Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

by EliteDelieght, tamilprongspotter

Summary

Harry Potter, a young wizard, is eager to begin his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with his best friend, Ron Weasley. He's ready to get out from under his parents' thumbs, cause some mischief and make a name for himself that doesn't involve Halloween of 1981. Little does he know, the events of this year will put him off school for a long, long time.
Mr. and Mrs. Potter were the least normal people you could ever think to meet.

They lived in a strange looking house just outside of town with their five children, who were all considerably more rambunctious than the average child, and there was always talk of odd, abnormal things happening around the house and its inhabitants. People had learned to steer clear of the Potter family, save for when the family interacted with them, and the arrangement worked well for everyone involved.

But on the morning of June eleventh, a solitary barn owl careened through the sky above the village, and several people looked up at the sound of screeches, wondering what an owl was doing about in the daytime. If they had looked closer, they would have seen a letter clutched in its beak, addressed to one “Harry James Potter”.

The morning of June eleventh, although a normal summer day for the rest of the town, was not a normal day for young Mr. Potter.

Today was the day that he would receive his letter, and receive it he did, when the owl dropped the square of parchment into his morning cereal.

“Well, guess that’s it, Hari.” His father, James, said, chuckling as he set toast down at two of the seven places at the table. It was a Tuesday, and for two very particular inhabitants of the Potter household, one of whom had already taken her place at her older brother’s right hand, Tuesday was always Toast Day. “You’re going, of course.”

Sarah, the second child and the older of the two Potter girls, immediately began scarfing down the toast as soon as her father had put her plate on the table, as the newest rule about not being allowed books while eating had sorely impacted her reading time. Her older brother, however, had decided that if he had food in his mouth at all times, the rule would make it impossible for him to have to read at all, and had continued upon his merry way with that argument in his back pocket.

Sarah looked toward the stairs again, wondering if she could get away with whipping out the book she had attached to the bottom of her chair with a weak Sticking Charm, but decided against it. Her father had a bad tendency to leave his wand lying around the house and, surprisingly, she was the only one of her siblings to take advantage of it.

Harry and Sarah’s mother, Lily, was likely upstairs rousing the triplets, who unfortunately hadn’t inherited their father’s tendency to wake up at ungodly hours. And, considering she would likely be down in a moment, such a move would not only risk Sarah’s remaining reading time but likely force her into babysitting the triplets while her parents took Harry to Diagon Alley later today.

Sarah was not very fond of people, let alone the triplets, the oldest two of whom were legendary within the Wizarding community even when compared to the Weasley twins.

“Appa, why wouldn’t I?” Harry said, grinning cheekily as he fished the letter out of the bowl and grimaced as it dripped milk into his lap. “Someone’s got to carry on the legacy.”

“Guess so.” James shook his head as the triplets, Anne, Drew and Mattie, thundered downstairs, with their mother in tow. “Lily, did you hear? Our boy’s going to Hogwarts.”

“Yes, he is.” Lily smiled. “And he’ll be good, of course.”


“I will.” Harry piped up. “You guys don’t need to worry about me like that.”

“I think we always will.” James winked as he ruffled his oldest son’s hair. “Just a little bit, at least.”

“Good.” Harry chuckled, setting about eating his cereal anyway, despite the distinct taste of parchment having seeped into the milk. The slowly drying letter lay unopened by his glass of water, because why would he need to open it if he already knew what it said?

Anne sat up in her seat, red hair already pinned back into neat little pigtail. “I wanna see your letter, Hari!” She pressed a hand against the table, using it as leverage to try and reach for the envelope.

“Anju, sit down sweetie.” Lily said absently, taking her own chair next to James.

“Go for it.” Harry tossed the letter over to Anne, but it landed in Matt’s oatmeal instead. “Err, sorry, Madhu. That wasn’t meant to go that way. Honest.”

“Liar.” Sarah called out, idly pushing her plate back and forth now that she’d finished her toast. “You can’t aim to save your life.”

“No fighting, you two.” James sighed. “No one’s gaining anything from this.”

Matt stared groggily down at the bowl of oatmeal, seeming mildly disgruntled. “It’s okay…” He fished it out, holding the soggy paper towards his sister. The girl eagerly snatched it up, pulling open the envelope in order to fish out her brother’s letter.

“Hari, they included a list of stuff you need. Can I go with you when you go to get it? Please, Appa? Please, please, please?”

“Guessed this would end up as a family trip, anyway.” James swallowed hard, thinking about the possible implications of unleashing five very dangerous Potter children on Diagon Alley. “Ron’s likely to have gotten his letter too, so we’ll likely run into Molly, Arthur, Ginny and the boys. If no one is injured, seriously maimed or killed, I may consider ice cream as a reward. May.”

“Sweet.” Harry grinned. “Hey, can I take my broom? I bet they won’t care, cause they don’t check trunks, do they? If I hide it deep enough in the bottom…”

“You’re not going to be able to sneak your broom in.” Sarah spoke up, having reached under the chair to retrieve her book while Anne was distracting their parents. “They’ve got charms that detect that kind of stuff.”

James nodded, finally sitting down to begin his work on his toast, which had gone stale while he waited. “Yeah. Your Uncle Sirius tried to sneak Dungbombs in, one year. What an adventure that was.”

“Then I can’t get any in either?” Drew frowned around his mouthful of breakfast, and Lily gently reminded him not to speak with his mouth full.

“You would be grounded until you graduate, young man. Molly has enough trouble with the twins, your father and I certainly don’t want a repeat.” She pointed her fork at him, eyebrow raised dangerously. He only nodded in response, seemingly disappointed.

“See, back when we went to school,” James said, pointing his fork at Drew as well, “corporal punishment was still legal. See, that kid Filch keeps bragging about stringing up by his thumbs?
Sirius, our third year. Bought a whole bunch of dungbombs, stuffed all his clothes in my trunk, and tried to sneak it past the adults. Didn’t work, of course, but the Blacks sued the school after and made it illegal to do anything but lines. And bedpan cleaning.”

Drew let out a soft “whoa”, obviously impressed by his father’s story.

“You’re encouraging him, James.” Lily said, her lips tugged upwards into a soft smile.

“Right, so just because Filch can’t make you do anything more than polish dirty things and lines, I’d step in at that point and make you knit jumpers with Molly for a week. God knows she needs the help.” James shrugged, grabbing the jar of jam from the middle of the table. “Herself, Arthur, all their kids, plus us, Remus and Sirius. That’s… a lot of people.”

“I like her jumpers.” Mattie murmured into his oatmeal, and Anne nodded her agreement.

“She always makes them with letters! And they’re warm.” Anne said this firmly, as though it were an indisputable fact.

“You only like them cause yours wasn’t maroon.” Sarah rolled her eyes.

Anne stuck her tongue out at her sister in response.

“Mine was green last year.” Harry grinned, then abruptly stopped once he realized which house’s color green was. “Bollocks.”

“Language.” James said, through a mouthful of toast, and then grinned sheepishly before swallowing. “If you’re in Slytherin, we’re disowning you. We won’t ever speak of you again. Sni--er, Snape, will probably claim you as his minion and lead you in war against us. Dreadful.”

Lily whacked her husband’s shoulder, eyes narrowed. “Harry, don’t you listen to him. We’ll support you no matter what house you’re sorted into, sweetheart.”

“Just don’t be a Hufflepuff.” Drew decided after a moment of thought. Anne made a noise in the back of her throat that might have been laughter.

“He might.” James shrugged, and immediately got kicked under the table by Sarah.

“Slytherin’s just as good a House as Gryffindor. It just gets a bad reputation because of people like Appa and Uncle Sirius’ parents.” She said, frowning.

“And the Death Eaters. And pretty much every evil person ever.” Harry waved a hand. “Not a big deal, definitely.”

“It might be a matter of nature and nurture. They’re told they must be bad, and the other houses don’t like them, and so they act bad because it’s what’s expected of them…” Matt mused to the ceiling, his head tilted back and lips pursed.

“Madhav’s gonna be a Hufflepuff, just watch.” Harry chuckled. “Wait, does that mean we’re disowning him when we kick out Charu for being a Slytherin?”

Matt looked suitably dismayed at the idea.

“Hey, shut it, lion boy.” Sarah slumped down in her chair so she could kick her brother too. “Just cause you pretty much dream in red and gold doesn’t mean everyone else does.”

Harry looked entirely confused by the idea of dreaming in red and gold and Sarah groaned.
“Harry, don’t be mean to your siblings.” James sighed. “If Mattie ends up in Hufflepuff, we’ll love him just as much still, just slightly less during Quidditch season.”

“Sounds fair.” Harry shrugged. “Mum, I’m gonna play for Gryffindor just like Appa did and I’m gonna be the best Seeker ever.”

“Maybe not just like me.” James shrugged. “Might save you some brain cells, in the long run.”

“Charu says we’ve all got a bunch of those.” Harry looked to Sarah to make sure he was getting the fact correct. “Won’t lose too many playing Quidditch, I don’t think.”

“You probably don’t have as many as you should.” Anne responded, giggling into her hand. Lily stifled a snort, only shaking her head.

“Got more than Ron.” Harry grimaced, wondering whether that was mean or not, eventually settling on the conclusion that Ron would not mind if he never heard about it.

Mattie puffed out his cheeks, but made no comment.

“I don’t know, Ron is pretty smart. He talks about quidditch with me!” Drew said thoughtfully.

“Hari does that too.” Anne said, frowning at her brother.

“He’s the only one who can play chess with me and actually pose a challenge.” Sarah mused, turning a page in her book. “Other than Uncle Remus, really.”

“But I play chess with you.” Harry frowned.

“Everything just goes straight over your head, doesn’t it?” Sarah sighed. “Oh, to be ignorant.”

“Charu, don’t.” James shook his head. “He won’t get it and it’ll just be painful when he does.”

“Appa, you’re supposed to defend me!” Harry groaned. “No one sticks up for me except--”

“I smelled breakfast!” A voice yelled from the doorway, preceded by the crack of Apparition, and another similar sounding crack resulted in the thud of another set of feet on the carpet. Harry immediately sat up straighter, recognizing the speaker simply by his voice, and immediately reached over to snatch the letter from Anne, eager to show it off to his godfather. “Prongsie, dearest, you’d best have left some for me!”

“Sirius, I swear, it’s like we have six kids.” James grinned as his best friend, Sirius, loped into the room, with Remus close behind. Sirius, of course, went straight for Harry, loudly congratulating him while extolling the virtues of Gryffindor House for the millionth time.

“At least you get free childcare.” Remus sighed, smiling faintly.

He looked much less pale and drawn than usual, having reached his usual burst of energy halfway through the lunar cycle, and was still dressed in his usual uniform of sweater vest and slacks despite the early hour. James, who strongly believed that Remus simply slept in the next day’s sweater vest and slacks, had spent years trying to prove it and, confusingly, always falling asleep just before Remus and waking up after his friend had gotten dressed.

Anne once again leapt up from her seat, beaming. “Uncle Sirius, Uncle Remus!” Mattie waved from his own place at the table, though he made no attempt to move.

“Hey there, Annie.” Sirius ruffled her hair. “What’s up, other ducklings? Your favorite uncle is
here to love you all endlessly.”

“Don’t know about you, but my favorite uncle’s not making a fuss of it.” Sarah deadpanned, flipping another page in her book.

“Why do we have to keep that one?” Sirius whined. “She’s mean to me, James! Mean!”

“Oh yes, a right terror.” Lily propped her elbow on the table, smiling kindly. “You look well, Remus.”

Drew made some teasing hissing noises at his eldest sister, though only in jest.

Sarah stuck out her tongue at Drew before returning to her reading. Boys were annoying and that was one of the few things she could agree with Anne on. Though in a few years, Anne’s opinions on that might change quite drastically.

“Thank you, Lily. You look just as lovely as ever.” Remus replied with a kind smile, the wrinkles near his eyes becoming more apparent with the movement. He patted Sirius’ shoulder as he passed by him. “Now, what’s this I hear about Harry getting his letter?”

“I’m going to be in Gryffindor and I’m going to be a Seeker and I’m going to win all the games and it’s going to be awesome!” Harry grinned. “Mum says to be careful and study and stuff, but I’m going to do all sorts of cool stuff like you guys did!”

Lily shook her head, an exasperated sigh escaping her. “I think you might want to listen to your mother, Harry.” Remus advised.

“Seriously, listen to your mother on that one.” James pointed a fork at his son, who rolled his eyes. “Detention gets boring after awhile. That’s why I started hanging out with your mother instead. Of course, that got me you, so I’m not quite sure if it was the best decision.”

“James Potter, we both know you only got to stick around me because I allowed it.” Lily said, laughing. “And don’t pretend you regret it now, either.”

“She has a point, mate.” Remus smiled fondly.

“Best decision I ever made.” James grinned. “Save that one time we hung Snape off the tree by the lake by his knickers though. That was fun. I mean, bad, very bad. No teasing people. Never. Nope.”

“Prongs, you act like you were actually involved in that.” Sirius snorted. “That magical marvel was all me, since I had the skill and the guts to do it.”

“You sat on my shoulders cause you were too short, you little twit.” James rolled his eyes.

“Prat.”

“Loser.”

“Boys, take it outside.” Lily chastised them lightly. “Remus can have your seat, James, and for once I’ll be able to have an intelligent conversation.”

“I have plenty of intelligent conversations with you!” James protested.

“Yeah, Appa, about Quidditch.” Harry shrugged. “If you haven’t noticed, Amma hates Quidditch, unless you’re playing. Uncle Sirius sai--”
“IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT I SAID, HARRY. EAT YOUR CEREAL.”

“Yeah, eat your cereal!” Drew laughed, shaking his head. “Really, Appa, Amma was only joking.”

“Didn’t sound like a joke.” James muttered, eyes downcast.

“When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things…” Sarah began, and then immediately quieted when Remus motioned for her to stop.

“Rabbit’s clever.” Harry added, chuckling. “Yes, Rabbit has Brain.”

“Enough teasing each other, you two.” Lily scolded. Her words were softened, of course, by the faint smile on her face. “After breakfast, we can take Harry to get his supplies.”

James smirked, running a hand through his hair to try and get it to stay flat. Harry mirrored the action, leaving both of them in equal states of disarray. “Oh boy, that’s going to be a riot.”

“Easy peasy, Prongsie.” Sirius rolled his eyes. “Just stick the ones who don’t need school supplies in Quality Quidditch with Ginny. We’ll be set.”

“You do have a point.” James nodded. “Quidditch usually occupies three out of five, but that’s still two that aren’t interested.”

“Parenting sounds like a bore.” Sirius huffed. “Do you guys even do anything else anymore?”

Matt murmured something about falling off of brooms, but was easily drowned out by his more excited sister. “Since I’m not going quidditch shopping, can I get new ribbons for my hair? Please?”

“How do ribbons go in hair?” Sirius frowned, trying to work it out. “I mean, it just seems… odd.”

“Once we get Hari all settled, we’ll see.” James stood up, lifting his empty plate off the table. “Right, let’s get moving.”

“Uncle Sirius, I’ll show you how it works!” Of course, Anne was the authority on anything and everything pretty, cute, or otherwise adorable. Especially the likes of which went in one’s hair. She stood, abandoning her half-finished breakfast in favor of tugging on his sleeve. “You can help me!”

“Can you sneak me into Flourish and Blotts?” Sarah whispered to Remus, who nodded resolutely, looking straight ahead as if he hadn’t heard her at all. It was a talent perfected from his Marauder days, and something that served him well, as being an uncle to four mischievous children and Matt took a lot of effort.

Lily stood, beginning to clear the table of what was left whilst an enthusiastic Sirius was dragged off by her youngest daughter. “James, make sure the boys are ready to go, will you?” She called over one shoulder.

“Got it.” James called back, returning from the kitchen, and slapped Drew and Mattie’s shoulders. “Right, boys. Adventure day. Let’s rock.”

Drew stood, groaning faintly at the idea of having to shop for the day.

“We Potter men are bound to serve the world, Adi.” James ruffled his son’s hair, sighing melodramatically. “It is a curse and a blessing, because we eventually get hot wives out of it.”
“Eww, Amma isn’t hot.” Drew wrinkled his nose up, obviously displeased with this line on conversation. Mat made a thoughtful noise as he climbed down from his own chair.

“I think she’s pretty.” He said, eyebrows furrowed in utmost seriousness. “Really pretty.”

“That’s cause she is.” James grinned. “Although Madhu does have a bit of a point about it being creepy.”

“You’re creepy.” Drew retorted after a beat of silence. He patted his father’s arm, obviously trying very hard to be sympathetic.

“Then you’re creepy cause you’re my kid.” James said, frowning.

“Appa, I hate to bust your bubble, but I don’t think it works like that.” Sarah sighed. “Can we go before all the shops close and we have to try again tomorrow? I found something cool to show Ginny.”

“Is it a frog?” Matt hurried over to her side, trying to stand on his toes in order to see the book in her hand. “Ginny likes frogs.”

“She does, but I found a bunch of books on the Harpies! I know she likes the Harpies.” Sarah nodded confidently. “Plus, they’re far better than the Cannons. I don’t know why Ron even likes them. Judging by the way he plays chess, he should know better.”

“Some people never quite give up on things, Sarah.” Remus patted her head as she stood up, grabbing her book as an afterthought. “Look at Sirius and that obsession with the Beatles.”

“Didn’t one of them die?” Harry asked, blinking. “John L--”

“We do not speak that name inside this house.” James cut in, afraid that Lily had heard. Between Lily and Sirius, the Potter house had been a veritable ocean of tears and snot on the day John Lennon had been shot and James was not eager for a repeat performance. Luckily she still seemed to be in the kitchen, if the sounds of dishes being washed were enough to go by.

Matt detached himself from Sarah’s shoulder, instead choosing to follow Drew as he trooped up the stairs. Sarah immediately ran after her brothers to collect the books she’d mentioned earlier, leaving James, Remus and Harry as the sole occupants of the room.

“Appa?” Harry asked, sounding slightly less confident than usual. “What if I’m in Slytherin for real, though? You won’t... actually disown me, right?”

“My mother was in Slytherin and she wasn’t evil at all.” James shrugged. “Course, for every single Slytherin that’s like your grandmother, you get ten that are, well, related to Sirius.”

“Hate to burst your bubble, mate, but your mum was related to Sirius too.” Remus smiled, shaking his head.

“Only by marriage.” James countered. ”That doesn’t mean anything, when we're talking about inbreeding central.”

Sirius re-entered the room, and James cleared his throat nervously. “Gnomes. We were talking about gnomes and how tiny they are, right, Remus?”

“Gnomes.” Remus repeated, solemn as always, as he rolled the sleeves of his threadbare sweater back to avoid getting his hands trapped in them. “They’re quite the menace.”
Lily rolled her eyes, patting Sirius on the shoulder. He eyed them all with mild suspicion. “You’re beginning to sound like a bunch of old geezers. Talk about something a bit more lively, would you?”

Sarah thundered back down the stairs, followed by her younger brothers, with two books tucked securely under her arm. “Can we go now?”

“Do we have everyone? Right, one, two, three, four... We lost one.” James frowned. “Who hid Anju?”

Sirius cleared his throat, stepping back to stand next to the doorway. “Now presenting, her Majesty, Princess Anne Marie Potter!” He announced, hands propped dramatically on his hips. Anne, who had of course been waiting for such a declaration, marched in. Her hair had been pulled back into a braid, with a pink ribbon tied into a bow.

Once her dramatic entrance was over, she simply made a beeline to her father’s side.

James put his arm around his younger daughter, counting everyone in the room once again before motioning toward the fireplace. “Let’s roll, ladies and gentlemen.”

“Let’s roll.” Harry repeated, looking as serious as he possibly could.
Diagon Alley
Chapter by tamilprongspotter

Chapter Summary

Harry belatedly realized, as he stared at his parents holding hands while laughing like teenagers, that they hardly looked old enough to have an eleven year old already.

But here they all were, and Harry was being forced to carry an incredibly heavy cauldron filled with several ludicrously thick books along all by himself. The injustice of it was insufferable, especially since it was compounded by the fact that his father kept laughing at his inability to fully lift it into the air.

Could be worse, though, Harry mused. He could be Dudley and have to live with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon all the time. The thought was almost as revolting as the number of schoolbooks his mother would likely force him to read before the end of summer.

Chapter Notes

There are racist and ableist slurs, as well as references made to blatantly racist actions taken against people of color, in parts of this chapter. A lot of these experiences are taken from similar experiences that I have had, so if you choose to criticize them as unrealistic, know that there is someone to which these things have actually happened.

As always, this chapter, the one preceding, and all the ones in the future are cowritten by the best partner a guy could ask for, yamibakuraofficial on tumblr.

Trying to get her to get an AO3.

We’ll see.

Harry looked about Diagon Alley as they left the brick archway, eager to experience as much as the shopping district had to offer. His parents did enjoy spending time at home more so than much else, which Harry found incredibly funny, considering all the stories that Uncle Sirius often told about his parents in their Hogwarts days. Of course, those stories often devolved into the uncomfortable silence that Harry knew was Sirius’ way of avoiding discussing the war that Harry’s siblings weren’t even alive during, and Harry didn’t even remember, but they were fun to hear.

It was fun to imagine James Potter as a mischievous boy his own age, getting into detention with his best friends and sneaking about the castle at night, and Lily Potter as anything but the mother that told him to go to bed even though Uncle Sirius said it was okay not to sleep just yet and made him read the books Auntie Molly was teaching the other kids from. It was fun to imagine them as children, Harry mused, but he liked them as adults just fine, thanks.
Harry belatedly realized, as he stared at his parents holding hands while laughing like teenagers, that they hardly looked old enough to have an eleven year old already.

But here they all were, and Harry was being forced to carry an incredibly heavy cauldron filled with several ludicrously thick books along all by himself. The injustice of it was insufferable, especially since it was compounded by the fact that his father kept laughing at his inability to fully lift it into the air.

“Appa, stop!” Harry groaned, nearly dropping the cauldron on his own feet. “It’s not funny!”

“Lily, look the books are practically as heavy as him!” James snorted, trying his best to stifle his laughter. “No wonder he can’t pick them up!”

Could be worse, though, Harry mused. He could be Dudley and have to live with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon all the time. The thought was almost as revolting as the number of school books his mother would likely force him to read before the end of summer.

“Morning, Potters!” Mr. Weasley called from across the road, cheerful as always. Percy, Fred, George, Ron and Ginny trooped along behind him, with Mrs. Weasley bringing up the rear. “How are all of you on this fine morning?”

“Tired.” Sarah remarked gloomily, prompting a laugh from one of the twins, probably George. The other, who may have been George, but was probably Fred, yawned dramatically in agreement.

Ron looked over at the Potters and ultimately ended up grinning at Harry.

“Ron! Did you see the new Nimbus in the window?” Harry crowed, nearly vibrating in his excitement. “The stats on it are amazing!”

“Yeah!” He ran across the street to his friend, clapping him on the arm. “It looks amazing- I envy the bloke that gets to Hogwarts on that.”

“I know, right?” Harry rolled his eyes. “Dad says I can’t get a broom into school, and even then, he’ll only let me if I do well this year! Can you believe it?”

“Yeah. Check the bottom of the letter. First years still aren’t allowed brooms. I think it’s a load of-”

“Ronald Weasley.” Mrs. Weasley shook her head, throwing her hands up as she looked over at Lily. One would think that, after four Quidditch obsessed boys and Percy, maybe a second one of her boys would enjoy something other than mid-air roughhousing.

“Sorry, Mum.” Ron blushed, his face turning nearly as red as his hair.

Sarah immediately rushed over to Ginny, eager to show off the books she’d found among her father’s old school things. “Ginny, I found some things on the Harpies when I was looking through Dad’s Quidditch books!”

Ginny, who had previously been staring into a storefront window, turned quickly. Her eyes were bright behind bangs that were slightly too long, and she grinned at her friend. “Really? Can I see?”

“It’s why I brought them, silly.” Sarah grinned, pulling a face before immediately beginning a detailed exposition on the most recently unearthed fact.
Ginny hung off her words, listening attentively as she peeked around Sarah to peer at the books. The pictures printed across the pages moved quickly, showing black and white images of women on brooms.

“Ugh, girls.” Harry rolled his eyes, sticking his tongue out at Ginny and Sarah. “Come on, Ron, let’s find something cool!”

“Not yet, buddy. We’ve still got robes, a wand and an owl to do before you kids go running off.” James pointed out.

“We should probably stop and get him the robes first, since it will take the longest.” Lily mused, shuffling one of the triplets closer to the group. They seemed to constantly be wandering off; it was a miracle the Potters managed to keep everyone in order.

“Yeah.” James nodded, warily eyeing the people in front of the robe shop. “Should get that done quick before everybody turns up and there’s a line, on top of everything else. Come along, Harry.”

“Can we get ice cream instead?” Drew asked, frowning in the general direction of the robe shop. There would be nothing for him and the younger siblings to do there, of course, and he didn’t see much of a point.

Lily glanced at her husband, raising an eyebrow. “We could stop and get him an owl while you two wait? Unless you want to come along for that, Harry.” She reached out to smooth his hair down, smiling fondly at her eldest son, who was being the very picture of propriety as he scowled at his cauldron full of books.

“Ice cream without me?” Harry pouted. “But that’s not fair at all-- Oh, wait, the owl. Uh, get me a cool one? I don’t really mind about colors and stuff, I guess.”

“Lily, you go ahead and get the robes with him, then? I’ll get the ice cream covered.” James stood unnaturally stiff, obviously nervous. Going out together, especially with the children, did carry a certain amount of danger. More than once, James had been accused of kidnapping Anne, who looked exactly like her mother, until Lily had shown up to affirm that James was, indeed, her husband and Anne was his daughter. And even then, they’d only allowed James to go free on the condition that Lily “let someone know” when she was ready for a good, proper English boy.

Lily reached out for him, smoothing down the front of his robes. “Alright. I’ve got robes covered then. Harry and I can meet up with you later?” She smiled calmly at him. He grinned, some of the nervousness wearing off.

“Sounds great.” James nodded, gathering up the triplets. “Right, you three, let’s get moving. Arthur, Molly, you sure you don’t mind Sarah tagging along?”

“Of course not!” Mr. Weasley grinned back, ruffling Sarah’s hair before doing the same to Ginny. “She’s a pleasure to have along, James.”

“All Lily, really.” James grinned, shrugging.

Lily leaned up to give James a quick kiss on the cheek before moving on. “Come along, sweetheart. We should get this over with while we still can.” She patted Harry’s shoulder.

“Yes, Mum.” Harry groaned. Robe shopping was absolutely boring and he’d much prefer being allowed to wear his Muggle clothes to school. But, of course, wizards weren’t particularly fond of anything comfortable or practical. “Let’s do it, I guess. Yay.”
“That’s the spirit!” She laughed, already herding him towards Madam Malkin’s.

Harry entered the shop first, immediately tripping over a display of cloak packs. Thankfully, only a few of them fell off the rack, and those were easily placed back before anyone noticed. He wandered a little further in, looking for the mirrors that usually signaled a fitting area, but found nothing.

“Oh. Bad signs everywhere, Mum, really.” When he turned around, Lily was nowhere to be found. “Bother.”

Footsteps clicked against the polished hardwood of the floor, and a moment later a boy that appeared to be about Harry’s age rounded one of the racks. His blonde hair was greased back from his face, and the combination of a pointed nose and pinched lips gave him a rather mouse-like look.

Whoever he was, he regarded Harry with what could only be described as utter disdain. “Who are you?”

“Who are you?” Harry said, frowning slightly. The other boy looked quite like his cousin Dudley, who Harry was marginally fond of, but spoke with an air of regality that bothered Harry to no end. “What’s that face for anyway?”

“What face?” The boy frowned at him, obviously displeased with Harry’s words.

“Your face.” Harry raised an eyebrow. “Whatever.”

“You’re an idiot.” He brushed past Harry with a roll of his eyes, moving into the fitting area. He turned slightly, glancing at his reflection in a bored manner.

“Am not.” Harry stomped his foot. “My parents say I’m smart and I do alright in school stuff.”

“Parents are required to say such things.” He sniffed, still refusing to look at Harry. “Besides, I doubt someone like you could accomplish much of anything. Feel free to try your best, though.”

“You’re a giant arsehole. Bet you don’t have friends.” Harry huffed. “You won’t get anywhere if you’re mean to people, at least that’s what my dad says.”

He turned, hands resting on the sharp curve of either hip. He was all pale angles and sneers, a direct contrast to Harry’s tanned skin and unruly hair, which he reached up to self-consciously smooth down after catching sight of himself in the mirror. “You won’t get anywhere being a good-for-nothing pansy either, but I doubt he’s told you that.”

“My dad’s the best and he’d never lie to me.” Harry crossed his arms, green eyes burning with fury. Anyone who knew Lily Evans would be fully aware that a fight was imminent, but, unfortunately for him, the pale boy didn’t. “He’s not a good-for-nothing pansy and neither am I.”

“Keep telling yourself that. Maybe one day it will be true.” The boy crossed his arms, the sleeves of his robe hanging slightly. It was a bit big on his figure, which took away from the imperious effect he was going for. Regardless of this, his face remained haughty and his nose upturned.

“Don’t you dare insult my family…” Harry seethed, glaring at the other boy. The sneer the other boy wore was far past simply getting on his nerves and closer to grating against them. “Bet you’re some rich, snobby prat raised by a house elf.”

“My name is Draco Malfoy, and you would do well to remember that.” He advised. “Not that I would expect a savage like you to recognize the name.”
“Harry Potter.” Harry growled, tensing at the sound of the insult. He’d heard it applied to his father once or twice, in public, but they’d always rushed him and his siblings away afterwards without explanation. “I know exactly who you are, and for some reason, it makes me like you even less. I didn’t even know that was possible, but miracles do happen sometimes.”

“Potter?” This seemed to catch his attention, though not in a particularly positive way. “How dreadful. Is it hard being the laughing stock of the Wizarding community? At least among those that matter.” The snort that escaped him was harsh, and his smirk even more so.

“Those that snobs like you think matter, you mean.” Harry’s hands shook, curling into fists at his sides. “Everybody we know is perfectly respectable, thanks. Probably a good bit more fun than your lot.”

Before Draco could make another comment, no doubt as horrid as the rest of those previous, another set of footsteps approached. A head of red hair poked out from behind the rack, and a relieved smile spread across Lily’s face.

“There you are, Harry. I was wondering where you wandered off to!” She made her way over to her son, smoothing down his hair. She didn’t miss the curl of his fists or the tension held tight in his shoulders, but she pretended not to notice. “Are you ready for your fitting?”

“Of course.” He smiled brightly, a touch of his father’s legendary mischief creeping into his voice. “Anything to get of out here faster, right, Malfoy?”

Draco merely rolled his eyes once again, and turned to the mirrors. “I suppose some of us can’t stand too long.” He replied.

Lily frowned slightly, merely placing a hand on Harry’s shoulder. She sincerely hoped he wasn’t about to do anything rash.

“I suppose some of us can’t stand looking away from a mirror for too long.” Harry shrugged, smirking slightly. “Where do I have to go for a fitting?”

“Up front.” She replied quickly, already pushing Harry away from the Malfoy boy.

“Awesome. Can we get Gryffindor stuff? I want to get Gryffindor stuff!” Harry piped up, thankful to be away from Draco. As far as Harry was concerned, Draco was bound for Slytherin and he’d never have to speak to him again.

“You haven’t even been sorted yet.” She admonished, a fond grin settling into place. If there had ever been any debate over Harry being sorted, it certainly had nothing to do with house placement. Everyone and their cat knew he was a lion through and through.

“Yeah, but I mean, George says we’ve got to fight a troll and Dad and Uncle Rem taught me some super cool troll fighting tricks.” Harry nodded, looking entirely serious. Ron had seemed almost scared when relating what the twins had told him to Harry, but Harry had taken solace in the fact that at least he hadn’t cried. Ron couldn’t exactly lay claim to that, depending on the definition of crying used. “Appa says that if it comes at me, just to run in circles around its feet cause trolls get dizzier faster than humans. And then it’ll fall down and everyone’ll get a laugh out of it, at least if you’re not standing behind the troll.”

“You don’t have to fight a troll, Harry.” She sighed, shoulders sagging. “You shouldn’t take everything your father and his friends say to heart. Merlin knows half the things out of their mouths are exaggerated.”
“I don’t?” He looked a little relieved, grinning as he rubbed his forehead. “Good, trolls are kind of... big. Like Malfoy’s forehead. He said some really nasty stuff about me and Appa and stuff.”

“Yes, I suppose he did.” In that moment, Lily seemed far older than she was. “Some pureblood families don’t take too kindly to us, sweetheart. Your father will probably talk to you about it soon.”

“Yeah.” Harry nodded, reaching out to squeeze his mother’s hand. “Bet I’m totally smarter and cooler than him, though. He seemed weird.”

“Washed out.” Lily says, smothering a mischievous grin. “Like someone went at him with an eraser and took all the color out.”

“Must be a pretty good eraser.” Harry mused. “Should probably get one of those for strictly school purposes.”

James knocked on the window, excitedly showing off a cage with a white owl in it while motioning to the children clustered around him.

“Oh, man, robes!” Harry ran to the front of the store to get his size. “Amma, we’ve got to do that before he comes with me everywhere!”

Lily laughed, following Harry at a calmer pace. “Only a few more days and then you’ll be rid of him for a whole year, sweetheart.” She said. “Me and your siblings as well.”

“Yeah, right.” Harry groaned. “He’ll follow me everywhere and give me detentions for breathing.”

“... What?” The familiar furrow appeared between her eyebrows, and Lily looked at her son from where she had been peering down at some robes. “Harry, what are you talking about?”

“He and Uncle Remus were talking about a phoenix and lesson plans over dinner last week and he was writing down stuff? And then I asked him what he was doing and he said that first years need to learn more than unlocking doors, so I said okay and left.” Harry shrugged, scratching the back of his head, entirely forgetting that he’d been told not to tell his mother about this. He had a bad habit of ruining surprises, as proven by the debacle that was Fred and George’s tenth birthday. “He promised he’d give me detentions for even breathing near secret passageways.”

She turned to her son, then glanced up at the window where her family had previously been standing. “Hari. Are you telling me your father is going to be teaching at Hogwarts?” Her voice was calm.

“Appa said Dumbledore’s been on him to take it for years. Cause of Halloween and stuff.” Harry remained entirely unaware of how deeply he’d dug his father’s grave as he spoke. “And then one of the professors went missing over the summer, so he tried to get Uncle Remus in first and then took it, because apparently Dumbledore was going to ask Uncle Sirius next.” Harry shuddered. As much as he loved his godfather, he would make a terrible teacher.

“Is that so?” Unbeknownst to Harry, his mother’s lips pursed, and her eyebrows drew low over green eyes. “Your father is going to be a great teacher, don’t you worry. I’ll write to him and keep him from giving you too many detentions- granted that you don’t deserve them.” She reached out to tap his nose.

“Well,” Harry shrugged, smirking, “I might deserve a couple, here and there. Fred and George showed me a few cool things.”
“Oh yes, then you’ll definitely be earning some.” She glanced around as though about to impart some wise piece of wisdom before leaning close. “Just make sure to avoid the third floor’s East wing after midnight, alright?”

“What’s in the third floor’s east wing?” Harry did his best to not appear fearful, as eleven year old boys are wont to do, but his legs still shook slightly. “Bet it’s something cool!”

“It’s a secret.” She responded with a wink.

“A good kind?” Harry asked, trying vainly to recover the confident smile he’d had on just a minute prior.

“Could be a bad kind.” Lily mused, turning to look through the racks of robes once again.

“Like that time that Charu actually made Padfoot eat a shoe?” Harry shuddered. Uncle Sirius hadn’t known that what he was eating was a shoe, but Sarah had been in one of her experimenting phases and he should have known not to trust her, especially while in dog form. “That was a bad surprise, especially when he started throwing up after.”

”Not a surprise quite like that.” Lily decided, shaking her head at the memory. That rug had been one of her favorites, too.

“So good, then.” Harry nodded. “I’ll stay away, I guess.”

“If your father asks, he should have told me sooner.” With that, Lily turned to Harry. “Now, let’s go buy your robes so we can meet up with the others.”

“Okay!” Harry nodded, enthusiastic as always. “Can we get my wand next?”

“I don’t see why not. Saving the best for last, of course.” Lily placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder, gently pushing him towards the front of the store.

Harry trooped along, completely ignorant of the fact that his father was definitely getting chased around the house at least twice tonight. “Hey, you won’t be mad, though, right? Like you said at breakfast?”

“Mad? About what?” She looked down at him curiously.

“If I’m a Hufflepuff or a Slytherin or a Ravenclaw or something?” He shuffled his feet. “I know Appa would get kinda fussy about it, ‘cause he kinda lives and breathes Gryffindor stuff, but…”

“Oh, Hari…” Fingers tugged through his hair in a half-hearted attempt to tame the unruly mess. “Of course we won’t be mad. All of us will be proud of you no matter what house you get put in.”

“You're sure?” He smiled shyly before shrugging. He’d spent years comparing his uncles and father to himself, searching for some small shred of the heroism and bravery that they all had in common, but as Ron had pointed out, maybe his brand of bravery was more like his mother’s. Quieter, but twice as cool, at the end. Overall, way less likely to land him in prison. “I mean, even if I end up in Slytherin or something, you won’t get mad? Appa might plan an exorcism, but that’s his problem.”

“If he tries, I’ll tie him up and leave him in the basement for a week.” She promised. Honestly, she was debating doing it regardless. James should have known not to keep secrets from his wife. After all, she was just as much a Gryffindor as him.

“Amma, come on, don’t do that…” Harry winced as he made his way to the counter with his
mother by his side before placing the package of robes they’d chosen on the counter. He smiled brightly at the cashier, trying to banish the thought that the basement was scary even when fully mobile from his mind. “He might actually get in more trouble that way.”

“Good.” She decided, tugging out her wallet in order to pay for the robes.

Harry waited eagerly as the cashier handed the robes over and then ran to the door. “Appa! I want to get a wand!”

“Hold your horses, buddy. We’ll get to it eventually.” James ruffled his son’s hair. “Most important part, though, is don’t put it anywhere wands don’t usually go. Then you’re stuck cleaning stuff off of it.”

“I’m not sure I want to hear that story.” Harry grimaced.

“Believe me, I didn’t want to be there either.” James shuddered.

“No one wants to hear that story.” Lily advised, already ushering the children down the street.

“I want to hear it!” Drew insisted.

“No. You don’t.”

“It’s another one of those stories where Uncle Sirius puts something in his mouth that doesn’t need to be there.” Sarah shrugged.

“Sadly, that’s only the tenth weirdest thing Sirius has put in his mouth.” James mused, thankful that they had reached Ollivander’s because, of all of his children, Sarah was the only one who would have asked what the other nine were.

