Encounters
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Encounters
by ryulabird

Summary

Harry Potter and L Lawliet have almost met three times and meeting once may be the best thing that ever happened to them. eventual slash. L/HP

Notes

So... this work is technically abandoned. But I'm going to post it here, and upload all the bits and pieces that didn't get published. It a lot, I'm gonna say that now, so it's a shame I couldn't finish this. Ah well, life goes on and all that.
Chapter 1

Prologue

Their first encounter wasn’t what one would consider a true encounter. It was really only when one of them learned the other’s name, but it was still an important event. It was what led a seven year old Lawliet to become the detective L.

Lawliet (who refused to acknowledge anyone using his first name) had been living in an orphanage since he was three but had only begun to enjoy this fact after he had been taken to Wammy’s House. Mr. Wammy allowed Lawliet a great many freedoms he had not know at his previous home. Lawliet got to eat cookies and cake and ice cream for snacks (which began to outnumber his regular meals after a few weeks), he could stay inside and read when the other children wanted to play outside, he could go outside and explore under the bushes when the other children wanted to play board games inside (anything that was the opposite of what the other children wanted to do was generally a good idea to Lawliet), and best of all, he could use the computer when Mr. Wammy wasn’t using it.

Lawliet had quickly mastered many of the everyday functions of the computer (faster even than Mr. Wammy could teach him) and had moved on to navigating the Internet. When Lawliet first found some news articles with rather grisly pictures of murder victims, he had paused.

These are what dead people look like, he thought. He was most curious because he knew that his own parents were dead (he did live in an orphanage after all) but his memories of the two people he assumed were they didn’t match up with the pictures at all.

Death must be different for different people then, Lawliet supposed, though he couldn’t imagine how. Dead was dead after all. He decided to ask Mr. Wammy about it when he returned with their customary afternoon tea (and cake, of course).

Unfortunately, Mr. Wammy’s reaction to what Lawliet thought was a perfectly reasonable question was greatly exaggerated (and not at all conducive to answering said question).

“Oh my dear child,” Quillish said sadly. “My dear boy. I don’t- I’m so sorry my boy, but I’m afraid I don’t quite know how to explain this to you.”

“You could start with why there are different types of dead people in the first place,” said Lawliet reasonably as he licked a bit of butter cream off his fork.

“I- My boy, I don’t think that-“

“I remember what my parents looked like and they looked nothing like the people in these photos,” said Lawliet as he forked another piece of cake into his mouth. “The article said these people were murdered, so what does that mean? What about that made these people look like this?” Several crumbs fell past his lips and rolled down his shirt to catch on his pants where they had bunched from the scrunched up position he was crouching in on the couch. Lawliet caught a larger crumb between his forefinger and thumb and quickly brought it back to his mouth (no piece of cake would escape him).

Quillish stared at Lawliet a moment in shock before he sighed rather sadly again and turned to face
the boy fully. “Lawliet, do you truly remember your parents before you were sent to the orphanage?”

“Oh yes. They were quite still, but they were sitting at the table and weren’t so very messy,” Lawliet looked at Mr. Wammy with wide eyes as if asking him why that was important at all (he knew about his parents, it was the people from the articles he was curious about).

“Well…” Quillish thought hard. He could do what he would do with any other child who asked him about such a dark topic and explain, gently and in very simple terms, about bad people doing bad things to good people and how sorry everyone was afterward… and then Lawliet would go look up more information in the library or the computer and likely be insulted that Quillish had talked down to him (that had happened once and only once and Quillish did his best not to underestimate Lawliet’s understanding again). “Those people were murdered, they were killed, by another person. Someone attacked them, with a gun it looks like, and that is why their deaths look so… messy.”

Lawliet thought about this as he sucked more butter cream off his fork. “This person with the gun then- why is he not in the picture?”

“Well he likely wasn’t around when the bodies were found,” Quillish was growing uncomfortable with the sudden turn the conversation was taking.

“Why not?” Lawliet seemed to be asking more out of reflex than anything else. Scraping the last of his cake off the plate with his fork (he had been warned about licking the plate) was much more important. Quillish really should have known better than to assume this meant Lawliet wasn’t paying attention.

“Because most killers don’t like to be found,” was his reply.

“Then how do you know they are there?”

That, Quillish thought, is an easy answer at least. “Well, the police usually track them down.”

“All of them?”

“Pardon?” Now Quillish was really confused.

“The killers. Do the police find them all?”

That was maybe not so easy… “Well, they do try, but- ah, no. Not all of them.”

Lawliet looked up from his plate as he stuck the last forkful of cake and cream in his mouth.

“I see…”

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After that afternoon conversation, Lawliet would not be kept away from the computer. He could be found in front of it at almost any hour of the day (making it difficult for Mr. Wammy to do work on it) or night (Mr. Wammy often had to carry him still protesting back to bed as the other caretakers simply could not argue with the boy). Lawliet had become obsessed with “checking up on” cases mentioned in the news. At first Quillish was certain that Lawliet was only checking old articles and dailies for mentions of “found” criminals. It was only several months later that he discovered Lawliet had learned hacking somewhere (Quillish would soon begin a new rule about checking books out of the public libraries just for Lawliet) and was actually reading police reports as they were filed.

Lawliet meanwhile had hit upon something that puzzled him. He had gone through many of the
reports for Hampshire County for the past ten years and he had found something from around eight years ago that seemed… odd.

A family of four had been found dead in their home with no marks upon them and no signs of forced entry and nothing apparently missing. Witness reports described an “eerie cloud” that had floated over the house before the bodies were discovered. The cause of death was listed as an ‘accidental death due to inhalation of toxic fumes’. But the coroner’s report could not find any traces of those fumes, or, really, of anything at all.

Lawliet frowned. He was certain he had read something similar somewhere else. He looked quickly through his files catalogue. There- listed under the reports for Durham County (practically on the opposite side of the country)- a similar report. A husband and wife with a visiting friend- all dead, no forced entry, no marks, nothing taken, and… “a mysterious cloud”. Lawliet bit his thumb. This was too odd, but… It could still be a coincidence.

He began to scour police reports from all over the British Isles. In Devon, Suffolk, Yorkshire, Sussex, Cornwall, Aberdeen, Perth, Inverness, London…. All dead, no marks, a strange cloud over the home, and cause of death listed as ‘accident’. Unless there was something very wrong with gas pipes in British homes, something was going on. Lawliet looked at the various dates on the files. Or rather, he thought, something had been going on…

The date of the last reported incident, from Somerset County, was October 31 1980… so five years ago then. But this last report was inconsistent with all the others. The strange cloud was the same and there were no marks on the bodies, but everything else was different. The door had obviously been forced open and was broken. In fact, quite a lot in the house was broken- including the house. The roof on the second floor was caved in and the windows were shattered. Most unusual however, was the presence of a survivor, an infant boy who, according to the report was alive and crying when the authorities arrived. The police began investigating the grounds around the house and questioning neighbors while waiting for a representative from Child Services to come fetch the boy when… the report ends. Cause of death… ‘Accident: natural gas explosion’. No further mention of the boy. Child Services never arrived and the police ceased all investigation.

Lawliet frowned and bit his thumb harder. This was not right. Mr. Wammy had told him that the police found killers. That they tried. This did not show that. He was… angry. This was not right. There was a pattern. There was a killer! Why did they not see that? Granted, none of the other cases he had looked through were this odd but surely it would be obvious to anyone looking. But then again, some of the cases he had looked over had been quite simple but were still unsolved. Lawliet had thought perhaps the police were waiting for something but maybe that was not the case…

Lawliet chewed his thumb as he looked at the open case file. He stared at the names listed. He especially stared at the name of the infant boy that had vanished. Why had the police stopped the investigation? Did they stop the other investigations too? Is that why no one noticed a pattern? Or… did they stop investigating because there was a pattern? Lawliet stretched his legs out of his crouch on Mr. Wammy’s chair and crawled to the floor. I need to speak to Mr. Wammy, he thought. Mr. Wammy would help Lawliet do what he needed to. Police were supposed to find killers. If they could not find them on their own… If they did not want to find them… Well. If they could not do their jobs, then someone else would.

Lawliet paused as he turned to the door. He looked back to the computer screen. He would have to look for more than just killers. He needed to find this Harry Potter and make sure he was alright because he knew that the boy wasn’t supposed to have lived.
In their first real encounter, only Harry noticed the other boy. Harry himself, like always, went unnoticed. He was eight years old.

Harry hadn’t wanted to go with Aunt Petunia to the grocers, but “Duddikins” wouldn’t go and Aunt Petunia didn’t want to carry all the bags by herself. He sighed to himself as they parked and walked up the block. He hated grocery shopping. It took forever as Aunt Petunia compared prices, eyes narrowed as if suspicious the numbers would change, he never got to pick any of the cookies (well, he never got to eat the cookies either, but he liked the colored packages) and his Aunt would glare and snap at him not to touch anything if he so much as breathed on a display. Then, when they had finally cleared the checkout, he had to put all the bags in the backseat and “Don’t you dare let anything fall out! If those eggs break! If the milk spills!” would be ringing in his ears the whole time as his Aunt supervised.

Harry wasn’t actually sure why he was made to do such a chore when it was so obvious his Aunt didn’t trust him to do it. But then, he supposed he ought to be doing something. He never got to sit around and wait for things to be done like Dudley did.

As Harry and his Aunt approached the store, Harry noticed a boy and a man exiting the ice cream parlor across the street. Harry watched them eagerly because he liked seeing what kinds of ice cream people came out with and imagining what they tasted like. He never did this with Dudley when he got ice cream- it always made him too upset.

The man appeared to be licking a small cone of vanilla. Harry always thought vanilla would taste soft and fluffy. Sort of like scrambled eggs but with sugar. The boy’s ice cream was much more interesting. It was a large waffle bowl covered in chocolate with bright pink ice cream with red specks, colored sprinkles, cherries, and chocolate syrup. Harry’s mouth watered a bit. He loved imagining what chocolate tasted like because he was sure it tasted just like it smelled and it smelled simply wonderful. He almost ran into a post as he thought about how good the boy’s ice cream must taste. Harry shook his head and looked to make sure he was still following his Aunt. She hadn’t even noticed him drifting. Good.

Harry looked back across the street. The man and the boy were walking along the same way! He grinned and looked at the ice cream again, wondering what the red flecks were and trying to guess what they would taste like. Sweet probably. Harry glanced at the boy and stared. This… wasn’t right he thought. This can’t be right.

Harry looked down at himself and fingered his over large Dudley-cast-off white tee. He looked at the boy across the street with the ice cream in a rather baggy white tee. Harry looked back at himself and his over large Dudley-cast-off jeans with the rolled up cuffs and hole in the knee. He looked at the boy across the street in rather baggy jeans that were catching under his shoes and ripped at the hem. Harry looked back over at the boy- the boy- and noticed worn out tennis shoes with no laces at all that didn’t seem to be on his feet all the way.

Harry looked again to make sure the boy was actually eating the ice cream and not just carrying it. Huh, he thought. I guess... It’s not my clothes that make me a freak after all.

In their second real encounter, Lawliet (who had become quite taken with Wammy referring to him as ‘L’ in private) noticed the other boy (it was impossible not to) and made sure not to catch his
Lawliet wasn’t quite sure how Wammy had managed to get him to agree to this. Or perhaps he
didn’t actually agreed but had been made to go along anyway. Wammy was devious that way.
Lawliet stayed slouched against the wall and wondered what exactly was taking Wammy so long
considering this whole trip had been his idea in the first place. Lawliet sighed and brought his thumb
up to chew on. He was nervous being in such a large, and above all, loud crowd and it was starting
to get to him. He wanted out of it already.

Lawliet and Wammy had spent the last three days or so in London together, a ‘holiday’ of sorts.
Wammy insisted. Really Lawliet knew it was an excuse to get him back to Wammy’s house for a
short visit. A visit for the backup ‘L’s’… Not something he particularly approved of, but Wammy
insisted. Of course he did.

Lawliet sighed again and wondered where Wammy was already. They were supposed to catch the
11:20 train to Heathrow so he could catch his flight to New York. He was more than eager to be off,
if only to get away from the noisy crowd that seemed only to be getting nosier.

Lawliet looked up and saw a crowd of red heads that seemed to be trying to be heard over the din of
at least a hundred other people. Lawliet wondered if people would stare at him if he crouched down
and covered his ears… Probably.

He looked around again for Wammy. How long does it take to buy a newspaper and a chocolate
bar? Lawliet glanced around and noticed… where did all the red heads go? He looked about. They
hadn’t gone further down the platform and they weren’t further down the row either. Where did
they- but there is one left. One red headed boy from the group with one dark headed boy. Lawliet
stared at them. They must be students off to school with their trunks, but where did their group go?
And what are they—Lawliet bit his thumb and blinked. The two boys had just deliberately crashed
into the brick wall arch between platforms nine and ten.

Lawliet scooted a little ways down his wall and crouched on the other side of a trashcan, balancing
on his feet. He chewed on his thumb and watched the two boys pick themselves up and collect their
trunks and an…owl? He winced a little at the bird’s shrieks. He supposed anyone would be unhappy
in the owl’s position and the boys had done it on purpose, but he wished the animal weren’t so loud.
The boys apologized to an angry station guard and arranged their trolleys properly. The owl was still
shrieking indignantly and the boys were looking confusedly at the wall as if it were at fault for the
crash and not they. The dark haired boy leaned his trolley against the wall while the red headed boy
moaned something at the clock. Lawliet looked about to see if the boys’ group were returning for
them. No one.

Lawliet looked back at the two boys from behind the trashcan. The red head boy was saying
something to the dark haired boy who laughed a little darkly before answering. He wished he could
hear what they were saying. Perhaps he should learn to read lips… That always worked in spy
movies.

Suddenly the dark haired boy looked around and seemed to notice all the people watching them (or
at least watching the still screeching owl). He seemed to bring this up to the red head who
immediately brightened and started gesturing wildly and speaking quickly. Lawliet noticed the dark
haired boy seemed nervous from all the attention (Then why did you crash into a wall? He
wondered. What did you think would happen?) but seemed to become more eager the more the red
head talked. Soon the pair turned their trolleys around and headed for the station’s exit.
Lawliet rose from his crouch to follow them.

“Derrick! There you are- I’ve been looking all over for you my boy.”

Lawliet turned and saw Wammy (finally) approaching him with a newspaper in hand. As he drew nearer, Quillish handed Lawliet a chocolate bar, which disappeared into his pocket.

“What took you so long James?”

Quillish smiled fondly at Lawliet. “Ah, well. The line was rather longer than I thought it was. Then of course, I wasn’t expecting you to be hiding behind a trashcan and went looking for you. I thought you’d boarded the train already.”

“I wouldn’t get on the train without you,” Lawliet sulked. “You have my ticket.”

“Well, you might have left early otherwise,” Quillish grinned. “Shall we go then?”

Lawliet looked off towards where the two boys had left. “Yes. Let’s go.”

Their third encounter and first real meeting would not occur for nearly eight years when Harry is 20 and Lawliet is 22.
Harry sighed as he put down yet another letter from Hermione. Another one! In the same week no less! He was really getting quite tired of it. Just because he hadn’t answered the last one… Course, he hadn’t answered any of the previous letters either.

Harry supposed he couldn’t really blame Hermione for worrying, but he honestly wasn’t sure what to say to her and just wished she’d give him some more time to think- not that he hadn’t been thinking about everything. Really, all he did was think lately. It wasn’t as though he had anything else to do, because Harry had quit his auror job at the Ministry only months after finishing the training program. He’d also broken up with Ginny. And now, everyone he knew were sending him concerned “What’s up with you?” letters- and Hermione was right there at the forefront, with the Weasleys close behind her.

Harry avoided their letters most of all and cringed with guilt every time a new one came. He wasn’t sure what to say to Hermione and the Weasleys, mostly because he was sure it wouldn’t do to tell them what he’d been thinking about himself.

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Harry had been just fine after the Battle of Hogwarts. He knew he would be after he finally got some rest. After all, everything was over with wasn’t it? There was nothing more to worry about, nothing more to run from, nothing more to plan. He could finally relax and get on with his life.

At first, Harry had thought it would be fine to just accept Kingsley’s request to join the Auror Corps, but Hermione had put a stop to that. “We never finished school Harry! What about our N.E.W.T’s?” The fact that she had made sure to convince Ron to return to Hogwarts first cemented the decision in Harry’s mind. How could he not follow his two best friends back to school? For that matter, why wouldn’t he go back for one last year at Hogwarts? It would probably be his least stressful year ever, even with the N.E.W.T’s.

Besides, nearly everyone in their year was going back. Not many had gotten anything even resembling a real education with the Carrows in charge of the school. Not many had even been able to go… So, it wasn’t as if he’d stand out.

Harry found during that extra year, that being at Hogwarts was the best decision he could have made. For one thing, Headmistress McGonagall kept all the reporters, well-wishers, opportunists, stalkers and general fans off the grounds and away from Harry. Being surrounded by his friends and classmates also helped buffer the even greater celebrity status he had gained as the ‘Vanquisher of Voldemort’. Well…at least no one was afraid to say the name anymore- some even said it with a malicious sort of glee.

Harry spent his last year studying like crazy, hanging out with his friends, and hiding from those few who managed to sneak onto the grounds to meet him. His classmates were more than willing to help in that endeavor. As was his now official girlfriend Ginny. It didn’t occur to Harry until much later that this might not have been the best plan. He wondered if maybe he had spent more time hiding with Ginny instead of asking her to cover for him then he might not have wanted to break up. Or
maybe he would have wanted to break up sooner…

Still, that last year had been a blessing. Safe at school with so many people he cared for, even with studying, was infinitely better than what awaited him when he went to work in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

Harry enjoyed the training program with Ron, of course, but… He couldn’t walk down a single hallway without a crowd forming and someone always started a line for handshakes. Two of his teachers in the program, the dueling specialist and the interrogation specialist, had rather obvious and embarrassing cases of hero-worship. His other teachers, however, seemed intent on proving that either Harry had limits or that they could beat him. The dark magic and curse specialist was almost constantly disappointed that Harry came out top of the class most sessions and never missed detecting a dark spell. The law specialist though was always very smug to be able to explain something Harry had forgotten on his tests. Harry wasn’t sure how to feel about the combat specialist who always picked Harry for demonstrations, but who always made sure Harry got the lessons down right without being too unbearable about it.

Harry kept himself busy mostly, and he told himself that everything would be easier once he started working a regular job. Then everyone would see that he was just a normal wizard like everyone else and all the embarrassing stares and handshakes and congratulations and questions would fade away. He was quite sure.

It wasn’t until the end of the training program when Harry and Ron went to the Burrow for a celebration dinner that Harry realized something might be wrong.

As always, Harry was happy to be visiting at the Burrow again. He really did love the Weasleys and being surrounded by them and eating a delicious dinner cooked by Molly (and Fleur, the two were really getting on much better now and had even come to an agreement on searing meat) was his idea of a splendid evening. However, as they were sitting down to eat, Harry realized that he was seated next to Ginny and she was squeezing his hand and smiling at him. He was still dating her! How on earth had he forgotten that, he wondered.

Well, he must have been too busy with the training program- he was worked much harder than the other students. But now that that was over, he could relax and he and Ginny could start having a real relationship like Ron and Hermione did.

Ginny leaned over and kissed Harry’s cheek. “Congratulations Harry!” She smiled at him again. They could do all the things couples were supposed to do. George plopped down across from Harry and grinned at him. “So you an’ Ron are aurors now huh? Gonna go catch some dark wizards now that you’re all trained up then?” Harry laughed along with him and Ginny. Yes, Harry thought. He could definitely get used to more nights at the Weasley house, seeing even George being more cheerful. He and Ginny could visit every week and stay for dinner, tell Molly that of course he and Ron were being careful, joke with Arthur about seeing him on Monday…

But wait, he and Ginny were going to be dating seriously. She wouldn’t want all their dates to be at her parents’ house. Harry thought about that a minute. Why was it that thoughts of dating Ginny made him envision the whole Weasley clan? Harry thought about it until dinner started and he thought about it after. He even found himself thinking of seeing Molly, George, and even Percy next week when he kissed Ginny good night at her flat!

Something was wrong with him. He should be thinking of Ginny when he kissed her, not her family! Harry thought and worried about this the whole weekend and when Monday came around and it was time to meet up with Ron for their first official day as aurors, he was still trying to puzzle things out.
By the end of the day, Harry was a distracted mess leaning over paperwork all the new aurors got stuck with, misspelling “Ethelbart” on a complaint notice and writing the wrong date on a confiscation report.

“Are you all right there Harry?” Ron asked him as they went home for the day.

“What?” said Harry.

“Only you’ve seemed… a bit off. It’s only the first day mate!” Ron thumped Harry on the back.

“Right! Right… well I suppose I’m just… excited… is all.”

Ron grinned at him. “I know mate. We’re finally here! We’re real aurors now!”

Harry only smiled glumly. “Yah… Real aurors…” Harry had a lot to think about.

O o o O

Harry did think about Ginny and the Weasleys and that led to thinking about himself and his life. The life he’d dreamed of having- being an auror, marrying Ginny, having kids and just… being normal. Aside from the Weasleys, he tried to remember why that life had been so appealing to him.

He wasn’t really enjoying being an auror so far. Too many people idolized him and it was driving him to accept extra paperwork so he could have an excuse to escape to his desk. He hated paperwork. He didn’t think fieldwork would be all that great either. He listened to the others tell stories about their finished cases and he thought that he, Ron and Hermione had done far more dangerous and exciting things at school and had spent most of that time confused, angry and scared.

He was also sure that having kids wasn’t something he wanted right now either. He thought that Teddy, his godson, was quite likely the cutest little toddler in all of Britain, but he was grateful every day that Andromeda had custody of him. He didn’t mind helping out now and then- babysitting and what not- but having to care for a child all the time along with work would really have been too much for Harry. He was just glad the nappy stage had passed with only minimal effort on his part. Dealing with his own children… well, he was sure somehow that Ginny would end up with most of the work and that struck him as somewhat unfair. He had always envisioned both father and mother taking care of him in his fantasies as a child, so the idea that his own children would make due with their mother caring for them while they saw their father only when he wasn’t working… It bothered him. Though he still didn’t think he’d be able to join in fully with child-rearing despite that.

As for marrying Ginny… He hated admitting it to himself, but he really couldn’t help but see her as “Ron’s sister.” She had always been there on the outskirts of his life and then she had just stepped into it and somehow she had a different role than she used to. Harry himself wasn’t sure how that had happened, but she had gone from ‘little sister’ to ‘really pretty girl’ and it had seemed perfectly natural to just go along with her at the time. Now that he looked back however, he felt as if he’d missed something but couldn’t figure out what it was.

So he started thinking himself in circles, trying to reason out why he wanted to date Ginny and whether her family was really the main factor in that decision. The fact was that the past four years of their relationship had been full of distractions- because dark lords and N.E.W.T.s were definitely distracting- and had kept them from spending any significant amount of time together. Then when they did spend time together, they mostly hung out with Ron and Hermione. Surely that didn’t count, did it?

Come to think of it, Harry realized, Ron and Hermione were much better at meeting up for snogging
sessions during school and during auror training. So why hadn’t he done so with Ginny? Especially during auror training- Harry had had far more free time than he was used to. But somehow even then he ended up visiting with Ron and Hermione or Andromeda and Teddy or Neville and Luna. The only time he really went to see Ginny- and this was perhaps the most obvious clue in Harry’s mind- was when he visited the Burrow. The only reason he even knew where Ginny lived was because he’d ‘escorted’ her there from a dinner at the Burrow.

Harry had been stunned when he reached a conclusion. He had only gone out with Ginny because of her family… Harry felt awful. Had he really been using her like that? Sure, he liked her okay, but he liked the Weasley’s as a whole much better. That didn’t seem like a good enough reason to date and maybe marry a girl who was in love with him. She deserved better than that…

As Harry slipped into a confused sort of depression over how he had treated Ginny and- oh no, what was he going to tell Ron and the rest of the Weasleys?- he found himself again looking at his decision to become an auror. He wondered if he’d really wanted to be one or if he’d just been following Ron. Was he really that dependent he wondered. But no, he did enjoy the spellwork and the dueling. He liked the chase, but all the paperwork and how dull the everyday duties were… Harry had a hysterical thought that he had grown too used to dealing with dark lords and death eaters to be satisfied with muggle-baiters and dark item smugglers.

Then he had a thought- hadn’t he wanted in forth year, before the auror thing came up, to have a quiet life with no danger. He knew he’d been looking forward to the Triwizard Tournament specifically because he would not be part of it. He would get to spend the year worrying about tests while three other unlucky students got to run for their lives for everyone’s entertainment. Then somehow, after being forced into the competition anyway, Harry had become resigned to danger and he and Ron had decided that being aurors would be the best job ever. …How had he decided that?!

Harry had suddenly realized that he didn’t want to be an auror. He blinked. He didn’t want to be an auror and he didn’t want to date Ginny.

Now what would he do?

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Now here he was, hiding from his friends because he couldn’t explain all of… what was going on. He had broken up with Ginny the same day he realized he wanted to- by letter. He had quit his job the very next day- by letter. Then it had occurred to him that everyone would come asking him what was going on and he couldn’t deal with that so… He moved. Secretly.

Honestly, Harry wasn’t sure what he was thinking when he did that. He just knew that he couldn’t possibly explain to everyone that he didn’t want to be what he’d always thought he’d wanted because he wasn’t sure if he ever had wanted it… if that made any sense. But he rather thought that his snap decision to move out of number twelve Grimmauld Place was both cowardly and, well, confusing. He almost thought that maybe part of him wanted his friends to find him easily and force him to explain- after all, he’d only moved into number nine Grimmauld Place, or Argyle Square as the muggles called it.

But even so, Harry was finding his ‘hiding place’ to be much better than he initially gave it credit for. The first few days, he expected Ron and Hermione to join up with the Weasleys to ask if they knew why he quit the aurors. He figured then Ginny would probably come asking him what was going on and he couldn’t deal with that so… He moved. Secretly.
one ever figured out where Harry had gone.

Harry was flummoxed. Didn’t they have tracking spells? They were definitely sending him letters, so couldn’t they just follow the owls? Was he seriously hiding from them less than twenty meters from his original home? Successfully? Harry wondered vaguely if they really wanted to find him at all. But no, their letters were quite worried. If they knew where he was they’d have come to yell at him already.

Harry put down Hermione’s latest letter and wandered off to the kitchen to make a sandwich. Really, what was he doing? He was hiding from his friends and the people he considered family and worrying them all like mad. He wondered how much longer he was going to keep this up. He wondered what exactly he was going to do now that he didn’t have a job.

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L scratched one foot with the other as he lay on his back looking at the ceiling. No interesting cases. Not that Wammy would let him take one right now. He was too worried about him. L wasn’t sure why when the only problem he could see was his ever-growing boredom.

L stretched his neck up without moving the rest of his body and looked at his computer. He tapped his toe on the mouse to reload his mailbox. Still nothing. He let his head fall back. Maybe Wammy was screening his mail… Except he’d hacked the Watari mailbox too and there wasn’t much of interest there either. L turned his head to the side and looked out the floor-to-ceiling windows.

It had been nearly five months since the LABB case was closed and it didn’t bother him. At all. Wammy may think that L was growing “despondent” and “listless” but L himself was just bored. And he didn’t care about BB. Really, the only reason he had bothered getting involved with the case after seeing the file was out of responsibility to Wammy (it was clear there would only ever be four victims, and three had already died so normally it wouldn’t have even been worth the trouble). But if BB were interrogated he might mention Wammy’s House and L couldn’t allow that to happen. Now that it was over and BB had shown no inclination to bring the home into his problems, L was just… bored.

Normally at this time he’d have slipped into one of his hundreds of other aliases and started working on the ‘lesser’ crimes that weren’t complex enough for ‘L’ or weren’t high-profile enough for ‘Deneuve’ or ‘Eraldo Coil’. But somehow he lacked interest in doing so and no, it wasn’t because he was “despondent”, of all things…. He was merely bored.

L rolled over and got up to fetch a cupcake from the table in the outer room Wammy had left for him. He grabbed a double chocolate cupcake with red icing and peeled a corner of the wrapper off before shoving half of it in his mouth. As crumbs rolled down his chin and bounced down his shirt to the floor he thought about why he hadn’t taken on any small cases lately.

He had at first- during that first month after BB was taken care of, he worked on several dozen cases simultaneously. He finished them quickly and took on more until Wammy had admitted that he was getting exhausted flying all over the place with him so he could work on some more isolated cases in person. Then, after he lessened the workload to compensate for Wammy, he found himself lessening it more and more as he had more time to realize… he wasn’t interested in any of the cases he was working. He solved the last case he had taken on and then just didn’t accept any more after that.

Now it was four months since his last case, he was bored, Wammy thought he was – he wasn’t going to use that stupid word again- thought there was something off with him, he had no desire to take on any case that wasn’t mind-bogglingly difficult, and… he was bored. L shoved the rest of the
cupcake into his mouth, hardly even tasting it, and grabbed another to take back to his room.

Maybe he should do as Wammy suggested and take a vacation (From what? He wasn’t exactly working…) and relax a bit. Wammy meant for L to return to Wammy House for a short while, meet the new ‘replacements’, but L wasn’t going to make that mistake again. He was sure it was his direct involvement that had unbalanced both A and B and… Not that he cared or anything. Not that what they did was in any way his fault either.

L stood in front of his favorite window and stared blindly as he shoved the cupcake in his mouth. He chewed a bit, thinking. No, it wasn’t his fault- he hadn’t made any mistakes… But he had to admit to himself that he felt like he had somehow…

He pulled the torn and mushy wrapper out of his mouth and dropped it on the floor as he turned to go to his computer. Wammy hated it when L left trash about, but this was more important- he had to do this before he changed his mind.

L started a connection from his computer with Wammy’s personal cell phone.

“L?”

“Watari, schedule a flight for me to Heathrow. I’m going to take a vacation.”

“…Of course. Will I be picking you up?”

L thought about this. He thought of how hesitant Wammy sounded and of all the subtle hints that had been dropped about L ‘needing time off’ and how the new ‘candidates’ were ‘better cared for’ and wondered which message was more important. Wammy meant for him to take care of both issues at once but… He always had been selfish.

“Yes, but book a hotel in London please. I’ll…” L paused. “I’ll speak to the house, but not in person.”

“… Very well, that’s more than enough I think. I will send you the ticket information soon.”

L ended the connection there. He always had been bad at social graces. Besides, now that he’d decided to do this he found he was feeling more energetic. He wasn’t sure exactly what he would do back in England, but Wammy would be there and would think of something. L licked his lips. It would likely involve cake.

dpdmpdpdpdp

Harry glanced up from the letter in his hand and looked out the second story front window of number nine Argyle Square and tried to think of what he should be doing just now.

There had been a lot of changes for Harry in the past few months. He had finally gone to visit Hermione and Ron in November- he couldn't quite manage going to the Weasley's directly- and he had explained, as best he could, everything he'd been thinking about over the previous months.

Hermione had cried a bit and said that of course Harry could talk to them about what he was feeling. Harry rather thought Hermione wished that he and Ron had been 'sharing their feelings' far sooner. Ron was pissed at him. Well, Harry had expected that after how he'd treated Ginny. But he hadn't expected Ron to get over it so quickly. "You are my best mate and you're practically family anyway- Mum's been wanting to adopt you for ages y'know- so I can't blame you for thinking of Ginny as a sister 'n all.” Harry winced a bit and agreed quickly, just glad that Ron didn't hate him. He hoped the other Weasleys were this understanding.
He’d gone to see other friends and dropped in on Andromeda and Teddy- who’d thrown a stuffed bear at him for not visiting- and then he’d eventually mustered the courage to meet up with the Weasleys. Harry had hoped to visit them individually, as then they wouldn’t have the advantage of numbers against him, but they had already worked out that the first to see Harry would immediately summon the others. That meeting had been… interesting and Harry had been surprised yet again.

The Weasleys had been mad at him, not for dumping Ginny as he expected (though she was still mad about it, especially the letter, and hexed him for it), but for dropping all contact with them. They’d been worried and considered him enough a part of the family that not seeing him for so long was a family crisis. Apparently Weasleys he hadn’t even met had been notified to keep an eye out for him- “Check if he’s feeling peckish!” had been one of the orders to the clan. Molly had all but collapsed on Harry and broke down in tears when Harry had explained why he thought he’d been dating Ginny and why he broke up with her. George had whacked him on the back of the head and smirked at him and Arthur had gripped his shoulder and solemnly told Harry that he would always be family. Ginny had removed her hex and said Harry was enough of a prat to fit in with her brothers perfectly well. She even smiled at him, a bit sadly yes, but still a smile.

Harry had been relieved that explaining himself had gone so smoothly… at least, the bit about Ginny and the Weasleys had. Everyone he knew was still confused about why he quit the aurors and kept telling him that it didn’t make sense- what else would Harry be but an auror?

Ron and Arthur told him they’d spoken to the auror head on his behalf and he could go back in at any time no matter how many times Harry said he wouldn’t. Even Percy had pulled Harry aside and told him, in true pompous-Percy style, that the paperwork for Harry’s resignation could be back-filed indefinitely and that Percy himself would see to it personally that Harry cleared all the reinstatement paperwork in record time. “Best to do these things properly!” was Percy’s reply anytime Ron insisted that Harry didn’t need to go through the bloody paperwork because he hadn’t really left.

Harry made sure to avoid conversations like this and to dodge around anyone who looked determined to bring it up- primarily Hermione, who was certain that Harry had just been panicked about Ginny and had over-reacted. “But Harry, you have always wanted to be an auror! You worked hard to get the proper O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s for an auror position! What else are you going to do?”

That was a good question Harry admitted. If he had any idea, any idea at all, what he would do, then no one would be bothering him about the auror job. But he really had no idea what he would do- being an auror was the only job he had ever thought about and that really seemed to fit him. He was, however, absolutely certain now that he didn’t want to be an auror. The only problem was figuring out what he did want and making sure to convince everyone else that it was a good idea.

Harry blinked and looked back at the letter that he’d been holding for the past hour or so and realized that he’d been clutching it in a fist. He released the letter and put it on the desk in front of him. He really needed to find something soon, before these rumors spread beyond his circle of friends.

Apparently breaking up with Ginny, quitting his job and vanishing for several months were signs of depression and even though everyone accepted his reasoning for breaking up, he still hadn’t returned to work and he still had a tendency to not be around much anymore. So the general conclusion seemed to be that Harry was still depressed. The fact that Harry hadn’t known he ever was depressed and that he thought he was much happier out of the auror department, didn’t seem to make a difference. He’d also taken to hiding in number nine Argyle Square (which he hadn’t yet told anyone about- honestly, they could find it themselves if they tried) any time someone wanted to come over and “talk” (which Harry knew was code for “ask why Harry hasn’t returned to the aurors”) but he
didn’t think explaining that habit would help any.

Really. Depressed? Him? After squaring everything away with the Weasleys and Ginny, Harry had found that he was actually happy. He was rather bored with nothing to do, but generally happy. How on earth had they decided he was depressed?

Harry decided he really needed to get out for a bit and got up to head downstairs. Perhaps he would walk around, maybe take the tube over to Regent’s Park. He could wander around and even go to the zoo if he felt like it. He had been planning to drop by Ron and Hermione’s flat to join them for dinner since it was the holidays, but he didn’t really feel like sitting there at the table while they thought he was depressed of all things. They’d probably ask him if was going to go back to the ministry next week and when he said no, they’d share a look about him. So…no. A walk it was.

- - -

By evening, Harry was starting to feel rather how his friends thought he did. He’d wandered up and down Regent’s Park for an hour, then he’d decided he would like to see the zoo- he’d lived in London for nearly two years now and he hadn’t been to the London Zoo. Harry was disappointed to find that lemon pops and other ice creams were out of season snacks (it was early January) and settled for some roasted nuts as he wandered past the gorilla exhibit and then meandered about the zoo looking at the giraffes and llamas and pygmy hippos, most in indoor habitats. He’d enjoyed himself for a while before he started thinking again and found himself wondering what he could do to fix everything.

He needed a job, he knew that, but what job could he do? He could probably get any job he wanted in the magical world without worrying about qualifications, but he balked terribly at the thought of using his fame for such a thing. He knew more about jobs in the muggle world, but he wasn’t sure his Hogwarts education transferred at all.

Harry sighed. Yep, auror really was the only thing he could do it seemed. So now, Harry was wandering out of the zoo at closing time and taking the long way back to Regent’s Park Underground station, feeling depressed. Bloody perfect.

Harry walked as slowly as he could to delay reaching the tube station and when Outer Circle met up with Baker Street and then went past, Harry turned on to Baker Street to make his walk even longer. He supposed he could take the Baker Street station… but he didn’t feel like it. He’d just walk down Baker and turn onto Marylebone Road and take that to Regent’s Park station… or maybe he’d go a ways further and then cut back. It wasn’t that cold a night- he hadn’t even bothered to bring a coat, feeling warm enough in his latest knit sweater from Molly.

When Harry got to Marylebone, he almost crossed to keep going, but something made him turn onto it anyway. He really should get home, he thought. It was rather late and wandering around London at night wasn’t going to solve any of his problems. Harry only had to walk a few blocks before he found himself wishing that he had continued on Baker Street, or taken the Baker tube station, or never left the bloody house, because then what happened wouldn’t have.

Harry had forgotten somehow that Madame Tussauds was on Marylebone and that he was going past one of the largest tourist traps in all London. So as Harry wandered past the leaving crowds of tourists (Tussauds and everywhere else was closing for the night), he of course had to run into one of the pickpockets that made their living off the distracted tourists. Not stealing from him though- Harry had spells on his wallet to prevent such a thing- but from an elderly gentleman ahead of Harry who looked well off enough that he surely presented an irresistible target.

Harry sighed and took off after the pickpocket calling “Thief!” just as the man and his companion
realized what had happened. Harry, despite having been a little farther back than the two men, had quickly caught up to the pickpocket who had been walking only slightly faster than everyone else to avoid drawing attention. At Harry’s quick approach, the man ran for it, dodging through the crowd and racing for York Bridge. Harry figured the man planned to make it to the park, hide amongst the trees for a bit, then pop out on a walk and act like just any man out for a stroll. He ran faster to catch up and almost grabbed the man’s shirt as he was turning the corner onto York Gate.

Harry pelted after the man and watched, surprised as the thief cut across Outer Circle while cars honked and blared at him. Harry gritted his teeth and followed him into the park. The thief had just crossed the bridge when he did exactly as Harry had thought he would and turned off the road into the trees. Harry ran up to where the thief had vanished and clambered quickly over the wrought iron fence before dashing into the trees.

Harry was in luck- the thief hadn’t expected anyone to follow him this far or this quickly and had slowed down before reaching the tree line to walk normally out onto the path ahead. Harry tackled him to the ground before he could look around.

“Ha!” shouted Harry. “Got you now- you really shouldn’t have run so much. Just made more trouble for yourself!”

Harry grinned and started pulling the man to his feet, exhilarated after the chase. He just managed to dodge as the thief swung around aiming to punch Harry off him. Harry grinned wider. He might not be an auror anymore and he might not want to be one but he had been through the whole training program. The combat specialist may have only been picking on Harry at the time, but being forced to participate in every demonstration the man gave meant that Harry was prepared to fight in any circumstances. The pickpocket hardly knew what hit him.

Harry was yet again pulling the man to his feet (this time with both arms held behind his back) when someone coughed behind him. He turned and saw two men- the older gentleman who had been robbed and his younger companion- standing between two bushes watching him. Harry blushed and looked down at his feet. Here he was telling everyone that he didn’t want to be an auror and now he gets caught acting like one.

“Er… Well, um…Could you check his pockets? I think he er… has your wallet.”

L stared at the boy. Everything he’d thought about the strange boy appeared to be wrong.

When the pickpocket had first bumped into Wammy, L had of course noticed the man’s hand slip into Wammy’s pocket.

We should have driven L thought. No one gets pickpocket in a car. But before L could tell Wammy what had happened and they could decide whether to retrieve Wammy’s dummy wallet (which Wammy always carried when with L and held only the current false I.D. and cash) a loud cry of “Thief!” sounded from behind them. L and Wammy turned just in time to see a young man (only a teenager surely at that height) race past them.

“I wonder what happened?” Wammy murmured bemusedly.

“Your wallet,” L said quietly. “It was stolen and the boy’s going after it.”

Wammy stared at L in shock. “Then we should hurry after them!”
“No.”

“No? Why on earth not?” Wammy asked L incredulously.

“There is a high probability that the thief and the boy chasing him are partners.”

“Partner thieves?”

L thought a moment. “Perhaps… It is also likely that they know who we are and are trying to draw us into a trap.”

Wammy stared at L again. “My boy, you know I always have the utmost faith in your reasoning, but isn’t that a tad paranoid?”

“No. Most pickpockets operate as unobtrusively as possible to avoid detection. But this draws too much attention and suggests another purpose.”

“But then why must they be partners?”

“The likelihood of an uninvolved bystander intervening in a theft to assist the victim is rather low—look around the street. Everyone else ignored the chase and have already begun to forget it.”

“Well,” said Wammy. “Then I don’t see how this is a good trap. We haven’t fallen for it. But if someone did know who we were, wouldn’t they come after us directly? I can’t see this as being terribly effective.”

“Yes…” L said. He stared after the thief and the boy. They had just reached the corner of Marylebone and York Gate. “Thomas, lets take a cab.”

“A cab? But I’ve just lost my wallet!”

“We can pay at the hotel.”

Wammy turned to the side of the road and commandeered one of the cabs lining up outside of Tussauds waiting for tired tourists. He had a feeling that they weren’t actually going to the hotel but had learned to wait and see what L would do before arguing with him.

As Wammy thought, L directed the cab driver to turn left onto York Gate—towards Regent’s Park and away from their hotel. Even vacations were far from boring with L.

L crouched on the cab seat and leaned forward to peer out the windshield. There— he could see the boy climbing awkwardly over the fence on the side of the road and disappearing into the trees of the park. “Pull over!”

L jumped out and leaped over the fence the moment the cab slowed down. He heard Wammy yelling for him and then the cab driver shouting something. He rushed through the trees quickly and slowed when he saw the blue sweater of the boy through the twigs. He was stepping quietly forward when Wammy grabbed his arm and startled him.

“Shouldn’t you be with the cab?” L glared blankly back at Wammy.

“The cab can wait or drive off for all I care! I am not about to allow you to walk into something that might be a trap alone.”

L sulked a bit and was just about to argue that he could get himself out of a trap far more easily than he could get two people out when he and Wammy heard a thud and turned to look. The boy in the
sweater had tackled the thief to the ground and was wrestling with him. “Ha!” the boy shouted. “Got you now- you really shouldn’t have run so much. Just made more trouble for yourself!”

L and Wammy watched the boy yank the thief back onto his feet and grin. Yes, they must be partners- the boy didn’t seem to feel threatened at all. L’s eyes widened when the thief- who couldn’t possibly be acting that look of loathing- swung his fist around to punch the boy. Wammy gasped in surprise and the boy… dodged.

L stared as the boy moved into a fighting stance he didn’t recognize, grabbed the thief’s arm, spun them both around and let the thief stumble forward from momentum. When the thief came at the boy again, the boy blocked the attack as if it were nothing, swept the thief’s arm down and lunged forward to give his own punch at the man’s face more power. The thief fell backwards an impressive distance and the boy went towards him to again bring him to his feet.

Wammy coughed delicately and attracted the boy’s attention who then… blushed and looked at the ground. L was confused.

He had been certain that the boy and the pickpocket were in cahoots somehow but seeing the fight and the boy’s reaction to being watched… made him think that was wrong. The odds of anyone chasing a pickpocket that had robbed a complete stranger were extremely low, but the boy obviously had done so. Why?

L bit his thumb and stared at the boy who still hadn’t looked up from the ground as he mumbled that someone should check the thief’s pockets. L felt Wammy glance at him before stepping forward to do so and finding his wallet along with many others in the man’s inner coat pocket.

“That was quite a heroic deed young man,” Wammy told the boy as he pocketed his own wallet and held onto the others.

“Um.. Yah… Er…” The boy murmured again as he glanced about nervously. The thief took the opportunity to jerk away from him and stumbled off towards the path before running as fast as he could. No one moved to follow him.

“Eh… Well.. I should, um, I’ll just go… home… now. Er… Glad you got your wallet back. Bye.” The boy mumbled and ‘er-ed’ his speech and moved toward the park path in the direction of the street.

L tilted his head slightly and bit his thumb harder. This was too odd… The boy really seemed to have no connection with the pickpocket. His behavior was so open and suggested embarrassment rather than any guile and L didn’t think that any of what he’d seen so far was an act. So, the boy actually had just jumped to the rescue as it were? L started chewing on his thumb, attracting Wammy’s notice.

“Wait a moment lad!” Wammy called out. When the boy had stopped and turned to look at him he smiled. “You did a good deed and I would be remiss if I didn’t repay you in some way.”

“Oh, no! I don’t need anything… Really, I should just get home, it’s rather late anyway..”

“Nonsense! I really must do something,” Quillish was watching L out of the corner of his eye. He was still chewing his thumb and staring at the boy with the most intense wide-eyed look Wammy had seen in a while. “Perhaps if I could offer you a ride home?”

“Ah! No, I don’t want to be a bother- I was just going to ride the tube-“ The boy seemed more
flustered now and was gesturing wildly. L meanwhile had apparently stopped blinking. Quillish wondered if it was L or the offer of the ride that had gotten the boy so worked up. Probably the idea of a ride with L Quillish thought amusedly.

“I insist!” declared Quillish and felt a bit of triumph as the boy startled slightly at his strong words and stilled staring at him and L. Quillish wondered what the boy was thinking of two so mismatched characters standing in the woods offering him a ride.

“Ah… Alright… I guess. Um… if it’s not too much trouble that is…”

“Of course not!” Quillish smiled, pleased that he’d gotten the boy to agree despite his obvious misgivings. “Now then, the cab should right back through here.”

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L crouched in his usual position on the cab seat, staring at the boy. They’d gotten back to the road to find the cab gone but had easily found another and were on their way to “Number nine Argyle Square.” L hadn’t taken his eyes off the boy the entire time.

He was still trying to figure out what the boy had done. Or rather why he had done it. L could accept that such Samaritan acts occurred frequently in movies and books, but in the real world they were so rare as to be practically non-existent. It bothered him that he had misread the entire situation so badly, but really! People just didn’t behave the way this boy had. L wanted dearly to find some proof that he had been right all along, and the whole event had been some elaborate scheme, but the more he observed the boy (thank you Wammy for figuring out how to give him more time to do so) the more he thought the boy actually was what he appeared to be.

How annoying. L bit his thumb a little too hard and had to take it out of his mouth. He watched the boy a bit more before turning to look out the window. He heard the boy breath a sigh of relief and almost turned back around to stare some more, but that would be too childish. Besides, L was already upset from being wrong. If he turned to look at the boy and he didn’t react (the boy hadn’t mentioned the staring and had seemed to decide that the best course of action was to ignore L completely), then L would only become more upset for not getting a rise out of the boy.

When the cab finally pulled up to number nine Argyle Square, L had worked himself into a horrid sulk and was taping the glass of the window in an annoying manner. The boy had gotten out and thanked Wammy profusely who had gotten out with him to escort him to the door. On the curb Wammy turned from smiling at the boy and stooped over to look at L still crouched on the seat in the cab.

“Aren’t you going to come say goodbye my boy?” Wammy asked.

Ha, L thought. Wammy was probably laughing inside at how paranoid L had turned out to be. Some vacation this was. He most certainly would not be extending this rather embarrassing encounter any further than he had to. “No.”

Quillish sighed and turned back to the young boy who was standing on the step of number nine rather uncertainly. Quillish smiled at him. The lad had turned out to be a rather brave and kind sort of person and had put up with L’s staring and darkening mood better than most would. The least Quillish felt he could do was make sure this chance encounter ended on a good note.

“Thank you again for your assistance young man. My companion may not say so, but he appreciates it as well.”
“Ah, no. It really wasn’t anything and I didn’t mean to take you out of your way…”

“Of course, of course,” Quillish smiled. “Now, you’d best get inside so your parents don’t worry- it’s become quite chilly.”

That statement seemed to bring the boy up short and he jerked alarmingly. Wammy frowned and reached a hand out to steady him. “Is something wrong lad?”

“Oh… Er… actually, I live alone you see… So, no one’s waiting for me…” The boy trailed off. Quillish paused and looked at the boy. That sounded true but off somehow, as if the boy was covering for something. Perhaps the boy was a runaway and had given a random address… Listen to him, he was becoming as paranoid as L.

“Well, you had still best get inside anyway as it is rather chilly,” Quillish tried to smile as cheerfully as possible as he watched the boy. When the boy reached into a pocket, pulled out a key, inserted it into the blue door of number nine Argyle Square and unlocked it, Wammy felt vaguely foolish. Every suspicion he or L had about this young man had been proven false. Perhaps L wasn’t the only one in need of a vacation.

“Thank you again for the ride,” the boy said as he turned in the doorway to regard Quillish and behind him, still in the cab, L. “You didn’t have to.”

“It really was no problem lad, and I owed you something in any case.” Quillish smiled one last time at the surprising boy and turned to rejoin L in the cab.

“Ah- Wait!” he heard behind him. “I never actually asked you your name…”

Quillish looked briefly at L who has turned to him was now watching the exchange he had previously ignored. He turned to the boy once more. “Thomas Reed my boy. Pleased to make your acquaintance.” Quillish tipped his hat. “And your name..?”

“Ah, right! Harry Potter, pleased to meet you.” The boy, Harry nodded happily at Quillish. “Thank you for the ride Mr. Reed”

“Thank you for rescuing my wallet Mr. Potter!” Quillish grinned as Potter blushed slightly and grinned back. “Have a good evening.”

“Yah, you too. Goodbye.” Harry waved them off before heading inside and closing the door.

Back in the cab, Quillish turned to L who was chewing on his much abused thumb once more. “There now, that wasn’t so bad was it my boy?” L ignored him and appeared to be thinking deeply about something.

“You’re not still worried, are you?”

L turned to look at him. “No… No. It’s just… I’m certain I’ve heard that name before.”
L was frustrated. Which wasn't much better than bored considering he was now wasting snacks rather than swallowing them without tasting them. If only that strange boy he and Wammy had run into would start making sense, L could go back to peacefully eating all the delicious tea snacks the hotel provided him. The fact that he had been too disinterested before to care for them was irrelevant. L glanced back at the two laptops open on the sitting table before him to see if the searches had finished. Nope. He went back to masticating the six or so gingersnaps he'd grabbed off the tea tray earlier, causing Wammy to sigh slightly and leave the room to fetch a book. L swallowed and glanced at the searches open. Still nothing. He grabbed a handful of jam shortcake biscuits and jammed what would fit in his mouth, not caring that large pieces and crumbs fell to his seat and the floor. He turned from the computers and dug his toes into the couch cushion, sulking.

"Really L, you are going to choke yourself if you continue like that," Wammy had returned to the room with his book. L had thought the book would be used to excuse Wammy having to talk to him (and watch him eat) but it seemed that Wammy was in the mood to lecture first.

L ignored Wammy and started tapping and gripping the arm of the couch in front of him while his toes dug further into the plush pillow. Wammy was frowning at him, he knew, but that still didn't mean L had to respond. It wasn't as though L was being unreasonable. In fact he was doing everything Wammy had asked of him- he'd taken a vacation, he'd just talked to the Wammy's House residents two days ago (over the computer of course, and wishing them a grudging 'Happy New Year' at Wammy's silent insistence)- so if he felt like sulking a bit (not that he was of course, but that's what Wammy would call it), then that was perfectly acceptable.

Quillish walked over to an armchair close to the end of the couch L was crouched on and sat down. He watched L a moment, still resolutely ignoring him and now gripping the arm of the couch with both hands while he rocked back and forth. Really now...

"L, I know you don't much like accepting this, but..." Quillish took a breath. "The boy is likely not involved in anything shady and he doesn't appear to have any knowledge of us whatsoever."

L released the couch arm and then gripped it tighter, still not looking at Quillish.

"It was only a chance encounter and there is no need to be carrying on like this. I know you are normally right about people and I'm sure that, were it anyone else, you would have been, but Mr. Harry Potter was exactly as he appeared to be. A good citizen."

Quillish stopped and looked at L who had now stopped rocking and returned to tapping his fingers against the couch arm while keeping the rest of his body perfectly still.

"L?" He wouldn't look up and even lowered his chin minutely, Quillish sighed, yes this was a rather poor vacation. "Perhaps it would be best if we forgot about this now? We could start planning what to do tomorrow? A new sweets shop perhaps?"

L lifted his head slightly to answer, then jerked as he heard the 'ding' sound of one of the computers finishing its search and whipped his whole body around. Quillish sighed, well he could only hope the search revealed nothing more suspicious than the boy's personality had or L really wouldn't be able to let go of this.
L meanwhile was absorbed in the search results and was leaning half on the sitting table and hanging half off the couch. He wasn't sure whether to be excited or disappointed about what the search had found on one "Harry Potter," but either way Wammy owed him cake. L smirked. He knew he was always right, even when it looked like he was wrong.

"Come look at this Wammy," L managed to keep his voice level without showing how smug he was feeling, but Wammy still gave him a look that said he should try harder. L gave a tightlipped, childish smile. He could try not to be smug later.

"What exactly am I looking at?" Wammy was still giving exasperated sighs as though he thought perhaps L was getting obsessed over nothing. This would show him.

"These are all available records on 'Harry James Potter,' the boy we met yesterday. Do you notice anything unusual?"

"Well... There doesn't appear to be much here. I see that he is the leaseholder for the property at number nine Argyle Square, so he must be old enough to be financially independent, but..." Wammy trailed off as he looked below the property listing. "Where are his medical records? His financial records? He only has school records up to the end of his primary years? L..."

Wammy turned to look at L, bewildered at the odd files that had been found.

"Why does he have primary school records but no birth certificate?"

L smiled widely and delicately plucked a chocolate biscuit off the tea tray with his forefinger and thumb.

"I don't know," he nibbled the edged of the biscuit and hummed happily at the rich taste of the chocolate and butter biscuit. "But I will find out."

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Investigating Harry Potter turned out to make for a rather entertaining afternoon. L especially enjoyed every time some contradictory or incomplete piece of information came up. Wammy would get particularly flustered trying to match up the disjointed profile they were slowly building with the "nice young boy" they had met.

First there was the fact that Harry Potter had no financial record whatsoever- except for buying the leasehold on number nine Argyle Square. A 70-year lease, paid in full with a special clause that specifically asked, politely, for the freeholder, or landlord, to 'butt out' and paid both service charge and ground rent in advance. The bank account that had made this huge transaction appeared overnight out of nowhere and then disappeared to the same place the next day.

Then there was the fact that Harry Potter had apparently never been to hospital. Ever. He had no medical record, no vaccinations, no check-ups, nothing! L wondered where Harry had gotten his glasses as there were no optometrist records either. Perhaps all this would make sense for someone who'd been hiding in obscurity his whole life, but 'Harry James Potter' had gone to school. Or, at least, he'd gone to primary school. Those records by themselves were confusing enough.

Harry had been applied by his guardians and relatives, the Dursleys, to only one primary while their own son had been applied to several. Both boys had ended up going to the same school anyway. Harry's marks had oscillated for several years before stabilizing at just under average- L noticed, just under his cousin, Dudley's, marks. He wondered if there was a connection there. The teachers' reports Wammy had scrounged up hardly mentioned Harry beyond "average", "quiet", and
"troublemaker." Apparently Harry had climbed to the roof of the school at one point and the fire department had to be called. He also had months, at various points, of sick-leave from school, but L knew it couldn't have been due to illness as Harry didn't have any medical records. Then, at the end of primary school, Harry had been enrolled to attend the local comprehensive school but never attended. Where he went L didn't know because there were no records after that point, save for the lease at Argyle Square.

What surprised Wammy most though (and L when he felt like admitting it to himself) was that Harry wasn't a teenager as they had thought. Going by his primary school records, he was a young man of twenty years. They still hadn't found a birth certificate, which was odd because all public primary schools required a birth certificate when the child was admitted to ensure they were the correct age. How had 'Harry James Potter' managed to get enrolled without submitting such documentation?

L swallowed the last strawberry from the fruit cup then began the delightful task of breaking and eating the chocolate cup the sugar glazed fruit had come in. It was noted, in the school application form that the birth certificate "and all identifying documentation" had burned in the boy's parents' house. L selected a broken piece of chocolate and tossed it in his mouth. How convenient. Except for the part where 'Harry James Potter's' parents didn't die in a fire. L paused before selecting another piece of chocolate. Actually, L and Wammy couldn't find anything about how Harry Potter's parents had died, or where, or who they were at all.

It was easy enough to deduce that the mother was Lily Evans- the only other relation of the Dursleys aside from a "Marjorie Dursley" who had never married and had no children. But while the Dursley's files made for dull reading, investigating Lily Evans' life proved to be as difficult as Harry Potter's was. She had all the normal documentation one would expect, except... Her school and medical records stopped at the end of primary school as well. She did go in to see an obstetrician however, so L knew from that that she must be Harry's mother. But the missing school records and the lack of a marriage certificate...

Which brought up, who exactly was Harry's father? After two days, L and Wammy still couldn't find any male Potters that could possibly be related to 'Harry James Potter'. L picked up his tea cup (no cream, six sugar cubes) and took a delicate sip before balancing the cup on his knee and smiling. Yes, this investigation was confusing, frustrating (mostly for Wammy and due more to the lack of information than the lack of progress), and a huge distraction from L's so-called vacation. But it was a lot of fun.

- - -

L got up from crouching on the couch in front of the now two laptops and one desktop and wandered into the bedroom to look out the window. He wasn't quite sure what to think at this point and reminding Wammy again that he was always right would be rather shallow. Besides, he wasn't sure anymore what he was right about.

He had decided the day before to do a comprehensive search for the death of "Lily Potter" in the hopes that might turn something up. He and Wammy had done as many searches of police files from twenty years ago or so in police databases as they could without requesting any files as 'L'. He'd even convinced Wammy to send for his old files catalogue from Wammy House as most of those were of the right time frame. It had been a low chance and L hadn't actually thought anything would come out of it.

L looked down at the road below for an indeterminable amount of time before he heard Wammy returning to the suite with the special order donuts from a place a block off the London Chinatown.

"L?"
L turned from the window and walked back into the sitting room, hands in pockets and staring at the ground.

"Ah there you are! Here are your... L? What is it my boy?" Wammy paused from pulling a heavenly smelling box from a plastic bag and stared at L worriedly.

L walked over to him and opened the box he held one-handed, snatched the first donut he touched (chocolate creme with sprinkles) and wandered back to the couch. Wammy watched as he calmly stepped up onto the couch, turned to face the front and crouched down before taking a small bite of the donut.

"I have located Harry Potter's parents."

"You have? You know who the father is?" Wammy walked quickly over the the side of the couch and peered at the computer screens, trying to focus on whichever might have the information.

"Yes," L licked some of the cream smeared on his hand from biting into the donut and looked up at the ceiling, contemplating. "Wammy, do you remember when I first asked you to do this with me?"

Distracted, Quillish turned from trying to read three screens at once- they all seemed to be files they already had on Harry, so what did L mean? "Yes? When you were seven. I do remember. It was quite possibly the oddest conversation of my life, even taking all subsequent conversations with you into account."

"Do you remember the reason I decided to do this?"

Quillish looked at L over the back of the couch. L appeared focused on his donut and was speaking in a perfect monotone, giving nothing of what he thought away. It had been a long time since L had acted like this with Quillish.

"Yes, you dragged me into my office to show me a police file on my computer as part of your argument. You were terribly upset at the time and seemed most angry that the police weren't, ah, 'doing what they're supposed to!', were your words I believe." Quillish smiled fondly at the memory. "Then of course I grounded you and restricted some of your privileges for using my computer to hack police databases."

"Yes," L said a bit waspishly, not liking the reminder of his punishment from so long ago, but finally showing some emotion and making the mention worth it in Quillish's eyes. "But the file I showed you, do you remember that?"

Quillish thought a moment. "I believe it was a family of three, husband, wife and infant. The house had been invaded and the parents were killed. The baby was stolen somehow and the investigation was stopped and the murder covered up. You connected that incident with a number of other mysterious covered up deaths, didn't you?"

L finished the donut and licked his fingers clean. "Yes I did. But I never found any evidence of foul play- all the crime scenes were too old for me to do anything. I also lost track of the baby. However, I think we have just found him again."

"What?" Quillish startled. "Surely you don't mean-"

"Yes," L pulled up a case file from Somerset County dated October 31 1980. "The couple murdered were James and Lily Potter and their missing son is most likely Harry James Potter."
Quillish stared at the screen in shock. "But... this is-

"A huge coincidence? I agree," L reached across the couch for the box Wammy had placed on the arm and pulled out another donut (glazed). "That is why I think we should begin a more... in depth investigation."

L bit the donut and smiled slightly. Yes, confusing, frustrating, but above all, fun. He rather liked vacations. He should take them more often.

dpdpdpdpdpdp

Harry yelped and jerked his finger to his mouth to suck on the cut for a moment. Why exactly was he doing this, Harry wondered, not for the first time that day.

