**Harry Potter with the Power the Dark Lord Knows Not**

by **BakenandEggs**

**Summary**

After a summer spent attending Quidditch World Cup games and tutoring sessions, Harry returns to Hogwarts for his fourth year of schooling with plans to study hard, have fun, play Quidditch and become an animagus. Too bad there's a Tournament that gets in the way. The fourth (and final) part in my series, 'Harry Potter in the Claw of the Raven'.

**Notes**

Welcome to the fourth (and final) story in my ‘Harry Potter in the Claw of the Raven’ series. If you haven’t read the three stories preceding this one, you probably should before reading this one.
Chapter 1

The first half of Harry’s summer was absolutely perfect. He had completed all of his summer assignments in the first couple of weeks, of course, and was still attending tutoring sessions with Sirius, Cousin Narcissa and his Gobbledygook tutor. He and Draco didn’t have Quidditch tutors this summer, partly because their tutors were playing in the World Cup, but mostly because they had chosen to spend that time attending the World Cup games instead.

Sirius had promised to get them to as many games as possible and so far he had kept his promise. He had taken them to at least one game each week and, during particularly brilliant week, they had attended four different games. Luna and Neville had attended most of the games with them, and Daphne, Theo and Blaise had attended a few as well. Thankfully, he didn’t have to invite Pansy to things anymore.

She and Tracey Davis had barely spoken to him since Sirius had threatened her father with financial ruin unless he stopped Pansy’s inappropriate advances, something Harry didn’t mind at all. Unfortunately Pansy and Tracey had also stopped speaking to Draco, Theo, Blaise and Daphne as well, which put Daphne in an awkward position since they were the only other girls in her dorm except for Millicent Bulstrode (who was one of the most unpleasant people Harry had ever come across). Daphne’s situation was something Harry could relate to – he and his dorm-mates hadn’t been on speaking terms for a year and a half – so, he, Draco, Theo and Blaise, had taken the opportunity to deepen their friendship with Daphne which, in the long term, was definitely a good thing for her. After all, three of them were going be Lords of Most Ancient and Noble Houses one day.

“…Harry?” Sirius asked, from his seat at the head of the breakfast table.

Harry jolted slightly in his seat in surprise. “I beg your pardon? My mind was elsewhere.”

Sirius and Remus both looked amused. “What were you thinking about so deeply?”

“Daphne.” Harry admitted. “And how ridiculous Pansy is.”

“You were thinking about girls?” Sirius grinned. “Ah, my little godson, all grown up.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I was thinking about one of my friends.”

“And your arch-nemesis.” Remus added with a grin to match Sirius’.

“Pansy isn’t my arch-nemesis.” Harry retorted, offended at the very idea. “She’s a small bug in my ointment. Voldemort is my arch-nemesis.”

Sirius grimaced. “Why did you have to ruin a perfectly fun conversation with mention of him?”

“Sorry.” Harry responded. “I’m just a bit on edge. I can’t believe he’s still not doing anything. He’s been back for over a year now!”

“He’s doing plenty of things.” Sirius responded. “He’s doubled the werewolf population, he’s killed hundreds of muggles in the last few months, he broke his followers out of Azkaban, and he’s currently trying to oust Dumbledore from the position of Chief Warlock.”

Harry perked up. “I didn’t know about the Dumbledore thing. How’s he doing that?”
“Well, technically Lucius is doing it for him.” Sirius corrected himself. “I think it’s the first order You-Know-Who has ever given him that he wholeheartedly agreed with.”

“Are you helping?” Harry asked with interest.

“I will be.” Sirius nodded. “Which will cause some problems with my relationship with the Order but, according to Lucius, will go a long way to convincing Voldemort that you and I might change sides after all.”

“Which is good for the Malfoys.” Harry commented.

“It is.” Sirius agreed. “The matter will be brought to a vote next month and then we’ll have to appoint a new Chief Warlock.”

“Who will it be?” Harry asked. “And how did I not know about this? I was at the last Wizengamot meeting with you.”

“I only found out this morning.” Sirius explained, gesturing to one of the letters that were now lying beside his breakfast plate. “Lucius is making sure he has the votes.”

“How are you so sure it will go through?” Remus asked. “People love Dumbledore.”

“The non-traditionalists love Dumbledore.” Harry corrected.

“Along with some of the traditionalists.” Sirius told him. “Lord Longbottom will vote with him, as will Lord Diggory. Lady MacMillian, Lord Odgen, Lady Bones, and Lord Greengrass all will as well, unless we can assure them that he won’t be replaced with one of You-Know-Who’s followers.”

Harry frowned. “That will be hard to do, won’t it?”

“Yes, ideally we’d find someone who was seen as neutral.” Sirius explained. “Lord Prince is probably the best option. Historically he’s been categorised as dark, but he could go either way. The problem is that the light faction won’t vote in anyone even remotely dark, and the dark faction won’t vote in anyone light.”

“You make it sound as though the nobles are the only ones who get to make the decision.” Remus said neutrally. “There are other seats you know.”

“I know,” Sirius shot his friend an apologetic look. “But realistically even they fall into the two factions. The Ministry officials will mostly vote with Fudge, who will vote with Lucius, the elected officials, and the youth representative, will vote with Dumbledore.”

Harry snorted. “I can’t believe that Percy Weasley is the youth representative. He’s a prat.”

“So is the Minister of Magic.” Sirius pointed out with a crooked smile.

“What about the Order of Merlin recipients?” Remus asked curiously. “Where will they vote?”

“They’re the wild cards.” Sirius admitted. “Dumbledore will of course vote for himself, as will Tilly Toke; there are four of them who will definitely vote with Lucius, but the rest of them could go either way. It really all depends on who Lucius nominates to replace Dumbledore.”

1-1-1

“Have you seen any of the World Cup Quidditch games yet?” Harry asked the Weasley twins.
The three of them were sitting on the lawn, near the Weasley’s house, waiting for the adults to finish their Order of the Phoenix meeting. Order meetings were the only time that Harry got to see the twins during the summer, but unfortunately it almost always meant running into Ron as well.

“No.” Fred sighed glumly, before perking up. “But we’ve been given tickets…”

“…to the England versus Bulgaria game next week…” George added.

“…because we played in the Under Seventeen League last year.”

“Smashing.” Harry grinned. “Well, except for the fact that Bulgaria are going to beat England.”

“Yeah…”

“…we know.” The twins nodded. “But still…”

“…it’s a game.”

“True.” Harry lay back on the grass. “It would just be great if our team was actually any good.”

“They’ll make it into the quarter-finals at least.” George protested

“Which makes them one of the eight best teams in the world.” Harry said. “That doesn’t sound very impressive to me.”

“They’ll be better…”

“…when we join the team.” The twins promised.

“That’s what Draco and I say to each other.” Harry laughed. “Imagine how good the team would be in five years if all four of us were on it.”

“You want to play Quidditch professionally?” George asked in surprise

“Maybe?” Harry sighed as he watched the clouds moving. “It’s a long way away. But it seems like a better idea than training for a profession that I would only be able to do for a few years anyway.”

“Why only a few years?”

“I’ll be Lord Potter.” Harry reminded them. “I’ll have responsibilities. Besides, I really do like the business side of it all. You know that chocolate business my dorm-mates have going?”

“That chocolate is bloody good.” Fred commented

Harry laughed. “Yeah, well, I’m their financial backer. I put in the capital at the beginning and I get a percentage of the profits. I’ve already earmarked enough through it to repay the money I put in, so anything I get now it entirely profit.”

There was a long silence, before the twins spoke again. “Harry, old friend?”

“Yes?” Harry asked, shielding his eyes from the sun so that he could see them.

“If…”

“…and we mean if…”

“…we wanted to start up a business…”
“…let’s say maybe a joke shop…”

“…would you consider being our financial backer?”

Harry sat up so that he was facing them. “Really? You guys want to start up a joke shop?”

“Shhh!” The twins both admonished, glancing towards the house.

“Mum’ll go spare if she hears…”

“…she hates the idea.”

“Sorry.” Harry lowered his voice. “But the answer is yes, of course. You’d have to show me a business proposal, and I might ask you to sit down with me to make sure that it’s viable, but other than that, I’d be thrilled to invest. You guys would be a huge success.”

The twins stared at him. “Seriously?”

“Just like that?”

“Yes.” Harry nodded. “You guys should use the phrase ‘Wizarding Wheezes’ in your store name. It would give you great advertising.”

“That’s what we were thinking.” The twins chorused, their faces beaming.

“Not that we’re admitting to having been involved in any pranks at Hogwarts.” Fred added quickly.

“What?!!” Mrs. Weasley’s shout could be clearly heard from inside. “Sirius you can’t…”!

Harry winced as he looked towards the house, sighing in relief when the sound was abruptly cut off. Apparently someone had decided to put up some wards.

“Woah.” The twins commented.

“I wonder what your godfather did.”

Harry sighed. “During the next Wizengamot meeting there’s going to be a vote to replace Dumbledore as Chief Warlock.”

The twins’ eyes widened. “Is it You-Know-Who?”

“Sort of.” Harry answered. “He was the one who started the idea, but now Sirius has agreed to support Lord Prince’s candidacy to replace Dumbledore. Lord Prince would at least be impartial.”

Fred whistled lowly. “No wonder Mum’s shouting.”

“She and Dad practically worship the ground Dumbledore walks on.”

Harry grimaced. “Yes, a lot of people do.”

“But not you?” George asked.

“He’s the one who sent me to live with my muggle relatives, who were horrible to me.” Harry told them. “And he didn’t even try to get Sirius a trial.”

“Not to mention the fact that he tried to fight Sirius for custody of you.” Fred put.
“Yes.” Harry agreed. “Besides, I think he’s a terrible Chief Warlock. He doesn’t uphold the rules at all.”

“Are you sure you’re not just saying that because you’re traditional?” George asked.

Harry considered his words carefully, he and twins had never actually discussed the issue of tradition before. “I’m sure that has something to do with it, but if there is any place left in our country where traditions ought to be respected – don’t you think the Wizengamot would be that place? Muggle government is significantly more traditional than ours is with Dumbledore as Chief Warlock.

“Besides, it’s not just the traditional parts.” Harry told them seriously. “Last summer the Undersecretary was trying to pass a new law that would discriminate against werewolves. She spent ages going on and on about how horrible they were and didn’t try to offer any kind of evidence to support her opinion. Dumbledore should have stopped her and asked for evidence, but he did nothing. Eventually Sirius stood up and did it.”

“So Sirius wants Lord Prince to be the next Chief Warlock?” Fred asked.

“I’m not sure whether he wants him exactly.” Harry answered. “But he doesn’t want Dumbledore to be Chief Warlock and he doesn’t want one of Voldemort’s supporters to be either. He thinks Lord Prince is a good middle ground.”

“Well did you decide to be traditional?” George asked after a few seconds of silence. “Don’t you find it…”

“…ridiculous?” Fred put in.

“I was going say restricting.” George grinned. “But yeah, ridiculous works too.”

“No, to both questions.” Harry answered with a smile. “I guess I can see why it might look a bit silly from your perspective, but it doesn’t seem at all ridiculous to me. Also, I like all the rules. It makes things easier, I know exactly how I’m supposed to act.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re on top of the food chain.” Fred pointed out.

“That does make it easier.” Harry admitted. “But it’s harder as well. It means I have a lot more responsibility. Say you see someone acting inappropriately, whose job is it to stop them?”

The twins exchanged a look. “It depends what they’re doing.”

“Good point.” Harry conceded. “But, my point is that if I see someone at school, who claims to be traditional, acting inappropriately I’m responsible for stopping them.”

“That must suck.” George commented.

“It’s not too bad.” Harry told him. “I’m getting used to it.”

“Still,” Fred started. “If we were to become traditional…”

“We’d be at the bottom of the food chain.” George added.

“It doesn’t sound like fun.”

Harry looked at them in surprise. “No, you wouldn’t.”

The twins looked surprised. “We wouldn’t?”
“Of course not.” Harry frowned. “Your mother was the daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett. Her oldest brother was Lord Prewett before he died. You wouldn’t be at the top of the food chain, sure, but you wouldn’t be at the bottom either.”

“Uncle Gideon was a lord?” They chorused in disbelief.

“Mum never mentioned anything like that.” George added.

“Your Uncle Fabian was his heir.” Harry told them. “So the House is currently unclaimed. Sirius once asked me why your brother Bill hadn’t claimed it.”

“Bill could be a lord?” They chorused again, before laughing.

“Mum would hate that!” Fred grinned.

George nodded. “Can you see Ron’s face? He wouldn’t know whether to be horrified or jealous.”

“If Bill doesn’t want to accept it, Charlie would be next in line.” Harry explained. “If all three of your older brothers turn it down, one of you could be the lord.”

They grimaced. “Yuck!”

“No offence, Harry.” George added quickly.

“But that is definitely not our idea of good time.” Fred finished.

Harry laughed. “You should ask your brother why he hasn’t accepted it.”

“He probably doesn’t even know about it.” Fred commented.

“No way would Mum have told him.” George agreed. “She hates all things traditional.”

“She’s nice enough to me.” Harry pointed out.

“That’s because she thinks she can convert you.” George laughed.

Fred nodded. “Well, that, and you’re the boy-who-lived.”

1-1-1

“Harry?”

Harry looked up from his breakfast plate to see Sirius looking at him. “Yes?”

“Have you considered what you want to do for your birthday?” Sirius asked. “It’s in eight days.”

“I was thinking about holding a dinner party.” Harry answered. “Nothing too fancy, just some food and games. If I hold it here then Madame Longbottom should let Neville come.”

“Who did you want to invite?” Remus asked.

“Draco and Luna, obviously.” Harry started. “Neville, Theo, Blaise, and Daphne. I would invite Takashi, but he’s staying with his grandparents in Japan again, and I was thinking that maybe I would invite the Weasley twins this year – I had a really good chat with the twins yesterday. The problem is dinner parties ought to have an equal number of boys and girls, but there is no way I’m inviting Pansy or Tracey and I don’t know who else I would invite.”
“Why don’t you invite people to bring their betrothed?” Sirius suggested. “I presume most of them have contracts?”

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “Daphne doesn’t, the boy she was betrothed to died, and neither do Neville and Luna. But that’s alright because between the four of us we’ll cancel each other out. Everyone else is betrothed though. Well, except for the twins.”

“You’ll want to send out the invitations today.” Sirius told him. “Let me know what you want and Remus and I will make it happen.”

“And I wouldn’t invite the twins.” Remus put in. “I doubt Molly would agree to them coming without their younger siblings.”

Harry grimaced. “Good point. I’ll invite them to Quidditch game soon or something.

1-1-1

“Harry?” Sirius asked three days later.

Harry hastily swallowed his mouthful of eggs. “Yes?”

“I need to see you in my study after breakfast.” Sirius told him.

Harry looked towards the pile of opened letters to the side of Sirius’ plate. “Is everything alright?”

“Of course.” Sirius smiled reassuringly. “I’ve received some correspondence that I would like to discuss with you.”

Remus snorted from his seat opposite Harry. “Correspondence? Lucius is rubbing off on you, Sirius. Why not just call them letters like the rest of us.”

Harry grinned in amusement as Sirius pulled a face. “Did you hear something from Lord Malfoy about the Chief Warlock issue?”

“Lucius and I are having brunch this morning to discuss it.” Sirius told him. “This is about something else.”

Harry nodded in understanding before turning his attention back to his breakfast. What could Sirius want to talk to him about?

After they had both finished, Harry followed Sirius to his study and, following his godfather’s prompting, sat in one of the large dragon skin chairs.

“Do you remember how, at breakfast a few mornings ago, we discussed your friends’ betrothal contracts?” Sirius started.

Harry gave his godfather a strange look. “I remember us mentioning that most of them had one. Why?”

“I received a letter this morning asking if I would be interested in discussing a contract between yourself and Daphne Greengrass.” Sirius told him.

Harry stared at him. “What?”

Sirius looked sympathetic. “It’s not an unreasonable request. There are very few traditional children around your age who aren’t already betrothed.”
“I’m almost fourteen.” Harry grumbled. “I’m not a child.”

Sirius looked amused. “Sorry, you’re right. There are very few traditional almost fourteen year olds who aren’t already betrothed.”

Harry leaned forward in his chair. “So Daphne’s asking that we become betrothed?”

“Daphne’s father is asking.” Sirius corrected. “I don’t know if Daphne is even aware of her father’s request.”

“Oh.”

“You don’t have to be betrothed.” Sirius said quickly. “Your father definitely wasn’t. If you get betrothed now you won’t be able to change your mind in the future.”

“But if I don’t get betrothed now, every traditional girl might be unavailable by the time I want to get married.” Harry said.

“Unlikely.” Sirius grinned. “I can’t see anyone agreeing to marry Pansy anytime soon.”

Harry laughed. “That’s horrible. Besides, I wouldn’t marry her if she was the only girl on earth.”

Sirius’ expression sobered. “Harry, you shouldn’t agree to a betrothal because you’re scared that you might not have a chance in the future.”

“But it is a factor, isn’t it?” Harry countered. “If I want to marry Daphne, this might be my only chance.”

Sirius’ eyes narrowed slightly. “Do you want to marry Daphne?”

“I don’t know.” Harry sighed. “Maybe? I can’t imagine marrying anyone, but Daphne’s great. She’s pretty and clever and funny and Cousin Narcissa would like her.”

“You don’t have to decide now.” Sirius told him. “I don’t need to reply to Samuel for at least another few days.”

Harry couldn’t help but feel relief at that. “Would you mind if I talked to Cousin Narcissa about it?”

“Not at all.” Sirius sounded a bit relieved himself. “Good idea. She would be a great person to talk to. You could talk to Andromeda about it as well, if you like? She had a different experience with betrothal contracts than Narcissa.”

Harry nodded. “I will, thank you.”

“No worries.” Sirius grinned. “I’m just glad it’s not me.”
Harry made arrangements to meet Cousin Andromeda for afternoon tea. He was thankful that Lord Greengrass’ letter had come on one of his days off from tutoring – he couldn’t imagine having to sit and listen to Cousin Narcissa teach him about proper comportment with the idea of the betrothal contract bouncing around in his head.

He flooed to Cousin Andromeda’s house at three fifteen and was relieved to see that neither Cousin Ted, nor Tonks, were present. He really didn’t want to have to talk this through with an audience.

Cousin Andromeda greeted with a polite curtsey before leading him to a small spindly table outside where afternoon tea was laid out.

“Tea, Harry?” Cousin Andromeda asked.

“Yes, please.” Harry inclined his head, sitting in one of the chairs. They were much more comfortable than they looked.

Harry watched silently as she poured them both tea and focussed all his willpower on not fidgeting. Normally it was natural for him, well it had been ever since Cousin Narcissa had forced him to learn how to sit still, but today it was harder than usual.

Eventually the tea was poured and the pleasantries had been completed, allowing Harry bring up the subject he had come to discuss.

“A betrothal contract?” Cousin Andromeda asked, setting her tea cup down on the table.

“Yes, ma’am.” Harry nodded. “With the eldest daughter of the Lord of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass.”

“The House of Greengrass has always had an excellent reputation.” Cousin Andromeda nodded. “I am surprised that she is not already betrothed.”

“She was betrothed to the eldest son of the Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Odgen.” Harry explained. “But he died of Dragon Pox a few years ago.”

“I see.” Cousin Andromeda inclined her head. “And what are your thoughts about being betrothed to this young lady?”

Harry sighed and sipped at his tea. “I don’t know. She is my friend, but it seems like a really big decision.”

“It is.” Cousin Andromeda agreed. “It is possibly the biggest decision you will ever make in your life.”

Harry’s stomach twisted. “What do you think I should do?”

“I think you should eat a scone.” Cousin Andromeda told him kindly, pushing the plate of scones towards him.

Harry felt too nervous to want to eat, but he selected a scone from the plate and bit into it anyway.

“I presume that you are aware that I was contracted to marry Lucius Malfoy?” Cousin Andromeda asked.
Harry nodded, before swallowing his mouthful of scone. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Unfortunately, Lucius and I never got along.” Cousin Andromeda told him. “I found him terribly boring and, I suspect, he believed the same of me.”

“Boring?” Harry asked in disbelief. He couldn’t imagine anyone describing either Lord Malfoy or Cousin Andromeda as boring.

Cousin Andromeda smiled. “Yes, terribly. But to Narcissa, Lucius was the most fascinating man she had ever met. It’s all relative you see.”

“But how will I know if I will find her boring in the future?” Harry asked.

“Do you find her boring now?” Cousin Andromeda asked.

“Not at all!” Harry denied. “She’s brilliant.”

“Well, that is certainly a good start.” Cousin Andromeda smiled. “And when you imagine yourself marrying her, what do you feel?”

Harry frowned. “I can’t imagine being married to anyone, but I think I’d rather it was Daphne than anyone else I know. I love Luna, but she would drive me crazy and Pansy is crazy and all the other girls I know are really boring.”

Cousin Andromeda’s smile grew. “Then what are your concerns?”

“What if I change my mind?” Harry asked. “What if I meet someone when I’m older, like you met Cousin Ted or my father met my mother, who I like more than Daphne? But what if I say no, and she gets betrothed to someone else and I never meet anyone better?”

“Changing your mind is not an option.” Cousin Andromeda told him. “That is why it is the biggest decision you will make in your life.”

“You changed your mind.” Harry reminded her.

“It was never my choice to be betrothed to Lucius.” Cousin Andromeda countered. “It was my grandfather’s decision. I made the choice to marry Ted and, while it is not a choice I regret, it shamed both my family and Lucius. How do you think he felt to hear that I had run off with another man?”

Harry winced. “Not so good.”

“Once you make this decision, you must live with it for the rest of your life.” Cousin Andromeda told him. “So you must decide which of your ‘what if’ scenarios you think is more likely: that you one day cease to find Miss Greengrass to be interesting, or that you never find someone you like as much as her.”

1-1-1

The next day Sirius took Harry, Draco and Neville to a Quidditch game in Bulgaria. Despite having lived in magical world for three years, Harry still found it hard to believe how easy it was to travel overseas when using a floo. Though admittedly, Harry was sure that the process was made easier because of their nobility. All five Floo Terminus’ that they visit had dozens of people lining up in front of fireplaces. Fortunately for Harry, each Terminus also had several fireplaces for V.I.P.s.

They flooed from Grimmauld Place to the British Terminus’, then to the Terminus in France, then
the one in Italy, then across to the one in Greece, before finally arriving at the Bulgarian Floo Terminus which, thankfully, was within walking distance of the Quidditch Pitch.

“Urgh.” Draco moaned as they exited the Terminus. “It’s so bright. I can hardly see.”

“It’s a brilliant day for Quidditch.” Harry grinned. “We’ll be able to see everything!”

“Unless we’re blinded by the sun first.” Draco complained.

Neville looked amused. “You’d think he’s never seen sunlight before.”

Sirius chuckled. “Well, he is a Slytherin. Their common rooms are in the dungeons so I doubt they see much light.”

Harry laughed as Draco glared first at Neville and then Sirius. Draco was right though, the sun seemed a lot brighter than it usually did at home. It reminded that he’d been meaning to buy himself a pair of muggle sunglasses since the previous summer. Maybe he would buy some for Neville and Draco as well.

It was short walk to the Quidditch Pitch and when they arrived, Harry took the lead - greeting the witch who was checking tickets in Bulgarian.

“Dobŭr den, g-tsa.”


Harry returned her smile. “Blagodarya.”

Once they were a few feet away from her, Draco spoke up. “What did she say?”

“I’m not entirely sure.” Harry admitted. “I’ve only been learning Bulgarian for a month and a half and it’s much harder than German and French.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Well, can you take any guesses?”

“She said good afternoon.” Harry said confidently. “And then I recognised the word for left.”

“That’s it?” Draco sounded horrified. “We should go back and see if she speaks English, or French, German or Italian. You know, a language that one of us actually speaks.”

Harry glared at him as Sirius excused himself to find some information. “At least I’m trying to learn new languages. You only know four.”

“Which is more than you know.” Draco pointed out. “You know three and three halves.”

“Technically that would equal four and a half.” Neville put in with a small smile.

“Don’t be stupid.” Draco told him. “Two half languages don’t make a whole.”

“Well, you’re both better than me.” Neville sighed. “I only speak two.”

“Really?” Draco looked surprised. “Which two?”

“Well, I’m going to go out on a limb and guess that one of them is English.” Harry grinned.
“And German.” Neville added quickly, before Draco could glare at Harry.


“If any of my dorm-mates knows French I’ll snap my wand.” Neville shook his head. “In fact, let’s make that any Gryffindor in my year.”

Draco sneered. “Well, perhaps I ought to have said ‘anyone of importance and good breeding’.”

“That I’d be more likely to believe.” Neville’s shoulders slumped.

Draco rolled his eyes and hit him on the arm. “I wasn’t meaning you, idiot. Though clearly someone in the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom lacks good breeding. I can’t believe they haven’t taught you French.”

Harry grinned. “Don’t worry about him, Neville. He gave me a similar speech when I told him that I’d decided not to learn Italian this summer.”

“Of course I did.” Draco agreed scathingly. “You chose Bulgarian and Japanese over Italian. What use are they going to be to you?”

“Takashi is Japanese.” Harry defended. “I want to visit him there one day.”

“And Bulgarian?” Draco challenged.

“Sirius said I should learn it.” Harry answered. “I have no idea why. He said something about how I would understand when school started up again and then mentioned that Bulgaria are probably going to get into the Finals.”

“So?” Draco asked. “How is that a good reason to learn their language?”

“Maybe not,” Harry admitted. “But Bulgarian is the fifth most widely known language in Magical Europe.”

“Is it hard to learn?” Neville asked quietly.

“Very.” Harry sighed. “Much harder than French or German.”

“Or Italian, I’m sure.” Draco added snidely.

Harry ignored him. “But it’s easier than Japanese and Gobbledygook.”

“Don’t even get me started on Gobbledygook!” Draco sneered.

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Alrighty.” Sirius grinned as he approached them. “Our box is over there,” He gestured to his right. “And we’ll pass some food stands on the way.”

“I was right!” Harry crowed. “She did say left.”

“Yes, yes, well done.” Draco told him sarcastically.

It took them twenty minutes to find their box, mostly because Sirius insisted that stop at every foodcart to make sure they weren’t selling anything different. Of course, once they had stopped Sirius always insisted that they buy something.
Harry would have said that he had never seen so much junk food in his life, except that Sirius had done the exact same thing at every Quidditch game they had attended that summer.

“Wow!” Neville exclaimed looking over the side of the box. “We can see everything.”

“There are definitely benefits to being Lord Black.” Sirius agreed. “Even in Bulgaria.”

“Come sit down, Neville.” Harry told him. “We have something we want to give you.”

“Give me?” Neville looked surprised. “Why?”

“Just come sit down and we'll tell you.” Harry commanded, before waiting for Neville to obey before continuing. “Now, as you know this trip is our way of throwing you a birthday party.”

“You really didn’t have to do that.” Neville said quickly.

“Don’t be an idiot. Of course we did.” Draco told him before sneering. “Especially since I’m not invited to your actual birthday dinner.”

Neville looked shamefaced. “I’m sorry. I tried to get Gran and Uncle Algie to let me invite you, but they said no.”

“It’s not a problem.” Harry promised him. “I’ll be there anyway and everyone knows I’m the better choice out of me and Draco.”

“Prat.” Draco jabbed him in the arm.

“I have no idea why your father thinks that you’re a perfect pureblood heir.” Sirius commented with a grin. “Especially since you keep going around jabbing Harry like a muggle.”

“If I was allowed to use my wand I would hex him.” Draco promised haughtily. “Besides, my father is quite aware that Harry is the better heir.”

“Oh I wouldn’t say that.” Sirius laughed. “Besides, I think you have the right end of the stick. Better to know when you have to be high and poncy and when you can jab your friends.”

“That’s why his father thinks he’s the perfect pureblood heir.” Harry pointed out.

“Anyway,” Sirius started. “You two were sharing birthday greetings with Neville. My apologies for side tracking you.”

“Right.” Draco nodded briskly and pulled a pulled a wrapped present out of the bag that he had bought. “Happy birthday, Neville.”

Neville looked at the present with a surprised expression. “You didn’t have to get me anything.”


Harry watched as Neville carefully undid the silver ribbon that was tied over green paper. Draco’s apparent need to constantly remind people that he was a Slytherin never ceased to amuse him.

When Neville had finished unwrapping the present, Harry had to choke down a laugh at the sight of a pair of golden omnioccurrals.

Neville looked to be having a similar reaction. “Are these made of actual gold?”
“Of course.” Draco answered snootily. “Malfoys only buy the best.”

“I can’t wait to see Ron’s expression when he sees these.” Neville commented with a smirk. “Thank you, Draco, they’re great.”

Draco sniffed haughtily at the mention of Ron, but he looked pleased none the less.

Harry met with Cousin Narcissa the next day for tutoring and, while he knew it wasn’t appropriate to bring up the subject during the lesson, he found it hard to concentrate with the idea of the betrothal hanging over his head.

“While the French system is very similar to our own, Bulgaria still have a reigning Monarch.” Cousin Narcissa lectured. “King Aleksandar has held his title since 1943 when his grandfather died. King Aleksandar’s heir is his oldest son, Prince Andrey, who currently holds the position of Minister of Magic.”

“Mother?” Draco started. “Why are you teaching us about Bulgaria?”

Cousin Narcissa looked severe. “It is important for you to understand all the nations that our Ministry interacts with, Draconus.”

“Of course, Mother.” Draco agreed quickly. “I was only asking because Cousin Sirius has recommended that Harry learn Bulgarian. He told Harry that he would understand why when school started. Do you know why Harry might need to know Bulgarian, Mother?”

Cousin Narcissa raised an eyebrow. “You didn’t tell me that you were learning Bulgarian, Harry.”

“Sorry, Cousin Narcissa.” Harry answered guiltily.

“Perhaps you ought to learn some Bulgarian also, Draconus.” Cousin Narcissa said told her son. “Our Ministry has much to do with its Bulgarian equivalent. It would only be prudent.”

Draco looked politely horrified. “Please don’t make me, Mother. If I am ever in a situation where I need to understand the language, I will bring Harry in as a translator.”

“Oh?” Cousin Narcissa asked, her tone dangerously light. “You, the Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy, plan to bring in the Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter to translate for you? Do you not think that people might find that peculiar? Or perhaps that Harry might have more important things to do?”

Draco looked like a deer in headlights. “He’s not Lord Potter yet, Mother.”

“Perhaps not,” Cousin Narcissa agreed. “However, he will be in a year and three days. Do you only plan to interact with the nation of Bulgaria in that time, Draconus?”

“I do see your point, Mother.” Draco acknowledged. “However, our Ministry interacts with a great many governments. Surely I cannot learn each of their languages?”

Cousin Narcissa eyed him. “Surely not.”

“Besides,” Draco continued. “Harry says that Bulgarian is very difficult. If I was going to learn another language maybe I could learn another one, that Harry won’t know. Spanish perhaps.”

“Excellent.” Cousin Narcissa nodded in obvious satisfaction. “I shall arrange a tutor for you.”
“Thank you, Mother.” Draco told her, before waiting until she had looked away to glare scathingly at Harry.

Harry tried not to feel too amused.

“No,” Cousin Narcissa started. “The Bulgarian equivalent of the Wizengamot consists of much the same make up as our own, with one obvious distinction. King Aleksandar resides over it, rather than a Chief Warlock.”

Eventually Cousin Narcissa finished her lecture and they stopped for elevenses. Draco stayed for a few minutes before leaving to receive fencing lessons from his father.

“All right?” Harry asked, after she had poured them both tea.

“Yes, dear?” Cousin Narcissa acknowledged.

“Sirius has given me permission to discuss a sensitive issue with you.” Harry started. “Lord Greengrass has approached him regarding a betrothal contract between me and Daphne. Sirius says that he will let me decide whether or not accept it.”

“Miss Greengrass?” Cousin Narcissa sounded pleased. “That would be a good match. I must admit, I have been hoping that Samuel would contact Sirius.”

“So you think I should agree to it then?” Harry asked her.

Cousin Narcissa considered him. “What do you think?”

Harry swallowed down a groan. Why couldn’t someone just tell him what he should do? “I don’t know what to do.”

“Why would you say yes?” Cousin Narcissa asked neutrally.

“Because she’s great.” Harry answered with a smile. “She’s smart and funny and really pretty and she’s always very poised.”

“All important factors.” Cousin Narcissa agreed. “Why would you say no?”

“What if, in a few years, I don’t like her anymore?” Harry asked. “What if I meet someone like better?”

“You cannot think of it like that.” Cousin Narcissa told him reprovingly. “If you decide to accept a betrothal contract with Miss Greengrass, you must choose her every day for the rest of your life. I did not choose to marry Lucius, as you are now being given the choice to with Miss Greengrass, and yet Lucius and I have both worked hard to ensure that our marriage has been a success.”

Harry leaned forward in interest. “You had to work at it?”

“Every couple has to work at it.” Cousin Narcissa told him seriously.

Harry sighed. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Would you rather have Sirius make the decision for you?” Cousin Narcissa asked.

“No.” Harry denied quickly. “I’m glad he asked me. I’ve just never had to make a decision this big before. What do you think I should do?”
Cousin Narcissa was quiet for a minute, then she spoke. “I believe that a betrothal between yourself and Miss Greengrass would be advantageous for the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter and the fact that you enjoy her company makes the match even more auspicious.”

“So you think I should agree?” Harry confirmed.

“I do.” Cousin Narcissa said. “Have you considered that doing so would make you and Draconus brothers of a sort? You would be marrying two sisters.”

Harry grinned at the thought. “That would be brilliant.”

“But it is not a reason to choose to betroth yourself to her.” Cousin Narcissa cautioned. “Neither is my approval of the match. This is a decision that you will have to live with for many decades. Discuss the matter over with Sirius. A discussion with Miss Greengrass might also be useful.”

2-2-2
“Hey, Sirius?” Harry asked at dinner the evening after his discussion with Cousin Narcissa. “Why weren’t you ever betrothed to someone?”

Sirius choked, and then began coughing.

“Way to ease into the conversation there, Harry.” Remus commented with grin, pouring Sirius some water.

“Sorry.” Harry responded repentantly. “It just seems strange that Sirius wasn’t betrothed.”

Sirius gulped down some water. “I was.” He answered in a strained voice. “But she was killed in the war.”

Harry winced. “Oh.”

“You were?” Remus looked surprised. “I had no idea.”

“It’s not something I liked to talk about.” Sirius admitted. “She was six years younger than I was and we didn’t exactly know each other.”

“What was her name?” Harry asked.

“Elaina Prince.” Sirius answered.

“Wait, Prince?” Harry stared at him. “As in Professor Snape?”

“She was his cousin.” Sirius acknowledged. “Not that they knew each other. Snape’s mother was disowned. Lord Prince only accepted Snape back after she died because, aside from him, he was the last living descendant of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Prince.”

“That’s horrible.” Harry grimaced. “Why would Professor Snape have agreed to go back? I don’t think I would have.”

“I don’t know.” Sirius shrugged.

“So how did she die?” Harry asked. “I didn’t think Voldemort went after purebloods. Well, unless they’re in the Order.”

“It was an accident.” Sirius sighed. “I’m not sure exactly how it happened, but her whole family were killed. Including her father and younger brother. That’s when Lord Prince brought Snape back into the family. She was ten.”

“That’s awful.” Harry grimaced. “And your parents never tried to arrange another betrothal?”

“No.” Sirius snorted. “Even if I hadn’t been estranged from them by then, it wouldn’t have been proper for them to have arranged anything for at least eighteen months. Surely Cissy’s talked to you about mourning periods?”

Harry nodded. “Yes, but what about afterwards?”

“By the time the mourning period was over I was almost eighteen and had already joined the order.” Sirius explained. “I think that at that point they were just waiting for me to die in a Death Eater attack
so that Regulus could take my place.”

Harry grimaced. “Your parents sound worse than the Dursleys.”

Sirius looked grim. “Well, let’s just say that we both have had terrible luck when it came to relatives.”

“Your relatives aren’t all bad.” Harry reminded him. “Cousin Narcissa’s great and so is Cousin Andromeda.”

Sirius smiled wanly. “True. How did your chat with Cissy go?”

“She thinks I should say yes.” Harry answered. “She pointed out that it would make Draco and me brothers.”

Sirius looked confused for a second, before he nodded in understanding. “Oh, right, he’s betrothed to the younger sister.”

“She said it wasn’t a good enough reason to do it though.” Harry continued. “What do you think I should do?”

Sirius leaned back in his chair and gestured to Remus with a grin. “Why don’t you take this one first, Moony?”

Remus shot his friend a dirty look. “It wasn’t my opinion he was asking for, Padfoot.”

“I do want your opinion though.” Harry reassured him quickly. “What do you think?”

Remus was silent for a few seconds, before answering carefully. “Well, I have to admit that it doesn’t make much sense to me. It all seems very outdated, but then so does a lot of traditionalism.”

“That’s why it’s called traditionalism.” Sirius pointed out with a grin.

“But,” Remus continued, throwing Sirius another dirty look. “You are traditional and you seem to like the outdated aspects of it. So, it is part of your culture.”

Harry considered that. “So you think I should do it?”

“That’s up to you, Harry.” Remus told him gently. “But I will say this, just because you like one part of a culture doesn’t mean that you have to embrace all of it. You can like most of traditionalism, but decide not to be betrothed.”

“Well said.” Sirius grinned. “I completely agree.”

Harry sighed. “Except, if I’m the only traditionalist who doesn’t get betrothed then there won’t be anyone for me to marry when I’m older.” He paused and pointed a finger accusingly at Sirius. “And don’t even consider bringing up Pansy.”

“Surely not all your traditionalist friends are betrothed.” Remus commented. “If Pansy isn’t there have got to be others who aren’t as well.”

“Luna isn’t.” Harry admitted. “But, as much I love her, she would drive me crazy. But everybody else is. Even the girls I’m not friends with, like Susan Bones and her friend Hannah Abbott, are betrothed.”

Remus shook his head. “Was it like this in school, Sirius?”
“It wasn’t quite so bad.” Sirius admitted. “Alice and Frank were betrothed, not that you would have known it. They were head over heels for each other since first year. Marlene McKinnon was betrothed to Gideon Prewett. Molly and Arthur weren’t betrothed, she ran off with him and it was quite the scandal. She was very nearly disowned over it, but then her father died and Gideon became the Head of House. He was only seventeen at the time, but he stood his ground and refused to let his mother go ahead with disowning her. Amelia Bones was betrothed Fabian, Regulus was betrothed to Anthea Burke…”

Remus cut him off with a laugh. “I didn’t need the entire list, Sirius. You said its worse now?”

Sirius looked grim. “There’s nothing quite like fearing for the future of your House to have people scrambling to have betrothal contracts put together.”

Remus shook his head. “I had no idea. Well, Harry, you could always marry a foreign girl.”

“We’re not the only country that has betrothals, Remus.” Harry told him. “According to Cousin Narcissa, France, Bulgaria, Germany and Italy all have higher betrothal rates than we do.”

“It’s like there’s this secret world within our one.” Remus commented. “I would have never known this stuff if you hadn’t been around to explain it to me.”

“That’s why I think there ought to be Wizarding Culture classes at Hogwarts.” Harry explained.

Sirius snorted. “You mean Traditionalism classes. Yeah, I can see that going over with Dumbledore.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Muggleborns should at least have the choice to decide whether they want to be traditional or not.”

“And halfbloods.” Remus agreed.

Sirius looked at his friend in surprise. “Moony?”

Remus looked sheepish. “I’m not saying that they ought be forced to traditional, Sirius. But I wish I’d at least known about this stuff before now. Did you know traditionalists are much more accepting of werewolves? I didn’t. If I had, maybe I wouldn’t have spent the last decade being ostracised by anti-traditionalists.”

Sirius looked as though he couldn’t believe his ears. Which to be fair, was a sentiment Harry completely agreed with.

“And when were you planning on telling me that you had made me a vassal of the House of Black?” Remus asked with a frown.

“I haven’t, Remus.” Sirius protested. “I swear, I would never do anything like that.”

“Well, let’s say that I believe you, which I don’t.” Remus told him. “Why not? What’s stopping you?”

Sirius opened his mouth and then closed it again.

“Last week I went to the Apothecary in Knockturn Alley and the shopkeeper practically fell over himself to serve me.” Remus continued. “When I was leaving, he asked me to send his good wishes to you. It’s not the first time that sort of thing has happened, everyone knows that we’re friends. But normally they ask me to send ‘Lord Black’ their good wishes. Do you want to know what this man
Sirius winced. “Liege lord?”

“Exactly.” Remus pointed an accusing finger at Sirius. “Now, you can imagine that I was rather confused about the entire thing. So I went to see Tonks, to ask her opinion.”

Sirius frowned. “You went to see Tonks?”

Remus ignored him. “And she had no idea why I was asking. She said she presumed I knew that you had made a vassal of the House of Black.”

Sirius winced again. “I haven’t! Not officially.”

“Just unofficially?” Remus asked.

“Not even that.” Sirius said quickly. “It’s just that, with you living here, and working at Hogwarts, people started presuming that I might have done something like that. I just…didn’t see the point in correct them. At least this way people will know better than to treat you badly.”

Remus shook his head and Harry started wondering whether he could sneak away from the table. He really didn’t want to present for the fight he was sure was coming.

“You’re a good man, Sirius.” Remus said eventually.

“What?” Sirius asked.

Harry silently seconded the question. That was not the reaction he had been expecting.

Remus looked up and gave him a crooked smile. “You’re a good man. When should we make it official?”

Sirius’s mouth fell open in shock. “Moony?”

“Don’t look at me like that.” Remus admonished him. “I’ve done my research. I know what I’m signing myself up for. Maybe this way I’ll finally manage to find the funding to write that book I’ve been wanting to write.”

“I’ll give you the money, Remus.” Sirius told him quickly. “You don’t have to be my vassal for that.”

Remus smiled softly. “I’ve been your vassal since we were eleven, Sirius, and we both know it. Might as well make it official.”


“Who benefits from the protection of your name and bank account.” Remus commented. “But it’s not just about that. You’re traditional now, Sirius, You might try to deny it, but we both know that you are. And so is Harry…”

Harry tried to sink down in his chair when both men turned to look at him. He really felt out of place in this conversation.

“…and I don’t want to be left behind.” Remus finished.

“I would never leave you behind.” Sirius promised. “Never.”
“I know that.” Remus agreed. “But at least this way people will understand why.”

“You shouldn’t have to swear an oath to me for people to understand that you’re my friend.” Sirius protested.

Harry sighed. “Remus is right, Sirius, he’s pretty much your vassal already. You might not have gotten him the Defence Against the Dark Arts job, but you definitely are the reason he’s going to be our new History professor. It makes sense to make it official and it will offer Remus some protection against idiots. No one would be stupid enough to insult a vassal of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.”


“Besides.” Harry smirked. “This way it will be easier for him to marry Tonks.”

Sirius’ mouth fell open. “What?”

Remus looked just as astonished.

“Oh come on.” Harry grinned. “Anyone with eyes can tell that she’s head over heels for you. If you’re a vassal of the House of Black it will give you credence when you decide to offer for her.”

“Moony?” Sirius asked in a high voice.

Remus was blushing. “I have no idea what he’s talking about.”

“Tonks?” Sirius asked. “Really? She’s twenty years old!”

“She’ll be twenty one in a few months.” Harry put in quickly. “And it’s not as though Remus is that old. He’s younger than you, Sirius.”

“Yeah, by three months!” Sirius returned. “You’re fourteen years older than her, Remus.”

Remus looked down at the table.

“Leave him alone, Sirius.” Harry defended him. “It’s not his fault. Tonks has been after him for months. He’s been turning her down all year.”

Sirius frowned. “How do you know all this? You’ve been at school.”

“Tonks told me.” Harry told him, trying not to sound too smug. “She wanted my help in convincing him.”

Sirius stared at him for a few seconds, before turning his attention to Remus. “What’s wrong with Tonks? Why haven’t you said yes?”

Remus gave Sirius an incredulous look before groaning in horror.

Harry gave into his urge to laugh.

3-3-3

A few hours later, when Harry was lying in bed reading, Sirius knocked on his open bedroom door.

“Mind if I come in?”
“Of course not.” Harry sat up straighter and put his book on his bedside table. “How may I help you?”

Sirius sat on the edge of the bed. “We didn’t get to finish our conversation at dinner. You wanted to know what I thought about this betrothal business.”

Harry nodded. “Cousin Andromeda seemed to think it was a good idea, though she didn’t say it, and Cousin Narcissa thinks that I should agree. What do you think?”

Sirius frowned thoughtfully. “First tell me what you think. You’ve had a lot of time to consider it since I showed you the letter.”

“I want to say yes.” Harry admitted, looking down at his bedding. “This is going to sound silly, but ever since first year I’ve wanted to grow up to be like Lord Malfoy.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “Really? Why?”

“No one would dare to push him around.” Harry explained. “He’s so confident and sophisticated.”

“And I’m not?” Sirius grinned.

“You are too.” Harry rushed to reassure him. “But you weren’t in first year, when I first met you. You were sort of crazy.”

“Yeah,” Sirius grimaced. “I was at that.”

“Besides,” Harry sighed. “You’re more charming than Lord Malfoy. I don’t think I’m ever going to be as charming as you are.”

Sirius chuckled. “Something I’m sure your future wife will be very glad of I’m sure. Now, what does all this have to do with Daphne?”

“Well, if I’m going to be like Lord Malfoy, I need to marry someone like Cousin Narcissa.” Harry explained. “And Daphne is like her. She’s really pretty, and poised. And she’s intelligent, and funny.”

Sirius grinned. “Sounds as if you really like her?”

“I do.” Harry admitted. “I can’t imagine ever meeting anyone better.”

Sirius smiled. “Well, you definitely shouldn’t agree because you think she’s the next Narcissa Malfoy. That wouldn’t be fair on her. But it sounds as if you want to agree.”

“I do.” Harry sighed. “But then I start worrying that maybe it’s the wrong decision. What if we hate each other when we’re older? What if I’m supposed to marry someone else?”

Sirius looked serious. “Those are some hard questions, pup.”

“I know.” Harry groaned, leaning his head back against the headboard. “But what if I say no and she ends us betrothed to someone else?”

“Tell me, Harry,” Sirius started after a moment of silence. “Do you think there is any chance that you and Draco might hate each other by the time your seventeen?”

“What?” Harry shook his head in confusion. “No way. Of course not.”
“Why not?”

“Because we’re best friends!” Harry exclaimed. Surely Sirius knew all this?

“But what if you meet someone you like better?” Sirius asked. “Wouldn’t you want them to be your best friend instead?”

“No!” Harry denied firmly. “I can’t imagine meeting anyone I like better but, even if I did, I’d still want Draco to be my best friend.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow expectantly. “And you don’t think that might also apply to Daphne?”

Harry stared at him as he processed it all. “You mean that if I decide to be betrothed to Daphne it will be like it is with Draco?”

“Oh, not unless you choose for it to be.” Sirius told him seriously. “You would have to work to make sure that it happens. It doesn’t always happen naturally.”

“That’s what Cousin Narcissa said.” Harry admitted. “She said that she and Lord Malfoy had to work hard at their marriage.”

Sirius looked pleased. “Good on Cissy! I knew I liked her for a reason.”

They were silent for a few minutes and Harry used the time to try and figure out what he wanted to do. He did really like Daphne and he thought that he might have asked her to go to Hogsmeade with him this year anyway. But it still seemed weird to sign up to marry someone at his age – a fact he put down to the fact that he’d grown up with muggles.

“Sirius?” Harry said eventually.

“Yes, pup?” Sirius asked gently.

“I think I’d like to talk to Daphne about it, if that’s alright.” Harry admitted. “Do you think Lord Greengrass would be alright with that?”

Sirius smiled proudly. “I’m sure he would. I’ll write to him in the morning.”

Harry smiled softly, trying to ignore his growing sense of anxiety. What if Daphne said no? What if Daphne said yes?

3-3-3

Harry spent the entirety of the next day waiting for Sirius to tell him that Lord Greengrass had replied, but a reply never arrived. He knew it didn’t mean anything was wrong. The Greengrass Estate was on the other side of Britain and it likely took the owl the majority of the day to deliver Sirius’ letter, but it didn’t help Harry’s nerves.

Because of this, Harry made sure to spend an hour meditating before he and Sirius left for Neville’s birthday dinner. Meditation always calmed him down and he was worried that if he wasn’t in complete control of his emotions he might curse Lord Longbottom.

Lord Longbottom was, in Harry’s opinion, one of the most insufferable men Harry had ever met and not just because he was horrible to Neville. No, Harry’s dislike of the man was primarily due to the fact that he reminded Harry of his Uncle Vernon (though admittedly, the fact that Lord Longbottom had dropped Neville out of window when he was child went a long way to Harry making the
connection). Lord Longbottom seemed to be persistently drunk, cheery, and slimy all at the same
time.

Thankfully, Sirius disliked the man just as much as Harry did (probably because Harry had told him
about the window incident) and so was always at his most snobby and traditional around him –
which was definitely a sight to see.

The first time it had happened, Harry had been worried that Neville might be upset by it, but Neville
had seemed to enjoy the show as much as Harry had. And this occasion was no different.

“…Harry began attending with me last year.” Sirius commented evenly.

Harry, who was seated down the other end of the table, looked up at the sound of his name. What
was Sirius talking about?

Lord Longbottom snorted disparagingly. “No point taking the boy. He wouldn’t understand a word
of it.”

The entire table fell silent and turned to look at Sirius took a large mouthful from his goblet, before
swishing it around in the air. “Oh, that seems hard to believe. Neville seems to be a very bright
young man to me.”

“Yes, well, your lordship with excuse me if I cannot agree with you.” Lord Longbottom grimaced.
“He’s nothing like his father you know. Just the sight of him makes me wish that my Elaina hadn’t
died so young.”

Harry turned to Neville in concern. He couldn’t imagine how he would feel if he ever heard Sirius
say something like that about it. Neville was looking down at his plate with a stony expression.

“Merlin, man,” Sirius’ fingers tightened around his goblet. “What a bloody awful thing to say.”

“We weren’t sure he was even going to get into Hogwarts, you know.” Lord Longbottom continued
absently. “Boy didn’t show any sign of magic until he was eight.”

Harry gritted his teeth at the man’s casual mention of the time when he had dropped Neville out of a
window. He couldn’t believe that people thought that the Malfoys were horrible, but considered the
Longbottoms to be perfectly respectable. Lord Malfoy would have never dropped Draco out of a
window.

“They say the same thing about Helga Hufflepuff.” Sirius pointed out evenly, though Harry could
hear the anger in his voice. “Perhaps you’re right though, it is a great responsibility to introduce one’s
heir into the Wizengamot. With your permission, I would be willing to have Neville attend with me. I
wouldn’t want to over burden you.”

Lord Longbottom choked slightly on his wine. “What? I couldn’t accept. Wouldn’t want to burden
you…”

“Not at all.” Sirius interrupted. “Neville wouldn’t be a burden, I would be happy to have him with
me.”

Lord Longbottom looked around the table desperately, as though looking for an ally, but nobody
would meet his eyes. Not even Neville’s gran. Harry wasn’t sure whether it was because they
thought Lord Longbottom was being horrible too, or because they could sense the danger in Sirius’
voice.
“Surely you understand that I couldn’t have my heir accompany anyone aside from me to the Wizengamot, my lord.” Lord Longbottom protested weakly. “It just isn’t done.”

“Let me make this perfectly clear, Algie.” Sirius wasn’t even attempting to mask the anger in his tone now. “Neville ought to have begun attending the Wizengamot with you last year, it is a shame on your House that he didn’t. Now you may not care about that, and you certainly don’t seem to care about Neville, but I will be damned if I allow Harry’s godbrother to grow up uneducated as to his role in our society. Either you bring the boy to our next Wizengamot session, or I will bring him for you.”

There was a long silence as Lord Longbottom stared at Sirius in horror, before hushed conversations started up around the table. Harry watched Sirius in concern for a few seconds, his godfather was glaring murderously at Lord Longbottom, before turning to Neville who was staring at Sirius as well. Neville didn’t look as though he knew whether to be horrified or grateful.

“You alright, Neville?” Harry asked quietly.

“Yes, of course.” Neville’s expression looked pinched.

Harry grimaced inwards, before deciding to change the subject. “Do you know what Sirius meant by us being godbrothers?”

Neville’s expression shifted to one of surprise. “You don’t know?”

Harry shook his head. “I’ve never heard anything like that.”

“Your mother was my godmother,” Neville explained. “And my mother was yours.”

“Really?” Harry smiled. “That’s brilliant. Who is your godfather?”

“Andrew MacMillian.” Neville replied glumly. “He was Ernie MacMillian’s uncle, but he died in the war as well.”

Harry grimaced sympathetically. Neville sometimes reminded Harry of himself when he was still living with the Dursleys, but unlike Harry, Neville didn’t have a godfather who could rescue him.
So you're probably wondering why I'm posting a chapter today, six days early. Well, the answer is actually a little embarrassing. I was trying to find something to read today, but couldn't find anything interesting, so instead I decided to read through some of this story. It was great, but then I found myself feeling sorry for all of you who are still waiting for the next part - so here it is. Don't worry, I'll still be posting another chapter next Tuesday.

By the way, I would love to hear about any story recommendations you guys have (since I'm clearly rather desperate). I should warn you though that I don't read slash or RC-17.

Harry’s birthday was the next day and, after having spent his usual hour strengthening his Occlumency, he, Remus and Sirius went for their morning run.

Well, Remus and Harry went for their morning run and Sirius joined them as Padfoot. Despite having been told of Sirius’ animagus form earlier in the summer, Harry still found it weird to see his godfather in dog form. Weird and inspiring – becoming an animagus was definitely something he wanted to try sometime.

After their run, they showered, before meeting in the dining room for breakfast. It was Harry’s second birthday with Sirius and Remus and he treasured every little tradition that the two men had introduced him to. Including the incredibly lavish breakfast that they had the house elves prepare for him.

As per usual, Sirius and Remus gave Harry one of his gifts while he was eating (accompanied with frustrating hints about presents to come) and Harry couldn’t keep the grin off his face when he carefully removed the wrapping paper to find a small book entitled ‘Finding Your Animagus’.

“It’s the book your dad and I used when we were learning.” Sirius explained. “We wrote notes in the margins about our experiences too, which you might find helpful. Your dad’s writing is the loopiest, mine is the manliest of course.”

“Of course.” Harry rolled his eyes as he opened the book to a random page in the middle. He turned a few pages until he found some handwritten notes in loopy handwriting.

‘Maybe we could use a sticking charm? NOT Epoximise!’

Harry read the sentence aloud, before turning to Sirius. “What does that mean?”

Sirius laughed. “Oh, that was bloody hilarious. One of the steps to becoming an animagus is holding a mandrake leaf in your mouth for an entire month. We considered doing it during the summer, but didn’t want to wait that long. The problem was that we couldn’t stop talking for an entire month either – the professors would notice. So James came up with the idea of using a sticking charm to stick the leaf to the bottom of our mouths. Problem was, he decided to use epoximise which actually bonds the two substances together – it worked, but once the month Madame Pomfrey had to cut the
Harry grinned. “What did you tell her?”

“That it had been a prank.” Sirius shook his head. “I doubt she believed us, but it was better than
admitting to the truth. Thankfully, we realised the problem within a minute of him casting spell and I
managed to learn from his mistake and used a different charm.”

Harry looked back at the book and saw another note, in different handwriting, below his father’s.
“Suffigo?”

“Yeah, that’s the one.” Sirius nodded. “Much better idea.”

Harry set the book down beside his breakfast plate and gave both men a grateful smile. “Thank
you!”

“You’re welcome, cub.” Remus smiled.

“Yeah, what he said.” Sirius grinned. “Just promise me two things. One, watch out for McGonagall
– if she find out I gave you this book she’ll skin me alive.”

“Okay.” Harry chuckled.

“Secondly,” Sirius said. “When you first try the actual transformation make sure that Remus is there.
A lot of things can go wrong and you really don’t want to end up stuck or anything.”

Harry nodded. “Sure. Can I do it with my friends?”

“Of course.” Sirius answered. “Whichever friends you like, just make sure that you trust them not to
nark.”

Harry laughed. “Got it.”

“Now,” Sirius turned his attention towards the letters beside his plate. “If I’m not mistaken, one of
these is from Samuel Greengrass. Should I read it now?”

Harry’s stomach squirmed in anticipation. “Yes, please.”

“Don’t tease him, Padfoot.” Remus rebuked him. “What does it say?”

Sirius opened the letter, infuriatingly slowly, and then began to read in silently.

It took every bit of willpower Harry had not to nag his godfather to tell him what it said. Instead, he
turned his attention back to his breakfast and used a fried mushroom to mop up some spilt egg yolk.

“Padfoot!” Remus sighed.

Sirius grinned. “You’re no fun, Remus, I was waiting to see how long it would take for Harry to
break.”

Harry frowned in confusion. “Break?”

“You know,” Sirius waved his hand in the air. “Give up the stoic act and beg me to read it.”

Harry’s confusion didn’t lessen. “But that would be rude.”
Sirius sighed tragically. “I blame Cissy!”

“Just read the bloody letter, Sirius.” Remus huffed.

“See, Harry?” Sirius smirked. “That’s how you do it. Anyone would think Remus was the one possibly getting betrothed.”

“Sirius!” Remus snapped.

“Right,” Sirius turned his attention back to the letter. “Sorry. Do you want me to read you the letter? Or give you the gist of it?”

“The gist of it.” Harry decided. That way he’d know Lord Greengrass’s answer as soon as possible.

“Basically,” Sirius started. “He’s delighted and honoured that we are willing to discuss the idea of a betrothal and invites us both over for morning tea this morning if we are able.”

“This morning?” Harry couldn’t help but feel relieved. “That sounds great. I wasn’t looking forward to having to pretend that nothing was going on at my party tonight.”

“You might still have to do that.” Sirius warned him. “I doubt anything will be made official today, even if you do decide to go ahead with the betrothal.”

“I know,” Harry assured him. “But at least this way I will have spoken to Daphne about it.”

“Isn’t it strange that he’s invited you over so quickly?” Remus asked.

“Not really.” Sirius told him. “We’re both men of leisure, so it’s not as though we have anything better to do.”

4-4-4

At exactly ten o’clock that morning, Harry followed Sirius through the floo and into the Greengrass’ Floo Room. He had been there before, since Daphne often hosted parties that Harry was invited to, but he took a moment to take in the room anyway.

It was smaller than the Malfoy’s Floo Room, but just as tastefully decorated. The wall were painted a pale yellow, the official colour of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass, and the curtains and trimmings were a deep brown. It wasn’t just the colour scheme that made the room tasteful though, each and every piece of art and furniture looked as though it belonged (unlike the Parkinson home where everything looked as though they were trying to prove that they were rich).

“Merry meet, Sirius.” A tall man with brown hair bowed gracefully, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. “It is an honour to have you in my home.”

Sirius nodded in acknowledgement. “Merry meet, Samuel. You know my heir of course.”

“Of course.” Lord Greengrass turned towards Harry. “We met at the Wizengamot last month.”

Harry bowed carefully. “Merry meet, Lord Greengrass.”

“Merry meet.” Lord Greengrass smiled as he nodded, then he turned his attention back to Sirius. “If you would follow me, Adrianna and Daphne are waiting for us on the east lawn.”

Harry followed Sirius and Lord Greengrass through the house, noting the different route they were taking. He didn’t think he had ever been to the east lawn before. It was impressive to watch Lord
Greengrass using magic to open each door before they came to it. He had seen Lord Malfoy do something similar of course, but it reminded Harry that it was something he wanted to learn to do too.

When they reached the east lawn, Harry’s eyes widened as he took in the incredible pavilion that was set on the lawn. It looked as though it had been made out of Acromantula webbing, though Harry wasn’t sure whether that was even possible.

As they approached the pavilion, Harry saw that there were chairs and table within it. Lady Greengrass and Daphne both were sitting around the table, but they both stood politely as Lord Greengrass and Sirius entered the pavilion.

“Merry meet, my lord.” Lady Greengrass and Daphne both curtsied to Sirius, before Daphne turned to Harry and curtsied to him as well.

“Merry meet, Adrianna. Please, call me Sirius.” Sirius nodded. “Have you met my heir?”

Lady Greengrass smiled kindly as she turned to Harry. “I have. Merry meet, Mr. Potter.”

Harry bowed. “Merry meet, Lady Greengrass. Merry meet, Daphne.”

As they each took their places around the table, the Greengrasses on side and Sirius and Harry at the other, Harry took a few seconds to observe Daphne’s parents. He had never seen them together before, though from what Daphne had said about them they seemed to have a good marriage.

Lord Greengrass’ hair was brown, like Astoria’s was, and he definitely was where Daphne got her height from. Lady Greengrass was already shorter than Daphne, but her hair was the same colour blond as her eldest daughter’s – slightly darker than Draco and Luna’s, but still lighter than Anthony Goldstein’s.

As Lady Greengrass began pouring the tea, Harry turned his attention to Daphne. She looked wonderful. Her hair was down, a rare occurrence at Hogwarts, and it hung well below her shoulders. She was wearing a lovely set of robes as well and Harry couldn’t help but notice the way that they complimented her figure.

She looked nervous though. Not obviously, Daphne was far too poised for that, but Harry had known her for three years and couldn’t help but notice how tight her expression was. Harry caught her eye and tried to give her a comforting smile.

“Daphne tells me that today is your birthday, Mr. Potter.” Lady Greengrass voice pulled Harry out of his thoughts.

“Yes, my lady.” Harry agreed. “I am fourteen.”

“Goodness.” Lord Greengrass commented. “One more year and you’ll be the Head of the House of Potter. You must be looking forward to that.”

Harry inclined his head. “Yes, my lord. Though it is also an intimidating thought. I am very thankful to my godfather and Lord and Lady Malfoy for helping me prepare for the responsibilities that will bring.”

“Well, we wish you many happy experiences in this coming year.” Lady Greengrass smiled.

“Thank you, my lady.” Harry returned her smile.
The adults continued with their small talk for another couple of minutes and Harry had to hold himself back from squirming in impatience. He knew that it would be rude to jump straight to the discussion of betrothal, but he wanted to get into it.

Finally, Sirius turned the conversation away from the Greengrass’ son Thomas, who was seven years older than Daphne, and onto the topic that Harry had been waiting for.

“Thank you for your invitation today,” Sirius started. “And for your letter earlier this week. It was a great compliment to my House that you would consider such a match.”

Lord Greengrass nodded. “As it is an honour to our House that you are here today to discuss it. You know, of course, that Daphne was previously betrothed to Eugene Odgen, who was Lord Odgen’s oldest grandson.”

“Of course.” Sirius agreed. “It is a shame that the boy died so young.”

Harry couldn’t help but remember Draco’s description of Eugene as a bully who Daphne was scared of. Maybe it wasn’t such a shame he had died young. At least now Daphne wouldn’t have to marry him.

“It was,” Lady Greengrass replied softly. “However, I cannot help but be glad that it gives us the opportunity to have this conversation.”

Sirius placed his hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Harry was hoping that he would have an opportunity to discuss the matter privately with your daughter.”

Lord and Lady Greengrass exchanged a glance.

“Of course.” Lord Greengrass said eventually. “Perhaps they could take a walk around the lawn.”

“Thank you, my lord, my lady.” Harry stood and bowed to them before walking around the table and offering Daphne his hand.

Daphne hesitated for a moment, before placing her hand in Harry’s and standing.

“Do not stray far, Daphne.” Lady Greengrass warned her.

“Yes, Mother.” Daphne acknowledged, before placing her hand in the crook of Harry’s arm and allowing him to lead her out of the tent.

They walked in silence for a while, until Harry felt for sure that they were out of hearing range of the adults.

“Are you alright, Daphne?”

“Of course.” Daphne said, her tone still formal. “Thank you for honouring me by considering my father’s proposal.”

Harry frowned slightly. “You’re welcome. You don’t need to be so formal with me, you know. We are friends aren’t we?”

Daphne glanced up at him so quickly Harry almost missed it. “Of course, Harry.”

Harry sighed. “Have you been enjoying your summer so far?”

“Very much so.” Daphne returned, her tone still formal. “Thomas was home for a few weeks and it
was lovely to see him.”

Harry already knew that, she’d told him two weeks beforehand when she had attended a Quidditch game with him and Sirius.

“It was very kind of you to invite Astoria to your dinner party this evening.” Daphne continued. “She is very excited.”

“She is Draco’s betrothed.” Harry explained. “And one of my friends. It will be wonderful to have her there.”

“I heard that you invited Natasja as well.” Daphne said. “You do know that she’ll only be a first year this year.”

“It will be nice to meet her.” Harry answered as they reached the end of the lawn and turned the corner.

“Yes,” Daphne agreed. “It will.”

They walked in silence for a minute, before Harry sighed. “Daphne, I apologise but I honestly don’t know how to ask this without being horridly forward. Do you want to be betrothed to me?”

Daphne stopped walking for a second, before continuing again. “I...I...”

“I like you.” Harry told her. “And I’ve done a lot of thinking about this over the last few days. Part of me wishes that we didn’t have to decide this now. That we could wait until we were out of Hogwarts and then decide like my parents did, but that’s not going to happen. If I don’t say yes, your parents will probably ask someone else. But I don’t want to force you into a betrothal you don’t want.”

Daphne didn’t say anything and Harry began to worry that he had offended her. He knew that Cousin Narcissa would probably have been horrified at his forwardness, but he could think of any other way he could have gotten to the issue. Particularly since Daphne hadn’t seemed interested in discussing it.

Thankfully though, just as Harry was beginning to form an apology in his mind, Daphne spoke.

“I do want to be betrothed to you.” Her voice was very quiet and, despite the fact that she was looking at the ground, Harry could see that she was blushing.

Harry’s heart jumped in excitement. “You do?”

“Yes.”

“T’m glad.” Harry told her with a smile.

They made their way back to the pavilion soon after where Harry announced their decision. The Greengrasses looked absolutely delighted, as did Sirius – though Harry could tell that his smile was a little strained.

After that, came a lot of paperwork. Lord Greengrass had apparently prepared much of the paperwork required and all that was left was the discussion of the terms of their betrothal. Sitting through the discussion, and hearing Sirius and Lord Greengrass discuss things like future children that he and Daphne might have, was a test of Harry’s will. But, somehow he managed to get through the entire conversation without blushing.
By the end of the morning tea, that turned into more of a brunch since they didn’t leave until just after twelve, all the papers were signed and Harry and Daphne were officially betrothed to be married when they were seventeen.

Harry could hardly believe how fast it had all gone. He’d thought it would take weeks, maybe even months, for the paperwork to be agreed upon and finalised.

They flooed directly from the Greengrass’ to Malfoy Manor where they were ten minutes later for lunch. There was no one waiting for them in the Floo Room and when they found the Malfoys in the Dining Room, waiting for them, Cousin Narcissa speared Sirius’ with one of the most terrifying looks Harry had ever seen her give anyone, before gracing him with an apology. Remus, who was sitting uncomfortably beside Lord Malfoy, didn’t look particularly impressed by their lateness either.

“I do have a good excuse though.” Sirius promised, as he and Harry sat down.

Cousin Narcissa’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “Oh?”

“We were just finalising Harry’s betrothal.” Sirius explained innocently. “It took a little longer than we thought, but I was sure you would understand the importance of it.”

Cousin Narcissa’s attention swung to Harry. “Congratulations, Harry.”

“Already?” Remus asked in obvious shock. “I thought you were just going over to talk about it.”

“You’re betrothed?” Draco asked incredulously. “When did that happen?”

“This morning, Draco?” Harry said in amusement. “Weren’t you listening?”

“He said you finalised it this morning,” Draco argued. “Not that you decided to get betrothed today.”

“Fortunately for us, Samuel had already written up most of the paperwork.” Sirius explained. “It was left over from her first betrothal. We changed some details, of course, but it wasn’t too strenuous.”

“Good thing too.” Harry grinned at him. “After all, you and Lord Greengrass are men of leisure.”

Draco’s eyes widened. “You’re betrothed to Daphne?”

Cousin Narcissa cleared her throat disapprovingly. “Draconus, dear, please remember your manners.”

“Sorry, Mother.” Draco didn’t look even slightly apologetic. “Do you know what this means, Harry?”

Harry grinned. “We’re going to be brothers-in-law!”

4-4-4

Daphne Greengrass had always known that she was pretty. As a young child she had often received compliments from her parents’ friends regarding her looks and had flourished in them. Then she had met Eugene Odgen – her betrothed.

Daphne couldn’t remember the first time she met Eugene, she presumed that they had probably met when their contract was originally drawn up when she was an infant, but as they got older they had seen each other more frequently as their mothers arranged playdates. Eugene was five years older than her and was not quiet in his discontent to be stuck with her – a fact that embarrassed his mother.
and horrified hers.

As they got older, Eugene became better had hiding his discontent in front of the adults and instead turned his attention to training her to be the sort of betrothed that he wanted. Despite them both being children, Eugene had demanded that Daphne conduct herself properly at all times. He hadn’t liked it when she played games, or showed emotion, or talked and, every time that Daphne broke one of his rules, Eugene would find some way of punishing her. Of course, being young, he had never been able to use his wand during the punishments, but his pinches, tight grips, and cruel words had certainly done their job. He was under the opinion that girls ought to be seen and not heard – particularly girls at pretty as Daphne.

Daphne had been eight when he died and while she had mourned him publically, she hadn’t been able to find any kind of sadness that he was gone. The older she got, the more she realised how lucky she had been. She had no doubt that, should Eugene have survived, his pinches would have one day turned into curses and she would have been helpless against him.

Eventually she attended Hogwarts and, unsurprisingly, was sorted into Slytherin. She befriended the other Slytherins in her year and discovered, to her surprise that she actually enjoyed the boys company more than the girls. Not that that was surprising when you considered the other girls who had been sorted into Slytherin.

She hadn’t been surprised when her father approached her about a new contract. Sure she had dreamed a little of never marrying, of staying an independent woman and having a career, but she knew her duty to her family. Her father had assured her that they would do everything they could to ensure that her new betrothed was nothing like Eugene, but Daphne wasn’t sure what he thought he could do.

Finding out that Harry and Lord Black had agreed to consider the idea of a contract was a surprise. Harry had never indicated that he was interested in a betrothal with anyone, but she couldn’t help but be pleased. Harry at least was kind and, in the three years she had known him, he hadn’t once cursed someone out of anger – not even Pansy.

The problem was that, the more she thought about the idea of being betrothed to Harry the more sure she became that he would too would demand that she just be a pretty face with no personality. There was no way Daphne wanted to suffer through the displeasure of a second betrothed. So she had come up with a plan.

Maybe if she ensured that she always acted with proper etiquette and didn’t presume to speak out of turn, maybe if she was as perfect as she could be and showed that she could just be a pretty face, Harry wouldn’t feel the need to punish her as often as Eugene had.
Chapter 5

The seating plan for Harry’s birthday dinner had been thankfully easy to create. Each of his guests were bringing their betrotheds, except for Luna and Neville who Harry could pair together, and Daphne who was now betrothed to him.

While Harry had never met the girls that Theo and Blaise’s were betrothed to, primarily because Natasja had just turned eleven and Ines lived in Italy, he still managed to create a reasonably seating chart without Cousin Narcissa’s assistance – though he’d still had her approve it.

Unfortunately, now that Sirius and Lord Greengrass had signed a betrothal contract for him and Daphne, the seating plan had to change. Instead of Draco being on his right, Daphne had to sit there, which threw the entire table off.

Thankfully though they managed to figure out a new one before any of the guests arrived. Draco and Astoria arrived first, with Daphne flooing in behind them, and Harry received his new sister-in-law’s congratulations for the match.

Daphne greeted him with a polite curtsey that was deeper than usual, but otherwise allowed her younger, and more excitable sister, to do the talking. Harry watched her with concern. He had put Daphne’s formality that morning down to the presence of Sirius and her parents, but none of them were present now.

Neville arrived next, his grandmother in tow, though thankfully he managed to give Harry enough warning of her arrival for Draco and the Greengrasses to vacate the room.

Madame Longbottom was as much of a battleaxe as usual but, after having quizzed Harry regarding the plans for the evening, and being mollified by the mention of Luna being in attendance, thankfully left them alone.

“Sorry about that, Harry.” Neville grimaced. “Honestly, I don’t know what her problem is. She asked you all those questions last night.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Harry reassured him. “You can’t control her.”

“No, but she sure can control me.” Neville replied miserably.

Harry shot him a sympathetic look. “Draco, Daphne and Astoria are in the Elladora lounge if you want to join them. Oh, and you remember how I told you that I was going to pair you up with Daphne tonight?”

“Yes.” Neville nodded.

“We’ve had to change things around.” Harry told him. “So you’ll be paired with Luna instead.”

Neville looked a little relieved. “That’s fine. I find Daphne a bit terrifying. She reminds me of my gran.”

Harry grimaced at the comparison. “Why?”

“They’re both so proper.” Neville explained. “Whenever I do something stupid or clumsy around Daphne she gets this expression on her face as though she wants to scold me.”
Harry smirked. “Well, I’ll let you in on a little secret. Sirius and Lord Greengrass signed a betrothal contract between me and Daphne this morning.”

Neville swallowed heavily. “Merlin, Harry. Sorry, I didn’t mean to insult her or anything…”

“I know.” Harry reassured him. “I honestly don’t mind. I really like how proper she is.”

Neville huffed in amusement. “Yeah, you would. Congrats, Harry. I hope you are both very happy together.”

Harry nodded in acknowledgement. “Thank you. Did you bring the leaves I asked for?”

Neville gave him a quizzical look, before pulling a small sack out of his robes pocket and handing it to Harry. “Yes. Why in Merlin’s name do you want so many mandrake leaves?”

Harry grinned. “I’ll tell you later.”

Luna’s arrival was thankfully uneventful, aside from her usual confusing comments that made absolutely no sense. Harry still took the time to ensure that he memorised each strange sentence though. While Luna’s comments rarely made sense at first they often were understandable in hindsight, and remembering them helped future interpretations.

Theo arrived next with an eleven year old girl on his arm. Natasja Lestrange looked nothing like Harry had expected her to, which, given that Harry’s only point of reference had been the prison photographs that the Daily Prophet had printed of her cousins – Lord Lestrange and his heir – wasn’t particularly surprising.

Natasja was quiet as she curtseyed gracefully beside Theo, her small hand tucked in his elbow.

“Merry meet, Harry.” Theo bowed. “May I introduce my betrothed Miss Natasja Lestrange, Heiress to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Lestrange?”

Harry nodded in acknowledgement. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Lestrange.”

Natasja flushed. “Thank you, Heir Black.”

“Please call me Harry.” Harry smiled gently.

Natasja returned his smile shyly, before quickly looking down. “You can call me Natasja.”

“Are we the last to arrive?” Theo asked, as the floo the flared behind him.

“No.” Harry answered needlessly as Blaise stepped through the fireplace with a girl on his arm and Theo and Natasja moved away to the side.

Harry observed the girl on Blaise’s arm. She seemed to be around their age, or perhaps even a little older, and she had dark hair and skin – though her skin wasn’t nearly as dark as Blaise’s. She was beautiful and Harry couldn’t help but think that, at the very least, the two of them looked very good together.

“Merry meet, Harry.” Blaise bowed as the girl beside him curtsied. “Please allow me to introduce Ines Abbatini of la Famiglia di Abbatini.”

Harry wished he had taken Draco’s advice and learnt Italian, thankfully though Cousin Narcissa had taken the time to teach him the important basics. “Merry meet, Signorina Abbatini.”
“Merry meet, Heir Black.” Ines replied with a slight accent. “It is an honour to meet you.”

Harry turned towards Natasja who technically was the next highest ranking person in the room. “Miss Lestrange, I believe you have met Blaise Zabini of la Famiglia di Zabini?”

Natasja smiled shyly. “Merry meet, Blaise.”

Blaise stepped forward and bowed to her. “Merry meet, Natasja.”

“And this is his betrothed,” Harry continued, as though she hadn’t just heard Blaise introduce her to Harry. “Ines Abbatini of la Famiglia di Abbatini. Signorina Abbatini, this is Natasja Lestrange Heiress of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Lestrange.”

Ines curtsied. “Merry meet, Heiress Lestrange.”

Harry led them to the Elladora Lounge and performed all the necessary introductions. It took over five minutes for all eleven of his guests to be introduced to, and properly greet one another.

Once the introductions were finished, Harry stood up and moved to stand beside where Daphne was sitting. “Before we begin, I have an announcement to make. As of this morning, Daphne and I are betrothed.”

“Really?” Theo looked from Harry to Daphne, then back Harry again. “That’s wonderful. Congratulations to you both.”

Blaise was smiling widely, his teeth gleaming in the light. “No need to ask what your favourite birthday present was then, Harry.”

As was proper, Harry sent each of his birthday guests home with a small bag of goodies. What wasn’t entirely proper, was that the majority of the bags also contained a mandrake leaf, an invitation to join him in learning to become an animagus, instructions on what to do with the leaf, and an offer for Sirius to perform a sticking charm on the leaf if they would like. They would leave for Hogwarts in exactly a month and a day which, in Harry’s opinion, made it the perfect time to start the first step – holding a mandrake leaf in your mouth for a month.

He’d sent Takashi, Fred and George each a leaf via owl since they hadn’t been at his party.

Harry didn’t get much sleep that night, his mind was turning too much. If he wasn’t thinking of his new betrothal, he was wondering what animagus forms he and his friends would have. After his morning run with Remus, Harry asked the older man to perform the sticking charm to stick the Mandrake leaf to the bottom of his mouth. Remus was happy to comply and soon Harry’s animagus preparation was underway.

Having a leaf stuck to the bottom of his mouth felt weird! It was annoying, and almost sickening. And it made both eating and talking difficult. Sirius and Remus both laughed at his frustration, but promised that he would get used to it. Harry made sure to owl that encouragement to all his friends after breakfast. He didn’t want them to just give up.

By the end of the day he had received owls from all of his friends, minus Takashi who was in Japan and so probably hadn’t even received the Mandrake leaf yet, both thanking him for opportunity and asking Sirius’ help in performing the sticking charm.

Sirius was, in Harry’s opinion, the best godfather a person could ever have and he happily spent the
next day meeting with Harry’s friends and casting sticking charms on the leaves in their mouths. The next day, Harry was inundated with letters from his friends complaining about how uncomfortable the leaves were. Harry didn’t disagree, he still hadn’t gotten used to the sensation of a having a leaf in his mouth constantly, but it was completely worth it if it meant he got to become an animagus.

5-5-5

As he had the year before, Sirius gave Harry an overseas holiday for his birthday. The previous year he had taken Harry to France and Germany, because Harry was learning French and German, so it was of no surprise to Harry to find out that this year they were going to be staying in Bulgaria.

They left six days after Harry’s birthday because, according to Sirius, that would ensure that they would be back in time for the next Wizengamot meeting and still be able attend a special event in Bulgaria. Harry had no idea what kind of special event Sirius was referring to, there were certainly no Quidditch games scheduled in Bulgaria during the week they would be there.

Remus refused to come with them, as he had the year before, so in revenge Harry ensured that Tonks knew Remus would be alone at Grimmauld Place for an entire week. Sirius thought it was hilarious.

The Dursleys had never taken Harry anywhere when he lived with them, but he did remember hearing them complain about the one overseas holiday they had gone on when he was eight. They had gone to Italy and had left him with Mrs. Figg. Being left behind had been horrible but, when they came home, they had complained for weeks about how uncomfortable their hotel beds had been and how rude they had found everyone they met.

Those memories left Harry feeling delightfully smug about the ridiculously expensive magical hotel that he and Sirius were staying in. His bed felt like he was sleeping on a cloud and every single person they met had been perfectly traditional and polite.

Bulgaria’s culture was different from England’s. They rarely wore robes, instead the wizards wore tunics over trousers and, occasionally, cloaks. Bulgarian witches wore skirts that, more often than not, actually stopped above the knees, and elaborately wrapped shawls that covered their entire torso. Harry could only imagine what scathing remarks Pansy would make about the indecency of witches not covering their legs, but he had to admit that he quite enjoyed the view.

Not only were the clothes different in Bulgaria, but so was the etiquette. Instead of bowing with their fists meeting over their stomach, they bowed with their arms at their sides, and they didn’t bother rolling up their sleeves for people of higher rank – something that Harry put down to the fact that their winters were freezing.

Cousin Narcissa had explained all of this to Harry and Draco earlier in the summer, along with the different customs of Italy, France, Germany and Spain, but it was great to actually get to experience it.

Three days into their holiday Sirius had taken Harry to most of the famous monuments and museums in Bulgaria, but still hadn’t told him what the surprise event they were attending was. After breakfast on the fourth day, he side-apparated Harry away from their hotel and to a large stadium with hundreds of people milling around.

Harry looked around in confusion, before finding a sign that announced it to be the ‘208th Annual Bulgarian Fencing Competition’.

“A fencing competition?” He asked in excitement. “I’ve never been to one of these before.”
Sirius grinned. “I thought you might like it. I was originally going to hire us a box, but unfortunately they were all sold out. Fortunately, when Gospodar Tomov heard that I wished to attend he invited us to join him in his box.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Gospodar Tomov is one of the King’s advisors. He’s the highest ranking person in Bulgaria who isn’t part of the royal family.”

Sirius laughed. “So I’ve been told. Luckily, I’m the highest ranking person in England.”

5-5-5

The fencing competition was amazing and definitely put Harry’s fencing to shame. The wizards and witches competing moved so quickly, both with their sword and their wand, and Harry couldn’t help but be inspired. He wanted to be able to fence like that one day.

Gospodar Tomov was one of the most intimidating men Harry had ever met, but he and Sirius seemed to get along really well. Harry didn’t mind a bit. He had the fencing competition to watch and an incredibly interesting book to read. The book, which had been a birthday present from the Malfoys, was over a thousand years old and discussed the theory behind Parselmagic. Because of the age of the book, all the pictures and diagrams moved like a photograph. He’d had to get Sirius to put a glamour on the book of course, he was still keeping his being a parselmouth a secret, but it was definitely worth it. It was fascinating!

After the second day of the fencing competition, Gospodar Tomov invited them both back to his manor for dinner and Harry enjoyed the opportunity to experience more Bulgarian culture. It was so similar and yet different to the culture in England.

5-5-5

They returned home from Bulgaria on the 14th of August to a grumpy Remus who promised payback for Tonks’ daily visits to Grimmauld Place while they were away. Harry wasn’t too worried originally, Sirius (having gotten over his original shock) was definitely on his and Tonks side and he was sure that the two of them could take Remus.

Unfortunately, with the vote for Chief Warlock less than a week away, Sirius spent most of his time out with Lord Malfoy trying to convince Wizengamot members to vote for Lord Prince and Harry ended up having to suffer from weird coloured hair and animated food all on his own.

So, in an attempt to hide from Remus’ wrath, Harry did his best to ensure that he wasn’t home much either and spent most of his time at either Malfoy Manor or Longbottom Estate. They were the only two houses of his friends that he was allowed, and willing to go to. Sirius wouldn’t let him go to Theo’s house (since his father was a Death Eater) or Blaise’s house (since most of the time there was no adult supervision), and there was no way Harry wanted to go to the Weasleys’ house and have to put up with Ron, Ginny and Mrs. Weasley.

Thankfully, on the morning of the Wizengamot session, Remus promised to put a stop to the pranks. Harry believed him, right up until a tiny sea monster popped its head out of his smoothie and bit him on the nose. He glared at Remus who promised that he’d meant it and that the sea monster was the last one.

Despite this Wizengamot session being Harry’s fourth, he still found it intimidating to be surrounded by so many powerful adults. It was exciting to see Neville there though, sitting beside Lord Longbottom who looked more than a little sulky. Harry wasn’t sure how Neville had grown up so well if Lord Longbottom had been his main point of reference.
Theo was in attendance as well and was sitting beside the Regent of the Ancient and Noble House of Lestrange. It was strange to see so many of his schoolmates in the room. Draco was there, of course, sitting beside his father, as was Susan Bones and Cedric who were sitting in the Bones Heir seat and the Diggory Heir seat respectively.

Professor Snape was there as well, sitting beside Lord Prince, and now that Harry knew a bit more about their history he could definitely tell that they didn’t seem to like each other very much. Still, at least Lord Prince brought Professor Snape with him voluntarily unlike Lord Longbottom.

Harry followed Sirius up the stairs to the Black seats just as the large clock on the wall chimed.

“Greetings,” Dumbledore stood up from the Chief Warlock’s chair. “And welcome to the six thousand and thirty fifth Wizengamot meeting.”

Harry tried not to feel too smug about the fact that his headmaster was almost definitely going to lose his position, but failed. Maybe if Dumbledore hadn’t been the Chief Warlock, Harry wouldn’t have been sent to live with the Dursleys.

The Chief Warlock issue wasn’t first on the program though, the interesting things never were, so Harry did his best to pay attention to the argument on diplomatic relations with Croatia of all places. Unfortunately, Cousin Narcissa hadn’t actually taught him anything about Croatia yet and, when Harry looked over at Draco, his cousin looked just as lost as Harry felt.

Eventually, after the lunchbreak, Dumbledore allowed Lord Malfoy to introduce the topic of a new Chief Warlock.

“As you are all aware,” Lord Malfoy started, standing in the middle of the room. “Headmaster Dumbledore, of the House of Dumbledore, has served as this body’s Chief Warlock for seventeen years. We are, of course, grateful for his service, however, it is my concern that perhaps Headmaster Dumbledore’s service to this body has been bought at a cost – primarily that of our children’s education.”

Harry loved listening to Lord Malfoy talk at the Wizengamot. He was so clever and articulate, and always managed to get everybody’s complete attention. The fact that Dumbledore’s expression was decidedly glum only helped to further his enjoyment.

“Leading a school as large and prestigious as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry takes a significant amount of work,” Lord Malfoy continued. “And I believe it to be important to note that no headmaster, aside from Dumbledore, has held a simultaneous position during his time as Hogwarts’ headmaster in the last three hundred years. Perhaps this is the cause for Hogwarts’ no longer being regarded the most respected school in Europe.”

Lord Malfoy paused as the Wizengamot erupted with murmuring.

“He’s good.” Sirius noted quietly to Harry. “Very good. It makes me glad we’re on the same side.”

Lord Diggory raised his wand in the air and Dumbledore called on him immediately. Harry frowned at the man’s obvious favouritism, normally Dumbledore made people wait for ages before he called on them.

“Lord Malfoy,” Lord Diggory frowned. “This is nonsense. We all know that you harbour no love for Chief Warlock Dumbledore. Do not insult us by attempting to hide your personal agenda beneath fictional statistics.”

“I will admit,” Lord Malfoy started, speaking over the loud murmuring. “That Headmaster
Dumbledore and I have not always seen eye to eye, however I assure you that my concerns do not originate from a personal agenda, nor are my statistics fictional. Several years ago, the International Wizarding Council conducted a survey of the ten major schools within Europe and the results of the survey put Hogwarts as third. I am sure that, as Supreme Mugwump of the IWC, Dumbledore could explain the results of the study in much more depth than I can."

It was a risky move on Lord Malfoy’s part. Returning the floor to Dumbledore gave the man an opportunity to defend himself and remind the Wizengamot that he was their darling. Alternatively, it forced Dumbledore to come clean about the report which, according to Sirius, the headmaster had buried, and it definitely paid off. People who had brushed off Lord Malfoy’s statement as that of a prejudiced dark wizard, now were taking notice as Dumbledore himself admitted that Hogwarts was no longer as good as it had been in the past.

Harry thought that Lord Malfoy’s plan was inspired. After all, removing Dumbledore from the position of Chief Warlock because they didn’t agree with his politics made them look like the bad guys, but removing him because they cared about their children’s education made them appear in a much better light.

Unfortunately, it meant that Dumbledore would still be Headmaster of Hogwarts – something Harry would much rather he wasn’t. And, if everything went to plan, it would mean Dumbledore would have more time to focus on making Hogwarts completely non-traditional.

After Dumbledore had finished his speech, blaming Hogwarts’ fall on the other school’s successes rather than his failures, Lord Malfoy took the floor again.

“Perhaps the blame cannot fall solely on Headmaster Dumbledore.” Lord Malfoy admitted to the Wizengamot. “However, I believe that it must be noted that the headmistresses of both schools who are now outshining Hogwarts do not hold more than one position. Both Madame Maxime of Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and Madame Brusilov, the new Headmistress of Durmstrang Institute, focus their entire attention on running their schools. Perhaps this year, as we work towards better relations between these two schools and our own, we ought to look at what we can learn from them.”

Harry looked up at Sirius whose attention was focussed on Lord Malfoy, and then towards Draco, who looked just as confused as he did. What exactly did better relations between the schools mean?

“It is for this reason that I, Lord Lucius Malfoy, Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy, do so request that a new Chief Warlock be elected, in order that Headmaster Dumbledore be able to give his best efforts to the education of our children.” Lord Malfoy announced.

Dumbledore slowly stood. “Your request is noted, Mr. Malfoy. Does anyone second this request?”

“I second it.” Lord Burke stood immediately.

“There will be called.” Dumbledore said, in a mournful tone. “First, however, nominees must be named. Mr. Malfoy, as the originator of this motion, do you have a nominee?”

“I do.” Lord Malfoy answered. “I nominate Lord Septimius Prince, Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Prince for the position of this Wizengamot’s Chief Warlock.”

Dumbledore turned his disapproving gaze to Lord Prince. “And do you accept, Mr. Prince.”

Harry watched as basically every noble person in his sight clenched their jaws at Dumbledore’s usual disrespect, as Lord Prince stood.
“I do.”

“Very well,” Dumbledore shook his head sadly. “Are there anymore nominees?”

There were three more nominations. Madame Umbridge tried to nominate Minister Fudge, before being reminded that, as Fudge was only part of the Wizengamot because of his position in the ministry, he was not eligible for the position. Then one of the elected members, a Mister Elphias Dodge, stood and nominated Lord Diggory. Finally, Lord Burke nominated Lord Nott for the position. It was exactly as Sirius had predicted it would be. One dark candidate, one light candidate, and Lord Prince who was, technically, middle ground.

Then Dumbledore opened the floor to debate which of the candidates would be the most capable to handle the task. The debate continued for hours and was, by far, the longest and most passionate debate Harry had witnessed. It wasn’t necessarily that the emotions were higher than they had been before, Sirius and Umbridge had both been very passionate about the werewolf debate the previous year, but every single member of the Wizengamot seemed to have an opinion they wanted to share on the issue.

In the end, Dumbledore had to the call the debate to a close or risk there not being time to finish the process. Of course Dumbledore made sure that all of Lord Diggory’s most passionate supporters got the opportunity to speak first.

The vote was called and Harry watched as Sirius first voted for the House of Black and then voted for the House of Potter. As intimidating as he found prospect of being eligible to cast the Potter votes next year, he was also looking forward to it.

“The votes have been cast,” Dumbledore announced. “And the Wizengamot has come to a consensus. The nominee for Chief Warlock is Mr. Septimius Prince.”

Then came the second debate, which horribly, was even longer than the first. Dumbledore’s supporters did their best to mention every single one of his accomplishments, while repeatedly reminding everyone of every negative thing Lord Prince had ever done (including disowning his daughter). Then Lord Prince supporters or, more accurately, Dumbledore’s opponents, would stand up and spend half their time trashing Dumbledore and the other half of their time praising Lord Prince. It was a circus.

Eventually though, Dumbledore drew the debate to a close.

“As Lucius Malfoy kindly reminded us earlier, I have faithfully served this body for seventeen years.” Dumbledore stated, peering at them over his half-moon glasses. “It would be my honour to continue to do so. We live in dangerous and complicated times and, just as you appointed me to be your children’s guide to adulthood, I believe that I can guide our great nation into our future.”

Harry rolled his eyes in frustration as Dumbledore opened the vote. Not only were Dumbledore’s words absolute rubbish, but he had used his position to get in the last word. If Dumbledore was really as unbiased as he claimed to be, he would have allowed Lord Prince to have a few minutes to make his own closing statement.

The hall was incredibly silent as the Wizengamot members placed their votes and then as Dumbledore stood again.

“The votes have been cast.” Dumbledore said, his voice delightfully mournful. Well, delightful in Harry’s opinion at least. “And the Wizengamot has come to a consensus. Your new Chief Warlock is Septimius Prince.”
Chapter 6

During the week after Lord Prince was voted in as the new Chief Warlock, Harry barely saw Sirius. Apparently, now that Dumbledore had been ousted, Sirius had a lot more influence over things than he’d had before. If Sirius wasn’t out somewhere, meeting people and discussing new laws, he was holed up in his study reading through tome after tome of Wizengamot Regulations.

Harry felt sorry for his godfather. While researching Wizengamot Regulations didn’t sound too bad to him, he knew that it would be absolutely killing Sirius who didn’t particularly enjoy reading. Remus seemed to be more amused than anything, which Harry supposed was understandable. From the stories that Harry had heard of their years at Hogwarts, Remus had spent a large amount of his time trying to convince Sirius, and Harry’s father, to study.

It seemed unfair to Harry that Sirius would be so busy during the last few weeks of the summer holidays. He’d gotten used to spending a lot of time with Sirius, and couldn’t help but miss his godfather now that he wasn’t as available.

Still, having less than two weeks left until he returned to Hogwarts meant that Harry had a lot to do as well – especially considering that one of those days would be taken up with the Quidditch World Cup. Not only was this Harry’s last opportunity to learn anything from Cousin Narcissa’ tutoring until the next summer, but he also had to get his school supplies together.

Harry’s Hogwarts’ letter arrived three days before the Quidditch cup and, since Sirius and Remus were both too busy to take him (Remus was having to rewrite the entire Hogwarts’ History curriculum), Cousin Narcissa agreed to take both Harry and Draco to Diagon Alley.

The shopping trip took hours. Not only did Harry and Draco have to buy school supplies, but there were a lot of extra things on their lists as well. They didn’t only need school robes (which were only available from Madame Malkin’s), but they also needed new every day and formal robes from Twilfitt and Tatterings. Harry couldn’t help but be annoyed at how quickly he was growing out of each set of new robes he bought. He was actually taller than Sirius now, though not by much. At the Apothecary they bought extra ingredients to use for pranking potions throughout the year, and Harry spent over an hour in Flourish and Blotts looking through the different books.

When he carried his new books out of the store Draco, who had abandoned him for Quality Quidditch Supplies after the first twenty minutes, shook his head in amusement.

“Merlin Harry, when are you going to find the time to read all of those? You can’t have already finished the books that you were given for you birthday.”

Harry grinned unrepentantly as Cousin Narcissa shrunk the books down for him. “Buying books isn’t just about reading them, Draco. Sometimes it’s just about owning them so that, if you ever want to read them, you can.”

“That makes no sense.” Draco told him, handing him a bag with the Quidditch shop’s logo on it. “Here are the things you wanted.”

“Thanks.” Harry added the bag to his growing collection. “Where to next?”

“Fortescue’s.” Draco answered. “Mother said that she would pay for us to get an ice cream. She’s going to the tea shop.”

Harry smiled at Cousin Narcissa gratefully. “That is very kind of you, Cousin Narcissa. Thank you.”
“I can’t believe you’re actually dropping a class.” Draco commented after they had bought their ice creams and were sitting down to eat them. “You’re going to be taking the same amount as everyone else, what kind of Ravenclaw are you?”

“Ancient Studies was boring!” Harry complained.

“Boring?” Draco raised an eyebrow in disbelief. “You actually found something boring?”

“Okay, not boring,” Harry admitted. “Though I do find some things boring. It just wasn’t applicable.”

“History isn’t applicable either.” Draco pointed out. “And you like that.”

“You’ll like to too this year.” Harry promised. “Remus has shown me some of his lesson plans – it’s going to be amazing. Our class won’t know what’s hit them.”

Draco grimaced. “You know, I’ve actually enjoyed having a class that I didn’t have to pay attention to.”

“Remus’ classes are going to be great.” Harry told him. “He’s not just going to be talking about the Goblin Wars, he’s going to teach us about the monarchy and traditionalism.”

“I already know all that.” Draco pointed out.

“Maybe,” Harry said, though he doubted it. Remus had been doing a lot of research into the history of the traditions and his lesson plans were incredibly thorough. “But the muggleborns don’t. Think of it as an undercover traditionalism class.”

Draco’s eyes gleamed. “Dumbledore’s going to hate that!”

“Maybe,” Harry honestly didn’t care if he did. “But there’s nothing he can do about it. It is history, and recent history at that, and the Board of Governors support Remus.”

“You mean my father and Sirius support him.” Draco corrected.

Harry waved a hand dismissively. “It’s the same thing.”

After they had finished their ice creams, Harry and Draco visited the last store on their list, the Magical Menagerie, where they bought some treats for their owls. Harry made sure to add some snake treats to his pile as well.

When Draco saw them he frowned. “I’d completely forgotten that you had snakes.”

Harry glared at him and quickly looked around to make sure no one was within hearing distance. “Quiet voices, Draco.”

“Sorry,” Draco acknowledged. “It’s just that I haven’t seen your snakes in ages.”

“They had some snakelets.” Harry explained quietly. “They have a nest in the Forbidden Forest – I hardly see them anymore.”

“Weren’t you using them to practise parslemagic?” Draco asked in an undertone as they made their way to the counter.

“I haven’t had time.” Harry admitted. “I’m hoping that, now that I’m dropping Ancient Studies, I’ll have more time to practise this year.”
When the day of the Quidditch world cup arrived, Harry spent the morning counting down the minutes until they could leave. Apparently some of the people who were attending the match had been camping there for two weeks already, to help spread out the arrivals. Sirius had explained that only people who had bought the very cheap tickets had to do that – Harry half wished they had cheap tickets. He’d never been camping before, but he thought it looked like fun.

Their portkey was due to activate at eleven thirty five and, by eleven twenty, Draco, Luna, Neville, Daphne, Blaise, Theo and Astoria were all gathered in one of Grimmauld Place’s living rooms.

“I can’t believe Lord Black let you invite us all.” Theo exclaimed, not for the first time. “And we’re all going to sit in the Top Box?”

“Yes,” Harry confirmed with equal excitement. “Draco’s parents are going to meet us there.”

“I can’t believe we’re not allowed to stay the night.” Draco grumbled. “Everyone else will be!”

“Sirius isn’t letting me stay either.” Harry reminded him. “In fact, he’s given me a portkey to make sure that we can all leave directly after the game finishes.”

“I don’t care about that.” Theo waved a hand dismissively. “We’re going to see the World Cup!”

“Alright,” Sirius appeared in the doorway, dressed in a pair of jeans and a leather jacket. “Everybody ready?”

Harry’s friends all bowed. “Merry meet, Lord Black.”

“Merry meet.” Sirius nodded quickly, his gaze sweeping over them. “I’m impressed. Who would have thought a group of traditional purebloods could look so muggle.”

Harry completely agreed, though they were dressed more formally than any group of teenaged muggles he’d ever seen. Luna, Daphne and Astoria’s summer frocks weren’t so bad, but he and the other boys were all wearing suits with ties.

“They’re making me look ridiculously underdressed.” Sirius complained to Remus as the other man entered.

Remus, who was wearing jeans and a jumper, looked them over with amused eyes. “So they are.”

Neville pulled uncomfortably at his suit jacket. “Are we not wearing the correct clothes, my lord?”

“You’re fine.” Sirius reassured him with a smile. “You’re all dressed exactly how I would expect youth of your lineage to be. It’s just a bit more formal than what most of the people your age will be wearing.”

Draco snorted disdainfully. “Yes, I can hardly imagine what the Weasel would have ended up wearing if he hadn’t been too impoverished to afford tickets.”

Harry grinned slyly. “Didn’t I tell you, Draco? The Weasleys will be joining us in the top box as guests of Ludo Bagman.”

Draco looked as though he had swallowed a lemon.

“Alright,” Sirius got their attention. “A few things before we leave. Make sure you that you don’t go anywhere on your own – I want you in groups of at least three at all times.” He turned to where
Luna, Daphne, and Astoria were standing. “Ladies, you need to have at least one of your wizard friends escorting you. Harry and Draco will be happy to assist with this, I am sure.”

Harry looked over to Daphne and offered her a small smile.

“As you are all aware,” Sirius continued. “You will be leaving immediately after the game has finished. There are some concerns regarding the security of the Tournament site and I do not want you wandering around in the dark. You will portkey here from the Top Box, using a portkey I have already given Harry. You will then spend the night here, I am sure Harry has already shown you to the bedrooms that you will be using.”

Harry nodded along with his friends. He wasn’t exactly thrilled with the idea of leaving early and missing the parties, but at least he and his friends would still get to celebrate together.

“Two more things,” Sirius said, glancing quickly at his pocket watch which looked out of place with his leather jacket. “Firstly, before the game each team will be introduced by their mascots. The Irish mascots are Leprechauns – I trust you are all familiar with Leprechaun gold?”

“No, sir.” Neville shook his head shamefully.

“Remus?” Sirius prompted. “You’re the professor here.”

Remus shot Sirius an annoyed look, before turning his attention to Neville. “Leprechauns have mischievous natures and are known to create phony galleons. These galleons look identical to real ones, except they disappear within a few hours.”

“Right,” Sirius nodded. “So, don’t bother collecting any gold that appears during their show.”

“As if we would need to collect galleons off the ground.” Draco muttered in an undertone.

“Now the Bulgarian mascots will be Veelas.” Sirius continued. “Have you heard of the Veela allure?”

Harry nodded along with his friends. “Yes.”

“Excellent.” Sirius grinned. “It is likely to be rather strong today as there will be a lot of them and they will be excited. The best way to defend yourself against the allure is through meditation. I presume you can all achieve a partial meditation state while your eyes are open?”

Harry looked around in surprise as his friends all nodded. He knew he could, he’d learnt to with all his wandless magic practise, but he hadn’t realised that it was a common skill.

“Finally,” Sirius said quickly, after having looked at his pocket watch again. “I expect you all to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of your upbringings. No fighting, no gambling, no rowdy behaviour. Understand?”

“Yes, my lord.” Daphne, Luna, Astoria, Neville, Theo, and Blaise all answered respectfully.

“Yes, Sirius.” Harry and Draco agreed.

“Hypocrite.” Remus muttered in an undertone, earning himself a half-hearted glare from Sirius.

“Fantastic.” Sirius told them, picking up a potion stirrer from the mantel piece and it holding out. “The portkey is due to leave in thirty seconds, you’ll all need to be touching this.”

Harry hated portkeying. He hadn’t done it much, only a few times under Cousin Narcissa’s watchful
eye to ensure that he was able to land gracefully, but it was definitely his least favourite kind of transportation.

They appeared in a misty moor and were greeted by a witch and a wizard who recorded their arrival, before sending them on their way. Then they had to walk for twenty minutes before arriving at the campsite. The walk wasn’t so bad, though Draco managed to find a lot of complain about.

The sheer amount of tents at the campsite was incredible and only made Harry more envious of the people who were going to be allowed to spend the night. The amount of people there was amazing. According to Sirius, one hundred thousand people would be attending the game and they were some of the last to arrive.

“You’ve got two hours until the game starts.” Sirius told them, as they stopped at the edge of the campsite. “When the gong sounds, you need to meet us near the entrance of the stadium.”

Harry nodded quickly in understand, before turning to his friends. “Where do we want to go first?”

“I want some food.” Theo decided. “Maybe they’ll have squizzle sticks.”

Blaise’s eyes lit up. “I’ll come.”

Harry looked towards Neville questioningly.

“I don’t know.” Neville admitted. “Maybe we could just look around?”

They decided to stay together for the time being and made their way into the campsite to look around, with the hope that they would come across some food carts. As they walked around the campsite, Harry thought that the most amusing part of it all was seeing wizards failing at acting like muggles. He’d even seen a wizard wearing a frilly nightgown.

They spotted a lot of people from school, though hardly anyone they actually wanted to talk to, and a lot of people who were clearly foreign. Those were the people Harry was most interested in and he enjoyed guessing their nationalities.

After having wandered around for an hour, they finally found a food cart that sold squizzle sticks much to Theo’s delight. With their original objective achieved, they discussed a new plan and, when Harry admitted that he was hoping to see the Weasley twins, they decided to split up. Draco, Theo, Blaise, Astoria and Luna went off in one direction to look at more vendor’s stalls and Harry, Neville, and Daphne wandered through the section where the English people were camping.

“Thanks for coming, Daphne.” Harry told her gratefully. “I know that you’re not exactly a huge fan of the Weasleys either.”

“Of course, Harry.” Daphne said, her tone perfectly polite as she walked beside him – her hand tucked into the crook of his arm. “It will be my pleasure to meet your friends.”

Harry looked down at her worriedly, she’d been acting weird ever since their betrothal and he was starting to wonder whether she regretted having agreed to it.

“I see red hair.” Neville commented unenthusiastically.

“Oh?” Harry looked in the direction where Neville was pointing and grinned when he saw Mr. Weasley sitting next to a fire. “Thanks, Neville.”

“I just hope that Ron’s not around.” Neville muttered. “I haven’t seen him all summer and I don’t
want to break my streak.”

Harry strode towards his friends’ dad. “Merry meet, Mister Weasley.”

Mr. Weasley looked up in surprise, before quickly jumping to his feet and offering Harry his hand. “Good to see you, Harry.”

Harry shook his hand politely. “Good to see you too, sir. Do you know Neville Longbottom?”

Mr. Weasley looked towards Neville, before offering his hand. “I know of him, you’re in Ron’s dorm aren’t you, son?”

“Yes, sir.” Neville agreed blandly as he shook his hand. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“And this is Daphne Greengrass.” Harry introduced. “My betrothed.”

Mr. Weasley looked at Daphne, and then back at Harry. “I didn’t know you were betrothed, Harry.”

“I’m not surprised, sir.” Harry replied, as Daphne’s grip on his arm tightened. “It’s a relatively new development.”

“Oh,” Mr. Weasley’s eyes widened. “I see, well, I suppose congratulations are in order then.”

“Thank you, sir.” Harry smiled in acknowledgement.

“And it’s nice to meet you, dear.” Mr. Weasley told Daphne.

“Thank you, sir.” Daphne answered quietly.

Mr. Weasley turned back to Harry. “I presume you’re looking for my sons?”

“Yes, sir. Fred and George.” Harry clarified just to be sure. The last thing he wanted Mr. Weasley to do was to find Ron for them.

Mr. Weasley turned back to the tent. “FRED! GEORGE!”

Harry quickly swallowed down his wince as Mr. Weasley turned back to him.

“I’m sure they’ll be out in a minute.” Mr. Weasley told him. “My older two sons, Bill and Charlie, are staying with us for the games and Fred and George have been catching up with them. Ron’s off with some of his friends.”

One of the twin’s head suddenly popped out of the door of the tent. “Yeah, Dad?”

“Harry’s here to see you.” Mr. Weasley told him, twisting around so that he was facing him. “And he’s brought some of his friends.”

The twin grinned at Harry. “Just a sec.”

The twin disappeared back into the tent, before emerging out of it. The other twin followed a few secondly later, with two other redheads behind him. Harry presumed the redheads were Bill and Charlie, but they looked nothing like he’d imagined. Of course, now that Harry saw them, they looked exactly as one might expect a curse breaker and a dragon tamer to look. Harry had no idea why he’d expected them to look like a mix between Mr. Weasley and Percy.

Harry carefully looked the twins over. He’d been starting to notice a difference between the two of
them. He couldn’t tell them apart individually, but Fred had a slightly smaller and rounder face than George.

“Good to see you, Harry!” The twins chorused, both grinning.

“Good to see you too.” Harry told them. “You know Neville Longbottom?”

“Course we do.” They both answered together.

“Good to see you, old chap.” George added.

Neville’s smile looked uncomfortable. “You too.”

“And this is Daphne Greengrass.” Harry added.

Daphne’s grip on Harry’s arm tightened as the twins both turned their attention to her.

“She and Harry are betrothed.” Mr. Weasley added helpful.

“So we’d heard.” Fred’s harmless smile looked strange on his face. “It’s nice to meet you, Daphne.”

“Thank you.” Daphne answered. “It is nice to meet you also.”

“Ah,” Mr. Weasley started. “These are my two oldest sons. Bill and Charlie.”

Harry gave a half bow to Bill. The man might not have claimed the Prewett Lordship, but that wasn’t any excuse not to be polite. “It’s nice to meet you both.”

Bill’s eyebrows raised in surprise. “Likewise, of course. We’ve heard a lot about you.”

Harry wasn’t sure that was a good thing – particularly if Ron had been doing the talking. He turned to the twins. “Want to come for a walk?”

“Sure.” They answered together, before looking back at their brothers. “Mind if they come?”

Harry shook his head. “Not at all. The more the merrier.”

“Unless Ron is involved.” Neville muttered, too low for anyone beside Harry and Daphne to hear him.

“Have fun, boys.” Mr. Weasley beamed at them. “Keep an eye on the time, the game will be starting soon.”

“I’m surprised to see you without Malfoy.” Fred commented when they had started walking. Bill and Charlie were trailing behind them. “Aren’t you two normally joined at the hip?”

Harry laughed. “Not really. He and our other friends went to have a look around.”

The twins looked amused. “And how did Neville and Daphne draw the short straw to come and associate with us Gryffindors?”

“Neville’s a Gryffindor too, you know.” Harry pointed out.

“We do know.” The twins agreed. “Which explains why he’s here, but not how you managed to convince your lovely lady to join you.”

Harry looked down at Daphne fondly. “Sirius told us we had to stick to groups of three, so Daphne
volunteered to come. Otherwise Draco would have come, but I doubt that would have worked out well.”

The twins snorted. “Yeah, Dad’s not exactly a fan of his family.”

“I think it’s mutual.” Neville commented.

The twins looked amused.

“By the way,” Harry said quietly. “How’s the leaf thing going?”

The twins both grimaced. “It’s bloody annoying!”

“Hey!” Harry frowned. “Language.”

“Language?” George repeated in confusion. “What are you?”

“Our mother?” The twins both chorused together.

“It’s impolite to use foul language around a lady.” Neville told them seriously. “Not that I disagree the sentiment at all.”

The twins looked surprised. “Really?” They turned to Daphne. “Sorry about that then.”

“What we meant to say…” Fred started.

“…is that having a leaf in our mouth…” George continued.

“…is a rather annoying sensation.” Fred finished.

“I know.” Harry agreed. “It’s gotten better though, and the month is almost up.”

“It’s been a bad month as it is.” Fred commented.

“Mum’s been on our case for weeks…”

“…and the leaves haven’t made it any better.”

“You know you don’t have to keep it there, right.” Harry said quickly. “Not if you don’t want to.”

“We want to.” The twins chorused.

“We definitely want to.” George reiterated.

“We’re just looking forward to the month being up.”

“I think everyone is.” Harry told them. “The only person I haven’t heard complaints from is Daphne here.”

“Really?” Neville asked in surprise. “It hasn’t annoyed you, Daphne?”

“It has been nothing I couldn’t handle.” Daphne said carefully. “Certainly nothing I wasn’t willing to put up with.”

“Well…” Fred started.

“…Mum’s always saying…”
“…that women have a higher pain tolerance than we do.”

“Maybe she’s right.” George finished.

“Anyway, Harry.” Fred said after a beat. “Bill and Charlie were hoping they could talk to you about that thing.”

Harry frowned in momentary confusion before remembering that he’d told the twins about the Prewett lordship the month before. “Sure. Do you think they’ll mind if Neville and Daphne are there?”

“Nah.”

“Of course not.”

“Let’s find somewhere to talk then.” Harry decided, ignoring Neville’s questioning look.

It took them a five minutes to find a quiet place to sit on the grass, the older Weasleys trailing them the entire way. When they eventually stopped, Harry pulled a silk handkerchief out of his pocket and held it out to them.

“Would one of you mind transfiguring this into a blanket to sit on?”

They both gave Harry an odd look, but Bill accepted the handkerchief and within seconds it had become a large red blanket.

Once the blanket was laid out on the grass, Harry offered Daphne his hand to help her down onto the blanket. When she was comfortable, he took a seat beside her and noticed that all four Weasleys were looking at him strangely.

Harry looked to Neville questioningly, but his friend looked just as confused by their strange looks as he was.

“Fred and George said you asked to speak to me.” Harry prompted Bill and Charlie who had settled themselves on the other side of the blanket, beside the twins.

“Yeah,” Bill answered, exchanging a look with Charlie. “They said you mentioned something about the House of Prewett?”


“Right.” Bill nodded. “They said, that you said, that Uncle Gideon was actually a lord?”

“He was.” Harry confirmed. “Not for long. His father, your grandfather died when he was seventeen, and then he was killed three years later. But he was the reason your mother wasn’t disowned for marrying your father.”

Bill shook his head. “You’ve got to realise that this sounds crazy to us. Mum and Dad have never told us anything like this.”

“No, I imagine not.” Harry acknowledged.

“But you’re saying that our grandad on mum’s side was a lord? Along with our uncle? And now Bill?” Charlie asked disbelievingly.

“Bill isn’t a lord.” Harry replied. “He could be, but he doesn’t have to be. The Ancient and Noble
House of Prewett doesn’t have a lord or an heir. However, Bill is the person who could be the lord if he chose to.”

“Let’s say I believe you.” Bill said. “What if I couldn’t care less about all that stuff?”

“Then you have two choices.” Harry told him. “You can either formally refuse the position, which means that Charlie would be next in line, or you can just ignore it.”

“And if I ignore it?” Bill asked, after having exchanged a look with Charlie.

“Then the Prewett seat in the Wizengamot remains empty.” Harry answered. “You could always decide to fill it in another couple of decades. Or you could wait until you die, and then your oldest son will be in the same position that you’re in. Eventually, the House of Prewett will cease to exist. Something that would make many anti-traditionalists, including Dumbledore, very happy.”

“I’m an anti-traditionalist.” Bill told him flatly.

“I presumed you were.” Harry acknowledged. “Your family is one of the most famous anti-traditionalist family in England.”

All four Weasleys exchanged looks. “We are?”

“Of course.” Harry told them. “For the same reason that Sirius was famous for being an anti-traditionalist. Because your mother was a daughter of an Ancient and Noble House and turned her back on it all.”

“And I suppose you disagree with that?” Charlie asked, his tone vaguely aggressive.

“Do I wish that everyone was traditional?” Harry asked. “Yes, of course I do. But I acknowledge an individual’s right to make their own decisions. I just think it’s a pity when an Ancient and Noble House, which has existed for over a thousand years, goes extinct because a few generations decide that they don’t want to honour the traditions of their ancestors.”