The bell above the door rang cheerfully as they all stepped inside. It was just as it had been for years. Dust lined the shelves, and the dim lighting gave a feeling of mystery. An old man stood behind the counter, surrounded by piles of wand boxes.

Harry ventured farther into the shop ahead of the rest of the family, startling slightly when he stepped on a creaky floorboard. He looked around, wondering how many of the boxes could possibly be stacked before the piles fell over, and was called out of his thoughts by the old man, who seemed to suddenly appear next to him. “Hi, uh, Mr. Ollivander, right?”

“Harry Potter… I was wondering when you’d be coming by….” The old man smiled as he looked over each of Harry’s siblings in turn, his grin growing wider as he noticed James and Lily by the door. “James Potter. Eleven inches, mahogany. Unicorn tail hair. Pliable and good for Transfiguration. Correct?”

“Harry Potter… I was wondering when you’d be coming by….” The old man smiled as he looked over each of Harry’s siblings in turn, his grin growing wider as he noticed James and Lily by the door. “James Potter. Eleven inches, mahogany. Unicorn tail hair. Pliable and good for Transfiguration. Correct?”

“It’s served me well.” James nodded, patting his pocket.

“And Lily Evans, Potter now, I suppose… Ten and a quarter, willow… Swishy. Good for Charms. You went into Healing?” Ollivander asked, retrieving several of the thin boxes before opening the first and handing the wand to Harry. “Here, Harry, try this one.”

Harry gave it a swish and immediately shattered one of the windows, grimacing. “Yikes.”

Lily only nodded in response, choosing to watch Harry instead. This was an important moment, of course.

“Perhaps not that one…” Olivander frowned before handing Harry the wand from the second
box. “Try this one.”

Harry waved it vaguely in Anne’s direction, turning her hair rainbow. “Hey, that one worked.”

“But not as well as we’d like, Mr. Potter. Try this one. An unusual combination for an unusual boy, perhaps.” Ollivander chuckled, before opening the third box and handing the wand to Harry. He found himself reaching out for it, unlike the first two, and as he took it from Ollivander, the room seemed to grow ten times warmer. A stream of red and gold sparks erupted from the end of the wand and Harry nearly bounced up and down in his excitement.

“Curious…” Ollivander muttered, looking over Harry much more carefully than before.

“What’s curious?” James asked, suddenly worried.

“The phoenix that gave the feather in Harry’s wand gave only one more feather, Mr. Potter. And that wand has caused your family quite a bit of grief, I’d imagine.” Ollivander eyed James and Lily cautiously before leaning down to look Harry straight in the eye. “He was a terrible man, but undoubtedly an excellent wizard. And I think it’s safe to say that we can expect great things from you.”

Lily placed her hand on James’ arm, watching Harry with unreadable eyes.

To have a wand nearly identical to Voldemort’s… Only time could tell how that might play out.

“Wicked.” Harry grinned, rolling his wand between his palms and laughing as it feebly emitted a few sparks for his enjoyment. “Can we get ice cream now?”
Chapter Summary

“The Waiting Game” Harry grabbed the dishrag, immediately getting to work to the nearest dish to the top of the pile. “Hey, about what Mr. Ollivander said at the shop… What was he talking about?”

Lily sighed, her thumb idly rubbing at the underside of her wedding ring. Both she and James knew that there would come a day when they would have to explain the past to their children, as much as they’d avoided the topic. Ten years of near silence on the subject, at least where their children were concerned, had been a blessing for both of them.

Harry shut the latch of the trunk, grinning in satisfaction. It was a miracle that the trunk had closed at all, considering the amount of things he had crammed in there, but thankfully climbing onto it had done the trick, just like Fred and George had said it would. He hopped down from the lid of the trunk, the bottoms of his red Snitch patterned pants catching on the lock for a split second, before stepping back to admire his handiwork, and looked around his room.

In just a few weeks, he’d be off to Hogwarts and Gryffindor House, just like his parents had been years and years ago, and he wouldn’t sleep in this bed or wake up to his Cannons posters until Christmas. He shuddered, the thought of leaving at all unsettling him, and decided going down to the kitchen might help. At least his mother would be up, the rest of his siblings and likely his father having gone to bed about an hour ago.

His father wasn’t very good with Diagon Alley visits, Harry noted, as he walked down the stairs. People in cloaks, especially people with hoods, tended to unnerve him, and Amma would usually rush them all home relatively quickly when Appa started getting stressed out. Too many people, he’d told Harry once, when Harry was young enough to demand an explanation. Harry had nodded, understanding how crowds could be scary, and left it at that. Maybe it had something to do with the man Mr. Ollivander had mentioned earlier, Harry mused, and hopped off the last step into the living room.

He spotted his mother washing the last of the dishes from dinner and eagerly padded over to the sink. “Amma, need some help?”

Lily turned to face her son for a second, a smile softening her features. “Sure. Why don’t you help me dry?” She suggested, nodding towards the dishrag that lay innocently on the counter. Perhaps she had been planning on drying them once she’d finished. Knowing Lily, however, one might be able to deduce that she’d been waiting for Harry to come downstairs.

“The Waiting Game” Harry grabbed the dishrag, immediately getting to work to the nearest dish to the top of the pile. “Hey, about what Mr. Ollivander said at the shop… What was he talking about?”

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children were concerned, had been a blessing for both of them.

“Well, I suppose it’s something of a long story.” She admitted, her face seeming to age decades as the light shifted, making her suddenly seeming far older than her thirty-one years.

“I’m almost eleven, so I can stay up late.” Harry shrugged, picking up the second dish. “Appa seemed… off after hearing that.”

“Someone’s a bit too big for his britches.” She chuckled, shaking her head. A stray piece of hair fell into her face, though she did nothing to move it away. “Your father and I, and all your uncles and aunts… We were involved in a war. You were only a baby, at the time, so you wouldn’t remember it.”

“That’s the same war Ron’s uncles died in, right?” Harry frowned, pausing for a second. Bill and Charlie often told stories of their uncles, Fabian and Gideon, but all the children knew not to speak of them around Mrs. Weasley, who often began crying when any of the boys happened to bear even the slightest resemblance to their late uncles.

Lily nodded in response, passing off a plate to her son, who started wiping at it with a determined passion hardly ever seen in an eleven year old doing chores. “I never knew them very well, but they were brave men,” she told him.

“Bill and Charlie say they were really brave and strong and awesome.” He took the plate from his mother, wiping it meticulously to catch every last drop of water. He’d grown mold in a jar in his room once and it had smelled horrible. Of course, it hadn’t helped that he’d shoved a sweaty sock in the jar to try and make it better, which only made things ten times more gross. “Appa knew them, I think, cause Bill said something about them helping the Marauders with pranks, at first.”

“Oh I wouldn’t doubt it.” She ruffled his hair, soapy water clinging to the wavy strands and causing them to stick up even more wildly than usual. “You should ask him about them someday. You know how he loves to tell a good story.”

“Yeah.” Harry nodded, shaking his head like Sirius did to get rid of the wet, sticky feeling. Of course, most of the water ended up soaking the shoulders of his shirt and he shivered, pouting melodramatically, as his mother shook her head in mild amusement. “But what did the two of you do in the war? If I was a baby, then it was super long ago, right?”

“Not as long as you seem to think. But yes, it was a long time ago. You see, there was an incredibly evil wizard. Most still don’t dare to speak his name…” She paused there, eyes seeming far away. “We had to go into hiding, once you were born. He found us anyway. Your father… He nearly died.”

After a moment Lily seemed to shake off the memories, offering a wan smile. “Lucky for us, your Appa is as stubborn as they come.”

“And angry.” Harry nodded seriously, crossing his arms. “Very angry.”

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” she only laughed. “Your father is many things, but angry is only an occasional trait.”

“Yeah.” Harry chuckled, piling the last dry dish atop the rest. “But he calls me a nerd, and that’s mean.”

“Well, he might have a point there.” Lily reached out to place her hands on Harry’s shoulders, tugging him around to face her. “Look at you. My little boy all grown up and going off to Hogwarts. Reckon you’ll cause just as much trouble as your father did.”
“Someone’s got to keep that detention record in the family.” Harry grinned. “Fred and George are apparently ahead of schedule already, and they’re just going into second year. Uncle Sirius is getting all up in arms about it.”

“As he should be.” James plodded into the kitchen, scratching the back of his head. He looked exhausted, and if Harry hadn’t caught him napping just earlier that afternoon, he’d guess that his father hadn’t slept in a week. James stopped to plant a kiss on the top of Lily’s head before putting an arm around Harry’s shoulders. “It’s a family thing. Gotta keep those.”

“Just like Potters being Head Boy?” Harry looked to James, who nodded. “That’s probably why they made you Head Boy, huh?”

“We’ve got a habit of turning out to be leaders all of a sudden, so Dumbledore figured I would pick it up at some point.” James snorted. “Bad bet, in my opinion.”

“I don’t know, I think he saw something in you that you couldn’t see yourself.” Lily mused, turning to begin putting the dishes away.

“Like what, dear wife? You know that I never tire of you listing out my positive qualities.” James winked, grabbing a few dishes to put away too. “After years of being called a toerag, my heart yearns for better.”

“You’ve gotten worse than toerag, though, I bet.” Harry muttered, thinking back to the shop.

“What’s got you thinking so hard, kanna?” James ruffled Harry’s hair, frowning at his son’s sudden pensive turn. Harry was usually a light hearted, mischievous child who ran headlong into situations without a single thought to the consequences, and seeing him this upset about anything was a rare occurrence. “Everything okay?”

Lily shook her head, her eyebrows dipping together. “We ran into the Malfoy boy at the robe shop, James.” Her tone was tired, and she leaned against the counter.

“Oh.” James frowned. “And that went beautifully, I assume.”

“Called you and me good-for-nothing savages. Cause… we’re… yeah.” Harry fixed his eyes on the floor, tracing the outlines of the tiles. “Says we’re laughingstocks and should be ashamed of ourselves.”

“So he’s just another Malfoy, then.” James shrugged. “They’re… hardly the worst that’s out there, Harry. Draco’s going to say these thing and lots of other kids are too, but you’ve got Ron and Fred and George and the rest to hang out with.”

“Your self-worth isn’t determined by what other people think.” Lily advised, smoothing out his hair again, as Harry squirmed uncomfortably.

“Not everyone will like you and that’s okay. Some people’ll call it on your the color of your skin or the way you talk or dress or walk, but that’s their problem, not yours.” James patted Harry’s shoulder as Harry looked up at his father. Although people loved to remind him that he had his mother’s eyes, Harry enjoyed the fact that he looked more and more like his father as he grew older. “All that matters is that you’re doing your best at everything you try.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Harry sighed, shrugging. “It’s kind of mean, hating people just because they look different.” It made no sense--people’s faces or features had no bearing on whether they were good or bad. A person with bad intentions was going to be bad, no matter what they looked like. Maybe, Harry thought, he simply had the benefit of good examples.
“People can be cruel.” Lily agreed. “It’s your job to know you can’t sink to their level, Harry.”

“You have to be ten times the person they are to stay on the same level.” James squeezed Harry’s shoulder. “And it’s hard, but you come out stronger than they ever could be, in the end. Not that it’s a good thing that you have to in the first place, but-- you get what I mean.”

“Yeah.” Harry smiled, though it was small. “I’m going to be the best ever and then people will realize they were wrong about all of us.”

“There’s a good man.” James ruffled Harry’s hair. “Good attitude helps.”

“Well, he’s our son after all.” Lily joked. “Merlin knows you can’t keep a Potter down for too long.”

“We’re literal balloons.” James cracked a smile. “You push down and we destroy your hopes and dreams.”

“I think wizard balloons are different from Muggle balloons.” Harry frowned, scratching his head. He’d stayed far away from wizard party favors after Fred and George had given Ron a lollipop that had burned holes through his tongue during Ron’s eighth birthday party. Ron had cried for a solid hour and everyone had to go home early, neither of which Harry had found fun at all.

“Incredibly different.” Lily snorted, thinking back to the spectacular debacle that had been their graduation ceremony. “I can show you sometime. I think Anju would love them.”

“She likes lots of thing that are scary.” Harry shuddered, thinking of his youngest sister, who often demanded to be called a princess and would yell if he even tried to tease her. “It’s gonna be weird, without a bunch of people around all the time. I mean, if no one’s going through my stuff, I probably won’t know where any of it is.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll probably end up rooming with Ron. I’m sure he’ll spend plenty of time rifling through your things.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Harry shrugged, fidgeting nervously. “You guys’ll write, though, right?”

“It’s only three months, kid.” James shrugged. “Plus, you’ll see me every day.”

“Yeah, like that’ll help.” Harry pulled a face, rolling his eyes. “Don’t pick on me in class or talk to my friends or anything.”

“I solemnly swear.” James grinned, already planning despite his promise.

“I wouldn’t count on this toerag, sweetheart.” Lily turned to make her way across the kitchen, shaking her head as she saw her husband pouting like a toddler denied candy.

“You’ve counted on me a lot, darling, and it’s always ended well for you.” James called across the room, confidence regained in the space of a second like always. “I rock.”

“Whatever you say, dear!” She called over her shoulder, already disappearing into the hall. She returned a moment later with a photo album in hand. It was thin, bound in slightly cracked leather, and obviously well-loved. “Anyways, this is a gift for you. I was going to give it to you before you boarded the train, but..”

Harry opened the photo album, excited to see what lay inside. Photographs were somewhat of a rarity in the Potter family, what with the effort necessary to get all the kids and parents smiling and
behaving themselves at once, and many of the ones that littered the mantel were formal, Christmas
card ones rather than candid shots.

The album held moving photographs ranging over the course of several years, nearly eleven, to be
exact. The main player on the first few pages was a small, chubby baby, who was very fond of
waving his tiny fists in the air. His hair, which he had quite a lot of, for a baby his age, already
stuck up at odd angles, and a finger would sometimes come into the frame to tap at his nose. The
baby would giggle excitedly, green eyes trying vainly to focus on the finger before him, and then
the scene would reset, endlessly looping.

The rest were all various pictures of Harry throughout his childhood, the baby slowly aging into a
little boy who, in the space of ten or so pages, went off to primary school, flew about on a small
broom and played with Padfoot. There were also some of him and his siblings mixed in
throughout. Harry and Sarah sitting on a couch together, a book propped up between them. Harry
making faces into a crib where two of the three triplets sat. Harry on a broom, with James in the
background, already having taken to the sky.

“I thought you’d like a reminder of home.” Lily said, rubbing Harry’s back. Harry’s shoulder
blades stuck out like incipient wings, the result of the stick thin build he’d inherited from his
father, and she worried that he’d forget meals in his effort to experience everything Hogwarts had
to offer. Harry was often very forgetful when left alone, let alone his tendency to be entirely
oblivious of what was going on around him.

“It’s… It’s great.” Harry stared in awe, mouth falling open just slightly. “I’m gonna keep it safe,
promise.”

“You better.” James chuckled. “That’s eleven years of hard, hard work entirely done by your
mother in there.”

“You’re damn right it is.” She laughed, a hand coming up to press to her cheek.

“I know.” Harry closed the album, tucking it under his arm. “Appa sucks at emotions.”

“Don’t worry too much.” Lily leaned down to kiss his forehead, smiling fondly. “Your father will
be there if you need anything, and your siblings and I will write every week.”

“I hope so! I bet I’ll have all sorts of cool stuff to tell you about!” Harry grinned, nearly bouncing
in his excitement. “Uncle Remus said to ask you about a map or something!”

“The answer is no, no forever.” James shook his head resolutely.

“Definitely no.” Lily chimed in, not even wanting to consider the amount of destruction the map
could cause in Harry’s hands.

“What is it anyway?” Harry blinked, confused. “I mean, maps are boring.”

“It’s a very boring, old map.” James nodded as seriously as he could. “Uncle Remus likes a lot of
old, boring stuff, remember. He did get excited about it.”

“He gets excited about books a lot.” Harry made a face. “I don’t like books.”

“Look at him, already done with school before it even starts.” James remarked fondly.

“If he fails, I’m blaming you.” Lily decided.

“He’s your kid too, you know. He’ll make it.” James shrugged. “If he doesn’t, we’ll both
eventually agree that blaming Sirius is the right option.”

“Yeah. I guess so.” She agreed, nodding her head.

Harry yawned, thankfully having missed the last few minutes of his parents’ conversation, and hugged the album a little tighter while James ruffled his hair. “Time for bed, big guy. You’ve got a big few weeks ahead of you, now.”

“Please, you’ll cry when I get on the train.” Harry grinned, sticking out his tongue.

“I’ll make it as embarrassing for you as possible.” James rolled his eyes, motioning to the stairs. “Get to bed. You’re about to fall asleep on your feet.”

Harry dutifully trooped back up the stairs to his room, and James sighed, leaning heavily on the counter, once Harry had disappeared through the doorway. “We are not that old. Not accepting it for a second.”

“We’ll have to accept it one day.” She sighed, running a hand through her hair. “I’m certainly beginning to feel old.”

“We have five kids.” James scratched behind his ear, grimacing. “All of whom will be off to Hogwarts within the next six years. We get to feel old then, I think. Let’s focus on real problems, like the fact that I have to work with Snape. For a year. And it’s all my fault.”

“You don’t get sympathy, considering you didn’t even mention this new job before today.” Lily reprimanded as she crossed her arms.

“McGonagall’s already sent me three letters this month threatening to handcuff me to him for a week if we try to curse each other in front of the children.” James pouted, crossing his arms to match. “Dumbledore gave this long speech about Halloween, preparing for the future and then got very… Dumbledore about it when I said no the first few times. And then I figured, well, Harry, so…”

“And you didn’t think to talk it over with me first? Really, I know I’m just the wife, but usually I’m kept informed on these things.” She said this dryly, her eyebrow raised dangerously close to her hairline. “You know. Things that might keep you out of the house and away from your four other kids for the better part of the year.”

“I did want to bring it up, I just…” He shrugged. “I guess I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it.”

“Oh, of course not. This new path in life is only a minor change. I’m sure the triplets and Sarah will be thrilled!” Lily remarked.

“I just… nothing’s safe anymore. And it’s never going to feel like it, really, so I might as well contribute something. There’s always going to be something that fucks up a whole generation and I want to have a part in stopping it, for once.” James looked away, trying to string together a sentence that would properly sum things up. “Quidditch is fun and games, but that’s all it is. Fun and games and reminders that I’m older than Dumbledore, compared to my teammates. I want to do something. Something useful.”

Lily sighed, the tension slowly bleeding out of her shoulders. “Who’s to say this is going to be useful? Being a teacher, sitting around at Hogwarts all year. Don’t get me wrong, I can handle myself. I just don’t see where you’re coming from, James.”

“To be honest, sometimes, I don’t either.” James sighed. “But at least I can make sure everyone
stays safe, this way. Told Dumbledore I’d punch him straight in the face if he made me stay at the castle anyway.”

“I’ll back you up on that one.” Lily mumbled, a hand carding through her hair. It fell in messy waves down to her shoulders, as though she hadn’t had the time to brush it. “You’ll be home at the end of the day?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “It’s just for the year. The last guy went missing after a couple students thought it would be funny to hex him or something. He said something about me striking fear into the hearts of children. Wasn’t listening, really.”

“You, scary? Maybe you should take me along.” She straightened, moving to tug at the edges of his shirt. It was a habit she’d picked up sometime after Sarah had been born. Constantly tucking and straightening and fixing things. Sirius had remarked on her actually acting like a housewife and she had hexed him into the next week.

“Something about the Weasley twins talking about how the Marauders are the coolest. It’s hilarious that they haven’t realized that they’ve been babysit by most of them.” He snorted. “We weren’t all that cool, to be honest. Just jerks with too much free time. Would have helped if I’d done my homework at least half of the time.”

“You say that like I wasn’t there.” She rolled her eyes.

“If you’d been in that dorm room more often, you’d question even your horrible view of us.” James shuddered. “Sirius got up to some weird stuff. I was a perfect angel, of course. The very image of propriety and goodness.”

“I bet you even washed behind these over-sized ears of yours.” She chuckled, tugging at one of them.

“Well, thankfully most of the kids got your regular sized ears.” James laughed, wrapping his arms around her. “I’ve gotten better, I promise.”

“Believe me, I wouldn’t have married you if you hadn’t.” She rested her hands on his shoulders, her lips quirking upwards into a smile. “Do you really think working at Hogwarts is a good idea, James?”

“Oh, of course.” James grinned, nuzzling the top of her head. “Wouldn’t be throwing myself into the eternal hell that is dealing with Snape on a daily basis again if I didn’t think I’d finally be a credit to society. Apparently he’s practically got a tiny shrine to you going on. Guess thirteen years don’t change some people.”

“I think he needs to work on letting things go.” She decided. “I’m perfectly happy right here.”

“You better be.” James rolled his eyes. “I’m the perfect husband and father. You could do much better, but do you really want to put the effort into it?”

“Nah, it just seems like so much trouble. You’ll have to do. Over-sized ears and all.”

“How did I ever manage to get someone this accepting?” James shook his head, chuckling, before going in for a kiss. “I’m a lucky, lucky man. I should make a habit of that.”

“It isn’t luck that got us here and you know it.” She laughed against his shoulder.

“True. It’s my endless reservoir of skill and charm.” He mused, hugging her a little tighter. “And my dashing good looks, as well as my absolutely astounding personality.”
“You know, I think you’re missing something. I might be mistaken, but I could have sworn I helped out a bit too.” She sighed happily.

“You did help quite a bit with the fun parts.” He winked. “Although, we did end up with a houseful of loud little ones for it. Well, one less in a few weeks.”

“Two less, more like.” Her voice grew softer, and she sighed again. “I swear if you aren’t home every night for dinner you’re going to be in big trouble.”

“I will be, and I’m not very loud, comparatively.” He pouted. “Plus, he breaks stuff. I don’t do that. Anymore. As frequently.”

“You do clean up after yourself without being told, now.” Lily leaned up to place a kiss on his cheek before pulling back. “We should hit the hay as well.”

“We should.” He stepped back to stretch his arms before planting a kiss on her cheek as well, grabbing her hand to lead her upstairs. “Like I said earlier, we’ve got a big few weeks ahead. Plenty of time to yell at me until you realize how empty your day is without my socks all over the house.”

“Merlin, I hope so.” She laughed as they raced up the stairs before stepping into the hall, and Lily paused in front of Harry’s room.

Harry was asleep in his bed, stretched out over the entirety of it, but the thing that made this particular night any different than any other was the fact that Harry’s left arm was wrapped around a lightly snoring Sarah, who was pressed into his side, legs laid out over Harry’s own. Matt had tucked himself against Harry’s other side, legs pulled up against his chest and head resting on his brother’s shoulder. Drew was half sprawled over the edge of the bed, and half across Anne, who had her legs entwined with Harry’s. He snored loudly enough to drown out Sarah, though it didn’t seem to be bothering any of his siblings.

James put an arm around Lily’s waist, pulling her into his side. “Sometimes I wonder how we made these adorable little nerds. Of course, we all know where they got the adorable from, but… You get what I mean.”

She leaned against him, smiling fondly. “I get what you mean.” She replied softly.

“Seems like they were all piling into our bed just yesterday, right?” He ran a hand through his hair. “And now they’re all growing up. Damn.”

“We’ve still got a few good years left. Don’t go getting sentimental on me now.” She pulled back, moving to shut Harry’s door. “I’m going to need a good night’s sleep before anything like that.”

“We’re going to need a good night’s sleep before anything comes out of that room in the morning.” James motioned in the vague direction of the now closed door, barely stifling a laugh. “God, they’re all going to hate each other. Or cry. And I can’t really decide which one’s worse.”

“Definitely crying. They all seem to hate each other a little bit every now and then, we can deal with that. If they start crying, you’re going to start crying, and if you cry, I start crying.” She reminded him.

“Sounds like a wonderful family activity for the morning. Should dig out the camera for that one.” He yawned before tugging on her hand again. “Bedtime for the big people, come on. Gotta have our heads on right if we’re going to handle that in the morning.”
“Is your head ever on right?” She teased, following him down the hall. The night was quiet after that, which was a blessing.

Merlin only knew what morning would bring.
Chapter Summary

“I’m Hermione Granger.” She stuck out her hand and Harry shook it eagerly. “Harry Potter? You’re Lily Potter’s son, aren’t you? I’ve read all the books about her!”

“She’s really mean in real life.” Harry huffed, grimacing. “Makes me go to bed fifteen minutes before my bedtime just to make sure I fall asleep on time.”

“Oh yeah, real menace, she is.” Ron rolled his eyes, kicking the back of Harry’s leg. “I’m Ron Weasley.”

“Pleasure.”

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a lot of eleven year olds making sick burns at each other.

“Mum, Dad, hurry up!” Harry struggled to push the trolley, which was loaded with his trunk and snowy owl, along but soldiered on anyway. Sarah sighed, taking pity on him, and helped him push it along. Matt already had his arms full of books, which they had had trouble loading onto the trolley earlier. He’d volunteered to carry them when he realized Drew and Anne were more interested in gaping at the passerby. Anne clung to James’ side, her tiny hand in his own as he tugged her along. “I’m going to be late.”

“Harry, it’s hardly ten-fifteen.” James said, frowning. “The train only leaves at eleven. You’re not going to be late.”

Sarah, who was just as annoyed as her father, nodded in agreement. “We could have even left at ten and been on time.”

“See? Even Sarah says you’re wrong.” James sighed. “Well, I’ll have to be off in a few hours too, so that’s horrible.”

“Sarah usually says he’s wrong, to be fair.” Lily spoke up, nudging Drew back into a slight trot when he got distracted.

“That’s cause he’s usually wrong, though.” Sarah pouted, looking exactly like her father for a moment.

“Thanks, Sarah.” Harry groaned. “I’m not even gone yet and you’re throwing me under the bus. Who knows what’ll happen when I can’t complain after? It’ll probably turn into a throw Harry under the bus marathon. All day, all night, forever--"
“Oh no, we’ll have to sleep at some point.” Lily pointed out.

“Fine, but other than sleeping. You know what I meant!” Harry pouted. “I bet I won’t miss you at all.”

“You cry more than Dad.” Sarah shook her head, before turning to Anne. “I give him five minutes, starting when he gets on the train.”

“I don’t know, I’ll give him ten. Ron will probably distract him for a little bit!” She argued back, looking thoughtful.

“Good point. Seven and a half. Ron may have the emotional range of a teaspoon, but he can get upset quicker than anyone else I’ve met, save Mattie.” Sarah looked to her youngest brother, who was excitedly looking about at the parts of the platform he could see around the pile of books in his arms. “Mattie does cry a lot too.”

“It’s a family thing.” James sighed. “We tend to keep those.”

Mattie puffed out his cheeks in silent protest, though no one could see it.

“It’s alright, Matt, we still love you.” James ruffled his youngest son’s hair. “Well, Harry, this is it.”

“Yeah.” Harry nodded, grinning as he scanned the crowd for his friends. “Can’t wait to be as far away from you guys as possible.”

Anne stomped her foot against the floor in response.

“Hey,” she exclaimed, “that’s mean! You’re probably gonna cry like a baby once you start missing us, and I won’t talk to you because you were being a jerk!”

“Whatever.” Harry rolled his eyes. “You’ll write me tomorrow anyway.”

“I will not!” Her voice jumped up an octave in her rage. “I won’t write you ever because you’re a huge arse!”

“I think we all need to take a few deep breaths.” Lily advised, slowing slightly in order to smooth out Anne’s hair. “I think Harry is just excited to be going off to school.”

“Yeah, I’m-- Ron!” Harry noticed his friend waving and immediately ran over to him.


“They’re both idiots.” Anne sniffed. Her face had turned a violent shade of red in her anger, nearly matching her hair.

“Easy, easy, kids, if we’re going to commit murder, we do it at home and in the dark.” James pulled Anne into a hug. “Relax.”

“Harry!” Ron waved in return as Harry approached, effectively causing his armful of second-hand books to topple to the floor. He ducked sheepishly, beginning to collect them once again.

“I got it.” Harry picked up a couple, handing them over to his friend. “You excited to get out of the house? I can’t wait to room together!”

“I can’t wait to get away from my family.” Ron groaned. “Being jammed in the Burrow for the entire summer is a pain.”
“And plus, I’m way more fun than anyone else.” Harry grinned.

“More fun than the likes of them, anyways.” Ron joked, shoving at Harry’s shoulder.

“You’re so lucky, I mean, you only have one sister. I have two.” Harry shuddered, remembering the horrors resulting from Anne being given nail polish a week before. “Hey, but we don’t have to share anything with girls anymore, so that’s great.”

“Yeah but you don’t have five brothers.” Ron grumbled, getting back to his feet. “I think they’re even worse than Ginny, half the time.”

“You’re right.” Harry shuddered. “Two is bad enough and Matt doesn’t even do anything.”

“Yeah, he’s quiet. Keep forgetting he exists, honestly.” Ron rubbed at the back of his neck, shuffling to the side as someone pushed past him.

“It’s kind of creepy, really…” Harry frowned, scratching the back of his head. “If we get on the train quick, then we’ll get an empty compartment to ourselves! Come on! The good ones are probably gone already!”

“I’m sure we’ll get something.” Ron said, but still began lugging his things towards the train. He called hasty goodbyes to his family, though his mother kept stopping him to fuss a bit more. The twins and Percy had already disappeared onto the train, lucky for them, leaving Ron to the wolves.

Harry ran back to the trolley with Ron by his side. “We’re gonna find some place to sit!”

“With your stuff, I hope.” James shrugged. “Don’t know what you think, but we’re tossing all the stuff you left behind the minute you leave.”

“I get your room.” Drew piped up jokingly.

“No, I’m gonna need it back at Christmas.” Harry frowned. “You can’t keep it.”

“You’d never know if we just all slept in there and then turned it back into a pigsty before you get home.” Sarah shrugged.

“It’s already kind of a mess…” Mattie sighed, offering up Harry’s books. “Maybe we can clean it!”

“You should totally do that.” Harry grinned, taking the books from his youngest brother. “Maybe I’ll bring you back something cool if you give me proof.”

“Harry, don’t bribe your siblings.” Lily admonished, smoothing her hand through his hair. She leaned down to plant a kiss on his forehead before smoothing out his robes. “Alright, your father will be there if anything too terrible comes up, and we’ll owl as often as we can. You’ll be alright, of course?”

“Amma, don’t worry so much.” Harry groused, straightening out his robes. “I’m going to be fine. Just watch, I’m going to have the most boring term of my life.”


“Oh, you jinxed it!” Anne frowned from around her father’s legs.
“Don’t be silly- that doesn’t work!” Drew insisted.

“I can totally handle whatever comes my way.” Harry shrugged. “Plus, I’ve got Ron for the other stuff.”

“Don’t drag me into your messes,” Ron grumbled, shuffling his feet. “C’mon, we’re gonna miss the train!”

“Yeah!” Harry hurried toward the train, trying to at least pretend he was doing most of the work while James helped him load his trunk onto the train. “I bet this is going to be awesome.”

“Keep saying that and you’ll end up with mini Remus and mini Sirius as your roommates. And believe me, that gets really uncomfortable around about fifth year.” James pulled a face.

Harry dragged the trunk into the compartment he’d chosen, shoving it under the seat before stretching out on the chair. “Come on, Dad, you’ll see me in a few hours. You don’t have to be so clingy.”

“In a few hours, I can take points from Gryffindor for that kind of sass, young man.” James ruffled Harry’s hair before clapping Ron on the shoulder. “Be good. You too, Ron.”

“Yes, sir.” Ron rolled his eyes, grinning brightly as he flung himself into the train compartment.

“See you kids later, then.” James waved before getting off the train just in time, hurrying back over to his family. “Charu, I’m giving him five and a half. Looks about ready to break, in there.” Sarah nodded at her father, looking quite convinced.

“You’re all terrible,” Lily decided.

“You married into it, love.” James laughed. “I think it’s your own fault, on that count.”

The Hogwarts Express gave one last, particularly large puff of scarlet smoke before starting to pull out of the station, and Harry leaned nearly a quarter of the way out of the window to wave at his parents one last time before sitting back down.

“Wow.” Harry heaved a great sigh, leaning back against the seat. “We’re gonna be away from home for three whole months.”

“Hogwarts is gonna be great! Fred and George told me there are a bunch of secret passages. Gits wouldn’t tell me where to look, though.” Ron snorted, already kicking his bag under the seat.

“No kidding!” Harry’s eyes widened. “Dad has a whole map of Hogwarts and he wouldn’t show me it!”

“Where the bloody hell did he get one of those?!”

“Uncle Remus wouldn’t say, but he said Dad had one.” Harry pouted. “Bet he’ll show it to everyone else but me.”

“Probably figures your sister’ll use it to find studying places. Or something.” Ron shrugged, lounging back in the chair.

“Yeah.” Harry snorted, crossing his arms. “Bet the rest of them aren’t even going to try and have fun.”

“Wouldn’t count on it. Drew likes Quidditch enough that he might make something of himself, at
least.” Ron scratched at his nose, frowning. “Enough about them, though. They’ve got another few years to wait.”

“Yeah. We’re going to be fifth years when Sarah joins.” Harry’s eyes went wide as he tried to process the concept. “Whoa.”

“Wicked.” Ron agreed, his words only slightly breathless.

“Bet I’ll be taller than you by then.” Harry sat up straighter in his seat.

“You’re on.”

“Yeah.” Harry grinned. “I’m gonna be super tall and cool like my dad, I bet.”

“Excuse me?” A girl was tapping on the door of their compartment, which they’d left slightly open, and Harry stood up to open it all the way. Her skin was darker than Harry’s, something he’d hardly seen before, and her bushy dark hair was tied back in a ponytail. She’d already changed into the uniform, looking entirely ready to start school in a split second, and Harry wilted slightly under her gaze, feeling like he’d already lost at some sort of competition.

She seemed to notice Harry’s apprehension and smiled in his direction, before wrinkling her nose when she noticed Ron. “Have you boys seen a toad? A boy named Neville’s lost one.”

“Nev’s toad? Trevor?” Harry chuckled. “He’s lost him about six times this summer. Trevor always turns up eventually.”

“He always hops on back. Neville needs to calm down about it.” Ron snorted, propping his chin on his hand.

“Hey, Ron, cool down. Trevor’s important to him and stuff.” Harry shrugged, before turning to Hermione. “I’m Harry Potter. What’s your name?”

“I’m Hermione Granger.” She stuck out her hand and Harry shook it eagerly. “Harry Potter? You’re Lily Potter’s son, aren’t you? I’ve read all the books about her!”

“She’s really mean in real life.” Harry huffed, grimacing. “Makes me go to bed fifteen minutes before my bedtime just to make sure I fall asleep on time.”

“Oh yeah, real menace, she is.” Ron rolled his eyes, kicking the back of Harry’s leg. “I’m Ron Weasley.”

“Pleasure.” She looked him over carefully, frowning slightly. “Did you know that you have dirt on your nose?”

He quickly brought a hand up, scratching at one side of his nose.

“It’s just— just there.” She reached over to move his hand just slightly up. “You boys should start getting ready. We’re almost there, you know.”

“Well, we can’t change with you here!” Ron protested, dropping his hand.

“I’ll see you boys at the Sorting, then.” Hermione shot an accusing glance at Ron before turning around and walking out, shutting the compartment loudly behind her.

“Mate, you have no idea how to deal with girls, do you?” Harry pulled a face, shuddering.

“Why would I need to talk to girls? I’ve already got to deal with Ginny.”
“There are going to be girls everywhere, now. You’ve got to know not to make them angry and stuff.” Harry shrugged before digging his uniform out of his trunk. “You kind of learn that early when your mum’s easily the most dangerous witch in ages and your dad’s a complete tosser.”

“Your dad’s pretty cool. If you’re looking for a tosser, look no further than Arthur Weasley.” He yawned, continuing to lounge in his seat, legs propped up against Harry’s.

“Your dad’s the coolest, are you kidding?.” Harry struggled with his tie before managing some approximation of a neat knot. “I’m just not going to touch this for the whole year.”

A corner of a jam-stained Gryffindor tie peeked out from under a book, in his still open trunk, and he tucked it back under the book’s cover as quickly as possible, hoping Ron hadn’t seen it. He’d found some of his parents’ school things during the latest attic hunt he’d gone on with his siblings, and had crammed his trunk full of little things he could fit inside books and between folded clothes. He closed the trunk, latching it shut before sitting back down. “You should probably get dressed, I mean, she said we’ll be there soon.”

He waved his hand, obviously unimpressed. “We have plenty of time. I’ll change in a minute or two.”

“Sure.” Harry stared out the window at the passing scenery, sighing deeply. He’d acted like the results of his Sorting wouldn’t be a big deal ever since he’d got the letter, with a few notable exceptions, but he was worried that he might embarrass himself. Especially in front of that Malfoy boy.

After several minutes, Ron stood to begin changing into his robes. They were worn hand-me-downs from his older brothers, but he took no mind of it. The scenery outside the train was slowly beginning to change, and the sky darkened as evening approached.

The whistle blew about ten minutes later, as they pulled into Hogsmeade station, and Harry jumped up from his seat as the train pulled to a stop, nearly running out of the compartment in his eagerness to have the night over and done with.

“Come on, Ron!” He called, and nearly bumped straight into Hagrid, who grinned, ruffling Harry’s hair.

“Would you look at that, little Harry’s all grown up!” Harry threw his arms around Hagrid, squeezing tight for a split second, before joining the throng of other students. “First years, this way! First years!”

Ron gaped at Hagrid for a moment, though he only quickened his pace to keep up with Harry. “Blimey! Who was that?” He asked in hushed awe. “He’s huge!”

“That’s Hagrid. A friend of Mum and Dad’s. He works at the school.” The line began moving out of the station and towards the large lake and Harry shuddered. The surface looked as if it were frozen solid and it did not look like the kind of lake one would enjoy falling in. “Dad says there’s a real squid in there. A giant one.”

“That can’t be true. He’s pulling your leg.” Ron said. Despite his confident words, he cast a wary look towards the lake.

“He’s not kidding.” Harry shook his head as he climbed into one of the boats Hagrid was directing him towards. “Did you know my Grandpa Potter fell in when he was a first year? There wasn’t a squid back then, though.”
“Where the hell did it come from?” Ron peered over the edge of the boat, wondering if it was safe to be sailing across the lake like this.

“Dad says probably Hagrid, but I’m not sure.” Harry shrugged as Neville and Hermione climbed into the boat. “Apparently he keeps bringing dangerous animals places and getting in trouble.”

“Then why doesn’t he stop doing it?” Ron settled back into his seat as the boats started to glide across the water.

“Dunno. Guess he likes scary things.” Harry shrugged. Neville was holding tightly onto Trevor, who did not seem very fond of boat travel. “Oh, you found him!”

