In Loving Memory

by Belega

Summary

After GoF, starts going AU from OotP's chapter three. After attempts to escort Harry to safety fail and he ends up in a cell in Malfoy Manor, all seems lost. He gets some surprising company in the cell: his parents, supposedly dead. Is their elation at being reunited short lived, or can Harry finally get to know his parents? Rated M for violence and bad language.

Notes

Overused or not, this plot happens to be one of my favorites. Meaning James and/or Lily coming back to life. I'm just so sorry that such exceptional people had to die so young! I know this is fiction, but still. Humour me, they're alive.
So, here goes. James and Lily come back to life. With much adventure, angst, maybe some romance... Pairings include James/Lily, rather one sided Snape/Lily, Hermione/Ron, a hint of other pairings.
I'm also looking for a beta for this story if anyone's interested. Americanisms may ensue, I've learned most of my English from TV... I'm trying to use British spelling because Harry Potter is British, obviously.

I can't give promises on how often I'll update, but it will get finished. First chapters have already been written.
CHAPTER ONE

August 2nd, 1995

All was right in the Wizarding World, at least if Cornelius Fudge was asked. And as the Minister of Magic, he often was. He was sitting in his office, enjoying his night time tea. Much of the walls were covered in magazine cutting of articled concerning the Ministry's affairs. His desk was currently littered with scrolls, covering the better part of the space.

He had wished to go home on time today, but had been caught up with his duties. It was partly because Dumbledore would not stop sending him letters and demanding he take action against You-Know-Who. Somehow, Dumbledore had been charming the letters to be quite persistent until they were read, so there was no ignoring them. Next, he'd be sending him, the Minister, Howlers. Even more irritating were the worried letters from people who were buying the lie. Much of his time was spent delegating the inquiries to his employees.

A haggard looking witch, his assistant of four years, strode into his office without knocking, carrying several scrolls of parchment in her hands.

"I just received word from Mafalda. The Potter kid used the Patronus Charm in Little Whinging, in front of his Muggle cousin. Your memo informed the whole Ministry to bring matters concerning Potter straight to you."

It took a moment for Fudge to comprehend what he'd just been told. Slowly, a smile spread across his face, and his stale tea started to taste much better than it had moments before. "Excellent. Yes, Mafalda was right to send word. Would you please send word back to her, Amanda? I'd like to see her right away."

Amanda nodded and was quickly on her way.

Fudge was not sure whether he was going to keep Amanda. She had been a loyal assistant, but who had her loyalties at the moment, he wasn't sure. After all, she had been recommended by Albus Dumbledore many years ago. He certainly didn't need anyone on the inside aiding the Headmaster.

There had been a time when he had been keen on receiving advice from Dumbledore, often writing to him several times a day. He had been inexperienced then, unseasoned and naive, it was no wonder he had sought the guidance of the legendary Albus Dumbledore. It was unfortunate that the old man had ultimately lost his mind. He could kiss his career goodbye if he spared even a second to consider the man's blabberings. But that was, possibly, Dumbledore's intention.

Fudge tried to gather the scrolls scattered on his desk into a more manageable pile as he waited eagerly for Mafalda. Usually, he didn't bother with underage use of magic but he had requested to be informed of all matters concerning the Potter boy.

How Potter had come mixed up in all this, Fudge didn't know... Many had guessed that perhaps fame had gotten to his head. He had seemed so charming and down to earth the first time Fudge had seen him, but people could change. The signs had been there for him to see, earlier, but he supposed he had been too kind to him them. The nonsense about Black being innocent and some rat being responsible... He hadn't gotten his face in the Daily Prophet because of that lie, he had made sure of that! Now, his tales about the return of the Dark Lord would certainly earn him a reputation as the biggest liar in the Wizarding World. The trash campaign against him and
Dumbledore was sure to assure the doubters of the fact.

Fudge would still have liked to know what had happened in the maze and how Potter had managed to turn the trophy into a Portkey! He didn't think Potter had killed Cedric Diggory, that far Fudge didn't believe the boy had gone, but something fishy was going on there.

At the knock on his door, he smiled. "Come on in, Mafalda."

Oh, was the boy in trouble now!

* * *

August 6th, 1995

Never did he feel as right as home as he did when on a broom. He had never flown in the open sky before, watching the clouds go by, the stars in the night as well as his Advance Guard, smoothly changing places around him, the switches timed like a clock.

They sped through the air, the rush of wind blowing Harry's troubles and worries away, making him forget about the hearing, about the Dementors and the rest of the horrible summer, even of the reason he had to be escorted by Aurors to safety in the first place.

He wanted to do a few swirls in the air, but didn't think Moody would appreciate it; who knew if he'd make him ride on the back of someone else's broom if he didn't behave. He settled for smiling happily to himself, pondering whether the Dursleys had arrived home yet. His uncle's face, distorted with anger was a much funnier thought when he wasn't there to be on the receiving end of his rage. The thought made him laugh out loud, but the sound was drowned by the whoosh of the wind in their ears.

Like predators surrounding their prey, one by one the guard circled Harry. Kingsley Shacklebolt was on his right, next it was Emmeline Vance, now Sturgis Podmore... Everyone kept their wands at the ready, turning their heads in every direction, continuously scanning the sky for unwanted company.

They hadn't been flying for too long, when the chill of the night started to seep through his clothes, gluing his hands to the broom more tightly... Harry started daydreaming about Mrs Weasley's cooking. With luck, there'd be warm food waiting for him wherever they were going. He wouldn't say no to hot soup.

Harry had lost track of time, Moody shouting directions at timely intervals to dodge Muggle towns and motor ways, when something made Harry look at his left. He didn't see anything, but his instincts were often right. Someone was there.

He was just about to shout out to the others, to look out, when he felt a spell hit him. Momentarily, he expected to fall from his broom or something otherwise bad to happen, but he only felt an odd sensation on his skin. When he had been Disillusioned, it had felt like an egg breaking on his head and trickling down his body, but removing the charm had the opposite effect. It gave the impression of the trickles travelling up his body back into the wand that had cast the magic, making Harry shiver.

He spared a peek at his body. He wasn't a human chameleon anymore; he was just as visible in the night as the rest of the group.

Noticing this, Harry heard Moody swear under his breath as he turned around on his broom and turning his head upwards, trying to see their attackers and casting jinxes into their supposed
location. Soon enough, three figures covered by hoods and masks became visible in the night.

"Death Eaters!" Moody shouted as a warning to the others. "Keep flying, Harry, we'll lose them! And keep your head down!"

As Moody said this, the air was suddenly full of different shades of light, flying in all directions between the attackers and the guard. Harry would have been impressed at the exceptional wand work and the quickness of their counter-blows if the situation hadn't been as dire and he wasn't terrified out of his skull.

A flash of red light and Sturgis Podmore was falling off his broom towards the ground with horrifying speed, aimed for a sure death coming from this aimed a spell at his falling body with excellent accuracy, making it descend much more slowly, falling through the air like a feather would.

"Keep going!" Kingsley yelled from above Harry.

No one paid the body any mind after that. Harry hoped Sturgis landed somewhere safe, and not in a lake or in the middle of a road.

The hooded people weren't aiming at Harry, but trying to fly between him and his guards, shooting them with curses and driving them farther away. They were trying to separate him from the rest of the group to make him easier to snatch.

Little by little, they were succeeding. Hestia Jones, currently on his right side, was forced to drift away to avoid being knocked off her broom, leaving that side unguarded. Harry tried to circle around the Death Eaters, but it was for naught as more and more attackers appeared from nowhere.

Harry wondered wildly if Voldemort had had his followers attend compulsory flying lessons to enter his services.

Remus Lupin showed up from somewhere, shooting a jinx at the man or woman closest to Harry, but was blocked. The counter-strike almost hit the professor, but the men seemed to be quite equal in skill, the fight going nowhere.

At last, a curse with an odd incantation managed to get through Remus' defences, making him lose altitude and disappear out of sight. Horrified, Harry turned to see where his old professor had disappeared to, but to his relief he saw Remus conscious and able to regain height before he could hit the ground.

Curses with bright green light were freely flying in the air now. Harry didn't think anyone on their side had been killed yet, but it was only a matter of time. In the worst case scenario, the guard would be killed off one by one, leaving him alone with the Death Eaters. Moody had mentioned a back up crew that would take their place in case they were all taken out, but he was not going to wait for them. The blood of Cedric Diggory was already on his hands, he couldn't handle anyone else's. If Remus were to die, Sirius would have lost all of his best friends along with his godson -

Trying not to stop and think about the implications of what this would mean for his own fate, he crouched down over his broom and prepared for take off.

"Harry, no!" bellowed a distressed sounding Tonks from somewhere, but Harry didn't even have time to comprehend from what direction it was coming from. He ignored her and swerved to the left, weaving his way between the Death Eaters, away from the circle and took off into a dive, wanting to get as far away from the fight as possible. Combined with the power of his broom and
his slight frame that allowed him to speed smoothly through the air, he was able to shake off his pursuers as they were far too heavily-built to keep up with him.

For a while, he could see no one else in the heights with him and he had a moment to think he was safe – but that one second of relaxing and slowing down cost him. A Death Eater Harry didn't remember seeing before, had managed to circle in front of him and cut off his escape. He was forced to stop so abruptly he almost flew off his broom from the front.

He was lean and small, his posture giving away a history of flying experience. It was no wonder he was the one that had been able to catch up to Harry. The man's wand was pointing directly at his heart.

"You're surrounded, boy! There's no escaping now", bellowed a voice from behind him and with a start Harry realized it was right. Having caught up with him, several figures were circling him in the air, his guard nowhere to be seen. "Fly down!"

Harry saw no other choice as he couldn't stay on his broom for the rest of eternity. He didn't think they'd knock him off his broom as he figured Voldemort wanted to kill him himself and the drop of several hundred feet would easily kill him... He considered this option fleetingly, but decided against it as it was practically suicide.

With his heart somewhere around his throat, he started to aim his Firebolt towards the ground, intending to land near the edge of a thick forest. He accelerated into a quick dive, faintly hoping to lose them again. Maybe there was a small chance to run by foot into the woods and lose them, he could hide until Remus and the rest would find him there. Once on the ground, he threw the Firebolt onto the ground, knowing it was no use to try to fly it amongst the trees. He attempted to break into a run, but soon felt a cold hand land on his shoulder.

"Master's going to be pleased to see you", rasped the man, and Harry felt his insides drop into something ice-cold. It was Nott. He had relived the night in his dreams enough times to know everyone who had been there to witness the rebirth of Lord Voldemort, even if he'd only heard the man speak once.

Desperately, Harry tried to raise his wand to curse him off, but Nott noticed, stopping his efforts by pressing the tip of his own wand against his throat. The man was close enough for Harry to smell the heavy stench of sweat coming from him.

"Don't bother, boy", he growled. "Drop it."

More Death Eaters dropped from their brooms, five in total, circling Harry and Nott. Harry wasn't sure if there'd been more people in pursuit in the beginning or not. Not seeing any way around it he obeyed, his wand slipping out of his grasp and falling into the moist grass.

Harry recognized several of the men around him, Lucius Malfoy's cold and hard eyes staring straight at him. He tried to appear brave, keeping his head high and staring back. Noticing this, Malfoy's lips twisted into a cruel smile.

"The Order clearly isn't up to their task anymore. Giving you up this easily. They should have
known there'd always be someone lurking around that house of yours", Lucius mused, still handling the wand.

"They weren't prepared, that's for sure", Nott agreed, his grip on Harry painfully tight.

One of the hooded Death Eaters moved around, restless. "Why are we standing around jacking? Let's get going. Master won't like it if Potter gets injured in another fight, the Order folk will find us eventually."

Lucius nodded, shoving Harry's wand into his robes, keeping his own at the ready. "Nott, you've got Potter? You can go first, wait for us in the yard."

Nott nodded. "Hold onto my arm", he said to Harry who saw no reason to resist at this point. They could just as easily knock him out and transport him that way. He held on to Nott's arm, feeling like a little kid being escorted home by a police man. Suddenly, he realized he'd have his first experience Apparating with a Death Eater.

END OF CHAPTER ONE

* * *

Fudge had no idea how right he was.

There you go, first chapter of the story. Please comment, give constructive criticism (please don't make me cry, I'm quite fragile), ideas, whatever comes to mind. If you see typos, errors in logic, anything, please let me know so I can correct them. I haven't been writing in a very long time and I'm worried it might show. Until next time!
The group that arrived at Grimmauld Place wasn't the one that had been expected. The guard was quiet as they stepped into the hallway. The gas lamps Moody had just ignited gave them enough light to proceed further into the house.

Tonks didn't bother to apologize as she clumsily knocked down an umbrella stand, waking up the delightful portrait of Sirius' late mother, who started yelling and shouting insults at them. Usually it took much more effort, but this time a flick of Kingsley's wand was enough to silence the haggard woman. Apparently even the portrait could sense the change in the atmosphere.

If it was possible for Remus' spirits to plummet more, they did as he saw Mrs. Weasley appearing out of the door at the end of the hall, smiling widely at them. "There you are!"

"I'll inform Dumbledore immediately", Moody said, walking away without saying anything to Molly. Remus couldn't help but think of how different the scene would have been if they had made it there with Harry. The boy certainly could have used some of Molly's mothering.

It didn't take long for her smile to die and for her to grow alarmed as she saw the faces of the arrivals. "What- What's going on? Where's Harry?"

Remus was the broodiest of them all as he stepped forward, enclosing her hand in his own. He found it hard to look her in the eye. "I'm so sorry, Molly. We failed."

Molly shook her head, perhaps hoping it to be a cruel joke. "No, you couldn't have. Where is he?"

Remus stood under her radiating worry, not knowing how to put the situation into words, when Kingsley stepped in to speak with her. "Has the meeting started yet? We need to figure out what to do."

Remus closed his eyes momentarily as he could faintly hear a distressed shout coming from somewhere in the house.

Molly heard it as well, her head turning between the men and the source of the sound. "Yes, everyone is here -"

Kingsley nodded and strode way, the rest of the group leaving as well. Remus gave Molly one more sorrowful glance before going the same way as Kingsley, aiming for the kitchen where he knew the meeting to be held. Still confused, Molly followed.

At the door to the kitchen, Dumbledore was waiting, as glum as the rest of them. He didn't waste any time on greetings. "I've informed the Order about the incident. Let's go in, I need to hear what happened."

The group poured into the room, each taking a seat at the table while the members already present greeted them halfheartedly.
Molly sat down next to Arthur who whispered something into her ear while Remus turned away, not wanting to see her reaction.

A pained silence filled the area as no one seemed to be willing to start the story. At last, Dumbledore took pity on them and broke the silence. He looked at each of the members of the guard in turn. "What happened tonight was unfortunate, but no one can blame you for it. You risked your lives on this task."

Some of the tension drained away, everyone having feared Dumbledore's reaction to the events. The press might have been trying to label him an outdated buffoon this past summer, but they had never seen Dumbledore angry.

Remus decided to be the one to start. "At first, everything went according to plan. We arrived at the Dursleys' house, the family had left for the fake contest..."

While Remus was speaking, Moody entered the room with Snape. Snape seemed unaffected by the situation, as mysterious and hating of everyone as always. Moments later, Sirius arrived, making Remus stammer. He had figured that Sirius had needed a moment to gather his composure and he had been expecting his friend, but seeing Harry's godfather wasn't much of a pick-me-up in the current situation.

He cleared his throat and kept going while Sirius took a seat next to Tonks. "The Death – Death Eaters arrived out of nowhere. We noticed it when someone broke the Disillusion Charm and Harry became clearly visible again."

He narrated the following fight with the rest of the group jumping in with additions and their sides to the story.

"We were losing", admitted Moody. "We were caught off-guard and they had us cornered and outnumbered."

"I'm guessing Harry saw that and decided not to risk our lives when he flew away", Tonks said. "I had a chance to talk with him while we packed, he seemed like a nice kid."

"It was foolish", argued Moody. "He had no chance going off on his own with that many Death Eaters. He knew we were prepared to die for the cause; he should have let us to do our job."

"He would never let you do that if he could do anything to prevent it", Sirius said, speaking for the first time and making everyone jump. "Harry is...much like his father was in that way."

His voice broke at the end and Tonks tried to comfort him by putting a hand on his shoulder. Remus couldn't help but notice that it lingered there.

"No matter how we see what Harry did, it happened", he said wearily. "Please continue."

Moody recounted how most of the Death Eaters went after Harry, the rest keeping them from following. The Death Eaters had a clear advantage; they were ready to kill when the Order was not. If the war continued in the same way it had the last time, the policy might soon change.

"When we finally got there, they were gone", said Kingsley. "Must have Disapparated with Harry."

"We scoured the area and didn't find a body at least", grumbled Moody.

Sirius made a pained noise, resembling the sound a whining dog would make.
Moody ignored him. "Nevertheless, we need to face the facts. He could be dead already. But I think we can presume they had orders to deliver him alive to their master."

"That much is certain", confirmed Snape. "The Dark Lord would like to do it himself."

"How did you not know about this?" asked Sirius angrily.

"Master doesn't tell me everything", Snape replied without looking at Sirius, directing his words at the rest of the table. "I haven't proven myself to be trustworthy yet. And we knew they would be watching the house. I had no idea they would try to snatch him now.

"I agree, you'd think they wouldn't try it now if You-Know-Who wants to stay hidden", said Kingsley. "But maybe he figured the trash campaign has had enough effect so no one will even look for Harry. Fudge has been playing into You-Know-Who's hands in that aspect."

"They'll make it look he ran away to get attention or something", commented Tonks, wrinkling her nose in disdain at the idea. "It's ridiculous, but it'll fit the story."

The next half hour was spent throwing ideas on how to proceed, but not much progress was made as they didn't have much to go on. They had no idea where Harry was as their spy, Snape, could only hint at the location of Voldemort's headquarters, and they couldn't even be sure if Harry had been brought there.

The man in question rose, Dumbledore doing so as well. They regarded each other grimly.

"Sir, I think it's time", said Snape. His complexion was even paler than usual, the only sign he was nervous about returning to his spying duties.

"Yes, Severus, I think so. Good luck."

Snape left the kitchen, his robes fluttering after him and giving him the usual dramatic effect. The group watched him go quietly, knowing they wouldn't learn the location even if Snape managed to get it. They could only hope the news he brought would be positive.

Dumbledore addressed the group. "Thank you for your ideas and the guard for telling the story. There's not much we can do until Professor Snape's update, so I suggest we get some well-earned sleep and convene once we hear from him."

That concluded the meeting. The Order members rose, and soon only the residents of Grimmauld Place were present. Molly was resting her head on her husband's shoulder, her eyes closed. Bill patted her on the shoulder before exiting, as did Kingsley.

Sirius was still sitting as well, staring at the table. His eyes were glazed, and Remus was quite certain he hadn't been listening for a while, maybe because of the shock.

Remus appeared at his side. "Sirius..."

Sirius didn't jump, but it took him a moment to focus on his friend. "Yes, Moony?"

"Look, you shouldn't worry. We will get him back."

"I'm sure you're right", he replied, but it wasn't convincing.

There was an uncomfortable silence that seemed to stretch. Remus wasn't sure if Sirius wanted him to bugger off or not, but he couldn't go until he had eased the pit of guilt that threatened to consume
"I'm sorry", Remus finally blubbed out. "I'm sorry I didn't get him here safe. I... feel like I failed you."

"It wasn't your fault, Moony", Sirius replied, turning to him. This time his voice was sincere. "It's Voldemort who's doing this, and it's only him we should blame."

Remus felt some of the weight lifting off and he nodded gratefully. The relief was short lived when he realized that perhaps Sirius wasn't in shock. He had seen that look enough times to know when his friend was planning something.

Remus frowned. "You're not thinking of going after him alone, are you? You know that'd be insane. You know what Dumbledore said."

Sirius didn't reply. Remus grabbed his arm. "Don't go out there, Padfoot. Imagine how Harry will feel if his godfather isn't here when we get him back."

"We might not have to worry about that, Moony", Sirius said quietly. "He could already be gone."

Remus tried to say something in reply, but Sirius had already turned away. He was sure he would later find him with he large bottle of Firewhisky Mundungus had brought him just yesterday.

Molly had let the table and came to speak with Remus. Her eyes were red, but her stance was determined, and there was no sign of tears. "The children need to be told. I will speak to them, of course, but I thought you could explain the situation to Ron and Hermione first. They'll take it hard and they might respond to you better as you were there when it happened. You were their favorite professor, so they might even listen to you."

Remus wanted to say no, but it wasn't fair to let Molly to carry all of the burden. He nodded.

Molly patted his arm. "Thank you. When you tell them, I hope you make a point that it would be of no use if they ran off on their own. If you understand what I'm saying."

"Crystal clear. I will personally tie them to their beds if necessary", Remus replied, getting a huffed laugh out of Molly.

He set off to the dark stairs leading up to the bedrooms, not looking forward to the task.

He had a feeling they would be waiting for Harry in the room he and Ron would share. Would have shared, he corrected himself, in a way of bracing himself for the questions he would have to answer.

Sure enough, as soon as he opened the door, Hermione was there, ready to jump to hug him. She faltered as she realized she had almost run to embrace her old professor.

"Professor Lupin", she said, embarrassed. "I wasn't expecting you."

Remus tried to smile. "Clearly not."

Ron was looking over his shoulder. He did this easily as he had once again sprouted in height this summer. "Is he with you?"

"No, he is not", he sighed as he closed the door behind him. "You should probably sit down."

Sensing he didn't have good news, they obeyed, Hermione taking the chair by the window and Ron
sitting on the edge of his bed while Lupin remained standing.

He wasn't sure how to start, but he figured it was better to spare the suspense as he wasn't sure if
the kids were breathing, tension in the room palpable. "I suppose you've already guessed that
something bad has happened, and it has. Harry isn't with me, because we were attacked on the way.
The Death Eaters managed to snatch him."

Hermione gasped and put her hands on her mouth, while Ron jumped to his feet, outraged.

"What?" he bellowed and let out a few curse words his mother wouldn't have approved.

"Is he alive?" Hermione asked quietly, clearly afraid of the answer.

Remus sighed. "We don't know that. We have no way of knowing if Voldemort has other plans for
Harry besides... Well, we'll know more soon."

"What are you doing to get him back?" Ron asked loudly.

"Ron, you know I can't talk about it."

Ron opened his mouth to argue but with a look closely resembling the one Molly used on a daily
basis, Hermione quieted him down.

"Professor Lupin", she started to reason, "We know you can't talk about specific Order business
with us, but if you could tell us something, it would really help to ease our minds. He's our best
friend!"

She was pleading now, and Remus could feel his determination dwindle. If someone had come to
tell him, when he had been fifteen, that Sirius or James (he decided not to include Peter on purpose)
was in danger and he wasn't privy to all the details, there would've been hell to pay. He was
actually quite proud of the way Ron and Hermione were handling the news.

He chose his next words carefully. "We'll know very soon if he is alive or not. Until that we can't
do much. But I can promise you, we'll do everything we can."

When they still seemed doubtful, he added. "You can trust me. I care about Harry just as much as
you do, I will do everything possible to bring him home. And I'll make sure you're updated.
Okay?"

Hermione appeared satisfied and gave him a nod.

"Thanks", Ron said shortly. "But how did it happen?"

Remus explained how the fight had happened and how Harry had been caught. Hermione and Ron
shared a somewhat tired look.

"I love Harry, but he makes things really hard sometimes", Hermione sighed. Ron frowned at the
word 'love', but didn't comment on it.

Remus was ready to leave when he realized he had almost forgotten his promise to Molly.

"Oh, one more thing." The kids turned nervous. "I know Harry is your best friend and the three of
you have experienced some dangerous situations that you've survived unscathed. This isn't one of
them. You need to promise not to try to do anything on your own, because it wouldn't end well."

They fidgeted, guilty. "We promise", they said in unison.
Outside the room, Remus took a moment to lean against the door, the serpent doorhandle digging into his back. He could hear Ron and Hermione talking nervously. He hoped his words had had some effect; he was not above making his promise come true and physically keeping them inside the house.

A moment later, he could make out two cracks coming from the room, knowing that the twins had arrived. If they'd been up to their tricks, they had heard everything he'd said.

