Halloween 1981 and the Potter family has been attacked. But when Sirius arrives, the crib is empty. Harry is missing, presumed dead, but Mipsy knows the truth. She takes care of little master just as Lord Potter's portrait commands her to.
Dead eyes stared up at Sirius Black as he knelt over the still cooling body of his best friend. His brother in all but blood. The grief he felt in that moment was so profound it took him several minutes to realize the frantic sobbing he'd heard when he walked through the destroyed front door was conspicuously absent.

Tearing himself away from James, he quickly bound up the stairs to see the nursery door in a similar state to the front one. Without even stepping inside another spear of grief ripped through his body as he saw the still red hair cast across the doorway. Both the Potters were dead.

Struggling furiously against the desire to simply give in to his agony, Sirius finally entered the room and could not keep his eyes from caressing the lifeless form of Lily. She was still as beautiful in death as she had been in life, but there was no longer the fiery glow in her warm eyes.

Unable to fight any longer, Sirius collapsed and wept as the reality of his world came crashing down on him with full force. The rat had betrayed them, and now he was utterly alone.

No!

One thought pierced the grief and pulled Sirius from the brink of the despair he was so close to surrendering to.

Harry.

Sirius dragged himself, barely crawling to the broken crib in the corner. He was all Sirius had left, and Sirius was all the boy had. He must be strong for him. As his eyes crested the deformed mattress he beheld the ruined bedding.

Shock set in as he realised the bed was empty, but for a few dark drops of blood. Harry was gone. Agony wrenched through his body as Sirius fell back against the now useless child's bed and let everything wash over him. Time meant nothing anymore and he would never again smile as he watched his dear friends holding their bubbly baby boy.

Hours passed before any semblance of rational thought managed to break through Sirius' mood. He, at last, noticed the shredded cloak and pale wand of the feared Dark Lord bunched over by the far wall from him. A tiny glimmer of pride grew in him as he realized that at least his friends had managed to take that dark bastard with them. Whatever had transpired had destroyed not only Harry but Voldemort as well.

The glimmer only lasted a moment before a fiery need spread through his chest. There was one more thing that Sirius could do for his friends. He could hunt down the rat and end him for good.

The fire was back in Sirius' eyes as he stood and wished Lily and James goodbye.

"I'll make him suffer for this Prongs. And we'll meet again when it's over."

And with a crack, he was gone.

The lungs on the lad were truly something to behold. Mipsy almost wished she were as deaf as Pops. Her large bat-like ears magnifying the sound to a painful degree.

"Mipsy, sit him down in the rocker, please."
"Yes, mistress, of course." The House-elf replied.

"Harry, sweetie," the voice cooed, trying hard to be heard over the wailing boy, "Mummies right here sweetheart. Please don't cry."

Bright green eyes opened, and Mipsy got her first good look at the young master. He had been kept away from her his entire life and now he was alone, but for her and the others. She had followed her instructions to the letter but had been unable to break through the enchantments. She'd had to wait for them to fall before she could enter the ruined building.

"That's my brave boy. Yes, you are."

Mipsy looked at the portrait of the young couple, practically crying as they attempted to calm the young lad she now rocked gently back and forth, just as she had been in this very same rocker.

"You must be so frightened and tired. Mipsy is going to watch over you and care for you now. But you can talk with me whenever you want too."

Young Harry was transfixed by the portrait. He knew it wasn't quite his parents but was too young to properly tell the difference. The confusion and longing were written on his face as he reached out to the painted surface eagerly trying to touch the dead.

"I'm so sorry my baby. I so dearly wish I could hold you right now. But you need to rest. Tybalt!" A soft popping sound heralded the arrival of her brother. "Mipsy is going to take Harry to his crib. I want you to take us and place us on the wall above it. Do it at the same time so Harry can see us."

"Right away Mistress." Tybalt bowed, nose brushing the floor, before gripping the frame firmly and watching his sister closely.

A moment later and they were all in a different room, a much brighter room with snitches and brooms adorning the walls. The nursery the young master and mistress had been preparing before old beardy suggested they hide in Godric's Hollow, where the elves could not go. Such was the twin's co-ordination that Harry's eyes never left his mother.

"Perfect. Time to sleep now my baby. I'll be here with you all night. Rest sweet child, for tomorrow, is a new day."

Mipsy lay Harry as gently as she could in the scarlet bedding and made sure he could see the portrait the entire time. Leaning over the wee figure, she pressed a delicate kiss to the boy's forehead, as she knew her mistress would want to do herself. Stepping back, she watched in silence as the painting sang soft lullabies and whispered kind words until Harry's eyes could resist no longer and fell closed for the first night in his new home.

The plan had worked. Voldemort was destroyed. The prophecy fulfilled. Both had died, which had been unfortunate. It should have been nice to have the boy as a beacon for the people to rise behind. No matter. Each eventuality had been prepared for. This one simply meant a richer position for the light side going forward. Albus Dumbledore would ensure the security of their world, and make sure the scales never tipped too far to either side.

For as surely as there is light and dark in all of us, there must be in the world. Balance is important. And he saw this clearer than most. So why were these infernal creatures taking so long? Surely, they knew that the great Albus Dumbledore had better things to do with his time right now than sitting here waiting for a meeting.
The law was clear on this. He'd made absolutely sure of it so that whichever Tom chose, he would benefit in the end. As Chief Warlock, he would take control over any unclaimed inheritance as a result of the war. To ensure proper distribution of course. And no one would begrudge a great man such as him from indulging himself of the finer benefits of those estates either. If they ever knew of such a thing that is.

"Mister Dumbledore." The voice broke the old man's train of thought.

"Yes?"

"Lord Ragnok will see you now." The goblin gestured at the enormous silver doors opposite his seat, a horrid grimace deforming its features.

"Very good. About time."

He straightened his bright purple robes and strode through the opening doors. He knew how to make an entrance, looking every bit the reincarnation of Merlin himself. He felt a spike of displeasure as the flair seemed wasted on these dull creatures. The armoured goblins along the walls smirked maliciously and Ragnok himself seemed unperturbed as Albus sat opposite him at the ridiculously large stone desk. Perhaps he would take the concept for use in his own office at Hogwarts.

"Mister Dumbledore" Albus rankled at the goblins continued use of such a plain title. He had worked and plotted so hard and long to garner his many titles, yet these cretins seemed determined never to use them. "How can Gringotts help you today?"

Clearing his throat Albus drew himself up as he addressed the leader of the Nation. "I have come to take possession of the Potter Estate, as per the law."

"I'm afraid that would be impossible." Ragnok gruelled back.

Albus concealed his shock well. "Whatever do you mean? That is the law. As Chief Warlock, I must preside over all unclaimable inheritances caused by this egregious war."

"Indeed." Ragnok stared him down, not moving an inch. "Despite that pretty trick in your Wizengamot, the Potter Estate is not unclaimable."

This time he failed to keep the shock from his face. "And why is that?"

Ragnok smiled as evilly as it was possible for a goblin. "Because the final beneficiary of the Will still lives. With a legal Heir, the Estate is not unclaimable."

"Nonsense. I was present at the Potters filing of their Will. I know that all who are listed upon it are dead or currently reside in a cell in Azkaban."

"Wills can change, Mister Dumbledore. And accidents happen." The glare directed at him by the Director of the Nation sent a cold chill down Albus' spine. While sure he was a very powerful wizard, raising his wand in these halls would see him cut down by the hundred beasts surrounding him. The unspoken threat bothered him. The goblins can't have known the truth about Black. Or the Longbottoms. His plans were still safe if he could just get them to act.

"Very well then, as Chief Warlock, I demand to see the adjusted Will so that I can see to its enactment." The grandfatherly smile spread over his lips to hide the darker smirk that would have appeared at such a genius maneuver.
"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, no! Are you deaf as well as daft?"

"How dare you. I have every rig…"

"You have no rights while seated in Goblin territory to demand anything of us if our clients see fit to keep it hidden. As the Potter Will was sealed by order of James Potter three days before his death, you have no right to overturn said decision. It shall only be opened by the listed Heir at the approved time."

"Now see here…"

"If that is all, Mister Dumbledore, I have other matters to attend to." Ragnok waved a hand dismissing him.

A fiery rage overtook Albus as he stood and felt his fingers slipping up his sleeve.

"I wouldn't if I were you." Ragnok chided, without even glancing in Dumbledore's direction.

Albus grimaced again. "Good day." He spat as he turned on his heel and beat a hasty retreat from the room. No matter, I will just have to throw a little more weight at the problem.

As the door swung shut behind the manipulative old goat, Ragnok was a blur of motion.

"Silvershard, get your ass in here. And bring Griphook with you." He shouted into an enchanted speaker on his desk. "Darkblade, watch that miserable coot closely. He will not give up at this." He called to his chief guard as the side door swung inwards bringing the requested goblins inside.

"Sit."

The two goblins quickly sat in the indicated chairs as Ragnok continued scribbling furiously on the documents on his desk. As he finished, he grabbed a silver blade from the desktop and sliced it over his palm, allowing several drops of blood to hit each piece of parchment.

"You have 24 hours to complete a full audit of the Potter Holdings. I need it on my desk by this hour tomorrow, or your head will take its place, Silvershard."

The aged goblin gulped deeply at the threat before taking the offered parchment and speeding from the room. Such was his terror that he forgot the customary nod as he left the office. Ragnok smiled to himself at his ability to strike fear into those he needed. There was a reason he was the unchallenged ruler of the Goblin Nation.

He turned his attention back to the younger of the summoned goblins. "Griphook. You are proving most resourceful. I wish for you to contact the Potter Elves. I know several still live on their properties and suggest that they lock down all properties as heavily as possible. The wizards may think young Harry dead, but magic tells us otherwise. Whoever has him will likely come for the same thing the stupid old bastard was after. You have five hours to have their response on my desk. Understood."

Griphook clearly felt the same fear that had sent Silvershard sprinting from the room, however, he did not show it on his face. "Of course, Director. Right away." He calmly leapt from his seat and strode from the room, remembering the customary nod as he left.

"That lad is going places."
Never Tickle a Sleeping Dragon

The soft breathing and occasional muttering were music to his ears. All the planning and plotting had not been in vain. Glancing beside himself, he drank in the imitation of his wife. As talented as Rohan had been, he had been unable to fully capture all that made Lily Potter so great. But there was enough.

Her fiery hair glowed in the shimmering lights from the nearby lamp and an unbreakable will shone forth in her beautiful emerald eyes. They were locked, unmovable, on the sleeping form of their only son, just below their frame in the crib he'ld built for the boy with his own two hands.

Well, his own hands, Padfoot's interference and several bottles of Firewhiskey. Lily had been furious when she had come home, heavily pregnant to the chaos of timber and tools scattered around the living room. Padfoot had fled quickly upon seeing her face, but the look she directed his way only made James love her even more.

That had been only days before Dumbledore had told them of the danger, the prophecy and suggested they move to Godric's Hollow, where he had prepared the perfect safehouse. He should never have trusted that stupid old codger. Not with his family. The Manor in which they now stood, where he had been raised, had wards of such strength and age that they would rival Hogwarts. And yet he'd taken the old man's word that he knew better. Thinking about it now James was certain there had been something in that tea to make them agree. He might have been stupid enough to agree, but Lily would never have abandoned the sure safety of the Manor.

Mipsy's sudden snores broke his reminiscing. The young elf had only just become of age to help around the house when he had started building the crib. She was to be Harry's personal elf, to help him with whatever he needed, keep him in line when he couldn't be there himself, and help to teach him his place in the world. She would still get to be that for the boy, but now it fell to her and the others to raise him entirely.

A portrait cannot truly cry, as they are not truly alive. Instead, the canvas on which James' eyes were rendered seemed to weep a clear oily substance. The only thing he could now give out into the real world were these cold imitations of real grief.

James would never truly teach his boy to ride a broom. How to talk to girls. The best pranks to pull on his teachers. He could pass his knowledge, but it would never be the same. He fell to his knees as the reality of his mistakes finally overwhelmed him. Hard sobs wracked his body as Lily's arms snaked around him and pulled him tight.

"It is not your fault, my love. Voldemort would not be stopped. And I'm sure that Albus thought he was doing the right thing."

James quaked in her grasp as all the perceived failings weighed upon him. His son was alone in the world. "I failed him, Lils. He deserved better than this."

"Get over yourself, Potter."

James stopped and looked up in disbelief at his wife a broad smile split her face.

"What?" he asked in confusion.

"Our son needs us to be strong for him. He needs our love and our guidance, not our pity and regret. So," her grin grew even wider as he became lost in her eyes, "get over yourself."
He reached his hand behind her head, tangling it in her hair and pulling her down. Their lips were millimetres apart when a shrill cry broke through their moment. Harry’s cries solidified the boost his wife had given him. Harry would always come first now. He was their only responsibility.

Mipsy was quickly roused by the hearty cries of the young child. She shot out of the small chair by the crib and was checking over Harry with her magic, trying to find the cause of his discomfort.

"Mipsy, he's hungry," Lily called, catching the elf's attention. "Trust me, that cry is hunger."

The elf simply bowed and popped away returning after a moment with a bottle and gently picking the boy from his crib and settling back into her chair as he drank. James felt the remorse and regret tickling at the back of his throat at the scene below him. Just another thing he'd never again be able to do for his boy.

"Stop it, James." Lily chided him again as he held him close. "He'll be grown before you know it and we'll wonder where the time went. Stop worrying about the past and focus on Harry's future.

Griphook ginned to himself as he held the small envelope in his claw. He had sent the Director's message off to the head Potter elf, suggesting that the elves secure and lockdown all the Potter properties to protect them against whoever might come searching.

The small wax seal on the rear of the letter proved it had been received by the correct party. It was the Potter seal, but of a size that would only comfortably rest on a house-elf's finger. And he could feel the natural magic the wax was steeped in. There was no mistaking its source. Ripping into the parchment, he unfolded the letter and spread it on his small cubicles desk.

Respected Banker Griphook,

We thank you for your concerns regarding the Potter holdings in these darkened times. Rest assured, the properties in question have been sealed since our Master's command many weeks ago now.

The elves have completed a thorough assessment of the possessions and properties of our Masters and found all to be in its proper place.

Our Master's commands that you continue to manage the affairs of the estate until such time as, a suitable Heir comes forward, has never been countermanded. As such, we would greatly appreciate you continuing in this regard.

Should you have further questions, please contact me in the same manner.

Regards, Pops.

Head House Elf of the House of Potter.

Griphook smiled again. Though the letter was fairly vague, it had contained a few pieces of information that he was sure the elf had not meant to convey. The boy lived, and the elf knew exactly where he was. It was only a small comma that assured him of this hunch, but it did not fit in its place in a piece of official correspondence from the Head elf of a greater House.

Poor Pops was beginning to show his age, as he would normally have completely rewritten the letter to erase such a mistake. Such knowledge would help the Nation stand ready to assist the boy at the proper time.
But for the moment he would sit on this little sliver of information. He had done as his Lord commanded. He had not asked to see the correspondence and as such Griphook would have time to verify his hunch. Perhaps he could convince the elf to part with the information willingly. But it mattered not. The young goblin had his methods, and he would get what he needs eventually.

_Stupid, shrivelled, wrinkly little mongrels. We'll see who has the last laugh after today._

Dumbledore stood in the Gringotts atrium with a full half of the Wizengamot behind him. They had seen the wisdom of his actions. An estate as broad and strong as the Potter’s could not be left to the greedy administration of the goblins. Only a great wizard like himself would be able to properly care for its needs and help it to grow. And if it meant he could utilize the holdings of said estate while it grew, who would know. Nobody would have access besides himself.

Of course, he’d had to make certain concessions to some of the members to garner their support. Some wanted money, some support on a doomed bill which he could offer without actually making any difference. He had become quite good at maintaining the status quo. Everyone thought that he was on their side, and none ever questioned him when their attempts at change fell in a heap at their feet. Surely it was never the fault of the Chief Warlock. Still, others had wanted favours. All would be called in eventually. But as with the support, Albus had long ago mastered the ability to slip free of his obligations, without it seeming that was what he was doing.

"Mister Dumbledore."

Albus seethed internally. He knew the little shits were doing it now to anger him. "Yes?"

"The conference room is through here. If your party would like to join us."

Without waiting for a reply, the goblin shot off down a side corridor and the wizards were hard-pressed to keep up without breaking into a jog. They were trying to unsettle them before the meeting. A simple manipulation tactic, that Albus himself had employed many times in the past. Clearly, these rodents had no idea who they were messing with.

As the goblin came to an abrupt halt in front of a pair of floor-to-ceiling doors etched in gold, the now panting wizards finally fell in behind him. "Enter."

The doors swung inward and the small goblin disappeared, leaving the assembled to enter and join the arrayed goblins already seated inside. They had clearly been sitting comfortably for some time, and Albus fumed silently at the attempts to throw him off his game.

"Good sirs," Ragnok addressed the new group as they all sat, "Mister Dumbledore." He added, nodding purposefully at the aged warlock.

Dumbledore’s eyes narrowed at the malicious grin on the goblin leaders face.

"My good lord Ragnok," began another of Albus' group, "we're here hoping we can resolve this issue we seem to be having with the poor Potters last wishes."

"My good Lord Nott, there is no issue with the Potters or their wishes. They are quite clear and quite plain." Ragnok replied, eyeing the upstart wizard angrily.

"Quite," Dumbledore added, "but it is the ruling of this body that something must be done regardless. It is not wise to ignore a problem until it becomes too big to clean up."

Dumbledore smiled, his time had come now and would have these little bastards learn their place once again. They only ran this institution due to the kindness of wizards after they were thrown
down and beaten the last time. A small concession to appease their retreat from their benevolent masters.

"You still seem to be bumbling about under the assumption you have the ability to pass laws that matter in some way to the Nation, Mister Dumbledore." The twinkle that had been in the old man's eye quickly vanished. "Pass all the laws you want, it won't get you what you desire."

The grin on all the goblins was now bordering on hysterical as the gathered wizards began to chatter and moan to one another at the gall of these creatures to deny them their rights.

"Director, we are the rightful law of this magical world. All are subject to its reach, as clearly noted in our treaty." The foolish young Undersecretary Fudge called, a smug smile on his face as he believed he had put the goblins back in their place.

"Perhaps, young fool, you need to read the treaty again." Ragnok glared, "I, however, know it very well. Seeing as my father signed it when you lot were tired of fighting any longer."

Dumbledore was truly struggling to keep his anger in check. These creatures were beyond the pale if they thought they could get away with talking to him like this.

"We seem to be veering off the topic here." He corrected, trying to get things back where he wanted them. Where he could control them.

"Again, you labour under false pretences Mister Dumbledore. The treaty in question is the heart of the matter. Did any of you think to read it carefully before calling this meeting?" Ragnok met the eyes of every member in the chamber all of whom looked away bashfully apart from Albus himself. He would not show such weakness in front of his lessers. "As I said, I know the treaty by heart. I have studied it long and hard, long before I took the seat of Director of the Nation. You would all do well to familiarise yourselves with it once more.

"According to the articles of the treaty of 1865, the matters of inheritance law fall solely under the auspices of Gringotts Bank. Furthermore, they also categorically affirm that the running of said Bank shall remain the castigation of the Goblin Nation for their efforts in rebellion.

"Now I assume that you learned men understand the wording of the treaty just fine, but I think it should be pointed out to some of our younger members. That is to say that you, the wizards, decided to gift the goblins the task of managing your bank as punishment for our actions in the rebellion. However, the wording of the treaty leaves no clause under which we can be removed from management of said affairs. Therefore, you put your defeated foes in charge of all your money.

"You were then stupid enough to leave the assessment and distribution of all inheritance and estate management to the above-mentioned bank. So, in short, challenge us on the Potter Estate. You are correct that you write the laws of the magical world. But by the words of the existing treaty, if we were to acquiesce to your wishes, it would require the reassessment of every single inheritance that has ever been our duty to oversee."

Several of the gathered wizards paled considerably at his last words. Money had long been passed, probably under this very table, to ensure the proper wizard was always the one to receive his 'due' from a will. If the goblins were to thoroughly reassess even half of the wills they'd been 'forced' to oversee, the entire balance of power in their world would change overnight.

"As it stands, there is an individual listed as the inheritor of the entire Potter Estate. That person is alive and well and under the age of majority to receive said Estate. If any were to attempt to cheat that individual out of said inheritance, the members of the Nation would be most," Ragnok stared
steely-eyed directly at Dumbledore, "displeased."

Though his face showed none of the shock he was feeling, Dumbledore began to see the full extent of the goblins threats. If he were to push matters, none of his political goodwill would be enough to let him survive the feeding frenzy that would go down in the Wizengamot the next day.

"And just to be absolutely clear, we have just finished an entire audit of the Potter Estate, as per the request of the Will. We know where every Knut, spoon and sock are. Should anything listed under it become misplaced, we will close the doors to this building until such time as the items are returned and the one responsible hands themselves over for judgement under the terms of our lovely treaty. Is that understood?"