There was a long silence.

“Sorry,” Harry sighed. “That was uncalled for. This is just something that I’m passionate about. I’m the last scion of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter and, if a goblin hadn’t suggested that I read some books when I was eleven, I would have probably never even considered traditionalism and my House would have become extinct too.

“You should talk to Sirius about this.” He told them. “He’s much less biased that I am. He grew up anti-traditional and was planning on letting his house go extinct. He’ll be able to explain everything to you much more neutrally that I can. You don’t have to be traditional to become the lord of your House.”

“Okay,” Bill nodded after a few seconds. “Thanks, I’ll do that.”

There was another long silence, before Charlie spoke up. “Hey, did I hear you guys talking about having leaves in your mouths?”

The twins winced. “Uh…”

“…well…”

A loud gong sounded throughout the campsite and Harry watched in amusement as the twins both
perked up at the sound.

“Saved by the bell!” Fred declared.

“Right…” George agreed, jumping to feet.

“…We can’t talk now…”

“…we’ve got a Quidditch game to see.”

6-6-6
Harry, Neville, Daphne made their way towards the giant stadium where the Quidditch match would start, with the four Weasleys accompanying them. Bill and Charlie spent the majority of the walk trying to convince the twins to tell why them why they had been talking about holding leaves in their mouths. Harry, who would rather they never found out, was glad that Fred and George had so much experience withholding the truth.

As they got close the entrance of the stadium that Sirius had told them to meet at, Harry could see Draco and Luna’s pale hair standing out in the crowd. He groaned inwardly when he saw Weasley’s red hair standing opposite them. With the only Weasleys that Harry could stand walking behind him, Harry doubted that this would end well.

“What are you going to do, Weasel?” Draco was taunting, Theo and Blaise standing at his shoulders. Luna and Astoria were standing beside Blaise. “You can’t use your wand during the summer.”

“Neither can you, Malfoy!” Ron snarled back. “And neither can your bloody sidekicks.”

Harry watched as Astoria’s eyes widened at Ron’s language. “Hey!” He interrupted, quickly moving to stand between Draco and Ron. “Watch your language.”

“Don’t tell him what to do!” Dean Thomas snapped from Ron’s side. “He’s not one of your mini-Death Eaters!”

Harry ignored him. “What’s your problem, Weasley?”

“What’s my problem?” Ron asked, his face turning red. “You’re my bloody problem, Potter. You and your Death Eater friends. You-Know-Who is out there, killing people, and you’re buddying up to the ones helping him.”

“Woah!” Bill quickly pushed himself into the group. “That’s a big accusation to make, Ron. I think you should calm down.”

Ron scowled at his brother, but eventually turned away and stomped over to where Charlie, Fred and George were standing.

Dean opened his mouth, but Bill got there first. “You too, Dean.”

Harry turned to Draco. “What happened?”

“He started it.” Draco answered petulantly. “He started accusing me of being a Death Eater.”

“Why didn’t you just ignore him?” Harry asked in exasperation. “Nobody even believes Voldemort’s back anyway. Look at all these people who overheard Ron’s accusation, not one of them believed him.”

“There you lot are.” Sirius greeted them cheerfully, as he and Remus made his way towards them. “Having fun?”

“Sort of.” Harry answered, glancing towards where the Weasley brothers were standing.
Sirius followed his gaze before sighing and moving towards them. “Bill, good to see you again.”

“You too, Sirius.” Bill shook his head. “Have you met Charlie?”

“I haven’t.” Sirius held out his hand to the dragon tamer. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too.” Charlie agreed.

“I heard that your family will be joining us in the top box.” Sirius commented. “There’ll be more Hogwarts students than adults at this rate.”

“Did you have a nice chat?” Draco asked Harry snidely.

Harry rolled his eyes. “We did actually, didn’t we, Neville? Daphne?”

“They weren’t too bad.” Neville agreed. “Nothing like Ron.”

Daphne smiled blandly. “It was lovely.”

Harry frowned at her. Why was she being so weird? Normally Daphne would have made a sarcastic comment about how surprising it was that there were Weasleys who could put together a sentence or something similar.

“I’m sure.” Draco said, disbelievingly.

“You’re going to have get over this Weasley hating thing.” Harry told him, before turning his attention the rest of their friends. “All of you are. I gave Fred and George each a leaf as well.”

Draco, Theo, and Blaise all grimaced. “Harry!”

Sirius chatted to the oldest Weasley brothers for another minute, before returning and leading them up the stairs to the Top Box. The box was small, though it managed to fit approximately twenty five seats in it – even if some of the seats looked a little squished.

“There were only supposed to twenty seats up here,” Sirius told Harry in an undertone. “But Fudge seems to have realised that I’m worth sucking up to, so he invited me to join him and I told him I’d be bringing you lot – so they had to add a few more seats.”

Harry smiled gratefully at Sirius. “Thanks so much, Sirius. This is great.”

The view over the Quidditch Pitch was amazing and as Harry stared out over it, he imagined one day flying in a similar pitch one day. Maybe even the next World Cup – he’d be of age then.

Lord Malfoy and Cousin Narcissa were the next to arrive and then the Weasleys, who had Dean Thomas with them. There was an awkward moment when Mr. Weasley and Lord Malfoy came into contact, Harry was sure he wasn’t the only person in the box who remembered their brawl in Diagon Alley two years previously, but Sirius managed to diffuse the tension.

After that Ministry Officials began arriving and Harry stood to Sirius’ side, with Daphne’s hand on his arm, so his godfather could introduce them. Ludo Bagman was overly familiar and boisterous enough that he reminded Harry of a house elf – and not in a good way. Minister Fudge was pompous and seemed to be trying to suck up to Sirius at the same time as boasting of his own achievements – neither of which made Harry like the man any more than he had when he’d first met him at the Malfoy’s Yule Ball.

The most interesting person, in Harry’s opinion, was the wizard that Fudge introduced as the
Bulgarian Minister of Magic. Harry had raised an eyebrow at that since Bulgaria’s Minister of Magic was also the King of Bulgaria’s son and heir.

When Fudge finally turned his attention away from both the Bulgarian and Sirius, Harry stepped forward and carefully performed a Bulgarian bow. “Dobre zavaril, Prince Andrey.”

The Prince looked amused as he replied in Bulgarian. “Greetings to you also, Mister Potter.”

Sirius looked proud as he leaned forward to whisper in Harry’s ear. “Apologise for Fudge’s behaviour would you?”

Harry inclined his head respectfully towards the prince as he quickly tried to figure out the right Bulgarian words to use. “Your highness, my apologies for the poor Bulgarian.”

“It is not so bad.” Prince Andrey told him. “This sigurnost po-dobre than your minister’s.

Harry blinked in confusion, but decided to ignore the unknown word for now. He could certainly guess what the prince had meant.

“Lord Black has wished for me to apologise also for Minister Fudge.” Harry told him slowly as he worked out the words.

“Perhaps ve could speak English?” Prince Andrey suggested in a low, amused tone. “Since my English is better than your Bulgarian?”

Harry felt like an idiot. “I apologise again, your highness.”

“Not at all.” Prince Andrey smiled warmly. “I vas honoured by your attempt to speak my language. It is difficult language to learn, I am told.”

“Yes, your highness.” Harry agreed. “Though not as hard as Japanese.”

“You are learning Japanese also?” Prince Andrey asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Impressive.” The Prince declared, turning to Sirius. “You must be very proud?”

“I am, your highness.” Sirius agreed.

“And you must be glad also.” Prince Andrey told Daphne. “To be betrothed to such a vizard.”

“Of course, your highness.” Daphne answered, in the same bland tone she had been using all month.

“Shall ve sit?” Prince Andrey suggested. “I believe that the game vill soon begin.”

They found seats in the front row just as Ludo Bagman cast an amplifying charm in his throat and began to welcome everyone.

Bagman introduced the Bulgarian team and Harry quickly began to sink into his meditative state. There was no way he wanted to be caught out by the Veelas’ allure. Half the men in the box quickly began shielding their eyes, but Harry thought Sirius’ advice was definitely the better one. In his half-meditative state he could feel the Veelas’ allure, but it wasn’t actually affecting him and, this way, he still got to see them dance. They were beautiful!

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry could see Ron and Dean Thomas both wandering towards the
edge of box like zombies – or more accurately, like wizards caught in a Veela’s allure. Harry tried not to feel too smug that none of his friends were making fools out of themselves the way that Ron and Dean were, but it wasn’t easy.

After the Veelas, came the Irish Leprechauns and this time there no way Harry was preventing himself from feeling smug as Ron Weasley scooped up handfuls of galleons. Not because Harry was rich and Ron was poor of course, he’d leave that kind of prejudice to Draco, but because he’d chosen the right Weasleys to be friends with. Fred and George hadn’t even attempted to pick up any of the falling Leprechaun gold.

The game started soon after and Harry focussed his Omnioculars on Victor Krum – he’d seen the seeker play in one of the Bulgarian team’s knockout matches and had been completely awed. Krum was amazing!

Krum didn’t do anything at first, but then Harry hadn’t expected him to – there was no point in the Bulgarian seeker showing his hand too quickly. When, after ten minutes, Krum obviously hadn’t spotted the snitch yet, the seeker began doing some tricks as he flew around the field.

The first time Harry had seen Krum doing that, he’d thought that the older boy was just showing off to the possible detriment of his team. But since then, Harry had done some research and discovered that some schools of thought actually believed that doing tricks helped seekers spot the snitch. Of course the seeker had to know the tricks back to front, otherwise they wouldn’t be able to keep an eye for the snitch at the same time, but the idea was that, while the seeker was doing the tricks, he was constantly looking in different directions – giving his eyes more angles to spot the snitch at.

Harry hadn’t really gotten a chance to try it out yet, but he had been teaching himself some new tricks to use when he was at school.

Harry watched as Krum completed death defying stunt after death defying stunt, while lending half an ear to Bagman’s commentary which, unbelievably, had yet to mention even one of them.

Then, suddenly, Krum froze staring down at the ground, before turning his broom down into a dive. The Irish seeker, Lynch, immediately dived after him, and the two seekers hurtled down towards the ground. Harry turned his Omnioculars towards where Krum was aiming, but couldn’t see any sign of the snitch. Was it a feint?

The two seekers continued to race downwards and Lynch was actually gaining on Krum which, more than anything, convinced Harry that it was a feint. Halfway towards the ground, Bagman finally took notice and babbled out a few words about the seekers’ dives. A few seconds later, Krum pulled up in the best Wronski Feint Harry had ever seen, and Lynch crashed to the ground.

The Irish supporters all groaned loudly, but Harry couldn’t find it in himself to feel sorry for Lynch – his focus was on Krum who, instead of celebrating along with his team, supporters, and mascots, was already heading back up to look for the snitch again. When Harry grew up, he wanted to be just like Krum!

The game continued and eventually a shaky looking Lynch joined Krum back in the air. Krum, who had been using Lynch’s break from the game to rest from the tricks he had been playing, immediately went back to performing death defying stunts.

As the game went on, Harry couldn’t help but empathise with Krum. While the seeker was definitely better than his Irish, his teammates just weren’t at the same level as the Irish. Harry had the same problem with the Ravenclaw team.
Harry knew that his friends were all supporting the Irish, they were definitely the more local team, but he was secretly hoping that the snitch would appear in time for the Bulgarians to win the game. The difference in score between the Irish and Bulgaria continued to increase though and soon the score was 140-10 to Ireland – Krum either had to catch the snitch in the next few minutes or Bulgaria had no hope of winning the game.

Less than a minute later, the Irish roared happily as one of their chasers scored yet another goal just seconds before Krum failed to duck out of the way of a bludger which hit him in the face. Harry groaned in sympathy as he saw blood begin to pour out of the seeker’s nose. Ridiculously, the referee didn’t even see it, he was too distracted by the fact the one of the Veelas had set his broom on fire, and so failed to hear the Bulgarian Captain’s request for timeout.

Harry thought it was ironic that the Bulgarian mascots were the reason that their seeker wasn’t being given the opportunity to get his nose looked at.

The Irish, taking advantage of their opponents’ momentary distraction, scored again less than a minute later and Harry groaned quietly.

Suddenly, Lynch turned his broom down into a dive and, within seconds, Krum was speeding after him – blood still pouring from his nose. Harry watched excitedly as the two seekers rushed towards the ground, Krum gaining on Lynch until they were neck and neck. Then Krum pulled slightly ahead, as Lynch attempted to slow down in order to avoid hitting the ground, and within seconds Krum had pulled himself out of the dive – the snitch in his hand – and Lynch had impacted with the ground again.

Krum raised his fist, to show the beating wings of the snitch caught inside it, and the Bulgarian supporters began to scream with excitement until someone actually looked at the scoreboard, which showed the score to be 170-160 to the Irish, and the Irish shouts easily overtook the increasingly disappointed noises coming from the Bulgarians.

Harry turned to the Bulgarian Minister who was sitting beside Sirius. “My condolences on your loss, your majesty. Your team played very well – particularly your seeker.”

“Thank you.” Prince Andrey replied gloomily. “Ve did our best.”

7-7-7

Sirius allowed Harry and his friends to hang around in the box for another few minutes, before giving Harry a pointed look. Right, they were supposed to leave straight after the game.

Harry gathered his friends up so that they could all touch the portkey Sirius had given him. “Home.”

Seconds later, they were standing in the middle of the Grimmauld Place lounge.

“What an amazing game!” Theo commented, falling back on one of the couches. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“I know!” Draco agreed excitedly. “Did you see how fast the chasers’ passes were?”

Harry turned to Daphne, Astoria and Luna, who were still standing beside him. “Would you like a seat? I’ll order us some drinks.”

“Thank you.” Astoria and Luna chirped together, smiling up at him.

Daphne nodded quietly as she gracefully chose a seat to sit in.
“Drinks anyone?” Harry offered loudly.

“Butterbeer, please.” Theo answered.

“Same for me.” Blaise agreed.

“I’ll have a cranberry juice.” Draco told him.

“What’s a cranberry juice?” Astoria asked.

“It’s a juice, made of cranberries.” Draco told her with a grin. “It’s great – much better than pumpkin juice.”

Astoria’s eyes widened in interest. “Could I try some?”

“Of course.” Harry answered.

“I want to try some too.” Theo and Neville said at the same time.

“You’ve already ordered a butterbeer.” Draco slugged Theo in the arm.

Harry grinned at how hyped up his friends were – he’d never seen Draco like this before. “How about I get everyone a cranberry juice to try, as well as any other drink they want.”

Blaise’s eyes sparkled. “Firewhiskey?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Any reasonable drink.”

In the end, everyone agreed upon butterbeer as their second drink and, within seconds after the last order was announced, the drinks appeared on the table in the middle of the room.

“Don’t you just love house elves?” Harry asked rhetorically.

Draco sipped from his cranberry juice, before returning it to the table. “Harry, did you see Moran pull a Woollongong Shimmy?”

“I’m sorry, what?” Harry asked in confusion.

“Just before their second goal,” Draco explained animatedly. “Moran’s high speed zigzag. It’s called a Woollongong Shimmy. How do you know every seeker trick ever invented, but not even the basic chaser ones?”

Harry snorted. “You sound ridiculous saying that. But no, I didn’t. I was watching Krum.”

“What?” Theo asked in disbelief. “For the whole game?”

“And I think that answers Draco’s question.” Neville said with a grin.

“Yes, for the whole game.” Harry defended. “He’s amazing. Some of the tricks he pulled off…”

“What?” Draco asked after a few seconds.

“There are no words.” Harry admitted. “He’s incredible!”

“Seekers aren’t that exciting.” Theo argued. “The chasers are where the excitement’s at.”

Harry raised an eyebrow in disbelief. “Did you even watch Krum?”
“Of course I did.” Theo returned. “I saw both dives.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Then you missed the most amazing parts. Any seeker can dive, but I doubt there are any other seekers alive who can pull as many complicated stunts as Krum.”

Neville snorted. “Not every seeker can dive. Or at least not every seeker can pull out of dive. Did you see Lynch’s face at the end of the game?”

“Did you see Krum’s?” Blaise returned. “He had blood pouring out as if someone had left a tap running.”

Harry looked towards Daphne and Astoria and saw that they were both looking rather sick. “Uh, guys, maybe we should move away from the talk of bodily fluids.”

“Why?” Draco asked, before seeing where Harry was looking. “Oh, sorry, Astoria, Daphne.”

“Thank you, Harry.” Astoria smiled sweetly.

They stayed up talking until the early hours of the morning, before eventually retiring to their bedrooms. Sirius and Remus still hadn’t returned, but that wasn’t particularly surprising – after all, there supposed to be some amazing parties after the game.

Harry quickly changed out of his clothes and into a pair of pyjamas, before crawling into bed. There was no way he was going to worry about his usually nightly wandless magic practise at two in the morning.

7-7-7

It was rare for Harry to wake up after the sun had risen so he hardly ever remembered to close his curtains, which meant that Harry woke up with the sun shining on his face. He felt awful! Why had he stayed up so late again?

He lay under his covers for a few more minutes, before remembering that he had guests staying over and so needed to play host. Ten minutes later, he had pulled himself out of bed, gotten dressed, and had made his way down to the dining room for breakfast.

“Woah.” Neville greeted him with a grin. “I had forgotten your hair did that.”

Harry pulled a face at him, before trying to smooth down his hair. He’d been too tired to bother putting his usual potion through it.

“Did you sleep well?” Neville asked.

“Yes,” Harry answered with a yawn. “Though it definitely wasn’t long enough.”

“Same.” Neville agreed. “By the way, Harry. I don’t know whether I said this yesterday, but thank you so much for inviting me to go with you.”

Harry grinned. “You only told me that three times yesterday, but you’re welcome.”

“The Daily Prophet has arrived.” Neville told him, gesturing to where it lay beside Sirius’ plate along with at least ten other envelopes. “What do you think it says about last night?”

Harry picked up the newspaper and unfolded it, before freezing at the headline.

‘You Know Who Returns: Hundreds Dead at Quidditch World Cup!’
Chapter End Notes

Duh, duh, duh!!!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Here's an early update, since I could hardly leave you with that cliffhanger for a whole week.

Enjoy :)

‘You Know Who Returns: Hundreds Dead at Quidditch World Cup!’

Harry stared at the headline as thoughts began spiralling through his head. Was this why Sirius and Remus hadn’t been home when he had retired to bed the night before? He’d presumed that they were just sleeping in, but what if they had never come home the night before? What if they had been hurt? What if they had been killed?!

“Harry?” Neville questioned from his seat across the breakfast table.

“So-something happened.” Harry stuttered, before turning the newspaper around so that Neville could see the heading.

Neville was silent for a few seconds as he read the headline. “You-Know-Who’s dead!”

“No, he’s not.” Harry told him blankly, he’d forgotten that Neville didn’t know about Voldemort’s return. “He never actually died, he just became a wraith. He performed a ritual to get a new body last summer.”

“No,” Neville shook his head. “You-Know-Who’s dead. You killed him. I would know if he had come back. Everyone would.”

“He’s been keeping quiet.” Harry explained, turning his attention back to the article in front of him. “Sirius and Dumbledore knew, but the Ministry wouldn’t believe them.”

Harry skimmed through the article quickly, looking for any mention of people he knew, but the article didn’t say anything that he hadn’t already guessed from the headline. About thirty minutes after the game had ended, Voldemort had apparated into the campground with dozens of his Death Eaters and begun cursing people. The Aurors had responded quickly, but hundreds of people had died and hundreds more had seen Voldemort’s face. Apparently Voldemort had decided that he was done with trying to hide his return.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Neville’s accusing tone interrupted Harry’s thoughts.

“Sirius said I shouldn’t.” Harry answered defensively. “Besides, what would you have done? What difference would you knowing have made?”

Neville’s jaw clenched. “What does that matter? I doubt you did anything to help, and you still knew.”

“Sirius only told me because Voldemort wants to kill me!” Harry snapped back at him.
“He wants to kill all of us!” Neville returned angrily. “What makes you so special?”

“What’s the matter with you two?” Draco’s voice came from the doorway.

Harry looked over at his cousin who, true to his nature, had clearly taken the time to ensure that every hair on his head was in perfect position.

“Voldemort attacked the World Cup.” Harry explained tiredly, holding up the paper. “The paper says that hundreds of people are dead and I don’t know where Sirius and Remus are.”

“Merlin, really?!” Draco exclaimed, walking forward quickly and grabbing the paper out of Harry’s hand.

“Wait, you knew too?” Neville asked, his tone outraged. “Did everyone knew that You-Know-Who was still alive?”

“No everyone.” Harry tried to reassure him. “I don’t think Daphne or Blaise know.”

“But Theo did?” Neville asked, his face turning red.

“What did I do?” Theo asked as he strolled into the room. “Because if you’re talking about…”

“You knew that Voldemort was back.” Harry interrupted him. “He attacked the World Cup last night.”

Theo went pale. “What?”

“Why did Theo and Draco know, but I didn’t?” Neville asked insistently.

“Because our bloody fathers are bloody Death Eaters.” Theo snapped at him.

There was a long silence as both Draco and Neville stared at Theo in horror.

“What?” Neville asked eventually.

“Don’t be naïve, Neville.” Draco snapped. “It’s not like you didn’t know.”

“I didn’t know it was true!” Neville protested.

“It doesn’t mean they’re evil.” Harry said quickly.

“No, my dad is pretty evil.” Theo corrected him with grimace.

Harry shot him a sympathetic look. “Well, Lord Malfoy isn’t evil.”

“How can you say that?” Neville asked him. “He’s a Death Eater!”

“Don’t call my father that!” Draco snapped at him.

“Why?” Neville asked loudly. “It’s true, isn’t it?”

Harry pulled his attention away from his friends, he didn’t have time for that right now. He needed to know whether Sirius was alright or not.

“Lindy!” Harry called firmly.

The aforementioned House Elf appeared in front of him almost instantly. “Master’s Heir is calling
“Lindy?”

“Are Sirius and Remus here?” Harry asked her hurriedly. “Did they come home last night?”

Lindy shook her head. “No, Master’s Heir, they is not being here.”

Harry’s stomach sank. “Can you sense them though? Are they alive?”

“Lindy is not sensing Master Remus,” She answered. “But Lindy is not being bonded to him.”

“And Sirius?” Harry asked her impatiently.

“Yes, sir, Master is being alive.” Lindy nodded. “Lindy is not knowing where he is being though.”

Harry let out a sigh of relief. At least one of them was alive and if Sirius was alive, Remus probably was as well. “Thank you.”

Lindy beamed at him. “Lindy is being honoured to serve Master’s Heir. Is Master’s Heir needing anything else?”

“No,” Harry shook his head.

After Lindy had popped away, Harry turned his attention back to his friends. Draco and Neville were facing each other with furious expressions, though thankfully their wands weren’t out.

“Stop it.” Harry shouted at them. “Shut up and sit down.”

They both turned to him with scowls on their faces but, being the well-bred traditionalists that they were, slowly sank into their seats.

“I don’t know where Sirius and Remus are.” Harry told them. “They didn’t come home last night, which means they were probably there when Voldemort attacked…”

“When Draco’s father attacked you mean.” Neville muttered.

Draco turned to him in fury, but Harry got there first.

“Shut up, Neville. You too, Draco. You can fight about this later if you want to.”

Theo, who had been standing to the side, watching with a helpless expression, carefully took a seat beside Draco. “We should put the wireless on. Maybe they’ll have some more news.”

Harry nodded and quickly called for a house elf to bring him the wireless from his room. Once it was set on the table, Harry switched it on.

“…complete surprise.” A wizard was saying. “The Ministry is claiming that there was no evidence that You-Know-Who had returned until his attack last night.”

“Rubbish.” Harry commented with a sneer. “Madame Bones knew, so did Sirius and Dumbledore, Fudge just wouldn’t let them do anything about it.”

“The Ministry aren’t releasing many details,” The wizard continued. “But they have released some of the names of those who died in the attack. William Alderton, Emmeline Vance, Broderick Bode, Peter Blotting, Alison Denbright, Jason Denbright, are all confirmed casualties. As are Auror Jonathon Franklin, Auror…”
“Wasn’t Auror Franklin one of our Defence Professors in second year?” Theo asked. “He was the one after Auror Tonks.”

Harry’s stomach squirmed uncomfortably at the knowledge that he’d actually met one of the people who had been killed.

“…three Hogwarts’ students, Roger Davis, Anita Samuels, and Seamus Finnegan have also been confirmed dead.” The wizard went on.

Neville paled in shock. “Seamus was in Gryffindor. We’ve shared a dorm since first year.”

“Roger was in my Quidditch team.” Harry commented blankly. “Anita Samuels was in Ravenclaw too.”

“Even now, new casualties are being reported.” The wizard continued.

“I don’t think I want to know.” Neville muttered.

“Including Lord Julian Nott, Head of the…”

Harry turned to Theo just in time to see his friend’s expression crumble.

“It can’t be true.” Theo denied. “I would know if father was dead.”

Draco leaned forward and switched off the wireless that was still naming individuals who had died.

“I’m so sorry, Theo.” Harry told his friend sincerely.

“I can’t believe he’s dead.” Theo shook his head in disbelief. “Why would they just announce it like that without telling me first?”

“I don’t know.” Harry admitted. He had no idea what to say.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Even Neville, who had previously been so angry at the idea of Theo’s father being a Death Eater, didn’t seem to know what to say.

“Harry?!” Sirius’ voice called suddenly from the hallway. “Are you here?”

Harry leapt to his feet and ran across the room, before meeting his godfather in the doorway. “You’re alright!”

Sirius pulled him into a firm hug. “I’m fine. So is Remus.”

Harry could feel tears of relief pricking at his eyes. “I was so worried. We were just listening to the wireless and they were announcing the names of some of the people who had died.”

“We’re alright.” Sirius repeated.

“Theo’s father died.” Harry mumbled into Sirius’ robes. “We heard it on the Wireless.”

Sirius released Harry, turning his attention to Theo who was still sitting at the table. “I’m sorry, Theo.”

Theo looked lost. “I didn’t even like him and now he’s dead.”

“Does your brother know where you are?” Sirius asked him.
Theo nodded. “Is he alright?”

“I haven’t heard anything that would suggest he wasn’t.” Sirius said noncommitally.


Sirius turned his attention towards him. “I don’t have time to explain everything, sorry, pup. I’m needed at the Ministry. I just needed to know that you were okay.”

“I’m fine.” Harry reassured him, because he was – physically at least. “You should go do what you need to do.”

Harry barely saw Sirius during the next couple of days, but Remus seemed content to stay at Grimmauld Place with him. He wouldn’t say much about what Sirius was spending all his time doing, but from the small pieces of information he let slip Harry knew that it wasn’t just about preparing to fight against Voldemort. Apparently there was supposed to be some kind of international event held in England later in the year and Sirius had been asked to help convince the other countries not to pull out.

Harry could understand where the other countries were coming from – he wasn’t sure he wanted to be in England right now either. So many people had died, some of whom Harry actually knew, and the knowledge that Voldemort was still out there was terrifying.

He hadn’t known any of the people who had died well. Sure Seamus Finnegan had been in his classes since first year and Roger Davis had been in the Ravenclaw Quidditch Team with him, but neither boy had been Harry’s idea of good company.

The death Harry felt the worst about though was Theo’s father because, no matter how much Harry tried, he didn’t feel the least bit sorry that the man was dead. Lord Nott had been horrible to Theo, not to mention he had been a Death Eater. He hadn’t been one of the helpless victims, he had been there to murder people and Harry was glad that he was dead. A reaction that, no matter how many times Remus assured him was understandable, reasonable even, Harry still was sure made him a horrible person. What kind of wizard was glad another wizard was dead?

To make matters worse, Neville wasn’t returning any of Harry’s letters. Remus said that Neville probably just needed some time, but Harry couldn’t help but be afraid that he had lost one of his best friends. He could understand where Neville was coming from – after all, he had freaked out when he’d heard that Lord Malfoy was pretending to be a Death Eater as well and Neville didn’t even know that he was faking it – but that didn’t make the thought of losing his friend any easier.

When he’d told Remus, the older wizard had suggested that he sit down with Neville by himself, just the two of them without Draco or Theo around, and try and talk Neville around. Harry had immediately owled Neville, asking if they could meet and talk. Neville hadn’t replied at first, but he had eventually replied suggesting that they could talk on the train.

It wasn’t exactly what Harry had had in mind. He wanted it all out of the way before school started but, since Neville’s reply hadn’t arrived until the last day of August, there was nothing Harry could do about it.

Sirius was actually home for dinner that night, claiming that he wanted to spend one last evening with Harry before he returned to Hogwarts. After dinner, they moved to the Elladora Lounge and spent the evening talking and laughing. It was the first time Harry had managed to take his mind off
the attack since he’d gotten the news and he was glad for the reprieve.

“You know what we were going to do this summer?” Sirius asked suddenly.

Harry shook his head. “No, what?”

“Remus was going to take the vows to become a vassal of the House of Black.” Sirius answered, looking over at his friend. “You still up for it, Moony?”

Remus looked a little startled, but he nodded. “Now?”

“If we don’t do it now we’ll have to wait until Christmas.” Sirius commented. “Because the two of you will be off at Hogwarts.”

“Alright,” Remus rubbed his hands on his trousers. “How do we do it?”

Sirius stood up. “You kneel in front of me,” He made an uncomfortable face, “Not because of anything, it’s just, you know, tradition.”

“I know, Sirius.” Remus told him soothingly, as he stood as well. “I’m not going to get offended. My knees might though.”

“We can always cushion the floor.” Sirius offered quickly.

Remus rolled his eyes. “I was kidding, Sirius! I’m only in my mid-thirties, I’m practically a sprite. My knees will be fine.”

“Right,” Sirius ran a hand through his hair. “So you kneel and I’ll stand…”

“What will Harry do?” Remus asked.

“He’ll stand beside me.” Sirius answered, gesturing for Harry to stand. “Then you recite the words that I gave you to memorise.” He paused. “You did memorise them, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did.”

“Good,” Sirius nodded. “Then I’ll say my part and then we’re done.”

“So Harry doesn’t say anything?” Remus checked.

“No, he’s pretty superfluous for the whole thing really.” Sirius answered.

“Superfluous?” Remus smirked. “Someone’s been reading the dictionary.”

Sirius barked out a laugh. “No, but it turns out that teenaged me was right – snootiness is contagious.”

“Right then.” Remus’ gaze swept across the floor. “Anywhere particularly we should do this? Because my knees and I vote for on that big rug.”

“What happened to you being a sprite?” Sirius smirked, as he took the few steps towards the rug in question.

Harry stood and moved so that he was standing to Sirius’ right, before watching as Remus knelt down on the rug in front of them. It felt weird to have Remus kneeling before them.
“Ready?” Sirius asked, offering both his hands to Remus. “You don’t have to do this, you know.”

“I want to.” Remus answered firmly, placing his hands in Sirius’. “I, Remus John Lupin, of the House of Lupin, do so swear obedience and fealty to the House of Black, its Lord and his Heir. I will be to Lord Black faithful and true. I will love all that he loves, and shun all that he shuns, according to the law of magic, and according to the world’s principles, and never, by will nor by force, by word nor by work, do ought of what is loathful to him. So mote it be.”

“So mote it be.” Sirius echoed. “I, Sirius Orion Black, Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, accept the oath of fealty sworn to me by Remus John Lupin, of the House of Lupin. As liege lord, I will be to Remus, fair and honourable, according to the law of magic, and according the world’s principles, and never, by will nor by force, by word nor by work, do ought of what is permanently harmful or injurious to him. So mote it be.”

Sirius and Remus both accompanied Harry to Kings Cross Station the next morning. The atmosphere on Platform Nine and Three Quarters was sombre and Harry couldn’t help but note the difference to previous years. Parents seemed clingier, not wanting to let their children go, and even the students seemed more reluctant to get on the train.

Harry hugged Sirius and Remus goodbye, before boarding the training and making his way to the cabin that he and Neville had agreed to meet. The cabin was full, already containing a group of third years, but Harry waited until Neville arrived before walking silently with him to find an empty cabin.

Neville seemed colder than usual and Harry’s stomach twisted uncomfortably at the thought of maybe losing another friend. Once they had found an empty cabin, Harry cast the most complex locking charm he knew on the doors, before sitting down opposite Neville.

“How are you?” Harry asked seriously.

“I don’t know.” Neville’s shoulders slumped. “Confused, angry, scared.”

“I’m scared too.” Harry admitted. “Did you see how serious everyone was on the platform?”

“Gran almost didn’t let me come.” Neville confessed. “I think if You-Know-Who had attacked again, she would have refused completely.”

“Sirius and Remus say that Hogwarts is one of the safest places in England.” Harry told him. “Apparently Dumbledore has had a whole team of people there this week strengthening the wards.”

“That’s good.” Neville nodded. “Of course, it won’t protect us from the Death Eaters who actually go to school with us.”

Harry sighed. “Draco and Theo aren’t Death Eaters.”

Neville’s face twisted into a scowl. “Maybe not, but their fathers are.”

“Theo’s father is dead.” Harry reminded his friend. “And Draco’s father…” He trailed off.

“Draco’s father what?” Neville prompted him.

“I trust him.” Harry answered finally. “I can’t tell you why, or even what that means, but can you trust me when I tell you that I trust him?”
Neville slumped backwards against the seat. “I don’t know.”

“You know I’m not supporting Voldemort, right?” Harry asked. “And if I want Voldemort dead and I trust Lord Malfoy, can’t you just trust me to be right about it?”

“I wish you wouldn’t say his name.” Neville muttered.

“Sorry.” Harry said, though he knew it didn’t sound very convincing.

“I don’t know.” Neville said again, though this time more firmly. “But you can’t keep bugging me about it. Let me think about it.”

“Alright.” Harry nodded.

“And you can’t keep staring at me.” Neville said after a few seconds. “Read a book or something.”

Harry looked away in embarrassment, before reaching for his satchel to find a book.

They sat in silence for the majority of the train ride. Harry reading a book on Ancient Runes and Neville staring out the window, deep in thought. Ten minutes before the train arrived in Hogsmeade, Neville turned back to Harry.

“I do trust you, Harry.” Neville told him seriously. “Can you swear to me that Lord Malfoy is nothing like Bellatrix Lestrange?”

“Definitely.” Harry nodded quickly.

“I can’t trust him.” Neville said after a few seconds. “Even knowing that, I can’t trust him. But I do trust you, and I trust Draco and Theo.”

Harry let out a relieved breath. “That’s good.”

“I wish you had told me he was back, Harry.” Neville admitted. “I hate the fact that you knew for a whole year and didn’t bother telling me. He’s the one who broke the Lestranges out of Azkaban isn’t he?”

“Yes.” Harry confirmed.

“Why didn’t you tell me then?” Neville asked.

“Because Sirius asked me not to.” Harry answered. “And because part of me wished I didn’t know. It was horrible knowing that Voldemort was out there somewhere, trying to come up with ways to kill me.”

Neville nodded slowly. “I guess that makes sense. Gran said that she knew all along. Apparently Dumbledore told her. She didn’t tell me either.”

“She was probably just trying to protect you.” Harry pointed out.

“I know.”

8-8-8

The Welcome Feast was a lot quieter than it usually was. Every single House had lost at least one student to Voldemort’s attack and their absences were almost deafening. After everyone had finished eating Dumbledore stood up to give his usual announcements.
He started with the normal announcements: the new DADA professor (Auror Moody), the Forbidden Forest being out of bounds, no magic in the halls, the list of contraband products, before moving onto the shocking ones.

Harry wasn’t sure which shocked him more, that Quidditch would be cancelled or that they would be hosting the Triwizard Tournament. The lack of Quidditch was disappointing, Harry had really been looking forward to trying out Krum’s seeker strategy, and he could only imagine how devastated the seventh years would be – this was their last year to play. This was the year that Quidditch Scouts usually came to watch the games.

Having said that, if there was ever a reason to cancel Quidditch the Triwizard Tournament would be it. Even if Harry wouldn’t be able to enter it would definitely be fun to watch. The Tournament also explained why Sirius had been so busy – Harry wasn’t surprised that the Durmstrang Institute and Beauxbatons Academy of Magic had been reluctant to send their students to a country where a Dark Lord had just killed hundreds of people. Harry was more surprised that they had actually agreed to come.

As exciting as the Tournament would be, Harry was more interested in meeting the students from the visiting schools. No wonder Sirius had advised him to start learning Bulgarian. While Durmstrang was actually somewhere in Scandinavia, it had been founded by a Bulgarian and so the official language of the school was actually Bulgarian. Harry thought it was strange given how difficult Bulgarian was as a language – though it definitely explained why Bulgarian was in the top five most widely used languages in magical Europe.

The news of the Tournament definitely lightened the atmosphere of the hall though, and the students murmured excitedly to one another. Harry hoped that the brighter mood would last. He didn’t want the school to spend the year mourning for their friends and fearing for their lives – that felt too much like a victory for Voldemort.
After the Welcome Feast had finished, Harry followed the other Ravenclaws up to their Tower to listen as Professor Flitwick gave his annual welcome speech to the first years. When that was finished, and the first years had been shown their dorms, the seventh year prefects called a meeting of all the fourth years.

“As you know,” Takashi started, once everyone had gathered. “Fourth years are responsible for buddying up with one of the first years and showing them around. We have a larger group of first years than usual with six boys and seven girls, so some of you will have to take on two students. Anyone willing to volunteer to do that?”

Terry, Lisa and Mandy all put their hands up quickly.

“Wonderful,” Penny White, the female seventh year prefect smiled. “Just hang tight for a few minutes and we’ll assign you some names.”

Once the meeting was drawn to a close, and Harry had been assigned a first year by the name of Tiberius Odgen (who Harry was pretty sure he was Lord Odgen’s great-grandson) Harry hung back to speak to Takashi. When the other students had moved away, Harry cast a basic privacy charm that Sirius had introduce him to.

“Merry meet.” Takashi greeted him with a wide smile.

“Konbanwa.” Harry returned, carefully concentrating on his pronunciation. “O genki desu ka?”

Takashi’s eyebrows flew up in surprise. “Genki desu, Harry-sama. Anata wa?”

“Good, thank you.” Harry replied. “Sorry, despite having been learning Japanese all summer, that’s about all I can manage.”

“It is impressive.” Takashi told him. “I am honoured that you have taken the time to learn that much. I have been told that my language is very complex to learn.”

“It is.” Harry agreed. “I’ve found it equally as hard to learn as Gobbledygook.”

“And yet you have persevered with both languages.” Takashi commented. “As I said, it is impressive.”

“Thank you.” Harry inclined his head. “I’ve been learning Bulgarian as well which is easier than Japanese, but is still a lot harder than French or German.”

“Did you know of the Triwizard Tournament before tonight then?” Takashi asked.

“No,” Harry denied. “But Sirius did and he was the one who suggested that I learn it.”

Takashi looked amused. “It will serve you well, I am sure.”

“I hope so.” Harry agreed. “

“My grandfather considered sending me to Durmstrang.” Takashi commented. “But he chose Hogwarts because I already knew some English.”

“Hogwarts must have been especially scary for you when you were a first year.” Harry commented.
“It was very new.” Takashi agreed. “Though it has since become like a second home. I will miss it when I leave.”

“Yes, you’re a big seventh year now.” Harry remembered. “Are you disappointed that you are not Head boy?”

“No,” Takashi answered immediately. “Lucian Bole is much more suited for the role than I am. I want to concentrate on my studies this year.”

“Will you put your name forward for the Triwizard Tournament?” Harry asked curiously.

“I will ask my father and grandfather what their wish is,” Takashi told him. “But no, I do not think so. They will want me to focus on my studies. Especially now that I have been tentatively accepted for an apprenticeship under Master Kobayashi.”

“Who is Master Kobayashi?” Harry asked curiously.

Takashi shot him an incredulous look. “You have never heard of him?”

Harry frowned in thought. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Master Kobayashi is Japan’s most prestigious wand maker.” Takashi explained.

“You want to be a wand maker?” Harry asked in surprise.

“Yes,” Takashi replied. “My father and grandfather believe that it will bring honour to our House. I think it sounds very interesting.”

“No wonder you want to study this year.” Harry commented. “Will you have time to become an animagus with us?”

“Definitely!” Takashi answered firmly. “My father was very pleased to hear that you would be helping me learn.”

“I wouldn’t say I’ll be helping exactly.” Harry admitted. “I don’t know any more about it than you do.”

“My father is also very grateful for the assistance you have given me with wandless magic.” Takashi continued as though he hadn’t spoken. “He wishes to meet you one day.”

“I wouldn’t exactly say I’ve been helping you with that either.” Harry denied. “We just practise together.”

“You do not understand your worth, Harry-sama.” Takashi told him seriously. “It is only because of you that I have come so far in learning the discipline of wandless magic.”

“So, I presume you've got the Mandrake in your mouth then?” Harry asked, desperate to change the subject.

Takashi looked amused. “Yes, though I still must keep it for another two days. I did not receive your owl until the third of August.”

“That’s alright.” Harry said. “We have to meditate before we take the leaves out anyway – to find our animagus forms. We could all do it together, or we could do it separately.”

“I would definitely recommend doing it as a group.” Takashi told him. “Meditating next to you
makes it easier to concentrate."

Harry frowned. “Still? I thought that would have gone away in first year after I learnt how not to
glow.”

“No,” Takashi denied. “It still remains. It is not bad. Meditating with you reminds me of meditating
with my grandfather.”

“So you've said before.” Harry remembered. “I should probably ask Professor Snape about it, just to
be sure.”

“I would not worry about it.” Takashi told him. “It will help those in the group whose magic is not as
strong, or who are not so practised at meditating, to find their animagus forms.”

Harry nodded slowly – he wasn't even sure that Fred and George knew how to meditate. “Alright.
I'll arrange for us all to meet after dinner on Wednesday then.”

9-9-9

Harry woke up at five the next morning to ensure he had time for his daily wandless magic practise.
He had been learning for almost two years now and he had definitely made progress. He could cast
the levitation, lumos, stunning, and tempus charms easily now, but he had discovered that he had to
learn each new spell from scratch. It was frustrating, since he’d hoped that one day he would be able
be as proficient without his wand as he was with it, but did make sense. Thankfully though, each
spell took less and less time to learn – the tempus charm had only taken him two months. Now Harry
was working on learning how to perform a heating charm wandlessly.

Neville had made similar progress, though his friend was still learning the tempus charm, but Takashi
was still working on the levitation charm. Harry had no idea how Takashi found the willpower to
continue practising. Sure the older boy had gotten better – while he still had to be meditating to
levitate the quill, he could now stop meditating and still hold the quill in the air – Harry had learnt
four spells in the time it had taken Takashi to mostly learn one.

After practising for an hour, Harry pulled open the curtains on his bed and quietly exchanged his
pyjamas for clothes he could run in. Then, with his Hogwarts’ robes tucked under his arm, he left his
dorm and made his way to the Common Room where Takashi was waiting. They walked down the
Quidditch Pitch together to meet Neville and, after the three of them had stowed their school
uniforms and school bags under the bleachers, they set off around the lake. It was nice to run at
Hogwarts again. The air was so clean and fresh compared to London and the scenery was a lot nicer
too.

It was a little strange to be running without Remus though, the older man had been Harry’s running
partner since June. Harry wondered whether maybe he would be interested in joining them on future
mornings. He’d have to ask Takashi and Neville of course, but he doubted that they would mind.

They made it around the lake in record time and then Takashi and Neville began stretching to
prepare for their fencing practise. Harry stayed for a few minutes, before quickly making his way to
the showers in the Ravenclaw Locker Room – he had less than fifteen minutes until he was due to
meet Tiberius Odgen in the Ravenclaw Common Room and show him down to breakfast.

Despite having run all the way from the Quidditch Pitch to the Ravenclaw Tower, Harry only just
made it to the common room in time to hear Penny White dismiss the first years and their
upperclassmen buddies.
Harry winced inwardly as the students all dispersed leaving a small boy standing near Penny – that was probably Tiberius.

“Ah, there he is.” Penny told Tiberius as Harry made his way towards them. “And I’m sure that Harry has a very good reason as to why he was late.”

Harry tried to ignore the way the seventh year prefect’s eyes were narrowed at him. “My apologies. I was running around the lake and misjudged the time.”

Tiberius Odgen stared at him with wide eyes, before bowing over his hands. “Merry meet, Heir Black.”

“Merry meet, Tiberius.” Harry agreed, ignoring the way Penny was rolling her eyes. “Are you ready for breakfast?”

“Yes, sir.” Tiberius nodded quickly.

“Excellent.” Harry smiled. “You can just call me Harry though.”

Tiberius’ eyes widened even further. “Thank you, Harry.”

“Did you sleep well?” Harry asked, as he led the small first year down the Ravenclaw stairs.

“Yes.” Tiberius nodded quickly. “I’ve never had curtains on my bed before. Mother always said they were only for older people.”

“Well,” Harry grinned down at him. “I guess you’re older now.”

“Yes,” Tiberius agreed with obvious excitement. “Did you really run around the lake?”

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “I do it every morning with some friends of mine.”

“Wow!” Tiberius exclaimed. “But the lake is so big!”

“I started by running around the Quidditch Pitch.” Harry told him, before remembering that it had been Takashi, his upperclassmen buddy, who had invited him running in the first place. “You could come and run with us one morning if you like.”

Tiberius shook his head. “I couldn’t run around the lake.”

“No, but you could probably run around the Quidditch Pitch a few times.” Harry pointed out. “Did you know that running is actually good for your magic?”

“Really?” Tiberius was looking at him with wide eyes.

“Really.” Harry nodded with a smile. “It helps you build up your stamina, which means that you can cast more spells without getting tired.”

“That’s so cool!” Tiberius told him.

“Meditating helps too.” Harry told him.

Tiberius nodded. “I meditate every morning at home. Mother says I have to.”

“I meditate every morning too.” Harry told him as they entered the Great Hall.
Tiberius stopped suddenly beside him. “There’s so many people.”

Harry looked around the hall in confusion, only about half the school were there. “There are less than there were last night.”

“I know.” Tiberius was looking at the ground.

Harry sighed and crouched down in front of the boy. “Don’t worry about all the people. They’re just here to go to school like you are.”

“Not like me.” Tiberius answered much more confidently. “I’m a scion of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Odgen.”

Harry couldn’t help but be amused. “There you are then. There’s no reason to let the people upset you. Be careful though. Just because you’re from a Most Ancient and Noble House doesn’t mean you can be rude to people.”

Tiberius nodded. “I know. Mother says that it is my responsibility to represent our House with honour and chivalry.”

“This must be the Odgen.” Draco’s voice sounded from behind Tiberius.

Harry stood up and grinned at Draco as Tiberius spun around. “Draco, this is Tiberius Odgen, Scion of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Odgen. Tiberius, this is Draconus Malfoy, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy.”

Tiberius bowed to Draco. “Merry meet.”

“Merry meet.” Draco agreed.

Tiberius looked up at Draco. “How did you know I was an Odgen, sir?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Honour and Chivalry. They are your House’s words, are they not?”

Tiberius flushed. “Yes, sir.”

“There you go then.” Draco said, in a slightly warmer tone.

Harry placed a hand on Tiberius shoulder to get his attention. “We should go to breakfast. You don’t want to be late for your first class.”

9-9-9

It was strange to be responsible to showing a first year around Hogwarts and most of the time Harry found himself falling back on the same lessons that Takashi and Jeremy had taught him in his first year.

Harry’s memories of his first few days at Hogwarts were startlingly clear now that he was focussing on them, something that he put down to all his Occlumency training, and he could hardly believe that he was now the same age as Takashi and Jeremy had been then. They had seemed so intimidating and all-knowing and Harry didn’t feel as though he measured up.

It was bizarre to go to Charms and listen to Flitwick give a lecture about the Switching Spell and remember hearing Jeremy talk about it on his first day of classes. The Switching Spell had sounded very useful to Harry then, but he’d forgotten all about it. He looked forward to learning how to cast the spell properly. It was definitely one that would be useful to learn how to do wandlessly. That
way if he was ever without his wand, he could switch it out for something near him.

The minute Flitwick dismissed the class, Harry quickly returned his parchment and quill to his bag before standing up.

“What is your hurry?” Neville asked curiously. “We have Magical Theory next, right? It's only one floor up.”

“I told Tiberius, the first year I'm responsible for, that I'd show him where his second class is.” Harry explained. “He's in Transfiguration right now and his next class is History.”

“Poor kid.” Neville grimaced. “Having History on his first day. Wait up, I'll come with you.”

“Remus is taking History this year.” Harry reminded his friend. “So it won't be so bad.”

Once Neville had packed all his things into his bag, they made their way through the classroom and towards the door.

“You think you're so great don't you, Potter?” Ron Weasley's voice suddenly came from Harry's right.

Harry paused and turned towards him, his eyes taking in the class ranking that was pinned up on the wall behind Ron. He'd completely forgotten to check it. “I take it I'm first again?”

Ron scowled. “You think you're so smart!”

“No,” Harry denied, suddenly fed up with Ron's attitude. “I know I'm smart. That's the difference between smart people and stupid people. Smart people know things, stupid people only think that they know things.”

Ron's face was turning red. “Yeah? Well I know that you and your friends are bloody Death Eaters!”

“Come on, Ron.” Neville started, his voice soothing. “Harry's not a Death Eater. He's the Boy-Who-Lived. He's the one who defeated You-Know-Who the first time. You can't seriously think that he's actually supporting him now.”

“Maybe if he'd defeated him properly the first time, Seamus wouldn't be dead now!” Ron snapped.

Harry raised an eyebrow scathingly. “You can't seriously be blaming me for not properly killing a fully trained wizard when I was an infant.”

Ron didn't look impressed. “Well, you clearly aren't too upset about him being back! You're the one swanning around with his Death Eaters.”

Harry turned to Neville. “We need to go. Tiberius will be waiting.”

“What?” Ron sounded surprised. “Not even going to try and deny that your friends are Death Eaters, Potter?”

The other conversations in the room stopped abruptly and Harry gritted his teeth in frustration as he saw his classmates turn their attention to him and Ron. The last thing he needed was an audience.

Harry turned back to Ron. “Not a single one of my friends are Death Eaters. There, I've denied it. Just like I've denied it every other time you've made this accusation.”

Ron snorted. “Yeah right. Your friends are bloody Death Eaters and, either you're one too, or you
just don't care that they're going around torturing and murdering people in their spare time.”

Harry turned to leave before stopping in surprise as Neville, who had been standing beside him, suddenly strode towards Ron.

“Don't you dare throw around those kinds of accusations!” Neville snapped, only halting when his wand was less than a foot away from Ron’s nose. “I get that you're still grieving Seamus' death, but don't you dare throw around the idea of torture and murder like that. How many family members did you lose in the war, Ron? Two uncles right? Well, Harry and I both lost our parents to Death Eaters and You-Know-Who. So you don't get to stand there, with two parents and a dozen bloody siblings, and accuse us of supporting that monster!”

Harry stared at his friend. He was impressed. How had the small, shy boy he had befriended in first year become this tall, icily furious wizard in front of him?

Harry stepped forward and placed his hand on Neville shoulder. “Come on, Neville. We should go.”

It took a few seconds for Neville to lower his wand, but eventually he turned towards the door. Harry turned with him and together they began to leave the classroom.

“Locomotor Wibbly!” Ron exclaimed.

Harry spun around, wand at the ready, but it was too late to shield against the jinx. The instant the orange spell hit Neville, the Longbottom heir’s legs collapsed beneath him.

Harry looked down at him, his wand still pointed at Ron. “You alright there, Neville?”

“Fine.” Neville grimaced as he used his hands to turn over so that he was sitting down.

Harry turned his attention back to Ron. “Attacking a classmate when his back is turned, Ron? Do you have any concept of honour?”

Ron sneered. “There’s no dishonour in cursing a Death Eater, Potter!”

Harry raised an eyebrow in disbelief. “You think Neville is a Death Eater?”

“Hey!” An older Gryffindor student, who Harry didn’t recognise, appeared in the doorway. “What’s going on here?”

“Neville raised his wand at me!” Ron exclaimed quickly. “I was just defending myself.”

The older Gryffindor looked down at Neville with a frown. “Is that true, Longbottom?”

“No,” Neville spun his body around so that he was facing the doorway which now contained at least five older students. “I’ll admit that I raised my wand at him…”

“See!” Ron exclaimed victoriously.

“…but then I put it away and went to leave.” Neville continued. “Ron jinxed me while my back was turned.”

The older student’s frown shifted to Ron. “You attacked him from behind?”

“He’s a Death Eater!” Ron exclaimed, his expression still red.

“You’re kidding, right?” Fred and George pushed their way through the group.
“Come on, Ronnie…,” Fred started.

“…you can’t seriously be accusing Neville Longbottom…”

“…of being a Death Eater! That would be like saying that…”

“…Harry Potter was a Death Eater.” George finished.

“Oh, we’ve already been through that.” Harry told them flatly. “You only missed it by about five minutes.”

“Really, Ron?” Fred asked disbelievingly.

“You can’t just go around accusing all the people you don’t like of being Death Eaters.” George told him.

Another older student pushed her way into the room wearing a Hufflepuff uniform and a Prefect badge. “What jinx did you use?”

Ron crossed his arms petulantly.

“He used the Jelly-Legs Jinx.” Harry answered for him. “I don’t know the counter for it.”

“I do.” The Prefect told him, before raising her wand. A few seconds later, Neville was able to climb to his feet. “Now, let me get this straight.” The prefect continued. “Weasley here accused Potter and Longbottom of being Death Eaters. Longbottom raised his wand, but then walked away. At which point Weasley attacked Longbottom from behind. Is that right?”

Harry nodded along with Neville. “Yes.”

“And you all agree?” The Prefect asked their classmates who had hung around to watch.

Most of the students nodded.

“This is way out of my league to handle.” The Prefect admitted. “But I’m going to start with twenty points from Gryffindor for verbal bullying, ten points to Gryffindor for good decision making, and twenty points from Gryffindor for attacking another student.”

“What?!” Ron exclaimed, practically foaming at the mouth. “You’re actually awarding him points?”

“And,” The Prefect continued firmly. “Weasley, I’m going to be talking to your Head of House. Does that sound reasonable, Professor?”

Harry turned in surprise, he hadn’t even realised that Flitwick had arrived.

“Very, Miss Patrice.” Flitwick nodded seriously. “Now, don’t you fourth years have somewhere to be?”

“Yes, sir.” Harry agreed, before finally managing to escape the classroom just as the second bell rang. “Damn it. Tiberius is going to think I abandoned him.”

“Unlikely.” Neville commented. “Chances are the whole school will know what happened by lunchtime.”

9-9-9
Neville was right and, when Harry showed the Ravenclaw first years the way the Greenhouses after lunch, Tiberius peppered him with questions.

“Did you really get into a duel?” Tiberius asked excitedly.

“No,” Harry answered firmly. “But another student cursed one of my friends.”

“Why?”

“That doesn’t matter.” Harry sighed. “Cursing anyone like that is against school rules. He lost a lot of points.”

“I think it sounds brilliant!” Tiberius exclaimed. “I wish I had been there. Why didn’t you curse him back?”

“Because that would have only made the situation worse.” Harry answered as patiently as he could.

“Maybe…”

“There it is.” Harry interrupted with relief. “That Greenhouse there.”

“Oh, cool!” Tiberius grinned. “Thanks, Harry.”

That duty done, Harry made his way to the big tree near the lake where he had agreed to meet his friends. It was the best thing about having a dropped a class – he actually got a free hour four times a week.

“So,” Draco started as Harry sat down. “Tell us what happened. Did you really curse the Weasel?”

“No,” Harry denied. “Why does everyone seem to think that I cursed him?”

“Hopeful thinking?” Theo suggested with a grin.

“We were in Charms,” Harry started. “Have you had Charms yet?”

“No, we’ve got that tomorrow with the ‘Puffs.” Theo answered.

“It’s definitely something to look forward to.” Harry told them. “We’re learning about the Switching Spell.”

Draco snorted. “Only you would think that was more interesting than what happened after the class, Harry.”

“Fine,” Harry sighed. “Ron accosted Neville and me as we were leaving. He made a comment about me being great and smart…”

“That doesn’t sound like him.” Theo commented.

“I think he was being sarcastic.” Harry pointed out. “I of course agreed with him and may have insinuated that he was a bit stupid.”

Draco whooped with glee. “I wish I had seen that.”

“At which point he called you all Death Eaters.” Harry continued. “I defended you, so he accused me of being a Death Eater. Neville got offended on my behalf and put his wand in Ron’s face. Neville ranted at Ron, before deciding to leave and Ron cast the Jelly-Leg Jinx at Neville’s back.”
“At his back?” Draco echoed. “Really?”

“It’s not surprising.” Theo put in. “It’s not as though we don’t know that they’re all blood traitors.”

“Let’s not lump the whole family in together.” Harry defended. “Sure, they’re not traditional. But some of them are definitely better than others.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it.” Draco grumbled.

“Well, it’s a good thing I’ve decided to give you chance to then.” Harry said cheerfully. “I gave Fred and George each a Mandrake leaf, remember?”

Theo and Draco both looked horrified.

Draco sneered. “We don’t have to learn with them though, do we?”

“Yes,” Harry answered firmly. “Takashi thought it would be a good idea to do it together and I do not have the time to go through the process with two different groups. Give them a chance. They’re nothing like Ron.”

“Why do we have to do it together?” Theo asked.

“Because, before taking the leaves out, we have to meditate to find our animagus forms and according to Takashi it’s easier to meditate when I’m around.” Harry explained.

Theo looked surprised. “Is this related to the glowing and levitating thing that happened first year?”

Draco chuckled. “I don’t think he actually levitated, Theo.”

Harry glared at Theo. “But, yes, it is related. We’ll do the meditation part tomorrow after dinner.”

“Where?” Theo asked.

Harry glanced towards Draco. “I’m not sure yet. I’ll let you know. “What’s it like having Natasja here?”

“No idea.” Theo replied, leaning back in his chair casually. “I’ve only seen her at a distance. I doubt we’ll have much to do with one another.”

“But you’re in the same house.” Harry protested.

“So are Draco and Astoria.” Theo pointed out. “And they don’t see each other much either. Besides, she’s just a first year. Do you plan to spend much time with the Ravenclaw first years, Harry?”

“Yes, actually.” Harry told him. “I’ve been showing one of the first years around and I’m not planning on marrying any of them.”
“No way!” Draco shook his head firmly. “There is absolutely no way that we are inviting the Weasley twins into Hoth.”

Harry looked around the classroom that they had converted to be their own private lounge. “Why?”

“For a multitude of reasons!” Draco exclaimed. “Not the least being that this is where all our pranking supplies are. We might know that they are the Wizarding Wheezes, but they have no idea that we’re the Marauders’ Apprentices. Maybe if it was just Theo, Daphne, Neville, Blaise and Takashi I would agree, but not the Weasleys!”

Harry sighed. “Alright, so where should we meet? It needs to be somewhere private where we won’t be interrupted, and it needs to be big enough for ten people to meditate.”

“Why not use the Come and Go Room?” Luna suggested.

Draco’s nose wrinkled. “It’s so dusty in there and it’s full of junk!”

“I don’t think there would be enough room either.” Harry agreed. “There are only thin aisles of floor that aren’t covered in piles.”

“Well, we wouldn’t use that version of the room.” Luna said with a roll of her eyes.

“There are different versions?” Harry asked curiously. “Are they in the same place?”

“Are the other versions as dirty?” Draco’s tone was suspicious.

Luna stood up and began walking towards the door. “Come on, I’ll show you.”

Harry pulled out his pocket watch as he stood. “Luna? Lunch will be over in five minutes. I don’t think we will have time.”

Luna turned around, her eyes twinkling. “Then you’ll just have to trust me.”

“Promise me that it will be clean.” Draco narrowed his eyes at her. “There is no way I am risking my life by meditating in a room that has more dust than it does air.”

“No promises.” Luna singsonged. “Just trust.”

“Alright.” Harry decided. “What should I tell the others?”

“To meet us by the dancing trolls.” Luna said with a smile, before turning around and skipping out of the room.

Harry exchanged a wary look with Draco. “So, the same place as last time then.”

“If there is even one speck of dust…” Draco started seriously.

“You wouldn’t even notice it.” Harry rolled his eyes.

Draco looked down his nose snootily. “Malfoys always notice those sorts of things.”

“Why does that not surprise me?” Harry asked rhetorically. “You have Care of Magical Creatures...
next, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Can you tell Neville, Daphne, Theo and Blaise to meet us in the left corridor of the seventh floor after dinner?” Harry asked. “I’ll tell Takashi, Fred and George.”

10-10-10

Telling Takashi was easy, but it was much hard to get access to Fred and George. They were almost always with other Gryffindors and, as Harry approached them after classes, some of the Gryffindors narrowed their eyes suspiciously.

“Afternoon, Harry.” Fred greeted with a grin. “How are you this lovely day?”

“Excellent, thank you.” Harry answered politely. “How are you?”

“Absolutely smashing, old fellow.” George answered with a fake posh accent. “Absolutely smashing.”

Harry chuckled. “Can I have a word with one of you?”

The twins exchanged a glance, before George got to his feet. “Lead the way.”

They didn’t go far, just far enough away that Harry could cast a privacy charm that wasn’t immediately obvious.

“We’re going to be completing step two of the animagus process tonight.” Harry told George. “Meet me in the left corridor on the second floor after dinner.”

“Oh, thank Merlin!” George exclaimed. “I swear, if we had to keep these leaves in our mouths for one more day we would have gone mad!”

Harry’s mouth quirked up in amusement. “Yes, that does seem to be the consensus. So I’ll see you on the seventh floor?”

“Absolutely.” George agreed, before raising an eyebrow curiously. “What’s on the seventh floor?”

Harry’s eyes twinkled as he removed the privacy charm. “See you there.”

That done, Harry turned around and made his way to Remus’ new classroom and office. Harry hadn’t had History yet, his first class would be the next day, so it was the first time he’d seen the changes that Remus had made to the room.

Previously the room had been decorated very sparsely, with only a globe, a clock and a blackboard aside from the desks and chairs, but it looked completely different now. The clock was still there, but the blackboard had been replaced by a large world map and the rest of the walls were covered with lines and writing. Harry looked closer at the nearest wall and realised that the writing was actually a timeline. In fact there were multiple timelines, one for the Ministry of Magic, one for the International Warlocks Council, one for Goblin Nation, and so on.

“What do you think?” Remus asked from behind him.

“Very nice.” Harry answered, reading the writing directly in front of him. Apparently in 1707 the Wizards’ Council had disbanded so that the Ministry of Magic could be formed. “How have your first two days gone?”
“Pretty well, if I may say so myself.” Remus answered as Harry turned around to face him. “Though I’m pretty horrified at how little the students actually know.”

“How many sixth and seventh years do you have?” Harry asked curiously.

“Four sixth years, six seventh years.” Remus answered. “And their knowledge isn’t too bad. It’s the fifth years I’m worried about.”

“The sixth and seventh years will be the ones who taught themselves.” Harry pointed out. “Hopefully with you here, more than an eighth of the fifth years will pass their OWLS.”

“Have you had a look at the class ranking?” Remus asked, gesturing towards where they were hanging up on the wall.

“Not yet.” Harry admitted. “I haven’t been too focussed on them this year. I was happy enough knowing that I got over ninety percent in all my classes last year.”

“Well, you came first in History.” Remus told him. “Miss Granger was a very close second.”

“Cool.” Harry smiled. “I came first in Charms, Transfiguration, Potions, Astronomy, Magical Theory, and Runes too. Neville came first in Herbology of course. I don’t know about Ancient Studies, I’m not friends with anyone in the class so I can’t exactly ask them.”

“That’s very impressive, Harry.” Remus told him warmly. “You must be the top of your class then?”

“Yes,” Harry smiled proudly. “Granger is furious, as always.”

“You’re not baiting her, are you?” Remus asked cautiously.

Harry frowned. “Of course not. Though I may have baited Ron Weasley a little yesterday.”

“Yes, I heard about that.” Remus commented. “Well, not about you baiting him, but the incident was discussed in our meeting this morning.”

“Very little of it was my fault.” Harry said quickly.

“I believe you.” Remus smiled. “Are you ready for duelling practise?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed, placing his school bag against the wall. “Will we be practising here?”

“We won’t be practising at all.” Remus admitted. “I’ve taught you all I can.”

Harry shook his head quickly in denial. “No, you haven’t!”

Remus looked amused. “Harry, by the end of the last school year you were beating me in two out of three duels.”

“Only because you were going easy on me.” Harry protested.

“At first, yes.” Remus agreed. “But not by the end.”

Harry wasn’t sure whether he felt proud or disappointed. Sure it was amazing to apparently be able to beat Remus, but he didn’t want to stop improving.

“So,” Remus went on. “Sirius agreed to come once a week to teach you how to combine duelling and fencing.”
Harry looked up at Remus. “Really? Can he do that?”

“Well, we’re not telling Dumbledore.” Remus admitted. “But yes he can. As one of the School Governors he has access to the school. He’ll be using the floo in my office. He should be here any minute.”

Harry grinned at the thought. “Thanks, Remus. That sounds amazing!”

Sirius arrived a few minutes later, holding a fencing sword in each hand. Harry greeted his godfather with a hug, before helping Remus spell all the desks and chairs to the sides of the classroom. Then Remus sat down behind his desk, claiming that he had lesson plans he needed to work on, and Sirius began Harry’s lessons.

They started with their basic fencing warmups that Harry knew off by heart, before spending a few minutes actually fencing. Harry loved fencing. It was both fun and practical and it was nice to have something that he did with Sirius. After Sirius had called their fencing to a halt, declaring the match to be a draw, he began instructing Harry on how to use his sword in a duel.

It wasn’t a completely new concept to Harry. The Bulgarian Fencing Tournament they had attending had contained some matches that used both swords and wands, but he had never tried blocking spells with his sword before. It was completely different from everything Remus had taught him the year before (which had basically been to dodge the spell, or cast a magical shield) and by the end of the lesson, Harry still hadn’t felt as though he had made much progress.

“It’s a completely different variety of duelling.” Sirius encouraged him when he finally ended the session. “You’ll get it after some practise, and then we can work on your blocking with your sword while you simultaneously cast with your wand.”

Harry frowned tiredly. “But I hold my sword and my wand in the same hand.”

“That’ll be another thing we work on.” Sirius promised. “You need to be able to use both with either hand.”

Harry groaned at the thought. “So I need to practise the basic fencing patterns with my left hand?”

Sirius looked sympathetic. “Yes, as often as you can. And you should start practising your first year spells with your wand in your left hand too.”

Harry considered, not for the first time, telling his godfather about how he was learning to do magic with no hands, but decided not to. He wanted to surprise Sirius with it one day.

10-10-10

As soon as dessert appeared on the tables at dinner, Harry and Luna got up from the table, each taking a treacle tart with them, and made their way up the seventh floor. They were the first ones there and Harry looked at Luna expectantly.

“How do we get a different version of the room?”

Luna’s expression was dreamy. “You just have to want it, silly.”

Harry sighed and looked at the wall where the door to the Come and Go Room usually appeared. “I have to want a different room?”

“You have to want any room that you want.” Luna agreed.
“Alright.” Harry considered what he needed, before pacing in front of the wall to make the door appear. “I hope this works, Luna. Draco will throw a fit if there’s any visible dust.”

Luna giggled. “So think clean then!”

Harry finished pacing, opened the door that had appeared in the wall, and stared at the room in front of him. It was the most sterile, least comfortable looking room he had ever seen. It reminded him of the Hospital Wing, but instead of beds and cloth curtains it had solid metal chairs and blinds.

Luna laughed from behind. “Not that clean, Harry. Close the door. I’ll do it.”

Harry did as instructed, before stepping back to watch Luna pace in front of it.

“Hey, Harry!” The twins chorused as they rounded the corner of the corridor.

“Hey.” Harry acknowledged them absently as Luna pushed the door open. He stepped forward to look over her shoulder into the room and nodded in satisfaction at the sight. It looked much like the Elladora lounge at Grimmauld Place, only bigger. Not only were there enough couches and chairs to seat ten people, but there was also room on the floor for them to meditate.

“Woah.” Fred commented from behind Harry. “Since when has this room been here?”

“I have no idea.” Harry answered truthfully, as he followed Luna into the room.

“It’s called the Come and Go Room.” Luna told the twins. “Or the Room of Requirement. Whatever you require, the room becomes.”

Both twins’ eyes widened. “That’s bloody brilliant!”

“I can’t believe we’ve never heard of it.” George added.

Neville arrived next, with Takashi only a few seconds behind him, and Harry found himself relieved at the way it had turned out. At least this way, he wouldn’t be the only buffer between Fred and George and the Slytherins when they arrived.

“Merry meet, Neville.” Luna curtsied. “Merry meet, Takashi.”

“Merry meet.” Neville agreed with a smile. “How are you?”

“Happy.” Luna told him brightly.

“I didn’t know Luna Lovegood was traditional.” George commented quietly to Harry.

“You know her?” Harry asked curiously, absently watching Takashi, Neville and Luna interact.

“She lives just down the road from us.” George explained.

“She and Ginny used to play together when they were younger.” Fred added.

Harry nodded in understanding. “I imagine that Luna is traditional around traditionalist and non-traditional around non-traditionalists. She can be quite the chameleon when she wants to be.”

Fred looked doubtful. “Luna a chameleon? Isn’t she a bit…”

“Odd?” Harry suggested quietly. “Definitely, but not in a bad way. She’s one of my best friends.”
“This looks much better.” Draco commented as he strode into the room, the other Slytherins following behind him.

“Doesn’t it just.” Harry agreed.

“Merry meet.” Neville, Takashi and Luna all greeted the new arrivals with a bow.

“Merry meet.” The Slytherins agreed, Theo, Daphne and Blaise bowing first to Harry and then to Neville.

Fred and George both looked on awkwardly.

Harry stepped forward. “Daphne, Draco, Theo, Blaise, this is Fred and George Weasley, unofficial scions of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett. Fred, George, this is my betrothed, Daphne Greengrass, Daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass, Draco Malfoy, Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy, Theo Nott, Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Nott, and Blaise Zabini of la Famiglia di Zabini.”

The twins’ eyes widened. “Uh, hi there.”

Draco’s upper lip curled slightly in a sneer. “Merry meet.”

Harry raised an eyebrow warningly at his cousin. “Excellent, now that everyone is all introduced, why don’t we all take a seat?”

“Can we take these leaves out of our mouths now?” Neville asked in frustration.

“Hear, hear!” Fred agreed.

“First we have to meditate to find our forms.” Harry reminded them. “Then, we’ll have to meet once a week to learn how to complete the actual transformation.”

“Once a week?” Draco repeated. “How long is this going to take?”

“I don’t know. A while though, it might even take us all year.” Harry answered, before taking in his friends’ unsure expressions. “But at the end of the year, we’ll be animagi, and it will have all been worth it. Now, according to the book, this original meditation might take anywhere between one hour, and twelve hours, depending on how much experience we have with meditating.”

“And if we’ve never meditated before?” George asked tentatively.

Everyone turned to stare at him. “You’ve never meditated before?” Theo asked in disbelief.

“I hadn’t meditated before I came to Hogwarts.” Harry told them.

“Yes, but you had grown up with muggles!” Draco pointed out. “Though I suppose that growing up with blood traitors as parents wouldn’t be that different.”

The twins both bristled at the insult.

“Draco.” Harry warned.

“It will be alright, so long as they sit near Harry.” Takashi put in.

“There was no levitating!” Harry reminded him. “And I don’t glow anymore. Anyway, once you’re meditating the magical properties of the Mandrake leaf will lead your magic to find your animagus form.”

Neville frowned. “That’s it? No more detailed instructions?”

Harry retrieved the book from his bag and opened it to the correct page. “No, nothing more than that. Other than my godfather’s helpful description of the process as ‘boring’.”


“So,” Harry started, standing up. “Find a spot on the floor, make yourself comfortable, and start meditating.”

“Harry, you should sit in the middle of the room.” Takashi said quickly.

Theo looked sceptical. “Will it really make that much of a difference?”

“Yes,” Takashi nodded. “Neville is similar, though not as strong.”

Neville turned to Takashi, his expression flabbergasted. “What?”

“Alright,” Harry said to the twins. “Meditating is simple, though it can be hard to concentrate at first – that’s why you’ll be sitting next to me. Basically, you’ll breathe in for three counts, hold your breath for one count, breathe out for three counts, and then hold for one count. As you’re breathing, clear your mind of everything and then search for your magic – your Mandrake leaf should do the rest.”

“All right.” Fred nodded, standing up and offering his hand down to George.

“Also,” Harry said, leading them towards the middle of the room. “You should really consider meditating daily. You need to be able to meditate to learn Occlumency and wandless magic, and it makes it easier to perform spells.”

George looked around. “Do they all know how to meditate?”

“They’ve been meditating since they were children.” Harry answered, sitting down on a cushion. “Now, cross your legs and place your hands on your knees.”

“Crossing our legs might be a problem.” George admitted as they sat on nearby cushions.

“We can’t do it.” Fred added.

“Oh,” Harry frowned in thought. “Okay, just sit comfortably then. It will need to be a position that you can sit in for a long time though.”

“Harry?” Neville called from the other side of the room. “You weren’t serious when you said twelve hours, right? Curfew is in two and a half hours.”

“It’ll take as long as it takes.” Harry answered apologetically. “Alright, close your eyes and relax. Clear your mind. Now breathe in, and out, in, and out.”

Meditating had become almost as easy as breathing for Harry now and, within seconds he could feel himself falling into his meditative state. He normally mediated twice a day, once to practise Occlumency and once to practise wandless magic, but it was rare that he took the time to just enjoy the sensation.
After a few minutes, Harry remembered what Takashi had said about the meditative aura he released when he meditated and he tried to see if he could feel it. Maybe he would be able to strengthen it to help the twins meditate.

It took Harry some time to find the aura, and then even more time to figure out where it was coming from. It seemed as though, while he had learnt to keep a tight control on his magic, there was a small part of it still escaping. It didn’t seem dangerous, nothing like it had been in first year, but Harry was still cautious about the idea of trying to let even more magic out. On the other hand though, he remembered how hard he had found meditating the first time he had tried it. There was no way he would have managed to keep concentrating long enough to start the animagus progress – he didn’t want the twins to fall behind or give up.

Harry carefully loosened his grip on his magic, allowing slightly more to create join the aura around him and then, when nothing bad happened and he still felt in control, he let out a bit more. He still had the majority of his magic locked tightly under control, and his grip over it wasn’t budging, but hopefully the little bit of extra would help.

That done, Harry turned his attention to the matter at hand. He was looking for his animagus form. He had no idea how he supposed to find it, only that the Mandrake leaf would make it happen. That was, after all, the reason he’d had a Mandrake leaf stuck to the bottom of his mouth for the last month.

Harry waited patiently for a while, waiting for something to happen, and eventually something changed. He wasn’t sure what had changed, just that something had, and then he saw a faint outline of something in the distance. Which made no sense, because there had never been distances within his meditative state before.

None the less, Harry slowly began to make his way towards the faint outline. He couldn’t see what it was, but as he slowly made his way closer he saw it suddenly lift up in to the air and began to move towards him. It wasn’t moving over the ground though, it was flying.

Harry grinned at the thought, he had secretly hoped that his animagus form would be one that could fly. He could only imagine how wonderful it would feel to fly without a broom.

After a while, Harry could make out the shape of its wings and body. It looked like some kind of owl.

Eventually, the owl, whose wingspan was easily two feet, was only a few feet away and then all of a sudden it dived towards Harry and collided with him at full speed, before disappearing.

Harry looked around for it, he wanted a better look, but it was nowhere to be found. In fact, the distance, which had appeared earlier, had suddenly disappeared at well, just leaving Harry in his usual meditative state – it was weird.

Harry waited for a while longer, just to ensure that he hadn’t missed anything, before slowly pulling himself out of his meditation. Opening his eyes, he looked around and saw that all his friends were still meditating – even the twins.

Easing himself to his feet, Harry pulled his out his pocket watch – it was almost nine o’clock. He’d been meditating for almost two hours. It was amazing how quickly time flew. Harry settled down in one of the chairs and pulled his Ancient Runes homework out of his bag. He might as well get some work done while he waited.

Neville was the next one to open his eyes, though it was forty two minutes after Harry had, and,
upon seeing Harry, he moved to sit next to him.

“How did it go?” Harry whispered quietly.

“Great.” Neville grinned. “I think I’m a badger of all things.”

“A badger?” Harry repeated. “Cool. I’m an owl.”

“I can see that.” Neville agreed. “Owls are supposed to be intelligent. What’s the time?”

“Almost ten.” Harry admitted quietly. “You can go if you like. I’ll wait for others.”

Neville looked unsure, but eventually nodded. “If I’m late, Ron will nark.”

Harry grimaced. “Merry part.”

Over the next few hours, the others slowly came out of their meditations. They would look around, take in who was still meditating, and then move quietly across the room to talk to Harry before leaving.

Before they left, they each told him what sort of animal they had seen. Takashi had seen a crane, Luna had seen a squirrel, Draco had seen a cat, Blaise had seen a dormouse, Daphne had seen a fox and Theo, to Harry’s great amusement, had seen a llama.

Eventually the only people left in the room were Harry and twins who were still meditating. Harry managed to complete every piece of homework he had been given, get as much done on all his assignments as he could without more resource books, and read a couple of chapters of one of the books he had gotten for his birthday – ‘Healing Dark Curses’.

Eventually, at 3.43 in the morning, George opened his eyes. Like everyone else, he looked around the room before moving to sit beside Harry.

“That was buzzy!” George whispered loudly.

Harry grinned. “What did you see?”

“You first.” George returned.

“I think I’m going to be some kind of owl.”

“I’m some kind of little dog.” George answered.

Harry smiled. “Cool. Sirius is a dog too. Though don’t tell anyone, he’s unregistered.”

“What’s the time?” George asked.

“Quarter to four.” Harry answered. “That’s why everyone is gone. They went to bed.”

“You could have gone to bed too.” George said. “You don’t have to stay up.”

“I want to.” Harry said. “What do you think Fred will be?”

“Not a dog.” George admitted with a sigh. “I know that people think we’re basically the same people, but we’re not. He’s louder than I am.”

“I know.” Harry smiled.
“Yeah,” George smiled warmly. “You can actually tell us apart. That’s impressive. Even our mum can’t do that half the time.”

“It took me a while.” Harry commented quietly. “You guys do sort of play right into the stereotype.”

George’s smile turned crooked. “That we do.”

It was another half an hour until Fred opened his eyes. “That was weird!” He exclaimed.

Harry grinned. “What did you see?”

“I’m a squirrel!” Fred grinned. “It’s going to be amazing!”

“Really? Luna saw a squirrel.” Harry commented. “I wonder if you’ll be the same kind.”

“What did you see, George?” Fred asked.

“A dog.” George answered with a grin.
“Look who it is. Its Loony Lovegood.”

Harry was reading in an armchair in the Ravenclaw Common Room (they had been at school for three weeks now, so he had plenty of reading he needed to be doing for classes), but he looked up at the mocking tone. He wasn’t sure who was talking, but he knew that some people called Luna that – though he had never been able to catch them in the act before.

“How, Cho Chang.” Luna’s replied, her tone dreamy. “Are you having a good day?”

Cho snorted. “Better than yours is about to be, Loony.”

“Hey!” Harry stood up quickly and moved around the chair so that he facing the two girls. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Cho looked startled, but then she glared at Harry. “Mind your own business, Potter.”

Harry strode forward, positioning himself between Luna and Cho. “Like you were minding yours just now?” He asked derisively. “Leave Luna alone, Chang.”

Cho glowered. “Or what? I’m not one of your bloody sycophants, Potter. You can’t tell me what to do!”

Harry’s upper lip curled into a sneer. “Well, last time I checked you weren’t a prefect, so you can’t tell me what to do either. But I’m sure that one of the prefects would be interested to know that you were picking on younger students.”

Cho scowled furiously. “Fine.”

“You didn’t have to do that, you know.” Luna said quietly, as Cho flounced out of the common room. “I can take care of myself.”

“I know.” Harry agreed, turning to face her. “But sometimes you don’t have to. I can’t believe you didn’t tell us that Chang was one of the nargles who have been bothering you! Draco and I must have asked you if she was one of them at least ten times.”

“It doesn’t really bother me.” Luna told him seriously. “There’s no reason to get upset about it.”

Harry raised an eyebrow doubtfully. “Let’s say it doesn’t bother you at all, which I don’t believe by the way, what’s stopping her from hassling someone else who is bothered by it?”

Luna opened her mouth but, before she could say anything, Harry spoke again.

“Besides, I know now and there is nothing you can do to stop the retribution that Draco and I are going to bring on her.”

Luna’s eyes widened. “You can’t tell Draco!”

“I am definitely going to tell Draco.” Harry countered, before smirking. “And then we’re going to make her pay!”

“Promise me you won’t really hurt her.” Luna said seriously.
“Of course not.” Harry reassured her quickly, they weren’t bullies. “But she shouldn’t be able to just get away with it.”

A small smile peeked through Luna’s frown. “Then why don’t you make sure she doesn’t?”

Harry considered that. The idea definitely had some value. The most effective prank they had pulled again Lockhart had been the one that used his past misdeeds against him. Maybe they could do something similar to Cho – something to force her to show her true colours.

“If we were to do something like that, would you be willing to tell us the names of the other nargles?” Harry negotiated.

Luna’s had an uncharacteristically shrewd look in her eye. “Only if you and Draco both swear that you won’t do anything else to any of them – including Cho.”

Harry grimaced, Draco was not going to be impressed.

11-11-11

“You promised her what?” Draco exclaimed in disbelief, before turning to Luna. “Why won’t you let us punish them? They’re horrible to you. They stole your shoes.”

“They borrowed my shoes,” Luna corrected lightly. “And they haven’t done that for years.”

“That doesn’t mean they don’t deserve to be punished.” Draco argued. “We wouldn’t do anything really terrible to them, we’d just rough them up a little.”

Harry snorted in amusement. “Rough them up a little? What are you going to do? Hit them?”

Draco recoiled at the thought. “And actually touch a blood traitor?”

“No roughing them up.” Luna said firmly. “Or I won’t tell you who they are.”

Draco pouted. “Luna!”

“I don’t think we need to anyway.” Harry told him. “I’ve been thinking about what we could do, while staying within Luna’s rules, and I have an idea. What if we were to give them some kind of potion that will remove their inhibitions?”

“Similar to Lockhart?” Draco asked. “We don’t want to repeat the same prank again.”

“Similar,” Harry admitted. “But not identical. What if it didn’t look like a prank? What if it just looked like them acting on their own? We wouldn’t get any credit, but as far as retribution goes…”

A smirk slowly crept across Draco’s face. “Oh, I like the sound of that. We could dose their food with potion during dinner one night.”

Harry turned to Luna. “How many people are there?”

“Five.”

“We shouldn’t do it all at once then,” Harry decided. “Otherwise people might get suspicious.”

Draco’s eyes gleamed. “Any idea where we might find a potion recipe for it?”

11-11-11
“Are you looking forward to your first Hogsmeade trip, Luna?” Neville asked absently, twirling a dandelion flower between in fingers.

Harry, who was leaning against a tree, attempting to complete a basic levitation spell with his wand in his left hand, looked up in interest. The first Hogsmeade trip of the year had been scheduled for the next day and all the students, third year and older, were buzzing in anticipation.

“Oh, yes.” Luna answered from where she was sitting on the grass making a daisy chain. “I’ve always wanted to go, but Daddy couldn’t find the time to take me.”

“I’m looking forward to going to Honeydukes.” Blaise commented, looking up from his, Theo, and Draco’s game of Exploding Snap. “I’ve been having to ration my chocolate.”

Theo quirked his eyebrow. “Really, Blaise? We’ve only been at school for three weeks!”

“I would have been fine,” Blaise defended. “Except I was generous to share some of it with you lot last week when we met to practise our ani…”

“Don’t say it.” Draco interrupted quickly. “You never know whose listening.”

Blaise made a show of looking around. “Yes, you’re right. Those second years over there are definitely worth worrying about.”

Draco sniffed haughtily. “I’m looking forward to drinking something other than pumpkin juice at the Three Broomsticks.”

“Oh, Merlin, yes!” Theo agreed passionately. “I can’t wait until later this year. Apparently one of the assignments McGonagall sets her fourth year class is to figure out how to transfigure pumpkin juice into their favourite drink.”

“You could always read ahead you know.” Harry pointed out as he let the twig he had been levitating down slowly. “Learn how to do that now.”

“Not a bad idea.” Theo admitted. “Imagine if I figured out how to conjure it into firewhiskey.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Where are you looking forward to going in Hogsmeade, Neville?”

“Dogweed and Deathcap.” Neville answered with a grin.


“Neville’s brilliant at Herbology.” Harry reminded him.

“Yes, but doesn’t Sprout provide everything we need for class?” Draco questioned.

“She’s offered me some advanced lessons.” Neville explained. “I have to grow a Fanged Geranium from its seed.”

“Oh, your dorm mates are going to love that.” Harry smirked.

Neville rolled his eyes. “Sprout’s letting me use a corner of Greenhouse Eight.”

“So how shall we schedule the day?” Theo asked.

“We could all do our individual jobs and then meet at the Three Broomsticks?” Neville suggested. “Though we should probably go in pairs.”
Harry shifted awkwardly and looked over to where Daphne had been sitting quietly on a blanket, her attention on the embroidery she was working on. He hadn’t even known that she knew how to do embroidery before this year.

“Actually, I was thinking that Daphne and I might go by ourselves.” Harry admitted. “If that’s alright with you, of course, Daphne.”

Daphne looked up with a polite smile. “Of course, Harry.”

Draco looked amused. “You’re taking her on a date, Harry? How very non-traditional of you.”

“I’m courting her.” Harry corrected him loftily. “As any gentleman would when betrothed to such a lovely lady.”

“Harry, promise me you’ll never say anything like that around Natasja.” Theo told him seriously. “Seriously, mate, you make the rest of us look bad.”

“She’s only eleven, Theo.” Draco pointed out. “She won’t be worrying about that for another couple of years. Blaise and I are the ones who should be worried. Astoria’s thirteen this year and Ines is older than all of us.”

“What about me?” Neville asked with a grin. “You’ve already got your girls locked in. I actually have to find someone willing to marry me. A task that will be much harder if they compare to me, Harry.”

“Oh, I don’t think it will be too hard.” Luna commented, not looking up from her daisy chain. “You just have to look in the right place.”

Harry watched her for a second and was surprised to see a faint blush spreading across her cheeks. What was that about?

11-11-11

Harry had to force himself not to pull anxiously at his robes as he made his way down to the Entrance Hall the next afternoon. He had arranged to meet Daphne and, despite the fact they had been friends for over two years, he couldn’t help but feel nervous. Aside from their conversation on his birthday, Harry couldn’t remember ever having spent time alone with her. Not to mention the fact that she had been acting weird ever since they had gotten betrothed.

What if she had changed her mind and wished she hadn’t agreed to the betrothal? There was no way out of their betrothal, at least not without shaming their Houses, and Harry didn’t want to spend the rest of his life with someone who didn’t like him.

Still, an unhappy marriage wasn’t Harry’s biggest worry right now. No, he was more worried about this Hogsmeade tripping going badly. He had spent an embarrassing amount of time in his dorm choosing a set of robes and calming his hair, while pointedly ignoring Anthony’s snide comments and his other dorm-mates’ obvious amusement.

Harry pushed down his nervousness as he strode into the Entrance Hall and looked around for Daphne. He found her after a few seconds, standing near one of the pillars with Draco, Theo and Blaise. Daphne looked lovely. Her hair was down and she was wearing silvery grey robes and gold jewellery, both of which looked stunning on her.

“Merry meet.” Harry greeted them all with a nod as he joined them.
“Merry meet.” Theo, Blaise bowed, while Daphne curtsied.

Harry swallowed down a grimace as he acknowledged them – he wished Daphne didn’t feel as though she had to do that.

“We’ll be off then.” Draco decided with a small smirk. “Have a good afternoon.”

“And make sure that you’re always around people to chaperone you.” Theo added, wiggling his eyebrows with a grin.

Harry raised an unimpressed eyebrow as he offered Daphne his arm. “I beg your pardon?”

Theo’s grin slipped off his face and he swallowed heavily. “Uh…”

“He apologises for his inappropriate humour.” Blaise said quickly, with a pitying look in Theo’s direction.

Harry nodded briskly. “Apology accepted.” He turned his attention to Daphne. “Shall we?”

“Of course.” Daphne answered demurely.

Harry turned and led Daphne towards the doors where Filch was checking students off his list.

“Thanks, Blaise.” Theo commented lowly as Harry was walking away. “Did you see his expression? I swear, Draco, he’s just as terrifying as your bloody father.”

Harry allowed himself a small smirk. After all, emulating Lord Malfoy was one of his life’s goals.

11-11-11

The carriage ride to Hogsmeade was twenty of the most awkward minutes of Harry’s life. He and Daphne had ended up in a carriage with some third year Hufflepuffs were spent the entire ride staring at them with wide eyes.

When their carriage finally stopped, Harry waited for the Hufflepuffs to scramble out, before following them much more gracefully and offering Daphne his hand. Daphne accepted it daintily, before carefully stepping down from the carriage.

“Where would you like to go first?” Harry asked, as she tucked her hand into his arm.

Daphne looked surprised for a second, before her expression cleared again. “I don’t have a preference.”

“Do you have anywhere you want to go?” Harry asked. “Or would you rather we just went somewhere to talk?”

“Whatever you would like.” Daphne murmured deferentially.

Harry sighed quietly. “Alright, well, how about we go to Honeydukes and then we can go the Three Broomsticks for a drink. Unless you want to go to Madame Puddifoot’s?”

“No, not unless you wish to.” Daphne answered.

Harry definitely didn’t want to Madame Puddifoot’s. He’d heard enough about it, and seen enough through the window, to know that he never wanted to set foot in the place. Not only did he not fancy drinking tea with pink confetti floating in it, but his friends would never let him live it down.
Thankfully there weren’t too many people at Honeydukes yet, since Harry and Daphne had been in one of the first carriages to leave Hogwarts, and Harry was able to buy himself and Daphne each some sweets without having to wait in a long line. He waited until they were outside before handing her the Sugared Butterfly Wings and Glacial Snow Flakes that he had bought for her.

Daphne accepted them with an uneasy expression. “Thank you, Harry.”

They walked in silence to the Three Broomsticks, before ordering themselves some butterbeers and choosing a small table near the front window. Like Honeydukes, the pub was quiet – with only a few groups of students sitting around with drinks. Harry knew that it wouldn’t be long until the hordes descended, but at least he and Daphne had a table.

“How are you?” Harry asked, once they had both taken their seats across from each other.

“Very well, thank you.” Daphne answered blandly.

“Are you enjoying being back at Hogwarts?” Harry questioned after a short pause.

“Yes.” Daphne inclined her head. “I do miss it during the summer.”

There was another pause, this one longer, and Harry sighed. “I haven’t had a chance to really talk to you since we started learning how to…you know. Are you happy with being a fox?”

Daphne looked slightly unsure. “Yes, very much so. Were you pleased by my animal?”

“Of course.” Harry assured her. “I think it matches you very well. Do you realise that your animal is the most dangerous out of all of ours?”

Daphne’s eyes widened. “I’m sure that’s not true.”

“Well, it does depend how big George’s dog is.” Harry admitted. “And my owl seemed pretty big, so it might be able to hold its own too, but you’re definitely going to be more dangerous that the squirrels and the dormouse.”

Daphne looked down at the table.

“Daphne?” Harry asked after a minute of silence. “Is everything alright? You’ve been very quiet since my birthday.”

Daphne’s eyes flew up to his face. “Are you displeased?”

Harry frowned in confusion. “Well, I wouldn’t exactly put it like that. But you’ve been…different. I don’t think you’ve reproved anyone all year.”

Daphne glanced away anxiously. “I don’t want to upset you.”

“I don’t understand.” Harry admitted, he felt as though he was floundering. “Why would you think that I would be upset? I love the way you reprimand people.”

“You do?” Daphne looked completely lost.

“Yes,” Harry answered seriously. “Is that why you’ve been so quiet? Because you were worried about what I would think?”

Daphne looked down at the table. “Yes.”
Harry sighed. This sort of situation hadn’t been in single one of Cousin Narcissa’s lectures on appropriate conduct during courting.

“I don’t want you to change who you are.” He told her eventually. “When Sirius told me about your father’s offer, I spent a lot of time thinking about it. I decided I wanted to go ahead with the contract because I like you. I think you’re funny and smart and really pretty. You remind me a bit of Cousin Narcissa actually, which might sound weird – but I really like it.”

Daphne’s gaze had moved from the table to Harry’s face and she seemed to be trying study his expression. “I… I…” She looked back at the table. “So you would prefer for me to talk more?”

Harry let out an explosive sigh, before gasping when she actually flinched away from him. What in Merlin’s name was going on? Why was Daphne so cautious and scared?

All of a sudden he remembered that Draco had once described Daphne’s previous betrothed as being a bully who Daphne was terrified of. Was that what this was about? Was Daphne scared that he would turn out like Eugene Odgen?

“I want you to be yourself.” Harry told her, before deciding to test his theory. “Daphne, I promise you that I’m nothing like Eugene.”

Daphne’s eyes widened.

“Really, I’m not.” Harry went on. “I don’t know much about him, but Draco said that he was a bully. You know I’m not like that, right?”

Daphne shook her head so quickly that some of her hair hit her face. “Of course not, Harry. I just don’t want to upset you.”

“But I don’t want you to not want to upset me.” Harry argued emotively. “I just want you to be you. We’re friends right? That doesn’t have to change just because we’re betrothed. I’m not going to suddenly get mean.”

Daphne looked just as lost as Harry had felt a few minutes before hand. “I’m not sure…” She trailed off.

“Listen,” Harry started. “I’m not sure what you’re worried that I might do, but I promise that I won’t do it. You know I only ever tell people off when they’re improper and you’re just as proper as I am, if not more so. Anyway, I would never tell you off like I do Pansy. You’re going to be my wife – that makes us partners.”

Daphne still looked unsure, but she offered Harry a weak smile. “Really?”

“Really.” Harry answered firmly.

11-11-11

The rest of their afternoon in Hogsmeade was awkward to say the least. Daphne seemed to switch between being herself and being the meek version of her from earlier, and Harry wasn’t sure what else to say. The worst thing was that he wasn’t sure who he could ask about it. He didn’t want to tell any of his friends (they were Daphne’s friends too and it felt as though he would be breaking a confidence), but he didn’t want to write it in a letter either – there was too much chance of it being intercepted.

In the end Harry decided to wait until the next Wednesday and talk it over with Sirius. His godfather
was still flooing into Hogwarts, through Remus’ floo, every Wednesday afternoon to teach Harry how to combine duelling and fencing. It was wonderful to be learning a new skill, even if it was ridiculously hard, but it was even more wonderful to have a reason to see Sirius every week.

The hardest part wasn’t the lessons with Sirius though, it was the homework his godfather had set him. Harry was supposed to be learning to use both his wand and his sword with his weaker hand. He had been using his, Neville’s and Takashi’s morning fencing practise to learn to how complete the basic fencing exercises with his left hand, but it felt even more awkward than it had when he had first picked up a sword over a year ago. Not only did his left hand seem to have absolutely no coordination, but it was also a lot weaker than his right hand.

Casting spells with his wand in his left hand was easier and, after three weeks Harry had already managed to cast about a quarter of his first year spells. The problem was that, due to his uncoordinated arm, he had to focus all his attention on making sure that the arm movement was right. He had no idea how he was going to manage to deflect spells with his sword at the same time as casting them.

His friends all seemed to think that he was a bit odd for even trying, especially since they were aware that he had been teaching himself wandless magic as well, but Harry was used to them finding his thirst for knowledge a bit bizarre.

Harry didn’t mind, though he did wish his friends cared more about learning to protect themselves. Sure they were purebloods and so were much less likely to be targeted by Voldemort, but that didn’t make them immune. Roger Davis, one of the Hogwarts’ students who had been killed at the Quidditch Cup, had been a pureblood too.
Chapter 12

“Avifors!”

Harry ducked away from the spell as he cast his own spell. “Locomotor Wibbly!”

“Petrificus Totalus!” Sirius returned, as he brought up his sword to block Harry’s spell.

“Stupefy!” Harry returned, stepping to the side of Sirius’ spell.

“Come on, Harry!” Sirius reproved. “Use your sword. Locomotor Mortis!”

Harry clumsily brought his sword up to block the spell. Despite having practised his fencing drills with his left hand for weeks, it was still much less graceful than his right hand.

“Calvario!” Sirius cast.

Harry blocked that curse with his sword as well, but he had no chance to return fire before Sirius cast yet another spell.

“Mimble Wimble!”

“Expulso!” Harry returned, before trying to bring his sword up in time to block Sirius’ curse. He was too late and the blue spell hit him in the right shoulder.

Harry grimaced, damn, now he would have reply on his wordless spells (and he had only mastered two). He brought up his wand again and, as Sirius dodged out of the way of the Expulso charm, followed it up with another stunning charm.

Sirius’ eyes widened in surprise as the red spell flew towards him, but he brought his sword up to block it. “Gelata Digitorum!”

Harry stepped aside, as he wordlessly sent the leg-locking curse at Sirius.

“Sword, Harry!” Sirius reminded him as he blocked the spell. “Nare Capillos Accrescens! Petrificus Totalus!”

Harry barely managed to block the first spell with sword, when Sirius’ second spell hit him. Seconds later, Harry was lying on the floor completely frozen.

“You’re getting better.” Sirius praised, as he made his way across the classroom and cast the counter curses.

“I don’t feel as though I am.” Harry sighed despondently. “My left hand is useless.”

“It’s no worse than your right hand was when you first started.” Sirius pointed out. “And that was just over a year ago. Give it time, you’ll get there. Bravo, by the way, I didn’t know you knew any wordless magic.”

“Only those two spells.” Harry admitted, he tended to focus more on wandless magic. “I haven’t put much effort into learning them, but I thought it would probably be good to have a few up my sleeve just in case.”

“Good plan.” Sirius grinned, offering him a hand. “Are you up for another duel?”
“Can we leave the swords out of it this time?” Harry asked hopefully. He asked at the end of every session, but Sirius’ answer was always no.

Sirius nodded slowly. “Alright, what the hell.”

“Thank you!” Harry sighed with relief. “I actually feel successful when I duel normally.”

“Remus says a lot of good things about your duelling.” Sirius commented. “At this point, I’m pretty sure he thinks you could beat Dumbledore.”

“Well, I’ve never seen him duel, but I really doubt it.” Harry shook his head. “I’m not that good.”

“Well, he’s caught my interest.” Sirius grinned, striding to the other end of the classroom. “Try to live up to the legend.”

“Usual rules?” Harry asked.

Sirius smirked. “How about we change it up a bit. Anything is permissible, so long as it isn’t lethal and doesn’t completely destroy Remus’ classroom.”

Harry’s eyes lit up in anticipation. “Brilliant!”

“Ready?” Sirius asked.

Harry bowed. “Three.”

“Two.” Sirius bowed in return.

“One!” They exclaimed together, before simultaneously casting spells.

“Stupefy!”

“Expulso!”

Harry dodged away from Sirius’ spelling spell, while casting again. “Incendium!”

Sirius, who had blocked Harry’s first spell with a magical shield, dodged his second spell. “Stultiloquium!”

“Protego!” Harry blocked the spell. “Densaugeo!”

“Cornu Lingua.”

“Engorgio Skullus!”

Sirius’ eyes widened as he dodged out of the way. “Bloody hell, Harry. Genu transuerso!”

“Ictus!” Harry returned. “Densaugeo!”

“Pollicem Clavum Crescit!”

The duel continued for almost half an hour and, by the time that Harry finally managed to pin Sirius down with a spell to stick his feet to floor before following it up with a stunning spell, neither of them were in great condition. Sirius’ left shoulder was dislocated and there was gash on his right thigh that had been bleeding sluggishly for over ten minutes. Harry, was a little better off, with only a broken arm and a bruised hip. Both of them had cast spells during the duel to mask their pain enough
to continue duelling. Harry really didn’t look forward the spell coming off.

Harry limped over to where Sirius was lying unconscious, before sitting on the floor beside him. “Rennervate!”

Sirius groaned as he opened his eyes. “Bloody hell.” He wheezed. “I guess I should be glad that you took pity on me and it me with a stunning and not one of your bloody skull expanding spells.”

“They’re much harder to undo.” Harry explained. “We’re going to need Remus’ help to fix your shoulder anyway. I didn’t want to have to admit to him that I’d enlarged your skull.”

“Didn’t stop you from casting it at me multiple times.” Sirius accused as he pushed himself upright with his right arm, his chest still heaving from the exertion.

“It freaked you out.” Harry pointed out. “Besides which, the protego doesn’t work against it.”

“Of course it bloody freaked me out.” Sirius exclaimed, raising his right hand to wipe the sweat off his brow. “It would have enlarged my skull.”

“It’s not lethal though.” Harry reminded him. “It was within the rules.”

Sirius grimaced at him, before looking around the room. “We should probably clean this up a bit before Remus gets back. He’ll be pissed if he sees it like this.”

“You’re not wrong.” Remus’ voice sounded from the doorway to his office. “What in Merlin’s name did you two do?”

“We duelled.” Harry admitted.

Remus didn’t look impressed. “And what are you doing on the floor?”

“He stunned me.” Sirius admitted, still slightly wheezy. “And he dislocated my shoulder.”

Harry’s stomach squirmed guiltily. “There’s a cut on his leg too.”

Sirius must have heard something in his tone, because he switched his attention to Harry. “Don’t feel bad, pup. I’m the one who broke your arm and slammed you up against the wall.”

“You broke his arm?” Remus exclaimed loudly.

“He dislocated my shoulder first.” Sirius defended.

Remus looked exasperated, as he made his way over. “And I suppose you want my help with healing spells.”

“Yes, please.” Harry answered meekly. “I don’t know many yet.”

Remus crouched down beside them. “Have you ever fixed a dislocated arm before?”

“No.” Harry shook his head.

“The incantation is sanare extorqueo.” Remus told him. “And the wand movement is like this.”

Harry watched carefully as Remus demonstrated it a few times.

“Wait a minute.” Sirius protested. “Is this really the right time for Harry to learn this?”
“I think this is exactly the time.” Remus returned evenly. “Give it a go, Harry.”

It took Harry a few tries, but eventually the purple spell left his wand and sunk into Sirius’ shoulder resulting in a quiet popping sound and a pain-filled groan from Sirius.

“Good job.” Remus told him. “Now, that cut doesn’t look too deep so you can probably just use episkey.”

“Episkey!” Harry intoned, watching with satisfaction as the gash on Sirius’ leg closed up.

“Now your arm.” Remus said. “Broken bones are harder to fix than dislocations and cuts. Something that Sirius knows full well.”

Harry swallowed down his amused grin as Remus shot Sirius a dirty look. “That’s alright.”

“I can splint it,” Remus continued. “But you’ll have to go see Madame Pomfrey to get it healed.”

“What would I tell her?” Harry asked. “Maybe I should just let it heal naturally.”

“You tell her that you fell off your broom or something.” Remus told him. “Ferula!”

Harry watched in amazement, and no little pain, as bandages that hadn’t been there before spun around his arm. “That’s brilliant.”

“Now,” Remus looked around his classroom. “I expect the two of you to remove all the scorch marks and fix all the broken furniture.”

Harry winced. “What’s the spell?”

“The basic mending charm ought to do for the furniture.” Sirius decided. “In fact, you could probably just try and put as much magic into the spell as possible and it might fix the entire room.”

Harry stood up, wincing inwardly as the bruise on his hip smarted, and held up in wand. “Reparo!”

The effect was instantaneously – all the furniture in the room righted itself and any pieces that had broken off reattached themselves. But the spell didn’t stop there. The scorch marks disappeared, as did any scratches on the desks, and the tear in Sirius’ robes mended as well.

“Bloody hell.” Sirius exclaimed as they watched the room right itself. “I wasn’t expecting that.”

Remus was looking around in amazement. “The classroom looks brand new.”

Harry winced. “You said to put as much magic into the spell as possible.”

“Yeah,” Sirius was still looking around in the room in astonishment. “I just didn’t realise you had quite that much magic at your disposal.”

“Thank you, Harry.” Remus smiled at him. “I don’t think my classroom has ever looked this good. Now, we should probably get you to Madame Pomfrey. Dinner will be ready soon and you shouldn’t go with a splint on your arm.”

“Actually,” Harry said nervously. “There’s something I need to talk to you both about.”

“That sounds ominous.” Sirius commented, before reaching up an arm. “Help me up, Moony.”

Remus sighed long-sufferingly, but pulled Sirius to his feet. “Shall we discuss this in my office?”
“Alright.” Harry nodded, at least there were comfortable armchairs there.

Once they were seated, Sirius and Remus both turned their attention to Harry who swallowed nervously.

“Well,” Harry started. “It’s about Daphne.”

Sirius wiggled his eyebrows. “Ah, trouble with the ladies. Well, you’ve come to the right place!”

Harry ignored him. “She’s been acting weird ever since you and Lord Greengrass signed the papers. Well, actually she was a bit weird while we talked beforehand too.”

Sirius and Remus both looked concerned. “ Weird how?”

“Quiet.” Harry explained. “She doesn’t talk much, and when she does talks it’s perfectly polite.”

“She might just be trying to figure out how to deal with the betrothal.” Remus suggested.

“Yes, that’s sort of what I thought at first.” Harry agreed. “Except then I took her to Hogsmeade on Saturday and she told me that she’s scared of displeasing me.”

“Displeasing you?” Sirius repeated, his forehead furrowed in concern.

“Yes,” Harry confirmed. “Remember how I told you that she was betrothed to Eugene Odgen? And that Draco said that he was a bully? Well, I think he must have been worse than I imagined. She’s terrified of me. What do I do?”

Sirius and Remus both exchanged a look, before Remus spoke. “What did you say?”

“I told her than I liked her the way she is.” Harry answered. “And that I would never hurt her, and that I see her as my partner rather than my subordinate. Which helped a little, she’s talking sometimes now. But sometimes she’ll say something and then give me this look, as though she’s scared I’m going to curse her.”

“It sounds as though you’re doing all you can.” Remus told him softly. “Sometimes, when people are expecting something bad to happen, it can take them some time to get used to the idea that they’re safe.”

“I was like that.” Sirius admitted, leaning forward in his chair. “You know that my parents were pretty horrible, and when I went to live with your father’s family I spent months expecting that your grandparents would get sick of me and curse me.”

“I did that too.” Harry remembered suddenly. “When I came to live with you last year. I knew you weren’t going to hurt me, but I was still scared that you might.”

“I remember.” Sirius nodded sadly. “You wouldn’t come within arms’ reach of me for a month.”

“So I just have to give her time?” Harry asked. “I was hoping that there would be something else that I could do.”

“Well, keep courting her.” Sirius told him. “And keep reassuring her that you like it when she talks.”

Harry sighed, he just wished there was more he could do.

12-12-12
Madame Pomfrey was singularly unimpressed by Harry’s admittedly flimsy story about how he had broken his arm but, despite her anger muttering, she had still healed it. Still, her extended interrogation made them both a little late for dinner – something that Harry really hadn’t wanted to be.

“Merry meet.” Luna greeted, as he slid into the empty seat beside her. “Something odd happened today.”

Merry meet.” Harry agreed with a smile, Luna’s non-sequiturs were always rather amusing. “What happened today?”

“There was a fixing wave on the fourth floor.” Luna explained. “Even some people on the third and fifth floors got things fixed.”

Harry stared at her. “What?”

“Everything got fixed.” Luna explained. “I was on the fourth floor, looking for Blibbering Humdingers, and my bag was suddenly as good as new.”

Harry’s mouth was suddenly dry. “When…” He cleared his throat. “When did this happen?”

“Oh, about forty minutes ago.” Luna answered airily. “Did you have a good lesson?”

Harry stared at Luna, trying to figure out whether or not she knew that he had been the one to cause the so called fixing wave. He gave up after a few seconds, it was Luna – who could really tell what she did or didn’t know. Damn Sirius and his stupid advice. He was never putting as much magic as possible into a spell again.

“Oooh!” Luna exclaimed a few minutes later. “Look, Harry. It’s about to start.”

Harry’s stomach clenched in excited anticipation as he turned to where Cho Chang was sitting with Marietta Edgecombe.

Nothing happened at first and, after a while, Harry forced himself to avert his gaze so that he wouldn’t look suspicious.

“I beg your pardon?!” Marietta asked, her voice raised in outrage.

Cho’s reply was too quiet for Harry to hear, but from the expressions of the students sitting near her it obviously hadn’t been very nice.

“You fat cow!” Marietta’s expression was twisted in fury. “Don’t act as though you’re so high and mighty. We both know that you’re a gold-digging tramp!”

There was a long silence, as the entire hall fell silent and turned to stare at the two girls, and then a few sniggers were held around the hall.

Cho surged to her feet. “Bitch!”

“Slut!” Marietta all but screamed back.

“Skanky whore!” Cho shrieked.

“Silencio!” Takashi suddenly broke in from his seat down the table, cutting the two girls off.

Not that it did any good, they still continued to silently scream at each other, though at least now the
poor first years weren’t having their innocent ears traumatised.

There was another long silence which, as it had been before, was broken by sniggers all around the hall.

Harry looked up at the Head Table and had to swallow down a chuckle at the horrified expression on the professors’ faces. Professor Flitwick, for his part, had gotten up and was making his way towards the Ravenclaw table.

“Thank you, Mr. Nado.” Flitwick squeaked as he passed Takashi, before stopping next to Marietta. “Miss Edgecombe, Miss Chang, if you would come with me please.”

Cho and Marietta, who had stopped screaming at each and were now sitting down looking mortified, quickly followed the professor out of the hall.

Harry shared a satisfied smile with Luna, before glancing over to where Cedric Diggory, Cho’s boyfriend, was staring after her with an almost revolted expression on his face. The best thing was, that the potion wouldn’t wear off for another six hours – Harry could only imagine how much trouble they were going to get themselves into.

Harry turned his attention back to the Ravenclaw table, specifically where Felicity Eastchurch, Latisha Randle, and Kim Sheringham, all of whom Luna had admitted had taken part in the bullying, were sitting together. Harry, Draco, and Luna were planning on dosing them with the potion in a few days. Hopefully they put on just as much of a show at Cho and Marietta had.

12-12-12

Cho and Marietta’s outbursts were the talk of the school the next day and Harry’s only regret was the amount of points that they had lost for Ravenclaw. Somehow, the two girls had managed to lose over a hundred points in one night!

He did feel a bit sorry for Cedric though. If the gossip was to be believed, Cedric and Cho had met up after Cho and Marietta’s disciplinary meeting with Flitwick and it hadn’t gone well. Harry wasn’t sure how accurate the information was, but the consensus seemed to be that Cho had gotten angry and called Cedric a bunch of names before admitting that she was only dating him because of his status.

“This is why people shouldn’t date blood traitors!” Draco declared after classes the next day.

Harry looked around the group and wasn’t surprised to see Daphne, Blaise and Theo all nodding in agreement. Neville and Luna, who were talking quietly amongst themselves, didn’t react at all.

“That doesn’t explain Pansy.” Harry pointed out. “She’s just as much as a gold digger as Chang and she’s traditional.”

“She wouldn’t make such a scene though.” Theo defended.

Harry raised an eyebrow sceptically. “Are we talking about the same Pansy? She’s always causing scenes.”

“Only when you’re around.” Blaise chuckled. “You seem to bring the worst out in her.”

Harry scoffed. “Really? Are you saying she didn’t cling desperately to Draco except when I was around? Because that was terribly inappropriate.”
“It didn’t cause a scene though.” Theo pointed out

“Only because Astoria either didn’t notice or was too young to care.” Harry returned.

“Well, Pansy’s the exception.” Draco decided decisively. “Not all traditionalists are like her.”

“And not all non-traditionalist are like Chang.” Harry returned. “The twins aren’t too bad, are they?”

“They’re Weasleys!”

Harry clenched his jaw. “Are you telling me that, despite having spent hours with them every Sunday for four weeks, you still can’t tell the difference between them and Ron?”

Draco shifted uncomfortably. “They don’t stare as much as the Weasel does.”

Harry pinched his lips together and turned towards the lake. Why couldn’t his friends realise that not all non-traditionalists were complete wastes of space?

Blaise cleared his throat. “Uh, I heard them say on Sunday that they’ve started meditating daily.”

“Really?” Theo’s voice was pitched higher than usual. “Good on them.”

“They’re not as bad as I feared they would be.” Daphne added after a pause. “They’re a strange combination of irreverent and respectful.”

There was another long pause, before Draco let out a long, low sigh. “They’re definitely better than the Weasel or the Weaselette.”

Harry turned back to Draco and inclined his head thankfully. “I am grateful that you have been polite to them.”

“They’re both intelligent and powerful.” Neville commented evenly. “It’s a pity that they’ve grown up in an anti-traditional household.”

Draco looked impressed. “We’ll make a proper elitist out of you yet, Neville.”

“I think that it speaks highly of them that they’ve turned out the way they have.” Harry challenged. “They could have turned out like Ron, but they didn’t.”

“That’s an interesting point.” Daphne acknowledged with a small smile in Harry’s direction.

“Though that doesn’t change the fact that they still are anti-traditionalists.” Draco pointed out.

“Non-traditionalists.” Harry corrected.

Theo tilted his head to the side. “What’s the difference?”

“Anti-traditionalists are opposed to tradition.” Harry explained. “If we weren’t traditionalists…”

“Perish the thought!” Draco wrinkled his nose.

“…Draco would be the anti-traditionalist.” Harry continued. “Because he holds a grudge against anyone who isn’t traditional.”

“I wouldn’t call it a grudge.” Draco protested. “More of a…”

“Deep seated hatred?” Theo asked with a smirk.
“Intense loathing?” Neville added.

“Discriminating tendency?” Harry put in.

“…dislike.” Draco finished, glaring indignantly at all of them.

“I, however, would be the non-traditionalist.” Harry went on. “Because I think that everyone should have the right to choose whether or not they want to be a traditionalist.”

“That makes sense.” Theo leaned back on his hands. “So the Weasel would be an anti-traditionalist.”

“Yes, I think that most of their family is.” Harry agreed. “Dumbledore is one too.”

“Did you hear that Bill has decided to accept the lordship?” Neville asked. “Ron was ranting about it last night.”