He started the journey back downstairs. Too many thoughts were going through his head, slowly but surely trying to give him a stress headache. One thought was the most relentless, however.

"We will get him back, James", Remus said to the heavens, hoping his friend was listening. "I promise."

END OF CHAPTER TWO

Chapter End Notes

I honestly forgot that I was updating here as well although it's my favorite fanfiction site. Ron and Hermione's reactions were pretty hard to write, but I suppose they'd try to keep their cool with Lupin in the room. I hope the scene worked.
CHAPTER THREE

August 4th, 1995

Harry was bored.

The initial reaction to being thrown in a almost completely dark, musty, damp cellar when he had expected to be thrown directly at the feet of of Lord Voldemort, had been a bit anticlimactic. Now, he was lying on a muddy mattress, made damp by the humidity of the cellar, staring at the ceiling he could barely see in the darkness and that was the most active he had been in a long while.

It was hard to keep track of time, but after his imprisonment had lasted for several hours, or so he gathered, he had stopped fearing for Voldemort to appear at the door and kill him on sight. The mattress and the pillow should have been few of his first clues to prove he was staying... There obviously was something else behind this or he would have been killed immediately. It didn't comfort him terribly; anything Lord Voldemort had planned for him, couldn't be very pleasant. But at least he was still alive.

Alive, but with absolutely nothing to fill his time with. It was impossible to fall into the same state of indifference and trance he had been in while at Privet Drive, as much more was at stake now than a Ministry hearing.

Harry could only hope the stunt that had ended up with him here had been worth it and everyone had escaped alive. That hope was much of the reason he was still keeping his sanity. Alone and scared, his mind kept wandering to bad places and dark thoughts threatened to consume him. He had learned to hate waiting, and now he had no idea what he was waiting for.

He had examined every inch of the room and found nothing, but that didn't surprise him. It would've been amusing, though very lucky, if Voldemort let him escape because of a hole in the wall. He snickered faintly at the thought, proving furthermore that he was exhausted. He ran a hand over his face and through his grimy hair, more disheveled than ever before. It wasn't only the mattress that made proper sleep impossible, but also because he was jolted awake by every noise he heard, or imagined he heard. Every once in a while, he could catch faintly spoken conversation coming from above, but it wasn't possible to make out the words.

There was a loud noise coming from outside the door, making Harry jump to his feet. He spared a moment to ponder whether he had imagined this noise as well, but he was convinced when he heard a voice. "Step away from the door."

He honestly wanted to throw a tantrum and not move an inch, but he figured Nott would take pleasure making him pay for that. If Harry was even close to estimating the time, he had arrived there two days prior. Harry had been disorientated to say the least after his first experience with Apparation. He understood why many people preferred brooms or Floo-Powder to this; he didn't consider being crushed from all directions and not being able to breathe pleasant.

After they had appeared out of thin air, Nott had pushed him forward hard and told him to walk, making Harry almost fall on his face. This had apparently been hilarious to the group. The Death Eaters had been forced to almost drag him inside and didn't bother to be gentle about it. At least he had figured out where they were. The huge mansion with a giant courtyard was a clue in itself, but while being dragged through a hallway, he had managed to catch a glimpse of a huge portrait; a
family of blonde, pale faced people with a Latin phrase written in big words underneath.

Harry had already put Nott on his least favorite person list, but the way he emerged, holding his wand lazily as if not expecting anything remotely threatening to happen... It didn't help that Harry's quiet rebellion, a look of contempt, head held high and arms crossed, was making him more amused than impressed.

The resemblance between Nott and his son Theodore was easy to see; the older wasn't as thin, but he had the same face shape, same brown hair and was tall as well. It was hard to believe that the man was here mocking him while his son was the same age as Harry and in the same school.

In his other hand he was holding a sparse tray of food. He set it on the floor, some of the juice in the mug spilling on the door. "There you go, Potter. Wouldn't want you to starve, would we? Also, this. There was an article I thought you'd enjoy", he added, with a sarcastic edge. A paper was thrown carelessly on the floor.

Nott grinned ruefully before exiting. Harry had trouble keeping still until he had gone, almost shaking where he was standing, wanting to wipe the smile off the man's face. Because he supposed he had to try, he went to the door handle and tried it once he was gone. Harry kicked the door for good measure, working some of his frustrations on it. It was a less hurtful target for him than the wall had been.

Remembering he had food, he rushed to it and started stuffing his mouth with bread. He'd been given food there before, but he couldn't tell how long it had been since the last time he ate. The ache in his stomach made itself known only now that there was something to put in there, his experience with hunger coming in handy for once. Halfway done it occurred to him that he ought to save some, not knowing when he'd be fed next. This may be the last time anyway, said a voice in his head.

He sat down on the mattress once again, picked up the Daily Prophet, nothing catching his eye on the first page. It did give him the date, August 4th. He'd been here for two days, even if it did feel like a week. We wondered briefly why Nott would give him reading material and what kind of articles he could possibly think Harry would enjoy, when a horrible thought occurred to him, filling his insides with cold that didn't have anything to do with the stale pumpkin juice he was drinking. He skimmed the headlines, his fingers soon smudged with ink as he rushed through the paper, but the headlines didn't have any familiar names in them.

Harry sighed in relief, allowing himself a moment of reprieve before deciding to read it more carefully, eager for news from the outside world. His heart jumped at the small mention of Sirius, but it was only an update on his search; still uncaptured. He forced himself to only skim the article and plow forward. It wasn't good to dwell on his godfather now. The night before, or what Harry's skewed inner clock assumed was night time, he'd been lying awake imagining Sirius learning of Harry's capture and probable death... If he was living in caves like he'd been the previous year, it could take months before he learned the news.

Every time his thoughts drifted to Sirius, they always led to Ron and Hermione as well, consuming him with painful guilt. His anger had felt justified in the summer, but now his behaviour seemed ridiculous, demanding answers when they clearly couldn't tell him anything. Even here, he felt his face heat up with shame. With no one there to see it, he drew in a deep breath and returned to reading.

With the way he had been reading the Prophet that summer, only browsing the headlines before discarding it, he wouldn't have even noticed the short article.
Surprise rescue of Theo Jones aged 5

On August 1st, Theo Jones, age 5, was out on a stroll with his parents and little sister Sara, 3. Neither of the kids had shown any previous signs of magical powers, so the parents didn't know to expect anything unusual to happen. Suddenly, Theo was sent flying ten feet into the air and was left twirling in the air above his sister, while she watched on and giggled.

After the parents had recovered of the shock they tried to magic him down, but they were too late as Theo started to fall. Luckily, at the last second, the fall stopped and Theo dropped only from three feet.

The children found the incident more funny than scary and Theo survived with a few scratches. Let's hope he doesn't have a scar on his forehead or we'll soon be forced to do another installation of his adventures.

Harry read the story several times, but he couldn't think of anyone else they could be referencing. He tried to turn it around in his head, but there was no way to interpret as anything but mocking. Why did he feel worse when it wasn't direct? He hadn't really thought about the last article Rita Skeeter had wrote about him, the one where he'd been painted disturbed and making up stories, because he had been getting ready for the third task. She'd managed to even convince Fudge, who Harry'd gotten along with in the past.

Harry went through the rest of the articles. He didn't find more mentions of him, but he did find one of Dumbledore. The article was about the Wizengamot's recent verdict. When reading between the lines, the point of it seemed to be that the decision was much more strict and sensible that what it would've been if Dumbledore had been the one heading the ruling.

Dumbledore had left the Wizengamot? Harry's head was spinning. He doubted the headmaster had left willingly. He could recall the hostility between him and Fudge in the infirmary after Voldemort's return, Dumbledore basically disregarding Fudge's authority. Fudge had done the same to Dumbledore but removed it altogether if you didn't include Hogwarts.

How had he missed it? There hadn't been one mention of Voldemort in the paper all summer and now it seemed that Harry and Dumbledore were being discredited. He had expected the Wizarding World to eventually come to realize that Voldemort had returned, even if the Prime Minister had been reluctant to listen to him last June. If this had been going on all summer, there certainly was no reason for anyone to start believing him now.

Harry wasn't sure if he wanted to cry or scream at the top of his lungs. Here he was, captured by Voldemort who, according to everyone else, didn't exist. A horrible, gut wrenching thought occurred to him as he wondered if anyone was even looking for him. Get a grip, a voice inside his head replied to this, have some faith.

He tried to calm his breathing. Lupin and the others had been taking him to 'headquarters', so other people had to be involved in addition to Dumbledore. But what could he and maybe a handful of people do if everyone else refused to believe what was happening?

Up until that point, Harry had been proud of himself for containing his fear, but now it threatened to choke him. He had a flash of Cedric Diggory on the ground, killed for being in Voldemort's way and imagined that becoming commonplace.

Harry spent the last burst of fight he had in him for throwing the Daily Prophet across the room. The flutter it did in the air while falling on the floor was very unsatisfying.
As James Potter awoke, his first thought was that he must have been asleep for a long while and wondered what the time it was.

His head ached, making him wonder if he had been out with his friends the previous night. That most likely wasn't the case as he felt quite rested, very unlike the way he felt after most nights out. He hadn't done much partying lately anyway. He cracked open one eye and determined it was still dark. If he could just get a glimpse of the alarm clock, he'd know it it would make sense to go back to sleep...

He felt a hand on his shoulder, trying to shake him awake. It was much like his wife, trying to rouse him before the alarm and getting him up on time. The shaking was becoming more intense, so James saw no other choice but to open his eyes.

Lily was the culprit, crouched down next to him. Her body was trembling, her eyes wide open in alarm. That woke him up quicker than the alarm clock or a cup of coffee ever could have. "What's going on?" he asked immediately.

"Look around you", said Lily quietly.

Confused, James did as was asked. He realized they weren't in their comfortable bed in their home, but outside, lying on the cold hard ground. How he had confused the pile of leaves under his head for a pillow, he'd never know. A second look confirmed that they were currently in the middle of a graveyard. He thought he saw a figure standing behind the last row of graves, but as he blinked and tried to focus his gaze, it was gone, making him unsure if he had seen anything at all. Judging from the names on the row next to him, they were at their very own graveyard in Godric's Hollow.

"What the... " he muttered as Lily stared at him. She was wearing her nightgown for some reason. He looked down on himself and noticed he had on his blue pajamas, the ones that matched Harry's. Lily had given them to him as a joke the previous Christmas, saying that she might as well start giving them the same presents as James was practically a child himself.

James rose from the ground and tried to shake some of the dirt off his clothes. Only now he realized how cold he was; he wasn't sure of the month, but he couldn't mistake the cold Autumn breeze that was now piercing through his clothes. Neither of them had any shoes on. Lily must have been freezing in her sleeveless nightdress, but she didn't show it, looking at him with fierce expression.

"Do you remember what happened?" she asked. He had a feeling that she already knew and was waiting for him to catch up. Typical.

James racked his brain, trying to put together the pieces. It had been Halloween. He remembered playing with Harry, the baby laughing with him, clapping his chubby hands at his antics.


An iron fist hit his chest and for a second he was unable to breathe. He stared at his wife, now unsure of what he was seeing. He was staring into her eyes when he had been sure to he would die, knowing that his wife and son would soon perish after him.

"It's real", said Lily, answering the question left unasked. "We did really die. There's no way around it."

"The last thing I saw was Voldemort's ugly face so I'd think so", said James trying for sarcasm, but
his voice shook. He tried to shove the memories down, but no matter how hard he tried, the terror he had felt that night couldn't be pushed down.

The corner of Lily's mouth lifted for a second. "Be serious, James, please."

"I think this situation is serious enough", said James.

With a grimace faintly resembling a smile and determined James was alright, Lily left his side and set out between the rows of tombstones with a mission. James wondered how much time she'd had to come to grips with the situation as she acted so composed.

"What are you doing?"

"Looking for us", said Lily, not stopping her search. James almost hoped she wouldn't find what she was looking. He didn't find confirmation of their deaths that important or reassuring at the moment.

"Come look!"

James hurried to his wife who was pointing at a white marble grave at their feet a few rows to the right of the spot they had been lying on. The names were easy enough to read, but it was hard to register them in his brain. James and Lily Potter, died 31 October 1981... James felt seriously creeped out to think that they had been resting there, six feet under, and now they were standing there over their own grave. He couldn't even start to marvel how impossible this all was.

"The engraving's beautiful. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death", she read off the tomb. James gave her a look and she shrugged. "It is!"

"Well, it's official. We're dead", said James. "It's impossible, but here we are."

"Where's Harry? Why weren't we... buried together?" said Lily, struggling on the words, voicing the question on both of their minds. They had been expecting a third name on that tombstone.

James shook his head. "I don't know... He couldn't have survived."

He heard a sniffle and saw that Lily was in tears. James stepped over to her, taking her into his arms and held her while he fought against his own tears.

After a while James spoke. "This might be a stupid question, but what was the last thing that happened?"

"It is a stupid question", agreed Lily. She took a deep breath and tried to wipe the tears on her hand. "I ran to the bedroom, tried to beg Voldemort to kill me and not Harry. I tried to shield him... and... I died."

"Maybe someone showed up and saved him?"

James and Lily shared a pained look. They were grasping at straws and both of them knew it as there was no way their son had survived. They stood upon their grave, shivering, mourning for the son they had died protecting. They had spent their last months fearing for this, but had never truly been prepared for the worst.

James felt Lily shiver against his chest. Her bare arms were freezing cold and bright red. "We have to get moving. We'll freeze to death over here."
Once again Lily attempted a smile. "Pun intended?"

Despite the situation, he was impressed by her spirit. "Yep."

They set off to the street, knowing the way by heart, but James felt naked without his wand. He was used to wandering in the dark at night, but doing it without a wand felt insane. It was also eerie to be strolling down Church Lane, passing familiar looking cottages. Neither of them mentioned that one of them had been theirs and made no effort to go look for it. Although they had no idea how long they'd been gone, some time had surely passed as some of the cottages did look different.

A playground Harry had liked was still there, but James had the impression it hadn't been cared for in a while; of course it could've been the dark.

After a while of walking aimlessly, a new sense of dread began to creep its way in. It was dark, they were freezing, and they had no idea where to go. They had no way to contact anyone right now without wands or owls, or as Lily pointed out, phones. James didn't dare to consider that there might not be many people to contact as the war could still be raging on.

"Maybe we could stay with Bathilda", suggested Lily.

"I don't know. We don't know how long we'd been dead and she wasn't very young when we last saw her..."

Lily obviously guessed what James was suggesting. "I'm sure she's fine. But I guess we shouldn't just barge in unannounced in the middle of the night..."

"What about the pub?" suggested Lily as the bright sign hit their vision. It was a small and humble building, named simply 'Hal's' after its owner. "There are rooms above it!"

"We have no money", reminded James. "What do you suggest, we beg?"

Lily shrugged. They couldn't think of anything else, so they headed for the center of the village. It hadn't changed much; the same post office was still standing, the retail shops had the same names as did their intended pub.

Godric's Hollow had hardly any nightlife, the pub usually closing around midnight, but the owner had lived above it before, and they were hoping the policy was still the same.

"I wonder if the same man still runs it", wondered Lily as they knocked on the door.

"Wasn't he a Muggle?" asked James.

"Yes, so if it's him, just let me do the talking."  

That was most likely wise, figured James. He had gotten them in trouble around Muggles plenty of times. They usually thought he was a criminal of some sort, too messed up to talk any sense, leaving Lily to sort out the situation.

Through the blinds, they saw lights turning on and the door opened. James hadn't had much of a chance to occupy any pubs while living in Godric's Hollow, but he recognized the owner. Hal was in his fifties or sixties, a pleasant looking fellow with thinning hair and a charming personality.

"Hello?" he asked uncertainly, eying their nightclothes suspiciously, wrabbing his own grey robe tighter around him. The band dig into his beer gut that had grown somewhat in size.

"Hello, sir", greeted Lily perhaps a tab too brightly for the time of day. "We were hoping you could
help us. Our car broke down near here and we need a place to stay for tonight."

Hal frowned. "Why are you in your nightclothes? It's freezing out there."

Lily stammered for a second, quickly thinking of a lie. "Well, you see, we're quite... spontaneous people. We wanted to take a trip right away and didn't think to change. We forgot our coats in the car, I think I hit my head..." She wrapped her arms around her midriff more tightly, not having to fake the trembling. James had lost the feeling of the cold a while ago, which wasn't a good sign.

"Well, come in, come in", the owner replied right away and stepped aside to let them in. "I have rooms available."

"We don't have any money on us right now-"

"Don't worry about that now, come in before you freeze."

They stepped in and the sensation of the heat hitting his body was what James had imagined paradise to be like. Soon his skin was prickling and the feeling returning. The pub was small, a few tables and a counter. If he recalled correctly, the interior was still the same; brown and red with a big landscape painting on the wall that didn't hold the window. The stairs next to the counter led upstairs.

"Have we met before?" he asked, eyeing them carefully.

"I don't think so, sir, we're not from here", lied Lily. She motioned to herself and her husband. "I'm Lily, this is James."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Hal. I'll show you to your room. I think I have some spare clothes that would fit both of you somewhere... How come you don't even have any shoes on?"

They climbed the stairs, leading up to a hallway that had a few doors. He led them into one of them, a small room with a kingsized bed and a window. James had the sense to ask Hal for a newspaper, too. He promised to bring that with their clothes and left them alone for moment.

"Smart. I think he would've been a bit freaked out if he didn't know what year it was", said Lily.

Soon Hal returned with a stack of clothes and that day's newspaper. They thanked him immensely and promised to pay him back soon, but he would hear none of it. In his mind, James promised to pay Hal back generously. Not many people would take on two strangers off the street.

They changed quickly out of their clothes, putting on the warmest ones they could find. Hal's wife was a size bigger than Lily, but the sweatshirt she put on fit her well enough. James was happy to get out of the pajamas and switched them for a warm sweatshirt and pants.

Once they were dressed, Lily picked up the newspaper. James waited expectantly to be informed of the date, not wanting to guess how long it'd been, or not daring to. She stared and stared at it for so long that James started to become worried. "Hun, you alright?"

Lily looked up, alarmed. "James, we've been gone for fourteen years."

END OF CHAPTER THREE
I realized I hadn't posted Chapter 4 on here, even though it's been finished for ages... If anyone's reading this on here, I apologize. Chapter 5 should be up soon.

CHAPTER FOUR

Harry missed Dudley. That was the conclusion he'd reached after waking up from one of his nightmares and returning to his current situation. He would have loved to have his cousin there making fun of him talking in his sleep, just to have a conversation with someone. The constant fear and frustration and mainly boredom had finally worn him out and made him reach a conscious coma. He was distantly aware of where he was but at the same time absolutely did not care. As Lucius Malfoy opened the door, he had to slam the door shut behind him to get Harry's attention.

"I hope you're enjoying your stay at my home", said Lucius with the most infuriating smile. He was almost jittery with excitement, informing Harry exactly of why he was here. "Time to go."

Harry rose from the mattress, his legs shaking, only partly from lying around all day. He tried to steady his suddenly rapid breathing and wipe his clammy hands on his legs without Lucius noticing it. His mind was racing, running through options as they entered the hall.

Lucius' hold on his wand was loose and as he was looking the other way, Harry decided to take his chance. With all the strenght he had, he crashed into Lucius's side, making him lose his balance and stagger towards the wall. Harry leaped for the wand still in the man's hand, but Lucius managed to regain his standing in time and shoved him back.

"Get off me!" bellowed Lucius, aiming his wand at his prisoner's heart.

"Lucius!" For once Harry was glad to hear Snape's voice. He was standing on the stairs, regardind the scene. Harry had completely forgotten about him working as a spy for Dumbledore again, of course he would be here. A tiny spark of hope ignited in his chest.

"He managed to get your wand?" sneered Snape in his most malicious, condescending tone that Harry had had the pleasure to listen to multiple times. Harry took sick pleasure in Lucius' long face. It was much more fun when it wasn't directed at him.

"He took me by surprise", gnarled Lucius. "But he'll pay for it."

"We're not to harm him. That's the Dark Lord's job", replied Snape. "You go on ahead, I'll make sure the teenager doesn't trip you on the stairs."

Lucius stormed off.

"That was incredibly stupid", hissed Snape once Lucius was out of earshot. Harry caught Snape leering at his dishevelled appearance and was reminded of why his presence made him physically sick.

"There are about fifteen Death Eaters in this house. You really think you're going to break your
way out alone even if you had his wand?"

"I'm going to die anyway", muttered Harry. "Might as well go down fighting."

"That's the exact reckless attitude that's sure to get you killed", snapped Snape.

Harry frowned at Snape. "And what do you care if I die?"

Snape didn't reply. They walked up in strained silence, and ended up in a big room with dark purple walls and an obnoxious, giant crystal chandelier that perfectly fit the rest of the extravagant decor of the manor. But it wasn't the interior design that stopped him in his tracks as Snape hadn't been kidding; there were at least fifteen people sitting around the ornate table. He guessed it was the inner circle meeting, as many of the people present had been there for Voldemort's return party. And at the end of the table sat Voldemort. Harry had been expecting it, but it still made his blood run cold in his veins to stare into the red slits that were the man's eyes.

"Welcome, Harry", greeted Voldemort, seemingly as close to gloating as the Dark Lord could get. He was tapping his fingers on the table in a lazy rhythm. He nodded at Snape. "Severus. You made it."

"My Lord", greeted Snape, making a small bow. "I heard commotion downstairs and decided to investigate. I'm sorry if I'm late."

"No, no, you're just in time. I am positively surprised, considering you've been missing so many."

The gripping tone caught Harry's attention and saw a rare glimpse of dread in Snape. He wished the malice he felt for Snape's situation would have drowned his own terror. He hid his trembling hands behind his back, trying to keep his head up.

"Maybe you're wondering why you're still alive."

Harry didn't comment; Voldemort raised his eyebrows and made the slightest move towards his robes, luckily Harry noticed. "I did wonder", he said through gritted teeth.

"You are alive because you can prove to be useful before your short life ends", replied Voldemort softly. "You are the perfect test subject for solving a problem between your Professor and I."

Snape frowned. "I'm sorry, my lord? I was under the impression you wanted kill him yourself."

"You won't need to kill him, Severus", Voldemort corrected him. "I'm going to hold on to that honor. Of course you would if I asked you?"

"Of course", replied Snape easily. Harry had to bite his tongue to keep quiet as his fate was being discussed.

"Naturally. Well, I would like you to torture him", said Voldemort with satisfaction.

Harry's breathing hitched, making Voldemort's sick smile grow wider. It stretched his waxy face, distorting it horribly even more. "And convince me that you have no reservations about doing so. Just another blood traitor we're taking care of."

"My Lord, I don't know what gave you the idea -"

"Let me enlighten you, then", Voldemort said, settling his elbows on the table and crossing his fingers. As he leaned in, the red eyes appeared to burn brighter with threat. The temperature in the
room dropped. "I have had time to rethink my earlier acceptance of your excuses."

Snape cleared his throat. "Excuses, my Lord?"

"For instance, why Potter is still alive after living in the castle as you for years."

"My Lord, I was unable as he was under Dumbledore's protection -"

"I have heard this before. It has come time to prove that your loyalty is to me and not to Dumbledore. And our guest here-" Voldemort motioned to Harry, "-is the perfect tool for achieving that. If you truly don't have concerns about his well-being, you should have no problem."

"What are you waiting for Snape?" asked Avery, if Harry remembered his name correctly. "Is it too hard for you?"

Harry was curious of what was behind all this and why Voldemort would care whether Snape wanted to hurt him or not, but those thoughts were concealed by the loud beating of his heart in his ears. He had spent the summer trying to forget about the last time being tortured, he wasn't eager to experience it again. Would Snape actually do it? Of course as a Death Eater he must have tortured people more times than he could count and Harry could recall many times he'd been sure that Snape had wanted to use the curse on him -

"Crucio!"

There was no way Harry could have prepared for the pain; he dropped to the floor, writhing around, trying to shake it off, to do anything. There were hot knives carving into him all around his body, both hot and cold at the same time. He wanted to die, he'd do anything to stop the pain. The screaming that echoed distantly somewhere must have been his.