Every wizard in the room shifted uncomfortably as Ragnok again made eye contact with every one of them. Each nodded their head silently as he passed from one to the next. The other goblins in the room were grinning openly as the truth of their victory became evident to the fools who had believed they had won the last war between their peoples, but who had been too stupid to read and understand all the terms of the documents they were signing.

Ragnok fixed his gaze one last time on Albus, an enormous grin spread from ear to ear "Then, you are dismissed."
"I'm worried about Harry."

The other figures in the painting stopped their game and all glanced up at Lily as she stared beyond the frame. Harry was curled up in the corner of the library with a book dangling perilously from his fingers as gravity sort to claim it for its own. The house elves had draped a light blanket over him and left him to slumber there at their instruction.

James glanced at the boy sleeping in confusion, "what do you mean, love. He's fine."

"Not the sleeping in the library, the boy has proven it to be his favourite room in the whole building." James shook his head, ashamed that Harry would sooner sit in here and read than learn to fly. "I'm worried about friends."

"Friends, dear?" James' grandfather asked, shuffling the cards on the table.

"Harry has none." Lily replied, "well; none that aren't house elves."

"He'll have plenty of time for friends at Hogwarts, Lil. Don't fret about it."

Lily stared back out into the real world, watching the gentle rising and falling of Harry's chest for the next several minutes. She felt a sickness at the thought of her boy spending the next several years cooped up in this house. As it was they practically had to bribe the boy to go out and play. If left to his own devices he'd have read every book in the house by now.

"What about studies? We can only teach him so much."

James looked back at his wife, "he's a smart boy, Lily. He's like a black hole to knowledge, just sucks it all up."

"You could always have some of the other youngins come to visit him from time to time. Does well for a lad to get out and about. See the sun, feel the fresh air." One of the Potter ancestors claimed, blowing a particularly thick cloud of cigar smoke over the table.

"Be hard to keep knowledge of the boy quiet if you invite half the magical world to visit. Word will spread quickly once they realize he is alive." Another interjected.

"Best to keep him safe here where no one can find him. Too much danger for the wee boy out in the world. The elves can only protect him so much."

Lily watched the sleeping boy for several minutes. The others were right, the world outside was far too dangerous for him at the moment. The letters they had received from Gringotts showed there were many out there trying their hardest to get their hands on the Potter Estate, and if they found Harry they could force him to hand it over. Or worse.

And he was learning a lot here with them. Every day he would be up bright and early, fed and ready sitting in front of them here in the library before most of the portraits had awakened. He absorbed information like a sponge. He was a delight to teach and was always asking questions about one thing or another. He'd almost learned everything they had to teach him about his place in the family. His responsibilities to the Estate as the sole Heir. Lily was sure the boy was only just short of an eidetic memory. He devoured every morsel of knowledge like it would be his last.

This too worried her. It was important to be keen on your studies, but it had almost become
Harry's entire life and that wasn't normal for a boy of his age. And that spurred a new thought in her mind. The magical world was indeed unsafe for him.

"He'll be five in a few days. He's the right age, James." Lily said sliding her arms around her husband.

"The right age for what?"

"School."

"He can't start at Hogwarts until he's eleven, dear. You know the rules."

"Muggle school, James. He can learn and be with kids his own age. No one from the magical world will be there to see him. He'll be safe," she looked down at the boy once more, "and happy."

"I don't know sweetheart. The Muggle world can be a dangerous place. We can't protect him outside the Manor. The magic protecting this place is beyond anyone's understanding. No one is breaking in here to get at him. Wish we hadn't left in the first place." James whispered as he trailed off.

"I know that. When they married into the family, the Peverell's took this place off the map more than just figuratively. I remember the day you first took me for a walk in the grounds and we walked a dead straight line from the house until we hit the other side of it again. I always wanted to research those wards and see what they'd done. It's like they ripped the whole area out of the world and stuck it in its own little bubble. But Harry is trapped in that bubble. There is so much he will miss out on, I can't bear to steal this from him as well."

"What about his lessons with us? He's learning quickly, but there is still so much to go over. The family histories, his place in the wider world. He'll be famous just for his last name, not to mention the fact he'll be coming back from the dead."

"I'm not talking about boarding school, James. We send him to state school during the day, so he comes back to us each night. Those are the type of children he needs to be around anyway. He'll meet enough of the snobs when he goes to Hogwarts."

James leant back in his chair staring up into Lily's eyes, he could see the concern etched on her face and smiled to himself.

"Why do I argue with the smartest woman I know?" He pulled her lips down and kissed her softly. "If you think we should send him, we send him. Mipsy loves that boy just as much as we do, I'm sure she can watch over him at school without a fuss."

A wide smile broke over Lily's face. "Thank you. It will bring a little peace to my heart."

The remaining Potters just shook their heads at their whipped descendant and dealt out the next hand.

"Master, Harry! Please don't run in the house!"

Harry ignored the wizened elf as he tore into the study and plonked himself on the chair facing the currently empty portrait. He shook with anticipation, rocking on the very lip of the chair as he waited for his mother to appear. He knew he didn't have long, but he refused to go without seeing her first.
"Harry," her disapproving voice came a moment before she entered the frame, "you need to listen to Pops. You'll be the end of him if you keep driving him mad like that."

The smile she wore as she spoke took most of the sting from her reprimand. But Harry still felt bad. He never liked being told off by his mother. Not because he didn't like the talking to, that he never minded so much. It was the fact that afterwards, she could never wrap her arms around him and make him feel better. Words were all they had to comfort him, and it was never the same. The only hugs he'd ever had were from Mipsy. None of the other elves felt it was appropriate to hug their Master.

Though he was very young at the time, Harry could still remember the feeling of being in his mother's arms. Of the warmth and security, he felt wrapped up in her. It was the thing he missed the most since that horrid night.

"Sorry, mother." Harry dipped his head as he spoke, the feelings of loss overwhelming him as his memory took a turn to its darkest reach.

"Harry, look at me, sweetie."

His eyes raised to meet with her own. Near perfect recall was a double-edged sword for Harry. He could remember all his lessons with perfect clarity. Recall any book he'd ever read with minimal effort. But he could also remember the pure perfect shine of his mother's eyes, and he knew not one of the paintings in the house, no matter the canvas or paint used, could ever properly convey them. He missed the fine details of his parents that were lost now to all but memory, and tears began to slip down his cheeks.

"I'm sorry I can't be there now to hold you, my love. You didn't deserve this fate. We do all we can to protect you from the dangers out there, we often forget about the ones in here. I know that you miss your father and me."

Harry nodded as she spoke, giving voice to the feelings he never did. He wanted to be their strong little boy. Never their soldier. Harry had used that term once after finding it in one of his story books and James had reprimanded him fiercely. They never wanted him to be a soldier.

"Come on, Harry. Aren't you at least a little bit excited?"

Looking back up at his mother Harry could see the love in her eyes. But also, the trepidation. This would be the longest he had ever been away from her since the night they died. At first, he'd thought he had done something wrong when his mother suggested it. That they were sending him away. It had been a long and emotional discussion. Harry had begged them not to send him away, promised to be a better son, to do anything they asked. Lily had to call Mipsy to hold him as they explained their reasons.

This was not a punishment, but a reward. He knew there were still a lot of things to learn about his responsibilities and the magical world he would re-join one day, but he knew there was something else he was missing. As much as he loved his family and the elves who were raising him, something else called at the edge of his soul. A dull throbbing ache that would never go away. Never getting stronger or weaker, just there. His mother had explained friends to him and while confused, he was also excited to meet these friends.

Lily was still watching him closely as these thoughts whipped back and forth through his mind. The troubles were ebbing away, and the excitement was building once more, and his eyes began to take on the glow he had once seen in his mothers. She smiled at him as he wiped the tears aside and smiled at her.
"Yes, mum. I'll make you and dad proud."

Lily's smile grew even wider. "That's wonderful, darling, but you already make me so proud. What I want you to focus on today is making you happy. It might be frightening at first, but I know you will make some really strong friends. Just remember, it might not happen right away."

Harry looked a little frightened at the idea of being away from home and without friends for a long time. How long would it take for them to like him?

"Calm, Harry," Lily called drawing his eyes. "Not like that. How do you feel right now?"

"Scared, but excited. What if they don't like me, mum?"

"That, Harry, is how every one of them is feeling right now." Harry's gaze went wide as he contemplated his mother's words. "They want to make friends just as much as you, but they are worried they won't be liked either. All you have to do is be yourself, and the friends will find you."

A feeling of purpose rose within Harry's chest. He would make friends. He would make them proud of him. He would make the best friends anyone has ever seen. Determination settled on his face as Lily laughed gently at her boy.

"Now are you sure we have everything? You can't be expecting Mipsy to pop back and forth because you forgot your pencil case or lunch!"

Harry tapped the backpack he wore and grinned. "I checked it three times this morning. All there." A proud grin spread across his face.

"Then come here and give mummy a kiss goodbye."

This was the reason for their discussions in this room. The picture in the study was almost touching the floor and was the only one in the house where Harry could stand at face height with his parents without them laying on the floor of the painting. Lily leant down so the wee boy could press his lips to the slightly raised portion of canvas that was her cheek. Neither one could feel the warmth of the other, but the motion, in itself, brought some small form of pleasure.

"I love you, mummy. I'll make you so proud."

"I know you will baby, now take Mipsy's hand and remember, you're there to have fun."

Harry nodded vigorously as he took the elf's hand. She nodded to her Lady and with a loud pop, Harry left the house for the first time since 1981.

Harry sighed as he ate his delicious sandwich. His legs swung too and fro beneath the bench as he sat and watched the other children running about on the playground. He felt the pull to climb on the equipment with them, but something was holding him back. Despite his talk with his mother on his first day, he still felt trepidation at the idea of talking to the strange children. None of the ones playing in the playground had connected with him as he had hoped.

Not for lack of trying either. Harry had talked with every one of them, at least three or four times. While some were nice and talked happily back, none gave him the feeling that they were friends. And for some strange reason Harry could not understand, his performance in the classroom actually made some of the children seem angry with him.

Eagerness to learn had always been encouraged in his studies at home. When he learned
something new, his entire family would praise his achievements. They even arranged a small party the day he had been able to recite the entire Statute of Secrecy to them, amendments and all. Knowledge was his friend and he loved learning. But the other children seemed to resent his knowledge. Only one other child in the class seemed to enjoy learning as much as he had, but he could never find her at playtime to talk.

She would disappear out the door before he could catch up and by the time he reached the playground she was gone. Harry was becoming frustrated with his ability to make friends. He could learn anything, why could he not succeed at this. How hard could it be to make friends?

"Oi, Scarface."

Harry closed his eyes as he downed the last portion of his sandwich. While he was still having trouble making friends, it seemed the opposite took care of itself.

"Yes, Thomas?" Harry turned to the third-year boy towering over him.

"What you bring me for lunch today, eh?"

It had been slow at first, but after news of Harry's intelligence spread, Thomas had made it his mission to knock the know-it-all down a few pegs. He'd been roughing Harry up every day for the past couple of months, but Harry never gave him the satisfaction of reacting.

"I'm afraid I've already eaten it all, but if you like I can bring some more to share with you tomorrow."

Harry knew it was not why the older boy was asking, but he knew to play along usually meant a shorter encounter. The bully clearly didn't like his lack of reaction but was determined to teach him who was in charge around here.

"You little pig. Hope you left some room for more."

Thomas grabbed Harry by the arm and dragged him to the nearby sandpit before grabbing a handful of sand and attempting to force it into Harry's mouth. Knowing he was weaker than the tall boy, Harry did not try to pull free of his grip, that would only result in bruises which his parents would ask about. Harry was determined to resolve this himself. He would not go crying to his mother as Thomas liked to taunt many of the children.

"THOMAS MITCHELL! You let Mr Potter go this instant."

Harry grinned slightly through sandy lips as his teacher stormed across the yard. This was how most encounters ended. He knew fighting back would only get him in trouble, so Harry let the scenario play out, knowing the teachers at this school were very prompt in reacting to the bullying. At least in his experience. He suspected Mipsy had a hand in drawing their attention whenever something happened to him. He knew the little elf was watching somewhere nearby, but he had forbidden her from personally interfering.

Thomas released Harry and quickly dusted the sand off his hands behind his back. Mrs Grevillea towered over them both as she arrived and looked down at the taller boy.

"What exactly do you think you were doing?" She asked the older boy.

"Harry fell into the sandpit, Miss. I was only helping him up." Thomas smiled his I-did-nothing grin.

Harry giggled at the foolishness of it, as there was no sand anywhere but his face, but did not
contradict the boy. That would only lead to more attacks. He could handle what was happening. He was no coward and he would not ask the teachers to fight his battles for him.

Mrs Grevillea stared at the boy, the look on her face conveying she clearly did not believe a word of the story. She glanced at Harry and merely raised an eyebrow, requesting his version of events.

"It really was jolly nice of him to help like that, Miss." Harry smiled, dusting the sand from his lips.

She stared down at them both before asking Thomas to accompany her back inside. Neither boy said a word to one another as they went their separate ways.

"Why don't you stand up to him?" A timid voice called as Harry reached his bench once more.

He spun about to see the young girl standing behind him. It was the girl he most wanted to be friends with. His eyes raked over her, taking in her messy hair much like his own. A smile spread across his face as he saw the curiosity and fear in her brown eyes.

"He'll only get worse if I do. Same if I were to tell on him." Harry shrugged, "I can handle a bully."

The girl looked terrified at the idea of standing up to Thomas. Her eyes kept flicking to the tall boy as he walked away.

"Why? Does he do that to you too?"

She just nodded vigorously as her eyes met his again. Anger built in Harry at the boy for the first time. He knew that he could take the punishment, but the girl in front of him looked afraid. As though even this conversation might bring the wrath of the third-year down upon her.

"It's why I always spend playtime in the library. He never thinks to look in there." Harry giggled at the thought, causing the girl to look at him oddly. "How exactly is that funny?" Small tears grew in the corner of her eyes.

"Please, I didn't mean to upset you. It's him. I imagined he's allergic to books like vampires to garlic. He'd likely burst into flames if he ever set foot in a library." Harry chuckled.

The tears dried up and a wide smile broke across the girls face at the thought. "Probably." She giggled.

The sound filled Harry with happiness as he saw the change come over her. "I'm Harry, by the way. Harry Potter."

He extended his hand to the girl who watched it closely as it approached, as though afraid of it. A small finger of anger leapt up Harry again as he wondered exactly what Thomas had done to the poor girl to make her so afraid of a handshake. He smiled broadly and held his hand perfectly still, letting the girl make the decision to take it or not.

She looked back and forth from his hand to his eyes, clutching the book in her arms tightly as she did. He could see the indecision and fear warring behind her eyes with something else, something he didn't recognise.

Very slowly, she reached from the book and took his hand. Harry beamed as they gently shook, surprised at the soft feel of the girl's skin compared to the House Elves. Their skin felt almost leathery, but hers was smooth and warm. He very much liked the feel of it.
"I'm Hermione Granger." She replied, her voice cracking softly.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Hermione Granger. Would you like to be friends?"

A new war began in her chocolate eyes as she studied him closely, not letting go of his hand. Harry had the odd feeling that he was hooked up to a lie detector and she was searching his grip and eyes for any sign he was trying to hurt her. He simply continued to smile at her as he watched the thoughts flitting through her mind.

"Yes." She finally said, giving his hand one last shake before breaking contact and hugging her book tightly once more.

"Excellent," Harry beamed, "Would you mind if I joined you in the library for lunch tomorrow. I'd go today, but I'm already finished."

The bell rang loudly across the yard and the children all groaned and headed back inside. Hermione remained frozen a moment, looking at Harry's face.

"I'd like that." She replied, before quickly turning and rushing back into the classroom.

Harry gathered his things with a broad grin. The tugging feeling he'd had for years had finally settled. He had made a friend.

"MUM!" Harry yelled as he dashed through the hallways.

He was ever so eager to tell her about his day. After returning to class he had found a space free next to Hermione and he had quickly taken it. The girl had looked at him, a hint of suspicion still present in her gaze, but it had quickly vanished as they had worked diligently side by side for the rest of the day.

She had looked into his eyes as they gathered their things and prepared to leave for the day. Wishing him good day, she quickly dashed from the room, a slight redness on her cheeks as she disappeared.

"Mummy, where are you?"

Harry tore back and forth, up and down the corridors passing many portraits all with his ancestors watching as he darted about.

"For goodness sakes, James, how can you manage to pull pranks in a portrait?"

Harry grinned as he heard his mother yelling at his father from the room at the end of the hall. He ran quickly through the door and his eyes fell on one of the smallest paintings in the house. It was full of horrid looking green smoke, that Harry had a distinct impression did not smell very good at all.

"Mum, dad. I have to talk to you!" Harry shouted at the small picture.

"Oh Harry, darling. Welcome home. Meet me in the study, sweetie. We do not want to be in here right now."

Harry could not see either figure in the painting but knew the look his mother was giving his father right now. And he could picture the grin that would adorn his father's face in response. He quickly made his way to the study and dragged one of the heavy chairs, so it would be right in front of the frame and sat. He was so excited to tell them of his day, he hadn't even shed his school
bag, which was still perched on his back.

He was practically bouncing in place as his parents walked into frame, Lily waving her hands about as though trying to clear the air. James wore the very grin Harry had imagined as they both caught sight of him eagerly waiting.

"Hello, Harry," his father greeted, "how was school?"

Harry rocked forward on the chair and rushed headlong into a detailed account of his day, from their quiz in the morning classes to the new subjects they'd brought up. But the most detailed of all was the end of his lunch break. He had forgotten one thing in his excitement and haste to tell them of his new friend.

"What do you mean, Harry? How long had this Thomas boy been picking on you?" His mother asked, a severe look on her face.

Harry mentally kicked himself as he realized he had never told his parents about the bullying. He wanted to be their strong boy and deal with the problem himself. He'd even asked Mipsy not to tell them, but as he was still not eleven he technically wasn't her true Master. His parents could override his instructions. All of this must have shown on his face because his mother immediately called for the elf.

"Mipsy, what has been going on? You are supposed to be protecting Harry!" James roared.

"Please don't yell at Mipsy, dad. It's my fault."

"No young Master, Mipsy is being a bad elf."

"No, you did exactly as I asked you to."

"You did what now, Harry?" his father interrupted again.

Harry looked up at his parents with trepidation. "I knew you asked Mipsy to keep me safe. But I know the Statute. If she does something magic to protect me, we all get in trouble. So, I asked her not to interfere. But I know she still does, don't you?"

Mipsy looked bashful as Harry stared at her, pleadingly. "Yes, Master. I cannot go against your orders, but you left a loophole Mipsy could use."

"You make the teachers notice, don't you?" Mipsy nodded and hung her head, awaiting punishment for going against orders. "Thank you. I thought as much."

Mipsy's head shot up as she caught her master's gaze. He was smiling fondly at her and popped off the chair to hug her tightly. He had grown a lot in the years she had been watching him and while they once were the same height during these hugs, he now was much taller than her.

Lily watched the interaction in silence, thinking about whether to reprimand Harry. "Harry, why didn't you tell us sooner? You've been going to school for months now."

"I wanted to be brave for you," Harry replied bashfully. "I want to be your strong boy and take care of my problems myself."

Lily watched as Harry mumbled something further under his breath. "What was that last bit, Harry?"

He locked eyes with his mother, momentarily pleading her. She just stared back, silently
demanding an answer.

"He teases me. Says I'll run home to mummy and cry." Lily gasped and Mipsy wrapped Harry in her arms again. "I don't want him to be right. I'm not afraid of him, mum."

A determined look filled his eyes as he stared up at his parents.

"My word, Harry. I know where you are going. Ravenclaw my foot." James said looking at his wife. "But being brave doesn't mean you have to take everything on yourself lad. We're your parents, and you can tell us anything."

Harry relaxed slightly as he sunk into Mipsy's hug. He was worried what his parents would say if they ever found out about the bullying. He didn't want to give Thomas the satisfaction of being right about him running and telling on him. He'd never once told anyone about the bullying, believing he was stronger if he just took it in silence.

"Now," Lily drew his gaze as Mipsy stepped back again, "tell me all about this Hermione."

She smiled widely at the glowing grin that spread on her son's face. He had finally found the friend he'd been looking for since he started school. Many nights he had come home and shared all about his classes, but he had always avoided talking about friends and the other children. Lily had heard what he wasn't saying. She could see the longing in his eyes.

She felt a little guilty, for filling his mind with the wondrous ideas of friendship, which had until now evaded him at the school. Many nights she had come home and shared all about his classes, but he had always avoided talking about friends and the other children. Lily had heard what he wasn't saying. She could see the longing in his eyes.

She felt a little guilty, for filling his mind with the wondrous ideas of friendship, which had until now evaded him at the school. But she could feel it in his voice and see in his eyes that he now understood every word she had said. And he was happier than she had seen him in a long time.