Harry’s mouth fell open in shock. “Really?”

“Who is Bill?” Theo asked before Harry could say anything else. “And what lordship is he accepting?”

“Bill is the oldest Weasley son.” Neville explained. “And he is accepting his place as the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett.”

“I wasn’t expecting that.” Harry commented. “He seemed really against the idea at the World Cup.”

“Will he be traditional?” Daphne asked smoothly.

“I doubt it.” Neville answered.

“A non-traditional lord?!” Draco sounded scandalised.

“He seemed more anti-traditional at the World Cup.” Neville grimaced.

“Oh, Father is going to love that.” Draco’s upper lip curled into a sneer.

“I know that he’s been talking to Sirius.” Harry admitted. “Maybe he’ll be able to talk him around. Sirius definitely understands where he’s coming from. He was anti-traditional too.”

12-12-12
Harry focussed on his mental picture of the owl that he knew was his animagus form and tried to somehow transfer the image to his own body. The problem was that despite how clearly he had seen the owl during his original meditation, the image was slightly fuzzy now. He’d tried to use Occlumency to see the image clearer, but it hadn’t worked.

The book that Sirius and Remus had given him for his birthday said that, the second step in becoming an animagus involved visualisation – you had to visualise the animal, before visualising yourself becoming the animal and, apparently, one day it would just work. It was way too airy fairy for Harry’s liking, he preferred his magic to have complete and detailed instructions. It was why his favourite subjects were Potions, Runes, and Charms. Defence wasn’t too bad either, but the theory for Transfiguration was vague and the practise of the subject was even more so.

Harry narrowed his focus to the owl’s face and, specifically, it's ridiculous looking eyebrows – though they could have been ears, he couldn’t really tell. He tried to take in each golden brown feathers that made up the eyebrows, before imagining them on his own face. Nothing happened, though his eyebrows felt a bit itchy.

“Merlin!” He heard Theo commenting in the distance. “Look at Harry’s eyebrows.”

The next thing he heard was the Weasleys’ rambunctious laughter and a few sniggers from his other friends. Harry opened his eyes and glared at his friends.

“Aren’t you supposed to be meditating?”

“It’s already been two hours.” Neville explained unapologetically, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“You really should transfigure a mirror.” Draco commented with a wide grin.

Harry raised an eyebrow questioningly, before shooting his friends an odd look when they all started laughing again. “What?”

Fred pulled out his wand and waved it over a piece of parchment. “Speculo!” He passed the transfigured mirror to Harry with a smirk.

Harry accepted the mirror and brought it up to his face, before almost choking in shock. No wonder his friends were laughing, he looked ridiculous. His eyebrows had been replaced with feathers and looked identical to the ones on the owl he had been visualising.

“I did it!” He exclaimed excitedly.

Takashi, who had still been meditating, opened in eyes, before looking astounded. “Congratulations, Harry.”

“Can you undo it?” Draco asked with a smirk.

“How did you do it?” Neville added.

“Instead of focusing on the entire animal, I tried focussing on one small attribute.” Harry explained. Theo chuckled. “So you decided to focus on the eyebrows?”
“They stood out.” Harry defended. “I’m going to try something else now.”

“Try the beak.” Fred suggested with a smirk. “It’ll go with your eyebrows!”

Harry ignored him as he shut his eyes and evened out his breathing, he didn’t want to try and turn his mouth and nose into a beak for a while yet. What if it went wrong and he couldn’t breathe?

Despite trying to replicate what he done before Harry didn’t manage to transform any other parts of his body, though he had managed to turn his eyebrows back to normal. Eventually, he decided to stop for the day and opened his eyes to the sight of all his friends sitting together and talking quietly.

Harry smiled in delight at the sight of Fred and George being included – the first few weeks they had all met together to practise, his Slytherin friends had done their best to avoid interacting with the Weasleys. It was nice to see that they had changed that policy. Admittedly, Draco and Daphne still looked a little uncomfortable, but still it was progress.

Harry stood up and made his way over to the group, sitting down beside Daphne. “Do you people ever practise?”

“Not everyone can meditate for two straight hours.” Draco pointed. “Even Takashi stopped before you did.”

“Did anyone make progress?” Harry asked curiously.

“No.” Neville sighed as everyone else shook their heads.

“Good to see that your eyebrows are back to normal though.” Theo smirked. “I’m sure Daphne is particularly relieved.”

The group chuckled, but Daphne just raised her chin and shot Theo an unimpressed glare.

Harry added his own glare, before changing the subject. “What were you talking about?”

“How much busier we are this year.” Neville answered. “There seems to be twice as much homework this year than there was last year.”

Fred snorted. “Just wait until you get to your fifth year.”

“Or your seventh.” Takashi agreed.

“There isn’t that much homework is there?” Harry asked rhetorically. “I’m noticing more in Ancient Runes, but that’s because I’ll be taking my OWL exam at the end of the year. I haven’t really noticed any other difference.”

“So you don’t feel busy?” Theo asked disbelievingly.

“I do,” Harry acknowledged. “But that’s because of all the extracurricular things I do.”

“Like what?” The twins asked together.

“Well, I wake up just before five every morning and then spend an hour working on my Occlumency shields.” Harry started. “Then I meet up with Takashi and Neville and we run around the lake before practising our fencing.”

“Which he does left handed.” Neville commented.
“Fencing?” The twins asked incredulously.

“What is this…?” George started.

“…the eighteenth century?” Fred finished.

“That’s what you find weird?” Theo exclaimed. “Not the fact that they run around the lake every morning?”

“That’s weird too.” George reassured him.

“I practise wandless magic every Thursday afternoon with Neville and Takashi,” Harry continued. “As well as by myself every evening.”

Draco’s mouth fell open. “You do?”

Harry swallowed down a wince, he’d forgotten that Draco didn’t know. At first he hadn’t told his cousin because Draco hated Neville, and he liked the idea of doing something with Neville, and then he just hadn’t thought it was important to mention. He hoped that Draco didn’t mind.

“Wandless magic?” Fred sounded sceptical.

“Can you actually perform any spells wandlessly?” Daphne asked.

“Both Harry and Neville can.” Takashi answered for him. “They are very powerful.”

“Harry’s better at it than I am.” Neville added quickly.

“Show me!” Draco ordered imperiously.

Harry raised an eyebrow challengingly, but retrieved his wand from its holster and put it in front of him. Then he slowly levitated the wand into the air.

“Merlin!” Fred and George both whispered.

“That’s amazing!” Theo exclaimed and Blaise nodded enthusiastically beside him.

Draco was staring at the wand with a vexed expression.

“You’re all welcome to join us if you want.” Harry said quickly, before glancing at Neville and Takashi to ensure that they agreed. “We’ve been meeting here, straight after classes on Thursdays.”

“How long did it take you to be able to do that?” George asked curiously.

“About a year.” Harry answered. “Though each additional spell seems to take less times.”

“Not everyone can perform wandless magic.” Takashi commented seriously. “I have been practising with Harry and Neville for two years now, but I still cannot levitate an object without meditating first.”

Fred grimaced. “More meditating?”

“What else do you do, Harry?” Neville prompted.

“Well, this practise,” Harry answered. “Which means that my Sunday afternoons are busy and Sirius floos in every Tuesday afternoon to duel with me. He’s teaching me how to deflect spells with my
sword.”

The majority of the group already knew that, but the twins’ eyes widened again.

“A sword?!”

“That’s why he’s learning how to fence and use his wand in his left hand.” Neville explained.

“When exactly do you do your homework?” Blaise asked. “You spend a lot of time with us as well.”

“In the evenings.” Harry answered. “After dinner I usually spend about three hours on homework each night. I thought that I’d have more time this year, since I dropped Ancient Studies, but I’ve only been flying three times all term. I can’t imagine how I would have fit Quidditch Practise in.”

“We could go flying now?” Fred suggested. “There’s an hour before dinner.”

Harry straightened excitedly. “I’m keen.”

13-13-13

When Harry met Draco and Luna at Hoth the next day, Draco was sitting in one of the armchairs looking decidedly peeved.

Harry greeted him, as he and Luna both sat down on the couch, before waiting for Draco to explain what he was upset about. It didn’t take long.

“How could you not tell me that you were learning wandless magic?” Draco’s nostrils flared. “Didn’t you think that I would have wanted to learn too?”

“You don’t like meditating.” Harry pointed out. “I didn’t think you’d be interested in doing something that involved meditating for a long period of time.”

“Becoming an animagus involves meditating.” Draco pointed out. “And you invited me to do that with you.”

“We’re both older now.”

“So?” Draco’s eyes were hard. “I can’t believe that you chose Neville over me. I thought we were best friends!”

Harry pressed his lips together. “We are.”

“Your wrackspurts look like Christmas, Draco.” Luna commented idly, her gaze unfocussed.

Draco jerked slightly, as he shot her a confused look, before he scowled at Harry. “Best friends don’t keep secrets like this, and they don’t choose Neville Longbottom over each other!”

“I didn’t choose Neville over you!” Harry snapped, before taking a deep breath. “I’ve wanted to learn wandless magic since before first year when I saw Baknog, my Family’s Accounts’ Goblin, conjuring a money bag wandlessly. Baknog told me that wizards couldn’t do wandless magic like Goblins could, but that I could probably learn to do some. He even recommended a book on wandless magic to me. That book was the reason I learnt to meditate. I had planned to start learning straight away, but then I got distracted with having learn to control my magic when I was meditating, so I didn’t get around to it until second year.”

Draco was glaring at him. “That doesn’t explain why you didn’t tell me.”
“Neville got a new wand during the summer before second year,” Harry went on. “Madame Longbottom had been forcing him to use his father’s one, but it hadn’t worked well for it. Ollivander said that the fact that Neville’s magic was strong enough to do some magic through his father’s wand, meant that he would probably be able to wandless magic one day. So, I asked Neville if he wanted to learn with me. I didn’t tell you because there was no way that you and Neville would have agreed to do anything together back then, and I already did a lot of things with you. I thought it would be nice to do something with Neville too. I really didn’t think you would be interested, Draco.”

“You could have at least told me.” Draco said, his arms crossed over his chest.

“I know,” Harry acknowledged. “And I’m sorry that I didn’t. I was twelve and stupid.”

“Because you’re so much more grown up now.” Draco challenged, a small smirk breaking through his glare.

“Much!” Harry agreed with a grin. “You’re welcome to come practise with us.”

Draco wrinkled his nose. “You said that it took you a whole year to complete one spell?”

“Just under a year.” Harry corrected.

“No, thanks.” Draco decided firmly. “I’ll just stick with learning to be an animagus.”

“Alright.” Harry smiled, swallowing down his desire to say ‘I told you so’.

“Is it alright if I come, Harry?” Luna asked absently, her eyes focused on something on the ceiling.

“Of course.” Harry assured her quickly. “You’re always welcome, Luna.”

Luna’s gaze moved from the ceiling to Harry. “Thank you. I think it sounds like fun.”

“Fun?” Draco grimaced. “Meditating is not fun!”

13-13-13

Harry’s next class was Defence Against the Dark Arts and, as he always did, Moody started by instructing them to put their books away. Since they had had at least two dozen lessons with the auror, no one had bothered having their books out in the first place, but Moody still continued to say it every single class.

Moody was a bizarre professor and Harry found him quite difficult to learn from. He knew that some of his classmates really enjoyed the professor’s no book policy, but Harry missed learning about theory. He’d read the textbook of course, and reread each chapter before class, but Flitwick and McGonagall always took the time to explain extra theory to them during classes. Moody didn’t bother – he just put them straight into action.

“Right,” Moody stared over the classroom, his magical eye spinning at a sickening speed. “Who can tell me what three spells are the most heavily punished in Magical Britain?”

Harry raised his hand.

“Bones?” Moody asked.

Moody nodded slowly. “Right, I presume your aunt has told you all about them. I know she runs into all three of them quite often with her job. Now, who can tell me what happens to a person who is hit with the Killing Curse?”

Harry fought the urge to shrink down in his chair as his classmates turned to stare at him.

Moody chuckled. “Or should I say, what happens to every person other than Potter?”

Terry put up his hand tentatively. “They die, sir.”

“Instant death.” Moody agreed. “No pain, no suffering, no chance of being saved.” He turned to his desk, where a jar of spiders sat, and pulled one of the spiders out of the jar to place on the desk. Then he raised his wand. “Avada Kedavra!”

Harry’s classmates flinched and Harry’s stomach dropped in horror as a green light hit the spider, which immediately turned over and lay still – it’s legs in the air. It was horrible and Harry found himself wondering whether that had been how his parents’ died. Had it been that quick? Had they also fallen over onto their backs without a mark?

“No magical shield can stop it!” Moody declared, leaving the spider lying on the desk. “There’s only one person who had ever survived being hit by it, and we all know who that is.”

The class turned to stare at him again, but Harry straightened his shoulders and held his back stiff. He refused to be self-conscious or embarrassed for having survived.

“Now,” Moody started. “What effect does the Imperius Curse have?”

Harry raised his hand.

“Potter?” Moody asked.

“It controls a person’s actions.” Harry answered. “The caster can make them do anything.”

Moody dug his fingers back into the jar and pulled out another spider. Harry’s stomach squirmed, he didn’t want to see the spell performed.

“Imperio!” Moody shouted.

Instantly the spider, that had been trying to escape from the table, froze in its place. Then it began to cartwheel its way across the table. It was ghastly. Moody didn’t stop there though and Harry couldn’t help but feel increasingly nauseous as their professor forced the spider to do his will.

Unbelievably, his classmates didn’t seem to feel the same way – some of them were even snickering.

When Moody had finally finished playing with the spider, and had reprimanded the students for laughing, he moved onto the final curse.

“Now the Cruciatius Curse. Anyone?”

Nobody seemed to want to raise their hand, but eventually Susan did. “It causes pain.”

Moody didn’t respond, instead he dug his hand back into the jar and pulled out the final spider. “Engorgio!”

Harry really didn’t want to see what was about to happen, especially not on a spider that large. He’d seen the curse cast before, Voldemort had cast in on Pettigrew in the visions he’d had in second year.
Maybe he could fake sick and be excused from class. Then again, he probably wouldn’t have to fake it that much – his stomach felt decidedly ill.

“Crucio!” Moody shouted, and Harry cringed as the spider drew its legs into itself as it twitched and rocked from side to side. He couldn’t imagine the pain that the spider must have been feeling.

Moody left the curse on the spider for ages and, after a few seconds, Harry clenched his eyes shut so he would have to see the suffering spider in front of him. How could Moody be allowed to torture animals in front of them? Surely he couldn’t have taught it to the fourth year class when he had taught had Hogwarts for some of Harry’s second year – Harry was sure he would have heard about it.

Thankfully it was the last class of the day, Harry didn’t think he could have sat through any more classes with the images of the spiders in his head. He walked out of the class automatically and then down the stairs and outside. His mind was flicking between images of the spiders and of Voldemort torturing Pettigrew. It was all a bit close to home. Especially since he knew the Voldemort was out there, probably casting those curses on people every day.

Harry wandered across the grass and soon found himself just outside the Forbidden Forest. He glanced around, to ensure that no one was looking at him, before quickly stepping into the forest and behind a tree. He hadn’t seen his snakes since starting his fourth, maybe now would be a good time to do that. Hopefully the sight of his happy and alive snakes would help chase away the other images from his mind.

Harry had only been to their nest once before, so it took him a while to find them, but eventually he found himself standing next to the hollow tree trunk that they had made their home in.

~Sarko?~ Harry hissed quietly, trying to visualise his snakes. ~Sativa?~ He had spent some time the year before working on being able to use his parselmouth abilities without having a snake right in front of him and had found that he could do it, as long as he was visualising a snake with enough detail.

~Who is there?~ Sarko’s voice hissed from inside the log.

~Harry~

Seconds later, Sarko’s head appeared in the opening of the log. ~Greetings, Snakeling~

It was surprisingly nice to speak Parseltongue again, Harry hadn’t even realised that he had missed it. He spoke to Sarko for a few minutes, before Sativa appeared, dragging a dead dormouse in her mouth. Apparently the two snakes’ eggs had hatched and they had dozens of tiny snakes to feed.

Harry didn’t stay for much longer. The two snakes were obviously busy and, while he had certainly enjoyed their company when they had been his pets, he felt rather distant from them. They had their life now, and he had his. He doubted he would go back and visit them again.

On his way back to the edge of the forest, Harry considered the different parselmagic spells he had read about. Originally he had bought the snakes to help him learn parselmagic, but he had always been too busy. Maybe he needed to make time for it, like he made time for all the other things he was learning. After all, while he certainly didn’t want to publicise his parselmouth ability, it would be a great skill to have if he ended up in a life threatening duel. A circumstance that wasn’t as unlikely as he would have liked it to be with Voldemort out there.
Chapter 14

As though seeing Professor Moody cast the Unforgivable Curses on spiders wasn’t bad enough, the retired auror spent their next DADA class casting the Imperius Curse on the students. Harry wasn’t sure why he, more than his classmates, found the idea horrifying. Sure everybody else seemed a little uncomfortable, but no one seemed as horrified as he was. Though he had to admit that it was nice to know that, for whatever reason, he was somewhat resistant to the curse.

When Sirius flooed in for Harry’s duelling lesson later than day, Harry told him about the classes. Harry wasn’t sure what he had been expecting, but he was disappointed to discover that Sirius had known that it was going to happen.

Sirius explained that Moody had argued that it was important for them to know what it felt like so that, if they were ever on the receiving end of the curse, they would have a chance to fight it. Harry understood the argument, but it didn’t make him feel any better.

The duelling practise went well though and Harry was delighted to be able to see actual progress. His daily left-handed practise was obviously paying off. His sword work with his left hand was still painfully clumsy, though it was getting better, but his wand work was much better. He could now cast all his first and second year spells effortlessly, but the small twists and jabs that their professors had introduced in third year still occasionally gave him trouble. He’d even started using his left hand occasionally in class – but only when he knew he wasn’t going to be graded on the outcome.

As well as progressing with his left handed magic, Harry had mastered the Heating Charm wandlessly, in just a month and a half – which put his tally of wandless spells up to five. Now he was going to work on the Shielding Charm, though since it was a fifth year charm (which he wasn’t technically supposed to know yet) he thought it would probably take a bit longer to learn wandlessly.

When it came time for Harry to meet Neville and Takashi in the Room of Requirement for their wandless practise, Harry was feeling nervous for two reasons. Firstly, he didn’t want to have to admit that he had mastered yet another wandless spell, especially since Neville had only just mastered his fourth, and Takashi was still working on his first. The problem was that his friends would notice if he wasn’t working on the Heating Charm any more, and Harry refused to waste his time by pretending to work on it. Secondly, he had given an open invite to his friends to attend the practise and, while he knew that Luna was coming and Draco was not, he had no idea if anyone else would come.

Harry pushed open the door of the Room of Requirement and hesitated in surprise when he saw George Weasley sitting on cushion next to Takashi. Of all the possible combinations of people to attend the practise, he had never considered that one of the Weasleys would come without the other. Harry knew that the twins were two different people, he’d even figured out how to tell them apart (though that was much easier to do when they were standing next to each other), but he rarely saw the one of them without the other.

Neville and Luna arrived together a few minutes later, something that Harry took note of. It seemed as though the two of them had been spending a bit of time together recently, something that Harry approved of whole-heartedly. He thought they would make great friends and it certainly didn’t hurt that neither of them were betrothed.

They started the practise soon after, though not before Harry admitted his most recent accomplishment. His friends were, as always, very supportive of him, but he couldn’t help but still feel a bit guilty for his success.
Harry offered to take first watch and then, while Neville and Takashi both immediately started meditating, he explained the basics to Luna and George.

“I can’t believe mum never taught us how to meditate.” George commented as Luna closed her eyes to begin meditating. “I’ve only been meditating for a month now and I’ve already noticed a difference in my magic. Though I can still barely manage ten minutes before I get distracted.”

“It will get easier.” Harry promised him. “I only learnt when I was eleven and by the end of first year I could meditate easily.”

“See, you say that like it’s supposed to be encouraging.” George grimaced. “But knowing that it took a prodigy like you a year, is actually pretty depressing.”

“I’m not a prodigy.” Harry denied quickly. “I just work hard.”

George looked sceptical. “Are you saying that Takashi doesn’t work hard?”

“Of course he does!”

“And yet he hasn’t even manage to learn one wandless spell in the time it’s taken you to learn five.” George pointed out. “You denying that you’re a prodigy doesn’t make anyone feel better.”

Harry considered that. “I don’t think I’m a prodigy exactly, but I’ll admit that my magic is stronger than a lot of people’s.”

George grinned widely. “Alright.”

Harry glanced towards where Neville, who had only been meditating for a few minutes, had already brought the water in front of him to a boil. “Neville’s stronger than most people too.”

“Yeah,” George followed his gaze. “He’s nothing like Ron described him as.”

Harry pressed his lips together at the mention of the youngest Weasley boy. While Ron hadn’t tried to attack him or Neville again, he still seemed to take every opportunity to harass them.

“I know you and he don’t exactly get along.” George commented. “But he’s not normally as awful as he is when he’s around you.”

“I know he’s your brother.” Harry acknowledged. “But he spent our first two years at Hogwarts alternating between staring at me like I was some amazing celebrity that was going to save the world again and staring at me like I was some kind of evil wizard because I was friends with Draco. Now he’s going around and telling everyone that my friends and I are Death Eaters. Not to mention that he’s an absolute arse to Neville.”

George looked grim. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to be sorry.” Harry said lightly. “You certainly haven’t done anything wrong. In fact, you and Fred are both redeeming the Weasley name. Even Draco has admitted that you two prove that the phrase nauseating blood traitor isn’t synonymous with Weasley.”

“I feel as though I should be offended on behalf of my family.” George commented, but he looked more amused than anything. “Draco does know that we’re still blood traitors, right? Fred and I are still untraditional.”

“Yes,” Harry smirked. “To his eternal horror. I don’t think he’s ever met an untraditional person he
hasn’t hated with all his being before. But you’re not anti-traditional, so that gives you points.”

“Mum and Dad are furious at Bill for accepting the lordship.” George admitted quietly. “Apparently mum sent him a howler at work and called him an embarrassment. Then he named Charlie as his heir and Mum sent him a howler too. I haven’t heard anything from Percy, but Ron’s been telling anyone who will listen that Mum and Dad should disown them.”

Harry sighed deeply. “That sounds awful.”

George clenched his jaw. “Charlie wrote to Fred and I yesterday, apparently Mum actually threatened to disown them if they didn’t stop. He said that he and Bill both think that it’s an empty threat, but he seemed really upset about it. I am too. It’s like she hates traditionalism more than she loves us kids.”

Harry reached out a hand and awkwardly placed it on George’s shoulder. “What does your dad and youngest sister say?”

“Ginny doesn’t seem to know what to think,” George admitted. “But, she’s much closer to Mum and Ron than the rest of us, so she’s starting to take their side. I have no idea what Dad thinks, he usually just goes along with whatever Mum says.”

“Will Bill and Charlie abdicate?” Harry asked softly.

“Charlie says no.” George rubbed hard at his face. “He says that they’re adults and that they both think that the good that Bill can do with a vote in the Wizengamot is worth something. I don’t want them to either, they shouldn’t have to give up their birth-right because Mum has a prejudice. But I’m scared that Mum and Dad really will disown them and our family will be split up.”

Harry had no idea what to say. “That sounds awful.”

“Yeah,” George rubbed at his face again. “Fred’s furious at Mum, I thought he would blow a cauldron when we read Charlie’s letter. Last night, he almost cursed Ron when he told everyone that he thought our parents should disown them.”

“I’m sorry.” Harry said, his stomach twisting horribly. “If I hadn’t told you and Fred about the lordship, none of this would have happened.”

George gave him a weird look. “You don’t need to be sorry. I’m glad you told us, at least this way Bill and Charlie got to make the decision for themselves and, maybe Bill will be able to do some good in the Wizengamot.”

“He will.” Harry confirmed quickly. “Voldemort is trying to get all kinds of awful laws passed through the Wizengamot at the moment. Sirius has managed to stop most of them so far, but he could use all the votes he can get.”

“Like what?” George asked curiously.

“A law discriminating against werewolves.” Harry started. “Sirius managed to block that one last summer.”

George looked incredulous. “Why would Voldemort care?”

“Sirius says that Voldemort wanted the werewolves to be angry at the Ministry so that they would join his side.” Harry explained. “He’s also tried to pass a law to ban muggleborns from holding Ministry jobs, and a law to make it illegal for aurors to cast lethal spells.”
George nodded determinedly. “Then it’s good that Bill will be able to help. Mum and Dad should be able to see that.”

Their second Hogsmeade trip of the year was that Saturday and, as he had the month before, Harry used the opportunity to court Daphne. It was really the only time during the month that the two of them had the opportunity to spend time alone, since normally they spent time with their friends.

As they walked through Hogsmeade, Daphne’s hand tucked into the crook of his arm, Harry found himself comparing this date with their last one. While Daphne still wasn’t completely herself around him, things had definitely gotten a lot better.

“Professor Snape says that the other schools will be arriving next week.” Daphne remarked as they passed the Hogsmeade Post Office.

“Really?” Harry looked down at her serene expression. “I wish Professor Flitwick told us those sorts of things.”

“He said that it would be properly announced in a few days,” Daphne explained. “But he gave us forewarning and reminded us that we need to have researched the visiting students’ customs. He doesn’t want us to embarrass him.”

“How have you researched Durmstrang’s customs?” Harry asked curiously. “They come from so many different cultures.”

“I think that Durmstrang is a lot like Slytherin.” Daphne answered. “No matter whether you’re traditional or not, when you’re in Slytherin, you act as though you were.”

“So no matter what country the students are from, when at Durmstrang they adopt the Bulgarian customs.” Harry worked out. “Don’t you think it is strange that they follow the Bulgarian customs even though their school is in the Netherlands?”

Daphne laughed lightly. “Yes, a little. But then Hogwarts was built in Scotland and we speak English.”

“So does the rest of Scotland.” Harry reminded her with a smile.

“Now maybe,” Daphne acknowledged. “But when Hogwarts was first built, they spoke Gaelic.”

“Who is to say that Hogwarts students didn’t speak Gaelic back then too?” Harry argued mildly.

“Well, ‘Hogwarts: A History’ for a start.” Daphne smirked. “Not to mention that I haven’t met a single ghost or portrait at Hogwarts that speaks Gaelic rather than English.”

Harry looked down at her in surprise. “‘Hogwarts: A History’ says that? I don’t remember having read it.”

“Alright then,” Daphne’s tone was amused. “Maybe ‘Hogwarts: A History’ doesn’t mention the language at all, but my second point still stands.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. “You mean you made that up?”

Daphne’s expression looked tight for a moment as she looked up at Harry’s expression appraisingly, but then she smirked at him. “And it would have worked too, if you weren’t such a bookworm.”

“Really?” Daphne challenged. “Just how many books have you read since we started back at Hogwarts?”

“I don’t think I want to answer that question.” Harry admitted with a smile. “I’ve been told that ladies are rarely impressed by bookworms.”

Daphne laughed softly and Harry found himself comparing the sound to tinkling bells. It was beautiful – she was beautiful and he had never been so glad that he had agreed to the betrothal contract.

“So, do you feel fully prepared for the arrival of the new students?” He asked after a few moments of silence.

“Of course,” Daphne’s tone turned slightly snooty. “Mother has tutored me on all the important European cultures.”

Harry grinned down at her. “What are your thoughts on the clothing that they wear in Bulgaria?”

“Absolutely nonsensical!” Daphne declared. “It’s terribly cold there and the girls still wear scandalously short skirts. It’s indecent!”

“I wondered the same thing,” Harry admitted. “Though I have to admit, I don’t mind the shorter skirts.”

Daphne looked scandalised. “Harry!”

“What?” Harry grinned. “It’s an equal opportunity thing, you know. I’ve heard the girls in Ravenclaw ooing and ahing over pictures of Victor Krum in traditional Bulgarian clothing – it’s much closer fitting than our robes.”

A blush was spreading across Daphne’s cheeks. “Harry!”

Harry chuckled lowly. “Alright, I’ll stop, but not before pointing out that Beauxbatons has shorter skirts as well.”

“Yes, well, they’re French.” Daphne replied disdainfully. “One hardly expects that they would know any better.”

Harry raised an eyebrow in amusement. “Merlin, Daphne, whatever did the French do to you?”

“Do you not find French culture rather…pretentious?” Daphne asked.

Harry laughed loudly, drawing stares from other students walking near them.

“What?” Daphne narrowed her eyes indignantly.

“It’s just a little ironic because that’s what anti-traditionalists think of us.” Harry explained with an apologetic smile. “If you were to ask Ron Weasley what he thought of traditionalists he would call us a lot of horrible names, none of them being pretentious, because it has too many syllables for him, but all meaning about the same thing.”

Daphne curled her upper lip into a small sneer. “We are not pretentious, we simply respect the traditions of our ancestors.”
“I know that,” Harry agreed. “But don’t you think that the French would say the exact same thing?”

Daphne considered that silently. “Perhaps.”

“Besides,” Harry smiled. “I very much doubt that any of the visiting students will outrank you even slightly.”

Daphne looked sceptical. “I am only the daughter of an Ancient and Noble House.”

“Well, yes,” Harry acknowledged. “But you are also the betrothed of the Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.”

A shy, but pleased smile appeared on Daphne’s mouth. “I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

“If you like, I could ask Sirius about finding the Potter Heiress ring.” Harry proposed nervously. “I considered giving it to you before we came to Hogwarts, but I didn’t want to without talking to you first.”

Daphne stopped walking, forcing Harry to stop as well. She dropped her hand from his arm and turned to face him. “Really? Draco hasn’t even given Astoria the Malfoy ring yet and they’ve been betrothed since she was an infant.”

“I know it’s early,” Harry admitted, his stomach twisting nervously. “But we aren’t two people who were forced into this by our parents, we’re friends who agreed to be betrothed.”

Daphne’s eyes looked shiny and Harry really hoped that she wasn’t going to start crying. He had no idea how to deal with crying girls. “You’re serious?”

“Very!” Harry answered firmly, though he was starting to doubt himself. If Daphne was this surprised by the idea, maybe it hadn’t been such a good plan.

A flush spread across Daphne’s face and she looked down shyly. “I would like that, Harry, thank you.”

Harry suddenly felt awkward and he searched his mind for the lessons Cousin Narcissa had given him and Draco on courting. It took him a few seconds, but eventually he remembered a comment that she had made the year before. His stomach twisting nervously, because what if he messed it up and looked like an idiot, Harry picked up her right hand and gently bestowed a kiss to it.

“It would be my pleasure.”

14-14-14

That evening, Harry composed two letters: one to Lord and Lady Greengrass asking their permission to give Daphne the ring and one to Sirius asking for both his permission and the ring. Both the letters were more of a formality than anything, but Harry still couldn’t help but feel sheer relief when, two days later, he received a letter expressing the Greengrasses’ surprise and delight.

Sirius’ response to his letter came later in the day, and in person, when his godfather flooed in for their duelling practise.

“The Heiress ring, Harry?” Sirius asked, as Harry entered the classroom. “Already?”

“Merry meet, Sirius.” Harry greeted him with an amused smirk.

Sirius, who was sitting on the edge of Remus’ desk, waved a hand dismissively. “You’ve only been
betrothed for two months, don’t you think it’s a little too soon?”

“I know it’s not how it’s usually done.” Harry admitted, replacing his smirk with a serious expression. “But I’m going to be Lord Potter in less than a year, so in a way it is like I’m giving the ring to her when we’re sixteen. Besides, it’s not as though we hardly know each other – we’re friends.”

Sirius looked unconvinced. “Last month you told me that she was terrified of you. Things don’t change that quickly, Harry.”

“She wasn’t scared of me.” Harry argued. “She was scared that I might turn out like Eugene.”

“And you’ve managed to completely reassure her that you won’t in one month?” Sirius asked sceptically.

“Mostly.” Harry nodded. “She still gives me worried glances sometimes, but we had a really great time together at Hogsmeade on Saturday.”

“One good date, does not an Heiress ring make.”

“That makes no sense.” Harry replied in a strained tone, he hadn’t expected Sirius to have a problem with him giving Daphne the ring.

“Tell me why you want to do this.” Sirius suggested, his expression softening.

“Because I really like her.” Harry started. “Because she’s going to be Lady Potter one day and she shouldn’t have to curtsey to Draco, Theo and Neville just because I haven’t given her the ring yet. And she definitely shouldn’t have to curtsey to any nobility who comes from Durmstrang or Beauxbatons. Because I want everyone to know that we’re betrothed.”

Sirius turned his attention to the ceiling and stared at it silently for a minute. Despite being used to his godfather’s need to think serious things through silently, Harry struggled not to shift impatiently while he waited.

“Alright.” Sirius said eventually. “You can give her the ring. I presume you’ve asked her parents’ permission?”

“Yes.” Harry answered quickly. “They think it’s great.”

“But before you give her the ring, we’re going to have a conversation.” Sirius grimaced. “Sit down.”

Harry moved a chair out from behind one of the desks and sat uncertainly, what could Sirius want to talk about?

Sirius cleared his throat. “Now, I presume that you know how, uh, witches and wizards, um, get it on?”

Harry froze, his face immediately heating up. “Um, yes, sort of.”

“Sort of?” Sirius repeated in horror. “Merlin, uh, well, alright, well… witches have, um, Quidditch hoops, and wizards have quaffles. Sex happens when the wizard throws their quaffle through the Quidditch hoops, but, uh, sex is also anytime that a witch interacts with the quaffle and anytime the wizard interacts with the Quidditch hoops.”

Harry slid down his chair, he didn’t think he had ever blushed so hard in his life. “Merlin, Sirius...”
Sirius was fiddling with the sleeves of his robes and was looking everywhere but at Harry. “There are different kinds of marriage bonds, but if you want the deepest one, there can’t be any interaction between your, uh, quaffle, and Daphne’s…”

“I get it, Sirius!” Harry interrupted quickly.

Sirius sighed in relief. “Okay. But if you do decide to, uh, play Quidditch together, you have to be careful. If your quaffle goes through any, uh, hoop, there’s a chance that you will end up with a, uh, goal that you’ll have to look after.”

Harry’s shoulders curled in as he rubbed at his face. “Sirius…”

“And there’s always the chance of one of you getting, uh, a disease.” Sirius continued relentlessly. “So, uh, you should probably just make sure that you don’t go anywhere near each other’s, um, Quidditch equipment until you’re bonded.”

Harry nodded quickly, anything to get out of the conversation. “Got it.”

“Okay, good.” Sirius grimaced.

At the sound of someone laughing loudly, Harry and Sirius both turned to their right to see Remus standing in the doorway of his office. Harry slid further down in his chair. Merlin, could this get any more embarrassing.

“Kettle calling the pot black there, Black.” Remus chuckled. “Or should I come up with an awkward Quidditch analogy for that too?”

Sirius groaned loudly and rubbed at his face. “Shut up, Moony.”

14-14-14
“A huge thank you to Ddzahlev who helped me with the Bulgarian in this chapter (and in the chapters to come).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Merlin, Harry!” Draco complained as he sat in the seat beside Harry for Magical Theory. “You couldn’t give me any warning?”

Harry raised an eyebrow questioning. “Warning about what?”

“About what?” Draco parroted in disbelief. “How about the fact that you were going to turn the girls completely insane in one night?”

“Ah,” Harry smiled. “You’re talking about Daphne’s ring.”

“Of course I am.” Draco retorted. “You didn’t think that I, your best friend and cousin, not to mention future brother-in-law, deserved a little warning that you were going to give Daphne the ring?”

“No,” Harry denied honestly. “You knew we were betrothed.”

“Yes, I knew you were betrothed.” Draco acknowledged. “But I thought you were betrothed like Astoria and I are betrothed. You know, officially, but not in a way that really affects anyone. Do you have any idea how nutty the girls are going over this? I’ve already caught Astoria sending me hopeful looks twice this morning, and she’s one of most well-bred girls in the school.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. “Really? I had no idea it would make such an impact. I’m sorry I didn’t warn you.”

“You didn’t think it would make an impact?” Draco repeated slowly. “You know, Harry, for all that you are often as proper and scary as my father, sometimes you act like a complete muggle. Of course it was going to make an impact. Now I’m going to have to give Astoria the Malfoy ring.”

“No you don’t.” Harry shook his head. “And you shouldn’t, not until you mean it. It’s a big deal, not something you give because someone else has done it.”

“Oh,” Draco exclaimed victorious. “So now it’s a big deal.”

“What’s a big deal?” Neville asked, placing his bag on the desk on Harry’s other side and sitting down.

“Harry gave Daphne the Potter heiress ring.” Draco answered shortly.

“Wow,” Neville’s eyes widened. “That is a big deal. The girls must be going crazy.”
“See?” Draco asked Harry smugly. “Neville gets it.”

“Alright, so I should have warned you.” Harry admitted. “I’m sorry, but it was always going to happen sooner or later.”

15-15-15

Draco wasn’t the only one put out by Harry’s actions and Harry found himself on the receiving end of glares from Theo and Blaise as well. Neville and Luna seemed to find the whole thing rather funny, something that Harry put down to the fact that neither of them were betrothed.

It wasn’t just Harry’s friends who were upset about it though. Apparently the non-traditional faction of the school hadn’t known that Harry and Daphne were betrothed and the information seemed to divide them into three groups: those who were horrified that betrothals still happened, those who were jealous that Harry hadn’t given the ring to them, and those who hated Harry because their girlfriends kept going on about how romantic he was.

Unsurprisingly, Ron was in the first group and, while Harry was used to the boy’s harassment, he found himself unexpectedly furious when Ron turned his attention to Daphne. Not that Daphne needed him to defend her of course, she was perfectly capable of verbally eviscerating Ron all on her own.

Harry, who had just come from Ancient Runes, hadn’t actually heard what Ron had said to Daphne (though Draco later told him that it was something foul), but he arrived just in time to witness Daphne’s reaction.

She had spun around to face Ron and raised an icy eyebrow. “Really, Weasley? What would your mother say?”

“Don’t you talk about my mum!” Ron spat, his complexion reddening.

“I understand that you weren’t raised in a traditional home,” Daphne continued scornfully. “But, really, I would have expected the daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett to raise her children better.”

Ron took a step forward in, what Harry presumed was supposed to be, a threatening manner. “You leave my mum out of this!”

Daphne’s upper lip curled slightly and she glanced over to where Harry was standing to her right. “This is what you have been dealing with? I had presumed that anyone stupid enough to insult you would at least have some talent at repartee.”

Harry didn’t think he had ever been so delighted to be betrothed to Daphne as he was at that moment.

“What does that mean?” Ron asked, his entire face was now red which, unfortunately only made his freckles stand out more clearly.

“And a better vocabulary.” Daphne added, ignoring the other boy.

“Yes, well,” Harry sighed theatrically. “We can’t expect everyone to live up to your high standards.”

“Apparently not,” Daphne’s gaze swept over Ron as though he was a rat. “Though I suppose I oughtn’t to expect anything better from a blood traitor!”
Spittle was gathering in the corners of Ron’s mouth as he snarled at her. “Yeah? Well you’re nothing but a haughty cow!”

Harry’s wand fell into his hand and he clenched in angrily.

“Haughty?” Daphne asked him. “Do you even know what that word means, Weasley? After all, we did just determine that you’re vocabulary is shocking.”

Harry could see the whites in Ron’s eyes as he glared hatefully at Daphne.

“Of course I bloody well know what it means!”

“Well?” Daphne asked, before pausing expectantly.

Ron sneered at her.

“Anyone?” Daphne asked lightly.

“Arrogantly disdainful or scornful.” Harry answered her, his tone equally light. “And I don’t think you’re arrogant at all. I think you have a perfectly correct understanding of your importance.”

“I am scornful though.” Daphne admitted. “And disdainful for that matter. But then, Weasley, you make to easy. It’s as though you’re asking people to scorn you.”

“Bitch!” Ron snarled, his wand in his hand.

Daphne laughed lightly as everyone around them gasped. “Yes, perhaps, I am that as well. But at least I am a well-bred ‘bitch’. Unlike you. You had the potential there, of course, what a pity it will never be realised.”

At that, Daphne turned her back to Ron and began to sweep out of the corridor. Harry followed her, his longer legs easily catching up with her within a few steps, and he knew that Draco, Neville and Theo would be right behind them.

“Anteoculatia!” Ron’s voice shouted from behind them.

Harry’s stomach dropped as he spun as quickly as he could, his wand in his hand. Why hadn’t he been prepared for that? After all, it hadn’t been that long since Ron had cursed Neville in the back.

“Protego!” Another voice called and Ron’s curse was neatly absorbed into the light blue shield that had formed around Daphne.

Harry looked around for the caster of the shield and was shocked to see Professor Moody standing in the doorway of his classroom.

Moody’s attention wasn’t on Daphne anymore though, instead his wand was pointed at Ron and, a few seconds later, Ron transformed into a Weasel.

Harry couldn’t have prevented the bark of laughter that left his throat if he had tried. How brilliant was that?

“Weasley!” Moody barked, his wand still pointed at the weasel. “You never, ever, curse someone in the back!”

15-15-15
After their final class on Friday, Harry returned his school bag to his dorm before making his way down to the Entrance Hall where the school was congregating to meet the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students. The Heads of the four Hogwarts Houses were there, arranging the students into lines, and Harry made sure to end up beside Luna. It was frustrating to be forced to stand with his House when he would much rather be with Draco, Neville, Daphne and his other friends, but at least he had Luna. Poor Neville was stuck standing beside Ron.

Once they were all lined up, the professors led them outside and directed them to line up outside the castle. It was already six in the evening and after they had been waiting for ten minutes, Harry began to get cold. He had never been so glad that he had mastered a wandless heating charm.

He rested in right hand on his leg and carefully cast the spell, wincing slightly when his hand got too hot. He repeated the spell again, this time with his hand on his stomach, and sighed happily as his body reacted positively to the heat. Then, Harry subtly placed his hand on Luna’s arm and cast the spell on her. Luna, who had been shivering slightly, smiled up at him thankfully.

The students began to get restless as more minutes passed, but eventually Dumbledore announced that he could see the Beauxbatons delegation approaching. At first Harry couldn’t see anything, but then a ginormous powder blue carriage appeared in the sky being pulled by gold coloured flying horses the size of elephants. Harry was hard pressed not to snort in amusement as he remembered Daphne’s description of the French as being pretentious – she hadn’t been wrong.

Amusingly, Madame Maxime was, to an average witch, what her horses were to normal horses and her students looked positively tiny next to her. Tiny and cold – their silk uniforms, which were the same colour as the carriage, definitely hadn’t been made for a Scottish autumn.

After Madame Maxime and Dumbledore had exchanged pleasantries, the Headmistress led her students into the castle to get warm, and the Hogwarts students were left shivering outside waiting for Durmstrang.

When Durmstrang’s ship eventually appeared in the Great Lake, Harry couldn’t help but be impressed. That was much more like it – he could only imagine what magic they had used to make it work. The Durmstrang students were dressed much more appropriately for the weather and Harry felt a twingle of envy when he saw the fur trimmed cloaks they were all wearing. The girls each had a fur muff as well, as did their Headmistress.

Harry observed the headmistress curiously. According to Sirius, she’d had the position for less than a year after Voldemort had killed the last Durmstrang headmaster for betraying him.

Madame Brusilova looked as tiny next to some of her students as the Beauxbaton students had looked next to Madame Maxime. She looked to be about the same height and width as Luna, which was to say under five foot and petite. She was wearing a black dress, but her cloak was the same blood red colour as those of her students which offset her black hair strikingly.

Madame Brusilova approached Dumbledore confidently and, just as Madame Maxime had, extended it for Dumbledore to kiss. As the two of them exchanged pleasantries, which sounded a lot less pleasant than Dumbledore’s conversation with Maxime had been, Harry looked the Durmstrang students over.

Whereas most of the Beauxbaton students had been slender, the Durmstrang students all seemed to have a lot more meat to them – especially the boys. Harry took in each face among the students, before stopping in surprise at the sight of one of the last boys in the row. Was that Victor Krum?

Apparently other Hogwarts’ students had seen him as well and Harry could hear Ron loudly
exclaiming at his presence. Harry grimaced, he hated the idea that he and Ron had something in common – even if that something was awe for a world class Quidditch player.

Finally, Dumbledore and Madame Brusilova finished their conversation and they were all allowed to file into the Great Hall for dinner. Harry wasn’t too cold, he had been recasting the heating charm every couple of minutes, but a lot of other students were shivering violently and let out embarrassingly loud moans of pleasure when they entered the warm Great Hall.

The Beauxbaton students were all sitting at the Ravenclaw table and Harry scoffed inwardly as many of his Housemates, including his dorm-mates, competed to get a seat near them. Sure the visiting students would be interesting to talk to, but there was no hurry – they would be at Hogwarts all year.

The Durmstrang students didn’t seem to know where to sit, but they eventually took seats at the Slytherin table. Harry couldn’t help but feel slightly envious as Draco ended up seated across from Victor Krum – Draco barely knew anything about the seeker position.

When all the students were seated, Dumbledore entered the Great Hall with Brusilova and Maxime beside him. Harry watched in interest as all the Beauxbaton and Durmstrang students leapt to their feet and stood politely until their Headmistresses were seated. The non-traditional students from Hogwarts scoffed at the action, but Harry thought that it was wonderful. He thought that it would be nice to attend a school where everyone was traditional.

It was an entertaining meal. The Beauxbaton students didn’t seem impressed by Hogwarts and Harry couldn’t find it in himself to feel defensive about his school. After all, both Beauxbaton and Durmstrang were rated above Hogwarts internationally. The most interesting thing about the Beauxbaton students though was that one of the girls seemed to be a veela. Harry wasn’t sure whether that was true or not, but that would definitely explain the way people were behaving around her.

As he was finishing dessert, Harry looked up to the Head Table and was surprised to note that two more people were seated there. He recognised Ludo Bagman from the Quidditch World Cup of course, but that wasn’t the biggest shock. Why was Sirius there? He quickly spelled his sleeves up to his elbows in respect.

A few minutes later, Dumbledore stood to his feet and addressed the Hall.

“Here we all are,” Dumbledore said, beaming at them. “Waiting excitedly for the start of something wonderful. But, before we go any further, I would like to say a few words. First, I would like to welcome Madame Maxime and her students from the Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and Madame Brusilova and her students from the Durmstrang Institute. I would also like to welcome Mr. Ludo Bagman, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports and Mr. Sirius Black, who is a member of the Wizengamot. Mr. Bagman has spent many long hours working to arrange this Tournament,” Dumbledore continued. “And Mr. Black has opted to join him as a judge for the Tournament alongside myself, Madame Maxime and Madame Brusilovaa.”

Harry smirked, apparently Dumbledore wasn’t pleased that Sirius was involved. Harry did wonder how Sirius had gotten the job, especially since Dumbledore had obviously been against the idea.

Dumbledore went on to explain how the champions would be chosen and, as the older students around him practically quivered in excitement, Harry found himself relieved that he wasn’t allowed to enter. He definitely didn’t have time for the Tournament and had no need for more money or fame, but he doubted that excuse would convince many people. At least this way no one could judge him for his decision.
After Dumbledore’s speech had finished, and he had dismissed the students, the two headmistresses stood up and their students followed suit. Harry stood up as well and began to make his way through the hall to find Sirius.

He was passing the Durmstrang students who were still standing near the Slytherin table, waiting for the headmistress to come and collect them, when Draco stopped him.

“Harry,” Draco started, his tone formal. “Please allow me to introduce to you Viktor ot rodyt na Krum. Krum, this is Harry Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.”

Krum’s eyes widened and his eyes flicked towards Harry’s forehead before he bowed politely, his arms at his sides. “Merry meet, Heir Black.” He greeted Harry in a thick accent.

“Dobre zavaril.” Harry greeted him with a polite nod.

Krum’s mouth fell open. “Vie govorite bulgarski?” (You speak Bulgarian?)

“Some.” Harry answered in Bulgarian before switching to English. “It is an honour to meet you. I have learnt a lot from watching you play Quidditch.”

Krum smiled widely. “You are a seeker?”

“Yes,” Harry nodded, before seeing Sirius standing up out of the corner of his eyes. “I’m sorry, I need to go. Merry Part.”

“Yes, Merry Part.” Krum agreed with another bow. “Ve shall have to speak again. I vant to discuss Quidditch with you.”

“Of course.” Harry agreed enthusiastically, before moving away to meet Sirius who was making his way towards him.

“Merry meet, Sirius.” Harry greeted him politely as they met each other.

“Merry meet.” Sirius agreed, before pulling Harry into a hug. “It’s good to see you, kiddo.”

“I can’t believe you’re a judge!” Harry exclaimed. “How could you not tell me?”

Sirius’ eyes twinkled. “I wanted to surprise you. Did it work?”

“Definitely.” Harry admitted, before lowering his voice. “How did you convince Dumbledore to let you?”

Sirius smirked as he glanced to where Dumbledore was talking to Bagman. “I didn’t give him much of a choice. The Ministry was expected to provide two judges, Ludo was an obvious choice and then they were thinking about forcing Magnus Drottle to do it, since he’s the Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation, but the guy’s a parchment roller. Good at his job, but a bit of a wet fish and would have hated having to actually interact with teenagers. So I volunteered. Drottle was delighted to get out of it and nobody could really argue that it wouldn’t be useful having me here.”

Harry smirked in reply. “That’s brilliant. How long are you staying?”

“I’ll be here all year.” Sirius grinned excitedly. “It’ll be great!”

“Dumbledore must hate that.” Harry chuckled.
“Oh, yeah.” Sirius agreed, not looking the least bit upset about it.

15-15-15

The Ravenclaw Common Room was a buzz that night, with all the students excitedly exclaiming over the events of the evening. Harry made his way to his dorms, before grimacing inwardly when he realised that Terry, Michael, Rodney and Anthony were already there. He and dorm-mates spent most of their time ignoring each other, but Anthony had been one of the louder opponents of his and Daphne’s betrothal.

Whatever conversation the other boys had been having stopped when Harry walked in, but they all turned to stare at him.

“We saw you talking to Victor Krum!” Terry exclaimed after a long pause.

“Yes.” Harry answered blandly, opening his trunk and pulling out his pyjamas.

“What is he like?” Michael asked. “What did he say?”

Harry ignored them as he gathered up his homework.

“Come on, Harry!” Terry pleaded. “You talked to Victor Krum! What was he like?”

Harry hung his bag from his shoulder, before turning to face them. “We’re not friends!”

“W-what?” Terry stuttered in shock.

“You don’t get to ignore me for two years and then suddenly decide that you want to gossip with me because I talked to someone famous.” Harry snapped. “So let’s just keep ignoring each other.”

“Don’t be such a bloody prat.” Michael scowled. “We just want to know what Krum’s like.”

“Then go and talk to him yourself.” Harry challenged him. “I’m bloody sick of you all ignoring me unless you want something from me.”

Anthony sneered at him. “Don’t bother, Michael. We all know that Potter’s thinks he’s too good for us.”

Harry pressed his lips together tightly. “Are you kidding me? You were the ones who decided you didn’t want to be friends with me! Now, I’ll admit I’m not exactly upset about that now since that proves that you were bloody awful friends in the first place. But you don’t get to rewrite history like that.”

Terry, Michael and Rodney looked away guiltily.

Harry shook his head in frustration and stalked out of the dorm and into the Common Room to find a private desk to work at. He hated the idea that he would have to spend another three and half years sharing a room with them.

Chapter End Notes

Exciting news!! I have officially finished writing this story which means that from now
on I will be updating twice a week - on Tuesdays and Fridays.
The day after the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students arrived was both Halloween and a Saturday, which meant that Harry got to spend some time flying. He’d found that Saturday mornings, when he’d had Quidditch Practice previous years, were one of few times in the week that he had time to spend a few hours in the sky. Draco, Theo, and occasionally the Weasley twins, had all started meeting him at the Quidditch Pitch and flying with him on Saturdays too. It was nice to fly with others and made the lack of Quidditch Cup that year easier to bear.

On this day though, Harry noticed some extra people standing with his friends near the Quidditch Hoops. As he got closer he saw that they were wearing Durmstrang uniforms and, when Harry was less twenty feet away from them, he recognised one of them as Victor Krum.

Harry could feel his heartbeat increasing in his excitement and slowed his pace so that he would have time to suppress all his gleeful emotions that, if allowed free reign, would probably lead to him embarrassing himself and his Houses.

“Merry meet.” Draco nodded to him, the others echoing the words a second behind him.

“Merry meet.” Harry nodded in reply to Draco, before turning to Krum with a neutral expression. “Dobro utro, Krum.”


Harry looked at the three Durmstrang boys that Krum had gestured towards and nodded in acknowledgement.

“Anastas, Petar, Marin,” Krum continued in Bulgarian. “This is Harry Potter, Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.”

Harry nodded again as the boys all bowed. “Draco, I presume the rest of you have all been introduced?”

“Yes.”

“I hope that you will not mind our joining you in the air.” Krum told Harry sincerely. “Ven Malfoy told us that you would all be flying this morning, ve could not resist. It will be good to be in the air again.”

“How long has it been since you’ve been flying?”

“Almost a week.” Krum admitted sadly. “And even then we were not out for long. It is very cold at Durmstrang, not like here.”

They all mounted their brooms and pushed off the ground. Harry somehow managed to resist the temptation to sit and watch Krum like an awestruck fool and, instead, began his usual warmup loop around the pitch.

It was great to be able to fly again and, after a few minutes, he had almost (though not entirely) forgotten Krum’s presence. He zipped through the air, forcing his broom to go as quickly as it could, and ignored the voice in his head that accusing him of showing off for Krum – after all, he always
did a lap the beginning of his flying sessions.

When he turned back to where the others were, he saw that Draco, Theo, and the three Durmstrang students who weren’t Krum, had started some chaser drills. Krum was practising some of incredible death defying stunts almost fifty feet above them.

Harry gripped his broom nervously as he steered towards where Krum was. Would Krum mind if Harry asked him some questions?

“You fly very fast.” Krum commented, halting his tricks as Harry hovered near it. “It vas most impressive.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. “Thanks!”

“You said you were a seeker, yes?” Krum asked.

“Yes.” Harry agreed quickly. “Your flying during the World Cup was incredible. I learnt so much, but I haven’t had the opportunity to try it out much since we don’t have any Quidditch games this year.”

Krum was watching him intently. “What did you learn?”

“I had never seen anyone perform so many tricks before.” Harry explained, trying to not sound too enthusiastic. “I didn’t understand at first, but then I read up on why seekers did it.”

“It is very dangerous.” Krum commented neutrally. “As vell as very tiring.”

“I know.” Harry acknowledged.

“Would you like to learn some of my tricks?” Krum asked and, for a moment, Harry was sure he had misheard him wrong – the older boy’s accent was very strong.

Harry had to bite his tongue to prevent himself from shouting in glee. “I’d love to.”


Harry frowned in concentration as he tried to remember his Bulgarian lessons. “Doesn’t that mean certain death?”

Krum laughed loudly. “Yes, but you vill do it vell I think.”

Dinner that night was tense, not only because everyone was waiting eagerly for the names of the contestants to be announced, but also because the Durmstrang and Beauxbaton students seemed absolutely horrified by the non-traditional Halloween decorations.

While different countries celebrated Hallows Eve differently, Harry doubted any of them used pumpkins with faces carved out of them. The Beauxbaton students were quite vocal about their disgust of the decorations, but Harry was amused to note that not even that was enough to stop Anthony from staring at the veela student lustfully. The Durmstrang students were quieter about their disgust, but Harry had seen the way their lips had curled as they entered the hall and took it all in.

Harry, who had been subjected to Draco’s annual rant against Dumbledore’s decision to replace Hallows Eve with muggle Halloween, understood how they felt. Though, having said that, he had no idea what a traditional Hallows Eve feast would look like.
After the meal was finally over and the plates had been cleared away, Dumbledore stood to his feet and announced that the Goblet was ready to make its decision. Then, for some bizarre reason, Dumbledore extinguished all the lights except the candles inside the pumpkins which make them look even more grotesque. The only reason Harry could think of for Dumbledore having extinguished the lights was to add to the drama (it certainly made the Goblet’s glow stand out more clearly) but such theatrics were hardly needed – the whole room was already tense with anticipation.

Finally, after a long, tense, silence, the Goblet glowed red and shot out sparks, along with piece of paper. Dumbledore, grabbed onto the paper and read it aloud.


Harry joined the rest of the students in cheering for Victor, as the older seeker stood up from the Slytherin table and made his way out of the hall and into the antechambers. They had flown together for over three hours that morning, only stopping when it was time for lunch, and Victor had even asked if they could fly together again. Harry could hardly believe it had actually happened.

When the applause died down, and everyone’s attention was focussed on the Goblet again, another piece of paper was shot out.

“The champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour!” Dumbledore announced.

Harry looked down the table to see the Beauxbaton student, who was probably a veela, stand up and gracefully make her way towards the antechamber where Victor was waiting. As Fleur walked past him, Harry could feel the tug of her allure pulling at his Occlumency shields – it wasn’t nearly as strong as the allure that had come from the veelas at the Quidditch World Cup, but he still quickly fell into his half-meditation state the instant he felt it. There was no way he wanted to make a fool of himself as many of the other male students were.

The other Beauxbaton students looked devastated, a few of the girls were even crying. It was a rather Gryffindor like reaction in Harry’s opinion, or rather a non-tradionalist’s reaction. Did the girls have no decorum? Or, at the very least, no shame?

When Fleur had exited the Great Hall, everyone turned their attention back to the Goblet again. The tension in the hall was palatable. This was the name that most of them were really interested in, who would be the Hogwarts’ Champion?

Finally, the final piece of paper flew out of the Goblet and Dumbledore read out the name.

“The Hogwarts’ Champion is…” Dumbledore paused for dramatic effect and Harry was hard pressed not to roll his eyes. “Cedric Diggory!”

The Hufflepuff students rose to their feet and began cheering boisterously for Cedric. Harry clapped along with them, pleased by the Goblet’s choice. Cedric was a good guy, not to mention a traditionalist, and it would be nice for Hufflepuff to be House of the Hogwarts’ Champion. Hufflepuff was much like Ravenclaw, in that its achievements often were drowned out by the rivalry between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw.

Cedric stood up with his house and then, after having accepted handshakes and hugs from many of his housemates, began to make his way to the antechamber. It reminded Harry of the reason he hadn’t wanted to be sorted into Hufflepuff – at least in Ravenclaw Luna was the only one who tried to hug him.

The cheering for Cedric was louder and went on for longer than for either of the other Champions,
but eventually it died down and the Hufflepuffs took their seats again.

“Excellent!” Dumbledore clapped his hands together. “We have our three champions. I am sure that you will each continue to support, and cheer for, the champions of your schools. While there are only three champions, you can certainly do all you can to encourage and assist them. The…”

Dumbledore broke off suddenly as the Goblet, which was still glowing, suddenly spat out sparks for the fourth time along with another piece of paper. The students, and adults, immediately began whispering to one another in confusion and Harry shot Luna a questioning look. After all, as a seer, Luna was probably the person in the room with the best chance of understanding what was happening. Luna looked just as confused as everyone else though, so Harry turned his attention back to Dumbledore who was staring at the piece of paper in his hand.

“Harry Potter!” Dumbledore announced eventually.

The hall was silent for a second, before it erupted with shouts of confusion and anger. Harry hardly heard any of it though, he was staring at Dumbledore in horror. There was no way that piece of paper could have his name on it. He hadn’t even been within ten feet of the Goblet all day. He hadn’t even wanted to enter the competition.

Harry looked away from Dumbledore, towards Sirius who was staring at him in shock.

Harry stood up unsurely, what was he supposed to do? Did he go through to the antechamber with the others? Or should he just pretend none of it had happened.

Dumbledore cleared his throat. “Mr. Potter? If you would come up here please?”

Harry’s hands were sweating and his stomach was churning, as he made his way up to where Dumbledore was standing next to the Goblet. Sirius, who had stood up when Harry had, met him there a reassuring smile.

“Through the door, then, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore instructed, his expression cold.

Harry nodded in understanding as he moved passed the Headmaster and towards the antechamber door. Sirius fell into step beside him and Harry shot his godfather a grateful look. He didn’t know what he would have done if Sirius hadn’t been there.

The antechamber was small, about the size of the Elladora Sitting Room at Grimmauld Place and the walls were covered by numerous paintings of witches and wizards. Opposite the door there was a lit fireplace and Cedric, Victor and Fleur Delacour were standing around it.

Cedric spotted Harry first and gave him a confused look. Then, as Sirius followed Harry into the room, Cedric quickly wiped the confusion from his face and bowed low.

“Merry meet, Lord Black, Heir Black.”

Victor bowed a traditional Bulgarian bow, first to Sirius and then to Harry. Fleur curtsied deeply, her nose wrinkled in obvious confusion.

“Merry meet.” Sirius greeted them briskly with a nod and Harry did the same.

“What’s happening, Harry?” Cedric asked after a moment of silence.

Harry shook his head. “I don’t know.”
Then the door opened again and Dumbledore arrived, along with the two Headmistresses, Bagman, Flitwick, Moody, McGonagall and Snape.

Harry moved out of the way, so that he was standing near one of the corners and was relieved when Sirius positioned himself slightly in front of Harry.

“How wonderful!” Ludo Bagman declared. He made to move towards Harry, but obviously thought better of the idea after Sirius gave him a look. “A fourth Triwizard Champion!”

Cedric’s mouth fell open. “What?”

“I do not understand.” Fleur announced, looking towards Madam Maxine in confusion.

Victor didn’t say anything, but he gave Harry a considering glance.

“It is a meestake, of course.” Madame Maxine decided, narrowing her eyes in Harry’s direction. “Zere can only be three Champions.”

Madam Brusilova was looking very severe as she moved to stand beside Victor. Harry thought the sight of them together looked rather humorous, since Victor was over a foot taller than his Headmistress. “I have never heard of such a thing happening before.”

“That’s because it hasn’t!” Bagman told her gleefully.

Dumbledore stepped towards Harry. “How did you put your name in the Goblet, Harry?”

Sirius cleared his throat. “Mr. Potter, Headmaster Dumbledore. I do not believe that my heir has given you the right to acknowledge him so informally.”

“Well, I never!” McGonagall declared. “Really, Sirius, now is not the time!”

“Also,” Sirius continued, as though she had not spoken. “Since my godson is underage, I require that you address all questions to me.”

Madam Maxime sniffed. “So ‘e is old enough to zink heemself worthy of competing, but not old enough to speak for heemself?”

“I must agree with Madam Maxime, Sirius.” Dumbledore said sadly. “If Mr. Potter is old enough to enter the tournament, then surely he is old enough to answer some questions.”

“Then shall we take this opportunity to submit a proposal to the Wizengamot to emancipate him? It would be an easy case to argue, after all, the Goblet seems to have declared him worthy of it. Of course, that would mean he would be eligible to becoming Lord Potter immediately.” Sirius commented blandly.

Dumbledore blanched. “It would not be fair to give him such a large responsibility so young.”

“Well, then.” Sirius nodded. “I suggest you direct your questions to me.”

Professor Snape was standing silently by the door watching Harry expressionlessly. Harry caught his eye and tried to express his innocence through his gaze – he didn’t want his favourite professor to think that he had entered the Tournament illegally.

Dumbledore sighed sadly. “Very well. Sirius, how did Mr. Potter enter his name into the Goblet?”

Sirius looked back at Harry. “Harry?”
“I didn’t.” Harry denied as calmly as he could, given the circumstances. “I haven’t been within ten feet of the Goblet all day.”

Victor bent down to whisper something into his Headmistress’ ear.

“Eet ees rubbish, of course!” Madam Maxime declared angrily. “Eef ‘e did not place ‘ees name een the Goblet, zen ‘ow could ‘ees name ‘ave come out?”

“I don’t know.” Harry admitted helplessly, before falling silent when Sirius gave him a warning look.

“I find myself somevat unconcerned as to how the boy’s name ended up in the Goblet.” Madam Brusilova decided, her quiet voice carrying through the room. “I am more concerned that Hogwarts now has two champions.”

Harry found himself nodding in agreement. That didn’t seem fair at all. Not that he expected that he had much of a chance against the three other Champions. They were all at least three years older than him.

“Yes!” Madam Maxime agreed loudly. “I insist zat my students each be allowed to re-enter zeir names eento ze Goblet. Eef ‘ogwarts ees to ‘ave two champions, so will Beauxbatons.”

“Impossible!” Bagman declared. “The Goblet doesn’t work like that! We can’t just put more names in and expect it to choose between them. The fires gone out.”

“Then vhy must ve use the Goblet?” Madam Brusilova asked. “Let us pull the names from a hat or, better yet, let us choose our next best student to compete also.”

Dumbledore shook his head. “That won’t do. It is the Triwizard Tournament. We cannot add extra champions in as we wish.”

“Why not?” Sirius challenged him.

“The magical laws that govern the tournament won’t allow it.” Dumbledore said firmly.

“And yet they did not prevent a fourth champion from being added.” Sirius argued. “Besides, are you so sure that the rules would prevent it?”

“Someone must have fooled the Goblet into somehow accepting Mr. Potter’s name as though he was from a fourth school.” Dumbledore explained.

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “That sounds like complex magic. Do you really believe that my fourteen year old godson is capable of doing that?”

Dumbledore opened his mouth, but didn’t say anything.

“Black makes a good point, Headmaster.” Moody agreed grimly. “More likely, someone else entered Potter’s name for him.”

“Zen ‘e ‘ad an older student do eet!” Fleur declared, tossing her hair haughtily.

“No student could have fooled the Goblet, girl!” Moody snapped, causing both Madam Maxime and Fleur to straighten indignantly.

Harry noted that a few of the people in the room, including Dumbledore and McGonagall, were giving Sirius suspicious looks.
“So,” Madam Brusilova started. “Madam Maxime and I vill each choose one more champion to represent our school.”

Dumbledore frowned. “That will not do. If this works, why should you get your two best champions, when we clearly do not?”

Harry didn’t disagree with Dumbledore, he was sure their seventh years who were a lot more qualified than he was, but it seemed rude to say it so absolutely.

“Are you suggesting that ve each choose a fourth year to compete?” Madam Brusilova asked, her upper lip curled. “I vill not put my students at such a risk.”

“We should probably check to see that it’s allowed first.” Bagman said nervously. “I, uh, don’t know the rulebook exactly, but we’ll do some research and get back to you.”

“Very vell.” Madam Brusilova agreed. “Is that alright vith you, Madam Maxime?”

“Yes.” Madam Maxime inclined her head.

“Right, good!” Bagman rubbed his hands together with excitement. “Shall we give the champions their instructions then?”

“Not yet, Ludo.” Sirius answered quickly. “We are still missing two contestants.”

“Ah,” Bagman looked crestfallen. “Right.”

“I will ensure that we have an answer to this question by breakfast tomorrow.” Sirius promised them all. “For now though, Miss Delacour, Mr. Krum, Mr. Diggory, Mr. Potter, congratulations on being selected as your schools’ champions.”

“Thank you, Lord Black.” Cedric answered with a nod, while Fleur curtsied and Krum bowed shallowly.


Dumbledore looked as though he had sucked on a lemon.

16-16-16
Chapter 17

After they had been dismissed from the room, Harry and Cedric followed Sirius back into the Great Hall. It was empty now, the other students having returned to their common rooms, so Harry took the opportunity to speak to Cedric.

“I’m sorry.” Harry told him sincerely. “I honestly never even considered putting my name in the cup.”

Cedric studied his expression carefully. “So you really didn’t put your name in?”

“Yes!” Harry assured him. “I didn’t want to be a Champion and I certainly wouldn’t have wanted to get in the way of you being Hogwarts’ Champion.”

“I believe you.” Cedric sounded almost surprised. “So there’s no reason to apologise.”

“I know,” Harry sighed. “But I still feel as though I should. You thought you were going to be one of three champions and now you’re going to be one of six.”

Cedric grimaced. “As though Krum and Delacour weren’t going to be hard enough to beat. Especially Krum, my knees go weak every time I see him. I’ve been following his career for three years – he’s my hero.”

“I know what you mean.” Harry acknowledged. “He’s amazing!”

“I heard that you flew with him this morning.” Cedric commented.

“Yes!” Harry asked in surprise. “How?”

“You were flying on the Quidditch Pitch.” Cedric reminded him. “A few people saw you and told the rest of the school. Did he really teach you one of his tricks?”

“Yes,” Harry confirmed. “He was amazing!”

Cedric looked envious. “That sounds incredible!”

“Maybe you could join us next time?” Harry offered. “If there is a next time – I hope he’s not too angry about me being in the tournament.”

Sirius cleared his throat. “Harry? It’s time to go.”

Harry glanced towards his godfather guiltily, he’d almost forgotten Sirius was still there.

“Merry part, Lord Black, Harry.” Cedric bowed politely.

“Merry part.” Harry agreed with a nod, before following Sirius out of the hall.

“You handled that very well.” Sirius commented as they walked through the corridors.

“Thank you.” Harry acknowledged. “I feel bad for him, and for Victor and Delacour. A six champion tournament isn’t what they signed up for.”

“No,” Sirius agreed. “But then you didn’t sign up for the Tournament at all.”
“Do I have to take part in it?” Harry asked. “I’m really busy – I don’t think I have time to fit it in.”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Sirius answered as they climbed the stairs up to the fifth floor. “For your name to have come out of the Goblet, you had to have written your name on the paper personally. That, along with the magic of the Goblet, will have created a magically binding contract which will force you to compete.”

“But I didn’t write my name on the paper.” Harry protested. “I didn’t even consider entering.”

“Your intent in writing your name doesn’t matter,” Sirius explained. “Whoever put your name in the Goblet likely just ripped your name off a homework assignment or letter. Besides, the Tournament won’t take too much time out of your schedule. There are only three tasks, plus a few other events that you will need to be at.”

Harry sighed. “But I’ll have to be preparing for the challenges, won’t I?”

“That depends.” Sirius answered as they stopped outside the door to Remus’ Quarters.

“On what?”

“Prongs.” Sirius said, causing the door to swing open. “On whether you want to win or not.”

Harry followed Sirius through the door as he considered that. Did he want to win? Yes, of course he did, though that would hardly be fair to the original three champions. Still, he was at least three years younger than they were, so the chances of him actually beating them were very slim.

“Merry meet, Lord Black.” Multiple voices chorused and, as Harry stepped out from behind his godfather, he saw the majority of his friends standing around the room. They were all bowing, except for Fred and George who were looking rather uncomfortable.

“Merry meet.” Sirius acknowledged them, before looking questioningly over to where Remus was standing.

“What happened, Harry?” Draco asked, sitting back into the armchair he had been standing in front of.

The others all began sitting down as well. Neville and Luna were sitting together on Remus’ small couch, Daphne, Takashi and Theo were sitting in armchairs, and Fred, George and Blaise were all sitting on large cushions that had obviously been transfigured for the occasion.

Harry looked around for a place to sit, before giving up and deciding to perch on the side of Daphne’s armchair. He couldn’t wait to learn how to transfigure things as big as armchairs.

Daphne looked surprised when Harry sat on the arm of her chair, but she didn’t say anything.

“What happened?” Fred repeated Draco’s question impatiently. “How did you manage to get past Dumbledore’s age line?”

“I didn’t.” Harry denied firmly. “I have no idea how my name got into the Goblet. Sirius thinks that someone else must have put it in.”

There was a long silence and Harry could see his friends trying to decide whether or not they believed him.
“I haven’t been within ten feet of the Goblet all day.” Harry told them. “I didn’t even want to enter.”

“So what’s going to happen?” Draco asked.

“Are you in trouble?” Neville put in.

“I would be if Dumbledore had his way.” Harry smirked. “But Sirius defended me. I have to compete in the Tournament, but they’re probably going to add two more Champions as well – one from Durmstrang and one from Beauxbatons – to make it fair.”

“It still won’t be fair though, will it?” Draco pointed out. “You’re only fourteen. They’re all seventeen.”

“Why would someone want to put your name in the Goblet?” Takashi asked. “It seems odd.”

“I don’t know.” Harry sighed. “But you’re right, it is odd. Dumbledore was furious.”

“I’m sure.” Draco smirked gleefully.

Harry looked up as Sirius cleared his throat, before remembering that Sirius had never met Takashi. “Sirius? This is Takashi Noda. Takashi, this is my godfather- Lord Black of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.”

Takashi stood quickly and bowed again. “Merry meet, my lord.”

“Merry meet.” Sirius nodded, before his gaze swept around the room. “It was very nice of you to all come and see Harry, but Remus and I need to talk to him alone now and curfew is in ten minutes. You should all be getting back to your Common Rooms.”

Draco stood quickly, and the other’s followed behind him. “Of course, Sirius. Merry Part.”

Harry watched as his friends filed out of the room, before moving to sit properly in the chair that Daphne had vacated. Sirius shut the door behind Takashi and then sat beside Remus on the small couch.

“How do you feel, Harry?” Remus asked kindly.

“I don’t know.” Harry admitted. “I can hardly believe this has happened. I didn’t even want to be part of the Tournament. I was glad that I was too young to enter.”

“I’m sorry, pup.” Sirius told him.

There was a long silence, before Harry spoke again. “What does this mean for the Tournament? You were only expecting three contestants, will having six change things?”

“Yeah,” Sirius groaned. “The first task will definitely have to change, I don’t know about the other two. Bloody hell, there’s going to be a lot of work to do.”

Remus elbowed Sirius in the side. “Language.”

“But it’s not your fault.” Sirius continued. “So don’t bother apologising. You’re the victim here, Harry. Everybody else signed up to take part in the tournament, or help organise it. You didn’t.”
“Why would anyone want to put my name in?” Harry asked. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

Sirius and Remus exchanged a worried look and Harry’s stomach twisted nervously.

“What?” He asked.

“We can’t know for sure,” Sirius started carefully. “But we think that it might have been You-Know-Who.”

Harry stared at him in confusion, and a growing sense of horror. “Why?”

“The Tournament is dangerous.” Remus explained. “A lot of students, older and more experienced than you, have died in it. Maybe You-Know-Who is hoping that the Tournament will kill you for him.”

“Are the tasks that dangerous?” Harry asked Sirius in horror.

“They’re not supposed to be and we could be wrong.” Sirius answered. “It’s just an idea, but we thought you should be aware that it’s a possibility.”

Harry groaned. “Then I really will have to spend a lot of time preparing for the tasks. It doesn’t really matter if I win or lose, but I definitely want to survive.

Despite it being almost an entire hour after curfew, the Ravenclaw Common Room was still filled with students when Harry stepped through the door.


Harry sighed, he really wasn’t in the mood to explain everything again. “I didn’t put my name in the Goblet. They think that someone else must have done it without me knowing about it.”

The majority of the Ravenclaws looked sceptical, but a few seemed to believe him.

“Are they going to let you compete?” Jeremy asked excitedly.

“They have no choice.” Harry answered, beginning to inch his way towards the dormitories.

“Yes!” Jeremy cheered excitedly. “We have a Triwizard Champion!”

“Take that, Gryffindor and Slytherin.” A fifth year shouted.

“Did they tell you anything about the first task?” Someone asked.

Harry sighed and looked hopefully towards the dormitories. “No, not yet, but we have a meeting in the morning. So I should probably head off to bed.”

The students looked disappointed but, after a few more questions, they eventually let him leave.

Harry pushed his dormitory door open in relief, only to wince inwardly when he saw his dorm-mates waiting for him with hostile expressions.

“How’d you get past the age line?” Terry asked belligerently.

Harry almost groaned. “I didn’t put my name in the Goblet – as you would know if you had taken part in the question and answer session in the Common Room instead of waiting to ambush me here.”
Anthony snorted disbelievingly. “Yeah, right, Potter. If you didn’t put your name in, who did?”

Heat flushed through Harry’s body. “Well, currently, our number one suspect is Voldemort!”

The other boys flinched and Harry regretted his words instantly. Nothing good could come from them knowing that.


“Haven’t you heard, Michael?” Anthony asked sarcastically. “Potter here is the most important person in the world. Of course You-Know-Who would go out of his way to give Potter riches, fame and glory.”

“Or death.” Harry snapped, before taking a deep breath and trying to calm down. “Anyway, it’s none of your business anyway.”

“None of our business?” Terry repeated. “We’re the ones who share a room with you!”

“I hardly see how us sleeping in the same room gives you the right to know about my personal life.” Harry pointed out. “We’ve gone almost two years without really talking to each other, let’s try and make it a hundred!”

“We have a business together!” Michael protested.

Harry raised an eyebrow in disbelief. “You have a business, of which I own forty percent. Because of this, every month you send me a written update of how much money you have made me. I hardly see how that has anything to do with us talking to each other.”

“We were friends!” Terry reminded him.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest. “’Were being the key word there. We were friends, until Anthony decided that he wanted to be a wanker and you three decided that you’d rather be his friend than mine. Not the most logical choice really, given that I have money, fame, and power, but it is the choice you made. Because of that we are no longer friends. Something that didn’t bother you in the least, until I started having conversations with Victor Krum and became a Hogwarts’ Champion.”

Anthony didn’t look the least bit impressed, but Terry, Michael and Rodney were all looking shamefaced.

“Listen, Harry,” Terry started. “It’s not that we didn’t want to be your friend…”

“I don’t care!” Harry exclaimed in frustration. “I’ll admit that I was upset about the whole thing for a few months, but I’ve got other friends now. I would happily never speak to any of you again, which has been working fine, so let’s go back to that, alright?”

He gathered his nightclothes out of his trunk, before stalking out of the room and towards the bathroom – ignoring Terry’s attempts to speak again. Why couldn’t they just leave him alone?

17-17-17

Harry woke at his usual time the next morning and, after having worked on his Occlumency shields, he joined Takashi, Neville and Remus for their morning run. After they had run around the lake, drawing some astonished stairs from the few Durmstrang students who were disembarking from their ship, they worked their way through their fencing exercises.
Harry was still practising with his left hand, so he was paired with Remus who had only been practising for a few months. Harry was still better than Remus, even with his left hand, but not nearly as good as Neville or Takashi.

After he had showered, Harry began to make his way to the antechamber off the Great Hall where he was supposed to meet Sirius and the other Champions.

“Harry?” Neville’s voice sounded from a few steps behind him. “Can I have a word?”

Harry fingered his pocket watch in his robe pocket, but turned to face his friend. “Sure. How can I help?”

Neville must have seen something in his expression. “I can walk with you if you like?”

“Thank you.” Harry smiled as Neville fell into step beside him. “What is it?”

“I thought you should know about something that happened in the Gryffindor Common Room last night.” Neville started. “Ron threw a fit about you being a Champion.”

“That’s not exactly surprising.” Harry commented. “I would have been more surprised if he hadn’t.”

“Well, he started getting some of the Gryffindors on his side,” Neville continued. “And when the twins stood up for you, he went bonkers. Screaming about how you were dark and how you had lured them, Bill and Charlie over to your side.”

“What?” Harry asked incredulously. “I’ve only ever met Lord Prewett and his heir once.”

“Then Ron said that they had to choose between him and you.” Neville went on.

“Oh,” Harry’s stomach twisted. He’d been down this path before, both in muggle school and with his dorm-mates, and it never went well. He’d really enjoyed having the twins as friends.

“And they said that they would rather be friends with you than a jealous paranoid arse.” Neville finished.

Harry stopped walking. “What?”

Neville turned to face him. “They chose you, but if I thought Ron had been off his rocker beforehand what happened afterwards was, well, unexplainable. He’s really out to get you today.”

“They chose me over their brother?!” Harry exclaimed. “I don’t understand.”

“I’d choose you over Ron too.” Neville pointed out. “Anyway, I thought you should know. I haven’t seen the twins this morning, but last night they looked pretty upset and angry.

Well, one of them looked upset and one of them looked angry.”

Harry nodded, George would have looked upset and Fred angry, but it was testament to how strong their emotions had been that they had actually appeared to have different emotions.

“Thanks, Neville.”

“You’re welcome.” Neville replied as they entered the hall. “I’ll see you in Magical Theory.”

Harry made his way through the Hall and then into the antechamber that they had met in the day before. Victor and Cedric were already there, as were Madame Brusilova, Ludo Bagman,
Dumbledore, and McGonagall.

Cedric and Victor both bowed as Harry entered and Madame Brusilova curtsied. Dumbledore and McGonagall’s faces both looked pinched at the sight.

“Ahh, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore greeted his jovially. “How are you this fine morning?”

“Very well, thank you, Headmaster.” Harry answered civilly, before crossing the room to stand near Victor. “Dobro utro, Victor.”

“Dobro utro.” Victor returned, before continuing in Bulgarian. “Harry, this is Madame Brusilova, daughter of the ot Rodyt Brusilova. Madame, this is Harry Potter, Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.”

Madame Brusilova extended her hand to Harry, who kissed it politely. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter.”

“The pleasure is all mine.” Harry returned.

Cedric, who had apparently moved across the room, cleared his throat nervously. “Excuse me for interrupting, but Harry, you speak Bulgarian?”

“I’m learning.” Harry answered. “I’ve got a long way to go though.”

“You speak it vell, for an Englishman.” Madame Brusilova commented.

“Cedric,” Harry started. “Have you met Madame Brusilova or Victor Krum?”

Cedric looked a little panicked. “N-no, I don’t believe I have. Not officially at least.”

“Well, this is Madame Brusilova, daughter of the ot Rodyt Brusilova, and Victor Krum, ot rodyt na Krum.” Harry explained. “Madame Brusilova, Victor, please allow me to introduce you to Cedric Diggory, Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Diggory.”

Victor raised his thick dark eyebrows and he bowed. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Diggory. I vas not aware that you vere an heir also.”

Madame Brusilova curtsied slightly. “Merry meet.”

“Yes,” Cedric looked vaguely apologetic. “I’m not nearly as good at all the formalities as Harry here.”

“There are many noble heirs at Hogwarts, yes?” Victor asked. “I have already met three.”

“There are six actually.” Harry explained.

“Oh,” Victor frowned. “Is that usual. To have so many together at once?”

“No,” Harry shook his head. “It’s a result of the last war.”

“Six?” Cedric looked confused. “Who is the sixth?”

“I would also like to know.” Victor added. “So that I might pay my respects to them if ve should meet.”

Well, there’s me,” Harry started. “And Draco, who you’ve already met, Victor. Then there’s
Professor Snape, who is Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Prince. Then Neville Longbottom, Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom. Then Susan Bones, Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Bones. Then Theodore Nott, Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Nott, and then Cedric.”

“Oh,” Cedric was nodding. “I’d forgotten about Nott. He’s relatively new as the heir, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “His father died at the Quidditch World Cup.”

Cedric frowned.

“That was a terrible tragedy.” Victor declared.

“Yes.” Harry didn’t personally think that Theo’s father’s death was a tragedy, after all, the man had been a Death Eater, but Voldemort’s attack certainly had been.

Cedric and Victor both suddenly bowed, and Harry turned around to see Sirius striding into the room with a tall, thin man following behind him.

“Merry meet.” Sirius greeted them all briskly. “Are we all here?”

“We are still waiting on Madame Maxime.” Dumbledore told him stiffly.

“And ‘ere we are.” Madame Maxime declared as she stepped through the door. Delacour was following behind her and, as she stepped into the room, Harry could feel the girl’s veela aura. It wasn’t very strong, in fact he didn’t even need to take any steps to protect himself from it, but it was definitely noticeable.

“Excellent.” Ludo Bagman rubbed his hands together. “Sirius, what did you discover?”

Sirius gestured to the man beside him. “This is Mr. Magnus Drottle, Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation. He will explain it all to you.”

Drottle cleared his throat nervously. “Uh, good morning, Lord Black has, uh, explained the intricacies of the situation and, while it is certainly unprecedented, there are a few rules of the Tournament that speak to the situation. Firstly, uh, rule seventy six point three, subsection four, any magical creature, whose name should come out of the Goblet, must participate in the Tournament.”

Harry nodded impatiently, he already knew that.

“Secondly, uh, rule one hundred and thirty seven, point two.” Drottle continued. “Each school that has agreed to, uh, take part in the tournament must have, uh, at least one champion compete. Thirdly, rule three hundred and forty five…”

“Can’t you just tell us whether or not we can add two students to the Tournament?” Bagman interrupted impatiently.

Duttle looked affronted, but after having glanced towards Sirius, he complied. “There is nothing in the rules to suggest that such an event could not happen.”

“So that’s a yes then?” Bagman checked.

“Yes.”

“Excellent.” Madame Maxime nodded in satisfaction. “I weell call for Beauxbaton’s second champion to join us.”
“I must object.” Dumbledore said gently. “As I said last night, Hogwarts did not get to hand select their second champion, surely it would be fairer for your Champions to be selected randomly.”

“Nonsense, Dumbly-Dorr.” Madame Maxime shook her head impatiently. “Do not be reediculous.”

“What do you think, Madame Brusilova?” Sirius asked patiently.

“I do not see the need to personally select Durmstrang’s second Champion.” Madame Brusilova commented. “Every one of my students is capable of winning this Tournament.”

Madame Maxime drew herself up. “Are you saying zat my students are not?”

“Not at all, Olympia.” Brusilova smiled dangerously. “Though it woul drop seem as though you are.”

“I most certainly am not!” Maxime denied. “Every single one of my students could beat yours any day!”

“Excellent.” Sirius grinned. “Then we are agreed. We will choose the second Champions from Durmstrang and Beauxbaton randomly.”

17-17-17
Chapter 18

The selection of the fifth and sixth Champions was much less dramatic than the original selection had been. Harry put this down partly to being to the lack of the Goblet of Fire being involved, partly because there was no theatrical lighting, and partly because it was announced at breakfast when only a third of Hogwarts students were present.

All of the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students were there – which was understandable since they were the ones who a chance of being chosen. Their Headmistresses must have explained the possibility of two more champions being chosen, because they had all straightened in anticipation when Harry and the other Champions followed Sirius and Bagman into the hall.

The Hogwarts students obviously had no idea what was happening, but once Dumbledore explained what was going to happen a few of the older students shot Harry envious looks. Then Bagman stepped forward, with a bright yellow hat in his hand, and made a show of pulling out a name.

“The second Beauxbaton Champion is… Aceline Moreau!”

Harry wasn’t surprised to hear him announce a female name, after all Beauxbatons had brought almost twice as many female students as male ones, but he was a little startled at how attractive the girl who stood was.

Aceline Moreau was a tall brunette with very pale skin and she was easily one of the most attractive girls in the room. Well, she was until Harry saw her shoot Fleur a spitefully triumphant smirk. Then she just looked mean.

Fleur’s chin rose defiantly in response to Aceline’s smirk, but otherwise she seemed to ignore her fellow champion – not even clapping along with the rest of the students.

Next, Bagman read out the name of Durmstrang’s second champion and Harry was surprised to see a girl standing in response. Sure Nina Viserova sounded like a girl’s name, but what were the chances that one of the five female Durmstrang students would have been selected instead of one of the nine male ones?

Viktor, who had been grinning crookedly ever since her name had been called, clapped a hand down on Nina’s shoulder in congratulations.

After that was done, they were ushered back into the antechamber where Bagman gave them their instructions.

Apparently the first task would test their daring and their improvisation, so they weren’t allowed to know what it would be. They were given the date though, the 24th of November, and were warned not to ask for any help from their professors or the judges (which Harry thought was a bit unfair given that it meant he couldn’t ask Sirius or Remus for help).

The worst part of it was that they were going to be exempted from their exams. Sure that wouldn’t make much a different for Harry’s fourth year exams, but he was supposed to take his Ancient Runes OWL this year. Besides which, the other Champions were all in their final year at school. How were they supposed to apply for apprenticeships or jobs if they hadn’t taken their NEWTs?

When he mentioned his concern to Sirius and Remus over tea and scones later that morning, Sirius laughed at him.
“I highly doubt they’ll stop you from taking your exam if you really want to, Harry.” He pointed out. “It’s just that the expectation is for you to spend most of the year preparing for the tasks, which will negatively impact your grades.”

Harry grimaced. “Why in Merlin’s name would anyone voluntarily sign up to something that would mean they would get bad grades?”

Sirius barked out a laugh. “Who needs good grades if they have fame, glory and riches?”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “I have fame, glory and riches. Does that mean you would support me in flunking out of school?”

Sirius choked on his scone. “What?”

“Calm down, Padfoot.” Remus chuckled as he thumped Sirius on the back. “This is Harry we’re talking about. He’s not going to flunk out of school.”

Sirius coughed for a few seconds, before shooting Harry a pained glare. “Don’t do that to me!”

“I’d apologise, but it wouldn’t be sincere.” Harry smirked in amusement. “Let’s call it payback for that tickling curse you hit me with last week.”

“You should have blocked it.” Sirius told him unsympathetically. “But speaking of our duelling practise, we have a bit of a problem.”

Harry raised an eyebrow questioningly.

“Merlin, you look like Narcissa when you do that.” Sirius grumbled.

Harry grimaced in horror. “Really?”

Remus chuckled. “I don’t think he means it like that, Harry.”

“I don’t mean it like what?” Sirius asked, looking between Harry and Remus.

“You don’t think he looks like your female cousin.” Remus explained.

Sirius’ mouth dropped open. “Merlin, no. I just meant that you look so dignified.”

“Oh.” Harry let out a relieved breath. “Normally people just tell me I remind them of Lord Malfoy.”

“Yeah,” Sirius smirked. “I can see why that might go down better.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “So there’s a problem?”

“Technically neither Remus nor I are allowed to help you prepare for the Tournament.” Sirius explained. “So we can’t teach you any new spells.”

“In case you teach me something that would help me.” Harry nodded in understanding. “But we can still duel together, can’t we?”

“Definitely.” Sirius nodded. “But don’t think that this means you can stop learning new spells, in fact I expect you see you learning more than you normally do, but you’ll just have to find them on your own.”

Harry studied the two men carefully. “I’ve been thinking of something that might help with that
“ Hmm?” Remus prompted him.

Harry lowered his voice. “Have you ever heard of Parselmagic?”

Sirius’ eyes widened and reared back slightly. “As in Parselmouths?”

Harry tried to ignore his hurt at his godfather’s reaction. “Yes. Parselmouths, speak Parseltongue, and magic that they cast in Parseltongue is called Parselmagic.”

Remus leaned forward. “I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“I’m not surprised.” Harry admitted. “People don’t really talk about anything to Parselmouths, except to vilify them.”

Sirius winced at his pointed glance. “Sorry, pup, old habits die hard. So, tell us about Parselmagic.”

“It’s similar to normal magic, in that it can be done with or without a wand – but it’s a lot easier with a wand.” Harry started. “There are specific spells, all of which are cast in Parseltongue. The best part of it is that Parselmagic can only be blocked, or broken, by Parselmagic. So if I was to send a Parselmagic curse at you, you could only block it with a solid object or with a Parselmagic shield.”

Sirius’ eyebrows were raised. “So if You-Know-Who was to send a Parselmagic curse at someone, it would be impossible to block with a normal shield.”

“Yes.” Harry explained. “I’ve been wanting practise it. In fact, that’s the reason I originally bought Sarko and Sativa, but I’ve never gotten around to it.”

“But you don’t have your snakes anymore, do you?” Remus asked curiously. “Aren’t they living in the forest and messing with the natural food chain by multiplying?”

Harry shot Remus a half-hearted glare. “Yes, but I don’t need them to speak Parseltongue anymore. I’ve learnt to do that by just thinking about snakes.”

“And you want to practise this at our duelling sessions?” Sirius asked unsurely.

“If you don’t mind.” Harry answered cautiously. “With your sword you’ll be able to block them anyway, and I’ll make sure I don’t cast anything too harmful.”

“It makes sense.” Remus nodded. “That way no one will be able to accuse you of teaching Harry spells.”

“Not that we’ll be able to tell people what we’re actually doing.” Harry pointed out. “I don’t want people to know that I’m a Parselmouth.”

“Alright.” Sirius nodded slowly. “We can do that, but we should probably ward the room carefully. We wouldn’t want anyone to interrupt us.”

Harry smiled widely. “Thanks, Sirius!”

Harry found the many differences between Remus and Sirius amusing. Remus had been at Hogwarts all year, but had never indicated any interest in sitting in on one of Harry’s animagus training sessions. Sirius had been at Hogwarts for three days when he insisted on tagging along.
As usual, Harry did his best to get there ten minutes early and was surprised to see that Fred and George were already there. They were talking quietly on the couch, but looked up when Harry and Sirius entered the room.

“Hey.” George nodded, his usually jovial expression glum.

“Hey.” Harry returned, moving to sit in the armchair opposite them. “How are you guys going? I heard a bit about what happened last night.”

Sirius, who had followed Harry across the room, shot him a questioning look as he sprawled out on another armchair.

The twins both looked uncomfortable as they watched Sirius out of the corner of their eyes.

“Don’t mind me.” Sirius grinned charmingly.

Harry nodded. “You can trust Sirius.”

Fred and George exchanged a glance, before Fred spoke up.

“It’s the whole bloody drama from last month again. Ron’s a bloody wanker!” His fists were clenched so tightly they were turning white.

George sighed. “We got another letter from Charlie this morning. Apparently, Mum’s refusing to have them around for dinner until they give up this lordship thing.”

Harry grimaced. “That’s awful.”

“Merlin knows what she’ll do if she finds out that we’re actually on their side.” George continued. “I’m surprised we haven’t already received a howler. I’m sure that Ron must have narked on us weeks ago.”

“And who bloody knows what he’s going to nark to mum about in his next letter.” Fred growled. “He’ll probably claim that we’re bloody Death Eaters again or something.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. “He accused you of being Death Eaters?”

“Yeah, and in front of the whole bloody common room.” Fred’s jaw clenched. “In a way it was a good thing, since it helped everybody else realise that he’s off his rocker, nobody took him seriously after that.”

“You didn’t have to choose me, you know.” Harry told them quietly. “I would have understood if you’d chosen Ron. He’s your brother.”

“He’s a bloody wanker, is what he is!” Fred snapped.

“Just because he’s family, doesn’t mean he’s right.” George added. “And we’re not going to spend our lives listening to what Ronnie or Mum think we should and shouldn’t do. We haven’t in the past and we’re not planning to in the future, so there was no point in doing it now.”

Sirius leaned forward in his seat, his forehead furrowed in concern. “Do you boys mind if I ask what this is all about?”

“Bill accepted the lordship…” George started.

“…and Charlie agreed to be his heir…” Fred put in.
George nodded. “…But Mum freaked out…”

“…She’s threatened to disown them both.” Fred added.

“Ron’s on her side…”

“…bloody wanker!” Fred growled.

“…and Percy, Dad, and Ginny aren’t saying anything either way.” George continued. “Then last night…”

“…Ron went bonkers…”

“…about Harry being Champion…”

“…because he bloody hates Harry.” Fred inserted.

George grimaced in agreement. “…and when we stood up for him…”

“…he tried to make us choose between him and Harry. We chose Harry.” Fred finished.

Sirius looked a little shell shocked as he glanced between the twins. “Molly’s threatened to disown your brothers?”

“We don’t think she actually meant it.” George said quickly.

“You don’t think she actually meant it.” Fred corrected. “I think she’s a bloody crazy bint!”

Harry’s eyes widened. He’d never heard Fred swear so much in his life.

“Why haven’t I heard anything about this?” Sirius asked rhetorically. “I was in an Order meeting with them on Monday.”

“Because you’re public enemy number one.” George explained with a sigh. “You’re the one who convinced Bill to accept the lordship.”

Sirius reared back slightly. “No, I didn’t. There was absolutely no convincing involved. He asked some questions, I answered them. That was it. Though that does explain why she seemed so…”

“Insane?” Fred suggested. “Shrill? Nutty?”

George seemed to curl into himself. “Come on, Fred. She’s our mum.”

“She’s a bloody awful mum!” Fred snapped. “She can’t even tell us apart.”

George’s shoulders slumped. “I know.”

Sirius was looking a little wide eyed, but he cleared his throat. “Your mum loves you. So does your dad. Arthur’s always talking about how proud he is of the two of you.”

George perked up slightly. “Really?”

“Oh, yeah.” Sirius nodded. “Just last week he was telling me about how the two of you had made some kind of candy that made people’s tongues grow.”

“Ton Tongue Toffees.” George smiled wanly. “We almost had them right, but then Mum found them and chucked them all out.”
“And now, because of bloody Ludo Bagman, we can’t even afford to buy the bloody ingredients again.” Fred growled.

Sirius looked just as confused as Harry felt. “What did Ludo do?”

“We made a bet with him at the World Cup…” Fred started.

“…that Ireland would win, but Krum would catch the snitch.” George explained.

“Nice bet!” Sirius grinned. “You must have gotten pretty good odds on it.”

“Yeah,” George nodded glumly. “But then he paid us with Leprechaun gold so it had all disappeared by the next day.”

Sirius looked startled. “What?”

“And we could hardly tell Mum or Dad.” Fred pointed out. “Mum would go spare if she heard that we’d been gambling. She’d probably just think it was good riddance.”

“And she’d be relieved.” George added. “If we don’t have any savings, we can’t start up our Joke Shop.”

“You want to start a Joke Shop?” Sirius asked in interest.

“I said I’d back you, and I meant it.” Harry reminded them. “We could draw up a contract now if you like and I’ll help pay for your ingredients.”

Sirius smiled warmly at Harry. “Or I could rustle the money out of Ludo for you. How much did you bet?”

“Thirty-seven Galleons, fifteen Sickles, three Knuts, and a fake wand.” George answered, exchanging a hopeful look with Fred.

Harry was impressed, that was a lot of money.

“And what were the odds?” Sirius asked.

The twins exchanged another glance. “We didn’t ask.”

“Always ask.” Sirius told them seriously. “Though, in this case, it’s probably best that you didn’t. I’ll contact one of the official betting places and ask what their odds were for that particular bet and then have Ludo up for the total.”

“Really?” George asked hopefully.

“Definitely.” Sirius promised.

“What’s to stop him from ignoring you?” Fred asked sceptically.

Sirius chuckled darkly. “He wouldn’t dare.”

18-18-18

Sirius’ presence during their animagus practise was both helpful and not.

It was helpful in that it gave Harry the confidence to transform both his arms into wings at the same
time, something he’d been too cautious to try before. But it was unhelpful in that it made some of his friends formal and stiff.

Draco wasn’t too bad, he’d spent a lot of time with Sirius, but Daphne, Takashi, Theo, and Blaise were painfully formal throughout the entire afternoon. The twins seemed to find the entire thing a little bemusing, though they were entirely sold on the wonderfulness of Sirius. If Sirius’ promise to retrieve their money from Bagman hadn’t been enough, Sirius later admitting that his animagus form was called Padfoot did the trick. Apparently the twins had the Marauder’s Map and had long considered the Marauders to be their idols.

They had all been working towards their animagus forms for two months now and had all made progress. Harry had gotten the furthest, managing to transform his eyebrows into feathers and his arms into wings, but the others had only managed to transform one of their body parts.

Sirius was very impressed and told them all so. Apparently it had taken him and Harry’s dad two months of twice weekly practises to transform their first body part, and a year to complete the entire thing. On hearing that, Harry’s friends all decided that they wanted to practise more often.

Harry had groaned inwardly at the idea, he was already busy enough and he hadn’t even started training for the Tournament yet, but he had agreed anyway and Wednesday evenings had been scheduled as an additional practise time.

18-18-18

The next day was Monday, which meant classes. It seemed a little bizarre that life was returning to normal after such a weird weekend. Harry felt as though something ought to have changed now that he had been forced into the Tournament, but nothing really had.

A few students seemed a bit miffed that Harry had somehow gotten into the Tournament, but none of them were very vocal about it. Well, no one except Ron, but then his vitriol was hardly a surprise.

Thankfully, Harry only had two classes with Ron (Charms and Herbology) and so didn’t run into him all that often. Unfortunately, Harry had Charms first on Mondays and Ron seemed to be lying in wait for him outside the classroom.

“Not content with just killing our friends, huh, Potter?” Ron asked, pushing himself off the wall he had been leaning against. “You want to steal everyone else’s glory too.”

Harry strode past him, into the classroom. Ron’s accusations had definitely escalated. First, Harry had just been a ponce, then dark, then friends with Death Eaters, then a Death Eater, and now he was apparently a murderer. It would be amusing, if it wasn’t so bloody irritating

“That’s right, Potter, run away!” Ron shouted from behind him. “No wonder you weren’t sorted into Gryffindor. You’re a bloody coward!”

“Ignore him, Harry.” Neville advised, as Harry placed his bookbag down on his desk.

“I’m trying.” Harry returned, pulling out his chair. Suddenly, a hand gripped his shoulder and spun him around.

“Don’t you bloody ignore me, you bloody coward!” Ron snarled.

Harry sneered as he shook his shoulder free. “Get your hands off me, Weasley.”

“Why?” Weasley asked. “You too good to touch people like me, huh?”
Harry straightened his shoulders. “Actually, yes, now that you mention it, I am.”

Ron’s face was turning red. “You bloody bastard!”

“You’re the one who said it, not me.” Harry reminded him coolly. “Now that you have my attention, Weasley, what was it you wished to speak to me about?”

Ron was silent for moment, before he gathered his wits. “Leave my brothers alone!”

Harry spotted a movement out of his eyes and raised his eyebrow with a smirk. “Or what?”

“Or I’ll bloody kill you!” Ron snarled.

“Mr. Weasley!” Flitwick exclaimed in his high pitched voice, a shocked expression on his face. “Forty points from Gryffindor for threatening another student’s life, and you’re to go see Professor McGonagall immediately.”

Ron looked startled as he swung around to face the professor. “But, sir…”

“No buts, Mr. Weasley.” Flitwick frowned, summoning a quill into his hand and beginning to quickly write a note. Once he was done, he passed it to Ron. “Give this to Professor McGonagall.”

Harry watched as Ron stomped his way out of the room, before taking his seat and exchanging an amused look with Neville. One point to him, zero to Ron Weasley.

18-18-18
Chapter 19

“We should do another prank.” Draco declared.

Harry looked up from the chess board in surprise. “Where did that come from?”

“The Weasleys made half the staircases slippery last month and we haven’t responded yet.” Draco reminded him. “We haven’t done anything all year.”

“We pranked Luna’s nargles.” Harry pointed out, as he returned his attention back to the board. “Rook to D1.”

“Yes, but we didn’t own up to it.” Draco argued. “People are starting to think that we graduated last year.”

“Really? Who told you that?”

“Bishop to G4.” Draco commanded. “I heard a second year telling some of the first years about it.”

Harry studied the board carefully. “So, what do you want to do?”

“A Star Wars prank.” Luna answered quickly, from behind her book. “We haven’t done one of those for ages.”

“The problem with Star Wars pranks, is that only the muggleborns understand them.” Harry pointed out. “Which leaves over two thirds of the Hogwarts students and the Durmstrang and Beauxbaton students confused.”

“So we do a Star Wars prank that is still funny even if you don’t know about Star Wars.” Draco told him. “Luna and I were thinking that we could charm people’s robes to play the Imperial March whenever they walk.”

“Knight to B5.” Harry decided, before looking between in two friends. “Everyone’s robes? Or just a few select people?”

“Just the Champions.” Luna answered, lowering her book to reveal a sly smile

“But I’m a Champion.” Harry reminded her.

“All the better to throw people off the scent.” Luna told him sweetly.

“Knight to A6.” Draco looked up from the board. “Besides, we normally prank ourselves.”

“Only because we’re pranking the entire school.” Harry protested. “Why can’t we do it to the adults involved in the Tournament?”

“Can you imagine Madame Brusilova’s expression?” Draco asked with a small shudder. “That woman is terrifying.”

“True.” Harry turned his attention back to the board. “Queen to B7.”

Draco frowned down at the game. “That was quick.”

“Come on, Harry.” Luna bounced in her seat. “It’ll be great!”
Harry sighed. “How would we do it?”

“That we don’t know yet.” Draco admitted, his attention still on the board. “We will need to find a way to store the music in a spell.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “That sounds incredibly complicated.”

“We know.” Draco agreed. “But think of how smashing it would be.”

Harry nodded slowly. “We could possibly use Runes. I remember reading something about a connection between Runes and music.”

“Wonderful!” Luna exclaimed. “I knew you would think of something.”

Draco was still frowning at the board. “Queen to E4.”

“It will take a while though.” Harry pointed out. “So you might want to do another prank while we figure it out.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Why might we want to do a prank? What will you be doing?”

“Preparing to take part in the Tournament.” Harry replied unapologetically. “I’ll help with this musical one, but I won’t have time to work on two pranks at once.”

Draco nodded reluctantly. “Alright.”

“Queen to A6.” Harry commanded, smirking slightly as his Queen smashed Draco’s Knight into pieces.

“Bishop to E3. Check.”

Harry waited until Draco’s Bishop had finished destroying his own Bishop. “King to B1.”

“Queen to C5.”

“Queen to B7.”

“Bishop to D1.”

“Queen to A8. Check.”

Draco scowled at the board. “I miss the days when you were terrible at this game.”

Harry tried not to smirk too smugly.

When Harry met Sirius for duelling practise after classes, Sirius suggested that they move the practise to the Room of Requirement. Harry thought it was a great idea, partly because it meant they wouldn’t be destroying Remus’ classroom every week and partly because it was more private. If he was going to practise his Parselmagic he wanted as much privacy as he could get.

Harry’s stomach was squirming nervously at the thought of practising his Parselmagic. He’d only ever tried a few spells and, while he hadn’t found them very hard, he hadn’t ever used them in a duel before. He had also never used Parselmagic in front of anyone before, and he didn’t think he had ever spoken Parseltongue in front of Sirius. His godfather could still be a little squeamish about
magic that was labelled ‘dark’, though he had been getting a lot better.

But Sirius had agreed to the idea and Harry could hardly back out now. It was the perfect opportunity to become more adept at Parselmagic and, hopefully, to prove to Sirius that Parseltongue was nothing to be afraid of.

Harry allowed Sirius to visualise the room that they required, but wasn’t surprised when he walked into a replica of the Duelling Room at Grimmauld Place. It would do nicely.

They started with a few basic warmup drills, before Sirius declared them ready to begin. Harry moved to stand on one of the two starting markers, his fingers clenching nervously on his sword and wand.

He and Sirius bowed to one another, before each bringing up their wands and casting their first spells.

Harry had meant to cast the Parselmagic equivalent of the Stunning Spell, but at the last second found himself casting the Disarming Charm instead. He brought his sword up to block Sirius’ Cutting Curse, all the while berating himself.

“Densaugeo!” Sirius cast again, having batted Harry’s spell away with his sword.

“Immobulus!” Harry returned, grimacing when he realised that he’d failed to cast a Parselmagic spell again.

“Locomotor Mortis!” Sirius stepped out of the way of Harry’s spell.

:Stun: Harry hissed, his wand twirling out the proper movements.

Just as the purple spell left Harry’s wand, Sirius’ curse hit him and forced his legs together. Harry toppled over, only barely managing to avoid landing on his sword.

Harry twisted around, so that he could see Sirius and blanched at the sight of a red spell racing towards him. “Protego!”

As Sirius’ spell splashed harmlessly against his shield, Harry quickly cast the counter-curse at his legs. Then, after having rolled out of the way of another of Sirius’ spells, Harry clambered to his feet.

:Stun: Harry hissed again, ducking out of the way of Sirius’ next spell and picking up his sword.

:Stop:

Sirius blocked the spells easily with his sword, while aiming more spells at Harry. “Obscuro! Levicorpus! Petrificus Totalus!”

Harry blocked the first two spells with his sword, before stepping out of the way of the third. :Stun:

Sirius waved his wand and, despite the fact that he hadn’t said anything, a yellow spell sped towards Harry who quickly blocked it with his sword.

:Trip: Harry hissed, bringing up his sword to block the orange spell that Sirius sent at him next.

:Stun:

The duel went on for a few more minutes, before Sirius eventually defeated Harry with a Disarming Charm. Harry, who had been too busy trying to block Sirius’ previous spell to even notice it, grimaced as his wand flew out of his hand.
“Nice work.” Sirius commented, throwing Harry his wand back.

“I barely lasted five minutes.” Harry argued. “It was terrible.”

“I was going a lot harder on you than I usually do.” Sirius grinned unrepentantly.

“You’ve been going easy on me?” Harry exclaimed in horror.

“Of course I have.” Sirius answered. “I might not be a prodigy like you, Harry, but I have over five
years of duelling lessons under my belt – not to mention the three years I spent duelling Death Eaters
with the Order of the Phoenix. It would be a pretty sad thing if you could already match me after just
two years of practise.”

Harry grimaced in disappointment. It made sense, sure, but he’d thought he’d been getting good at
duelling.

“Which isn’t to say that you’re not far above average.” Sirius added. “Remus wasn’t going easy on
you, you really did beat him, and you could beat most witches and wizards. Just not the ones who
have been trained like I have been – not yet, anyway.”

“What do I need to do better?” Harry asked determinedly.

Sirius grinned. “First, tell me what I did differently this time.”

Harry thought about it. “You cast your spells quicker.”

“I did.” Sirius agreed. “There’s no point in waiting for your opponent to block your spell before
sending another one. The best duellers can cast one spell per second.”

Harry couldn’t imagine what that might look like. “How?”

“They learn to tie their wand movements in together.” Sirius explained. “For example, if I cast a
Disarming Charm…” He acted out the movement. “My wand finishes here, which is the perfect
place to start casting the Severing Charm, after which I can continue the wand movement around to
cast the Langlock Curse. Put them all together, and you can cast three spells in just a few seconds.”

Harry watched in awe as the three spells left Sirius’ wand. “That’s amazing.”

Sirius smiled widely. “I know. The problem is that it’s very tiring and can exhaust you in just a few
minutes, so you need to use it wisely. What else did I do differently?”

“You didn’t incant most of your spells.” Harry remembered. “The only warning I had that you had
cast a spell was the sight of it racing towards me.”

“Silent casting.” Sirius agreed with a nod. “Fantastic in a duel, partly because of the lack of warning
and partly because if your opponent doesn’t know what spell it is then they can’t block it as
effectively. There are a lot of spells that Protego doesn’t block, but if your opponent doesn’t know
you’ve cast one of them they might try and block it with Protego anyway.”

“We won’t learning Silent Casting until sixth year.” Harry reminded his godfather.

“Not officially, no.” Sirius grinned. “But I don’t think anyone would try and stop you if you wanted
to start learning it now.”

Harry nodded, he could take a hint. “Did you do anything else differently?”
“Not really.” Sirius answered. “The only other big difference was that you were using spells you weren’t familiar with, so you were a lot more distracted than you usually are.”

Harry winced. “Yes, I was.”

“But that’s alright,” Sirius continued with a grin. “Because practice makes perfect. Ready for another round?”

19-19-19

Harry spent every spare minute he had over the following days practising his silent casting. His friends, who had gotten used to the sight of his practising casting with his left hand, barely batted an eyelash at the sight.

He also took the time to discuss his idea of using Runes to create music with Remus, who had taken Runes at school, and was relieved when the wizard promised to help him work out how to do it. Remus even agreed to do the book search for him. Harry, who was fast beginning to feel as though he was drowning in work, was very grateful.

His professors all seemed singularly unsympathetic to the fact that he had just found himself stuck in a Tournament that he needed to be studying for and had all assigned his class assignments that were due before the First Task. There was nothing unusual about it of course, but to Harry it seemed like cruel and unusual punishment. He’d never understood why his classmates complained about their assignments, but he thought he was starting to get it now.

On top of preparing for the First Task (not that he had any idea what he was supposed to be preparing for), doing assignments, practising wandless magic, practising duelling with Sirius, becoming an animagus with his friends, and preparing the musical prank, Harry was supposed to be trying to get to know Daphne better.

So far they had been on two dates, but otherwise they only saw each other with their other friends. Sirius had told him that was probably a good thing, because spending too much unchaperoned time with her would only lead to trouble. Remus had called Sirius a hypocrite.

Thankfully, Daphne seemed to understand Harry’s preoccupation with learning things and didn’t appear to mind that they hardly an opportunity to talk.

Some days Harry wondered whether maybe he should be worried about how unconcerned Daphne was about it all. He had shared his concerns with Sirius and Remus, both of whom had laughed at him, before Sirius suggested that he write Daphne a letter. At first Harry had thought his godfather had gone bonkers, but it did make sense. So, after having done some secret research on writing love letters (research that Draco and his other friends could never ever find out about), Harry sat down to write Daphne a letter.

‘Dear Daphne,

I hope that it does not seem too odd that I am penning you this letter, despite having seen you only hours ago. While I may have seen you today, I do not feel as though I have truly had the opportunity to speak with you for many weeks. A fact that I find greatly disappointing.

I had thought that we would have many opportunities to come to know each other better this year, but I have found myself tiresomely busy. I have greatly enjoyed both of our visits to Hogsmeade and hope that you will do me the honour of accompanying me again on the 21st of this month.
However, as much as I look forward to the opportunity to spend time with you, I find that the date is much too far away to truly satisfy my desire to spent time in your company. It is for that reason that I am penning this letter. I wonder if we might quicken the passage of time by correspondence. There are many things that I would wish to say to you, but find myself unable to in the presence of our friends.

Today, for instance, I want to tell you how singularly beautiful you looked with your hair falling on your shoulders. Your hair was like a beautiful, golden waterfall cascading down your back and I wish that I had the opportunity to see if it really was as soft and smooth at it looked. You truly are the most beautiful witch at Hogwarts this year, as you have always been, and I daily find myself delighted by your Father’s forethought in proposing our betrothal.

You obedient servant,

Harry James Potter

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter

It was, without a doubt, the most embarrassing thing Harry had ever written and he almost didn’t send it. It was only after having shown the letter to Sirius and endured his godfather’s teasing, that Harry allowed Sirius to talk him into it.

The next morning, when Hedwig delivered the letter to Daphne at the breakfast table, Harry felt sick with anxiety. What if she didn’t like it? What if he had just made a humungous fool of himself? What if she showed it to everyone at the Slytherin Table and they all laughed at him for it?

Because of the seats that he and Daphne had chosen that morning, Harry could see her confused expression as she took the letter for Hedwig. Daphne glanced towards him questioningly and Harry somehow managed to restrain himself from running across the room and snatching the letter from her hand. Instead, he smiled reassuringly and watched as she broke the seal on the parchment.

