutinous potion. It did look exactly like the instructions had said it should, and it had apparently worked as Dora had proven that morning. Despite those reassuring signs, Harriet was still nervous as she took her glass then the hair that the Grace twins had taken from Wendy. Hermione took her glass and Danielle’s hair, while Kieran had Goyle’s hair and Scott had Crabbe’s.

“Right, now, we each drop the hair into the potion,” Hermione said, her voice shaking.

Kieran nodded and bravely dropped his hair into the potion. The potion frothed and gurgled in the glass before turning the colour of a bogey.

“Oh god, that looks revolting…” Ronnie said, cringing.

“Are you sure the rest is right?” Dora asked, looking on. “That looks nothing like how yours looked, yours looked and tasted good actually.”

Hermione blushed. “I-uh… I think it varies based on the person…” she said and dropped her hair into the potion.

It hissed and frothed as Kieran’s had, but this time it turned almost neon yellow.

“Ugh, well if it’s based on whom the hair belongs to… I don’t fancy getting to know Danielle better,” Ronnie said.

Dora glowered. “I don’t know… I don’t think she’s so bad as others…” she said defensively. Harriet remembered how they had spent an hour arguing with Dora that they were only using Danielle’s hair to ask questions, not because they thought she was a suspect. “She never really talks usual anti-Muggleborn gibberish, think she just fits in with the others because she is a Pure-Blood and seems stuck up. She’s better than Wendy is… maybe it tastes like banana or something?”

Scott dropped in his hair, turning his potion into the colour of mud. Everyone looked at Harriet. She took a deep breath and dropped her hair into the potion. Unlike the others, however, instead of turning some gross colour, it turned into a silky-smooth crème colour. Everyone looked at it confused.

“That’s weird… you sure you didn’t mix up Danielle and Wendy’s hairs?” Dora asked.

Harriet shrugged. “Well doesn’t matter either way who gets what potion, does it?”
Hermione nodded. “Right, as long as we get all the people into place, that’s what matters. Now, I got us all changes of robes and clothes so that we can pass as Slytherins and because you two obviously won’t fit into your normal clothes after you become Crabbe and Goyle,” She said directing the last to Kieran and Scott.

They all nodded nervously, took the clothes Hermione offered them and stepped into stalls to change. Harriet put on the clothes which felt a little tight for her and listened for the others to stop changing.

“Everyone ready?” she asked.

There were three affirmative replies, and she took a deep breath. “Alright, bottoms up.”

Harriet closed her eyes and drank. To her surprise, the potion did taste just like crème. However, she didn’t get much time to enjoy it. The moment she’d swallowed, she felt like her entire insides began to writhe. She dropped her glass, clutching her stomach and slumping down onto the toilet seat in pain. By the sound of it, the others were going through the same sensations she was.

She felt as though her insides were now on fire, and the heat was spreading through her body. To her horror, her skin bubbled just as Dora’s had done when she turned back into herself. She then felt as though she was shrinking, her clothes starting to fit better. She groaned as her skin stopped bubbling and became much paler than her usual shade.

She put her hands on her face and felt it had stopped changing too, though it was much rounder than she remembered her face being before. She also could barely see. At first, she was worried something had gone wrong when she realised it was her glasses. She took them off and was amazed at being able to see without them. Then she remembered Wendy didn’t wear glasses and apparently did not need them.

“Everyone okay?”

Harriet jumped at the voice. It was Crabbe’s voice, though it sounded gentle and caring, unlike any time she had ever heard Crabbe before.

“Yeah,” responded Goyle’s voice. “I’m… I’m fantastic!”

Harriet furrowed her brow. Fantastic? How could being Goyle be fantastic?

Harriet pushed the stall door open and stepped out. Ronnie gaped at her, but Dora merely grinned and gave Harriet a thumbs up.


Harriet quickly went to a mirror and looked at herself. Dora was right; she did look just like Wendy. Harriet turned to see other stall doors opening, and Kieran who was Goyle, and Scott who was Crabbe, came stumbling out. However, the reason Kieran had said it was fantastic was evident at once. He jumped a few times and laughed with excitement.

“Scott! Look! I can stand! I can walk!” He said sounding almost childish despite Goyle’s deep grunting voice.

Scott gave a laugh that didn’t suit Crabbe’s voice. In spite of herself, Harriet couldn’t help but beam at the sight of Kieran balancing on his usually bad leg, showing off.

“Hermione, everything okay?” Ronnie asked, bringing Harriet’s attention around to the stall
Hermione had changed in.

“I-uh… I’m… not coming!” Hermione said through the door.

Something about this struck Harriet at once. Kieran and Scott both sounded like Goyle and Crabbe, yet Hermione had still sounded like herself. The only difference was, her voice was now shrill and panicky.

“Hermione, something wrong?” Harriet asked. Her voice too had changed, so she sounded like Wendy.

“Yes, I’m fine, you three get out of here, you only have an hour! Get to Malfoy!” Hermione said. Her voice was still a bit shrill and panicked.

The others merely shrugged.

“We’ll meet back here,” Kieran said. “Come on Harri-er-Wendy, Crabbe.”

Harriet smiled and followed him out of the bathroom.

“Remember the password’s ‘pure-blood’!” Dora called after them.

Kieran led most of the way, Harriet and Scott close behind. As they went, they made little suggestions to each other on ways to look or act more like the people they were pretending to be. They also laughed loudly when Kieran pointed out this as being the first time in his life he’d ever wanted to punch his best friend in the face. However, as he said this, Harriet couldn’t help but ponder two of the mysteries of her friend. How had his leg been hurt, and what did it have to do with Crabbe, if anything?

Finally, after five minutes they’d arrived at the stretch of stone wall that held the concealed doorway to the Slytherin common room.

“Pure-blood,” Scott said confidently, and the door slid open.

They stepped inside, and Harriet did her best not to look surprised by what she saw. The Slytherin common room was mostly walled and ceilinged in rough stone. Round, green lamps hung from the ceiling and ominously lit the room. The fireplace was carved with elaborate snake designs and was glowing with a crackling fire.

“Oh there you two are,” came Malfoy’s voice from a nearby door.

They turned to see him walking towards them from what Harriet took to be the Slytherin boys’ dormitory.

“Uh yeah, just got carried away eating,” Scott said.

Malfoy didn’t question this story and looked down at Harriet. “Hello Aarons, good dinner?”

Harriet was taken aback a little at Malfoy’s kinder tone. He’d never spoken to her that nicely before.

“Oh yes, fine, thank you,” Harriet said, feeling nervous.

Apparently, Wendy was usually this nervous around Malfoy because he didn’t seem to notice.

“Well, join us if you like, must be lonely without Pansy and Pixie around,” Malfoy said.
He turned and headed for some nearby couches and chairs. He gestured for Harriet to sit on a sofa and for Kieran and Scott to sit in two chairs. They sat and to Harriet’s horror, Malfoy didn’t just sit on the couch with her; he flopped down on it and rested his head on her lap. Harriet gave Kieran and Scott a horrified look, but all they could do was give her surreptitious looks of comfort back.

“Got some bad news today…” Malfoy muttered darkly.

“O-oh no,” Harriet said, doing her best to sound concerned. “What happened?”

“The stupid Ministry searched our house again… that’s why Father didn’t want me coming home,” Malfoy replied, ripping up a piece of paper absent-mindedly.

“You’re kidding?” Kieran asked, quick on the uptake.

“Of course I’m not kidding, Goyle, I already told you that’s why I couldn’t go home,” Malfoy snapped.

“Oh, sorry,” Kieran muttered.

Malfoy sat up now, much to Harriet’s relief, though it was short lived because all he did was grab a pillow to punch angrily before lying right back down again.

“Wh-why are they searching your house?” Harriet asked, hoping Malfoy hadn’t confided that to Wendy.

Malfoy growled. “Father’s got some really expensive old dark arts stuff. We sold a lot of it, but some of it’s just too valuable, family heirlooms and stuff. Fortunately, we keep that all hidden in a secret chamber under our drawing room.”

Harriet shot a look at Kieran and Scott, who both gave her little grins.

“That’s clever,” Harriet said, trying to sound flattering.

“Thanks, Aarons…” he said and smiled at her. “Don’t these people have anything better to do? You’d think they’d be investigating Dumbledore for all these attacks. He’s probably keeping it quiet somehow… but they’ll sack him for sure if the attacks keep going on.”

Malfoy grinned at the thought. “This place needs a real headmaster, one with proper pride and priorities… like old Phineas Nigellus Black. Heh, still can’t believe people thought Black was the traitor… still funny to think one of Dumbledore’s little stooges is sitting in Azkaban for a crime he didn’t commit. Anyway, Phineas Nigellus though, now that was a headmaster! He would never have let vermin like that little Creevey in… following Potter around everywhere. Jumped up little mudblood…”

Harriet looked up at Kieran and Scott again. They both looked just as perplexed as she felt.

“Too right, Draco…” Harriet said, feeling disgusted with herself. “But the Heir will take care of them all, right?” Harriet went on, trying to grin down at Malfoy knowingly, hoping it would trigger Malfoy into either a confession or at least into saying something more incriminating.

However, Malfoy glared and sat up again.

“He probably will… I just wish I knew who it is!”

Harriet felt her face fall. Malfoy’s statement had been too blatant and upset to be acting.
“I could help them! Point out who to attack and hints for how to go about it! If the Heir knew what he was doing, he’d have gone straight for Granger or Van De Lakk! Good for nothing mudbloods too big for their britches…”

Harriet glanced at Kieran and Scott again and noted to her horror that rage that was starting to show on Scott’s face. Kieran put a calming hand on Scott’s, and Scott seemed to regain his senses enough to ask.

“Come on, Draco, you gotta have some idea?”

“I’ve told you I don’t, Crabbe. Father told me to keep my head down while this is all going on. He won’t tell me anything about it either; he said it’d be suspicious if I know too much about it, but I do know it’s been fifty years since the last time the chamber was open. And the last time it was, a mud-blood died. It’s only a matter of time before it’s another one killed this year.”

Malfoy grinned darkly again. “I hope it’s Granger… or Van De Lakk… maybe especially Van De Lakk… mud-blood or not at least Granger is somewhat pleasant to look at… even with her beaver teeth.”

Scott was starting to look dangerously angry again. Kieran thought fast and changed the subject.

“Did they catch whoever had opened it before?”

“Yeah,” Malfoy replied. “It was a student I think because they were expelled. Whoever it was probably died in Azkaban by now.”

Kieran glanced at his watch, and his eyes went wide. He gave Harriet and Scott a significant look, and they both knew what he meant. Their hour was almost up.

Scott winced and held his stomach.

“What’s wrong with you, Crabbe?” Malfoy asked, noticing.

“Oh, stomachache, must have et too much, think I’ll go to the hospital wing,” Scott replied.

“I’ll take him,” Kieran said and rose with Scott.

“Well, give all those petrified mud-bloods a kick for me…” Malfoy said lazily.

To Harriet’s surprise, Malfoy looked a little hurt they were all leaving at once, but Harriet was very relieved to get away. She caught up with Kieran and Scott in the hallway, and they tried to make their way as best they could back towards Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Their pace was impeded when Kieran suddenly let out a gasp and stumbled, grabbing his leg. As Harriet watched, he was slowly beginning to turn back. Scott was also beginning to return to himself. Harriet winced as she felt herself starting to change back as well.

They quickly made their way into a nearby classroom. Harriet groaned as she felt her skin begin to
bubble once more, and the heat move through her. She also could no longer see and had left her glasses behind in the bathroom.

“Well, that was almost a complete disaster,” Scott muttered, trying to hold up the oversized trousers.

“I wouldn’t say complete… we did learn a few things,” Kieran said, trying to sound bolstering even though he was apparently still in pain.

“Yeah, we learned it’s not Malfoy, and the last time the Chamber was opened was fifty years ago… that gives us a place to start looking,” Harriet said.

“Yeah, and about that secret chamber, I’m sure Ronnie’s dad would love to know about that,” Kieran added, his eyes twinkling.

Harriet and Scott helped Kieran to his feet, and each put one of his arms over their shoulders and helped him down the hall. It was even more awkward because as Scott had to hold Kieran and his trousers, and Kieran had his arms over their shoulders, Harriet had to hold Kieran and Kieran’s trousers up as they finally made it to the bathroom.

However, when they opened the door, no one was there. Not even Moaning Myrtle.

“What do you suppose…?” Kieran asked as Scott helped him back into his stall so he could change into his normal clothes.

“I don’t know…” Harriet said looking around.

Everything had been cleared away, the cauldron, the ingredients, there was not a single sign left that they had ever been there.

“Wait, what’s that?” Scott asked pointing at one of the nearby sinks.

He hurried over and picked up a piece of parchment. He read it out loud.

Dear Harriet, Kieran and Scott,

Had to take Hermione to the hospital wing. No time to explain. Meet us there.

Dora

Scott looked up at them blinking.

“Well, let’s get changed and head up,” Harriet said.

Scott agreed, and a couple of minutes later they were back in their regular clothes, on their way up to the hospital wing. Kieran was looking much better on his leg now he had his shillelagh back, though the pain of having had to walk on it without it was apparently still gnawing at him. Again, Harriet felt she had to know the truth, but once more, she didn’t feel it was the right moment.

They opened the door to the hospital wing and immediately saw Dora poking her head around a drawn curtain, looking at them. The three hurried over.

Harriet was cut off as Hermione gave a soft wail of despair. Harriet felt her jaw go slack. In the bed was Hermione, but a Hermione unlike Harriet had ever seen her. Her hair had shortened and turned black, and now covered her whole face and hands like fur. Her eyes had gone yellow with black slit-like pupils, her nose pink and flat, and her ears had grown long and pointed and moved to the top of her head. Out of the side of the bed covers, Harriet could see a long, thin, black tail.

“It was a cat hair!” Hermione wailed. “Danielle must have a cat and Kenley must have taken the wrong hair by mistake!”

Ronnie grimaced and gave Hermione’s furred hand a consoling squeeze.

Hermione wailed again. “Polyjuice Potion isn’t supposed to work with animals! I could be stuck like this forever!”

* * * *

It was a very sullen group that sat around the Gryffindor fireplace that night. It was just Harriet, Kieran and Ronnie. Most of the refugees had gone to bed already, except for Erica who was sitting at a study table alone, reading a book about magical horse breeds. Fred and George had apparently sneaked out to try and stage a party somewhere, while Percy had left to track them down and put a stop to it.

Harriet sighed. Almost nothing had gone according to plan from the beginning. They hadn’t found out who the Heir of Slytherin was, or where the Chamber of Secrets is, and on top of that, Hermione was now in the hospital wing, turned into a half-human, half-cat.

As Harriet sat, she once more felt her eyes being drawn continuously to Kieran’s leg. When would she ever find the time to ask? To Harriet’s surprise, it happened almost instantly.

“Well, I think I’m going to turn in,” Ronnie said in a defeated sounding tone.

She didn’t stop to see if Harriet was going to follow, just headed off to the dormitory, stretching and yawning. Harriet watched her go before turning and finding Kieran looking back at her. She blushed and looked away, though as she did, her eyes again found themselves on his bad leg.

“Kieran… okay, I finally have to ask… what happened to your leg?”

Kieran grimaced but did not look surprised.

“I’ve been waiting for you to ask that…” he muttered, looking at the fire.

“Oh… sorry… I’ve meant to for a while… there’s just never been… well… a good time…”

“Yes, I can imagine,” Kieran replied. He sighed looking down at his leg. “When I was just a baby… a little after You-Know-Who attacked you… his followers were looking for him everywhere, and interrogating anyone who might know anything about where he was…”

Kieran paused to take a deep breath before he continued. “Well… some of them came to our house…”

Harriet put her hands to her mouth without realising it. Somehow she knew the rest of the story before Kieran told it.

“Well… my folks wouldn’t cooperate or tell them anything, so they attacked. My folks fought back,
and they did pretty well. They managed to get the upper hand. One of the Death Eaters though, Crabbe’s father realised they were outmatched, and I guess he saw my crib.”

“Oh, Kieran…” Harriet said into her hands. “So that’s why you and Crabbe hate each other so much…”

Kieran didn’t look up at her or stop. “He fired a curse at my crib… it just grazed my leg, but the damage was done. My parents broke off the attack, and the Death Eaters escaped. Been to St Mungo’s countless times, but nothing can fix it. I had figured that tonight wouldn’t work because it would still hurt while I was Goyle… but it didn’t… guess I just got carried away once I figured it out…”

Kieran looked up at her and grimaced. “But at the same time, it’s why I wanted to do it, in case it did work. And it did. I’ve never felt that before… being able to stand on my leg without leaning on something. As much as I hated being Goyle, for that hour, it was wonderful…”

Before Harriet could stop herself, she flung her arms around Kieran’s shoulders and hugged him tightly.

“H-hey!” Kieran said in surprise, but he did not attempt to dislodge her.

“I’m so sorry I never asked sooner,” Harriet said, hugging tighter.

“It’s fine, Harriet, really, it happened a long time ago, and I’ve grown to live with it. I’ve got my stick, and I’ve got the best friends in the world. I can live with a bum-leg.”

In spite of herself, and in spite of everything that had happened. Harriet finally smiled. They talked a little while longer about their lives growing up. Harriet told Kieran all about her life with the Dursleys, while Kieran explained his childhood. He told her about how his family had moved to Scotland when he was six, and happened to move onto the property right across the road from Scott’s family manor.

Harriet felt a little awkward at this. She had always known Scott was well off compared to the rest of their group, except Dora, but she didn’t know he lived in a manor. Either way, Harriet was touched hearing the story of how Scott and Kieran had become friends. How Kieran had always appreciated how Scott had never treated him as though he were any less than anyone else because of his leg, and how much he appreciated that Harriet and the rest made him feel that way too.

Twenty minutes later, when Harriet finally slid under her covers, she was still smiling. She sighed contentedly and closed her eyes. Despite how tired she felt, sleep did not come right away. Harriet ended up tossing and turning. Despite the relief of having finally learned the truth about Kieran, she was still worried about Hermione. And her disappointment over not discovering the truth about the Heir of the Chamber was still nagging at her as well.

Finally, Harriet felt she was just about to drop off to sleep when she thought she heard the sound of bed curtains being drawn open. Harriet listened but didn’t hear anything else. The door didn’t open, and Harriet didn’t hear anyone getting a drink. Had she just imagined it?

Harriet rolled over and almost screamed. It hadn’t been the bed curtains of another bed; it had been the curtains to her bed that she’d heard. A small figure was standing at the edge of Harriet’s bed, holding the curtains open. Even in the nearly pitch-black, and without her glasses, Harriet recognised the silhouette of Rachel.

Rachel’s shoulders were moving up and down rapidly. She sounded as though she was panting. The
sight somehow put Harriet over her initial shock very quickly, and she sat up.

“Rachel…?” she whispered. “Are… are you okay?”

Harriet didn’t expect an answer. She was wondering if somehow Rachel was still asleep, another form of her night terrors. To Harriet’s surprise, Rachel shook her head.

“Do… do you… um… need help with something?” Harriet asked, still trying to keep her voice down and sound calm.

Rachel didn’t answer. Instead, she climbed onto Harriet’s bed and hugged Harriet tight around the chest. Harriet was taken aback, not only at what Rachel did but also by what she felt. Rachel was trembling as badly as if she’d been standing outside for the last hour with no coat.

“Rachel!” Harriet gasped and put her arms around Rachel in return. She was hard pressed to sound concerned and yet keep her voice down. “What’s wrong?”

Harriet wasn’t sure, but it seemed the moment she put her arms around Rachel, the smaller girl’s trembling seemed to subside, and her breathing started to slow down. Harriet wasn’t sure how long it took, but finally, Rachel spoke.

“I want to go home…” she said in a tremulous voice. “We were supposed to be safe here… now bad things are happening… people hate us… I’ve never been away from home for Christmas before…”

Harriet didn’t know how to respond. She just began to stroke Rachel’s hair and rocked her gently.

“Shh… it’s okay…” Harriet said, trying to think of anything to say. “You’re safe right here… nothing’s going to get you right here…”

“I miss my dad…” Rachel said. “I miss my mom…”

Harriet just nodded and rocked Rachel more. Rachel had never talked about her family before.

“I miss my brothers… I want us all to be home again…”

“I know, sweetie… I know…” Harriet whispered, feeling lame.

Despite not feeling very helpful, Rachel was starting to calm down. She wasn’t trembling nearly as much, and her breathing was getting under control.

“They’re dead.”

Harriet blinked, caught entirely off guard by the statement.

“What?” she asked.

“Mom… Dad… they’re dead… gone… I’m alone…”

Harriet felt her heart sink. Rachel was another just like her; another orphan.

“Oh, sweetie… I’m so sorry… really… but… what about your brothers…?”

Almost the moment she asked, Harriet wished she hadn’t. What if they were dead too?

Rachel just shook her head. “They’re in the war…” was all she said.
“Oh,” Harriet said and stroked Rachel's hair a little more. “Well… at… at least they’re trying to do something good, right…?”

Again Rachel did not respond right away. Instead, Harriet felt her arms tighten around Harriet’s chest, and she trembled once more, but this time it felt less like fear, and a lot more like anger.

“Aaron and Blaine are…” she muttered. “Not Sean… and they abandoned me… all of them… they sent me away and stayed to fight. They just threw me away…”

Harriet had no idea what to say to that. She didn’t have to ask what Rachel meant either. One of her brothers was fighting for the secessionists. Harriet couldn’t possibly imagine how the tiny figure hugging her must be feeling. Harriet hugged Rachel a little tighter and once more Rachel seemed to calm down. She wasn’t breathing so hard, and she wasn’t trembling.

However, just as Harriet was about to loosen her hold on Rachel a little, Rachel gripped her tighter. She gave a little spasm, then another. Rachel buried her head into Harriet’s shoulder, and Harriet felt two wet spots starting to grow on her nightgown where Rachel’s eyes were. Soon Rachel broke down into deep sobs, great heaving sobs that shook Harriet with each one.

Harriet wondered if she had talked to any of her other friends about this, or if she’d ever told anyone about it. And if she hadn’t, why was she telling Harriet? Although, as she thought about it, for once Harriet thought she understood what Rachel was feeling and why Rachel was telling this to Harriet. Harriet was an orphan too.

Harriet gently lay back on the bed with Rachel. Rachel continued to sob, and Harriet just let her. Eventually, Rachel’s sobs stopped, and her breathing slowed to the deep, steady rhythm of sleep. Harriet tried to move her arm but Rachel was laying on it, and Harriet didn’t want to wake her. She shifted just enough to where Rachel wasn’t putting quite so much pressure on her arm, and she felt a little more comfortable. Satisfied that Rachel was sleeping soundly and her arm wasn’t going to fall asleep, Harriet smiled, closed her eyes, and finally fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Scott McIntyre, Kieran O'Brien, Rosie and Nanette Sinistra, and Wendy Aarons property of night-miner(dA)

Kim and Leslie Grace, Rachel Kane property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
Hello Harriet Potter, My Name is Tom Riddle

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(Disclaimer: This chapter includes a section which delves into events that occurred before Harriet was born. As the primary nature of this project is how events would transpire differently than canon as a result of the gender-swap, we could not justify changing the dialogue within that section from what it was in canon. This was not done out of laziness or any intent to truly steal from Rowling’s work. It is simply a reflection of the fact that the change in Harry’s gender could not alter events happening years before his birth. Please keep this in mind when reading, and rest-assured all pieces of writing outside of the dialogue in that section are my own writing.)

“When what you see comes in conflict with what you feel, it is always better to go with your feelings. That is your heart speaking to you, guiding you toward the choice that is right for you.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Rachel had returned to her bed by the time Harriet woke up the following morning. Rachel didn’t say anything about what had happened, and Harriet decided to follow her lead. Harriet didn’t mind so much. All that day Rachel seemed happier and was smiling more than Harriet had seen her do during the whole school year to that point. Harriet supposed finally getting what was tormenting her off her chest had done the trick, and she had to admit she did feel a little spot of pride that she had been the one Rachel had trusted.

Meanwhile, Hermione was still in the hospital wing. Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori said that they did not think the effects would be permanent, but it would still take several weeks to treat fully. While Harriet and her friends were relieved that Hermione would be okay, Hermione was distraught at the prospect of missing classes once school resumed.

It was another moment that Harriet found herself appreciative of how strongly both Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori stuck to their oaths of patient-healer privileges. This meant that even though Hermione had to admit to them that they had made Polyjuice Potion, and had accidentally used a cat hair, they would not tell Professor Dumbledore or any of the other staff about it. In fact, it was a bitter-sweet pill of pride they all swallowed when Miss Momori informed them that the only reason Hermione was able to be cured at all was that the potion had been perfectly brewed. Had the potion been made with any less care Hermione’s condition would probably be permanent.

What Harriet did not like was the bitterness that had welled up in Hermione during the days that followed. While Harriet didn’t blame Hermione for being upset over what happened, she was surprised at how quickly Hermione turned to the conclusion that Kenley must have slipped her the cat hair on purpose. No matter how many times Dora insisted that Danielle did, in fact, have a cat with long black fur, nothing seemed to dissuade Hermione from her newfound conviction.

The second fortunate thing about the Polyjuice potion fiasco, after the fact Hermione’s condition was curable, was how it seemed they had at least gotten away scot-free. While Draco did seem suspicious that something strange had happened that night, he did not seem to have figured out exactly what. Harriet was sure seeing Crabbe and Goyle walk back into the Common Room after he thought they
had just left, saying they had just woken up in a closet, was very confusing. How was Draco to reach the conclusion someone had made Polyjuice Potion, one of the most challenging potions to make, just to question him about the Heir of Slytherin and the Chamber of Secrets?

They had also worried that Danielle and Wendy, being smarter than Crabbe and Goyle, might put enough pieces together to expose them. However, Kim and Leslie had carried out their part of the plan flawlessly. Dora explained how the two had sent letters to both girls, telling them to go to the astronomy tower. Apparently, the letter to Wendy had been ‘from’ Malfoy, while the letter to Danielle had been ‘from’ AJ’s brother, Ben. Once both girls were there, Lexi and Lola had merely hit them both with Full-Body Bind jinxes from behind and left them there until Professor Sinistra found them a couple of hours later. Whatever Dora had said about the pair being “good kids,” Harriet had to admit she didn’t want to get on their bad side.

The other good thing about that night was the information about the secret compartment the Malfoys had under their drawing room. Harriet quite eagerly let Ronnie borrow Hedwig to send the letter home to her father, who everyone was sure would love a reason to launch another investigation on the Malfoys’ home. All in all, even if Malfoy wasn’t the Heir of Slytherin, at least they made sure his Christmas wouldn’t be all that jolly.

However, turmoil in Malfoy Manor did little to get them closer to figuring out the identity of the Heir, the location of the Chamber, or what the supposed monster was. Nor did it help Harriet solve her other mini-mystery: the identity of T. M. Riddle and why someone had thrown his fifty-year-old diary, in which he had never written anything but his name, into the Gryffindor Common Room fireplace.

Harriet still hadn’t told any of her friends about finding the diary. Something about it seemed to make her not want to, as though she had to keep it secret and safe, tucked away where no one could see it. It also seemed to creep into her mind at odd times, such as during meals or even in the middle of conversations. Throughout the week, she would sometimes sneak it out of her trunk just to look at it, flipping through the pages hoping words would appear.

Even though she was sure she had never heard the name T. M. Riddle, she couldn’t help but feel as though she should have heard it before. It felt a little like last year when they had been searching for the identity of Nicolas Flamel. The difference was Flamel was a name Harriet was sure she had read before, while this time, Riddle was someone she was sure she had met before. But she knew she couldn’t have. T. M. Riddle had to be old by now if he bought a diary back in nineteen forty-two, and the Dursleys would always make her stay hidden in her cupboard under the stairs whenever they had company.

However, the strangest impulse Harriet would get while holding the diary was the urge to write in it. Once or twice during the week after Christmas, she even found herself taking out her quill and ink. She always stopped herself just before she started. It was as if anytime she would start, a little voice inside her head would tell her no… don’t write in the diary… I don’t need to write in the diary… it’s not my diary… why do I have to write in it?

It was a week before the end of the Christmas Holidays when finally, Harriet couldn’t take it anymore. She waited until everyone in her dorm was asleep, snuck out the diary, her quill and ink from her trunk, and crept down the stairs into the quiet of the common room. She didn’t listen to the little voice telling her no this time; she had to figure out what was going on.

She lit a candle and sat at one of the study tables. She opened her ink bottle, dipped her quill into it, and touched it to the paper. Now that it came to it, she suddenly felt a little silly. What was she hoping to write? She almost felt as though she should say something like “hello,” but that was silly to
write in a diary, wasn’t it? Diaries weren’t people; they didn’t think.

Finally, Harriet just wrote the words:

*My name is Harriet Potter.*

After she wrote the passage, Harriet sat back and looked down. Nothing happened, though why exactly she expected something to happen, Harriet didn’t know. Harriet sighed and rubbed her eyes. After she finished, Harriet looked back down at the diary and jumped so hard she nearly knocked her ink bottle over.

Instead of the words she had written, there was now the words:

*Hello Harriet Potter, my name is Tom Riddle.*

Harriet stared. How had the words got there? And what happened to the words she’d written before? Harriet squeaked with fright when more words seemed to ooze up through the paper. This time they formed the words:

*Don’t be afraid, Harriet Potter, I would just like to know how you came by my diary?*

Harriet felt her hand trembling as she lifted it and dipped it into her ink again. She wrote with difficulty:

*I found it in the fireplace, someone threw it in there, but your diary didn’t burn up.*

As Harriet watched, the words she had written seemed to sink into the paper and vanish. Then, more words returned.

*Well, it’s certainly lucky that my diary is stronger than something as trifling as fire. But I always knew there would be those who did not want this diary read, or worse, would want it destroyed.*

Harriet bit her lip. She was starting to wonder if she was dreaming. She was talking to someone in a diary; she was either dreaming or had gone crazy. She wrote more:

*I wondered how it hadn’t been burnt up. Do you mind if I ask; who are you? And why would someone want your diary destroyed?*

Harriet held her breath as she waited for the reply.

*Interesting questions, Riddle replied. My name is Tom Marvolo Riddle. I was born in an orphanage in London on 31 December 1926. My mother died just after giving birth to me, and I never knew my father. I bought this diary to store my memories back in 1944 after terrible things happened at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.*

*That’s where I am now, Harriet wrote eagerly. And terrible things are happening now too! They said it happened before, about the Heir of Slytherin and the Chamber of Secrets. Is that what happened when you were here?*

Harriet paused and thought. By the sound of it, Riddle had been an orphan just like her. She didn’t bring it up, however. Instead, she wrote:

*But if you bought this diary in 1944, why is the year listed as 1942?*

There was a bit longer pause this time. Finally, the writing formed again.
I bought it second hand, from a shop on Vauxhall Road. It was the best I could afford. It was something I could hide my memories in, and if done right, it could last forever.

Harriet blinked and pondered this information. Forever was a long time and nothing or no one could live forever, could they? Not even Nicolas Flamel had lived forever.

But why? Harriet asked. Did you know something about the Chamber?

Yes, I did, Riddle replied. I caught the one who was carrying out the attacks. But Professor Dippet, the headmaster at the time, told me I could not tell anyone anything about what had happened. I don’t think he needed to bother. After all, I was an orphan living in a Muggle orphanage. Who could I have told?

Harriet thought hard and nervously wrote more.

I’ve heard the last time the Chamber was open, someone died?

Yes, that’s correct. A Muggleborn girl.

Harriet swallowed at that unpleasant information.

So, if you caught who did it before, do you know who could be opening it now?

I imagine it could very well be the same person. The perpetrator was expelled, but not imprisoned. It’s very likely this person may have found a way back into Hogwarts. It may be someone you know very well.

Who? Harriet wrote back, her hands starting to sweat with nervous excitement.

I can show you if you’d like?

Harriet blinked.

How?

As Harriet watched, she gasped as the pages began to flutter and turn themselves rapidly until they stopped in the middle of June. Harriet was even more astonished when the square that should have been marked the 13th of June had turned into a tiny window or television, Harriet wasn’t sure which. Underneath, more of Riddle’s writing appeared.

Look inside, please.

Harriet took a deep breath, picked up the diary, and put her eye up to the tiny window. Before she could do anything else, Harriet felt as though she had been pitched forward, launched out of her chair, and was freefalling towards the ground. She cried out, but the moment she did, she landed hard on her feet. She looked around. She knew exactly where she was. She was in the Headmaster’s office. There were all the sleeping portraits hanging on the walls, but she didn’t see any of the spindle-legged tables with the delicate silver instruments. Nor was there Fawkes.

Harriet squeaked in surprise when she looked at the desk and saw someone sitting behind it. The man was not Dumbledore. He looked older and much frailer than Dumbledore. He also, it seemed, had lost most of his hair.

“Oh! Oh, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to intrude!” Harriet said quickly.

However, the wizard gave no response. Instead, he continued to read a letter by candle-light. Harriet
furrowed her brow and stepped closer. Even with how focused the wizard was on the letter, there was no way he could fail to see Harriet approaching.

Harriet’s suspicions that the wizard could not see her were confirmed when the wizard folded the letter and rose, walking straight past her to open the curtains to the window. By the looks of it, it was now sunset, when just a second ago, Harriet had been sitting in the Gryffindor Common room, and it had been almost one in the morning.

It was as the old wizard sat back down that Harriet started putting the pieces together. Riddle had said he had bought the diary to “store his memories.” Was that where she was now; in Riddle’s memory? Was the old man, who Harriet now assumed was the headmaster fifty years ago, T. M. Riddle?

Harriet turned when she heard a knock on the door.

“Enter,” the Headmaster said. He sounded just as old as he looked, though somehow Harriet didn’t think it was just his age. He looked as though he had a world of misery on his shoulders.

The door opened, and Harriet felt her jaw drop open. The boy who walked in was the most handsome boy Harriet had ever seen.

“Ah, Riddle,” the old headmaster said.

Harriet continued to stare at the boy. So this was Tom Riddle. He had jet-black hair, much like hers. His skin was flawless and smooth, and his eyes shone brightly even in the dim light of the Headmaster’s office. He looked as though he was about sixteen in age, and was wearing a Slytherin uniform, with a silver prefect badge pinned to his robe. He was also quite tall and thin, though his shoulders were beginning to get quite broad. In spite of herself, Harriet felt her cheeks get hot and that same butterfly feeling she would get whenever Wood praised her crept into her stomach.

“You wanted to see me, Professor Dippet?” Riddle asked. He looked and sounded nervous.

“Sit down. I’ve just been reading the letter you sent me,” Professor Dippet said.

“Oh,” Riddle replied. He sat as requested. He looked up at Professor Dippet as though he were going to say something more but instead looked down at his hands, fingering a large ring. Harriet didn’t know why, but something about the ring drew her attention. It had a gold band and was set with a large, black stone. There were some marks on the stone, but Harriet couldn’t quite make them out before Professor Dippet spoke up again, distracting her.

“My dear boy,” Professor Dippet said looking sympathetic. “I cannot possibly let you stay at school over the summer. Surely you want to go home for the holidays?”

“No. I’d much rather stay at Hogwarts than go back to that—to that—”

Professor Dippet furrowed his eyebrows, studying Riddle. “You live in a Muggle orphanage during the holidays, I believe?”

Riddle nodded. “Yes sir,” he said. To Harriet’s surprise, Riddle seemed to blush, as though that fact was embarrassing to him.

“You are Muggle-born?” Professor Dippet asked.

Harriet found this an odd question to ask, then she remembered how the same attacks were going on back in Riddle’s time, and so asking if Riddle was a Muggle-born was probably a valid concern.

Professor Dippet sighed and leaned forward on his desk. “And are both your parents—?”

Riddle’s jaw seemed to clench a little, and his lips tightened. Somehow, something about this reaction seemed odd to Harriet. He didn’t look upset, or sad, or even nervous. What was the look on his face? She just couldn’t place it.

“My mother died just after I was born, sir. They told me at the orphanage she lived just long enough to name me—Tom after my father, Marvolo after my grandfather,” Riddle said in a serious tone.

Harriet bit her lip. As she looked down at Riddle, a wave of pity rose up inside her. He seemed so strong about the loss of his family and having to live in an orphanage, although Harriet could tell it troubled him.

Professor Dippet tutted sadly. “The thing is, Tom, special arrangements might have been made for you, but in the current circumstances…”

“You mean all these attacks, sir?” Riddle asked.