Hermione curled up on her bed struggling to read the page she had been staring at for the last three hours. She was furious at herself. Not for talking to the boy she had been watching for weeks. Harry was smart, like her and he wasn't afraid to show it as she was becoming. She was upset because he was distracting her from her book. The other children would pick on her for knowing the answers. They made fun of her for spending her free time reading books instead of playing. But most of all she hated that they made fun of her hair and her teeth.

The other things she could deal with, they were her choice, but she had tried so many times to tame her wild hair and nothing could be done with it. She had broken several brushes her first week of school trying to tame the mane and had cried herself to sleep many nights since knowing her parents wouldn't fix her teeth. As dentists, they assured her that she would grow into them soon. But while she was growing, the other kids would keep picking on her.

Everyone except Harry had made fun of her for something. At first, she'd thought he was too, laughing at her hiding in the library. But she had to agree, the picture of Thomas in flames running about the library had been funny. But the fear was still there.

When he sat next to her, terror filled her as she waited for him to mock her. Or to steal her pencils. Some of the other girls liked to take her things and she never got them back again. She was so upset that one of them had taken the notepad her Nanna had given her on her first day. She lived so far away that she hadn't seen her since, and the notepad had filled her with joy any time she had written in it.

Now she was waiting for the other shoe to drop with Harry. Surely, he would see what everyone else did and abandon her. Or worse, join in the mocking. Hermione didn't think she could take it if he did it as well. She had been terrified when she was fleeing past the playground as Thomas picked on Harry. She couldn't understand his reluctance to tell the teachers what really happened.
Curiosity had finally won out and she had to ask.

And now she had a friend. He had said that they were friends, and he had sat with her the rest of the day. His attention baffled her. When she looked at him, there was no malice in his gaze. His smile was always warm and when he put his hand on hers a few times, her heart had beat so fast she thought she would pass out. She was dreading Monday, as she was sure he would change his mind over the weekend and hate her come school next week.

These kids really had done a number on her. Her insecurities would swarm her all night, egged on by the cruel comments she had to endure all day. But there was a tiny little part of her, deep down inside that thought maybe, just maybe, Harry was different. Maybe he really was her friend.
Harry had never been so excited to go to school. Over the weekend he had been having trouble focusing on his studies. His grandfather had told him off multiple times during his classes, but it had not been able to break Harry's mood. He was ecstatic that he finally had a real friend.

Mipsy had made a strange face the first time Harry had voiced that thought aloud in front of her. But quickly cheered up as he wrapped her in a warm hug and reminded her there was a difference between friends and family. Watching a House Elf blush is always a funny sight but seeing her do so while being spun around by a laughing child was something else altogether.

Harry by no means had a sad childhood. Mipsy had made sure he played and had fun. But for the last few years, his idea of fun had been reading. It had become such a strange occurrence for a child's laughter to fill these halls that many of the portraits would probably have let Harry get away with anything, just to keep the sound coming.

Now he was following Tybalt as he moved about the kitchen preparing the lads lunch. He was constantly asking if it was ready yet, as it was the final thing keeping him from heading off to school. But every time Tybalt was ready to say it was done, Harry would ask him to add something else. He wanted to share his lunch with his friend but had no idea what she liked to eat.

Mipsy finally had enough, as she was unfamiliar with this version of Harry and wasn't sure how to handle him. She put her hand on his shoulder, stopping him following her brother and turning him to face her.

"Master Harry, if you keep changing your mind, we'll never get to school. Is that what you want?"

Shock suddenly flew across Harry's face at the idea of being late. "No, Mipsy. I'm ready to go."

Tybalt silently thanked his sister, handing over the well-overstuffed lunch bag to her to tuck into Harry's bag.

Harry was so excited that he forgot that his parents were waiting for them in the study to wish him a good day, and he grabbed Mipsy's hand firmly.

"Let's go, Mipsy, I want to get there as quickly as possible."

Unable to ignore the request, Mipsy sighed and popped them from the Manor.

Harry could not contain himself. He had begun running for school the moment they had materialised in the small park a few blocks away. Mipsy had chosen it because the trees offered a great deal of natural cover for her appearance. She could not hide herself while popping with Harry and if someone spotted her before she could become invisible, it would cause trouble.

She was having trouble keeping up with the exuberant youth as he tore past strangers rushing down the pathways he had long since memorised. She couldn't help but smile at the difference between him now and his first day. He had been so hesitant to go that first time, slowly puttering beside her as she guided him, invisible hands on his shoulders guiding him forward. It had taken almost half an hour to make the walk that first day, but this time they would arrive in moments.

As the school came into view over the roadway she watched the boy charge ahead, others watching as he swept past them towards the same destination.
Unfortunately, Harry had become too single-minded in his rush to arrive at the school and did not stop at the edge of the road to wait for Mipsy as he crossed. It was a moment of forgetfulness that would cost him dearly as he stepped onto the street and was immediately struck by the car he had paid no attention too.

Mipsy froze in horror as her young master was flung backwards down the road and came to a rest a few feet in front of the skidding vehicle. Every eye in the area was now fixed on the still body of the boy laying in the street.

She silently popped to his side and cast a notice-me-not charm over his body. She could see he was still breathing, but there were very obvious injuries over his entire figure. Mipsy didn't know what to do. She was trained in basic first aid, all House Elves were, but this was beyond what anyone had taught her.

And despite the charm, people were gathering nearby. The charm stopped them from directly seeing Harry's body now, but they were aware that something major had just happened in front of them. The skid marks laid out behind the car gave a very clear indicator of what sort of event had occurred, but right now the Muggles could no longer see what the car had hit.

Mipsy looked about and notice a hubcap had come off the car as it stopped and lay not two metres from Harry's prone form. She quickly cast another notice-me-not on it before transfiguring it into a small dog. It was a sad distraction to leave outside a school, but she needed something to keep people from noticing Harry. With the intensity with which they were all looking, her charm would not last for long.

She pulled the notice-me-not from the transfigured dog and reaching gingerly out she pressed her hand to Harry's forehead. He did not react to her touch in the slightest and she began to fear the worst. She laid her other hand on his chest and his body groaned in pain at the contact. She could feel the shattered bones under her touch and knew he was far too wounded to move. She would only cause more injury. But she had none of the equipment needed to treat such wounds.

Which left her only one recourse. The most dangerous of all, and the one that would surely see her given clothes.

Mipsy pressed both hands back onto Harry, one on his head and the other his chest. The soft groan came once more, but Mipsy ignored it as she pushed her magic out and willed it to repair the damage to her young master.

She could feel the bones clicking back together as Harry moaned out in pain. He was still unconscious, but such pain had the ability to pass such boundaries. She could feel her magic coursing up and down the small body, repairing bones and soothing the bruising on his organs. Time began to blur as the people around them disappeared into nothingness as Mipsy focused her entire being on fixing Harry.

Her magic began to falter as she pushed all of it into Harry, willing his injuries away. And as she began to black out from the strain Harry's eyes shot open and a scream of pain shot past his lips.

Every one of the gathered Muggles currently trying to keep their young children from seeing the wounded dog in the road heard the horrid screech of pain, but before anyone could notice the odd pair laid on the pavement, a soft flash shot out and both bodies were gone.

Hermione walked towards the gathered group with trepidation. Crowds were not her friends. They often hid those who most wanted to do her harm. But unfortunately, this one was gathered in front of her school, so tightly packed she had to push through it to get to the gates.
As she passed she heard the parents whispering about the poor dog who had been hit by the car on the road. He'd shot out from the footpath and been struck dead in a moment. She had no desire to see such a thing and was glad that she had been running a little late that morning.

All she wanted now was to be free of the crowd and see if her hope had come true. That she still had someone at this school who wished to call her friend.

Finally breaking through the group and rushing to her classroom, Hermione put away her things and settled into her desk, awaiting Harry and the start of class.

She was a little surprised when the teacher called the class to order and the bell sounded. Harry had yet to arrive. She was seated right by the door. It made for the fastest get away from the bullies and was close enough to the teacher to answer questions. Surely, he could not have made it inside without her noticing. She glanced about the room and saw the many gossiping faces. All were surely discussing the scene outside the gates. But not one of them was his.

The teacher drew her attention once more and the class got underway, but throughout the entire day, Hermione found herself wondering what could have happened to Harry that he would skip class. He seemed as keen to learn as she was, and she was sure she’d never miss a day of school unless something terrible had happened.

But beneath it all was the doubt. The voice in her head telling her it was her fault. That Harry had not wanted to come back to this school and be friends with a weirdo like her. And the teasing and bullying from the other students did nothing to ease her suffering. By the time the final bell rang, Hermione was in tears rushing to get away from the pain that school has suddenly become.

She burst in the front door and shot up to her room, discarding her things and launching at the bed, her entire body racked with the sobs that consumed her. She had known it was too good to be true. She would never have a true friend.

Harry groaned as his eyes opened slowly. The bright light washing over him was blinding and his head throbbed heavily. His whole body ached, and he had no idea where he was. The last thing he could remember was rushing to school. Why was he suddenly here instead of there? His eyes began to focus, and he began to recognise the features of the room. He had been in here often. It was Mipsy's personal room in the attic. She had refused to take a normal room as he had requested, instead settling here.

Harry loved visiting her room. It had the best view over the whole grounds, and that very window was where the bright light of the near noonday sun was pouring in, hitting him directly in the face. He groaned again and closed his eyes to protect them from the bright light. He tested his other senses and could feel something heavy on his chest. Peeking downwards he saw Mipsy. Her head was resting on his chest and she looked utterly exhausted. He had never seen her so pale before and it chilled him.

"Tybalt!" He called in fear.

The little elf popped into place beside him a look of utter confusion on his face. "Master Harry?"

"Something is wrong with Mipsy, Tybalt. Help her" he yelled.

Tybalt rushed over and rolled his twin sister of his master. She was indeed very pale, she looked sickly and unwell. He pressed his hand to her head and gasped. She was almost completely exhausted of magic, a death sentence for a House Elf if not rectified quickly.
He glanced at his master and a moment of indecision froze him. He knew what needed to be done, but only a wizard could provide what she needed. Normally the master of the house would slowly have all present contribute a little magic to the elf to trigger its own body to absorb the ambient magic around it, but in this house, there was only one wizard. And he was far too young to ask such a thing of. But if he did nothing, his sister would die.

"What? What is it, Tybalt? Tell me now!" Harry screamed, afraid he was losing his oldest friend. His family.

"She is not well young master. She needs magic, but I cannot ask it of you."

Harry shook his head as she leant forward over his Mipsy. "What do I need to do?" He asked, his eyes fixed on the sickly elf.

Tybalt hesitated again, afraid of what the other masters would say when they learned of this. Harry tore his eyes from Mipsy to glare at Tybalt. A lump formed in the small elf's throat at the intensity of the look and he took Harry's hand and laid it over Mipsy's forehead.

"Just will a little magic into her master. Only a little, or you'll be in the same state she is."

Harry had not been trained in magic yet. The one or two small accidental outbursts had been quickly dealt with by the elves, so his parents had not thought it necessary to bother him with such training. And given most accidental magic was the result of intense emotion, Harry hardly had to deal with it at all, his home life was calm and peaceful. With no experience to draw upon, Harry instead went upon instinct. He knew he didn't want his family to die, so he followed the instruction and felt a warm surge rush up his arm and into the prone elf.

A pale glow began to surround Mipsy as Harry's magic surged through her small form. Tybalt watched as the magic did its work, and he felt his sister becoming stronger for the sharing.

"That is enough little master. You must stop now."

Tybalt reached out and lifted Harry's hand from his sister and received a jolt of Harry's magic through his body as he did, throwing him back against Mipsy's bed.

"Oh god, I'm so sorry, Tybalt, are you ok?"

Tybalt shook himself off and felt amazing as he stood. "Yes, Master Harry, we elves live of the magic of our masters, it's just not often we get it so directly. Bit of a shock to the system."

He moved back over to check on his sister and found her colour had returned and she was now resting comfortably. He clicked his fingers and she rose into the air and hovered over to her bed. The covers enfolded about her as he settled her in and tucked them down around her.

"Rest. That is what she needs now. And you too master. You gave her a lot more magic than you should have. Please, come lie down."

Tybalt guided Harry through the house back to his own room where he quickly collapsed into his own bed, snoring softly before his face hit the pillow.

When he woke again, it was dark in the room. Except for a pair of pale blue eyes staring at him from the darkness, well within arm's reach. Harry grinned internally as he would recognise those eyes anywhere.

"Good evening, Mipsy."
He rolled onto his back and groaned. His body was still stiff and sore, but he still couldn't remember why. Surely it wasn't from sharing his magic.

"HARRY JAMES POTTER!"

Harry sprung back into the bed head as he saw his mother fuming in the portrait opposite him. This was the original portrait painted of them. It had rested above his bed ever since this had become his room, only changing sides once he had outgrown the crib and gotten his current double bed. He had never seen his mother so angry in all his life and he was afraid of her for the first time he could ever remember.

"I'm sorry, mummy," he cried, tears falling freely from his face, "I couldn't let Mipsy die."

Harry was sure he was in trouble for helping her, but what else could he have done? His friend was dying.

"Harry Potter, you know full well that is not what you are in trouble for!"

He looked up at his mother stunned, turning to see if Mipsy could shed any light on the argument, but she was looking fixedly at the floor, refusing to meet his gaze. It was almost as if she was waiting for him to yell at her for something.

"I don't understand mum? What's going on?"

"YOU STEPPED INTO TRAFFIC! That's what's going on!"

Harry sat gobsmacked as he struggled to remember any such event. He could remember rushing towards the school and being so excited to see Hermione…

"Oh no, Hermione!" Harry yelled. "Does she know?"

Lily smiled softly at the comment, unable to help herself. Her boys first thought after being told he was hit by a car is for his new friend. She was going to have to find a way to meet this girl for herself. But that was a discussion for another time.

"Don't change the subject, Harry James. What were you thinking? You know you are supposed to wait for Mipsy before crossing the street."

Harry became bashful once more as his mother yelled at him. He knew why he hadn't waited, he was eager to get to school. He wanted to talk with Hermione before classes started and instead had left her alone with the bullies all day long. He felt terrible, not only had he let his friend down, but he had upset his mum, and he was sure he was somehow responsible for Mipsy's condition earlier as well. Harry had never felt like this before in his life. Not since the day his parents had been murdered.

"I'm sorry, mum. I wasn't thinking."

"Well, that much we can clearly agree. Gryffindor indeed. No Ravenclaw would do something so stupid."

Lily was still angry, but now it was fading behind the concern. Mipsy had told her what had happened after she'd been summoned. James and Lily had been worried when they hadn't seen either Mipsy or Harry before school, but when neither one appeared long after school should have finished, she became panicked and summoned the elf. Mipsy had cried and bowed and apologized profusely for her part in things, but Lily had been so afraid for her son, the conversation had
ended, and she had stood watch in this portrait ever since.

"You are grounded," Lily growled, James chuckled softly behind her, drawing her gaze before putting up both hands and backing out of the frame. "No library for a month. And you are to help Mipsy and Tybalt with all their chores for a month as well."

"Mipsy is not fired?" She squeaked her first words since the conversation with Lily.

"Mipsy, why on earth would you be fired?" She asked, her anger suddenly cooled at the look in the poor elf's eyes.

"Mipsy was a bad elf, she failed to protect Master Harry." She whispered. "And when he got hurt, I couldn't help. All I could do was..."

She trailed off, unable to say what had transpired. No one had yet interrogated her properly, so they had no idea how she had healed Harry. When they knew, she would be out. House elves did not corrupt wizards with their magic.

"What's wrong Mipsy, please tell me." Harry pleaded.

"I am so sorry Master Harry. You were so badly hurt, and I didn't have the supplies and there was no time." Mipsy was rambling as she stared at the boy she loved more dearly than anything in this world. "I had to."

"Had to what?"

"I healed you with elf magic." Mipsy buried her face in her hands and began to sob in earnest. She was a disgrace to her family and she was about to be sent away.

"Thank you, Mipsy." Harry's arms wrapped the crying elf so delicately. She flung herself into his arms and cried on his shoulder, soaking his tattered shirt.

"Mipsy," Lily called, "Why on earth would you think we would care how you saved Harry?"

James stepped back into the frame and there was a deep frown on his face.

"She shouldn't have done that, Lily. It's not right."

Lily rounded on her husband once more, the anger spiking at the comment. "You'd rather she watched our son die on the pavement?"

James cowered under her gaze, but he knew this was a case of her being a muggle-born. She didn't understand what had transpired.

"Of course not, Lily. But you don't understand. For an elf to push so much magic into a wizard, it changes them." James defended, stepping towards the angry redhead. "Harry will never be the same again."

"I don't care, dad. I'm proud of what Mipsy did." Harry glared at his father. Never had he been so angry at his father. His friend was in tears over this and he was making it worse. She needed their support, not ire. "She was so exhausted afterwards she needed my magic just to survive."

Both parents turned back again a strange look in their eyes. "What did you say?" James asked.

"Tybalt said she was dying. She needed magic. He told me how."

"TYBALT!" James roared.
The small male elf popped into the room cowering under the gaze of his current master.

"What the hell did you do?!"

"Tybalt is sorry Master, sister was dying. Master could not help, only Master Harry could save her. My sister was dying."

Lily softened at the waterworks in front of her. She had had enough of this pureblood nonsense. "James, leave. NOW!" Her voice remained soft and quiet, but James stared at her with hard eyes. Harry had not seen his parents fight like this ever. He knew something serious was going on but not what. "Go. We'll talk in the library later. GO."

He glared at her for a moment before ducking out of the portrait and storming off to the library. Lily looked down at the three youngest members of her household. Mipsy was still crying hard into Harry's shoulder and Tybalt looked about ready to flee out the window, despite being on the second floor.

"I want the whole story. Slowly, calmly and from all three of you. Go sit on the end of the bed and let's talk."

A few hours later, once Harry was again tucked into bed sleeping and the two elves were not fearing for their very lives, much less their positions, Lily stepped into the frame in the library to find the entire Potter family present and waiting for her. She sighed and stepped over to the table.

James turned on her, anger still visible at his dismissal from such an important conversation.

Lily just pointed at the chairs and the family gradually settled at the table.

"So, what are we to do with those two?" James demanded.

"Mipsy and Tybalt are resting after a trying day. Tomorrow, Tybalt will return to his tasks and Mipsy shall escort Harry to school again." Lily replied calmly.

James looked about to pop like her sister's husband at the first sign of magic. A vein was throbbing in his temple and his lip was twitching. If he weren't already dead, Lily would fear he was having an aneurysm.

"That's it? They corrupted our son, Lily."

"No James, they saved his life. Our son charged like a Gryffindor into the road with oncoming traffic. He was flung 10 metres by the impact and had so many broken bones and busted organs he'd have been dead within 5 minutes. Mipsy did the only thing she could at that moment and healed our son. Even Madame Pomfrey would have lost him to the sheer number of injuries he received."

James head of steam seemed to lessen somewhat as the extent of the damage was made clear to him. "But, that elf corrupted Harry's magic. He'll never be a proper wizard now."

"Rubbish, James. That is more pureblood nonsense, like most things when it comes to House Elves." James looked ready to interrupt again. "No, shut up and listen. That poor girl just about gave her life saving your boy and you want to give her clothes. No matter how cruel that is, to begin with, she would then have to go out into the world. With no obligation to keep your family secrets anymore. Think about that James."
James rocked back in his chair as the obvious finally sunk through his mind. House Elves had to share the magic of wizards, it was the entire reason for their service, they syphoned off small amounts of the family magic and in return served the family. If he were to dismiss Mipsy, she would have to seek out another family to survive, or worse Hogwarts.

Once there, the new master could learn all about the family secrets, including that Harry Potter was alive and well. There was a reason his friend's family beheaded their elves rather than give them clothes. Dead men tell no tales after all. If they were to keep Harry secret, the elves would have to stay. Else Dumbledore could be knocking at their door within days. But years of pureblood teachings were still warring with this knowledge in his head.

Seeing James was finally starting to calm slightly, Lily continued, "Now as for corrupting his magic, Mipsy did no such thing. Harry's magic will be just fine. There will likely be some outburst as his body adapts to the change, but he will still be able to cast magic. He is not a squib if that's your fear."

James had the decency to look bashful at the thought. His family was long thought to be one of the kinder members of magical society, but they still suffered the rumours and whisperings of most pureblood families. The fear was always there that the family would fall to nothing, die out into non-magical bloodlines and be lost forever.

"Now I have grounded Harry and for the next month, he is not allowed to step foot in this library and will actively help the elves with their tasks. If you see him shirking these tasks or standing about doing nothing, get Pops to find him something to do. That is the only punishment that will be taking place because of this. Any questions."

It was a testament to the fiery temper of the Evans girl that not one member of the extensive Potter family portraits dared to question her on this. All felt cowed at what she had said.

"Good, now if we're done, I'm going back to Harry's room. I'm still scared he still might disappear." She added softly as she departed the frame.
Hermione had not wanted to come to school today.