Draco, Theo and Blaise were all looking between her and Harry curiously as she unfolded the letter and began reading it. She was too far away for Harry to read any nuances in her expression, but he was relieved to see that she wasn’t laughing or exclaiming at his presumption. Instead, she seemed pleased and, while Harry tried not to stare at her while she read the letter, he was pretty sure that her cheeks were pink by the time she folded up the letter. Once she had put the letter in her bag, Daphne met Harry’s eyes and smiled shyly. Harry hoped his answering smile didn’t broadcast all his relief.

19-19-19

“Really, Harry?” Draco asked in obvious frustration as he took his seat beside Harry in Magical Theory. “What did I tell you about making big romantic gestures without warning me first?”

“Pardon?” Harry asked nonchalantly.

“Oh, don’t play dumb.” Draco groused. “You know exactly what I’m talking about. You sent Daphne a love letter!”

Harry looked away and tried to fight down his blush. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Draco snorted. “Well, you might not, and Daphne might not, but your interaction this morning did not go unnoticed by the school body. We’re into our third class of the day and I’ve yet to come across a single witch who wasn’t fawning over how romantic you are.”
Harry whipped his head around to stare at his cousin. “What?”

“It’s like the ring drama all over again.” Draco complained. “I haven’t seen Astoria yet, thank Merlin, but Theo and I passed Natasja on our way to Care of Magical Creatures and the look she gave him was…well let’s just say that Theo is not particularly pleased with you right now.”

Harry groaned. “Why can’t people just mind their own business?”

“Why can’t you refrain from big romantic gestures?” Draco returned unsympathetically.

“A letter isn’t a big romantic gesture.” Harry denied. “For all anyone knows I could have been…uh…asking her for homework help.”

Draco snorted again. “Harry, a Hufflepuff could see through the excuse. Worse than that, a Gryffindor could see through it.”

“Ouch!” Neville commented lightly as he sat in the seat beside Harry.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Come off it, Neville. Not even you could claim that Gryffindors were anything other than inept at picking up social nuances.”

“Social nuances?” Neville asked slyly. “Oh, you mean like Harry here sending Daphne a love letter this morning? Because I can tell you that every single Gryffindor who saw it picked up on that.”

Harry groaned. “I’m going to kill Sirius!”

“It’s not all bad, Harry.” Neville grinned. “If Daphne doesn’t want you, I know of at least fifteen Gryffindors who would happily be the recipients of your letters.”

“I hate you!” Harry told him with a glare.

“Tough luck there, Neville.” Draco smirked. “Looks like your chances of receiving a love letter from Harry just went down.”

Harry had never been so glad to have a professor call for the class’ attention.

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‘Dear Harry,

I cannot describe to you my delight at having received your letter. I have also found myself disappointed by the lack of opportunities to speak with you this year and am honoured that, in the midst of your business, you have taken the time to write to me.

I believe that I must apologise sincerely for having been indelicate enough that the school could guess the contents of your letter. The idea of corresponding with you in this manner pleases me greatly, but I will understand if you do not wish to continue to do so.

Please pardon my forwardness, but I must confess that I find your attention to your studies very inspiring. The character of the House of Ravenclaw has long been a jest among Slytherins. Ravenclaw is the House of the intelligent and witty, though often they seem more slothful than inspired. You, however, put this jest to shame and encourage me to, not only be the best Slytherin that I can, but also to give my studies more attention.

It would be my pleasure to accompany you to Hogsmeade on the 21st of this month. I will be
counting down the days.

Your humble servant,

Daphne Greengrass,

Daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass’

19-19-19
Chapter 20

It was exactly a week after Harry and Sirius’s conversation with the Weasley Twins’ about Ludo Bagman that they all met back in the Room of Requirement.

Fred and George sat beside each other on the couch and stared at Sirius hopefully. “What did Bagman say?”

Sirius grinned reassuringly at them. “Well, first things first, I wrote to Fawley House and Shafiq’s Wagers, both of which are official gambling institutions and asked them about the odds they had given for Ireland winning and Krum catching the snitch. How much Leprechaun gold did you say that Ludo gave you?”

“One hundred and fifty Galleons.” Fred answered him eagerly.

“Right, well, according to both Fawley’s and Shafiq’s he ought to have given you closer to three hundred and fifty Galleons.” Sirius told them with a grin. “Which, if he had been honest with you from the start, wouldn’t have been a problem. As the taker of the bet, he had the right to give you whatever odds he wanted, but since he’s tried to steal from you I will be holding him to the official odds.”

Fred and George’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Three hundred and fifty Galleons?!”

“Plus an additional one hundred Galleons for having held onto your money for the last two months.” Sirius added, his expression firm.

“Bloody hell!” Fred swore. “Four hundred and fifty Galleons?”

George looked shell-shocked.

“I spoke to Ludo about it a few days ago,” Sirius continued, his eyes hard. “And, after a long conversation, he has agreed to pay you the full amount. Unfortunately, he is having some money flow problems at the moment so it may take him a while to gather it all together. I know that it’s not ideal, but I am happy to lend you some Galleons in the meantime.”

“Oh, no you don’t!” Harry denied quickly. “I’m going to be their backer, not you!”

Sirius looked amused. “Really?”

“Really!” Harry nodded determinedly. “The House of Potter found them first! Right, George? Fred?”

Fred and George were both still looking shell shocked. “Four hundred and fifty Galleons?”

“I’ll tell you what, Harry.” Sirius decided. “We can both put in a proposal to be their backer and then the twins will be able to choose which one of us they prefer.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Fine, but I’m sure they’ll choose their friend over an old man.”

Sirius put his hand to his chest and gasped dramatically. “I’m hurt. Though, I wouldn’t be so sure about that. You don’t think they would rather have one of the original Marauders as their backer? Let alone the man who singlehandedly recovered four hundred and fifty Galleons for them?”

Harry’s mouth dropped open in surprise. “No fair! I met them first!”
The next week went by relatively normally. Harry and Daphne were still exchanging letters with each other, averaging about one letter every second day. Their letters, while still formal, had begun to be a little more relaxed and Harry was enjoying the opportunity to get to know her better. Most of the school had gotten used to the letters, but a few of the girls were still staring at Harry with love struck eyes whenever they saw him and some of the boys were still angry that the girls were staring at him. Ron Weasley was one of the angry boys, but he seemed to have lost a lot of his steam after having received two months of detention for threatening Harry in Charms Class.

Harry’s duelling lesson with Sirius went much better than the previous one. Sirius was still beating Harry easily, but Harry felt as though he was getting a lot better at casting spells quickly and silently. Not only that, but he had learnt five new Parselmagic spells and was feeling much more comfortable at the idea of casting them.

George and Luna were still joining Harry, Neville and Takashi for their weekly wandless practise and, much to Harry’s surprise, this week Daphne joined them as well. It was strange practising with a larger group, but it was nice to be able share it with more of his friends. Harry was still working on the Shielding Charm – he had definitely been right about the fifth year spell taking longer to learn, he hadn’t even managed to consistently cast the spell while meditating yet.

Everything was going so normally that, aside from the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students floating around the castle, he sometimes found himself forgetting that he had been entered into the Triwizard Tournament against his will. But on Friday, a third year Gryffindor student, pulled him out of Ancient Runes to attend the Official Wand Weighing Ceremony for the Triwizard Tournament. It was something Harry had been expecting, Sirius had warned him that it was coming, but Harry couldn’t help but be frustrated that they had pulled him out of class for it. Couldn’t they have done it during lunch or after classes? Hadn’t they thought about his education at all?

The Gryffindor, who enthusiastically introduced himself as Colin Creevy, led Harry to a small classroom. The desks in the classroom had been pushed to the back of the room. There were some desks, side by side, that had a red velvet cover over them and Ludo Bagman was sitting on one of the five chairs behind the desks and talking to a witch who Harry recognised as being Rita Skeeter. Harry couldn’t remember how he knew that she was Rita Skeeter, but he presumed that Sirius must have pointed her out to him at some point. Harry definitely remembered some of Skeeter’s articles – they tended to border on slanderous.

Skeeter was wearing bright pink robes, which not only made her look ridiculous, but were the exact shade of magenta that represented the Most Ancient and Noble House of Odgen – clearly Skeeter wasn’t traditional.

The only other people in the room were the two Beauxbatons’ Champions: Fleur Delacour and Aceline Moreau. The two witches were standing on opposite sides of the room and pointedly ignoring one another – it was almost amusing. Both witches looked up when Harry entered and curtsied prettily – Harry thought that Fleur’s curtsey was a lot more graceful than Aceline’s though.

“Merry meet, Mr. Potter.” Fleur greeted him, her accent heavy.

“Bonjour, Mademoiselle.” Harry returned with a nod, before continuing in French. “I trust you are enjoying your stay here?”

Fleur’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “You speak French, Monsieur?”
“Of course.” Harry replied in French. “Should I be offended that you did not believe me educated enough to be able to do so?"

“Non, Monsieur.” Fleur replied quickly, shaking her head so that her long silver hair flew into the hair. “My apologies.”

“You are forgiven.” Harry allowed with a smile as Cedric arrived.

“Merry meet, Harry.” Cedric bowed to Harry, before nodding to both Fleur and Aceline who had curtsied to him.

“Merry meet.” Harry agreed. “How are you?”

“Great!” Cedric smiled widely.

Harry turned to Fleur. “I presume you have been introduced to Cedric?”

“Oui.” Fleur smiled prettily at Cedric. “Do you speak French also, Monsieur?”

“Oui,” Cedric answered with wide eyes. “Of course.”

Fleur looked faintly surprised. “Is this common among Hogwarts’ students?”

“Non.” Cedric replied easily.

“Zen I am impressed.” Fleur smiled prettily.

Harry moved away, already feeling like a third, and much younger, wheel.

“Ignore her.” Aceline told him suddenly in French.

Harry looked up in surprise, he hadn’t realised he had moved so close to the other girl. “Pardon?”

“You should ignore her.” Aceline repeated, rolling her eyes. “She does not know how to be anything other than a flirt.”

Harry frowned; he hadn’t found Fleur flirtatious at all. “I do not believe we have been properly introduced. I am…”

“Harry Potter.” Aceline interrupted. “Yes, I know. Just as you know that I am Aceline Moreau.”

“Congratulations on being selected to take part in the Tournament.” Harry told her, trying to ignore her rudeness.

“Thank you.” Aceline accepted. “I am glad to have been chosen, if only so that Beauxbatons might be represented by someone other than her.”

Harry raised an eyebrow at the disdain in Aceline’s voice. “You do not get along with Mademoiselle Delacour?”

“Non!” Aceline denied strongly. “She is a half-breed, you see – a stain on our proud school.”

Harry didn’t quite know what to say. Sure he had known that Fleur was part veela, it would be impossible to miss, but he hadn’t considered that her classmates might see that as a bad thing. Since when did traditionalists have prejudices against creatures and half-breeds? Normally it was the anti-traditionalists, with their muggle views, that had issues like that. Was it different in France?
“I’m afraid I do not understand, Mademoiselle Moreau.” Harry replied eventually.

“Acéline frowned at him like he was slow. “She is part veela. Surely you must have noticed.”

“You misunderstand me, Mademoiselle Moreau.” Harry told her stiffly. “I did not mistake your meaning. I simply do not understand your prejudice. In England, only the uncultured believe in such things.”

Which, admittedly was a bit of a stretch, but Acéline’s pink cheeks and narrowed eyes assured Harry that he had made his point.

“I beg your pardon?” Acéline asked indignantly.

“As you should.” Harry acknowledged facetiously. “It shows that you have at least some degree of class.”

Acéline’s face flooded with colour. “Why you little…”

“Ah, Mr. Potter!” Bagman called suddenly, bounding towards him. “I didn’t see you there!”

“Mr. Bagman.” Harry acknowledged, turning away from Acéline. “You will note of course that Cedric has also arrived.”

Bagman glanced quickly towards where Cedric and Fleur were still talking. “Yes, yes, wonderful, wonderful. We’re still waiting on the Durmstrang students though and the rest of the judges. I’m sure they’ll be here any minute. There’s nothing to worry about though, this is just the Wand Weighing Ceremony.”

“I am aware.” Harry told him stiffly, it was hard to forget that this was the man who had tried to steal from Fred and George.

“It’s nothing to worry about,” Bagman said again. “We’ll just be checking your wands to make sure they work, and then there will be a little photo shoot. Rita Skeeter is doing a piece on you all for the Daily Prophet.”

Harry glance over to where Rita Skeeter was standing, talking the wizard with a camera who was standing near the windows. Unfortunately, Skeeter caught his eyes and quickly made her way across the room.

“You must be Harry Potter!” She announced loudly.

“Yes.” Harry agreed blandly.

“Harry, this is Rita.” Bagman said with a wide smile. “I’m sure you must have read some of her articles.”

“I’d rather you called me Mr. Potter, sir.” Harry told him firmly.


Rita’s eyes were narrowed on Harry. “Ludo, do you think that there might be time for me to have a quick chat with Harry here before the ceremony starts? It might do the Tournament some good, an interview with the youngest champion.”

“Of course!” Bagman agreed excitedly.
“I would rather not.” Harry put in quickly. “I am underage, you see. It would be inappropriate for me to talk to Miss Skeeter without Lord Black present.”

“Ah, yes,” Skeeter’s eyes gleamed. “Lord Black is your godfather.”

“He is.” Harry agreed neutrally.

“Tell me, Harry,” Skeeter started. “What is it like to live with someone like your godfather?”

“It’s Mr. Potter, Miss Skeeter.” Harry corrected her firmly. “And I would rather not answer any questions until Lord Black arrives.”

“Shy, are you?” Skeeter asked slyly.

“No,” Harry denied. “I am just very aware of my legal rights.”

Skeeter’s smile was starting to look strained. “Don’t you think my readers have a right to know about you though, Harry?”

“Mr. Potter.” Harry corrected again.

Skeeter rolled her eyes. “There’s no need to be so formal, you know. We’re all friends here.”

The door opened and Harry turned towards it hopefully, sighing internally when the Durmstrang students entered. Where was Sirius?

“So?” Skeeter prompted. “Don’t you think my readers have a right to know about you? After all, you did put your name forward to compete in the Tournament.”

“I didn’t, actually.” Harry denied firmly.

“Oh?” Skeeter had a quill and parchment in her hand, ready to take notes.

“I didn’t put my name in the Goblet of Fire.” Harry repeated.

“But surely you must of.” Skeeter exclaimed. “How else would you be competing in it?”

“I believe the theory is that someone else submitted my name.” Harry told her, before remembering that he didn’t want to be answering her questions. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, Miss Skeeter, I want to have the opportunity to speak to the Durmstrang students for a minute.”

Skeeter looked disappointed, but she nodded. “Of course.”

Harry quickly made his way across the room to the corner where Viktor Krum and Nina Viserova were standing together.

Viktor bowed and Nina curtsied as Harry drew nearer. “Merry meet, Harry.” Viktor greeted him.

“Merry meet.” Harry agreed with a nod.

“This is Nina Viserova, ot Rodyt Viserova.” Viktor started in Bulgarian. “Nina, this is Harry Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter.” Nina greeted him gruffly in Bulgarian.

“And you, Miss Viserova.” Harry agreed. “Please call me Harry.”
Nina smiled. “Then you must call me Nina.”

“Congratulations on being selected as a Champion.” Harry continued in English.

“Thank you.” Nina’s smile widened. “I would say the same to you, but Viktor tells me that you have no wish to be a Champion?”

“Not really, no.” Harry agreed. “But I’m here now, so I’ll do my best.”

“As you should.” Nina agreed. “Your knowledge of our language is impressive.”

“Thank you.” Harry nodded in acknowledgement. “It is a very hard language to learn. I met Prince Andrey at the Quidditch World Cup, but found it hard to speak to him. His English is much better than my Bulgarian.”

Nina’s eyes widened. “You met the prince?”

“I did.” Harry confirmed, before turning as he heard the door open.

Sirius came through first, followed by Dumbledore, Brusilova, Maxime, and an older man who Harry recognised as being Ollivander – the wandmaker who had sold him his wand.

Cedric and Krum both bowed to Sirius, while Fleur, Aceline and Nina curtsied. Sirius nodded in acknowledgement as Madame Maxime and Madame Brusilova curtsied shallowly to Harry.

“Excellent!” Bagman declared. “Shall we get started? Champions, you need to be sitting on those seats near the door, while we judges will be sitting behind the table.”

Harry began to walk across the room, pausing when Sirius met him halfway.

“Everything going alright, Harry?” Sirius murmured.

“Skeeter wants an interview with me.” Harry answered quietly. “I told her I couldn’t talk to her without you present.”

Sirius’ gaze darted to where Skeeter was talking to her photographer again. “Good on you.”

Harry chose a seat beside Cedric and then watched as the judges all took their seats. Dumbledore didn’t sit down, choosing instead to stand behind his desk and address the Champions.

“Let me introduce Mr. Ollivander.” Dumbledore told them, gesturing to the wandmaker who was standing near the windows. “He is England’s foremost wandmaker and he will be checking your wands to ensure that they are fully functional for the Tournament.”

Harry observed Ollivander, suddenly remembering that Takashi was hoping to apprentice under a wandmaker after graduating from Hogwarts. He wondered how Ollivander measured up against the Japanese wandmaker that would hopefully be Takashi’s master.

As Dumbledore finished speaking, Ollivander moved away from the window. “Mademoiselle Moreau, if you would.”

Aceline stood and, with a haughty glance in Fleur’s direction, flounced across the room to where Ollivander was waiting. She handed him her wand, and then stepped back.

Ollivander brought the wand up to his eyes. “Ah, eight and a quarter inches, inflexible Maple wood and containing a Melusine hair.”
Harry looked at the wand in interest, he’d never heard of that wand core before.

“Quite an unusual core,” Ollivander commented. “Though I imagine less uncommon in France than it is here.”

Aceline raised her nose haughtily.

Ollivander raised the wand in his right hand. “Orchideous!”

Once Aceline had taken her seat again, flowers and wand in hand, Ollivander called on Fleur.

Fleur’s wand apparently contained a veela hair, which made Aceline snort disdainfully. It raised an interesting question in Harry’s mind though. If veela hair could be used for wands, did that mean that werewolf fur could be too? What about wizard’s hair or Merpeople’s hair? After all, a Melusine wasn’t that different from a Merperson and Aceline had one of their hairs as her wand core.

Krum was next and, while Harry had heard of his wandcore (Draco had a dragon heartstring core as well) he had never heard of a wand made of hornbeam before.

Next up was Nina, whose wand was ten inches long, flexible, made of ebony, with a Rougarou hair. Ollivander seemed impressed by Nina’s wand, commenting that Rougarou hair could be very difficult to work with.

Cedric was next and nothing about his wand sounded unusual to Harry. A fact that Harry put down to Cedric also being from England. Clearly different wandmakers, in different countries, used different materials. Harry wondered what Takashi would use when he was making wands in Japan.

Then it was Harry’s turn and, as he passed Ollivander his wand, he hoped desperately that the older man wouldn’t tell the others of its connection to Voldemort’s wand. Harry doubted that would go down well. Thankfully, Ollivander left that piece of information alone and, aside from taking longer with Harry’s wand than he had the others, didn’t say or do anything odd.

After the ceremony was over, and Ollivander had slipped out of the room, Skeeter arranged them all for photos. First there was the shot of the whole group, then just the judges, then just the Champions, then the two Beauxbatons Champions and Madame Maxime, then the two Durmstrang Champions and Madame Brusilova, then Harry, Cedric and Dumbledore, and finally individual shots of each of the six Champions.

Finally it was over and Dumbledore dismissed them all to dinner. Harry had almost made it out the door when Skeeter’s long fingernails suddenly dug into his arm.

“You can’t be leaving yet, Harry!” Skeeter said quickly, tugging him away from the doorway. “Lord Black’s here now and you promised me an interview.”

Harry shook his arm free. “I think you are mistaken, Miss Skeeter. I merely told you that I could not give you an interview without Lord Black’s presence, not that I would give you one when he arrived.”

“Nonsense!” Skeeter dismissed his words with a wave of her hand. “An interview will be good for you, and good for the Tournament. Don’t you want to be famous?”

Harry looked around for Sirius and was relieved to see his godfather making his way towards them.

“Merry meet, Miss Skeeter.” Sirius greeted her with a charming smile.
Skeeter giggled. “Oh, Lord Black, how many times must I tell you to call me Rita?”

“At least one more, it would seem.” Sirius answered with a grin. “I see you have met my heir.”

“Oh, yes.” Skeeter turned her attention back to Harry. “I was just telling how important it is that he gives me an interview. Just think how much good it would do the Tournament.”

“I’m sure that Harry was just being cautious.” Sirius told Skeeter. “He can’t be too careful, you know. It would be terribly inappropriate for him to give an interview without me being present. Don’t you agree?”

It was obvious that Skeeter didn’t agree a bit, but she forced a smile. “Of course, Lord Black.”

“I would, of course, be willing to give an interview now that Lord Black is present.” Harry announced magnanimously.

Skeeter’s eyes widened in delight. “Oh, how positively lovely!”

They moved away from the door and sat on the seats that had previously been occupied by the Champions. Harry and Sirius sat beside each other, forcing Skeeter to pull a chair out of position so that she was facing them.

“Now,” Skeeter started, unsnapping her ridiculous crocodile-skin handbag and pulling out a green quill and some parchment. “It’s alright if I use a Quick-Notes Quill, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid not.” Harry told her apologetically.

Skeeter’s eyes darted up to his in shock. “Are you sure? Using it will allow me to talk to you normally. I find that people often find talking to someone who is actively taking notes somewhat intimidating.”

Harry imagined that she found that someone actively taking notes reminded the person being interviewed that they were on record.

“You could always use a Transcribing Quill.” Harry suggested.

Skeeter’s eyes narrowed slightly, but she returned the green quill to her bag and pulled out a plain black one. Once the quill had been set on the parchment and was poised, ready to transcribe their conversation, Skeeter leaned towards Harry.

“So, Harry, you were telling me before the ceremony that you are still claiming not to have entered the Tournament.”

Harry raised an eyebrow at the poorly hidden accusation in the question. “That is because I didn’t enter the Tournament. A fact that I can easily prove.”

“You can?” Skeeter asked, her eyes gleaming.

“Of course.” Harry inclined his head. “And I shall do so if the Wizengamot, or any other official body, should ever ask me to.”

Skeeter looked disappointed. “Don’t you think that my readers, the people of England, deserve to know the truth?”

“I do,” Harry agreed neutrally. “That is why I have told you the truth.”
Skeeter looked sceptical. “Don’t you think…”

Sirius cleared his throat. “Next question, Miss Skeeter.”

Skeeter’s eyes darted towards him. “Of course, uh, how are you feeling about the upcoming tasks? Are you nervous? Excited?”

“All of the above.” Harry admitted. “It is certainly intimidating to find myself competing against students three years older than me, in a tournament that has been known to result in death. However, despite my nerves I am excited by the opportunity to learn new things.”

The transcribing quill was scribbling away and, as Harry glanced at the parchment, he was glad to see that it was recording his words perfectly.

“Lovely!” Skeeter exclaimed. “Learning new things, exactly what I would expect to hear from a Ravenclaw. Tell me, Harry…”

“Mr. Potter.” Sirius corrected firmly.

Skeeter’s eyes darted towards him again. “Right, yes, tell me, Mr. Potter, what do you think your parents would think of you being sorted into Ravenclaw? They were both in Gryffindor I understand.”

“Harry has very few memories of his parents.” Sirius answered, before Harry could even open his mouth. “But I have no doubt that they would be incredibly proud of the young wizard that their son is growing up to be.”

“Despite him being in Ravenclaw?” Skeeter asked.

Sirius’ expression was firm. “It was a long running joke between Lord and Lady Potter that Lady Potter had been mis-sorted. Lord Potter often called her a Ravenclaw in disguise.”

Harry glanced at Sirius in interest, he hadn’t known that.

“And what do you think they would think of their son’s close relationship with so-called dark families?” Skeeter addressed her question to Sirius. “I understand that Mr. Potter has recently become betrothed to Daphne Greengrass, not to mention his close relationship with the Malfoy family.”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “I wasn’t aware that you held Lord Malfoy in such disregard, Miss Skeeter.”

“Not at all!” Skeeter denied hurriedly. “But many people do, you know.”

“It should not be surprising that Draco and I are friends.” Harry told her firmly. “He and Cousin Narcissa are two of my closest cousins.”

“Are they?” Skeeter sounded confused.

“Of course.” Harry inclined his head. “My grandmother was a daughter of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.”

“Not to mention that, as my heir, Harry can claim all members of my House as his own.” Sirius added.

“I see.” Skeeter commented. “Now, Harry…”
“Mr. Potter.” Sirius corrected her again.

Skeeter ignored him. “…how does it feel to know that You-Know-Who is still out there? That you didn’t really defeat him?”

“It is horrifying of course.” Harry started solemnly. “Particularly since I knew some of the people who were killed by him and his followers at the Quidditch World Cup final. I don’t want anyone else to have to lose their parents to Voldemort like I did.”

Skeeter, who had let out a ridiculous sounding squeak at the word ‘Voldemort’, looked shaken. “Don’t say his name!”

Harry barely managed to prevent himself from rolling his eyes. “My apologies.”

Sirius cleared his throat. “I think that’s enough for today, Miss Skeeter. We wouldn’t want to miss dinner.”

Skeeter looked disappointed, but she nodded. “Very well. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me, Mr. Potter.”

She took the quill off the parchment and returned it to her bag, before beginning to roll up the parchment.

“Miss Skeeter, if you don’t mind.” Sirius held out a hand for the parchment.

Skeeter looked confused, but reluctantly handed it over.

“Gemino!” Sirius cast, pointing his wand at the parchment. “Now, if you wouldn’t mind signing both copies of the parchment, Miss Skeeter, and I will do the same.”

Skeeter was looking increasingly put out, but she pasted a smile on her face and retrieved a pink quill from her bag. “Of course, Lord Black.”
Chapter 21

When Harry saw the front of the Daily Prophet the next morning, his stomach dropped in dread. Of all the photographs that they had posed for, why in Merlin’s name had Skeeter chosen a picture of Harry on his own as the cover picture?

Worse still, when Harry opened the paper to find Skeeter’s article on the Triwizard Tournament, he discovered that she had written more about him than she had the other five Champions put together. Harry hoped the other Champions didn’t blame him for her article.

The only good thing about the article was how accurately she had described their interview. Skeeter’s usual articles were filled with slander, but this article didn’t have any of that. Harry primarily put it down to Sirius’ insistence that Skeeter leave him with a signed copy of the interview. There was no way that she could have misrepresented Harry in her article without being sued by the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.

After he had finished reading the article, Harry looked up to the Head Table where Sirius was sitting. Sirius, who also had a copy of the paper in his hands, caught Harry’s eyes and gave him an approving nod.

Harry smiled gratefully in reply, before standing up and making his way over to the Slytherin Table where Viktor Krum and Nina Viserova were sitting with their schoolmates.

“Dobro utro, Viktor, Nina.” Harry greeted them politely. They both started to stand respectfully, but Harry stopped them with a wave of his hand.

“Dobro utro, Harry.” Viktor replied, returning to his seat. “How may ve help you?

Harry looked around and noted in discomfort that the rest of the Durmstrang students weren’t even trying to hide the fact that they were listening in on their conversation.

“I wanted to apologise.” Harry explained, bringing up his copy of the Daily Prophet to demonstrate what he was apologising for. “Miss Skeeter’s article ought to have been about all six Champions, not just me.”

“Do not worry about it.” Nina instructed him with an amused smile. “It is the same in Bulgaria ven Viktor does anything. It vill do him good to, uh, how do you say, igrae vtsiga tskylka?”

Harry smirked in amusement as Viktor glared at her in mock outrage. “Play second fiddle?”

“Yes, that.” Nina nodded. “So you should not worry. I am used to not being in papers and it vill do Viktor good not to be.”

“Thank you.” Harry inclined his head. “That is very understanding of you.”

Unfortunately, not everyone was so understanding. While Cedric and Fleur seemed to understand that he hadn’t sought the attention, Aceline apparently was still outraged by Harry’s set down the day before.

When Harry had attempted to apologise to her, albeit reluctantly, she had shrieked at him in French and called him an “arrogant little boy!” Harry, not willing to be made a fool by her, had simply raised a scathing eyebrow in reply and had, later, made sure that people had overheard him commenting to Draco over the boorish manners of some of Beauxbatons students. He had also made a point to
mention how refreshingly cultured he found Fleur – something that later won him a smile from the witch in mention and a proprietorial look from Daphne.

The only other person who seemed to have a problem with the article was Ron Weasley. Ron had been acting subdued ever since he had received two months of detention for threatening Harry in Charms class, but the article seemed to stir him up again and he had renewed his regular verbal attacks on Harry’s character.

“Eager for the spotlight, aye, Potter?” Ron heckled outside Charms class a few days later.

Harry rolled his eyes, couldn’t Ron come up with any new lines? Ron had already used that one three times since the article had come out.

“I betcha think the whole bloody tournament is about you.” Ron continued. “Well, I reckon it’s a pity the article didn’t mention what dark murderous wanker you are! Next time I see Rita Skeeter I’m going to tell her about how you hang around with Death Eaters and corrupt innocent light wizards. What do you think you’re adoring fans will think of that?”

Harry sat down at his usual desk with a small frown. As much as he inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, wished Ron would get new material, he had absolutely no idea where the corruption charge had come from.

Ron moved to stand in front of Harry’s desk, close enough that Harry could see the other boy’s freckles despite them being mostly hidden by red face.

“You think you’re so great, don’t you, Potter?”

Harry ignored him, laying out his quill and parchment on his desk. That was definitely not a new line.

“You swan around school corrupting my brothers over to the dark side!” Ron snarled.

Harry’s eyes darted up to Ron’s face in surprise. “What?”

“You heard me, Potter!” Ron snapped. “First you corrupted Fred and George, and as though that wasn’t enough now you’ve gotten Bill and Charlie too!”

“Wait,” Harry shook his head. “You’re blaming that on me? What do you think I did? Held a wand to your brother’s head until he accepted his birth-right?”

“It’s not his bloody birth-right!” Ron exploded, spittle flying everywhere.

“Come on, Ron.” Dean Thomas was pulling at his friends arm. “Flitwick will be here any minute and you don’t want to get any more detentions.”

“Or lose Gryffindor any more points.” One of the Gryffindor girls mumbled quietly.

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“He said what?” Draco asked, between peals of laughter.

Neville, who was leaning against the trunk of the tree that they were sitting under, looked confused. “That Harry was corrupting his brothers across to the dark side.”

Draco let out another burst of laughter. “He actually said dark side?”
Neville glanced sideways at Harry, as though hoping that he would be able to explain Draco’s strange behaviour.

Harry, who had been attempting to wordlessly cast a Disarming spell at the ground, sighed. “Yes, Draco, he used those exact words.”

Draco laughed again. “Oh, that’s just too wonderful! Do you think he knew that was using a muggle reference to insult you?”

“I doubt it.” Neville put in. “For all that he’s anti-traditional, Ron knows next to nothing about muggles. How is ‘dark side’ a muggle reference?”

“We really should have taken you to see Star Wars over the summer!” Draco declared.

“Next summer.” Harry promised. “Last summer was too busy with the Quidditch World Cup.”

“Hopefully next summer will be busy as well.” Draco said excitedly. “Father said that I could try out for Under Seventeen Quidditch!”

“Sirius said the same thing!” Harry exclaimed gleefully, how had he forgotten about that?

“Smashing!” Draco declared, before his face fell. “Though it makes the lack of Quidditch Cup this year even worse. How are we supposed to keep on the top of our games if we aren’t playing?”

“You’re still practising though, aren’t you?” Neville put in.

“Yes,” Draco admitted. “But it’s not the same. I’m a Chaser, I need to practise with other Chasers.”

“What happened to those Durmstrang Chasers you were practising a few weeks ago?” Harry asked, trying once again to cast the spell wordlessly.

Draco considered that. “I suppose I could ask them if they are interested in practising again. Are you going to fly with Krum again?”

“I’d like to.” Harry answered, pausing as he tried the spell again. “But I don’t want to ask him. I don’t want him to think I’m like Weasley.”

Draco snorted. “I don’t think anyone could find similarities between you and Weasley. It would be like comparing a Hippogriff with one of Hagrid’s flesh-eating slugs.”

“Have you noticed the glares that Pansy has been sending you?”

Harry turned his head slightly so that he could see where Pansy and Tracey were sitting on a transfigured blanket approximately fifteen feet away from where he was sitting with Draco, Daphne, and Theo.

“Of course.” Harry answered Theo with a small smirk. “Not that she’s unique.”

“No, you have quite the collection of haters.” Draco agreed. “There’s Pansy, Weasley, and Moreau.”

“No to mention my dorm-mates.” Harry agreed.

“What’s their problem?” Theo asked curiously. “I thought they were mostly ignoring you?”
“They were, until they realised that being my friend might earn them an introduction to Viktor.” Harry rolled his eyes. “Now I’m the one ignoring them.”

Theo grimaced. “Aren’t you still part of their chocolate business?”

“If by ‘part of’, you mean benefit financially without having to do anything, then yes.” Harry answered with a pleased smile. “I put ten galleons in when they started in up, with the understanding that I would get twenty percent of the profits. They’ve been selling so much that I’ve already doubled my investment.”

“Is it really worth it though?” Draco sneered. “You get less than a galleon a month – that’s barely anything.”

“It’s not about the money.” Harry pointed out. “It’s about the fact that they do all the hard work and I still get paid. They must hate it!”

Draco, Theo, and Daphne all smirked. “Well, when you put it like that.”

“She is still glaring at you.” Theo commented, glancing back towards Pansy.

“She’s just jealous.” Draco said, puffing out his chest.

“Whatever happened with her, anyway?” Theo asked curiously. “I’ve always wondered. One day she was hanging out with us, and the next she had just stopped.”

“It wasn’t quite that dramatic.” Harry pointed out. “Do you remember her behaviour last year?”

“I do.” Daphne sneered towards Pansy. “She was acting like a wanton hussy. It was disgraceful.”

Draco smirked. “It was hilarious.”

Harry shot him a dirty look. “You didn’t think it was so funny in second year when she was focussing all her attention on you.”

“No,” Draco grimaced at the memory. “But you did.”

“It just goes to show how terribly uncouth she is.” Daphne sniffed. “As though her wanton behaviour wasn’t bad enough, to turn her attention towards a wizard who is betrothed is simply deplorable.”

“So what happened?” Theo asked eagerly.

“Well, you know that I reprimanded her multiple times.” Harry told him.

Theo smiled gleefully. “You know, I actually miss watching you do that. It was even more entertaining than Quidditch.”

Harry ignored him. “But you may not have been aware that Sirius had contacted Pansy’s father about her behaviour at the end of second year, and then a few times in third year.”

“Really?” Theo’s eyes were wide.

“Eventually, Sirius basically told Mr. Parkinson that if he didn’t make Pansy stop then Sirius would make it his personal mission to make the House of Parkinson regret it.” Harry grinned, he’d been so proud of Sirius that day.
“Merlin!” Theo looked over at where Pansy was sitting. “No wonder she stopped, Lord Black can be terrifying.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “Now she just glares at me from a distance.”

“Which is still contemptibly ill-mannered.” Daphne declared.

“Yes, though not unexpectedly so.” Harry agreed. “It is not as though she has ever given us a reason to believe that she would behave otherwise.”

Daphne sneered. “It is witches like her who give traditionalism a bad name. Presumptuous plebeians who do not understand their place in the world.”

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “Moreau’s the same. Can you believe that she tried to warn me away from Fleur? She called her a half breed and said that she was a stain on their proud school.”

Daphne shook her head in disgust. “What did you say?”

“I told her that the only people in England who had those views were uncultured.” Harry smirked. “And then, when she said ‘I beg your pardon’, I told her that in doing so she was showing that she had at least some class.”

“That sounds amazing!” Theo exclaimed, before sighing in disappointment. “I can’t believe that I missed it.”

It was Harry and Daphne’s third date to Hogsmeade and Harry couldn’t help but feel that it was a lot more comfortable than the last two had been. Something that he put down to their letters. Sure, writing letters wasn’t the same as talking to someone, but it was definitely better than nothing.

“A tasty treat, for a delightful lady.” Harry teased as he handed Daphne the packet of Sugared Butterfly wing he had bought from Honeydukes.

Daphne blushed prettily. “Thank you, Harry.”

“Though I don’t understand how you like them.” Harry commented, as they began walking towards the Leaky Cauldron – Daphne’s gloved hand tucked into his elbow. “Did you know that they have actual butterfly wings in them?”

“Oh course.” Daphne answered. “That’s what makes them so pretty.”

“What do butterfly wings even taste like?” Harry asked curiously.

Daphne laughed lightly in amusement. “You don’t actually taste them.”

“But you don’t think it’s weird to eat something with actual butterfly wings in it?” Harry asked.

“Says the wizard who enjoys eating animated frogs.” Daphne returned.

Harry grinned unapologetically. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“No,” Daphne answered. “I don’t. It is no weirder than eating any other kind of meat anyway.”

“Fair point.” Harry acknowledged, before groaning quietly when he spotted Skeeter standing outside of the Leaky Cauldron with the same photographer who had been at the Wand Weighing Ceremony.
“What is it?” Daphne asked, before apparently seeing who he was looking at. “Oh.”

Harry turned, spinning Daphne around with him, and began to walk quickly in the opposite direction.

“Mr. Potter!” Skeeter’s voice called loudly.

Harry sighed in defeat and turned around again, before waiting for Skeeter to make her way towards him. She looked ridiculous trying to run in her stilettoed heels.

“Miss Skeeter.”

“Mr. Potter.” Skeeter’s eyes were gleaming and they narrowed on Daphne. “And who is this?”

Harry clenched his jaw. “Daphne, dear, this is Rita Skeeter, reporter for the Daily Prophet. Miss Skeeter, this is my betrothed, Daphne Greengrass, daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass.”

“Oh how lovely!” Skeeter exclaimed, turning and beckoning her photographer over. “You two must be on a date.”

“Yes.” Harry admitted shortly.

Skeeter ignored him, turning her attention to Daphne. “Can I call you Daphne? Tell me, Daphne…”

“No, you may not.” Daphne interrupted firmly.

Skeeter’s eyes widened in surprise. “Well, then, tell me, Miss Greengrass, what do you think of the fact that Harry entered the Triwizard Tournament.”

“I don’t believe that he did.” Daphne answered, her tone leaving no room for argument.

“Really?” Skeeter raised an eyebrow sceptically. “Come now, Daphne…”

“Miss Greengrass.” Harry corrected her firmly.

Skeeter shot him an annoyed look as she continued. “You can’t seriously believe that your boyfriend’s name just appeared in the Goblet of Fire.”

“Certainly not,” Daphne agreed. “However, I do believe that someone other than my betrothed put his name in the Goblet.”

Skeeter frowned disgruntledly before she replaced the expression with a sickeningly sweet smile. “Well, enough about that. Tell me, how long have the two of you been together?”

“Lord Black and Lord Greengrass signed our betrothal contract at the end of July.” Harry answered carefully.

Skeeter’s eyes widened in, what Harry could only presume was, fake surprise. “A betrothal contract, really? Aren’t they dreadfully old fashioned?”

“I don’t believe so, no.” Daphne answered sharply.

“You don’t feel…trapped, dear?” Skeeter asked her. “You wouldn’t rather have the opportunity to decide who to marry for yourself?”
Daphne’s hand tightened on Harry’s arm. “No, I trust my father’s judgement.”

“But…” Skeeter apparently wasn’t willing to let it go.

“Besides,” Daphne interrupted her dismissively. “I cannot imagine finding anyone that I would rather be married to than Harry.”

Skeeter’s smile was probably supposed to be sweet, but Harry thought it looked calculating. “Ah, young love.”

Harry made a show of looking at his pocket watch for the time. “We really must be going. Merry Part, Miss Skeeter.”

“Wait!” Skeeter said suddenly. “First, a photograph.”

Harry glanced down at Daphne to ensure that she was willing, before agreeing. “Very well.”

Skeeter’s face lit up. “Lovely! Now you stand there. Bozo, come and get your camera set up!”

Harry bent down so that he could whisper in Daphne’s ear. “Shall we make it like an official portrait?”

Daphne’s eyes sparkled. “Definitely.”

“Do you know the portrait in the Elladora Lounge?” Harry asked. “Where they’re both standing?”

“But I don’t have a shawl.” Daphne pointed out.

Harry pulled a clean handkerchief out of his pocket and, turning his back on Skeeter and Bozo, enlarged it until it was large enough to be a shawl.

“You had better do the colour charm.” Harry suggested quietly, passing her the material. “There is no way I would get the shade right.”

Daphne laughed softly, before tapping the enlarged handkerchief with her wand and whispering the incantation. Immediately, the shawl turned a dark burgundy colour.

Harry’s eyes widened in appreciation. “That’s the colour of the House of Black.”

Daphne met his eyes. “I know.”

Harry reached for her hand and squeezed it in appreciation. He agreed with what she had told Skeeter, he couldn’t imagine anyone he would rather marry than Daphne.

“Ready?” Skeeter’s voice called out from where she was standing behind the camera.

Harry faced the camera before angling his body towards Daphne, as Daphne draped the shawl across her back and over both her arms. It took a few seconds for her to get the shawl right, with one end of it falling onto the ground in front of her, then she placed her left hand on Harry’s arm and they both turned their attention to the camera and smiled blandly.

“Lovely!” Skeeter declared as the camera flashed. “Now, how about one with the two of you kissing?”

Harry stared at her coldly. “I think not.”
Daphne removed her hand from his arm and readjusted the shawl so that it was no longer hanging on the ground.

Harry smirked in amusement. “I’m not getting that back, am I?”

“Not today.” Daphne answered and she wrapped it around her robes.

21-21-21

Betrothals: Old-fashioned or Romantic? A conversation with Harry Potter and Daphne Greengrass.

The Daily Prophet’s headline the next day came to no surprise to Harry, though he couldn’t help but be pleasantly surprised at how well the photo had come out. He and Daphne looked perfect and, while the photo was black and white, Harry felt proud that Daphne had chosen the colour of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black for the shawl.

He could feel the eyes of his fellow students on him and glanced over at Daphne to see how see was receiving all the attention. He needn’t have bothered, Daphne looked perfectly at ease as she accepted their fellow students admiring stares.

Looking up the Head Table, Harry noticed that even Sirius looked impressed. Though his godfather would of cause know where they got their inspiration for the photo.

Harry looked back down at the photo, before flicking through the paper to find the article. He skimmed through it quickly and was pleased to note that Skeeter hadn’t misrepresented them at all. Either she thought that the truth made a good enough story, or she was more scared of being sued by Sirius than Harry had thought.

As pleased as Harry was by the article though, it didn’t help his growing anxiety. The First Task was in two days and he had no idea what he was supposed to facing. Maybe, if he had been a Gryffindor, the idea of having to face a challenge without any warning would be exciting, but he was a Ravenclaw and it just made him feel underprepared.

21-21-21
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Welcome to Double Update Friday! Don't get too excited, this won't be a regular occurrence, but today's two chapters go together and I didn't want to leave you hanging. Enjoy :)

When Harry woke on the morning of the First Task, his first thought was about the fact that he still had no idea what the task would contain. He knew that not knowing was actually part of the task, after all Bagman had described the purpose of the task as being to test their daring and their improvisation, but that didn’t mean he had to like it.

The only good thing was that he was relatively certain that the other students didn’t know either. Sirius had made a comment a few days before that someone had been concerned that he might try to help Harry and so all the judges, including Dumbledore and the Headmistresses, had been sworn to secrecy about the contents of the tasks.

Still, knowing that the five other Champions also had no idea what was happening wasn’t a huge encouragement. The other five Champions were all over three years older than him, Harry needed every little advantage that he could get.

The First Task had been scheduled for after lunch, which meant that Harry had the entire morning to worry himself into a frenzy – not that he let anyone else see how anxious he was. Unbelievably, he was actually expected to attend his morning classes and, as Harry sat in History of Magic and tried to concentrate on what Remus was teaching them, he realised it was the first time in his life he had been frustrated about having to be in class.

The tense atmosphere of the school wasn’t helping Harry’s nerves either. It seemed as though every person he came across wanted to wish him luck or, in the case of Ron Weasley, taunt him regarding his likely death. Which, even in his panic filled state, Harry thought was a bit of an over exaggeration of the situation. He would describe it more as his possible death, but then he didn’t really know enough about the task to make a reasoned prediction.

After lunch, Professor Flitwick led him out of the castle and onto the grounds.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Potter?” Flitwick asked gently.

“Nervous.” Harry admitted with a shaky laugh. “We Ravenclaws don’t do very well with the unknown, do we, Professor?”

Flitwick chuckled wryly. “No, we don’t. Though I’m sure you’ve done as much research as you could.”

“It’s hard to research when you don’t know what you’re researching.” Harry pointed out, wincing at the slightly hysterical edge to his voice.

Flitwick stopped and, when Harry turned to see what was holding his professor up, he stared up at Harry seriously. “You’ll be fine, Mr. Potter. I have complete confidence in you.”
Harry inclined his head gratefully. “Thank you, Professor.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence, stopping only when they reached the opening of a large tent. Harry presumed that the tent was probably blocking whatever their task would be and was tempted to run around it to try and get a peek of what was to come.

Instead, he rubbed his clammy hands against his robes and ducked under the tent opening. The other Champions were already there and each of them greeted him with polite bow – even Aceline, though her curtsy was accompanied with a sneer.

The others all looked about as nervous as he felt, though they all exhibited it differently. Viktor was glaring darkly at the second door of the tent that Harry presumed would lead them to the task, Nina’s shoulders were hunched and her hands were clenched in her robes, Fleur was sitting on a stool looking pale, Aceline was standing as far away from Fleur as she could get in a tent and staring at the second door blankly, and Cedric was pacing across the tent floor.

Ludo Bagman was there too and his excited grin looked very out of place surrounded by the pale faces around him. Not to mention that he was wearing black and yellow striped Quidditch robes.

“Harry!” Bagman greeted him, striding forward to pump his hand up and down.

Harry hoped that the man wouldn’t notice how clammy his hands were.

“Since we’re all here, I can fill you in!” Bagman announced, immediately drawing the attention of everyone in the room. “Now, before the audience assembles, we’ll just take a quick look out that door so you can see what your challenge is. We don’t want to send you in completely unprepared after all.”

Harry’s lip curled in disdain as Bagman laughed at his own joke. Now was definitely not the time for humour.

Bagman marched self-importantly over to the tent’s second door and, with a wave of his wand, the door rolled up.

Harry joined the other five Champions in all but running to the door, before frowning in confusion when he took in the view.

There were bleachers surrounding a large, flat area of dirt with a large chasm in the ground and about twenty feet past it a stone wall. There was obviously something past the stone wall as well, as the bleachers continued past it, but whatever was there was blocked from view by the wall.

Harry looked around and saw that his fellow Champions looked just as confused as he did. What exactly was their task?

“Back inside!” Bagman instructed suddenly, barely waiting for them to return to the tent before lowering down the tent door. “Now, you’re probably wondering what all that means.”

Harry could feel his lip curling again at Bagman’s inappropriate excitement. How had he gotten this part of the job anyway? Harry would have much rather had Sirius giving the instructions.

“Well, I can’t tell you much.” Bagman told them brightly. “But I can give you three words, or rather, three elements that you will have to conquer. Not water, that will come later, the elements are air, stone, and fire.”

Harry’s forehead furrowed in thought. Stone was obviously the brick wall, which meant the chasm
was either air or fire. He was going to guess air, which meant that fire was over the wall.

“It’s an obstacle course!” Bagman announced with a beaming smile. “You must get past each of the challenges to collect the golden egg! The judges, myself included of course, will then score you points out of ten for your performance.”

Harry turned away from the man, desperately trying to think through all the spells that he knew. One of the shields that Sirius had taught him before his name had come out of the Goblet could withstand fiendfire – though not for very long – but of course it’s appropriateness for the task would depend on what form the fire had. He could use a blasting curse on the stone wall, unless it had been spelled to be unbreakable.

As Harry was thinking he could hear the sound of hundreds of people making their way past the tent – presumably towards the spectator stands. They were all talking excitedly and Harry found himself unreasonably angry at them. Didn’t they know that he and the other Champions were terrified?

“Now,” Bagman said, pulling a small bag made of purple silk out of his robes pocket. “We need to find out what order you will all be going in. Ladies first, I think.”

Aceline stepped forward haughtily, actually elbowing Nina out of her way. “I weell go first!”

“Righty-ho.” Bagman grinned, holding the bag out to her.

Aceline put her hand in the bag and pulled out a small token.

“Ah, second.” Bagman was smiling so widely you could see all his teeth.

Aceline didn’t look pleased by the number and Harry wondered whether she had been hoping to be sooner or later.

Fleur went next, pulling out a token with the number three. She looked shaken by the number and Aceline’s malicious smirk couldn’t have helped.

Nina pulled out the number four, then Viktor pulled out a token with the number one on it.

Harry and Cedric exchanged nervous glances, trying to decide who ought to go first. Harry wasn’t sure which option sounded worse, being fifth or sixth.

Cedric stepped forward and pulled out a token with the number five on it.

Harry’s stomach dropped as he decided that being last was definitely the worst option.

“Come on, Harry!” Bagman encouraged his jovially.

Harry glared coldly at the man, causing Bagman’s smile to fall, but he stepped forward and pulled the sixth token out of the bag.

“Excellent!” Bagman declared, his smile returning to his face. “Now I have to be off, I’m commentating you know. Mr. Krum, you’re up first so just step out those doors when you hear a whistle.”

Krum nodded stiffly.

“Harry!” Bagman said suddenly, drawing Harry out of his thoughts. “Mind if I have a word? Outside?”
Harry stared at him in confusion. “Pardon?”

“Just a quick word.” Bagman said, tugging on Harry’s arm.

Harry shook his arm free. “I’d rather not, sir. I need as much time as I can to plan.”

Bagman’s face fell. “Are you sure?”

Harry narrowed his eyes suspiciously, what could Bagman possibly want. “Yes.”

“Right then,” Bagman looked glum. “I’ll be off then.”

Once Bagman was gone, Harry turned his attention to his thoughts. What could he use for air? Presuming that air referred to the chasm, then they were probably supposed to get over it somehow – but it had been at least ten feet wide. Were they expected to fly over it somehow? He could always summon a broom he supposed, but that would take too long. Besides, he kept his broom shrunk in his locked trunk.

A whistle blew in the distance and Harry looked towards Krum. “Good luck!” He wished him in Bulgarian.

Krum nodded stiffly, before exiting the tent. A few seconds later they heard the roar of the crowd and Bagman’s voice introducing him.

“…Viktor Krum! Last time I called his name like this it was at the Quidditch World Cup Final. Krum caught the snitch then of course, but he faces a very different challenge today.”

Harry turned his attention back to his thoughts, so he could probably use the shield against fire. The only problem was the shield was the most draining spell he had ever cast and he had never been able to hold it for any longer than three minutes. Sirius had been impressed by that, explaining that most wizards couldn’t hold it for longer than a minute, but three minutes still wasn’t very long.

“Ooo, interesting strategy!” Bagman commented. “It will be impressive if he can pull it off…so far so good…oooh, that doesn’t look good…”

It was horrible listening to Bagman’s vague commentary. Harry wished that they had thought to block the sound from the tent. He would have blocked out the sound himself, except he didn’t want to miss any hints that Bagman might accidently give.

“How are you feeling?” Cedric asked quietly, moving to stand beside Harry.

“Alright,” Harry lied with a smile that he thought probably looked more like a grimace. “You?”

“Alright.” Cedric agreed, his face pale.

Harry cast his thoughts back to the fire. He remembered having learnt in history about how during the witch trials, witches had used a spell to protect themselves from fire. The spell had made the fire feel more like a tickling sensation than anything. Harry wished he had looked up that spell.

“…not surprising really,” Bagman was saying. “Brawn over brains…it’s taking a while though…just another few spells I think, and he’ll be through…”

“It’s bloody insane!” Cedric commented suddenly.

Harry looked across at him in surprise. “What is?”
“This whole tournament!” Cedric answered passionately. “I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“I don’t know what Dumbledore was thinking.” Harry added.

Cedric nodded. “It makes me feel sorry for you though. I’m here because I was apparently insane enough to think this was a good idea, you didn’t get a choice.”

“It is what it is.” Harry said neutrally.

“…well, that’s an interesting strategy…” Bagman continued. “…ouch! That’s got to have hurt…”

“What’s her problem?” Cedric asked quietly, subtly gesturing towards Acelyne who was sneering at them.

“She’s as prejudiced as an anti-traditionalist.” Harry answered, just as quietly. “She tried to tell me before the Wand Weighing Ceremony that Fleur was a half-breed and a stain on their proud school.”

Cedric drew himself up in offence. “What?”

“I reprimanded her for it.” Harry assured him. “She didn’t seem to appreciate it.”

“Fleur’s not a half-breed!” Cedric hissed indignantly.

“Well, obviously you wouldn’t think so.” Harry told him with a half grin. “I’ve seen you flirting with her.”

Cedric’s pale cheeks suddenly filled with colour.

“…he wasn’t expecting that, now was he!” Bagman announced, his tone amused.

“That doesn’t sound good.” Harry commented worriedly.

“…nice bit of spellwork there though…” Bagman added. “…very impressive…almost there…he’s got it!”

The sound of the spectators roaring in approval was almost deafening and blocked out anything more that Bagman might have been saying. Then came the judges marks for Viktor, but Bagman didn’t announce them aloud.

A few more minutes passed and then the whistle blew again, and a pale looking Acelyne exited the tent.

The crowd roared in excitement again and Bagman began his commentary.

“Our second champion is Acelyne Moreau!”

Harry went back to his thoughts. He could blast through the wall, but what if it had an unbreakable charm? What would he do then? Could he blast a tunnel underneath it? That would only work if the stone stopped at the surface of the ground. If he couldn’t go through it, and he couldn’t go under it, then the only other option was to go over it. The problem was that he had no practise in climbing stone walls and he couldn’t think of any spells that would help.

“…well, that’s an interesting idea…” Bagman sounded confused. “…not sure it will work though… ouch, that looks like it’s going to sting…”

Harry frowned in confusion. Presumably Acelyne was still on the first obstacle, which had looked to
be the chasm. But he couldn’t see how an air challenge would make you sting? Unless it was actually the fire challenge…

“…it still looks very painful, but she’s making her way to the next obstacle.” Bagman continued. “…interesting use of that spell…let’s see if it works…well she’s certainly making progress, but if she doesn’t watch out…ouch…well, she got passed it at least…”

Harry shared a worried glance with Nina who was standing several feet away from him.

“That did not sound good.” Nina commented, moving closer.

“No.” Harry and Cedric both agreed.

Fleur was still sitting on the other side of the tent, looking deep in thought.

“…a very ambitious strategy…” Bagman was saying. “…I wouldn’t want to have to hold it for that long…oooo, that’s the last place you want your spell to fail…”

Harry watched a small smile tug at the corners of Fleur’s mouth and couldn’t find it himself to blame her. Aceline had been really horrible to her and he could only imagine how much worse she was when they were alone.

“…uh, oh…” Bagman commented a few minutes later. “…she’s panicking…that’s not going to impress the judges…”

Eventually though, Bagman announced that Aceline had gotten her hands on the Golden Egg and the crowd roared in approval. Then came the judges scores, not that Bagman announced them, and eventually the whistle blew again and a nervous looking Fleur stood up from her stool and exited the tent.

“…Fleur Delacour!” Bagman announced. “Let’s hope she can do better than her fellow champion.”

Harry frowned in thought, they were almost halfway through the Champions and he still hadn’t figured out what he could for air – or the mysterious danger at the end of the Obstacle Course that had surprised Viktor. The problem was that there wasn’t much he could do with the information he had.

“…Merlin!” Bagman exclaimed suddenly. “Is she allowed to do that?”

Harry shared confused glances with Cedric and Nina, what was Fleur doing?

“…anyone else reminded of the Quidditch World Cup?” Bagman added jovially.

Harry rolled his eyes. It was as though the wizard had no idea what a sensitive subject the World Cup was. Did he not remember that some of the students in the crowd had lost family members and friends?

He supposed that air probably meant he had to fly, but how? His own broom was locked in his trunk, but he supposed he could try for one of the school brooms. He just wished he had finished his animagus transformation – then he could have transformed into the owl and flown across that way. Of course that would mean revealing that he was an animagus.

“…well, it worked for the last obstacle, so it makes sense to try it again…” Bagman was commented. “…ouch, didn’t quite go high enough…’
So if Harry summoning a broom was plan Z, he needed a plan A. He supposed he could try and
transfigure some kind of bridge, but he had never done anything like that before. Levitation was
always an option, but you couldn’t levitate yourself so he would have to levitate what he was
standing on.

“…Merlin!” Bagman exclaimed. “I wasn’t expecting that…I bet that comes in handy a lot…”

Harry supposed he could always jump. He snorted at his own silliness, before stilling suddenly.
What if he did jump? If he jumped high enough and used a propelling spell on himself he could fling
himself forward. The trick would be jumping high enough, propelling far enough, and landing
without breaking his neck. There was a lot wrong with the plan, but it was the best option he had so
far.

“…oh, dear…” Bagman commented. “…she doesn’t look very happy does she? Almost there
though…and she’s done it!”

Harry clenched his hands nervously as the crowd roared in excitement. “Good luck, Nina.”

“Thank you.” Nina nodded, before biting her lip nervously.

They waited for the judges to give their scores and then the whistle blew again.

It was weird to be in the tent alone with Cedric and Harry didn’t want to think too hard about what
that meant. He was almost up, soon he would be the one that Bagman would be enthusiastically
commentating on.

“Nina Viserova!” Bagman called. “…interesting, we’ve seen this tried before…let’s see if it works
faster this time…”

“You alright?” Cedric asked again.

“I’m looking forward to it being over.” Harry admitted.

“Me too.” Cedric agreed, letting out a deep breath.

“…we’ve seen this before too…” Bagman announced. “…similar strategy to her fellow Durmstrang
champion, clearly brawn is something that they focus on at Durmstrang…”

Harry turned back to his thoughts. So blasting curse for the wall, shielding for the fire, propulsion
spell for the air, he just needed to come up with a way to jump high enough.

“…impressive spell work there…” Bagman declared. “…very well done…”

There was only once spell that Harry could think of that would help him jump, but it was a
Parselmagic spell. What if someone recognised it for what it was and told everyone that he was a
Parselmouth?

“…oh, dear…she doesn’t seem to know the right spell to use here either…” Bagman commented.
“…well, at least she’s dealing with the effects better than some of her opponents…almost there…and
she’s done it!”

Harry’ stomach clenched nervously as he held out a clammy hand. “Good luck, Cedric.”

Cedric grasped Harry’s hand. “Thank you, you too.”

They waited in silence for the judges to give their scores and then the whistle blew again and, before
he knew it, Harry was alone in the tent.

“Cedric Diggory!” Bagman announced. “The first of Hogwarts’ Champions!”

Harry’s nerves were pumping like crazy and he began to pace back and forth across the tent.

“…we’ve seen this before…” Bagman commented. “…clearly our Champions are running out of new ideas…ouch, yes, that happened last time too…”

Harry winced on Cedric’s behalf, he hoped the older boy was alright.

“…interesting…” Bagman commented. “…that’s new…well, he’s a bit grubby, but he’s unhurt…”

Harry clenched his hands into fists and then unclenched them. Should he use the Parselmagic spell? Surely nobody would be close enough to notice and he could always ask Sirius for the name of the normal magic counterpart in case anyone asked him about it.

“…wonderful spellwork…” Bagman announced. “…well done, Diggory…”

Harry nodded firmly, yes, he would use the Parselmagic spell. The benefit was worth the risk.

“…and yet another student who doesn’t know the correct spell…” Bagman sounded disappointed. “…but he does seem to be reacting to the affects rather well…”

That was the most worrying part now – the unknown final obstacle that, apparently, needed a specific spell. As many spells as Harry knew, he doubted he knew one that most of the other Champions didn’t know.

“…and he’s got it!” Bagman declared gleefully. “Five champions down, only one to go!”

Harry thought he was going to be sick. He paced the tent as the judges gave their marks and waited for the whistle. Finally, after what felt like forever, the whistle blew and turned towards the tent door.

Here he went…he just hoped he wasn’t going to die.
Chapter 23

Harry ducked under the opening of the tent and winced as the crowd roared in excitement. They were very loud and would likely be a distraction. He wished he could magically shield himself from the noise but he didn't want to risk it. He didn't know how to block out the crowd without blocking out noises that he might need to hear and he didn't want to use any extra magical energy – he was sure that he would need all the energy at his disposal for the obstacle course.

He could see the giant stone wall in front of him, with the large chasm between him and it. The previously empty bleachers were now filled with spectators and Harry was sure that they couldn't all be students – there were far too many of them.

“Our final Champion is Harry Potter!” Bagman announced him excitedly, his voice echoing around the area.

The crowd cheered again and Harry tried to block them out as he began to run towards the chasm. It felt good to run and expend some of his nervous energy, but the closer he got to the chasm, the more his nervousness turned to panic. From a distance the chasm had looked about ten feet wide, but now that he was closer he could see that it was more like fifteen feet. What if his propulsion spell didn't send him far enough and he fell in?

Harry sped up, running and fast as he could towards the chasm. He could hear Bagman making some kind of joke about how he thought Harry might try to jump over the chasm. Harry ignored him, all his attention on the chasm. He would have to cast the spell and jump at the exact right time, in three...two...one...

:Up: Harry hissed, his wand providing the needed movement as he jumped.

The result was amazing and, before Harry knew it, he was over ten feet in the air. Instantly, he began to fall and made the mistake of looking down.

Merlin! The chasm was more of a pit than anything and there were giant lizards in it. Lizards that, if the liquid shooting towards him out of one of their mouths meant anything, spit some kind of venom.

“Propellentem!” Harry cast hurriedly as he fell.

The spell hit him as though he was a bludger being hit by a giant beater's bat, and suddenly the fast approaching ground was a much bigger concern than the pit filled with giant, venom spitting lizards.

“Malacisso!” Harry shouted, his wand waving some kind pattern in the air as he fell head first towards the ground.

The ground rippled slightly beneath him and Harry hoped furiously that it hadn't been his imagination. If it had been, and the ground hadn't softened at all, this was really going to hurt!

Harry clenched his eyes shut and stretched out his arms, bracing himself for impact, any second now he would...bounce?

His eyes flew open in confusion as he bounced off the ground and back into the air. What? A cushioning charm wasn't supposed to make things bouncy, just softer.
There wasn't much time to consider what had just happened though as he falling again, though this time feet first. His second landing was a lot more permanent than his first had been and Harry winced as his legs impacted with the hard ground. Ouch!

Harry stood still for a moment, trying to move past the pain in his ankles and feet. His shoulders and arms were aching from his first landing, and he could hear Bagman exclaiming over his strategy.

But he didn't have time to stand still for long and, the second the pain in his legs had decreased a little, he set off towards the wall.

The wall was at least twenty feet tall and Harry could see little statues lined up along the top. It made him glad that he had opted for smashing through the wall, as opposed to climbing it. If he took the venom-spitting lizards as an indication, the statues were probably some kind of creature that would try and kill him.

When he was ten feet away from the wall, Harry slowed to a halt and pointed his wand at the wall.

"Ah," Bagman was saying to the crowd. "I think we know what he's going to do here..."

Harry ignored him, focussing all his attention on the spell and, more specifically his magic that he wanted to put into the spell.

"Expulso!" Harry watched as the blue spell sped from his wand towards the wall.

The wall exploded into bits of stone and he brought an arm up to protect his face from falling debris.

"Bloody hell!" Bagman sounded completely flabbergasted. "Did everyone else see that?"

Once the dust had settled, Harry nodded in satisfaction at the lack of wall in front of him. There was still wall to his left and right, but all that was left of the wall in front of him was a pile of rocks. Harry quickly made his way over the rocks, keeping a careful eye out for any of the little statues in case they really were creatures that would try and kill him, before turning his attention to the next obstacle.

This obstacle had to be the fire obstacle, since he'd already done air and stone, but he couldn't see fire anywhere. Instead, he could see the Golden Egg that he was supposed to be collecting about hundred feet in front of him. Between him and the egg was flat ground, and for the first thirty feet or so, two lines of stone statues – one on his left and one on his right.

Harry stepped forward cautiously, stopping just before the first two statues. If this was the fire challenge then the statues probably had something to do with it and, if he had to take a guess, Harry thought that they statues were probably going to shoot fire at him – it was how he would have done it anyway.

He tightened his grip on his wand, before bringing it up to draw the elaborate hand movement for the shielding spell. "Cingo!"

Immediately the orange shield appeared before his eyes and, while Harry could only see the shield in front of him, he knew from experience that was encircling his entire body.

That done, Harry took another step forward. The fire was instant – surrounding him, roaring, consuming, warring against his shield to try and get at him. Harry grimaced as he felt his shield begin to weaken, though he was quite sure that it would last him to the end of the statues. He walked quickly though, just in case, trying to ignore the sight of the red and orange flames, licking at the surface of his shield. It felt disconcerting, to be so close to fire and not feel it's heat.
He lasted about ten feet at a walking pace before the flames swirling around him began to get to him. They were just so close, so all consuming, and he could feel them fighting his shield. At first it was just a niggle in the back of his mind but the further through the flames he got, the more afraid he felt.

Harry broke into a jog when he thought he was about twenty feet through the fire (though he couldn't really tell, the fire was completely surrounding him and he couldn't see anything other than flames). Sure the faster pace would make it harder to stay focussed on the shield, but it would be worth the risk if only he could get out of the flames quicker.

Eventually he broke free from the flames, but despite the fact that he could see the sky again his fear continued to increase. He felt suddenly cold, as though ice water had just been flung over him, except the coldness wasn't just from the outside – it felt as though it was coming from inside him as well. As though his heart and lungs were turning to ice.

Suddenly, Harry heard screaming. The sound was blood-curdling and like no other sound he'd heard before. He looked around desperately, trying to find where the noise was coming from. Who was screaming? Was this part of the obstacle course? Was he supposed to save them?

The first thing Harry saw as he looked around was the Golden Egg about seventy feet in front of him, the second thing he saw were the tall cloaked beings to his left and to his right.

They weren't moving, just standing there – their dark cloaks moving gently in the light breeze.

Suddenly, Harry remembered something he'd read years beforehand, when he'd still been researching the Wizarding World. Azkaban was guarded by Dementors, tall humanoid creatures who wore dark cloaks and had an aura of terror.

Which possibly explained what they were (though only if whoever had come up with this obstacle course was completely bonkers!), but he couldn't remember ever having read about how to fight them.

Harry took a step forward, ignoring the goose bumps that were breaking out on his skin as the screaming in his head got louder. He took another step, carefully watching the Dementors for any sign of movement. When they didn't even twitch, he broke into a sprint towards the Golden Egg.

He could do this, he could, he was sure he could. He just had to ignore the screaming woman in his head.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

Harry shook his head sharply to try and block out the voice. He ran on, before a pricking on his neck made him look back over his shoulder in case something was chasing him – but there was nothing there. He looked forward again, at the Golden Egg that he was aiming for. Surely once he'd gotten there they would take the Dementors away – only forty feet left.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!" The voice screamed again.

Thirty feet...

Suddenly there was another voice. "Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now...."

Twenty feet...

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead --"
With only ten feet left, Harry ran like he'd never run before, anything to get rid of the voices and the paralysing fear that was all but consuming his body.

Finally he reached the Golden Egg, but he didn't stop. He barely even slowed down, just enough to snatch the Egg off its pedestal, before continuing on – away from the Dementors.

He had only run another ten feet when he saw a tent, identical to the one at the start of the obstacle course, with Professor Snape standing outside of it, a sneer on his face and a silver white doe beside him.

“In here, Potter.” Professor Snape instructed him.

Harry ran towards him, the Golden Egg tucked under his arm, before slowing in surprise when the terror began to fade. It was strange, by the time Harry was standing next to his favourite professor the terror had all but gone. Leaving only a feeling of nausea in his stomach and a cold sweat covering his skin.

“Inside.” Snape said, jerking his chin sharply towards the tent.

It felt surreal, to step calmly inside the tent after all that had happened in the last ten minutes, and even odder to have Madame Pomfrey fussing over him as though he was a first year with a cold.

“...what were they thinking?” Pomfrey muttered quietly, as she shoved a large piece of chocolate into Harry's hand. “...Dementors! Never in my life...”

Harry looked around the tent for the other Champions, but he presumed they were all in different rooms – if they were still in the tent at all.

The chocolate Pomfrey had given him worked like a charm and within minutes, Harry was feeling more relaxed than he had all day. Then Pomfrey gave him a light blue potion which soothed the pain in his limbs from his hard landing at the beginning of the course.

“Are you feeling tired, dear?” Pomfrey asked him, with a concerned frown.

Harry took a few seconds to try and decide on an answer. “No more than I would expect, ma’am.”

Pomfrey looked taken aback. “Are you sure? You don’t feel exhausted?”

Harry shook his head. “No, ma’am.”

Pomfrey didn’t seem to know what to do with that information but, after a few more minutes of fussing, she temporarily dismissed him back out of the tent to hear the judges’ scores.

Despite the calming effects of the chocolate, Harry was reluctant to leave the safety of the tent, but he slowly trudged his way outside.

Professor Snape was still standing outside the tent and, now that Harry had calmed down a bit, he was able to pay more attention to the silver doe standing beside his professor.

It was beautiful! And completely unlike anything he had seen before. Harry reached out a hand to touch it, but the doe skitted away from him as though it was a living creature.

“This way, Potter.” Snape instructed him, leading him back towards where he had encountered the Dementors. The doe walking in front of him.

Harry followed reluctantly, before pausing in surprise when he realised that the Dementors weren't
effecting him. Had they been taken away? No, they were still there. Then what...Harry stared at the silver doe, was it protecting them?

“And now the judges' scores!” Bagman announced.

Harry forced his attention away from the doe, to where the judges were sitting in raised golden seats near the stone wall that he had demolished.

Madame Maxime was first and, as she raised her wand, Harry realised he had no idea what kind of score he would be getting. Had he done well? He'd smashed through the wall relatively easily, he thought, and his shield had held for the fire, but his face plant at the beginning of the Task probably hadn't looked very impressive and he certainly hadn't known what to do for the Dementor.

Madame Maxime waved her wand and a silver ribbon flew out of it, forming the number nine.

Harry's eyes flew towards Professor Snape's face in surprise. “Really?”

Snape didn't say anything, but he wasn't sneering in disdain – so did that mean he agreed?

Sirius was next and Harry' stomach felt as though it was tied up in knots waiting for his godfather's decision. Of all the judges, Sirius' opinion was the one that mattered the most to him.

A silver ribbon, identical to Madame Maxime's, flew out of Sirius' wand and slowly formed the number nine.

Harry almost leapt in his excitement. Two nines?! (One of which being from Sirius!) Did they not care that he hadn't known how to deflect the Dementor?

Dumbledore was next and he scored him eight, then came Bagman whose ribbon formed the number ten.

“But I didn't know the spell for the Dementor.” Harry murmured in confusion.

“You refrained from tears, unlike one of your opponents.” Snape commented dryly.

Madame Brusilova was next and, as her silver ribbon formed the number eight, the crowd roared in excitement.

“Forty four.” Snape sounded almost impressed. “I believe that puts you in the lead, Mr. Potter.”

23-23-23

It took Harry another ten minutes to be officially released from Madam Pomfrey's care and then another five to listen to Bagman’s instructions regarding the next task. Apparently the Second Task wouldn’t be until February and the Golden Egg contained a clue for it.

Finally they were dismissed and Harry made his way towards the large tree near the lake where he and his friends often sat, the golden egg tucked under his arm.

They were all there waiting for him, except for Takashi and the twins, and they greeted him enthusiastically as he drew near.

“'You were amazing!’” Neville exclaimed, standing up and flinging an arm around Harry's shoulder.

Draco looked almost as excited. “Very well done, Harry!”
“Thank you.” Harry acknowledged, stepping out from under Neville's arm and sitting down with a proud grin. “I still can't believe they brought in Dementors!”

“I can.” Luna smiled dreamily. “They're not all bad, you know.”

Harry raised an eyebrow incredulously. “Have you ever been near them, Luna? Because they feel horrifying!”

“That's not their fault.” Luna protested. “They can't help it if they're...”

“Terrifying, soul eating, nightmare inducing monsters?” Draco finished for her.

Daphne, leaned forward and reached out a hand which Harry squeezed gently, before releasing. “I'm glad you are alright.”

“So am I.” Harry let out a breath. “I don't think I have ever been so scared in my life.”

“You're not supposed to admit that sort of thing, Harry.” Draco admonished.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Draco, if I hadn't been scared there would be something terribly wrong with me.”

“Bravo, Harry!” Theo leant over and clapped Harry on the shoulder. “That was one impressive blasting curse.”

“Krum took six curses to get through the wall.” Neville added with a grin. “Viterova took seven.”

“Really?” Harry gave him a sceptical look. “Why?”

“Because it was three feet thick.” Theo exclaimed, as though it should have been obvious. “You blasted through three feet of stone in one spell.”

“What did the others do?” Harry asked curiously, he'd only heard Bagman's vague commentary and, while he could guess what some of his narration might have meant, he wanted to know all the details.

“Cedric tunnelled under the wall.” Draco said with a horrified shudder. “He was covered with mud by the time he came up the other side.”

“Don't exaggerate.” Neville admonished. “The ground wasn't even slightly wet. He was covered in some dirt definitely, but it wasn't mud.”

“Both of the Beauxbatons girls went over the wall, but they were attacked by the Gargoyles at the top.” Theo took over the explanation. “The brunette...”

“Moreau.” Daphne put in primly.

“...climbed.” Theo finished. “But the veela actually flew over.”

Harry's mouth dropped open in shock. “What?”

“Obviously fullblooded veela have wings when they transform,” Neville pointed out. “We saw them at the World Cup Final, but apparently part veela can transform too.”

“She must have flown over the chasm then too.” Harry realised.
“Yes,” Draco confirmed. “And much more gracefully than you did.”

Harry grimaced. “I probably looked ridiculous.”

“Not as ridiculous as the brunette looked trying to levitate little plates to stand on.” Theo grinned. “She almost fell in multiple times and the lizards hit her with venom more times than I can count.”

“Krum transfigured a bridge across.” Neville took over the explanation. “But it was falling apart at the end and he barely made it across. Cedric levitated things just like Moreau, but he did a better job of it.

“What about the fire?” Harry asked with interest.

“The veela just transformed and walked through.” Theo answered. “Though she did look a little singed by the end of it all.”

“Cedric and Viserova walked through as well.” Draco added.

“They probably used the spell that makes flames feel as though someone is tickling you.” Harry guessed. “I thought of that spell, but I didn't know anything about it other than the fact that it existed.”

Theo grinned. “The brunette...”

“Moreau.” Daphne corrected with a frown.

Theo rolled his eyes. “...tried to shield like you did, but something must have gone wrong because she was looking pretty singed when she came out the other side.”

“Krum's shield held up much better.” Neville added simply. “Though not as well as yours.”

“The Dementor was the worst part.” Daphne said with feeling. “The only person who knew what to do was Viserova. The rest of you looked completely terrified.”

“It was awful!” Harry admitted. “I was so scared I was hearing voices.”

Luna looked up from the daisy chain that she was making. “Not just voices, memories.”

Harry frowned questioningly. “What do you mean?”

“Aren't Dementors supposed to bring out your worst memory or something?” Neville asked uncertainty. “I remember Gran talking about it once.” He added when everyone looked at him weirdly.

“But why would I hear a woman screaming?” Harry asked in confusion. “I don't even know what my worst...” He trailed off in horror.

“What?” Draco asked.

“I heard a woman screaming,” Harry answered slowly. “She was pleading for something and she kept saying, not Harry, not Harry.”

His friends all stared at him incomprehendingly, except for Luna who had turned her attention back to her daisy chain.

“What if it was my mother?” Harry asked, his stomach churning in dread. “What if it was her, just
before she died?”

Neville paled, as Draco’s mouth twisted in horror and Daphne reached out a hand to lay on Harry’s arm.

Harry scrambled to his feet, leaving the golden egg sitting on the grass. “I need to find Sirius. I’ll see you all later.”

23-23-23

Chapter End Notes

Oops, so this chapter ends with a bit of a cliffty too. Sorry about that :P
Harry strode away from his friends, trying to decide where he should look for Sirius. The last time he had seen his godfather, Sirius had been with the other judges near where the First Task had taken place, but that had been at least fifteen minutes ago. Would Sirius still be there?

“Congratulations, Potter!” An older Gryffindor student commented, as Harry walked pass him.

Harry wanted to ignore him, but he smiled politely. “Thank you.”

“You were amazing!” A first year blurted out, before her face turned red.

“Thank you.” Harry nodded.

“Well done, Potter!” The Head Girl told him. “You did us proud!”

Harry smiled politely. “Thank you.”

“Good show, Potter!”

“Bravo, Harry!”

“Incredible job with that blasting curse! I didn’t even know the curse could do that.”

“Did it hurt landing on your head, Potter?”

“What was that shield you used for the fire?”

“I can’t believe you did that! I think I would have just died in terror!”

Harry smiled politely as he returned each greeting, and tried not to grind his teeth in frustration. He wanted to talk to Sirius about having possibly heard the audio of his mother’s death and all these students, some of whom he had never spoken to before in his life, were getting in the way.

Finally, Harry reached the tent that he and the other Champions had waited in before the challenge and soon after he was looking up at the empty judges’ seats. Damn, where could Sirius be?

“Congratulations, Harry!”

Harry spun around looking for the speaker, before inwardly groaning when he saw Rita Skeeter. How had he not seen her as he had walked past her? She was wearing acid-green robes, for Merlin’s sake.

“How had he not seen her as he had walked past her? She was wearing acid-green robes, for Merlin’s sake.

“Merry meet, Miss Skeeter.” Harry greeted her politely.

“So formal!” Skeeter complained. “There’s no need for that, you know, Harry. We could be great friends.”

Harry raised a sceptical eyebrow. “I hardly think that would appropriate, ma’am.”

Skeeter waved his words away dismissively. “Do you have any comments about today’s challenge?
How did it feel facing all those terrible obstacles?"

“I’m afraid I am unwilling to comment at this time.” Harry answered neutrally. “Though, if you wish you can always send a formal request for an interview with me to Lord Black.”

Skeeter’s forehead furrowed. “Come now, Harry, surely you have something to say. How do you feel about coming first? Proud? Excited? Surprised?”

Harry had had enough. “Merry part, Miss Skeeter.” He told her politely, before turning on his heel and striding back towards the castle. Where could Sirius be?

It took Harry another ten minutes to discover that Sirius wasn’t in the Great Hall, or his quarters. Which meant that he was either holed up somewhere private with the other judges, or he was visiting Remus.

But, despite the frustration of not being able to find Sirius, Harry felt calmer than he had at the beginning of his search. After all, as horrifying as it was to think that the Dementors’ presence had possibly brought up his memory of his mother dying (and he was increasingly sure that it had), what difference did that make to his life? It was upsetting, definitely, but not something that required immediate attention.

None the less, Harry couldn’t help but feel relieved when Remus turned out to be in his quarters.

“Harry?” Remus looked surprised. “I thought you would be with your friends.”

“I need to speak to Sirius.” Harry explained urgently. “It’s important.”

Remus stepped back and Harry let out a sigh of relief when he saw Sirius sitting on the couch.

“Sirius!”

Sirius stood up in concern. “What’s the matter, pup?”

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere!” Harry exclaimed, walking across the room and allowing Sirius to wrap him in a hug. “I thought you might still be at the Obstacle Course, but you weren’t and you weren’t at the Great Hall either, or your quarters.”

Sirius squeezed him tightly, before letting go and sitting back down. “Sorry about that. Remus and I were just talking about what a great job you did.”

“I’ll go shall I?” Remus asked Harry. “Leave you two to talk.”

“It’s alright, you can stay.” Harry assured him, sitting on the couch next to Sirius.

“Alright.” Remus shut the door to his quarters, before sitting down in one of the two armchairs.

“What’s the matter?” Sirius asked again.

Harry looked down at his hands, unsure how to start. “You know how Dementors have an aura of terror?”

Sirius shuddered. “Do I ever!”

“Sorry,” Harry grimaced. “I’d completely forgotten about your…history with them.”

“It’s fine.” Sirius assured him. “What about the Dementors?”
“They made me hear voices,” Harry started. “At first it was just one voice, a woman screaming, but
then she started talking and there was another voice, a man.”

“That’s unusual,” Remus commented. “But not completely unheard of. Some people find that
Dementors force their worst memory to the front of their mind.”

“I know,” Harry agreed impatiently. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. The woman was
pleading, she kept saying, not Harry, not Harry…I…I think she was my mother. I think she was
pleading with Voldemort not to kill me.”

Sirius’ expression was horrified and Remus didn’t look much better. “Bloody hell!”

Harry clenched and unclenched his hands. “She said not Harry, and then Voldemort told her to stand
aside, he called her a silly girl, but she told him to kill her instead.” He could feel tears pricking at his
eyes. “She told Voldemort to kill her instead of me, that’s why she’s dead. She’s dead because of
me!”

Sirius threw an arm over Harry’s shoulders and pulled him closer, so that Harry was leaning against
him. “That’s some bloody terrible logic you’ve got there, Harry. Your mum’s dead because You-
Know-Who killed her and because she loved you more than anything. Neither of those are your
fault.”

“But he didn’t want to kill her!” Harry protested. “He only killed her because she was protecting
me.”

“From which we learn two things,” Sirius replied gently. “That You-Know-Who is a monster who
wanted to kill a baby and that your mum loved you enough to be willing to die for you. Neither of
those things say anything about you, other than that you are loved.”

Harry had been holding himself stiffly but, he slumped against his godfather’s side – tears running
down his cheeks. “I feel horrible. She loved me that much, and I don’t even remember her.”

“That’s alright.” Sirius hugged him tightly.

“And completely understandable.” Remus added gently. “You shouldn’t feel bad about it. They must
seem very abstract to you.”

“Yes,” Harry felt around in his pocket for a handkerchief and wiped at his eyes. “I remember that in
first year, on the morning of Halloween, I tried to feel sad about the fact that they had been killed on
that day, but I couldn’t. I’m a horrible person!”

Sirius rubbed his hand across Harry’s back comfortingly. “No, you’re not. It’s hard to be sad about
the death of someone you don’t even remember.”

“But Mum died because of me!” Harry protested weakly. “And, if you think about it, my father
probably died because of me too! What if the only reason Voldemort attacked us was because of me?
Why else would he be willing to let Mum go? But why would Voldemort care about killing a baby?
It makes no sense.”

There was a long silence and, when Harry looked up, he saw Sirius and Remus exchanging
meaningful glances.

“What?” Harry asked, sitting up and wiping at his face again. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Dumbledore has arranged for the Order of the Phoenix to guard something in the Department of
Mysteries.” Sirius started, almost questioningly. “He hasn’t told us what it was, just that it’s a weapon that You-Know-Who wants.”

Harry didn’t understand. “So?”

“The Hall of Prophecy.” Remus said slowly, as though just coming to a realisation.

“Why would You-Know-Who kill a baby?” Sirius asked rhetorically. “There’s only one reason I can think of – because he thought that baby was going to grow up to be dangerous.”

Harry looked between the two men, his brain feeling sluggish. “But why would he…”

“What if there was a prophecy about you?” Sirius asked. “A prophecy that You-Know-Who didn’t want to come true.”

“But if You-Know-Who knows the prophecy, why would Dumbledore be trying to guard it?” Remus asked.

“I don’t know.” Sirius admitted, slumping back against the couch. “But a prophecy would explain why You-Know-Who is so focussed on killing Harry, and why Dumbledore was so intent on staying Harry’s Magical Guardian.”

“You think there’s a prophecy about me?” Harry asked incredulously, his mind racing. What kind of prophecy would have made Voldemort want to kill him? What would it mean?

“Maybe.” Remus said tentatively.

“Probably.” Sirius said at the same time.

“But if there was a prophecy, wouldn’t someone have told me about it?” Harry asked hopefully, he couldn’t think of anything good coming from there being a prophecy about him.

Sirius and Remus shared another look.

“What?” Harry asked in frustration.

“Dumbledore wouldn’t have.” Sirius said darkly.

They were silent for a minute, and Harry took the time to try and think it through. If there was a prophecy, and he didn’t want to think there was, would that explain why Dumbledore had left him with Dursleys? And why Dumbledore had invited him to his office for lunch in first year?

“We can’t be sure though.” Remus said eventually, but he didn’t sound very convincing.

“Well, we’ll just have to do some research.” Sirius said emphatically.

“But how?” Harry asked, feeling helpless. This was the last thing he needed this year, wasn’t the Triwizard tournament enough?

“There is no point in asking Dumbledore.” Sirius growled. “He’ll just give us half answers, or lie to our faces. We’ll have to look in the Hall of Prophecies.”

“How?” Harry asked. “We’re all stuck at Hogwarts, and you said that Dumbledore has guards on it.”

“I’m not stuck here.” Sirius contradicted him. “And I just happen to be on guard duty next week. I’ll sneak in and have a look.”
It was almost dinnertime when Harry left Remus’ quarters and he found himself, for the second time that day, trying to figure out where he would find people.

Despite the fact that his mind was swirling, trying to process all the new information he had learned in the last few hours, he wanted to find his friends. He wanted to apologise for the way he had left them, especially the way he had ignored Daphne’s attempt to comfort him. Not to mention that he had the left the Golden Egg with them and he really wanted to know what the clue for the next challenge.

As he had with Sirius, Harry decided to start by looking in the last place he had seen them and, as he strode out of the castle, he was pleased to see that were all still sitting under the big tree near the lake.

Theo noticed him approaching first, but before long they were all watching him with concerned expressions.

“You alright, Harry?” Neville asked, as Harry drew closer.

“Yes, thank you.” Harry answered, stopping a few feet away from them. “I apologise for the way in which I left. It was rude of me.”

“It was.” Draco agreed, with mock severity. “But we forgive you.”

“It was completely understandable.” Neville told him sincerely. “Was Sirius able to help?”

Harry swallowed down a grimace as he sat down beside Daphne. “Sort of.”

“At least your wrackspurts aren’t blue anymore.” Luna told him, staring at a spot just above Harry’s head. “Now they look more…”

“Red?” Harry suggested, having become rather familiar with the meaning of wrackspurt colours.

“Yes.” Luna nodded decisively, looking pleasantly surprised. “How did you know?”

“Practise.” Harry told her with a smile.

“You should open your egg!” Draco demanded suddenly. “Do you have any idea how hard it has been not to open it while you were gone?”

Harry looked at the Golden Egg that was sitting on the ground, exactly where he had left it. “How do you know that it opens?”

“It has hinges.” Neville answered bashfully. “Not that we, uh, looked at it closely or anything.”

“Of course we did!” Draco contradicted him. “Why wouldn’t we? And, Neville? No wonder Gryffindors never lie if they’re all as terrible at it as you are.”

Harry smiled in amusement as he leaned forward and picked up the Egg. “Are you ready?”

“Only for the last three hours.” Draco drawled.

Harry rolled his eyes and pushed is fingers into the small seam in the egg to pull the lid open. The first thing Harry noticed was the ghastly screeching sound coming from it, the second thing he noticed was that the egg was hollow and empty.
The sound was like nothing Harry had ever heard in his life and, as he slammed the lid shut, he saw that everybody in the area had turned to stare at him.

“Merlin!” Draco shuddered. “That’s awful!”

“What is it supposed to do?” Neville asked, pulling his hands away from his ears.

“Deafen him, but the sound of it.” Theo joked. “And us along with him.”

“It’s supposed to be a clue for the Second Task.” Harry explained, frowning down at the egg.

“Maybe you’re going to be locked in room with that noise in it for a few hours.” Theo suggested.


“Go insane?” Draco smirked. “You say that like you’re not already there.”

Harry rolled his eyes as he turned to Daphne. “What do you think?”

“What else did they tell you about the Second Task?” Daphne asked.

“It’s in February.” Harry remembered. “During the morning.”

They stared at him, as though expecting more. “That’s it?”

“Yes.” Harry answered. “The egg is supposed to be the clue.”

“They didn’t say anything else?” Draco sounded sceptical.

Harry quickly ran through what Bagman had said in his head. “No, that’s all Bagman said after the task.”

“What about before the task?”

“He was awful!” Harry grimaced at the memory. “There we all were, scared out of our wits, and he was making jokes. He told us about today’s task, and how we would have to conquer three elements – air, stone, and fire.”

“Pity he didn’t mention the terror aspect.” Neville grumbled. “That seemed to be the hardest bit for everyone, except for Visser that is.”

Harry was still thinking through what Bagman had said. “He did say something about a later task! He said that water would come later.”

“Water?” Daphne sounded mystified.

Harry looked down at the egg, but couldn’t see any connection between the egg and water. Then again, he couldn’t see any connection between the egg and the Obstacle Course either.

24-24-24

The Daily Prophet the next day was embarrassing as, once again, Skeeter all but ignored the other five Champions in lieu of Harry. Not to mention that the cover photo was of him demolishing the stone wall with one blasting curse. Though, admittedly, he would rather that photo than one of him falling on his head after leaping over the chasm.
Along with the Daily Prophet came multiple letters congratulating Harry on his performance. Most came from people he had never heard of, let alone met, but the letter from the Malfoys was very touching.

Once again, Harry spent the day trying to ignore the stares of the other students, only this time it seemed as though all his professors were staring at him too – or at the very least giving him searching looks. It was off putting, especially coming from Moody, but Harry did his best to ensure that he didn’t let any of his discomfort show.

Thankfully, the stares lessened after the first day and the rest of the week was delightfully quiet.

He had Animagus practise with his friends and wandless practise on Wednesday and Thursday respectively, and his duelling practise with Sirius on Friday – they’d had to postpone it since the First Task had been on Tuesday. The duelling was fun. Harry was very encouraged to see that he had improved since their last session, and he took the opportunity to ask Sirius some questions about the Triwizard Tournament.

Sirius hadn’t been able to say much, since he was under magical oath not share any information, but he had been able to explain to Harry why the clue was in the shape of an egg (apparently the original First Task had involved dragons). The only other piece of information that Harry gleaned from their conversation, was that Bagman hadn’t been supposed to mention water. Which, while the information wasn’t at all helpful in trying to solve the clue, did serve to deepen Harry’s disdain for Ludo Bagman.

Saturday was amazing as Harry spent the afternoon being tutored by Viktor Krum. Harry hadn’t even had to ask Viktor, the older boy had been the one to suggest it. Harry had no idea why Viktor seemed to have taken such a liking to him, he hoped it wasn’t just because he was the Boy-Who-Lived and Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter, but he definitely wasn’t complaining about it.

Viktor was, by far, the best seeker Harry had ever seen and, while he wasn’t as good of a teacher as Aiden Kiely (the wizard that Sirius had paid to tutor Harry the summer before his third year), his seeking style was definitely more up Harry’s alley. Viktor’s style was aggressive and intense, as opposed to Kiely’s defensive and laid back style of seeking. Harry could see the benefits in both styles, but he had to admit that he found Viktor’s one a lot more fun and exciting – not to mention that Viktor was the best seeker in the world.

Sunday was a quiet day and Harry enjoyed the fact that, aside from his Animagus practise with his friends, he had absolutely nothing he had to do. He spent most of the day with his friends and even managed to ask Daphne to take a walk around the grounds with him. Draco had frowned disapprovingly until Harry had assured him that they would stay within sight of the group at all times.

Dinner that night was definitely one of the highlights of Harry’s week though as Draco and Luna pranked the entire school (along with the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students). It felt weird to not have been involved, but it was hilarious to watch students try and communicate with each other while speaking different languages. Harry had heard of language potions, but had never used one since they only lasted five minutes and extended use could lead to severe side effects. He had no idea how Draco and Luna had managed to create so many different languages though.

“Good job.” Harry attempted to tell Luna with a smile, but the sound came out guttural and weird.

Luna opened her mouth and seemed to reply, but the words were just as non-understandable as Harry was sure his had been.
“Bloody hell!” One of the Ravenclaw sixth years swore angrily in French, while their friend seemed to be trying to calm them down in German.

Harry looked around and was glad to see that most people seemed to be enjoying themselves. Some of the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs had even stood up and had moved to find someone speaking the same language.

Luna interrupted Harry’s observation, but elbowing him in the side and pointing up at the wall above the Head Table where words had suddenly appeared.

‘Rumours of our graduation have been greatly exaggerated.

Good luck Diggory and Potter.

The Marauders’ Apprentices’

24-24-24

Chapter End Notes

The prank in this chapter was inspired by jodic. It isn’t exactly what they suggested, but it was the beginning of the idea. Thanks for the idea, jodic.
Chapter 25

Harry leant back against the tree behind him and studied the golden egg that was sitting in his lap. It had been a week since he had collected the egg during the First Task and he had yet to figure out what it meant.

To be fair though, he hadn’t actually spent much time trying. Sirius and Remus had both suggested that he take a week to relax first and he’d done his best to do so. It hadn’t been easy, but knowing that the Second Task wasn’t until mid-February had definitely helped.

But the week was up now, so he could finally study the egg. It was oddly heavy given that it was empty on the inside, and there weren’t any marks or grooves on the outside.

Harry pulled out his wand and cast a silencing spell around him, before bracing himself and opening the lid. He shuddered as the sound of screeching immediately filled the air – it was far worse than he had remembered. Peering inside the egg, Harry frowned in frustration when he saw that there were no markings there either. Which meant that, given that he knew that the shape of the egg was related to the original First Task (before they had decided that getting six dragons was far too complex), the only clue was the sound coming out of it.

Shutting the lid, Harry shook his head to try and get rid of the ringing in his ears. The screeching hadn’t been a constant monotone, there had been tones and pauses to it – though all the tones had been equally goose-bump inducing. Still the different tones suggested that there was definitely more to the noise than just screeching. Was that the clue? The problem was that Harry couldn’t figure out what different tones might have to do with anything, let alone water.

Though the water wasn’t necessarily connected – after all, Bagman could have been talking about the Third Task when he mentioned it. So he had a screeching sound, and possibly water.

Harry groaned and thumped his head backwards against the tree trunk. How in Merlin’s name was he supposed to figure this out? He looked back at the golden egg and glared at it. It was just sitting there looking perfectly innocent, as though it had no idea how much frustration it was causing him. Which it likely didn’t, given that it was an inanimate object, but you never knew in the magical world.

A bell rang faintly from inside the castle and Harry looked up towards the sound in surprise. Had he really just sat thinking for an entire hour without coming up with any kind of plan of attack? He hoisted himself to his feet and, tucking the egg under his arm, began the trek back towards the castle.

The best thing to do would be to presume that Bagman’s comment about water was related to the Second Task and start the research there. Then, if nothing turned up, he could abandon the water idea and move on. At least that way he would cover the smaller area of research first. Though water was really quite vague and could mean a lot of things – it was a good thing he had two months to figure it out.

25-25-25

When Harry pushed open the door the Come and Go Room later that day he was surprised to see a replica of the Elladora Living Room from Grimmauld Place rather than the usual duelling room. The second surprising thing was that Remus was there, sitting in an armchair beside Sirius.

“Come and have a seat, Harry.” Sirius instructed him with a grim smile.
Harry studied his godfather’s expression in concern, before turning to Remus were was looking just as grim. “What’s going on?”

“Have a seat.” Sirius said again, before leaning forward picking up a teapot that was sitting on the table in the middle of the armchairs. “Tea?”

Harry chose the seat opposite Sirius and Remus and slowly sank into it. “Yes, thank you.”

Nobody spoke as Sirius poured the tea but, when Sirius had handed Harry and Remus’ their cups and was seated again with a cup of his own, Harry repeated his earlier question.

“What’s going on?”

“I was on guard duty at the Department of Mysteries last night.” Sirius explained grimly.

Harry’s stomach dropped as he recalled the conversation they’d had the week before about the possible existence of a prophecy. He hadn’t forgotten about it of course, he didn’t think that would have been possible, but he’d done his best not to think about it.

“And I found a prophecy with your name on it.” Sirius continued. “I don’t know what it says, only the subjects’ of prophecies can activate the globes that the prophecies are kept in, but it definitely had your name on it.”

“Tell him the rest too, Sirius.” Remus chided gravely.

“It had your name and You-Know-Who’s name.” Sirius admitted reluctantly. “It said that it was given by S.P.T., whoever that is, and that it was witnessed by A.P.W.B.D. There’s only one person I know with that many names whose first name starts with A and last name starts with D.”

“Dumbledore.” Harry muttered numbly.

“Right.” Sirius growled darkly. “Secretive bastard.”

“You alright, Harry?” Remus asked gently.

Harry bit the side of his cheek to try and fight the numbness that felt as though it was spreading through his body. “I don’t know.”

“We still don’t know what it says,” Sirius pointed out. “For all we know the prophecy has already been fulfilled.”

“Then why wouldn’t Dumbledore have told someone?” Harry asked.

“Good question.” Sirius admitted. “But there’s no point in getting too worked up about it until we know what it actually says.”

“And even then there’s no point in getting worked up it.” Remus added. “Prophecies are strange things, but there’s no point letting them control your life.”

Harry stood up. “Can we go look at it now?”

“Well, that depends on whether or not we want people to know that you’ve been.” Sirius told him, standing as well. “But we can break you out of school if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Voldemort already knows that it exists, right?” Harry asked impatiently. “And he already wants to kill me, so him knowing isn’t going to make anything worse.”
“And Dumbledore?” Remus asked curiously.

“Screw Dumbledore!” Harry snapped.

Sirius let out a surprised laugh. “I’d rather not, thanks.”

“I don’t care if other people know.” Harry said, in a calmer tone. “I just want to go and destroy it, if I can.”

Sirius and Remus exchanged a glance.

“I don’t know if you can destroy prophecies, Harry.” Sirius commented.

“I bet my blasting curse could do it.” Harry exclaimed passionately.

Sirius let out another laugh. “Alright, let me rephrase that – I don’t know if you’re allowed to destroy prophecies.”

“I don’t give a bloody rat’s tail about what anyone else thinks!” Harry snapped in frustration.

“Yeah, I’m picking that up.” Sirius nodded. “But I think that tomorrow you just might, so I’m going to be the level head here and suggest that we wait until you’ve calmed down before leaving the castle.”

Harry clenched his hands into fists. “What if I don’t want a level head involved? There’s a bloody prophecy about me and Voldemort! What if he gets to it first?”

“I doubt that another day is going to make a difference.” Sirius commented evenly. “But the quicker you calm down, the more likely I am to take you tonight.”

Harry closed his eyes and clenched his jaw in frustration. “That’s not fair!”

“Ah,” Remus muttered quietly. “So there is a teenager in there after all. I had been wondering.”

Harry’s eyes snapped open and he glared at the werewolf.

“That’s not exactly helpful, Remus!” Sirius sounded more amused than anything. “Listen, Harry, why don’t you spend some time meditating?”

Harry couldn’t think of anything he wanted to do less. “So you’re not going to let me go and see a prophecy that’s about me, and you’re not going to teach me how to duel either? Do you want Voldemort to kill me or something?!”

“Of course not!” Sirius exclaimed, frustration creeping into his tone. “Just sit down and meditate already.”

Harry glared darkly, but moved across to the far side of the room and settled down on the floor. He’d meditate alright, but he wasn’t going to calm down! How the bloody hell could he knowing that there was a prophecy out there about him and Voldemort?

Shutting his eyes, Harry gritted his teeth and started his breathing. Sirius thought this would calm him down? He’d show Sirius when he came out of it just as angry as he was now.

25-25-25

Harry didn’t know how long he had mediated for but, as he eventually pulled himself back to reality,
he felt a flood of shame and guilt. How could he have gone off at Sirius and Remus like that? He didn’t think he had ever been so rude to an adult in his life. What if they were angry with him? He was sure that they would be – he couldn’t believe that he’d actually accused Sirius of wanting Voldemort to kill him, and the tone he’d used had been so disrespectful!

He opened his eyes and looked around the room. Sirius and Remus were still sitting on the armchairs and they seemed to playing some kind of game with playing cards. Harry’s stomach twisted uncomfortably at the thought of facing up to them, but he stood up regardless. He might not be a Gryffindor, but he definitely wasn’t a coward either.

Sirius and Remus both turned towards him immediately and Harry could feel his face flushing in shame.

“How are you feeling, pup?” Sirius asked gently.

“Embarrassed.” Harry admitted, cautiously moving closer. “Please accept my heartfelt apology for my intolerable behaviour earlier. My words and my tone were disrespectful and…”

“It’s alright.” Sirius interrupted him, standing up and grabbing Harry in a hug. “Well, no, it’s not alright, but we forgive you – don’t we, Moony.”

“Of course.” Remus agreed.

Sirius released Harry and stepped back. “If you think that behaviour was intolerable you should have seen some of the fits that your dad and I threw when we were your age.”

“Not to mention when you were older.” Remus commented with a smirk.

Sirius pulled a face at his friend, before turning back to Harry. “Which isn’t an invitation for you to try and reach our levels of teenage drama.”

Harry smiled weakly. “Thanks, Sirius.”

Sirius sat down and again and gestured for Harry to do the same. “Do you have any new ideas of what you want to do about the prophecy?”

“I want to go and see it.” Harry answered. “I don’t think it matters if Voldemort knows that I know what it says…”

“Except that Lucius has put his neck on the line for you.” Sirius interrupted seriously. “You’re forgetting that You-Know-Who thinks that the Malfoys are wooing you over to his side.”

Harry’s stomach dropped, he hadn’t considered that. “He said he’d kill them if I don’t defect.”

“Right.” Sirius agreed. “Now you’ve still got half a year until his deadline, but if he knew that you knew about the prophecy it might make things harder for Lucius.”

“You make it sound like Harry’s still deciding whether or not to join him.” Remus groused.

Harry ignored him. “So does that mean that I can’t go and see the prophecy?”

“No,” Sirius assured him quickly. “It just means we have to be more strategic about it.”

Harry slumped back in his chair in frustration. “Do you have any ideas?”

“Remus and I have been talking, and we think that you should go during Winter Break.” Sirius
answered patiently. “That way your absence from Hogwarts won’t draw attention and we can schedule it for a time when one of us, or Tonks, are on guard.”

Harry frowned. “But what if Voldemort gets there first?”

“Well, I don’t know what the prophecy could say that would make him want to kill you anymore.” Sirius pointed out. “And if he destroys it, we can just try and force Dumbledore to tell us about it.”

“Except that You-Know-Who isn’t trying to kill Harry at the moment.” Remus reminded them.

“True.” Sirius groaned and ran a hand through his hair.

“Couldn’t we sneak out one evening?” Harry asked. “Or are there wards that tell Dumbledore when a student leaves?”

“There can’t be,” Sirius answered. “He never caught us when we snuck into Hogsmeade and bought some butterbeer.”

Remus grimaced. “Way to go on being a good influence, Sirius.”

“So when are you next on guard?” Harry asked, his knee bouncing in anticipation.

“I’m not on for another few weeks.” Sirius admitted.

“I’m on Thursday night.” Remus said.

“So we could go then?” Harry asked excitedly.

Sirius and Remus exchanged a glance before nodding. “Alright.”

Sitting through classes the next day was torturous. It was so hard to concentrate on Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration and the uses of Valerian Sprigs when he had both the prophecy and the golden egg swirling through his brain.

After classes were finally finished, Harry met his friends in the Come and Go Room for their Animagus practise and brought the golden egg with him – as was becoming his practise. He knew that it was illogical, but there was a desperate part of him that hoped that if he looked at the egg enough times he would understand the clue. Not that he was relying solely on that, he also had three different books on all things ‘water’ in his bag.

After they had finished their practise, and had discussed the new progress that they had made (all of them could now transform at least one of their limbs), Harry turned his thoughts to the golden egg as his friends talked about other things.

“…Harry?” Fred’s voice pulled him out of his thoughts.

Harry turned to face the older boy. “Pardon?”

“Have you figured out the golden egg yet?” Fred asked curiously.

“No,” Harry admitted with a sigh. “I think it’s got something to do with water, but I don’t know what. And I think that the sound coming out of the egg has different tones to it.”

“Huh.” Fred glanced towards where the egg was sitting next to Harry’s bag. “Give us a listen then.”
Most of the others groaned. “No, don’t!”

“My ears might fall off if I have to hear that horrible sound again.”

“Go outside and do it!”

Harry rolled his eyes and stood up, moving over to pick up the egg. “Cast a silencing charm if you don’t want to hear the egg.”

“Is it really that bad?” George asked a little fearfully.

“It is the worst noise I have heard in my life!” Theo exclaimed feelingly.

Harry settled back down on the floor and placed the egg in his lap. “Are you ready?”

“Not yet.” Draco told him, pulling out his wand and casting a silencing charm around himself.

“Now?” Harry asked, and, when the only replies were Fred, George and Takashi’s nods, he pried open the lid.

“Merlin!” Fred shouted over the noise. “That’s awful!”

“I know.” Harry agreed, shutting the lid again.

George was rubbing at his ears. “I see what you mean about different tones though.”

“There also seemed to be pauses in the sound.” Takashi commented. “They are not long, but not all languages have pauses of the same length as English does.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “You think it’s a language?”

“It would make sense.” Fred commented.

“What would?” Draco asked, having apparently lowered the silencing charm.

“The screeching noise being a language.” Harry explained.

“It’s not like any language I’ve ever heard.” Neville commented with an amused grin.

“So it’s probably a magical creature then.” George commented. “When Charlie was younger he used to go on and on about how all magical creatures have their own languages.”

“But it sounds so horrible.” Draco’s voice was almost a whine. “Who would talk like that?”

“Someone who lived in the middle of nowhere.” Theo laughed. “Can you imagine if people spoke like that at Hogsmeade, the entire town would hear them.”

Daphne tilted her head to the side. “Or people who lived underwater.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open and he stared at her. “You’re a genius!”

Daphne’s cheeks flushed pink.

“But how is that supposed to help Harry?” Theo asked in confusion. “So what if it’s a language that’s used by magical creatures that live underwater – how is Harry supposed to know what it means?”
“It gives me a place to start.” Harry defended Daphne, already making plans to return all his library books and get out new ones with magical creatures in them.

“Did the Marauders’ Apprentices use a language potion last week?” Neville asked thoughtfully. “Maybe you could find one that will let you understand the egg.”

Harry tried not to look at Draco and Luna, he was sure that if he did he would give the game away and he enjoyed having the secret far too much. “That’s a good idea. Thanks, Neville. I’ll have to figure out what language it is first though.”

“It shouldn’t be that hard, should it?” Draco asked. “How many horrible sounding underwater languages can there be?”

25-25-25

Hours later, after dinner was over and Harry had holed himself up in his bed with two large tomes on magical creatures found in water, Harry silently cursed Draco’s optimism. He’d had no idea how many magical creatures lived underwater. There were hundreds of them just in England, let alone across the rest of the world.

Harry grimaced in horror as he came across a particularly terrifying creature – hopefully they wouldn’t have to fight anything like that. Though, given that the original First Task had involved dragons, he was sure that if magical creatures were involved they would be extremely dangerous ones.

The next creature in the book didn’t seem that dangerous, but neither did it have a known language. Harry groaned and pushed the book of his knees, before sliding down in his bed. This was going to take forever!
“This tunnel is a lot longer than I remember.”

“Really?” Harry glanced over to where Sirius’ face was illuminated by their lumos spells.

“Yeah,” Sirius looked around. “And I don’t remember there being quite so many cobwebs.”

Harry grinned. “Draco would hate it down here.”

Sirius barked with laughter. “Yeah, I can imagine. Still, it’s a useful tunnel to be able to use – particularly if you’re after some butterbeer for a post-Quidditch party.”

“How did you get them to sell it to you?” Harry asked. “Surely they must have known that you had snuck out of school.”

“You just had to be careful about who you got.” Sirius answered. “Rosmerta was a good sport, she’d sell it to us no problems. We even managed to get a bottle of firewhiskey off her once, but if you got Stebbins he’d sell you out to Dumbledore.”

“Stebbins?”

“He owned the Three Broomsticks before Rosmerta bought him out.” Sirius explained. “He was a mean old coot.”

“There’s a Hufflepuff who’s called Stebbins.” Harry commented. “He’s a Chaser.”

“Huh, he’s probably his great-grandson or something.” Sirius commented, as they came to the end of the tunnel. “Now, we need to be quiet otherwise the Flumes will hear us.”

“They don’t have wards?” Harry questioned in disbelief, what kind of security was that?

“Merlin, I hope not.” Sirius pulled a face. “They didn’t twenty years ago.”

“Surely they know about the tunnel though.” Harry whispered, as Sirius pushed against the trapdoor to open it.

“No idea.” Sirius returned in a hushed whisper and he pulled himself up through the opening in the tunnel ceiling.

Harry didn’t feel very reassured. How had Sirius, Remus and his father gotten away with this sort of thing while they were at school? It seemed unbelievable that not only would Dumbledore not have wards to warn him of students leaving, but that the owners of Honeydukes wouldn’t know there was a trapdoor in the floor of the store room.

Once they were both standing in the Honeyduke’s storeroom, Sirius carefully lowered the trapdoor. “Do you have the cloak?”

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out the invisibility cloak that he had been given in first year. He only ever used it set up pranks with Luna and Draco and, as he through it over his and Sirius’s heads, he found himself missing Luna’s humming.

He couldn’t remember the last time he had worn the cloak without having Luna humming a nursery rhyme in his ear. He had no idea what prompted her to hum that particularly nursery rhyme every
time but, knowing Luna, it was probably important somehow. Though how the story of the Three Brothers could be important was beyond him – maybe it was just because the youngest brother had been given a cloak from death.

It was a tight fit under the cloak and Harry was sure that his and Sirius’ feet and ankles were showing. Thankfully though, they managed to get out of Honeydukes and into a nearby alley without anyone seeing them and then Sirius wrapped his arm around Harry and quickly apparated them away.

Harry swallowed heavily as they landed in the Floo Room at Grimmauld Place. Thanks to Cousin Narcissa’ tutoring he had no problems landing without a stumble, but he still found that side-along apparition made his stomach turn. Apparently normal apparition wasn’t nearly as bad.

“We’ll floo in.” Sirius told him. “Normally the floos are closed to the public after working hours, but staff and Wizengamot members still have access.”

“How did Remus get in then?” Harry asked with a frown.

“Through the front entrance.” Sirius explained. “But that takes more time than it’s worth.”

Harry took a handful of floo powder, before turning to Sirius expectantly.

“Remember what I said.” Sirius told him seriously. “Keep the invisibility cloak on, don’t make any noise until I say you can and…”

“…don’t do anything stupid.” Harry finished for him. “I know, Sirius. I’ll be sensible – I promise.”

Sirius studied him carefully, before giving a slow nod. “At least you’re a Ravenclaw. I can’t even imagine the nonsense your dad and I would have gotten up to if I’d been let into the Ministry of Magic after hours at your age.”

Harry drew the invisibility cloak over his head and then stood still while Sirius cast a silencing charm on him.

They flooed together, something that Harry had never done before, and was much less comfortable than flooing on his own. Still, when they stepped out of the floo, Harry was glad that they had. There were two people snogging against the wall a few feet from the fireplace Harry and Sirius had come out of.

The two people jumped apart comically and whipped their heads around to stare at Sirius in horror. Harry almost choked in amusement when he recognised Percy Weasley.

“L-Lord B-Black?” Percy asked, as the woman edged behind him.

“Mr. Weasley.” Sirius sounded as though he was trying not to laugh. “Are you going to introduce me to your lady friend?”

Percy’s face was ashen and he swallowed. “Of course, uh, this is Anahita Burke.”

“Daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Burke.” The woman finished when it was clear that Percy wasn’t going to.

Harry vaguely recognised her as having graduated from Hogwarts the year before. He thought she had probably been in Hufflepuff.
“O-of course.” Percy nodded quickly.

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “I see. I presume that your father isn’t aware of this dalliance, Miss Burke.”

Underneath his invisibility cloak, Harry stared at his godfather incredulously. He knew that Sirius had been becoming increasingly traditional, but he didn’t think his godfather had ever sounded so much like Lord Malfoy.

“No, my lord.” Anahita answered weakly.

“It’s not a dalliance!” Percy exclaimed suddenly. “I love her!”

Anahita’s expression tightened, though Harry thought that it probably had more to do with her fear of Sirius than Percy’s words.

“And do you feel the same, Miss Burke?” Sirius asked.

Anahita’s lips trembled. “Yes, my lord.”

Sirius grinned. “Ah, young love. I presume you are both rather concerned about your parents’ reactions to this…development?”

They both nodded jerkily.

“Well, my first piece of advice would be not to spend time canoodling in public places.” Sirius told them brightly.

Canoodling? Harry mouthed the word silently in disbelief. What kind of word was that?

“I presume that you don’t have a contract, Miss Burke?” Sirius asked, apparently uncaring that it was an impolite question.

“No, my lord.” Anahita shook his head quickly. “I was contracted to Rabastan Lestrange, but my father broke it off after he was sent to Azkaban.”

Harry grimaced, Rabastan Lestrange had to be at least fifteen years older than her.

“Right then,” Sirius nodded. “Then if the two of you really want to make this happen, my second piece of advice is for Mr. Weasley here to discuss the matter with your brother Bill.”

Percy looked uncomfortable at the idea. “But…”

“Castiel is much more likely to accept the idea of marriage between his youngest daughter and a scion of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett than he is a Weasley.” Sirius told him bluntly.

“But my mum…” Percy protested weakly, before trailing off.

Anahita was looking a lot less scared now, though she didn’t look very impressed by Percy’s protests. “Thank you, my lord.”

“You’re welcome, Miss Burke.” Sirius told her. “Merry part.”

Harry quickly followed Sirius as his godfather strode away without a backwards glance. They entered an elevator, and then exited it again on Level Nine where Remus was waiting for them.

“You should be safe now, Harry.” Sirius commented. “There’s no portraits on this floor, but you
should probably keep your cloak close, just in case.”

Harry let the hood of the cloak fall onto his shoulders. “Merry meet, Remus.”

Remus smiled in greeting. “Merry meet.

“Where do we go from here?” Harry asked, looking around.

“Through that black door.” Sirius told him, gesturing towards the plain black door that stood about ten feet away from them. The light from the torches were flickering against the door giving it a very sinister appearance.

As they approached the door, it swung open for them and the movement made Harry flinch in surprise. Why was everything so creepy here?

That wasn’t the worst of it though, the room through the door was completely black. The ceiling was black, the walls were black, and the floor was black. Even the multiple doors that sat evenly spaced around the room were black and the only light in the room were candles that let out a blue light.