“Precisely,” Professor Dippet said. “My dear boy, you must see how foolish it would be for me to allow you to remain in the castle when the term ends. Particularly in light of the recent tragedy… the death of that poor little girl… You will be safer by far at your orphanage. The Ministry of Magic is even now talking about closing the school. We are no nearer locating the—er—source of all this unpleasantness…”

Riddle looked as though all of his worst nightmares had come true at once.

“Sir—if the person was caught—if it all stopped—”

“What do you mean?” Professor Dippet asked looking shocked, and even a little angry. “Riddle, do you mean you know something about these attacks?”

Harriet was surprised to hear a slight tone of accusation in Dippet’s voice.

“No, sir,” Riddle said quickly.

Harriet furrowed her brow, studying Riddle’s face. She couldn’t help but think that Riddle had replied a little too quickly. Dippet meanwhile sank back into his chair, looking like a deflated balloon.

“You may go, Tom…”

Riddle slowly rose and walked with heavy feet from the room. Harriet followed close behind. Riddle looked at once miserable and deep in thought as they made their way down the moving spiral staircase.

It was then that Harriet felt something odd. Although she was certain no one in this memory could see her, she couldn’t avoid the sensation that someone or something was watching her. She looked around, but couldn’t see anyone who could be watching in the narrow, spiralling staircase.

They hit the ground floor, and Riddle paced a few times, running his hands through his hair. In spite of herself, Harriet wished she could just put a hand on his shoulder, give him some comfort.

Suddenly, Riddle turned and started off down the hall towards the entrance hall. Harriet followed,
looking around anxiously. For some reason, she still felt like she was being watched.

They headed down the large marble staircase. They reached the bottom, and Harriet was starting to wonder why they hadn’t seen anyone when a voice called from the top of the marble staircase behind them. The sound of the voice made her freeze even though the speaker couldn’t be talking to her. She also couldn’t help but feel there was something familiar about that voice.

“What are you doing, wandering around this late, Tom?”

Harriet turned with Riddle. The wizard who had spoken was standing at the top of the staircase, wearing midnight blue robes and had flowing auburn hair and beard. Harriet furrowed her brow when she also noticed the man was wearing half-moon spectacles. At once, she knew who he was. This was a fifty-year younger Professor Albus Dumbledore, in the days when he was just the Transfiguration teacher.

“I had to see the headmaster, sir,” Riddle replied.

Harriet looked at Riddle again. Again, his entire demeanour seemed different than it had when they were with Professor Dippet or when they had been alone outside Dippet’s office. Harriet watched hard, trying to figure out what it was. If she didn’t know better, Harriet would have thought Riddle looked almost afraid of Dumbledore the way his body had gone rigid and his jaw set.

“Well, hurry off to bed. Best not to roam the corridors these days. Not since…” Dumbledore paused and sighed. “Good night, Tom.”

“Good night, sir,” Riddle replied.

Dumbledore turned and headed off down another corridor. Riddle watched until Dumbledore was out of sight before hurrying off, heading down towards the dungeons. Harriet thought they were indeed going to follow Dumbledore’s instructions and go to the Slytherin common room when Riddle paused and ducked into the same dungeon in which Professor Snape now taught Potions.

Harriet waited with bated breath as they hid. Riddle had kept the door open only a crack, peering out and waiting. He was almost motionless as he stood watching. The entire time, Harriet could not keep her eyes off Riddle. Something was starting to puzzle her. If Riddle did know something about the attacks, and who was doing it, why hadn’t he come forward before? Or why didn’t he just tell Professor Dippet?

Harriet didn’t know how long they had waited when finally she heard something in the hallway beyond. It was the sound of footsteps, as though someone very large was trying to sneak inexpertly down the hall. The footsteps moved past, and Riddle opened the door silently, creeping out after whoever had walked past. Harriet started sneaking out behind Riddle, when she remembered that she couldn’t be heard and blushed, simply walking along with him.

Harriet stopped as Riddle paused and listened. She heard the sound of a door opening, and a gruff voice spoke.

“C’mon… gotta get yeh outta here… C’mon now… into the box…”

Harriet blinked. She knew that voice. It was perhaps the voice of her favourite person in the entire world.

Before Harriet could ponder this any further, Riddle sprang around the corner and drew his wand in one fluid motion. Harriet peered around the corner and saw the tallest boy she had ever seen in her life. He stood almost as tall as the ceiling, and he was crouched in front of what looked like a broom
cupboard. Beside him was a huge, open box.

“Evening, Rubeus.” Riddle said.

Harriet couldn’t help but notice an air of triumph in Riddle’s voice.

The tall boy who could only be a fifty-year younger Hagrid slammed the cupboard door shut and rounded on Riddle.

“What yer doin’ down here, Tom?”

Riddle grinned and took a step towards Hagrid. Despite knowing how gentle Hagrid was, Harriet had to admit she was impressed by the bravery Riddle showed, stepping up to a boy twice his height.

“It’s all over. I’m going to have to turn you in, Rubeus. They’re talking about closing Hogwarts if the attacks don’t stop,” Riddle said.

Harriet still couldn’t help but notice the triumphant tone Riddle had. She also couldn’t bring herself to believe what she was seeing. Hagrid, the Heir of Slytherin? Setting a giant monster loose on the school’s Muggle-born students? It couldn’t be, it just couldn’t be.

“What d’yeh—?”

“I don’t think you meant to kill anyone. But monsters don’t make good pets. I suppose you just let it out for exercise and—”

“He never killed no one!” Hagrid shouted.

Hagrid backed against the door, shielding it from Riddle. It was then that Harriet heard the disconcerting sound of something rustling and an agitated clicking noise.

“Come on, Rubeus. The dead girl’s parents will be here tomorrow. The least Hogwarts can do is make sure that the thing that killed their daughter is slaughtered…”

‘It wasn’t him!’ Hagrid bellowed. ‘He wouldn’t! He never!’

“Stand aside!” Riddle ordered, raising his wand.

Riddle cast a charm on the door behind Hagrid that was so powerful, the door flung Hagrid across the hall, past Riddle and into the wall. The hallway was lit brightly by the spell, and in the fading light, Harriet finally saw what had been inside the cupboard.

Harriet screamed. Inside the cupboard was the most giant spider Harriet had ever seen. It filled the entire cupboard, and it had two large glinting front eyes, surrounded by six smaller eyes, set above a giant pair of fangs.

With surprising speed, the spider shot from the cupboard, one of its long legs swatting Riddle aside as easily as if he were a rag-doll. Riddle forced himself to his feet and raised his wand after the departing monstrosity.

“NOOOOOOO!” Hagrid cried and grabbed hold of Riddle, pushing him back down to the ground.

At that moment, the scene began to swirl and darken. Harriet felt as though she were flying, or perhaps more floating with great speed, shooting up into the air. With a sudden crunch, she landed back in her chair, grunting in pain and rubbing her back. She continued to stare at the diary. She couldn’t believe what she had seen. She just couldn’t. Could it have been Hagrid, all along?
"I don’t believe it."

It was the next day, and Harriet and her friends were all gathered around Hermione’s hospital bed. Harriet had finally told her friends about the diary and what she had seen in Riddle’s memory. They were all displeased that Harriet had chosen to keep it a secret, but none were as upset as Ronnie. Ronnie was even more upset with her because of how dangerous it had been for Harriet even to touch the diary. She wasted little time telling Harriet off and listing all the perilous books there were, the most unpleasant being one that melted its reader’s eyes.

Now that was all over. However, they had turned to the topic of Hagrid letting the monster out of the Chamber of Secrets. Of all of them, Ronnie also looked the most distraught about the prospect of the monster being a giant spider. Harriet remembered how strongly Ronnie feared spiders after the shed incident last summer and knew that the possibility of a giant spider running about the school was probably Ronnie’s worst nightmare come true.

“I just can’t believe it,” Kieran continued, thinking hard.

“Nor me,” Scott said in agreement. “Something just seems all wrong about that… just… trying to put my finger on what…”

“Yeah… none of these attacks seem like the kind of attack a spider would do…” Hermione said. She was starting to make some progress in her treatment and had already lost her prominent whiskers.

“Though… this is the same man who called a Cerberus, Fluffy, and tried to raise a baby-dragon,” Ronnie admitted, sighing.

There was a reluctant murmuring of agreement at this.

“Yeah… Hagrid probably would do whatever it took to find a monster here in the castle,” Dora said. “He probably felt sorry for it being cooped up for so long.”

“Well, no matter what, I do know one thing,” Harriet said, feeling defiant. “Hagrid would have never meant to kill anybody, or hurt anyone.”

There were more nods and murmurs of agreement on this as well.

“And… well… maybe… maybe Riddle had the wrong person?” Hermione suggested. “I’ve never heard of a spider that could petrify people; maybe it was some other monster, and Hagrid was the victim of mistaken identity?”

Harriet chewed her lip in thought. Hermione did have a point. However, Harriet was also aware of the fact she probably wanted Hermione to be right more than believing her.

Ronnie suddenly looked nervously over at Harriet. “Harriet… you said that Hagrid found you down Knockturn Alley this—”

“He was shopping for slug-repellent,” Harriet said, in a more defensive tone than she’d meant.

There was another awkward pause when Hermione spoke up. “Do… do any of you think maybe… we should, just… I don’t know… ask Hagrid about it?”

“Yeah… that’d be a cheery visit,” Ronnie grumbled.
In the end, they still had no idea what they were going to do. There was no option they could think of other than waiting that seemed to spare Hagrid. The remainder of the Christmas holidays passed without incident. They thought perhaps the Heir had gone home for the holidays, which Harriet thought was reassuring. As Hagrid had not left, no attacks happening while he was here at the school seemed to be evidence of his innocence, which made Harriet feel better.

There was something else that was intruding on Harriet’s mind as well. As the days went by, Harriet could not help but notice Isabella sitting alone at the Hufflepuff table, away from the others. Harriet noted how aside from the Hufflepuff prefect, Cedric Diggory, Isabella was the only Hufflepuff student beside the refugees to stay behind. Furthermore, the McGee twins, the only two Hufflepuff refugees in their year, had also left for the holidays. With almost all of her usual friends gone for the holidays, Harriet could only imagine how lonely Isabella must be.

Finally, a week and a half before the end of the holidays, Harriet worked up the courage and walked over to her in the Great Hall.

“Hey, Isabella, mind if we join you?”

Isabella blinked looking entirely taken aback.

“Oh, um…” she thought and finally smiled. “Yeah, that’d be great!”

Harriet beamed. After all the uncomfortable events that had happened, Hermione being transformed into a half cat, and Riddle’s diary, Harriet was glad to do something that made someone else smile for a change.

Harriet waved to the others, and they all came over, smiling too.

“Hey Bella,” Dora said as she sat.

Isabella smiled. “Hey Dora, how’s life amongst the happiest house in school?”

Dora rolled her eyes. “Oh you know, same old same old, a little ‘I hate Muggle-borns’ this, a little ‘I hate you too,’ that.”

Everyone laughed. They spent the rest of dinner chatting about their home lives when finally Harriet had an idea.

“Hey, well we’ve all seen the Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Slytherin common rooms, why don’t we go hang with you in your common room tonight?” Harriet asked Isabella.

Isabella’s eyebrows rose. “You’ve been in the Slytherin common room?”

Harriet felt her insides clench. “Oh, well, we’ve walked Dora there before and peeked inside, not like we’ve hung out there before,” she said, somewhat lamely.

“Oh, well, yeah, that would be great!” Isabella chirped.

They all got up and followed Isabella who seemed to have a little bounce in her step as she led them. They had just reached the door to the Great Hall when Harriet paused. She looked back over her shoulder seeing Rachel and AJ talking with Erica. She gave a wave catching their attention and beckoned for them to follow.

AJ started to rise, but Rachel looked at Erica. Erica just smiled and nodded to Rachel, who rose and followed AJ. As Harriet watched them come, she caught Erica’s eye. To Harriet’s surprise, Erica
gave her a smile that could only be pride before she flipped open her ever-present copy of *Magical Beasts and Where to Find Them* and resumed reading.

Harriet blushed and turned to re-join the group when Rachel and AJ caught up with her. Isabella then led them down a flight of stairs and a corridor. Harriet felt her chest tighten as she realised they were heading down the same hallway that she and Marcus found Colin that fall. Indeed, they walked right past the very spot. Harriet recognised the large portrait of a bowl of fruit.

They continued past until Isabella stopped them in front of a nook in the wall that was filled with large barrels stacked on their side. Harriet furrowed her brow, and Isabella stepped up to the barrels. She raised her hand when suddenly Rachel rushed forward excitedly.

“OH! Let me do it! Let me do it!” she squealed with delight.

“I wanna too!” AJ said and pushed past Isabella too.

Harriet watched with amazement as Rachel reached up and knocked twice on one of the barrels and said: “Hel-ga.”

AJ quickly jumped in and knocked three times muttering: “Huff-le-puff!”

Isabella rolled her eyes. “Show-offs,” she teased but laughed as the two girls ducked and climbed through the passage.

“Oh, that’s clever…” Scott muttered thoughtfully, leaning closer to inspect the door.

“You have to knock and say Helga Hufflepuff’s name?” Dora asked, interested.

“Nah,” Isabella said. “You just have to knock out the rhythm, but saying the name helps you remember.”

“Well that doesn’t sound so hard to get past,” Ronnie said.

Isabella smirked. “It’s not until you don’t do it right.”

“What happens then?” Hermione asked.

Isabella’s smirk grew. “You get doused in vinegar and barred entrance.”

Harriet swallowed and made a note in her mind that in the future she would always wait for someone to open the door to the Hufflepuff common room properly.

Harriet stepped forward and bent down as she moved through the passage. Once she reached the end and rose, Harriet couldn’t help but gape as she finally took in the Hufflepuff common room.

The entire room was a giant circle, and there were flowing yellow hangings on the ceiling, and brass pots full of lush green plants everywhere. It was very warm with a roaring fire going in the large, round fireplace. The fireplace had a wooden mantelpiece covered in carved badgers and topped with a large portrait of a woman Harriet took to be Helga Hufflepuff herself, who was smiling down at them all warm and welcoming. There were black, overstuffed armchairs and sofas everywhere. The walls were lined at the top with circular windows. Harriet was amazed that outside the windows, instead of seeing the Hogwarts grounds, there were vast fields of waving grass and yellow dandelions. Two other large circular doors were on either side of the fireplace, and Harriet assumed they led to the boy and girl dormitories.
“Wow… this is fantastic…” Dora said, looking around. She ran over and flopped into one of the chairs, giggling as she bounced on it.

Isabella laughed as AJ and Rachel followed suit. “We may not have the best reputation when it comes to academics… but at least we have the best common room.”

As Harriet looked around, she had to admit Isabella may have had a point. It was very comfortable and warm here. Everything had an air of home about it. In fact, even if it didn’t look much like it, Harriet couldn’t help but get the same feeling of comfort and “home” like she had at the Burrow with the Weasleys.

They all took seats near the fireplace. Having exhausted the topic of home, they instead began talking about why they had all stayed behind over break. Most everyone had to lie about this, except for Harriet and Isabella. It turned out Isabella had to remain in school because her mother was away on business and couldn’t return in time to get her from the Hogwarts Express, and didn’t want her and her younger sister staying home alone.

“I guess I wouldn’t have minded it so much… if Jeremy ever wrote me back…” Isabella said sounding hurt.

“That doesn’t sound like him…” Scott said scratching his chin.

“Aye, are you sure he’s not doing something with family and just busy?” Kieran asked, sounding concerned.

Isabella shook her head. “I don’t know… we were writing back and forth pretty regularly, then at the start of January he just… stopped writing back… he didn’t say before that he was going anywhere…”

Isabella looked down at her lap. “He’s my best friend… I wrote his parents once even, and they said he’s fine, and they would talk to him… but I still haven’t heard back…”

Harriet and her friends all looked at each other. That didn’t sound like the Jeremy that Harriet had come to know. All last fall he had always seemed so lively and friendly. He’d also been the most outspoken about Harriet’s innocence. Harriet couldn’t imagine he wasn’t writing back unless he had an excellent reason.

However, they were all distracted from the subject of Jeremy by the sound of someone tapping out the rhythm to get through the secret door. The door swung open, and Harriet felt her heart skip a beat as Cedric Diggory came in. He stood up and stretched, looking around when his eyes fell upon the group around the fireplace. His eyes went wide.

“Martinez?” He asked in bewilderment. “Did… did you let them all in?”

Isabella flushed looking nervous.

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“Martinez?” He asked in bewilderment. “Did… did you let them all in?”

Isabella flushed looking nervous.

“Um… yes…? Was that… was that bad…?” She asked, sounding as worried as she looked.

Cedric continued to stare, his face unreadable. “No non-Hufflepuff student has set foot inside the Hufflepuff common room since the school was founded…”

Isabella hung her head, looking ashamed. Dora went red in the face too but her look was more of anger than embarrassment, and she got to her feet.

“And what’s wrong with it? I’ve been in the Gryffindor common room, and the Ravenclaw common
“Aye, Clearwater had no problem with it,” Scott agreed.

“An’ besides, Rachel an’ I an’ lotsa the others who we came with this summer been in here before. We all found out how ta get in over the summer. Dumbledore showed us all how to get into every common room!”

Cedric laughed holding up his hands. “No, no! Honestly you lot, it’s fine! I was just surprised!” he said smiling. “I think it’s great. Good on you Martinez, nice to have you all here. Dumbledore always says the houses need to be more unified.”

Cedric looked at Harriet and smiled more. “Though… you might not want to tell Wood about this. He might consider it ‘fraternising’ with the enemy or something.”

Harriet blushed and forced a laugh. “I… well… maybe… well, he’s not that bad…” she said, not meeting Cedric’s eyes.

Cedric turned to Ronnie. “Oh, hey Weasley. How’s the family?”

Ronnie’s cheeks also reddened. “They’re fine. How’re your folks?”

Cedric shrugged. “Well enough, well enough.” He smiled again at Harriet. “So, Potter, ready for our rematch next month?”

Harriet felt the knot in her stomach tighten. “Of course I am, are you?” she asked back. She felt just like she had after her first match with Cedric, trying to sound tougher and more confident than she felt.

Cedric winked, sending Harriet’s heart into a flutter. “Better be, Potter, I’ve been practising hard for it.”

Cedric turned without another word and headed towards one of the round doors beside the fireplace. They all watched him go. Harriet couldn’t help but smile. As much as she knew he was her opponent on the Hufflepuff Quidditch team, she couldn’t help but feel he was one of the best boys she had ever met. He was so genuinely kind and caring.

Harriet finally looked back at her friends and found them all looking at her with varying expressions. Kieran, Scott, Hermione, and Isabella looked amused, while Ronnie, AJ, and Rachel were almost in fits of laughter. Dora was not paying any attention by the looks of it, seeming overly interested in the knits in her Weasley jumper.

“What?” Harriet asked, blushing.

“Nothing, nothing,” Hermione said, though her expression said otherwise.

“Yeah, ‘nothing;’ the same amount of effort you put into hiding how much you fancy him,” Ronnie teased.

“Hey!” Harriet retorted. “I do not fancy him!”

“It… was pretty obvious…” Isabella chimed in, giggling.

Harriet rolled her eyes. “Well, okay, he’s nice… but… that’s all…”

Hermione laughed. “It’s fine Harriet; we know it’s not just him.”
“What do you mean?” Harriet asked, feeling hot under the collar.

“Well, it’s the same way you act around Wood, for one…” Ronnie teased.

Harriet blushed looking away. However, as she did, she couldn’t help but catch the looks on Kieran and Dora’s faces. Kieran was smiling though his jaw was set a little too hard to make the smile all that convincing. Dora, on the other hand, was looking at the door that Cedric had left through. Though Harriet could only see her profile, Harriet could tell she was frowning, and her hands were gripping the arms of the chair she was sitting in, digging her nails into the upholstery.

Chapter End Notes

Scott McIntyre, Kieran O'Brien, and Isabella Martinez property of night-miner(dA)

Erica Quoy and Rachel Kane property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

AJ property of Hasbro

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by (dA)night-miner(dA), (dA)littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
The Heir Returns

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

“‘Hyt is not al golde that glareth.’ I always remember that from Chaucer, essentially the saying “not all that glitters is gold.” I don’t think truer words have ever been spoken. But it is an incomplete piece of very old advice. I believe it was Tolkien who addressed it best when he spun it on its head, “All that is gold does not glitter.””

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

So, you like mystery stories? I do remember Nancy Drew books, some of the girls at my orphanage used to read them.

So all you had to do was look into the mirror but not want to use the Stone? That was clever of him. You were so brave…

I would love to see you fly sometime. I never played Quidditch myself, but I will always admire a natural performing their art.

Your eyes are green? Green was always my favourite colour, and no not just because I was in Slytherin.

I’m sure you looked gorgeous in your outfit if only my diary had eyes…

Goodness, your Quidditch captain, and a sixth year to boot? And the captain of the Hufflepuff team as well? You are an ambitious one, aren’t you?

Even though she had promised Ronnie not to write in Riddle’s diary again, Harriet couldn’t help herself. She was starting to feel as though the diary was not just Riddle’s memory, but Riddle himself. She felt terrible keeping him locked away in her trunk all the time. So every night she would wait until Ronnie had fallen asleep and sneak down to the common room to write.

And yet, despite the fact his apparent stopping of the monster the first time, and how friendly he seemed, there was still something about him Harriet couldn’t entirely trust. Maybe it was her loyalty to Hagrid speaking, but something about the incident still did not sit right with her. The main thing Harriet knew she was sure of was that Hagrid had not harmed anyone intentionally, and even if he had set the monster loose, he hadn’t done so to drive anyone away from Hogwarts.

The other thing Harriet was sure of was that she was not ready for classes to resume. She was even less prepared for the rest of the students to return. She was excited for Marcus to get back and fill him in properly on everything that had happened. However, she was not ready for the possibility of facing more scrutiny over being Slytherin’s Heir, or, if the Heir had gone home for the Christmas Holidays, the possibility of the attacks starting all over again.

However, the day finally came, and Harriet headed down with Kieran, Ronnie, Dora and Scott to meet their returning friends.

“Hey you lot, miss me?” Marcus asked, beaming broadly as Ronnie, Harriet and Dora gave him hugs in greeting.
“We’ve got so much to tell you,” Ronnie said, grinning.

“I’ve got a fair bit of news too, but you lot first,” Marcus replied. He paused looking around. “Where’s Hermione?”

“Well…” Scott started awkwardly but was cut off by an excited shout of greeting.

“Hey, you guys!” It was Ginny, looking just as bright and cheery as she had been the previous summer.

“Hey Gin,” Ronnie said hugging her little sister tight. “How was Egypt?”

“It… was… awesome,” Ginny said.

“Well tell me all about it!” Ronnie replied, and the two were off, heading towards Gryffindor Tower.

Harriet smiled after the two. It seemed as though the time away from Hogwarts had done Ginny the good that Percy had said it would.

“Jeremy!” Harriet turned to see Isabella streak past them, hugging Jeremy tight around the neck.

Several things struck Harriet at once about this. First was the way Jeremy didn’t hug back, merely put his hands on her back in a feeble attempt at a return embrace. Second was that Jeremy did, in fact, look as though he had been ill.

“Yikes, doesn’t look well, does he?” Kieran noted, apparently on the same page as Harriet.

“No…” Scott muttered, thoughtfully.

They were surprised even more when Jeremy finally broke the hug, said something they couldn’t hear Isabella and stepped around her, walking away from her rapidly. Harriet watched as he came towards them. He got within a few paces when he finally looked up in time to look Harriet right in the eyes. His eyes widened, and his face seemed to turn to stone before he turned and went off in another direction.

Marcus blinked. “Well, that was…”

“Strange…” Kieran finished for him.

Harriet didn’t say anything. The way Jeremy had looked at her was chilling. He’d looked terrified. Her heart sank. She hoped that didn’t mean what she was afraid it meant: that Jeremy had somehow succumbed to the theory that Harriet was, in fact, the Heir of Slytherin.

“Well, no big deal,” Marcus said. Harriet turned to look at Marcus and was surprised to see him smiling.

“What are you so cheerful about?” Harriet asked before she could stop herself from sounding irritable.

Marcus however only shrugged. “Oh just had an excellent break… that might get better in the next week or so, but I won’t say till I know for sure.”

He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a letter.

“For Lockhart from Dad,” Marcus explained. “Says I can no longer take part in any of his stupid demonstrations.”
“Lucky you,” Harriet said. She was still feeling irritable and put off by the encounter with Jeremy.

Marcus simply shrugged. “Hey, we all know I’m the one who hates him the most, not apologising for that,” He said with a laugh. In spite of herself, Harriet smiled too.

“Well… you lot certainly did have quite the interesting break…” Marcus said as they made their way up to Gryffindor tower.

Harriet and the rest filled Marcus in on everything that happened as they went. Finally, they came to the tale of Harriet’s trip into Riddle’s Diary.

“Tom Riddle…” he said furrowing his brow. “I could have told you who he was ages ago.”

Harriet blinked. “How?”

Marcus grumbled darkly. “Because Filch made me polish his ‘Special Award for Services to the School’ shield about five times during a detention last September. It didn’t say what he got it for… but I’ll never forget polishing that stinking thing.”

“Yeah… But, it just can’t be! None of the victims showed any sign of being bitten… there weren’t any bite-marks on Mrs Norris…” Kieran said, stubbornly.

“And no spider has a bite that petrifies.”

The little group all spun around. Harriet felt her heart sink. Erica Quoy was standing right behind them. Out of the corner of her eye, Harriet noticed both Kieran and Marcus’ cheeks redden slightly as they looked up at the pretty fourth year.

“Uh… h-hi Erica,” Marcus stammered. “Uh… h-how long were you behind us?”

Erica rolled her eyes. “Pretty much the entire way since you left the Hospital Wing… Seriously, you guys should be a little more discrete about that kinda stuff. And sorry for eavesdropping but I heard you guys talking about Hagrid and couldn’t help but listen in. So he had a giant spider, and that’s what people think attacked students the first time the chamber was opened?” Erica asked. She was looking down at them all with an odd expression. Was it scepticism?

Harriet, Kieran, and Marcus looked at each other. Harriet didn’t see how they could not say anything more having been overheard this much. Would she go to Dumbledore about this? Would she get Hagrid in trouble all over again? And then, at that moment, a realisation hit Harriet as hard as a speeding car. It wasn’t scepticism on Erica’s face; it was worry. Harriet remembered how Erica had become a friend of Hagrid’s, an excellent friend in fact. This made her an ally, not a liability.
“Yes,” Harriet said. “But we don’t think it was him. We think the person who caught him made a mistake.”

Erica nodded. “That would make sense. As I said, there are no spiders of any size with petrifying bites. And a spider that big could only be an acromantula, and their venom will kill almost instantly, but not paralyse. That’s just… Horrible! Poor Hagrid…”

Harriet blinked. In spite of all her odd feelings she would get whenever Erica waved at Hagrid in the Great Hall, or whenever Harriet would catch George staring at her (or trying not to stare at her), something was starting to change in Harriet. She wasn’t getting that same tightness at the moment.

They reached the portrait hole and climbed in. Just as they got inside, Erica put a hand on Harriet’s shoulder. “Hey, Potter… mind if we talk?”

Harriet blinked but slowly nodded. Erica gave a little nod towards the stairs to the girl dormitories, and Harriet followed. Erica led her up only a little ways, just out of earshot.

“Look, Harriet, I know you don’t like me very much,” Erica said without preamble.

“Wh-what?” Harriet asked, caught off guard.

Erica sighed. “I’ve seen the looks you give me whenever I say hi to Hagrid… honestly, I’m not trying to steal him away, I know he was your friend first.”

Harriet blushed looking down at her feet. She suddenly felt a strong sense of shame she couldn’t quite place.

“He talks about you all the time, you know?” Erica went on, smiling. “He thinks the world of you. He also wishes you would go visit him more.”

“Oh… r-right,” Harriet said. She still felt too ashamed of being called out for being jealous to feel like saying much.

“I also want to thank you for being so good to Rachel,” Erica went on.

Harriet looked up at the older girl.

“She told me about how you helped her Christmas night. She’s suffered a lot since the attack… with her family… I know Tori does a lot to try and help, but you just seem to have that knack with people,” Erica explained.

“Knack? Harriet asked. “I’m horrible with people;” she went on rolling her eyes.

Erica laughed. “You can be awkward sometimes, but I don’t mean being some social butterfly or something. I just mean you make them feel better when they’re upset or worried. You’re a good, strong person, and you have a big heart. You can tell that just talking to you once. Anyway, I just wanted to say that and well…” Erica held out a hand. “Friends?”

Harriet looked down at Erica’s hand, then up again. She smiled and shook.

“Friends.”

* * * * 

The first week back after the Christmas holidays may have been, if possible, more awkward than
Harriet’s first week at Hogwarts. The worst affected by this was Hermione. Being a Muggle-born, everyone naturally assumed that she had been attacked, and Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori had to keep a constant vigil to keep Hermione’s curtains closed at all times, from the students that kept trying to sneak in to catch sight of her.

At least Harriet and her friends were allowed to keep her company and brought her homework so she could keep up. Ronnie was of the attitude Hermione should be taking it easy, but Harriet thought she understood. It wasn’t just Hermione’s work ethic at play. After what Hermione had gone through, Harriet supposed she was dying to do something ‘normal.’

Unfortunately, Hermione’s conviction that Kenley had given her the cat hair on purpose had not abated. “It’s because she didn’t want us investigating her refugee friends,” Hermione said for what felt like the hundredth time.

The topic was brought back up by Dora this time, who had found the “get well/I’m so sorry” card Kenley had them take for her in Hermione’s bedside waste bin, unopened. They’d had to resort to hiding it in another stack of “get well” cards for Hermione from other students, as Hermione refused to see Kenley. Harriet was at least glad to see the overly gaudy, gold “get well” card from Professor Lockhart had been stuck all the way at the back of the cards propped up on Hermione’s bedside table.

Harriet supposed Hermione’s mood wasn’t helped by the news that she would most likely need to spend another two weeks in the hospital wing. She was, however, showing marked improvement. The hair at least had finally gone from her face, though her eyes were still yellow, which Harriet somehow found even more unnerving than the full cat face.

“Feeling better, little Granger?” asked a dark voice.

Harriet, Ronnie, Kieran, Scott, Dora and Marcus all spun in their seats. A tall, lanky, older Slytherin boy with shoulder length, greasy brown hair was standing in the gap in the curtains.

Dora glowered. “What do you want, Scabior?”

“Shut up, Flamel,” the boy named Scabior snapped. “I’m not talking to you.”

He turned his eyes back to Hermione. “I like the cat-eye look, Granger, suits you,” He said, smirking.

Marcus got to his feet, drawing his wand. However, Scabior was quicker. “Try it, little boy,” Scabior snarled. “Ya got fire, but ya don’t got much nerve yet,“

“Put that away this instant!”

The shrill voice of Madame Pomfrey resounded through the Hospital Wing. She appeared behind Scabior, her eyes crackling with anger. Scabior spluttered before grunting in pain as Madame Pomfrey took hold of his ear and began to pull him from the Hospital Wing. He was glaring back at Marcus, who had managed to slip his wand back in his pocket before Madame Pomfrey came back.

“Okay… seriously… who was that…?” Ronnie asked.

Dora growled. “His name’s Scabior. Only thing I’ve ever heard people call him, and wish I didn’t even know that much… He’s a seventh-year, so we’re almost done with him but seriously. Total. Creep.”

Harriet finally looked back at Hermione and felt her heart catch in her throat. Hermione was
trembling and had her legs pulled up to her chest, hugging them tightly. Harriet went to take a step towards her, but to her surprise it was Scott who got there first, sitting on the edge of her bed, putting his arm around Hermione’s shoulder.

“He tried sneaking in here a couple of nights ago… but Miss Momori caught him that time…” she whimpered as Scott hugged her tighter.

“But… why is he even bothering you anyway?” Kieran asked. “I mean, you’re wonderful, and we all love you of course but… he’s a seventh year, and you’re just a second year…”

“That might be what he likes about her,” Dora muttered, crossing her arms. “I mean… yeah, you’re a second year but, you have a reputation already. Sometimes that attracts the worst attention…”

Harriet exchanged worried glances with her friends. Harriet didn’t know what to think about this development. Regardless, Harriet had to admit by the looks of things, Hermione was having an awful year, indeed. And as they left the hospital wing a little while later, after Hermione had finally calmed down, Harriet knew one more thing. She had another suspect in mind as the Heir of Slytherin.

They made their way down to dinner. The usual chatter was disrupted halfway through the meal by a loud outbreak of squeals of delight from the Ravenclaw table. Going up on tip-toe, Harriet finally managed to see what the fuss was all about. The two Slytherin boys, Ardghal and Cian, had gone over to sit with Scott. She could see Ardghal smiling broadly and looking down at his lap. At first, Harriet thought he was wearing a ridiculous white and orange bowtie when she suddenly realised it was the face of a kitten.

“Looks like Scott wasn’t the only one to get a new pet for Christmas,” Harriet said to Ronnie.

“Yeah, and he would get the tiniest kitten I have ever seen, too,” Ronnie pointed out giggling.

Harriet smiled as she turned her attention to Cian. He wasn’t paying much attention to the kitten. Instead, he seemed entirely focused on talking to a refugee Ravenclaw first year Harriet remembered being named Ashley Roth. Harriet recognised her as she was the only refugee shorter than Rachel.

Harriet laughed under her breath. Cian was apparently trying to put on the charm for Ashley, but she wasn’t buying it. She then remembered the Christmas Feast and how Lindsey and Peyton had both rebuffed Fred’s efforts at flirting.

“Ravenclaw girls are hard sells, I guess,” she said in Ronnie’s ear.

Ronnie laughed and nodded in agreement before sitting back down. Harriet sat too, however, her spirits fell when she caught sight of Ernie Macmillan and Zacharias Smith at the Hufflepuff table. Both were giving her dirty looks and muttering to each other. They clearly hadn’t changed their attitudes towards her over the holidays.

Her spirits fell even further when she spotted Jeremy. He was sitting with Isabella, but they weren’t talking. Jeremy was merely eating his food quietly while Isabella kept stealing glances at him. It was obvious she wanted to talk to him but seemed to be just happy that he was letting her near him.

Harriet sighed and sat back down. She felt Kieran put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. She let him keep it there for a moment or so before he removed it, and they went back to eating.

* * * *
Harriet sat bolt upright in bed. She was breathing heavily. It was two weeks into the new term, and once more Harriet was having unsettling dreams. They weren’t nightmares, just uncomfortable.

This dream, in particular, had been quite vivid. She recalled every moment of it. She’d been sneaking down a corridor when strong hands had grabbed her from behind. She fought as hard as she could but whoever it was had been too strong, wrenching her into a classroom. Her attacker had pushed her against the wall and spun her around. As she looked up, she’d expected one of two faces.

The first face she’d expected had been Voldemort’s face from last year: snake-like with burning red eyes. The second face she’d expected had been Scabior’s. After their encounter in the hospital wing the previous week, Scabior had nested in her mind as a new nightmare in his right.

The face Harriet hadn’t expected was Riddle’s. He was grinning down at her, not in a wicked way, but more possessive. Like a lover in the middle of a game. His eyes were blazing as he moved in closer until finally, their lips touched. It was then that she finally woke up. Harriet put a hand to her lips. She could almost feel his lips on hers and his hands on her wrists.

Harriet slid her curtains open and swung her legs out of bed. She looked at her clock; it was just after three in the morning. She didn’t know exactly why, but all she knew was she had to talk to Tom about the dream. Perhaps because this was not the first dream he had popped into in the past week.

The strange thing about these dreams was the way in which he appeared. It was almost as though he wasn’t just intruding on the scenes; it was as though he was intruding on the dream itself. It was as though the roles he took on, as with the dream she’d just had, had initially been meant for someone else.

Harriet quietly took Riddle’s diary, her quill and ink bottle from her trunk. As she turned around she saw Hermione’s bed, curtains open, empty. She sighed. Despite Hermione’s bitterness, Harriet did miss having her around. Fortunately, it would be only two more days before Hermione was released. She was physically back to normal on the outside, but Miss Momori wanted to keep Hermione under observation until they were sure she was entirely human on the inside as well.

Harriet finally snuck out of the room and down the stairs. She sat and opened Riddle’s diary and her ink-bottle, putting her quill to the page.