There was nothing there worth the pain she would feel. She told her mother that she was feeling unwell, but Mrs Granger was not buying her story. The problem with medically minded parents, they could see right through her lie. She was angry at her mother for refusing to let her stay home. Her mother had questioned her as to why she was trying to skip school, something she had never done before. Hermione had clammed up and refused to answer, so her mother had driven her to the school and watched her walk inside.

Trudging through the corridors was even harder than normal. For a fleeting moment, she had seen the light. She had someone to call friend, and then it had been snatched away. Like so much joy she had found since starting school.

"Hermione!"

She walked into the classroom and slumped heavily into her seat. Not even bothering to pull her things out of the bag or put them on the desk. It wasn't worth the struggle anymore.

"Hermione?" A hand softly pushed her shoulder.

She ignored them. They would just tease her like they always had. She needed to rebuild her armour. She had let it down for a fleeting moment and the world had stabbed her sharply in the heart.

"Hermione." Two hands grabbed her shoulders and pulled her to face the boy beside her. "Are you alright?"

She glared into the green eyes of the boy holding her. She was about to yell at him, unleash months of pent-up rage and hurt when her brain finally recognized what she was looking at. Harry Potter was on the seat beside her. His face was filled with worry, and he was staring straight into her eyes.

Her breath caught in her throat at the intensity of the gaze in which she was caught. He was here. He was real. She hadn't imagined it. Wait. She thought. His presence wasn't a guarantee of that. She knew he was a member of her class, she couldn't have imagined that much. But his presence alone didn't mean what had happened on Friday wasn't an act or a lie.

"Mrs Grevillea. Hermione isn't feeling well, I'm going to take her to the nurse."

Hermione didn't move as the teacher walked over and watched her closely. Her eyes did not leave the boy beside her. She couldn't figure out how this could possibly end in her ridicule. Why was he doing this?

"Come on, Hermione." He gripped her under her arms and slipping an arm around her waist he guided her from the room.

The pair were completely silent as they walked through the corridors. Hermione was looking ahead but could still see Harry out of the corner of her eyes. His gaze was still fixed on her as he guided her back and forth, taking her to the Nurse Joy's office. When he sat her down on the bed and spoke to the nurse, Joy Matthews, she barely heard a word of the exchange. She just continued to stare at the boy.
Joy became extremely worried about her lack of response and rushed from the room to call her parents.

Harry knelt in front of her, grasping both her hands and looking up into her eyes.

"Please, Hermione. Please be alright."

"You were gone." She finally said the words barely a whisper.

"I'm sorry about yesterday. I was," He paused, thinking a moment, "not feeling well yesterday, Hermione."

"You didn't want to see me."

"Rubbish." She recoiled back slightly at the intense edge in his voice. "I was so excited to spend the day with my friend. You are the only friend I have here, Hermione."

Months of anguish fought inside her with the hope. She couldn't open herself to the possibility and have it taken away again. She would not survive.

"We are still friends, aren't we?" Small tears were forming in the corner of Harry's eyes and Hermione couldn't resist the hope anymore.

She lunged forward, the most movement Harry had seen from her all day as both arms wrapped tightly around him. Harry was no stranger to hugs from Mipsy, but this was completely different. This wasn't even like the times he remembered his mother's arms around him. He felt like he was home. A warmth spread throughout his body as he wrapped his arms back around the girl he was so worried about.

Her arms were like a vice squeezing him tightly, but Harry was revelling in it. He'd never felt joy like he was in that moment. Hermione began to cry into his shoulder, soaking it through to the skin as she pulled him tightly against her. Hope sprouted deeply within her at the thought it wasn't a joke. He really wanted to be her friend.

Both children were so wrapped up in one another they didn't notice the nurse return with Hermione's mother. Both ladies were stunned at the sight in front of them. They both had been privy to some of the things Hermione had gone through in her few short months at the school. Neither had expected to see the sight that greeted them.

Harry whispered softly in her ear. "I'm your friend, Hermione. I will be forever if you'll have me."

Hermione's sobbing became audible as the joy raked her body in ways she had not experienced since beginning school.

"Hermione, sweetheart?" Her mother cooed, squatting down beside the pair.

Hermione pulled her face from Harry's shoulder and looked up at her mother's face. Tears continued to stream down her face, but except for the occasional sob, she contained herself in the presence of the adults.

"What happened, dear?" Natalie wanted to wrap her little girl up and never let her go, but she would not release her grip on the boy in her arms.

"A misunderstanding, Mrs Granger. It was my fault." Harry said, drawing her attention.

"And you are?"

This was a shock to the elder Granger. Hermione had made no mention of any friends at school. In fact, she had made a point of telling them just how much most of the students enjoyed mocking her. She was certain that if she had made a friend that she would have told her own mother. She looked at Harry with suspicion wondering if the lad could be trusted, or if this was some long-winded attempt to hurt her daughter.

A scowl must have broken out on her face because Harry suddenly looked afraid of her, and Hermione let Harry go for the first time since they had entered. "Mother! Don't you dare judge, Harry. He is my friend."

Natalie was taken aback by the tone of her daughter's voice. A tone she had never heard from the timid girl before. She looked between the two again and this time she tried to do so without the rose-tinted glasses of her experience with the children of this school. This boy had practically dragged her daughter, if Joy was to be believed, from the classroom to her office. He had continued to sit with the entire time and had been hugging her so strongly she doubted she'd have been able to fit a sheet of paper between the two of them.

There was also a look on both their faces. A challenge against anyone who would seek to try to pry them apart. Hermione's arm was wrapped back around Harry's as they sat there staring at the adults in the room.

"A pleasure to meet you, Harry." Natalie extended a hand to the boy.

He hesitated a moment, looking at Hermione for her thoughts. She nodded softly, and he took the offered hand in a firm handshake.

"A pleasure to meet you too, Mrs Granger. Your daughter is really something else."

A beaming smile spread across her daughter's face, the first one the nurse could recall seeing on the young lady since she started at the school. It gave her a glow, despite the tears and messy hair.

Natalie snuck as close to Hermione as she could get, attempting to whisper in her ear and keep the others from hearing. "Is this why you didn't want to come today?"

Hermione contemplated a moment before slowly nodding her head and tightening her grip on Harry's arm. She was afraid that her mother would misunderstand and try to take her away from Harry.

Natalie ran her fingers gently through her daughter's hair. "Sweetheart, you don't look up to school today. How about we go home, and you have a lie-down?"

A shard of fear ripped through Hermione as her grip tightened even more. "Can… can Harry come too?" It was barely a whisper.

Natalie smiled and turned to Harry. "Would you like that?"

Harry looked torn. He wanted to, more than anything, but he remembered the talking to his mother had given him last night. He was grounded. "I really would, but I need to check with my mum first."

"Of course. Hermione, you need to let Harry go for five minutes so he can get permission."

Hermione stared into the green eyes begging him to return as she released the iron grip she had on his arm. He squeezed her hand softly as he stood up. "Five minutes, I promise."
Harry rushed from the room and shot back into the classroom. He grabbed both his and Hermione's bags and without a word shot back out of the room before anyone could say a word, and ducked into the first closet he came across. Fishing through his bag he searched for the gift his parents had given him his first day so that he could always get in touch with them if he needed. He wrenched the mirror free from its hidden partition and held it to his face.

"Home."

The surface of the mirror shimmered before the reflection disappeared and was replaced by an empty picture frame hanging on a wall.

"Mum," Harry called into the mirror and waited a moment as a figure stepped into the picture frame.

"Harry? What is going on? You haven't gotten in trouble two days in a row, have you?"

Harry grinned, but quickly realized this was the wrong thing to do as his mother scowled.

"No, I promise, I'm being as good as I can. It's just… Hermione, she is not feeling well. She was nearly catatonic when she came in this morning. I had to take her to the nurse's office."

"Oh my, is she alright?"

"I think so, her mum is here. She is going to take Hermione home, but I think they're afraid she'll freeze up again. She thought I abandoned her yesterday mum. She's never had a friend at school. I can't leave her again. Her mum asked me to go with them. Can I mum, please?"

Lily was shocked by the situation. The poor girl must have been having a terrible time at the school. "You know you are grounded, Harry. But given until now you never had anywhere to go outside the house, that really meant locked out of the library."

Harry now understood his father's chuckle at the fact that he was grounded. The entire situation had gone over his head as he was rather distracted by his mother's wrath at the time. A feeling of dread built in his chest that she would say no, and he would be forced to break his promise to Hermione.

"Yes, Harry. You can go. When you get there tell Mipsy and she will summon Tybalt. I want both of them watching over you while you're there. We haven't had the chance to vet these people yet, and I don't want you at any unnecessary risk, understood?"

Harry barely stopped himself from whooping and jumping up and down, probably a good thing given all the cleaning supplies surrounding him.

"Thank you so much, mum. I love you."

Lily smiled as the mirror call ended and Harry shoved the glass back into the hidden section of his bag. He shouldered it quickly and grabbing Hermione's bag he shot back off towards Nurse Joy's office. He slid to a stop just inside the door almost exactly five minutes after he had left. The look of relief on Hermione's face brought a grin to his own.

"She said yes."

A wide grin spread across Hermione's face as she leapt up and hugged him tightly again. Natalie and Joy had a quick conversation before she led the two children out and into the car. They did not let go of each other's hands as they both climbed in through the same rear door and settled into
The seats, clipping on their belts and smiling at Natalie as he settled in the driver's seat.

She smiled to herself as she started the engine and began the short trip home.

The day spent at the Grangers was one of the best of Harry's short life.

Shortly after arriving, Mrs Granger called her husband to inform him that she was taking the day off and would be home watching over Hermione and her new friend. She settled them in by making an amazing early lunch. Harry had tasted some rather amazing dishes with several House Elves cooking solely for him, but somehow the food made by Mrs Granger was a cut above. Hermione sat with amazement through the meal that not only did she have a real friend now, he was sitting in her house talking to her mum. The joy she experienced was beyond anything she'd known before.

The moment they had both finished eating she dragged him through the entire building showing him every nook and cranny. She even filled him in with some rather embarrassing stories of events that had taken place in them over the years. When they reached her room, Harry was amazed at the number of bookshelves wrapped around the blue walls. There were no dolls or girlish toys that he had expected to see. It was clear his new friend was a complete bookworm, and at home at least, proud of it. She showed him all her favourite books, of which there were much spread throughout the home. Almost every room had at least one bookshelf in it and Harry felt a little guilty that he couldn't tell her about the library he had back home yet.

As the day wore on Mrs Granger suggested the children spend some time outdoors and after a few minutes of showing Harry around the yard, they settled under the tree in the middle of the yard. Hermione's favourite place to sit and read. She chose to read him her favourite book together. Harry already loved the Lord of the Rings, but he loved it, even more, when Hermione read it. She used different voices for all the characters and some of them were truly out there.

The laughter coming from the backyard had Natalie smiling constantly. She had known Hermione was having a hard time at school but hadn't thought things were as bad as she made out. When she had begged to stay home for no reason, she couldn't figure out what had come over her normally bubbly little girl. After the story about how they had first met and how Harry had to miss school on Monday came out, it all began to make a little more sense.

In her first month at the school, several children had pretended to be friendly to Hermione to get help with their homework, or some just as a cruel joke, but in the end, all of them had ended in heartbreak for her daughter. Aware now of what she had been feeling that morning, she felt terrible for forcing her to go, but was now so glad that she had, as it had led to these two sitting under the tree happily chatting away.

Both children were disappointed when Hermione's father had come home, and they realized just how late it was becoming. Harry thanked the Grangers for having him but said he had to go home before his parents became worried, but he promised Hermione he would see her again at school the next day and if for any reason he couldn't make it on a day he would make sure to get a message to the school. Before he could leave Hermione grabbed him firmly in a hug that Harry swore he would never tire of. He walked out the door with a huge grin on his face to see Pops standing there, appearing to all to be a wizened old man. Waving to the Grangers, Harry took Pops' hand as the elf lead him down the street to a concealed copse of trees where, with a pop, they both headed home.

The days passed quickly after that and before Harry knew it his grounding was over. This was the best thing in the world because, excepting that first time, his parents hadn't let him go back to
Hermione's house again while he was grounded. She had taken it well this time, understanding the punishment and made sure he had as much fun as possible when they saw each other during school hours, but things quickly became normal between them.

They would always eat their lunch together in the library under the watchful eye of Miss Holmes the librarian. One-time Thomas had figured out where his two favourite punching bags had been vanishing to and tried to start something in the library but was summarily tossed out on his ear by Miss Holmes. The letter home to his parents did not go well for the third-year and his bullying was severely toned down after that.

Harry and Hermione had only giggled with each other as he was being escorted out, discussing how disappointing it was he didn't burst into flame.

With the added benefit of a reliable and helpful study partner, the pair quickly shot to the top of their class, stunning all the teachers with their combined abilities. Harry was more excited every day to go back to school and almost dreaded the weekends that he had to spend cooped up at home learning about the magical world. While he knew these were important lessons that would help him immensely when he was finally revealed to the world again, he much preferred the occasional weekend he got to spend all day hanging out with Hermione.

His father had looked at him with pride and anguish the day he came home and described in detail how Hermione had taught him to ride a bike. After Harry had gone to bed that night, Lily had held James in the portrait above his bed as the man cried for hours at the loss of yet another major bonding milestone in his son's life.

During one of the more boring weekend lessons, Harry felt his mind drifting to his friend, wondering how Hermione was spending her time while he was cooped up inside, listening to great, great, great, great, great uncle Reginald waffle on about trade practices and their impact on grain something or other. He felt his stomach trying to eat itself as he had not been terribly hungry at breakfast, but Reginald would never end a lesson early and let him get a snack.

While wishing hard that he could just grab something sweet to eat as he listened Harry looked up when the talking stopped and found himself sitting in the kitchen being stared at by Tybalt as he steadily poured a bottle of milk over the floor rather than into the bowl he had been aiming for.

"Um, Tybalt, you're making a mess."

The elf quickly pulled himself together and snapped his fingers, cleaning away the spilt milk.
"Young master, how did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"You just appeared. Like we do."

"Whatever are you talking about, Tybalt. I was just really hungry, and Reginald wouldn't stop talking."

The elf laughed. He was too young to have been around in Reginald's day but had many run-ins with the man's portrait over the years. Of all the Potters he was the most difficult to remain awake around. Mistress Lily had once said he reminded her of Professor Binns at Hogwarts, not that he knew what that meant.

Tybalt quickly fixed Harry a small snack and suggested he head back to his lesson, but he made a note to bring up the strange appearance with the masters when he had finished preparing dinner.
When he told James and Lily what had happened they summoned Harry and Mipsy to the study to discuss the matter.

"I swear I didn't do it on purpose. Just Uncle Reginald is boring." Harry added under his breath.

Mipsy laughed and Lily looked at him sympathetically. James had an odd expression, torn between humour and concern. He was sure he knew what had triggered the strange ability.

"Harry, I want you to concentrate really hard on something for me. I want you to picture yourself standing on the other side of the room, just by the window, but looking this way. Can you do that for me?"

Harry shrugged and closed his eyes, focusing intently on what his father had requested. After several moments he heard several gasps and opened his eyes to see what had everyone so flustered. Only now he was looking at the portrait from a different direction. He glanced about and was now standing exactly where he had imagined himself to be.

"But, I didn't do anything?" Harry exclaimed.

Mipsy looked unhappy and James was glaring at the little elf. "This is your doing."

Lily smacked James softly on the back of the head. "We have talked about this James. We thought something might happen but it's hardly something to get upset about."

Harry was still confused. "What is going on? I'm getting scared. Am I going to disappear from my bed in the middle of a dream?" Tears began forming in his eyes.

Mipsy quickly grabbed her young master in a firm hug, shaking her head. "No little Harry. You must really mean it. You can't pop about in your sleep. Elsewise we elves would be popping all over the place."

"So, he is elf apparating?" Lily inquired softly.

"It certainly felt like it, Mistress," Mipsy replied looking bashful.

"Excellent. Means he never has to deal with the horrid feeling of appariotion."

"I'd hardly call it excellent." James jibed before being silenced by a look from his wife.

"Harry it's nothing to worry about. It will get easier as you practice, which Mipsy will help with over the next few weeks. Then you can pop wherever you need to. And unless I'm mistaken, you could even pop in and out of Hogwarts once you start going there. I know the elves in the kitchens certainly can."

Harry started to feel a little better after the talk with his parents, and as he lay trying to sleep that night, he heard a rather heated argument coming from his parent's portrait. But decided it was none of his business and allowed himself to drift off, knowing tomorrow was Monday and he would see Hermione again.
Memento Mori

Chapter Notes

A/N: Ok, I need to address the elephant in the reviews! James Potter.

James loves his son like nothing else. He gave his life fighting the darkest wizard in history without a wand for that boy. The issue here comes from how portraits work in this story. They are captured with the feelings, knowledge and moods of the person in them at the time of painting but are imbued with a piece of their soul at the point of death when the subject crosses over. This is when they become active and start moving and can be conversed with.

James Potter, while a member of a loving, happy and kind pureblood family, is still a pureblood. For them to interact with other purebloods they would discuss and even share some of the beliefs of the others. While they care nothing for blood politics, they have been around a long time. There are rumours that pass down through families like this and are picked up from others as well. James is subject to these. There is no proof that elf magic corrupts a purebloods magic, just rumour, but it is so old and so common it is taken as fact by most of them.

James is stuck in a portrait, unable to leave his home. He has lost all three of his closest friends, and as such feels alone for the first time since starting Hogwarts. Add to this he is still suffering under the feelings his portrait was imbued with at the time of his death and his actions don't quite match the person he was in life.

Lily doesn't suffer as badly because in life she never heard these rumours. They aren't locked in the back of her mind and at the time of death, she had made her peace with the fact she was going to die. James was actively fighting against death in the attempt to save his entire family. Given time, a portrait adapts and changes as they pull in new information and magic and they settle, becoming much more like they were in life.

As such James will mellow out and become the father Harry needs, he just needs time to break free of the horror of the moment he was killed. I hope this makes sense as I have no issue with his character and I apologize for making him seem like a bad guy. I just needed to address this, though with the time jump we're about to have, there will already be a noticeable difference in James from this point forward.

And as I hate having old author notes left lying in chapters, I shall endeavour to find a way to merge this information into the story somewhere so that I can one day delete this off in the hope it will no longer be needed.

Over the next year and a half, things became quite routine for Harry. He would spend his days at school, studying hard with Hermione as they both shot ahead of the class. While Thomas had been mostly dealt with after the few times he'd tried to get at them in the library, the few other bullies still tended to target them for being show off know-it-alls. But together the pair quickly found ways to avoid or deal with the bullying and school quickly became a lot of fun for the both of them.
They would spend almost every day after school hanging out at Hermione's house. It had become so routine for them to be found under the tree in the yard reading that it was the first place either Granger parent looked upon returning home from work of an evening.

While they would occasionally be found doing their homework together, they usually finished it so quickly that it was much more likely to find them sharing yet another story together. They would take turns reading and both loved how the other would portray the characters. Hermione tended to put on silly voices, giving each character their own mannerisms and speech patterns. While Harry would jump about and act out scenes with fervour, dashing back and forth through the yard, and rolling about as he continued to read.

Both resulted in childish laughter echoing about the yard and house and the Grangers were happier than they had been in years now that their daughter was happy at school and home.

Mipsy and Tybalt would both watch over the children whenever they were at the Granger home, and both had become so enraptured by the children that they awaited story time with the same glee as the young humans. And when arriving back at the Manor, they would happily help Harry share the details of his day with the portraits. It had become the habit for dinner to be taken in the atrium of the library as it was the only room with enough portraits assembled in one place that the entire family could listen in firsthand.

The only difficulties that arose came from Harry himself. And even those were not his fault. It quickly became clear that while Harry's magic had not been diminished by the merging of magic with Mipsy, it had been affected. Accidental magic outbursts, which had been almost unheard of for the small boy, became much more frequent. The first of which had changed the colour of the entire first floor of the Manor when he had become truly angry for the first time since the accident. It had taken the elves two whole days to reverse the change and it had only been the beginning.

There was talk of removing Harry from school, to prevent an outburst hurting someone or alerting the Ministry, but Harry had rebelled forcefully against the idea. It had taken almost a month to fix all the damage that outburst had caused, and Harry had become terrified of the idea of his magic hurting Hermione. It was this fear that had him begging his parents to help show him how to control the outbursts, and his lessons on the weekend had quickly shifted focus to training how to direct and control his unstable magic.

James had wanted to 'ground' Harry while they began his training as he worried teaching him the basics would allow the magic to release easier when he was away from the house, but Harry couldn't do that to his friend. He would miss her terribly if he was confined to the house again and promised to do everything he could to learn fast, so it wouldn't be necessary.

After the initial reaction, James soon came to see the benefits of the blending. Years of pureblood rumour scratched at the back of his mind as he came to witness first hand just how wrong they had been. He had quickly called Mipsy and Tybalt aside one morning before Harry went to school, hiding in the most distant room of the house as far from Lily as possible, as he apologized to them both for his reaction. Mipsy had wept at the apology, still slightly afraid that one day she would be taken to task for her actions.