“Merlin.” Harry muttered looking around. “How are we supposed to know which door to go through?”

“We just have to try them all.” Sirius told him cheerfully, pulling out his wand and using it to place a glowing mark on the door they had just come through.

Harry looked between the mark and Sirius in confusion. “What…” He trailed off as the walls began to rotate, spinning faster and faster, before finally slowing to a halt. Only the doors were in different places and the door that Sirius had marked, the one that had been right beside them, was now on the other side of the room.

“It’s almost as though they don’t like visitors.” Remus commented dryly.

Harry looked around at the many doors hopelessly. “What do we do?”

“We try each door until we find the Hall of Prophecy.” Sirius answered firmly. “Harry, pick a door.”

The first door they opened led to a long rectangular room that contained a whole bunch of clocks. It was tempting to step into the room and look study everything inside it, but Harry just wanted to find the prophecy and get back to Hogwarts.

“One down, eleven to go.” Sirius commented. “Your pick next, Remus.”

Remus chose the door to the right of the first one and, when they opened it, they found themselves looking into another large rectangular room. This one didn’t have clocks though, instead a tank of green water stood in the middle of the room with brains floating in it – it was disgusting.

Sirius chose the next door, picking one on the opposite side of the room, but that door refused to open – even after Sirius and Remus had both thrown every spell they could think of at it.

Then it was Harry’s turn again and he slowly opened another door. This room reminded Harry of the Wizengamot Chamber. The room was large and square and had stone tiers leading down to a pit. At the centre of the pit, which was about twenty feet down, there was a large stone archway with a curtaining hanging across it.

“Do you know what we’re looking for?” Harry asked, as he shut the door and watched the walls
spin again.

“Of course.” Sirius told him. “I was here a few days ago, remember?”

Remus picked the next door, which led to a room filled with floating planets, and then they only had seven more doors to check.

Sirius chose the next door and Harry shivered as the door opened and a draft of cold air hit him. This room was shaped similarly to the Great Hall, except it was longer. The room was dark, lit only by more candles emitting blue flames, and seemed to be filled with shelves.

Sirius grinned. “Welcome to the Hall of Prophecy.”

Harry looked around the room sceptically. “Really?”

“See all those shelves?” Sirius asked, stepping into the room. “They’re filled with prophecies.”

“Why is it so cold?” Harry asked, wandlessly casting a heating charm on himself.

“No idea.” Sirius answered, beginning to stride through the hall. “Now, we’re looking for row ninety-seven. It took me ages to find it the first time, but then I figured out that they’re ordered according to the date that the prophecy was given.”

“So the prophecy about me was given in the seventies?” Harry asked as he and Remus followed Sirius through the dark hall.

“Presumably.” Sirius shrugged. “By the way, Remus, you’ll never guess what we came across in the lobby?”

“What?” Remus asked, quirking an eyebrow in interest.

“Come on, Moony, guess!” Sirius exclaimed.

Remus let out a longsuffering sigh. “A hippogriff playing Quidditch with a House Elf.”

“Where in Merlin’s name did that come from?” Sirius asked incredulously.

“You said to guess.” Remus reminded him with a grin.

Sirius rolled his eyes. “There were two kids snogging! Not their smartest idea, since apparently they’re trying to keep their relationship a secret, but it certainly brought back memories.”

Remus barked with laughter. “I’m sure.”

“Not that I’ve ever done it in the lobby here.” Sirius sounded disappointed. “Maybe I should make it my new year’s resolution.”

“What?” Harry exclaimed, staring at his godfather in horror, surely Sirius wouldn’t really do that.

“You’re all respectable now, Padfoot.” Remus pointed out. “Besides, where would you find a witch who’d agree to it?”

Sirius grimaced. “I miss Amy Clearwater. That witch was bloody shameless. She would have done it.”

“I’m sure.” Remus’ tone was dry. “I stopped doubting Amy’s willingness to do things the day the
two of you got caught snogging in the Headmaster’s chair.”

Harry choked in shock. “The Headmaster’s chair?”

“Like you’re one to talk.” Sirius smirked at Remus. “You’re the one who snogged that witch in McGonagall’s classroom and then had to hide in one of her cupboards when she came in. Who was that witch anyway?”

“Dorcas Meadowes.” Remus answered with a fond smile.

“You can’t be serious!” Harry exclaimed.

“Oh, but I am.” Sirius grinned. “Sirius Black, at your service.”

Harry levelled his godfather with an unimpressed look. “The Headmaster’s chair?”

Sirius grinned unrepentantly. “You should try it. It’s a little uncomfortable, but worth every detention.”

“Exhibitionist.” Remus coughed into his hand.

“And you!” Harry turned to Remus. “McGonagall’s office?!”

“Don’t be such a prude, Harry.” Sirius grinned. “There’s nothing wrong with snogging somewhere interesting. You should try it sometime.”

Harry shuddered at thought. “Not a chance.”

Sirius rolled his eyes, before changing the subject. “Did you know that Percy was seeing that girl?”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “What in Merlin’s name was that conversation you had with them?”

“My good deed of the day.” Sirius looked smug.

“You had them terrified at the beginning.” Harry pointed out.

Sirius smirked. “Yeah, that was fun. Merlin, did you see Percy’s face?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Isn’t Lord Burke really old? How does he have a daughter that young?”

“He’s not really old,” Sirius protested. “He’s not even eighty yet.”

“So he’s over twice your age and not old?” Harry asked incredulously. “Sirius, you’re old.”

Sirius adopted a hurt expression. “Did you hear that, Moony? Harry thinks we’re old.”

“We are old.” Remus told him heartlessly.

“Not as old at Castiel though!” Sirius protested.

“Which is what makes him really old.” Harry explained. “So how does he have a daughter that young?”

“She’s from his second, and much younger, wife.” Sirius explained with a grimace.

“And how could he have thought that Rabastan Lestrange would make her a good husband?” Harry asked incredulously. “He’s way older than her.”
Sirius looked as disgusted by the idea as Harry felt.

“Ninety-seven.” Remus pointed a shelf on their left. “How far along is it?”

Not too far.” Sirius began walking down the aisle.

Harry followed slowly, observing the prophecies on the shelves. They were glass orbs, some of which were glowing, and they each had a tiny label stuck beneath them.

“Here!” Sirius declared triumphantly and Harry quickly caught up with him.

Sirius pointed towards an orb that was on a shelf at Harry’s chest level. Harry bent down to read the label and shuddered at the sight of his name and Voldemort’s name written beside each other.

“Why is it glowing?” Harry asked, looking around at some of the nearby orbs – only some of which were glowing.

“No idea.” Sirius admitted.

Harry reached out a hand towards the orb, before stopping. “It won’t hurt me, right?”

“No, you’ll be fine.”

The prophecy orb was surprisingly warm, especially when compared to cold room that they were in. Harry picked it up and then held it in the palm of his hand, it seemed small.

“Do you hear anything?” Sirius asked.

“No.” Harry shook his head. “How do you think it works?”

Remus was staring at the orb with narrowed eyes. “The prophecy is recorded inside it, yes?”

“Yeah.” Sirius agreed.

“Maybe you have to break it to let it out.” Remus suggested.

Harry looked down at the orb. “I thought you said I wasn’t allowed to break it?”

“I said I didn’t know if you could.” Sirius corrected him. “It’s worth a try at least.”

“I don’t know,” Harry frowned. “Shouldn’t we try something else first? What if we break it and nothing happens? Then we’d never get to hear it.”

“No, then we’d just have to force Dumbledore to tell us.” Sirius told him. “I don’t know what else you could do. You don’t know legilimency, and if the orb would hurt us for touching it I can’t imagine that it would like the idea of us performing legilimency on it.”

“Alright.” Harry held the orb away from him and then slowly tilted his hand until it dropped.

The orb shattered as it hit the floor, but the faint glow that had emitted from it seemed to hover above the floor and then a voice suddenly came from it.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as
the seventh month dies..."

Once the voice had finished the glow vanished, as though it had never been there, and Harry was left staring the broken shards of the orb.

“ Bloody hell.” Sirius murmured behind him.

Harry stared at the floor, it couldn’t be real – could it? The prophecy never actually said his name and who knew whether or not his parents had defied Voldemort exactly three times. Besides, he couldn’t be the only person who was born at the end of July – after all, Neville was born just a day before him.

“You alright there, Harry?” Remus asked, his hand coming to rest comfortingly on Harry’s shoulder.

“I don’t understand.” Harry admittedly weakly. “Why does it have to be me? Why can’t it be someone else?”

“That would be a good question for us to ask Dumbledore I think.” Sirius replied, his voice hard. “Along with what the bloody hell he was thinking keeping this from us.”

Harry looked back down at the shards. “At least now Voldemort won’t be able to get his weapon.”

“True.” Sirius stepped forward. “Scourgify!” Instantly all the shards of the broken orb disappeared.

“Shall we go?” Remus asked, squeezing Harry’s shoulder before releasing it.

“Yes, please.” Harry nodded, slowly making his way back down the aisle.

“Do you want to talk about it, kiddo?” Sirius asked gently.

Harry sighed. “It just seems so much. First the tournament and now this. How am I supposed to focus on my classes knowing that I’m the one who has to kill Voldemort?”

“You aren’t the one who has to kill Voldemort.” Remus corrected. “You are the one who can kill him. There’s a difference.”

“How?” Harry exclaimed in frustration. “How does that make any difference at all? It’s not as though I’m going to just sit there and let Voldemort kill everyone knowing that I could stop him.”

“Hey,” Sirius grabbed Harry’s arm and gently stopped him. “Do you remember how Remus said that there was no point in worrying about the prophecy regardless of what it said?”

“Sort of.” Harry admitted. “But how can I not worry about it?!”

“Prophecies aren’t history books written in advance.” Remus told him seriously. “They’re complex and tricky and you shouldn’t let them control your life.”

“That’s easy enough for you to say.” Harry groused. “You don’t have to defeat Voldemort.”

“Neither do you.” Remus repeated seriously.

“Didn’t you hear the prophecy?” Harry asked in frustration. “Either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives. How does that not mean that I have to defeat him?”

Remus sighed. “Harry, do you remember the lecture I gave last week on the Ministry of Magic’s
treaty with the Merpeople in 1932?”

Harry let out a huff. “Of course. Merpeople are very musical and when they communicate they speak in poetry rather than prose. So when the treaty was drawn up the Merpeople regarded its contents differently to what the wizards did.”

“Exactly.” Remus smiled proudly. “Harry, prophecies are poetry not prose. Take the second half of that sentence, neither can live while they, uh, while…”

“Neither can live while the other survives.” Harry recited for him.

“Exactly.” Remus. “Now, would you say that you’re living right now?”

“Yes, of course.” Harry replied, starting to understand Remus’ point.

“And yet You-Know-Who survives.” Remus pointed out. “There’s no point worrying about it, it could mean numerous things and if it’s a prophecy then it will happen whether you try and make it happen or not.”

Harry stomach unclenched slightly at that. “Really?”

“Definitely.” Remus nodded firmly.
As much as Harry had wanted to storm Dumbledore’s office for answers immediately after returning from the Department of Mysteries, the next morning he was grateful that Sirius had insisted that they wait. Of course, waiting meant that Remus couldn’t join them since he had classes to teach, but Harry was feeling a lot calmer. He was glad that he had a free period first thing in the morning though since he didn’t think he could have waited any longer.

“You ready?” Sirius asked, as they stood in front of the gargoyle that guarded Dumbledore’s office.

“Yes.” Harry replied neutrally.

“Ice-pops.” Sirius said, and the gargoyle stepped away revealing the staircase that led up to Dumbledore’s office.

They climbed up the stairs in silence, before Sirius knocked on the door that led to Dumbledore’s office.

“Come in, Sirius, Harry.” Dumbledore called from within, and Harry found himself wondering what kind of ward it was that let the headmaster know who was there. It seemed very useful.

Dumbledore was seated behind his desk and he looked over his glasses at the two of them. “What can I do for you, my boys?”

“Must we address the issue of familiarity yet again, Headmaster?” Sirius asked coldly.

Dumbledore looked disappointed. “Of course not, my apologies.”

Sirius strode across the room and settled in one of the chairs in front of Dumbledore’s desk. Harry followed behind him and sat in the other seat.

“Now, what can I do for you?” Dumbledore asked again.

“Harry?” Sirius prompted.

Harry met Dumbledore’s eyes. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives. The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...."

Dumbledore’s eyes widened in surprise as Harry started, and by the end of it he was looking rather pale. “Should I presume that this is the reason that you both left the Hogwarts’s grounds last night?”

“We visited the Hall of Prophecies.” Sirius told him. “The orb is destroyed now, by the way, so you can call off the guard.”

“Are you sure that was the best course of action, Sirius?” Dumbledore asked in concern.

“Yes.” Harry answered for his godfather. “I’d rather Voldemort didn’t know any more about the
prophecy than he already does.”

“How much does he know?” Sirius asked.

“What makes you think he knows any of it?” Dumbledore asked curiously.

“You mean other than the fact that he seems set on killing me?” Harry asked flippantly.

Dumbledore sighed. “You are right, Voldemort does know part of the prophecy. When the prophecy was first given to me…”

“It wasn’t given to you!” Harry protested. “Just because you were there doesn’t mean that it’s yours.”

“Of course.” Dumbledore allowed.

“Don’t say of course, like you accidently used the wrong words.” Sirius reprimanded him. “You had no right to keep this prophecy from Harry.”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Harry is so young, I wanted…”

“Then you should have told me!” Sirius interrupted him. “I am his guardian, after all.”

Dumbledore was beginning to look frustrated. “If you will allow me to finish, Sirius…”

“No,” Sirius interrupted again. “I know how you are, Headmaster. You’ll weave words around us and try and hide the fact that you aren’t actually telling us anything. We only want to know three things…”

“Four.” Harry corrected quietly, shooting his godfather an apologetic look.

“Four things.” Sirius amended smoothly. “Not all the fluff in the middle.”

“My dear boy,” Dumbledore started. “I don’t know…”

“Familiarity, Headmaster!” Sirius interrupted again.

Dumbledore’s expression became cold. “Sirius, I do not know what makes you think that I will allow you to treat me with such disrespect, but I would watch your tone if I were you.”

Sirius raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “Or what? You’re not Chief Warlock anymore, Headmaster. You’re just a headmaster and while, admittedly, we are in your school I can always bring this matter before the Wizengamot for their judgement. You did after all withhold vital information about my heir, even after the Wizengamot ordered you to turn everything over.”

“I thought you said that you didn’t want Voldemort to know the prophecy?” Dumbledore asked, almost smugly.

“I am sure that I could convince them that the contents of the prophecy are private.” Sirius pointed out coldly.

Dumbledore was silent for a while, but eventually he sighed. “What is it that you would like to know?”

“How much of the prophecy does Voldemort know?” Harry asked.
“Only the first part, he did not hear the phrase about him marking you as his equal.” Dumbledore answered. “The prophecy was given in the Hog’s Head Inn, you see, and…”

“Fluff, Headmaster.” Sirius interrupted warningly, earning himself a dark glare from the headmaster.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Harry asked, though Dumbledore had already partly answered it.

“You were so young.” Dumbledore answered mournfully. “I wanted to allow you the chance to be a child.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me?” Sirius asked, his expression hard.

“Surely you had enough on your plate.” Dumbledore explained. “You were recovering from your time in Azkaban and had only recently gained custody of Harry.”

“What is your interpretation of the prophecy?” Harry asked quickly, before Dumbledore could continue.

Dumbledore peered over his glasses at him. “Surely that is obvious, Harry. It means that the only person with a chance of vanquishing Voldemort was born at the end of July, to parents who had defied Voldemort three times. This is of course you, given that he then marked you. So you have ‘the power that he knows not’ and so will one day kill him for good.”

“And what do you believe is the power that Voldemort knows not?” Harry asked.

“Department of Mysteries contains a room that is always kept locked…” Dumbledore started.

“I’ve heard of that room.” Sirius interrupted. “It’s the room where they study love, isn’t it?”

Harry stared at the headmaster in disbelief. “You think that my power is love?”

Dumbledore nodded slowly. “It is something that you possess much of, and yet Voldemort has none.”

Harry scoffed. “Well, that answers my fourth question. You didn’t train me because you think I’m going to hug Voldemort to death.”

“There is no reason to be rude, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore told him firmly.

“No?” Harry asked. “You don’t think so?”

“Harry.” Sirius warned him, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Thank you for your answers, Headmaster.”

“Of course, Sirius.” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled. “We are all on the same side, after all.”

Harry wasn’t sure that he agreed.

27-27-27

Harry found it hard to concentrate on his classes that day. If his mind wasn’t trying to figure out what the prophecy meant, it was trying to figure what kind of language the screeching from the egg was. Still, he at least managed to get a good amount of notes and he promised himself that he would look back over them later.

He spent the evening reading about magical creatures that lived in water, and more importantly what
languages they spoke, because it was the only practical thing he could do. He couldn’t kill Voldemort, or even figure out what the prophecy meant, but he could do research.

He was so accustomed to not finding any information that he almost missed it. Merpeople, blah, blah, blah, would be full-beings, blah, blah, blah, rejected the status, blah, blah, blah, language sounds like screeching out of water, blah, blah…

“Wait.” Harry murmured excitedly, before reading the last paragraph.

Apparently, Merpeople spoke Mermish which, while it sounded melodic underwater, sounded horrible above the water.

Harry slammed the book shut and pushed it off his lap. “Tempus!” Damn, it was after nine so there was no way he could sneak down to the Great Lake and duck his head under it now. Well, no sensible way. He’d just have to wait for morning.

27-27-27

Harry snuck out of his dormitory just before dawn the next morning, golden egg tucked under his arm. He was scheduled to meet Remus, Takashi and Neville in thirty minutes for their run, but first he wanted to listen to the egg underwater.

The air outside the castle was freezing and almost made Harry turn back. Surely there was a better way to do this? Except he didn’t want to wait – he wanted to know now!

Harry carefully made his way across the grounds and then onto one of the small beaches down to the lake. Then, after having double checked that no one was around, he began to strip off his clothes.

It a so cold that his heating charms barely had an effect and by the time Harry was standing next to the lake in just his underwear he had decided that he was an idiot. Still, he was most of the way there so…

Harry put a foot in the water and then pulled it out again with a yelp. Merlin! It was a freezing! He walked backwards and quickly pulled his trousers back on and then his shirt and jumper. He definitely needed to come up with another plan.

Thankfully, when he shared his dilemma with his running partners, Takashi offered to give him the password to the Prefects’ Bathroom. Harry hadn’t even known there was a Prefects’ bathroom, but when he let himself in later that day he found himself sighing in relief that he hadn’t ended up diving in the lake after all.

The bathroom was huge and ostentatious, but the idea of soaking in the bath sounded amazing. Harry quickly ran the bath, before shucking off his clothes and carrying the egg in. The water was amazingly warm and for a moment Harry just enjoyed the sensation, but then he grabbed the egg and ducked under the water before opening it.

“Come seek us where our voices sound,
We cannot sing above the ground,
And while you’re searching ponder this;
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,
An hour long you’ll have to look,
And to recover what we took,
But past an hour, the prospect's black,
Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.”

Harry pushed himself out of the water and desperately gulped in a breath. Merlin, the song was long. If it had been a line longer he would have had to listen to it in two parts. So the Merpeople would take something from him, which he would then have to find under the Great Lake with a time limit of an hour. The last two lines of the song worried him a little, but he presumed it was probably a hyperbole. After all, the organisers of the tournament could hardly steal something from him and then refuse to return it.

27-27-27

“You seem to be in a good mood.” Draco commented later that day when he, Harry and Luna were hanging out in Hoth. It was nice to be just the three of them, especially since it didn’t happen very often anymore.

“He discovered the naiads’ song.” Luna explained from where she was lying on the couch.

“Pardon?” Draco asked in confusion.

“I discovered the naiads’ song.” Harry repeated for him with a straight face, before beaming proudly. “I figured out the clue.”

“And you didn’t tell me straight away?” Draco asked accusingly. “What is it?”

“The naiads’ song.” Harry grinned.

Draco levelled an unimpressed look at him.

“The screeching was Mermish.” Harry gave in. “It sounds melodic underwater, but awful above water. It was a song explaining to me that the Merpeople are going to take something off me and hide it under the lake, then I’ll have an hour to get it back.”

“An hour under the lake?” Draco asked in disbelief. “What do they think you are, part fish?”

Harry chuckled. “Apparently. I have no idea how I’m going to do it yet, but I’ve got more than two months to figure it out.”

“Plenty of time to figure out how to be a fish.” Draco smirked. “Anyway, have you figured out the musical runes?”

“Yes,” Harry answered triumphantly. “Remus has been helping me with them and we finished it earlier in the week.”

“And you’re just telling me now?” Draco asked in disbelief.

“Sorry, I’ve had a lot on my mind this week.” Harry explained. “Family business.”

“Don’t worry about it, Harry.” Luna told him with a wide smile.

Harry wondered whether she was talking about the prophecy or about not having told them, or both. You could never really tell with Luna.
“So have the two of you figured out how you’re going to put it on the champions’ robes?” Harry asked.

“Your robes with be easy,” Draco pointed out, ignoring Harry’s grimace. “But the House Elves have agreed to help with the rest.”

“Amazing things House Elves.” Harry declared. “I don’t know how we would do half our pranks without them.”

“So now that you’re done, shall we do this weekend?” Draco asked. “Say tonight, through to Sunday night?”

Harry groaned. “That long?”

Draco smirked unsympathetically. “Come on, Harry, be a good sport.”

“I am a good sport.” Harry protested. “I just don’t want the Imperial March following me around all weekend.”

“Can you imagine Aceline Moreau’s face though?” Draco asked. “She’ll hate it the most.”

“Her or Fleur.” Harry agreed. “Though I think Fleur actually has a sense of humour.”

“Exactly.” Draco grinned excitedly. “So tonight?”

27-27-27

Harry honestly had no idea how House Elves did half their magic because somewhere between him sitting down for dinner and him standing up again they had attached the material with the musical runes onto his robes. Harry hadn’t heard or felt a thing.

The entire hall stared at him as the music started up and Harry silently swore to get Draco for this. He felt ridiculous, walking through the hall with the Imperial March from Star Wars playing loudly. He was almost to the door when some of the students’ exclaimed causing him to turn around and glare at the writing that had appeared on the wall.

‘The Marauders’ Apprentices bring you the Imperial March.’

Yes, he was definitely going to get Draco for this.

Since he was the first of the champions to leave the Great Hall, out of design rather than any specific place to be, Harry missed the other champions’ expressions when they realised that they too were creating noise. Apparently Aceline Moreau had been the next champion to leave and her expression had been completely priceless. Cedric was next and he had apparently accepted it in good humour.

Of course by the time Viktor, Nina and Fleur stood up they had some forewarning and, while Fleur had seemed a little uncertain about the entire thing, Viktor and Nina had embraced it and had walked in time to the music.

While Harry didn’t see the first reactions, it was fun to see the other champions walking around to the music for the rest of the weekend. Well, everyone except for Aceline since she refused to leave Beauxbaton carriage until the music stopped.

Viktor and Nina continued to stride along to the music and Cedric soon began copying them (though he had a much less intimidating air about him). Fleur didn’t seem at all phased by the music, though
Harry did overhear her saying that she wished the music chosen had been more personalised since the Imperial March didn’t sound much like her. Harry thought it was a good point, though it was definitely too late to fix it now.

27-27-27

Harry met with his friends on Sunday afternoon to continue practising to become an Animagus and, with Sirius’ supervision, managed to transform all four of his limbs for the first time. He was sure he looked ridiculous – human sized, with a human head and body, but giant bird feet and wings – and his friends definitely agreed. Harry was proud of his achievement, though a little nervous as well. Next week he would have to start working on transforming his entire head.

Dinner that night was delicious though, in Harry’s opinion, the best part of it was standing up and walking away afterwards without any music following him. Merlin, that music had gotten annoying!

They had classes again the next day and, given that it was the second to last week before the end of the term, their professors were piling them up with extra readings and homework. Each of their professors had also warned them about the giant assignments they were going to be given to do during Christmas Break. Harry wasn’t looking forward to it. With all the time he was spending researching how to breathe underwater and how to interpret prophecies (neither of which topic he’d had any luck with yet) he didn’t have much extra time to dedicate to assignments.

It was a pretty normal week, especially given that two weeks ago he had been competing in the First Task, and one week ago he had found out about the prophecy, but then Professor Flitwick called a Ravenclaw House meeting and announced that there was going to a Yule Ball.

The announcement was met with excited squeals and whispers from the girls and groans from some the boys. Harry wasn’t sure what he thought about it. On the one hand, an evening dancing with Daphne sounded wonderful, but on the other hand it would mean that he would miss the Malfoys’ Yule Ball (where he would have gotten to dance with Daphne anyway).

Thankfully, Draco later assured him that his parents had shifted the date of their Yule Ball to take place on the day after Christmas. Apparently it was the first time in over a century that the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy wouldn’t host a Yule Ball on the 25th of December, but Cousin Narcissa and Lord Malfoy had thought that it was worth it to ensure that Draco could be there – not to mention Sirius and Harry. After all, what kind of society event would it be without Lord Black?
Percy Weasley stared at the green door knocker in front of him and tried to slow his breathing. He couldn’t believe that he was here, doing this. He’d worked so hard over the last few months to be neutral in the conflict between his older brothers and his parents, but if he went through with this all that would go down the drain.

He’d never been one for conflict, always the first to slip away and hide in his room when his mum and dad were having a row. The problem with conflict was that there didn’t seem to be any rules. It wasn’t like books, or classes, or Ministry policy, it was wild and could go any direction without warning and he always found himself feeling stranded with no way out.

As frustrating as he found Fred and George, he had always admired them for their unflinching bravery in the face of conflict – they even seemed to go out of their way to seek out conflict. Ginny was a bit like that too, as was Ron. Bill and Charlie didn’t exactly seek out conflict, but they didn’t shy away from it either. It was one of the things that always left him feeling like a changeling in his family and then later his Hogwarts’ House. How could he be a real Weasley, a real Gryffindor, if he wasn’t brave enough to face conflict?

Working at the Ministry had been a breath of fresh air. Sure there was some conflict there, but there were actually policies on how to handle conflict in the workplace – policies that he had memorised by his first day.

Things had been going so well, especially after he’d moved out of home a few months ago, but then Bill had decided to become Lord Prewett, and Charlie had agreed to be his heir, and it seemed as though their family was falling apart. Percy had done what he did best, ignored all the conflict and hoped that it would eventually be resolved, but it had been over two months now and Mum still refused to let Bill and Charlie come home for dinner.

In all honesty, Percy thought he could probably have ignored the entire thing for years if it wasn’t for Anahita Burke. He’d known of her for years, she’d been in his year at Hogwarts, but he didn’t think he’d ever exchanged words with her before. She had been a traditionalist, not to mention incredibly popular and beautiful, and he had been a Weasley.

He’d almost swallowed his tongue when she had asked to sit with him at lunch on his third day at the Ministry. He didn’t think he’d said much for the entire lunch, but she’d managed to carry the conversation anyway. Apparently she had just started work at the Department of Public Relations and had been worried that she wouldn’t know anyone (aside from her father’s friends). She’d told him that she was delighted to see a familiar face.

Percy had passed the lunch off as a fluke, but then the next day she’d chosen to sit with him again and he had just never stopped. She’d asked him out a month later and this time Percy was pretty sure that he’d swallowed his tongue and had started choking on thin air. She’d laughed kindly and told him that she would meet him at a restaurant that he’d never heard of at seven that night.

He’d gone, despite half believing that it was all a trick, and had barely believed his eyes when he’d seem how stunningly beautiful she looked in her purple dress robes. He’d felt like a scruffy, plain pauper next to her, but she hadn’t seemed to share his opinion and after a while he found himself relaxing.

They’d discussed their different view on traditionalism on their third date and Percy, who had never realised that traditionalism brought with it strict rules for all interactions, had been ready convert by
the end of the night. The next morning he’d gotten an owl from Bill explaining that he’d accepted the position of Lord Prewett and then the owl from his Mum denouncing Bill’s actions. Suddenly, a traditionalist life didn’t sound so conflict free anymore.

So he’d kept quiet on the issue. Allowing Anahita to teach him how to behave traditionally, but not willing to let anyone else know. The problem was that now that they had been dating for two months, Percy knew without a doubt that he loved her and wanted to marry her. But Lord Black had been right, as a Weasley he didn’t stand a chance of convincing Lord Burke to let him. The only chance he had was to follow Lord Black’s advice and ask Bill for help, but that meant choosing sides and risking being disowned with his siblings.

It had been a hard decision, he loved his parents and the idea of being on the outs with them horrified him, but he loved Anahita too.

Percy reached out a hand towards the green doorknocker, before stepping back in shock as the door swung open.

“You coming in, Percy?” Bill asked with an amused tone. “You’ve been standing there for ten minutes.”

Percy could feel his face flushing in embarrassment as he stepped past his brother into the house. Why hadn’t he remembered that Bill would have wards to inform him when someone was on the front porch?

He shrugged off his cloak and hung it on the peg, before following Bill down the hall and into the kitchen where Charlie was sitting at the table. Percy could feel his stomach twisting again in fear, he hadn’t known that they would both be here. Didn’t Charlie live in Romania?

“Hey, Perce.” Charlie greeted him with a beaming smile, standing up and drawing him into a hug. “How are you?”

“G-good.” Percy stuttered, awkwardly hugging his older brother back.

“What can I get you to drink?” Bill asked as he used his wand to light the stove under the kettle. Percy watched enviously, he’d always struggled with wordless magic. “Tea, please.”

“Still black, no sugar?” Bill asked, pulling three tea cups out of a cupboard and levitating them over to the table.

“Yes, thank you.” Percy winced, remembering Fred and George chorusing that his tea was just as boring as he was.

“Have a seat.” Bill instructed him, gesturing to the three empty seats around the table. “The tea won’t take long.”

“It’s good to see you.” Charlie said, as Percy stiffly took a seat across from him. “We haven’t heard from you in a while.”

Percy winced again, hearing the unspoken judgement. “Sorry, I…”

“I didn’t mean it like that, idiot.” Charlie interrupted him. “I get it, you’ve never picked sides before. We didn’t expect you to now.”

Percy let out a sigh of relief that they understood. “Still, I am sorry. Mum and Dad are being
“From what we can tell it’s just Mum.” Bill commented from where he was pouring boiling water into a teapot. “Dad seems to be trying to play it neutral too, though it’s harder for him than it is for you.”

“What about the others?” Percy asked cautiously.

“Ron’s with Mum.” Charlie grimaced. “We get almost as many threatening letters from him as we do from her.”

“We haven’t heard from Ginny,” Bill added, carrying the teapot over to the table. “But Fred and George are probably madder at Mum than we are.”

“Really?” Percy pushed his glanced up his nose. “Why?”

“No idea.” Charlie shrugged. “Though I suspect their friendship with Potter’s got something to do with it.”

“You think he’s coaching them to be angry?” Percy asked.

“No,” Bill shook his head, causing his long hair to brush across his shoulders. “I doubt it. I think it’s mostly just because they feel things more strongly than most of us.”

“And them being mates with Potter means that they’ve been pro-traditionalism for longer than we have.” Charlie added. “Not that any of us are actually traditional.”

Percy felt his shoulders slump slightly in disappointment. “You’re not?”

“Merlin, no!” Charlie exclaimed. “All that fussing around, it would drive me bloody mad!”

“But what about you accepting the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett?” Percy asked.

“You don’t actually have to be traditional to be a lord, you know.” Bill sounded amused. “It’s just highly encouraged.”

“What about you, Perce?” Charlie asked, leaning forward with his elbows on the table. “Would you describe yourself as pro-traditionalism?”

Percy bit his lip nervously. “Uh…”

“Leave him alone, Charlie.” Bill elbowed the dragontamer, before picking up the teapot and beginning to pour tea.

“No, it’s alright.” Percy said quickly. “It’s, uh, sort of why I’m here.”

Bill gave him a sharp look. “Oh?”

“I’m seeing someone.” Percy blurted out.

“Someone traditional?” Charlie guessed with a smirk.

“Yes.”

“Well, who is it?” Charlie prompted, as Bill slid a teacup across to him.

Charlie leant back in his chair and whistled in surprise. “Really?”

“Yes,” Percy confirmed quickly. “She’s wonderful, and she doesn’t have a contract, but then Lord Black found out and he said that I should talk to you about it.”

“Why?” Bill asked with a confused frown.

“Because I don’t have a chance with her father as a Weasley.” Percy admitted. “But if I’m a scion of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett…”

“He’s more likely to say yes.” Bill finished for him. “What does your girlfriend say about all this?”

“She agrees with Lord Black.” Percy answered. “And she says that I’ll have to be traditional too.”

“And you don’t mind that?” Charlie asked with a frown.

“No.” Percy answered quickly. “I like it.”

Charlie huffed in laughed. “You would.”

“Drink your tea.” Bill instructed them both, before taking a sip at his own. “So, how exactly would this work?”

“You would accept me into the House of Prewett,” Percy explained, repeating everything that Anahita had told him. “And I would change my name.”

“You’re serious?” Charlie asked in disbelief. “You know we haven’t even done that, right?”

Percy nodded.

“Mum’s not going to like this.” Bill warned him. “You won’t be able to play neutral anymore, this will be you picking a side.”

Percy let out a shuddering breath. “I know.”

“She might disown you.” Bill continued.

“I know.” Percy nodded jerkily.

“Bloody hell,” Charlie exclaimed. “You must really love this bint.”

Percy glared at him. “Hey! Don’t call her that.”

Charlie rolled his eyes, but didn’t argue.

“So you’d become a Prewett, then what?” Bill asked.

“Then you’d send a request to Lord Burke for a contract to be discussed.” Percy answered, before quickly adding. “She has a dowry, so you would get something out of it all.”

“Hey, calm down.” Bill soothed. “I don’t care about any of that stuff, just so long as you’re sure that this is what you want. Have you really thought this through?”

“Yes.” Percy nodded firmly.
Charlie snorted. “Of course he has, Bill. This isn’t me you’re talking about. Percy thinks everything through.”

Percy felt himself wilting slightly.

“I didn’t say it was a bad thing.” Charlie growled. “Don’t be so bloody sensitive.”

Percy looked down at the table and tried to ignore the awkward silence that followed Charlie’s comment. When he looked up again he saw that his older brothers were communicating through facial expressions. It was something they had been able to do since they were kids, though not as successfully at Fred and George could. Percy had always been envious, he wished that he’d had a sibling that he was that close with.

Eventually Bill cleared his throat. “So you’re going to go all traditional then, Perce? You’re sure?”

“Yes.” Percy nodded.

Charlie shuddered dramatically. “I can’t imagine having to spend the rest of my life bowing and scraping to people.”

“But it’s logical.” Percy protested. “There are rules about how to behave and so long as you stick to them you’re fine.”

Bill looked considering. “I can see how that might work for you.”

Percy looked away uncomfortably. Why did he have to be so different from all of his siblings?

“Listen, Percy, I don’t really want to be Bill’s heir.” Charlie said suddenly. “I only agreed because he didn’t want to tell anyone else what was going on at the beginning, just in case Mum freaked out.”

Percy frowned in confusion and pushed his glasses up his nose. What did that have to do with anything?

“We agreed that Charlie would help out, but that I’d eventually replace him.” Bill said.

“I’ve been accepted to apprentice under Andrew Ridgebit next year.” Charlie explained excitedly. “I’m going to be a Dragonologist. I want to spend my life studying dragons, not being a poncy politician.”

“Thanks for that.” Bill told him dryly.

“You’re not a ponce, Bill.” Charlie backtracked quickly. “Neither are you Percy, but you know what I mean.”

“No really,” Percy had to admit. “I can’t imagine anything worse than studying dragons. But congratulations on your apprenticeship – that’s wonderful. Isn’t Andrew Ridgebit one of the most prominent dragonologists in the world?”

Charlie barked out a laugh. “Yeah, well I can’t imagine anything worse than sitting in an office all day, but thanks. And, yeah, Master Ridgebit’s amazing.”

“Anyway,” Bill started. “How would you feel about being my heir, at least until I have a son?”

Percy stared at him, and then at Charlie. “What?”

“I want you to be my heir.” Bill repeated. “You’d be better at it than Charlie anyway. Merlin, you’ll
be better at it than I am. It’ll make you look better to Burke too.”

Percy shook his head. “But Charlie…”


“Just talk it over with your girl.” Bill suggested. “In fact, why don’t the two of you come over for dinner tonight? If you’re free that is.”

“I won’t be here.” Charlie commented. “I’ve got to get back to the reserve, I only popped over to nag Bill about replacing me anyway. But you have my wholehearted support.”

Percy found himself nodding. “What time should we come over?”

“How about six?” Bill asked. “We can even do the accepting you in the house thing tonight if you like. Sirius lent me a book with all that kind of stuff in it.”

27-27-27

“So?” Anahita asked expectantly when Percy met her at a café an hour later.

“He said yes.” Percy told her, still feeling a bit shell-shocked. “And he’s asked me to be his heir.”

“I thought your other brother was his heir?” Anahita asked with a small frown that wrinkled her nose.

“He is, but he doesn’t want to be.” Percy explained. “He likes dragons better than people.”

“What did you say?” Anahita asked excitedly.

“I said that I would talk to you about it.” Percy told her. “He’s invited us over to dinner tonight to discuss it some more.”

“Dinner tonight?” Anahita’s eyes widened.

“Are you free?” Percy asked nervously. “We could do it another night, it was just that Bill said tonight and I…”

“Yes, tonight is fine.” Anahita interrupted him calmly. “I’m just a little nervous. I haven’t met any of your family before.”

Percy felt awful. “I’m sorry, it’s not that I’m ashamed of you, I promise. It’s just that…”

“That your family has been a bit tense recently.” Anahita finished for him. “And don’t worry, I never considered that you might be ashamed of me.”

“Merlin, I love you.” Percy blurted out suddenly.

Anahita smiled in delight. “I love you too.”

“So, what do you think?” Percy asked nervously. “About me being Bill’s heir?”

“I think that there is no way my father will turn down a chance to marry me off to you if you’re his heir.” Anahita told him, still smiling.

“Even though I’ll only be a presumptive heir?” Percy asked.
“I’m the youngest,” Anahita explained. “So it’s not all that important who I marry. It’s not as though I’m Belvina or anything. Besides, there’s always the chance that your brother won’t have sons.”

Percy raised a sceptical eyebrow. “If there is one thing that Weasleys are known for it’s their ability to beget sons.”

“True.” Anahita looked amused at that. “I hope you won’t be as desperate for a daughter as your parents were. I don’t think I could handle seven children.”

“Merlin, no!” Percy denied passionately. “Maybe two though?”

“An heir and a spare?” Anahita asked with an amused smile.

27-27-27

Arthur Weasley stood outside his back door enjoying the quiet, before pushing it open. “I’m home, Mollywobbles.”

“Arthur?!” Molly screeched loudly from in front of the stove. “You’ll never believe what your son has done!”

Arthur sighed as he shrugged his bag off his shoulder and hung it up behind the door. “What has Bill done now, dear?”

“Not Bill! Percy!” Molly corrected him, turning from the stove and brandishing a wooden spoon.

“Percy?” Arthur repeated in disbelief. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure!” Molly gestured towards the table with her spoon. “Read that!”

Arthur slowly took his seat at the head of the table and summoned the parchment toward him. It turned out that there were two different letters, one on top of the other, so he started at the one on top.

‘Dear Mum and Dad,

I just wanted you to know that Charlie has resigned as my heir. He only agreed temporarily anyway. You know Charlie, he’d rather be playing with dragons than doing anything else.

Anyway, Percy has agreed to be my heir. We performed the ceremony last night. He’d pretty good at all this stuff, though I guess that shouldn’t be a surprise to me. Percy always was good at being formal.

I love you both,

Bill’

Arthur sighed as he finished the letter. Bill’s letters had once been filled with anecdotes about his life and job, but now they were short and business-like and Arthur couldn’t really bring himself to blame his son. But what had Percy been thinking? Didn’t he know that this would upset his mother? Usually he could count on Percy as being the only other family member who was willing to bend over backwards to make sure that Molly stayed happy. The idea of being the only one left was discouraging – especially given how easily angered Molly had been recently.

He looked at the next letter.

“Dear Mum and Dad,
I am sure that you are now aware that I have agreed to act as Bill’s heir. I will only be a presumptive heir of course, but I am honoured that he has asked this of me. I am aware that you will not be pleased by this news and I beg your forgiveness for what I am sure you see as my defiance in this issue.

That aside though, I hope that you will be pleased to hear that I have recently become engaged to a young witch I met at work. Anahita Burke is the youngest daughter of Lord Burke and her father has agreed to allow us to marry. We have yet to set a date, though I hope that it will be within the next year. I hope you will let me know when I should bring her over to meet you both.

In order for Lord Burke to allow me to marry Anahita, I had to change my name from Weasley to Prewett. I hope that this does not offend you in anyway, or that you will not see this as me repudiating our family. I remain at heart a Weasley and hope that you will understand that this small sacrifice was worth it to me.

With love,

Percy Prewett’

Arthur frowned at the parchment, unsure what exactly he thought of it all – aside from his worry of Molly’s reaction. He was delighted that Percy had found a witch that he loved, of course he was, but he couldn’t help but think that it might be the end of his family as he knew it.

“Well?!” Molly demanded suddenly. “Can you believe him? When I get my hands on that boy, I’m going to give him a walloping like he’s never received before.”

Arthur sighed. “Percy’s a grown man, Molly.”

“Perhaps,” Molly sounded unconvinced. “Though clearly he is lacking any kind of decency! Can you believe it? He’s renounced our family! All for a title and a girl!”

“A girl who he loves.” Arthur reminded her. “And he hasn’t renounced our family, he’s only changed his name.”

“Well, if he doesn’t want to be a Weasley he doesn’t have to be!” Molly declared, brandishing her wooden-spoon around. “I want you to disown him, Arthur!”

“What?” Arthur asked weakly. “But, Mollywobbles, he’s our son!”

“He’s no son of mine!” Molly declared.

Arthur sighed, he could hardly believe that his family had come to this. He still remembered Molly’s body-wrenching tears when she had received the letter from her parents announcing their intention to disown her unless she broke up with him. How had that devastated woman become someone who wanting to put her own son through the same thing?

And what was he supposed to do about it?
“Daphne, would you do me the honour of accompanying me for a stroll around the grounds?” Harry asked politely, pointedly ignoring his friends’ reactions.

Neville and Theo were both grinning with amusement. Despite being traditional, they tended to be a lot more laid back about it than the rest of them and found the formality that Harry and Daphne employed hilarious.

Draco, on the other hand, was frowning disapprovingly. “Around the grounds?”

“We will stay within sight of my distinguished cousin of course.” Harry added, inwardly rolling his eyes. Did they really have to go through this every single time he and Daphne took a walk? Surely Draco knew that them staying within sight of the group was a given.

“Thank you, Harry.” Daphne inclined her head. “I would be delighted.”

Harry stood and offered his hand to help her to her feet. Then he held out his arm for her to take and began to lead her down the hill.

“What do you suppose that Draco is afraid we will do?” Harry asked, once they were out of hearing distance of their friends.

Daphne looked up at him, her eyes sparkling. “I think he enjoys teasing you.”

“You think it is all an act?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“Of course.” Daphne giggled. “Draco isn’t nearly as…”

“Stuck-in-the-mud as I am?” Harry offered with a grin.

“Not exactly the words I was looking for, but close enough.” Daphne admitted. “Though it isn’t just you. I am just as ‘stuck-in-the-mud’ as you.”

“So he’s mocking us?” Harry asked. “How had I not noticed?”

“I suspect that it is because you would likely do something similar in his position, only you would be sincere about it.” Daphne pointed out.

“Because I’m stuck-in-the-mud?” Harry grinned down at her.

“Your words, not mine.” Daphne smiled prettily.

Harry laughed and reached across to pat the hand that she had tucked into his arm. “You are lovely.”

Daphne’s cheeks pinked and she looked away. “Thank you.”

They walked in silence for a minutes, before Harry finally worked up the confidence to ask her the question on his mind.

“Daphne, would you do me the honour of accompanying me to both the Hogwarts’s Yule Ball and the Malfoys’ Yule Ball?” Harry looked down at her hopefully.

Daphne smiled up at him, before glancing away shyly. “Of course. I would be delighted.”
“Wonderful.” Harry declared with a broad smile. “I talked to Sirius and he has given me permission to offer you any of the Potter or Black jewels for the occasions. If you want, we can visit Gringotts next week and you can pick out the ones that you like.”

Daphne’s gaze flew to his face. “Really?”

“Of course.” Harry stopped walking and turned to face her, her hand dropping from his arm. “You are my betrothed. All that belongs to me is yours.”

Daphne looked down and curtsied. “You do me great honour, Harry.”

Harry reached out and grasped both her hands, before drawing them up to his mouth and touching her gloves to his mouth. “As you do to me.”

Daphne was blushing again, but she squeezed his hands. “Thank you.”

Harry smiled down at her, before spotting a bug in her hair. “Hold still a moment.” He released one of her hands, before carefully capturing the bug in his fingers.

“What was it?” Daphne asked in confusion.

Harry brought down the hand that was now holding the bug and opened his fingers so that she could see it. “Not your usual hair ornament, I think.”

Daphne’s nose wrinkled, but she giggled. “Certainly not.”

As though sensing an opportunity to escape, the bug quickly took flight and flew towards the lake. Harry offered Daphne his arm again. “Shall we?”

29-29-29

Having secured his own date for the Yule Ball, Harry couldn’t help but feel entertained by the desperate flurry that most of the other students seemed to be in. All of Harry’s friends had found dates, except for Takashi who would be in Japan over Yule anyway. Draco and Theo were taking Astoria and Natasja (since they were betrothed to them), Neville had asked Luna, Blaise had gotten special permission for his betrothed, Ines, to accompany him, and Fred and George were taking two of the Gryffindor Chasers.

Other students didn’t seem nearly as organised and Harry took particularly enjoyment from the fact that neither Ron Weasley, nor Harry’s dorm-mates, seemed to have a date. Better yet, rumour had it that Ron had actually asked Fleur Delacour to be his date – Harry wished that he had been there to witness the spectacle.

Harry knew it was petty, but the night after Daphne had agreed to go with him, he’d considered rubbing it in his dorm-mates faces – even though it would break his policy about not interacting with them. Thankfully he managed to talk himself out of it, after all it was hardly appropriate behaviour for someone of his station, but was almost grateful when the Daily Prophet did it for him the next day. Though he almost choked when he saw the headline.

‘Young Love at Yule: Boy-Who-Lived Romances Girlfriend’

Well, grateful and surprised. How had Rita Skeeter known about their agreement? Harry hadn’t seen her since the First Task and he knew that none of his friends would have spoken to her. What was most surprising though was the detail in the article. Somehow, Skeeter knew about his offer for Daphne to wear any of the Potter or Black jewels – something that they hadn’t even told their
friends.

Still, as perturbing as the article was, it certainly had an effect on his dorm-mates and in the days after Anthony began loudly boasting about how he was going to ask Fleur, accompanied with snide comments regarding how much hotter Fleur was than any other girl at the school. Harry listened in amusement – he knew for a fact that Fleur had already agreed to accompany Cedric Diggory.

Anthony’s boasting stopped after the first few evenings, presumably because Fleur had turned him down, and a few days after that he started crowing about having scored Cho Chang as a date. Harry didn’t know what there was to boast about taking Chang, the older girl had been a bit of a social outcast ever since he and Draco had used a potion to punish her for bullying Luna, but from what he could gather Anthony was mostly just excited that she was a year older than he was.

29-29-29

George Weasley wasn’t exactly sure how Harry Potter and his little gang of snooty traditionalists had become his and Fred’s friends. Sure, he remembered finding Harry sitting with Lee on the Hogwarts’ Express over three years ago, but how had he ended up with Harry becoming one of his best friends? At first it had just been fun to show the kid around – not an entirely altruistic act on his and Fred’s part, after all, Harry was the boy-who-lived.

But over the years that friendship had grown and George had no idea how. Of course, the fact that Harry, Draco and Luna were the Marauders’ Apprentices probably had a little to do with it – not that George and Fred had ever let the younger prankers know that they had figured it out. The only reason they had figured it out was because of the Marauders’ Map (and yes, George did see the irony in that). Finding out that Harry was one of the people engaging them in a prank war had been surprising and had definitely vaulted Harry out of ‘sweet, younger kid’ status and into ‘clever kid’ status.

Then Harry had lent him brooms (and really, who needed two Nimbus 2001 brooms?) to play in the Under 17 Quidditch League, had offered to partner with them to start up their dream shop, and had invited them learn how to be an animagus with him, and somehow they had been drawn into his little gang.

It would have been weird being two years older, except they all acted so grown up and mature most of the time and Takashi Nado was normally there too. Probably the weirdest part of it was how traditional they all were.

George had never spent much time with traditionalists, there had never been much opportunity to – he was a Gryffindor and a Weasley and neither of those things tended to attract traditionalists. He’d always considered traditionalists to be weird, formal snobs, which they were, but there seemed to be more to it than that. They actually seemed to enjoy the traditions, not because it made them better than anyone else (though Draco Malfoy certainly seemed to think that it did), but because it was their normal.

Hanging out with them had been awkward at first. Some of the kids (well, mostly just Draco Malfoy) had been so scathing of their being Weasleys with all that that implied, and it had been bizarre to realise that maybe some of the weird traditionalist things had a purpose. He had no idea how meditation had ended up being lumped in with traditionalism – it was amazing! And learning to do it had not only made it possible for him to begin learning how to be an animagus, but he was learning wandless magic too. Not to mention the comments his teachers had been making regarding his newfound ability to concentrate in classes and his improved wandwork. Why wasn’t it compulsory for all parents to teach their children to meditate? Or, at least, why didn’t Hogwarts’ teach all first years how?
Still, as awkward as it had been at the beginning, George had found himself coming to like the weird, formal snobs and he knew that Fred felt the same way. It had been strange to realise that Harry and his friends found non-traditionalists just as weird as George and Fred found traditionalists. It had been actually sort of horrifying to discover that his family’s anti-traditionalist stance basically made them the equivalent to the Malfoys, just on the other side of the cultural divide.

It was hard to swallow, especially with the whole drama between their mum, Bill and Charlie. How could their mum be so prejudiced? Weren’t the non-traditionalists supposed to be the good guys? The ones who accepted everyone as they were – regardless of their blood status or culture?

Strangely having their mum and Ron spewing anti-traditionalist nonsense actually brought George and Fred closer to Harry and his friends, and by the time Christmas Break was approaching George often found himself preferring their company over some of his Gryffindor friends.

Because of this, he couldn’t help but be pleased when Harry invited them to come to the Come and Go Room on the last night of term for one last animagus practise. Despite the fact that Fred and George were planning on staying at the castle over the holiday, Sirius had warned them not to practise their animagus transformations without supervision since they had reached a stage where that was dangerous.

George and Fred had both readily agreed, neither of them wanted to get stuck in a partial transformation, though Harry had seemed to find the entire conversation hilarious and had called his godfather a hypocrite.

They all met in the Come and Go room after dinner and immediately settled down to work on their transformations. George, whose animagus form was a Jack Russell Terrier, immediately began working on transforming his left arm. Once he’d managed it, he transformed it back into his human form and began again. According to Sirius, who had become their instructor of sorts, it was important to learn to do each individual change quickly.

It was interesting to note the different amounts of progress they had all made. He and Fred had made the least progress overall, something that Sirius put down to the fact that they had only just learnt how to meditate that year. Harry was ahead of them all and he could transform all four of his limbs simultaneously.

As had become their custom, they practised for two hours before sitting around on the couches that the Come and Go Room had provided for them and drinking the butterbeer that Sirius brought.

After they had been talking for a while, and during a lull in the conversation, Fred spoke up.

“Did you hear about Percy, Harry?”

“Which part?” Harry asked, tilting his head to the side. “His betrothal or his new position as your brother’s heir?”

“Either.” George shrugged. “It’s all pretty…”

“…unbelievable.” Fred finished for him.

Draco narrowed his eyes in thought. “I’m presuming that this ‘Percy’ is one of your multitude of brothers?”

George nodded. “He’s the one who…”

“…graduated last year.”
“Wears glasses…” George continued.

“…kind of prattish.” Fred added.

“And he’s betrothed?” Theo looked confused. “I didn’t think your family did that sort of thing.”

“We don’t.” George chorused with Fred.

“But then he’s not a Weasley anymore.” Fred went on.

“He changed his name to Prewett,” George expanded. “And Bill…”

“That’s Lord Prewett.” Harry added.

“…has made him his heir.” George finished, shooting Harry a grateful look. Sometimes he forgot that the others weren’t well versed with their family.

“Who is he betrothed to?” Daphne asked curiously.

“Anahita Burke.” Fred answered, with a shrug. “Apparently she was a Hufflepuff in Percy’s year.”

“As in the youngest daughter of Lord Burke?” Draco asked, an eyebrow raised sceptically.

“That’s the one.” George agreed, before watching as the others all seemed to exchange glances.

“No wonder he changed his name to Prewett.” Theo whistled. “Lord Burke’s a stickler for traditionalism. I’m surprised that he agreed to betroth her to a non-traditionalist.”

“Except turns out, Percy’s not so non-traditional after all.” George commented neutrally, he still wasn’t sure what he thought about Percy’s decision. On the one hand he understood where Percy was coming from, but there was a small part of him that felt a little betrayed and abandoned by his older brother.

Harry apparently hadn’t known that. “Really?”

“Well, he was.” Fred admitted. “But apparently Anahita showed him the light or whatever.”

“A traditional Weasley,” Draco smirked. “Good Merlin, what is the world coming to.”

“Prewett.” Fred corrected.

“Not that we mind either way.” George added quickly, in case they took offence. “It’s just that our mum is, uh…”

“Bloody bonkers.” Fred finished harshly.

“I could have told you that years ago.” Draco muttered quietly.

“She’s gone off her rocker.” Fred continued. “Swearing to disown Percy if it’s the last thing she does.”

Blaise looked at them in confusion. “Is the House of Weasley matriarchal?”

“No,” George sighed. “And that’s where she’s having problems. Dad’s refusing.”

“And so he should.” Draco nodded firmly. “Imagine, disowning your child because they decided to be traditional.”
“My mother tried to disown me for being anti-traditional.” Sirius commented, from the armchair where he had been watching quietly.

“Yes, but there is nothing wrong with being traditional.” Draco argued.

George shook his head, Draco’s inability to see things from the perspective of non-traditionalists was almost amusing – well, it would be if it didn’t remind George of his own mum’s view of traditionalists.

“I don’t think that’s quite how they see it.” Sirius sounded amused too.

“So what will happen?” Harry asked.

“No idea.” George’s shoulders slumped. “Dad’s never held his ground against mum for more than a day, so I don’t see him lasting long. Chances are Percy’ll be disowned by Christmas and then Mum’ll start on the rest of us.”

“That’s why we’re staying here over Christmas.” Fred explained.

“Yule!” Draco corrected passionately. “The approaching holiday is called Yule! Not Christmas and certainly not Hanukkah, or whatever I heard a muggleborn going on about yesterday. It’s Yule! And it’s got nothing to do with Christmas trees, or stockings, or bloody Santa Claus!”

Harry threw Fred a dirty look. “See what you’ve done?”

“If you’re staying here over the holiday how will you buy new robes for the Yule Ball?” Daphne asked, breaking into Draco’s tirade firmly.

George looked towards Fred in confusion. What did that have to do with anything? “Eh, Mum bought us some second hands ones over the summer. They’re not too awful…”

“…definitely not as bad as Ron’s…” Fred added with a grin.

“…and we’re going to transfigure them a bit.” George finished smoothly.

“Certainly not.” Daphne shook her head. “Harry and I cannot have our friends attending public events in second-hand robes.”

George shifted uncomfortably at the disdain in her tone, he didn’t think he was wearing anything that wasn’t second hand. He could feel Fred bristling beside him.

“See, Harry?” Draco asked primly. “This is exactly why we shouldn’t befriend blood traitors.”

Fred stiffened, but George just elbowed him. There was no point in taking offence at Draco’s anti-non-traditionalism. They knew that he didn’t really mean anything by it.

Harry seemed to study them quickly, as though to ensure that they weren’t too offended, before he turned his attention to Draco. “There are more important things in life that dress robes, Draco. Though I agree that appearances can be very important when you are trying to make the right impression.”

“But we’re not trying to make any kind of impression.” Fred protested. “And, as Draco said, we’re blood traitors. Nobody is going to care what we’re wearing.”

“What do you think Miss Johnson and Miss Spinnett are going to think?” Daphne asked haughtily.
“They’re non-traditional too.” George pointed out. “I honestly don’t think they’ll care. Just so long as we look presentable.”

“Well, I care.” Daphne told him. “Has your brother officially accepted you into the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett yet?”

George exchanged another look with Fred. “Uh, no?”

“At least, we don’t think so.” George added.

“Well, you would know if he had.” Harry told them. “There’s a whole ritual which involves kneeling and a magical oath.”

“Then no.” George answered much more firmly. “We haven’t even seen Bill since he became the lord.”

“Though I’ve got to say,” Fred was looking a little wide eyed. “You didn’t make it sound all that enticing.”

“That’s another matter,” Daphne waved a hand dismissively. “If you are not officially members of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett then Harry will buy you new robes. Send me your measurements and I will arrange for them to be owled to you.”

George knew that his mouth had probably dropped open. “Uh, that’s very kind of you, Daphne…”

“…always nice when someone offers to spend someone else’s money…” Fred added a little snidely.

“…but we’re fine.” George finished, elbowing Fred in the side again.

“Harry doesn’t mind, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Daphne assured them.

“I really don’t.” Harry confirmed. “What’s mine is hers and all that.”

“Nevertheless,” Fred shook his head. “We really can’t accept.”

“Yes, you can, and you will.” Daphne told them firmly. “Harry and I are pleased to be your friends, but being our friend isn’t like being friends with any other plebeian.”

“We, uh,” George started unsurely. “We…”

“I’ll talk to you guys about it later.” Harry told them quickly, as he took hold of Daphne’s hand. “But it’s getting pretty late, we should probably go to bed.”

Theo pulled out his wand and cast tempus. “Merlin, it’s past curfew.”

“I’d offer to write you a note, but I’m not actually a professor.” Sirius told them apologetically. “Best advice I can give you though is not to talk. Portraits tend to sleep at the same time that we do, but if you make enough noise they’ll wake up and might tell a professor that they saw you. It really depends on the portrait.”

George, who was out after curfew more often than not, watched as all the Slytherins left together and Harry waved Takashi and Luna ahead of him.

“Fred and George, mind staying behind for a while?”

“Sure.” Fred answered for them both.
“I’ll be off then.” Neville told them. “Merry part.”

“Merry part.” Harry agreed.

“Cheerio.” George waved.

“I’ll walk you back.” Sirius told Neville with a grin. “The Fat Lady is usually pretty good about not narking on students, but I’m sure my presence will help.”

Once they were gone, Harry turned towards them. “Sorry about Daphne.”

“It’s fine.” George shrugged. “I’m sure she meant the best.”

“She did.” Harry agreed. “And she’s not entirely wrong.”

“Oh, not you too.” Fred groaned. “We’re not traditional, Harry. Just because Percy’s decided to be, and all your other friends are, doesn’t mean that we’re suddenly going to decide that we want to spend the rest of our lives bowing and scraping to people.”

“I get that.” Harry assured him. “But that doesn’t change the fact that you’re friends with traditionalists.”

“But why does that have to affect us?” Fred asked in frustration.

“Look, if we were just normal traditionalists it wouldn’t be so much of a problem,” Harry began. “I think your girlfriend called them plebeians.” Fred pointed out caustically.

“Betrothed.” Harry corrected. “Or fiancée if you prefer.”

“Whatever.” Fred waved a hand dismissively. “You know, Harry. As much as I like you, sometimes you sound exactly like Draco.”

Harry sighed. “That’s because Draco and I actually agree about this stuff. The only two differences between us is that I am a bit more formal about the traditions than he is, and he cannot comprehend why anyone might choose not to be traditional – I can.”

“You’re more formal than Draco Malfoy?” Fred asked in disbelief that George silently echoed.

“Yes.”

“Merlin.” Fred slumped back against the couch. “I didn’t even know that was possible.”

“So why is it important that we wear special robes at Yule?” George asked, trying to get the conversation back on track.

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “It’s like Daphne said, she and I have appearances that we have to keep. Well, maybe not have to – appearances that we want to keep. This time next year I’m going to be Lord Potter and then in three more years we’ll get married and she’ll be Lady Potter, and we’ll have a lot of power and influence – if we play our cards right.”

“And you have to start playing your cards now?” Fred asked with a frown.

“We started playing them when we were eleven.” Harry answered. “Though I wasn’t great at it back then, and she didn’t know that she was playing her cards for the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter.”
“What does this have to do with us?” George asked patiently.

“Continuing the card playing analogy,” Harry started. “One of the cards that we play is our friends. Who we choose to befriend, and that sort of thing.”

“And we’re not good enough to be your friends, is that it?” Fred asked aggressively.

George elbowed him with a sigh. “Just listen.”

“It’s definitely not that.” Harry denied passionately. “You guys are great, but people will judge Daphne and me by your actions.”

“Us being non-traditional isn’t going to help with that.” George commented evenly, he’d never really considered what impact their friendship might make on Harry’s life. But then he doubted that Harry had ever considered how their friendship would impact their lives either.

“No,” Harry agreed. “Though you being scions of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett will, if you decide to do that. Anyway, your clothing isn’t a huge deal, except if you go to the Yule Ball in old robes people will gossip about how I don’t care for those under my protection.”

“Under your protection?” Fred repeated in disbelief. “What the bloody hell is that supposed to mean?”

Harry groaned. “Listen, it’s nothing bad. It’s just like Sirius and Remus.”

“Weren’t you saying that Remus had sworn a fealty oath to Sirius or something though?” George asked uncomfortably.

“Only just this year,” Harry defended. “And only because he wanted to. He’s the one who asked Sirius to do it.”

George nodded. “Alright, so explain this protection thing.”

“If you had been accepted into the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett it wouldn’t be so much of an issue.” Harry started. “Then your actions would reflect on your House and Lord Prewett, but since you’re not it’s a different story. Basically, you are from a lower class than I am and, because we’re friends, people expect that to mean that you are under my protection. It’s the same with Luna and Blaise.”

“A lower class than you.” Fred repeated, his face growing red. “What is this? The seventeenth century?!”

Harry seemed to wince at the volume of Fred’s voice. “In a way, yes. We’re called traditionalists because we still follow the traditions that were used back then.”

“So Daphne’s going to buy us robes, so that nobody thinks you’re a bad liege lord.” George concluded.

“I’m going to buy you robes,” Harry reminded them. “Daphne’s just going to order them. But yes.”

“And we’re supposed to be alright with this?” Fred asked, his face still red.

Harry clenched his jaw. “Merlin! It’s not as though I’m asking you to do anything awful, I’m just asking you to accept a gift of new dress robes to support me on the pursuit of my dreams.”

George personally didn’t see anything wrong with that, but he waited to see what Fred would say.
Fred had always been the more passionate and aggressive one out of the two of them.

Fred eventually nodded. “Well, when you put it like that how can we refuse?”

“I understand that all this probably seems really weird to you.” Harry admitted with a sigh. “In a way we live in two very different worlds, but this isn’t about me thinking that you’re not good enough to be my friends.”

“We get that.” George assured him. “We should probably be thanking you really. It’s not every day someone asks us to let them spend a dozen galleons on a gift for us.”

“Don’t you mind Daphne just volunteering your money like that though?” Fred asked.

“No,” Harry shook his head. “We’re betrothed. It’s all going to be hers in a few years anyway.”

“Yeah, but Draco’s betrothed too, isn’t he?” Fred asked. “And I don’t see him letting his betrothed spend his money.”

Harry grinned. “No, but Draco and Astoria have a very different relationship than Daphne and me. It’s...well, the best way that I can describe it is that Daphne and I have decided to acknowledge our relationship publically and begin working towards it now. I’m courting her, but because our marriage is a foregone conclusion our courtship looks a slightly different than your courting Alicia and Angelina.”

“Woah!” Fred held up hand quickly. “I’m not courting Angelina. I’m not even dating her. We’re just going to the ball together – as friends.”

George nodded in agreement. Not that he would mind dating Alicia, it was just that with everything going on with their family…

“My apologies.” Harry inclined his head. “I shouldn’t have presumed.”

“People can go to a ball as friends!” Fred continued defensively. “Neville and Luna are going as friends.”

“No, they’re not.” George argued, how had Fred not noticed that they were dating?

Fred gave his brother a disbelieving look. “What?”

“Neville is courting Luna.” Harry clarified. “He has all the appropriate permissions from his Great Uncle and Mr. Lovegood. It just so happened that his asking Luna to allow him to court her coincided with the announcement of the Yule Ball.”

“Really?” Fred looked astonished. “But she’s so…”

“Crazy?” George offered jokingly.

Harry laughed. “She’s not really. She just sees the world differently.”

Fred rolled his eyes. “I think that could quite possibly be a definition of the word crazy.”

29-29-29
Chapter 29

It was wonderful to be back at Grimmauld Place, even if it was just for the two weeks of Christmas Break, and, while his professors had definitely given him enough assignments to keep him busy for most of the holiday, Harry was looking forward to doing other things as well.

One of the best things about Grimmauld Place was its library and, when Harry added the fact that he also had unlimited to the Malfoys’ library, he thought that it probably gave him an advantage over the other Champions. If there were ways to breathe underwater, surely either the Black library or the Malfoy library would have books detailing them.

The best thing was that, unlike the Hogwarts’ library, the Black and Malfoy libraries had a cataloguing system that he could search with. He didn’t know why Madame Pince didn’t let students use the cataloguing system at Hogwarts, it would definitely have made searching for books much easier. Though maybe it was good thing that she didn’t – Harry could only imagine the rude words and inappropriate topics that some of the less mature students might have used it for.

Despite it being the weekend, Harry spent his first two days home from Hogwarts pouring over the books in the Black Library that the catalogue thought had something to do with breathing underwater. He forced himself to take breaks ever few hours of course, though he usually used those to work on his assignments.

He was halfway through his third day in the library, when Sirius dropped into the armchair beside him. “Harry?”

“Hmmm?” Harry asked, not looking up from the book that he was skimming through. He hadn’t found anything useful in it so far – just mentions of different magical creatures who could breathe underwater.

“How are you going?” Sirius asked, tugging the book out of Harry’s hands.

Harry obediently relinquished the book with a sigh. “I haven’t found anything yet. I think I need to make my catalogue search more specific, but I’m not sure how.”

“Sorry I can’t help.” Sirius peered at the cover of the book, before closing it and putting it on top of the pile of books next to Harry’s chair. “You were at page one hundred and sixty three.”

“It’s fine.” Harry rubbed his forehead. “I’ll figure it out.”

“Though I would like to remind you that Lucius and Narcissa are allowed to help you.” Sirius pointed out. “As are Andromeda, Ted or Tonks. All five of whom are coming over for dinner tonight?”

Harry straightened in his seat. “Really?”

“Yes,” Sirius grimaced. “I’m already starting to regret it. They’re always so snooty.”

Harry laughed. “Sirius, you’re snooty now.”

Sirius looked horrified. “I am not. You take that back!”

“Remember a few weeks ago when you had Percy and his girlfriend terrified?” Harry asked with a smirk. “You were being snooty.”
Sirius grinned slowly. “That was fun and it was my good deed for the day. They’re engaged now, you know, and it’s all because of me!”

“Sure,” Harry snorted. “It had nothing to with them, or Lord Prewett, or Lord Burke. It’s all to do with you.”

Sirius shot him a disgruntled glare. “Anyway, you need to take a break.”

Harry pulled out his pocket-watch. “No, I don’t. It’s only two thirty, my next break is at three.”

“During which you will do what?” Sirius asked expectantly.

“Work on my Ancient Runes essay.” Harry admitted, not meeting Sirius’ eyes.

“You know what we called kids like you when I was at school?” Sirius asked rhetorically. “Swots. And if you’re not careful you’re going to burn yourself out like half of them did. One of the girls in my year ended up having to repeat her seventh year because of it.”

Harry frowned. “I wouldn’t be studying this hard if it wasn’t for the Tournament. Besides, there’s nothing wrong with liking hard work.”

“So Remus keeps telling me.” Sirius grinned. “Anyway, you need to slow down, kiddo. Go flying with Draco, take Daphne out for ice cream, arrange to go see a movie with your friends, whatever, just do something other than study.”

Harry perked up at that. “Draco and I have been talking about taking Neville to see Star Wars.”

Sirius rolled his eyes. “Of course you have. You know, your dad and I were actually cool. I have no idea how you’ve turned into such a geek.”

“By the way,” Harry started. “When would be a good time for me to invite Daphne to look through the Potter and Black jewels?”

Sirius smirked. “Ah, yes, what was the headline again? Young Love At Yule: Boy-Who-Lives Romances Girlfriend?”

Harry grimaced. “Every time I do something like that, Draco, Theo and Blaise all get mad at me. Apparently I’m setting too high of a standard.”

“Girls deserve a high standard.” Sirius told him seriously. “Especially girls who have been forced into a marriage by their parents.”

“You make it sound so awful.” Harry complained. “Daphne wasn’t forced into anything.”

“No, but most of your friends were betrothed when they were infants.” Sirius pointed out. “They’ve grown up knowing exactly who they’re going to marry. Sometimes wizards think that means that they don’t have to court them. How do you think that makes the witches feel?”

“I hadn’t considered it like that.” Harry admitted.

“No, I don’t think many wizards do.” Sirius sighed. “I certainly didn’t. I was betrothed to Elaina Prince, but I barely even gave her a second thought – not that I ever saw her. Though she was ten when she died, so it wasn’t as though I had ignored her at Hogwarts or anything.”

“So those stories that you and Remus were telling the other night,” Harry started uncomfortably.
“You mean the ones about me snogging Amy Clearwater on Dumbledore’s chair?” Sirius asked with a grin.

Harry grimaced. “Yes, were they after Elaina died?”

“That particular one, yeah.” Sirius ran a hand through his hair. “But I was a real brat then, Harry. I didn’t want anything to do with traditionalism, or my parents, and since my betrothal was connected to both I pretty much ignored it and hoped that it would go away.”

“And it did.” Harry commented neutrally.

“Yeah,” Sirius sighed deeply. “I wish I could tell you that I felt terribly about it back then, but I didn’t. I was more relieved than anything. Not that she was dead, but that I wouldn’t have to marry her.”

Harry nodded slowly. “That makes sense. I think Draco feels like that sometimes.”

“He doesn’t like Astoria?” Sirius asked carefully.

“She’s…younger than us.” Harry answered.

Sirius gave him a knowing look. “Not that much younger.”

“I know.” Harry nodded. “I think the problem is that she’s always been so quiet around him. Daphne says that she’s not really like that, but she’s scared that Draco won’t like her so she withdraws.”

“And becomes the perfect pureblood young lady.” Sirius nodded.

“Exactly.” Harry sighed.

“It sounds as though Draco needs a good kick up the pants.” Sirius suggested. “Someone to remind him of his duty towards her.”

Harry didn’t disagree. “I should do it. I’m his best friend, and I’m going to be Astoria’s brother-in-law.”

Sirius looked proud. “Good on you, kiddo. Now, ready for that break?”

Harry groaned. “Hasn’t this just been a break?”

“A five minute long break.” Sirius agreed, before looking down at the pile of books besides Harry. “How about you take a break on the Tournament research until you can talk to our dinner guests about any ideas that they might have?”

“So I can work on my assignments then?” Harry asked hopefully.

“You can study for two more hours.” Sirius told him sternly. “That’s it for the rest of the day. It’s up to you about whether you want to do that now, or later.”

Harry scowled. “Only two?”

“Only two.” Sirius grinned. “You make this parenting thing easy. Most people have to force their kids to study.”

“Alright.” Harry stood up and stretched out his legs. “What about the prophecy? Am I allowed to research that?”
“If that’s how you want to use your two hours, sure.” Sirius told him, ignoring the dirty look that Harry shot at him. “But I think Remus has got that under control. Why don’t you floo over to see Draco and ask if he wants to play some Quidditch?”

30-30-30

Harry stepped gracefully out of the Malfoys’ fireplace, before stopping in surprise at the sight of three wizards standing in the Entrance Hall. He recognised Lord Malfoy of course, but he didn’t think he had ever seen the other two before.

All three wizards seemed to recognise him though and the two strangers’ eyes seemed to gleam excitedly.

“Harry Potter!” One of them exclaimed, his wand appearing in his hand.

“I should hope that you are not planning on doing anything imbecilic in my Manor, Rudolphus.” Lord Malfoy snapped, his voice colder than Harry had ever heard before. “You may be married to my wife’s sister, but that relation will only take you so far.”

Harry’s breath hitched and he took a step backwards. There were only two men who were married to one Cousin Narcissa’s sisters, and only one was named Rudolphus.

The other man cackled. “Oh look, Rudolphus, I think he recognised you.”

“Be silent, Rabastan.” Lord Malfoy snapped, stepping forward. “Can I assist you, Mr. Potter?”

Harry took another step back, before freezing when he felt the heat of the fire on the back of his legs. “I-I was looking for Draco, my lord.”

Lord Malfoy raised an eyebrow. “And you thought it appropriate to floo into my manor without any warning?”

Harry bit in lip and looked down. “Sorry, my lord.”

“Draco is in his room.” Lord Malfoy told him coldly. “Do try and express better manners during your next visit, Mr. Potter.”

Harry nodded quickly. “Of course, Lord Malfoy.”

There was a long silence, before Lord Malfoy spoke again. “Well, Mr. Potter? Are you leaving or not?”

Harry jolted into action, bowing to Lord Malfoy and then to Lord Lestrange. “My lords.” Then he walked out of the room as quickly as he could.

“What?” Rabastan asked. “Don’t I get a bow?”

“You should be bowing to him.” Lord Malfoy answered coldly. “Or have your years in Azkaban robbed you of your respect for our traditions?”

“Bow to Harry Potter?!” Rabastan sounded horrified.

“Are you not concerned with the tales the boy might tell, Lucius?” Rodolphus asked, as Harry finally reached the door.

“Of course not.” Lord Malfoy dismissed the idea. “Has not our lord commanded that the boy be left
alone to decide which side he will choose? The boy will not tell anyone who would do our cause harm, he is too loyal for that.”

Harry shut the door behind him, before breaking into a run – sprinting for Draco’s room. Once there, he paused just long enough to open the door, before rushing inside and slamming the door shut behind him.

Draco was sitting at his desk near the window, but he startled as Harry slammed the door and twisted around on his chair. “Harry?”

“Merry meet.” Harry greeted him shortly, wishing that Draco had a fireplace connected to the floo in his room. He really wanted out of the manor! How could Lord Malfoy just be conversing lightly with the people who had tortured Neville’s parents to insanity?

Draco’s eyes widened. “Were you just downstairs? Father said that…”

“That he was entertaining Death Eaters?” Harry asked harshly. “The bloody Lestranges are down there, Draco!”

Draco’s eyes darted towards the door. “Including Bellatrix?”

Harry shook his head. “No, just Lord Lestrange and his heir.”

“Oh.” Draco sighed in relief. “That’s alright then.”

“Alright?” Harry repeated in disbelief. “They tortured Neville’s parents!”

“I’m not saying they’re not awful.” Draco defended. “But Bellatrix is bloody insane. Father has a rule about them staying downstairs, but Bellatrix never listens. I’ve encountered her three times this holiday alone.”

“You mean they’re here all the time?” Harry asked in outrage. “How could you not tell me that?”

Draco stood up. “What would you have done? Besides, surely you knew! You know what Father does.”

“I didn’t know that they would be here!” Harry shouted. “I didn’t know that your family was entertaining Death Eaters!”

“Father is a Death Eater!” Draco bellowed. “What did you think that meant? We have one of the most secure manors in the country. You’re just lucky that the Dark Lord isn’t here today!”

Harry froze. “Voldemort was here?”

“Yes, and it was bloody terrifying.” Draco’s voice hitched. “So you don’t get to come in here and yell at me because you met two of the sanest Death Eaters.”

“Wait,” Harry froze. “Did you meet Voldemort?”

“What do you think?” Draco snapped, his fists clenched tightly. “I’m the heir of one of his most loyal followers. He’s planning on marking me during the summer.”

“What?!?” Harry stepped closer to his cousin. “But he can’t. Your father won’t let him.”

“I know that!” Draco shouted. “But he doesn’t, he can’t, he’d kill Father, and Father still has another six months until your time-limit is up and the Dark Lord figures out that he’s betrayed him.”
Harry’s shoulders slumped, but his stomach felt horridly twisted. “I’m sorry, Draco.”

“What for?” Draco asked, his own shoulders slumping.

“Yelling at you.” Harry started. “Freaking out. Being the reason that Voldemort is going to know that your father is betraying him.”

Draco opened his mouth, before stilling when there was a knock on the door.

“Draco?” Lord Malfoy’s voice could be heard.

“Yes, Father?” Draco stepped past Harry and opened the door.

“They have gone.” Lord Malfoy announced, before turning his attention to Harry. “Are you alright, Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, thank you, sir.” Harry answered, ignoring his squirming gut. “I am sorry for not calling ahead.”

Lord Malfoy inclined his head. “It would be best if you did in the future. I am sorry that you had to encounter them.”

“Thank you for defending me, sir.”

“Of course, Mr. Potter.” Lord Malfoy told him. “You are family. How could I do otherwise?”

30-30-30

Dinner that night started out painfully awkward. Not only was Harry feeling unsure around Lord Malfoy (it was one thing to know that he was a Death Eater and a completely other thing to meet dangerous Death Eaters in his Manor), but Sirius and Lord Malfoy seemed angry at each other (probably because of the Death Eater incident), which, added to the fact that Cousin Andromeda didn’t seem to like Lord Malfoy and Lord Malfoy seemed to enjoy winding her up, made for a volatile dinner party.

Thankfully though both Cousin Narcissa and Tonks were good at setting people at ease (though in very different ways) and by the time dessert was served, everyone seemed much more relaxed.

“Has Sirius told you about the time when he turned everything in the house red, Harry?” Cousin Andromeda asked.

“Come on, Andy.” Sirius groaned. “Haven’t we heard enough stories about my childhood?”

“There’s no such thing.” Harry grinned, as he dug his spoon into his trifle.

“There really is.” Sirius assured him.

“Sirius must have only been six.” Andromeda continued, ignoring Sirius’ complaints. “Because I was in my fourth year at Hogwarts at the time.”

“Ooh,” Tonks interrupted, her eyes sparkling. “Quick, Sirius, how old are you? All we will have to do is add eight and we’ll know how old Mum is.”

Sirius opened his mouth, before quickly closing it when Cousin Andromeda pierced him with a warning look.
“As I was saying,” Cousin Andromeda continued starchily. “Sirius had clearly realised that Walburga despised the colour red – a remnant of her days at Hogwarts I believe – and one day, when he was throwing an especially dramatic tantrum during Yule Dinner, he somehow managed to turn everything red.”

Cousin Narcissa brought her napkin up to cover her mouth. “Aunt Walburga was absolutely mortified. Mother thought it was wonderful.”

“Only because of how embarrassing it was to Walburga.” Cousin Andromeda pointed out with a smirk. “She would have been horrified if it had been one of us.”

“Not that it would have been.” Cousin Narcissa said primly. “We were always model Slytherins.”

Lord Malfoy looked amused. “I had been under the impression that your mother was surprised when you were sorted into Gryffindor, Sirius.”

“Yes, well,” Sirius grinned, apparently having forgiven Lord Malfoy. “My mother wasn’t the smartest of women.”

“Ah, so that’s where you got it from then.” Lord Malfoy said dryly. “I had wondered.”

Harry met Draco’s eyes and grinned in amusement as Sirius adopted a put out expression.

“What is this? Pick on Sirius day?”

“We wouldn’t dream of it, Lord Black.” Cousin Andromeda assured him seriously.

“Certainly not.” Cousin Narcissa agreed. “Such impropriety.”

Harry swallowed down a grin, it never failed to amuse him that when Tonks was relaxed her hair changed colours depending on her emotions. The best part of it was that the colours always correlated with Luna’s wrackspurt colours.

“So according to the clue, they’re going to take something that I will miss and hide it underwater.”

Harry started nervously. “Part of the First Task was to collect a Golden Egg which contained a clue about our Second Task.” He glanced towards Sirius who nodded encouragingly. “I’ve figured out the clue, but now I have to figure out how to breathe underwater.”

“Why?” Tonks asked curiously, her hair yellow.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Anyway, I think Harry was hoping that you would all be able to help him with something.”

“Oh?” Cousin Narcissa turned to look at Harry, along with the rest of the table.

“We wouldn’t dream of it, Lord Black.” Cousin Andromeda assured him seriously.

“Certainly not.” Cousin Narcissa agreed. “Such impropriety.”

Harry swallowed down a grin, it never failed to amuse him that when Tonks was relaxed her hair changed colours depending on her emotions. The best part of it was that the colours always correlated with Luna’s wrackspurt colours.

“According to the clue, they’re going to take something that I will miss and hide it underwater.”

Harry explained. “Then I’ll have an hour to search for it.”

“Underwater?” Lord Malfoy repeated, an eyebrow raised sceptically. “Surely they are not planning on having you children gallivant through the Great Lake? I can only imagine what the Merpeople would think of that.”

Cousin Narcissa laid a hand on his arm. “They did use Dementors during the First Task, dear. Clearly they are not the most…sagacious of wizards.”

“Clearly not.” Lord Malfoy agreed grimly.
“So what did you want help with?” Tonks asked, turning everyone’s attention back to Harry.

“Ways to breathe underwater.” Harry answered. “And maybe how not to be killed by the Merpeople.”

“Or the Giant Squid.” Draco added lightly.

Harry ignored him. “Though the clue was sung in Mermish, so maybe the Merpeople are involved?”

“That would be the way to do it.” Cousin Ted put in. “Though I can’t imagine how they managed to talk them into it.”

“Have you dealt with Merpeople much, Cousin Ted?” Harry asked hopefully.

“Never, thank Merlin.” Cousin Ted smiled crookedly. “Though I used to share an office with the bloke who does. He’s as mad as they are.” He shuddered. “Musical types, I’ll never understand them.”

“Ah, yes,” Lord Malfoy drawled. “I had forgotten that you worked for the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, Edward. You must be a rarity for the Department.”

Cousin Andromeda’s face tightened. “Oh?”

“No need to take offense, Andromeda.” Lord Malfoy told her reprovingly. “I was simply referring to Edward being a wizard of good sense and character. Normally members of that department are either senseless Dryad-lovers or sadistic executioners.”

“Anyway,” Sirius’ voice was slightly raised. “Do any of you know how Harry could possibly breathe underwater?”

There was a long pause, before Tonks spoke up. “At the beginning of my Auror training they taught us to look at each problem from the perspective of each type of magic that we learnt at Hogwarts. Like, what potion could you brew to solve the problem? Or what transfiguration spell could you use?”

“I would rather Harry not use transfiguration.” Cousin Narcissa said disapprovingly. “Self-transfiguration is notoriously dangerous.”

“It was just an example.” Tonks explained defensively.

“The Bubble-Head Charm may be useful.” Cousin Ted suggested, diverting Cousin Narcissa’s attention to him. “It forms a bubble of air around the caster’s mouth and nose.”

“That doesn’t sound very stable.” Sirius frowned. “What if the bubble popped?”

Tonks tilted her head to the side. “Can you pop a bubble underwater?”

“How big is the bubble?” Harry asked curiously. “Would it last an entire hour?”

“I don’t know.” Cousin Ted admitted. “I’ve never had to use it.”

“Does the spell conjure the air or simply create a bubble around it?” Lord Malfoy asked. “If the air is not conjured then the spell could not be recast underwater.”

“It’s worth looking up.” Sirius decided. “Does anyone have any other ideas?”
They didn’t, but Harry didn’t really mind. Tonks’ suggestion, that he look specifically for a solution from each subject, was great and it would definitely help him narrow down his search. Besides, it sounded as though the Bubble-Head would at least be a good backup plan.

30-30-30

‘Dear Neville,

I hope you are enjoying Christmas Break. Is there anything in particular that you grow in your Greenhouse during these two weeks? I remember you saying that you have a plant that is dormant throughout the entire year, except for over the summer. Do you have a similar one for these two weeks that you are home?

I have spent the last few days researching different ways to breathe underwater. My cousin, Auror Tonks, suggested that I look for a way to breathe using each of our Hogwarts’ subjects. I have found one for Charms and for Transfiguration, but neither of them seem ideal. Have you ever heard of a plant that allows someone to breathe underwater?

Are you available on the thirtieth of December? Sirius has agreed to take us to see a muggle movie that day, though if you are unavailable we will find a different day. Draco and I are considering inviting the rest of our friends too, would you mind?

Kind regards,

Harry James Potter

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter’

30-30-30

‘Dear Harry,

Thank you for your letter. It is very nice to be able to spend some time in my Greenhouse – I do miss it when I am at Hogwarts. No, there is no special plant for me to focus my attention on at this time of year. I haven’t been able to find any plants that are only active for these two weeks of the year. That doesn’t mean I don’t have plenty to do though. Normally Zolk, one of Gran’s House Elves, looks after my Greenhouse when I am at Hogwarts, but I always relieve her of the job when I am home. There is something comforting about digging over ground and watering plants.

I think the plant you are looking for is Gillyweed. It is a magical plant native to the Mediterranean Sea and would serve your purpose rather well, I think. If you were to eat some of it, you would grow gills to allow you to breathe underwater. Your feet and hands would also transform to help you navigate underwater better. It was either discovered by Elladora Ketteridge during the seventeenth century or Beaumont Marjoribanks during the eighteenth century, depending on who you believe. (Though admittedly, you probably aren’t that interested in that part.)

Gillyweed is also reasonably easy to come by as it is a non-restricted potions ingredient. Having said that, apparently the fresher it is the longer the effects last. So you would either want to keep it in complex status until you needed it, or buy it closer to the Second Task.

I hope this helps. I spent an entire afternoon in the Longbottom library researching it.

Also, yes, I am available on the 30th. Though Lord Black will need to contact Gran about it. I think
she might need some convincing. I think it would be fun if you invited everyone.

Kind Regards,

Neville Algernon Longbottom

Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom’

30-30-30

‘Dear Draco,

Neville has agreed to the 30 th and he thinks we should invite everyone. Does that still work for you? I will send everyone invites when I receive your reply and I will have Sirius add a piece as well. I am sure his presence on the trip will make parents feel better.

Sorry that I haven’t seen you in a few days. I’m sure that you know that Sirius and your father apparently decided that I shouldn’t come over to your Manor anymore. You’re welcome to visit here of course, though we don’t have a Quidditch Pitch.

I am meeting Daphne at Gringotts’ tomorrow to look through the Potter and Black vaults for jewellery for her to wear to the Yule Balls. Have you considered doing something like that for Astoria?

Kind Regards,

Harry James Potter

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black

Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter’
Daphne could hardly believe that it had only been four and a half months since her father and Lord Black had signed the contract betrothing her to Harry. It seemed ridiculous to think that five months ago she had only considered Harry a friend. Or that three months ago she had been terrified to upset him. But now, here she was, wearing the Potter Heiress Ring and preparing to meet Harry and Lord Black at Hogwarts to look through the jewels of the two most powerful Houses in Britain with them – just so she could wear some of them to the Yule Ball. How had she gotten so lucky?

They flooed straight from their Manor to Diagon Alley, before making their way towards Gringotts where they had agreed to meet Harry and Lord Black. As they approached the bank, Daphne spotted the two wizards standing together near the entrance. Harry seemed taller somehow, despite it being less than a week since she had seen him last, though it could have had something to do with the fact that he was taller than Lord Black. Not by much, but enough that it was noticeable.

“There they are.” She commented to her mother.

“Of course,” Mother didn’t look at all surprised. “A gentleman is always early.”

Daphne followed her mother up the stairs towards where Harry was standing and then curtsied politely.

“Merry meet, Lord Black, Heir Black.”

“Merry meet, Sirius, Mr. Potter.” Mother curtsied to Lord Black, before nodding politely when Harry curtsied to her.

“Merry meet, Lady Greengrass.” Harry agreed. “Please call me Harry.”

“Then you must call me Adrianna.” Mother told him with a smile. “We will be family, after all.”

“I am honoured.” Harry bowed again, before his attention moved to Daphne. “Merry meet, Daphne.”

“Merry meet.” Daphne said softly, before inwardly kicking herself when she remembered that she had already said that.

“Are you well?” Harry inquired, stepping closer to her.

“I am, thank you.” Daphne answered with a small nod. “Are you?”

“Yes,” Harry smiled wryly. “I don’t have time not to be. I’ve been spending every spare minute researching for the Second Task.”

Daphne glanced towards where Mother and Lord Black were conversing quietly a few feet away. “Have you found anything yet?”

“Neville has found a plant that might do the trick.” Harry answered quietly. “Though I don’t know whether I would be allowed to use it. We were only allowed to carry our wand during the First Task.”

Daphne opened her mouth to reply, before closing it again when Lord Black’s hand suddenly appeared on Harry’s shoulder.
“Ready to go, kiddo?” Lord Black asked, though the question seemed to be more rhetorical than anything.

They entered the bank together and had barely made it ten feet inside before a goblin appeared before them.

“Lord Black.” The goblin acknowledged gruffly.

Daphne swallowed down her surprise. She had never seen a goblin personally greet a client before.

“Baknog.” Lord Black returned with a nod.

Harry stepped forward, until he was standing beside Lord Black, and greeted the goblin in a language that was presumably Gobbledygook. It sounded rough and painful.

Baknog’s mouth widened, revealing a mouthful of sharp teeth, before replying in the same language.

Daphne looked up at Mother who was watching Harry’s interaction with the goblin with a neutral expression – though Daphne could tell that she was surprised.

After less than a minute, Harry looked across at Lord Black. “He needs to talk to you privately.”

Lord Black turned towards Mother. “My sincerest apologies, Adrianna, but would you mind accompanying Harry and Daphne alone to the Potter vault? I will rejoin you for the visit to the Black vault of course.”

“No at all.” Mother answered with a polite smile.

Lord Black bowed shallowly. “My thanks.”

The trip down to the Potter vault was long and by the time the cart stopped Mother’s expression was tight. Daphne winced in sympathy, Mother always got motion sickness on Gringotts’ carts.

After they had disembarked from the cart and Harry had opened the vault using his blood, the goblin accompanying them gestured for them to all enter it. This was the part about visiting Gringotts that Daphne hated. She knew that it was completely irrational, but ever since she had been a child she had feared that the goblins might shut a vault door with her inside the vault.

She took a deep breath and followed Mother and Harry into the vault, trying to ignore the goblin that was standing near the vault door. The sight that awaited her was enough to drive the goblin completely from her mind. The vault was filled with shelves that contained jewellery set after jewellery set.

“Merlin.” Harry breathed, sounding just as astonished as she felt. “I had no idea there would be this much.”

Daphne could relate, she had expected the Black vault to be large – it did belong to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter – but she had expected it to be a larger version of the Greengrass vault and so contain a bit of everything, furniture, jewellery, books, paintings, and more. The idea that the House of Potter had a vault for its jewellery alone was unbelievable.

“So how do you want to do this?” Harry was looking around the vault, looking a bit lost. “Do you have a favourite colour or something?”

“Daphne only wears silver, white gold, and mithril.” Mother answered him, reaching into the pocket
of her robes. “And these are the two main fabrics that her robes have been made out of.”

Harry stared at the pieces of cloth in Mother’s hand looking no less confused.

Daphne stepped forward. “How about Harry and I search for something to match my robes for the Hogwarts’ Ball, Mother, and you search for something to match my robes for the Malfoys’ Ball.”

Mother looked amused, but she nodded and passed Daphne the appropriate piece of cloth before moving away.

Daphne stepped up to Harry and held out the fabric for him to see. It was the colour of Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter and she hoped that he wouldn’t be offended by her decision to wear his House colours. Mother had assured her that he wouldn’t be, after all, he had given her the Heiress ring, but there was a small part of her that was still cautious about stepping over any boundaries.

A smile spread across Harry’s face and he reached for her hand that wasn’t holding the fabric before bringing it to his lips. “You do me great honour, Daphne.”

Daphne fought the blush that wanted to spread across her cheeks. Merlin, how had she gotten as lucky as to end up betrothed to a wizard like Harry?

Harry released her hand, before offering her his arm. “Shall we?”

Daphne gently tucked her hand into his elbow and allowed him to lead her to the nearest set of shelves where multiple sets of jewellery sat waiting for her perusal.

“So only silver coloured jewellery?” Harry asked.

“Yes.” Daphne said quietly, staring at the jewellery set in front of her that had a blue stone the size of a galleon on the necklace. Merlin, how had she gotten as lucky as to end up betrothed to a wizard like Harry?

“They seem to have different pieces.” Harry commented. “That one has a bracelet, but this one has this strange spiked piece.”

Daphne turned her attention to the jewellery set he was describing and tried to hide her amused smile. “You put it in your hair.”

“Oh,” Harry tilted his head to the side. “That makes sense. It doesn’t look very comfortable though.”

Daphne turned her face away so that he couldn’t see her smile.

“You’re laughing at me.” Harry accused lightly. “That’s unkind.”

“But not undeserved.” Daphne pointed out, turning back to him.

“No, probably not.” Harry agreed with a grin. “Anything you like on this shelf?”

Daphne swept her eyes across the jewellery sets on display. “No.”

“Alright, next shelf then.” Harry led her the few steps to the next shelf.

“These are all made of gold.” Daphne commented.

The next shelf didn’t have a single piece of gold on it and Daphne stared at the sets in astonishments. “These are incredible.”
“They do look quite expensive.” Harry agreed.

Daphne turned to him in disbelief. “Any one of these sets would be worth at least fifty thousand galleons.”

Harry’s look of sheer astonishment was almost comical. “What?”

“Take this one for example.” Daphne said, lifting the tag attached to it so that she could read it. “It has four pieces. Each one has been crafted out of mithril and contains more diamonds that I had seen in my life before entering this vault. Individually they would be worth a fortune, but together…”

“Do you like it?” Harry asked, looking between her and the jewellery set.

Daphne bit her lip, unsure how to answer. Of course she loved it, it was stunning, but she could hardly wear anything that expensive.

“Does it match the fabric?” Harry asked, apparently unfazed by her lack of response.

Daphne brought the fabric up reluctantly and held it beside the necklace. “Yes.”

“Then you should try it on.” Harry decided, reaching out and picking up the necklace. He brought it up to his eyes and stared at the clasp. “How do you think it works?”

Swallowing down an amused smile, Daphne reached out and quickly undid the clasp.

“Oh,” Harry sounded, before moving behind her and draping the necklace across her chest and then fumbling with the clasp. “There!”

The necklace was strangely light given the amount of diamonds that were on it and, as Daphne brought her hands up to touch it, she wondered whether there was some kind of charm on the necklace.

Harry had moved back to stand in front of her. “I think it looks good?”

Daphne looked around, wishing for a mirror, before raising her voice slightly. “Mother?”

“Yes, dear?” Mother appeared at her side barely five seconds later, her eyes widening as she took in the necklace. “Goodness, that is quite the cluster of diamonds.”

“What do you think?” Daphne asked unsurely.

“I think it will look lovely on you in a few years.” Mother answered gently. “Though I suspect something simpler might be more appropriate this year.”

Daphne nodded in understand and reached her hands behind her to unclasp the necklace.

“I’ll get it.” Harry said quickly, before fumbling with the clasp again.

Daphne thought it was odd to see the usually suave Harry being clumsy and awkward. Though, to be fair, she doubted he had ever touched a necklace before in his life.

Once the necklace had been returned to the shelf, Mother spoke again. “I think I may have found a piece that will work for the Malfoys’ ball, dear.”

“Oh?” Daphne looked towards Harry. “Do you mind if…”
“Not at all.” Harry interrupted offering her his arm.

Mother led them to a shelf around the corner and pointed out a simple set that was sitting slightly above Daphne’s eye level. Daphne stood up on tiptoes, before smiling gratefully when Harry reached up and picked up the box that the jewellery was sitting on and brought it down to her level.

The set was much simpler than the one Daphne had tried on, containing a single (though very large) diamond in the necklace and then two smaller diamonds in the earrings.

“It’s lovely.” Daphne exclaimed, reaching out a hand to touch it before quickly withdrawing it when she remembered herself.

“Would you like to try it on?” Harry asked.

Daphne looked towards Mother. “Yes, please.”

Harry didn’t fumble nearly as much with this necklace and one it was on, Daphne looked towards Mother for her thoughts.

“Lovely!” Mother proclaimed.

It didn’t take them long to find another, equally wonderful, set of jewellery for her to wear to the Hogwarts’ Yule Ball and they were just leaving the vault when Lord Black arrived.

“All done?” Lord Black asked.

Daphne couldn’t tell from his tone whether or not he was disappointed or relieved to have missed it.

“Yes, we have found two pieces that will work.” Mother answered for them.

“So we don’t need to visit the Black vault then?” Lord Black asked. “Thank, Merlin, I can’t think of a single piece of jewellery that my mother wore that wasn’t hideously ugly.”

“That may have had more to do with your mother’s taste than the contents of the Black vault.” Mother pointed out with a smile.

Lord Black grinned. “True. Did you kids have fun?”

It took Daphne a few seconds to realise that he was talking to her. “Yes, my lord. Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, thank Harry.” Lord Black told her. “It’s his vault after all. Besides, it’s not as though he’s going to want to wear any of it. And you had best call me Sirius.”

Daphne curtsied. “Thank you, Sirius.”

31-31-31

“Draco?” Harry asked, staring unseeingly at the chessboard in front of him.

“Yes?” Draco answered, his own attention on the board.

“There’s something I need to talk to you about.” Harry started nervously, he was really starting to regret his promise to Sirius that he would talk to his cousin about Astoria.

Draco straightened in his chair. “It sounds serious.”
“It is.” Harry confirmed. “And I don’t think you’re going to like it.”

Draco let out an aggrieved sounding sigh. “Well, now that you’ve got me nicely worried about it, why don’t you just say it?”

“Alright.” Harry forced his gaze away from the chessboard and towards his cousin’s apprehensive face. “I think you should treat Astoria better.”

Draco’s face twisted into a scowl. “What?”

“You heard me.” Harry returned sharply, before regretting his tone.

“So what, you’ve been betrothed for less than five months and you already think you know more about it than the rest of us?” Draco asked with a sneer.

“No,” Harry denied. “Listen, just hear me out, alright?”

Draco crossed his arms across his chest. “Alright.”

Harry was silent for a moment as he mentally ran through all the versions of this speech that he had come up with over the last few days. None of them seemed quite right though.

“I was talking to Sirius about Daphne,” He started. “And about how you, Theo and Blaise have been getting frustrated at me for setting a high standard. Sirius made a comment about how witches deserve a high standard.”

Draco looked unimpressed.

“Listen,” Harry tried again. “You know how Neville and Luna are dating?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Neville’s always doing sweet things for her,” Harry reminded his cousin. “He picks her flowers and carries her books and goes to feed the Thestrals with her.”

“So?”

“So it’s not Astoria’s fault that she’s trapped into a betrothal with you.” Harry pointed out in frustration. “Maybe if she wasn’t, there would be a nice boy doing all those things for her, but all she’s got is you.”

“What do you mean trapped into a betrothal with me?” Draco asked defensively. “I’m the Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy, any witch would be delighted to marry me.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “That’s like Anthony Goldstein saying that because his family is rich anyone should be delighted to be his friend.”

“Money isn’t everything.” Draco pointed out loftily.

“Alright, imagine that I was a complete and utter prat.” Harry started, before suddenly having a thought. “Imagine I was like Eugene Odgen was before he died. A horrible bully.”

Draco frowned. “You wouldn’t be.”

Harry sighed in frustration. “I know, just imagine it. Now, if I was like him would everyone be delighted to be my friend just because I’m the Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black
and Potter?”

Draco was scowling again. “I’m nothing like Eugene!”

“I’m not saying you are.” Harry soothed him. “I’m just trying to make a point that money and status aren’t all that matters, the way people act is important too. Astoria is going to marry you because her father is delighted that you are the Heir of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy, but that doesn’t mean that she doesn’t still deserve to be courted.”

“I’m taking her to the Yule Ball, aren’t I?” Draco asked defensively. “And at great personal sacrifice. She’s bloody boring. You’re lucky, you got the interesting sister.”

“She’s scared of you!” Harry snapped.

Draco startled. “What?”

“She watched Eugene being bloody awful to Daphne,” Harry reminded him. “And then there’s you, who barely even talks to her and doesn’t even treat her like a person.”

Draco looked as though someone had hit him. “She’s scared of me? How do you know that?”

“Daphne told me.” Harry admitted. “I probably shouldn’t have told you that, but I know that you’re a gentleman, Draco. I’ll bet that if you got to know Astoria, showed her that you weren’t going to hurt her, she wouldn’t be so boring.”

“She thinks I’m going to hurt her?” Draco sounded horrified. “I would never!”

“I know that,” Harry assured him. “But she doesn’t.” Suddenly he had another idea. “Draco, imagine Neville started treating Luna like you treat Astoria – ignoring her all the time – what do you think she would do?”

“Break up with him.” Draco answered immediately.

“Right,” Harry agreed. “But Astoria doesn’t have that option, so you have to look after her.”

Draco nodded silently, before turning his gaze back to the chess board. “Your turn.”

Harry sighed and absently moved his rook forward three spaces, hopefully Draco had gotten the message.

“You can’t do that.” Draco pointed out grumpily. “It puts you in check.”

“Sorry.” Harry focussed on the board and returned the rook to its previous position. A few seconds later, he moved his remaining horse to take out Draco’s pawn.

The game continued for another ten minute, but Draco’s heart clearly wasn’t in it and Harry won easily. Draco knocked over his king and stood up.

“I’m going to go. I’ll see you at Hogwarts’ tomorrow.”

Harry stood as well. “Sure. Are we alright?”

“Of course, I’ll see you later.” Draco nodded sharply, before turning and striding out of the room.

Harry fell back into his chair with a sigh, that had gone about as well as he had expected it to.
Harry loved Christmas with Sirius and Remus. It was such a stark contrast from his previous Christmases, at the Dursleys’ and at Hogwarts, and he doubted that he would ever tire of the effort that Sirius put into making the day special. They ate breakfast together, a special breakfast that Sirius had the house-elves prepare especially (since apparently all Christmas meals had to contain Christmassy food), before moving into the Elladora sitting room to exchange gifts.

Harry could still remember receiving his first proper Christmas presents at Hogwarts during his first year. It had seemed like the best thing ever, but now he knew better. Opening gifts when surrounded by people who loved him was a hundred times more special than opening them alone.

Lunch was a much more formal affair, with the Malfoys and Cousin Andromeda, Cousin Ted, and Tonks flying over for the meal, but Harry enjoyed it nonetheless. He loved having a large family, even if not all of them got along, and it was always amusing to watch Lord Malfoy and Cousin Andromeda’s polite verbal sparring.

It was good to see Draco as well. Harry hadn’t seen his cousin since their conversation two days previously and he was relieved to see that Draco wasn’t angry with him. Though only time would tell if Draco had decided to be nicer to Astoria.

The family lingered for a while after lunch, but then Cousin Narcissa announced that Draco needed to be home preparing for the Hogwarts’ Yule Ball and the Malfoys took their leave. It was then that Sirius announced that Cousin Andromeda had agreed to stay for the afternoon to help Harry get ready. Harry could have cursed him and probably would have, if not for the fact that it would register as underage magic and would be unforgivable rude – especially since they had guests.

It wasn’t that Harry didn’t like Cousin Andromeda, because he did, but couldn’t Sirius have given him a bit more warning? Besides, it wasn’t as though he really needed her help anyway. He’d been fine when he’d prepared for the Malfoy’s Yule Ball by himself the year before.

Cousin Andromeda’s help was certainly educational and, by the time that she announced him ready, Harry was glad of her assistance. He’d had no idea that there were so many different spells that could be performed on his hair, though he did like the result. It looked a lot more elaborate than it usually did, though not in a feminine manner, and Cousin Andromeda had promised that the spells would last the night. She had even cast some sort of shield over his hair, claiming that the last thing he wanted was for someone to cast an Undoing Charm in his direction and have his hair return to a mess. Apparently that had happened to Lord Burke’s son once and he hadn’t lived it down for years.

The hair wasn’t the only thing that Cousin Andromeda helped with though. She had been horrified to discover that, while Harry had found jewellery for Daphne to wear, he hadn’t considered that he might need some matching cufflinks. She had immediately dispatched Sirius to Gringotts with instructions not to come back without two sets of cufflinks, one set for Harry to wear to the Hogwarts’ Yule Ball and one set for the Malfoys’ Yule Ball the next day.

All in all, the experience made Harry aware of just how many aspects of traditional culture that he was still unaware of. It wasn’t surprising really, after all Cousin Narcissa could hardly have imparted fifteen years of information to him in three summers, but it was discouraging. Would he ever learn it all?

Eventually, Harry was ready and, when he looked himself over in a mirror, he scarcely recognised himself. He looked so…proper – which he thought was really saying something given the fact that
he always made an effort to dress appropriately.

Sirius and Remus, both of whom were in dress robes as well, stared at him when he came downstairs, before Sirius gave a melodramatic sniff.

“Ah, my little prongslet, all grown up!”

Harry rolled his eyes, before stiffening when Cousin Andromeda cleared her throat disapprovingly. She was just as bad as Cousin Narcissa when it came to policing proper behaviour.

“Ready to go, Harry?” Remus asked from where he was leaning against the wall beside Sirius.

“Yes.” Harry nodded, looking Remus’ dress robes over with an impressed eye. Clearly Sirius had managed to convince Remus to let him foot the bill this time.

Sirius let out a low whistle and Harry followed to gaze to the stairs that Tonks was descending. She looked incredible in her wine coloured dress robes. Her hair, which was brown and longer than usual, had been put up in a complicated and delicate arrangement that held a piece of jewellery like the ones he had seen in his vault. She was also wearing a necklace and earrings that contained large jewels that matched the colour of her dress robes set in gold.

Harry glanced back to Remus who was staring at her like he’d been hit over the head. “Something you want to tell me, Remus?”

“Uh…” Remus’ eyes were fixed on Tonks.

“You don’t know?” Sirius looked apologetic. “Sorry, kiddo, I presumed he’d told you and he probably presumed that I’d told you.”

“Told me what?” Harry persisted.

“That Remus is courting Tonks.” Sirius answered. “He asked me in October, all nice and proper. Personally, I think she coached him.”

“Well, I had to do something.” Tonks commented with a grin, stepping off the last step. “He was moving at a snail’s pace.”

Remus stepped forward and bowed. “You look beautiful.” His voice was unusually gravelly.

Tonks’ hair turned a faint red, before returning to brown. “Yeah?”

Cousin Andromeda sniffed disapprovingly, but didn’t say anything.

Cousin Andromeda sniffed disapprovingly, but didn’t say anything.

“Stunning.” Remus promised seriously.

“You don’t look so bad yourself.” Tonks told him with a smile, before quickly adding, “I’m not wearing heels. I hope that’s alright. It’s just that I’m likely to fall over anyway, and with heels…”

Remus smiled warmly as she trailed off. “I don’t mind, really.”

Harry turned away from the couple when he felt a hand fall on his shoulder. “Yes, Cousin Andromeda?”

Cousin Andromeda looked him up and down, before nodding. “Be sure that you represent our House with pride and honour tonight.”
“I will.” Harry promised.

“What she means to say is have fun.” Sirius said, with a pointed look towards his cousin. “Tomorrow night is the formal event, this is just the school one.”

“I will have fun.” Harry told him with a smile. “There’s no reason why I can’t do that and represent my Houses with pride and honour at the same time.”

Cousin Andromeda nodded approvingly while Sirius rolled his eyes.

Harry turned his attention back to Tonks and Remus, who were now talking to Cousin Ted.

“Right.” Sirius said loudly. “Time for you lot to be off, I think. You wouldn’t want to be late. I’ll be along soon.”

Harry winced at the idea of being late to meet Daphne, he hated the idea of leaving her standing alone.

32-32-32

As it turned out, they were half an hour early. Tonks thought that Sirius had probably been trying to rescue Remus from his discussion with Cousin Ted.

“Why?” Harry asked curiously, unsure why anyone would need rescuing from Cousin Ted. He was definitely the most harmless member of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.

Remus’ cheeks turned pink. “Uh, no reason. Anyway, I should probably go and make sure there’s nothing they need me to be doing. Are you alright staying here with Harry, Dora?”

“Of course.” Tonks promised.

Harry turned his attention to her as Remus left. “You let him call you Dora?”

Tonks’ hair gained a reddish twinge. “Yeah, but that doesn’t mean anyone else is allowed to.”

“Understood.” Harry assured her quickly. “So…how has your work with the auror department been going?”

Tonks sighed. “It’s a lot harder now that You-Know-Who is back.”

“Because of his attacks?” Harry asked quietly.

“Partly,” Tonks sighed again. “Two of the people who I went through training with are dead, killed by Death Eaters.”

Harry’s stomach twisted. “That’s awful.”

“That’s war.” Tonks said grimly. “But it’s also harder because it seems as though half the housewives in the country are sure that they have Death Eaters hiding in their backyard. All it takes is a rustling bush and they summon us, certain that they’re about to be attacked.”

There was a part of Harry that found that funny, and kind of pathetic, but it was also very grim. “I had no idea people were so scared.”

Tonks glanced over at him. “Yeah, well you weren’t around during the last war. Neither was I, really. I was only eight when You-Know-Who disappeared, but these housewives were. They
remember the days when there was a good chance that a rustling bush was a Death Eater out to kill them. All of them can reel off a dozen names of friends and family that were killed in the last war, half of them in their homes. They have good reason to be scared.”

Harry stared at her in horror. “It was that bad?”

“Why do you think Hogwarts is half empty?” Tonks asked. “According to Mum, there were twice as many students here when she was a student. And three times as many when her parents were at Hogwarts. Of course then Grindlewald declared war on Europe and hundreds of people died, and then then You-Know-Who came and killed even more.”

Harry felt sick. “I had no idea.”

“No, you wouldn’t.” Tonks sighed. “I didn’t either, not really, not until I became an auror trainee. People don’t talk about it, and Binns certainly didn’t teach it.”

“Why hasn’t Remus taught it?” Harry asked heatedly.

“Because there’s more important things you need to know.” Tonks pointed out. “And because he doesn’t want your classmates to be crying murder at every rustling bush. It’s no way to live, Harry.”

Harry thought about that, it did make sense. He could remember the first few weeks back at Hogwarts, when everyone was still shaken from Voldemort’s attack on the Quidditch World Cup. It had been awful.

“Anyway,” Tonks’ tone became forcedly bright. “Sorry, that’s no kind of subject for a Yule Ball. I shouldn’t have brought it up. Let’s talk about something else.”

“It’s fine.” Harry assured her slowly. “I’m glad you told me.”

Tonks’ eyes were compassionate, before they were suddenly filled with mischief. “I have a new topic. Remus told me that he walked in on Sirius trying to give you ‘The Talk’. He said something about Quidditch metaphors?”

Harry could feel his cheeks heating in embarrassment. “It was awful!”

“What metaphor did he use?” Tonks asked with an unsympathetic grin. “Snitches and seekers?”

Harry shook his head.

“Beaters and bludgers?” Tonks questioned.

“No.” Harry tried to force away his blush.

Tonks’ eyes widened. “He didn’t use the quaffle and hoops one, did he?” When Harry’s blushed deepened she crowed in amusement. “Merlin, that’s brilliant! There is absolutely nothing left to the imagination with that one.”

“Tell me about it.” Harry groaned.

“Did he cover pregnancy?” Tonks asked shamelessly.

“They were the goals.” Harry mumbled.

“Ha!” Tonks grinned widely. “Brilliant! So, Harry, played any Quidditch with Daphne recently?”
Harry thought that this was possibly more embarrassing than his conversation with Sirius had been. “No.”

32-32-32

Thankfully other students began arriving before Tonks could ask him any more embarrassing questions and Harry took the opportunity to escape to the Entrance Hall. Neither he nor Daphne had known which floo she would be assigned to come through, so they had arranged to meet in the Entrance Hall to make things easier.

The room was mostly empty when Harry arrived, with only a few older students milling around, and he settled himself against one of the walls to wait. It was interesting to watch people, as they arrived. The girls seemed gigglier than normal and the boys seemed more awkward. Harry wondered whether the change in behaviour was due to their fancy clothes or their feelings about the ball.

The first of Harry’s friends to arrive were the Weasley twins, which wasn’t surprising given that they were staying at Hogwarts over the holidays to avoid their family. They both looked very smart in their new dress robes, which Harry took as a testament to Daphne’s good taste. They weren’t alone though, George had Alicia Spinnet on his arm and Fred had his arm around Angelina Johnson’s waist. Both girls looked lovely, though they were wearing muggle styled dresses rather than dress robes.

Theo was next, with Nastasja Lestrange on his arm. She was by far the youngest person in the room, and Harry suspected that she would be the youngest person at the ball, but she looked delighted to be there. Theo spotted him immediately and made his way across the hall to where Harry was standing.

“Merry meet.” Theo bowed low, as Nastasja curtsied at his side.

“Merry meet.” Harry agreed with a nod. “You look lovely, Nastasja.”

Nastasja blushed deeply as she looked at the floor. “Thank you, Harry.”

“No comments about my appearance?” Theo asked jokingly.

Harry gave him a cursory glance. “My apologies, I was distracted by your betrothed’s beauty. You look…well.”

“Merry meet, Harry.” Neville’s voice came from Harry’s left.

Harry was hard-pressed not to startle in fright as he spun around to face his friend. “Merry meet.” He returned as calmly as he could. “Is Luna meeting you here?”

“Yes.” Neville looked around. “It was easier this way. I presume you’re waiting for Daphne?”

“Of course.” Harry searched the room with his eyes. “Oh, there’s Luna.”

“Where?” Neville asked, before heading in the direction that Harry had pointed.

Draco arrived next, though Blaise and Ines weren’t far behind him, and then they were only missing the Greengrass sisters.