“Yeah! He was under my jacket the whole time!” Neville grinned, patting his toad on the head softly. “I forgot I’d left him there!”

“So what houses do you think you’ll be in?” Hermione spoke up as the castle came into view. “I think anything but Slytherin sounds alright, but I really would like to be in Gryffindor.”

“Gryffindor.” Harry nodded. “My parents, uncles and everyone I know were there, so I’ll probably be in Gryffindor too.”

“My whole family has been in Gryffindor. Not going to change that now.” Ron shrugged.

“My mum says any house is a good house, so I shouldn't worry.” Neville piped up. “Both my parents were Gryffindors, but they say it’s alright if I’m not.”

“This is coming from a place of love, Nev, but you wouldn’t last a day in Gryffindor.” Harry reached across the boat to pat his friend’s knee, accidentally scaring Trevor, who wriggled in Neville’s grasp.

“It’s alright.” Neville blushed. “I kind of figured that.”

“No hard feelings, of course, but I have to side with Harry.” Ron nodded.

“It’s alright, I mean, I’m not upset.” Neville shrugged, his grip on Trevor slipping, but managed to keep the toad from hopping away. “What do you think they’ll have us do?”

“Mum says that what Fred and George said about the troll was complete and utter bollocks.” Harry shrugged. “Apparently it’s just something really simple.”

“Did neither of you read Hogwarts, A History?” Hermione blinked in surprise when Harry shoved his head between his knees, groaning.

“That load of rubbish? Haven’t even picked it up yet.” Ron replied.

The boat docked just in time to distract Hermione from a reply, which Harry was quite thankful for, as he wanted to start Hogwarts with more than just Neville as a friend. He hopped off the boat and onto the dock before hanging back to help Hermione and Neville rather than run ahead.

“Hey, Hermione, right?” Harry looked to the girl, smiling brightly. She turned to him, an expression of mild surprise on her face, and he reached out a hand to pull her out of the boat and onto the platform. Hermione looked almost dazed as she stared at the bright lights of the castle looming before them and Harry remembered his mother’s stories about how wondrous it was to come to this castle, having never known magic before.

“You know”, he began, slightly cautious, “it would be pretty cool if you sat with us. I haven’t
read Hogwarts, A History yet and I bet there’s all sorts of facts in there.”

Hermione’s face lit up at his question and she nodded eagerly. “Thanks, Harry.”

“Hey, no problem.” He shrugged. “More people makes for better conversations.”

The group of first years began trailing in through the grand front entrance, many peering about eagerly. Portraits lining the walls crowded together, waving enthusiastically to greet their new guests.

Harry stuck to the middle of the pack, hoping to blend into the crowd if he was surrounded by enough people, but he saw a familiar set of grey eyes a few people over and knew that wasn’t to be.

“Ron. We need to switch places.” Harry whispered. “Now.”

“Huh? What are you going on about-?”

“Well, if it isn’t Harry Potter.”

“...Yeah, that’s what I was going on about.” Harry sighed, turning to face Malfoy. “I am, in fact, Harry Potter. Good on you for figuring that out.”

Draco smirked, looking all the more confident now that he had two bulky first years crowded behind him. “Who are your little friends?”

“Neville’s got a toad that likes to roll in trash, so be ready. Once he grabs onto you, he probably won’t let go.” Harry smirked back, raising an eyebrow.

“I’d think rolling in trash would be more suited to your own tastes, Potter.” He spit the name out like it was poison on his tongue.

“I pride myself on having some class, Malfoy.” Harry frowned. “I don’t just decide not to like people because they look different. And neither do my friends.”

“Uh, right!” Ron cut in, raising his fists as though preparing for a fight. The look of disdain on Malfoy’s face did nothing to sway the wizard.

“Well I’m certain you’ll all be... very happy wherever you end up. If the hat doesn’t decide to kick you out right off the bat, that is.” He sniffed.

“I’d like to think that the hat knows better than to put you anywhere, Malfoy.” Harry smirked, rolling his eyes. “You can go ahead and run home to Daddy. We won’t tell anyone.”

“I could say the same to you- though I suppose you won’t have to do much running to find your father. Since he’s taken up the job of your personal babysitter.” Draco smirked right back at him, arms crossed loosely over his thin chest.

“I don’t need a babysitter, Malfoy. I’m surprised your house elf hasn’t followed you this far.” Harry noticed a teacher approaching and lowered his voice. “Not time for a nappy change yet?”

Draco opened his mouth to respond, but was interrupted by the booming voice of the instructor, a middle aged woman with rectangular glasses. She smiled at Harry, who shot a triumphant glance at Draco, before looking as innocent as possible once the professor looked his way.

“Welcome to Hogwarts.” The professor’s eyes swept over the crowd of first years before her.
“The start of term banquet will begin shortly. But before you take your seats, you will be sorted into one of the four houses—Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin. Your house will be like your family, while you are at Hogwarts, and the House that performs the best in and out of the classroom is awarded the House Cup at the end of the year.”

Harry chuckled, remembering that Gryffindor had won the House Cup quite often, except for a seven year drought in the seventies, oddly coinciding with the time his parents spent at the school.

“The Sorting Ceremony will take place in front of the rest of the school in a few moments. Please wait quietly.” The professor went back up the stairs and Harry rolled his shoulders, looking to Ron and Hermione.

“Hopefully it’s not too embarrassing.”

“You and Malfoy said something about a hat.” Ron frowned, looking uneasy. The nerves were probably getting to him.


“The Sorting Hat’s been at Hogwarts for centuries.” Hermione added. “Hogwarts, A History says that it once belonged to Godric Gryffindor.”

“Hopefully that’s a good sign.” The redhead grumbled in response.

“Come on, Ron, lighten up.” Harry ruffled his friend’s hair. “You’ll be just fine, I bet.”

The professor reemerged just as he said that, motioning for all the students to form a line, and Harry made sure he was sandwiched between Ron and Hermione rather than anywhere near Draco.

The grand doors to the great hall opened of their own accord, and the first years began to trail through. The four tables stretched across the massive room, laden with shining dishes. The benches were filled with excited students, all craning their necks to get a good look at the fresh meat.

Candles hung in the air, suspended hundreds of feet above their heads. Ron tilted his head back, whistling in appreciation. “Blimey, that’s huge.” He said, unintentionally repeating his words from earlier.

Harry spotted his father at the head table, looking distinctly uncomfortable at his place between Professor Flitwick and a very familiar face. Severus Snape’s face was contorted in disgust, between being seated next to James Potter and looking directly at James Potter’s son and Harry considered starting a staring contest, just to make him more uncomfortable, before deciding he wasn’t that mean.

James waved when he noticed Harry looking in his direction and Harry grinned, moving to wave back enthusiastically for realizing he would have looked like a little kid by doing so. He settled for a thumbs up instead before watching as the professor from earlier unrolled a large scroll and began reading names.

They stood in silence broken only by hushed whispers as the first student was called up to the stool. The hat had barely grazed her hair before it was screaming, “HUFFLEPUFF!” The table erupted into cheers, and the girl ran off to join her house mates.

A few Sortings later, Hermione’s name was called, and she walked up to the stool, seating herself comfortably before the hat was placed on her head. It seemed puzzled for a few seconds, before
yelling out Gryffindor almost twice as loudly, as if to make up for its indecision.

Ron’s name was called a few later, and he clapped Harry on the shoulder before hurrying to the stool. A group of redheads at Gryffindor table leaned back in their seats, and the twins gave premature hoots as the hat was lowered. It immediately declared Ron a Gryffindor, and he hurried over to the table. Relief was apparent on his features, despite his own confidence in being placed there.

Harry was left with only Neville for company to watch Draco practically strut up to the front of the room. The smug smile on his face never wavered as he was placed into Slytherin, the hat barely touching his head before announcing its judgment. The rightmost side of the room erupted into cheers as he went to sit down. Harry shuddered, nodding along. If he were the hat, he wouldn’t want to touch Draco’s head either.

Harry gulped as Neville went up to the stool, nearly falling off in his nervousness. The hat was on his head for a few minutes, just as it had been with Hermione, and seemed almost puzzled, if a hat could be that, when it yelled “Hufflepuff” to the hall. Neville, with Trevor still clutched in his hands, hurried over to the table draped in yellow and black.

“Harry Potter”, the professor called out, and the whole hall fell silent.

Harry, trying his best to look brave, strode up to the stool, sitting up as straight as possible as the hat was placed on his head. There was a moment of deafening silence throughout the great hall, and anything Harry might have heard was muffled by the worn fabric of the hat.

‘Hmm… Harry Potter, eh?’ The voice seemed to reverberate through his head, impossibly loud and impossibly soft at the same time. ‘Interesting… You possess the courage of a Gryffindor. The loyalty of a Hufflepuff. The focus of a Ravenclaw. The ambition of a Slytherin… Oh yes… You would do well in Slytherin.’

“No Slytherin.” Harry whispered, frowning slightly. The other students all seemed to be staring at him and he tried his best not to show any weakness. “No Slytherin.”

“What’s this?’ The voice whispered in his ear. ‘Not Slytherin…?’

“No Slytherin.” Harry said, a little more confident this time.

‘If not Slytherin, then…’

“GRYFFINDOR!”

Harry eagerly hopped off the stool and ran to his classmates, seating himself between Ron and Hermione. “Hey, look, I made it!”

“You had me worried for a minute!” Ron joked, shoving at Harry’s shoulder.

“It did take awhile.” Harry shrugged. “But Hermione’s took awhile too, didn’t it?”

“Not as long as yours.” She looked him over. “You were up there for a few minutes and you started talking to yourself too.”

“Yeah, what was up with that?”

“Nothing at all.” Harry shrugged, still slightly off balance due to the Hat saying that he would have done well in Slytherin. “So, Ron, I’m going to be rooming with you with seven whole years.”
Ron didn’t give a response, just raising his hand for a high five.

“As always, I have a few words.” The headmaster stood up and the hall fell entirely silent as he rose from his chair, as if by magic. Although, Harry mused, it probably was by magic, as Fred and George seemed to be entirely puzzled by their inability to so much as whisper without getting caught. “Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Let the feast begin.” He sat down, smiling, and Harry could tell that he was hardly the only one puzzled by the speech.

The food appeared just in time to distract him and he immediately shifted his focus to dinner, not having realized how hungry he was. The confusion caused by the Hat had faded to a mild buzzing in the back of his head, which would likely resolve itself if he wrote home like he was planning to, as soon as he got up to the dormitory.

The headmaster looked over the crowd of students, as he stood a second time, before his eyes settled on Harry. “Students would do well to remember that both the Forbidden Forest and third floor corridor are off limits to anyone who does not wish to die a most painful death.” Harry shuddered, remembering his mother’s mention of something scary always being in Hogwarts, and tuned out the rest of the speech, only realizing that people had started singing the school song when Fred and George closed out the end alone.

After that had finished up, the prefects started leading the first years to their dormitories. Ron, Harry and Hermione followed quickly up the shifting staircases. The excitement of the night was beginning to wane now that they had eaten and the sun had set.

Percy, Ron’s brother, was the Prefect in charge of the Gryffindors, and had hardly let them forget it all summer. Once they reached the portrait that led to the Gryffindor dormitories, a lady in a pink dress, Percy said the password, causing the portrait to swing sharply to the left, barely missing Ron as it revealed a doorway.

“Boys, up the stairs and to the left. Girls, same thing, but to the right.” Percy called out, as Harry nearly dragged Ron up the stairs, calling out a quick goodbye to Hermione before they found their dormitory.

Harry nearly threw himself onto the bed closest to the window, claiming it before his best friend could even get halfway across the room, and grinned when he noticed his trunk was at the foot of it. “That was lucky.”

Ron flopped across the bed next to Harry’s, grumbling in what might have been agreement. “I’m ready to sleep for about fifteen years.”

“Can’t sleep for that long.” Harry groaned, suddenly remembering. “We have school tomorrow.”
“Ten points from Gryffindor.” A deep voice intoned from behind them. Ron jumped, whirling around. A spindly figure loomed behind the trio, nearly drowning in his flowing black teaching robes, and stared down his hooked nose at the trio with an aura of languid disdain.

“For what, Professor?” Harry tried to look as innocent as possible, but only earned a sneer for his efforts.

“For speaking of a Professor out of turn.” He responded, already moving towards the front of the room.

“I don’t know about you two, but Potions sounds incredibly interesting!” Hermione gushed, clutching her book to her chest. She looked far more put together than both of her entirely disheveled companions, the taller of whom was trying to yank his robes back into place while still hiding the burn marks from when his second oldest brother, Charlie, had a bad experience with a particularly volatile salamander in his first year. Harry, on the other hand, looked unusually pensive while leading the group, as he knew his way around Hogwarts better than the rest. “I’ve heard that our Professor was one of the youngest wizards to ever get a Mastery in any subject.”

“Uncle Sirius warned me about him.” Harry nodded, thoughtfully staring at the ceiling as they entered the dungeon room. It felt oddly forbidding, like they weren’t meant to be there, and he supposed most of that was due to the bat-like teacher he remembered seeing once or twice as a child. “He said to be good or that Snape would use me as an experiment. Apparently, he tests his potions on the first years he doesn’t like. And he hates dad, so he’d take me in a second.”

“Fred and George told me that sometimes first years go missing, and that he’s gone and stuffed them into his supply cupboard. Bet he chops them up to use in the potions.” Ron whispered conspiratorially, his eyes flitting over his shoulders as though looking for some invisible eavesdropper.

“I don’t know what books you’re reading, but I’ve never seen one that calls for chopped up children.” Hermione looked fearful for a second before shrugging.

“I bet Mum would know. I should ask.” Harry mused aloud. “She wouldn’t tell, though.”

“That’s cause she’s your mum,” Ron harrumphed, his hand moving to rub against the worn strap of his satchel. “Bet she isn’t allowed to tell you.”

“Dad would tell us that we’re making potions that require chopped up kids on the first day.” Harry scowled. “And probably send one of the triplets too.”

“Your father sounds horrible.” Hermione winced. “Don’t we have his class after Potions?”

“Yup.” Harry said glumly as they entered the classroom, lowering his voice just in case Snape, who was not in the classroom, was listening in. “At least he won’t pick on us for being Gryffindors. Snape does a lot of that.”
“Big git, he is.” Ron muttered, taking a seat. “Probably just jealous he didn’t get sorted into it when he was a student.”

“All the other houses have positive qualities too.” Hermione shrugged. “You’re biased, Ronald. You’ve been surrounded by Gryffindors all your life, so of course you think he’s jealous that he’s not one of you.”

“Mione’s got a point, Ron.” Harry shifted a little closer to her in jest, crossing his arms.

“Am not!” He insisted as a deep frown settling over his features. “Didn’t he used to be friends with your mum, Harry? And then they got sorted into different houses. He definitely wanted to be a Gryffindor.”

“Not gonna lie, I’m pretty sure he just wanted my mom to have no friends and be lonely like him.” Harry shrugged. “I guess it would have been more convenient for him if she were in Slytherin?”

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"For what, Professor?" Harry tried to look as innocent as possible, but only earned a sneer for his efforts.

“For speaking of a Professor out of turn.” He responded, already moving towards the front of the room.

"Uncle Sirius was so right about him." Harry muttered under his breath, clenching his hands into fists under the table. "Dad said to play nice, but he's impossible!"

"We’ve only just met him and I want to drop out of his class.” Ron grumbled.

"That's entirely unjust. Harry didn't even do anything!” Hermione frowned. "I'm pretty sure he can't do that.”

“If you don’t wish to lose more points, I suggest you stop whispering amongst yourselves and begin paying attention.” Snape’s voice carried back to the trio.

"I guess I'll give it a shot.” Harry turned towards the teacher, quill and parchment ready for note taking.

“I do hope, Mr. Potter, that you don’t expect special treatment in this class. Whoever your parents may be, I assure you your own merit will be judged…. independently.” Snape cast a withering glance across the class before moving to begin his lesson.

Harry eagerly began taking notes as Professor Snape began the lesson. His mother had been very good at Potions while at school, enough that Professor Slughorn, who Harry detested, still came around every once in awhile to visit, and he had very much enjoyed helping her with ingredient preparation as a child.

Ron only frowned at the front of the room, occasionally glancing over at Harry’s notes.

Harry’s handwriting, although far from neat or acceptable, was legible enough in most places for Ron to get the information he needed. They both knew that they’d likely check against Hermione’s notes later, since her handwriting was far neater than Harry’s, and therefore, a much more reliable source of information. Ron had already copied down that Boil Cure Potion required
Fungus Onions rather than Pungous Onions, and Harry winced, wondering how that would come back to ruin them.

“Potter. What would you get if you were to add powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?” Harry looked up from his notes, startling slightly as he found Snape looming over him, and swallowed hard.

Hermione raised her hand, but the professor ignored her.

"The Draught of Living Death", Harry replied, as calmly as he could, given the situation. For once, he was thankful for the summer reading his mother had set him.

Snape regarded him coldly, before nodding once.

Harry returned to copying whatever he'd missed from the board as Snape, who may have even looked disappointed at his success, strode back to the front of the classroom and picked another Gryffindor to chastise.

After a lesson on the properties of each ingredient, Snape had them start brewing the Boil Cure Potion.

The first years split up into small groups in order to brew, and Harry, Ron, Hermione, as well as Dean and Seamus, the other two boys from Harry and Ron's dormitory, all tried their best to pair off within their House despite the odd number. Harry immediately claimed Hermione as a partner and no one wanted to separate Dean and Seamus, who glowered at anyone who even approached them.

Ron, having not moved fast enough, was stuck with a weedy looking Slytherin by the name of Theodore Nott, who Harry could have sworn was the only person in their year taller than Ron. Ron seemed incredibly uncomfortable with this, but put on a brave face and began to divvy up the ingredients.

Harry concentrated on his own potion, preparing the ingredients so that Hermione could add them. By the end of the lesson, they'd managed to reach and exceed the standard for passing that Snape had set, thanks to a few tricks Harry had remembered.

Seamus, however, was not that lucky. Just as Snape called for samples from every group, the contents of his cauldron exploded, sending up a plume of flame that missed his face by mere centimeters.

The classmates in the surrounding vicinity ducked, some even hiding beneath their tables. Ron, in a feat of astounding agility, had managed to completely hide himself beneath his own work station before peering cautiously over the top once the sounds of panic had faded. The tense silence that followed was interrupted by a long-suffering sigh from the resident Potions Master.

Harry barely stifled a chuckle at the sight of Seamus' face, but no one seemed more surprised than Seamus himself, despite his disastrous showing in Charms an hour before.

"Blimey." Dean's jaw dropped in awe. "Everything you touch blows up, doesn't it?"

“It’s not like I mean to!” Seamus protested, staring in dismay at the still smoking cauldron, which, if one were to look at the bottom, seemed to be melting.

"At least we've got defense next. Dad might blow up something bigger than a cauldron." Harry shrugged. "Like a student."
“Doubt he’d be able to rival good old Seamus here.” Ron said.

“Have you seen him trying to help Mum with Potions stuff?” Harry snorted, shaking his head as he gathered up his things. He shot a glare at Snape, who hovered menacingly by his desk, before marching out of the room with Ron and Hermione close behind him. The staircase loomed before him and Harry took the stairs two at a time, as was his habit. “It’s a mess if I’ve ever seen one.”

“My mum gets all worked up when she visits,” Ron confirmed, shuffling after Harry with Hermione hot on their heels. “Demands to help Aunt Lily clean up.”

Harry located the Defense classroom and took a seat at one of the desks in the middle, not wanting to seem too eager. The book, although dull, had been captivating in its descriptions of Dark creatures, despite the fact that it had included werewolves among them and Harry knew, for a fact, that most werewolves were harmless librarians by day and prodigious cookie bakers by night.

His housemates were already filing in, taking seats nearby. Ron was leaning back in his chair, whispering to Dean and Seamus, the latter of whom was still wiping soot from his face.

“Morning, class!” James shut the door of the office behind him, a thick stack of papers tucked under one arm as he ran down the stairs to face his class. “It’s nice to finally see some Gryffindors, isn’t it?”

The class settled down, many turning to stare at James in what might have been awe. Hermione was especially excited, whispering something about James and Lily being in all of the defense books concerning the late twentieth century, but Harry, who had heard at least half of it before, only glowered in his father’s direction before putting his head down on the desk and resigning himself to another hour of boredom.

“So, the first year syllabus says we’re going to be learning about werewolves and curing bites today, so settle in for a fun ride.” James turned to the board, scrambling to find the piece of chalk before writing out the points he’d scrawled on the back of his hand.

“Werewolves.” Harry snorted. “As if no one knows about that.”

“If you’re going to cause trouble, Harry, do it a little more quietly.” James called out, without missing a beat, and Dean and Seamus thankfully had the decency to laugh quietly.


“He’s not scary at all.” Hermione whispered in awe, just as James turned around, and he chuckled, shaking his head.

“To be quite honest, I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing.” He shrugged. “Right, so they want us to teach you how to heal werewolf bites, so you’re probably going to want to know whether you got bitten by a werewolf in the first place or if it’s just a really angry gray dog.”

There was a general murmur of amusement throughout the class, which James took as a cue to continue.

“Being bitten by a werewolf at any time other than the full moon will just kind of make you angry a lot and maybe make you like raw meat a little too much to be socially acceptable, but if you’re bitten by a werewolf at the full moon, powdered silver and dittany will seal the wound, but at a great cost.” James looked far more serious than Harry had ever seen him before, and Harry frowned, confused by this. “The mixture will seal the wound, but the bitten individual will change at every full moon for the rest of their lives. Loads of witches and wizards have stated that they’d rather die than be a werewolf, which is a shame because it’s quite manageable, really, if you’ve
“But professor… They’re… werewolves.” The statement came from the back of the class, and seemed mostly confused.

“They’re still human for all but one day of the month, kid.” James shrugged. “If you look at it, a werewolf’s only really a wolf twelve nights a year, for just a couple hours, at most. That’s barely anything, compared to the other three hundred and fifty-three days, right?”

“But they’re dangerous.” One of the first year girls from Gryffindor asked, raising her hand in confusion. Harry recognized her from a few of his earlier birthday parties, before inviting girls who weren’t related to him became uncool. Her family tended to come over for holidays and things even now, and Harry distinctly remembered making her sister cry by waving a sparkler a little too close to a squirrel a few years ago. “Aren’t they?”

“Most are just like the rest of us, Miss Patil. Waiting on dinner.” James cracked a smile and the tension in the room faded a little bit. “Werewolves are all different just like people are all different. There’s going to be good and bad in everything. Best thing you can do for yourself is make sure you fall in with the right sort. Any questions?”

Several hands shot into the air.

“Uh, you on the left.” James pointed. “Hit me with your best shot.”

“Is it true you fought He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?” A girl asked in a hushed tone. Her eyes were wide and curious, and soon James found himself faced with a classroom of students waiting in rapt silence.

“It’s true.” James nodded sharply, looking around at the other still raised hands. “Anybody else?”

“Is it true he doesn’t have a nose?” A voice piped up from the middle of the room.

“I’ve seen his face before and it’s not something I’d like to do again. Let’s leave it at that.” James shrugged, his smile a little strained. “Any questions about the lesson?”

There was a long silence before a hand slowly rose into the air. “Um… On closing the wound? Do you have to do that within a specific time limit…? Before you… die, or something.”

“As soon as possible.” James nodded. “The sooner you close it, the less it’ll scar.”

“You mean you can’t prevent the scarring entirely?” Hermione raised her hand a second after she began speaking. “But doesn’t magical healing usually prevent scars?”

“Werewolf bites and strong curses are exceptions to that.” James grinned, thankful for Hermione’s input. “Injuries caused by either of those things cannot be entirely erased, or even permanently healed in some cases. It’s why werewolves are often identified by their scars.”

Harry hesitantly raised his hand, a question forming in the back of his head, and winced when James called on him. “Err-- Professor-- Da-- Professor Potter, uh, what kind of curses would leave scars that bad?”

“Ones you won’t learn for a couple years at least.” James winked, hoping Harry hadn’t brought too much attention to himself with his slip up. Judging by the snickers from the other side of the classroom, he was entirely wrong on that count. Just then, luckily enough, the bell rang, and Harry hastily scooped up his things, nearly running for the door.
He was stilled by a hand on his shoulder, and looked up to see his father, looking about ready to combust. “Did I do alright?”

“Loads better than Snape, Dad.” Harry grinned, elbowing his father in the side. “That bit about werewolves being human most of the time? Priceless. I’m writing home about it.”

“It’s Professor Potter, to you, young man.” James said, trying to look as solemn as possible as he shook his finger at Harry, who snickered. “I should give you detention for disrespect.”

“Snape already took house points away for it.” Ron complained, still hanging in the doorway.

“Snape’s tough on you kids, I’ll agree to that, but he’s not all bad. Give him a chance, at least.” James shrugged and Harry stepped back, nearly tripping over the leg of a desk in his outrage.

“He did give us a lot of information we couldn’t have gotten anywhere else.” Hermione pointed out. “Not that you didn’t, Professor.”

“No offense taken, Miss…” James frowned, looking back at the seating chart on his desk. “Granger, right?”

Hermione nodded eagerly, happy that one of her professors had recognized her.

“You know, Hermione, you remind me of someone.” James chuckled, looking over at the clock. “You should get going. The good jam runs out within five minutes.”

“You’re really not scary at all, are you?” Hermione blurted out, before looking extremely ashamed. “I-- Professor, I’m sorry.”

“These boys have stuffed you full of stories, haven’t they?” James shook his head, throwing his hands up. “Look, sure, I got in a couple tussles with the big guys back in the day, but I’m really not terrifying. If you want terrifying, stand behind Snape for more than two seconds without introducing yourself.”

“What happens then?” Hermione asked, leaning in slightly.

“Horrors untold.” He winked before waving them off. “Head off to lunch, nerds. I’ll see you around later. Harry, don’t forget to brush your teeth after.”

“You’re gross.” Harry scowled at his father before nearly dragging Ron and Hermione to the Great Hall for lunch. The rest of the day was hardly eventful, with History of Magic turning out exactly as boring as everyone but Uncle Remus had promised it would, and, after getting ready for bed, he took out a free roll of parchment and a quill, he finally began his first letter home.

Dear Everyone,

You won’t believe how fun school is...
Youngest In A Century

Chapter Summary

“Well, Hogwarts was nice.” Harry looked around the grounds mournfully. “Mum’ll be mad. She was hoping I’d last a full term, at least.”

Chapter Notes

And, with this chapter, we move into the main plot of HPSS! Next week’s chapter, which will be set within universe at Halloween, is probably going to be more filler than anything else.

Don’t worry, though, we’ll have Harry back in trouble soon enough.

“We have flying first! With the Slytherins!” Harry hurriedly shoveled his oatmeal into his mouth, as if consuming breakfast faster would speed up time. “I can’t wait to show Malfoy who’s boss.”

“We’re gonna kick his butt.” Ron spoke around his mouthful of toast, blue eyes blazing with the sheer force of his words.

“I don’t know what the appeal is.” Hermione sounded the tiniest bit jittery as she pushed her cereal around her bowl with a fork. “It’s dangerous and there are probably less time consuming and safer methods of transportation.”

“Yeah, but Quidditch.” Harry pointed his spoon her way, too gleeful at the prospect of being allowed back on a broom to look properly threatening.

“You don’t get it,” Ron swallowed, “I mean, you’re muggleborn and all, so you don’t get it. Quidditch is the best.”

“It seems really dangerous, from what I’ve read. Apparently people go missing and get injured badly!” She swallowed hard. “Hogwarts, A History has a whole section on horrible injuries in matches at the school!”

“Wicked.” Harry grinned.

“Seriously? That’s a chapter I’d read!” Ron yanked his bag up onto the bench beside him, beginning to rummage through his things.

Harry grinned, leaving the last bit of his oatmeal untouched as he nearly tripped over himself in an effort to get up the quickest. “If we get there early, we can grab the better brooms!”

Hermione reluctantly got up, still looking nervous. “Older brooms are easier to handle, right?”

“Except for the butt splinters, yeah, more or less.” Harry shrugged.
“Just wear extra padding.” Ron grabbed a strip of bacon as he got to his feet, promptly stuffing it into his mouth. The trio swept through the great hall and towards the grounds, Harry and Ron racing ahead as Hermione barely kept up.

They reached the Quidditch pitch not five minutes later, and Harry could barely contain himself when he saw the rows of brooms laid out for the first years to try. The teacher was nowhere to be seen, but he didn’t dare risk something like the ability to play Quidditch over having some fun. That would be irresponsible.

The other students showed up in small groups. Slytherin girls giggled to the side, and Seamus and Dean could be seen arguing in hushed tones over something partially obscured by Dean’s robes.

Eventually, the object of Harry’s ire made his grand appearance. Draco swept across the lawn, Crabbe and Goyle hot on his heels.

Harry sighed, running a hand through his hair. If there was one thing he was focused on, it was getting the better of Malfoy. No one shamed the name of Potter and got away alive. Likewise, the sneer on Draco’s face seemed to lend to the idea that he thought the same of his own family.

“Potter.” He greeted curtly.

“Malfoy.” Harry frowned, not even glancing in Malfoy’s direction.

It was then that the teacher decided to appear.

Madame Hooch strode towards the gathered group of students, broom already clasped tightly in one gloved hand. ‘Gather round!’

Harry eagerly stepped forward, followed by Hermione, who was far more tentative about her displays of enthusiasm. Ron peered down at the brooms all lined up in the grass, obviously trying to determine which was the best one.

Madame Hooch began directing the students, shooing them into position. There were two separate lines, one facing the other, and each student was placed in front of a broom. ‘Now. Hold out your hand, and command the broom to rise. A simple exclamation of ‘up!’ should suffice.’

“Up!” Harry nearly yelled, and the broom immediately flew up into his outstretched hand. He grinned, looking around, and grew even happier when he realized that he was one of the few people whose brooms had immediately jumped into their hands.

Hermione’s broom, as if sensing her apprehension, did a few interesting rolls across the grass while she glared at it.

Ron seemed to be having similar problems with his broom, if the mumbled complaints were anything to go by. Draco stood a few people down the line, broom firmly held in one hand. He watched the group with a gaze that was equal parts bored and haughty. When it finally landed on Harry, he offered only an antagonizing smirk.

Hermione’s broom finally flew up into her hand and she sighed in relief, looking over at Harry, who shot her a thumbs up.

After the majority of student’s had gotten the broom into their hands, Ron’s slapping him in the face before settling into his hand, the professor directed them to mount the brooms.

Harry immediately got on his and hovered a few inches above the ground, eager as always, when flying was concerned, and his classmates slowly followed. Several children had already joined
Harry in hovering several inches above the ground, their feet only barely brushing the grass.

Hermione cautiously pushed off, nearly squeaking in surprise as her broom immediately rose up into the air. Thankfully, she stopped it at the level that Harry and her other classmates were at, easily gaining control of the situation.

“Reading’s good for something.” Harry grinned in her direction, lifting his hands from the broomstick as Hermione grabbed onto hers even tighter. “Look, no hands!”

Ron snorted from beside him, already looking comfortable on the broom. The Weasley children, of course, practically grew up playing quidditch. Others were not so lucky, however, and there was a very loud ‘thud’ and a cry of pain from further down the line. One of the Gryffindors had gone a bit too high a bit too fast, and had subsequently tumbled back to the ground. The girl let out a low moan of pain, clutching at her ankle.

“Out of the way, out of the way.” Madame Hooch briskly made her way down the line, the set of her shoulders calm. “Happens every year, don’t worry yourselves.”

Harry slowly guided his broom back to the ground and sighed. “Dad said we’d get to have fun, but I guess the whole point is that everyone learns.”

“That’s deep.” Ron responded, seeming even more reluctant to land. Madame Hooch was already leading the girl away, most likely to the infirmary.

“Stay off your brooms!” She commanded, and then was gone.

As if her absence was his cue, Draco immediately took to making a complete and utter ass of himself. He was tossing a small glass orb into the air and catching it again, while remaining several feet off the ground.

“What’s that, Malfoy?” Harry called out, squinting to catch a glimpse of what Malfoy had in his hand. It seemed vaguely familiar, based on its shape and size, but he just couldn’t remember where he’d seen it last.

“This useless thing?” The blonde snorted, wrinkling his nose in distaste. “A Remembrall. I… acquired it from a Hufflepuff this morning. Why do you care, Potter?”

Harry suddenly realized where he’d seen it last-- falling out of Neville’s pocket during the Longbottoms’ visit near the end of the summer. Neville had dropped it somewhere on the beach and he and Harry had waded in and out of the water all afternoon searching for it, only to find it right next to Neville’s sweater. “Give it here, Malfoy. It doesn’t belong to you.”

“Who says? I hope you’re not making yourself the authority on such things. I’d hardly take an order from someone like you.” He replied, somehow managing to turn his nose even further upwards.

“A coward?” He laughed, rising further upwards. The infuriating grin remained firmly fixed upon his face. “By all means, come and get it!” Without hesitation the Slytherin took off, turning to zip through the air in the opposite direction.

Harry immediately sped after him, without a thought for the consequences, and Hermione, who was safely on the ground, sniffed in disappointment. “Why is he doing that? He’s going to get
himself expelled!”

“Harry knows what he’s doing. Don’t worry so much!” Ron clapped Hermione on the shoulder.

Within a few minutes, Harry had easily caught up to Draco, despite his desperate attempts to stay ahead. “Give it here, Malfoy. Stealing isn’t right.”

“You want it? Catch.” Draco’s expression had turned into a scowl by now, but he only turned to chuck the Remembrall into the air. The tennis ball sized orb arced almost gracefully, catching the sun’s rays from where they peaked over the astronomy tower.

Harry immediately went into a steep dive, delighting in the way the wind rushed past his face and whipped through his hair. He easily turned about just in front of a window, catching the ball as if it had taken no effort at all, and flew back to his classmates as if nothing spectacular had happened. Of course, without looking into the window that he had flown past, he had no way of knowing that a professor had seen his reckless act.

He landed a few feet away from his classmates, leaving the broom where it dropped on the grass, and showed off the Remembrall before tucking it into the inside pocket of his robes. Neville would likely be needing it and, if Harry had any say in it, he’d have it back before lunch time.

His fellow students’ loud exclamations of wonder died out, however, upon hearing a sharp voice call out across the grounds.

“Harry Potter!”

“Well, Hogwarts was nice.” Harry looked around the grounds mournfully. “Mum’ll be mad. She was hoping I’d last a full term, at least.”

“Nice knowing you, mate.” Ron said solemnly.

Hermione stepped in front of them both, shaking her head at their sudden turn into melodrama. “They won’t expel him for helping a classmate!”

McGonagall was already marching towards them, her face pinched in displeasure. “Harry Potter. What do you think you were doing?”

“Defending a fellow classmate, Professor.” He retrieved the Remembrall, turning it so Neville’s initials, which were engraved into it, were visible. “Malfoy took it from him. So I took it back.”

“Is that true?” She turned to Draco, who only stared at her innocently.

“I’m sure I don’t know what he’s talking about, professor!” He exclaimed. Ron made a rather caustic comment somewhere behind Harry, but was mostly ignored. McGonagall seemed to regard the group for several long moments before motioning to Harry.

“Potter. You’ll be coming with me.” She ordered.

“Fine by me.” Harry followed her back into the castle, albeit reluctantly. He’d only been at Hogwarts for a short time, but he’d come to love it almost as much as he loved his home. At least he’d be back there, soon, even if his siblings would tease him forever for managing to get himself expelled so soon.

They walked in tense silence until they had returned to her office. She sat at the large desk, peering at him over her glasses. “Take a seat, Mr. Potter.”
“Right….” Harry sat down in the offered chair. “Am I in trouble?”

“That remains to be seen.” She responded, steepling her fingers together. “Now, as you were saying…?”

“I wasn’t saying anything?” Harry fidgeted, unsure of where this was going.

McGonagall gave him a look that could only be described as ‘supremely unimpressed’, before heaving a sigh. “You caught that Remembrall, did you not?”

“Course I caught it.” Harry shrugged. “It’s just like Quidditch, except my opponents usually, you know, can put up a fight.”

“... The Gryffindor team is in need of a seeker.” The professor leaned back, seemingly nonchalant as she shuffled through some parchment.

“And?” Harry sighed, scratching his head. He’d wanted to try out, but he’d been promptly informed by both his parents that he was not to even think about getting on the pitch until second year, and even then, only if he could handle school and sports at the same time. “Can’t try out until next year.”

“I’m sure something can be arranged. You’re dismissed, Mr. Potter.”

“Wait… you’re letting me try out?” He blinked in surprise. “I’m not being… expelled?”

“Expelled? Whatever for? It’s only your first semester. You’ll have to do better than that if you want to be sent home.” The professor shook her head, chuckling softly. “Your father certainly did, and he managed to get himself invited back to teach.”

“I don’t want to be sent home!” Harry exclaimed. “Not--not that home isn’t great or anything, I just like it here! And I’d really rather not go back until Christmas, if that’s alright.”

McGonagall only stared up at him in mild amusement before turning back to her work. “If you don’t cause too much trouble, I can’t imagine it will be a problem.”

“Thanks, Professor!” Harry stood up. “Dad was right, you are cool.”

“Back to class.” She gestured with one hand, barely even glancing up.

“Yes, ma’am.” He ran off at the first opportunity, eager to tell his friends about his conversation with their Head of House. Ron would be incredibly jealous, yes, but that would have nothing on the reaction seeing him on the team would get out of Malfoy. Flying was probably over by now, so Harry headed for the common room, hoping he’d catch his friends there.

Of course, as was Harry’s luck, he bumped into someone on the stairs halfway to the common room, interrupting his daydreaming.

Malfoy stepped back, looking affronted, as he often did. He was on his own for once, and brushed off his robes as though something dirty had gotten on them.

“Going to pack, Potter? I can’t imagine you got out of trouble.” He smirked.

“Only out of trouble? You underestimate me.” Harry smirked. “One of us is going to be getting on a broom more than once a week this year and it’s definitely not you.”

“Excuse me?” His smirk melted off, reforming into a scowl.
“You heard me.” Harry started back up the stairs, ready to be rid of Malfoy as soon as possible.

“Where do you think you’re going?” The blonde demanded.

“Back to my common room.” Harry replied. “Do you want to join me?”

“Running away already? Here I thought you’d at least put up something of a fight.” He sniffed.

“A fight?” Harry turned around, at the top of the staircase. “You wouldn’t last a second.”

“Don’t underestimate me, Potter. I’d have you on the floor in seconds.”

“Then prove it.” Harry shrugged, sure that Malfoy would likely shy away from an actual fight. What Harry was not expecting, as usual, was to have his bluff called.

“Alright. Tonight. Third floor, midnight. We’ll have a proper duel, and I’ll show you who’s superior.” Malfoy crossed his arms, looking quite pleased with himself. “Unless you’d like to save your own skin and back out now?”