After a time that felt like an eternity, Snape lifted the curse. Harry wanted to stand up and show that he wasn't affected, but all he could do was try not to cry. He lay on the ground, breathing heavily as the Death Eaters laughed and Voldemort looked by as though Harry squirming on the floor was a common occurrence. Harry tasted blood; he'd bitten his tongue.

"Convinced?" Snape asked coolly.

Voldemort nodded. "Very good, Severus. It is hard to tell with you but I don't think I saw any emotion."

Snape made one of his infuriating bows and though it was not meant to be mocking, Harry found himself marvelling at how ridiculous the scene was and a small laugh escaped his mouth. He regretted it immediately not only because it made his aching chest hurt more, but also because it made Voldemort's attention turn back to him.

"Is it my turn already?"

At the last minute, Harry rolled over and the curse hit the floor instead of him. He knew it wouldn't help making Voldemort even angrier, but he also knew he couldn't take much more. Voldemort looked at him, Harry stared back in his terrible face and he knew; his luck had run out.

"My lord, we have time for this later -"

"Be quiet, Severus, I'm ending this now. Avada -"
Small man scurried into the room and it took Harry a second to recognize his unlikely rescuer. "Master", called out of breath Wormtail, bringing in a good stench of sweat with him. "I have news!"

"You interrupt your Master?"

Wormtail seemed to shrink under Voldemort's impending wrath. "I apologize, my lord. I have urgent news about the alarm in Godric's Hollow."

"You charmed it and it actually worked?" sneered Lucius. Harry took sick pleasure in the rest of the Death Eaters' attitude towards him; Harry saw Nott whisper something to the person next to him and they shared a quiet laugh.

"The alarm was set there in case Potter set foot there, Wormtail. I am sure even your incompetent eyes can see that it is not needed as the boy in question is here ready to be killed", Voldemort said, his voice silky smooth while tenderly stroking his wand. Wormtail spotted it, taking in a noticeable gulp of air.

"I am aware, my Lord", Wormtail squeaked quickly, keeping his face down. "The alarm around the grave went off and I was confused because I meant it to only give the alarm if someone of the Potter family was there. I went to investigate and it was them. The Potters."

Voldemort regarded Wormtail for a minute, then addressed the table. "I haven't authorized making any Inferi. Is there anyone in here that would like to confess? After I have specifically given orders to keep my return a secret?"

The temperature in the room dropped below zero, not one person uttering a word. They seemed just as afraid as they'd been in the graveyard after Voldemort's return. Harry could tell from the shivering that most of them still hadn't been forgiven for their failure to search for him; Avery had moved his chair back.

"Are you sure?" Snape snapped to Wormtail.

"Yes. I would recognize them", he said quickly. He met Harry's burning glare and swiftly turned away. "They were talking and acting much like they did while alive. Not at all like Inferi."

"That means someone else is making Inferi", gathered Lucius. "If they talk, they can be questioned."

Voldemort nodded. "Lucius, take Nott and both Carrows. Take care of this. Wormtail, take Potter away. I'll deal with him later."

Lucius, Nott and two people that appeared to be brother and sister left the room with their assignment. Wormtail looked hurt to be dismissed, but took out his wand and without looking at Harry beckoned for him to follow. For a split second he contemplated on whether to follow the rat that had betrayed his parents, but then he remembered he was leaving the presence of Lord Voldemort, alive, once again. He hurried out of the room while Voldemort was talking to Snape.

"Walk ahead of me", ordered Wormtail.

"What are Inferi?" Harry asked immediately, his curiosity winning over his repulsion of being in the man's presence.

Wormtail poked him forcibly in the back with his wand. "Shut up and move."
"They were talking about my parents, I want to know", Harry snapped and turned, startling Wormtail whose hands shook while he held his wand ahead of him like a shield. "What are Inferi?"

"They're creatures made with Dark Magic", the man grumbled. "They're bodies that aren't alive, per se, but they'll do the Dark Wizard's bidding. Making them requires quite a lot. Not everyone can do it", he added bitterly.

"And someone's made ones out of my parents?" Harry asked, disgusted. An image of a greyfaced, gurgling figure from one of the zombie movies he had watched at the Dursleys invaded his mind. "Are you sure?"

"For the last time, yes", replied Wormtail. "I know how they look. It was them."

"Their murderer would know", said Harry, unable to hold it in any longer.

Wormtail eyes bulged and he surged towards Harry, his wand still in front of him, aimed towards his victim's heart. "Shut up", he gnarled.

Something took over Harry. Maybe it was the stress of the situation, being tortured and escaping death by a hair, but the rage that had been building in him all summer threatened to break through. Blood pumping in his ears, he stepped closer so the tip of Wormtail's wand was touching his chest.

"Go on, finish it", Harry said quietly. He could smell the sweat and hear the wheezing of the rat's breathing this close. "Do what you meant to do years ago."

Pettigrew seemed to consider it for a moment until he stepped back. Perhaps he remembered they were not to harm him without Voldemort's consent. "Walk or I'll make you."

Harry knew it looked petulant, but he spun on his heels and stormed towards the staircase that led to the cellar. Once inside, the door slammed shut and Harry threw himself against it in his outrage, but all it did was make his aching body hurt even worse. He let out a frustrated cry and was let alone in his gloomy prison.

*o*o*

A beam of morning light found its way through the window, shining in James' eyes. He didn't mind as he hadn't gotten a wink of sleep all night. He'd been tossing and turning for a while before giving up. Lily had barely moved all night, lying next to him like a statue. As they rose, she gave him a tiny smile and stretched as if after a good night's sleep, but the bags under her eyes told a different story. As she turned, she hid a yawn with her hand. James didn't feel too weary, but perhaps his body had gotten enough rest in the fourteen years he'd been dead.

Lily sat on the edge of the bed, picking lint from the bedspread. James joined her, neither of them saying a word.

"How did you sleep?" she finally asked, staring at her hands. James merely shook his head. "Yeah, me too. Did you... uh..."

"Hear Harry crying at four o'clock? Yes", sighed James.

"Wasn't it creepy? I know I imagined it, but after hearing it every night... " Lily sniffed. During his first year, Harry had been sound asleep until four in the morning when he'd start crying at the top of his lungs. By the time he was six months, his parents had started waking up on their own at that time and the habit had stuck.
"Please don't cry", pleaded James. He wrapped an arm around his wife's shoulders and pulled her against him. "I miss him, too."

Lily wiped his eyes on James' shirt and cleared her throat. "If we don't want to stay here forever, we need to think about our options."

The conversation proved to be a dead-end. Without wands they couldn't Apparate, send a message by Patronus and they certainly didn't have any owls at their disposal. If Voldemort was still around, it wasn't safe walking around and getting recognized by a Death Eater.

Run out of magical solutions, Lily turned to Muggle means and suggested a phone call. The problem was, wizards usually didn't have phones in their homes. Or know how to use them.

"Do we know anyone with a phone?"

Lily broke into a huge smile. "Actually we do!"

"That can do magic?"

"Well, no. But I know someone who is in the Order and has a phone."

She was dragging it out and it may have been childish, but James knew that she was enjoying the dumb look on her husband's face. It always made her feel better and he was willing to act stupid to cheer her up. Unfortunately for the most part, it wasn't an act.

Then James' face lit up. "Arabella Figg!"

"Yes! She can contact Dumbledore and he can take it from there. I'm just not sure she'll believe us, though", mused Lily. "I wouldn't."

"But she'll definitely tell him about the phone thingy", replied James. Lily's face remained passive, but her eye twitched oddly. James ignored her. "He won't believe us either but they'll definitely come get us."

"They'll think we're Death Eaters imposing as us, won't they", gringed Lily. "That will be fun."

"Yeah… But I'm sure we can convince the people we know of who we are."

Lily bit her lip, wringing her hands together and walking to the window, pretending to look outside. James was sure there was something extremely interesting outside. "Right."

James sighed. "We can trust our friends, Lily."

Lily sat back down on the bed gingerly and wound her hands tightly together. She opened her mouth multiple times, trying to find the right way to phrase it. James waited for the start of the lecture patiently as they had talked about the subject before. He was ashamed that the constant doubt had gotten him suspicious of the wrong person.

"James... " She started carefully as though tiptoeing around a volcano in danger of activating. "You do realize the situation we're in right now, don't you? And why we're in it?"

James was quiet for moment. "Yes, I do, Lily. Peter betrayed us. He's the reason we've been gone for fourteen years and our son isn't with us right now."

Lily looked doubtful, forcing James to utter a sentence he had never in a million years thought he'd say. "If he isn't dead, he is dead to me", he added with finality.
Lily was thrown back for a second. "Well, good, I-I guess."

As Lily turned away to think, James realized he had forgotten to breathe. Changing his beliefs threw him even more than coming back from the dead did. Could he truly trust anyone again? He took in a few deep breaths and was able to keep his face passive as Lily spoke once more.

"There is another problem with Peter being a traitor. He must have told Voldemort everything he could while he was a spy."

"Yes, but we have the advantage of being dead. As long we don't run along the street yelling about our resurrection, we're quite safe", James pointed out. "Nothing he can use against us."

"True. What if it was Voldemort's doing?" suggested Lily, voicing the question that had been going through his mind as well. 

"That crossed my mind, too, but why would he do that?"

Lily threw her hands in the air out of frustration. "I don't know, it's Voldemort. It had to be someone quite powerful and I doubt Dumbledore would go around resurrecting people. Dumbledore himself has said it's not possible and I myself wouldn't believe it if I wasn't here. Unless we're talking about Inferi..."

"Now that you mention it, I've been feeling very zombie today", quipped James, but saw the look on Lily's face and hurried to continue. "Well, if it was Voldemort, I'm sure we'd been caught, killed or participating in some weird ritual by now."

Lily shrugged. "Yeah… I'd better go call Arabella now."

"Okay. I have no idea how to help you with that. Is it difficult?"

"I think I can manage", said Lily wryly before giving him a peck on the cheek and disappearing out the door. James had barely time to go to the bathroom before she was back, but she didn't look happy.

"She wasn't home, I left a message. Kind of hard to phrase on the phone, but she'll tell Dumbledore someone with my voice phoned."

"You can do that?"

Lily didn't bother to reply. "What do we do now? Just wait for Arabella to get the message?"

Both of them out of ideas, they stayed quiet. James' head was buzzing with everything that was going on. He was trying hard to keep his son out of his mind, but it was proving to be difficult. The grief was trying to suffocate him, invading every part of his body as well his mind.

When he tried to get Harry out, his friends were trying to get in. He was worried for them, but he was also scared to talk to Remus. The conversation wouldn't be easy, and he wondered if he'd ever be forgiven; he was the one always preaching about absolute trust. Ironically that trust had gotten them here.

"Did you hear that?" said Lily suddenly, startling James out of his head and into the real world.

"What?"

She didn't have to answer, as there was another crash coming from downstairs. Both of them froze.
Without speaking, they went into automode, jumping up in sync and creeping to the doorway. They sprained their ears, but there was nothing.

They shared a look, of course expecting the worst. James summoned for Lily to follow him, together they started to tiptoe along the wall, trying to avoid the paintings spread on it. The hallway had felt much shorter in the dark, the distance between them and the stairface felt like miles.

The pair reached the end of the stairs and James peered downstairs cautiously. He couldn't see anyone, including Hal or his wife, so there was a chance they were okay. Lily peered across his shoulders, holding a candle holder.

"Where did you get that?" he whispered as quietly as he could and Lily shushed him more loudly than he had spoken.

"I think there's a back door", murmured Lily and pointed towards the direction they've come from, but someone cleared their throat at the bottom of the stairs.

"Just come down", a distantly familiar man ordered pointing his wand at them. James was quite sure he had run into him before, that pig-like face was hard to forget even though he was older now.

Lily was frowning. "Carrow?"

"How do you know who we are?" demanded the man who James now identified as Alecto Carrow.

"Oh, right and that's his sister!" exclaimed James in triumph and pointed at the sturdy woman who had appeared at his side.

"Stop talking to the Inferi", Lucius Malfoy snapped as he walked into the hall with Nott. His eyes were wide as he gawked at them, his usual bravado gone. "Come down, slowly."

James raised his eyebrows at Lily who was giving him the same confused look. Voldemort hadn't done this? There was nowhere to run so they complied. Getting captured by Death Eaters should've frightened him more, but he hadn't expected to be left walking around unnoticed. He had only hoped the Order had gotten to them first.

"At least we got the message out", Lily whispered and gave his hand a squeeze as they reached the bottom of the stairs. The rest of the Death Eaters were staring as well and James got the feeling they were actually scared of him and Lily.

"Nott, check them for wands", ordered Lucius. Nott approached them reluctantly and declared them unarmed after barely touching them. James would have found this funny if it wasn't for Malfoy's next words. "Good, let's get you to the Dark Lord."

END OF CHAPTER FOUR

Sorry about the cliffhanger, there was no other spot to end the chapter. Please let me know how you liked it.
James cringed as he continued to squirm to loosen the ropes, but the only result so far had been the red welts on his wrists. Voldemort's snake - he had apparently acquired a pet - was quietly circling the room, staying near the walls and James nervously wondered if it could smell the blood from his wounds.

Voldemort's patience had quickly started to deteriorate as he had gone from mildly peeved to infuriated dangerously quickly. There had been talk of glamour spells among others as well as some Magic James hadn't ever heard of and never wanted to get to know. Polyjuice potion had been discussed, but even James knew the key to its making was a bit of the living person one wanted to turn into, and that hadn't been available until now.

James and Lily hadn't said a thing, hoping the magical problem would keep Voldemort occupied enough to ignore the actual resurrected people in the room. It had worked so far as he only paid them any attention when he was hovering over them with his wand, muttering gibberish.

Voldemort wasn't quite the sight for sore eyes. Dumbledore had once explained that the dark path the man had took and the unimaginable things he'd done to become the evil he was now, had turned him into less of a man and distorted his features. Fourteen years they'd been gone hadn't done him any favours as his features had distorted to a point where he barely looked human anymore. The red eyes certainly were a nice touch.

James leaned over to Lily as another one of Voldemort's ideas failed. His snake like nostrils were flaring dangerously, but so far he had directed his anger at his Death Eaters who couldn't solve the puzzle any better than he could. "Any ideas?"

She shook her head. "He'll start to question us pretty soon."

James glanced around wildly, the panic he'd been pushing down slowly starting to rise. "So... have you mastered Wandless Magic yet?"

"I can put out a candle, not vanquish Voldemort", hissed Lily in reply. "Besides, we've been dead. Who knows if we can even do Magic."

"I didn't even think about that..."

Avery was covering in front of Voldemort. "My Lord, we cannot think of another way. If your superior knowledge of Magic isn't enough, I don't think we'll -"

"Save it", snapped Voldemort in reply, his terrible eyes wide and nearly bulging out of his skull. He charged at Lily and James who instinctively leaned back in their seats as far they could. "How did you do it?"
Despite the frightening face too close theirs, they kept quiet. "Speak! I can make your deaths as painless as they were last time… or not.” He cast a significant look at Nagini and the implication was quite clear.

"My lord”, started Lucius hesitantly. James had never seen him appear this stressed; sweat was dripping down his forehead and his usually slick blonde hair was sticking to every direction. "You cannot possibly think that they are truly… that they've come back from - ”

"Be quiet, Lucius”, replied Voldemort in a snarl, but Lucius wasn't paying attention to the warning signs.

"My lord...”

Voldemort's wand slashed in the air in a indifferent manner; Lucius' mouth vanished, leaving behind smooth flesh as it had never been anything else. The man desperately groped at his face, trying to find his voice or more like his mouth, but nothing could be found. Horrified, he scrambled out of the room, Voldemort having forgotten him by now.

"The rest of you, leave us, unless you want to be Nagini's early dinner.”

The group exited rather swiftly. James' breathing quickened as Voldemort turned back to the Potters. "Now… How did you come back from the dead?”

Voldemort's attention was set on Lily and James reacted on instinct, trying to avert his attention from his wife. "We didn't do anything, we were dead! You can't make us tell you, because we don't know.”

Voldemort's head snapped to James and he dared to breathe. "Do not lie to the Dark Lord, Potter. You must have done something before your death. It takes much to impress Lord Voldemort... I thought I was the only one to walk down this path... Then again, what wouldn't we do for our offspring.”

Voldemort turned to Lily again, aiming his wand straight towards her chest. James fought against his restraints, but the magicked rope just tightened its grip. The only sign of distress in Lily was the faster rate of her chest rising. "Especially you, Mudblood. After all, it was you who forced me out of my body. ”

"What are you talking about?” asked Lily, her voice shaking slightly.

Voldemort shifted the wand upwards to her face and settled it on her forehead. "Of course, you don't know. My curse was aimed right here at your crying brat. Because of your sacrifice, instead of killing him, it rebounded. I was cast outside my body and left him with only a scar.”

"For thirteen years I was nothing but a ghost, a spirit, trying to find my back to the corporal world. But don't despair; I've returned.”

"He's alive?” gasped Lily. "That's not… that can't be true!”

"Stop lying!” cried James, trashing once again on the restraints. "You killed him, murderer!”

He didn't hear the incantation of the curse, as all his senses were forwarding the message of pain to his brain. Vaguely, he was aware of his chair falling over and his head hitting the floor. After a time that felt like eternity, Voldemort lifted the curse. James tried to catch his breathing and could hear Lily calling out his name. He would've offered her a reassuring smile, but he couldn't control the muscles in his face.
Voldemort was standing over him. "Insolence won't help your situation, Potter."

"Tell me and maybe I'll let you see your son."

"Is he here?" Lily's voice was faint.

"Oh, yes. I meant to kill him today, but I was interrupted. I won't insult your intelligence by telling you he's not going to die, but maybe you can spend some time together… And die a quick, painless death as a family", Voldemort said mockingly. James bit his lip, forcing himself to keep his head down. "No?"

Avery cracked the door open and popped his head in and James sighed a sigh of relief. "My lord, I beg your pardon. Snape's here, you called for him?"

James inwardly cursed. Meeting up with his nemesis could only brighten the day. He hadn't straight up wished Snape wasn't around anymore, but never seeing him again would've been preferable.

Voldemort didn't avert his gaze from the Potters. "Good." He stroked his wand, lost in thought while the Potters barely dared to breathe. "Avery, now that you're here… Take our new prisoners to the cellar, I might as well wait for Snape. A bittersweet reunion awaits."

"Y-yes, m'lord."

Avery stepped cautiously into the room and approached the Potters. Their ropes disappeared into thin air and Lily dashed to James, helping him from the floor. James' heart was thumping as he scrambled to his feet. He could see the same hope he felt in Lily as their eyes met. Could Harry actually be alive? Voldemort was left pacing around the room as they were led out of it and down a staircase.

The door was slammed shut in their wake, leaving them in the relative darkness. Blinking, he tried to let his eyes adjust to the dimness of the space. The air was humid, giving the place an unfortunate smell and it took him a second to notice the teenager in the corner.

He was huddled in a corner, arms around his knees and head down. James thought that maybe he was asleep but then he raised his gaze; at first there was no sign that he thought anything was amiss. As his eyes widened in recognition, James in turn recognized the strikingly green eyes their son had gotten from his mother. As he inspected his son up and down, he was struck by how similar their looks were; it was like looking into a mirror that had a hex on it, altering some of his features. Where James had been lean and muscular at that age, and though Harry was lean as well, he was more on the skinny side. The oversized clothes he was wearing only made him look smaller. James could tell he did sports, but he had that permanent delicate build as if he’d been malnourished at some point. He noticed all those things, but he could register only one thought.

Harry was alive.

* * *

The cool and rough wall felt wonderful, or as wonderful as it could, against his aching back and dulled the pain to a tolerable level. He tried to ignore the other parts that still hurt, which was all of them. Grimly, Harry wondered why he even bothered to try as the discomfort was a good distraction.

His will to survive, to keep on fighting, was such an important part of his being, that giving up had never crossed his mind. Even as he’d been sitting in this very cellar, he had feared death, but he had
still been looking for ways to get out or wait for his rescue. But as Voldemort had started to cast the curse, he had felt relief. It had been so close, the end of the road just visible behind the hill… but no, he had been thrown back in here.

He'd been thinking about the people he loved a lot the past hours, especially his parents, imagining what it would be like to join them. It would make sense for him to hallucinate them, here, while he just waited for Voldemort to have time to kill him. Therefore, he didn't react as he saw them standing in front of him. They were simply here to collect him.

Except it didn't seem like a simple hallucination; they looked real. His breath stuck in his throat and he stared at the couple.

Harry had studied the few pictures he had, stored every feature into his memory, but he would have recognized James without seeing any. He was taller and obviously older, but he wore glasses, had the same unruly black hair, same facial features… In his pictures of Lily she was usually smiling and happy, her beautiful dark red hair styled; now it was tangled and mixed with dirt and the eyes Harry had been hearing about for years were staring at him in shock.

He scrambled to his feet and stood there awkwardly, unsure what to do or say, his mind refusing to co-operate. His parents were standing before him, alive and breathing, exactly as Harry had imagined, albeit more shaken.

“Harry”, rasped James, his father, almost mesmerized. “I can't believe it…”

How was it possible? Dumbledore had said it wasn't possible to bring people back from the dead. But it had happened, hadn't it?

Horrible realization struck him. For a moment, for one glorious moment, he had allowed himself to believe it. But no, wonderful things like this didn't happen, especially not to him. These people were Death Eaters in disguise or those Inferi things he'd just heard about, here to to torment him further, because it took someone as twisted as Voldemort to mock him this way before murdering him. Either that, or terror and lack of food had driven him to seeing things like he'd originally thought.

“No”, said Harry loudly, shaking his head, angry at himself now. "It's not real."

“I know what you're thinking”, said so-called James hastily, his hand outstretched. “No, we're not impostors. We're really your parents. If you just hear us out-”

James tried to approach him, but Harry backed up immediately while automatically reaching for his non existing wand. “Stop. Get out, now.”

“Harry, please”, said Lily desperately. It was painful, as she sounded very similar to when Harry had heard her screaming and begging for her son's life whenever Dementors got too close. “I'm your Mother.”

“How dare you?” he yelled, his face twisting in disgust, the whirlwind of emotions getting the best of him. “My parents are dead, they died protecting me and you – you dare to claim to be them… GET OUT!”

“We can't get out, we're prisoners just like you”, said James.

“Don't!” bellowed Harry. “You're Inferi or – or- something!”

“Inferi don't even talk”, argued James. “I know 'cause I've been attacked by many, it wasn't much
fun."

“Then you're Death Eaters, same difference!” yelled Harry in response, throwing his arms around in his rage, frustration, he wasn't sure what he felt anymore.

“We're your parents! I don't know how to convince you, but we're here now”, said Lily. “Please look at me.”

The sincerity in her voice compelled Harry to do as asked.

“I want to talk to you, Harry. I thought you were dead, I thought Voldemort killed you”, her voice was barely a whisper. She grasped his arm and Harry was captivated by her stare. Could it really be his mother? He wanted to believe it so much. “We've been given a second chance. Please, Harry, hear us out.”

This was insane. Would he actually fall for Voldemort's games?

Harry wrenched himself free as if burned and turned on his heel. No, he would not allow himself to even entertain the thought, not even if the woman started singing nursery rhymes. He would have preferred the Cruciatus curse to his kind of torture. If he dared to believe and have it taken away again... He couldn't even tell if the people were good actors because he had never met the real James and Lily Potter; these would the only memories he had of them.

Breathing was becoming very hard and his chest felt tight as he leaned on his knees for support. It was all too much.

“Are you okay?” asked Lily's impostor and tried to approach him again. Panicked, Harry stumbled to get away and an odd but a familiar sensation that usually flowed though his wand surged through his entire body. An invisible barrier forced Lily to take several steps back. She yelped in surprise and lost her balance, but James managed to grab her before she fell. It took Harry a second to realize he'd just cast a Shield Charm and it was enough to calm him somewhat.

“Did you just make a shield?” asked the man, looking impressed. “Without a wand?”

“Yeah, so?” asked Harry in defiance. “You – you should stay back, Death Eater! You can see I can still hurt you.”

“Okay, okay”, said James as he raised his arms in surrender. “You're obviously a talented wizard, we don't want to cause trouble. Let's calm down and talk. Just talk while maybe sitting down.”