So, while Harry would still spend his days with Hermione during the week, his evenings and weekends were spent sitting in the nursery surrounded by the soft rustling of wind through the leaves as his mother and father helped him to focus on his magic. It took weeks to finally feel his magic consciously and when he had, he'd been so surprised he'd unleashed a wave of it across the room. The sudden growth spurts the magic gave the plants turned the quiet nursery into a veritable...
jungle of overgrown and wild plant life.

His parents had been slightly worried, but Harry had loved the result. He now had a room he enjoyed spending time in as much as the library. When he wasn't practising control, he was exploring the now enclosed pathways leading amongst the greenery. Lily would often become fretful when he disappeared among the plants, knowing there were some dangerous seedlings in the nursery, but Tybalt stuck close to the boy whenever he would wander off, and always pulled him out of danger before anything could happen.

His training with Mipsy helped him to focus and channel his magic as well. He found he only had to picture a location in his mind and he could Pop there without trouble. They had even tested distance when he Popped to the school late one night. Mipsy and he had been so busy celebrating they'd nearly been spotted by the night janitor before they escaped. He was, however, forbidden from Popping to Hermione's, and Pops would always be there to collect him from the Grangers in the afternoons.

Albus Dumbledore fumed as he paced in his office. Fawkes tracking his every step back and forth as he sat in the pile of ash, slowly gathering his strength after his most recent burning. The bird was thoughtful as he quietly watched. His friend of so many years had changed since the first war. His drive to teach the young of the world had been replaced by a brooding manner. He often wondered if the bond they shared could continue much longer if he could not nudge his friend back onto the correct path.

He had wasted many months now striving to find ways to discover the identity of the mysterious Potter heir. Even long after the government had given up on the idea. He seemed hell-bent on ultimately owning the contents of the estate. As though there was something among its treasures he sought control over.

Fawkes trilled softly, attempting to break his master's mood, but to no avail. He doubted if Albus had even heard him in his current state.

Locking eyes, so to speak, with the crumpled hat perched opposite him on the wall, Fawkes trilled again. The hat at least acknowledged his cry with a nod and scrunched his face up more than usual. Both were worried what it would mean for the school and the students if Albus kept up his singular focus. But neither had the power to change his mind once he had it set on a course. They had tried a great many times throughout the years.

Fawkes trilled softly once more, before closing his eyes and snuggling deeper into the warm ash, hoping something would come to him in his sleep.

Today was Friday, Harry Potter's seventh birthday. He had always loved his birthday as he would share it happily with his entire family. The elves would bring a cake and all the portraits would sing happy birthday and cheer as he blew out the candles.

But today, Harry was thrilled for another reason.

Today, he was celebrating his birthday, not in the library surrounded by portraits, but in the Grangers living room.

His best friend watched eagerly as Harry gently peeled back the tape on his present, carefully as he did not want to ruin the delicate paper his friend had spent hours wrapping carefully if her mother's whispers were to be believed. There was a shadow of fear in her eyes as he finally broke the package within from its festive wrapper. She was worried what he would think of her gift.
She had been so excited when she had found it in the local bookshop, finding it hilarious and hoped that he would share that humour when he read the title.

Harry gasped as he read the cover, looking up at his friend agape.

"Where did you find it?" He asked.

"It was in Demming's. I thought you might find it funny. Even as fanciful as the stories inside are."

A lump formed in her throat as she watched him peruse the contents page reading through the titles of the stories within.

Harry was unsure of what to think about the strangeness of the gift. In his hands was a compendium of stories all with one central thread.

*Harry Potter – The Boy-Who-Lived*

Harry looked up at Hermione again. He smiled widely while watching her face carefully. Did she know something? The stories inside were all ridiculous by Muggle standards. A five-year-old boy fighting dragons, saving damsels and fighting evil. He recognised the publisher as well; Obscurus Books. Several of the tomes at the Manor bore their mark. They were a magical publishing house based in Diagon Alley.

"I… I love it Hermione, thank you." He smiled again as the fear left her eyes and she launched at him, wrapping him in her arms even tighter than she had the book in its wrapping.

"I'm so glad. I thought it was so ironic to find a storybook with your name on it while I was searching for a present for you. It was almost like it was meant to be. He even sounds as though he'd look a bit like you. Messy black hair and green eyes."

Harry relaxed into her arms, all thoughts of conspiracy and danger from the Grangers leaving his body. He could never stay angry or upset when in a Hermione Hug.

However, a small shard of worry lodged itself in his stomach. He knew of the rumours in the magical world. Pops had shared them with him after receiving some strange letters from some goblins. Apparently, because his body was never found with his parents, people theorized that he had lived through the night.

Not just that, but that a baby of no magical talent had ended a war they had been fighting. Now it appeared they were writing storybooks about him. The book wasn't overly thick and the tales inside were quite short, leading Harry to believe these were meant as children's stories. Much like the Beedle the Bard stories Mipsy had read him as a child.

The worry was as to what such a book was doing in a Muggle bookshop all the way out in Crawley.

But things like that were for other times. He squeezed his friend once more and pulled back, setting the odd book with the other gifts he had received from the Grangers. Smiling, he grabbed her hand and led her out into the yard, where they both snuggled together under their favourite tree continuing the Narnia book they had been reading the day before.

"Sirius Black?" James asked looking at the confused boy in front of him.

"Yep, he's the main antagonist. Every trouble Harry fights is somehow orchestrated by him. He's
meant to be really evil.” Harry replied, showing his father one of the few pictures in the storybook, of a tall man with shaggy hair and dark eyes glaring out of the page. As soon as he’d opened it in the Manor library the pictures inside had begun to move.

"Well, I'll admit, Sirius was a troublemaker, but evil?" Lily scoffed looking at the nonsensical picture in the book. "Where do they get such an idea?"

"The appendices say it's because he betrayed the Potters…"

"He did no such bloody thing!” James called, standing and pacing at the slight against his friend. "I'm sorry, Harry. Your father gets a little touchy about that subject."

"And why wouldn't I? We were betrayed alright, but not by my best friend. By a frigging rat and an old goat!"

Harry looked at his parent's portrait in confusion. Ever since he had returned and shown them all the presents he’d received from the Grangers he had been confused. His parents had both reacted poorly to the book Hermione had given him.

"Sit back down sweetie," Lily sighed, "I think it's time we tell you everything that happened that night."

Harry quickly sat in the nearest chair, shutting the book and resting it on his lap.

"First thing you should know is that nothing that happened was in any way your fault, Harry." James began, leaning heavily on the back of his own chair. "War is not a fun place to be, and we'd been in one since we finished Hogwarts. Dark wizards were causing chaos everywhere. One in particular, Voldemort, was terrorizing Britain."

"Your father and I were part of a group trying to stop him, called the Order of the Phoenix, as the government refused to label his group criminals, instead claiming it was a slew of random acts caused by radicals. Albus Dumbledore was the head of that group. He is also currently the Headmaster of Hogwarts."

"Anyway, that mental goat tricked your mother and me into leaving the Manor for a little shack of a house he owned in Godric's Hollow. Turns out some loopy bag had given him a prophecy stating a boy born in July would destroy old Voldy and end the war. You were born right in the window the prophecy gave, so we were to go into hiding."

"We suspected someone in the Order was giving Voldemort information, so Sirius suggested that we tell everyone that he was our Secret Keeper when we actually made it one of our other friends, Peter Pettigrew. People would search for Sirius, but even if they caught him, he couldn't reveal the secret. We would be safe."

"Except we trusted a stinking rat!" James growled returning to pacing.

Lily and Harry watched as his anger subsided and he sat heavily in his chair.

"You see Harry, they were all very good friends at Hogwarts. James, Sirius, Peter and another boy named Remus Lupin were such good friends that they learned how to become Animagi together. Peter was a rat, your father a stag and Sirius a large dog."

"What about Remus? What was he?" Harry enquired, becoming quite excited at the story of his parent's schooling.
"Moony wasn't strictly an animagus. His furry little problem was more lunar based." James replied, the first sign of a grin spreading over his face as he remembered his school days.

"Remus is a werewolf, Harry. He's a lovely man though, I can't believe we ever thought he would betray us. There really must have been something in the tea. He was sent away to Europe to talk to the other werewolves while we went into hiding. We successfully hid until that Halloween, when Peter led Voldemort right to us."

"I tried everything I could to keep you safe. I can't believe I left my wand upstairs. We became too complacent. With no magic to use, I gonged that bastard over the head with your mother's favourite vase. Sorry love." James smirked at Lily as he continued. "He tossed me about the living room like I was nothing. Whenever I landed I grabbed for the most solid object I could get my hands on and kept hitting him over and over. None of it worked. And then he must have tired of the game. He just hit me with the Killing Curse and I woke up in here."

Lily wrapped her arms around her desolate husband. "Trust me, you didn't want to be there for the next bit. I could hear him coming up the stairs as I laid you in your crib. We had prepared as best we could for him, but it wasn't enough. He ripped the door away like it was made of tissue paper and stepped into the room.

"I was so proud of you, Harry. I could see you standing in your crib watching him. You didn't cry once as he threatened to kill you. All over some stupid prophecy. He told me you know, James. He told me who told him. I still can't believe that Severus fell so far."

"Damned Snivellous. He's lucky we're dead, or he bloody would be." James snarled.

"When I refused to just step aside and let him kill you, he used the Killing Curse on me too. I woke up here in James' arms with him crying over me. Mipsy was watching us in confusion and I shouted at her to get you out now. She tried so hard to push through the enchantments, but when she suddenly vanished I knew what had happened."

Both of Harry's parents were crying now, holding each other tightly as they remembered the worst night of their lives, which were ironically enough the end of them.

"I know what happened next," Harry whispered, distracting both Potters from their memories.

"You what?" James asked.

"I was awake. My memory works too well sometimes." Harry looked down at the floor as he continued bashfully. "He stepped over your body, mum. Laughing as he stood over me. His red eyes looked at me and I just stared back. I was waiting for you to stand up and make him go away. I could feel you, as though your arms were wrapped around me, but I could still see you on the floor. He pulled some shiny trinket out of his pocket and waved his wand over it. He was hissing at it as he moved before holding it between us.

"Then he… pointed his wand straight at my face. Right here," he tapped the scar on his forehead as he continued. "And he said *Avada Kedavra*. I remember because he pronounced it much slower and clearer than when he did it to you. There was a horrid green flash and I felt you squeeze me even tighter. It hurt so bad when it hit me. My whole body hurt more than when I woke up after the car hit me."

Lily and James were leaking tears as they watched their poor baby recount the most traumatic event of his young life.

"And then you let go." Harry stared straight into his mother's eyes, tears streaking his face. "The
green light pooled in front of me pushed away by a bright white glow, and then it rocketed back at him. Whatever trinket he held between us was obliterated and the light hit him right in the chest. He flew across the room and the green light and the white glow exploded. But the white glow stopped it from coming towards me and you. It all went to the sides and back at Voldemort. Made a real mess of his body and blew out the walls of my room.

"I cried so hard then. I couldn't feel your warmth around me anymore. I wanted my mummy. And then Mipsy arrived. She stood right in front of me. I didn't know why she was there but all I wanted was to see you again. And then she brought me here, just as someone was rushing up the stairs."

"Oh Merlin, Harry." James whispered, "You shouldn't have to remember something so horrible. I am so sorry."

"It's ok. She brought me back to you. It's not the same, I can't hug you. But I got to keep growing up with my parents."

"Who do you think that was on the stairs?" Lily asked James.

"Probably Wormtail, coming to rescue his master. Or maybe Sirius. He would have come running when he felt the magic lift. Oh, gods no!"

"What?"

"Lily, Sirius! What do you think he would do if he found us both dead and Harry missing?"

"Oh, bugger! POPS!"

"Yes, mistress." The elderly elf bowed low as he appeared beside Harry, his nose scraping the floor.

"Where is Sirius Black?" James called.

"Master Black is in Azkaban prison. He was sent there for killing twelve muggles and one Peter Pettigrew."
Silence reigned over the room. No one knew what to say to that. James looked much like a fish as his mouth repeatedly opened and closed, but no sound came out. Lily simply looked shocked. And Harry didn't know enough to look anything more than confused.

Finally, Lily broke the silence. "Say that again."

"According to the papers, Master Black betrayed you all to him, then went after Mister Pettigrew to finish the job for his master. When he found him on a muggle street, Pettigrew accused him of your betrayal and Black blew him, and twelve nearby muggles, to bits by blowing up half the street. He was found by the Aurors laughing and occasionally muttering 'my fault'. They stunned him and took him in."

"Given he wasn't our secret keeper, he can't have betrayed us. Surely that would have been revealed at his trial?" Lily asked the aged elf.

"There was no mention of a trial in the papers, mistress. Just a small section a few days later that he had been sent to Azkaban for his crimes. It happened the same day the Lestranges were sent there for their failed attack on the Longbottoms."

"Pops, why didn't you tell us about any of this?" James griped, looking angry.

"Master told Pops to read the papers and keep track of the news for word of young Master Potter. You were very clear that was more important than anything, everything else was secondary. I thought I was following your instructions, master."

Again, the room fell to silence as they realized that could be taken as the word of their orders. And as a result, Sirius was locked up in the worst place they knew of and had been there for years.

"Dumbledore…" Lily growled.

"What now?" James replied, turning to look at his now livid wife.

"He witnessed the will. He knows Sirius is Harry's guardian. He could have pushed for a trial and it would have at least come out the Peter was the secret keeper, even if he killed the rodent. For people to believe otherwise, Sirius can't have had a trial."

"What can we do?" Harry asked quietly, reminding his parents of his presence.

"Leave it to us, Harry," James called, standing tall in his portrait. "Why don't you see if Hermione's parents are ok with you staying over again tonight?"

Harry looked between his parents before nodding and heading out the door.

"Now, Pops. Tell us everything. Leave nothing out."

"So, let me get this all straight," James called, slumped in his chair, "Padfoot is thought to have betrayed us, then gone after Wormtail, our real secret keeper. He blasts him and a street full of innocent muggles to pieces and they throw him straight into Azkaban without so much as a question."

"Yes, master."
"Then Moony learns of all this and refuses to return thinking there is nothing left to live for in Britain. You're sure he's still alive?"

"Indeed, master. We tracked him for a while, in case you ordered us to bring him home. When we checked in last June, he was draining pubs all over the continent, well on his way to a decade-long bender."

"Sounds like fun." James quipped, as his wife's eyes narrowed. "Ok, most of the Death Eaters who weren't caught actually torturing someone managed to get off by claiming 'Imperious'." The elf nodded. "And now you inform us, nearly six years after the first occurrence, that Albus fucking Dumbledore has been trying on and off to either take ownership of the Potter estate outright or learn the identity of the heir so he can take control of them. Information the Goblins gave you within a week of Harry arriving back in this house."

Pops looked abashed at the summary. "Yes, Master James."

The anger was evident on James' face. Most of it directed at himself for being so narrow with his orders as to let such a dire situation spiral beyond their control. It was only Harry's continued absence from the world that had kept him safe.

"I… can't. You deal with him."

With a twirl of his finely painted robes, James vanished from the portrait and began ranting as he stalked the halls of the Manor. Lily looked at the aged elf kindly. "Don't worry Pops. He's still getting over his death. He doesn't blame you."

"He is well within his rights to do so, mistress. I kept useful information from my master. Information that could harm the little Lord."

"Harry is fine. He's probably tucked under that tree reading some fantasy book with his best friend. A relationship you have been instrumental in protecting, my friend. How many times have you kept the Grangers from asking too many questions about me and James? We trust you with our… well with Harry's life. And that is the dearest thing on this planet to either of us."

Soft tears rolled down Pops face as he nodded his acknowledgement.

"How much longer do you think the goblins can stall Albus?"

"He long ago ran out of legitimate channels to pursue. He now seems fixed on reworking the law to his favour, but he must be careful to keep the rest of the Wizengamot on his side. Many of his options would infringe on their own rights so they will never pass them. I believe for the foreseeable future; young Harry's future is in safe hands. But it will not remain so if given sufficient motivation. Whiskers is diabolical when pushed."

Lily suppressed a giggle at the elf's nickname for Albus. If he referred to McGonagall as Kitty again, she would lose it for sure. It had become near impossible not to imagine her straight-laced head of house bouncing around the castle chasing a ball of string.

"So, for now, we must keep our eyes and ears open and shore up our defences. Can you think of no way to prove Sirius' innocence? We cannot believe he would be responsible for the muggle deaths. Peter must have screwed up a spell and blown the street."

"Short of the Rat confessing his crimes, I am at a loss, mistress. No proof was ever given as to his guilt, but the lack of investigation also gives no evidence of innocence either."
"Fat chance of that if the moron managed to blow himself up. What I don't understand is why Albus is still so fixated on the estate. Surely, it's more trouble than it's worth at this point. Beyond money, what does he really stand to gain?"

"I am unsure, mistress. The goblins will not share the finer details of the estate with me without my master present. The entire account is locked down until claimed by the heir. If we weren't self-sufficient here, we'd have long ago run out of supplies and money for the caring of the little Lord. As it is, the money spent gathering the papers and magazines for news has nearly drained the local funds."

"Alright, Pops. Send off a letter to Remus. Sign it from the Potter Estate and request his return. Hopefully, he'll pull himself out of a bottle long enough to read it. If not, we'll deal with it later. And once you've done that, I want you to go to Gringotts, in person this time. We need to get them to see if there is any way to free Sirius. Harry is growing well, but he needs an adult in his life that he can actually touch. Understand?"

"At once, Mistress Lily." Pops bowed low, his old floppy ears brushing the surface of the plush carpet before he popped away.

Lily sighed. This was going to be difficult. Resigning herself to that which she couldn't change, she stood up and went in search of her wayward husband.

"For the last time, elf. I cannot authorize a meeting with Griphook without a message from your master. Tell him to get his lazy wizard arse in here and maybe we can do something for you."

Pops was growing angry at the belligerent teller he had managed to get. He had much to do and this hideous moron was standing in his way.

"I have corresponded with Mister Griphook for many years now on behalf of my master. He is aware I hold discretionary powers and low-level access to the Estate and its overseer. As such I do not need the presence or command of my master to arrange a meeting with him. Even though it is their command."

The goblin stood higher behind its desk, looking down on the old house-elf below and made to continue his tirade when a tap on his shoulder distracted him. Looking back, he saw Manager Griphook glaring at him dangerously.

"I'll see my customer now, thank you, Teller."

"Of… of course, Account Manager." The goblin squeaked in fear as he resumed his seat and waved the elf through the gate.

"Apologies, some of our tellers are new. Still acclimatising to their roles. Perhaps a few extra shifts in the Deep might teach them better manners regarding our clients." Griphook stated as he very slowly walked Pops past the shuddering teller.

They quickly traversed the marble and onyx hallways, passing few others despite the busy hour of the day. Not many had cause to go further into the bank than the main floor. However, Estate business couldn't exactly be expected to take place in the open where just anyone could hear.

Turning at last into a large office, Pops took his seat in front of the desk and ignored the vicious accoutrements hanging from the walls. He was far too old to be threatened by goblin window dressing.

"How may Gringotts serve the House of Potter today, my friend."
"My master has asked me to discuss two matters with you today, my good Griphook. A slight repopulation of the Manor's funds is required. A few small matters need to be addressed in the building and it would not do for the ancestral home of their line to become… dilapidated in their absence."

Griphook smiled. They had been playing this tune for years now. He would imply that the elf knew where Harry Potter was, and the elf would divert and act unaware. Neither thought the other stupid or unworthy, just that to state matters aloud without express permission would be uncouth.

"And my master has decided something must be done about the travesty of injustice related to Sirius Black. Too long has this innocent man languished in the company of the foul Dementors."

This quickly removed Griphook's smile. Not for any judgement on Black. The goblins couldn't care less if a wizard found himself locked away unless it adversely impacted their incomes. And as Arcturus still lived, his heir being a prisoner didn't affect their income in the slightest. No, what Griphook hated, what all goblins hated with a passion, were Dementors.

They had long since driven the demons from their underground lairs, clearing more room for Gringotts and the Nation to grow. But when they found the humans had employed the monsters as guards… it had damn near started another rebellion. Many goblins had been killed when they first encountered the Dementors while delving in the Deep. And the collective memory of the Nation was long and vengeful.

"Indeed." Griphook drawled. "I take it you have some evidence to provide that casts doubt on Mr Blacks incarceration then?"

"I'm afraid while such does exist, it is impossible to bring it to light in the current climate. What with the Wizengamot making plays for greater control of the Bank, we cannot risk certain knowledge being placed in their reach."

Griphook could read between the lines. The one with the information couldn't come forward so long as Dumbledore was attacking the sealed Estate. The problem is finding a way to release funds to the elf without implying or showing activity on said frozen account. To do so would open new avenues for the hairy bastard to attack them.