“Back out?” Harry chuckled, trying to keep the nervous edge out of his voice. “Nah. Never. I’ll see you at midnight.”

“You’d better.” The blonde turned, continuing down the hall with sharp clicks of his shoes.

Harry nearly ran back to the Common Room, blurring out the password before bursting in to find his friends sitting in the chairs nearest the fireplace. “I’ve got good and bad news.”

“Bad news first”, Hermione said, even as Ron presumably started to ask after the better section of the news.

“Well, Malfoy’s going to kill me, but McGonagall’s letting me play Quidditch!”

“Malfoy? That pansy wouldn’t last a-“ Ron, who had actually fought Harry before, exclaimed, sitting up. His hair stuck out at odd angles due to his previous position of lounging in front of the fireplace. "Wait-- you're only a first year!"

“Yeah! I’m the youngest player in a century!” Harry nearly beamed with pride. “Dad’s going to be mad, since he only got on the team as a second year, but it’ll be so worth it.”

“I swear I could hit you right now.” Ron said, but he was beaming. “This is going to be wicked.”

“I bet!” Harry grinned. “Course, I’ve got to try out and stuff, but I’m better than Charlie!”

“That’s ’cause Charlie only cares about dragons, not quidditch.” Ron rolled his eyes.

“Aren’t either of you worried about Malfoy’s duel challenge?” Hermione spoke up. “You absolutely have to tell a professor, Harry!”

“He probably knows loads of Dark curses. Dad says Malfoy Manor’s a breeding ground of darkness and resentment.” Harry chewed on his lip. “Maybe I shouldn’t have said yes.”

“Well, we can’t tell anyone. They’ll call it off, then Malfoy wins by default.” Ron pointed out.

“But how do we get there? He said to be at the third floor at midnight. That’s after curfew and Filch’ll be about.” Harry frowned. “I wish Dad would have given me the cloak, that would have made this way easier.”
“Dumbledore said the third floor’s off limits at the feast.” Hermione pointed out. “And what would a cloak do to help?”

“Never mind the cloak, Hermione. We’ve got to get to that duel.” Harry cracked his knuckles before striding over to the stairs that led up to the boys’ dormitory. “So I should probably at least try my potions homework first.”

Later that night, a half hour before midnight, Harry and Ron both snuck down the stairs, the hoods of their cloaks pulled up to avoid detection. Hermione followed a few minutes later, wand at the ready. All three of them, Harry especially, were convinced they were playing the part of heroes rather than simply looking ridiculous late at night. Such is the beauty of being eleven.

They quietly made their way down to the third floor, thanks to Ron and Harry’s knowledge of Filch’s usual haunts, and Harry finally relaxed, drawing his wand as he looked around for Malfoy before ducking into the empty classroom that they’d agreed to meet in.

Of course, to Harry’s horror, they soon discovered that this particular classroom wasn’t as empty as they’d thought, when Hermione heard a plaintive meow from right behind her and turned to see a brown cat blinking up at her.

“That’s Filch’s cat!” Ron hissed, ducking his head as though to keep the animal from recognizing him. “We need to move- he’s gonna be nearby!”

“Yeah!” Harry grabbed Hermione’s hand and dragged them down the corridor, even as Filch’s voice echoed from behind them.

“Blimey.” Harry’s eyes were wide and his heart was racing. “That wasn’t fun at all.”

Hermione turned around and suddenly flinched in fear.

“You know, Harry…” She began, conversationally, as if she were trying to alert him to something truly terrifying. “There’s another thing that might not be fun in here.”

Ron made a noise in the back of his throat. It sounded peculiar, like a scream that he’d clamped down on before it could escape. He scrambled back for the door, yanking at Hermione.

“Okay, out! Out!” If his voice had jumped up an octave or so, he would never admit it.

Harry turned around slowly, just to see what his friends were on about, and ended up face to face with a three-headed dog, which was barking quite fiercely as drool dripped out of all three of its jaws. “Oh.”

As soon as the coast was clear, the trio sped back the Gryffindor Tower, not stopping even once until they were safely back in their common room.

Harry nearly wheezed as he grabbed onto a chair for support, shaking his head. “I’m never going out again. Ever.”

“Stop dragging me into this stuff.” Ron groaned from the floor.
“I’m going to bed.” Hermione nearly stomped up the stairs.

“Suit yourself, I guess.” Harry shrugged, offering a halfhearted wave as she climbed up the stairs and out of sight. “We should probably listen to Dumbledore, next time.”

“Probably”, Ron echoed glumly, “but we won’t, will we?”

“Probably not.” Harry cracked a grin.
Troll in the Dungeon

Chapter Summary

“Word on the street’s that Appa punched You-Know-Who’s nose off and that’s why he doesn’t have one anymore.”

“Mmm, I’d believe it if I hadn’t done it myself.” Lily teased.

“In the interest of preserving the truth”, James raised an eyebrow. “we technically punched his body off.”

Lily Evans-Potter was a force to be reckoned with. Her family had long since learned to get out of her way when she was on a warpath, and to pray they weren’t the reason she was mad.

Unfortunately for one Harry Potter, there was no avoiding his mother. Even at Hogwarts.

Lily stood in her husband’s office, arms crossed over her chest. “Harry James Potter, you had better have one hell of an explanation for all of this.”

“Draco Malfoy is a horrible, terrible person.” Harry tried his best to look as innocent as possible, trying to play his winning card simultaneously against both of his angry parents, one of whom was currently beating him at a staring contest. Of course, his father was easily the less scary of the two on any occasion, so Harry saw no reason that he should lose to him. “He stole Nev’s Remembrall.”

“And, pray tell, how does that put you on the Quidditch team? We made it quite clear that Quidditch is off limits until your second year.” Lily’s voice was harsh, and her gaze didn’t waver. “You’re supposed to be concentrating on actual schoolwork.”

“Well, he stole something and we were already on brooms, so it only made sense that I caught it when he threw it.” Harry frowned, crossing his arms. “And McGonagall saw and said that the Gryffindor team needed a seeker. I told her that you said no and Professor McGonagall pretty much made the decision for me. Not my fault at all.”

Lily turned on her husband at this, green eyes narrowing dangerously. James, who was leaning against his desk almost casually until now, tensed up, his knuckles seeming close to pushing through his skin as his grip on the edge of his desk tightened. “You’re a teacher. Veto it.”

“Can’t. McGonagall’s the Head of House for Gryffindor and makes final decisions. I can start an argument and get fired, though.” James shrugged, shaking his head. He, of all people, knew better than to start an argument with Minerva McGonagall and expect to come out ahead. “Besides, Harry’s doing alright in all of his classes, except mine and Potions.”

This caused the redhead to pause, and eventually puff out a sigh. “Which is taught by Severus. Harry, how are you behind in your father’s class? Don’t answer that.”

“Well, Appa assigned an essay on werewolves, see, and I just wrote down Remus Lupin about fifty times really big so it filled the parchment. And he said that ‘wasn’t acceptable and that Remus Lupin isn’t a complete sentence’.” Harry wiggled his fingers in the air, pulling the most ridiculous
place possible. “‘Pay more attention in class’, says the king of all hypocrites.”

“Hey, I pay attention in class now that I have to stop myself from cursing at tiny, eleven year old menaces who refuse to participate just because they called me Professor Dad in public, entirely on accident, once.” James frowned. “And, although Moony loved that essay and probably has it framed somewhere, now, it really didn’t answer the question. So I had to take off points, really, or it would have been blatant nepotism.”

“The point stands that you being on the team is not okay.” Lily sighed, running a hand through her hair. Being home alone with the other four children for the majority of the day wasn’t as taxing as one might think, but she was beginning to wish James hadn’t taken the teaching position.

“But I earned it.” Harry pouted. “And I’ve done worse than that, anyway, I mean—”

He covered his mouth with a hand, eyes going wide. He’d spent too much time around Hagrid lately.

Two sets of eyes focused on Harry again, and Lily’s voice was dangerously calm. “Excuse me?”

“If Appa had just given me the map, I wouldn’t have gone exploring.” Harry muttered. “Wouldn’t have been out there after curfew if Malfoy hadn’t challenged me to a duel, really, but—”

“A duel?” James sighed. “You’re first years. You literally only know the Jelly Legs Jinx.”

“Too bad he didn’t show up, cause I was going to Jelly Legs Jinx him until he cried for his daddy.” Harry grinned, looking very much like his mother. “Not like he isn’t doing that all day anyway.”

Lily’s stern expression wavered, and amusement tugged at the corners of her lips. “Dueling other students is also off limits until you’re older, you know.”

“Right. I’ll just smack him next time.” Harry winked. “He’ll probably run off and wash his face for three hours, the git. ‘Did you see? Potter touched me.’”

“Smear mud in his hair.” Lily advised, leaning against the edge of her husband’s desk. “It’ll be great.”

“Or pretend to be him and write to his dad asking for diapers.” James grinned. “We did that to Peter, once.”

Lily shook her head, stifling a laugh. “Or you could just go with the Jelly Legs Jinx, if you can’t think of anything better.”

“The diapers thing is cool, but I’m going for embarrassing him, not another duel. I mean, who knows what kind of Dark stuff he knows?” Harry shuddered.

“Considering he’s only eleven, probably not much.” Lily’s tone was warm, but the unspoken ‘yet’ hung in the air.

“Speaking of untrue things”, Harry grinned, “have you heard the stuff people are saying about Appa, yet?”

“I certainly haven’t.” James scratched his head. “What’s going around now?”

“Word on the street’s that Appa punched You-Know-Who’s nose off and that’s why he doesn’t have one anymore.”
“Mmm, I’d believe it if I hadn’t done it myself.” Lily teased.

“In the interest of preserving the truth”, James raised an eyebrow, “we technically punched his body off.”

“But, I mean, Amma wasn’t even there.” Harry scratched his head. “Did she get him on the way out or something?”

“Never underestimate your mother.” Lily chuckled.

“I’ve half a mind to take off points for that one, Harry.” James shook his head. “Really, she did most of the work. I just stood there and looked pretty.”

“Some of the girls in my year think you’re cute.” Harry shrugged. “You’re pretty old, I mean…”

“They’re eleven and that’s disgusting and I’m married and oh man, is that why the girls are always in the front row?” James grimaced.

“Don’t worry. You earned it after being ignored by girls for six years when you were a student.” Lily said in mock sympathy, reaching out to pat James’ shoulder.

“Hard to believe, but ninety percent of that was absolutely on purpose.” He shuddered, putting his hand over his wife’s. “Hari, don’t you dare like anyone before seventh year. It’s a right mess, it is. You lose all your friends and it gets real awkward.”

“You should totally just put pictures of Amma everywhere. That would probably help.” Harry shrugged. “But don’t, cause that would be creepy. I’d stop coming to class.”

“Not like you need many more reasons, at this point.” James snorted. “Professor Dad was the highlight of my month.”

“Stop bringing it up!” Harry pouted. “You don’t need to remind me every two minutes.”

“I’m thinking about having something regarding Professor Dad framed. Maybe for the Christmas card!” Lily mused.

Harry groaned. “Dudley already laughs at me enough, he doesn’t need more reasons.”

“So”, James cleared his throat, “Halloween feast is coming up. Do you want to stay at school or be home for the night? Your call, really.”

“Dunno.” Harry shrugged. “Do you have to stay?”

“Dumbledore assigned me patrol duty with our dear friend Snape.” James grimaced. “Just what I needed, really. Top off a great night with quality time with my all time favorite faculty member and new best friend.”

“Don’t say it too loudly or Uncle Sirius might take it as a challenge.” Harry laughed.

“We don’t need Sirius applying for a teaching job.” Lily sighed.

“Besides, Remus is my best friend.” James shrugged. “Don’t tell Sirius, though, he’d throw a fit.”

“I already sent him the date of the Gryffindor and Slytherin game, though, so be prepared for a fit.” Harry grinned. “I got lucky, that’s my first game too.”
“Are you sure McGonagall doesn’t have any other options?” James frowned, remembering his own years on the Quidditch team. The Gryffindor versus Slytherin matches were always especially rough, usually ending when one team was entirely in the hospital wing rather than anyone catching the Snitch. The rules had probably been updated since the ‘70s though, James reasoned, so hopefully there was less danger involved now. “Not even a reserve who could play that game?”

“Charlie was their last Seeker and he left in June.” Harry shrugged. “Guess I was the next best choice. And a good one too, since I’m way cooler than him.”

“You’re also an eleven year-old who is going up against sixteen and seventeen year-olds.” Lily frowned.

“Yeah, but the Seeker’s job is to be small and fast. I guess I’m good at the small part, but I’m good at the fast part too.” Harry nodded. “Just got to find the Snitch without getting knocked off my broom.”

“Hey, there’s still a fifty percent chance you’ll get taller than you are.” James ruffled Harry’s hair. “Don’t give up just yet.”

“If it means you’ll quit the team, please go through your growth spurt now.”

“Quit the team?” Harry looked nearly horrified. “Why would I do that? I’m the youngest Seeker in a century! Someone in this family’s got to hold a record that doesn’t involve most detentions ever!”

“We’ll leave that to Sarah- I’m positive she’ll come up with something great.” Lily mumbled.

“You mean something boring and weird, like Gobstones Club or something.” Harry pulled a face.

“Hey, your grandfather was in the Gobstones Club and he turned out alright.” It was obvious from the look on his face that James did not entirely believe his own statement.

“You’ll come watch anyway, I bet.” Harry shrugged, looking to his mother. “It’ll be more interesting than listening to Anne tell you what color she’s painted her nails for the billionth time.”

“As opposed to hearing you and your father rehash the same Quidditch maneuver a billion times?” Lily raised an eyebrow, finally getting back to her feet. “I need to be heading back.”

“Appa’s probably going to be yelling at Madam Hooch for the whole time. I’ll catch the Snitch quick to save you the trouble of listening.” Harry went over to hug his mother, wrapping his arms tight around her. The top of his head was already at the level of her shoulder, and he was one of the shortest in his year. The stories about how his father had been quite short until sixth year had placated him just enough to keep him appeased, but Harry was still quite sore about the subject of his height. “Don’t let them eat you.”

Lily gave him a quick squeeze before planting a kiss at the crown of his head. Harry fidgeted in her grasp, as any eleven year old having a kiss planted on his head would, but eventually settled on squeezing her tighter. “You should be more worried about your siblings than me, you know.”

“They’ll survive.” Harry shrugged, stepping back just slightly. “I did, so it shouldn’t be that hard.”

She pulled away from Harry with a fond smile and turned to kiss James goodbye.

Harry hardly seemed ready to let go of her and settled back into the chair on the other side of his father’s desk, tentatively waving goodbye as his parents said their goodbyes. His father, at least,
would be going home tonight, so it wasn’t so much of a goodbye as a “see you later, jerk”.

Lily’s footsteps were soft on the floor of the office as she moved towards the crackling fire, promptly disappearing as the flames flashed green.

Harry stared into the fireplace, trying to will the flames green so they would regurgitate his mother at any second, and James sighed, wrapping an arm around his son’s thin shoulders.

“I know.” Harry looked up to his father, confused. James ruffled Harry’s hair, smiling fondly at his son. It was hard, sometimes, for James to see him as anything but the one year old baby that had never hesitated to rest his head on James’ shoulder at the first opportunity given, but Harry was very nearly his own man now. The clock is winding down, James thought, as he pulled Harry just a fraction of an inch closer. “It’s hard not having her here all the time.”

“Yeah.” Harry smiled softly. “I think so too.”

Halloween wasn’t a day to look forward to in the Potter household. It held too many negative memories, too much risk. Every year it passed in tense silence, which was occasionally broken by James or one of the children, but, more often than not, settled over them like a thick, unbreakable layer of ice that melted overnight, leaving them wondering if it had ever been there in the first place.

Lily sat at the dining room table, eyes trained on the window. Her gaze tracked raindrops as they pattered against the glass, dripping downwards. This would be the first year that James would be working on Halloween, and the first year she wouldn’t be able to keep track of all her children. She could only hope James would hold up well enough to keep an eye on Harry.

She let out a long sigh as the rain was joined by the noise of footsteps thundering down the stairs. Drew appeared in the kitchen, Anne hot on his tail as they headed for the counter. “I’m making tea, if anyone wants some. Just wait for the water to boil.” Lily said.

“Thanks, Amma!” Anne chirped in response.

“In London, tea was first sold in 1657.” Sarah remarked offhandedly, staring out the window. She was seated at the table already, having spent the greater part of the day so far trailing her mother around the house in a state of mild worry. “They said it was a health beverage and didn’t tell anybody what else was in it. Since it was 1657, and all, I figure there was probably a rat or two at least.”

“Ew.” Anne wrinkled her nose in distaste, her hand stilling on the handle of the tea cupboard. “But… there aren’t any rats in there now, right?”

“Aren’t there?” Sarah looked over at Anne, her expression carefully kept blank. “You’ll never know.”

A dismayed look crossed the redhead’s face, and Lily sighed. “There aren’t any rats, Anne. Don’t listen to your sister.”

“Hey, where’s Madhav? I haven’t seen him today.” Drew sat heavily in the chair opposite his mother. As though in response, there was a shuffling from under the table, and Matt’s head poked out from under the cloth.

“I’m here.”

“Why were you under the table?” Sarah looked confused, lifting the tablecloth high enough to
make sure Matt wasn’t injured or stuck.

He shrugged, scooting so that he could lean against the leg of the table. “I forget.”

Lily let out a breath of air, a wan smile pulling at the corners of her lips. “Do you guys want something to eat?”

Sarah shrugged, more interested in the pattern of the raindrops on the window pane.

Anne shook her head, tugging the kettle from the stove as it began to whistle. A heavy silence seemed to fall over the incomplete family like a blanket. Lily ran a hand through her hair.

“How are dad and Hari doing?” Matt asked softly, peering up at his mother curiously.

“They were fine when I checked in on them…” She smiled.

“He’s already found someone to beg homework answers off of, looks like. God knows who’d want to be friends with him.” Sarah scrunched up her nose. “He’s smelly, annoying and gets into way too much trouble.”

“Oh, come off your high horse,” Anne sniffed. “We all know you miss him.”

“It’s better around here. Less interruptions.” Sarah rolled her eyes. “Why so defensive? Do you miss him?”

“Yes. He’s my brother- I’m not going to act like a heartless idiot and pretend I don’t.” She retorted, eyes narrowing.

“Girls.”

“I’m not heartless!” Sarah nearly growled, standing up. “I just don’t like crying about everything, which seems to be something of a hobby for you.”

“Well, excuse me for having emotions!” Anne snapped, turning on her sister. Drew cast a nervous glance at his mother, looking as though he wanted to follow Matt back under the table.

“That’s enough! Both of you!” Lily stood, placing one hand on her hip.

“She started it!” Sarah clenched her fists at her sides. At this point of the fight, James would have usually intervened, taking Anne away with the promise of letting her paint his toenails or something equally inane, but her father had problems of his own to deal with today and Sarah was not one to depend on other people. “I was telling the truth and then she decided to get all condescending about complete lies.”

“You’re the one who’s lying! You miss him the most and you’re too much of a baby to admit it!” Anne shouted.

“Both of you are done. I don’t care who started it. We all miss Hari and your father, but that’s no reason to argue.”

“I’m hardly a baby.” Sarah gritted her teeth. “Remember who started shouting first, Anju.”

“You started shouting!” Anne shrieked, her voice jumping to an impossibly high octave. Her voice took on a mocking tone as she continued. “‘I’m not heartless’! Could have fooled me!”

“Go to your rooms, now!” Lily thundered suddenly.
“Yes ma’am.” Sarah trudged up the stairs, offering no protest, and slammed her bedroom door behind her.

Anne stormed after her sister in silence, and a moment later her door also slammed shut. Lily collapsed back into her chair and buried her face in her hands. She was left by herself in the kitchen as Drew retrieved his brother from beneath the table and tugged him into a separate room.

“I’m going to kill James.” She mumbled.

Harry barely stifled a laugh as Ron and Hermione argued across the table about the latest assignment Ron had tried to copy, picking at the dinner in front of him as he reveled in the nearly palpable excitement around him. The floating candles and general air of celebration of Hogwarts only amplified the feeling, and he hummed contentedly as he looked about the room.

Halloween had always been one of Harry’s favorite holidays, and early childhood memories of going over to the Weasleys and loading pumpkins into the catapult Fred and George would inevitably build to pelt the gnomes with was always fun were some of the best ones he could recall.

His own house had always been a supremely somber place on Halloween, his parents looking especially tired and worn, but that usually resulted in more affection sent Harry’s way, which he could definitely live with. Even that, however, could hardly put a damper on Harry’s enthusiasm, and only lead to him taking extra care to pick out the cinnamon flavored hard candies that his father somehow enjoyed and a chocolate or two for his mother when given a choice.

Ron grumbled something about illegible handwriting and Harry chuckled even as Ron and Hermione both sent glares in his direction, putting his hands up in front of his face just in time to shield himself from the chunk of carrot that Ron threw his way. “Ouch, mate, don’t do that!”

“I’ll stay proper if you do, Potter.” Ron grinned, kicking him in the shin none too lightly under the table, and Hermione sighed, shaking her head.

“I’ll be a good boy, ickle Ronniekins, no worries.” Harry stuck his tongue out before looking to the teacher’s table to see his father toying with his dinner the same way Harry had been just moments before. James looked up just in time to notice Harry looking his way and waved subtly, not wanting to embarrass his son in front of his friends. Harry blinked, pausing for a second, before waving back more enthusiastically than he usually would have.

If even one thing had gone wrong on Halloween ten years ago, he could be here alone.

He could have come to Hogwarts without familiar faces, familiar friends, around him. He could have had no one to write home to, no one to ruffle his hair fondly when he got good grades and no one’s office to go to after a particularly hard day. He could have had so little, but because things went just right, he had his mother and siblings to write home to as soon as the feast ended, Appa’s office to sneak into after curfew and a near endless supply of sweets from his uncles, whenever he asked (and, sometimes, when he didn’t).

Harry stood up slowly, looking around to make sure no one was paying attention, and stepped out into the aisle.

“Where are you going?” Ron asked with his mouth full, belatedly putting his hand up to cover it even as Hermione shook her head in disgust, already handing him a napkin.

“Got someone to hang out with.” Harry said, giving Ron a half-hearted shrug, before making his
way up to the head table mostly unnoticed. A few of the Ravenclaws turned their heads as he climbed the steps onto the platform and walked right up to his father, who had the seat on the very end, but he ignored them as best as he could. “What’s up, Appa?”

“Nothing much. Dumbledore’s discussing handcuffing me to Snape during patrols like it would be a bonding exercise.” James snorted, rolling his eyes, and Harry awkwardly patted his shoulder.

If someone were to look close enough, they would see that James Potter’s visible hand was shaking minutely and the other was gripped tight around the handle of his wand, which stuck out of his belt loop at an angle obviously meant for easy drawing. Harry was very used to looking closely, especially on Halloween, and put his hand over his father’s to steady it.

“It’s better than it could have been, right?” James asked, offering a tired smile.

“Way better.” Harry paused for a second before throwing his arms around his father for a split second, hugging him tightly before stepping back, muttering something about it being uncool to hug your father in public. “Thanks, Appa.”

“No problem.” James smiled, a softer smile than usual. “I’d do it all again in a heartbeat. We both would.”

“Here’s to hoping you don’t have to.” Harry said, more sincerely than he’d mean to let show, and James raised his goblet in agreement before turning back to his food.

“Love you”, Harry added as an afterthought, before climbing back down the steps.

“You too, kid.” James called, catching Harry just as he turned his back.

“I know.” Harry grinned, feeling much better than he had in weeks, and he may have skipped once or twice on his way back to the table, but his fellow students knew much better than to bring it up.

He slid back into place beside Ron as if he hadn’t been missing at all, seamlessly inserting himself back into the conversation, and the calm settled into his bones as he joked around with his housemates.

The festivities seemed to be going off without a hitch, when the cheerful atmosphere was broken by the doors to the great hall opening suddenly as the resident Muggle Studies teacher came rushing in.

“Troll!” Quirrell shrieked. “Troll in the dungeons!”

Harry, who had just gotten back to his seat, looked about in horror, trying to gauge the reactions of his classmates just in case getting up and running for the hills wasn’t what everyone was going with. James was already standing by the time Quirrell had finished his sentence, wand drawn, and seemed ready to go on a moment’s notice.

“Silence!” Dumbledore boomed, and the entire hall fell quiet. “Prefects, escort the students back to their dormitories. Professors, pair up and search the dungeons.”

All the other professors paired up near ridiculously quickly as the prefects lead the students out of the Great Hall, leaving only James and Snape without partners.

“Well”, James offered a wary smile, “I guess it’s you and me, pal.”

Snape gave him a quick once over, only sneering at what he saw. “Lovely.”
“Agreed. Let’s get going, then.” James set off down the middle of the hall, heading straight for the dungeons. “Business to be done, and all that.”

Snape merely grunted in response. He followed quickly, the fabric of his robes billowing slightly with the force of his stride. “It’s almost… amusing, that this would happen today of all days. Perhaps a sign?”

“Perhaps.” James struggled to keep his calm, making sure to stay exactly at Snape’s side. “But maybe it’s just a coincidence. Weirder things have happened around here.”

“It’s your first year here, Professor Potter,” he strained the word as though he was mocking James, though his face remained blank. “You wouldn’t know the half of it.”

“I was here for seven years before that and, I don’t know about you, but doing a little bit of exploring gets you a lot of stories.” James looked around as they climbed down the staircase that lead to the dungeons.

Their footsteps echoed loudly against the stone, nearly drowning out the drone of Snape’s response. “I suppose even the emptiest of heads can be filled with stories if they’re idiotic enough.”

“Look, Snape, I’m making an effort. Least you can do is try too.” James looked around the next corner, and nodded as he found the corridor empty. “This one’s clear.”

“I hadn’t noticed.” He ignored the first statement, and only responded dryly to James’ observation. He continued down the corridor, eyes peering into the gloom.

James heard a noise coming from the stairwell and immediately ran back to it. “What if it was in the dungeons and didn’t stay in the dungeons? If babies can climb stairs, trolls probably can too.”

“The stairs would be destroyed, were that the case.” The voice echoed back to James, though the footsteps continued.

James frowned, but continued up the stairs regardless, leaving the dungeons and, presumably, Snape behind. Maybe it had been a careful troll, or a particularly small one. Regardless, ridding himself of Snape’s company would probably help his chances of doing any damage, if he did happen upon it at all.

His progress was halted, however, as McGonagall swept around the corner. She frowned, eyes searching past James for the potions master. “Where is Professor Snape?”

“We split up.” James tucked his wand back through his belt loop before shoving his hands in his pockets. “He didn’t agree with my ideas. Still in the dungeon, as far as I know.”

Perhaps if she had been less pressed for time, she would have chastised him for this. As it was, however, she only sighed and pinched her lips together. “The troll has been found.”

“Great. I’ll be heading home then.” James ran a hand through his hair, having never quite lost the nervous habit from his childhood. “It’s been a long day.”

“Take care, James.” She sighed, straightening her shoulders. “I suppose I’m left with the task of tracking Snape down…”

“I’d stay, but I’ve got more than enough grease on my hands, and I’m pretty sure I’m at least fifteen minutes too late to avoid my lovely wife’s wrath.” James chuckled. “Poor Lily, the kids are hard enough to deal with when they’re not high on sugar.”
She cracked a small smile, shaking her head. “Lily is a smart woman, I’m sure she’s managed. I’ll be seeing you tomorrow, Professor.”

“And I’ll be seeing you tomorrow too, Minnie Dearest.” James blew her a kiss before heading off toward his office, more than ready to head home for the night. Hopefully Harry hadn’t caused too much trouble, tonight, but that was practically an impossible thing to ask for.

“You still awake?” James called from the doorway to their bedroom, having nearly run up the stairs after tumbling out of the living room floor not a minute before. The kids, thankfully, were all asleep and hadn’t woken from the noise. She would have killed him for that, if he’d forced a repeat of the usual Potter Family Bedtime Routine, and today’s focus, especially, was definitely meant to be not dying.

“No.” She grumbled, face buried in a pillow. Lily had spent her evening making dinner and trying to keep Sarah and Anne away from each other’s throats. Sometimes she wondered why the girls could be so much harder to manage than the boys.

“Someone’s had a hard day.” He climbed up onto the bed, sighing as he patted her head. “Tell me what happened.”

She idly swatted his hand away, though otherwise remained motionless.

“I almost fought a troll today. And destroyed our son’s chances at impressing any girls for a few years.” James shrugged. “He hugged me in public. Snape almost pissed himself, poor guy.”

“He’s eleven. I doubt he’ll be impressing any girls soon.” She mumbled in response.

“He’s my son. He’s got to start early, considering he’s probably going to start a mortal enemyship with the girl he’s going to end up with first.”

“You were a very unique case. Romance usually doesn’t work like that.”

“There’s a reason people like us aren’t made into fairytales.” James rolled his eyes. “But we ended up alright, I think. I mean, I’m here. And you’re here. That’s a pretty good start.”

“You forgot the five kids we managed to make.” She sighed.

“At least three of whom were complete jerks today, I’m assuming.” He shook his head. “I don’t think either of us realized how much of a role Hari played in keeping them from eating each other alive, really.”

“The fact that you automatically rule out Madhav is both amusing and unsurprising.” Lily finally dragged herself into a sitting position. “The girls keep arguing because they miss him.”

“Why, wouldn’t you rule him out? Plus, it’s Adi that’s the wild card, in that situation.” James threw an arm around her shoulders. “They all get their good qualities from you, of course.”

“Evans girls are a force to be reckoned with. Why did you marry me again?”

“Because you’re beautiful, talented, smart and remind me that socks should be folded every once in awhile.” He laughed, resting his head on her shoulder. “Also, you did do my homework that one time, and I think that made it a done deal.”

“I only did it because we were partners. I didn’t want to get points off.” She scoffed, nudging at
him with her elbow.

“And it had nothing to do with how attractive your partner was. Sure.” He rolled his eyes. “I’ll believe it.”

She slapped his shoulder lightly, before deciding to lay back down.

“You need the rest.” He leaned over to plant a kiss on her forehead. “You’ve had a long day.”

“Go to sleep, James.”

“As the lady wishes.” James stuck his tongue out.

She tugged her husband down into bed, sighing as she rolled over. “Goodnight.”

“Can’t wait to see your face in the morning.” He smiled, settling in beside her. “Night.”
“Nah, he’s still not given up on making me a halfway decent Chaser. And Mum’s ready to confiscate my broom and bring me home, really.” Harry shrugged, poking a piece of toast with his fork. “She says I might get hurt and die or whatever, cause I’m eleven and everyone else is old.”

“Blimey, Harry, Seeker! And the youngest seeker in a century, to boot! Your mum and dad must be proud, right?” For once Ron’s voice was clear, as he only managed to wolf down a sausage after he had spoken. “Of course they are, since your Dad played quidditch. Wasn’t a seeker though, of course.”

“Nah, he’s still not given up on making me a halfway decent Chaser. And Mum’s ready to confiscate my broom and bring me home, really.” Harry shrugged, poking a piece of toast with his fork. “She says I might get hurt and die or whatever, cause I’m eleven and everyone else is old.”

“She’s right, you know.” Hermione huffed. “Based on what I’ve read about Slytherin’s playing style, it’s very likely that you’ll get hurt. They don’t care about the rules at all. Especially the current team! They have Marcus Flint down for a school record for the number of times he’s blatantly cheated as Captain and he’s only been Captain for a month.”

“Oh don’t be such a spoil-sport.” Ron groaned. “Harry’ll do great!”

“But if he gets hurt while doing great, then nobody wins! Gryffindor will be out a seeker, Harry will be hurt and everyone loses.”

“Snape’ll probably dock me points for existing, if I win.” Harry cleared his throat, trying to imitate the Potions Master’s scowl. “Mr. Potter, you’re breathing near me. Fifty points from Gryffindor!” Harry declared, with a dramatic sweep of his arm, snickering as he remained oblivious of the fact that said Potions Master had heard every word he’d said.

“I have half a mind to dock points regardless, Mr. Potter”, came the cold voice from behind him.

Harry winced, sure that he was in for a detention, especially if he won the game. “Sorry, Professor.”

Snape made no reply, only sweeping past the Gryffindors on his way to the professors’ table. His
normal fluid movement was interrupted with each step by a slight limp, as though he were injured.

“Did you see that? How he’s dragging his foot?” Harry leaned forward to whisper to Hermione, who was seated across the table, motioning for Ron to join him. “Snape’s hurt. And I bet you anything it happened on Halloween.”

Ron frowned, watching the professor slowly and carefully ascend the stairs to the platform upon which all the teachers ate. “Well, there was that whole ‘troll in the dungeon!’ thing.” He murmured.

“Maybe…” Harry muttered, frowning as he despondently shoved a rather large piece of toast into his mouth. “Nah, Snape’s too smart to just bump into something…”

“What do you mean, Harry?” Hermione looked around to make sure the coast was clear before leaning in.

“It’s the dog!” Harry slapped his palm against the table, a mannerism he’d picked up from his mother, as his friends stared in confusion. “I’ve gotten scratched by one before and that makes you limp around. What if Snape was trying to get past the dog?”

“Why would he want to get past that thing?” Ron grimaced, remembering the way it had drooled all over them. “It’s gross.”

“You didn’t see, did you?” Hermione frowned, tapping the end of her spoon against the table. “It was standing on a trap door.” She stated this as if it were the most obvious thing in the world and Ron pulled a face, Harry’s agreeing nod only making the situation worse in his eyes.

“People don’t usually have trap doors unless they’re trying to hide something.” Harry cut in. “Like treasure. Or Christmas presents.”

“Wait, wait, I’m sorry. There was a giant three-headed dog ready to eat us, and you thought to look at what it was standing on?” Ron gave Hermione the single most perplexed look Harry had ever seen grace his friend’s face.

“Of course she did.” Harry chuckled, reaching across the table to playfully tap Hermione’s shoulder. “That’s our Hermione, noticing everything.”

“Girls.” Ron sighed dramatically, before frowning, as if he were about to say something else. Thankfully, Ron was interrupted by the cawing of a familiar snowy white owl, who dropped a scarlet envelope, which was pouring ominously red tinged smoke out of its edges, on the table just in front of Harry.

A rush of laughter erupted from the Slytherin table, but Harry calmly reached out for the letter, reading the address before thoughtfully toying with the seal. Hermione, silenced by the scorch mark the letter had left on the table, stared at it in horror.

“What’s that?” Hermione asked, curious despite her reservations.


“It’s from Sirius, Ron. Can’t be that bad.” Harry grinned and tugged the ribbon edged seal open, entirely prepared for a Howler for the ages. Of course, nothing could compare to the Howler he’d received when he caught the Snitch two minutes into the Little League game he’d been in last year. Immediately, the letter floated up into the air to his eye level, twisting, turning and folding in on itself until it resembled a mouth, the ribbon on the seal turning into a tongue.
“HARRY JAMES POTTER, ONE OF MY FAVORITE GODSONS IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER!” Sirius Black’s voice boomed out of the envelope and Harry chuckled, shaking his head. Uncle Sirius was fond of congratulatory Howlers, something most Wizarding families did not realize was an option, and usually sent everything from birthday cards to holiday gifts this way. “YOU KNOW, YOUR FATHER AND I WERE THE BEST QUIDDITCH PLAYERS HOGWARTS HAD SEEN IN YEARS, SO YOU NEED TO KEEP UP THE FAMILY LEGACY, HERE. SHOW GOOD OLD SNIVELLUS WHO THE WINNERS ARE, YEAH? REMUS SAYS HELLO AND WE WILL ABSOLUTELY BE THERE TO WATCH OUR BOY WIN HIS FIRST MATCH. WEAR A HELMET, PROBABLY. LOVE, YOUR FAVORITE UNCLE AND ALSO REMUS.”

“Course I will. I’m Harry Potter.” Harry replied, smirking, as the letter disintegrated, seemingly chewing itself to pieces. He felt reinvigorated, his nerves melting away as the remaining shreds of the letter faded into nothingness, and he attacked his toast with a newfound voracity.

The rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch team began getting up and exiting the Hall and Harry swallowed hard, shoveling as much food as he could into his mouth. Fred and George, who Harry had only recently learned to tell apart despite knowing them all his life, ran over, dragging him out of his seat.

“We’ll bring him back—” One of the twins began, absentmindedly brushing his floppy shock of red hair out of his eyes.

“If you’re good little firsties!” The other finished, grinning enthusiastically. George, Harry deduced, because his grin was slightly crooked to the left, rather than Fred’s, which was a mirror image of George’s. “Especially you, ickle Ronniekins. Best behavior during matches, you know. Can’t have you shaming the name of Godric Gryffindor more than once a week.”

Ron only stuck his tongue out in response as his brothers chuckled, elbowing each other in congratulations for the well placed joke. “Good luck, Harry! You’d better catch the snitch!”

“I’ll be in big trouble if we lose, really. My whole family’s going to be rooting for Gryffindor, and we all know what happens when Uncle Sirius gets disappointed.” Harry shuddered, worming his way out of Fred and George’s grasps. The last time Puddlemere United, who his uncle was very fond of, had dared to lose a game, Sirius hadn’t spoken to anyone but Remus for a week, and then only to ask if there was any toilet paper left. “Come on, then. Let’s go.”

Fred, George and Harry made their way out of the castle and down to the pitch, a few yards behind the rest of the team, Harry nearly tripping several times in his excitement.

Fred and George ran ahead to grab the rest of their gear from their cubbies, but Harry hung back near the doorway of the locker room, suddenly realizing that he was missing one very crucial thing.

He muttered under his breath, incredibly embarrassed by the fact that he’d forgotten that you needed a broom to play Quidditch, and that his was safely at home, probably being destroyed by his siblings in his absence.

“Harry?” Oliver Wood, the team captain, tapped his shoulder. “You alright there?”

“I’m missing a broom. Do you think I could borrow a school one?” Harry fidgeted nervously as Oliver looked him over, before Oliver broke into a grin.

“If you’ll look over at your place, Mr. Potter, you’ve got one.” Oliver pointed at the slot labeled with Harry’s last name. As Oliver had said, there was a broom propped up within it, and Harry
ran over, recognizing his broom from home.

A note was tied to the handle and Harry grinned, recognizing the familiar smudged mess as his father’s handwriting. He had no idea what it said, as did most people who attempted to decipher the meaning of James Potter’s messages, but assumed it was wishing him good luck, which it likely was. He turned the note over to find his mother’s familiar cursive, with the g’s and y’s looped exactly like his did, telling him to be safe and, thankfully, explaining his father’s addition as well.

“Five minutes, Potter.” Someone slapped Harry on the back while he was pulling on his goggles and arm braces. “Best of luck.”