Harry took offense to the condescending tone, but nodded. He sat on his mattress while the pair searched for a good spot to settle on the grimy floor. Grudgingly, Harry tossed them the blanket he'd hardly even used because of its awful smell; Lily looked far too pleased to receive the moth-eaten cloth. Harry crossed his arms and waited for the pair to speak.

"You could ask us something", suggested James. "Only something we'd know."

"That's kind of hard”, replied Harry honestly. “I don't know that much about you- I mean, my parents.”

"You must have heard stories. Sirius must talk about us", said James, saying it as if anything else was ludicrous.

Harry snorted. “Of course you'd mention Sirius. If you think you'll pry his hideout out of me, you can save your breath! I don't even know where he is.”
“Hideout?” James’ forehead wrinkled and Lily looked just as confused. “Why is he hiding?”

Harry crossed his arms and attempted a look that he hoped looked intimidating. "I won't talk about Sirius."

James sighed and ran a hand through his hair, making it even messier if possible. "Fine. Then ask something."

Harry was silent for moment before starting, “Okay, how about you explain how you supposedly came back from the dead?”

“We have no idea, honestly”, said Lily.

James gave a rough description of their adventures from the previous night. “But you've got Voldemort upstairs with his brain trust”, said James with a laugh that was devoid of any humour. “I'm sure we'll know soon.”

Harry frowned at the careless way he threw the name around. The Death Eaters had almost bit his head off when he'd disrespected their precious leader, but the impostors were in character. “That's convenient”, replied Harry.

James shrugged. “Don't know what to tell you.”

“Okay, I've got a question you can answer”, Harry said after a moment of contemplation. “All I've heard about you two is how you valued friendship above everything and trusted your friends with your lives. Then how could you suspect Remus Lupin as the traitor?”

James flinched as if he'd been struck in the face; his stunned expression became anger that became shame. He opened his mouth and closed it again, seemingly lost for words. Harry felt a pinch of guilt at how lost he looked, but smothered it. He had be tough if he expected to learn the truth.

“I've got no excuse”, James replied after the silence had stretched.

“Look”, started Lily with a worried glance at James. “We were at war. People who opposed the Dark Side were disappearing left and right. Everyone was on edge, paranoid, looking over their shoulder and waiting for the next attack. We especially, because James and I knew we were high on Voldemort's list as we'd escaped from him before.

“Voldemort was recruiting Dark creatures to his side or gravitating there on their own and Remus-Remus was...” she struggled to find the words.

“Yeah, everyone now knows he's a werewolf”, said Harry. “And I don't care”, he added vehemently.

“Good, you shouldn't”, said Lily with a sad smile. “We thought we didn't either until we were in the position to choose who we trusted the most. “

“I remember thinking Remus was acting odd”, James chimed in, speaking quietly, lost in the memory. “And of course he was, if anyone had found about his condition during that time… it wouldn't have been good. Now it all makes sense, but at that time...”

“It was my fault”, said Lily heavily, with the presence of someone confessing their deepest secrets while on trial, her eyes glistening. “I'd found out I was expecting my first child at the worst possible time and I was paranoid. I was the one who started suspecting Remus and convinced Sirius. James didn't believe it.”
And when Sirius came up with the plan to change secret keepers, it seemed like a solid plan. Sirius was really convinced it would work and we got James to go along with it. It would've been perfect if we hadn't suspected the wrong person.”

James hung his head while Lily was wiping her eyes on the sleeve of her oversized jumper. They looked miserable enough for Harry to feel guilty for asking the question that had dispirited them in such a way, but he still couldn't tell them what they wanted to hear.

“It makes sense”, admitted Harry, struck with the need to comfort them in some way and offer them a lifeline. “It really does. But people don't come back from the dead, they just don't...”

“Yeah”, sighed James. “I wouldn't believe us either. “

There really wasn't anything to add and the conversation came to a dead end. They sunk into a miserable silence, James and Lily huddling together while Harry leaned against the wall. He tried staring at the wall and not at the people he wanted to be his parents. Lily had a thoughtful expression on her as James stared into nothing.

“Hey, I know!” called out Lily suddenly, startling both James and Harry. “Turn into Prongs, James!”

James brightened up immediately and jumped to his feet, a concentrated look on his face as he closed his eyes. Everything was still for a moment, until things started happening very fast. Harry stared, mesmerized, as the human head grew antlers, clothes morphed into fur and limbs turned into hooves. For a second, the result was formless and not human nor animal until the transformation was complete.

Harry blinked and then blinked again, but the large stag was still there, acquiring much of the space in the cellar.

Prongs was moving and shaking his head; as much Harry could interpret stag behaviour, he was rejoicing to be flexing his muscles. His hooves clattered on the concrete as he rose to his hind legs and took a few strides, crossing the room in two steps.

As if in a trance, Harry made his way to the animal, his legs shaking. Prongs stilled and bobbed his enormous head in greeting and allowed Harry to stretch out his hand and touch him. He ran his fingers along the stag's neck. His frame was slight and the fur was missing in patches, reflecting the stage of his human form.

Harry startled when he noticed that Lily had joined him at Prongs' side. She smiled and stroked his head with a familiar ease. Prongs leaned into the touch and exhaled in content.

Harry couldn't find a way around it, it had to be true. He didn't need to confirm with Hermione that Death Eaters couldn't impersonate an Animagus form, but it wasn't just the proof. These people felt right. Harry broke into a smile and turned to Lily who was watching him with expectation.

“You can't fabricate that”, stated Lily, bouncing on her heels in excitement. She addressed Prongs. “Transform back, will you?”

Harry backed out of the way as James morphed back into himself. “So I can still do that, good to know”, he said, a little out of breath and turned to Harry with a hopeful and questioning look on his face. “Do you believe us now?”

An almost hysterical laugh forced its way out his throat. Did he? He wanted to be sure of his answer. Once he said it out loud, he would have to believe, with absolute finality, that his parents had come
back from the dead. He would have to let it sink in that he wasn't an orphan anymore, not the last Potter on the face of the Earth. He took a deep breath and replied, “I... I do. Hi, Mum. Hi, Dad.”

END OF CHAPTER FIVE
There hasn't been six months between chapters, what?

I'm very curious to know what you think of Lily in this story. We know very little about her, especially of her flaws, and I've had to create much of her character myself. I googled to find out if there's been anything new on Pottermore (nope) and even 'what was Lily like' in desperation. Sigh.

CHAPTER SIX

Harry was alive.

The thought had been going through Lily's head like a mantra. Her son was alive and even though convincing him of the fact had been though, they were here with him.

She couldn't help it any longer. She yearned to verify for sure that Harry was really here, corporeal and not a figment of her tired imagination.

Lily embraced him before he could shy away. Harry's body went rigid and Lily had time to see his eyes widening in surprise before burying her face in his neck and holding on tightly. After a moment Harry relaxed, but only remotely and his arms hung at his sides. She didn't hold on for long - she had a feeling she'd be pushed away again – and as she withdrew, she held him at arm's length, examining his features more closely than before.

Harry wasn't shying away, but he was cautious, wired for action the instant something went wrong.

"You need a haircut", Lily said with a smile, eyeing the familiar way the strands stuck in every direction. "But then again, so does James and it never did any good."

Harry smiled. It was guarded, tentative, as if he had almost forgotten how the movement was made. Lily sensed she was approaching the limit of how much contact Harry could take and stepped away.

She had never been the one to fuss, but now she was overcome with the need to brush the dirt off her son's hair and clothes, hold and rock him until he was happy again. She had a feeling he couldn't take the motherly fussing right now. He was huddling within himself, arms around his torso, looking confused and vulnerable.

Lily wasn't offended he wasn't jumping up and down in joy. Most likely he was still in shock, as was she. She'd thought Harry was dead for one night, Harry had known they were dead for fourteen years.

James was talking to Harry quietly, carefully, of course trying to make a joke and Harry was trying to find it funny. His laugh was almost believable, with a hysterical tinct to it.

Harry had been trying to give on a tough front, as if he wasn't affected by seeing his dead parents come back to life, as themselves as not. The facade was fading, though, and the shock was
threatening to take over.

He wasn't the baby she'd left behind, but he was still young and had obviously been through a lot. Maybe he was still afraid that it was a trick or that it wasn't, and it would all be taken away. Which was a good possibility, considering where they currently were.

Lily pushed the thought away. She wanted to get to know her son, dammit, not worry about dying. Again.

She tried to find the right words, some way to start the conversation, but there was no natural way to it. "So, Harry… What have you been up to?"

Her tone was far too light for the situation and Harry laughed, not the strained, forced sound that had come out of his mouth earlier, but a true, surprised laugh. It made some of the tension in his shoulders melt away.

Lily gave James a smug look, the one that said 'I'm better than you', because James always teased her that he was the funny one of the pair. He rolled his eyes, but there were laugh wrinkles around his eyes.

"Not much", said Harry, his tone nervous, the corner of his mouth twitching. "Cooped up in here. Food's terrible."

James snorted. "Speaking of which", he gestured to the room. "How did you end up here?"

"Um… I was being escorted to… somewhere", he stammered and shook his head. "Sorry, it's still a bit weird talking to you."

"For us, too", said Lily. "We'll work through it."

Harry nodded, squared his shoulders and continued. "There's not that much to tell, really. We were surrounded and I figured it was me or everyone else. So I kind of let them take me."

"I am both proud and ashamed", said James. "But I can't really judge. Who was there?"

Harry glanced around nervously. "I've got a feeling I shouldn't say."

"The Death Eaters probably recognized many of the group anyway", Harry rushed to say, eying the exchange. Lily hid a smile. If Harry started protecting James from his wife and vice versa, he'd have his plate full.

Lily wondered if they should start the Q&A right away or let the shock wear off, but as they sat down, Harry looked at them expectantly, ready to answer.

"The one thing we’re wondering the most", said James, glancing quickly at Lily. “is how you’re alive in the first place. Did someone rescue you?”

Harry bit his lip, a cease appearing between his brows. He scratched his forehead thoughtfully. "That’s a long story. I don't even know where to start."

"Voldemort said something about me”, said Lily. It had been bugging her ever since she'd heard it. "About forcing him out of his body?"
"Yeah", said Harry. "I guess that’s a good place to begin. As I understand it, because my mum—" he stopped himself and gestured to Lily. "Because you sacrificed yourself for me, I survived. The killing curse rebounded and hit Voldemort instead. He didn't die as many people thought, was just left without a body.

"I was left with this scar”, Harry said, moving his bangs aside, revealing his forehead and a lightning bolt shaped scar they hadn’t noticed before.

Her head was spinning with the new information, but Lily said, "Go on. How is he back now?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably. A shadow of pain crossed his features, his tone strained. "He was weak for a while, building his strength and preparing. Last month he came back. I was there, too. Because he needed the blood of one of his enemies and I’d escaped him before, they snatched me and by accident, my friend, Cedric, from Hogwarts using a Portkey. We arrived at this graveyard where his father was buried in…"

Harry wrapped his arms more tighter around himself, looking awfully small as he stared at the wall, lost in memory. Lily almost told him to stop, to forget she ever asked, but then he continued.

“Pettigrew was there as well”, said Harry carefully and James stiffened. Harry noticed, but James waved for him to continue. He averted his gaze from Harry and there was a deep sense of hurt in him at hearing his old friend's name that it made Lily's heart ache. It was also confirmation he was still alive. Lily refused to let the rush of rage come through.

“…We arrived, and Voldemort was just this… little vile creature wrapped in a cloth. He told Pettigrew to ‘kill the spare’ and he did, he killed Cedric”, continued Harry, his whole body shaking along with his voice. Lily closed her eyes momentarily.

“I’m sorry”, said James quietly and they stopped speaking for a minute while Harry’s lip quivered.

"Pettigrew had been helping Voldemort for a while. He collected some of my blood and used it to revive Voldemort into his body, somehow. He said it made him stronger because of what you did for me”, Harry said, nodding at Lily. "It caused for the protection to move into him."

"There was a cauldron…"

He described the disturbing image of Wormtail moaning on the ground in pain while Voldemort rose again from the cauldron, more terrible than ever. Lily was shivering just imagining it.

Harry related the monologue as well as he could remember, pausing at times to remember the exact words that had been spoken. He didn't say he'd been tortured, but Lily guessed he had been. Voldemort loved to play with his prey. Lily swallowed the bile that threatened to rise at that thought and tried to keep her expression neutral.

James voiced the question on both of their minds. "How did you escape?"

"He gave me my wand back and we duelled- "

James and Lily were both so shocked that Harry rolled his eyes at them. "We didn't actually trade curses back and forth, don't be ridiculous."

"I wouldn't be surprised at this point”, said James full of pride and Harry's chest seemed to swell. He looked a little less somber for a moment.

"I used the disarming charm and he used the killing curse…” A reminiscing, thoughtful expression
appeared on Harry's face as he tried to explain. "This… odd… connection was formed between our
wands, where the curses met. And well… You came back from the wand”, he signalled at Lily and
James.

Lily was utterly and completely confused. "We did?"

"People that wand had killed, in reverse, so eventually you came out of it too. Or not actually you,
but your ghosts - no - your echoes, that's the word Dumbledore used.

"You spoke to me, told me to break the connection when you said so and you would distract him. I
made my way back to the Triwizard Cup, grabbed C- Cedric's body… and got back to Hogwarts. ”

Harry wiped his eyes discreetly on his sleeve as he looked away and Lily and James pretended not
to notice.

James' brow was furrowed in confusion. "Triwizard Cup?"

"Oh”, said Harry. "Right, of course you don't know. ”

Lily couldn't believe she'd been worried about Voldemort when she heard about Harry’s fourth-
FOURTH- year in Hogwarts and it was only a narrow account. She was sure he was glossing over
some bits. Apparently Harry never slept and was constantly in trouble.

"Dragons? You fought a dragon?"

"I evaded a dragon”, corrected Harry, but his excitement shone through. "I flew around it and
grabbed the clue for the second task. A golden egg.”

"Cool”, said James and Lily glared at him.

"Not cool! Dragons, James!” He still looked unaffected and Lily’s voice rose higher, “Dragons!”

"They're much more fun than a pack of Acromantulas or a Basilisk”, Harry said with a small grin.

He was goading her, she knew it, but she had no doubts that he'd encountered both of those things.
She'd been the 21-year-old mother of a teenager for all of one day and already she wanted to wrap
him in tinfoil, secure that with a charm and call it a day.

James’ face showed only glee. "You've been to the Forbidden forest?"

"Obviously.”

Lily groaned, a reluctant smile forming on her lips as she watched the two men grinning at each
other. "Okay, tell us about the spiders and the giant snake. I can take it."

Harry described his encounters, jumping from one tale to another, adding things he’d forgotten in
between. He frequently mentioned Ron or Hermione and Lily gathered they were his friends, the
Basilisk was dead and that he and Ron had escaped the spiders in a Ford Anglia.

He was lost in story as the door creaked open, making them all quiet down and stiffen. Lily’s heart
was pumping rapidly in her chest as he waited to see the newcomer, James was ready for action,
undoubtedly ready to jump in front of Harry if the need arose. Lily relaxed a fraction when the first
thing they saw was a tray of food followed by one of the one of the Death Eaters Lily didn't
recognize. He didn’t look any of them in the eye as he laid the food down, summoned the empty
tray and exited quickly without a word. The door closed with a resounding bang, leaving behind a
Harry was looking down, his expression fallen and the story forgotten.

James was the one to get up, only the slight grunt exposing he was still in pain after their last encounter with their captor, and divided the food between them.

Harry turned his bread over in his hands with a frown, the corners of his mouth turned in disgust. Lily wasn’t any hungrier, but she forced the food down. James sighed before digging into his portion and they ate in silence.

Lily must have dozed out, because the next thing she knew was James’ shoulder against her cheek and he and Harry were talking quietly.

“I can’t believe Snape is a teacher”, James was saying as Lily lifted her head, blinking and trying to clear her head. “I’m guessing he teaches Potions?”

Lily covered her yawn with her hand and tried to concentrate on the conversation.

“Yeah, his classes are the worst. He always takes points away from Gryffindors, me especially. “

“Sorry about that.”

Harry shrugged. “It’s not all because of you and really, he’s horrible to everyone. He just hates me a little bit more.”

“And you said Remus was your Defence teacher? How did he get a job if everyone knew about the werewolf thing?”

“He was, in our third year. He was the best one we’ve had”, said Harry, nodding vehemently. “Dumbledore hired him. People didn’t know he was one until the year was practically over. He had to leave after Snape let it slip”, he said bitterly.

“Bloody Snape”, grunted James. “Well, of course he would. But how is he teaching if he’s a Death Eater?”

“He was”, said Harry slowly. “Apparently Dumbledore trusts him for some reason, he vouched for him. “

Lily blinked. “He switched sides? When?”

“After your death.”

Lily didn’t know how to take that revelation. Was he a spy for Dumbledore, then? Voldemort had asked for Snape, so he was right here in the Mansion. Lily had just assumed he’d resumed working for Voldemort after the resurrection.

What on Earth could have gotten him to change sides? The last time they’d crossed paths, he’d been a full on Death Eater and they hadn’t done much talking between Lily trying to curse him and him blocking each and every one and disappearing.

Lily was still chewing on the news when James had already moved on.

”We probably shouldn't get into much specifics here”, James was saying. ”You said Sirius is in hiding, why?
Harry averted his gaze. “It's a long story.”

”Can I get the gist of it?”

”Well, because you changed Secret Keepers without anybody knowing, everybody thought Sirius had betrayed you”, said Harry.

”Oh, Merlin”, exhaled James, his eyes wide in horror. He had gone deathly pale. ”And?”

Harry was gnawing on his lip, wringing his hands and trying to find the words. Almost anyone could’ve told him how close James and Sirius had been and Lily didn’t envy Harry in this position. Lily held her breath, even though it wasn’t hard to figure out what had become of Sirius if he was accused of murder.

”He went to Azkaban without a trial.”

James didn't cry out, but he let out a muffled sob as he buried his face in his hands. His shoulders hunched in defeat.

”He escaped two years ago”, Harry added, looking at James hopefully, but he didn’t move.

Lily's mind wasn't working properly. It was now 1997 and he’d escaped two years prior so Sirius had been in Azkaban for… twelve years.

She moved closer to James, letting him know she was there while she swallowed her own tears. She laid a tentative hand on his back and rubbed circles on it. It was a long while before he looked up.

”I can't believe anyone would believe Sirius would betray us”, said James, disbelief written all over him. He shook his head. ”Even Remus? Dumbledore? Everyone in the Ord- ” he stopped himself, even though it was no use as Voldemort already knew they were in the Order. ” - everyone who knew him?”

Harry nodded. ”It was really convincing, you see. No one knew about the change and then Pettigrew staged his death. He blamed Sirius publicly, cut off his own finger and changed into a rat, blew up half the street and killed thirteen people. He hid for twelve years, so there was no doubt.”

James let out a hysterical laugh and shook his head again. His hands were shaking; he quickly hid them in his lap.

It was truly cruel; it had been Sirius' idea in the first place to switch and it had come back to bite him the arse. They'd done it because who would've thought that they had chosen incompetent Peter for such an important task? Lily had even felt guilty for thinking that. Clearly he'd been capable of more than anyone had thought.

”Most people still think it's true. I found out on the same night as Remus did that it wasn't. I don't know where he's now, but I saw him last month. I'll let Sirius tell you the whole story himself, yeah?”

James nodded and ruffled his hair with both hands the way he did when he was trying to gather himself.

“But he’s okay, right?” he asked, with a hint of desperation in his tone. “His… mind is okay?”
“Yeah”, said Harry, a little too quickly. He bit his lip and covered it with, “I haven’t had that much time with him, but I’m sure he’s fine.”

James nodded again and rested his head against the wall and grabbed Lily’s hand. His grip was tight and Lily knew he was trying not to fall apart in front of Harry. She squeezed his hand back.

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The kitchen of Grimmauld Place was quiet for once as Remus sat there, staring at the surface of the sturdy oak table. It was worn, full of scratches made of many dinners had at the table.

Remus ran his finger along one of the marks, lost in thought, or rather trying not to think. Sleeping had been impossible as it had been for the last few nights, and it was starting to take its toll. He blinked and his vision cleared.

“Morning”, a sleepy voice greeted suddenly, making Remus jump and look around. Tonks. Remus sighed in relief as she walked past him, yawning. He’d forgotten that she’d stayed for the night. He mumbled a response that hopefully could be interpreted as a greeting.

The young witch was wearing her hair chestnut brown today, the least distinctive colour he’d seen on her discounting the Order missions they’d been on together where her usual hot pink shade could be impractical. Yawning, she flicked her wand at the kitchen cabinet. A kettle jumped out of the cupboard and filled itself with water from the tap and headed for the stove. Remus watched with trepidation and sure enough, the kettle toppled over in the air and drenched her. She only let out a little shriek and wiped her eyes.

“Why do I even bother with the housekeeping spells?” she muttered, chuckling slightly at herself. She filled the kettle by hand and flicked her wand again, making the water boil. The next flick dried her clothes.

Tonks turned to Remus, a small smile still on her lips that died when their eyes met.

“Sorry”, she said. “I forgot for a minute. We’re screwed.”

“Don’t be”, replied Remus. “Brooding won’t change anything.”

“You’re damn right”, said Tonks with such ferocity that Remus was almost forced to smile. “They’re keeping Harry alive, which means we have time to get him out. There’s hope.”

Remus nodded, more to himself than Tonks. Ever since Snape had informed the Order Harry was alive and then immediately been summoned back, the meeting had lasted well into the night. The subject had been covered so thoroughly they’d now been reduced to repeating facts.

Harry was alive, but they didn’t know for how long or what for.

Snape knew where he was, but he couldn’t tell them nor could he be followed there.

They were out of ideas.

All they could do was to collect information and keep going on with their original plan of attack, slowly but surely informing the public Voldemort had returned. All the while hoping Harry would be kept alive until they figured out what to do or wait for a miracle.

Tonks was regarding him with an observant eye. “What is it?”
Mutely, Remus passed the Daily Prophet along the table. As she unfolded it, he stretched out his hand; he’d been clutching it so tightly it had left his fingers numb.

“Oh, no.”

Remus didn’t have to look at the page to see as he already knew it by heart.

“THE BODIES OF JAMES AND LILY POTTER DISAPPEARED” the title read, or rather screamed, with a large picture of the very familiar gravestone in the Godric’s Hollow graveyard and two graves that had been neatly opened. An elderly man, possibly the groundskeeper, was pictured staring at the scene, aghast.

Tonks had already read the article once, and was rereading the article, sounding the words out with her mouth. When she refolded the paper, her lips were pursed and she appeared unshaken, maybe to reassure Remus, but the tiny tremor of her body gave her away.

“We’d better keep this from Sirius”, she said.

“He’s hiding with Buckbeak, I doubt he’ll be up to reading for a while”, said Remus quietly. Tonks frowned and he added, “I know he has a stash there.”

“Ah”, said Tonks. “And how are you holding up?”

Remus shrugged. “I’m fine.”

Tonks shook her head, but silently got up.
A moment later there was a cup of hot tea put in front of him. He nodded his thanks and they drank in silence, both lost in their thoughts.

Remus was never allowed to move on. He had tried and for twelve years, he had tried to accept that Sirius had been the traitor although it had never felt right. Everything had been turned upside down merely a year ago, revealing Peter. It had hurt, but he had grieved and lived on.

Now the wound was ripped open again. His dear friends could be walking around on their murderer’s orders. He tried to take a sip of his tea, but his hands shook too much and he set the cup back again with a loud thud. Tonks was looking at him, stone faced.

“What are we going to do, Remus?”

“Dumbledore will think of something”, Remus replied on automatic.

Tonks snorted, “Look, I trust Dumbledore almost as much as you do, but he hasn’t had much plans so far.”

“He will think of something”, he repeated. He wouldn’t admit he had been wondering the same thing.

“And what if he doesn’t?”

“He will!”

“Harry’s in You-Know-Who’s hands and his dead parents are walking around all the while You-Know-Who is regaining power!” said Tonks, her volume rising. “We can’t just sit on our arses while we wait for Dumbledore!”