"A true shame then. I take it you wish us to find some avenue to assess the legality of said imprisonment then? A loophole that frees the individual from the need to come forward?"

"Such would be appreciated by my master. And would be greatly rewarded should such efforts bear fruit."

"Indeed." Griphook thought carefully. They had access to the records, but to go digging now could also give the goat means by which to challenge the bank. They would need a clean third party who could act without drawing the suspicion on the bank directly.

"A troublesome pair of plights we find ourselves embroiled in, my friend. Give me a few days to assess the issues and see what method Gringotts can bring to bear."

"As ever, Griphook, it is a pleasure to speak with you."

Without waiting for the response, Pops vanished. Griphook sighed, he had mentioned to management a few times about the house-elves ability to pop in and out of the bank unchecked. To date, all they had done was ward the vaults from this ability. Someday, he had a feeling, they may regret that hole in the security.
Hermione hadn't had the best childhood before she began schooling. While her parents loved her deeply, they never fully understood her growing up. She wasn't quite interested in sports enough for her father, and a bit too bookish even for her nerdy mother. And she had been teased harshly by children ever since she first went to places, they gathered in large groups, be it parks or pre-school.

As such, she had developed a shell that had taken years for Harry to truly penetrate. Now she couldn't imagine life without him in it. Yet today she felt a little of that old fear creeping back in. He was still his normal effervescent self around her.

He had given her the customary morning hug when he arrived, escorted by the tall man he only ever referred to as Pops. They studied the morning away, finishing the last of their outstanding homework from the week. And now they were ensconced under the favoured tree reading the oddity that was the Boy-Who-Lived book.

Everything was as normal a day as had ever been between them. Except for two small things. The first was the odd look Harry had been giving her out of the corner of his eye all morning. A look that said he was deeply debating something and that he wasn't yet ready to share it with her. She was more than patient enough to wait on this normally and would have let it go had it not been for the second point.

Today was Saturday. Specifically, Saturday the 19th. Of September. Her eighth birthday and Harry had not even said happy birthday to her. And that was what had some of her old fears resurfacing. Was Harry thinking about ending their friendship? Every other birthday they had shared it had been the first thing out of either's mouth. Yet today he was too busy thinking his puzzle over to even notice.

Nor had he noticed she had just re-read the same page to him for the fifth time.

"Harry?"

He glimpsed at her once more from the corner of his eyes, the puzzling look still evident within but he showed no sign of having noticed her comment. In fact, she was sure the glimpse had been independent of her question.

"Harry!"

This time he gave a barely audible hmm and turned his ear to listen better.

Beginning to anger, Hermione set the book in her lap, licked her finger and poked it into his ear canal. "HARRY!"

"Argh, what?" He jumped at both the wet willy and the volume of her shout.

"You've been ignoring me for at least the last twenty minutes." She huffed.

"No, no I haven't." He flashed his shit eating grin, trying to distract her.

"I read you the same page of this book five times and you didn't even notice."

"Of course, I did, I thought you were being funny."

"Then tell me what the page is about." Hermione tucked the book under her loose shirt to prevent him from seeing where in the text they were at.
"Um, what…"

Hermione nodded. She was not going to make things easy on him if he wanted out. Her armour was reforming as they spoke, and she would not let it show how much the idea hurt her.

"How would you like to get out of here?" Harry asked suddenly, the puzzled look leaving his eyes for the first time that day. Whatever he had been thinking on he had finally settled his internal debate.

"My parents aren't going to be home for hours Harry. We can't go anywhere. Unless you want to go to the park?"

"No, it's somewhere special. Somewhere for just you and me."

The grin was back and this time she wasn't sure it was a distraction. Harry was up to something. That was definitely his up-to-something face. He held his hand out to her, standing as he did. The early afternoon sun tickled his skin as the leaves of the trees cast varying shadows across his body.

"Please?" He begged, his eyes pleading with her.

"Fine. But it better be good."

As she stood beside him, he took both her hands tightly in his own. "Ready?"

"For what?"

And with a pop, the garden was replaced by a momentary feeling of displacement. There was no squeezing or pulling. No spinning or dizziness. One moment she was in her own backyard, the next in the biggest library she'd ever seen, staring at towering rows of books as far as the eye could see.

"Happy birthday, Hermione." Harry's grin broadened as he watched her take in the massive room of books.

When finally, her wits returned she looked back at her friend and wrapped him in the tightest hug she'd ever given. Before jumping clean out of her skin at a shout right behind her.

"HARRY JAMES POTTER! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

Hermione spun to see a fuming woman towering over her. Her red hair was whipping wildly about her face and her eyes, Harry's green eyes, were glowing! As Hermione watched a man joined her, passing what must have been the edge of the doorway as he appeared from nowhere. He looked a lot like an older version of Harry, except for the eyes, which were brown and tucked behind glasses. He took in the scene in front of him and collapsed on the chair behind him with suppressed laughter.

"WELL!" The woman screamed again.

"Nice first impression mum," Harry muttered. "Hermione Jean Granger, meet the Lady Lily Jasmine Potter. My mum. And that quivering lump in the corner is my dad, Lord James Charlus Potter," Harry finished with a mocking tone on the honorifics.

Hermione gave a slight curtsey as she squeezed Harry's hand tighter at the woman still fuming above her. "Pleasure."

"It's lovely to meet you too dear. You, mister. Are grounded. A whole damn year this time. How
"Could you be so stupid?"

"Mum, you're ruining her birthday present."

"Oh boy, abort son. Abort!" James giggled, hiding behind the chair.

"Shut up you moron. Explain yourself now!"

"She's my friend," Harry replied as though that excused any other issue. He stood resolute under the withering gaze of the still clearly livid woman.

"If it's a bother, I'll just go, Mrs Potter."

"Stay right there, young lady. You can't go anywhere."

"MUM!" Harry warned, making Hermione gasp as he pulled her behind him.

"Don't you 'Mum' me little man. Do you have any idea what you've done?"

"Yes!" He snapped back, drawing Lily up short.

"You did this on purpose?" She asked, flabbergasted.

"I gave it a lot of thought. All of it. Every facet."

"You're definitely grounded. Go to your room and we'll discuss it later. Pops!"

"Yes, mistress?"

"I need you to take Miss Granger home and wipe her memory of this place."

Harry remained resolutely in front of Hermione as the odd creature that had suddenly appeared seemed to sway uncertainly from one foot to the other.

"What is it Pops? Out with it now."

"Elf's don't have memory magic, mistress."

Pops bowed his head and looked as though Christmas had been cancelled. Hermione couldn't help herself as she stepped around Harry and hugged the small creature.

"Well that's hardly your fault is it Pops?" She said as the shocked elf stared at her in disbelief.

Harry just laughed at the look on the old elf's face. And she glared at him for having instigated the event that led to him feeling so adrift.

"You don't… then, how do we? James?" Lily asked, looking even more unsettled than Pops.

James just stood behind his chair and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't." Harry stepped forward, once more placing himself between his parents and Hermione. "Unless you plan to call the Obliviators. Now, I'm off to show Hermione the rest of the house."

He stepped over to her again and held out his hand. Hermione was a whirlwind of thought and emotion. She was still in the most impressive library she'd ever even heard of. Was currently hugging something she'd never even heard of before, and Harry was acting like there was nothing
his parents could do to stop him, despite them standing right behind him.

He simply grinned at her as she released the, she believed, elf. And took his hand again, glancing uncertainly at Lily as she huffed at her son. He winked at his parents and led her out the door she hadn't noticed to their left and into the hallway. As they walked away, she couldn't help but glance back at the Potters and noticed the perspective of their doorway seemed off but was unable to fully assess it before they were out in the hall.

"Sorry, Hermione. Mum is usually really nice. It's not you, trust me, she is going to love you once she gets to know you."

Hermione's mind continued to whirl as she followed Harry in a daze. "What do you mean? Why is that?"

"She's really intelligent. Absolutely adored books growing up too. She's half the reason the library is so big. Though the Potters have always had a lot of books. She's mad at me right now, but she'll calm down once she thinks it all through."

Silence reigned for several moments as her brain attempted to process everything she'd seen since the garden. She still had no idea how they were even here. Was she hallucinating? Maybe she'd just fallen asleep in the garden and this was all a weird dream. She pinched her arm just as Harry stopped them beside a tall door.

"Ow." She yelped, rubbing the spot where she had pinched.

"What'd you do that for?" Harry looked at her oddly, rubbing the spot for her too.

"Dream," Hermione mumbled. "Trying to wake up."

Harry laughed gently and took her hand again.

"Given I've seen yours, and it is adorable by the way, I thought we'd start here."

He kicked the slightly ajar door wide open and led her inside. She found herself in a large bedroom with a huge bed taking up most of the left wall. Directly opposite the door was a floor to ceiling window that showed a beautiful garden stretching out from the house and disappearing into the distance. Six tall metal poles rose out of it in the middle distance. The other wall had a large fireplace flanked by two huge bookshelves and above the fire was a large still life portrait with bowls of fruit beside a pair of comfortable recliners.

"My room," Harry said proudly.

Hermione stepped inside and wandered to the window. The view was sublime, and the weather looked heavenly. Colourful flowers of every variety stretched away from her and she could now see that the garden ended quite a way out, but long before the odd poles that seemed to rise from some low seating.

Tearing herself from the view, she turned to the bookshelves and began perusing them. Many books had no titles but looked to be bound in ancient leather covers. She grinned to herself as she saw the pride of place had been given to the books she had gifted to Harry over the years.

Looking back over at her friend she saw he had kicked his shoes off and was lounging back on the bed watching her explore. His smile vanished, and Hermione spun to the door as the same voice from before piped up loudly.

"Don't think you've gotten out of discussing this, young man."
Hermione was confused. The voice was clearly originating from in the room, but she couldn't see Lily anywhere. Turning to Harry she saw him scowling at the painting above the fireplace, and she stepped back to better see what he was looking at.

A soft eep left her mouth as she saw Lily Potter standing in the still life painting glaring at her son. Her head began to swivel back and forth as both pairs of green eyes locked on one another, refusing to blink.

Harry's mother was a painting? Hermione was still so confused by everything else that had happened today she figured she must have finally snapped. What was going on?

"Well!?" Lily called, drawing her attention again.

Harry glared at the painting and waved his hand before collapsing back onto the sheets. Hermione watched as Lily continued to yell at Harry, but now no sound came out. Her hair was whipping about even more violently than before, yet no sound was audible. Hermione crept forward until she could stand on her tiptoes and peered at the bottom edge of the painting.

She ran her fingers along it and it felt like any other painting she'd ever seen. But she felt as Lily's feet passed her fingers, as though there was a slight bowing outward where she existed in the paint. So, not a screen of some kind. It's really paint.

"Um, Harry?" Hermione asked, turning from the angry woman. "What's going on?"

"Don't worry, she's just pissed because I technically broke the Statute. But I don't care. Your friendship is worth it, and I knew you were getting suspicious with me never inviting you round."

"And Pops?"

"Yeah, that's him. He can make himself look human."

"So, he isn't then?"

"Not human? No, he's a house-elf. They've raised me since I was fifteen months old. Since the night my parents were killed." Harry's face darkened at the thought and Hermione was quickly on the bed hugging him tightly.

"Thank you, Harry. I know you are in trouble because of me, but this is the best birthday present I've ever had."

Neither noticed as Lily stormed from the portrait.

"He silenced me!"

"He what?" James asked as Lily stormed into the family portrait.

"Silenced me. With a wave of his hand." She slumped into a chair as she demonstrated with a lazy wave. "I think we're in trouble."

James moved over to hug his wife as Charlus piped in. "Why's that?"

"He's testing us. And he knows we really have no way to discipline him. HE brought her here. Didn't get one of the elves to do it for him. Just popped into the library with her right in front of me."
The others began to chatter as the full extent of what she was saying began to sink in.

"We can't ground him. Unless he co-operates, we can't contain him. And now he knows it. And that wasn't a normal silencing charm. That was elf magic. It's coming to him naturally now. I doubt he knows he cast it. He just wanted me to be quiet. Probably so busy hugging he hasn't even noticed I've left."

James chuckled beside her. "Don't you laugh. This is your influence. He used to be such a well-behaved boy."

"Wasn't me dear. I may not be the best role model in the world, but it was your actions that started this."

Lily glared at him and James knew he had moments to head off the explosion.

"School! Sending him to that school was your idea, love. Remember? Get him real friends. Well, he has them now, or one at least. And like a true Marauder, he'll move Gringotts herself to please them. You better hope that girl can exercise some control over him because we sure can't anymore.

"This was supposed to be Padfoot's job. He still wouldn't have been able to control him, probably would have joined in half the time, but he'd be there. In person. To fix anything."

"Remus," Lily whispered.

"Say what Lils?"

"We need Remus. Pops is great, but Harry needs a proper adult. Someone he can't push around. Remus kept you lot under control, mostly. He's the one we need."

"True, but he's somewhere off in Europe trying to drink himself into an early grave."

"Because he believes he has nothing to live for. We get him back here, he'll live for Harry. And maybe he can do something to help free Sirius. Then Harry can finally have a real family again."

The other Potters all nodded and for the first time in ages they were all in agreement on a course of action.

"Tubalt."

"Yes, master?"

"Need you to do something big for us, buddy. Our friend Remus Lupin. Track him down and give him a message from us. Tell him 'Messer Moony needs to pull his head out of his arse and get back to England. Messer Prongs wants a word with him about Messer Padfoot and the cub.' Tell him that and we'll see how he reacts. Take your time, do it right. If you need help, ask. But under no circumstances are you to tell Harry. Understood?"

"Yes, Master James."

"Always thought those nicknames of yours were ridiculous, boy. Glad to see them finally being useful." Charlus chided as Tubalt popped away.

Harry shuffled into the family room quietly, hoping not to draw attention. While today had been fantastic, showing Hermione his home and chatting away, it couldn't last. He took her home
before the Grangers were due back from work and after a short party with her family, returned to face the music.

He knew what he did was wrong. The Grangers were muggles, they weren't allowed to know about magic. But he also knew there was no one who knew about him that could perform the memory charm. Now she knew and there was no way to reverse it without involving the Ministry.

Harry was proud of his actions. He had felt horrid hiding a portion of his life from Hermione when she was so completely open with her own. She had no secrets from him, and yet he was keeping a huge one from her. He still wasn't being completely honest with her. She'd implied that the elves were the magic ones and that everything was their doing, and he chose not to correct her.

It was still a lie, but enough of the truth that he could live with it for now. Given the odds on him attending Hogwarts in four short years, he wanted to make the most of all the time he could get with his friend before life took her away.

He fronted up to the enormous picture containing every member of his Potter family. Most were sleeping or at least pretending to do so. Except for two. James, who was clearly trying to suppress a laugh. And Lily, who was watching him closely with unreadable eyes.

"I'm sorry." He mumbled.

"Missed that, Harry. Please speak up." James called, quietly enough to not wake the family.

"I'm sorry." He repeated, louder. "I know it was wrong, but I couldn't lie to her anymore. She deserves better than that Mum."

He locked eyes with Lily and another staring contest began. James interrupted before it could go too long.

"Enough you two. Harry's sorry. The kneazle is out of the bag, and unless we want the world to know he's alive, it's gonna stay out. How much did you show her?"

"Not much. We just walked around the house and talked. She guessed the elves are magic and I let her think they were responsible for everything. She has no idea I'm a wizard. But she is still confused about the both of you. Doesn't understand how my parents can be in a painting. She thinks you were tricked or cursed or something." He finished with a smirk. "Bet you anything tomorrow she's at the library trying to look up painting curses."

"See Lils. Not a total catastrophe."

"Harry, do you realize how serious this is?" Lily asked, ignoring her husband. "You exposed our world to muggles. Just because the Ministry doesn't know doesn't make it ok. I lived in that world once, I know how muggles react to magic."

There was a pained look on her face and Harry knew she was thinking of his aunt and her horrid husband. They had said very hurtful things to his mother and refused to attend their wedding. She had also told him about people's reaction to her accidental magic when she was in primary school. Lily took the divide between their world very seriously.

"Hermione is not Aunt Petunia. She won't tell a soul. Not even her parents."

"Intent isn't important here, Harry. You broke the law. An international law. You could end up the cell right next to Sirius for this."

"Only if the Ministry finds out. I'm not going to tell them. Are you?" Harry retorted defiantly.
James put his hand over Lily's mouth drawing her ire, but his look silenced her.

"As we discussed Lils, this is your fault. Yours too Harry, don't get cocky. What's done is done. Harry will do as he is told from now on, won't you?"

Harry nodded and became bashful again.

"He has definitely inherited your temper, my love. He may look a lot like me, but underneath he is all you. You are grounded for the week. Straight here after school. No detours. And no library. In fact, no books of any kind except for schoolwork. And all day tomorrow we are going to go over the Statute from top to bottom."

Harry groaned. Revision bored him stupid. His memory was such that he could recall almost anything he had ever heard, seen or read. So, reading and listening to Reginald drone on about things he already knew was a sure way to a bored Harry.

"Take it as punishment. If it doesn't seem to sink in, you'll be doing a whole lot more revising, and might find yourself grounded a lot longer than a week."

"Yes, dad. Sorry, mum."

Harry walked over to the painting and on his tiptoes, pressed his lips to his mother's cheek.

"Good night." And with a turn, he was gone.
Tybalt was cold. He'd never felt a bone-deep chill quite like the one he felt now. This Siberia place was not somewhere he wanted to spend much time. But he was tasked with finding his master's Wolf, and that was what he was going to do.

He'd been at it now for months. Every time he felt he was getting close the trail would jump away again. At first, it had zigzagged all over France. Spending a lot of time centred around the areas where the muggles made their wine. It appeared that Wolf had used them for work while on his travels and this added a whole new level of difficulty to his search.

While Pops was a master of disguises in his elder years, able to take on different forms using his magic, Tybalt was still far too young to master such techniques. And a house-elf questioning muggles without a disguise was a tricky proposition. He'd had to resort to subterfuge and misdirection. Talents he had learned over many years of reading under the guidance of Mistress Lily and perfected while caring for Master Harry.

Back when young master was still too young to do much, and Mipsy was his main minder, Tybalt would spend hours in the library learning to read at Lily's insistence. His favourite stories were the mysteries and spy thrillers she had brought into the library years before.

And the talents of the detectives and spies in those novels were now being put to good use.

He felt a little bad for kidnapping people for a night and holding them in a dark interrogation room he conjured with a bright light shining in their faces. Disguising his voice as he asked his questions. Unknown to him or the Potters, this would be responsible for a huge surge in reports of alien abduction reports in those areas for months. But he was a good elf. His master had given him a job to do. A big job he had called it and Tybalt would not fail in his quest.

This vineyard tour had continued into Italy and after several weeks onto Greece. It was here that Tybalt had had the most difficulty finding the next leg of the trail. Wolf seemed to hop back and forth around the many islands in this area for some time before he moved on again and following that path had taken almost a full half of the time he'd spent on this journey.

The many magical sites that he went through on his way north allowed for quicker passage as he tracked up through Bulgaria and Romania. Had it not been for the run-ins with a few hungry vampires in this area, he likely wouldn't have taken more than a couple of days tracking him northward.

The trail appeared to be following a straight line north but had suddenly shot to the west at the border of Belarus. Far to the west, which is what led to Tybalt standing, shivering despite his many warming charms, on the shore of a near-frozen sea, staring up over the breaking waves.

Bolshevik Island lay before him now, cold and desolate. But it was still early morning, and the moon was still glaring down over the frozen hellscape. He could clearly hear the howls of the island's inhabitants as they ran over its bare flanks.

This particular pack seemed to have found a safe place to turn. The island held no homes, no people of any sort that he could see. Not even any trees grew there. Only ice and dirt. Though it meant others were safe, the wolves themselves would suffer greatly. With nothing else to turn their claws and teeth too, they would attack each other. It would be a very long night for them.

And so, Tybalt waited, for the moon to set and the wolves to rest so that he could question them.
Even from here he could sense he was too late. Wolf was not amongst those running amok on the island. But he had been with them very recently.

Perhaps they could lead to him finally catching him up, as he would not be very comfortable travelling over the next few days.

It would be nearly ten in the morning before the small boat they had left anchored a few hundred metres offshore returned to the mainland with its ten passengers. And Tybalt still stood, watching like the lone man keeping his lighthouse.

His questioning of the werewolves did not take very long. They were still weary from their night of pain and only wanted to be free of the questioning elf so that they could find a hot meal and a comfortable bed. So, Tybalt soon had what he wanted. Switzerland.

After a quick restock for supplies at the Manor, a detour that took the elf no time at all due to its unique magical location, he was on his way.

Wolf had told the pack exactly where he was headed, and why he was breaking off from them after almost nine months of running with them. His guilt had been growing at the contentment he'd felt with them. They had tried to convince him to stay, but he had still left them. And only days earlier.