“Best of luck to you too!” Harry called out, turning around once he’d properly tightened the last strap to see Katie Bell, one of the Chasers smiling at him as she took her place behind Oliver.

“Break a leg!” Fred called out, before taking his place near the door.

“But not really!” George added, playfully nudging his brother to their left, into Angelina Johnson.

“Mount your brooms, team!” Oliver called out, and Harry hurried to the back of the group before mounting his broom. His grip tightened on the familiar broom, and the familiar jittery feeling that always came right before a particularly good flight settled in the pit of his stomach. “We’ll do great. We’ve practiced our formations and adapted strategies to play to our strengths. Slytherin doesn’t stand a chance!”

Madam Hooch’s whistle could clearly be heard, along with a voice that introduced the Gryffindor Quidditch team, and everyone took off, one after another. Harry gleefully pushed off the ground, taking his place in the starting formation as he hovered above the middle Chaser. The Snitch wouldn’t come into play until the middle of the game, at the very least, and Oliver had told him to wait until Gryffindor was ahead by at least seventy points before catching it.

So, for now, all he had to do was wait and not get pummeled by Bludgers while doing so.

“Sounds relatively easy.” Harry said aloud, while surveying the crowd in the stands below him, easily picking out his parents and uncles, as well as Ron and Hermione, who looked incredibly small from this far up, especially when compared to Hagrid, who towered over them even when sitting. “I guess it won’t be that bad.”

On that count, Harry was, as he often is, very much wrong.
On The Pitch

Chapter Summary

“Somebody help!” Harry called out, but he was too far up for anyone but the other players to hear him, and they were all busy concentrating on winning. “Something’s wrong with my broom!”

Chapter Notes

This week was another tough one, in terms of writing, but this chapter's about one and a half times the length of the last one, because if there's one thing I can at least try to do, it's write sports.

Next week, we should get back to our usual update length, since LadyLai'll have it a lot easier in terms of workload, and just in time, because our Dear Mr. Potter is going to hit the plot-heavy section of the book then!

We're closing in on the beginning of Chapter 12, in terms of parallels to the book, and that's going to make things really exciting.

Harry swung his broom around to face the Slytherin end of the field, watching the Chasers push at each other and jostle for possession of the Quaffle while keeping an eye out for the golden glimmer he’d been told to focus on. He looked over his shoulder to see Oliver flying back and forth between the goal hoops, and smiled in relief when Oliver waved in his direction.

“Ten points to Gryffindor.” He said, as he heard the commentator announce that the scoreboard had changed, daring to fly a little lower after dodging a Bludger that one of the Slytherins sent his way. That Beater was immediately rewarded with a Bludger to the stomach, hit hard enough to nearly knock him off his broom, courtesy of George, who winked in Harry’s direction before getting back into position.

“Stay out of trouble, Potter!” George yelled gleefully, hitting an errant bludger away from Alicia Spinnet and toward Fred.

“Wouldn’t want our favorite little brother to lose an arm, right?” Fred batted it straight over to the group of Slytherin Chasers, easily scattering them.

Harry chuckled and nodded before resolving to be more aware of the movement of the other players, hovering close to the goal hoops for a few more minutes before deciding upon making slow circuits of the field. Moving around more, he mused, should make it easier to spot the Snitch and probably make him much less of a target for the Beaters. Harry was nothing if not fast, on or off a broom, and faster targets made for a hard time aiming, which was yet another reason why he had to pay more attention to whether the Snitch had been spotted yet. Gryffindor was up to thirty points, now, and Oliver had said to wait until at least sixty before grabbing the Snitch, if Slytherin didn’t begin to score too quickly.
The Slytherin Chasers had managed a couple goals already, resulting in loud groans from the red and gold clad section of the stadium and cheers from the side draped in green and silver, and the general air of nervousness was palpable. Someone had to catch the Snitch, whether it was Gryffindor or Slytherin, and end this quickly before a fight broke out. And judging by the way both sets of Beaters’ hands were inching towards their wands whenever they weren’t occupied by the Bludgers, Harry did not have long to end the game.

The Slytherin Seeker, a green and silver clad boy a couple years ahead of Harry whose name he couldn’t recall immediately, was watching him like a hawk, moving every single time he did. Harry sent a good, strong glare in the other boy’s direction, hoping to scare him off, but it didn’t work, of course, Harry being the sort of boy who was not very well suited to intimidating others, and he huffed in disappointment as the boy laughed it off, Harry retaliating by making a few slow circles around the pitch to try and throw him off his game.

However, as luck would have it, these laps worked to Harry’s advantage, and he gasped as he noticed the Snitch floating near Angelina Johnson’s head. But just as he began to urge the broom into a dive, it jerked uncontrollably beneath him, twitching wildly as it tried to push him off, and he held on as tightly as he could, wondering what exactly was happening.

“Somebody help!” Harry called out, but he was too far up for anyone but the other players to hear him, and they were all busy concentrating on winning. “Something’s wrong with my broom!”

Hagrid’s jaw dropped in shock as Harry’s broom jerked beneath him, nearly dropping his binoculars. “Ron, yeh have ter take a look at this. Somebody’s messin’ with Harry’s broom.”

“What?” Ron glanced up at the unusually tall man, concern evident on his face. “No, it… must be the wind, I reckon.”

“Not when the broom’s moving like that.” Hermione said, fearfully watching Harry hold on for dear life. One of his hands slipped from the broom, leaving him holding on by the tips of his fingers, but he got his other hand gripping the broomstick tightly quickly enough to avoid a rather nasty fall. If he fell from that height, he’d easily break a few bones, if not worse. “The Nimbuses, like most other modern broom brands, are enchanted to account for wind. It shouldn’t be doing that.”

“But… who’d want to mess with his broom? One of the Slytherins, maybe?” The redhead’s expression darkened as he cast his gaze towards the stands bearing students clad in green and silver. His gaze fell upon one particular student, who was cheerfully shouting at Harry to just let go already as his two dark haired minions flanked him on either side, glaring at anyone who dared disapprove of their leader.

“Maybe.” Hagrid frowned. “Yeh’ve got the binoculars, Ron, so I couldn’ta told yeh if I wanted to.”

Hastily, Ron pressed them to his eyes, peering across the stadium as Harry’s course grew increasingly violent before his slow sweep of the crowd led him to a familiar face. “No, no, no… Hey. Hey, look, Snape’s lips are moving.”

“Is he making eye contact?” Hermione frowned, and stood up when she saw Ron nod in confirmation, looking around cautiously before drawing her wand. Ron blinked in surprise, never having seen Hermione this scared before, and drew his own to match. “We have to stop him! Hagrid, thanks for the binoculars.”

“We don’t have time to thank people, Hermione!” Ron scrambled to his feet, already shoving his
way through the huddled Gryffindors. “Hurry up, Hermione!”

“I’m running, Ronald.” Hermione raced down the steps and rounded the corner to get into the gaps behind the stands, ducking under support beams as she made her way to just behind the teacher’s stand. She spotted the hanging edge of Snape’s black robes a few feet away and motioned for Ron to be quiet before she pointed her wand at the hem. “Lacarnum inflamare!”

At once, blue flames streamed forth from the end of Hermione’s wand, finding their target in the edge of Snape’s robes, and the air underneath the stands quickly became thick with the smell of burning cloth as the flames rose higher and higher. Hermione quickly sheathed her wand before grabbing Ron’s arm, dragging him out of the way. The rest of the teachers fled the stands, or at least scooted further along the bench to avoid injury, as Snape whipped his robes around, trying to put out the fire before it spread.

Professor Quirrell, who had, until now, been watching the match very closely, fell over when Snape’s elbow barely missed his face. By the time he had regained his balance and straightened his turban, Harry had regained his balance, swinging his body back up onto the broom before zooming after the Snitch. “We have to be back at the Gryffindor stands before anyone else notices we’re missing!”

“Wha- hey, let go- blimey-” Ron grumbled as the duo weaved through the stands, Hermione’s hand clenched tight around his wrist. Lee’s exclamation that Potter had done it and gotten back on his broom went almost entirely unnoticed as they focused on remaining unheard and unseen by the crowd just above them.

“This is not the time.” Hermione dragged them back up into the stands, letting go of Ron’s hand as they nearly bumped into Hagrid, who was gleefully clapping as Harry executed a rather spectacular roll to avoid a Bludger aimed at the back of his head.

“Where’s Harry?” Ron demanded, searching the air for his best friend before grabbing the binoculars he’d left on the bench, scanning the sky until he spotted Harry hovering just above the action. He exhaled in relief, thankful that no harm had come to him, and set the binoculars down before sitting down heavily. “Merlin’s beard, that was enough excitement for a lifetime.”

Hermione picked up the binoculars as soon as Ron had set them down, wanting to confirm for herself that Harry was alright, and looked up to see Harry diving for the field, seemingly out of control again. She very nearly shrieked in surprise, shaking Ron, who was, by this time, focusing on retying his shoelaces, which had come undone during their short run, by the shoulder. “Ron, look, he’s lost control again—”

“But you stopped Snape!” Ron shouted in reply, lunging forward to grab onto the railing.

“I can’t set Harry on fire, Ron!” Hermione yelled before grabbing the railing just as tightly, watching in horror as Harry leaned forward a little too far, arm outstretched in front of him, and tumbled off his broom, rolling over a few times before coming to a rest. He didn’t move for a few seconds, and a few teachers, James Potter included, cautiously made their way down to the edge of the field just in case they were needed. “Is he alright? Can you see anything?”

“I don’t know- he isn’t moving yet!” Ron leaned a little further over the railing, and was only saved from taking a fall much like his friend’s by Hermione’s quick thinking, as she grabbed him by the back of his sweater as soon as he’d moved too far forward. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” She shrugged, still watching Harry, who began to stir. “Look, he’s moving!”

Harry, who felt as if a thousand angry bees were flying about inside his head, slowly sat up,
bracing himself with one hand, and coughed hard, smacking his chest with a fist. The crowd stared in confusion, wondering what could possibly have happened in the air that could have Harry choking on something, and James Potter, who was being physically restrained by Professor McGonagall to avoid violating the terms of the game, was yelling something about hexes and cheating Slytherins, which many of the Gryffindors were echoing quite loudly, much to the other teachers’ displeasure.

Harry’s upper body violently lurched forward once, twice and then he stopped suddenly halfway through the third, spitting something out into his gloved hand. Harry lifted the shiny object up, wiping it off on his robes before breaking into a fit of laughter as it sprouted wings, buzzing happily in his hand as it shone golden in the morning sun.

There was a long moment of stunned silence before the stadium erupted into frenzied cheers, the rest of the Gryffindor team getting to the ground as soon as possible to congratulate their teammate as the Slytherins grumbled about the loss, immediately disappearing into their locker room as they touched back down.

Ron continued staring at the Snitch in Harry’s hand in mild horror for a few moments, before turning to look at Hermione. “Did he just spit up the Snitch?”

“You know, I think he did.” Hermione leaned forward as Harry got to his feet, waving the Snitch around wildly, as Fred and George threw their arms around his shoulders. Oliver looked supremely pleased as he ruffled Harry’s hair, telling everyone who would listen that he was sure that Gryffindor would have the Quidditch Cup safely in McGonagall’s office for the next seven years.

“HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH. HE CAUGHT THE SNITCH!” A loud voice erupted suddenly, from the end of the magical megaphone its owner was holding. Lee Jordan, everyone’s favorite unbiased commentator, paused for a moment before yelling again. “GRYFFINDOR WINS!”

Lee Jordan’s grin could be seen from halfway across the stadium, as could Harry’s, until he caught sight of his father frowning deeply from the sidelines, wearing an expression Harry was much more familiar with seeing on his Uncle Remus after Uncle Sirius had spilled something on one of his books. That expression, when paired with the tie-dye Gryffindor Quidditch jumper his father was currently sporting, was truly an image he wanted to forget ever existed.

Harry groaned.

He was definitely grounded forever, and that was if word about how this match ended didn’t reach his mother.

“Professor!” Hermione called out as she approached the teacher’s desk, Ron and Harry close behind, at the end of the next Defense lesson, catching James’ attention as he wiped the blackboard clean. “We, well, I would like to ask about something.” She shot a scathing look at the boys, who mumbled incoherently for a few minutes before looking around the room.

“At ease, Granger. I’m technically not your teacher, right now.” James smiled as Hermione relaxed a little, holding herself slightly less stiffly. “What’s your question about?”

“Actually, it’s about the Quidditch match.” Harry spoke up, stepping forward. “And what happened with my broom. I know you saw it. Someone was jinxing it. And we think we know who that someone is.”
“Investigating these things is all well and good, really, but…” James paused for a second, looking over the three children in front of him. Ron, especially, was strangely silent, his face set in a grimly serious manner that James had seen on Molly many a time during the war. Whatever it was these kids had their minds set on, Ron was thoroughly convinced and wouldn’t budge an inch unless shown concrete proof that they were in the wrong. “Accusing someone of tampering with a broom, especially a broom with a child on it, is really serious. People go to Azkaban over things like this. You have to have solid proof that whoever you think is doing this actually did it.”

“We think it was Snape.” Harry said, eyes narrowing. “He was making eye contact the whole time and Hermione and Ron saw him with Hagrid’s binoculars and he was whispering something the whole time the broom was trying to throw me off.”

“Harry’s broom stopped moving around like that when Snape’s robes caught on fire and looked away.” Ron piped up. “And Hermione said that you’ve got to keep eye contact if you’re jinxing someone! That’s got to mean something!”

“Look, it’s no secret that there’s no love lost between myself and Professor Snape, but I do know one thing about him.” Harry snorted, rolling his eyes, and James sighed, running a hand through his hair, as he often did when nervous or tackling hard topics he did not want to expound upon. “He would never physically hurt a kid. Slander, sure. Lies, sure. Blatantly bigoted campaign to ruin someone’s life? Definitely. But he would never risk killing a kid just for laughs. Unless you’re telling me Snape’s running some sort of Evil Science Camp that wants Harry dead, you’ve got nothing of substance.”

“But-- But-- Professor-- Dad!” Harry stammered, clenching his fists at his sides. James crossed his arms, with an expression that could have been carved from stone, and Harry, recognizing his father’s message that the conversation was over and that no further elaboration on the reasoning behind this accusation would get anywhere, chose to ignore it. “I could have died and you’re not even going to tell me that you’ll consider it.” The way Harry spat out the word death as if it meant nothing had something dangerous flashing in James’ eyes before his expression was carefully schooled back into something resembling neutrality.

“Severus Snape, while not an exemplary human being, deserves the benefit of the doubt just like all of the rest of us.” James went back to cleaning the blackboard as a new class full of students slowly filtered in. “The three of you are going to be late to your next class if you don’t hurry. I’ll write you a note, if you want one.”

“That would be--”

“Unnecessary. Come on, let’s go.” Harry cut Hermione off before stalking out of the room, grumbling, Ron and Hermione on either side of him as they climbed up the middle set of stairs at the end of the hall and took a left into another corridor. “Who needs adults to help anyway? We’re getting to the bottom of this our way.”

“You thinking what I’m thinking?” Ron grinned as he looked to his friend, rewarded by a hint of a smile from his best friend.

“I’m thinking that it’s been far too long since we’ve gone exploring.” Harry said, just as they rounded the corner to enter the Charms classroom exactly on time. “And we’ve got no homework, so I say we do it tonight.”
Chapter Summary

Harry stuck his tongue out, speeding up slightly as they found an unfamiliar corridor. “Don’t worry, I’m at least a little sure this isn’t the dog one.”

“Harry!” Ron sounded entirely displeased with his friend’s lack of direction.

Ron’s footsteps echoed in the empty hall behind them as he trudged after Harry, who was enthusiastically walking forward despite the lack of light to guide them. His voice was pitched low, but he only seemed to be whining.

“Harry… Why are we up? We have class tomorrow.” He grumbled, rubbing at one of his eyes with the heel of his palm.

“Cause we’ve got to do something more interesting than star charts this week.” Harry gripped the railing tightly as he padded down the stairs in front of them, hoping no one saw them. Thankfully, there was no sign of any professors, let alone Filch or his even more terrifying cat, Mrs. Norris, and Harry, relieved, let loose a breath he didn’t know he was holding before making a sharp left down the next hallway. “Star charts suck.”

“Yeah, but you know what’s even better than… whatever this is?” Ron replied, his movements sluggish and obviously very much forced. “Sleeping. Sleeping would be awesome.”

“Exploring is cooler than sleep, I guess.” Harry sighed, stumbling slightly for a few steps as he blinked sleepily, before regaining his balance.

“That’s a personal opinion.” Came the response, accompanied by a snort.

“Yeah, but it’s my opinion, so it’s got to count for at least one and a half times more.” Harry stuck his tongue out, speeding up slightly as they found an unfamiliar corridor. “Don’t worry, I’m at least a little sure this isn’t the dog one.”

“Harry!” Ron sounded entirely displeased with his friend’s lack of direction.

The corridor ended in a large, circular room, and Harry stepped out into the middle of it, looking around until he noticed something shiny peeking out from behind one of the stone pillar arranged in a ring around the edge of the room. “Ron, do you see that?”

Harry crept forward, realizing that what he’d seen was the very edge of a mirror catching the moonlight filtering in through the only window. The mirror itself was surrounded by an ornate gold frame, with a series of incomprehensible words carved across an arch spanning the whole top edge of the rectangular mirror. The words, however, made no sense to Harry, especially in his sleep addled state, but he did remember one word in particular.

Erised.

“... Sorry, I don’t read gibberish.” Ron mumbled from the doorway.
“Must be a magic mirror.” Harry said, looking into its depths as if staring harder would reveal something, but all he saw in the mirror was himself, dressed exactly as he was at this very moment in last Christmas’ slightly frayed, red Weasley jumper with a blocky gold ‘H’ embroidered in the middle, haphazardly pulled over blue and white striped pajamas that were finally, to his delight, getting just a little short in the arms and legs. The Harry in the mirror shot a smile his way, waving contentedly, and Harry raised a hand to wave back, before realizing it would look extremely odd if Ron were to see him waving at himself, and stepped to the side.

Whatever magic was in this mirror, it wasn’t working for him.

“Ron, c’mere. You take a look.” He said, shooting one last glance at Mirror Harry, who looked about the room as if the world were owed to him before laughing and running a hand through his perpetually messy hair, which stuck up in oddly grouped tufts after his hand had left it. Harry raised a hand to his own hair, which was likely squashed into some odd shape after all the tossing and turning he’d done before deciding to go exploring rather than sleep, trying to flatten it self-consciously.

He was soon distracted by Ron shuffling forward to peer into the mirror. Almost immediately, his eyes widened and his mouth formed a small ‘o’. “Blimey...”

“What do you see?” Harry asked, from where he was standing off to the side. He felt more than a little jealous, now, seeing as Ron had seen something in the mirror but he hadn’t.

“I’m… I’m standing in front of the Great Hall. Dumbledore is handing me the house cup...!” He whispered in awe.

“That’s really cool, Ron!” Harry grinned, still uneasy. “You’re seeing this in the mirror, right?”

“Yeah. Yeah, of course.” Ron rubbed at the back of his neck, his eyes still lingering on the glass.

“Honest?” Harry’s voice wavered slightly. “I didn’t see anything. Just me.”

“Dunno. Maybe it doesn’t work for you?” Ron finally tore his gaze away to look at his friend, nose scrunched up in thought.

“Maybe.” Harry shrugged. “What do you think it shows, anyway?”

“The future, maybe.” The response was hopeful, and Ron glanced between Harry and his reflection once more. The Ron in the mirror grinned as he lifted the House Cup above his head, as both Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall looked on proudly, and the corners of Ron’s lips curved upward as he allowed himself to believe a little more in this being real, someday.

“If it shows the future, that means I’m dead. Or a vampire.” Harry frowned, glaring at the mirror as if it had personally offended him. “Well, I guess I wouldn’t have see anything if I were a vampire, really, so that one’s out.”

“Good point... “ Ron sighed. “I have no idea.”

“Your dad does artifact stuff at the Ministry, right?” Harry turned to Ron eagerly. “We could ask him!”

“Nah, Dad works with muggle stuff. He probably wouldn’t know anything about this.”

“Maybe Mum might.” Harry shrugged. “She knows stuff like this, usually.”

“Your mum is smart. It’s worth a shot, at least.” Ron nodded, yawning into his hand. “Now can
we go back to bed?”

“Sounds about worth it.” Harry sighed, plodding off towards the exit. “Have we really found everything interesting in this school already?”

“You know, the Fat Lady says you two came back in at two in the morning, last night.” Hermione frowned, looking at Harry and Ron disapprovingly as they made their way down to Hagrid’s Hut. It was time for their weekly tea and Harry, for one, was looking forward to rock cakes. They’d glue his mouth shut so he wouldn’t slip up and tell Hermione about the mirror, thereby saving himself two hours of talking about his feelings.

“The Fat Lady says a lot of stuff.” Harry shrugged, hunching his shoulders slightly. “Doesn’t mean it happened.”

“Yeah, she just likes the attention, I bet. I would too, if I were stuck in a frame all day.” Ron nodded sagely.

“So you’re telling me that neither of you left the dormitory last night.” She raised an eyebrow, looking between them as if she knew one of them was going to crack eventually, and Harry sped up ever so slightly in the hopes that Hagrid’s appearance would rescue them from the fallout. Or, if he were lucky, Ron would admit to it first, saving Harry a lecture or any of the blame.

Ron cleared his throat, offering a sheepish smile, as he often did when trying to sway Hermione’s decision in his favor. “Well… we aren’t saying we didn’t?”

“And we also aren’t saying we did.” Harry winked at his friends before knocking on the wooden hut’s door. “Hey, Hagrid, it’s us!”

The door swung open a moment later, revealing the looming form of Hogwarts’ Keeper of the Keys and Grounds, Rubeus Hagrid. Hagrid was nearly twice the size of the children, and his heavy brown coat, which seemed to be made of pockets, only added to his intimidating stature. But, despite how scary he looked, Hagrid was, save for Uncle Sirius, the most enthusiastic adult Harry had ever known.

He was full of glee, as always, at the sight of friends’ son, and smiled fondly as he ruffled Harry’s hair before pulling him in for a bone crushing hug. Harry grinned, wrapping his arms as far as they would go around the groundskeeper before letting go and wriggling out of Hagrid’s grasp.

“C’mon in.” Hagrid said cheerfully, ushering the students through the wide doorway. “I got the tea on already.”

“How’s your life been?”

“Oh, same as usual, mostly!” He chortled. Fang padded over to Ron and Hermione, who had taken up residence on the over-sized loveseat near the door.

“My year’s been just grand, so far.” Harry looked over at Hagrid, his face the picture of innocence. “We discovered a giant black dog with three heads who wanted to eat us, a couple weeks ago, I have no idea how I can pass Potions and Snape tried to kill me last weekend. Don’t
know about you, but I’m hoping I’ll at least get extra credit for that last one.”

Hagrid seemed dumbfounded by the sudden influx of information, especially delivered with such a cheerful smile. “.... Yeh found Fluffy?” He finally asked.

“Fluffy?” Harry’s expression shifted into something resembling incredulity. “His name is Fluffy? Hagrid, he’s a three headed dog!”

“Oh, he don’ mean no harm. He’s just a guard dog, is all!” Hagrid protested.

“Hagrid, he’s violent and dangerous and in a school full of children!” Hermione frowned. “And of course he’s a guard dog. He’s sitting on a trapdoor.”

“Question is, what’s he hiding?” Harry leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Dad was saying something about someone breaking into Gringotts a couple months ago…”

“Well, my mum always says Hogwarts is one of the safest places in the world… Maybe they moved whatever they were after here?” Ron suggested.

“Now, there’ll be none o’ that. Whatever is beyond that trapdoor is between Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel.” Hagrid said, setting his mug down on a nearby stool.

“Who’s Nicolas Flamel?” Hermione asked, tilting her head slightly to the right, as she often did when wondering about something.

“Oh… I shouldn’ta said that.”

“The name sounds familiar…” Harry frowned, trying to place where he’d heard it before. “I can’t remember where I’ve heard it, though.”

“No. Yeh kids just forget I said anythin’, you hear me? This is a heap o’ trouble you aren’ gettin’ involved in.”

“Hermione, I’m going to regret saying this in a second, but…” Harry bit his lip, as if he were about to sign over the world to his friend. “We’d better check the library.”

“Why bother? This obviously has something to do with Snape. He was limping, remember?” Ron crossed his arms. “He probably tried to get past the dog-”

“Fluffy.” Hagrid corrected. “And Snape has nothin’ ter do with anythin’- an’ neither do any o’ yeh.”

“Dad said the same thing.” Harry grumbled, running a hand through his hair. “Don’t blame Snape, he says, because Snape’s an alright guy despite being, you know, entirely evil and hating everyone. Well, everyone’s forgetting that Snape cursed my broomstick and he’s constantly picking on me. He’s definitely up to something!”

“He’s a teacher, Harry! He wouldn’t be after whatever Fluffy’s hiding.” Hermione frowned. “The teachers would be protecting it, wouldn’t they?”

“Snape has no reason ter steal the stone. He’s the one protecting it. Well, one of ‘em, of course.”

“A stone?” Ron scrunched his nose up, scratching at one of his ears. “.... Maybe we should head to the library.”

“We don’t have much time before the end of term. Hardly a week, actually.” Hermione stood up,
looking to the door. “If we want answers, we should start looking.”

Harry immediately stood up, striding towards the door, and Ron and Hermione followed, although Ron was reluctant to get up. Adventures were all well and good, but he really did need some sleep.

The wooden door swung shut behind them, leaving Hagrid holding a now cold mug of tea. He looked down at Fang, who simply wagged his tail in excitement while staring at the door, as if expecting the children to return.

“I shouldn’ta told ‘em any o’ that.” He sighed, scratching behind the dog’s ears.
Chapter Summary

“Three sibling free months and now, it’s all over.” Harry sighed, looking out the window.

(Or: In which Harry becomes the seagulls from Finding Nemo, James makes horrible dad jokes and Spike the Cactus finally attains main character status.)

Chapter Notes

We skipped a week for Thanksgiving, but here we are with a nearly 4k long update to make up for the week we missed! I think we might take another two weeks off for Christmas and New Years, so that'll have us wrapping up HPSS around the end of January.

And then begins the next Adventure-- Harry Potter and the Haunted Toilet.

“Three sibling free months and now, it’s all over.” Harry sighed, looking out the window. They’d already been told that it would be less than half an hour until the train pulled into King’s Cross station, and he was glad for it, as he’d been missing his siblings a little more during the last week than he’d like to admit.

“My parents and I are going skiing.” Hermione piped up. “It’s bound to be fun. I’ll write to you both.”

“Just send ‘em to Harry.” Ron advised. “Ginny and I are staying at his house since Mum and Dad are off visiting Charlie in Romania.” Ginny, of course, had had the option of going with her parents since she was the only child still living at home. She had opted to stay over at the Potter’s, however, and catch up with Sarah.

“It’s going to be loads of fun, having Ron over.” Harry nodded enthusiastically. “It’ll be lots more people in the house than usual, though. Especially since Neville and his parents’ll drop by on Christmas, probably.”

“Well there’ll be less than the Burrow on a normal day.” Ron snorted, digging around in his bag in search of his wand. He had changed out of his robes earlier and had forgotten to pick it back up. “Plus your house is way bigger anyways.”

“I guess, a little.” Harry shrugged, checking that he had his wand just in case. He’d tucked it into the belt loop of his jeans, just like his father did, and he smiled as he wrapped his fingers around the grip. “Sucks that we can’t use magic over break, though.”

“I was just starting to get the hang of some of those spells too.” Ron huffed. “At least you’ll be used to it, right Hermione? Since your parents are muggles and all.”
“You know,” Hermione began conversationally, barely stifling a laugh, “if there are magical adults in the house, the Ministry often can’t tell the difference between a child and an adult doing magic.”

“Oh, no, Ron, we’ve ruined Hermione.” Harry groaned, hiding his face in his hands. “You’re supposed to be the good one.”

“Fred and George can never know.” Ron swore quietly.

“Never.” Harry shuddered, standing up as soon as the train came to a stop. He hurriedly pulled his trunk out from under the seat before rushing out the compartment door, which Hermione opened just before Harry ran into it.

“Thanks.” He grinned at her for a second before dragging the heavy trunk behind him and into the hallway. “I’ll write, I promise.”

Ron rushed after his friend, waving over one shoulder as they disappeared into the throngs of students. They managed to get off the train without too much issue, and the platform was slightly less crowded.

Harry looked around eagerly, although he tried to appear less excited than he was, and found a spot away from the general rush of the crowd, motioning for Ron to hang around near the wall with him. Hermione, who spotted her parents immediately, stopped to hug both boys before rushing off to them.

“Have a good holiday!” She called out, and Harry waved at her.

“You too, Hermione!”

“Bye!”

A few moments after Hermione and her parents had disappeared from the platform, there was a high pitched shriek of joy. “HAAAARRY-!”

A small form darted from the crowd and Anne crashed into her brother’s legs, a grin lighting up her face. “I missed you!”

“Hi there!” Harry set down the handle of his trunk to hug her as tightly as he could. “I missed you too!”

“You better have, you big idiot!” Any bite in her words were lost as she stood on her toes to hug him properly. Drew trotted over, Matt hurrying after him. Sarah brought up the rear, hanging back rather than attacking Harry, as her siblings seemed to want to do.

“Course I missed you. I wrote you every day, just like I promised.” He ruffled her hair. “I even skipped homework too, sometimes, but don’t tell Amma.”

“It’s Charu you have to worry about, not Amma.” Drew reminded his older brother. Matt had already moved to attach himself to Harry’s other leg, mumbling something that was probably a greeting. It got lost in the clamour of voices surrounding them.

Harry patted Matt’s head, not one to miss his brother’s actions, and sighed. “Well, Charu, I did alright. I went to all of my exams.”

“That’s all that can be expected, I guess.” Sarah shook her head. “It’s nice. Seeing you. Yeah.”
“Same.” Harry grinned.

“How come Ron is here?” Anne demanded, wrinkling her nose at the Weasley. He stuck his tongue out at her.’

“His parents are in Romania with Charlie, so he’s staying over with us for the break.” Harry grinned, throwing an arm around his friend’s shoulders.

“Are all of the Weasley kids coming?” Drew asked, a look of excitement overtaking his features. If there was one thing he loved about that many people, it was the ability to have a proper Quidditch match.

“Nah. Percy, Fred and George said they were staying back at the castle.” Harry sighed, shaking his head. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, Percy’s not bad, but he sucks.”

“He doesn’t play Quidditch.” Drew said, sounding mildly disappointed.

“You’ll be here for Christmas, right?” Matt reached up to tug at Ron’s shirt.

“Uh. Yeah, guess so. Mum’ll probably send over gifts for everyone too.”

“Sweaters?” Harry asked hopefully. “I’m growing out of mine.”

“What else?” Ron snorted.

“Food?” Sarah shrugged. “Your mom’s predictable about those thing. It’s nice.”

“She sent candy last year.” Matt pointed out.

“Candy’s nice.” Harry brightened up. “Candy’s always nice.”

“Oh, there you are.” James sprinted up to the crowd of happy children, calmly checking his watch as he came to a stop. “Four, five, six… We’re missing one. Where’s Ginny?”

“Mum says she’ll drop her off at your house before her and dad head off. Probably an hour or so.” Ron said.

“Okay, good.” James grinned, motioning to one of the fireplace grates further down the platform. “Let’s get in the shortest line, I guess, considering there are about forty of us.”

“Forty?” Harry snorted. “Dad, it’s ten at the outside.”

“You’re not the only one done with school, kid.”

“Professor Dad needs a break.” Lily smiled, already ushering her children towards the fireplaces. She ruffled Ron’s hair in greeting.

“Agreed.” James groaned, before motioning for the kids to follow. “Right, no one’s going to do anything like get in the fire without putting Floo Powder in or say the wrong place, right?”

“We’re first years, Mr. Potter, not idiots.” Ron grumbled.

“Believe me, the getting in the fire story did not happen to a first year.” James shook his head. “Maybe it would have been less funny if it did.”

“Was it you, Daddy?” Anne asked, peering out from behind Harry’s legs.
“I bet it was Uncle Sirius!” Drew snickered.

“You’ve never met that person.” James shrugged. “Harry has, but not the rest of you.”

“What, some distant uncle or something?” Harry scratched his head, shrugging as he realized he had no idea who his father was talking about.

“Something of the sort.” James replied calmly before helping Harry and Ron pull their trunks over to the fireplaces. “Remember, grab the Floo Powder, drop it in, say ‘Potter Residence’ clearly and you’re golden.”

“What happened to the person who forgot to put the powder in first?” Sarah asked.

“Well, we had a pretty spectacular fire on our hands, then.” James rolled his eyes. “He’s done worse since, really, so that must have been the beginning of the downward spiral.”

“That’s enough of that. Holidays aren’t a time to be talking about people setting themselves on fire.” Lily said, a hint of warning in her voice as she glanced towards her husband. “Harry, why don’t you go first?”

“Sounds good.” Harry grinned, dragging his trunk along behind him as he ran the length of the platform to the previously pointed out fireplace. He approached the cup of floo powder by the fireplace, scooping up a handful before returning to grab his trunk, which his father had shrunk down to the size of a matchbox with a tap of his wand, stuffing it in his pocket before approaching the flames.

He threw the handful of powder into the roaring fire, the flames turning a bright green, and stepped into them, yelling “Potter Residence” before he was swept away from the train station, tripping out of a familiar fireplace onto the previously gray living room carpet, which was now covered in soot, thanks to him. “Mum’s going to be livid.”

Harry padded down the stairs once he was sure all of his siblings had gone to the bed, hoping to find his mother alone. The image he’d seen in the mirror a week or two before was still bothering him, especially when coupled with the fact that Ron had seen something incredible. Was it really the future? Did that mean that Harry wouldn’t make it past eleven? He’d heard some of the Slytherins mutter under their breaths about people like him not being welcome, but he hadn’t thought it was that bad.

“Amma?” He called out, from the base of the stairs, hoping he didn’t wake the portraits instead.

There was a shuffling noise from the den, and then his mother’s familiar voice called out, “I’m in here, Hari.”

Harry nodded before making his way into the den, fidgeting as he stood in the doorway, playing with some of the loose threads in the hem of his t-shirt. “You free for a second?”

Lily was sitting in one of the big armchairs near the fireplace. The flickering flames cast a warm light through the whole room, and she smiled brightly. “Well, there isn’t much I’d be doing this late at night. What did you need, sweetheart?”

“Nothing, really.” Harry shrugged, choosing a chair by her and walking over to sit down in it. “Was just thinking about something.”

“Oh, something is all? Here I thought it might be a somewho, or a somewhat.” Lily teased. “And just what might this something be?”
“A somewho?” Harry frowned. “Is that even a word?”

“Probably not.”

“Something… happened at school.” Harry chose his words carefully, trying his best to make himself seem as innocent as possible in the situation. That was a tall order, considering he’d been the one to suggest exploring in the first place, but he did his best. “Ron and I found this empty classroom and we wanted to see what was in it, so we went in. And there was this mirror there, with weird writing on the top. And Ron saw something in it and I just… didn’t.”

Lily watched him curiously, having to suppress a sigh at his cover story. It was severely lacking, but there wasn’t much she could do about it now. “What sort of things did Ron see?” She asked, instead.

“Saw himself grown up and winning the House Cup. Something about Dumbledore and McGonagall being proud of him.” Harry shrugged, once again fiddling with his shirt instead of looking his mother in the eye, like he normally would have.

“And you… didn’t see anything?”

“I just… saw me.” He shrugged, pulling his knees up to his chest before wrapping his arms around them. The action made him look a lot smaller than he was, and he stared off into the heart of the flames as if some distraction would spring up if he wished hard enough. “Like a normal mirror. It was weird, ‘cause Ron kept saying that maybe it was telling the future or something, and if it was telling the future, then maybe I’m dead or something.”

“No, I don’t think it was anything like that.” Lily shook her head and reached out to smooth down Harry’s wild hair. “Is that what you’re so anxious about? If the mirror could show the future, I don’t think it would show nothing. Why not show you right now? Or this morning, when we collected you off the train?”

“Then what was it?” Harry looked up, barely meeting her eyes for a second. “It said ‘Erised’ across the top. That’s not Latin for something, right?”

Lily smiled softly, shaking her head. “No, not Latin. It isn’t anything you should worry about, at least. If you really didn’t see anything, then what harm can it do?”

“Ron said to talk to you cause you usually know stuff about artifacts and things, so I guess I’ll take your word for it.” Harry smiled, pushing his glasses back up into place. “Can’t do any harm if I just don’t think about it, right?”

Lily smiled softly, “No, I don’t suppose it can.” She patted his shoulder, shifting slightly. “Now, you should be in bed. It’s late.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Harry got up, stretching his arms before heading for the door. He turned back just as he reached the doorway. “I missed you. Only a little bit, though. Not too much. Yeah.”

“I missed you too, sweetheart. Just wait till summer. You’ll be begging to go back to Hogwarts.” She joked.

“Maybe.” Harry shrugged. “I’m liking this no homework deal.”

“Ron! Ron, wake up!” Harry nearly pounced on his friend, who was asleep on an extra mattress that they’d dragged into his room.
Ron grumbled, rolling over and pulling the blanket over his head. “It’ll still be Christmas an hour from now.”

“Who cares about Christmas? The Longbottoms are here! Come on!” Harry grabbed his friend by the arm, dragging him out the door and down the stairs. Neville and his parents were probably already here, as they usually were on Christmas morning, and Harry was quite eager to show off the latest picture he’d taken of Spike the Cactus, the pet plant Uncle Frank had given him as a “congratulations on getting into school and hopefully staying there” present. Spike, incidentally, was now growing white and purple flowers that smelled like spearmint toothpaste.

“About time you two showed up.” James grinned, sitting on the floor with his kids rather than in the armchairs scattered around the room like the other adults. “Sleepyheads.”

“It’s hardly even eight, Appa.” Harry groaned, sitting down right next to Anne, leaning back to wave at Ginny, who was sitting by Sarah. “Morning, Ginny.”

“Good morning, Harry.” She yawned. “Morning, Ron.”

Ron, who was still in the process of waking himself, only grunted at his sister.

“Ron seems angry.” Neville piped up from where he was sitting on the floor, squished between Frank and Alice’s chairs. His Weasley Sweater, which he’d already unwrapped, was patterned in yellow and black, which Neville seemed very proud of. Harry spotted his under the tree in the corner of the room, among a couple other boxes, and rubbed his hands together in excitement. Unlike Ron’s, Mrs. Weasley always made his in his favorite color.

Frank reached down to ruffle his son’s hair, shaking his head. “He’s just tired, Nev. Don’t mind him.”