Remus’ patience cracked and before he knew it, he was standing and bellowing at the top of his
lungs, “Be my guest, Tonks, storm Voldemort’s lair! Oh, you can’t, because you DON’T KNOW WHERE IT IS!”

Tonks was also on her feet, her cheeks streaked with tears and suddenly Remus desperately wanted to take the last few second back for making her look like that. She hadn’t known James or Lily, she didn’t really know Harry yet and she didn’t know how bad things could get if Voldemort rose to his full power. She still cared as much as he did, and he had yelled at her for being frustrated.

They stared at each other, unmoving and breathed heavily.

“I’m sorry”, said Tonks faintly, beating Remus to the apology that was stuck on his lips. “I shouldn’t have pressured you like that.”

“It’s fine.” Remus crashed back into his chair. “I’m sorry, too. We’re all on edge, I don’t usually yell...”

“Oh, you have yelled at me before”, said Tonks, the playful tinkle of her eyes returning, but the atmosphere was awkward. “It’s becoming sort of a habit.”

“Well, it was a stressful situation and you did give away our position”, said Remus, knowing what the reply would be.

“Oi, you old git!” Tonks wagged a finger at his face. “It was a tiny mirror, they didn’t even notice! Your hollering was what led them to us!”

Remus huffed in defeat and they smiled carefully at each other.

“Where were we? Oh, right, the Inferi”, said Tonks, grimacing. “D’you think the rest of the Order knows?”

“Don’t you hear?”

Tonks craned her neck and listened. They’d become so accustomed to Mrs Black’s voice that they hadn’t even noticed she’d been shouting insults for a while now. They could make out the background chatter and the people starting to wander towards the kitchen.

Remus sighed. He surely hoped this meeting would achieve more than the last one or the muscle cramps that came from sitting all day would be for nothing.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Once again, a HUGE thank you for your alerts and especially your comments! I love your feedback, please keep it coming. Updating is slow, I'm sorry about that, but I like to procrastinate and also have other projects going on. Just yesterday, my dollhouse received some new furniture! Sorry, sorry, getting distracted again, here's the new chapter. I promise more action in the next one..

CHAPTER SEVEN

Lily adjusted her huddled position against the wall and tried to find a spot that didn't dig into her back, but no such luck. Carefully, she straightened her legs and pondered getting up, but her fuzzy mind decided it wasn't worth it. There wasn't anywhere to go.

She could hazily remember a particular History of Magic double lesson during their seventh year, when she had wondered if time had stopped and they had joined Professor Binns in death. She had spent that time exchanging notes with James with Sirius trying and failing to steal them. The memory made her smile for the first time in days.

Her partner in crime was currently snoozing against her shoulder with a slight frown on his face. She glanced at Harry who was sprawled on the only mattress, showing no signs of life. She had had to check his pulse to make sure he was breathing multiple times already. Harry had been there the longest, and it was starting to show. His cough sounded truly worrying, not to mention the fever that refused to break and in the conditions they had, likely wouldn't. She and James had rationed the sparse food and water they'd been given and fed most of it to Harry. He had stopped resisting by now and it may have worried Lily the most.

Lily must have dozed off again, because the next thing she knew was someone kicking her feet. Light shone from the open door and revealed the speaker as Nott. He was tapping the floor with his foot impatiently and Lily only barely refrained from giving him the finger at the way he was flinging his wand carelessly in his fingers.

"You're being moved. Let's go."

Lily nudged James, making him wake up with a jolt and utter a confused, "What?"

"Are you dim? Let's. Go", repeated Nott, enunciating each word slowly and carefully. He glanced at his watch and made an exasperated sound. "If you make me be late…"

While James was sleepily glaring at Nott, Lily rose with much effort and crouched next to Harry. She moved the sweaty strands of hair away from his forehead gently, but there was no reaction.

"Harry, wake up. We have to go."

Harry groaned in his sleep and Lily shook his shoulder as hard as she dared. His eyelids fluttered and Lily helped him into a sitting position.

He seemed to be awake, but his movements were sluggish and Lily had to support almost all of his weight as they tried to rise from the floor. One touch of his skin told Lily the fever was once again on the rise.
"C'mon, honey. You've got to walk."

Nott was eyeing Lily crouching with a glint in his eye, making no effort to assist but instead raised his wand. "Do you need encouragement?"

"You won't live to regret it", growled James, taking a step in his direction. Nott responded with a snort and by beckoning him with his hand as if to say 'Come at me'.

"We're moving as fast as we can", Lily said from behind gritted teeth and gave James a warning glare as they managed to take a few steps. Harry seemed to be more awake now, but his movements were sluggish and almost all his weight was supported by Lily. It got a little easier as James joined them and he was able to help from the other side.

The stairs were tricky, but once they got into a rhythm, they managed, Harry's head lolling from one shoulder to the other. By the time they had reached the top, James and Lily were panting with the effort of dragging Harry, even with him weighing worryingly little.

Nott led them into the entrance hall, the sight of it making Lily pause. The likeness to the Order's old headquarters was staggering. Cloaked people cluttered the space, talking in groups and pairs. James was scanning the crowd with a frown and Lily followed his gaze, but couldn't see the one person he was looking for.

Lily did spot many familiar faces, albeit harder to recognize as they were older. As they walked past, some of the Death Eaters smiled mockingly and some spared Lily crude looks. She kept her head high and paid them no attention, knowing full well that in normal circumstances a Muggleborn wouldn't simply stroll past a group of Death Eaters.

"They just like you, sweetheart", said Nott into her ear, so close that she could smell his breath. She recoiled, provoking a teeth-revealing grin from him and some chortles from the crowd as it slowly trickled into another room.

Swallowing the bile that threatened to rise in her throat, she asked, "Where are we going?"

"Keep going up."

The stairs ahead arched upwards high enough that they couldn't see the end and Lily ignored the weariness that threatened to overwhelm her already exhausted body. She readjusted Harry's arm around her shoulder and they started the journey.

As they reached the landing at the top, Lily's legs nearly gave out and they stumbled into a room that Nott lazily pointed them at.

It was a plain room with dark wallpaper and a few paintings on the walls as well as a table with chairs in the middle of the room. The twin bed in the corner fit in with the rest of the furniture that included a small sofa and an armchair, but the smaller bed against the opposite wall had clearly been moved there. A heap of bed sheets lay over it.

Lily and James moved Harry carefully on the single bed before collapsing on the floor next to it, breathing heavily. Lily leaned against the bed and allowed herself a few moments of rest. Never had her lungs felt like they were on fire the way they did now and they had simply walked upstairs.

James recovered first and pulled the duvet over Harry who was pale and motionless again. "He's breathing, at least", said James, sounding hollow. He turned to Nott, who was leaving. "Are you meaning to do something about that? He's really sick."
Nott didn't even comment as he exited their new prison. It was only then that Lily looked to the far end of it, and was startled to see Severus Snape standing in the corner, arms crossed, staring at them with a blank expression.

Lily nudged James whose body went rigid in recognition. Snape wasn't looking at James, but steadily enough at Lily that it made the hairs on her arms stand up.

Aging had been good on him. His dark eyes still held that menacing, deeply sorrowful look and he had kept his signature shoulder-length, somewhat greasy black hair, but he wasn't as gangly anymore as he'd been the last time Lily had seen him, on the last day of school as they'd said goodbye and walked away. Now, his shoulders were broader and he carried himself more confidently than before.

"Could we talk?"

It was an order concealed in a request, full of authority and Lily found herself nodding and rising to her feet without further thinking. Snape paced across the room swiftly as James watched on, and led Lily back into the hall. She was confused at first at his carelessness but found soon that if she stepped too far away from the entrance, an invisible pull kept her in her place. She sighed and crossed her arms across her chest in a tight knot.

They stared at each other quietly for a full minute. The steady glare was making Lily nervous in a way it hadn't been able to do before. Maybe it was because of the age difference now, or because she knew she would lose at the staring game. He was truly a menacing sight in his big black cloak, one hand resting against his leg, while the other was hidden in the cloak, no doubt grasping his wand. His black eyes looked dead to her now that she didn't know the man behind them. After a while, she had to avert her eyes and started shuffling her feet.

"So.." started Lily. "How've you been?"

No reply.

The silence stretched as Lily couldn't think of a thing to say and couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed. They hadn't left things at the best of terms, no. They hadn't spoken in years and since then, Lily had only heard rumours of what Snape had been up to in Voldemort's ranks and she hadn't felt a pulling need to catch up. She still would have expected some form of astonishment to her being alive, some curiosity or even an acknowledgment of the fact. He was also the one that had pulled her into the hall and was now refusing to talk!

But then, she took note to the way Snape was watching or rather monitoring her, cataloging her every moment for further inspection. She'd seen him do that during Potions class, as Snape had ignored Slughorn completely and been lost in his own world, scribbling notes to the edges of the pages in his book.

"You don't think I'm me."

Her voice came out unnecessarily loud, making Lily cringe. She tried to cover for it by straightening her posture and placing her hands on her hips, figured it looked ridiculous and returned them in the knot.

Snape's eyes narrowed. "I don't think you're Lily Evans, no."

"I see. Voldemort's conviction isn't enough for you?"

Snape didn't flinch at the name, but did blink several times and the hand grasping his wand moved
an inch or two. Lily eyed the hand nervously, but the wand stayed hidden.

"The Dark Lord", he said, putting emphasis on the name, "did ask me to confirm it for myself."

"Ah. Does he know we used to be friends?"

"Yes, he knows I knew Lily Evans."

Lily's reply was automatic. "It's Potter now."

Snape's mouth tightened into an ever straighter line. He was quiet for a moment and when he spoke, his tone changed into a silkier, somehow more of a dangerous tone. "I would like to know why you are impersonating the Potters. I do not see much point in it."

Lily sighed. "We're not impersonating."

"I am here asking nicely. The Dark Lord won't."

The insinuation was quite clear. Lily raised a brow. "I thought he was convinced we've come back from the dead and wants to know how we did it."

"He does seem convinced, yes. I would imagine he won't be happy when it turns out you aren't who you say you are."

"We are -"

"Then how did you come back?"

"I don't know", replied Lily with a sigh. Snape leaned back with a slight, self-satisfied smile and a raised brow. He was practically making fun of her now and Lily had never wanted to punch him this bad. "Look, can we stop?"

Snape made a half-shrug, effectively saying 'what on Earth do you mean?'.

"How do you identify impostors using Polyjuice potion? Ask me something!"

"You could have inherited Lily's memories."

"That kind of magic doesn't exist, thankfully."

"That we know of."

I don't have time for this. Lily only barely stopped herself from screaming out loud in frustration. "I'm Lily Potter, née Evans. We met when we were nine years old -"

Snape's expression hardened and his muscles clenched, his visible hand moving into a fist. "Stop."

"You never got along with my sister, Petunia", prattling on without thinking about it too hard. "I didn't get along with you at first, either -"

Snape had drawn his wand and had it pointed at Lily too fast for her to see it. Lily raised her hands in the air, heart beating fast. "Shut up. Lily is dead!"

"No, I'm not", Lily replied as calmly as she could. "I don't know how, but I came back to life, with James. Remember him?"
It may have been a low blow, but Snape only snorted and didn't reply.

"Speaking of him, I should tell you, I learned the real story. Of the night in the Whomping Willow. James did save your life, but only because Sirius put it in danger, first."

Snape's frown deepened with each word. "Who told you that?"

"James did", she continued. "Sirius told you how to get past the Whomping Willow and see Remus for yourself. You went and James came to stop you before you were attacked."

Snape was regarding her with uncertainty now, opening and closing his mouth. "That's… that's good research. However, it isn't enough -"

"What is?" Lily asked. "How about the day we stopped being friends, after O.W.L.S? I could recount the whole thing!"

A flash of pain crossed across Snape's features and Lily felt a stab of guilt at bringing up the memory. Snape recovered quickly, crossing his arms and giving her a glare that must have terrified his students. "The whole school was there."

"But not in front of the Fat Lady", she argued. "You came to see me, waited for me for hours, but I only came because you threatened to sleep there."

"So she told someone the story."

"I even received your letter, Severus. I'm sorry I never sent you a response -"

"STOP!"

Snape was panting now, eyes wide, his wand hand trembling, outstretched and pointed at Lily's chest. Lily kept her hands in the air and stared back, trying to stay calm although she herself was trembling. All she could think of were the nasty curses that had been used on Muggleborns in school by Snape's gang.

Over Snape's shoulder, Lily saw a Death Eater walking across the entrance hall without a glance in their direction, making her wonder if Snape had used one of his own spells to make sure they had privacy, in which case calling for help wouldn't help.

"Who are you?" he asked in a whisper, a hint of hope detectable in the tone.

Lily moved closer, hands still visible and stared Snape straight into his eyes, trying to convey that she was telling the truth. Snape took a step back. "It's Lily."

"Can I use legilimency, then?" he asked in a challenging tone. "I can't think of anything else that will prove what you're claiming."

Lily didn't allow herself time to think about it further and say no. She nodded curtly, having time to see the look of surprise on Snape's face before closing her eyes. She did her best to relax her body as she visualized a box where she locked away the things she didn't want seen, and allowed a memory of the two of them as kids fill her mind, leaving it there, out in the open so it would be the first thing he saw. It flashed past her and she looked for another memory, settling for one of them doing homework well into the night on a gloomy November evening, helping each other with subjects that came easier to the other. For added effect, she brought forth a recollection of her scanning the words of a letter years later, and putting it away without further thinking.
She pulled herself away, physically lightheaded and came across silence and an incredulous Snape who had lowered his wand and was openly staring at her.

"It's really you?" he whispered, unguarded in a way Lily hadn't seem him before.

Lily's lips formed a somewhat sad smile. "Hi Sev."

A mixture of emotions flashed over Snape's face that Lily couldn't properly read, was it joy, shame? He opened and closed his mouth, but no words came out. He took a step closer, widened his arms a fraction and Lily tensed, ready to step aside to avoid the hug, but then he looked unsure and didn't advance further, dropping his arms. A rush of relief washed over Lily and her shoulders relaxed. Snape noticed and ducked his head, his shoulder-length locks forming a protective barrier around his face, for a second making him look more like the awkward boy she had first met.

The atmosphere awkward once again, Lily found herself staring at the floor, fiddling with her hair, not sure what she was feeling. The two had never truly embraced or shared much physical contact. Lily had tried to show him affection by trying to hug him on several occasions, but it had always made him uncomfortable so she had stopped.

Snape cleared his throat. "How?"

Lily shrugged, wondering how many times she would be asked to give a non-answer to that question. "No one knows. And if Voldemort still doesn't either…" she trailed off with an inquiring intonation at the end and Snape shook his head.

"Are you… feeling like yourself?"

Snape was regarding her carefully again, making Lily feel like a test subject. What was he looking for, excessive drooling or signs of a newfound taste for human blood?

She omitted an exasperated sigh. "I'm not a zombie or an Inferius, if that's what you're asking. I feel completely normal."

"Good", said Snape. "That's good."

Lily couldn't believe how hard it was to talk to him now. They'd been best friends for years before everything got in the way, but in the back in her mind, she had longed for the time Snape had been the one she had spoken to. It also felt like Snape was holding back somehow and Lily had to admit she was feeling curious. Was it just their long estrangement or was it something else?

"Have you truly switched sides?" Lily asked. "You're working for Dumbledore?"

"Yes", Snape said with conviction. "I have been for a long time."

Lily watched him for a while before nodding to herself. Could she trust him to tell her the truth? She wanted to ask what had prompted him into leaving Voldemort's side and if he had abandoned the Dark Arts as well, but that might have been a conversation to be at a different time.

"Can you get us out?" The question escaped Lily's mouth before she could stop it, coming out quick and hushed, revealing her desperation. She tipped her head down to hide her slight blush.

Snape swallowed and looked away. "I will have to ask Dumbledore for orders. If there's a way to keep my cover…"

"Right", accepted Lily and sagged in disappointment, reality setting in. "Stopping Voldemort
comes first."

"Of course I'll try", he added quickly, looking at her as if worried he'd hurt her. He took a look at a
clock on the wall and sighed. "I have to go", he said reluctantly.

Lily stayed in her spot and Snape grimaced. "You have to… " he said and trailed off, indicating
awkwardly towards the room they had come from.

"Oh, right", said Lily. She stepped over the threshold and a sensation of satisfaction rushed over
her, eliminating all intention of leaving the room, knowing she was supposed to be there, confined
within the walls. The spell wasn't enough to suppress the feeling of worry as her eyes set on Harry,
who was still motionless.

"Severus!" she called to Snape who was still standing at the other side of the door. "Could you
bring Harry something? He isn't looking very good."

Snape frowned and stepped over to Harry, his nostrils flaring as he passed James still sitting on the
floor, but didn't give him any further attention. James cleared the way without a word, but did go
rigid as Snape drew his wand and ran it over Harry's body.

"Relax", Lily whispered to his husband's ear as she stood next to him, but he still kept a watchful
eye on the scene. Lily had to admit that she was on edge as well, but there wasn't anything they
could do if Snape turned out to be fooling them.

"Seems like pneumonia", Snape said slowly, head tilted in thought. "It needs to be treated, but…"

"What?" asked Lily with trepidation.

"Voldemort doesn't want him too healthy", said James quietly. Snape didn't contradict the claim,
maintaining his unhappy frown as he repeated the scan and seemed content with his diagnosis.

"I'll see what I can do", he said as he got onto his feet. He made an awkward hand movement to
signal towards the entrance. "I will… see you later."

He addressed his words only to Lily and James' eyes moved swiftly from him to Lily and back
again. Lily spared him a careful smile. "Yes. Thank you."

After they'd been left alone, Lily took one of the chairs and moved it next to Harry's bed while
James glowered at her. "So, are you buddies again?" he asked harshly.

Lily didn't turn to him as she sat on the chair and took Harry's clammy hand. "Are you starting this
up again?"

James' eyebrows shot up into his hairline as he threw his arms into the air, his volume rising. "
Well excuse me! I'm just worried about you socializing with a known Death Eater -"

"Hopefully a former Death Eater and if you hadn't noticed, I got help for our son", Lily snapped.
Harry sighed in his sleep and Lily put a hand on his shoulder and lowered her volume. "Is this
really the time?"

"Maybe not", agreed James, but his tone was slightly petulant. He looked like he wanted to
continue, but Lily turned her head away sternly, ignoring the heat in her own cheeks at the high
level of conversation she was having with her husband.

"Good, we agree."
The rivalry and hatred between Snape and James ran deep, but the trouble they were in didn't leave time for resolving old grudges, she reasoned. Snape's choice to simply ignore James didn't seem like a long time solution, but it might keep them from coming to blows... at least until they both had wands or when they could brawl it out for all she cared. Lily certainly wasn't going to play peacemaker!

Lily was still sulking as James walked into the bathroom. She could make out the tap turning on and James bustling about until he returned with a wet towel which he placed into her hand, keeping his head down as if in regret. Lily bit her lip to keep from smiling and started to dap Harry's forehead with the towel. James brought himself a chair right next to Lily's and sat down.

"Sorry about yelling", he said quietly, nudging her with his shoulder.

Lily pursed her lips slightly before leaning her body against his and sighed, trying to release some of the tension she'd been holding. James looped an arm around her shoulders and she didn't shrug it off. "It's fine, I'm sorry too. Let's just focus on Harry."

It took an hour for a tray of food to be delivered with a cup of steaming, thick liquid. The potion's consistency and colour indicated it to be Pepperup Potion, but it might have had something stronger mixed into it, at least judging by the smell. The first dose had to be administered to Harry's closed lips, but it did do the trick, as two hours later he was already sitting and talking. He'd been sipping the potion steadily a small dose at a time with a distasteful grimace for a while, but was now approaching the bottom of the goblet.

Harry's skin still had a greenish shade to it and his hands shook as he lifted the heavy goblet. "Did I miss anything while I was out?"

"Snape was here", replied Lily, deliberately not looking at James as she said it.

"Snape?" Harry's tone turned curious and his next words were directed at his father. "How did that go?"

"Surprisingly, we didn't make friendship bracelets..."

"He sent the potion", said Lily and Harry turned to inspect the almost empty cup and peered at the liquid left on the bottom.

"It seems I haven't been poisoned…"

Lily rolled her eyes, but couldn't stop the corners of her mouth curling up as James snorted with suppressed laughter and said, "Let's give it a few hours."

"Some poisons do have a delayed effect…" said Lily, stroking her chin thoughtfully. Harry frowned worriedly until Lily broke into a grin and ruffled Harry's hair. "You're too easy."

"Ha ha", Harry replied as his stomach rumbled audibly.

"We forgot about that food, didn't we?" said James and went to the table where an untouched tray of food was still waiting. As James picked up one of the plates, he paused, grabbed something off the tray and set it in Lily's hand without a word before starting to set the table.

Lily opened the crumpled up note and smoothed it out.

'The potion should be taken twice a day. I was glad to see you. S.'
Here you go, once again I'm sorry for the wait. I promise more action in the next one!

EDIT: I'm adding my reply to a review on fanfiction.net here because Lily's behaviour is getting discussed a lot, so I thought I'd shed some light on my view for everyone. "I obviously don't want to give you spoilers, but I'll try to explain my thinking. I don't think Lily has forgotten what Snape has done or who he is (and she also doesn't know Snape's part in their deaths yet), but they're also in a situation where they need all the help they can get. At first I imagined James' reaction to be a bit more aggressive but decided to downplay it for that reason. I had a few versions of the chapter and I'm still not sure which was the right one. :D I also think Lily may have a blind spot when it comes to Snape, which in my mind is why she didn't cut him out of her life earlier. Worrisome? Definitely."

EDIT2: Enough people said the same thing, so I went back and looked at the chapter again, which made me agree with some of the reviews. I ended up revising quite a bit and I recommend checking out the edit before reading the next update (in progress) as it did change much of the tone. I stand behind my earlier response, but I think some of you might find it a bit more believable now. Thank you my wonderful betas!
A/N: I recommend checking out the last edit of the previous chapter, if you read it before the finished version. Thanks to a lot of comments on FF, I made some adjustments. I hope to get them in the future as you helped to make the last one better. Thanks!

CHAPTER EIGHT

"He almost caught us the very next day. He was right on our tail and if he hadn't had the map, we wouldn't have lasted a moment."

"Then what happened?" asked Harry, leaning towards James who was engrossed in the story, his hands flying in the air.

Harry was half-sitting in bed, propped up by pillows with his legs hidden under the covers as he'd been for longer than he would've liked. James and Lily hadn't let him get out except for the bathroom and short periods to slowly regain his strength, hassling him back in whenever he looked too tired. He didn't argue, but slightly rolled his eyes and let them fuss.

They'd been left to their own devices for long enough that they'd been able to pretend their room was more of a hotel room. They'd discussed escape plans a few times, but hadn't gotten anywhere with the window magicked shut and the invisible barrier outside their room, insuring they stayed within it even if they managed to break through the door. Other than that, they weren't sure of much.

From the small breadcrumbs of information they had through the rotating Death Eaters, they'd gathered that Voldemort wasn't currently in the Manor. Sometimes when the door was open, shouts and calls carried to their room, as opposed to whenever their leader was present. Then, the house was eerily quiet, people passing by their door quickly and quietly, as if scared that frolicking around would make Voldemort think they were having too much fun and needed more work. Even Nott, who would sometimes make crude jokes or try to mock them in any way he could, would move like greased lightning and be out without uttering a word.

James' supply of great stories was never ending. Many of them were wild and dangerous enough for Harry to doubt they'd happened exactly as he told them, especially as Lily had most likely heard most of them and even she looked surprised at some events.

The story was becoming animated quickly, James putting his soul into it with Lily chuckling next to him and sometimes offering commentary while Harry was doubled over with laughter.

"You know, I never saw Filch use magic, but that man has superpowers for sure", said James, shaking his head. "We hid in the library, behind the counter and tried to be quiet, watching his dot and the light get closer and closer..."

"Then Peter -" James halted as he realized what he'd said, swallowed a few times and continued, but his words were muffled. "-changed into his rat form and distracted him."