Hello Tom, it’s me again.

There you are; I missed you this week.

Harriet blushed at this, especially in light of her dreams.

Sorry, it’s been busy with classes starting again, I need to sleep at night and well my friends…

I understand… Riddle replied. Even if it was just words, Harriet felt she could sense the disappointment.

Anyway, there’s something I want to ask about. Harriet wrote. She was starting to feel nervous, as though she was about to make a giant fool of herself.

What’s wrong? Riddle asked. What happened?

Harriet thought hard about how to word what she wanted to say. Finally, she put her quill on the page.

Well, I’ve been having dreams. Strange dreams.
Romantic dreams? Riddle asked, jumping to that conclusion a lot more quickly than Harriet would have liked.

Kind of? Harriet wrote.

Getting caught snooping, eh? Riddle asked.

Harriet shifted uncomfortably in her chair.

How did you know?

It seems to be a theme with you, Riddle replied.

Harriet rolled her eyes. Ha-ha. Well, anyway, the reason I wanted to talk to you about it was because, well, you were in it.

Riddle didn’t reply at first. Harriet felt her throat tighten. She hoped she hadn’t offended him.

Really…? I trust I wasn’t too villainous…?

Harriet flushed. Well, you did sorta grab me…

Ooooh, did we kiss?

Harriet glowered.

It’s not funny, Tom.

Sorry, sorry, Riddle replied. But guessing by that reaction, I hit the nail on the head, so to speak?

Harriet bit her lip. Yes.

Well… I suppose I’m flattered, but it’s not like you’ve never had these dreams before. You’ve had them about Diggory and Wood. It’s pretty normal. I wouldn’t worry about it.

Harriet thought hard. Should she tell him there were others?

Well, that’s not all. She wrote, her hand trembling.

No?

No. That’s not the only one you’ve been in.

Again Riddle did not write back right away.

Really? Have they all been the same?

No, Harriet wrote. But this is the first that happened. You usually just, pop up in them. Totally out of place…

I see… was all Riddle said in reply.

Harriet was starting to get nervous she’d offended him.

Sorry, she wrote back. I know I shouldn’t have told you.

No, no, honestly. Just surprised, and like I said, flattered.
Harriet blushed again.

*Good, I was worried.*

*Why?*

Harriet thought hard. *Well, you have become a pretty good friend…*

*I’m honoured you think of me as one…*

Harriet went to put her quill back in her ink bottle but heard only the clink of the quill hitting the bottom. She groaned.

*Be right back, Tom, I have to get more ink,* she wrote, just enough ink left to finish.

*I’ll be here,* Tom wrote back. *Not like I can go anywhere though, can I?*

In spite of herself, Harriet laughed. She got up and stretched before making her way up the stairs. On the way up she paused at the first year girls’ dorm. The door was half open. She smiled and quietly pulled it closed. She snuck back into her room, grabbed her spare ink bottle, and made her way back downstairs. She was halfway to the table again when she froze. The lit candle was there, as well as her empty ink-bottle and quill. But Riddle’s Diary was gone.

* * * *

“I *thought* you said you wouldn’t write to him anymore?” Ronnie muttered angrily the following morning. They were huddled together in the Entrance Hall, keeping an eye out in the event of eavesdroppers. They had wanted to go to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom for privacy, but she’d thrown a fit that morning and flooded the room and the hallway.

Harriet rolled her eyes. “I’m sorry!” she said more out of exasperation than an actual apology. “But that’s not what’s important… what’s important is that someone stole it!”

“Aye… that is troubling…” Kieran agreed, stroking his chin in thought.

“Yeah… because if it was in your common room… the only person who could have stolen it would be a Gryffindor…”

“Not necessarily,” Dora said. “It’s not impossible to think the password got leaked somehow.”

“That’s true,” Ronnie muttered. “Then who?”

“Kenley?” suggested a bitter voice behind them. They turned to see Hermione standing there grinning.

“Hey, they let you out early!” Scott chirped.

Hermione beamed. “A clean bill of health, they wanted to keep me longer, but I talked them out of it,” she explained before turning to Harriet, “If you ask me, I think I know exactly who it was.”

Dora rolled her eyes. “Yeah, the same people you think are responsible for everything around here…”

Hermione glowered, but Dora didn’t back down. “Seriously, okay, you got the cat hair, but if she wanted to do something to you she could have just petrified you and not incriminated herself
whatever! On top of that, how was she to know it was Harriet who found the diary huh?"

Hermione crossed her arms. “Katy,” she said simply.

Kieran shook his head. “No, I don’t think so…”

“It was Katy who threw it away in the first place,” Hermione said. “That’s how it got in our fire; she disposed of it as far away from her sister as she could.”

Harriet was starting to feel her blood boil. She had tried to be understanding of Hermione’s anger before, but it was starting to go too far. “Riddle said the Chamber was probably being opened by the same person who had opened it last time. It couldn’t be Kenley and Katy, they’re our age, and they’re Muggle-borns.”

“So they say,” Hermione muttered.

Harriet glared. Hermione’s arms tightened. “Well, who do you think it is then?” Hermione demanded.

Harriet kept glaring but felt her resolve ebbing away.

“Well…” she said looking around again before glancing at Kieran and Marcus. “The only other person that I know of who knows about the diary is Erica…”

Hermione let her arms drop. “Erica knows about it?”

“Aye, she overheard us talking about it the day after Marcus got back,” Kieran said. “When we were heading back to Gryffindor tower…”

Hermione thought. “I suppose it could be her… I mean…” she swallowed in a way that said she was trying to swallow her pride. “We can’t rule anyone out…”

Harriet nodded. She turned to look back at the others and paused. Ronnie was looking at her shoes, and her ears were very red.

“What’s up?” Harriet asked.

Ronnie sighed. “Erica’s not the only other person who knows…”

Harriet raised her eyebrows. “No…?” She asked.

“No… Ginny knows too…”

“You told her?” Marcus asked, surprised.

Ronnie shrugged. “She’s my sister! I think I’d know if my little sister were running about attacking Muggle-borns, don’t you?” she snapped.

Marcus flushed. “Sorry…”

Harriet sighed. “Well… either way… we do know the Heir, whoever it is, is back…”

“Hey…” Scott chimed in, looking cheerful. “This does prove one thing.”

“What’s that?” Kieran asked.
“It can’t be Hagrid!”

Harriet blinked and felt her heart swell. He was right; he was right. “Scott! You’re right!” She exclaimed giving him a tight hug, though she released him quickly.

“That’s very true,” Hermione said, beaming. “It’s not like Hagrid could hide anywhere in the common room.”

“Or even get through the door,” Marcus pointed out.

“Unless…” Hermione started, her face falling.

“Unless what?” Harriet asked. She wasn’t ready to start suspecting Hagrid again so soon.

“Well… you said Erica knows you had the diary… and she is very good friends with Hagrid…”

Harriet’s throat tightened again. No matter how hard she didn’t want to think so, Hermione had a point. She wanted so badly to like Erica again, after Erica had been so sweet to her for helping Rachel. She’d even shook Harriet’s hand, wanting to be her friend. Hadn’t she?

“Look… it’s… it’s plausible… but I’m not going to believe it yet,” Kieran said, sounding defiant. “We know Hagrid would never hurt anyone on purpose, and there are no spiders that can petrify people.”

“So Erica said,” Harriet muttered. Her insides were starting to squirm uncomfortably. Even if it was possible that it was Erica, she felt like she was stabbing her in the back suspecting her now. But that was where the evidence was pointing.

Even though Harriet would never admit it, the worst part about the missing diary wasn’t the worry that something terrible was about to happen. It was her worry about what was happening to Riddle. Had the Heir managed to destroy him? Was he safe?

Harriet felt her stomach twisting in knots every time she was in the Gryffindor common room. What if the Heir was sitting there amongst the other students, only feet away from her, playing innocent, and waiting to attack again? Harriet did her best to smile back at Erica whenever she passed. This was both because she felt guilty about suspecting her and because if Erica was behind the renewed attacks, Harriet didn’t want to reveal it to Erica that she was a suspect.

It was the following weekend, a week before Valentine’s Day when something finally happened. Harriet was just about to head out for Quidditch practice when the portrait hole swung open before her and Professor McGonagall stepped into the common room.

Harriet watched as Katy looked at all her friends and rose, walking over. Professor McGonagall
looked around at the rest of the students. “The rest of you are to remain here in the Common room until further notice,” She ordered. “You will all be notified when it is safe to leave.”

“Was there another attack, Professor?” asked the fifth year girl who Colin had been watching the night of his petrification.

Professor McGonagall’s jaw clenched a little. To Harriet’s surprise, she did not answer. She merely put a hand on Katy’s shoulder with surprising gentleness and started to guide her towards the door. Katy kept looking up at Professor McGonagall, her face full of disbelief until the portrait closed shut behind them.

“Oh no… oh Kenley!”

Harriet looked to see Hermione. She had been sitting with Kieran and Ronnie, working on a report for Professor Snape. Now she was standing, staring past Harriet at the portrait hole with her hands over her mouth. Her eyes were wide with horror.

It was then that Harriet finally put it all together. She turned and looked at the portrait hole as well. The Heir had finally struck again. And this time, the victim had come from Slytherin’s own house. A Muggle-born American who had fled an attack that destroyed everything she knew. The Heir had attacked Kenley.

Chapter End Notes

Scott McIntyre, Kieran O'Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, Jeremy Owens, Isabella Martinez, Cian Whelan and Ardghal Coghlan property of night-miner(dA)

Erica Quoy, Ashley Roth, and Katy Tyler property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

AJ property of Hasboro

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“Nothing brings out the most primal aspects of human nature as fear.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

After the attack on Mrs Norris, the atmosphere in the castle had been excited anxiety. After the attack on Colin Creevey, the atmosphere had become hushed and apprehensive. After the double attack on Justin and Nearly-Headless Nick, the school had been in near panic.

However, the aftermath of the attack on Kenley, Harriet had a hard time figuring out what the reaction was. It seemed as though it was all of the previous responses melded together. No one seemed to know how to feel. On the one hand, Kenley had been a Muggle-born. On the other, she was a Slytherin. This meant that she was at once a target and yet had been considered immune by most of the students. Muggle-born or not, the fact that a Slytherin had been petrified greatly increased the fear people felt.

Slytherin students seemed torn between a newfound fear that they could now be attacked, and their natural inclination to be glad that another Muggle-born had been petrified. Harriet took some grim satisfaction from the fact so many did seem afraid. She supposed it was a good indication that many Slytherins were not in fact as “pure” of blood as they pretended to be.

What Harriet found the most surprising was that even though Kenley was a refugee, yet again, the rest of the students seemed to be turning their sights on the rest of the refugees to blame.

“Must have been one of them,” she overheard some Ravenclaws muttering in a hallway that morning. “The Heir wanted to make everyone afraid so went after a Slytherin, and a refugee to show that no one’s safe!”

Harriet wanted to stop and tell them off, but she was jostled along in the moving crowd, and the little group turned off down another corridor before Harriet got the chance. Harriet supposed her growing anger had a lot to do with her guilt over what had happened to Kenley. Deep down, Harriet was sure the attack on Kenley had come because she had helped Harriet and her friends with their investigation.

According to Katy, Kenley had even been found outside Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom, the same place Mrs Norris had been attacked. Myrtle had apparently thrown another fit and flooded the bathroom and the hallway. Kenley had apparently been tip-toeing through the water when the monster struck, leaving her petrified just as the others were, lying on her side in the inch deep puddle of water.

Harriet was glad Katy was still speaking to her because she most certainly was not speaking to Hermione. When Katy finally returned to Gryffindor Tower, the very first thing she did was shout at Hermione. The memory of it still made Harriet’s stomach tighten in awkward embarrassment. Fortunately, it had not lasted very long before Percy stepped in.

Harriet felt bad for Hermione, but she knew she needed Katy on their side. Katy’s determination to find out what happened to her sister combined with her inquisitive nature made her a good asset in
Harriet’s mind. So Harriet opted to meet with Katy alone to keep Hermione from feeling left out.

Harriet finally found time to sneak up to the trophy room to see Riddle’s shield. It looked just like Marcus had told her. It didn’t say what he had won the award for, but as she looked around, Harriet soon realised that the award was far from Riddle’s only accomplishment. He’d also received a Medal for Magical Merit, and had been Head Boy.

While she’d hoped learning more about Riddle would cheer her up, unfortunately, it only increased her problems. Her worry something had happened to him had increased dramatically. There was also the fact that if Riddle was so accomplished and respected during his time at Hogwarts, the likelihood that Hagrid had been the one to set the monster loose became all the more probable.

What made Harriet the most uncomfortable was the fact that since the attack on Kenley, almost everyone seemed to have leaned off of her as the prime suspect for being the Heir of Slytherin. This was made most apparent to her during the first Herbology lesson after the attack when Ernie Macmillan asked her in a very polite tone if he could borrow her trowel. While Harriet was glad that the pressure was now off her as the suspect, she wished it hadn’t been at Kenley’s expense.

Meanwhile, Marcus’ plan to get out of Lockhart’s demonstrations had not gone entirely to plan. Instead of relenting when faced with a letter from a parent, Lockhart seemed to think Marcus had merely faked the letter to get out of schoolwork. After the first day of Marcus refusing to join in, Lockhart gave him a detention. Marcus immediately went to Professor McGonagall, who dismissed the detention for him as deputy headmistress.

Unfortunately, it did not end there. The same thing happened the following class. This time after he went to Professor McGonagall she again dismissed the detention and promised to speak to Professor Lockhart about the issue if he did so again.

Somehow, Lockhart was even more infuriating than usual. He seemed to be putting on an even bigger air of bravado and continually insisted that he was going to catch the Heir before long. Even worse, he kept mentioning that he had a “surprise” coming for them all soon. Given the result of Lockhart’s first surprise, a cage-full of Cornish Pixies, no one was very excited about this prospect.

It was that Valentine’s Day when Lockhart’s surprise was finally revealed. Harriet, Ronnie, Hermione, Marcus and Kieran met up with Scott and Dora in the entrance hall before heading in to sit together as they always did. It seemed the Christmas holidays had also wrought a change in Percy, who now permitted students from other houses to sit at the Gryffindor table as well.

As they entered the Great Hall, they all paused in shock. The Great Hall had been turned into a giant Valentine’s Day card. There were enormous, pink roses in full bloom everywhere. In spite of herself as the confetti floated down and caught up in her and Hermione’s hair, Harriet couldn’t help but giggle. Marcus, Ronnie and Dora kept giving Harriet and Hermione dirty looks.

Harriet wasn’t sure what it was that had made her so giggly. It wasn’t the ‘romantic’ atmosphere. It was more just the overall silliness of the entire spectacle. It wasn’t only Harriet and Hermione either. Parvati, Lavender, Rachel, and Tori had all come over giggling as well. Even AJ looked as though she was in a good mood, and Harriet couldn’t help but notice Katy giving an occasional smile.

“Happy Valentine’s Day!” Professor Lockhart called out as the students all began to sit down at their tables. “Might I just take the time to thank the no less than forty-six people who have sent me cards just this morning.”

Harriet couldn’t help but roll her eyes. Even if this were Lockhart’s doing, she’d rather he did so as quietly as possible.
“I decided the school could use a morale booster from all that’s been going on, and so I arranged this little surprise for you all! And look cupids!”

Lockhart gave a loud double-clap, and the doors to the Great Hall opened once more. Marcus groaned and buried his face in his hands while Dora gaped in disbelief. Through the door marched at least a dozen grumpy looking dwarves wearing white togas with golden wings and harps.

“They’ve come from far and wide to take your valentines to your sweethearts all day! And don’t let that slow you all down! Maybe sneak down to the dungeons to ask Professor Snape for the proper way to brew a love potion? Or seek out Professor Flitwick to learn the proper way to perform an Entrancing Enchantment!”

Harriet looked down the staff table. Professor Flitwick had his face buried in his hands like Marcus, while Professor Snape was glowering. Harriet was secretly glad today was a Sunday as she didn’t want to see what would happen to the person foolish enough to ask Professor Snape how to brew a love potion.

Most of the boys seemed to share Marcus’ sentiments on the spectacle, but not all of them. Kieran and Scott, for instance, seemed in good spirits, but as the two almost always tried to be positive no matter what the circumstances, Harriet wasn’t sure that was just because it was Valentine’s Day. Dora, on the other hand, seemed completely oblivious as she helped herself to sausages and eggs.

Mostly the older boys seemed to be into the spirit of the day. This was most evident by the number of flowers and boxes of chocolates that many of the older girls had already received. Apparently, there were a lot of older boys who had planned ahead. Surprisingly, despite the widespread suspicion of the refugees and the cool attitudes, Harriet couldn’t help but notice quite a few of the older refugee girls with flowers.

Harriet also noticed older boys with quite a few cards already. Harriet felt a little knot in her stomach at the number that Cedric had received. However, Harriet also noticed how Wood hadn’t received any. Wood didn’t seem very upset about it, but Harriet couldn’t help but think he at least deserved something for all the work he did.

Harriet’s discomfort was increased when Tori made her way around the table handing out Valentine’s Day cards she had made herself. She’d made one for all the second years, including Harriet.

Somehow, that little nagging feeling in her gut when Tori made her way around to table to hand Kieran his valentine returned. The same little twinge of jealousy she got when Tori had tried to help Kieran, or she used to get when Erica waved at Hagrid.

Harriet tried hard to keep the feeling down and remind herself that it didn’t mean anything, as everyone had gotten a card. Then she had to ask herself why she even felt that jealousy anyway. It was only Kieran, wasn’t it?

Unfortunately, it seemed Lockhart had overlooked one crucial detail with his “cupids.” Valentine’s Day at Hogwarts was always a day that students third year and older went to visit the little town of Hogsmeade. So the dwarves had very little to do all day until the older students returned.

“So, how much are you being paid for this?” Scott asked one who was sidling past them in the hallway.

The dwarf snorted. “Not ‘nuff, but gold’s gold, eh?” he said sounding disgruntled.
Kieran furrowed his brow. “I don’t know… it’d take a lot to get me to dress up in a sheet and wear gold wings…”

The dwarf scowled. “‘Spect it would, wouldn’t it?” the dwarf plucked at his toga. “Damn sight better than nought,” he muttered before stomping off.

“What was that about?” Ronnie asked.

“Dwarves are another race that have sort of been… well… displaced by humans…” Hermione said in a subdued voice.

“Aye,” Scott agreed. “They mostly just travel around doing odd-jobs now.”

“How were they displaced?” Ronnie asked. Her voice had softened a great deal. “I mean… they live in the mountains don’t they?”

Dora crossed her arms as she always did when annoyed. “They do… and so do the giants we witches and wizards pushed into hiding…”

“So…”

“So the giants moved in and pushed the dwarves out…” Scott said sighing.

Harriet felt her fists clench. On the one hand, she was sure Lockhart was taking advantage of them. On the other, she was sure the dwarves were happy for work, whatever it was.

Meanwhile, Harriet kept thinking about Wood. She finally made up her mind, and while they were sitting in the library, she snuck out an extra piece of parchment and hastily wrote up a little poem. It wasn’t anything special, but it was at least something.

They spent the whole morning in the library, enjoying the quiet. Finally, they headed down for lunch. Harriet was hoping to slip off to find a dwarf afterwards to give the poem for Wood, but one found her instead in the Great Hall.

“You ‘Arriet Potter?” the dwarf asked.

“Um… yeah?” Harriet replied.

“Good, got a singing valentine for yeh,” the dwarf said and pulled out a scrap of parchment.

Eyes as green as a fresh pickled toad
Legs scrawny and thin as a grasshopper,
She can’t get a man because no one can stand
The zero who conquered the Dark Lord.

After he finished the poem, Harriet rather wished she’d lied. Her face was red as the dwarf sauntered away. Harriet had a strong suspicion as to who had sent her the poem. Sure enough, as she glanced across the Great Hall, she saw Pansy Parkinson and Pixie Fanfarró in fits of laughter, along with Wendy Aarons.
“Just ignore them,” Hermione said coolly. “It’s not your fault they’re—”

But Hermione was cut off when another dwarf cleared his throat behind her. Hermione’s poem was no better.

*A squirrelly and insufferable intellect

With style as dull as a lizard,

It’s a wonder boys see anything in her

The buck-toothed know-it-all Granger

Hermione’s fists were clenched as the poem finished.

“Yes, just ‘ignore them,’ eh Hermione?” Ronnie said, looking amused. However, apparently, she had spoken too soon.

*Gangly and tall, pale as a newt,

With a mop of unruly red hair,

It’s time she was taught that it won’t be forgot

That she’s mostly a poor scrawny weasel

“That’s it, I’m going over there,” Ronnie declared and started to her feet.

Marcus, however, put a hand on her shoulder pushing her back down.

“No you don’t, not in front of the teachers,” he said, then leaned over to whisper in her ear. “Wait till after the meal.”


Harriet smiled too. It was only Pansy and Pixie; she was pretty used to this by now. She remembered what Dumbledore had told her last year and tried just to let it wash over her. They weren’t worth the effort. However, when a second dwarf came up to her, Harriet found her patience wearing thin.

“Can’t you wait until we’re done eating?” Harriet demanded.

“Nah, this ain’ a bad one, Miss,” the dwarf said holding up the parchment.

*A valiant witch, an unrivalled leader

Who inspires loyalty and courage in others,
I’d love to go out, and frolic about,
With Gryffindor’s cute Ms H Potter

Harriet felt her cheeks burning brighter. While it had not been a ‘bad one,’ Harriet still would have preferred to receive it in a more private venue. Fred and George were doubled over with mirth a short ways down the table.

“Well… he was right,” Dora said in an odd voice. “It was better than the others, right?” she asked. Harriet had the distinct impression Dora was trying not to laugh. And yet, she’d almost sounded insistent in suggesting it was better than the other poems. Harriet also couldn’t help but notice how Dora’s cheeks had gone pink for some reason.

“Well, at least you know you’ve got an admirer somewhere,” Kieran suggested.

Harriet blushed brighter and slumped forward on her arms on the table. She looked up just in time to see Hermione giving Kieran a sympathetic look that she couldn’t place.

“Well, let’s get outta here before anything else happens,” Scott suggested, the corners of his mouth twitching.

Harriet didn’t wait for a second opinion and got to her feet. The others followed suit and made their way out of the Great Hall.

“So, what do we went to do now?” Ronnie asked, stretching.

“Go somewhere dwarves can’t find us?” Harriet suggested.

Everyone laughed and agreed. They decided to head to Ravenclaw tower to get away from the “cupids.” On the way, Harriet suddenly remembered her poem to Wood.

“Um, hang on, I’m just gonna… use the restroom,” she said lamely.

“Okay, just knock when you catch up, and I’ll let you in,” Scott chirped.

Harriet turned and headed towards the bathroom. Once her friends were out of sight, however, she sped on past the bathroom, looking for a hairy, toga-wearing cupid.

Once more, a dwarf found her first. This time it was the same one Scott had asked about how much they were being paid.

“Oy, Potter,” he said gruffly as he sauntered up to her.

Harriet groaned. “Oh, not another one…”

“Aye,” he said and cleared his throat.

Wit light as a feather, and sharp as a talon
Inquisitive to the very last minute,
I wish I were free to talk to and see
Harriet blinked. Something about this poem kicked her in the stomach, unlike any other others. Somehow, deep down she knew who had written that poem.

“Who… who gave you that poem…?” Harriet asked.

Her hands were trembling. It couldn’t be, it just couldn’t be from Riddle. He was just a diary, how could he have sent her a poem?

“I can’t give ‘way none of that pers’nal information, Miss,” the dwarf said. “Iff’n the writer didn’t want yer ta know she sent it…”

Harriet felt her eyebrows rise into her fringe.

“She?” she asked.

The dwarf scowled. “Right, just gone and made a fool of a poor old dwarf, eh? Right classy of you,” he muttered darkly.

Harriet shook her head. “Sorry!” she said. “I wasn’t trying to do anything like that just… never mind, here,” she held out her poem. “This is for Oliver Wood, Gryffindor sixth year.”

The dwarf took the poem, grudgingly, and sauntered away. Harriet watched him for a minute before heading back to Ravenclaw Tower. She kept mulling it all over in her head. There were so many things in the poem that made her think it was Riddle. It had called her inquisitive; something Riddle had always praised. It had also mentioned her eyes, which Riddle had always talked about wanting to see. There was also that third line that was the biggest hint to Harriet: I wish I were free to talk to and see… Riddle had been stolen by someone, who seemed to be keeping him hidden. Maybe whoever it was had still not figured out how to destroy the diary?

She knocked on the door, and Scott opened it up for her. He was smiling at first, but his face fell. “You alright? Look like you’ve seen a ghost?”

“Oh, sorry,” Harriet said. “Uh, upset stomach, I’ll be okay.”

They ended up spending the afternoon finally finishing the Wizard Chess match between Ronnie and Kelly from Christmas. The board had been left exactly where it was. Harriet appreciated this, as it gave her time to sit quietly and think. Maybe it wasn’t from Riddle after all. It could just be coincidental. But if it wasn’t from Riddle, then who was it from? And who sent the other “good” poem she’d received?

However, if Harriet thought the drama of the day was over, she was very wrong. The older students all returned just before dinner, and to Harriet’s horror, she spotted the dwarf she had given the poem for Wood making his way towards the Gryffindor table. Sure enough:

His smile beams bright when a victory’s won,

His courage is strong as a griffin

Yet under the bluster and hard perseverance
Harriet could have died ten-thousand deaths. Why had she thought to send the stupid poem? She stared determinedly at her plate as the laughter died down. That was the worst part, why had everyone had to laugh at it? It had taken her a lot of courage, even if she didn’t want anyone to know she had sent it.

When she finally looked up, it became instantly apparent that all her friends knew she had been the one who sent it.

“Shut up,” she muttered under her breath and kept eating.

Ronnie put a sympathetic arm around Harriet’s shoulder.

“Just please tell me he didn’t laugh too?” Harriet asked, trying to keep the plea out of her voice.

“Actually… he didn’t,” Marcus said in a gentle voice.

“Oh no… seriously?” Hermione asked.

Harriet turned, and her heart sank even lower. Another dwarf had found her. To her disbelief, he took out another poem.

Skin white as pure snow, eyes emerald green

A kind-hearted girl, with whom I’d like to be seen,

If it were possible, I’d surely try to charm her,

The courageous Gryffindor Seeker.

There was another wave of laughter at this one, at the Slytherin table in particular. As Harriet looked at her friends, she noticed something else odd. Kieran was the only one not looking at her. Instead, he was looking much like Harriet had been acting after the dwarf had read Wood his poem.

Harriet’s head was spinning. Had Kieran sent her the poem? If he had, when had he done it? The only time she hadn’t been with him today was when she had gone off to send the poem to Wood. Had Kieran also done the same?

However, that wasn’t the end of the mysteries. As she looked past Kieran to the Slytherin table, she noted almost all of them were still laughing and muttering darkly to each other watching her. All except the one she had expected to be getting the most humour out of Harriet’s embarrassment. Draco Malfoy was also staring down at his dinner, eating determinedly.

All in all, between the poems and who had sent them, Harriet had a lot to think about that night as she slid into bed. She had been sent three poems that appeared to be from admirers, but she had no idea who exactly had sent them. One might have been from Kieran or Draco, another that had sounded just like something Riddle would have sent her, and another that she had no clue who it had come from. All in all, Harriet only took one thing away from her first serious Valentine’s Day she had ever celebrated. It was a lot more trouble than it was probably worth.
The remainder of February happened without incident. Wood didn’t say anything about the poem, and Harriet knew she would never tell him it was her until her dying day. Furthermore, Malfoy had gone back to his usual self, taunting her at every opportunity. Kieran had also returned to normal it seemed. Harriet didn’t want to make him uncomfortable had the poem been his, and so she didn’t bring it up either.

Even the month of March passed mostly without incident. There were no more attacks, and the atmosphere in the school seemed to be lightening finally. There was laughter in the corridors again. Conversation began to switch from the Heir and the Chamber to the upcoming Gryffindor/Hufflepuff Quidditch match.

Lockhart continued to be infuriating. He now insisted that the Heir had only stopped because the culprit knew that Lockhart was on the trail. He also continued to be nasty to Marcus, who in turn never missed an opportunity to insinuate Lockhart was not entirely truthful about his exploits. In particular any time a story had something to do with Australia. Harriet wasn’t sure where Marcus had got all his information, but since Christmas, he had become rather knowledgeable on Lockhart’s exploits, or rather the lack thereof.

Another thing that continued to weigh on Harriet’s mind was Jeremy. The more she watched, the more she was sure whatever was going on with him had nothing to do with her. He was talking to everyone less, even Isabella. While his health had seemed to improve during February and into March, he appeared to have another lapse again into ill health and even missed a few days of class.

Harriet felt the sorriest for Isabella. Something was seriously wrong with her friend, and he wasn’t talking to anyone about it. Harriet tried to ask him about his issues, but he brushed her off, telling her to mind her own business.

“You don’t suppose…?” Ronnie asked one day as Jeremy walked past in the library.

“Suppose what? Hermione asked, not looking up from her book.

“That Jeremy’s… well… you know?”

“The Heir of Slytherin?” Harriet asked. She heard the edge in her voice as she spoke. She still remembered all too well the moment she had overheard Jeremy staunchly defending her innocence sitting only a few tables away from where they sat now.

“Well… I mean… he’s been so weird lately…” Ronnie went on. “He’s a pure-blood with a long family lineage…”

“No, I don’t think so,” Harriet said, adding more of an edge to her voice. Jeremy was sick with something, and she wasn’t going to accuse one of her few defenders.

“Hey, have any of you all seen Jeremy?” Isabella asked, walking up to them.

“Oh, yes, he just went by heading that way,” Hermione said in a gentle voice, pointing in the direction Jeremy had gone.

“Thanks…” Isabella said sounding miserable as she headed off.

Hermione bit her lip. “She sure is loyal, isn’t she?”
Ronnie snorted. “Well, that is a tenant of Hufflepuff, isn’t it? Stubborn and loyal?”

Harriet rolled her eyes. She knew why Ronnie was so gruff. The weather was finally beginning to turn into spring, and with all the worry going on she didn’t have time to go out to practice her football. She was afraid of losing her spot on her summer league team, just as Harriet worried about losing her place on her Quidditch team when she was unable to practice last summer.

During the Easter holidays, the teachers gave them all something to take their minds off football and Quidditch and even the attacks. They had to pick their new subjects for the coming year. Harriet felt lost as she sorted through the various pamphlets for all the higher level classes.

“Think it’d be possible to drop Defence Against the Dark Arts?” Marcus asked miserably.

“No… you have to keep your core classes,” Hermione said. No one had to ask why Marcus wanted to drop Defence Against the Dark Arts.


Ronnie laughed. “You wanna study Alchemy, huh? Who’d have thought?”

“Oh shut up,” Dora muttered throwing a ball of wadded up parchment at Ronnie who dodged, so it hit Seamus instead.

Harriet chewed her lip, glancing around. Dean Thomas was closing his eyes and jabbing his quill at the list of subjects blindly. Others were reading letters of advice their parents and other family had sent them. Neville had a stack of letters in front of him, all full of advice from his family.

Harriet sighed jealously. If only she had someone to write to for advice. Percy had tried to lecture her on the proper choices, but in the end, he’d left her more confused than she was before. He told her to play to her strengths, but all she was good at was playing Quidditch and making a fool of herself.

“Well, Divination might be kinda fun…” Ronnie said thoughtfully.

Harriet nodded. “Okay, that sounds good.”

“Ooooh, you guys should take Care of Magical Creatures too!” Dora said excitedly. “I’ve seen the classes before, and Slytherins and Gryffindors take it together!”

Harriet smiled. “Okay, yeah that sounds good.” She circled it on her sheet.

Ronnie nodded and circled it too. “That’s us taken care of!”

Kieran meanwhile had selected Basic Magical Medicine and Care of Magical Creatures. Marcus also selected Ancient Magic and Care of Magical Creatures, the same as Dora. Scott picked three new subjects; Ancient Runes, Care of Magical Creatures, and Basic Wandlore. Unable to decide, Hermione selected everything.

* * * *

Finally, the day of their second Quidditch match against Hufflepuff arrived. Harriet was looking forward to it. The good-natured taunts that she had shared with Cedric over Christmas had nested in her head, pushing her to take this match more seriously than she had taken any other. Harriet would practice every chance she got. She was going to prove she could beat him twice if it killed her.
It was a beautiful, clear-blue sky that day. Wood himself was almost ecstatic with enthusiasm that morning at breakfast. As usual, his excitement nested into Harriet, making her stomach flutter every time he gave her the grin of pride he always saved just for her.

Harriet wouldn’t admit it, but a big part of why she wanted to win was Wood himself. Not even to impress him to get his attention more. He had played for so long and never set his hand on the Quidditch Cup. He only had one more year after this, and Harriet didn’t want to risk having to clinch it at the last minute next year.

Breakfast finished, Harriet and her friends headed back up to Gryffindor Tower to get her Quidditch gear and broom before heading down to the pitch. However, they had only reached the top of the stairs when at long last, it happened once more.

“Must kill this time… must eat… must… KILL!”

Harriet stopped and gasped. “The voice!” she shouted in panic. “It’s back! I heard it again!”

“Again? After all this time?” Ronnie asked wide-eyed.

Hermione suddenly gasped. “Harriet! Oh goodness! I think I’ve just figured it out! I’ll be right back I need to run to the library!” Before any of them could call her back, Hermione shot off down the corridor away from them.

Scott furrowed his brow looking troubled. “Think I should go after her…?” he asked.

Dora shrugged. “It’s Hermione… she always runs off to the library without telling us what she’s up to, doesn’t she?”

“Yeah…” Scott muttered. He still looked troubled, and Harriet didn’t have time to ask what was on his mind.

Voice or not she had to get down to the Quidditch pitch. Harriet kept listening for the voice as they made their way up to Gryffindor Tower. She grabbed her broomstick and gear and made her way as quick as she could to the changing rooms.

The whole team were still in good cheer, and their infectious enthusiasm made it difficult for Harriet to keep worrying about the voice. At least everyone’s going to be watching the game, Harriet reminded herself as she finished changing and followed the team out onto the pitch.

The crowd cheered all around as the teams emerged. Wood was in such a good mood he kicked off to fly a few laps around his goalposts while Madame Hooch prepared the balls. Harriet kept stealing glances towards the Hufflepuff team, watching Cedric talking strategy with his team, his face almost as severe as Wood’s got when he was giving orders.

Harriet was just about to join Wood flying when a booming voice filled the stadium.

“This match has been cancelled!”

Harriet turned to see Professor McGonagall calling into a large, purple megaphone. The crowd booed angrily. Wood landed and ran awkwardly towards Professor McGonagall, in too big a hurry to even get off his broom.

“Cancelled! But Professor! You can’t—!”

Professor McGonagall merely glared at him and raised the megaphone again. “All students are to
report to their common rooms immediately! Your Heads of House will give further instructions when
you arrive,” Professor McGonagall glared around at the still unmoving crowd. “I said immediately!!”

Finally, the crowd began to move. Apparently, Professor McGonagall did have the power to
intimidate an entire crowd of people. She turned and looked at Harriet and beckoned her over.
Harriet made her way over nervously.

“Potter, you and your friends had better come with me, yes, you too Flamel, McIntyre,” she said as
the others came down onto the pitch, confused and concerned.

“Professor, there wasn’t another attack was there?” Kieran asked, his knuckles white on his
shillelagh.

Professor McGonagall’s jaw tightened, but her eyes softened. “Follow me you lot,” was all she said.

Suddenly, Harriet couldn’t help but feel she had seen this situation before only two months ago.
Only on that instance, it had been Katy being told that her sister had been petrified. Harriet felt her lip
tremble; knowing the only reason Professor McGonagall could be selecting them to follow her was
that her friends had met the same fate.

They followed along as requested. No one spoke the entire way. Harriet felt herself fighting back the
tears the whole way, hoping beyond hope that she was wrong but knowing in her heart that she was
right. They finally reached the Hospital Wing, and Professor McGonagall paused.

“I… can see that most of you have worked out why I have called you all here… but please prepare
yourself that this will be… unpleasant…” Professor McGonagall said, sounding strained as she tried
to keep a stiff demeanour.

“She… she’s not… I mean… she’s only…” Scott said, his face full of despair.

Professor McGonagall sighed. “She is alive, McIntyre… but…”

Professor McGonagall opened the door and stepped inside.