“Morning, Uncle Frank. Aunt Alice. Neville.” Harry grabbed the photograph he’d tucked into the pocket of his pajama pants before scrambling to his seat, running over to the Longbottoms. “I got a picture of Spike. He’s growing flowers. They’re purple.”

“That’s impressive, Harry.” Frank passed the photo to Alice after taking a good look at it. “You might want to put Spike in another pot after this round of flowers passes. I’ll show you how to remix the soil.”

“Cool.” Harry grinned, happy that he’d kept his plant safe. The last one Uncle Frank had given him had suffered a rather unpleasant fate, and was no longer mentioned for quite good reasons.

Lily smiled as she entered the room, a tray of mugs propped against her hip. She was passing out coffee or tea to the adults, and hot chocolate to the kids. “Since you boys just woke up, why don’t you unwrap some gifts?”

Harry, who had been raring to go from the moment he spotted the package from the Weasleys, nearly raced over to grab it. “Hey, Ron, ready for your newest maroon fashion accessory?”

Ron groaned, but picked up his own package. As much as he grumbled over it, he still pulled the maroon sweater on over his pajamas.

Harry tore open the brown paper package to find an emerald green sweater, the yarn the exact shade of green as his eyes, and smiled as he read the note Mrs. Weasley had tucked in next to it. “I’m going to need this. Gryffindor Tower’s drafty. How’d you get lucky and end up next to the kitchens, Neville?”

“Luck?” Neville smiled wide, laughing softly. “It’s warm and that suits me just fine.”
“Bet you and the other Hufflepuffs sneak into the kitchens for midnight snacks, too!” Ginny giggled.

“Not always.” Neville shrugged. “Only sometimes. Although Harry and Ron get out far more than-- Hey!” He barely dodged the balled up wrapping paper that Harry threw his way.

“We’re perfect little angels, Mum, don’t listen to a word Neville says.” Harry smirked, shooting a conspiratorial look at Ron. “Or Dad either, cause he’s lying.”

“Moony framed that essay, by the way.” James chuckled, shaking his head. “Said something about modern art.”

“What essay?” Matt asked, looking up from the oversized book he had in his lap.

“Harry was supposed to write an essay about how to cure werewolf bites, but he just wrote ‘Remus Lupin’ fifty times and handed it in.” Sarah rolled her eyes at her older brother, who returned the attempt at affection with a particularly rude hand gesture, once he was sure their parents weren’t looking. In her lap lay a particularly weathered looking copy of The Standard Book of Spells, Year One, and if one were to look close enough, the name Remus J. Lupin could be made out on the top right corner of its tattered paperback cover.

“I got a 20.” Harry nodded slowly, looking around the room for approval. “Out of a hundred, but still something.”

“A 20? That seems a bit generous.” Lily laughed, glancing at her husband.

“I was grading them alphabetically by last name.” James sighed. “By the time I got past Malfoy, I was feeling a bit generous.”

“What did he get?” Neville looked nervous about receiving an answer to that question. He’d managed to get on Draco Malfoy’s bad side from the very first moment of the school year, and hadn’t quite figured out how to fight back.

“Detention.” James replied, looking far more cheerful than he had a moment before.

“Sounds appropriate”, Frank piped up, before Alice aimed a kick at his shin. “Um, I mean, James, that doesn’t sound like a good policy for dealing with students.”

“I just made him blow out Muggle trick candles for three hours. Well, technically, I said he could leave when he’d blown them all out, but..” James shrugged. “We all know that’s impossible.”

“Malfoy nearly pissed himself when I caught the Snitch that first time too. Looked like he’d smelled something nasty.” Harry chuckled.

“Probably Crabbe.” Neville muttered, only half paying attention.

“See, Nev, that’s brilliant.” Harry nodded. “Just do that in front of Malfoy next time!”

“That doesn’t sound like such a good idea.” Matt piped up, a frown pulling at the corners of his mouth.

“I think it sounds brilliant.” Ron snorted.

“I-- I shouldn’t--” Neville looked to Frank, who was trying to stifle a grin.
“Don’t bait Malfoy, boys.” Frank tried his best to keep a straight face. “He might write home about you.”

“Ah, those were the days.” James sighed. “Old Man Malfoy hearing all about us at school. ‘Father, James Potter is so much cooler than me’. ‘Father, they made fun of my four hour long hair care routine today.’ I hope Draco is half as imaginative as his father.”

“If he’s in Slytherin, he can’t have much of an imagination at all.” Anne sniffed.

“Alright, that’s enough of that.” Lily sighed. “We have better things to be doing than trash talking Harry’s classmates.”

“Like opening presents.” Drew agreed.

“Yes, like opening presents.” The redhead chuckled.

The children went about choosing gifts from under the tree, and Lily leaned against her husband. “Did you unwrap your jumper yet?” Ginny asked Sarah, already tugging her own on over her pajamas.

“Not yet.” Sarah dug her package out from under the hurricane of wrapping paper Anne and Drew had left behind. She ripped the brown paper open and sighed. “It’s pink.”

“You get extra points if there’s cats on it.” Harry grinned.

“Why are you the only one who gets normal sweaters?” Sarah looked to Harry, who stuck his tongue out at her.

“Cause Mrs. Weasley likes me best, obviously.”

“She says your eyes are just darling.” Ron crooned, batting his eyelashes mockingly. Ginny sighed, chucking a wad of wrapping paper at his head.

“My eyes are darling, though.” Harry chuckled, reaching over for a piece of wrapping paper before throwing it at Ron’s head.

“Stop throwing things at me.” He protested, though the effect was somewhat lost through his laughter.

“I’ll stop throwing things at you when people stop telling me I have my mother’s eyes.” Harry groaned. “I can’t even believe it, it’s like they’re going out of their way to remind me. Yes, I looked in the mirror this morning. I know. Big whoop.”

“Well it’s the only thing you didn’t get from your father, really.” Lily hummed.

“A shame, really.” Harry deadpanned.

“I think I’m supposed to feel insulted, but I’m just really confused.” James frowned.

“As is your natural state.” A new voice called. Sirius swept in from the hallway, his coat thrown over one arm and a bag held in his free hand. “Merry Christmas, everyone.”

Remus followed Sirius in, smiling softly as Sarah eagerly scooted over, patting the spot on the floor next to her. He sat down next to her rather than with Sirius, as was his habit, and nudged her shoulder. “Did you like your gift?”

“It’s wonderful!” Sarah’s eyes lit up. “Thanks!”
“I’m glad it’s doing somebody some good.” Remus ruffled her hair.

“Certainly wasn’t doing any good gathering dust in the attic.” Sirius said, sprawling out on the couch beside James and Lily. “I brought something useful. Candy.”

“Mine!” Harry hollered, grinning as he beat the rest of his siblings to it. Anne protested, Drew echoing her sentiment. Sirius laughed, already digging through the bag.

“Here you go, kid.” He tossed a small package into Harry’s lap.

“Sweet.” Harry tore it open to find a Chocolate Frog, immediately fishing out the card. “It’s Dumbledore.”

“I’ve already got one of those.” Anne sighed, deciding she wasn’t interested any longer.

“I don’t. Harry, do you have a Dumbledore? I need one.” Drew looked up at his brother pleadingly.

“I have six. Plus, you haven’t even opened your birthday stuff, mate. Hold off for a second.” Harry stuck his tongue out before reading the description aloud. “Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and ten-pin bowling.”

“Nicolas Flamel!” Ron piped up, eyes going wide.

“What’re you two looking up Nicolas Flamel for?” Frank frowned. “Don’t you not have to learn about alchemy until fifth year?”

“History of Magic.” Harry replied, gloomily. “And we have that first thing in the morning next term.”

“I only have it third.” Neville grinned. “Besides, Binns likes me.”

“Shut up, Neville.” Harry passed the card to Drew, groaning in exasperation. “If someone told me Christmas break would only be a week, I wouldn’t have gone to school in the first place.”
Who is Nicolas Flamel?

Chapter Summary

“Yes, Ronald, light reading.” She rolled her eyes. “Anyway, Nicolas Flamel’s in here… right there! Nicolas Flamel is… the only known maker of the Sorcerer’s Stone! The Sorcerer’s Stone turns any metal to gold and produces the Elixir of Life, which makes you immortal. That’s what Fluffy’s hiding!”

Chapter Notes

Unfortunately, due to LadyLai having some computer troubles, our Holiday Hiatus will have to start this week rather than next week. We were originally planning to take the weeks of December 26th and January 2nd off to spend with family, but due issues, we have to take this week off as well.

We’ll be back on January 9th with Chapter Fourteen: Norbertgate!

Happy holidays and thanks for sticking with us!

“Whoever this Nicolas Flamel guy is, he’s certainly put work into making himself completely un-findable.” Harry took off his glasses, tossing them aside carelessly before rubbing his eyes. “I mean, we’ve got to have read a million books already and found nothing.”

“You’ve read twenty pages in total over the last two hours, Harry.” Hermione sighed as she returned with a stack of books tall enough that her head wasn’t visible from most angles. “Check the indices-- if he’s mentioned, that should be faster.”

“It isn’t our fault… you’re the brainiac, not us.” Ron groaned, dropping his head to the table. “These books are for the upperclassmen and the teachers. I don’t even know half the words.”

“There are dictionaries to your right, Ronald.” Hermione set the pile down, exhaling hard as she grabbed the first book off the pile, before sitting down and opening it. “Or you could just ask.”

“Yeah, Ronald.” Harry chuckled, the chuckle morphing into a yelp of surprise when Ron stepped on his foot hard.

Ron glared at his best friend before flipping one of the books open. “No good if I need to look up every other word.” He grumbled half-heartedly.

“Some good. You’d have to read less.” Harry smirked until he caught sight of Hermione’s accusing glare, quickly backtracking. “But then we wouldn’t find out who Flamel is in time, so that’d be a big loss. Do your best, Ron!”

The redhead rolled his eyes and pursed his lips instead of answering.

“So, I heard something interesting about this week’s game.” Harry mentioned offhandedly, as he
turned a page. Once again, he had no luck. Nicolas Flamel’s name was nowhere to be found on this page, much like the last.

“Does it have to do with you falling off a broom again?” Ron asked, his tone torn between genuinely curious and light-hearted teasing.

“No, but it does involve everyone’s favorite professor.” Harry drawled the last three words, in a decent imitation of Snape’s voice. He’d heard the horrifying news straight from Fred, who’d heard it from Alicia, who’d heard it from Angelina, who was there when McGonagall had told Oliver. Of course, he wasn’t sure that the part he thought either Fred or George had added about the Bludgers being replaced by carnivorous pumpkins was true.

“So it does have to do with you falling off your broom.” There was the heavy thud of a book shutting as Ron looked up.

Harry looked around tentatively before leaning in to try and minimize the risk of them getting caught. Hermione leaned in as well, temporarily shutting the book she’d been working through. “Snape’s refereeing the next match.”

“Again- does no one want to comment on Harry falling off his broom?” Ron hissed, crossing his arms on the table. He leaned forward, glancing between his friends. “This is bad.”

“Sure, that was bad, but I didn’t break anything. All in one piece, see?” Harry wiggled his fingers before continuing. “If he tried to kill me from the sidelines, he could easily just kill me in midair this time! He’d probably call a penalty for Slytherin afterward too.”

“Your mum is going to kill you.” Came the eventual response. “Probably your dad too.”

“Probably. As long as Snape doesn’t get to me first.” Harry shuddered, miming cutting his own throat. “I’m done for, between the three of them. Someone’s bound to aim well enough to take me out.”

“Me and Hermione will come to your funeral.” He answered solemnly, patting Harry’s shoulder. “I’m sure it’ll be very emotional. Bet there’ll even be some tears.”

“From who? Neville?” Harry snorted. “Scratch that, probably not Neville.”

“I think that the easiest way to get out of this is to sit this match out.” Hermione shrugged.

“Okay, a few small problems with that plan. One, we have no reserve seeker and two, this game puts us in the lead for the Quidditch Cup!” Harry exclaimed.

“You can get the lead back, can’t you?” Hermione frowned.

“Yes, but that’s not the point, see?” Harry sighed. “Point is, I’m going to go out there in two days and probably die if I don’t end the match as quickly as possible.”

“Then end the match as quickly as possible.” Hermione shrugged. “If anyone could do it, it’d be you.”

“After the whole mess during the last match, the rest of the team’ll probably have the same idea in mind. Except maybe Fred and George,” Ron mused, “they like to drag things out.”

“Fred and George are great.” Harry mused, resting his head on his palm. “Except when they’re trying to kill me too. I’m sensing a pattern.”
“You get used to it.” Ron murmured sagely.

“Well, I guess we have a good record of surviving things, in the family.” Harry shrugged. “What if we’re all secretly cats like Professor McGonagall?”

“With like, nine lives?” The redhead scrunched up his nose. The action caused him to look even more like his younger sister. “Dunno. Suppose Drew and you have already used up a bunch of them, if that’s the case.”

“Mum and Dad had gotten five each off the list, minimum, by this age, so I guess if I stay on track I might make them last until the time I’m thirty too.”

“The books said your parents were heroes during the war. They probably risked their lives a lot.” Hermione put yet another book on her pile of discarded ones.

“Yeah, really. Next time Dad dies, he’s probably staying dead.” Harry rolled his eyes.

“I don’t know, your dad is pretty good about… not being dead.” Ron pointed out.

Madam Pince glared at Ron, having heard him speak louder than a whisper, and Harry cringed. “Maybe we should take all this research somewhere else.”

“Or we could skip the research entirely and go get something to eat!” Ron suggested hopefully.

“Not as if we’re getting anything done to begin with, really.” Harry shrugged, getting up. His chair screeched loudly against the floor as he pushed it back, and he shuddered. Madam Pince was always particular about noise levels, and he was pretty sure he was on her last nerve about three weeks ago.

“Wait, wait, wait!” Hermione’s voice rose and her eyes went wide. She slapped a hand over her mouth, hoping the librarian hadn’t heard, and ran off into the shelves to find something.

“Guess we’re not leaving then.” Harry groaned, pulling his chair back into place. “Wonder what she’s found this time, huh?”

“I checked this out a couple weeks ago for a bit of light reading.” Hermione said, dropping a particularly thick, leather bound volume on the table. Harry thought you could easily knock a troll out with it, judging by its size.

“Light reading?” Ron spluttered.

“Yes, Ronald, light reading.” She rolled her eyes. “Anyway, Nicolas Flamel’s in here… right there! Nicolas Flamel is…the only known maker of the Sorcerer’s Stone! The Sorcerer’s Stone turns any metal to gold and produces the Elixir of Life, which makes you immortal. That’s what Fluffy’s hiding!”

“It makes sense! If you’re going to hide something like that, then Hogwarts is the safest place!” Harry spoke up. “And the Chocolate Frog card said that he was partners with Dumbledore, so Dumbledore must know for sure.”

“Then we should tell him someone’s after it and be done with this whole mess, right?” Ron frowned at the book, displeased with the lack of concrete information. There were only a few, short paragraphs on the alchemist.

“We should.” Harry nodded. “After the match, though. Cause if we say it’s Snape now, he’s more likely to believe it’s just me trying to take the mickey out of Slytherin rather than anything else.”
“Sounds fair.” Ron nodded, getting to his feet.

“But why would Snape be after the Sorcerer’s Stone?” Hermione asked, tucking the book into her bag, as they left the library. “What does he have to gain?”

“He’s not going after it for himself.” Harry replied, looking angrier than Hermione had ever seen him. “For an old friend, you could say.”

“I hope to see a fair match today…” Snape drawled, eyes drifting from player to player. “I wouldn’t want to have to disappoint anyone with a harsh call.

Harry rolled his eyes, looking about for the Snitch.

The only way to get this game to end in a way that benefited even half of the people there was to get to the Snitch as quickly as possible, Oliver’s plan be damned. Winning this match, by any margin at all, would put them in the lead for the Quidditch Cup, and if Harry wanted anything at all this year, it was to have the Cup back in the Gryffindor Common Room. He did want to pass Potions as well, but his priorities lay with Quidditch, as it was, by far, the more easily achievable goal of the two.

And a few minutes into the game, there it was, a golden glimmer near the Slytherin Beater’s ear. Harry dived for it, easily snatching it while Fred and George kept the other Seeker distracted, and touched down with it claspined in his hand. He shot a triumphant look at Snape, who looked severely disappointed in his team’s performance. As he should be, Harry thought, smirking. The Slytherin team, although good at winning, were hardly good at playing the game the way it should be.

There was an eruption of frantic cheering from the stands, punctuated by Lee Jordan’s ecstatic voice. “HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH! HE’S CAUGHT THE SNITCH IN UNDER FIVE MINUTES!”

Harry, who had begged off the post-game celebration by pretending to spend more time flying after the game, turned his broom toward the Forbidden Forest, speeding after Snape, whose robes billowed behind him as he strolled into the trees, looking back once before disappearing from view. He kept his distance from the longer branches, ducking just enough to keep from making too much noise while staying high enough up that Snape did not see him.

Snape eventually reached a clearing, where someone unexpected was waiting.

“Professor Sn-Snape… How odd to see you out tonight!” Quirrell’s voice echoed through the clearing.

“Is it?” The response was as chilly as the crisp evening air. “And what, might I ask, were you doing in the Forbidden Forest at such a time?”

“O-oh?”

“Don’t act like I’m an idiot. We both know you can’t afford to turn me into an enemy.”

Quirrell’s nervous smile seemed to sharpen, though Harry thought it might have been a trick of the moonlight. “M-my apologies, Professor. I’m not quite sure I can agree with y-you. Good evening.” He moved to sweep past Snape. The potions master only watched him, beady eyes boring into his back as the man disappeared into the darkness.
Harry quickly turned his broom about, rushing back to the castle. He had much to tell his friends and, the more he thought about it, the more he was sure that they had a lot less time to get to Dumbledore than he thought.
How To Train Your Hagrid

Chapter Summary

“What do you suppose Hagrid was hiding?” Hermione asked, curious as always. “Do you think it had anything to do with the stone?”

Ron returned a moment later, practically bursting with excitement. He ducked back down, glancing around as he whispered fervently. "He's looking at books on dragons."

Chapter Notes

A lot of the next few chapters are very close to canon, in terms of the plot, and as such, you may find many similarities in dialogue or structure. These things were not done intentionally, and I claim no ownership of dialogue that appears in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

The way we have it, the very first chapter of the story of their second year, Harry Potter and the Haunted Toilet, is going to be released February 13th. Hopefully that holds true!

Thanks for everyone for sticking with us through the hiatus, and don't worry, we shouldn't be gone for a long time, now.

As the weeks passed, Quirrell grew thinner and paler, Snape grew more menacing and Defense grew more entertaining, but Harry’s opinion on the last one was quite closely guarded, lest his father find out that he was actually doing a good job.

“If Snape’s still mad, then that’s good, isn’t it?” Ron had said the night before, as Harry lay awake in bed, worrying. “Means the Stone’s still safe.”

“Good point.” He immediately rolled over and fell fast asleep, and it was a choice well made, as Hermione chose the next morning to remind them that there was something more important than the Stone at stake.

"Exams aren't till June, Hermione! You need to relax.” Ron's tone closely resembled something like disgust, and his expression wasn't much better.

“Ten weeks isn’t as much time as you’d think, Ron.” Hermione snapped, rummaging through her bookbag for the Charms textbook, which she’d been furiously studying since early that morning.

"Thanks for the insight, Ms. Know-it-all." He grumbled.

“Don’t you realize we need to pass the exams to make it to second year? I should have started studying months ago! I’m glad this business with the Stone’s quieted down a little, or we’d be completely without any time to focus on revisions!” Hermione sighed in relief as she found the
proper textbook, flipping it open to a spot three chapters ahead of where the class was currently. Harry stared in awe, only remembering to chew and swallow the toast he was eating when Hermione looked over at him in disgust.

“D’you think Dad’ll tell me what’s on the exam if I ask nicely enough?” Harry stared at the ceiling, which was currently displaying a bright and sunny day.

“No use, mate.” Ron sighed, slowly shaking his head. “I already tried.”

Unfortunately, many of the teachers seemed to be thinking along the same lines as Hermione, and homework and quizzes kept Harry, Ron and Hermione at school over the Easter holidays, much to Harry and Ron’s consternation. It was incredibly hard to get through one game of Wizard’s Chess with Hermione sitting beside Harry, reciting the twelve uses of dragon’s blood or practicing Wingardium Leviosa over and over again (not that she needed to-- that honor rested solely with Seamus Finnigan, who’d nearly blown the classroom halfway to hell during their first Charms lesson).

"I can't do this. It’s too hard. I'm going to drop out of school and run off to Romania to live with Charlie and his dragons," Ron groaned. "I won't remember anything!"

"Neither will I, but we must soldier on." Harry said gravely, shaking his head, as he tried not to fall asleep. One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi, although enthralling when Uncle Frank read it, with voices, as a bedtime story, was not nearly as entertaining when read for school.

“Look! Hagrid!” Ron exclaimed, suddenly standing up and waving wildly as he grinned.

“Hagrid isn’t an herb, Ron…” Harry turned around, spotting the large man by the door. Hagrid was clad in his usual moleskin overcoat, and seemed every bit as out of place in a library as Harry himself was. He seemed to be holding something behind his back, and Harry rushed over to him eagerly, ready to abandon his work once and for all. Ron followed close behind, having stayed back to wheedle Hermione into coming along. “What are you up to?”

“Jus’ lookin’.” He scanned the room suspiciously, giving all the kids more reason to question his motives. “Yer not still lookin’ fer Nicolas Flamel, are yeh?”

"You bet we are." Ron's tone was caught between smug and excited. "We've already figured out who he is and what he did. We figure Fluffy must be guarding the Sorcerer's stone."

“Don’ go shoutin’ about it, Ron!” Hagrid looked around quickly to make sure they hadn’t been overheard.

“There are a few questions we have.” Harry said, looking far more serious now than he had while studying. “About who’s guarding it besides Fluffy.”

“Listen-- come an’ see me tonight. I’m not promisin’ I’ll tell yeh anythin’, but don’t go yammerin’ about it in here. Students aren’ s’posed ter know about this.”

“Perfect. We’ll see you later, then.” Harry started back to their table, and Hagrid, thankful for the distraction, quickly fled the library.

“What do you suppose Hagrid was hiding?” Hermione asked, curious as always. “Do you think it had anything to do with the stone?”

The sound of chair legs scraping against the stone floor interrupted his musings, and Ron stood. "Well I've had enough of school work. I'll go see what Hagrid is up to.” Before Hermione could protest, the redhead had scurried off after the half-giant and into the shelves.
He returned a moment later, practically bursting with excitement. Ron ducked back down, glancing around as he whispered fervently. "He's looking at books on dragons. I don't think that has anything to do with the stone, does it?"

"Hagrid’s always wanted a dragon!” Harry spoke up, slapping his palms against the tabletop. “He’s been saying so forever. Dad told him not to think about it anymore, ‘cause it’s illegal.”

"Well yeah. Charlie is always yammering on about his dragons. The Warlock’s Convention of 1709 outlawed dragon breeding." Ron propped his chin up on his palm, eyebrows furrowing low over blue eyes. "I say if you can't handle the heat, don't bother looking into dragons!" His joke fell flat, and was promptly ignored by his companions.

“I read about there being wild dragons in Britain, but I assumed the information was outdated, maybe, or perhaps incorrectly reported…” Hermione shook her head. "How do they hush the existence of giant dragons up?"

"Common Welsh Greens and Hebridean Blacks live in England. The ministry tries to keep on top of it, but I heard Dad telling Mum that they're always obliviating muggles who've gone and seen them.” Ron nodded sagely.

“So what on Earth is Hagrid up to, then?” Hermione asked.

The first thing Harry noticed, when Hagrid opened the door to the hut about an hour later, was the burst of hot air that seemed to clobber them all in the face. It was almost like being back in India, for a second, except that the wind tended to be less direct about smacking you in the face. Harry soldiered on, walking in ahead of his friends, and Ron held up the rear, pushing Hermione forward as he stripped off his jumper, mumbling about it being warm enough outside.

“So… yeh wanted ter ask me somethin’?” Hagrid asked as he shuffled around the kitchen, occasionally offering them tea and rather questionable looking sandwiches. The blazing fire seemed to be the biggest contributor to the heat, and Harry tugged at his shirt collar, wrinkling his nose.

“What else is guarding the Stone?” Harry saw no reason to play games with Hagrid, having always kept things simple and direct with him since childhood. “Besides Fluffy, of course. We’ve all met Fluffy.”

Hagrid frowned at Harry, who looked to his friends for support. Finding none, he shrugged unconvincingly.

“O’ course I can’t.” He said. “I don’ know meself, and yeh know too much already! It was almost stolen outta Gringotts in July. Bet you’ve worked that out already.”

“Hagrid, you might not want to tell us, but you do know. You know everything that goes on. Besides, Dumbledore wouldn’t have trusted just anyone with this information, would he?” Hagrid brightened up as Hermione spoke, using a warm, flattering tone that the boys had never heard her use before.

Hagrid’s beard, which seemed to swallow nearly half of his face, shifted slightly, and Harry assumed he was smiling.

“Let’s see… there’s Fluffy from me… then some o’ the teachers did some spells… Professor Sprout, Professor Flitwick, Professor McGonagall…” Hagrid counted them off on his fingers. “Professor Quirrell… Professor Dumbledore… Oh, yeah, Professor Snape.”
“Professor Snape?”

“Yer not still on abou’ that, are yeh?” Hagrid blinked in surprise. “Snape helped protect the Stone, he’s not about ter steal it.”

Harry knew, of course, that Ron and Hermione were thinking the same thing he was. Perhaps Snape had decided to assist in the guarding of the Stone just to find out how the other teachers had guarded it. All of the other teachers except Hagrid and Quirrell, and if Snape couldn’t get past Fluffy, maybe they still had a chance.

“You’re the only one who knows how to get past Fluffy, right, Hagrid?” Harry asked, afraid of what he might find out. Hagrid’s confident nod set his nerves a little more at ease. “You wouldn’t tell anyone, would you?”

“No one knows a single thing, other than me an’ Dumbledore.” Hagrid said proudly, and Harry heard Ron exhale in relief.

"That's all well and good. But Hagrid, why is it so hot in here?" He tugged at his collar, frowning in discomfort. "Can you put out the fire or something?"

“Can’t, Ron, sorry.” Harry noticed Hagrid glance at the fire and frowned.

“Hagrid?” Harry cautiously made his way over to the fire. “What’s that?”

Harry was hoping he was wrong, but for the first time in awhile, he wasn’t.

In the very heart of the fire, underneath the kettle, was a huge, black egg.

“Ah”, Hagrid said, fiddling with his beard. “That’s--not--”

"No way!" Ron rocketed to his feet, practically tripping over Fang as he made a beeline for the fire. "Bloody hell! That's a dragon egg! Where did you get that?! It must have cost you an arm and a leg!"

"Won it at the pub las’ night." Hagrid beamed proudly. "Got into a game o’ cards with a stranger. Think he was glad ter get rid of it, ter be honest."

“What are you going to do with it when it’s hatched?” Hermione asked.

“Well, I’ve been doin’ some readin’...” said Hagrid, motioning to a stack of books perilously close to the fire. “Some of ‘em are a bit out of date, o’ course, but they all say that you keep the egg in the fire and feed it a bucket o’ brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour when it hatches. An’, see here, they tell yeh how to recognize the different eggs--what I got there’s a Norwegian Ridgeback. They’re rare, them.”

He looked pleased with himself, but Hermione’s look of dawning horror was enough to quell any rising pride.

“Hagrid, you live in a wooden house.”

Hagrid, who was not listening anymore, hummed as he stoked the fire.

"Y’know, I hope I never have to know what living a peaceful life is like.” Ron laughed.

"A dragon! Can you believe it? Wait till I write Charlie and tell him!” Ron turned to grin at Harry
and Hermione, excitement shining in his eyes.

Hermione wasn’t nearly as excited. “Considering our track record, we’re bound to get into trouble. But that’s nothing compared to the amount of trouble that Hagrid’s going to be in when someone finds out what he’s doing—”

“You could say”, Harry looked to Ron before grinning, “that he’s in deep shit. Y’know, cause baby humans and baby dragons are probably pretty similar.”

“That’s disgusting, Harry.” Hermione scrunched up her nose as he rolled his eyes. “I had to.” He leaned in before pointing his thumb back over his shoulder at a hastily retreating Malfoy, who looked quite worried. “Don’t know what or how much he heard, but hopefully he’s running ’cause of the bathroom joke and not to report Hagrid.”

After an argument that lasted nearly all the way through morning classes, Hermione agreed to follow Harry and Ron down to Hagrid’s during the morning break. And, as soon as the bell let them out of class, the three of them raced across the grounds to Hagrid’s hut at the edge of the forest.

Hagrid greeted them outside, looking far more excited than he should be at the prospect of raising a fire-breathing animal at the edge of a forest.

“It’s nearly out.” He said, opening the door to allow them to hurry inside.

The egg was on the table, deep cracks marring its previously smooth surface, and if one were to listen closely, a strange clicking noise could be heard deep within it. Sort of like a small clock, or a rather hungry crocodile. Whatever it was, it was an ominous noise, and Harry didn’t like it too much.

They all drew chairs up to the table to watch with bated breath as the small dragon split apart its egg, slowly emerging from the shattered pieces of shell covered in slime, and Harry shuddered. It looked more like a tiny black umbrella than a dragon, and honestly resembled Padfoot after a night out in the rain more than the majestic creature he’d been expecting. But Hagrid coddled it all the same, scooping it up to keep it in one of his palms, cooing over its stubby horns and giant orange eyes.

It sneezed, a couple sparks flying out of its long, scaly snout, and caught on Hagrid’s beard. He patted it with his other hand, hoping to stop the sparks from spreading, and barely succeeded, thanks to the dragon’s attempts at eating his fingers.

“Bless him, he knows his mummy!”

"Did your books say how fast Ridgebacks grow?" Ron's voice was hushed in awe, and he watched the dragon with wide eyes.

Hagrid was about to answer when he leapt up, dragon still in hand, and ran to the window.

“What’s the matter?” Harry turned around from where he’d been skeptically eyeing the discarded eggshell and slime, poking at it with a still gloved finger. He was thankful he’d forgotten to take his gloves off after Herbology, because the slime seemed like it would be extremely gross to get off his hands.

“Someone was lookin’ through the gaps in the curtains! He’s runnin’ back up ter the school!”

Harry bolted to the door, using his Seeker’s speed to his advantage.
There was no mistaking it.
Malfoy had seen the dragon.

Something about Malfoy’s self-assured smirk put Harry, Ron and Hermione even more on edge than usual, over the next week, and they spent most of their time in Hagrid’s hut, trying to plot themselves out of this mess.

“Set him free, maybe?” Harry shrugged, gesturing in the direction of the forest.

“I can’t”, Hagrid said. “He’s too little. He’d die.”

The dragon had tripled in size over the week, taking over nearly all of Hagrid’s time. There were empty brandy bottles and chicken feathers all over the floor. Anyone who entered the hut now would be suspicious, though what they’d be suspicious of, if they neglected to spot the dragon on the kitchen table, wouldn’t be nearly as dangerous as the truth.

“I’ve decided to call him Norbert.” Hagrid said, wiping his eyes with one hand as he fondly patted the dragon’s head.

"Have you gone completely mental?” Ron demanded.

“Hagrid, give it a week and he’s going to be the size of Hogwarts. Or nearly that big.” Harry sighed. “Malfoy could rat us out at any minute.”

Hagrid grimaced, clasping his hands behind his back.

“I--I know I can’t keep him forever, but…”

"Well what about Charlie? He goes totally mental over dragons. Maybe he can take... Norbert.”

“"Well, I-- I s’pose so…” Hagrid said grudgingly, “write him and see about it, Ron.”

The following week dragged by, with little news of Malfoy or Norbert, and Wednesday night found Harry and Hermione in the otherwise deserted common room.

The clock had just chimed twelve times for midnight when Ron burst through the portrait hole. He had taken responsibility for the midnight feeding, trying to keep Norbert somewhere near satiated, which was hard, considering he was now eating rats by the crateful. It was even tougher when Harry was the only one with a strong enough aversion to rats to allow Norbert to eat his fill.

"Norbert bit me!” Ron cried in dismay. The Weasley stalked his way over to the fire, looking incredibly put out.

There was a tap on the window across the room, and they all raced to it to see a familiar snowy owl, a letter clutched in her beak. “That’d be Hedwig, with Charlie’s answer.”

They put their heads together to read the letter.

“Dear Ron”, Hermione read aloud, “How are you? Thanks for the letter-- I’ll be glad to take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won’t be easy getting him here. I think the best thing will be to send him over with some friends of mine who are coming to visit me next week. Trouble is, they mustn’t be seen carrying an illegal dragon. Could you get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and take him while it’s still dark. Send me an
answer as soon as possible. Love, Charlie.”

“The tallest tower’s Astronomy. Guess we’ll have to use all the brains we’ve got.” Harry swallowed hard.

Anything to get Malfoy off their trail.

But, as with all plans, there was one tiny, tiny problem-- the fact that Ron’s hand now resembled a cricket batsman’s glove. All of them had agreed that it would be too risky to visit Pomfrey, thereby revealing the existence of a dragon on campus, but he had no choice. His hand had turned a nasty shade of green, leading them to believe that Norbert’s fangs may be poisonous.

Harry and Hermione rushed up to the hospital wing at the end of the day, as soon as they were able, and found Ron lying in one of the beds, sweaty and barely lucid.

Ron let out a low groan as his friends approached. "My hand’s gonna fall off." He slurred, turning to look at them pleadingly. "I'm gonna have to learn to write with my left hand! This is terrible!"

After several moments of mild hysterics over what Ron was sure was the impending loss of his appendage, he managed to calm down. His voice took on a hushed quality as he spoke, though he didn't seem fully awake. "Malfoy came to see me. He knows... That Norbert bit me. Said he was gonna tell on us." He mumbled.

"It’ll all be over on Saturday at midnight.” Hermione tried to sound comforting as she ruffled Ron's hair, but it hardly sounded comforting at all. Perhaps that was why Ron sat straight up, looking terrified.

"Oh no," he moaned. "He took my book! Charlie's letter was in there! He could... He'll know everything." He swayed slightly before lowering himself back onto the bed with another groaned. "This is a disaster."

They would have felt sorry for Hagrid, when the time came to give Norbert away, had Norbert not thoroughly ruined their lives for the last few weeks. It was dark and cloudy, with hardly a star to be seen in the sky, and they were a bit late because Peeves had chosen tonight to play tennis in the Great Hall.

“He’s got lots o’ snacks in case he gets hungry, and a teddy bear in case he gets lonely…” Hagrid patted the side of a small crate. A sick ripping noise came out of the crate, and Harry wondered if the teddy bear hadn’t been used for something else already. “Bye bye, Norbert. Mummy will never forget you!”

A long, mournful groan echoed from inside the crate, and Harry wondered if that was dragon for "so long, sucker”.

How they managed to get back to the castle was something none of them could remember. Midnight inched closer and closer with each passing second, and before they knew it, they’d managed to climb the astronomy tower unnoticed, with the slightly smoking crate held between them.

Then, a sudden movement in front of them made them duck into one of the side rooms. And just in time, it seemed, as Professor McGonagall was visible through the slight crack between the door and the wall. The ends of her tartan bathrobe whirled about her feet as she dragged Malfoy down the hallway by his ear, muttering something about children wandering about in the night with no regards for authority.
"You don’t understand, Professor!" Malfoy howled, slapping at her hand. "Harry Potter’s got a dragon!"

"Harry Potter hasn’t got enough sense to bring a dragon into Hogwarts. Or he’s got too much. It’s too late to do much but see Professor Snape about you." She grumbled, dragging Malfoy down the corridor that lead to the dungeons. "If he’s got an ounce of sense in him, he’ll write your father straight away."

They waited until the corridor was clear to emerge from the room, careful not to jostle Norbert.

"Ha! Serves the bugger right!" Ron exclaimed softly, looking entirely too pleased about Draco’s predicament.

Chuckling about Malfoy, the three of them climbed the stairs, Norbert’s crate carefully held between them, and they reached the top of the stairs just in time to pass him off to Charlie’s friends, a cheery bunch of young men who all seemed far too excited about transporting contraband.

The three of them slipped quietly back down the staircase, smiling widely. Who wouldn’t, in their situation? Norbert was gone and Malfoy had detention, a combination of events that would brighten anyone’s week, but it was about to come crashing down around their ears.

As they stepped off the stairs and into the corridor, a sudden meow from the vicinity of Hermione’s feet sealed their fate. Filch emerged from around the corner, rubbing his grimy fingers together.

"Well, well, well, students out of bed."

"We’re doomed." Hermione swallowed hard.

“I’m pretty sure we were doomed awhile ago.” Harry shrugged. “Alright, Filch. Take us in.”
“The-- The Sorcerer’s Stone-- which-- The Elixir of Life!” Harry exclaimed, eye going wide. “But who would--”

“Can you think of no one, Harry Potter?” Firenze said softly. “No one who would seek to harm you and your family?”

As they all marched down to McGonagall’s first floor study, Harry held his head high. It was the least he could do, given the situation, and he’d often been told by his father when he was young that projecting false self-confidence was much safer than allowing people to see that you were scared.

His mother, as usual, had immediately protested the point, saying that such things were unhealthy and, frankly, stifling to the emotional growth of small children, but Harry figured that it was just one of those manly things that he had to pick up eventually. Of course, at that age, he couldn’t have known that his father was wrong about most manly things, but, for better or for worse, it had stuck with him.

So he stood rather than sitting in one of the plaid patterned armchairs, facing the door as proudly as possible, because remembering what were easily going to be his last few moments in Hogwarts as uncomfortable because of his own choices would definitely stick the lesson of “don’t go wandering” in his head permanently. And these were sure to be his last moments in Hogwarts, as McGonagall would hardly accept any excuse for wandering about this late, let alone the truth.

And just when Harry thought things had gotten as bad as possible, McGonagall returned. She looked enough like a dragon in this lighting that he figured mentioning Norbert wouldn’t change too much. He felt like one of the rats he’d been feeding Norbert just a day ago-- trapped and about to get the sickest burns ever.

"Mister Filch has informed me that he found you three wandering about the halls. You do realize, I would hope," the professor's voice was cold, "that it is nearly one in the morning?"

It was the first time Hermione had failed to answer a question asked of her, and Ron looked horrified as she kept her head down, twisting her fingers together, while she kept her silence.

"I'm going to assume that Mister Malfoy's presence in the halls was also your doing? You fed the boy a tall tale of a dragon, of all things, and now you've all been caught out of your dormitories."

Harry caught Ron’s eye, shrugging. They were all in for it now, no doubt about it.