He grew quiet and turned his gaze towards the wall, crossing his arms tightly across his chest, giving out a small, barely audible sob.
Harry bit his lip and stared at his hands, unable to think of anything to say. It had been the first time Wormtail's actual name had been uttered as every story had managed to avoid it, but the name had still hung in the air. Lily's brow was furrowed, the corners of her lips slightly pulled down as she laid a hand carefully on James' upper back. He didn't turn, but his tense shoulders fell an inch. She kept her hand in place and started to massage small circles on it. Harry looked away, uncomfortable to be present at a moment that seemed very intimate.

"I'm okay", James was saying quietly to Lily, discreetly wiping his eyes. "Where was I? Harry, are you up for another story?"

"Yeah, sure", replied Harry, forcing a smile on his face.

*o*o*

The next morning as Harry woke, he knew it wasn't going to be a good day.

Something was prickling at the back of his neck, making him feel uneasy and agitated, as if something he'd been expecting for a long time was about to take place. He had no idea what that thing was going to be, but the inking had made him toss and turn all night.

He moved the covers aside and inched himself towards the edge of the bed carefully, keeping an eye on his sleeping parents, at the moment breathing steadily. He didn't want wake them, as he figured it was still early. The bed strings groaned loudly as his weight lifted off the mattress and he cringed, halting in a half-standing position and waited. No sound. Carefully, he put his whole weight on one foot. Just one step after another...

"Harry, what are you doing up?" asked Lily's sleepy voice as she squinted at him, supporting her upper body on her elbows.

Damn. "I need to move", Harry said as he straightened to his full height and took a step. "I'm feeling antsy. Just for a moment, okay?"

Lily nodded, yawning. "Just don't stretch yourself too thin, all right?"

Harry nodded and Lily rolled over, facing against the wall again, her breathing evening out. James was lying on his back, snoring, not showing any movement.

Harry took a few steps, first carefully, but soon he was walking across the room at a relatively normal speed. There wasn't much room to do anything else and he wandered into the bathroom. He splashed some cold water on his face, staring in the mirror. His own reflection stared back, dark circles under his eyes, but looking completely normal, even if he felt somehow different. He didn't feel that sick anymore and even his usually pale cheeks had regained some colour. But because pneumonia was a resilient illness even when it was treated with magical means, as Lily liked to remind him, he had to take it easy.

Harry ran wet fingers through his hair, lost in thought. It wasn't just the frustration of being cooped up and lounging in bed all day, it was something else that was driving his senses up the walls. What was going on? His fingers drummed against the sink.

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He returned to the main room and sat back on his bed. He bounced a few times on the mattress, making it creak. By then, James had woken and was now and rubbing his eyes, putting his glasses back on. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing", Harry replied, swinging his legs from side to side. "Just restless."
"I get it", his father said, nodding. He moved his head from side to side, stretching it, before straightening his back. "It's driving me up the walls, too."

"You don't look like it."

"Well, I got used to staying put in our little cottage back in the day", replied James. "It wasn't safe to go outside a lot. You adjust. And if I fidgeted too much, it upset you and the missus."

"Was it scary, hiding out for so long?"

"Not really, boring mostly. But there was always that foreboding, the tiny possibility that everything would go wrong... Turns out that the odds were not in our favour after all", he added quietly.

"It wasn't your fault", Harry replied immediately. "You trusted your friends. It's not wrong."

"Isn't it?" he asked harshly, but it was at himself and not Harry. "If I hadn't trusted him blindly, you wouldn't have grown up in an orphanage."

It was the perfect opportunity to correct their assumption that had been formed because of the vague and detached way Harry spoke of his childhood, never mentioning names, but he hesitated. "Well, no, but you can't blame yourself for someone else being a traitor."

James shrugged, not looking like he was really listening. "Hmm-n... I'm going to wash my face."

He got up and walked with his head down, not looking at Harry, seeming more distracted than anything.

Harry sighed. James gone, Lily sleeping, he kept swinging his legs and trying to think of things to do as options were quite sparse.

Next few moments happened in a blur as a dark-bearded, giant man burst through the door. Harry stiffened and had no time to do anything as the man came straight for him, lifted him off the bed in one smooth motion and set him on his feet. As he was only a few inches from the man, a heavy stench of alcohol mixed with sweat filled his nostrils. The sheer mass of him reminded Harry of Hagrid, but where the half-giant's eyes radiated warmth, this one's didn't. He was dressed in elegant, tidy robes that were in contradiction with the rest of him.

Nott entered next, as bored as ever, leaning against the door frame. "Let's go, Junior."

James emerged from the bathroom. "What are you doing? Leave him alone!"

"Do shut up", Nott said, "Petrificus Totalus!"

"C'mon, lad", the large man said as he clasped a heavy hand on Harry's shoulder and pushed him onwards.

Harry staggered and the man sighed, grabbed a good handful of the collar of Harry's shirt and started to unceremoniously drag him by it. The hold didn't leave much room for breathing, leaving him wheezing for air. Harry tried to regain his footing by kicking, but only reached air. He had time time to see his parents' frozen faces, James standing with his hand outstretched and Lily in a half crouch on the bed in the process of climbing out, before he was dragged into the hall.

"Make sure he's alive when you get downstairs, Higgs, " ordered Nott as he descended the stairs ahead of them with a bounce in his step. They followed him, Harry's back and bottom impacting painfully against each step, already feeling the bruises forming.
"I can walk!" wheezed Harry, trying to pry the hands off his collar, but was ignored. His scar had started hurting, which made him claw at the hands even harder.

They made their way like that downstairs and into the same room he'd been brought to once he'd been captured. The ornate table had been moved aside, leaving a large part of the floor free. The drapes of the large window were closed, only a hint of light getting through, leaving them in dusk. An aggressive hissing sound told him that Nagini was somewhere near, not easing his feeling of foreboding.

Higgs threw him on the floor face down, leaving Harry eating dust and trying to keep from suffocating on it. He rolled over and stared at the ceiling, laying straight under the large chandelier, watching the crystals spin.

"Hello, Harry."

The high-pitched voice still made his skin crawl. He turned to look at Voldemort, who was seated on a large armchair that resembled more of a throne. Nagini was placed at his feet and Nott and Higgs were standing in front of the doorframe, blocking it.

"Let's pick up where we left off", Voldemort said silkily. "Get up."

The intense pain from his scar made him want to scrunch his eyes shut, but he forced them open as he rose to his feet and tried to straighten his posture, but his body was shaking. Breathing hurt, making him wheeze, the strain too much on his still weak lungs.

"I have questions, and if you answer them honestly, this will go much… smoother."

Harry couldn't help but snort. Voldemort's jaw clenched just slightly before in a movement Harry barely had time to see, his wand slashed in the air and Harry was knocked off his feet by an invisible force. He landed uncomfortably on his side and a whimper escaped from his mouth. Nott and Higgs sniggered in the background.

"We are wasting time. Up."

Carefully, Harry placed his hands on the floor and helped himself to his feet slowly, cringing as he did so. His ribcage was contracting and shooting him with pain with each breath, all the while his mind was racing. Would Voldemort question him and then kill him, or did he have time? He hadn't even said goodbye to his parents.

"Did you do something to bring your parents back?"

Harry struggled to keep his voice clear. "I didn't."

Voldemort didn't speak. The red in his slit-like eyes deepened and Harry didn't dare to breathe as his eyes bore into his. It could've been only a few seconds, but for Harry the wait felt forever, his body tense, waiting for torture.

Harry supposed his answer was accepted, as there was no punishment. He doubted Voldemort had truly suspected he'd done something, if even he himself didn't know how that something could be done. He sighed in relief.

Voldemort was stroking Nagini's head, his stare still intense as he asked the next question. His tone was more urgent, as if this question was the one he truly wanted the answer to. "Have you heard the Prophecy?"
Harry frowned. "What's that?"

This time the spell was more forceful, throwing him against the opposite wall and he bounced back to the carpet with his face first. As he crawled into a crouch, something red dribbled onto the floor and before the pain registered in his nose, the smell soon told him it was his blood.

Higgs took a step towards him and Harry struggled to his feet to avoid another mauling, holding his nose and trying to stop the bleeding. He must have risen too fast, because the room was spinning again.

Voldemort’s fingers were drumming against the armrest. "Harry, do not insult me. Dumbledore couldn't have kept its existence from you. Do not lie to Lord Voldemort, for he will know…"

"I don't know what you are talking about", he insisted. He was trying to blink his surroundings back to focus while holding his bleeding nose. Even if he had known, he didn't think he would have had the energy to even try to lie.

Voldemort’s lips curled slightly and his head tilted. "You do not lie… Have I given you too much credit, still? Dumbledore's lapdog isn't trusted even by his master..."

Harry's fight to stay in a standing position kept him occupied, but he still flinched.

Voldemort regarded him for a moment more, appearing as if he was enjoying the situation before leaning back in his seat. "Fine, then. We won't waste any more time here."

A cold sensation rushed through Harry. Was this it?

Voldemort gave a tiny nod in the direction of the two Death Eaters, and Higgs approached Harry, grabbed him by the shoulder and steered him towards the exit. Harry dared to glance back at Voldemort, who had not risen from the armchair and was stroking Nagini's head, mumbling quietly to her.

As they reached the entrance hall, Harry headed to the direction of the staircase on instinct, but Nott spun him around by his shoulders and almost got him to lose his balance.

"Oh, no, the party's over. You're not going back there", he said.

Lucius was waiting outside by the front door, arms crossed and a displeased look on his face. "Ready to go?"

"Yep", said Nott. "Follow me, Junior."

The men led Harry deeper into the house than he'd been before and to yet another room, which Harry guessed to be the living room. A large, colourful rug covered most of the floorspace, with a sofa and two big armchairs as well as a coffee table placed on it. A few school books were scattered carelessly on it, and it struck Harry that he'd completely forgotten that Draco Malfoy lived in the house, too.

The centerpiece of the space was a large, gilded fireplace. Higgs retrieved a container filled with powder from the mantel piece and it finally occurred to Harry that they were going to use the Floo Network.

"Just to be clear", said Lucius, leaning close to Harry's ear while pushing the end of his wand deeper into his back. "If you try anything, try to escape, try to expose us… I don't care if the Dark Lord wants to be the one to do it, I will kill you. Clear?"
"Clear as day", said Harry, unable to keep the irritation from his voice. Lucius’ lips pulled into a thin line. "Want to tell me what we're doing?"

"Just a little day trip."

Higgs was doing a spell on Nott, muttering silently. As he turned, his appearance was slightly changed as he was sporting a mustache and with his nose longer, hair lighter, he was fairly unrecognizable.

"Your turn", said Nott, even his voice an octave lower.

Higgs was waiting with his wand raised and Harry tried to pull away. "What for?"

"Don't worry, he'll try to save your eyebrows…"

The spell felt odd on his skin, making it prickle and sensitive to touching. In the end, Harry had no idea what kind of alternating they ended up with, as Higgs had to try a few times before everyone was convinced he wouldn't be recognized.

The Death Eaters had one more short conversation that Harry couldn't make out until Higgs went in the fireplace. Nott held the container for him as he took a handful of Floo powder, threw it in the flame and spoke clearly. "Ministry of Magic!"

In a flash of green flame he was gone, leaving Harry flabbergasted. Why were they going to there? The disguising did make more sense now. At the same time, a flame of hope ignited in him, as his odds for escape were much better in a public place, no matter what Lucius threatened.

Lucius was next, and soon Harry was standing in the fireplace, ready to open his palm.

"This fireplace has been set go only to the Ministry", Nott warned him. "Say anything else, and you'll end up stuck."

"Ministry of Magic!"

The way of transportation was just as unpleasant as he remembered it. Harry managed to inhale some of the ashes during the way, and came out of the fireplace coughing.

"For goodness sakes, get out of there", Lucius chided, pulling him out while glancing over his shoulder. Harry swallowed the curses he was about to throw the man's way and rested his hands on his knees, catching his breath.

They'd arrived in a glorious hall, standing near a wall that had several other fireplaces set into it other than the one they'd used, the opposite wall similarly constructed, except with people standing in line in front of each one, waiting to depart. Harry spent a second staring at the blue ceiling that had moving golden symbols, until Nott appeared behind him and ushered him to move.

Higgs was walking in front, his robes matching with some of the workers' clothes appearing from other fireplaces in the Atrium. Lucius and Harry followed him, Nott bringing up the rear. They blended into the crowd, many of the witches and wizards sporting tired looks, not giving them a second glance.

Their group passed a large fountain, a large desk underneath a 'Security' sign that Harry eyed hopefully, but no one stopped them. On and on they walked, through golden gates to a smaller hall, where several lifts stood.
Harry was waiting for one of the lifts with the Death Eaters as a familiar head of red hair caught his eye in one of the departing lifts. He perked up and tried to raise his hand without the others noticing just as Mr Weasley's gaze travelled right over him before the doors closed. Harry was confused as he was sure their eyes had met, but then his shoulders drooped as he remembered that his looks had been altered.

Lucius was looking at the closed lift and quickly ushered them into a free one with a small frown. According to the voice of the lift, the group exited on Level Nine, the Department of Mysteries, catching Harry's interest, as the only thing he knew about the place was that it was top secret, making him wonder how they imagined to get in.

They exited the lift and were met with a deserted hallway where a middle-aged, grim looking wizard in pale gray robes was waiting for them, leaning against the wall. As they approached, he nodded and led them along a corridor without windows or doors, except for one at the end.

Harry was starting to lag behind Lucius and the strange wizard, Nott having to push him forward. "Don't make me carry you", he growled in his ear, making him pick the pace slightly.

They entered the lone door into a circular room with a dark marble floor and candles with a cool blue light, and twelve handleless doors.

"What…" mumbled Harry, confused by the sight.

Their guide didn't even pause, but kept walking at a rapid speed and the door at the far end opened, letting the group through.

The room they'd arrived in was filled dancing, diamond-sparkling light. It was filled with clocks of every size and model, grandfather and carriage, resting on every surface in sight. The chamber was loud with the clocks' ticking at variating rhythms.

Suddenly their guide halted, raised his wand and mumbled incoherently. The end of his wand shone with blue light.

"Someone's coming", he said, stuffing the wand into his robes, his eyes darting around. He turned around to the way they'd come. "You're on your own", he said, slinking away and disappearing without a second look in their direction.

"Coward", gruffed Higgs.

"It must be the Order", said Nott, taking out his wand and glancing around wildly. "We made sure the Department would be empty."

Lucius' wand was out as well. "It was that damn Weasley, shoving his big nose into other people's business. Higgs, stay here and keep them at bay."

Higgs grunted in response and turned around, setting in a spot by the door, armed and ready. Nott looked relieved to see he hadn't been asked to stay and hurried to follow Lucius, who was already leading Harry by the arm and rushing them out of the room. "We're getting that Prophecy even if it kills me", grumbled Lucius as they entered an enormous chamber with a high ceiling, its entirety filled with high shelves, stocked with hundreds of small glass globes that were mostly covered with dust.

Candles were located on either side of each row, making the light in the Hall very dim and leaving most of the space in darkness. He could faintly make out the yellow label underneath each orb.
The chamber was cold enough for the hair on Harry's arm to stand up and he shivered as Lucius counted the shelves, finally leading them all the way to row 97. His forehead was damp with sweat and he kept glancing over his shoulder. He shoved Harry in front of him and pointed at the shelf.

"Grab it. Now."

A small, glass ball rested on the shelf above the label 'S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D, Dark Lord and (?) Harry Potter', the orb filled with smoke that was twirling and moving.

There was a crash coming from somewhere behind them, making them turn.

Nott and Lucius exchanged looks. "I'll go look", Nott said, his head hung low in defeat.

Harry's hand was hovering over the orb, his heart rate through the roof. "Why does it have my name on it?"

"Stop asking stupid questions, take it!"

Harry reached for the ball; it was cool to the touch and was small enough to fit into his fist. Harry took note to the way Lucius' movement were now slow, careful, as he stretched out his open palm. "Good, now give it to me."

Harry pressed it tightly to his chest. "Why should I give it to you?"

Lucius' fists tightened into fists and he bared his row of perfect white teeth as he snarled. "Because I said so! Give it!"

Harry's mind was racing. His instincts were saying to not give it to Lucius, as this was something Voldemort badly wanted.

His mind travelled to his parents briefly and to what would become of them, but he knew they'd want him to flee.

Nott was panting as he came back and almost crashed into Harry. "Someone's here!"

"Watch it! Don't break the Prophecy!"

As Lucius was distracted by Nott, Harry finally made up his mind in the split of a second, ducked down and sprinted towards the darkness at the end of the hall, holding the orb tightly in his fist.

"Potter! Get back here!"

A spell whooshed past his ear, hitting one of the shelves, breaking at least a dozen glass balls. He bowed his head, some of the glass shards hitting his skin, but the crash allowed for him to dive between another row of shelves and keep running.

"NOTT, WHAT DID I JUST SAY?"

"Calm down! Let's go look for him!"

Harry was panting, having to stop frequently to rest, not getting very far from the men at his pace. He figured he wasn't going to outrun them, so he kept moving as long as he could keep upright, picked a spot in the darkest corner he could find and almost collapsed on the floor. He moved into a crouch and tried to listen, but his wheezing was loud in his ears.

His vision swam and he grabbed onto the shelf next to him, trying to use it for balance. The flimsy structure shook and the orbs clinked against each other. The effect seemed to last for a long time as
Harry cringed and listened, trying to hold his breath, but the men were still arguing, their voices carrying easily through the space.

Lucius was shouting, agitated. "Do you understand what the Dark Lord will do if we lose the boy and the Prophecy?"

"Let's not do that then!"

Harry sighed in relief and tried to plan his next move, but his mind was fuzzy. Should he stay put and hope they wouldn't find him or try to get help?

"Harry", came a whisper from somewhere behind him.

Harry turned to face the speaker, almost fainting from relief as he recognized Mr Weasley. He was positioned in a half-crouch near him, also hiding behind the rows of shelves, his wand at the ready. He started to inch carefully to Harry's spot, keeping an eye at the direction the Death Eaters' voices had come and stopped by now.

"Are you okay?" he asked in a whisper as he reached him and laid a hand on his shoulder. Harry nodded quickly. "Help is coming."

"How did you know we were here?"

"I saw Lucius and got suspicious", Mr Weasley said. He nodded at the glass ball. "We also knew he was after that, so I alerted the Order."

Harry's hushed tone grew more intense as he held the orb up. "You knew about this?"

Mr Weasley bowed his head, looking apologetic. "We did. Whatever you do, don't let the Death Eaters get it. Break it if you have to."

"Do you know what it contains?"

"Not specifically, no", he said, staring intently through the rows. The hall was eerily quiet. "I think we should move."

A motion at the corner of Harry's eye caught his attention just in time. "Watch out!"

As Harry pushed Mr Weasley out of the way, the curse almost hitting him, the Prophecy slipped from his hand. Harry stared at the glass ball as it crashed to the floor and smashed into hundreds of small pieces at his feet. Lucius' white face was staring at the scene from a distance, screaming in frustration. The mist was released from its containment and twirled into air and from where the ball had fallen, a somehow familiar looking, ghostly figure rose into the air.

The mouth of the figure opened and spoke, Harry listening to it as if in a daze, no one else near enough to hear what was said. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

END OF CHAPTER EIGHT
My googling led me to believe that a drawing room is a different thing than a living room, am I correct? Also, as I couldn't find if the robe colour of the Unspeakables had been mentioned in the books, I made up my own.

I tried to rush through the ministry descriptions because we've all read them and the chapter was running looong.
Arthur’s patronus appearing with a message had caused somewhat of a frenzy at Grimmauld Place. Hardly anyone of the adults had been present in the middle of the day with the next Order meeting not scheduled until hours later. The only reason Tonks and Mad-Eye were there was because of a social visit, and promise of Molly’s cooking. Dumbledore had been once again unreachable, leaving Remus, Tonks and Moody to hastily leave for the mission by themselves.

They’d been able to get into the Ministry relatively fast and unnoticed, but getting through the giant block of a man guarding the door had proved to be a bigger challenge that it should’ve been between the three of them. Now, the Death Eater was propped up against the wall bound and gagged. Remus half expected him to wake up and tear through the robes with no problem.

Tonks was still panting as she brushed a stray strand of hair off her face. “Nasty little bugger, I thought he’d never go down.”

Moody nodded, brushing dirt off his own robes. “A new recruit, but luckily going straight to Azkaban. Let’s move on.”

“Yes, let’s”, agreed Remus, his heart thudding painfully as he checked his watch; it had taken far too long to get past the lackey. The screaming they’d heard earlier was still ringing in his ears. It had stopped for now, but for some reason the silence made his blood run even colder.

Moody went first, wand drawn and ready at battle position. The room of doors was deserted and Tonks called, “Time Room.”

Tonks wasn’t technically authorized to be in the Department, but the room seemed to think their intentions were good enough as they were led through just as another scream carried its way to them, much quieter than before. They broke into a run to pass the rest of the way and the final door banged open.

Remus’ eyes scanned the grand hall and the endless shelves of glass balls that gleamed in the blue light, but it was the sound of a man screaming nearby that made him sprint in its direction, diving between the rows, followed by Moody and Tonks. The trio didn’t have to look for long until a horrifying sight was upon them, one they had been expecting but still made them come to a pause.

Arthur was bound on the floor, eyes fixed in horror at Lucius and Harry; Harry unmoving on his side, limbs splayed in every direction with Lucius standing over him.

The Death Eater’s face was as white as a sheet, his eyes bulging out of their sockets in his rage as he screamed at the boy at his feet. He looked enraged, but also somehow scared out of his mind. A look at the floor and the shards of broken glass there made Remus connect the dots.
Lucius kicked Harry in his side and received only a feeble whimper in response, the boy’s face scrunching in pain.

Remus and Sirius had had a bit of a yelling match on whether he was going or not, but luckily the latter had relented after making him promise Harry would be returning with them. Remus was now wondering whether he’d be coming back breathing.

Nott noticed them first, not even bothering to fight before fleeing. Tonks’ curse missed him by a fraction and the man disappeared between the rows.

“Get away from him!” yelled Moody with his wand pointed at Lucius’ heart. The ex-Auror could be a frightful sight when he was angry, and he was definitely angry now.

Lucius’ didn’t look surprised to see them, but did eye Moody rather carefully. “I could kill him”, he said as a greeting and raised his own weapon in warning.

“Aren’t you in enough trouble with your boss already?” Growled Moody. Lucius didn’t respond. “Drop the wand and I’ll let you live.”

As Lucius backed away, his wand falling on the floor, Remus crouched next to Harry, but was unable to do anything but stare. The boy’s eyes were scrunched shut, his lips a pale greyish blue. The disguise Arthur had mentioned in his message had almost completely faded and his own facial features had returned, revealing a bloody nose at the top of it all.

“Harry, it’s Remus”, he called carefully, but he remained unresponsive. Remus touched his shoulder as gently as he could muster, but there was still the slightest pull back, his forehead wrinkling.

Harry was mumbling something under his breath. Remus moved closer and was able to make out the words. “Don’t hurt them”, he was mumbling, over and over.

“Who do you mean?” Remus asked, but the mantra didn’t change.

At a loss of what to do, Remus looked over his shoulder where Lucius was now bound, staring daggers at them. Remus’ mood lifted an inch seeing him just as helpless as Harry had been. Remus somehow got the feeling that the sag of his posture was from relief. Arthur was back on his feet and talking with Moody, but he looked shaken.

Tonks came over and bent next to Harry. Her brow was furrowed, her shoulders tense as she clasped and unclasped her hands, but as she noticed Remus watching, she brushed them once on her thighs and forced her mouth into a thin smile. “Right, let me check if anything is broken.”

Remus nodded mutely and let her take charge of the situation, moving over to give her space to work. She ran her wand over his body, scanning it and after a moment, shook her head.

“Let’s turn him over.”

Harry’s skin was hot to the touch and as soon as their fingers made contact with it, he wailed in pain, the sound jabbing straight into Remus’ heart. He turned away to blink away tears as they turned the boy on his back as carefully as they could, but it still made him moan quietly, forehead scrunched.

“He’ll be alright”, tried Tonks, but her voice was shaking. “Just the lingering effects of the curse,
they will pass.”

Moody cleared his throat. A stretcher was hovering in the air by him.

“Maybe we should move him by magic, it shouldn’t hurt him”, he suggested in a gentle tone that felt unnatural coming from his mouth.