"Master Harry sir, yous isn't holding potato like Kreacher is telling you!" Kreacher appeared suddenly at Harry's side, made him take his hand away from his mouth and then showed him again how to hold the potato properly. "Now, is Master Harry sir going to be careful or will Kreacher have to give him simpler task to be doing?"

Harry felt both abashed and insulted at Kreacher's tone and horribly embarrassed to see the other elves around the kitchen staring at him and whispering to themselves about whether they should fetch a bandage for "Poor Harry Potter sir's" finger. He grimaced slightly and tried to angle himself on the small stool so he was facing away from them all.

"No Kreacher, I'm fine. I can do this."

Kreacher nodded and then turned to the rest of the elves. "All right, all right! Everyone's back to working nows!" He turned back to Harry. "Once Master Harry sir is done with potatoes, Kreacher is showing him to make Master Harry sir's favorite chips!"

Harry glumly watched Kreacher walk off and looked at the half peeled potato in his hand. He wondered what he'd have been doing just now if he hadn't gone nutters about Ginny and the auror job and left it all. He sighed and admitted to himself that he'd probably have been just as bored then as he was now, but at least now he could blame that on the potato.

After the whole pickpocket event, Harry had sat in the living room of number nine Argyle Square until nearly three in the morning, trying to figure out why he had chased the thief in the first place. He hadn't even thought about it when he ran after the thief. He just reacted. Harry had frowned and thought that through. All his instincts were suited to being an auror, all the skills he knew were as well.

Then it had hit him. All he knew how to do was what an auror would know. He had never trained or learned to be anything else, so maybe- maybe he should! That is, he should learn to do something else. Once Harry had realized that, at about three in the morning, he had been elated. He could finally get his life in order, get a job and all his friends would stop thinking he was depressed and try to get him to go back to the auror department! It was perfect, only... Harry didn't know what to do. He was back to wondering what job he could do and he still had no idea.

That was about the point Kreacher had found him, wanting to know why Master Harry Potter hadn't been to twelve Grimmauld Place to eat the dinners Kreacher was sending him from Hogwarts and what on earth was Master Harry Potter doing living in a muggle house in the first place and did Master Harry Potter know that Master Harry Potter's friend and teacher at Hogwarts, "Perfessor Granger", was coming into kitchens to ask if Kreacher had seen Master Harry Potter lately because she couldn't find him? Harry had wondered briefly if the main reason Kreacher had come to check up on him was to get away from Hermione before he decided that he may as well ask Kreacher if he knew what kind of job Harry could do.

Kreacher had stared at Harry a moment as though Harry had lost his mind and then told him slowly "Master Harry Potter sir is auror he is. What other jobs would he be doing?" causing Harry to hang
his head in defeat. Even a house-elf thought Harry was suited to being an auror. Maybe he should just give up?

Then Kreacher had surprised him by trying to cheer him up. "What is Master Harry Potter sir wanting to be doing then?" Kreacher had asked him gently. Harry had looked at him before saying "Anything but auror work." Kreacher had then surprised Harry more by tilting his head and actually appearing to ponder Harry a moment. "Then what is Master Harry Potter sir being good at that's not auror-ing?"

Harry tried to think, what was he good at? "Um, flying, I guess?"

"Does Master Harry Potter sir want to being flying for work then?"

Harry thought about quiddich. He could get on any team probably, but he probably wouldn't like the attention that would get him and as much as he liked flying and being a seeker, he couldn't really see himself doing that for a living. "Uh, no, not really. No."

"What else does Master Harry Potter sir do?"

Harry thought hard. Stuff he could already do, something he was good at or, at least, could build on and get better... He blinked.

"Er, I can, uh... cook and clean and stuff..." That was one of the reasons Harry had insisted that Kreacher could stay at Hogwarts to work and only occasionally come back to see to twelve Grimmuald and Harry. Harry had learned that a busily working house-elf was a very happy one and really, he could mostly take care of himself without help. Admittedly, Harry wasn't a marvelous chef or anything, but he could certainly cook breakfast and make sandwiches and as far as cleaning went, well- he was hardly around to make much of a mess and he could wipe up dust perfectly well. With Kreacher sending over a large dinner package once a week and summoning and washing his laundry, Harry was more than set.

Kreacher had looked at Harry a tad crossly and Harry had suddenly worried he might have offended Kreacher by admitting that he didn't really need a house-elf, but Kreacher had only nodded. "Yes, Master Harry Potter sir is good worker. But he should be doing more wizard-y stuffs he should!"

Kreacher had frowned then and looked up at Harry sitting rather morosely in the armchair, in the dark, at three in the morning and in a muggle house. Kreacher didn't really like to compare his new master (or any master) to his Master Regulus, because Master Regulus would always win and he shouldn't think poorly of his current master, but sometimes he wondered if Master Harry were really a wizard. Which was silly because everyone (Kreacher, Hogwarts, the whole world really) knew that Master Harry was a brave and powerful wizard. Kreacher wondered if being raised with muggles had broken his Master Harry somehow... But anyway, his master needed Kreacher's help and help he would.

"Does Master Harry Potter sir likes cooking and cleaning?" Kreacher had asked slowly, as if worried that this was a very bad thing to be asking a wizard.

"Eh, well... I don't really mind them. I mean, I like cooking food that I actually get to eat and I don't mind so much picking up after myself..." Harry had trailed off and tried to phrase himself better. "I don't think I'd like to clean for other people really- didn't much like it before- and I don't know much about cooking but-" Harry thought of all the marvelous feasts Molly had made and how happy she always looked when he ate something. "But, maybe I'd like cooking things for people..."

Kreacher had had the most twisted grimace on his face by then, as if he were in terrible pain.
"Ah! But, I don't have to, I mean, I could probably find something else-"

"Can Master Harry Potter sir think of anything else he can do?"

Harry had thought hard. Flying, cooking breakfast, cleaning, fighting the dark arts, and- ah! "I can garden!" Kreacher had brightened at this.

"Magic wizard plants for potions?" Kreacher had asked hopefully. Harry had cringed, ah right...

"Er, no, actually. I do pretty average. Mostly because I know how to garden muggle plants- the magical ones don't agree with me..."

Kreacher's ears had sagged, much like Harry's spirits. "What can Master Harry Potter sir cook?" he asked Harry after what seemed a fierce internal battle.

"Breakfast mostly. And sandwiches," Harry had looked at Kreacher carefully, wondering if anything he said might prompt violent action in the elf.

Kreacher had begun breathing rather heavily at that point and had barely gotten out "Would Master Harry Potter like to learn more cooking?" before falling over in a faint.

After Kreacher had woken up on the couch where Harry had placed him, they had both agreed not to mention the 'cooking plan' more than necessary and to head over to Hogwarts to begin Harry's new training in the morning. Truthfully, Kreacher hadn't been too thrilled with the idea of Harry learning to cook where other house-elves could see him, but Harry had sheepishly told Kreacher that he'd stopped buying groceries weeks ago and had been eating the massive number of pot pies and treacle tarts Molly had sent him for Christmas. Besides, if Master Harry was actually going to do this, then Kreacher was determined to make sure he would be better at it than any other wizard in the world (just in case anyone tried to point out cooking wasn't proper wizarding work, Master Harry would at least be the best) and the best cooks Kreacher knew were all at Hogwarts.

So the next day Harry and Kreacher had gone to Hogwarts, marched right into the kitchens, and Kreacher had imperiously told the other elves that his great and wonderful Master Harry Potter-slayer of evil, dark wizards, defender of house-elves, both good and bad, and greatest wizard with power over death!- had elected to learn proper cooking so he could feed other peoples who weren't lucky enough to be having house-elves to help them. Harry wondered if Kreacher was emphasizing that Harry would be feeding people without house-elves so they wouldn't be offended quite as much at the idea that a wizard was doing house-elf work. He'd done his best to ignore the titles Kreacher gave him- most of them he heard enough from other wizards, but the 'defender of house-elves' one was new.

After the other house-elves had gotten over the shock of Kreacher's announcement (as well as the shock of Harry Potter stepping into their kitchen) they had crowded around Harry and Kreacher, telling Harry he was such a "good, kind wizard!" and telling him what each elf was best at making and offering to teach him. Kreacher had made them all step back by saying that he would be teaching Master Harry Potter the basics and the other elves should work out a schedule to teach Harry various dishes each week as his skill improved. Harry soon found himself at the center of as much excitement as the death of Voldemort had prompted and sitting at a table learning the proper techniques to clean and cut various vegetables from Kreacher while other house-elves whispered encouragement when they walked past.

Then after a full day of dealing with more vegetables than Harry had even known existed and eventually blanching them, frying them, or sticking them in a soup, Harry had gone home exhausted only to return the next day to learn about... potatoes. There were literally dozens of ways to cook
potatoes and Harry was terribly worried that Kreacher was going to make him learn them all PROVIDED Harry managed to finish peeling them properly. He'd already been scolded for cutting the skins too thick, too thin, and accidently cutting himself three times.

Harry sighed. He was bored and he was thinking that he didn't much like vegetables and potatoes anymore, but at least he was doing something. Harry was vaguely cheered by that. After all, he was doing something and he was learning and it didn't have anything to do with aurors or dark lords or bloody pickpockets. Harry smiled and started peeling again, slowly- Kreacher had told him it was okay to start out slow. As much as he really hated potatoes right now, things were definitely looking up.

- - -

Harry woke, gasping, from a dream where a giant turnip with Kreacher's voice was chasing him with a ladle and chanting "Yummy mashed or boiled, but wash off the soil!" He really didn't like vegetables anymore. He pulled his glasses off the side table and peered at the clock- only eight o'clock. Today was Saturday, wasn't it? Harry sighed happily. Kreacher and the other elves had been oddly relieved that Harry had accepted taking weekends off from the cooking lessons- apparently it was okay for Harry to learn cooking but keeping the same work hours they did was much too un-wizardly. Harry had been relieved to have a break from what was turning out to be a more grueling schedule than the auror training program.

He considered going back to sleep and having a decent (and much deserved) lie-in on his first day off, but found he was too awake after that dream. Yawning, Harry got up and wandered off to get ready. He'd go out and relax somewhere nice and quiet- and he would buy every meal of the day and be thankful for it. Harry grinned. He wouldn't be having any vegetables all day either.

Once Harry stepped out the door of twelve Grimmauld Place, he went in the direction of King's Cross. He would go back to Regent's Park; there were lots of places to eat all around it and when he went last time he'd been too upset to really enjoy the outing. Maybe he'd even go back to the zoo and have lunch there- he hadn't gotten to some of the exhibits before it closed.

When Harry walked out of the Regent's Park station he pulled his coat tighter and stuck his hands in his pockets. He should be able to pick any direction, walk out of the park and quickly find an eatery. He headed off and barely went a block before he smelled fresh baked something and followed the scent to a cafe, just open for the breakfast crowd. Perfect.

Harry happily walked into Regent's Park while he ate a warm blueberry scone with butter. He leisurely passed by bare trees and empty flower beds and thought he should start coming here more often and when it was warmer. There would be larger crowds, but he wanted to see what the place looked like all green and with flowers everywhere.

Harry finished his breakfast by the time he reached Chester Road and debated crossing it or not. That mostly depended on whether he felt like going to the zoo or not. He could either cross and continue until he got to the zoo and spend the rest of the day there, or he could circle back around and explore this side of the park more thoroughly before continuing on. Hmm, well, he could always come back next weekend for the zoo, Harry thought.

When Harry turned around to go to another path he had by passed earlier he stopped and stared, bewildered. Standing about eight or nine meters behind him, looking much the same as before, were the two men from the pickpocket incident at the start of the week!

Harry blinked and wondered if he ought to wave or thank Mr. Reed again for the ride or if he should just continue with his walk. They probably wouldn't remember him... But before he could decide
what he should do, the younger man, who'd never bothered to introduce himself to Harry, grinned and gave a large wave while calling "Hello again!"

Well... It would probably be rude at this point to ignore them, much as Harry dearly wanted to after that startling greeting from someone who had made Harry feel like a fish in a bowl the last time they'd met. Harry dragged his feet forward and gave a nervous wave. He really hoped he wouldn't be stared at again. At least Mr. Reed was nice.

By the time Harry reached Mr. Reed and his... friend, the man had stopped smiling and had his thumb in his mouth and was staring at Harry for all he was worth. Great...

"Hello there young man," Mr. Reed smiled at him. "Harry Potter, wasn't it?"

Harry grinned back. "Yes. Mr. Thomas Reed, right?"

"Indeed. How are you this fine day? Taking another walk in the park?"

"Yeah. You too?" Harry asked, trying not to flinch when Mr. Reed's weird friend blinked and leaned toward Harry, still staring. If Harry didn't know better, he'd think the man was trying to creep him out.

"Yes, it is a splendid day for a walk, isn't it?" Mr. Reed smiled as he looked around at the mostly empty park and the chilly, overcast sky.

Harry laughed. "I thought so too!"

"Would you mind if we joined you Mr. Potter?" Mr. Reed asked Harry, smiling at him kindly. "We're tourists you see and get lost easily."

"Ah, well, I've only been here a couple times and as long as you stay in the park you won't get too lost. There are signs," Harry said as helpfully as he could. If it were just Mr. Reed, he would agree in an instant, but having the other man follow him around and stare at him... If he felt like being stared at on his day off he would've just gone to Diagon Alley.

The odd man cocked his head to the side and blinked. "Would it help if I didn't stare at you?" he asked in a flat voice.

"Ah, yes..?" Harry said, startled.

The man nodded and smiled slightly. "I won't stare then," and with that he turned sharply around and started walking slowly back down the path.

Harry stared after him. What the hell was that about?!

Mr. Reed coughed politely. "I do hope he hasn't upset you, Mr. Potter. He's not the most sociable of people..."

"Oh, no! It's alright, I guess, and um, just Harry is fine, please," Harry knew he was jumbling his words again and he was probably going to offend Mr. Reed somehow.

"Then I should like it if you called me 'Thomas', Harry," Mr. Reed- Thomas- smiled at Harry as though trying to put him at ease. "And please think nothing of my companion's behavior, he doesn't know how not to be rude I'm afraid."

Harry's lips quirked slightly. "I know some people like that."
"We all do," Thomas laughed before looking at Harry more seriously. "You needn't walk with us if you don't want to, lad."

"No!" Harry felt rather bad now. He certainly hadn't meant to upset Mr. Reed- Thomas. Perhaps he should try to be more polite to the other man. "I don't mind walking with you, er, Thomas, really. I was just, er, surprised."

Thomas grinned at him conspiratorially. "He is a rather shocking sort, isn't he?"

Harry laughed. "Yeah." He and Thomas turned to follow the man they were now talking about. "Actually he reminds me a lot of this girl I know, from school." Harry smiled fondly. "She always stood out a lot. Oh- But she knows how to be polite once in awhile!"

Thomas and Harry laughed together as they reached the man waiting for them. "So where are we walking?" he said, pointedly not looking at Harry. Now that Harry'd talked with Thomas, he found the odd man a lot more funny than before. It helped that the man reminded Harry so much of Luna. Come to think of it, she'd stared at Harry an awful lot the first time they met too.

"I was just going to wander around the whole park," Harry told him. The man continued staring at a nearby tree.

"Very well. You were planning to come back to this path, weren't you?" he said before setting off down the side path that Harry had indeed been thinking of when he turned around earlier. Thomas and Harry followed him.

Harry was rather enjoying just walking in quiet company next to Thomas when he realized that the man walking ahead of them seemed to be in a bad mood. Harry thought maybe he'd been more offended at Harry admitting to not liking being stared at than he let on. Harry frowned. Why someone should be offended at not being able to stare rudely at another person was beyond him. But, he decided, he would try to make peace for Thomas's sake.

"Er, you know, you never told me your name," Harry called ahead to the man in front of him.

The man stopped and looked over his shoulder back at Harry. "No I didn't," was all he said. Then he turned back around and continued walking.

Harry all but gaped after him. This man was worse than Malfoy! Thomas coughed next to Harry. "Please, don't mind-"

But Harry had already left Thomas' side and caught up with the offending man. "Listen!" Harry said angrily as he stepped in front of the man. "I'm trying to be polite here! You're the one who's being rude! You're the one who wouldn't stop staring at me without being told to! You're the one who never bothered introducing himself even though it's common courtesy! You're the one who called out for me to join you! If you didn't want to bother at least pretending to be nice, why did you even bother asking me to walk with you!?"

Harry was practically shouting by the end and he stood shaking as he stared furiously at the still unnamed man. So much for trying to be polite.

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The man, meanwhile, had put his thumb in his mouth and was chewing it roughly as he stared wide-eyed at Harry. He took it out to say, "Thomas asked you to walk with us" and then promptly put it back in to resume chewing.

"Huh?" Harry relaxed his stance and looked blankly between the odd man and Thomas, who'd caught up and was looking at him worriedly. He blinked. Did he really just shout childishly at a man
in public? He felt his face burning and turned swiftly around and started walking as quickly as he could up the path. Maybe they'd forget what happened...

The odd man appeared suddenly in front of Harry, making him jerk. He glanced up at the man's face, saw that he was still chewing his thumb and grinning, and quickly looked down at the ground. He felt like an idiot.

"William Tale," the man said smugly.

Harry glanced up. The thumb was more resting on the man's lower lip now and the grin was wider than ever. "What?"

"My name is William Tale," the man said and he turned around to continue walking. "Pleased to meet you."

Thomas came up next to Harry as he stared, flabbergasted, after Mr. William Tale. "Well, shall we keep going then?" Thomas asked Harry pleasantly.

Harry eventually calmed down enough to start enjoying the walk again, which under normal circumstances would have been very pleasant indeed. As it was, Harry was only able to enjoy himself because Thomas made a point of conversing with him every time William, as he insisted on being called after hearing that Harry and Thomas were using first names, turned to look at Harry and grin at him. William was acting as though he'd won a quiddich match and now had bragging rights over Harry and Harry was quite sure he'd have yelled at him again were it not for Thomas.

Harry was now associating William with both Luna and Malfoy in his head and was finding the experience alternately funny and frustrating. He sighed as he tuned back in to the conversation with Thomas and William about where to get lunch. Thomas was trying to explain to William that as they had taken Harry out of his way, he should be allowed to pick where they ate. William countered, saying that Harry would have gone through the park without them anyway and his pick would be better than anything Harry choose anyway. Harry finally ended the debate by admitting that William was likely right as his own method of choosing a place to eat was based more on random chance than anything else.

William smirked at Harry as if he'd won yet another invisible game and Harry just stared at him blankly and lifted his eyebrow, trying to say silently "What game? You think I'm actually trying?" William frowned at him and turned away to sulkily lead the way to his choice of eatery. Harry grinned. He could deal with this.

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L slouched further as he walked, listening to Wammy (sorry- Thomas, he thought in disgust) chatting pleasantly with the Potter boy behind him. This morning- no, this entire investigation- had not gone at all as he had planned.

First, after he had decided to begin investigating Harry Potter more closely, he had gotten into an argument with Wammy about whether it would be okay or not to install surveillance cameras in number nine Argyle Square. Wammy had insisted that L shouldn't invade the boy's privacy when they were investigating him more for L's amusement than for a case. L had tried to explain that it would be the fastest way to find out what sort of conspiracy was surrounding the Potter boy. Wammy had then told L that, conspiracy or no, the boy was innocent in his parents' deaths and his own apparent kidnapping. Therefore, he could not be treated like a criminal.

L felt that Wammy was missing the point entirely and tried to sneak a camera into number nine Argyle while Wammy went to buy sugar lollies. Wammy (who knew L far better than L liked to...
admit) of course caught him and said (rather despairingly) that it would be permissible to follow Harry Potter around in public instead. L had grumbled but ended up agreeing when Wammy looked like he was considering not going out to buy snacks anymore.

Then, when they started the first day of surveillance of Harry Potter, he had ruined it by not coming out of the house! L had been furious. Didn't the boy have a job? Disappearing bank accounts aside, Harry Potter had paid a rather sizable sum for the lease on his home. Surely he had to do something to fund such purchases. L had been fully prepared to follow Harry Potter to some black market smuggling operation that day and had been severely disappointed at the no-show.

Even worse, once the boy had shown up both he and Wammy had missed his exit from the property. They had been shocked to watch him stroll leisurely down the street, past number nine Argyle Square and right in front of them and neither of them knew how he got out of the house. It had worried L that the boy had managed to appear, as if from nowhere, like that and he thought that maybe Potter had noticed them watching the house front and was toying with them. Then Potter had confused L even more by leading them to King's Cross to take the London subway system, acting for all the world as though he didn't know he was being followed.

L and Wammy had been especially cautious when following Potter through the Underground, but had again been confused when the boy led them to... Regent's Park. Where he did nothing more suspicious than buy a scone from a bakery and wander down the main path into the park.

By that point, L was bored, confused and vaguely angry and had been more than ready for something more interesting to happen. So when Potter had finished his scone and made to turn in their direction, L had decided to stay in view and set up a more controlled encounter than their last one. He quickly gave Wammy his instructions and gave a large and loud greeting to Harry Potter so there would be no chance of the boy feigning obliviousness.

Wammy did well in gaining enough of Potter's trust to get him to walk with them and L was secretly delighted to find that the boy was unnerved by him. They had only been walking a short while before L had a chance to test some of the boy's reactions by denying him a name. That had been both a startling and amusing event.

L had been sure that Potter would press for something to call him by but what he got was an explosion of nerves and complaints about his apparent treatment of the boy. L had been shocked and had replied with the first thing that came to mind. That the boy had immediately calmed down at that and then made as if he were humiliated by the outburst and tried to abandon their company as quickly as possible had also surprised L. Perhaps Potter wasn't really concerned with having a name for L after all.

L had caught up with Potter before he could get too far and, having been so pleased by the boy's unexpected reaction to his simple manipulation, L had given a name he hadn't meant to. He'd been planning to use the pseudonym 'Derrick Wallace' as he already had an ID made up for it. Oh well, he'd just have Wammy make documents for 'William Tale' and hope he wouldn't need them before they were ready. He was simply too pleased with Potter's outburst to worry about anything else.

The outburst was an important point as far as L was concerned. It revealed a great deal about Potter's mental state- L was certain now that the boy was under considerable stress- and his reaction to L's simple rebuttal showed so much emotion that L was certain that it was all quite genuine. Potter had revealed far more about himself than L had despite giving the wrong name and L couldn't wait to find a way to use this information.

Unfortunately, after that Potter stayed annoyingly close to Wammy (and when exactly had they decided to use first names?) and Wammy was allowing it! L had tried to integrate himself into their
dull conversations about the weather and the park by offering use of his own first name (not that he cared if they used first names) but found that most of his attempts at conversing with Potter were resolutely ignored. Wammy had begun to give L a look whenever Potter clammed up, forcing L to draw back so Wammy could engage the boy's attention once more.

L had been hopeful when Potter had unexpectedly spoken up during the debate about where to eat and surprised both Wammy and himself by agreeing with him. L had thought this meant the boy was warming up to him somewhat and would be more malleable to a subtle interrogation by him later. But then Potter had turned to L with a look that told him "I'm not affected by you at all" and mocked L totally.

So now L was annoyed. Again. And it was entirely Harry Potter's fault. All L felt he could look forward to at this point was something sweet at his choice of restaurant.

L led Wammy and Potter out of the park toward Prince Albert Road and tried listening to whatever it was they were discussing now. He didn't really think they would be talking about anything of interest but, as Potter had apparently decided not to talk to him at all, he had no choice but to try and gather as much information from the dull topics Wammy had chosen (L never approved of small talk no matter what Wammy said). They seemed to be talking about zoos now. Potter had been to one when he was a child and had eaten a lemon pop and was disappointed that he couldn't get one at the London Zoo last week. L tried to think of what valuable information could be pulled from such statements other than the boy having poor taste in ice cream. L himself would never choose such a sour treat.

As they walked down the street, L heard Wammy and Potter ending their discussion and called out without turning around. "The restaurant is just ahead, but I'm sorry to say they do not have any lemon pops Harry." There was silence behind him and L glanced over his shoulder. Potter had a clearly annoyed expression on his face and was glaring at his back before he could make his face blank. L grinned at him which made Potter roll his eyes.

"Now don't be disappointed Harry. They do have other ice creams," L told him. Potter responded with the same blank "I'm not bothered" look as before and L turned back around to glare at the walk ahead. He couldn't get to the desserts soon enough.
Chapter 4

Chapter 3

After Harry got over his huff about how blatantly William was eavesdropping on his conversations with Thomas, he looked around and started wondering where exactly they were going.

"Er, Thomas?" Harry said as he looked up at the tall apartment blocks around them. "Where is there someplace to eat here?"

Unfortunately it was not Thomas who answered (though he did open his mouth to do so), but William who again called out from ahead. "It's just up here, on the first floor of the mansion block."

Harry glared at him crossly. "What sort of place is part of an apartment?"

This time Thomas did get to answer Harry. "It's a family restaurant. Been here for years," Thomas grinned conspiratorially at Harry. "William is most fond of the dessert trolley."

"It's the only one around with a good selection," William all but snapped over his shoulder, clearly annoyed to be talked about behind his back- quite literally in this case. Harry grinned back at Thomas.

Harry thought a family restaurant with dessert sounded like a nice place for lunch. Nicer at least than his original plan to buy a sandwich from a pub. But when they turned up a driveway and entered the place, Harry was starting to think that maybe eating with Thomas and William wasn't such a good idea after all. At the door, the maitre d' almost turned them away due to how William was dressed before appearing to recognize Thomas and welcoming them in warmly. Then, as they followed the man through the dining area to a secluded corner away from the windows, Harry found himself alarmingly reminded of Madam Puddifoot's. Pink everywhere and frills on the curtains, and William's shabby dress looked terribly odd amongst it all.

Harry was surprised actually that he hadn't paid much notice to William's clothes sooner. Thomas was so smartly dressed in suit and overcoat and then right next to him was William, in baggy jeans and baggy hoodie. Harry supposed he was so used to wizards wearing odd muggle clothes it hadn't occured to him to wonder what Thomas and William were doing together dressed like that. Not to mention that Harry had spent so much of his life in baggy, unwanted clothes and had worried a great deal about people noticing... Harry decided it was more habit at ignoring his old Dursley wardrobe that had him ignoring William's outfit. Still, this made Harry wonder why William had picked such a fancy place when he wasn't dressed for it.

As they sat down, Harry figured it might be better not to ask. He had no idea, after all, how Thomas and William were related and he didn't want to bring up anything unpleasant- especially as he'd already blown up at William earlier. As he watched William climb into his bucket chair and perch on it with his knees to his chest and balancing on his toes, Harry thought that maybe William's personality also had a lot to do with why he hadn't noticed his clothes. Harry just shrugged and turned to look at his menu.

Then he promptly lowered it and turned to Thomas. "Er, Thomas, maybe I should just meet up with you after lunch?"
"Why?" asked William as he stared at Harry.

"Er, because..." Harry tried to think of the politest way he could say what he wanted. 'This place is rather expensive and I didn't bring much muggle money with me' probably wouldn't work. "Er, the food seems pretty rich and, er, I was planning just to have a sandwich, and-"

"We will pay for you," William told him with a smug air about him. Harry managed not to throw the menu at him.

Thomas turned to Harry quickly. "It's perfectly alright Harry. We did invite you out of your way and I still feel that only giving you a ride home wasn't a proper repayment for before. I would be delighted if you would allow us to treat you," Thomas ended this with another gentle smile at Harry and Harry felt that he had no real choice but to agree.

"Well, if you're sure I mean, I really don't mean to be a bother-"

"Don't worry at all my boy!" Thomas said happily as he turned to his own menu. "Order whatever you like."

"Yes Harry, order whatever you like," William said blankly as he played with a napkin. Harry glared at his open menu.

"Ah, nothing you order will outdo William's lunch, I assure you," Thomas injected. He winked at Harry. "William's order will put us both to shame!"

Harry turned back to his menu, wondering what that was supposed to mean and missed the glare William shot at Thomas and Thomas' grin back at him.

The menu was full of a lot of foods that Harry had heard of but never gotten the chance to eat before and he was overwhelmed with the choices. He thought the duck with cherries sounded really good but was too worried about the price. Of course, nearly everything on the menu had high prices so Harry wasn't sure it mattered what he got. When he finally did pick something it was beef wellington, something the house-elves at Hogwarts served once during the holidays. He'd always liked it and he wondered if he'd be learning to make it soon. Thomas ordered some type of fish and William... just sat there playing with his napkin.

"Aren't you going to order?" Harry asked. "You did want to come here after all."

William looked up briefly from the napkin he was carefully pleating across the table before turning back to it, ignoring Harry. Harry suddenly wished he still had his menu to throw at him.

"Oh, William is simply waiting for our food to come," Thomas told Harry. "You see, what he wants is already mostly ready and he doesn't want to eat without us."

Harry blinked. What? Before he could ask anything, William spoke up. "So Harry, is this your day off?" He was still staring at the napkin. Harry frowned.

"Yes actually." Harry wondered what William was getting at with this. He was perfectly welcome to spend his day off at the park!

"From what?" William asked him. Thomas seemed to be sighing to himself as he took a sip of water.

"From cooking," Harry said suspiciously. "Why?"

William shrugged and lifted the pleated napkin to shake it out. "Curious. What do you cook?" He
laid the napkin back down and started pleating again.

"Well..." Harry thought. He had learned names of things, right? So why couldn't he think of any?
"Um, not very much actually... Er, I just started."

"Just started?"

"Yeah, this week. We did vegetables mostly. And tubers."

"I see..." William appeared to be folding the napkin into three-dimensional bows. "So what did you do before?"

"Before?" Harry asked, distracted by the napkin. He could feel Thomas watching him and William, though William kept his eyes on the napkin.

"Before cooking."

"Oh," Harry thought hard. What was the acceptable cover story to tell muggles again? "I was in the police department." William and Thomas both looked at him. The napkin folded over on itself on the table, forgotten. "Er, only for a few weeks though..."

"A few weeks?" William's face was blank now and his eyes were half lidded, presenting a rather unnerving image to Harry.

"Yeah. I finished the training program and then quit a few weeks in."

"Why did you quit?"

"Because I didn't want to do it anymore," Harry recited the same line he'd been giving all his friends for months now. William and Thomas were still giving him odd looks and he wondered if maybe they thought he was being irresponsible or something. Actually, Thomas was giving him a slightly worried look and William's gaze was just creepy.

"Why ever not my boy?" Thomas asked him quietly. "Surely if you went through training you already knew what you were getting into?"

"Well, I didn't really think about it I guess," Harry said and tried to recall what he'd told Hermione about his reasoning for quitting after the training program rather than before. "I just did the training and kept telling myself that the job would be different. Then, when it wasn't, I kinda realized I'd been fooling myself and quit."

"What did you think the job would be like?" William's monotone voice made Harry turn from Thomas with a frown.

"Well, less boring I guess." "Boring? Police-work is boring?"

"Yeah, filling out paperwork, investigating complaints and chasing after contraband peddlers is boring," Harry glared at William. He didn't need a muggle, of all people, telling him to go back to the auror department... Er, police department, whatever. Anyway, he already heard the same thing from everyone he knew, he didn't need to hear it from William too.

"You did all that in your first few weeks?"

"Well, no... I mostly filled out paperwork."
"So you don't know if it's really boring or not then."

"-AND, I listened to older officers tell stories about cases. It didn't sound any more exciting than the paperwork."

"Didn't you know what police mostly did before you became one? What exactly were you expecting?" William seemed to be leaning forward now and his unblinking stare hadn't once left Harry's face.

Harry paused. Well, he'd expected dark lords, giant monsters, mysteries, and magical wars. That was sort of what he'd gotten used to. But with everything going back to normal for the wizarding world, Harry was finding that his own version of 'normal' was too extreme. That was why he knew he didn't really fit in at the auror department. 'Normal' to them was so dull he wasn't sure why they even bothered with it. That was why he was trying to find something else to do- something that he wouldn't associate fear and death with. Something that could be a 'normal' for him that everyone else recognized.

"Not what I got," Harry was looking at his glass, wondering when he'd gotten so morose. "Anyway, I quit. And that's the end of it, so if you wouldn't mind..."

Thomas glanced at William, who still hadn't let up staring at Harry, and nodded at him. "Of course. We'll drop the matter at once. I'm sure we didn't mean to upset you, Harry."

"Oh, no. It's not your fault," Harry shrugged and gave a slight smile. "Actually all my friends have been bothering me about this for months so I'm just a little sore about it is all."

"Your friends didn't want you to quit?" William asked blankly. Harry wondered why he was still asking so many questions when he didn't seem to be interested in the answers.

"Yeah, they were all really upset about it. They kept calling and writing me asking if I'd lost my mind or something."

Thomas glanced again at William before turning to Harry. "But they haven't been bothering you recently?"

At this Harry blushed a bit. He still felt terrible over how he'd been acting and he didn't like admitting it to Thomas. "Er, well, actually... I've sort of been ignoring them. I, uh, moved and didn't really tell them where I'd gone you see..." Harry fidgeted with the tablecloth and didn't dare look up from his glass. Surely now Thomas had to think he was mad, or a coward, or something awful.

Thomas and William meanwhile shared a long and rather meaningful look before a waiter arrived with their lunch. Harry looked up as his plate was set before him. He'd begun to lose his appetite with all the talk about the auror department, but the smell from the beef wellington did a lot to restore it. Thomas also had his fish set in front of him. Harry glanced at William and saw he was turned slightly in his chair to inspect... a dessert trolley?

Harry forgot all about his own lunch and watched, utterly shocked, as William selected no less than seven desserts off the trolley and had them arrayed around him on both the table and a little folding table the maitre d’ set up next to him. William looked up at him from his slice of cheesecake. "You already picked your lunch, you can't have mine." Then he stuck a piece of cake in his mouth and stared at Harry as he chewed it. Harry didn't know if he was being made fun of or not and wasn't entirely sure he cared anymore and so just shrugged and started eating his own meal.

Lunch ended up being quite delicious and Harry was trying to decide whether the restaurant's or the
house-elves' beef wellington had been better. He figured he could always try the elves' again when they taught him to make it and happily dug in to his slice of cheery pie. William was just eating his last dessert, a pear tart, and Thomas was sipping tea contentedly. A better lunch than a sandwich, thought Harry, even with all the questions.

"So," Thomas looked at Harry over his tea. "Where shall we go from here?"

"Well, I was planning to stay all day in the park," Harry said thoughtfully, wondering if Thomas and William had wanted to do something more interesting.

"Isn't it boring?" William looked up from his pear tart, fork tongs still in his mouth.

"No," said Harry a bit tersely. "It's quiet and restful."

"I thought you didn't like boring things like that."

"That's not what I meant," Harry was sure he was glaring now and tried to clear his mind. Maybe he should just pretend William was a legilimens if he couldn't stay calm around him otherwise. "My job before was boring because it was... predictable and easy. Cooking is a lot harder because I've never done a lot of it and don't know much about it. And it is rather tiring. I had dreams about turnips! So I'm perfectly happy relaxing somewhere quiet, alright?"

Harry was definitely glaring at William now and waited only long enough for him to nod before turning to finish his pie. Thomas set his tea down and glanced between them concernedly.

"Well, I think continuing our walk sounds like a splendid idea. It is a lovely park after all, even now," Thomas smiled at them both and was rather disappointed when they both chose to ignore him. Perhaps tempers would cool when they got back outside.

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When evening fell and Potter told them he was still quite full from lunch and would likely head back home, L was against parting ways so soon and insisted they escort him back to number nine Argyle Square once more. Potter seemed willing to argue at first, but gave in after receiving another of Wammy's personable smiles and they all headed off for the subway station. L was relieved, as this trip wasn't so much for courtesy's sake as it was to extend the amount of time Wammy spoke with the boy. The more they spoke, the more the boy trusted them and the more likely he would slip something else as fascinating as what he told them during lunch.

That story about working for the police (obviously false, L had access to records of who worked in every police department in the world and Potter wasn't listed in any of them) had given L a great deal to think about. He'd been watching the boy carefully out of the corner of his eye at the start of lunch, hoping his portrayed disinterest would make Potter more relaxed. Then, in answer to what the boy used to do for a living (and what L believed funded his purchase of the lease at nine Argyle Square), Potter had clearly been trying to think of an appropriate lie when he said he was in the police department. L had felt like jumping up and calling "Ah-HA!" when he heard it. He hadn't expected Potter to slip in the interrogation so soon.

However, such a statement proved that Potter didn't know anything about him or Wammy. No one who believed they were speaking to 'L’ or one of his associates would claim to be part of a police department if they weren't. It was a lie too easy to see through. L had shrugged to himself, that theory had been proved false, but was still right to think Potter suspicious. L had hoped that Potter might make more slip ups in his answers to continue proving him right.
But, while the whole story about the "police department" was false, nearly everything else Potter told them seemed to be true. He tried and failed to remember something about his cooking lessons, but the lessons themselves seemed to be real. His reasons for quitting said "police department" also seemed to be true. At least, Potter had shown nothing but honesty when he explained why he quit. He was also telling the truth about his "friends" hounding him with letters and phone calls and about moving to number nine Argyle Square secretly.

This was actually somewhat worrying. After the lie about the police, L got the feeling that Potter was speaking in some sort of code. The cooking lessons were the only thing that really stood out. So if everything else were codewords and only the cooking lessons were really cooking lessons... L was worried suddenly that Potter was trying to build a 'normal' life for himself after getting out of a much more abnormal life and if the boy's "friends" ever caught up with him, Potter would be in a great deal of trouble. If there was one thing L agreed on with Wammy it was that, suspicious as Potter's files were, Potter himself was an innocent sort of person. But if he'd been involved in crime, that might not be true. Fortunately, L didn't think Potter had participated in anything- that line about "paperwork" seemed to indicate he'd been more of an observer. Which, really, was still quite bad.

L needed to find out exactly what Potter had been involved in before running to Argyle Square. Unfortunately, all of Potter's records for the timeframe of whatever this "training" was, were completely blacked out. As if they didn't exist at all. He frowned and glanced next to him at Potter speaking pleasantly to Wammy about the Forest of Dean. Perhaps if the investigation didn't get far enough (or, worse, if it got too far) he would confront the boy directly. That certainly wouldn't be a good idea at this point. The boy had a habit of clamming up when he didn't want to discuss something and letting on how much they knew might cause him to run and L wasn't entirely confident in his ability to track Potter down before his "friends" did. For now, they would let Potter stay where he was and where they could easily keep an eye on him.

L's eyes widened and he lifted his thumb to his mouth. Had Potter gone to his cooking lessons yesterday? They hadn't noticed the boy exiting his house today and if he had left the house yesterday, they hadn't seen that either. He should bring the cameras up again- perhaps now that Potter himself had all but admitted to being part of something shady, Wammy would be more amiable to the idea. L was certain that keeping an eye on the boy, if only for his own protection, was more important now than worrying about his right to privacy.

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The moment Wammy closed the door of their suite, L turned and said "We need to install surveillance in Potter's house." Wammy didn't bother to respond as he calmly took off his coat and hung it in the closet off the entryway.

"Did you hear me?" L glared at Wammy. There was no way he would allow Wammy to ignore this issue just because he liked the Potter boy.

"Yes, L," Wammy walked into the sitting room while L followed on his heels. "I did hear you, but... Are you quite sure that's necessary?"

"Yes."

Wammy looked at L who was staring at him unblinkingly, and collapsed on the armchair by the window. "Well, it seems a shame. Harry is such a nice lad..."

"Yes, but we need to know where he is and if anyone comes after him," L, pleased that he'd finally gotten his way, walked over to the couch and the laptops before it to begin organizing the next stage of investigation.
"Do you really believe someone will go after the lad, L?" Wammy asked him, clearly afraid of the answer. L stared at him as the laptop loaded.

"Did you see his hand?" L asked flatly.

Wammy sighed. "Yes, knife scars it looked like, old ones. I thought it might be spelling something out, but he never held still long enough for me to check," Quillish looked out the window sadly, wondering what sort of person would cut up a child's hand and hoping nothing worse had happened to Harry. "Well, I still don't understand how Harry got involved in all this. I still don't know what it is he's involved in!"

"Nor do I, but it obviously isn't anything good if he needs to lie about it."

Wammy sighed again and leaned back to look up at the ceiling. "It was rather nice talking to someone who doesn't lie constantly. At least until after lunch it was... Then I kept wondering if he would lie about something else."

"None of your conversations with him outside the restaurant went over personal topics, so he didn't need to lie."

Wammy glanced over at L. "You know my boy, you seem just as upset about this as I do." He smiled sadly at L. "Were you starting to like Harry as well?"

L looked up at Wammy blankly. "Shouldn't you be getting something?"

Wammy laughed. "Rather sad isn't it, my boy? We meet pleasant company on our vacation only because you insist on investigating him and then discover that he might actually be a criminal!"

L's eyes narrowed darkly and he looked back at the computer. "I suspected from the beginning that Potter might be a threat to us."

"Oh don't give me that rubbish L!" Quillish leaned forward in his chair to scold L. "You never felt threatened by him at all! You wanted to follow him even when you thought he was in league with the pickpocket! Then when he wasn't, you were intrigued by him and found out everything about him you could. Even now, you're still intrigued."

Quillish looked thoughtfully at L who'd frozen during his speech and was staring blankly at the computer he'd turned on. "Are you worried about him, my boy?" Quillish asked gently.

L's neck snapped up and he looked expressionlessly at Quillish. "No."

Quillish smiled sadly at him and leaned back in his chair. "I am as well. Harry is a very kind boy and we'll make certain nothing untoward happens to him," Quillish said with a note of finality.

"He might be involved in something criminal. Even if he didn't participate in anything, he obviously witnessed something and he has no intention to tell the authorities."

"Yes, but that might not be his fault," Quillish suggested. "For all we know he was kidnapped from his relatives and made to believe he was actually going to join some form of law enforcement, realized the truth and ran away!"

L stared at Wammy and blinked a bit, thinking this new theory through. "So... he was kidnapped from his parents' house after their murder and kidnapped from his relatives' house before secondary school?" he asked incredulously.
"Possibly," Quillish responded brightly, as if it were only a matter of time before L found evidence supporting his exaggerated claim.

"But... How does that explain everything else?" L sounded as though he was puzzling things aloud and had started chewing his thumb. "What about his parents' deaths? Or his parents for that matter? His mother has the same discrepancies in her records and there aren't any records of his father at all. And why didn't his relatives file a missing person's report if he was kidnapped?"

Wammy tapped his chin. "Hmm, well, perhaps there is something special about him? Perhaps whatever dastardly organization he was dragged into has been around longer than we thought. It could even be behind those mysterious deaths! You did believe that something was manipulating the police somehow..."

"There were too many police from too many areas involved for the cover-ups to be either coincidence or a case of bribery or blackmail. That many people would need a large, powerful organization to be controlling them..." L frowned as he nibbled his thumb.

"Exactly! Perhaps even the boy's relatives were manipulated somehow," Wammy was beginning to sound pleased with himself.

"Wammy?"

"Yes L?"

"There's a great deal of supposition in your theory."

Wammy looked at L and smiled more brightly than he had since saying goodbye to Harry at Argyle Square. "Yes, but we have met Harry. What is your judgment of his character?"

L looked over his thumb at Wammy thoughtfully. "Harry is honest, for all that he lied to us today. He worries how he appears to other people, but doesn't seem to judge others by their appearance. He does what he believes is right, without thinking about the consequences."

"That is exactly what I thought," Wammy was grinning now, utterly pleased with L's assessment. But there was one thing he seemed to be forgetting...

"Wammy, going by that profile, Harry should have notified someone about what was going on. He wouldn't be hiding," L said this last piece almost glumly as he let his hand and thumb fall to his knees.

"Well," Wammy tried to think of what he could say to counter this. "He does seem out of sorts... Perhaps his choice to hide was the only option available at the time and now he's making the best of it."

L thought of how that would fit into the puzzle. "He was very stressed last week and today..." The puzzle wasn't fitting quite right and he tried to think of what else he was missing. "We don't really have enough information, Wammy. But... I admit that the piece that fits best into the data we've gathered is the idea of a large organization."

Wammy looked cheered by this. "In that case, Harry might not be accountable for anything."

"Unless he joined willingly."

"Nonsense! He would have joined when he was only eleven- he wouldn't have had legal consent then- and now, as an adult, he is clearly choosing not to join. It makes perfect sense!"
"No... Something still feels off about this theory..." L leaned his chin on his knees and thought about everything he'd learned about Harry Potter in the last week. Some things fit well, but others just fell out. "It could be possible that our profile of the boy is wrong... It could all be an act."

"You don't believe that, nor do I. Harry is the most open and honest person I've met in years. No one could fake such a thing and then stage lying to us and keep it all straight."

"True.." L lifted his head and looked seriously at Wammy. "We could be fooling ourselves though. We both seem to be doing all we can to prove Potter's innocence before we've even discovered what he's involved in."

Wammy winced at this. "Well, yes... But I do think that meeting Harry is such a huge coincidence that planning some sort of subterfuge around it all is too unlikely."

L thought about this. "It is unusual, isn't it?" Wammy nodded, wondering what L was thinking of now. "But... You're right. I agree the organization idea fits everything perfectly and while such a powerful group might be capable of pulling off a complicated subterfuge like this, I doubt it would be so aware of me as to know what I first investigated before I even had the name 'L'. A subterfuge wouldn't be necessary in that case- they would, as you said before, attack us directly. Therefore, Harry's behavior is most likely an honest portrayal of his character. Which means that we need to keep a close eye on him." L let a small smile form on his mouth as Wammy grinned at him. "-in case he needs help."

Wammy nodded happily and got up from the chair. "Naturally. I shall return soon then." L waved him off and turned to the computer.

In light of recent decisions, he needed to refocus his investigation. The cameras would go up in number nine Argyle Square to keep an eye on things and as Harry was taking cooking lessons, they should have an opportunity to install them on Monday. They would know more accurately when Harry came and went from the house and would know if anyone else entered it. They could follow Harry when he went outside and in the meantime- L intended to start investigating the Dursley's more directly. Any connection they could find to whatever organization was behind all this needed to be explored to the fullest extent.

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The next day, Harry decided to stay at home and relax, which brought up the question, which home? Harry had realized after Thomas and William dropped him off, that he had been sleeping in twelve Grimmauld Place for most of the week and now he was at nine Argyle Square again. He'd only moved to the muggle house to avoid his friends and had only started sleeping in Grimmauld Place again because Kreacher expected him to. So now Harry was trying to figure out where to stay and whether he shouldn't just get rid of one of them.

It was obviously out of the question that he sell Grimmauld Place- he'd inherited it from Sirius and it was an old magical family home. But he cringed at the thought of losing Argyle Square- in the past months he'd come to enjoy the freedom in no one knowing where he was. He still thought he was a prat for ignoring his friends, but it was nice not having to answer the floo every morning and evening (not to mention dealing with those who just apparated onto the step and waltzed in like the house was still headquarters) and having to explain again that he was sure he didn't want to be an auror anymore.

Harry wondered if he was just being selfish, wanting to keep a house so he could get away from his friends. Well, put that way he really did sound like a prat. Harry decided he should head over to Grimmauld Place and start fire-calling his friends, starting with Hermione. He needed to apologize
and they really had to talk about this 'depression' theory she'd come up with. He was sure he wouldn't be hiding so much if he wasn't so embarrassed about everyone thinking he was depressed. Maybe telling her about the cooking lessons would help. But, he would solve that problem first and then decide what to do about the houses.

As he walked out the door of nine Argyle Square, he paused, seeing a rather odd person sitting on the curb a couple houses down. The girl's head and face were hidden from view by a large brimmed black hat with a peacock feather sticking out of the brim. She was wearing a grey sweater over a long red shirt and bright blue jeans and Harry thought he could see a canary yellow skirt sticking out from under the shirt and sweater. It looked as though the girl was playing with a silver slinky and trying to get the toy to fall over itself down the street the way it would fall down a staircase. She seemed terribly familiar to Harry and he couldn't think why a muggle would be sitting on the curb-Harry looked behind her, yep- sitting right in front of twelve Grimmuald Place. Harry approached her cautiously.

"Er, excuse me..?"

The girl looked up from her slinky. "Harry! There you are. Well, that didn't take very long at all did it?"

Harry blinked. It really was Luna and he was already confused. "What didn't take long?"

"For you to show up of course," Luna collected her slinky and stood up. When she turned around, Harry saw the front of her grey sweater was covered with emerald green beetle pins. "Did you want to have lunch Harry?"

"Er, Luna, it's only 9 o'clock," Harry stared as he watched Luna put the slinky away in a bag shaped like an owl. "Um, Luna-"

"Do you like my whorlzinger?"

"Er, your what?"

Luna pulled the slinky out of her bag. "My silver whorlzinger. I bought it when I got my hat."

"Um," Harry shook his head. "It's great Luna. Listen, what are you doing here?"

Luna blinked and tilted her head to the side as she thought. "Well, I was trying to walk my whorlzinger while I waited for you to invite me to lunch."

"...Luna, would you like to go get lunch?" Harry figured that Luna would tell him whatever she wanted from him if he just went along with her. Besides, he hadn't had breakfast yet.

"Certainly Harry," Luna smiled brightly at him. "Shall we go then?"

"Sure. Where did you want to go?"

"Hmm, well I was going to meet Neville for lunch after I found you, so we should go to where we planned to eat."

"Hold on, I thought you were having lunch with me?" Harry asked, confused as he followed Luna down the street.

"Oh no Harry. You're having lunch with us," Luna told him happily.
Harry sighed. "So where are we going again?"

"Oh, the Leaky Cauldron."

"Wait- Luna!" Harry stopped her and dragged her back towards Grimmauld Place. "I can't go there like this!"

"Why not, Harry? You look fine."

"Because," Harry opened the door to number twelve Grimmauld and pulled Luna in after him. "Everyone will recognize me!"

Luna blinked and followed Harry as he rushed up the stairs to his room. "Well of course they would Harry- just because no one's seen you in a while doesn't mean they've forgotten what you look like."

"Exactly, so, um- could you get out so I could change?" Harry waved Luna toward the doorway as he pulled something out of his closet. Once he heard the door close, Harry changed quickly into a set of his old Dudley clothes and spelled his hair a Weasley red color. When he got downstairs, he found Luna in the kitchen with her "whorlzinger" spread out on the table. She looked up from waving it back and forth as he entered.

"You look like Ron's brother Harry," Luna tilted her head as she looked Harry up and down. "I don't think most people will recognize you now."

"That's sort of the idea."

"To look like Ron's brother?"

"What? No! Just, not to look like me," Harry said, wondering if he should've made his hair brown instead. "Are we going now or not?"

"Yes," Luna put her whorlzinger away and followed Harry back out onto the street to head for King's Cross again. "Harry, do you often go out disguised? Was I supposed to wear one too?"

"Huh?" Harry looked at Luna confusedly. "Oh, no. You don't have to wear a disguise Luna. I only do this when I visit Diagon Alley is all."

"Why?"

"Because I can't walk down the Alley without getting mobbed otherwise...

"Oh, I suppose that would be true, wouldn't it." Luna stopped talking then and Harry was relieved. As easy as it was to explain things to Luna, it was still embarrassing. They made their way through the station in silence and it wasn't until they'd boarded a train that Luna spoke again.

"Harry, is that why Hermione couldn't find you last week?"

"What?" Harry had no idea what Luna meant.

"Last week," Luna explained to Harry patiently. "Hermione came and told Neville this morning that you missed a dinner with her and Ron last week. So I was wondering if you went to dinner in disguise and she didn't know."

Harry groaned. "Oh no. I forgot all about that!"

"So you weren't in disguise then?" Luna asked.
"No, no. I..." Harry paused. Well, explaining this to Luna was much easier than explaining it to Hermione or Ron. "I sort of skipped the dinner. I was going to write them later, but I forgot. Actually, I was going to talk to them today, but not about the dinner..."

"Oh. What were you going to talk to them about?"

"Huh? Oh, I'm taking cooking lessons. So I was going to tell them that I'm not depressed and not to worry."

"Well it's very good that you aren't depressed Harry, but I'm afraid they are rather worried," Luna tilted her head curiously. "What sort of cooking lessons?"

"Vegetables mostly... Um, do you know how worried they are?" Harry asked, fairly worried himself now.

"Quite a lot I'm afraid. When you didn't show up they called you and then went to your house, but you weren't there. They thought something terrible happened."

"No," Harry said glumly, now feeling horrible for not at least writing to his friends. "I went to the zoo."

"Did you have fun?" Luna asked brightly. "I've never been to a zoo before."

"Not really, but I was upset at the time..."

"Well, that probably doesn't count then," Luna said. "Next time, you should bring friends along. That makes everything better."

Harry sighed. He didn't think Luna was trying to make him feel bad, but he wished she'd change the subject. "Yeah, sure Luna."

"I know Harry," Luna turned to Harry happily. "I'll go with you."

Harry stared at her. "Er, to the zoo you mean?"

"Yes," Luna told him. "We could bring Neville and Hermione and Ron and Ginny with us as well if you'd like."

Harry looked at Luna confusedly. "Er, Luna... Aren't you mad at me?"

Luna blinked. "Why would I be mad at you Harry?"

"Well, I don't know... Mad at me for making Ron and Hermione worry about me and search for me and not caring? Mad at me for running away from my job and ignoring all my friends? Mad at me for hiding all the time and wearing disguises and stuff?" Harry ran a hand through his messy red hair. "Aren't you mad at me for all that?"

"Well, no Harry," Luna tilted her head again as she stared at Harry with wide eyes. "I know you aren't trying to hurt anyone with what you're doing-"

"But I am!" Harry burst out, making the other people on the train stare at him. He hunched in his seat and said more quietly "I am hurting everyone and making them worry and-"

"Yes, Harry, I know," Luna said calmly.

Harry stared at her, utterly confused now. "Then why aren't you mad?"
"Because you don't mean to hurt anybody Harry. You've just got a terrible infestation of sneedles and once those clear up I'm sure you'll apologize."

Harry blinked a bit, trying to think of any time Luna had ever made any sense. Which wasn't fair really, because she'd made sense plenty of times before... he just couldn't think of them at the moment.

"Er, 'sneedles', Luna?"

"Yes. I'm afraid you have the worst case I've ever seen."

"I'm afraid to ask this, but what do they do?"

"Well, they latch on to your ears and sing strange songs that make you sleepy and when they start swinging your mind gets all turned around and confused."

Harry started feeling angry. Did Luna think he should've stayed in the auror department too? "So, what? I'm being a prat and making silly mistakes because of the sneedles and once I get rid of them I'll just go back to the auror department and everything with be all better then?" he demanded hotly.

Luna looked at him oddly. "Oh no Harry. You have far fewer sneedles now than you did last year. You're getting better. I think you're doing a good job of it too and you're only hiding from everyone so no one else gets caught by the sneedles," Luna thought about that. "Which really, is quite nice of you."

"So... You think... I mean- you thought there was something wrong with me before?" Harry said hopefully. "When I was an auror, I mean?"

"Well, you didn't seem very happy Harry," Luna shrugged. "But I don't suppose anyone would be with that many sneedles hanging off them."

"But you think I'm better now?" Harry asked her. "I mean, better off not being an auror?"

"I don't really know about that Harry. But I do think you're much more cheerful than you were before," Luna stood up to head for the train door. "This is our stop Harry."

Harry got up and stumbled as the train lurched to a halt at the Leicester station. "If you think I'm happier, then why does everyone think I'm depressed?"

"Because," Luna said as they got off the train and headed off. "You've been hiding and no one has seen you."

As they walked out into the sunlight, Luna paused and looked at Harry kindly. "But that's okay Harry."

"It is?" Harry asked her, bewildered.

"Yes, because once all the sneedles are gone, you'll make certain to see everyone and apologize and then they'll all know how much happier you are and stop worrying," Luna turned to walk up Charing Cross Road with Harry keeping pace. "And you know Harry," Luna smiled at him. "You're losing sneedles all the time."

Harry thought about this and wondered if this was simply Luna's way of telling him she forgave him for being an idiot and gave a tentative smile back. "Thanks Luna."
Harry was glad he'd gone out with Luna to have lunch with Neville. Neville, like Luna, didn't seem to be mad at him and only hoped that Harry talked to Hermione soon because "she was in a right state." Otherwise, Harry, Neville and Luna had a very pleasant lunch and chat and Harry was reminded of his lunch the day before with Thomas and William. The food wasn't anywhere as rich, but Harry thought the company was just as enjoyable.

Neville asked Harry what he was up to now and Harry started telling them both about his cooking lessons with the house-elves. Neville was amazed the elves had allowed such a thing- "They must really like you Harry, they get up in tears if anyone else tries to cook in their kitchens!"- and Luna told him to ask them how to make truffula toffee, a supposed secret recipe of house-elves. Harry agreed to do so as soon as he passed his carrot test.

He felt relieved to be with friends again and realized that he'd really missed seeing them. He couldn't wait to see Ron and Hermione too- he'd just have to make sure he apologized first. Thinking of that also made him realize that the only way he had to get in contact with his friends was through the floo. Harry didn't know if he'd just gotten used to sending replies back with his friends' owls or if he'd been avoiding buying an owl, but after Luna and Neville offered to go shopping with him, Harry was determined to get his own owl. The first letter he sent would go straight to Ron and Hermione.

The walk down Diagon Alley was peaceful and without too many interruptions- while Neville attracted almost as much attention as Harry when he wasn't disguised, people seemed more willing to give him space to walk. Harry supposed it must be because Neville looked so fierce with the burn scar across his face. Neville had been surprised by Harry's disguise, but admitted that it was likely a good idea since he'd once gone with Harry to Diagon Alley and got knocked over by a rather large woman with shopping bags on each arm, trying to get to Harry so she could hug him. Harry just grinned sheepishly and told Neville he'd gotten tired of not being able to buy his groceries in less than five hour trips. This trip however, was blissfully peaceful because none of the witches and wizards recognized Harry at all and Harry, Neville and Luna were able to walk all the way to Eeylop's Owl Emporium without being stopped once.

Inside the dark and dusky building, Harry turned to the rows upon rows of perches and wondered how he was supposed to pick an owl. Hedwig had been picked out for him by Hagrid and Harry had no idea what he should look for in an owl.

"Come over here Harry," Neville called softly. "Look at these."

Harry walked over to him and looked at the large owls Neville was pointing out. There was an eagle owl, a horned owl, a grey owl and... a snowy owl. Harry flinched slightly.

"Er, you know, I think I'm gonna look for something different, okay Neville?" Harry said quickly as he backed away and turned to go down another aisle.

"Oh, yeah. Sure thing Harry," Neville said apologetically. "I'm gonna go see what Luna's looking at, alright?"

"Sure," Harry said and he wandered down an aisle of perches. He looked around at the softly hooting owls, some asleep and some blinking at him slowly, trying to remind himself why it was important to buy an owl. Wizards used owls to deliver mail, so an owl was really just a tool to stay in touch with other people in the magical world. The only problem was, Harry kept remembering Hedwig, one of his best friends, falling in a flash of light behind him. Harry shook his head to clear it. He was being silly. He needed an owl and that was that.
Harry started seriously looking at the owls around him and noticed that he'd wandered into a section for smaller owls. He was also being stared at by a barn owl with incredibly large black eyes.

"Er, did I wake you? Sorry, I'll just go-" Harry said before the small owl let out a sharp screech. He jerked back as the owls around him all woke and started screeching in displeasure. Neville and Luna ran towards him with the shopkeeper close behind them.

"What happened Harry?" Neville shouted at Harry over the racket of all the owls crying out.

"I didn't do anything!" Harry gestured toward the little barn owl (the only one, he noticed, that wasn't screeching) and shouted back "That one woke them up!"

Harry, Neville and Luna stood as much out of the way as they could while the shopkeeper cast sleeping charms over the screaming owls and quiet slowly descended again. Before the man could aim his wand at the barn owl that started the whole mess though, the little creature half hopped, half flew over to Harry to land on his shoulder and peck his ear.

"Ow!" Harry shouted and tried to shoo the creature away. Behind him he heard Luna laugh and Neville cover a suspicious sounding cough. "Get off me!"

"Oh, wait- Harry!" Neville started, still clearly trying not to laugh as Luna was doing. "Don't, he wants to go with you."

"What?" Harry paused in shoving the owl off his shoulder, giving it a chance to sidle up to his ear again to peck it. "Ow! Knock it off!" Harry glared at the owl that was looking very smug by this point and turned to Neville. "What are you talking about?"

"You wanted an owl Harry," Luna had stopped laughing and was walking forward to observe the barn owl on Harry's shoulder. "This is your owl."

"Huh?" Harry said. He could feel the owl perched on him start to fall asleep. The shopkeeper walked up to him, looking annoyed, and asked Harry if he would be purchasing the owl now. "No, wait a moment- I didn't pick out an owl!"

"Well, no, but owls sometimes choose wizards Harry," Neville said calmly.

"But Hagrid bought Hedwig for me," Harry said. Neville nodded.

"Yes, but Hagrid was buying her for you and he's good with animals. He probably picked out an owl he thought would suit you," Neville pointed at the owl on Harry's shoulder. "This time you're getting an owl for yourself and this one decided it liked you."