McGonagall took a seat behind her desk and allowed her gaze to rest on each of her student's in turn. There was stark disapproval in her eyes, and the silence stretched on for several moments. When she did speak, her words were crisp. "Four students out of bed in one night. And three of them from my own house! I've never seen such nonsense! Fifty points will be taken from Gryffindor."

“Fifty points?” Harry’s mouth fell open. That was the lead he’d won, in their last Quidditch
match. Fifty whole points, all down the drain thanks to Hagrid and his dragon.

"Fifty points." She repeated. "Each."

“Professor-- You can’t--” Harry fumbled for words, hoping that she might lighten the punishment if he looked pathetic enough. Unfortunately for him, all the things his father had told him about Professor McGonagall seemed to be true-- once she set her heart on a punishment, there would be no begging your way out of it. “A hundred and fifty points-!”

"I am ashamed of you all, and I can only hope you're as ashamed as well. I shudder to think of the future of Gryffindor house if this is how my first years have decided to spend their time." She shook her head, tutting under breath. "Even your father, mischievous though he was, would not have risked another student’s safety during his time as a student, Mister Potter."

A hundred and fifty points, all gone.

In one night.

That put Gryffindor in last place.

In one night, they’d ruined any chance Gryffindor House had for the House Cup. Harry felt as though he could cry, if he tried hard enough, and the look on his father’s face as he entered Defense the next morning sealed the deal. That was nothing, though, when compared to the rest of Gryffindor House. Once the first person walked by the hourglasses in the morning, the news spread like wildfire that the points were gone and Potter had done it, along with another couple first years.

In little more than five hours’ time, he’d gone from Gryffindor House’s Quidditch Hero to a bratty first year who’d brought the whole house down with him just for the sake of adventure. And it wasn’t just the Gryffindors-- Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff had turned their backs on him as well, hoping that Gryffindor would defeat Slytherin once and for all.

“Thanks, Potter!” One of the older Slytherins yelled, as he walked into the Great Hall. “We owe you one!”

“Don’t listen to them, Harry.” A quiet voice piped up behind him, and Harry turned around to see Neville behind him, shoes only half-tied and sweater on backwards. The short end of his yellow and black tie was in the front and the clip holding his robe shut was higher on one side than the other. All in all, Neville struck a really confusing figure, as he did most mornings, but even Neville had moved a step up the social ladder, what with Harry’s fall from grace. “People have done worse before, I bet.”

“You know, Nev, I really hope so.” Harry tried for a smile, and Neville patted his shoulder when it just didn’t make it all the way. “Thanks. For this.”

“You’re my friend.” Neville shrugged, smiling slightly. “What else would I do?” He ambled back over to the Hufflepuff table, accidentally knocking a few plate and cups over on his way, and Harry nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"They've gotta forget this soon enough, right?” Ron sighed. For once his appetite seemed cowed, as he was only shoving some eggs around with his fork. "I mean, Fred and George have probably blown tons of house points. Thousands, I'd bet. And no one seems to hate them."

“Doubt they’ve lost a hundred and fifty in one go, right?” Harry asked glumly, and Ron shook his head. “I figured.”
It was a bit late to try and repair the damage, but Harry wanted to do what he could, at least. And that began, of course, with talking to Oliver Wood.

"Resign?! You can't! How are you going to win us house points if you resign! Not to mention arranging a try out for a new seeker when we're already in the middle of the season-" Oliver spluttered from behind Harry, distress obvious in his voice.

“It’s just-- I’ve lost so many points and… Well, the rest of the team doesn’t want me here, so…” Harry shrugged, clearing out his cubby.

He was almost glad that exams weren’t too far away, as he could just fail the whole lot and be done with school as a whole. But Hermione kept him and Ron studying, saying that the monotonous work would keep their minds off their misery, and so it did, until the novelty of knowing ridiculous facts wore off and Harry realized that answering questions in class wasn’t earning him any brownie points.

“I’m never meddling in anything again. I promise.” He said aloud, as he walked back from the library one night.

“Good choice, boy.” One of the portraits called out.

“I hope so.”

All of a sudden, about a week later, Harry’s resolution to keep out of others’ affairs was put to the test. As he walked back from the library, he heard two men yelling, one of whom was obviously threatening the other. Under normal circumstances, he would have stopped to listen, but this Harry was a new man. One who didn’t meddle. So he thought about drawing closer, but decided to continue on his way.

“I’m sorry! Just-- Not again, please!” He heard a familiar voice yell, and frowned. That was odd. Professor Quirrell would only be threatened by one person, and if he’d heard correctly, Fred and George had put Professor Snape off work for about two weeks in celebration of Gryffindor’s latest win two Saturdays before. That was, of course, before Harry had sent it all to hell, so there had still been something to celebrate.

Apparently, the fact that he had decided not to stop and listen served no purpose, as Quirrell nearly barrelled into him in his efforts to escape whoever he was talking to. Harry was knocked bodily to the the floor by strength he didn’t know the reedy looking Professor had in him, and slowly picked himself up, rubbing at the back of his head.

"Mi-mister Potter! I'm sorry- so s-sorry!” The professor's stuttered apology seemed even more frantic than his normal demeanor.

"Professor?” Harry asked, concerned. Professor Quirrell seemed to be shaking even as he made every effort to stand still, even more so than usual. “I don’t think you should talk to whoever you were talking to anymore.”

He let out a quivering laugh and tossed a glance over one shoulder. "I-I'm inclined to agree..” He murmured before brushing past Harry with another apology.

Harry quickly ran back to the library, forgetting why he had left in the first place, and found Ron and Hermione exactly where he’d left them.

“No, Ron, Regulus is a star and Orion is the constellation!” Hermione sighed, rubbing her forehead. “I don’t get how you haven’t figured that out yet!”
Ron— who seemed to be attempting to balance a corked inkwell on his nose— responded with a sigh. "You can shove all these stupid stars and constellations right up Uranus." He mumbled childishly.

Harry quickly told them what he’d heard, along with his suspicions about who else had been in the room, and his compatriots nodded gravely.

Ron let out a groan and collapsed back in his armchair. The inkwell landed on the carpet with a thud, ink splattering out and staining the floor, and rolled several feet before coming to a stop. "It’s all over! Snape can get around anything!"

“There is still Fluffy, right?” Hermione chewed on her lip. “If he can’t get past Fluffy, what does it matter if he knows how to get past the rest of the enchantments? If he can’t get in, all the other knowledge he has is absolutely useless.”

"There's got to be a book in this bloody library that tells us how to get past a three headed dog. There just has to be! Harry, what do you think?” Ron looked at his best friend with a frown.

“We’re going to do what we should have done at the start.” Hermione said sharply, cutting Ron off. “We’re going to Dumbledore. Immediately. If we do anything else on our own, we’ll be thrown out.”

“And, plus, we’ve got no proof.” Harry added. “Quirrell’s terrified of his own shadow, so he won’t back us up. And everybody knows Snape’s suspicious, so if we pin it on him, even with the little dirt we’ve got on him, it still looks like we’re imagining things. Dumbledore’ll think we made it up. Filch won’t help us. McGonagall thinks I’m a child delinquent, so that’s out. And Dad won’t lift a finger, now that I’ve put Gryffindor six feet under.”

"Not to mention the itty bitty detail that we aren't supposed to know about any of this? How do we report something that we're supposed to be completely ignorant of?” Ron sighed.

“We’ll have to do some research, but--” Hermione began, but Harry shook his head.

“No more of that. We’re in enough trouble as it is.” Harry said, and flipped the Astronomy text in front of him to a random page. “Jupiter’s moons it is.”

The following morning, Harry, Ron and Hermione all received identical notes at the breakfast table.

"Detention at 11 o'clock, with Filch? Why hasn't McGonagall told us what we're going to be doing?” Ron frowned at the parchment.

Harry had half-forgotten that they had a detention to take care of, in all the furor of studying, and groaned as he ran a hand through his hair. “Eleven o’clock? That’s way too late for a bunch of eleven year olds to be out, let alone awake.”

“We were caught out at half past twelve two weeks ago.” Hermione said, flatly.

“Good point.” Harry sighed. “Good point.”

At eleven o’clock that night, the three of them slowly marched down to the Great Hall, finding Filch and Malfoy already waiting. Malfoy looked quite disgruntled, possibly owing to the fact that he was in detention at all, let alone being in detention with three people who could easily be considered his worst enemies.
“Bet you’ll think twice about breaking a rule next time, won’t you?” Filch grinned, exposing yellowing teeth, and Harry mimed choking as soon as the man turned around. “It’s a pity they let the old punishments die out… Used to be able to hang you little buggers from the ceiling by your wrists for a couple days to straighten you out. I’ve got the chains in my office still, nice and ready for whenever they’re needed…”

“Did that to Uncle Sirius once.” Harry whispered to Ron. “He didn’t turn out too straight in the end after all.”

They started off across the dark grounds, Malfoy occasionally breaking the silence to complain about the nature of their punishment. Ahead, they could see Hagrid’s hut, well-lighted with candles in the windows. It seemed much less disorganized than Harry had last seen it, from what the large windows revealed of the inside, and perhaps that was owed to the fact that Hagrid was no longer babysitting a dragon.

Malfoy was to thank for that, at least partially, but Harry wouldn’t dream of acknowledging his role. Not in a million years.

“That you, Filch? Hurry up!” Hagrid called, from outside the hut, motioning for the children to follow as he picked up the pace.

"Oh, thank god." Ron muttered, leaning closer to Harry. "It’s Hagrid. At least we don't have to go herb gathering with Snape. No one comes back from that quite the same. Mum’s convinced that’s why Charlie moved to Romania.”

Harry’s heart rose as well. Hagrid wouldn’t make them do anything ridiculous. Perhaps he’d invite them in for tea and call it a night, tell the professors that they’d cleaned out his pumpkin patch or something.

“Think again, boys.” Filch said, with a smile that would have been eerie even in full lighting. “You’re going into the forest tonight.”

“The forest?” Malfoy stopped dead in his tracks. “We can’t go in there at night-- there’s all sorts of thing in the forests! Werewolves, even!”

“Should’ve thought about that before you got in trouble, eh, Malfoy?” Filch said gleefully, voice cracking slightly, and Harry could have sworn that twisted grimace was Filch’s attempt at a smile.

"My father wouldn't stand for this...” Malfoy muttered, stomping his foot in the grass.

"Be thankful for your dad, then." Harry shook his head. "My dad would leave us there."

Hagrid strode towards them, Fang at his heels, with a giant crossbow in his arms. The quiver, full of equally large arrows, was slung over his shoulder.

“Right, Harry, Ron, Hermione. Let’s get a move on.” Hagrid turned toward the forest.

“I’m not going into the forest!” Malfoy piped up, and Harry was more than a little pleased to hear that he sounded just as terrified as Harry felt, if not more.

“Yeh could go home, instead, if yeh wanted. An’ yeh wouldn’ be able ter come back next year, then.” Hagrid scanned the ground before shaking his head, as he saw what he was looking for. He led the four children towards a silvery looking patch on the grass, which was being ruffled by a slight breeze.
“That’s unicorn blood. This is the second time in a week. Found one dead last Wednesday.” Hagrid sighed. “We’re gonna try an’ find the poor thing. Put it out of its misery, if we have ter.”

“And what if it finds us?” Malfoy asked, the note of panic now grown into a full symphony’s worth of terror.

“Nothin’ in there’ll hurt yeh if yeh’re with me or Fang, here.” Hagrid slapped the dog’s back lightly, and Fang howled. “An’ keepin’ ter the path wouldn’ hurt yeh much either. Right, now we’ll split in two groups o’ three, then. Ron an’ Hermione, yeh’ll be with me on the left path. Harry an’ Draco, yeh can take Fang on the right. Green sparks if yeh find the poor beast and red if anyone’s hurt.”

The forest was bleak and silent, as anyone would expect at this hour of the night, and the darkness seemed ready to swallow them all whole. Harry had heard about the forest from his father, who would often joke about his monthly romps in it with his friends, but he had never imagined it to be quite this dark or quite this scary. Even Draco’s occasional mutterings weren’t enough to quell the feeling of unease rising from the pit of Harry’s stomach to settle in the back of his throat.

Every once in awhile, a ray of moonlight cut through the thick branches of the trees to illuminate another silvery-blue patch of grass or fallen leaves, sticky with the unicorn blood that Hagrid had shown them earlier, and each time it happened, the feeling seemed to grow in multiples of ten.

“Don’ worry, it can’t’ve gone far if it’s this badly hurt…” Hagrid said, to try and calm the children, and at the first sign of noise, he shoved both Ron and Hermione behind a tree. Draco yelped, grabbing Fang’s leash tighter than before, as Hagrid shot a bolt from the crossbow. Something slithered away quickly, something that sounded suspiciously like a cloak trailing over the piles of leaves on the forest floor.

“There’s summat in there that shouldn’ be.” Hagrid frowned, eyebrows drawing close together as his forehead furrowed. “Firs’ sign of trouble an’ I want your wands lit.” He called out, loudly enough for Harry and Draco to hear clearly, and Harry nodded, despite the fact that Hagrid couldn’t see them.

“Scared, Potter?” Malfoy sneered at him, as though mocking Harry’s own fear would somehow keep his hands from shaking.

“Or are you just being defensive, Malfoy?” Harry said, in a voice only marginally more steady than Malfoy’s. “Best way to cover up that you’re terrified is to blame someone else.”

They kept walking, and nearly half an hour later, after the path had become damn near impossible to follow, Harry found larger pools of blood. There were splashes on tree roots and smears on the trunks, as if the creature had limped further and further into the forest until it had simply lost energy to go on. And so it had, he realized, as he looked further up the trail to see it lying at the foot of a rather large oak tree.

“Is it… you know, dead?” Draco asked, curiously, and Harry put a finger to his lips.

“Green sparks. Quietly. You don’t know what’s out there.” He advised, and Draco frowned for a second before nodding tentatively, sending green sparks up for Hagrid and the rest to follow.

Harry crept closer, wanting to see more, because he had never seen such a beautiful creature, even in death. Its mane, although tangled and dirty due to the time it had spent thrashing in pain on the forest floor, still shone in the moonlight, and its legs were bent at odd angles, perhaps even broken. Harry felt nothing but emptiness, the happiness sucked out of him by the thought of such an innocent creature gone from the world.
A slick sliding sound caught his attention as one of the bushes on the edge of the clearing quivered, parting slowly as a hooded figure emerged, crawling across the forest floor like a predator stalking its prey before reaching the unicorn, pacing a slow circle around it. It bent down, then, lowering its head against the animal’s side, and began to drink its blood.

Malfoy let out a terrible scream, scrambling backward in an attempt to get back to the safer path, and Fang followed him. The cloaked figure looked up, at the noise, and saw Harry. He could have sworn that, if its hood weren’t hiding its face, the figure was grinning. Unicorn blood still running down its front, it crept toward him, slowly, filling him with dread. He felt as if his limbs were weighted down with cement, preventing him from running, and he swallowed hard as it approached.

Suddenly, something from behind Harry jumped forward, charging at the figure, and it sped off back into the darkness, as if afraid. When Harry blinked to clear his head, and fully consider the figure in front of him, he saw a centaur, with white-blond hair and a palomino’s body.

“Are you alright?” said the centaur, as Harry shook each limb in turn, slowly returning to himself.

“Yeah, yeah, I think so.” He took a deep breath, looking back at the section of the forest into which the specter had disappeared. “What was that?”

The centaur didn’t answer, looking over Harry with surprisingly blue eyes. “I know you. You’re the Potter boy.”

“Gotta keep the family legacy alive.” Harry grinned weakly. “Running around in the forest in the middle of the night and whatnot.”

“The forest is not safe, at this time. Especially not for you. Can you ride?” Harry shook his head, pulling a face, and the centaur lowered himself onto his front legs so Harry could awkwardly scramble onto his back, moving only once Harry had clung tight to his torso. “My name is Firenze, by the way.”

“Doesn’t that mean friend or something?” Harry asked, as they sped away from the clearing.

“So it would seem, Mr. Potter. So it would seem.” The centaur kept his silence for a few seconds before posing a question. “Do you know what unicorn blood is used for?”

“No, sir.” Harry shook his head. “We’ve only used the horn and tail hair in Potions.”

“It is beyond monstrous, to slay a creature so innocent and pure. Only one with all to gain would commit such a crime, as the blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, but at a dastardly price. You will have only a half-life, from the moment it touches your lips.” Harry stared at the back of Firenze’s head. “It will keep you alive, especially if you need only stay that way until you could get your hands on something else. Something far more powerful, with the potential to bring you back to yourself. Something that will make you immortal. Do you know what is hidden in the school?”

“The-- The Sorcerer’s Stone-- which-- The Elixir of Life!” Harry exclaimed, eye going wide. “But who would--”

“Can you think of no one, Harry Potter?” Firenze said softly. “No one who would seek to harm you and your family?”

Harry felt as though a vice had closed around his heart, remembering suddenly the way his parents would nervously watch the door every Halloween night even as his siblings chattered excitedly.
about costumes and candy, the way Dad’s hands would shake and Mum would cry when she thought they were all safely in bed. It felt as though all his blood had turned to ice, freezing him from the inside out, and all he could do was hope that this couldn’t be true.

“You mean that-- that was--” He stuttered, but Hermione ran up to them too soon for him to get an answer. Hagrid was running behind her, huffing and puffing loudly.

“Hagrid.” Harry began slowly, feeling as if he might faint, as he slid off of Firenze’s back and landed unsteadily on the grass. “The unicorn’s dead. In a clearing. About half an hour back there.” Hagrid nodded, quickly speeding off in the hopes of finding the carcass before something else did, and Harry hadn’t the heart to tell him that the worst possible thing had already happened.

“This is where I leave you, Harry Potter.” Firenze whispered. “You are safe now. The planets have been read wrongly before, even by my kind, and I hope this is one of those times.”

“I hope so too.” Harry managed to say, before Firenze turned about and ran back into the forest, much faster now that he didn’t have Harry on his back.

”You look like you’ve seen a ghost, mate.” Ron frowned, tugging on Harry's sleeve. ”Are you alright?”

Harry was shaking now, and Hermione’s hand clasped around his right arm was the only thing keeping him even remotely steady. He couldn’t sit down, but could barely stay standing, a conflict that was sure to have him face down in the mud before long. “Sn--Snape wants the Stone for You-Know-Who. Snape wants the Stone for Y--”

"You-Know-Who’s dead." Ron hissed nervously. "What are you talking about?"

“T--Firenze saved me, but he shouldn’t have. And we’ve lined ourselves right up for him! Dad and I are right here, and then it’s only a short Floo over back home to get Mum and the rest! We’re like pigs for the slaughter, all neat and ready for him! Incredible!” Harry stuttered his way through the sentence as they slowly began walking back toward the castle. Judging by the set of footprints leading that way already, Malfoy was long since back in bed. “Malfoy’ll be thrilled. His father’ll have a party, once we’re all good and dead.”

“Harry, you’re forgetting one thing.” Hermione spoke up, steadying him as they climbed up the steps leading up to the towers from the Great Hall. “Who’s the one wizard You-Know-Who has always been scared of?”

"Yeah! Dumbledore’s Headmaster, right? He won’t let a student die!” Ron enthused, clapping a hand to Harry's shoulder.

“Besides, what the centaurs are talking about sounds like Divination to me, and Professor McGonagall says that’s a very imprecise branch of magic.” Hermione nodded. “Very easy to misread.”

“So, what, you suppose the centaurs were looking at it upside down and I’m really just going to get nasty oatmeal tomorrow?” Harry asked, trying to support his horrible joke with a winning smile.

Ron laughed, shaking his head. "Who knows? Maybe you'll end up putting a pin in the arse who's causing us all this trouble and be done with it."

They finally made their way up to the Fat Lady, Hermione whispering the password to let them all through the portrait hole, and Ron took over the monumental job of keeping Harry upright through the stairs up to the boys’ dormitory.
"You shouldn't worry so much." Ron decided as they climbed the stairs. "After all, me and Hermione are right here."

“You know what’s brilliant, mate?” Harry asked, as he and Ron stumbled into their beds. “If Quirrell’s the last hope we’ve got, I might die before exams!”
“Don’t you think it’s odd that what Hagrid wants most in the world is a dragon? And that he just gets one, out of the blue, from a stranger?” Harry broke into a sprint, heading toward Hagrid’s hut. “I mean, how many people just carry illegal contraband around to bet on games of cards?”

"Have you ever been to Diagon Alley?" Ron called out from behind him.

“I’ve just realized something!” Harry said, as they were leaving the Herbology greenhouse. Professor Sprout had kept them a little past the bell, claiming their final exams would depend heavily on them building relationships with the plants. Harry, who was absolute pants at Herbology, was left battling a plant for dear life for nearly ten minutes more than necessary, which had him a little rattled. Of course, being nearly murdered gave him time to consider what was really important— the looming threat of actually being nearly murdered, this time by a person.

"Don’t work your brain too hard, it might explode." Ron warned.

“Don’t you think it’s odd that what Hagrid wants most in the world is a dragon? And that he just gets one, out of the blue, from a stranger?” Harry broke into a sprint, heading toward Hagrid’s hut. “I mean, how many people just carry illegal contraband around to bet on games of cards?”

"Have you ever been to Diagon Alley?" Ron called out from behind him.

“Hagrid never mentioned seeing his face either...” Hermione frowned. “That’s odd too, even for a society full of people that wear hooded cloaks everywhere.”

“Yeah! Random hooded guy has a dragon egg for some reason, sees Hagrid and bets it on a game of cards. Awfully convenient, don’t you think?” Harry was nearly raging at this point, as they tripped their way over a small hill. “And who’s the only other weird hooded guy who doesn’t show his face around these parts, huh? Oh, that’s right, the guy who tried to murder me. And the guy that’s working for him, of course. Awesome.”

“So you think Snape knows how to get past Fluffy?” Hermione looked around to make sure they weren’t being followed.

"Well, we know who to ask!" Ron snorted.

Hagrid was sitting on the front step of his hut, playing a tune on his flute, and the three children marched right up to him. A bowl of shelled peas nearly the size of Ron’s head sat next to him, and Harry barely avoided sitting in it as he sank down on the steps. “Harry! Ron! Hermione! What brings yeh here at this hour?”

“Who was the man who you got Norbert from?” Harry jumped straight to the point, as he often did. “Did you see his face at all?”

“Saw nothin’ of him. It’s not odd, gettin’ that type of folk down at the Hog’s Head.” Hagrid looked at the three kids before him, wondering why they all looked so mournful. “Yeh kids are
just worried ‘bout something more’n you should be. Maybe the weird bloke was a dragon dealer!”

“What did you say to him, Hagrid?” Hermione piped up. “Did you say anything about yourself? Your job?”

“Mighta come up.” Hagrid looked nervous. “He asked what I did an’ I told him about bein’ the gamekeeper here at Hogwarts. Askin’ about the types of animals I saw here… He kept buyin’ me drinks, so I can’t remember too well…”

“Did he— Did he seem interested in Fluffy?” Harry, having realized that it would be easier to get information if he sounded calm, had tried his best to keep his voice steady.

“Who wouldn’ be? A bloody great three headed dog?” Hagrid broke into a grin. “Fluffy’s a real piece o’ work, but I told him, the beast’s easy if yeh know how to calm him. Just play him a bit o’ music and he goes right down for a nap.”

A look of horror twisted Ron’s face, and he quickly employed several curses he had heard Fred and George use before.

“I shouldn’ta told yeh that!” Hagrid called after the three kids as they began running back to the school. “Forget I said any of it! Where’re yeh goin’?”

No one spoke a single word until they were safely in the Entrance Hall, which seemed downright dreary when compared to the bright sunlight washing over the grounds. It was definitely more fitting to the mood, though,

“We’ve got to go to Dumbledore,” said Harry. “Hagrid told someone how to get past Fluffy, and it was either Snape or Voldemort under that cloak. Must have been easy, once he got Hagrid drunk.”

"I just hope we don't think we're raving mad." Ron moaned.

“Guys, one problem?” Harry scratched his head. “Where’s Dumbledore’s office?”

The night was quiet, what with the triplets and Sarah finally having gone to bed. The windows were slightly ajar, letting in the cool air. Lily had settled herself in the kitchen with a mug of tea, ready to relax for a few minutes.

At least, she was until a snowy blur fluttered through the window. Hedwig landed on the table, head bobbing slightly as she caught her balance.

"What on earth...?" The mother of five set down her drink in favor of the owl. She leaned forward to smooth her fingers down the bird’s feathers before untying the parchment she carried.

It was rather late to be receiving a letter from Harry. Lily frowned as she unraveled the message, green eyes sweeping across the cramped handwriting.

Dear Mum,

I’ve had an eventful day. Had to wait for Ron to go to sleep to write this because he was getting kind of worried about me. You know how he gets all hover-y like Aunt Molly when things are wrong. Hermione nearly wanted me sent to the hospital wing. I don’t blame them. I was really shaky earlier, but I’ve gotten over most of it. Besides, I’m good at pretending to go to sleep, though, and Ron’s useless after midnight, so he’s asleep now. For the best, really.
There was this scary hooded person in the forest. We were out there looking for an injured unicorn, for detention, and Malfoy and I found him drinking the blood out of it? Malfoy ran off, of course, the spineless git. And then he looked straight at me and I couldn’t see his eyes and it was… really scary. I dunno how to feel about it. The centaur that got me out of there, Firenze, told me a lot of things that I don’t think I can say over a letter.

I really hope none of those things are true, for all of our sakes, but we don’t have the best track record with prophecies, right? It’s worrying, to say the least. Something big’s about to happen at school, and I’m right in the middle of it, as usual. Except, this time, I’d rather not be. It’s not all fun and games anymore, you know? There’s real life consequences to some of this.

I’m rambling and I’ve got Potions tomorrow morning. If I die, please blame Snape.

Love you and please do tell everyone I’m still in one piece,

Harry

Lily sighed, her moment of relaxation forgotten. Certainly she had gotten up to her fair share of dangerous activities while attending Hogwarts. But for Harry- a first year- to already be attracting this much attention?

"You're too much like your father." She murmured. Any amusement it might have held was lost in worry.

She should write back, but what was there to say? 'Come home, forget prophecies and scary creatures and be safe'? It sounded ridiculous just thinking about it.

Lily Evans-Potter was a mother, however. And no matter how clueless she was, it was her job to help her children.

Dear Harry,

Disregarding the fact that I should be telling you to sleep, it sounds like you're having a hard time.

I can't say I know anything about hooded men drinking unicorn blood in the dead of night, or magic mirrors in the basement. But I do know that you're smart and talented, and your father and the other professors will do their utmost to keep you safe. You have to try the best you can to take care of yourself and your friends, as well. Hopefully all of this will be over soon.

Avoid the forest, and try not to get caught on the grounds after dark.

If you do end up dead because of potions, I promise to personally hex Snape into another plane of existence.

Be the strong boy I know you are, sweetheart.

Lots of Love,

Mum

She rolled up the parchment, tying it to Hedwig's offered leg before allowing the owl to take off again.
Lily ran a hand through her hair and sighed. James would be home soon enough, hopefully, and she would be able to bring up the more frightening aspects of Harry’s letter. None of this boded well.

“What have you gotten yourself into?” Her sigh was met with silence from the empty kitchen.

“Appa?” Harry knew who was coming up behind him by the familiar sound of heavy footsteps, having spent nights awake listening for them as a kid, and he smiled as his dad playfully grabbed his shoulders. “Didn’t think you’d find me up here.”

Harry had hidden himself away in the clocktower, hoping to get some space. He loved his friends—Ron and Hermione were brilliant people—but he could only take so much being together in one day, and with exams drawing closer, Hermione had laid claim to their every free moment for revisions. The Clocktower was a nice place to hide, and one place Hermione and Ron wouldn’t look for him. Harry liked the constant hum of noise, though, as the gears locked into each other, and it was fun to watch time literally tick by. Calming, even, as much as Harry could be calm.

“Should have known better than to hide out in this particular tower then, silly. Your mum and I used to hang out here, back when we were at school.” James frowned when Harry mimed gagging, before the full weight of what his son was implying struck him. “Merlin’s balls, Harry. You know girls don’t actually have weird girl germs, right? Also, no kissing anyone until you’re at least seventeen, because nobody benefits from anything before then. I’m guessing that talk is not what you came here for.”

Harry stuck out his tongue as James threw up his hands, shaking his head. “Regardless, me and your mum hanging out like that… that was back in seventy-eight. Wow. Almost, what, fifteen years ago?”

“Hate to break it to you, but you’re old.” Harry smirked, shrugging innocently as James pressed a hand to his mouth in mock horror. “I’ll be twelve in a few months and then you’ll be really old.”

“Everyone’s got to lose out somewhere.” James rolled his eyes. “I’ve been lucky to avoid it as long as I have. But, before I get any closer to Dumbledore’s Old Man Who’s Seen Things In Life routine, spill.”

“What do you mean, spill?” Harry frowned.

“You’re playing your old man for a fool, kid. You’re up here because your friends wouldn’t look for you here, but I would. So, there’s something on your mind that you need to talk to me about.” James ruffled Harry’s hair. “Are we doing this the easy way or the hard way?”

“I, uh… Saw something kinda scary in the forest and…” Harry began tentatively, tapping his fingers against the transparent dial of the clock, wondering if anyone in the courtyard would look up to see Harry Potter through the clock face. “What was it like?” The question came out more hurried than he’d anticipated, tinged with a little too much curiosity, and James sighed, shaking his head. “When… you know. He was around.”

“Well, it was incredibly scary.” James nodded, staring out over the courtyard. Harry felt as though he should be taking notes, but shrugged it off. This was father-son time, not a lecture. “We’d just finished school, and here we were, smack dab in the middle of a war. There were certainly bright spots, like you and everyone being safe at the end, mostly, but it’s not something I’d wish on anyone else, you know? One of those life experiences I’d like to avoid repeating.”

Harry swallowed hard, thinking of what he knew, and nodded as resolutely as he could. “Yeah.
Besides, he’s long gone, right?”

“Evil like that… it fades, but there’s always someone willing to take up the banner. It’s like you’ve got a whole bunch of lemmings. Once one lemming jumps off the cliff, there’s always going to be another one that follows. There’ll always be somebody willing to do terrible things, as long as they believe in what they’re doing.” James ran a hand through his hair. “We just have to keep the evil down for as long as possible. That’s the goal.”

“Keep it down.” Harry whispered, eyes lighting up as he thought of the trapdoor. If they made sure Voldemort, along with whoever he was working with, was stopped down beneath the school, then no one would get hurt. Harry remembered nothing of the war, and knew little beyond what he’d heard his parents and their friends whispering about, on nights when they thought all the children had gone to bed, but he knew for sure that nobody needed to get hurt on his watch. “Thanks, Appa.”

“No problem, sport.” Harry threw his arms around his dad for a quick second before running to the stairs that would take him back down into the school and James waved a quick goodbye before turning back to the view.

Behind him, the clock struck the hour, and a few crows that had been roosting peacefully on it squawked loudly as they flew back to Hagrid’s pumpkin patch.

“I’ve got it!” Harry whispered excitedly, as he slid into a chair beside Ron and Hermione, who were the only two people in the common room. “Whoever’s going down there, we have to keep them down there. And, if you were a criminal trying to destroy the world, when would you steal something important from a school?”

"Last day of finals?" Ron suggested. "No one would be paying attention. I know I'm not."

“Brilliant, Ron!” Harry crowed, pulling a face when he realized how loudly he’d said that. “We’ll do it then. Catch them at their own game.”

“We should at least try focusing on our exams until then.” Hermione said. “Considering we have no idea what’s protecting it.”

"You're working me into the ground. I'm going to die." Ron dropped his head to the table with a loud 'thunk'.
“It’s going to be tonight, just like Ron guessed.” Harry shuddered, standing up abruptly before making his way back to the school. Ron and Hermione trailed behind, close enough to listen but far enough away to escape the aura of gloom that seemed to surround Harry these days. “He’s got everything he needs and now Dumbledore’s out of the way. He got him out of the way, I bet. It’s underhanded and sneaky and such a Slytherin thing to do--”

Hermione gasped and the two boys turned around slowly, only to find that Snape was standing behind them.

“Good afternoon”, Snape said, even as Ron flushed and Harry tried to hide behind Hermione.

Harry could hardly understand how he managed to make it through his exams without any Large Incidents (for example, Lord Voldemort bursting in through the door and requesting Harry’s head immediately), but he attributed it to the Legendary Evans Luck and kept working. The sooner these exams ended, the sooner they could get to the root of this problem. The days blurred into each other at a snail’s pace and his only comfort was knowing that Fluffy was hopefully doing just fine, confined in his corridor.

The classrooms in which they took their written exams were stuffy and stank of sweat, and the Anti-Cheating quills they had been given did nothing to revive Harry’s flagging mood. Thankfully, the few weeks of study he had crammed in had him guaranteed Acceptables at the very least.

Ron had commented briefly that they should get extra credit simply for showing up, considering their track record.

The practical exams were, by far, easier. For Charms, they had to make a pineapple tap dance across the a desk. For Transfiguration, they had to transform a mouse into a snuffbox. For Potions, Snape breathed down their necks in an attempt to make them forget how to brew a Forgetfulness potion.

Thankfully, the Defense practical exam was nothing more than casting Periculum, a spell that sent up red sparks, successfully and everyone got full marks, save for Seamus Finnigan, who managed to cause significant property damage and got extra credit.
Thanks to all of this, Harry entered the History of Magic exam confident in his ability to fail it well enough to hopefully get a good grade when Binns adjusted the marks. Fred and George, who had had History of Magic two nights before, had hosted a prayer session to the gods behind Binns’ Grading Curve. Harry, despite his general aversion to religion, had attended in the hopes that someone might help him out. No amount of learning about wizards who’d invented largely antiquated cauldrons or horribly dangerous brooms would help him, so any and all help was in someone else’s hands now.

And when Professor Binns’ ghost told them to put down their quills, Harry nearly jumped out of his seat in glee.

“That was a lot easier than I thought it would be!” Hermione exclaimed. “I needn’t have read the last few chapters at all.

"You needn’t have read any of it at all. I sure didn't. It’s summer now and I'm not picking up another book until September!" Ron declared.

“We could go over our exam papers--” Hermione began, but was cut off by Ron, who groaned loudly.

"No! Hermione, you need to calm down. We're all going to die if you keep trying to run us into the ground with all this homework."

They raced each other to the edge of the lake, where they all flopped under a tree to watch Fred and George, with Lee Jordan as their backup, pretend to joust the Giant Squid. The Squid’s pale pink, floppy tentacles were swinging every which way, nearly missing knocking the boys out at times. Harry sighed, plucking a few grass blades before he absentmindedly twisting them together.

"Cheer up, mate." Ron clapped his friend on the shoulder. "We don't get to see how bad we did for another week."

“How am I supposed to look cheerful when the whole school’s at risk?” Harry groaned. “You two noticed what happened at breakfast, right?”

“What?” Hermione asked, looking surprised.

"Huh... Well Dumbledore wasn't there, right? That was weird." The Weasley frowned, flopping back ok the grass.

“It’s going to be tonight, just like Ron guessed.” Harry shuddered, standing up abruptly before making his way back to the school. Ron and Hermione trailed behind, close enough to listen but far enough away to escape the aura of gloom that seemed to surround Harry these days. “He’s got everything he needs and now Dumbledore’s out of the way. He got him out of the way, I bet. It’s underhanded and sneaky and such a Slytherin thing to do--”

Hermione gasped and the two boys turned around slowly, only to find that Snape was standing behind them.

“Good afternoon”, Snape said, even as Ron flushed and Harry tried to hide behind Hermione.

“Afternoon, Professor!” Harry said, a lot more brightly than he felt. He had absolutely no idea where he was going with this train of thought, but he’d been lucky in the past. Hopefully that streak stuck. “We were just--”

"Just gallivanting about and bad mouthing professors, mister Potter?” He quirked a single eyebrow and stared down the curve of his hooked nose at Harry. "I would be careful, if I were
you. Gryffindor doesn't have many points to spare.

Harry hung his head even as Snape sighed. It was a very put-upon sound, as though Harry were pushing the weight of the world onto the potion master's shoulders.

"Don't let me catch you children again, or you just may find yourselves... homeschooled next year." Snape turned to leave, only briefly glancing over his shoulder. "Though I suppose I can't expect much from the likes of you."

Nervous laughter bubbled from Ron's throat in the silence Snape left behind. "Did he just threaten to expel us? I think he just threatened to expel us. I don't even think Fred and George have ever had that happen. Maybe we should stay away from the third floor corridor- right?"

“No, Ron. I have to do it tonight.” Harry said resolutely, biting his lower lip. “If we let it go tonight, there’ll be no Hogwarts to get expelled from. House Points won’t matter if we’re all slaves to a Dark Wizard, right?”

"That's nothing compared to what'll happen to the muggleborns..." Ron mumbled, glancing apologetically at Hermione.

Hermione winced, shaking her head. “We can’t let you go alone, Harry. Not when all of that is at stake.”

“But if we get caught, then all of us will be expelled.” Harry frowned.

“I got a hundred and twelve percent on the Charms exam.” Hermione replied, looking absolutely terrifying. “They’re not kicking me out after that.”

After dinner, the three of them sat quietly in the Gryffindor common room, all apart rather than clustering together as usual. Other than the occasional word to Ron or Hermione, the rest of the students were silent. No one had a single word to say to Harry, and he was utterly convinced he deserved it, which, of course, he did. But this was the first night on which it hadn’t bothered him—he had quite a few thoughts to sort through before tonight’s escapade, and most of them were heavy enough to need as much quiet time as he could give.

When the room had emptied, once their classmates had gone off to bed, Harry raced up the stairs to the boy’s dormitory to grab the flute that Hagrid had given to him shortly after Christmas, a smaller pair to Hagrid’s own, and nodded sharply as he jumped off the last step and onto the floor. Hermione and Ron rose slowly from their chairs and the three of them approached the portrait hole as the entrance swung open.

Harry, Ron and Hermione scrabbled through the portrait hole one after another, and carefully avoided Mrs. Norris, who was waiting at the foot of the first stairs. It was almost as if Filch had been expecting them. But, just this once, Mrs. Norris said nothing as the trio carefully climbed the stairs around her, her lamplike eyes staring at each of them in turn as she kept her silence.

They reached the third floor staircase without any other incidents, thankfully avoiding Peeves, who had decided to frequent that floor these days. But a horror awaited them, when they happened upon the right corridor-- the main door was already wide open.

Snape was in.

"Oh no.” Ron groaned, clutching his wand close to his chest. "This is it. We're all going to die. It was nice knowing you guys."
“If you want to turn back, I don’t blame you.” Harry said, steeling himself. “It’s kinda scary, the idea of fighting a teacher and all.”