Remus raised his wand, but his trembling hand made it impossible to do the task. He stepped away, and Tonks put a hand on his shoulder.

“Let me”, she said and magicked Harry onto the stretcher with a careful and swift movement of her wand. He mumbled something as he was laid down, but it didn’t seem to hurt him.

“I’ll stay and deal with the mess”, said Moody. “You lot get going. Fudge really shouldn’t see Tonks with us.”

“I’ll stay too”, Arthur cut in.

Tonks frowned. “You’ll be in trouble-“

“I don’t care”, he argued vehemently. “I need to make sure Malfoy doesn’t get away with this. Even if I lose my job and the Order another spy in the Ministry. I don’t care.”

Remus took a closer look at Arthur’s glassy eyes that were set on Harry, the taut line of his shoulders and hands tightened into fists. Remus decided not to argue.

Remus forced his voice to be steady and nodded. “Right. Let’s get going.”

o*o*

Voldemort’s scream of rage had shook the whole house, a release of magic spilling through the cracks and nooks of it, leaving James and Lily wondering what could have happened to their son. Obviously a plan had gone wrong, but they only wished they’d known what that plan entailed. They only knew that Harry hadn’t come back.

Lily was hunched on the bed, leaning her elbows on his knees, staring into nothingness. The petrification had worn off soon after the Death Eaters had gone, and since then there had been nothing to do but wait. Lily hadn’t said a word since she had given up on yelling through the door.

James didn’t have the strength to comfort her. They’d been here before, sure of his death and then been proven wrong. Was there hope? The way their son had been dragged away by that giant madman… It had looked like he was headed for his execution.

Time dragged by; it could’ve been minutes or hours, but finally darkness fell outside. James had joined Lily on the bed, where she’d been lying in a fetal position, and settled behind her, wrapping his arms around her torso. She sniffed and planted a wet kiss on his hand.

They’d fallen into a slumber, so at first they didn’t realize someone was standing by the entrance, but the man’s loud and quick breathing finally alerted them to his presence. Both of them scrambled to their feet and Lily’s faint gasp told James that she’d recognized him too.

Peter hadn’t aged well. The twelve years he’d spent as a rat showed, forming his appearance, making his nose more pointed and his front teeth more prominent, skin grubby and the some hair
he had left had lost all colour. All in all, he looked far older than he was supposed to be. He was staring at them, his whole body trembling, small watery eyes wide.

Lily charged towards the man, pointing her finger at him. “YOU!”

Peter’s breathing hitched as he raised his silver hand, revealing his wand and pointed it at Lily. It shook and he placed his other hand on it as well to steady it. “Stay back.”

Lily’s eyes narrowed as her gaze shifted from Peter to the wand and back, but she halted.

James had risen too, and come to stand beside Lily. He was shaking all over, a whirl of emotions leaving him speechless. He didn’t know if he wanted to wrestle the weapon from him and strangle him or demand answers. Was there really anything to ask? Peter had betrayed them, simple as that.

It was only now that Peter turned his attention fully on James and swallowed. A single drop of sweat trickled down the side of his face as he panted. “J-James, is it really you?”

“What do you want?” Growled James, his voice the complete opposite to Peter’s squeaking.

“I - I - “ He swallowed again. “I brought you your tray.”

“Oh? Where’s Nott?”

“He’s not… well”, he started. He opened his mouth a few times, but seemed to be petrified under their hostile stares. “He let Pott- Harry e-escape.”

James seemed to jump awake, some life returning to his eyes as he looked expectantly at him. “He escaped, so he’s alive?”

Peter nodded vigorously, his hunched up shoulders lowering an inch. “Yes, the Order came and rescued him.”

Both Lily and James sighed in relief, releasing some of the tension they’d been holding. Lily nearly fell into James’ arms and they embraced. He exhaled heavily into his wife’s hair and savored in her warmth for a moment.

Peter was observing them with an odd, half-smile, half-frown. “It’s really you, isn’t it?”

James turned back to Peter, remembering he was there, the coldness seeping back in. Lily seemed to do the same as she stiffened, pulling back from him.

“Yeah”, Lily spat as she wiped her eyes with her other hand, the other holding onto James’. She was gripping it hard enough to form bruises, but he didn’t pull it away. “It’s not often murderers get to confront their victims.”

Peter visibly flinched at the word ‘murderer’ and started shuffling his feet, shifting his gaze from Lily’s. “I didn’t do it!”

“Yeah”, Lily spat as she wiped her eyes with her other hand, the other holding onto James’. She was gripping it hard enough to form bruises, but he didn’t pull it away. “It’s not often murderers get to confront their victims.”

Peter visibly flinched at the word ‘murderer’ and started shuffling his feet, shifting his gaze from Lily’s. “I didn’t do it!”

“It’s the same difference!”

“I- I’m sorry -”

That did it for James as he sputtered. “You’re sorry?!?”

James started towards Peter, who stumbled as he retreated several steps, all the way to the end of the room, his back hitting the wall as James towered over him. Peter’s wand was touching James’
chest, the only thing between them.

“You betrayed us, Peter! You murdered your friends and twelve other people and then sent one of your best friends to Azkaban! And you’re sorry? Do you think that’s enough?”

Peter was shaking his head, his lower lip trembling

“We were brothers, Wormtail”, James said, his voice cracking. “We were family.”

He spluttered, snot coming out of his nose and his eyes welling up. He was wringing his hands and crouching, as though to appear smaller. “I know, James, I’m sorry!”

Lily’s nose wrinkled in disgust and James took a few steps away from him. Once upon a time, he had felt the need to watch over him, take him under his wing as after all, he’d been a loyal friend. That need was now replaced by pity, but also revulsion for the creature he’d turned into. Wanted by no one, trying desperately survive even though there was not much to do it for.

“You- you and S-Sirius- You were so much brighter than me, so much braver - I couldn’t resist the Dark Lord when he came to me! I didn’t want to die!”

James turned away, finding himself fighting against tears. He took in one shuddering breath and forced his voice to be steady.

“I can’t-- I can’t even look at you. You’re a pitiful human being. Get out of my sight.”

Peter flinched at the dismissal, but then he wiped his nose and squared his shoulders, as though defiant. “I don’t have to take this! You never appreciated me or took me seriously anyway-- “

“Yeah?” Asked Lily. “Are you liking it better here?”

Peter didn’t reply.

“Just go. Scurry away, Peter”, said James quietly, pinching the bridge of his nose, not looking at Peter. “Do what you do best.”

Peter stopped before exiting, opened his mouth a few times before slamming the door in his stead.

*o*o*

The curtains of the room were drawn, but a small crack between them let in a narrow beam of sunshine that shone in Harry’s eyes. He tried to move his hand in front of his eyes, but the limb felt oddly heavy. He settled for facing his head to the other way which was when he noticed that someone was asleep in the chair next to his bed, but his vision was still blurry.

“H- hhe- “ he tried, but the sound was hoarse and gravelly, merely a croak. He tried clearing to throat, but it hurt far too much.

The rest of his body hurt as well, full of odd aches and pains that his sleepy mind couldn’t quite register. He decided to ignore them for now, as the bed was very comfy and his eyelids began to droop back down. Where was he?

Then Harry remembered why his throat was sore. He tried to get up, but not one muscle seemed to be responding to his commands. His breathing hitched and he knew he didn’t want to lay down anymore, not for a second. Lucius could be anywhere, waiting to torture him more -

He tried to draw in a breath, but his chest was awfully tight, as if he was being compressed from all
directions. With his heart rate quickening rapidly, he started thrashing in the bed, his arm hitting the mattress loudly. The man by his bedside startled awake, browsing the room until his gaze set on Harry. He leaped to his feet and rushed to his side.

“Hey, hey, you’re okay!” he said. When Harry didn’t still, he clutched him by the shoulders, holding him in place. His touch caused pain, but it did also ground him to the present and he was able to make out the person. Sirius. “Harry, you’re safe!”

Harry closed his eyes. Sirius was here. It was okay.

Sirius keeping him still and his gaze locked with his, he tried again and was able to draw in a breath. He gasped for more air and started coughing while Sirius rubbed his back.

“Good, good, my boy. Calm yourself.”

Harry turned his head, scanning the room. He wasn’t sure of where he was, the room not at all familiar. The bed was large with a carved headboard, the tall windows’ drawn curtains were made of velvet, the hems touching the floor. Not the Ministry, then. Posters of bikini-clad girls and muggle motorcycles hung on the walls, but most of the space was covered in Gryffindor colours and banners. Definitely not Malfoy Manor.

Sirius was watching him. “You’re in my room, in case you’re wondering. In my old childhood home.”

Harry nodded and took in one more rasping breath, willing to calm himself down. As his heart rate slowed down and breathing got easier, he was able to take a better look at Sirius.

He clearly hadn’t slept or showered in days, his shaggy black hair more disheveled than ever, large bags under his eyes. Sirius was smiling faintly, but there was sadness in his expression.

“Don’t try to talk”, he said in a calming tone. “Just rest.”

He cleared his throat once and though it hurt immensely, croaked, “What happened?”

Sirius gave him a scolding glance before replying. “You were rescued by Remus, Tonks and Moody. You’re at 12 Grimmauld Place in London. They’re all fine and so is everyone from your rescue trip from Little Whining.”

Harry nodded, sighing in relief. “Why… here?”

“This is now the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. But we’ll talk about that later. “

Harry knew what he had to discuss, urgently, but wasn’t sure how to bring it up. Instead, he tested his muscles and found he could move his arms. Grunting, he attempted to support his upper body with them, but they were too weak and he slumped back onto the mattress. Sirius noticed and moved to help; together they were able to get Harry propped up on pillows and against the headboard, so he was in more of a sitting position.

Sirius gave him another smile, this one almost reaching his eyes. He moved to get up. “I should tell the others you’re awake. Madame Pomfrey has been here to tend to you, they’ll send for her… “

“Have you heard?” asked Harry, suddenly, unable to hold his tongue any longer. “About… my parents?”

Sirius’ expression became shadowed. He drew back, lips pursed and jaw clenching. He was
suddenly somewhere far away, shielding himself from Harry.

“Yes, I’ve heard”, he replied, staring at his hands. “And I am sorry, Harry, if you were convinced by the trickery -”

“It’s not a trick”, argued Harry, speaking quickly as Sirius turned his head. “It’s hard to believe, but they’re really -”

“Harry -”

Harry’s throat burned from the strain, causing for him to cough. He clutched his throat and continued. “Please, if you would just listen to me. They told me stories -”

Sirius was shaking his head, staring at the wall. There was a picture there, of four young men laughing with arms looped around each other’s shoulders, looking like they didn’t have a care in the world.

“Your friends are alive”, said Harry, more gentle. “If we could just get them out -”

“Harry, stop!” yelled Sirius, jumping to his feet and staring at Harry, eyes wide and full of sorrow and regret. “Stop with the daydream, they are dead!”

Harry bowed his head and bit his lip with warmth in his cheeks. He didn’t dare to speak, as Sirius looked frail enough to break. He walked to the door and paused before exiting. His voice was chilly. “I will see you later.”

Sirius stormed off into the hall, leaving Harry more exhausted than he’d been upon waking. He shouldn’t have expected a different reaction with the way he pushed, but there wasn’t any time to waste. He had no idea how to get through to Sirius or anyone as his parents weren’t there to convince them themselves. He was just an orphan holding onto a fantasy.

He sighed and rubbed his scar. Were they even still alive? He wished that the cause of so many of his troubles would help him for once and give him something, an idea what Voldemort was up to, to know if he had taken his anger out on his parents. But no, there was only the usual throbbing that he’d experienced steadily ever since the graveyard.

His mind drifted off back to the Ministry where Nott was threatening to take it out on his parents if he didn’t tell them the Prophecy. Harry’s fist closed around the corner of his blanket as the Death Eater’s cruel smile flashed before his eyes, Lucius hitting him with the curse again as he screamed…

“Welcome back, Mr Potter”, Madame Pomfrey greeted as she entered. She was smiling as she walked to his bedside, but her lips pursed as she noticed he was upset. She made no comment, for which Harry was grateful as he quickly wiped his eyes. ”Let’s get you checked out.”

There was something comforting in her efficiency, the way she didn’t waste any time getting to her usual procedures and soon it was as if he was back at Hogwarts. He wasn’t even lying in his reply when Madame Pomfrey asked if he was feeling any better. That was before she had him drink a potion that was just as vile as Snape’s had been, only with a different aftertaste that made him gag.

“Holding your nose might help”, offered Madame Pomfrey. Harry took the advice and managed to get a gulp of it down. It burned and tickled his throat and soon he was coughing hard enough that he almost missed what the matron was saying.

“...and with rest, you should be perfectly fine. And I do mean rest”, she added sternly. “Nothing
overly exciting or stressful."

“What could I possibly be up to from here?” Harry protested faintly.

“I never know with you”, she said with a huff. “Now, rest.”

END OF CHAPTER NINE
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

A summary of the previous status update:

Sorry for the long hiatus. I hadn't written at all for a while, but I have now regained my previous drive for this story. If this drive continues, you will get a sequel! But let's try to finish this one first.

Special thanks to those who have been asking after the story, it means a lot! And of course, to all readers and those who have commented. Please continue to leave comments, I'd love to have more input from you.

Actual info/ rant: I am also ignoring the Cursed Child. It is quite irrelevant to this story anyway, but I am not using any information from the screenplay, as I do not consider it canon. Feel free to like it, but I really, really don't.

CHAPTER TEN

Another meeting, nothing accomplished, thought Remus irritably as he gathered parchments from the kitchen table at Grimmauld place. The rest of the Order members were still trickling out of the house, conversing in hushed tones in the entrance hall and kitchen. As Remus moved to the living room and collapsed on the sofa, he crumbled the parchments and threw them next to him, not really caring about the curious kids probably lurking close by, ready to peek at the papers. They didn't contain much anyway.

Sirius was the only one who followed him into the living room, leaving Molly to prepare dinner in the kitchen. He didn’t look any happier than him; the shadows under his eyes kept growing and getting darker.

The meeting had been a little smaller than usual. Snape hadn’t been by, Tonks and Arthur were at the ministry, and various other members had been missing as well. Dumbledore had grazed them with his presence, but he apparently had somewhere to be, as he had left the house immediately after the meeting had ended, and Remus fought hard against the growing irritation towards the old wizard. The rest of them had tried their best to convince Harry that the people he’d met at Voldemort’s lair weren’t really his parents, but Dumbledore had, of course, done the opposite. They still had no idea how to get these people out, but Harry was more convinced of their identities than ever.

Remus would have suspected a charm or a curse, but Harry had been checked upon his arrival by several people, including Remus himself. Naturally, they couldn’t check for the Imperius curse, but they knew that Harry could resist it. How could he be so convinced? Then again, Dumbledore believed it as well…

“You’re wondering about it, aren’t you?”

Remus jumped. “What?”
“You’re thinking about it. Wondering whether it’s true”, Sirius said, watching him intently. The dim lighting of the living room illuminated his dark eyes eerily. “Don’t. It’s just gonna make it harder on you when they’re not real.”

“And you haven’t thought about it? At all?” Remus said a little harder than he had intended. Sirius’ mouth tightened into a thin line, but after a pause, he replied tersely, “Of course not.”

Remus snorted and would’ve been in an irritable mood enough to start a row when Mrs. Black’s voice reached them, and a few seconds later Tonks walked in. It was apparently raining outside, as her hair and cloak were soaked. She nodded in greeting before shrugging off her cloak and dropping into an armchair.

Molly popped her head out to see who it was. She greeted the newcomer normally but was unable to hide her disappointment. “Arthur?”

“Still in questioning”, Tonks replied grimly. “I’m sorry, Molly, I don’t know when he’ll be back. Or whether he’ll still have a job.”

Arthur hadn’t officially been fired, but he was on leave and had been in and out of the Ministry for three days now.

“We didn’t think he would”, said Molly, sounding very tired. “And what about Malfoy then?”

Tonks hesitated, her eyes darting towards the men on the sofa. “I don’t know. He was questioned, but he wasn’t detained - “

“What?” cried Sirius. “He’s just walking the streets after several witnesses saw what he did? He should already be in Azkaban!”

“I know”, said Tonks. “I said so to Fudge, but… I don’t know what’s going on anymore. He won’t listen to reason.”

“He won’t even listen to Kingsley?”

“Fudge thinks he’s on Dumbledore’s side. Of course, he is correct, but it means that Kingsley needs to be careful. He’s doing his best though - “she added as she glanced at Sirius, who was rigid on the sofa, eyes staring into nothing.

Remus watched him for a moment and felt all his irritation for him melt away. “I’m sorry, Padfoot. Our criminal system - “

“- is a bloody joke, I know”, Sirius said as he rose to leave the room. “Tell me about it.”

He didn’t get far, as a silver figure emerged through the window of the living room, and landed on the floor, forming into its corporeal form. It was a large, glorious stag. Its mouth opened and spoke with the voice of James Potter. “Lily and I are alive, and we aim to leave this rat hole soon. We’re at Malfoy Manor. Would appreciate help. ”

The stag dissolved, leaving only silence in its wake. For a minute, no one dared to move a muscle or even breathe. Sirius was staring at the spot where the figure had disappeared, an unreadable expression on his face.

“Is it Harry’s?” asked Tonks, who had never heard James’ voice before, but stood just as frozen as the men and Molly.
“Why would it be Harry’s?” said Remus in a tone that was being forced to stay calm. “He’s upstairs.”

At this, Sirius came to life, and without a word, he started to run up the stairs towards his own room where Harry currently was.

“Oh, Merlin”, said Remus to himself.

“Bloody fucking hell”, said Tonks.

Harry woke with a gasp, still on the edge of the nightmare, and he fought himself to full consciousness. As his heartbeat slowed, he came aware of his surroundings again. He was alone with no Voldemort or dead Cedric, no Malfoy… He wiped a hand over his face. These days, his nightmares were becoming more and more animated as there was more than enough material to choose from. Madame Pomfrey had given him Dreamless sleep potion for his first night back, and she would’ve given him more if he’d asked, but he hadn’t. The potion took away the dreams, but it also left him feeling groggy and disoriented.

Annoyed at himself for falling asleep, he started to disentangle himself from the quilt someone had thrown over him. There wasn’t much to do but think or sleep, cooped up here by himself as he was, both bad ideas at the moment. His trunk and other belongings had been brought to the room, but he had found that he didn’t have the attention span to read his school books just yet.

There was just too much time to think, too much uncertainty and questions left unanswered, much like there’d been during the summer. He was stuck on the sidelines again, safe and sound while his parents were still in Voldemort’s clutches. On one hand, they were his one talisman of hope; the dream he’d had all his life, probably the one all orphans had of their parents being miraculously alive, had come true. On the other hand, he didn’t know how long that would remain true.

Lost in his thoughts, he was startled when Ron and Hermione stood at his door, ready to save him from his despair and boredom. Madame Pomfrey had apparently finally given them permission to visit him, and Harry waved them in with a smile.

Ron came in first; he paused at the door, as did everyone, to inspect his surroundings with some bafflement. Hermione followed, raising an amused brow at the bikini-clad girls on the walls. When Ron remained in place a tad too long, Hermione cleared her throat, making Ron jump and scurry further into the room.

Their focus on the decor had allowed Harry to run his fingers through his hair in a vain attempt to tame it. He couldn’t do anything about the bags under his eyes or his battered appearance in general. His friends had certainly seen him in worse circumstances, but he was glad he had at least changed out of his pajamas.

“Hi”, said Hermione, while Ron smiled carefully next to her.

“Hello”, replied Harry.

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. Harry had no idea how much of the recent events they knew of, but apparently enough, as both of them were looking at him with a mixture of worry and fear, much like they had done after the third task. Of course, both times he had been snatched by Voldemort and come back and then been confined to his sick bed as they came to see him. It was crazy to think that had been just two months ago.
Finally, the tension broke as Hermione grabbed an ornamental pillow from an armchair and smacked Harry over the head with it. “Idiot!”

Harry blinked in surprise and coughed a few times at the dust residue that had come off from the pillow. “What was that for?”

Hermione scoffed, tossing the pillow away and taking a seat in the armchair. “For being an idiot! Why did you have to fly off when the Order folk was transporting you? They were there for a reason!”

“Oh, that - “

“Yeah, that, you git”, said Ron gruffly. “You had us thinking you were dead.”

“I am alive, though”, Harry said meekly, making Hermione huff. “But sorry for making you worry.”

Hermione was starting to resemble Mrs. Weasley with her passive-aggressive huffing and puffing, and Harry fought to keep his face properly regretful. It seemed to work because after a moment her face softened, and she was asking after his wellbeing and helping to prop him up to a better position.

“Don’t take this the wrong way…” started Ron slowly as they had finally settled to their seats. “But why are you alive? Why didn’t You-Know-Who kill you?”

“Oh, he was gonna”, Harry said in such a casual way that both Ron and Hermione looked at him weirdly causing for Harry’s cheeks to feel a little warm. He didn’t want to start explaining how so much had happened in the last few weeks, or however long it had been, that Voldemort wanting to kill him felt like old news. “I mean, he meant to, but then Wormtail came in… and he didn’t.”

Dumbledore had been to see him the night before, and Harry had asked him the same question. Dumbledore’s guess was that after the resurrection of his parents, he was afraid to try to kill him without hearing the full prophecy. But he had been working hard not to think about that yet, and he wasn’t ready to tell his friends about it. It would make it far too real. Even Dumbledore had seen that he wasn’t ready to fully discuss the matter, and had postponed the discussion.

“I don’t know why he didn’t”, he finished and shrugged.

Hermione was frowning and observing him in a very uncomfortable way, and Harry rushed to change the subject.

He had made a promise to himself while he’d been alone in the cellar of Malfoy Manor. He did feel silly about it now in the safety of the comfy room, but not silly enough to surpass his embarrassment over his actions.

“Look, guys…” he started. “I’m sorry.”

His friends stared at him blankly, “For what?”

“For acting the way I did. During the Summer.” When they still looked uncomprehending, he added, getting slightly annoyed, “The letters?”

Realization finally dawned on Hermione’s face, but she waved a hand to dismiss the matter. “Don’t mention it. We had forgotten all about them, honestly, with everything else going on.”
“Hey! You’ve got sandwiches!” exclaimed Ron, noticing the untouched tray on the nightstand before Harry could continue. “Mind if I..?”

"Go ahead", Harry replied automatically as Ron grabbed a napkin and compiled a healthy-looking pile of sandwiches on it before returning to his seat. He looked considerably happier as he prepared to dig into the first one.

Hermione was eyeing him. “We ate like an hour ago. “

“Sure, but have you seen the speed I’m growing at? I need sustenance!”

“Hey, guys! I’m trying to be serious here”, called Harry in desperation as it looked as though the bickering would continue.

Ron shifted uncomfortably at this notion, but Hermione straightened her back. ”Oh. Go ahead.”

Harry took a deep breath. ”When I thought I was gonna die... again, I regretted a lot of stuff. Then I didn’t die, but I still had time to think about stuff and... it bothered me that I had such a jerk to you. You’ve been such great friends to me, and I know I'm not the easiest friend. I mean a lot of stuff happens to me -”

“Understatement of the century”, scoffed Ron, but he was smiling.

“Yeah, but you’ve stuck with me through all that. So, thanks.”

Hermione beamed. ”That's what best friends do.”

They fell into a more comfortable silence, Harry accepting a sandwich from Ron as had realised he didn’t remember the last time he’d eaten. At the same time, he felt Hermione’s eyes on him and kept waiting for her to get to talking about the elephant in the room. From under the cover of his downcast lashes, he watched as she bit her lip, debating.

At last, she asked,”Is it… is it true? Were your parents there?”

Harry nodded, and Ron and Hermione exchanged a not-so-sneaky glance, and he knew he had confirmed their fears. He pushed down his irritation, and said sincerely, “I know it’s crazy, believe me, it took some convincing for me as well. “

“They are alive. Or were when I last saw them”, he added softly. It was not easy, trying not to imagine them dead, once more. His only comfort was the fact that Voldemort hadn’t killed them so far, so maybe he had other plans. That was, of course, also a sinister thought.