They followed, though Harriet now felt afraid. She didn’t think she could take the sight she knew
was coming. The moment her eyes fell on Hermione’s petrified form, Harriet burst into tears. Kieran
stepped up and hugged her tight. In spite of her despair, Harriet was surprised to see Dora move out
of the corner of her eye as if she had been moving to hug Harriet instead though stopped when
Kieran got there first. Professor McGonagall’s lip wobbled. Harriet couldn’t bear to look at
Hermione. Her face was frozen in a look of terror that tore her up inside, unable to imagine what
horror could have done such a thing to one of her best friends.

“How… how did…” Marcus asked, his voice sounding hollow and disbelieving.

“The attack happened outside the library… Madame Pince witnessed the attack,” Professor
McGonagall said and gestured to another bed where Harriet saw Madame Pince sitting on a bed
wrapped in a blanket, trembling head to foot. To Harriet’s surprise, another girl was lying on the bed
beside Madame Pince, just as stiff as Hermione and wearing an equally terrified expression. It was
Penelope Clearwater, the Ravenclaw Prefect who had been so kind to them over the Christmas
holidays.

“The two girls left past her talking about a monster. They stepped out of the doors—”

“And they froze…” Madame Pince said in a raspy, scared voice. “They held out the mirror around a
corner and just… stopped… moving… at first, I thought they were just still and secretive… but… I
put some books back on the shelf, and when I came back five minutes later they were still…”

Madame Pince dissolved into wails of tears. Harriet buried her face in Kieran’s shoulder again, not caring how it looked anymore.

“This was the mirror Madame Pince mentioned,” Professor McGonagall said holding it up. “Can any of you explain why they were using it?”

The little group all shook their heads.

“Very well then,” Professor McGonagall said and sighed. “I shall take you back to Gryffindor Tower now…”

They followed her out and down to the Slytherin Common Room in the dungeons then up to Ravenclaw Tower before continuing to Gryffindor Tower. Professor McGonagall was greeted by a cascade of questions when she opened the portrait hole, but she held up a hand for silence.

“There was another attack, a double attack.”

“Who was attacked, Professor?” Percy asked trying to sound important and in charge.

“Miss Hermione Granger, and Penelope Clearwater from Ravenclaw.”

Percy looked as though someone had punched him. Silence fell hard on the group. Another Gryffindor had been attacked.

Professor McGonagall drew out a piece of parchment. “The new rules are as follows: all students are to return to their common rooms by 6 pm, sharp. No student may leave their common room or dormitories after that time until 8 am the next morning when the Heads of House will escort them to breakfast. Students will be escorted from class to class by their teacher. Students must have a teacher escort to use the bathroom. All evening activities, including Quidditch practice and matches, are postponed.”

No one in the crowded Gryffindor Common Room replied or argued in any way. The news that yet another Gryffindor had been attacked had hit the house hard. Not even Wood protested the final news about Quidditch.

“I… don’t think I need to add that I have never been so distressed. It is only fair to warn you all that this may be the end of Hogwarts if the attacks do not stop. I implore any of you if you have any information at all about these attacks; please tell any of the staff immediately. It is the only way to save ourselves and our school.”

The moment Professor McGonagall left, loud muttering broke out.

“Two Gryffindors down, a Hufflepuff, a Ravenclaw, and a Slytherin refugee down,” Lee Jordan said in an uncharacteristically serious voice. “No one’s safe anymore…”

“I still say it was a Slytherin!” shouted one disgruntled voice in the crowd. The voices went on.

“What about Tyler’s sister? She was a Slytherin!”

“And a Muggleborn!” countered another older student.

“Yeah, maybe the Slytherins were just purging their own house when they petrified that new girl.”

“Don’t talk about my sister that way!” Harriet heard Katy snap.
The shouting grew again, the voices indistinct. Harriet made her way through the crowd, Ronnie behind her, trying to link up with Marcus and Kieran. As she did, she caught sight of Percy sitting off in a corner alone, staring blankly.

“In shock, I think,” said George who popped out of nowhere. “Think he figured the monster wouldn’t attack a prefect like him…”

Harriet merely grunted in reply. She knew what had to be done. She might not do it precisely the way Riddle had done, but Harriet had to at least talk to Hagrid. She had to know.

She finally found Kieran and Marcus. “We have to talk,” she said and led them towards their dormitory. The boys and Ronnie followed her up the stairs and into their room.

“I have to go talk to Hagrid,” she declared.

“You’re not going to accuse him, are you?” Kieran asked, his eyes narrowing.

Harriet shook her head. “No, but if he knows anything about what happened last time… we have to find it out.”

Ronnie nodded. “I’ll go too, when are we going?”

“Tonight, after everyone’s in bed,” Harriet said.

The others looked at each other before looking back up at her and nodding.

“Okay.”

* * * *

It was nearly midnight by the time Parvati, Lavender, Rachel, Tori and AJ fell asleep, and Harriet and Ronnie could slip out. They threw the cloak over themselves and pushed open the portrait hole.

“Hello? Is someone there?” the Fat Lady asked as she swung shut again, having been woken up.

Harriet and Ronnie tiptoed their way down the stairways and corridors towards the Entrance Hall. Along the way, they faced a veritable obstacle course of teachers, prefects, and even ghosts on patrol. However, between Ronnie’s agility from football and Harriet’s abilities from Quidditch, they managed to make their way to the large front doors.

“That was easier than I thought,” Ronnie muttered as they finally snuck outside.

“Shhh,” Harriet hissed, still not wanting to risk being heard for any reason until they got to Hagrid’s.

It was a cloudless night, and they made their way as silently as they could to Hagrid’s cabin. Fortunately, his lights were on, indicating he was in and awake. Harriet pulled off the cloak and knocked. Fang only gave one bark before the door was flung open and before Harriet could even flinch, she was face to face with the business end of a giant crossbow.

“Oh!” Hagrid said quickly pulling away the crossbow and looking embarrassed. “Sorry you lot, was just expectin’… nevermind, c’mon in, quick.”

Harriet swallowed but didn’t argue. Hagrid was twitching nervously and kept knocking things over in his cabin. Harriet and Ronnie took seats at his table as he haphazardly went about the process of making tea.
“Er… everything alright, Hagrid?” Ronnie asked.

Hagrid turned and looked down at them. His whole body was trembling. He managed to set down the tea tray before he sat on his oversized bed and buried his face in his hands.

“No! No, I’m ruddy well not a’right!” he wailed.

“Hagrid!” Harriet said getting up and running to hug his arm.

“Little ‘Ermione, all…”

There was a knock at the door. Without hesitating, Harriet grabbed her invisibility cloak and threw it over Ronnie’s head, climbing in under it with her. They backed into a corner, and after looking to make sure they were properly hidden, Hagrid opened the door.

“Good evening, Hagrid,” said the all too familiar voice of Professor Dumbledore.

However, Harriet had never heard Dumbledore speak in that tone before. There was no cheer in it, and Harriet felt a chill as he stepped into the cabin, and she took in the serious look on his face. Behind Dumbledore came a man Harriet had never seen before but Ronnie gasped at the sight of him, and Harriet elbowed her in the ribs. He was wearing a pin-stripe suit with a scarlet tie, purple boots and a black cloak, carrying a lime-green bowler hat under his arm.

The man Harriet didn’t recognise sighed deeply.

“I’m very sorry, Hagrid, bad business this. Has to be done. Five Muggle-borns attacked now. I have to act.”

Hagrid looked pleadingly at Dumbledore. “Professor Dumbledore, sir… you know I never…”

“I will say again, Cornelius, Hagrid has my full confidence, and that if you continue on this path I will convene the Wizengamot to review the case,” Professor Dumbledore said in a dark tone.

“Albus, please, his record is against him, and the Ministry has to be seen to be doing something. I’ve heard from the school governors; we can’t keep this quiet forever!”

“No, we can’t,” Dumbledore replied. “But simply arresting an innocent man will not get us any nearer to the actual culprit. You are setting a perilous precedent, Cornelius.”

“A-arrest?!” Hagrid gasped.

The man named Cornelius grimaced. “It… temporary thing only, Hagrid. It is simply a precaution, and if someone else is found to be responsible, you will be released with a full pardon.”

“Not Azkaban?” Hagrid moaned in disbelief.

Harriet felt something sink inside her. She had heard Hagrid worried before, but this was something new. He sounded terrified. Harriet didn’t blame him; she had heard all the stories as well about the terrors of Azkaban prison. She went to take a step forward, but Ronnie grabbed her arms tight holding her back.

Just then another knock came at the door, and Harriet gasped once more as Dumbledore opened the door. It was Lucius Malfoy.

“Ah, so you are here then, Dumbledore, and Fudge as well, good…”
Hagrid got to his feet again. “Get outta my house yeh no-good—”

“Temper, temper, Hagrid,” Mr Malfoy said narrowing his eyes. “I assure you I have no pleasure in being in your… er… house… I was just told that the Headmaster could be found here.”

Professor Dumbledore narrowed his eyes too. “And what is your business with me at this late hour, Lucius?” he asked.

Lucius grinned and pulled out a roll of parchment. “Well, it is a terrible burden on me, I admit, but I’m afraid I am here with an Order of Suspension. All the governors have signed it. There’ll be no Muggle-borns left in the school at the rate these attacks are going, and we simply can’t have that, can we?”

“Lucius? Suspend Dumbledore!?” the man named Cornelius Fudge asked. He sounded deeply unnerved by this. “That is the absolute worst thing to do at a time like this!”

“It is the school governors who decide who is in charge of Hogwarts, Fudge,” Mr Malfoy said casually. “Dumbledore has failed long enough at stopping these attacks.”

“But if Dumbledore can’t stop them, who could, Lucius!?” Fudge asked.

“We shall see… but the decision was unanimous.”

“Unan’mous, yeah, right,” Hagrid snarled. “More unanimous because they were all scared a’ bein’ cursed and blackmailed if they disagreed with ya, eh?”

Lucius’ eyes narrowed. “That temper again, Hagrid… it’ll get you into worse trouble than you are now… wouldn’t want to act like that around the dementors, would you?”

“There’ll be killin’s if you take Dumbledore! You can’t!”

“Please Hagrid, calm down,” Professor Dumbledore said soothingly. He turned to Mr Malfoy. “If the governors have called for my suspension, Lucius, I shall not argue and shall step aside.”

Fudge was spluttering. Hagrid was moaning a plea to Professor Dumbledore.

“However,” Professor Dumbledore went on. His voice was measured and slow, so there was no misunderstanding his words. “I will make it clear, that I will only truly have left this school when none here are loyal to me. You will also find that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.” As he finished, Harriet was sure Professor Dumbledore’s eyes darted to her and Ronnie and back.

Lucius Malfoy raised an eyebrow. “That is an… uh… an admirable sentiment,” he said, sounding quite confused. Harriet was sure Professor Dumbledore’s statement made little sense to the others. Harriet was sure no one else got it because she was equally convinced that Professor Dumbledore’s words had been meant for her.

“Well, we shall all miss your unique handling of this school, Dumbledore, I’m sure,” Malfoy went on. “And hopefully your successor will have the proper ability to avoid, er, killins…”

Mr Malfoy opened the cabin door, and Dumbledore strode out without another word. He turned and quickly followed Dumbledore out. Fudge was fidgeting uncomfortably with his bowler and waiting for Hagrid. He looked very rattled. He didn’t look any more settled when Hagrid cleared his throat and declared:
“If anyone wanted ter find out some stuff, all they'd have ter do would be ter follow the spiders. That’d lead ‘em right! That’s all I’m sayin’!”

Fudge gaped as Hagrid stepped past him towards the door. “Alright, let’s get going… oh goodness! I’ll have ter find someone ter feed Fang while I’m away!”

As the door shut, Harriet whipped off the cloak.

“That’s it… we’re goners,” Ronnie muttered. “No Dumbledore…”

“Who was that, Fudge?” Harriet asked, angrily.

Ronnie blinked. “Harriet… that was the Minister of Magic! The most powerful man in magical Britain!”

Harriet kept glaring at the door. She didn’t care. She knew one thing; it would take an awful lot for him to ever make it up to her for taking Hagrid like that.

Chapter End Notes

Scott McIntyre, Kieran O'Brien, Marcus Van De Lakk, Jeremy Owens, and Isabella Martinez property of night-miner(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

Pixie Fanfarró property of Hasboro

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and (dA)littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“I don’t think anything that happens to us is pointless. Merely we do not always have the wisdom or experience to understand the significance of the events as they happen.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“I am not following any spiders…”

It was lunchtime the day after Dumbledore’s suspension and Hagrid’s arrest. Harriet and Ronnie were sitting in the Great Hall with the others, explaining all that had happened in Hagrid’s hut. Harriet didn’t like talking with so many potential eavesdroppers around, but the strict new security measures made it impossible for Harriet, Ronnie, and Kieran to talk to Scott and Dora any other way.

“Why would we follow spiders anyway?” Kieran asked scratching his chin in thought.

There was an awkward pause, and everyone looked at Scott. Scott, however, did not notice. Instead, he was staring blankly at the ceiling, which was cloudy and grey, matching the sky.

“Uh, Scott?” Harriet asked.

Scott jumped and looked at them all as though he’d forgotten the others were there. “Oh, sorry, just… stuff on my mind…”

Scott didn’t need to say anymore. Harriet sighed and looked around the hall. While the school had been conflicted in its response to Kenley’s petrification, there was no doubt about how the students felt about the double-attack on Hermione and Penelope Clearwater. There wasn’t curiosity or gossip or even anxiety. There was only fear.

The only thing she could hear was soft muttering and the clinking of silverware on plates. Everyone she could see was either staring at their plates as they ate, or muttering quietly to their friends as they glanced around the Great Hall suspiciously. Harriet didn’t blame them.

“Wait…” Dora said suddenly turning to Harriet. “Harriet… do you remember that day last fall, just after the attack on Mrs Norris…?”

“What about it?” Harriet asked. She’d been so distracted she had forgotten what they were talking about.

“We were looking around for clues where Mrs Norris and… later Kenley were attacked…?” Dora went on awkwardly.

Harriet thought, and suddenly the light turned on in her brain. “You’re right!”

“Right about what?” Ronnie asked.

“That little horde of spiders I found trying to fit through a crack in the window,” Harriet explained.

“Oh yeaahhhh!” Ronnie exclaimed. “Blimey, I’ve never been excited to think of spiders before…”
In spite of herself, Harriet gave a little laugh. It felt good, even if it was over quickly. Students all around shot her odd looks. This time, it wasn’t accusation in their faces, more of pity and guilt. One thing had become apparent to Harriet during the morning, with the attack on Hermione all blame on Harriet had completely fallen away.

Ernie Macmillan had wasted no time in apologising as formally and pompously as possible in Herbology that morning for having ever suspected her. As he did, Harriet managed to catch Jeremy’s eye. In spite of everything that had happened and his gruff nature after the Christmas holidays, he gave her the tiniest of smiles before he went back to work.

“Well, I know one thing… I’d be hard-pressed to follow a horde of spiders like that too,” Marcus muttered. “Especially if they led to one of those… things…”

Dora laughed. “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of spiders too?”

Marcus rolled his eyes, and Ronnie glowered. “I’m not afraid of them… they’re just… dangerous… and based on Harriet’s description, if that spider Hagrid had is that big…” he swallowed.

“Do you think it’s still alive after all this time though?” Ronnie asked. She sounded more hopeful than thoughtful.

“I don’t know…” Scott muttered. “I… I used to know about acromantula but…” he sighed. “I just can’t think of how long they usually live…”

Harriet bit her lip. Scott looked utterly lost. Somehow, this made Harriet feel even more lost herself. Scott and Hermione had always been the brains of their little group. But with Hermione petrified, and Scott still so obviously upset by it…

“Why don’t we ask Erica?” Kieran offered.

Harriet blinked. “Yeah, that… that would work… she knew right away that the spider was an acromantula, didn’t she?”

Harriet suddenly regretted this enthusiasm at the look on Scott’s face. He looked even more miserable now that he hadn’t been the one to think of that. Harriet grimaced, and Dora patted Scott’s shoulder.

Harriet looked down the table to where Erica sat with Angelina, Katie, and Alicia. She swallowed, got to her feet, and headed off towards the older girls. As she got nearer, Harriet couldn’t help but notice how miserable Erica looked. Again, Harriet felt her jealousy lessen and instead it was replaced with a kinship with Erica over her friendship with Hagrid.

“Hey, Erica?” Harriet asked.

Erica looked up at Harriet and managed a half-smile. “Oh, hey Harriet, what’s up?”

“Well, I just had a question, it’s random, but how long would you say an acromantula usually lives?”

Erica’s eyes narrowed. “Oh, I’d say… forty to fifty years…? Maybe longer? No one knows. Acromantula are known to eat their dead…” Erica paused. “Why do you ask?”

Harriet chewed the inside of her lip. Harriet knew Erica knew precisely why she was asking.

“Oh, just, thought it might be useful,” Harriet replied.
Angelina, Alicia and Katie were looking back and forth between Harriet and Erica in confusion. Harriet ignored their looks and merely bid them a good day before returning to the others.

“Okay, Erica said they’re known to live forty or fifty years,” she said significantly.

Kieran and Dora both narrowed their eyes thinking.

“So, it’s not out of the question Hagrid may want us to talk to the spider itself…” Scott spoke up. He was finally looking more alert and engaged.

Ronnie, however, did not look thrilled about this. “Okay, if that’s the case, I am one-hundred percent not following the spiders… I mean… I wanna help Hermione and Hagrid and everyone and all but —”

“Ronnie, it’s fine,” Marcus said. “I’m… well… yeah… I don’t think I could either.”

Ronnie blushed and smiled in appreciation.

“We don’t know what we have to do… other than follow the spiders,” Kieran said reasonably.

Ronnie and Marcus both looked apprehensive. Dora rolled her eyes. “Okay, fine, you two don’t have to look for spiders.”

Scott smiled weakly and sighed. “Well, the only problem with that now is… how do we find the time to find them?”

Scott had a point. With the strict new security measures, it was going to be challenging to find the time to do snooping of any kind. This was proven throughout the following week. Even though Harriet had her eyes peeled for any sign of a spider, there were none to be had. There weren’t even cobwebs to be seen. And Scott was right, with the teacher escorts from class to class and the mandatory curfew at six in the evening, their time to look for spiders was insufficient.

The worst part about the aftermath of the double-attack and Professor Dumbledore’s suspension was revealed the following Friday. They were being led down a hallway by Professor McGonagall and happened to wind up behind a line of Gryffindor first-years being led to class by Professor Sinistra. As Harriet watched, one of Katy’s first-year friends, Alexis Richardson, stepped a little out of line to check something in her bag. As she did, a fourth year Slytherin boy stepped out of his line going the other direction and bumped into her forcibly, knocking her over.

“Outta the way, ‘fugee,” he said just loud enough to be heard as he swept past.

“Hey!” Harriet shouted angrily. There were other shouts as well, but the loudest she heard was easily recognisable as Cedric Diggory. Harriet watched in amazement as Cedric grabbed the boy by the back of his robe and pulled him back to Alexis. Harriet, Ronnie, Marcus and Kieran all hurried up to Alexis as well as the line stopped and Professors McGonagall and Sinistra hustled back.

“Are you alright?” Professor Sinistra asked helping the younger girl to her feet.

Alexis winced and held her wrist. “Not really,” she managed to whimper.

“We should get her to the hospital wing,” Kieran said. “Probably a sprain. Madame Pomfrey can have you ready to go in a second.”

Alexis blushed but gave a rare smile.
“Good idea, O’Brien,” Professor McGonagall said.

“Is she alright?” Cedric asked after giving the offender a week’s worth of detention. He still had not let go of the boy’s robes, clearly holding him there in case either of the two professors wished to give extra punishment.

“It hurts a lot,” Alexis said wincing.

“We were just going to take her to the hospital wing,” Marcus said.

Cedric nodded. “Sounds good, I’ll escort them there, Professors,” he said.

“Wonderful, I will escort my students to their next class then, thank you all very much,” Professor Sinistra said.

Professor McGonagall turned on the student who had knocked Alexis down. “And you… you will come with me…” she said in a dangerous voice.

The Slytherin boy swallowed and followed as Professor McGonagall started to lead the line of Gryffindor second-years down the hall once more.

“We’ll see you tonight, Alex,” Sarah Hollins said in a comforting tone to Alexis as Professor Sinistra started to lead her first-years away as well.

“Alright dear, let’s get you better,” Cedric said in a soft voice.

Alexis flushed as red as Ronnie’s hair, and they helped her along to the hospital wing. However, while Harriet had hoped for the chance to see Hermione again, she was soundly disappointed.

Madame Pomfrey allowed Alexis in but gruffly told the others they were not permitted inside as per the new security protocols and shut the door in their faces.

“Well… that was abrupt,” Cedric muttered, his eyebrows raised.

“Aye,” Kieran agreed. “Well… we should get to our next class then.”

“Right, where are you heading? I’ll lead you there. No sense you lot getting in trouble after being so helpful,” Cedric said.

“Potions,” Marcus said, sounding put out.

While Harriet had not expected it to, Potions most certainly did not improve her mood. Draco Malfoy was bragging openly about how his father had finally got rid of Dumbledore.

“The headmaster has only been suspended, Malfoy,” Professor Snape corrected, overhearing. “I daresay he shall be back before long.”

Malfoy scoffed. “Right… and I’m a flubberworm… you know, you should apply for the job, sir, you’d be a wonderful headmaster. I could probably pull strings with father?”

Professor Snape did not respond, but fortunately, his back was turned as Dean and Seamus were pretending to wretch into their cauldron, while Marcus was miming hanging himself, drawing widespread sniggers from the Gryfffindors. Dora and Sae also laughed, and Harriet was pleased to see the lone Slytherin second-year refugee, Courtney Thomas, join in as well.

“You know,” Malfoy said glaring at Marcus across the room. “I’m surprised the Mudbloods haven’t all cleared off yet… bet anyone five galleons that the next one snuffs it…” he fixed Marcus with a
cold smirk. “Hope it's you…”

The bell rang at that very moment. It was fortunate, as in the clamour of leaving students Professor Snape didn’t notice Dean and Seamus holding back Marcus, and Harriet and AJ holding back Ronnie. Both were trying to draw their wands and get at Malfoy. They were forced to keep a hold on the two until they were out of the castle and on their way down to Herbology.

“Alright, that’s enough you two,” Kieran muttered as Dean and Seamus finally let go of Marcus.

Marcus simply scowled and stormed off towards Herbology, as did Ronnie. Harriet simply shrugged at the others and followed. She knew perfectly well why they were that upset. Harriet felt her anger burning, but she had a long list of other things on her mind: finding the spiders, stopping the heir, freeing Hagrid, bringing back Professor Dumbledore, and wiping that smug grin off Malfoy’s face forever.

* * * *

As the weekend went on, Harriet sincerely hoped the animosity towards the refugees at least would die down. Confined to the Gryffindor common room, the houses were forced to mingle at least with the refugees in their ranks. In spite of what had previously happened with the misunderstandings over Kenley and Hermione, Harriet found herself getting even closer to Katy and her friends. To the extent that Harriet decided it would be good to enlist Katy’s help as well in searching for spiders.

“Spiders…?” Katy asked. “You know… someone just the other day mentioned spiders acting strangely… who was it, Annie?”

“It was some Ravenclaw girl, named… Chang was it?”

“Yeah, the older one, Cho,” Sarah chimed in, not looking up from her colour by wand book.

“Thanks,” Annie said. “Yeah, she saw them by the greenhouses,” Annie answered.

Marcus raised an eyebrow. “You lot are on speaking terms with Cho Chang?”

“Nah,” Katy said. “Ashley Roth overheard Cho talking about it, and Ashley told Toni about it who told Megan about it who then told us.”

Harriet shook her head in disbelief. “You lot are unbelievable,” she muttered, though she smiled.

Katy smirked. “So… you want us to keep an eye out for spiders, huh?”

Harriet nodded. “That would be great, the faster we solve this mystery, the faster we can help your sister and keep anyone else from being petrified or worse,” she said earnestly.

At these words, Katy’s whole demeanour changed and she nodded gravely. “Okay, we’ll do our best,” she said.

Sarah finally looked up from her book. Annie and Alex both gave curt nods in agreement. Harriet smiled feeling reassured that something might eventually go her way.

Unfortunately, Monday morning proved that Harriet had been wrong about the weekend helping students get over their mistrust against the refugees. The students were greeted by a large, crudely painted banner that had been stretched across the entrance to the Great Hall at breakfast:
Filch promptly took the banner down, but most of the damage was already done. While the refugees did enter the Great Hall to eat, it was clear they were unwelcome. Pieces of food kept flying across the Great Hall towards them at random during the meal, in the closest thing to a food fight Harriet had ever been in. Except this was not the usual free-for-all food-fight that Harriet had seen on television, this was apparently targeted and meant to be carried out discreetly.

Harriet felt her blood boil and finally spill over when a bowl of hot porridge plopped onto the back of Rachel’s head. Harriet had enough. She saw who had sent the bowl flying. Harriet didn’t care if people targeted her, and she was sure the older refugees could take it and stand up for themselves, but she drew the line at Rachel.

Having heard everything Rachel had gone through, everything she’d lost, her screams of uncontrollable panic in the middle of the night for fifteen minutes at a time, Harriet had reached her breaking point. Seeing Rachel’s gasp of shock and cringing in pain as she tried to brush off the still steaming porridge, Harriet could take no more. She reached across the table, grabbed an orange, and threw it hard at Zacharias Smith, bouncing it off his forehead and toppling him backwards onto the floor.

The result was chaos. All the frustrations that had been brimming in everyone seemed to explode at once. Prefects and teachers were shouting as the food began to fly everywhere. With a single orange, what was once only close to a food-fight became a full-on brawl.

Food, silverware, plates and serving trays went everywhere. Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws were caught in the middle as the Slytherins, and the Gryffindors tipped their tables over as barriers, throwing whatever food they could get their hands on across the hall. There were shouts and curses of anger everywhere. The fight finally came to a close when there was an ear-splitting bang and a gust of air that snuffed out all the candles, darkening the hall.

“Silence, everyone! Now!” Professor McGonagall cried out, her eyes blazing with rage.

Silence fell over the crowd like a pair of Professor Sprout’s earmuffs as Professor McGonagall got down from the teacher’s table and made her way to Rachel who was still wincing from the burns on her neck. The candles floating above re-ignited and Harriet was finally able to take in the carnage. Tables overturned, chair smashed; food coated all of the walls and the floor. In spite of her anger at Zacharias, and how good it had felt letting out all that frustration, Harriet was rapidly starting to feel ashamed.

Professor McGonagall reached Rachel and waved her wand. The porridge on Rachel’s neck vanished, leaving behind bright red burn marks. The sight of them blunted Harriet’s shame a little.

Professor McGonagall turned around slowly, glaring at every single face in the room. While Professor Dumbledore often made Harriet feel transparent when he looked at her, Professor McGonagall seemed able to make her feel very, very small.

“I don’t know who started this… but if I ever find out, that person will be very sorry, indeed…” Professor McGonagall growled in a way Harriet found akin to a lioness.

Harriet finally felt her anger ebbing away. Smith was glaring at her angrily, still rubbing his forehead. He knew she had thrown the orange, but if he admitted it, he would have to admit he had thrown the porridge at Rachel. Harriet glared and knew one thing for sure. Even if he was a Hufflepuff, Harriet
had made a genuine enemy that day. And given his attitude, Harriet was glad to call him one.

The bell rang for classes. Malfoy scurried with Crabbe and Goyle for the door. “You wait right there,” Professor McGonagall said pointing at them.


“No, but you did take part in it…” Professor McGonagall replied.

Harriet heard the danger building in her voice. Apparently, Malfoy did as well because he swallowed. “You can’t give us all detention…” he retorted in a feeble attempt at bravado.

Professor McGonagall did not reply right away. Instead, she strode towards Malfoy very slowly, until she towered over him and then bent down, so she was almost nose to nose with him.

“Oh… can’t I…?”

True to her word, it was the only instance in Hogwarts history of the entire school being given a detention at the same time. Professor McGonagall had Filch bring in buckets and mops and sponges, and every student was set to work cleaning almost every inch of the Great Hall without magic. Filch looked as though he had been given an early Christmas present. The only exceptions were the petrified students in the hospital wing and Rachel who had been escorted the hospital wing by Madame Pomfrey.

As they cleaned, Harriet noticed an odd trend. The regular students filled most of the great hall, cleaning, with the refugees pulled back into a sort of defensive circle in a corner. At the front was AJ’s brother, Ben Jackson, who was mopping and glaring around defensively, as if daring someone to try something. Given his size, there were no takers.

Meanwhile, Harriet kept overhearing students gloating about what they had done during the fight. Ronnie was eagerly telling anyone within earshot how she managed to get a bowl of scrambled eggs dumped over Pixie Fanfarro’s head. Fred was proudly showing off his black eye he got from an apple thrown by Marcus Flint while pointing out the giant red welt that Flint had on his forehead when Fred paid him back in kind. Nearby, Harriet saw first year Gryffindor Ryan Yukisaki and his first year Ravenclaw friend Ben Archer muttering and grinning at a pair of Slytherin third years who were rubbing their shoulders as they glared back at the pair. Angelina was smiling too as she mopped her way towards Harriet.

“You should keep an eye on that Yukisaki… he’s a fighter, saw him and his little buddy there take down both of that third-year Slytherins using some Muggle-duelling… he might make a good beater after Fred and George are gone,” Angelina said grinning.

Harriet blinked. “That’s far-off, isn’t it? That’ll be after you’re gone too.”

Angelina laughed. “I know; that’s why I’m telling you to keep an eye on him.”

Harriet gaped, and Angelina winked and kept mopping, moving away towards Katie and Alicia once more. Harriet shook her head trying to come to her senses over what Angelina had just said. Had Angelina meant what Harriet thought she meant?

After classes that night the last thing Harriet expected was a party. At six-o-clock, Harriet climbed through the portrait hole and was greeted with a roar of cheers. Fred and George lifted her up onto their shoulders, carrying her around as though she had just won the Quidditch House Cup.

Lee Jordan laughed, reaching up to shake her hand. “First food-fight since your father! Way to go,
Potter!

Harriet flushed brightly. It was just then that she noticed something odd. Removed from the cheering, standing in the doorway to the girl’s dormitory staircase, Harriet spied AJ, Tori and Rachel standing together and talking in a way that said to Harriet they were up to something. As she watched, Katy and her friends walked nervously up to the three older girls. They talked briefly before they all turned and started to head up the stairway to the girls’ dormitories.

Before they got out of sight, Rachel and Katy both paused, turned, and looked back at Harriet. They both gave her the same sad, apologetic look before they turned and disappeared up the stairs. Harriet bit her lip but was distracted as Fred and George turned her away and finally lowered her down, and she lost sight of them.

* * * *

Friday of that week could not come fast enough. Despite her pleasure at getting away with hitting Zacharias Smith in the forehead with an orange and Angelina’s hint at Harriet’s future on the Quidditch team, the morale in the school had reached an all-time low. There was no more laughter in the halls, just lines of dismal looking students following teachers around from class to class until six-o’clock every evening when they were confined to their common rooms.

Meanwhile, Harriet did solve the mystery of what the refugee girls were up to. The problem was it created another mystery. Where had they gone? Sometime during that night, all of the refugees just vanished. They weren’t in the dormitories that following morning. They weren’t at breakfast, lunch, or dinner. They weren’t in classes either and did not reappear in the common rooms that night. It wasn’t just the Gryffindors; they had vanished from all the other houses too.

At first, Harriet thought perhaps Professor McGonagall had relocated them somewhere, they’d be safer, but this was proven wrong when Professor McGonagall rose in the Great Hall during breakfast the following day to ask if anyone had seen where they had gone. Harriet saw very real concern on her face. Most of the students, however, did not share her concern. No one volunteered any information, and those that did show any interest seemed to be glad they were gone rather than worried.

Harriet, however, couldn’t help but be worried. She also felt a little ashamed, as though she should have tried harder and earlier to stand up for them. However, her shame did not solve the mystery of their disappearance. Unfortunately, the security measures meant Harriet had just as difficult a time solving this mystery as she did finding spiders.

However, when Friday finally arrived, Harriet received evidence that the refugees were not truly gone. Harriet was serving herself some eggs when the owl post arrived. To Harriet’s surprise, Hedwig came swooping in with the other owls. Harriet furrowed her brow as Hedwig came down and landed in front of her, hooting importantly.

“What have you got?” Harriet asked. She took the note tied to Hedwig’s leg and read it.

Harriet,

Spiders spotted passing greenhouses. We’re all safe. Don’t worry about us. We’re safe. Please solve this.

KMT
Harriet blinked. KMT? Who was KMT? Her eyes suddenly went wide.

“Who’s it from?” Ronnie asked reading over her shoulder.

“I… I think it’s from Katy!” Harriet gasped.

“What?” Dora asked leaning over across the table.

“Passing greenhouses…” Kieran read. “We have Herbology this morning… we have to try and look for them while we’re there.”

“Definitely,” Harriet said, nervously rolling up the note and stuffing it into her bag. She took out a piece of parchment of her own and looked at Hedwig very seriously.

“Hedwig… was that from Katy?”

Hedwig gave a single, dignified hoot. Harriet nodded.

“Good, take this back to her then if you can…”

Harriet quickly scribbled down a note.

KMT,

Thanks for the heads up.

She paused, thinking hard and went on:

Not as sorry as I am… I’m glad you’re safe… Tell Rachel, AJ, and Tori that we miss them… and please come back soon…

HLP

Harriet sighed and tied the note to Hedwig’s leg. She gave Hedwig a very gentle hug and watched as Hedwig flew off through the opening in the ceiling. Harriet bit her lip, hoping as hard as she could that Hedwig would be able to deliver it.

An hour later, Harriet was standing in greenhouse two. She had looked for spiders on the way, but apparently, it was a different greenhouse where they had been spotted. Katy’s note had not specified which one it was.

Harriet, Ronnie, Marcus and Kieran were working on a shrivelfig when finally, Harriet saw them. A line of spiders, each about the size of her outstretched palm, were scuttling past the greenhouse only feet away from where she stood. She nudgeRonnie who was nearest and pointed them out. Ronnie’s first reaction was to take a step away, which called Marcus and Kieran’s attention to the sight.
“They’re heading towards the forest,” Kieran observed.

Ronnie groaned at that thought. Marcus didn’t look thrilled about it either. Kieran, however, set his jaw resolutely.

“Okay… well… we know what way they’re heading, that’s a start,” he said.

Their next class was Defence Against the Dark Arts. Since the food-fight, Harriet had spent almost every day of Lockhart’s poor excuse for a Defence Against the Dark Arts class wishing she had an orange (or maybe something harder, like an apple) to throw at his smug face. Today was no exception.

“Oh come now,” Lockhart said looking around at them all. “Why so glum, chums? It’s been two weeks since the last attack; the danger has passed! The Minister of Magic took the culprit away weeks—”

“Hagrid was innocent!” Marcus shouted, standing up and glaring at Lockhart.

Lockhart’s grin faltered. “Were you there, Van De Lakk? I don’t think so.”

“Neither were you,” Ronnie said though Harriet stamped on her foot to shut her up.

“Now come on, sure you can’t all be defending someone like Hagrid…” Professor Lockhart said.

There was something in Lockhart’s insinuation that Harriet didn’t like, and neither did the rest of the class apparently. Most of all, Marcus.

“And why should we believe you? You’ve lied about everything else!” Marcus shouted, still on his feet.

The class went deathly still at this declaration. Lockhart’s face went white, and his jaw clenched. “What are you—?”

“Does the name Badouagan Eskandrian ring a bell?” Marcus said, smirking openly.

Lockhart’s face went, if possible, even whiter.

“They remember that name pretty well in Wagga Wagga… he’s an Armenian warlock who was pretty famous there, after he faced a werewolf in a phone booth, slammed it to the floor and performed a Homorphous Charm on it, turning it back into a human,” Marcus went on. “Then, funnily enough, a few years after that Badouagan disappeared… and for some reason, Wanderings with Werewolves isn’t available in Australia… I wonder why…?”

The class looked from Marcus to Lockhart. Lockhart’s eye was twitching. He flinched, and Harriet knew in a moment what he was about to do. She stood and as fast as she could drew her wand. There was a flurry around her and Harriet realised almost the entire class had risen and drawn their wands as well. Lockhart had his wand pointed at Marcus, who was also pointing his wand at Lockhart.