"Not that scary. Nothing I can't handle.” Ron's words were a direct contrast to his earlier statement, and he tried for a confident smile. It was a bit shaky.

“We’re already here, Harry.” Hermione replied. “Why would we back out now?”

They carefully opened the second door, behind which Fluffy was hidden, and heard soft music between the dog’s loud, long snores. The music suddenly slowed as the door creaked shut, and the beast began to whimper, all of its noses sniffing for the scent of an intruder. Harry grabbed the flute out of his pocket and blew as loudly as he could, which sent it right back to sleep.

"I think you blew my eardrums out, mate.” Ron grumbled.

“Didn’t say I could play the flute, did I?” Harry grimaced as the interruption made the dog yawn loudly, sending a cascade of smelly breath over them, and began blowing into the flute, trying to mix it up by playing a few different notes every once in awhile as they circled the dog. They finally found the clearest path to the trapdoor, blocked only by part of the dog’s front left paw, and Ron crept forward to try and and shift it to the side.

He grunted when it refused to budge, and hastily waved Hermione over. "Help!" He hissed.

Hermione joined him, carefully pulling the paw aside gently enough to avoid waking the dog, and Ron looked to Harry.

"Well," he gulped, "who's going first?"

Harry nodded gravely, slowly making his way to the trapdoor while intermittently playing notes.

"Give it to Hermione." Ron directed.

Harry quickly handed it off to Hermione, who wiped it off on her sweater before beginning to play something marginally more palatable than Harry’s atempt at music. However, that pause was all Fluffy needed to open one of his eyes, and Harry ended up settling for an undignified stumble into the darkness the trapdoor lead to.

He fell down, down, down and then, with a wet, slick thump, he landed on something unbearably slimy. He sat up, eyes not adjusted to the darkness, and shuddered. It felt like the greenhouse all over again, what with the slime and the tentacles and-- wait, tentacles?

“IT’s a soft landing!” He called up. “Jump!”

That was all the direction Ron required before he leaped in after his friend with a startled yelp.

Hermione jumped in as soon as Ron was through, having the sense to shut the trapdoor behind her, and landed on Harry’s other side.

"Talk about lucky.” Ron laughed in relief. "This plant thing broke our fall."

“Lucky?” Hermione whispered incredulously, quickly grabbing at the wall. “Look at you two.

Harry looked down to see the tentacles curling around his hands and feet, slowly dragging him under. Ron was in the same situation, except he was yelling up a storm. Hermione had managed to free herself immediately, having noticed the creepers trying to bind her ankles as soon as she landed, but the boys were more tightly bound. The tentacles’ grips grew stronger as they
struggled, and Ron’s screams rose in volume as their bonds tightened.

“I know what this is!” Hermione yelled over the sound of the boys’ struggles. “It’s Devil’s Snare!”

“Oh FANTASTIC, Hermione! We might be getting eaten by a bloody plant but at least we know its name!” Ron’s shout with tinged with both sarcasm and hysteria.

“Quiet, Ron, I’m trying to remember how to kill it!” Hermione kept up her strong grip on the wall as she thought through her notes.

“Would help if you thought faster, ‘Mione!” Harry said, trying to keep his voice steady as he wrestled his arms free. “You’re brilliant for even knowing the name, but breathing is something I’d like to keep doing!”

“It-- It likes the dark and the damp, so… fire! Fire! But there’s no wood!” Hermione muttered.

"You're a witch, for crying out loud!” Ron snapped as he attempted to free his arms. "Make a magic fire! Use magic!"

“Oh, right!” Hermione shot a jet of the same flames she had used on Snape at the tentacles surrounding Harry and they retracted in fear, allowing Harry to scramble to the wall by Hermione. She did the same to free Ron, who quickly made his way to the wall as well.

“We’re lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione.” Harry said, slinging an arm around her shoulders. “You’re a right genius, you are.”

“We’re lucky Harry doesn’t lose his head in a crisis." Ron grumbled, shaking his robes as though to remove imaginary dust.

“This way.” Harry pointed down a passageway which none of them had noticed before, but seemed to be the only way forward. All they could hear, apart from their footsteps, was the steady trickle of water, telling them they were quite far underground. Harry was reminded of the few times he’d accompanied his father to Gringotts by the sharply sloping tunnels and shuddered.

There was a real, fully grown dragon somewhere in Gringotts. What if there was one here? Norbert had been terrifying and he was a baby.

"Do you guys hear something?"

“Yeah.” Harry brightened as he listened closely, picking up a familiar fluttering noise. He rushed forward into a brilliantly lit chamber, full of little birds doing tricks in the air. “Wings!”

On the other side of the room was a large wooden door, reminiscent of the entrance to Hagrid’s hut.

"Do you think they’ll attack us if we try to open it?” Ron was staring up into the swarm of birds suspiciously.

“Only one way to find out.” Harry swallowed hard before sprinting across the room and toward the door, trying to tug it open with all his strength. The door didn’t budge, even when Hermione tried the unlocking charm on it.

"Well now what?” Ron kicked at the door.

“Those birds…” Hermione squinted at them and Harry gasped as they soared overhead, glittering
in the light.

“That’s exactly it! They’re not birds!” Harry crowed in delight. “They’re keys! And we’ve got to catch them!”

“But how?” Hermione looked about the chamber, and spotted the broomsticks at the same moment that Harry did.

“We’ve got to catch the key to the door!” Harry said.

“But there are hundreds!” Hermione exclaimed, trying to distinguish any one key from the rest.

In that time, Ron had kneeled by the door, examining the lock, and turned to Harry. "By the looks of it, the key is going to be really big, really old, and possibly silver?"

Harry was not the youngest Seeker in a century for nothing, however, and within five minutes of him being off the ground, he’d spotted it. “That one! Over there! With the bent wing!”

The key, as if it had heard him, streaked off toward the wall and Harry pinned it against the stone with a nasty crunching sound. “Got it.” He slowly hovered lower and lower until he could step off the broom comfortably, the key still in his hand, and walked toward the door. “Hopefully it works.”

The moment he inserted the key, the lock clicked open, revealing a dark chamber.

“Ready?” Harry asked, feeling a little uncertain, and stepped in.

The moment they were inside, light flooded the room to reveal an astonishing sight. Large chess pieces, stood in place along a chessboard, which ran the length of the room. Each piece was more than one and a half times Ron’s height, and Ron was the tallest of the three of them. Facing them were the white chessmen, faceless and terrifying, and Harry and Hermione shuddered a little.

Ron stepped forward, his footsteps echoing loudly against the edge of the chessboard. His eyes caught on each piece as he looked around, and then back at his friends. "I bet we have to join them. The pieces. We’ll have to play on the board with them."

They could see a door, hidden behind the white pieces, and Harry nodded.

"Hermione, I want you to take the queen’s side castle." Ron pointed to the piece in question. "It'll be the piece least likely to get used, and it's the safest. You've gotten us through all the other puzzles, so you should be kept out of the thick of it. Harry should be the king’s side bishop. You'll only be at risk if we go for a quick checkmate, really, and other than that you've got the pawns to protect you. As for me.... I'll take a knight. Its risky, but there's a lot to gain from it."

The chessmen seemed to be listening, as a rook, knight and bishop all slowly slid off the board, leaving their spots open to take. Hermione and Harry nervously took their own spots even as Ron scrambled onto the horse that the knight had left behind.

A white pawn moved forward two spaces and Ron nodded before launching into his battle plan. Harry moved when directed, although tentatively, but the real surprise came when the first piece was taken. The white queen smashed the other knight to pieces, dragging him off the board where he lay motionless.

Hermione gasped, staring in shock at the piece, even as Ron let out a shaky breath and straightened.
"It’s how wizard chess works." He called out. "Sacrifices need to be made if we want to win."

After the first piece went down, the pile of crumbling black pieces only grew. Harry took solace in the fact that the pile of white pieces, at the other end of the board, was just as tall. Ron couldn’t be counted on to sit back and relax at all, as he was busy darting around the board and taking those pieces. So invested was he in the game that he nearly let Harry and Hermione get taken a few times, realizing they were in danger only just in time to save them.

"We've almost got this. We can win." He declared, his grip tightening on the stone horse.

The white queen turned towards him, faceless and intimidating, and Ron swallowed hard.

"We can win." He repeated. "This is it."

“No!” Harry and Hermione yelled in unison, as Ron shook his head gravely.

"Don't you guys get it?" He stared at the queen in determination. "If I sacrifice my piece, Harry can get a checkmate. It’s the best option."

“Ron--” Harry moved to step forward, but Hermione waved her arms wildly to keep him within his square. “You can’t!”

"We need to hurry! Snape could already have the stone by now!"

Hermione nodded. “There really isn’t an alternative.”

Ron urged the horse forward, pale but determined, and crumpled to the floor as the white queen struck him hard across the head. She dragged him off to the side of the board, throwing him so he landed hard on the pile of black pieces, and resumed her position.

Harry, limbs shaking, moved up to the white king. “Checkmate.” The king threw his crown to Harry’s feet as the white pieces parted, leaving the path to the doorway clear. With one last look at Ron, Harry charged toward the passageway, Hermione close behind.

“What if he’s--” She began, but he shook his head.

“I’ve known Ron since I was born and he’s taken worse spills than that.” Harry said, trying to convince himself as well as her. “He’ll be okay. What do we have left?”

“We’ve gotten Sprout’s, Flitwick must have been the keys and McGonagall was the chess pieces… That leaves your dad’s, if he did one, and Snape’s.”

“Dad wouldn’t have. He only told Dumbledore he was in over the summer, and they’ve had to have been getting this ready for ages.” Harry looked around. “Besides, he probably would have just put a bucket of chalk dust in the doorway or something. Maybe put a permanent sticking charm on the bucket to slow someone down.”

They had reached another door while Harry was talking, and he pushed it open tentatively.

Harry hardly dared to look at what came next, but the sight before them was hardly terrifying. Seven differently shaped bottles stood in a line on a rickety looking table.

“Snape’s.” Harry said stolidly, and he and Hermione stepped over the threshold together.

As soon as they did, purple flames sprung up behind them, blocking their exit. Even as Harry tried to run for the door at the other end of the room, black flames sprung up to block it.
“Alright, that’s cheery!” Harry said, trying to muster up something beyond badly hidden fear, and Hermione found a scroll of parchment on the table that Harry hadn’t seen before. He looked over her shoulder to read it:

Danger lies before us, while safety lies behind,

Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,

One among us seven will let you move ahead,

Another will transport the drinker back instead,

Two among our number hold only nettle wine,

Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,

To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide,

You will always find some on nettle wine’s left side;

Second, different are those who stand at either end,

But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;

Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,

Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;

Fourth, the second on the left and the second on the right

Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

Hermione had the most brilliant smile on her face as she reached the end of the puzzle, which confused Harry, as smiling was one of the last things he felt like doing.

“This is brilliant!” She exclaimed. “Even the best wizard is nothing if he doesn’t know how to use his magic. Logic is absolutely necessary, and most wizards would be trapped down here forever because of it!”

“Great.” Harry sat down on the floor, ready for a good hour of sulking. “Guess we’d start making this more homey, then.”

“I didn’t say anything about witches, did I?” Hermione chuckled. “Everything we need is in the riddle— seven bottles: three are poison, two are nettle wine, one will take us forward, through the black flames, and one will take us back through the purple.”

“But how do we know which one to drink?” Harry asked, slowly getting up off the floor.

“Give me a second.” Hermione looked over the paper several more times before nodding. “The smallest bottle should get you through the black fire— towards the Stone.”

“There’s only enough for one of us.” Harry picked up the smallest bottle, turning it around and around in his hand. “Which one takes you back through the purple ones?”
Hermione pointed to a rounded bottle, the farthest one to the right.

“You drink that and go get Ron. Use the brooms from the key room-- those’ll get you past Fluffy- - and then get to the Owlery. Get McGonagall, get Dumbledore, anyone. I can hold off Snape for a bit, but… we’re first years. And he’s a teacher.” Harry sighed, running a hand through his hair. “I’m no match for him, but I can try.”

“And-- And if You Know Who’s with him?” Hermione asked, voice trembling even as she reached for the rounded bottle.

“Let’s hope getting lucky runs in the family.” Harry said, fidgeting nervously. Hermione threw her arms around him all of a sudden, and he spluttered in surprise before hugging her back. “What’s that for?!”

“You’re a great wizard, you know?”

“Not as good as you, I mean, I’ve practically failed half the year.” Harry scoffed.

“Come off it, I’ve seen your grades.” Hermione rolled her eyes. “And me? That’s just cleverness and years of reading getting me ahead! You’ve got friends and you’re brave and those things are really important too! Harry, be careful!”

“Good thing I’ve got the smartest witch I know on my team, then.” Harry hugged her a little tighter. “For bailing me out and stuff. On that note, you’re sure this isn’t poison.”

“Absolutely positive.” Hermione nodded as she drew back, smiling softly. “Want me to drink first just in case?”

“You know me too well.” Harry chuckled as Hermione downed the contents of the bottle and shuddered. “You-- You alright there?”

“It’s not poison, it’s just… like ice.”

“Quick, before it wears off!”

“Harry-- Good luck, be safe--”

“RUN!”

Hermione gulped and ran through the purple flames, emerging unharmed on the other side, and that was all the proof Harry needed. He uncapped the bottle in his hand, turning to face the black flames, and swallowed hard.

“Should probably say something cool, in case I die here.” He nodded thoughtfully for a few seconds before shaking his head. “Nah.”

He downed the whole bottle in a single mouthful and raced through the black flames to meet his opponent. But it was hardly who he was expecting. There was already someone in the next chamber, but it wasn’t Snape. And it wasn’t Voldemort.

It was Quirrell.
Harry looked into the mirror, and at first, saw only himself. The Harry in the mirror was anxious looking at first, eyes darting around to check his surroundings, but then smiled softly, patting his pocket. He put his hand into his pocket, withdrawing a blood red, gem-like stone, before dropping it back in. At that same moment, Harry felt a heavy weight settle into his pocket. Somehow, incredibly, he had gotten the stone.

“You!” Harry yelped, entirely taken by surprise.

There was the rustle of fabric as Quirrell turned. The cruel smile that stretched his thin lips to the sides was chilling. "Y-you took longer th-than I expected."

“But-- Snape--”

"Sn-Snape? You must be jo-joking."

Harry couldn’t take it. It couldn’t possibly be true. Snape had treated him worse than any of the other students all year, had openly hated him, had even tried to kill him. And the real villain was Professor Quirrell? Professor Quirrell who they thought had been the victim? Had they been played the whole time?

“But Snape-- He tried to kill me and--”

"Are you talking ab-about the quidditch game?" He sighed, a sound layered with false disappointment. "Cred-Credit where credit is due. Th-that was me as well. I was kn-knocked over when his robes caught fire- luck-luckily for you. Without his in-interference I could have finished you off."

“Snape was trying to save me?” Harry asked, blown away by this revelation.

"Why else wou-would he volunteer to re-referee Quidditch? He hates sports." Quirrell's hand moved quickly, and the hissed spell caused Harry’s chest to tighten as though a large hand were gripping him. "A sh-shame, really. I-I can't let someone so no-nosy live. Not after my little st-stunt
on Halloween."

"You let the troll in?"

"I have a gift with trolls. I-I had hoped your id-idiot father would distract Snape, but he sto-

stopped me before I could get past the damn do-dog. A sha-shame he didn't lose his leg in the

encounter." He turned away from Harry, towards the back of the chamber.

It was only then what Harry realized what the glimmer of silver behind Quirrell was-- the Mirror

of Erised.

"The mirror wi-will be the key to the stone." A pale hand was pressed against the reflective

surface, and Quirrell frowned into the glass. "But how?"

"But I saw you and Snape in the forest!" Harry said, wanting more than anything to keep Quirrell

distracted. He knew that keeping people distracted often kept them from solving things on time,

from years of distracting his parents from his own messes, and he could only hope that Quirrell

was as easily put off as his parents. "What was that?"

"Snape knew what I wa-was doing, it seems, a-and got the idea in his he-head to stop me. His id-

idiocy is nothing compared to the mi-might of Lord Voldemort." The glee in his voice was

apparent even as he circled around to the other side of the mirror. "My gre-greatest wish is to

present the stone to my ma-master... If only I could find it."

Harry struggled against his bonds, knowing that he needed to keep Quirrell’s attention diverted.

"But Snape’s always hated me!"

"Of cou-course he does." The exasperation in the professor's tone was becoming more

pronounced. "You and your father both. Bu-but that's n-n-no reason to want y-you dead."

"But I heard him threatening you! When I was leaving the library!" Harry spoke up. "You seemed

like you were upset!"

"I-I-It's hard to follow m-my Master sometimes. Even wh-when he's always with me. The D-Dark

Lord has so much pl-planned, boy. More th-than any of us could dream."

"Always with you?" Harry frowned. "But how?"

Quirrell was standing in front of the mirror again, staring fervently at his reflection. "I discovered

my m-master in Albania, on a re-re-researching trip. Oh, what a go-glorious day. Despite how pe-

people moan and whine, I knew the tru-truth. There is no good and evil, P-Potter, only power and

those too weak to seek it," He turned again, pacing. His footsteps were loud against the stone. "I-I

attempted to st-steal the stone from Gringotts, but I failed. Ma-Master decided he would have to

keep a closer watch on me." His beady eyes bore into the mirror. "Perhaps if I br-break it?"

"Okay. Think. I want to get the stone out of the mirror, and before Quirrell. If I see myself in the

mirror, I should see where it is, right? Makes sense."

Never had Harry been so thankful he was bilingual, and Quirrell stared in confusion before turning back to the mirror, tapping the frame and whispering at it like it would change things.

Harry tried to move to see himself better, but couldn’t without falling flat on his face, thanks to

how he’d been immobilized. Quirrell ignored him, still busy talking to himself.

"H-How does it work? Master, what do I do?" He wrung his hands together in front of himself.

"Use the boy." An unfamiliar voice hissed.
The professor turned, a manic look entering his eyes. He waved a hand, and the pressure that had clung to Harry's ribcage evaporated. Bony hands motioned him closer, and Quirrell clutched at his shoulders. "Tell me, boy... What do you see?" His tone had turned syrupy, practically dripping with false sincerity. The stutter that Harry was so used to had disappeared entirely. Had it been an act all along?

Harry looked into the mirror, and at first, saw only himself. The Harry in the mirror was anxious looking at first, eyes darting around to check his surroundings, but then smiled softly, patting his pocket. He put his hand into his pocket, withdrawing a blood red, gem-like stone, before dropping it back in. At that same moment, Harry felt a heavy weight settle into his pocket. Somehow, incredibly, he had gotten the stone.

"What is it?" Quirrell hissed. "What did you see?"

“I’m shaking hands with Dumbledore.” Harry said, remembering what Ron had seen months before. “I’ve won the House Cup for Gryffindor.”

A disgusted noise was expelled from the back of Quirrell's throat, and he shoved Harry back. "Worthless." He spat.

Something occurred to Harry-- he could make a run for it!

The Stone was heavy against his leg, and if he ran now, Quirrell would be far enough behind that catching up would be tough. There were a few things that magic just could not compete with, and one of them was fast little kids. But, before he had made it even a quarter of the way to the stairs, the same gravelly voice from earlier spoke again.

"He lies."

"Going somewhere, Potter?" Quirrell's shaking hands clung to the loose cloth hanging from his turban, and his smile stretched impossibly wide.

"Let me speak to him. I have strength enough for this."

Slowly, Quirrell reached up to unwind the fabric encasing his head. It was as if his head had shrunk three sizes, when the cloth fell away. He turned slowly and Harry came face to face with a nightmare. Where there should have been nothing, on the back of Quirrell's head, there was an angry face, with snake-like slits for nostrils and blood red eyes.

"Harry Potter," the whisper was bone-chilling.

Harry tried to take a step backward, but he was frozen by fear.

"Do you know," his gaze was terrifying, as were the cold words that fell from his lips, "how difficult it's been for me? To sit around, waiting, for months? Listening as children and teacher alike blathered on about such boring things. Muggle Studies. Of all the topics to be stuck with..."

A sigh punctuated his words, and the eyes narrowed. Harry felt as if he wanted to throw up. "After all that waiting, I won't be foiled now. Why don't you hand over the stone in your pocket, Harry Potter?"

He knew. Harry, suddenly regaining feeling in his legs, stumbled backwards.

“Don’t be a fool like your parents. Your filthy mudblood mother thought to defy me as well.” Voldemort cackled. “And all that work will amount to nothing. The darling son she nearly died to save has handed himself over.”
“My mother is infinity and one times the person you are!” Harry yelled. “Take that back, you stinker!”

Quirrell stepped backwards, towards Harry. It was rather terrifying, watching Voldemort’s face grow closer. Had Harry taken the time to look back later, he might have found the situation a bit amusing. Quirrell walking backwards and managing to appear menacing as he did so.


“NEVER!”

Harry sprang toward the flame door, but then Voldemort screamed “SEIZE HIM!”.

And the next second, Quirrell’s hand was gripping his wrist tightly enough for it to hurt. At once, pain rolled over Harry in waves, his head feeling as though it was splitting in two, and he struggled against Quirrell as bravely as he could. And then, all of a sudden, he let go. The pain lessened, dulling to a consistent throb in the pit of his stomach, and he sat up to see Quirrell howling in pain as his fingers blistered before his eyes.

Voldemort screamed, "SEIZE HIM!" over the shrieks of pain. Quirrell lurched forward in an attempt to follow his orders, but his screams of pain only increased as he came into contact with Harry’s skin.

"My hands!" He shrieked. "I can't hold him!"

"KILL HIM." Voldemort roared.

Quirrell raised his wand, presumably to perform a fatal curse, and Harry saw his chance, jumping up to grab his face with one hand and Quirrell’s wrist with the other. The professor howled again, thrashing in an attempt to dislodge the eleven year old.

The pain was building again, leaving Harry in somewhat of a fog, and all he could hear were Quirrell’s terrible shrieks, and Voldemort’s yelled threats to finish him off or be killed.

He felt Quirrell’s arm pulled from his grasp as the world went black. He felt as though he was falling, but all was well.

The Stone was still in his pocket.

Harry blinked slowly before opening his eyes, bringing a hand up slowly to rub at his forehead before looking around slowly. The room was white, much unlike the dingy dungeon he’d been in the last time his eyes were open, and he was still puzzling over his location when, suddenly, his glasses were slid gently onto his nose, bringing the world into focus.

“Oh no.” He said, biting his lip, before he heard a familiar laugh from his right.

“Oh no is pretty damn right.”

"I don't think 'oh no' even begins to cover it." Lily sat beside Harry’s bed. The stern, pinched look on her face was softened by the disarray her hair was in. She had probably been running her hands through it, meaning she was worried.

“Well, let’s look at the bright side. I’m alive.” Harry said, shrugging. He tried to worm his casted right arm under the blanket to check if the Stone was in his pocket, but found it empty. “The Stone--”

"What I want to know is why you had it." Lily frowned as well, green eyes narrowing dangerously at her son. "Did you really think any of what you did was a good idea, Harry? You should have gotten your father!"

“He was mad at me.” Harry muttered. “Cause I lost all those points for Gryffindor.”

“ Incredible.” James slow clapped it out. “You thought I was mad at you for losing points for Gryffindor?” His voice raised slightly in volume, and Harry grimaced. His father hardly ever got mad, but when he did, it was not too fun to be on the receiving end of it. Voldemort had been once and he was living on the back of Quirrell’s ridiculously shiny, golf ball head. Gross. “No, I was mad at you for risking your life for absolutely no reason. You almost got yourself, Ron, Hermione and Draco murdered! Just because Hagrid wanted to keep a fucking dragon in his wooden house!”

“Since when are you and Malfoy on first name terms?”

Lily reached out a hand to keep James from exploding. "Harry, your father was worried about you. We both were." Her voice was strained, and when she reached out her free hand to cover Harry's own, they were shaking. "Something like this... You can't handle it on your own. Or," she amended her statement, "you don't have to, at least."

“Appa, look, I’m sorry. But it had to be done! Quirrell was going to--” The memory of Voldemort was pulled back to the front of Harry’s mind and he fell silent, chewing on his lower lip to avoid talking. After a few seconds, when he’d formulated the most bulletproof response he could think of, he spoke again. “It was going to get nasty. Like… Nightmare on Elm Street bad.”

"I- you've seen Nightmare on Elm Street?" Lily's confused expression traveled from her son, to her husband, and back again.

“Uncle Sirius thought it would be a kid’s movie.” Harry nodded, glad for the change in topic. He was going to keep to it as long as possible. “It had the word nightmare in the title, which is weird. Makes you wonder what kind of stuff Uncle Sirius was doing as a kid to make him look at something like that and decide it’s appropriate.”

“Sirius was busy being the nightmare.” James shook his head. “But we’re not here to talk about what happened to him. He’s a lost cause. We’re here to try and understand why you, against all recommendations, decided to chase a teacher through high level enchantments in the middle of the night. There are adults specifically here to handle that problem.”

“Well, when I was trying to get a mass murderer to kick the bucket, I didn’t see any of you helping out!” Harry blurted out.

“You’ve got a point.” James nodded. “What happened down there? What really happened, I mean, not some topic change and two bit excuse this time.”

"All we’ve been told is that professor Quirrell was down there with you. I kind of doubt Dumbledore would have hired him if he was a mass murderer, so you had better start explaining.” Lily raised an eyebrow.

“He… He’d gone to Albania, on a research trip. And he met someone there.” Harry hoped that information would be enough for his parents to understand the gravity of the situation, but if they didn’t, it would be for the best. They’d worried enough, over him and everyone else, and he was sick of making them suffer. Maybe he’d give up mischief making as a whole. No, that was
impossible. He’d limit it to weekends next year.

Lily seemed to have figured it out, if the expressions on her face were anything to go by. Albania had been the last known location Voldemort had been. The sudden fear in her eyes was replaced a moment later by hard resolve.

"Are you telling me Dumbledore hired..." A heavy silence fell, and Lily pushed back from the bed, rising to her feet. "Where the bloody hell is he? I'm going to give him a piece of my mind."

“Get in line.” James looked absolutely livid, and Harry was glad that his father was too busy being mad at Dumbledore to be mad at him. It’d be much easier to not call the next Defense teacher Professor Dad.

“Apparently the latest fashion trend is possessing peoples’ heads.” Harry had always been the type of child who joked about his problems, but something told him it was inappropriate in this situation. And, as he often did, he told that instinct to get out.

Lily looked ready to march out of the hospital wing and hex Dumbledore into an early grave. Before she could, however, the doors burst inwards. Ron and Hermione hurried in, perhaps having heard that Harry was awake.

"Harry! Uh- hello, Mrs. Potter. Professor.” Ron shuffled to a halt a few feet from the end of the bed, awkwardly scratching at one of his ears.

“Harry!” Hermione called out, noticing her friend first before realizing his parents were also in the room. “Professor. Mrs. Potter.”

“I’m not your professor again until September, so you can cut the crap now.” James shrugged.

Lily was still on her feet, but she sighed and placed a hand on her husband’s shoulder. "Hello, Ron. Are you Hermione? Harry's mentioned you in a few of his letters."

“Yes ma’am.” Hermione was more excited than Harry had ever seen her, and he’d seen her when Ron voluntarily agreed to a study session. That had been terrifying, and if he was a betting man, he would say that even Voldemort would have keeled over if he’d taken one look at Hermione’s face.

"It’s brilliant to meet you. Though I do wish it were under different circumstances.” Her smile was tired, but genuine.

“Miss Granger here’s got the highest score on the first year Defense exam since you.” James grinned proudly, putting a hand on Hermione’s shoulder. She beamed proudly, slightly nervous because of all the sudden attention. “She found the extra credit section I hid and everything. Well, to be fair, Finnegan did too, but Hermione didn’t blow up the classroom getting there.”

"You don't say?” Lily laughed, shaking her head. Why had he hidden the extra credit? "That's amazing. You should be proud of yourself, Hermione." The redhead stepped away from James in order to offer a handshake to the student.

Hermione was awestruck at the thought of meeting one of her heroes, especially one who she’d researched relentlessly after learning about the Magical world. That was one constant between both worlds-- women as role models were few and far between, and the fact that Lily Potter had been readily presented as something for a young witch to aspire to had been nothing short of a surprise to Hermione.

“Thanks, Mrs. Potter.” She shook her hand nervously. “It means a lot.”
Ron side stepped Hermione and Lily before flinging himself onto the foot of Harry's hospital bed. "You've been out for two days! Hermione has been making my ears bleed with all the worrying she does. How are you feeling?"

"Aces, except for the fact that Dad’s about to blow and ground me for the next ten years.” Harry grimaced. “Good thing ‘Mione’s got him and Mum distracted, right?”

“Keep talking like that, son, and we might be able to fit in a second visit to your aunt and uncle’s this summer, just for you.” James called out, not even around to look at Harry. “I’m sure they’d be delighted to spend some more time with their favorite nephew.”

"Don't say something like that around the boys, or they'll start a competition to see who can make Petunia more blue in the face.” Lily sighed. Drew and Harry could get so competitive over the strangest things.

“You’re forgetting the true master of being well-liked by Petunia, really. I think Harry’s spent more than enough time around Snape this year to have picked up a few tips.”

“I can’t smell like a medicine cabinet or drip grease everywhere, so I guess I’ve got to rely on my natural charm?” Harry shrugged.

“That seems to be more than enough, these days.” Lily pressed a hand to her mouth, as though to hide the smile she was sporting. "But honestly, your father has you beat. Just try walking like your pants are two sizes too small, and you'll be fine, apparently.”

“You try growing a foot in a year and see how that goes.” James rolled his eyes. He was still sore about that, almost fifteen years later. “It’s a miracle I didn’t break anything.”

"Does your dignity count?"

“That was all you, dear.” James shook his head. “I tried my best, but there was no stopping you.”

“You’re both gross and should be ashamed of yourselves!” Harry cupped his hands around his mouth to amplify his yelling further. “I don’t need more siblings!”

"Merlin knows I agree.” Lily laughed, some tension draining from her shoulders as she leaned over to plant a kiss on her son's cheek.

“To be fair, we’re firing one of you at the end of the year. Your case isn’t looking good.” James said, as solemnly as he could.

"Is that allowed? Because I think my mum would have fired Fred and George by now if it was.” Ron said seriously.

“Illegal in England, but there are other places.” James nodded seriously. “I’d gotten fired at least six times by the time I was seventeen, but my stunning looks and dashing personality got me back into my parents’ good books soon enough.”

"James, we should probably get going if we want to speak with Dumbledore.” Lily glanced briefly at the watch on her wrist.

“You’re abandoning me, nice.” Harry called out. He really didn’t want his parents to go to jail. He’d have to live with Uncle Sirius, then, and that, although it would be funny for the first little while, was nowhere near a long-term solution, no matter whether Uncle Remus was always there or not.
As though summoned by the mere thought, the enormous fireplace at the end of the room flared to life. The flames leapt, turning to a startling green as a figure stepped out. Sirius approached with a sheepish smile, and briefly winked at Harry. "Sorry to cut your visit short, but Rem and I have run ourselves into a spot of trouble."

"Please tell me you didn't set my house on fire," Lily sighed.

"Nothing of the sort!" Sirius placed a hand against his chest in mock hurt. "But we did misplace two of the triplets, and for once Matt is right where we left him."

"Where did you leave him?" James knew Sirius far too well to leave that point alone.

"Broom cupboard under the stairs. Seemed quite happy there, if you ask me." The cheeky grin did nothing to reassure any of the other occupants of the room.

"You locked my son in a broom cupboard?" James groaned. "That’s it, Sirius, you’re never babysitting. Ever. Even with Remus."

"Have a little faith in me, Prongsie Dearest. He wasn't locked. That's just where he happened to be, so we left him there. Annie and Drew seemed to be the priority at that point."

"We should probably go stop them before they manage to lose the other two." Lily shook her head.

"Agreed. Rest up, son. Next time you’re in here, you won’t make it out alive."

"Love you too, Dad."

Lily leaned over to kiss Harry's forehead before speaking. "This conversation isn't over, young man."

Ron winced in sympathy, having heard those exact words from his own mother more times than he cared to admit.

"Guess I’d better get back into running shape as soon as possible." Harry said glumly. "There’s a summer full of Harry Hunting ahead of me. Don’t need any crystal balls for that."

"Even the Hospital Wing was less depressing than this." Harry muttered, as the three of them trudged into the Great Hall. The walls were covered in silver and green hangings, making it clear who was going to be presented with the Cup tonight. Snape even seemed to be smiling, even though Harry was quite sure that if his mouth stretched any wider than a frown necessitated, his whole face would shatter from the surprise of it.

"Can you still do that fire trick you pulled during the quidditch match, Hermione?" Ron asked, only half joking. "The hangings would look much better that way, I'd bet."

“Slytherin earned their win.” Hermione said, grudgingly. She would have liked to win, of course, but Slytherin hardly got a chance at good things. Besides, if they won the cup this year, revenge would be all the sweeter when Gryffindor won the cup for the next six years in a row. Provided, of course, that Harry did nothing but play Quidditch.

Ron snorted, shuffling his feet against the stone floor as they made their way to Gryffindor table. "Probably cheated their way into so many points."

“Look at Malfoy.” Harry grimaced, having accidentally caught sight of the boy who apparently
considered himself Harry’s arch-nemesis. “With his weird, tiny, pointy face. I could kick him.”

“How do white people even get like that?” Hermione wondered aloud as they took their seats.

"He's a pureblood. Hundreds of years of inbreeding'll do that to a guy." Ron answered sagely.

“I guess we’re allowed to laugh at him, considering my dad and Ron’s family are like… pureblood trash, at this point.” Harry shrugged. “I’ve seen worse, though. Draco’d piss himself if he ever met Dudley. He’s like… Dudley, if Dudley was… less Dudley.”

"You have such a way with words." Ron couldn't help the giggle that escaped him.

“You know someone named Dudley?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, boy, do I know him.”

The chatter that filled the Great Hall died down as Dumbledore stepped forward. His voice echoed throughout the room, though he barely seemed to raise it. "Students... Teachers. It has been my pleasure, and my honor to preside over you this year, as it is every year. Let us celebrate, as the end of one year is simply the beginning of another. I hope to see you all come summer's end.” He raised a glass, smiling out at the rows of students.

“Yeah, if we’re not all dead or enslaved by a racist, blood purist regime.” Harry rolled his eyes. “You’d think he was living in a dream world all the time or something.”

"Wouldn't put it past him." Ron yawned. "When is this over? I'm going to sleep on the train."

“Not sure.” Harry sighed. “Oh, look, he’s starting the House Cup speech.” The sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach that hadn’t left since he lost points over Norbert had worsened, and he stared in confusion at Ron’s suddenly excited expression. “Ron, it’s Slytherin.”

"Weren't you listening?" He whispered back. "Dumbledore said he was awarding extra points. We could still win this!"

Dumbledore's calm voice continued on. "To Ronald Weasley... For outstanding strategy, bravery, and talent in the area of wizard chess... Fifty points."

Ron suppressed a whoop, though his did grab Hermione's arm and give it a shake.

"To Hermione Granger... For her wit, intelligence, and above all else, her ability to remain calm in the face of grave danger to stand by her friends... Fifty points."

“Sixty more and we beat Slytherin!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Sixty points we don’t have, Hermione.” Harry grumbled.

"And last, but certainly not least, Harry Potter. For bravery that knows no bounds, friends that stand loyal, and the uncanny ability to protect that which others could not... Fifty points."

“Please, God, let him not be done yet…” They were only ten points away from a Gryffindor win, only ten, measly points away. Even Neville could earn ten points, if he really worked at it.

"And with that, I present this year's House Cup... To Slytherin!"

There were cheers from the Slytherin table that were far louder than anything Harry had heard before, save for Anne’s protests the one and only time Dad had gotten to watch cricket since he and his siblings were all born. If they were that excited, then they should get it, really. He was
going to win every single Quidditch game next year and not lose a single point, so they’d have even stiffer competition.

Ron let out a discouraged noise, dropping his head onto his palm. "We were so close..." He groaned. "At least we have all of summer to forget about this, right?"

“Agreed.” Harry nodded. “And a long train ride before we even have to think about responsibilities again.”

“It’ll be odd, having a summer break after all of this.” Hermione smiled. “I can’t even begin to think of what I’ll tell my parents.”


"They wouldn't believe you anyways." Ron agreed.

“Here’s to a slower next year.” Harry said gravely. “And six more Gryffindor wins.”

"A slower year? If I weren't best friends with Harry Potter I'd almost think that was a possibility." Ron smiled widely, lifting his cup all the same.

The rest of the day passed in a blur of handshakes and far too enthusiastic hugs from his classmates, and Harry only vaguely remembered waving goodbye to Hagrid before falling asleep on the train back. Judging by the horrible drawings on his face and arms that Hermione had, thankfully, erased before they got off the train, Ron, at least, had had a fun time.

Hermione, who spotted her parents the minute she stepped onto the platform, embraced each of the boys in turn. “Oh, do write at least once! I bet your owls will know where to find me.”

“I’ll tell Hedwig to look for the smell of libraries, then.” Harry pulled a face as Hermione nudged his shoulder. “That hurt.”

"You signed up for it when you befriended her, mate.” Ron threw an arm around Harry's shoulders. "Take out a safety deposit if you want your unharmed shoulder back."

Their conversation was broken up when a loud shout of "I FOUND HARRY!" echoed through the crowd, closely followed by Drew. Anne was hot on his heels, protesting that she had seen him first.

“Well, hate to break up the fun, but… I’ve got a summer full of grounding to get to.” Harry joked, checking that all of his luggage was securely on the trolley. Hedwig hooted happily at the sight of his siblings. Betrayer.

“Hey, Ron, drop by, alright? As much fun as this lot is, I’m going to need a change or two.” He ruffled Drew’s hair before waving to his friends one final time. “Right, where are Mum and Dad hiding?”

“Matt’s guarding them.” Sarah, who Harry had hardly noticed, spoke up. “Uncle Sirius made a joke about Mum, Dad and rabbits. It didn’t go over well. We’re keeping one of us with them at all times. For safety reasons.”

“One of us is getting fired in September, so don’t get too comfortable.” Harry chuckled, before pushing his trolley into motion. “Right, guys, let’s head home.”

"I took your room while you were gone. We put all your stuff under the stairs." Drew informed his brother, but as always, his grin gave away the joke. If it had come from small, serious Matt,
Harry might have believed it

“I’ll just have to get it back out then.” Harry could see his parents in the distance, thankfully, and Matt seemed excited. Whether that was from a chance to play with Hedwig again or seeing his brother again for the first time in six months, Harry didn’t know, but he’d have three months at home to find out.

“This is going to be the best summer ever.” Harry exclaimed, grinning.

“Why?” Sarah asked, curious.

“Cause I get to leave at the end.”

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