If someone would actually listen to him! Sirius hadn’t even been to see him since the first time, Remus had listened to his story but he clearly didn’t believe it, and the rest just smiled sadly and kept telling him how glad they were that Harry was alright, dismissing the matter entirely. Dumbledore seemed to believe him, but even he didn’t know what to do about it.

His friends were quiet, watching him. Harry concentrated on looking as sane as possible. He was sure that the topic had come up in their conversations and they were now deciding which arguments to present to him first.

“But how can you know it’s them?” Ron said, starting the reasoning. “You don’t really know them. I mean, you were too young to really-” He was cut off by Hermione’s glare.

Harry gritted his teeth to keep from snapping at him. After all, he had just apologised for similar
behaviour. “I know, thanks”, he simply said.

Hermione went with the classic “But it isn’t possible! There is no Magic that can bring back the dead”, to which Harry had no adequate reply. He told them most of what had happened, from his capture to his first meeting with his parents and some of what they had told him during their time together. They still looked doubtful, but Hermione seemed to be stuck on James’ transformation, unable to find a reasonable explanation for it. “He actually turned into a stag in front of you?” she asked for the fifth time, and he described the scene again.

Eventually, they had gone over Harry’s story several times, and as Harry grew tired of describing the same things over and over, getting nowhere, he finally asked what the two of them had been up to during the summer. Relieved to be on more neutral ground, they proceeded to fill him in with enthusiasm. Though they hadn’t been let into the meetings, they had found out a respectable amount of information - Ron promised to show him the new invention they’d been using later.

Hearing about Fred and George’s attempts to drive their mother insane, as being seventeen they were now permitted to use magic outside the school, was also a great distraction.

Lost in conversation as they were, they were caught off guard when Sirius suddenly burst in the room, the door making a loud bang as it hit the wall. He was panting, his eyes wide, his already messy hair sticking out to every available direction as he rapidly scanned the room, his intense gaze finally focusing on Harry.

“Did you just cast your Patronus?”

“Of course not”, Harry replied right away, raising to a better position on the bed. “You know I don’t even have wand.”

“What’s going on, Sirius?” Hermione asked, but Sirius was already out the room and making a ruckus as he took the stairs down two at a time.

The three of them shared a look, and together Ron and Hermione helped Harry on his feet, and the trio started to make their way downstairs to find out what was going on.

*o*o

The commotion had alerted Fred and George to the hall, and after happily greeting Harry on the landing, they noticed the trio’s struggle at getting Harry downstairs. They helped Harry the rest of the way down with Magic with surprising care. The adults were so enthralled in their conversation that they didn’t even notice as Harry collapsed on the sofa where he closed his eyes briefly, breathing heavily.

His friends came to stand next to him, observing the scene. Remus, Tonks and Sirius were talking rapidly and they were just in time to see Molly rushing out of the room. Ginny had apparently also become aware that something was going on, as she joined the gathering crowd. She greeted Harry silently, as they hadn’t seen each other this summer yet. Harry waved at her tiredly.

“We’ve got go, don’t we?” Sirius was saying to Remus.

Remus raised a brow. “We?”

“Don’t you start, Moony - I’ve been a good boy and stayed behind on every mission besides this”, snarled Sirius, leaning so close to Remus’ face that the latter took a step back. “I am not missing this one.”
Tonks shrugged, “I don’t think we can stop him. Hold on, I’ll be right back. Do not leave without me!”

Tonks pushed past the group of teenagers, and a moment later they could hear her conversing in hushed tones with the Order members that were still lingering in the house. Remus had finally realised that they had spectators. He frowned at Harry’s slumped form, but then asked without preamble. “Were you held at Malfoy Manor?”

Shocked momentarily speechless, it took Harry a second to stammer out, “Y- yeah. How do you know that?”

His friends were trading curious glances, and Ron mouthed, “Malfoy’s house?”

“We received a message”, said Sirius briefly. “Can you say the name right now?”

“Malfoy Manor”, said Harry quickly, half-expecting for the word to get stuck on his tongue, but it slipped out normally. He stayed still, waiting for something sinister to happen, but it didn’t. The whole room seemed to sigh in relief.

“You were unable to say it before?”

Harry nodded. He had been forbidden to even try to disclose the information of Voldemort’s lair, as they didn’t know what kind of precautions had been put on the place, but of course he had tried.

Sirius and Remus were looking at each other. “It could be a trap”, said Remus.

“It probably is. But we have to go check, don’t we?”

His godfather’s hands were shaking, but as he noticed it, he shoved them in his pockets. This was probably the first time he would be leaving the house in a while. His eyes briefly met Harry’s, and Harry thought he saw a flicker of hope in them, but then he turned away and the moment was gone.

Tonks returned with Mad-Eye Moody and Kingsley in tow. Both of them were wearing their travel cloaks, wands drawn, looking ready for action.

“What are we waiting for?” asked Moody while Tonks grabbed her cloak. “Let’s go!”

END OF CHAPTER TEN
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

What happened before the Order received the message?

Chapter Notes

Hi... So, you know, how has everyone been? It's only been like, what, three years since the update? Who's counting?

For old readers, I'm sorry. Also, here's a little recap if you've forgotten what happened previously (who would forget in three years??) and you don't want to re-read:

Harry escaped, but he was tortured by Lucius Malfoy. Lily and James are still trapped at the Manor, but the Order got their message. Now we're going to see what led to sending that message.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A dark figure was walking on the edges of the grounds of Malfoy Manor, his wand drawn and gaze set on the forest surrounding the yard. He was so concentrated on his surroundings that he almost walked into a peacock. He caught himself just before doing so, and raised his fist at it, but the peacock ignored him. The Death Eater turned around and repeated the lap he’d just made around the premises.

“That’s where the border is, I’m sure of it”, said James. He was leaning on the windowsill, hands gripping it so tightly that they were turning white as he followed the path. They had noticed that the Death Eaters patrolled the grounds once an hour, usually alone, but sometimes in pairs.

The man turned his head, and James quickly hid from view. After another lap, the Death Eater seemed to be satisfied and returned inside.

Lily made an affirmative noise from her spot next to him. “Sure, but how do we cross it?”

“No idea”, replied James. “And even before that, we need to worry about crossing that first border first.” They both glanced automatically at the door and the invisible line behind it.

“And we need a Death Eater for that”, sighed Lily. “If we’re correct in our theory, that is.”

“We are”, said James with more conviction than he actually had.

Now that the Death Eater was gone, there was once again nothing to do, and he slumped back onto the bed and ran his hand through his messy hair. The only other excitement they had to look forward to was their food being delivered, if it was. Usually, someone came to deliver it once a day, but sometimes they went days without any food. They supposed it was a way to punish them
for Harry escaping, but it wasn’t like James or Lily cared about the food, as they had no appetite, and they didn’t really need much energy for doing nothing but stare out of the window all day, trying to figure out how to escape. However, with no way to breach the door and with no one visiting their room no less, they had no chance of escape.

The knowledge that Harry was alive and safe with the Order was their only source of comfort and reason to keep going. One thought burned inside James like a talisman: he wanted to see Harry again. He wasn’t going to let his son being dragged away by Death Eaters be his last memory of him. Their little family had had far too little time together, and they would be reunited. It was the only thing that kept him going.

As James sat on the bed, Lily remained by the window, looking at the empty grounds. Her red hair was hanging on either side of her face like drapes, covering her face from view. James wanted to comfort her, but there was nothing to say that they hadn’t said a million times before.

Hours crept by, and darkness began to fall as Death Eaters appeared for their patrolling shifts obediently every hour. Finally, it became too dark for them to see the grounds, so they lay on the bed next to each other having nothing else to do. When Harry had been with them, their incarceration had been bearable, even when he’d been sick. At least they’d had someone to care for, and later they’d passed the time listening to his stories of his life and telling him their own. James smiled involuntarily as he remembered the look on Lily’s face when Harry had told them about his encounters with dementors and a dragon, of all things. Now, Lily was staring at the ceiling, face blank.

They hadn’t meant to fall asleep, but they must have done so, as the next thing James knew was that someone was at the door.

James jumped to his feet as Lily was still blinking blearily at him. James groped at his clothes before he remembered that he had no wand to take out. He settled for standing between Lily and the door. He knew without looking at her that despite the situation, she was rolling her eyes at his antics.

Alecto Carrow was sneering at them with her wand drawn. “You’ve been summoned. Let’s go.”

She stepped inside, leaving the door open for them to go through, and they moved to comply at once. James barely registered his muscles complaining after days of being cooped up in the room. At least something was finally happening.

“Looks like we get the test our theory”, murmured Lily to James’ ear as they willingly followed the woman into the hall. And they seemed to be right. When they crossed the border with a Death Eater, they passed it with no problem and with no lingering feelings for the room. What were the chances that the border outside worked the same way? Quite slim, thought James glumly. Voldemort surely didn’t trust his followers enough for that to be the only precaution.

They followed the familiar path through the halls and past the grim looking portraits that surveyed them, looking almost bored. As they reached the familiar drawing room, they saw that Death Eaters were sitting around the large ornate table as James and Lily were escorted in. They were left standing in the middle of the room as Alecto stepped back, her smugness gone as she hung her head in respect.

The Death Eaters at the table weren’t leering at James and Lily either, but kept their eyes on the table. Same went for Nott, whose chair was placed a little farther from the table, as if he was trying to hide; he was sitting right by the roaring fireplace, and the glow from it accentuated the gauntness of his cheeks and his pale skin.
James could also recognize Avery and Macnair who had both been involved in the war the first time. There was Crabbe, Goyle… and Peter, except he was covering by the wall, looking unaware of whether he should be there or not. His insides twisted at the sight and he turned quickly away.

It was as if the temperature in the room was lower than in the rest of house, and it took James a moment to realise where it was coming from. The culprit, Voldemort, was by the window, looking through a crack in the curtains at the dark yard outside. The snake, Nagini, was right at his master’s feet, hissing at the occupants of the room. Everyone except the snake was quiet, barely breathing as they waited.

Without looking at his guests, Voldemort started moving around the room slowly. He didn’t glide like he usually did; now his movements were erratic and twitchy. He walked along the edges of the room, and every time he came close to the Death Eaters, they shuddered and recoiled away. He paid them no attention, seeming to be lost in thought.

Once he had walked around the room twice, he spoke in his cold, high voice. “Lord Voldemort is forgiving as well as hospitable…”

Lucius Malfoy, at the table with his fellow Death Eaters, twitched. His normally shining silver hair was dirty and tangled, hanging like drapes around his face, hiding it from view.

“- and you have been very well taken care of. In exchange, I would advise you to tell the truth.”

James and Lily remained quiet, keeping their heads low.

Voldemort looked around the room and saw his Death Eaters, apparently realising that they weren’t alone. He gave a dismissive wave with his skeletal hand. “We will continue later.”

The Death Eaters scrambled from their seats as one and proceeded to leave the room in a haste, Peter along them, but Voldemort’s call stopped him short.

“Wormtail, stay.”

Anger flared up inside James at the use of the nickname. Peter froze and then returned to the spot where he’d been standing before, his legs shaky, the colour of his face matching the grey wall behind him.

Voldemort was watching them during this, and James fought to maintain his anger and not to do what Voldemort wanted him to do. He wouldn’t let Peter’s presence make him lose his head.

“There is no need to waste much of our time here”, Voldemort said softly. He had drawn his wand and was running his long, slim fingers along its length. The tender movement was making James feel sick. “There was a prophecy that concerned your son and myself.”

James’ heart had already been beating in his ears, but at this, it nearly leapt out of his chest, and Lily couldn’t quite hide her gasp.

“I know you know of its existence, as you knew that you had to hide from me”, Voldemort continued, his tone even silkier than before.

There was no point trying to deny that fact, so James and Lily remained silent.

“I need to hear what it said.”

He was looking at Lily, and James said immediately, “We don’t know. Dumbledore never told us.”
Voldemort was still stroking his wand as he regarded them with a sneer. “It concerned your son. You claim that Dumbledore didn’t tell you the contents?”

“He didn’t”, Lily confirmed. “We swear.”

Voldemort’s scoff was shrill and made shivers run down James’ spine. “You trust the old buffoon so much that you didn’t question him?”

“His word was enough.”

Voldemort’s high laugh was terrifying and devoid of humour. “Do not insult Lord Voldemort with your lies.”

Sensing danger, James swallowed the actual retort that he wanted to say, but said instead, “We’re not lying.”

Voldemort moved so fast that their eyes couldn’t follow the movement. Suddenly his wand was so close to James’ face that it was hard to focus his gaze on him. Voldemort’s face was contorted with rage, his red pupils dilated, but the wand didn’t even quiver. The sight of his distorted features up close was enough to make James’ stomach churn, but he didn’t react. He wasn’t going to give Voldemort the satisfaction of seeing him cower in fear.

“Yes, you are!” spat Voldemort. He turned to threaten Lily instead.

“We’ve already said we’re not”, replied James, glancing at Lily. “Do you have wax in your ears?”

Lily’s sharp intake of breath made him look at her briefly. She hadn’t cowered before Voldemort, but had instead remained standing defiantly with her shoulders back, but now she was staring at James in horror.

A small wicked smile was playing at Voldemort’s lip as he looked at them. The sight was somehow more terrifying than when he was angry. “What I’ve noticed, Potter”, said Voldemort slowly, addressing James. “That you seem very keen on drawing my attention away from your Mudblood wife. How very gallant.”

Before Lily nor James could say anything, Voldemort had raised his wand. “Crucio!”

James expected pain, but it was Lily who was on the floor, screaming, and those screams tore right through James’ heart like a thousand knives. She was thrashing in every direction, and James dropped to his knees next to her, trying to hold her in place so she didn’t hit her head against the wall, while screaming, hollering at Voldemort to stop, begging him. Voldemort was holding his wand lazily, watching Lily writhing in agony. He didn’t respond.

“STOP!”

Voldemort lifted the curse. “My patience is waning, Potter. What did the Prophecy say?”

“We don’t know what it said!” James yelled, and Voldemort raised his wand, ready to hit Lily again. She had closed her eyes and her breathing was laboured. James threw himself over Lily to block any possible curses and hastened to continue, breathless after yelling. “Dumbledore only told us that it concerned Harry and you, and that we had to go into hiding. That’s it!”

“STOP LYING!” Voldemort screeched, and Peter moved nervously by the doorway. James hadn’t even realized he was still in the room, nor did he particularly care.
“I’m telling the truth!”

Voldemort’s mouth drew into a thin line, and his wand hovered in the air, still aimed at Lily, who was in a heap on the floor.

“Look into my mind! I swear to you, I’m not lying”, he pleaded, his gaze jumping between Voldemort and his wife.

Voldemort’s eyes narrowed and then bore into his. James could feel the onslaught on his mind begin, and he had to concentrate on not using Occlumency, which went against all his instincts. He closed his eyes, and images began to flash through his mind as Voldemort went through his memories. Images from his childhood flashed through fast, but Voldemort slowed down as they began to be more recent, many of them including Lily. One of them was his first date with Lily in Hogsmeade. Dinner, walk, and then they were about to kiss...

No, you don’t get to watch. He used just a bit of Occlumency, and he felt no resistance from Voldemort. Unsurprisingly, Voldemort couldn’t care less about their first kiss. More images flashed by, and finally, there was an image of him and Lily and Dumbledore in Dumbledore’s office, talking. The flashing of the images stopped, as Voldemort paused to listen in on the conversation.

“I have attained reliable information... “
“You need to go into hiding, your lives are in danger.”
“There’s a prophecy... He will be after your son...”

And there it was, proof that they were telling the truth. Dumbledore hadn’t told them anything besides the fact that a prophecy existed, as it wasn't safe, but he had told them that the prophecy was about Harry, but that wasn't completely certain. The important fact had been that they had to hide for all their safety.

James had barely a moment to feel relief flush through him, before the room around him cleared and Voldemort’s red eyes came back into view. He was standing so close that James recoiled back. He was panting from the invasion into his mind, but he still didn’t break eye contact. Everything was still.

And then Voldemort’s control broke.

His already deformed face seemed to contort even more as he screamed in fury. It wasn’t like Lily’s screams of pain before, but animalistic and pure rage. The rage was bursting out in magic; the energy of it crackled in the room. Just before flashes of red and green and purple began to light up the room, James lunged for Lily, covering her with his body. The force of the curses had knocked over the table to its side, so James wrapped his arms around Lily and rolled them both behind it just in time, as the light beams missed them by a quarter of an inch, hitting the table instead with a CRACK!

Not trusting the table to hold the curses off indefinitely, James lay on top of Lily, while curses were still flying everywhere around them, crashing into objects and ornaments on the shelves, shattering them into pieces. Every time a curse slammed into the table protecting them, there was a loud bang, and splinters of wood flew into the air. The racket of it was enough for Lily’s eyes to flutter open, and finally James felt her begin to twitch in his arms.

“James?” she asked, frowning slightly. “What...?”

“Shh. You chose the best time to wake up, I’ll tell you that”, he whispered as quietly as he could,
quickly swiping away the red hair that had fallen in front of her face. “It’ll be alright.”

James left Lily on the floor to wake up properly, while he rose into a crouching position and peered from behind the table. Maybe, if Voldemort was preoccupied with his fit of rage… The light beams had stopped momentarily, and James wondered if they had time to run for it. Just as he was about to pick up Lily and run, the table disappeared from in front of them and crashed into the opposite wall with a resounding bang, leaving the Potters exposed to Voldemort’s gaze.

Voldemort was shaking and breathing heavily, his whole body vibrating in anger, the air still heavy with his magic. James could swear he could hear the air crackling with it.

“I suppose you’re no use to me anymore”, Voldemort said finally, leaning closer so that they could see into his burning, red eyes. James didn’t want to die like this, crouching on the floor, but it was as if he was frozen on the spot.

“My Death Eaters haven’t had a Mudblood to play with in such a long time”, Voldemort spat at Lily. “You can watch”, he added, looking at James.

Lily lost the rest of the colour in her face, while James growled low in his throat. They were holding each other tightly, James’ hand turning numb from the tightness of Lily’s grip. Voldemort’s expression couldn’t be described as a smile, but he was clearly pleased. He straightened up slowly, the bones and joints in his body cracking, as if savouring the stretch. He remained looking down on them, a sickeningly satisfied look on him. He raised his wand.

“Do you really dare to kill us?” asked Lily, her voice shaking slightly, but otherwise she showed no sign of fear. “You still don’t know how we came back.”

Voldemort paused, his slit like nostrils flaring. His wand was likewise paused in the air, not yet pointed at them. Lily held his gaze.

For a moment, James was confused at what had happened. Sure, Voldemort had been extremely interested to know how they had come back and had refrained from killing them until now, but surely he had no reason to keep them alive now? It was clear they had no more information to give; they didn’t even know the contents of the prophecy.

And then realization dawned on him.

While working for the Order, Dumbledore had told them of the dark wizard’s obsession with conquering death; he had told them that Voldemort had gone far beyond the edges of Light Magic and had delved into the deepest pits of the darkest Dark Magic, which had led to the distortion of his features. Dumbledore hadn’t elaborated on what that actually meant and what Voldemort had actually done, but...

But Voldemort wouldn’t dare to kill them, not when he had living proof of someone coming back from the dead. He wouldn’t, even if these resurrected individuals were people that he truly loathed.

Barely breathing, James silently thanked his wife’s quick wit and waited.

Suddenly, Voldemort called, “Wormtail!”

He wasn’t quite yelling, but his shrill voice still rang throughout the silent room and made the Potters jump.

For a moment, there was no response, but then, a familiar squeak came from the doorway. “Yes, my Lord?”
“Take our guests-”, he said without looking at his servant, spitting out the last word as if spitting out poison from his mouth. “-away.”

James turned to see Peter cowering at the door. He kept his beady eyes firmly on the ground as he beckoned for them to come. Neither James nor Lily hesitated to obey, as it was quite clear whose company they preferred in this instance. They weren’t quite out of the room as Voldemort spoke once more. “To the cellar. The sick brat is not with them now.”

“Yes, my Lord”, Peter murmured in response, and they changed course towards the dungeons.

James was too relieved to still be alive and too shocked by recent events to be too perturbed by Peter’s presence as he grabbed Lily’s hand, but Peter clearly wasn’t eager to spend any more time than necessary in completing his task. Their eyes met briefly as Peter instructed them to walk in front of him, but he immediately looked away, swallowing. James and Lily didn’t feel like talking either. They merely did as they were told, James supporting Lily on the stairs, as her legs were still shaky. If they dawdled, Peter jabbed his wand into their backs without a word. James gritted his teeth without reacting otherwise.

As soon as James and Lily were inside the cellar, Peter slammed the door in their steady shut immediately. From behind the door, they could hear his deep intake of breath before he returned upstairs. Without another thought to Peter, James turned to look at Lily, whose hand he was still holding. Without a word, they fell into a tight embrace. Lily drew in a shuddering breath and James felt her body relax a little as she let out some of the tension she’d been holding.

“We’re alive”, James whispered into her ear, his face buried into her hair. “Thanks to you.”

Lily didn’t reply, only held him tighter to her. When they parted, Lily immediately sank to the floor, her body most likely still feeling the aftereffects of the Crucuiatus. She straightened her limbs with a grimace and let her eyes close. James sat down next to her, close enough that their shoulders were touching. He knew her well enough to know that she needed a moment to gather herself, but he wanted to let her know that he was there.

James closed his eyes as well and listened to Lily’s breathing, calmed by the steadiness of it. He was startled when Lily spoke, her voice shaking with anger.

“What the hell were you playing at?”

James frowned. “What do you mean?”

Lily threw her arms in the air in frustration. “Back there! You were trying to antagonize Voldemort on purpose.”

“Well, yes, obviously, but -”

Lily grabbed his wrist and yanked him closer. He flinched as her nails dug into his skin. “James, we’ve talked about this!” James could hardly make out her face in the dim light, but it was easy to tell how upset she was. “You don’t do that! We’re in this together. We need to -”

“I know!” James replied as soon as he could get a word in. “I know, alright! I just… I panic when you’re in danger. I want to protect you!”

“Don’t you think I feel the same way?” Lily asked urgently. “Or do you think I don’t care about you as much as you do me?”

“Of course I -”
“Well, then, stop being stupid!” ended Lily heatedly.

James smiled faintly. “I’m afraid I can’t promise that…”

Lily snorted, and James hurried to continue before she had time to continue lecturing him. “But yes, I hear you. I will try to act more… sensible, I guess.”

Lily muttered something rude under her breath about the probability of that.

“And people think you’re such a delicate flower”, commented James wryly.

Lily’s faint smile was directed at the floor, but as she pressed her shoulder against his, James knew that he’d been forgiven.

They fell into silence, and James couldn’t help but think how their situation was even bleaker than before with their relocation. Here, all they could catch of the conversations upstairs were snippets and murmurs, and only if people were speaking in the entrance hall or yelling somewhere else in the house. There was also no way to spy on what was going on outside with the guarding of the grounds.

“I know we’ve been trying to gather information, to slowly plan our escape…” James started, and Lily looked up. “But we aren’t any closer to getting out of here.”

“And now we’re here”, finished Lily, whose thoughts had clearly centered on the same subject. “With even less chance of getting out.”

James nodded.

“The next Death Eater that comes through that door, we’re going for it, yeah?” asked Lily, her voice shaking.

James grabbed her hand and squeezed it. Her fingers were ice cold, and James took them between his own hands to try to warm them. A small smile played on Lily’s lips at the gesture.

“Yeah”, he replied with the confidence he didn’t have. “We’re getting out of here.”

Lily squeezed his hand back and leaned in to kiss him. Their lips touched softly, and as they parted, James pressed his forehead against Lily’s. James didn’t want to think of it as a goodbye kiss, but he couldn’t help himself. No matter what came of their escape plan, this was it.

They remained close, huddling together on the mattress as they set out to wait. And they waited. And waited, until it was coming apparent that no one was coming. Perhaps Voldemort had decided not to deal with them altogether, but let them die again, naturally this time.

END OF CHAPTER ELEVEN

Chapter End Notes

I had to cut it here, the chapter was going to be ridiculously long. But we will catch up to real time in the next chapter, I promise. It's also almost completely written, so you don't have to wait another three years. I swear on my wand!!
(I've actually got one, you know)

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