"So, what, I have to buy it?" Harry asked incredulously.

Luna frowned at him. "No, but the poor thing will be very sad if you don't."

Harry stared at her and at Neville and at the owl (asleep already!) on his shoulder. He sighed. It wasn't as though he knew what he was looking for anyway. "Alright, I'll buy it."

Luna smiled and followed Harry and Neville (who had decided he might as well laugh a little) up to the front where the shopkeeper was waiting for them impatiently.

Once outside, Harry tried to convince the owl to wake up and fly ahead of him- Hedwig always knew where to go, this owl could figure it out to- but it just glared at him and went back to sleep. "Fine," Harry snapped at it. "But you'd better be resting for tonight, I do need you to deliver
something you know!" The owl fluffed its feathers and that was the only response Harry could get out of the bird.

Harry decided that he should get back home - walking around with an owl on his shoulder was making people take second glances and he worried that someone might see through his disguise. He said goodbye to Neville and Luna, apologized again, and thanked them for helping him out. He promised to write them later in the week to let them know if he ever learned to cook anything more than vegetables. Then, he apparated to twelve Grimmauld Place, a sleepy owl on his shoulder and a bag of owl treats under his arm, to look for Hedwig's old perch and cage.
Chapter 5

After deciding to spy more closely on Harry for his own protection, L had sent Wammy to begin gathering surveillance equipment and had started going over plans for investigating the Dursley's. L would either send Wammy or another associate to get close to them, but first, he needed to set everything up to watch over Harry. On Sunday morning, L and Wammy agreed that spending the day with Harry, while not as productive as other tasks, would be for the best. L told himself this was just so they could subtly interrogate Harry more, not because he was worried something might happen to Harry while he was out of view. They had headed for the house later than they had yesterday, but L wasn't worried about finding Harry if he had already left- Harry seemed to visit the same area weekly. Unfortunately, they had only just arrived on the street in time to see Harry and an unknown girl disappear between two houses.

L and Wammy had rushed to where they thought Harry had gone, but only found the walls of two houses, so snug next to each other, a centipede couldn't worm it's way between them. Wammy had suggested worriedly that perhaps Harry was in his house and whatever they had seen from down the street was how Harry got in and out without notice. L had led the way back to number nine and rang the bell. When no one answered, L pounded on the door. When still no one answered, Wammy immediately went to check around the block while L picked the lock on the door.

L had only had enough time to enter the house and establish that no one was inside (and sparsely furnished, L wondered if Harry had never intended to stay long term) when he glanced out a front window and saw- the girl! It had to be the same girl, there couldn't possibly be two girls walking about in a large black hat with a peacock feather and a sweater covered in green beetles. L had raced downstairs to the front door, waited for the girl to walk one more house down, and quickly exited number nine and headed after her. Walking beside her was a boy with red hair and tattered, baggy clothes. L couldn't see the boy's face, but his gut told him that the boy was Harry. Why would Harry be walking around in disguise with that girl? She couldn't be one of Harry's 'friends' from his past job...

L called Wammy as he followed the two and told him to meet up at King's Cross, he would call if they boarded a train before Wammy arrived. L stayed behind the girl and the redheaded Harry and was joined by Wammy, carrying a newspaper tucked under his arm, just as the subway arrived. As the girl and Harry got in line to board, Wammy and L took up positions on either side of them, further up and down on the car. When L got on, he waited for the girl and Harry to sit before choosing a seat at a diagonal from them, next to the juncture between cars. Leaning forward now and resting his elbows on his knees, he could easily see the boy's face and it was indeed Harry. He had donned sunglasses and a red wig and ill-fitting clothes, but it was definitely him.

As the train started moving, the girl began speaking and L settled in to watch, reading her lips as they moved. L frowned, if he was interpreting her speech correctly, the girl was asking if Harry had been in disguise when he went to meet someone. Harry said he hadn't gone at all and seemed upset at the reminder. Harry had also been planning to tell the people he'd been supposed to meet that he was taking cooking lessons and wasn't depressed. L blinked. Maybe 'cooking lesson' was code for
something after all, because this whole conversation seemed to be exactly what L had been afraid would happen if they didn't get to Harry fast enough. Maybe learning to cook meant that Harry was retiring? Or perhaps that he wasn't going to reveal information about the organization?

The girl told Harry that his friends had "flew-ed" him (perhaps she meant they flew in from elsewhere?) and when they couldn't find him, had thought something had happened. The meeting last week, maybe it had been to make certain that Harry wouldn't go to the police. But last week had been when they had first met Harry. Perhaps that was why Harry had been so upset at the time, and so willing to chase after a thief to relieve tension? After Harry admitted to going to a zoo instead of meeting them (L approved- a populated, public area with cameras everywhere would be much safer if someone came looking for him), the girl seemed to mock Harry for his trip and suggested that the next time Harry went he should bring his 'friends' with him. L gritted his teeth, was she telling Harry he wouldn't be safe no matter where he went?

Harry had grown even more upset than he already was and asked suddenly if the girl was mad at him for running and hiding. When the girl claimed she wasn't because Harry hadn't meant what he'd done, Harry had frightened L by shouting out that he did. No! L thought, the girl had been handing Harry an excuse and if Harry denied it he might anger her! L was worried that Harry's denial would end the conversation for the worst and seeing Harry almost slump over in defeat and hiding his face from L's view upset him more than it should have. Nothing bad would happen in a public setting like the subway, on a train packed with passengers. So long as he and Wammy kept Harry from going off alone with the girl, everything would be fine.

As L watched the conversation continue, things took a very strange turn. The girl introduced what could only be a new codeword, "snii-del." L had thought at first that he had misread that, but it was repeated several times, and by Harry as well, so L was certain that the word really was "snii-del." From the description she gave, L thought perhaps "snii-del" meant someone who gave information to Harry that the organization didn't want him to have. That might explain why he left. The girl seemed to be using the codeword as an excuse for Harry's behavior and Harry had asked if she thought he would return to the "ar-ours" when the "snii-dels" were gone. The girl told him he didn't have to and that he was doing a good job hiding from everyone to get rid of the "snii-dels" and he would be happier when they were all gone. Then she had led Harry off the train.

L had followed them, staying four people behind them up into the station, with Wammy following two people behind him. L was terribly worried. As far as he could tell, the girl had used subtle psychology on Harry, first interrogating him on missing a meeting and worrying his 'friends', then mocking him for being too cowardly to meet them and implying that they could find him anywhere he went anyway. When Harry became stressed from this, she had unbalanced him further with the codeword for whoever Harry had been talking to and then used it to soothe Harry by telling him he was doing the right thing and no one was mad at him for it. Worst of all was that L could tell Harry was buying it. The hopeful relief on Harry's face when he asked her if she thought he was better off out of the "ar-ours" twisted L's stomach into knots. They needed to get Harry away from these people and soon, he really didn't belong with them.

Once up on the street, L and Wammy had followed Harry and the girl up Charing Cross Road and quietly discussed what the train conversation had revealed. Wammy had been all for simply going up and joining them, thereby preventing the girl from taking Harry anywhere while they were in the way. L insisted they couldn't because one, Harry was disguised and they shouldn't be able to recognize him, and two, they knew nothing about the girl. If they interfered now, they might make things worse. Their best option was to follow closely and intercede only if they needed to.

About four blocks later, L was cursing that decision and wishing he'd gone along with Wammy's plan instead. They had lost Harry and the girl. They searched the street, the stores, the alleys,
everywhere they could think of. But nowhere could they find Harry.

L and Wammy had returned to Harry's house on the remote chance Harry had returned. When they found the house empty, L had emotionlessly told Wammy to begin installing the surveillance cameras so they would at least know if anyone came back to it. Wammy did so, with L keeping a close watch outside, and when they had finished they went back to the hotel and began setting up the monitors they would need to connect to their various bugs.

Then, they watched and searched and waited. On Monday, Wammy was sent to investigate the Dursley's in person and on Tuesday, L set up a missing person's case for Harry with the police as a "close friend." By Thursday, the police hadn't turned up anything more than Harry appearing in the security camera of a record store, walking past the window, and then not appearing in another security camera with a view of the street only three stores down. The two stores between the videos had been questioned but no one remembered seeing a boy or girl matching the descriptions given. Which, L reflected, was part of the problem. Harry had been disguised as a redhead with green eyes, baggy clothes and sunglasses at the time of disappearance, but was actually a black haired boy with green eyes, regular glasses and better clothes. He hadn't wanted to mention the disguise though, as that would make the police suspicious and search for Harry as though he were a criminal rather than a victim, so he ended up juggling two separate missing person's cases and waited to see if they connected.

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Wammy straightened his jacket as he rang the bell of Number Four Privet Drive, the front was neat and trim and he knew the people inside would expect the same from any visitors. The door pulled open just as he decided his tie didn't need any adjustment.

"Yes?" A woman who could only be Petunia Dursley answered the door. She was thin and somewhat harsh behind the eyes, enough so that the polite smile she gave him couldn't quite hide her general displeasure at being interrupted so early in the morning.

"Sorry to disturb you, ma'am," Wammy nodded at her pleasantly and held out his hand with a business card associated with his current identity, "I am Inspector Reginold White from the Metropolitan Police Service, may I have a word with you?"

Mrs. Dursley's smile grew more strained with every word and her eyes seemed ready to bulge out of their sockets when he finished, but she gestured him inside as politely as she could before leading him to a couch in the sitting room.

"Can I get you anything, Inspector?" she asked, gracious even as she watched him nervously. "Some tea perhaps?"

"Oh no," Wammy waved her down, "I'll only be a moment."

"What's this, pet?" A man, surely Vernon Dursley, came up the hall into the sitting room, still wiping a bit of jam off his mustache with a napkin. Wammy nodded and smiled at him politely as Mrs. Dursley introduced him.

"From Scotland Yard, eh? We're not in any trouble, I hope?" Mr. Dursley clearly intended this to be a joking comment on his presence in their home, but Wammy couldn't help noticing the way Dursley's eyes narrowed nervously and shifted between him, Mrs. Dursley, and the hall.
"Certainly not, Mr. Dursley, no, I came, in fact, to inquire if you've had any recent word from your nephew, Mr. Harry James Potter."

Mrs. Dursley froze, smile stricken off her face, and Mr. Dursley seemed to be holding his breath, face slowly purpling with every second of lost oxygen. Wammy glanced between them with a pleasantly confused expression, his mind whirling over the suspicious behavior.

"We haven't, I'm afraid," Mrs. Dursley finally came unstuck and rushed to cover their lapse. "He doesn't actually live here any longer and he hasn't spoken to us in years. We don't know where he lives." The polite smile came back in full force and seemed to incite some action in her husband.

"Quite right! Quite right!" Dursley's voice boomed off the walls as he stood up. The color in his face didn't go away as he worked himself up. "That boy was nothing but trouble growing up, we were good enough to raise him up when he needed a place to stay, but we're well washed of him now!"

Wammy tried to interrupt the rant, "I assure you, Mr. Potter is not in any trouble, so far as we know, this is only a missing person's inquiry," but the Dursleys seemed content to ignore him now as they protested their association with one Harry Potter.

"We're well rid of him, you hear?" Mr. Dursley said insistently when Wammy rose from his seat. "That boy was always getting into trouble, never listening to his betters or making an effort to straighten up, and see where it's got him? Same as his parents!" Wammy knew if he were L, a remark like that wouldn't go unchallenged, but he was only himself, pretending to be a law abiding officer making an inquiry in the home of supposedly innocent citizens, so the best he could do was file away the information to be reported to L later. "Haven't a clue where he could be, but if he turns up here you can be sure we'll turn him straight in!"

Wammy was being herded over to the door as Mr. Dursley made his assurances, so when Mrs. Dursley darted behind him to open it, he knew the only acceptable thing he could do now was give in and leave quietly. "Well, then, Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, please call my number if you receive any information regarding Mr. Potter," Wammy bade farewell to them both, and chanced spotting a third person further along the hall before he was shuffled onto the front step and the door closed firmly behind him.

Well, that had gone both better and worse than he had imagined. L, at least, would be pleased to have more evidence that Harry was connected to something sinister, though how to arrange questioning the Dursleys more closely might prove difficult. Wammy shook his head as he walked across the lawn to the hire car. There wasn't enough evidence yet to warrant any sort of formal investigation, so L would have to make do with simply knowing there was a secret here.

"Wait up!" a voice behind him stopped Wammy as he was pulling his keys out to unlock the cardoor. He turned to find a young man, very much resembling Vernon Dursley, skulking by the azalea bushes just down the walk. "You... you were asking about Harry? Is he alright?" The young man, who must be, Wammy realized, Dudley Dursley, seemed extremely nervous to be speaking with him, and kept sneaking furtive glances back at his own house, as well as up and down the street around them.

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Also by Thursday, Wammy returned from what he claimed was one of the most exhausting interrogations he'd ever dealt with. He had introduced himself to the Dursley family as a police
detective from London, investigating the disappearance of Harry Potter. The response he was given
to this, he told L, was "So why're you looking for him here?" The family hadn't seemed worried
about Harry at all and behaved more as if being questioned about it was only an inconvenience that
was being unjustly forced on them. He was able to get very little information from Mr. and Mrs.
Dursley and had been forced to leave rather sooner than he would have liked when they told him
frankly that Harry had promised never to come back and if he ever did they would be only too happy
to turn him in.

"I don't think they even listened to me," Wammy told L indignantly. "They seemed to think I was
looking for Harry because he'd committed a crime! They didn't care at all that he was missing, and
I'll tell you, their sitting room was simply covered with pictures of themselves and their son- but there
was not one picture of Harry! If I hadn't known any better, I'd never have thought they ever had
another child in that house."

But, despite the elder Dursley's complete lack of cooperation, Wammy did gain some interesting
information from the younger Dursley, Dudley. The boy Dudley had run after Wammy as he walked
away from Privet Drive and had asked him if he knew what had happened to Harry. Wammy,
curious at the opposite reaction Dudley was showing to his parents', had asked him why he was so
concerned about his cousin. Dudley had flinched and mumbled that Harry had saved his life.
Wammy had pressed for details and learned that when Dudley was fifteen, he and Harry had been
walking home from the park at night and been attacked. Dudley had been attacked by two assailants
and ended up pinned, while Harry had been attacked by one and managed to fight the person off.
Dudley had shakily told Wammy that Harry had had a chance to run for it, and if it'd been him he
would've left Harry without a backward glance. But Harry, he said, had immediately turned to help
him without any hesitation at all. Harry had fought off the attackers, "Hurt 'em all enough to make
'em run", and then had helped Dudley limp home.

Dudley had explained how, when they got back, his parents had blamed everything on Harry and
they never spoke of it again. But Dudley had been thinking about it, a lot. He'd been happy to blame
Harry back then too, because Harry had always been weaker than him and he'd always been able to
beat on him whenever he wanted. The fact that Harry had proved stronger than him had been
difficult to accept and was something, he said, that his dad would never accept. So now Dudley was
upset, because his cousin had saved his life and he'd never really thanked him and had, in fact, tried
to make him feel like he'd done something wrong instead. Which was why Dudley hoped they could
find Harry and make sure he was alright and would be willing to help if he could.

Wammy had been touched by the story and impressed at Dudley's decision to change his opinion of
his cousin- a difficult task indeed when Wammy could tell the boy's parents were more than willing
to vilify Harry. Wammy had asked Dudley if he knew any of Harry's friends and Dudley had told
him that the only ones he knew about were a family of redheads called "Weasley" (who Dudley
didn't like much because they'd poisoned him) and somebody named "Cedric." But, Dudley said,
they wouldn't be able to find "Cedric" probably, because he was dead. Wammy had asked him why
he knew the boy's name in that case and Dudley had said that Harry had had nightmares about him
dying in front of him years ago and would sometimes wake up calling his name.

Wammy was of course shocked to hear such a thing, but had made certain there wasn't anything else
for Dudley to tell him before moving on. His next visit, he told L, was by far the worst. Using the
same cover story he had given the Dursley family, Wammy had presented himself to Ms. Marjorie
Dursley and endured a blistering lecture on all evils relating to "Harry Potter." The woman had been
only too happy to talk about Harry and, believing much the same as her brother and sister-in-law
about the nature of a 'police officer' asking after Harry's whereabouts, was convinced that Harry
would have murdered someone by now and made off to Switzerland. She had gone on about her
poor family being so good as to take in a worthless brat only for him to turn around and repay them
with all this trouble. "Bad blood," she said. "Bad blood will out, and you couldn't get any worse than what he had!"

By the end of the interview, Wammy had been quite disgusted and more than eager to leave, but he had to admit he had learned quite a lot. He told L how the woman related the story of Petunia Dursley finding her nephew on the doorstep, wrapped in a blanket with a letter explaining his parents were dead and that, as family, it was now her responsibility to care for the boy. Ms. Dursley had been proud to tell Wammy that, had she been in Petunia's place, the boy would have been in an orphanage before the door had closed. She'd also explained how Harry had been sent to "St. Brutus' Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys" when he was eleven and the fact that even that place couldn't train him to be a law abiding citizen only proved her point. His parents had been trash and so he, naturally, was trash and such things couldn't be beaten out of a person.

Wammy had been livid by the end of his report to L. "Why, it's a wonder Harry has any morals at all," Quillish shouted as he paced before L. "Living with people like that all his life and still ending up the sort of person who would save a tormentor, catch a thief for no gain, and to be so polite all the time! Why, the boy must be a saint!"

"Yes," L said absentmindedly. "That title... St. Brutus' Secure Center... It sounds fake, but I will check to make certain."

"That as well!" Quillish yelled. "Imagine! Claiming to send an eleven year old boy to such a vile sounding place! And that woman, from the way she told it, Harry was caned at that place!"

L looked up from his computer. "Was he?"

"Apparently," Quillish turned and gestured. "He told her himself they were caned all the time. Though she said he said it so frankly she thought perhaps they weren't doing it hard enough!" Quillish collapsed into an armchair beside the couch.

"Don't worry Wammy, I do not believe Harry was actually caned. More likely than not this "St. Brutus" is a ruse the family came up with to explain Harry's absences. Harry likely went along with the tale to please them."

Quillish leaned back in the chair as he looked at L tiredly. "I know, dear boy, I simply... Do not like to hear of such things, and those people- some of the things they didn't say, I fear, were worse than anything a "St. Brutus' Center" could have done to poor Harry." Quillish closed his eyes sadly. "You know, I almost wish those awful people had given Harry up to an orphanage. He might have had a better life then, and might never have gotten involved in whatever has him now."

"No," L said simply as he multi-tasked watching the monitors on number nine Argyle Square, continuing his work on Harry's two missing person's cases and beginning a search for a 'St. Brutus' Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys.' "His relatives would never have given him up and he would have still gotten involved regardless of where he lived."

"Why do you think so, my boy?" Quillish asked.

"The letter. Harry was found on his relatives' doorstep with nothing more than a blanket and a letter explaining they had to care for him, correct?"

"Oh, no." Quillish said with fearful realization.

"Yes," L said flatly. "The same ones who took Harry when he was eleven, also took him when he was a baby and sent him to the Dursley's care, possibly threatening them in some way to make sure
they kept him."

"Why though?" Quillish asked desperately. "I admit that the more I learn of Harry's personality, the more I am impressed by him- I don't doubt his potential, certainly- but why would any group be so invested in the boy's life like this? From the time he was orphaned to when he was ready for whatever they needed him for?"

L sat quietly and gripped his legs tighter to his chest as he watched the monitors on Harry's house. "I don't know."

Quillish gaped at L. He had forgotten that L was upset by all this as well and was perhaps less prepared to deal with it than he was. L had always been an anti-social sort of person, never even wanting to associate with anyone, as a child or later. The only exception L had ever made to this was Quillish himself. But dealing so closely with Harry had affected L. L really was becoming attached to the boy, Quillish thought. Harry had been polite, of course, but he had also been accepting. When L was a child, his odd habits evoked all sorts of reactions in those who met him- most of them rude, some of them pitying. Quillish actually thought the main reason L had warmed up to him was because he had tried his best to allow L to behave as he liked (so long as no one was hurt, Quillish had never much cared how anyone acted) and had not judged him for it. Now, L had interacted closely with Harry and Harry had essentially accepted L's odd behavior without coming off as either condescending or as though he thought there was something wrong with L. The closest Harry had gotten to calling L on anything he did was when he had that outburst in the park, but he had been stressed already and L had been intentionally antagonizing him, and so didn't take it personally. Quillish wondered if perhaps, even after only a day, Harry was the closest thing L had ever had to a friend.

"L," Quillish asked kindly. "Would you like some cake?" L looked up and blinked at Quillish owlishly. Quillish smiled. "I believe there is a lovely shortcake I brought with me from Gloucestershire."

L's lips quirked as if to say he knew exactly what Quillish was trying to do, but he nodded anyway and Quillish got up. He would call down to the reception for tea to be sent up as well.

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The next day, after another sleepless night, L began reorganizing the information gathered from the searches for Harry as well as what Wammy had learned from the Dursleys. As fascinating as that new information was, it was also terribly worrying when put into context with Harry's situation. L had already seen how easily Harry had been manipulated by the girl on the train- if Harry had been raised in an uncaring household, careful psychological handling would keep Harry pliant his whole life. Yes, L thought, if Harry had been raised to see himself as worthless and then a group approached him and treated him well, but maintained the mindset in Harry that he was not as important as other people, then Harry would be polite to everyone he met, work hard to help others, and would do anything to keep the approval of those who treated him well despite his supposed worthlessness.

L took a sip of his afternoon tea (seven sugars, no cream). It was rather disturbing, as Wammy had said, but it explained a great deal about Harry. It also, unfortunately, meant that Harry was more likely to return to the organization than run from them. Perhaps Harry had learned something he didn't approve of and tried to leave, but after meeting with that girl and being so masterfully handled, Harry would probably rethink his decision and agree to go back with her. L set his cup carefully back down on the table and hunched over his knees as he stared at the monitors on nine Argyle Square. He was beginning to get the feeling that was exactly what happened to Harry. But, if he had
returned to wherever he'd been, there was little chance L and Wammy would ever see him again.

Wammy was expecting L to find Harry somehow, but now L was feeling incredibly depressed because he didn't see how he could. He was confident, of course, that he would eventually uncover the organization that took Harry, he certainly had enough clues to work off of. The Dursleys, for instance, would have to be revisited. The son at least, had seen some of Harry's associates and, despite the fact that "Weasley" was likely an assumed name as none of L's searches turned up anything useful, a group of redheads was clearly important. Why else would Harry wander around disguised as one? Or perhaps, L thought, the red hair was the disguise, for all of them. He would have to look into any suspicious occurrences involving redheads. Then there were the Dursleys themselves- they obviously knew more than they were saying, perhaps calling Harry and his parents criminals had been a hint rather than an expression of mindless hate.

L tapped his finger on the sugar bowl and got up to find Wammy, they did have enough to start with, but the main problem was whether they could find the information they needed fast enough to find Harry as well. As soon as they probed too deep, the organization would seek to cut off any leads they had found already and would place Harry as far from their reach as possible. Then there was the problem of Harry himself. L was starting to worry that even if they did manage to find Harry, the boy wouldn't even want to be saved from a group of people he trusted more than two strangers he met off the street.

As L walked into the second bedroom, he missed seeing the very person he was thinking so solemnly about, calmly enter the screen showing the front door of nine Argyle Square and pass casually across four more screens as he headed for the kitchen.

"Wammy," L called as he waited in the doorway of Wammy's bedroom, hands in pockets while he stared at the ground. Wammy looked up from the suit he was airing out for tomorrow- he had planned to go back to Little Whigning and try to speak with Dudley Dursley again.

"Yes, my boy?" Wammy said.

L paused a long while before speaking and he didn't look up once. "It is a strong possibility that we may not be able to find Harry again... I believe he is with the unknown organization."

"Well, of course he is!" Wammy said desperately, coming forward at once, to stand in front of L. L hunched in further on himself, but didn't step back. "We saw him go off with that girl."

"Yes, but- I believe he may have chosen to go with her."

"It's true we didn't see any evidence of a struggle, or any inclination from Harry that he didn't want to go with her, but I thought we agreed that was simply because Harry was being misled by her!" Quillish wanted to know why L was suddenly acting so subdued. Perhaps L had gotten more attached to Harry than he thought and didn't like that Harry had disappeared before L could solve his case. He had to convince L to stay positive, Harry was depending on them. "L, let's go sit down and you can explain to me why you feel this is now so hopeless."

"I just told you," L said sulkily as Wammy herded him back into the sitting room. "He obviously chose to go back to the people who took him. We have yet to find any information on this organization save for vague descriptions of their passing. The closest we have gotten to any of them directly, was that girl who acted in such a contrary manner to typical criminals that I have no way of either profiling or searching for her at all! Harry was with her and now we've lost him!" L bit out angrily to Wammy. "I am not saying that we will stop the investigation, merely that we may not locate them in time to do Harry any good!" Wammy wasn't understanding this because he didn't want to understand it. L turned away from him, intent on ignoring him, when his eye caught
movement on the screens set up over the sitting table. L froze, wide-eyed, and Wammy almost ran into him, having expected L to keep walking.

"L?" Wammy asked, confused at the sudden change in L's posture and expression. What was he staring at so intently? Wammy turned toward the sitting table as well and gasped. There was Harry, standing in the upper corner of the screen showing the kitchen, chopping up a carrot.

L jumped onto the couch and ran the past twenty minutes of feed over his computer, fast-forwarding quickly to see at what point Harry had entered the house. He watched Harry in the kitchen view out of the corner of his eye.

"What on earth is he doing there?" Wammy asked dumbly. L didn't think Wammy was asking what Harry was cooking. L ascertained that only Harry had entered the house and that he had gone straight to the kitchen, not even checking for signs of surveillance or tampering in his home. L turned to focus fully on Harry in the kitchen, now slicing an onion. He upped the volume on the feed from the bugs, Harry appeared to be mumbling to himself.

"Okay, so that's the carrots and onions, next I need the rosemary and sage and... what else was it? Hmm, but the chicken's clean and the oven- The oven!" L and Wammy watched incredulously as Harry jumped away from the cutting board on the kitchen table to check the oven. "Okay, electric oven, er, what temperature do I set it... Uh, flames would be around 1500 degrees Celsius, but you cook chicken after the flames die down to embers, so the embers would be about, er, 200 degrees, so.." Harry started fiddling with the dials on the oven. "200 degrees and... Hmm. I have to wait for the light. Huh," L watched as Harry stared quizzically at the oven. "Maybe I should have done the chicken after the oven after all. I forgot it takes a while."

"I can't believe it," Wammy said quietly as he watched Harry go back to the cutting board to finish with the onion. "He just... walked back and... He's cooking a chicken." The last word was said rather high pitched for Wammy and L chanced looking back at him. Wammy's eyes were riveted on Harry and he seemed to be in shock.

"Should we go see him?" L asked Wammy speculatively. As he had thought, that question snapped Wammy out of the stunned state he was in.

"See him?" Wammy asked as he stared at L in confusion. Hmm, perhaps Wammy was still in shock, which meant they should take a taxi rather than drive.

"Yes," L got up and with a last look at Harry, who was now shoving onion slices and various spices into a chicken, headed for the door. "He has far more food than he can eat by himself and I saw him put a chocolate cake in the refrigerator when he arrived."

"Did you now?" Wammy started smiling slowly. "Well, we must help him eat all that, by all means. By the by, what shall our excuse for dropping in on him be?"

"That we enjoyed his company at the park and tried to invite him to join us on Sunday. We've been checking back periodically and became worried when he was never home. When we 'check up' on him tonight, we shall inquire as to his health and, of course, invite him out with us tomorrow," L said as they walked out the door. Wammy handed L his hoodie as he pulled his coat on.

"Do you think he will believe it?" Wammy asked while keeping up with L's fast pace.

"Harry is the type who will believe anything so long as he doesn't suspect the person. He does not suspect us of anything, so he will definitely believe whatever we tell him- within reason of course," L waited impatiently for the elevator to open. He was worried suddenly that Harry would vanish
before they could reach him, and L wasn't sure he could stand losing track of Harry again.

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Harry looked up from worrying over the oven as he heard the doorbell start ringing repeatedly. He
gazed at the oven again, not certain he should leave it (what if it exploded?), when the doorbell
stopped and was instantly replaced with a disjointed pounding sound.

"Alright already!" Harry shouted as he walked quickly into the hall. He'd check who was at the
door, send them off, and be back to check the roast chicken was still cooking properly in minutes.
After Harry shouted, the knocking stopped and Harry thought for a moment that he could go back to
the kitchen, but then it started up again, faster and louder than before. Harry sighed, it had better not
be anyone he knew or he might yell at them.

When Harry opened the door however, it was someone he recognized, but not anyone he would
have guessed would be at the door. William looked at him, his arm still raised to knock on the door,
with Thomas standing behind him on the step below.

"Ah, Harry. There you are," William said flatly. "Your doorbell may be broken."

"It's not," Harry said blankly. "Er, what are you doing here?" Harry tried to think if he had planned
something with Thomas and William tonight and just forgotten. He didn't think he had and honestly,
Harry hadn't thought he would ever see either of them again. Of course, he'd thought that after the
first time he met them too.

"We were worried about you, lad." This came from Thomas, who was leaning slightly around
William to smile at Harry. "We tried to see you Sunday and on random days throughout the week,
but you never answered your door. Were you quite alright?"

Harry looked between Thomas' concerned smile and William's unwavering stare. "Uh, yeah... I went
out for most of the day Sunday with some friends of mine. Then for most of the week I was either at
cooking lessons or catching up with everyone. I didn't really come home much," Harry said
hesitantly. He had been busy, trying to keep up with the exhausting cooking lessons (he'd finally
moved on to poultry) and seeing his friends.

After Harry had sent a letter to Ron and Hermione with his new owl (whom he'd named 'Rowag'
after flipping through his old history book and landing on "Rowag the Wanderer", a gaelic wizard
who'd managed to get lost in Greece when he tried to visit his mother in the Orkneys- an unlucky
name for a post owl, but Harry was still cross about getting bit), he'd found both of them waiting for
him when his lessons on Monday ended. They'd had dinner at Hogwarts (Harry being proud to point
out the drumsticks he'd helped season) and talked about Harry's new path in life. Ron was finally
cottoning on to the fact that Harry wouldn't be returning to the auror department and was a little
confused that Harry would pick cooking, of all things, over being an auror. If he really wanted a new
job, why not join a quiddich team? Hermione, meanwhile, was torn between her pride in Harry
going on so well with the house-elves and her continued insistence that Harry was really depressed.

"But Harry," she kept saying. "It's not as though you don't have any reason to be upset! Your whole
life has turned out differently than you planned for- anyone would be out of sorts. You can always
talk to us Harry, we'll help you with anything that's bothering you!"

Harry had finally gotten Hermione to stop talking about it by threatening to go back to hiding from
everyone again. He knew she meant well and was only worried for him, but really- she never knew
when to let up! After Hermione stopped pestering him, Harry was able to speak to the other people
eating with them.
Headmistress McGonagall had admitted to Harry that she'd known since last week that Harry was taking lessons from the elves and had been planning to corner him if he didn't come on his own to see her soon. She'd smiled and told Harry that he was always welcome at Hogwarts, but it would be nice to visit with him once in a while. Harry had grinned and promised to have tea with her the next day.

Hagrid had asked Harry if he wouldn't mind taking a look at some of "the new specimens" he had for his classes as he thought Harry would appreciate them. Harry had grimaced slightly and asked Hagrid if he'd like to have lunch together instead. Some of the other teachers had perked up at this. Flitwick and Sprout had both asked if Harry would visit with them as well, and scheduled which days to meet him.

After a full week of lessons, lunches, tea and talking with Hermione about how he wasn't depressed (he was taking charge of his life, an idea which Hermione seemed to approve of and which finally got her off the depression theory) Harry was exhausted at the end of each day and after flooing to Grimmauld Place, he had enough energy to wash up, send Rowag off with a letter and go to bed. It had never occurred to Harry that his absence from number nine Argyle Square would be noticed. He went to the muggle house, after all, to get away from people, but Harry had forgotten that he had met muggles who knew only that address for him. Now that he thought of it, it was only natural for Thomas and William to be worried- they didn't know about Grimmauld Place, so the fact that Harry was never "home" would be rather worrying.

Harry smiled at them sheepishly. "Er, sorry?"

William blinked at him. "We will accept if you invite us in."

"Huh?" Harry said, totally thrown off.

"If you invite us in, we will forgive you for worrying us," William said flatly. "You do want us to forgive you, don't you?"

Harry stared at William incredulously. Well, yeah, he was feeling guilty that they had been worried for nothing- Harry seemed to be doing that to all his friends lately- but, invite them in? Really? Harry wasn't entirely sure inviting strangers into his house was a good idea. But then, he had rather enjoyed lunch with them last week and Harry didn't feel at all threatened by them. Even if they did turn out to be a bad sort, Harry was confident he could deal with anything they tried- he'd made a point of learning how to transfigure a person into a ferret.

"Yeah, okay," Harry said, standing aside and sweeping his arm toward the hall. "Come in then."

After Thomas followed William into the hall, Harry closed the door and turned to them. Thomas had his coat draped over one arm and William was turned around and staring at Harry intently with his hoodie hanging limply from one hand and dragging on the floor.

"Oh!" Harry exclaimed. "Sorry 'bout that! Let me put your coats away." Harry hastily took Thomas' carefully folded jacket and William's crumpled hoodie and went to hang them on the coat-rack. "You can just go," Harry thought quickly, which rooms actually had seating? "Er, to the kitchen I guess- it's just down the hall. I'll make some tea."

William turned and started walking to the back of the house calling loudly "Are you cooking Harry?" Harry stared after him and Thomas smiled as he waited patiently for Harry to finish putting the coats up and walk with him.

"He was quite worried you know," Thomas told him quietly. Harry winced. He didn't like William
as much as he did Thomas, but he still felt bad. "He's not well practiced at interacting with people properly, but he quite likes you. Finding you gone all week was most distressing."

"I'm sorry," Harry said glumly. He was getting used to apologizing to people for worrying them. Even muggles now. "I was just so busy, I kinda stayed where I was to sleep. All the meals I've had this week actually were at the school."

Thomas smiled again as they entered the kitchen. "Ah, so that heavenly smell means you're practicing then?"

Harry grinned, embarrassed. "Well, yeah. I was really excited to learn to cook an actual meal. I mean, I learned to do meals that were just vegetables, but it doesn't feel the same, you know?"

"Yes, well it smells as though you are doing quite well at your cooking school," Thomas said while he sat down at the kitchen table- clear now of the traces of Harry's preparations. William was already sitting at the table and Harry could see his trainers on the floor below the chair while his toes played with themselves on the seat.

"Don't your feet get cold without socks?" Harry asked him quizically as he put the kettle on.

William actually glared at Harry. "No."

Blinking at the unexpectedly fierce reaction, Harry turned to inspect the chicken through the oven door once more. "Okay, okay. No need to get so uptight."

Behind him, Thomas started laughing and said gaily, "Oh, I'm afraid William detests socks! Every time they get mentioned, he assumes he's going to be made to wear them and becomes most antagonistic." When Harry looked back at them, he saw William glaring at the table and mumbling to himself. "They're too tight and they slide on floors," he said. Thomas began laughing again and William got up to turn his chair around to face the wall.

"Oh, come now, my boy," Thomas said suddenly. "I don't mean anything by it and no one is going to make you wear socks."

"No one could if they tried," William said defiantly, glaring at the wall.

"Of course," Thomas smiled. "So there's really no need to make a fuss. I promise I won't laugh again."

William looked as though he was considering turning the chair back to the table then, but stopped and stared suddenly at Harry who had burst out laughing himself. Both William and Thomas watched as Harry laughed until tears formed in the corners of his eyes and he had to come to the table to sit down a moment so he could calm down. As soon as he landed in the chair, William had turned quickly back to the wall and muttered darkly over his shoulder that some people didn't have any sense when it came to footwear.

Harry waved at his back and gasped out. "Sorry, sorry! I didn't mean to upset you," He leaned on the table and turned to grin at Thomas. "I knew two people once who really loved socks. One of them loved having the freedom to wear socks and collected all kinds and the other told me, 'Happiness is a warm pair of woolen socks.'"

Thomas watched Harry carefully and even William was glancing surreptitiously over his shoulder.

"So, really," Harry said, getting up again to go look at his chicken. "The thought of someone not liking socks at all is really funny to me. I think they're really great!"
Thomas and William looked at each other while Harry bent to check the chicken. Finally, William huffed in annoyance and turned his chair around. "Very well," he said dully. "I acknowledge that you are not making fun of me- But I refuse to accept there is anything good about socks." This last was said quickly and forcefully and made Harry smile over his shoulder at him.

"Sure," Harry said pleasantly and he went back to carefully watching his chicken. When the kettle whistled, Harry quickly set out a tea service for his guests and himself, and then went straight back to see that his chicken hadn't burned. While William spooned half the sugar bowl into his cup, Thomas poured a bit of milk into his and waited patiently for Harry to return to the table.

After a few minutes of silence, Harry heard Thomas give a cough behind him and looked back.

"Harry, do you need to watch the chicken as it cooks?" Thomas asked hesitantly, as though worried he was interrupting some sacred ritual he didn't fully comprehend.

"Er, no," Harry said in embarrassment. "But you see, I've never cooked in an electric oven before, so I'm worried I might burn it." Harry looked back at the chicken in the oven as if it might have caught flame while he wasn't looking.

" Doesn't your school have ovens, if this is a dish they taught you?" William asked in a flat voice, stirring his syrupy tea slowly.

"Well, no," Harry said, still staring at the roasting bird. "The school only has wood burning ovens-no electric or gas."

"That is unusual!" Thomas said, surprised. "Isn't it difficult to get much done?"

"Oh no. Making a fire for a wood oven takes some time, but it's really easy. Besides, they have a lot of ovens."

"So you are learning to cook exclusively with fire?" William asked. Harry could practically feel the man staring a hole into his back. He'd forgotten, in his guilt over worrying William, about his least favorite habit the man had.

"Could you please not stare at me like that?" Harry called in annoyance without turning around.

Silence for a few moments before William blankly asked, "How am I supposed to look at you then?"

Harry glanced at him briefly, his forehead creased. "I don't know, just... Not like that!"

"How exactly am I staring at you then?"

Like I'm a flobberworm you're about to dissect, Harry thought. "Like I'm some toy for you to take apart."

Another silence before William said, "Not a toy."

This got Harry to actually turn around. "What?"

William (who was still staring at him) said in a monotone, "You are not a toy, therefore, I am not staring at you as though you're one."

Harry stared blankly at William. That prat! And Harry had actually been thinking he might be nice. "Then maybe you should just stop staring at me period," he said angrily.

"Now, now," Thomas interjected worriedly. "Let's not fight over something so simple." Thomas
gave a stern look to William, who hunched his shoulders and appeared to be pouting. "William, I think it's time you stop antagonizing Harry." As William looked down, Thomas turned to Harry, who'd gotten up from the oven and was watching Thomas scold William with obvious glee. "Harry," Harry flinched. What had he done? "I think you should come sit with us rather than spending all your time crouched on the floor with your back to the room." Thomas gave Harry as stern a look as he'd given William. "We did come to see you after all."

"But, what about my chicken?" Harry protested.

"How long has it been cooking?" Thomas asked patiently.

"Er, about twenty minutes?"

"And how hot is the oven?"

"Um, I set it at 200..."

"That is a bit too high," Thomas said calmly. "I suggest you turn it down to 175 and we will check on it in 40 minutes, alright?"

Harry did as Thomas suggested and walked meekly over to the table, wondering how on earth Thomas could make him feel as though he were five years old and misbehaving in public, when he was the guest in Harry's own house. As he sat at the table and William glanced at him briefly before looking blankly at the table again, he thought maybe Thomas just had so much practice dealing with William, anyone else was easy to maneuver.

"So, um, do you cook, Thomas?" Harry asked hesitantly, hoping the awkward silence that had risen would be broken.

"Sometimes," Thomas said as he sipped his tea. "It is a pleasant way to spend an afternoon, and I find I enjoy making something people will enjoy." Thomas gestured at William who was stirring his tea again and pointedly ignoring them. "I make all sorts of snacks for William."

"Oh?" Harry asked, interested despite himself. "What kinds of snacks?"

"Oh, cakes, pastries, biscuits. Mostly sweet baked things," Thomas looked up thoughtfully. "Though I did try my hand at ice cream a time or two. I managed the vanilla quite well, but I'm afraid the strawberry didn't turn out at all. Although, William still ate it." Thomas smiled fondly across the table. William glanced up and then went back to stirring his tea.

Harry had run out of anything to say. He'd sort of been trying to get William to talk so he could apologize, but William clearly didn't want to speak with anyone anymore. Harry sighed and sipped his tea. So far, this visit from Thomas and William wasn't anywhere as enjoyable as lunch on Saturday had been, and Harry had been rather annoyed at the time what with hearing all the same sort of questions he'd been avoiding from his friends. Now he almost wished William would start pestering him again- at least then he wouldn't be sulking.

Harry glanced at William over his cup, William had stopped stirring the tea and was staring into it and clutching his knees against his chest. He really was sulking like a child... Harry thought about what Thomas had told him in the hallway- William didn't know how to interact with people. Well, duh. Harry could have guessed that, but, maybe that also meant that William didn't know how to apologize? As Hermione would tell him, he needed to be the adult in this situation.

"Er, William?" Harry said hesitantly. William ignored him and Harry could tell by his gaze and the way his legs were shifting that he must be playing with his toes. "William?" Still nothing. Harry was
starting to get annoyed. It was really difficult to be an adult with such a childish person acting a prat in your kitchen. "William!" Harry snapped.

William looked up with a blank expression. "Yes, Harry? Did you want something?"

Really, it was quite hard being an adult... "I am trying to apologize to you you prat, but I can't do that if you ignore me!" Harry said indignantly.

William looked at Harry blankly before lifting his hand to his mouth and pulling at his lip slightly. "I do not think apologies are meant to include insults Harry."

"That wasn't the apology." Harry said flatly. William stared at him and put his thumb in his mouth. Well, at least Harry had his attention now. "I'll apologize for being rude and snapping at you, if you apologize for being rude and staring at me, deal?"

William seemed to be chewing his thumb now and took it out momentarily. "If I refuse?"

Harry should have expected William to be as contrary as possible, but what could he possibly do to make him agree? Oh! There was one thing... "Well, if you refuse to apologize, you won't get any dessert." Harry said, trying his best not to gloat.

William's eyes widened and he froze. Ha, thought Harry. Beside him, Thomas seemed to be shaking slightly and coughed before taking a long sip of his tea, clearly intending to leave this discussion up to Harry and William. William, meanwhile, was staring at Harry with too wide eyes and Harry was starting to wonder if maybe he'd gone into shock or something. Then suddenly, William's eyes contracted and focused on Harry's face and he smiled creepily. "Very well. I accept your apology."

"I'm happy to apologize to you William," Harry said smugly. "That means I get cake. Chocolate cake in fact." Harry waited patiently for William to catch on. Honestly, what sort of idiot would fall for that?

William's eyes stayed trained on Harry's face while he kept them wide open. "I believe, Harry, that according to our deal, I also get cake."

"No," Harry said slowly. "The deal was that we each had to apologize. I did, now it's your turn. Or," Harry smiled. "Did you not want any cake?"

William blinked. "I am not hungry enough for cake," he said indifferently. "But, as it would be rude for you to let a guest go hungry at all..." Thomas snorted quietly and refilled his teacup.

Harry smirked. He played stupid games like this with Teddy when he was baby-sitting. Teddy could come up with all sorts of excuses for why he didn't need to go to bed right away, but if Harry patiently took them away, one by one, then Teddy was inevitably forced to go along with Harry's wishes- Harry was positive he could do the same with William. "Well, you're right. There is plenty of chicken after all."

Harry could see William's fingers clenching in his jeans. "I was thinking snacks that went with tea would be better- that is after all, Harry, what you have served us."

"I'm so sorry William, but I haven't been food shopping in weeks. I'm afraid I don't have any snacks," Harry said this with a great deal of relish, not even pretending to be sorry.

William was staring so fixedly at Harry, that he could see his eyes dilating and contracting rapidly. This was kind of fun. "Your only choices are the chicken and the cake," Harry said happily. "So, which do you want? I wouldn't want you to go hungry after all."
Thomas coughed suddenly and Harry glanced over at him amusedly. William continued staring at Harry. Finally, William glanced at the ground beside the table. "Fine," he said.

Harry raised his eyebrow. "Fine what?"

William looked up blankly at him. "I apologize."

Hmm, that didn't sound terribly sincere, but it was probably all Harry would get. "I accept," Harry said brightly and he got up to check on his chicken again. William called rather loudly after him, "Do I get my cake now?"

Harry, after making certain the chicken was doing all right in the electric oven, glared back at William. "No."

"Are you going back on our deal?" William asked darkly. Harry had the distinct impression that William was plotting to steal a piece of cake if that was the case. He rolled his eyes.

"Of course not," he said. "But the chicken isn't done. You aren't going to eat while Thomas and I have to wait are you?"

"If you were smart," William said sulkily. "You would skip the chicken and just eat the cake."

"I worked hard on the chicken!" Harry huffed. "It's the first real meal I've made without any helper," Harry looked at Thomas sheepishly. "Well, except for Thomas that is... I probably would have burned it otherwise."

Thomas laughed. "Not with the way you were watching it, my boy!"

Harry blushed as he sat down and took a quick sip of his tea to cover it. "So, er, what have you two been doing for your vacation anyway?" he asked, trying to steer the conversation away from himself.

Thomas smiled at him. "Well, aside from worrying over you, nothing very much."

Harry gaped at Thomas, had he actually ruined their vacation? "I'm sorry- I really didn't mean-"

"Oh, no, lad!" Thomas said quickly. "I didn't mean to upset you with that. I simply meant that William and I were holding off doing anything truly interesting until we knew whether you could join us."

Harry blinked. "Join you?"

"Yes," Thomas nodded. "We do truly enjoy your company Harry. Our walk in the park was all the better for you presence, so we were hoping you might want to go on another outing with us."

"What would you want to do?" Harry asked confusedly. He admitted to himself that he had rather enjoyed Thomas' and, to a lesser extent, William's company, but he hadn't thought they enjoyed his very much. He wanted suddenly, very much, to go out with them again and hoped that he wouldn't disappoint them- Thomas especially.

"Well, have you ever been to the London Eye?" Thomas asked.
Chapter 6

By early morning on Saturday, L was pacing restlessly from his bedroom to the sitting room and back again, glancing every now and then to check if Harry had woken. Last night had gone fairly well. Harry had believed their excuse for seeing him, had allowed them to stay for dinner (there was a brief moment where he decided whether to trust them or not and L felt particularly proud they had passed that judgement), and had been rightfully chastised for disappearing over the past week. L got the feeling that Harry was going to make a point of being around entirely for their benefit, which really, suited him perfectly. Now he just had to wait for Harry to wake up so he could 'be around' them some more. L was looking forward to the day specifically for that reason.

L stopped his pacing behind the couch and stood with his hands dangling limply at his sides as he watched Harry's still form on the screen, sleeping under a pile of blankets in his empty bedroom. L had enjoyed dinner last night and he felt it wasn't simply due to relief that Harry had returned in one piece. He'd been greatly annoyed at the start, of course, at the mention of socks, and Wammy and Harry both laughing at him. Really, he wouldn't even have considered forgiving Harry had he not gotten such a sad look when he mentioned the two sock-lovers he had known. L could tell that the people with such bad taste mentioned must be dead and even he wouldn't throw a fit when someone was so obviously grieving. L thought he had been quite magnanimous actually, but then Harry had to argue with him and try to take away his cake!

He couldn't believe anyone would be so rude as to deny a guest their cake, and after he'd forgiven Harry for laughing at him too! L had been terribly annoyed (at Wammy as well, who'd not done anything to help him and who'd thought the whole thing terribly amusing), but when dinner started, L found most of his annoyance slip away. While Harry gave himself and Wammy ample helpings of chicken, potatoes, and carrots, he had also cut out a very large slice of cake for L. L had stared at the huge piece, suspicious, but Harry had only smiled slightly and said that he really was sorry, even if 'William' wasn't. L had almost felt bad for faking his apology. He'd suspected momentarily that Harry was trying to manipulate him in some way, but he had evidence of Harry being similarly manipulated and knew that Harry simply didn't have the skills to use such devious emotional blackmail on anyone.

So L had watched Harry eating his chicken and talking with Wammy and had finally taken a bite of his cake and then... L had to interrupt Harry and Wammy's conversation- he absolutely had to find out where Harry had gotten such a delicious chocolate cake. Harry had stared at him and told him simply that he got it from the kitchens where he was learning to cook. L had demanded to know if Harry would be learning to make such a cake anytime soon and Harry had grinned and said he would be learning to make it next week. L had then started up a surprisingly pleasant conversation with Harry about the virtues of various cakes and which Harry should focus on. Chocolate, of course, was easiest, but if Harry really wanted to master cakes he should look into tiramisu, a cake that had mild flavors balanced carefully with much stronger ones and which had to be soaked in either coffee or rum while still retaining its shape. If Harry could make a perfect tiramisu, L had told him, then making any other cake would be easy in comparison.

When dinner had finally finished, L had still been discussing desserts of all kinds (they had moved onto puddings and cookies) and was quite sorry to have to leave. Harry had been an attentive listener
and had asked very well thought-out questions and L had found himself incredibly pleased to explain the flavors, techniques, and history of all the desserts they covered. As soon as L and Wammy had returned to their hotel, L had quickly reviewed the footage recorded on his computer so he could catch up to what Harry was currently doing. Harry had cleaned up the kitchen, put all the leftovers away (L had watched as the last of the cake was placed in the refrigerator and wondered what would happen to it) and then Harry had wandered upstairs to shower and go to bed.

L had been disappointed to realize that the only camera in the bathroom faced the door and sink. When Harry hadn't been in the house, L hadn't concerned himself with any cameras that didn't show an entrance to the house and the second floor bathroom had no windows. Wammy had told L frankly that he didn't think Harry's bathing habits would factor greatly into their investigation and L had sulked until Harry emerged. Then, of course, L felt he had to mention that Harry's apparent habit of dressing in the bathroom might be a problem in the future. Wammy had actually sounded amused at that and asked how on earth such a thing could matter and L had primly told him that they would not be able to check if Harry had anymore injuries in addition to the scars on his hand. Any evidence of mistreatment could be used against the perpetrators when they were finally caught, but if they couldn't see any and Harry never told them, they would never have that evidence, would they? Wammy had sighed and told L he wasn't sure if he was being serious or a pervert and that they could ask Harry about such things when it came to it and not before. L had continued sulking as he watched Harry get into bed and fall asleep.

Then they passed the night going over what they would do in regards to the other leads they had and glancing up as Harry turned over every now and then. L decided to call in another agent as 'L' to begin investigating the Dursleys; he thought it would be best to set up cameras in their home as well. Once those were in place, he would set up another confrontation with the family about Harry and watch their reactions when they thought they were unobserved. He was certain that, at least, would pay off immediately as the Dursleys didn't seem the types to stay tightlipped about their secrets in the privacy of their own home. Later in the week, he would figure out a way to surreptitiously bring up Harry's relatives in conversation and see what his thoughts on them were. Wammy went to bed soon after that and L was left alone to watch Harry and wait for morning.

Which was taking forever, L decided. He had noticed a lot about Harry's house, during those boring hours of the darkness, which he'd not bothered to care about previously. Harry only had the barest minimum of furniture—table and chairs in the kitchen, desk and chair in a study, bed and dresser in the bedroom. All the other rooms were bare, with not even rugs decorating them. Harry only had a minimal amount of clothes and toiletries and the most annoying thing— he didn't have an alarm clock. L had noticed that around 4 in the morning and had begun to worry that Harry would sleep in till noon and L really didn't want to wait that long. He had actually tried to comfort himself with the idea that he could simply call Harry if he didn't wake at a suitable hour, which made L realize that Harry didn't have a phone either. Looking through his records revealed that Harry had never had a phone. How had Harry survived this long?

The uncertainty of whether Harry would wake up when L wanted him to and being unable to reach him without going and knocking on his door drove L to restless pacing, wanting desperately to do something, but not having anything to do. L huffed and turned away from the couch and the screens (where Harry was still sleeping peacefully) and wandered back to the bedroom. He looked out the window and could see a long line of light over the horizon—surely Harry would wake up with the sunrise. He walked quickly back to the sitting room to check. Harry was still asleep... L slumped and fell onto the couch face first to sprawl across it. Harry should wake up now, L was bored just waiting for him to do so—he needed a phone so L could call him and wake him up. He lifted his head, that was true—Harry needed a phone.

L jumped up to open his laptop so he could order one. He was sure suddenly that Harry didn't have a
phone so that the organization couldn't track him through it, but if L gave him a phone under the name "William Tale" (he would have to say it was on loan or something, or else Harry would never take it), then he could call Harry from his other (untraceable) phone and not worry about losing contact with him again. The global positioning device he would have Wammy install would be an extra bonus. L grinned to himself as he selected the various options for the phone and had an express rush put on it. He and Wammy should be able to pick it up before they saw Harry, the store he was ordering from was based right here in London.

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When Quillish emerged from his bedroom, it was to see L avidly watching the screen on which Harry was apparently making breakfast for himself. A laptop was open on a nearby chair, papers were strewn across the floor and the shirt L had been wearing the day before was trailing through the doorway of L's bedroom. Quillish sighed, he wished sometimes that L didn't need to be on an almost permanent sugar-high in order to function. Quite aside from the fact that it was horribly unhealthy, L got exceedingly bored in the early morning hours and had the habit of simply dropping things wherever he was at the time when he moved to do something else.

"L, seeing as how we cannot allow the cleaning service into the rooms, I would appreciate it if you at least tried not to make such a mess," Quillish said tiredly as he plucked L's shirt off the ground and tossed it further in the bedroom to land on a small pile of similar shirts.

"Ah, there you are Wammy," L said distractedly, keeping his eyes on Harry who flipped an omelet expertly in a pan. "We need to pick something up before we meet with Harry."

"What exactly?" Quillish said as he closed the laptop and took its place on the armchair to watch the screens with L.

"A cell phone. I ordered one for Harry's use," L said.

Quillish stared at him. "You ordered Harry a phone?"

"Yes, he doesn't have one and we need a way to contact him if he leaves the house without us."

"What if he decides not to take the phone with him? Or if he chooses not to accept it at all?" Quillish asked in bemusement.

"I will make it clear that he is to keep it with him so he does not 'worry' us again and I will assure him that I have multiple phones and do not use that one often enough to warrant keeping it," L said as he watched Harry take his finished omelet to the table to begin eating. "I am certain I can convince him to agree with this plan- he worries very much about upsetting other people."

"And I assume you want me to, ah, improve certain tracking features on this phone before we 'loan' it to Harry?" Quillish asked suspiciously.

"Of course," L said shortly, as if there had never been any doubt he would ask Wammy to do such a thing.

Quillish sighed. "Very well. I do agree that it would be nice to keep better track of Harry, losing him last week was quite terrifying. But aren't you worried he will be suspicious about being offered a free phone merely so you can maintain contact with him?"

L thought quietly with his arms around his knees and watched as Harry ate. "Perhaps, but... Harry is not the type to be suspicious of people he likes and after last night, I am certain his regard of me has improved considerably. He will trust my intentions because he will not want to think ill of me."
"Yes, that makes getting close to Harry fairly easy, but..." Quillish trailed off. "It will make it difficult to hold his trust when we try to keep him from rejoining this organization that's after him."

"We will simply have to make him like us more than them," L said determinedly. He stood as Harry took his dishes to the sink to wash. "We should go, our stop for the phone will put us behind schedule if we do not leave now."

Quillish got up to follow L, taking one last look at Harry on the video feed before asking L if he would like to stop for breakfast on the way as well.

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After breakfast, Harry went briefly over to Grimmuald Place. He needed to check on Rowag and pick up a few things. Most of his things were still in the house as, when he moved to number nine, he hadn’t bothered to bring more with him than he absolutely needed. Now that he needed to keep up appearances with Thomas and William, it would be more convenient to have some things over at the muggle house. He'd been thinking before of working out some sort of schedule to stay at the houses at different times and maybe enjoy a little more solitude at number nine before he finally gave it up (having two houses so close to each other was pretty silly, Harry thought and he wondered how he ever decided it was a good idea), but having Thomas and William show up at his front door looking for him made him rethink that plan.

He would probably have to stay at number nine for now and only visit Grimmuald Place as the need arose. He could always place an alarm on the floo and the knocker so he'd know if any of his wizarding friends showed up, but all the alarm charms he knew were muggle sensitive and wouldn't activate if Thomas or William knocked on his door. Harry would have to actually be in the house and hear them knocking in order to answer any of their calls. Besides, Thomas and William were his only home visitors the past week- everyone he knew in the wizarding world had figured out they could find him at Hogwarts and went out of their way to see him there. Also, now that he had an owl of his own, it was much easier to just mail his friends to stay in contact.

When he entered Grimmuald, Harry heard a shrill shriek from the kitchen and ran to see what was going on. Rowag was hunched over a chair with her wings out and making horrible hissing sounds as another owl- one of the school owls he thought- looked on regally from the table. "Oh, knock it off Rowag!" Harry said as he hurried forward to take a letter from the other owl.

Rowag hissed some more and hopped onto Harry's shoulder so she could look down on the other owl. Harry rolled his eyes. He'd found out from Hagrid that not only was Rowag a girl (not that he could change the name now, Rowag was terribly proud of her name and refused to respond to anything else), but was only two years old and was, unfortunately, not fully trained. Harry was depending on advice from Hagrid about how to train Rowag and deal with her adolescent tantrums when they came up without alienating her. Mostly, he said, Harry should just stay calm and let Rowag figure things out on her own. When she delivered mail properly she could be praised and rewarded and when she lost letters or went to the wrong place (or when she threw a fit about another post owl) then Harry should just ignore her and try to get her to do the proper task again.

So far, Harry thought it was working out well, but Rowag really hated when other owls visited. Hagrid told him that was just a territorial thing and Rowag was only worried Harry would get another owl and she'd be pushed out. To deal with this, Harry just let Rowag ride his shoulder and read the other owls' letters as calmly as possible until it was time for them to leave. It helped a lot that the owls that had visited so far were all fully trained post owls and didn't twitch so much as a feather at Rowag's fits.

Harry read through the current letter (from Hermione) and felt Rowag calming somewhat. He patted
her absently as he got a scrap of parchment from the sideboard and jotted out a quick reply. Hermione was wondering if Harry would like to have lunch with her next week (school had started the spring term, so Hermione would be in the castle for the rest of the season) and discuss a new project she was starting. Harry was relieved that Hermione had let off him. She and Ron had come to terms with Harry taking cooking lessons and had apparently decided to be supportive by simply asking him about it from time to time and telling him what they were doing. In short, they were just being his friends and Harry was very much enjoying not having to worry about running into an interrogation or lecture anymore. He sent the owl off with his reply (Yes please, does Monday work or do you want to wait a few days?) and felt Rowag ruffle her feathers in relief. He scratched her chest as he walked upstairs to figure out what he should move to the muggle house.

He should probably take more clothes and a few odds and ends- he'd only noticed after he had visitors, but number nine was really quite empty. He looked about his room, wondering where he should start. The clothes probably, they would be the easiest to move as he could just toss them into his school trunk and carry that over. He opened his closet, drug his trunk out from the back and started doing just that. He made sure to separate the wizard's robes from the clothes that could pass for muggle. Most of Harry's clothes now had come from Madam Malkin's but Harry was still so used to muggle clothing that nearly all the outfits he had were close mimics of muggle pants and shirts. He only had a couple formal wizard outfits (he'd needed them for the formal celebration, Ministry re-instatement, and funerals) and six robes, three black work robes and three dress robes of different colors, all dark. He hardly ever worn them and now that he was working in a kitchen and spending his free time in the muggle world, Harry wondered if he ever would again.

After Harry had placed most of his closet's contents in the trunk he looked about wondering what else he should take. He shouldn't bring anything obviously magical into the house, but maybe some less flashy books to read when he had free time would be okay. He thought hard, most of the books he had here were magic books and most of them either focused on defense against the dark arts or were supplements from his auror training. Actually, one aspect of auror training that Harry (and Ron with him) hadn't spent much time on, was magical races' languages, which really, had been more optional than anything else and required a lot of self-study. Harry had half-heartedly started learning Gobble-de-gook and Mermish, but had left off when other work required more attention- or when he went off to visit his friends.

At the time, Harry had thought it was strange that aurors had to learn the languages of other magical races, but Hermione had told him (and Ron, who'd complained and tried to skive it off entirely) that aurors dealt with magical races all the time- hags, house-elves, gobins, veela, centaurs, merfolk, werewolves, vampires! The magical world, she said, has had a lot of wars in the past due to misunderstandings between races- some of them thanks to the language barrier- didn't Harry remember anything from his history lessons? Harry (who remembered falling asleep in his history lessons) had relented then and chosen to learn Mermish because he'd always been sort of impressed that Dumbledore spoke it and then, grudgingly, he added Gobble-de-gook as well.