His destination now was a glacier, Blau Gletscherli, to the north of a tall mountain. With his extensive reading, Tybalt understood the reference that Wolf was making with his choice of destination. While the glacier and the mountain were not that unusual, the nearby village had a very particular name for anyone in the magical world.

Grindelwald.

And it was here, in the cracks of the glacier a little north of the village, that he finally caught up with his mark.

The magic he felt in the crag was the same he had been following now for months. And it also was a quite impressive transfiguration. Both ends of the thin gap in the ice had been filled with slanted flat plates of six-foot-thick iron. The tips were rounded to prevent purchase and silver mesh laid over top discouraged repeated attempts at escape.

At their base, a small fire still burned on charmed wood to prevent it from going out and the passed-out man by its side looked as ragged as any Tybalt had ever met.

His clothes were shredded and spread across the open ground, some even smouldering beside the fire. But the most common item about the campsite was empty bottles. Mostly of terribly strong liquors. The smell was horrendous and nearly knocked out the poor elf. But at long last, he had the chance to complete his mission.

He quickly prepared his message, carving it deep into the ice walls on both sides of the crevice. However, now he'd caught up to his mark, he wasn't about to leave him alone. And an idle house-elf is never a good thing. So, he set himself to cleaning the camp, repairing the clothing as best he could and clearing away the bottles.

And the smell.

Remus shook himself awake and immediately regretted his decision. The pounding of his head was only worsened by the jerky motion and the bright white walls of ice under the evening sun assaulted his eyes if he opened them even a little.
Last night had been the worst full moon in years. Locking himself in such a small space after running free with a pack for several months had resulted in the wolf turning on him. He could feel the deep scratches and angry bites slowly healing all over his body. The wolf was angry at him and had not shied away from expressing that displeasure.

But such was what he deserved. Family, belonging, home. These were things for people who were whole. Who hadn't allowed themselves to be sent away when their true family had needed them the most. When he had failed them. This was his penance, as best he could perform it before death, at last, took him and he got to suffer anew in the hell his cursed soul was damned to.

Stretching added a new dimension to the pain running through him as the healing damage was stressed and, in some cases, broken open anew. The odd feeling of the ice at his naked back and the roaring heat of the fire on his side causing even more stress to his already tasked nervous system. Pulling a deep breath through his nose helped to clear his clouded senses a bit, but as he took his second breath, he froze.

There was a new scent in his lair, one that had not been there the night before.

Opening his eyes, he again regretted it as the sunlight glinted off the links of the silver mesh he had covered his hovel with. And it only magnified brighter as it reflected off the sheer walls of the glacier and burned at his retinas.

But he pushed through the pain, turning his head slowly to the side his senses were telling him the scent was located. And now he was certain he was still dreaming.

For sitting by his fire, on an intact chair was a house-elf dressed in a deep blue shirt dotted with pockets, drinking a steaming mug of something, while reading a book.

Remus blinked several times as he tried to will his imagination to remove the odd display, but no matter the method, it remained resolutely in place. It took him several minutes before he realized the elf wasn't reading but was instead watching him silently from over the top of the book.

"Good evening," the elf said, the sound echoing about the small space and attacking Remus' sensitive ears.

"If you say so." He replied, rolling onto his side to find his clothing folded and perched on a second chair with his name on the back. Clearly whoever this elf was, he knew who Remus was. "Can I help you?"

The elf smiled as he placed a bookmark in the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird Remus noted, and set it besides himself.

"I've been tasked to find you. And convey a message."

The elf waved a lazy hand to either side as Remus stood and again stretched his haggard body. His feet rebelled at the cold they were now being subjected too, as his back and side were now so numb, they hadn't cared about the cold. He slipped into the prepared clothing, which felt thicker and warmer than the day before.

"And what would that message be?"

The elf smiled again and waved his hands to the sides, not taking his eyes from Remus. Confused, this time Remus followed the wave to the side and finally he noticed something was carved deep into the walls on either side of him. He had ignored it at first, believing it was simply the result of the wolf trying to climb it's way free. Now he looked closer and saw the text carved into its
surface and highlighted by the shadow cast by the sun and fire.

*Messer Moony needs to pull his head out of his arse and get back to England. Messer Prongs wants a word with him about Messer Padfoot and the cub.*

Remus froze again.

While his Marauder name was hardly a secret, given how often they'd used them during very public pranks, there were not many individuals who knew all four identities. And the phrasing of this message was near identical to several his old friend had used when he would mope over his condition in their school years. Adding in the term cub, too. While Moony was known, very few knew its true source, or that he had referred to Harry as cub when he'd first met the boy.

This was a message from James Potter.

But that was impossible. His friend was long dead, betrayed by Padfoot all those years ago. The whole family had died that night. Cub and Lily included.

Could it just be a delay in the message that had resulted in this moment? Surely that must be the case. James had sought him out before his death and his stupid mission for Dumbledore had meant he'd missed the message until it was far too late.

"You're a little late passing on the message." Remus barked, allowing his frustration to colour his voice. "They're already dead. Not much I can do about that now, elf."

"My name is Tybalt, Mister Wolf. Please use it." The elf's expression took on a darker note for a moment. "And I am not late unless my master says so."

"I'm sorry, Tybalt. But I don't know what you expect of me. If your master is James Potter, this message can't help him now." He turned to face the iron wall and felt himself fall into memories of happier times.

"And why would you think that?"

"Because I failed them and they're dead!" Remus roared, rounding on the elf, who didn't even blink at the sudden anger. "I failed to protect my pack and now they're all dead. James, Lily, Harry." He sank into the chair and sobbed into his hands as he broke down. He'd managed to suppress this all for so long. "Even Peter. And I can't even avenge their deaths because Black is already locked away. All I can do is remember."

"So, you didn't know?" Tybalt asked, an inquisitive look on his features.

"Didn't know what? That Black would sell us out? Of course not. I'd have killed him before he had a chance. The wolf would have ripped his heart from his chest and eaten it before his dying eyes."

Tybalt smiled widely at the man. Why would he enjoy that?

"Your information seems to be dated. The message also comes with an offer. I was to talk to you to find out if it was safe to make that offer."

Remus was beyond confused now. The pain he had been hiding in his heart for years was running rampant through his body. The agony of that Halloween had haunted him all this time and now this damned elf was churning everything he'd tried to lay behind him back up. Whoever had sent the blasted creature was playing with fire if they thought they could bring all this up and he'd help them with much of anything.
"What offer?"

Tybalt smiled again and fished something from his pocket and threw it at Remus. Even in his intoxicated and pained state, his reflexes were sharp enough to swipe it from the air. He hadn't expected to have the feeling of a portkey triggering to rip him from his camp and send him swirling into a heap on the floor of a tiled room.

The pain in his body and brain kept him from moving for several minutes. A pop nearby signalled the elf following him. The small bag of knickknacks and clothing he had concealed on the other side of the iron plate was dropped before him and the sound of running water filled his ears.

"Master requested you take a bath and change first. Once you are presentable, call for me. I shall take you to him."

Remus pulled his hand free from under his crumpled form and looked at the item he had caught. It was a small stuffed animal. A wolf. The very same one he had bought for Harry on his first birthday, that matched the dog, rat and stag the others had given him.

Harry honestly loved the Grangers. As much as he loved his parents, there were just some things they couldn't do. Taking him to the beach. Giving him a hug good night. Tucking him into bed and pressing a kiss to his forehead. And both the Granger parents would treat him to these things on a regular basis.

While he could understand his parents cared for him on an intellectual level, the Grangers could prove it in a physical sense and this had resulted in him latching onto them as much as he had to their daughter.

When they had opened the wall between his spare room and Hermione's bedroom so that they could share the room, he had been unable to contain the happy tears. It had taken almost half an hour for his friend to console him enough to settle in for the night.

He was truly amazed at how understanding the Grangers had been about his occasional need to stay over the night with little warning. Tonight, he didn't even know why he had been sent to stay. Just that Tybalt had returned from some long trip and it required him to stay at Hermione's.

Not that he ever minded. There were few places in this world where he felt happier or safer than 53 Ringwood Close.

In the months since he had first brought Hermione home to the Manor, his sleepovers had increased a lot. He was now there almost twice a month and was fast coming to think of Richard and Natalie as his second parents.

When he had accidentally called Natalie mum tonight as she had tucked him in, she had started, and Harry was worried at what her response would be. After a few short seconds though she had kissed his forehead and wished him a good night before doing the same to Hermione and leaving the room.

Harry's heart had pounded for ages after that and it wasn't until Hermione slipped in next to him and wrapped him in a hug that he settled.

"They love you, you know. She already thinks of you as a son." Hermione whispered into his ear. "I don't mind in the slightest. There is no one I'd rather share my family with than you."

Harry nodded and snuggled tighter against Hermione, finally letting the worry clenching at his
Remus had never set foot in such a brilliant Manor before in his life. Thankful for their ignorance of his condition, his many stays with Sirius in their youth had shown him the opulence of the darker purebloods, but this was a cut above even that.

The building managed to be light and open despite all the rich furniture and fancy paintings decorating the walls. The place had a homely feeling to it and many of the people in the pictures along the wall gave him soft greeting smiles as he passed.

It had been several hours since the elf had dropped him in a bathroom that put even the Prefect's one at Hogwarts to shame. Making the most of it, he had scrubbed himself clean and now felt better than he had in years. But curiosity was a tough thing to avoid, and instead of calling for Tybalt as he was instructed to do, he had set off into the house to find some clue as to where he was.

Looking out the many windows was no help. The gardens that stretched out from the Manor showed no obvious clues and the clear starry night just meant there were no muggle settlements full of electric lights nearby. He could have been anywhere in the world with what he saw outside. So, he was left to use internal clues to figure it out.

The architecture looked right for a rich pureblooded family from England, but it was not one he had ever visited before. Not that many of the local purebloods would welcome a werewolf knowingly into their home for anything other than sport.

He'd kept track of news from the island and knew that some horrid woman by the name of Umbridge had helped pass some appalling laws regarding his kind while he'd been away. He was unlikely to find much in the way of employment in this country anymore.

But these were thoughts for another time. He realized he could hear voices in the room just up ahead, and he went into Marauder mode in order to sneak close enough to hear.

"He finished in the bath ages ago mistress. He is currently wandering the halls."

"And you just let him? He's a werewolf!"

"Shut it, Bob. Just because you were a bigot doesn't mean anyone else here has a problem with his condition." A familiar voice echoed down the hall. A voice he'd not heard in many years but was still unable to place. "Do you plan to invite him to join us anytime soon, Tybalt?"

"Yes, master."

Remus froze as the elf stepped out into the hall and looked directly at him. There was no accusation in its eyes and he now realized they had known exactly where he had been as he wandered the halls. A cheeky grin spread across his face as he straightened up and nodded to the elf who now pointed into the room.

"Yes, well. Too right." Remus said as he straightened his clothes and walked into the room, looking about to see the people who had been talking with the elf.

He found no-one. The room was empty but for three chairs and a large painting that took up the entire left-hand wall of the room. The chairs were angled toward the painting and each had a small table to it's right with a platter topped with glasses.

"Over here, Remus. Long-time no see." The familiar voice called.
Remus spun to the painting and took in those within. It was a massive family portrait filled with over a hundred faces staring at him. Hair and eye colours ran the gamut and while many had similar noses, or chins, there were a lot of different ones as well. It took him a moment to locate the waving figure who had called his name and he gasped aloud as he finally recognised the face of Charlus Potter.

"Perhaps a seat?" Charlus stated, angling a hand at one of the chairs.

Remus fell into the seat heavily and continued to stare at the father of his long dead friend. The long-dead himself father of said friend. This was Potter Manor. He had not ever visited the Manor before, not trusting himself in his youth to be around the family of his closest friends. While he had no worry for the Blacks after the stories Sirius had shared in their schooling, James and his family meant a great deal more to the werewolf.

"You look a bit shocked. A drink perhaps?"

"Tea, please," Remus said as Tybalt stepped up beside him and he attempted to resettle his disjointed thoughts. "You sent the message?"

Charlus smiled at him. "No dear boy. While I knew about your little troupe, I wasn't the one reaching out to you. Just the one chosen as greeter."

"I sent the message."

Remus' head wrenched around, and he knew he'd done some small amount of damage, but his brain ignored it. That was a voice he would never forget. His eyes locked on the face of his oldest friend.

"James…"

"Hiya Moony. How's the liver?"

Several different responses called from the painting at the greeting, from laughter to scolding. Remus was too shocked to speak. When had James had the time to have a portrait done? He looked the same as the last day he'd seen him, even wearing the same shirt and robe.

"How?"

"Well, you see, Moony. There are a group of people in this world, let's call them artists. And they use brushes and paints to record…"

An almighty smack put an end to James' comments as his head rocked forward and the figure hidden behind him finally came into view. Her red hair and vibrant green eyes were filled with amusement as her hand dropped once more and she locked eyes with Remus.

"Hello, old friend." Lily cooed.

"How?" Remus echoed.

"Magic," Lily replied, a wide grin on her face. "Day you left we had it done. Took the whole damned day. Charlus demanded it. Glad he did."

Her eyes flicked to her father-in-law and he nodded in response.

"Is Harry in there too?"
"Not right now."

"Right, too late. Little tyke'd be sleeping." Remus said to himself, missing the looks between those in the painting.

"We didn't ask you here to reminisce Remus." Lily continued. "We have a job for you if you're willing."

"A job? After what happened with Black, you'd trust me?"

"If you can show yourself to be trustworthy." James cut in. "We learnt our lesson about blind trust a long time ago now."

An angry look covered his features as he spoke, and Remus felt he knew the cause. They had all trusted Sirius in their youth and had all been burned by that trust.

"For now, some questions. Why did you never come back, Remus?" Lily asked. "You've been hiding away on the continent for so long it took Tybalt almost seven months to find you."

"What was there to come back to? You were all dead. Sirius had already killed Peter and gotten himself locked away. Even I can't infiltrate Azkaban to take revenge. I chose to spend my time… reflecting I guess you could call it."

"I call it one hell of a bender." James quipped, shuffling further away from his wife in the process. "Lucky your furry little problem helps you heal quicker or you'd have drunk yourself to death by now from everything we've heard."

"Don't think I didn't try. It just felt like giving up like that would be too easy. I deserved to suffer for failing to protect you."

"You're a right idiot you know that, Moony? Voldemort himself came knocking on our door. What were you gonna do? Cock a leg on him?"

"It wasn't a full moon. I could have helped. I should have stopped Black."

"And you can give that rubbish a rest too." Remus looked at his friend in confusion. "Sirius Black is, was and ever has been our friend. He would sooner shack up with Fenrir Greyback and try for a baby than betray any one of us."

"But he was your secret keeper? You told me yourself! I watched the ritual!"

"And he was, for a day, before we came up with the plan to change it out for someone less likely," Lily added. "Peter Pettigrew was our Secret Keeper. We just told everyone it was Sirius, so they'd go looking for him and never find Peter."

" Turns out that the animagus transformation showed not just his inner animal but his true nature. Bastard sold us out to Voldemort first chance he got."

Remus was stunned to silence, and the others just sat and allowed him to process. If Black was innocent, he’d been hating his loyal friend for years, done nothing to help him gain his rightful freedom. Pettigrew had betrayed them. Now that he was confronted with the possibility, it screamed itself as the truth. Sirius would have never betrayed the Potters, but Pettigrew. He could believe the little rat would do it in a heartbeat, with the right motivation. Something Voldemort was very good at dishing out.

Looking back up at the painting, his eyes took on a resolved sheen. "Please, tell me everything…"
Harry felt the churning of the waves as they rocked the boat as he hung from the rigging. A pirate's life was for him as the sea air kissed his face and filled the sails. The sun baked down from above as the frothing waves churned about his craft and he looked ahead to the tropical island fast approaching.

It was an odd feeling, but he loved it, nonetheless. Looking down at the ocean he was surprised to see it looking so flat. He could feel the churning movement that should have been caused by a moody sea. If not waves, where was the motion coming from?

Feeling arms tighten about him dragged Harry from his dream as he felt the blankets slipping off his body. His left hand was tangled in Hermione's bushy mane of hair, and her own arms were wrapped almost uncomfortably tight around his waist. Looking beyond her sleeping form he could see the floor.

It was entirely on his left side and was swaying back and forth as though he were still aboard the ship of his dream. It hadn't been the boat that was moving, but the whole bed.

Looking back at Hermione, he saw her face scrunched up in fear as the world moved once more around their bed. Now the floor was above him their hair began to hang down from the bed, the covers now completely fallen to the floor as the bed hovered upside down above the thick carpet.

Harry gasped loudly and tried his hardest to reign in his magic. His dream must have bled through and now he was levitating the bed. And if he didn't flip them back over, they would be squashed when the bed succumbed once more to gravity.

"No… leave him alone…” Hermione mumbled as her arms tightened even further.

Harry was now in pain from how tight her grip had become and even breathing was becoming difficult.

"Hermione… I can’t…”

He ran his fingers through her hair to try to calm her, loosen her grip so that he could focus on righting his magic and setting them back down safely.

Suddenly her eyes flew open and spotting his face she yelled. "NO!"

A burst of energy surged from her body, her hair zapping Harry with static electricity as the blast hit the floor and flipped the bed end over end making a cacophonous noise as it landed on Hermione's unoccupied bed.

She was panting loudly and sobbing into his shoulder finally releasing her grip from his waist and lifting it to around his neck. Harry was stunned to silence as he tried to hold them from slipping off the oddly angled bed.

"Why would they do that? I begged them to stop. They were hurting you. They hurt my parents. Oh, Harry." Hermione continued to sob away as he stroked her hair with his free hand while holding tightly to the bedhead with the other.

The lights flicked on and he blinked up to see both Richard and Natalie looking at the room in shock. Harry's bed was laying half on Hermione's and except for the bookshelves, everything seemed to have been knocked out of place as was laying on the floor.

The adults quickly focused on the sobbing girl in Harry's arms and rushed over to settle her down.
"Master!" Mipsy called loudly as she popped into being between Remus and the painting.

Everyone could see her panting and there was a fear in her eyes Lily had not seen since the Incident years before.

"One moment, Mipsy," James said, looking back over to Remus. "We have a deal?"

"Yes," the werewolf replied, eyeing the newly arrived and clearly frantic elf, "I'll head back for a couple of weeks and settle any outstanding affairs and be back as soon as I can."

"Good. We'll see you then, Remus." Lily finished as Remus stood. "Tybalt will take you where you need to go. And who knows, we may even have another surprise for you when you get back."

Remus grinned softly and held out his hand to Tybalt, who took it and they popped away in an instant.

"What is it, Mipsy? You should be watching Harry tonight." James asked briskly after the interruption.

"Mipsy was master. But something happened…"

"What!?" James yelled, "get Harry back here now!"

Mipsy frowned deeply but was unable to ignore her master's direct order so she popped away.

"James, we don't know what happened. If he was in danger, surely she'd have brought him along." Charulus scolded as they waited for the elf to return.

A loud pop broke the silence and Harry was looking around in confusion until he spotted the painting and everyone staring at him.

"Now tell us, what happened."

"I was having a weird dream, and my magic manifested. My bed was levitating." Harry told the gathered Potters quickly, clearing uncomfortable under their gaze.

"Excuse me, young master, but that's not true."

"What? What do you mean?" Lily asked frantic, worried what the muggles would do after being exposed to magic like that.

"Master Harry didn't levitate the bed. I know young masters magic. I feel it inside me still. This didn't feel like his magic."

"But the only other person in the bed was Hermione." Harry fretted, worried about his friend.

The shock on the Potters faces as this sank in would have been priceless to Harry in any other situation. Right now, he just wanted to get back and make sure Hermione was ok.

"Harry, we need to speak with her. Bring her here as soon as you can without it being suspicious. Please." Charulus asked watching his son and daughter-in-law still trying to process what was happening.

"Fine, I'll be back."
And with a pop, he was gone.
Hermione continued to sob heavily into her mother's shoulder. The images of her dream refused to clear, even as she felt the strong arms of her parents wrapped about her shaking form.

Every time her eyes closed, she could see them suspended in front of her, dangling upside down as their blood dripped from their hair into the expanding pool below. She was officially swearing off television forever. Books had never given her such a horrid nightmare, but the images they'd seen in the few moments while channel surfing that afternoon had left a deep mark. Why had the batteries in the remote chosen that moment to stop working?

The depraved laughter still echoed in her ears as the figures in the dark blue cloaks had taken their evil tools to her best friend, strapped to the floor, her parent's blood dripping on either side of him. She was no longer sure what was transference from the few moments they had seen and what was her powerful imagination taunting her with her greatest fears.

A soft pop sounded behind the ruined bed and she noticed Harry sticking his head around her mother's shoulder.

"Hermione?" He whispered, a look of fear on his face.

A new round of sobbing came from the small girl as she worried that her secret was uncovered. That Harry would not want to be friends with a freak who couldn't control her powers. She could have killed him tonight.

"Shhhh, it's ok sweetie. It was just a nightmare."

"I… they… oh, mummy."