The Entrance Hall was definitely filling up now and, according to Harry’s pocket watch, the ball was scheduled to start in less than five minutes. Harry stood as tall as he could and searched the room for his betrothed, or at least for the colour purple that he knew she would be wearing.
Eventually he spotted her, standing near one of the doors and looking around expectantly.

Presuming that Astoria would be with her, Harry got Draco’s attention before making his way towards them.

It took them at least a minute to reach the door where Harry had seen Daphne, but when Harry moved around the last group of people between him and the door he had to swallow down a gasp. She looked incredible! Like...like...like...he honestly couldn’t think of a single comparison that could describe how beautiful she was.

Daphne’s dress robes, which were the colour of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter, were tailored to fit her body in a tantalising way and her hair glowed like a lumos spell. Not to mention that the diamond necklace, earrings and bracelet that she was wearing matched perfectly.

“Merry meet.” Daphne curtsied shallowly.

“Merry meet.” Harry knew that his voice sounded rougher than usual. “You look beautiful.”

“Thank you.” Daphne glanced towards the floor, before returning her gaze to his face.

Harry stepped forward and took hold of one of her hands, before bringing it to his lips to kiss it.

“Absolutely stunning.”

Daphne’s cheeks pinked. “You look good as well.”

Professor McGonagall’s voice could suddenly be heard above the noise in the hall. “Champions over here, please.”

“That’s us.” Harry offered Daphne his arm, before glancing over to where Draco was standing with Astoria. “We’ll see you later.”

“Of course.” Draco inclined his head.

Harry led Daphne across the hall, towards where McGonagall’s voice had come from. Nodding in acknowledgement to the bows and curtsies that he and Daphne received as they walked through the crowd.

“I could get used to this.” Daphne admitted in a low tone.

Harry smiled. “You should.”

McGonagall, who was wearing tartan dress robes of all things, was standing to the side of the doors into the hall and she nodded briskly when she saw them approaching.

“Good, you’re here.” She said. “Wait over there with the other champions.”

Harry turned his attention to where she had gestured, before swallowing down a sneer when he saw that the only other champion who had arrived was Aceline Moreau. Why couldn’t it have been any of the other ones? Aceline was awful.

Aceline didn’t look happy to see him either, but she did offer a curtsy.

Harry nodded in acknowledgement, deciding to ignore how insultingly shallow the curtsy had been, before nodding to her date’s bow. Harry didn’t think he had ever met the wizard before, but he was pretty sure that he was one of the Beauxbatons’ students.
There were a few seconds of awkward silence, as they waited for Aceline to introduce them, before Harry gave up.

“I am Harry Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Black and Potter.” He told the wizard. “And this is my betrothed, Daphne Greengrass, Daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass.”

The wizard bowed again. “Merry meet, ‘eir Black. I am Walcott Durand, of the ‘ouse of Belanger.”

“Merry meet.” Harry acknowledged.

“So eet is true then?” Aceline asked scathingly. “You are betrozzed?”

Harry narrowed his gaze onto her. “I am.”

“And you do not care zat you will force zis girl into marrying you?” Aceline asked, looking Daphne over in disdain.

Daphne stiffened on his arm, before replying in fluent French “I beg your pardon? I will happily marry my Lord Potter.”

Aceline sneered. “Then you are a gold digger!”

“Stop, Aceline.” Walcott frowned, glancing worriedly towards Harry.

Daphne raised a condemning eyebrow. “So it is true. Peasants do think first of money.”

Aceline’s face flushed red. “Bitch!”

“Aceline!” Walcott reprimanded sharply, before turning his attention to Harry and switching the language back to English. “My apologies, ‘eir Black.”

Harry nodded sharply as Cedric and Fleur arrived together

“Merry meet, Harry.” Cedric greeted him cheerfully with a bow.

“Merry meet, ‘arry.” Fleur echoed, curtsying lowly.

“Merry meet.” Harry acknowledged. “I believe that you know my betrothed, Daphne Greengrass, Daughter of the Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass.”

“I do.” Cedric bowed again, this time over Daphne’s hand.

“I ‘ave not ‘ad the pleasure.” Fleur admitted with another curtsey. “Eet is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Greengrass.”

“Likewise.” Daphne agreed with a smile.

Harry looked around and saw that the Entrance Hall was mostly empty, with most of the students having moved into the Great Hall. Viktor and Nynke arrived less than a minute later, each with a date from their own school, and then McGonagall bore down on them.

“You will be entering the hall together.” McGonagall instructed them. “I want you to line up with your dates in front of the doors.”

It took them a few minutes to work out the order of the pairs, but Harry was unsurprised that he
Daphne ended up being first, with Cedric and Fleur directly behind them, after all, he and Cedric were the highest ranking champions.

“Follow me.” McGonagall ordered, spelling open the double doors to the Great Hall and walking forward.

Harry looked down to where Daphne was standing, her hand tucked into his arm. “You ready?”

Daphne smiled confidently. “Of course.”
Harry and Daphne entered the Great Hall to the sound of applause and followed McGonagall towards a large round table at the far end of the Hall – where the judges were sitting.

Harry took note of the decorations that had been added to the Hall for the occasion. The walls were covered in a sparkling silver frost and there was mistletoe and ivy hanging from the ceiling that showed a clear starry night. The House tables had been replaced with smaller ones and there were tables with drinks on either side of the Hall. Harry thought he might have been impressed if he hadn’t attended the Malfoys’ Yule Ball the year before and seen what kind of decorations magic could produce.

As they approached the large table, Harry noted that Dumbledore was beaming happily and trying to catch his eye. There were two spare seats to Dumbledore’s left and, unwilling to be stuck sitting next to the man, Harry turned away and looked for Sirius. Unfortunately his godfather was sitting between Madame Brusilov and Madame Maxime, and so couldn’t provide an excuse to get out sitting beside the Headmaster.

“Ah, Harry, my boy.” Dumbledore greeted him brightly, standing and pulling out the seat beside him. “Why don’t you and Miss Greengrass come and join me?”

Seeing no way out, Harry inclined his head in acquiescence and, after having bowed to Sirius, pulled out a seat for Daphne.

Daphne sat gracefully, sweeping the skirt of her dress robes into the appropriate position, before smiling sweetly up at Harry.

That done, Harry turned his attention to Dumbledore. “Headmaster.” He acknowledged with a tight nod.

Dumbledore beamed in response and gestured towards Harry’s seat. “Won’t you have a seat, my boy?”

“Of course.” Dumbledore replied reasonably, as though Harry hadn’t protested the familiarity in every conversation they’d had. “My apologies.”

Harry nodded tightly again, before turning his attention to Daphne who was looking through the menu. “Anything interesting?”

“A few interesting dishes from France and Bulgaria.” Daphne answered, returning her menu with a small sigh. “I believe that I will have the Bouillabaisse.”

Harry looked dispassionately at the bowl of soup that appeared in front of Daphne, before turning his attention to his own menu. She had been right about the interesting dishes being the international ones. Pork chops and Cornish Pasties could hardly compete with Bouillabaisse, Goulash, Magret de Canard, or Musaka.

“Magret de Canard.” Harry decided firmly, before nodding in satisfaction when the dish appeared in front of him.

Beside him, Dumbledore ordered Pork Chops and Harry swallowed down a sneer at the
“How have you been, Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked with, what Harry was sure was supposed to look like, friendly interest. “It seems like an age since our last chat.”

It had almost been three years since their last chat, something that had only taken place in Harry’s first year, and he hadn’t missed them at all.

“Very well, thank you, Headmaster.” Harry returned neutrally. “And you?”

“Well enough, dear boy.” Dumbledore returned cheerfully. “I find I have rather a lot of extra time on my hands these days.”

“Yes, I imagine so.” Harry agreed. “Still, I am sure that you have found it easier to dedicate your time to Hogwarts now that your time is not taken up by the role of Chief Warlock.”

Dumbledore’s expression tightened. “You may be right, Mr. Potter.”

Harry smirked inwardly, one point to him. He turned back to Daphne. “How is your soup?”

“Delightful.” Daphne answered with a smile. “I see you have yet to touch your meal.”

Harry looked down at the duck on his plate, before picking up his knife and fork. “You make a good point.” He cut a bite sized piece, before bringing it to his mouth. “Absolutely splendid. The house elves have certainly done themselves proud today.”

“I am looking forward to seeing the dessert menu.” Daphne confided. “I simply adore French desserts.”

Harry chuckled. “You like all desserts.”

“True.” Daphne smiled ruefully. “How could I not?”

“I quite agree, Miss Greengrass.” Dumbledore put in brightly. “There are very few things I enjoy as much as a good dessert.”

Daphne turned towards the Headmaster with a polite expression. “You have a sweet tooth, Headmaster?”

“Most certainly.” Dumbledore’s eyes sparkled. “My favourite is a hard boiled sweet called a lemon drop.”

“I don’t believe I have ever heard of them before.” Daphne commented lightly.

“No, I doubt you would have. They are a muggle-made sweet, you see.” Dumbledore replied, before watching her carefully.

“Oh,” Daphne’s polite expression didn’t as much as twitch. “I imagine that makes it harder for you to purchase them, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore’s smiled widened. “It does, indeed. But they are definitely worth the adventure I must undergo to retrieve them.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “I wouldn’t have thought that a wizard such as yourself would describe visiting the muggle world as an adventure. Surely it is not too dissimilar to visiting Diagon Alley?”
Dumbledore’s smile slipped slightly. “Of course, Mr. Potter. Though I am sure you understand the differences between our world and the muggle one better than many of your peers. After all, you were raised there.”

Harry ignored the way the Headmaster’s eyes flicked towards Daphne, as though expecting her to react negatively to this information.

“I did.” Harry agreed.

“I’ll admit that I have been surprised to see how you have taken to the Malfoys’ traditional propaganda.” Dumbledore commented neutrally. “It is not often that muggle-raised students choose to accept such a structured way of life.”

“On the contrary, Headmaster,” Harry started. “My experience in the muggle world was one of the reasons I was delighted to discover the traditions of my heritage. I doubt you can imagine my excitement at discovering that I belonged to a different world. With that in mind, is it really as surprise that I was eager to learn as much as I could?”

“Ah, Ravenclaws.” Dumbledore smiled fondly. “Still, you must admit, Mr. Potter, that it is not usual for muggle-raised students to accept traditionalism as you have.”

“Nor is it usual for muggle-raised students to be taught traditionalism as I was.” Harry returned with a bite to his tone. “Had my cousin had not instructed me on the matter, I would be as ill-informed as my muggleborn peers.”

Dumbledore looked mournful. “Would that have been so bad?”

“Yes.” Harry answered firmly. “Headmaster, surely you would agree that having the opportunity to make a well-informed choice will always be preferable to having that choice made for you?”

“I have heard that argument used many times, Mr. Potter, and for more dangerous subjects as traditionalism.” Dumbledore replied. “Would you make the same argument for teaching our children the Dark Arts?”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Tell me, Dumbledore, by ‘Dark Arts’ are you referring to Raczidian’s or Ekrizdis’ theory? Because if you are referring to Raczidian’s definition, then yes, I would use that exact argument. Besides which, Dark Arts’ by that definition are already taught at Hogwarts. I learnt the Knockback Jinx during my second year. But if you are referring to Ekrizdis’ definition, then no, I do not think that argument can be used. After all, there is a large difference between allowing people to choose between untraditionalism and traditionalism, and allowing them to choose to use magic that will hurt both them, and others.”

Dumbledore drew his eyebrows together. “You seem very well informed about this subject, Mr. Potter.”

“Of course, Headmaster, I am a Ravenclaw.” Harry pointed out lightly.

“So you are, Mr. Potter.” Dumbledore acknowledged. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I fear that I have been ignoring Mr. Bagman.”

“Of course.” Harry inclined his head, before turning back to his meal.

“That was interesting.” Daphne commented in a low tone.

“Was it?” Harry asked absently, grimacing when he raised his fork to his mouth and found that his
meat had gone cold.

“Do you always enjoy poking a volatile Hippogriff?” Daphne was speaking so quietly Harry could barely hear her.

Harry just smirked in satisfaction. “How is your soup?”

After they had finished dessert, Dumbledore rearranged the hall with a flick of his wand to create a space for dancing. Then the Weird Sisters were announced and Harry and the other Champions led their dates onto the dance floor.

The first song that the weird sisters played was slow and mournful and, while it wasn’t all that similar to the music Cousin Narcissa had used to teach him how to dance, it was close enough that Harry could adapt. He bowed to Daphne, as she curtsied, before placing his right arm around her waist grasping her right hand with his left.

It was wonderful to dance with someone other than Draco or Cousin Narcissa, and even better that the person was Daphne. It was also wonderful to know how to dance, he could only imagine the spectacle he would have made of himself Cousin Narcissa hadn’t taught him.

After a few minutes other couples joined the Champions on the dance floor and while some students certainly knew what they were doing, there were a painful amount of students who were just shuffling in place.

It was easy to see which students had received dance training, aside from the half-hearted sessions that their Heads of House had provided. The traditionalists in particular seemed to know what they were doing, though there were some people that Harry recognised as being non-traditional who were showing dancing ability as well.

Sirius was dancing with Madame Brusilov and they were definitely the most striking adult couple on the dance floor. Dumbledore was dancing with Madame Maxime and looked completely ridiculous, and Ludo Bagman seemed to have somehow convinced McGonagall to dance with him.

As he slowly twisted Daphne around, Harry spotted Remus and Tonks dancing off to the side. They looked…far less awkward than Harry had expected them too. Though, watching them, he supposed that Cousin Andromeda would have taught Tonks to dance as a child and Remus had probably asked Sirius for a few lessons.

Draco was dancing with Astoria and, if the lack of scowl on his face meant anything, wasn’t hating it, Blaise and Ines, Neville and Luna, and Theo and Nastasja were all dancing near them. Harry couldn’t help but think that Nastasja looked incredibly young.

When the Weird Sisters finished their song, Harry and Daphne stopped and clapped along with everyone else, before sharing an anticipatory look when the next song was a lot faster.

“Do you think you could handle a Quickstep to this, Harry?” Daphne asked, her eyes sparkling.

Harry paused for a moment, taking in the beat of the song. “Of course.” He offered his hand to her before placing his other hand on her shoulder, elbow bent out.

Accepting his hand, Daphne lay her other arm over his bent one and placed her hand on his shoulder. “Don’t hit anyone.”
Harry grinned. “Of course not.” Then they were off. There wasn’t enough room to dance the Quickstep properly, but Harry made sure to use what little room they had. Not to mention that people tended to move out of the way when they sure them approaching.

It was fun, though fast-paced, and Harry hardly had time to observe the dancers around them. Daphne, apparently didn’t have that problem.

“Oh dear,” Daphne commented as they turned. “Look at Fred.”

Harry waited until their dance naturally brought himself into a position to see his friend before wincing. Fred and Angelina were dancing together and, while they certainly seemed to be having fun, people around them were actually beginning to back away.

“Maybe you should have arranged dancing lessons as well as new robes.” Harry commented lowly.

Daphne sighed. “They never would have agreed.”

“No,” Harry agreed. “Thank you, though, for picking out their dress robes. They look wonderful.”

“You’re welcome.” Daphne tilted her face up so that he could see her smile.

They danced another few dances together, before deciding to stop for a drink.

“Very nice.” Draco commented with a smirk as Harry and Daphne join him and Astoria, a glass of punch in their hands. “Mother will be very impressed.”

“She’ll be able to see for herself tomorrow.” Harry reminded him. “And at least at your Ball the music will be better suited to dancing.”

“Not to mention there won’t be as many lunatics on the dance floor.” Draco agreed, sneering as two couples collided on the dance floor.

“I quite like this music.” Astoria volunteered quietly.

“It certainly creates a challenge.” Harry commented, smiling kindly at her.

“Are you having a good time, Astoria?” Daphne asked, her eyes darting towards Draco worriedly.

“Yes,” Astoria smiled sweetly up at Draco, before holding out her left hand. “Draco bought me a bracelet.”

As Daphne moved closer to her sister to look at the bracelet, Harry raised an eyebrow at Draco who rolled his eyes.

“That’s lovely.” Daphne commented, smiling first at her sister and then at Draco. “What good taste you have, Draco.”

Draco inclined his head. “Thank you.”

“Where are Theo and Blaise?” Harry asked, looking around for their friends.

“Blaise and Ines are still dancing.” Draco explained, nodding towards the dance floor. “Theo’s walking Nastasja back to the floo. Dumbledore said that she could only accompany him if she left before eight.”

Harry pulled out his pocket watch and glanced at it, five past eight. “Cutting it close, isn’t he?”
“He left about ten minutes ago.” Draco explained. “Just after the second song.”

“I think it’s wonderful that he brought her.” Astoria commented. “She was so excited.”

“I should imagine so.” Draco agreed. “Imagine being invited to something like this as a first year.”

“I would have been petrified.” Harry grinned. “And I would have made a fool of myself.”

“Yes,” Draco sneered. “You were quite the embarrassment back then.”

Astoria was looking between them unsurely, as though trying to figure out whether or not it was a joke.

Harry decided to take pity on her. “I didn’t know anything about traditionalism before I arrived at Hogwarts. Draco had to teach it all to me.”

Astoria’s eyes widened. “Really? Why?”

“Because the Heir of two Most Ancient and Noble Houses could hardly go around behaving like a blood-traitor!” Draco pointed out.

Astoria wrinkled her nose. “Obviously not. Why didn’t you know though, Harry?”

“I grew up with muggles.” Harry answered shortly. “My mother’s sister’s family.”

“I did tell you about it, Astoria.” Daphne reminded her sister.

“I thought you were telling me a story.” Astoria admitted. “Harry has always seemed so…”

“Traditional?” Draco finished for her. “Yes, that’s all me.”

Theo snorted as he joined them. “We all know that’s not true. He’s more traditional than you are, Draco.”

Draco raised an eyebrow reprovingly. “As we are both more traditional than you.”

Theo nodded unapologetic. “It never used to be a scale, you know. There were just traditionalist, and non-traditionalists.”

“Yes, but then Harry and Pansy happened.” Daphne pointed out. “You can hardly put them in the same category.”

Harry shuddered at the thought. “Merlin, no.”

“Who is she here with, anyway?” Theo asked, looking towards the crowd of dancers. “I haven’t seen her.”

“Marcus Flint, last I heard.” Daphne answered with a sneer.

“She’s five years younger than him.” Theo grimaced.

“Says the wizard who just walked his eleven year old betrothed to the floo.” Draco smirked.

“I’m only three years older than her.” Theo pointed out. “And I’m not Marcus Flint.”

“You make a good point.” Draco grimaced. “Merlin, how awful.”
“It almost makes me feel sorry for her.” Daphne commented.

Harry raised a sceptical eyebrow.

Daphne quirked her lips. “The key word being almost.”

There was sudden quiet as the Weird Sisters finished a song, and then started a slower one.

Harry bowed to Astoria. “May I have this dance?”

Astoria’s cheeks pinked as she placed her hand in his. “Of course.”

Harry glanced towards Daphne, to ensure that she was alright with it and received a wide smile.

“Care to dance, Daphne?” Theo asked, bowing as well.

Draco scowled. “What am I supposed to do?”

Dancing with Astoria was nice, though not nearly as enjoyable as dancing with Daphne, and Harry then took the opportunity to dance with Luna and Ines. Then he danced with Daphne a few more times, before Sirius cut in on him.

Harry wasn’t sure what it was, but he couldn’t help but feel some anxiety about leaving Daphne to dance with Sirius. What if his godfather turned her hair blue?

Making his way off the dance floor, Harry spotted Remus standing by himself and went to stand beside him.

“You’re a brave man.” Remus commented with a crooked grin.

Harry groaned. “What could I do?”

“Good point.” Remus acknowledged. “Maybe I should warn Tonks to steer clear of him.”

“Congratulations, by the way.” Harry smiled up him. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me about that.”

Remus looked apologetic. “I thought you knew. You knew that I liked her without me saying anything.”

“That’s because Tonks told me.” Harry pointed out, his eyes fixed on where Sirius was spinning Daphne around the dancefloor.

“Daphne looks lovely tonight.” Remus told him after a long pause. “And she’s wearing your colours. Should we expect an article in the Daily Prophet tomorrow?”

Harry grimaced. “Merlin, I hope not. You’d think I was the only Champion the way Skeeter’s reporting it. Anyway, I haven’t seen her tonight so hopefully I’ll be safe.”

“Dumbledore’s banned her from the grounds.” Remus explained. “Though that was before the last article came out, so it doesn’t seem to be helping.”

“Speaking of Dumbledore, I had an interesting conversation with him tonight.” Harry commented.

Remus chuckled. “Yes, I saw you sitting beside him. How did it go?”

“We discussed the importance of teaching muggle-raised students about traditionalism so that they
can make an educated choice.” Harry answered with a smirk. “And then, he asked me what I thought about teaching children the Dark Arts.”

Remus’ mouth fell open. “He didn’t.”

“Not in so many words,” Harry admitted. “He was trying to use it to debunk one of my arguments.”

“And you said…?”

“That it depended on one definition of Dark Arts he was talking about.” Harry admitted with a smirk. “And that if he meant Raczidian’s definition then he was already teaching Dark Arts here, and if he meant Ekrizdis’ definition then it was a completely different situation.”

Remus groaned. “Harry!”

“And then I passed it all off on being a Ravenclaw.” Harry reassured him. “You’d be amazed what sort of topics people are willing to ignore me researching simply because I’m a Ravenclaw.”

“We encountered the same phenomena in Gryffindor.” Remus admitted. “After all, Gryffindors are the epitome of good.”

“I feel sorry for Slytherins.” Harry admitted. “They get four Houses’ worth of suspicion.”

Remus nodded. “The song is finishing.”

Harry searched the dancefloor for Daphne, before breathing in relief when he saw that she looked completely unharmed. “It doesn’t look like he’s pranked her.”

“Definitely a sign of growth and maturing if I’ve ever seen one.” Remus grinned.
Chapter 33

It wasn’t often that Albus Dumbledore allowed himself a sleep in during the school year. He knew that his absence at the Head Table was conspicuous and didn’t want to set a bad example to the students. Still, the Yule Ball was certainly reason enough to allow himself an extra few hours in the morning. He had been up until one in the morning, helping the rest of the staff return to the Great Hall to its usual décor, and he was far too old to manage on just a few hours’ sleep.

The sun was shining through his window as he grudgingly opened his eyes. It was far too tempting to close them again and try for another hour or two of sleep – after all, it was the day after Christmas, who would really miss him?

“Randy.” Dumbledore pulled himself into a sitting position, and pushed an extra pillow behind him to lean against as his personal House Elf appeared beside his bed.

“Master be calling Randy?” Randy asked brightly.

“I need some tea.” Dumbledore told him. “And scones, with jam and cream. And a copy of the Daily Prophet.”

It took Randy less than a minute to arrange everything that he had asked for on the table beside the bed, and Dumbledore then dismissed him before pouring himself a hot cup of tea. He blew cautiously on his tea, before taking a sip.

Ah, perfection.

As the Yule Ball had been the night before. It had been wonderful to see so many students dancing together and having fun. There wasn’t nearly enough joy in the world these days, not with Tom and his followers being active again, and it was wonderful to see that it still remained. Though, he’d always found children the most joyful of people. Well, most children. There were a few exceptions of course, solemn children such as Tom, or Severus, or even Harry, were always troubling for him. Not only because they seemed to lack the joy that made children, children, but also because he had seen what path that solemnness led them down. First Tom, then Severus (though he was reformed now), and now it seemed as though Harry might be heading down that same path.

He couldn’t be sure, of course, but the hints were all there. Why else would the Malfoys have taken him under their wing? Why else would he have chosen a traditional lifestyle? Why else would Tom not be trying to kill him?

And the most recent hint, why else would he know so much about the Dark Arts?

Their conversation over dinner had been most troubling. He had not been surprised to hear Harry’s support of traditionalism, but to hear him supporting Dark Arts had been disconcerting to say the least. And how did he know so much about the different definitions of the term Dark Arts? The Malfoys had mostly likely been the ones to teach him, though if that were true why would he have been against teaching the Dark Arts as Ekrizdis’ defined them? He would have thought that Lucius Malfoy would have supported that strain of magic. Unless, Harry had only been pretending to be against that magic to pull the wool of his eyes. Yes, that must be what had happened.

After all, it was hardly surprising that Harry had been drawn to the dark given that his scar contained part of Tom’s soul. Dumbledore could only imagine the ways the horcrux had contaminated the boy. It was enough to make Dumbledore wish that he had followed through his original urge to destroy
the horcrux when Harry had been an infant, but no, that would have made him no better than Tom. He was Albus Dumbledore, Champion of the Light, not Albus Dumbledore, murderer of infants (regardless of whether or not the infant in question was a horcrux). Even now, the knowledge that Harry would have to die for Tom to be defeated was unsettling for him. Dumbledore just hoped that he would be able to manipulate events in such a way that Voldemort would be the one to kill Harry so that he wouldn’t have to do it himself.

Unfortunately, Sirius and Remus’ connection to the boy would most likely make that harder than it needed to be, but Dumbledore had no doubt that he could do it. Though, if the boy became a Death Eater that would certainly make things easier. That way Dumbledore could have one of the Order members kill him in a battle. Either way, Harry Potter had to die.

Dumbledore sighed, it sounded so cold when he put it like that. But then, if he had learnt anything from his relationship with Gellert, sometimes you had to do horrible things for the greater good.

Ah, Gellert, Dumbledore shook his head firmly. Nothing good ever came from him dwelling on Gellert.

Reaching for the Daily Prophet that the elf had placed on his bedside table, Dumbledore shook it out with one hand and laid it across his knees, before choosing a scone from the plate. He bit into the scone, before turning his attention to the paper. What did the Daily Prophet have to report today?

‘Dark Arts Taught At Hogwarts’

Dumbledore choked, before coughing violently. His eyes watered as he coughed out the scone crumbs that he had breathed in. What? Where in Merlin’s name had Skeeter gotten that from?

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“How did you know?” Lord Malfoy answered, before looking behind Harry. “Speaking of your godfather, where is he?”

Cousin Narcissa commented coolly, sweeping towards them in the most majestic dress robes Harry had ever seen. “Though may it be noted that I am thoroughly unsurprised that it was you who arrive first, Harry. Sirius is many things, but punctual he is not.”

“Very true, Cousin Narcissa. Merry meet.”

“Merry meet.” Cousin Narcissa agreed, with a small smile of her own. “Unfortunately Draconus
seems to have a similar problem with punctuality as your godfather and will not be down for a few more minutes.”

“I am not surprised.” Harry admitted, before making a point of looking around the room. “The decor is spectacular.”

“Thank you.” Cousin Narcissa inclined her head proudly. “Did you enjoy yourself last night?”

“Yes, thank you.” Harry answered. “Though I expect to enjoy myself more tonight.”

Cousin Narcissa looked pleased. “I hear that you had a rather interesting discussion with the headmaster last night?”

“Yes.” Harry sighed lightly. “I doubt he was pleased to read about it in the Daily Prophet this morning.”

Cousin Narcissa and Lord Malfoy exchanged a pleased smirk. “No, I am sure he was not.”

Harry wasn’t sure what was so good about the article. “Though it mostly seemed to be fearmongering. So I doubt he minds that much.”

“Ah, Mr. Potter,” Lord Malfoy’s smirk grew. “You are considering the article only in its short-term ramifications.”

“I don’t understand, my lord.” Harry admitted.

“While the article itself condemns the Dark Arts, it condemns Dumbledore in equal measure for allowing the Dark Arts to be taught.” Lord Malfoy explained.

“So it will help you to convince people to replace him.” Harry realised.

“Precisely.” Lord Malfoy gave him an approving nod. “Once Dumbledore is gone we can replace him with a Headmaster who will be more…open minded.”

Harry smiled proudly at Lord Malfoy’s approval, before smiling in greeting when Draco strode into the room wearing silver dress robes that gleamed in the light.

“Merry meet, Harry.” Draco bowed politely. “Mother, Father.”

“We are pleased you could join us, Draconus.” Lord Malfoy told Draco dryly. “Our guests will be arriving any minute.”

Harry smiled, he liked not being considered a guest by the Malfoys.

34-34-34

The Malfoys’ Yule Ball was everything that Harry had hoped that it would be. Their ballroom was just as large at the Great Hall, though there were half as many people present – and everyone on the dancefloor knew what they were doing.

As he had the night before, Harry danced the first dance with Daphne – who was looking absolutely stunning in dress robes the colour of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. Harry twirled her around the dance floor, enjoying having the room to do so properly and not having to avoid people dancing like they were being electrocuted.

Daphne, who had of course been present for his discussion with Dumbledore the evening before,
seemed more amused by the article than anything, though she was just as puzzled about Skeeter’s source as Harry was.

“Unless Ludo Bagman told her.” Daphne commented halfway through their third dance. “He was sitting on Dumbledore’s right.”

“He is having money problems.” Harry agreed. “Maybe she offered to pay him for the story.”

“Is he?” Daphne looked amused. “How do you know that?”

“He tried to steal from Fred and George.” Harry admitted, before spinning her away from him and then pull her back. “Sirius is sorting him out though.”

Daphne’s lips twitched. “He must be desperate to steal from Weasleys.”

Harry chuckled. “I hadn’t considered it like that. Though by the sounds of it he did get a rather large number of galleons off them.”

“Really?” Daphne raised a surprised eyebrow.

“Well, large by Weasley and Bagman standards.” Harry admitted. “Not large by our standards.”

“Merlin, I’d think not.” Daphne laughed. “I don’t think anyone’s money standards are the same as yours. I don’t think I will ever get over your jewellery vault.”

“It will be your jewellery vault in a few years.” Harry reminded her with a grin. “I’m certainly not planning on wearing most of it.”

Daphne laughed again, curtsying as the music came to stop. “I should hope not.”

“Shall we get something to drink?” Harry suggested, offering Daphne his arm.

“Yes,” Daphne agreed. “All this dancing has left me feeling rather parched.”

They made their way to the side of the dance floor, towards one of the empty tables, before each ordering a drink and collecting it from the table when it appeared.

“Merlin, I love House Elves.” Harry admitted with a grin.

“They are useful.” Daphne agreed. “Though I don’t believe I would say that I love them exactly.”

Harry chuckled as he turned his attention towards the couples dancing. “Look there are Draco and Astoria.”

“They seem to be enjoying themselves.” Daphne commented, as they watched Draco twirled Astoria around.

“They do.” Harry agreed.

“Astoria had a wonderful time last night.” Daphne continued, her tone oddly neutral. “She told me that, for the first time in her life, she can imagine herself marrying him. Apparently he was attentive to her all night.”

“I’m glad.” Harry smiled in satisfaction.

“Did you say something to him?” Daphne asked curiously.
Harry glanced towards her, worried about how she might take it. “Yes. I was talking to Sirius and he suggested that perhaps I could encourage him to treat her better.”

Daphne slipped her gloved hand into his. “Thank you.”

“She will be my sister.” Harry explained. “How could I not?”

Daphne rewarded him with a bright smile. “You, Harry Potter, are the most gentlemanly wizard I have ever met.”

Harry looked back at the dancing and hoped that she wouldn’t see him blush.

34-34-34

One of the most interesting things about the Malfoys’ Ball was the opportunity to interact with adults who weren’t his professors and weren’t part of the Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix. Sirius spent at least an hour of the evening leading Harry around the room and introducing him to people like Lord Odgen, Lord Prince, Minister Fudge, Lord Burke, and the French Minister of Magic.

Harry had been introduced to most of them the year before, though this year he found it a lot easier to engage them in conversation. He didn’t know whether it was because he was a year older, or because they were more interested him now that he was a Triwizard Champion and seven months away from joining the Wizengamot.

“Quite the show you put on during the First Task, Mr. Potter.” Minister Fudge commented with a broad. “Your blasting spell is very impressive, very impressive indeed.”

Harry inclined his head. “Thank you, Minister. Were you there?”

“Merlin, no,” Fudge shook his head. “I’ve got a Ministry to run, dear boy, can’t just slip away whenever there’s something interesting going on.”

Harry swallowed down a sigh. What was it with everyone addressing him with such familiarity? First Dumbledore, then Skeeter, and now Fudge.

“I’m sorry to hear that, sir.” He replied neutrally. “Will you be at the Second Task?”

“No, no, I shouldn’t think so. It’s on a Friday, you see. Oh,” Fudge swallowed heavily. “Was I supposed to tell you that?”

“We’ve been told the date.” Harry reassured him. “Though I hadn’t yet looked to see what day of the week it will be.”

“Haven’t you?” Fudge peered at him in obvious confusion. “Why not?”

“I’ve been working out the clue.” Harry reminded him.

“Oh, of course.” Fudge smiled brightly. “And have you worked it out yet?”

“Yes,” Harry answered with a satisfied smile. “Now I am coming up with strategies.”

Fudge rubbed his hands together. “Excellent, excellent. I’ll be sorry to miss it.”

Harry inclined his head again. “I am sure your presence will be missed, Minister.”

“Of course,” Fudge agreed. “But can’t be helped I’m afraid.” He glanced around, before leaning
closer to Harry. “Anyway, Harry, I was hoping that I might have a word with you about another issue.”

Harry forced himself not to take a step back. “Yes, Minister?”

“About the article this morning.” Fudge explained. “You know, the one in the Daily Prophet.”


“Quietly, boy, quietly.” Fudge hissed.

“Sorry, sir.” Harry lowered his voice to match Fudge’s.

Fudge’s eyes darted around the room again and Harry wondered whether he realised just how suspicious that made him look.

Eventually, Fudge’s focus returned to Harry. “The article claimed that the Dark Arts were being taught at Hogwarts!”

“Yes, sir.” Harry agreed.

Fudge’s eyes widened in horror. “So it’s true then?”

“That depends on your definition of Dark Arts, Minister.” Harry pointed out.

Fudge’s mouth fell open. “My definition of Dark Arts?”

“Yes, sir.” Harry nodded seriously.

Fudge’s face began to turn red. “My definition is the same as everyone’s definition! The Dark Arts are...are dark!”

This time it was Harry whose gaze searched the room, looking for someone to rescue him from this conversation.

“Mr. Potter!” Fudge’s harsh whisper demanded his attention. “Does Dumbledore allow Dark Arts to be taught at Hogwarts or not?”

Harry considered the question for a moment. While Fudge’s definition of the Dark Arts had been far from helpful, he did suspect that by that definition none of the spells taught at Hogwarts were dark. On the other hand, if he said yes it would probably make it easier to oust Dumbledore from his position of headmaster, and technically, the Dark Arts were being taught.

“Yes, sir.”

“I knew it!” Fudge hissed in outrage. “Dumbledore is plotting against me!”

Harry only just managed to prevent himself from frowning incredulously at the Minister. “I beg your pardon, Minister?”

“He wants my position.” Fudge answered hurriedly. “He’s raising up an army of Dark wizards to attack the Ministry!”

Harry didn’t think he had ever heard anything quite so funny and it took everything he had not to burst out laughing. “Are you sure, Minister?”
Fudge opened his mouth, before apparently remembering who he was talking to. “I’d best be off, Mr. Potter.” He said with the fakest smile Harry had ever seen. “Enjoy your evening.”

“Thank you, sir.” Harry nodded. “You as well.”

“What?” Sirius barked with laughter, before quickly putting up a silencing spell when people turned to stare at them.

“Fudge thinks that Dumbledore is using Hogwarts to create an army of Dark Wizards to attack the Ministry.” Harry grinned. “I think he’s been reading too many history books about Manuel Gaunt.”

Sirius blinked blankly. “Who?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Remus would know who he was. He attempted to attack Minister Hesphaestus Gore in 1755 because he thought that he could run Ministry better. He was the first wizard to be sentenced to a Dementor’s Kiss.”

“Of course Remus would know it, he’s your History Professor!” Sirius pointed out. “Anyway, tell me exactly what Fudge said.”

“That’s it.” Harry told him. “Just that Dumbledore was using Hogwarts to create an army of dark wizards to attack the ministry because he wants to be Minister of Magic.”

Sirius shook his head. “Unbelievable. What got you onto the subject?”

“He asked me if Skeeter’s article was true.” Harry explained. “If there really are Dark Arts being taught at Hogwarts.”

“And you said no.” Sirius encouraged.

Harry bit his lip. “And I said that it depended on your definition of Dark Arts.”

“And then when he defined it, you said no, right?” Sirius asked.

“And then I said yes.” Harry said with a wince, he hadn’t considered what Sirius might think of his plan.

“Merlin!” Sirius ran a hand through his hair. “Why?”

“Because Lord Malfoy said that the article would help get rid of Dumbledore.” Harry explained.

Sirius groaned. “Bloody Lucius!”

Harry frowned worriedly. “Will it be bad?”

“No,” Sirius shook his head ruefully. “We should probably warn Lucius though. He’ll need to talk Fudge off his ledge.”

“Sorry.” Harry told him in a small voice.

“It’s fine.” Sirius said absently, before giving Harry his full attention. “Really, Harry, it’s fine! Hilarious, yes, but not a big problem, and you’re right, it probably will help oust Dumbledore from Hogwarts. Just…you remember how Lucius sometimes encourages you to have a little more subtly about things?”
"Yes."

"This is the sort of time when subtlety is useful." Sirius explained. "The article by itself was great, you setting a fire under Fudge’s arse is overkill."

Harry’s shoulders slumped. "Sorry."

"It’s fine!" Sirius told him again. "You live, you learn. You certainly gave me a laugh, and I can’t wait to see Lucius’ face.”
It was almost ten in the morning by the time that Harry made it down to breakfast after the Malfoys’ Yule Ball. He couldn’t believe how late he had slept, but did make some kind of sense. After all, he hadn’t gotten to bed until after midnight for two nights in a row now.

Neither Sirius or Remus were at the breakfast table since, according to the house elf who served him his breakfast, they had both eaten hours earlier. Harry’s stomach twisted in disappointment. Mealtimes were his favourite parts of the day when he was living at Grimmauld Place. Not because of the food, though it was a lot better than the food that was served at Hogwarts, but because of the opportunity to spend time with both Sirius and Remus.

Once he had finished his breakfast, Harry made his way to Sirius’ office and knocked gently on the door.

“Yeah?” Sirius’ voice sounded from inside.

Harry pushed the door open. “Good morning, Sirius.”

“Morning.” Sirius smiled widely and returned his quill to its holder. “Sleep well?”

“Yes,” Harry grimaced sheepishly. “I had no idea it was so late.”

Sirius chuckled. “I doubt many of your classmates would consider this late – especially in the holidays.”

“I’ve got so much to do though.” Harry protested.

Sirius looked amused. “Come have a seat, Harry. I’ve got some things I need to talk to you about.”

Harry studied his godfather carefully as he obeyed, looking for any clue about what Sirius might want to talk about.

“First,” Sirius started, looking almost guilty. “I’ve got a new rule for you. You are only allowed to study for six hours a day.”

“And by study, you mean homework?” Harry asked hopefully.

“By study, I mean anything that involves books, or the library.” Sirius corrected firmly. “That includes homework, and research about the Second Task, prophecies, and anything else you might be trying to research at the moment.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open in horror. “You can’t do that!”

Sirius raised an eyebrow. “I think you’ll find that I can.”

“But that doesn’t give me enough time!” Harry argued. “I’ve only got seven days until I go back to Hogwarts. That only gives me…” He paused a second to do the maths. “Forty two hours. I can’t finish my homework and do enough research for the Second Task in forty two hours!”

Sirius didn’t look sympathetic. “It’s up to you how you spend those hours, but Remus and I are both concerned about how much time you’re spending on work. And you know that it actually means something coming from Remus. You need to have some down time too, kiddo.”
Harry crossed his arms defensively. “I can’t believe you’re telling me I’m not allowed to study.”

“I’m not,” Sirius argued. “All I’m doing is putting limits on how much time you’re allowed to spend working. Everyone needs a break sometimes and I don’t want you to burn out halfway through the year.”

“You know, when I used to stay at Hogwarts over Christmas I spent the entire two weeks reading!” Harry pointed out. “I didn’t burn out then.”

Sirius sighed. “Don’t you think that’s a bit different though? Back then you were reading about things that interested you, now you’re doing research.”

Harry leaned forward. “So does that mean that I can still read, so long as I’m not doing research?”

“What sorts of things would you be reading about?” Sirius asked carefully.

“Well,” Harry considered it. “Theo gave me a new book on Ancient Runes for Christmas that looks interesting…”

Sirius grimaced. “I have no idea how anyone could possibly enjoy reading like you do, but yes, you can read that sort of thing. Just so long as you’re reading for enjoyment.”

Harry let out a relieved breath. “Thank you.”

“But I want to see you doing other things as well.” Sirius added sternly. “Play chess with Draco, take Daphne out for ice-cream, go to a movie.”

“I’m going to see a movie with Draco, Neville and the others on Wednesday.” Harry reminded his godfather.

Sirius nodded. “Right, yes. Remus agreed to take you, didn’t he?”

“Yes.” Harry agreed.

“Excellent.” Sirius looked towards the pile of parchment on his desk. “By the looks of things I’m going to be snowed down all week. Between yesterday’s headline in the Daily Prophet and your conversation with Fudge last night…”

Harry looked down. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine, pup.” Sirius grinned. “Lucius’ expression was definitely worth it. But it’s got Fudge all in a tizzy and he’s decided to try and force Dumbledore to accept Umbridge as a staff member at Hogwarts so that she can ensure there’s nothing funny going on.”

“Umbridge is his Senior Undersecretary, isn’t she?” Harry grimaced. “The one who hates werewolves.”

“That’s the one.” Sirius sneered.

“But there aren’t any open positions are there?” Harry asked with a frown.

“No, but Fudge wants to invent one.” Sirius sighed. “It’s all rubbish of course, and there’s no bloody way that it’ll get through the Wizengamot, but it means extra work for me.”

“Sorry.” Harry said again, if only he hadn’t wound Fudge up the day before.
“It’s not entirely bad.” Sirius told him comfortingly. “It’s going to make Fudge look like a paranoid idiot so, when the time comes, it’ll be easier to oust him as well as Dumbledore.”

Harry perked up at that. “Well, that’s good.”

“Yes,” Sirius agreed. “Still, and I can’t believe that I, a Gryffindor, am the one telling you this, subtlety is important. Maybe you should ask Lucius for some books on the subject.”

Harry narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “Would they count towards my six hours?”

Sirius shook his head with a laugh. “No.”

“Alright.” Harry agreed, standing up. “Thank you.”

Sirius gestured for him to sit again. “Actually, there’s something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

Harry sat slowly, taking in Sirius’ serious expression. “Yes?”

“I am sure you remember that when we went to Gringotts last week, Baknog pulled me aside for a word?” Sirius asked.

Harry nodded silently, he’d been wondering what that had been about.

“He wanted to talk to me about the Horcruxes.” Sirius explained.

Harry leant forward. “What about them?”

“Remus and I have had a long discussion about whether I ought to tell you this,” Sirius said, instead of answering Harry’s question. “And we decided that I would, partly because of the prophecy, and partly because we think that you have a right to know, but you can’t tell anyone.”

“I know.” Harry said quickly. “I haven’t even told Draco that they exist.”

“Good.” Sirius nodded, before lowering his voice. “Do you remember how many horcruxes You-Know-Who has?”

“Six.” Harry answered immediately. “I was one, and the Goblins had found two more.”

Sirius nodded. “They have found and destroyed the fourth one, and they know what and where the final two are.”

Harry let out a breath of relief. “Why did they tell you?”

“They need my…assistance in collecting the fifth one.” Sirius answered carefully. “I’m not going to tell you any more than that about that one, but the sixth one is his snake.”

Harry shuddereded at the thought of another living creature having to live with a piece of Voldemort’s soul inside them.

Sirius leaned forward. “I’m telling you this because, while Remus and I will do everything we can to keep you safe, we want you to have all the information in case something happens.”

“You mean in case Voldemort attacks me and I have the chance to kill his snake.” Harry said flatly, his stomach squirming at the very idea.

Sirius looked pained. “I will do everything I can to make sure that never happens, Harry.”
“I know.” Harry assured him. “But Voldemort is very powerful and you can’t keep me safe forever.”

“I can damn well try.” Sirius said stubbornly. “And as part of that, I’ve finally managed to get you permission to carry an emergency portkey. I’ve been working on it for months, ever since the World Cup, but it took a while for me and Amelia to sneak it under Fudge’s nose.”

“An emergency portkey?” Harry questioned. “Is that really necessary?”

“Hopefully not.” Sirius answered. “But you’ll wear it anyway.”

Harry nodded at Sirius’ stern command. “Of course.”

Sirius opened one of his desk drawers and pulled out a small wooden box. “Here, it’s activated if the person touching it says ‘sospes’.”

“Latin for safe.” Harry commented as he accepted the box and opened it, before pulling out the thin silver chain inside it.

“You’ll wear it around your neck.” Sirius instructed. “Do you still wear that pendant that Luna gave you last year? Because you could replace the chain with this one.”

Harry reached behind him to undo the pendant he was wearing. “Yes. Luna made me promise never to take it off and I couldn’t tell whether she was ‘seeing’ something or not, so I decided to do what she said – just in case.”

“Good idea.” Sirius grinned. “Have you figured out what it means yet?”

“Yes, ages ago.” Harry let the pendant drop from its original chain and began threading it onto the new one. “Apparently it’s the sign of the Deathly Hallows.”

“The what?” Sirius tilted his head to the side.

“The Deathly Hallows.” Harry repeated. “They’re from a legend. You probably know it as the Tale of the Three Brothers.”

“The children’s story?”

Harry nodded. “The wand, stone and cloak in the story are called the Deathly Hallows. The legend says that anyone who collects them all becomes the Master of Death.”

Sirius looked nonplussed. “Any idea why Luna gave it to you?”

Harry chuckled as he put the necklace back on. “No. She said that I was a third of the way there, whatever that means.”

“Maybe she thinks they’re real?” Sirius suggested.

“I considered that.” Harry admitted. “But if Luna thinks they’re real, then they probably are, and how crazy would that be?”

35-35-35

The rest of the Harry’s Christmas Holiday went smoothly and, while it was annoying to have a limit on how much he was allowed to study, he did enjoy taking the time to see his friends. Not only did he, Draco and Luna take Neville, Daphne, Theo and Blaise to their first muggle movie, but he also followed Sirius’ suggestion and took Daphne out for icecream – with Remus as their chaperone.
In fact, by the end of the holiday, Harry found that he had actually completed everything that he had hoped to. Not only was his homework done to its usual level, but he had also managed to come up with three different plans for the Second Task. The plans still needed some work, and he hadn’t decided which would be his primarily plan yet, but he still had a month and a half to work out the details.

As much as he hated to admit it, Sirius had probably been right in restricting his study time. Harry felt more relaxed than he had since Halloween and he’d been able to read three extra-curricular books – one that he’d gotten for Christmas, one that he’d been wanting to read for months, and one that Lord Malfoy had recommended to help him learn to be more subtle.

He knew things would get busier again once he was back at Hogwarts, but he hoped that it wouldn’t be as intense at it had been before the holidays. After all, after the Second Task he would have months to prepare for the Third Task, so he wouldn’t need to feel rushed about that.

As had become their custom, Harry met Remus, Takashi, and Neville at the Quidditch Pitch at six on their first morning at Hogwarts. It was nice to run at Hogwarts again, the trees and the lake definitely made for a more enjoyable backdrop than the streets around Grimmauld Place – not to mention that the air felt cleaner.

Breakfast was less enjoyable since, while he enjoyed Luna’s company, he found himself watching Sirius and Remus talking up at the Head Table and wishing he could join them. When the owls arrived, bringing with them the Daily Prophet, Harry frowned at the headline.

‘Minister Fudge Works To Protect Hogwarts Students From Dark Arts’

Sirius had spent the last week working to prevent Fudge from sending Umbridge to Hogwarts, an action that would require the Wizengamot’s approval, but Fudge seemed to be trying to get the public on his side. Harry wasn’t sure why the editor of the Daily Prophet continued to allow Fudge to use his newspaper to further his agenda, but he knew it was making Sirius’ life harder.

Harry felt guilty, after all, he was the reason any of this had started. It had been his conversation with Dumbledore that had caused the first article, and then his conversation with Fudge that had upset the Minister so much. He wasn’t sure what he’d do if Umbridge did get sent to Hogwarts because of his actions.

The drama didn’t just end there though as, at the beginning of Charms class, Ron Weasley interrupted Flitwick before their professor got his first sentence out.

“Professor?”

Flitwick looked surprised, understandably since it was rare anyone was rude enough to cut him off. “Ten points from Gryffindor for speaking out of turn, Mr. Weasley.”

“Are you going to be teaching us Dark Arts, Professor?” Weasley asked, apparently not deterred by Flitwick’s displeasure. “Because there is no bloody way I’m going to do it!”

Harry didn’t have to turn around to know that Weasley comment had been aimed at him.
“Mr. Weasley,” Flitwick was frowning. “I assure you that you are not being taught anything illegal.”

Harry wondered whether Weasley was intelligent to realise that Flitwick hadn’t denied that there were Dark Arts being taught. Unfortunately though, Weasley didn’t have to.

“Yes, Miss Granger?” Flitwick acknowledge the girl’s hand.

“Does that mean that there are Dark Art spells that aren’t illegal, Professor?” Granger asked from her seat in the front row.

“No way!” Weasley answered before Flitwick could. “All the Dark Arts are illegal! That’s why Azkaban’s filled with Dark Wizards.”

“Another ten points from Gryffindor, Mr. Weasley.” Flitwick told him.

“Professor?” Granger asked, her eyes fixed on him.

Flitwick looked around the class and Harry found himself feeling sorry for their professor. He had no idea how he would answer the question if he was in the professor’s place. It was one thing to believe that the Dark Arts weren’t evil, it was completely another thing to be questioned about it in this sort of setting.

“The term Dark Arts means different things to different people, Miss Granger.” Flitwick explained eventually. “According to the Ministry’s definition, which is the one that Mr. Weasley is familiar with, all Dark Magic is indeed evil.”

“Exactly.” Weasley sounded smug.

“Another ten points from Gryffindor.” Flitwick told him sternly. “I would have thought that as a fourth year you would have learnt to hold your tongue.”

Granger’s hand was back in the air. “Professor?”

“Yes, Miss Granger?” Flitwick asked wearily.

“Do you agree with the Ministry’s definition? What are the other definitions?” Granger asked, barely pausing between questions.

“If this is a subject that interests you I suggest you do some reading on the subject.” Flitwick told her, before sighing when Granger’s hand rose in the air again. “Yes?”

“Can you recommend any books, sir?”

Harry raised his hand without really thinking about it.

“Mr. Potter?” Flitwick acknowledged.

“Raczidian’s Treatise on Magic’ is a good place to start.” Harry suggested.

Weasley snorted loudly. “Of course bloody Potter has an idea, he’s as dark as they get!”

Harry twisted around in his seat to stare incredulously at his classmate, because really?

“Twenty points from Gryffindor!” Flitwick snapped. “And a detention with Mr. Filch.”

“Shut up, Weasley.” One of the Gryffindors hissed from the back of the room. “You’ve lost fifty
The rest of the class went by relatively smoothly, though Harry spent most of it kicking himself for saying anything. While Racizidian’s Treatise on Magic wasn’t actually among the many books that Ministry had banned, reading it was discouraged. And while he was sure no one in his class would have recognised that name of the book (aside from Flitwick), he had no doubt that his words would eventually find their way to someone who did. He could only hope that it didn’t end up in the Daily Prophet.

When the bell rang, Harry stood up and carefully packed his inkpot, quill, and parchment into his bag before following Neville out of the classroom.

“What was that?” Neville asked, as soon as they had put a little distance between themselves and the other students.

Harry groaned. “I know, I should have just kept my mouth shut.”

“Yes, probably.” Neville agreed. “Ron’s going to have a field day with this.”

“No to mention Skeeter.” Harry pointed out glumly.

Neville grimaced. “I didn’t think of that. Are you sure it’ll get back to her? I hear she’s been banned from the grounds.”

“Didn’t stop her from writing an exclusive about my conversation with Daphne at the end of the last term.” Harry pointed out. “Or my conversation with Dumbledore at the Yule Ball.”

Neville stopped in his tracks. “That was you? Are we really being taught Dark Arts?”

Harry shushed him, looking around to ensure that no one was nearby. “According to Racizidian’s Treatise? Yes, but his definition is very different from the Ministry’s definition.”

Neville looked unsettled as they began walking again. “Really?”

“Remember learning the Knockback Jinx?” Harry asked.

“Of course.” Neville nodded, before his mouth dropped open “Do you mean that it’s dark?”

Harry nodded.

“I think I should read this book.” Neville decided as they approached their Magical Theory Classroom.

“It’s pretty intense.” Harry warned. “And you’ll probably want to hide it from Weasley.”

“That’ll be easy.” Neville scoffed. “I’ll just spell the cover to look like a herbology book.”

Harry sat in his usual seat in their Magical Theory classroom, before reaching into his bag and pulling out his Charms Textbook. He placed it on his desk and levelled his wand at it before performing the switching spell they’d learnt in Transfiguration Class.

“Very nice.” Neville complimented, as the Charms textbook was suddenly replaced with an old, thick book.

Harry pushed it over to his friend. “Thanks. I think it’s one of the most exciting spells I’ve learnt.”
Neville waved his wand over the book while murmuring something and the cover of the book suddenly claimed to be ‘Flesh-Eating Trees of the World’. That done, he put it in his bag.

“Really, why?”

“Because when I was a first year, Takashi and Jeremy were learning how to do it.” Harry explained. “It seemed so incredible back then, especially given that we were just turning matchsticks into needles. I’d been looking forward to learning it since then.”

“It was the Herbivicus Charm for me.” Neville commented. “I read about it a few years ago. You can’t use it on all plants, but it’ll be incredibly useful.”

Harry frowned in thought. “That’s the spell that increases that growth rate of plants, right? I think I’ve read about it.”

“You would have.” Neville agreed. “We’re learning it this year, so it’s in the textbook.”

“Merry meet, Neville.” Draco greeted, suddenly dropping into the chair beside Harry. “Merry meet, Dark Lord Harry.”

Harry grimaced at his cousin. “What?”

“Haven’t you heard?” Draco asked, with a delighted grin. “You’re the next Dark Lord! Apparently you’re even trying to lure muggleborns over to the dark side. And in Charms class no less.”

Harry groaned. “Charms ended less than ten minutes ago, how did you find out?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “There are plenty of ways to communicate during classes. You can write on a piece of parchment, place it in the bottom of your bag, and then use a switching spell to send it to a friend. You can write it in a book that is magically connected to someone else’s book. Or you can send a charmed paper plane through the halls of Hogwarts to another class.”

Harry stared at him. “But we were in class.”

Neville chuckled. “Not everyone pays as much attention in class as you do, Harry.”

“Well, they should!” Harry pointed out. “Besides, wouldn’t Flitwick have noticed?”

“Hardly any of the professors notice.” Draco answered. “Snape does, obviously, so does McGonagall, but that’s about it.”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “How do you know so much?”

Draco’s eyes skirted to the side. “Sometimes I get bored.”

“You’ve never sent me a message.” Harry accused.

“Because we respect your love of learning too much to interrupt it.” Neville replied smoothly.

“You do it too?” Harry asked in disbelief. “Wait, were you the one who told Draco?”

Neville looked uncomfortable. “Uh…”

35-35-35
Chapter 35

‘Dark Arts Taught At Hogwarts: Students’ Reactions

Written by Rita Skeeter’

Harry sighed as he took in the Daily Prophet’s Headline. He supposed he should be glad that it didn’t say ‘Boy-Who-Lives Recommends Book on Dark Magic to Muggleborn Student’ or something thereabout. Still, despite the vagueness of the headline, he had no doubt that the article had been written about his stupid comment in Charms class the day before.

He skimmed through the first two paragraphs. The first one was just Skeeter rabble rousing, and the second one contained quotes from three different students, Ron Weasley, Andrew Diggle, and Angelina Johnson, who were shocked and horrified at the idea that dark magic might be being taught at Hogwarts. Of course Harry thought he might have held their opinions in greater esteem if they hadn’t all come from notoriously light and anti-traditional families.

Harry had to stifle a frustrated sigh when he began the third paragraph. It was everything that he had expected.

‘There are of course some students who do not seem all concerned that dark magic is included in their curriculum. The identity of many of these students are unsurprising, after all, one would hardly expect otherwise from the children of Death Eaters, but there are a few shocking names. Perhaps the most shocking of all is Harry Potter, better known to many as ‘The Boy-Who-Lived’, who seems to actively support the teaching of dark magic at Hogwarts. According to Ron Weasley, one of Potter’s classmates, Potter has even been known to recommend books on the Dark Arts to other students. “Potter’s as dark as they get,” Weasley told me. “And he doesn’t even try to hide it.”’

The following few weeks went about as well as Harry had expected that they would. While the article made no difference to his friends’ perceptions of him, the most of the school regarded him with suspicion. The older students glared at him through narrowed eyes and occasionally would shove him, or try and hit him with a jinx, meanwhile many of the younger students would gasp and shiver in fear as he walked by them. It was disheartening to be regarded with so much fear and hate, though perhaps the most off-putting reaction came from the students with Death Eater connections who watched him with anticipation and excitement – as though his presumed loyalty to their side was going to win them the war.

Harry didn’t know how he would have coped with it all if it hadn’t been for Sirius, Remus and his friends. Sirius had even offered to sue the Daily Prophet for slander, but Harry had decided against it. After all, nothing the Daily Prophet had printed was actually untrue – even if they couldn’t possibly know for sure that his magic was dark – and Harry didn’t want to go on public record as having protested being called dark. He was still hoping that one day their world wouldn’t view dark magic as a synonym for evil.

Still, as frustrating as the school’s reaction was Harry was too busy to really let it bother him too much. When he wasn’t in classes he was either practising his wandless magic and animagus forms with his friends, practising duelling with Sirius, flying with his friends, Viktor, and other Durmstrang students, or doing his homework and researching in Hoth. The only times that he had to deal with the suspicious and fearful glares was in classes and during mealtimes, but in classes he could easily focus his attention on the professor and at mealtimes Luna kept him pretty well distracted.
Still, it was a relief when things started to go back to normal three weeks after Rita’s article had been published. Harry wasn’t sure why things were going back to normal, but he suspected that the school had just gotten bored of hating him. Or maybe his lack of suspicious and dark behaviour had put them all at ease.

Of course, there were still a handful of people who seemed determined to believe that he was a Death Eater including Ron and Ginny Weasley, Dean Thomas, his dorm mates, and the second Beauxbatons champion – Aceline Moreau. It wouldn’t have bothered Harry that much, except it made thing hard for Fred and George, and he was a little concerned that Anthony might try to be a hero and murder him in his sleep. (He’d even put a parselmagic protection spell around his bed to keep anyone who wasn’t a parselmouth out).

Harry wasn’t sure what was happening in the Weasley family. His only sources of information were Fred and George and they hadn’t been saying much about it. Still, from what he could figure out, nothing had really changed since before Christmas. Lord Prewett and Percy were still refusing to give up the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett, Mrs. Weasley was still threatening to disown them over it, Mr. Weasley was still refusing to disown them, Charlie was still in Romania, Ron was still telling anyone who would listen that he hoped his brothers were disowned, and Fred and George were still on Lord Prewett and Percy’s side – but were unwilling to join the House of Prewett in case it got them disowned. The only thing that seemed to have changed was that Ginny had apparently chosen a side, and was now agreeing with Ron on the fact that their brothers were disgracing their House and ought to be disowned – albeit a little less passionately. Harry honestly didn’t see how it was going to be resolved, at least not without an awful lot of pain for most of the people involved.

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“Here.”

Harry looked up from the book he was reading and accepted the book Neville was passing to him.

“Flesh-Eating Trees of the World?” Theo asked curiously, reading the title of the book. “Is that something that we’re going to be studying in Herbology?”

“Oh, right.” Neville pulled out his wand and tapped it on the cover of the book to return it to normal.

“Racizidian’s Treatise.” Theo read the real title of the book. “What’s that?”

“It’s on…”

“It’s about…” Harry and Neville both started, before stopping and looking at each other.


Harry nodded in thanks. “It’s the book on the Dark Arts that Skeeter reported that I’d recommended. Neville was interested, so I lent it to him.”

“What did you think, Neville?” Draco asked with interest.

“It was…” Neville paused. “Different.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “I really struggled with it at first. It quite contradictory to what we’re taught here.”

“Not in all classes though.” Neville argued. “I can’t remember Professor Flitwick ever saying anything that contradicts it. If the last few weeks are an indication he usually just leaves out the bits
of theory that would be relevant.”

“Interesting.” Draco commented, before turning to Harry. “Do you think he might be dark?”

“Do goblins have dark and light magic?” Harry asked.

“He’s only half-goblin.” Daphne pointed out. “And he uses a wand for his magic – goblins don’t.”

“True, though he could just be using a wand so that he fits in.” Harry suggested.

Daphne looked unconvinced. “That would make it hard for his to teach though, wouldn’t it? Especially when he’s teaching the first years. Most of what they learn is wand movements.”

“True.” Harry acknowledged. “Though he does use more wandless magic than our other professors. He never uses his wand to pass things out like McGonagall does.”

“So, Neville, anything else to say about the book, other than different?” Draco prompted.

“It all made sense.” Neville answered, before grinning wryly. “Can you imagine my Gran’s face if she heard me say that?”

Harry produced a fake shudder. “A more terrible sight I never have imagined.”

“There was one part that confused me though.” Neville continued.

“Oh?”

“Let’s say that it’s true,” Neville started.

Harry winced. “How about we say that it’s true to our understanding, but likely not comprehensive.”

Neville rolled his eyes. “Fine, let’s say that, why did dark magic become so vilified?”

“Vilified?” Theo asked incredulously. “Who even uses those kinds of words?”

“Aside from Harry?” Draco asked.

“Obviously, Harry’s a Ravenclaw – they all use ridiculously old and complicated words.” Theo agreed.

“You make a good point.” Draco nodded seriously, though there was an amused glint in his eye. “Neville’s a Gryffindor. When was the last time any of us heard one of them use a word that had more than two syllables.”

“Clearly you have never been in a conversation with Hermione Granger.” Neville told them. “Sometimes listening to her is a bit like listening to a spoken version of a textbook.”

“That’s because she just regurgitates the textbooks.” Harry explained dismissively. “At least that’s what she does in class. The majority of her answers are word for word from either the textbook, or the other recommended readings.”

“And that, Harry, it what makes you a Ravenclaw.” Theo grinned. “Not only have you read the textbook and the recommended readings, but you actually remember them enough to know when someone is reciting them.”

“By that logic Granger would be a Ravenclaw too.” Harry pointed out.

Harry took a moment to recall the question. “Oh, right, because while not all dark wizards are evil there have been some that were and we are currently experiencing the backlash from that. Not to mention that Voldemort is definitely not helping.”

“So dark wizards are more likely to be evil?” Neville asked tentatively.

“Of course not.” Draco bristled. “But right now, we’re the ones with motive to try and change things and while some wizards, like my Father, are content to do that legally, some wizards aren’t. An evil light wizard is much less likely to try and take over Magical Britain since their side is already controlling it.”

Neville seemed to consider that carefully, before nodding. “That explains the now, but if there have been evil light wizards, as well as evil dark wizards, why is the backlash only happening against dark wizards?”

“Remember how Remus has been teaching about The Ancient and Royal House of Wendex?” Harry asked. “

“Yes.” Neville agreed. “He is a thousand times better than Binns.”

Harry smiled proudly. “He is, isn’t he? Anyway, the House of Wendex was light, though they were very careful to maintain a healthy respect and balance between light magic and dark magic. But when the Maison Ancienne et Royal Carolingienne was cursed, killing most of the House of Wendex, the curse used was dark and the wizard who used it was known to be dark. By the time anyone got around to deciding what to do about it, the rest of the House of Wendex had been assassinated and those assassins were presumed to be dark as well – though it was never proven.”

“Ah, so people blamed all dark wizards?” Neville asked.

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “I think Remus is going to be talking about this next month – it’s in our textbook.”

“And without the House of Wendex around to defend dark wizards they were all vilified.” Neville concluded.

“Yes, in England and France. Then a few hundred years after that Grindelwald rose to power and he was as further proof that dark wizards were evil.” Harry explained.

“And now You-Know-Who.” Neville added.

“Right,” Harry agreed. “So it is becoming increasingly ingrained in people’s minds that dark equals evil. After all, there haven’t been any light wizards who have tried to take over Britain.”

“Except that Grindelwald never actually claimed to have dark magic.” Draco put in.

Neville whipped his head around to face Draco. “What?”

“And if you were to ask the Durmstrang students about Grindelwald, they would likely tell you that they don’t know.” Harry added. “He’s not a parselmouth, so the only way to tell is by considering the spells he used.”

“And while some people, such as Dumbledore, claim that all his spells were dark,” Draco added. “Other people claim that he used more light spells than he did dark spells.”
“How is this not public knowledge?” Neville looked flabbergasted.

“Because Dumbledore has appointed himself to be the benevolent dictator of Britain.” Draco sneered. “And who would dream of contradicting him?”

“There is one more piece of information though.” Daphne added quietly. “Something that my grandmother told me.”

“Oh?” Harry turned towards her in interest.

“Apparently, Grindelwald was related to the House of Bagshot.” Daphne told them. “My grandmother is friends with his Great-Aunt, Bathilda.”

“That can’t be true.” Theo denied. “She’d have to be older than Dumbledore.”

Daphne shot him a dark look. “Are you calling me a liar, Theo? Or is it my Grandmother that you’re doubting?”

Theo swallowed heavily. “Neither.

“But the House of Bagshot is notoriously light.” Neville commented in disbelief. “Bathilda Bagshot is friends with my gran. She’s friends with Dumbledore!”

“It doesn’t necessarily mean that Grindelwald was light.” Harry pointed out. “Both my parents were light and I’m dark.”

“No,” Daphne agreed. “But it is interesting, don’t you think?”

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“Potter!”

Harry stopped and looked around for source of the voice.

“Potter!”

Harry looked around and winced inwardly as he saw Granger striding towards him. The last time he had spoken to Granger, he’d ended up being ostracized by the school for weeks. Admittedly it hadn’t actually been her fault, but Harry wasn’t exactly in a hurry to repeat the experience. Besides, he didn’t really like Granger. The only interaction he had ever really had with her was being on the receiving end of her glares whenever he got a higher grade than her.

“Merry meet, Granger.” Harry greeted her formally as she stopped in front of him.

Granger pushed her hair out of her face and frowned at him in confusion. “What?”

“Merry meet.” Harry repeated patiently.

“Oh,” Granger nodded in comprehension. “That’s the salutation that witches and wizards used in Magical Britain in the eighteenth century.”

Harry felt bemused. “It is. It’s also commonly used in modern times.”

“No, it’s not.” Granger denied. “Now people just say hi, or hello, or good morning.”

“Non-traditionalists do.” Harry allowed. “But traditionalists still use the older greeting.”
“Why?” Granger asked brusquely. “It’s archaic. Muggles don’t go around saying ‘how do you do’ to each other.”

“What do you want, Granger?” Harry asked stiffly, glad that Draco hadn’t been around to hear that. He doubted that his cousin would have taken her rudeness well.

Granger looked frustrated. “I can’t find that book you recommended anywhere! I asked Madame Pince and she banned me from the library for a week. A week!”

“I’m not surprised.” Harry told her sympathetically. “Racizidian’s Treatise isn’t exactly on the Ministry’s Recommended Reading List.”

Granger looked excited. “The Ministry puts out a Recommended Reading List?”

Harry frowned at her. “Not that I know of. I was…never mind. What are you hoping that I’ll be able to do?”

“Lend me the book.” Granger said bluntly. “I asked Neville, but he said that I needed to talk to you about it.”

Harry considered it. On the bright side, this was what he’d talked to Dumbledore about at the Yule Ball – educating muggleborns on dark magic and traditionalist. Dumbledore had refused, of course, but here was a muggleborn who was interested in learning – how could Harry turn her down?

One the not-so-bright side, if Ron Weasley or Rita Skeeter (or Dumbledore for that matter) found out that he’d lent a book on dark magic to a muggleborn the consequences would not be pretty.

“Well?” Granger asked impatiently.

“You have to swear that you’ll keep it safe.” Harry told her. “And you can’t tell anyone that you’re reading it or that I lent it to you.”

Granger’s eyes narrowed. “It’s not against the rules, is it?”

“Of course not.” Harry answered, half truthfully.

“Fine.” Granger nodded sharply.

“Alright, I’ll bring it with me to Charms tomorrow.” Harry told her.

“Fine.” Granger said again, before turning and walking away.

Harry watched her go in bemusement, before making his way to Ancient Runes. That had been decidedly odd.

Sirius honestly couldn’t think of a better year for him to be at Hogwarts. Technically he was only supposed to be interacting with the students when his duty as a Triwizard Tournament Judge called for it, but he’d be damned if he was going to give up the opportunity to look out for Harry. And it was a good thing too. Between the Triwizard Tournament, and Harry’s determination to become an animagus, his godson had a lot on his plate.

Sirius hadn’t really considered the ramifications of giving Harry the book on becoming an animagus, and he doubted that Remus had either. In fact, Sirius didn’t think that he’d ever really understood how dangerous the animagus transformation could be. He certainly hadn’t when he and James had
started the process aged thirteen and, since nothing bad had happened to them, he’d never considered that it might go wrong for some people.

Well, at least, not until the first time he invited himself along to Harry’s animagus practises and watched ten teenagers attempt a complex human transfiguration. Then all he could think about were the multiple different ways that Harry and his friends could seriously injure or disfigure themselves. Since then he hadn’t missed a single one of their practises, though thankfully there hadn’t been any major disasters that he’d needed to fix. Well, aside from the time that Blaise Zabini couldn’t figure out how to get rid of his tail.

It was interesting to watch the process as an adult. Sirius didn’t remember much from his and James transformation process, but then something would happen and it would remind him of a specific memory. Like the time that James couldn’t figure out how to get rid of his antlers and had spent over an hour panicking over it. Or the fact that James had managed the transformation an entire month before Sirius (and six months before Peter).

Similarly, Harry, who was working towards an owl animagus form, was ahead of all his friends and almost ready for his complete transformation. He had managed to transform all four of his limbs and his torso, and was now just working on his head – the most dangerous part.

Neville wasn’t far behind, though when he transformed his torso the fur was amusingly patchy. Draco, Daphne and Takashi had all just finished transforming their fourth limbs and were beginning to work on transforming their torso. While Luna, Theo, Fred and George were all working on transforming their legs. Blaise Zabini, who was going to be a dormouse animagus, was probably the furthest behind, having only managed to transform his arms, and give himself a tail and whiskers. Sirius had to work at ignoring the similarities between Blaise and Peter (both had rodent animagi, both took longer than their friends).

Sirius leaned back in the chair that the Come and Go Room had provided for him and watched as Harry’s eyebrows suddenly transformed so that they were made out of feathers. It looked painful. At least his own form only had hair sticking out of his skin, the thought of having the thick shafts of feathers sticking out of his face was a little horrifying.
“How are you feeling, Harry?”

Harry turned his attention away from the windows that the owls used as an entrance to the Great Hall and towards Jeremy who had spoken to him. Harry had barely seen Jeremy all year, and the only times he’d seen the older boy the year before was during Quidditch Practises, but he was glad that he and Takashi had chosen to sit with him.

“How are you feeling, Harry?” Harry answered, before glancing back to see whether or not the owls had arrived yet.

“You look a little stressed.” Jeremy commented.

“Of course he’s stressed.” Takashi rolled his eyes. “He’s got less than an hour till the start of the Second Task.”

Harry’s stomach squirmed at the reminder. How was it already the 24th of February? And why hadn’t the owl post arrived yet? The Gillyweed, which he would be using to help him breathe underwater, was supposed to be arriving this morning and he would feel much better once it was in his hands.

He had backup plans of course, a total of ten of them (though the plans from six through to ten were a bit bonkers), but he really wanted to go with his first plan. Plan two involved using the Gillyweed that had arrived by owl the day before, but the fresher Gillyweed would last longer. Plan three, which he didn’t really need anymore, involved begging some Gillyweed of Professor Snape, and plan four was to use the Bubblehead Charm that Cousin Ted has suggested.

“Here they come.” Luna commented quietly from his side and Harry looked up in hope as the owls flooded into the room.

He searched for Hedwig amongst the many brown and black owls and grinned as he saw her swooping down towards him a small box clasped in her foot. He could do this.

“So, Harry,” Jeremy started, as Harry fed Hedwig a few pieces of bacon. “What’s your plan?”

“You can’t ask him that!” Takashi rebuked him.

“Why not?” Jeremy asked defensively.

“What if one of the other Champions overhears?”

Jeremy snorted. “He’s a fourth year, no offence, Harry. Do you really think that any of the seventh years are going to be so stuck for ideas that they’ll steal his?”

Harry didn’t know why Jeremy thought saying ‘no offence’ would take away the sting of his statement. Though to be fair, he didn’t exactly disagree. He doubted he’d be half as worried about the Task if he was the same age as the other Champions.

“What kind of House loyalty is that?” Takashi asked, with a frown.

“The realistic kind.” Jeremy returned. “He’s going up against Viktor Krum!”

“Who he’s already beaten once.” Takashi pointed out.
“So Harry has a bloody brilliant blasting curse,” Jeremy acknowledged. “I doubt that’s going to be what they’re testing today. We’re meeting down at the lake.”

“So Harry has a bloody brilliant blasting curse,” Jeremy acknowledged. “I doubt that’s going to be what they’re testing today. We’re meeting down at the lake.”

“Speaking of which,” Takashi gestured over Harry’s shoulder. “Harry, I think Professor Flitwick is coming over to get you.”

Harry twisted around to see his Head of House walking towards him, before gripping the parcel that Hedwig had brought him tightly in his hand and standing up.

“Good luck, Harry,” Luna smiled up at him.

“Thanks, Luna.” Harry reached out a hand a squeezed her shoulder. “I’ll see you and Neville afterwards.”

“Of course you will.” Luna agreed brightly.

“Merry meet, Mr. Potter, Miss Lovegood.” Flitwick greeted as he approached them.

“Merry meet, Professor.” Harry agreed. “Is it time to go?”

“It is.” Flitwick nodded. “Are you all prepared?”

“Yes, sir.” Harry swallowed heavily as the followed his professor out of the Great Hall.

“Got the puzzle all figured out then?” Flitwick asked curiously.

“Of course, Professor.” Harry smiled down at him. “I’d hardly be worth my weight as a Ravenclaw if I couldn’t figure out one little puzzle.”

Flitwick chuckled. “Yes, I imagine that our doorknocker has certainly given you enough practise over the years. Do you mind me asking what your strategy will be?”

Harry looked around to ensure that no one was nearby, before opening the parcel that Hedwig had brought and showing Flitwick the Gillyweed.

“Ah, most impressive.” Flitwick said approvingly. “You will do Ravenclaw proud.”

“Thank you, Professor.” Harry acknowledged, before returning the parcel to his pocket.

“I do hope you aren’t planning on wearing your robes into the lake, however.” Flitwick commented.

Harry chuckled. “No, sir. I’ve got a swimsuit underneath.”

“Excellent.” Flitwick sounded pleased. “I believe you are to wait over there.”

Harry looked over to where Flitwick was pointing and took in the sight of Cedric, Viktor and Nynke who were already waiting. “Thank you, sir.”

The three other Champions bowed as Harry approached. “Merry meet.”

“Merry meet.” Harry agreed with a nod.

“Nice day for it, isn’t it?” Cedric commented, looking up at the clear sky.

“Not really.” Harry disagreed.

Viktor frowned. “You would rather the weather was different?”
“I would rather it was any season except winter.” Harry told him. “It can’t be more than five degrees out here.”

“At least it is not snowing.” Nynke pointed out. “And the lake is not covered in ice.”

Harry shivered at the thought. “True. Thank you for putting it into perspective for me.”

“You are welcome.” Nynke looked amused.

“Here come the Beauxbaton girls.” Cedric murmured quietly. “They don’t look very happy.”

Harry watched as Fleur and Acéline followed Madame Maxime towards them. Both girls were wearing their school uniforms and looked even colder than he felt.

“Their uniforms are hardly made for this kind of weather.” Harry pointed out. “At least our robes are thick.”

“It don’t see why their robes aren’t thicker.” Cedric commented. “It’s not any warmer in France.”

Fleur and Acéline both curtsied to Harry and Cedric as they reached them, though Acéline looked as though she would rather be cursing them.

“Merry meet.” Harry greeted them with a smile. “Horrible day for it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, eet is.” Fleur agreed, moving to stand beside Cedric and slipping her hand into his.

“At least it is not snowing.” Nynke said again. “And there isn’t any ice.”

Fleur shivered visibly. “Do not speak of such zings. Eet is bad enough zat we will be entering ze water at all.”

“Fleur!” Acéline rebuked sharply, before continuing in French. “You should not give away such hints to our opponents.”

Fleur rolled her eyes dismissively, as replied in French. “Really, Acéline. It is not as though they do not already know that we will be entering the lake.”

Acéline’s face twisted in anger. “I doubt that Potter knows what day it is.”

Harry raised an eyebrow in amusement. “I thank you for your concern, Mademoiselle Moreau, but I assure you, I am well prepared for today’s task.”

Acéline looked at him in surprised disdain, having apparently forgotten that both Harry and Cedric spoke fluent French, before pointedly turning away.

The spectators began to make their way towards the stands that had been arranged around the lake and Harry found his stomach twisting uncomfortably at the sheer number of them. He distracted himself by looking for his friends amongst the crowd. The problem was that unlike Quidditch games the stands weren’t separated by Houses and so there was no way to narrow down his search.

After a few minutes, Sirius and the other judges arrived and Bagman instructed Harry and the other Champions to get ready.

Harry moved to stand on the bank of the lake, leaving ten feet between him and Cedric and Viktor who were to his left and right, before shrugging off his robes and letting them pool on the ground behind him.
It was freezing!

Harry clenched the fresh Gillyweed in his fist and used his other hand to cast a wandless warming charm on his leg. What a ridiculous time of year to go swimming in the lake. Thank Merlin that Gillyweed would hold his body deal with the cold.

As Bagman began to announce the rules of the task to the spectators, Harry checked that the pouch containing the older Gillyweed was still attached to his belt. He hoped he wouldn’t need it, since the fresher Gillyweed was supposed to last for an hour, but it was good to have a backup plan in case he was under the water for longer than he expected to be. He had wanted to have a language potion as well, just in case he needed to communicate with the Merpeople, but he’d only thought of that a few days before the Task and by then it had been too late to make some.

“…On the count of three, then.” Bagman’s voice echoed around the lake. “One…”

Harry stuffed the Gillyweed into his mouth.

“Two…”

Harry began chewing as quickly as he could.

“Three!” Bagman finished as a whistle blew loudly.

Harry began to swallow the Gillyweed, ignoring how slimy it felt against his throat, and strode forward into the lake.

The water was icy and his feet immediately began to numb, making it even harder to make his way across the slippery stones, but then suddenly the Gillyweed took effect and Harry had to dive shallowly into the water in order to breathe.

As he took his first breath of water, Harry was interested to realise that it felt different than it had during his practises. Understandable, since he’d practised in the Prefects’ Bath rather than the lake, but he hadn’t expected the water to feel so clean and refreshing as it passed through his gills.

Still, there was no time to dwell on the difference, so Harry kicked his feet and began to make his way out into the lake. The power behind his kicks surprised him and, when he began using his transformed hands to help him move, he was amazed to realise that was moving faster than his fastest running sprint. Well, that would be helpful.

After he felt as though he was far enough away from the shore, Harry paused and clumsily pulled his wand out of his wrist holster. Bollocks, he hadn’t considered how hard it would be to hold a wand with webbed hands.

He tried to lay the wand across the palm of his hand to perform the Four-Point spell, but found that it kept trying to float away. Still, after a few tries, he managed to keep it on his palm long enough to say the incantation.

“Point Me Merpeople Village.” Harry watched in frustration as a bubble of air exited his mouth instead of any sound.

Bloody hell, he really ought to have gotten over his dislike of cold and spent some time practising in the lake. He had been short sighted to think that practising the spells out of water and trying the Gillyweed in the Prefects’ Bath was enough preparation.

It took multiple tries, and a wasted five minutes, but eventually Harry managed to cast the spell...
wordlessly and had a direction to head – north east. The loss of five minutes was frustrating, but he supposed that it was better than spending half an hour swimming in the wrong direction.

Harry set off in the direction that the wand had pointed as quickly as he could. He didn’t want to lose any more time.

The lake seemed endless, he swam, and swam, and swam, and swam, and nothing really seemed to change. The water was still green, the weed was still green, the mud at the bottom of the lake was still black. Every now again he would see a school of small fish fleeing away from him.

Three times gangs of grindylows tried to accost him, but Harry easily despatched them with wordless spells. The first time he had decapitated them, but after realising that their blood then entered the water than he was breathing, he’d stuck with just stunning and repelling them.

After what felt like fifteen minutes, Harry began to hear the familiar sound of the Merpeople singing – though the song was different than it had been in the Golden Egg. About a minute after that, he noticed that there was no more weed. Instead large boulders lay on the bottom of the lake, some of which were covered in crude drawings of Merpeople.

Then, suddenly, there were no more boulders, and he was swimming past stone caves that obviously served as homes for the Merpeople. As Harry swam through the village, Merpeople began to emerge from their caves and stare at him. They seemed entertained to see him and occasionally one of them would point at him. Harry was pretty sure that at one point he saw a group of them laughing. He supposed that he probably looked a bit strange to them.

Eventually, Harry made his way to the centre of the village where a choir of Merpeople was singing the song that had drawn him to their village.

Looking around, Harry tried to find whatever it was that he was supposed to retrieve. That was the part of the clue that he had quite figured out. What was it that they had taken from him?

Suddenly, Harry spotted six people tied to the tail of ginormous statue of a Merperson that stood in the middle of the village square. Surely not! The Tournament organisers wouldn’t have actually taken a person, would they?

Swimming closer, Harry was horrified to recognise one of the people as Daphne. He sped towards her, his heart in his stomach, and was relieved to see that small streams of bubbles were coming from her mouth.

As Harry wordlessly cast a spell to cut through the ropes holding Daphne captive, the Merpeople’s song changed.

“... your time’s half gone, so tarry not

Lest what you seek stays here to rot...”

That was worrying. Harry gripped hold of Daphne, to prevent her from floating to the surface, and took in the other five captives. There was a small blond girl who was probably related to Fleur, a Hufflepuff seventh year that Harry recognised as being Cedric’s best friend, and three other people who Harry only recognised as being the people that Viktor, Nynke, and Aceline had taken to the Yule Ball.

What if the other Champions didn’t make it? Would that mean that these people would rot?

No, Harry shook his head firmly, of course they wouldn’t. Sirius was one of the judges and, while
Harry knew that his godfather hadn’t been happy with some parts of the tasks (especially the use of the Dementor in the first task), there was no way that Sirius would allow these students to die.

That decided, Harry tightened his hold on Daphne’s arm and kicked off the ground hard. All he had to do now was get back to the edge of the lake.

The trip back was a bit harder since he had to drag Daphne along with him, but this time he made sure to swim closer to the surface to avoid coming into contact with any grindylows. Eventually though, the lake began to rise and meet with the surface and Harry began to consider another downside of Gillyweed.

He thought he probably had another fifteen minutes left before he could breathe above water again, but he would reach the edge of the lake in less than two minutes. What was he supposed to do for that extra eight minutes? Just lie in the water – looking like an idiot?

Eventually, the water was only a few feet deep and Harry allowed his head to break the surface. Well, he’d judged his direction well – he was only about twenty feet away from where he had entered the lake.

“Merry meet, Harry.” Daphne greeted him with a smile.

Startled, Harry whipped his head around to face her. “Merry meet.” He attempted to say, but only managed a sort of gurgle.

“Thank you for rescuing me.” Daphne smiled sweetly, pushing herself to her feet.

Harry smiled back, before his need for oxygen became too great and he was forced to submerge his head again.

Daphne moved away from Harry, towards the shore. Harry almost stopped her, before realising how cold she had to be without Gillyweed to keep her warm.

It took another ten minutes, but eventually Harry could feel his feet and hands transforming back to their usual state and then suddenly he couldn’t breathe. Harry pushed himself to his feet and quickly stumbled out of the lake – eager to get away from the icy water.

“Well done, Harry!” Sirius greeted him, wrapping a warm blanket around Harry’s shoulders. “You were the first one back.”

“Is anyone else back yet?” Harry asked, looking behind him at the lake. He’d presumed that his delay in being able to surface would mean someone would beat him back.

“Yes, Diggory arrived back a few minutes ago.” Sirius pointed to where Daphne, Cedric, the other Hufflepuff seventh year, and Fleur were being fussed over by Madame Pomfrey in front of a small tent.

“And Fleur?” Harry asked.

“No, she was attacked by grindylows in the first half hour and had to be rescued.” Sirius explained. Harry grimaced sympathetically. “Her person is going to be alright though, isn’t she?”


Harry let out a relieved sigh and followed Sirius over to the tent, before allowing Pomfrey to fuss
over him. She replaced the blanket the Sirius had given him with another one and then handed him a potion vial.

“Drink it quickly.” She instructed sternly.

Harry did as ordered, wincing when the hot potion scolded his tongue. It was strange to feel steam gushing out his ears, but he welcomed the warmth that rushed through his body.

“What did you use?” Cedric asked curiously as Pomfrey bustled away to care for Nyke who had just arrived with her hostage in tow.

“Gillyweed.” Harry answered, wrapping the blanket closer around him. “You?”

“Bubble-Head charm.” Cedric answered.

“Ah.” Harry acknowledged, before turning to Daphne who was wrapped in a blanket of her own. “Are you alright?”

“Of course.” Daphne told him. “Congratulations on being the first one back. I expected no less of you.”

“If I’d known that it was you that they had taken I would have gone faster.” Harry said, though he wasn’t sure what he would have changed.

Daphne looked surprised. “You didn’t know?”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “I had no idea.”

It took another ten minutes for Viktor break the surface of the lake, and then another five for Aceline to appear, but eventually they were all back on dry land.

Almost immediately, ten more heads – one blond and nine dark – bobbed to the surface of the lake and Fleur let out a cry of relief.

“Gabrielle!”

Once everyone was dry, and warm, and Dumbledore had exchanged words with one of the Merpeople, the judges secluded themselves to decide on the Champions scores.

Harry felt a lot more confident than he had before the scoring of the First Task. He knew he’d done well, though admittedly the use of Gillyweed wasn’t as advanced as Viktor’s partial human transfiguration. Of course, if McGonagall’s rants on the subject were to be believed, it was as stupidly dangerous either.

“Just one more task to go.” Daphne commented, slipping her hand into Harry’s.

“Thank Merlin!” Harry agreed. “And that’s not for another four months.”

“Any idea what it will be?” Daphne asked.

“No.” Harry shook his head. “And I’m not even going to worry about it for at least another week. Not until I’ve handed in my Ancient Runes essay.”

“Of course, by then, you’ll probably have a Potions Essay and a Charms Essay due.” Daphne pointed out.
Harry groaned. “Don’t remind me. I’m looking forward to next year.”

“Next year is our OWL year.” Daphne reminded him.

“I’m already doing my Ancient Runes OWL year.” Harry pointed out. “Besides, at least I won’t have any Triwizard Tasks to be worrying about.”

“No,” Daphne agreed. “You’ll just have a seat in the Wizengamot to concern yourself with.”

Harry sighed. “I know. I’m mostly looking forward to it, though it would be nice to have a quiet year.”

“Last year was a quiet year.” Daphne reminded him.

“It was nice.” Harry remembered. “I liked it. Nothing to do except study, read, play Quidditch, and spend time with friends.”

Daphne opened her mouth, but closed it again when Bagman’s voice began echoing around the lake.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are ready to award the champions their points! Each champion will receive marks out of fifty. These marks will be based on the method each champion used, the time it took them, and additional details that Merchiefstainness Murcus has provided regarding exactly what happened at the bottom of the lake.”

Harry rolled his eyes in frustration as Bagman paused dramatically.

“Fleur Delacour,” Bagman started again. “Cast an excellent Bubble-Head Charm, but was waylaid by the grindylows and was unable to retrieve her hostage. We award her twenty-five points.

“Aceline Moreau also used a Bubble-Head Charm,” Bagman continued after the applause had died down. “And, while the grindylows did trouble her, she did manage to continue unassisted and retrieved her hostage – though she did so fifteen minutes outside the time limit. We award her thirty points.

“Viktor Krum used an incomplete form of Transfiguration, which was nevertheless effective, and was fourth to return with his hostage. We award him thirty five points.”

“Nynke Visser used a plant known as Gillyweed,” Bagman announced and Harry’s stomach squirmed in disappointment. He’d hoped that he would be the only Champion to use it. “And she returned with her hostage with one minute to spare. We award her forty points.”

“Cedric Diggory also used the Bubble-Head Charm and was the second champion to return with his hostage.” Bagman went on. “We award him forty five points.”

Harry couldn’t help but feel hopeful. So far they had given the points out in ascending order – which presumably meant that he had gotten the most points.

“Harry Potter also used gillyweed,” Bagman continued. “And he was the first to return with his hostage. We award him fifty points. That puts Mr. Potter in the lead with a total of ninety four points!”

“Yes!” Harry murmured excited to himself, smiling at Daphne when she slipped her hand into his and squeezed it. “Take that Jeremy!”

37-37-37
The weeks after the Second Task went by in a blur. Despite not having a Triwizard Task to research, Harry still found himself busy with assignments and homework. He also took the time to sit down with Remus and ask if he had discovered anything new about the prophecy. Unfortunately, Remus’ research all seemed to be hitting dead ends. Prophecies just were and nobody seemed to know how they worked or how to translate them.

Hogwarts seemed to have either forgiven Harry for his interest in Dark Magic, or decided that it was less important than the fact that he was winning the Tournament for them. It seemed as though every student wanted to congratulate him, offer him advice, or ask if he knew any of the details of the Third Task. Harry was disgusted at their fickle nature, but did his best not to show it. Instead, he used the opportunity to practise his diplomacy skills.

Which was mostly working, though Harry’s patience with his dorm mates was growing increasingly thin. They had apparently decided, once again, to try and befriend Harry and weren’t taking the hint that Harry wasn’t even remotely interested.

It was infuriating, and inescapable since he shared a room with them, but Harry had been doing his best to stay polite — if only because there was a good chance of any fight ending up on the front page of the Daily Prophet.

Still, three weeks after the Second Task, Harry’s patience officially ran out. He’d been studying at the desk beside his bed, which admittedly in hindsight hadn’t been the best idea, when they others had returned talking loudly.

Harry grimaced at the noise and considered casting a spell to muffle the sound they were making, but instead decided to just relocate. He cast a spell to dry the ink on his partially completed Transfiguration essay, before rolling up the parchment and sliding it and, the three reference books he was using, into his bag.

“Hey, Harry,” Terry’s voice sounded, as Harry stood up. “Want to play Gobstones?”

Harry clenched his jaw to prevent himself from turning as he turned to face them. “No, thank you.”

Terry looked disappointed. “Oh, come on! We haven’t played with you in ages.”

“No, not for two years.” Harry agreed shortly. “Not since you decided to break off our friendship.”

Terry groaned dramatically. “You’re not still holding that against us, are you? It was years ago! We were just kids.”

“So you want me to pretend that it never happened?” Harry asked.

“Yeah,” Terry nodded eagerly, Michael and Rodney nodded as well.

“We could start from scratch.” Michael suggested.

“We could.” Harry agreed. “But I honestly don’t think it would help your case.”

Terry and Michael shared a confusion glance. “Why?”

“Because I don’t associate with blood traitors.” Harry answered simply.
“Why you little bastard!” Anthony, who had been watching the proceedings with a disgruntled expression, surged forward and drew his wand. “Weasley’s right! You’re just a stuck up, little, poncy, wanker! I’ll teach you to call me a blood traitor.”

Harry called his wand from his holster and eyed Anthony with contempt. “Sit down, Goldstein, I wasn’t talking to you.”

“Of course you were bloody talking to me!” Anthony argued. “Me and Rodney! We’re they blood traitors.”

Harry raised an eyebrow mockingly. “Well, at least you admit it. They say that acknowledgement is the first step to recovery.”

“Calvorio!” Anthony growled.

Harry casually lent to right to avoid the Hair Removing Curse, as he sent one back. “Petrificus Totalus!”

The spell hit Anthony in the centre of his chest and Harry watched dispassionately as his arms and legs snapped together and he fell backwards.

“Hey!” Michael protested.

“He cast first.” Harry reminded them coolly. “I was just defending myself.”

“I told you that Malfoy was bad news!” Terry accused. “I told you that you should spend time with someone like him, but you wouldn’t listen to me and now look at you!”

“If you were that worried you shouldn’t have left me without any other friends.” Harry pointed out. “Who else was I supposed to spend time with after you lot betrayed me?”

Michael snorted. “Don’t be overly dramatic, we didn’t betray you.”

“No, you just decided that you would rather be friends with him,” Harry sneered towards the frozen Anthony. “Than me. Now, I may have a been a pushover back then, but I’m not now, and you don’t get to try and worm your way back into my life now that I’m a Triwizard Champion.”

Terry had the good grace to look ashamed. “That’s not why we’re…”

“No?” Harry interrupted. “You managed to go a year and a half without talking to me and then suddenly, the night my name came out of the Goblet, you decided you wanted to be friends again.”

“Alright,” Michael stepped forward, his wand still in his hand. “So we have less than stellar reasons for wanting to be your friend, that’s no cause for calling Anthony and Rodney blood traitors – or cursing Anthony.”

“I cursed Anthony is self-defence.” Harry reminded them. “Besides, it wasn’t them I was calling blood traitors.”

Terry and Michael both looked confused. “But we’re traditional.”

“Sure you are.” Harry scoffed. “Whenever it suits you, but when it doesn’t you just ignore it.”

“You are friends with blood traitors though.” Rodney put in quietly, while his friends were silenced by their shock. “Angelina told me that you’re friends with the Weasley twins.”
Harry nodded and acknowledged. “Maybe I should have been more clear, I’m not friends with hypocritical, two faced, blood traitors. The ones who call themselves traditional but then go around spitting in the face of traditionalism.”

“Who are you calling hypocritical?” Michael snapped. “You’re the half-blood traditionalist!”

“Traditionalism is different for blood-purism.” Harry pointed out.

“Is it?” Rodney questioned.

“Or course it is.” Harry answered sharply. “As a traditionalist I respect the old traditions, regardless of people’s blood-status.”

“We are too traditional!” Terry protested.

“Really?” Harry asked skeptically. “When was the last time that you bowed to me, or any of the other heirs at this school? When was the last time you followed a tradition for any other reason that the fact that your parents were making you? Your sleeves are rolled down for Merlin’s sake!”

Terry and Michael both looked down to the covered forearms, seeming surprised. They were silent for a few seconds, but Michael rallied first.

“Why the hell would we want to be a bloody ponce like you?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to get into a traditionalism argument with you, Boot, I do not have time for your gormlessness. Maybe you should ask your parents why they’re traditionalists. Just in the meantime, stop pretending that you’re a traditionalist and stop trying to worm your way back into my good graces.”

“You’re such a prat, Potter!” Michael snapped. “I don’t know why we even wanted to spend time with you anyway.”

“Oh,” Harry brought a hand up to his chest. “That hurt. How will I go on? As to your dilemma, I suspect that it had something to do with the fact that I’m richer than all your families put together, smarter than you, and about to be Lord Potter. Well, that, and the aforementioned Triwizard Tournament thing. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have somewhere to be.”

Harry couldn’t prevent his small smirk as he strode out of the room. He had spent years regretting how much of a pushover he had been when they originally broke off their friendship, but at last he had gotten to have his say.

38-38-38

When Harry’s copy of the Daily Prophet arrived the next morning, he unrolled it with trepidation before breathing a sigh of relief when he read the headline. Apparently Skeeter hadn’t gotten her hands on the story of his argument with his dorm mates. He flicked through the rest of the paper to be sure, but there was nothing there, and neither was there anything in the paper for the rest of the week.

It was confusing. He had been so sure that Skeeter would write about it, as she had been writing about all the other incidents that had included him, but clearly he had been wrong. It was a bit embarrassing really. Was he so egocentric that he thought the world ought to revolve around him? Of course the Daily Prophet had better things to report than schoolboy arguments.

“No, they don’t.” Neville argued, when Harry shared his concerns. “Sure, ideally they would, but
they choose not to. Merlin, a month ago they had an entire article about your choice in swimwear for the Second Task.”

Harry grimaced at the memory. “That was mortifying!”

“You know what’s mortifying?” Neville asked. “That our national newspaper is little better than a gossip-rag.”

Harry turned to his friend in surprise. “How do you know about gossip-rags? I didn’t think they existed in the wizarding world.”

“Clearly they do,” Neville sneered. “But here, we just call them ‘The Daily Prophet’. I heard the term from Hermione. She’s been ranting about it for weeks.”

Harry felt oddly touched. “Really?”

“Not because of you,” Neville told him quickly. “Apparently all the information about you is getting in the way of her learning actually important information about current events.”

“I didn’t know you spent that much time with her.” Harry commented.

Neville shook his head. “I don’t, we just sit together at meals and in Herbology.”

“Why Herbology?”

“That’s the only class we share with the Hufflepuffs.” Neville explained. “Otherwise I sit with you or Draco.”

“Has she mentioned that book she borrowed off me?” Harry asked curiously. “She returned it a month ago, but didn’t actually say anything about it.”

“Not specifically.” Neville answered. “Though she did ask me about traditionalism a few weeks ago. I tried to explain it all, but I don’t think she liked my answer very much.”

Harry considered it. “Next time you should tell her that it makes social interactions logical. According to George, that’s why their brother Percy decided to be traditional.”

“That might work after she’d graduated, but right now she’s a Gryffindor.” Neville pointed out. “There’s only five traditionalists in our entire house. Sure it would make her social interactions with those people easier, but what about other people? Besides, I don’t think she’d go for the lack of equality. You should hear her rants about house-elves.”

“I was a little concerned about house-elves at the beginning.” Harry admitted. “But then I spoke to them, and did a bit of research.”

“Maybe you should have been in Gryffindor.” Neville suggested. “I think you and Granger would have gotten along. You would have least been able to keep up with her.”

“What part of me researching about house-elves makes you think I ought to have been in Gryffindor?” Harry asked, with a grin. “Besides, I’m sure you can keep up with her. You came sixth in our class rankings last year, she was only three spots ahead of you.”

“I probably could,” Neville admitted. “But I just don’t care enough. Besides, whenever we disagree on something, she completely ignores my argument. It’s as though she’s not even hearing it, she just goes on and on and on about some book she’s read that said something or another, and I can’t make
her even consider my point of view.”

Harry grimaced. “She sounds infuriating.”

“She is.” Neville agreed. “I think part of the problem is that she’s never had any friends to sort of rub off her corners, which is sad.”

“Yes.” Harry nodded, he couldn’t imagine not having had his friends.

“But doesn’t change the fact that she’s a nightmare.” Neville continued. “And because she’s a nightmare, she has no friends. It’s a vicious cycle.”

“Which you feel guilty about?” Harry questioned.

Neville sighed. “Yes, I do. Maybe if I’d befriended her in first year, instead of being such a scared little dweeb, then we would be friends now and I wouldn’t feel like pulling my hair out when I have to spend more than an hour in her company. I know it’s silly. Draco would tell me that I’m being an idiot.”

“He would.” Harry agreed. “But then Draco’s a bit biased about this stuff. He still sometimes forgets that he’s not a blood-purist.”

Neville chuckled. “Yes, but he always feels so guilty once he remembers.”

“I’m feeling a bit guilty myself.” Harry admitted. “You remember be telling you that I had a fight with my dorm mates?”

“Yes.”

“I think I went a bit over the top.” Harry admitted. “It felt good at the time, but I was a bit of jerk. I called Terry gormless.”

Neville grinned. “Really? Brilliant!”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re not supposed to look so happy about it. I’m feeling guilty, remember?”

“Sorry.” Neville said, his grin still in place. “Personally, I think they deserved everything you gave them and probably more.”

“I called them blood traitors.” Harry sighed. “And I cursed Anthony with a body-bind.”

“That’s unlike you.” Neville commented.

“I know.” Harry sighed deeper. “I felt like I was channelling Draco or something.”

“No, not the blood traitor thing.” Neville corrected. “The cursing Anthony part. You usually use your words rather than your wand.”

“He cursed me first.” Harry explained. “Which I dodged, pathetically easily, before responding. It was self-defence. What do you mean the blood traitor think wasn’t unlike me? I don’t normally call people blood-traitors!”

“Didn’t you call Pansy one last year?” Neville asked.

“Yes, but that was Pansy.” Harry argued weakly. “She was claiming to be traditional, but behaving
like a non-traditionalist.”

“So are Boot and Corner.” Neville pointed out.

Harry sighed again. “Still, it seems sort of harsh.”

Neville rolled his eyes. “I don’t think so and Draco certainly doesn’t. Besides, what are you going to do about it? Apologise?”

“No.” Harry answered quickly. “They deserved it.”

“Exactly.” Neville nodded. “So let it go.”

Before Harry knew it, March was over and the Easter Holidays had arrived. It was nice to have the opportunity to spend two weeks away from Hogwarts, though it was hard not to spend the entire time pestering Sirius about when the details of the Third Task would be released. The only thing that stopped him was the knowledge that, due to the vow Sirius had sworn, his godfather was incapable of giving him any information. Still, with the end of the school year less than three months away, the lack of information was really starting to grate.

The only positive thing about not knowing what sort of task he needed to preparing for was that it allowed him to dedicate his time to studying for his exam – which would be starting in just over two months. As he had the years before, Harry used the first day of Easter break to draw himself a study chart to follow.

Sirius had taken one look at Harry’s study chart and had bemoaned the fact that Harry seemed to be more like Lily and Remus’ kid than Lily and James. Remus had just rolled his eyes and flooed away to meet Tonks – apparently their relationship was going well.

A week into the holidays, Dumbledore called an Order Meeting at the Burrow which meant that Harry got to see Fred and George who had gone home for the first time since Lord Prewett had accepted his title. Last Harry had heard the family tensions were still high, with Mrs. Weasley still threatening to disown Lord Prewett and Percy, but that had been two months ago. None of the Weasley offspring had heard anything from their mother since before the Second Task, though they had received the occasional short note from their father assuring them that everything was fine, and Harry knew that Fred and George had been worried. It had been the reason that they had jumped at the chance to return home during the Easter holidays, despite having stayed at the castle during the Christmas holidays to avoid the conflict.

Harry stepped gracefully out of the Weasleys’ floo and tried not to look too surprised when he saw Mrs. Weasley hugging Sirius tightly. Last he’d heard from the twins, Sirius had been public enemy number one in Mrs. Weasley’s eyes for having suggested the Lord Prewett accept his title. What had changed?

“Harry!” Mrs. Weasley exclaimed, releasing Sirius and pulling Harry into a tight hug. “Welcome!”

“Thank you for having me, Mrs. Weasley.” Harry replied, marvelling over the fact that he was almost tall enough to fit her head under his chin.

“You’re welcome, dear.” Mrs. Weasley released him and held him at arm’s length. “Look at you, you’re getting so tall. You must be taller than my Ron.”

“Possibly, ma’am.” Harry answered politely. All he knew was that the two of them were two of the
tallest boys in their year.

Mrs. Weasley turned her head upwards. “RON!”

Harry tried not to grimace at the loud sound. He didn’t think he would ever get over how much the Weasleys yelled for each other. Was it really too difficult to find the person they were looking for? Or, in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, use a spell a summon them?

“What?” Ron asked insolently, as he appeared in the doorway, his hand under his dirty t-shirt scratching at his stomach.

“Come over here.” Mrs. Weasley ordered briskly. “Harry’s arrived and I want to see which of you is taller.”

Ron stiffened as he took in Harry’s presence. “Muuuummm! You can’t be serious. He’s a bloody Death Eater!”

Harry thought the accusation would probably bother him more if he hadn’t heard it almost every day at school. Well, that, and if it hadn’t been said with a whine. Still, he saw Sirius, Tonks, and Remus all stiffen at Ron’s words.

“Language!” Mrs. Weasley snapped. “And don’t you call him that! Harry is a guest in our home and you will treat him with respect.”

“So, what? We’re entertaining Death Eaters now?!” Ron’s face reddened as he shouted.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley!” Mrs. Weasley seemed to swell with fury. “Get back to your room this instant! We will be talking about this later.”

“Gladly.” Ron snarled with surprising vehemence, even for him, before stomping upstairs.

Mrs. Weasley turned to Harry. “I’m sorry, dear, I didn’t…”

“Harry!” Fred and George chorused from the doorway that had held Ron just a few seconds earlier. “We thought we heard your dulcet tones.”

“Well, not your tones – …” Fred admitted with a grin.

“…Ron’s,” George continued. “But only you can make our brother…”

“…sound quite so angry.” Fred finished.

“Well, you and Mum.” George added with a cautious glance in his mother’s direction.

“Oh, you boys.” Mrs. Weasley sounded fond. “Will you take Harry up to your room? Dumbledore should arrive any minute now and then the meeting will be starting.”

“Sure.” The twins chorused. “Come on, Harry.”

Harry smiled at Mrs. Weasley, before glancing at Sirius for permission. Once he’d received his godfather’s nod, he followed to the twins out of the room and up to their room.

Having never been in their room before, Harry looked around curiously. There were two unmade beds that took up most of the room, one dresser, and a cauldron that had a purple liquid bubbling inside it.
“Sorry about the mess.” George commented, yanking up the covers on one of the beds.

“And for the lack of seating.” Fred added, doing the same to the other bed.

“It’s fine.” Harry promised, sitting gingerly on the nearest bed when Fred gestured for him to.

“So, what did you do to set Ron off this time?” Fred asked with a grin.

“Existed.” Harry replied with a groan. “Your mother wanted to see which of us was taller.”

“Ah, you and Mum.” Fred nodded sagely. “No wonder he was yelling.”

“What happened?” Harry asked in confusion. “I thought that Ron was your mother’s biggest fan.”

“He was,” George agreed, with a sigh. “Up until she turned into a reasonably human being again.”

Harry nodded. “About that, what happened? She was hugging Sirius!”

The twins exchanged a glance and then George got up and closed the door.

“You have to promise not to tell anyone.” Fred told him seriously.

“Not even Draco.” George put in.

“Or Daphne.” Fred added.

Harry nodded again. “Alright, I promise.”

The twins exchanged another glance. “Dad had Mum committed to the mental ward at St. Mungo’s.”

Fred said eventually.

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “What?”

“I know.” George agreed with feeling.

“You know how I said she was off her rocker?” Fred asked. “Well, turns out that she was.”

“Mum and Dad haven’t given us all the details,” George continued. “But apparently something happened when she was younger that really mucked her up, and she never really healed from it.”

“So Dad had her committed against her will.” Fred said. “That’s why she hasn’t written to any of us for the last two months. She only got out a few weeks ago.”

“And she says she didn’t write then because she was embarrassed and wanted to explain it to us in person.” George went on.

“We had a family dinner the night we got home.” Fred explained. “Everyone was there, even Bill, Charlie and Percy, and she and Dad explained everything to us.”

“Ron went bonkers.” George said, before wincing. “I mean, he got really angry.”

“Yelled about how Mum was betraying him and Ginny and all that kind of rot.” Fred frowned. “He’s been furious with Mum ever since.”

“Ginny was mad too, but she seems to be getting over it.” George added.

Harry stared at them. “That’s...”
“Crazy?” George suggested.

“Bonkers?” Fred put in.

“Insane?” George went on.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Amazing. You must be so relieved.”

“We are.” Fred and George said in unison.

“Mum and Dad have even given us their blessing to join the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett.” George added.

“Mum said that she and Dad are thinking of joining too.” Fred shook his head. “It’s just bonkers!”

“I didn’t even know that St. Mungo’s had a department for that kind of thing.” Harry admitted.

“Neither did we.” George commented.

“Dad says that it’s really private.” Fred explained. “All the staff have sworn unbreakable vows not to tell anyone who their patients are, and the only way you can get there is by floo.”

“So your mother is back to normal now?” Harry asked.

“She’s better than normal.” Fred corrected with feeling. “She sat us down the other day and told us that she and Dad would support us if we decided to pursue careers in pranking.”

“It’s like she’s a whole new witch.” George agreed. “It’s…”

“Amazing!” Fred finished for him.

“Incredible!” George agreed.

“Fantastic!” Fred added.

Fred and George both exchanged a glance. “A dream come true.”
Harry had always found the first week back after Easter Break amusing. He had noticed in first year that, after that last break of the school year, the speed at which their professors taught them increased significantly. It was as though the professors suddenly realised how little time was left to teach them everything they needed to know and so decided to cram as much into the final two months as possible. Harry didn’t really mind, though it was frustrating to have his homework load increasing as he was trying to begin his exam preparation, but it was amusing to watch his classmates react to the change with surprise and outrage.

There wasn’t much grumbling in front of the professors, or at least there wasn’t after the story of how Ron Weasley earnt himself a detention and lost twenty house points for grumbling to Professor McGonagall, but there was plenty of complaining outside of the classroom.

From what Harry heard whenever he was in his dorm room, his dorm mates were just as horrified by the increased number of assignments as they had been the year before. Harry was glad to be able to ignore them, it was much harder to ignore Draco and Theo’s moaning about their increased course load. Harry wasn’t sure what they were complaining about, not only was he taking an OWL level subject, but he was also spending at least two hours a day on exam prep, and he wasn’t feeling overwhelmed by the homework.

There was something thing that Harry found frustrating though. According to what Takashi, Fred, and George, had told him about fourth year, Professor Moody was supposed to be teaching them about counter-curses, but instead the retired auror was wasting time on spells like Aqua Eructo. Harry wasn’t sure what made Moody think they needed to know so much about Aqua Eructo. Sure it was an interesting spell (being a weaponised version of the Aguamenti spell), but they weren’t due to be taught it until sixth year, and it certainly wasn’t worth missing out on the theory behind counter-curses.

It wasn’t the first odd thing that Harry had noticed about their DADA professor. Most of the time Moody seemed to know about what he was talking about when he was lecturing, but when he was asked a question about theory (usually by Harry or Granger) his answer was often either vague or completely wrong. And now he was forgoing teaching them the theory that would be the foundation of much of their future study in the subject just to wax lyrical about how some slightly obscure spells could be used in practise. Harry supposed that it was understandable, given that Moody would have focussed more on practise than theory as an auror, but he thought it was odd that Dumbledore would have hired someone for the role who wasn’t qualified. But then again, it wasn’t that odd. After all, Dumbledore had hired Lockhart.

Despite the increased workload, and the hours he was spending preparing for exams, Harry found himself missing Quidditch more than he had all year. He’d been glad that the Quidditch Cup had been cancelled during the build up to the First and Seconds Tasks, but it had been over two months since the Second Task and they still hadn’t been given any information about the Third Task.

So, three weeks after Easter Break, Harry arranged for a casual game of Quidditch. It took a little bit of organising, but it was a lot easier than he’d thought it was. The first thing he needed was permission, which Remus was happy to provide, then he needed a set of Quidditch balls, which
Remus convinced Madam Hooch to let them use, and finally he needed thirteen other players to fill up the two teams.

It was easy enough to find players, especially given than Harry had friends in each of the House Quidditch Teams, and in the end the problem became actually choosing which players to use. Apparently it wasn’t just Harry who was missing Quidditch.

In the end, each of the two teams had at least one player from each of the House teams – though admittedly that was more of coincidence than anything.

Harry’s team had Fred and George as beaters, Takashi as Keeper, and Draco, Jeremy and Amy Fawcett (a sixth year Hufflepuff) as Chasers. While the opposing team had Cedric as Seeker, Brandon Summers (a fifth year Hufflepuff) and Duncan Inglebee (a fifth year Ravenclaw) as Beaters, Andrew Orpington (a third year Slytherin) as Keeper, and Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet, and Katie Bell as Chasers.

They booked the game for a Saturday afternoon and, when the day arrived, Harry watched in astonishment as basically the entire school turned out for the event. Madam Hooch was there, with her whistle and broom, apparently planning on refereeing – which was good because Harry hadn’t even considered needing to organise one.

“Alright,” Jeremy said, as their team gathered together in one of the locker rooms. “The way I see it, both teams have advantages and disadvantages. We have the best two Beaters in school,” He waved towards Fred and George. “And most importantly, they’re used to working together. But they have three of the best Chasers, and unlike our Chasers, they’re used to playing as a team.”

Harry nodded along with the rest of the team. He was a little bemused that Jeremy had apparently decided that he would be Captain, especially since the entire game had been Harry’s idea, but he supposed that it made the most sense. Not only was Jeremy the only member of the team with any experience as Captain, but he was also in a position to have the role. Seekers were notoriously bad Captains since their attention was supposed to be on catching the snitch and not on what the other six members of their team were doing.

Draco looked disgruntled about Jeremy’s presumption, though thankfully it didn’t look as though he was going to do anything about it.

“Thankfully,” Jeremy continued. “We’ve got the best Seeker. So, Harry, we need you to catch the snitch.”

“As opposed to all the other possible strategies I could go into the game with?” Harry asked, his eyebrow raised.

Jeremy ignored him. “Weasleys, don’t let the fact that the opposing Chasers are Gryffindors affect you. Show them no mercy!”

Fred and George exchanged excited grins. “Got it.”

“Chasers,” Jeremy turned to Draco and Amy Fawcett. “I know we haven’t had a chance to practise together, since someone decided to arrange this game at the last minute,” He shot Harry a small glare. “But I’ve seen you play and you’re good at what you do, so just follow my lead and we’ll be fine.”

Draco’s mouth dropped open. “I beg your pardon.”

“Time to go!” Harry exclaimed quickly, gripping Draco’s arm tightly. “Lee will be announcing us at any minute.”
It felt great to fly out onto the Quidditch Pitch to the sound of cheers again. Harry had made sure to make the time to go flying at least once a week, but he had missed the competitive side of the game. He was also looking forward to seeking how much he had improved with all of Viktor’s coaching. Harry had no idea why, but the older Seeker had voluntarily given up his time to teach Harry some of his tricks at least once a month since the Durmstrang students had arrived October.

Speaking of the Durmstrang students, Harry’s stomach clenched nervously as he spotted the delegation sitting with the Slytherins. Merlin, he hadn’t expected that they would come. Harry casually flew past the stands and bit the inside of his cheek when he saw Viktor sitting there with his friends. How was Harry supposed to play Quidditch without freaking out when Viktor Krum was watching?! He’d actually considered asking Viktor to play in the game with them, but had then decided that the other boy would have too much of an advantage. Besides, there were enough Hogwarts players who were disappointed about missing out without adding Durmstrang players to the mix.