Harry was still vaguely resentful of Griphook's mistrust and betrayal at Gringotts, but he'd somewhat gotten over it since he'd been planning something of a double cross as well. After the celebration at Hogwarts (which lasted almost a whole day and night) Harry had returned from a wonderful nap and had taken the sword of Griffindor from where it had been placed at the teacher's table so everyone could admire it and given it directly to Griphook and the other goblins (who had been glaring at it for a while). The goblins had been shocked and Griphook had demanded to know why Harry was returning it after he stole it. Neville had piped up hotly that Harry had been dead when the sword fell on his head from the Sorting Hat and Harry had interrupted before everyone could go off on the topic he'd been hoping the whole night no one would comment on, and said that he'd only wanted the sword to destroy the horcuxes. With all of them gone, Harry had meant his promise to give the sword to Griphook and was fine with the goblins having it. He also warned them that there was
some spell on the hat so that any Griffindor who really needed it would be able to summon the sword, so if the goblins ever lost it again, they should ask the Headmaster-or-mistress to please return it.

When Harry had woken from his nap, thinking heavily on his conversation with Dumbledore in the empty King's Cross, he had only meant to tie up any loose ends he could find (his next stop was to make sure the Malfoys weren't going to be punished, he felt bad enough for them already and they had sort of helped him), but the goblins had taken his actions to mean much more. They felt Harry was the first truly honest wizard they had ever dealt with and went out of their way to make his accounts (his parents' and Sirius' vaults) as profitable as possible. In fact, when Harry had gone to them about buying a house to move into immediately, they had set everything up so he could move into a property almost next to Grimmauld Place (they thought he wanted to expand his magical property and were actually looking to buy out the whole block before Harry stopped them) the same day and they had made sure the exchange rate from galleons to pounds favored him so much, he hardly noticed the dip in his vault. Harry wasn't sure if he liked the goblins doing so much for him- he kept thinking that he might owe them later- but if the least he could do was to learn their language, then he might as well.

Harry sighed and dragged his trunk down to the library to collect his Gobble-de-gook texts. He'd managed to get a working knowledge of Mermish (speaking it made his throat horribly sore), but trying to learn the goblin's language had given him a splitting headache and was part of what made him give up. Somehow he didn't think learning it now would be any different, but he was so grateful for the house and the new life it had helped him to make, he felt he would just have to try his best. He pulled the five books he had and dumped them unceremoniously into his trunk, closed it up and carried it to the front door. Once there, Harry tried to shoo Rowag back into the house.

"Go on to your perch and go to sleep," he said. "The other owl's gone so you don't have to cling anymore."

But Rowag had started getting a bad feeling while watching Harry pack up a trunk with clothes and books and now that he was taking it out of the house, she was certain something was up. Rowag hooted at him and gripped her claws into his shoulder.

"Ow! Rowag, that hurts!" Harry said and he tried to brush her off him. This was exactly as effective as it had been when he first met Rowag in Eeylops, which is to say, it wasn't at all.

Harry glared at Rowag and she glared right back and hooted shrilly again. Harry sighed. "Fine! You can come with me," he said as he wandered back to grab Rowag's perch and treats. Rowag hooted happily and flew ahead of him to land on the perch and wait for him to pick it up.

When Harry got to the door again and put her things in the trunk as well, Rowag was hooting excitedly and Harry knew that as soon as the door opened, she would be off flitting about above him.

"Don't fly off Rowag," Harry said sternly. "We aren't going far and if you get off my shoulder, I'll leave you behind!"

Rowag stopped hooting immediately and clutched his shoulder as if afraid he would disappear.

"You're okay, just don't fly off, alright?" Harry told her. Rowag chirped happily and loosened her hold some, still eager to be off. Harry opened the door and picked the trunk up to walk it over to number nine.

As he walked up to the blue door he heard someone call his name and looked to the street. There, in a rather nice black car with a long, gently rounded hood, was William, leaning out the back-seat
window and waving at him. Harry put the trunk on the step of number nine and walked over to the
car.

"I'm sorry," Harry said. "I didn't realize I was late."

"Not a problem, we just arrived." William was alternating his stare between the trunk behind Harry
and the owl sitting on his shoulder. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, uh..." Harry glanced back at the trunk. He'd been hoping to get it inside before Thomas and
William arrived. "I just got some stuff out of, er, storage... I don't really have much at the house and I
just thought it would be easier if I brought some over."

"I thought you had lived here for a while Harry?" William's head was tilted to the side and he had a
portrayed expression of confusion on his face. Harry wondered if part of not interacting with others
meant that William didn't know how to make proper expressions or if maybe William was
deliberately making fun of him.

"Not that long," Harry said evasively. Somehow he didn't think that explaining he had another house
on the same block would make much sense. "I didn't really need much anyway."

"And now you do?" William had turned his gaze to Harry and he was startled by how focused it
was.

"Er, yeah, I guess so," Harry said awkwardly. William nodded and got out of the car. "Did you need
any help?" William was looking at Harry again and he was confused to see his eyes focused more to
the side of his head. Was William trying not to stare at him?

"No, it's not really heavy. If you like you can come in or wait out here, I won't be long."

"Certainly, I would be delighted," William said almost grandly. "To come in with you," he finished
flatly. Harry rolled his eyes. William was definitely making fun of him.

"Whatever," Harry said and he walked up to unlock the door and pick the trunk up. Behind him he
heard William telling someone that he "would be a moment inside" and Harry turned around.
Thomas was sitting in the driver's seat of the black car and Harry hadn't noticed. He waved quickly,
hoping Thomas wasn't put off from being ignored and got a jovial wave and smile back. Harry
grinned and turned back to the door to lug his trunk inside. William caught up with him quickly and
closed the door behind him, then grabbed an end of the trunk and asked Harry where he wanted it.
Harry sighed. "I really can carry it myself you know."

"Yes, it is light." William lifted and lowered his end of the trunk making Harry almost drop his.
"You did not bring very much, did you?"

"Well, I don't really need much," Harry said frankly as he tried to walk backward with the trunk.

"You did say that before. I think I will believe you," William said blankly with his head tilted to the
side, staring over Harry's shoulder. Harry was getting annoyed and wondered if maybe there was
something wrong with him. He got upset whenever William stared at him and now that he wasn't
(sort of), Harry was even more annoyed.

They managed to get the trunk up the stairs to Harry's bedroom and dropped it on the floor. As Harry
opened it to get out Rowag's perch and treats to place them in the corner, he felt William staring at
the side of his face. When Harry pulled out the little bowl attached to the perch and took it to the
bathroom to fill it from the tap, William came with him, still staring over his shoulder.
"Okay, why are you staring like that?" Harry finally asked as he put the bowl back on the perch and encouraged Rowag (who'd begun to nod off) to move to it. Harry glanced at William as he wandered over to the windows to pull the blinds shut.

"Harry," William said matter-of-factly. "You have an owl." Harry stopped and looked back at Rowag while William looked between them. "Why would I not stare?"

Harry blinked. He honestly hadn't even thought it was strange to have Rowag with him- true he'd been planning to leave her in Grimmuald Place and visit her when he used the floo, but bringing her here and setting up her perch hadn't seemed odd at all. He really was losing touch with the muggle world if he thought having an owl wasn't in any way unusual. Now how did he explain this to William?

"Yeah, I do," Harry said blankly as he stared at Rowag. He couldn't think of anything. "Her name's Rowag." Well, no one said he had to explain anything, right? Rowag was pretty much a pet in muggle eyes, so she wasn't that strange, right?

William came and looked closer at the sleeping owl on the perch and then turned to Harry. "Shall we go?" he said. Harry sighed in relief. Apparently he didn't need an explanation. Well, of course he didn't. Having a pet was perfectly normal. Harry was really starting to get paranoid around William, probably because he was trying to plan out how to keep his magic hidden from him. Harry could tell already that if he had to keep this up for long, he would need to work out what things he could and could not do in the muggle house. There were just too many aspects of everyday life he took for granted that might stand out to someone like William.

"Yeah, I'll just grab my coat," Harry said while they walked back downstairs.

William waited for Harry to put his coat on and lock the door and then led Harry to the black car on the curb where Thomas had been waiting for them. As Harry waved again to Thomas, William opened the back door and crawled in. Harry watched as William assumed his typical position on the far end of the car seat and climbed in after him, closing the door and turning to Thomas in the front.

"So where are we headed?" Harry asked.

"Ah, well, we have tickets for the London Eye this evening, before then we will be taking lunch at The Dorchester, so we might walk about Hyde Park, if that's alright?" Thomas said pleasantly. Harry nodded with a grin. He had never been to The Dorchester or Hyde Park and was pleased at the idea of spending the day at these new places with Thomas (and William).

As the car set off, Harry glanced about and felt his eyes widen. This... was a really nice car. The bench-seat he and William were sitting on was upholstered in pale leather and the flooring and interior of the car were colored to match. The front seat had a window that could be raised up to separate the driver from the passengers and also seemed to have a tiny fridge installed in the middle and trays that folded down from the sides. Harry also thought there might be a TV screen that lowered from the ceiling, but as he'd never seen one before, he couldn't be sure.

Harry had gotten the feeling when he first had lunch with Thomas and William that they were well off. Now he was starting to wonder exactly how wealthy they were because, Harry thought, if the Malfoys were muggles, this would be the sort of car they would be chauffeured in. But Thomas was driving the car and William- Harry glanced over at William, crouched on the bench-seat and playing with his toes- was the one being chauffeured. Harry wasn't sure if this made sense or not, but the car did have one of those divider windows, so surely that meant this car was a limousine.

Before, Harry had thought that Thomas was the wealthy one and William was something like a son,
following Thomas around. However, seeing the way the car was set up didn't support that idea at all. In fact, Harry was beginning to get the impression that the wealth being flaunted was William's and that Thomas, whether related to William or not, was just accompanying him. What in the world did William do to be so well off while not showing any signs of affluence on his person? His clothes were cheap and unkempt, his hair was a bird's nest, his manners were brusque, his behavior was weird and uncouth... There didn't seem to be any aspect of William's appearance or personality that would fit in with any job Harry could think of.

Oh. Harry blinked. William must have inherited or something. That was actually why Harry had any wealth to speak of, so it made sense that William might have a similar situation. It might also explain why their vacation was so long- Harry was sure this was at least their second week off and they hadn't mentioned any plans of ending it soon. Of course, in order to inherit, someone had to have died, which meant that William was probably an orphan. Harry felt vaguely sorry for William then. Maybe that was why William had such a hard time interacting with other people. William really was a lot like Luna, Harry thought, it was sort of scary.

Harry tried to settle in and looked out the window, doing his best not to think of whatever circumstances led to William and Thomas' situation. It wasn't any of his business after all, and he certainly hadn't told them anything about his own past, so asking about theirs would be terribly rude. In his effort to ignore the strangeness of his companions, Harry missed William glancing at him throughout the car trip, looking vaguely disappointed.

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After a frustratingly quiet drive with Harry, he and L were dropped off at Hyde Park Corner while Wammy went to park the car at The Dorchester. L had hoped that the car ride would prompt Harry to begin questioning 'William's' place in the world due to how opulent riding around in a tripped out 1960's Rolls Royce was, but Harry (after looking around and noticing the obvious wealth and even sending a curious glance in L's direction) had chosen not to remark on it. L wondered whether this was due to Harry not wanting to ask questions about him because he might have to answer questions in return, or if maybe Harry was just polite enough to leave other people's business alone. He needed to get Harry comfortable enough to ask about him though, or Harry would not learn the things L wanted him to.

For now though, L was left alone with Harry as they waited and decided to use the opportunity to question Harry subtly about his whereabouts this morning. L was certain that Harry had a second hideaway close by to number nine Argyle Square (something he approved of) because he and Wammy had watched him have breakfast at the house before they left and after little more than forty minutes later had arrived to see him walking up to the house with a large trunk.

L had gotten out to 'help' Harry more out of a desire to see what was in it. What Harry had told him about needing more things at number nine rather pleased L, because it meant that Harry really would be making an effort to be available to himself and Wammy and having Harry in view was far preferable to not having any clue where he was. However, the idea of Harry having a second, more secret hideout, nearby also disturbed L because he didn't know where it was. The organization had found Harry already and were probably watching him just as L and Wammy were, but L was afraid to think the organization might know where both Harry's hideouts were, whereas L only knew about one of them. If something ever happened to Harry while he was at this second hideout, L might never know. Clearly he would have to either prevent Harry from utilizing the second hideout (already in progress if Harry was moving clothes and such to number nine) or follow Harry more closely to discover the second hideout's location.

L knew which tactic he preferred but unfortunately, the choice was largely dependent on Harry's
movement over the next few days. L hoped, however, that he might become enough of an influence on Harry to nudge him in the direction of his own preference. Unfortunately, L was apparently not trusted enough for Harry to be comfortable to discuss where he had fetched his trunk from as the moment L mentioned (fairly innocently he felt) helping Harry to move anything else he wanted into nine Argyle Square, Harry switched topics to the nearby rose garden and went on about how it was a shame they weren't visiting when it was in bloom. L was terribly annoyed by this, but, he supposed, it was a step up from Harry's previous habit of simply not talking to him. L smirked a bit, Harry really was warming up to him, so perhaps he could breach the topic again after putting Harry more at ease.

"Is there anywhere you want to go?" L asked Harry (who'd been vaguely disturbed by 'William's suddenly evil smile). Harry shook his head and stayed silent. L frowned, he thought Harry was comfortable enough with him to talk. What happened?

"Well, then do you mind if I pick a place?" L asked slowly, trying to speak kindly as Wammy often did. Harry stared at him a bit oddly and said he didn't mind at all. "Good. There is actually something I want to show you," L said proudly. He hoped that the walk in the park would help cement his place in Harry's good view and give him a chance to loan the boy the phone he had bought this morning. If Harry went back to ignoring him, then all of L's plans for the day would be ruined.

"Do you like roses?" L asked, trying to keep up a pleasant discussion now that Harry had spoken to him.

"Er, not really," Harry said sheepishly. "I just thought it sounded nice. You know... sort of, in general..." Harry trailed off and was looking embarrassed by that point.

"Hmm, that's fine," L said reassuringly. "What other sorts of things do you like 'in general'?"

Harry blinked at him, clearly trying to think of something. L wondered briefly if Harry would just say the first thing that came to mind, or try to create a false topic to lead L away from personal questions. Harry seemed the type to like most everything "in general", or rather he was the type who didn't seem to have any great dislike for anything. Hmm, perhaps asking after what Harry disliked would be more productive?

"Er, gardening in general?" Harry finally said hesitantly, as though waiting to be marked on his answer and told it was wrong. Apparently he chose the first thing that came to mind, probably got gardening straight from the idea of roses.

"...You in general, like gardening in general?" L asked blankly. Harry stared at L with a slowly reddening face and looked down quickly, mumbling "Not really..." Harry really did get flustered easily. At least it made conversations easy to lead (provided, of course, that the person you were talking to was willing to speak). "Then what do you not like?" L asked nonchalantly.

Harry blinked again and looked around as though he hoped 'Thomas' would walk up to them and he wouldn't have to answer. L looked at Harry more carefully and then, just as carefully, turned to the side to appear as though he wasn't watching Harry's every move. If Harry was trying to avoid lying to L, then it would be better not to make him uncomfortable- he might actually answer!

"Well," Harry said exasperatedly, clearly knowing that he was giving in. L did his best not to grin at the garden wall he was staring at. "I don't much like rats." Harry thought some more. "Or people who are rude. Or thieves. Or liars." Harry listed those off slowly and L had the feeling that Harry was envisioning specific people with each term.

"Rude, thieves and liars?" L said speculatively. Harry didn't seem to associate with the best sort. L
was fairly sure the Dursleys were the 'rude' people- Wammy would likely attest to that as well, but he wondered who the 'thieves' and 'liars' were. "And rats as well?" L ended the query on the more innocent note so Harry would believe L wasn't interested in further explanation.

"Yeah... A friend of mine had a pet rat and, well, I ended up not liking him much," Harry was staring off toward the street. L was starting to wonder if the rat was a person as well. Surely no one would normally get such a bitter look over a pet rat? So, Harry was speaking in code again... But, thought L, that was very good! Harry was, in his own way, offering information about himself, meaning that he did trust L somewhat.

L was considering turning the conversation towards one of the other 'things' Harry didn't like, seeing as the 'rat' was apparently a more volatile subject than L had thought, when Wammy walked up to them, breaking the mood that had built up.

"There you are!" Wammy said. "I hope you didn't mind the wait?" Wammy smiled, mostly at Harry, when he said this.

"No, we didn't mind," Harry said happily, all thought of 'rats' and 'liars' and 'rude people' forgotten. L almost forgot about them as well when he realized that Harry was including him in his answer. Almost.

Wammy looked between them speculatively. "Well then, I'm pleased the two of you are getting on so well!" Harry blinked at this. Wammy grinned. "Shall we be off?"

L turned without a word, toward a path that opened out on the Serpentine Road and Harry and Wammy followed behind him, already starting up some pointless conversation about lakes and swimming. L found himself annoyed that Wammy had accidentally interrupted his interrogation. Harry had been opening up to L, offering more information than he'd actually asked for, and then Wammy had to come and steal him away! L listened to Harry speaking behind him, he sounded much happier talking to 'Thomas' than he did when talking to 'William.' L frowned. He would have changed the topic if Harry had been truly against it. L had proved last night that he could easily carry on a pleasant conversation with Harry.

L continued sulking and thinking dark thoughts about what he might have learned by now if he were talking to Harry instead of Wammy and so, didn't hear Harry calling him until he tapped his shoulder, making him spin around. Harry was staring at him with wide eyes and Wammy was looking at him with a great deal of amusement. "Did you want something, Harry?" L said blankly.

"Er, I was trying to ask you where we were headed?" Harry said awkwardly. "You don't seem interested in looking about and you did say you wanted to go somewhere..."

"Did you not want to walk around the park first?" L said flatly. "We have plenty of time Harry, no need to be anxious."

Harry glared slightly. "I just thought that since it is your vacation, you should do what you want. Besides," Harry added as he looked away, upset and trying to hide it. "You seem like you're in a bad mood and you were fine earlier... I thought maybe you were bored or something," Harry mumbled.

L thought about that and looked up at the sky. On one hand, he was pleased that Harry was paying attention to him as it meant that Harry did have a higher opinion of him now (Harry seemed to prefer to ignore anything he didn't like). On the other hand, he was upset because Harry was paying attention to him and L hated it when people watched him and decided how he felt. Not that Harry was too far off, and he was trying to make L feel better by letting L do whatever he felt like. L liked it when people let him choose what to do and didn't interfere. L looked back down at Harry, who
was now watching him warily, and decided that he would accept Harry's submission to his apparent mood.

"Then we shall take the direct route!" L declared and he led Harry and Wammy back a short way to Rotten Row to continue along the south side of the Serpentine Lake. He was eager now to get Harry to the place he'd picked out. Since Harry was going along so nicely with L's plan to get close to him, L was looking forward to the next stage and hoping Harry would go along with that just as well as everything else.

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Harry enjoyed the walk down Rotten Row. He'd heard about it before and hadn't thought it sounded all that interesting, but it was really a nice place with its line of trees and the occasional rider on horseback. He thought he might come here later, with his friends or by himself. He could walk along it much more leisurely then, as opposed to now when William was rushing them along and hardly letting Harry or Thomas catch a breath.

Harry glanced then, at William, who was striding forward impatiently, and tried not to laugh. When he'd started talking with Thomas earlier, he'd gotten the feeling that William was put out for being ignored. Deciding to try and get William more involved by letting him dictate their path so he might feel better (Harry didn't actually want to start up another conversation, William was too difficult to talk to), had really been a good idea. Thomas had whispered a congratulations to Harry for snapping William out of his sour mood- normally William would only be brought out of those when he decided he would.

The walk along Rotten Row passed very quickly and they approached an area surrounded by bare shrubberies. Harry could see a number of tennis courts, a bowling field and paths winding between all the dead looking shrubs. William led them on a path around to a small building and waited outside with Harry while Thomas (who'd been looking more and more amused as the morning wore on) went inside. Harry shifted awkwardly on his feet as he waited beside William and looked around.

"Er, what was it you wanted to show me?" He asked uncertainly.

William grinned widely at him. "Do you play any sports Harry?"

Well, that was difficult to answer; Harry couldn't tell William he'd been on his house's quidditch team for six years or so. "What sort of sports?" Harry asked instead. Harry hadn't really participated much in any outside activities when he was in primary school- thanks to Dudley and his gang, no one ever wanted to play with him- but he had watched others play. Hopefully, whatever sport William was interested in would be something that Harry at least knew the rules for.

"Tennis," William said shortly, watching Harry with that odd smile.

Harry shook his head. He knew the general theory behind tennis- hit a ball over a net- but he'd never watched anyone play it and he had certainly never played it himself.

William pouted and then grinned at Harry. "Too bad, but I suppose this means I will have to teach you."

Harry stared at William. "What?"

William watched Harry's face and brought a finger up to pull slightly on his lip. "I like tennis and you did say that I should do what I want on my vacation."

Well, Harry did say that, but if he'd known that it would bring him to learning how to chase a little
ball around in front of a net from William, he might not have said anything at all and let William carry on with his sulking. Thomas stepped back out of the building at this point and handed a racket and ball to William and held another racket uncertainly as he looked at Harry.

Harry sighed. "Oh, alright..." he muttered. "I'll play with you, but I'm warning you- I don't know how to play this at all, so if you don't have any fun, it's your own fault!"

William, who had already let himself onto the empty tennis courts, smirked over his shoulder at Harry. "Of course Harry. But I think I will have a great deal of fun with you."

Harry just sighed resignedly and followed after him while Thomas walked over to a bench at the back of the court to sit down and watch them. At least there weren't many people around, Harry thought. No one normally played tennis in an outdoor court in winter. Actually, Harry was surprised the courts were even open at this time of year.

Harry stood next to William, wondering what he would have to do, while William started bouncing the tennis ball and catching it one handed.

"Watch carefully, Harry," he said as he looked at Harry over his shoulder. "This is how you serve." With that, William tossed the ball high in the air, drew the racket back and then struck the ball suddenly as it fell back down. Harry watched the ball speed over the net, hit the court and then bounce into the fence and roll back. He was rather impressed despite himself, the ball had gone quite fast.

William went to fetch the ball and handed it solemnly to Harry. "Now you," he said confidently. "Just hit it as hard as you can, don't worry about aim."

Harry took the ball apprehensively. It would be so embarrassing if he missed or if the ball didn't even make it over the net. He bounced the ball a few times the way William had and then tossed it up and waited for it to fall so he could hit it. When he reached back to strike the ball, he did just as William told him and hit it with all his might, only hoping it would at least get to the other side of the court. The only ball Harry had ever hit before this had been a bludger, and that was the only reason Harry could think of that might explain why he'd mucked things up so badly.

Harry and William watched as the tennis ball flew over the fence on the opposite side of the court, over the shrubbery, across the path, and into the dirt road of Rotten Row. "I'll, er, I'll go get it," Harry said glumly as he trotted off out of the court.

When Harry came back, his face was burning and he stared at the ground. He'd been worried when he wandered off to fetch the ball that he would look up and see William and Thomas in the court, laughing at him, and now that he had forced himself to come back, he found he still didn't want to look up.

William took the ball from him and casually commented that maybe they should work on aim after all and that Harry would be very scary if he hit the ball that hard all the time. Harry risked a glance up and saw William's face as blank as it always was and that he was, in fact, regarding the tennis ball rather than Harry. Harry felt a lot of the tension flow out of him and decided he was really worrying too much. Tennis was a game people played for fun, right? So he would just do his best and try to have fun.

The next hour or so was spent with William teaching Harry how to hit the ball so it would go where he wanted and Harry learning that it didn't take as much force as he had thought to get the ball over the net. William even told him that some games were won by getting the ball to hit the net and fall gently over it. He'd only told Harry to hit the ball so hard because most people underestimate how to
hit the ball and become discouraged when the ball doesn't make it across the court. Harry, he said, didn't seem to have that problem.

When Harry was able to at least get the ball to hit close to wherever William told him to aim for, William decided it was time to actually play. Harry found he was somewhat looking forward to it.

The first ball William served over the net, Harry was barely able to tap. The second ball Harry was able to catch on his racket and roll back towards the net. By the third ball, Harry felt more confident about judging the speed and direction of the small ball (it was like chasing a snitch sized bludger) and was able to hit it back to William, who then hit it back to Harry, who hit it sideways off the court.

Harry frowned after the ball. He forgot he had to keep chasing the bloody thing even after he hit it. William called out that Harry should get the ball instead of waiting for it to come back to him. Harry decided he would take his frustrations with this stupid game out on William. Even if Harry couldn't play as well as William, he would at least do his best to making winning difficult for him.

When William served the fourth ball, Harry was ready for it and when William hit it casually back at him, Harry managed to keep the ball in play. They whacked the ball back and forth, Harry running around and thinking that this game would be better if it had brooms, and William rushing about calmly, as if he did this every day. Finally, Harry misjudged the direction the ball was spinning and lobbed it over into the court next to them.

"Out," William called flatly. "I have the advantage, Harry." Harry glared at him as he went to pick up the ball. Stupid ball. Stupid game. Stupid William.

As Harry handed the ball to him, William tilted his head to regard Harry. "Do you really not play any sports Harry?"

"What makes you say that?" Harry asked in annoyance.

William shrugged. "You are doing surprisingly well, but have yet to mention any sports you know. If you want, we could play what you like instead."

Harry huffed, he didn't need pity or anything. "Sorry, but the sport I play is a team one, so we couldn't-"

"What sport exactly?" William looked at him. "We could easily adjust the rules for two people."

Harry glared at him. Quidditch couldn't really be played by two people- well, they could play as Keeper and Chaser, but Harry felt that tennis was already enough like it that he didn't want to do that with William. What he really wanted to do was play Seeker against him. William was so much better at tennis, but Harry was sure he could win at Seeker...

"Actually it's a game that was only played at my school," Harry said suddenly. What was he doing?

"So you wouldn't know how to play anyway."

William's eyes narrowed and he let the tennis ball fall to the ground and roll away. "I'm certain I could figure it out, Harry."

Harry smirked. "It's called quidditch." Well, as long as he didn't mention broomsticks, he could probably explain it to William. They wouldn't be able to play, of course, but just knowing how to do something that William didn't seemed much more important at the moment. "There's seven players to a team. Three Chasers, Two Beaters, a Keeper and a Seeker. The Chasers try to get a football past one of three goals guarded by the Keeper. The Beaters try to hit opposing players with two other balls with lead centers to knock them off course. Then the Seekers both compete with each other to
try and find a fourth hidden ball to end the game."

William stared at him and had his finger on his mouth. "That sounds unnecessarily complicated."

"Well," Harry shrugged. "I suppose it is more complicated than batting a ball back and forth over a net for hours, but it is a lot of fun." Harry grinned as he turned to walk back to his side of the court. He could feel William glaring at him the whole way.

"What player were you?" William called out.

Harry turned to look back at him. "I played Seeker. Why?"

William was watching Harry avidly now. "All the Seeker does is find something hidden?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. A ball smaller than a golfball."

William grinned that horribly creepy, evil smirk he'd made earlier. "Very well. Let us play Seeker against each other."

Harry stared at William. He wanted very much to play this game- it wouldn't really be like chasing after a snitch, but he felt he could compete with William more evenly than he could with tennis. "What exactly would we be seeking then?"
Harry and William spent the next two hours wandering around the park, sometimes walking placidly by Thomas' side and sometimes racing across a field, as they fought to see who could spot "the hidden object" first. Thomas was made an impartial judge and set to select various rare birds one might see in Hyde Park. First, after they left the tennis courts and wandered by the Serpentine, was a black swan which Harry proudly pointed out from almost 500 meters away and which William refused to believe was actually a swan and not a duck until they rented a boat and went out to it to check.

Harry was ridiculously smug on returning to shore and William sulked until Thomas gave them the next "object" to look for. Then, William became incredibly alert and looked around with Harry to try and spot a redwing before him. He managed to do so, although Harry contested this was due more to the fact that William kept cutting him off and obstructing his view, and so, when they started hunting for a fieldfare, Harry took to running past William into the fields. Harry, who was much quicker than William, found a fieldfare first, although William argued that Harry had only done so because he accidentally startled it from a bush and if Harry had been playing properly, he'd not have seen it at all.

By two in the afternoon, Thomas was trying desperately to get them back onto the path to head for The Dorchester because they were going to be late for their reservation. Harry, feeling guilty that he might ruin lunch plans, quickly raced toward him to walk out of the park. William, however, dragged his feet slowly back to the path and stubbornly insisted that Thomas select another bird for them to find as they left the park. Harry was greatly annoyed that William was being so rude and knew he was only making such a fuss because Harry had found the last bird and was ahead of him. But William refused to move until Thomas relented, and so, as they walked off, both Harry and William were glancing around quickly, trying to find a dunnock- a small brown bird, easily mistaken for a sparrow but with slightly different markings and a narrower beak.

Once they reached Park Lane to head for The Dorchester, William was in an absolutely foul mood because, after Harry had spotted the first dunnock moments before a small flock swept past, he had turned to him and smugly told William that he 'had the advantage.' Harry, on the other hand, was positively beaming and responding happily to Thomas' amused comments.

Upon reaching the hotel, Harry was once again impressed by how extravagant the surroundings were and wondered once more why William, dressed as he was, was so fond of such places. They were greeted in the lobby of the hotel itself and led to a large dining area. Harry was startled to find that they were actually being led past all the tables where everyone else was eating and were instead given seats in a secluded nook, separated from the larger hall by a low wall and rows of tall fronds. In the small area was a setup rather like a sitting room, with a couch and two armchairs situated around a low table.

Harry looked about nervously at the huge gilt mirror over the couch, the lacy cloth on the table, the velvety covers on the seats, the patterned wallpaper, and- worst of all- the three people who were apparently going to wait on them alone. He really had dressed somewhat nicely for today, in one of his favorite red shirts and well tailored black pants, but after playing tennis and racing about (and sometimes getting knocked down- William did not play fair) in the fields of Hyde Park, Harry was sweaty and dirt stained and quite a mess. He didn't feel at all as though he should be in such a posh
place as this.

As he was glancing about and looking down with embarrassment, William and Thomas both sat on the armchairs and left Harry to sit on the couch between them. Harry sat gingerly, worried that someone would insist he leave rather than stain the upholstery. If Harry had ever tried to sit in any chair at Privet Drive in the state he was currently in, Aunt Petunia would have tossed him out on his ear, yelling for him to rinse off with the hose before coming in again. Thomas noticed how nervous Harry had become and quickly asked what the matter was. Harry tried to play it off by saying only that he wasn't used to such a grand place.

William, glaring blankly out of the corner of his eyes, cut Harry off impatiently. "It does not matter what you are dressed like Harry, or how dirty you are." Then he went back to glaring at the table with his toes twisting over each other restlessly.

Harry blinked and glared back at him.

"Look, I can tell you don't care what other people think-" he started off angrily before being cut off again.

"Correct! I do not care what other people think," William glared at Harry and then set his chin on his knees, suddenly appearing to lose interest and gazing at Harry placidly. "Why do you, Harry?"

Harry was brought up short by that. "Er, well, why wouldn't I?" he asked lamely.

William gazed seriously at him. "Perhaps because the only people you know here are myself and Thomas and we will not hold your appearance against you. What would it matter if anyone else does?"

Harry looked at the table and shifted his feet. It had always mattered what people thought of his appearance. The Dursleys had always thought Harry's hair and scar were hideous and would punish him whenever they were reminded just how upsetting those features were. The neighbors and his teachers had all thought Harry was too scrawny and his clothes too baggy and believed he was a troubled child because of it and ignored and avoided him. Then, in the wizarding world, Harry worked so hard to fit the standard of the "perfect Gryffindor", hoping no one would notice how he looked, and he ended up being judged, being liked or disliked, based on that alone. Everyone had always had an opinion of Harry based on what they saw of him, and some of those people could be quite loud about expressing those opinions.

"It just... always has," Harry mumbled uncomfortably. "Why would that change now?"

"Would you prefer it if it didn't matter?" William asked in a monotonous voice.

Harry looked up at him, really looked at William- at his baggy clothes, his tangled hair, the dirt on his shirt, the tear in his jeans. Harry looked carefully at how at ease William was, perched on a fancy chair like a naughty five year old. He looked at William's face with a smudge on one cheek and bags under his eyes. Now that Harry thought of it, he was rather... envious of William. William could go anyplace and just be himself and not worry about how others viewed him, he was completely unaffected by others' opinions of him. For Harry, who had always lived being dictated by the opinions of other people, it was both disturbing and entirely enviable. Harry wished that he could sit here in this opulent room, on this expensive couch, in his dirty clothes and not be at all intimidated by the surroundings or the people watching- the way William was sitting. Harry realized he hated William in that moment.

"Yes, but that doesn't mean it won't stop mattering," Harry said softly.
"Why not?" William asked again in that flat tone.

Harry was suddenly very angry with William. "Because," he said shortly. "Just because I want to not care about it, doesn't mean everyone else will let me!"

William tilted his head to the side while keeping his chin on his knees. "Do strangers have that much control over you, Harry?" he asked lightly.

Yes, Harry wanted to say, they did. He didn't like it, but they did and when he disappointed all those strangers in some way (like dumping his "fiancé" and quitting the auror department), he got to read about it in the paper (pages 9-12 of The Daily Prophet, written by Rita Skeeter a month and a half ago after senior aurors spread the 'where is Harry Potter' gossip) and feel confused and guilty that he wasn't living up to some un-named expectations. Harry couldn't say this though, so he just glared at the table in silence. William and Thomas shared another meaningful look that Harry didn't notice and then the conversation was interrupted as a tea service was set out with finger sandwiches and scones.

Harry looked up at the food, utterly starving after the long and active morning and wanting to ignore the conversation that had just happened. He was surprised to see that 'lunch' was actually afternoon tea- a high tea in fact. Harry hoped the sandwiches could fill him up. He took the first one, chicken with mustard, and swallowed it in a single bite.

The tea continued in a subdued manner, Harry eating quietly and nodding every now and then while Thomas tried to make small talk. William sipped his tea (laden down with six sugars and half the cream) and watched Harry ignoring him expressionlessly. When the little cakes were set out, William made sure to grab as many as he could to keep Harry from eating them and Harry just shrugged and started eating what was left. Thomas had since given up trying to get Harry to talk and only took a small tart to nibble, stirring his tea rather morosely.

After the tea finished and they went out to the car, which had been brought round the entrance by valet, Harry was starting to feel guilty about ruining the tea so. Once the car was on the street, he muttered a quiet 'sorry.' William turned to regard him from his perch and chewed his thumb. Thomas glanced back in the rearview mirror at Harry, smiling sadly, and said it was quite alright.

But Harry was far from satisfied with this. He had been having a splendid time with Thomas and William and then he had ruined it by getting all moody and sulking. It wasn't William and Thomas' fault that Harry had to put up with the wizarding world going loopy over his every move. Harry had hoped simply saying he was sorry would be enough to fix things, but as William was only staring at him in that creepy manner and Thomas had gone back to driving without saying anything else to Harry, he thought maybe he needed to do something more.

"I, er," Harry said hesitantly. "I... um, I don't really like talking about this," Harry frowned and looked out the window so he wouldn't have to see William staring at him or Thomas glancing at him in the mirror. "I've always been judged by people, for lots of reasons, and whenever I don't do whatever they think I should, I get... in trouble, I guess." Certainly a lot of trouble was caused for him anyway.

"And I don't like it, but that's just the way it is, and lately," Harry paused. He had already told Thomas and William about quitting his job and all his friends being upset with him, so this shouldn't be difficult to explain. "Lately that is, I've not really been doing what everyone expected me to and... It sort of makes me nervous I guess. It's the first time I've really gone against other people's wishes."

Harry paused, that wasn't quite right. "Well, important people anyway- people that matter to me. But, I've disappointed them now and... and I don't really want to go back to the way things were, I didn't like it as much as I thought I would." This was starting to get confusing, but Harry just had to make
That sounded perfectly barmy. Harry probably sounded like a timid twat who was afraid of offending anyone around him. Even worse was that Harry felt it was at least partially true.

The car was silent and Harry worried for a moment that he had completely alienated William and Thomas and his jumbled attempt at an explanation hadn't helped anything, but then Harry heard William saying his name lowly and realized he was being called.

"Er, what?" Harry said as he turned to look cautiously next to him. He wasn't actually looking at William, but watched his toes as though those might give him a clue to what William was thinking.

William bent sideways so his head hung over his feet and he blinked up at Harry's startled gaze. "Apology accepted Harry." William sat back up and Harry's confused gaze followed his blank face as it turned to look out the window. "However, I think you must learn to stop caring for those 'important people's' opinions, Harry. If you can disappoint them only by trying to be happy, then they are not very good friends, are they?"

"That's not it!" Harry protested.

"Then what is it, Harry?" William asked un-caringly as he looked out at the passing street. "It certainly sounded just now, and last week, as though all your friends were disappointed with you for making a new life for yourself."

"They're okay with it now though," Harry said weakly. "They just... Worry that I'm not doing the right thing is all."

"How exactly is living your life as you choose 'not the right thing'?"

Harry looked down. That wasn't really what he meant, at least he didn't think it was. He knew his friends were worried about him when he quit the aurors, but that was because they thought he was depressed or something- not because it wasn't the right thing to do. As for now... okay, so they did think that cooking was... well, not as important as auror work, but they were supporting him! They wanted him to be happy, he knew that! The problem, he supposed, was that he also knew that everyone in the whole world (including his friends) thought that "The Vanquisher of Voldemort" should be doing something more worthwhile with his life than house-elf work.

"It's complicated," he said softly. "Just, I've always done my best to live up to everyone's expectations and now that I'm not... it just takes some adjusting to. But they're all letting me do what I want- they do want me to be happy. They're just... surprised, I guess, that what makes me happy isn't what they thought."

"I see," William said flatly. Harry wondered how they'd even gotten on this topic. William didn't seem interested in talking about it and hadn't Harry only wanted to apologize for spoiling tea? But that seemed to be the end of the conversation and Harry spent the rest of the drive gazing out the window in an uncomfortable silence.

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About half an hour later, L was walking leisurely along a path in Jubilee Gardens with Harry
keeping pace quietly beside him and looking everywhere but at him. Wammy had dropped them off yet again so he could park the car. They would meet up with him around the entrance to the London Eye around four o'clock. L had planned to take advantage of the alone time this afforded him with Harry, but that was before the disturbing conversations they'd had over tea and in the car.

L had known, of course, after going over information gained from the Dursleys, that Harry was likely to have certain... issues regarding his sense of worth, but seeing it on display almost, had been difficult for L to handle. Something about seeing directly how Harry felt about himself made L feel raw inside, as though he was being scraped with sandpaper every time Harry gave an unconscious indication of his sense of worthlessness.

L was certain, after spending a rather competitive morning with him, that Harry had a definite sense of explicit self-esteem. That is, Harry was proud of himself and his abilities in a specific and conscious manner. However, hearing Harry speak about "disappointing important people" and not wanting to care for other people's opinions when he obviously did care, proved to L that Harry had a very low implicit self-esteem. Meaning that Harry thought of himself as having less value than other people in a general and unconscious manner.

Perhaps the worst though, was when Harry had looked at L so intensely. L had gotten the impression that, as Harry studied his every feature, he was comparing L to himself. L was used to people comparing him to themselves, and knowing they would always find him lacking in some way that justified their derision of him was what made L hate being looked at so much. Because, L knew, generally speaking, most people would get an ego boost at the thought that they were better in some way than him. As much as he disliked the implications, this was perfectly normal.

But when Harry had compared himself to L, he seemed to find himself lacking and became depressed for it. L wasn't sure what to think of this. He'd always thought personally, of course, that he was a much preferable person to everyone else, but to see Harry think similarly and then feel bad for it... It was horribly distressing and not normal at all.

The entire situation was very disturbing to L, even though he had been expecting it and had even planned out how best to manipulate Harry based on that psychological profile of him. But now that it came to it, L found himself too uneasy to do much more than walk quietly with Harry and pretend nothing was wrong. This wasn't a particularly poor move- it wouldn't lower the trust he'd managed to build with Harry and would likely increase it- but he had intended to utilize Harry's issues at a moment of stress (a moment like right now) in order to gain more information. And now that it came to it, he wasn't doing that!

L scuffed his trainers on the path as he walked. He couldn't understand it. Here was a perfect moment to interrogate Harry, when he was vulnerable and willing to give out more information than he normally would (he'd certainly been desperate enough for forgiveness in the car to go babbling on about his life) and instead of taking full advantage of that like he should- L was giving Harry time to calm down and regain his balance. L was flummoxed.

Beside him, Harry was unconsciously nodding to himself and his steps began to match L's more forcefully. Well, L thought glumly, Harry must be feeling better. As if to prove this, Harry started talking to L as if nothing awkward had ever occurred between them.

"So, why did you want to go to the London Eye anyway?"

L shrugged. "Thomas wanted to try it," he said noncommitally.

"Oh," Harry trailed off, but L could tell that was more because he was trying to think of something else to talk about, rather than nerves. Well, he had missed out on a prime interrogation opportunity,
but he could still lead the conversation.

"Are you interested in riding it?" L looked directly at Harry as he said this. He would start with Harry's topic and then slowly direct the conversation toward something more interesting.

"Sure," Harry said with only slight interest.

"Why?"

"Well, I've never done anything like it I guess," Harry said as he thought.

"Never done what, exactly?" L asked dully as he turned to walk down another path. Harry paused a moment before joining him.

"Never ridden a big wheel," Harry said with such practiced nonchalance that L knew instantly he was deliberately avoiding something.

"Neither have I," L said with as careful disinterest as Harry was trying to portray. "But that is not what you meant."

Harry glared at him and shrugged. "Don't know what you mean," he said stubbornly.

L grinned slightly and was amused when Harry flinched. "Yes, you do," he said with a pleased smile. Who knew Harry's own bland choice of topic would give L something to question him about? Harry glanced away, clearly trying to dismiss the whole conversation.

Normally, it was boring when a suspect was this easy to read, but somehow watching Harry express nearly everything he was feeling, when before he only showed polite interest to 'William', was incredibly satisfying. L thought this might be because he knew Harry had decent control over his face when he needed it (when he'd lied a week ago, his expression hadn't changed at all- only his eyes had flickered briefly to the side), but since last night, Harry had reached a point where he was willing to trust L and Wammy with more personal matters and was relaxing that control.

So now, L got to enjoy a whole range of emotional expression and visible cues on Harry's face that revealed his every thought. The best part was that, unlike a suspect who would break from nerves and spill everything once realizing they had slipped somehow, Harry seemed completely unaware of his relaxed expressions and was more than willing to stubbornly ignore any slips he made. Which made it all the more fun to get Harry to admit to something or go along with L's plans while his face showed exactly how annoyed he really was with the situation.

"So," L asked with that same evil grin that unnerved Harry so much. "What did you mean?"

Harry was looking at him dubiously now. "Why on earth would that matter?"

Ha, L thought, an admission. "Because," he grinned. "I am curious."

"Yeah," Harry muttered. "You're like a bleeding cat with all your curiosity."

L nodded. "Yes, so, would you please answer the question?"

"Why should I?" Harry asked defiantly, and L was oddly pleased to see Harry becoming angry instead of falling into that awful, listless mood he'd been in since tea. Even if that particular state would aid the investigation, L found he preferred dealing with Harry like this, than when he was anxious.

"Because," L said with relish. "This is my vacation and I want to know."
Harry stared at him and laughed suddenly. "Nice try, but I don't think that really applies."

"Why not?" L pouted.

"Cause," Harry smirked at him. "It's my life you're asking about, so I get to decide whether or not to answer and- guess what- I don't want to!"

L felt his eyes narrow slightly and glared at Harry. "Too bad." Harry just gave that annoying look that said he didn't care what L thought of him and continued walking.

"I will answer one of your questions if you answer mine," L said suddenly to Harry's back. He didn't think it mattered so much if he found out what Harry had actually meant when he said he'd "never done anything like it" in regards to the London Eye, but he hated that Harry was now holding that information over him and he would win it from him.

Harry looked back at him with amusement. "I don't want to ask you anything."

"Liar," L said shortly and he saw Harry's eyes widen with shock. He smirked. "You want to ask about the car," he stepped closer to Harry. "-and the dining venues," L stepped in front of Harry and leaned into his face. Harry stayed where he was, refusing even to lean back and glaring confusedly at him. "-and why I dress like this. Don't you, Harry?"

Harry stared at him a moment and then took a deliberate step to the side to get away from L's face shoved into his. "So what?" he asked stubbornly. "It's not any of my business and my life isn't any of yours."

"But," L said reasonably. "You do still want to know about me and I want to know about you, so why not trade?"

"Why do you care so much?" Harry asked him suspiciously, but L could tell by his posture that Harry was seriously considering the idea of trading answers.

"You say and do odd things and I want to discover why," L said calmly. Harry stared at him and L was sure that Harry was thinking the same could be applied to him.

"What exactly was your question?" Harry asked slowly. L grinned at him and brought his thumb up to nibble on.

"What did you mean when you said you had never done anything like the London Eye before?"

Harry sighed and looked off a bit uncertainly before answering. "My relatives never took me along with them on outings, so I've never been to, um, 'fun' places, I guess. Tourist-y places."

L could have easily figured that out, but the point of this was to make Harry tell him what he was trying to hide, so L would count this as a win. "Alright," he nodded. "Why didn't they take you with them?"

Harry crossed his arms and braced himself. "That's two questions. It's my turn now, isn't it?"

L pouted again. "Yes."

Harry nodded. "Okay... Er, why do you dress like that?" he asked hesitantly. "I mean, you seem to know it doesn't fit in, so why..?"

He chose to avoid the money question again, L thought. Oh well, this was really the easiest question
to answer and considering Harry's answer had been so insignificant, it was better his had a matching value. L would consider this a double win.

"These clothes are comfortable," L shrugged and turned to display an arm and a leg, his trainer dangling off his foot. "They are not itchy, they allow for maximum movement and they are warm. Much better than the tight, synthetic clothes fashionable people inflict themselves with."

Harry stared at L's pose and tilted his head. "And the socks? Why don't you like those?"

L stood straight again and tutted, waving his finger at Harry. "Now, now, Harry. That is two questions. If you want another answer, you must give me one as well."

Harry actually smiled at L. "Oh, so that's what you want to play now?"

L blinked at Harry. This might be a good way to get information while increasing Harry's trust in him... "If you can play by the rules, then yes."

"What rules?"

"Answers must always be kept even. We are now one and one. If I give an answer now, you must do so as well to bring us both to two. The same if you give an answer now."

"Can we choose to answer a different question if we don't like one?" Harry asked.

L thought about that. The point was to get information from Harry that he might not want to give, so if he could choose not to answer, then the whole game would lose its purpose. But if he didn't give Harry some concession, he would definitely back out...

"Yes," L said carefully. "However, choosing not to answer a question will result in a penalty."

"What penalty?"

"How about if the person who does not answer a question must instead do one task the other tells him to," L said speculatively.

"What?" Harry asked startled. "Why not just answer two questions or something?"

"No, that would make the answers given uneven and the only way to fix it would be to punish the questioner by having him give two answers as well."

"But what sort of 'task' are you talking about?" Harry asked.

"Hmm, that would be decided by the questioner when it comes up," L said simply.

"Well, what if the person doesn't want to do whatever task it is along with not answering a question?" Harry asked shortly.

"They will be doubly punished."

"I don't think-"

L jumped forward and interrupted. "We will play by the rules, but if someone truly does not want to answer a question and then does not want to perform the asked for task, we will simply call off the game. Alright?" L had to give Harry a way out it seemed, or he would not agree to play at all. Still, L was certain that Harry would be fine if the penalty rule came up - L would make sure any tasks he requested were tolerable.
Harry still looked uncertain. "Well, okay... But, what if someone lies?"

"How would either of us prove the other had lied?" L asked, trying to let Harry subtly know that he could still play the game without compromising himself. L would of course be able to tell when Harry lied and learn from that, but as long as Harry believed he could get away with it, he would agree to play.

"What if a person really believes the other lied without any proof?" Harry asked hesitantly. L frowned, did Harry know he could read him?

"If there is no proof, the liar cannot be penalized in the game." L watched Harry and bit his thumb. Perhaps Harry was nervous about lying in the first place? "Do you think you will be lying, Harry?"

Harry looked startled but didn't do more than shrug and glance away, making L's eyes widen. So there were questions Harry was anticipating lying for.

"I thought you didn't like liars, Harry," L said flatly as he walked a circle around Harry. "Isn't it hypocritical of you to dislike other liars and then lie yourself?"

Harry flinched and turned to face L walking behind him. "I never said I was the one who'd be lying!" he said angrily. But the fact that Harry had been so hesitant in asking about it before and was so defensive now made L completely certain that Harry had been planning to lie in the game. L was also certain that Harry honestly disliked liars though, as he seemed upset at the thought of lying even in a childish game like this.

"Then why so worried about rules for liars?" L asked speculatively, standing before Harry and looking at him with his eyes wide open.

"Well," Harry started awkwardly. "It wouldn't be fair if one of us is honest and then the other just lies the whole time. The game would be totally one-sided."

L nodded while his eyes stayed trained on Harry's face. "True, but again, there is the issue of how to prove someone is, in fact, lying."

"Er, I can tell sometimes," Harry said slowly. "When someone lies to me..." Harry looked questioningly at L. "You can too, can't you?"

L blinked at Harry, stunned. "What makes you say that?"

"You stare a lot," Harry said simply and he shrugged, as if that was his only explanation for the sudden insight to L's abilities.

"I stare?" L asked puzzled. "Because I stare, I can see people lying?"

Harry huffed in annoyance, acting as though L was being deliberately obtuse. "Well, yes. Why do you think I get so upset at you staring at me all the time?" he asked briskly.

"I thought you disliked being looked at."

"Well, yeah... But I know why people stare at others and it's not always friendly."

"People have stared at you to check if you are lying or not?" L asked curiously.

"Some people have," Harry shrugged again. "They'd watch and wait to catch a lie. I don't like it."

"So, do you lie a lot then?" L asked as he tilted his head to the side. Harry glared at him.
"No, I don't," he said shortly. "That's why I don't like the implication that I do."

"I see..." L stared at Harry some more. He believed that Harry didn't like lying and that certain people had indeed watched him to see if they could catch him in the act of lying... But he also believed that Harry, distaste for it or not, was still prepared to lie about anything he didn't want L to know. He also wondered how good Harry was at catching other people's lies and if he had seen through any of his or Wammy's... But, he didn't think Harry would continue associating with them if he had, so they were probably safe. He would watch what he said more carefully though, just in case.

"Well then," L started slowly. He would have to be careful about this. He had to ask certain leading questions to gain information and since he could not yet convince Harry not to lie to him, he couldn't really punish Harry for doing so. But he also needed this game to proceed for as long as possible- it was too good an idea not to use fully, even with the risk of Harry seeing through his own lies.

"Perhaps, we could set up a point system. When one of us is convinced the other is lying, that one will get a point. If the other wishes to claim he is telling the truth, he will have to offer up proof of some sort- that should keep us from racking up points by declaring the other a compulsive liar. What do you think, Harry?"

Harry looked to be thinking about this carefully. L waited patiently, fairly certain of Harry's decision.

"Alright then," Harry said resignedly. "I suppose that'll work. So," he sighed. "Whose turn was it?"

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When Harry and William finally met up with Thomas at the Eye, they had been playing the question game for about ten minutes. They'd gone through a dozen questions on each side, mostly because the questions were all fairly casual, innocent ones. William seemed to think they should start out with easy questions, to get comfortable, before asking the ones they were more interested in having answered. So far, Harry had learned from William that socks were evil, the sky was not actually blue but any shade of it was a color William didn't mind looking at, cakes with cream were always better than cakes without, William was the English Junior Tennis Champion years ago (which made Harry feel slightly better for not playing well against him), and that reading was more a useful tool than a favored pastime.

Harry was surprised at himself for playing such an odd game with a muggle he'd only known for a couple weeks or so. He was even more surprised to realize he was having fun. He was also incredibly eager to get to the 'big' questions, like why William seemed to be so wealthy and wandered around with Thomas as a chauffeur and chaperone. Harry was still unsure whether such a question was polite (well, he didn't think William would care, but he worried what Thomas would think when he learned of the game) and was waiting until William asked him something that annoyed him enough to stop caring about being polite or not.

However, as he followed William and Thomas onto a capsule of the Eye, Harry thought he might be asking why William was so rich even before that because after they got on, the capsule was closed up. Harry turned to look outside in surprise and noticed quite a few angry people in the queue, watching their capsule go with only three people in it.

Looking back at his companions, Harry watched in confusion as William set himself up in that odd position on the curved bench in the middle to start eating... chocolates? Harry walked over to the bench to stare at the dozens and dozens of chocolates lined up on silver trays on the bench and William, balanced on a corner, delicately plucking one after the other off a tray to toss in his mouth.

"Er..." said Harry.
William glanced up with a square chocolate held between his lips and quickly swallowed it. "Try one Harry. There are plenty."

Harry just stared and, feeling suddenly as though he needed a translator, turned to look over at Thomas standing on the other side of the bench, watching him and William bemusedly. Thomas coughed quietly as Harry looked at him.

"This is a special service of the London Eye," Thomas explained. "A private chocolate capsule- I'm afraid William insisted once he learned about it." Thomas shrugged helplessly, though Harry could see him smiling.

Harry leaned against one of the glass walls of the capsule and stared at these two odd men he barely knew. He'd seen the ticket prices on a board outside- a single person was moderately expensive, how much more expensive would a single capsule, filled with chocolate, be?

"So, how much is a chocolate capsule?" Harry asked slowly. William paused in selecting another chocolate and glanced at Harry.

"Is that your next question, Harry?"

"I thought it was your turn," Harry said as he focused on William.

"We have answered an equal number of questions, Harry. It does not matter who goes next," William shrugged nonchalantly and rested his hands on his knees as he gazed back at Harry, chocolates forgotten.

"Fine," Harry said shortly. "That's my question."

"£750," William said blankly. "Although we had to pay extra to keep the 'chocolate expert' from joining us."

Harry found himself staring in shock at William. 750?! For an hour long ride on a big wheel with chocolate?! Thomas made a calming gesture at Harry.

"The price would be the same no matter how many people we brought with us Harry, you haven't changed anything by coming with us," Thomas said reassuringly.

William tilted his head to the side. "Harry is not curious about his affect on our purchases, are you Harry?"

Harry just stared at him and felt his face blanking much like William's. He was curious about something and it didn't have anything to do with him. "Why do you have so much money to spend like this?" he asked flatly.

William waved his finger at Harry with a grin. "That is two questions in a row, Harry. I get to ask one first!" Harry just watched him expressionlessly and waited.

"Why does it matter where I get my money from?" William asked in a monotone. Harry blinked. So all the money was William's after all. But did it really matter why he was so rich? Harry didn't want to intrude on any personal business, but William was including Harry on his outings and had said he was curious about him and that he knew Harry was curious about him as well. However, Harry was getting a weird feeling from all this.

Harry was actually fairly well off, but after a life of not having anything, he'd gotten used to only using money for things he needed at the time. So paying £750 for something as frivolous as a
chocolate capsule ride made Harry think of the Dursleys, always paying ridiculous amounts to lavish Dudley with gifts, and of the Malfoys, who used their wealth to buy power over others. Harry figured that William was probably selfish enough to actually want a chocolate capsule ride, but he thought that somehow this outing wasn't really about what William wanted, despite it being his vacation. Harry actually got the impression (from the car and the tea and now this) that William wanted Harry to notice how rich he was. But Harry was utterly clueless as to why.

"I don't really think it matters," Harry said slowly. Harry was certain that William was intentionally showing off his wealth to him as some way to manipulate him. So, he was suspicious of whatever it was a muggle like William wanted from him, but he still didn't think the man was a threat. For all he knew this whole thing was a weird way for William to make friends.

Harry decided he might as well ask- William wouldn't care if he was rude and Thomas... Well, Thomas actually seemed both exasperated and amused by the whole conversation, so he likely wouldn't mind if Harry was rude either.

"But you seem to want me to ask about it, so why do you think it matters?" Harry asked as blankly as William. William stared at him and Harry was disturbed to see his eyes go flat and narrow slightly as they focused on him.

"Why do you think I want you to ask me about my wealth, Harry?"

"Just a feeling," Harry shrugged. "Are you going to answer?"

"But you have not answered my question yet, Harry," William said flatly.

"Yes I did-"

"A question does not answer a question, Harry."

Harry sighed in exasperation, the first sign of emotion he'd made since the question of money was brought up. "Fine," he snapped impatiently. "I don't care where you get your money from, but I think you, for whatever strange reason, want me to ask about it. That's my answer," Harry took a breath. "So, why do you want me to ask about it?" Harry paused. "That's my question."

William stared at Harry with those narrowed blank eyes and suddenly Harry wondered why he didn't feel threatened by this man. Oh, that's right, he could turn him into a ferret.

"I want you to think well of me," William said in his monotone.

"What?" Harry blinked and stared at William incredulously. William shrugged and turned to regard the chocolates again.

Harry looked questioningly at Thomas who also shrugged and selected a chocolate to take with him to the glass wall behind him.

Harry sighed. This was turning out to be oddly exhausting. "So... Where do you get your money from?" he asked tiredly as he walked forward to pick out a chocolate too.

"That is two questions in a row, Harry!" William tossed a round chocolate into his mouth and crunched down on it with a grin. "It is my turn now."

Harry glared at him as he ate his own chocolate. "Fine, ask a question then!"
Chapter 8

When they had dropped Harry off at his house last night, L had kept him in the car for an hour or so before Harry agreed to take the cellphone with him. Harry had been utterly against accepting the phone at all and L had been forced to resort to as careful psychological manipulation as he'd ever used in previous cases; more than that even- suspects and operatives didn't argue as much as Harry did.

Not that Harry was particularly good at arguing (he did lose after all) considering he had few, if any, logical rebuttals and he repeated himself quite a bit. But he was stubborn and once Harry had decided something, it took far more effort than L thought should really be necessary to make him change his mind again.

L had listed every logical reason behind the absolute necessity of Harry having a phone (and why the phone being handed to him was better than any others) which was ruthlessly shot down by Harry's only excuse "I never needed one before." Then L had started a debate on why Harry's life would now need to include a cellphone due to the different responsibilities of a working member of society as compared to a student. Harry had argued that- hah!- he was still a student, a cooking student.

Harry, thinking he was on a roll, had then started arguing that even if he did need a phone, he certainly wouldn't take someone else's phone and could just as easily buy his own! L had quickly ended that argument by asking innocently why Harry hadn't done so yet, which made Harry blink and look awkwardly out the window.

The argument had finally been ended when L brought up the 'guilt' reasoning, saying that after vanishing on them for an entire week, Harry should stay in better contact with him and 'Thomas'. The phone he was offering was the only reliable method of maintaining contact which 'William' trusted. If Harry didn't accept the phone, he and 'Thomas' would spend all their time worrying about whether Harry was home safe or not and would, therefore, be unable to fully enjoy their vacation.

Harry hadn't known what to say to that beyond a quietly muttered "You don't have to worry about me at all," as he grudgingly took the phone from L's hand. L had grinned at him from the car window until Harry had waved goodbye to 'Thomas' and then shut the door, ignoring 'William' completely.

Once they had reached the hotel, L and Wammy had caught up with the more technical details of the investigation. Wammy had contacted the agent that had been sent to Little Winging while they were out with Harry, to find out when he would move on the Dursley household to plant surveillance equipment, and L had gone over the files his computer had been collecting throughout the day on criminal redheads.

L also watched Harry, out of the corner of his eye, disappearing into the bathroom for a shower, tossing the phone onto his dresser with a disgruntled look, talking to his owl as he opened the window, and, finally, going to sleep.

Long after a not unsurprisingly inconsistent review of known or suspected criminals with naturally or dyed red hair, as well as all cases where criminals were known to have employed wigs (red or otherwise) as disguises, L looked up to realize Wammy had already retired to his bedroom for the
night. L shut his laptop and huddled around his legs, horribly depressed.

Red hair was a dead end. While L still thought there was a connection between the organization and red hair, there was either no evidence of the organization's involvement in any crimes, or they only used the red hair for moving about quietly, not for unsavory activity as L had hoped. He probably should have realized that when Harry wandered off with red hair- of course Harry wouldn't commit any crimes right now, he was moving out of the organization. But L had been too upset about losing Harry and too desperate to look into any possible lead to let go of the idea.

L had looked briefly into tracking any redheads in Britain, but had run into a wall of public relations problems. No government or police system in the correct area would investigate only people with red hair. This apparently came too close to some sort of racial profiling. Which L thought was unfair because while, yes, he was profiling redheads, he wasn't only going after natural-born redheads- he wanted to follow dyed redheads and red wig-wearers as well, especially the wig-wearers. There was nothing racial about it at all.

So now, after failing to hack into a satellite to spy on any redheads outdoors in the British Isles (never mind it was night), L was bored. He was lounging on the couch dejectedly as he watched the screen where Harry could be seen sleeping and he was debating calling Harry just for something to do. Unfortunately, Wammy had warned him that if he started calling Harry at inappropriate times, then Harry would likely give back the phone and L didn't want to have to argue with him again so soon- he'd had an exhausting evening already thank you.