“Yeah, should be careful who you brag around,” Marcus said. “Bound to come across someone who can dig up dirt, aren’t you?”

Lockhart’s eyes narrowed and looked around at all the drawn wands before slowly put his away.

“Class dismissed for today,” Lockhart said, trying to control his breathing. He walked stiffly to the door, wrenching it open. “I will lead you back to your common room. And Van De Lakk… mark my words… I never want to see you in my classroom again…”
The clock chimed one in the morning. Harriet, Kieran, Ronnie, Marcus, Fred, George, and Ginny were all still in the common room. They were playing rounds of Exploding Snap, passing the time until Fred, George, and Ginny went to bed. As the clock chimed, George finally yawned and stretched.

“That time I think,” he said.

Fred nodded in agreement, and the twins rose. Harriet and the others got up too. They were only going to pretend to go to bed. Harriet planned to grab her invisibility cloak and sneak back down where they would decide who would go into the forest. Harriet was relieved to see only Marcus and Kieran down in the common room when she and Ronnie snuck back down after fetching Harriet’s invisibility cloak.

“Okay… well… here we are…” Harriet said, looking around importantly. “So… I’m going… who else?”

“We,” Kieran said before Harriet had even finished speaking.

Harriet looked at him, and even if she hadn’t been going to argue, she felt herself pull back a little from the determined look Kieran gave her.

“I am not missing out on another adventure this time…” Kieran declared.

Marcus smiled and put a hand on Kieran’s shoulder. “None of us are going to tell you not to, mate…” he said warmly.

Kieran blushed. “Sorry… just…”

“We understand, you big lug,” Ronnie said, punching his shoulder.

Kieran grunted but finally smiled.

Half an hour later, Harriet and Kieran finally made it undetected to the front door. Harriet was feeling winded having gone the whole way with Kieran leaning on her for support to keep his shillelagh from clunking on the floor as they snuck down. Harriet pushed the door open barely enough for them to fit through, to keep the door from creaking and giving them away. They squeezed through, and Kieran groaned finally able to put his weight on his shillelagh.

“Okay… let’s go…” he said, and they snuck off towards Hagrid’s cabin.

They planned to get Fang, as even if he wasn’t very brave, he was familiar with the forest, and might be helpful in finding spiders at least. Harriet regretted this decision the moment Fang began barking frantically at their arrival.

“Fang, shut up,” Harriet hissed.

Kieran thought fast and made his way to Hagrid’s mantle, picking up a tin that Hagrid kept treacle toffee in and quickly giving one to Fang. Fang’s barks were silenced instantly as he lapped up the sticky candy, sealing his teeth together.

“Good thinking,” Harriet said and hugged Fang around the neck. “Okay, Fang wanna go for a wa —”
Harriet didn’t get to finish before Fang bolted out the door. Harriet shook her head but smiled, and the two made their way out after him. Fang was relieving himself against a tree before he walked back over to them. Harriet and Kieran stood, staring at the wall of trees that marked the beginning of the Forbidden Forest.

“Well… now or never,” Kieran said and drew his wand. “Lumos…”

Kieran’s wand lit, marking the path. Harriet lit hers as well. “Should we head to the greenhouses?” she asked, but Kieran shook his head and pointed at the path. As Harriet watched, two spiders scuttled across it and into the darkness.

“Well… that’s helpful,” Harriet said.

“Ready?” Kieran asked.

“Ready,” Harriet replied, and they set off down the path.

Fang scampered about excitedly as they went. Harriet wished he wouldn’t and was starting to regret bringing him. The noise he was making was possibly covering the sound of anything more sinister that might be approaching. Fortunately, it seemed the spiders were mostly following the path. Harriet remembered Hagrid telling her last year to never go off the path. And that same night, she had almost been attacked by Lord Voldemort sharing Professor Quirrell’s body.

“Crap,” Kieran muttered stopping.

Harriet stopped too and groaned. The spiders were clearly leaving the path now. Harriet scanned with her lit wand. She had to duck low to see where they were going.

“Well… we’ve come this far,” Kieran said in a bolstering tone.

Harriet gritted her teeth and nodded. They slowly made their way through the underbrush, trying to follow the spiders without stepping on them or disrupting their path. Harriet grumbled before shrieking with fright as Fang let out a booming bark.

“What, what is it?” Kieran asked, pointing his wand around, shining the beam of light everywhere.

Harriet quickly swatted his hand down. “Shhhhhhh!” she hissed, her eyes darting around, tilting her head to listen. Finally, she heard the sound of something rumbling, almost like a low purring. She’d heard rumours of werewolves living in the forest, but it wasn’t the full moon, and it sounded more like a cat than a dog. She could also hear snapping branches, and a crunching, gravelly noise, almost like the sound Uncle Vernon’s car made when he pulled in and out of the driveway. But how could that be? There weren’t any cars in the Forbidden Forest, or were there?

Harriet jumped once more and closed her eyes tight as bright light flooded the area. Fang attempted to run but became tangled up in brambles, yelping frantically.

“Oh, Kieran… it’s… it’s Ronnie’s dad’s car!” Harriet exclaimed, and sure enough, from out of the bushes rumbled Mr Weasley’s scratched, bashed, but still running Ford Anglia.

The car slowly rolled towards Harriet, its rear end shaking on its suspension much the same way a dog did when wagging its tail. In fact, it rolled right up to Harriet, almost as if sniffing her in greeting. She put her hand on its hot hood, and the car gave a little shudder as if in pleasure.

“Ronnie’s dad’s car…?” Kieran asked. “Suddenly the way you got to school this year makes a lot more sense…”
Harriet blushed. “Okay… so… yeah… secret’s out on that… yeah… Kieran… meet the Weasley car…”

Kieran laughed patting its roof. Harriet smiled at him when something in the trees caught her eye. Harriet looked up and felt her body lock up. Before she could even react, there was a loud series of thuds behind her, and something strong and hairy grabbed her tight around the waist, hoisting her into the air.

Kieran shouted in shock. Harriet heard Fang whimpering loudly in fright. There was loud clicking, and with incredible speed, Harriet felt the beast begin carrying her off through the trees. Hanging face down, Harriet was able to see six slender legs scurrying as she was carried along. She could also make out a second beast, with Kieran suspended beneath it. Kieran’s face was stricken with terror as he looked back at her. They had been caught by giant spiders, and these were even larger than the one Hagrid had hidden in the cupboard fifty years ago.

Finally, they entered a hollow where the trees broke and allowed star and moonlight to come down. Harriet felt her terror increase as she realised the ground beneath them was utterly swarming with smaller spiders. Harriet was able to turn her head enough to see that the entire hollow was surrounded by other giant, horse-sized spiders. In the centre was a giant dome-shaped web. The spider carrying Harriet made its way to the web, and the other spiders all converged on them, their clawed feet thudding the ground and their fangs clicking excitedly.

Harriet grunted as she was dropped to the ground, trying to catch her breath as the wind was knocked out of her. She trembled and winced as she got to her hands and knees. It was then that Harriet heard the most chilling voice she had ever heard.

“Aragog!” the voice cried. It was the spider who had carried her.

As it spoke, Harriet could hear the horrible clicking of its fangs, which were hovering only feet above her neck. Harriet chanced a glance sideways and saw Kieran looking back at her. He was propping himself up on his elbows, unable to get on his knees because of his leg.

Harriet felt the ground tremble beneath her. Her eyes widened even more as a spider the size of an elephant emerged from beneath the web-dome. Its hair had turned entirely grey, and the eyes that Harriet could see were a milky-white. The monster spider was blind.

“What is it, why do you disturb me? Have you brought food?” the giant creature asked, clicking his enormous fangs.

“We have brought humans, Aragog! They were with the light-bringing beast from which we cannot feed!” the spider that had carried Kieran declared.

“Eat them then, feed yourselves on your catch, leave me in peace—”

“We’re friends of Hagrid!” Harriet shouted.

She didn’t know what made her call out, but it had an immediate effect on the spiders. They all clicked and stamped and shifted around interested. Aragog had been turned halfway into his dome already, but he paused and slowly turned back.

“Friends of Hagrid? But Hagrid has never sent humans this deep into our part of the forest before, why are you here? I doubt you are here by accident?” Aragog asked.

Harriet shivered. Somehow talking to a reasoning, clearly intelligent spider was just as unnerving as seeing one the size of an elephant.
“Hagrid’s in trouble, he’s been arrested,” Harriet answered.

“In trouble?” Aragog asked. Harriet was even more surprised to hear a definite note of concern in Aragog’s voice. “What has happened?”

“Something is attacking people at the school. They think Hagrid is behind it, so they sent him to Azkaban,” Kieran spoke up, finding his voice.

Aragog bristled and clicked his fangs in anger.

“But that was ages ago!” Aragog declared. “How well do I remember those dark days, when they believe I was the one who had done the attacks and dwelled in the Chamber of Secrets…”

“So, you’re not from the Chamber of Secrets then?” Harriet asked.

“I was born in the castle, but not in the Chamber. I was born in a cupboard, where I lived until I was finally discovered and made my escape,” Aragog explained. “We owe all we have to Hagrid. He made good my escape and has kept our existence a secret from the humans at the castle who would surely attack us if they knew of our presence. Later, he found me my wife, Mosag. Our family stands all around you, friends of Hagrid, alive through the goodness of Rubeus Hagrid.”

Harriet took a breath. “So, you never attacked anyone?”

“Not a single one,” Aragog said. “It was my instinct, of course, but we acromantula, as you humans call us, are reasoning beings. Hagrid implored me not to eat humans, and in respect to him, I never did. The girl who died was found in a bathroom, whereas I never left the cupboard where Hagrid kept me until I was forced to flee.”

“So… what did kill the girl?” Kieran asked. “Because the attacks are happening again, that’s why Hagrid was taken away.”

The spiders once more began clicking and shuffling about angrily. It was almost like the most macabre dance Harriet had ever seen as the spiders moved about with an odd, jittering grace.

“The… thing… that lives in the castle is an ancient evil… a dread creature that we spiders fear and hate above all. I pleaded and begged Hagrid to let me leave when I felt the creature pass my cupboard.”

“What is it?” Kieran asked sounding eager now they were so close to the truth.

“WE DO NOT NAME IT!” Aragog shouted. His voice shook the hollow in his rage. “I never even told Hagrid what that foul beast was. He asked me over and over again but never would I sully my mandibles with the name of that monstrosity!”

Harriet looked at Kieran who looked back at her, nodding.

“Okay, thank you Aragog, we’ll go now,” Harriet said, trying to keep the hopefulness out of her voice.

“Go? I don’t think so,” Aragog said.

“But…” Kieran muttered.

“My children do not harm Hagrid on my command, and I do not eat human. But I would be a horrible father if I denied my children food that wandered so readily into their home. Goodbye,
friends of Hagrid.”

“What does that make you then!?” Kieran shouted as loudly as he could.

Harriet looked at him in shock. Kieran was trembling, but whether out of fear or out of rage she couldn’t tell in the dim light. However, he still made Aragog pause once more.

“What do you mean?” Aragog asked. The spiders circling them were clicking more in agitation, clearly hungry and anxious to eat. Harriet felt herself getting woozy with fear, being this close to certain death.

“You talk about the creature that’s petrifying the students as some beast, and you talk about how much you care for Hagrid, yet you’re going to kill the only two people in the world who can save him? Doesn’t make you seem much better than the monster in the school if you ask me!” Kieran went on, still shouting. He was gripping his shillelagh again tightly. Apparently, the spider had grabbed it along with Kieran.

Aragog did not respond, and Kieran went on. “You said Hagrid has been protecting you and keeping you secret. Other people know we’ve come out here. If we don’t return, they’ll come looking for us. And what do you think will happen when they find this place and realise it means you killed some humans, huh?”

Kieran paused and took a deep breath. “But if you let us go, we’ll tell people that you did not attack anyone and that Hagrid is innocent. You will save Hagrid and your colony in one go. But if you kill us, no one will know Hagrid was innocent, and he’ll rot in Azkaban, and people will come destroy you and your whole family… your choice!”

Harriet stared. She had never seen Kieran like this. He was still trembling and was breathing rapidly.

Aragog did not respond for some time. Harriet didn’t know if it was several minutes or several seconds, but finally, the aged monstrosity spoke up. “And how can I be sure you will not simply tell everyone at the school about us and have us destroyed anyway?”

It was Kieran’s turn to pause and think. Finally, he spoke only two words. “You can’t.”

Harriet closed her eyes. She could practically feel the fangs sinking into her as Kieran doomed them all, letting Aragog call his bluff. But to her surprise, Aragog gave off what could only be a laugh. The most horrible, terrifying laugh she had ever heard in her life.

“You are an honest one, unlike the rest of your kind. What is your name, friend of Hagrid?” the giant spider asked.


“And yours, girl?”


At the sound of her name, the spiders reacted in a way Harriet would have never expected. Instead of advancing, they all backed away a few strides, shivering and clicking and stamping their many feet.

“*The* Harriet Potter… vanquisher of the Dark Lord?” Aragog asked.

“Um… yes…?” Harriet replied, her voice barely a whimper. She couldn’t think of anything else to say.
Aragog clicked in agitation. “Leave here... never return... you are allowed passage from our hollow this one time, and this one time alone.”

Without another word, Aragog finally turned back into the dome and climbed inside out of sight. Harriet looked at Kieran who grunted trying to get to his feet. Harriet rose on shaky knees and helped him up. Fang was curled up in a tight, black ball on the ground, trembling. Harriet took hold of his collar, and the spiders parted, clicking and shuffling around, showing the way out.

Harriet glanced around at them all suspiciously. Even if she could not make out their expressions, Harriet could not help but feel they were not happy about this turn of events and wished Aragog had gone with his original plan of letting them be eaten. She, Kieran, and Fang all made their way out of the hollow on trembling legs.

The spiders closed in behind them but did not rush or make any motion for attack. Harriet shivered, still able to feel their many eyes watching her and hear their agitated clicks and scuttling sounds. They kept moving, feeling their way through the trees until they finally could no longer hear the sounds from the hollow.

“I... I think we can light our wands now...” Kieran said, drawing his.

Harriet nodded and drew hers. They both ignited their wands. The moment they did, Harriet wished they hadn’t. They were greeted at once by two more spiders climbing down out of a tree.

“Aragog gave us passage,” Kieran said quickly, pointing his wand at them.

Both of the spiders clicked and gave eerie laughs like Aragog’s. “What Aragog does not know, won’t hurt him,” one said.

Harriet recognised the voice. It was the same spider that had carried her into the hollow.

“We hunted hard until we found you,” the other spider said. “We’re not about to let a meal walk away, no matter what Aragog says. Aragog owes Hagrid his allegiance, not us.”

Harriet raised her wand as well when they were hit by another blaze of light and a loud roar. Both spiders cringed and tried to cover their eyes with their hairy forelegs, but it was too late. Mr Weasley’s car slammed into the one who had grabbed Harriet, knocking it into the other, toppling both spiders over.

The spiders flailed, knocked over on their backs, attempting to flip themselves back over. The car’s engine roared, and it charged forward again, slamming into the spiders once more, crushing some of the legs on one. It cried out in pain.

The car backed up right in front of Kieran, Harriet and Fang and the doors popped open. Harriet didn’t think twice. Neither did Kieran. They both grabbed Fang and flung him into the back seat. Harriet dived into the front seat, and Kieran slid in behind her. The doors slammed shut behind them, and the car threw itself into reverse just as the uninjured spider finally righted itself and charged after them.

Harriet gripped the steering wheel hard trying to hold herself up off of it as the car sped off in reverse. Kieran was trying to push himself off the dash as the car raced backwards, darting between the trees with surprising ease. The spider gave chase for a few yards but finally fell back.

“We’re... we’re alive... I can’t believe it...” Kieran finally said.

Harriet couldn’t speak. She was still too terrified. The car rumbled and bumped, and Fang
whimpered in the back seat.

Finally, the car trundled out into the safety of the Hogwarts grounds. No spiders came after them from the trees. They were alive, and they were finally safe. The doors opened on their own and Harriet tried to step out, but instead, she merely fell to the ground as her legs gave out under her. She heard a thump from Kieran falling too, followed by the unpleasant retching sound of him being sick on the grass. Apparently, it was fear that had him trembling back in the hollow after all.

Harriet got to her feet. She just managed to catch sight of Fang running as fast as he could towards Hagrid’s cabin, his tail between his legs. She turned to see Kieran grunting to his feet, using the car and his shillelagh to push himself up. She rushed over to him helping him the rest of the war.

“You were brilliant, both of you…” she said, hugging Kieran tight around the chest and patting the car’s bonnet.

The car trembled and rubbed up and down against her side before its engine revved again and it moved on, trundling back into the woods from which it came.

“That… was the strangest, most horrifying thing I have ever done…” Kieran said, swaying a little.

Harriet put his arm around her shoulders. They made their way to Hagrid’s cabin where Harriet retrieved her invisibility cloak. Fang was cowering under Hagrid’s bed, and Harriet figured it was best to leave him there. She threw the cloak over herself and Kieran and the two finally made their way slowly back up to the school.

* * * *

“Okay… so in one week, we got the entire school detention after a giant food-fight, the refugees disappeared, and you all met a spider the size of an elephant…” Dora recapped in amazement.

Harriet shivered. She still hadn’t gotten over the terror of the previous night. She was exhausted as well. She hadn’t slept at all either. Every time she got close, she would feel a little tickle somewhere on her skin that would snap her awake, imagining it to be a spider. After tonight, Harriet had to admit she had gone a long way to being just as arachnophobic as Ronnie was.

“Well… we know Hagrid’s innocent now…” Marcus said, trying to find a positive. “That’s a step in the right direction, right?”


Kieran rolled his eyes. “Easy for you lot to say…”

Harriet smiled a little in spite of herself and hugged his arm. “You were amazing though,” she said for what felt like the hundredth time.

Scott managed a rare smile. “Yeah, that’s Kieran…” he said in a very forced tone.

Everyone looked at him. Scott hung his head.

“Sorry… I just… I don’t know… I’ve felt so lost… I just… Harriet?” he asked looking at her.

Harriet furrowed her brow. “What is it?” She asked concerned.

“Do… do you think I could maybe borrow your invisibility cloak tonight…?” he asked, leaning over to whisper as quietly as he could and still be heard.

“Yeah… I just… I… I want to see Hermione… I can’t during the day… I just… I think easier when she’s around… I know it’s weird…”

Everyone was looking at Scott with confusion except Harriet. Instead, she patted his arm across the table.

“Of course… I’ll bring it to your common room tonight…” she said. “You can go after everyone’s asleep… sound good?”

Scott positively beamed and reached across the table to hug her. Harriet smiled. Part of her wanted to go too, and yet, she had to admit there was a small part of her that was afraid to. After everything that had happened the night before, Harriet didn’t think she could take the sight of Hermione’s petrified face locked in a look of terror.

And so, at just after midnight, Harriet once more snuck out of the common room alone. She moved even more carefully now that she was alone. Even if it was easier to sneak past the teachers, she found her fear of running into Slytherin’s monster was increased dramatically.

Fortunately, it was faster to get to Ravenclaw tower than it was to get to the front doors of the school. Scott looked both relieved and pleased to see her when she got there.

“Thanks, Harriet, really,” Scott said taking the invisibility cloak with surprising eagerness.

“You want to see her don’t you?” Harriet asked.

Scott blushed. “I just… like I said… I need to think… she thought of what the monster is and I couldn’t… and because of that, she got petrified, and I didn’t…” Scott admitted, hanging his head.

Harriet hugged him tightly. “You’re a good friend Scott, and you’re brilliant. I’ll wait here… you go think, and you solve this,” she said smiling.

Scott nodded and threw the cloak over himself, disappearing. Harriet watched the door open on its own and slowly shut. She sighed looking around. There was still the Wizard’s Chess set on the table. It had been used since, but Harriet couldn’t help but remember the fun moments watching Ronnie and Kelly going toe to toe. Shame came over her again that she had not properly helped the refugees fit in, not done more of her part to get them accepted. Of course, she was only one girl, what could she have done?

Harriet now took in the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw. She was very pretty, and Harriet sighed looking up at her tiara, or ‘diadem’ as Scott had called it. It supposedly gave its wearer increased wisdom and wit.

“Heh… Scott probably wishes he had something like your diadem, huh?” Harriet asked the statue.

Predictably, it did not reply. Harriet turned and made her way over to the soft arm-chairs by the fireplace. She sat in one and stretched. After all that had happened, she was exhausted. She started to doze off, but as the night before she kept snapping back awake, expecting a spider to attack her. Slowly her eyes finally closed.

Harriet grunted. She couldn’t move. For a moment, she thought she was being held by a spider once again, but she realised she was sitting in a straight back chair. Her hands and shoulders were pulled back, her wrists bound together with tight ropes. More rope was around her waist, holding her down to the chair and her ankles had been tied together as well. There was something tied over her mouth,
but there was more, something soft was also stuffed in her mouth, holding down her tongue, reducing her attempts to talk into grunts. She couldn’t see and realised not only was she not wearing her glasses, but a cloth had been tied over her eyes.

“Don’t be afraid, Harriet.”

Harriet jumped and grunted, looking around despite her blindness. She could hear the sound of feet walking around her.

“You’re safe with me,” the voice said again. “I had to steal you away, just like you’ve always wanted.”

Harriet grunted and tugged on the ropes.

“And at last… I can finally see you in your dress… you do look wonderful, Harriet.”

Suddenly, Harriet knew who the voice belonged to. At the same time, she realised she was wearing her party outfit from the previous summer.

“Tomm? Tom Riddle?!” Harriet grunted into her gag.

Riddle laughed. “Yes, it’s me… and you’re safe… I won’t let anything hurt you…” he said.

Harriet jumped as she felt a soft hand caress her cheek along the small strip of her skin that was exposed between her gag and blindfold.

“I have to leave you again, Harriet… but I’ll be with you soon… very soon… to take you away… to keep you safe… I’ll make you stronger too… so much stronger… no one will ever be able to take the things you desire from you again…” Riddle said.

Harriet groaned and struggled. Despite his words, something seemed off. Something wasn’t right; this wasn’t right. She didn’t want Tom to have her here like this. She didn’t want to see his face when he took off the blindfold. She didn’t want him in this dream. She had had this dream before, and Riddle did not belong in it. For some reason, she wanted it to be Kieran who took off the blindfold.

The chair legs clopped loudly on the stone floor as she struggled. As she did, Riddle laughed. She felt Riddle’s hands on either side of her head, lifting off her blindfold. She blinked as it came off and she found herself nose to nose with Riddle. His face was so close and so handsome, but she trembled at the desire in his eyes. Her grunts turned into a scream as his eyes slowly turned red and the scene faded into a flash of bright green light.

Harriet heard more clopping. But she wasn’t struggling anymore, what could the sound be? She blinked and realised she was still in the Ravenclaw common room. She had fallen asleep; it had all been a—well what was it? Was it a dream, or a nightmare? Harriet decided on the latter.

Harriet heard another clopping and a voice speaking behind her. It was then that Harriet realised it was the door. Scott was trying to get back in and apparently, couldn’t think of the answer to the door’s riddle. Harriet got up and crossed to the door, pulling it open.

The moment it got halfway open, Scott fell inside the room. Harriet saw his feet sticking out from under the invisibility cloak. He was trembling head to foot and panting heavily.

“Scott?!” Harriet exclaimed and crouched beside him.
Scott whipped off the invisibility cloak and grabbed Harriet hard by her upper arms. His face was bleach white and his eyes the size of dinner plates in his terror.

“H-H-Harriet… I… I know what it is… I heard it… I saw it… I followed it!”

“What?!” Harriet asked, helping Scott up, shutting the door and leading him to the chair she had fallen asleep in.

Scott was still shaking so hard his teeth were chattering. He finally looked at her and managed to speak. “M-M-Monster… Slytherin’s… monster… Moaning Myrtle’s… it must have gone in… Chamber must be there… basilisk!”

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O’Brien, Scott McIntyre, Jeremy Owen, Ryan Yukisaki, and Ben Archer property of night-miner(dA)

Erica Quoy, Alexis Richardson, Katy Tyler, Angela Gilberts, Sarah Hollins, Rachel Kane, and Tori Hoffman property of littlebityamelie(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

Ben Jackson and Adele “AJ” Jackson property of Hasboro

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“I remember my first war. I was told going into it that there was a very fine line between bravery and stupidity. It did not take me long to realise that this was not true. There is no line between bravery and stupidity.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

“I saw the monster, Professor McGonagall! It… it was a basilisk!” Scott finally managed to say.

“I—”

“Impossible!” grunted a gruff wizard to their left. He was one of the professors Harriet had never seen before. She found the fact he was missing an arm and a leg far from comforting, as were the scars on his aged face.

“So this is Professor Morrisey,” Harriet thought. She remembered how Professor Dumbledore had sent Professor Snape to fetch him the night Colin was petrified.

“Something to say, Morrisey?” the one armed, one legged professor asked.

“Yes, I do,” the suit-wearing professor replied. “You put too much faith in Scamander.”

“Yes, basilisks have not been seen in Britain for a great many years, true,” Professor Morrisey said,
cutting off Kettleburn, “but basilisks also live an incredibly long time. Just last year, freshly dead remains were discovered in India that was dated to be nine-hundred seventy-six years old. Hogwarts itself is nearly a thousand years old. I would say, beyond a shadow of a doubt, based on these attacks, that it is a basilisk. In fact, I would not be the slightest bit surprised if this basilisk turned out to be the original monster Slytherin planted before he left.”

Professor Morrisey cleared his throat and went on. “Professor Howe from Rathlin and I have made this assertion before, based on the evidence: the petrification, the eye-shaped burn-marks on the floor of the corridor where the first attack was made, and perhaps most importantly the killing of Rubeus Hagrid’s roosters before both attacks last fall.”

There was silence at this pronouncement. Harriet kicked herself. She remembered seeing those marks on the floor the same day she had seen the horde of spiders last fall. It made perfect sense now.

Professor Kettleburn spluttered. “Then what has it been waiting for all this time?”

Professor Morrisey’s eyes darted disconcertingly to Harriet. “I would say it has been waiting for a Parselmouth, wouldn’t you?”

“You’re not seriously accusing Potter?” Professor Snape asked. There was something odd in his tone Harriet couldn’t place. It sounded like disbelief, but whether it was disbelief that Harriet would turn a monster like that loose, or could turn a monster like that loose, she wasn’t sure.

“No, not at all,” Professor Morrisey said. “But we do have in our midst evidence that Parselmouths do still exist. And because of this boy’s testimony, we have evidence that within the last century another Parselmouth entered the halls of Hogwarts.”

Professor Morrisey paused and looked around the room significantly. “The last time the Chamber was opened; whoever opened it was also a Parselmouth. They would have to be to command such a beast. This leaves us with one suspect and one suspect alone. And unless I miss my guess, somehow he must have figured out a way to do so again.”

“The same person you mean?” Professor McGonagall asked urgently. “But how?”

“As to that, I am afraid I still cannot say,” Professor Morrisey finished.

Harriet looked back and forth between the two professors. She wanted to know who they were talking about but was afraid to speak up. This sounded like a conversation that was well over her head. She wondered if they meant Hagrid, but she didn’t think so. There was something else unspoken between the two professors.

“Very well, McIntyre,” Professor McGonagall said turning her attention back to Scott. “What happened? What were you doing out past curfew and how did you see the monster without suffering petrification or being killed?”

Scott nervously set down his tea-cup. He took a deep breath and went on. “I… I was going to see Hermione… in the hospital wing…”

Professor McGonagall’s eyes narrowed. “But she’s petrified, McIntyre, what were you doing trying to sneak in to see a petrified student?”

Scott blushed hanging his head. Professor McGonagall’s eyes narrowed to mere slits. However, something about Scott’s apprehension seemed to say something to Professor McGonagall that it did not say to Harriet.
“Very well, McIntyre… go on…” Professor McGonagall said shortly.

Scott swallowed. “Well… anyway… I was going to see—to the hospital wing… and I almost got there when I heard something… it sounded like something really heavy being dragged. It was coming towards me, so… so I ducked into that little niche there across the hall from the hospital wing door and hid behind the statue of Hippocrates. I listened and heard—whatever it was—reach the spot I was hiding. I could hear it hissing and its tongue flicking in and out. At least I think it was its tongue…”

“And how did you avoid being killed by its stare?” Professor Snape asked. “Or did you just happen to hear something and instinctively knew it was a basilisk and closed your eyes?”

Harriet glared at him, as did Scott and Professor Flitwick. Scott sighed and hung his head.

“I didn’t know it was a basilisk then… I just had my eyes closed as I hid because… well… I was scared…” he admitted.

Harriet felt her lips tighten as she looked at her friend. She knew how much that had to have cost him to admit, especially after having heard the stories of Kieran’s bravery from the night before.

“That’s understandable, my boy,” Professor Flitwick squeaked. He got off his chair and patted Scott’s knee as he couldn’t reach Scott’s shoulder.

“And after that?” Professor McGonagall pressed.

“Well… it… it just sat there for a while. I… I think… I think it was looking for me… like it knew I was going to be there, or knew I already was there… I’m not sure…” Scott went on. “Then after a while, I heard another sound… hissing and spitting… but it came from somewhere else… it… it sounded like Harriet did at the duelling club last winter.”

Scott looked at Harriet apologetically. “I mean, it didn’t sound like you-you… but… it was Parseltongue. Like someone ordered the basilisk to leave. I heard it slithering off…”

“And that’s when you headed back to Ravenclaw tower?” Professor McGonagall asked.

Scott shook his head and Professor McGonagall’s eyebrows raised.

“Don’t tell me you followed it?”

Scott swallowed and nodded. The teachers all muttered around them. Harriet glanced back and saw Professor Morrisey watching Scott with great interest.

“You followed a basilisk?” Professor Snape asked. “One moment you were too afraid to open your eyes, and the next you followed it?”

Scott managed a glare. “I wasn’t as scared when I realised what it was,” he retorted. “I was still scared but… I mean… I finally knew what it was that had petrified one of my best friends… I had to know where it was coming from; I had to solve the puzzle.”

“Very well, McIntyre,” Professor McGonagall cut in, cutting off Professor Snape. “You followed it… how?”

Scott shrugged. “It… wasn’t that hard really, Professor. It wasn’t trying to be that sneaky. I just tried to stay close enough I could hear it. Now and then I caught a glimpse of its tail disappearing around a corner.”
“But if that’s the case, why have none of us heard it before while on patrol?” Professor Snape asked. In spite of herself, Harriet had to admit he had a point.

“It is a serpent… I would think that should be obvious,” Professor Morrisey said. “It must be using the extensive plumbing throughout the school.”

Professor Morrisey turned back to Harriet. “It is known you have been hearing voices throughout the school, corresponding with the attacks on Mrs Norris and later on your friend Miss Granger and the Ravenclaw Prefect, Miss Clearwater?”

Harriet didn’t know how he knew about the latter instance, but Harriet knew it was too important to answer the question to ask. “Yes, sir.”

“Well then, if she has been hearing a giant snake moving about, the only clear answer is pipes,” Professor Morrisey said.

“I see…” Professor McGonagall said leaning back in her chair. “Who was in charge of patrolling that corridor tonight?”

There was an awkward silence at this, and Professor McGonagall glowered. “Foolish question, I suppose… in any case, McIntyre, continue.”

Scott cleared his throat and went on. “Finally I got to the corridor where Mrs Norris and Kenley were attacked. It was flooded again. I figure that can only mean one thing…”

From behind them, Professor Morrisey let out an odd laugh. “That the room where Salazar Slytherin placed the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets, over the course of a thousand years, was eventually turned into a girls’ bathroom…”

He laughed more before stopping as he looked around at the other professors who were looking at him incredulously.

“Sorry, but you have to admit the irony is humorous.”

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat. “How did you know it was in that floor’s bathroom?”

“The floor was flooded…” Professor Sinistra said; her eyes wide in dawning comprehension.

Scott nodded. “Right, Professor.”

Professor Sinistra looked at Professor McGonagall. “I had to take another path getting here tonight because that corridor was flooded once more. It was also flooded the night that Mr Filch’s cat was petrified, and when Kenley… was attacked…”

She faltered at the mention of Kenley’s attack. Professor Sprout put a consoling hand on Professor Sinistra’s. Harriet bit her lip again. She remembered Rachel saying how it had been Professor Sinistra who had talked the Minister of Magic into letting the refugees come to Hogwarts. The fact that they had been so ill-treated by the regular students and one had even been attacked must have been weighing heavily on her conscience.

“Well… if this is the case, what are we to do?” Professor McGonagall asked. “My first impulse, of course, is to temporarily remove the students from the school until the Chamber can be properly dealt with.”

There were many murmurs of assent at this, yet to Harriet’s surprise, there was one definite voice of
“No, I cannot say that I agree with that, Minerva,” Professor Morrisey said. He looked around at the disbelieving faces. “If I am sure of one thing, the Heir is probably acting through a student. A student who might not even know what they are doing, given the Heir’s power. Sending the students home without identifying who the Heir is using will achieve nothing. Doing anything further will succeed only in alerting the Heir to the fact we are on to him; we need to catch the culprit and end this once and for all, rather than alert him to the fact we are on to him so he can hide for another fifty years.”

There was silence at this. Professor McGonagall’s eyes narrowed. “You are suggesting we leave students in the path of one of the most dangerous creatures in the magical world?”

Professor Morrisey did not look abashed. “It is not ideal, but what choice do we have? If we send all the students home, we are likely to send the Heir and his stool-pigeon home as well. His vanity and his pride are his biggest weaknesses. We have to lure him out. And we also have to consider the possibility that if we take a measure that makes him feel as though we are closing in, he may attempt something even more dangerous. For example, he may finally kill a student or staff member. More than likely, he will probably kill the student he has turned into his puppet…”

“But whoever it is may do just that whether we do anything or not,” Professor McGonagall retorted. “I don’t think this can even be considered a lesser of two evils discussion. It is bad decision versus equally bad decision.”

“Unfortunately, I agree with you completely Minerva,” Professor Morrisey said and sighed. “None of these are easy answers, but all possibilities must be explored. I say if we act now and act rashly we will lose our opportunity to defeat this threat once and for all.”

None of the teachers spoke again for a long time. Finally, Professor McGonagall spoke up. “I shall write to Albus of this newfound information. I don’t think any of you will blame me for that?”

There was a wave of mutterings and head nods at this. “In the meantime, we will attempt to do as Morrisey has suggested. We will keep this as secret as possible, and I will charge Professors Morrisey, Snape and Kettleburn with the task of researching all measures of defeating a basilisk. Is that acceptable?”

There were no disagreements.

“Good, now, Potter,” Professor McGonagall said. Harriet jumped finally being addressed directly.

“I want to thank you for coming to us directly with this. While I am disappointed that you went out after hours, putting yourself at risk and facilitating McIntyre putting himself at risk, I will admit that if not for doing so, we probably would have never discovered this information. Furthermore, it shows that you heeded my words last fall, and in doing so have brought us evidence that may solve this case once and for all. For that, I must thank you most sincerely.”

Harriet flushed. “Thank you, Professor.”

“And I hope that both of you will understand that even though I would normally give you a reward for this, given the interest of secrecy, in this case, I can give you nothing until the matter is settled once and for all,” Professor McGonagall went on. “Rest assured, once this matter is finally settled you will be properly rewarded for your services to the school.”

She did sound apologetic, and both Harriet and Scott agreed. Harriet wasn’t sure she liked Professor Morrisey’s logic much, but Professor McGonagall agreed, and she was going to write to Professor
Dumbledore for his take on the matter. Harriet was sure that Dumbledore would know what to do.

“Well, if there are no further thoughts or objections, I shall return Miss Potter to Gryffindor Tower if you will take Mister McIntyre, Filius?”

“Of course, Minerva,” Professor Flitwick said.

“Very well, again, I will caution everyone in this room to the utmost secrecy. Hogwarts shall continue as though nothing has happened. Very well then, come Potter, let’s get you back to your bed.”

* * * *

“Okay, so I know I’m about to sound stupid… but… what is a basilisk exactly? I thought it was some lizard? Like I saw some at a zoo once,” Harriet asked the others at breakfast that morning.

Dora snorted into her milk. Scott rolled his eyes at her before turning a kinder expression on Harriet.

“Well, I mean, you’re right, there is a lizard, but they named the lizard after the real basilisk. A real basilisk is a huge snake. It can kill in two ways, it has big venomous fangs, but it also can kill with its stare. At least if you look at it directly,” Scott explained.