“Since neither team has submitted a name to me, I will be referring to them as Team One and Team Two.” Lee announced, his amplified voice carrying across the pitch. “Now, just to be clear, Team One contains Messers Weasley, Weasley, Nato, Stratton, Malfoy, Fawcett, and Potter, though I suppose that Fawcett’s more than a Missus than a Mister. Missus? Miss? Madam? Anyway, moving on, Team Two is made up of Summers, Inglebee, Orpington, Johnson, Spinnet, Bell, and Diggory! I hope you have cast your bets, because the game is about to begin!”

“Jordan!” McGonagall snapped.

“Sorry, Professor,” Lee said, his tone unrepentant. “She’s right, folks, gambling’s against school rules, so make sure you don’t get caught!”

Harry grinned as he moved into his starting position, it felt just like a normal school game.

Hooch blew her whistle and Harry watched as she threw the Quaffle into the air.

“Malfoy has possession,” Lee announced immediately. “Merlin, that kid is fast. He dodges Spinnet, ducks under Bells, and, wow, that was close. Summer aimed a bludger right at him, but Weasley got to it before it could do any damage. Malfoy passes to Stratton, who tries to dodge around Johnson, but doesn’t quite manage it. Johnson’s got the quaffle, she drops it down to Spinnet who’s sprinting towards the goal hoops, and Merlin! Another close call with a bludger. If Weasley had shot that any closer it might have knocked her off her broom!”

Harry tuned out Lee’s commentary as he began to fly through some of the tricks that Viktor had taught him. According to Viktor it was bad strategy for Seeker to listen to the commentary for the entire game since it distracted them from their goal – finding the snitch. He’d admitted that it was important to tune in every now and again, just to get an idea of what the score was, but otherwise he should be completely focussed on searching for the snitch.

Harry dived down and performed a perfect double-barrel roll – using the opportunity to search the skies for the glittering of a sun against the golden snitch. Nothing. Harry aimed his broom towards the sky and shot forward, before using his momentum to spin his broom in the air. Still nothing.

Harry ran through all the tricks that Viktor had taught him, and the few that he had managed to teach himself, before taking a break. It was dizzying work, all the spinning, flipping, rolling and diving, and Harry was glad for the opportunity to just search the skies as his head and stomach stabilised.

“Potter seems to have finished his series of death-defying stunts,” Lee was commenting. “Which,
even if they were good for nothing else, certainly succeeded at distracting Diggory from even searching for snitch. Stratton has possession, he passes it back to, well, I’m not sure who he was passing it back to, since one was there. No one from his team at least. Bell has possession, she passes it forward to Johnson, beautiful intercept from Malfoy who now has possession, Malfoy races the quaffle towards the goal, he shoots, and scores! Which puts the points total at forty points to twenty, Team Two in the lead.”

Harry grimaced, damn, at this rate he would need to catch the snitch pretty early to stop the other team from getting too far ahead in points. With that in mind, and his dizziness gone, Harry began to run through the series of tricks again, constantly on the lookout for a glimmer of gold. Theoretically, all the spinning and diving he was doing would give him a better chance of spotting the snitch since it gave him the opportunity to look for it at all angles.

Except, he managed to get through the entire series of tricks again without having spotted anything. He knew it wasn’t exactly surprising. It often took professional players like Krum over an hour to spot the thing but, with Lee’s announcement that the score was now seventy to fifty, he was starting to feel desperate.

“…and Malfoy scores again!” Lee announced. “Normally I can’t stand it when he does that, what with him being a Slytherin and all that, but you’ve got to admit, it’s pretty impressive – he’s scored all six of his team’s goals today. I’m not sure what Stratton and Fawcett are doing out there, they seem completely and utterly outmatched.”

Harry winced, Jeremy wasn’t going to like that. He gained another ten feet of altitude, all the while keeping an eye out for the snitch, before beginning his series of tricks again – though this time he changed up the order. Halfway through, when he still hadn’t seen any sign of the snitch, he decided to have some fun with Cedric and pointed his broom into a deep dive.

“Potter’s spotted the snitch!” Lee announced loudly. “And Diggory’s right on his tail.”

Harry looked behind him to see Cedric only a few feet behind him, then he turned his attention back to the fast approaching ground. He was only a few feet away from the ground when he pulled up sharply, allowing his body to turn the momentum into a roll, then, suddenly, he saw a golden glittering out of the corner of his eye. Was that…?

Adjusting the direction of his broom slightly, Harry raised to towards the snitch – pressing his body against his broom to increase his speed. It was ten feet away, nine, eight, seven…

Harry risked a glimpse behind him and was shocked to see that Cedric was at least five feet behind him. What was he doing back there? Turning his attention back to the snitch, Harry reached out his hand, three feet, two feet, damn!

The snitch darted to the side, and Harry barely managed to turn fast enough to follow it without falling off his broom. Four feet, three feet, two feet, one foot, and…

He closed his hand around the snitch and grinned in triumph! He’d done it!

“Potter catches the snitch.” Lee announced, almost glumly. “In what was probably the most disappointingly short Quidditch game I’ve ever attended. Team One wins, two hundred and twenty points to one hundred.”

39-39-39

“The problem was that both Keepers were decidedly average.” Theo commented later that afternoon.
“That’s why the score got so high, so fast.”

“The problem was the Stratton’s an idiot!” Draco growled. “He’s all talk and no action. Fawcett was better, but she was willing to follow Stratton around and watch him lose possession time and time again.”

Theo grinned. “You should have seen him, Harry. Ten minutes into the game, Draco decides that he’s had enough and just starts ignoring the other Chasers. It only worked because of Fred and George, who are so much better than I remember them being. They managed to keep the other team’s Chasers busy enough that Draco could score some points.”

“I don’t know why you picked him!” Draco ranted. “There are better Chasers that him at Hogwarts! I should know, I play with two of them!”

“We couldn’t have an all Slytherin line,” Harry pointed out.

“Why not?” Draco asked. “The other team had an all Gryffindor line. Which is why they almost won!”

“They didn’t almost win,” Neville rolled his eyes. “Diggory was never going to beat Harry to the snitch. Did you see him out there? He looked like a rank amateur next to Harry.”

“How in Merlin’s name did you learn all those tricks?” Theo asked, his eyes wide. “They were amazing!”

“Viktor’s been teaching me.” Harry reminded him. “What did you think we did? Just raced each other to the snitch?”

“Well, yes.” Theo nodded.

Harry grimaced. “We do that sometimes, but he always beats me. He’s amazing!”

“You’re amazing!” Theo told him sincerely. “Honestly, you, Draco, and the Weasleys were definitely the stars of the game.”

“Don’t forget the Gryffindor Line.” Neville defended. “They weren’t bad either.”

“True,” Theo admitted. “But they weren’t anything new either. Harry and Draco both played like completely different players out there.”

“And the twins?” Harry asked.

“They seem to be better each game they play.” Theo gushed. “If your team had two more Draco’s, and good Keeper, I bet you could play professionally.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “That might be going a bit far. Though Draco and I are going to try out for the Under Seventeen League this summer.”

“Will the twins be playing again?” Neville asked curiously.

“I presume so.” Harry answered. “I haven’t actually asked.”

39-39-39

It was a few days later, after the school had gotten over the disappointingly short Quidditch game and a second game had been commissioned (though the second game was going to be played by all
the players who didn’t get a shot in the first game), that Harry met Sirius in the Come and Go Room for their weekly duelling practise.

Harry arrived early and settled down on the floor against the wall with a book while he waited. He’d only managed to read a few pages when Sirius arrived though.

“What are you reading about?”

Harry closed the book and returned it to his bag, before standing up to greet Sirius. “The theory behind counter-curses. Professor Moody still hasn’t started teaching us about them.”

Sirius grinned. “So you’ve taken the subject into your own hands?”

“It’ll be in my exam!” Harry exclaimed. “Besides, Takashi says that the theory is foundational for what I’ll be taught next year.”

“Fair enough.” Sirius looked amused. “You ready to duel?”

“Oh, come on. You know that parselmagic shields don’t block normal spells.”

“It just as normal shields don’t block parselmagic spells.” Sirius agreed, with a smirk. “We’ll both be doing a lot of dodging.”

Harry grimaced. “Oh, come on. You know that parselmagic shields don’t block normal spells.”

“Ready?” Sirius asked, with a shallow bow.

“Ready.” Harry nodded, with a bow of his own. :Slice!:

Sirius’ own spell, a light blue colour that suggested that it was either the ear-shrivelling curse or the sponge-knees curse, was cast almost simultaneously.

Harry dodged with a smooth step to his left. :Rip!:

Sirius’ next curse was a pinkish colour and Harry didn’t waste any time trying to identify it as he sidestepped it again. It was, he supposed, one of the benefits of only being allowed to use parselmagic, since it freed him from having to identify the curse so that he could decide which shield to use against it.

:Burn!: Harry hissed, as he dodged away from a yellow spell. :Cut!:
Sirius’ spells were coming just as quickly as Harry’s spells were leaving his wand and they were
damningly accurate. As Harry spun to the left to avoid a dark purple spell, he found himself
considering, not for the first time, how similar duelling was to dancing. Both required the participants
to be quick on their feet, in both each participant’s moves were affected by the moves of their
partner, and mistakes in both could have severe consequences. Though, as Harry sidestepped a dark
blue curse that looked a lot like the Bone-Breaking Curse, possibly the public embarrassment that
resulted from making a dance while dancing wasn’t quite as severe a consequence as failing to dodge
a spell.

:Break!: Harry cast with a hiss. :Stab!: He ducked under the next spell. :Rip!: And then side stepped
so that the yellow curse that Sirius had sent towards him splashed harmlessly against the wall behind
him. :Slice! Burn! Cut!:

Sirius’ spells were increasing in frequency as well and Harry doubted that they could continue for
too much longer. Surely one of them would misjudge something soon, though Harry was determined
that it wouldn’t be him.

:Snap!: Harry hissed. :Freeze! Push!: He stepped left to avoid a dark green spell. :Cut!: Spun right to
avoid a purple one. :Break!: And then ducked under an orange one. :Burn!:

Their duel went on, and on, and on, until Harry was beginning to breathe heavily – a rare occurrence
in their duels since he was still running around the Great Lake each morning.

:Crush!: Harry threw himself to the left to avoid a yellow spell. :Hit!: He pushed himself back to his
feet and twisted away from the pink spell hurtling towards him. :Cut!: Then he spun away from a
dark green curse and…

“Ow!” Sirius exclaimed loudly. “Bloody hell!”

Harry sidestepped the last spell that Sirius had cast, before stilling and watching his godfather
suspiciously. These duels, the ones in which there were rules around what spells could be uses,
usually stopped at first blood (or first hit), but Sirius wasn’t above pretending to be hit just to get a
good shot at Harry.

Still, the blood dribbling down Sirius’ arm and onto the floor looked real enough.

“Good job, Harry!” Sirius congratulated him, his right hand pressed again his left arm. “Now come
over here and heal me already.”

“I win?” Harry asked cautiously, his wand still slightly raised.

Sirius rolled his eyes. “Merlin, what did I do to deserve such a suspicious plonker for a godson? Yes,
you won. I lost. Now and stop me from bleeding out.”

Suspicion forgotten, Harry jogged across the room and took a closer look at the wound on Sirius’
arm. “Don’t be silly. It’s not much bigger than a papercut.”

Sirius gasped in outrage. “Are you kidding me?”

“Episkey!” Harry cast, before smirking when the cut in Sirius’ wound healed before his eyes. “See,
episkey only works on minor injuries.”

“Minor injuries?!” Sirius exclaimed. “I’ll show you minor injuries!”

“How exactly are you planning on doing that?” Harry asked cheekily, skipping back a few steps and
raising his wand defensively. “I just bet you in a duel.”

“Getting cocky, huh?” Sirius asked, raising his on wand. “Let’s do this then. No rules. Just you and me.”

“As opposed to last time?” Harry asked, continuing to put distance between himself and his godfather. “Was there someone else in that duel that I wasn’t aware of?”

“Mimble Wimble!” Sirius cast with a slash of his wand. “Slugulus Eructo! Locomotor Mortis!”

Harry dodged each spell nimbly, before sending back his own volley of spells. “Locomotor Wibbly! Mucus ad Nauseam!” And then. :Cut!:

It was over half an hour later, by which time both Harry and Sirius were huffing for breath, when Harry eventually admitted defeat when his godfather managed to trick him into dodging into a Body-Bind Curse. It wasn’t a surprising outcome, Harry’s duelling had improved exponentially with Sirius’ tutoring but he still only won one out of every three duels with his godfather.

“I win!” Sirius crowed victoriously, as he came to stand over Harry’s frozen body.

Harry rolled his eyes as violently as he could.

“None of that,” Sirius rebuked him with a smirk. “Be nice or I might not cast the counter-curse.”

Harry just rolled his eyes again, before sighing gratefully when Sirius released him from the spell.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Sirius nodded smugly. “It’s only polite for the victor of a duel to heal the person they firmly defeated.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Were you in a different duel? There was nothing firm about that victory.”

Sirius shrugged unapologetically. “A victory’s a victory, kiddo.”

“Also,” Harry continued with a grin. “You made that bit about the victor healing the loser up.”

“Maybe,” Sirius winked. “But you admit you’re the loser?”

“This time.” Harry said grudgingly. “But overall it was a tie. One duel to me, one duel to you.”

“So it was.” Sirius’ smirk shifted into a proud expression. “You’re incredible, Harry! Absolutely amazing.”

Harry looked away awkwardly. “Thanks.”

Sirius reached out a hand a grasped his shoulder. “I really mean it. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone under seventeen duel as well as you do. You should consider entering a competition this summer.”

“Really?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“Maybe you could try that one in Bulgaria that we attended the summer before your third year.” Sirius suggested.

“That was fencing though.” Harry protested. “We haven’t done any of that for months.”
“We could start practising with it again, if you like?” Sirius offered.

“Do you think I’ll have time?” Harry asked hopefully. “Draco and I are still hoping to join the Under Seventeen Quidditch League, and I’ll be joining the Wizengamot.”

“The tournaments are a week long, at maximum.” Sirius pointed out. “We can do some research, see if you’ll be able to fit it into your Quidditch schedule.”

Harry grinned widely. “That would be amazing!”

“You’re amazing.” Sirius countered, with a proud smile.

“Thanks.” Harry moved to pick up his bag to try and hide his blush. He grabbed it by the strap and then swung it up onto his shoulder. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Sirius sighed. “I suppose we should go tell Moony about how you beat me in another duel.”

“He’s just glad that he’s not the only one that I beat.” Harry pointed out.

Sirius began to turn towards the door, before pausing. “You have a beetle on your bag.”

“Really?” Harry looked down and blinked in surprise at the large brown beetle that was clinging to his bag. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a bug in here before.”

“You probably brought him in with you.” Sirius pointed out.

“Yes, probably.” Harry agreed. “Daphne and I went for a walk earlier.”

“Alone?” Sirius asked in horror, as he led Harry out of the room and into the corridor.

Harry rolled his eyes. “No, we weren’t alone, Neville and Luna came with us. And you can drop the act, Draco does that too, and neither of you are funny.”

“But the thought of you being alone with your betrothed, without an escort!” Sirius brought a hand to his chest. “It just filled me dread. What if someone should hear about it?”

“They’d probably think that I’ve spent too much time with my godfather who, according to Remus, spent half of his time at Hogwarts in broom-closets with girls.” Harry pointed out.

Sirius smirked. “True. Still I hope you know better than that.”

“Of course I do.” Harry told him seriously. “I would never do anything to damage Daphne’s reputation.”

“You’re a good man, Harry.” Sirius told him, grasping his shoulder. “Your parents would be so proud of you.”

Harry smiled awkwardly. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Sirius told him, pausing when they hit an intersecting corridor. “You want to come to Remus’ with me?”

“No,” Harry shook his head. “I’m going to go put the beetle outside.”

Sirius glanced towards Harry’s bag. “It’s already gone.”
Harry followed his gaze. “Oh, I hope it gets out alright.”

“You have clearly been spending too much time with your friends Luna.” Sirius told him. “Worrying about the welfare of beetles. Now come on, Remus will be thrilled to see you. If you’re lucky, you might even be able to convince him into giving you a lecture on the theory behind counter-curses. Just wait until after I’ve had a few firewhiskeys, will you? That theory stuff is dead boring.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Christmas everyone! (Though it is Boxing day for those of us in New Zealand). Unfortunately for you (though excitingly for me) I am going on holiday today and, since I'll be staying in the wop wops (middle of nowhere) I won't be posting another chapter until the 13th of January. Sorry!
Hello all. I'm back from holiday and ready to get posting again. So here are two chapters to celebrate the occasion. I hope you enjoy them.

‘Harry Potter a Parselmouth
Boy-Who-Lived a Dark Wizard
Written by Rita Skeeter’

Harry stared at front cover of the Daily Prophet in horror. How in Merlin’s name had Skeeter found out that he was a parselmouth? He’d done everything he could to keep it a secret. He’d only told a few select people, he’d never used it while anyone other than Sirius or Draco were around (except for that one spell during the First Task, but even then he’d been careful to whisper it), and he knew that nobody he’d told would have shared the information with the reporter.

“I told you he was a bloody Death Eater!” Ron Weasley’s voice suddenly rang across the Great Hall.

Harry looked up from his paper and almost flinched when he took in the distrusting looks and hostile glares that the other occupants of the Hall were shooting at him. The other students’ hostility wasn’t new to Harry, it had only been a few months since they had vilified him for supporting the teaching of Dark Magic at Hogwarts, but it had never seemed this bad before.

“Death Eater!” A Ravenclaw student hissed, from further up the table.

Harry frowned at him in confusion, unsure how they had gotten that from the fact that he was a parselmouth.

“Harry,” Luna touched his arm lightly. “We should probably go.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Get out!” Another Ravenclaw sneered. “We don’t want your sort here!”

Harry looked around the table and couldn’t help but feel angry when every face he saw held a scared expression or malevolent glare. This was exactly the reason why he’d kept his being a parselmouth a secret.

He stood up, Luna at his side, and stalked away from the table. It was hard to walk through the hall and see the same fearful and hostile expressions at the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables. Hogwarts was one of the two places that felt like home to him.

Ron Weasley smirked victoriously as Harry walked past their table. “I knew you were a Death Eater, Potter! And this just proves it. Only dark wizards are Parseltongues.”

Harry stopped in his tracks and sneered at the other boy. “Firstly, Weasley, I am not a Death Eater. And, secondly, the term is parselmouth – not parseltongue. I, as a parselmouth, speak parseltongue, and I can cast parselmagic – so don’t tempt me, you gormless wanker!”
With that said, Harry turned on his heel and strode out of the hall as quickly as possible.

“Did you see his face?” Luna asked with a giggle, once the door to the Great Hall were shut behind them. “I can’t believe you called him that in front of the professors.”

“Neither can I.” Harry admitted, with an almost hysterical laugh. “I can’t believe that Skeeter found out that I’m a parslemouth.”

“She’s a sneaky little coleopteran.” Luna commented sagely. “What are you going to do now?”

Harry filed the strange word aside to look up later, as he sighed and slumped against the nearest wall. “I’m so sick of all this rubbish. No wonder Voldemort decided to conquer the Wizarding World if this is the reception he received. I have to admit, some days, it’s a tempting prospect.”

There was a startled gasp and Harry groaned when he saw a student wearing Gryffindor robes darting back down the corridor. “Merlin, Luna, you couldn’t warn me?”

Luna looked worried. “Sorry, I didn’t see them. I’m not omniscient, you know.”

“I know.” Harry let his head fall back against the wall. “This is just brilliant. Now they’re going to think that, on top of being dark, and a parslemouth, I have urges to be like Voldemort when I grow up.”

“Do you?” Luna asked, her head tilted to the side curiously.

“No!” Harry answered firmly. “How could you ask me that?!”

“Surely you want to be like him a little,” Luna protested. “You want to change the world, don’t you?”


“I can’t tell you how glad I am to hear that,” Neville’s voice sounded Harry’s other side. “For a moment there I was beginning to think that I had somehow become a member of the next Dark Lord’s inner circle.”

Harry turned his head at glared at Neville was openly amused. “I’m glad you find this so amusing.”

“Sorry,” Neville’s expression sobered. “Ignore Ron, he’s a…”

“Gormless wanker?” Luna suggested, moving so that she was standing beside Neville.

Neville wrapped his arm around her and grinned down in amusement. “Yes, exactly.”

Harry and let his head fall back against the wall. “I can’t believe I swore like that in mixed company. What is Daphne going think?”

“She’ll understand.” Neville promised. “But you probably want to move. The other students are going to start flooding through those doors any minute now.”

Harry winced at the thought. “It seems worse than it was in January.” He commented, as he pushed himself off the wall began walking down the corridor.

“It does.” Neville agreed. “Maybe because they never really forgot the whole January drama and now this is just being added on top.”
“Yes,” Harry agreed. “That and the fact that when they think about parselmouths they only think of two people.”

“You-Know-Who and Slytherin.” Neville agreed. “Well, on the bright side, the Slytherins probably just became your biggest fans.”

“I wonder what the Beauxbaton and Durmstrang students think about it.” Harry sighed. “I think their culture is more accepting of Dark Magic.”

“Durmstrang definitely is.” Luna nodded. “But Beauxbatons seems just as bad as Hogwarts.”

“Maybe I should finish my schooling at Durmstrang.” Harry suggested glumly. “Better that than being vilified by the whole school.”

“Not the whole school,” Luna protested. “Just three quarters of it.”

“Thanks, Luna,” Harry rolled his eyes. “That makes me feel so much better.”

“Though admittedly, half the Slytherins hate you too.” Neville pointed out. “Because of your dark lord slaying skills.”

“I wish I had slayed him.” Harry groused.

40-40-40

“You know what I like about you, Harry?” Draco asked later that morning, when he sat beside Harry in Magical Theory.

“What?”

“Normally I’m the anti-traditionalists’ most-hated wizard,” Draco commented cheerfully. “But with you around, I come a distant second.”

Harry glared at him. “Seriously? The entire school has decided that I’m basically Voldemort in disguise and you think it’s funny?”

Draco’s expression became contrite. “Sorry, I was just trying to lighten the mood. How has your morning been?”

“Awful!” Harry answered with feeling. “We’ve only had one class and I already feel ready to curse someone.”

“You probably shouldn’t say those things out loud.” Neville advised, sitting at the desk on Harry’s other side. “I don’t think it’s exactly reassuring for the natives.”

Harry glanced around the class at the students who were either pale with fright or glaring at him, and sneered. “Bloody idiots.”

“Or, you know, gormless wankers.” Draco’s tone was amused.

“I shouldn’t have let my temper get the best of me.” Harry admitted quietly.

Draco shook his head. “Theo disagrees, he was delighted. It’s been ages since he’s seen you do your impression of my father.”

“Your father wouldn’t have sworn like that.” Harry sighed, disappointed in himself.
“Yes, he would have.” Draco disagreed. “He doesn’t do it often, but in times like that, he really goes for it. Once, when I was nine, someone said something horrible to Mother when we were in Diagon Alley and Father decimated him.”

“In front of your mother?” Harry asked in surprise.

Draco grinned. “You should have heard her lecture him about it afterwards. I only heard the first part, then they put up a silencing spell, but it was smashing!”

“Oh.” Harry couldn’t help but feel slightly cheered by that.

Neville looked amused. “By the way, Professor Snape and Professor Lupin both ripped into Ron after you left. Lupin took 50 points from Gryffindor for verbal bullying and fear-mongering, but Snape gave him a huge speech about the stupidity of making unfounded accusations and how Ron should hope that Lord Black doesn’t decide to sue him for slander, and then gave him two weeks of detention with Filch. Dumbledore and McGonagall didn’t look very happy, but they didn’t say anything.”

Harry felt the corners of his mouth perk up. “Did I lose any points for swearing?”

“Not that I’ve heard of.” Neville answered.

“I haven’t heard anything either.” Draco added. “Though it could be that they’re just waiting to do it in person.”

“I had Transfiguration last class and McGonagall didn’t say anything.” Harry commented.

“You’re probably fine then.” Draco decided. “She’s the one who is most likely to take points.”

The rest of the day went just as terribly as Harry’s morning had been. It seemed as though wherever he was, whether it be in class, in the Great Hall, in the corridor, or the library, there were students harassing him. He had been called a Death Eater more times than he could count and had been forced to shield himself from anonymously cast curses eleven times.

His friends had done their best to shield him from it all, but his Slytherin friends’ presence only seemed to spur his harassers on. As though the sight of them together only confirmed the fact that Harry was a Death Eater.

It was demoralizing to constantly be surrounded by hostile students who seemed to have nothing better to do than harass him. Even more demoralising was the sight of younger students choosing to run in the other direction rather than have to cross paths with him. One Hufflepuff first year had even burst into tears when she’d come around a corner and seen Harry in the corridor.

The only students who didn’t seem to either hate or fear Harry were the Slytherins, though Harry had noticed that the students he suspected were Death Eaters were watching him closely. It made Harry wish that the Sorting Hat had decided to put him in Slytherin instead of Ravenclaw.

Remus pulled Harry aside after History of Magic and asked if Harry was alright. Harry hadn’t really known what to say, but he’d assured Remus that he was surviving. According to Remus, Sirius had left the school in a rage after breakfast and had spent the day in conversations with his lawyers and the editor of the Daily Prophet. Harry didn’t have much hope that Sirius would manage to do anything. After all, nothing that Skeeter had written had been untrue. He was a parslemouth, his magic was dark, and he had been hiding it.
Of course, the article had included some insinuations that hadn’t been true, such as that being dark was synonymous with being evil, but Harry wasn’t sure whether you could sue someone over implicit messages.

After leaving Remus’ classroom, Harry made his way to Hoth – the only sanctuary he could think of. It was a relief to close the door behind him and know that the only people who would be able to find him there were Draco and Luna. He took a moment to sit on the couch and breathe, before calling for a House Elf to bring him some food. He’d barely been able to eat anything at lunch, partly because the Ravenclaw Table tried to prevent him from sitting with him, and then, after Flitwick had intervened on his behalf, he’d found it hard to eat with so many hostile glares aimed at him.

The sound of the door opening had Harry twisting around on the couch anxiously, but it was only Draco and Luna.

“Merlin,” Draco exclaimed. “It’s a nightmare out there.”

“I know.” Harry agreed glumly, before taking another bite from the scone the House Elf had brought him.

Luna plonked herself down on the couch and leaned into Harry. “Are you alright?”

Harry stiffened at the contact, before relaxing again. “I don’t know. It’s really been a day.”

“I’ve written to Mother and Father.” Draco told him, sitting on Harry’s other side. “Father’s a School Governor, he should be able to do something.”

Harry felt safer than he had all day, with Draco and Luna on either side of him. “Sirius is a School Governor too,” He reminded his cousin. “But I’m not sure what they’ll be able to do.”

“I hope they expel everyone who looks at you funny.” Draco said, his voice hard.

Harry let out a bitter laugh. “Draco, that would only leave the three of us.”

“No, it wouldn’t.” Luna argued, her head resting on Harry’s shoulder. “What about Neville and Daphne?”

“Or Theo and Blaise?” Draco added.

“Not to mention Takashi, Fred and George.” Luna continued. “Besides, not everyone hates you.”

“No, the Slytherins don’t seem to mind that I’m evil.” Harry snapped.

Draco frowned at him. “That’s not fair. We Slytherins know what it’s like to be vilified for something that we can’t control. Not to mention that we don’t believe the fallacy that dark equals evil.”

Harry sighed and let his head fall back against the back of the couch. “I know, I’m sorry.”

“You’re not all wrong though.” Draco admitted. “Some of the older students look a little too happy that you’re a parslemouth.”

“I noticed that too.” Harry agreed. “It’s mostly the same ones who we decided were spying on me for Voldemort.”

Luna stiffened against his side. “There are students spying on you?”
Harry winced, he’d forgotten that Luna didn’t know about the deal that Lord Malfoy had made with Voldemort. “Yes, we think so.”

There was a long silence, then Luna spoke again. “I think we should tell our friends about Hoth.”

“What?!” Draco exclaimed.

“I don’t want to be a doomsdayer,” Luna started. “But I don’t think this is going to go away quickly. It took the school a month to get over thing in January and this seems much worse.”

“I know.” Harry sighed deeply.

“So we should let our friends in here, so Harry doesn’t have to spend more time out there than he has to.” Luna concluded.

“No way.” Draco shook his head firmly. “That would be as good as announcing that we’re the Marauders’ Apprentices.”

“We could always hide the potions.” Harry pointed out. “There would be no reason to link us to the pranks then.”

“I have a better idea.” Draco decided. “You two, and Neville, will just have to start spending time with us in the Slytherin Common Room.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “Draco, you can’t be serious. The Slytherins will never let us in.”

“They will if I tell them to.” Draco declared imperiously.

“And Neville?” Harry asked skeptically.

“You’re forgetting three things, Harry.” Draco told him, his tone faintly smug. “Firstly, Slytherin is the only House that supports you right now. Secondly, I am the unofficial leader of the House. And, thirdly, Slytherin is traditional. They’re hardly going to deny noble Heirs entry if I demand it of them.”

“So they’ll just let any noble heir in?” Harry asked, still unconvinced. “Whatever happened to House secrecy?”

“They wouldn’t usually,” Draco admitted. “But you’re forgetting my first and second points. Put them all together and there is no way the Slytherins will refuse.”

“Alright,” Harry nodded slowly. “But you have to get their agreement before I try and enter. I’m not going to put myself in a position where they might turn me down.”

“Understandable.” Draco agreed. “Will that work, Luna?”

“Yes,” Luna smiled brightly. “What about Fred and George?”

“No.” Draco answered flatly. “Besides, they don’t usually spend any time with us outside of the Come and Go Room.”

Harry spent the rest of the evening at Hoth with Draco and Luna, even going so far as asking the House Elves to bring them dinner there. The atmosphere was so safe and relaxed that Harry had almost forgotten how hostile the rest of the students were to him until he stepped through the door.
into the Ravenclaw Tower and encountered the majority of his House lying in wait for him.

“What do you think you’re doing here, Potter?” Payton, one of the seventh years, spat.

Harry subtly removed his wand from his wand-holster, just in case. He was glad that Luna was standing behind him. “Going to bed.”

“We don’t want you here.” Payton told him.

“Yes,” Harry looked around the room. “I can see that.”

There was a long silence and then Harry saw Takashi emerge through the door that lead to the dormitories.

“What is going on here?” Takashi asked, his wand in his hand.

“We’re just telling the Death Eater that we don’t want any of his sort in our House.” Cho Chang answered shrilly.

Takashi raised an eyebrow disdainfully. “Under what authority? The Sorting Hat, Professor Flitwick and Headmaster Dumbledore are the only people who have the power to make those kinds of decisions.”

Payton looked unimpressed. “Either Potter gets out, or he might find himself waking up missing an eye.”

“Twenty points from Ravenclaw for threatening another student.” Takashi snapped out.

Penny White, the other seventh year prefect, pushed her way through the crowd. “Twenty points to Ravenclaw for standing up for what you believe in. You’re not the only prefect around here, Nado.”

“No, I am not,” Takashi agreed, “But there is only one Professor Flitwick and I am sure that he would not condone what you are doing here.”

“You’re such a nark, Nado!” Payton snapped.

Takashi looked the group over in amusement. “Do you really not believe that Flitwick will find out anyway?”

“There is no way I am sleeping in the same room as that Death Eater!” Anthony Goldstein shouted suddenly, from the side of the room.

“I am not a Death Eater.” Harry denied firmly. “I hate Voldemort!”

The entire group flinched as one.

“Then why aren’t you scared of saying his name?” A student yelled from the back.

“Not denying that you’re dark though, are you?” Another student asked caustically.

“No point denying it, Potter.” A third student commented. “Everyone knows that parselmouths are evil.”

“Yes, well, everyone knows that Ravenclaws are supposed to intelligent.” Harry pointed out. “Clearly public knowledge isn’t all that it’s made out to be.”
The Ravenclaws seemed to swell with fury. “How dare you?!”

“You’re no Ravenclaw! You’re a bloody Slytherin!”

“Get out, Potter!”

Takashi sighed and shot Harry a reproving look. “If Harry cannot sleep here, then he must sleep somewhere. I will accompany him to see Professor Flitwick so that something can be arranged.”

“Like hell, Nado!” Penny White snapped. “I’m coming with you. I’m not going to let you to slander us to Flitwick. I’m sure the professor will understand once I’ve explained it all to him.”

Professor Flitwick did not understand, in fact he looked completely flabbergasted. “I beg your pardon, Miss White.”

“We took a vote, sir.” White explained. “And we decided that we don’t want him in our House anymore.” She glared at Harry. “We’re excommunicating him.”

Flitwick blinked. “I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“It’s something some religious muggles do,” White explained. “My folks are catholic, you see, and…”

“I understand the term, Miss White.” Flitwick interrupted her with frown. “I just don’t understand why my House would decide to do such a thing.”

Harry smiled gratefully at his professor.

“He’s a Death Eater, Professor!” White said sincerely. “None of us would feel safe knowing that he was sleeping in the same place as us.”

Flitwick turned towards Harry. “Is this true, Mr. Potter?”

“No, sir.” Harry denied firmly. “Voldemort killed my parents, not to mention that he’s an evil, genocidal maniac. I would never follow him.”

Flitwick nodded approvingly, before turning back to White. “There, you see, Miss White. Mr. Potter is no more a Death Eater than I am.”

White shook her head resolutely. “I’m sorry, Professor, but I don’t believe him. Death Eaters lie. We’ve made up our mind, we want Potter out.”

Flitwick’s expression was grave. “I see, and if I deny your request?”

“It’s not a request, Professor.” White told him. “If we see Potter in the Ravenclaw Tower we’ll be forced to take matters into our own hands and defend ourselves.”

Harry slumped against the wall. This had to be a nightmare.
Chapter 40

After Flitwick had dismissed Takashi and White, he led Harry silently through the Hogwarts corridors and up to Dumbledore’s office. Harry spent the walk trying to figure out what was going to happen to him. He doubted that they would send him back to the Ravenclaw dormitories, not after the threats that White had made, but where else could he sleep? He’d never heard of someone being excommunicated by their House before.

Dumbledore was sitting with his hands clasped on the desk in front of him, as though he had been waiting for them to arrive. “Good evening, Filius, Mr. Potter.”

“Merry meet, Headmaster.” Harry acknowledged, as he sat in the seat that Professor Flitwick gestured him towards.

There were few seconds of silence, before Dumbledore spoke again. “What can I do for you?”

Flitwick, whose short legs were hanging off the edge of the chair, frowned. “It seems as though my Ravenclaws are lacking the ability to scrutinize the information that they read.” He sounded offended by the thought.

Dumbledore sighed deeply. “Should I take that to mean that this matter is related to Miss Skeeter’s article in this morning’s edition of the Daily Prophet?”

“Yes,” Flitwick nodded sharply.

Dumbledore turned his focus to Harry. “I do wish you had felt comfortable sharing the knowledge of your…ability with me, dear boy. Perhaps, if I’d had some prior knowledge, I could have prevented the articles release.”

Harry swallowed down a grimace, he wished Sirius was here.

Dumbledore rested his gaze on Harry, as though waiting for a response, before turning back to Flitwick. “So, what seems to be the problem?”

“Ravenclaw House has taken it upon themselves to repudiate Mr. Potter.” Flitwick explained disapprovingly. “Miss White has informed me that, should we ignore their wishes and sent Mr. Potter back, they will take matters into their own hands.”

Harry resisted the urge to slump down in his chair. As though his day hadn’t been disheartening enough, now he had to listen to the account of how his House had rejected him – living through the experience had been bad enough.

Dumbledore’s mouth fell open. “Are you sure you did mishear her, Filius? I find it hard to believe that Miss White would be so injudicious.”

Flitwick bristled. “I am quite sure, Headmaster. Though I assure you, I was just as shocked as you are. To think that one of my prefects would act so foolishly.”

Harry thought that White’s behaviour barely scratched the surface of the foolishness of Ravenclaw House. After all, according to White the entire House had voted on the matter. She had just been the spokesperson.

“Yes,” Dumbledore’s expression was mournful. “It is indeed shocking. Though I am sure that she is
merely reacting from a place of fear. It is an alarming thing when one is forced to confront their fears.”

Flitwick didn’t look impressed. “As alarming as Miss White and her housemates are no doubt finding the situation, that is not my concern at this moment. Mr. Potter is in need of a place to stay tonight.”

“You are sure that his Ravenclaw dormitory is not an option?” Dumbledore asked.

Harry stared at Dumbledore in disbelief. Had he not been listening?

“I am.” Flitwick answered firmly.

Dumbledore was looking sad again. “Then perhaps we could add a bed to the Gryffindor dormitories for the night.”

Harry stiffened. What?

“You cannot be serious, Headmaster.” Flitwick seemed just as astonished by the suggestion as Harry was. “You cannot be unaware that this morning’s article has sparked a great deal of animosity towards Mr. Potter amongst the Gryffindors.”

Dumbledore peered disapprovingly over his glasses. “I am sure that your outburst did not help the situation, Mr. Potter.”

Harry met his eyes unflinchingly. He wasn’t going to apologise for insulting Weasley when the other boy had clearly deserved it. There was sudden tickle in his brain and Harry’s eyes narrowed when he realised that Dumbledore was attempting to use Legilimency against him.

“I presume you are aware that using Legilimency on a person without their consent is a crime, Headmaster.” Harry commented as evenly as he could. “Not to mention using it on someone who is underage.”

Harry wasn’t sure who looked more surprised, Dumbledore, at being caught out, or Flitwick, whose head snapped around to stare at Harry.

“Are you accusing the Headmaster of performing Legilimency on you, Harry?” Flitwick asked worriedly.

Harry considered the question. Was he accusing the Headmaster? Or just warning him not to try again?

“Yes.” Harry decided firmly. “I would like Lord Black present.”

Dumbledore’s face fell. “I am sure that is unnecessary, my dear boy.”

“You just attacked me, Headmaster.” Harry pointed out, his stomach twisting nervously. “I would feel much safer if my godfather was here.”

Flitwick, who had been glancing between Harry and Dumbledore, brought out his wand. “Of course, Mr. Potter. I noticed that he wasn’t at dinner this evening. Has he returned to the castle, Headmaster?”

Dumbledore frowned disapprovingly at Flitwick. “Sirius presence is not required, Filius. His presence in the castle is due to the Triwizard Tournament and this is a Hogwarts’ matter.”

Flitwick squared his shoulders. “If you do not summon Lord Black, I will, Headmaster. Mr. Potter
has made a serious accusation…”

“Which is completely unfounded.” Dumbledore interrupted, taking on an injured expression.

“The validity of Mr. Potter’s accusation is not up for debate.” Flitwick argued harshly. “He has requested Lord Black’s presence, which is his right.”

Dumbledore sighed. “Very well.” He picked up a quill and wrote a short note on a piece of parchment, before charming the parchment into a small paper bird that flew out of the office. “Now, perhaps we might discuss the original purpose for this meeting while we wait.”

“Not until Lord Black is present.” Flitwick denied firmly.

Harry didn’t think he had ever respected his professor more.

They sat in a heavy silence that was only interrupted by Dumbledore occasional attempts to defuse the situation. Each attempt was firmly thwarted by Professor Flitwick who seemed intent on not allowing Dumbledore any interaction with Harry until Sirius arrived.

By Dumbledore’s fifth attempt, and subsequently, Flitwick’s fifth interruption, the Headmaster was clearly beginning to get frustrated.

“Is this really necessary, Filius?” He frowned. “Surely you do not believe that I would do something as rash as attempting to use Legilimency against Mr. Potter.”

Flitwick’s expression didn’t waver. “It is not my place to determine the legitimacy of Mr. Potter’s accusation. My role, as Mr. Potter’s Head of House, is to make his safety my first priority.”

“As is my role as Headmaster.” Dumbledore agreed smoothly. “We are all on the same side here, Filius.”

Harry wondered if Dumbledore knew that he was using Flitwick’s name in every second sentence. Was it some kind of manipulation technique? Or was Dumbledore just obsessed with using people’s names?

“I am glad to hear that, Headmaster.” Flitwick agreed.

There was a long pause, before Dumbledore frowned again. “Perhaps it would be wise for me to have a witness of my own present. I am sure Minerva would be willing to observe our conversation.”

Flitwick inclined his head. “If that is your wish, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore wrote out another note, before charming it into another bird and sending it on its way.

Harry sighed quietly. How was it that the biggest things on his mind yesterday had been the Third Task of the Tournament (that he still knew nothing about) and his exams? Those things seemed almost insignificant now, what with him behind despised by most of the school, excommunicated by his House, and having just accused Dumbledore of attacking him.

Merlin, why couldn’t his life be easy?

Sirius arrived a few minutes later and, while he looked surprised to see Harry, he simply nodded in acknowledgement of Harry and Flitwick’s bow before transfiguring Harry’s chair into a two seater couch and sitting down.

“I’m glad you could make it, Sirius.” Dumbledore greeted him earnestly.
“What’s going on?” Sirius asked brusquely.

“We’re just waiting for one more member of our party, and then I will be able to explain.” Dumbledore answered.

Sirius looked at Flitwick and then at Harry. “I’m sure you won’t mind if I have a word with Harry while we wait.”

Dumbledore opened his mouth, but Flitwick bet him to it.

“Of course not, Lord Black.”

Sirius shot Flitwick a smile and pulled out his wand to cast a privacy spell. “You alright, Harry?”

Harry clenched his jaw to prevent his expression from crumbling. “Not really.”

“Want to tell me what’s going on?” Sirius asked softly.

“The whole school hates me.” Harry admitted. “Well, except for the Slytherins. The Ravenclaws tried to stop me sitting at our table at lunch, and then, when I went up for bed, they told me that they were kicking me out.”

Sirius’ mouth dropped open. “What?”

“They think I’m a Death Eater.” Harry explained. “White, one of the prefects, told Flitwick that if I go back they’re going to take matters into their own hands to protect themselves.”

Sirius wrapped his arm around Harry’s shoulders. “Oh, Harry.”

“And then Dumbledore tried to use Legilimency on me.” Harry finished. “That’s why you’re here.”

Sirius’ expression turned thunderous. “He did what?”

“I reminded him that it was a crime.” Harry went on. “And Professor Flitwick asked if I was accusing Dumbledore of using it against me. I said yes, I hope that’s alright. I didn’t know if I should. I didn’t want it to be like the Fudge thing all over again.”

Sirius’ expression seemed to be warring between fury and amusement at the memory of Harry’s interaction with Fudge over Christmas – fury won.

“You did the right thing.” He told Harry seriously.

“It won’t cause problems?” Harry asked, he glanced towards Dumbledore to check that the Headmaster couldn’t hear what they were saying. “I know you and Lord Malfoy hadn’t planned on moving against him until later.”

“To hell with any problems.” Sirius exclaimed, squeezing Harry’s shoulder. “You’re the important one. Keeping you safe is my number one priority.”

Harry smiled weakly. “That’s what Flitwick said when Dumbledore tried to convince him to sweep it all under the carpet.”

Sirius shot a grateful look towards Flitwick. “Good on him. Who are we waiting on?”

“McGonagall.” Harry sighed. “Dumbledore wanted to have someone on his side.”
Sirius didn’t look impressed by that. “I need to know what you want to happen. Are you alright with me telling Amelia?”

Harry glanced towards Dumbledore who was looking more and more frustrated. “If I say yes, and he gets fired, people are going to hate me even more.”

“Maybe.” Sirius nodded.

Harry considered it. “Yes.”

“Yes, you want me to tell Amelia?” Sirius checked.

Harry nodded.

“Good.”

Harry saw a movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to see McGonagall entering the office. She stopped with a surprised expression when she saw the other occupants of the room, but then conjured herself a chair on the other side of Flitwick’s chair.

“Thank you for coming, Minerva.” Dumbledore greeted her.

McGonagall inclined her head. “What is going on?”

“We have two issues at hand.” Flitwick answered, as Dumbledore opened his mouth. “Firstly, Mr. Potter has been repudiated by Ravenclaw House. I brought him here to discuss alternate living arrangements with the Headmaster.”

“Well, I never!” McGonagall looked incensed. “Such disloyalty!”

“Yes, however, that’s not the reason I called you here, Minerva.” Dumbledore started. “Mr…”

Flitwick broke in. “The second issue is that Mr. Potter has accused Headmaster Dumbledore of performing Legilimency on him against his will.”

McGonagall stared at Flitwick, and then at Dumbledore, and then at Harry. “I beg your pardon.”

“I…” Dumbledore started.

“Mr. Potter immediately asked for Lord Black’s presence.” Flitwick interrupted against. “At which point Dumbledore insisted that you be present as well.”

“I see.” McGonagall’s expression was disapproving. “Would not the Aurors office have been a more appropriate port of call?”

“Minerva!” Dumbledore looked hurt. “You cannot believe Mr. Potter’s accusation.”

If anything, McGonagall’s expression became even more disapproving. “I do not…”

Harry’s shoulders slumped, before he straightened them again.

“…however,” She continued. “That is neither here, nor there. It is up to the Aurors to decide the validly of the allegation, not me, and certainly not you.”

Sirius squeezed Harry’s shoulder encouragingly. “Exactly. Perhaps now would be a good time to call for the Aurors.”
McGonagall leaned forward so that she could see Harry. “You are sure this is the course of action you wish to take, Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Then, yes,” McGonagall nodded firmly. “This is exactly the time to call for the Aurors.”

41-41-41

The Aurors that came through the floo seemed so astonished at the idea that anyone would dare accuse Dumbledore of committing a crime (and suspicious that Harry, the parslemouth, was the one accusing him) that Sirius immediately demanded different Aurors. Dumbledore protested it, of course, but in the end a much put out looking Lady Bones stepped out of the floo.

She, with the assistance of the two original Aurors, took statements from Harry, Dumbledore and Flitwick, and, when it was clear that Harry and Dumbledore’s stories were conflicting (and Flitwick’s account was pretty much useless), suggested gently that if Harry wanted his accusation to be believed he would need to use Veritaserum.

“Really, Madame Bones,” Dumbledore interrupted with a frown. “Mr. Potter is underage. You know full well that the DMLE is not authorised to use Veritaserum on underaged wizards.”

“Unless both they, and their guardian, give their consent.” Sirius pointed out. “Harry?”

“I want to take it.” Harry decided firmly.

“And I give my consent.” Sirius nodded.

“I must protest,” Dumbledore started. “Veritaserum is far from infallible. If Mr. Potter is as proficient at Occlumency as he claims to be, he may be able to fight its effects.”

Lady Bones frowned at him. “If Mr. Potter is as proficient at Occlumency as he claims to be, it only strengthens the accusation he made against you. Besides, the only proven instance of an Occlumens lying through Veritaserum was the result of years of ingesting truth serums of different strengths. Surely you are not claiming that Mr. Potter could have done the same?”

“No, no, of course not.” Dumbledore denied. “I am simply concerned about the effects the Veritaserum may have to Mr. Potter’s health.”

“I want to take it.” Harry repeated firmly.

“Mitches.” Lady Bones held out a hand, and one of the younger Aurors stepped forward and passed her a small vial. “Tongue out, Mr. Potter.” She instructed.

Harry glanced behind him at Sirius, whose hand was resting encouragingly on Harry’s shoulder, before turning back and poking out his tongue. He felt three drops fall on his tongue, before Lady Bones told him to swallow.

There was a long pause, and then Lady Bones began to ask the questions.

“What is your name?”

“Harry James Potter.” Harry heard himself answer flatly.

“When is your birthday?”

“Who is your godfather?”

“Sirius Orion Black.”

“Are you a parslemouth?!” The question didn’t come from Lady Bones, but Harry had no choice not to answer it.

“Yes.”

“Mitches, get him out of here.” Lady Bones snapped.

Harry watched as one of the original Aurors practically pushed the other one through the floo.

“Why did you come to Dumbledore’s office this evening?” Lady Bones asked.

“Professor Flitwick told me to.” Harry answered.

“Professor Flitwick told me to.” Harry answered.

Lady Bones’ eyes crinkled. “Do you believe that Headmaster Dumbledore performed Legilimency against you?”

“Yes.”

Harry could hear McGonagall gasp in surprise.

“Did you give him your consent to do so?” Lady Bones continued.

“No.”

“How did you recognise Headmaster Dumbledore’s attack on your mind?”

“I felt it.”

“Mitches.” Bones called. “Tongue out, Mr. Potter.”

The antidote worked just as quickly as the original serum did and within a minute, Harry felt like himself again.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter.” Lady Bones smiled tightly, before turning to face Dumbledore. “Do you have anything further to say, Headmaster?”

Dumbledore was looking thoroughly disappointed with all of them. “You cannot truly believe such an outrageous claim, Madame Bones. The idea that I would attack one of my student’s minds is simply ludicrous.”

Lady Bones looked severe. “I see. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, you are being charged with the attempted assault on an underaged wizard using Legilimency. If you would please accompany us through the floo?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “I believe we have reached a parting of ways, if you will.”

“Oh?” Lady Bones asked, her wand in her hand. “Don’t do anything rash, Dumbledore.”

“I’m afraid I can’t allow you to arrest me.” Dumbledore explained apologetically. “Voldemort is still out there, you know. I can’t allow you to send me to Azkaban. Certainly I could break out, but it
would waste valuable time that we just don’t have.”

Lady Bones looked thoroughly unimpressed. “Are you announcing your intent to resist arrest?”

“Yes, I believe I am.” Dumbledore admitted.

“And I suppose that you plan to take on myself, Mitchens, Lord Black, and Professors McGonagall and Flitwick?” Lady Bones asked.

“Only if you make me.” Dumbledore pointed out in a reasonable tone.

Sirius gripped Harry’s shoulder tightly and pulled him to his feet. “Get behind me.”

Harry obeyed quickly, even as he drew his own wand. How was this happening?

“Stupify!” Mitchens suddenly shouted and, as Dumbledore easily shielded from the spell, Harry couldn’t help but roll his eyes. Really? Did the Auror not know that shouting a spell only made it easier for it to be blocked?

Suddenly Lady Bones cast a spell, with Sirius and Flitwick only half a second behind her. McGonagall was standing near one of the walls looking conflicted. Harry couldn’t imagine what she was feeling. Everyone knew that she was Dumbledore’s supporter, through and through.

Dumbledore blocked all the spells easily, and then raised his own wand.

In a split second, Harry had a thought. Parselmagic couldn’t be blocked by any non-parselmagic shield and so far Dumbledore had used a shield to block all the spells sent at him. If Harry cast the Parselmagic equivalent of a stunning spell, quietly enough that Dumbledore didn’t know that it was different, he might try and block it in the same way.

He raised his wand. :Sleep!:

Simultaneously, a streak of silver light flashed out of a Dumbledore’s wand. The floor shook, dust filled the room, voices shouted, Fawkes screeched, and then Harry knew now more.

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“What if he wakes up?”

“We don’t even know what happened to him.”

“Did anyone see a spell hit him?”

“Harry? Harry?”

Harry opened his eyes with a groan, before flinching back when he saw Sirius’ face only inches away from his own. His head hit the floor with a crack. “Ow!”

“Sorry.” Sirius offered him a hand. “How are you feeling?”

Harry allowed himself to be pulled into a sitting position and then raised a hand to rub his head. “Nauseous. What happened?”

“We’re not sure.” Sirius admitted. “Dumbledore cast something to knock us all out, but it seems to have knocked him out as well.”
Harry looked around Sirius to where the Headmaster was lying unconscious on the floor with Lady Bones, Mitchens, Flitwick, and McGonagall gathered around him.

“Um, I think it might have been me.” Harry admitted quietly. “I cast a Parselmagic spell on him.”

“What?” Sirius asked loudly, drawing the attention of the others. “Didn’t you hear me telling you to stay behind me?”

“I did.” Harry protested with a frown. “I just thought maybe I could help as well as cower behind you.”

“You weren’t cowering.” Sirius argued. “You were staying safe. What did you cast?”

“Sleep.” Harry answered.

Lady Bones crouched down beside him. “You cast a spell, Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, my lady.” Harry nodded, before wincing when the movement increased his nausea. “I cast a,” He glanced nervously towards Sirius who nodded encouragingly. “I cast a Parselmagic spell.”

“Parselmagic!” Mitchens exclaimed in horror. “Like, as in, Parseltongue?!”

Harry looked down nervously. “Yes. It can’t be blocked by normal shields and Dumbledore was only using shields to block your spells, so I thought that I might be able surprise him.”

Sirius barked out a laugh. “I’ll say you did.”

“What does the spell do?” Lady Bones asked worriedly.

“It’s the equivalent of a stunning spell.” Harry explained. “I don’t know how long it will last though.”

Lady Bones looked back towards Dumbledore. “Well, then, we should probably get Dumbledore back to the Ministry.”

“That’s it?” Mitchens asked in disbelief. “He cast a spell in Parseltongue! Shouldn’t we be arresting him, Director?”


Harry exchanged an amused glance with Sirius. Lady Bones was smashing!

Madame Bones and Mitchens left soon after, with Dumbledore being levitated with them, and then it was just Sirius, Harry, Flitwick and McGonagall.

“Well,” Sirius looked around the room that was looking a little worse for wear. “That wasn’t quite what I was expecting.” He offered a hand to Harry who used it to climb to his feet.

Professor McGonagall was looking rather lost.

“Thank you, Professor Flitwick.” Harry said earnestly.

“Yes,” Sirius nodded. “Thank you. Your actions this evening do you proud.”

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat. “I must apologise, Mr. Potter. For not believing your
claim."

“You still suggested that we call the Aurors though, Professor.” Harry comforted her. “Thank you.”

“It seems that we are in the need of a temporary Headmaster,” Sirius started. “Professor McGonagall, I cannot speak for the rest of the Board, but would you be willing to fulfil the role for now?”

McGonagall still looked off balance, but she nodded slowly. “Of course.”

“Excellent.” Sirius smiled. “Now, it seems that we still have one more order of business. I believe Harry needs somewhere to sleep. Would my quarters be acceptable, at least as a short-term solution? I would be happy to convert my living area into a second bedroom. I spend hardly any time there anyway.”

McGonagall and Flitwick exchanged a glance before nodding.

“That seems very reasonable.” McGonagall agreed. “I will have the elves prepare the room while you walk there. They will also remove Mr. Potter’s belongings from his dormitory.”

“Thank you.” Sirius told her sincerely. “I presume you will make an announcement regarding Dumbledore’s absence at breakfast tomorrow?”

“Perhaps it should come from the Board.” McGonagall suggested.

“Very well.” Sirius nodded. “I will contact Lucius and discuss that matter with him after I have seen Harry to bed.”

Harry swallowed down a tired yawn. The idea of having to do anything more tonight was exhausting.

“Please remember that the Board contains more members than just yourself and Mr. Malfoy.” McGonagall commented dryly.

Sirius looked amused. “Of course.”

41-41-41
Chapter 41

When Harry’s alarm went off the next morning, he turned it off with a groan. It had been after midnight by the time he’d gotten to sleep that night which meant that he’d had less than five hours sleep. The memory of why exactly he’d been in bed so late was enough to make him consider burying his head under his blankets and going back to sleep. He didn’t want to get up and face another day like yesterday.

Still, the knowledge that Neville, Remus, and Takashi would be waiting near the Quidditch Pitch to go running was enough to pull himself out of bed. He didn’t want to worry them and, given that Takashi had witnessed his expulsion from Ravenclaw House the evening before, Harry thought that him not showing up would probably do just that.

As he did every morning, Harry cast lumos and used the light to find his clothes, before remembering that he was alone in the room. He could turn use his magic to turn on the lamps and get dressed in the light. Once dressed, Harry tiptoed through his bedroom door and then passed Sirius’ bed since his godfather had opted to take the bed in the living room. Sirius’ reasoning for it was sound, he was often up a lot later than Harry was, though Harry thought that his godfather probably hadn’t considered Harry’s early mornings.

Harry was halfway towards the door when Sirius sat up in a fright, his wand in his hand. “Who’s there?”

“It’s Harry.” Harry answered quickly.

Sirius groaned and flopped back down onto the bed. “What are you doing?”

“Going running.” Harry answered apologetically. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Sirius mumbled into the pillow. “Good night.”

The air outside was crisp, but Harry found himself appreciating the fact that it was no longer freezing. He much preferred running in the warmer months than when the ground was covered in snow and ice.

Remus, Takashi and Neville were already stretching under one of the goal posts on the Quidditch Pitch, but they stopped when Harry approached.

“Are you alright?” Takashi asked, looking him over carefully.

“Takashi said the Ravenclaws kicked you out.” Neville commented in disbelief. “That’s crazy! Can they even do that?”

“I’m fine.” Harry answered Takashi, before turning to Neville. “Not officially, but given that the Ravenclaws threatened to attack me if I return to our Tower, I think they’re going to win this one.”

“So what did Dumbledore say?” Neville asked curiously. “Where did you sleep last night?”

Harry winced at the reminder of his conversation with, and the subsequent arrest of, Dumbledore the night before. “I’m staying with Sirius.”

Remus looked amused. “Please tell me you woke him up on your way down here.”
Harry smirked and began his stretches. “Only a little bit. I’m sure he was asleep again before I had even shut the door behind me.”

After their run, Harry enjoyed a hot shower in the Quidditch Locker rooms, and then followed his friends to the Great Hall with trepidation. He definitely didn’t want a re-enactment of lunch the day before when his house mates had tried to prevent him from sitting at their table. It had been one of the most humiliating moments of his life, not to mention the horrible sense of rejection he’d felt afterwards. Though, admittedly, being kicked out of Ravenclaw Tower had definitely been worse.

They entered the Great Hall and Harry tried not to notice when the students at the Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Gryffindor Tables all bristled at the sight of him. Neville split off to sit at the Gryffindor Table, and Harry walked with Takashi towards the Ravenclaw Table with a sinking stomach. This was not going to be fun.

“Mr. Potter.” Professor Snape’s smooth voice broke into Harry’s misery.

Harry looked around and spotted his Professor standing a few feet away from him. “Sir?”

Takashi paused as well, but quickly began moving again when Snape fixed him with a glare.

“Professor McGonagall has asked me to inform you that you have permission to join your friends at the Slytherin Table this morning.” Snape told him.

Harry stared at him. “Pardon, sir?”

“I believe you heard me, Mr. Potter.” Snape arched an eyebrow.

“Yes, sir.” Harry nodded quickly. “Thank you.”

He waited until Snape dismissed him with an impatient nod, before striding towards the Slytherin Table. In reality his direction didn’t change at all, since he had to walk past the Ravenclaw Table to get to the Slytherin Table, but he definitely felt more confident.

In fact, as he reached the Ravenclaw Table, and began to walk down the aisle between it and the Slytherin Table, Harry found himself amused by his house mates’ actions. They looked ridiculous, desperately sliding along the benches to try and prevent him from finding a space to sit. Though, admittedly, he hadn’t found their actions nearly so amusing the day before when he hadn’t had anywhere else to sit.

Harry ignored them as he strode towards the far end of the Slytherin Table where Draco was sitting with their friends – though he did make sure to nod reassuringly at Takashi and Luna who were watching him with worried expressions.

The students’ conversations began to die off as they picked up on Harry’s complete lack of interest in the Ravenclaw Table and, by the time he came to a halt behind Draco, the hall had fallen completely silent.

Draco stood up and stepped over the bench seat he had been sitting on, before greeting Harry with a bow. “Merry meet, Harry.”

Harry nodded in acknowledgement to Draco. “Merry meet. I will be joining you this morning.”

Draco’s eyes widened marginally in surprise. “Of course.” He turned back to the table and flicked a finger towards an older student who was sitting a few seats down. “Bletchley.”
The wizard, who Harry recognised as being the Slytherin Team’s Keeper, nodded respectfully and moved to sit in an empty spot further down the table. Immediately, Daphne and Blaise both slid across the bench to create an empty seat opposite Draco.

“Have a seat.” Draco offered, gesturing towards the now empty seat beside Daphne.

Harry moved around the table and sat down. “Thank you.” He turned to smile at Daphne. “Merry meet, and please accept my sincerest apology for my intolerable language yesterday morning.”

“Merry meet.” Daphne’s eyes danced. “I accept your apology, of course. If only because I also find Weasley to be a g-gormless bastard.”

Harry couldn’t help but be amused by the way she had stuttered over the words. He doubt she had ever used such words in her life. He beamed at her and reached for her hand before pressing a gentle kiss against it. “You are a gem among witches.”

Daphne looked pleased. “How are you this morning?”

“Tired.” Harry answered honestly. “It was a long night.”

“Did the Ravenclaws give you trouble?” Draco asked, his eyes narrowing.

“They ambushed me in the Common Room.” Harry admitted.

Daphne let out a small gasp. “Are you alright?”

“They didn’t hurt me.” Harry reassured her quickly. “But they’ve banned me from the Tower.”

“What?” Theo asked in disbelief. “They can’t do that.”

“They’re convinced that I’m a Death Eater.” Harry explained. “They told Flitwick that they’ll attack me if they see me in the Tower again – to defend themselves of course.”

“They told Flitwick that?” Theo smirked. “How did he take that?”

“Not so well.” Harry admitted, with a smirk of his own. “I’m staying in Sirius’ quarters for now.”

“And sitting with us.” Draco added, with a satisfied nod. “At least Slytherin House hasn’t gone insane like the other three Houses.”

Harry looked over Draco and Theo’s heads towards where the students from Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, and Ravenclaw were all occasionally shooting him, and the entire Slytherin Table, malevolent glares.

“This isn’t going to win you points.” He pointed out. “Maybe I should sit somewhere else?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Daphne rebuked him gently.

“Besides,” Theo looked down the table. “I don’t think you sitting here will make things much worse. Three of our first years spent the night in the hospital wing after being hexed in the back last night. All they remember is hearing a male voice accuse them of being Death Eaters. They’re not even twelve yet.”

“Is Natasja alright?” Harry asked in concern.

Theo rolled his eyes. “She’s fine.”
“She’s scared.” Daphne corrected primly. “They all are.”

Suddenly Professor McGonagall’s voice rang out across the Hall. “If I might have your attention please.”

Harry’s stomach twisted nervously as he realised what McGonagall would be announcing. He hoped she didn’t mention his involvement – he doubted the students would react well to the idea of an alleged Death Eater being the reason that Dumbledore was gone.

McGonagall expression was stern as her gaze swept across the students. “Mr. Black, one of the Hogwarts’ Governors, has an announcement to make.”

Sirius stood up and pointed a wand at his throat. “Yesterday evening, Professor Dumbledore was taking into auror custody on the charge of mentally attacking a student.”

“What?” Someone yelled from the Gryffindor Table.

“You can’t be serious!” Another student shouted.

Harry could see Sirius’ mouth twitch and amusement and just knew that his godfather wanted to make his usual quip about being ‘Sirius’.

“Quiet!” McGonagall snapped, surging to her feet and glaring in the direction that the shouts had come from.

Sirius nodded gratefully at McGonagall. “As such, the Hogwarts Board of Governors have temporarily removed Professor Dumbledore from his position as Headmaster and have asked Professor McGonagall to act as an interim-Headmistress. Thank you.”

There was a loud outcry as all the students reacted to the news.

Harry looked around at his friends and saw that they all looked flabbergasted, though they were hiding their surprise better than the other students in the hall.

“I can’t believe that Dumbledore attacked a student.” Theo commented slowly.

“They said that it was a mental attack.” Draco pointed out. “That means Legilimency. Father’s always suspected that Dumbledore used it illegally, but he never had any proof. He warned me never to look Dumbledore in the eyes.”

“What do you think, Harry?” Daphne asked curiously.

“Good riddance!” Harry declared with a smirk. “McGonagall will be a definite improvement.”

Draco looked sceptical. “Father says she’s Dumbledore’s woman, through and through.”

“Even if he attacked a student?” Harry challenged.

Draco looked unsure. “That assumes that they’ll be able to prove that he did. And that McGonagall will believe the proof.”

“Attention!” McGonagall’s voice rang through the Hall again. “I have a few more announcements to make.” The conversations in the hall slowly died down, until there were only a few students still talking. “Weasley, Thomas, McLaggen, thirty points from Gryffindor.” McGonagall snapped. “Chang, Edgecomb, twenty points from Ravenclaw!”
The conversations came to an abrupt halt.

“Thank you,” McGonagall told them dryly. “As of this morning, I am temporarily rescinding the rule restricting you from sitting at other House tables on a trial basis.” Her gaze rested on Harry for a moment. “You may eat at any of the four tables that you wish to – this also extends to the students from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons.

“Additionally,” McGonagall raised her voice slightly to drown out the few whispered conversations that had started across the hall. “I would like to remind you that any assault against a fellow student, whether it be verbal or physical, is against the school rules. This includes accusing one another of being Death Eaters. Any, and all, assault against another student will be punished.”

Harry met Draco’s eyes and raised a questioning eyebrow. “See?”

Draco nodded slowly. “She’s already better than Dumbledore.”

McGonagall wasn’t finished though. “Professor Flitwick has asked me to announce that last night Ravenclaw House lost four hundred and thirty seven points for their discrimination against Mr. Potter. Additionally, any points that Mr. Potter earns for the remainder of this year will be purely for his own benefit and will not be counted towards the House Cup.”

As the Ravenclaw Table erupted in anger, Harry’s eyes darted towards where Flitwick was sitting staring at his House with a disappointed frown. Merlin, Flitwick was amazing! The small professor was quickly overtaking Snape as Harry’s favourite.

“Finally,” McGonagall continue, her voice growing louder to match the noise. “I would like to assure you that Mr. Potter’s status as parslemouth, though unusual, does not in any way indicate his loyalty in the war. Mr. Potter is no more a Death Eater than I am. Thank you.”

“Well,” Harry started, looking over Draco’s head as the hall erupted into noise. “That was interesting.”

“Interesting?” Theo asked. “That was amazing! Who knew she had it in her.”

“Who knew Flitwick had that in him?” Harry asked. “That’s all of Ravenclaws’ points.”

Draco smirked. “Well, that takes them out of the running for the House Cup.”

Harry glanced down the table, his eyes resting on the few students who he thought were Voldemort’s spies. None of them looked pleased by McGonagall’s speech, which certainly made them a minority at the Slytherin Table. It didn’t make much sense to Harry. Surely Voldemort would be happy by the news that Dumbledore was gone?

42-42-42

The rest of the day was a lot more tolerable than the day before had been. At first, many of the students kept up their harassment of Harry and his friends, but they quickly found out that Professor McGonagall’s threat hadn’t been idle. Professor Flitwick took fifty points from Ravenclaw and one hundred points from Gryffindor during their first class and, when, in an inter-house effort, Ron Weasley and Harry’s dorm mates tried to ambush Harry in the corridor, a passing prefect took another thirty from each person involved.

By lunchtime, Slytherin was practically guaranteed the House Cup as they were the only House who hadn’t lost several hundred points over the morning. Apparently the professors had been cracking down on all bullying of Slytherins as well.
Lunch was interesting. For the first time that Harry could remember, the students were scattered across all four House tables. The only table who stayed mostly the same was Slytherin House, but even they gained new students as not only Harry joined them, but also Luna, Takashi, Neville, Fred and George.

The Slytherins didn’t seem to know what to do with two Weasleys sitting at their table, but nobody said anything – though there always seemed to be at least one student watching them suspiciously. Harry thought their lack of reaction was either due to them enjoying the high ground (as the only House not currently in trouble for discrimination) or because it was clear that the twins were there at Draco’s invitation.

“There was a prefect meeting during first period.” Takashi commented to Harry, part way through lunch. “Professor McGonagall was furious that nobody tried to stop what happened yesterday. She dismissed some of them and placed the rest of them on probation. I am the only Ravenclaw prefect left because the rest are still determined not to let you into the Tower.”

“She fired them?” Harry asked. “All five of them?”

“Yes.”

“Doesn’t that just mean that there will be less prefects around to stop bullying?” Neville asked.

“What good is a prefect that just encourages the bullying though?” Harry pointed out.

“She fired Damian Perriss too.” Fred commented.

George nodded. “He is…”

“Or was…” Fred corrected.

“One of the sixth year Gryffindor prefects.” George finished.

“We’re worried she might ask one of us to replace him.” Fred admitted with a grimace. “Just imagine the shame!”

Draco looked amused. “Not the usual perspective one approaches prefect selection with.”

“You don’t understand.” Both twins chorused.

“Bill was a prefect.” Fred continued.

“Charlie was a prefect.” George added.

“Percy was a prefect.” Fred went one. “If one of us become a prefect…”

“We’ll be just as bad as them!” George finished passionately.

Theo leaned around Fred so that he could see Takashi. “Any news on who the student Dumbledore attacked was?”

“Allegedly attacked.” Neville protested, before shrugging apologetically when everyone stared at him incredulously. “Alright, yeah, he probably attacked him.”

“Don’t shrug.” Draco reprimanded him. “It’s…”

“…uncouth.” Harry grinned, as he chorused the last word along with his cousin.
“No,” Takashi answered Theo. “Though, I do not believe that he is coming back. When the dismissed prefects declared their intention to challenge her decision when Professor Dumbledore returned, she suggested that they not hold their breath.”

“Interesting.” Draco commented. “I wonder how they convinced her that he was guilty.”

“I wonder how they even caught him in the first place.” Neville added. “I doubt I’d notice if someone was performing Legilimency on me.”

“No,” Draco agreed slowly. “Only someone who knew Occlumency would notice.” He turned to stare at Harry. “And not many people our age have even considered learning it.”

Harry shook his head minutely and hoped that his cousin would get the message. “What do you think all this means for the Quidditch game tomorrow?”

Draco nodded in understanding and looked away.

“I doubt they’ll cancel it.” Daphne commented, shooting Harry a questioning look. “Now is exactly the time for inter-house unity.”

“Unless the entire school is in detention.” Neville commented with a grin. “I’m currently the only Gryffindor fourth year who hasn’t been given a detention for the entire day tomorrow.”

“That’s because you were the only one smart enough not to pull a wand on us outside McGonagall’s classroom.” Daphne pointed out.

“How do you think they’d manage having most of the school in detention?” Fred asked curiously. “There wouldn’t be enough professors to supervise.”

“Let alone enough trophy cabinets and cauldrons to clean.” George added with a grin.

Thankfully, the school seemed to have calmed down by the time the afternoon classes started and at dinner that night Professor McGonagall announced that the Quidditch Game would still take place the next day.

After dinner, Harry, Neville and Luna, followed their Slytherin friends down into the dungeons for their first visit to the Slytherin Common Room.

“Are you sure this is okay?” Neville asked worriedly, as they stopped in the middle of the corridor. “I’m a Gryffindor!”


Neville shot him a dirty look. “You know what I mean.”

“You are the Heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom. Act like it.” Draco told him sternly, before turning to the wall. “Basilisk.”

Harry watched in interest as a door appeared in the wall. He’d heard that the other Houses had passwords, but it was very different from the Ravenclaw Tower’s riddles.

“Basilisk?” Neville asked, with a grin. “Are all your passwords that stereotypical?”

Draco pointedly ignored him and led them into the Slytherin Common Room. Harry followed him
through the doorway, only raising an eyebrow in surprise when the ten or so students that were already there immediately leapt to their feet and bowed.

Harry automatically nodded in acknowledgement and noted that Draco, Neville, Daphne and Theo were all nodding as well.

“As you were,” Draco told them, before leading Harry and the others across to a gathering of chairs and couches in the middle of the room.

Harry looked around the room with interest. It was very different from the Ravenclaw Tower. Where the Tower had bookcases, the Slytherin Dungeon had portraits; where the Tower had desks, the Dungeon had more seats and couches; where the Tower was painted blue, the Dungeon was painted green; where the Tower was light and open, the Dungeon was dark and could almost be described as gloomy.

Joining Daphne on a two-seater couch, Harry pulled out his wand and threw up a privacy charm.

Neville, who was sitting with Luna on one of the other two-seater couches, looked curious. “Harry?”

“I was the student that Dumbledore attacked with Legilimency last night.” Harry explained, reaching for Daphne’s hand. “Flitwick took me to see him after the Ravenclaws kicked me out and, while I was explaining what had happened, I felt Dumbledore trying to get into my mind.”

“Merlin!” Theo leaned forward in his chair. “It's always you, isn't it, Harry?”

“I confronted Dumbledore about it,” Harry continued. “Flitwick convinced Dumbledore to call for Sirius, but Dumbledore called for McGonagall to join us too.”

“He probably thought that she’d defend him.” Neville commented.

Harry nodded in agreement. “Once they arrived we called for the aurors and eventually for Lady Bones. They questioned me with Veritaserum and then tried to arrest Dumbledore.”

“Tried to arrest him?” Daphne questioned, tightening her grip on his hand.

“Dumbledore resisted.” Harry explained shortly. “Lady Bones, Sirius, Flitwick, and the other auror all tried to stun him, but Dumbledore shielded their spells easily.”

“So he got away.” Draco concluded, in obvious disappointed.

“Not quite.” Harry smirked. “I knocked him out with a Parselmagic spell.”

A delighted smirk spread across Draco’s face. “You cursed Dumbledore?”

“I did.” Harry confirmed with a satisfied nod. “It was glorious.”

“His expression must have been smashing!” Draco exclaimed.

“Probably.” Harry sighed. “I missed it though. Dumbledore knocked us all out with a curse just after I cast my spell. All I know is that he was unconscious when I woke up.”

“You cursed Dumbledore.” Draco repeated in delight. “Oh, Father’s going to be so jealous. He’s wanted to do that for years!”

Neville was frowning. “I hate to say it, but won’t this make things easier for You-Know-Who? They say that Dumbledore’s the only wizard that he’s afraid of.”
Draco sneered. “You mean imbecilic plebeians say that. I’m not sure the Dark Lord is sane enough to be scared of anything. Besides, Dumbledore’s no better that the Dark Lord is.”

Neville shook his head. “At least Dumbledore isn’t killing people.”

“No,” Daphne agreed coolly. “He just uses Legilimency on children and uses his position to encourage the discrimination against all traditionalists, dark witches and wizards, and Slytherins.”

Neville looked uncomfortable. “Maybe, but that’s not as bad as killing people!”

“Nobody is saying that it is.” Harry soothed him. “We want both of them gone.”

Neville looked sceptical at first but, when he looked around the circle and saw Draco, Daphne, Theo and Blaise all nodding, his expression cleared. “Oh.”

“One down, one to go.” Harry said, trying to ignore the way his stomach was twisting. He doubted Voldemort would make it as easy as Dumbledore had and unfortunately, because of the idiotic prophecy, he knew that one way or another he would have to be the one to stop him. It wasn’t a pleasant thought.

42-42-42
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone :) I am going camping with friends tomorrow and, since we'll have an early start, here is your Friday chapter twelve hours early. I warn you, it'll really get your blood pumping (there's not really a cliff-hanger though).

Harry spent the majority of the weekend in the Slytherin Common Room, only leaving for meals (which he ate at the Slytherin Table), to sleep (in Sirius’ quarters), to practise Quidditch with Viktor (who was both astounded and condemning of the Hogwarts students’ behaviour), and for his and his friends’ animagus practise. It was weird, to spend so much time surrounded by Slytherins, but it was also a relief.

None of the Slytherins looked as though they were scared of him and none of them bristled in hostility when Harry entered the room. In fact, aside from the fact that he was a Ravenclaw in the Slytherin Dungeon, it would have been easy to forget the malevolence that awaited him in the corridors.

There was also something comforting about being surrounded by traditionalists. Draco had once told him that everyone in Slytherin was either a traditionalist, or pretended to be one out of self-preservation, but Harry hadn’t really understood what that meant. Now that he understood, he found himself jealous of the traditionalist environment that his Slytherin friends enjoyed every day.

Every time Harry entered the Dungeon, every single Slytherin in the room would stand and bow respectfully and then they would remain standing until Harry gave them leave to sit. The chairs and couches in the middle of the room were apparently reserved for Draco, Daphne and their friends, and so Harry never had to worry about where he would sit.

When curfew approached on Sunday evening, Harry found himself reluctant to leave the safety of the Slytherin Dungeon – especially since he knew that the next morning he would have to attend classes with his hostile classmates.

Still, he packed up his things, bid his friends merry part, and made his way back to Sirius’ quarters under his invisibility cloak. It felt strange, to be creeping around the corridors under his cloak, but it was a precaution that Sirius had suggested after a Gryffindor fifth year had attempted to curse Harry in the back on his trek from the Slytherin Dungeon to Sirius’ quarters a few nights previously. Harry had managed to dodge the curse and hit his attacker with a stunning spell, before delivering the perpetrator to Professor McGonagall, but he was glad that the cloak allowed him to avoid similar encounters.

Despite being safely hidden under the invisibility cloak, it was a relief to reach the safety of Sirius’ quarters – which, in itself, was upsetting. Hogwarts had been the first place that Harry had felt safe - the first place that had ever felt like home - and, while Grimmauld Place had since replaced Hogwarts as his ‘home’, the fact that he no longer felt safe in the corridors stung.

Harry removed the cloak and nodded to Sirius in greeting. “Merry meet.”

“Merry meet.” Sirius agreed from his place on the couch, his legs stretched out in front of him. “How
was your evening?”

“Good.” Harry folded the cloak up and put it back into his bag. “I wish it wasn’t Sunday night.”

“Me too.” Sirius looked sympathetic. “Come and have a seat, would you?”

Harry glanced towards the spare seat on the couch, before putting his bag on the floor and moving obediently to sit down.

“I have two things to tell you.” Sirius said seriously, turning in his seat so that he was facing Harry.

Harry eyed him in trepidation. “Alright.”

“First, Dumbledore has broken out of Azkaban.” Sirius grimaced. “We don’t know how, but the best theory so far is that Fawkes got him out.”

Harry wished that he felt more surprised. “What does that mean?”

“Well, the good news is that by doing so he’s ruined any chance he might have had at being reinstated as Headmaster.” Sirius told him. “The Hogwarts’ Governors who were unconvinced of his guilt beforehand have all agreed to support Dumbledore’s permanent dismissal.”

Harry didn’t even try and prevent his smile. “So McGonagall will be his permanent replacement?”

“Not necessarily.” Sirius answered. “I don’t even know if she wants the position, let alone whether she would be willing to work with the Board to action some change.”

“Her speech on Friday morning was pretty great!” Harry pointed out, smiling at the memory. “And she’s definitely lived up to her words. Ravenclaw is in negative points, and both Gryffindor and Hufflepuff have less than two hundred.”

“Your Slytherin friends must be feeling pretty smug about it all.” Sirius looked amused.

Harry nodded. “What’s the bad news about Dumbledore having escaped?”

“Well, its put Amelia and Fudge in a difficult spot – between this escape, and the Death Eaters break out a year ago, we’re expecting a bit of a public outcry.” Sirius grimaced. “Otherwise, I don’t think there really is any bad news.”

“Except for the fact that the man who attacked my mind is somewhere out there.” Harry pointed out, though wasn’t all that bothered. He very much doubted that Dumbledore would even consider attacking Harry for revenge.

“Yeah, except for that.” Sirius agreed, his expression serious. “My second piece of information is the really serious one.”

Harry’s stomach twisted, what could be more serious that Dumbledore breaking out of Azkaban? Unless Voldemort had attacked somewhere?

“You-Know-Who has moved up the timeline.” Sirius said, his eyes fixed on Harry’s. “He’s given Lucius twenty four hours to present you to him.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “What?”

“Lucius doesn’t know why.” Sirius continued gently. “Though he wonders whether your being a parselmouth has something to do with it.”
“Or McGonagall’s speech announcing that I’m no more a Death Eater than she is.” Harry pointed out, his mouth dry. “Voldemort’s spies didn’t look very happy about that.”

Sirius winced. “I didn’t consider that.”

Harry waved a hand dismissively. “Not that it matters. What happens now?”

“Lucius and Narcissa are preparing to leave for France.” Sirius explained grimly. “It’s a bit earlier than expected, but they’ve been planning for it. We’ve put one of the Malfoy properties there under Fidelius and they’ll stay there.”

Harry winced, this was all his fault. “What about Draco?”

“That’s up to him.” Sirius answered. “Lucius and Narcissa are going to be flooing here on their way to France and they’ll discuss it with him. He can either go with them, or stay here until the end of term.”

“Won’t he be in danger?” Harry asked worriedly. “What about the students who are working for Voldemort?”

“Actually, that’s the one piece of good news.” Sirius looked excited. “Great news even!”

Harry waited expectantly. “Well?”

“Since Lucius no longer has to hold onto his cover, he’s spent a few hours with Amelia giving her the name of every person that he knows is connected to You-Know-Who.” Sirius’ eyes sparkled. “Amelia has declared that, because of his long service, his testimony is all the evidence the aurors need to arrest them. They’ll be given trials of course, but, after the catastrophe that was the last set of Death Eater trials, use of Veritaserum will be mandatory.”

Harry felt his eyes widen. “Can she do that?”

“She can with sufficient evidence of their guilt.” Sirius looked smug. “Evidence that Lucius has been only too happy to give.”

“So any Death Eaters at Hogwarts will be arrested?” Harry asked, with a huge sense of relief.

“They will of Lucius has heard of them.” Sirius nodded. “Though even he admits that he doesn’t know the identity of all the Death Eaters.”


“It is.” Sirius agreed. “Of course there is one small problem.”

“Azkaban.”

Sirius nodded. “You-Know Who has already broken out his followers once.”

Harry groaned. “I hate Voldemort!”

“Yeah,” Sirius sighed. “There’s a lot of that going around.”

“Maybe I should just challenge him to duel or something.” Harry exclaimed in frustration. “Maybe I’d get lucky and this whole thing could be over.”

Sirius reached out and gripped one of Harry’s fists. “Or maybe you wouldn’t get lucky and would
end up dead. How would that help anything?”

Harry clenched his jaw. “My classmates would be delighted.”

“And what about me?” Sirius asked fiercely. “Or Remus? Or Draco?”

Harry slumped back against the couch. “But I have to do something! The prophecy says that I…”

“We have no idea what the prophecy says.” Sirius interrupted. “Or at least, what it means! Remus has been researching it for months and he says that so far he’s found fifteen possible interpretations, all of which are just as likely as each other.”

Harry moaned in frustration. “Then what’s the point of the bloody thing?”

“Who knows?” Sirius slid across the couch and wrapped an arm around Harry’s shoulders. “You should ask McGonagall about prophecies sometime, she’s got a fantastic rant about how useless they are. Maybe all the prophecy is supposed to do is give us hope.”

“Or maybe it’s just there so some bloody seer can say ‘I told you so’ when it’s all over.” Harry grumbled.

Sirius chuckled grimly. “Maybe.”

“So what am I supposed to do?” Harry asked helplessly. “Just keep pretending that there isn’t a prophecy about me killing Voldemort? Keep ignoring the fact that most of the school bloody hates me? And that Lord Malfoy and Cousin Narcissa have had to flee the country because of me?”

“Hey!” Sirius rebuked sharply. “Lucius and Cissy aren’t leaving because of you. They’re leaving because of Voldemort, and because they were brave enough to stand up to him.”

Harry chuckled despite himself. “Don’t let Draco hear you say that. I described Lord Malfoy as brave once – he was horrified by the idea that his father was anything like a Gryffindor.”

Sirius rolled his eyes. “There’s nothing wrong with a dash of bravery.”

“Says the Gryffindor.” Harry pointed out dryly.

“Says the Gryffindor.” Sirius agreed. “Though, and you probably shouldn’t tell Draco this, but some days I think that Lucius is more of a Gryffindor than I am. I don’t think I could do what he’s done.”

“I don’t think you could either.” Harry admitted, with a smile. “But only because you’re not cunning enough. Voldemort would have seen through you on the first day.”

Sirius laughed in agreement. “True, subtlety isn’t one of my strengths.”

“What’s the point of arresting the Death Eaters if Voldemort’s just going to break them out again?”

Harry asked suddenly.

Sirius looked startled. “That’s one hell of a non sequitur, Harry. But to answer your question, one, it means that they won’t get a say in Wizengamot votes, two, we’ll be able to prevent them from entering places like Hogwarts, the Ministry, and St. Mungo’s and, three, it will hopefully mess with You-Know-Who’s plans.”

Harry nodded in satisfaction. “Good.”
“Don’t worry, Potter.” Weasley hissed as he shoved past Harry into the Charms classroom. “Your time will come and then you’ll be locked up along with your little friends.”

Harry ignored him and moved to sit at his usual seat where Neville was watching his approach with obvious concern. It had been four days since a team of aurors had arrived during breakfast and arrested four Slytherin students, two Ravenclaws and a Gryffindor for conspiring with Voldemort, and Weasley still hadn’t managed to get over his disappointment that Harry hadn’t been arrested with them.

Unfortunately, Weasley didn’t seem willing to let it go. “Didn’t you hear me, Potter? Just you wait! The aurors will be back for you!”

“Twenty points from Gryffindor, Weasley.” Flitwick snapped, suddenly appeared from behind the desk (which was about the same height as him). “And detention tonight with Mr. Filch.”

“What?” Weasley protested, whipping his head around to face their professor. “But I didn’t do anything. I didn’t even call him a Death Eater, even though everyone knows that is one.”

“Another twenty points from Gryffindor.” Flitwick looked fierce. “Sit down and be quiet, Mr. Weasley, before I send you to the Headmistress’ office.”

Weasley sneered at the professor as he angrily threw himself into his chair. “Bloody Death Eater supporter.” He snarled in, what Harry could only assume, was supposed to be a quiet whisper.

Unfortunately for Weasley, the words clearly reached Flitwick who seemed to swell in fury.

“Class dismissed.” He snapped. “Weasley, come with me.”

“But, Professor!” Granger’s hand snapped into the air. “We haven’t even started yet, and we were supposed to be learning about Pulley Charms today.”

Flitwick ignored her. “On your feet, Weasley.”

Weasley climbed to his feet and crossed his arms over his chest belligerently. The height difference between Weasley, who was one of the tallest students in their year, and Flitwick was almost comical, but Flitwick didn’t even seem to notice as he ignored Weasley’s posturing and led him out of the classroom.

“You know what I love about Ron.” Neville commented, as he packed his textbook back into his bag.

“What?”

“He never learns.” Neville explained. “Most of the school has abandoned their heckling, but not Ron. He doesn’t seem to care that he’s lost Gryffindor hundreds of points, or that he’s got detentions from now until the end of the year, he’s just keeping at it. That’s commitment.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Forgive me if I don’t appreciate that quality in him as much as you do.”

“What do you think McGonagall’s going to do to him?” Neville asked, as they followed the other students out of the classroom. “I heard him telling Dean that McGonagall has threatened to suspend him if he doesn’t pull his head out of his arse.”

“Unlikely.” Harry shook his head. “Nobody has been suspended from Hogwarts in decades.”
“I know Dumbledore wouldn’t have suspended him.” Neville agreed. “But McGonagall has always been tougher than he has.”

“Am I a terrible person if I hope that he does get suspended?” Harry asked with a grin.

“You’re a terrible person because you’re a bloody ‘you-know-what’!” Anthony Goldstein snapped from where he was walking behind Harry.

“Twenty points from Ravenclaw.” A nearby prefect said tiredly.

“I didn’t say anything!” Anthony protested.

“Yeah, sorry, that excuse didn’t work for Ron either.” Neville told him mockingly.

Anthony snarled and stopped past them.

“I think the points system is really losing its effectiveness.” Harry commented. “Both Ravenclaw and Gryffindor are in the negatives…”

“Gryffindor is mostly only in the negatives because of Ron.” Neville defended.

“…and Hufflepuff has less than a hundred points.” Harry went on. “Slytherin is so far in the lead that people have just stopped caring.”

“All the more reason for McGonagall to start suspending people.” Neville pointed out. “Maybe that will get through their thick skulls.”

Harry sighed, as they walked into the Magical Theory classroom. “Do you think Dumbledore’s proud of his legacy?”

“I think Dumbledore’s probably feeling a bit smug that everything has fallen apart without him.” Neville answered, dropping his bag on the floor near his desk.

Harry raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Is that negative sentiment towards Dumbledore, I hear?”

“I think Draco’s getting to me.” Neville sighed. “Besides, he broke out of Azkaban! Who does that?”

“Death Eaters.” Harry pointed out, remembering the headline of the Daily Prophet that morning. Apparently all the Death Eaters who had been arrested in the last few days had escaped. Well, all except the ten who had been killed by the five aurors stationed at the prison. Unfortunately, all the aurors had been killed as well.

“Exactly.” Neville nodded firmly. “It’s as though Dumbledore thinks he’s above the law.”

“Now you’re getting it!” Draco exclaimed triumphantly, as he sat in the seat on Harry’s other side. “After all, he’s Dumbledore, Saviour of the Wizarding World!”

“No, that would be Harry.” Neville pointed out.

“Only because Harry outdid him.” Draco retorted. “Dumbledore was the hero of the Wizarding World, until Harry was selfish enough to steal that title for himself.”

43-43-43

“She did it!” Neville crowed loudly, as he burst into the Slytherin Dungeon after classes that day.
Harry, who was sitting on one of the couches going of their Herbology homework with, looked up in surprise. “Who did what?”

“You guys can sit.” Neville casually told the Slytherins who had darted to their feet and bowed as he entered, and he strode towards where Harry and Daphne were sitting. “McGonagall has suspended Ron!”

“Yes!” Harry whooped excitedly and his cheer was quickly joined by the Slytherins. “Go McGonagall!”

“How long for?” Daphne asked curiously.

“A week.” Neville answered. “Which isn’t nearly long enough if you ask me.”

“Still, it sets a precedent.” Harry pointed out. “Where are the others? I thought you had DADA?”

“Daphne and Blaise are a few minutes behind me.” Neville explained, with a self-deprecating shrug. “They’re too sophisticated to run through the corridors.”

“What about Draco and Theo?” Harry asked.

“Moody wanted a word with Draco, Theo opted to stay with him.”

Harry stiffened. “Mad-Eye Moody?”

“Yeah,” Neville shrugged. “What other Moody would it be?”

“I’ll be back.” Harry jumped to his feet and walked as quickly as he could out of the Common Room, before breaking into a run.

He was being stupid, he knew that. There was no way that Mad-Eye Moody, Tonks’ mentor, would ever hurt Draco. No matter that the professor hated Lord Malfoy and had been watching Draco with narrowed eyes since the news of Lord Malfoy’s real allegiances had been announced.

The problem was that, after having been harassed, bullied, and full-out attacked by students for the last two weeks – not to mention Dumbledore – Harry wasn’t really feeling all that trusting.

He sprinted down the corridor, waving when he passed Daphne and Blaise, and then up three staircases, and then down another corridor. Why did the DADA classroom have to be so far away from the Slytherin Common Room?

When he reached the final corner before the DADA corridor, Harry didn’t even bother to slow down and allowed himself to bounce of the stone wall as he rushed around it.

“Harry?” Theo exclaimed in confusion, straightening quickly from his position against the wall. “What are you doing here?”

“Where’s Draco?” Harry asked hurriedly, stopping in front of the door to the DADA classroom.

“In there?” Theo pointed to the door with a puzzled frown. “Why?”

Harry drew his wand quickly and reached out his other hand to open the door. If he was wrong, when he was wrong, he could just tell Moody that he’d been practising ‘constant vigilance’. The ex-aurnor would like that.

“What’s going on?” Theo asked, his tone worried.
“Nothing.” Harry denied, twisting the doorknob and frowning when it wouldn’t open. That wasn’t good. Why would Moody lock the door if he was just going to talk to Draco about homework or something?

“Harry?”

Harry stepped back and pointed his wand at the door. “Go get a professor.”

“And tell them what?” Theo asked sceptically.

“Just go.” Harry snapped. “Confringo!”

He didn’t put as much power behind the spell as he had for the First Task, but the spell still blew through the wall destructively.

“What in Merlin’s name?!” Moody’s voice exclaimed.

Harry winced, he was going to get in so much trouble for this! Maybe he shouldn’t have picked the day that McGonagall started suspending people to decide to destroy school property. He began to approach the torn door frame cautiously, his wand in his hand.

“Help!” Draco’s voice suddenly called desperately.

“Shut up!” Moody snapped. “Silencio!”

Harry’s heart dropped as he stopped in place. No, no, no, no, no, no! He wasn’t supposed to be right! He was supposed to have been paranoid and crazy!

“I know you’re there, Potter!” Moody’s voice called cajoling. “Show yourself!”

Harry gripped his wand tightly. How did Moody know it was him? There was a stone wall between them. Oh, who was he kidding, this was Mad-Eye Moody! Who knew what tricks he had up his sleeve? Harry didn’t stand a chance! And yet, he knew that he had to try. Who knew how long it would take Theo to find a professor and he couldn’t just let Moody hurt Draco.

Still, he wasn’t going to announce himself – he needed every advantage he could get.

He could hear Moody stomping across the floor, his wooden leg thumping against the floor. “Show yourself!”

Harry swallowed heavily and clenched at his wand. His best bet would be to use the same strategy as he had with Dumbledore. A basic parslemagic spell, aimed straight at him, so that he would try and shield and fail. Which would only work if Moody chose to shield against the spell instead of dodging it.

By the sound of Moody’s wooden leg thumping against the floor he was going to be able to see Harry any second. Which meant that Harry had to be ready to cast the spell, and dodge.

Harry raised his wand. He could do this. He could do this. He could…

Moody stomped into sight, his wand at the ready, and snarled when he saw Harry.

:Sleep!: Harry hissed under his breath.

“And what is that?” Moody asked.

“Avada Kedavra!” Moody snapped, a split second later.
Harry dove away from the green spell, his heart in his stomach. He’d never even considered that Moody might try to kill him. The idea was completely illogical!

The spell flew past him and splashed harmlessly on the wall behind him and Harry scrambled to his feet, his wand at the ready.

There was a loud crash from inside the classroom and Harry took a hopeful step forward. It sounded as though his spell had hit Moody and sent him to sleep, except what if it was a trick? What if Moody was just pretending to be hit to lure Harry into a sense of security?

Harry froze and kept his wand pointed at the door frame, a spell on his lips.

For a tense for seconds, Harry remained still, desperately listening for any sign of Moody being awake, and then suddenly her heard someone running up behind him.

“What’s going on?” Theo asked, skidding to halt beside Harry.

“Moody’s gone crazy!” Harry explained shortly, his eyes fixed at the door. “Where’s the professor?”

“Professor Vector’s coming.” Theo said, staring at Harry in disbelief. “Are you sure?”

“Vector?!” Harry asked in disbelief. What good was an Arithmancy professor in a duel? “Yes, I’m bloody sure. Get your wand out.”

Theo scrambled for his wand, before pointing it at the door. “What should I do?”

“Avada Kedavra!” Moody’s voice suddenly snapped, his wand barely visible around the doorframe. Harry flung himself to the ground and watched, in horror, as the spell only missed Theo’s shoulder by an inch. His friend hadn’t even tried to duck.

“Run!” Harry instructed his friend quickly. “Find another professor.”

Theo was staring at the doorway, his mouth wide open.

“Run!” Harry shouted, whacking him in the leg.

“Avada Kedavra!” Moody cast again, his wand still the only thing visible.

Harry watched the green spell fly towards his friend in horror, before bringing up his wand. “Serpensortia!” The conjured snake flew out of his wand and right into the path of the spell. Harry tried not to feel too guilty as the snake’s corpse fell limply to the ground.

Theo, apparently jolted out of his shock by the sight of a second killing curse racing towards him, turned to Harry. “Come with me!”

“No.” Harry shook his head. “Draco’s in there. Run and get help!”

Theo nodded quickly, spun around, and sprinted back the way he had come. Harry scrambled to his feet and narrowed his eyes at Moody’s wand. He raised his own wand, only to quickly roll out of the way when Moody cast the killing curse at him again.

Though, at least Moody wasn’t silently casting the spell. In fact, he wasn’t even casting it quietly – which didn’t make much sense really, given the ex-auror’s training, but Harry was wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.
Harry rolled to his back and then scrambled back onto his feet, before dodging yet another killing curse. Then, taking a second to perfect his aim, Harry cast another Confringo Curse – this one aimed straight at Moody’s wand.

Moody jerked his wand away at the last minute, but at least it gave Harry a reprieve from dodging Killing Curses.

“Potter?” Professor Vector’s voice sounded from behind him. “What in Merlin’s name is…”

“Avada Kedavra!” Moody cursed again.

“Confringo!” Harry returned, this time aiming not for his professor’s wand but for the piece of doorframe just to the side of it. The curse blew out a chunk of the wall and Harry grinned in satisfaction when he heard Moody exclaim in pain.

“Is that Professor Moody?” Vector asked in disbelief.

Harry ignored her. “Confringo!” The spell had barely left his wand before he shifted to parselmagic :Sleep!:

This time the Confringo curse blew out an even bigger section of the wall, but through the dust Harry could faintly see the glitter of Moody’s shield reacting to the pieces of stone. The sight gave him hope, maybe, if Moody was using a shield charm, he wouldn’t bother ducking from Harry’s parselmagic spell this time.

The spell disappeared into the dust and Harry waited, wand at the ready, for Moody’s next move.

There was another crashing sound from inside the classroom, but Harry didn’t so much as flinch. He wasn’t going to fall for that again.

“Potter!” Vector grabbed his by the shoulder and spun him around. “What’s going on?”

Harry shook his shoulder free and turned back to the doorframe. “Moody’s gone crazy. He’s got Draco Malfoy in there with him?”

Vector stepped passed him, her wand at the ready, and began to make her way towards the door. Harry grabbed her arm to stop her. “What are you doing?”

“Going to check on him.” Vector frowned disapprovingly at Harry’s hand that was gripping her arm. “Didn’t you hear him collapse?”

“I heard a noise that could either be him collapsing, or him pretending to collapse so that we’d go in and check on him.” Harry released her arm. “He’s already pretended to collapse once.”

“Oh,” Vector looked towards the door worryingly. “What happened?”

“He held Draco back after class.” Harry explained shortly, returning his attention to the dust that was beginning to settle. He couldn’t see any sign of Moody, but that didn’t mean anything. “I got worried, because Moody’s been staring at him strangely all week, so I came to check on him. Moody attacked me.”

“Are you sure?” Vector asked.

Harry rolled his eyes. Of all the professors that Theo could have gotten. “You just saw him try and hit me with a Killing Curse.”
“Right, sorry.” Vector shook her head as thought to clear it and then raised her wand. “Ventulus!”

At first it looked as though nothing had happened, but then a sudden breeze blew away the remaining dust that had been obscuring their view into the classroom revealing the sight of Moody lying unconscious on the floor.

“Stupefy!”

Harry watched as his professor’s spell hit Moody’s body with relief. “Does that mean its safe?”

“You said he’d pretended to collapse before?” Vector asked him.

“Yes.”

“It could be a body double.” Vector admitted. “Though, if it was one he would have probably attacked us before now. We need to wait.”

“Draco’s in there!” Harry reminded her.

Vector grimaced. “Merlin!”

“Harry!” Sirius’ voice called suddenly from behind him.

Harry twisted around, his relief growing when he realised that his godfather wasn’t alone. McGonagall, Flitwick, and Snape were all with him.

“What happened?” McGonagall snapped out quickly.

“Moody’s got Draco in there.” Harry told her quickly. “He’s been casting the Killing Curses.”

“Yeah, that’s what Theo said.” Sirius nodded. “But Moody?!”

“He seems to be unconscious.” Vector commented, her wand still pointed at the door. “But Potter says that he’d pretended to be hit before, so it could be a body double.”

McGonagall drew herself up. “We should go in together. Severus, you can cover us with a shield, I’ll be ready to conjure physical shields against unforgivables, Filius, Sirius, you’re on the offensive. Septima, Harry, get back.”

Harry lowered his wand in relief and looked over at Vector to see how she felt about being left out, but the professor looked just as relieved as Harry felt. They backed away, allowing the others to pass them, and then watched as Sirius, and the three professors, slowly moved towards the demolished doorframe.

They inched forward pausing when the reached the doorframe which, after Harry’s Confringo Curses, was now large enough for two people to walk through side by side. Then they moved forward, wands at the ready.

It was actually pretty anticlimactic. They inched forward, McGonagall and Snape looking forward, Sirius looking left, and Flitwick looking right, until they reached Moody’s body. There was a long pause and then…

“It is him.” Snape confirmed, before splitting off from the group and disappearing out of sight.

“Draco!” Harry called worriedly, running past Vector and into the classroom.
Draco was sitting against one of the walls, his lip was bleeding and he looked paler and more disheveled than Harry had ever seen him, but he was alive and talking to Snape who was crouched down beside him.

Harry let out an explosive breath of relief. “You’re alright.”

“Mr. Potter!” Professor Vector rebuked sternly, following Harry into the classroom. “You were told to wait in the corridor.”

“Thanks to you.” Draco admitted quietly, turning away from Snape and trying to climb to his feet. “I owe you a life debt.”

Harry rushed forward to help him to stand, ignoring Snape who was frowning disapprovingly. “What did he do to you?”

“He mostly just talked.” Draco admitted, the corner of his mouth quirking up into a weak smile. “Well, that, and the Cruciatus Curse.”

Harry reached out a hand and grabbed Draco’s. “I’m sorry I didn’t get here sooner.”

“I do hope that I am not hearing any kind of Gryffindor-like guilt, Mr. Potter.” Snape told him severely. “Nothing that happened to Draco this afternoon was in any way your fault.”

“He’s right, Harry.” Sirius said, placing his hand on Harry’s shoulder. “You did brilliantly!”

Harry smiled gratefully at Snape, and then Sirius, before turning back to Draco. “I’m so glad you’re alright.”

“Me too.” Draco admitted. “I thought he was going to kill you.”

“Me too.” Harry laughed weakly. “He almost killed Theo. I only just managed to stop him by conjuring a snake in front of the curse.”

“That is very impressive, Mr. Potter.” McGonagall said approvingly, from where she was standing over Moody’s unconscious body. “Should I presume that you used the same strategy today as you did last time?”

“Yes, Professor.” Harry nodded. “But then Professor Vector hit him with a Stunning Charm too.”

McGonagall’s smile was almost feral. “Let us hope that those two spells don’t react poorly when combined. We would hate for anything untoward to happen to him.”

43-43-43
Chapter 43

“A word, Malfoy.” Moody commanded, from where he was standing in front of his desk.

Draco, who was almost at the door, stopped in his tracks and turned towards his professor in confusion. What would Moody want to talk to him about?

“Yes, sir.” Draco acknowledged, turning to face him.

“I’ll wait outside.” Theo promised quietly.

Draco nodded thankfully, before watching his friends leave with the rest of their classmates. While Hogwarts was significantly safer than it had been the week before, mostly due to Headmistress McGonagall’s unyielding stance towards bullying, it still wasn’t safe for Slytherins to walk the corridors alone. It was worse for the first, second, and third years who needed to travel in packs of four or five in order to be safe.

Once the final student had filed out of the classroom, Draco turned back to Moody who hadn’t moved from his position at the front of the room. “Professor?”

He flinched as Moody’s wand appeared in his hand and flicked towards him, before clenching his jaw in embarrassment when he heard the door behind him click shut. Of course that was what Moody had been doing? Why in Merlin’s name would his professor want to attack him?

Moody’s wand drew an intricate pattern in the air and Draco watched in confusion. What was his professor doing?

“There.” Moody pronounced eventually, as the walls around them flared purple for a second. “Now nobody will hear you scream.”

“What?” Draco stepped backwards and grasped at his wand.

Moody’s tongue darted out of his mouth and flicked at his lips. “Expelliarmus!”

“Protego!” Draco shouted desperately, before exhaling in relief when Moody’s spell hit his shield. What was going on? Was this some kind of test?

Moody chuckled darkly. “Clever boy. Ten points to Slytherin. Let’s see what you can do with this. Crucio!”

Draco watched helplessly as the red spell left his professor’s wand and flew towards him. He felt as though his feet were rooted to the floor, he couldn’t move, and the spell was going to hit him at any…

Pain! So much pain! Draco was vaguely aware that he had collapsed on the floor, but it didn’t mean anything to him. Not over the pain, pain, pain, pain…

And then suddenly the pain was gone, though Draco could still feel residual shocks running through his body. He opened his eyes and flinched away when he saw Professor Moody watching him with a malicious grin – Draco’s wand held loosely in one of his hands.

“Not so cocky are you now, boy?” Moody asked with a smirk. “Your father was always the same – thought he was better than everyone else.” His smirk twisted into a snarl. “But he isn’t, is he? He’s
just a traitorous coward.”

Draco stared at Moody, trying to ignore his racing heartbeat. Why would Moody, the most famous Auror of all time, think his father was a traitor? That made no sense.

“The Dark Lord is going to find your father.” Moody promised darkly, his tongue darting out of his mouth again. “And he’s promised that, when he does, he’ll let us have our fun with him before he kills him.” Moody’s eyes were filled with sadistic glee. “I look forward to hearing him scream.”

Draco’s breath hitched in horror and his eyes darted towards the door. Theo had said he’d wait, surely his friend would realise something was up and come and save him. Except, Theo wouldn’t manage against Moody any better than Draco had and then they’d both be in trouble.

“Just like I’m going to enjoy hearing you scream.” Moody’s lopsided mouth leered at him. “Crucio!”

The pain was all-consuming! Draco couldn’t think, he couldn’t do anything but writhe and scream. When the pain eventually stopped, Draco’s limbs, which had been tensed against the pain, flopped helplessly against the floor.

Moody was chuckling gleefully as he stepped closer and used his foot to roll Draco’s trembling body over so that he was lying on his back. “Your father will scream just as beautifully as you do when the Dark Lord finds him, little Malfoy.”

Draco’s brain felt sluggish, aftershocks of pain were shooting through his body, making it hard to think. He had to do something, anything to distract Moody from torturing him into insanity.

He didn’t want to end up like Neville’s parents. He didn’t want to die. He needed to do something!

“Crucio!”

The pain was just as bad as it had been the first time, maybe worse – though Draco honestly couldn’t believe that there could be any pain worse than this. The pain went on, and on, and on, and on, and…then, finally, it was over and he could hear Moody laughing again.

“P-p-professor?” Draco asked weakly, grimacing when the movement of his mouth made his lip sting. Had he bitten his lip during the pain? He dabbed a finger to his lip and pulled it away – it was bleeding.

“Yes, Malfoy?” Moody leered at him.

“I don’t understand.” Draco admitted, feeling like a hypocrite. How many times had he rebuked Harry for admitting that he didn’t understand something? Surely it was allowed when you were trying to distract someone from torturing you though.

“No,” Moody said slowly, his amusement audible. “I imagine you don’t.”

“Are you a Death Eater?” Draco asked, trying to pull himself up into a sitting position.

“I am the Dark Lord’s most loyal follower!” Moody declared passionately. “I didn’t deny him like those spineless cowards did. I went to Azkaban for him!”

Right, so Moody was either completely delusional or not Moody. It was useful information, though Draco doubted that even that was going to save him.

“Not like your father!” Moody snarled, spit flying. “He denied our Lord, kissed the feet of the filthy
blood-traitors, but our Lord still forgave him! Welcomed him back as though he wasn’t a bit of faithless, worthless, filth! And what did your father do to repay him? He betrayed his master! Turned tail and ran!”

Draco watched with wide eyes as Moody, or whoever it was that was masquerading as Moody, worked himself into a lather. One the one hand he was relieved that his distraction had worked, any second that he wasn’t being cursed was a relief, but he doubted that Moody’s rage would mean anything good for him.

“I serve the Dark Lord faithfully! I…” Moody broke off in shock as a sudden explosion blew a hole in the wall where the door had once been. “What in Merlin’s name?!?”

Draco made use of Moody’s distraction and scrambled backwards until his back was against the wall. He didn’t think he had ever felt so relieved in his life. Maybe he wasn’t going to die today.

But, as the dust began to fall to the floor and nobody stepped through the new hole in wall, he began to doubt himself. What if it had been an accident? What if whoever was out there didn’t know that he was in the classroom?

“Help!” Draco called desperately.

“Shut up!” Moody snapped, swinging towards Draco and pointing his wand at him. “Silencio!” Then Moody turned back towards the hole in the wall. “I know you’re there, Potter!” He called cajolingly. “Show yourself!”

Draco’s heart sunk in horror. What in Merlin’s name was Harry doing? Why hadn’t he gotten a professor?

Moody began to walk towards the door, his wooden leg thumping against the floor. “Show yourself!” He walked steadily towards the door, his wand out and a malicious smirk on his face. “Avada Kedavra!”

“No!” Draco screamed silently as the green spell left Moody’s wand and sped out of Draco’s line of sight.

Immediately, Moody stepped to the side, just in time to avoid whatever spell that Harry had sent at him. The spell splashed harmlessly against one of the desks and Moody violently pushed a nearby desk over causing a loud crash.

There was a long, nail-biting silence and Draco waited desperately for some kind of noise to confirm that Harry was still alive. His heart leapt in relief when he heard a voice in the hall, before dropping again when he realised that Theo was there now too.

“What’s going on?” Theo asked

“Moody’s gone crazy!” Harry’s voice replied. “Where’s the professor?”

“Professor Vector’s coming.” Theo answered. “Are you sure?”

Draco watched in horror as Moody slowly crept towards the door, his wand out. He screamed out a warning as loudly as he could, but the silencing charm didn’t break.

“Vector?!” Harry didn’t sound impressed. “Yes, I’m bloody sure. Get your wand out.”

“What should I do?” Theo asked.
“Avada Kedavra!” Moody’s suddenly snapped, having reached the door.

The next five minutes were possibly the most nerve-wracking of Draco’s life. He spent the entire time arguing with himself about whether or not he should do anything to help Harry. But no matter how many times he tried to convince himself that it was the right thing to, his logical side always won out. After all, he didn’t even have a wand. If he did something stupid like tried to tackle Moody he’d just end up dead – and that wouldn’t be helpful for anyone.

Eventually though, Harry somehow managed to defeat Moody and Draco was left staring at the fallen body of his attacker. How had Harry done it? Whoever Moody was, he was an adult – Harry was only fourteen!

Draco waited for Harry to come bursting through the door, but when nothing happened he realised that his cousin was probably suspicious that Moody was faking again. He opened his mouth to call out to his Harry, before remembering the silencing charm.

Instead, Draco tried to climb to his feet, but his legs were too weak and he just ended up slumped back against the wall waiting for something to happen.

Draco didn’t he could ever be more relieved as he was when he heard Sirius’ voice in the corridor with Harry, but then his godfather slowly stepped through the door along with Sirius, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick, and Draco was proved wrong.

He waited patiently, and silently, for Uncle Severus to check on Moody, and then for his godfather to approach him and remove the silencing charm.

“How are you, Draco?” Uncle Severus asked softly, crouching down beside him.

“Sore.” Draco admitted, clenching his jaw to prevent himself from bursting into tears of relief.

Uncle Severus frowned worriedly. “What did he cast on you?”

“The Crucius Curse.” Draco answered, looking down at his left arm that was still trembling from the after-effects of the curse.

Uncle Severus’ expression twisted as though he was in pain. “I’m sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault.” Draco pointed out, looking over at where Sirius, McGonagall and Flitwick were gathered around Moody’s body. “I don’t think he is actually Moody. He said he was a Death Eater and that he had gone to Azkaban.”

Uncle Severus looked startled. “Pardon!”

“Draco!” Harry rushed into the classroom, with Professor Vector a few steps behind him. “You’re alright.”

“Mr. Potter!” Professor Vector rebuked him. “You were told to wait in the corridor.”

Draco looked up at his cousin who had saved his life. “Thanks to you.” He tried to stand again, but couldn’t find the strength in his legs to force himself up. “I owe you a life debt.”

44-44-44

“Draco was right.” Sirius announced hours later, when they met in his and Harry’s quarters. “The wizard who attacked him wasn’t Alastor Moody. It was Barty Crouch Junior.”
Harry stared at Sirius in disbelief. “Pardon?”

Theo looked just as shocked as he felt, but Draco didn’t look at all surprised.

“He was actually Barty Crouch Junior using Polyjuice.” Sirius repeated patiently. “The real Alastor Moody has spent the last nine months locked in the bottom of his trunk. He’s been sent to St. Mungo’s for treatment, but Madame Pomfrey thinks that he will make a full recovery.”

Harry wondered whether he should have been less surprised. He’d heard of Barty, of course. He, Rudolphus and Bellatrix Lestrange, had been the Death Eaters who had tortured Neville’s parents into insanity. Not only that, but he had been the Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of Crouch up until his father, Lord Crouch, had disowned him.

It was surprising and completely bizarre but, the more he thought about it, Professor Moody having actually been Barty made complete sense. Or, at least, explained a lot of things.

Like why Professor Moody had struggled to teach them magical theory – since Barty had only been nineteen when he had been sentenced to life in Azkaban.

And why he had attacked Draco – since obviously, as a Death Eater, Barty hadn’t appreciated Lord Malfoy’s betrayal.

So, yes, Harry thought maybe he should have expected it – except he hadn’t. Because Dumbledore and Moody were supposed to know each other really well, and Dumbledore had been the one to hire him. Harry couldn’t imagine not noticing if someone polyjuiced themselves as one of his friends – especially not if they’d kept up the ruse for the majority of a year!

“What’s going to happen to him?” Draco asked quietly, not looking up from his hands.

“Amelia isn’t feeling very confident in Azkaban’s security, so he is being held in one of the small holding cells at the Ministry.” Sirius explained. “An emergency Wizengamot session is being held tomorrow to decide whether he will face a Dementor’s Kiss for his actions.”

Harry watched in concern as Draco’s eyes closed in relief as he slumped back in his chair – he had never seen his cousin so vulnerable before. Harry wanted to be able to comfort him, but he had no idea what to say.

“Good.” Theo said, with a shudder.

“Were you there when they questioned him?” Harry asked his godfather. “Did they use Veritaserum?”

“I was and, yes, they did.” Sirius answered. “He admitted to having been the one to enter your name into the Goblet.”

“Did he say why?” Harry asked hopefully. “Other than because Voldemort told him too?”

“No,” Sirius leaned forward and leant his elbows on his knees. “He didn’t seem to know.”

“Oh,” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Because that would have been good information to have.”

“It’s almost over though.” Theo pointed out. “There’s only task left and, having seen you in action today, I don’t think you’ll have any problems.”

“Except that I still have no idea what it will involve,” Harry sighed. “And who knows what
Voldemort’s got up his sleeve. I doubt he entered me into the Tournament just to watch me do well.”