But there really was nothing else to do right now, L thought as he stared blankly at the video screen. Besides, he wanted to talk to Harry, about a number of things. At the London Eye, Harry had surprised him with his insight. L hadn't thought before that Harry was very observant. He had good eyes for spotting things that were hard to see, but he didn't seem to notice the mannerisms of people around him. When Harry had first said he could tell when he was being lied to, L had raised his guard (it would be stupid not to, after a declaration like that) but he hadn't really believed that Harry had any such skill.

Then, when Harry had asked about the price of the capsule ride so cautiously, L had felt his guard raise even more. Harry's posture against the wall of the capsule and blank face had startled L, they told him that Harry was extremely suspicious of him. But the only reason seemed to be the expense of the outing. L had responded carefully and had tried to sound out the reason behind Harry's sudden suspicions.

But Harry didn't seem to have any definitive reason for suspecting L and Wammy, in fact, he seemed confused about the situation as well, as if he didn't think they had any reason to act suspiciously. Was he really reacting only to the money? L had thought the money Harry had used to buy the lease on nine Argyle Square had been his own, but perhaps he had gotten the money from someone else? Someone who was using wealth to manipulate him?

Harry had certainly seemed to suspect that L and Wammy were using wealth to manipulate him (which they were), so perhaps he was simply sensitive to that sort of manipulation. L decided that must be it, after all, Harry's suspicions had apparently been laid to rest with L's careful statement "I want you to think well of me." Which was, at least, partially true, and it was an innocent enough reason, as well as being one which would make Harry feel guilty for suspecting him at all. Guilt was something that Harry seemed particularly susceptible to- the girl had used it on him and L had used it on him as well.

After that, L noticed that Harry had deliberately dropped his guard- being guilty really seemed to be Harry's weak point- so he decided to start asking more interesting questions. Harry had, as L thought
he would, responded to all the questions asked honestly, but he seemed to become more upset as they went on and then, when he used the same question L had asked him last, he immediately noticed L's lie.

L had been surprised by that, even more than by Harry's suspicions. He had a practiced lie prepared after all, and he didn't think there was any way for even an expert interrogator to notice because his answer was so vague that there was no way to tell what was false. But still, Harry was one hundred percent certain that 'William' was lying, without offering any observations to support that suspicion. The game had stopped after that and Harry hadn't spoken much to L until they dropped him off and the argument about the cell phone started.

So, L had many questions to ask Harry, about what he'd learned in the Eye as well as Harry's inexplicable insight that only made an appearance when it annoyed L. But Wammy had already warned him about the dangers of waking Harry up with a phone call, so he could only watch Harry sleep and wait. As he watched, Harry turned over in his sleep, raising an arm out of the covers. L leaned forward eagerly, if Harry was moving around, then he wasn't fully asleep...

Without bothering to think any more about it, L snatched up the cell phone he'd placed on the table and pressed the speed dial for the phone Harry had been given. As the call went through, L watched the screen showing Harry's bedroom and waited for the ring tone to start up.

The phone on Harry's dresser rang five times before Harry himself began to stir and then he only turned over, mumbling incoherently. After the phone had rung seven times, Harry's head rose out of his covers part way and he called out "Wha..." L blinked. He wondered exactly how long Harry had been without a phone of his own that he wouldn't react instinctively to the sound the way most people would.

"Rowag!" Harry called out on the screen. L watched as he sat up on the bed and looked around blearily. "Did you bring something strange back again?" Harry mumbled before blinking blankly at the empty perch in the corner. "Rowag?"

L was so caught up in watching Harry's sleepy reaction to the wake up call, he was surprised when he heard the automated voice message on the phone in his hand saying the number he had dialed was unavailable. He hung up quickly and pressed the re-dial button before Harry (who was blinking at the perch and open window next to him in confusion) went back to sleep.

The moment the phone on Harry's dresser started ringing again, Harry literally jumped and fell sideways off the bed. As L watched, he got up warily, peering over the bed toward his dresser with a stick in his hand. Once he determined the cell phone was making the noise, he lowered the stick and walked over to the dresser to stare at the ringing phone in confusion. L watched Harry pick the phone up and blink at it before it rang again, then he opened it and held it to his ear. "Hello?"

L held his phone up to answer and then heard the phone ring again. He blinked and so did Harry, who held the phone away to stare at it for a moment. Then he pressed a button, held it to his ear again and repeated "Hello?"

L brought his phone quickly back to his own ear to answer when he heard the line go dead and the dial tone start. L stared at the phone in his hand. Harry had hung up on him! Back on the screen, Harry apparently realized that the line had been disconnected but didn't seem to realize he was at fault for that because he shrugged, put the phone back on the dresser, and wandered over to his bed. L glared at his figure on the video and pressed the re-dial button hard.

The phone on the dresser started ringing just as Harry got his feet back under his blanket and L saw him stare at it as if debating whether or not to try answering it again. L glared and was already
planning on calling Harry's phone all night when Harry huffed and threw the blanket back to walk over to the dresser again. This time when Harry opened the phone he stared at it for three rings before pressing another button and when he said "Hello?" hesitantly, L heard his voice coming through his own cell phone. He lowered the sound from the surveillance screen before answering.

"Good morning Harry," L said brightly as he watched Harry jerk and then slump on the screen.

"It's not morning," Harry said after a moment of silence.

"Yes, actually, it is Harry," L said.

"It's four o'clock William," Harry said tiredly as he rubbed his eyes and walked back over to the bed. "I know that's technically morning, but it doesn't really count until the sun rises."

"It is morning if you have risen for the day, Harry," L said reasonably. On the video screen, Harry had sat down on the edge of the bed and looked like he wanted to throw the phone across the room.

"I haven't 'risen for the day' though," Harry ground out into the phone.

"But you are awake Harry."

"Because someone kept calling me and woke me up!" Harry shouted at the phone before collapsing back on the bed and staring angrily at the ceiling.

"If you did not want to wake up Harry, you should not have answered the phone." Harry sighed and curled on his side on the bed with the phone still against his ear.

"What did you want then?" Harry said tiredly.

"Want, Harry?" L asked as he watched Harry trying to pull his blanket back over himself when he was on top of it.

"Yeah," Harry grunted as he yanked on the blanket. "You called so early, you must want something."

"I wanted to talk to you, Harry," L said simply as he raised his thumb to chew on. Harry had finally yanked the blanket half out from under himself and wrapped himself in it so he now looked a bit like a dumpling, curled on the bed in a tight ball.

"Yeah, what about?" Harry asked impatiently.

"What do you want to talk about, Harry?" L said around his thumb as he grinned. There was a long silence and L stopped chewing his thumb as he tilted his head to the side, had Harry fallen asleep?

"You woke me up at four in the morning..." Harry muttered into the phone slowly. "Just... to talk?"

"So you admit this is morning?" L said as he stuck his thumb back between his teeth. There was another long silence, then the line suddenly went dead. On the video screen Harry's arm came out of the ball of blankets to toss the phone across the floor in the direction of the dresser and the ball rearranged itself so it was stretched out more and covered entirely.

L thought perhaps Wammy was right about not calling Harry at certain times and got up to find something else to do. He thought there was some leftover cake in his room he could eat. He put the cell phone in his pocket as he walked.
Harry huddled around his pillow for what felt like a long time, but no matter how long he lay there, he couldn’t seem to fall asleep again. Groaning, he tossed the blanket off his head and lay back to stare at the dark ceiling above him.

Stupid William. It was all his fault Harry was having such a hard time sleeping, now and even when he came home. Harry had lain awake in bed for several hours before he’d drifted off, thinking about all the strange things William said and did, and now Harry was stuck thinking about him again.

Harry really didn't understand William at all. He'd thought at first that William was just an annoying, childish person who followed Thomas around because he didn't have anything better to do. Then he'd thought William was an annoying, childish person who needed to be escorted by Thomas because he couldn't be trusted to wander around by himself. Now he wondered if maybe William, as annoying and childish as he was, was trying to manipulate him in some way. But Harry couldn't think why he would want to.

Harry had checked, subtly probing both William and Thomas with his magic, but they never reacted, so they couldn't possibly be wizards, pretending not to know him or even untrained muggleborns. He didn't think they were squibs either, because they simply didn't talk or act like people who knew magic was real. In the muggle world, Harry was essentially a nobody. He had nothing, he did nothing and there wasn't any reason he could see for any muggle to want to use him. So why were they so involved with him?

Even Harry admitted that he’d gotten close to William and Thomas rather quickly, and he was very suspicious of that and of how blatantly they were spending money. It really made him think of the Malfoys and even of his uncle- whenever Vernon had wanted to impress a prospective client, the first order of business was to buy a new suit and take them out for a fancy dinner. But again, Harry couldn't think of why they'd bother with him.

Then there was William's reason for it- wanting Harry to "think well" of him. Harry draped an arm over his face. That had been embarrassing. He'd almost accused William of trying to manipulate him and it turns out he was only trying to make a friend! It had sounded like such a stupid excuse, but Harry thought it sounded true and when he thought about it- thought about William- he realized it fit pretty well. William really was clueless when it came to interacting with other people and most people would have been very impressed with the fancy food and car and capsule ride, so it made sense. So the only reason William and Thomas were spending so much time with him was really because they wanted to be friends?
After a week, Harry was deeply regretting ever accepting the phone from William. The moment William tried to hand it to him, Harry should have run for it and not looked back. He'd thought a cellphone in everyday muggle life was supposed to be a nice thing—convenient, just like a floo—and Harry did rather like the odd moments when William allowed Thomas to say hello to him in the mornings before Harry went off to Hogwarts for his cooking lessons. But that was where a cellphone being a good thing ended, and all because William was an irritating prat.

William called him in the morning (early morning, Harry had occasional 4 and 5 o'clock wake-up calls and one 3 o'clock wake-up that was never repeated because Harry hung up and put the phone in the refrigerator for the rest of the night), William left dozens of messages on the phone while Harry was away at Hogwarts (William was furious to realize Harry would not be taking the phone with him when he left the house—"That defeats the purpose of you having the phone at all!"), and then, almost as soon as Harry walked in the door of Nine Argyle Square, William would be ringing him once more to ask when he and Thomas could come over for dinner.

Harry had tried any number of times to give the phone back to William, even going so far as threatening to leave it on the doorstep if William wouldn't take it with him, but somehow, Harry ended up stuck with the phone after each encounter. He had also tried to minimize the number of times he answered the phone by leaving it in other rooms, turning it off, pretending to lose it... But if William couldn't reach Harry after ringing him three times in a row, he would invariably show up on Harry's doorstep.

The first time that happened, the Sunday night after first receiving the phone, Harry had hoped to avoid another early wake-up call from William by leaving the cellphone on the table in the kitchen when he went to bed. Then, around five in the morning, Harry was startled awake by pounding on his front door. He'd thought at first he was under attack and had been preparing to either fight or run for it when he realized the magical alarm on his door hadn't gone off.

Harry had wandered downstairs cautiously, still wary of a trap, and opened the door to find a very annoyed William (as well as an apologetic Thomas) standing in the dark and demanding to know why Harry wasn't answering his calls. Harry had called them both nutters but grudgingly invited them in for tea and somehow ended up promising William he would answer the phone from now on.

That same evening, Harry returned from his cooking lessons to find several dozen messages on the phone, all asking where he was. While Harry was going through the messages the phone rang, and Harry answered it instinctively and then spent an hour being scolded by William (and surprisingly, Thomas as well) for leaving the phone behind when he left the house.

Harry had patiently (well, annoyed-ly, but he tried to speak calmly when Thomas came on the line) explained that phones didn't work at his school anyway, so taking the phone was pointless. William had argued (sounding as though he wanted to strangle Harry) that the phone was meant to be with Harry so he could use it if he ended up stranded somewhere and needed to call for help. Harry had said there wasn't much chance of that happening and that phones didn't work at his school anyway.

Thomas had been forced to take the phone away from William at that point and he agreed with Harry
that leaving the phone at home when he went to lessons was alright, but "anywhere else" he went, he should definitely take the phone with him. Harry (who could hear something breaking in the background on Thomas' end) agreed quickly and hung up.

Later that night, Harry decided to try turning the phone off so he could sleep peacefully, even though he didn't really think William would want to talk to him for a while. Harry was again woken by heavy pounding on his front door around five in the morning, but (getting a bad feeling) he checked the alarm as soon as his eyes popped open. When Harry went down to let William and Thomas in, William had only glared at him silently until they were all in the kitchen and Harry, yawning rather widely, had set a teacup in front of him.

William had told Harry shortly that the cellphone was meant to further their connection and that being toyed with like this, especially after being so worried about Harry when he was missing, was a very cruel thing to do. Harry had flushed with shame - this was starting to remind him too much of how poorly he'd been treating his friends and the Weasleys. Then, somehow, Harry found himself promising not to turn the phone off again!

Which all meant that Harry had to put up with William pestering him nearly every moment he was available - all because of a few stupid promises and a stupid phone!

Harry was yawning after a long day with the house-elves and a lunch meeting with Hermione to start working on her project when he returned home, balancing a cake box in his hands as he closed the door. He was hoping he could put the cake away, take a quick shower, deal with whatever it was William wanted, and then go to bed! He was really looking forward to relaxing this weekend.

Just as Harry had walked into the kitchen, he could hear the cellphone upstairs ringing and Rowag shrieking in competition. For whatever reason, Rowag had decided that the best way to deal with the scary noise-maker was to be even noisier than it, in the hope it might get scared and run away. Harry (who sort of wished phones could run away) was thinking maybe he should start leaving the cellphone in a drawer or something when he left.

He trekked upstairs, dropped his coat on the bed while he whistled a hello to Rowag, who thankfully stopped her screeching to fly over to his shoulder, and answered the phone.

"Hello William," Harry said tiredly as he went back downstairs to deal with the cake.

"Hello Harry," came William's annoyingly pleased sounding voice. "You have made it home safely."

Harry rolled his eyes. Honestly, it was like William thought Harry was going to be mugged or kidnapped or something whenever he left the house. "Yeah, I did."

"Shall Thomas and I take you out for dinner tonight? There is a very nice bistro nearby - they have a rotating menu of desserts and tonight is a molten chocolate cherry sundae."

"Er, no. I already ate," Harry said. "Besides, I was planning to go to bed early tonight."

"Then Thomas and I shall pick the dessert up to-go and bring it over to your house -"

"Er, actually," Harry interrupted William quickly. He needed to lay out his plans for the night before William came up with anything, or Harry wouldn't be able to keep him away. "I was sort of thinking that maybe you and Thomas could go out for once, er, without me. I mean, I've been intruding on your vacation the whole week and -"

"I believe, Harry," William interrupted him. "That you are misinterpreting our outings together. We
have been inviting you out with us, therefore you are not an intrusion."

"Well, okay," Harry took a breath, arguing with William was always an ordeal, but Harry wasn't going to let him win this one. "But, I was planning on going to bed early-"

"So you said," William interrupted again. "We will of course be sure to let ourselves out at an appropriate hour, so you."

"I'm going to bed as soon as I hang up on you, William!" Harry shouted. There was silence over the line. "Er, that is- See, I'm really tired, so, er, I'm not going to visit with you tonight. Okay?"

Harry waited a moment for a response, but all he got was a quiet "Very well," before the line went dead. Well, thought Harry, that didn't go too well, but on the plus side he could actually get some sleep tonight.

Harry put the cake away, took a shower, and let Rowag out for the night before climbing into bed. He felt a little bad for being so rude to William, but he really didn't feel like dealing with him tonight. Anyway, Harry figured he could apologize to William in the morning when he called to wake him up. Harry grinned as he lay down. He'd brought back one of the cakes he made today because William had been asking him constantly when he would start baking, so Harry was sure William would forgive him for a piece of cake.

When Harry was woken the next morning, he got up blearily to answer the ringing phone over on his dresser, but when he pressed the answer button and said "Morning," he didn't hear anything in response. For a moment, Harry thought perhaps William was still annoyed about last night.

"Oh, come off it, William," Harry said as he yawned. "It's not that I don't like you or anything, I just was really tired yesterday." That was certainly true. Besides his usual lessons with the house-elves, Harry had spent his entire lunch hour with Hermione to help with her advanced transfiguration project- the animagus spell. While he was happy to be working amiably with his friend on such a difficult task, he found the research behind the spell a rather daunting addition to his cooking lessons, his resolve to study Gobble-de-Gook and, of course, William's constant calls and visits.

"I really don't mind talking to you," Harry said hesitantly when there was still no answer. "And I do like spending time with you and Thomas, I just... I really would like to have an evening or two to myself." Harry did enjoy William and Thomas' visits, much as that surprised him. So far, they'd only spent the evenings in, with Harry cooking dinner for himself and Thomas, while William snacked on whatever sweet treat Harry had either brought back from the Hogwart's kitchens or bought from the grocer's on his way home.

They talked of mostly inconsequential things, hobbies, what dishes Harry had learned so far, nothing really important. Harry had been worried that William might start up the question game again, but so far he seemed content to talk to Harry about cakes and such. Harry thought maybe this was the closest William would ever get to apologizing for being a git, but he couldn't help wondering when the questions would start again. He almost hoped they would, if only so he could find out how William and Thomas knew the Dursley's, if at all.

"But," Harry took a breath. Admitting this would be a pain, but William still hadn't said anything, so Harry would have to say something to make up for his rudeness yesterday. "I wouldn't mind seeing you today, if you still want to come over-"

Just then, the phone in his hand started ringing, making Harry blink. When he looked at the cellphone he was holding, he saw that William was calling him. "Huh?" Harry stared at the phone, hadn't he just answered it?
"Hello?" Harry said after answering the ringing phone.

"Good morning Harry," came William's flat voice from the phone.

"Er, didn't you just call me?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"No, I have only just called you now," William said curiously. "Why do you ask?"

But Harry was staring off, over at Rowag's perch now, because he'd heard a phone ringing again. As Harry walked over to Rowag, he noticed a couple things. First, was that Rowag was back when usually she didn't turn up until after William had already woken Harry. The other, was that she was clutching something in her talons as she sat on the perch and was pecking at it viciously.

"Rowag, what do you have?" Harry asked as he bent to look at whatever his owl had brought back. The cellphone she was trying to rip apart rang again. Harry gaped. "Where did you get that?!"

"What, Harry?" came William's voice again. Harry jerked the phone he was holding up to his ear.

"Er, listen, I'll call you back, okay?" Harry said quickly. "I, er, need to do something."

Harry hung up and placed the phone on the dresser again before turning to Rowag. "Okay, now where did you get that?" he asked sternly.

Rowag chirped cheerfully and flapped a bit before raising one talon up to toss the cellphone to the floor. Harry stepped back and Rowag swooped down to start attacking the phone again, which continued ringing.

"You stole someone's phone?" Harry asked incredulously. "How could you steal someone's phone? Wha- what did you do? Swoop down and grab it?" Harry knelt down and tore the phone away from the owl. Rowag shrieked and flapped up to Harry's shoulder, chirping and whistling and bobbing her head.

"I don't care if you want it back!" Harry said as he walked off to the study down the hall. "It's not yours! We have to return it!"

Rowag hooted shrilly and sulked. Harry sighed. "Why on earth would you want a cellphone anyway?" He asked as he sat down at the desk. "I thought you hated phones?" This started a long series of whistles and chirps and flapping and bobbing from Rowag and Harry listened with half an ear while he opened the stolen phone to scroll through the call list.

"Okay..." Harry mumbled to himself. "I think this belongs to someone named 'David Keller'- his name is listed under 'Home.'" Harry started writing the name out on a scrap of parchment from his desk and folded the paper around the phone. Once it was wrapped up with the name on the outside, Harry turned to regard the still twittering owl seriously.

"Rowag," Harry told her sternly. "You can't steal other people's phones. It's bad enough you go rooting around in people's garbage and bring all sorts of weird things back, but stealing phones is absolutely not allowed!" Harry glared at Rowag, who refused to look at him and shuffled off his shoulder onto the end of the desk, chirping softly. Harry sighed again. "Look, just don't do it anymore, okay?"

Rowag bobbed her head happily and climbed back onto Harry's shoulder. Harry wondered if she'd understood anything he had said, or if maybe he would be finding more stolen phones in his bedroom in the future.
"Alright, come here then," Harry had Rowag stand on the desk in front of him. "You stole it, now you're going to return it, okay?" Harry started tying the wrapped up cellphone to Rowag's leg. "I'm going to leave this bit of string loose, so when you get to the person, just pull on this here," Harry held up a length of string for Rowag to inspect. "and the package will come off you, got it?"

Rowag started bobbing her head excitedly and whistled. Harry nodded and took her over to the window by the desk and let her out. He watched her fly off into the rosy sky and wondered suddenly why he had woken up so late. William usually called well before sunrise...

When Harry walked back into his bedroom, the cellphone from William started ringing. He answered, wondering if he should ask why William hadn't called earlier.

"What was it you had to do, Harry?" William asked blankly.

"Nothing," Harry said absentmindedly. "How come you didn't call until now?"

"I did call you before now."

"No," Harry shook his head. "Not then, I meant earlier. Why didn't you call earlier this morning?"

"Was I supposed to call earlier?" William asked after a moment.

"Well, normally you call around five or so and-" Harry took the phone away to glance at the clock quickly. "Now it's after eight o'clock!" Harry said in shock. "Are you... upset still?" he asked hesitantly.

"No," William said petulantly. "But if my calling you is so important, I will make sure not to miss it again."

"Ah!" Harry started. "Wait- no! I mean, I don't mind being called later in the day! Actually, if you want to call around eight, I think I'd like that a lot better than-"

"But you are upset that I have called you late, Harry," William said loudly. "So I will continue to call you at the usual time!"

"I, no, you don't have to-" Harry tried to say.

"No, Harry," William said, a little snidely in Harry's opinion. "You were worried and it would be rude of me if I didn't make it up to you! I will make sure to call you at five from now on."

Harry slumped in defeat. He could practically hear William grinning and all he could think was that he was an idiot for mentioning the late call at all. Well, at least William hadn't heard Harry's rather embarrassing attempt to excuse himself for not seeing William yesterday. He was sure that William would become an even worse prat if he ever thought that Harry actually liked having him around.

"Fine, whatever," Harry said as he rubbed his eyes. "Did you want cake?"

"Cake?" William's voice suddenly sounded a great deal more interested than it was a moment before.

"Yeah," Harry grinned as he started walking downstairs to make breakfast. "I made cake yesterday! Didn't you ask me about that once?" Or twice, or several dozen times, Harry thought.

"Thomas and I will be over at once," William said before he hung up.

Harry laughed a bit as he closed the cellphone and put it in his pocket. It was weird actually. He hated that William called him constantly, but he still rather enjoyed talking to him and thinking that
William might not have called him this morning was upsetting. Somehow, Harry had gotten used to William pestering him and when he stopped, Harry actually missed it!

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L had been having a very odd week. It was not what he would call a particularly good week. There were too many issues (most of them caused by Harry) for him to deal with to be able to relax.

The most prevalent issue, was convincing Harry to use the cellphone he'd been given. Harry kept trying to give back the phone, or turn off the phone, or pretend to lose the phone- anything so he wouldn't have to use it. He even refused to carry the phone with him when he left the house! L had never before wanted so dearly to hit a person as he did when Harry kept repeating "Cellphones don't work at my school," while L was trying to order him to carry the phone with him. As if there was any place around London that didn't get a signal! L had actually thrown his plate of strawberry and cream cake at the wall, he was so furious that Harry would try to use such a stupid lie with him.

Arguments with Harry about keeping the phone on and with him at all times (except for when he went to his cooking lessons and L was still seething that Wammy had allowed Harry to get away with that!) took up a great deal of L's attention and energy. Winning an argument with Harry was never so much a victory, as it was a trial, because beating Harry in an argument was more akin to knocking down a brick wall with one's head, than to a logical debate. After all the arguments he'd had with Harry this past week, L was exhausted.

Then there was all the work he had to deal with in the investigation that didn't directly involve Harry. He had started searching for cases that ended oddly- anything that was considered a closed case but had no direct evidence. L was surprised actually, at the number of cases that fit this criteria. There was everything from motor accidents and disappearances to terrorist attacks and noise complaints. Nearly everything he'd found so far, no matter how different, all ended the same way- case closed with a perfectly plausible explanation, but no conclusive evidence to back up that explanation.

Sometimes a case would have witness accounts that didn't make any sense, such as disappearing girls or mysterious bangs and creatures. One odd missing person's case had an account stating that a "great bloody lizard" had flown down the beach and "eaten" a man's boat before carrying one of the passengers off. Another excited account stated in a motor accident, that a girl had thrown "blue light" at the driver who caused the crash, knocking him out and making him swerve into oncoming traffic. Both cases appeared solved- the missing person's body was recovered from the ocean and most of those involved in the crash were content to blame the swerving driver- but L thought that the police reports were using the easiest, most common explanations to "solve" the cases.

For instance, the boat in the missing person's case was badly burned and was said to have exploded due to engine failure, but the engine itself was salvaged by the owner and was the least damaged part of the ship. It seemed as though the ship had caught fire, broken apart, and then sunk into the sea before the engine or gas tank could ignite as the report claimed they had. Then, in the motor incident, a street camera caught the driver looking perfectly normal, then suddenly falling unconscious while driving- before swerving to the other side of the road; but the report claimed the man had been inebriated and lost consciousness when he hit his head in the crash.

L was beginning to suspect that the organization was to blame for all these odd cases, but he hadn't yet figured out why any organization would be involved in so many mundane things. The terrorist attacks seemed to fit the profile of a secret organization with unknown motivations, but everything else added on was just odd. It was a peculiar puzzle and L was frustrated that all he had found was evidence to support a supposition, instead of anything concrete. He was sure if he could just find a clue to what the organization's aims were, then all the peculiar actions they were taking would make
There was also the matter of the agent he had sent to Surrey, whom had planted the surveillance he wanted in the Dursley household. However, he hadn't yet made plans for a confrontation with the family and so was only monitoring their day-to-day behavior. That particular task had been quickly regulated to the agent placed in Surrey because, quite frankly, the Dursley's lives were so mundane L couldn't focus on them when he had more interesting subjects to watch.

Which brought L's attention back onto Harry, and all the headaches that went with him, as well as Harry's... pet. At first, L hadn't bothered to pay much mind to Harry's interactions with his owl- in L's experience, most pet owners spoke to their animals as if they could understand them. However, Harry's owl acted as though it really could understand human speech.

The bird appeared, at first, to only be very well trained. It responded to nearly everything Harry told it, but L's research into pet owls showed no evidence of using spoken word to direct the animals— only whistles, clickers, calling and hand signals were used. But Harry's owl still seemed to listen and respond to every word Harry said to it.

Then there was the fact that Harry allowed the little barn owl to fly free at night. Barn owls did not require any licence or permit to be owned in the UK, however, any 'tame' owl had to be kept in an aviary or tethered when outside. If an owl was flown (from a glove and usually for falconry) then an Article 10 certificate was required. But Harry neither had a permit nor did he seem to pay any mind to where the owl flew or when it came back. The owl also appeared to have the habit of rooting through trash cans while out and bringing back treasures. Its proudest achievement, that L had witnessed, was half a cheeseburger, presented to Harry and subsequently tossed out by him, resulting in an 'argument' with the bird.

L was certain that Harry's ownership of the owl was quite illegal, but he was fascinated with how intelligent the bird seemed, as well as Harry's apparent disregard. L had actually started a game, to try and test the bird, by calling Harry's phone while he was away at different times of day.

For two days, he called the phone and left a message for Harry at the top of every hour. The owl had woken each time and hissed at the phone before going back to sleep. Then, on the third day, L had called three times in a row every third hour. The bird had woken each time and had hissed at the phone, but after the second time, it sat awake and watched it until it rang again and then hissed at it until it stopped. On the forth day, the owl had apparently decided it didn't want to deal with the phone and had flown off to sleep in a different room. So L called the phone constantly, leaving a message only every twentieth call or so. The owl had flown into the bedroom sometime in the afternoon and had started screeching at the phone every time it rang.

When Harry came home that day, he found the phone ringing and his owl shrieking and bobbing over it with hunched wings as if it were a snake it was trying to intimidate. Harry had answered the phone only after making the bird hop up to his shoulder and calming her. Then, after the call ended, L had been intrigued to watch Harry start lecturing the owl on "leaving the phone alone" no matter how annoying it got- and the owl listened! The next day when L called, the owl had shrieked at the phone from the other side of the room and refused to come any closer to it.

By Friday evening, L was looking forward to a pleasant evening, where he could perhaps question Harry about his bird and whether or not he had finally learned to make that chocolate cake. Unfortunately, when Harry came home, he apparently didn't want to see L at all and had even refused an offering of chocolate cherry sundaes. L had hung up on him and fumed while watching Harry on the video screen— absolutely certain that Harry was planning to enjoy himself without L present.
Or at least, that was what he’d thought until Harry went to bed and fell asleep almost instantly. He’d spent the rest of the evening sulking while Wammy not so subtly attempted to make him feel guilty.

"He must be very busy, don't you think?" Wammy had asked casually while pouring another cup of coffee for L. "He wakes up before dawn, he spends all day in a cooking school- which, I should tell you, is quite a bit of work- and then when he comes home, he entertains guests until late evening and has to clean up after them once they leave. Then he gets woken up early again next morning. It must all be very tiring."

L had glared after Wammy when he walked away to organize case requests and refused to speak to him again.

When morning finally came, L had decided to let Harry sleep in for once. Wammy had scolded him, Harry had yelled at him- so fine. No one wanted him to call Harry in the mornings anymore, so he wouldn't. Then, of course, L had found himself staring at the video screen in shock when a phone started ringing despite the fact he hadn't called Harry.

Wammy had come over from his laptop to scold L again, but had been brought up short by the fact that L’s phone wasn't in use and that... the owl had a phone.

Both of them had watched, a little incredulously, as Harry had woken and walked over to answer a phone that wasn't ringing. When Harry had started talking into the phone as though L were actually on the other end and trying to get him to respond, Wammy insisted L call him up at once. L had to admit it was rather amusing that Harry had been trained to expect only L to be on the phone with him- even when no one was at all.

L was less amused when Harry had hung up on him to deal with the phone his owl had brought into the house. He knew, of course, that it was very rude when he hung up on other people, but he still hated when anyone did that to him.

Watching Harry deal with the phone and his owl, however, wiped all thoughts of being mad at Harry away. Harry had decided, correctly, to return the owl-stolen phone to its rightful owner. But he went about this by wrapping the phone up in paper, writing a name on it, tying the thing to his owl, and then sending the bird off with instructions to "find the person" and "pull the string."

By this point, L had all the evidence he needed to know that the owl was more than an owl and that Harry owned it as more than a pet. He was treating it as some kind of freely thinking messenger-bird! L decided then that when he saw Harry next, he would be questioning him closely about his bird and why exactly he had such a pet.

When Harry went back to his room and answered L's call (Harry hadn't seemed to notice yet that he couldn't call L's phone and L intended to keep it that way), he dismissed his recent activities and turned the conversation onto L himself. Even as Wammy gestured desperately at him, L grinned and maneuvered both him and Harry into accepting his schedule for wake-up calls.

As he and Wammy left for Harry's house and that wonderful chocolate cake, L reflected that even with the headaches it brought, talking to Harry was enjoyable. L smirked in the elevator (making Wammy glance at him and shake his head) especially if there was cake involved.
Chapter 10

Harry watched cautiously as William ate the slice of cake he'd been given. From the moment William had come through the front door, all he'd been interested in was eating the chocolate cake Harry had made and now that he was actually eating it, he was ignoring everything else. Harry wasn't sure what to make of that. Normally when William ate a slice of cake in the kitchen, he paid idle attention to Harry and Thomas' conversations and either spoke up or stayed silent while his toes played with each other. But now, William was crouched on his chair, not moving at all other than to slowly chew. Which was making it horribly difficult for Harry to pay attention to what Thomas was saying.

"Er, well," Harry tried awkwardly after sitting down next to Thomas to drink his morning tea. "Do you like the cake?"

William continued chewing, swallowed and then took another bite. Harry watched him for a minute and scratched his neck.

"Okay, so, you are still mad."

William swallowed his bite. "Why would I be angry, Harry?"

"Well..." Because you're a prat, Harry thought, but saying that would only start a fight and Harry was tired of arguing with the odd man. "Because I didn't let you have cake last night?" he said uncertainly.

"I had cake without you, Harry." William shoved a large forkful of cake into his mouth and chewed vigorously.

Harry frowned. "I mean, because I didn't let you visit last night."

William swallowed again and took a long sip of tea (four sugars and half a cup of cream). "Oh, I'm not bothered by that."

"Really?" Harry said sarcastically.

"I'd forgotten about it entirely until you brought it up again." William's fork scraped across the plate to pick up the last traces of cream.

"Alright, then why are you acting, so," Harry waved his hand restlessly, "so, oddly."

"You hung up on me," William said shortly around the fork he'd stuck in his mouth to suck on.

"William," Thomas chided over his teacup. William dropped his fork back on the plate with a glare and picked his cup up to sip at again.

"Wait, you're upset because I hung up on you this morning?" Harry asked incredulously. "You hang up on me all the time!"

"Only when there is nothing more to say."

"Nothing more to say!" Harry stared at the man. "You- you prat!"
"Well, you hung up in the middle of our conversation, Harry, I at least wait until we've both finished our parts."

"You don't know that!"

"Yes I do, Harry." William slurped his tea and placed the empty cup on the table before looking piercingly at Harry. "Now, why did you hang up on me?"

Harry glared. Why had he ever thought it was fun talking to such an impossible man? "I had something better to do than talk to you!"

"Really now, Harry," Thomas chided him now as he set his cup down. Harry shrugged uncomfortably, but refused to back down from William's flat glare or to apologize. William hung up on him all the time after all-- every single call in fact, so it was perfectly fair for Harry to do so once to William!

"I heard you talking to your owl before you disconnected," William said darkly. "Was playing with your pet so much more important than apologizing to me?"

"Apologizing to you!" Harry sputtered angrily. "For not doing whatever is most convenient for you?"

"You yelled at me last night," William hissed. "When I offered you cake! Don't you think I deserve an apology for that?"

"You wouldn't stop bothering me! You act as if it's entirely expected for me to just go along with whatever you feel like, no matter how I feel about it!" Harry yelled.

"I did offer to change plans for your convenience! You still weren't satisfied." William was glaring now and gripping his pants in tight fists.

"I wanted to go to sleep!"

"So yelling at me was the only way you could achieve that goal?" William sneered.

"Considering it's you, yeah!"

"Alright, enough!" Thomas stood as he shouted, startling both Harry and William as they glared daggers at each other. Thomas coughed when they both turned to stare at him. "Ahem. Now, I think the pair of you ought to apologize for your deplorable behavior just now-- Yes, William, you as well."

Harry glared at the table before looking briefly up at William. "Sorry, for, for yelling at you and calling you a prat."

"Sorry," William said flatly.

Thomas sighed warily as he sat down. "Good, now I think it best if we simply dropped the matter and moved on, don't you?"

"I still want to know what Harry was doing with his owl that was more important than me," William sulked.

"You are so self-centered," Harry muttered, crossing his arms.

Thomas glared at them both and they quieted once more.
After a long silence, Harry huffed. "Rowag brought something back, that's all. She's an owl, she does that sometimes."
"It sounded serious," William muttered.
"Yes, well," Harry glanced away. "It wasn't that bad... just, just not something I expected."

William opened his mouth to continue when the very creature they'd been talking about swooped into the kitchen from the hall. She must have delivered the phone; Harry had forgotten that as a post owl still in training, Rowag expected to be rewarded for every accomplished delivery.

Indeed, Rowag landed on the kitchen table between Harry and William's plates to chirp and flap with excitement, waiting for a treat. Harry sighed. It was childish, but after the way William had been acting all morning, he absolutely did not want to explain what his owl had been up to. Actually, even if William had been perfectly pleasant (a rare occurrence he was sure) Harry still didn't think he'd want to explain this.

An owl that stole cell phones was, well, embarrassing. Especially since he didn't understand why she'd done so in the first place.

"Your owl is on the table, Harry."
"I know that," Harry glared at William before getting up to fetch an owl treat from the cupboard.
"Why is she on the table?"

Harry sighed loudly. "Because she wants a treat." A treat which he carried over to the table and fed to Rowag while William and Thomas watched.

"Why does she want a treat now? Shouldn't she be sleeping?" William looked up with his creepy half-lidded eye look.
"Because, she, uh," Harry thought carefully. "She did something I asked her to."

William blinked slowly. "You can asks owls to do things for you, Harry?"

"No," Harry frowned. "Just Rowag."

"Ah, and, what did she do for you exactly?"

As Harry was trying to think of something that didn't involve cellphones, Rowag finished her snack and turned to chirp at William and Thomas.

"Oh, uh, you've met them," Harry said absentmindedly. Rowag turned her head to look back at him. William and Thomas looked up at him as well. "Er, well," Harry felt awkward under the attention all of a sudden. Why were William and Thomas looking at him like that? "You met William actually, Thomas was sitting in a car...."

"Are you introducing us to your bird, Harry?" William asked speculatively. Rowag turned her head back around to snap her beak at him. William stared.

"Well, she doesn't know you, you see," Harry sighed. He wondered if he should be relieved to be off the topic of what Rowag had been doing earlier, or worried that they were now focused on Rowag herself. "Anyway, it is getting late in the morning, so Rowag should be getting to her perch to sleep now," Harry said meaningfully, staring hard at the owl as he did.
Rowag fluffed her feathers and ignored him, opting instead to walk across the table to nibble at William's sleeve.

"Your owl is trying to eat my shirt, Harry."

Harry sighed. "No she's not. She just wants to know who you are. She, er, likes meeting new people."

"I have already met her though, when you moved her here." Rowag glanced up at this and stopped nibbling on the sleeve to perch-walk up William's arm. William froze. Harry snorted.

"Well, she was falling asleep then."

"Shouldn't she be falling asleep now?"

"Do you not like birds, William?" Harry asked with a wide grin.

"Her talons are very sharp, Harry." William was glaring at him now. Thomas coughed.

"Perhaps you should take her upstairs now, Harry," Thomas smiled meaningfully at him, making Harry grin apologetically. Honestly, he thought this was the perfect revenge for William's demand for an apology he didn't deserve.

"Alright, Rowag, c'mon." Harry gestured to the little owl. She hopped from William's shoulder, making the man flinch, and flapped her way to Harry. "You are tired aren't you?"

Rowag chirped and looked back at the men sitting at Harry's table. Harry glanced back at her, wondering at her interest in them. The owl gave a short shriek and fluffed her feathers in their direction. Suddenly Harry understood why she was making such a fuss about them.

"Oh! Yeah, that's him," Harry said to her. "Why- ah, hey!"

Harry watched in confusion as Rowag launched herself from his shoulder to fly straight at William, who ducked under his arms with a shout. Harry walked quickly over to the table to shoo her away.

"What do you think you're doing, Rowag?" The owl simply hissed at William, ignoring Harry completely, and when Harry made a grab for her, she flew off the table to land on the kitchen counter where she turned to hiss at William again.

"Stop that!" Harry said, walking away from the table to shoo her off to her perch upstairs. But the little owl swooped down from the counter as Harry reached it, landing on the floor beside William's chair.

William looked down uncertainly at the barn owl on the floor by his discarded shoes, still hissing like a demon from hell as her head wove back and forth like a snake's. Harry turned from the counter in annoyance just as Rowag struck. William fell sideways off the chair while Rowag, shrieking up a storm, clawed and slashed at the man's pants.

When William tried to get up, the little owl clung on until, just as it looked as though William was going to try knocking her off, a loud rip sounded. Harry rushed forward, in utter shock at Rowag's ghastly behavior.

Rowag fell to floor flapping, along with William's torn pocket and its contents-- a cellphone. Shrieking even more shrilly, Rowag began attacking the cellphone more viciously than Harry had ever seen her, clearly intent on destroying the thing. Harry tried to grab the owl, or the phone,
anything to stop this random violence, and ended up get slashed by a stray talon for his efforts.

"Oh dear!" Thomas said dumbly from William's side as the pair watched Rowag's antics.

Harry had had enough. With a snarl, he turned from the kitchen, walking quickly to the entry to fetch his jacket. Returning to the room, he spread the jacket wide and lunged for his owl, snagging her in the folds of cloth. He pulled the ends of the jacket carefully around the bundle as Rowag shrieked and thrashed inside.

Then he turned to Thomas and William, who had moved to the opposite side of the table during the excitement and were watching Harry in shock.

"Please excuse me a moment," Harry smiled brightly at them while backing out of the kitchen with his bundle.

The moment Harry had gotten to his room he slammed the door closed and let the jacket fall open in his arms. Rowag was flapping her way free and turning to hiss at Harry a moment later.

"Don't look at me like that!" Harry said furiously. "What on earth is wrong with you? Attacking a guest like that!"

The owl fluttered up to his dresser so she could look disdainfully down at him and began cackling and shrieking while her wings flapped restlessly beside her.

"Well, of course he calls!" Harry said snidely. "How else would he talk to me without coming over here at all hours of the day?"

More shrieking was the reply. Harry stared at her.

"Wait, that doesn't make any sense." He frowned at the owl. "I know he calls at ridiculous hours, but he wouldn't bother calling when I'm not even here!"

Rowag glared cooly down at him and clicked her beak sharply.

"Well, obviously he knows when I leave for the day, and that I don't come back until late," Harry scoffed. "And that I don't take the cellphone with me. So there's no point."

Rowag puffed herself up and began hissing and bobbing again. Harry frowned worriedly.

"But... that's just silly," he said uncertainly. "I mean, why would he?"

Rowag gave a shill shriek before clacking her beak sharply.

"Look, I'm sure it's just a mistake--" Rowag looked to be getting ready for another shrieking session. Harry waved her down hurriedly. "No! No, look, we'll ask him, alright?"

Rowag seemed to think about this before she chirped and glided down to Harry's shoulder. Then the two of them went back downstairs.

In the kitchen, Thomas had resumed his seat while William had scooted his chair closer to him and was staring at his tea and a new slice of cake blankly. The cellphone was lying on the far end of the table in pieces, the tattered scrap of William's pocket next to it. When Harry entered the room, the two men looked up at him quickly.

"My boy, are you quite alright?" Thomas asked in concern. His eyes were trained on the owl on Harry's shoulder, as if worried she might lash out again.
"Yeah," Harry said absentmindedly, his eyes firmly trained on William's blank face. "Yeah.... Hey, William?"

The man looked up curiously. "Yes, Harry? Do I get an apology for being attacked and having my phone broken?"

"Huh?" Harry blinked. "Oh, right. Yeah. I'm sorry. Rowag's sorr--" Harry glanced at the puffed up owl on his shoulder, only barely keeping her hissing under control. "Er, well, I'm sorry. I'll pay you back."

"With cake?"

"Er, I was thinking I'd just pay for the phone with money...." Harry said awkwardly.

William waved him off. "I can buy another phone. Make me a cake."

Harry blinked. "O-kay.... Uh, anyway.... May I ask you something?"

"What would you like to ask me?" William turned to pick up his tea.

"How many times do you call the cellphone each day?" Harry said quickly, hoping William and Thomas wouldn't think him crazy for asking such a thing.

The two men looked at him. "Don't you know? You do answer after all."

"Yeah, but," Harry sighed. "I mean, when I'm gone and I leave the cellphone behind. Do you ever call the phone then, knowing I won't answer?"

William blinked. "No."

Harry jerked his head up from staring embarrassedly at the floor. "What?"

"No." William repeated dully. "There is no point."

Harry stared at him. "You're sure then? You've never called the phone when I'm not around?"

William looked blankly into Harry's eyes. "Of course I have not. What would be the point in such a thing, Harry?"

Harry stared at him a moment longer, blinking in shock. On his shoulder, Rowag began hissing again, but Harry felt this was less the furious hissing of before, warning of an attack, and more a jeering tone of hissing, the smug "you're-in-trouble-now" sort.

William was lying.

"Alright then," Harry said placidly before turning smartly from the room to head upstairs again. Rowag turned her head around to hiss mockingly at the man while they left.

Harry was perfectly calm. He was calm when he got to his bedroom, he was calm when he fetched the phone. He was still calm when he returned to the kitchen to find Thomas and William sitting up quickly from speaking in hushed tones over their teacups. When he went to rummage in a drawer for something, he was calm.

"Harry?" Thomas called hesitantly. "Is there something wrong?"

"Oh, no," Harry said pleasantly. He pulled a small trowel from the clutter, clutching it like a prize.
"Then he turned to a cupboard to pull out a small plastic box he'd saved from takeout months ago. "Everything's perfectly fine."

"I...see," Thomas said, though he clearly didn't. "Are you not going to finish your tea, lad?"

"In a moment," Harry turned to smile at him and he must have come off as more crazed than he thought, because both William and Thomas looked quite alarmed. "I just need to go to the garden for a bit."

"...What do you need in the garden?" William asked flatly, eyeing the trowel, box and cellphone clutched in Harry's hands suspiciously.

Harry grinned happily. "I'm going to bury the cellphone."

William and Thomas stared at him.

"Back in a mo."

The back garden of Nine Argyle Square was rather small, only about two meters by three, and the last tenets had covered it with large stone tiles to make a patio of sorts. Harry knelt down in front of one that looked loose and broken and pried the trowel under an edge to lift the thing up. As expected, only half of it came, but that was enough.

William came out to stand over him, making Rowag hiss sharply, just as Harry was trying to drive the pointed end of the trowel into the frozen dirt.

"Why are you burying the phone, Harry?"

"Because-" The trowel struck the hard dirt. "-you won't-" The trowel struck again. "-take it back-" It struck a third time. "-and you won't-" The trowel dented the frozen ground. "-stop calling!" Harry huffed at the little progress he'd made. "So, really, this is the only thing I can think of."

"...Burying the phone in your garden is the only solution you could come up with?"

"Well," Harry huffed, staring angrily at the ground. "You won't take the phone back, you won't stop calling all the time, and you lied when I asked if you did! So," Harry stood and turned to face William. "What exactly am I supposed to do?"

"Why do you think I lied, Harry?"

Harry glared at him. "Because you did!" he shouted before stalking around the horrible, fish-eyed prat to go back into the house. The ground was frozen and the trowel couldn't dig through it. He could use a spell to simply make a hole in the ground, but he'd promised himself already that he would avoid getting into the habit of using magic for everything when he had muggle visitors all the time. So how was he going to dig through the rock-hard dirt?

L-H-L-H-L-H

L followed Harry cautiously back into the house. The morning was not progressing as he had planned. He only wanted an apology for Harry's behavior today and yesterday-- not that he was really angry about it, it was the principle of the thing, Harry had been rude so an apology was only to be expected-- as well as to investigate the purpose of Harry's owl.

Instead Harry had fought with him, his pet owl attacked him, and now the boy had apparently lost his mind and was trying to bury his cellphone in the garden. Harry's apology hadn't even been
adequate-- he'd been insincere and there was no cake offered (the one they were eating didn't count). He was, in fact, beginning to wonder if Harry were somehow unstable.

"Harry?" Wammy was trying to reason with the odd boy now. L peeked into the kitchen, making sure to locate the owl first, still on Harry's shoulder. Wammy was standing near Harry, who was turning the stovetop on. "Don't you think there's a more reasonable response to this?"

"No," Harry said forcefully, placing the metal blade of the trowel on the heating coils. "He's the one being unreasonable! He lied! About something so stupid!"

"Yes, but," Wammy continued uncertainly as L slunk into the room behind them. "Don't you think you're over-reacting?"

"Is that prat going to listen to me if I don't?" Harry asked seriously, turning to look at the older man. Wammy seemed at a loss, so Harry turned to glance at L crouching behind the counter. "Well, William? Are you?"

Vaguely surprised at being found, L stood. "I don't know what you mean."

"That's what I thought," Harry said snidely. Then he turned to wrap a towel around the handle of the trowel. The scooped metal was red hot. "So, I'm just going to bury the bloody thing and we'll all pretend this never happened, alright?" Harry nodded and took his heated trowel back out with him, the barn owl on his shoulder almost crowing with joy.

"William!" Wammy said sharply. L looked at him blankly. If the man thought he was going to follow an unbalanced young man with a burning hot, bladed weapon outside, he was seriously mistaken. "You must promise to stop calling incessantly!"

"How does he even know I was calling?" L said flatly, refusing to move. "I wiped his call log everyday before he returned."

"I don't know, but he is right that you shouldn't have done such a thing. Besides," Wammy glanced at the kitchen doorway warily. "He does seem terribly upset by this. Don't you think it would be best to patch it all up?"

"He seems homicidal," L said darkly, still refusing to move.

Wammy winced. "Well, you already knew how much he dislikes being lied to after our outing to the Eye."

"That's no excuse to go around threatening people with hot, sharp pieces of metal."

"Oh, he wasn't threatening you!" Wammy said exasperatedly. "And the trowel wasn't that sharp! Besides, if he actually buries the phone, how will you call him?"

L thought hard. Was talking to Harry each day worth risking possible cauterized impalement? The investigation could continue just as easily without Harry's knowledge or involvement with L.... But, the loss of contact with Harry meant the loss of more of that cake he made. L had tried every chocolate cake he could find in London, he'd not gotten to them all, but so far nothing was quite like Harry's cake....

"Very well."

Wammy sighed in relief, but stopped L with a hand as he turned. "Be careful though... be polite if you can."
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Here is the beginning of notes, extras, and unpublished future chapters that will now never be connected to the story properly. Prior to this collection of snippets, Harry and L patched things up over their owl phone argument, only to have an argument the next day about the Dursleys because L can't leave it alone. L alludes to perhaps seeking justice against the Dursley family for past abuse, and Harry absolutely refuses to acknowledge any abuse really took place. He also becomes so worried about trying to protect the Dursleys that he doesn't wonder how 'William' could possibly know anything about his life with them. He's a bit of an idiot. There was also supposed to be a fun 'date' scene at a series of small museums where L would first broach the subject in one of their idiotic question games.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter ?- The Dursleys

Harry closed his eyes and, with one last regret for always having to do the right thing, pressed the call button. He opened one eye as it started ringing. One ring, three, maybe they weren't home just now? Four rings. Perhaps they'd gone out for dinner, or, it was still winter hols, maybe they'd gone to Majorca or something. Five rings, then a click and a gruff "Dursley residence," put an end to Harry's wishful thinking.

"Er, hallo, Uncle Vernon," Harry leaned his head on a hand heavily. Over the phone he could hear Vernon blustering with fury as he tried to draw breath to scream.

((First call to Dursley's doesn't go well, argue too much for Harry to explain why he called, spends the next day fretting about it))

Harry choked on a laugh, his body shaking with fury.

"I'm too friendly?" He looked up at the man hunched before him, his eyes narrowing.

"Fine then," he said softly, before lunging forward and grabbing William by the arm and dragging him out of the kitchen. "I'll stop being so nice to the perfect stranger I invited into my home!"

William tried to jerk back, his eyes wide, but didn't manage to pull out of Harry's grasp until they turned into the hallway. The moment he shoved Harry away from him, he took a defensive stance, clearly prepared to fend Harry off if grabbed for again.
"This is not an appropriate reaction, Harry," William said angrily.

But Harry had already dropped to the ground so a leg could lash out for William's knees. As the lanky man went down, eyes wide, Harry rolled himself behind him and again grabbed his arm, this time twisting it behind the man's back. When he stood, he pulled William's arm with him and brought the man painfully to his feet.

"You said it wasn't right for me to be so friendly with you, so fine then!" Harry yelled as William twisted and thrashed against his hold. "I don't ever want to see you again!"

William had little more than five seconds to struggle in Harry's grip before the front door was thrown open and he was tossed out on the steps. The door slammed closed behind him just as he was catching his balance and whirling to look back, eyes bulging like a fish's and pupils contracted to pinpoints.

Harry locked the door the moment the latch caught and leaned against it, breathing heavily. For a moment, all that existed in the world was the sound of his labored gasps and the feel of the smooth, cool wood pressing into his forehead. He felt as though the whole world had been thrown off tilt while he fought to keep his balance, and now he was left sick and dizzy in the aftermath.

A sudden slam shook the door he was braced on and Harry jerked away from it, watching warily as it shivered from William's enraged pounding from the other side. As he stepped back from the door, a noise from the hall startled him around.

Thomas stood in the middle of the hallway, hands raised calmly. Harry stared at him in shock for a moment, before his eyes narrowed again.

"You can leave too!" he said, stepping against the wall of the hall and waving wildly to the door still being shaken by muffled thuds.

Thomas lowered his hands slowly as he walked carefully to Harry's side. "Oh, my dear child," he muttered softly.

Harry's breath caught as he noticed the man's eyes were shining with unshed tears. He looked away and snarled, "I'm not a child!"

"Of course not," Thomas said quietly. "Of course not."

Harry stared at the floor of the hall, refusing to look up and see Thomas' pity, hoping the man would simply leave. But Thomas, it seemed, had other ideas as he continued standing there waiting for something. After several minutes of listening to the muffled sounds of William shouting and pounding on the door outside, Harry finally broke.

"What?" he snapped, sending a quick glare at Thomas before looking away again.

"We never meant to hurt you, Harry," Thomas' words came softly. "William least of all."

Harry laughed harshly. "Doing a bang up job of it then, aren't you?"

"He is only trying to help--"

"I don't need help!" Harry shouted.

"--and this is the only way he knows how." Thomas spoke quickly and cautiously reached forward to place a hand on Harry's shoulder, making him flinch. "Please, Harry, at least hear me out."
Harry stayed silent, uncomfortably aware of the weight of the hand upon him. He didn't need anyone's pity and he was long past needing anyone's help! But Thomas... Harry swallowed thickly and looked back at the door as it rattled.

"What?" he asked dully.

Thomas' hand squeezed his shoulder briefly, a comfort and silent encouragement. Harry closed his eyes, reminded painfully of other hands that had offered the same gesture.

"William is," Thomas paused, "he, is also an orphan. And he has been for a long time." Thomas stopped and looked over to the door. The sounds of pounding had changed, become sharper and moved lower, as if someone were kicking it instead of hitting.

"He has lived in orphanages since he was a little over three years old. Many different orphanages, because you see, none that he was sent to ever really understood how to care for him." Thomas sighed as a particularly loud thud rattled the door and the pounding went silent. "He saw many children who had lost everything and many children who were mistreated."

Harry shifted uneasily. This sounded like a familiar story, and not a very good one. Thomas' hand gave another reassuring squeeze.

"As such, he is now adamantly against the abuse of children under any circumstances." Thomas pulled lightly on Harry's shoulder, making him look up. The old man's eyes bored into his, willing Harry to trust him. "Believe me when I say that if William had found you as a child, he would have done everything in his power to remove you from the Dursley's care and punish them for any misdeed against you. Knowing that he cannot undo the harm done to you is the main reason he is so vociferous now."

Harry shrugged Thomas' hand off him, unable to stand the desperate look in the man's eyes. "I don't need his help," he said quietly, staring at the floor.

Thomas sighed heavily and allowed his hand to fall away. "I know, my boy. I know. But William, well," he trailed off and was silent for so long, Harry glanced up at him. The old man was staring at the door, his brow creased in thought. When he turned back, Harry was startled by the determination he saw in Thomas' steady gaze. "William only wishes to help, and he blames himself I think, for not being able to help you before."

"That doesn't make any sense," Harry said.

Thomas nodded sadly. "I know, lad. But it is how he feels." His eyes softened then. "He does like you, Harry, more than anyone else he has met. If he cannot do something to help you, he will feel as though he has failed."

Harry shook his head. "But, I never asked him for help... I never asked him for anything-- he doesn't owe me anything!" he said fretfully. "He said we were strangers! Why does this matter so much to him?"

"I truly cannot say, Harry. But I wish you to understand how sincerely William intended his offer. He never meant to insult or hurt you."

Harry shook his head again. He felt unbelievably lost in that moment. "Well, he can't. I mean, there's nothing he can do," he said. "It doesn't matter anymore."

"Oh, my boy," Thomas said suddenly. "Of course it matters."
Harry's head shook faster and he leaned tiredly against the wall. "No, it doesn't. It's over. I promised, we all promised, it would be over," he muttered quickly, in a rush suddenly to get it all out. "So it doesn't matter anymore!"

"Oh, child..." Thomas' voice was so faint, Harry almost didn't hear it, and before he could protest again that he was not a child, Thomas had pulled him into a tight hug.

Harry froze. Thomas was holding onto him the way Mrs. Weasley once had when she was in one of her "worried mother" moods. Like Sirius had when Harry told him about the graveyard. Like Dumbledore had just before Petrifying Harry on the Astronomy Tower....

"Please leave," Harry whispered, afraid suddenly that he might be crying. And more afraid that if Thomas continued comforting him, Harry might begin talking to him as if he were someone else, someone dead, someone who was supposed to help him.

Thomas slowly pulled back and regarded him carefully. Harry kept his gaze on the floor by his feet. Finally, Thomas sighed and pulled away.

"Very well." The man's voice sounded tired and somehow even older than he looked. "Will you be alright?"

Harry swallowed and shuffled carefully away as Thomas collected his and William's coats. He nodded.

Thomas scrutinized him once more before sighing and turning to the door. Just as he reached to unlock it, Harry stepped forward, his arm reaching out to stop him.

"Wait! I..." Harry flinched as Thomas looked back at him and his arm fell back to his side. "I, er, I didn't mean it. What I said to William that is.... I wouldn't mind seeing him again, just... just not now."

Thomas smiled sadly and nodded. "I know, lad. I'm certain William does as well."

"Right," Harry said, looking at the floor again.

It was a moment more before Thomas unlocked the door and stepped out. Harry waited a bit, listening for a clue to what was happening outside, William's angry voice, footsteps, the Rolls Royce's doors slamming shut before driving away perhaps. But there was only silence. So finally, Harry moved to lock the door and wandered back to the kitchen.

He stood staring at the empty room for who knows how long before he realized he should go to bed. Yet after finding his way to his room, Harry only sat on his bed in a daze.

He'd learned a lot about William today. More than he'd wanted to really. He was now absolutely certain that the Dursleys were the entire reason William and Thomas had made such an effort to get close to him. How they'd found him or known that the Dursleys had been abusive when no one had ever noticed before didn't matter. All that was important was making sure they didn't do anything to upset the fragile peace Harry and his relatives had managed to create.

Considering that peace was already fracturing, Harry needed to do something fast. It was too late to convince William and Thomas to stop investigating the matter-- Harry's own reaction to questioning was proof enough for them. So the only route left was to ensure there was no physical evidence for them to use against him.

Harry grimaced. Any physical evidence would be with the Dursleys and considering how Uncle
Vernon had reacted to him calling, they were unlikely to listen to any advice he tried to give. Which only left one option.

Just the thought of what he had to do made Harry groan and press his forehead into his hands. Tomorrow was sure to be one of the hardest days of his life, and considering some of the days he'd had that was really saying something. But, then again, that was how things with the Dursleys had always been.

((After throwing L out of the house Harry plans the next day to visit the Dursley's in person, spends the whole day wandering around trying to build up his courage, L monitors the Dursley's expecting Harry to show up there, sulking majorly))

"You have no right to be here, boy!" Vernon bellowed. "You swore when you left this house you would never return, so--"

"AND I NEVER MEANT TO!" Harry shouted over his uncle. "I never wanted to have anything to do with this place again!"

Silence echoed after the last word and Harry stood there, breathing heavily, glaring at Vernon Dursley for all he was worth. His aunt and Dudley were standing shocked in the hallway. After a few moments, Vernon began sputtering, readying himself to shout more abuse and accusations, so Harry, with a smirk that looked more like a snarl, interrupted before the man could start.

"Did it never once occur to you that the way you treated me may have been illegal?" he snarled. Vernon froze and, as Harry watched, his face turned a putrid red.

"Well, for starters you could get rid of the extra locks on my door, or, you know what?" Harry said coldly and he paused to glare at Vernon, making the man flinch at the open hostility in his eyes. "You could just replace the door altogether, since I don't have any idea how you'd explain the cat-door you installed so you could shove canned food in without having to look at me."

There was a tense silence around the room while Petunia fidgeted and Vernon's eyes narrowed into two little hate filled black dots. Finally, Petunia spoke up timidly and Harry broke the glaring contest with his uncle to stare at her.

"We changed the door after-- after you left..." The woman trailed off into silence again and turned a flushed, pinched up glare of her own at the coffee table, too unnerved to meet Harry's gaze.

"Well," Harry said after another long silence. "That's good at least. What about the room itself?"

"What business is it of yours what we do with the room!" Vernon argued. "It's our house!"

"Because I don't know much about police forensics and I thought perhaps painting the room might be the best way to cover anything that might be found." Harry glared at the man again until he sat down. "So? Have you painted or anything?"

"Y-yes." Petunia was the one who spoke up again, though she kept her gaze on the table before her,
her eyes and nose pinched so tightly, Harry wondered if she could even focus on anything. "We even installed carpet, for my new sewing room."

Well, that was odd. Harry had never known his aunt could sew. But perhaps it was a new hobby. Harry snorted and the Dursleys all flinched. A new hobby she'd started in celebration of him leaving probably.