Hermione wanted nothing more than to press her face into her mother's chest and lose herself in the comforting embrace, but that just brought back the images.

Her mother continued cooing and stroking her hair as the three Grangers rocked on the oddly angled bed.

"I'm s… sorry, Harry…" Hermione sobbed, looking once more at her concerned friend. "I should have… told you…"

Harry shuffled forward and placed a soft hand on her shoulder, looking into her eyes as he spoke. "Told me what?"

"I'm…"

More sobs prevented her from going on, but her father's voice continued for her.

"Hermione is telekinetic. Do you know what that means?"

"Telekinetic… she can move things, without touching them?" Harry asked, looking confused.

"Though she hasn't had an episode like this since she met you," Natalie added, smiling softly down at him.
"I was so scared. They had already…"

"No, sweetie… just forget it. Don't tell us." Her mother cooed, pressing her closer to her chest and increasing the gentle rocking. "Think of unicorns and fairies. Rainbows and the gentle sea. Let your mind drift into the calm waters. Just like we practised."

Hermione followed her mother's instruction. It had been years since she'd had more than a small episode with her ability and she had stopped doing her calming techniques before bed. So, now she let her mind drift into the place she had created as a four-year-old terrified of her own shadow.

The meadow soon resolved in her mind's eye and the soft waving flowers and grass caressed her hands and her soul as she let herself slip fully into the calming mindscape. In moments the air was full of dancing fairies swirling about and singing gentle songs that soothed her ragged edges and there was Caius, the silver-haired unicorn with the golden horn she had not seen in years.

He approached her ever so slowly, his powerful muscles rolling gently under the gleaming coat. While it appeared to be made of molten gold in near constant flux, the horn felt like silk as it gently slid against her cheek, and she leant heavily into the touch.

Behind her she could hear the soft rolling sound of waves sliding over the white sand beach that bordered her mental meadow, and she knew that if she were to turn there would be a giant bright double rainbow stretching up from its calm waters, despite the fact her brain knew such a thing could not exist in the bright cloudless sky of her mind.

Feeling the contentment of her happy place, Hermione opened her eyes and realized the tears had stopped.

She noticed that she was only wrapped in one of her mother's arms now and that Harry was tucked against Natalie's other side, looking straight at her, a look of deep concern still written over his features. She allowed a small grimace to show on her face and she could see him relax at the sight.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Natalie told him, running her hand through his messy hair. "It had been so long. And she has never had an incident when you're around. I hope you don't blame her. We thought it best if she kept it a secret."

"Blame her? I think it's brilliant." Harry replied, smiling broadly at his best friend.

Hermione felt the last remnants of her fear washed away by the soothing waters as her friend confirmed he wasn't terrified of her. Every other child who had witnessed her ability had run screaming. And if ever asked about it, they always acted like she was crazy, saying they had no idea what she was talking about and giving her strange looks.

It had only further ostracized her from her peers as she could never tell if they were serious or not. For a few minutes there she had been terrified that Harry would be the same. Despite years of friendship, she feared that more than the dream that had triggered everything.

Richard stood and shooed the trio off Harry's bed, shoving it firmly back onto the floor next to Hermione's. The room was still a chaotic mess, but apart from having a bed land on and pushed off it, Hermione's bed was still immaculate. He pulled back the covers and patted the mattress.

"In you hop, pumpkin. You too, Harry. We'll go get some hot chocolate to help you sleep."

Hermione was loath to leave her mother's embrace, but Harry wrapped his arms around her and helped guide her to the bed. They were just being tucked in once more when the front doorbell
rang.

Her mother glanced at the clock on her bedside, but it must have been yanked from the wall in the fracas and showed only a blank screen.

"Who could be calling at this hour?" She still asked, as she and her father quickly headed for the door and down the stairs.

"Hermione… my parents." Hermione tensed noticeably at Harry's words. Had he just been pretending in front of her own parents? "They want to talk to you about what happened. I think they can help."

As he finished, he snuggled tighter to her allowing her to relax once more. No, not pretending. Not Harry. He'd never do that to her. It was only old fears cropping up after such a fright. She gently nodded and felt Harry's arms tighten and his smile against her forehead.

And with a soft pop, they vanished moments before several figures entered the now empty room.

It took almost two hours for Hermione to tell the entire story to Harry's parents. They listened calmly as Harry held Hermione on his lap in the tall wingback chair and Mipsy kept a steady supply of steaming hot chocolate in her cup.

She told the Potters everything. The gritty details of her nightmare, the cloaked figures with their deformed silver animal masks. The vicious things they had done to her parents and friend while she was chained up against the wall. How she had awoken to find Harry in her arms and, still in the befuddled half-dream state, had pushed hard with her power to make the Cloakers go away.

And further back. She told them of all the times that she had summoned books and toys her parents had taken away. All the items that they'd needed to replace over the years, broken in a tantrum or moment of intense emotion. The incidents around other children where they had been knocked over or their things had shot to the other side of the room.

James couldn't suppress his chuckle as Hermione explained how the other children never seemed to acknowledge or even remember the events.

"Sorry, Hermione," he offered as she glared at him, "it's the Obliviators. It's their job to cover up accidental magic. The kids really don't remember. They wiped it from their memories."

"You mean that I made it worse by referring to it?"

"I'm afraid so, sweetie," Lily added. "Had you acted as nothing had happened, they would have just ignored it as well."

"That is so unfair. They could have told me at least." Hermione sniffled. "No wonder they were so horrible to me. They think I'm crazy."

Harry squeezed the girl in his arms a little tighter before looking back up at the painting.

"So, you're both certain then?" Harry asked, watching his parents closely.

"I think it's pretty clear. You, Hermione, my dear girl, are a witch." Lily smiled.

"But, how?"

"No one knows. Muggleborns have been popping up for centuries. There are many theories, but
no one has ever done any real research on it." James answered.

Lily scoffed. "Yeah, magicals doing proper research is like trying to get Sirius to behave like his name."

James couldn't help but laugh as well at the highly accurate statement. But he noticed both the children yawning and their eyes drooping quite heavily.

"Perhaps that is enough for now. Mipsy, take them both back to Hermione's. Tomorrow you can bring the Grangers over and we can explain everything to them as well. I'm sure Harry will relish the opportunity to show Hermione some of the things he's been forced to keep hidden until now."

Both children smiled softly at the Potters as Mipsy vanished the hot chocolate and took both their hands.

They quickly settled back into the bed as Mipsy checked on the Grangers and confirmed that they were both back asleep in their own room. After all the excitement and with bellies full of warm milk and chocolate, it took no time at all for the pair to drift back off to sleep. Neither noticed that the room had been set back to rights.

"SHE'S A WHAT!?"

"HOW DARE YOU…"

Harry giggled slightly at the raised voices of the elder Grangers, which cut off as the door fully closed, as he led Hermione further down the hall to his second favourite room in the Manor.

When they had awoken that morning, the Grangers had both acted as though nothing odd had happened the evening before, and Harry just assumed that they were so used to Hermione's 'power' as they thought it, that they paid the incidents no mind after the fact.

After taking their hands and popping them both to the Manor however it had quickly become apparent that Obliviators had visited the Granger home while the children had been explaining things to the Potters, and it was only their absence that had saved their own memories.

Once his parents had calmed the Grangers down about the idea their minds had been messed with, likely multiple times in the past as well, they moved onto the real reason for the visit. They dismissed the kids to go and do their own thing while the adults chatted, and the last thing Harry had heard as they left was James explaining their daughter was a witch.

"It's not funny Harry. What the Ministry does is wrong." Hermione chided as they walked.

"Hey, you'll get no argument from me. I get why they do it, the Statute is our world's highest law." He recited in an odd voice, as though repeating something he'd been told several times before. "But how they do it, that's another story altogether. C'mon."

Silence fell between them once more as he directed her into a large room with a wide glass ceiling. Had it been on the ground floor, she'd have expected it to open out onto the yard as a sunroom, so surrounded was it by glass windows. The small balcony visible beyond the open French doors looked down over the densest part of the beautiful gardens.

There were a couple of wingback chairs, which she knew Harry's preferred form of reading chair, about the room all bracketed by a small side table with a set of glasses on one side and a rolling trolley like those used for returned books in a library to the other. Several with books stacked inside.
She could see why this was his second favourite room in the house. It was perfect for losing oneself in the sounds of nature outside and the contents of the book in your hand.

Looking back toward the doorway, the only solid wall in the room, she saw a pair of paintings on either side that, as with most she had seen in the house, were simple landscapes stretching over the blank white wall that would have been there in their absence.

"This is amazing, Harry."

"Isn't it." His grin was infectious as she stepped out onto the balcony and looked down into the garden, seeing numerous animals she couldn't identify from this distance flitting about the vibrant spring colours.

"So, I was wondering," Harry mumbled, "now that you know about magic if you wanted to see some more?"

Hermione twirled on the spot so fast her colourful dress swung wide catching the bright morning sunlight coating the balcony and sending her messy hair flying about.

"Really!?"

"Um, if you wanted, that is."

"Yes please!" Hermione shot back over, and the pair took a seat on the thick plush rug in the centre of the room. It was so soft it almost felt like sitting on a cloud, but without the wet bum.

Harry cast his eyes about the room looking for something he could use before his eyes settled on a stack of cards on one of the side tables. Snapping his fingers, the cards began to lift into the air one-by-one all following the same path. They weaved up and down, doing large circles in the air and rolling end over end, following the path directed by his hand.

Hermione was amazed, tracking the cards as they soared through the air. Sometimes, when she really focused, she could direct a single object to move in a single direction, but never had she accomplished something so complex.

She continued to sit wide-eyed as the cards began to settle on the floor in front of her separating themselves out by suit until all the cards were stacked ace high in front of her.

"That was amazing!" She whispered as if afraid too much noise might break the spell. "Can you teach me to do that?"

Harry just smiled at her and looked about again, searching for something else to show her. With another snap of his fingers, one of the wingback chairs began to trot about the room on its clawed wooden feet, making a clacking noise against the marble floor.

Hermione quickly got up from her spot and moved over to the ambulant chair before jumping onto the seat and giggling at Harry over the back.

Harry animated a second chair and the pair were soon racing them around the room, though Hermione quickly noticed that her chair seemed to win all the races. She gave Harry a judging look and he merely shrugged back at her.

Another snap had both their clothes constantly changing colour through the entire spectrum before Harry popped away momentarily, returning with a sleek looking broom in hand.
"Teach me to do that as well?" Hermione asked forcefully as she dismounted her now inanimate chair.

"Sure, that's why I went to grab it."

"Not flying," Hermione responded, eyeing the broom as though it were responsible for the events of the previous night, "popping in and out like that. I want to be able to do that. Teach me, Harry."

The enthusiasm on the girl's face was intoxicating and Harry was unable to say no.

"Ok, but you have to keep it a secret. It's a special type of magic."

Hermione nodded so fiercely her face disappeared occasionally behind her wild locks. Harry looked about, noting that both paintings by the door were empty.

"Elfin, please."

A small elf, about half Mipsy's age, popped into the room in front of the children and eyed Harry.

"Yes, young master?"

"How are you today?" He replied.

The elfin cocked its head to the side appearing confused before answering.

"I is well, young master. How may I be serving you today?"

"I wanted to ask you for a favour. But you must acknowledge this is not an order. You can say no. Do you agree?"

The elfin nodded vigorously as Hermione circled her, eyeing the younger elf closely. She was clearly still in whatever the elves called their adolescence. She was shorter and thinner than the others, though not sickly so. Her ears were shorter, and her nose would not have been long on a human adult. But her eyes were a vivid and shining violet.

"I need to hear you say it, please."

"I acknowledge this is not a command. I can says no."

Harry nodded to himself as he turned to look at Hermione.

"You see, Hermione, the reason I can pop is thanks to the accident I had just after we first met. Mipsy needed to heal me and the only way she could before moving me was to push her magic into my body. It nearly drained her, and I had to do the same to her once I came to."

Hermione looked somewhat nervous now, worried that she might have to be injured in some way first.

"Don't worry, I'm sure it will work with you healthy. In fact, I'll wager it will work faster and require less magic." Harry grinned, pulling over the nearest seat.

The elfin was now eyeing Hermione closely, watching the girl as though trying to read her.

"So, do you think you want to try?"

Hermione knelt before the wee elf and stared into her bulbous eyes. Harry remained silent as the pair sized one another up, yet no words passed between them.
"Ready to try?"

Both Hermione and the elfin nodded together much less vigorously this time.

"Ok, place your hand on the other's chest." He paused allowing both to do so. "Now on the count of three, you need to push gently with your magic into the other. Don't push too hard, you don't want to knock each other over. Just focus on letting it pass into the other."

They both nodded again, though Hermione still looked a little apprehensive.

"You don't have to do this Hermione. Most magicals learn a similar method of travel when they graduate from school."

"No, I want to do this." She replied sharply tearing her eyes from the elfin to glare at Harry.

"Ok," he replied, holding up both hands, "three, two, one. Push."

The experience felt very different to what Harry could recall from his own time. He could feel the static building in the air as both magicals in front of him began to expel magic outwards, though he could sense most of it was passing down their arms and into their partner. He closed his eyes and revelled in the feeling of foreign magic washing over him.

It felt like he was being held in Hermione's arms in one of her tight hugs, but there was something else there as well. Raw energy he'd not felt before and he realized it was the immature elf. The Potters still only had the three mature elves, Mipsy, Pops and Tybalt. But they had several younger elves, most were the descendants of former Potter elves.

As Mipsy was already bonded with him after the incident, and that was the purpose she had been assigned as she finished her training as Lily was pregnant with him at that time, Harry felt uncomfortable with the idea of letting Mipsy bond again. He had no idea what a second bond like this might do to her, especially if he and Hermione were ever to give her conflicting commands. He doubted even giving her clothes could properly sever their connection now.

Tybalt was away again on whatever mission his father had sent him to complete. And he knew that his father's commands still superseded his own when it came to Tybalt and Pops. So, if the elf was doing something important, he wouldn't even respond to Harry's call. And Pops was old. So old that he had changed the nappies of Harry's great-great-grandfather as one of his first tasks as an official Potter elf.

And Harry worried of what the effect of a sharing like this would be on him at his now very advanced age. It would not do to kill the only one in the house who keeps the Muggles from asking difficult questions about his parents, though they would cease coming from the Grangers now at least. Not that he would ever risk Pops' life even if there were others doing those tasks. He loved the old coot, just as much as Charlus or any of the other Potters he never actually got to meet in life.

"STOP!"

Harry's eyes shot open and the feeling of static in the air vanished, as did the warmth of Hermione's magic against his skin. His eyes quickly locked on the figure in the painting by the left of the door and he noted a foot disappearing out the side of the frame.

"What the devil do you think you are doing? Wasn't once enough, boy?" The figure chastised, looking ruddier than Santa.
Standing, Harry's eyes narrowed as he approached the painting, not glancing at the girls as he passed.

"Like you're one to talk Sampson. I well remember my family history. I know what you used to do for fun, you bigoted murdered."

Hermione gasped from behind him as he confronted the figure. While most acknowledged the Potters were generally kind and giving, not every member of a family follows the grain. Sampson Potter had joined up with some long forgotten Dark Lord sometime in the mid-13th century and Harry hated that he still thought what he had done was the right thing. However, before any further words could be exchanged between them, a bunch more figures entered the wide landscape. The collected Potters looked down at the rug behind Harry and his parents immediately locked their gaze on him.

"What did you do?" Lily asked.

Harry refused to back down. "What Hermione wanted to do, and nothing more."

Sighing heavily, Lily ran her hand down her face before replying.

"I love you to death, Harry James Potter, but sometimes I do not understand you. We still don't know the long-term effects of sharing magic like that. Yours was a special case."

"Well, Hermione is special to me. And if she wants elf magic than she can have it." Harry replied petulantly, as he crossed his arms and steadied his stance, preparing for another epic argument with his mother.

"Spilt milk, my dear," Dorea called, laying her hand on Lily's shoulder. "Look at the elfin. The process is complete."

"She's right, love. Whatever the consequences," James paused as he glared at his defiant son, "they'll have to live with them now."

As James finished speaking, the Grangers both came running in the open doorway and took in the scene before them. Their daughter was still kneeling on the floor with her hand on the shoulder of one of those wee elf creatures, who appeared to be shivering slightly despite the warm day. Harry appeared to have squared off against a painting that was filled with the Potters they had been talking to until a distraught woman had shot into the frame and demanded that they follow.

"What is going on? What's wrong with Hermione?" Natalie demanded as she ran over and wrapped her arms about her daughter.

"Nothing, Mrs Granger. She just worked out how to use a few new abilities is all." Harry claimed, his broad smile once more settled on his face.

James scoffed behind him and Harry momentarily glared at his father over his shoulder.

"A few weeks. Merlin, give us the strength." Matilda Potter called from several rows back in the painting.

Harry ignored them as he knelt beside the quivering elfin. "You aren't in trouble. I asked you to. I take all the blame."

"What is going on?" Richard demanded, stepping behind his family and staring at the Potters.

"Hermione has shared her magic with one of the adolescent elves. It's what happened to Harry
after he got hit by a car a fe…"

"My daughter was injured!?” Richard yelled, cutting the old Potter off.

"No, sir. They just shared their magic. There was no danger." Harry supplied, reaching out and squeezing Hermione's hand.

"You got hit by a car?" There were tears developing in her eyes as she stared at him.

"Little bit." He replied, looking bashful. "I was in a hurry to get to school. Didn't look properly before crossing. Stupid really, having a school on such a busy road."

Hermione launched herself at Harry and wrapped him tightly in her arms. "I wanted to see my best friend again. I hadn't seen you in two days. I was young and foolish."

"Most would say still are, young man." Lily chided from the painting.

Harry refused to take the bait and continued softly stroking Hermione's back until she pulled away. He smiled softly at her and turned to the young elf only to stop in shock. Before him was no longer a wee immature elfin. She now stood almost as tall as Mipsy, who was now posted behind her one hand on the shaking elf's shoulder. And her eyes were no longer violet.

He glanced back at Hermione for confirmation. They were now the exact same shade of brown as hers. "Oh."

"Figured it out did you, boy?"

"Shut it, Sampson," James growled.

"I didn't think…"

"Again, very clear, Harry."

Harry again ignored his father, turning to Hermione. "Guess you need to give her a name then."

Hermione looked at him quizzically. "What?"

"Apparently if you share your magic with an unbonded elf, or at least an elfin, they bond to you. Mipsy and I were already bonded as part of the Potter family so nothing changed there. She is now your elf."

"My elf?" Hermione mumbled, turning to gaze at the now taller and healthier looking creature. "Is that what you want?"

The elfin nodded vigorously once more, gazing longingly at Hermione.

"What was your name before?"

"Elfin's don't have names, Mistress. We don't get a name until we reach maturity." The elfin replied.

"Usually the name is chosen by our first master," Mipsy added. "In my case, young master Harry was too young when I was assigned as his elf, so Pops chose my name at master James' insistence."

"You have no name?" Hermione asked. The elfin shook her head, not letting her now deep brown eyes leave Hermione's. "Do you have a preference?"
The elfin finally broke the connection between them, looking to Mipsy as if asking permission. Mipsy nodded and the elfin vanished with a loud crack before reappearing a moment later with a thin book in hand. She held it out to Hermione who took it and inspected it. It had no title or markings on the thick leather cover but was clearly very heavily worn. The bindings of the book were nearly falling apart and when she allowed it to fall open, it became clear that it usually sat open on a very particular page.

In the centre of the page was an image of a man wrestling a mighty lion. The beast stood almost twice his height as he grappled it from its back with only his bare hands, not even using the club hanging from his belt. Hermione immediately recognised the image from her own readings. The man was Hercules and he was wrestling the Nemean Lion.

The elfin pointed at the lion and then to herself. Hermione pondered a moment. This was apparently the young elfin's favoured story.

"You want me to call you Nemea?"

The elfin nodded vigorously. "Yes. If it would please the Mistress."

"It pleases me a great deal, Nemea," Hermione stated, laying her hand on the elfin's shoulder as a short flash of light leapt between them and Nemea grew another few inches.

"Thank you, mistress." Nemea bowed.

"I think we need to talk about all of this, Harry," Hermione whispered, not taking her eyes off her elf.

Harry made to reply but was immediately cut off by Richard. "What you need, little girl, is to come home with us right now. We need to have a family talk about all this nonsense."

"Daddy…"

"None of that. Someone, take us home now."

Harry sighed before nodding to Mipsy, who grasped the three Grangers and vanished almost silently compared to the crack Nemea made earlier. He turned to the newly bonded elf, who looked confused.

"How about you go back to the quarters and have a rest. I'm sure you're feeling drained after all of that."

"Yes, young master," Nemea replied before popping away much quieter herself.

Standing once more, Harry ran his hand nervously through his hair before turning to face the painting.

"So…"

Chapter End Notes

_A/N:_ For everybody's reference in this elfin is to elf what calf is to cow. I was going to use elfling, but I like elfin better.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!