Kieran nodded. “Yeah, but it seems as though if you only see its reflection—”

“You get petrified,” Harriet finished for him.

Suddenly, everything made sense to her. Mrs Norris must have been drinking from the flooded water when the basilisk appeared. Colin had seen the basilisk through his camera. Justin saw the basilisk through Nearly-Headless Nick, while Nick must have seen it full on, though he was ‘saved’ from dying by already being dead. Kenley must have seen its reflection in the water the same way Mrs Norris had as she tip-toed through the flooded water. Hermione and Penelope saw it in the little hand mirror they held around the corner.

“But… if its stare is that dangerous, how can it have only petrified people so far?” Harriet asked.

“And if it has fangs and it keeps talking about wanting to kill whenever I hear it why hasn’t it eaten anyone yet?”

Scott thought hard. “Well… you know how I said it seemed like it was waiting… like it knew I was there?”

“Yeah?”

“I think these attacks are targeted… and I think they’re meant only to petrify…” Scott went on.

“Well, according to the legend, the Heir wants to drive out only Muggle-borns, right? Well, killing people and shutting the school down altogether would defeat that purpose right?” Scott suggested.

Harriet thought hard. Something more suddenly made sense to her.

“You know… last year… Moaning Myrtle told me how she died… she said she heard something and stepped out of her stall in that very bathroom and saw two yellow balls and died…” Harriet said. She had never told that story to the others before.

Kieran rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Marcus spoke first.

“But if he wasn’t trying to kill people, why would the Heir kill Myrtle?” he asked
“Well…” Ronnie said. “What if it was an accident? We think the entrance is in that room, right? What if it was just dumb luck? The Heir opened the Chamber and Myrtle walked out the moment the basilisk came out…?”

“You know…?” Scott said looking impressed. “I would bet you anything you’re right!”

Ronnie blushed and smiled the little smile she saved for when she was proud of herself. Marcus smiled too and patted her shoulder.

“Well, things sound pretty simple now,” Kieran said cheerfully. “The mandrakes should be ready soon, and now the staff know where the Chamber is and what the monster is, it looks like it’s pretty much case closed for us.”

However, with one worry set aside, Professor McGonagall gave them a brand new one in that afternoon’s Transfiguration lesson.

“Exams?!” Seamus Finnigan cried out. “Everything that’s gone on, and we’re still getting exams?!”

Professor McGonagall glowered at Seamus as she flicked her wand, restoring the missing leg of Neville’s chair that had vanished when he dropped his wand in surprise at her announcement.

“The entire point of keeping the school open during these times, or any time, is to provide you all with a proper magical education,” Professor McGonagall said stiffly. “Professor Dumbledore’s instructions were to keep the school running as normally as possible. That means that at the end of it we need to figure out how much you’ve all learned. The only way to measure that is by examinations.”

Meanwhile, Harriet was staring down at the two white rabbits in the box on her desk. She was supposed to turn them into slippers. This was proving difficult because on the one hand, rabbits were much more complicated than anything she had transfigured before, and on the other, they were so cute she felt terrible turning them into slippers.

Harriet thought hard about what exactly she had learned that year. The most significant lesson she’d learned came from Defence Against the Dark Arts: do not set a cage of pixies loose for any reason. However, she was reasonably sure that was not the lesson Lockhart had in mind.

Fortunately, Professor McGonagall’s announcement three days later was much more welcome.

“Professor Sprout has just informed me that at long last, the mandrakes are ready for cutting and Professor Snape has begun the preparations to make the Mandrake Restorative Draught. By tonight, all of our students should be returned to us, safe and alive and un-petrified.”

The Great Hall erupted with cheers. Professor McGonagall let it go on for several minutes before her face became set once more and she raised her wand for silence. After the incident with the food fight, this was all it took for the students to take their seats once more and listen intently.

“I need hardly remind you all, that one of those who was petrified, was one of our refugee students, Kenley Rose Tyler,” Professor McGonagall’s eyes narrowed and Harriet felt the tension slip back over the crowd. “She is a young girl who came here following a terrible attack. Her home and the homes of all the others were destroyed. Many lost their entire families. All of them lost friends. There was not a single one among them who did not witness the horror of seeing another human being’s lifeless body… They were saved and brought here through the bravery of many good and courageous people to live a happier, safer life.”

In spite of herself, Harriet felt her insides tighten. Professor McGonagall’s ability to make her seem
very small extended beyond her stare it seemed.

“They came expecting and hoping to be accepted and befriended. Instead, they were met with disinterest, mistrust, and finally outright hostility. I need hardly say that despite my excitement that this terrible debacle with the Chamber of Secrets is possibly drawing to a close, I have never been more ashamed of you all. There were those among you, I will admit, who certainly did make a noble and largely successful effort to befriend them. But I must call that the exception to the rule.”

Professor McGonagall paused and took a deep breath. No student in the school was looking at her, or at anyone else. Everyone seemed fixated on their plates.

“And now, they have gone. Finding themselves unwanted here, it seems they have moved on elsewhere. Whether they have truly left, or have found somewhere even the likes of Professor Flitwick, Snape, or myself do not know within the castle, I cannot say. I will, therefore, ask once again, if anyone has any information on where they may have gone, please come forward. There are several of these students who still have family who are desperate to know where their children have gone.”

Professor McGonagall tightened her lips once more and sniffed. “One of those families is the parents of Miss Kenley Tyler, lying in the hospital wing at this very moment. One of their daughters has been petrified, and now the other is missing.”

Harriet bit her lip. Forget small, she now felt microscopic, even though she was sure she was one of the people Professor McGonagall was referring to when she spoke of those who had befriended the refugees.

“I will therefore further use my power as acting-Headmistress to hereby decree that when this is over, and we have located these students and brought them back, they are never again to be referred to as refugees. They are your classmates; they are fellow students. They are one of you, no matter where they came from or the circumstances, is that understood?”

At once, a wave of “Yes, Professor McGonagall’s” swept over the Great Hall. However, Harriet was not at all surprised to see that certain Slytherins, namely Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Pixie Fanfarró, Pansy Parkinson and Wendy Aarons had not joined in.

Finally, Professor McGonagall sat back down. Slowly, the students all began to talk again. It was Ronnie who spoke first amongst their group.

“Heh… exams in half a week and Hermione’s going to be un-petrified tonight… she’s going to die when she finds out.”

All of them laughed in a subdued way. Ronnie had a point. If Harriet felt unprepared for exams, she could only imagine how Hermione would feel. Just then, Ginny sat down beside Ronnie. She looked tired and upset.

“Hey Gin, what's up?” Ronnie asked, smiling weakly. “Not feeling well again?”

Ginny shook her head.

“Do you need to go to the Hospital Wing?” Kieran asked in a gentle voice.

Ginny shook her head again.

“What’s the matter then?” Ronnie asked, looking more concerned.
“I… I’ve got to tell you something… something really important…”

“What is it?” Ronnie asked leaning down. “Is it about the Chamber of Secrets? Or the ref—er—the missing students?” Ronnie corrected.

Ginny took a deep breath. It was just then that Harriet noticed an odd resemblance to someone else she knew. As Ginny rocked and wrung her hands nervously, Harriet was immediately put in mind of Dobby the house-elf. Only this was a slightly larger, human, female, and prettier version of Dobby.

“I… I think… I think I…”

“Oh finally, food!”

They all looked up to see Percy standing over them. He looked exhausted. At the sight of him, Ginny squeaked and shot off down the table to sit with the other first-years.

Ronnie glared as Percy took Ginny’s vacated seat.

“Percy, what did you do that for?!” Ronnie growled.

“Do what?” Percy asked, taking a sip of tea and moaning in revelry. “Oh, that’s good…”

“She was just about to tell us something important!” Ronnie snapped angrily.

Percy choked on his next sip of tea. “Something important? What do you mean?”

“She said she had to tell us something and I asked if it was anything to do with the Chamber or the missing students when—”

A look of dawning comprehension came to Percy’s face. “Ohhhhh that, no, that had nothing to do with either of those things.”

“How do you know?” Dora asked.

Percy gave her a disapproving look. Harriet wasn’t sure if it was because she was questioning him, or because she was sitting at their table. She decided it was probably both.

“If you must know, last Valentine’s Day Ginny saw me, well… doing something… and I asked her not to mention it to anyone… most specifically, well,” he glanced down the table to where Fred and George were sitting, muttering to each other in a conspiratorial way.

“I did rather hope she would keep her word not to tell anyone though,” Percy muttered as he helped himself to bacon.

“What were you doing, Perce?” Ronnie asked, her eyes glinting in a way that reminded Harriet very forcefully of her twin brothers.

“I don’t wanna know,” Dora added, her eyes looking even more malicious than Ronnie’s.

Percy glared at them both and didn’t answer, merely picked up a slice of bacon with his bare hand.

* * * *

Finally, it was time for lunch. Harriet was famished. She had not eaten very much for breakfast after Professor McGonagall’s speech. Neither had anyone else, and the sound of Ronnie and Marcus’
rumbling stomachs hinted she was not the only one.

However, to Harriet’s surprise, the bell that usually signalled lunchtime did not come. Instead, Harriet felt a horrible sinking feeling as Professor McGonagall’s voice shook the very floor as it boomed down the corridors.

“All students return to their House dormitories immediately. Repeat, all students return to their House dormitories immediately. All teachers and staff report to the staff room at once. I repeat; all students to their House dormitories, all staff and faculty to the staff room.”

Harriet gasped, and Ronnie gripped her arm.

“Oh no… oh no, not another attack?” Ronnie said.

Professor Binns sighed and rose from his desk. “Very well, after me everyone, I will lead you to your dormitory,” Professor Binns said floating through the door.

The class wasted no time in following. Harriet didn’t know why, but something about this made her even more afraid than any of the other attacks. Professor McGonagall had not made such an announcement the other times. Harriet remembered the night that Scott saw the basilisk, the way Professor Morrisey had cautioned against making the Heir think they were closing in on him. Then she remembered Professor McGonagall’s announcement about the mandrake potion being ready. Had that been enough to spur the Heir to do the unthinkable and finally kill someone?

Harriet’s fear immediately multiplied as they turned the corner. Professor McGonagall was standing there looking solemnly down at Ronnie, a tear in the corner of her eye. Fred and George were standing either side of Professor McGonagall, both looking dumbstruck. It was only when Percy came walking up that Harriet realised the worst.

Ronnie realised it at the same time. Her face went paper-white and her eyes immediately filled with tears.

“NO!” Ronnie nearly screamed. “GINNY!?”

Percy rushed forward to Ronnie, but she pushed him away, glaring.

“THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT!” Ronnie shrieked and then started towards him, hitting his chest. “IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU! SHE KNEW SOMETHING, AND NOW SHE’S DEAD ISN’T SHE!” Ronnie carried on.

She only stopped going after Percy when Fred and George both grabbed hold of her and held her in a tight embrace. Ronnie kept crying and struggling before she merely collapsed.

Harriet, meanwhile, felt too stunned to react. It couldn’t be, it just couldn’t be Ginny. Her mind raced with all the images of Ginny from last summer, smiling and laughing. Her excitement over coming to Hogwarts for the first time. Getting her first wand.

Something strange was happening in Harriet now. It wasn’t sadness or sorrow for Ginny and Ronnie and the rest of the Weasleys. Something else was building up inside her that she had never truly felt before, but she had no trouble identifying what it was. It was rage.

She never knew what it was, but in that very moment, her mind began to move in fast forward. She knew exactly what had happened. All of the puzzle pieces were falling into place at the same time.

It had been Ginny all along. Ginny had been the Heir’s puppet, as Professor Morrisey had put it. It
had been Ginny who Harriet had seen standing over Colin’s petrified body. That’s why she looked so sickly all last fall and looked so much better after break. She had spent time away from Hogwarts and away from the Heir.

And then, another epiphany struck Harriet. An epiphany that left her feeling doubly enraged and even more betrayed. She knew who the Heir was. She finally put all the pieces together as she stood there watching Professor McGonagall begin to lead the Weasleys away to write to their parents. She had been talking to the Heir all along. She had considered him a friend, and a hero. The Heir of Slytherin was Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Ronnie had told Ginny about the diary. Harriet remembered the night the diary had disappeared. She had seen the door to the first-year girls’ dormitory open. She hadn’t thought anything of it at the time. It was just an open door, but now, it meant everything. That was why Ginny had started looking sickly again; she had got hold of Riddle’s diary once more.

Harriet’s legs worked on their own. While no one was looking, she turned and ran headlong towards Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. The only way the Heir could have opened the Chamber and commanded the basilisk was by being a Parselmouth. That meant that Harriet could do it too. People shouted after her as she ran, but she did not listen.

She kept running when suddenly a hand caught her shoulder and stopped her dead. She turned around to find herself face to face with Professor Snape.

“Where on earth do you think you are going, Potter?!” Professor Snape snarled.

It was another odd moment where Harriet found herself face to face with the Potions master who typically spent his time pretending Harriet did not exist. Harriet was not only surprised by the fact he was talking to her and looking at her, but also by the rage in his face.

“Let me go!” Harriet cried and struggled. “I have to stop this! I can open the Chamber! I know who did it! I can stop him!”

“What are you blathering about, Potter? Hold still!” Professor Snape shouted back.

Harriet looked up at him with her most determined face possible. Her glasses fell askew, and Professor Snape went out of focus as they fall off her eyes, barely hanging on at the end of her nose. Inexplicably, Professor Snape stopped struggling with her. Even though she could not see him, Harriet could feel Professor Snape looking into her eyes, and felt his hands tighten like vices.

Harriet felt her voice crack with emotion as she spoke again. “Help me… help me stop him; I know where the Chamber is and I know I can open it. I’m a Parselmouth, I’m the only other person who has the power,” Harriet said choking back a pleading sob as her rage melted into desperation.

And just like that, Professor Snape’s hands loosened their grip, but for some reason, Harriet found she could not run away yet. Instead, she just reached up and pushed her glasses back up her nose. Professor Snape was still staring down at her, his expression fathomless.

“Very well, Potter, you will show me where the Chamber is,” Professor Snape said. “And you may open it, but that is all.”

Harriet’s lip continued to tremble, but she slowly nodded. Without another word, Professor Snape stepped past Harriet, though he kept a hand tight on her upper arm, hauling her behind him.

However, Professor Snape was not leading them to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. He looked so purposeful however that Harriet was afraid to ask where they were going. Finally, they paused in
front of Gilderoy Lockhart’s office. Harriet could hear loud thumps and the sound of someone rushing around inside. Professor Snape raised his hand and rapped loudly on the door.

The sounds coming from the room all ceased. Finally, the door opened just wide enough to see one of Professor Lockhart’s bright blue eyes peeking out at them.

“Oh, S-S-S-Severus,” Lockhart said, stuttering in a way that reminded Harriet rather forcibly of Professor Quirrell. “I-I-I am rather busy just right now, i-i-if you’ll be quick, I-I-I have some things to —”

“Oh no, this won’t be quick. This won’t be quick at all, Gilderoy,” Professor Snape said with relish. “You see, Potter here knows where the Chamber of Secrets is, and to top it off, she has the ability to open it. I believe our dear Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor is just the man to join us in investigating this mystery…”

“W-w-what?!” Professor Lockhart stammered.

“Haven’t you heard, Gilderoy? A girl has been taken by the Heir into the Chamber itself… here’s your bright and shining moment to prove yourself, isn’t it?” Professor Snape went on.

Lockhart’s eye went if possible even wider. “Oh w-well about that, Severus, I-I don’t think—”

From nowhere, he produced his wand and stuck it right up to Lockhart’s exposed eye.

“My dear Professor Lockhart… you wouldn’t be thinking of running away would you…” Professor Snape asked, his lips curling even more wickedly.

“R-R-Running away? D-D-Don’t be ridiculous!”

“Wonderful!” Professor Snape mocked. “And now you’re going to come along with us and prove yourself, aren’t you?”

Professor Snape’s smile melted into a glare that sent a chill down Harriet’s spine. “Because if you don’t, I shall be very, very displeased…”

Harriet gaped at Professor Snape. She had always known he was a lot scarier than most of the Professors, but right now he was downright terrifying. He exuded much of the same power Harriet had always felt from Dumbledore, but this was different, much different. This was angry and far more malicious.

Slowly, Lockhart’s door opened. By the looks of it, he had indeed been packing up to leave. Harriet felt her rage starting to build again. Her best friend’s little sister, one of Lockhart’s students, had probably been killed, and Lockhart was going to just run away? He wasn’t even going to try and help?

Professor Snape sneered once more. “Good… now… how about you lead the way?”

Professor Lockhart only mumbled. With a prod of Professor Snape’s wand, he stepped out and slowly started down the corridor. Professor Snape guided him with prods of his wand in Lockhart’s back as they finally made their way to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.

Once more, the floor of the corridor was flooded. Harriet tip-toed through the water as Professor Snape continued to prod Lockhart along. No one spoke. Harriet did pause and felt her heart jump up into her throat as she saw new words painted beneath the first message the Heir had left.
Harriet felt her lip tremble again. So it was true, Ginny had been taken. And by the sound of it, she was already dead. However, she felt ashamed of herself when it was revealed that Lockhart was thinking along the same lines.

“Severus… clearly, the girl is already dead, what can we hope to—”

But Lockhart was cut off when Professor Snape slammed him into the wall and snarled. “She was one of your students, Gilderoy! You took on the job of a teacher to instruct and protect the students of this school! We appear to have failed, and it is now our job to make sure that the perpetrator of this crime is brought to justice!”

Harriet stared. She was visited with another memory, of the look of relief on Professor Snape’s face when he determined that Colin was not dead, merely petrified. She hadn’t understood the look at the time, but she was now sure of one thing. Even if he didn’t particularly like students from other houses (most specifically Gryffindor), he didn’t want any harm to happen to any of them.

Lockhart whimpered again, looking reedy and feeble in the face of Professor Snape’s rage. Professor Snape finally let go of Lockhart again and pointed to the door to the bathroom.

“You first…”

Lockhart looked as though Professor Snape had just given him a death sentence. He turned and slowly opened the door, his eyes closed as he stepped inside. However, all they found inside the bathroom was more water. Myrtle did not appear to be there either.

“Very well, Potter,” Professor Snape said, looking around. “Where is the entrance?”

Harriet bit her lip and thought hard. She walked to the stall that Myrtle said she had died in. She put her back against it and stared straight ahead. Directly in front of her was one of the sinks. She stepped towards it, no longer caring if her feet and socks got wet. She was so close now.

Harriet began examining the sink. She looked all over the top and the bottom when finally she found what she was looking for. Scratched onto one of the taps was a tiny snake.

“Here,” Harriet said, pointing it out.

Professor Snape leaned over scrutinising it. “It’s old, but it’s certainly not a thousand years old, nor is this sink,” Professor Snape said. “It must have been left here by the last person to—stay right there!” Professor Snape snapped, jabbing his wand at Lockhart who had been inching his way towards the door.

Lockhart stopped with a squeak, like a mouse being stepped on.

“Very well then, Potter, try it,” Professor Snape said.

Harriet looked at the scratched snake. “Open?” Harriet said, half an order, half a question.

Nothing happened.

“No, that was still English, Potter,” Professor Snape said.
Harriet took a breath and tried again. This time, she tried to imagine the snake was alive. The only times she had ever been able to speak Parseltongue before had been in the presence of a live snake. She hoped this would work.

“Open!” Harriet said; more an order this time.

It worked. There was a low rumbling, and as Harriet watched in amazement, the wall in front of the sink began to slide apart, and the sink itself slid forward towards Harriet. Behind it was a massive pipe, easily big enough for a full-grown man to slide down.

Professor Snape’s face was set as he looked down the pipe. He held out a hand to Lockhart.

“Wand.”

“Wh-what?!” Lockhart stammered.

“Your wand,” Professor Snape said.

“What for?” Lockhart asked.

Professor Snape did not answer, and Lockhart finally handed over his wand. Professor Snape grinned. “Right then, you first.”

Lockhart spluttered. Now wand-less and faced with Professor Snape’s very capable wand, he did not argue as he stepped up to the pipe. He gave Professor Snape one terrified glance over his shoulder and was about to say something but never got the chance. Professor Snape kicked him just hard enough in the backside to send him flying down the pipe. Harriet could hear him shouting and thudding for a while. Apparently, there were curves to the pipe as it went.

“Right, I’m going now,” Professor Snape said and turned to Harriet. “And you, Potter, are to remain here, do you understand me?”

Harriet glared. “You might need me yet, I might be able to command the snake!” she said indignantly.

“The danger is too great, Potter. You got lucky last year, but you can’t expect that to happen again.”

Harriet tried to give Professor Snape the same glare that had worked on him before, but apparently, he was ready for it this time.

“My word is final, Potter,” Professor Snape said shaking his head.

“If you don’t let me come I’ll just come in after you anyway. You can’t command the Chamber to close; I can,” Harriet said.

Professor Snape glared now too. He chewed his tongue, thinking.

“Very well… very well… but I am going first. You will follow. Once down there, you will follow and keep your eyes closed at all times… and if or once the basilisk is encountered, you are to run back as fast as you can. Is that understood?”

Harriet thought hard but couldn’t think of any other argument. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. I’d better get down there,” Professor Snape said.

Without another word, he slung his legs down into the pipe and pushed off sliding down. Harriet
wasted no time. Not wanting anything to interrupt, she lowered her legs into the pipe and slid after him.

The inside of the pipe was wet and lined with slime. She immediately regretted having not changed into trousers or jeans. The pipe did indeed wind and curve a lot as it went. There were also off-shooting pipes, though they were all much smaller than the one she was in. Finally, the pipe levelled off, and Harriet shot out the end, tumbling onto equally wet and slimy ground.

She stood up and looked around. They were in a dark tunnel, tall enough that Professor Snape and Lockhart could stand. Lockhart was ghost white in the light of Professor Snape’s wand, which was still pointed at Lockhart’s back.

“Very well, Potter, eyes closed. Hold onto the back of my robes and follow me,” Professor Snape said.

Harriet nodded and stepped forward, grabbing the back of Snape’s robes and closing her eyes. “Okay,” she said, and Professor Snape started forward. The floor was so smooth that Harriet had no trouble walking along behind the two men. The only sounds she could hear were the sloshing of their feet over the wet ground and the dripping of water all around them.

There was a crunching noise that made them all pause. Against orders, Harriet opened her eyes and looked down and gasped. The ground was completely covered in animal bones. Harriet swallowed and looked up at Professor Snape. He gave her a disapproving look and Harriet nodded and closed her eyes again.

They continued on once more. Harriet kept trying to ignore the unpleasant crunching sound as they walked across the bone-covered floor. After what felt like a few more yards, Professor Snape stopped short again, and Harriet ran into the back of him.

“No one move a muscle…” Professor Snape whispered.

Harriet suddenly felt fear rising in her. Had Professor Snape spotted something? She could hear Lockhart’s ragged, terrified breathing a few feet away. He wasn’t helping Harriet feel any calmer. “Let go and remain here, Potter… I will come back for you… Lockhart, forward.”

Harriet let go of Professor Snape’s robes and heard him and Lockhart moving away from her. Fortunately, it was only a few seconds before Professor Snape called back to her. “It’s alright, Potter, you can come.”

Harriet opened her eyes again and finally saw what had stopped Professor Snape. It was a giant snakeskin, perhaps forty feet long. It looked fresh enough that some of the bright green colour was left.

Harriet stepped up to the skin, crouching and looking at it with interest. Professor Snape was also studying it carefully, muttering to himself. Lockhart meanwhile was backed against the wall, not daring to look at it.

Harriet moved to the other side. “It’s so big…” she said in disbelief.

Professor Snape nodded. “It’s probably larger now… they shed their skin as they grow—Hey!”
It happened in a second. Professor Snape let his guard down for the briefest of moments and Lockhart pounced on his wand hand, attempting to wrestle Professor Snape’s wand away.

Harriet jumped back, trying to duck and dodge as the wand aimed around wildly as the two men wrestled for it. Harriet drew her wand, wanting to help, but she couldn’t be sure of whether or not she would hit Professor Snape or Lockhart. Both men were grunting and snarling when finally it happened.

Whether it was Professor Snape or Lockhart who did it, Harriet didn’t know. All she knew was the wand fired off a burst of light that hit the ceiling with incredible force. The floor began to tremble, and rocks began to fall. The tunnel was caving in. Harriet acted instinctively and dived away down the corridor.

She curled up and covered her head, expecting to be crushed at any moment but finally, the rumbling stopped, and Harriet was still alive. She sat up and looked back at the tunnel where Professor Snape and Lockhart had been. It had become a wall of collapsed stones; there was just a little space at the top.

“P-Professor Snape?” Harriet called.

Silence greeted her, and Harriet started to grow worried that they had not managed to get out of the way in time.

“Potter?” she finally heard Professor Snape call back. He sounded as though he was in pain.

“Professor!” She called back. “I’m okay!”

There was an awkward pause. “Very well,” Professor Snape finally said. “I’m trapped, and my wand… my wand got caught in the collapse. Don’t panic, Potter, just stay where you are. The others will catch up with us.”

There was a loud thump noise, and Harriet heard Lockhart shout in pain. It sounded as though Professor Snape had punched him.

“Are you both alright?” Harriet called back.

Again there was a long pause before Professor Snape replied. “Yes, well enough. Nothing Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori won’t be able to fix. Find a spot to hide, keep your eyes closed, and wait for the others to come.”

Harriet nodded, lit the tip of her wand and looked around for a place to hide. However, there didn’t seem to be anywhere to go but further down the tunnel. It was then that sense of bravery built up inside her. That feeling that she had to do something, that someone had to do something. She was here, she was alive, and she could press on.

“Professor, I’m going to go on ahead.”

“What?!” Professor Snape cried out.

Harriet could hear the sound of rocks moving. It sounded as though Professor Snape was trying to dig himself out. He sounded frantic.

“I’ll be careful; I have to see if Ginny’s still alive. I’ll be back I promise,” Harriet called.

“Potter, you stay right where you are!” Professor Snape’s voice rang through the space over the
collapsed ceiling.

“I’m sorry, Professor, I can’t,” Harriet said. She turned, pointed her wand down the tunnel, and started forward.

Behind her, she could hear Professor Snape calling: “Potter, you get back here right this instant! Potter!? Are you listening to me?! POTTER!”

Chapter End Notes

Kieran O'Brien and Scott McIntyre property of night-miner(dA)

Dora Flamel property of me!

Professor Morrisey property of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (I'm sure you can all figure out who he's supposed to be ;) )

All other characters property of J. K. Rowling

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), (dA)littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“That being said; even if bravery and stupidity are one and the same, and there is much to be said for cleverness… it is usually bravery that wins out in the end.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Despite the bravery she felt when setting off from the collapsed tunnel, the further Harriet got the more nervous she became. It was so dark she could barely see anything outside the pool of light from her wand. It reminded her of the Forbidden Forest again, only this time she didn’t have Kieran, or Fang, or even Malfoy to keep her company. Everything looked as though it was moving out of the corner of her eye. However, she met nothing as she went on; even the bones on the floor had ended.

She gave a little shriek of surprise and clamped her eyes shut as she stepped around a corner. She was sure she had seen not one but two giant snakes rising up before her, ready to strike. However, she heard no spitting, nor hissing, nor the sliding of their massive bodies racing towards her.

Slowly, she opened her eyes once more. There were indeed two giant snakes looming up in the tunnel ahead of her, but they were only carvings on a giant door that blocked the tunnel. Their eyes were set with enormous emeralds that flickered in the wand-light. Even though she now knew they were stone, Harriet could not help but feel they were alive and watching her.

Once more, as if by instinct, Harriet knew what had to be done. She stared into the eyes of the snakes and spoke as commandingly as she could. “Open.”

Harriet took a step back as the doors shuddered to life. The snakes parted from each other, and the doors slid apart. She closed her eyes, took three deep breaths, and started forward. She had finally arrived.

Harriet gaped as she looked around. The cavern she had entered was immense. The walls were lined with stone pillars that stretched so high Harriet could not see the tops of them in the darkness. More carved snakes wound up the pillars, all set with the same glinting, emerald eyes as the snakes that had guarded the door. As she moved, Harriet could have sworn she saw one or two of them move.

Every step felt like an eternity as she made her way deeper into the chamber. She kept expecting the basilisk to leap out at her from behind every pillar and out of every shadow. She kept her eyes narrowed to mere slits, ready to slam them shut at a moment’s notice. However, Harriet was starting to wonder just what that plan was going to accomplish. Scott said that basilisks also had venomous fangs, and given the size of the skin she saw back in the tunnel, this basilisk could most likely swallow her in a single bite without needing to use them.

Finally, Harriet did see something move, but it wasn’t a snake. At the very end of the chamber, between two vast, flat-based pillars, something stirred, but it was not a snake. It was a small figure with brilliantly red hair, wearing a black robe and a grey uniform.

“Ginny!” Harriet cried out.

Ginny looked up at Harriet and groaned, shaking her head. Her face was chalk-white, as though she
had been drained of blood. Harriet ran towards her, hardly able to believe the evidence before her. Ginny was still alive.

“H-H-Harriet,” Ginny stammered as Harriet reached her. Her voice was dry and cracked and broke several times. She was crying.

Harriet knelt and took Ginny in her arms. As she did, Harriet saw Riddle’s diary lying next to her. Anger burned inside her as she looked at it. She was met with the strong desire to rip it in half.

“Harriet,” Ginny said, her voice barely a croak, “…get out of here…”

“Not without you,” Harriet said. She tried to lift Ginny to her feet, but apparently Ginny had no strength left.

“It’s Riddle…” Ginny muttered. “It’s him, Harriet… tried to tell you…”

“I know, Ginny, I know,” Harriet said impatiently as she tried to get one of Ginny’s arms over her shoulder.

“You do, do you?” asked a boy’s voice from somewhere nearby. “Well, I suppose you were bound to find out sooner or later.”

Harriet didn’t need to turn to see who the voice belonged to. She knew the moment she heard him speak. It was the voice from the memory in the diary; it was the voice from her dreams and the voice from her nightmares. It was the voice of Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Harriet turned, and in spite of herself, she gaped in shock. Riddle was leaning against one of the pillars, smirking down at her.

“You!” was all Harriet could think to say, but she tried to put every bit of anger and malice into it that she could.

Riddle simply smiled brighter. “Oh dear, this isn’t how I envisioned our first meeting would go at all,” he said casually.

Harriet squinted a little. Riddle looked as though he was out of focus. His edges were blurred. Even his features were difficult to make out. However, Harriet was sure her eyes were not playing tricks on her.

“He came from the diary,” Ginny muttered, her head lolling.

Riddle laughed. It was a high, cold laugh that sent shivers down Harriet’s spine. It didn’t seem to belong to him; it was an evil, sinister thing.

“Yes, little Ginny… yes, I did… thanks to you and our dear Miss Potter here,” Riddle said smirking.

“What do you mean?” Harriet asked.

Riddle’s grin widened. “Shouldn’t that be obvious by now, Harriet? It was you and Ginny, pouring out your secrets, your hearts and souls, that made me stronger. Much stronger than even I would have guessed as I lay dormant these past fifty years.”

Harriet felt her eyebrows knot even tighter. Riddle’s grin did not falter. “You used her… It was you; you made her attack everyone, didn’t you?” Harriet accused. “And you framed Hagrid all those years ago!”
Ginny sniffed and sobbed again.

“Oh yes,” Riddle said. “To this day even I am amazed at how well framing Hagrid worked. I was sure someone would figure it out, but no, no one ever stopped to question it. I thought surely someone would realise that acromantula do not petrify their victims, or that a fool like Hagrid would never have the brains or the power to open the Chamber. It took me five years to find it. But alas for the prejudices of humanity; so convenient, aren’t they?”

“What do you mean?” Harriet asked.

Riddle laughed. “Oh come now, Harriet. You can’t tell me you’re that thick? It was my word against Hagrid’s… Who was going to believe him over me?”

“Me,” Harriet hissed angrily. “And Dumbledore.”

Riddle’s grin faltered. “True. Dumbledore never did seem to trust me as much as the other teachers, and he did persuade that old fool Dippet that Hagrid hadn’t meant to do it and to keep him on as game-keeper rather than turning him over to the Ministry to be sent to Azkaban. Though that doesn’t matter anymore.”

Riddle’s smile returned, and he turned his eyes on Ginny. “As for little Miss Ginny, she found me months and months ago, and she’s been writing to me ever since. Every pitiful little secret and worry in her little mind. How ashamed she was to have to wear second-hand robes, and use second-hand books, and how proud she was to have spent a summer with the good and the great Harriet Potter.”

Riddle turned malicious eyes on Ginny. “She fed so much into me she made me even more powerful than herself; far more powerful. So powerful I was able to begin feeding some of my soul back into her. It was much more interesting than listening to her complaining and moaning all the time. I was able to speak Parseltongue through her. I was able to command my pet once more; just as I had fifty years ago and just as I had planned when I made the diary. I was able to use her to paint the message on the wall and to slaughter that great oaf Hagrid’s roosters…”

Harriet felt her muscles tighten. Ginny gave out a pathetic little sob.

“Now, now… don’t give me that little Ginny. You simply loved your dear diary, didn’t you? Even if it was probably the most boring experience of my life, and I spent fifty years hidden away from everyone,” Riddle taunted and laughed. Ginny sobbed harder.

“But I was so kind wasn’t I? Wasn’t I sympathetic? Wasn’t I always there for you? Didn’t you always tell me how no one had ever understood you as I do? In fact, I believe you called me a ‘friend you can carry around in your pocket’?”

“Leave her alone!” Harriet barked. “You’ve done enough to her!”

Riddle laughed wickedly again. “Oh no, Harriet, I’m not quite done with her yet. You see, the longer we’re here talking, the stronger I get and the weaker she becomes. See, I’ve become more solid in just the last few minutes.”

Harriet looked at the rest of Riddle again and saw that he was right. His edges did seem to be harder than they were before. Ginny, on the other hand, felt weaker in Harriet’s arms.

“What are you doing to her?” Harriet asked.

“Why, I’m stealing her life of course. Granted I won’t be able to steal all of it before I am whole again,” Riddle explained.
“Ginny has you to thank for that, Harriet. You put a great deal of life into me as well for the mere month that I was in your possession after Miss Ginny finally got suspicious of me,” Riddle explained before he turned disdainful eyes on Ginny.

“See, stupid little Ginny didn’t know what she was doing, nor did she remember. But I suppose she was eventually smart enough to put it all together and attempted to dispose of me. Fire, Ginny…? Honestly, did you think it would be that easy to get rid of me? But no matter, there won’t be much life left in her when I’m done.”

“And you were just going to kill her anyway?” Harriet asked, her fists clenching.

“But of course!” Riddle said as if this was the most obvious thing in the world. “I can’t leave a witness to my return. Besides, my poor pet has been so hungry for so long. You heard him whining as he made his way around the school. I know… that was another little secret Ginny told me.”

Harriet’s breathing was getting out of control as her rage began to bubble over once more. Riddle’s eyes glinted with interest as they roved over her face. “A Parselmouth… just like me… it’s fascinating…”

“And so you’re going to kill me too,” Harriet said glaring, ignoring Riddle’s words.

This time Riddle did not respond right away. He merely continued to study her face with great care. “That depends, I think…” Riddle replied.

“On what?”

“On you, of course.”

“On me?”

“Yes, Harriet. I’ve seen the darkest areas of your mind. I’ve seen your dreams… Oh yes… You were quite right; those were not natural dreams you were having at all. I saw the way you looked at my face when you entered my memory… I saw the desire in your eyes… I felt the longing in your heart.”

Harriet felt her anger being replaced with fear. So Riddle had been invading her dreams. She felt her throat clench and tried to swallow but failed. She felt dirty somehow, from more than just the muck on her clothes.

Riddle laughed again. “Oh yes, Harriet, I don’t need a body to be powerful. Your dreams and thoughts are my playthings. How many times I wandered into your dreams… I just watched at first. I was intrigued, you see? You have such strength that I cannot deny… but it conflicts so strongly with your innermost desires and fantasies…”

Harriet felt herself tremble. Ginny felt weaker still as she tried to hang on. Harriet held her tighter.

“And so I decided to start playing with your dreams. I experimented. I discovered powers even I didn’t know I had… I had never met someone as interesting as you to play with. Unfortunately for me, little Miss Ginny stole me back from you before I could get a full grip on you, as I had on her. I was so angry when the next time my diary was opened it was Ginny writing to me, and not you. And so I decided to punish both of you.”