"Good for you." Petunia stiffened at the tone and Vernon looked to be rallying some indignant fury at the perceived slight to his wife. Harry continued quickly to stall him. "What about the cupboard?"

"What?" Both Vernon and Petunia looked startled, but at least they were confused enough to keep listening.

"You never did anything about the cupboard while I was here," Harry said slowly. "so, have you painted it or anything?"

Vernon gave him a look to say he was clearly an idiot. "It's a ruddy boot cupboard! Who cares if it's painted or not!"

"Yes, and I lived there for ten years!" Harry snarled this so viciously that his uncle actually flinched back into his seat as far as it would allow, and Petunia began trembling on the couch, clearly thinking Harry would hex the man.

He wished he could. But, Harry wouldn't be here if that was what he really wanted, so, with a deep breath and a reminder to himself why he needed to be here, he calmed down and turned back to his aunt.

"I think perhaps you should paint the inside of the cupboard."

Petunia nodded quickly in agreement.

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((Harry wanders around Little Whigning for a while, has a pretty good discussion with Dudley, L freaking out quietly in his hotel))

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As soon as Harry entered number Nine, he headed upstairs to see if William had left any messages. The phone sat silently on the dresser and a quick check revealed that William hadn't called once all day.

Well, fine. Harry dropped the phone back on the dresser, startling Rowag awake, and whirled from the room to go back downstairs. Unfortunately, once Harry was in the kitchen, his thoughts turned once more to the phone.

He paced from the table to the counter, trying to make himself think of something to cook when all that popped into his head was how William hadn't called this morning. William always called in the morning! For him not to…

Harry stopped before the counter by the refrigerator, and leaned on it heavily. For William not to call
it must mean the man was very upset. Because of what Harry had said to him.

Harry rubbed his face tiredly and stood to open the fridge door. There were leftovers and there was cake and all the makings for a very good sandwich. Harry closed the door and walked slowly over to the table to sit down. He didn't feel much like eating just now, especially after seeing the cake.

He needed to apologize. William was only trying to help in his own awkward, overbearing way. Harry should never have taken his frustration with the Dursleys out on the overbearing man. Even though it was his fault Harry had to deal with the Dursleys in the first place.

Harry stood suddenly and left the kitchen in a rush. He was sure he heard ringing.

But when he entered his bedroom, the phone was silent and Rowag was pecking at the lock on the window.

"Oh. Sorry girl." Harry moved over to the sill and opened the window for his owl. She nibbled his sleeve in thanks before hopping out and flitting off. He watched her white form fade into the growing darkness until she was swallowed up by the shadows. Then he turned to the dresser once more.

The cell phone sat quietly on the polished wood, and Harry glared at it, unaccountably annoyed now. William always called him in the morning and he always called when Harry returned from Hogwarts!

Harry sat stubbornly on the edge of his bed, glaring at the silent phone and willing it to start ringing. William would call, he always did. And then Harry would apologize and things could go back to the way they were.

As the minutes ticked by, Harry began to fidget worriedly. Maybe he should call, just in case William didn't. Just as he was getting up though, he decided it would be better to wait just a little longer and sat back down hurriedly. William might just be busy after all, and Harry didn't want to bother him.

Chapter End Notes

When Harry finally returns home, L actually leaves him alone, having heard a report on the confrontation at the Dursley house. This barely lasts the day, and by evening he calls Harry and they fight. Then L really leaves him alone, calls off the investigation into the Dursleys, rants and throws a fit, Wammy has to calm him down, and for once sweets are doing absolutely nothing to improve his mood. Then they sort of calm down and start talking again, they meet up, Harry bakes cakes, and they continue the question game, except it's become a bit more personal as far as past history is concerned, but they are both being a little more honest. Harry talks about life with the Dursleys (hypothetically of course) and L talks about being in an orphanage, and sneaking in bits of abuse cases he investigated. The cake helps these discussions immensely.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

So, after putting the Dursley topic to rest, things between Harry and L are going swimmingly. They're sharing stuff about themselves without fighting, they're starting to like each other without getting into a one-up style fight, and there is lots and lots of cake as Harry's skill and eagerness to show off go up. It's a good time for all!

Then... Harry visits Hermione. This is actually a good thing, he needed to stop running away from people who love him and reconnect. But the topic of who he was spending time with comes up, and Hermione's kinda excited that Harry made friends with muggles, she wants to meet them, maybe for a dinner with Ron? Yeah, Harry's down with that and he's sure his muggle buddies will be too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter ?-- Hermione

"So what have you been doing then?" Hermione asked him.

"Er, well-" Harry thought quickly. "I've been... practicing."

"Practicing?"

"Yeah. The cooking lessons, you know," Harry said quickly. "I've been making my own dinners every night. Pudding as well."

Hermione studied Harry closely. "So, you won't be joining me and Ron for dinner next week, because you'd rather practice."

"What? No- I, when did you ask me for dinner?" Harry asked in confusion.

"Well, not yet, Harry," Hermione bit her lip. "But every time I've asked you to meet on the weekends, you say you're too busy!" She looked at him seriously. "I know you can't be spending the whole time cooking-- you'd never be able to eat everything you made!"

Harry blinked. "Well, you know, some recipes take time to make-"

"Oh, that isn't the point Harry!"

"Well, what is the point then?" Harry asked as he shoved Hermione's books back on their shelf.

"You asked me what I'd been up to and I told you-- I've been practicing my cooking!"

"For who, Harry?"

Harry froze and turned from the bookcase to stare at Hermione.

"What do you mean?" he asked carefully.
"Oh, Harry!" Hermione said exasperatedly. "I know you! You wouldn't spend all your time alone if you really are as happy as you say! And," Hermione blushed a bit. "I do believe you, you know.... I, I think you are happy now. So-" she straightened self-consciously. "I just want to know who it is you're spending so much time with that you don't have any left over for me and Ron."

Harry blinked. "I didn't mean to ignore you-"

"You're not ignoring us, Harry!" Hermione said with an impatient wave. "I didn't mean that. I just, I just...."

Harry walked over to where Hermione was standing, rubbing her arms as if cold. "What is it, Hermione?"

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione wailed. "I miss before!"

"What?"

"I mean, I don't miss all the danger or the war or anything, not at all!" Hermione sniffed and sat back down at the table. "But I miss us, the three of us-- you, me, and Ron! We were always together, we always shared everything and even when we were fighting, we still managed to make up and stay together!"

"Uh," Harry blinked and sat down at the table too, if only to buy some time while he thought of what to say. He'd thought Hermione had been trying to figure out where he'd been disappearing to, trying to find nine Argyle Square, and Harry was still wary of sharing that place. But now... it seemed that Hermione was honestly lonely and Harry felt like a prat, trying to keep her out...

"I mean, now," Hermione continued as her sniffles got worse and tears began dripping down her cheeks. "I'm here at Hogwarts, teaching, and Ron's over at the Ministry as an auror, and you're off getting cooking lessons!" Harry awkwardly handed her a hanky he dug out of his pocket. She took the wrinkled thing and blew into it without even looking.

"I thought before, that with you and Ron being aurors, you two would stay close and since Ron and I are getting married, the three of us would still see each other all the time!" Hermione waved the hanky around in emphasis. "I thought, 'this is good', because you and Ron would probably end up partners or something, so you'd come over for dinner and maybe bring Ginny and everything would be fine!"

Harry winced as Hermione blew her nose again, much more loudly than before.

"But then, you didn't want to marry Ginny and I thought Ron would be mad at you-- and he was, but then he got over it, so I thought, this was still okay because now everything would be the same, just you wouldn't be bringing Ginny over-"

Hermione was speaking so quickly now, it was difficult to keep up. Harry was also rather startled that Hermione had so easily factored Ginny in and out of her life with Ron and Harry.

"E-except," Hermione sniffed very loudly. "You didn't want to be an auror anymore!" she wailed before leaning over and cradling her head on the table. Harry patted her back hesitantly, still unsure of the proper response just then. Hermione sat up only a moment later and stared Harry in the eyes desperately.

"I really did think you were upset, Harry! I still think you were, but I wasn't a very good friend about helping you." She stopped talking then to sniff and wipe her face with the hanky.
"You see, I kept trying to fix things so it would all fit the plan I had for our lives. I thought, 'this was the way we all expected things to be, so it must be the right way', but Harry, I really didn't mean to disregard your feelings!" Hermione was leaning toward Harry as if expecting something, so he nodded.

Hermione nodded back before continuing. "You'd always talked about how you couldn't wait for everything to be over, and then, when it was, you seemed so much more relaxed than you normally were. I thought everything was fine and then, when you broke up with Ginny and quit the auror program, I didn't understand why...."

Hermione took a deep breath. "I should have asked you, Harry," she said. "I should have asked you, because-- and I didn't notice this until recently, but.... I hadn't asked you about the future or what you wanted since before the Battle."

Hermione looked at Harry sadly then, and not able to think of anything else, Harry took her hand. "It's okay, Hermione. I know you were worried about me-- I don't mind."

"Well I do!" she exclaimed. "Because you see, Harry, sometime after Voldemort was defeated, you changed your mind! And I... I should have known that!" Hermione looked down, her tears slowing to a crawl.

"Well, you know, it's not as if we didn't talk about what we were going to do after Hogwarts-- I know I kept up the auror idea with Ron and anyway, I sure didn't know I'd changed my mind about it, so how could you have known?" Harry asked reasonably.

Hermione shook her head. "You were different once the auror program started, Harry. You... you stopped talking as much, stopped going out with us-- you only ever wanted to visit at someone's house." Hermione looked up at him again and Harry was startled by how dark Hermione's eyes had become from the tears. "You didn't laugh as much, or smile normally-- did you know you have a fake smile, Harry?"

"Uh, no..."

Hermione smirked sadly. "When strangers came up to us a few times, I noticed it. Your eyes sort of narrow and you don't show your teeth. You started smiling like that every time I asked you and Ron how the training was going-- he'd explain and you'd just sit there, smiling and nodding occasionally."

Harry blinked. He'd certainly never noticed such a habit before....

"Anyway," Hermione sighed tiredly. "I just, got upset when I realized that... well, that we were drifting apart-"

"We're not drifting-" Harry tried to say loudly, but Hermione continued as if she hadn't heard him.

"-and I started to wonder, would we have drifted apart if you had stayed an auror and married Ginny?" Hermione laughed, but it didn't sound at all happy. "Then I realized that I really was being a terrible friend to you, because you hadn't been happy with the aurors or with Ginny.... I, I started thinking that maybe the only reason we were drifting apart was because I was ruining things." Hermione gulped.

"So, I miss it... I miss the three of us just being together and not having all these other things to worry about-- jobs, marriage, responsibility...."

"We had a huge responsibility, Hermione," Harry said quietly.
"Yes! But it was the same one! Defeat Voldemort and look out for each other-- that was our responsibility. Now... Ron has auror responsibilities, I have Hogwarts responsibilities, and you have your cooking! And I keep feeling like those things are all so different that we're going to slowly drift away from each other!" Hermione gasped out.

"Well, you and Ron will have a time of it, considering you're going to marry this summer," Harry tried to joke.

"You're my friend too, Harry!" Hermione shouted desperately.

They fell silent after that, neither knowing what to say now. After a while, Harry asked hopefully if Hermione would like it if he cooked for her and Ron sometime.

The smile Hermione gave him at that did a lot to ease the tension in the room and Harry was grateful. He honestly hadn't thought much about his friends beyond his own feelings and now, finding out how badly one of them had been affected by his refusal to talk to them for so long... Well, Harry didn't think he could feel any lower. He was, well, he was a cockhead, is what he was! He would have to do a lot to make up for this, somehow.

"I'd love it if you made something for us, Harry! I'd really," Hermione started crying softly again. "- really love that!"

"Ah, Hermione!" Harry said worriedly. "Look, I'll, I'll make you lots of meals-- so many, you'll never have to cook again, so..."

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed, throwing her arms about Harry in a tight hug. Harry let her sniff into his shoulder for a bit while he thought. Maybe... maybe he could show Ron and Hermione Argyle Square.

After Hermione had calmed down once more and dabbed her eyes, Harry asked if she'd like to plan when he would cook for them. Delighted, Hermione told him that she and Ron would be meeting up at their flat over the weekend, so Harry could come by whenever he liked. Harry thought a bit and asked if Sunday was okay.

"Why Sunday, Harry?" Hermione asked curiously. "You could come over the whole weekend if you like-- oh!" She looked at Harry as if she'd remembered something important.

"Er, well, I had plans this weekend," Harry hedged. He didn't actually have any plans other than meeting up with William and Thomas, but he was sure they had planned something with him.

Hermione smiled. "So?"

Harry stared at Hermione's complete reversal of moods. "So... what?"

"So, who is it?" she asked with a laugh.

Harry blinked in surprise. "You mean..."

"Who do you have plans with?" Hermione said. "Who have you been meeting with? I-" she blushed. "I promise I won't tell Ron or Ginny if you're nervous about them knowing."

"I- well," Harry stammered. He hadn't planned on telling anyone about William and Thomas-- they were muggles, so it wasn't as if he could easily introduce them to anyone he knew. Besides, Harry thought childishy, they're my friends and they don't have anything to do with the wizarding world! He fully intended to keep things that way; if he told someone about them, it would definitely change..."
things. What, Harry wasn't entirely sure, but something.

"You've been cooking for her, right Harry?" Hermione said encouragingly. "So it must be pretty serious by now."

"What?" Harry blurted. What was Hermione talking about?

"Well, I just thought, since you're spending so much time with this girl, and cooking for her too, you must be-"

"What on earth gave you the idea it was a girl?" Harry exclaimed. Hermione stared at him before raising a hand to her mouth.

"Oh!"

"Not 'oh', Hermione," Harry said quickly, before his friend got any more odd ideas. "They are just friends. Nothing more."

"Then... you cook dinner for friends... every weekend?" Hermione asked hesitantly.

And every weeknight, Harry thought, but it might be better not to mention that. "We go out as well."

"Where?" Hermione asked.

"Well, um- we went to Regent's Park, Hyde Park, the London Eye, lots of museums, er, and sometimes we have dinner or tea out..." Harry trailed off as he saw Hermione's face.

"You- What exactly do you do at all these places?" she asked, her eyebrows creasing together.

"What do you mean 'what do we do'? We talk! What else would we do?" Harry asked in confusion.

"So... you walk through parks and, and museums and you just... talk," Hermione said slowly.

"Yes..."

"You also go out to eat with these... um, who are these people, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Um, William and Thomas... they-" Harry thought quickly, what should he tell her? "- they're on vacation."

Hermione stared at him. "What are they like?"

"William is, well, about my age I think, and sort of odd. Thomas is quite nice-- he's something like William's grandfather," Harry said vaguely.

Hermione stared at him incredulously. "You go about with a, a young man and his grandfather on... on their vacation tour of London?" she asked.

"Well, they were trying to treat me the first time, and then they just, er, said they liked my company...." Harry glanced away.

"Harry... do you think these two are trying to take advantage of you?" Hermione asked seriously.

"What- No!" Harry said forcefully, even as his mind flashed back to the Dursley incident. But that wasn't important anymore, they honestly were good folk...
"But, Harry-" Hermione said hesitantly. "I know you don't like, well, how famous you are now- but you really have to be aware that some people might try to-

"No, no, Hermione-" Harry interrupted. "They really aren't, they, uh, they-" Harry sighed. "Look, they're muggles, alright?"

Hermione blinked. "Muggles?"

"Yeah, so they have no idea who I am, so they can't possibly be trying to take advantage of me, alright?" Harry said shortly.

"Why are you friends with muggles, Harry?"

"What, does everyone think I'm some bigoted sot, because of the Dursley's or something?" Harry asked angrily. "I know not all muggles are the same you know!"

"I know, Harry," Hermione said quickly. "I do know that! What I meant was, well, you aren't the most, uh, tactful person in the world, Harry. How do you deal with not mentioning magic around them, or not using it?"

Harry glared at her. "I do know how to get along without magic, Hermione," he said. "Muggle-raised, remember? It's not like you use magic for every little thing, right?"

Hermione blushed. "Ah, well..."

Harry blinked. "You used to get on Ron all the time about how lazy it was to use magic for everything when it was so easy to do some things by hand!"

"Yes, well," Hermione coughed. "I may have just been upset that he grew up with so much magic that he never even bothers to think of the normal way-- the muggle way-- of doing things! And I do still think it's lazy! I just... might have gotten used to household charms lately."

Harry snorted. "You use household charms? Like for cleaning and such?"

"Oh, don't laugh," Hermione muttered. "It's only, I still feel bad about the house elves cleaning everything without pay, so I try to pick up after myself as much as I can at Hogwarts, but I don't have much time what with classes and patrolling duties and such! So, when I mark papers in the evening, I set a charm up to go through the rooms and... it all sort of spiraled out from there."

Harry smothered a grin and tried to say seriously, "Well, I left my job ages ago, so I've been cleaning up after myself by hand just to have something to do!"

Hermione huffed and changed the subject. "So? I take it this means you've been avoiding magic while these two muggles are about?"

"Er, yeah." Oh no, Harry thought. He hadn't mentioned the other house yet... Should he? Did he really want to?

"How do you explain the magical items in your house then?"

"Oh, well, I actually don't have any out-- it's all packed away."

"What about Rowag?" Hermione pressed.

"They think she's a pet," Harry said. They seemed to be coming away from the topic of the house. Maybe he wouldn't have to bring it up at all?
Hermione leaned back in her chair and regarded Harry curiously. "So, basically, you hide all hints of magic in your life whenever these muggles visit you?"

"Well... basically." Harry wasn't sure he liked the way that sounded. It wasn't as though he was lying to William and Thomas after all. He just... never mentioned that he was a wizard-- which he wasn't supposed to do anyway.

"Harry... are you sure you're okay with this?" Hermione asked in an oddly concerned tone.

"Well, yes," Harry said confused. "Why would it be a problem?"

"Because you're essentially hiding a piece of yourself from them, Harry!" Hermione's forehead creased. "Doesn't that bother you?"

Harry looked away, his eyes picking out magical odds and ends from Hermione's sitting room. She had a collection of half transfigured objects sitting on a side table-- probably student homework. There was a clock on the wall with softly glowing archaic characters instead of numbers around the rim and no hands. Over in the corner, by the door, was the hatstand that had moved to take Harry's coat when he walked in. On the table before him were a number of quills with never-out-ink nubs, Hermione's favorite kind.

He loved magic, he really did. He never got tired of the wonder of magical objects, magical homes, of seeing the mundane become suddenly extraordinary. So, he had to admit he did miss living around magic, just because he was in a muggle house. Which was a silly way of thinking about it, because it was his house-- so, it was by default a wizard's house!

But, Harry kept magic out of it just the same. Why? Because of William and Thomas. That hadn't been the reason when he first moved to number nine Argyle Square, but they were definitely the reason now. But they were also the reason he stayed in that house.... Why was he doing this for them?

"Harry?" Hermione said worriedly. "Are you alright?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm good Hermione," Harry said quickly. "I just, I don't know-- I guess I don't really mind so much... I mean- I do sort of miss magic around the house, but, if I do any, there's a chance I'll leave something about that William or Thomas might find and... I just realized that I don't want to lose them."

"Lose them?"

"Yeah-- We're only allowed to tell muggles who are direct family about magic, right?"

"Yes," Hermione said slowly.

"Right," Harry said. "So if William or Thomas find out about it, then they'll have to be Obliviated, because they aren't family. I don't want them to forget me."

"Oh, Harry," Hermione leaned forward. "I thought the Obliviators only took away memories specific to whatever information they want to erase, though?"

"Yeah, but, it's like you said, Hermione," Harry said sadly. "I'm magic. So what if they connect whatever magic they see to me? The Obliviators will take that away, and they might take away anything that might lead back to that connection. I don't always act the way a muggle should, so I think that would involve quite a lot of memories with me."
Hermione shook her head slowly. "I don't know what to tell you, Harry," she said quietly.

"Yeah," Harry said. He honestly didn't know what to do, other than what he'd been doing.

"Are you sure you should keep seeing them?" Hermione asked suddenly. Harry looked at her, surprised.

"What? Why would I stop seeing them?"

"Well," Hermione stopped for a moment, then straightened as if bracing herself. "To be honest, it really is awkward having muggle friends. I mean-- look at what you're doing, Harry! You've completely separated your magical side from the rest of you just to keep them from becoming suspicious!"

"Well, what else am I supposed to do!" Harry said, frustrated. This was not at all a conversation he had expected-- or wanted to have.

Hermione sighed. "Well... you could stop seeing them," she said quietly.

Harry gritted his teeth together at the suggestion. "No."

"Harry..."

"No, Hermione," Harry said stubbornly. "I like them! They're good friends! I'm not going to just stop seeing them! That would be the same as making them forget me!"

"Did you know something, Harry?" Hermione switched topics. "I don't have any muggle friends."

Harry paused, thrown off, and looked at her suspiciously. Hermione wasn't the type to just drop a topic she wanted to discuss. "Why not?"

"Well, I think you know that you and Ron were my first real friends." Harry nodded. "Right, but I did used to talk to some friends by post, and I also occasionally saw a few cousins and people from a camp I went to ages ago."

"But they aren't your friends anymore?" Harry asked.

"No," Hermione shook her head. "It got... difficult, keeping my priorities straight with them. I mean, for one thing, we were in the middle of the war so it wasn't as though I could keep up contact anyway, and when I came back, I found out some of them were upset at me for missing their birthdays!"

Harry felt his eyes narrow. "Well, I think what you were doing was more important than someone's birthday, Hermione!"

"I know, Harry," she nodded. "But I couldn't explain that to them, you see?"

Harry shrugged uncomfortably. "Yeah, but, you're not saying I'll have that problem with William and Thomas, are you? The war's over!"

"I know, Harry, but," Hermione sighed. "I didn't exactly know I'd have problems like that when I first met my old friends either. The real problem is that you will never be able to fully explain your life and whatever is happening in it to these muggles. When something comes up where they know you aren't explaining things properly, they are likely to get upset with you and, well...."

Harry stared at the table for a long time. He knew that. He knew he could never tell William and
Thomas everything about his life, but that wasn't why he liked being with them. In fact, Harry rather liked them for not having to tell them everything. He liked that there were certain aspects of his life (most of which literally everyone in the wizarding world knew, or thought they knew) that William and Thomas would never know about. It hadn't been awkward talking to them so far-- unless one counted the general awkwardness of talking to William about anything that didn't involve sweets. And maybe the fights, but those were mostly William's fault anyway.

"I just don't want you to get hurt, Harry," Hermione said softly. Harry glanced back at her and tried to smile.

"I know, I just..." he trailed off, trying to explain something he didn't fully understand. "I like them. I do, and I think they're really good friends, and William, I think, has never had a friend before, so I don't want to ruin this for him, and, I...."

When he didn't start up again, Hermione reached over to grasp his hand. Harry looked at her, wondering if she was right, wondering if he would eventually lose his two muggle friends because of a misunderstanding or a memory spell.

"Then, I suppose you'll just have to see how long it lasts, and not worry about it," Hermione said.

"But, you said-"

"I know, Harry, and I do worry about what'll happen to you when something like that comes up, but...." Hermione tightened her hold on his hand. "You- you've been so happy recently, without my help, or Ron's help, or anyone's and, I think it's because of these muggles, so... if you really want to be friends with them, I think you should." Hermione smiled tremulously at him.

"I- I don't want to lie to them... and I don't want to lose them," Harry said, wishing Hermione could come up with some brilliant solution for his problem, the way she always seemed to do.

"Well, then, just keep doing what you've been doing!" Hermione said brightly. "They like you the way you are, right?"

Harry nodded.

"That's that then!" Hermione took a deep breath and let go of Harry's hand as she leaned back. "Why don't you tell me about them, then? I'd like to know what sort of muggles you've given me and Ron up for!" she teased.

Harry stared at her. How had he forgotten what a good friend Hermione was? Sure she could be pushy sometimes, and once she latched onto an idea, she had a hard time letting go, but all in all, she was the best friend he could ever ask for. If something ever did happen with William and Thomas, Harry would be sure to remember this.

So it was with that thought, that Harry told her about his first few encounters with the odd muggles he'd befriended and had a wonderful afternoon describing William in all his awkwardness. It took nearly two hours before Hermione interrupted him to ask what Thomas was like and then she spent the rest of the time laughing as Harry told her all the many ways Thomas was better than William.
After talking to Hermione and feeling pretty great about the direction his life is going in, Harry mentions having dinner with her and William and getting his friends to like each other.

L... freaks a bit. He's convinced that Harry is involved in some worldwide criminal conspiracy, so he nopes as hard as he can without freaking Harry out. Harry's like oh, okay, that's too bad. And proceeds to plan to meet them anyway without William. L freaks a bit harder and plots. He and Wammy clear out what surveillance equipment from the hotel they can, and L invites Harry to visit him the next day....
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

So, Harry spends the day with L in his hotel suite, eating sweets and watching movies, and just hanging out and enjoying himself. Meanwhile, Wammy is clearing out his house of surveillance, being attacked by Rowag, and generally not having a good time.

Then L pulls all this shit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 13 - The Confrontation

It took a great deal of arguing, but L was finally victorious in convincing Harry to spend the night in their hotel suite. All that mattered at this point was keeping Harry from returning to where the organization could easily find him. When Harry was persuaded to make use of the bathroom, L and Wammy had a silent discussion using English sign language.

Wammy was pleased that Harry would not be going back to such a dangerous place yet, but he wanted to know what L intended to do to keep Harry from ever returning.

This was tricky, L admitted. He didn't feel there had been enough time to form a stronger bond with Harry than he already had with his so-called "friends." But they were out of options, they had to confront Harry with what they knew so far. It might not be enough and they didn't have any definite proof, but L thought if they phrased everything right, Harry might believe they knew more than they did.

However, L didn't want to have the confrontation tonight. He was too uncertain of Harry's reaction and he hated that he had so little control over the situation. The best he could do was stall for time - they would keep Harry with them tonight, discuss everything tomorrow and then try to prevent Harry from leaving.

Wammy agreed to the plan and L laid out how tomorrow would go and what they would do if Harry refused their assistance. They both really hoped it wouldn't come to that.

When Harry came out from his shower, dressed again in the clothes he'd worn that day and looking awkwardly at the ground, L went to fetch one of his shirts for him. Harry took the shirt, looking as though he would never have expected such an offering, and went wordlessly back to the bathroom to change into it.

While L watched the bathroom door, waiting for Harry to come out, Wammy sighed and went to his own bedroom to change for the night. The moment Harry emerged, L led him to his bedroom. Harry followed and then stared at the bed in confusion.

"Er, where do I sleep?" Harry asked slowly.

"Here," L said simply. Why else would he have led Harry to this room? Harry's face turned red.
"Uh- no, I'll um- I'll just go sleep on the couch, if that's alright," Harry stuttered out as he turned quickly to walk back to the sitting room.

L lunged forward and grabbed his arm to keep him from leaving. If Harry slept in the sitting room, he could leave in the middle of the night or someone could enter and take him without L or Wammy close enough to interfere. He had to keep Harry in this room.

"No, you will sleep on the bed," L told Harry insistently, gripping his arm tightly.

Harry sputtered and tried to shake L off. "L-look, I don't know what it is you're thinking, but I really should just sleep out there-"

"No," L said as forcefully as he could and he glared at Harry until he stilled. "I want you to sleep here, in this room." Harry didn't look any calmer and prepared to argue again. L sighed. Arguing with Harry was worse than a doctor check-up, and he'd already spent several hours getting Harry to agree to stay in the hotel. He would have to try a different tactic. He looked at Harry tiredly. "Please."

Harry stared at him, and L could tell it was the stare that meant Harry thought he'd done something odd. Well, it was odd because L never begged for anything. But if it would get Harry to stay where L could watch him...

"Please sleep here," L said. Harry looked shocked and nodded mutely. L smiled and pulled Harry over to the bed, then watched him climb into it. Satisfied that Harry was settling himself, L dragged the desk chair around to the bedside closest to the door and crouched on it, getting himself comfortable. Harry blinked at him from the bed.

"Er, what are you doing?" he asked blankly.

"Getting ready to go to sleep," L said.

"Wait-" Harry said, sitting up with a worried look on his face. "You're going to sleep in a chair?" he demanded incredulously.

"Yes."

"You can't do that!"

L tilted his head to the side. "I assure you, I can, Harry."

"No, no, no!" Harry started getting out of the bed hurriedly and L leapt up to stop him. "Look- I'm not going to take your bed from you!"

"You are not taking it from me," L snapped. They had already agreed on the sleeping arrangements, and now Harry was trying to change them? "I do not use the bed frequently enough to have a claim on it."

"No," Harry said forcefully. "It's still your bed and I can't sleep in it while you sleep in, in a chair-" Harry really did seem upset about the chair. Which was too bad, L thought, as the chair was quite comfortable. "Look, I'll just go sleep on the couch- that would be much better anyway-" Harry was trying to maneuver around L but there was no way he was going to let Harry go back to the sitting room after he'd gotten him to agree to the bedroom.

"No!" L said quickly as he thought. There was nothing for it. He would do his best not to fall asleep, otherwise... He would simply not let go of Harry.
L grabbed Harry by the shoulders and forced him to sit back down on the bed.

"Watch it!" Harry said angrily.

L started herding Harry back onto the bed, away from the door. Then, when Harry had made it halfway across the bed, clearly planning to get off on the other side to get away from him, L got on the bed as well, grabbed Harry, and knocked him down to the pillows.

"What the bloody hell are you doing?" Harry shouted in shock. L just arranged his and Harry's legs so they were mostly under the covers and held onto Harry as hard as he could. "William! What do you think you're doing!" Harry's voice had an edge of panic to it.

L glared at Harry. "You agreed to sleep on the bed because I asked you. Then you refused to sleep on the bed because I was not sleeping on the bed. Exactly what is your problem now?" he asked icily.

"Wha- you- you bloody prat!" Harry sputtered. "I didn't- I mean- I don't mean for us to sleep together! I only felt bad that you didn't have a place to sleep!" Harry glared back at L. "And what's wrong with sleeping on the couch anyway?"

L huffed at Harry. "I want to make sure you don't leave," he answered honestly.

"Leave?" Harry repeated. "I said I would stay!" He glared at L furiously. "Don't you believe me?"

L shook his head. "I trust you will stay since you said you will, but I need to make sure," L hesitated. "I... have something important to discuss with you tomorrow."

Harry stared at him and appeared to be thinking this over. "Well," he finally said. "You don't need to hold on so tightly."

"Actually," L said, dragging Harry closer to him and wrapping his arms around him so Harry was pinned tightly to his chest. "I do."

"No you don't, you git!" Harry shouted as he struggled to break free. "Let go!"

L sighed. "I cannot Harry. If I fall asleep, I need to notice the instant you move."

"Argh!" Harry shouted, as he found it quite impossible to get L off him. "What the hell is so important anyway?" he snapped in annoyance.

"I cannot tell you that now," L said flatly. Strangely, Harry stilled at that and tried to look up at him. L loosened his hold so Harry could move back to see his face.

"Why?" Harry asked in concern.

L looked at Harry and wondered if he shouldn't tell the younger man what he suspected about him now, but... no. He needed Wammy to keep Harry calm, because L, much as he found he liked playing with Harry, could not calm him when he got worked up about something. He sighed again. "I will tell you tomorrow, so please," L emphasized the 'please' as Harry seemed to react to that more than any logical explanation. "-stay here and go to sleep."

Harry stared at him a bit more, looking extremely worried, and L wondered suddenly if Harry had figured out what L knew, but then Harry nodded and lay back down. L tightened his hold a bit and waited for Harry to settle himself before relaxing into the pillow.
He was becoming more upset as he felt himself drifting closer and closer to sleep, and only holding Harry against him was reminding him that everything would work out. He and Wammy would explain the situation to Harry, Harry would go with them, and then L would solve the case with Harry's help. Harry was right here in his arms, so that proved it.

His thoughts weren't making any sense. L clutched Harry tightly and tried to put all thoughts and worries from his mind. He needed to be alert for tomorrow.

A while after Harry had already drifted off, L was surprised to feel Harry's arms curling around him. He looked down at the younger man's head, tucked into his shoulder, and blinked. Right. Even if the thought didn't make complete sense, Harry was here and that meant everything would be alright. L wrapped a leg over Harry's and held onto him as if he might be snatched away at any moment.

Everything would work out right- he would make sure of it.

When Harry woke the next morning, he could feel William breathing into his hair. He jerked back slightly and felt William's hands tighten around his back and William's legs hooked around his knees clench- wait a second... When had William's legs gotten around his?! Harry jerked a knee forward and shoved William away from him as hard as he could. William (who'd been dozing and wasn't fully awake) fell off the side of the tall bed with an "Oomph!"

Harry stared wide eyed at the empty space next to him and then moved over to the side to look down. William was laying on his back and blinking at the ceiling. When he saw Harry's head poke over the edge of the bed, his eyes narrowed darkly.

"Er, sorry?" Harry mumbled uncertainly. "Wasn't expecting to wake up like that."

William glared at him as he levered himself off the floor and stood. "You fell asleep like that, why wouldn't you expect to wake the same way?" he asked snidely.

Harry sat up and glared back. "Well, when I fell asleep, you didn't have your legs around me!"

"My arms were around you," William said flatly as he looked down at Harry. "Adding my legs is not so great a difference that it warrants such violent action."

Harry stared at William. "You don't get it, do you?"

"Don't get what?" William asked blankly, glaring even more darkly now.

Yeah, William had no clue what sleeping with someone in a bed meant... Harry had thought so last night and hearing William's explanation now only reinforced the theory.

"Never mind," Harry said resignedly. He didn't want to have to explain this to William, and now that they were awake and out of bed, it didn't matter so much anyway.

"Didn't you say you had something to talk about today?" Harry asked after a yawn, as he got up and stretched. William looked down suddenly and then walked out the door. Huh, well that was odd. Harry pushed the long sleeves of the shirt William had loaned him over his elbows and padded after the strange man into the sitting room.

When he entered, Harry found William sitting crouched on a chair off to the side, looking out a window at the predawn sky. He didn't turn around as he told Harry they had to wait for Thomas to wake up. Harry shrugged and went to sit on the couch.
"I don’t suppose there's anything to eat, is there?" Harry asked slowly, not sure if it was rude or not to ask for breakfast after essentially being forced to spend the night in someone's hotel room.

William got up from the chair and wandered over to the room phone to order a breakfast tea. Then he dropped the phone back in the cradle and went back to his chair and window.

Okay... Harry wondered what in the world was bothering William so much that he would stop talking to him. William had always been fairly obnoxious about talking to Harry, even when he wished he wouldn’t.

It was incredibly worrying really, the odd way William was acting, both now and last night. Quite apart from getting into bed with him and then refusing to let him go, William had said "please." William, who had no manners to speak of, who avoided using any social niceties like "goodbye" or "thank you" or "sorry." Hearing William actually ask politely for something had shocked Harry so much, he'd just lay quietly with him and gone to sleep.

The tea came just as Thomas walked out of his room, fully dressed and glancing worriedly at Harry and William sitting on opposite sides of the room, not talking to each other. Harry silently helped Thomas set the tea and scones down and William wandered over to peck at a sugar encrusted danish. Harry and Thomas drank their tea and when they were all done, Thomas told Harry quietly that they needed to talk to him about something.

Harry nodded and looked over to William who'd gone back to the seat by the window. Thomas started talking and told Harry that first off, they did like him, very much, and that was why they were so worried about him. What?

"Wait, why're you worried about me?" Harry asked, confused. Hadn't they settled the Dursley issue already?

"Well, Harry," Thomas said slowly. "We know about your life before moving to Argyle Square."

Harry froze and stared wide-eyed at Thomas. What?

"Huh?" Harry gasped out.

William got up from his chair at that point and stalked over to Harry on the couch. "We know Harry."

Harry got up and backed away, breathing quickly and William followed him slowly while Thomas got up to move around the back of the couch. They knew? They knew he was- that he was-

He grinned shakily, this couldn't be right. "You're kidding, right? What about my life is so worrying?"

William looked at him calmly and then started listing off all the things he and Thomas "knew" about Harry's life. Harry felt his eyes widen even further as he listened and he stopped breathing for a moment. What?!!

"Wait a minute," Harry interrupted, stunned. "You think what?"

William didn't blink at all at Harry's shocked question, he simply repeated himself- word for word- in a slower and clearer tone.

"We know that you were taken as a child to a hidden institution and were trained in a variety of skills focusing on combat, stealth, and basic survival. You became part of a tight-knit, secret organization
which operates under the British government's radar, with its own establishment and rules. After your training finished and you began your new 'job' as part of this organization officially, you realized it was a mistake and sought to escape the life you'd built. You hid at nine Argyle Square and attempted to make a new life for yourself by first waiting for your fellows to stop looking for you and then going out to learn a new skill set - cooking. You have unfortunately been found by your old companions and they are urging you to return to your old place with them.

"Thomas and I felt it was best to offer you a second option," William stopped his speech and moved closer to where Harry stood frozen in shock, gazing at him more seriously than Harry had ever seen him before.

"Harry, Thomas and I do not believe you have done anything wrong. You were taken as a child and the choices you made since that time are not your responsibility. I personally believe that you only went along with things so long because you enjoyed what you were taught," William smiled slightly at this. "This does not make you a bad person - I agree that learning such things is fascinating and would be happy to discuss them with you. But Harry, you do not need to go back - there is another choice for you to make."

William paused, took a breath and told Harry with desperate sincerity, "You can come with us. We will help you."

William and Thomas were watching Harry now, waiting for a response, but all Harry could do was stare at William with his mouth open, more shocked than he'd ever been in his life. He hadn't even been this surprised when Hagrid had told him for the first time that he was a wizard, and that had been a literally life-changing event.

Harry took a gulp of air and looked quickly between William and Thomas, he was taking too long to answer and they were starting to look at him worriedly, clearly thinking that he might either bolt for it or pass out. William grabbed his arm and led him back over to the couch and all Harry could do was follow numbly, still trying to figure out what to say.

He was certain that, despite what William and Thomas believed (and despite how oddly familiar what William described sounded), they hadn't really figured the truth out at all. Harry was positive that, if they had, the word 'magic' would have come up at least once.

Instead, Harry got the unbelievable impression that William and Thomas thought he had been kidnapped as a child and was forced to participate in some kind of secret spy training program and then somehow escaped from it. Oh, and they apparently thought Luna (because it had to be Luna they were talking about, as Harry hadn't been out with any of his friends in the muggle world except Luna) was part of this secret spy-thingy and had hunted him down to take him back to a life of crime.

Harry was starting to come out of his shock and thought that he must really be nutter or something, because the image of Luna as a spy was so funny that Harry almost laughed aloud before he gasped and held it back. William had moved to sit beside Harry, distracting him because William was sitting normally on the couch and was rubbing his back in an effort to calm him. Harry blinked and looked up to see that he was being watched carefully by both William and Thomas on either side of him. He really needed to think of something to say.

"So what was your other theory?" Harry blurted out.

William's eyes narrowed and his hand paused as it went up Harry's back. "Pardon?"

"Your other theory," Harry thought he might as well continue as he didn't have any better idea what to say. "You told me the first one, you have to have another - something better - because this one is
complete rubbish."

William withdrew his hand and looked at Harry. "Harry- you cannot deny this. We have proof."

Harry laughed. Proof. Right. "I don't believe that! If you had proof of anything we wouldn't be having this conversation!"

We'd be having a totally different one, he thought.

William's eyes narrowed. "Do you doubt my ability to find proof?"

"Well, yeah," Harry shrugged. "Pretty much everything you said is wrong- so any 'proof' you have has to be wrong too."

William stared silently at Harry and Harry wondered if he'd made a mistake in challenging William directly, missing an opportunity to smooth things over. Bugger. Harry tried to think what he should do. His interrogation class at the auror department had covered with-holding information and giving misinformation when captured by an enemy-- main idea in those scenarios was to stay silent. But Harry couldn't just ignore William and Thomas- they were his friends.

Harry had always hated lying to his friends. But he couldn't tell two muggles about the magical world, no matter how much he liked them.

As Harry tried to work out how he was going to ease his muggle friends' worries without breaking wizarding law, he missed William and Thomas exchanging a look over his head. Harry jerked up suddenly- he had to figure out why his they had come to such a wild conclusion. Harry was actually embarrassed he hadn't thought of that sooner, he must have been more shocked than he thought.

"Er," Harry looked hesitantly at William. He knew he should be going about things more subtly, but Harry had only been good at that sort of thing when it was desperately important. Besides, William and Thomas were his friends and Harry wanted to be as honest with them as he could since, well, he wouldn't be able to tell them the truth at all. "Exactly what do you mean by 'proof'?" Harry winced, definitely not subtle, but at least it was honest.

"Ready to confess and accept our help?" William asked Harry flatly.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I just told you, you were wrong! I only want to know what you think you found out that made you go totally hatstand!"

William's eyes widened at that and then narrowed.

Maybe I could have phrased that better, Harry thought.

"If everything was wrong, why does it matter what proof I have?" William snapped at Harry.

Harry's own eyes narrowed. This would probably be easier if William didn't insist on being such a prat. "Obviously I want to know because whatever it is made you think I'm some kind of ex-criminal on the run!"

"And you're not?" William said, sneering.

"No, you idiot!" Harry yelled.

Thomas came up suddenly and pushed Harry and William away from each other.

"Enough!" Thomas said loudly. "Both of you!" Thomas glared at William, causing him to glance at
the ground with a frown. Thomas turned to Harry and his look softened some. "Harry, I know you're not going to like hearing this, but William and I have been looking into your background." Thomas paused as Harry stared at him, and knelt down. "And we've found quite a few inconsistencies in your records that can indicate any number of illegal activities. You claim that we are wrong, but we do know you are involved in something, Harry, so you really must tell us what it is. Please, Harry," Thomas begged quietly. "We do want to help you."

Harry gaped a bit. They'd been investigating him? Was that even legal? Harry really wanted to be angry at this breach of privacy, and had it been William who told him, in his typical monotone, Harry was certain he would be. But having Thomas almost kneel before him and look at him so sadly and beg him to be honest with them and let them help him... Oh, Merlin, Harry felt guilty. They'd invaded his privacy, had totally the wrong idea about him, then said he was lying when he told them so, and he felt guilty!

Harry really didn't want to lie with Thomas still looking at him like that, but what could he say? 'Oh, yeah, well- it wasn't a spy school, it was a magic school.' Hah. Then they'd believe him or not and either way, Obliviators would be knocking on their door and Harry would lose his two muggle friends forever. How the bloody hell did he get involved in a warped problem like this?

"What inconsistencies?" Harry asked, determined to go through with his original plan of trying to explain whatever information they had about him in a logical (and legal) muggle fashion. He had the sad thought that he might need a better plan soon, as he felt William all but jump off the couch and stalk angrily away from them.

Thomas sighed and raised himself to sit beside Harry on the couch. "Well Harry, for one thing, you have no records from the time you turn eleven to now."

Harry stared at the sitting table off to the side, chewing his lip. What exactly would be the logical muggle explanation for that? He knew what the traditional wizard answer to a muggle would be- "They all burned." But that was because wizards didn't know very much about technology nowadays. They didn't know about computers and how information was stored in them and over the internet and that just breaking one computer might not erase the information. Harry knew though, and he wondered suddenly how all the muggleborns dealt with this issue. How did squibs deal with it?

Unfortunately, Harry didn't know because he had spent the last decade of his life learning how to live in the wizarding world exclusively, because that was what he thought he'd be doing. He hadn't expected to leave his job in the wizarding world and start wandering around the muggle world more often, and he certainly hadn't expected to make friends with two muggles who apparently couldn't stay out of other people's business.

Well, there was nothing for it. Harry couldn't bear to lie to Thomas, but he couldn't tell the truth either. He took a deep breath.

"I have no explanation for that," Harry declared with as much bravado as he could muster. Thomas blinked at him in surprise and Harry could hear William stop his pacing to whirl around behind them. But now that Harry had decided what to do, there was no way he'd back down. "What else?"

"What?" Thomas asked blankly.

"What other inconsistencies do you have?" Harry asked calmly.

William practically growled and stalked around the side of the couch to stand in front of Harry and lean angrily over him. "Are you joking?" William demanded. "You don't have an explanation?"
Harry stared defiantly at William. "No, I don't. It's not as though I write records for myself, so I have no idea why they aren't there."

William took a deep breath and then relaxed into that utterly blank, half-lidded face that creeped Harry out so much. "They are not there because they either weren't written or were erased. Who do you think would do such a thing, Harry?"

"I haven't a clue," Harry said as innocently as he could.

"The correct answer, Harry, would be the people who took you and trained you," William said flatly. If Harry hadn't gotten so used to William slipping in and out of that expressionless state, he would have missed the way William's pupils were contracted and focused on his face. William was furious with him. Harry wondered if he should be more careful how he answered from now on. Then again, it wasn't as though William could get any more angry than he already was.

"Well, if you really want to believe that, go ahead. But I still think you've jumped to a pretty stupid conclusion."

William's jaw clenched. Maybe he could get angrier. "You do not disagree that you were taken from your relatives to be trained for an occupation of questionable morals?"

"I totally disagree," Harry said indignantly. "First off, I left my relatives by choice, and quite happily I might add, to attend a boarding school, which, I should also add, sent me back to my relatives every summer--definitely not by choice. Secondly, the school taught me the skills I needed to be hired for a job I picked out. It was all perfectly normal and not... whatever it is you've convinced yourself it was."

"Then why are there no records of your education?" William asked triumphantly.

That was it. That was how Harry could get out of this mess. He needed to get school records that muggles could understand. But before that, he had to explain why his records weren't available over the internet.

"My school doesn't have computers," Harry said quickly.

Thomas shifted beside him and asked "What?" in confusion. Harry had been so focused on William staring at him with that creepy, fish-eyed glare, he'd forgotten Thomas was still there.

"My school," Harry turned to him, relieved to not be staring into William's black gaze anymore. "It's really old fashioned. Doesn't have computers or anything electronic. All their records are on paper."

"On paper?" Thomas asked incredulously. "What do they do when their students need to apply for a job?"

"The student has to request a transcript be mailed to the prospective employer," Harry said simply. That was actually how it was done, except it wasn't yearly marks that were sent, but O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. scores. "The transcript is copied out, then signed by the Headmaster or mistress and embossed with the school's seal. That way everyone knows it's official."

"Why do they not keep computers?" William asked, drawing Harry's attention briefly back to him. Harry ended up turning to Thomas to answer anyway.

"They just never have. I know cellphones don't work properly in the area, so maybe computers don't either," Harry shrugged. Actually, Harry knew that computers and any electronic device didn't work around Hogwarts, but he wasn't sure an 'electronic-device-dead-area' would fly with William and
"Cellphones and computers are very different, Harry," William said slowly. "Just because a cellphone loses its signal doesn't mean a computer will shut off."

Oh, Merlin... Harry knew that- he did! He remembered that cellphones needed a signal from a tower or a satellite or something, and computers... Those were plugged in. Harry was starting to group all electronic devices together the way wizards did- which was going to make explaining the "no computers" situation even more suspicious. Maybe William and Thomas would just assume any weird gaps in Harry's explanation were due to being raised in general ignorance... which, he had been, come to think of it.

But no! That wouldn't work- William and Thomas were already suspicious because of gaps in Harry's records, so not knowing how everyday muggle objects worked was likely only going to increase their suspicions! Harry was essentially trapped as far as explanations went- nothing he said would fix this. His only hope was to get those school records (in muggle format) mailed to him and hope that would fill in any holes better than he could, so that William would be satisfied.

"Look," Harry said as he stood up. "It's just a... traditional thing. The school never bought computers or anything when they came out and they probably never will. So," Harry edged around Thomas to get away from William, whom had refused to back away when Harry stood. "Everyone just works around that and they all get along fine."

Harry managed to get away from the couch and table and stood looking awkwardly at William and Thomas. William was still staring at him blankly and Thomas was holding his head in his hands. Harry winced. Was this really so worrisome for Thomas?

"I'll ask if they can send me a transcript, okay?" Harry tried hopefully, as he started walking toward the door. He really should go- nothing he said was helping, and anyway he had to meet up with Ron and Hermione. "That way, you won't have to worry anymore, okay?"

William moved quickly from his place between the couch and sitting table and blocked Harry's path. Harry flinched. He didn't know what other arguments he could make- a school transcript was all he could think of...

"Harry," William said slowly before glancing at the floor. "That won't help, Harry." William looked up and stared hard at Harry. "Documents can be forged after all."

Harry huffed. "Then what exactly am I supposed to do?" he said angrily. "You won't believe me, you won't believe anything I show you- what do you want?!"

"The truth," William said as he stared. Harry sucked in his breath and glanced away. He couldn't tell them that- they would have their memories erased, or think he was crazy and then he'd never see them again. William turned his gaze to the ground and looked oddly sad.

Harry thought that was it. He couldn't ease his friends' fears, he couldn't tell them the truth, he couldn't do anything! He shuffled his feet, struck by sorrow suddenly as he realized there was nothing he could do to keep his two odd friends. Hermione was right, having muggle friends just caused problems.

"I'll just... I need to go," Harry said quietly. "I have to meet up with my friends."

Walking past William was much harder than it should have been and Harry was depressed that William didn't even glance up at him as he passed. But when he was only a step past him, William
suddenly turned toward Harry, grabbed him around the throat and shoulders and before he could react, there was a sharp pain on his butt.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Harry shouted as he threw off William's arm and turned to face him. The room continued to spin after Harry stopped and he blinked confusedly at William. William was watching him carefully and backed up to place a syringe on the sitting table before he straightened and spoke.

"I cannot allow you to return, Harry," William said calmly. The room swam again and Harry suddenly noticed how sleepy he was. "I am worried that you do not fully understand what may happen to you."

"What'll happen... to me..?" Harry said slowly. He was so sleepy now and William kept tilting sideways so it was hard to focus on him. What did he do?

"What did... did... you give me?" Harry asked suddenly. The room spun again and Harry stumbled as he tried to raise a hand to his face to rub his eyes.

William was suddenly beside Harry and holding firmly onto his arm and bracing his back. The room was tilting crazily now and Harry was sure he would have fallen if William hadn't caught him. William led Harry carefully back to the couch while Thomas got up and watched them worriedly.

"A sedative, Harry. I need you to go to sleep now."

"Wha..?" Harry was having trouble focusing on what William was saying. He'd given him something- a sedative... "Why... did'ja gi’ me... a sed'tive?" Harry slurred, trying to keep his eyes open as William helped him lie back on the couch.

"I cannot let you return to people who might hurt you, Harry," William said quietly as he lifted Harry's feet onto the couch.

What did he say, Harry wondered. Someone would hurt him? Harry thought maybe he should ask about that- had some of the death eaters escaped from Azkaban or something? But he forgot what he wanted to say when William started petting his head and brushing his hair out of his face. That felt really nice and the room had stopped spinning once he lay down. In fact, Harry thought the couch might be rocking gently from side to side and combined with William patting his head like that, Harry was more comfortable than he could remember ever being. He felt himself start to drift away and just as everything started turning black, Harry was sure William leaned down to murmur something in his ear.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah. That manipulative, guilt-tripping, crazy-asshole. It gets worse, I promise.

By the way, this was actually a fully complete chapter. I just needed to write about three, maybe four chapters between 9 and this one to have a full update to this point. So close, am I right?
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Yep, so... I had wondered whether to have L take a regular airline versus a private jet, then gave him a ridiculously convoluted plan to have both take off at the same time, with Wammy on the jet with a decoy, and him on a public plane with Harry. Gotta make sure the criminal conspiracy can't track them after all. Yeah, it was pretty ridiculous. I was mostly looking forward to Harry waking up and beating the crap out of L.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14- The Kidnapping

As soon as Harry was sleeping peacefully, L got up and went into the bedroom to fetch his bag. When he came out, Wammy was shaking his head sadly as he brought his own bag out of his room along with a pair of shoes and roll of socks. He stood silently beside L as he removed Harry’s trainers, trousers and pants and replaced them all with his own clothes and the footwear Wammy handed to him.

Once that was done, L calmly handed the discarded clothes to Wammy, who then folded them up with the shirt Harry had worn yesterday and began packing them in a box. There was a brief moment where both L and Wammy puzzled over the presence of a short, polished stick from Harry's trouser pocket and over the fact that his wallet didn't seem to have anything in it- despite L having seen Harry put change into it the day before. Both items, after L decided they would be of no use, were also placed in the box and sealed.

After Wammy wrote out an address on the now sealed box with Harry's clothes in it, he turned to L and looked pointedly at him. L ignored him and went back to sit on the couch by Harry, petting his hair and looking blankly at the floor. Wammy sighed and went downstairs to summon the car and check out.

Soon after that, L was sitting in the backseat of his upgraded 1960s Rolls Royce with Harry propped up against him. Wammy, after a brief stop to drop the package in a post box, was driving them to Heathrow. The car was silent for the trip, with L staring blankly ahead as he mindlessly rubbed Harry's arm, until Wammy turned them onto the M4.

"Are you certain this was the best course of action?" Quillish asked quietly as he glanced at L, so forlorn looking, in the rearview mirror. L's head jerked and his hand clenched on Harry's arm. But his only response to Quillish's inquiry was a stiff nod. "L?" Quillish asked concernedly.

"What do you want me to say?" L muttered. "If we had allowed Harry to meet up with those people, we might never have seen him again- you know he told them about us and that they disapproved."

Quillish sighed. "I know, L. I know," he glanced in the mirror again. "But I do think this is rather extreme. Couldn't we have managed to convince Harry to simply come with us?"
L looked blankly at Quillish in the mirror. "You heard him, Wammy. Harry is utterly convinced there is nothing wrong with his life—despite the fact that there are certain aspects he cannot tell us about." L lowered his head again and began rubbing his hand up and down Harry's arm once more.

"Yes..." Quillish said sadly. "I don't understand how he can believe that though... He certainly acted as though us finding anything out about his life was bad— but then all he did to refute us was offer poorly thought out excuses and deny everything!" Quillish shook his head in confusion. "I know Harry is smarter than that—"

"He didn't want to lie," L muttered from the back. Quillish glanced in the mirror again.

"Pardon?"

"Harry didn't want to lie to us," L said flatly. "He wouldn't tell us the truth, but we did connect with him enough that he won't simply lie to us anymore."

Quillish watched the road quietly for a few minutes as he thought about that.

"But then, couldn't we have convinced him to at least humor us in our worries?"

L shook his head. "No, he fully believes that his life is not in any danger and the fact that he likes us will not change that. He won't give up the life he has just because we are worried, because, to him, there is nothing to be worried about."

The car fell into a contemplative silence once more and Quillish drove automatically as he tried to reason out, for himself, why Harry needed to be brought with them forcefully like this. He'd come to quite like Harry and he was very pleased with how well the boy and L got on. Quillish had always worried somewhat about L never having any friends or close acquaintances aside from himself. He had hoped that Harry's involvement in L's life would become at least semi-permanent, so that even when they had solved the mystery of the secret organization, Harry and L would still speak to each other.

But this event was likely to ruin any chances of Harry ever wanting to continue a relationship with either of them. Once Harry woke from his drug induced sleep, he would be furious and would probably refuse any explanation they gave him. So, even if L was able to discover the organization and bring them to justice, even if he was acting to protect Harry's life, this one event would lose him his friendship with Harry forever.

Which Quillish thought was desperately unfair and which he was sad to see that L understood completely, if the way he clung to Harry's sleeping form was any indication.

Quillish sighed again as he turned his eyes back to the road.

In the end, Harry's life was more important than his relationship with them— a fact L clearly believed, or he would never have enacted such a plan in the first place. Quillish had actually been surprised when L had explained it to him. On all previous cases, L took into account 'acceptable losses' and was always prepared to continue despite them. But it seemed that Harry's life was not an acceptable loss to L. So, they would simply have to do what they could— protect Harry, even from himself, and hope that maybe he would forgive them when this was all over.

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Making their way through Heathrow Airport went smoothly. L had been worried during the car ride that Harry's "friends" would have already caught on to his plan and made arrangements to stop them the moment they entered the terminal. What else could he expect from such a shady group that
seemed to have been appearing and disappearing wherever they felt like for years?

Still, luck seemed to be with them, which gave L greater confidence that his plan to rescue Harry would work perfectly. Maybe Harry would even come to his senses and accept their help once he realized exactly how capable L really was.

L glanced down at Harry's sleeping head as he pushed the airport wheelchair along the walkway.

No... L wasn't that deluded. Harry would probably argue for hours once he woke. But L still held out hope that he could maneuver him into accepting help anyway. After all, Harry argued the way a child would- so once L patiently took away all of Harry's options in the argument, he would only have to wait for Harry to tire himself out before giving in. Shouldn't take more than a day or two.

Due to Harry's status as a passenger requiring assistance (L had Wammy book a special aid ticket for him expecting he might refuse their offer), L, Wammy and Harry were the first allowed on the plane. While Wammy stowed their two bags in the overhead compartment, L lifted Harry out of the wheelchair and into his seat by the window. L allowed the steward to take the wheelchair back out of the plane and began fussing with Harry's body, making sure he was properly situated, before buckling him in.

They had arranged things so that Harry would be in the seat by the window in the furthest row back for first class. L would be across the aisle from him and would be able to easily see if he needed anything, and Wammy would take the seat ahead of him to act as a buffer between Harry and the other passengers.

As for Harry's state during the flight, he would of course be mostly unconscious for the duration, only waking enough to move about with aid and perhaps eat something. L would have to keep him sedated until they had reached the safe-house he'd ordered prepared for them. He couldn't remember exactly what excuse they had given the airline for Harry needing to be kept like this- some medical condition that didn't do well with plane travel, he thought- but it was enough (or rather, Wammy had paid them enough) to keep questions at a minimum.

While waiting for the other passengers to finish boarding and for the plane to reach cruising height, L watched Harry obsessively. Was his head lolling too much to the side? Were his legs comfortable tucked in the corner of the curved wall? Was his seat belt too tight or too loose? Each time L decided Harry needed to be readjusted, he would unbuckle his own belt and walk over to arrange him again. Wammy would shake his head exasperatedly each time L rose from his seat.

When the plane was finally at the right altitude and fully on its way, L allowed himself to relax some. No one had tried to stop them at the airport and no one had followed them onto the plane- that is, no one boarding had shown them any particular interest. He unbuckled himself and rose to fiddle with the controls on Harry's seat. He would be more comfortable lying down, L was sure. Now he just needed to find where Harry's pillow and blanket had been stowed and he would be set for the next few hours of the flight.

Harry had been fully under the affects of the drug for about two hours. It would take another two at least before he came out of it, and even then, he would be groggy and unaware of his surroundings. L would have to allow Harry to work his way through that state (lasting about six hours) before he could give him another dose.

That would be fine though- Harry seemed to be responding to the drug normally, which meant when he was 'awake' he would be drowsy and submissive to anyone directing him. So L would be able to feed Harry and help him take care of any hygienic needs, which would probably put the plane staff more at ease. Someone requiring constant assistance on their plane was something they could
understand, but someone who slept through an entire eight hour flight without once getting up would raise suspicions.

But, until Harry needed him again, L planned on sending a few discrete emails to Interpol. Now that the investigation had reached the point where it was necessary to leave the country, L needed the assistance of a police force— one large enough to not be easily swayed by whatever methods the secret organization employed to influence the British police. Possibly the FBI... they did owe him for all the good press they'd gotten from one of their agents "solving" the L.A.B.B. case.

((L YOU CRAZY ASS BASTARD!!!!!!!!!!!! Why didn't Wammy stop you?? Oh, right, he has the spine of a freaking snail.))

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Harry woke slowly, blinking at the dark ceiling above him. What an odd dream he'd had. He'd spent the night at William's hotel room, then they'd fought and then… Harry was on an airplane and he and William were driving through snow. Or had they driven through the snow, then got on an airplane? It was all rather muddled. About the only thing he could recall clearly was William being with him throughout— holding him, helping him walk, talking to him in a quiet murmur.

Harry groaned as he sat up. That was too bad though, because he was fairly certain the fight had actually happened and William was no longer talking to him. But it would be nice if they could make up and be friends again…. Harry blinked as he glanced around the room. This wasn't his bedroom, nor was it William's. Where was he?

The door near the end of the room opened just then, and William walked in. Harry stared.

"Good to see you awake, Harry." William watched him carefully, staying on the other side of the bed near the door. Harry felt his head spin.

"You-- what are you doing here?" he asked incredulously. William shuffled his feet, glanced out of the room, then turned back to him.

"I brought you here, Harry."

"Here?" Harry repeated stupidly. "Where- where is here? Where are we? Where did you bring me?" Harry gasped, his panic and confusion rising with each question. Where was he? Where was his wand? Oh, good Lord, where were his clothes? William waved his hands weakly at him.

"Please calm down, Harry. It's not good for you to get too excited just after working the sedative out of your system."

"What?" Harry yelled. He got out of the bed like it was on fire, a desperate tumble and jump that resulted in his legs getting tangled in the sheet and sending him crashing to the ground. William was kneeling next to him in an instant, trying to help him get untangled so he could stand properly.