“He didn’t know that you would do well.” Sirius reminded him. “And he still thought that you might join him when he entered you. Maybe he was just trying to test you?”

Theo’s mouth dropped open. “The Dark Lord thought you were going to join him? Why would he think that? You won’t even let people say ‘mudblood’ around you.”

“Tell that to Weasley and the rest of the school.” Harry snorted. “They seem to think Voldemort and I are a great match.”

“One can hardly expect anything more from ignorant plebeians.” Draco commented disdainfully. “To answer your question, Theo, the Dark Lord believed that Harry was considering joining him because Father told him so. The Dark Lord was suspicious of Harry’s relationship with our House, so Father told him that we were wooing Harry over to the dark side.”

Harry smiled in both amusement and relief. Draco was clearly feeling more like himself if he was insulting non-traditionalists and making Star Wars references.

Theo’s eyes widened. “That explains a few things.”

“I trust that you won’t share this with anyone.” Sirius told him sternly. “While Lucius’ true loyalties are now public knowledge, it would not do Harry’s reputation any good for people to know that the Dark Lord believed that he would defect.”

Theo nodded quickly. “Of course, my lord.”

“The information about Barty Crouch Junior’s actions this year is also privileged information.” Sirius continued sternly, his eyes moving from Theo, to Draco, and finally to Harry. “The only reason I am telling you any of this is because it would be unfair on Moody for the three of you to believe that he had been the one to attack you. You are not to tell anyone what happened today – not even your betrotheds.”

Harry nodded seriously. “We understand, Sirius, we’ll have to come up with a good excuse on why nobody has seen us since the end of classes. We even missed dinner. Not to mention that Neville and over a dozen Slytherins saw me leave the Slytherin Dungeon in a rush when I heard that Draco was alone with Moody.”

“How did you know there was something wrong?” Theo asked curiously. “You can’t have known that Professor Moody was actually Barty Crouch Junior.”

“He’d been eyeing Draco strangely all week, and there were a few times when his glares seemed a little homicidal.” Harry explained, shooting Sirius an apologetic look when his godfather turned to him in surprise. “I thought maybe Moody didn’t believe that Lord Malfoy had been spying on the Dark Lord for the Ministry and was angry that he had been exonerated.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Sirius asked in obvious concern.

“It was Mad-Eye Moody.” Harry reminded him. “He’s a war hero. I thought I was just getting paranoid.”

“I wouldn’t blame you.” Draco commented lowly. “I think I’m going to be paranoid for the rest of my life.”

44-44-44
Harry wondered what it said about their school that nobody seemed particularly surprised to hear that Moody had resigned his position and was leaving Hogwarts immediately. He supposed it made sense though, after all, Moody was hardly their first DADA professor who had left before the end of the year, and everyone knew that the position was cursed.

As always, there were a few crazy stories that circulated about why Moody was leaving, and, unsurprisingly, more than a few involved Harry the Evil Death Eater, but even those stories seemed to die down over the week.

In fact, if it wasn’t for the fact that Remus and Snape had started teaching the DADA classes as well as their own, Harry doubted anyone would have remembered that anything had happened. Well, anyone except him, Draco, and Theo that was, but then Harry thought it probably would have been weird if they had gotten over their experience so quickly.

Still, the nightmares and constant flinching at any loud, or sudden, movement got old very quickly and it didn’t make it easier to keep the truth from their friends. In fact, Harry knew for a fact that every single one of their friends knew something had happened, even the twins, though thankfully they all seemed to be alright with not knowing the details.

Harry wished that his mind would catch onto the fact that he was no longer in danger – especially with Barty Crouch Junior having received the Dementor’s Kiss the day after the attack. The whole thing was over, why couldn’t his mind understand that?

At first Harry was worried that it might become a long term problem, but thankfully it only took him a week and a half to stop flinching at sudden movements and loud noises. Theo and Draco both took a little longer, but eventually they began to return to normal as well. Something that Harry knew they shared his relief over. It had been embarrassing not to have control of their actions and had, more than once, earnt them derision from some of their classmates who thought it was amusing that the usually composed traditionalists were so jumpy.
Harry wasn’t sure when he’d started being thankful that the Ravenclaws were being prejudiced and paranoid idiots. Sure it had hurt at first, but as the weeks had gone on he’d started enjoying the benefits he got from being the Ravenclaw reject. He preferred the Slytherin Common Room to the Ravenclaw one and he was enjoying having a room to himself in Sirius’ quarters – not to mention that McGonagall was still allowing students to sit at any of the four House tables.

Flitwick was horrified at his House’s behaviour and had started removing fifty points from Ravenclaw for every day they rejected Harry. So far Ravenclaw House had managed to lose so many points that their total was over minus one thousand – a Hogwarts record. Harry wasn’t sure why the Professor was persisting, since the loss of points obviously wasn’t making a difference to their behaviour, but he did appreciate the show of support.

Not that he wanted Flitwick to find a more effective form of persuasion. He was dreading the day that Ravenclaw House changed their minds and invited him back. He’d gotten so used to being able spend time with his friends in the Slytherin Common room and eating with them at the Slytherin Table. Before Skeeter’s article had come out and prompted his House to exile him, he’d only really gotten to talk to the Weasley twins a few times a week, but now they joined the group at the Slytherin Table for at least one meal a day. He didn’t want to go back to only seeing them at their biweekly animagus practises and weekly wandless magic practise (not that Fred came to the second one).

Still, he knew that things couldn’t continue like this forever. One day the Ravenclaws would realise that he wasn’t an evil Death Eater and would invite him back and he would have no choice but to go back to them. He just hoped McGonagall still let students eat at any of the House tables when that happened.

45-45-45

“Are you ready?”

Harry sucked in a nervous breath and nodded, trying to ignore the way his friends were all staring at him.

“Don’t try and force the transformation all together.” Sirius warned, from where he was crouched down in front of Harry. “Do it in stages and make sure you transform your head last.”

Harry nodded again. It wasn’t new information, since Sirius had explained it multiple times already, but it was always good to be reminded. He closed his eyes and began his breathing exercises that would help him sink into his meditation.

He remembered a time when mediating had been hard, when it had taken him ages to find his meditative state and he had struggled not to distracted from it. Now it was as easy as walking – he knew exactly what he needed to do to achieve it and had trained his body, mind, and magic to do with ease.

He brought the image of his animagus form forward in his mind and focused his attention on transforming his left arm and, within seconds, could feel it shifting painlessly into a wing. His left arm was next, then he transformed his legs one at a time, and then finally his torso. He knew that he must look ridiculous – a giant bird with a human head.
Next came the hardest, and most dangerous, part.

Harry allowed his mind some time to settle and then brought the image of the owl back to the centre of his mind. He could do this. All he needed to do was transform his head and then his entire form would shrink to its actual size.

He had never transformed his head before, since it was the last step in becoming an animagus, but Sirius had assured him that it would be easier than any of the other parts of his body had been since it would want to transform and be at one with the rest of his body. The problem was that if he made a mistake with the transformation there was a chance that he might damage his brain and never fully recover. According to Sirius the chance was slim, but it was an intimidating prospect.

He needed to transform his head into the owl’s head; his head into the owl’s head; his hair into the owl’s feathers; his eyes into the owl’s eyes; his mouth into the owl’s…

And then suddenly his entire body seemed to be doing something. The feeling was indescribable. It wasn’t painful it was just…Harry couldn’t think of a single word to describe it.

“Yes!” Sirius’ voice exclaimed loudly. “You did it!”

Harry opened his eyes slowly, before blinking in confusion. Everything looked so different, and not just because he was less than two feet tall. Things seemed more detailed, more focussed.

“Can you fly?” Draco asked, and Harry was fascinated to discover that he could tell where exactly his cousin was standing – despite the fact that he was standing behind him.

It was a good question though and Harry focussed on moving his wings. He flapped them a few times, before letting out a surprised hoot when his feet actually left the ground. He flapped his wings a few more times and found himself a few feet in the air, flying directly towards one of the nearby walls with no idea how to stop himself.

“Immobulus!” Sirius’ voice called quickly.

Harry hooted quietly in relief as the spell prevented him from colliding with the wall.

“I think flying should be an outdoor activity.” Sirius commented dryly.

Harry startled as hands gently plucked him out of the air and then set him on the ground.

“Finite!” Sirius murmured, and Harry used his newly restored ability to move to tuck his wings back in.

“How about you change back now.” Sirius suggested. “You’ll want to practise the transformation a few more times today so that you can transform quicker.”

Harry shut his eyes and went through the process he normally used to undo one of his partial transformations. The feeling of transforming back was just as indescribable as the original one had been and, before he knew it, he was standing on his two human feet.

“That was amazing!” Theo exclaimed.

Draco looked Harry over. “What was it like?”

“How did it feel?”

“Did it hurt?”
“How are you feeling now?”

Harry grinned in amusement as his friends’ questions. “It was weird. I don’t have a word to describe how it felt. No, it didn’t hurt, though my arms are aching now.”

“How are you feeling now?” Neville asked curiously.

“It must be.” Harry agreed. “Which is a little pathetic really. I hardly flew at all.”

“It would make sense that your wings would use different muscles than you usually use.” Theo commented.

“It will take some time to get used to it.” Sirius told him, with a proud expression. “It took me weeks of practise to get my front legs up to scratch. Your father spent the first few weeks with his antlers on the ground because his neck wasn’t strong enough to hold them up.”

Harry grinned at the image. “I didn’t consider that I might have to build up muscle in my animagus form.”

“Just be glad that animal’s develop much quicker than humans.” Sirius grinned.

“It takes Great Horned Owls nine to ten weeks to be able to fly.” Harry remembered from the reading he had done.

“Exactly,” Sirius nodded. “Your muscles will develop faster in your owl form than they do normally.”

Harry smiled in relief. “I’m glad. Can I try again?”

“Go for it.” Sirius leaned back in his chair. “This time, attempt to transform simultaneously. Your magic will have some idea of what you’re looking for now, so it should be easier.”

Easier wasn’t the word Harry would use to describe it, though he supposed it wasn’t exactly harder either. It just took him a little extra time to convince his body and magic to complete the transformation, but even then it wasn’t much longer than doing each limb individually.

The third time Harry completed the transformation it took even less time and, by the end of two hours, he was able to complete the transformation in under a minute.

His friends, who had started their practise session watching Harry rather than practising their own forms, were all making progress as well and Harry thought that all of them would probably have completed the transformation by the beginning of the next school year if they all continued to work at it. Even Fred, who was the least far along, had completed three limbs and was working on his fourth.

“Here.”

Harry accepted the piece of parchment from Sirius and looked it over curiously. “What is it?”

“You’ll need to complete it to register your animagus form.” Sirius explained.

Harry looked up with a frown. “Register it?”

“Yes.” Sirius nodded seriously.
“You and my father didn’t register yours.” Harry pointed out. “Wouldn’t it be a good trick to have up my sleeve?”

Sirius sighed. “Harry, you have plenty of tricks up your sleeve already, none of which will earn you two years in Azkaban. Do you really want to risk Rita Skeeter somehow finding it out and writing an article about it?”

Harry’s mouth dropped open in shock. “Of course! That explains everything!”

Sirius gave him an odd look. “What?”

“Skeeter must be an unregistered animagus!” Harry explained quickly. “Think about it. Moody, or, well, Crouch, could see through things, so she couldn’t have been sneaking onto the grounds under an invisibility cloak, but if she was an animagus no one would have recognised her.”

Sirius shook his head. “How did you get to that conclusion?”

Harry let out a laugh. “I don’t know. I’ve been wondering about it for a while, and Luna said something to me about her being a coleopteran, which means beetle, but it didn’t make any sense to me. I just thought Luna was being vague, but it just came to me. She must be a beetle animagus. There was a beetle in Daphne’s hair when I invited her to accompany me to the Yule Ball.”

Sirius’ eyes tilted his head to the side considering. “I’ve never heard of anyone having a bug animagus form before.”

“Probably because most people who found out that their form was a bug wouldn’t bother,” Harry pointed out. “But Skeeter must have realised that she could use it to get good stories.”

Sirius’ eyes sparkled mischievously. “We’ll have to catch her in the act to turn her in.”

“That will be easy.” Harry told him confidently. “The Third Task is in three weeks, she’ll be hanging around looking for some information on it.” He shot Sirius a frustrated look. “Not that I know anything about it.”

Sirius looked apologetic. “Alright, but in the meantime, you need to fill in that form. If she has been spying on you in bug form, there’s a chance she already knows that you’re an animagus and is just waiting for a good time to publish the information.”

Harry grimaced. “Fine. What about you?”

“What about me?”

“If she knows about my form, she probably knows about yours.” Harry pointed out. “You talk about it often enough when we’re practising.”

“I’m already registered.” Sirius told him. “I’ve been to Azkaban once, there’s no way I’m risking being sent back.”

“Oh,” Harry supposed that made sense. “Wait, what if Skeeter’s here now?”

Sirius’ eyes widened and his wand was in his hand in seconds. “Revelio!”

They both looked around the room, looking for anything that glowed, before sighing in relief when nothing did.

“Between this, what happened with Crouch, and what happened with Dumbledore, I’m going to be
as paranoid as Moody.” Harry commented with a grimace.

Sirius put a hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry, Harry.”

Harry sighed. “It’s not your fault.”

“I know, but I’m still sorry.” Sirius told him solemnly, before his expression suddenly brightened. “But I do have some good news for you?”

“Yes?” Harry straightened in anticipation.

“We need to go down to the Quidditch Pitch.” Sirius said, standing up.

Harry stood up with a confused frown. “Why?”

“We’re meeting Ludo there.” Sirius told him with a grin.

Harry’s heart leapt excitedly. “Ludo Bagman? You mean we’re finally going to find out what the Third Task is?”

“Yeap.” Sirius looked pleased with himself. “We’re meeting them there in ten minutes.”

“Oh, thank Merlin!” Harry exclaimed, quickly leading Sirius out of their quarters. “I honestly don’t know how much longer I could have waited without going insane.”

“You’ll have three weeks to prepare.” Sirius pointed out.

“Two weeks and five days.” Harry corrected. “I was rounding up before. And that is not nearly enough time for us to reasonably prepare.”

Sirius looked amused. “You’ll be fine. I have complete confidence in you.”

“I’m only fourteen.” Harry pointed out, as they made their way down the stairs to the Entrance Hall. “All the others are seventeen.”

“And yet, you’re beating them.” Sirius reminded him, just as Cedric came up from the Hufflepuff Common Room.

“Merry meet, Lord Black, Harry.” Cedric bowed in greeting.

“Merry meet.” Harry and Sirius both echoed with a nod.

Cedric fell into step beside Harry as they left the castle and began walking towards the Quidditch Pitch. “Any idea what the Third Task might be?”

“Sirius knows.” Harry told him with a sigh. “But he’s taken an oath not to tell us.”

Cedric’s darted nervously towards Sirius. “Oh.”

“I can’t believe they waited this long to tell us.” Harry told him. “The Task is in two weeks and five days!”

Cedric groaned. “Oh, don’t tell me that.”

“They ought to have told us weeks ago.” Harry said, shooting Sirius a disgruntled glare.

Sirius just looked amused. “Be thankful for the two weeks and five days. They could have always
Harry grimaced at the thought. “That would have been too…” He trailed off as they turned a corner and spotted the Quidditch Pitch – or at least, what had once been the Quidditch Pitch. “What in Merlin’s name…?”

“What have they done to it?” Cedric sounded indignant. “We were hoping to have another Quidditch Game next weekend.”

Harry looked the Quidditch Pitch over carefully. It was as though they had turned it into a wildlife habitat or something. The Quidditch Hoops were gone and the previously grassy ground was now made of uneven stone. There was a ridge made of boulders and rocks that looked as though it was approximately five feet tall and spanned three quarters of the way across the pitch to his left; a large pool of water that was at least eighty feet wide and was shaped like the letter ‘C’ to his right; and numerous small boulders (most of which were barely two feet across and three feet high) scattered throughout the area.

“This way.” Sirius instructed, leading them around the boulders into the middle of the pitch where Bagman was waiting with the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons’ Champions.

“Hello there!” Bagman greeted them cheerfully as they approached.

In contrast, Viktor, Nynke, Fleur, and Aceline all bowed politely. “Merry meet, Lord Black.

“Merry meet, Heir Black.”

“Merry meet, Heir Diggory.”

“Merry meet.” Harry acknowledged with a nod, as Sirius and Cedric did the same.

Bagman looked uncomfortable for a moment, but then rallied himself. “Righteo, well, this is your Third Task!” He spread out his arms in an invitation for them to look around.

Harry did so, but didn’t see anything new.

“No?” Bagman repeated, his face falling in disappointment. “What about now?”

Harry raised his eyebrow in surprise as, with a flick of Bagman’s wand, a burst of flame erupted out of the stone ten feet away from them. He turned his head and noticed two other places across the arena where the same thing had happened. Rather than dying out, the flames continued to burn, creating three pillars of fire that stretched higher than he was tall.

“Non.” Fleur shook her head firmly.

“No?” Bagman repeated, his face falling in disappointment. “What about now?”

Harry noticed that the other five champions looked just as confused as he felt. “No, sir.”

“Now,” Bagman called their attention back to him. “I’m sure you all know what we’ve created here.”

Harry noticed that the other five champions looked just as confused as he felt. “No, sir.”

“Now?” Bagman repeated, his face falling in disappointment. “What about now?”

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“Non.” Fleur shook her head firmly.

“Oh,” Bagman looked towards Cedric, Nynke, Viktor hopefully, before his expression fell again. “No one?”

“No.” Viktor rumbled in denial.

“Well, that means that I get to tell you all then, doesn’t it?” Bagman brightened up at the idea. “It’s a…a…well, I guess I’m not sure that there’s a word for it actually, but basically, you’ll each be
planted behind one of the rocks around the edges of the arena, and then will participate in a non-
traditional duel until there is one victor.”

Harry tried to keep his relief off his expression. Duelling he could do. “What are the rules?”

“There aren’t any.” Bagman grinned. “Well, except for the obvious of course.”

Sirius took over. “You may not cause your opponents any permanent damage. Every injury that you
cause must be able to be healed within twenty four hours.”

“Healed by potions and magic, or naturally?” Harry asked.

“Healed by a professional Healer.” Sirius clarified. “You may not use any spell that has been banned
by the British Ministry of Magic. You may not leave the arena. The only thing that you may bring
into the arena is your wand.”

“What of the use of unnatural talents?” Aceline asked, glaring at both Fleur and Harry through
narrowed eyes.

Sirius didn’t look impressed. “All talents and abilities that any champions may possess are allowed,
so long as they uphold all the other rules.”

“But zat ees unfair!” Aceline protested. “Just because we are not freaks…”

Sirius stiffened. “What was that, Miss Moreau?”

Aceline paled. “I beg your pardon, Lord Black.”

“It is not my pardon you ought to be begging.” Sirius told her sternly. “You owe my heir and Miss
Delacour an apology.”

Aceline looked as though she had swallowed a lemon, but she turned towards Harry and Fleur. “I
beg your pardon for my rudeness.”

Harry nodded in acknowledgement, deciding to ignore the lack of sincerity in the apology. There
was no point in causing a fuss – particularly not over a prejudiced French witch who would be
returning to her own country within a month.

Bagman cleared his throat nervously. “The, uh, the last person standing in the arena will be declared
the winner and will become the Triwizard Champion.”

Harry frowned. “The last person standing? Or the last person conscious and willing to fight?”

“The second one.” Sirius answered. “If you are knocked unconscious, or out of the arena, you are
immediately out of the Task. However, you may also yield by releasing red sparks into air.”

“What about the points we’ve earnt from the previous Tasks?” Cedric asked.

“Ah,” Bagman looked excited. “They will determine when you enter the arena. Miss Moreau and
Miss Delacour will enter first, as they are currently in fifth and sixth position. After one minute Mr.
Krum will enter, then Mr. Diggory, Miss Visser, and finally Mr. Potter!”

Harry considered that. It sounded pretty good as advantages went. Ideally, by the time he entered the
arena, some of the other Champions would have already been defeated.

“But zat ees not fair eizer!” Aceline protested. “Why should zey get to come in later?”
Bagman frowned. “Well, the other tasks have to mean something, don’t they? No point in having three tasks, if it’s only the last one that matters.”

“Zen ze last Task ought to be judged on points also.” Aceline argued. “Zat way we, who need more points, would still ‘ave ze chance of winning.”

“You still do.” Sirius told her. “You will just have a defeat the other five Champions to do so.”

“And eef I defeat all but one, and am zen defeated myself?” Aceline asked. “What zen?”

“Then you will have come second.” Sirius told her flatly.

“Eet makes sense to me.” Fleur nodded, shooting Aceline a reproving glare. “I will still do my best.”

Aceline’s entire body seemed to stiffen as she turned to Fleur with a hostile expression. “As will I, of course.” She tossed her head haughtily.

There was a long, awkward silence, before Bagman stepped forward. “Any questions?” He asked, rubbing his hands together. “No? Alright, let’s go back inside then, shall we?”

Harry took one last look around the arena, before following the others back up to the castle. The boulders were obviously there to help them hide from their opponents and stay out of the line of fire. It would be very different from the usual duelling he did with Sirius which was one on one with no kind of shelter. Hopefully the Come and Go Room would be able to recreate something similar to help him figure out how to duel in that kind of environment.

45-45-45
“So a duel?” Draco asked, over breakfast the next morning. “That’s it?”

“It’s more of a battle really.” Harry corrected. “There won’t be any of the usual duelling rules or etiquette.”

“Surely there are some rules though.” Theo commented. “They’re not just going to let you kill each other.”

Harry nodded in agreement. “We can’t do any damage that a healer won’t be able to fix in twenty four hours and we can’t use any illegal spells.”

“That’s it?” Neville asked, his eyebrows raised. “That leaves you with an awful lot options.”

“I know.” Harry allowed his smile to spread across his face. “I’m looking forward to it actually. The only problem is that Sirius can’t help me train.”

Most of his friends looked up towards the Head Table where Sirius was talking to Madame Brusilov.

“That’s not unexpected, is it?” Daphne tilted her head to the side. “He hasn’t been able to help with any of the other tasks.”

“No,” Harry acknowledged. “But he’s been duelling with me all year and, now that I really need to practise, he has to stop. Apparently it was allowed when I didn’t know that I would be duelling in a task, but now it would go against the oath he’s taken.”

“So how will you prepare?” Neville asked curiously.

“Well,” Harry looked them all over. “I was hoping that…”

“Absolutely not!” Draco interrupted firmly. “There is no way that I am going to duel against you. I’ve seen you in action and I do not want to end up on the wrong end of your wand.”

Harry had to swallow down a grimace at the reminder of his duel with Barty Crouch Junior. “What if it was all of you against me?”

Draco considered that. “Fine, but you can’t use any dangerous spells.”


“As tempted as I am to say anything more than a stinging hex,” Draco grimaced. “Anything that would take a healer to heal.”

Harry nodded in understanding before looking around at the rest of his friends. “What about the rest of you?”

“I’ll help.” Daphne said quickly, as Neville and Luna both nodded.

“I will too.” Theo added.

“I’m in.” Blaise agreed.

“Great!” Harry grinned. “Thanks. Now I just have to get Takashi, Fred, and George on board.”
“They’re sixth and seventh years.” Neville pointed out, his eyes wide.

“So are the other Champions.” Daphne pointed out.

“Yes, but there’s only five of them.” Neville argued. “With them involved, there will be eight of us against Harry.”

“It will be good for me.” Harry told him. “I need to learn to duel against more than one person at the time. The more the merrier.”

“Besides,” Theo exchanged a glance with a Draco. “Harry’s probably better at duelling than they are. The five of us wouldn’t stand a chance against him.”

Neville narrowed his eyes at Theo, before turning to Draco, and then to Harry. “I suppose this is connected to that thing you can’t talk about.”

“Gryffindors.” Draco sneered at Neville. “No sense of guile.”

“I’m going to take that as a yes,” Neville grinned. “And so ask no more questions.”

Draco shook his head in obvious disgust. “Gryffindors!”

“So I’ll meet you all in the Come and Go Room after classes?” Harry asked, after sharing an amused smile with Neville. “I’m hoping it will be able to create something similar to the enclosure that the Third Task will be held in.”

With exams less than two weeks away their classes were mostly just review – which Harry found frustrating. He’d already been doing his own exam preparation for over a month and very little of what the professors had them review was helpful to him. In a way it was encouraging, since it suggested that he would do well at his exams, but Harry had better things to do than practising cross-species transfiguration (which would be not use to him in the Third Task) or the Summoning Charm (which he could do wandlessly).

He was tempted to accept the option of not sitting his exams that came with being a Triwizard Champion, since that way he could maybe convince his professors to let him skip classes, but he knew that he would regret it. Admittedly most of his exams weren’t that important, but he was due to take his Ancient Runes OWL and there was no way that he wanted to postpone that for a year.

So after a morning of needless exam review, Harry visited the Library during lunch to find some books on duelling strategy that he could begin reading during his afternoon classes. He wasn’t sure how it would go over with his professors, but thankfully Remus and McGonagall (who was taking their DADA class) seemed to understand the need for him to focus on researching for Third Task. Though McGonagall did make him prove that he could cast all the spells the class was reviewing before letting him turn his attention to his book. He didn’t even attempt to read during Potions class, partly because it was the hardest subject to review outside class and partly because he knew that Snape wouldn’t be impressed.

Finally classes were over for the day and, after dropping his bag off at his and Sirius’ quarters, Harry made his way up to the Come and Go Room. He was the first of his friends to arrive and as he paced back and forth in front of the wall, Harry tried to hold the image of the duelling arena in his mind. Once the door appeared, Harry pushed it open before grinning in satisfaction.

He’d forgotten how big the room could be, since normally he asked it to form a much smaller room,
but this room was just as big as it had been when he’d seen it filled with junk – if not bigger. Not only was the size perfect, but the ridge of stone was there, as were the boulders, the flame pillars, and the pool of water. This would be perfect!

“Well!” Neville commented, coming in behind him. “This room is huge.”

“I know.” Harry turned to face him. “It’s great!”

“Are those actual rocks?” Neville questioned, walking towards the nearest one and banging on it with his fist. “Ow!”

Harry chuckled. “So they’re real, then?”

“Does that mean that the fire’s real too?” Neville asked, shooting a worried glance towards the flame pillars.

“I presume so.” Harry nodded. “And the water.”

“How does the room do it?” Neville asked, looking around. “When it was just chairs and cushions I presumed it was just borrowing them from somewhere else in the castle, but these rocks…”

“They weren’t just any chairs though.” Harry pointed out. “Most of the time it was an exact replica of one of the rooms at Grimmauld Place. As to how it works, I have no idea.”

“It must be some kind of transfiguration, right?” Neville asked.

“Powered by Runes maybe?” Harry suggested. “Professor McGonagall might know. You could ask her?”

Neville grinned sheepishly. “I’m not sure I care that much.”

“You might not, but now that you’ve mentioned it – I do.” Harry told him. “Imagine being able to replicate this room? You could have a Come and Go Room in your house.”

“What if you had entire house of rooms like this?” Neville asked. “That way you would have as many bedrooms, bathrooms, or living areas as you needed.”

“Or you could simply visit Malfoy Manor.” Draco commented haughtily, stepping into the room. “We have ten bathrooms in the left wing alone.”

“Why would anyone want that many bathrooms?” Neville asked, throwing his hands in the air. “Ten greenhouses I could understand, but ten bathrooms?”

“Why would you want ten greenhouses?” Draco rolled his eyes.

“To grow plants.” Neville told him flatly. “Which makes them significantly more useful than your ten bathrooms.”

“You two always have the most amusing conversations.” Theo commented, as he arrived with Blaise and Daphne. Takashi and Luna followed soon afterwards.

Draco shot him an annoyed glare, before turning back to Neville. “Malfoy Manor has significantly more bathrooms that just ten. It’s a Manor, not a hovel.”

“It’s ostentatious is what it is.” Neville retorted, with a small smile. “A perfect example of the grandiose nature of affluent traditionalists.”
“I’m sorry,” Draco made a show of looking Neville over. “I didn’t recognise you, Weasley.”

Neville snorted. “You think Ron knows the word grandiose? Or ostentatious? Or affluent? He’d just call you a Death Eater and be done with it.”

Draco chuckled. “Not unless he wanted to be suspended again.”

Harry turned away from their conversation and made his way across to Daphne. “Merry meet.”

“Merry meet.” Daphne agreed with a smile. “How was your afternoon?”

“Not a complete waste of time.” Harry acknowledged. “How was yours?”

Daphne let out a light laugh. “Well, as I haven’t completely memorised the textbook, I found my classes quite helpful.”

“I haven’t memorised the textbook.” Harry argued. “Not word for word anyway.”

Daphne shook her head in amusement. “I love that you think that’s any kind of defence. Still, I suppose it gives you more time to prepare for the last task.”

“It does.” Harry agreed, looking around the room. “Though part of me wishes that I could just get it over and done with now, without any kind of preparation at all. Last night two weeks and five days felt like nowhere near enough time to prepare, but today it seems like forever.”

“Two weeks and four days now.” Daphne encouraged him. “And then it will all be over.”

Harry smiled weakly. “And then there will just be Voldemort trying to get me, and the majority of the school hating me, and…”

Daphne slipped her hand in his. “And the summer holidays when we throw pool parties, and attend balls, and you and Draco can join the Under Seventeen Quidditch League, and you will turn fifteen and become Lord Potter.”

“Which isn’t a terrifying thought at all.” Harry chuckled, before squeezing her hand gratefully.

“Sorry we’re late!” Fred exclaimed as he and George rushed into the room. “McGonagall held us behind after class.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Neville commented, his tone amused. “You didn’t miss much. Harry and Daphne have just been making eyes at each other.”

Harry whipped his head around to glare at his friend and he could see Daphne doing the same out of the corner of his eyes. “I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing wrong with it, you know.” Neville grinned, before looking down at Luna who was standing beside him. “Luna and I do it all the time.”

Luna nodded. “It’s nice. Sometimes if we look long enough we create baby Curoses.”

There was a long pause, as everyone considered that, before Harry cleared his throat. “Alright, since we’re all here, let’s get started.”

“So where do you want us?” Fred asked, looking around the room.

“We’ll each start behind one of the boulders around the outside.” Harry explained. “Then, one of
you, will whistle to indicate that we’re starting.”

Draco grimaced. “You want us to whistle? What do you think we are? Plebians?”

“Well, speaking for the two of us…” Fred started with a grin

“…yes, yes, we are.” George finished with an identical expression.

Draco waved a hand dismissively. “No, you’re scions of the Ancient and Noble House of Prewett. Even if you are uncouth anti-traditionalists.”

“Non-traditionalists.” George corrected.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Draco, you don’t have to whistle. One of the others can indicate when to begin, or you can just create a loud noise. After that, all of you will be working to knock me out.”

“I’m still not so sure about this.” Neville admitted, looking around. “All of us, against you? That hardly seems fair. Maybe a few of us should sit the first one out.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Neville, I’ve been practising every week for two years. Not to mention that I know wandless magic and parselmagic. I’ll be fine. Besides, none of us will be causing enough damage that we’ll need to go see Madame Pomfrey, so the worst that will happen is that I get knocked out.”

Neville nodded unsurely. “Alright.”

“And don’t take it easy on me.” Harry said, looking towards Fred, George and Takashi. “I’m going to be facing five seventh years. I need as much of a challenge as you can give me.”

They all dispersed, wandering around the room looking for a boulder to start behind. Harry chose one of the ones closest to him. It wasn’t in the most strategic position, but he figured that he would need to practise starting behind each one just in case.

He’d only ever duelled against one person at a time before and, aside from Crouch, his duels had never involved objects to hide behind. He really wasn’t sure how his strategy should change to incorporate more people and a different environment, though the book he had started reading had started giving him some ideas.

The boulders would be useful to help him shield himself from his opponents, but they would also make it harder to cast spells of his own. Which meant that, while he did want to utilise the boulders, he couldn’t spend the entire duel behind them if he wanted to knock out his opponents. The difficulty came with the risk that leaving the safety of the boulder put him into. With more than one person to look out for, who could be behind any of the boulders, Harry would have to be ready to dodge spells from all angles. Not mention he had no idea how he was supposed to know if a spell was being sent at his back.

The ridge was possibly the most usual piece of cover in the arena, though it, like the boulders, would make it hard to go on the offensive.

“Go!” Draco’s magically amplified voice suddenly filled the room.

Harry tightened his hand around his wand. Alright, how was he going to do this?

He peeked his head around the boulder, but couldn’t see anything except boulders, flame pillars, and the ridge to his right – the nearest piece of shelter, aside from boulder he was currently crouched
behind, was at least twenty feet away from him. He doubted his friends would leave the safety of their shelters, which meant that he was going to need to. What could he do?

He could climb to the top of his boulder so that he could see further – except then he would be a perfect target for his friends.

He could run from the boulder he was behind to another one – except that felt too much like playing hide and go seek. Not mention that it would make him a target as well.

He could sit behind this boulder and hope that his friends sought him out – but that wouldn’t help him learn how to defeat the other Champions during the Third Task.

He could use his blasting curse to destroy all the boulders – but that was likely to cause more injuries that was allowed. (It was a good plan to consider for the actual task though.)

What he needed to do was figure out where his friends were, and then get to them without being hit. Which, now that he put it like that, wasn’t that much of a challenge.

He lay his wand on the palm of his hand. “Point me, Takashi.”

The wand spun around on his palm, before slowing to halt and pointing straight at the boulder he was crouched behind. Right, so Takashi probably wasn’t the best person to start with then,

“Point me, Theo.”

This time the wand ended up pointing towards Harry’s right. Which gave him a direction, now all he needed to do was get there without being seen.

He crouched lower, before raising his wand over his head and twirling it around. “Talpa!” He whispered.

Immediately he could feel the disillusionment charm traveling down his body. It felt as though a raw egg had been cracked over his head and Harry barely managed to hold back a shudder. He looked down at his legs and was glad to see that they now looked like the floor.

That done, Harry slowly stood up from behind the boulder, his wand in his hand, and scanned the room for any visible sign of his friends.

“Stupefy!” Fred cast loudly, his head popping up behind one of boulders in the middle of the circle. Clearly Harry had been wrong about his friends not moving out from behind their original boulders.

Harry watched for a second as the red spell flew towards him, before quickly beginning to run towards where Theo was hiding. So the Disillusionment spell wasn’t actually that useful when moving – that was good to know. He wished he had his invisibility cloak – except he knew that he wouldn’t be able to use it in the actual Task since they were only allowed their wand.

“Petrificus Totalus!” Theo’s voice called desperately from the behind the boulder that Harry was quickly approaching.

“Protego!” Harry cast, continuing to run as his friend’s spell splashed harmlessly against his shield. “Stupefy! Stupefy! Stupefy!”

The first two spells hit the boulder, but by the time the third one left his wand Harry was close enough to see Theo and the spell hit him in the arm.
Harry ducked behind the boulder with a grin, ignoring Theo’s unconscious body for the moment. One down, seven to go.

46-46-46

“How did it go?” Sirius asked, looking up from the parchment he was reading from as Harry entered their quarters.

“Terribly.” Harry sighed, dropping onto the nearest seat. “It’s nothing like the duelling we’ve done.”

“I know.” Sirius grimaced sympathetically. “That’s why I was allowed to duel with you all year.”

“My friends are terrible at duelling.” Harry sighed, letting his head fall back against the chair. “I managed to beat them all within half an hour, and that was with me having no idea what I was doing.”

“I imagine your friends are actually quite reasonable for their age.” Sirius corrected gently. “You’re just very good.”

“Takashi’s a seventh year!” Harry pointed out.

“Yes, but not only are you incredibly powerful, but you’ve also been trained by one of the best duellers in the Order of the Phoenix.” Sirius told him, with a crooked grin.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You and Draco are a lot alike. No humility whatsoever.”

Sirius laughed. “There’s no point in pretending you’re not the best when you really are, Harry.”

“Which is exactly the sort of thing Draco would say.” Harry pointed out.

“If only,” Sirius continued, with a half-hearted glare. “Because it makes people who aren’t as great as you feel even worse about themselves. I was very, very good, Harry. Ask Dumbledore,” he grimaced and shook his head. “No, don’t ask Dumbledore, ask someone else. Your grandfather used to call me a duelling prodigy.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “But I beat you sometimes.”

“Because you are also very, very good.” Sirius told him. “Not as good as me yet, but Merlin, Harry, you’re fifteen years old.”

“Fourteen.” Harry corrected.

Sirius grimaced. “Right, sorry.”

“So you’re saying that I’ll be fine in the Third Task?” Harry asked hopefully.

“Not without a good strategy.” Sirius said sternly. “You might be brilliant, but the people you’re going to facing off against aren’t exactly slackers. What did you learn from your practise?”

“That duelling identical twins is hard.” Harry said immediately. “Fred and George worked together seamlessly. They hounded me the entire time and were the last two that I managed to take out. I think I just got lucky.”

Sirius laughed. “Yeah, I remember duelling with their uncles. They were a force of nature. Always seemed to know exactly where the other one was and what they would be doing. Good thing there aren’t going to be any twins in the final task. What else did you learn?”
“That I’m going to get destroyed.” Harry groaned. “It was like playing hide and go seek. I tried to use a disillusionment charm, but it didn’t seem that effective.”

“Probably because you were moving and they were looking for you.” Sirius commented. “Disillusionment charms leave a blurry edge around your body which, when you’re still and nobody is expecting to see anything is easy to miss, but if you know what you’re looking for they’re easy enough to spot.”

Harry sighed. “I need a new strategy.”

“Good think you’ve got over two weeks to prepare then.” Sirius told him. “Don’t forget that Cissy, Andy, Lucius, Ted, and Tonks are allowed to help you. I imagine that Tonks and Lucius will have some good ideas, both of them have some experience in duelling in this kind of environment.”

Harry smiled gratefully. “I’d completely forgotten I could ask them. Thank you!”

“I’d write to them soon.” Sirius advised. “You’ve only got two weeks and four days.”

Harry groaned. “I know.”

46-46-46
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

Another early chapter since I'm going camping again this weekend. Woohoo. Enjoy :)

The two and a half weeks before the Third Task were some of the busiest days Harry could remember having ever had. He wasn’t sure who had been the one to decide to schedule the Third Task in the middle of their exams, but they were clearly an idiot. Admittedly, as a Champion he had been given the option of not taking his exams, but Harry wasn’t sure what good that would do. Sure he would have more time to prepare for the Third Task, but it wasn’t as though doing well in the task was going to guarantee him good grades.

Still, as Harry sat through class after class of exam review he found himself regretting his decision to take the exams. The spells they were reviewing were so much simpler than the ones that he was studying for the task. Turning a hedgehog into a pincushion seemed so pointless when he knew that he would spend the evening learning to manipulate water and fire into a dragon shape and then control it.

The only subject that he felt particularly invested in was Ancient Runes, since he would be taking his OWL exam with the fifth years three days before the Third Task. Still, he found himself getting frustrated at the theoretical nature of the subject. According to Professor Babbling they wouldn’t start learning how to infuse their magic into the runes they drew until seventh year and even then it was unlikely they would ever be proficient enough to use them often unless they continued studying them after they left Hogwarts.

It made Harry glad that he had started studying for his exams months previously, since he was barely able to find the time or inclination to study in the final few weeks before the exams. When he wasn’t in classes, he was in the Come and Go Room reading about new spells; practising new spells; and participating in practise duels with his friends. The practise duels weren’t nearly as useful as they would have been if he had been duelling Sirius, or even Remus, but his friends were improving in their technique. Unfortunately, Harry was also improving and, after having been beaten by him every day for two weeks, his friends were becoming less and less enthusiastic about the idea of duelling with him.

“A fire dragon, Harry?!” Draco complained from the floor after Harry had rennervated him. “What if it had actually hit me?”

Harry offered his hand to help his cousin to his feet. “I made sure it wouldn’t. It was just a distraction so that I could hit you with a stunner.”

“You could have killed me!” Draco protested, straightening down his robes.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re the one who tried to hit me with the rock.”

“You did it first.” Draco pointed out.

“I cushioned the rock when I did it.” Harry told him, moving towards where Daphne was lying unconscious a few feet away.
“Really?” Draco turned to him, surprise written on his face. “Why?”

“So that we wouldn’t need to visit Madam Pomfrey again.” Harry told him. “You should have seen her expression when she saw Blaise’s broken arm last week. She was furious.”

“And yet you used the fire dragon.” Draco commented pointedly.

Harry crouched down beside Daphne. “Rennervate! This is our last practise. I wanted to make sure I could use it in a combat setting.” He smiled as Daphne opened her eyes. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine.” Daphne allowed Harry to pull her to her feet, before raising a hand to check her hair. “How did you sneak up on me so easily?”

“Invisibility cloak.” Harry admitted.

“I thought you were only allowed to take your wand into the task.” Draco commented curiously.

Harry led them to a boulder a few dozen feet away where Theo was lying unconscious on the stone floor. “I’ve been thinking about trying a Summoning Charm.” He admitted, crouching down beside his friend. “Rennervate! My invisibility cloak would be a big advantage.”

“Merlin, Harry.” Theo groaned, as he pulled himself upright. “I think it hurts more every time. I pity your opponents in the actual task.”

“Sorry.” Harry patted his friend on the shoulder. “It’s all over now.”

“Yes,” Draco frowned. “Why exactly was this our last practise? The task isn’t for another three days.”

“Our exams start tomorrow morning.” Harry reminded him. “Sirius says that if I haven’t learnt enough in the last two weeks then three more days isn’t going to make much of a difference and we need to concentrate on sitting our exams.”

“Speak for yourself.” Theo told him cheerfully. “My first exam is tomorrow afternoon.”

“And you’re pleased about this why?” Draco asked him. “That just means that you’ll still be sitting exams after the rest of us are finished.”

“It means I get to sleep in.” Theo told with an unrepentant grin. “I do better at exams when I’m allowed to sleep in first.”

Draco scoffed. “You say that about everything.”

47-47-47

The first two days of exam week were very busy for Harry. He had his Magical Theory and Potions exams on Monday, and his Ancient Runes OWL and Transfiguration and Astronomy exams on Tuesday. It was enough to make him glad that he had taken Sirius’ advice to not practise his duelling during the week, though he still ran through different strategies in his head whenever he had a free moment.

When Wednesday arrived, Harry wasn’t sure that he was going to be able to sit through his exams knowing that the Third Task would be that night. After breakfast, Professor Flitwick directed him into one of the Great Hall’s ante-chamber where the other Champions were already greeting their family members.
Harry was glad to see Tonks, Cousin Andromeda and Ted, though he found himself missing Cousin Narcissa and Lord Malfoy who were still in hiding. He was sure that, if circumstances had been different, Draco’s parents would have come to watch the Third Task too. Unfortunately, given the timing of his History exam, Harry was forced to say goodbye to his visitors only minutes after greeting them, and then had to sit through his History exam and concentrate on remembering the details of the various wars, treaties, and Wizengamot laws that Remus had put in the exam.

After lunch, during which Cousin Andromeda, Cousin Ted, and Tonks joined Harry and his friends at the Slytherin Table, Harry took his Herbology exam, and then it was time for the evening feast. It felt strange to be eating calmly when the Third Task would start in just a few minutes, but Harry made sure that he ate enough to give himself energy for the duel ahead of him. Cousin Andromeda’s presence helped as he could only imagine the lecture she would give him if he decided not to eat. Cousin Andromeda was a lot like Cousin Narcissa.

There were more courses that there usually were at the evening meal – something that Harry thought was clearly for the benefit of the audience rather than the Champions. He doubted the other champions were any more interested in partaking in two dessert courses than he was.

“How are you feeling, Harry?” Tonks asked, as she liberally spooned chocolate mousse into her bowl. “Going to put on a good show for us I hope?”

“I hope so.” Harry answered, trying to ignore the way his stomach was twisting nervously. “I’m just hoping that I don’t get eliminated first.”

“I doubt the likelihood of that, lad.” Cousin Ted told him encouragingly. “Not if half the things Sirius says about you are true.”

Harry smiled weakly. “Thanks.”

“e’sides,” Tonks started, before pausing to swallow her mouthful of chocolate mousse. “You’ve had me as a strategic advisor. You’ll be fine.”

“Nymphadora.” Cousin Andromeda frowned disapprovingly. “I think I speak for everyone when I ask that you swallow your mouthful before attempting to speak.”

Tonks grimaced. “Thanks for that, Mum.”

Harry grinned, before spotting Draco’s melancholy expression. He knew that Draco was missing his parents – especially since he had been forbidden from exchanging letters with them in case someone intercepted them. Hopefully they would be able to come out of hiding soon – except that would take Voldemort being defeated and, according to the prophecy, that would mean Harry would have to defeat him.

Which reminded him that he still had no idea what Voldemort’s reason had been for having Barty Crouch Junior enter him into the Tournament. One of his theories – or paranoid hunches, as Sirius had started calling them – was that Voldemort had been planning on ensuring that Harry died during one of the Tasks. Which, since Harry was still alive, meant that tonight was Voldemort’s last chance to see that plan come to fruition. Though Harry had no idea how Voldemort would do it – especially since he couldn’t imagine any of the other champions agreeing to try and kill him. Not even Aceline, though Harry doubted that she would mourn if he actually died.

“You alright, Harry?” Daphne’s hand rested on top of his hand. “You’re quiet.”

“Just thinking.” Harry explained, twisting his hand around so that he could wrap it around her
smaller hand. “Have you got my cloak?”

“Yes,” Daphne assured him. “It’s in my bag. I’ll take it out when I get there.”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled down at her. “Draco?”

Draco looked up from his bowl. “Yes?”

“Do you have my sword?”

“Not yet,” Draco admitted. “I thought bringing it to dinner would be too conspicuous. I’ll get it on my way out to the Quidditch Pitch.”

Harry nodded. “Thanks.”

“Did you decide to wear the duelling robe I got for you?” Tonks asked quietly.

“Sirius says that I’m not allowed to take it into the arena with me.” Harry explained. “So I’m going to use a Switching Spell once I’m in there. That’s why I’m wearing this robe – it’s almost identical to the duelling robe, except it doesn’t have any dragon skin. I have gloves in my pocket that I’ll put on, so that I can use can switch them out too.”

“Clever.” Tonks looked impressed. “I presume you’ve got them all laid out somewhere to make the spell work better?”

“Yes,” Harry assured her. “And I practised it until I could get it perfect every time.”

“Harry?” Daphne squeezed his hand gently, before nodding towards where McGonagall had stood at the head table.

“I hope you have all been enjoying this delightful meal as much as I have.” McGonagall told them. “We will begin making our way to the Quidditch pitch in a few minutes so, if you’ve forgotten anything, now is the time to go and fetch it. I suggest that you all ensure that you have your winter cloaks and scarves with you as the air is rather chilly this evening. Now, if the champions would please follow Mr. Bagman outside so that they can start their final preparations for the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament.”

Harry looked around at his friends and family, taking courage from their encouraging expressions, before standing up and following Bagman and the other Champions out of the Great Hall.

“How are you feeling?” Harry asked Cedric, taking in the other boy’s pinched expression.

“Fine.” Cedric answered quickly, before clearing his throat. “You?”

“A bit nervous.” Harry admitted honestly, with a smile. “But eager to get this entire Tournament over and done with.”

Cedric chuckled. “Yes, I can’t disagree with you there. I’ve spent the last few weeks trying to remember why I thought putting my name in the Goblet was a good idea.”

“I can relate.” Harry told him. “I’ve spent the last few weeks trying to figure out why Voldemort decided to put my name in.”

Cedric faltered. “You think You-Know-Who entered you into the Tournament?”

“I know he did.” Harry answered seriously. “I just don’t know why.”
“Merlin!” Cedric exclaimed quietly. “That’s…”

Harry waited a few seconds and, when Cedric didn’t finish his sentence, nodded gravely. “I know.”

The Quidditch Pitch turned battle arena looked the same as it had for the last two weeks – which was a relief. Harry had spent so much time practising on an identical arena in the Come and Go Room that he thought it would have been rather off-putting for things to have been changed at the last minute.

“Excellent.” Bagman rubbed his hands excitedly as they came to a stop next to the Pitch. “Well, here we are. In a few minutes each of you will be led to the place in the arena where you will start. The last one of you standing will be the Triwizard Champion.” His gaze swept across them. “You may only take your wand into the arena with you.”

“And robes, I presume.” Harry commented with a small smirk.

Bagman’s eyes widened. “Yes, yes, of course.”

“What about gloves, sir?” Harry asked, ignoring the sideways glances the other champions were giving him.

“What sort of gloves?” Bagman asked carefully.

Harry pulled his gloves out of his pocket. “Woollen gloves, sir. To keep my hands warm.”

Bagman nodded, his expression confused. “Certainly, certainly.”

Harry swallowed down a pleased smirk as he pulled on his gloves. Perfect.

The students, and other spectators, began arriving and Harry found himself much more relaxed at the idea of an audience than he had been during the first two tasks. After all, even if he made a fool of himself the school’s opinion of him was unlikely to get any lower than it already was.

Harry watched Professors Flitwick, Snape, Hagrid, Vector, Babbling, and Remus all walked purposely towards them. They were all wearing large, red, luminous stars on their hats, except for Hagrid whose star was on the back of his vest. The difference in height between Flitwick and Hagrid was comical and Harry faked a cough into his gloved hand to hide his amused smile.

“We will be leading each of you to your starting positions.” Professor Snape explained sternly. “If you want to resign from the duel make your way out of the arena and send up red sparks and we will come and find you. When you are knocked unconscious we will summon you out of the arena and take you to the Healing Tent. A horn will blow when you resign or are knocked unconscious to signal your elimination from the duel. Potter, you’re with me.”

Harry walked quickly to keep up with his professor’s fast paced steps. Snape was only about four inches taller than he was, but he had a long stride. Harry grinned, if Snape about four inches taller than him then he was almost half a foot taller than Sirius. He could only imagine how mad that made Sirius.

“How do you feel, Potter?” Snape asked sharply, as they walked around the outside of the arena.

“Nervous, sir.” Harry admitted. “But as prepared as I’ll ever be.”

“Good,” Snape stopped suddenly near one of the small boulders than were scattered near the edge of the arena. The large ridge that was made out of stones and small boulders was about ten feet to their
Harry looked into the arena, his stomach twisting when he realised how dark it was getting. Why had he never considered that? What if he couldn’t see anything?

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Bagman’s voice suddenly boomed around the Quidditch Pitch. “The third and final task of the Triwizard Cup is about to begin – or perhaps we ought to call it the Sexwizard Cup…” His laugh was made all the more awkward by the dead silence around the arena.

“Dunderhead.” Snape growled quietly.

“…Anyway,” Bagman said, with so much cheer that Harry was sure that it had to be fake. “Let me remind you how the points currently stand! In first place, with ninety four points, is Mister Harry Potter of Hogwarts School. Then Miss Nina Viserova of Durmstrang Institute sits on eighty three points, Mister Cedric Diggory of Hogwarts School has eighty four points, Mister Viktor Krum of Durmstrang Institute has seventy three points, finally Miss Moreau and Miss Delacour, both of whom are from the Beauxbatons Academy, are currently in fifth and sixth place on sixty seven, and sixty points respectively. The Champions will be engaging in a duel and the last Champion able and willing to continue will be our new Triwizard Champion. Now, Miss Delacour and Miss Moreau will enter the arena on my whistle…one…two…three…”

Harry took a small step backwards as, at the sound of Bagman’s whistle, the three pillars of fire suddenly exploded out of the ground. Ah, that had been why he hadn’t worried about seeing in the dark – the pillars lit up the entire arena.

He took advantage of the light to search the stands for his friends, nodding in satisfaction when saw that they were sitting relatively close to where he would be starting from. That would make it easier to summon his cloak and sword – though he still wasn’t sure that the Summoning Charm would work.

He turned back to the arena and searched for any sign of Fleur or Aceline, but couldn’t see anything. He didn’t even know where they had started from. The seconds ticked by and then Bagman’s whistle blew again and Harry knew that Viktor would be entering the arena.

“Not the most exciting event so far.” He commented.

“No,” Snape agreed dryly. “Nevertheless, it is likely that this task will be more entertaining than the second one.”

Bagman’s whistle blew again and Harry smiled in satisfaction as he saw Cedric suddenly enter the arena about two hundred feet to his right. Good, at least he had some idea where one of his opponents was.

A few seconds later, Harry saw Viktor creeping out from behind a rock about a hundred feet in front of him. Harry quickly crouched down, hoping that Viktor wouldn’t see him. He didn’t want the older boy to be lying in wait for him when he entered.

Bagman’s whistle blew again and Harry let out a deep breath. That meant that Nynke was now entering the arena and he had less than a minute until it would be his turn.

A blue light appeared suddenly out the corner of his eyes and Harry turned towards it to see another spell fly towards Viktor from behind the ridge. That was good, not only did he now have a vague idea where three of the other champions were, but Viktor was likely to be too distracted to spot Harry.
Bagman’s whistle blew again and, with a quick glance towards where Snape was standing, Harry slowly moved into the arena – still in a crouched position. He crept forward until he was directly behind the small boulder, before bringing his wand up in preparation. He could do this.

First things first, he quickly performed the Switching Charm that he had been practising the last to week. He nodded in satisfaction as he felt his new duelling robes settle over his body replacing his other robes. These robes, though definitely heavier, would deflect the most basic of spells – including stupefy – and, possibly most importantly, were flame-proof. That done, Harry turned towards the stands.

“Accio invisibility cloak! Accio sword and scabbard!”

47-47-47
Chapter 47

Daphne tucked her hands deeper into her muffler and shivered, though she didn’t know whether it was due to the chill or her anticipation. This was it – the Third Task of the Triwizard Cup – and she couldn’t wait to see Harry in action.

The two weeks she, and the others, had spent as Harry’s practise opponents had been an eye opener to her. She wasn’t sure what she had thought Harry’s duelling lessons with Sirius were like, but she had never imagined that Harry would be as adept and deadly as he was.

They had practised in the Come and Go Room at least once a day for two weeks, though on weekends they had normally practised three or four times, and none of them had managed to land a curse on Harry once. Daphne knew that some of the boys had found it demoralising, to be beaten so thoroughly time and time again, but for her it was more evidence of her good luck.

“I’m glad it’s not me down there.” Neville commented lowly, from his seat to her left.

“Me too.” Luna agreed, from his other side.

Daphne thoroughly agreed with the sentiment and she saw Astoria nodding at her side.

Draco, who was sitting on Astoria’s other side, scoffed as they watched as the two Beauxbaton Champions entered the arena at opposite ends, before settling down behind boulders and not moving.

“How is this an advantage for Harry?” He asked in frustration. “If he had been allowed to enter first he could have at least spent the time preparing.”

“I think the idea is that these two are supposed to knock each other, so that Harry doesn’t have to.” Neville commented.

“Why would they?” Draco asked rhetorically. “The best strategy would be to stay put and wait until everyone was in. Not to mention that they’re starting five hundred feet away from each other. By the time they reach each other, Harry will have entered the arena anyway.”

Viktor Krum entered next, about a hundred feet to Delacour’s left and directly opposite where Harry was waiting. Unlike the others, he began to creep forward towards the massive fire pillar between him and Harry’s starting place.

“I idiot.” Draco commented. “Clearly he’s taken one too many bludgers in the head. Why doesn’t he just stay where he started?”

“Maybe he wants a better starting position?” Neville suggested. “If he stayed behind that rock until everybody was in the arena he might find himself a bit stuck.”

Draco scoffed again. “Gryffindors – always rushing into battle.”

“So you admit that Krum would be a Gryffindor then?” Neville sounded triumphant.

“If this is his strategy, you can have him.” Draco answered, as they watched Krum come to a halt near another of the small boulders.

Daphne turned to watch Diggory enter the arena about two hundred feet to Harry’s right. He, like Krum, ignored boulder nearest to him and began to move further into the arena.
“Delacour’s moving.” Neville commented. “That ridge looks like it will be handy.”

“Only if she uses it correctly.” Daphne pointed out, turning to watch the half-veela slowly climb up the ridge until she was peering over it. “If she’s not careful she could end up trapped behind it.”

“How?” Astoria asked curiously.

“If someone decides to do what she’s doing, only on the other side, then she would be left with very little cover.” Daphne explained, just as Delacour began to cast spells at where Krum was crouched behind a boulder.

Krum threw himself out of the way of her first spell, before quickly moving around the boulder so that it gave him better cover. Then he returned fire.

“There goes Viserova.” Draco commented, nodding towards where the Bulgarian girl was starting opposite to Diggory’s starting position.

Daphne bent over and pulled Harry’s invisibility cloak out of her bag, before draping it across her legs. “Harry’s next.”

She watched as Viserova crept forward until she was hiding behind one of the two absolutely ginormous boulders in the arena. It meant that she was right next to the pool of water, and in a good position to target both Diggory and Moreau – the bitchy Beaxbatons champion. At least she would be if Moreau ever came out from behind the boulder she was hiding behind.

“Ooh, Viktor almost got Delacour with that one.” Neville exclaimed excitedly. “It was close.”

“I can’t believe she hasn’t hit him yet.” Draco groused. “Harry would have destroyed the boulder he’s hiding behind by now.”

“Harry’s starting.” Astoria told them.

Daphne looked down at Harry and watched as he entered the arena in a crouched position – he was already making better decisions that the other champions.

“Merlin,” Neville exclaimed, as Harry’s robes rippled. “Imagine being about to perform a Switching Spell that accurately.”

Daphne started in shock as she felt something on her knees, before realising that it was just Harry summoning his invisibility cloak. She could see his sword and scabbard flying through the air towards Harry as well.

“Ha, look at Potter!” Weasley’s voice travelled easily down to where Daphne was sitting. “He’s just hiding behind a rock. Coward!”

Draco and Neville both stiffened, but Daphne was glad to see that they were wise enough not to engage with the idiot.

Daphne watched as Harry buckled his scabbard around his waist and then threw his cloak over his head, before enjoying the gasps of the students around her.

“Where’d he go?”

“What happened?”

“Is that an invisibility cloak?”
Daphne glanced towards where Krum and Delacour were still exchanging curses – neither of them managing to land a hit. If they were an indication of the skill levels of the champions, Harry was going to win easily.

Though, as she watched, Delacour send a ball of fire at the boulder Krum was crouched behind. The ball of fire hit the boulder harmlessly, but the next one had Krum diving out of the way. That was more like it.

“Woah!” Neville exclaimed. “Look at Viserova.”

Daphne turned towards the other end of the arena to see Viserova somehow causing the water from the pool to rise up as a tall wave which then crashed out of the pool and over the boulder that Moreau was crouched behind – the wave knocked Moreau off her balance and onto her back.

“Impressive.” Daphne agreed, as Viserova followed the wave up with a purple curse that Moreau only just managed to roll out of the way of.

“Harry’s about to do something.” Luna told them in a sing song tone of voice.

Daphne turned back to where she had last seen Harry, feeling as though she was trying to watch bludger, just in time to see three blue spells appear out of nowhere and fly towards the second ginormous boulder.

“Is he…” Draco trailed off, as the spells hit the boulder one after the other – exploding it into pieces.

“It was at least twenty feet wide!” Neville exclaimed. “How does he do that?”

“He’s the reincarnation of Merlin.” Luna said airily.

Daphne’s head swung around. “What?!”

Luna burst into a peel laughter. “I’m kidding.”

“Oh,” Daphne could feel her face heating up. “Of course.”

“Look,” Draco started. “One of the boulder pieces hit Viktor and knocked him over.”

Daphne watched as the Bulgarian champion pulled himself upright, before being hit in the chest with a pink spell from Fleur that knocked him back down. This time he didn’t move again and, within seconds, Daphne could see Professor Flitwick summoning his unconscious body to the side of the arena.

“Go, Diggory!” A student behind them exclaimed excitedly, as a horn blew signalling that one champion had been eliminated.

Daphne looked around just in time to see Diggory’s red spell hit Moreau in the head, causing the girl to drop like a stone. Seconds later, she was summoned out of the arena too.

“I thought Krum would put up a better fight.” Neville sighed. “I can’t believe Delacour managed to take him out.”

“Harry did most of the work.” Draco retorted defensively. “Delacour just swept in to get the credit.”

“I doubt Harry minds.” Daphne pointed out. “Dealcour just did his dirty work for him and now he can concentrate on taking her out.”
With Harry still hidden under his invisibility cloak, Daphne turned her attention towards where Diggory was sprinting towards the third ginormous rock in the arena only just managing to dodge Viserova barrage of spells.

It was a good strategy on Diggory’s part, since now both he and Viserova were safely behind rocks of approximately the same size and Viserova wouldn’t be able to use a wave of water to knock him off his feet.

47-47-47

Harry grimaced as he began to approach the fire pillar that was between him and either Fleur or Viktor (or possible both of them). The heat from the pillar was intense and he could already feel himself beginning to sweat. He changed direction slightly, and decided to creep quietly along the base of the ridge on his left. Not only would it put at least twenty feet between him and the pillar, but it would also prevent himself from announcing his position by stepping noisily through the rubble that had once been a boulder.

He was almost even with fire pillar when he saw Fleur, standing behind a small boulder her eyes sweeping across the arena. Harry stiffened when her gaze reached him, before letting out a relieved breath when she made no indication of seeing him.

Her presence, along with the fact that there was no sign of Viktor, meant that the Bulgarian champion had probably been eliminated. It was surprising, since he’d expected Viktor to last a while, but it was good to know.

Harry crept forward until he had halved the distance between him and Fleur, before turning his attention to the fire pillar that was almost at a right angle to him and Fleur.

“Draconifors!” He murmured quietly, before watching in satisfaction as a dragon made entirely of flames emerged from the pillar. Harry jabbed his wand towards Fleur and watched in anticipation as the fire dragon hurtled towards her, its mouth wide open.

Fleur looked startled for a moment, before leathery wings sudden appeared behind her and her face elongated into a bird’s head. She stood still unaffected as the fire rushed towards her and then surrounded her, hiding her from view.

Harry cursed himself. Merlin, how stupid was he? Using fire to try and attack a Veela – and after his friends had told her that she had been unaffected by the fire during the First Task. He allowed the fire to dissipate, bringing Fleur back into view.

“Homenum Revelio!” Fleur exclaimed, her wand sweeping across the arena.

Damn, damn, damn, Harry knew that spell and he knew that his invisibility cloak wouldn’t be able to hide him from her spell. As though on cue, he felt something swoop over him and saw Fleur’s gaze focus on his position. She brought her wand up and, after a moment’s thought, Harry quickly shrugged off the invisibility cloak and pulled his sword from its scabbard just in time to use it to deflect Fleur’s first spell.

“Everte Statum!” Harry cast, before stepping out of the path of Fleur’s second spell. “Langlock!”

Fleur sidestepped his spells easily, before returning fire.

Harry grimaced as the fireballs flew towards him. “Frigidus ignis! Frigidus ignis! Frigidus ignis!” He breathed a sigh of relief as his spells froze the fireballs, before gasping when he saw Fleur’s next spell was only seconds away from hitting him.
Side stepping the spell, Harry brought his wand up again. “Expulso!”

The boulder Fleur was standing behind exploded into pieces, but Fleur’s magical shield protected her from the flying pieces of rock.

“Orbis!” Harry cast quickly, while Fleur was still occupied with her shield. “Stupefy! Confundus!”

Fleur stepped to side of Harry’s curses, just in time for the first one to hit the ground just in front of where she had been standing. She raised her hand to return fire, before looking down in horror as the ground sunk beneath her causing her to sink up to waist. She struggled for a few moments, before having to abandon her attempts for a shield to block Harry’s curses.

“Confundus!” Harry cast again, striding forward. “Stupefy!” :Sleep!:

Fleur’s shield managed to deflect the first two curses, before her eyes widened in horror when the third one flew through it as though it wasn’t there. The spell hit her chest and she immediately slumped forward unconscious.

Remembering what Snape had said about summoning them once they were unconscious, Harry looked around cautiously before striding forward and pulling her unconscious body out of the soft ground. Immediately, Fleur’s body rose into the air and began to fly slowly towards the edge of the arena.

A horn blew, announcing that another champion had been eliminated, and Harry nodded in satisfaction. He’d been a bit sloppy at first, but he’d definitely gotten better and now there were only three of them left.

Picking up his invisibility cloak, Harry threw it over his head again before laying his wand on the palm of his hand. “Point me, Cedric Diggory.”

48-48-48

Draco groaned as Harry stopped to pull Fleur’s unconscious body out of the ground. Sometimes his cousin’s goody-goody sensibilities were painful. Harry was in a fight for his life, or at least for the Triwizard Cup, and he was taking the time to help his enemies. It was ridiculous!

Thankfully though, Harry seemed to regain his good sense after that and put the invisibility cloak back on. Still, as useful as the invisibility cloak was for Harry, it didn’t exactly make for good entertainment, so Draco turned his attention towards where Diggory and Viserova were both still battling it out from behind their ginormous boulders. Neither of them had even gotten close to hitting the other yet, mostly because they were both using the boulders to hide behind.

The boulders, which were at least twenty feet in diameter and ten feet tall, were approximately the same size as the one that Harry had exploded in just three curses, but neither Diggory or Viserova’s had even attempted to blow their opponents shelter apart yet.

Though, that wasn’t particularly surprising. After all, who in their right mind would even consider blowing apart a rock that big?

“Harry’s duelling is much more interesting.” Astoria commented quietly, as they watched Viserova’s curse fly harmlessly past the boulder Diggory was hiding behind.

Draco looked down at her. “It is. Hopefully he’ll get involved again soon.”

“Who do you think he’ll take out first?” Astoria asked, tilting her face up towards him.
“I don’t know.” Draco admitted. “Viserova is his biggest competition, but he hasn’t seen her duel so he won’t know that. Diggory would be the easiest one to hit.”

“I hope he takes out Diggory.” Astoria commented. “I want to see him and Viserova duel. His fire dragon and her water wave would look incredible together.”

Draco didn’t disagree. “Are you warm enough?”

Astoria smiled sweetly. “Yes, thank you. This muffler is wonderful.”

Draco tried not to feel too jealous as he glanced towards the muffler that was preventing him from holding her hand. “I’m glad.”

“What the..!”

“Where’d that come from?!”

“It must have been Potter.”

Draco turned back to the arena just in time to see a red spell hit Diggory in the chest. “Go, Harry!”

The other students around them protested loudly as Diggory’s unconscious body was summoned out of the arena to the sound of the horn blowing. Draco wasn’t sure what they thought Harry had done wrong, but their irrational belief that Harry was a Death Eater was clearly affecting their judgement.

“There he is.” Neville said, pointing to where Harry was standing behind the boulder that Diggory had been using for cover. “He must have decided not to use the invisibility cloak anymore.”

“It would restrict his movements.” Draco pointed out. “Besides which, Viserova knows he’s there now. A simple human revealing charm would give his position away.”

They watched as Harry pulled his sword out of his scabbard, before stepping out from behind the boulder. A blue spell flew out of his wand and towards the boulder that Viserova was hiding behind, and then another, and then a third one.

Draco watched in anticipation as they each hit the boulder, before frowning in confusion when the third spell hit and the boulder remained standing. “Why didn’t it explode?”

“Maybe he’s getting tired.” Astoria suggested. “I would be.”

Draco shook his head. “I’ve seen Harry do a lot more than this without getting tired. Maybe she did something to the boulder?”

Harry frowned as his Expulso Curses didn’t destroy the boulder. He was sure that if he hit it with enough Expulso Curses it would explode eventually, but maybe he should try another strategy. After all, it was just down to him and Nina. If there was ever going to be a time to show off – now would be it.

He brought his sword up in his left hand to deflect the three curses that Nina had sent towards him, all the while casting with his right hand. “Flipendo! Immobulus! Obscuro!”

Nina ducked behind the boulder seconds before the curses would have hit her and Harry grimaced in frustration. That was going to get annoying very quickly.
He stepped behind his own boulder and turned towards the pool of water to his right. If his memory of the arena was correct then the pool was bent around the boulder that Nina was hiding behind.

Harry pointed his wand at the water. “Draconifors!” The shape of a dragon made entirely of water rose from the water, and, with a jab of Harry’s wand, dove behind Nina’s boulder.

Nina came into sight immediately, ducking out of the way of the dragon, her wand raised defensively as its head snapped down towards her. Suddenly a stream of fire left her wand, colliding with the dragon made of water. There was a loud hissing sound and a burst of steam made it hard to see what was happening. When the steam dispersed the water dragon was gone and Nina was standing in front of the boulder her wand raised in preparation.

Harry sidestepped her first spell. “Colloshoo! Stupefy!”

Nina ducked beneath the spells with ease, before sending back a volley of her own.

“Flipendo!” Harry stepped away from her first spell, before using his sword to block the second and third ones. “Bombarda!”

Harry grinned as she deflecting his spells with a shield, before retaliating. She was a much better dueller than Fleur had been, and her style reminded Harry of Sirius’ style. Which meant that Harry couldn’t just depend on typical duelling technique to defeat her – he would need to use something out of the box.

He deflected her next spells, while looking around at their surrounding for something to use. He could use the water again, but he’d already one that once and she had dealt with it easily. He was sure that she had cast something on the boulder she was standing in front of to make it harder to break, so that was out – except...

Harry sidestepped her next spell. “Immobulus! Accio boulder! Stupefy!”

At first nothing happened and Harry frowned in disappointment, but then the boulder seemed to shift slightly. Harry stepped away from Nina’s next volley of spells and focused his attention on the boulder.

“Accio boulder!”

48-48-48

“What’s he doing?” Daphne frowned down at Harry who didn’t seem to be focussing on his duel. He was still dodging and deflecting Viserova’s spells, but he didn’t seem to be returning fire. It was almost as though he was preparing for something big.

“Is that rock moving?!” Neville exclaimed suddenly. “Are you kidding me?!”

Daphne’s mouth dropped open as the boulder behind Viserova suddenly jerked forward, knocking the Bulgarian champion off her feet.

“That’s impossible!” Draco protested. “It must have weighed several tons.”

“At least.” Neville agreed, sounding just as shocked.

They watched as Viserova pushed herself to her feet, before collapsing again when Harry took advantage of her distraction to hit her with a red spell.
“Yes!” Neville exclaimed, pumping his fist in the air as the horn was blown for the fifth time. “Go Harry!”

Daphne smiled proudly as Harry watched Viserova’s unconscious body be summoned out of the arena, before turning to bow to the judges who were seated together at the end of the arena.

Harry had done it! He was the Triwizard Champion! He had…

She gasped as a large group of wizards in black cloaks suddenly appeared in the middle of the arena with a sharp crack. Was this part of the task?

“They’re Death Eaters!” Draco exclaimed suddenly, surging to his feet.

Daphne whipped her head around to face her friend as the students around them started screaming in horror. “What?!?”

“Voldemort’s there too!” Draco told them, seemingly unaware of the panic he was causing around them. “He’s going to kill Harry!”
Harry couldn’t help his victorious grin as his Stunning Spell hit Nina in the stomach. He’d won!

He waited until Nina’s body had been summoned out of the arena and the horn had been blown to announce his victory, before he turned to where he knew the judges were sitting. He bowed towards them, before straightening and beginning to make his way out of the arena.

He’d only taken a few steps when sharp crack signalled the arrival of a crowd of black robed wizards. He turned towards them in confusion, before recognising the white masked they were wearing.

Death Eaters!

What were they doing here? How had they gotten past the wards?

Another crack sounded and suddenly Voldemort was standing ten feet away from him.

Harry stepped back in horror.

“Hello, Harry Potter.” Voldemort smirked. “Finally we meet again.”

Harry tightened his grip on his wand and looked around desperately. Where were the aurors? Where was Sirius?

“What do you want?” Harry asked as neutrally as he could.

Voldemort smirked. “What? No pleasantries? Pity, I had heard that you were unfailingly polite.”

Harry sneered. “You left out the pleasantries first. If you had wanted a polite conversation you ought to have begun with a bow.”

Voldemort snarled. “I bow to no one! I am the Dark Lord!”

“And I am the Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Potter and Black.” Harry returned, trying to ignore the way his legs were trembling. “Which, seeing as how your title is completely made up, means that I outrank you.”

“Expelliarmus!” Voldemort snapped.

The spell hit Harry unaware and he watched helplessly as Voldemort caught his wand in his hand.

“I have two wands, you have none.” Voldemort told him with a smirk. “Do you still think you have the upper hand?”

Harry shook his head. “I never said I had the upper hand, only that I outrank you.”
“Crucio!” Voldemort snapped and Harry had to step quickly to the side to avoid being hit by the spell.

“How else would I have beaten you as a child?” Harry asked, maybe if he Voldemort talking he’d give Sirius time to rescue him.

“You are still a child.” Voldemort told him.

“What does that make you?” Harry forced himself to smirk. “A schoolyard bully?”

“Crucio!” Voldemort cast again, only this time Harry wasn’t fast enough and the curse hit him.

The pain was indescribable and, when it eventually left him, Harry found himself collapsed on the floor. He pulled himself to his feet, ignoring Voldemort’s laughter.

Harry looked around again, desperately hoping to see Sirius and an army of aurors approaching, but his stomach twisted in horror at the sight of a magical barrier surrounding the arena he and Voldemort were standing in. A barrier that, by the looks of it, was keeping out anyone who might come to his aid.

“What do you want?” He asked, hoping his voice didn’t sound as scared as he felt.

“Your loyalty.” Voldemort answered with a smirk. “Or your death.”

“I will never serve you.”

Voldemort’s smirk grew. “Then you will die.”

“Will killing me make you feel powerful?” Harry snapped. “I hear that it’s a terribly difficult thing to murder a fourteen year old.”

“It won’t be murder.” Voldemort denied in amusement. “We will duel and I will beat you.”

“So, you’re challenging me to a Death Duel?” Harry asked. “What’s to stop your followers from interfering?”

Voldemort looked amused. “Why would my followers need to interfere? You are a child and I am the Dark Lord!”

Harry hated to admit it, even to himself, but Voldemort had a point. There was no way he was going to win the duel. Still, he squared his shoulders. There was no way he was going to die cowering in fear.

“Since you are the challenger, I get to pick the rules.” Harry declared as confidently as he could.

Voldemort’s lip curled. “Very well.”

“Both swords and wands.” Harry told him. “No seconds, no recesses, no interference from your Death Eaters.”

Voldemort didn’t look impressed. “Swords. What are we? Muggles?”

Harry watched a few of the masked Death Eaters shift uncomfortably at that. “Of course not. We are, however, of noble birth. Well, I am at least. I can’t vouch for you. What House were you born into again? I don’t think I’ve ever been told.”
Voldemort snarled and whirled to face one of the unmasked Death Eaters. “Rodolphus, get us swords.”

“Don’t worry about me, Lord Lestrange.” Harry told the Death Eater, patting the sword he had strapped to his side. “I brought my own.”

It didn’t take long for Lord Lestrange to deliver a sword to Voldemort and, as Harry watched the man apparating away, and then back again sword in hand, a new hope grew in him. If Death Eaters could apparate into the bubble, surely Lord Malfoy and Professor Snape could as well. Maybe they would be able to bring help with them.

Voldemort snatched the sword out of Lord Lestrange’s hand, before twirling to face Harry. “Ready, Potter?”

Harry drew his own sword. “Well, I will be once you return my wand.”

Voldemort sneered as he threw Harry’s wand towards him so that it fell a few feet away from Harry’s feet. Harry considered summoning it wandlessly, he really didn’t want to have to crouch down with Voldemort’s wand pointed at him, but eventually decided to just pick it up. This was no place to show off.

Once his wand was in his hand, Harry backed up so that he was standing approximately fifteen feet away from Voldemort, before bowing shallowly.

Voldemort bowed as well. “Prepare to die, Potter.”

0-0-0

Sirius had no words to describe the helpless terror that he felt as he watched a crowd of Death Eaters and You-Know-Who appear in front of Harry, right in the middle of the arena. It took him a moment to process what he was seeing, before he pushed his way out of the aisle he was sitting in and began sprinting down the stairs towards the arena. He was halfway down the stairs when Voldemort cast a red spell at Harry, which Harry avoided. Unfortunately Harry wasn’t so fortunate with the second spell and Sirius let out a cry when he saw Harry collapse.

Harry looked so small, as he pulled himself to his feet and then stood alone in the middle of the arena faced with at least thirty wizards. As Sirius ran towards the boundary of the arena, only peripherally aware of the other wizards and witches running with him, he watched helplessly as You-Know-Who summoned Harry’s wand.

A few seconds later, when Sirius was less than ten feet from the boundary of the arena, an orange magical barrier suddenly appeared around the boundary. Sirius cried out in despair as he recognised it, but didn’t slow down. Maybe if he ran fast enough he would be able to burst through it.

“Pulvinus!” Remus’s voice rang out from a few steps behind him, just seconds before Sirius bounced off the, now cushioned, barrier.

Sirius’s fell back and cried out as his head impacted against the ground. He rolled over, clenching his eyes shut for a few seconds as he tried to dispel the stars he was seeing, and pulled himself to his feet.

“You alright, Sirius?” Remus asked, helping him to his feet. “Sorry, I didn’t have time to cushion the ground as well.”

Sirius ignored him, twisting around so that he could see Harry. Harry who, despite facing unbeatable
odds, was standing proudly, back straight as he conversed with Voldemort.

“Why can’t we hear them?” Sirius asked desperately. “Why hasn’t anyone cast an Amplifying Charm?”

“The barrier seems to be blocking it.” Kingsley Shacklebolt commented from where he was standing a few feet away.

“What are we doing to get in?” Sirius asked, his eyes focussed on Harry.

“Madame Bones has called in a wardbreaking team.” Kingsley answered. “They’ll be here in a few minutes.”

“Harry might not have a couple of minutes!” Sirius snapped, before pulling out his wand. Maybe a hundred reducto curses would get him through.

“Stop, Sirius.” Remus grabbed his arm. “You know that won’t work. There’s no point in wasting your energy. Save your strength for when the ward-breakers get us in.”

Sirius clenched his jaw. “And if Harry’s dead by then?”

Remus didn’t say anything.

“Hey!” Someone nearby yelled. “One of them just apparated away.”

Sirius pulled away from Remus and, wand in hand, began the initial spin to apparate into the barrier.

“Don’t!” Kingsley ordered quickly. “One of my team already tried that and splinched their leg off.”

Sirius only just managed to stop himself from completing the spin. He wouldn’t be able to help Harry if he was missing a limb.

“Maybe it’s their Dark Mark that allows them to apparate.” Someone nearby commented.

“To bad nobody on our side has a Dark Mark then.” Another person replied.

Sirius’ heart leapt. “Yes, they do. We have two people on our side with dark marks.”

“What?” Kingsley asked quickly.

“You can’t be serious!” The first person told him. “There is no way we have Death Eaters on our side.”

“Someone get Snape!” Sirius yelled loudly. “And Lucius. Where’s Lucius?”

“France.” Remus reminded him.

“Really, Sirius!” Molly Weasley snapped from nearby and Sirius turned in surprise. He hadn’t even realised that she was there. “If Lucius Malfoy is anywhere right now, it’ll be inside the barrier. He’s a Death Eater.”

“No, he’s not.” Sirius denied, turning to Kingsley. “Tell Lady Bones that we need Lucius here now!”

“Something’s happening.” Remus told him quickly. “They’re bowing.”
Sirius spun back towards the arena and watched in horror as Harry straightened out of a shallow bow. “What is he doing?”

“Look,” Remus said. “They’ve got swords in their hands. I think they’re going to duel.”

“Does You-Know-Who even know how to use a sword?” Sirius asked.

“Does Harry?” Molly countered. “Oh, that poor boy. What is he thinking?”

“It’s a good strategy.” Remus answered. “You-Know-Who might be better with a wand, but I doubt he could beat Harry in a sword fight.”

“What’s to stop him from throwing down his sword and just cursing him then?” Arthur asked from Molly’s side.


Sirius’ stomach dropped as You-Know-Who raised his wand and sent a curse that he didn’t recognise in Harry’s direction.

Harry raised his sword to block the curse, sending it ricocheting off towards the Death Eaters, before sending his own spell towards You-Know-Who.

You-Know-Who raised a magical shield to block the spell, before sending three different spells towards Harry.

“Oh, mercy!” Molly cried. “He’s going to kill the poor boy.”

“Shut up!” Sirius snapped, his focus not moving from where Harry was rolling out of the way of the spells.

The duel continued and, despite Sirius’ horror at what was happening, he couldn’t help but be proud of the way his godson was handling himself. Harry was amazing. Here he was, fourteen years old, holding his own against You-Know-Who. Not to mention that his sword skills were definitely putting the Dark Lord to shame. While Harry was using his sword to block half the spells that were sent towards him, You-Know-Who’s sword hung limply in his left hand.

Which gave Harry an advantage. While You-Know-Who relied on his wand to block and Harry’s spells, Harry could block spells with his sword while simultaneously casting them with his wand. It wasn’t easy and, many fully grown wizards couldn’t perform both movements at the same time, but Harry was a natural.

But, despite, Harry’s advantage, You-Know-Who had both more duelling experience and more spells in his reputation, and, seven minutes into their duel, You-Know-Who drew first blood.

Sirius couldn’t tell what the curse had been, but the sight of Harry’s left leg collapsing under him, sending him to the ground, made him want to vomit. This was Harry, his godson. James and Lily’s little boy. He couldn’t die.

Harry wasn’t giving up though and Sirius watch as his godson sent a volley of curses back towards his attacker.

You-Know-Who dropped his sword on the ground as he raised a shield to block the curses, before summoning Harry’s wand to him. Then he stalked forward until he was standing above where Harry
had collapsed. You-Know-Who raised his wand again, over where Harry lay helpless on the ground, and Sirius clenched his eyes shut. There was no way he could watch whatever was about to happen.

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Duelling Voldemort was different to duelling Sirius, or his friends, or the other champions. Harry wasn’t sure whether that was because Voldemort was better than anyone he had ever duelled before, or because this time he knew he was duelling for his life, but either way Harry much preferred the other duels he had participated in.

Voldemort blocked every curse with ease and Harry found himself feeling like a mouse being played with by a kneazle. He’d even tried to use Parselmagic, but Voldemort had used a Parselmagic shield to block it and had then increased the ferocity of his attack.

When Voldemort disarmed him again, Harry’s stomach clenched in horror. This was it then, this was the end. He’d had some hope during the duel that maybe this wouldn’t happen. That maybe he could pull off the impossible and actually beat Voldemort.

But here he was, lying on the ground – his leg broken and part of his bone had pierced through his skin – with no wand and a sword that was practically useless while he was lying on the ground. Well, unless he wanted to slice at Voldemort’s ankles, but Harry very much doubted that would help.

“Any last words, Potter?” Voldemort was smirking.

Harry didn’t want to die, that was all he really had to say right now. He stared at Voldemort’s ankles, trying to ignore the man’s cruel laughter, and wondered whether it would be worth trying to stab them. Except, stabbing Voldemort’s ankles wasn’t his only option. He might not have his wand, but this was one of the reasons he had been learning wandless magic. So that if he ever had his wand taken from him, he could still defend himself. A sword in the ankle might not do Voldemort much harm, but a stunner in the ankles? That would knock the wizard out.

“Goodbye, Harry Potter.” Voldemort said. “Av…”

“Stupefy.” Harry whispered quickly, concentrating as hard as he could. This had to work!

“…ada K…”

A red light flew from Harry’s right hand and hit Voldemort’s left knee. Harry almost laughed in delight as he looked up at Voldemort and saw the man’s surprised expression. Then Voldemort collapsed backwards, mid curse.

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Sirius only had his eyes shut for a second before he opened them again. If Harry was going to die then he would be with Harry in every way he could, even if that just meant watching it. The sight of You-Know-Who standing over Harry, wand raised, made Sirius’ heart hurt.

But You-Know-Who didn’t cast a spell. Instead, he suddenly collapsed backwards and, instantly, the barrier disappeared.

“What the hell?” Sirius asked in shock, even as he began running towards Harry.

“Sirius!” Remus called after him. “Apparate!”

Sirius watched as several people, aurors and Order members alike, suddenly appeared in front of him
and began shooting spells at the Death Eaters. You-Know-Who must have disabled the anti-apparition wards in order to get in.

Sirius spun, mid run, and apparated himself to a spot ten feet away from Harry. He saw a Death Eater raising his wand towards Harry and immediately disarmed him. Then he looked for another Death Eater to curse.

A few of the Death Eaters were leaving, apparating away, and Sirius hoped that wouldn’t mean that they would get away for good. They deserved to die!

Harry stared at Voldemort’s fallen body for a second, before realising that he wasn’t out of danger yet. He was still surrounded by Death Eaters.

Harry grabbed his sword as tightly as he could before dragging himself towards where Voldemort was lying. He bit off a scream as his leg protested the movement, but eventually was sitting near Voldemort’s head.

As he sat, staring at the snake-like face of the unconscious Lark Lord, Harry realised that, for some reason, the Death Eaters hadn’t tried to attack him yet. He looked up and saw a full blown battle taking place around him. Harry wasn’t sure how the aurors and Order members had gotten through the barrier, but he honestly didn’t care.

He looked back down at Voldemort and the brought his sword up over the man’s neck. All it took was one slice and Voldemort’s head separated from his body.

The blood was horrible and Harry attempted to move away, to try and avoid being soaked in it, but his leg protested the movement.

Harry allowed his shoulders to slump as he looked around to try and see how the battle was going. He could see Sirius and Remus, both duelling Death Eaters, and Professor Snape were was there as well.

“You can’t kill me, Potter!” Voldemort’s hissing voice sounded from Harry’s left.

Harry spun around quickly and blanched in horror at the sight of a black cloud hovering over Voldemort’s head.

“I’ll be back.” The cloud promised. “And when I return, you will die!”

Harry stomach dropped as he remembered what the goblins had said. They still hadn’t destroyed the last horcrux because it was Voldemort’s snake and they didn’t want him to know that all the horcruxes were gone. Harry looked around for the snake, where was it? It had been with Voldemort when he’d apparated in, surely it would be here somewhere.

As he looked to his left, Harry saw the snake near Professor Snape. The snake raised its head and opened its mouth and Harry’s opened his mouth to cry out a warning, but as he watched his professor spun around, sword in hand and neatly decapitated the snake.

“No!” Voldemort hissed.

Harry turned back just in time to watch the cloud that was Voldemort spontaneously combust, and then it was gone.
Later, when Harry was tucked up in the infirmary under the watchful eye of Madame Pomfrey, he found himself wondering at the anti-climatic nature of Voldemort’s attack and defeat. Sure it had been terrifying, but he’d always imagined that when he and Voldemort eventually met it would be… more.

As it was, Voldemort’s defeat seemed more like a postscript to the rest of the evening. He thought that if in the future people were to ask him about this day, his answer would be: ‘I became the Triwizard Champion, oh, and I defeated Voldemort.’ Surely the death of Voldemort ought to be a little more important to him?

Despite the fact that his only injuries were a broken leg and some post-cruciatus trembling, both which were healed within an hour of him being carried into the infirmary, Madame Pomfrey refused to release Harry until the next morning. But, as Harry dressed for breakfast, he couldn’t help but wish that she’d kept him a little longer. He had no idea how the school was reacting the previous evening’s events and didn’t want to walk into the Great Hall unprepared.

Once he had ensured that his hair was perfectly coiffed (he hadn’t attended a school meal with messy hair since his first year and he wasn’t about to start now), Harry presented himself to Madame Pomfrey.

“No flying.” She reminded him sternly. “No duelling. Your leg might be healed, but you still need to give it some time.”

Harry nodded earnestly. “Yes, ma’am.”

Madame Pomfrey didn’t look convinced, but she sighed. “You can go.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Harry acknowledged. “Merry part.”

He strode out of the infirmary, wondering at the complete lack of pain in his leg – it was as though it had never been broken.

“Merry meet.” Neville’s voice broke through his wonderings.

Harry turned towards the voice and smiled at the sight of Neville and Draco leaning against one of the walls. “Merry meet.”

Draco nodded in agreement, as he pushed himself off the wall. “How are you?”

“I’m fine.” Harry answered, falling into step beside Neville as they walked towards the Great Hall.

“Professor Lupin told me that she was letting you out for breakfast.” Neville answered Harry’s unspoken question. “He thought you might like some company. How are you really?”

“Fine.” Harry said again. “Honestly. Though I’m not entirely convinced that yesterday actually happened. How are you both?”

Neville grinned. “Brilliant! Bellatrix and Rodolphus were both killed last night and Rabastan was
arrested by Aurors.”

Harry’s stomach twisted uncomfortably as he glanced towards Draco to see if his cousin was upset at his relatives’ deaths. He hadn’t considered that more people than just Voldemort might have died. “Did many people on our side died?”

Neville’s expression sobered. “Four, I didn’t recognise any of their names though.”

“Gawain Roberts, John Dawlish, Dorcas Underhill, and Ananias Meadows.” Draco answered. “They were all Aurors. A lot more were injured, but they are being treated at St. Mungo’s.

Harry sighed. “How many Death Eaters were killed?”

“I don’t know.” Draco admitted, while Neville shrugged in agreement. “A lot, and a lot more were arrested. A few got away though.”

“They’ll get them.” Harry declared confidently. “Between Lord Malfoy and Professor Severus’ testimonies they should be able to figure out who is missing.”

“One of the younger aurors tried to arrest Professor Snape.” Neville commented, his voice amused. “You should have seen Headmistress McGonagall’s reaction.”

Harry grinned at the image his brain conjured. “How are your parents, Draco?”

Draco entire face lit up. “They apparated back last night. Uncle Severus has arranged for me to be having morning tea with Mother. Father will be busy working with the Ministry.”

Harry grinned. “That’s great. How is everyone else?”

“Everyone, as in our friends, or the entire school?” Neville asked.

“Both.”

“Our friends are fine – worried about you, but more relieved than anything.” Neville told him. “Last night was a bit upsetting, but afterwards Professor Lupin invited us back to his quarters and gave us hot chocolate to drink, chocolate to eat, and kept us updated.”

Harry smiled, Remus was amazing. “And the school?”

“Well, I can only speak for Gryffindor, but they’re relieved, disbelieving, guilty, and ashamed.” Neville shrugged. “You can probably expect to receive a few hundred apologies if the other Houses are feeling the same. Ron though…”

Harry groaned. “Oh, don’t tell me.”

“He’s convinced that you only defeated You-Know-Who so that you could take his place.” Neville finished apologetically. “Nobody’s listening to him, of course. You’re the Boy-Who-Defeated-You-Know-Who-Twice, I don’t think you could do anything wrong in their eyes.”

“I’d make a joke about it being the perfect time for me to take over the world, but someone would probably overhear it and they’d all hate me again.” Harry commented dryly.

“Most of Slytherin is relieved.” Draco said. “There were a few people who seemed less than pleased that You-Know-Who was gone last night, but I passed their names onto Uncle Severus. He said that they would probably be called into the Ministry for questioning.”
Neville looked pleased. “Beyond that, I think everyone is holding onto hope that McGonagall will cancel the rest of the exams.”

Harry head spun around to stare at his friend in horror. “What? She can’t do that!”

Neville laughed again. “Don’t you think that everyone might be a little distracted?”

“So she could postpone them.” Harry suggested. “The Hogwarts’ Express doesn’t leave until next week. Maybe we could take them next week instead?”

Neville rolled his eyes as they entered the Great Hall. “What about the OWL and NEWT students? They’ve got some exams next week anyway.

“Yes, my Ancient Runes exam is next Wednesday.” Harry commented, before stopping in surprise as the other students noticed his entrance and suddenly began cheering.

The Gryffindor Table was the loudest, as they always were, but all of the other tables were putting in a good effort as well. The Slytherins were even joining in, though their applause was much more reserved than the other Tables’ cheers.

Harry’s gaze swept across the hall, his expression carefully dispassionate, before he gave them a sharp nod of acknowledgement. “They hated me yesterday.” He commented as they began walking towards the Slytherin Table.

“Yesterday you hadn’t defeated You-Know-Who.” Neville pointed out, as the cheers died down around them.

Harry frowned as some Ravenclaws tried to wave him over to sit with them. “They’ve made my life miserable for months, they can’t seriously think that I’m just going to forget that.”

Neville’s expression was grim. “You’re going to have to forgive them eventually. We’ve got three years left, you can’t live at odds with the entire school until you graduate.”

Draco snorted disparagingly.

“Not the entire school,” Harry denied, as they approached their usual spot at the Slytherin Table where some of their friends were waiting. “I have nothing against the Slytherins.”

“Of course you don’t.” Draco agreed, haughtily. “Who could?”

“Well, to start with – three quarters of the school.” Neville pointed out, sliding into the seat beside Luna as Harry walked around the table to his seat beside Daphne who smiled welcomingly at him.

Draco waved a hand dismissively as he sat down. “Their opinion is hardly important.”

“The school’s opinion of Harry certainly seems to have changed.” Theo commented, looking over at the other tables.

Harry served himself some eggs. “I think I would have respected them more if they had stuck to their opinions.”

“No, you wouldn’t of.” Daphne disagreed.

“No,” Harry admitted. “But at least it would have been so pathetic.”

“If I might have you attention.” Headmistress McGonagall’s voice suddenly echoed around the hall,
causing all the conversation to die off.

Harry twisted around in his seat to give her is full attention, before reaching for his goblet of Pumpkin Juice. He really hoped that she wasn’t about to announced that their exams were cancelled.

“I hope that you all enjoyed a good sleep, safe from any worries regarding You-Know-Who.” McGonagall told them, her eyes flicking towards Harry. “Despite what rumours might be tell you, your end of year exams will not be cancelled, nor will they be postponed.”

Harry’s pleased smile was at odds with the groans of disappointment that filled the hall.

“The only student who will receive an exemption from his exams is Mr. Potter.” McGonagall continued to Harry’s horror.

“That’s not fair!” Harry whispered in frustration.

Neville looked amused. “It’s not as though they’ll stop you from taking the exams if you really want to, Harry. They’re just giving you an out.”

Harry felt silly, of course they wouldn’t stop him from taking his exams. He nodded his thanks to Neville, before turning his attention back to McGonagall.

“…ceremony this evening after the evening meal. Thank you.”

“What was that last part?” Harry asked Daphne, as the conversations around the hall started up again.

“The Triwizard Award Ceremony is going to be tonight.” Daphne answered. “They couldn’t have it last since you were indisposed.”

“Not to mention that all the adults were a bit busy rounding up the Death Eaters.” Theo commented.

“Who did they get?” Harry asked curiously.

“Who didn’t they get?” Theo asked rhetorically. “They got Crabbe and Goyle’s fathers, Marcus Flint, Alistair Gibbon – he graduated last year, Petrov Avery – he was a prefect when we were first years, not to mention Gibbon and Avery’s fathers. Lord and Lady Lestrange were killed, apparently Lord Black killed Lady LeStrange in a duel, and Heir Lestrange was arrested. Rumour has it that he’s going to be given the kiss – along with all the other Death Eaters who have escaped from Azkaban.”

“Without a trial?” Harry asked in concern.

“They’ve already had a trial.” Neville reminded him. “They had a trial and were sentenced to Azkaban for life. Apparently there’s a law that says that anyone who escapes Azkaban automatically increases their sentence to a Dementor’s Kiss.”

“It’s never been used before, because no one had ever broken out of Azkaban before You-Know-Who broke out his Death Eaters last year.” Draco added.

50-50-50

Harry’s day sped by quickly, especially since his morning was taken up by reading through all his DADA notes for his exam that afternoon. After his exam he joined his friends out by the lake until five thirty when a second year found him and told him that he was being summoned to the Headmistress’ office.
Sirius, McGonagall, and Bagman were all waiting for him in the office, along with the five other Triwizard Champions and the two other Headmistresses and, as Harry nodded in acknowledgement to the various bows and curtsies he had received, he studied the other Champions’ expressions for any sign that they were feeling malcontented regarding his win.

He was surprised to find nothing negative in any of their expressions – though Aceline’s expression was as haughty as usual. Surely they were frustrated to have beaten by someone so much younger than them?

“Excellent.” Bagman rubbed his hands together excitedly. “Now, I’m sure you know why we’re all here?”

Harry was hard pressed not to roll his eyes. “Presumably to discuss the Award Ceremony.”

“Precisely!” Bagman beamed at him. “Though I’m sure it seems insignificant given the ceremonies in your future, aye, Harry?”

Harry glanced towards Sirius in confusion.

“Minister Fudge wanted to award you your Order of the Merlin, First Class tonight too,” Bagman continued. “But your godfather here managed to talk him out of it. Good thing too – wouldn’t want to give you too many awards all at once. Might give you an inflated ego.”

Harry bit his tongue to prevent himself from asking all the questions he wanted to. He was getting an Order of Merlin, First Class? Why hadn’t anyone told him? But then, he hadn’t seen Sirius since the night before – his godfather had been busy dealing with the repercussions of the previous night’s events and apparently trying to talk Fudge out of highjacking the Triwizard Award Ceremony.

Sirius was eyeing Bagman with thinly veiled disdain. “Why don’t you explain the details of this evening, Ludo? I’m sure the Champions are eager to join their friends at dinner.”

“Right,” Bagman nodded eagerly. “It’s quite simple really. The Triwizard Cup will be brought in and all six of you will stand in a line behind it. Then I will spend some time reminding the audience of each of your highlights in the Tournament, before finally discussion Mr. Potter’s highlights – the last of which was his victory. At that point Mr. Potter will receive his prizes, one thousand galleons and eternal glory and honour, and the Triwizard Cup will be placed into Headmistress McGonagall’s safekeeping until the next Triwizard Tournament is held. Any questions?”

Harry was tempted to ask just they were planning on awarding him with eternal glory and honour, but he managed to refrain.

“Good, good.” Bagman beamed at them. “Well, off you go then. It’s almost time for dinner.”

“‘e is an eediot.” Fleur exclaimed once they reached the bottom of the staircase that lead to the Headmistress’ office. “I weel be glad not to ‘ave to see ‘im again.”

“Lucky you.” Cedric sighed glumly, Fleur’s hand tucked in his own. “He’s friends with my dad. I see him a lot when I’m home.”

Fleur gave him a sly look. “Zen perhaps you should find some ozzer place to be. A ‘oliday or somezzing. Perhaps in France?”

“Perhaps.” Cedric agreed fondly, before turning his attention to Harry. “How are you feeling, Harry?”
“Fine.” Harry answered honestly. “Madame Pomfrey does good work. How are you?”

“Well, given that I was taken out with a simple stunner, more embarrassed than anything.” Cedric admitted, shaking his head.

“Better a stunner than a giant rock.” Nina groused without heat.

“Better a giant rock than the sharp pointy remains of a giant rock.” Viktor retorted.

“You are all just lucky zat ‘arry did not attempt to burn you to a crisp.” Fleur commented.

“You’re a Veela,” Harry pointed out. “It didn’t even singe your hair.”

Fleur tossed her hair haughtily. “Non, but eet would ‘ave singed zeirs.”

“You know, when they reneverated me, and told me what happened, I felt embarrassed to have been taken down by a fourteen year old.” Cedric admitted. “But that only lasted about twenty minutes, because there is absolutely no shame in being bested by the wizard who killed You-Know-Who.”

Harry flushed uncomfortably. “It was only luck. He definitely beat me in the duel.”

“What exactly happened?” Cedric asked, as they entered the Great Hall. “I was stuck in the Healing Tent with Pomfrey so I missed it, and all anyone can tell me is that You-Know-Who just seemed to collapse.”

Harry looked around and realised that the other four Champions were listening intently. Knowing Madame Pomfrey they had probably been trapped in the Healing Tent too. “I used a wandless stunner.” He admitted quietly, not wanting his voice to carry through the hall. “Voldemort had disarmed me and was about to kill me, but I shot a stunner into his ankle.”

“You can do wandless magic?” Cedric asked loudly.

Harry winced as the entire hall seemed to still and turn their focus on him. “Just a few spells.”

“Zat is an incredible achievement for someone so young.” Fleur commented.

“It’s an incredible achievement for anyone.” Cedric declared. “No wonder you won.”

50-50-50

The ceremony went just as Bagman had told them it would and, aside from Bagman’s overly enthusiastic moment by moment description of Harry’s actions during the three tasks, it wasn’t a painful as Harry had thought it would be.

After the ceremony was over, and Harry had been awarded with a large bag of Galleons, McGonagall dismissed the students and Harry took the opportunity to escape to Remus’ quarters. He’d had enough of being stared at, though admittedly he did prefer the awed stares to the terrified and hostile stares he had been receiving for the last few months, and having random students, who had never spoken to him before, attempt to thank him for what he had done. He hadn’t done it for them!

Remus’ quarters were empty when Harry arrived, so he settled down in one of the armchairs and pulled his book out of his bag. He had only managed to read a few pages of ‘Elder Futhark Runes: A Defence’ when Remus and Sirius arrived together.

“I thought we might find you here.” Remus smiled as the door swung shut behind him.
“I needed some space.” Harry admitted.

“And what’s wrong with my quarters?” Sirius asked in mock offence. “Quarters which you share with me, I might add.”

“They’re not as…cosy.” Harry explained unapologetically. “Besides, the Tournament is over. Aren’t you being evicted?”

“I am.” Sirius sighed mournfully, as he flopped into the armchair opposite Harry’s. “But only because McGonagall’s heart is as cold as a Dementor’s soul.”

Remus’ back was to them, as he retrieved some mugs from the cupboard, but Harry could still tell that the wizard was rolling his eyes.

“What about me?” Harry asked worriedly. “Do I have to go back to Ravenclaw Tower?”

“No.” Sirius reassuringly. “McGonagall clearly favours you over me and is allowing you to stay in my quarters until the end of the year. It’s probably because you defeated Voldemort.”

“You don’t think that it could be because Harry actually has a reason to be here?” Remus asked, passing first Harry, and then Sirius, a steaming mug of hot chocolate.

Harry sniffed it experimentally. “Is this the hot chocolate that my old dorm mates sell?”

“It is.” Remus nodded, as he retrieved his own mug. “You were right. It’s the best hot chocolate I’ve ever had.”

“Which, coming from Remus, is really saying something.” Sirius commented fondly.

Harry sipped at his drink with a contented smile. “What about next year? Will I have to go back to the Ravenclaw Tower then?”

“That depends.” Sirius answered. “Given last night’s events, and the school’s reaction to them, it is unlikely that the Ravenclaws will reject your presence next year, or that you will be able to claim that you are concerned for your health and wellbeing being there.”

“Just because they’ve decided to get over their irrational stupidity, doesn’t mean that I have.” Harry grumbled.

“There is another option.” Sirius told him. “There is a precedent for students, who are the Head of their Houses, being given their own quarters. It hasn’t happened for at least a century, but the argument could be made.”

Harry grinned. “That sounds amazing!”

“There is a downside though.” Sirius cautioned. “You wouldn’t be able to be a prefect. According to the Hogwarts’ rules, all prefects must sleep in their Houses’ dormitories. Now, don’t tell anyone I told you this but, according to McGonagall, you’re a sure in for Ravenclaw prefect next year – so long as you return to your dorm.”

Harry grimaced, he’d always dreamed of being a prefect.

“You don’t have to decide now.” Sirius told him. “But McGonagall will need to know by the end of July so that they know who to send the prefect badge to.”

“I think you should remember that it wasn’t just the Ravenclaws who were horrible to you.” Remus
put in. “The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs weren’t any better. You shouldn’t place all the blame on one House.”

“The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs didn’t kick me out of my own dormitory.” Harry retorted. “And I won’t have to sleep in the same room as any of them.”

Sirius shrugged. “Anyway, you’ve got a few months to decide what you want to do. On other matters, how are you feeling?”

“Frustrated with all the Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors who have suddenly decided that they want to be my best friend.” Harry answered grumpily, before letting out a long sigh. “But otherwise I’m fine. My DADA exam went well today.”

Remus grinned. “I told McGonagall you wouldn’t want to be exempted from your remaining exams.”

Sirius leaned forward, his hands wrapped around the mug of hot chocolate. “You aren’t feel upset about last night?”

“Not really.” Harry answered guiltily. “I know I should be, I killed Voldemort. I actually cut his head off with my sword.” He shuddered at the memory. “It was horrible, and I don’t like thinking about all the blood, but I don’t feel bad about it. He was evil, and if I hadn’t killed him – he would have killed me and a whole bunch of other people. Not to mention that the prophecy said I would do it, or could do it, or something, so in a way I feel as though I just did what I was supposed to do.”

“I’m glad.” Sirius told him with a small smile. “I’d hate for you to be beating yourself up about it.”

“I’m not.” Harry reassured him. “At most, I feel bad that I don’t feel bad. I feel worse about the four aurors who died.”

“Their deaths are not your fault.” Sirius told him quickly.

“I know.” Harry nodded. “But I still wish they hadn’t died.”

“Don’t we all, kiddo.” Sirius sighed. “Don’t we all.”

There was a long pause, before Remus broke it. “On a slightly brighter note, Harry, you can do wandless magic?”

“Yes.” Harry felt himself grinning. “Only six spells, but I’m learning my seventh.”

“That’s extraordinary.” Remus exclaimed, while Sirius just grinned proudly. “Sirius said that’s how you turned the tables on Voldemort?”

“I cast a stunner into his ankle.” Harry admitted proudly. “If I hadn’t, I’d be dead.”

Remus shook his head in amazement. “That’s extraordinary!” He repeated. “What other spells can you do wandlessly?”

50-50-50

The week and a half until the Hogwarts Express departed for the Summer was torturously long, made even longer by the fact that the other students didn’t seem to understand that he didn’t want to forgive them for ostracising him for months and he certainly didn’t want to be friends with them.

Eventually though, he was on the train, locked safely in a carriage with his friends and away from
the constant staring, and only hours away from having two and a half months of holiday.

“Just imagine how much they’re going to adore you after you and Draco take the Under Seventeen Quidditch League by storm!” Theo commented with a grin.

“I doubt most of them even know the League exists.” Harry pointed out. “Fred and George’s popularity didn’t rise because they played in it two years ago.”

“First of all, yes, it did.” Theo retorted. “How did you not notice that?”

“He spends most of his time with Slytherins.” Neville pointed out. “Slytherins who wouldn’t have admitted to admiring a Weasley at wandpoint. Trust us, Harry, Fred and George and very, very popular among the right crowd.”

“Which is to say non-traditional Quidditch idiots.” Daphne commented acerbically.

“At first, yes.” Neville agreed. “But their fan base has actually expanded this year. Once it became known that they were friends with Harry and Draco, the traditionalists started getting on board too.”

“I’m not friends with them!” Draco protested loudly.

Harry snorted. “Yes, you are, Draco!”

“I am not!” Draco denied. “They’re acquaintances.”

Harry shook his head. “You’re friends, don’t try and deny it. We all know you like them.”

“Anyway,” Theo broke in. “Secondly, you defeated V-V-Voldemort, if you play in the Quidditch League, everyone will become a fan of it. The team that gets you is going to immediately become the most popular.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “We don’t even know that Draco and I are going to get into a team.”

“Of course we are.” Draco said, looking at Harry strangely. “Who wouldn’t want us on their team? We’re excellent!”

Neville chuckled, before quickly holding up his hands defensively when Draco glared at him. “I’m not disagreeing. You are both very good. When are the try-outs?”

“Next Thursday.” Harry answered, since Draco was still glaring at Neville. “It’s going to be a busy week.”

“It’s going to be a busy summer.” Draco corrected. “Between our tutoring sessions with Mother, our Quidditch practises, our Quidditch Games, Wizengamot sessions…”

“Sirius is planning on entering me into some Duelling Competitions.” Harry added. “Not in England, since they don’t allow people under seventeen to enter, but maybe in Bulgaria, or wherever Sirius takes me for our holiday.”

“It’s probably a good thing that you won’t be entering the English ones.” Neville commented. “I think everyone would be too scared to duel Voldemort’s Vanquisher here.”

Harry grimaced. “I think I preferred ‘the Boy-Who-Lived’.”

“It made you sound too young.” Daphne pointed out. “It would have sounded ridiculous if they’d still been calling you that in thirty years. V-Voldemort’s Vanquisher will last you your entire life.”
“I hope they’re not still calling me that in thirty years.” Harry moaned.

“Face it, Harry. If they’re still bringing up the fact that Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald, they’re not going to forget that you vanquished Voldemort when you were fourteen.” Neville said.

“I haven’t heard anyone mention Dumbledore’s history with Grindelwald in months.” Harry pointed out.

“That’s because now they’re focussing on the fact that he’s a fugitive.” Daphne told him.

“There you are, Harry.” Theo grinned. “All you have to do is do something to make the aurors arrest you, and then evade arrest and you’ll be fine.”

“Except that he’d be on the run.” Neville rolled his eyes.

“Then I suppose you have to pick which option you’d prefer.” Theo told Harry. “Would you rather be known as Voldemort’s Vanquisher? Or be on the run from the law?”

“That’s a hard one.” Harry said, his expression serious.

Daphne sniffed. “I hope you realise that I wouldn’t go on the run with you.”

“Or then again,” Harry started quickly. “Maybe it’s not so hard after all.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, folks, we're almost there. Just the epilogue left, which I'll post on Tuesday. I just wanted to take this opportunity to apologise to all of you who were desperately holding out to see Harry do something with his knowledge of Rita's animagus form. In all honesty I completely forgot about it when I was writing the end of this story and, when I read through it again looking for somewhere to slot it in, it occurred to me that Harry likely forgot about it too (what with him beheading Voldemort and all that). This isn't to say that Harry won't deal with it, because of course he would, but I haven't (nor will I) written that scene. I shall simply leave it up to your imagination. Sorry again for all of you who were really looking forward to seeing that scene.
Harry felt strange to be walking into the Wizengamot Chamber, not as Sirius’ Heir (though he still was that), but as Lord Potter, Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter. It was hardly the first Wizengamot Session he’d attended, he’d attended five before – the last of which had been only a month ago – but this felt different. This time he would actually be introduced to the Wizengamot, this time he would have the right to vote, the right to speak, the right to propose new laws.

He strode into the Chamber at Sirius’ side, easily matching his godfather’s steps since he was now two and a half inches taller than the older wizard, and then across the chamber and up the stairs towards the seats that belonged to the Most Ancient and Noble members. The four wizards who were already sitting along the row, Lord Malfoy, Draco, Lord Ogden, and Professor Snape all stood and bowed to both him and Sirius and Harry only just managed to keep his nod of acknowledgement regal and smooth – it still felt weird to have Lord Malfoy bowing to him (and to have Draco and Professor Snape bowing so low).

Following Sirius down the row, past the other wizards who were still standing respectfully, Harry tried to prepare himself to sit in the Potter Seat for the first time. The last person who had sat there had been his father, and the person before had been his grandfather, and now it would be his turn. He would sit in that seat and represent the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter like his ancestors had - it felt like an enormous responsibility to put on fifteen year old.

When he eventually reached the seat, he waited respectfully for Sirius to sit, before slowly lowering himself into the throne-like chair that sat below the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter’s Coat of Arms. It was surprisingly comfortable, definitely more so than the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black’s Heir chair had been and Harry had swallow a grin at the idea that one of his ancestors had thought to put a cushioning charm on the chair. It felt isolating, to have an empty seat on either side of him – since the chair to his left was for the Black heir and the chair to his right was for the Potter heir. He wished that either Sirius or Lord Malfoy, though preferably Sirius, were close enough for him to talk to – what if he needed to quietly ask a question?

Glancing towards Sirius, Harry realised that his godfather was watching him with slightly sad expression and Harry wondered if he was thinking of his father. If it hadn’t been for Voldemort, James Potter would have been the one sitting in the Potter chair and Harry would have been sitting in the chair to the left. If it hadn’t been for Voldemort, Sirius would have probably have had a son of his own sitting in the Black Heir chair too.

Still, there was no point in dwelling on what may have been – not for Harry at least who didn’t even remember his father. Instead, Harry gave Sirius what he hoped was a comforting smile, before turning his attention to the floor of the Chamber where other Wizengamot members were still arriving and milling around. He’d never understood why so many Wizengamot didn’t take their seats until the last minute. Surely they had plenty of time to socialise during their lunch break, or during the entire month that was between meetings.

Eventually, the large clock on the wall opposite Harry chimed, announcing that it was ten o’clock, and the last few members scurried up the stairs into their seats. Then Lord Prince, the Chief Warlock, stood from his seat.

“My Lord Prince.” Lord Prince greeted the room, bowing towards Harry, Sirius, and Lord Malfoy. At
that, every single Lord (aside from Harry, Sirius, and Lord Malfoy), Heir, and a third of the other members stood and bowed first to Lord Prince, and then towards those higher than them in the hierarchy. Harry stood too, and bowed to Sirius who nodded first to him, and then to Lord Malfoy who had bowed to them both again.

Harry thought that it looked a bit chaotic, every bowing in different directions. The non-titled members simply bowed once to the rows above them, the Ancient and Noble Lord bowed to the Lords on their right, before turning and bowing to the Most Ancient and Noble Lords seated above them, and he Most Ancient and Noble Lords bowed to the lords on their right. It was chaotic, but it was also wonderful to see traditional behaviour embraced by the Wizengamot – clearly Lord Prince’s year as the Chief Warlock had made a difference.

Eventually, they were all seated again and Lord Prince continued. “Our first order of business this morning is to welcome Lord Potter, of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter and recipient of the Order of Merlin, First Class to our number.”

Lord Prince bowed again and, just as they had when Sirius had joined the Wizengamot, at least half of the Wizengamot stood and as well.

Harry nodded as regally as he could and tried to ignore the way his heart was beating loudly. In some ways it was hard to believe that this was actually happening. Just over four years ago he’d been the Dursleys’ House Elf, completely unaware that he was a wizard. Now, he was Lord Potter, the second highest ranking individual in all of England, he had a godfather (and Remus) who loved him, he was top of his year at Hogwarts, Ravenclaw Prefect, he had an amazing betrothed and a large group of friends, he was the Seeker of the Quidditch team that was almost definitely going to win the Under Seventeen Quidditch League Cup, he was the Vanquisher of Voldemort (which he still thought was a stupid title), and now that he was Lord Potter no one would ever be able to send him back to the Dursleys (not even if Sirius died). He didn’t think life could get any better.
story), but I'd love it if you'd go check it out. If you don't watch/read Buffy or Iron Man, well, now's the time to start - they're both amazing! The story is called, 'Influenced Out of Normality' and you'll be able to find it on my profile page.

Thank you again for all your amazing support - I am so glad you've enjoyed my story.

Bakenandeggs

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