“So you made her attack Kenley…” Harriet growled, her courage starting to come back.
“Of course,” Riddle said with a laugh. “Ginny had told me how she and her sister were helping you with your little investigation. However, I thought her nosy little sister would be too close to Ginny and would bring suspicion, and so her loner elder sister made the perfect target. That and even if I could have cared less about attacking Muggle-borns at that point, it did feel good to take a little break and re-purify my ancestor’s noble house.”

Riddle’s smirk returned. Harriet glared.

“So if you punished me then, why did you go after Hermione? And why did you stop attacking Muggle-borns?”

Riddle’s eyes glinted. “Why… I was trying to get you back.”

“Get me back?”

“Oh yes,” Riddle said. He finally stood up and started walking towards her. “I couldn’t stand working through stupid little Ginny anymore. I wanted to learn more about you. From all Ginny told me, and from what I learned by our writing sessions, I knew nothing would stop you from learning the truth about Slytherin’s Heir. And particularly, I knew you would be even more determined were a friend of yours to be attacked.”

Riddle suddenly looked annoyed. “I failed, however, the other night when I had Ginny send my basilisk against your pathetic blood-traitor friend McIntyre… my pet would have succeeded had he simply been stupid enough, or brave enough, to open his eyes…”

Harriet thought hard about that hallway. An even more horrible sensation gripped Harriet’s insides.

“But… there was nothing there for him to see the reflection… that means—”

Riddle laughed again, cutting her off. “That I was trying to kill him, of course! Ginny overheard him asking to borrow your cloak to see your little Mud-blood friend… But like I said… his cowardice saved him…”

“But why Scott? You were going to kill him just because he was my friend?”

Riddle chuckled darkly. “Well, partly… I admit the McIntyre’s are among the worst of blood-traitors… so snuffing out some of their line did make me feel good. Or it would have. I did at least get to enter your dreams once more. To tell you how safe you would be with me… how I could give you everything, you wanted… to make sure you never lost anything, ever again…”

Once more, chills spread down Harriet’s spine as Riddle grinned down at her. He was standing right in front of her. Harriet was doing her best to keep Ginny supported and position herself between Ginny and Riddle.

“Oh yes… I know about all of your little desires, Harriet… Ginny was standing right outside the door to the Ravenclaw common room with me in her arms,” Riddle went on.

Harriet shivered again. Ginny’s head lolled and her eyes closed. Harriet shook her, trying to wake her again, but all Ginny did was emit a low moan. Her strength draining, Harriet slowly lowered Ginny to the ground.

“I have some questions for you now, Harriet,” Riddle said.

“Like what?” Harriet snapped, not bothering to look back up at Riddle as she lay Ginny down as gently as she could.
“Well, how, for instance, did you manage to defeat Lord Voldemort, twice now at last count?”

Harriet blinked. That was the last question she had expected. “Why do you want to know that? Didn’t Voldemort come after… after…”

Harriet’s voice trailed off. More dawning comprehension was washing over her. She remembered the red eyes from the nightmare and the flash of green light. She also remembered all the nightmares she had experienced the year before. They had all featured those same burning red eyes and those green flashes of light.

“Got there at last, have you?” Riddle asked. “Yes… I hadn’t planned on that… your subconscious seems to have an excellent memory, and very good intuition. I tried to give you your deepest fantasies, and yet you fought me every step of the way. Scenarios where you had given yourself over so freely to others… yet I was always denied…”

“You became Lord Voldemort?” Harriet asked, wide-eyed.

Riddle’s dark grin returned. “Became? On the contrary, my dear Harriet…”

Riddle turned and produced a wand. As Harriet watched, she suddenly paused. “Hey, that’s my wand!” she said and reached down into her pocket. Sure enough, her wand was no longer there.

“I know,” Riddle smirked. Before Harriet could say anything more, Riddle started to draw in mid-air with the tip of her wand. As he drew, golden letters appeared, spelling out the name:

TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE

Riddle gave the wand a wave, and the words began to rearrange themselves. They finally stopped, and Harriet read the words:

I AM LORD VOLDEMORT

Riddle turned back to her. Harriet felt frozen in place.

“I was already calling myself Lord Voldemort by the time I made my diary, Harriet. It was a name I used amongst my most faithful followers only, of course. I was never going to keep my filthy father’s common Muggle name… Not me… not I…”

Riddle’s face turned into a grimace and his fists clenched. “I?! I, who am directly descended from the great Salazar Slytherin, himself!? Me, keep the name of a common, pathetic Muggle who abandoned my mother the moment he found out she was a witch?! Before I was even born?!”

Riddle was trembling with rage, talking through gritted teeth. “No, Harriet, not I… I made myself a new name… a powerful name… a name I knew would one day strike fear into the hearts of witches and wizards everywhere! That would help me become the greatest sorcerer of all time!”

“You’re not,” Harriet said without hesitation. She didn’t know what made her say it.
“What?” Riddle asked. He looked taken aback, almost as though Harriet had slapped him.

“You’re not the greatest sorcerer of all time!” Harriet replied. Her heart was racing, but she was feeling a sense of calm again now that Riddle was wrong-footed. “That’s already been taken… the greatest sorcerer of all time is the only wizard you’ve ever been scared of, isn’t it? No… if you ask me… the greatest wizard of all time is Albus Dumbledore!”

Riddle’s face contorted with rage. “Dumbledore was driven from this school by my mere memory in a book!” he snarled.

“Oh no he’s not,” Harriet said. She still didn’t know where her courage was coming from. It was almost as if just thinking of Dumbledore was injecting it into her. “Dumbledore will only have left when there’s no one here loyal to him… and well, I am… and I don’t care if I’m the only one!”

Riddle snarled and was about to retort when he paused, looking around curiously. Harriet listened and then she heard it too. It sounded like music. Harriet and Riddle both turned, looking down the chamber. The more Harriet listened, the more it sounded like no instrument she had ever heard. And yet, it gave her a feeling very similar to the one she got whenever she heard the invisible violin.

However, as it got louder, Harriet found this was a very different song. This was so much stronger. Harriet felt her heart swelling, and her skin tingled as though charged with static. It reverberated through the floor and the walls and her very bones.

As Harriet and Riddle watched, a light appeared at the end of the chamber, growing brighter by the second. It looked as though a fireball was approaching them. But as it got closer, Harriet realised it was not a fireball; it was a bird. The most amazing, beautiful bird she had ever seen.

It was bright crimson and glowed with a fiery light. It had a tail of shimmering golden feathers as long as a peacock’s, and gleaming golden feet and talons with a curved, golden beak. The bird flew straight at Harriet, but she was not afraid of it. The song it sang as it flew towards her filled her with such hope.

The bird landed in front of her, and as it did it dropped an old, brown sack at Harriet’s knees that she hadn’t noticed it carrying before. As Harriet looked down at it, she realised it wasn’t a sack. It was the ancient, ragged, Hogwarts’ Sorting Hat.

“A phoenix…” Riddle asked, staring in amazement.

Harriet blinked looking back at the bird. It was so large it looked her straight in the face.

“Fawkes…” Harriet asked breathlessly.

The bird merely chirped and blinked once, and even this chirp was lyrical and warmed Harriet’s heart.

“And the old Sorting Hat?” Riddle muttered. “This is what sticking up for Dumbledore got you, Harriet? An overgrown canary and a pile of rags? Don’t you see, Harriet? I can give you so much more than that…”

Riddle’s smirk came back. “I can give you all that I offered in the dream. I was once all-powerful until I met you… how did you live while I lost my powers? But no longer… I am almost fully restored, and if we cannot truly defeat each other… why don’t we work together…”

Harriet blinked. “Work together?”
“Yes,” Riddle replied. “We could fashion you a new name too… the Dark Lord and the Dark Lady… the two greatest wizards of all time…”

Harriet felt her anger rising. How dare he? How dare he kill her parents in an attempt to kill her, and then turn around and ask her to join him? How dare he ask her to stand with him when he was only standing there by draining the life from one of her friends?

Before Harriet could speak, Riddle was no longer in front of her. She gasped as arms wrapped around her from behind, holding her tight.

“Come now, Harriet, didn’t you like your dreams? I had tailored them just for you; your favourite scenarios, caught while snooping around… bound and helpless… a face you find so desirable grinning down at you…”

Harriet felt herself trembling. Whether it was from rage, or from fear, she couldn’t tell. She saw Riddle raise a hand slowly, approaching her face. She grunted and struggled in his grasp as it came nearer.

Against her will, Riddle’s hand brushed her cheek in the same spot it had in her nightmare. However, something very different happened in real life. Instead of feeling his hand, Harriet’s scar burned, and she screamed in pain. However, her scream was not the only one. Riddle was also crying out in pain, and he let go of her.

The pain abated almost at once, and Harriet turned around, looking at Riddle. He was staggering backwards, staring at his hand. Even though he was still blurred, Harriet could see the skin on his hand where he had touched her had turned red and blistered, just as Quirrell’s had the year before.

Riddle gasped looking at Harriet, shock and fear registering on his face for the first time. “What are you…?” He asked, trying to catch his breath.

The pain was gone, and with Riddle no longer holding on to her, Harriet felt her courage return. She took a deep breath. “I’m a girl, my name’s Harriet Potter, and I’ll never join you,” Harriet said with an air of finality. “And it wasn’t me who stopped you; it was my mother.”

Riddle again looked dumbstruck.

“Yes, my mother, I don’t know how it stopped your powers, but it stopped you from killing me. My mother did it, my filthy common Muggle-born mother, when she died to save me,” Harriet paused and took a breath. “And I’ve seen what you’ve become… you’re still out there somewhere, but you’re foul, powerless, and hideous, hiding all alone.”

Riddle snarled before forcing his face into a cruel leer.

“So… that’s it, is it? Your mother died to save you? Yes… that is a powerful counter-curse… perhaps the most powerful… And so finally I learn the truth… there is nothing special about you after all.”

To Harriet’s surprise, Riddle’s leer faded. His whole aspect fell. He no longer looked angry, merely disappointed.

“Well, that’s disappointing…” Riddle said. “I’d hoped for so much more. We just had so much in common… both half-bloods… both orphans…”

“I’m only an orphan because of you!” Harriet shouted.
Riddle laughed. “I’m an orphan because of me too, Harriet. I killed my father, you see… just like I killed yours, the very summer I finally learned who he was, and what he had done. And I suppose, one could say I killed my mother as well, as she died giving birth to me.”

Harriet felt a chill run down her spine. Riddle had a manic grin on his face. “And not just them. I killed my dirty Muggle grandparents as well. I had to wipe out the line permanently; to cut all my ties to them. I knew only then could I truly ascend to my proper place of glory. The following school year, I put my plan into action and released my monster for the first time.”

Harriet was breathing fast. So he was already a murderer by the first time Harriet had ever laid eyes on him? Not once, with Moaning Myrtle, or even twice with his father, but four times? Harriet felt even more unclean.

“But all that aside, we even share being Parselmouths. And besides being a girl, we even look somewhat similar. I was so fascinated, but if it was just chance?” Riddle sighed. “I’m afraid I have no real use for you anymore, Harriet Potter. And so, let us see… If I cannot touch you myself and snuff out your pitiful life, let us test the powers of Salazar Slytherin against the best that Dumbledore could send you… I’m sure my dear pet would not mind two mouthfuls tonight.”

Riddle sneered at Fawkes and the Sorting Hat and turned. He tilted his head back, looking upwards. Harriet followed his gaze and gasped. What she had taken for more pillars were legs. The legs of the most giant statue Harriet had ever seen. It was a tall, hunched man, with an ancient face and a long, thin beard that was even longer than Professor Dumbledore’s.

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

Harriet gaped as the mouth of the statue began to open. Harriet felt her dread increasing once more as she gazed up into the open maw. As the rumble of the opening mouth ceased, Harriet finally heard it: a terrifying, rasping hissing. But what was worse, was she could understand it. It was that same disembodied voice she had heard three times now.

“So hungry… I smell blood, master… may I eat?” the voice asked.

Harriet could see something moving now in the statue’s open mouth. She scrambled to her feet, backing up quickly. She backed into one of the pillars and clamped her eyes shut.

“You may, my pet…” Riddle said, still speaking Parseltongue. “The one by the pillar first, if you please?”

Harriet trembled. She heard a loud thud and felt the ground shake as the body of the giant serpent hit the floor. She listened to the flapping sound of Fawkes’ wings and the clack of his nails as he took flight. So even Fawkes was abandoning her, Harriet thought. What could a bird like that do against such a snake anyway?

“Sooooo hungry…” the basilisk hissed as it slithered towards Harriet. “Stay still little morsel… I’m coming for—AHH!”

Harriet heard the giant snake give out a scream of pain. Riddle was crying out too in rage.

“My eyes! Get away! Stop! My eyes!” Harriet heard the snake cry out.

There was a scratching and grinding noise, with loud thuds coming from some of the pillars around her. Harriet tried to slide around the pillar to run, but something hard caught her on the side and sent her rolling across the floor.
Something wet splashed across her face and shoulders. Without meaning to, Harriet’s eyes opened. The first thing she saw was the basilisk. It was bright green with a soft-white belly. Its body was as thick as Harriet was tall, and its head was raised high in the air, swaying and lashing about, knocking into pillars. There was a blast of light, and Harriet realised what was happening.

Fawkes was attacking the basilisk’s face. As Harriet watched, unable to close her eyes now, the snake’s head turned, and she found herself looking straight into its eyes. However, instead of bright yellow orbs that killed her on the spot, there were ragged mounds of torn, bleeding flesh. Fawkes had pecked out the basilisk’s eyes.

“LEAVE IT! LEAVE THE BIRD!!” Riddle screamed. “THE GIRL! KILL THE GIRL! SMELL HER OUT!”

Fawkes changed tactics now, diving at the writhing snake’s mouth. The snake hissed and snapped, still too distracted by Fawkes’ onslaught to go after Harriet. It was then that Harriet saw it beside Ginny. The Sorting Hat.

It seemed Fawkes had come for a reason, now that he was defending Harriet. Fawkes must have brought the hat for a reason. And there was only one thing to do with a hat.

Harriet pushed herself to her feet and ran towards the hat. The basilisk’s tail lashed as it tried to fight off Fawkes but Harriet saw it coming this time and ducked. She slid across the floor and grabbed the hat. She stayed lying flat on the ground and forced the hat down on her head.

Help me, Harriet thought as hard as she could, please, I need help!

Whang. Something hard and heavy dropped onto Harriet’s head. She saw stars and fell over on her back. Above her head, she heard a loud, metallic clanging. Her eyes drifting in and out of focus, Harriet turned and gazed at the source of the sound. There was a sword, nearly as long as her whole body, lying there with the hat perched high upon its tip. The blade was shimmering silver and flawless, while in its handle large rubies the size of chicken eggs glimmered.

Harriet’s jaw fell open, and she sat up, grasping the handle. It was surprisingly light, despite its size, and she was easily able to lift it as she got to her feet. There was a flash of light, and a bang as Riddle shot a jinx at Fawkes, who finally fluttered away.

“THE GIRL! SHE’S THERE IN FRONT OF YOU! KILL HER!” Riddle cried.

As Harriet watched and brandished the sword, the snake finally turned its giant, sight-less head towards her. Its long, forked tongue flicked once; then it opened its mouth and struck.

Ready for it, Harriet jinked to the right and slashed with all her might. The basilisk screamed, and more blood splattered Harriet’s face as she sliced open the side of the snake’s neck. It flailed and paused just long enough to locate Harriet by her scent once more.

Harriet had slipped on the wet floor and lost her footing. She wasn’t able to dive out of the way as the snake lunged again. All Harriet had time to do was raise the sword and point it right at the basilisk’s oncoming mouth. The sword passed directly between the snake’s massive fangs and pierced the back of its throat. More blood flowed over Harriet, and she grunted as the snake’s great head knocked her back and landed on her legs.

Harriet could feel the basilisk’s body convulsing and twitching. The sword had pierced its brain, killing it instantly. Harriet tried to push, but the head was too heavy for her. She looked to her right and left. The snake’s great fangs had buried themselves in the stone floor on either side of her. Had
Harriet been only a foot or so to the left or right, she would have been pierced by them. Harriet wriggled, and finally, the snake twitched enough she was able to slide out from under it, drawing the sword with her. She backed up quickly, afraid it would somehow spring back to life. She kept pointing the sword at the beast when finally it gave one massive shake, twitched, and moved no more.

“You…”

Harriet turned. Riddle was standing there, only yards away from her. His face was red with rage. He pointed Harriet’s wand at her. “Why can’t I kill you?!” Riddle cried out, starting towards her. Harriet raised her sword again and held her ground.

“I can’t touch your skin, and I can’t kill you with a curse!” Riddle shouted, veins pulsing in his forehead and neck. His rage turned into a manic grin again. “But I can touch your clothes… Come here, Potter! Let me just grab your cloak and bash your brains out against a pillar. It will probably be quick if you don’t strug—”

Riddle was cut off when Fawkes dove past him. The bird swept past Ginny’s unconscious form and retook flight. As they both watched, Fawkes turned and plunged straight at Harriet. Riddle ducked and fired another jinx at the oncoming bird, but Fawkes dodged it easily and flew past Harriet. As he did, something hard hit Harriet in the chest and fell to the floor.

Both Harriet and Riddle looked down at the object. It was Riddle’s diary. The two slowly looked up at each other, and almost automatically, Harriet raised the sword high above her head. Riddle’s eyes went wide with panic, and he raised a hand out to her. His mouth fell open in a scream that Harriet could not hear over the pounding of her blood in her ears. With all her might, she drove the point of the sword straight downwards, right into the centre of the diary.

Now Harriet heard a scream. But it did not seem to be coming from Riddle. It seemed to be coming from the diary itself. It shook the walls, and Harriet’s whole body as Fawkes’ song had done. Ink spurted from the diary as if it were blood, spilling over the floor and her feet.

Harriet looked up at Riddle. He was writhing, clutching his chest, his face twisted with pain. He looked into her eyes one more time. They were wide with terror. And then, in a puff of smoke, he vanished.

Harriet panted heavily. It was over; it was finally over. Riddle was gone. The basilisk was dead. There was a quiet groan, and Harriet looked past where Riddle had been standing. Ginny was moving again. Harriet’s legs felt heavy, but she started to make her way over to the feebly stirring form.

“Ginny…?” Harriet said. Her voice cracked, and she used the sword as a makeshift cane.

“Harriet…?” Ginny mumbled.

“Yeah… it’s me, Ginny… we won…”

Ginny stared at Harriet, a look of horror on her face. Harriet looked down and realised why. She was completely soaked in blood.

Ginny looked back up at Harriet’s face, and tears began to flow from her eyes. “Oh, Harriet… I… I tried to tell you all at breakfast… but I couldn’t say it in front of Percy…”
“I know Ginny…” Harriet said. She knelt and picked up the Sorting Hat.

“How… how did you kill… and where did you get the sword…?” Ginny asked in amazement.

“I… I don’t know where to start,” Harriet said. She was starting to feel very tired.

Fawkes landed between Harriet and Ginny. He warbled a soft song, and Harriet felt the same warmth flow through her.

“You were brilliant, Fawkes…” Harriet said. She reached out, and to her surprise, Fawkes quietly cooed and closed his bright eyes as Harriet stroked the soft feathers of his neck. Harriet guessed that Fawkes had decided she was worthy of touching him after all.

“Wh-where did the bird come from?” Ginny asked.

“He’s Dumbledore’s phoenix, Fawkes…” Harriet said smiling. “You were so brave… how did you do that without being killed…?”

“Do what?” Ginny asked.

“He stabbed out the basilisk’s eyes so I could see without being killed,” Harriet explained.

As she looked at the phoenix, she noticed something odd. It looked as though the bird was crying. Then Harriet remembered. Just before the Christmas holidays, Professor Dumbledore had told her about phoenixes. “Their tears also have remarkable healing powers, able to cure any poison and heal any wound.”

In spite of herself, Harriet laughed. “You clouded your eyes with your tears, didn’t you…? Clever bird…”

Fawkes warbled again and shook his head. Something wet landed on Harriet’s tongue. Almost at once, Harriet felt her strength returning. By the looks of it, Ginny was getting her colour back and her strength. She looked at Fawkes and saw his tears were gone. She felt a little strange having just drank a phoenix tear, but the effect it was having on her fatigued body was most welcome.

However, Ginny’s face fell, and she dissolved into tears once more. “I’m going to be expelled!” Ginny wailed and collapsed into Harriet’s arms. “I’ve been looking forward to coming to Hogwarts since Bill was here! Now I’ll have to leave! What about Mom and Dad?! What are they going to say!?”

Ginny gripped the front of Harriet’s robes and looked up at her, her expression stricken with fear. “What if they send me to Azkaban!? Don’t let them send me to Azkaban!” Ginny cried more gripping Harriet hard.

“It’s okay, Ginny, it’s all going to be okay,” Harriet said as she helped Ginny to her feet.

Slowly, the two made their way past the fallen basilisk’s body. Harriet paused where Riddle had disappeared and picked up her wand. Harriet didn’t know why, but she also picked up the ink-soaked remains of Riddle’s diary. While she felt nothing but disgust for the object, something was telling her it was still significant.

The two girls followed Fawkes who had retaken flight, leading the way out of the Chamber. As they left, Harriet heard the doors slide closed behind her, but she did not look back. Riddle was gone, the basilisk was dead. There was no need to look back.
They rounded the corner. There was a blast of light and an outbreak of noise that made Harriet jump in shock and brandish the sword once more.

“Put that away, Potter!” snarled the angry voice of Professor Snape.

“It’s alright, Harriet… it’s over now… you can put it down,” said another voice, much closer, kinder, and deeper; brimming with pride.

Harriet took in the scene before her. The passage had been cleared away, and light was pouring in from magical lamps and at least a dozen lit-wands. She could see silhouette’s now of people coming towards her through the light. Finally, one of the figures came close enough that Harriet could see who it was. It was a tall, very old man, with a long, white beard. He was wearing deep purple robes and had half-moon spectacles set on a very crooked nose. His eyes were a piercing blue. Albus Dumbledore had returned.

Chapter End Notes

Original concept by night-miner(dA) and littlebityamelie(dA)

Proof reading/editting by night-miner(dA), littlebityamelie(dA) and h-a-cooke(dA)
“Good and evil. I do not know if they define humanity, but both clearly have the biggest impact when carried out by humanity.”

General (ret.) Jigme Dorji Wengshuk

Harriet beamed. “Professor Dumbledore!!”

She went to take another step when all of the exertion and stress of everything that had happened caught up with her. It felt as though her knees turned to rubber and they gave way under her. Ginny shrieked with surprise as both girls went tumbling to the ground, crumpling on top of each other. Harriet heard the sword clang loudly on the stone floor, echoing up and down the corridor.

“Girls!”

There was the sound of splashing footsteps. Harriet felt hands on her arms, lifting her up to a sitting position and Ginny was lifted off of her. Harriet grunted in protest, too dizzy to talk.

“It’s alright, Potter,” said Madame Pomfrey’s gentle voice. Harriet felt her glasses being taken off and blinked and winced as a bright light was shone in her eyes.

“We’re just checking you both for injuries and shock, dears,” Miss Momori’s voice said from somewhere nearby.

“Where does it hurt, Potter?”

Harriet felt hands moving over her, lifting her jumper.

“Check Ginny first,” Harriet said, starting to get her faculties back.

“But Potter, you’re covered in blood!” Madame Pomfrey exclaimed.

Harriet looked down and remembered that she was in fact covered almost head-to-toe in the basilisk’s blood.

“It’s not mine,” Harriet said. “It’s from the basilisk… I killed it.”

“You what?!” a familiar voice gasped.

Even without her glasses, Harriet recognised the one legged, one armed figure of Professor Kettleburn stumping over on his false leg. “A little girl kill a basilisk?! That’s just impossible!” Professor Kettleburn snarled in disbelief.

“Clearly, it is not,” said another familiar voice that Harriet recognised as Professor Morrisey. “Unless I miss my guess, that girl looks to have been covered in more blood than she holds in her entire body. And so if it’s not her blood, and it is not Miss Weasley’s, then where did it come from?”

Professor Kettleburn quietly muttered grumpily as he stomped away.
She heard Professor Morrisey sigh. “Though, it did make my invention rather pointless… oh well, it was still a good idea anyway.”

“That is quite alright, Johnathan,” Professor Dumbledore said in a comforting tone. “I heard India still has a rash of them. You could patent your design there I am sure.”

“Yes… yes, I certainly could…” Professor Morrisey said thoughtfully.

Harriet looked up at the blurry figure of Professor Dumbledore. Another shape, glowing red, flew into view and settled itself on Professor Dumbledore’s out-of-focus shoulder. Harriet shivered. After Riddle, the sight of out-of-focus people disconcerted her slightly.

“M-Madame Pomfrey…? May I have my glasses back please?” Harriet asked.

“Oh right, of course, Potter, here you are,” Madame Pomfrey said, handing them back.

Harriet put her glasses back on and turned to see Miss Momori holding a stethoscope to Ginny’s chest. Harriet turned to look at Professor Dumbledore when she caught Professor Morrisey’s eye. He was giving her the same calculating look he had given Scott the night Scott had followed the basilisk. It was not a sinister look, but it did make Harriet feel uneasy, as though she was being appraised.

“Well, it seems you’re right, Potter, there doesn’t seem to be anything more than a few bumps and bruises,” Madame Pomfrey said in disbelief, “though I dare say a hot bath and change of clothes are in order.”

Madame Pomfrey moved over to help Miss Momori inspect Ginny. Ginny still looked miserable, and her eyes kept darting towards Professor Dumbledore nervously. Professor Dumbledore, however, was smiling warmly at Ginny and leaving Harriet in little doubt that Professor Dumbledore knew Ginny was innocent. The trouble would be genuinely proving it.

It was then that Harriet noticed some people she had expected to see were missing. She saw Professor Dumbledore as well as Professors Sinistra, Sprout, and Flitwick who were hanging back, merely looking from Harriet to Ginny and back in amazement. Then there was Professor Morrisey and Professor Kettleburn who had just walked back into the bright flood-lights. There was Madame Pomfrey and Miss Momori. It was then she put a finger on who she thought was missing.

“Where’s Professor McGonagall, Snape and Lockhart?” Harriet asked, looking around.

“Ah,” Professor Dumbledore said. “Professor McGonagall is back up in the school where she is keeping the rest of Miss Weasley’s family company—”

“Mum and Dad are here?!” Ginny asked.

Professor Dumbledore smiled wider. “But of course, surely you don’t think your parents would be given news that their youngest daughter had been taken by the Heir of Slytherin and sit around at home?”

Ginny blushed but finally smiled. Professor Dumbledore nodded and turned back to Harriet. “As for Professor Snape, he is further down the tunnel. His leg suffered rather considerable damage in the rock-fall, but it was nothing a little Skele-Gro could not fix.”

“And Lock—er—Professor Lockhart?” she asked.

“Ah, yes, well, I think I shall explain that unfortunate set of circumstances after we have all exited this dank cavern into the more hospitable environs of the school,” Professor Dumbledore said. He
“Well, I would like to keep her under observation,” Miss Momori said. “But I don’t see any signs of any lasting damage.”

Professor Dumbledore nodded. “In that case, I shall gladly escort both of these young ladies back into the castle.”

Professor Dumbledore put a hand on Harriet and Ginny’s shoulders, turning and guiding them towards the light. As they got closer, he cleared his throat. “You may turn off the lights now, Severus,” he called. “They will no longer be needed.”

The lights went out, and Harriet blinked in the darkness, waiting for her eyes to adjust. As they did, she gasped. At first, Harriet thought she was looking at herself, but then she realised she was looking into a giant mirror that filled almost the entire tunnel. It was lined with enormous lamps around its edges.

“What are the lights for?” Harriet asked, looking them over.

Professor Dumbledore chuckled. “Well, you see, Harriet, a basilisk is a rather crafty creature, and it would be sure to spot a mirror before it looked into its reflection. This was evidenced by its intentional use of mirrors to petrify victims rather than killing them. By casting a light such as this, we could taunt the basilisk into approaching while hiding the mirror. When it approached close enough, we would then simply turn off the lights, and the basilisk would be looking right into its reflection and thus be no more.”

As Harriet watched, Professor Snape finally came around from behind the mirror. His foot was in a cast, and he was walking on a crutch. His eyes narrowed as he glanced down at Harriet before looking back up at Professor Dumbledore.

“All is well then, Headmaster?” Professor Snape asked without acknowledging Harriet further.

“Yes, I think so,” Professor Dumbledore said. “The perpetrator it seems has been defeated, and his monster is no more. Furthermore, both Miss Potter and Miss Weasley are in perfect health, if a little shaken by their experience, which I’m sure was terrifying.”

Harriet gave a short laugh. That was an understatement. Professor Snape still did not look at Harriet. Instead, he glanced down at Ginny.

“It is good to see you are alive, Weasley,” he said in his usual curt tone.

“Th-thank you, Professor,” Ginny said nervously.

Professor Snape just sniffed and started moving past them on his crutch towards the other staff members. Harriet looked up at Professor Dumbledore who merely smiled and gestured onward.

Finally, they reached the end of the tunnel. It was then that a question occurred to Harriet. “Uh, sir, how are we—?”

She was cut off when Fawkes twittered and swooped down off Professor Dumbledore’s shoulder.
He hovered in mid-air in front of the tunnel and waved his long tail at them.

“Simply grab hold of my robes, both of you,” Professor Dumbledore said as he took hold of Fawkes’ tail.

“But… a bird like that can’t carry us, can it?” Ginny asked, though still grabbing Professor Dumbledore’s robe as ordered.

Professor Dumbledore just smiled enigmatically. Harriet took hold of his robes as well, and the moment she did, she felt as though she was as light as one of Fawkes’ feathers. Before Harriet could even think, Fawkes shot off up the pipe, hauling Professor Dumbledore, Harriet, and Ginny after him. Harriet couldn’t help but smile as Fawkes navigated easily through the large pipe. It was every bit as exhilarating as flying on her broom as they swirled and zig-zagged up the long, winding pipe.

All too quickly, the ride was over. They flew up into the bathroom, and Fawkes lowered them to the ground. Professor Dumbledore let go of Fawkes’ tail, and Harriet felt her weight return.

“And now, let us make our way to my office,” Professor Dumbledore said as Fawkes landed on his shoulder once more.

Harriet and Ginny followed Professor Dumbledore out of the bathroom and down the hallway, making their way to the large gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster’s office.

“Ice Mice,” Professor Dumbledore said, and the gargoyle leapt aside.

Beside her, Ginny squeaked in fright and ducked behind Harriet. She was still jumpy from her experience in the Chamber, although Harriet remembered how surprised she had been when she first saw the gargoyle move last winter.

Professor Dumbledore put a hand on Ginny’s shoulder and gently urged her forward onto the moving spiral staircase. Harriet followed, and they all waited as the stairs carried them upwards to Professor Dumbledore’s office. When they arrived, Professor Dumbledore opened the door, and they stepped inside. They were met with a scream of mingled shock and relief.

“GINNY!”

Harriet watched as Mr and Mrs Weasley ran towards them from the fireplace where they had both been sitting with Professor McGonagall, Percy, Fred, George and Ronnie. Professor McGonagall and the other Weasley children stared in disbelief before the rest of the Weasleys rose and ran over.

Mr Weasley was the first to reach Ginny. His face was stricken and his eyes full of tears as he dropped to his knees and pulled Ginny into a tight embrace. Mrs Weasley caught up and dropped down to hug Ginny too, as did the other Weasley children.

Harriet glanced at Professor Dumbledore awkwardly. Professor Dumbledore, however, continued to beam at the reunited family. Harriet nervously shifted from one foot to another when Mr Weasley shot out an arm, wrapped it tight around her, and pulled Harriet into the hug as well. At first, Harriet didn’t know how to react. She merely stood there as Mrs Weasley put an arm around her as well.

It was then that something new and strange came over Harriet. A feeling she had never had before. It was a sense of belonging and caring. Slowly, Harriet reached up and began to hug Mr and Mrs Weasley back. For the first time, Harriet felt that she knew what it was like to be embraced by parents.

It was this, more than anything else that finally caused Harriet to break down too. A warm sense of
happiness swept over her as they all held each other tight. She felt as though she could have stayed there forever in the embrace. However, it was Professor McGonagall who first broke the mood.

“P-Potter… are you… covered in blood?”

Mrs Weasley gasped noticing. “Harriet!? My dear are you alright?! Albus why isn’t she in the Hospital—”

“My dear Molly, please,” Professor Dumbledore said holding up a hand to stall her. “I assure you, Harriet is perfectly fine. Both she and Ginny were thoroughly inspected for injuries by Miss Momori and Madame Pomfrey before I brought them back into the school. Harriet does, however, have quite a story to tell I am sure. Perhaps, Harriet, you should start at the beginning?”

Somehow, Harriet didn’t find it all that difficult to explain everything that had happened. She told them how she and Kieran had followed the spiders into the forest and learned that Hagrid was innocent (Professor McGonagall seemed less than pleased to learn of that adventure). How Scott had nearly been killed by the basilisk but had still mustered his courage to follow it to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. How Harriet knew only she would be able to open the Chamber because she was a Parselmouth (which caused Mrs Weasley to gasp in shock).

Finally, she came to entering the Chamber itself. Now she was having a hard time finding the right words. She did her best to explain how she had seen Riddle, and how Fawkes had arrived with the Sorting Hat. She explained how Fawkes had blinded the basilisk for her and the Sorting Hat had given her the sword.

She looked at Professor Dumbledore as she paused. She hadn’t explained about the diary yet; she wasn’t sure how. Who would believe her? She didn’t want to say anything that would incriminate Ginny, even if Professor Dumbledore had given no sign of thinking Ginny was guilty.

“The thing that I would like to know,” Professor Dumbledore said, cutting in. “Is how Lord Voldemort was able to enchant Ginny from so far away? According to my sources, he is currently believed to be hiding in the forests of Albania.”

Harriet felt another wave of relief that threatened to turn her knees into rubber again. So he knew, somehow, Professor Dumbledore knew that it had been Riddle, or rather Lord Voldemort all along.

Harriet raised the diary. “It was this diary,” Harriet said. “Riddle—er—Voldemort wrote it when he was only sixteen. He said he put his memory into it so it could possess people and open the Chamber for him if he couldn’t.”

Professor Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he took the diary and inspected it. “Ingenious… and you destroyed it with the sword?”

“Yes sir,” Harriet said. “After I killed the basilisk with it… it lunged at me, and I couldn’t get out of the way so I just pointed the sword at its head and it sorta… ran into it…” Harriet said. Somehow, the event didn’t sound nearly as impressive when she described it as it had in her memory.

Professor Dumbledore inspected both the diary and the sword with great interest. It seemed like it was a full five minutes before he finally set both down and returned his attention to Harriet and the Weasleys.

“Very few people today know this, but once upon a time, Lord Voldemort was known by the name of Tom Riddle. He was a student here at Hogwarts, perhaps the most brilliant student to ever pass through these halls. I taught him myself fifty years ago,” Professor Dumbledore said. “He was
respected by the staff and his peers, and even rose to be Head Boy. However, shortly after leaving Hogwarts, he disappeared. In that time, he travelled all throughout the magical world, dedicating himself to the study of one thing: the Dark Arts. He became so immersed in them it began to change his physical form. Finally, when he resurfaced years later, there was nothing of the handsome young man known as Tom Riddle left.”

“But… but how did the diary enchant our Ginny?” Mrs Weasley asked, hugging Ginny even tighter.

“He… it was like… he was living in it…” Ginny said in a hushed voice. “I thought it was just a normal diary at first… I found it in the old Transfiguration book Mom got me… I thought it had just been left in there by mistake… and Riddle started writing back…”

“Ginny!” Mr Weasley gasped. “What have I always told you?! Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can’t see where it keeps its brain! Why didn’t you show that diary to your mother or me?! It was a dark object!”

“I didn’t know!” Ginny wailed just hugging him tightly. “I’m sorry, Daddy, really he was so nice to me at first!”

“I think it would be a good idea for you all to head down to the kitchens,” Professor Dumbledore said, smiling. “Professor McGonagall would you please accompany them? The kitchen staff will be more than happy to attend to you all and give the youngest Miss Weasley a nice steaming mug of hot chocolate; just the thing to cheer up someone who has been through a most terrible ordeal.”