As soon as Harry's feet were clear of cloth, he shrugged out of William's hold and scrambled away
from him. Turning to brace against the wall, Harry looked back at William who was staring at him with that blank gaze, frozen in his crouch on the floor. Harry stared at him worriedly before he felt he had enough breath to speak once more.

"What's going on?" his voice sounded thready. Not that he could help it really-- he had an idea what was going on, but it was so horrible he couldn't think about it.

William looked down and moved back on his heels so his knees would be brought up in front of his body, sitting on the floor now the way he normally sat in chairs. "I brought you here for your protection, Harry."

"Brought me where?" Harry asked forcefully. He couldn't think about this, he couldn't think. But he should know where he was so he could figure out how to get home.

"A safe house, Harry, you don't have to worry about being found, no one knows this place is here," William said in what he likely thought was a soothing tone. Wasted on Harry no matter the effort, as all he could focus on were the words themselves. No one could find him. Harry stared at William in absolute horror.

Chapter End Notes

This cuts off RIGHT at the part I was most excited about. L took Harry to the wilds of northern Canada, because reasons, Wammy eventually catches up with them, Harry wakes up and is confused. But as he remembers what happened as the drugs wear off, he gets progressively more pissed off. He beats down L, makes a break for it, and then... runs into an electric fence. He doesn't have his wand and he has no clue where he is, and then he electrocutes himself.

L is freaking out, he kinda considers Harry his friend and Harry... may never speak to him again. They lock Harry up "for his own good", Harry insists they're completely nuts, everyone argues and feels very bad about themselves. After a day, Harry is allowed out of the locked room (L may or may not be feeling guilty and so may be trying to be nice) and wanders around, refusing to talk to L. So, L watches him on cameras, which Harry doesn't like. He goes outside and finds more cameras, but comes up with a plan to get past the fence and away from the cameras so he can apparate. L is feeling even worse by now, and Wammy too, but Harry doesn't want to talk to them--he's got his escape plan going.

Eventually, Harry manages to escape and gets out of sight to apparate home, he takes a freaked out Rowag and hides in Grimmwauld place. L and Wammy are busy freaking out themselves, they can't find Harry and L is convinced that the criminal organization DID follow them and retrieved Harry the instant he got out. Was it a plan, a test, a dare? They flee, and a week later L chances calling Harry on the cellular. They fight. They scream a lot, it's very emotional, and then Harry buries the phone out in the back of Grimmwauld's yard. L can't figure out how he's unable to track the phone (magical wards) and assumes Harry has rejoined the criminal organization and he failed at saving Harry so hard he basically sent him straight into criminal hell. The End.

Then I was going to write a few snippets of what Harry and L were doing from other characters' perspectives for the next year or so. Harry opens a bakery, L cracks down on crime all over the world, both are grumpy idiots. Then the next story would start up right where Death Note opens up with Light killing off criminals by the hundreds. Stay
tuned!
I KNEW IT!! I KNEW I WROTE THIS SOMEWHERE!!!!! I FOUND IT!!!!
SORRY This is what was meant to be the "start" of the second Encounters story!! You
guys can finally figure out what happened!!! ARGHH!!! Sorry. You guys got a chapter
that I know made no sense, but I thought maybe I just didn't have the other bits I'd
written, and I couldn't remember everything I wrote. BUT IT'S OKAY NOW!!
Because HERE YOU GO!!!

Also, I should mention, that yeah, these are all kinda unedited, so they probably all have
random rants and whining from me. I donno, if it bothers you all I can weed them out.
Let me know, okay?

SO, after the short chapters of other characters view of Harry and L in all their messed
up glory, the second story would start with the Kira killings making world news.

L would be investigating and making contact with InterPol, and then make his daring
challenge to Kira on Kanto TV feeds. Then the international news would catch hold and
spread the story to everywhere!

Harry will have opened a cake shop in muggle London, along Charing Cross Road near
the Leakey Cauldron. It's more a muggle business than anything, but he gets wizard
traffic too. The wizarding world know immediately when a shinigami enters the world,
so when criminals start dying, the international wisengamut issues public safety laws
that mostly include avoiding the muggle world for a while. Countries nearest the reaper's
location adopt the practice of wearing masks. So, when the muggle news reports on the
detective L figuring out part of how the reaper's power works and challenging whoever
made a pact with the creature, the wizarding world is thrown into chaos.

Harry doesn't think much of it, other than the muggle detective being insane. But--
thanks to his connection with so many higher-ups in the Ministry, and his refusal to
close his muggle based cake shop until the reaper leaves Earth-- Harry is shown the only
lead the magical world has to L's identity, so he can try to avoid the idiot who
metaphorically painted a target on his back. This lead is a magic photo of 'Watari', L's
only known contact, removing his hat and coat in an Auror monitored hotel room. Harry
recognizes Wammy, and realizes that the enormous idiot detective is the same berk of an
idiot that kidnapped him a year ago.

Then he frets, waffling between telling the ministry so the international community can
more closely monitor the reaper business, and doing something stupid. Basically he's
worried about L, but still furious. So it takes him a couple weeks to come to a decision,
then he tracks L down, using a combination of tracking magic and postal birds.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Harry watched as William—no, L, he reminded himself—shuffled over to a plain couch pushed up against a wall and sprawled leisurely on one end.

"You're not going to sit with your legs up?" Harry asked hesitantly. Honestly, William—L, Harry thought stubbornly—looked rather intimidating like that, legs stretched out before him and leaning back with his arms draped almost gracefully on the back of the couch. He looked much more confident than he normally did, much more arrogant, and Harry felt as though he was being judged for something he didn't fully understand.

"I don't feel like it right now," Will—L—said languidly, casually raising one hand up to prop his head as he studied Harry standing nervously by the doorway. "Besides, I normally don't sit that way here."

"Here? Why not?" Harry asked in sudden confusion. William—L!—sat that way everywhere, why would one place be any different?

"This is my building," Wi—L said simply. "Only I or Wammy ever come here— even deliveries only come as far as the first floor entrance."

Harry blinked. So, Wil—L, L, he thought fiercely. How hard was it to remember that William wasn't his name?—L sat in a crouch everywhere he went because... other people were around and might see him? And who in the world was Wammy?

"I don't get it," Harry said quietly.

L didn't speak, simply stared at him. Harry huffed and looked away from those horribly blank eyes. He shouldn't have said anything, it didn't matter how Wi—L! It didn't matter how L sat! He probably shouldn't have even come here because, of course, L wouldn't do anything stupid that might get him killed.

Except he did, a small voice whispered in Harry's head. L had done something unbearably stupid and Harry, realizing that William—L—his friend, whom he'd kind of almost forgiven and been hoping to see and worried he never would, was in trouble, had rushed off to save him.

But William had never been in any trouble. William didn't even exist, Harry thought bitterly. There was only L, and he had been perfectly safe, playing with dark magic from halfway around the world as if he hadn't a thing to worry about! Now Harry was stuck trying to figure out how to explain to this—this—alphabet detective he didn't know at all, why he had tried so hard to find him.... Why he had bothered to worry about him, when it clearly wasn't necessary. When it really, really wasn't deserved.

Across the room, L sighed and stood from the couch, making his way back over to Harry, who was still standing by the door and staring sadly at the ground by his feet. Harry jerked when Wi—L’s bare feet and baggy pants came into view and looked up quickly. L stared at him a moment more before gently taking Harry's wrist and leading him into the room toward the couch.

"There isn't any particular reason I sit that way," L said as he sat back down, stretching out his legs and curling his toes as he did so. Harry found himself sitting next to him, suspicious about L's sudden
familiarity after the angry, accusing greeting, but curious nonetheless.

"I simply find it to be more comfortable to sit that way when I am required to travel anywhere." L leaned his head against the back of the couch and closed his eyes. "Here, however, I feel perfectly comfortable sitting in whatever manner I like. Sometimes I sit with my legs up, most of the time I don't."

L opened his eyes and looked over at Harry. "Right now, I feel like stretching a bit."

Harry stared at him and blinked again as his head started throbbing. Nothing made sense anymore. He couldn't understand why L was acting so oddly... First he was angry that Harry had come, then he had closed up entirely, and now he was casually explaining his sitting habits while making Harry sit next to him on the couch. Harry... didn't know what he should do.

L sighed again and glared at the floor. "If Wammy were here... he would say I feel more comfortable crouched around people as a defense mechanism," he forced out. "He claims that I dislike other people so much, I 'subconsciously adopt a defensive position to feel more at ease around them.' I admit I would prefer to not be near them at all," he muttered quietly.

Harry wasn't sure what to make of this odd explanation, or who this Wammy person was, but he had caught on to one thing. "Well, I'm sorry I'm bothering you then!" he said as he all but jumped up from his seat. The room spun and he blinked while a rushing noise filled his ears.

L hissed and lunged forward to grab Harry's arm to try and pull him back onto the couch. "Were you listening at all?" he asked. "Obviously, I am not including you when I say 'people,' Harry!"

"You said you didn't like being near other people! You sit all crouched like that because you don't want to be near them and you always sat crouched up around me!" Harry yelled, furious and feeling suddenly nauseous. He had hated William for months. He had worried about William for months. He had given up on ever seeing the mad idiot again, and stupidly felt bad about it. Then, long after Harry had given up, after he'd been prepared to simply forget about William, he found out the man was a, a letter, of all things, and spent weeks more worrying as he watched the massive prat play games with a damn immortal dark creature and slowly realizing he had to help somehow. Now, it turned out he shouldn't have bothered, because William was L, and Harry didn't know him at all, and L didn't even like people!

Why had he come here?

L yanked hard on Harry's arm and sent him sprawling. "I said I am uncomfortable around other people and that my peculiar sitting habits may be a result of attempting to cope with their presence! I never said you were one of those people!" L ground out to Harry as he fell off the couch in an effort to right himself.

"Then why-" Harry tried to say.

"You are the one who remarked on the fact that I was not crouching," L said flatly, glaring at Harry on the floor.

Harry blinked and blushed sullenly. He had, hadn't he? How did he forget that... No, Harry knew. He was so angry at William— at L... for a lot of reasons. Harry had wanted something to blame him for, to fight about. The fact that Harry dearly wanted to punch him probably had a lot to do with that. Because if Harry stopped being angry at the man, he might admit he'd already forgiven him for the colossally misguided attempt to protect him. And even Harry wasn't going to do that until Will—L!--made some show of remorse. Or at least got punished a little.
L slid off the couch to sit by Harry on the floor when he showed no sign of getting up. "Harry... I do not mind being near you," L said slowly and so carefully Harry thought it sounded like he was reciting a memorized line.

"Then why didn't you visit?" Harry said as viciously as he could at the floor, refusing to look at the man. L stayed silent. Harry jerked his head up, the pounding behind his eyes getting worse with fury.

"Why didn't you visit?" he shouted angrily. "Or call? Or anything! For a whole year!" Harry raged. He was panting at the end and his eyes stung and L still hadn't responded, only stared at Harry with too wide eyes. When he started to bring his legs up in a crouch, Harry snarled and tackled him, shouting again. "Why didn't you? Can't you at least answer!?"

Unfortunately, attacking L wasn't the smartest thing Harry had ever done, and, as he shouted at the man, Harry felt one of those long legs twist out from under him to lash out, connecting with his side in a flash of pain. Harry rolled off L, landing away from the couch, and coughed harshly as he clutched his side. That hurt! L rose from where Harry had knocked him down and looked back at him with concern.

"I didn't-- Are you alright, Harry?" L asked hesitantly. Harry winced as he took a deep breath, stretching the muscles L had kicked, and clutched his side harder. L got up hurriedly and approached him cautiously.

"Why didn't you visit?" Harry asked softly when he felt L touch his shoulder. The hand withdrew briefly before coming back to rub along his back.

\[L-H-L-H\]

L stared at Harry's shivering form, thinking how to answer. It wasn't as though he hadn't wanted to visit... especially after Harry opened a cake shop.

"You know why," he said, gently helping Harry up to go sit on the couch. Harry probably would have killed him if he'd ever just strolled back into his life.

"I told you, you were barmy," Harry whispered. "Didn't you believe me?"

L chuckled lightly as he eased Harry onto the couch and then wandered off to the kitchen area of the large room. "I believed you to be the one who was 'barmy',' " he called out while taking an ice tray out of the freezer and dropping cubes onto a towel he laid out on the counter.

"You drugged me, kidnapped me, believed I was some kind of runaway spy-- and you thought I was the crazy one?" Harry asked incredulously behind him. L wrapped the ice up carefully and brought it back to Harry, kneeling beside him and helping to hold it against his side. Harry winced as the cold seeped past the towel and his shirt into the bruised muscles.

"It fits my theory, Harry," L murmured as he stared at the towel wrapped ice packet against Harry's side. "I believe you are still missing school records, health records, birth records-- where are all of those, by the way?" he asked snidely. Harry glared at him.

"I told you I don't know! And that still doesn't give you any right to kidnap a person to Canada!" Harry added indignantly. "Which makes you the nutter-- not me!"

L sighed again and leaned back on the couch, letting Harry hold the ice himself. They would likely never reach an agreement on this particular topic.

"So, what?" Harry asked flatly. "You never bothered to contact me because you were afraid some
non-existant terrorist organization had laid a trap for you using me as bait? You sure it wasn't just so you wouldn't have to admit you were wrong and apologize?"

L thought briefly of Harry tied up as the bait in an animal trap to prevent himself from answering immediately. It wasn't as though he had wanted to just let Harry go.

"Actually, I changed my theory in the face of new evidence."

"Oh?" Harry said with false surprise. "Could you maybe have discovered that you were just a looney and were too embarrassed to admit it?"

L glared at him. "I will kick you again if you continue to antagonize me, Harry."

"Thanks, but once hurts plenty," Harry said waspishly. "And you still haven't told me why I never saw you for a whole year!"

"It's been roughly ten months, Harry- not a full year," L snapped back.

"Then why didn't you call for ten months!" Harry yelled, dropping the towel and spilling ice across the couch cushion as he turned to face L fully.

"I didn't think there was any point!" L shouted back. Harry stared at him, his face showing how much that statement hurt him. L sucked in a breath. Nothing ever went the way he wanted with Harry it seemed. He couldn't even keep control of his temper.

"I thought," L said slowly when Harry turned away from him to stare at the floor. "That you wouldn't want to hear from me."

"Why?" Harry asked softly, still looking away.

"You do recall that I drugged and kidnapped you, don't you Harry?" L asked flatly. Harry snorted, of course he remembered that. "Well, the last time I saw you was when you escaped and then... You didn't go back to Argyle Square."

"Yes I did!" Harry said quickly.

"For how long?" L asked seriously. "Long enough to pack a bag and walk out the door?"

Harry swallowed as his eyes wandered to the side. That was exactly what he'd done, and L couldn't find it in himself to blame him. If such a thing had happened to him... Well, actually L wouldn't have gone back to any place his kidnappers knew about at all.

"I thought that after what happened, you would never want to see me again-- you would justifiably see any further contact as an attempt at stalking or a second attempt at kidnapping," L admitted blankly. He didn't like how the whole situation had played out-- mostly because he came out the obvious loser-- but also because the plan he had made had left no reliable opening for a backup. Losing control of Harry had meant that he lost the younger man's trust and L didn't want to actually force Harry into anything. The only reason he had acted so rashly then was because he had believed he could persuade Harry to his point of view. But then Harry had managed to leave before L could speak to him properly, making the whole plan and all his efforts fruitless.

"Also," L hesitated. Harry would likely accept what he had already said as a reasonable excuse for dropping contact, but there was more to L's reasoning and, while he didn't think Harry would like it, L felt compelled to share his new theory anyway. He still wanted to rescue Harry from the people hiding in secret from the law after all and it would be easier to do so if Harry trusted him. Which was
something he would only do if L was honest with him-- or, at least, as honest as he could be.

"I no longer believe you are affiliated with a hidden terrorist cell."

Harry perked up at that, possibly thinking L might offer him an apology.

"I believe you to be part of a long standing, secret cult," L said as he glanced up at the ceiling innocently.

Harry stared at him. "You-you're joking, right?"

"I am not, Harry," L said, turning to look at Harry. "You are involved with a group that keeps itself apart from the established society-- do not try to deny it, Harry!" L said swiftly when Harry opened his mouth to protest. "Not without proof."

They spent a long moment glaring at each other before Harry gave in with a huff and turned away. L let out the breath he'd been holding and continued.

"You already admitted that your 'friends' within this group disapproved of your association with myself and Wammy--"

"They didn't disapprove! They just thought--!" Harry started before clamping his mouth shut.

"Thought what, Harry?"

"Tha-that it would be, er, awkward..." Harry said lamely. "They didn't 'disapprove' or anything...." An obvious lie.

"But having friends outside of your group is, as they told you, awkward," L said flatly, daring Harry to contradict his own words. Harry stayed quiet. L nodded as if this only confirmed his statement.

"It is awkward to have friends outside of the group because you are not allowed to bring them into the group, correct?" L asked, not expecting an answer and Harry fulfilled that expectation by staying stubbornly silent and glaring at the floor in front of him. L let out a sharp breath, Harry was much too easy to read.

"Only those born into the group and some few children deemed 'special' for whatever reason are allowed to join, correct?" Harry sucked in a breath in shock. This was clearly exactly the case, if Harry's worried expression was any sign. Then the boy's face went blank.

"You really are crazy," Harry said quietly. "You're so busy coming up with ridiculous theories about why I haven't got proper records when you should be focusing on the murderer you taunted on live television."

"I came up with this theory last year, Harry," L said darkly. Harry was obviously attempting to divert his attention. "After I was shocked by your staunch loyalty to people who had committed crimes they were never punished for. Only someone brought up with a cult mindset would be so obstinate."

"Obstinate?" Harry gasped angrily, all thoughts of distracting L from the conversation forgotten. "Why-You-you prat!"

"What would your cult do if they found out I even suspected this much, Harry?" L asked as Harry started to get up angrily. Harry froze and stared at L with wide eyes. That was all the confirmation L needed-- Harry was trying to protect both the cult and him from each other.
L looked away, not sure quite how he felt now. On one hand, he was very angry with Harry for playing dumb for so long, and with himself for not realizing the full extent of Harry's psychological conditioning earlier. On the other hand, he found himself secretly pleased that Harry had broken enough of the brainwashing he'd grown up with to at least try to side with him.

However, while Harry had been trying to use the topic as a distraction, he was right about where L's attentions needed to be focused just now. L would have plenty of time to deal with Harry's cult after the Kira case was solved and until then, it appeared that Harry would willingly abandon his fellows for the sake of L's safety. L smirked. Meaning that Harry could be kept under careful watch until L was ready to start up investigating the cult once more.

"Never mind, Harry," L said calmly, turning back to the younger man's startled form with an impish smile. "Why don't you sit down and tell me how you found me. I am most curious you see-- no one's ever managed it before."

Harry stared at L in confusion, clearly not sure about the sudden change in topic. "I followed a post bird."

A post bird?

L frowned. Could he mean something like his trained owl? But how could an owl or any bird find a location they had never been to?

He was about to ask, when he noticed Harry was swaying on his feet. L closed his mouth and watched him, considering the past hour. Harry was much less coherent than their previous interactions, which could be due to the emotional potency of the meeting. But they had emotional conversations before, and Harry had never had an issue keeping up with L's changes in conversation before. Now he was just standing there, blinking at L as if he wasn't sure what to say or do.

Recalling the exact moment Harry had first shown up at his door, L had been too stunned at the incredibly short notice of his arrival to react very well and had only inspected Harry for possible injuries. He seemed fine, if a bit emotional, but L thought that was perfectly reasonable considering the circumstances of their parting and reunion. However, looking at him now and comparing it to an hour ago, L realized that Harry was slowing physically while his mind was considerably worked up. Looking at Harry as his eyes darted over L too quickly as his body swayed and shook, L realized there was only one thing that could be wrong with him.

"Harry?"

"Uh, yes?" Harry asked, jerking as though he'd been jostled to attention when he had in fact been staring straight at L the whole time.

L blinked. "Sit down, Harry."

Once Harry was back on the couch next to him, he began carefully picking up stray pieces of ice and placing them back on the towel he'd dropped earlier. As soon as the ice had been collected, Harry wrapped up the towel and held it on his lap, looking confusedly at it, seeming to have forgotten what it was for. L brought his thumb up to chew.

"Does your side still hurt?"

Harry jumped and glanced over at him. "My... side?" he asked.

L tilted his head. "Yes, where I kicked you."
Harry blinked and then felt his side carefully. "Er, no, it's just, um, sore, I guess." Harry blinked again as he looked at the towel full of ice, lost. L blinked in thought, and reached out a hand to feel his forehead.

Harry startled at the touch and looked over at L curiously. "What are you doing?"

"Checking your temperature," L said speculatively. Harry was shivering slightly, he was having trouble keeping up with the conversation, he seemed to have a shorter temper than usual (although, L wasn't entirely sure of this, as the last time he had seen Harry, he'd been, well, incredibly and justifiably furious) and he seemed to have difficulty remembering recent events-- such as the purpose of the ice he was holding.

Harry was slowly leaning rather heavily into his hand and his eyes kept fluttering closed. L withdrew his hand, making Harry jerk to stay upright after the sudden lack of support, and regarded him. Harry had also been demonstrating an uncharacteristic lack of coordination-- falling off the couch, failing to dodge L's kick, and now this.... L's eyes widened as he watched Harry's eyes flutter again. He had never considered after their tumultuous parting, that Harry would ever drive himself to exhaustion for his sake.

"When was the last time you slept, Harry?"

"Huh?" Harry blinked and jerked back, staring at L as if he hadn't expected him to speak just then. L had the sudden thought that Harry really was a very foolish person. He'd put a great deal of energy into finding L, and then, once he had, ran out of energy because he hadn't bothered to put any in reserve. How could someone like this even exist?

With a rather put upon sigh, L stood. He supposed he should be grateful that Harry had decided to focus his efforts on finding 'L' rather than on finding 'Kira', or who knows what trouble the boy would have got into?

"Come Harry," L said as he pulled Harry up off the couch. "You should get some sleep."

"What? But-- Hold on! I'm not leaving!" Harry yelled, trying to pull his arm out of L's grip and dropping the towel in the process. Ice spilled out on the floor, scattering across the polished wood. L glared at it in annoyance. He didn't feel that he should have to clean up Harry's mess, but the boy was clearly in no state to do so now and the ice would melt into water before he was.

"You are sleeping here, Harry," L said simply as he started guiding Harry's still struggling form toward a nearby doorway. Harry stilled and stopped walking, almost making L run into him.

"Huh, I am?" Harry asked in surprise. "Why?"

"Do you have a hotel room?" L asked, though he already suspected the answer, given Harry's personality and current state.

"No."

L nodded and began herding Harry toward the door once more. "So you will be staying here."

Harry appeared to think about this, but he couldn't seem to come up with any arguments against the idea. "Oh, okay..."

After leading Harry's quickly drooping form to his bed, L left him to pass out while he pulled a bag out of his closet. He tossed a few changes of clothes into the bag, before leaving the room to call
Wammy. It was obscenely early in Japan, but the man still answered after three rings.

"Yes?" Wammy's voice sounded cautious, with only the slightest trace of sleep slurring his speech.

"I need to move," L stated, not even bothering with salutations. "Harry just arrived."

"What?" Wammy sounded wide awake now and terribly worried. "He's in New York?"

"He's in my bed," L said wryly as he began disconnecting the cables to his desktop on the floor. "He found the building."

On the other end, Wammy sucked in a breath. "Are you alright? Is he--"

"No security breaches have been noticed. He just," L paused. "He just... walked through the front door. Then he found the stairs, then he came up and knocked on my door."

"How..."

"I don't know." L packed the desktop and its accessories into a case he'd dragged over from the corner before turning to the various laptops and their cables. "He did say no one should know where he is, or that he was even looking for me. He said he was too worried to tell anyone."

"But you are moving?" Wammy asked forcefully.

"Of course," L said as he wrapped the last cord up to place on top of a laptop. "I'm packing now." He zipped up the case and stood to drag the three black computer cases he'd filled into the living room with him.

"I will reserve a suitable hotel for you-"

"No," L interrupted. "I want to make sure Harry wasn't followed. I'll select a place to stay at random afterward."

"Very well," Wammy said calmly. "Is Harry-- that is... Will you be taking Harry with you?"

Wammy sounded worried again.

L thought about it and glanced toward the open bedroom door. He could just make out the edge of the bed with Harry's arm dangling off it. "...Yes," he said finally. "He would only stress himself trying to find me again, and I worry what he might do when he succeeds."

"You think he could truly hunt you down again?" Wammy asked, intrigued.

"He managed to escape me when I thought it was impossible. He has also just now managed to find me when I have thought that to be impossible for ten years. I don't know if I could hide from him...." L trailed off speculatively. That sounded like an interesting game.

"But he only found you after a year, surely you could simply stay ahead of him--" Wammy said anxiously. He and L had put an unfathomable amount of effort and resources into keeping the great detective hidden, therefore any weaknesses in their defense were worrying because they could be exploited by those with less kind intentions than Harry.

"Given what he told me this afternoon, I believe he may have only been trying to find me in the past few weeks," L said shortly as he walked back into the bedroom to grab the bag on the floor. He would take the bags down to the car first, then return for Harry.

"...How on earth did he find you?" Wammy asked helplessly.
L grinned, pleased that he could finally share the headache that Harry's cryptic, and possibly delirious, answer had given him. "He said he followed a bird."

Chapter End Notes

And... L kinda moves Harry while he's asleep. He takes him on winding, backtracking routes by taxi, train, and then driving himself. Harry wakes up mid-travel, and while he's pissed that L is sort of almost kidnapping him again, and exasperated by L's paranoia, he's also touched that L brought him along instead of just running.

They talk, Harry refuses to explain how he found L, L gets frustrated, but they sort of patch things up. L even apologizes, though Harry is pretty sure he doesn't really mean it. They come to an agreement to at least stay in contact via another phone, new and updated which L makes Harry promise he won't show to anyone. Harry, again, is exasperated by L's paranoia. He also tries to get L to drop the Kira case, which at first makes L suspicious, but Harry seems more concerned over his and Wammy's lives being in danger from such a massive threat as Kira represents, so he decides Harry is merely being protective.

They separate--Harry returns to London on a plane L booked for him--which is weird to Harry and takes sooo much longer than floo or apparation-- and L flies to Japan to join Wammy. They exchange mostly emails and IMs on the phone.
OMG IOD, Sorry guys, found another chapter that was meant to go earlier....

L's investigation has progressed to the point of narrowing down on Light Yagami, and he even goes so far as to enroll in the same university as him. But, during the down time between the placement exam and school actually starting, L has several months of following leads that he knows won't go anywhere. So he insists to the investigation team that, because they could really lose their lives, they should continue investigating while taking time to visit loved ones. He sort of guilts everyone into this, because while he understands the need to spend time with loved ones (and sort of has someone he wants to spend time with) he's mostly just bored and frustrated. Because he is an ass. But, he goes to London for a few weeks, then sort of travels between London and Tokyo for about two months, until he can enroll in school with Light and prove the teenager is a mass murderer.

Harry, meanwhile, is still running his cake shop. I had a few ocs working for him that I never fleshed out fully, but they were cute. He's worried and a little angry about L being in Japan, and when L shows up and spends such a long time hanging around the shop, eating cake and complaining, he gets the impression that L might leave the reaper case alone. He's very relieved about that, but knows it's unlikely. Then L casually mentions how close he plans to get to the person he suspects is Kira, and Harry--who knows how pacts with reapers work and that L will have no idea if the reaper is around or if it decides to kill him--panics a bit.

Harry felt a smile tugging at his lips as he watched William set himself up at the kitchen table, kicking his trainers to the floor and crouching carefully on the edge of the chair. It was just like before, as if nothing had happened to interrupt their routine. William even stuck his thumb up to his mouth to begin nibbling on the nail the way he always did.

Harry shook his head and turned to the counter to start making the cake he'd promised. It was... nice, having William and Thomas back to visit him. Nice to have William behaving as if they had stayed friends the whole time- as if things hadn't gone horribly wrong and they'd spent a year apart, Harry thought bleakly. But, despite everything, they had managed to patch things up and start talking again. Well, actually, Harry had hunted William down to try and protect him and William had decided to stay in contact with him to prevent a repeat. Sort of. Harry stared at the bowl of sugar he was pouring out. Okay, so, actually William had taken him back to London and then gone off to Japan and the only reason they'd spoken at all after that was because Hermione and Arthur finally found a way to hack a cell phone with magic. William had probably only kept the phone Harry was connecting to because he was worried Harry would come after him in Japan if he dropped contact again.

But, that was okay, because this time William had come to see him! Showed up out of nowhere with no warning and expecting to be fed something sweet. Just like he used to. Harry wasn't sure if this...
meant things were okay between them now, or if L was being a manipulative prick. Probably a bit of both.

But even so, with the Kira case going on, Harry was mostly certain William had forgotten all about his crazy "Criminal-Cult-Organization" theories about Harry's past. Really, it would be dangerous not to be focused on someone who would kill you, just to pester someone else about something that wasn't even true.

Although, Harry paused as he beat an egg into the cake mix, why would William take a break on such a dangerous case just to come see him? Harry glanced back at William, playing with his toes and rocking back and forth on the chair. He looked up when he felt Harry staring at him.

"Yes, Harry?" William asked.

"Um, William," Harry started hesitantly. He didn't want William to leave (not that he would without his cake), but he was worried suddenly about William possibly having run from the Kira case because he was in terrible danger. "Why exactly are you here? I mean-" Harry said quickly, putting down the large mixing bowl and turning to William fully. "Aren't you busy with, you know, the case and all?"

"Yes," William said simply before going back to playing with his toes. Harry knew better than to wait for further explanation and simply walked over to the table and sat down across from William.

"I'm not going to finish the cake until you tell me what's going on, William," Harry said flatly, glaring at the man until he looked up.

"The case will not be progressing further until April," William said blankly. "Therefore, it is not necessary for me to stay in Japan during this time."

Harry stared at William. "W- Wait a minute!" he said, shocked. "Aren't people still being killed by Kira?"

"Yes."

"So..." Harry blinked, utterly confused. "How do you know there's nothing you can do until--April!? I mean- people are still dying, and you're going to wait until April to catch their killer?"

Harry shouted incredulously.

William frowned. "I am not doing this by choice, Harry. Kira is too smart to give himself away under surveillance, so a direct confrontation is necessary," William shrugged nonchalantly. "I am unable to arrange such a meeting until April, so I will be staying here until then."

Harry gaped.

"It is not as though I have dropped the case entirely," William said sulkily, hunching his shoulders and glaring defensively at Harry. "I am still in contact with the Task Force and I am kept updated on all activity from Kira. There is simply nothing more I am able to do at this time."

"But," Harry said slowly. "All those people... Kira kills somewhere between 20 and 50 people every week and you're going to wait two months before you try to stop him?"

"I do not have enough proof to arrest the suspect at this time and I will not be allowed by the Japanese police to approach him until April. For now, they wish to explore other possible suspects," William shrugged again. "I know those leads are dead ends, so I am having the team keep me updated while I prepare to face the main suspect. I thought the fact that this meant I would have free
time to visit you would please you, Harry," William said petulantly as he pursed his lips.

"I- I am glad to see you William," Harry said quietly as he stared at the table. "I just- I don't think I really understand how you can be so calm about this. I mean," Harry ran a hand through his hair as he tried to articulate how much he wanted the Kira case to be over now. "I don't think I'd be able to do anything else until all the killing stopped."

"Harry is a kind person," William said softly. "But I already knew that. In any case, aren't you supposed to be making me a cake, Harry?"

Harry jerked slightly. "Oh, right," he said quickly, still disturbed by how easily William could dismiss so many possible victims Kira would kill in the coming weeks.

"However, Harry," William said contemplatively as Harry returned to the mixing bowl and hoping the mixture wasn't ruined from standing for so long only half finished. "If you are so worried about the use of my time on the Kira case-"

Harry spun about to protest. "I don't mean you're not-"

William held up a hand and waited for Harry to quiet. "I know, Harry. I was only trying to ask if you would like to assist me in something?"

Harry blinked at him. "Assist you?"

"Yes. I need a control."

"What?"

"When I confront Kira, I plan to interrogate him," William explained. "I have an idea how an innocent person would react to the questions I intend to use, as well as how the Kira I've profiled would react. However, I have never dealt with a criminal this intelligent."

Harry watched, surprised, as William clutched the calves of his legs in anger. "Kira was smart enough to not give himself away while killing under surveillance and I believe he is smart enough to mime innocence during interrogation as well," William looked up sharply at Harry. "Therefore, I would like to test my questions on an innocent person in order to have a definite comparison against someone only pretending to be innocent."

"Can't you tell that for yourself?" Harry asked. "I mean, you are really good at reading people, I think..."

William's mouth quirked. "I am, but Kira is a very good actor. He has enough control of himself to not show any outward signs of his true thoughts."

"Then how am I supposed to help-" Harry started asking, really confused by now.

"It is not the reactions themselves I need from you, Harry," William said loudly. "I need the reasoning behind them. That is the one thing Kira should not be able to mimic."

"The... reasoning of an innocent person?" Harry asked curiously, oddly intrigued by the idea.

"Yes. Kira can pretend to be innocent all he likes, but he has the mind of a criminal and all his actions will be dictated by the thoughts of how a guilty man can 'prove' his innocence," William smirked. "So, even if he reacts similarly to you, his reasoning for acting that way will always be 'I think an innocent person will do this' instead of whatever a truly innocent person might think."
"So, you want to ask me questions, see how I react, and then ask me why I reacted that way?"

"Yes."

Harry sighed. This was starting to sound complicated. It was too bad he couldn't just give William some Veritaserum to use on his suspect. That would definitely speed things up.

"Well, did you want to have cake while we do this?"

"Yes," William nodded emphatically.

"Then you'll have to wait a bit," Harry said as he stirred the mixture, watching it clump unpleasantly. "And I need to start another batch- I left this one alone too long."

"I can wait, Harry," William said calmly. "I've waited this long for you to make me a cake, a few hours won't make any difference."


xxconnect or chapter break?xx

"First then," William said after swallowing a large bite of the cake. "I believe you are Kira."

Harry stared at William. "You- you're not really going to say that to someone you actually believe is Kira, are you?" he asked shakily.

"Of course, Harry," William said simply, taking another bite of cake. Harry wasn't sure if this meant 'Of course I will' or 'Of course I won't', but he had a terrible feeling it was the former.

"You can't say that!" Harry shouted. "You'll be killed!"

"Harry, you are supposed to be playing the part of an innocent person being interrogated- not supposing how Kira will react to my interrogation," William murmured as he slowly licked cream off his fork.

"But-" Harry said desperately.

"I will not tell Kira my name, Harry" William said frankly, giving Harry a serious look. "He cannot kill me without a name and I will never give him that- so," William selected another bite of cake to eat, "I will not die."

Harry wasn't sure if that was entirely true given what Hermione had found in records of previous events like this, but how could he explain that to William? He supposed he would have to let William do as he pleased for now- after all, he wouldn't needlessly risk himself, so there must be proof that Kira was only killing after learning someone's name. But Harry worried still that maybe Kira would begin killing with just a face if he thought doing so would get rid of L...

"Fine," Harry said quietly. There wasn't anything he could tell William now, except to warn him to be careful, which he already would do anyway.

William stared expectantly at Harry for a moment and Harry wondered if maybe William knew there was something Harry knew that he didn't.

"Harry."

"Er, yes?" Harry said nervously.
"The interrogation... 'I believe you are Kira', now- react please," William said flatly.

"Oh, right," Harry said, startled. He'd forgotten about the 'test' in the shock of hearing the first question. "Right, er, why?" he asked confusedly.

"Pardon?"

"Why do you think I'm Kira?" Harry said lamely. That sure sounded odd... He hoped the rest of William's questions were easier to deal with than this one. Honestly, how was anyone really supposed to react to something like this?

William stared flatly at him. "Harry, please try to be serious. I have just accused you of being a mysterious mass-murderer with unknown powers and your only response is to ask 'why'?

"I'm sorry, I was busy imagining your funeral," Harry said flatly, glaring at William. "And carving "Here Lies the World's Greatest Idiot" onto your grave."

"Harry." William glared back, setting his fork on his plate.

"Well how am I supposed to react then?" Harry said angrily. What exactly did William want from him?

"First, try to pretend that we do not know each other," William said patiently. "Then try to pretend that I am a detective who has the power to incarcerate you simply because I think you are a killer."

"Well, then," Harry said snidely. "I think you're a right prat." William glared at him. "Oh fine," Harry mumbled. "Right, so... I guess I'd be pretty shocked, I mean, Kira's supposed to be in Japan and here we are."

"We are also in Japan, Harry," William interrupted.

"Okay... Then I'd still be shocked... and angry I guess."

"Why?"

"Well, because I have nothing to do with Kira, so being accused of actually being Kira doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me," Harry shrugged and crossed his arms. "Which is why I asked 'why,' he muttered to himself, though he was fairly certain William could hear him anyway.

William nodded. "Reasonable, but then why would you be angry?"

Harry looked at William. "I don't like being accused of things I didn't do," he said flatly.

"So you would be angry at your accuser?"

"Of course! I mean, if someone actually thought I was a murderer, then it's because they don't really know anything about me, so what right do they have to accuse me in the first place?" Harry reasoned.

William tilted his head to the side. "I hadn't thought of it like that..." William spent a moment picking at his slice of cake with the fork and licking cream off of it every now and then, before changing the subject.

"Next, I would like you to please look at this and tell me what you think, Harry," William rummaged in his pocket, pulling out several sheets of paper and passing them across the table. He began scraping the last of the cream off his plate while Harry looked at the papers.
The sheets... were odd. Harry wasn't really sure what to make of them. Three of them appeared to be rather distressing suicide notes and the fourth page was just a list of names and numbers with two categories- "file" and "death"...

Harry looked up at William, who was carefully slicing himself another piece of cake and transferring it to his plate. "Er..."

"Yes, Harry?" William glanced up from his new slice of cake (easily twice the size of the piece Harry had cut for him).

"What am I supposed to think about this?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"What do you think about it, Harry?" William asked unconcernedly.

"It's creepy," Harry said flatly.

"Why?"

"Well," Harry glanced at the papers on the table. "The list of names... These are the FBI agents that were killed, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"So, it's creepy... Having a list of murdered people's names and the time's they died..." Harry looked critically at William. "You don't think showing this to Kira is going to make him feel sorry or something, do you?"

"Of course not. Kira has no remorse for anyone-- particularly those he kills."

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, this was one of the files that got corrupted way back when my computer had some issues that required it be de-fragmented so... this was what I could recover on flashdrive. Sorry. I'm trying to remember how the rest of the scene went, I know L showed Harry the evidence he shows Light later, and I know Harry was more concerned with how people were manipulated and killed by Kira, and I also know that the one 'trick' to get Kira to reveal himself by getting him say things only the killer would know is something Harry knows, because EVERYONE in law enforcement is supposed to know that. Seriously.

Death Note was kinda a meta critique of the corruption and ineptitude of the Japanese police force, disguised as a supernatural mystery with the police becoming the 'heroes' after a long and disturbing moral rollercoaster ride. Which is why the police in the story are too stupid to give the same answer to L's question "What would you do to prove Kira was Kira if you met him?" that Light did. It's damn police procedure to withhold information from the media for this EXACT reason. Dear god. A lot of L and Light's
actions actually weren't to make them look smarter, so much as to make the police look
dumber, and that was sometimes very frustrating to read through...

Anyway... there's a whole chapter that was supposed to be dedicated to L visiting Harry
every few days while the investigation team gets frustrated running into dead ends.
Harry's employee's also have fun watching the interactions between their boss and his
strangely unappealing boyfriend, and make lots of suggestive comments. This
embarrasses the crap out of Harry, and prompts L to make vaguely sexual overtures to
Harry, partly due to genuine interest and mostly due to boredom and a desire to
manipulate more cake out of him. Because L is an asshole. It would have been a fun
chapter, but unfortunately it was another loss to the great defrag of hell.

Also, at some point after this, Harry and L would officially become lovers. Wasn't sure
if it would be sexual or not, but definitely a romantic couple. An annoying romantic
couple.
Hey, sorry this snippet wasn't posted before the other one. I had intended to get everything up in one month, but I lost some of my files and didn't find them until recently.

Anyway, THIS chapter is where Harry gets worried about William and Wammy and comes to Japan to check on them. The Japanese wizarding community was a lot of fun to make. I envisioned a Wizarding News Station on the television, accessible only if a wand is tapped on the TV screen three times, and a wizard only train line, invisible to muggles, but anyone carrying a wand can see it. And it jumps around on the tracks the same way the Knight Bus jumps from street to street, so it is always on time, and sneaking around between other trains.

It had been nearly two weeks since William had last called. Harry hoped William was only avoiding another argument with him-- which, to be fair, was a definite possibility-- but Harry worried more whether William was alive or not. After all, how long does a person live after going up to a mass murderer and telling them he's the detective trying to catch them?

After twelve days of thoughts like this, Harry finally couldn't take it any more. Neither William nor Quillish were answering his messages and Harry couldn't stand the thought that this might be because they were dead. He had to do something.

So, when the lunch rush ended, Harry took the opportunity to close the bakery and head to Grimmuald Place. First, he needed to send Rowag to Hermione and let her and Ron know what he planned to do. As soon as the barn owl had flown out the window, Harry set about packing. He wasn't sure how long he'd be gone, nor did he know what he might need. He was in such a restless state that staying busy packing was the only thing keeping him from running off to Japan that very moment. But he needed to plan things out properly- there was too much at stake and Harry couldn't risk one of his friend's lives just so someone would be there to help him if he messed up.

Harry knew he needed to find out for sure or not if William and Quillish were alive. Then, he would need to find Kira and the... creature that would be with him. Getting into the country shouldn't be too hard- the Japanese magical government (apparently called the “Court of the Chrysanthemum Throne” for some odd reason) had declared a state of emergency and issued a strict warning against travel in the muggle world. If he wasn't allowed to pass through customs at the International Apparition Gate, then Harry would simply apparate to a muggle area where magical law officials wouldn't follow due to the Kira Crisis.

Once actually in Japan, Harry would have to find William... if he was still alive. If he was, and after making sure he was okay, Harry would try to figure out who his Kira suspect was and follow him. Then Harry would just have to figure out how to make the dark creature appear to him so he could deal with it and then he could leave William to deal with Kira however he liked. This would work.
But if William wasn't alive... Harry shook his head, better not to think on that too closely.

As far as the plan went though, it would be harder to find Kira and the creature if William was... not around, so Harry might have to turn to the Japanese magical government for assistance. They were probably keeping tabs on the dark creature's general location, so they could certainly tell Harry where to find it. Harry hoped though, if it came to that, he would at least be able to enter the country legally, as he didn't think any officials would be willing to help him if he broke a few travel laws first.

He only needed a few clothes, which he stuffed in an old duffle bag. The bag would give the illusion of luggage while all the items he really needed would be hidden in the wallet Hermione had placed an Undetectable Extension Charm on for him last Christmas and that would be hidden in the furry Mokeskin pouch Hagrid had given him for his seventeenth birthday. For now, there wouldn't be much in there-- only some potions, his Cloak, and his broom. The most important item Harry would hide in the wallet in the pouch, he would get at Hogwarts.

Once Harry had gone over everything several times without grabbing something else to add to the bag, he decided it was time to go and went to the floo. First he would go to Hermione's office. She should still be in classes so he could pick up one of the Two-Way Mirrors she was sure to have in her desk before sneaking upstairs. She always complained about how many of them she seemed to be confiscating this year. Apparently, Weasley Wizard Weezes had started a new fad by charming the Two-Way Mirrors to only let sound be heard by the users, allowing for greater secrecy when used in class. Probably the fact that they would change into ink blotters with a tap whenever a teacher walked by helped as well.

Several hours later found Harry walking quickly through Heathrow Airport to the International Portkey, Floo and Apparation Gate (conveniently located in an extra stretch of hallway hidden between Gates 9 and 10 in Terminal 3). He felt a little bad about sneaking in and out of Hogwarts without speaking to Hermione or anyone else. McGonagoll probably already knew that Harry had been by and left, and once Rowag arrived with his letter, Hermione would speak to her when she couldn't reach him immediately.

Harry gulped. Considering what he did in the Headmistress' office, it was better that he avoid meeting anyone before he got out of the country. Hermione alone would try to talk him out of his plan, never mind what the Headmistress would have to say to him. But if the Goblins ever found out about it, Harry was sure to be in even worse trouble than William was with Kira.

Despite all of Harry's misgivings about his methods though, he was still determined to see this through. It was for William after all, and, maybe to a lesser extent, everyone else in the world. As Hermione had told him, Harry thought wryly, he did have a "saving-people-thing." It would be a shame to let that tradition die.

After walking casually through the barrier between two tall potted plants into the International Gate, Harry quickly put on his black half-mask and walked up to the counter to buy a travel pass for Japan. The witch at the counter stressed multiple times that now wasn't a good time to travel to Japan and that he might be turned away at the border, but Harry was insistent and soon after was standing in line for the designated departure site.

While he waited for his turn to apparate, Harry studied the picture printed on the back of his travel pass. Every travel pass to an international location came with an image of the designated incoming apparation point, usually located in an international muggle airport or seaport. The designated area in Japan was in Narita Airport, Terminal 1, Gate 19. Pretty specific, Harry thought, and it looked like it was an actual gate too-- unlike the hidden section of hallway the Heathrow Airport had.
As Harry reached the front of the line, he took one last look at his pass, tucked it into his pocket and disapparated off to Japan. When he blinked and looked around himself, Harry saw the place depicted on his pass and noticed signs in multiple languages directing travelers to the customs desk. However, when Harry approached the desk, no one was there.

Confused, Harry glanced around. He had expected there might be trouble at the Japanese Apparition Point, but he hadn't expected it to be empty. Shrugging, Harry turned to follow signs into the muggle section of the airport to find his way out. But the moment he did so, Harry was faced with a dozen guards wearing odd colorful masks and all pointing their wands at him along with, Harry gulped, swords.

"Er, hallo," Harry said nervously.

A man wearing a rather terrifying green mask with a twisted grimace on it stepped forward and the swords were lowered-- although Harry noticed the wands stayed up. "State your name and business here," the man's voice rang clear despite the mask covering his mouth. Must be a spell, Harry thought, but at least he speaks English. Harry had been worried he might have trouble just because he didn't speak any Japanese.

Harry thought quickly. He shouldn't go around giving out his name-- everyone in the magical world knew that was a bad idea right now-- but if he didn't give them his name, they might not let him enter the country. "Evan Miller," he blurted. As bad as he was at coming up with names, he had tried to be more creative than usual-- he didn't want any of his friends directly implicated in this and both Evan and Miller were common muggle names.

The guards pointing their wands at him all shifted, drawing Harry's attention. The man in the twisted mask, on the other hand, only seemed to stare at him. "Is that so? And what business do you have here, Mr. Miller?"

"Visiting," Harry said carefully. "One of my friends is here, so I came to see him."

"Could your friend not leave and visit you instead?" the man asked casually.

"No, he-uh, doesn't feel like it," Harry winced. Flat out refused to leave is more like it. Refused and then stopped talking to him.

"So you came to check up on your friend, Mr. Potter?"

"Yeah- uh," Harry stopped suddenly. "That's not my name."

"I believe it is," the man said quickly and Harry felt as though the man's mask had turned more sinister, as if it was glaring at him. "You are Harry Potter from England, are you not?"

Harry winced. How had they known? When he bought the pass, the witch hadn't asked for a name-- nearly every interaction requiring names was being modified due to the terror of the creature somehow hearing one's name from around the world and deciding to kill that person. Pretty paranoid to be sure, but Harry knew that being paranoid around dark magic was the best way to stay alive.

"You are quite famous," the man said quietly, tilting his head to the side. The mask looked less threatening now-- almost as if it were grinning. "The aura of your magic from the long distance apparition was all that we needed to identify you."

Harry stared at the man. He'd heard of the Trace on wands and general magic in Britain and he knew how to track apparation trails, as well as how to identify different types of magic-- he could even recognize the magical auras of different magical creatures-- but he had never heard of a witch or
wizard being identified by their magic. Was magic in Japan that different?

"As honored as we are that a wizard of your considerable reputation is visiting, we must wonder at the particular timing," the man said calmly as he crossed his arms. The mask stared at Harry, making him somewhat nervous. He was beginning to not like the thing very much.

"Like I said- I'm here to see my friend," Harry said forcefully. "I... I lost contact with him," he admitted quietly.

The mask appeared to contemplate this. "So, you believe this friend of yours to be in danger and are jumping to the rescue?"

Harry didn't really like the way the man was putting it but... "Yeah," he said thickly.

"Which brings us to our point-" the man paused. Somehow the mask, despite the twisted grimace, now seemed solemn. "Do you intend, in doing this, to venture out into the muggle world?"

"Yes," Harry said slowly, hoping his answer wouldn't get him sent back to London.

"Even knowing what danger lies there?"

"Yeah- the creature," Harry said. "I know about it."

The man regarded him for a moment. "Why?"

"Well," Harry glanced down. Hopefully nothing he said would get William targeted for an Obliviate. "Er, my friend's a- a muggle, you see-"

"I had gathered as much."

Harry blinked.

"All foreign wizards have long since left our land-- unless your friend is Japanese?" the man asked frankly.

"Er, no, he's, um," Harry thought hard. What nationality was William? "Well, he's foreign in any case... and," Harry hesitated. "He's trying to find Kira."

The guards around Harry began muttering at this.

"A dangerous task indeed-- one which few are attempting," the man commented blandly. Harry couldn't tell what expression the mask had now. Though how such a fierceum mask could suddenly turn blank, he had no idea.

"Yeah," Harry muttered. "I've told him that, and I've tried to warn him- I haven't told him anything!" he added quickly. "I haven't told him anything about our world or magic or the creature. But, since he doesn't understand, he won't listen to me."

The man thought a moment as he tapped a finger against the chin of the mask. "So then, you are here to find him and take him home?"

"Er," Harry winced. "Well, he's pretty dedicated, so..."

"Then what is it you intend to do?" the man asked. The mask was back to staring at Harry.

Harry swallowed. "I... was going to help him."
He could feel the guards staring at him now, in addition to the man. "What could you possibly do to help without revealing our world's secrets?"

"I'm not sure," Harry said quietly. "But I'm still going to try."

The man in the mask continued staring at him. Harry was beginning to feel nervous, maybe he'd said the wrong thing after all...

"Very well. You may have passage into our land." The man walked over to the customs desk and began pulling scrolls and forms out of a drawer. The guards all put their wands away.

Harry looked up, surprised. "What- really?"

"Tell me, Harry Potter, if we refused you now, would you try to enter the country illegally once our backs are turned?"

Harry blanched and the man nodded as if that answered his question.

"Besides," the man continued as he began stamping forms with a jade seal. "I feel that the muggle police are not enough to deal with a situation like this. Nor, really, are our own. However," the man stood to hand Harry the freshly stamped travel papers and train pass. "I believe that if anyone could handle a creature of death, it would be you-- the Master of Death."

Harry flinched slightly as he folded the papers up and placed them in a pocket. "People call me that here?" he asked hesitantly.

"Did you think we would call you the 'Vanquisher of Voldemort'?" the man scoffed harshly. "There have been three dark lords in Japan in the last hundred years. Do you know any of their names, or the names of those who defeated them?"

Harry blushed. The magical history course at Hogwarts wasn't the best suited for anything happening in the last two to three centuries, but even then, Harry didn't think he'd learned much of anything that happened outside of Europe-- unless European wizards went somewhere. "Er, no."

The man nodded. "Nor do most people here know much of the United Kingdom's dark lords, but we do know of you," the man gazed steadily at Harry, the mask's eyes boring into him. "A boy who masters three ancient magical objects and then rises from the dead is of much more importance than the defeat of any random, power-hungry madman-- no matter what atrocities he committed."

Harry blinked. "Wait, people here know about that...?"

The man nodded and cocked his head as he regarded Harry. "Did you know, Japan has its own ancient objects. Three, in fact."

"It does?"

"Yes," the mask seemed to be smiling again. "In magic, three is a powerful number; with magical objects it becomes even more so. Each object in a set of three must compliment the other two in some way and when they all do, they create a balance between them. Anyone who masters all three gains control over that perfect balance and that is what gives the person power-- not the objects themselves. The three objects of Japan have been kept by the same family for centuries and they have enjoyed the benefits of such a gift, never losing their balance. Because, once united, three pieces of magic cannot be easily torn apart."

Harry stared at the man. He'd never heard an explanation like that associated with the Deathly
Hallows and he wasn't entirely sure it would apply. After all, Harry himself had "torn" the objects apart by throwing the stone away and putting the wand back in Dumbledore's tomb, hadn't he? This was also the first he'd heard of some family in Japan having control over ancient magical objects--wouldn't something like that, at least, have been part of the Hogwarts curriculum?

--------continue--

Harry wanders Tokyo, tracking L and setting up a hotel room base. Interesting Japanese wizard integrations with muggle world= invisible train line that jumps between tracks to get around the country like the Knight Bus does in Britain; news and entertainment TV channel similar to the wizarding wireless; few witches and wizards that are out traveling are wearing masks, lots of variety there—festival masks, fashion masks, anime and kids masks----------Harry disguises himself and starts stalking L around the university campus he and Light are on; incredulous that L's playing tennis-------------

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L was having yet another terrible week. The Kira case was progressing fairly well-- the more time L spent watching Yagami Light as he attended classes with him, the more certain he was that the boy was Kira. But spending so much time in close proximity to the Kira suspect was taking his attention away from other endeavors. Like talking to Harry.

Not that calling Harry would be a good idea right now. He would want to know how L's investigation was going and after how upset he'd been at finding out L had introduced himself as such to the Kira suspect, he was sure to be even more upset if he found out that L was going to classes with the boy as well. Which would start another argument that L was already quite sick of having.

It wasn't as though L was risking his life on a whim. He had figured out what Kira needed in order to kill after all, and one of those things was something no one could ever find out, so it was perfectly safe to show his face to Kira. There was no need for Harry to be worried at all. In fact, Harry was being completely unreasonable in his worries, even going so far as to demand L leave Japan.

As if Harry has any right to order me to abandon a case, L thought darkly.

So L hadn't called Harry in over a week. It was the most logical choice right now, but L still found himself staring at his phone every night. He'd ordered Wammy not to contact Harry as well, even though this resulted in Wammy giving him a smaller selection of cake than usual for the whole week. The increasingly frantic messages Harry left on both their phones probably had a lot to do with that. It was becoming harder to stop himself from dialing Harry's number after listening to each new message, but L was resolute. This was for the best.

Once he found solid proof that Light was Kira, the case would be over and he and Wammy could return to London to see Harry. L was certain that Harry would forgive him for not calling, and then Harry would make L a cake and they would eat it together, and everything would be better. Best of all, he could begin his inquiry into Harry's "not-a-cult" secret, L thought with a predatory grin.

But until that time, L needed to continue this investigation. After making the initial introduction with the Kira suspect, L had stayed mainly in the background, waiting for Light to respond. However, attending classes was boring, and L admitted-- in the privacy of his mind-- that he might have gotten impatient. On Thursday, 'Ryuga' had invited Yagami Light to spend the following afternoon with him. Perhaps by playing tennis at the school courts.
After only a week of distant interaction, L didn't think a normal person would be comfortable accepting such a sudden invitation, but it fit his profile of Kira to accept, because he was the type who would not back down from a challenge. So, was this an indication of Light being Kira and wanting to get closer to 'L' as quickly as possible and willing to use any excuse to do so, or only that Light was intelligent enough to want to utilize a possible high connection on his path to becoming a police officer and was willing to put up with social discomfort to achieve that?

L's gut told him it was the former. In any case, he would have Wammy buy a tennis racket on the way to meet Light at the school. Yagami Light had been a junior champion, much as L had been, and would likely pose a challenge-- but L was confident he would win anyway. He always did.

L spent the rest of the day impatiently looking forward to his meeting with Light. Now that he had an opportunity to get the Kira suspect alone, L intended to initiate the next phase of the "Make-Kira-Reveal-How-He-Kills" plan. He was vaguely disappointed that the real 'Ryuga Hideki' hadn't died in the past week, but he'd known from the start that Kira falling for such a trick was a slim chance. Kira was far too smart for that.

However, L grinned to himself, Kira is very prideful. Meaning his tactics for interrogating suspects should get him an interesting response from the murderer.

Once the afternoon meeting had finally come, L had been forced to wait longer as Light went into the locker rooms to change into a typical tennis outfit-- a polo shirt and shorts. L himself had always wondered if such clothes granted players some advantage, but had eventually come to the conclusion that most peoples' everyday outfits did not allow for as great a range of mobility as the shirt and shorts did. Seeing as how L's own everyday clothes were chosen for the allowance of maximum cover and mobility, he considered himself ahead of any tennis player who needed to buy a 'tennis outfit.'

Actually getting onto the courts and starting a game went about how L had predicted. Light behaved friendly and politely interested, only becoming agressive once the game was underway. As for himself, L took this time to let loose. It had been a habit for years, for L to relieve stress by playing a game of tennis. That was why, after having lost track of Harry for a week when they first met, L had maneuvered the young man into playing a game with him-- pathetic as it was. Now, after three months of little progress on the Kira case, and only being able to confront the Kira suspect himself in the last two weeks (and after many arguments with the investigation Task Force, as well as Harry), L was more than ready to vent some pent up energy.

The fact that he might be able to goad the Kira suspect into behaving rashly at the same time was merely a bonus.

Unfortunately, about midway through the set, when the score was four-all, L was beginning to worry his plan to unwind before interrogating Yagami Light seriously, might be backfiring. He certainly hadn't expected someone who had dropped out of tennis so many years ago to still be able to play at such a high level.

Of course, L thought sulkily, I dropped out much longer ago than Yagami-kun did. Years longer. Anyway, it would be just like Kira to childishly want to beat L at something as meaningless as a tennis match.

It was meaningless too-- this match. L had only really wanted to play in order to relieve his stress (and beat Kira at something), but he knew Yagami-kun would read more into it than that. With any luck, the boy might even go so far as to suppose L was using this game to simulate a bond with him-- thereby opening the door to inviting him onto the investigation task force, as L had originally told
Yagami-kun he would. Which meant the Kira suspect would himself provide an opportunity for L to interrogate him-- something L would do anyway, but it would be much more amusing if Kira arranged those circumstances voluntarily.

L distracted himself with the fact that, even if he lost the tennis match, he at least was still several steps ahead of Yagami Light in the larger game they were playing. It was during such thoughts, in the tenth game of the set, that L saw something just beyond the fence of the court that made his blood run cold.

Harry....

No, that couldn't be Harry. The boy's eyes were black and his hair was too long-- or wait, wasn't that a girl? L must need to catch up on his sleep if he was beginning to hallucinate girl versions of Harry halfway around the world. He dismissed the girl as he returned a volley from Yagami-kun.

But L couldn't keep his mind focused on the game after that, his eyes kept drifting from the ball to follow the Harry-like figure. The girl (or maybe it was a boy, with such a flat chest?) wasn't staying still as the other spectators were. He-- or she-- was wandering amongst the crowd, weaving between people gracefully, and heading around the fence. L tried to figure out why someone would bother moving through the crowd to get around the court, but the person kept his-- or her-- eyes on the tennis match the whole time, so perhaps he/she was simply trying to find a better vantage point.

Whatever the reason, L told himself firmly that Harry had no reason to come all the way to Japan-- especially without telling him first. Unfortunately, it was just as L finally turned his focus back on the game that Yagami-kun made his move and won the match. When L glanced around the court while pretending to watch the ball roll away from him, the boy-girl who looked like Harry was nowhere to be found.

Dismissing the odd sighting as a further sign of stress, L turned his attention to dealing with his Kira suspect. Yagami-kun reacted about how he suspected a guilty person would act when told he was under suspicion (wouldn't an innocent person, even a highly intelligent one, be more outraged?) so once they got to a more secluded location, L would begin his interrogation in earnest.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

HEY GUESS WHAT?? This chapter was supposed to come AFTER THREE--THE OTHERS that I just found, so if you're looking for an update there should be a NEW chapter 15!! READ FROM THERE

L notices Harry stalking him, though at first he doesn't recognize him, and sets a trap to catch his follower. When it turns out to be Harry, there is much arguing and storming off. Basically, L tries to hide Harry by taking him away in a car with Watari, and after not coming to a compromise about who's leaving Japan (Harry says L should, L insists Harry should), Harry just opens his supposedly locked car door and walks out in the middle of a busy street.

At first, L is willing to let this go and hope that Harry stays removed from Kira's view, but unfortunately, Light saw them, because L cornered Harry on the university campus. So, when Harry is semi disguised (he really just changes his clothes/hair color/length) Light approaches him. Harry can feel the reaper hanging around Light, so he knows that Light is Kira, and Light knows that Harry is familiar with L and hopes to use him to learn L's name. So, Light keeps seeking Harry out, who is always somewhere nearby when L is around, and Harry finds it incredibly annoying and frustrating, and plots out how to feed L enough clues to just lock Light up. It doesn't help that there's a second reaper/Kira who came out of nowhere, and happens to be jealous of Light's attention to Harry (Misa), and worried about the Master of Death's involvement (Rem).