Ginny looked up at Professor Dumbledore disbelieving. Professor Dumbledore continued to smile at her. “There will be no punishment. There have even been old headmasters of this school who were hoodwinked by the likes of Lord Voldemort. Now off you all go. I shall send Miss Potter along in a few minutes after I have a little word with her on my own.”

The Weasleys all rose and made their way to the door, following Professor McGonagall. Just as it was about to close, it burst back open, and Ronnie ran back into the room. Harriet had no time to react before Ronnie grabbed her and hugged Harriet as tight as she could.

“Thanks, Harriet… thank you so—”

“It’s fine, Ronnie,” Harriet said and hugged her best-friend back. “It’s all fine.”

Ronnie nodded and finally let go. She gave a little sniff and turned her head away quickly, clearly trying to hide tears. She made her way back to her family who had paused to wait for her, and the door quietly clicked shut after them.

Harriet now turned to look back at Professor Dumbledore.

“Well, Harriet, first of all, I have to admit I’m rather flattered.”

“Sir?” Harriet asked, confused.

“Well, you must have shown me some real loyalty down in the Chamber today. That is the only thing that could have called Fawkes to you,” Professor Dumbledore explained.

He sat back down behind his desk and leaned forward, studying Harriet with interest. “And so you finally met Tom Riddle. I’m sure he was, shall we say, uncomfortably interested in you…”

Harriet blushed and shivered. “Yes, sir… he—he said I’m like him… how I’m a Parselmouth like
“I see…” Professor Dumbledore muttered, his eyebrows rising higher. “How do you feel about that?”

“I’m nothing like him!” Harriet spat in disgust. She paced angrily as her rage boiled over once more. “I’m a Gryffindor! He murdered my parents! He killed his father and grandparents! I mean… who does that?! He told me I should join him, how we could rule together! Can you believe that?! He’s sick; he’s evil, he’s twisted!”

It felt like she went on for hours. Every dark feeling she’d had since learning the truth about Riddle came tumbling out of her.

“He got inside my head, he saw my dreams and manipulated them… he… he saw things he shouldn’t see… private stuff,” Harriet muttered, blushing and feeling embarrassed. She sat in the chair opposite Professor Dumbledore and crossed her arms.

“I see…” Professor Dumbledore said in his gentlest voice. “You are quite right, Harriet… you are nothing like him. Might I confess, knowing what I know of the life you have led how very proud of you I am.”

Harriet finally looked up at Professor Dumbledore and felt her cheeks grow hotter at the sight of more tears in his eyes, running down into his bushy moustache and beard. “You have lived a life of neglect that no one should have to live. And yet you have risen above it to be the wonderful, good, and loving person who sits before me.”

Professor Dumbledore’s eyes continued to twinkle with tears. “It was not anger that sent you into that Chamber after Miss Weasley, Harriet. It was love. In my whole life, I do not think I have ever seen anyone who is as full of love as you. You hold in your chest a heart so big I imagine it may hold love for everyone in the entire world. Hold on to that, Harriet, no matter what it costs. Through it, I believe you will one day accomplish true greatness.”

Harriet blushed looking down at her feet. “But… I don’t wanna be great, sir… I’m no one special… I’m just Harriet…”

It was then that Harriet remembered something from long ago, on her very first day at Hogwarts. She looked down at the Sorting Hat that was still in her hands. Eerily, its words floated up from the depths of her memory.

“You could achieve much greatness in Slytherin house, many great witches and—”

“Sir… when… Riddle said I’m like him… when I was being sorted… the Sorting Hat told me I could ‘achieve much greatness’ if I was a Slytherin… and then… everyone thought I was Slytherin’s Heir because I can speak Parseltongue too—”

“I’m afraid,” Professor Dumbledore started cutting Harriet off, “that the reason you can speak Parseltongue, Harriet, is because Lord Voldemort, the true Heir of Slytherin, can speak Parseltongue.”

“Sir?” Harriet asked, her eyes widening.

“Yes, Harriet. I believe that on the night he failed to kill you and his body was destroyed, Lord Voldemort impinged some of his powers into you.”

“Into me?” Harriet gasped. “So… so is that why the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin?”
Because it could sense Voldemort’s powers—"

“I’m sure it could. And yet you were placed in Gryffindor,” Professor Dumbledore said sternly. “And I’m also sure you know why.”

“It… it only put me in Gryffindor because I asked—”

“Precisely,” Professor Dumbledore said seriously. “Please hear me out, Harriet. I will not deny that you have many qualities that Salazar Slytherin himself prized in his hand-picked students. You are a Parseltongue, you’re resourceful, determined, and of course, you have a rather blatant disregard for rules…”

Harriet was inclined to hang her head at that last factor, but Professor Dumbledore’s moustache twitched, and his eyes twinkled. Professor Dumbledore was not reprimanding her.

“And yet, you chose to be a Gryffindor,” Professor Dumbledore went on. “And that is the key. It is our choices, Harriet, that show who we are instead of our abilities. Within everyone is the ability to accomplish great good and great evil. It is what we choose to do that defines us, rather than those abilities. Do you see?”

Harriet nodded slowly.

“And even then if you had been placed in Slytherin house that would not have been so horrible, would it? Take your friend Miss Flamel for instance,” Professor Dumbledore said smiling brighter. “She has her confusions and choices to make in life, but she is at heart a far kinder soul than she gives herself credit for. Furthermore, none of those qualities I listed are bad qualities. What’s wrong with being resourceful, or determined? It’s just as the Sorting Hat sang at the beginning of this school year, is it not? The four houses are not so different, after all.”

Harriet looked down at her muddy feet. It wasn’t out of shame now; instead, she was thinking hard processing everything Professor Dumbledore had just told her.

“However, should you require more proof that you truly are a Gryffindor, I would like you to take a look at this,” Professor Dumbledore said and held up the sword once more.

Harriet noticed several things about the sword at once that she had not noticed before. Despite having been dropped on the muddy ground, and plunged deep into the head of a giant snake, there was not a drop of dirt or blood anywhere on the sword. Professor Dumbledore pointed to a spot just below the hilt. Harriet leaned forward and gasped. There was a name engraved where Professor Dumbledore was pointing.

Godric Gryffindor.

“That is the sword of Gryffindor, Harriet. It presents itself only to true Gryffindors in a time of great need. It usually sits there,” Professor Dumbledore said, pointing to an empty case on the wall. “Only a true Gryffindor could have taken that sword from the hat, Harriet.”

Harriet didn’t respond. She merely kept staring at the sword, lost in all her thoughts. Professor Dumbledore smiled.

“Oh, and I believe you also expressed concern over the whereabouts of former Professor Lockhart?”

“Oh… uh… yes, sir,” Harriet said, caught off guard.

“Well… unfortunately, or fortunately depending upon your point of view, the Minister of Magic
himself turned up after hearing word that Miss Ginny Weasley had been taken by Slytherin’s monster. He and his most capable Auror, a wonderful man named Kingsley Shacklebolt, accompanied us into the Chamber where we found Professor Snape in his less than enviable position, and Gilderoy Lockhart begging and pleading for us to take him away. It seems he was so anxious to escape the Chamber he admitted to many very ethically questionable choices on his part concerning his past adventures. It seemed as though he preferred being arrested to remaining in the Chamber a moment longer, and so the Minister was obliged to have him taken away for further questioning.”

Professor Dumbledore’s moustache quivered again. “In the process, the Minister also ran into your good friend, Marcus Van De Lakk. Mister Van De Lakk it seems was quite busy with an investigation of his own with the aid of some members of the Australian Ministry of Magic, and could not wait to hand over a handful of documents that seemed to corroborate Lockhart’s stories of his misdeeds. And so I’m afraid it will be my unenviable task to convene the Wizengamot and try him for his crimes shortly. Being a former employer I shall recuse myself of course, but the trial will take place.”

Harriet blinked in amazement. So that was what Marcus had been up to all that time over the holidays. “On an even happier note, you will be pleased to hear that the evidence we gathered was enough to convince the Minister to order the release of our beloved gamekeeper, Rubeus Hagrid.”

“How’d coming back!?” Harriet asked a sense of glee welling up inside her.

Professor Dumbledore smiled and nodded. “Indeed, almost all injustices it seems have been righted.”

Harriet blinked. What had Professor Dumbledore meant by almost all? “And now that all those matters are once more behind us, I highly suggest taking a nice hot bath and a nice change of clothes. I am going to send word to the kitchens and to all the houses that we are to hold a special feast in celebration of the final defeat of the Heir of Slytherin and the return of the school to normal.”

“But… sir…?” Harriet asked. “What about the missing new students?”

Professor Dumbledore sighed. “While I do not know where they are hiding in the school, I am quite sure they will soon reveal themselves. Now that the danger is past and the true perpetrator has been caught, perhaps they will be more willing to open themselves up to the school, and vice versa.”

Harriet nodded. She hoped he was right.

“And finally, I understand Professor McGonagall told you and young Master McIntyre that you would not be properly rewarded for your services to the school until after this dreadful business with the Heir of Slytherin was concluded. Well, as that has finally come to pass, I believe it is time we took proper care of this matter.”

Harriet looked up at Professor Dumbledore in surprise. With everything that had happened, she had completely forgotten all about that.

“To you, Harriet Potter, I am awarding two-hundred points and a Special Award for Services to the School for your defeat of the Heir of Slytherin. I will also award a further one hundred points each to your friends Kieran O’Brien and Scott McIntyre for their contributions, with their Special Awards. And finally, I shall give another one-hundred points to Master Marcus Van De Lakk for his assistance in making sure Gilderoy Lockhart, a perpetrator of many acts of injustice of his own, was also exposed.”

Harriet’s jaw fell open. That was four hundred points for Gryffindor House. That put Gryffindor
House in the lead by three hundred points over Ravenclaw, who would now be in second after the one hundred points for Scott. That made this the biggest victory Gryffindor House had ever had.

Before either Harriet or Professor Dumbledore could say anything more, however, the door to Professor Dumbledore’s office banged open, causing Fawkes to shriek in fright. Harriet jumped herself and spun in her chair to see who had come in so suddenly. Her mouth fell open even wider. It was Lucius Malfoy.

“Ah, Lucius, I was wondering when you were going to arrive,” Professor Dumbledore said pleasantly.

“So,” Mr Malfoy said; his voice cold with barely contained fury. “Even after we the governors suspended you, you saw fit to come back here?”

As he spoke, something around his feet caught Harriet’s eye. She looked down and gasped. Scurrying around Mr Malfoy’s feet, attempting to shine his shoes, was Dobby the House-Elf. Suddenly, many things made sense to Harriet all at once. She looked up at Mr Malfoy again and noted that more than his shoes looked unprepared. His hair wasn’t slicked down and stuck out at odd places, and his robe was on sideways.

“Well, Lucius, it’s a most interesting tale,” Professor Dumbledore replied. “I was simply enjoying my afternoon tea when I was greeted by not one, not two, but eleven owls, each frantically attempting to give me their letter first. And wouldn’t you know it, but every letter came from one of your fellow school governors. And I was most astonished by their insistence that, after hearing of the death of young Miss Ginny Weasley, I should return to Hogwarts at once. I suppose they decided I was the best man for the job after all.”

Professor Dumbledore continued to smile. “I found it even stranger that each of them insisted they had all been threatened by none other than you if they did not suspend me, to begin with. Very unpleasant threats as well, aimed at their friends and families…”

Mr Malfoy’s face drained of colour, and his hands shook as his eyes narrowed. “Well then… were they right…? Did you catch the culprit?”

“Me? Oh no, I did not. That was Harriet, here.”

Mr Malfoy’s eyes darted down to Harriet, fitting her with a stare of the deepest resentment. “Well, who was it then?” he asked looking back at Professor Dumbledore.

Professor Dumbledore continued to smile serenely before he held up Riddle’s diary. “Oh the same person as last time, but this time, Lord Voldemort was using this diary to enchant and control Miss Ginny Weasley quite against her will.”

More movement at Mr Malfoy’s feet caught Harriet’s attention. She looked back down at Dobby who had ceased trying to shine Mr Malfoy’s shoes. Instead, he was pointing at the diary, then at Mr Malfoy, then punching himself in the head. Harriet felt her eyes narrow on their own as a deep sense of anger began to rise in her. She nodded at Dobby who whimpered and backed up into a corner as he twisted his ears hard in punishment.

“Yes… it was a clever plan I would say… you see if Harriet here had not discovered this diary and its power before destroying it, I imagine poor Ginny would have taken all the blame. How could anyone have proven that she had not done so of her own free will? And then, just imagine the effect that would have had on her father, particularly on his proposed Muggle Protection Act, had Arthur Weasley’s daughter been caught attacking and attempting to kill Muggle-borns? Very fortunate that
“Did not come to pass, isn’t it?”

“Yes…” Mr Malfoy muttered through gritted teeth. “Very fortunate indeed…”

“Do you know what else is interesting, Mr Malfoy?” Harriet asked.

Mr Malfoy glared at her without speaking.

“What’s interesting is how you put the diary in Ginny’s old Transfiguration book at Flourish and Blott’s last summer.”

Mr Malfoy’s face went from pale to bright red. His hands curled into tight, clenched fists and he snarled at her. “Prove it…”

“Oh we know you were too clever for that at least,” Professor Dumbledore said. “However, I would like to caution you against sending any more of Lord Voldemort’s belongings into this school. If any should turn up, I’m sure Sherrod Howe, in particular, would love to return for one last case to determine its origins.”

At the name Sherrod Howe, Mr Malfoy’s face drained of so much colour he looked as pale as Ginny had when Harriet first saw her in the Chamber. His eyes widened, and unless Harriet was much mistaken, Mr Malfoy looked genuinely afraid.

“Come, Dobby, we’re going…” Mr Malfoy said.

Dobby nervously moved towards the door when Mr Malfoy kicked him through it before hurrying off after him. Harriet’s rage bubbled once more but suddenly abated when inexplicably, words she remembered Oliver Wood saying once floated up into her mind.

Gryffindor the Cunning.

Harriet turned and looked at the diary in Professor Dumbledore’s hand.

“Sir, might I have that diary for a minute?” Harriet asked.

Professor Dumbledore simply handed it to Harriet, and Harriet turned and ran from the office after Mr Malfoy and Dobby. She could hear Dobby’s yelps as Mr Malfoy took out his anger on the poor house-elf. Harriet had a plan, she doubted it would work, but she had to try. She paused just long enough to take off one of her shoes and muddy socks. She rolled the thin diary and stuffed it into the sock and ran off again after Mr Malfoy.

“Mister Malfoy!” Harriet called. She skidded to a halt in front of him as Mr Malfoy stopped and glared down at her angrily. Before he could do or say anything, Harriet thrust the smelly, muddy sock into his stomach. He grunted and grabbed it, looking down at it with disgust.

“For you! Sock and all!” Harriet said grinning up at him.

Mr Malfoy pulled the diary from the sock and flung the sock aside, growling.

“One of these days, Potter… you’ll get what’s coming to you… same as your meddling parents…”

He turned and started stomping down the corridor again before pausing. “Come, Dobby.” He took a few more steps and looked back. “I said come!”

However, Dobby didn’t move. Instead, he was staring down at Harriet’s old sock, holding it up in his hands as though it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life.
“Master gave Dobby… a sock…”

“What?!” Mr Malfoy spat enraged.

“Harriet Potter gave the sock to Master… and Master… Master threw it… and Dobby caught it… and now it is Dobby’s… and that means Dobby… Dobby is… FREE!”

Dobby began prancing about, laughing hysterically. Mr Malfoy, however, looked almost as angry as Riddle had after Harriet had killed the basilisk.

“You’ve cost me my servant, girl!” Mr Malfoy roared and took a step towards Harriet, his arms outstretched, his hands going straight for Harriet’s throat.

However, he had only gone two more steps when there was a loud bang, and Mr Malfoy was thrown backwards. He rolled down a flight of stairs, grunting in pain as he finally hit the bottom. Harriet looked down to see Dobby pointing one of his fingers in Mr Malfoy’s direction, his chest swelled up in pride and his eyes smouldering.

“You shall not harm Harriet Potter!” Dobby declared, breathing heavily. “You shall go now! Dobby will not hesitate to defend Harriet Potter again, old Master or not!”

Mr Malfoy’s face was livid as he looked up at his old house-elf. He looked as though he was longing to reach for his wand but instead he pushed himself to his feet, and turned, storming off down the corridor and out of sight.

“Harriet Potter!” Dobby cried in delight and jumped up, hugging Harriet tight around her waist.

“Oof,” Harriet grunted as the elf collided with her. “Hello, Dobby,” Harriet said smiling down at the elf. “I knew I’d find some way to help you get free.”

Dobby looked up at Harriet, his mouth open as if he was going to speak, but couldn’t find the words. His tennis-ball eyes filled with tears and he began to sob, hugging Harriet even tighter and burying his face in her bloody jumper.

“Oh thank you, Harriet Potter, thank you! Dobby can never thank Harriet Potter enough. All his life Dobby wished to be free and Harriet Potter has done it! Harriet Potter is the greatest! The most wonderful! More than Dobby ever, ever knew!”

Harriet simply smiled and gently stroked the elf’s bald head. She let Dobby finish before speaking again. “I just want you to promise me two things, Dobby. I don’t normally ask to be repaid for things… but I think this will be okay.”


“Well… first… never try and save my life again unless you are genuinely saving my life from an imminent threat… like a boulder about to fall on my head.”

Dobby smiled a little sheepishly.

“And second…” she smiled and leaned down and gently kissed his forehead. “Feel free to stop by and visit me anytime.”

Harriet couldn’t quite tell, but she was sure Dobby was blushing as he buried his face in his old pillowcase sheepishly. “Dobby will, Miss… farewell, Harriet Potter.”
With a loud crack, Dobby vanished. Harriet smiled looking at the place the little elf had been standing when a noise made her turn around. Professor Dumbledore was standing a few yards away, beaming at her with pride.

“And now, all injustices have been righted,” he said proudly.

Harriet beamed.

* * * *

The party that as was held in the Great Hall that night was the most fun Harriet had ever had in her life. It was already going by the time Harriet finished getting clean and a changing her clothes. It lasted the whole evening and well into the night. Two hours into the party, the doors to the Great Hall opened, and Hermione, Justin, Colin, Kenley, Penelope and Nearly-Headless Nick all came through the door.

The whole school cheered, and Harriet and all her friends ran up to hug Hermione. However, the entire school all gasped at once and froze in shock as Percy Weasley ran forward and Penelope squealed with delight. They caught each other and both embraced and kissed. Harriet shot a glance at Fred and George. Both of them looked as though someone had punched them.

Hermione finally ran over, and Harriet and her friends all hugged her tight in greeting. They sat with her at the Gryffindor table and explained everything that had happened after she had been petrified. She looked very proud of them all for solving the mystery on their own. They all had to laugh awkwardly as Hermione revealed she had figured it out the day she had been petrified and had written it down on a piece of paper no one had seen because it was clenched tightly in her petrified hand. Equally amusing was the look of awe Hermione had when hearing Scott’s story of following the basilisk. Scott blushed at Hermione’s reaction, and Harriet saw Dora giving them both a shrewd smile.

Harriet was distracted by another little scene going on behind Dora. Colin was staring up in disbelief at the fifth-year girl he had snuck out with Fred and George to impress before being petrified. She was smiling down at him and handed him a brightly wrapped package.

“Next time you want to impress someone… try doing it when there’s not some evil nutter petrifying people, alright? It’s more effective if you’re not petrified,” she said and gave him a gentle pat on his very, very red cheek before she turned and strode off smiling towards her other friends.

Colin watched her before he looked down and jumped as if he had forgotten she had given him a gift. He slowly opened it with trembling hands and gasped. He reached into the box and pulled out a brand new camera. He looked back after the fifth-year girl, his face so red Harriet was starting to worry he was about to pass out.

However, Harriet was distracted from this scene by the doors to the Great Hall opening once more. Her heart leapt as she looked and saw the massive form of Hagrid beaming at her. He looked as though he had lost a great deal of weight, but Harriet didn’t care. She ran as hard and fast as she could and leapt into Hagrid’s wide arms. Ronnie, Hermione and Dora joined her in Hagrid’s warm embrace.

“I’m free thanks to you lot,” Hagrid said, his voice shaking with happiness and he sniffed. “Never thought I’d be happy again…”

“It took them that long to release you, Hagrid?” Harriet asked. Her negative feelings towards the
Minister of Magic for arresting Hagrid were not yet abated.

“Nah, been free fer hours. Full pardon and all! I just had to take a little trip ter get this,” Hagrid said, and he smiled brighter as he reached into his pocket. He winked at Harriet and drew out the biggest wand Harriet had ever seen in her life. It was nearly as long as she was tall.

“Brand new; made just fer me by Scott’s cousin. Seems Peresser Dumbledore knew I’d be gettin’ set loose soon and asked ‘er to make it fer me… great man… Dumbledore…” Hagrid said, his voice thick with emotion again. “Said he’d be givin’ me private lessons too, ter help me catch back up fer all the years I missed…”

The good news did not stop there. It was another hour however before the next good thing happened that night. The doors to the Great Hall opened for the third time, and Harriet saw Professor Sinistra standing there, giving the whole room her most radiant smile.

“Everyone, please allow me to re-introduce…”

She stepped aside, and for the third time, Harriet’s heart swelled as all the missing students filed into the Great Hall behind Professor Sinistra. Despite Harriet’s delight, it was at first a very awkward moment. It was clear that the new students were not entirely inclined to forgive the regular students for the transgressions against them from the previous year.

“KENLEY!” a voice cried from the crowd of new students.

“KATY!” cried another voice in reply. Harriet watched as both Katy and Kenley broke from their respective crowds and caught each other halfway. They embraced and broke down in tears of happiness.

As if a switch had been flipped, everyone started forward. Harriet struggled to make her way through the mingling crowd. She overheard lots of apologies coming from both parties when finally she saw who she was looking for.

Rachel was standing off to the side looking bashful. However, she was not alone. To Harriet’s amusement, she had her little crowd of third, second, first, and even a couple fourth and fifth-year boys around her, all trying to introduce themselves. However, the moment she saw Harriet, Rachel’s face broke into a wide grin, and she pushed past them all and hugged Harriet tight.

“Oh, Harriet… I’m so sorry we had to leave like that without telling you…”

“It’s okay,” Harriet replied, smiling. “I’m just glad you’re all okay. Where did you all go, anyway?”

To Harriet’s surprise, Rachel gave her a sly grin. “Oh you’ll find out soon enough,” she said before moving on to hug Hermione who had also come over.

Harriet watched after Rachel, feeling confused, but the energy filling the room quickly pushed it from her mind. At that moment, Harriet was on top of the world. The Heir of Slytherin and the basilisk were gone, all of the students had been un-petrified, Hagrid was back, and the new students were back and seemed to be finally being accepted.

The final bit of good news came when Professor McGonagall rose to tell everyone that contrary to her previous announcement, the final exams would be cancelled that year as a school treat. Only Hermione and Scott did not leap to their feet and cheer at this. Harriet didn’t care. Her throat was raw from all the cheering she had been doing, but that didn’t matter either. Nothing could spoil her mood that night.
The remainder of the term passed with indecent speed. Marcus was beside himself with pride at the constant news reports detailing the deeper and deeper scandals being unearthed by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement regarding Gilderoy Lockhart’s crimes. By the looks of things, Lockhart’s upcoming case with the Wizengamot was looking bleaker and bleaker with each passing day.

The only thing that made Marcus even happier came after Harriet finally told them all what had happened down in the Chamber.

“So… You-Know-Who’s real name is Tom Riddle…?” he asked thoughtfully.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Harriet replied shrugging.

Marcus grinned. “Very well then… Tom Riddle… got it…”

Meanwhile, Rachel, AJ and Tori were still being enigmatic about where they had been hiding all that time. Even Katy and her friends, usually all too eager to divulge any secret information they came across, wouldn’t tell her.

What made Harriet even happier was fulfilling her final goal of that year. Instead of marching about as though he owned the place, Draco Malfoy was now slouching around grumpily. His father had been fired as a school governor, and he was quickly replaced by Dora’s father who was voted in unanimously by the other governors. Now it was Dora strutting about proudly wherever she went.

“Slytherins…” Ronnie muttered and shook her head every time she saw Dora putting on her smug act, but she always smiled warmly when she said it.

Finally, the last night at Hogwarts arrived. The End of Year feast was almost as fun as the celebration feast had been. The declaration that Slytherin had not only failed to win the House Cup but had fallen to third place even had the Hufflepuffs celebrating.

Professor Snape, however, was glowering grumpily. Harriet sighed and shook her head. She didn’t think she’d ever know what had made him decide to help her find the Chamber, or what had made him revert to his “Harriet doesn’t exist” policy afterwards, but she didn’t care just then. There was too much to celebrate despite having to return to Privet Drive the following day. Slytherin had come in third place, and Gryffindor had won its greatest victory in the House Cup match ever.

Harriet was starting to lose her sense of joy come that night when they were all back in their dormitories packing. Rachel, AJ, and Tori all sat on their beds quietly watching the other girls pack to leave. Harriet felt a particular knot in her stomach as she kept seeing the three girls out of the corner of her eye. It felt like she had just got them all back, and now she was the one leaving.

They finished packing, and Parvati and Lavender decided they were going to bed. The other girls went down to the Common Room. Fred and George were still up, talking with Alicia, Katie, Angelina and Erica. George was still having a hard time talking when Erica was around. In spite of her earlier awkward feelings about this, Harriet was starting to find it rather cute.

After another hour of playing Exploding Snap with Kieran and Marcus, Harriet saw Erica get up and grin at Rachel, Tori and AJ. The three girls nodded. Almost on cue the first year girls; Katy, Annie, Alexis, Sarah, Rayne, Tory and Cassidy all came down the stairs as well.
“Right; Potter, Granger, Weasley, O’Brien, Van De Lakk? You’re with us,” Erica said, striding past them towards the portrait hole.

“Oh, what?” Fred asked looking disgruntled. “Why don’t we get to come?”

Angelina, Katie and Alicia glared at him while Erica quietly laughed.

“They saved the school this year,” she replied casually. “What did you two do?”

Without another word, Erica pushed the portrait hole open and stepped through it. Harriet didn’t follow right away. Despite loving Fred and George like older brothers she’d never had, Harriet wanted to dedicate their finally speechless faces to memory for as long as she possibly could. Ronnie meanwhile was smiling after Erica.

“Oh, I like her... I like her,” Ronnie said, clearly enjoying encountering someone who could make her brothers speechless as well.

“Come on,” Rachel said insistently, tugging on Harriet’s sleeve. “It’s time!”

Harriet nodded, and they all followed her and the other new girls out of the portrait hole. They all made their way quickly through the hallways. It was only just about to turn curfew, and now that the threat of the Heir of Slytherin was over, the teachers were no longer patrolling the halls. They finally made their way up to the seventh floor. Harriet at first thought they were heading to the astronomy tower. Had Professor Sinistra been hiding them the entire time?

However, before they reached the astronomy tower, they all stopped in the middle of a corridor. The first thing Harriet noticed was the silly tapestry of a wizard being clubbed by trolls in tutus. A noise behind her made her turn and look at the opposite wall. She gasped in amazement. Where there had once been a blank stone wall was now a door that was being held open by the McGee twins who were both grinning smugly.

“Welcome to the hide-out,” one of them said. Harriet still couldn’t tell them apart.

The twins bowed them inside. Harriet swallowed and stepped in. What she saw was even more amazing than the mysteriously appearing door. It was a room easily big enough to house fifty people comfortably. There were lines of bathrooms and beds with dressers of clothes and mementoes from home.

“What is this place?” asked Scott’s voice from behind them and Harriet turned to see him being led into the room by the new Ravenclaw students.

“We call it the—” Ari Miller started to explain when Dora’s voice rang out from the doorway.

“I KNEW IT! I KNEW YOU WERE ALL USING THE ROOM OF REQUIREMENT!”

Lindsey Gallifrey laughed. “Well looks like it wasn’t that much of a secret then,” she said as Courtney Thomas and Kenley led Dora into the room.

“You knew they were here all along?!” Kieran asked, sounding flabbergasted. “Why didn’t you ever say anything when Professor McGonagall asked? Twice?!”

Dora simply shrugged. “I figured if they went into hiding they didn’t wanna be found. I wasn’t gonna rat on them just to be a good kid,” she explained.

“How did you know about this place then?” Hermione asked, her eyes narrowed.
Dora rolled her eyes. “Well, actually my mum told me about it before I started last year. She said I would probably like it for a nice place to get away if I ever felt the need. I couldn’t get this year because of all the stupid security measures.”

“You wouldn’t have been able to anyway,” said one of the fourth-year Hufflepuffs, Meredith McQueen. “We sealed it to anyone but us. It’s pretty useful. Tell the room what you want, and it’ll get it. Except for food.”

“Yeah, I was about to ask, how have you all been eating? Just sneaking into the kitchens?” Dora asked.

There was a curt laugh, and they all turned to see Peyton grinning smugly.

“Hey… we told you this secret… we’re not giving them all up at once.”

Ronnie glowered. “Hey… we made it safe for you lot to come back, the least you can—”

“Oh we get that, Weasley, we do,” Peyton went on. “And we appreciate being ‘accepted’ now by the rest of the school. But this year still proved how much we all need to stick together and to look out for ourselves until it can be guaranteed we’re going to be safe. Until then, we’re going to have to keep a few secrets I’m sad to say.”

Ronnie didn’t look thrilled by this but didn’t argue further. Peyton simply continued to smile. “In the meantime, let’s get this ceremony going.”

“Ceremony?” Marcus asked.

Peyton’s grin grew. “Oh yes.”

As if on command, all of the new students formed a circle holding hands around Harriet, Kieran, Marcus, Ronnie, Hermione, Scott and Dora. Every one of them was smiling with pride at the little group in the middle, and Peyton cleared her throat.

“In honour of your service to this school, our new home, and to helping save one of our sisters, we hereby declare you honorary members of The Fugee Club,” Peyton said.

The new students all burst into applause. Rachel ran forward and jumped up catching Hermione and Harriet around the necks, hugging them together tight.

“You’re ones of us now!” she declared excitedly.

Ronnie grumbled. “Wait… if we’re members, can’t you tell us—”


“What do we get for it then?” Dora asked shrewdly.

“You watched out for us, well now we’ll watch out for you,” AJ’s older brother Ben said. He strode forward and patted Scott hard on the shoulder, nearly toppling him over. “Oh, sorry, well anyway, we all promise to be there for you lot whenever you need us. Really… we just wanted to show you all how much we appreciate what you did for us… I mean come on… we’re just a bunch of kids a long way from home… what sort of title can we give you guys?”

In spite of herself, Harriet laughed. They remained in the Room of Requirement for a long time that night. Harriet found herself striking up an interesting conversation with Peyton despite her usually
gruff demeanour, learning all about how to get into the Room.

Apparently, it changed according to what you needed, and all you had to do was walk past it three times thinking hard about what you needed. Once inside, it could give you almost anything you wanted, except food. Seeing as they were so secretive about that still, Harriet was sure there was something more to the story of how they got food than just them sneaking down to the kitchens at night.

She mingled with others. They all showed her their mementoes from home. The hard part was the regrets of things they had all left behind. Ari, in particular, was sad she had missed the chance to try out for her school’s cheer team. Harriet didn’t find the idea of cheer all that interesting, but to her surprise, Dora did butt into the conversation, bombarding Ari with questions about the sport.

Despite that, Harriet had to admit; she did feel as though she were one of them. Or perhaps, they had become one with her group. Either way, Harriet was glad.

The following day, Harriet did her best to put on a happy face as the Hogwarts Express steamed back to King’s Cross station. She was determined to make sure she could hear from her friends over the summer in a way that could not be intercepted. Shortly before arriving, Harriet pulled out some parchment and wrote down six copies of the Dursleys’ phone number and handed them out to Hermione, Ronnie, Kieran, Dora, Marcus, and Scott.

She had to explain what exactly a telephone was to Ronnie and Dora, but she did explain to Ronnie that she had told her father how to use one the previous summer, and if she had any questions to ask him first.

“And if you have any trouble with them,” Fred said, clearly referring to Harriet’s aunt and uncle.

“Let us know, and we’ll hop in Dad’s car and head off, got it?” George finished.

Harriet choked back a laugh. They had not yet been told that Mr Weasley’s car was now running wild in the Forbidden Forest. With nothing else for it, Harriet finally sighed, gave her friends further hugs goodbye, and headed back through the gateway with them to the Muggle world.

* * * *

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away, a young man was looking through a pair of strange looking binoculars at a little village in the American state of South Dakota. His knuckles were white on the golden device. He was wearing a dusty tan uniform that blended in well with the waving sage-brush of the bad-lands. He could see the dirty secessionists scurrying about from hiding place to hiding place, erecting barricades in defence of the town.

He didn’t twitch as another person slid into the spot next to him, leaning his back against the side of the trench.

“Anything different in the omnioculars, lieutenant?” the newcomer asked. He was at least twice the young man’s age, with captain’s bars on his shoulder.

“Negative sir,” the young man replied. “They just keep putting up more and more defences, spells and barricades.”

The captain nodded. “Keep watching, Kane. Have you managed to identify the unit yet?”

“Yes sir, they’re from the 42nd Regiment… not the whole regiment, company strength at best…
probably all that’s left of them, we’ve been harrying them pretty hard,” Lieutenant Kane said darkly. His hands gripped the omnioculars even tighter, and they creaked as though about to snap.

“Kane,” the captain barked, and Kane finally pulled his head back from the looking glasses. The captain’s face was full of concern.

“Sorry, sir,” Lieutenant Kane replied gritting his teeth. “I just have a history with the 42nd…”

The captain nodded, seeming to understand something. “You lost family in that attack?” he asked.

Lieutenant Kane nodded. “My parents, sir. My younger brother’s down in Texas fighting with our 83rd Regiment… my youngest brother…” he trailed off before clearing his throat. “We had my sister sent to England with that first batch of refugees, sir.”

The captain chewed his tongue and held out a hand for the omnioculars. Lieutenant Kane handed them over, and the captain started panning the defences. He ducked as a blast of green light hit the side of the berm that had been built up along the edge of the trench, launching dirt high in the air.

“Secessionist bastards,” the captain muttered as he brushed dirt from his hair.

“Heh, I’ll agree to that, sir,” Lieutenant Kane muttered as he tried to blink some dirt out of his eye.

The captain stroked his chin, thinking hard. “Sorry for your loss, Kane… I lost family there as well.”

“Really sir?” Lieutenant Kane asked. The captain never talked about his personal life.

“Yep… my niece… beautiful little girl… my brother’s pride and joy… burned alive in their house.”

Lieutenant Kane nodded. “And your brother?”

“In a camp,” the captain replied flatly. “From what I understand, bastards made him watch as they burned his house down before they dragged him away.”

Lieutenant Kane grimaced. He had heard about the camps. The worst were in the middle of Montana; cold winters and hot summers with very little protection for the prisoners inside.

“You know, Lieutenant,” the captain said, his eyes staring blankly at the opposite wall of the trench, lost in thought. “This is just a little town… I bet most folks here are Secessionist sympathisers anyway… we have them surrounded…”

Lieutenant Kane blinked. “Sir… are you… suggesting—”

“No, I’m not suggesting,” the captain said. His tone was changing by the minute, and his eyes were starting to burn. “I’m ordering. Pass the word amongst the troops. Ready wands and grenades. Ready armour and the barriers. We’ll attack at dawn.”

Lieutenant Kane felt a strange tightness in his chest. “Sir, we can’t… those are civilians, whether they support the secessionists or not—”

“Are you questioning me, Lieutenant?” the captain asked. There was a very dangerous edge to his voice.

Lieutenant Kane did not answer right away, but after a moment thinking about it, he finally replied. “No, sir.”

“Good, then tell the men: no quarter. They wiped out three towns and killed thousands. No one’s
gonna grudge us this little speck on the map.”

Lieutenant Kane swallowed. “Roger, sir. Attack at dawn.”

Chapter End Notes

Miss Momori, Marcus Van De Lakk, Kieran O'Brien, and Scott McIntyre property of night-miner(dA)

Kenley Tyler, Katy Tyler, Rachel Kane, Tori Hoffman, Erica Quoy, the McGee twins, Lindsey Gallifrey, Peyton Riseman, Meredith McQueen, and Lieutenant Aaron Kane are property of littlebityamelie(dA)

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