L, predictably, freaks out, and gets a 'contact' to do him the favor of tracking Harry down to make sure Kira knows his interactions with "Evan" are watched. Hint--it's Aiber. Because reasons. The investigation team is curious, but kept locked out of L's room. When Aiber finally finds Harry, L has him install cameras in his room and follow him around. Because L doesn't really learn from his mistakes. Obviously, Harry finds out about it. He's fairly hard to follow what with magical travel and disguises, so Aiber gets closer than is really safe, and after threatening him, Harry finds out Aiber was sent by L.

Harry is pissed. L finds out when Aiber reports in, and goes to speak to Harry, who is preparing to leave. Not to leave the country, just to find another hotel where L can't find him.

"No!" Harry shouted. "I can't believe you would even ask after what you did! Just go!" Harry slammed the door in L's face, or tried to anyway.

"I am not leaving," L said lowly as he braced his shoulder against the door to keep it open. Harry tried to brace against the other side, but found he was too late. L had already positioned himself and would not be moved. Harry felt like screaming, or throwing something, or maybe turning L into a toad. That would show the arrogant prat.

Harry jerked back from the door and stalked into the room. L watched for a moment before sighing
and coming in to close the door behind him.

"Harry, there is a perfectly reasonable explanation," L tried saying again.

Harry snorted and ignored him, concentrating on filling his duffle bag. After finding out the room had been spied on with cameras, Harry found he couldn't stand to stay any longer.

"You were too close to the Kira suspect," L said angrily. "This was the best way to keep him away from you without putting you at further risk."

Yeah right, Harry thought. "How about telling me I'm at risk and asking me to avoid the 'Kira suspect', huh? Wouldn't that have worked better?"

"No," L replied flatly. "That would have alerted Kira to the fact that you and I are in contact and would have increased his interest in you."

"So, I start avoiding a guy who bothers me anyway and that would immediately make him think that I know L?" Harry asked incredulously.

L shook his head. "Your avoidance would have seemed suspicious after how polite and accommodating you've been. He would have realized that someone had told you about the suspicions against him and the only people in the world who know about that are on the Task Force working with me. The only member who might warn a British visitor to Japan during the Kira Case about such a thing would be me."

"So I could have pretended to leave the country," Harry said sharply. He wasn't sure if what L said was true-- maybe Light Yagami really would have deduced all that-- but it sounded more like L was making up excuses for his actions after the fact.

"But you would not really have left?" L asked with narrowed eyes.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Of course! I'm not going to leave an idiot like you to deal with this alone!"

"I am perfectly capable of dealing with this, Harry-- by myself or otherwise-- and the fact that you continually place yourself in danger for no reason is what is making everything so difficult!" L snarled as he stalked closer to Harry and glared at him. "If I did not have to spend so much time making sure Kira doesn't kill you, this entire case might already be solved!"

Harry felt the blood draining from his face and glared at L furiously. "So this is my fault?" He asked coldly. "It's my fault that you don't have any proof against Kira and my fault that there's a Second Kira killing people on television?"

L hissed out a breath. "No," he said flatly. "But dividing my attention between you and the Kira case is proving difficult-"

"Then don't!" Harry shouted. "Stop paying attention to me! I'm sure everything would be much easier for everyone then!"

"I'm sure it would be easier as well," L said quietly, staring at the ground. Harry flinched. He wasn't sure he'd meant to say that and he definitely hadn't meant for L to agree with him. "However, Harry, I do not believe I have a choice," L looked up at Harry. "I have already tried to not pay attention to you while working on the Kira case. That is why I allowed you to stay in Japan for so long. But this isn't working," L sighed and looked to the ground once more.

"I need you to leave," L stated quietly. "I cannot concentrate on the case while I worry about you," L
glanced up and raised a hand to stop Harry from interjecting. "I know you would prefer I not worry about you, but wondering what risks you might be taking, wondering if Kira has decided he no longer has a use for you, wondering if I cannot reach you because you are ignoring me or because you are dead... I cannot do that anymore Harry," L glanced away again. "I need to know you are somewhere safe so I won't worry," he mumbled quietly.

Harry felt vaguely guilty then. He thought about telling L that it really was okay- that he wasn't taking nearly as many risks as L thought he was and that he knew how to keep himself safe. L looked so dejected and Harry wasn't sure if the bags under L's eyes were darker than normal or if he was only imagining they were. But... Harry did know how to take care of himself and L's reaction to Light's interest in him was too extreme. Besides, the one really in danger from Kira, was L.

"I'm fine," Harry muttered as he turned back to the duffle bag, stuffing a few shirts haphazardly into it. "So you don't have to worry." Harry needed to move to another hotel before L did something crazy again-- like drug him and ship him back to London.

"Didn't I just explain why that isn't good enough?" L asked harshly, stepping into Harry and forcing him away from the bed and his packing.

"Not really, no," Harry glared defiantly at L. He wasn't going to be pushed around. So L was worried about him? Well, it just so happened that Harry was worried about him too! If L thought it would be better for Harry to stop investigating Kira and leave, then he could bloody well do the same!

Harry was furious all of a sudden. L was trying to guilt him into doing what he was told and it wasn't fair that L wouldn't do anything Harry asked him! And he'd put cameras in Harry's room! That was even worse than kidnapping him! Harry glared at L and shoved him away to go back to tossing clothes into the duffle bag.

"What exactly is so difficult for you to understand, Harry?" L asked flatly when Harry turned his back to him. "I could explain in more simple terms if you like."

Harry dragged his bag over to shove a pair of jeans roughly into it and spun around to snap at L. The moment he opened his mouth, however, Harry felt a sharp pain in his chest. He was about to shake the feeling off and continue arguing with L when the pain intensified.

It felt like he was being stabbed. No, it was like the basilisk from second year had bitten him again- but instead of catching only his arm, it had landed a killing blow to his torso. Harry couldn't breathe, the pain was so intense. He could feel everything fading away as the pain became all-consuming. He thought he must be falling forward because the last thing he saw clearly was L's blank face tilting away to the ceiling as the floor rushed toward him.

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L watched, stunned as Harry fell forward, his face twisted in pain. Just as Harry hit the floor, L lurched forward-- too late to catch him-- but suddenly desperate to turn him over and make sure he was still breathing.

He wasn't.

L frantically reached into a pocket and hit the numbers for Wammy's cell phone, pressed the speaker button and started CPR on Harry's still form while the call went through.

"Ryuzaki?" Wammy's voice came worriedly.
"Bring the first aid bag to Evan's room! Now!" L yelled as he pressed down on Harry's chest again and again.

L had been doing CPR on Harry for exactly 2 minutes and 14 seconds by the time Wammy got to the room. Another 12 seconds passed as Wammy quickly took out the AED that was part of the emergency first aid case he kept, pulled open Harry's shirt, and attached the two adhesive pads diagonally across Harry's chest before connecting them to the defibrillator.

L counted out 17 agonizingly long seconds without Harry receiving any CPR before the AED read out a flatline and turned off the voltage. Wammy gasped sadly and moved to pat L gently on the shoulder. If Harry's heart had stopped completely, there was little chance of starting it again. But L pushed Wammy out of the way and forced the defibrillator to charge, manually sending a shock into Harry.

"Ryuzaki!" Quillish gaped at L. "Stop- stop this at once!" Quillish got up to pull L away from the AED and Harry while L desperately tried to send another shock through the pads.

"Ryuzaki! You can't-" Quillish pulled L's shoulders up, succeeding in making L drop the defibrillator. "Harry is gone! You will only-" Quillish gasped and clutched L against his chest. "You will only burn his body like this..." Quillish trailed off sadly and felt L trembling against him.

Harry was dead.

Quillish tried to move backwards across the floor- away from Harry's... away from Harry-- and pulled L with him. L shouted wordlessly and kicked the defibrillator. Both of them were surprised when this caused the AED to deliver another shock to Harry's body, making it arch and convulse.

As L lunged forward to disconnect the pads from the unit, the defibrillator shorted out. L had already over-ridden the computer on the AED to allow him to send whatever voltage to the pads he wanted and when he kicked it, the voltage had been increased to a level the machine was unable to maintain for longer than a few seconds. L pulled out the cord connecting the now dead AED to the pads anyway. Leaving them connected to a live charge had caused Harry's body to be burned needlessly.

Quillish got up carefully and picked up the dead AED to place back in the first aid bag. He would have to remember to replace it, but for now it was important to stay with L and- and with Harry, he thought sadly.

L was peeling the gel pads off Harry's chest when he felt it. Harry had let out a breath....

He stared carefully at Harry and kept a hand over the pad, it could have been a death rattle. Harry sucked in a breath. L's eyes widened. "Watari!"

Wammy jerked and stared at L. "What-"

Harry coughed shallowly, causing his head to fall to the side.

L leaned closer and pressed his fingers to Harry's throat-- there was a pulse. L stared at Harry incredulously. There was a steady pulse....

"We-" L said slowly while Wammy watched Harry with shocked joy. ":we need to get Ha-Evan to a hospital. There are-" L gasped at this. "Burns... There are burns where the gel pads were attached..."

Wammy patted L's back and clutched his shoulder tightly. "Of course," he said tearfully. "Of course! The car is just downstairs!" Wammy laughed. "He's alive!"
L leaned further over Harry until his nose was brushing against Harry's ear, his fingers still laying against Harry's neck. The pulse was still there - it hadn't faltered once. "He is... He's alive," L said so quietly, he didn't think Wammy had heard him at all.

((------------------------Chapter Break? Or scene with Misa and Rem?? aaaaaaaaaaaaaggg))

Together, L and Wammy got Harry downstairs into the car. As they drove away, Harry's breathing was regular and his heart hadn't missed a single beat-- L counted every one. L decided then to take Harry to the hotel room Wammy had been using and to treat his burns there. It would be better to keep Harry's survival as secret as possible. While L watched over Harry at the hotel-- continuing to count every beat of Harry's heart-- Wammy went back to Harry's hotel to pick up his forgotten bag and check out for him.

Harry had suffered a heart attack that stopped his heart. L was certain that Kira or the Second Kira had made an attempt on Harry's life- meaning that Harry had gotten too close to one or both of them.

Which meant that L had failed to protect Harry. Again.

L shifted his knees closer together as he crouched on the bed next to Harry and tried to comfort himself with the steady pulse coming from Harry's wrist.

He had allowed Harry to do as he liked in Japan because it was simply too much trouble arguing with him and L needed to concentrate his efforts on the Kira case. Then he had allowed Harry to interact with Yagami Light because he was worried any involvement from him would give Light proof that Harry was close to him-- close enough to perhaps know L's real name. The only move he had made to protect Harry was to put him under surveillance in case one of the Kiras attempted to harm him.

If L had done something sooner-- forced Harry to return to England, or perhaps set him a task that would take him away from the center of the investigation-- Harry might not have been made a target.

But L couldn't understand why Harry had been attacked now-- according to both Aiber's and Harry's reports, Yagami Light had been civil and subtle in his dealings with Harry. In fact, Harry's only complaint about the boy was that he "reminded him of someone" and that alone made Harry suspicious. There was also the fact that Harry had been using an alias for his entire stay in Japan. L had such difficulty finding any information on Harry when in his native country and already knowing his name; he was certain that it would be next to impossible for Yagami Light to find out Harry's real name here in Japan. So how had Kira known Harry's name to kill him?

Harry had only been in contact with Kira and then was almost killed while only his face was known. Something only the Second Kira should be able to do. If L had needed more proof that the Kiras had joined forces, this would be it.

Of course, there was the chance that the Second Kira had seen Harry in Aoyama, but then why was he targeted? The only reason could be because Kira told the Second Kira to target him. Which could only mean that Kira had no more use for Harry.

L was worried about this. Light had only associated himself with Harry because of a suspected connection to L. If Light had decided he didn't need this connection anymore, then it could only be because he had either discovered L's name or found a way to discover his name that did not require Harry. Since only Harry had been attacked and L was still alive, it meant that Light did not yet have L's name, but had needed Harry out of the way to acquire it.
The Second Kira. That must be the key. L had been worried before about the possibility of the two Kiras working together, but now that nightmare had become a reality and L needed to form a plan to stop Light before he could enact his own scheme-- and before he realized that Harry was still alive. He had no evidence on Light yet, but thanks to Wammy and Harry, there was plenty to go over for Amane Misa. His first action would have to be to remove the Second Kira from the picture. After that... he would think of something.

For now though, L would stay by Harry, watching him breathe and counting heartbeats, until he was certain Harry was really okay.

When Harry woke, he found himself lying on a bed he didn't recognize. He blinked and gazed blindly at the ceiling, wondering where on earth he could be. However, the moment he shifted to lever himself up, a lanky man leaned over his head and blocked his view. Harry jerked backward, staring into the man's dark eyes, before he realized it was L. Harry gasped as the quick movement sent stinging agony pulling across his chest.

"Harry, are you alright?" L asked quickly.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

After Harry wakes up from his sudden heartattack--which was definitely an attack by one of the Kiras!-- L manages to convince him to remain with Wammy, and fake his death. Harry is uncertain, he knows that he was likely targeted by a shinigami's powers, but he doesn't know why he survived. ((Wanna know a secret? It's because this is a MASTER OF DEATH Harry fic!!))

Then, L moves against Misa (who he is fairly certain is the one who tried to kill Harry-- there's some evidence that she was stalking Harry because Light kept trying to meet up with him. Then L finds out Harry knew about it and did nothing because he thought it was more funny than dangerous. They argue about it) and things go down pretty similarly to how they do in the manga. With Harry added as a "background character" getting more and more frustrated with having to play dead and hide all the time. L brings up the possibility of Harry returning to London, which just annoys Harry into sticking it out. Harry also bakes almost all the treats L eats during this time.

Side note-- Before all this, when Harry was "helping" to monitor Light because he refused to leave, he was actually changing into his animagus form and following Light around. Light thought he was a stray dog and didn't pay him much attention, but Ryuk recognizes him and makes a habit of laughing to himself whenever Harry's around, which makes Light paranoid thinking someone ELSE is around and... it just leads to Light getting stressed, and L being stressed, and Harry just having fun getting scraps from people and thinking about Sirius.

Chapter ???-- Shinigami Rem

Harry hated the helpless feeling of watching an event unfold before him. He watched Sirius fall through the Veil, he watched Dumbledore tumble from the tower, he watched the Killing Curse fly from Voldemort's wand to strike his body. Watching was usually one of the most horrible experiences of his life.

Sitting sullenly next to Wammy safe in the security room as they watched L try to pressure a god of death with subtle threats and hope it would maneuver Kira into incriminating himself, was quickly adding to that list of why watching was the worst thing in the world to do.

"My boy, do have some tea. It will help calm you down." Wammy slide a cup closer to him on the table before them.

"Is it calming you down any?" Harry asked waspishly.

"Well, I should like to say that I have seen far more stressful encounters than this with L before, but..."

"But they weren't grotesque, immortal beings with the power to kill with a pen." Harry glared darkly at the screens showing the reaper 'Rem' from different angles. It was largely unconcerned with the humans standing around watching it suspiciously, and occasionally turned to stare directly into a
camera before L or Light recalled its attention.

Wammy sighed. “Certainly not, but L was certain that something unnatural was used to affect these killings. People were being manipulated quite horribly.”

“But he didn't think it was some invisible god, did he?”

“I doubt this thing is a god, Evan.”

“Does it matter?” Harry glanced at Wammy. “It has supernatural powers, it can't be killed, and it's from another world. What else would it be? A demon?”

“I'm sure I don't know.”

Harry snorted and turned back to the screens. He could see L was getting frustrated with the creature’s lack of answers to most of his questions. The darker his frown became, the more indifferent the creature acted, and... the more Light turned or brought a hand up to hide his mouth. Harry just knew the awful troll's dung of a prick was concealing a smirk. Even L had asked him when they returned to the base why Light was so happy, and while the investigation team were satisfied with Light's excuse that they had found Kira, L and Harry knew it was because he thought he'd won.

(( Light meets with Misa; Rem realizes that L will start investigating Misa because the killings started again, she goes crazy trying to kill L and terrified that Harry didn't die when Misa tried to kill him; Harry notices Rem disappears on the cameras while watching with Wammy, goes to confront her; magic battle with a shinigami! Harry firing spells and actual fire around to burn up Rem's death note, the investigation squad watches on surveillance, L realizes Rem is trying to kill them, Rem starts fighting back rather than trying to avoid Harry, Harry knocked around pretty bad; figures out his spells and he himself are the only thing that can touch Rem-- the police bullets pass right through her; finally manages to destroy her note, but is caught and knocked out Rem drags Harry through the base to the main room, intending to trade Harry for the other death note; the squad obviously don't want to; Rem threatens to kill Harry, L questions whether shinigami even can kill a human by hand-- actually really freaked out, Harry is still unconscious and bleeding on the floor; Rem insists it is possible, she will merely be punished for it, and she doesn't care anymore Harry wakes up, some of the team are sneaking behind Rem while L suggests trading a page for Harry; Rem distracted when Matsuda bravely attempts to wrestle her; she starts to phase out, Matsuda falls and Harry transforms into his animagus form and lunges for her throat--mod!Harry can still touch her!!-- she tries to pry him off with her claws and he is able to rip her throat out; Rem throws Harry across the room, but the damage is done and she is turning to sand))

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO WRITE... ;___;

Chapter ???-- Cry Wolf
When Harry awoke, all he could feel was pain, pain, pain. What had happened-- Wait! The death god!

Harry's eyes snapped open and his body lunged upward, startling the two people standing on either side of the table he was lying on. Harry gagged and snapped at them viciously as he tugged some horrible tube out of his mouth and shook the ties holding it in place off his head. What was going on, where was the death god? Did he succeed in stopping it?

As Harry settled and looked blearily around him, he realized something. He was still a wolf, everything was monochrome. Harry shook his head to clear his fuzzy, black and white vision. But no, he couldn't change back now, could he? There were two muggles talking rapidly into a phone on the wall and gesturing to him. He should find a more hidden place and change there.

Unfortunately, when Harry stood up on the high metal table he'd been laid out on, he further discovered that the two muggles must have been stitching him up because there was stiff thread trailing from one of the wounds by his back leg and-- his leg?! Harry felt it throb as he turned his attention to it. Hadn't the death god dislocated that when trying to get Harry off? Well, those two muggles must have put that mostly back to rights Harry thought, because he could feel everything (yeah, he could definitely feel everything...) and he could move it, but doing so sent a sharp, burning ache racing all through his hips.

Harry shook his head again to try and clear the haze over his thoughts, then snarled half-heartedly at the two muggles who had become more frantic on their phone call. He was grateful they had tried to take care of him, but he would have preferred going straight to a magical healer (who would probably have to get rid of the stitches the muggles had put in him-- Harry would never forget the fiasco Arthur Weasley's stitches had been) and besides, the two men's shouts were getting rather high-pitched and it was hurting his ears.

Harry supposed it must be Japanese they were speaking, but their voices were so high from panic that Harry's wolf ears couldn't distinguish anything sensible. Not that he would be able to understand much anyway, considering how limited his grasp of the language still was.

As the two probably Japanese muggles fled the room, clearly no longer willing to stay in close quarters with an injured, cranky wolf, Harry gave himself a full body shake to get rid of the various loose ties, gauze and whatever else it was muggles used to fix injuries. Harry thought foggily that he should probably know what it was muggles used, but everything seemed dim and cloudy and all he could remember was the death god trying to kill L... Harry shook his body again. He needed to get human and find L.

Just as he was about to step off the table though, Harry was lucky enough to finally notice the one tube that hadn't flown off him during all his shakes. A tube that was carefully taped and gauzed around one of his front legs. Harry stared at it. That was a needle! There was a needle in his leg! Just as he was about to start biting and clawing at the evil thing (which had started to ache the moment Harry noticed it) he calmed down and stopped himself. He'd been a wolf too long, he was starting to forget to think like a human.

As he carefully bit through the tape holding the needle in place, Harry wondered if this was how Sirius had felt when he stayed a dog for long periods of time. It would certainly explain a few things.

Harry was gently biting the tube and coaxing the needle out of his leg when an intercom of some sort came on, letting a low voice echo around the room.

"Evan?"
Harry's ears perked up and he had to force himself not to jerk the needle out sideways. That was L! He was alive!

Harry finished pulling the needle out all the way and spat it onto the ground before jumping down himself and looking around. If he was where he thought he was, then there should be a camera somewhere. Turning his head to a corner, Harry caught light glinting off of a tiny dark speck high up in the wall. Harry barked happily and waved his tail low as he stared at the speck.

"Are you aware of what you are doing, Evan?" came the voice from nowhere.

Harry felt like rolling his eyes, it sounded as though L was worried he was possessed. But he still yipped in what he hoped L would take as agreement, just the same. He even wagged his tail a bit faster and stepped closer to the speck in the wall above him.

It seemed that L was okay, so Harry didn't need to worry about that anymore. Then Harry's ears fell back flat on his head as he realized something. He was a wolf... and L was talking to him.... Harry yelped and jumped as this revelation hit him.

"Are you alright, Evan?" the voice came, sounding worried. "You need to be taken care of-- I am sending someone to the room to help sedate you so the veterinarians can continue treating your wounds. Please don't bite him."

Harry panicked. L saw him change into a wolf! There were cameras all over the building and Harry had performed magic in front of them! Oh, the Wizengamut was going to have a field day at his trial! The beloved hero Harry Potter-- deliberately breaks the Statute of Secrecy in front of a dozen muggles and all of it caught on camera! Even the Ford Anglia hadn't been this bad! Harry ran to the door and began desperately pawing and biting at the handle until it opened, racing out into the hallway as fast as he could.

L's voice followed Harry down the hall as he ran, shouting something, but Harry was long past hearing him as the wolf part took over in his panic to get out as quickly as possible. He was lucky the Japanese magical government hadn't yet investigated the source of all the magic Harry had let loose in his fight with Rem, but he knew he couldn't count on them to stand idly by on the sidelines for long. He could remember now-- Rem was dead, or, probably dead. She'd turned into sand anyway, and Harry didn't think anyone could get any deader than that. But a dead death god was certainly something the magical authorities would be curious about, and once they decided it was safe to investigate they would come straight here.

Harry needed to get away from L, get healed and turn himself in. He didn't fool himself into thinking there was any way he could cover this up, but maybe if he went to the aurors personally, they would hold off a field investigation long enough for Harry to get L out of the country and get rid of any recordings of him doing magic. Then Harry would probably be sent to trial for performing magic in front of muggles (he'd have to sacrifice the Task Force to the Obliviators unfortunately), but at least L would be safe.

Not to mention, Harry thought slightly giddily as he ran, the death god is dead! So, L will be safe from Kira now as well!

Harry skidded around a corner and almost ran into two men holding long sticks with rope on the ends. They shouted in surprise and tried to loop the ropes around his neck. Harry dodged as his nails scraped the tile floor and jumped onto one man's back. L's voice started shouting Harry's codename over the intercom once more and then Harry had leapt past the men and was racing down the hallway again while they shouted behind him, L's voice echoing overhead.
Harry recognized the men-- one was the quiet Japanese policeman whose name Harry couldn't remember and the other was the obnoxious French man L had brought in to help with the Yotsuba investigation! If Harry was right about those two being the one's L had sent to sedate him (which he and L were going to have a long talk about once this was all over) then they had probably come from the main computer room of the building-- which was near all the elevators and staircases.

Harry panted happily, he could just follow their trail back to wherever they'd entered this floor from, and then he could get to the ground floor, and then he could escape!

"Evan! Please calm down! You are hurting yourself!"

Harry yelped and flinched when L's voice blasted from much lower down than it should have. He stopped running for a moment and glanced around-- there! Midway up one wall of the hallway was a speaker with buttons, much lower than the hidden speakers located throughout the building. Harry padded over to it cautiously and nosed the button pad. There was a click and L's voice came out of the speaker more quietly.

"Evan, please go back to the surgery so the veterinarians can finish stitching you up." L paused while Harry cocked his head at the intercom with his ears perked. "You are bleeding all over the floor, Evan," L said softly.

Harry huffed and looked around him. Dark splotches trailed away down the hall he had come, more of the stuff trailed down his sides and haunches.

Odd that he hadn't noticed how much he was bleeding in his rush to get out of the building. Actually, the pain he'd felt upon waking had all but faded away. That probably wasn't a good sign, but.... Harry shook himself, he couldn't afford to wait and see if aurors came or not-- he had to get his magical trail away from L while he could, not to mention he was bleeding from what Harry suspected were very dark magical wounds. Any other sort of physical injury might be fixed up adequately with stitches, but wounds inflicted by magic-- especially dark magic-- would fester and grow even if the skin was closed up. If Harry wanted to get better, he needed a magical healer to help him.

Harry whined sadly, trying to tell L this-- not that he could speak as a wolf or a human, he thought sullenly. His Japanese was too rudimentary and disjointed and Harry wasn't too crazy about the idea of signing words at a wall while L spoke to him out of a speaker.

"Please, Evan…"

Harry whined again, licking both his muzzle and the speaker while he thought. He didn't want L to worry about him so much-- hadn't he already worried enough?

Besides, Harry thought speculatively, he'd already broken the Statute of Secrecy when he turned into a wolf (...and Apparated and cast Accio and cast the Patronus charm and cast a fire spell, whispered Harry's mind), so, really, it probably wouldn't hurt much if he changed back and let L know directly that he was okay. He just needed to go and... find a doctor that wasn't a vet! Right.

Not entirely convinced that this was a good idea, but disliking the tone of L's voice as it came out of the speaker again, Harry changed back... or rather, he tried to change back.

When the world failed to come into color, Harry spent a terribly confused moment staring at the speaker and coming to the horrible realization that he couldn't seem to dis-spell the Animagus charm. Then his ears twitched as they noticed two quiet pairs of feet sneaking up on him from behind.
Whirling and snarling rapidly, Harry just managed to avoid having a rope slung around his neck by the Japanese police officer he'd run into moments before.

Tha-that prat! Harry thought furiously. He was distracting me!

"Evan!" L's voice came out of the speaker by the wall and Harry edged away from it growling. "I know you are confused right now, but you need serious medical attention. Please remain calm-"

Harry tuned him out then as his ears flattened against his head and snarled at the two men trying to surround him, as well as the speaker on the wall. How dare L do this! Didn't he know enough by now to trust Harry, at least a little? Well, Harry was fed up with trying to explain his intentions to L-- it wasn't as if the man ever listened to him anyway.

Harry spun and ran off down the hall again, he would leave and then, once everything was arranged to his satisfaction, he would come back to let L know how it had gone.

L watched in horror as wolf-Harry evaded Aiber and Mogi again. Things were quickly progressing into a terrible situation, barely an hour after L had begun to hope everything would turn out alright...

Harry had barely lasted long enough for L to get a vet capable of operating on the many deep wounds Harry had sustained in the fight with the shinigami Rem. He hadn't woken once and L had worried he would never wake again-- a feeling he was sadly becoming accustomed to associating with Harry.

Although, it was odd attaching those feelings to a large, bleeding black wolf.

Receiving a call from the surgery that said wolf had woken up and was biting off the restraints had worried L, almost as much as receiving a call that the wolf had died might have. Then he turned on the surveillance and watched as the wolf-- *Harry, it had to be Harry, if it was doing something no animal would think to*-- very slowly and carefully removed the IV line inserted in a vein to keep his rapidly dropping fluids up. Seeing the wolf react to his voice and search him out-- not his figure, but a camera, a camera to look into, knowing that someone was looking out of it-- confirmed in L's mind, that the animal really was Harry.

Unfortunately, dealing with a frightened animal might have been easier than dealing with a frightened Harry, because, as L was continually reminding himself, nothing ever worked out with Harry the way he planned. In hindsight, L should never have mentioned sedation considering the history he and Harry had with it.

So now, he was watching wolf-Harry run rampant through the building, dodging the people L sent to catch him-- and thank goodness Harry wasn't attacking them the way he had attacked Rem. The possibility of Harry being some sort of werewolf had already occurred to L (*and everyone else who had witnessed Harry's transformation*) and if he somehow infected anyone... Well, shinigami were bad enough without adding yet more supernatural creatures to the mix.

Though, L did wonder if maybe Harry hadn't tried to bite anyone simply because they weren't trying too hard to catch him. Mogi was certainly wary of getting too close to him, only leaning as far as the animal control staff he wielded would reach, but then, the man had gotten the best view of Harry trying to rip out Rem's throat.
Worst of all though, was the fact that Harry had woken before he had been fully stitched up and so, was running about, bleeding all over the place. L winced internally every time a particularly large splash of blood splattered across the floor as Harry ran, or into a wall when Harry turned a corner too sharply. Every hallway he went through would have to be cleaned now.

L sighed and pressed a key on his computer to start the intercom again. He wasn't sure there was any point in trying to reason with him anymore as Harry didn't seem to be listening-- perhaps he'd regressed into the wolf mind and couldn't understand speech any longer?

...No, Harry is probably just ignoring me, L thought in irritation.

"Evan, please stop running before you injure yourself further. You may not like it, but you do need to have your wounds treated..." L paused. Bargaining with Harry wouldn't go well because what he was about to say was an out and out lie and lies never worked well on Harry, but he might not figure it out until he changed back to human. Maybe by then he would be grateful for the effort L was going to, to keep the foolish boy alive. "We do not have to sedate you if you promise not to bite anyone."

Next to him, Yagami-kun snorted.

L sulked. Harry obviously hadn't believed him either, as he wasn't slowing down and had reached the door of the stairwell Aiber had come down to join up with Mogi. Wammy opened a link with the desktop beside L.

"It might be best if we corner him in the stairwell-- the high ground might allow us to safely tranquilize him."

"Assuming he gives you an opportunity-" Yagami-kun protested. "You saw how quickly he moves-- and he can just disappear!"

That was a good point and certainly one L would have thought of by himself were he not so distracted with the trail of red that wolf-Harry was leaving behind him on the video feed. However...

"Why hasn't he disappeared yet?" L asked.

"Well, actually," Yagami-kun closed his eyes and thought back to the recording he had watched of Evan's fight with Rem. "He only did that when he was human...."

"Why hasn't he changed back?" L asked sharply, as he felt a cold lump begin to form in his stomach. He really needed some cake-- cake Harry had made for him would be choice.

Yagami-kun gaped and turned to the screens again as he made the same connection L just had. "He can't...."

"But, Light," Chief Yagami interrupted. "We all saw him change multiple times-- Why can't he do so now?"

"He must be too hurt," Yagami-kun explained. "He was injured by Rem's claws in that last attack, not to mention he might have swallowed some of the sand Rem turned into. Who knows what affect a shinigami could have on whatever power allows him to change."

Yagami-kun (and everyone else really) was resolutely avoiding saying the word "werewolf" out-loud, as if that might jinx things somehow. But L admitted the boy had a point.... The vets had complained after realigning Harry's hip, that the gouges along his side were slowly widening and would not stop bleeding. They also seemed to be bleeding more profusely as Harry ran, though that
could be due to his exertions. Those wounds were, however, the only ones inflicted by Rem's claws.

Perhaps shinigami claws are poisonous somehow, L thought worriedly.

"Evan, please calm down and let us help you!" L said quickly over the intercom. But Harry didn't even pause in his effort to pull the pins out of the hinges on the door blocking his escape. L was surprised that his jaws were dexterous enough to do that and made a note to have the pins on future doors somehow welded into place. It really shouldn't be this easy for an animal-- even an intelligent one-- to escape a building he had commissioned.

Then again... L reflected on how easily Harry had dealt with previous security measures he had placed around the boy. Maybe it was only Harry he needed to worry about getting through his defenses.

"Watari-" L turned to the computer with an elegant gothic 'W' floating on the screen. "How quickly can you get in position with a tranquilizer gun?"

"Y-you aren't serious, are you Ryuzaki!?" Matsuda gasped from beside Chief Yagami.

"If you will direct me to an appropriate vantage point, I can rendezvous there in less than a minute," Wammy replied calmly.

L checked the security footage, Harry had shoved the door aside and was quickly loping down the stairwell, but he wasn't able to go as fast as he had in the hallway because he had to keeping turning in a circle to follow the stairs. "Go to the third floor, I will tell you when to enter the stairwell."

"Understood."

"L," Yagami-kun said seriously beside him. "What if Watari misses?"

"Watari is an expert marksman, Yagami-kun. He will not miss." L focused on the screens showing wolf-Harry's progress down the stairs, as well as Mogi and Aiber's, and now Watari's. "Yes," Yagami-kun conceded. "But what if he misses? What if Evan attacks him?"

"Evan will not attack. He has not done so yet, he is too focused on escaping. And Wammy would scold him later, L thought, in the hope that even in this form, Harry would remember his friends.

"Do you think it might be better to simply let him go?"

L turned from staring at the screens to glare at the arrogant boy. "He is injured and needs to be treated."

Yagami-kun nodded. "Yes, but maybe he knows that. The vets weren't having much luck stitching him, maybe the reason he's trying to leave is so he can get help?"

"And what help could he get?" L snapped angrily before his mind went blank. Unexplained occurrences, a secret cult that indoctrinated only 'special' children, Harry's warnings and seeming foreknowledge, his miraculous abilities... Harry was going to his people for help. Because they would know how to fix him-- because they knew about the death gods... they knew.

"L?" Chief Yagami was calling him. Yagami-kun was leaning over him looking concerned. L wondered if his face had shown the sudden rage he felt inside at his revelation.

"L, I am at the door," Watari's voice came over the speakers. The task force looked up to see him
standing with a rifle by the third floor stairwell door. The camera on the second floor showed wolf-Harry just turning the bend to continue down the stairs. L watched him pad down the steps tiredly.

"Abort. Mogi, Aiber cease pursuit." L typed a command out on one of his terminals. A warning popped up saying the front doors were opening.

"What?" Watari sounded surprised.

"L, what are you doing?" Chief Yagami asked in shock. L ignored them both and typed a command to open the doors on Harry's path to the front entrance.

"L, what is going on? Is Evan returning to surgery?" Watari asked insistently over the intercom.

"No, he is finding his own surgeon," L replied monotonously. He and the team watched silently as wolf-Harry crept carefully out of the stairwell on the first floor, looking about for an ambush, before rushing down the hall toward the front entrance.

"L! You can't let him out like this! What if he attacks someone?" Chief Yagami shouted.

"Evan will not attack anyone, he is perfectly aware of his actions," L said as he watched wolf-Harry rush out the atrium of the building and down the front steps to the street. The cameras outside the building followed his progress until he dove into an alley across the street and disappeared from view.

"But he is still a wolf wandering down crowded streets! He will start a panic!"

"Most people won't recognize him as a wolf, Chief Yagami." L stood and headed for the door. "Didn't your own son mistake him for a dog?"

"What?" Both Yagamis sounded perplexed as L left the room.

Watari met L as he waited before the elevator.

"L, what is going on? Why did you let Evan leave?" Watari whispered worriedly. "He needs help!"

"He is getting help," L answered tonelessly.

"What?"

"The cult, Watari, he is going back to his cult."

Watari gasped, then thought about it carefully. "But, they-- do you think they are all like Evan?"

"No one is like Evan," L said as the elevator opened and he boarded. Watari followed before the doors closed and they were both lifted to the top of the building.

"I mean, my boy, do you think they can do the sorts of things Evan can?"

"Perhaps."

Watari glanced at him. "Are you alright?"

"He knew. They all knew, Watari!" L bit out suddenly. "They all knew...."

"Knew what, my boy?"
"About the shinigami, the death note, everything!" L breathed out harshly, the fury from before rising again. "Evan knew the whole time and he said nothing!"

"Now that isn't entirely fair," Watari admonished. "He was quite adamant about the danger, and continually tried to both warn and protect us!"

"But he never explained!" L shouted. "He knew what was going on and all he could say was to hide our faces and be careful! As if I couldn't figure that much out myself!"

"Now, really," Watari said loudly. "He did try, you know how much he dislikes dishonesty. If he didn't tell us everything but still wished to help, it can only be because he could not tell us!"

"Why could he not tell me then?" L said angrily, refusing to be reasoned with now. He wanted to shout these things at Harry. How dare he keep such secrets, such powers, such a dangerous truth, from someone he professed to love! "Why didn't he tell me?" he seethed.

"Oh my boy," Watari said softly, watching sadly. "I do not know, but I am sure it is the same reason he does not tell us many of the secrets in his life."

Of course.

The cult, L thought caustically as he composed himself.

He was sick of the influence such a rotten organization had over his Harry, and that he had been forced into allowing Harry to return to them! L fumed silently. Well, he hadn't been able to help Harry-- because he simply didn't know enough to be of any help-- Harry and he would be having a discussion about that later-- but once Harry returned, L would make sure the man never went back to those vile people again.

< tân glas> blue fire; a welsh bluebell flame spell?
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

After Harry flees the building as a wolf, he seeks out magical help. He manages to get to a shop that sends for aurors who take him to the hospital. With help he is able to change back, some sort of death curse is discovered in the wounds Rem gave him, and then the auror he first met when he entered Japan sits down with Harry to have a little chat. They mostly discuss what happened with the shinigami, and how the curse is affecting Harry, then the conversation turns to the "investigation team" that managed to catch Kira. The auror knows the muggles must have encountered the shinigami, and that Harry must have magically battled the creature in order to be wounded so. He warns Harry that any muggles exposed to the magical world must be dealt with by the authorities--by Obliviators--and that if Harry knows the muggles in question and where they are, to aid the aurors in containing them. Harry, of course, insists he didn't see the muggles, and his friend--while close to the investigation--had not been around to see any magic. True, but he's gonna be in so much trouble for this.

The investigation team is worried about where wolf-Harry went, and the new Kira activity that started after Misa was released. Light and L are pissing each other off, and everyone is stressed out because now they know that some invisible supernatural creature is involved and that creates issues for both sides of the investigation.

Meanwhile, Harry is released from the hospital, and the Japanese aurors are on the hunt for the last Kira and shinigami. Hoping to get the aurors off his trail, Harry returns to London, and heads to Hogwarts to speak with Hermione. Part of the reason for this is his wand was actually destroyed by Rem, and he needs a new one. Didn't plan out exactly how, but I was intending for him to end up with the Elder wand again. Just cause, you know... MoD!!Harry. It's my fav.

Once he gets a wand he heads back to Japan, apparating to a random alley in Tokyo before apparating to the investigation team's building. Just to keep the aurors from tracking him. Then, shit hits the fan!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

((Harry returns to the base; investigation team very eager and ask lots of questions--mostly Mochida--Light acting polite and creeping Harry out; L furious with him, some of the police suspicious of him))

Harry sputtered. "N-now look! You're really looking at all this the wrong way!"
"Oh, and what way should I be looking at it?" L asked peevishly.

"Well, you don't have to deal with a scary monster hanging over you, plotting to kill you," Harry said brightly.

"Kira is still at large Harry."

"Oh, ha-ha, very funny," Harry snapped. "I meant the death god and you know it!"

L nodded slightly in acknowledgment. "Yes... I thank you for stopping the creature Harry. I reviewed the footage of your fight and I could see on several pages torn from the death god’s notebook the first few letters of Wammy’s name and... others, before you set them on fire," L looked at Harry seriously. "You saved all our lives."

"I just... didn't want you to die," Harry said in embarrassment. "I didn't know what else to do...."

L sighed. "Very well. Considering the ineffectual efforts of the Task Force to assist in stopping Rem, as well as the obvious outcome had she succeeded in her actions, I cannot truly... be mad... at you for your... feat." L forced the last word through ground teeth.

"Er, alright," Harry said awkwardly.

"However," L said forcefully. "I would like to question you on why you never saw fit to tell me you had any means of battling a creature like a death god, or that you had any idea such a creature even existed. And why you never brought up the fascinating fact that you are a werewolf. This is not the sort of information you keep from your friends, Harry, and certainly not your lover."

"Wa-wait!" Harry yelped. He could feel his face burning even as he resolutely decided to ignore that last comment. "I'm not a werewolf."

L glared at him.

"Well, don't look at me like that!" Harry said angrily. "This is just like your crazy theory about me being kidnapped by spies or something! You're just really good at being wrong about anything to do-
"

"If you are not a werewolf, then why do you turn into a wolf!" L yelled at him, clearly fed up with Harry's attempt to divert the conversation.

Wammy walked up to L and placed a consoling hand on his shoulder before turning to Harry who was still stunned that L had raised his voice like that. "Yes Harry. I would also like to know how you managed to accomplish such a feat, and what it means if you are indeed, not a werewolf."

Harry looked to the side. "Don't know what you mean," he muttered.

L brushed off Wammy's hand and stalked up to Harry. "We have video of you doing so, Harry! You cannot argue this time!"

"Yeah, about that...." Harry winced, this was not going to go well. "Could I, um, have that?"

L stared at him. "Have what, Harry?" he asked flatly.

"The, er, video." Harry coughed, looking away again. "Of, um, me. Could I have that, please?"

"You deny that you changed into a wolf, yet you want the video depicting you doing so?" L asked shortly and Harry could tell he was becoming even angrier. This really wasn't going as well as he'd
hoped.
"Yes...?"

L stared at him. When Harry glanced away, he noticed Wammy also staring at him, a bit chidingly in fact. Harry huffed.

"Oh fine! Bloody hell-- Yes! Alright?" Harry said quickly. "Yes! I can turn into a wolf-- but that doesn't make me a werewolf!"

L smirked at him, prompting Harry to continue on if only to wipe that expression off his face.

"If I was a werewolf, I'd have killed everyone in the building."

Wammy coughed suddenly and L glared at him. "What do you mean?" he asked harshly.

"Well, it's not that they're bad people or anything," Harry explained quickly. "It's just, it's a curse, you see. So, when they're around humans, they go a little mad and just, er, rip them apart..." Harry mumbled, feeling bad suddenly about Remus. He never should have said such an evil thing. "They don't mean to, usually."

L and Wammy stared at him in silence, L with a narrow glare, Wammy with a dazed sort of wonder.

"Er, so, anyway," Harry said loudly, trying to break the tension. "Can I have the tapes please? And, er, any other copies of the, um, fight from that night?"

"Why?" L asked shortly.

"Um... because...." Harry sighed. "Look, I really didn't take the time to come up with an excuse, I just need you to trust me, okay?"

"No."

Harry blinked incredulously. "Y-you're not going to trust me?"

L looked at him blankly. "I do trust you Harry, but I am not giving you the footage I have without a full explanation."

"Oh, like you ever explain anything to me!" Harry said irritably.

"I have explained things to you before, Harry. Perhaps not everything-- but then neither do you." L stared at Harry before turning and walking toward Wammy. "If you are not in the mood to discuss your supernatural abilities at the moment, then I will have to ask you to wait until after I close the Kira case. After all," L called over his shoulder. "People are still dying."


"Look," Harry said as he caught up to them. "I can't explain right now, there isn't time, I just--" Harry took a deep breath. "I really need you to trust me for a little bit, alright!"

L looked at Harry briefly. "As I said, Harry, I do-"

"No!" Harry shouted. "You don't!" They glared at each other. "Please," Harry tried again. "I promise I'll explain after everything is over."

L stared at him for a while. "You cannot ask me to trust you blindly when you have never granted
Harry winced regretfully, L was never going to let that go. "Well, that's what I'm trying to do right now! So please-"

"No, Harry!" L said sharply and Harry flinched away from him. L didn't look just angry now, he looked... betrayed. "I need to finish this case," L said quietly. "Then I will have time for you."

Harry closed his eyes. "I only have time right now," he said sadly as he took the Elder wand out of his pocket. "So, I--" Harry wavered when both L and Wammy jerked away from him at the sight of the wand. "I'm, really, really sorry about this."

Before either of them could reach him, Harry waved the wand with a half-hearted "Petrificus Totalus." But, of course, the power of the deathstick more than made up for Harry's wavering will, and both men before him fell to the ground, stiff as boards. Harry winced as their bodies hit the ground, but the spell should protect them from being bruised. With another wave, Harry floated them both up and levitated them over to the bed on the other side of the room. After setting them down carefully, Harry pulled his Invisibility Cloak out of his pocket and draped it over them, making sure they were fully covered.

As the shimmering cloth fell over their faces, Harry could see L glaring at him as viciously as he could without moving a muscle. Once that was done, Harry walked a short distance over to an armchair to collapse in it and held his head in his hands. He felt worse than when he'd woken up with someone sewing his side closed. Just the thought of L-- William-- and Wammy being so mad at him that they-- they hated him... was awful. Harry felt absurdly like he was going to start crying.

He shook his head vigorously and stood up. He didn't have time for this-- he needed to get rid of any physical evidence of his magic and then...

Harry cast a quick disillusionment charm and started walking quickly out of the room. He would go to where Wammy had set up his end of the computer terminal running this building, and then...

Harry would have to figure out how to erase any data about his fight with Rem without knowing the first thing about computers.

After creeping carefully down through the building to Wammy's terminal room, Harry dispelled the charm and stared at the wall of screens and electronics blinking before him. Then he pulled the mokeskin pouch out of his pocket to get the two-way mirror. He needed Hermione's help.

It took a few tries, with Harry becoming more frantic each time, but finally Hermione answered.

"Harry? What's going on? Are you alright?" she called as her worried face swam into view.

"I'm alright," Harry said quickly. "Listen, Hermione, I need you to come here right now, can you do that for me?"

"What?" she asked startled. "Aren't you still in Japan? What's wrong, Harry?"

"I need your help, please, Hermione, please hurry."

"I- I'm at Hogwarts right now, but I'll leave straight away. Where are you?"

"Can you follow the signal from the mirror?" Harry asked hopefully.

"I- Yes, yes I should be able to, I'll be there soon." Hermione's face wavered in the mirror, it looked
as though she was running. "Are you sure you're alright, Harry?"

"I am, I just need help quick. I don't have much time," Harry said. Hermione nodded into the mirror and then put it away as she ran faster. Harry set the mirror down on Wammy's desk before sitting in the chair before it and stared sadly at the many computer screens hung around the room. It would be a long wait for Hermione to arrive.

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Chapter End Notes

So, Hermione helps Harry destroy the digital evidence, not because she's tech savvy, but rather because she comes up with the biggest hammer strike plan ever. She and Harry use a rune spell to have lightning rain down on the building and magically burn out every computer and camera and harddrive there. ^__^

Then Harry gets her help to smuggle L and Wammy out of the country, to Grimmauld Place, and he... releases them. Good god, is L ever pissed off. Hate to say it though, this is almost exactly what he did to Harry, so... payback.

NOT that Harry views it that way. They fight, Hermione gets introduced, eventually L and Wammy are informed that their memories would have been erased if they had stayed and they calm down a bit. Everything is very awkward.

After that, they were gonna go back to Japan, find the investigation team HAD had their memories erased--INCLUDING Light's!-- and they were pretty much just trying to pick up the investigation. L sweeps in, they replace all the broken shit, and things are back on track. Just in time to start pointing back to Misa...

This is about to where I planned to. I was never sure exactly how I'd close out the Kira investigation after this, because I loved Mello and Near, and I always felt bad for Misa, and I did kind of like Light. So... I was waiting to figure out how to make a somewhat happy ending for everyone and... never could.

The only sure scene I had in mind but never wrote was L retrieving the files from his personal server--cause every recording and piece of info was sent to the 'L' server, just in case anything happened to the ones in Japan--and watching exactly what Harry did that night he destroyed the investigation and bespelled him and Wammy. Watching Harry break down and cry, and beg for his friend Hermione to help him, and arguing with her when she tried to talk him out of it. And finding out just how illegal Harry's actions were--and that he still did it in order to protect L. So, yeah, that was probably the real ending for me. L finding out how very much Harry loved him, that he was willing to turn against his whole secret society just for L's sake. Maybe even realizing that he'd do the same for Harry, and kinda already had what with all the strings he pulled during the Kira Case.

Then the idiots would eat cake and argue together, and cue sunset! @__@ Sappy, right? God, I was such a sap for these two once upon a time! I wish I still was so I could write more, but, I just don't have the inspiration anymore, y'know?
Well, that's the end folks! No more story after this! I'll put together all the little scraps I found after this, but they aren't really part of the Encounters Saga, so, they're just scraps. Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Random scraps and snippets that had no place in Encounters or anywhere else. This is literally the last of what I could find of my Encounters writing. There is no more! Hope you all enjoyed the ride~

This first snippet was a kind of alternate discussion after L really finds out about magic and confronts Harry and Harry...almost?...explains things? Then it turned into a weird magical theory discussion and.. I scrapped it. I didn't delete it because I thought it might be useful somewhere else, but...seriously, no idea where I was going with this.

"Police are you?" L snapped. "If you wanted to say you were a magic police you should have said so! Or, even better, you could have just said you were a stage magician and we could have left each other there!"

"Okay, now look!" Harry said exasperatedly. "That was the story I'm supposed to tell you, okay? Do you get it? I was a police! A wizard police! That's what aurors are, they're wizard police!" he shouted as his arms waved dramatically.

L just glared flatly at Harry and waited for him to calm down. "Alright, you've made your point."

Harry huffed and sat down. As he calmed a bit he realized something he'd said wasn't quite true. "Er, well actually- auror means "dark wizard catcher." I mean they act like police, but so does everyone in the Department of Law Enforcement."

"Isn't that the same thing?" L asked irritably.

"Not exactly," Harry said sheepishly. "The aurors mainly go after dark wizards- that's, er, any witch or wizard who's used magic to infringe on the basic rights of a human or anyone living with a sentience equivalent to human-" Harry's voice sounded as though he were reciting a memorized line. "But some of the other officers in the department just go after people who misuse muggle artifacts or traffic in illegal creatures or who break one of the laws of wizarding secrecy--"

"Like I am," Harry muttered darkly to himself.

L stared at Harry, intrigued despite himself. So many odd things were being mentioned as if they were everyday matters and L wasn't sure which to question first. Perhaps he should start with the most threatening sounding one. "What basic rights exactly?"

"Oh, uh," Harry started counting off on his fingers. "There's the right of form, the right of thought, and the right of feeling. Any direct manipulation of those through use of magic automatically make a
wizard dark."

"Didn't you threaten to turn me into a ferret? That would change my 'form', correct?" L asked. "Wouldn't you be a dark wizard then?"

"Oh no," Harry said, waving L's question away. "That's basic human transfiguration- not actually a direct manipulation, it's a superficial manipulation. You'd still be yourself and without any help the spell would wear off in a couple hours or a couple days at most. Dark magic makes it permanent- you would be a ferret and never even remember having been human, even if you were changed back into a human later."

"Wouldn't that fall under the realm of 'thought' then?" L leaned forward. He enjoyed learning new things and he enjoyed debating them even more. Harry looked at him oddly, wondering why he wasn't mad anymore.

"Er, no, because the form was changed first and the thoughts altered naturally afterward. If the thoughts are manipulated, form and feeling don't necessarily change to match. See, it would make you think you were a ferret, and you might take on ferret traits through behavior, but you wouldn't grow a tail," Harry nodded factually, satisfied with his answer.

"Can a person's thought's be manipulated to make them become a different person?"

"Yes," Harry said. "There's all sorts of ways to do that actually. Thoughts a lot more fluid than form, so it's easier to change. Course, that also makes them harder to control completely. Anything that control's a person's thoughts directly risks wearing off or not working at all- it depends on the victim's will. The dark wizard would have to have a much stronger will than the person they're controlling, see?"

L nodded.

"Right, but, if the dark wizard does have the stronger will, or if they use a method that doesn't depend on their own will, then a person can easily be made to act or even think like a totally different person than they actually are."

"Wait, what methods?" L asked quickly.

"Well, dark magic can be poured into an object or a potion and then the magic is bound to something physical outside of the original source-- the witch or wizard. Having a physical anchor to guide the dark magic controlling a person can make it easier to control another's thoughts than doing it with one's own thoughts, especially if the victim willingly accepted the physical anchor."

"Why would anyone accept something that could hurt them?" L asked quickly. "And why would that make it more effective?" he added.

"Well, they might not know what it is, and by the time they realize it's harmful, it may be too late," Harry said. "As for why, well, by accepting something, a person lowers a subconscious barrier. That is, it's harder to reject something that you've already accepted once. Does that make sense?"

"Yes," L nodded. This was disturbingly fascinating. "So that is why it is easier to affect a person's mind with an object rather than directly?"

"Well, one reason," Harry said. "The other reason is because of how thought works. I said that will helps determine if a person falls under such an attack?" L nodded. "Right, so if the victim's will helps their thoughts to shake off the attacking wizard's magic, that's usually enough to free them. The attacking wizard would have to set up an attack again and the victim might be able to escape or
fortify their mind in that time. But if the magic is attached to an object the victim is holding or a potion the victim has ingested, then every time the victim tries to shake free, the magic draws strength from its anchor and just holds on tighter."

"So an enchanted object not only makes it easier to enter a victim's mind, but makes it harder for the victim to escape."

"Right, but we don't really say 'enchanted', not for dark magic anyway," Harry corrected.

"Very well." L brought his thumb up to chew. "What about the last 'right'-- feeling."

Harry shrugged. "That's even easier to manipulate and a lot harder to avoid or fix. If thoughts are like water, then feelings are like air— as free and random as wind. It's also a lot harder to prove when someone's emotions have been magically manipulated."

"Why?"

"Because people can't always control their own feelings, so how can they, or anyone, tell if someone else is controlling them?" Harry shrugged. "Oh, but, there is one feeling alteration that's usually really easy to spot."

L leaned forward. "Only one? Perhaps because of it's affect on behavior?"

"Sort of. It's because the feeling becomes so overwhelming it begins to affect nearly everything the victim does," Harry said.

L had visions of people being controlled to be angry and raging out of control the longer the spell had hold of them. Something like that would certainly be easy to spot, and dangerous besides.

"Love," Harry continued, "it's the most powerful emotion, the most difficult to control, but the easiest to induce in anyone."

L stared. That wasn't what he'd expected at all.

This next snippet was originally going to be one of L and Harry's early conversations, back when they first meet, but it got kinda out there and way more personal than I needed them to be at that point, so... scrap! But it was still fun to write, and it gave me a better perspective on Harry's feelings toward death.

"You know, someone once told me not to pity the dead but to pity the living. Especially those who live without love. That... That really helped me. To realize a few things."

"Like what?"

"Like... It's okay... I guess- to die. I mean- It's not something to be scared of. Like... Sometimes death is better than life, or, no- that's not it." Harry thought hard a minute. How could he say what he felt and what he remembered from King's Cross when he died without mentioning that he had actually died? "Um, okay... Death isn't an ending, and it isn't peace, at least not for everyone, but it is something that everyone can share, something that gives everyone a place they can accept..."
"Um... I'm not sure I'm explaining this too well... But I just feel that... Death's not a bad thing. It's not something to be afraid of, but still... I think that it's important to live and to do in your life anything you can to help others live happily because... Life is the only time people get the chance to make choices and once you die, those choices are stuck with you and you can't change them anymore. Even if you feel bad about them, once you die they're all that's left to you. So... so people should live as much as they can so they can meet death without regret ..."

Harry paused a moment, breathless. He had never tried to explain anything like this to anyone before. He had never tried to think about it even. Something about that place, that memory, that dream of death- whatever it was- was too powerful for him to acknowledge. When he found himself remembering, he tried to focus on Dumbledore and how much Harry missed him and hoped he was happy wherever he went. But now here he was, pouring his jumbled thoughts out to William, of all people, and he was starting to get choked up as he remembered the peace and the drifting and the wondering of what was beyond.

"Um, did any of that make any sense?" Harry gulped. He wasn't going to lose his senses over this and certainly not before William, even if he couldn't see him.

"Yes, it seems you are not afraid of death."

"Uh... well, yeah, but-"

"You do not fear death because you are trying to have the best life you can."

"Well, I guess-"

"Because the choices that shape your life stay with you after death, so if you make good choices, you will have a good death. Is that correct?"

Harry thought about it. "Uh, I suppose. Though that's a lot more concise than what I said..."

"So does this mean you believe people are punished in death for bad choices they made in life?"

"I think people punish themselves for whatever they think are bad choices..." Harry said as he thought back to the piece of Voldemort's soul he had seen, sobbing and shaking and covered with wounds. Had that piece been so tortured at the memory of those who died to create its horcrux, or because it had been torn apart and discarded from Tom Riddle's body? With how much pain it was in, did it really matter?

"Don't they say 'only the man who has enough good in him to feel the justice of the penalty can be punished'?"

"What?"

"It means that only good men punish themselves, Harry. That is why criminals don't normally turn themselves in."

"Oh." Harry thought again of that twisted baby. "Somehow I don't think that's an issue in death. I mean, you're left with just yourself when you die so, probably it happens even if you think you don't want it to..."
Harry worried suddenly over the silence. Why had Harry started spouting all that? Now William likely thought he was a looney...

"Harry is... a good man I think." William's voice came more slowly than before. That can't be a good sign Harry thought.

"Er, come again?"

"You say that people who live are to be pitied more than those who are dead because they still have a chance to... make up... for any mistakes they have made. But you know they most likely won't. So you pity them and want to give them chances to change before they die because... you believe they will suffer their poor choices once they die."

William's voice was low and sounded as though he were slowly putting delicate puzzle pieces into place and the wrong word would break them all apart. Harry stayed still, not sure what William thought he'd figured out and not sure that what William was saying really was what he thought. Sure he wanted "bad" people to be given second chances, but that was because of Dumbledore and Snape! Not because of what Harry had learned from the King's Cross in his head... wasn't it?

"Uh... I suppose that's about it... how does that make me good exactly?"

"Maybe not good, but kind. You don't want anyone, even criminals, to suffer needlessly."

"Well," Harry thought of Bellatrix, locked away in Azkaban and madder than ever, even without the dementors around. He thought of Pettigrew who had been murdered by Voldemort's silver hand because he had almost thought of letting Harry go. He was pretty sure he hated them both and he did sort of want them to suffer for all the things they had done. But he still wished Pettigrew hadn't died and just thinking of Bellatrix's crazed screaming as she was taken away after her trial made him flinch.

He pitied them. Just like he had come to pity Voldemort after all the terrible things he had done. Harry had even tried to keep from killing him at the end. It just didn't seem fair, somehow. They had been evil people, they had made the most horrible choices and done terrible things, but... Were they happy now? Bellatrix sure wasn't. Harry was positive that Tom was suffering in death as well. Pettigrew... maybe he would be okay, if he or his friends could forgive him.

He wanted them to suffer, to regret, but... Harry was startled as he realized he wasn't sure they truly deserved the suffering he'd witnessed. Whether that was because the fragment of Tom's soul had been shaped like a baby or because, after he'd had time to reflect, Harry himself regretted trying to ignore the soul fragment's cries, he wasn't sure. But it still seemed wrong to him, so terribly wrong. It reminded him of the real baby Tom, being left alone all night to cry with his mother dead and no one to comfort him. Was it really fair for Tom's death to be so similar to the start of his life when he'd spent the rest of it trying to forget such things?

"I... Yeah," Harry said as he reached his decision. "Yeah, I don't want them, or anyone to suffer, at all." It's not fair, he thought to himself.
Harry and the Task Force after he returns from getting healed. I had a different plan for the battle with Rem then, where Harry steals the Sword of Gryffindor to kill Rem, loses it, and then somehow MATSUDA, of all people, is able to retrieve it and slay Rem in Harry's place. There was also an early idea, that Harry had been using a translation spell to speak Japanese (which he does), but then something would happen that prevented him from using it after the Rem fight, so he'd show up speaking English, and Light would be his creepy translator. But, that got confusing fast and... just no.

Harry jerked as the task force crowded around him, the youngest member at the fore. The man blurted something very quickly and excitedly at him. Harry blinked. He'd missed everything but one word- 'doko.' At least he hoped he'd heard that right. Anyway, doko, doko... that meant 'where' didn't it? Harry blinked again and looked about himself confusedly. Where what? The group of Japanese police were looking at him expectantly.

"Er, ko-nee-chi-wa, mada- er, no- mata? Wait..." The men stared at him as Harry desperately tried to remember an appropriate catch phrase he'd been told to memorize. Ah! "Mou-ee-chi-dou!" he said cheerfully.

The men before him blinked. "Eh?"

"Matsuda was trying to ask where you got the sword from." Light's pleasant voice came from behind him. Harry turned to look at the younger boy. "It appears quite valuable and was the only thing that could injure the death god, so everyone is very curious about it," Light smiled as he stepped next to him and continued. "Did you always have it?"

"Oh," Harry said dumbly and turned to look at the waiting police. This would be awkward. "Er, well, um... I sort of, technically, may have... stolen it."

Light blinked at him before turning and translating that to the investigation squad. Not that it was necessary, as two of them apparently understood English well enough and were already telling the others. Once Harry's answer had been shared with all present, they turned to him again and began firing rapid questions at him, one or two of them might have been in English, but it was hard to tell. Harry looked over at Light hopefully.

"Where did you steal it from? Also, 'you shouldn't steal' even for a good cause." Light grinned at him in sympathy. "However, I think we all agree this was a very good cause, so I doubt anyone will arrest you."

Nice to know some authority figures could overlook his less than scrupulous behavior for the sake of saving lives, Harry thought wryly. Then he realized he had to tell them where the sword came from. Saying he got it out of a hat wouldn't be too bright. Telling them about goblins would be even worse.

"From--" Harry thought quickly. "From a museum!"

"Oh!" the youngest policeman exclaimed, clearly recognizing the word and being very impressed.
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